



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

March 2, 2017, to December 13, 2017
and Index

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker



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Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 2, 2017

Day 1

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
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Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstaub, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)

Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk

Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House
Services

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and
Legal Research Officer

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms

Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Anderson, S.	Gotfried
Carson	Orr
Connolly	Piquette
Coolahan	Schneider
Dach	Schreiner
Drysdale	Taylor
Fitzpatrick	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Cooper	Nixon
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Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

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Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleisteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleisteuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
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Hanson	van Dijken
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleisteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

3 p.m.

Thursday, March 2, 2017

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

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated January 18, 2017, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

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

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

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back, hon. members. Honoured guests and visitors, welcome to your Legislature.

Would you please all bow your heads. Let each of us pray or reflect, each in our own way, to search for wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of and with each other. We ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all judgments for the benefit of all Albertans.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Maura Sharkey-Pryma, accompanied by the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join us in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

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

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Royal Canadian Artillery Band will now play a brief musical interlude. The piece to be performed is entitled *First Suite in E Flat for Military Band*, composed by Gustav Holst. Composed in 1909, the *First Suite* was the British composer's first composition for a military band. Today we hear the March, one of the three movements in the suite.

The RCA Band, Canada's oldest regular army band, was formed in Quebec City in 1879. It was subsequently stationed in Montreal and in Halifax. It has since seen service in both world wars and in Korea, and it has travelled across Canada and beyond our borders. Reconstituted in this city of Edmonton, Alberta's capital, in 1997, the band is under the direction of Mr. Benjamin Van Slyke, who is in the Speaker's gallery.

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

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

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

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

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

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

Her Honour: Please be seated.

Good afternoon, everyone. I was just explaining to the Premier why I am wearing this purple robe. It was given by the Legislative Assembly to the Hon. Helen Hunley in 1987 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of this beautiful building, so I felt that it was only appropriate, as you all know that it's Canada's 150th anniversary, that I should wear it today. I also, though, want you to know that it is a tribute to all the wonderful Albertans, the committed, dedicated citizens who worked in this building for over a hundred years and made such great history, just like we're doing this afternoon.

Let's begin.

Speech from the Throne

Introduction

Her Honour: Friends, welcome everyone to the first day of this new session of Alberta's Legislature. As we gather today on Treaty 6 land, we are reminded again of the bedrock importance of this institution to the democratic life of our province.

Albertans come from every part of the globe. We are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice. In an uncertain world these values are more important than ever, our North Star to guide us through our deliberations as we seek to build a better province for every Albertan, no matter their background, birthplace, or creed. We are one province, one people on a common journey towards a common future. Let's never forget that.

The power of these values revealed itself again this past year. Albertans came together in a time of extraordinary danger. As the Wood Buffalo wildfires tore through communities, we stood as one, as fellow citizens with a shared responsibility to each other. When called upon, ordinary women and men from all walks of life do extraordinary things. Therein lies hope for the future, not only here in Alberta but throughout the world.

Of course, the wildfires were one of the most significant events in what has been a very challenging time in Alberta's history. The collapse in the world price for oil continues to affect the well-being of families and communities, reverberating at boardroom and kitchen tables throughout the province.

Cutting the Growth of Government Spending

It has also affected the province's bottom line. For too long Alberta tied spending to the price of oil, which resulted in volatile funding swings for core services. For instance, under former governments the rate of yearly spending growth increases was as high as 11 per cent. Your government stopped that practice.

Through diligent action and targeted reductions we are bringing the rate of spending growth down thoughtfully and prudently. Your government has cut and amalgamated government agencies; frozen salaries for cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff, and management in the civil service; and streamlined spending across government. For example, last week your government took action to cut salaries and eliminate bonuses for the highest paid executives of agencies, boards, and commissions, including eliminating perks such as retention bonuses, golf club memberships, and housing allowances.

As we pursue further spending reductions, your government will hold firm to the belief that spending reductions should never happen at the expense of our schools, hospitals, and those very things Albertans rely on to weather the downturn and provide for their families. Such reductions certainly should not happen at the expense of Albertans who need government to have their backs in a crisis such as the residents of Wood Buffalo.

Working to Make Life Better for Families

Now more than ever the fundamentals matter. Albertans are worried about the basics: paying the bills, keeping or finding a job, saving for retirement and their children's education, and caring for loved ones. As our economy recovers, families rightly expect their government to help them come through the downturn and make their lives better. Your government understands this is its core responsibility, to make life better for everyday Albertans. Over the last two years your government has aimed its every action and decision at meeting this test. We will continue to do so.

Building New Pipelines

Making life better starts with coming to terms with an economic reality that past governments failed to address. Alberta is too dependent on selling its energy products to one customer at one discounted price. As a result, we have been at the mercy of global economic forces over which we have no control. This must change. Under this government it is changing.

In last year's Speech from the Throne your government committed to erasing doubts about Alberta's environmental reputation as part of an effective economic diversification strategy that would break Alberta's land lock and open up new markets for our oil. The plan is working. Last November the government of Canada approved the Trans Mountain pipeline and line 3, citing Alberta's climate leadership plan as key to its decision. Let there be no doubt: the approval of these two pipelines is a historic step forward. Though we won't celebrate until the first drop of oil leaves Canadian shores from a new pipeline, we recognize the spirit of co-operation and hard work by those who have brought us to this point. Our energy industry, indigenous communities, environmentalists, and ordinary Albertans came together in common purpose, showing, once and for all, that a strong economy and a clean environment can and must go hand in hand.

In the weeks and months ahead your government will remain focused on bringing this pipeline to completion. But to get the job done, we must all pull in one direction. We must speak with one voice and communicate one message: a strong energy industry supports a strong Canada. This is a message we will repeat at every opportunity. On the Trans Mountain pipeline our work is not done. In any and all appropriate forums your government will continue to make the case that this pipeline is critical for Albertans and all Canadians. To that end, your government will defend our province and its key industry in court, seeking intervenor status on legal challenges to the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Trans Mountain is not the end of our market diversification efforts. This year we will also continue to work thoughtfully and respectfully with the federal government, indigenous communities, and elected officials across Canada on the Energy East pipeline proposal.

Creating and Supporting Jobs

Your government's singular determination to build new pipelines to Canada's shoreline is for an equally singular reason: Alberta's energy industry creates good jobs, and good jobs are the bedrock of a strong province.

Good Jobs in Alberta's Energy Industry

Since the beginning of its mandate your government has zeroed in on the task of supporting Alberta's energy industry. Three weeks ago Alberta celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Leduc No. 1 oil strike, which inaugurated the rise of modern Alberta: strong, confident, and proud. Over those seven decades Albertans have become world-class innovators. The same is true today. Through innovation our energy industry will always stay ahead of the pack.

Innovation is one of the driving motivations behind Alberta's modernized royalty framework. The new framework is now doing its work: offering incentives to reduce costs, improving efficiency, and, through increased activity, creating jobs, a fact recognized by industry leaders and energy experts. Although the framework only came into force in January, many producers opted in early, leading to the approval of 158 new wells that would not have otherwise been drilled last year, with each well supporting up to 135 direct and indirect jobs. Mid-January of this year saw a 50 per cent increase in active rigs compared with the same point in 2016. Shipments in energy products in December of last year were the highest in two years and almost double the 2016 low. Your government is taking action to build on this momentum and make life better for families.

In addition to accessing new overseas markets, this year further work will be undertaken to add value to our energy products here at home. Through the petrochemical diversification program your government will continue to work alongside our energy industry to push forward on the construction of two new world-class petrochemical plants. These new plants will create thousands of jobs and diversify our economy by adding value to our energy resources here in Alberta, producing products used in plastics all over the world.

Later this year we will receive recommendations from the energy diversification advisory committee. Committee members are currently consulting with industry, economists, academics, and labour to find ways to get more value and more jobs from our energy resources and diversify our economy. Also, your government is working with Ottawa to create good oil field service industry jobs and make sure more orphaned wells, those no longer under the care of a company, are safely closed and reclaimed.

Creating Jobs Across Our Economy

As important as it is to create jobs in energy, it is equally critical we create jobs across our economy, in agriculture, forestry, tourism and manufacturing, as well as in emerging sectors such as high tech, craft brewing, and more. To help, your government has cut small business taxes, created new tax credits to encourage innovation, and helped entrepreneurs get loans to start new businesses. The newly introduced capital investment tax credit and the Alberta investor tax credit, both of which are tax credits other provinces have enjoyed for years, are doing exactly what they are supposed to: helping

business expand, innovate, and hire more people. This year work continues to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and job creators.

Alberta's agricultural producers are the world's best, and so are the products made by them. Building on investments your government made last year such as capital to expand the Agrivalve Processing Business Incubator and Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc, an investment that doubled the size of that facility, making it the largest of its kind in Canada, this year will see further support to help Alberta's agrifood entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs across the province will also get tailored, new supports. The expansion of more entrepreneurship incubators in communities across Alberta will help get good ideas off the ground and provide new businesses with tools to help them grow. Alberta small businesses with this type of support average a 25 per cent annual growth rate compared with a rate of less than 5 per cent nationally. Your government will also remain nimble and responsive to good ideas for bringing more business to Alberta, like we were with the city of Lethbridge to ensure the expansion of Cavendish Farms, the single largest private-sector investment in the history of Lethbridge, which will create good jobs and more opportunities for Alberta farmers.

Clean Energy

This year your government will also move forward on attracting more renewable energy investments. When it comes to renewables, investors world-wide are looking to Alberta as the next exciting place to bring their money. This spring the first competitive renewable energy auction will take place, securing up to 400 megawatts of new renewable energy investment in Alberta. Over the coming years more renewable auctions will take place, keeping Alberta on track to add 5,000 new megawatts of renewable energy capacity while also generating more economic activity in a more diversified economy and creating jobs.

While your government works to attract more renewable energy, we need to ensure that green power is backstopped by strong, stable power from clean-burning natural gas. So this year your government will continue with Alberta's electricity market transition. By changing our electricity market so it is no longer a risky outlier in North America, we can provide more stable, predictable prices, less risk for investors, and attract the new natural gas generation investments needed to create jobs and power Alberta's future.

Infrastructure

While we are building renewable energy infrastructure, we are also building the hospitals, schools, highways, and transit that are the lifeblood of the modern economy. Jurisdictions with the foresight to invest today will be tomorrow's economic leaders. Last year shovels were in the ground on nearly 300 transportation projects, more than 100 schools, plus universities, colleges, and health facilities. This year even more progress will be made on Alberta's historic capital plan, putting thousands of Albertans to work on construction sites, building the infrastructure we need to secure our economic future and way of life. With interest rates at historic lows there is simply no better time to get projects built and create good jobs.

Protecting Alberta's International Trade Interests

This year action is also being taken to protect Alberta's interests and jobs in a fast-changing global economy. The Premier just returned from Washington, DC, where she had productive

conversations with members of Congress, officials from the Canadian embassy, industry representatives, policy experts, and others. Those conversations were grounded in advance work with representatives of key Alberta industries. The Premier and members of cabinet got good advice from industry leaders on how to best approach upcoming trade discussions, with a focus on protecting jobs and seizing new areas of opportunity.

These important conversations will continue. Your government's message to officials in Washington was clear: a strong Alberta contributes to a stronger Canada and a stronger continent. Your government will continue to work closely with Ottawa and officials in Washington to ensure our shared economic interests are protected and advanced. In order to bolster and diversify Alberta's trade relationships, additional trade missions will be undertaken this year to key markets across the world, including Japan, India, and China.

Making Life More Affordable

Whether it's selling Alberta to new markets, attracting new investments, building pipelines, or putting Albertans to work on vital infrastructure projects, your government's focus is the same: creating good, family-supporting jobs. Those good jobs are even better when paycheques go further, and paycheques go further when life is more affordable.

Reducing School Fees

Every September parents across Alberta scramble to cobble together money to pay for a host of school fees. Rather than having a bit extra to put into savings or groceries or their mortgage, parents are forced to redirect their money to pay for education services. For years families have said enough is enough; the fees are too much. Yet school fees have grown and grown. This session your government will take a major step forward to make life more affordable for parents and families by eliminating instructional supply and material fees at Alberta's public schools. Your government will also eliminate busing fees for children travelling to their designated school. The first bill tabled this session will start that work, by eliminating these fee categories in time for the start of the next school year. These changes will reduce total mandatory school fees by approximately 25 per cent. Work to further reduce school fees for families will continue.

Capping Electricity Rates

But that is far from the only step your government is taking to help protect the family budget and make life better. This year your government is capping electricity rates for families and businesses because an electricity bill isn't a jack-in-the-box. There is no need for a surprise. Rates will be capped below the average price families have paid over the last decade. If electricity prices go up past the cap, electricity bills won't. Period. Legislation will be introduced this session to make this cap the law.

Energy Efficiency

Not only will energy bills be capped, but tools will be made available to bring energy bills down. Your government will help families, businesses, nonprofits, farmers, municipalities, and indigenous communities save money and increase energy efficiency with programs to support more energy-efficient appliances, heating, lighting, and more. In addition, your government will make it more affordable to install solar panels on homes, supporting jobs and growth in Alberta's residential solar industry and helping families power their homes with more green energy. All the while, carbon

levy rebates will continue going right to the bank accounts of two-thirds of Alberta households.

Protecting Consumers

But to protect the pocketbooks of families, your government is not stopping there. We banned door-to-door energy sales and put an end to predatory payday lending. This year your government will take further action to protect consumers and give them more peace of mind. Also, in this session your government will make consumer protection laws in Alberta stronger and introduce a consumer bill of rights.

Strong Support for Health Care and Education

Focusing on jobs and affordability helps to make life better for families. So, too, does a focus on other fundamentals such as high-quality public services. This year your government will build on its plan to protect and enhance health care, education, and the public services families in Alberta count on every day.

Strong Public Education

Albertans want their children and grandchildren to fulfill their potential and realize their dreams. It's for this reason that generations of Albertans built a strong public education system to provide our children with tools they need to lead productive and happy lives. It's for this reason that through the economic downturn your government has made classroom education a top priority, including reversing planned cuts that would have taken teachers out of the classroom. Through the future ready initiative we are freezing tuition, working with parents to modernize our curriculum, expanding access to student loans, and investing in more apprenticeship and training. This year, in addition to eliminating certain school fees, your government will continue to provide stable, predictable funding to our schools, universities, colleges, and institutes and will announce the approval and construction of new schools.

Strong Public Health Care

At the same time as we are improving education across the province, we are also improving health care. Modern new hospitals are being built such as the new cancer building in Calgary, and services at rural health centres are expanding such as the one in Sylvan Lake. But hospitals aren't the only answer. We can deliver more care in our communities. This year your government is partnering with the Alberta Medical Association to help communities find and retain the health care professionals they need both in rural and urban areas and especially in underserved communities. New ways to pay doctors are being developed, ways that support them in spending more time with each patient. Taken together, these initiatives mean families spend less time on the highway and in the waiting room and more time with a medical professional who knows them.

Your government will continue to create new long-term care and dementia spaces and offer more home-care services to help seniors live safely in their homes and communities. We will make life better for vulnerable Albertans by putting nurse practitioners on the front lines to care for homeless women and youth in Calgary and Edmonton. We will invest in mental health care, with specific programs for youth, for children and families, for Albertans who have experienced trauma, and for indigenous communities. We will move forward with supervised consumption services and other harm reduction measures to address the rising tragedy of opioid overdose deaths. Above all, we will maintain a stable, dependable

health care system that Albertan families can rely upon to make their lives better.

Protecting People, Workers, and Families

For Alberta's youngest and most vulnerable more needs to be done to help struggling families thrive and to make sure every child has a safe home. When a child's home isn't safe, we have a responsibility to step in and do whatever it takes to make sure kids are protected. Child protection is one of the most important services any government can provide, and we owe it to our children to get it right. It is for this reason that your government created a new department to focus on services for children and launched an all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. Building on the work of that panel, your government will introduce new legislation focused on ensuring child death reviews receive the utmost care and attention.

Your government will also build on our work to better help and protect victims of sexual and domestic violence with the introduction of legislation that eliminates barriers to pursuing justice.

For Albertans with disabilities more work will be done to provide timelier, more accessible services.

More work will also be done this year to modernize working conditions for Albertans.

For low-income families in need of housing, your government will continue to address long-overdue repairs of the affordable housing units we already have, and we will build more units for families and seniors in need.

Hundreds of thousands of families will continue receiving the Alberta child benefit and the enhanced Alberta family and employment tax credit to ensure that children get a good start in life.

This year your government will also make further progress on its commitment to \$25-per-day child care. Bids to create or expand new affordable and innovative child care centres will be awarded in the coming weeks.

Your government will also continue to make sure Alberta's lowest paid workers, most of whom are women and many of whom are parents, get a modest and predictable raise, staying on track to fulfill our commitment to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Supporting Local Government

In addition to creating jobs, making life more affordable, and supporting strong public services, this year your government will take further measures to support communities and families. Important work remains this session on the Modernized Municipal Government Act. This work will build on the strong, respectful relationships developed with municipal leaders. Those relationships have allowed us to bring in new measures that empower local governments, enabling them to provide their communities with better services and more jobs. Your government, the city of Edmonton, and the city of Calgary will also continue to work together to create city charters, with a view toward building stronger, more vibrant cities that attract trade, investment, and jobs.

Working with Indigenous Communities

Important work remains to improve relations with indigenous communities and people. To date the Alberta government has signed new relationship agreements with Treaty 8 and the Métis Nation of Alberta. This year your government will pursue further agreements.

When it comes to ensuring that First Nations communities have access to safe drinking water, our country has a shameful record. Many First Nations communities in Alberta currently have boil

water advisories and have for some time. This is unacceptable. Indigenous people in Alberta need to see concrete action that makes their lives better. Working with First Nations and the federal government, your government will address the critical need for access to clean drinking water on reserves, thereby making real progress on fulfilling the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Protecting Our Natural Heritage

As we work to create better conditions for communities across Alberta, we also have a responsibility to protect our extraordinary natural heritage. Albertans love to hike, fish, hunt, and enjoy our natural beauty. This year your government will continue to improve parks across our province and build on the historic protections we have brought into place such as the recently announced protections for the Castle area. Consultations on the plan to protect the Castle area will continue this year, as will your government's commitment to create better opportunities for everyone to enjoy our parks. Investments will be made in new campgrounds, trails, and roads, and we will support all types of recreation with real improvements to our parks, whether you are exploring on a motorized vehicle, horseback, or lacing up hiking boots. Alberta's natural beauty is part of the wealth we all inherited, and that natural inheritance must be protected and passed on for future generations to enjoy.

Strengthening Our Democracy

Finally, to make life better for families, we will continue to strengthen our democratic institutions. To date your government has taken big money out of politics and enacted an ambitious democratic reform agenda. This session that work continues. New measures will be introduced to expand protection for whistle-blowers and to strengthen our conflict-of-interest laws.

Conclusion – Working to Make Life Better

Friends, grit built this province. Grit will build its future. That future is in the hands of us all: farmers, teachers, oil workers, nurses, welders, entrepreneurs, public servants, and so many others, everyone who made the decision to call this northern slice of the continent their home and never looked back.

As a province we have had our ups and downs. But we have always been at our best when we are focused on what matters. Two years ago oil prices collapsed. It hurt badly. Did Albertans panic? No. Did we sacrifice the very things that make our province strong? No. We didn't do those things because that's not who we are and it wouldn't have solved a thing. What we did was simple. We got down to work and stayed focused on what matters to everyday Albertans: good jobs, protecting pocketbooks, strong health care, and education. These are the things that count, the things that make life better.

Two years later our economy is starting to turn the corner. We are on our way to breaking the land lock, jobs are coming back, our kids have good schools, and our loved ones have the care they need. Are we there yet? No. Though the world around us may be growing more uncertain, your government will remain calm and focused. Now is not the time to let our steady hand waver. As we have from the start, we will continue to create jobs, diversify our economy, and protect the health and education services on which families rely. In that work we will make life better for Alberta families.

Thank you, friends.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

And God save the Queen.

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

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Maura Sharkey-Pryma, accompanied by the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, to lead us in the singing of *God Save The Queen*. Please remain standing after the conclusion.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

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

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, it's an honour and a privilege to be before you today as Speaker of this, the 29th Legislative Assembly, to share with you a few words about an important anniversary, an anniversary that binds us all together, the 150th anniversary of Confederation, which we will of course all celebrate together on July 1.

I want to inform you of a number of events that are occurring here on the Legislature Grounds to help celebrate this occasion. Canada Day 2017 will feature a full program highlighting established and emerging Alberta artists throughout the Legislature Grounds. Additionally, Canada's 150th anniversary represents a unique opportunity to celebrate the great diversity of our country, the diversity that binds us together in this Legislature. Performers will be on-site for National Aboriginal Day on June 21 to celebrate our indigenous origins, La Célébration de la Francophonie Canadienne on June 24 to fete our francophone heritage, and Canadian Multiculturalism Day on June 27 to acknowledge that immigration has contributed to the development, the strengthening of our inclusive society. Of course, there will also be a series of Canada Day events across this province, giving us the opportunity to celebrate this great and wonderful nation on its 150th birthday from our smallest rural communities to our urban centres.

A more sombre but no less important anniversary is that of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Now, I know you know that Vimy is one of if not the most important military battles in Canadian history. Many historians consider that battle at Vimy Ridge a defining moment for Canada, with some saying that after that battle Canada truly emerged as a nation. But that battle was not without its heavy costs. Taking place over four days, from April 9 until April 12, 1917, the Canadian Corps successfully took Vimy Ridge, which was an important strategic position on the front lines in northern France overlooking enemy positions. Fighting together for the very first time during the First World War, approximately 15,000 Canadian infantry stormed German positions on the morning of April 9, showing tremendous bravery as they moved forward during the barrage even though thousands of their soldiers fell in that battle. More than 10,000 Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded on just those four days.

After the battle was fought and the war was won at a huge cost, Vimy Ridge has endured as a reminder of the sacrifice that the young Dominion made. In 1936 an impressive memorial was unveiled in northern France, which commemorates the sacrifice and

the contributions of Canadian soldiers at that battle. Anyone who has seen that monument can testify to its magnificence. I have visited that solemn place. It screams of the pain and loss of war. Fifty thousand Albertans were a part of that Canadian force and enlisted in the Great War, and nearly 50 per cent of those Albertans were either killed or injured.

Partly to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we are presenting an impressive exhibit called Alberta and the Great War, which is featured in the Borealis Gallery in the Edmonton Federal building's visitor centre. It will be on display until May 22, 2017. I would invite and ask all of you present today to attend an opening reception of Alberta and the Great War at 5:30 this afternoon.

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

Tablings

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

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Bill 1

An Act to Reduce School Fees

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a great deal of pride to introduce the first reading of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees.

This is legislation that through a series of amendments and a new school fee regulation will make life better and more affordable for Alberta families.

Our government ran on a platform of commitment to reduce the burden of school fees on Alberta families, and we are following through with that commitment. If passed, this legislation will put money back into the pockets of parents of nearly 600,000 Alberta families. They will no longer be billed for textbooks, workbooks, photocopying costs, and so much more. Our government is protecting and improving education because of the difference it makes in the lives of Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I am truly proud and honoured to move first reading of Bill 1. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the speech of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration the week of March 6, 2017.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly stand adjourned until Monday, March 6, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:04 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, March 2, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fallittings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

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Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 6, 2017

Day 2

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
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Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
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Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
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Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
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Kazim	

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Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleisteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 6, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back. I'm glad to see that all of you had safe travels to and from.

I would ask you to bow your heads as we reflect and pray, each in our own way. Allow us to be a source of support to one another, and let us allow others who garner support from a higher authority to do so in peace. During times of debate, disagreement, and conflict let us take moments to listen, understand, and reflect. Let us be reminded that in the end our shared ultimate goal remains the same, to improve our province for future generations. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Joel Crichton. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly a group of 37 brilliant grade 6 students from Norwood school in my constituency. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Susan Strebchuk. These students are participating in the School at the Legislature program this week and will be enjoying extensive tours of our building and the visitor centre, presentations by various officers and agencies of the Legislative Assembly, and many other activities during their stay with us. I would ask them to please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a number of students, staff, and chaperones from Spruce View school in the magnificent riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. We have Ms Michelle Long, Mr. Ryan Johansson, Mr. Ryan Skage, Ms Kim Davies, and the class. If you'd all stand up, please, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?
Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Mickey Wilson, who for over four years has served as the executive director of the Pride Centre of Edmonton, providing important supports and services to Edmonton's LGBTQ-plus communities. He also travels to communities across our province, providing training and education to help various organizations better support and understand the same. He's a tireless advocate for justice and a true friend to some of the most marginalized among us, including LGBTQ youth, trans youth, and new immigrants to Canada from the LGBTQ community. I'd ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three individuals from the University of Alberta whose work is influencing innovation in many areas, including agriculture and environmental sciences, and I ask that they stand when I say their names.

Dr. John Wolodko is the Alberta Innovates strategic chair in bio and industrial materials and an associate professor at the University of Alberta. His research focuses on the development of sustainable green materials from agricultural and forestry feedstocks and microbial-influenced corrosion and wear materials, which we'll hear more about in my member's statement today. Dr. Stanford Blade is dean of the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Alberta. He has contributed greatly to Alberta's understanding of innovation in the resource economy, and he was also the CEO of Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions corporation, which co-ordinates science and innovation to grow prosperity in Alberta's agricultural, food, and forestry sectors. Cait Wills is the director of communications for the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences at the U of A, but more importantly she happens to be an old friend. I ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour for me to stand today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature five women whose lives have been grievously and irrevocably touched by the ongoing opioid crisis in Alberta. After losing or nearly losing a loved one to the scourge of opiates, they have all become passionate advocates on these issues. Through their activities in groups, including Moms Stop the Harm, Get Prescription Drugs off the Street, and Changing the Face of Addiction, they hope to stem the tide of overdoses so that no one else has to suffer the pain and grief they have endured. They are here to listen to today's emergency debate on opioid-related deaths, and I ask them to stand as I introduce them so they can receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Rosalind Davis of Changing the Face of Addiction, Susan Robblee, Amy Graves, Regan Magnus, Lorna Thomas. Thank you for joining us today.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Pipeline Corrosion Research Project

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the energy leader the world needs for the 21st century. That's why I'm very proud to rise today to speak about the way our research community helps to ensure safe and environmentally sustainable oil transportation. I'm pleased to speak about Genome Canada's recent announcement of \$7.8 million in funding to support an Alberta-based oil sands innovation research project.

Two scientists, Dr. John Wolodko from the University of Alberta and the strategic chair of Alberta Innovates: Technology Futures and Dr. Lisa Gieg from the University of Calgary, are coleading a project that aims to decrease microbial decay in pipelines. Fixing this type of decay is like a diagnosis and treatment in the medical field. It is necessary, and it's important to not only the patient but also to everyone who is impacted. If we live in concert with our environment, keeping it healthy is a requirement for the oil transportation industry. This announcement is an example of the investment being made to support innovative research that promotes safe and environmentally sustainable oil transportation.

1:40

The expected cost savings resulting from this project are significant. It is estimated that corrosion of steel infrastructure costs the oil and gas industry \$3 billion to \$7 billion each year in maintenance, repairs, and replacement. Canada's energy transmission pipeline industry alone spends \$2.9 billion a year to monitor and maintain pipelines. This team will turn science into solutions and, in doing so, potentially reduce operating costs for the Canadian industry by \$300 million to \$500 million over the next 20 years. The financial impact of this type of research is significant, but the environmental benefits are priceless when this team is able to stop pipeline corrosion, saving the environment and the economy from the risk of pipeline leakage and spills.

Congratulations to Dr. John Wolodko and Dr. Lisa Gieg on the grant and helping to make our energy industry the best in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the NDP claimed last week that they care about making life more affordable for Albertans, but the problem is that no one believes them. Their carbon tax will raise the cost on the average household in Alberta by \$2,500 a year. It has already caused . . . [interjection] Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

It's already caused a big spike in inflation this year, with higher gas and fuel prices raising the cost of everything. There's no question that this carbon tax hurts all Albertans but especially those in rural and central Alberta.

Life is already too expensive, and the NDP is making it worse, but they're just getting started. They're shutting down coal, destroying historic communities across Alberta, and putting livelihoods at risk. They've raised business taxes, personal taxes, gas taxes, beer taxes, and almost every fee in the book. The NDP is driving our province tens of billions of dollars into debt, with no plan to pay it back or even to stop borrowing. That's billions of dollars that will be sucked away from hospitals and schools just to cover the interest of this government's reckless borrowing.

Where are they spending this money? There's the \$9 million on the carbon tax ads that angered Albertans throughout the Christmas season and now \$10 million to tell Albertans how to change a light bulb. They're throwing out billions of dollars to kill coal, wasting millions of dollars to protect government-run laundry services at AHS, all at a time while wait times increase in our health care

system and violent criminals are getting off scot-free because of chronic delays in our court system. This is the type of waste and mismanagement that is making life more expensive and exactly why Albertans are ready to throw this government out.

The Wildrose will be here and ready to take the NDP's place. We will continue to be on the side of everyday Albertans. We will fight for a better, stronger, more prosperous Alberta, and we will fight every day in this Legislature to carry those forgotten by this NDP government.

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

Government Spending

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past two years every time members of the opposition call on this government to exercise even modest spending restraint, they tell us that they cannot without firing thousands of teachers and nurses. In fact, the government has worked very hard to convince Albertans that they must choose between billions of dollars of debt and gutting public services and that any reduction in spending automatically equals a cut to the front lines, which is why I was surprised to hear the Education minister declare last week that he's able to offer Alberta parents a legislated reduction in school fees due to internal savings that his department found over the last year.

Mr. Speaker, I have to ask: how many educational assistants and teachers did they fire? How many larger class sizes are they going to create? When the only path is through front-line cuts, where did he find the \$50 million? If that sounds ridiculous, that's because the NDP's logic is ridiculous. My colleagues and I on this side of the House have been saying for years that it is absolutely possible to find internal savings and efficiencies without gutting front-line services. It seems that the minister is finally in agreement. The only difference is that while we would use those savings to reduce the size of the deficit, the minister decided to spend it. He decided he should spend it bribing Alberta parents.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that borrowing money doesn't make life more affordable for Alberta families in the long term; it mortgages their children's future. It makes it more expensive because that money will eventually have to be paid back with interest. Even though the Finance minister says, "Albertans should not have to pay this back," well, Minister, there is no one but Albertans to pay this back.

The huge cost of interest would be much better spent on things like cutting the debt, on teachers, nurses, schools, and hospitals. Since this government has demonstrated that there is no interest in developing a plan to pay any of this borrowed money back, it will fall to the very children who attend these schools today to deal with the mess tomorrow. Not a very good education for our children, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Red Deer Seniors' Birthday Celebrations

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise proudly to reflect on an event held in my constituency of Red Deer-South this past weekend. With the help of my colleague the MLA for Red Deer-North and the Golden Circle seniors' centre we hosted community celebrations for the birthdays of local seniors.

Seniors are an essential part of the cultural makeup of Red Deer and Alberta communities and cannot be overlooked. That is why this past Saturday, March 4, seniors with birthdays falling in the first quarter of the year were invited to partake in festivities and be commended for their unique role in our community. I was honoured to

meet with Albertans like Violet Elliot, who was celebrating her 100th birthday. From music of the '50s to cake and ice cream it was a day full of fun and entertainment, and I'm happy to say that it was a success.

Seniors are some of the most active people in our communities, and their past and current efforts to make lives better throughout Alberta are truly cherished. Our senior population devotes on average more than double the time of individuals aged 15 to 34 volunteering in their community, showing that seniors know the value of social activism, and we can all be thankful to them for that.

Mr. Speaker, while this government is working to make life better for our seniors by adding supports and building more long-term beds, these Albertans have already spent a lifetime working in and for our communities, and they deserve to be celebrated. Though this was for those with birthdays January through March, I am looking forward to working with the Member for Red Deer-North, the Golden Circle, and more community stakeholders to hold three more of these events to recognize the work and presence of seniors within the Red Deer community. I hope that people remain mindful of the great things this group brings to the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Pink Shirt Day

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September 2007 Jadrien Cota of Berwick, Nova Scotia, arrived for the first day of grade 9 wearing a pink shirt. Sadly, what should have been an exciting day kicking off a fresh school year was marred by students who bullied him for his choice of clothing. Two other students at his school saw the incident, decided to do something about it, and after school they went and bought 50 pink tank tops. The next day they stood in the school foyer and handed them out to other students to wear in solidarity with Jadrien. In the face of oppression, hatred, and prejudice they chose to stand with the oppressed. Because of their example, every February we now celebrate Pink Shirt Day.

Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of Albertan students report having been bullied in school. I myself was bullied in school. It causes real emotional and psychological damage that victims are often too ashamed to talk about. In fact, only 10 per cent of them find the courage to speak up. But, sadly, 28 per cent of Albertans believe that bullying is just a normal part of growing up.

Mr. Speaker, bullying is not normal, it is not acceptable, and it is not right. But while 80 per cent of Albertans say that they've witnessed bullying, less than one-quarter stepped in to intervene. That needs to change. We as adults need to set better standards, stand up to bullying behaviour in our homes, in public, and in our places of work, and teach our children that they should never seek to boost their ego at the expense of someone else, that might does not make right.

Mr. Speaker, I call on all of us in this House to not just wear a pink shirt one day a year but in our roles as representatives of Alberta to be better people, to stand up against hatred, ignorance, fear, and intolerance and for acceptance, inclusion, and true equity for all regardless of their ethnicity, gender, orientation, self-expression, or choice of faith. That is what it means to be Albertan, and that is the meaning of Pink Shirt Day.

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

Rainbow for the Future's Aid to Ethiopia

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to tell the members of this House about Rainbow for the Future, a

charitable organization based in my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. It's a story of a group of western Canadians reaching out across the ocean to benefit communities and improve the lives of individuals in Ethiopia.

In 1984 Canadians heard about the drought in Ethiopia that was causing millions of people to starve, and they took action. One man, Leo Seguin, started working with Westlock area farmers to organize grain drives. The Westlock growing project partnered with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Canadian Lutheran World Relief to feed over 400,000 people. Once the situation stabilized, Albertans like Leo didn't consider the job finished but, instead, dedicated themselves to helping the poor help themselves.

1:50

Rainbow for the Future was born in 2005. Their name signifies hope after experiencing dark clouds of turmoil, and it's about being a bridge, a conduit of love and compassion. To date the organization has raised more than \$10 million. Among other things they support irrigation-based development projects as a means to improve food security. Having food security allows communities to turn their attention to education, health care, and income generation projects, especially for women. Their philosophy is that small steps lead to big changes.

I look forward to participating in their sports for Ethiopia fundraiser on March 17 and 18 and will be playing in their 24-hour hockey tournament. Last year's event raised \$87,000. This allowed us to finish funding the Kuriftu orphans and vulnerable children's support project, the women living with HIV support project, and the construction of the Dode primary school. I am looking for pledges to support me in raising funds for the admirable work Rainbow for the Future does.

Thank you for your consideration.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm sure you all read that memo that was sent out to you back in February. I'd just draw your attention to the point that I underlined in that note and remind you. Each of you, I'm sure, will abide by it. Please keep the volume down in this room.

The Official Opposition House Leader.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: The NDP said last week that they understand it's their responsibility to make life better for Albertans. They've failed, every single one of them. Fresh off a carbon tax, Albertans have seen the annual inflation rate climb by 2.5 per cent, driven in large part by this government's new carbon tax. Natural gas prices are up 42 per cent. Thanks, NDP. It's more expensive to drive, to heat your homes, and to buy groceries for every Albertan. Can the Premier please explain how making everything more expensive is actually making life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly proud to be part of a government that is working each and every day to make life better for Alberta families. That's why last week we brought forward legislation that's going to cut school fees for Alberta families. What did the opposition do? They sued the Ethics Commissioner. I think we know who has their priorities on the right side, making life more affordable for Alberta families. That's the difference. That's the choice.

Mr. Jean: I know it must be absolutely crushing for the Premier that the vast majority of Albertans think that the carbon tax is absolutely terrible. People who work in our energy and agriculture sectors drive trucks, and they use fuel. Moms and dads can't just hand in their car or turn their heat off in their homes, and the NDP has already rubber-stamped a \$50 carbon tax from Ottawa that will pull \$2,500 out of every single family's budget in Alberta. How can the NDP possibly justify not only their carbon tax but a 150 per cent increase in the carbon tax in just a few years?

Ms Hoffman: I'm so glad to talk about affordability, Mr. Speaker. Under previous governments tuition went up year after year after year, and under this government we froze tuition to make life more affordable for Alberta families. On this side of the House we're working every day to keep money in Albertans' pockets and to keep money in the local economy. On that side of the House all they care about is standing up, running in circles, and fighting among themselves. We're going to keep working to make life more affordable by cutting school fees, by keeping tuition affordable, and by keeping strong public services, and I will stand up for that each and every day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on this side please keep the volume of your hitting the desks down, and on this side please keep the volume of your voices down. Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at the facts. The NDP has overseen the worst budget crisis in Alberta's history. To date they've tried raising taxes on everyone and everything, but that hasn't worked. In fact, Alberta is raking in nearly a billion dollars less in income taxes than they budgeted. The NDP have made it clear that they have no appetite to cut spending for the most expensive government in Canada by far, so that leaves only one other option, more tax hikes. With the NDP now leaving a PST, believe it or not, on the table, what new taxes should Albertans expect, and when will the NDP government bring them in?

Ms Hoffman: Let's keep talking about facts and affordability, Mr. Speaker. Under the former government rates for electricity skyrocketed. They were in constant chaos. It was a jack-in-the-box. Under this government we brought in a cap. They want to jack up your fees; we want to keep them affordable. They want to make sure school fees go up; we want to keep them affordable. They want to see tuition rise at postsecondary; we're not going to let that happen. The choice is clear. You've got a government that's standing up for ordinary Albertans, or you've got an opposition that only wants to stand up for themselves. We've made the right decision.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and the NDP seem – and, frankly, I think they are – totally out of touch with reality here in Alberta. If there's a new recovery, Albertans certainly aren't feeling it. In the past year 45,000 full-time jobs have evaporated, including 24,000 just in January. Downtown vacancy in Calgary is at more than 30 per cent, and we now have Ottawa promising to phase out our oil sands. How, then, can the NDP justify raising taxes, crippling small businesses, and driving our balance sheet off the cliff?

Ms Hoffman: You want to talk about Ottawa? Let's talk about Ottawa. Under this government Ottawa has approved us to move forward with two new pipelines to the west coast, Mr. Speaker. We're moving products. We're getting results. What happened in

the 10 years the member opposite was in Ottawa? No pipelines, no new access, no international markets. I want to say that we're working hard to make sure that we're diversifying the economy, getting new jobs, and making life more affordable, and I think it's time that the members opposite acknowledged the real progress this government is making.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to talk about progress because in just two years the NDP has hammered Albertans with personal and business tax increases; increased regulations; Bill 6, of course; caps in our oil sands; coal shutdowns that are killing historic communities; lawsuits against power companies; record debt and record deficits; and the largest tax increase in Alberta's history. The new carbon tax alone will cost families \$2,500 each and every year and has already increased the price of everything for Albertans. How can anyone in this government stand behind these policies, that are obviously hurting Albertans and handcuffing our economy and our future?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question from the leader of the Wildrose. Now, whether it's the Wildrose, Wildrose 2.0, Conservatives, Conservative Alliance, Conservative Reform Alliance, the answer will always be the same. They will always stand up for themselves and for the big insiders while we are on this side making life better for Alberta families, Mr. Speaker. That's why we have a government that's making life more affordable by bringing in modest salary increases to the lowest wage earners in Alberta. They want to cut the minimum wage. We're standing up for low-income Albertans, we're standing up for Alberta families, we're keeping money in their pockets, and it's time for the members on the other side of the House to stop saying the opposite.

The Speaker: I think we're on the second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta should be doing much better right now, but it's not, and NDP policies are to blame. The Premier promised 100,000 new private-sector jobs last April. Instead, 45,000 full-time jobs have disappeared in Alberta. After jacking up business taxes and bringing in a carbon tax, our number one competitor, the United States, is making drastic cuts to their taxes, building pipelines, and won't see any carbon tax any time soon. When can Albertans expect to see a plan to keep Alberta competitive instead of letting jobs and investment move out of the province?

Ms Hoffman: Well, one of the ways we keep Alberta competitive is by keeping Alberta families strong and supported and by making their lives better, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why last week we took real action to reduce school fees for Alberta families. Instead of the members opposite screaming angry rhetoric and sending angry tweets out late on a Friday night, we're actually making lives better for Alberta families. We'll continue to do that today and tomorrow and for the days to come because Albertans deserve a government that's on their side. It's clear that they have a choice between the guys opposite, who are busy arguing amongst themselves, and a government that's on their side.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: I know, Mr. Speaker, that most of the NDP's inner circle come from out of province, but here's some free advice. Albertans

don't like carbon taxes, and they especially don't like it when you take their money to hire Ontario companies to install light bulbs and power bars.

There's no reasonable control and no restrictions on who can access it, and it's just the start of the NDP carbon tax fuelled boondoggles. I have an easy question for the Premier: how many NDP bureaucrats does it take to install a light bulb?

2:00

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite have no interest in energy efficiency or anything that will make life more affordable for Alberta families. That's why we were the last jurisdiction to finally catch up to the rest of Canada and bring forward an energy efficiency program, and I'm not going to apologize for putting money back in Albertans' pockets. This is the right investment in making their lives more affordable, and we're going to keep moving forward on those initiatives, that should have taken place decades ago, but the folks on the other side had no interest. Instead, we're going to actually take concrete action to make life more affordable for Alberta families.

Mr. Mason: [inaudible] and three Wildrosers to heckle her.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Jean: Well, actually, Wildrose believes that Albertans spend their money better than any government's going to. The NDP believes they need to take people's money to show them how to spend it better. It's NDP elitism and condescension at its finest. Oh, and if you've already paid for energy efficiency this year in Alberta in your own home, you're out of luck. Albertans care about the environment. They don't need the NDP to tell them how to do it. How many more millions of dollars in boondoggles can Albertans expect to pay with this environment minister in charge?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the price on carbon we're investing every single dollar back in the local economy, and as a result we're going to have good, long-term jobs here in Alberta, and we're also going to have lower bills for Alberta consumers. The Dunsky report says that it will lower bills by \$6.3 million. That's money back in Albertans' pockets. The members opposite want you to pay more for electricity. This side is working hard to keep your costs down. The dichotomy is pretty clear.

Mr. Jean: Well, here are the facts, Mr. Speaker. There's absolutely no ceiling whatsoever on how much it's going to cost Alberta taxpayers, how many people will have to be hired, how many light bulbs, how many power bars, and how many shower heads people will receive, and who actually will qualify. It's a mess. But at least the NDP are helping out-of-province Ecofitt's bottom line by helping them expand their warehouse total by nearly a third nationwide. Here's a solution: scrap the carbon tax and respect the intelligence of Albertans. Does the minister really believe Albertans need some contractor from Ontario to show them how to change their light bulbs?

Ms Hoffman: As you probably have heard, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the last jurisdiction to finally come out of the Dark Ages and move forward on electricity and retrofits, and that's one of the reasons why we've used some of the best folks from across the industry to

be able to help us do that. This company works in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, British Columbia, and they're going to be doing good work right here to help Albertans save money and put those dollars back in their pockets. This is good news for Albertans.

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

Provincial Third-quarter Fiscal Update

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister presented the third-quarter fiscal report, where he spent more time talking about green shoots than he did explaining why the fruits of those green shoots, an extra one and a half billion dollars in resource revenue, were not applied against the massive \$10.8 billion budget deficit. It's a great thing. We're starting to see some modest economic recovery in Alberta, but nothing this government has done since it took office has contributed in the slightest to the increase in the price of oil. To the Finance minister: why are you now taking credit for the price of oil on the way up, when you were running away from it ever so recently on the way down?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, it's really great that the price of oil is slowly climbing, and people talk about it coming up, but it's going to be lower for longer, so in that regard we are doing the things that Albertans require in terms of addressing things like the biggest natural disaster this country has ever seen. We showed Albertans and all of the country that we have Fort McMurray's back. We had expenditures there. We are addressing that. I would really love to see oil go higher and higher and higher, but the base is going to be lower for longer. With that, we have to budget properly, and we are.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In that same third-quarter update the minister bragged about the creation of 18,000 new jobs since July 2016. What he failed to mention is that 13 and a half thousand of those jobs are part-time. Given that he called his last budget the jobs plan – a failure – and approximately 100,000 mortgage-paying jobs have been lost since this government took office, can the Finance minister explain to the hundreds of thousands of unemployed Albertans why he is satisfied with switching out full-time jobs for part-time jobs?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, these are difficult times. We're coming through a two-year recession and just finally seeing the economy start to turn around, but it is quite tenuous, and we will have to do everything as a government to support Albertans through this time. But we're working always to create good jobs, we're working to diversify the economy, and we are investing in infrastructure. Those will get us through to better times. The opposite group here cut, cut, cut, and they figure that nirvana is going to happen with that. That doesn't get you there. It's a long, tough road, but we're supporting Albertans.

Mr. McIver: Tax, tax, tax doesn't work, Mr. Speaker.

The Finance minister also bragged about diversification in the Alberta economy. As examples he pointed to the uptick in drilling rigs and overall oil and gas activity as proof. Previously he said that economic diversification equals getting away from our reliance on the energy sector, but now that oil and gas is solely responsible for recovery, or largely, they couldn't be happier to champion the central role that it plays in our prosperity. Again to the Finance minister: now, does this mean your government is finally willing to

embrace the energy sector and work with the men and women that have depended upon it for so long?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the oil and gas sector is incredibly important in this province and always will be into the future, but diversification is also important. The oil and gas roller coaster got us to the place we're at now. That group didn't do a lot to try and get us off the roller coaster. We are not going to be in this funhouse forever. They created it. We are going to be bringing jobs back through diversification, and that's the role of government.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I released Pathway to Prosperity, the Alberta Party's plan to get our province back on track. Our plan curbs government spending without hurting front-line services, reduces reliance on nonrenewable resource revenues, and not only balances in four years but also starts to pay back debt. That's quite a concept. As part of our analysis we modelled the NDP budget, and guess what? It never balances, ever. To the Minister of Finance. You claim you will balance the budget by 2024. Will you prove it by showing your work and including a detailed plan to balance in next week's budget?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. Well, you know, you'll have to wait till next week's budget to see where things are at, but I can give you the answer about PST right now. We will not bring in a PST. We have a plan to thoughtfully reduce our spending over time. We have a plan to deal with the deficit without bringing in a sales tax. Our plan focuses on important things Albertans need, and we're going to do those. We're going to freeze tuition. As the Deputy Premier said, we're cutting school fees. That side would create more after school fees for kids. That side would raise tuition. They have before. We're not going to do those things. We're going to thoughtfully bring the deficit down.

Mr. Clark: So that's a no. You will never balance the budget.

Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't seem to understand that some day it's Albertans that will have to pay back the massive debt load the NDP has piled up. This means raising taxes or sacrificing public services or probably both. Their plans so far haven't worked. Their NDP tax increases have resulted in billions less in revenues because business is leaving the province, and further tax increases will make the problem worse. To the Premier: beyond simply crossing your fingers and hoping the price of oil goes up, what is your plan to put Alberta on a sustainable ...

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is to continue to work to make life better for Alberta families each and every day. That's one of the reasons why we're bringing forward a reasonable, predictable salary increase to the lowest wage earners in this province, because everyone deserves to put food on the table if you're working full-time. That's one of the reasons why we're going to keep moving forward by protecting health and education. The members opposite want to cut those areas, and they want to cut the minimum wage. We're not going to do that. We're going to

stand up for Alberta families, make their lives affordable, and defend their jobs.

2:10

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, our Pathway to Prosperity document also modelled the Wildrose plan, and I put that in air quotes because the Official Opposition hasn't actually put out any plans or shadow budgets or, frankly, much at all. But based on public statements and party policies, we know that they would make massive and devastating cuts to public services. Again to the Premier: do you have any estimates on how many teachers, nurses, Crown prosecutors, judges, court staff, social workers, or first responders would be laid off if the Wildrose or whoever they become cut \$8 billion or more from the provincial budget?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We saw what was being proposed in the last election: billions of dollars of public-service cuts to the front lines. We see that there are folks out there talking about being able to cut 10 per cent from line items. I'm sorry, but 10 per cent from Health is major hospitals in everyone's ridings that would be negatively impacted. We're not going to do that. We're going to stand up for Albertans. The members opposite have a lot of areas they want to cut. The member who just asked the question has only three letters for an answer: PST. Neither one of those is the path that's going to bring Alberta forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Rural Economic Development

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta plays a critical role in building a strong, resilient economy that all Albertans can count on. From strength in oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture to tourism, rural Alberta has opportunities across many sectors to build on. In fact, municipalities and industry groups in regions such as my constituency of Stony Plain have long been partners in securing jobs and economic growth. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. The economic downturn has hit rural Alberta hard. How are we supporting our communities to help build a diversified economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. I know that she's been a very vocal advocate working with businesses in her constituency and municipal leaders. I can tell you that last year we launched our two-year community and regional economic support program, or the CARES program. What this program is doing is partnering with municipal leaders, with regional and community organizations looking at opportunities to develop business plans to further economic development that are local to those areas. I'm very proud of the amount of applicants that we had in the first intake. The second intake opens April 1, and I encourage community members and municipal leaders to look at this program.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in these difficult economic times what is the minister doing to address

the unique challenges that we all see that rural Alberta faces to create good jobs in our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. There are a number of different tools and entities that we're working with and working through. The regional economic development alliances: Alberta has 11 REDAs across the province, that are made up of municipal leaders, community leaders, and economic development organizations. That's one of the ways that we're working in rural Alberta and through these entities. We know that they have the expertise and the ideas. What they need from the government of Alberta is some support. I can tell you that REDAs were developed out of a need to stimulate long-term economic development and growth strategies in Alberta. We're working closely with them along with the Northern Alberta Development Council.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Canada is one of the many countries moving away from coal-powered electricity and that Albertans whose livelihood depends on coal are concerned about their future, especially in my riding of Stony Plain, to the same minister: what does a made-in-Alberta plan look like for these communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Canada's transition away from coal is creating uncertainty in Alberta's communities. We know that, and I know that because I've recently visited a number of plants and communities. We've met with miners, with mom-and-pop shops, and worked closely with mayors and councils. My message to them is that we have your back. In 2012, when the Leader of the Opposition was in federal government, the federal government prohibited coal plants from generating beyond 2030 and actually stopped the conversion of these same plants to natural gas. What our government is doing is we've reversed that so facilities can continue to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon minister.
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Justice System Delays

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this government prioritizes their radical environmental agenda and changes every facet of Alberta's economy, our justice system is falling apart. Last week we learned that 15 cases in Edmonton were dropped due to the Jordan ruling and an attempt to triage charges. The accused are not going to trial, and victims are being robbed of justice. When victims of crime don't have confidence that they will see their day in court, it diminishes the will to come forward when a crime has been committed. What does the minister have to say to the victims of crimes where charges were stayed last week?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe passionately that Albertans have a right to a strong and effective justice system. We never want to see a charge being stayed and a victim not getting their day in court as a result of a procedural matter. The decision in Jordan brought to the forefront backlogs that have been building

over many decades. Certainly, we've worked quickly to address that, and we will have more to say about that after the budget.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that Crown prosecutors are doing their best with the resources that they have, but given that included in the charges stayed last week were multiple counts of impaired driving over .08, assault with a weapon, and possession of a weapon with danger to the public, to name just a few, and given the fact that Edmonton's chief Crown prosecutor expects more charges to be stayed unless something is changed, when will we see action and an attempt to fix a broken system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is moving forward to ensure that we have the necessary resources for the government. We are actively recruiting 15 Crown prosecutors right now, and more will be coming in the future. This government is doing a careful assessment of what resources are necessary for all our systems. We'll have more to say after the budget, and I hope the members opposite will support it.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has been in power for almost two years and given that this problem has only grown during their term in office and given that there is a failure by the NDP government to fill Crown prosecutor positions and also fill other gaps within the system and given that there is also a responsibility of the federal government to appoint more Court of Queen's Bench justices, what assurances can the minister give that we will receive the appropriate level of judicial positions immediately to address a serious shortage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, as the House will be aware, the government has created a number of positions, including nine positions on the Court of Queen's Bench. I find it a little ironic that the opposition is taking this particular tack given that they voted against a budget that allowed us to hire front-line Crown prosecutors and that when the Leader of the Official Opposition was in the federal government, he never once advocated for more justices.

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

Education Policies

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on minutes we've received from a meeting of the leadership of the ATA, SOS Alberta, and others, a stated objective is to direct children from the private system into the public system. This is a direct attack on educational choice by groups like SOS Alberta, who openly admit to not representing parents. To the minister, who allegedly mandated that a letter be sent to all school boards with a quotation from SOS: how is this not an abuse of government resources? Will you commit today in this Legislature that you will not slash private and charter school funding and allow parents to make educational choices based on their children's . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this government right from the beginning ensured that we funded enrolment for all forms of schooling across the province, \$110 million and counting all the way for each of the years. In direct contrast to the

Conservative opposition on the other side, who made cuts and made unreasonable and very unstable funding, we have stabilized the situation. Parents appreciate the work that we have done.

Mr. Rodney: No answer to either question. Albertans deserve to know.

Given that recently a union coalition pushed for the elimination of funding for independent schools and the union coalition controls tens of millions of dollars in dues, money that parents can never dream of matching, and given that in the last CBE trustee election a former NDP candidate won with \$20,000 of union money, much more than trustees would ever spend on their entire campaign, can the Premier ensure that the voice of parents will not be drowned out by big money from special-interest groups in the funding of trustee elections?

2:20

Mr. Eggen: Well, once again, you know, it's pretty rich, Mr. Speaker, coming from the Conservative opposition, that cut millions of dollars from education and continued to campaign on that in the last election. Well, you can see the result of doing that. The people of Alberta want to have the investment in public education. We want to make sure that we have the resources available for all forms of education. We did do so. They just cut.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: I'll just wait for that answer some other time.

Now, given that parents deserve to know the changes that are being recommended for the instruction of our children and given that the Education minister has embarked upon curriculum redesign in a manner that is alarming to Albertans clear across the province, in the spirit of openness and transparency when will the minister release the names of the committee members, the details on the groups that have been presenting, the documents that have been presented to the working committees, and as a show of common courtesy and simple respect why has this information not been readily accessible from the get-go?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of common courtesy to ensure that the hard-working teachers that have been working on the curriculum – they deserve the respect that they have, working through volunteers and so forth. I would like to protect them from personal attacks from this Conservative opposition. That's why I'm reluctant to release the names.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Health Care in Central Alberta

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Central Alberta region health care is no longer a priority on Alberta Health Services' top 20 list. The people of central Alberta are starting to wonder if they are less valuable than other Albertans. I understand that this is a 20-year problem, but the current government took the Red Deer central region hospital off the priority list. This hospital has not had a new bed in 17 years despite a population growth of 50 per cent or better. Can and will the Minister of Health provide a reason why this hospital was taken off the priority list, leaving 450,000 central Albertans with substandard health care?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question about ensuring that everyone, no matter where you live in this province, gets the right care at the right place

by the right provider. For decades we saw that there were drastic cuts in a number of areas throughout the province. I'm not one to say that things are perfect in Alberta. Far from it. That's one of the reasons why we're campaigning on making life better for Alberta families by making sure that we're investing and providing stable health care services and working with front-line providers. Mr. Speaker, it's important to us to ensure that every part of this province gets quality health care.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has created 15 different planning documents in the last 10 years, which included central Alberta every time except this last one, and given that metro areas have received 8,300 per cent more funding than central Alberta residents, the people of central Alberta are wondering why they are not equally valued. We are beyond planning. How does the minister suggest we move past 10 more years of planning and on to real, actual new beds and essential programs that other hospitals have had for years already?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and for the important question. We are working to make sure that every part of this province gets the right care, and that means that they have the right investment in terms of deferred maintenance. We have significant deferred maintenance in this province because of drastic, irrational cuts that happened by Conservative governments. Instead, we're moving forward by increasing the infrastructure maintenance plan. By making sure that we invest in that Red Deer hospital, we've done things to increase opportunities for obstetrics and for operations, and there is a great corridor now between Calgary and Edmonton, with a central hub in central Alberta, in Red Deer, for cancer treatments as well. The members opposite want to cut. We want to make sure that we're protecting important health care services for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government does not have a really good track record on plans, Albertans are not trusting that the requirement for yet another plan or any plan to help the people of central Alberta will ever come to fruition. It appears Alberta Health Services would rather provide plans than essential medical services. Can the minister be up front and tell central Albertans if plans are a deliberate but deceptive denial of resources instead of providing fair and essential medical services to central Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we are making important investments and making sure that folks in central Alberta, just like people living in Sylvan Lake, have increased access to essential after-hours care. I'm so proud of the fact that we've been able to work with community, not treat community like an obstacle like happened so many times in the past when political games were played with communities that deserved to have better access to health care.

The members opposite want to cut. We want to make sure we're working in partnership to invest where it's needed to make sure that everyone has access to the very best care. You can't cut \$2 billion and increase access at the same time, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite know that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Prescription Drug Coverage for Rare Diseases

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year my colleagues brought forward the case of Haley Chisholm, a young girl from High River who needs a rare drug, Soliris, to survive. After much pushing, the ministry finally met with the family, and the solution was: try an alternate remedy. Five months later Haley has endured painful hospital visits and medical procedures, missed school, had multiple visits to the hospital, failed drug therapies, and her parents' unpaid absences from work. Haley's doctor has reapplied to the STEDT program and is now back to square one. When is the Health minister going to do the right thing and help Haley?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You're right that I did meet with Haley myself, and my office continues to be in regular contact with her. The situation that she and her family are in is one that no Alberta family wants to ever have to experience, where you're worried about a child being sick. It's important to us that we ensure that health professionals are the ones determining treatment and the course for moving forward on prescribing drugs. But I also have raised with the family – and if members opposite want to do the same – that I understand that drug companies can provide compassionate coverage and regularly do, so that's an avenue that we're supporting them in, and I would encourage others, if they want to join us in that cause, to do so as well.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that precedent has been set and this funding issue should be taken care of provincially and given the precedent has also been set that the provincial minister should reach out to their federal counterpart and work together in a campaign with the drug manufacturer to provide this life-saving medicine, when will this minister take ownership and start the process of helping this poor child and provide this life-saving remedy through the specialized high-cost drug program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is clearly a dangerous path for politicians to be determining who is getting what types of drugs. That's one of the reasons why there are experts in the profession who actually make the decisions and that there are committees that are applied to, with physicians that make those decisions around the best course of medical treatment.

When it comes to opportunities where things could be experimental and might have opportunities for benefit, again, drug manufacturing companies do sometimes take exceptional measures, when something isn't on label, to pursue that angle, and that's something that may want to be pursued further by the family, by the physician. Of course, we are going to support this family in making access available when we can.

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, given that on August 7, 2013, the then opposition NDP Health critic, currently the Minister of Education, stated in a press release that the "province must fund treatment to save young girl in St. Albert" and then stated that "this is another sad and stark example of the PCs' approach to health care... to diminish and delist services" and given that this government is always blaming the past government for its lack of empathy and inaction, the then Minister of Health at that time signed off on the funding for the drug for that girl and saved her

life. Again to the Minister of Health: now that you are in government, have you decided that other things are more important? Why won't this current Minister of Health do the right thing and give Haley back her life?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very important that we work with the medical professionals who are in the best position to make determinations about prescribing and access to these types of medications, that may or may not be of benefit. I think it's a very dangerous path for somebody to stand up and assert that he knows better than medical professionals. That's one of the reasons why we're making sure that the actual expert panel on drug therapy has support to be able to make decisions, and it's up to those physicians that are governing these programs to make sure that they have access to the right areas.

I do want to remind everyone that there are opportunities for us to make sure that we look at – when there are manufacturers who are putting impediments, that might be able to increase access, that we support them in considering those options.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Opioid Use Prevention and Mitigation

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first step in dealing with addiction is admitting that you have a problem. Unfortunately, addicts remain in denial for years, but in doing so, they damage everyone around them. Premier, Minister of Health, associate minister, Justice minister, you all have a problem because Alberta has an opioid crisis and you are in denial. To the Premier: will your government take that first courageous step today and admit that Alberta has a public health emergency?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We have taken many actions to make sure that we're addressing the extreme situation that is happening in Alberta with regard to the opioid epidemic. That's one of the reasons why we're making naloxone kits available throughout the province, to make sure that anyone who wants one can get one. That's one of the reasons why we're moving forward aggressively on supervised consumption services, to make sure that real harm reduction strategies can save lives. I hope the members opposite will determine which side of the debate they want to land on that one, because this is a life-saving strategy.

I know that my colleague the associate minister will have more to say in supplemental answers, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that the federal government has set aside \$65 million in funding for provinces to respond to their fentanyl crises and given that Alberta will not even admit it has a crisis despite the deaths of 717 citizens in three years and given that Alberta could use that money to fund crucially needed programs to reduce opioid abuse, to the Health minister again: when are you going to request Alberta's share of that \$65 million?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government has been working very closely with our federal counterparts to ensure that we have a seat at the table on all discussions around funding for mental health and addiction. Make no mistake. Alberta will get a fair deal and a fair part of that, and we'll have more to say about that in the coming days.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, given that B.C. was quick to declare a public health emergency after overdoses spiked in Vancouver and given that it has received \$10 million from the federal government to combat the opioid abuse and given that Alberta's stubbornness has meant that we are refusing to accept millions of dollars to fight our own crisis, to the minister: please tell Albertans what it will take for you to declare a public health emergency.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working very closely with public health officials. We're meeting with experts in drug addiction as well as people with lived experience, who actually are some of the foremost experts in what it will take to help address this problem. We haven't declared an emergency because we have the tools that B.C. needed to call an emergency for. We are continuing to move forward on a variety of fronts. Is there more work to be done? Absolutely, and I hope that when we table our budget, the opposition will support the measures we're taking.

School Fees

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, we know that school fees can be a major burden on Alberta families and even more so in these difficult economic times. Some of my own constituents in Edmonton-Decore have told me that they struggle to pay these fees and often have to make difficult choices with their family budgets in order to do so. This is unacceptable. To the Minister of Education: how extensive are school fees in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. We heard from parents loud and clear that the school fees were simply too high right across the province. For many years this conservative opposition allowed out-of-control school fees to take place, and we are there to clean up the problem. We ran on a platform to reduce school fees, and now we are acting on that promise. We're looking for ways to reduce instructional supply and material and busing for students as well to their designated schools. We're happy to work with everybody to ensure that we have a more equal and affordable education system for . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the opposition had the chance to reduce school fees and instead let them grow, to the same minister: do these fees vary across the province, and on average how do these fees compare to those being charged in the rest of the country?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this is part of the issue. Over many years, because school boards were trying to of course deliver the best education possible but not getting stable, long-term commitments for funding from the conservative opposition, the fees started to turn into a bit of the Wild West, quite frankly. So we're

here to clean it up. I've looked across Canada, and certainly there are much more reasonable ways by which we can have school fee reductions and make differentiations, say, between field trips and basic instructional fees. We don't want anything to get in the way of a strong education for every student regardless of how much money they have in their pocket.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that noon-hour supervision fees and those charged for technology like computers are also quite high. To the same minister: what are some other examples of the most concerning school fees currently in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. Again, there are so many different school fees. It needs to be rationalized, Mr. Speaker, for one thing. Part of this legislation, which I hope that everybody will support, will be in order to make sure that we get a grip on new fees being charged and to make sure that, you know, instead of maybe ridiculing this bus fee thing, they can think about actually supporting it. That would be a good idea. I'm here to clean up the Conservative mess that happened over a long period of time. They should have the decency to listen and support this bill.

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

Education Policies (continued)

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans do not trust this government. Just look at the mishandling of the PPAs, the unwanted carbon tax, and the way they mistreated 3,500 students when they closed Trinity Christian and Wisdom home-schools. Now this government will not release the names of the organizations that are influencing the unprecedented rewrite of kindergarten through grade 12 curricula. To the Premier: when will this government get its head out of the clouds and start being honest and transparent with its intentions for our education system?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very interested in having questions like this because, you know, we have many, many teachers, postsecondary institutions, school board trustees, everybody working as volunteers to build the curriculum. The curriculum has been sitting idle between eight and 30 years now. It's high time that we did this work, and – you know what? – let's judge the work that they do based on the results that they have and not make personal attacks on the individuals that are writing this curriculum as volunteers.

Mrs. Aheer: I think Albertans asking for information about organizations is not personal attacks.

Given that in response to the 13 labour unions, advocacy groups, and school boards that called for the defunding of independent schools last week, the minister said very clearly that he supports the current funding model and has no plans to defund independent schools but that since this weekend the minister waffled on his stance and said that the funding model will likely be changed during this term and given that we've asked the minister about his intentions before and each time he has refused to give a straight, yes-or-no answer, to the minister: are you going to change the current funding for independent schools during this term of government? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, you know, it's interesting. Every two months or so the conservative opposition likes to resurrect this thing to try to whip up their base and get votes, score cheap political points, but we are actually doing the work to ensure that education is delivered right across the province, that it is funded in private schools and in home-schools and in public schools, too. We have raised that level of funding to meet enrolment, and we're very proud of what we have done. Quite frankly, this opposition likes to go around chasing their tails on cheap political points while we actually get the job done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks, tone it down. Tone it down.

Mrs. Aheer: To the minister: are you going to change the current funding of independent schools during this term of government? Yes or no?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, as I said on Friday, we review all forms of funding every year. We call it a budget, because that's what we do, because we're responsible for public funds. So, you know, that's the way it goes. Certainly, I've worked very hard with all forms of education and lots of different choices. That is a reasonable thing to do. One thing I can tell you that I am going to do: I'm going to cut school fees because they're too darn high.

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

Government Spending

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In last week's throne speech and the previous week's update to Albertans the government congratulated itself on its self-described measures to cut targeted reductions and reduce the growth of government spending, but the numbers tell a different story. Total expenses for this fiscal year are projected to be 5.2 per cent higher than originally budgeted and 9.8 per cent higher than last year's actual expenses. To the minister: if you're doing such a great job of cutting government spending, why are expenses up nearly 10 per cent?

2:40

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier. Please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to start, and then, of course, the Finance minister will follow. Let's look back at what happened in past years in the Health budget, for example. We saw increases that were close to 10 per cent each and every year, and certain line items went up even more than that. That's one of the reasons why we sat down with doctors in a respectful way and found ways to save Alberta taxpayers \$500 million over two years. That wouldn't have happened under the last guys. Instead, they would have just had rash, drastic cuts. We're working with people. They used to do mean things to people.

Dr. Starke: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the Health minister's budget is \$200 million overspent. That's not restraint. Given that this government preaches financial restraint but then has cost overruns of nearly \$800 million, some 50 times the amount of their so-called savings they announced in the throne speech, to the minister. Your last budget forecasted an increase in total expenses of 4.4 per cent, and we know you missed that target. What is your target for this year, and why should Albertans have any faith at all that you're going to meet your objective?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, we are bending the cost curve down. Of course, just two weeks ago I cut CEOs' salaries at ABCs, saving \$16 million for Albertans. I cut \$250 million out of the budget in 2015 and 2016 again, and we've got more coming in 2017. That gang couldn't shoot straight. They never could. We're targeting, and we're cutting, and we're saving Albertans money.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, they may well be targeting, but let me tell you that they are missing the mark on every single occasion. With regard to your statement about the reductions in CEO funding, Minister, I'd like to know: what's the actual amount that you're actually going to spend? It's not \$250 million. I actually read your press release, which you didn't. What percentage of your total expenses does that actually represent, Minister, or do you even know? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.
The Finance minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it sounded like that side was defending perks and golf course memberships, the kinds of things that were present in ABCs before we got here. We are cutting that. I said: \$16 million. I also said that we cut or amalgamated 26 ABCs for a savings of \$33 million. Those are the kinds of real savings we're achieving. You never did over there, and you won't do it again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Notices of Motions

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and today provide notice that at the appropriate time I'll move the following motion.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the growing number of deaths from opioid use and abuse, including the use of fentanyl, which now constitutes a state of emergency.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I want to remind all of the members again. When there is one of the members speaking, try not to get out of your chair while the Speaker is speaking to the member present.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I rise to proudly table five copies of Pathway to Prosperity, which I referenced earlier today in my question. It is the Alberta Party plan to get our province back on track by curbing government spending without hurting front-line services and reducing reliance on nonrenewable resource revenues. It not only balances the budget in four years but actually starts paying back Alberta's debt as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other reports or returns, hon. members? I have one, I believe. I rise today to table five copies of a letter I sent to the Speaker of Quebec on behalf of all of our members, expressing our deepest sympathies to the people of Quebec for the tragedy that occurred on January 29, 2017.

In addition, I'm tabling five copies of Speaker Chagnon's response.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, pursuant to Standing Order 52.09(1), response to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship recommendations from the final report, review of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office 2014 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there were two points of order. Is that correct? The Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Interrupting Members' Statements

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During Members' Statements earlier today, while, in fact, I was on my feet, members of the government side took some objection, I suppose, with some of the things that I may or may not have been saying. I just wanted to point out that on March 13, 2016, the Government House Leader rose in this place to speak about Members' Statements and the long-standing tradition inside the Chamber of Members' Statements going uninterrupted and allowing members to speak about the issues that are important to their constituents for that period of time. His words, sir:

In [the] future I would ask that people be allowed to give their members' statements without being interrupted by [any] other members.

Then, Mr. Speaker, in your ruling following you noted:

Speaker Kowalski did [the same] on April 5, 2006, at page 733 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, the principle that members should have the opportunity to speak on any subject they wish without being interrupted.

Mr. Speaker, if you're looking for a standing order, I think you will find that even though the words that they may have used are not unparliamentary, when they're interjecting during Members' Statements, it is likely to create disorder in the Chamber. So if we're going to utilize a standing order, it would be 23 (h), (i), and (j) "uses . . . insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The words they may have used were not insulting, but certainly the act of interrupting a member's statement, something well established in this House, clearly is out of order.

Perhaps I'm willing to provide a little bit of grace today, being the first day after an extended period of time away from this Chamber, but I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you would find the government members out of order for interrupting Members' Statements.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I suppose it's a good reminder on the first day, actually, of full business, the first day back, that members are not supposed to interrupt other members through heckling or applauding or other methods during the course of a member's statement.

It's also a good reminder, Mr. Speaker, that an equally important rule is that no points of order are permitted during Members' Statements. So I would remind the hon. Opposition House Leader of that.

2:50

The Speaker: Any other points with respect to this item?

I would say that the practice, as I've said at least three or four times in this House, and the point being made is: let's keep the courtesy. I happen to like no interruptions for two minutes. It's the

one time that I can hear members speak. So allow me, allow all of us to at least preserve that one practice. Please, everyone, pay attention to that.

The second point of order.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to an incident that took place during question period while the Leader of the Official Opposition was asking a very important question about how many NDP bureaucrats it takes to change a light bulb. [interjection] I'm not sure why that was funny. The Government House Leader made some comments that certainly were not adding to the decorum inside the Chamber. I, unfortunately, don't have the benefit of the Blues, and I'm not entirely sure if they were heard by yourself, but they perhaps were a response to Wildrosers and either how many it takes to change a light bulb or how many heckles they have. This certainly did not create order inside the Chamber. I'd hope that the member would be willing to withdraw those.

And just so that we're clear, if there's a question about how many Wildrosers it takes to change a light bulb, the answer is one because the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre can do it on his own.

Mr. Mason: Spare me, Mr. Speaker. Spare me.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the point of order I didn't hear the specific point, but I can tell you that your heckling continues. In fact, I received a note from a couple of our members that are here today that, you know, if we're going to get through this next three months with some degree of decorum and professionalism, I've got to tell you again that the volume and the comments are not respectful. I would leave it up to you individually to govern yourselves differently.

I use this time to rise on a point of privilege which took place in the last session.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm prepared to rule on a purported question of privilege raised in December. The Government House Leader raised the purported question of privilege on December 12, 2016, during question period immediately following the Member for Calgary-Elbow's second supplementary question that day. The Government House Leader gave oral notice under Notices of Motions later that day of his intention to raise a question of privilege under Standing Order 15 regarding supposed allegations made by the Member for Calgary-Elbow about the minister of what was then Human Services. The Government House Leader made arguments to support his purported question of privilege later that same afternoon. These comments can be found on page 2507 of *Alberta Hansard* from that day.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow and the Official Opposition House Leader made their arguments on the following day, December 13. Their remarks are found on pages 2584 and 2586 from the December 13, 2016, edition of the *Alberta Hansard*.

Hon. members, since the purported question of privilege was raised and argued, I've taken the time to review *Alberta Hansard* and the parliamentary authorities on the matter. On December 12 the Member for Calgary-Elbow made a comment during the preamble to his second supplementary question, the substance of which is as follows: the minister's "inaction means that whoever murdered Serenity is walking free today." I will note that *Alberta*

Hansard has recorded the member saying “inaction” on page 2500 and not “negligence” as was suggested by the Government House Leader as indicated in *Hansard* for December 12, 2016.

In his arguments the Government House Leader said that the Member for Calgary-Elbow made an inappropriate allegation against the minister of what was then Human Services. The Government House Leader also raised concerns about the impact of the member’s comment as in his view it “places [the] minister in a very, very difficult position and may in fact threaten his very safety.” He argued that the statements “represent a direct interference in the ability of members on this side of the House to do their job,” which, he submitted, “must be treated as a contempt of Parliament.”

Hon. members, Joseph Maingot on pages 230 to 231 of the second edition of his book *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* articulates the privileges and immunities of members pertaining to freedom from obstruction, interference, and intimidation in their parliamentary duties. Maingot writes that

Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any Member on the floor of the House or while he is coming or going to or from the House, or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament, is a violation of the rights of Parliament. Any form of intimidation . . . of a person for or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

Maingot provides additional insights on page 224.

Parliamentary privilege is concerned with the special rights of Members, not in their capacity as ministers or as party leaders, whips, or parliamentary secretaries, but strictly in their capacity as Members in their parliamentary work. Therefore, allegations of misjudgment, or mismanagement, or maladministration on the part of the minister in the performance of his ministerial duties do not come within the purview of parliamentary privilege.

Hon. members, a very similar issue arose in this Assembly in 1998. On April 29, 1998, the then Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert asked the following question. First supplemental:

Given that people are on the verge of blocking off highway 794 in protest, what is it going to take for the minister to do the right thing? Make it safe. Plan it this year. How many deaths does it take? What’s the magic number?

Second supplemental:

My final question, Mr. Speaker: why do you put partisan politics ahead of the safety of people? Are the lives of the people in Westlock more important than the lives of the people in Sturgeon?

On November 16, 1998, the then minister of transportation and utilities reported that his privileges as a member of the Assembly were breached because the statements and the questions implied that he as a member and a minister of the Crown did not care about the lives of Albertans.

In his ruling on the purported question of privilege Speaker Kowalski noted that it is the role of the Speaker to ensure that the language members use complies with the rules of what is parliamentary language. But he added, quoting *Maingot*, second edition, pages 254 to 255, as follows:

Language spoken during a parliamentary proceeding that impugns the integrity of Members would be unparliamentary and a breach of order contrary to the Standing Orders, but not a breach of privilege.

Ultimately, Speaker Kowalski found that a question of privilege is

a very serious matter. In order for a prima facie case to be established, it must be shown that there has been an interference or an obstruction in either a member’s ability to perform his or

her functions or the ability of the House to carry out its functions. This type of obstruction does not appear to have occurred. Rather, these statements, although clearly unparliamentary and inappropriate, appear to be of the nature that can arise during the heat of debate in question period.

Speaker Kowalski’s ruling can be found on pages 1908 to 1909 of *Alberta Hansard* for November 17, 1998.

3:00

Hon. members, I would also note two similar questions of privilege that arose in this Assembly involving language that was allegedly unparliamentary. The first of these was raised on May 24, 2001. In his ruling on the matter Speaker Kowalski found that the language used in a question posed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands was likely unparliamentary, but it did not give rise to a valid question of privilege. That ruling can be found on pages 808 and 809 in the May 28, 2001, *Hansard*.

On April 19, 2007, an additional similar purported question of privilege was raised, the basis of which is found on page 638 of *Alberta Hansard* for April 18, 2007. Again in his ruling Speaker Kowalski quoted the passage from *Maingot*, which I already noted, which states: “Language . . . that impugns the integrity of Members [may] be unparliamentary and a breach of order . . . but not a breach of privilege.” Furthermore, while Speaker Kowalski concluded that “it is unseemly to cast aspersions on members,” he ruled that there was no prima facie question of privilege. Speaker Kowalski’s ruling is found on pages 679 and 680 of the April 19, 2007, edition of *Alberta Hansard*.

As were other Speakers, I am acutely aware that there must be a balance between this fundamental right of the freedom of speech and the responsibility of members to use language which befits the office of a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, which also complies with parliamentary rules and practices. In this instance it could be argued that the language used was intemperate and unparliamentary, and it certainly caused disorder. Clearly, the remarks that the Member for Calgary-Elbow made could have been the subject of a point of order, but no point of order was raised. As noted, parliamentary authorities are clear. Uttering words that are unparliamentary is a breach of order, but this is not enough to constitute a question of privilege.

Furthermore, the standard applied in adjudicating a question of privilege in which it’s purported that a member has been obstructed in his or her duties is that the member has been obstructed strictly in his or her capacity as a member in his or her parliamentary work, not in his or her role as a minister or caucus leader or other role. I found no evidence that the member had been obstructed in such a way. Therefore, I can find no prima facie question of privilege.

Allow me to conclude by cautioning the hon. member and all hon. members of this Assembly to please be careful that the words they use conform to parliamentary rules and practices. Do unto others as you would have done unto you. I realize that rhetoric has become a part of this question period – hon. member, could we wait until I’m finished, please; thank you – but members must appreciate that the words they use should not lower the public’s estimation of the Assembly.

This concludes the matter.

Emergency Debate

The Speaker: I believe we have a Standing Order 30 application. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I can circulate it to the members and proceed at your will.

The Speaker: Hon. member, at this stage we are arguing the importance of the urgency of the matter.

Opioid Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to ask you to approve my motion under Standing Order 30 to adjourn the ordinary business of the Legislature to discuss a matter of urgent public health importance – namely, the growing number of deaths from opioid abuse, including the use of fentanyl – which now constitutes a state of emergency.

To be clear, I am not asking the Assembly to declare a state of emergency. Rather, I'm categorically stating that a state of emergency exists, and that it is up to the Assembly to urgently debate this issue in this Assembly. The issue is being debated everywhere but here, Mr. Speaker. It's happening at the federal level, at the municipal level, in the media, in our health and justice systems, by our police, fire, and ambulance services. MLAs on both sides of the House are touched by personal stories which are being sent to our constituency and our caucus offices. And Albertans are talking about it around their dinner tables.

It is time for this Assembly and this government, which has jurisdiction over the areas of health, justice, social services, and emergency management, to have the courage to talk about it here. It is time to put aside pride and partisanship and discuss how, together, we're going to stop this scourge and make lives better or even possible for Albertans. We will leave it up to the government to determine if it is going to keep being reactive or show stronger leadership for what matters. After hearing this debate, should the government decide that calling a state of emergency is needed in order to tackle this epidemic, then I would encourage it and applaud it and thank it for this leadership.

Now, in terms of the specific requirements for this motion I am confident that the Speaker will find it is in order. Standing Order 30(1) states:

After the daily routine and before the Orders of the Day, any Member may request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business . . . to discuss a matter of urgent public importance when written notice has been given to the Speaker at least 2 hours prior to the afternoon sitting.

This is clearly a matter of urgent public importance given that it is, in fact, a genuine crisis which is putting public health and safety at risk. As well, proper notice was given to the Speaker. It clearly meets these criteria.

Beauchesne's section 387, on page 113, says:

It must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

Certainly, the government has the administrative competence to deal with whether or not a state of emergency exists.

Furthermore, should the government want to act on the matter, the Emergency Management Act also gives the Lieutenant Governor in Council the power to formally declare a state of emergency should she be satisfied that "an emergency exists or may exist." In that context, an emergency is defined as a public health risk that exceeds the capacity in technical, human, and material resources. End quote.

In terms of opportunities for debate there is no proposed legislation or motion before the Assembly that would provide us with another opportunity to debate this matter.

Beauchesne's section 387, page 113, also says:

In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate.

I believe the Speaker will find that at least on this side of the House there is a general wish to have this debate. There are also people in

the galleries who have joined us to hear the debate and would like to see it proceed.

Beauchesne's section 389, page 113, says:

The "specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration" . . . must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention.

The current opioid crisis is ending lives, destroying families, disrupting communities at an incredible rate, and clearly is a matter of public interest, approaching more than two deaths a day and a greater number of deaths than motor vehicle injuries, motor vehicle deaths, and homicides combined. Clearly, failing to recognize this as an emergency or refusing to talk about how to address it will cause the public interest to suffer.

3:10

Beauchesne's section 390, on page 113, also says:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means "urgency of debate", when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

Given that this is the first day of regular government sitting, obviously it is the first opportunity for us to debate this. This is also our first opportunity since the government released the report called Opioids and Substances of Misuse, fourth-quarter report, to discuss the shocking data that it contained. I don't know how we could in good conscience just let that report hang over us without taking the time to take a critical look at what has been reported and what it means for the future.

It is fitting and right that we take this opportunity to debate a matter of such urgent importance instead of throne speeches, which were on the agenda for today. Likewise, I would draw your attention to the fact that despite the release of this alarming report, the government only gave the issue one sentence in the throne speech. Finally, perhaps now would be a good time for the government to tell Albertans more about what it plans to do in response to this opioid crisis.

There is also the matter of precedent. The Speaker has previously permitted debates to occur on similar matters under Standing Order 30. As recently as November the Assembly held an emergency debate on the deaths of children in government care. I would argue that the need to discuss the opioid crisis is equally or more serious and urgent, and it is getting worse.

Finally, under SO 30(7):

- (a) the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.

With regard to whether this is or isn't a genuine emergency, the facts speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker. In fact, if these numbers were related to an influenza epidemic, a public health emergency would already have been declared. There's been a steady increase in fentanyl-related deaths for four years. Our last fourth quarter shows 343 deaths, a 33 per cent increase over 2015. That is not counting roughly 150 unspecified opioid-related deaths that have still to be characterized by the medical examiner.

In 2016 there were 2,267 emergency medical service responses in Alberta to opioid-related events. Eighty-four per cent of these events occurred in the following large urban settings: Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Medicine Hat. There is a continual backlog in the medical examiners' office, causing lengthy delays in confirming suspected opioid-related deaths. This week I got a letter from a gentleman whose stepson's death occurred 11 months ago. He has yet to hear from the Chief Medical Examiner. His is one of many stories I've heard over the past year, and I'm sure my colleagues have heard similar stories.

There is also a rise in overdose deaths in Alberta's correctional facilities and remand centres, eight deaths last year compared to one in 2015 and 27 near deaths that presumably were overdoses reversed by naloxone. We don't know about those 27 near deaths because the medical examiner hasn't finished the deaths and doesn't cover the near deaths.

Police services have expressed frustration at the lack of co-ordinated wraparound health and social service supports. There's a clear lack of strategic leadership for large-scale, co-ordinated, and well-funded intervention with police, health, social services, and even our education institutions.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I want to urge you to speak to the matter of urgency and then to the substance of the debate.

Dr. Swann: Fair comment, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The list goes on. The opioid crisis is literally a matter of life and death for those who are facing it, and we need to talk about it. Therefore, with respect, I'm asking you and my colleagues in this House to recognize that the growing number of deaths from opioid abuse in this province, including the use of fentanyl, is a genuine emergency requiring our urgent consideration and debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to respond to the request made by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I believe that everyone in the House today shares the view that the spread of fentanyl and the deaths that have occurred as a result as well as the spread of other high-strength opioids are extremely alarming. In fact, I would say that this has undoubtedly created a public health crisis right across Canada and here in Alberta. I know that it's an issue that the government is very committed to tackling, whether that be through greater efforts at education, better intervention and treatment, or better supports to help break the cycle of addiction.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has dealt in part of his remarks today with the requirements for consideration of an emergency debate on this matter, and I will leave those decisions to you with respect to that rather than present arguments for or against here but will only indicate that I believe that it is fair for all members of the House to be given an opportunity to be able to weigh in on this important issue. For that reason, I support the request from the hon. member to set aside the normal business of the House in order to discuss this critical issue.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, in light of that, it sounds like we may have some agreement around the Chamber. I'll keep my remarks very brief. I think the Member for Calgary-Mountain View did a fine job of laying out just the urgency of the debate. I think a very good case could be made that this crisis, in fact, on its own merits – it would be reasonable to have an emergency debate on the fact that this is very clearly an emergency in our province and should be dealt with at the earliest possible time, which, of course, is today. Given that we've heard from the government and given that he has clearly laid out that *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states, "Finally, the Speaker may take into account the general wish of the House to have an emergency debate and grant a request for an emergency debate," it appears to me that we are certainly going to have a general wish of the House today. I would encourage you, sir, to rule in favour of proceeding with Standing Order 30.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the fentanyl crisis is baring its ugly face in every community across the province, and we're currently facing at least a death a day from fentanyl itself and double that if we include other opioids. We have people in the gallery today who know how truly tragic that is, and that's why our Progressive Conservative caucus stands united with all other opposition parties and, hopefully, the government as well to urge them to hold an emergency debate on the provincial response to the opioid crisis.

I have abbreviated my remarks. I will give you all the citations right now. First of all, this is not before the House in any form of a bill debate, and the most reasonable opportunity is right here and right now. According to *Beauchesne's* 387 to 398 – and I'll only read a sentence. Regarding motions to adjourn the House to discuss an important matter, Standing Order 30(7)(a) states, "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." If the skyrocketing number of opioid-related deaths in our province does not constitute a genuine emergency, I don't know what does. We're seeing an increase in deaths caused by fentanyl which is 57 times higher than we experienced just a few years ago.

Beauchesne's 390 states that a motion for emergency debate must meet the test of urgency; that is, "when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately." Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the well-being of Albertan families – and the lives of Albertans are at stake – nothing could be more urgent than this. Opioid addiction has been raised in question period in previous sessions, as you know, many times, and we have yet to have a proper debate and focus the attention of this House on the crisis and those it affects every day. There is no government motion on the Order Paper asking for a debate on this very important issue, which there certainly must be. There was no mention of the immediate and continuing pressing issue of fentanyl in Alberta in the throne speech last week, but I'm sure you noticed that, Mr. Speaker.

On to *Beauchesne's* 389, which states that the matter "must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this issue, if not dealt with in a real and comprehensive way immediately, will be nothing short of suffering to the public interest. In fact, it is much more pressing than that. It is, indeed, a matter of life and death.

3:20

From *Beauchesne's* 387: "Most decisions based on these conditions are bound to be subjective and few clear cut decisions can be made. In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate." Now, Mr. Speaker, as you may well know, thousands of families of current and, I dare say, present and future victims of opioid addiction are depending on your decision, sir. This matter is urgent enough to proceed. Our guests here today will attest to that.

I urge you to consider that this very important matter has escalated since – another quotation from the Premier herself, who declared on December 13, 2016, page 2578 of *Hansard*: "The rise of illicit opiates, including fentanyl and the more powerful carfentanyl, has created a public health crisis here in Alberta and, quite frankly, across the country." I don't think it needs to be much more clear than that. In *Hansard*, page 116, on March 14, 2016, the Health minister called fentanyl "a deadly threat," and on May 19, 2016, page 1054 of *Hansard*, the Health minister said, "The situation with fentanyl is something that we are dealing with in Alberta very seriously. We've been doing so for many months." It has been a year since that statement.

Lastly, from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 695:

An application was approved for an emergency debate on “the sudden and unexpected revelation of events which [had] taken place in the past, in that they might precipitate a course of conduct which, if allowed to continue unchecked, would certainly classify itself as an emergency and a matter of urgent consideration”.

Many feel that the system has failed Albertans who are addicted to opioids, and we need to do everything that we can do to ensure that this problem does not get any worse.

We can start that right now, Mr. Speaker. It is a public health crisis. We must deal with it in this Assembly as a state of emergency. Earlier today all opposition parties stood together to call on the government to take a proactive and co-ordinated approach to dealing with this issue. Our province is already in an emergency when it comes to the opioid crisis, and it's time we treat it as such.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Mason: I can wait till he's done if you would agree.

Mr. Rodney: One sentence. Mr. Speaker, I ask that you rule in favour of this motion, and I urge the members of the Assembly to vote to move forward with this very important debate, that indeed is a matter of life and death.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader raised a point of order. Is that correct?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The House leader for the third party indicated in his remarks that there was no mention of the fentanyl crisis in the throne speech. I just want to correct that because it does in fact refer to it on page 15 of the speech. I just wanted to put that on the record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're dealing with the urgency requirements, not the substantive.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. I will be brief. I will not repeat citations made previously, but I wanted to briefly rise and be on the record in support of the call for an emergency debate. The opportunity in the urgency is to show Albertans that we genuinely care about this issue, show Albertans that this is, in fact, a crisis, and here in the Assembly, for all of us to show leadership and, ideally, talk about solutions. It is an opportunity to hear from all members of the Assembly about proposed ways that we can address this issue. To the question, just briefly and finally, of urgency: with the 343 deaths last year that we know about plus the 150 as yet unspecified deaths and likely many more deaths as a result of fentanyl, carfentanyl, and other opiates, this meets the very definition of urgency. I would encourage you, Mr. Speaker, to support the call for an emergency debate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, hearing the debate, I am prepared to rule on the request for leave for this motion to proceed in accordance with Standing Order 30(2). The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has met the requirements, providing at least two hours. His motion reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the growing number of deaths from opioid use and abuse, including the use of fentanyl, which now constitutes a state of emergency.

The relevant parliamentary authorities on the subject are pages 689, 696 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387 to 390.

I have listened carefully to the argument, and my sense is that the House has an almost, possibly unanimous desire to treat this and does see this as a matter of urgency. I am for the record going to cite some of the same statements that have been made by various members. The Standing Order is clear that the question must be specific, must require urgent consideration. It must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the government, and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* further notes, on page 695, that “the Speaker may take into account the general wish of the House to have an emergency debate and grant a request for an emergency debate.”

The motion by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View raises an undoubtedly serious and pressing matter. The first meeting at the first regular sitting day of the new session: this is also the first opportunity for debate to take place.

With respect to the requirement for urgency, the following can be found in paragraph 390 of *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition:

“Urgency” within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means “urgency . . .”

Hon. members, please don't speak while I'm speaking, particularly on this matter, that I know you are all concerned about. Thank you.

. . . when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

I note that the Leader of the Official Opposition has Motion 501 on the Order Paper. Even though that motion refers to opioid addiction, I don't think the debate would necessarily be devoted to that subject. Of course, there is the Speech from the Throne debate and, early in this session, the budget debate, but I sense from the hon. members this afternoon that there is a desire on all sides of the Assembly to discuss this issue as it is so important. For these reasons, I find that there is a matter of urgent public importance in this case, and the request for leave is granted.

The rules governing the procedure, once the chair finds the request for leave to be in order, are as follows: Standing Order 30(3) requires that the question be put to a vote of the Assembly. If there are any objections to the question, then the chair will ask “those Members who support the motion to rise in their places.” If 15 or more members rise, the debate will proceed, and each member who wishes to speak will have 10 minutes until all who wish to speak have done so or until the hour of adjournment. If at least five members rise but fewer than 15, “the question whether the Member has leave to move adjournment of the ordinary business” is put immediately and if necessary is determined by division. If fewer than five members rise, the debate will not proceed. Finally, the standing order states that an emergency debate will not entail a decision of the Assembly.

Now, to the question: shall a debate on the urgent matter proceed? All in favour, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All opposed, say no. The motion is carried. The debate on this matter will now proceed.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members of the Legislature. This is a debate that's long overdue here and recognizes the deep sadness, grief, and anger developing at the inadequate and fragmented response to five years of increasing

deaths due to addictions and mental illness, especially of our young adults and First Nations. Most members and professionals have been surprised, I included, at the devastation this has taken and at how quickly and quietly it has overtaken our health care, our justice system, our social services system. Surely there is enough statistical evidence and anecdotal stories to suggest this is indeed a public health and safety emergency in this province.

3:30

Our two major municipalities are having their own discussions on how to better tackle this issue. Edmonton's mayor, Don Iveson, is quoted as saying that there's no doubt this is a serious and escalating crisis, so the time well may come for that declaration to be issued. End quote. Calgary's mayor, Naheed Nenshi, is reported saying that we lost more people to opioid overdose last year than the combined deaths from homicide and car collisions. We're not talking about this enough. We've got to do something. End quote. The Calgary Police Service is holding a public discussion on opioids March 7, this week, expressing frustration at the lack of co-ordinated social and health services. Health stakeholders are holding a public panel discussion this week, March 9, at the University of Alberta, Edmonton Clinic Health Academy, on opiates.

As an MLA I'm hearing these concerns raised almost on a daily basis from constituents, advocacy groups, and professionals in the medical, policing, and social services systems. As a physician I can confidently say that the current levels of opioid addiction overdose are beyond anything I've ever experienced in a lifetime of medical practice and constitute indeed a threat to public health and safety.

Assuming that these last-quarter reportings, that showed 343 deaths related to fentanyl, which was a 33 per cent increase over the previous year, similarly constituted only 57 per cent of all opiate-related deaths, as was reported in previous quarterly reports, then another 43 per cent of deaths have actually occurred this year than has been reported and are still awaiting final medical examiner confirmation. That would mean roughly 500 deaths last year, Mr. Speaker. We're approaching two deaths per day in this province. I happen to believe that the provincial health officer cannot be expected with the resources she has to manage this extraordinary multidisciplinary, multidepartmental crisis. Consideration should be given to reinstate the provincial mental health and addictions officer that was let go last year. It's critical to have someone in place with a mental health and addictions leadership background.

I'd also like to see a clear, comprehensive plan for mental health and addictions, specifically on the opiate crisis, that is related to a collaborative stakeholder consultation; adequate, shared resources; more open communications between these organizations; and a close monitoring to see what is working and what is not working in our systems of care. I hear too many reports that people are not getting help, are pushed from place to place, do not have a clear plan, and do not have the emotional or mental support to go through the very difficult, painful family challenge of getting off opiates.

I also believe that resources beyond those currently being used are needed and that the federal government has recognized this. It means that we have to recognize other resources outside of Alberta, which is the definition of an emergency, when current resources fail to meet the needs of the emergency.

While we don't necessarily understand all the dimensions of this epidemic, we must address the urgency. We must acknowledge that we do not have the resources or expertise currently or the co-ordination of resources needed to bring this under control. Five years surely has shown us that. With the recognition that we need resources, consideration should be given, as we have in other natural disasters, to call an emergency under the Emergency Management Act if not the Public Health Act. This would

demonstrate (a) that we now appreciate the unpredictable devastation of this evolving and increasing crisis. It would demonstrate (b) that we will develop a comprehensive plan and more effectively manage and mobilize the resources we have within this province as well as seek other resources from outside the province – why? – because we recognize that this is a national crisis needing federal, provincial, and municipal collaboration, because unprecedented numbers of people have died, and the rate has increased progressively over the last five years despite the welcome distribution of free naloxone that saves lives every day.

It's not enough to save lives. We have to get ahead of this and get people off the drugs. Harm reduction elements are important – the tremendous and growing cost and the failure of our current approach with tremendous loss of money and morale in our police service, in our social service, in our front-line health workers, who see the same people coming in again and again without getting the appropriate supports they need.

Finally, "why" includes the need for strong and expert leadership focused on developing the plan that includes policing and the justice system; human services; our education, including the post-education system; and, of course, Health, which should be leading the charge and co-ordinating this effort as well as nongovernmental agencies, some of whom are represented in the gallery today; and the professionals outside the health system that are dealing with this: social workers, psychologists, counsellors.

What is needed? The government of Canada signed on November 19, 2016, a joint statement of action to address the opioid crisis with eight provinces and the Northwest Territories but not Alberta. Why is that? Why was Alberta not at the table?

More money needs to be directed at various sites and harm reduction approaches, especially supervised substitute therapy, and approaches to more focused leadership and a plan that includes all stakeholders. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that new and expert leadership focused on co-ordination and integrating the partnering of these various organizations and stakeholders with experts in mental illness, addiction, as well as the police, social services, and schools is essential. Clearly, enhanced funding for supervised injection sites and opiate replacement therapy are needed. Other harm reduction programs are needed beyond the big cities, where we know that we have much stronger resources available to deal with poverty and homelessness, including their families in a comprehensive approach to their care.

Doctors, too, are fundamentally involved in this crisis. They have been involved in prescribing too many opiates, failing to monitor the opiates and other psychoactive drugs, and according to the college's triplicate prescription program requiring all doctors prescribing opiates to register these, there's been a failure of doctors to check on individual patients on whether they're taking more drugs than they should be or continuing to take opiates from more than one physician. That is the responsibility of the medical profession and the college. To its credit the college has finally brought in this week standards for opiate prescribing. Now they must monitor and enforce more stringently, confronting the painful truth that most addicts were begun on prescription opiates.

My final comments, Mr. Speaker, have been said.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I have a request. The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by thanking the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his passion and his advocacy on this issue. I know that he comes to this with his full heart and a deep caring for the future of Alberta.

Over the past year I've met with Albertans who've been touched by this crisis of opioid use and overdose that we are experiencing. I've met with doctors who realize that the prescription practices of the past decades have helped create this problem. I've met Albertans with chronic pain who are deeply concerned that their needs will be lost in the work to solve the problem. I've met with members of Alberta Addicts Who Educate and Advocate Responsibly, or AAWEAR, who said clearly that they need a seat at the table. They've said: nothing about us without us.

3:40

I've met Albertans who've lost loved ones to overdose: sons, daughters, brothers, husbands, wives, neighbours, and coworkers. I think most if not all of us in this House have either lost someone they know or know of someone who has. There are hundreds of grieving families in Alberta. I know that every day those families want to see their government taking more action to prevent deaths and to spare other families from enduring this grief, and they are right. We absolutely must do more.

I'm going to touch on the language used by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I know he has called for a public health emergency in the past. Today he is calling for a provincial emergency, and I understand that sentiment. I would like the member to know and this House to know that the use of emergency powers is something that this government has seriously considered and that we continue to review. We know that more action is necessary. We do not believe at this time that activating our provincial emergency response system will provide new ways that we can help Albertans who use substances. We do not believe that substance use is something that can be fixed in the 30 days provided for in the Emergency Management Act or in the Public Health Act. It would not be helpful for the province of Alberta to enter an indefinite period of emergency in response to what is fundamentally a crisis of social isolation and stigma.

More help is coming. It will build on the work that we have already done in several key areas. Health and Justice staff are working side by side to track this problem in detail, providing important information to law enforcement and public health officials. Officials from across this government are working together to collaborate within individual departments and individual ministries to address this problem.

I recently met with both the mayor and the chief of police in Calgary. In both meetings we discussed our desire to work together to share data and to find collaborative solutions. The issue of wraparound services came up, and that is something that all of us are agreeing is an important piece of solving this puzzle. I know that the federal Health minister is also very interested in a national opioid data program.

I would like to assure the House that Alberta is a leader in Canada in providing timely and accurate data on opioid misuse. In fact, when I was at the Opioid Summit in late November, which the member referenced, many of the provinces across our great land were looking to Alberta as a leader on this issue, and we heard from experts in all fields and all areas of addiction and support that the work we are doing is on the right track.

Is there more to do? Absolutely.

We are working closely with the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. We are very pleased to see the college's updated prescription guidelines. These will help doctors and patients make the best decisions about appropriate prescribing of opioid painkillers. We know that the college is also aware of the need for more doctors to be able to treat substance use, and we are working with them to help bring more treatment options into primary care. We've also heard the challenges around data sharing

for doctors and pharmacists and are working with the colleges to address those issues.

This government has moved quickly to make naloxone as widely available as possible. This is a short-term intervention, the definition of a Band-Aid. Naloxone is meant to save a life at the last possible moment. We know that the take-home naloxone program, the kits, have reversed hundreds of potentially fatal overdoses. Today any Albertan who wants a kit or is concerned that they might need one can get one easily, for free, without a prescription. Any Albertan who knows someone or thinks they might know someone who may be at risk of an overdose can obtain this life-saving kit. They can get it at a community pharmacy in communities across our province, or they can get it from a local harm reduction agency. Recently we made sure that all of our first responders across Alberta will have access as well.

Beyond naloxone, we have made opioid replacement therapies like Suboxone and methadone easier to access, with new clinics that have opened in Cardston and new clinics that will be opening soon in Grande Prairie and the central zone. Clinics already exist in Edmonton and Calgary, and in those communities an Albertan can receive this treatment inside of a week. Is that good enough? No. Reducing these wait times and expanding access outside of urban centres is a priority for this government.

We are also working to reach out and connect with Albertans who use substances even if they are not yet ready to enter treatment. Treatment only works when an individual is ready for it, and we need to make sure that treatment is available when people are ready. We are also needing to make sure that those people are able to live another day to make another choice. Offering supervised consumption services is one of the most critical life-saving measures available. We are working in partnership with outstanding community agencies to provide these services in a way that provides wraparound social and medical care and provides access to counselling and treatment. We are doing this in partnership with the local residents, local government, and law enforcement. I would like to do this in partnership with members opposite as well, and I would strongly urge them to support supervised consumption services.

Our government committed to moving forward with supervised consumption services in the throne speech and to working with communities to open these life-saving services. The issue of supervised consumption services has been intensely studied, and the evidence is crystal clear: supervised consumption saves lives. Communities across Canada are developing applications to the federal government, and the federal Health minister has made it very clear to me that she wants to make these services available to Canadians as quickly as possible.

I look forward to hearing from the Official Opposition and the third party on this, much like I look forward to the continued debate on this issue here in this House and to plans, concrete plans, to address this crisis. I've met with members opposite as well as many community groups, and my door is always open. I look forward to hearing their ideas.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In just three years the number of fentanyl-related deaths in Alberta has surged from 117 to 717. I think I can illustrate the magnitude of those deaths in a way that we as Members of the Legislative Assembly can relate to. Losing 717 Albertans in just three years would wipe Bashaw off the map, it would turn Boyle into a ghost town, and the homes of Consort would be empty. I know that's a bit alarming, but it's true.

Now, try to imagine the pain and suffering of the thousands of families and friends of each of the dead. It's almost too much to comprehend. The 717 dead Albertans are just a tally of the fentanyl-related deaths. We don't even have accurate figures for the opioid-related fatalities, which is a related and growing issue.

I am proud that so far our work to combat this scourge has been collaborative in this Assembly. For instance, after I encouraged the Minister of Justice to increase the funding for ALERT, the provincial government stepped up, and they did do the right thing. We also put aside partisan politics to unanimously approve Bill 205, which controls the pill presses used to manufacture the deadly concoctions sold on Alberta streets.

But while Bill 205 was designed to halt the production of tens of thousands of fentanyl-laced pills, I warned the government that Albertans would still die without a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach for dealing with our opioid crisis. I had thought that action would have already occurred, and I'm disappointed that it has not. Once again I'm urging action, further action. We are in the midst of a crisis, and we need to treat it as such. More needs to be done, full stop.

I'm not accusing our government of indifference or even inaction. What I'm saying is that we need to do better. The first step in dealing with the addiction is admitting that we have a problem. Premier, Minister of Health, Associate Minister, Justice minister, you have a problem. We all have a problem. Please admit it. Take the appropriate action to deal with it.

3:50

What is that action? Well, we must follow in the footsteps of our neighbours in British Columbia and declare a public health emergency. I often talk about former Police Chief Hanson's motto of education, prevention, and intervention. Declaring a public health emergency will allow front-line responders such as police and paramedics as well as the whole health system, the justice system, and municipalities to address this crisis using a multipronged approach. We need a crossministerial body established to quickly implement new models of prevention and care. We need real-time data that will allow law enforcers to address an evolved and a very evolving situation which occurs rapidly. We need full commitment to educate the public on the serious dangers of all opioids, the terribly toxic recreational ones that appear quickly on the streets and the opioids that Albertans obtain legally for bona fide health problems. If this government does not declare a public health emergency and instead continues to deal with our opioid crisis in a reactive, piecemeal fashion, more and more Albertans will die.

The federal government is taking action, and it's listening to advice. After Bill 205 passed in the House, I reached out to the federal Health minister, and I asked her to do the following: prohibit tools used to manufacture drugs, prohibit the ingredients for creating fentanyl and other illicit opioids, expedite approval for the nasal spray version of naloxone. I'm pleased to note that Minister Philpott has either taken action or is in the midst of taking action through Bill C-37 on all of my recommendations.

You can likely understand, then, why I find it strange that our own province is so hesitant to take advice on the need to implement a comprehensive plan to combat the opioids that are killing our citizens in ever-increasing numbers. I'm absolutely baffled why this government chooses to double down and dig their heels in the sand and not call this what it is, a public health emergency. The federal government has even made \$65 million available to the provinces for opioid programs. B.C. called it a public health emergency and received \$10 million of that funding. Alberta has yet to secure a penny. Yet AHS's own figures allow us to conservatively estimate that opioid abuse is costing \$5 million a year in emergency room

visits alone. That doesn't take into account hospitalizations or treatment or enforcement or naloxone, and I could go on and on and on. If only for the sake of receiving this money and earmarking it to the positive opioid abuse initiatives, why would our government not declare this emergency? I'm clearly frustrated, Mr. Speaker, but I will not give up.

Once again I'm calling on this government to build on the collaborative efforts that we have seen so far in the Legislature on this issue. Please declare a public health emergency, launch proactive, multiministerial attacks on opioids. Working with experts in the field, this government can focus on increasing access to long-term treatment of opioid addicts. Far too often we incarcerate an addict for the night and release him or her back onto the street, back into their addiction, and the cycle goes on and on and on. It's time for a different approach. It's time for real help, help that will pull them out of their addiction. Albertans continue to die, and it is time for us to find proactive, all-encompassing solutions.

To the Premier, to the Health minister: please do not make any more excuses. Albertans are not buying it. Again, please declare a public health emergency today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that affects all Albertans. I don't think it can be overstated, the devastating impact that fentanyl and other opioids are having on our communities, on our families, and on all of our loved ones. What's necessary to address this crisis, as my hon. colleague the Associate Minister of Health has pointed out, are actions, and that's why the government is taking action.

Have we solved the crisis yet? No. I don't think that anyone would say that we have, but as my colleague has outlined, the government is taking steps to ensure that we move forward. We're investing money in treatment beds, in replacement therapies, in naloxone, and we're advocating for supervised consumption sites.

Mr. Speaker, the evidence is clear, and our law enforcement professionals, many of whom I've spoken to in detail on this issue, support this. This is not a problem that we can enforce our way out of. We have to attack the demand side. It's true that there is an enforcement element, and we do have that role. This government has taken action on that front as well. After the former Conservative government, the federal government, cut funding to ALERT, this government, this NDP government here in Alberta, stepped in to fill that funding to ensure that we had that integrated model, the best in the country, to help us on the enforcement side. These actions were taken as a result of listening to Albertans. We listened to community groups. We listened to the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, to front-line police officers, and to mayors throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, we know we won't solve this problem overnight. We know that it is a complex problem with multiple influences that we will need a long time to work on, and one of the things that we think is necessary to address this is good data. That's why we've asked the office of the Chief Medical Examiner to continue doing significantly more work. They were the first we know of to develop a test for carfentanil in blood. In cases previously noted as multiple drug toxicity, our medical examiners are going back to re-examine those deaths to determine if opioids were the primary cause. This is complex and detailed work. In many cases, with the volume of drug in the blood, multiple different drugs could themselves have caused the death, so we need to be sure that we're taking our time to get it right and to ensure that we have good, solid, concrete data to roll out the door for Albertans.

This increase in work required additional resources, and that's why this government stepped up. I announced just a few months ago a million dollars in additional funding. This will fund, Mr. Speaker, two new medical examiners and one research officer, who will be able to help co-ordinate the data to ensure that we have the best information available in the country. We've also just completed a new toxicology lab that will help us to get a handle on this problem. We know that saying that we have better data and a better understanding of the problem will not come as comfort to those who have lost loved ones to this crisis, but we do know that it's a necessary precursor to continue moving forward and to continue addressing this crisis.

This crisis requires investment, Mr. Speaker. It requires investment in front-line resources throughout the province, and I hope that when it comes time for budget, when it comes time to make and pay for those investments, all of us will remember that this is the cost we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, we've been working closely with police services. I've been in constant contact with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, and in fact I raised this issue with them just in February. We've been working with police and communities on the need for supervised consumption services. I have found that our police partners are very supportive, that the evidence indicates that this is the way to go. EPS certainly has been very publicly supportive of such supervised consumption services provided they have wrap-around supports to ensure that people have access to alternatives, not only that they survive to make a better choice in the future but that we make those better choices available to them.

4:00

In addition, we've been working with our federal counterparts. In fact, at the Justice table I was the first provincial Justice minister to raise the issue of fentanyl in January of 2016 at our Quebec FPT.

Mr. Speaker, it's clearly the case that this is a challenge. The government is willing to step up and meet that challenge, and I'm glad to see that all members in this House support our efforts in that direction.

Certainly, with respect to opioids in correction facilities we have a huge concern for the safety of our front-line staff and for the safety of the inmates in those centres. We have been working, Mr. Speaker, with advocates for those who are incarcerated. We have been working with the union to ensure that our corrections professionals have the necessary tools to deal with this because it can be very challenging for them. We have naloxone available on all sites. Our officials indicate that there isn't an increase in the frequency of drugs coming into the centres, but because fentanyl is very deadly, that's a huge concern for us. We take a number of steps, including examination for drugs, weapons, and other items when the inmate is admitted, drug screening, the use of drug dogs, regularly scheduled rounds, and we're also reviewing the effectiveness of body scanners for inmates coming into our correctional facilities.

Mr. Speaker, to conclude my comments, we can't overstate the impact that this is having on our families and communities. We know and our partners throughout the justice system know that this is an issue that needs to be addressed by way of support for the addict, by way of ensuring that people survive to make a better choice, and that we support them to make that better choice in the future. It's a complex issue that requires a complex and co-ordinated response, and that's why we're working so closely both between the ministries of Health and Justice but also with our partners in the health care field, in the corrections field, and in policing.

At the end of the day, this is a problem that requires action, and those actions are ones that the government is taking. We have not

solved the problem. We will need to continue to take further actions in the future, and this requires that we invest resources. These lives are worth that investment, Mr. Speaker, and I hope, again, that when it comes time to debate the resources necessary to achieve those outcomes, everyone will, at the end of the day, remember that the costs can be measured in lives and that those investments are absolutely critical.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great sense of urgency and seriousness that I rise today to speak to the emergency debate on the fentanyl crisis here in Alberta. Today all parties in the opposition have risen above partisan lines to call on this government to do their job. Fentanyl, according to the data provided, has risen to a point where there is almost one death per day. It is clear that the government's strategy to deal with this is just not working. This government has taken a singular, narrow-minded approach, which involves primarily the use of naloxone. This is a Band-Aid solution, and it has done nothing to help address the serious addiction treatment problems or to help get any of these drugs off our streets.

The Wildrose cares about saving lives, Mr. Speaker, the lives of individuals suffering from addictions. The Wildrose cares about safe and strong communities. Albertans care about these things, too. This is why we believe the government needs to take this issue seriously, that they need to have a well-thought-through, unified, and co-ordinated plan across all government ministries. This is certainly something that we feel the NDP government has failed at.

As the shadow minister for Justice and Solicitor General I've been appalled at this government's silence as to how they plan to tackle this problem from an enforcement side. In fact, the only leadership Albertans have seen from this cabinet and the minister is the willingness to hire more medical examiners to conduct autopsies on victims. We need action now.

The fact is that criminals are importing cheap sources of fentanyl from overseas in order to cut their costs. They create knock-off versions of oxycodone, heroin, and they're even adding fentanyl to other drugs such as marijuana. The problem with this is that drug dealers are not chemists, and the quality, the consistency, and potency of these drugs are unable to be tested. Fentanyl is a drug which is 100 times stronger than morphine, and even more scary are some of the derivatives like carfentanil, which is up to 1,000 times stronger than fentanyl. Every time people use these drugs, they are playing a dangerous game of Russian roulette.

Those who are lucky enough to survive the odds are causing other challenges. This drug and its derivatives are so powerful and so addictive that people will do anything to get it, which leads to increased crime, thefts. Both major cities' chiefs of police have stated that crime is linked to a number of factors. Both are seeing a direct correlation between fentanyl and our crime surge. Now, ALERT, the Alberta law enforcement response teams, has been doing a good job of taking pills and dealers off the street, but they can't stop everything. We need to ensure that all police forces are properly equipped and that the government is approaching this from a co-ordinated position: all ministries, all stakeholders.

Now, this is why we believe it is necessary to declare a public health emergency. There are several reasons for this, and I will attempt to highlight some of the most relevant. First and foremost, there is an aspect of raising public awareness. It is absolutely crucial that we recognize that this is not just an issue affecting those living on our streets or chronic drug abusers. This is hurting all Albertans in all walks of life, all demographics. The stigma needs to go away.

This does not just mean the general public, either. This means awareness amongst health care professionals.

When we are talking about a drug that can cause an overdose with two tiny flakes, it is important that we keep our first responders alert and aware that this drug is out there and it's dangerous. Outbreaks only get worse when they also pick off first responders. This is something that's already happened in B.C. a few times, putting police officers, paramedics, and firefighters in the hospital due to skin contact with this deadly drug. We as Albertans risk a similar experience here if we take our own first responders for granted in this ongoing epidemic.

Second, a declaration will result in real-time opioid statistics being published on a frequent basis. This is very important. Currently there is no mandate for the government to report, and there is no sense of urgency to report the data in real time. Every life is important; they deserve to be counted. This drug has claimed several lives. If this is a tool that will help law enforcement and health professionals come up with solutions, then the government has an obligation to declare a public health emergency.

Thirdly, this will allow for a co-ordinated response from the government, allowing all ministries to collaborate in a deliberate effort. This means including the ministries of Justice, Health, Community and Social Services, aboriginal affairs, and all others. We need to be assured that there is a plan in place so there will be measurable results. These results are not simply counting how many naloxone kits have been distributed. This is not a success that is measured in costs. Naloxone is an important tool that will allow vulnerable individuals the opportunity, as has been said before, to make a better decision on another day. But it is just a tool. Solutions include bringing everyone together.

4:10

This is an emergency. There's been a 33 per cent increase in the rate of overdose deaths linked to the drug from just 2015, and a shocking 110 per cent rise from just two years ago. Calgary had a death toll of 149 people, people with families, just in 2016.

Wildrose released a combatting fentanyl 10-point plan last year. We provided several solutions to help this situation. In here we gave several recommendations, and it's worth noting a few of them now. Point 5: "Increased funding for addictions and detox programs within the province." This is crucial. Many people, especially those who choose to seek help, cannot access it. Point 6: "Ensure that all ambulances and hospitals have adequate supplies of naloxone available." Point 8: "Urge the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to ensure the harshest possible prosecution [and punishment] for fentanyl trafficking or creation." Point 9: "Urge the federal government to enact federal laws or regulations regarding the import, export, sale, and possession of commercial pill presses in Canada." We have done some of these things here in Alberta. We need to do more outside of just this province.

Today we have heard from families who have been devastated by this crisis. All of us have spoken with these people here today in the gallery, who are very brave for being here, pushing this issue. These families have been devastated by this crisis, the seriousness in which it should be taken. We have an obligation as legislators to stand up for these families and for others across this province and take action to address a situation where almost one person per day is dying.

There are obstacles to monitoring activity as federal and provincial authorities have no real-time data collection of opioid-related hospital visits, coroners' toxicity reports, arrests, border seizures, drug and urine tests, or reports from addictions counselors, probably because they're not totally accessible.

The Wildrose is urging the government to answer our call from spring of last year, renewed today: implement a public state of emergency, please.

Thank you for your time.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to have the opportunity to rise in the House and participate in this debate today on a very important and crucial issue. I, too, would like to acknowledge the families that have joined us here today. I appreciate that you've come here to share some of your stories and recognize some of your own pain in trying to seek that this does not happen to other families in our province, and I honour you for joining us and being part of this here today.

I first had the opportunity to meet families and friends of people who had died from overdoses at the international overdose day here in Edmonton back in August of 2015. It was my honour to speak on behalf of the government as part of that. There I saw many people whom I had the opportunity to first meet just shortly after my election in 2015, when I had the opportunity to tour Boyle Street Community Services, a truly amazing social agency operating right here in Edmonton-Centre.

On that tour I met Marliiss Taylor, a nurse and community advocate who for over 20 years in Edmonton has been running the Streetworks program. Now, Streetworks' original goal was to combat HIV, but over time they expanded their work and became the first organization in Canada to equip workers with naloxone kits. But all along the principle that Streetworks has been committed to has been the principle of harm reduction, the recognition that substance use is a chronic medical issue, that it's not a moral issue but a medical condition, one that touches almost every family in every community in our province.

Members today have spoken of the need to remove the stigma around substance use. I absolutely agree. It's regrettable that in past years some politicians, including, I think, some past federal politicians, have failed to do that. They took actions which furthered the stigmatization and which prevented the implementation of important services that could be saving lives.

Now, harm reduction focuses on practical strategies that work to reduce the negative consequences associated with substance abuse, allowing workers to build relationships of trust with those who are suffering from substance use so that they can help them address the root causes and the drivers of their substance use and begin to help them on the difficult road to recovery.

After having met Marliiss, I was very happy a short while later to have the opportunity to bring up her name with Minister Hoffman – pardon me; I apologize – with the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the Minister of Health. It was the opportunity to help connect Marliiss with her, and I was overjoyed when in October 2015 Marliiss was appointed to the board of Alberta Health Services, bringing a strong voice to advocate for those suffering from substance abuse.

That same month I had the opportunity to meet with Marliiss and fellow members of a group called AMSISE, Access to Medically Supervised Injection Services Edmonton, at my office. They shared with me their proposal to embed safe consumption services in existing community agencies here in Edmonton. They explained how these sites could help to combat the incredible costs that substance use visits on individuals, families, and our health care system and how safe consumption sites could drastically reduce those effects by greatly reducing substance users' likelihood of overdose, by reducing their exposure to criminals, by reducing their need to commit criminal acts, by reducing the spread of infectious diseases,

and by reducing the stigma and isolation of substance use, a crucial step in addressing its root causes and helping users on the road to recovery.

Now, being familiar with the incredible results that have been seen through similar work at Vancouver's InSite clinic, I was very excited by AMSISE's proposal. I made every effort to give them the opportunity to connect with our government, and in February 2016 I had the honour of bringing them in to share their proposal with some of our fellow MLAs and the Associate Minister of Health. Last October I was incredibly proud to see the minister announce funding of \$230,000 to support AMSISE in engaging our local communities as part of their application for a federal exemption to operate those sites here in Edmonton as well as another \$500,000 to help other communities conduct needs assessments for safe consumption services in their areas.

Mr. Speaker, there is overwhelming evidence that these service sites save lives, providing users with social support, medical care, and the opportunity to live long enough to make better choices. They also provide a vital on-ramp for the wraparound services that can change people's lives.

Mr. Speaker, I also note that AMSISE began developing their proposal over five years ago. They were unsuccessful in getting any support from previous governments. They were unable to get support to move these projects forward. It's been four months since we announced our support, and to the best of my knowledge I have heard nothing from the Official Opposition or the third party. Now, I recognize that our previous Prime Minister and some federal politicians that our opposition continues to vocally support went out of their way to make these important, scientifically proven, life-saving interventions next to impossible to provide, but it's my sincere hope that members on all sides of this House will have the courage to take a clear stand in support of these crucial investments because saving lives is far more important than trying to preserve or burnish our political reputations.

4:20

Investing in harm reduction – specifically, safe consumption sites alongside opioid replacement therapy, needle exchanges, and additional treatment beds, which we have invested in and continue to invest in – is one of the most effective tools we have to address the challenges posed by fentanyl and opioid use. I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the initial sites that are proposed are within the downtown core and are targeted at those who have the most need. I recognize that we need to see more of these sites, and I look forward to seeing this federal process go forward. I look forward to, hopefully, AMSISE receiving the federal exemption so that they can start these sites, that we can prove their efficacy and see more of these sites open up throughout our province, around our city, because we know that when people use alone, they are at their most dangerous. When we provide them with safe places where they can get support, away from stigma, we have the opportunity to save lives, to help connect people with services and supports that can help them make better choices.

I appreciate the concern that's been brought forward by members on all sides of this House today. I recognize the desire to want to do something publicly to declare support. I agree that we need to work to remove that stigma, work to bring this out more to the public, and we can do that. We are doing that here today. I've been doing that since I was elected to this office. I was very pleased to see at international overdose day last year that Dr. Verna Yiu of Alberta Health Services was there to speak and indicate their support for harm reduction and addressing these problems here in our province. But, Mr. Speaker, I have not heard anything today that requires a provincial emergency to be called to accomplish. These are things

we can all do. We can work together, we can be collaborative, we can raise awareness, and we can continue to take the important steps that our government has been taking.

Mr. Speaker, none of us want to see any more lives lost. I look forward to continuing to work with my government colleagues, to work with members across the aisle, and I look forward to hearing them give their vocal support for important services like safe consumption sites as part of harm reduction and part of a comprehensive plan to address this issue in our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my hon. colleagues may be surprised to learn that Grande Prairie has had a difficult struggle with fentanyl and other deadly opioids, but I'm very proud of the way our first responders, the RCMP detachment, medical personnel, and social agencies have dealt with this devastating epidemic. In fact, our community's attempts have been so successful that Grande Prairie has seen a reduction in the number of fatalities in the past year.

Fort McMurray's efforts to tackle the crisis have also proved positive. As proof let me review the numbers of deaths in our major northern cities over the past two years. In 2015 Grande Prairie lost 18 of our citizens to fentanyl-related overdoses. The drug also killed 17 people in Fort McMurray. But in 2016 each city saw the number of fatalities drop to nine. That's a 50 per cent reduction in Grande Prairie and slightly more than that in Fort McMurray. The reason we are seeing this change for the better is due to the concerted efforts of many local agencies in northern Alberta; for instance, health units have made special attempts to generate awareness of the dangers of fentanyl and other deadly synthetic opioids.

The RCMP and the Alberta law enforcement response teams, known as ALERT, also waged aggressive antidrug campaigns. In Fort McMurray ALERT managed to wipe out an entire drug operation, which took thousands of pills off the streets. Grande Prairie's Mounties established a special police unit to combat the drugs in our area. HIV North also mobilized to distribute naloxone kits to smaller rural communities in northern Alberta. I have to credit the provincial government for announcing plans to open an opioid dependency treatment clinic in Grande Prairie this spring. All of these initiatives have helped the north to at least gain some control over a terrible crisis that has been tearing apart our communities.

Grande Prairie, which saw its crime rate spike in recent years, has even seen a decrease in criminal activity. The positive turnaround in the north shows us what can happen if this kind of co-ordinated approach were to occur on a provincial scale. Of course, it'll take the government of Alberta to implement the framework, and I hope that that happens. If the provincial co-ordination does not take place, fentanyl will continue to take a toll throughout our province, and it could even regain its foothold in the north.

While I've been pointing to some progress up north, fentanyl and other deadly synthetic opioids are devastating small communities. Red Deer, for instance, has lost 39 citizens to fentanyl-related deaths in the past two years, and we know that a number of First Nation reserves faced severe crises over the past few years, to the point of declaring their own states of emergency in order to stem the carnage. Like all other communities, the leaders of the reserves had to create a framework from scratch when they were forced to take action due to their desperate circumstances.

Fentanyl is also prevalent in small-town Alberta, where crime has climbed alarmingly. Taber is an example of a small rural town that has been dealing with a steep increase in drugs and other crime. It

is especially hard for communities like Taber, which is only a short distance from Calgary, because its residents fall prey to criminals bent on stealing their vehicles and ATVs to make money for their next fix or to drug dealers seeking new customers. As the Taber chief of police noted, break and enters and property crimes fuel the drug trade. As we have seen an increase in fentanyl and crystal meth usage in southern Alberta, we can draw a nexus to Calgary. Like so many communities, the Taber police service took matters into their own hands by launching a public awareness campaign on fentanyl that went viral in its community. Taber also found its own school resource officer who teaches students about the dangers of drugs.

I've outlined a few of the occurrences around rural Alberta in an effort to demonstrate the efforts communities and regions are making to combat this crisis and to underline that this crisis is occurring throughout Alberta, not just in our large cities. But if mid-size and small communities can implement measures and programs that make a difference locally, can you imagine how powerful a provincial response would be? Mr. Speaker, I urge our government to call a public health emergency and start taking this step today for all Albertans. If they do not take this step, they are doing all Albertans a disservice because everyone is suffering in some way from this crisis, whether they know it or not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to say that I'm pleased to rise, but this is an important subject. I do want to honour the attendance of those in the gallery on this. Our hearts go out to all these families who have lost loved ones.

The rise of illicit fentanyl in our communities has created a public health crisis here in Alberta and across Canada. Just as the Member for Airdrie mentioned, this is a crisis in my riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. We've had several deaths from fentanyl overdose in that area. You know, the stereotype about Edmonton-Whitemud is that it is the nicest part of Edmonton and that it is generally well off. That hasn't protected us in Edmonton-Whitemud from the scourge of this drug.

You know, I attended the opening of the Alberta and the Great War exhibit just last Thursday evening. I toured the exhibit, and I couldn't help but think that there's a similarity in this. I mean, we talk about the death toll, but think about the families who got those telegrams after those brave soldiers in the First World War were killed or were a casualty. It's a very analogous situation now for our first responders who have to contact families here in our ridings to let them know that there's been a death. I think that, you know, we all need to recognize the impact of this.

4:30

I really want to commend the MLA for Calgary-West on his private member's bill, that was unanimously passed by all members of this Assembly to try to limit the production of illicit pills. I think that this was a shining example of the kind of co-operation that this House can come to that's going to have some impact.

I want to turn to my experience as a physician. I've actually been on the front lines of illicit substance abuse for many, many years. I had an experience about eight years ago in which we had several patients show up in the hematology ward here in the University hospital: some from Fort McMurray, some from Grande Prairie, some from Red Deer. They all were common. They were young people that had a profound shortage of white blood cells. Now, ordinarily that means you've got leukemia, and I've got to give you chemotherapy, and I'm going to hopefully fix your leukemia. But, in fact, what was going on was that these individuals had been

poisoned. It was men and women, and it wasn't the classical substance abuser profile.

These men and women had been exposed to a chemotherapy agent called levamisole. Levamisole caused a profound leukopenia in these patients. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster will know all about levamisole since it's a veterinary product. But that medicine was only detected because our toxicology lab at the University of Alberta hospital was the first one in North America to actually detect it in urine. We were able to recognize that this epidemic of leukopenia was coming from contaminated cocaine, crack cocaine. We were able to actually alert public health and get the word out to my fellow physicians that if you saw a young person with a low white blood cell count, you should get the testing done.

Now, the Alberta OCME is believed to be the first toxicology laboratory in Canada to positively identify carfentanil in human blood, and this was just developed last October. The new toxicology lab is going to increase testing capacity for drug-related deaths from opioids like fentanyl as well as carfentanil. With this help we're going to be able to provide interim reporting as well as quarterly reporting of opioid deaths. This is a really important advance and is an example of how the province of Alberta is responding to this crisis. As the Minister of Justice indicated, the government is supporting the OCME by hiring two new medical examiners and a research officer, and this is going to help support the data collection that is shared with Alberta Health.

I wanted to mention one other thing that's going on that's quite important, and it was alluded to in previous remarks. We need to be able to have greater use of the pharmacy information network and Netcare. These are things that physicians should be using before they prescribe medicines. I think we need to come to some understanding with physicians in general that that's a requirement. It's a standard, and as was indicated by another member, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta has said that.

Now, I want to turn back to my own experience. There are many Albertans with acute or chronic pain that cannot abstain from opioids. Some high-dose narcotic treatment is essential, particularly in palliative care or if you've got diseases like sickle-cell crisis, osteoporosis, phantom limb pain, vertebral disc disease, fibromyalgia. These are people that need to have opioids, so you can't expect that everybody that's on opioids is going to be abstaining. We've got to come up with some systems with medical supervision and with appropriate documentation by physicians and nurses as well as pharmacists on the use of these medicines.

Basically that's the message that I wanted to get across. I think that Alberta is approaching this in a multipronged way. I've very impressed with the way that our police and other first responders are responding to it. I'm impressed with the way the pharmacists as well as the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta are responding to it. I basically think we need to continue to support that sort of activity and, hopefully, overcome this scourge.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by recognizing the people in our gallery for being here today and thanking you and all of the members that have spoken to this opioid crisis. We've heard many impassioned arguments today, and I want to thank the members for their combined wisdom on this issue.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Now, earlier today I heard someone refer to this crisis as a war, and I think that's an appropriate term. The impact that this war, this crisis, will continue to have on our society is just going to devastate the lives of so many Albertans, and in many ways it does feel like

a war. I think it's up to us as legislators to try to find the concrete and the workable and adaptable solutions to address this crisis. That's why today all of the political parties in opposition gathered together. The Wildrose, the Progressive Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Alberta Party: that's why we gathered today, to jointly call on the government to declare a public health emergency to deal with the fentanyl crisis.

This crisis may appear to have exploded on the scene in just the last couple of years, but as is often the case, that's not the truth. It's come to us with a history that's quite complex. The path of opioid abuse and addiction can be traced to the rise of drugs like OxyContin. OxyContin, a slow-releasing pain reliever, became the drug of choice for many when patients and users discovered that it produced a heroin-like rush when crushed and consumed. It was a prescription drug that could be purchased over the counter, and it's left a trail of addicts and pharmacy burglaries and dislocation of society for Canadians to have to deal with.

As society took measures to try to deal with the misuse of OxyContin, desperate addicts looked for other options, and they soon turned to other opioids like fentanyl, a commonly prescribed drug to treat chronic and serious pain. Fentanyl is relatively cheap, it's a powerful drug, it's easy to manufacture, and it's toxic in very small amounts. It's up to 50 times more potent than heroin, I'm told, and a hundred times more potent than morphine. I was surprised, as I've educated myself on this, that two milligrams is enough to kill the average person in less than 15 minutes and that an overdose of fentanyl shuts off the oxygen to the brain and the heart and can kill you in minutes.

Many addicts begin their addiction when they're prescribed fentanyl to address their pain issues, and we've seen an increase from January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2016, that the quarterly opioid dispensations from community pharmacies have increased by 23 per cent to approximately 1,034,000 in the fourth quarter of 2016. We've seen a continued increase.

4:40

Carfentanil. Some of you have mentioned it. It's another opioid, 10,000 times more powerful than morphine. It is so potent that an amount the size of a grain of sand can kill a person.

The use of fentanyl and other opioids has grown. It's grown considerably in the last few years, and it's meant that we've had to address and try to deal with this crisis. Last year approximately 2,000 Canadians died as a result of opioid overdoses. In 2015 in Alberta 257 deaths were related to fentanyl. In 2016 in Alberta 343 drug overdose deaths were related to fentanyl. From January to December 2016 there were 149 drug overdose deaths related to fentanyl in Calgary and 109 in Edmonton. Since January 1, 2014, a total of 717 Albertans have died from an apparent drug overdose related to fentanyl. It can be cut into other drugs, like cocaine and alcohol and methamphetamines.

The causes of an opioid addiction are complex, but, then, issues around addictions are generally very complex. Some Albertans are drawn into addiction by being prescribed an opioid like fentanyl by a doctor in order to control their pain. Others fall into a drug addiction as they try to address psychological and social and emotional pain, and that often accompanies mental health issues. Some of the people become addicted as they experiment with other drugs. As a former teacher I've seen that pattern over and over in some of the students that I've taught.

The *Calgary Herald* reported in an article by Michele Jarvie that the Stoney Nakoda First Nation is facing a prescription addiction crisis. It was reported in that article that addiction rates were skyrocketing as high as 60 per cent among the adult members of the reserve. The Stoney Nakoda First Nation has declared a state of

emergency. There were 139 deaths attributed to opiates in a two-year period out of a population of only 6,000 people. It is understood that fentanyl is the number one drug of choice on the reserve.

Regardless of the path to addiction this emergency is placing great stress on our public services: emergency departments, police, ambulance, detox centres, the justice system. Even education and mental health services are having to address the carnage that this public health emergency is creating.

It is for those reasons, for all those statistics that I just finished reading, for all those pressures that are being put on the services that we try to provide to our citizens of Alberta, and for the addicts and the families that are left behind that the Wildrose Party is calling on the government to declare a public health emergency. The Wildrose Party, while calling on the government to declare a public health emergency, has been urging all levels of government to more seriously address the fentanyl crisis. Brian Jean, the leader of the Wildrose Party, has said that the Wildrose believes that all levels of government need to be working collaboratively to combat this crisis head-on. We have already lost too many lives to this deadly drug. And I apologize for using the member's name.

We have asked for funding for addictions programs. Today we are once again asking for the government to enact a public health emergency to allow for greater information sharing and further education campaigns regarding these deadly drugs. The declaration of a public health emergency would provide the government with the tools to more effectively address this crisis. Declaring a public health emergency would increase awareness in the public health care community and the general public. It would provide additional resources to the coroner's office to conduct autopsies. It would help to co-ordinate one unified government response. It would provide real lifetime tracking and geographic breakdowns that would be useful for law enforcement agencies.

British Columbia, which has been ground zero of the fentanyl crisis, has declared a public health emergency. The increasing number of deaths in British Columbia were, quote, unusual and unexpected, according to medical health officer Dr. Perry Kendall and are therefore one of the criteria needed for declaring an emergency under the Public Health Act.

Even a cursory reading of the evidence collected in Alberta thus far would suggest that the number of deaths due to fentanyl would be sufficient reason to call a public health emergency. When questioned on the use of a public health emergency in Alberta to deal with the fentanyl crisis, the Associate Minister of Health said: we just don't feel that it's appropriate when responding to a serious addictions and mental health issue.

In contrast, the Wildrose Party believes that a public health emergency would help to provide timely information on the number of deaths and the circumstances of those deaths, et cetera. Vital information . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In my time as a paramedic for well over a decade in this province I've seen all too often the many overdoses, the results of overdoses, whether it's within our street communities, whether it's in rich homes, poor homes. All too often. As we try to personalize this – and I know that often it's said in government: don't get too operational; think high level. But we need to humanize this, and we see some of the human faces in the gallery today of families that have lost loved ones. I want every member in this Chamber to stop what they're doing and listen for a second.

We can all relate to a family that has a 14-year-old child. You may have a 14-year-old son or daughter. It's a Saturday night. Your child comes home at curfew as normal. Nothing is out of the ordinary. You go down 20 minutes later into the basement or the rumpus room to check on your child, and the child is unresponsive. They're no longer breathing. This is not a homeless person or an addict on the street, on the corner, in a back alley. This is in a middle-class home, suburbia in Alberta. By the time the paramedics get there – I know because I was one of those paramedics – the child is no longer breathing, and we have no idea how long the child hasn't been breathing.

That 14-year-old will never get the chance to be a leader like us, to help somebody else with addiction or mental health, or to hug their parents. This is what we're talking about. Yes, we're talking about a public health emergency or a provincial state of emergency. Look, let's face it. Overdoses have been happening in this province for a long time. What has changed?

Well, let's ask the folks in High River. High River flooded over and over and over and over again. At times there were local states of emergency. What did they do? They brought more sandbags. They tried this; they tried that. What changed for them to get a provincial state of emergency? The water overflowed every single sandbag, every solution that had been put forward and drowned the town. And other communities in this province. I'm sure that there have been forest fires in Fort McMurray before that have encroached close to the city. But what changed? The fire consumed most of the town.

What is happening today? This drug is overflowing our communities. That's what has changed. Our perception of it has changed. The way drug dealers operate has changed.

4:50

A grain of sand of carfentanil is enough to kill a human being, and if they don't die, it's enough to shut down vital organs and definitely enough to destroy a family. All it takes is a drug dealer because I'm assuming the ones that are making the pills and all the other drugs that kids may be interested in – make no mistake. Each one of you in this House has a loved one. There's a good chance they might try a drug, and if that drug dealer pressed some other drug and a piece of carfentanil wasn't cleaned up, like that 14-year-old, an honest mistake takes their life.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West worked alongside me in downtown Calgary. I can tell you that over time perhaps Conservative governments – as things change and as we evolve, this caucus does support safe injection sites. The hon. Member for Calgary-West supported those initiatives as a police officer. All the other tools that we used and are using now are important. Absolutely.

But you know what? For the families in the gallery, for the family of that lost loved one, there was no Narcan kit for them. The majority of these overdoses are happening outside of our most populated downtown areas. As we heard, they're happening in Grande Prairie. They're happening in suburban parts of our communities, where not every family has a naloxone kit. Naloxone, whether you aerosolize it or inject it, doesn't always save people. Sometimes it's too late.

So when we think about this, calling a public state of emergency, what these families want to hear is not: well, we've tried this, and we're trying that. Quite frankly, they're sick and tired of us blaming one another because, to them, it doesn't bring back their loved ones. They're here today with their bravery and around this province trying to prevent another one. What they want to hear and what a public state of emergency does or a public health emergency does for these people is not to say, "There, there," but "We're fighting

for you; we recognize that this drug is overflowing our streets and killing our children and our loved ones."

Now, that's the drug itself. The hon. Member for Calgary-West has brought policing solutions to the government. There are lots of ideas. We can go around and around and around, but if we're going to save lives, we need to put money into mental health. During the floods in High River the provincial state of emergency allowed us to co-ordinate with different agencies and, again, pull money from the treasury to the tune of \$5 million to support mental health. Families are breaking apart today because we are not brave enough to address the issues around mental health and addiction, and it should be at the forefront.

We should be teaching kids in our schools about fentanyl and the risk of drug use and abuse and addiction. We should be supporting our educators and our family counsellors and our local leaders and church leaders because this is an issue. The best way to do that, to get people to stand up and pay attention to it, is to co-ordinate all these efforts like we did in Fort McMurray, that got world recognition, like we did in High River, national attention that brought communities together because the government said: this is a priority.

What that state does – and I heard the hon. Associate Minister of Health say: well, in 30 days what are we going to change? I can tell you that it's maybe not a lot for those who are already addicted, but you're going to start the ball rolling with these agencies that you mean business. That initial co-ordination keeps that momentum to do what? To save families.

Now, I was on the phone last night with a constituent, a brave lady with a brave son. Her name is Jacqueline. Her son's name is Jacob. He wrote a paper that spoke about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for Canadians. It's a plea for his older brother, who is on the streets of Vancouver now because of an addiction and suffering from mental health. They have no avenue in which – a public state of emergency would allow us to have a conversation about that Charter, to maybe open it up for these folks who no longer have the mental capacity but still have the right to go kill themselves.

That's what a state of emergency does. It allows us to open up pieces of legislation that normally might not be opened up, to have a conversation with our federal counterparts to show them that we mean business. Now, I know that everybody in this House truly means business when it comes to fentanyl, so let's show Albertans that we're going to stand up and fight for them by calling this state of emergency. I implore the government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I really want to say to the Member for Calgary-South East: thank you for your passion; thank you for your service as a first responder. You're a braver man than I for doing what you do. As you were speaking, I was just reflecting as a father of a junior-high-aged daughter and another daughter who is younger but will soon join her sister in junior high and I think about our life, the life that we have at our household. I think: well, my daughters can't possibly be at risk. We love them very much, they're safe at home, they're well fed, they're not abused, they don't see addiction at home, but of course they're at risk. Of course they are. Every single one of our children is at risk, all of our neighbours are at risk, and we as individuals are at risk as well. None of us are immune from this. I think the story that the Member for Calgary-South East told really brings that home.

What also brings that home are the people who have joined us here today, some of whom spoke this morning at our news

conference, others who joined our news conference, like the father who lost his daughter just last November to a carfentanil overdose. She was loved. She was supported by her family. She looked like a normal, ordinary teenager. She was a big sister, she was a granddaughter, she was a friend, but she's lost to us because of an accidental carfentanil overdose at age 19.

We were joined this morning also by Rosalind Davis, who is here now, who lost her spouse, Nathan Huggins-Rosenthal, to an accidental fentanyl overdose, which he became addicted to after being prescribed opioids in response to a back injury. But they sought treatment. They had the means to seek private treatment, and Nathan for a time was clean and sober, but he relapsed, which is something I've learned is tragically common. I've come to understand that an addict will relapse up to seven times before getting clean permanently. It's not simply a matter of saying, "Well, just please stop; just quit cold turkey," especially with opioids. It's far more complicated than that.

Nathan and the 19-year-old daughter: it's a common story. It's not just people who are street involved. Every single one of these people and every single one of these lives has their own story. There is no such thing as a typical, quote, opioid addict.

There have been too many deaths in this province, far too many deaths in this province, and there has not been enough co-ordination, not enough sense of urgency from this government to stop this epidemic. I'd ask this minister, who I know to be a compassionate person, to listen to your heart, to not just listen to the technical arguments that you may be hearing from your department. It's important that we use all of the tools at our disposal.

5:00

It's important that naloxone is made available, as it has been, but it's nothing more than a Band-Aid. People will die alone. That happens in suburban Alberta, it happens in small-town Alberta, it happens in dense urban areas. Naloxone cannot be the only solution. We need more in-patient treatment for people who finally choose to seek help. We need more outpatient treatment for people who finally seek help and are appropriately able to continue on about their lives and don't require in-patient treatment. We do need supervised consumption sites. That can't be the only answer, but it needs to be part of the solution. We need opiate replacement therapy.

We need to declare a public health emergency. Now, declaring a public health emergency is not just some symbolic act. I quote from the Public Health Act. It allows for the "prompt co-ordination of action . . . required in order to avert or minimize the pandemic." What we're dealing with here is a pandemic. It is an epidemic that is rampaging through not just our streets but our neighbourhoods, our homes, our communities.

Further quoting from the Public Health Act, declaring a public health emergency will also "provide for the distribution of essential health and medical supplies and provide, maintain and co-ordinate the delivery of services." I want to emphasize the importance of that word "co-ordinate." A public health emergency would provide focused leadership, it would provide a sense of urgency, and it would allow for the co-ordination of efforts between departments. Now, I know that various departments of this government have a plan. I know that the Department of Health has a plan, the Department of Justice has a plan, Community and Social Services has a plan, Education has a plan, Indigenous Relations has a plan, but I've seen scarce, if any, evidence of co-ordination within and between those departments of their plans. We need a public health emergency to bring focus to this issue.

Any large organization has challenges working within and between departments. For something like this we cannot have, we

cannot afford to have different departments working at cross-purposes. We need to use all of the tools in the tool box. We need to use every tool at our disposal. There's no reason not to. In fact, there are tragic consequences if we don't.

Now, there have been some objections raised by the fact that a public health emergency would expire after only 30 days. That's true, but it does not prevent the minister from renewing that should she decide it is required to be longer. The other question that has been asked is: "Well, when do we know that this public health emergency is over? It's not a typical, obvious, contagious disease, influenza or other, where we would know that it's over." Well, the answer is that it's over when the rate of deaths from opiates – fentanyl, carfentanil, others – drops back to its long-term average. Right now – we've seen the graph – it's just a hockey stick. It goes through the roof. It is literally off the charts. That is an emergency. It is a crisis.

Madam Minister, there's no shame in now declaring a public health emergency. We all would have liked to have seen that done months or even years ago. It should have been done sooner, but it wasn't. But it still can be. It still can be to the benefit of people who are struggling with opiate addictions now, to the benefit of their families, who will not lose those people to opiate addiction. I can assure you that every single member in this House will thank the government for doing so. There will be no we told you so. There will be no gloating. It will be an acceptance that it's the right thing to do. I will be the first to congratulate the government, to praise them publicly, and to thank them for taking this important step. It's not too late, Minister. Please, I urge you to declare a public health emergency.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My thoughts and prayers go out to the families who have lost a loved one due to an opioid overdose. My thoughts and prayers also go out to the families who are watching a loved one live with and suffer from an opioid addiction. Just this past Sunday I met with a father and mother of a 16-year-old who just celebrated her 17th birthday in hospital after taking a concoction of a number of illicit opioids. The doctors looking after her care could only guess what drugs she had taken. This young woman is just one of my constituents of Red Deer-North who has been adversely affected by the rise of dangerous drugs here in Alberta as well as across Canada.

Since being elected in 2015, I have met with mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and siblings of those suffering from opioid addictions as well as business owners and neighbours. Madam Speaker, I heard from my constituents asking that our government take more action to help those suffering from opioid addictions in order to get well and potentially prevent premature deaths – premature deaths – of adults and youth.

Madam Speaker, my community asked for more action, and I am proud to say that our government has listened. As you have already heard, Alberta is a leader in our country in providing timely and accurate data on opioid misuse. The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta has updated prescription guidelines. The college is also aware of the need for more doctors to be able to treat substance abuse, and we are working with them to help bring more treatment options into primary care. Our government worked quickly to make naloxone kits as widely and readily available as possible, an action that has reversed hundreds of potentially fatal overdoses here in Alberta. Opioid replacement therapy is now easier to access, with new clinics opened or opening in Cardston,

Grande Prairie, and the central zone. I am proud that our government is working hard regarding opioid addictions in Alberta. My constituency of Red Deer-North has just received additional medical support for 20 adult detox beds as well as five additional youth detox beds.

On behalf of my constituents of Red Deer-North and on behalf of all the constituents in the central zone I thank our government. I thank our government for listening and taking all of these actions. The parents of the young woman who just celebrated her 17th birthday in hospital are grateful for the supports already put in place for their daughter. I'd like to recognize Turning Point in Red Deer as well as Safe Harbour for working with those in our community whose lives are impacted by the serious drug addictions that they have.

Madam Speaker, we know that Albertans that suffer with opioid addictions are all kinds of Albertans from all different walks of life. They are from communities, from suburbs to inner cities. They may be your next-door neighbour, a straight-A student that made a wrong choice. We know there is still more work to do, but our actions are going in the right direction.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak to the state of emergency in our province that has been caused by opioids. A public health emergency is long overdue and will give the resources needed to our front-line workers to combat this crisis head-on. As a former paramedic and firefighter for a long time I can tell you that there is an emergency here, and as the shadow minister for Health it is my job to educate and to inform and to eventually ask our good Minister of Health and Associate Minister of Health.

5:10

Opioid use, misuse, and overdose have risen at exponential levels in the past few years, and as often is the case, the situation did not appear overnight. In fact, Madam Speaker, it has a complex and lengthy history. Opioids are a group of drugs that are used for treating pain. They are derived from opium, which is from the poppy plant. Opioids can go by a variety of names. You can call them narcotics, opioids, opiates. From history's earliest civilizations to the modern day, societies have struggled to find the balance between medicinal properties, that are used to treat pain, and the euphoric effects, that have led to recreational use and misuse. That's the problem that's plagued so many countries, so many societies, and so many governments.

Part of the problem we are seeing now is the creation of designer drugs for pain management. Extended-release OxyContin is twice as potent as oral morphine, and fentanyl is 100 times as potent as that, and carfentanyl is 10,000 times as powerful as that.

Let's take a closer look at some of these designer drugs. Oxycodone was developed in 1917 in Germany as one of several semisynthetic opioids in an attempt to improve on the existing opioids, and it is twice as potent as morphine.

Fentanyl was developed in the 1960s by Paul Janssen, and it entered medical use as a general anaesthetic. It was in the mid-1990s that fentanyl started to be used for its palliative qualities, and it is 100 times stronger than morphine. I remember as a paramedic that when they put fentanyl in our cars, in our trucks, a lot of the guys started to use it because it was known to have less respiratory depression, so it was better for our patients than morphine. We give anywhere between 10 and 50 micrograms, compared to 10 milligrams of morphine.

Then there's this carfentanyl, which is marketed under the trade name Wildnil and is supposed to be a general anaesthetic agent or tranquilizer for large animals. That's right, Madam Speaker. This is literally an elephant tranquilizer. It's 10,000 times more potent than morphine.

All these drugs have legitimate medicinal purposes, and when used appropriately and prescribed by a medical professional for pain management, they do their job.

But part of the reason why these drugs have become so important in our society is due to the exceptionally long wait times for surgeries. As reported in the 2016 Waiting Your Turn report by the Fraser Institute, Albertans are waiting nearly three weeks longer than the national average for treatment, and this is the second worst amongst all provinces outside the Maritimes. The report also demonstrated that in 2016 Albertans were waiting five more weeks than was reasonable between appointments with a specialist and receiving treatment. This, to me, is completely unacceptable. Despite the fact that we're spending almost half of our budget on health care, Albertans are continuing to experience long wait lists and uncertain outcomes when it comes to their health.

This negatively affects all aspects of a person's life. This is true regardless of if we're talking about physical health or mental health, relationships with friends, family, and co-workers. This adds costs that are more than just dollars and cents. Furthermore, these unreasonably long wait times can lead to a decrease in the person's overall health and, in turn, create increased costs on our already taxed health system. What is often ignored is the fact that the stress is passed along to the nurses and to health care staff, who may feel helpless to remedy the situation.

Several studies have shown that the increase in wait times creates worsening symptoms and conditions, long recovery times, and more cases of depression. As pain increases, there is greater dependency on these pain drugs, and that leads to the substance abuse, particularly the opioids like fentanyl and oxycodone. Ultimately, longer wait times have also had an effect on the mortality rates within Canada, with the Fraser Institute publishing that 72 per cent of premature deaths – that is, deaths under the age of 75 – are avoidable either via prevention or treatment.

According to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta opioid use has increased threefold. In 2012 there were over 500,000 – half a million – prescriptions for opioids for under 200,000 patients. In 2015, a mere three years later, it tripled: 1.7 million prescriptions for just over 500,000 patients. That's a 300 per cent increase in opioids in three years. Now, it's good to see that the College of Physicians & Surgeons and the AMA are trying to make some changes, but we can only hope that those are effective and that they're supported.

This highlights, though, that we need solutions that prevent the overprescription of all drugs, including opioids. We need to move away from a system that is focused on illness and injury to one that is focused on the promotion of early intervention using crossdiscipline teams. We need to have more pain-management programs that include a more holistic approach, incorporating exercise, physiotherapy, and dietitians as well as painkillers. We need to focus on palliative care options that focus on the wide array of treatments that are the options other than drugs.

Part of why this is an issue of such importance is due to the fact that these opioid painkillers are highly addictive. These medications provide users with a sense of pain relief but also that feeling of pleasure and euphoria. As time goes on, patients develop a tolerance to the drug and, therefore, need to increase their dosages to have that same effect. These drugs are so powerful, so addictive that people will do almost anything, which leads to increases in crime.

Furthermore, there is an extremely high risk of experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms from these drugs. Medically, when the drug has been taken regularly over an extended period of time, it has to be gradually withdrawn over a period of time rather than abruptly. It has to be noted that this risk is even higher for people who regularly use these drugs recreationally. The symptoms of opioid withdrawal can last anywhere from a week to a month and even longer. These people go through a lot of suffering. They go through low energy, irritability, anxiety, agitation, panic attacks. They go through nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, insomnia, muscle pain, muscle weakness, and fevers. These withdrawal symptoms end up encouraging many users to use more drugs to fend off these undesirable symptoms.

Our government isn't doing enough to save these citizens from this crisis. It's bad enough that we have that increased drug use when the economy goes down. There are a lot of unemployed people who are running from things, and we have increased crime, more theft because of that same thing. But we can't wholly blame the low economy. We have to also look at what these physicians are doing and how they're treating their patients and make sure that they follow up with their patients.

There has been a 33 per cent increase in the rate of overdose deaths linked to these drugs from 2015 and a dizzying 110 per cent rise from just over two years ago. Calgary saw the lion's share of the death toll with 149 deaths in 2016. Of those 343 deaths 22 were linked to carfentanil. That's the elephant tranquilizer.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is an emergency situation and that we need to have an emergency debate. We need to find solutions for addiction treatment, a focus on the cure and the rehabilitation of these victims. That's exactly why Wildrose released over a year ago a report calling for harsher penalties for trafficking and producing fentanyl and for solutions that help deal with those crises on the front line. A public health emergency is long overdue and will give the resources needed to our front lines to combat this crisis head-on. Please give it the attention that it deserves.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to begin by telling all family members and friends present and all those far beyond these walls who've lost loved ones to fentanyl and all other opioids and beyond that my heart breaks with yours.

My comments, I suppose, Madam Speaker, come from my time in cabinet in wellness and as the chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and as the advocate for Indigenous Relations and, to be honest with you, just a fellow Albertan. Because I think my colleagues have said it well, many different angles being represented here, I'll focus for the moment on our friends who are from indigenous communities, all of those individuals. I know from speaking with them personally that fentanyl is a killer that's taken cruel aim at indigenous individuals and communities both on- and off-reserve. It's a terrible thing. Opioids have no respect for culture or age or anything else. I think it's fair to say today – we all agree – that this issue goes far beyond any politics.

5:20

Alberta's fentanyl crisis first showed up on reserves in early 2015, and the death toll was simply staggering. Reserve leaders started blowing the whistle on the crisis as far back as 2015. The Blood Tribe was particularly hard hit with 20 deaths in six months,

and on one terrible day four people died from an overdose. Now, for the sake of comparison, in a small city in Alberta of maybe 12,000 people that's equal to 20 citizens dying a terrible death in just a few months and 60 others overdosing. That's just horrifying. It's also horrifying that it took 20 deaths and a plan created by doctors and a community before certain government action. The situation had become so dire that the Blood Tribe band took it into its own hands and declared a state of emergency. They did that a long time ago, and AHS assisted by making the antidote available to its band and training 50 members to administer it. The band also launched an addiction crisis line.

Now, two doctors that I've spoken about in this House more than once, the intrepid Esther Tailfeathers and Susan Christenson, who ran a clinic in the Cardston area, mobilized the community and the government to save lives, and save lives they did by convincing the government to supply naloxone and provide reserve members with training to administer it. That's a good thing.

Now, in November of 2015 in question period in this very Chamber I urged the government to use the tragic Blood Tribe experience as a model for other reserves facing desperate circumstances. What did I hear? This. The Justice minister said: yes, this is a true tragedy; we are working with partners, and we've had meetings, and we're committed to looking into ways to make naloxone more available.

Now, when nothing happened to share the successful Blood Tribe framework, which did save lives, I asked the government again to help Albertans on other reserves. And what did I hear? Well, for one, that "fentanyl is one of the most extreme drugs we've seen in our time." The Minister of Health said that. And what were we told? That there's "a four-pronged approach," and not one of those prongs involved re-creating the successful Blood Tribe fentanyl crisis model on other reserves. If that isn't frustrating enough, we could ask this question: did the government take the loss of life seriously? Well, I believe that the government does take this seriously. I would never suggest that anyone in government did not want to try to gain control over a public health crisis. Perhaps, in all fairness, they just didn't know how to go about it.

Here's yet another successful Blood Tribe initiative the government did not jump on to assist other reserves. The Blood Tribe Police Service launched an extremely effective on-reserve crime unit dedicated to gaining control of fentanyl distribution. So when I asked the Justice minister again in this Legislature in question period what she was doing to adapt the Blood Tribe's model to other reserves trying to get a handle on fentanyl abuse and distribution in their areas, Madam Speaker, the response was sad at best. Here it is, right from *Hansard*.

Well, of course, we have a number of police forces throughout Alberta policing on First Nations. There are a couple of other First Nations that have their own policing forces, but a majority of it is done with the RCMP, so we are working with those partners to ensure that they have access to naloxone and that they have access to all the information necessary going forward to make sure that they can cut off the supply.

That's it, and that's not enough.

Perhaps the government of this day doesn't understand our motivations in opposition. When it comes to a crisis that is killing Albertans in alarming numbers, I would trust that nobody is looking for glory and that we're just offering solutions. So, please, don't dismiss them out of hand. That helps no one. We're trying to help. When I ask a question and other members do, on certain occasions it's actually okay to say: "That might be a good idea. Let's talk about it. Let's do something about it. Let's look into it." But to get political doublespeak and then find out a year and a half later that maybe your government is kind of encouraging partners to work

together, that's not just disappointing. Some would call it unconscionable.

The government also ignored advice from the Alberta mental health review to specifically deal with opiate dependency among indigenous peoples on- and off-reserve. After all, the overall rate of emergency visits related to opioids and narcotics is 5 times higher than the rate for non-First Nations, and the opioid dispensation rate is twice what it is for First Nations. Clearly, these communities do need special attention. I hope the minister in charge will look into this.

Now, establishing the Alberta mental health review was a positive step I can give you credit for. Our new Premier did that as one of her first acts. My hat's off to that. It identifies as an immediate priority the creation of an opiate addictions plan for indigenous peoples. Now, the report way back in November of 2015 offered as part of its first recommendations this suggestion: "Engage federal counterparts to increase access to harm reduction tools on reserve." But, Madam Speaker, the province's opioid crisis progress report released in October 2016, just four months ago, indicates that Indigenous Relations only recently facilitated an initial meeting of representatives from AHS, Human Services, Health Canada, and doctors providing services in indigenous communities. That's a full year and a half after the crisis began.

And there's more. According to the same provincial report on November 7, 2016, Alberta Health had started working with the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, our federal partners, who have so much responsibility for indigenous peoples. The associate minister tells us that this has been a priority. Well, I think it's fair to say that actions do speak louder than words.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm outlining this history because it displays that, while perhaps well intentioned, this government needs to look further. It's out of its depth on this, and it does not appear to be taking the epidemic seriously enough. As evidence I note that the NDP will not use the word "crisis," yet everyone else has, from the federal Health minister to the mayor of our largest city to B.C.'s Premier, who declared a public health emergency in the past – let's set the record straight – when her people began dying from fentanyl in alarming numbers.

Now, Madam Speaker, it's time for Alberta to do the same. On behalf of all Albertans and especially as the PC advocate for indigenous peoples I implore this government to declare a public health emergency, and please – please – pay special attention to First Nations, indigenous, Métis, and Inuit Albertans in the process of establishing a co-ordinating body to oversee a desperately needed, fulsome response to the opioid crisis.

Now, in the 30 seconds that I have left, I was hoping to quote an article from the *Rocky Mountain Outlook* from just four days ago entitled Wesley Band Hosts Meeting to Discuss Community Solutions For Drug Problems. I won't have time to do that. It is worth your time to read. The bottom line: "The short term focus is saving lives."

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to everyone who travelled here today for this important debate, and thank you to everyone listening in. I thank in particular the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who has called for a public health emergency in the past and today is calling for an important debate about this tragic trend that is killing Albertans. Of course, the rise

in illicit fentanyl in our communities has created a public health crisis here in Alberta and across Canada, just like the minister said earlier. Like with any problem, it's important to understand the scope of the problem.

The *Globe and Mail* published a very interesting and in-depth piece recently on this very topic called A Killer High: How Canada Got Addicted to Fentanyl, a deadly denial. Very clearly, this detailed piece pointed to the fact that a lack of focus on harm reduction measures contributed to the crisis that we are faced with today. What it found particularly alarming were the many factors that led to widespread loss of life in Canada related to opioid abuse.

5:30

The *Globe and Mail* writers noted that the previous federal Conservative government were said to have spread word that not-for-profit groups would have difficulty getting federal funding if they continued to provide harm reduction services. It was also noted that previous governments attempted to shut down North America's only supervised injection site at the time.

The reason I refer to this history as reported in the *Globe and Mail* is to emphasize the importance of harm reduction strategies as well as prevention and treatment. We need to learn from this history. Albertans would have benefited from increased access to harm reduction services for many years. Sadly, this is not the first time Albertans are dying because of substance abuse. Show Albertans that we're fighting for them by supporting intervention supports and strategies. These are not free, and these require a commitment of resources.

Earlier the member said that actions speak louder than words. They certainly do, and I'm so proud that we have made naloxone kits available to more first responders than ever before. Remember that. I'm thankful we're finally focusing more resources on harm reduction. I'm thankful that a short-term intervention, naloxone, is widely available. I'm thankful that all of our first responders across Alberta have access.

Better access to opioid replacement therapy and shorter wait times for substance abuse treatment will continue to be vital. These critical services require resources. Offering supervised consumption services is one of the most critical life-saving measures available. This complex problem requires complex answers. These complex answers are not short-term answers but require a commitment to fighting this fight until it's over: prevention, education, treatment, mental health care, awareness, and harm reduction, all the things that we're doing, all of the things that we're focusing on.

I believe the number of opioid-related deaths in 2016 was 343. One life lost to substance abuse is too many. Add to this the staggering number of Albertans who die by suicide, approximately 500 per year, and it's clear that we need a long-term strategy to address a complex and widespread problem. One life lost to mental illness is too many. I hope that we continue to act with the intensity and swiftness that we've recently seen in response to this emergency.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If you could just remember to please table the *Globe and Mail* article you referred to tomorrow. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have sat this afternoon and heard a lot of my colleagues give some very impassioned speeches about fentanyl and the various forms of fentanyl. There are a lot of sad stories, a lot of distressing facts that come out that come from this fentanyl crisis that we're looking at.

I'd like to make sure, before I get too far into my speech, that people understand that I'm not trying to pin blame on the government. I am trying to bring forward some concerns that I and my caucus mates have got regarding some of the handling of this.

Now, I will start off with that I was elected May 5, 2015. Why is this relevant? It's relevant because I was pretty excited to get into my new role as an MLA, to represent my riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. This later came to me meeting with my new caucus mates, and I was given the mandate of the shadow Minister of Justice in June 2015. Why this is, again, important is that when the Leader of the Opposition gave me my mandate, he said that you need to review all of the concerns that are happening within the justice system right now. I'll tell you that one of the clear concerns that came forward was fentanyl. This was early in my mandate, in the early, early days of my mandate.

So we sat down as the Wildrose. We came up with a plan, Safer Communities, Saving Lives: Combatting the Fentanyl Crisis. Now, a lot of people say that it's easy to pile onto the government when it appears that they've mishandled a file or a crisis. But let's look back. This was done by myself and my colleague the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who was the shadow Minister of Health at the time, on December 18, 2015, so this was about six months after our election. It was important that we were putting in some time here. It took us some time to get out to the stakeholders, to hear what they felt were solutions to this fentanyl crisis.

So we came up with this 10-point plan. What's important here is that a lot of people say that the opposition only criticizes, that that's all they're good for, but that is not a fact. My colleague and I and the staff put a lot of work into this plan. And you know what? There are a lot of things in this plan that have already been implemented today.

Now, I'd like to start off by reading a part of the plan, from the executive summary.

Alberta is at a critical stage in safeguarding our communities and improving the health of our citizens with the rise of illegal fentanyl use in our province. The misuse of fentanyl has long-lasting and devastating impacts on the user, their loved ones, and the community at large.

Improper use of fentanyl just once can [lead to] a deadly impact. Health authorities and police officers have said they have never encountered a drug as deadly as the fast-acting opioid. Fentanyl is reported to be approximately 100 times more potent than morphine and 20 times more so than OxyContin.

Now, as little as a few grains' worth of drug can prove deadly. While the NDP has recently acknowledged that there is a problem, there have been little to no solutions offered. It was December 18, 2015, that this was released. This is something that has been available to the public, and we actually have referenced it a lot.

I would like to go through the different points. But, really fast, I'd like to start off with what it is that we're actually asking for before I go into the 10-point plan. What we are looking for is a public health emergency. This must be declared by the chief medical officer and approved by cabinet, and it includes tools such as increased awareness both within the health care community and the general public. It would provide additional resources to the coroner's office to conduct autopsies, help to co-ordinate one unified government response, and provide real lifetime tracking and geographic breakdowns useful for law enforcement agencies. You've heard that from my colleagues already. That's what we're asking for.

When I read through these points, it's important to remember what it is that the Wildrose has been calling for. The first thing: empowering local police forces and health professionals. That means better reporting. That's how we know people are dying.

Right now it is my understanding that we're doing quarterly updates. We need monthly updates on this. This needs to be implemented now. [interjection] Well, I would say that that is unfortunate to be mentioned.

5:40

Now, we've got a state of emergency with the neighbouring province of B.C., so how exactly is it that our neighbouring province sees that their province is at the state where they actually have to call a state of emergency? That means that they've actually had to go further.

What we need to be making sure of is that when we look at where our fentanyl is coming from – it is coming from outside of the province. It is coming from a different country. We are suspecting that much of it is coming from China. We need to make sure – and this goes into the second part of this 10-point plan – that we improve collaboration between provinces, territories, and the federal government so that we have the ability to find out where it's coming from and prevent it from getting into this country in the first place.

The third part is implementing a patch-for-patch system. This has already been done in Ontario, and this is something that we need to consider here.

The fourth part is pushing for further education campaigns. This is important because in the end we need to make sure people understand the risks of fentanyl. Having a debate like this will do that, getting it into the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *National Post*. These are all good ways of getting it out. But I will tell you that a lot of times it comes down to making sure that it gets also to our education system, medical officers, and shelters because these are the people that are going to end up using it. Now, this is where we also mention a push to bring forward an ability for people to understand that if you are going to abuse fentanyl as a drug, you need to have a naloxone kit nearby.

Now, the fifth part is increased funding for addictions and detox programs within the province. You know, you hear us in the Wildrose always saying that we need to find better ways of being accountable to our taxpayers, so when you hear Wildrose actually calling for funding in this area, you'd think they would take notice.

Number 6: ensure all ambulances and hospitals have adequate supplies of naloxone available, particularly those serving rural and remote areas. Now, it's good to see that the government brought this forward.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Hon. member, just a reminder that you'll need to table that tomorrow as well, please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta's big cities have been raising the alarm on fentanyl as an insidious killer of their vulnerable citizens for over 18 months now, fully a year and a half of inadequate action on this issue. Our big cities are the battleground and perhaps the epicentre for the attack we need to launch against this crisis.

I've got some words I want to share with you here. Addiction turns your world upside down. That little kid, that funny sibling, that devoted friend, that loving spouse, that admired, caring parent you remembered has disappeared. Your family is tearing itself apart. You feel helpless. You are looking for hope, but more than that, we need to give people hope, to tell them that they shouldn't give up hope. Hope can be here in our communities, and the time to give Albertans that hope is now, to treat and save the lives of their beloved family members.

Some of these words are taken in part from an inspirational message on the AARC, Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, website. But what happens to youth applies to addicts of all ages, and we need to start education and treatment early to save Albertans and, quite frankly, to create hope and a path to truly address this crisis, this emergency we now face across our province.

Anecdotally, I recently visited an alcohol and drug addiction treatment facility in Calgary: 50 beds, a 12-week program which translates into potential treatment for over 200 clients per year. Of their \$2.4 million budget, they shared with me that just \$39,000 comes from government funding, or the equivalent of a hospital stay for just five of those same clients. This does not factor in the even steeper price emotionally for just one family with the loss of a loved one. Can we do better as legislators, as a province, as Albertans in working within our health care, justice, social services systems? Can we work more effectively with a lean and passionate nonprofit sector? I believe we can.

Now back to those big cities. Calgary was the first big Canadian city to struggle with a spike in use of powerful opioids such as fentanyl, but it did not take long for the deadly drugs to make their way north to Edmonton, an element of civic competition that I think we would all rather avoid. In Calgary 249 people have died since 2014. In Edmonton that figure is 215. Calgary police chief Roger Chaffin, our city's primary defender of public safety, noted on December 28, fully two months ago: it is a crisis; look at the number of deaths; the number of homicides and traffic fatalities don't come anywhere near the deaths associated with these drugs.

Let's look at why our police chief is making this statement. Last year 35 citizens died in fatal vehicle collisions in Calgary while 149 people died of fentanyl-related overdoses. That's almost five times the number of traffic fatalities, and we rightly put a lot of resources into trying to address the carnage on our roads. In Edmonton 109 people died from overdoses related to fentanyl in 2016, sobering numbers indeed. Mayor Nenshi also calls it a public health crisis. He says that we need to try new things, gather evidence, do pilot projects, be innovative, and move quickly. Lives depend on it.

Fentanyl addiction doesn't just kill people. People overdosing on fentanyl and other opioids account for 39 per cent of emergency ward patients. I looked it up: \$7,580 for the average stay, where I got my number of the five clients being served. It doesn't take a lot of people fronting up in the acute-care system to tell us that we need to be spending more money on prevention and education.

Because these life-threatening situations must be dealt with urgently, of course, it affects wait times for patients with other illnesses and injuries. Calgary EMS crews responded to 988 calls related to opioids. Edmonton's statistics are similar, with its emergency medical responders handling 812 cases. As we know, a huge cost to municipalities in our health care and justice systems comes with statistics of this magnitude.

Ironically, while I noted that the number of people killed in vehicle collisions doesn't come near to the fentanyl statistics, traffic deaths also involve fentanyl and other toxic opioids. According to police, people who are under the influence of opioids are not just driving under the influence; they are overdosing at the wheel. Think about it. People may even unknowingly ingest a toxic pill. Their body goes into an immediate medical shutdown, and a 2,000-pound missile is now travelling down the road without someone at the controls.

The point is that these people are not just killing themselves; they are killing others. It's called collateral damage, and it could be our loved ones who perish suddenly, tragically, and without warning. Yet this government says that this is not a public crisis or societal emergency. Madam Speaker, I believe it is.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Gottfried: And while I'm talking about the crisis in our largest cities, for every statistic or situation I mention, add Red Deer, Lethbridge, or Fort McMurray . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, a point of order has been called.

Mr. Mason: Would you mind stopping the clock?

The Acting Speaker: Yes. It's stopped. Please go ahead.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Under 23(h), (i), and (j). Madam Speaker, this is not the first time it's happened. I've let it go a couple of times. The hon. member suggested that the government does not consider this a crisis. That's not true. Even in my introductory remarks supporting the debate I indicated that it was, in fact, a crisis. The government takes it very seriously, and it's not fair of the member to impugn our motives in such a way as to suggest we don't care about this. We have called it a crisis, it is a crisis, and we are dealing appropriately with it.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. member, are you wishing to respond?

Mr. Gottfried: Madam Speaker, I'd be happy to withdraw that if it's offensive. Certainly, I think we've all been addressing this public crisis and societal emergency, and we are obviously addressing that issue today in this House, so thank you. And I withdraw that if it's offensive to you at all.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. We will now start the clock.

Debate Continued

Mr. Gottfried: Okay. Thank you. So we've talked about the other cities and the meltdown of statistics accordingly and the same crisis occurring across other cities across the province. This has to stop, and we have the opportunity here today to do something about this province-wide crisis. This is one place where urban and rural challenges meet head-on, and it must stop.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In every community crime has spiked, and police point to fentanyl and other highly addictive drugs as one of the major culprits. Chief Chaffin also says that when you have powerful addiction rise in a community, crime tends to move with it. With crime comes property offences such as theft. With crime comes assault. It can be very serious assault because addicts are desperate. They don't care about the welfare of others. They only care about finding a way to get their next fix. With crime comes death, homicides as well as overdoses.

In 2015, the year when fentanyl announced its arrival in the city of Calgary, our crime rate rose the highest in Canada, increasing by 29 per cent. To put it in context, these figures are from the crime severity index, which measures the volume and severity of police-reported crime. Prior to 2016 Calgary's crime rate had actually dropped for 11 consecutive years. In 2015 Alberta recorded the

largest provincial increase in the country. Its crime rate jumped 18 per cent. Here is a statistic that may surprise a lot of people. As you may expect, the map of the hot spots for overdoses is downtown in both Calgary and Edmonton. In Calgary the east-central areas also had high concentrations, and that includes neighbourhoods that typically are in higher risk and higher crime areas. Again, no surprises.

Mayors of our largest cities have joined 10 of their colleagues from other major Canadian cities to form a national fentanyl task force to look at best practices in combatting opioids. It's good to see our mayors displaying the kind of leadership we need and that we should be delivering from our province and from this Legislature.

Speaking of leadership, we only need to look to the west to see true strong provincial leadership on this front, that we should emulate. British Columbia acted rapidly and effectively by declaring a public health emergency when fentanyl and fentanyl-laced drugs started killing the citizens of Vancouver, its largest city, in increasing numbers. The question is: why not in Alberta; when in Alberta, which experienced a spike in deaths even earlier than British Columbia?

We must not be reluctant followers in this area. We can show Albertans and Canada that we are leaders in caring for our most vulnerable. We may never know if earlier action could have made a difference, but it doesn't mean Alberta can't still act. I believe the time to act is now. It can and should be declared an emergency today in this Legislature, and we need to develop a crossministerial, province-wide approach to dealing with this terrible scourge. Let's all of us right now as responsible legislators in this House do the right thing. Let's act today to save the lives of Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. I've spoken to this, Mr. Speaker, so it's a matter of procedure. I know that there's at least one other government member who would like to speak to this life-and-death issue. We have two, possibly three members who would like to speak to it as well. I know that would take us slightly past 6 o'clock, but I beg indulgence, and I would humbly request the unanimous consent of all members of this Assembly that on this occasion we go for a short time past 6 o'clock in order that those who are representing various constituencies in their various roles as advocates would have the chance to speak to this important topic as this is the first and only chance we've had so far. Again, unanimous consent is requested, please.

Thank you.

The Speaker: A motion, I think, has been called for unanimous consent.

Mr. Mason: Are you going to put a time limit?

Mr. Rodney: We just have three or four speakers, so it won't be a long time. How about 6:45? But I'll bet you it's before that. Or 6:30?

Thank you.

The Speaker: So if I heard that correctly, the unanimous consent was to adjourn no later than 6:30. Am I correct?

Mr. Rodney: I'll take that friendly amendment.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that I have very, very personal experience with in my family. Opioid addiction is very dangerous, and it doesn't just affect the individual in question but their entire family, their friends, and their community. I know that in my life I fully expect to receive that final phone call one day. It won't be the first time I've gotten one of these calls and waited in hospitals and taken care of family through the crisis moments, heard the promises and the pleas from my family member for treatment and then refusal of treatment that was offered. This is something we have dealt with in my family since I was 11, almost the same age as my youngest daughter is now.

I clearly remember the first time that I had to report the overdose to someone. I remember how we spent time in the hospital due to a number of overdoses. I remember the emotions of my family members, the anger, blame, tears, screaming, and recrimination. Remember that at this time my family member wasn't yet an addict, but these events helped set the stage for the future addiction. This has had a powerful effect on the makeup of my family and always will have.

My family is not unique, sir. The long-term effects of opioid addiction, the effects on mental health of children and spouses, never mind the mental health of the person addicted, hospital stays, caregiving, and the worry that never goes away, the fear that accompanies phone calls from that household or the worry when we ask each other if someone has spoken to the individual lately, and everyone says no: I understand that.

I also understand that an individual cannot get help until they are ready to get help. For years I have watched my family member turn down alternative therapies even when offered at no charge. It is chronic pain and mental weariness that won't even allow the thought of abstinence. We continue to hope in my family that this family member will take advantage of opioid replacement therapy someday.

Mr. Speaker, I have also had several of my constituents come in and share with me their personal story of opioid use and their addiction to those very, very dangerous drugs or those family members that are affected around the individual.

Supervised consumption services provide Albertans who use substances with social supports, with medical care, and with the opportunity to take a new path in life. The evidence is overwhelming. Supervised consumption services save lives. Opioid replacement therapy is part of harm reduction, recognizing that not everyone is ready to permanently stop using substances and that relapse for an opioid user can be fatal. They also provide a vital on-ramp for the wraparound services that can change people's lives, and I am proud that our government is supporting these initiatives.

We announced that four months ago, and I am very proud to have been a part of this government that accomplished that first step. Harm reduction recognized that substance abuse is a chronic medical condition and that it is not the result of bad choices or bad character. It is a medical condition that reaches out far past the cities into rural areas, that are greatly in need of support.

We did not grow up in an urban centre. I did not grow up in a family that wasn't privileged. I grew up in a small town in rural Alberta. I grew up where everybody knew who we were, and we knew who they were. This is a problem that has continued in those communities as well as our urban centres, so to say that this is something that we find only in our vulnerable populations is wrong. To say that it is something that we find only in the populations on reserves or in inner cities is wrong. We find it in every community in our country and in our province and in every community in my riding and in every single one of yours.

6:00

There is more to do on data tracking and reporting, and the work is under way at all levels of government. It's important to remember that those affected by poverty and trauma and everyone else around them are affected by this as well. My history in nursing has also given me insight into this growing problem in our society with the number of deaths and people that are struggling to get off these very, very dangerous medications. I've witnessed and assisted a number of people suffering from the DT's due to an overdose. I've seen the positive effects of opioid replacement therapy. It can change lives before Albertans get to this crisis point, as can harm reduction.

Mental health professionals are also part of the solution as no one sets out to become an addict, and we cannot take away the substance of addiction without treating the underlying personal issues that created the frame for that addiction, whether it is a case of chronic physical pain or mental anguish. The real opportunity for social support, medical care, and maybe even a new path is with the wrap-around services that are available.

As someone who is very, very personally affected by this issue and has spent too much time at the bedside, I ask everyone in this House to work together to embrace and promote the supports that are available, the programming such as safe injection sites and replacement therapy, the education and law enforcement that are working so hard to make a difference, because they may have to make a difference in my family, and they may someday have to make a difference in yours.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For two years now Staff Sergeant Martin Schiavetta of the Calgary Police Service has been saying, "Police [cannot] arrest their way out of this problem . . . It is a health problem. It is a law enforcement problem. It's a problem for all of society." I agree with this experienced police officer. Fentanyl and the growing problem of opioid abuse is a problem for all of Alberta, and I would bet that Albertans agree with that. If Albertans agree with that statement, then it's incumbent upon us, the Members of this Legislative Assembly, and the government of Alberta to act upon what we can all agree is a provincial crisis.

The death of 717 Albertans from fentanyl-related overdoses in the past three years is unquestionably a public health emergency. Quite frankly, if that death toll and all the repercussions for our communities from the prevalence of opioid abuse do not qualify as a public health emergency, I don't know what else would. Yet this government has repeatedly ignored pleas to declare an emergency and move quickly to put a co-ordinated plan in place to deal with it. Today we're seeing all opposition parties come together to make this plea with one voice. I believe it will finally work.

One of the reasons, I believe, our effort here today will prove successful is that one year ago Alberta was seeing one death a day from fentanyl, and at that time the Health minister was asked about safe injection sites. They were not something that she had been concerned about. But when the federal government recently enacted policies to allow provinces to set up these sites, Alberta made a positive move on that front. It was the same with the nasal spray version of naloxone. When my colleague asked about it in the House last fall, he was loudly derided by the members opposite. Today it is widely available. Of course, there was another colleague's bill, Bill 205, from Calgary-West, which proposed to control the use of pill presses, and the NDP, thankfully, agreed to approve this nation-leading and life-saving legislation.

Now, we're asking the NDP to declare a public health emergency and co-ordinate a crossministerial approach to gain control of opioid abuse in our province. One of the reasons I'm hopeful our government will take this necessary step is that they need only to look at the successful inroads British Columbia made after declaring its own public health emergency. The B.C. declaration resulted in a joint task force of leading health and criminal justice experts to address this crisis on all fronts.

Why has B.C. been so open in declaring an emergency and Alberta has not? It is impossible to say, but perhaps the crux of the problem is this. The Health minister would not even admit we have a crisis until recently. Instead, Alberta, the province where fentanyl first raised its deadly head, has taken a reactive stance and a wait-and-see approach. I cannot tell you what our government has to lose by taking strong action now. I don't know what the rationale is for not doing it. I will confirm that we have seen some positive initiative on the part of this government. The concern is that they have not been proactive.

As the Member for Calgary-West pointed out, B.C. received \$10 million worth of federal funding for its opioid crisis after it declared a public health emergency. Wouldn't the extra money alone be worth making the same declaration in this province? I'm sure Ottawa has been waiting for months for Alberta to step up and declare a crisis, and perhaps it is as baffled as we are that the Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Health and Alberta Health Services keep telling us that a declaration is unnecessary because they already have all the resources they need to combat opioids. If that's the case, why are they not doing more?

I would argue that the declaration is critical to raising public awareness of the dangers of opioids. Whether they're illegal recreational drugs or legal prescription drugs, alerting the public is a critical piece when a province is facing a crisis. However, when you read the province's last urgent opioid response team's report, you can clearly see that public awareness is an afterthought. Education, prevention, and intervention: that is my colleague's mantra about dealing with societal problems. Yes, already naloxone's availability is saving lives, and I credit the government for intervention initiatives, but where are the education and prevention that will help us ensure that people do not need an antidote to save their lives?

Another critical preventative piece that can come into play by declaring an emergency is the ability to track fatalities quicker. The government keeps claiming that it is more important to ensure each death is properly identified as fentanyl related, but tracking deaths quickly in a specific area of a big city or in a rural community alerts our medical and enforcement personnel to new killing drugs on our streets, which, in turn, lets them alert the public and bring all the forces to bear on the problem.

I'm particularly confused about this government's resistance to declaring a public health emergency, especially when they received applause for the way they handled the Fort McMurray fire, which involved the same crossministry approach we are recommending today. There is no question that a similar co-ordinated approach to combating opioid deaths would receive similar appreciation from Albertans, and more importantly, Mr. Speaker, it will save lives.

As I said at the outset, Mr. Speaker, I remain hopeful this government will take the right steps at the right time, and I believe that the right time is now. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to join the conversation this afternoon because, clearly, as everyone in this House has indicated, this is a topic that is very important and one

that needs to be addressed by us here in the House. As the Minister of Indigenous Relations, of course, I'm also deeply concerned about this issue as it directly affects the communities that I represent and the communities I deal with.

6:10

I know that as I travel the province, I have had many opportunities to speak with chiefs and councils and members of friendship centres and the Métis Nation of Alberta, all of whom express concerns about the need to respond to fentanyl as an issue as we move forward. They, of course, also indicate that fentanyl is simply the latest drug of concern for them and that, as has been previously mentioned by members of the opposition, there have been concerns about drug use over many years, and there are many different drugs that have each taken their turn in time to devastate our communities and destroy families. Each one of them brings us great anxiety and concern here in this House, on both sides of this House. As a result, it is important that we respond to this issue as we respond to the other drugs that are of concern.

I might note that the chiefs and councils often remind me that alcohol still takes many more lives in an average year in their communities than any of the other drugs that may be mentioned, fentanyl and so on. The concern is that while we do want to pay attention to fentanyl as a drug, the responses that we need to employ in this situation are ones that are really systemic and sustained. It's really a structural intervention that they're looking for rather than an immediate response, intervention, to a particular drug. While it is fentanyl today, we know that it will likely be another drug. We've already unfortunately had to deal with the introduction of carfentanil as well, and perhaps next year it'll be another drug. They seem to keep coming from some awful, hellish place in this world.

I think it's really important that as we respond to this crisis, we respond to the fact that we are going to need to have a response in place to all the crises that are yet to come. That means that we need to have processes in place which are about responding to the needs of the community, based on good science. In this case, for example, the doctrine of harm reduction is a very good, strong policy basis on which we should create the responses to the fentanyl crisis and to the other crises which we anticipate. As a result, I think it's very important that we follow up with those things that are not an immediate response, necessarily, to one situation but that will deal with all of the situations forward.

As a result, we have done a number of things that I think are really important, and that includes things like increasing funding for addictions and detox, dramatically increasing the availability of naloxone in this case and other responsive drugs in the future. Of course, we were very happy to support the bill by the MLA for Calgary-West that helped to ban pill presses. These are the kinds of things that are structural and that will actually deal not only with this crisis but with future crises.

Now we are looking at opioid dependency treatment in a variety of places: Cardston, Grande Prairie. I was fortunate enough to go down to Cardston and meet with the city council and subsequently, that afternoon, go to the chief and council of the Blood Tribe and talk to them about the issues and the problems that they're experiencing, learning from those problems so that we can develop new plans. I look forward to the plan of opening a treatment centre as well in Grande Prairie, and of course I'm very much looking forward to the medically supervised injection sites that are being trialed here in Edmonton as they teach us the things we need to understand to reduce stigmatization, to respond in a harm reduction, scientifically based manner, and to set up structures in society that will deal not only with this crisis but with all crises.

As a social worker of many years I want to take a moment to advocate for us to think broader, long term and to develop those processes and practices which will enable us to deal with all of the issues that come forward and the issues that we are still stuck with such as alcohol abuse and other kinds of drug dependencies.

I'd like to thank the House for everyone's comments in this conversation today because I think it's very important that we work together just as we ask the community members, the police, the medical associations, and the street-front agencies to work together. That's the kind of constructive, process-oriented, long-term thinking that I think will help us to deal with this crisis and other crises in the future.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you, and thank you to the members of the Assembly for extending debate time this afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to address this critically important issue. I thank the family members in the gallery as well for their attendance and, of course, their profound interest in this key issue for us.

I've been listening to the debate very carefully this afternoon, and over the course of the debate I would say that this debate has represented a microcosm of the problem that we have. We have had presentations from various members that have been, you know, very excellent in terms of their own personal experience with this situation. We had the presentation from my colleague the Member for Calgary-South East with regard to being an emergency first responder. We had the very passionate presentation from the Member for Edmonton-Centre talking about the work of AMSISE and harm reduction.

For the record – I will say it here – I support harm reduction measures, including safe consumption sites. This is one of those science-based, clearly demonstrated, evidence-based measures that can be taken for harm reduction.

But I will add to this – and I know that the Health minister has just recently had a meeting in this regard – that if we're going to talk about harm reduction and making investments in prevention in health care, then by the same token, while we're helping people who are in a cycle of addiction, we should also help people, for example, that have diabetes that don't have the money to buy the test strips so they can monitor their blood sugar. We would save our system a great deal of time and funds and would also save a great deal of harm to those individuals as well. We should not restrict our looking at and our examination of harm reduction simply to this one restricted area. Harm reduction has to be looked at in a much broader perspective because preventative medicine is much more effective than reactive medicine, and I think my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who has considerable experience with regard to some of these issues, will concur with that.

This debate has in fact been a microcosm of the problem that we have, and the problem that we have is that everybody is approaching this same issue from a slightly different angle, from a slightly different perspective, but there is a lack of overall co-ordination in our provincial effort in addressing the problem effectively. That is what this motion is asking for. It is to provide a level of focus. It is to provide a targeted response to this crisis as was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Elbow. This is our challenge. This is our difficulty.

Included with that, there are some, you know, particularly alarming statistics. I am always hesitant to quote statistics in a debate like this because statistics make it sound like we're reducing these discussions to numbers. I will tell you that this is much, much more

important than individual numbers. This is talking about people. This is talking about people's lives and the lives of their families, and it doesn't matter if it's one or 100 or 1,000. Those are important things to look at.

Nonetheless, the statistics that we have from Alberta specifically are alarming. Alberta's statistics, when compared to other provinces, indicate that we have a much higher degree of a problem than just about any other province with the exceptions of British Columbia and Saskatchewan. It's interesting that the three western provinces have by far the highest rates of hospitalization for opioid overdoses compared to any other province and that our rate of emergency room visits for opioid poisonings are 57 per cent higher than the province of Ontario's according to the CIHI report which was just published. These statistics indicate a significant problem that needs to be addressed if we are going to have an overall, wraparound response to the opioid problem.

Has the wider distribution of naloxone kits been helpful? Yes. We won't argue that. But has it been the answer? No. And to pretend that it is the answer is wrong. It's fooling ourselves. Now, I'm not saying that that's what the government is saying, but it is not where we have to stop this discussion.

6:20

I'm grateful that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned some of the issues with regard to prescription of opioids and not just prescription of opioids but the prescription of benzodiazepines, which is often related to opioid abuse. We have seen an increase in opioid dispensations of 23 per cent over the last three years where we have recorded data in Alberta, and we have this as a long-standing problem. You know, in terms of people who have suffered from a fatal fentanyl overdose, some 60 per cent of the people were prescribed an opioid in the year prior to the incident of the overdose, and also benzodiazepines had been prescribed in the week before or after the opioid was prescribed. This is one of the issues that needs to be discussed with our medical community, and it is something that has become pervasive.

Overall, what all of this means – and the word comes up again and again in this discussion and needs to be addressed – is that all of these efforts, whether it's the efforts that are being made in our indigenous communities, as outlined by the Minister of Indigenous Relations, or whether it's the efforts that are being made as outlined

by the Associate Minister of Health, right now are not properly co-ordinated. By declaring a public health emergency, it brings together the clear focus that is required on this issue rather than continuing these earnest, honest but piecemeal efforts at addressing the problem. This problem can only be addressed if it is done in a more co-ordinated manner.

That is what is missing right now, the co-ordination of our efforts and those efforts becoming more co-ordinated with our medical community's, working with the College of Physicians & Surgeons to reduce opioid prescriptions. In the last four years of my veterinary career I had to fill out triplicate prescription forms to prescribe narcotics and controlled substances to my veterinary patients. Now, people might say: well, why would you do that? It's to eliminate the risk of triple prescribing. Triple prescribing, where patients go from one physician to another physician to another physician, can only be detected if there is a monitoring system in place, and that monitoring system has to be beefed up as well because a significant number of people who have suffered from fentanyl overdoses have in fact seen two or more prescribing doctors and received product from them. That's a problem, and that's one of the things that needs to be addressed.

Again, my concern is: I'm not criticizing the efforts that are being made individually, but they are not co-ordinated in any way. If we cannot co-ordinate our efforts, we will continue to have a situation where we have 20 horses hooked up to one cart, all going in separate directions. They're all pulling the cart, but the cart is not moving. We have to harness these horses together and head them off in the same direction, and that harness can be provided by the declaration of a public health emergency. That's why I support the motion of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I urge all members in the Legislature to support this measure for the sake of Albertans and for the sake of those who are vulnerable or who have a situation where they could be vulnerable and where they could suffer from an opioid overdose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak?

Seeing and hearing none, pursuant to the unanimous consent of the Assembly and Standing Order 30(5) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:24 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, March 7, 2017

Day 3

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Wildrose: 22

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Please bow your heads. Let each of us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us have confidence in our abilities to make decisions while maintaining respect for those who may oppose those decisions. Never let our actions or our words be disrespectful. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

2. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

3. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

4. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates (No. 2) for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates (No. 2) for the general revenue fund for six hours: three hours on Wednesday, March 8, 2017, beginning at 3 p.m., and three hours on Thursday, March 9, 2017, beginning at 9 a.m.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

6. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2017-18 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

7. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2017-18 interim supply estimates for three hours on Tuesday, March 14, 2017, beginning at 3 p.m.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

Amendments to Standing Orders

8. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
 - A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective April 21, 2016, be amended as follows:
 1. Standing Order 14 is amended by renumbering suborder (1) as (1.1) and by adding the following before suborder (1.1):
Withdrawal and custody of strangers
14(1) For the purposes of this Standing Order, a stranger does not include an infant being cared for by a Member.
 - B. And be it further resolved that the amendment in this motion shall come into force on passage.

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to the motion? The Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; I'm a bit out of breath. I was just running from Public Accounts. I just want to speak briefly to this. This is a recommendation that came about as a result of the recommendations of the family-friendly subcommittee of the Members' Services Committee that was charged to look at ways in which we can make our Legislature more family friendly. This is the result of that committee. I just wanted to say that I thought the committee worked really well together. It was an all-party committee, and we worked, you know, co-operatively. We worked on a consensus basis, and this is a recommendation that everyone on the committee agreed was something that we should do. I just would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the members of the family-friendly subcommittee for their work on that subcommittee in allowing this to be something that we can act on.

Now, as many of you know, there have been a few babies in the House already. I think some of us might argue that said babies have been better behaved than members at times. However, these children that have been in the House have been here as the result of work that has been done through the Speaker's office to allow the babies and not as a result of a change in the standing orders. So with this change to the standing orders we are making this a permanent change.

Now, as many of you will also know, it's Westminster parliamentary tradition that no one is allowed on the floor of a House or a Legislature who is not a member. Anyone else is deemed to be a stranger. Now, I've mentioned this to many of my colleagues before, and I want to reiterate it now. I don't think that tradition is ever a good reason to continue to do something if the basis of continuing to do it is tradition alone. So I think that in this sense we are changing tradition in a very positive way for the future of parents and people all over Alberta.

However, in recent years this particular issue has come up again and again in parliaments around the Commonwealth. It's come up here, in the House of Commons in 2012. It came up in Australia recently, and they've had to make changes there. Just in April of 2016 a Slovakian MP was barred from bringing her child onto the floor of the House there because of this rule.

10:10

I just want to say that there are a few facts, I think, worth considering, to my mind, in this matter. First of all, elected officials, MLAs, in Alberta don't get parental leave. Regular folks in Alberta are entitled to parental leave; MLAs are not. As a result of that, we sometimes need to bring our children with us to work, and I would encourage folks to do so.

Second, it's quite obvious to me and, I think, anyone who's been around small babies and small infants that the best place for an infant is always in the arms of a parent. That parent could be a male parent or a woman parent or a parent of any gender. It really doesn't matter. Babies like to be snuggled. It's an incredibly crucial time, the first three months of life especially, so to be able to have the opportunity to bond with your baby and still be a sitting member of the House is a huge benefit.

Thirdly, I think this really sends an important signal to Albertans. It sends a signal to Albertans that in this province we believe that you can be both an MLA and a parent. This is one step that we're doing that really makes that clear. It makes it clear to women and men all over the province who have small children that you can still run for public office and you can still be involved. You can still be involved and be a parent. It's something that you can do. I think we want to have members in this House that represent all ages and all stages of Albertan life, so making this change makes that possible.

I think it's also very clear – it's been clear to me – that all of us in this House who are parents struggle. We struggle to do this job, and we struggle to balance our responsibilities as parents with our responsibilities as MLAs. We struggle every time we have to leave our kids at home and come here for four days. We struggle every time we have to bring them to an event on the weekend and they knock down a signed B.B. King guitar, like mine did this weekend. We struggle every time we miss a recital or we miss a soccer game or a school event. So, you know, something small like this is perhaps more . . .

An Hon. Member: Symbolic.

Ms Luff: Symbolic. Thank you.

. . . than something that actually makes a difference, but I think that sometimes these symbolic gestures are important.

I do want to just take this moment to thank all of the people who are not here in this House who make it possible for us to parent and to do our jobs. My partner, who stays at home with my two-year-old and my four-year-old during the week so that I can come do this job; I know the Minister of Status of Women's partner did an amazing job when Patrick was little; the Associate Minister of Health's husband; every single partner, every single grandparent, every single family friend that has helped out when we needed it: I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those people.

What this change is really about at its core is the acceptance that children are part of life and part of society. Being a new parent can be an incredibly isolating experience because it's this thing that happens, that you're not supposed to bring your baby places because it might cry or because it will cause a fuss. But children are part of life, and children should be part of society. We should embrace them at every level of society, and a change like this really makes that possible.

I think it's also appropriate that on this day so close to International Women's Day and given things that are happening in this world, the House embrace what I consider to be a very feminist change. It's a step towards equality, equality in opportunity to be both an elected official and a parent for all genders. I thank my colleagues in the House for accepting this very feminist revision of the standing orders.

I'd just like to take a moment right now to read something that my dear friend Kate wrote on Facebook last night that I think deserves to be on the record. She said:

If feminism is cancer, it is cancer to misogyny, cancer to modern backwards double standards, cancer to discrimination and oppression. Feminism shall invade those practices, shall morph

them into equality and humanity, shall multiply rapidly. Let this "feminist cancer" wreak havoc on prejudice and bring about symptoms of . . . respect, fearlessness, merit, opportunity.

This is a great opportunity that we have here today to make history in this change, so I'd like to thank all of the members of the House for supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to what in some ways is a historic change to the standing orders. As you know, sir, there's nothing that gets me more excited in the morning than the standing orders of this place, so it is a pleasure to be part of the discussion today, this discussion around what is a positive change.

I think you'll probably remember, Mr. Speaker, that quite some time ago I rose in this place to suggest this very committee. At that time members on this side of the House and that side had identified some shifting demographics here inside the Chamber and that perhaps it was time to address some of these very important issues that face families here inside the Chamber as well as right across Alberta. I was pleased to be able to sit on the family-friendly subcommittee. I think that there was some significant work that was done. I think that there was some very positive work that was done. I might add that it was very positive, very good to be able to work in a bipartisan way as this affects so many members of the House.

I might just add that my good friend from Strathmore-Brooks is, I believe, next on the list to be able to bring an infant into the Chamber as we look forward to the arrival of a new bundle of joy just in the next couple of weeks, so there are lots of exciting things that are happening for him and this side of the Chamber when it comes to babies being passed around caucus, et cetera. We look forward to that, and we'll celebrate with him as we've celebrated with many in this House on the birth of new arrivals.

With respect to moving forward and identifying areas where we as members can support each other as parents as well, I think it is critically important that we do those things, not in a way that makes us more important or less important than any other Albertan but that acknowledges it is important that through our public service we are also able to make our families a priority.

Oftentimes, as was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-East, our families do wind up taking a bit of a back seat, so I know that I'm just so grateful for the work of all of our spouses and partners, that provide us the opportunity to serve the public day in and day out. They have an equally great commitment to this Chamber. They have an equally great and sizable commitment to our province to ensure that we all play our particular role in ensuring that we leave our province better. Really, creating a family-friendly environment is just about that. These young babies and children all across our province are the next generation of Alberta and are so critical to the success of this province.

I know that I and members of this side of the House, too, will be pleased to support this motion. I know that we are happy to be able to make some positive steps for all members of the Chamber, and I think that on a go-forward basis, it is really great to be able to see ways that we can engage more people in the political process.

In many respects this committee was about that, not putting barriers in place for those who are in the very critical years of their lives, where they're raising children, but to be able to remove barriers. We should ultimately be trying to remove barriers for all folks. I think that the Member for Calgary-East is correct in her assertions about not placing barriers for people, particularly for women that may like to engage in the political process.

I know that when people from all backgrounds and all genders are engaged in the process, our democracy is strengthened and our Chamber is strengthened and our province is strengthened. I know, Mr. Speaker, that I can tell you that I and members of this caucus want to partake in encouraging people to engage in the process, particularly women.

10:20

I also shared last night some significant – significant – disappointment in some individuals that are not in our party but associated with our party that produced some very inappropriate content on the Internet. I certainly reject their comments. Any indication or any comment that would discourage women from wanting to be involved in politics is absolutely unacceptable and in no way, shape, or form reflects my views. I will speak for everyone in our caucus that those comments or statements are not reflected by anyone in our caucus and should be dealt with appropriately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time. Thank you to the members opposite for their input into the community and as well, in this particular case, into the committee, and thank you to the members of the third party and the independent members, who also had the opportunity to provide some comments specifically to the motion. I think that it is a positive step for all of us here today.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I wonder if you as an experienced parent might give some lessons. I'm sure you'd be welcomed by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. It would be nice to see the Member for Strathmore-Brooks snuggling, with a soothing and soft voice. I'm sure that the House but certainly I will look with anticipation to that.

I think we have application of 29(2)(a) here. Are there any questions or comments to the Opposition House Leader? Okay.

The hon. member of the third party. Please proceed.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in support of the motion, and in the spirit of the member that moved it, who talked about the way that the committee worked very much in a collaborative and co-operative fashion to get here, I will simply say: what she said, what he said.

Mr. Hanson: Not under 29(2)(a) but just while we're on the subject of babies and babies in the House, although I've been sworn to secrecy, I'm going to take this opportunity to say that I'm going to be a grandpa.

Mr. Cooper: Relevance.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I must tell you that it is very, very relevant.

Are there any comments under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Taylor: I was just going to, I guess, comment on what Dave said. On April 27 I'm going to be a grandfather as well for the first time.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this motion?

[Government Motion 8 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wonder if I could inquire if someone from Executive Council, the cabinet, would be prepared to introduce this motion.

Amendments to Standing Orders

9. Mr. Schmidt moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that Standing Order 52.01(1) be amended in clause (a) by striking out "Human Services" and substituting "Community and Social Services, Children's Services."

The Speaker: Are there members who wish to speak to this matter?

[Government Motion 9 carried]

Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

10. Mr. Schmidt moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee be authorized to meet during the consideration of the 2017-18 main estimates.

The Speaker: Having heard the motion, anyone wish to speak further to it?

Opportunity to close debate, Mr. Minister?

[Government Motion 10 carried]

Adjournment of Spring Session

12. Mr. Schmidt moved on behalf of Mason:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2017 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to members of this Assembly for the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. It is such an honour to be able to debate on the throne speech. I'd like to thank Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for her thoughtful and passionate words about our province and for laying the groundwork of this, the Third Session of the 29th Legislature of the province of Alberta.

I'd like to echo some of Her Honour's words that have stayed with me since that speech. "We are one province, one people on a common journey towards a common future." Those words gave me pause for thought. It's not easy to work together on a common future in an often confrontational parliamentary system. It's even harder when some people use the excuse of confrontational politics to justify threats, bullying, and harassment.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand before this Chamber and give my support to this year's Speech from the Throne, because while working together towards a common future is a goal that some days seems elusive in this Chamber, we all know, at least, that

the values espoused by Her Honour in her speech are worth the effort, and they're worth stating again: openness and inclusiveness, compassion, hard work, and justice. I'm sure that every person in this Chamber will join me today in showing their support for those values.

When we talk about openness, we're celebrating the Alberta we know today, built by people from all over the world, all religions, all creeds. For many of us our parents or our grandparents were the beneficiaries of that openness and came here to build a new home and a new life. We must protect that heritage and those values to ensure that our province continues to grow strong into the future. Inclusiveness of all kinds is the key to the values of this province.

10:30

I was thrilled to hear in this year's Speech from the Throne that the government is going to work with people with disabilities to provide timelier, more accessible services. A powerful voice for inclusion and persons with disabilities ally, Leah McRorie, shared her thoughts with me about the throne speech. She said:

I believe the majority of Albertans share my vision . . . for an Inclusive Alberta where all people have equal access and opportunity.

I do not know of another Govt that shares my vision & values. NDP are the 1st & only government to not only hear thousands of [persons with disabilities], but listened to folks and took action.

I found her words very moving. It's satisfying to know that a group of Albertans who traditionally felt overlooked or ignored now feel that they're being heard and respected by government. This world that we live in was made, for the most part, for the able-bodied. For people with disabilities, physical or learning disabilities, there's often a daily struggle to belong in a world that wasn't really built with them in mind. But that's changing, and I'm proud to work with the people who want to make that change.

Of course, inclusiveness is not just about people with disabilities. Creating an inclusive society also means helping those who are excluded from enjoying the basic benefits of our province because of poverty. The Alberta child benefit and enhanced family and employment tax credit have helped nearly 200,000 children in this province to date. These kids now have nutritious food to eat, a warm winter coat, or new books to read, when they didn't before in this province. In the fall families all across Alberta had to dig a bit deeper into their pocketbooks to come up with extra money to pay school fees, but no more. For some families, including families in my constituency, in Calgary-North West, those fees added to a lot of pressure on the family budget. When a child comes from a low-income family, they may be left out of activities that their classmates get to enjoy, noticeably left out, and this can make them feel different in the eyes of their classmates. When kids go off to school – it was the same for me when I was a child, and I can imagine that it's the same now – they just want to fit in, to be accepted by their peers and not singled out for their differences.

Once again I turn to the wonderful Leah McRorie for perspective on this. She shared her personal experience on social media, saying, "I was called to the principal's office b/c my fees were not paid. No fieldtrips 4 me . . . Humiliating!" She went on to tell me about how she got in trouble at school for having unpaid fees and was given a letter to take home. She was afraid and didn't give the letter to her mom. She knew that her mom had no money to give, so she ripped it up, and the next day she skipped school for the first time. She was 10 years old. No child should have to go through that. This government agrees, and I think that's wonderful. We're taking steps to reduce school fees, saving families hundreds, potentially thousands of dollars every year, and that means that kids won't have

to feel the pain of being excluded from activities that their friends get to enjoy. They can focus on their school work, making friends, and having fun.

A strong education system, Mr. Speaker, is the key to a strong Alberta. We all want children to fulfill their potential. I know that the parents in Calgary-North West are very thankful that their government continues to provide stable, predictable funding for education. That means that teachers have remained in the classroom; new schools are being built. As laid out in the throne speech, I was so happy to see that classroom education will remain a priority, as will infrastructure. Children can't learn if they don't have a proper space to learn in. They need a school, a classroom that's up to date, that's safe, and that's not overcrowded.

Last year shovels were in the ground at over 100 new school sites. This year thousands of Albertans will be put to work on construction sites across the province as well: new schools, health care centres, roads, and bridges, infrastructure that is critical for Alberta's economic future, a future that is starting to look very bright.

The world-wide collapse in the price of oil left our province reeling, but we are stabilizing. There have been positive signs of economic recovery, but it is going to take a while before Albertans feel it in their daily lives. Until then I want to reassure my constituents, the people of Calgary-North West, that I as your MLA will continue to support you. I'm proud to be part of an inclusive, compassionate government that is truly working to make life better for Albertans. The agenda laid out in the throne speech may seem daunting, but it's one that is so worth while to accomplish because it puts Albertans first.

I along with my government colleagues will continue to work to create good jobs, to make life more affordable, to protect and enhance the public services relied on by everyone who calls this great province their home. I am proud to be an Albertan, Mr. Speaker, proud to be a member of a caring and compassionate government, and proud to work every day for the residents of Calgary-North West.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members of this Assembly, for this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. It is such an honour to be able to second the motion to accept Her Majesty's speech. Every day when I step into this House I am humbled by the task before me, that the great constituents of Red Deer-South entrust me to speak for them on matters that are vital to the well-being of their families. I want them to know that I will continually strive to earn that trust.

I'm proud to be a part of a government that is working to make life better for ordinary Albertans. Albertans are worried about covering the basics: paying the mortgage, putting food on the table, and making sure their kids get a good education. I've been there myself, sitting at the kitchen table looking at a pile of bills and wondering how I was going to make ends meet. The agenda laid out in Thursday's throne speech is an ambitious one but one that puts Alberta families first by creating good jobs, making life more affordable, and protecting the public services that families rely on.

These goals reflect the values of my constituents in Red Deer-South. Every fall families across Alberta have to reassess their budgets in order to ensure they have enough money to pay for school fees. This government's plan to reduce school fees will save families hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars. This is money that families in Red Deer-South can now put towards their bills, their mortgage, or put into a savings account.

Red Deer, like a lot of Alberta communities, is feeling the effects of aging infrastructure. The city is now home to over 100,000 people. It's the third-largest city in Alberta, and millions of vehicles pass by every day as people travel between Edmonton and Calgary. I'm so grateful that our government has seen the need to invest in infrastructure, including the Gaetz Avenue-QE II interchange that is currently under construction. This project will not only improve traffic flow in the critical corridor; it will make it safer, too. It has created many good, mortgage-paying jobs.

Another project I'm really pleased with is the Red Deer regional airport runway extension. I stressed to my colleagues the importance of this, and we got it done. Having been already completed, this directly created jobs, and we're already seeing interest in expanded usage of the airport, meaning more jobs are sure to follow.

Last year construction started on hundreds of infrastructure projects across the province: roads, bridges, schools, health care facilities. I was happy to see in the throne speech plans to continue to rebuild and replace aging infrastructure, creating even more construction jobs. I will work with my colleagues to give Red Deer a voice at that table as our city is growing in number and in need. Our city needs new schools. I've heard this first-hand from teachers and educators during my numerous visits to the schools in my area. We need a new courthouse, something I've been working on with the appropriate ministries so that this necessity materializes.

I also need to stress to my constituents: I've heard your concerns about Red Deer regional hospital loud and clear. This government has already met with the hospital many times in recent months to address your concerns, and we will continue to work on making health care in Red Deer world-class quality. Expanding the hospital and the services it provides has always been and continues to be at the top of my priority list.

10:40

Red Deer is a growing city. It is also an aging city. Senior care is a priority for residents of Red Deer-South. Seniors helped build this province. They deserve to retire in comfort and dignity. However, seniors can be overlooked. Recently I was shopping at a local Red Deer grocery store when I ran into a senior lady that I know from my days at Safeway. It was her birthday, so I wished her a happy birthday. She smiled and thanked me, and then what she said broke my heart. She told me that I was the only one to wish her a happy birthday. Her family and her friends had all passed on. This is the reality for many seniors in Alberta. It was then I realized I could do something. I teamed up with my wonderful colleague in Red Deer-North to start hosting birthday parties for Red Deer seniors and those in the surrounding areas, a simple thing, really, just cake, entertainment, and good company, but it's something that can make a big difference in the lives of seniors, to know they have not been forgotten, to know that we recognize how important they have been and continue to be in making our communities stronger.

Seniors deserve a government that makes life better for them. I applaud the provincial and federal governments for providing funding for Red Deer senior housing groups in order to pay for much-needed maintenance. Having upgraded fire safety systems, new hot water tanks, and upgraded furnaces will make our seniors safer and improve the quality of their life. I'm pleased that this government will continue to create new long-term care facilities and offer more home care services to allow seniors to stay in their homes and communities. To those of you who fear that your quality of care depends on the state of our economy, you can rest assured that we are on your side. To this government austerity can't be the answer to the pressing question: what's going to happen to vital social services when times get tough?

Low-income families in Red Deer can often feel that their concerns are overlooked also. I want to say to them: I see you, and I hear you, and so does this government. We have been and will continue to be in your corner fighting for you. We are moving towards a minimum wage of \$15 per hour, a wage that will mean that low-income workers won't have to go to the food bank in order to feed their children.

This year we will also continue to make progress on our government's commitment to \$25-a-day daycare so that more families can access affordable, safe child care, more women can enter the workforce, and we remove a barrier from mothers who want to work but sometimes can't. Raising a family and providing for one shouldn't have to be a choice. We won't let it be. Bit by bit this government will help to eliminate the wage gap and empower women.

I'm also glad to see a pledge in the throne speech to build more affordable housing units so more Albertans will have a roof over their head. Providing access to the most basic of human needs shouldn't be lauded as generous or wasteful but, rather, acknowledged as the simple first steps in building a bigger and better middle class.

No Albertan should have to live on the streets. In October I participated in the homeless count that took place all across the province to show that this government wants to address the issue of homelessness. I want to tell people in Red Deer that if you ever find yourself out in the cold, my office is open to you. If you need to warm up, please come inside and share your experiences with me and my staff. The humanistic aspect of my job is something that I will always be able to make time for. I recently moved my constituency office to a street-front location to make it more accessible for exactly these reasons. An open and accessible office is something I pride myself on, and I hope my constituents take me up on this. Every time I walk into this Chamber, I do it for the benefit of you folks, the hard-working people of Red Deer-South.

We all know that a strong energy sector in Alberta is vital for our province's economic future and Canada's. Last November the federal government approved the Trans Mountain pipeline and line 3, citing our government's climate leadership plan as one of the main reasons the pipelines got the go-ahead. But our government's work isn't done yet. I'm proud that our Premier and ministers continue to make pipelines a priority. Just how big a priority was outlined in Thursday's throne speech. Albertans now know that their government will defend this province and our key industry in court by seeking intervenor status on any legal challenges to the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Alberta's energy industry impacts every corner of this province. It's no different in Red Deer. I will join my voice to those of my hon. colleagues in this Assembly to continue to speak in support of these pipelines. They are critical not just for Albertans but for all Canadians because a strong energy sector in Alberta makes Canada stronger.

There's no doubt that low oil prices have hurt our province. Alberta's economy has taken a beating lately, but as we've seen time and time again, when this province takes a hit, it always shakes it off and keeps its head up. There are already positive signs of recovery: more wells are being drilled, exports reached \$8 billion in December, and employment has grown by 18,000 since bottoming out in the summer. While our economy continues to recover, I'm proud to tell my constituents and all Albertans that their government will help them through this downturn and make their lives better.

It looks like we've weathered the eye of the storm in true Albertan fashion. We pushed onwards with our goals and promises. We will continue to reduce costs and bring government spending

down while maintaining and protecting the core services – health care, education, and social services – that many Albertans rely on. Steps have already been taken. This government has cut and combined government agencies; frozen salaries for cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff, and civil services management; and spending has been streamlined. I know that we will continue to work to find further reductions and bring down spending growth at a thoughtful pace.

While it might have been easy to cut services during our tough economic times, you don't turn your back on Albertans when they need it the most. Providing front-line services are some of the most important duties of a government. To wash our hands of these responsibilities would be short sighted, with poor consequences.

We will also be helping families by introducing a consumer bill of rights, further building on consumer protection steps that we took last year to end predatory lending practices and ban door-to-door energy sales.

I'm proud of what our government has accomplished and eager to get back to making this province a more progressive and accessible place for the 4 million people that have the pleasure to call this beautiful province home. I'm proud to go to work every day in service of the people of Red Deer-South, and I'm thankful they trusted me with their vote. This agenda laid out in the throne speech is an ambitious one, but it is one that will put us on the path to a brighter future for all Albertans, including my constituents in Red Deer-South.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to reply to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor and the throne speech. Myself, my colleagues here, and the good people of Calgary-Foothills: all of us are very pleased to see Her Honour address the issue of building new pipelines to markets. She's right. Alberta is too dependent on selling its energy products to one customer at one discounted price. This must change.

The government of Canada approved the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion over the existing pipeline right-of-way. The line 3 expansion to Wisconsin was also approved to reach the installed capacity of that pipeline. This was done despite the opposition of the NDP in both British Columbia and Manitoba. Pipeline construction brings with it good-paying jobs, including union jobs. I can't believe that the NDP in those two provinces threw their union brothers and sisters under the bus for ideology. I guess they have enough money and enjoy being the permanent opposition in those two provinces.

10:50

Speaking of being in permanent opposition, Mr. Speaker, I dare say that this throne speech is a large warning shot across the bow of the British Columbia NDP as it heads to the polls in two months. The hon. Premier is correct. How dare her NDP comrades in British Columbia oppose a pipeline expansion allowing a route that has provided the safe movement of petroleum to Vancouver since 1953. I know Albertans and British Columbians will be relieved that Alberta NDP government ministers, backbenchers, and staffers will not be going to British Columbia to interfere with that province's election that's coming up soon.

I'm also pleased to see that the government is going to work thoughtfully and respectfully with the federal government and business communities and elected officials across Canada on the Energy East pipeline proposal. Canada is home to the third-largest oil reserve in the world. Still, Mr. Speaker, Canada is not energy

independent, although we own the third-largest resource. Support for Alberta oil and gas means not just a stronger Alberta but a stronger Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the Energy East pipeline is still not approved, but just the prospect alone is causing global investment decisions to be made. This pipeline alone can displace almost 800,000 barrels per day of foreign oil coming into Canada. The Liberals and the NDP want to leave our bitumen and the conventional oil in the ground and be dependent on foreign dictators. Investment decisions are happening that will one day see Alberta's petroleum products sold all over Europe. Talk about market diversification.

First, let's talk about utilizing about 925,000 barrels of Alberta oil in refineries within Canada and Europe, and that's not counting the United States, our largest trade partner. Irving Oil already operates at 300,000 barrels per day in its refinery, the largest in Canada, at Saint John in New Brunswick. Irving boasts having long-term supply arrangements with the offshore of Newfoundland and Labrador, the North Sea, and Saudi Arabia. I'll come back to Saudi Arabia a little later. Irving recently purchased the Whitegate refinery in County Cork, Ireland. This being the only refinery in Ireland, it has 75,000 barrels per day of capacity and currently sources oil from North Africa and the North Sea, selling gasoline, diesel, and kerosene across Ireland and Europe.

Can you see, Mr. Speaker, that we are on the verge of selling Alberta's synthetic crude? Western Canadians sell it to Ireland and Europe, and that's travelling from New Brunswick in Irving's double-hull tankers. This would not have been possible without the work of our Alberta international offices and the diplomats at Global Affairs Canada, who worked tirelessly to end the proposed European Union's field quality directive.

Alberta could very well soon displace 375,000 barrels per day of Saudi Arabian and North African oil used by Irving Oil. The oil that they currently use is conflict oil, dictator oil, bloody oil, or whatever you want to call it. It's an exciting prospect to think that it could be replaced by free, ethical, and democratic Alberta oil. Their women are not allowed to vote. Women are not allowed to drive automobiles or have the freedom to show their faces.

The Energy East pipeline is just getting started. Then there is the Valero refinery in Lévis, Quebec. Beginning in 1971, it produces 265,000 barrels per day. Then our Suncor's Montreal refinery, built in 1955, has a capacity of 160,000 barrels per day. Coastal Petrochemical operates the Montreal East refinery. Built in 1963, it has a capacity of 70,000 barrels per day. That's another 495,000 barrels per day for Alberta's petroleum products to be moved into the domestic market in addition to Irving Oil refineries' 300,000 barrels. This oil is not coming from places where people are taking up arms against each other and committing atrocities on a regular basis. Need I mention the Burnaby refinery at the end of the Trans Mountain pipeline, which handles 55,000 barrels per day for the B.C. Lower Mainland's use?

Speaking of trade, Mr. Speaker, I did notice Her Honour mention that "additional trade missions will be undertaken this year to key markets across the world, including Japan, India, and China." As you know, I was in India and Japan not even two months ago, at my own expense, and I have reached out and am prepared to sit down with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the Premier to brief them on my experience and provide them with insights into the government and business community to better prepare them for the trade promotion that they seek to undertake to those countries.

Alberta has incredible scenery and resources for the staging of motion picture productions. Bollywood produces over a thousand films a year, and there is no reason why Bollywood films cannot be filmed in Alberta.

Seventeen per cent of India's GDP comes from the agriculture sector, and that is valued at over \$152 billion. Agrifood alone is valued at \$40 billion and expected to grow to \$65 billion by 2018 in India. India remains an important player in the global agriculture market as an importer of commodities like edible oils, pulses, lentils, wood, and wood products. Guess what? Alberta produces all of those products, and we need to be selling more into that market. In the last fiscal year India imported about 6 million tonnes of pulses. We have so much opportunity to grow more pulse crops in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, the majority of the Indian population is vegetarian, and they consume lentils and pulses as their main diet regularly, so we have an opportunity to export more of our valued agriproducts. Canadian pension funds and institutions are very bullish on India and have committed about \$12 billion over the last 24 years in equity investments.

My former employer Reliance Industries Limited is the largest privately owned company with interests in telecommunications and oil and gas. When I met them, they expressed interest in importing our bitumen from here because their refinery can process the hardest crude in the world. Reliance was the first refiner from India to import about 320,000 barrels of Canadian crude in 2012. After that, there was not much business with them. I used to work at the company, and I was part of the team which built the world's largest refinery, producing 1.4 million barrels per day, on the west coast of India in the province of Gujarat.

While I was in India, I carried your best wishes and compliments and greetings to the Speakers of the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana provinces, and they were quite happy to receive your greetings and gifts. They also sent their greetings and best wishes to all of us here. Thank you for that.

I also met many union ministers. They call their federal ministers union ministers. I happened to meet with India's Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation minister and India's ministers for Information and Broadcasting and Civil Aviation and their Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences. They have shown lots of interest.

11:00

I also happened to meet the Speakers of both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states. Most of the questions they asked were about how we run the business here and whether there are disruptions in the House. That's the kind of thing that happens in that part of the world. They were quite pleased to actually follow us as a role model in their proceedings in their Legislatures.

But one thing I was excited about, Mr. Speaker, is that I happened to visit my native place, where I was born. All my relations send their greetings and best wishes to all Albertans and to all of us here. I happened to meet their Premier, who's a very, very dynamic leader. He's building a new capital in Amaravati, a brand new capital. It's a greenfield capital. He said that there will be lots of opportunities for Albertan and Canadian businesses, so I'm going to meet with our economic development minister and update him on the opportunities there.

I also met numerous cabinet ministers from the Premier's cabinet and neighbouring province in Telangana as well. They have shown lots of interest. With Mr. Trump as President of the United States there are lots of inquiries from students in India. They used to go to the U.S. before, and they're looking at Alberta and Canada for opportunities in our universities here. So I'm planning to meet with the presidents of the U of A and the U of C and update them on the opportunities. If I get time to meet with our Minister of Advanced Education, I'll be happy to brief him, too, on the opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, on my way home I stopped in Japan, the world's third-largest economy. It's interesting that I found Alberta pork. It

was displayed on grocery store shelves, very proudly, there. With Abenomics happening there, there is cheap Japanese money that overtook Chinese direct investment into Canada in 2015. It used to be China that was high in the trade between Asian countries and Canada, but now Japan overtook that.

AltaGas LPG in Alberta here have received approval to build a liquefied propane export facility on Ridley Island near Prince Rupert to ship Alberta's surplus propane for use in Japan. That's a good opportunity for exporting LPG, for using Alberta's surplus gas – convert that into LPG and ship it to Japan.

Mr. Speaker, it is through trade and selling quality Alberta products into these emerging markets that we will diversify the economy. That way we can build on our strengths in the energy sector as well as diversify in sectors like agriculture, forestry, tourism, and even producing Bollywood movies in Canada and in Alberta, particularly.

The world is at Alberta's doorstep, Mr. Speaker. [Mr. Panda's speaking time expired] Sorry. I ran out of time.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I hope you enjoyed holiday time as part of that. It seems to me you were doing a lot of working.

Under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Orr: I really appreciated your comments and your thoughts and your experiences. I just wonder if you would like to sort of continue, any other things you'd like to add to that, please.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Panda: Thank you so much. As I said, Mr. Speaker, the world is at Alberta's doorstep. I know how scary it can be to take that first step onto the plane or ship and venture to a foreign land, but we need to make that step. Our airports have grown, and airlines keep adding new offerings to new destinations. Entrepreneurs are now taking advantage of dedicated air cargo to help move products made right here in Alberta to Shanghai. It's a direct, nonstop flight to China. If not for the Air China cargo at the Edmonton International Airport, pump manufacturers in the Nisku industrial park would be shut down due to the recession, but because of the direct cargo access, they can ship to buyers around the world and keep people employed here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to speak and reply to the Speech from the Throne. There is much more potential in Alberta than this government has ever recognized, and for everyone's sake I hope we can unleash much more of it to get out of this recession in Alberta.

Also, Mr. Speaker, you know, I visited the Canadian consulate in Mumbai and the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi and met with the Alberta tradespeople, and I did the same thing in Tokyo. I met with the Canadian trade commissioner and his staff and Alberta's managing director there. They're all doing a great job. They need a little bit more encouragement on finding ways to diversify the markets. That needs political leadership. This government can actually do much more.

I recently found the India itinerary of the agriculture minister. I felt it was too light, and the stakeholders he was meeting were not the best return for the money and time he spent there. He could consult with his opposition critics, whichever ministry is travelling. We are here to help and collaborate. That's the job of any elected official here, to make sure that we advance the cause of Alberta in the international market because we are in a recession. We are all in this together, and we have to find ways to get out of these economic difficulties we're in.

On behalf of the Wildrose and all my colleagues we are here to help the government bring in good policies that will improve Alberta's economic conditions. With that, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any other questions or comments to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, M. le Président, I would be tempted to talk about my recent travels overseas, but I think I'm going to limit my response to the throne speech this morning. First of all, I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor, the Right Hon. Lois Mitchell, for her speech outlining the government's agenda for the session of the 29th Legislative Assembly. I would also like to thank her for her remarks reminding everyone of the 150th birthday of Canada, that we are going to be celebrating in 2017. I liked the explanation as to why she was wearing the special purple robe and the significance. As someone who became a Canadian citizen on Canada's 110th birthday, I recognize the significance of this birthday and the privilege of calling Canada my home and the honour of serving Alberta as an MLA.

In the Speech from the Throne Her Honour reminded all Albertans that we are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice. Albertans come from every part of the globe. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a government MLA with my colleagues that truly represent a diversity of backgrounds of Albertans. This is important to not only myself but also to many Albertans. The reason I became a Canadian citizen was because Canada is an open and inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to reach for their dreams. No one is excluded. It is important to remind oneself often how easy it is to exclude people and how easy it is to perceive others as different, as a threat, or as not welcome.

During my maiden speech I mentioned that as a daughter of a French Jew I have lived all of my life with the consequences of what happened to his family and friends. This should not be happening to our Muslim neighbours or the LGBTQ-plus community. I am proud of a resident of Strathcona county who after the massacre in the mosque in Quebec invited community residents to write messages of love, peace, and welcome to our Muslim neighbours who are building a mosque in my riding.

11:10

One of the first actions of community building I did when I became an MLA for Sherwood Park was to form the Strathcona diversity committee. This committee is comprised of strong, passionate residents from a wide range of faiths, ethnic backgrounds, ages, and interests. This committee has shown incredible leadership. Members have taken the initiative to promote diversity through hosting events, writing articles for local newspapers, and spreading the message of unity and diversity through the daily actions in their lives. This committee hosted a blanket exercise led by youth, and one of these youths organized a Christmas potluck for the LGBTQ-plus youth in the community. These are, I believe, common values in Alberta, and it was an honour to invite two members of this committee to witness the reading of the throne speech.

As stated in the Speech from the Throne, "the Alberta government has signed new relationship agreements with Treaty 8 and the Métis Nation of Alberta" and is continuing to pursue other agreements. An ongoing issue for our First Nations communities is the lack of clean drinking water, which is deplorable. I know the challenge of access to clean water for drinking, washing, cooking,

and daily activities. It means the constant search for water for infant formula, washing clothes, and the huge expense to households. In light of our government's commitment to the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples I am happy that addressing the critical need for access to clean drinking water on-reserve is a priority.

Mr. Speaker, the leadership the government is showing in terms of relationships with First Nations has inspired municipalities, schools, and other institutions to model the government's leadership and acknowledge the treaty lands they are located in. I am delighted that my own municipality of Strathcona county is starting a process to make such a statement at the start of council meetings.

Mr. Speaker, it is difficult not to cheer for the work being done by the government to advocate for the building of pipelines to get our oil to tidewater. This was achieved because of the clear vision of the government to work with diverse sectors to demonstrate how a strong economy and a clean environment can and must go hand in hand. As my riding is part of the Industrial Heartland, I often meet with oil and gas executives and tradespeople. They appreciate the work done by the Premier and her ministers to promote the need for pipelines and market for oil. They also appreciate the guidelines around emissions and clear environmental standards. The Kinder Morgan pipeline will be starting in Sherwood Park. It will provide employment for many in my community and throughout Alberta. I will actually be able to watch the pipeline construction from my constituency office, and I look forward to it being constructed.

In late 2016 the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the Minister of Energy announced the first grants for the petrochemical diversification program. The first grants were awarded to companies in the Industrial Heartland. This was great news not only for constituents of mine but for construction and oil and gas workers throughout the region. The plant site will be built, adding value to our energy resources, and will be producing the chemicals needed to produce plastics that are used all over the world. More grants will be announced later, when the Energy Diversification Advisory Committee makes its recommendation on how to find ways to get more value and more jobs from our energy resources.

Mr. Speaker, over the past year the government has made great headway in showing its commitment to improving Alberta's environmental reputation as part of our highly effective and realistic economic diversification plan: renewable energy businesses, retraining for workers, solar installation companies, geothermal and wind energy businesses as well as the creation of several boards and foundations to support the work of this growing sector. In Sherwood Park we have formed the Strathcona county environmental committee so that we can identify local expertise and promote awareness of this wide-ranging and quickly growing renewable energy sector in our county.

The government has recently completed the Anthony Henday ring road to the relief and delight of not only my constituents but everyone who works and lives in the capital region suburbs. More infrastructure projects are being planned to make up the infrastructure deficit inherited from previous governments. It is especially important that school construction keeps pace with enrolment projections, and I look forward to seeing the completion of schools announced for the Elk Island public and Catholic boards.

The recent announcement of renovation funding for social housing and seniors' projects was important in ensuring that the existing stock of housing is maintained and remains suitable for habitation. I am delighted that in the projects funded the Robin Hood Association will be able to renovate some of their group homes and the Strathcona Shelter Society will be able to make the

much-needed repairs to A Safe Place, the shelter for women and children. These infrastructure programs are keeping our skilled workforce employed in Canada and providing oil and gas companies with alternative projects.

Now, Mr. Speaker, school fees. After hearing about the promise in the throne speech of a reduction in school fees and the tabling of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, a constituent contacted me to say: thank you for the reduction in school fees. This constituent is a single mom with three teenagers. This woman's income is high enough that she doesn't qualify for government subsidies or credits. Her family income provides stability but no frills. Last year the cost of instructional fees and transportation for her kids' designated school was close to \$2,000. She is extremely grateful for the savings she will experience next school year. This savings can now be added to her children's education savings, which will continue to benefit the family financially as time goes on. This is a direct increase in the quality of life for this family, and it will make these kids' futures easier to navigate.

I can identify with this constituent. When my children first started school, we lived on a limited income. I remember the challenges of budgeting for school fees and the embarrassment of asking for a fee waiver, letting the principal know that I was not supportive of an expensive field trip because my family's budget had no room for it. No child or family should be in the position of struggling to pay for fees in our public school system. On behalf of this constituent and, I know, many other parents I would like to thank the Premier and the Minister of Education for this step in ensuring that all children in our public school system are not embarrassed about their family's financial situation. This government is truly making life better and more affordable for Albertans.

In the throne speech Albertans were reminded of the natural beauty that is part of the wealth we have all inherited and that that natural inheritance must be protected and passed on for future generations to enjoy. As an MLA I am privileged to visit different parts of the province and meet individuals and elected officials who are taking the protection of our natural heritage seriously. Some of my favourite examples are the sasquatch project in Clearwater county; the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance and their wonderful, informative book; and RiverWatch, a group that focuses on providing students an opportunity to learn about water and its conservation.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I attended a conference of lay and ordained leaders in Christian churches who gathered to talk about creation care. This gathering included farmers, who saw the results of climate change yearly; theologians, who understood the message of the Bible as humans called to be good stewards of the earth; and members of the green church network, who work with churches to green their buildings and build environmental sustainability programs, including energy efficiency.

The Canadian Foodgrains Bank is an institution heavily supported by Albertan farmers and started by church groups. This organization has a climate change fund. Their brochure states: each of us has a role to play in addressing climate change. Fortunately, more Canadians today are recognizing the frightful consequence of climate change and their role in generating the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to it. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank brochure encourages individuals to reduce their emissions and to contribute to the climate change fund by calculating their greenhouse gas emission and donating it to the fund. So when I hear the opposition remarks about how the impact of humans on the Earth is negligible and that there is no acceptance of the work that the government is doing on renewable energy and energy efficiency, I would like to encourage my colleagues in the

opposition to pay more attention to what these community leaders have to say.

I am delighted that the new mosque in Sherwood Park has made environmental sustainability one of the core pillars for their new building. The government's energy efficiency agency programs will be helping individuals and congregations to explore how they can save money and increase energy efficiency.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is not only faith communities that will benefit from the energy efficiency agency programs. There are currently about 10 groups in Alberta exploring the development of community solar energy projects that will provide electricity for communities, members of co-operatives, and community associations. These groups can be found all over Alberta and are made up of a wide range of individuals who are committed to using renewable energy.

11:20

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech is dedicated to making life better for Alberta families, ensuring that Albertans' health care and educational needs are met and continuing to develop good jobs for Albertans.

Le discours du Trône est dédié à la vie plus facile et meilleure pour les familles Albertaines: accès aux soins de santé, aux écoles et institutions d'études supérieures, et à des emplois bien payés. That's the translation of the sentence I just said in English.

Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan I am proud of the government's work towards creating a strong, diversified economy that will see Alberta through the ups and downs of the resource industry and that will make life better for Albertans for generations to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) for the hon. member?

Mr. Rodney: Yes, sir. With respect, just a quick question for the hon. member. I'm just curious. Can you tell us who it was in opposition, any of the parties, who said what you said that they said about climate change, someone here that said on some occasion that they don't think climate change is related to human activity? Who said it and where? What are the details? Can you quote *Hansard* or any other document, please?

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful today to have the opportunity to rise and give my response to the Speech from the Throne. I'm grateful to be an Albertan, and I'm grateful to represent the good people of Cypress-Medicine Hat.

I want to start by complimenting the government on the 25 per cent reduction in school fees. I'm absolutely proud of the fact that in my two campaigns as a Wildrose candidate, in 2012 and 2015, we absolutely realized, Mr. Speaker, that these mandatory fees were a huge hardship on Alberta families, got in the way of the equality and the direction that was best for our education system. Of course, in both campaigns we campaigned on a hundred per cent eliminating these mandatory school fees. If memory serves me right, I believe the government actually campaigned on a 50 per cent reduction, so 25 per cent is good, sort of a failure, sort of not measuring up to where they set their initial goal. I'm wondering the possible reasons for that, and maybe I'll touch on that as we go. But hats off to the government. You're headed in the right direction to making life more affordable for Alberta families, to making it so that our children have more opportunities. So thank you for that.

I want to put the next series of my comments on what I've heard several times in the last several months in Alberta. I bump into

investors who say: we were going to invest in Alberta, but we decided to go to Saskatchewan instead. I heard of a company that is putting hundreds of millions, billions, into the petrochemical company in the Gulf states at the same time as they reviewed going into Alberta and decided not to because of the political climate. Whether it's the high per capita spending started by the last government and drastically continued by this one, whether it's the high taxation, whether it's the carbon tax, it's costing us all – it's costing us all – jobs, opportunities, investments, costing in taxes that we can put to worth or costing individual Albertans and individual companies the opportunity to be even more successful than we know the good Alberta companies can be.

I always like to try to put myself in the shoes of my constituents, so I want to start with this point in this way. I had an elderly gentleman come to my office and show me his utility bill, how it was up approximately \$266, how large parts of that seemed to relate to the carbon tax, tears in his eyes, how it meant that he had to miss a trip somewhere with his family.

Later that day I had a younger Albertan, a friend of mine, come in, who two years ago in the oil and gas industry made \$120,000. Mr. Speaker, he had just accepted a job for \$1,800 a month. I absolutely can't imagine what my friend and his family are going to have to go through to make that happen.

My first point is a small one, but for some reason it still bothers me. This happened on the day that I got the notice that we were going to have the throne speech on Thursday. I still don't understand that. Of the 87 of us, there are 50 or 60 of us that the taxpayer pays for us to come in and out of the city. It started at 3 o'clock on a Thursday; we were done at 4:30 on a Thursday. At what point do we start caring about taking money from Albertans? At what point do we start caring about value for taxes? I don't know. Cabinet, I'd ask you to consider that each and every time. An Albertan somewhere has to get out of bed, an Albertan somewhere has to take a risky investment decision so that we can be here. Please don't waste their money.

You know, I've heard the other side talk about how this throne speech is a way to enhance quality of life and government programs. So much of it, to me, is an attack on families, communities, and charities. I want to start with what I've been told is the biggest per capita deficit in Canadian history since World War II. The biggest per capita deficit. It's almost \$11 billion just to keep the lights on, for operating. If we add the \$7 billion the government says that they want to spend on infrastructure, that's an \$18 billion deficit. With 4.1 million Albertans, Mr. Speaker, it will take years to dig out of this hole.

Mr. Nixon: Decades.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah, exactly. Decades.

You know, I understand that this year alone it's \$714 million of interest. So while our government, our cabinet doesn't look for efficiencies, let me tell you what that \$714 million could have bought instead, Mr. Speaker. That's the construction of about 24 schools. That is some side of 5,950 nurses or teachers, annually, never mind the social programs, never mind letting Albertans keep their own money so that they can go to support restaurants, so that they can go and buy clothes, so that they can travel to Cypress Hills or Banff or Jasper, so that they can truly make their own decisions to make our economy strong. And then I think: well, where does this interest go? Who collects this interest? Not too much of it is ordinary, everyday Albertans, those two gentlemen that I talked about that were in my office. No. The people that collect interest are the rich. Non-Canadians own a lot of our provincial government debt, I'm sure. Big corporations, no doubt, own a lot of our debt.

So \$714 million taken from the pockets of hard-working Albertans . . .

Mr. Hanson: Just this year.

Mr. Barnes: . . . just this year. You're absolutely right. Just this year, and escalating, costing our children, our seniors, our communities, our charity services, and paying the rich of the world. It's not a philosophy I subscribe to. It's not something I believe in. It's not something I would do.

You know, then I want to talk a little bit about the carbon tax. A lot of Albertans were hopeful that this new government would be different than the last government, who after 44 years maybe had a certain way of doing things, who maybe was a bit hard to consult. But the Premier came to Medicine Hat for the first time about a month ago, and she was asked a question about why it took so long to come to Medicine Hat and if that was a problem. If I heard the answer right, it was: no; it was okay because her ministers had been there, she'd heard some consulting, and Cypress-Medicine Hatters and Medicine Hatters were happy with what she was doing. Sorry; but I thought: are you kidding me?

11:30

First of all, Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal, thank you for coming to Cypress-Medicine Hat on your trip. But I clearly heard, as you did when you met with all of our small-business people, when you met with our job creators, that they were absolutely opposed to how fast the minimum wage had gone up. They want to pay their employees well. I think they all pay them more than minimum wage. But the overall theme that I kept hearing was: "It took 15 years for it to go from \$5 to \$10, and now in three years you're going to go from \$10 to \$15. How in the world are we going to adjust to that? How are we going to adjust to that without some labour changes, without some price increases that we may or may not be able to pass on." That's what I heard.

Same on the carbon tax. At least 70 to 80 per cent of Cypress-Medicine Hatters that I talked to are absolutely opposed to this and opposed to it for a number of reasons. I was at an ag conference the other day where the speaker said that only four-tenths of 1 per cent of the world has a carbon tax – four-tenths of 1 per cent of the world – and here we are in one of the coldest parts of the world, one of the most remote parts of the world, where transportation and travel are not an option. We're not given recognition for our forests, our greenhouses that regrow and replant and refurbish, so much of those carbon capture trees. We're not giving great recognition to our ranchers. I think it's \$13 billion I've heard. The value of carbon sequestration in our grasslands and our ranches is worth \$13 billion a year, so compare that to the \$5 billion you're taking out of the economy annually. Guys, guys, we're already there.

That's before we talk about how this carbon tax, because everything is transported so much in Alberta, is going to be compounded every step of the way. It's going to be so inflationary. If a good has to move three or four times before it's finally completed, carbon tax will be added every step of the way. The inflation will be phenomenal, making it very, very hard for our families, our seniors to afford this.

Then carbon leakage. I'm told about the plants that aren't looking at Alberta, the plants that won't expand, the plants that are looking to jurisdictions without a carbon tax because it will save them tens of millions of dollars, and I think: "Oh, my goodness. Not only was this the worst timing possible for something like this, this will be a wealth destroyer. This will be a job destroyer." As the Premier to the east of us has pointed out so capably, western industries are

structured more and they're more sector-specific based on carbon. How is a federal tax going to pass on any level of equity and fairness?

I want to take a second in the time I have to talk about Cypress-Medicine Hat. We have a lot of good things going. Our people are industrious, our people are strong and entrepreneurial, and our people are hoping to take advantage of the fact that we have the most days of sunlight in all of Canada. We have some of the best winds in all of Canada. They are looking for the opportunity to be included. Like so many other parts of the province we're often thought of as the forgotten corner. Possibly when it took the Premier two years to come and see us, that was reinforced, but I think that's a small thing, actually.

For years – for years – the southeastern part of Alberta was the leader in providing wealth to the Alberta treasury through the royalties on natural gas, through the Suffield military base, where Alberta Energy started and EnCana and Cenovus grew out of it. That's not the case anymore, colleagues. The price of gas is low. Unemployment is high. My goodness, it's hard to go a day without talking to somebody who hasn't worked for two years. The good news the last little while is that it sounds like 20 or 30 per cent of them are back to work. They used to work at \$40 or \$45 an hour, and now they're telling me two things. They're now working for between \$20 and \$25 an hour, and they're working in Kindersley or Estevan, Saskatchewan.

So don't forget us. I mean, we're independent, we're proud. We have a strong petrochemical industry, Methanex, Canadian Fertilizers. We have a Goodyear tire plant. A lot of us were disappointed when the petrochemical money wasn't brought our way. If we're going to transfer taxation and people's hard-earned money around, please don't forget a part of the province that might need it the most. I do know that we've talked lots about the trade corridor and opening the 24-hour border at Wild Horse for our connection to Montana. Again, that's an important thing. I do know that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is on it, so thank you for that. But please, please don't forget us.

I want to talk a little bit about pipelines before I close. I'm disappointed to see that once again political propaganda is getting in the way of facts for the NDP.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any – the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: I'd like to hear a little more from the hon. member in regard to pipelines. I was quite interested in where he was going there.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you to my colleague. There's a section in this throne speech entitled Building New Pipelines in which the speech claims: "Making life better starts with coming to terms with an economic reality that past governments failed to address. Alberta is too dependent on selling its energy products to one customer." And then it goes on.

This line is problematic, Mr. Speaker, for a few reasons. It's not true that previous governments failed to address market access. Of course, with a change in government in the States, we're on the verge of gaining Keystone XL, an expansion that will see an increase of our commodity to that one customer, but this will benefit Alberta's economy. It will benefit the Americans as well. In a show of working together and in a show of getting our asset to market, I'm grateful for that.

Previous Conservative federal governments had built pipelines, and I wonder why it's so hard for this government to acknowledge it. You guys know that they exist. A lot of you were there protesting

when they were being built. You know, the Harper government built four major pipelines. It was responsible for brand new pipelines like Keystone phase 1 from Hardisty, Alberta, to Roxana, Illinois. This was built in June 2010. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Clipper, Enbridge line 67, was built in 2010. It was also responsible for major pipeline expansions like the Kinder Morgan anchor loop, which was expanding an already existing Trans Mountain pipeline, completed in 2008. The Enbridge line 9 reversal was completed in November 2012.

You know, guys, I'm so cheering for you and for Alberta and for all of our good industries to get the two pipelines. There are many, many conditions that need to be met, and I hope we get there. Albertans need this. We especially need access to the west coast. The truth of the matter is that the federal Conservative government got four lines done while we were stalled on Keystone. I think the Americans built more pipelines in America than the entire length of the Keystone would have been. So I guess the truth and the reality need to be discussed.

11:40

I want to talk a little bit about the idea of social licence. You know, if social licence was real, we have our carbon tax, so where's the Northern Gateway approval? Where's the Energy East approval?

Mr. Bilous: Working on it.

Mr. Barnes: I hope you get it.

You know, Energy East, I understand, is like 15,000 construction jobs, 3,500 annual jobs, and it's entirely, entirely in Canada. We have the mayor of Montreal possibly blocking it. We're looking at some of the stuff with Trans Mountain, where there are groups that are still opposed to it, possibly the B.C. NDP party – not possibly; I think they have come out against it. That will make that an interesting election. We've had some success, principally with Keystone. We have two pipelines tentatively approved. We have four that federal Conservative governments got through, and for the jobs and the commodities that that will provide for us we are grateful.

I want to talk a little bit more about Keystone XL, Mr. Speaker. I was surprised it did receive no mention in the throne speech. It's a huge opportunity. It's a huge opportunity for our producers, experts, safety conscious, socially conscious people that are experts, the best in the world at bringing the product out of the ground to the pipeline.

The Speaker: Thank you. I'm sorry; time has lapsed on 29(2)(a).

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure and an honour to rise and present remarks in response to the Speech from the Throne by the Lieutenant Governor. I was really impressed with her delivery of this. I think that she was enthused, as I was, with the contents of that speech. I remarked on the feeling and the emphasis that she put into that speech, and I'm pleased to respond to it.

I also want to mention your services, sir. In the introduction to the speech the Lieutenant Governor said, "We are reminded again of the bedrock importance of this institution to the democratic life of our province." It's only through the work of your office in this Legislature as well as in the precincts of the Legislature that the value of our democratic life is seen. I particularly want to commend you on the current exhibit that was opened on the evening of the Speech from the Throne, Alberta and the Great War. If none of my colleagues here have gone through the exhibit, I really would

commend that exhibit to them. As I mentioned yesterday, there's a tremendous amount of relevance of that exhibit to our current situation.

The Lieutenant Governor also in that first paragraph said, "We gather today on Treaty 6 land." I don't think that's been mentioned today, but I think that's something that should be repeated again and again and recognized that it's an honour and a privilege. I respect that we are here because of the work of the original inhabitants of these lands. One of the things that I've really enjoyed that was facilitated by your office, sir, was the recognition of the Métis Association of Alberta and the event that was held in the rotunda. Many of the people in this room attended it, as did representatives of civil society and of treaties 6, 7, and 8 First Nations. It was a very important recognition of the very important role that the Métis of Alberta have made to this province.

A similar event was held, again under your auspices, for Black History Month just within the last few weeks, again organized by one of my colleagues, the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Over 450 people attended that. I can tell you that my constituents who attended that event were very gratified at finally getting some recognition.

I'm one of the older members of this Legislature, and I've lived in this province for almost 40 years. I have to say that over those 40 years I've witnessed a lot of changes in this institution. The one that I'm, of course, most proud of is the change that occurred on May 5, 2015. The reason that I ran in that election was not to defeat the ex-mayor of this city although I'm proud of that, and that's probably going to be on my political tombstone. What I'm proudest of is that I played a small, small role in the election of the current Premier. Our Premier and her cabinet have completely changed the tenor of the government of this province, and I am extremely proud to have played a small part in that and to continue to play a small part in that.

I want to just record some of the things that have happened over that period of time since May 5, 2015. I'm particularly proud – and I mentioned this in a member's statement previously – that we opened the Nellie Carlson school in Edmonton-Whitemud. Nellie Carlson is a phenomenal leader, educator, great-great-grandmother, and we're very proud in Edmonton-Whitemud to have her name on a school that had been promised by the previous government for over 12 years. In May 2015 the Premier promised that we would get that school built. In September 2016 that school was opened to over 900 residents of my riding as well as my colleague in Edmonton-South West.

That's not the only school that was opened, of course. Everybody in this Legislature knows of a school that's been opened in their riding because we are an education government. We are going to promote the best of public education and advanced education, make sure that training and apprenticeships are developed. That's going to be a focus of this government.

I'm going to come back to things that are important to my riding. The Alberta child benefit and the child care pilot study that's going on, \$25-a-day child care: very, very important to all the families in my riding, particularly those that have young children that need child care.

I'm also pleased – and I'm going to come back to this – with the climate leadership action plan, that was announced in November 2015 and which is already showing a lot of benefit. It does give us social licence. We did get two pipelines approved, and there's more to come.

11:50

Not to forget my Calgary colleagues, another advance that I'm very proud of is the funding and the planning and the building of

the Calgary cancer centre. Our party ran on this in the May 2015 election, and it's another example where our government has come through. I can tell you that this is a very positive measure in cancer care in Alberta. I happen to work here in Edmonton at the Cross Cancer Institute, and I can tell you that all of the oncologists, nurses, and other staff are really pleased that, finally, Calgary is going to have its equivalent to the Cross Cancer Institute.

I also want to mention something else that happened that you may not think would apply to a relatively well-off area of Edmonton like Edmonton-Whitemud; for instance, banning door-to-door sales of various products. That's a scourge on seniors, and I've got a lot of seniors in my riding. These folks need to be protected from predatory door-to-door salesmen. I think that the measures that have been introduced and discussed in the Speech from the Throne are really helping in this regard.

Talking about predatory, we also got rid of predatory payday loan operations. Again, this affects all Albertans, whether or not you're in a riding like Edmonton-Whitemud or any other riding. We need to make sure that consumers are protected from unscrupulous business practices, and I'm really proud to be associated with that.

Another thing that I want to mention – it was alluded to earlier today – is the way that Albertans of all stripes have come together to deal with disasters like the fires in Wood Buffalo. I want to bring it to the context of Edmonton-Whitemud. Last June I was very pleased to be able to speak at the graduation at Lillian Osborne high school, which is in the beautiful riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. The principal is actually the spouse of an ex-Premier of this province, and despite our political differences she was happy to have me speak at the event. At the event I learned that Lillian Osborne high school actually had about a dozen students graduating from there who had been students in Fort McMurray, and I know that there were many other schools in Edmonton and elsewhere that did this. Now, they did this without asking for additional monies or asking for special recognition. This was the Albertan way to respond, and our schools and our teachers and the school councils responded very well.

The Minister of Culture and Tourism, actually, gave me the opportunity to hand out a cheque to a project in Rainbow Valley, which is in my riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. This was in support of development of a campground in Edmonton. It turns out that it is the only campground within the city of Edmonton, and I would recommend it to any of you who have friends or relatives that are looking for a place to camp here. It's a beautiful site. That campground was opened, actually, to folks with RVs and other camping equipment from Fort McMurray. Again, without any fanfare they just did it. I can tell you that I met with several of these families that day, and they were very, very appreciative.

I want to actually turn to some of the details that are in the Speech from the Throne. One of them that I want to mention, because it was brought up by a member opposite, is about the B.C. election that's coming up. You know, when I look at what's going on in politics in B.C., I see basically distortion. I mean, every day in the *Globe and Mail* or the *Edmonton Journal* I'm reading reports about how big money is corrupting the political process in British Columbia. It's big money but not to the B.C. NDP; it's big money to the governing party of B.C. This is something that I'm very proud that our government is starting to work at. We're strengthening our democracy. We've taken big money out of politics in this province, and we've still got more democratic reform to go. I'm hopeful that we are going to continue with that.

There's also going to be protection for whistle-blowers, and we're going to be strengthening our conflict-of-interest laws. This is democracy, folks. This is what we have been elected to do, to

come here and make sure that these democratic institutions are protected.

In the few minutes I have left, I'd actually like to turn to making life more affordable for Albertans, and I'm particularly going to focus on what we've done in terms of capping electricity rates and the energy efficiency manoeuvres. You know, electricity is an essential for all Albertans, and we're going to cap the rates below the average price that families have paid over the last decade. If electricity prices go up past the cap, electricity bills won't, and we're going to protect. The question is: who pays? The capping of electricity rates means that our consumers are not going to be the ones that pay. We're going to introduce legislation this session to make the cap law.

I was really pleased to be part of the sponsorship of Bill 34, in which we basically created or allowed the creation of what are called capacity markets. Alberta was an anomaly in North America. Almost no other – I think only one other jurisdiction . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), the Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud and I share an interest in common. We both attended the recent solar energy trade fair and so on. I know we both have a passion for climate change and the science of it, and we both have degrees, actually, from the same university, so we're both – I would call us really steeped in science. I was wondering if you could comment on a recent article in the *Edmonton Journal* where an MLA from the opposition was asked by a journalist about climate change.

"According to scientists who study this, the majority of the increase is man-made." The MLA from the opposition said, "You can't say that anymore." The journalist said, "Why can't you say that anymore?" The MLA said, "The science isn't settled." I was wondering if you had a comment on that issue.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you very much for that very, very important question. I think that this is something that needs to be aired greatly, aired even more. Do you believe that man contributes to climate change, or do you not? Is it reasonable that we make every human effort to limit the amount of greenhouse gases that are being produced? I can tell you that just last Friday I made arrangements to have LED lights installed in the constituency office. Not only is that going to save taxpayer money because we're going to be consuming less power; I'm actually going to be responsible for, quote, unquote, saving the planet. We're going to be reducing that.

Now, I also walk the walk in my own personal life on this. Four years ago I had solar panels installed on the roof of my personal residence, and I'm very, very happy with that. What I'm really happiest about is that our government is actually going to be helping Albertans on this with the new grants for solar panel installation, not only on residences but on farms . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I would move adjournment under Standing Order 4(2.1) until 1:30 p.m. The House stands adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 7, 2017

Day 3

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Kleisteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire two schools from Beaumont. Thirty-five students are here today from l'école Beau Meadow school and l'école Bellevue school. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mme Brigitte Marshall and Mme Danielle McCallion, ainsi que de leurs chaperons Mrs. Pam Nelner, Mrs. Rachel Gregor-Stang, Ms Tracy Callahan, and Mrs. Hannah Klar. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and a great honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the students, teachers, and helpers visiting the Legislature today from Velma E. Baker school in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. Could the teachers, Mr. Philip Singh and Mr. Bruce Grant; helpers Mrs. Christine Braun, Mr. Alex Fisher, Mrs. Kelly Nicolson, Mrs. Andrea Carreiro, Mrs. Muna Ali; and the students please rise and accept the warm wishes of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Master Warrant Officer Garry Wood, CD; Master Corporal Hugh Hayes, CD; and Corporal Rebecca Campbell. Master Warrant Officer Wood has served in the military for 33 years, served two tours in Bosnia, and is currently the equipment technical quarter-master sergeant at Lord Strathcona's Horse. Master Corporal Hayes has served in the military for 14 years and is currently serving with Lord Strathcona's Horse out of CFB Edmonton. Corporal Rebecca Campbell has served in the military for seven years and also serves with Lord Strathcona's Horse as a supply technician. I would like to thank my guests for their service to Canada, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Les Landry and his service dog, Annie. Les Landry is a well-known advocate for expanding the access to service dogs for people in Alberta that need them, and we're thankful for his work. I'm sure many of you know him. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Landry and Annie to the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you a friend but, more importantly, the mayor of the village of Amisk in my riding of Battle River-Wainwright, Mayor Bill Rock. He's here in Edmonton taking in the AUMA convention. Of course, following a rash of crimes that have happened in his community, he would like to find out what the government is going to do to keep his community and communities like the village of Amisk safe. I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a large contingent of forestry stakeholders. Today we have 20 hard-working mayors, reeves, and councillors from different towns, counties, and municipal districts that have forestry as a major industry, supporting the livelihoods of thousands of Albertans and the respective local economies. With them are 17 equally hard-working board members and officials of the Alberta Forest Products Association, an industry that has been providing jobs to thousands of our citizens. Alberta's forest sector represents a great story for our province because it's one of the most sustainable industries on the planet and a major contributor to our economy. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Samantha Pearson. She's the director of the sexual assault centre at the University of Alberta in the magnificent riding of Edmonton-Riverview. The centre strives for a campus free of sexual violence, providing free, anonymous, and confidential support for members of the university community who are survivors of sexual assault and abuse. Samantha is a graduate of the University of Alberta, as I am, and has been volunteering with the centre since she was a student, after seeing one of the centre's awareness presentations. She's dedicated and optimistic and proud to say that she is helping make the University of Alberta a safer place. Samantha, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all of the Assembly two friends of mine: first, His Worship Pat Alexander, the reeve of beautiful Clearwater county, which I am proud to represent inside this place; and, with him, His Worship Terry Leslie, the mayor of my hometown of Sundre, who is also with me here today celebrating the one-year anniversary of the attempted shutting down of the Sundre hospital, which, I am glad to say, is still open to this day because of the hard work of both this side of the House and that side of the House. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several dedicated and passionate Albertans who work with survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. I'll ask them

to rise as I say their names and to remain standing till the end: Mary Jane James, the executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and the team at SACE; Deb Tomlinson, CEO of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services; Jackie Foord, CEO of the YWCA Edmonton. I also have the great pleasure of introducing Elizabeth Halpin, a survivor who has courageously shared her story and is an inspiration to us all. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Wildrose on Campus Calgary Film Screening

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Feminism is cancer." At least, that's what the Wildrose club at the University of Calgary would have you believe. Yesterday that's what they wrote on their invitation to a film screening about the men's rights movement called *The Red Pill*, funded and supported by Breitbart and Milo. It's a fundraiser they were cohosting with the campus federal Conservatives for a men's rights group. Now, these so-called men's rights advocates belittle the advancement of women and promote hatred and violence. One of their leaders in the U.S. advocates legalizing rape so that, in their minds, women would learn to protect their virtue.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, the language used by these people online degrades women. They use slurs and insults, calling women special snowflakes, social justice warriors, and other unparliamentary language. Where have we heard that before? It is a sickening message any time, but on the eve of International Women's Day it is a sobering reminder of how far we need to go.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition is outraged when anyone suggests that they're far-right social conservatives, but holding fundraisers like this shows just how out of touch they are with Albertans, especially Alberta women. While we work to get more women on boards and in leadership roles, they nurture hateful language. While we take action on domestic violence, they say that feminism is a horrible disease. That is the Wildrose. They've proven time and time again that they can't keep their true colours from showing, and that's whose ranks the PCs want to join?

On the upside, seeing as how their prospective dance partners for a united right just drove out the only woman in their caucus, I would say that they're getting the unity part right.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Rural Crime

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the people of my riding need help fighting crime in their communities. Many of our communities have been hard hit by crime that has started with this economic downturn, and we need this government to do something and do something more.

Let me paint you a picture of how bleak this situation has become in Amisk. The local ATB has recently been robbed twice. Additionally, last year there was an armed robbery at this bank. A gun was pointed at an expectant mother in an attempted vehicle theft. The post office was broken into, robbed, and vandalized, and the crimes aren't slowing down. There have been many more criminal complaints. In just the past few weeks the local officials

are coming together to say that enough is enough. This issue of rural crime is very real and very serious, especially in this economic downturn as it persists.

On February 21 I invited the Justice minister to meet with local officials and make some important choices on rural crime. The minister ignored my request, and the problem hasn't gone away. The NDP has made a priority of everything from taxes to free light bulbs, but this government needs to understand that it has no greater duty than protecting the people of this province.

I'm proud to welcome the Amisk mayor, Bill Rock, to the Legislature today. Together he and I are calling on this government to take action to protect the people of rural Alberta, who feel vulnerable and violated. Yesterday we had an emergency debate in this Legislature about the opioid crisis that is happening right here in our own backyards. I want to commend my colleagues in this House that have been calling for action on this opioid epidemic for years now and remind them that these issues only get worse when we ignore them.

Let's not ignore this. Let's face this heartbreaking issue with swift, strong action that leaves no room for doubt that this Legislature won't ignore rural crime.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Calgary Gravel Pit Operation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to great planning and budgeting by the previous government, the Edmonton Anthony Henday has become a reality, and three-quarters of the Calgary ring road is now complete. It was our very own PC leader who was the minister responsible for engineering the historic agreement on the southwest Calgary ring road with our friends from Tsuut'ina. But nowhere on his plans or even on the plans of the current Ministry of Transportation has there ever been any evidence of a huge gravel pit and asphalt plant to be placed right behind the fine residents in Bridlewood.

Many weeks ago I wrote to the minister in charge now, and I sent him 13 pictures illustrating the monstrosity. I personally asked him about it, and I was told: we are looking into it. Now, residents in the area sure wish that he had done exactly that a long time ago. If he had, he'd know that there was absolutely no public consultation about this and that all the residents ever received were household notices after the operation had already begun.

It's to run nonstop, Mr. Speaker, for several years, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every single day. Now, the noise and smell from a project of this magnitude will impact the quality of life of these residents in extremely negative ways. This is fraught with damage to air quality, including potential carcinogens, and we have no indication whatsoever that environmental or health studies were ever even conducted. A number of residents have been told by the company that this was supposedly a fortuitous decision, if you can believe it, and Alberta Transportation indicated that it is unfortunate that the company did not inform them of the plans until after public consultations were already done. The department expressed disappointment over this, but that is not enough.

With the full support of the community association and on behalf of their residents I formally request that the minister intercede and have the company move this operation to a site which is much more appropriate for all involved this month. By the way, there is another site I'll have questions about tomorrow.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Black History Month

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over one month ago I joined over 400 Albertans here for Alberta's first official recognition and celebration of Black History Month. It was a powerful moment that paid tribute to our original settlers of African descent and those who continue to come here from around the world, men and women seeking to escape racism, prejudice, and hatred due to their ethnicity or choice of faith and to build better lives in our province. I was honoured to be joined by some of my colleagues from across the aisle.

A few days before that, members from all sides of this House stood with members of Alberta's Muslim communities to condemn the slaughter of six Canadians at prayer in their mosque in Quebec. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to nearly 75,000 African Canadians, and 113,000 Albertans practise the Muslim faith. I'm proud to be working with my colleagues to make their lives better through truly inclusive government and support for families.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry to say that some here are choosing to make the lives of these Albertan families worse. For their own political gain they stand with a so-called media organization who celebrated Black History Month with a video of a correspondent in blackface arguing that it was historically a sign of respect for African culture, an organization that is a constant source of fear, hatred, and misinformation about the Muslim community. Members of this House have granted them interviews, appeared at their rallies, and paid them to distribute fundraising e-mails. That is not the face of a modern, inclusive Alberta. That is the same face of ignorance and prejudice that black Albertans have fought for over a century and that they and others are forced to continue fighting today.

So I commit that if any member of this House stands with those who spread this kind of ignorance and prejudice, I will call them out because families in our province deserve a government that supports all Albertans, a government that moves us forward instead of trying to drag us back. That is what we've promised, and that is what we will deliver.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Order, please. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Students' Association of Mount Royal University

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to offer my congratulations to a group of young Albertans for their leadership and commitment to fostering engaged citizenship on the Mount Royal University campus, the Students' Association of Mount Royal University, also known as SAMRU.

As some of you know, when I was a science student at Simon Fraser University, I served as president and vice-president of the Interactive Arts and Technology Student Union. It quickly became clear to me that it was important to focus on the needs of students, and that's why I'm proud to be part of a government that is working to make life better and more affordable for our postsecondary students.

Over the past year I've been able to attend various SAMRU organized events designed to create a healthier, more inclusive campus. I continue to be impressed by the calibre and diversity of their events such as their Black History Month workshop that explored indigenous and black relations in Canada and encouraged students to spit yo' game and talk yo' stuff. I'll let you figure out what that original quote was. And last October I participated in SAMRU's Student Connect event that brought politicians to

campus to meet and speak with students about being community leaders.

Student unions are also laboratories of leadership. They are places where lessons about policy are learned and confidence is built. Like our Legislature, they're places where Albertans meet, debate their values and ideas, and perform citizenship by voting, which is why I must applaud the over 1,700 Mount Royal students who marked their ballots in last week's SAMRU election. Although a slightly lower turnout than last year, it's a significant improvement over the 1,000 who voted in 2015 and speaks to the student association's work to get out the vote.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the members of this House join me in recognizing the important work performed by student unions and congratulate this year's winners: Madelaine McCracken, VP student life; Cordelia Snowdon, VP academic; and Shifrah Gadamssetti, president.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Jean: There's no question about it. Crime is on the rise in communities all across Alberta. The most recent StatsCan data shows an 18 per cent rise in crime in Alberta just in 2015, including a 12 per cent spike in violent crime. Very troubling. The 2016 data from the Calgary police shows that property crime and personal crime continue to rise. Albertans feel vulnerable while the accused walk scot-free. Rather than accuse us of fearmongering, will the Premier listen to the police, acknowledge a growing crisis of crime across Alberta, and start putting in the resources that we've asked for to keep Albertans safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government believes that all Albertans deserve to live in safe and resilient communities. The police work very hard to keep those communities safe. While we have seen a recent upswing in crime, it's important to keep in context that this is still lower than the crime rates were 10 years ago. You know, we are very concerned to see any increase. We work very closely with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police and the RCMP to ensure that we're able to provide them with adequate resources, and we will keep working in that collaborative way.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Albertans don't trust the NDP. They're too busy worrying about spending millions of dollars on light bulbs instead of addressing this serious issue. The president of the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association has said that in 2017, 200 significant charges have been stayed due to a lack of resources, charges including assaults, violent crimes, and DUIs. That's on your watch. Will the Premier release to Albertans the total number of trials stayed under this government and detail what charges accused criminals are simply walking away from?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to ensuring that Albertans have a safe and resilient justice system and that it's able to work as well as possible. We will

continue to work with the association. It's true that we need to find efficiencies within the system, and we have been doing this in order to address these ongoing problems. We have also been looking very carefully at the resources necessary to pursue these aims, and we will be coming forward – I hope the opposition will support that.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that under the NDP watch, under this government's watch, accused murderers have been let go free of charge before even going to trial. Assault charges against police officers have been stayed, and so have several DUI cases. This means that our streets are less safe. Gun thefts are up. Property crime is up. Personal crime is up. Violent crime is up. This government needs to lift the veil of secrecy on a system that is failing Albertans. Why won't the Premier give Albertans the full picture of the state of our justice system by publicly reporting the total number of charges stayed since taking office and what exactly those stayed charges were?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is committed to being transparent on this issue. I have been out in the media several times on this. We regularly release numbers detailing the number of Jordan applications, whether they've been successful, whether they've been abandoned, and what the outcome was. We release those numbers all the time. We are absolutely committed to addressing this issue. We have worked very hard to find insufficiencies and to put in a triage system, but what is necessary is more resources, and I hope that the opposition will support that.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: It's very clear that the NDP need to figure out how to brighten up their dismal approval ratings, but I can assure you that no amount of free light bulbs is going to accomplish that, not with a carbon tax increasing the price of everything, making everyone in Alberta poorer, as they've done. The new plan is to take billions of dollars out of Albertans' pockets and give back a fraction of it in free light bulbs, installed, of course, by an Ontario company. Not the brightest idea, I would suggest. Can the Premier please tell us how she will ensure this doesn't turn into a boondoggle of a program, or is she simply leaving us all in the dark?

Ms Hoffman: What is it, Mr. Speaker? Groundhog Day in here? I think the member's staff gave him last year's envelope.

Now, the member is worried about his job – we understand that – but he needs to get his head in the game. Yesterday the Wildrose called feminism a cancer, and you guys want to join them. So let me ask the Leader of the Opposition a simple question: why is your party spending its time calling the fight for women's equality a cancer on our society?

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition. First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. Absolutely unacceptable. But Albertans want to upgrade products at home. They've been doing it for years. And now more than ever they are making the switch in an attempt to survive the carbon tax. It's going to be difficult. What's driving Albertans crazy is the fact that the

NDP government seems to think they need to go into our homes to change our light bulbs using our money. It may come as a shock to this government, but Albertans actually want to save money on their energy bills, and they're going to have to because they're going up. Why didn't the Premier trust Albertans and give them a program to upgrade their homes on their own?

Ms Hoffman: I wish I could say good try, Mr. Speaker, but it's weak, weak, weak. A strong opposition is good for democracy. It happens again and again with you guys. The Wildrose is spending more time having to apologize than doing their jobs. So why won't the member stand in this House and admit that feminism isn't the problem? The problem is within his own party.

Mr. Jean: The NDP must listen to talk radio. If they did, they'd hear caller after caller talking about how ridiculous the Ecofitt program is. Albertans have been buying new bulbs, new thermostats, and a lot more for years. They're savvy. Those Albertans who took the time to upgrade before the NDP ecomonster was created: well, they aren't going to see a dime. They're justifiably upset. Will the Premier commit to putting an end to this Ecofitt fiasco and taking the time to create an energy efficiency program that doesn't penalize Albertans for using their own initiative to save energy?

Ms Hoffman: In the last few months the Wildrose compared . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few months the Wildrose compared the climate leadership plan to the Ukrainian famine. Then they attacked the Premier of Ontario when she visited this very House. The leader of the party joked about beating up women. Now they're comparing our struggle for equality to cancer.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: Another day, another half-hearted apology. Will the Leader of the Opposition actually show some leadership, put an end to these Wildrose bozo eruptions?

The Speaker: Third main question.

Municipal Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Jean: The building Canada fund is a crucial federal program for Alberta's municipality, and I hope this government will take this seriously because it helps to build the infrastructure that our communities rely on right across Alberta to survive. As recently as August 2016 the Minister of Infrastructure provided assurances to the AUMA that \$300 million of that fund would be allocated for municipal projects. However, in a letter to AUMA members just last month the Infrastructure minister stated that he will not honour his promise or the commitment of \$300 million. To the Premier: why is this happening?

Ms Hoffman: Our government is making life better for everyday Albertans by building new schools, hospitals, and roads that communities need to thrive and to grow. That's why we've put shovels in the ground on nearly 300 transportation projects, more than a hundred school projects, plus postsecondary and health facilities. Our government is the most generous in the country when it comes to funding municipalities. Even in the midst of the current downturn our government is investing. You know you guys would cut. Stop playing martyrs.

Mr. Jean: Nice read, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta's municipalities have been counting on the \$300 million for critical infrastructure projects. The NDP government's decision to instead use those funds for provincial projects and the province's deficit is disappointing, to say the least, especially to those municipalities. The NDP doesn't trust Albertans to install light bulbs, and now they don't trust municipalities to build local projects. We've seen what centralized power in the hands of the NDP looks like, and Albertans don't like it. Why doesn't the NDP restore local decision-making at the local level for municipalities so this money actually gets out the door?

2:00

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I met with the AUMA today, with the mayors' caucus from around Alberta, and we talked about the issue of infrastructure funding. Alberta spends, for example, about a third more than the next highest province on a per capita basis on its grants to municipalities. Furthermore, \$260 million of federal infrastructure money has already gone to municipal governments, and more to come. We've applied, furthermore, for funding for the Springbank reservoir to protect Calgary from flooding.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: The NDP just can't seem to help itself when it comes to meddling in systems that previously worked well. The building Canada fund, before the NDP government, was an effective way of flowing through infrastructure that were necessary projects for local communities and that were deemed as a priority for a local municipality. The fact is that local government knows best what projects are urgently needed, or at least that was the fact before the NDP world view came into play, where they know best. Can the Premier tell me why her government doesn't trust local municipalities to know what their projects, their needs for their local municipalities are?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, one of the projects that we've applied for under the federal infrastructure program that the member is talking about is the Springbank flood mitigation project to protect the city of Calgary from flooding. We know that members opposite don't support that. They would rather give the money to someone else and let Calgary flood, but we're here to protect Alberta families. [interjections] We're here to make sure that they get the infrastructure they need. That's what this government stands for.

The Speaker: I think the young students are leaving because they thought it was too noisy in here.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks a big game when it comes to making life better for Albertans, but the opposite is true. At the AUMA breakfast this morning I heard from municipal leaders who are upset that \$300 million in the federal building Canada fund that was to go to municipalities never got there. Withholding the \$300 million has meant that \$900 million in projects didn't get built because it's usually a three-way split between governments. To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that your Infrastructure budget was underspent by more than a billion dollars, why did you deny Alberta municipalities this much-needed funding when you didn't even use it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. As I mentioned in my earlier answer, over \$260 million of that federal infrastructure money has already flowed to municipalities. We've asked for more, including for the Springbank diversion project that I referred to. This government funds municipalities' infrastructure needs to a much higher level than any other province in this country. Quite frankly, for the members to suggest otherwise is simply to mislead the public.

Mr. McIver: It's a shame to hear the minister tell municipalities that they're wrong because they're the ones that told me they're not happy. I'm disappointed that despite keeping \$300 million in federal funding, the provincial deficit is still going to hit \$10.8 billion this year, further proof that this government can't help itself when it comes to reckless and irresponsible spending. Given that this money did not go to municipalities like it was supposed to, can the minister tell us: what did you spend it on, please?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative opposition would like us to reduce the deficit, but when we try to reduce the deficit, they object. Not only did we reduce the deficit by \$600 million, but we provided \$260 million for municipal projects. This government is making life better for Alberta families. We're spending money on infrastructure to meet the needs for transit, for roads, for housing, for justice facilities and hospitals and other health care facilities that that government ignored while it was in office. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. McIver: The minister is reducing the truth.

Alberta municipalities depend on stable, predictable funding, which is why the previous government created the MSI program, which provided 10 years of stability. This morning the Municipal Affairs minister couldn't tell AUMA mayors what next year's funding is going to be like, one year out. This shows a complete lack of competence on the part of the new minister. Given that Alberta municipalities are struggling with the economic downturn and the NDP carbon tax, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: when will you finally give some clarity to these municipalities on MSI, or will it even exist next year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate the question from the opposition member. Unlike what they're trying to say, the taps aren't turning off on March 31 like they're telling everyone. They are continuing. For the next budget cycle they will have their funding for MSI. As I said this morning, if the opposition member was actually listening as I have been doing to municipalities, we are going to work collaboratively with them going forward to find something that's sustainable, not a 10-year Band-Aid.

Thank you.

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

Opioid Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we debated the increasing number of deaths each year for the past five years caused by opioids. The government calls it everything from an epidemic to a crisis, but it refuses to call it an emergency. The definition of an emergency in the Emergency Management Act is, quote, an event that requires prompt co-ordination of action to protect the health of people and limit damage to property. End quote. Health and crime

statistics say that this is an emergency. To the Premier: why is the government the only one who won't call this an emergency?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I was really pleased to be part of the discussion in our House yesterday as we talked about some new ideas. You know, I was certainly pleased to hear from most of the opposition their support for supervised consumption services, which are viewed as leading best practices for how we can help stem the tide of deaths from the opioid crisis. I agree with the member opposite that we need to be doing more and continuing this hard work that we've started to protect Albertans and to make sure the supports are in place. We're going to do that no matter what.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, two of the courageous survivors of this crisis, Petra Schultz and Rosalind Davis, said that this government's refusal to act on the call for an emergency is, quote, unacceptable and the inadequate response perpetuates the stigma about opioid-related deaths. End quote. The government insists that a state of emergency isn't appropriate in this situation. Clearly, the government can do more to help and mobilize resources without kicking down the doors. If the government has all the resources it needs, why is the opioid crisis continuing to worsen? Why are you failing?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I hear people call for a public health emergency, I hear them wanting to know that their government understands that this is a serious issue, a top priority, and that we are taking action. Is there more to do? Absolutely, and it is top of mind for this government. Earlier today I met with Marliss Taylor of Streetworks and Jennifer Vanderschaeghe of Turning Point in Red Deer to discuss practical, on-the-ground solutions that we can do to help save Albertans' lives, ways that we can support front-line workers who are working to support people who use substances day in and day out so that we can help to stem this tide.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the reason we're failing is that the government's response to this emergency has been piecemeal at best. During the emergency debate it touted more incremental, one-off measures. Harm reduction is good; it is not enough. The government has provided no comprehensive plan. It is unwilling to admit that the opioid crisis has become an emergency. Focused leadership is what is lacking. The NDP campaigned on leadership for what matters. Well, certainly, these nearly 500 lost lives last year matter. How many deaths will it take before you call it an emergency?

2:10

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to disagree with the member's categorization of our approach as piecemeal. We have moved forward on harm reduction by expanding access to naloxone for people who need it. Yes, definition of a Band-Aid. It's going to save a life when it's needed. That is one part of our plan. We've been working on opioid dependency treatments, Suboxone and methadone, which are top-of-the-line clinical evidence for helping people who are living with opioid addictions. That is the treatment that is needed, and we are working to expand access to that treatment.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Postsecondary Students with Disabilities

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Jason Lang scholarship is awarded to any postsecondary student in Alberta who earns a 3.2 GPA on a full course load. In 2007 the course load eligibility for students with documented disabilities was reduced from an 80 per cent course load to 60 per cent in accordance with a Human Rights Commission decision. In 2009 the previous government ignored this decision by reverting the criteria for the scholarship back to 80 per cent, leaving many students with disabilities ineligible. To the Minister of Advanced Education: will you commit to including . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend for the important question. Our government is making lives for students better by providing support to students who are seeking to further their education, and we're continually looking for opportunities to improve our programming. As he mentioned, Advanced Education is currently conducting a system resource review, which includes learning supports such as loans, grants, scholarships, and awards, and the Jason Lang scholarship will be included in the scope of that review. We understand the extra challenges that students with disabilities face and that financial support for this population must support their unique needs, and we're committed to making our postsecondary system . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there other programs and scholarships for disabilities with the Jason Lang scholarship in the review you are currently conducting on student grants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thanks again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that important question. There are a number of resources available to support students with disabilities, including both federal and provincial student grants for students with permanent disabilities. The Canada student grant provides \$2,000 a year to assist with education and living costs as well as up to \$8,000 a year for services and equipment. Additionally, the Alberta grant for students with disabilities provides an additional \$3,000 in funding for each student. All these grants provide nonrepayable assistance to students who may not otherwise be able to access postsecondary education and are administered by Student Aid Alberta through the Student Aid Alberta Service Centre.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. To the same minister: what programs are available to help students with disabilities transition into the world of postsecondary education?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, each of Alberta's public postsecondary institutions provides services to students with disabilities to minimize barriers to education. These include various accommodations provided as necessary on a case-by-case basis. The appropriate accommodations are identified in consultation with professional staff at each institution, the student, their physicians,

and other professionals working with them for care and support. Accommodations can include extensions of exam time limits and private exam spaces, modification of course loads, and additional equipment. All of these help students with disabilities have a more successful transition into colleges and universities as they make their lives better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Government Communications

Mr. Fildebrandt: Today the government's official propaganda wing testified before the Public Accounts Committee. We asked real, simple questions about the extent of partisanship in this historically partisan branch of the public service. Government has parachuted NDP apparatchiks into dozens of positions across the government that are supposed to be nonpartisan. For the most part they refused to answer our questions, so I'll ask the government directly. How many employees in the Public Affairs Bureau have partisan ties to the NDP?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question that's being asked is one that I'd say was directed to the appropriate body. It's a public agency, the Public Affairs Bureau, and they are working as public servants, and it's important that we respect their professionalism as public servants. I wish the members opposite would show a little bit of professionalism as well.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They're not professionals; they're party bureaucrats, Mr. Speaker.

They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Continue.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Do I get to start again?

The Speaker: No, you can't start again.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money to convince people to vote for the Progressive Conservative Party. Those words were spoken exactly five years ago to the day, when the Government House Leader was in opposition. Now the NDP are spending tens of millions of dollars to convince people to support their carbon tax. Can the Government House Leader stand up, look me in the eye, and tell me with a straight face that they're not doing the exact same thing?

The Speaker: I would ask whoever . . .

Ms Hoffman: I'll start, and if the Government House Leader wants to answer . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Premier, I wonder if you would look me straight in the eye, though, rather than the other side. Please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start, and I'm sure that if the Government House Leader wants to respond to the third one, he'll have an opportunity to. The Public Affairs Bureau is a professional communications branch. It supports campaigns about things like seat belt importance and public health. I think it's important that we pay attention to what they have to say. I know Albertans

want to hear what the campaigns are and make sure that they're hearing clear communications from a professional communications branch.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Professional communicators who used to be party campaigners.

Alison Redford was set to go down in history as the most wasteful Premier in Alberta's history. She squandered \$4 million on wasteful government propaganda over her entire term. I say "was" because this Premier has budgeted \$10 million on a single ad campaign. Given that over Christmas I went to watch a movie where people literally booed as they were subjected to this kind of propaganda – Albertans aren't buying it, and they want them gone – won't the government just save us the money and cancel the propaganda ads?

Mr. Mason: Well, I'm glad that the hon. member watches movies other than on Rebel media, Mr. Speaker, because he might get a bit of an education.

Now, the Public Affairs Bureau are professional public civil servants. I have a point of order with respect to this matter because the impugning of professional civil servants by the opposition is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's announcement was that two technical working groups developing recommendations on how employment standards and labour relations should be applied in the agricultural sector as a result of Bill 6 have now finished their report to the government. We have been told that the next step is to provide feedback on these recommendations through a web portal for the next four weeks. To the minister: why is there no attempt to have face-to-face feedback with Albertans such as town halls?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Farming is more than a job; it is a way of life, and this government recognizes that. We have heard from some very balanced technical working group tables that members of those tables included voices representing employers, farmers, experts from various fields. They had such fulsome discussions at these groups, and I'd like to thank all of the members for the work that they did at those technical working groups. We are now taking the reports that came from our technical working groups and asking Albertans to give us feedback on the work that was done at these technical working groups.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are still four more working groups, two of which are reviewing the applicability of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, another one on best practice for agriculture, and one on education and training and certification, and given that these groups have not completed their consultation and that no expected date for completion has been outlined, to the minister: when can Alberta farmers expect to see these consultations completed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I have said from the beginning and this government has

said from the beginning of the process that we're going to take the time that is necessary to make sure that we get this right. As the member I'm sure recognizes, some of those issues are complicated, especially in occupational health and safety. The nuances in agriculture have to be examined to make sure we get it right, and I'm very happy, as is the Minister of Labour, with the hard work that these technical working groups have done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's been over a year since Bill 6 legislation was passed and given that parts of it are already being implemented, such as WCB, and given that the regulations for this legislation have still not been completed, to the minister: when are you going to have the regulations in place for Alberta farmers to be able to follow?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important that we get this right. We're continuing to take the time. I've heard from the opposition that they would actually repeal this legislation that will protect farm workers. This government believes in the protection of farm workers as all workers. We're going to continue to do that work. We're going to continue to make lives better for Alberta's farmers, ranchers, and workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, for the past few months I've been hearing disturbing reports from members of the Bill 6 round-tables about whether this government has been taking their input seriously. The concerns being voiced are that should there be no consensus, the government will simply toss out any views that don't mesh with their ideology and create regulations as they see fit. To the minister: what assurances can you give these round-table members that their hard work and efforts will not simply be sent to the burn barrel as so much trash?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, there were 72 members total for these technical working groups – they have put in hard work – a variety of interests right across Alberta. I thank them for their hard work. They were not able to reach consensus on everything, but the ones they do, we're going to be able to have all Albertans examine, looking for that input. The opposition had criticized the consultation process. They were wrong on that. We've had fulsome consultation and are looking to the results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, given that per the government's press conference yesterday consensus was not reached on all round-tables and given that if there is no consensus, the final decision on which recommendations to accept lies with the government, which means that choices will have to be made, to the minister: for those round-tables that didn't reach consensus, will the minister side with views that mirror their ideology, or does the minister plan to break the stalemate in some other way, and if so, what will that be?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The members opposite would have preferred these

technical working groups to be made up of all the same people. They weren't. There were very diverse views right across – labour, workers, farmers, ranchers, experts in health and safety – that all made up a part of that table. The discussions were robust. That they didn't come to consensus in all the recommendations is natural, but with all those views, on the ones that they have, we're looking forward to those recommendations and hearing from all Albertans as we always said we were going to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Barnes: Southern Albertans are struggling, and this government's bad policies . . .

The Speaker: My apologies. I was jumping ahead.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in yesterday's press conference the minister stated that government will decide what regulations come out of the Bill 6 round-table reports, certainly on reports that have points where consensus hasn't been reached, and given that even if the vast majority of Albertans submit their opposition to certain recommendations, the government will have the final say, to the minister: how do you plan to respond to complaints from some table members that fear that the results of these consultations are ultimately predetermined?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the opposition has gone on record saying that they will repeal this legislation if and when they ever get in power, that they would deny basic workers' rights to these workers, and I'm assuming they would deny basic rights for every worker in Alberta. For that, I say: shame. This government, I as minister, will continue protecting Alberta's workers, will continue making lives better for those workers.
[interjections]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please keep the volume down.
Now the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Southern Albertans are still struggling, and this government's bad policies have made things worse. The carbon tax has increased the cost of everything. This government refuses to provide any evidence that this tax won't just force industries to relocate. Recent public policy research identified that families, couples supporting kids or relatives are the biggest losers of the carbon tax. This tax won't help the environment, has harmed our economy and our job creators. To the minister of environment: when will this government put Alberta families first and abolish the carbon tax?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, we learned over the weekend that members opposite seemed to have problems interpreting the dictionary. We learned that again yesterday in terms of the definitions of words. Why don't I just help out the opposition with a couple of definitions of our own? Made in Alberta is a plan designed by Albertans. It means a plan that is carefully structured around our unique economy. It is Alberta's climate leadership plan. I'll give you another definition: made in Ottawa, which is the sum

total of the opposition Conservative Party's so-called plan to deal with climate change. That is not our approach. Our approach is to make sure that we are moving carefully, creating . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, study after study shows that this government doesn't care about the damage they're causing. Given that good Medicine Hat employers like Rosenau Transport have been forced to pass along the expense of the carbon tax and given that this government's own estimated cost per family of the tax never bothered to consider the price increases that the tax has put on every good from farm equipment to groceries, again to the minister of environment: how can you claim that your efforts to mitigate a tax with impacts that you refuse to acknowledge have made the carbon tax easier to swallow?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member asks about the business climate, so it's very interesting to me that that's why we cut small-business taxes by a third. They would increase business taxes by that third. We have put money in the pockets of Albertans, starting on January 5 with the rebates, moving along with various energy efficiency programs for farms, for schools, for nonprofits. [interjection] They would take money out of those pockets, and they would cancel all of those ways that people are saving money on their . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, please keep your volume down. Thank you.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the day after the carbon tax was implemented, my office received call after call from petroleum service stations across the province shocked and confused as to why they needed to apply GST on top of the carbon tax. Given that this government had the option of lobbying the federal government to exempt the carbon tax from the GST and given that we're now forcing Albertans to pay a tax on a tax, Albertans are left wondering: when will this government stop lining the pockets of bureaucrats in Ottawa and start working for Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we understand that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand, and part of that is creating good jobs both in our energy industry and in our emerging industries. That's how we secured approvals on two pipelines. The Wildrose still believes that their dead-end approach will work. [interjections] That failed to get pipelines built. They would repeal the very plan that secured those two pipelines.

The Speaker: We're certainly having a robust afternoon.
The Member for Calgary-South East.

Addiction and Mental Health Emergency Responder and Family Supports

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We spent the afternoon in the House yesterday debating the need for an emergency response to the fentanyl crisis. In order to get to that point, every member of this House agreed to have that debate, recognizing that there is a crisis. Yet the government has failed to respond by calling a public health emergency to co-ordinate resources to save lives. Since the minister and the government won't call an emergency, my question

is: where is the support for the true emergency worker, emergency medical services, how much money has been allotted to them during this crisis, and how much in additional resources?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are incredibly grateful for the work that first responders, including firefighters, paramedics, police, and peace officers, are taking in responding to this crisis. We have been working very diligently to ensure that they have the mental health supports that they need to help process any of the trauma related to the work that they do day in and day out. I'm regularly meeting with members of emergency responders, representations from across the province, to make sure that we have those supports in place. One of the key things that we've heard was the desire . . .

2:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Given that addiction and mental health issues are extremely complex and that it's certainly a tragedy for those that are suffering from addictions and mental health problems but that it is equally tormenting for the families that love them, to the same minister. You've outlined some help for addicts. Can you tell Albertans: where are the supports for families of those suffering from those problems? They're also hurting. Can you tell me if you're supporting them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. One of the first things that our government did when we came into office was to create the valuing mental health commission to review some of the work that government had been doing on mental health supports and to make sure that we had a more co-ordinated system. What we found was a very fragmented system, without supports for families. Our government, since the adoption of that report, has been working diligently to make sure that we have supports across the province so that it doesn't matter which part of Alberta you live in; if you need mental health support, that help will be available for you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you. Given that during the emergency debate we heard multiple stories about the tragedy of addiction in families – and I referenced one such family during my speech – and most members of this House recognize that their families and all families are at risk, to the same minister. Families are calling this government to action. Can you outline what steps are being taken with our youth to educate them and their parents to prevent the issues that our province is currently facing?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. Our government has been working very closely crossministerially to make sure that we've got supports available in schools and have that education piece available in addition to some of the public advertising that we've been doing on the concerns around the dangers of fentanyl as well as the take-home naloxone program. I am always very eager to meet with other members of this House and with members of our community about ideas for things that we can be doing that will help to improve the supports available as well as the services . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Indigenous Child and Family Services

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is an overrepresentation of indigenous children in care and that the Ministry of Children's Services is responsible for overseeing the delivery of child intervention services on-reserve, funded by the federal government, to the Minister of Children's Services: please explain how the government works with indigenous and federal partners to support indigenous youth in care.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for a very relevant question. We all know that the overrepresentation of indigenous youth is a heartbreaking reality of our child intervention system, and we know that all children, no matter where they grow up, deserve a safe, healthy, loving home and opportunities to thrive in strong communities. Now, while the number of indigenous children receiving services over the past few years has decreased, we know that there is more work to do. A ruling by the Human Rights Commission has asked the federal government to increase funding for on-reserve service delivery. We will continue to work . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the funding for supports is less on-reserve versus off-reserve, to the same minister: how is programming such as family support programs offered on-reserve?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel very strongly that where an Alberta child or family lives should never dictate the level of support that they receive. We need to do better for these children, for our youth, and for the families. As a former front-line service professional this issue is near to my heart. Our government is working with First Nations partners and other orders of government to make sure indigenous people have the support they need. For instance, Children's Services is working with Kapawe'no First Nation to develop a pilot program to license child care on-reserve. We are working with the Bigstone Cree Nation to establish an on-reserve reunification home . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal government is responsible for providing funding for on-reserve programs, to the same minister: what work is being done to advocate for more program supports on-reserve?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons this government created a stand-alone Children's Services ministry was to maintain and strengthen supports to indigenous children, families, and communities. We are also focusing on the root causes affecting the safety and well-being of children, including poverty, addiction, mental health concerns, and family violence. We're committed to working with indigenous partners and the federal

government to ensure that indigenous families have fair access to the support they need. We will continue to look at this issue as part of our ongoing work on the UN declaration and the TRC's calls to action.

Thank you.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, we have heard time and time again from the media, the opposition, and from the Privacy Commissioner that the NDP refuses to improve our province's access to information. Last session the Official Opposition asked the Justice minister what she was doing to clean up the mess in her department, but it was no surprise to us when we didn't get an answer. The Privacy Commissioner's recent report clearly shows that she still has a problem. Minister, it's been two years now. Why should Albertans trust you to get the job done?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government values the importance of transparency and access to information. It was clear from the reports that the backlogs had built up over a number of years. We've been increasing the number of full-time positions. We're increasing those positions from 10 to 18 in order to get this backlog cleared. I hope the members opposite will support the resources necessary to do that.

Mr. Cooper: Given that last year Canadian privacy experts described Alberta Justice as a rogue organization due to their manipulation of FOIP requests and since Alberta's Privacy Commissioner stated as recently as two weeks ago that the NDP government needs a top-down culture change to address a "lack of respect" for freedom and information, to the Premier. Your Justice minister is falling short. The experts say that you need a top-down culture change. When will you listen to those experts?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, it's always fun to see how people can pull one area within a report to try to create some massive drama. But the truth is that our government has worked diligently to increase investment in the area of FOIP. The number of FOIP requests, for example, in Executive Council has gone up threefold in the last two years, and we're working diligently to address those by putting the resources and the people where they're most needed. I hope that when they push for cuts in all ministries again, if they do the same as they did last year, they'll remember that they're proposing cutting things like FOIP, that we're actually investing in.

Mr. Cooper: Given that last fall the Premier stood in this Assembly and assured us that "transparency and openness are exactly what [this] government is endeavouring to do" and given that the Privacy Commissioner's report has found that FOIP requests sent to the Premier's office are delayed due to lengthy and unnecessary processing delays, to the Premier: is it a lack of leadership, or is having a trustworthy government simply not a priority?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is putting our money where our mouth is, so when it comes to increasing access, we're doubling down on efforts to make sure that we have the right resources aligned to be able to meet with the FOIP requirements. They would cut those offices. The same people that they're expecting to do more and more and more they have no respect for. All they want is to try to create some drama and some

speculation when the truth is that we're putting our money where our mouth is. We're aligning resources, and we're committed to following the legislation.

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

Social Service Provider Staff Safety

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In early February a 60-year-old woman was viciously attacked at the Elk Island youth ranch. The beating took place at 11 p.m., and the RCMP were not called until 1 a.m. Understandably, the minister was unable to answer critically important questions about the incident immediately after it occurred. It's been a month now. To the minister: was there a delay in emergency response because she was working alone that night?

The Speaker: I'm not exactly sure where this line of questioning is going. It could be a sub judice issue, so I would seek the guidance of the government as to how they may choose to answer this.

2:40

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Out of respect for that, I'll just say that I respect the personal sacrifice of our front-line workers that undertake to support and protect others, but absolutely we all understand that that sacrifice should never mean that people are not supported to do their job safely. Certainly, we've been working with the facility to ensure the safety of both the staff and the residents. As an independently contracted service provider, certainly, Elk Island youth ranch is in the best position to speak to the specifics. However, we continue to ensure the safety and well-being of both the staff and residents . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just days before the attack the judge presiding over a fatality inquiry for the murder of a care worker in Camrose released seven recommendations and given that the Premier indicated that this government planned to act quickly to hold itself accountable for recommendations from fatality inquiries, to the minister: what have you done since February 1 regarding these recommendations?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, we watched with interest the recommendations that came out of that particular fatality inquiry. We are aware that one such recommendation was that the government begin tracking such recommendations. The reason for that was that under the former government they had never been tracked. So we have committed to come up with a system to do that tracking to increase transparency, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Gill: I'm talking about the recommendations released on February 1, Minister, not the previous government.

Given that two youth in care at the centre have been charged with attempted murder and given that one of them has since pleaded guilty to assaulting other workers in the months leading up to this attack and given that ensuring that workers know the histories of those in their care is a fatality report recommendation, again to the minister: was the care worker aware of the youth's history of violence, and was she trained to deal with it?

The Speaker: Please proceed, hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in response to this terrible event our government has been working with the facility. We put a conditional status on their licence so that we would have oversight of their day-to-day decisions. There are a number of investigations and reviews currently under way: occupational health and safety, the RCMP, and Children's Services is reviewing policy and licensing requirements and accreditation. We will certainly be acting quickly on any findings because, as I stated, our government believes that no one's life and safety should be put unnecessarily at risk when they go to work. We're committed to taking a closer look at how we support safety for contracted service provider staff.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Carbon Levy and Agribusiness Costs

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of Albertans do not want this punitive, destructive carbon tax that's been levied on them. Examples of business costs skyrocketing have increased dramatically since its inception. I sit on the Alberta's Economic Future Committee. We are dealing with how to promote value in business and agriculture. The comment that we heard more than any other from presenters was that this carbon tax is making business increasingly noncompetitive.

On the weekend I sat down with the owner of one of the largest exporters of dehydrated forage products in Alberta. Their company produces dehydrated alfalfa and other forage products for both domestic and foreign export. They also send dehydrated corn and barley silage into Asian and Middle East countries. This is a niche market that they created. This should be an Alberta success story. This is as value-added as it gets.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the carbon tax is imposing a huge competitive disadvantage on this Alberta exporter. During the month of January alone their natural gas bill increased by over \$20,000 from the carbon tax. This cost cannot be passed on to consumers. Imagine: \$260,000 a year in increased tax. The carbon tax has also increased trucking rates to the plant by 8.3 per cent. The annual cost of the carbon tax on this business is higher than the profit margin. This plant operates year-round and has 50 full-time employees. Millions have been invested in the dehydration equipment. If this entrepreneurial agribusiness disappears from Alberta, a huge market for Alberta hay producers disappears with it.

Mr. Speaker, the negative realities of this crippling tax on business and families are becoming clearer by the day. Across that imaginary line they call the 49th parallel, those folks don't pay a carbon tax. This Alberta company cannot be competitive in this market in a carbon tax environment. You are killing business, Premier. Axe this tax instead. Act like you care about . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 2

An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

Bill 2 proposes amendments to the Limitations Act that would eliminate legal deadlines for commencing civil claims related to sexual and domestic violence. These changes include the following types of claims: sexual assault and sexual misconduct or nonsexual assault involving a minor, an intimate relationship, or a dependant.

Mr. Speaker, the decision to come forward is extremely personal and can be very difficult. Survivors of sexual and domestic violence should be empowered to do so on their own terms. The proposed amendments would put Alberta in line with the majority of the country. However, this change would also make Alberta a leader across the country in addressing sexual misconduct in intimate relationships. This is a change Albertans have asked for. This government listens to Albertans, and we are taking action to address their concerns.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, not all Albertans were elated to receive their carbon tax rebates. I have a bank draft made out to the Provincial Treasurer for \$100 from Mr. Stan Olszowka of St. Paul, Alberta, and he writes:

I am refunding my carbon tax refund. To accept it on my part would be like accepting blood money for over educated stupidity.

This money could be used to develop refrigeration units to stop global warming.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm disappointed to table this document dated September 28, 2016, that shows that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the executive director of the Wildrose Party, is an active member of the Wildrose on Campus club, with the subtext: "As the executive director of the Wildrose Party I probably should be involved with our Wildrose on Campus group." I have the requisite five copies.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table two articles – one is called Is Wildrose Still Cool to the Reality of Man-made Global Warming? and the other one is called Wildrose Still Seems to Be Flirting with Denials of Man-made Climate Change in 2017 – in response to a Standing Order 29(2)(a) question I was asked by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and in response to my question to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a Twitter message from Wildrose on Campus titled Feminism Is Cancer. "You and I both know that feminism is cancer. To create a dialogue on campus, we have decided to take action." It's an advertisement for *The Red Pill*, a movie on men's rights activists. I table five copies.

I have a second tabling, Mr. Speaker, a little explanation of *The Red Pill* by MRA – that's men's rights activist – Roosh V. This is titled MRA Roosh V Wants to Legalize Rape to Teach Women a Lesson. That's what happens when you take the red pill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As promised yesterday, I'm pleased to table this article entitled Wesley Band Hosts Meeting to Discuss Community Solutions for Drug Problem, the gist of which is that "this is a crisis we don't even have a name for in our language" and that "we need to battle this demon upon us."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an article I referred to yesterday from the *Globe and Mail* called A Killer High: How Canada Got Addicted to Fentanyl.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I believe we may be at points of order. If I recall, I think there are a total of three points of order.

The Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to speak to a point of order. I will be speaking specifically from Standing Order 23, "uses abusive . . . language of a nature likely to create disorder." That's 23(j) for those of you following along at home. I will speak to both points of order that were raised by my hon. colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre here, on the first one predominantly because I have some significant concerns about language that the Minister of Health used. She used language that was likely to create disorder and, in particular, made allegations about members of this Chamber.

Let me be very clear that no one in this caucus thinks or agrees with statements that were made by members of Wildrose on Campus. The statements that were made are totally inappropriate, completely wrong, and do not represent myself or any member of this caucus. I had the opportunity this morning to rise in this Chamber and also denounce those comments, and I am in agreement with my colleagues that those comments are totally inappropriate.

However, today in question period the Minister of Health said that the Wildrose said that feminism is a cancer. No one inside this Chamber has ever or would ever make the statement that was made by members of an association that is no longer connected to the Wildrose. For the Minister of Health to imply that it was said by a member of this Chamber is not likely going to create order. I cannot be more clear that I, the House leader of the Wildrose Official Opposition, and our caucus denounce these sorts of statements. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I feel personally responsible to do things that create an environment where more individuals, including those of all genders and females in particular, would feel welcome and safe to engage in the political process.

Making allegations like the Health minister did today is not going to create order in this Chamber. I think the Health minister understands that. I think the Health minister understands a lot about my personal motives and my personal beliefs. For her to make such a claim, that would imply all members of this Chamber had made statements like that, is not going to be part of productive discourse in this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by saying that I accept the hon. member's assertion that he and other members of the Wildrose caucus have disavowed themselves from those statements. Nevertheless, what the hon. Deputy Premier was saying is that there are repeated what she called bozo eruptions

coming from the Wildrose membership, which indicates a deeper problem, and this was just one example.

Other examples, as we know: the famous examples before the 2012 election relating to the lake of fire for gay and lesbian people or on the denial of climate change, and we've seen some language by, actually, caucus members around that as well. There are a number of other instances that the member has cited, including the willingness of members, including the leader of the party, to appear on Rebel media, which is noted for its spread of anti-Islamic hatred and, as well, homophobia and a number of other things that I think Rebel media has talked about, yet we've yet to see members opposite disavow that particular organization. They attend the rallies – the Deputy Premier pointed that out – as well as appear on their online programming.

The Deputy Premier did not use unparliamentary language. She referred to very specific matters that have happened. Now, whether or not individual members opposite support or agree with any of those things is not what the Deputy Premier was talking about. She wasn't talking about members opposite; she was talking about the party. She was talking about views that are within the party that keep popping up from time to time that are very disturbing and very contrary to the views of most Albertans and certainly the ones that we represent. So I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that there is no point of order.

I would just like to quote from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which is very clear that while the opposition may not like an answer, it doesn't mean that it's a point of order. It says:

The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect, I don't believe that the Deputy Premier impugned members opposite but, rather, was talking about some basic problems within the political party itself. I think that her answer was not unparliamentary, and I would ask you to so rule.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to ensure that I'm on the same page. There were, in fact, two points of order, that we're dealing with now. As I understood, the first one was about a comment made concerning, I believe – I have a copy of the Blues with me here: "Why is your party spending its time calling the fight for women's equality a cancer on our society?"

Can I just get a clarification that we're dealing with both points of order together, hon. House leader?

Mr. Cooper: I will withdraw the second point of order because it's on a very similar topic. My concern was the minister saying: Wildrose said feminism is a cancer. That's what I believed was said. It's certainly not true. I don't have a copy of the Blues. I'm not sure if that is the only reference in the answer, if that's what you call it, that you have access to now or if, in fact, those words were said. Those are the words that I had heard. But this is the only point of order that I will need to have dealt with on this issue.

3:00

The Speaker: Well, just for the sake of clarity, thank you, hon. member, for making that point. The Blues have it so that we all are dealing with the same document.

I believe the point that was being focused on in the first point as well as the second was:

Yesterday the Wildrose called feminism a cancer, and you guys want to join them. So let me ask the Leader of the Opposition a simple question: why is your party spending its time calling the fight for women's equality a cancer on our society?

Then there was a second reference, which I believe the Government House Leader addressed, which was the "Wildrose bozo eruptions."

Let me just say this. In its purest sense this probably is not a point of order but a difference of opinion. However, the language used in those kinds of comments is not helpful to this House agreement on arriving at good policy. You all know which buttons to push on the other side. If you choose to do that, it just consumes your time. You can get the anxiety of the place. In this particular instance I don't believe it was a point of order. However, particularly when you're answering these kinds of questions, I would caution you, hon. House leader, that your members be more cautious about the words that they are using.

Point of order 3. I believe you raised this one, Government House Leader.

Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers

Mr. Mason: I did indeed, Mr. Speaker. I raised it in response to comments made by the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks with respect to the Public Affairs Bureau. I heard him refer to members of the Public Affairs Bureau as partisan bureaucrats and, I believe, also partisan hacks. There were a number of other terms that were used along a similar vein.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to distinguish between a criticism of the organization and an attack on the public servants who work within it. If the opposition feels, as it may legitimately do, though I don't agree with it at this point, that the Public Affairs Bureau or any other agency or department of government is behaving with a bias towards the government, that's one thing. However, when a member stands up and singles out the individuals that work for an organization and labels them, he not only demeans those individuals, who have no recourse to defend themselves, but also undermines their ability to do their work. I think that is unacceptable. I've seen on a number of occasions that this particular member is unable to distinguish those two things. To him, in my experience, they're one and the same, and he can't stop at that line where the organization ends and the person begins.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of references in the rules to nonmembers, people who are not in the House and are unable to defend themselves. *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* on page 151, section 493(4), states, "The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply."

O'Brien and Bosc on pages 616 and 617 states, "The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander, but from any slur directly or indirectly implied."

On June 25, 2015, Mr. Speaker, you yourself cautioned members, stating, "Members must remember that when they refer to people outside of the Assembly, those individuals have no ability to respond to the allegations that may have been made in here."

Your predecessor, Speaker Zwozdesky, in 2012 made similar cautions. For example, on November 26 he said, "We should not be referring to people who are not here and not able to defend themselves."

Mr. Speaker, I certainly don't have a problem ruleswise with the members criticizing an organization of government if they feel that it's demonstrating a bias. I may not agree with it, but that's fair game. But to label the individuals as hacks and to suggest that they are partisan people who are there in order to promote one party over another is simply beyond the pale. It should not be accepted in this House, and I would ask that you so rule and that you ask the hon. member to stand up and withdraw the remarks and apologize to those individuals as well as to the House.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to discuss a point of order here. I think if we have learned anything this afternoon with respect to what is a matter of debate and what isn't, clearly you have just ruled on what is a matter of debate, and I think we have seen that here again.

The member opposite made a career out of criticizing this particular department, and that is exactly what we saw today from the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. In fact, he used some of the Government House Leader's own words from five years ago, when he was doing the exact same thing. What did happen this afternoon was that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks did not point out any of the individuals that do have significant ties to the NDP that currently work inside this department. It would have been very easy for him to do that because it is well known that there are lots of partisan connections to individuals who are currently working in the PAB. What happened was that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks asked a very important question on how this branch of government, which has been historically partisan, is continuing to do so.

I don't think there is a case that is more clear with respect to an issue of debate as what we have before us this afternoon, and for the Government House Leader to suggest anything different is a new set of reality for the Government House Leader from when he was in opposition to when he was in government, where he used to express concern around the exact same things that the government is currently engaging in. Now he's defending the very behaviour of those individuals. Clearly, this is a matter of debate, one that I anticipate more debate to take place on in the future. I would hope that you, too, would rule that this is just that, a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Any other members?

Well, let me just be clear as to what the Blues say. To the Government House Leader, I see no nor did I hear any reference to use of the word "hacks." What he said was: "They're not professionals; they're party bureaucrats, Mr. Speaker. They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money."

Again, you're both zero for zero. This is also not a point of order, in my opinion. The earlier positions that were taken, as I recall, were with respect to where individuals were named, and even today in this House I heard the use of a person's name that probably could have been left out of our discussion in this Chamber. But in both cases the tone, the use of words is not very constructive and not as respectful as the goals that I know all of you are aspiring to, and you don't need me to tell you yet another time to exercise your caution and your respect for each other by avoiding such language.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

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

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2017, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. When supplementary estimates are tabled, section 4(5) of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act requires that an update to the consolidated fiscal plan be tabled.

Accordingly, I also wish to table the 2016-17 third-quarter fiscal update, which serves as the updated fiscal plan. The quarterly fiscal update provides a framework for additional spending authority for the Legislative Assembly and for the government.

Mr. Speaker, these supplementary supply estimates will provide additional spending to 18 government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize an appropriate increase of \$1.6 billion in expense funding and \$125 million in financial transactions funding for the government. The largest share of these amounts will fund the Fort McMurray wildfire disaster. These estimates will also authorize the transfer of \$141 million, with a net transfer of \$120 million for the previously approved capital investment vote to the expense vote across 14 departments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned March 7]

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's my pleasure today to rise to respond to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor Lois Mitchell's gracious reading of the Speech from the Throne. That speech began by recognizing that we are a diverse province but that in our diversity we share common values, those of compassion, hard work, and justice, and that we at our best are an open and inclusive society, one province, one people on a common journey towards a common future. I say "at our best" because, admittedly, that's an ideal we haven't always risen to. I think back to the Famous Five, who had to fight for women in our province to have the right to vote and to eventually be elected to this House.

I think back to the First Nations, who walked this land before us, where we stand today on Treaty 6 territory, and after signing those treaties, by whose grace we stand here today, were corralled onto reserves, their children forced into residential schools and their voices not fully heard in our democratic process until 1960.

I think of the many immigrants who came here to build better lives and found themselves confronted with prejudice like the Alberta senior I spoke with at the recent celebrations for Black History Month, a son of the original Exodusters, who told me that his first language was Ukrainian due to the close ties forged between his family and local Ukrainian families as they both faced discrimination.

I think of the Klein cuts of the 1990s, when thousands of Albertans – doctors, teachers, nurses, child service workers – were thrown out of work, tuition spiked, and Albertans suffering with addictions and mental illness were turned out into the street.

I think of the debate in this very Chamber where members of this House stood to argue that vulnerable LGBTQ-plus youth should have to go to court to earn the right to form a peer support group in their school. Mr. Speaker, I dare say that those were moments that did not make life better for many Albertans and their families.

However, there are times when we live up to our ideals. As Her Honour read in the Speech from the Throne, last year “Albertans came together in a time of extraordinary danger. As the Wood Buffalo wildfires tore through communities, we stood as one, as fellow citizens with a shared responsibility to each other.” Indeed, I’m encouraged to think of the thousands of Albertans who donated time, money, and goods to support the residents of Wood Buffalo.

I think of the thousands of Albertans who rose up to demand that the government of Alberta amend Bill 10 to provide true support for LGBTQ-plus students in our schools.

I think of the 400 people who attended our Legislature’s first official recognition of Black History Month, the dozens of articles and stories I saw in our local media celebrating the stories and contributions of Albertans of African descent.

I remember standing here in this Legislature shortly after our election when our Premier on behalf of the government of Alberta apologized to the First Nations people for the injustices visited on them through the residential school system.

I think of the thousands of Albertans who formed community organizations, social agencies, volunteered their time to triage the damage that was wreaked by short-sighted cuts in the funding of our systems of community support and mental health, organizations that have become such important partners with government in delivering street-level services and addressing issues of substance use and homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is at its best when we work together, when we stand together, and when we are committed to government that includes and looks out for all Albertans, a government that, when faced with a crisis, doesn’t abandon its responsibility to protect and maintain the core services Albertans rely on, a government committed to making their lives better.

Mr. Speaker, we’re well aware of the impact the historic drop in the price of oil has had on families in our province, and since our election we’ve been working to help protect them through this economic downturn and make their lives better. We’ve maintained stable, predictable funding for health care and education, protecting key services and vital jobs that support everyday Alberta families. While we’ve instituted a freeze on salaries for cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff, and management in the civil service, we have not resorted to the sorts of sweeping layoffs that devastated Edmonton’s economy in the 1990s, affecting many families in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Speaker, we’re well aware of the integral role that the energy industry plays in our economy and the need to ensure that it can continue and be a sustainable source of good jobs and prosperity in a carbon-constrained future. That’s why we worked with industry, First Nations, and environmental groups to develop the climate leadership plan, a plan that will put our province at the forefront of

innovation in clean energy and sustainable resource extraction while protecting the environment and all those who depend on it; a plan that secured the approval of a new pipeline to the west coast, a pipeline that will help ensure that we get the best value for our product, supporting good, mortgage-paying jobs in our province; a plan that will create even more in the development of a robust renewable-energy industry and support communities as we transition away from coal-fired power generation; a plan that supports Alberta families in reducing their energy use; a plan in which all Albertans work together to build a stronger, more sustainable economy for our future.

Of course, our modernized royalty framework also provides new incentives, helping to reduce costs and improve efficiencies, and has led directly to an increase in drilling activity and the jobs that that provides.

I was happy in the last session of the Legislature to have the opportunity to co-sponsor legislation to establish the Alberta investor and capital infrastructure tax credits, programs that will help to attract investment to grow our growing start-up and technology industries, many of which get their start at Startup Edmonton and TEC Edmonton right here in Edmonton-Centre, industries that help to diversify our economy and provide good opportunities for young Alberta families.

Our increased investments in infrastructure are also supporting good jobs in construction while maintaining and increasing our stock of much-needed hospitals and schools.

3:20

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we’re looking out for those that need an extra hand. I have the honour of representing our government as a member of the stewardship round-table for EndPovertyEdmonton. In discussions and recent reports EPE noted that the new Alberta tax credit and the increase in minimum wage are important steps towards lifting hundreds of families in our city out of poverty and giving them the opportunity to truly thrive in their communities. These are concrete actions that make life better, not only for those particular families but for all Albertans, as we work together to build stronger communities and local economies.

We’re investing over \$1 billion to upgrade and increase our stock of affordable housing and will shortly be releasing Alberta’s first affordable housing strategy, a plan to ensure that all Alberta families can afford a dignified place to live.

Mr. Speaker, we’re investing in many other areas to support those in need. I spoke at length yesterday about how proud I am to see our government’s commitment to implement the principles of harm reduction. As stated clearly in the Speech from the Throne, we will move forward with supervised consumption services and other harm reduction measures to address the rising tragedy of opioid overdose deaths. I was very happy to hear several members of the third party rise and declare that they also support these sites and these principles during our emergency debate yesterday. I look forward to hearing members of our Official Opposition also voice their support.

We’ve increased funding to FCSS, which funds many important community organizations around our province. We’ve increased funding for women’s shelters in multiple municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making life better for Alberta’s families. Every week I see all of my colleagues, these other 53 men and women that I have the honour of serving with and, indeed, members of the other parties in this House, out serving their constituents, out working in their communities. I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve gone to events and had opportunities to go out and meet with groups and been told: we’ve never had an MLA here before. I am so pleased to see that all members of this House have

begun to have a renewed commitment to the people of Alberta, that they're spending time on the ground listening to the people, working with the people who work on the front lines, who know the work that needs to be done.

Our government remains committed to working with them, to supporting them, to ensuring that we continue to build the facilities we need, provide the services that are required and that we are there to support them through this difficult time, a difficult time, Mr. Speaker, that we will come through together. We are united as Albertans. Our government is there to support, to make Alberta's families' lives better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Edmonton-Centre under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, I would recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As always, it's an absolute privilege and honour to be in this House to speak to the people of Alberta and lay out a vision as well as critique the government's budget, in this particular case, the thorn – the throne speech. I didn't mean to say "thorn speech," but I understand how that came out, sir.

With respect, you know, it was only two years ago that I had an opportunity to see, for instance, our health care in action. Mr. Speaker, I sat beside my son for four or five months while I watched him die, and it was a tragedy. But what I really saw was a health system that failed my family, failed my son, and fails an amazing number of people in Alberta.

Since the time that I've had the privilege of being the Leader of the Official Opposition, I've travelled the province. I don't stay here in Edmonton under the dome too long, Mr. Speaker, because you get what is called dome disease. That's when you don't understand what the people of Alberta are truly looking for. The people of Alberta have told me, when I've travelled the province – and I've spoken to them in many dozens and dozens of town halls and spoken to literally thousands of people just in the last six weeks and in the previous two years – many stories, many examples of how the health care system has failed them.

Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to see seniors in my own community that had been promised, over three times by three different Premiers, a seniors' long-term care facility. Over a 10-year period those promises were broken time and time again. That's why I got back into politics, because politics is important. Policies that this government brings forward are very important. They impact the lives of people: health care, education, forest fires. Yes, seniors, the people that built this great province and this great country, have been ignored by successive governments for too long.

We need a government that will respond to the people based upon what the people need and respects the people, all people, all Albertans and governs for them all equally. A good government truly is practical, is pragmatic, makes decisions based upon the best interests of the people at the time. They are not ideological right. They are not driven by ideological left. They make the decisions based upon the circumstance the people are involved in.

I've watched democratic principles that our party and Albertans strongly believe in be threatened: the principle that the people should make the decision and have the ultimate say. I knew in my heart that Albertans deserve so much more, Mr. Speaker. That's why I've dedicated my life now to make a better Alberta, to make it better for future generations, to make sure that families are supported by their government and supported by their health care system. I knew I could no longer stand on the sidelines.

Although a lot has changed in the past two years, there is one thing that will always stay the same: my resounding belief in the spirit and the people of Alberta, the spirit of our pioneers, our sodbusters, our men and women that drill for oil, that drive the big trucks, all of these people that have built the greatest place in the world to live, work, play, and raise a family. That's Alberta, Mr. Speaker. That's the Alberta I love, but I have seen some of it being dismantled, and I am concerned.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I saw what I would say – just about a year ago, one of the most significant times in my life, I saw the people of Fort McMurray flee their homes to run into the arms, the open arms, of other Albertans. It was a moment of significant pride for me to see the firefighters, the emergency workers, the RCMP personnel that were not just saving lives but saving homes and property at their own risk.

I do serve a caucus, Mr. Speaker, that is a proud caucus, one that works extremely hard, that is focused on the principles of making sure all Albertans are served equally. I believe I work right now in a caucus where some of the best values, some of the best things of who we are as Albertans are truly found. They've walked hand in hand with our agriculture workers, our energy sector workers, office assistants, small-business owners. They see the same things I do because we are going across the province doing town halls.

Although it's a great privilege to be able to do what I do, I've never seen in the eyes of Albertans such despair, such lack of hope. Albertans want something different, and they're worried about what this government has done in the last two years. They are concerned, and I don't think anybody in this House, including the government, is not aware of that concern.

I went to Grande Cache just a few months ago. I talked to a person that had owned and run a restaurant for many years, a small-business owner, closing their doors, and would not sign a new lease, Mr. Speaker. Just this summer it's up, and they are gone because they don't trust what's happening. I had a couple come to me that had just moved out of their home into their car. They were living in their car – living in their car – in Alberta, the promised land, because they were kicked out of their house. They couldn't afford it, had not had a job now, I believe, for about 10 months.

3:30

It's very concerning, Mr. Speaker, and I think the largest concern is that what this budget is doing, what the throne speech is doing, is throwing the problems onto future generations. That's what I'm concerned about. We're spending more money than we've ever spent. Bigger deficits, bigger debt: somebody has to pay that. It's not going to be these people, and it likely won't be us – we won't be able to pay it off, but we will pay for it – because it's going to take far too long.

The longer you travel down that road of debt and deficit and borrowing money, the longer it takes to get back the other direction. Mr. Speaker, I think we have to reach up as a group, as all MLAs in this place, especially the government, and recognize that if we don't turn around and go in a different direction, there is going to be more significant pain, more Albertans that move into their cars, more small businesses that don't renew their leases.

I see people without hope who are desperate for a brighter future. They're resigned and frustrated – and I don't blame them – because they've seen very little help out of this government. Now, I've heard platitudes, and I've heard things and plans and suggestions. In fact, we had a job plan that came up with one job after nine months, the minister's job. That was the only job it created, Mr. Speaker, although it cost a lot of money. That's why we can't get this wrong. We've got to get it right. That's why I truly don't understand why the government doesn't reach out to the opposition

and say: "How can we do it better for all Albertans? How can we work together to create a better budget?"

Let's not have any more unemployed Albertans. We've already had a hundred thousand unemployed Albertans in just 16 months. We say that by conservative estimates there are 200,000 Albertans unemployed right now, today, and very few of them – well, about a hundred thousand of them can only get unemployment insurance. Mr. Speaker, 65,000 jobs in the last year, over 20,000 in January alone, were lost. I'm concerned because we don't seem to be doing anything or learning anything from our mistakes. I'm sorry; it was 45,000 full-time jobs lost since last year.

You know, this carbon tax is troubling me as well. We have a carbon tax that by all estimates is going to be costing families in Alberta at least a thousand dollars out of their pocket. Well, the rubber-stamping of Ottawa's carbon tax is now bringing that number up to \$2,500 per family. That's going to come out of our pockets, every Alberta family's pockets, Mr. Speaker, out of the money they currently earn. They aren't going to have the money, that \$2,500, to pay for their priorities, to take their children to sports or drama classes or ballet. The things and the priorities they want to spend on for their children are no more because this government has taken \$2,500 out of their pockets per year and are going to pay it on projects that we don't know much about. A small, small portion is going for these green projects but, the truth is, a very small portion compared to the large part that's coming out of Albertans' pockets.

I did hear the economic development minister stand up in the House yesterday and say that he has – and I quote – the back of the coal workers across the province. Now, Mr. Speaker, these coal workers drive trucks. They do. You know, whether you go on highways 63, 55, 40, 881, or anywhere across the province, you can't ride bikes on those highways. I would say that there are very few coal plants that you can ride a bike to from your house. In fact, very few Albertans outside of the major urban centres and some of the mid-sized centres are able to use bikes because of the infrastructure involved and also because they live and work so far from each other.

We have large distances to travel in Alberta, especially in rural Alberta. That means that for rural Albertans this carbon tax is going to cost a lot more. We don't have those opportunities that other places do have although we do have a great quality of life. These Albertans pay for their own gas, and with gas prices going up, it's going to mean even less money in their pockets.

The NDP have made everything more expensive, whether it's food in your grocery store that's going to be more expensive because they had to pay more to get it shipped in, Mr. Speaker, or more for construction, for farming, for ranching, for industry. All of these will be more expensive, and Albertans ultimately pay the bill.

Now, I've heard them talk about big industry: "Oh, big industry is going to pay some of that," or "These guys are going to pay some of that," or "You know, it's going to be revenue neutral." Well, it's not. The \$3 billion, the \$5 billion, whatever billion dollars they want to make it, will come out of Albertans' pockets, Mr. Speaker, and those Albertans don't make the money these folks do. Maybe they should try to take some of their money and understand how the rest of the people live in Alberta, how they live week to week, paycheck to paycheck, month to month.

We do have one of the largest consumer debts in North America as well. So as interest rates become higher, as all of these different policies come into play, whether it's the accelerated shutdown of coal, whether it's the carbon tax and the doubling of the carbon tax in just a short period of time, whether it's the uncertainty in the

marketplace that they send by way of things like royalty reviews, these things hurt, and they hurt Albertans.

You know, I had an opportunity recently to go to the United States and go, particularly, to Washington and New York, and I did it on my own dime. I had an opportunity to speak to many investors, including other people in the U.S. State Department and industry and other areas, energy in particular. In speaking to these other investors from right across New York and even Toronto, they told me in private meetings, one-on-one. I said: "How can we get people to invest in Alberta? How can we bring back the Alberta advantage, where we received billions of dollars in economic activity and investment each and every month for years?" Alberta was the golden goose. I said: "How can we get them back? How can we get them from the TSX? How can we get them from New York?" They said that it was simple: "Change your government." They said that to me, Mr. Speaker.

You see, most Albertans and most Canadians and the people in the investment community are smart. They know that we sit on the third-largest oil reserve in the world here, 1.9 trillion barrels of oil, Mr. Speaker, and we know where it is. All we have to do is manage it properly as a resource that belongs to the people. It doesn't belong to these people. It belongs to the people of Alberta. These people have a fiduciary obligation to manage it properly, but what did they do? They capped it. It was already oversubscribed, over 100 megatonnes, and they capped it. They broke more contracts. That's not the signal you send to the investment community.

Without the investment community investing in Alberta, we don't have businesses. It would have been just as well for the Premier to have stood up outside the Legislature, here on the front steps, with a big sign that read: Alberta is closed for business. That's exactly what they've been doing, and it's not helpful because those businesses, those investors that come into Alberta, that create jobs, are the ones that ultimately will create employment for Albertans. It's not the government. We've seen what they've done. They made a job plan, created one job, and that was for the minister. One job, Mr. Speaker. That's ridiculous. It took them eight to nine months to figure out that it wasn't working. They could have just come across the floor and asked. I would have told them that that's not going to work.

I've been in business for years, Mr. Speaker, many different kinds of businesses, and I can tell you one thing that I don't do. I don't rely on the government for handouts because they don't work. Creating an environment of low taxation, low regulation, removing red tape, cutting taxes and individual taxes so that people have more money in their pockets, so they'll take that money out and spend it: that's what we need. We need a government that understands that their philosophy, increasing taxes, is only hurting the people of Alberta.

All these pet projects, Mr. Speaker – and I don't even want to get on the free light bulb situation, but let's talk about that just for a moment. We have this government that's focused on free light bulbs installed by a company from Ontario. That's creating employment. And what's happening? We have 100,000 Albertans that are seeking unemployment insurance. I would say that at least 50,000, a conservative estimate, can't get employment benefits anymore because we have a federal government that's not listening to us, and we have an Alberta government, a local government, that's not working with us.

3:40

Both levels of government are working against the people of Alberta and our industries. They need to reverse direction, Mr. Speaker. They need to stop thinking they know better. They need to stop believing they can spend Albertans' money better than

Albertans can. Albertans know what they're doing. They're smart; they're savvy. They're so savvy that they're not going to spend any money in Alberta until this government is gone. That's how savvy they are. They recognize the steps that they're taking.

Free light bulbs and a hundred thousand Albertans that are trying to collect unemployment insurance: I think they have their priorities mixed up, capping our oil sands while we have a hundred thousand workers in the oil sands leaving town. We have a community that had 2,100 homes destroyed by fire. Free light bulbs, Mr. Speaker, while we can't even build our homes in Fort McMurray: how ridiculous.

What do they say, Mr. Speaker? They call us the embarrassing cousins on the international stage – and it wasn't one of their backbenchers; it was their Premier, their leader; that tells you what their attitude is – or, better yet, that we were in the Dark Ages before they came to government. Well, the way they're going with our industries, especially our oil and gas industry, the only thing left will be to burn wood like in the Dark Ages. But, of course, there'll be a carbon tax, so we're probably not going to be able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, they capped our oil sands, they've raised costs for small businesses significantly, they've raised personal and business taxes, and they brought in the ever-popular Bill 6. I can promise you that every time I mention that in any town hall across any community in Alberta, I get applause by saying that I'm going to take it away and destroy it, which we will do within 30 days of a Wildrose mandate.

Our balance sheet has gone off the edge of a cliff. Downgrades have happened. Laugh if you want, but we have had our finances downgraded, and we're in for more. Do you care? No. Mr. Speaker, we had somebody stand up from the NDP and say: it's not going to affect us. Well, why don't you ask some people that have bad credit how much they'd like good credit? It makes a big difference: you borrow for less, your payments are better, and everybody wants to lend you money.

But we're going down a different path. I've shown you that path. It's so far down there that it's out the door and down the driveway, and we need to come back. This throne speech: \$60 billion is what we're going to owe when that government is gone. Now, that's \$2 billion in interest payments each and every year. Two billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. That's \$1,800, approximately, more or less, for every single family in Alberta to pay that they didn't pay two years ago.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you know what's happening to interest rates. I know you're a sophisticated man. You know that the United States is going to put up their interest rates, and we have to follow. We don't have a choice, or else we're going to be living in inflation.

Right now we have the lowest interest rates that I've ever seen, but I remember 19 per cent. I am that old. I remember paying 19 per cent on a mortgage, and I remember, too, Mr. Speaker, that when I looked at that mortgage payment and that schedule for payments, I couldn't believe how little of the house I was paying off. It was all going, almost all of it – I think 90 per cent when I started – towards interest payments. That's exactly where we're going with this government, interest payments, like Ontario at \$310 billion, more or less. That's a billion dollars a month in interest.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not just throwing out numbers to throw them out. A billion dollars: I could build so many schools for that for the people of Alberta, in health care hire nurses, front-line workers that actually get things done, that accomplish things, that don't just fill in NDP paperwork and increase regulation. These are things that really matter. A billion dollars in borrowing every six months: they can say what they want, but it is going to cost Albertans a lot in the long term for our structural investments that are necessary, whether it's infrastructure or schools or hospitals.

We're going to be spending \$2 billion a year not on those priorities but going towards big banks. I can't think of anyone that I'd rather see not have my money than big banks except for NDP governments.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take much more time, but I would like to say this to you. Compare free light bulbs with what's going on in Medicine Hat or Calgary, where we have 30 per cent of the buildings downtown vacant today – two years ago they were full – or 200,000 Albertans that are unemployed. I don't think they care about free light bulbs, and they certainly don't want any Ontario companies sending people into their homes to install them, and I think that goes for shower heads and thermostats.

I think right now this government should take a very serious look at what they're doing, what they've done, start talking to the other members in this place, and consult properly with us because we are so far down that road, Mr. Speaker, that it's going to take my great-grandchildren to get us anywhere near back to where we are today even.

I believe that under a vision of a Wildrose government, we can be number one in health care again, we can restore outcomes and make sure we work with a great bureaucracy and public servants that care about their work and care about their job and don't just care about a paycheck. Our public servants are the best in the world, but they're operating in a system that will not work. It cannot work, Mr. Speaker, not when you have one manager for every five employees. That's called paperwork, and they do paperwork to accomplish paperwork to accomplish more paperwork but don't worry about outcomes. I've seen it. It's terrible.

I did hear some bellyaching from the other side. They're right. It's not the worst case in Alberta, AHS. So Alberta Health Services is not the worst. The worst is the government itself, who has three workers for every one manager. Yes, Mr. Speaker, three workers for every one manager. I'm not even going to tell you how much they get paid on average because you are going to get so upset that you'll jump out of your chair.

Mr. Speaker, all we're suggesting and all we've ever suggested is: let's not cut; let's just freeze. Let's freeze wages and freeze hiring. Let's look at 2 cents out of every single dollar. We proposed 2 cents out of every dollar. They weren't interested in that. We proposed \$2 billion in savings just over a year ago; 10 ideas on how to not destroy one job in Alberta but how to lessen our bill by \$2 billion. They ignored every single one of those suggestions except one, which was a reduction in the small-business tax. Thank you for that. One thing out of 10. They could do better by just listening to us on this side.

We came forward with a 12-step jobs action plan. Not one of those steps was taken, Mr. Speaker. I would say that we had pretty good foresight because since we came forward with that plan, we've had 60,000 or 70,000 people lose their jobs. Full-time jobs, not part-time jobs. Full-time jobs. These are jobs where people go out to work and bring back the bacon to support their family. Not now.

You wonder why so many people are at home and depressed? It's because they don't see any hope from this government whatsoever. This government is not going out and listening to them. They are going out and telling them. Bill 6 was no different. The carbon tax: well, I think we can clearly see where Albertans are on that and free light bulbs. Mr. Speaker, these people are so out of touch that they might as well go and govern in Ontario. I think they'd be more at home there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to take a lot of time, but I do want to just ask what we get for all of this extra spending that we do. As I've mentioned many times in this place before, we spend about \$2,700 per man, woman, and child in Alberta more than

British Columbia. We spend between \$8 billion and \$10 billion more every year than B.C. does when you adjust for population; \$8 billion to \$10 billion. We're on just over a \$52 billion budget. That's a lot of money. I have been to B.C. I don't think that's any capitalist bastion. In fact, I would suggest to you that since it costs a lot more to, for instance, pave highways and create highways there than it does in Alberta and it costs a lot more for other services, it doesn't really make sense that we're 20 per cent more expensive. We need to avoid long-term debt, and we need to go in a different direction. We need a government that responds and listens to the people.

3:50

But what do we get as a result of all this extra spending? Well, Mr. Speaker, we get one of the highest rates for wait times for key surgeries out of all of Canada. Highest. The only ones that may be approximately the same are the Maritimes. All the rest are better. Go next door to Saskatchewan: three months. Go on the other side, to B.C.: three months. Here in Alberta: eight or nine months. Yet we spend 20 per cent more.

Our education system is more focused on creating lawsuits, fiddling around with experiments, using our children like guinea pigs in the classrooms instead of getting back to the basics. There is nothing wrong for a child that doesn't do their homework for them getting a zero, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing wrong with that. That's what happens in the real world. You don't show up for work, you don't get paid unless you work for the NDP, I suppose.

We need to protect choice in education. We need the freedom for parents to be able to decide for their children what's best. We don't need bureaucrats in downtown Edmonton telling people in rural Alberta or anywhere in Alberta what their parents should do. We need them to allow freedom of choice so parents can decide what's best for their child so their child can decide the future for themselves, and parents know a lot better than bureaucrats do. You know, it was not very long ago, in fact, when I went to school – okay, that was a long time ago – that we were number one in the world in education. I think most of the people here received that education. Number one in the world. And today, Mr. Speaker, we're not even in the top five. Quebec has a better education system than we give our own children, and we spend a lot more on our education than they do.

The Justice file, Mr. Speaker: I don't want to get too started on this, but do you know that the courts, as a result of a court decision, because of a backlog in our Crown prosecutors and this government not giving enough resources to our Crown prosecutors in our justice system – that's exactly why – a murderer was let go just a little while ago? Two accused of sexual assault were let go because they couldn't get to trial because there weren't enough resources, not enough Crown prosecutors or judges or resources generally, and now we find out just a little while ago that there have been 200 cases in Alberta that have suffered the same fate. In fact, many people were let go for impaired operation, DUI charges. Those people didn't even get a slap on the wrist. They were let out without a trial because of lack of resources, and they're back on the streets along with many violent criminals that should go to jail and should stay in jail. That's because this NDP government is not taking our justice system seriously.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Communities feel less safe. Crime is rising across the province, even violent crime, and we get a great idea from the NDP: let's give out free light bulbs while the justice system is being starved, while the health care system is a broken system that doesn't work, and while our teachers are not given the resources and the tools to teach

our children and make them number one in the world. Madam Speaker, they can laugh all they want, but the truth is that they know it. They hear it whenever they leave the dome. I don't think they do that very often, but I can assure you that I do, and when I get a chance to travel the province and to talk to people, I'm astonished by how they feel about this government and the lack of representation they feel they're getting from them.

We need a government, Madam Speaker, that doesn't bring in new taxes without a mandate from the people. Wouldn't that be interesting if the people actually got to vote on the ability to bring in a new tax? You know, this carbon tax is just a 3 per cent PST in disguise, and they know it. Albertans know it. It's not helping. Increasing taxes is taking money out of people's pockets, and it is starving businesses. A government that recognizes that money in the pockets of Albertans is better than in the hands of bureaucrats is what a Wildrose government would do, a government that believes in the unbridled potential of our province and a government that works relentlessly for the people of Alberta on their priorities.

I do believe that Alberta can come back to a place of unparalleled greatness. We want to lead a government that doesn't just tolerate poverty, Madam Speaker, but champions opportunity and tries to eliminate it. I want to fix the health care system so that no other children, no other grandchildren, no brothers or sisters die as a result of negligence. I want to make sure that no other family ever experiences what we did. I want to make sure that when Albertans go to the hospital, they're not seen as simply a number, as a statistic; they're seen as a family member, as somebody that matters and matters to fix not just to treat. It's not about just showing up and finding a comfortable bed. It's about showing up and getting better. That's what our health care system is missing.

I do want our education system to be the best in the world, just like our health care system, and there's no excuse. We have every natural advantage, including the people, including natural resources, including space.

The Alberta advantage. I've over the last year decided what I believe the Alberta advantage was, and I said "was" because it's no more. The Alberta advantage was where everybody in the world wanted to live in Alberta, wanted to raise their children in Alberta, and wanted to work here. The opportunity to move to Alberta meant so much more to people than it does today.

I believe with this vision, the vision of what I'm proposing, it will lead to the greatest job creation that this province has ever seen, the opportunity for people to be able to take their lives back, to be able to find a job in the pursuit they want, and to be able to be educated in that pursuit and for us to be able to have long-term sustainable investment from our government in those core services that are so important to the people of Alberta.

No one in this House believes those core services are not important. Nobody wants to destroy our health care system or our education system. Nobody. We just believe that there are different ways to get to the sustainability. The path out that door and down that lane, Madam Speaker, is a path that is going so far away from where we are right now that it is threatening significantly our ability to provide those core services.

Sooner or later banks will not lend us any more money. Sooner or later we will be paying so much in interest that we will not be paying off principal. That's why we need to turn in that other direction. That's why the Wildrose is here. That's why we fight like we do, Madam Speaker, with words in and out of this House across the province, because we believe Alberta can be great again. And it will be great again. It will be after the next election and the NDP are gone.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's so welcoming by you. It's great to be able to rise and speak just for a moment. First of all, I'd like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his remarks and his comments. I think one thing that we can certainly all agree upon is just how passionate the Leader of the Opposition is about our province and how he brings such an incredible skill set to his role. I'd like to thank him for his leadership of our caucus and of our party. The work that he's doing plays a critical role not only here in the House but right across the province.

One of the things that I know that he's been doing over the last number of months is travelling across the province. We were together in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills last week and had a couple of events, with close to 500 people attending. There's a real sense of excitement around the vision that the Wildrose is casting and the work that's being done. I know that he had the opportunity to spend time in places like the north as well as Drumheller, Stettler, Hanna, Grande Prairie, Calgary. He really has the chance to hear from such a wide range of Albertans. I'm just curious to know if he might share with us just for the couple of minutes that remain here what exactly is the feedback that he's getting from Albertans. What is the feedback that he's hearing with respect to the direction the government is taking, and what is he hearing about where Albertans are in their desire for the Wildrose and the Official Opposition to take a prominent leadership role in the future of our province?

4:00

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I would like to just talk about the facts. Now, the member is right. I did attend two particular events and did speak to about 500 people. With those 500 people – you're not going to believe this – we sold 120 memberships. We asked ahead of time, and most of them were already members. I don't know what that means, but most of the 500 people that came out were already members of our party, yet another 120 bought memberships.

What that says to me clearly is that they're interested in a change, that they want to be more politically involved than they've ever been in the past. It doesn't matter where I go in the province, whether it's Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Calgary or Edmonton, we're selling a record number of memberships because people recognize, I think for the first time in a long time, in generations here in Alberta, that they need to be involved, that they need to join the Wildrose because whatever happens in the future, Wildrose will be a significant part of it.

They've told me that they want a government that responds to the people, that is practical and uses common sense, that makes sure that they're there for the government not in an ideological bend left or right but one that actually solves the problem for the people that is happening at the time. Right now, Madam Speaker, everyone is worried about the economy. Everyone. They said the same thing. The last question my friend asked me was: what are they saying for the future? These Albertans that I speak to are very intelligent, very smart because they're saying exactly what the investment community said to me in Toronto and in New York and Washington: change Alberta's government. That's what we plan to do.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the throne speech? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. I am proud of our government, which in tough economic times is working to make life better for Albertans by doing things like capping electricity rates, freezing tuition, protecting health care, expanding apprenticeship and training, cutting small-business taxes, and avoiding reckless cuts to health care, education, and infrastructure. We are protecting and improving the things that make a difference in the daily lives of Albertans.

Several aspects of the throne speech are particularly relevant to the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, one of which is working with indigenous communities. Between 16 and 20 per cent of my constituents are First Nations living in Maskwacis and Wetaskiwin. It is for this reason that if you could indulge me, Madam Speaker, I would like to have an unofficial opening of this session by starting with an elder Cree prayer. [Remarks in Cree]

A very short prayer just thanking our Creator for the protection that they offer all men, women, and children equally.

I and our government stand with and amongst the Maskwacis leaders – and I'm not just name dropping here; these are my friends: Chief Kurt Buffalo, Chief Darrell Strongman, Chief Randy Ermineskin, Chief Irvin Bull – working for justice, language and culture protection, economic growth, seniors' care, housing, clean drinking water, education, health care, and mental health support.

I have been honoured to have taught so many but have learned so much about life and living from friends such as Lucy Kammer; Dennis Lewis; Jason Currie; statesman, lawyer, and Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Willie Littlechild; grand chief for Alberta Craig Makinaw; political activist Katherine Swampy; social activist Chevi Rabbit; and hundreds more who came out to vote and voted for the New Democrats. They organized rock the indigenous vote against neglect, discrimination, and previous government arrogance and mistreatment.

Working with First Nations, we will continue to address the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We will implement both Jordan's principle, which is a principle that you help first regardless of your jurisdiction, and we will do Gladue reports, as required by the Supreme Court.

Previously, the habit of the provincial government was to refer all indigenous issues to the federal government. This practice will end. All Albertans are Albertans, and we will be the most transformative in developing relationships with First Nations. We will work to ensure that service levels on reserves are brought up to the service levels off reserves. We will foster the collaborative model, which is characteristic of the traditional indigenous way.

I am proud of the work done by the Wetaskiwin regional school division to foster inclusion of First Nation students and families living within the school district. I would like to congratulate the Montana Cree Nation students attending Red Deer College doing the innovative apprentice welding program, and I would particularly like to congratulate Patrick Buffalo for his recognition by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce with an eagle feather award for outstanding business entrepreneurship by Samson Management Ltd. In conjunction with Alberta Education and Maskwacis four nations are forming one education authority to provide consistent, quality education for their 11 schools' students.

Many of my constituents are voicing approval of our clean energy and climate change initiatives. Their actions are speaking louder than the noisy Alberta bashers. The city of Camrose has recently installed the second-largest solar panel system in Alberta on its

recreation centre roof. Augustana campus' new performing arts centre has installed new, innovative exterior wall photovoltaic cells and a new system of LED interior lights, which was the first system not only in Alberta or Canada but in the world. Augustana continues to put up more solar panels on the roof of additional buildings. Camrose is the home of three solar panel installation companies formed in the last year, creating new employment and adding new clean energy self-sufficiency for more and more Camrosians.

Individual entrepreneurs see business opportunities, and some of those visiting my office would say: Bruce, I did not vote for you because I've always been a PCer, but I am excited about new businesses that your government is encouraging. For example, these constituents are moving forward on more efficient furnace baffles; carbon fibre and value-added products; fuel additives which reduce CO₂ emissions, improve mileage and life of engines; and new ways to recycle tires to create new value-added items. And I predict that there will be more.

The county of Camrose already uses biomass fuel to heat their administration building. Let me congratulate city councillor Bill Sears for his personal leadership on renewable energy projects.

Wetaskiwin, likewise, is extremely progressive with regard to green energy. The city would like, in fact, to become the home of the Alberta Energy Efficiency agency, so this is just a gentle hint, wink, and nudge to the ministers responsible for climate change, labour, and economic development. Wetaskiwin city hall has an electric car charger that's free for citizens' use, heats its city hall with geothermal heating, and has solar panels on several city buildings, including the recreation centre and drill hall. Wetaskiwin has replaced every single streetlight with LED lighting.

Bruce Ganske of Wetaskiwin is looking at setting up a school to train certified solar panel installers, and I would like to also recognize Wetaskiwin city councillor Bert Horvey for his leadership in clean energy.

4:10

While the Alberta bashers brag about the opposition to the carbon levy, we are seeing what was once a trickle turn into a groundswell of support for entrepreneurial stewardship, environmental stewardship, jobs, and economic growth. It is heartwarming when growing numbers of constituents come to tell me that they have been on the efficiencyalberta.ca website and have registered for new lights and will change their windows or put up solar panels. By the way, two of the four nations at Maskwacis have already installed solar panels on their administration roofs and hope to soon start on their residential buildings.

The feedback on our government's action on economic development reminds me about how on Family Day for Alberta I had the opportunity to witness the signing of a letter of intent between J and H Aviation of Wetaskiwin, whose owner is John Jeffries, and Shengda Xiang Yun Aviation of China and their manager, Feng Ge, for a \$200 million project to build an airplane assembly plant in Wetaskiwin to produce eight-seater passenger planes. Economic diversification will strengthen our economy and bring jobs to our unemployed.

The Speech from the Throne highlights other achievements, creating jobs not only in the petrochemical sector but also approval of the two pipelines and the two petrochemical plants, which, of course, will help. It is impressive that tax credits will also help business expansion right here in Alberta. It is exciting to support emerging sectors such as aviation, craft brewing, and high-tech food-processing centres such as the one in Leduc, which will support Alberta's agrifood industry. Likewise, Cavendish Farms of Lethbridge will create good jobs for Alberta farmers. The new federal Canada-European trade agreement has the potential to

significantly expand our beef exports to Europe by millions of dollars. Our agriculture and economic development ministers will continue with trade missions, helping to make Alberta a destination for trade.

The recent Conference Board of Canada projection for Alberta to lead all provinces for the next four years in gross domestic production bodes well for all of my Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituents and all Albertans. Alberta led the country in private-sector capital investment in 2016. Alberta will lead the country in economic growth in 2017 and 2018, according to TD Bank as well as other banks.

Alberta has the highest weekly earnings in the country. Alberta has the highest employment rate in Canada. Alberta just led, with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, its largest trade mission in history, and in the last year our exports have increased by more than 13 per cent while the rest of Canada's have decreased by 3 per cent. Alberta has among the most educated workforces, including the highest concentration of engineers in the country. Alberta has the fastest growing population in Canada. Alberta has one of the youngest populations in the country. Alberta has one of the lowest taxes in the country, with a \$7.5 billion tax advantage over Saskatchewan, which is the second best. Alberta's debt-to-GDP ratio is the lowest in Canada. Alberta has the largest economy in western Canada, bigger than British Columbia and Saskatchewan combined. Wetaskiwin for the last two years has set building permit records despite the recession.

Madam Speaker, I have not yet begun to deal with how my constituents are positively thrilled about the reduction of school fees announced in the throne speech. This past Sunday evening six cabinet ministers and over a dozen government MLAs were in attendance at the Alberta Rural Education Symposium. That evening we reaffirmed our commitment to the future-ready initiative: freezing tuition, working with parents to modernize our curriculum, expanding access to student loans, and investing more in apprenticeship and training. Resounding applause welcomed the elimination of those basic school fees, our pledge to restore stable, predictable funding, and our commitment to the construction of more new schools.

We were also able to share our commitment to child care and child protection, to better support students in achieving academic success. In fact, the principal at Norwood elementary school in Wetaskiwin complimented our government for providing the pilot lunch program in his school. He has seen how students who are properly fed are more successful when it comes to behaviour and academic achievement. Albertans have confidence in our government when it comes to guaranteeing quality education.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to another robust sitting of the spring Legislature, where, time permitting, I will have the opportunity to bring forward to the floor a motion other than a government motion and a private member's bill. I have a new desk, looking at the morning sunshine, much closer to you, Madam Speaker, and also Mr. Speaker. I will be keeping my heckling within bounds, maybe.

It is an honour to be here, Madam Speaker, representing the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I thank them for their trust in me.

Tomorrow is International Women's Day, and I would like to thank the women of my life. My wife, Janet, who is so passionate about justice, the environment, health care, and education, is my strongest supporter but also capable of holding me accountable in ways no opposition could. I am proud that the Speech from the Throne was delivered by a woman. Our Premier is female. Half of our caucus are women. Half of our cabinet are women. Half of my constituency association are women. My office, on the fifth floor,

is where we commemorate the Famous Five women. While much remains to be done to have gender equity, I believe Alberta's strength is the growing number of strong female leaders. I salute all the females of this Legislature for their dedication and commitment to social democracy and justice.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If we could just ask you to table tomorrow your prayer in Cree and English so that it can be recorded.

Mr. Hinkley: You want it in English right now?

The Acting Speaker: No. Tomorrow, please.

Mr. Hinkley: Tomorrow. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We hear that our government is going to solve all our problems through this throne speech, but it seems like they've left out a few important things, that I think I would like to take a few minutes to actually bring forward to Albertans.

Now, I went to the Alberta government website, and there was a nice highlight section for this throne speech. I'd like to go off those highlights, if you will. The four highlights are creating jobs and supporting jobs, making life more affordable, protecting public services, and making Alberta a better place for everyone. These are admirable.

Now, I'd like to start with point 1. If the government is interested in creating jobs and supporting them, then I would suggest that the NDP start listening to Albertans. They are telling them that the direction they are taking us in will only lead us to misery, not salvation. The NDP hasn't figured this out yet, that government doesn't create jobs, but it does get in the way of those who do. With the record unemployment in our province, if this government went to a residence, they would find proud, intelligent, hard-working people looking to get back to work.

As the government continues to grow, we are already weighed down by a crippling bureaucracy that just needs to get smaller. Drawing money out of our economy to pay for your pet projects, that have no economic cost analysis done to achieve a goal, that have no goals attached, is what is actually costing us jobs.

4:20

An article in the *Calgary Herald* on March 4, 2017, by Mark Milke, called Alberta's Carbon Tax Is Already a Failure, explains that the premise of the NDP carbon tax is flawed. The passage I will quote does a great job of explaining how our current government is implementing barriers in front of our job creators and for those that are so desperately needing to get jobs.

Here, Alberta's carbon tax is oddly self-defeating. If a government wishes for people to change behaviour, it must levy a tax so punitive that it modifies actions, i.e., less carbon-based activity.

The province obviously intends that as the outcome. Every year the carbon tax is increased, the more punitive it becomes, including for charities such as food banks.

But to offset the higher costs for some, the province is subsidizing just over 1.1 million people. The province claims that will positively affect about 60 per cent of households.

The plan is thus inherently contradictory: The province will tax everyone more in an attempt to change behaviour. It will then subsidize at least one person in 60 per cent of Alberta's households. That [is counter] the government-intended behavioural nudge.

So the government is saying that it wants to stop people from creating greenhouse gases, and then it subsidizes people to do that. That does seem to be contradictory.

The only result that this government has helped when it comes to jobs is their ability to see that my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake is paying the price with high unemployment and a staggering number of empty houses on our real estate market. Instead of stating how the NDP will create jobs, what I would like to hear is: how will you stay out of the way of our job creators?

Point 2. As we move to the point where we need to identify what the government is doing that will reduce our households' costs and will help to make our lives more affordable given that a number of Albertans have lost hours of work, had salary rollbacks, shifted to part-time jobs, or just don't have a job, making life more affordable must be a priority. In 2015-2016 we saw higher personal taxes and business taxes fully implemented. At the start of 2017 we added a carbon tax, that added to our burden. My question to the government is: how does adding more taxes help Albertans? How does it help Albertans thrive? These taxes, that are there to save us, end up being passed on, through purchases of goods and services, to our families. It doesn't matter who you are.

Yet the NDP has assured us that cutting our spending is not the solution, and I will quote the government on that, where they say:

Under former governments the rate of yearly spending growth increases was as high as 11 per cent.

Your government stopped that practice.

Through diligent action and targeted reductions, we are bringing the rate of spending growth down, thoughtfully and prudently.

Guess what? There's nothing prudent about only reducing how much you increase your spending when you're running an \$11 billion deficit. We're still waiting to hear how this will lead to a more affordable life for Albertans.

Why can't this government learn from other provinces' mistakes? Ontario is still learning that if you spend recklessly chasing down a hopeless ideology, it leads to many families choosing between feeding their children, having their utilities cut off, or paying mortgages and rent. If the NDP wants to help make life more affordable, they need to stop blaming the last guys. Axe the carbon tax and the renewable-electricity plan, and reverse most of the legislation that has been a direct attack on our oil sands. This would be a good start. It would also put us back on the road to the Alberta advantage, which will help to keep money in Alberta's families' pockets so they can get through these trying times instead of standing in food bank lines.

Point 3 is protecting public services. This is one point that is actually near and dear to my heart. How do we protect the services that we all value for future generations? Nowhere in the throne speech is debt accumulation or management even mentioned. This is truly astounding. We talk about preserving our public services when we are accumulating approximately \$12 billion in new debt just this year. That's borrowing about one-quarter of your spending. I understand that this isn't the budget speech, but I hear our government has a plan in our throne speech, and it is expected that we start to look down to future generations.

Unsustainable debt doesn't protect public services; it does the exact opposite. It puts everything we hold dear at risk, and it puts what past generations have done in jeopardy, irresponsibly, recklessly. Our parents worked hard to ensure that what was handed

to us would allow for options in the future. If they had been as irresponsible as we are today with the accumulating debt, you would be forced to make even tougher choices. But since you inherited a big credit card with almost no balance, you're just running it up and kicking the giant can down the road. By having stable government through a sustainable, balanced budget, we can ensure that the level of services that we have today will be available tomorrow. If we don't start planning the balancing of our budgets now, we're putting at risk the jobs of our doctors, nurses, teachers, and public employees tomorrow.

The NDP has rapidly increased taxes under the mantra of vague statements like "getting our fair share." Once elected, in the 2015 Speech from the Throne the NDP shared their vision of what a fair share was.

As its second act our . . . government will introduce Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. This bill will ask those who have benefited the most from the boom times in Alberta to now contribute a little [bit] more so that our schools and health care can be spared from chaos and reckless cutbacks. Corporate taxes on [our] largest and most profitable corporations in Alberta will be increased from 10 per cent to 12 per cent; small-business taxes will remain at the current rate, 3 per cent; and progressive income taxes will be reintroduced in Alberta for those earning more than \$125,000.

Now we've seen what it means when the NDP says: fair share. This means tax increases, especially for job creators.

Then we have the 2016 throne speech, where they announced a carbon tax, that again radically increases our taxes.

[The] government will introduce the Climate Leadership Implementation Act to . . . force and effect [the] key elements of Alberta's new climate plan. Every penny raised by this plan during this period of low energy prices will be reinvested back into the economy to create jobs and to promote diversification in our economy.

It looks like we fell off that bandwagon. The NDP considers taxes collected as investments in Alberta. The Wildrose Party considers them as discouraging investment in Alberta. Well, we have seen two years of so-called NDP investment collection now, and all we have witnessed is high unemployment and low actual investment in Alberta's jobs and the economy.

4:30

Our government stated in their 2015 platform that if we raised tax profoundly, we would see balanced budgets within three years. That promise is long broken. They aren't even trying to talk about how to balance anything now. If we avoid the word "deficit," the NDP government considers it to be hidden, and it will just go away.

Let's be crystal clear. Taxes are now the largest expenditure for Alberta's families, not food, not energy, not housing but taxes. With the increase in our tax rates, we haven't seen the success that the NDP promised. That much is clear. All we have seen is continued public service hiring at a time when our food bank use is at an almost record high or record high. This is what happens when government ignores the foundation of low taxes, what has brought success to our great province. Now they are doing irrefutable harm to our Alberta advantage, which makes families in our province and public services more vulnerable.

Point 4, making Alberta a better place for everyone. I must mention that as the shadow minister for Service Alberta I didn't see several major topics this government needs to address. But the one that comes to me as the most serious, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, is nearing a, quote, crisis situation according to our Privacy Commissioner, and nothing is mentioned. We also just had a fentanyl debate, where we are questioning what exactly "crisis" means.

So we have a government that has stated its intent, making Alberta a better place for everyone, but it doesn't begin to address its own lack of following the rules of law. That's shocking. The February 23 . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Is anyone wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much to the hon. member for his response to the Speech from the Throne. I was interested in all the comments that he had and would be interested in hearing more if he'd like to continue.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The February 23, 2017, investigation report by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta is called Investigation into Alberta Justice and Solicitor General's Delays in Responding to Access Requests. Page 3, paragraphs 7 and 8, read as follows:

Among the most concerning of the findings from this investigation, however, are the comments related to the investigator about the lack of respect for access to information across the Government of Alberta (GoA). It is easy to regard access to information as a nuisance, particularly when workloads are increasing and staff levels are not; however, access to information is also a cornerstone of democracy and, as has been said, "democracy dies behind closed doors."

With this in mind, I will repeat a comment I made in the 2013 submission to the Government of Alberta's review of the FOIP Act. In a section titled "Strong legislation is not enough . . .", I said that I "encourage the GoA and heads of all public bodies to lead by example and adopt a culture that respects and balances both access to privacy, and to ensure adequate resources are allocated to administering the FOIP Act and fulfilling legislative obligations."

A second report was done on the same day by the Privacy Commissioner on February 23, 2017. The investigation report was called Investigation into Executive Council and Public Affairs Bureau's Delays in Responding to Access Requests. Page 3, paragraph 4, reads:

The investigation confirmed that the Public [access] had not met legislated timelines in responding to [applicants], and it became clear that a number of factors contributed to these delays including processing practices that involved unnecessary preliminary reviews and internal consultations, as well as lengthy approval processes.

Madam Speaker, it seems pretty clear from this that we have a government that has astoundingly disregarded government transparency and accountability. This is a slap in the face to every Albertan. We have a bureaucracy that is not taking the FOIP as law. Even the Privacy Commissioner has found that it appears that they are not only not taking their jobs seriously, but they are actively preventing FOIP staff from following the law. The government is on the record in a CBC article named Information Commissioner Slams Alberta Government for Poor State of Freedom of Information on February 23, 2017. The quote goes:

She was "disheartened" to read Clayton's criticism. She said the government accepted the reports' recommendations and was already implementing some of the main ones, specifically by hiring more staff in Justice and Executive Council.

"I think a big part of it is putting your money where your mouth is, and make sure you have the staff there to support the work that needs to be done to fulfil the requirements under the law and [our government's] commitment to transparency" . . . A

Justice spokesperson said the ministry now has 14 FOIP staff, up from 10 in 2015, and it plans to hire four more.

This isn't a new problem. It's long standing enough that they already plan to hire more FOIP staff, but that's not going to change the culture, attitude, and political obstructionism. This government's answer has always been to add more money, then hope it fixes the problem. Now, in this particular case I am not saying that the government shouldn't be reviewing the staffing levels based on the workload. I am saying that I want to see a commitment to this Assembly, Albertans, and our Privacy Commissioner that they will add measurement to the FOIP process to ensure that Albertans can see a measurable benefit. We need to see more than putting your money where your mouth is. We need to see results, not more platitudes.

If the government wants to make Alberta a better place for everyone, it should start with actually giving Albertans access to the information on the government inner workings. That is entrenched in law. I appreciate this opportunity to outline . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

The next member that I have to recognize is the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise as we gather here on Treaty 6 territory and the traditional homeland of the Métis in response to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. As we begin this session, I suspect that all members of this Assembly are reflecting on the conversations that they have had in their communities and reflecting on the priorities that Albertans hold dear. Those priorities are undoubtedly shaped by global economic realities. Alberta, being a resource economy, has felt the shift in the global price of oil more sharply than many of our Canadian counterparts, to be sure. But this means that the fundamentals matter most now. Albertans are looking for job creation, and they are minding their pocketbook. It is these priorities that I am happy to see in the Speech from the Throne.

Madam Speaker, these are the same priorities for this government. This government has cut or amalgamated government agencies, frozen salaries of cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff and management in the civil service. This government has been working diligently to streamline spending across government, all while protecting the services our families rely on.

Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree that job creation is one of the foremost duties of any government. In this throne speech we see a commitment to continue to work to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and job creators. I know that many in this Assembly are anxiously awaiting the report from the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future on agribusiness and how we can expand on what is already the world's best agriculture sector. Last year I was pleased to hear of the expansion of the Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator and Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc. I don't envy the Member for Leduc-Beaumont having to repeat that all the time. The Northern Alberta Business Incubator, or NABI, in St. Albert contributes so much to the community of St. Albert. As such, I was pleased to hear that the government was committed to expand more business incubators across Alberta and in our communities to help get good ideas off the ground.

4:40

This government is also committed to infrastructure. Madam Speaker, as you know, there are many projects in my community that were announced several Premiers ago but had not made any progress. Ray Gibbon Drive was first discussed by the Social Credit, and W.D. Cuts junior high school was approved for a

modernization by Premier Getty. While I continue to work toward Ray Gibbon Drive, I'm happy to share with you that I joined the Minister of Education at the ribbon cutting of the modernized W.D. Cuts just a few months ago. These investments are putting Albertans to work and will enable greater economic activity in the future. These investments in infrastructure are making Albertans' lives better now and are ensuring that we are ready for the future.

I was also pleased to hear that this year's Speech from the Throne focuses not only on job creation but on supporting the pocketbooks of Albertans. When I rose to last year's Speech from the Throne, I talked about the need for affordable housing, and I hear that both Spruce Grove and St. Albert along with communities across this province are continuing to pursue affordable solutions for all Albertans. This government is helping these efforts with the creation of an affordable housing strategy.

Madam Speaker, in conversations I have had with Albertans as they come into my office or when I knock on their door, they have expressed concerns about the growth of school fees. You see, many families in my communities and in communities across this province are hard pressed to cover these fees when they come due in September. The reduction in mandatory school fees is a great step forward.

Now, as you know, Madam Speaker, I am proud to see that this government has followed up the commitment to maintaining funding per student for schools and to build additional schools in our communities with the initiative to ensure that Alberta's education system is more affordable for all Alberta families.

Albertans are also pleased with the initiative to cap electricity fees. We've seen massive spikes in the cost of electricity in the past, and this was of great concern to our families. I am pleased to see that this government is taking action to keep Albertans' electricity bills below the average price families have paid in the past decade. In short, Madam Speaker, we are working to ensure that the peaks we saw in the past are not quite as high.

Now, I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to talk about a file that is quite important to me. As you know, I am very proud of my Métis heritage. In recent years I have worked to reconnect with the culture and community my ancestors were pushed away from, but I hesitate to claim an indigenous experience. This work has led me to take a strong interest in the continued efforts our communities and governments are making towards truth and reconciliation.

I was proud to attend the signing of the framework agreement between the Métis Nation of Alberta. This agreement commits to move forward on a nation-to-nation basis and to continue our work toward reconciliation together. I was happy to see that the government has also signed a new agreement with Treaty 8, committing to work on several key priorities that will truly help to make the lives for the people of Treaty 8 better. I look forward to seeing more agreements along this line in the future.

Now, one of the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was to implement Jordan's principle. Jordan's principle is a priority in our government's work on the UN declaration and the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. This principle was initially developed for health care, but I believe that there is great potential for Jordan's principle to be implemented across the board to better the lives of families. Everyone deserves to be supported and to live a safe, healthy life with opportunities to thrive in their community.

As you know, Madam Speaker, Jordan's principle is the idea that governments should ensure that everyone has access to vital services regardless of whether they live on- or off-reserve. No one should suffer because of a dispute between different levels of government over who should pay for medical care. I hope that this

government will continue working with indigenous leadership and with the government of Canada to ensure that no one experiences delays or denials of services due to jurisdictional disputes.

In this Assembly we know that there is an outstanding gap between the education of indigenous youth and everyone else. Madam Speaker, I know that the Minister of Education has been working hard to reduce that education gap. We have seen the establishment of education authorities on-reserve to bring the level of funding up to that of any other Albertan student. All students deserve an education, and I am proud to see that the Department of Education is working to ensure that our indigenous students realize the same levels of education as our other students.

Now, as you know, Madam Speaker, many First Nations communities right across the country are, sadly, left without access to safe drinking water. Many First Nations communities here in Alberta are left with boil-water advisories and have been for many years. That is absolutely unacceptable. I was very excited to see that the throne speech made a commitment to work with First Nations and with the federal government to address the need for access to clean drinking water on reserves, and I look forward to seeing more details on how this government will proceed on that.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I believe that it is government's highest duty to make life better for Albertans. As such, I was happy to hear commitments on job creation and on affordability. I was also proud to see that this government is continuing action on truth and reconciliation and especially on providing clean drinking water for our First Nations.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is the second time today in the House that I've heard references to attending ribbon-cuttings and how proud this government is of the schools that they've built. I'd like the member to expand a little bit on his apparent knowledge of the construction industry. I'd like you to tell me how long it takes to design a school, how long it takes to obtain the land and the permits to build a school, how long it takes to award some pretty significant contracts to get a school built, and then how long it takes to actually build the school. I think that when you start checking those dates, you're going to ask yourself: how can this government possibly take credit for any of the schools that have been opened in 2016?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, just under 29(2)(a) if I might, there's no obligation on the part of anybody to answer any prosecutorial-type questions that somebody might want to ask. The hon. member needs to know the rules.

You know, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments with respect to the Speech from the Throne. As we've said, there's been a significant increase in the capital plan under our government, and to give credit to the past government, the plan that they had put in place was already relatively robust. They had much neglect to make up for from the Klein years and had actually increased infrastructure spending. Because of the recession, we thought it was important to increase capital spending for a period of time in order to put people to work and to take advantage of low prices on construction tenders. That certainly has been paying off very well as tenders have been coming in about 10 per cent lower, and we're able to get more done for the taxpayers' dollars. The previous government had invested, you know, at the peak, so they

were competing with private industry. They were paying premium prices, competing for capital and labour. We've decided to adopt a countercyclical approach and invest when private industry has cut back and try and keep people working, and I think that that's working, you know, very well.

4:50

Obviously, we've continued with most of the projects that were in the capital plan at the time that we were elected. We've continued to do that, and we've made sure that the funding is available for those, and we've added new ones, Madam Speaker. For example, the previous government had cancelled plans to go ahead with the cancer hospital in Calgary. We've resurrected that project and are going to be working very hard to meet the needs of Calgarians.

There are a number of other projects. There is new investment in housing, in affordable housing, new investment in seniors' care that wasn't really there in the past either. We've expanded upon the previous government's expenditures and their program in order to keep people working but also to build critical infrastructure that Albertans need. They need housing that they can afford. Families need that. Really, we need to take better care of our seniors and keep them out of acute care, very expensive acute-care hospital rooms. We're doing that, and we're doing so much more, Madam Speaker. This is about making life better for Albertans, and we're doing that.

You know, with respect to the questions of the hon. member I'm sure this is not an LSAT. This is not a test that is administered by the hon. member to our members. Each member is entitled to stand up and say what's important to them, what's important to their constituents. It's not up to the opposition to try and administer tests on basic knowledge. I might ask the hon. member about his knowledge of labour law, for example, and I'm sure he would struggle with that. He might struggle with a number of other areas that we might raise. The science of climate change might be one of them, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.
The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Spring is a season of new beginnings, when the long winter begins to dissipate and the buds begin to break through. A throne speech, likewise, can be the sign of a new beginning. It can present an opportunity to recalibrate, to readjust, to refocus. Unfortunately, the government missed the opportunity and instead doubled down on the same old misguided agenda, the same old talking points, and the government is still blaming everything on the price of oil. Of course, it's a factor, but incompetent governance, something the Premier does have control over, is the real issue along with unencumbered spending.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Instead of concrete plans on tackling that ever-growing debt and deficit, the throne speech self-congratulated the government on cutting the growth of government spending. This statement is telling insofar as it exposes this government's ideology for what it is, classic tax-and-spend socialism. Bob Rae couldn't be more proud. Only this government can look at an increase in spending and call it a reduction. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the graph of spending in this government, it goes up, but this government comes into this House and says that that's a reduction. It is because this government subscribes to the idea that the budget will balance itself, I guess.

Now, from the throne speech again: "Your government understands this is its core responsibility, to make life better for everyday

Albertans.” Well, I’ll tell you that somebody better call Burger King because I just found their Whopper. This government has made a lot of grandiose claims over its 20 months, but this one takes the cake. They are correct in that government’s first priority should be to make life better for us. Unfortunately, that is where the truth stops. Let’s have a look at this government’s record.

One of the first moves this government made after its election was to call for a royalty review. As the province entered the worst recession in a generation, this government took a hammer to investor confidence. It takes a special kind of someone to look at an entire industry sector that is facing a major downturn and think that it is the best time to establish a royalty review. What followed was the downgrading of Alberta’s credit rating from triple-A to double-A plus and then, finally, from double-A plus to double-A. Instead of looking to our eastern neighbour, Saskatchewan, for inspiration, this government instead looks to the financial pariah, Ontario, the jurisdiction with the highest subsovereign debt in the entire world. They look to them for financial leadership.

The government did get one thing right in their throne speech. “Albertans are worried about the basics: paying the bills, keeping or finding a job, saving for retirement and their children’s education, and caring for loved ones.” However, I find it alarming that we have a government that looks at Albertan families, sees that they are struggling, sees them finding it harder and harder to pay their bills, heat their homes, and put food on their tables, and in response commits to take even more from them. Have they no shame? This government has introduced the largest tax increase in the province’s history, a carbon tax that they never campaigned on, increases to corporate and personal taxes, and a multitude of other taxes and fee increases. In nearly every way this government has made life for the everyday Albertan more difficult and more expensive.

And what does the government do with the money it takes from the hard-working Albertans? It spends it on ridiculous lawsuits with power companies in an effort to cover up its failure to read their own power purchase agreements before instituting their ill-conceived carbon tax. Another of this government’s claims is regarding its long-standing support for our province’s oil and gas sector. By long-standing I guess they mean since 2016.

On June 18, 2015, the Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier, “Can the Premier confirm that building more pipelines to move Alberta’s energy to new markets remains this province’s top intergovernmental and international priority?” The response from the Premier was sad, to say the least. She didn’t answer the question. She talked about the environment, but she didn’t say that this government’s top priority would be getting pipelines.

Now, on November 23, 2015, I asked this question of the Premier. “Will the Premier now start advocating for the Northern Gateway pipeline? Will she start advocating for the Keystone XL pipeline? Or does she prefer that the oil stay in the ground?” The Minister of Environment and Parks answered that question, and you can guess what the response was: more double-talk, no answer, no support for pipelines. So when this government comes in with the Speech from the Throne and says that they have long-standing support for the oil and gas sector, that’s simply not true. The party with the longest record of unwavering support for oil and gas is the Wildrose, a fact that I’m incredibly proud of.

As a province we are too dependent on selling our energy products to one customer, our southern neighbour, the United States. The government’s climate leadership plan gets pipelines? If that was true, what happened to Northern Gateway? Maybe if you’re Meat Loaf, two out of three ain’t bad, I guess, but for Albertans it was just another opportunity passing us by.

In spite of Alberta’s climate leadership plan the federal government still cancelled the approval of the Northern Gateway pipeline.

What was this government’s response? Nothing. They said nothing. Crickets. When the rubber finally met the road, this government blew it like an overinflated tire full of hot air. On this side of the House we proudly support pipelines in all directions because pipelines are the safest and most environmentally friendly way to get our products to market. The government promises that “Trans Mountain is not the end of our market diversification efforts.” No, the end of this government’s market diversification efforts was the Northern Gateway.

The government recently announced their latest boondoggle, the residential no-charge energy savings program. It’s the program where certified installers go house to house installing light bulbs, power bars, and night lights. Not only is this program a gross misuse of taxpayer funds; it shows a total lack of respect for Albertans’ intelligence. Electricity came into widespread use in Alberta in the 1920s and ’30s. Since that time Albertans have been changing light bulbs in their own homes without any difficulty. It is preposterous to believe that since the implementation of this government’s carbon tax just two short months ago the average Albertan has somehow forgotten how to install a light bulb or plug in a night light.

5:00

I’ll close with this question. How many Albertans does it take to screw in a light bulb? The answer is none because we’re going to pay the government to do it for us, I guess.

Now I’ll move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to introduce today Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, for second reading.

In 2015 our government campaigned on a platform that we would make life better for Alberta families, and among our major commitments was a pledge to invest in reducing the burden of school fees on Alberta families. I am so proud today to advocate for this bill, which follows through on this commitment at a time when Alberta families need it most. I am a teacher myself and a parent, and I have seen first-hand over the years and experienced the impact that fees have had on Alberta families. They went unregulated for far too long, and they acted as a barrier to public education.

I know, just as a high school teacher, for example – it was more than 10 years ago – that when the fees were still running into the hundreds of dollars that many of the kids, when they hit the end of the line signing up in September, you know, were embarrassed to not be able to pay that fee. Of course, individual schools might try to compensate for that and quietly talk to people. But, Mr. Speaker, that’s not a way to run the financing of schools. Certainly, it’s time for us to make a change on this, and together – I’m so very proud of my caucus and cabinet and our Premier that finally we’re here to start cleaning this up.

This bill, through a series of amendments and the creation of a new school fee regulation, will effectively eliminate school boards’ abilities to charge on two specific types of school fees, instructional supply or material fees and busing fees for eligible students travelling to their designated school. If proclaimed, this legislation would also provide the government with increased authority over all school fees.

The savings that come out of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, will be seen immediately this fall and will total more than \$50 million annually. That's more than \$50 million moving into the pockets of our families that have kids in school. This is money that families can spend on groceries and clothes for their kids, on their mortgages, or that they can put aside into savings.

As important is the long-term work that will be driven from this bill as well. Our government intends to consult further on school fees with parents and school boards, and together we will redefine what public education is and what parents should or should not be paying for.

Each year school boards collect more than \$200 million from Alberta families in various fees. Bill 1 would reduce this by 25 per cent, and we have intentions of making further reductions in the years ahead. The bill will prevent charges for things like textbooks, workbooks, paper, and so much more. Parents may know these fees by various descriptions across the province: instructional fees, instructional material fees, basic fees. There are so many different names. Regardless of what they are called, they cause a significant financial strain on our families.

Take, for example, the impact of school fees on one family, Brandi and Hardeep Rai, the proud Edmonton parents of five children between the ages of six and 12. The Rais have three children attending Parkland school division and two in Edmonton public schools. They pay hundreds each year in fees: a combination of instructional fees, lunchroom fees, and technology fees. These fees continue to rise every year. The instructional material fee in Edmonton public is set at a school level in elementary, and it's usually quite modest, but it rises to \$50 a child in junior high, and then it moves to \$145 in high school. I had the pleasure of the Rai family coming to watch us as we introduced Bill 1 last Thursday. This bill will save them some money this fall. There's no doubt about that, and over the long-term Brandi believes that it could amount to about one thousand dollars or more in savings just for that one family.

Mr. Speaker, it's significant, and you know, it's high time that we did this. Certainly, I think that school boards were always trying to put the best foot forward for a strong public education for all of the students that they were responsible for. But, quite frankly, the long-term sort of unstable funding that they had to live under really caused school boards to try to stabilize things with individual fees. They tried their best, but of course the first thing that we did as a new government was to ensure that we funded for enrolment, that we projected long-term, stable funding so that school boards could be reassured that they didn't have to keep jacking fees up over the long term.

Mr. Speaker, this is the next phase along the way to rationalize the financing of our schools, to reduce school fees. I mean, just taking this one basic ISM fee and then financing the busing of students to their eligible schools is more than \$50 million. We know that there is more work to do, but certainly what a significant start. It's not easy to do this during these difficult economic times, but then, of course, if our government is having a difficult economic time, we can only imagine that families are having a difficult time of it as well.

We're pretty proud of this move forward. I know that it is a reasonable and measured response to school fees, and it will help us to reduce school fees further and rationalize and equalize the school fee situation across the province over time.

The bus situation is another issue that we're starting to address here with Bill 1.

We note that poor planning and a lack of funding from previous times, previous governments led to delays in building projects and so forth. You know, it should be noted that with our capital project

builds, more than 50 schools are being opened here in the fall. Yes, of course, over time the previous government did announce and build these things, but we built a rational approach by which we could build and have those schools open on time at a much greater rate than was projected before.

Once I got a full picture of what was going on, there were more than 50 per cent of school projects that were late. We brought that down very significantly by building a much more rational approach together with school boards and Infrastructure and the Department of Education to ensure that we could have those schools open on time, to cut those ribbons and to allow thousands of kids to enjoy new schools right across the province.

You know, it's interesting. Just as an aside, Mr. Speaker, at every turn I made sure if a school was being built in an opposition riding to invite that opposition MLA to come and participate in the festivities and also to invite and have the former MLAs that helped to build those schools and planned for them attend those festivities and have them acknowledged in the various school openings that we had over the last number of months. It's very important to recognize that. It's very important to recognize the difference between reaching out and being fair to what is actually happening on the ground or, otherwise, making some sort of snide and unfair comments about taking credit where you're not able to do so.

Our government – what we do do is make sure that we reach out and give credit to all people who are involved in building a more progressive Alberta by building schools and putting teachers in those schools, too. You can't just build a bunch of rooms and buildings and doors and windows. We, through funding through enrolment, actually put schools and support staff and everybody else into those programs as well and to finance their enrolment over time.

You know, it's a little lesson in humble pie, which is a much easier thing to digest and eat than a bologna sandwich, which I was tasting previously. I hope that everybody is reminded about that as they move forward.

5:10

An Hon. Member: What's wrong with bologna?

Mr. Eggen: Well, no. I'm a fan of bologna. I don't want to denigrate bologna sandwiches. With a fair bit of mustard in there, they taste pretty good.

Anyway, back to looking in terms of the busing. You know, we're looking to make sure that we are helping because the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, in many places, especially where we saw rapid growth, places like suburban Calgary and Edmonton and other places like Rocky View, say, for example, is that you had a school being built, but it was oversubscribed as soon as the school went in. So they would hold lotteries – right? – for kids to be able to go to those schools. You can have a circumstance where you live right across the street looking at the school, and you lose the lottery, and you end up having to be bused many kilometres away. By paying for that busing for eligible students, I think we are providing a degree of fairness and are opening the door to more school fee and busing reform and transportation reform down the road, working together with school boards and parents and families.

That was a very interesting time last week. We've seen lots of good support from school boards and parents' associations across the province in regard to taking a stab at reducing school fees. We had the Alberta School Councils' Association that told me that families report that their annual school fees sometimes will cost more than Christmas, Mr. Speaker, for kids and for families, people taking out loans for their school fees in the fall, borrowing against their houses just to send their kids to public school.

I also was just, as many of my colleagues were as well, at the Rural Education Symposium here in Edmonton last Sunday. We had a chance to speak to more than 200 school board representatives from right across the province. Again, they were echoing the same enthusiasm for reducing school fees, and they really thought it was a big step forward because, of course, for our level of government and trustees and so forth, this is a perennial problem for them, Mr. Speaker, dealing with school fees and bus fees and so forth. So, you know, we're reaching out to ensure that school boards are getting that support, that we're covering from the government to do so, and that they're not compromised in any way with other programming or teachers and all of that kind of stuff.

You know, I want to reassure Albertans every step of the way that our program to reduce school fees here will not result in any compromise in other education programming that we have here in the province, that we will make sure that kids are getting the education that they need, and that the reduction of school fees is only a net benefit to them and their families to have that access to public education that they so deservedly should have.

Anyway, we're moving on, and there are questions, and we will help to try to resolve those over time. School boards have requested the opportunity to have their say in the development of regulations related to these fees, and, Mr. Speaker, we're happy to do so. We will work with them because, of course, they know where they are at better than anybody else, and they know where they need to build their fees and to have regulations that allow some greater equality across the province.

What I did hear was a recognition that the amount charged in school fees each year widely varies, so we are intending to take action on this as well. As I've said, our initial focus will be on instructional supplies and material fees because that's where we see the greatest measure of equity possible. You know, I won't pretend, Mr. Speaker, to say that from school board to school board there's not some differential in the immediate year or two or three of building this out because, of course, some school boards charge a lot more fees, some places charge fewer fees, and so forth. This isn't just a way to save money for families across the province. This is also a way to try to pull these things in, to have them responded to in a more equal manner across the province.

Almost every school board charges a fee at some level. We do recognize two school boards that don't, and we will be giving them, based on their population, some equivalency of compensation for them to build programming. Those two school boards in northern Alberta, you know, of their own choice – and I thank them for that – had already eliminated school fees. We will, based on population, compensate them in the appropriate manner so that they are part of this initiative as well.

The removing of the fee will lead to immediate savings for parents in nearly 600,000 Alberta families, Mr. Speaker, so it's a pretty good deal. There are many sitting in this House here now, if you have children, that might, you know, see this benefit yourselves and for all of your constituents, right? It's a pretty big deal. Like I say, the Rai family is a good example of literally hundreds of thousands of families that will derive a benefit from this.

I just want to carry on. Of course, you know, we're talking about the importance of technology in our schools – it's very important, too – and we want to make sure that our students are ready for their future careers in a diversified economy.

This is where the new school-fee regulation comes in, to allow us to start to set some rules for fees and justify to families what the money they do spend is going towards. This regulation would affect all fees, Mr. Speaker, charged by school boards. Right now various sections of the act refer to the charging of fees: for example, section 30 deals with fees charged by public boards for early childhood

services programming, section 34 addresses fees charged by charter schools, and section 60(2) addresses field trip fees. Amendments to these sections would ensure that school boards charging fees for these purposes must follow requirements of the new school-fee regulation.

After section 39 Bill 1 would also add a section that would expressly provide the minister – that's me – with regulation-making authority with respect to school fees. There is currently no such authority under the School Act. As I already described, a number of existing sections within the act currently authorize boards to charge fees; however, these fees are not legislatively regulated. This proposed section contains a listing of authorities in addition to general powers that the minister would specifically be able to address through the regulation.

These additions, Mr. Speaker, are broad enough in scope that they would provide the authority to deal with all matters related to school fees. For example, section 39.1(2) of the act would allow the minister to make regulations respecting fees parents may be charged by boards, including but not limited to authorizing the charging of fees, defining fee types or costs, limiting the amount of fees or costs that they may be charged by the board, the refund of fees or costs, the waiver of fees or costs, the establishment of policies and procedures by boards in respect to school fees, school fee reporting by boards, and penalties or sanctions for a board's failure to comply with the regulations respecting fees or costs.

Specific to transport fees, or busing fees, Mr. Speaker, the amendments are in section 51(3). This section currently allows boards subject to the current transportation regulation to charge fees. Through the amendments the boards' current fee-setting authority to charge transportation fees would be shifted somewhat. Instead of explicitly being permitted to charge fees, they would not be able to do so unless they adhere to the regulation, including the new school-fee regulation. This provides greater ability to regulate certain transportation fees, which, like I've outlined before, we certainly intend to do.

Now, for the amendment that will along with the forthcoming regulation lead to the elimination of instructional supply and material fees, section 60(2)(j) of the School Act currently allows a board to charge parents for instructional supplies or materials. Bill 1 would repeal this section, Mr. Speaker. The new school-fee regulation would then establish which fees may or may not be charged.

5:20

Finally, section 124 currently provides parents with a mechanism to request a ministerial review of matters pertaining to fees after an appeal to the school board. Through these amendments parents will continue to have the right to request a ministerial review of these matters but only after a specified process has taken place. This new process will outline requirements boards must follow to address the parental concerns regarding fees or costs. This review process will be another mechanism to hold boards accountable for requirements regarding school fees.

Overall, then, this legislation will strike a balance between making life more affordable for Albertans with families immediately and giving us flexibility to see further reductions and rationalizations over time.

Since I tabled Bill 1 last week, Mr. Speaker, I've seen lots of support from parents and from school trustees and from teachers and many more quarters of our society. Albertans know how important this legislation is. There's high anticipation for it, and I'm very, very proud to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Wildrose has been pushing for all mandatory fees to be scrapped since 2012, so I am extremely, extremely grateful to see this government step up and make changes so that public school boards can stop charging fees for instructional materials. Fees should not be charged for instructional supplies and other basic needs. This is a most welcome and sensible change, so thank you.

This is a massive win for Albertans as well, so I congratulate the government on its ability to find the efficiencies within the government and to fund, well, it's actually \$54 million or so so that the burden of this bill is not shifted onto the school boards. Boards are already struggling with increasing costs due to the carbon tax and are trying to find a way to provide a quality education for all of our students, especially at this time when we have scarce resources. Each school board has done their best to work within the fiscal constraints with insufficient funding, lack of autonomy with respect to so much of the funding that they do receive.

Next to parents our teachers are the most important and influential people in the lives of our kids. I would personally like to take this opportunity to thank our teachers for their hard work every day, their adaptability to changing environments and expectations. I would like especially to thank the people of Alberta and the public school boards for their dedication and their contribution to this bill through their lobbying and pressuring this and previous governments to find ways to be able to meet the growing financial pressure.

We are immensely privileged to be here in Alberta and to live here, but we are facing extremely challenging times, so this bill is a good start, and again I'd like to thank the minister for tabling it.

I do look forward to full discussion and debate on this bill, and, as always, I have some questions, so I'm going to jump right in. I'd like to look first at transportation, and this is a highly, highly complex funding model. I have to admit that when I first looked at it, at the funding manual, I literally went cross-eyed. Kudos to the government for wading in, but I'm wondering if the public may not be better served if the funding model could be simplified. It might be something you want to think about, going through this process, so that we actually understand what the provisions in Bill 1 for transportation mean.

Some of the questions that I've heard from school boards include things like: do all public schools benefit from this bill, or are there just a chosen few? The minister was mentioning that he had met with rural schools, so I look forward to finding out what that means for rural school boards, that travel literally millions of kilometres each year. As for our urban schools, what does this mean for urban school boards, that may not travel as far but who transport thousands of students every year?

Also, what does this mean for parents who send their children to a specific program outside of the mileage parameters that meet educational requirements of the child but that is not a designated program? I mean, I have personal experience with this. My youngest son did not go to his designated school because of the disabilities that he had when he was younger. We were fortunate enough to be able to go through Renfrew services. That's quite a distance from Chestermere, as you can imagine. I'm looking forward to having that discussion to find out what the parameters are of that, especially if there's not a designated special education program in that area. A lot of public schools actually provide special education programs, but as I'm sure the minister would agree, Mr. Speaker, the parent is obviously the best person to make the decision as to the education of their child, especially if there are specific requirements for that child. So I look forward to having that discussion as to how that's going to be determined and if the parents will be consulted in that as well.

Also, what does this mean for families whose children take urban transportation? Also, there are families who drive their children to school because the bus rides are too long and the walk distances to the congregated bus sites are too far. We have lots and lots of rural folks who have driveways that are miles and miles long. I'm sure any of you who've door-knocked in rural areas know how long some of those driveways can be on a cold, stormy day when you're walking up there. You know, having little munchkins walk down those long, long driveways is not always feasible. Just curious about that, too.

One of the number one messages that I heard from the education stakeholders is that one funding model – and this is really important – does not meet the idiosyncratic needs that we see across the province. We just have to make sure that this model looks at all of the various and thumbprint issues that each of these school boards has. So I look forward to the consultations on that to see how that's going to go forward.

When it comes to a transportation funding model, one size fits no one. Again I go to the transportation funding model. It's very, very complex. So I'm looking forward to those discussions.

What measures will be built into the regulations to allow the school boards some flexibility in using the funding to meet the needs of their communities? I believe I heard the minister mention that school boards may be or will be consulted and included in that discussion to figure that out and how that's to go along within the regulations. I'm sure the school boards will be pleased to hear that that consultation will happen.

On another note, I applaud the government for finding efficiencies to underwrite the \$54 million that is being billed for this cost. Many of us would like to know where those efficiencies come from and if we will see similar new efficiencies each year to cover the ongoing costs associated with this bill. I believe I heard the minister say that this is an annual thing; it will be year after year. Again, I look very forward to the discussions on finding out where those efficiencies were found. If you found \$54 million this year, will you find another \$54 million next year, adjusted, of course, for the increasing costs of the carbon tax and then, of course, the successive years that follow and the sustainability of making sure that school boards and parents are going to be able to depend on this program that reduces fees in schools?

I have a lot of questions about the transportation fees, and I look forward to learning more about that as we go through debate in this House.

I also have a couple of questions about the instructional material fees. My main question is: what is a basic instructional fee? These reductions in school fees: are they limited to the provided list within the bill? If so, we could see some trouble as future ready, as the minister would know, sets out a vision of education that moves well beyond the four walls of the classroom and the school. To bring future ready alive, school boards will have to offer a wide variety of options for students to allow them to take advantage of the dual credit opportunities, to participate in learning activities outside of the school, and to apply that learning to life outside the school. Teachers will also have to provide a whole array of learning opportunities that fall well beyond the realm of photocopying and workbooks.

5:30

The minister was mentioning about field trips and technology and other things. We just need to understand if those are included or not included in the fee reductions. Again, I look forward to discussions to find out the logistics and some clarity on where these dollars are being spent. While on one hand this government looks to foster a

new and forward-thinking model of education, we are hoping that that funding will follow with that mandate.

There are a couple of troubling things, and this just goes to historical issues within this Legislature, with a bill coming forward and the consultations following. Much of this bill will be fleshed out through regulation, which doesn't happen in here. The government has followed this pattern of consultation since they were elected, and it's disturbing. While the intent of the bill is laudable, the implementation may fall short of its intention. Again, we would encourage that many, many of these things that the government is thinking about doing be brought forward here in the debate of the bill so that we can have some stakeholder outreach and have some feedback while we're all in the House to discuss this together.

Given the unsettled climate within the education community these days – I mean, we have, as you know, been very vocal about the secrecy with the curriculum rewrite, with regard to associations that are impacting the curriculum rewrite; the union and lobby groups, Mr. Speaker, that are pushing governments to defund independent schools; public school boards calling for Catholic schools to be incorporated into the public model; and many, many other conflicts. I've heard concern that this bill will be passed before appropriate consultation has given shape to the substance and the provisions of the bill.

There's also some confusion – we've heard this, and I don't know if the minister has heard this as well; again, I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say about this – about why the bill is being tabled now. Previously I believe the minister had stated that the election promise of reducing school fees by 50 per cent would not see the light of day until 2018. So while I'm very grateful, I am curious as to the reasoning behind this. With 50 per cent, we would have seen a much larger reduction.

Is the bill a partial recognition of the devastating impact of the carbon tax on school boards and families? Better yet, the government could just scrap the carbon tax and add in this reduction of fees, and you would have a perfect recipe to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I do indeed applaud this government's actions in introducing this bill, and I truly, with all my heart, recognize that this is a step in the right direction. But I believe that all of us in this House need to take some time to be convinced that the government has considered the full implications of the provisions of this bill, and I'm very much looking forward to more discussion and receiving some of the answers to the questions that I've asked.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand here in support of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, in second reading. You know, it was one of the key campaign promises. Being in a suburban riding in the south end of Calgary, I really heard from a lot of constituents that it was something that was very important for them, something that they would rely on us as well to make sure that we follow through.

You know, it's funny. Many of us here are blessed to be parents, have heard the great news of finding out about motherhood or fatherhood, and many of us here have held a newborn baby in our arms. The number one thing that we never really thought about when this was coming down the pipe was: what's my busing fee going to be? If I live near my designated school, am I going to lose the lottery? Realistically, it becomes a very big shock when you get closer and closer to that first day of school and you find out what the burden is going to be, especially if you have a larger family.

You yourself, Mr. Speaker, said once that you don't know where you're going unless you look at where you've come from. I'm going

to reflect back and share sort of my experiences as a young parent. I've shared some of them before in this House, about being a 21-year-old and having my first child. It was an exciting time. We made the choice to move back to Calgary from Ottawa after our son was born. We never really thought about school fees in Alberta, what was happening and how they were gradually and gradually increasing, especially when it came to busing fees. To be honest, as we moved forward on buying a house, we wanted to make sure that our kid had a good school, but we also had to make sure that our house was affordable. So, as many experience, our house and the area that we lived in was a little bit further from our school than what was ideal.

As I was building my career and developing as a young person who's trying to build a profession as a young parent, there was something I experienced in the '08 recession. I actually had to deal with a 25 per cent income decrease because of many variables that existed within my employment, like many families are dealing with today here in Alberta. So as I'm continuing to pay these bills that aren't going to go down, like mortgages and insurance, I start getting closer and closer to the date that my son is going to be going to school. And I was blessed to find out in 2008 that I was going to have another child. Eventually what ended up happening was we started learning what the school fees were going to be, and I reflected back to when I was in school, which wasn't too, too long ago. The busing fees weren't as high as they are today, especially in Calgary, especially in the public board.

Right then I was dealing with this area where I was on the cusp of what would be defined as low income. I refer to it as sort of the no-man's-land, where you're not eligible for any benefits, but you're really pinching every penny to get by. I remember hearing on the news a year out of my first son going to school about a hike in busing fees because there was a shortfall in the CB's budget, and that got a bit scary because, you know, I was reflecting back to what it was going to be.

Right now in Calgary our busing fees in the public system sit at \$335. Now, I reflect on the fact that I had a third child. That would be over \$1,000 to take my kids through school, and to reflect back to where my income was sitting when my first son was going to school, I was going to be paying 4 per cent of all the money in my pocket to bus my kids to school, just to bus my kids to school. That didn't include any of the other fees that were coming in there, including instructional fees.

When you're a young parent, you have a lot of pride. You know, you don't want to seek that help. Sometimes people look at you, and you feel like you're being stigmatized, so you don't necessarily seek the help that you need. I'm going to tell you that, especially when it came to that September fee for my first son, that was around a time where it was paycheque by paycheque. That was around a time where, yep, you're going to have holes in your knees for a little bit longer. It was really tough, and this is a basic necessity. This is a basic necessity that as a taxpayer I'm already paying into and the generation before didn't have to pay as much for, so you're really questioning the equity around this. Fortunately, I had a little bit of a shift in career and was able to move up, and it became a bit more affordable for us to maintain that.

But I reflect back to many other variables. I reflect back to where it's a single parent, how when you're a single parent and you have a situation where you're raising a family by yourself, it's a lot harder for you to progress through any structural system and move up the ranks. The reality here in Alberta is that a lot of our single parents, not all of them, are women, and the reality here in Alberta is that there is a huge pay inequity that exists between men and women. I can only envision the burden that we see on many of these single, stay-at-home moms who are in that no-man's-land that I

speak of, where they're not eligible for the supplements and the subsidies for busing, or they carry that pride because they want to show that they can do it on their own and they don't seek them out.

Growing up in northeast Calgary I saw a lot of challenges. I would say that with our new Canadians there are a lot of language barriers that exist. So a lot of people are not aware that these subsidies do exist, or they're worried about trying to seek them out, or there's a lot of pride that exists with it, as I just spoke about.

5:40

When we reflect back to how much is collected by school boards, it's a significant amount of money. It's over \$200 million. Now we're helping assist with backstopping the school boards, which is something similar to what we saw with the tuition freeze. It's our government making sure that not only are we going to implement a policy, but we're going to make sure that we support our stakeholders when we do it.

In the past we used to see mandates – and I use the tuition freeze as an example – where we would say: we're going to freeze tuition; figure it out. One thing that our government acknowledged is that there are many variables that cause increases in overall costs for many of these institutions, so when we implemented a tuition freeze, we made sure that we backstopped our postsecondaries so that they weren't going to take an unnecessary burden, so that we didn't see unnecessary cuts that were going to the classroom, so that we could allow them to continue to accept as many students as possible. That's one thing that we're supporting with this policy. Not only are we implementing the policy; we're helping our stakeholders get there.

It's important to recognize, too, that for many of the people who are in their designated areas and who are busing their students, when we speak about, on average, that a lot of parents are going to see a 25 per cent decrease, to be candid, especially in a lot of the newer communities in Alberta, some of them are going to see potentially more than a 50 per cent increase because they're paying a significant amount of money for their busing fees.

Recently we had the opportunity to have the minister down in Calgary to speak to many stakeholders, including the Calgary school board, about this policy and about moving forward with it. Unfortunately, I didn't have a chance to attend that because I was down in Auburn Bay with the Member for Calgary-South East to open a new school there.

I chatted with a lot of the administrators and a lot of the principals there. We've seen a significant amount of growth in south Calgary, and unfortunately we weren't catching up to the school builds that we needed to with the growth that we're facing in that area. I spoke with some of the administrators about the student population that we're seeing there. They had over 600 kids from day one in that school – 600 – so the reality is that even though the new developed community of Auburn Bay down in the south end has that new school, there is a huge possibility that not all of the kids are going to go there, that some of the parents who live in that community may end up having to bus their kids anyway.

The reality is – and you hear this all the time in Calgary; you hear it in the radio ads and you see it in any of the advertisements they do for any new development – that there's a perception, a misleadingness that happens because they talk about: oh, a new school is coming in this area. Well, the reality is that there is designated school land, and the reality is that we might be breaking ground or that the community is very new and there might only be 50 kids living in that area. But the reality is that there isn't a school right now, there isn't a school for that kid in that area, and the child has to be bused.

Subsequently, these families who've moved into this area because it's going to be a new, well-developed area for a family are going to face this heavy burden. In Calgary specifically, a lot of young families go into our suburban areas. A lot of them, building their careers and sometimes dealing with financial hardships, live in those areas because they're affordable and we've seen inflation in more centralized houses. Just as I spoke about, most families, when they're holding their newborn child, aren't thinking about the school fees that they're going to have to pay. So they ultimately face the heavy burden that parents who have to pay for these busing fees face.

Now, the one challenge that I've always acknowledged that we face with this is that there's been a gradual increase in costs, and the previous government was not looking at ways that we could ultimately support this long-term growth. So we saw gradually a lot of things that were eroding within how much people are paying for bus fees. One thing that we specifically saw in Calgary as well is the subsidy for transit passes. Most high school students take public transit to school because their high school is maybe far away, especially because we have a lot of centralized high schools in Calgary, so a lot of students end up going, you know, dozens of kilometres in some cases. Myself, even, when I was in high school, I went from literally the end of Calgary to downtown to go to high school on a city bus.

An Hon. Member: Was this four years ago?

Mr. Sucha: Unfortunately, no. It was not four years ago. I don't show the grey yet.

With that being said, the fact of the matter is that in the past there was a significant subsidy that parents received for having to pay for public transit passes, and that subsidy has eroded. One thing that our government is looking at is supporting that subsidy as well as we move forward with this program.

The one thing that we have really shown as we implement policies like the tuition freeze, as we implement policies, as we saw, similar to the TEBA board, looking at collective bargaining negotiations with our school boards, is that we've always had a collaborative approach with our stakeholders. We're going to continue collaborating with organizations like the ASBA and all 61 school boards here in Alberta to ensure that we can implement this in a very fair and transparent way, that we can continue having these conversations as well.

You know, when you look back at some of the instructional fees that many people are paying – I mostly spoke about busing fees – the fact of the matter with our instructional fees is that as you go up the grade levels, surprisingly, as I've learned, the older your kid gets, the more expensive they become, especially when you're looking at activities like sporting activities. The instructional fees also start to increase. We've gradually seen an increase in our instructional fees that has not really matched the level of inflation, so it's been that heavy burden that a lot of our students are realistically facing.

Reflectively, I'm very excited to move forward with this because I know it's going to impact over 600,000 students, and realistically it's something that we've always committed to. It's a way that we can help many parents during these hard economic times, and it's a way that we're continuing to make life more affordable for Albertans. It's a way that we reflect on and look at people who are marginalized, people who don't need handouts, those who are lower income, similar to myself a few years back, but who are working hard, are pulling those 50-hour workweeks.

You know, it wasn't like I was looking for a handout when I was a parent. I was coming home at 2 a.m., waking up at 7 to bundle up

three kids, sometimes holding two of them in my arms because they get tired and don't want to walk, to drop my first son off at school. I always reflect on the anxiety that used to come as September was coming closer, trying to figure out how we were going to pay for this, having to maybe delay that credit card bill or maybe having to think twice if I'm going to actually make that cable bill or that telephone bill.

You know, many of these commitments, similar to what we've seen with the investments that our government has made for low-income transit passes and the supports that we're doing with some of our municipalities to really encourage supports for lower income and marginalized people, are really trying to widen that gap because we do recognize, especially in a province like ours, that for many individuals it can be really tough to try to have these essentials, and ultimately school is something that's essential for all kids.

We need to do what we can to remove the barriers for parents, to make sure that ultimately our schools have all the tools they need to succeed and that we follow through with the commitments that we've made. This is the first step as we move forward in our mandate. It's something that I'm proud of, and I know that the constituents of Calgary-Shaw and all Calgarians are going to be happy that we moved forward with this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A question under 29(2)(a)?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yes.

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for quite an enlightening, I guess, discussion about the bill.

Now, I was certainly a single parent for quite some time, and I remember actually walking and dropping my daughter off and carrying her to take her to school. If you'd just tell me a little bit more about kind of where you think we need to go in terms of giving support in this area.

Mr. Sucha: You know what? I think that we're making some great strides, and this is the first step as we move forward. I really reflect back to the biggest burden as a young parent who dealt with some challenges in relation to a little bit of financial hardship. That was the biggest anxiety, to be completely honest and to be completely candid. That's why, you know, when I was sitting here for the throne speech and we were moving forward with first reading of Bill 1, it got really exciting for me.

5:50

You know, I had an individual here, whom I invited, who's with the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Calgary. We reflected on how this would possibly impact a lot of people. It was very funny because we actually sort of grew up in the same area of Calgary. It was sort of these parallels in life.

You know, it's very easy, when we sit here, if we've had good jobs for a long period of time or if we've had our career for 25 years or if we're in a situation where we're becoming a grandparent, to kind of forget what it was like to be raising those kids and the challenges that we had with the finances.

It's also important to reflect back – you know, it wasn't that long ago; it was only 25 years ago – to when a house in Calgary was a five-digit number and when you didn't have to deal with as many technologies to make sure that we keep our school systems modern. It's important to reflect back that I was going to school at a very interesting time because it was when we faced a lot of heavy, heavy

cuts. We started to really see that in the implications in the classroom, even when I reflect to myself on the troubles that I had learning how to read and write as a young child and the lack of supports that I had in the classroom, because it gradually went up from 20 students to 30 students, where the teachers were overwhelmed.

So we have a choice to make here, ultimately, and it's either (a) heavy cuts and letting our students pay for it and ultimately impacting our economy in the long term or (b) supporting our essential services and our education system and making sure that we move forward in supporting those families who need it most and reflecting on how we can support them through reductions in things like school fees. Ultimately, we're looking at it as – you know, I'm going to call it the way I reflect on it, that it's almost like a flat tax in many respects.

One thing that we asked Albertans when we were standing up during the election – and this is one of the key things that we said over and over again, and people looked at it as our mandate – was that we asked for those who reaped the benefits of our province, who are earning a little bit more, to pay just a little bit more. Realistically, we still sit here with one of the lowest tax jurisdictions in the country. We're reflecting on how we can move forward with this, and it's asking those who might earn \$200,000 to pay a little bit more so that we can support those families earning under \$40,000, who are struggling to get by day after day, have that support and not see the soaring costs that come from these fees and ensure that we continue to fund for enrolment, ensure that we can give their kids the best-quality education.

At the end of the day, these kids are going to be the ones taking care of all of us in this province when we get old, and they're going to be the ones sitting in these chairs. Maybe it reflects our government sooner than expected. Nonetheless, it's important that we make sure that we do everything we can to support these students moving forward.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It looks like we'll have a few minutes left to wax eloquent on Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, a welcome addition to the Legislature. I think you'll find unanimous consent for this and maybe not unanimous consent for how you're going to finance it. That may be the challenge that you're up against. Borrowing is not a solution if we don't have a long-term plan to address this important contribution to young families particularly.

Of course, it was under the PCs that these fees got out of control. Under the Klein cuts in the '90s the schools had to make up the reduced income they were getting to function, and Ralph Klein's government allowed schools to levy whatever fees they wanted, so they went from about \$80 a child in 2008 up to \$240 a child in 2012 and even higher since. The only question, I guess, that all of us need to look at is: how can we continue to spend more and not get into trouble for those very children and their future and the level of debt they're going to incur?

One suggestion we have on the Liberal side – and it's been in our platform for some time – is to phase out the private school fees as they're able to and find the resources to sustain some of their needs, not suddenly but over the course of five to 10 years. That would amount to something like, I believe, over \$200 million. That could help to sustain the kind of reduced school fees in the public system that I think we're all looking for. According to my research \$248 million is now being paid for private schools in Alberta. That would go a long way in moving us towards a sustainable source of funding and satisfy us that we're honouring our commitment to public

education while not compromising some of the special schools that are in the province that have to be subsidized because of disabilities – learning disabilities, physical disabilities, autism, and significant learning disabilities – and that at this point are under the private purview, perhaps.

I guess that in the short time that I have, I just wanted to make the point that we certainly support this. It's another important step that this government is taking to make living more affordable for lower income people and education accessible for more people at the lower income levels and allow people to keep their own money and use it in other ways. We often hear from this side of the House: leave money in people's pockets. Well, that's exactly what you're doing in this case. You're leaving more money in people's pockets to spend in other ways that they consider valuable and preferable for their own families.

However, borrowing is not an answer in terms of the longer term. We have to be careful that this is also a slow transition away from private school funding and ensure that we deal with the special populations that they are dealing with. We believe that there should be more support for wraparound services, including affordable lunch programs and transportation, as is indicated in this bill.

Subject to hearing more about just how we're going to fund this, we will certainly be providing provisional support from this side of the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can either adjourn the House, or I can ask the hon. member under 29(2)(a) to

enlighten us further for a couple of minutes about the Liberal plan to make education more affordable.

The Speaker: There's a question under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: Well, I would be very pleased to add more to what I've said. The Liberal plan has been outlined in our platform for a number of years along with the message about shifting more of the private school funding to the public school system. I think that is well recorded. I'm pleased that the government is borrowing our policy and looking at that still although the minister has been a bit ambiguous about exactly what he's going to do with the private schools. I hope he will become more clear with time and ensure that we do provide the more fair response to a public system that is struggling. I encourage the government to look more seriously at that private funding source.

The Speaker: Hon. member, under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hanson: Yes. I'd just like to clarify: is it your party's position to defund private schools and charter schools?

Dr. Swann: It's our position that over time we should bring all the school systems under one public school system. That will not be quick or easy because, as I indicated, there are some special schools that are only funded by private funds right now. But the goal is the same, to ensure that public funds go to public schools over a period of five to 10 years.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will adjourn the session until tomorrow morning at 9.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, March 8, 2017

Day 4

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect and pray together, each in our own way. Hon. members, today is International Women's Day, a day to celebrate and thank the Creator for the people in our world who are mothers, partners, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, friends, and women who lead in families and in communities every day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Loewen]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on 29(2)(a) for the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. I was listening intently yesterday as he took the members of this House down a little bit of a Willy Wonka's wondrous boat ride.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're not able to be under 29(2)(a) at this point. It ends. So to the main question: is that what you wish to speak to?

Cortes-Vargas: Because he adjourned debate?

The Speaker: Debate was adjourned.

Cortes-Vargas: Yes? Okay. Excellent.

The Speaker: Your main speech? Is that what you're . . .

Cortes-Vargas: That's okay.

The Speaker: Okay.

The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, good morning, everybody. I would like to say that I'm very grateful for the opportunity to have a response to the Speech from the Throne. Thank you to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta for her beautiful expression of this document.

Last year we saw many, many Albertans standing up against a government that wants to alter the very fabric of our community. They stood up against actions of a government that insult the people who built this province. We've seen so many Albertans actually gather at the steps of the Legislature asking, demanding, crying out

the government, trying to be heard. Albertans have tried to help bring some common sense to this government. We have seen a government that is bent not only on altering the very province that they are privileged to govern but also the people who live here.

What this government does not seem to understand is that you can only blame low oil prices for a very, very short period of time and that solid economic policy and fiscal policy are the keys to surviving and thriving in these terrible economic times. This, however, would only become clear to this government had they the wisdom to actually reach out to Albertans and converse with them about their needs and provide real solutions for living through this downturn. I've heard from many of the members opposite that they've had many conversations with people, and I'm curious as to why those conversations did not turn into consultations and then impact the policies that they brought forward. Many times we're able to see outside of our own ideology when we have legitimate conversations with those who challenge or oppose our own ideas, and we have yet to see the government have these conversations authentically with Albertans. Instead, they've simply pushed through legislation that supports their own agenda and that sidesteps Albertans.

This government has blamed the opposition for public concern over unpopular and unwanted legislation and regulations and has accused us of fearmongering and has sidestepped accountability to Albertans. They claim that the concerns that we bring on behalf of Albertans to this Legislature are exaggerations. It's time for the government to get off their talking points, I think. The language that is being used is flying in the face of the open statement of this throne speech, where it states, "We are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice."

This government not only talks down to the opposition, but it also has belittled the very people that they are put here to represent. Perhaps most disrespectful is that this government has said to Albertans who are saying that, for example, they can't afford the cost of the carbon tax to take the bus. Very thoughtful indeed. The government will never – never – win the hearts and minds of these great people in this province in this way. The desire to build a better province lies in the hearts of every member of this Legislature. I mean, I've said this many, many times in the past, that the broad and ideological objectives that guide this government have left us all wondering what it is about the spirit of Albertans that is overwhelmingly offensive to this government.

I'm surprised to hear in the Speech from the Throne that the government claims that they've brought down the rate of spending thoughtfully and prudently. Well, we only need to look at the billions of dollars in debt repayment, the lowering of our triple-A, which I know doesn't seem to be a very big deal to them, and the bureaucracy to see that this claim in no way reflects the reality of their actions and it certainly does not meet the needs of this province.

We have seen an increase in the price of oil and, thankfully – thankfully – we have seen a change in this government's stance on pipelines and our precious natural resources. The people of Alberta deserve a huge pat on the back for that. That came from Albertans and their strength of lobbying this government and past governments to do the right thing and to allow, actually, the folks at the National Energy Board to do their job to help provide information necessary to the federal government so that they can do their job and approve pipelines.

Now this government needs to fully support and move forward – and I see some changes there – toward Energy East as well and Keystone XL. The proof is in the pudding. Right, folks? The eco-activists involved in this government have had their say. Their needs as well as those of every other Canadian will be balanced in

the outcomes of the NEB, and this process must be and needs to be respected and followed so the interest groups on all sides of this discussion have their say. To date this government has fallen short of its claims, especially the claim of making life better for all Albertans. I personally receive thousands of e-mails weekly asking, begging for answers. No government truly, truly invested in making life better in an oil-rich jurisdiction would cap the oil sands, which translate to prosperity for Albertans and Canadians. I just can't imagine how that makes life better for all of us.

What government truly invested, Mr. Speaker, in making life better would bring back a capacity market and then sell it to Albertans as that somehow they're trying to help families when we all know that that cost of electricity will be hidden in every other tax you pay? What government interested in making things better would spend \$9 million on a campaign for a carbon tax when we have massive levels of child poverty in this province? Nine million dollars in the pockets of those families through tax breaks and education: that could have changed lives.

The Premier is on record as stating that the previous government's commitment to environmental protection was anemic and that our air, land, and water would continue to be threatened by government neglect. What exactly has this government done differently?

The debacle over the PPAs is a perfect example. I would certainly appreciate understanding how this makes life better for Albertans. In the government's own words, "Alberta's energy industry creates good jobs, and good jobs are the bedrock of a strong province." Well, everyday Albertans expect, then, from this government that when we are thrown under the bus by people in other nations who call our oil sands dirty that this government will be the first to stand up and educate and alter the untrue perceptions of our environmental stewardship in this province. Some of these perceptions are courtesy of this government. It is now time to fix that. Now, in my opinion, that is how you make life better for Alberta families.

9:10

I would like to give another much, much needed shout-out to Albertans for their work in pressuring this government and others into fulfilling, at least partially, their commitment of reducing school fees and to the government for taking this very first and necessary step. I believe we can go further, as I stated before. Because the numbers in this reduction did not include the carbon tax, we'll see how the numbers shake out. But again to the government: thank you. What I would also like to say, though, is that, unfortunately, what should have been helpful for Albertans is only going to have minimum impact because of increased taxes, carbon taxes, out-of-control spending, expanded size of government, and new spending commitments.

We're thrilled to see, though – and this is awesome – that parents will be consulted outside the structure of predetermined surveys in modernizing the curriculum. Again, to the people of this magnificent province: this is your victory lap. We will be watching to make sure that this government follows through with its promise of parental involvement in the curriculum rewrite, choice in education, and local decision-making at the board levels. We saw this government tear apart a home-schooling community, and we will be watching closely this government's commitments to funding independent schools.

We, unfortunately, see very confusing commitments to literacy, numeracy, and testing for our kids. If we expect to give our kids the best education possible, we need to look at some proven teaching strategies as well as those strategies that link classroom education to life outside the classroom. Our children are not guinea pigs, and

Albertans will not sit back and watch this government experiment with our children any longer.

I look forward to seeing how this government will provide accessibility to services for our very able special-needs people, Mr. Speaker. This is imperative, and I'm grateful to see it in the Speech from the Throne. This government has the opportunity to lead by example through collaboration with all Albertans, but so far what we've seen from this government is labelling and dividing groups of Albertans and using this divisiveness to pit groups of Albertans against each other in its race for scarce resources. The government has created anger and distrust where there was once open discussion and thoughtful discourse.

So, Mr. Speaker, here is my love letter to the government. If you truly want to make life better, you must create a strong economic environment and communities that have resources to celebrate, love, accept, and enjoy each other's uniqueness. Good governance will get to the heart of the problem without politicizing or polarizing society for its own gain. This does not make life better. While we see glimmers of hope in this Speech from the Throne, this session will be very telling. I know that I and the rest of us will be watching and waiting for the actions from this government that demonstrate that they're truly interested in enhancing and strengthening our open and inclusive society that is built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Ms McKittrick: I'd like to thank the member for the interesting discussion on the throne speech. I was wondering about those letters that she had received. She mentioned that she had received thousands of letters, and I was wondering if it would be possible for them to be tabled or to have access to them because I'm very interested. I haven't received those letters, so I'm not quite sure what those thousands of letters mean.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, I'd said thousands of e-mails. I will, certainly, if you would like. I haven't read specifically from any e-mails, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if I need to table, but I would happily provide this House with the thousands of e-mails, without the names, if that's what's required of me. I'm not sure. I did not speak specifically of any e-mail, but I would be happy to send this member – in fact, I will forward you the thousands. I would happily share those with you any day. You just let me know. We'll talk about it, and we'll make sure that the e-mails that are coming to me – I'm not sure what the privacy situations are with that. Let me look into that. But I will happily – happily – forward the thousands of e-mails that I get and happily share them with you.

Thank you for the opportunity, actually.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments to the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we come to the halfway point of our first mandate, it is an incredible honour and privilege for me to respond to Her Honour's Speech from the Throne. This provides an opportunity to not only look forward in anticipation of what is to come but also to look back at what has been accomplished and what we had set out to do in our platform.

Alberta has a long and proud history. Despite recent economic challenges beyond our control Alberta also finds itself in an enviable position in the present. Thanks to the visionary leadership laid out in the Speech from the Throne, Alberta has a bright future,

set to lead the country in economic growth. Albertans elected us on a platform of change, of doing things differently. The trust placed in me by the voters of Banff-Cochrane to be their representative is something I always keep top of mind.

On International Women's Day I'd like to pay tribute to the women in my life: my wife, mom, sister, niece, my 101-year-old grandma, and my constituency staff.

I'm honoured to represent such a diverse and vibrant constituency, full of community-minded Albertans, who look out for one another. I'm inspired by them every day. Indeed, the determination and resiliency they displayed during the 2013 floods influenced my decision to run for election.

Alberta is going through difficult economic times due to the low international price of oil. At times like these Albertans expect a steady hand on the tiller to navigate challenging situations, and this commitment was reaffirmed in the Speech from the Throne. Like all Albertans, the people of Banff-Cochrane are pragmatic and sensible, but they also don't shy away from challenges or let hard work deter them from striving to reach new heights, literally and figuratively. It's quite the opposite really.

Take the recent reintroduction of bison into Banff national park, for example. In early February bison were successfully translocated to the Panther valley after many years of planning. This historic return of bison, a keystone species and North America's largest land mammal, coincides with the 150th anniversary of Canada's Confederation. After being absent from the wild for over a century, the bison's homecoming is a historic and cultural triumph.

This was made possible by people like Banff national park superintendent, Dave McDonough; bison reintroduction project manager and wildlife biologist, Karsten Heuer; Bison Belong co-ordinator, Marie-Eve Marchand; and Eleanor Luxton Historical Foundation trustee Harvey Locke, just to name a few. This was a significant team effort, and I'd like to thank all of those involved in this historical undertaking. There are too many to name them all.

Preceding the physical reintroduction of the bison, another example of determined co-operation took place during the signing of the Buffalo treaty during the summer of 2015 in Banff. At that time First Nations from both sides of the Canada-U.S. border gathered in Banff to welcome the Stoney Nakoda and the Samson Cree as signatories to this treaty of renewal, co-operation, and restoration.

It is truly inspiring to see the recognition of our past creating a path toward a vibrant future. This is especially so with respect to the reconciliation process with Canada's indigenous peoples. The traditional territory of the Stoney Nakoda First Nation, or *İyāhé* Nakoda, includes Banff national park. A letter signed by 20 First Nations leaders is calling for the name of Tunnel Mountain to be changed to its traditional name, Sacred Buffalo Guardian Mountain.

Alberta's wild spaces are world renowned and form an important part of Albertans' personal and collective identity. From our rugged mountain landscapes, rolling grasslands and foothills, boreal forests, and badlands, tourists from across Canada and around the world have a visit to Alberta on their bucket list.

Banff-Cochrane is fortunate to be home of the global water futures research station led by Dr. John Pomeroy. Over the next seven years the program will involve 18 universities and over 700 scientists studying ways to improve disaster warnings, water quality, and finding innovative ways for local and regional governments to adapt to and manage risks related to climate change.

During the Speech from the Throne, Her Honour told us that the government will continue to improve parks across our province and build on the historic protections that have already been brought into place such as the recently announced protections for the Castle region. The constituents of Banff-Cochrane are especially delighted

to hear about improvements to Alberta's provincial parks, many of which are located in this constituency.

Camping and recreating in Alberta's outdoors is a family pastime, where many fond memories are formed. Albertans and visitors love to hike, fish, hunt, and enjoy our natural places. Greeting those visitors are our world-class tourism partners. Whether you're looking for the thrill of a dogsled tour across the Continental Divide in Lake Louise, snowboarding on Olympic terrain at Nakiska, being pampered in the spa in Banff, attempting some of the world's most difficult rock climbing routes in Canmore, watching the Lions Club rodeo in Cochrane, or cross-country skiing in Bragg Creek, there are family-friendly activities for all ages and all ability levels throughout Banff-Cochrane.

9:20

Supporting the businesses who cater to visitors and locals alike are several active and engaged chambers of commerce and business associations throughout the constituency. Launching just this past January, the newest addition to these hard-working groups is the Bow Valley Chamber of Commerce. I had the honour of attending several of their conversation cafés while they were in the formative stages of creating a chamber.

I'd like to congratulate for their efforts the founding members of the Bow Valley Chamber of Commerce: Chair Brian McClure, Vice-chair Stephanie O'Brien, Treasurer Stefan Armstrong, Secretary Elaine McPherson, and members at large Isabelle Daigneault and Darin Fauth. I look forward to working with them and all other businesses as we diversify and strengthen Alberta's economy together.

Banff-Cochrane is fortunate to be home to no fewer than five craft breweries and two craft distilleries. The newest additions – Wild Life Distillery, Canmore Brewing, Half Hitch Brewing, and Bragg Creek Brewing – join their more established counterparts Grizzly Paw brewing, Banff Ave. Brewing, and Park Distillery. The Minister of Finance is known for declaring that beer is good, and I'd like to add that craft spirits are good.

The tourism sector in Banff-Cochrane is thriving. Canadians are looking forward to celebrating 150 years of confederacy, and many are planning a visit to Banff, home of Canada's first national park. To help ensure that these visitors have the best possible experience, our government recently committed \$14 million for public transit projects in the Canmore to Lake Louise corridor.

There are many tourist attractions to choose from for those visiting Banff-Cochrane. The Whyte Museum, located in Banff and founded by Peter and Catharine Whyte, inspires visitors by providing a glimpse into the area's rich history. Museum Director Vince Varga, Board Chair Marino DiManno, and CEO Brett Oland work incredibly hard to collect, preserve, and tell these important stories.

Another unique attraction for visitors near and far is the Cochrane Lions Club Labour Day rodeo. I'd like to thank Lions Club President Darren Begg for inviting me to celebrate the rodeo's 50th year this past September. The rodeo is considered one of the toughest amateur events in Canada.

The Cochrane & District Agricultural Society is yet another organization serving Cochrane and the surrounding areas. President Justin Burwash and the board of the ag society are working hard to preserve and promote Alberta's traditional roots.

While we work hard to celebrate and preserve Alberta's proud heritage, we must also work to ensure a bright future. Her Honour's Speech from the Throne indicated that our government plans to do exactly that by supporting energy efficiency programs. The programs will help families, businesses, nonprofits, farmers, municipalities, and indigenous communities to save money by

supporting more energy efficient appliances, heating, lighting, and more. In addition, the government will make it more affordable to install solar panels on homes, supporting jobs and growth in Alberta's residential solar industry, and helping families power their homes with more green energy.

KCP Energy, located in Canmore, is one such company that helps homeowners to use less energy and save more. With young children and a strong belief that climate change is real, KCP Energy founder, president and CEO Geoff Domenico decided to create a business that would help his family and others to move towards living more sustainably.

Consideration of what the future holds in store for generations to come is a strong motivator for action. When a child's home isn't safe, we have a responsibility to step in and do whatever it takes to make sure that kids are protected. As Her Honour said in the Speech from the Throne: "Child protection is one of the most important services any government can provide, and we owe it to our children to get it right." It is for this reason that I'm honoured and humbled to be a member of the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. Building on the work of this panel, the government plans to introduce new legislation focused on ensuring that child death reviews receive the utmost care and attention. This is difficult yet important work, and I'm committed to working hard alongside fellow panel members to ensure that children are protected.

I was also pleased to hear in the Speech from the Throne that the government will work to better help and protect victims of sexual and domestic violence with the introduction of legislation that eliminates barriers to pursuing justice. This work will complement that being done by the Banff YWCA, which offers a safe place for those leaving domestic violence situations in the Bow Valley. The Banff YWCA's women's emergency shelter project is led by CEO Connie MacDonald, with a strong team and talented board supporting her. A person of courage and determination, Connie and the YWCA team are working to create a made-in-the-Bow Valley solution.

Affordable housing in Banff-Cochrane is a long-standing issue. I was pleased to hear Her Honour refer to our government's commitment to continue to address long-overdue repairs of the affordable housing units we already have and to build more units for families and seniors in need. Affordable housing helps make our communities whole, and these are essential in communities like Cochrane, Canmore, and Banff, where housing costs are high.

I'd like to express my gratitude on behalf of the constituents of Banff-Cochrane for Her Honour's comments in the Speech from the Throne regarding our government's commitment to building infrastructure, supporting public education, and health care. This will especially benefit residents of Cochrane, which was the second-fastest growing municipality in Canada according to the most recent census. Residents of Cochrane will benefit from the construction of a new school, the Calgary cancer centre, and the Calgary ring road. I'm looking forward to attending the grand opening of RancheView school in Cochrane later this month.

Our government's legislative and policy agenda is bold and ambitious and exactly what Alberta needs in this time of economic recovery. As Her Honour concluded in the Speech from the Throne:

Though the world around us may be growing more uncertain, your government will remain calm and focused. Now is not the time to let our steady hand waver. As we have from the start, we will continue to create jobs, diversify our economy, and protect the health and education services on which families rely. In that work we will make life better for Alberta families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I took particular interest in the Member for Banff-Cochrane's comments regarding the reintroduction of bison into the national park area. It sounds like he is well versed in that and took great interest in that. He also made significant comment in regard to the people that were involved in the reintroduction and going forward, so I was wondering if he could provide to the Chamber the wildlife management plan for the reintroduction of that.

I noticed also that the minister of environment is here today. I don't want to offend any sensitive ears, but the introduction of elk onto the Suffield base, that was also federal property, did not have a wildlife management plan and to this day still does not. We've since only recently learned that those animals have had chronic wasting disease discovered in the facility there. I'm wondering if the Member for Banff-Cochrane could tell us if there is indeed a wildlife management plan that's available for the introduction of those species in a national park.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much for the opportunity to expand on the reintroduction of bison. As I mentioned during my speech, the bison are a keystone species in the Rocky Mountain area. The activity of the bison, the way they eat and graze, stimulates the biodiversity of the region. Then, you know, their dung supports insect species, which also feeds the birds, and the birds also use the bison fur that they rub on the trees to line their nests. So it's an incredible opportunity to increase biodiversity in the region.

I'm not an expert, but I was fortunate to attend a ceremony in Banff national park just last week at the cave and basin site, where the folks involved in the reintroduction told us the background story of how they were introduced. The way I understand it, the plan for reintroduction for the next two years or so is to keep the bison in, as they call it, a soft release pen. There are 16 animals. Most of them are pregnant females, about two or three years old, so the plan is to have them calve about twice in this enclosed area so that they have a better understanding of the geography and they create sort of a home base, a home territory in that region.

9:30

Once those calvings have been successful – and there's a team supporting the bison through that process – then they're going to open up the pen and have them wander in a larger area. The area that they were reintroduced to in the Panther valley is ideal for buffalo grazing, bison grazing because it's a very grassy area and there are also lots of natural barriers for the bison. They have a large space for a home range to roam, but even without a pen they're somewhat contained in a certain valley.

It's quite an exciting project. This is something that our indigenous and First Nations people are very excited about. It's something that required an incredible amount of collaboration and planning. They had to bring in a heavy-lift helicopter from the west coast to carry the bison to the soft-release enclosure. The buffalo came from Elk Island national park. This is a place where they keep bison, and it was part of the plan all along to select healthy young animals that were pregnant and bring them to the enclosure.

I'm really excited to see how this goes. I know that people are watching this closely and interested to see what other effects this reintroduction might have. You know, it's a really great way to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 29(2)(a) to reflect upon the response to the Speech from the Throne from the Member for Banff-Cochrane. I want to ask him to tell us a little bit more about the balance that's always been sought in the Banff-Cochrane area with respect to keeping a balance between environmental protection and economic development. It's something that's been going on for decades and decades. I remember one family's story, that's been told often... [The time limit for questions and comments expired]

The Speaker: Respectfully, hon. member, you don't get to ask the question.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to respond to the forward-looking Speech from the Throne we heard last week, especially on International Women's Day. Throughout the world today people are commemorating the struggle for women's rights. This is feminism, and feminism is simply equality, something we're all entitled to and something that is not a cancer.

Before I get started though, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a minute to thank my constituency assistants, Stephanie and Marie, who are in the constituency office today making sure that the people of Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill can connect with their government.

Governments are elected to do many things, Mr. Speaker. To give hope, to lead in good and tough times, and to make life better for Albertans. Sometimes that includes making difficult decisions, and I'm proud of my colleagues in the cabinet and all the hon. members in the government caucus who do just those things. Since being elected in 2015, I've seen how dedicated all members of this House are to serving the people of Alberta, and I want to acknowledge you all.

I'd also like to recognize the staff of the Legislature. I've seen how hard they work. The long hours they put in and their commitment to doing excellent work are obvious every day we are in the House. Thank you.

On May 5, 2015, the people of Alberta chose a new government because they wanted change, change from feeling disconnected from their government, change from obscure election financing rules that allowed those with the deepest pockets to have the most influence over elections, change from seeing our provincial savings stagnate, change from uncertainty about the health care and education that their families depend on, and change from relying heavily on resource revenue that is at the mercy of markets we do not control. I was proud to run for election and support a platform that promised Albertans what they have always needed and should expect from their government: funding for health care and education that they can rely on, respect for the environment, and a commitment to ensure that people in the province will get the maximum benefit possible from natural resources that belong to all of us.

Our government under the leadership of our Premier is committed to serving Albertans. With the clear agenda detailed in the throne speech and with an eye to the future, we're showing Albertans that we have a plan for today and tomorrow.

Alberta is the land of milk and honey, and Albertans want strong leadership. They want stability, and they want to know that the government has their back when times are tough. This is exactly what this government has promised and has been delivering since the last election. Our busy legislative agenda shows Albertans we are committed to their future. Through thoughtfully cutting the growth of government spending, we can ensure that vital services remain accessible and innovation and prudence are valued.

In the last throne speech our government committed to a strong, diversified economy in concert with strong environmental policies. Protecting both our below and above ground resources is imperative to Albertans today and into the future.

Last year the federal government approved both the Trans Mountain pipeline and line 3 as a result of the climate leadership plan, and we will continue to nail our colours to the mast and foster the co-operation that led to these approvals to ensure that the pipelines are built and Alberta oil is exported through them because what is right for Alberta is right for Canada, too.

Alberta is seeing the benefits of the new royalty structure. Already this year there has been more than a 50 per cent increase in drilling activity over last year. While the oil patch hasn't rebounded to where it was before the price of oil fell so dramatically, some of the workers affected by layoffs over the last two-plus years are heading back to work, and the outlook for our province is to lead the country in economic growth this year.

Our government knows how hard the downturn in the economy has been on Alberta families and how important jobs, both in the energy sector and in other industries, are to them. By investing in infrastructure that is essential to ensuring our economy is in a good position to rebound and continue to gain strength, our government is providing the elements that both industry and individuals need to get around, grow, and be productive.

Even with the downturn, Mr. Speaker, Evanston in Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill continues to be one of the three fastest growing neighbourhoods in Calgary, and the people of Evanston need good neighbourhood schools for their kids to attend. I was very pleased to attend the opening of two schools in the area. Kenneth D. Taylor school is named after the former Canadian ambassador to Iran, and each one of the students has been appointed an ambassador to the school. I also went to the opening of Our Lady of Grace school. Investing in this type of infrastructure not only provides good jobs so people can support their families and plan for the future; it builds community.

Other industries are vital to the economic success of Alberta, and our government is supporting small businesses. We reduced the small-business tax by a third, cutting it from 3 per cent to 2 per cent. Stimulating investment and growth in start-ups is an integral part of supporting a healthy economy. By introducing the Alberta investor tax credit, we are encouraging the flow of venture capital dollars within the province. I was very excited to be one of the co-sponsors of this bill.

I worked in information technology for a number of years, helping companies in manufacturing, health care, and oil and gas meet their strategic business goals, and I know that the scope of technology is wide. Technology pervades almost every aspect of our work and personal lives. While Alberta has some incredible tech leaders and innovators, especially in the oil and gas industry, the top three tech companies world-wide represent market capitalization of almost \$1 trillion. Our province is full of smart, well-educated people who are positioned to take advantage of the tax credit, grow the technology sector, and create very good, well-paying jobs for Albertans.

Through this program and the capital investment tax credit, coupled with the establishment of business incubators like the one recently opened in Medicine Hat, we are making the province a desirable home for start-ups.

AgriFood will continue to be a shining light in terms of economic growth. In addition to investments made in expanding the Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator in Leduc, this year our government will further support Alberta's entrepreneurs in this sector. Agriculture is what helped to make Alberta the strong province it is today. I grew up in what was a small farming town

outside of Grande Prairie called Sexsmith, and I know first-hand how the pioneers of our province helped create our culture. This is critical to our future.

Many of my colleagues and I had the chance to meet with the Alberta Beef Producers at the Canadian Beef Centre of Excellence in the fabulous riding of Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, and sampling the beef there reinforced something I've known my whole life and was able to brag about at PechaKucha events in London last year. Alberta has the best beef in the world.

Our government knows that Alberta doesn't exist in a vacuum. We need to nurture the relationships we have with current and potential trade partners so our shared economic interests are protected and can grow. Our government will keep supporting and growing Alberta's trade relationships, with missions to Japan, India, and China this year, because the world has an appetite for what our energy, agriculture, and forest industries have to offer.

9:40

What all these actions have in common, Mr. Speaker, is the same commitment, a commitment to creating good-paying jobs that support hard-working Alberta families.

Good jobs mean good paycheques, and those go further when families aren't paying out of pocket to cover rising school fees. Every year it's been getting harder and harder for many families with kids in school to make ends meet. Our government promised to do something about rising school fees during the last election campaign, and we announced in the throne speech that we're reducing school fees by 25 per cent, keeping our promise to families to make life more affordable for them. We'll continue to look for ways to reduce school fees even more. Money should not be a barrier to attending school.

In addition to these strategies to support the growth of the economy, create jobs, and keep costs down for families, our government knows that some people in our province haven't always had a fair shake. We signed the new relationship agreements with Treaty 8 and the Métis Nation of Alberta, and we'll work with indigenous communities and the federal government to make sure that First Nation communities have access to clean drinking water.

Our government has taken steps to make sure that every child is protected because it is one of the most important services our government and any government can provide. We've established an all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, and we will introduce new legislation focused on making sure that child death reviews get the attention and consideration they deserve.

Our government is continuing to address long overdue repairs on affordable housing units we already have, and we're building more units for low-income families and for seniors because everyone deserves a safe, affordable home.

We're continuing to act on our commitment to affordable, \$25-a-day child care, which is a huge help for parents, and families will continue to receive the enhanced Alberta family employment tax credit. We will continue the path to \$15-an-hour minimum wage because no one should have to work three or more jobs just to pay their living expenses.

Mr. Speaker, as a survivor of sexual assault I am especially heartened that our government has tabled a bill that, if passed, will empower survivors of both sexual assault and domestic violence to bring forward civil cases when they're ready by removing the time limitation. It takes time to be strong enough to share our stories. Lifting this limitation respects the time it takes to heal. If we hope to eradicate domestic violence and sexual assault, we must provide the support that survivors need to overcome what has happened to them.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans can be proud of their government. We've stayed by their side during one of the tougher times our province has faced, and we will continue to stand by Albertans while our economy recovers and more people re-enter the workforce. We'll continue to stand by our industries, both the established ones like agriculture, oil and gas, and forestry and markets that are emerging in our province like value-added agribusiness and agrifood and advanced technology.

I'm proud to have run for and been elected to a government that keeps its word, a government that has followed through on what we promised Albertans we would do in spite of the mock outrage we often hear, and I'm looking forward to the many good things we will do this session.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions to the member under 29(2)(a)? Please proceed, Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see that in the throne speech we've got the announcement that there's been a 50 per cent increase in drilling, and I welcome that as well. But my riding hasn't seen the people going to work quite yet. I noticed that you had mentioned in your Speech to the Throne that people are going back to work. What kind of, I guess, justification do you have to show that, like, Bonnyville-Cold Lake is going to see the spike of people going back to work? I guess, right now I can tell you that people are still concerned in my riding with how to feed their families, and food bank use is at an all-time high.

Thank you to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the question brings up a valid point. It is going to take some time for as many people who have lost their jobs to get back to work. I have seen, however, a lot of advertisements for people to go and work, especially up in northern Alberta, and I often post those kinds of job postings on my Facebook page so that people who are in my riding are able to connect with the employers that are looking for well-qualified people. There are definitely more opportunities opening up than we've seen over the last couple of years, and I'm happy to help the member connect with those companies and share that information with him if he thinks that'll be helpful for him.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. What Albertans heard in the Speech from the Throne was a continued commitment from this government to value and be inclusive and intelligent when considering legislation. Now, one might say that that's how all governments approach legislation, and that may be so, or at least that's what they think. If that is the case, then it must be that different governments have different definitions of what it means to value and be inclusive and intelligent. The throne speech highlighted what these words mean to this government, and it's very different from what Albertans have experienced for far too many years, and it's very different from what's being proposed by opposition parties or being proposed by other loud factions who are set on turning back time.

Mr. Speaker, the policies that this government has passed and proposed demonstrate what value means to this government. It's a value system that says that at all times and especially during tough

economic times everyday Albertans deserve a government that considers them and that they deserve a government that tries to make their life better for them.

Mr. Speaker, it didn't take long for this government to reiterate its values with its first bill of the spring session, that commits to reducing school fees across our province. The decision to eliminate fees for the instructional supplies and materials and busing students to their designated schools will see parents of nearly 600,000 students save \$50 million a year. These are the actions of a government that thinks about making life better for the majority of Albertans, a government that understands that these fees are a burden to many families and the importance of putting money into the pockets of these families. Not even in good economic times did previous governments see reducing school fees as valuable. They didn't see or understand that school fees can put some children at a disadvantage, that it staggers the starting line.

In addition to reducing school fees, we have introduced the school nutrition pilot to help get our students future ready. Building on our successes, our government has appointed a panel to review the curriculum and has been seeking input from Albertans. Mr. Speaker, it's our job as legislators to ensure that all of Alberta's children are given an equal opportunity to succeed. The bottom line is that not only do we stand behind Alberta's families by trying to make life more affordable, but we simply value education.

This government treats education as an investment, an investment that we cannot afford to not be part of and that we refuse not to make a budget priority. The dangers to our education system with the previous government's plan to remove \$500 million from the budget were immediately evident to our government and the public. I've been speaking to grade 6 students all over Calgary's greatest riding, Calgary-Klein, over the last couple of months, and rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that these kids are aware of those proposed cuts, and, believe it or not, they did not hear it from me although I do get to tell them that we restored the \$500 million to the budget.

They ask me: how many kids would be in my class? Would Ms Smith be my teacher? Would they have had to have gone to another school? Well, Mr. Speaker, this government values education and understands that quality education is a right and not a privilege. I'm proud of this government's stance and record on education.

I'm also proud of our government's position to protect people from predatory payday lenders. We've all borrowed money, Mr. Speaker, mainly to make large purchases that we can't pay in full. But when you're borrowing money to pay bills and having to borrow from predatory payday loan operations, it can be difficult to dig out. We also recognize the need that some may have for these types of services. This is why we introduced new laws covering payday loans. Alberta now has the lowest fee for payday loan borrowing in Canada.

9:50

As well, Mr. Speaker, the government will put more money in the pockets of families as it continues with its plan to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. And let's not forget about the Alberta child benefit. For years we had one of the lowest minimum wage rates in Canada. We need to recognize fair value for work, and we need to recognize the cost of living in all parts of the province.

Another way of ensuring that more money stays in the pockets of everyday Albertans is to reduce the chances of losing money to people and companies using disingenuous sales tactics. That's why this government has eliminated high-pressure door-to-door sales of items such as utility rates and energy products, and as was noted in the throne speech, a consumer bill of rights will be introduced, protecting Albertans' hard-earned money.

What's more, Mr. Speaker, this government has capped electricity rates to ensure that there are no surprises on electricity bills. Electricity bills will always be reasonable and predictable. Instead of a government that builds escape clauses for corporations, we now have a government that takes the needs of Albertans across the province into account, and it understands that there needs to be a balance between what allows the economy to work and what allows families to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, in difficult economic times a good measure of a government's values is how it deals with necessary cutbacks and where these cutbacks occur. I'm pleased to say that this government takes a very different approach to trying to control spending than previous governments did. This government refuses to make things worse for Alberta's families by making deep cuts to front-line staff, by reducing services, or by reducing the quality of education and health care.

This government is trying to steady the rate of spending by reducing the salaries, bonuses, and perks such as golf and country club memberships to executives in the province's agencies, boards, and commissions, and it has now legislated that the executive compensation of the heads of the ABCs will be transparent to both the government and the public. Not only were these salaries out of line with comparable positions in other jurisdictions; they were insulting to Albertans struggling to pay the bills.

This government is also freezing the salaries of government employees and dissolving or consolidating 26 ABCs. These moves taken together represent annual savings of \$16 million a year. While this is a small step in controlling the province's finances, it's clear that this government has its priorities aligned with making life better for Alberta's families and is not just here to reward those who've helped us get elected.

Mr. Speaker, this government is built on inclusion – just look at our caucus – and we never forget that with our policies. Our commitment to the LGBTQ community has been a pillar of this government's mandate, and we are working with the PDD community to ensure that improvements are made to have access to services that are required by every individual.

I'm immensely proud that this government had the courage, Mr. Speaker, to protect paid farm workers in this province. This was an act of inclusion, an act that sent a message to the province's paid farm workers, who work our land and grow our food, that they matter, that they will be protected in the case of injury, and that they no longer fall outside of the government's purview. There is little explanation as to why this never happened before other than that it was merely a tradition not to include them. This is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I am elated that this government developed a Ministry of Status of Women, especially on International Women's Day. This is 50 per cent of our population not given the inclusion that it not only deserves but is necessary for a better society and province.

Another example of inclusivity that may not be as obvious is the bill An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. What this bill did, Mr. Speaker, was remove big money from our elections. It removed corporate, union, and executive influence from politics, and it levelled the playing field for our democratic parties in this province. I've also been told by constituents that this bill has restored their faith in Alberta elections. They believe that ideas and policies will again be the determining factor in voting and that elections will not be won simply with a chequebook. We will continue to work on electoral finance reform.

Mr. Speaker, it's not a secret that the price of oil has had an impact on Alberta's economy. It's also not a secret that this is not the first time that the price of oil has had an impact on our economy. So why has no previous government made decisions to move

Alberta's economy into a position in which it can weather downturns in the oil price with diversification strategies and make it equipped to deal with the realities of the 21st century?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I just don't know the answer to this, but my intuition says to me that at the core of this is that change is difficult for some. Thinking beyond what you've always known in terms of relationships and the economy and recognizing that there are new ways and alternative economic opportunities is crucial to building a better province and a better world. We need to make intelligent decisions in regard to our economy. Every time there's a downturn in the price of oil, slashing public services and cuts to health care and education and layoffs are not the answer. These types of austerity measures look good on paper, and they work for a short time, but they actually do more damage in the long run by putting more people out of work and creating massive infrastructure deficits that impact generations to come.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, we now have a government that gets it. We have a government that is working to ensure that we will be able to weather further economic shocks from low oil prices while at the same time strengthening our oil and gas sector in a way that accepts the ecological realities of the 21st century.

This government has opened up investment in this province with the investor tax credit. We are putting shovels in the ground and putting people back to work with several infrastructure projects.

The climate leadership plan is as much about protecting our environment as it is about growing our economy in renewable energy. It's about demonstrating to the world and the rest of the country that we can have a strong oil and gas sector and still be stewards of our environment. We can use our oil and gas wealth to fund our increasing need to transition to renewable energy. To be sure, we would not have federal approval of two pipelines to tidewater without the climate leadership plan.

The carbon levy will enable us to grow the renewables sector, creating more renewable energy on the grid and 21st-century jobs in this growing sector.

The new royalty structure is paying off, Mr. Speaker. There has been steady growth in drilling and extraction over the last several months, and industry and economists are applauding this incentivized plan. But we didn't do it alone. We worked with industry experts to ensure that we would arrive at a place that was good for industry and the province.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of this government, and I am certain that our definition of values, inclusion, and intelligence resonates with more Albertans than the definitions held by the opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that in the previous session of the Legislature the Member for Calgary-Klein introduced a private member's bill regarding bullying in the workplace. He never had a chance to discuss that. I know that we've made some commitments in the throne speech to make life better for working people. I know that bullying in the workplace is one of those elements that the member is very passionate about, and he's been working collaboratively with the ministry, so I wonder if he might want to tell us a little bit about that.

Mr. Coolahan: Sure. Thank you for the question. Well, yeah, I was disappointed that that bill did not pass, but that's okay. I'm pretty sure that we as a caucus and the government are very committed to

making sure that psychological harassment finds its way into our legislation.

You know, it is a shame. I think that that legislation is a lot like the farm workers legislation. It just baffles my mind that we don't have that type of legislation in this province. Many other jurisdictions have it, and we wouldn't be reinventing the wheel on this because we can take from other jurisdictions what has worked and what hasn't. The numbers are astounding of how many people have actually suffered bullying in the workplace. If I can remember correctly, just over 60 per cent have been victims of bullying in the workplace.

You know, I do admit that there are a lot of companies that have harassment policies, but it's not mandated, and I think that was the first step in legislation, to mandate that we have this type of legislation in the workplace. I know companies try very hard to make sure that their employees are safe, but without the legislation, workplace harassment policies really don't have the teeth to back up their policies. [A cellphone rang]

What's more, Mr. Speaker, the policies that we do see in workplaces throughout Alberta are kind of piecemeal. There's no consistency to how these policies are written and how they're enforced.

10:00

Yeah, I do look forward to more debate on this, and I do look forward to support from opposition parties on this matter. I think this is a very important topic for everyone in this province. Nobody deserves to be bullied at work in our province. We do a very good job of staying off bullying with children and online. We've worked very hard on that, but we've kind of forgotten our adults in the workplace. We've always focused, unfortunately, just on the physical aspect of bullying or harm reduction, I guess, at work. You know, it's just not enough. I mean, people that have been bullied at work: they suffer symptoms that are similar to PTSD. It's really quite disturbing, and this can go on for years and years without somebody coming and making a complaint, a formal complaint. Even if they do make a complaint, there may not be a harassment policy in place, or the HR department is not equipped to deal with these types of situations because they haven't been trained on it, or they simply just don't understand what their recourse is.

I think what we are trying to do with that type of legislation is to give people recourse when they can't get satisfaction, I guess, or a resolve at work. I would hope that they would be able to go to a third party and file a formal complaint that will be investigated by a third party. Quite frankly, I think the notion of having a third party investigate is really an incentive for employers to ensure that their workers are safe at work and that harassment is dealt with immediately and satisfactorily.

Anyway, I'll end it there. Thank you for the question, and I do appreciate thinking about this topic.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I would have recognized you earlier, but I was distracted by a sound in the gallery. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for overlooking my ...

An Hon. Member: Indiscretion.

Dr. Swann: My indiscretion. That would be a good term, yes.

Thank you. My honour and privilege to speak to the throne speech, a very fine speech, to be sure, as all throne speeches are. I haven't heard a bad one in 11 years. The question is: what follows, and what's the action on the ground?

I acknowledge we're here on Treaty 6 land. Our First Nation brothers and sisters clearly need to be heard and seen and be part of the activities of this Legislature more than they have been. I acknowledge a government that, perhaps for the first time since I've been here, recognizes First Nations and the importance that they have and the relationship with them as critical to our success, all of our success, going forward.

This is probably my last Speech from the Throne as leader. Who knows? It's possible. I won't be the interim leader for a third time.

An Hon. Member: We've heard that before.

Mr. Cooper: It's the swan song.

Dr. Swann: I hope to have many farewells over the next few years.

I want to acknowledge International Women's Day and in that context the Calgary Police Service's troubles over harassment. I've been working or trying to work with the Calgary Police Service to establish two things: one, independent hearing officers in our police forces so that the hearing officers for complaints are not past police people but independent, legally trained people. The chief has said that he's interested in this and is going to look at the possibility and feels that it's an important area. Other police forces should be looking at this, as far as I'm concerned.

The second is amendments to our Human Rights Act. Under the Human Rights Act the Human Rights Commission can only hear complaints within a year of them occurring. For many of these women who have been harassed, it's been years, and they haven't felt that they could come forward. We need to extend that period. Just as the minister is doing with respect to sexual assault, sexual harassment should also be included in extending the timelines, and I'll be coming forward with a suggested amendment there.

But the other part of the Human Rights Act that needs to be amended is for the Human Rights Commission to be able to independently investigate systemic concerns like what is going on in the police force today. It's something like 28 women who've now come forward in Calgary in addition to the others that have come forward. It's clear that none of them felt free to make a complaint to the Human Rights Commission, and therefore the Human Rights Commission can't act. It can't investigate without a complaint. Well, if we amend the Human Rights Act – and in special circumstances only. We don't want them going willy-nilly into organizations and pulling down people. But I think it's important that the Human Rights Commission be empowered. In situations like this, where there's clear evidence of wrongdoing and it's being hidden, they need to have the power to go in and launch investigations.

Yes, the speech was excellent, and I acknowledge that many of the issues that were raised were important. We all, I think, could agree on most of the statements that were made. I was disappointed with only one sentence which related to the ongoing crisis with opiates in this province ravaging our families and increasing by the month, even in our remand and jails. Last year there were eight deaths in remand and our provincial jails and 27 near deaths in our remand and jails. The near deaths were reversed by naloxone – great – but if the naloxone or the guard wasn't there, that could have been a potential 35 deaths due to overdose, raising a lot of questions about what is happening, how the drugs are getting in, how well they're being managed by the staff, whether there is access to professional health care workers in there, how they deal with people who are coming off drugs as they come into jails. We need a public inquiry there, as far as I'm concerned, and I'll be again raising that with the minister, which I raised in the fall as well.

I want to acknowledge the bold new direction this government has taken. It's the first serious commitment I've seen since I got into the Legislature to reduce inequity and poverty – the first serious commitment to reducing inequity and poverty – and the first serious commitment I've seen to climate change. You know, I got into politics because of climate change and the lack of action, and I want to acknowledge this government for being bold and moving the yardstick down the field, if you will. Most Canadians believe that climate change is real, and they want to protect future generations from the scourges of extreme weather events, new infectious diseases, droughts and floods, and the increased impact on the global community with refugees and the massive immigration that we're going to be facing. Someone has said that what we've seen from Syria so far is a small indication of what we're really going to be seeing in the next two decades if we don't get some degree of control over all three: conflict, poverty, and climate change.

The Stern report – some of you may remember it, from 2006, 11 years ago – said that we can spend 2 per cent of our GDP on climate change now, or we can spend 20 per cent of our global GDP in 30 to 40 years. That's what we're faced with, and this government has taken that on actively if not aggressively.

Infrastructure: surely worth investing and borrowing for at this stage and protecting our employment here, with interest rates being favourable. These echo the Liberal platform, which I'm very pleased to have influenced this government on over many years of advocating.

10:10

Parks. By the way, I meant to mention parks in the environment portfolio. Happy to see the commitment to protecting our wildlands, our eastern slopes. It needs to go much further, and there need to be, as with everything, authentic consultations. I'm glad to see the off-highway vehicle people being listened to. They're a strong lobby. They're going to be very, very active, very challenging to the protection that is needed in the eastern slopes. Science is the basis for evaluating linear disturbance. We need to make sure we're protecting our waterways, primarily, and our habitat. We can co-exist in some areas with off-highway vehicles, but there are certain areas where we cannot. Our eastern slopes have to be very carefully examined, which I applaud.

The electricity agenda moved ahead without sufficient research, in my view, and with a lack of awareness of unwanted side effects, negative effects, from some of the changes. I will be tabling a motion next week, with the help of the former Utilities Consumer Advocate, offering a regulated rate option that we believe would save Albertans up to a hundred dollars a year, and that amounts to, you know, significant dollars over the course of the next 10 years. We calculated that close to a billion dollars could have been saved in the last 10 years if we had used this form of calculating the regulated rate option over the current one.

There needs to be – and I'm pleased to see it – a stronger emphasis on mental health and addictions in this province. I was pleased that the Premier included me in the review last year. I still haven't seen an update on where that is. There were 32 recommendations. Six were acted on within a week, but we haven't heard any follow-up on the other important recommendations, that relate not only to the lack of integrated mental health services in this province but also now to the opiate crisis, that appears to be out of control. That is all I can say. Whether we call it an emergency or not doesn't matter, but we need to mobilize resources. We need to co-ordinate the departments of Justice and Solicitor General, Education, homelessness, First Nations, and Health. If we don't get all those departments working together, we are not going to get ahead of this terrible and costly tragedy that's going on.

Bill 6 was a wonderful, welcome initiative, again, by this government. They've been part of recognizing basic human rights for the people that feed us every day: the right to a safe working place, the right to compensation, not being booted down the road because they can't perform their functions after an injury. I'm not saying that all farms and ranchers were not ethical and good employers, but some were not, and all workers deserve a standard of safe conditions and compensation when they get injured.

I'm pleased to see a couple of reports come out this week from the working groups. I'm waiting now for the other three. I hope they will not be delayed too long, and I hope they will not be watered down by the very strong push-back from the ag coalition, who only came on the scene since Bill 6 came in. Formerly it was the Alberta Federation of Agriculture that spoke for the agriculture community and agriculture and the ranching and farming industries. Somehow the ag coalition jumped on the bandwagon against a lot of the positive elements of Bill 6 and undermined any belief in the rural community that this is actually going to be good for both owners and farm workers.

It's going to improve both the image of the agricultural and farming sector, and it's going to obviously improve, hopefully, long-overdue child labour standards, which we still don't have in this province for farm workers. There are no child labour standards. Especially in the context of the Mexican Mennonites, I've seen and heard lots of stories about some of the ways that they have been misused and abused, not only by working in situations that are not safe, but because their families needed the income, they allowed them to skip school to go and work in some of these somewhat dangerous areas.

So that is an ongoing satisfaction to me, and I'll be watching for progress reports and holding the government to making strong decisions there.

Health innovation is happening, but it's much too slow and much too piecemeal. We need to address the waste and inefficiency in our major public service health care, consuming more dollars per capita than any other provincial budget and getting poorer results in spite of it. It's not about money. It's about better management, and I hope that the minister is going to be bolder in looking at the ways that the systems are top heavy. They're focused on treatment and high tech, and they're not addressing early intervention/prevention programs in the community that would make such a difference.

Primary care family physician teams are not working well together. They're not working consistently on some of the most important issues plaguing our population, including mental health, addictions issues, child poverty, child behaviour and learning problems. If we don't get primary care networks to work more effectively and efficiently and clearly fit into the rest of the system with the other players in social services, in education, and with the other departments that are important to health, including the poverty work that needs to be done, we're going to see a continued escalation in costs that we're not going to be able to afford without sacrificing many other things that are needed.

I'm happy to see the commitment to high-quality, affordable child care and, obviously, given the financial situation recognize that we can't do everything we would want to do at this time. I'm pleased to be part of the panel reviewing child deaths in care, and I hope that we'll soon focus on the early determinants of child health and family health. This is clearly an area where we are missing the boat.

Since 1994, when Ralph Klein cut social services, we now have 20 per cent fewer social services supports than the national average. It has never caught up. As a result, we have families in distress, families unable to meet their basic needs, families that are in a cycle of poverty and violence and unable to succeed in school. The

vicious cycle continues. I think we have Ralph Klein to thank for that, but successive Conservative governments have not addressed the issues of basic social supports for people.

I'm pleased to see First Nations and Métis appearing to be more of a priority. Clean drinking water clearly needs to be addressed. Both provincial and federal governments have to step up and make sure that we can guarantee every person in this population clean drinking water. We need regular progress reports on that. I hear a smattering from time to time: oh, this reservation, this organization now has clean drinking water, and another one is going on a boil water order. Well, let's make it a systematic and consistent progress report that we get with, again, joint federal and provincial response.

Change is difficult. I think we recognize that. It disrupts people and organizations in their lives, in their work. Essential as it is, the pace of change I think has to be examined by this government. The pace of change in some areas has been beyond what many people can tolerate. Particularly the business community has been giving me an earful. I think that if you want to be successful in the next election, you need to listen to the legitimate concerns of the business community and understand that all the wealth that we are distributing here comes from business.

Oh dear. Is it possible I've run out of time?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much for your thoughtful response. I do want to go back to your comment about the opioid crisis. I want to go back there because you and I have had many conversations over this and my over 30 years of experience in corrections. Certainly, I would have to say that staff in every institution in the country, in the remand centres are vigilant in terms of stopping drugs coming into that institution. They do everything that they can to stop it. Unfortunately, it doesn't stop. My question to you – well, I need to back up. Those drugs come into the country, come into the city, come into the province. In fact, Lethbridge police had a huge drug bust of over a million dollars just a couple of weeks ago. Somebody is fronting that money for those drugs to come in. Can you give me a suggestion of an achievable objective to stop it there? Certainly, from my experience that's where it needs to stop.

10:20

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much for the question. I would leave that to the federal and provincial authorities, who know much more about screening packages and substances and finding these.

I would flip that to recognition that maybe we don't have enough discussion at this time about the revenue as well as the spending. We've been very focused on the spending in this government, and I think we need to have an adult conversation about the revenue side as well, recognizing that, again, all the revenue that we distribute comes from business and, yes, some federal transfers, some fines, some land sales, and taxes. I see a real need to examine what is happening on the spending side, though, as I mentioned, in public services through independent reviews, I would hope, of all the public sectors. Independent reviews. I haven't seen or heard any of the ministries doing independent reviews and examining with real action following the failure of certain aspects of our delivery services.

We cannot expect carbon taxes, royalties, fines, and federal transfers to meet the burgeoning debt load, which ultimately will fall to our children. We have to examine other options. We have to look at other sources of revenue. That includes a PST; I'm sorry. We used to have a 7 per cent national GST. Now it's at 5 per cent.

A 2 per cent PST would simply take us back to where we were before. We need to have an adult conversation about a PST in conjunction with a very rigorous examination of what we're spending in the public sector and how we can bring that under control.

I know of all kinds of examples of waste in the health system. That's the system I know best, but I'm sure that there are areas in every branch of government that, because they haven't had an independent review, are not able to make serious and strategic, maybe surgical, decisions about where we can find efficiencies. I would be willing to entertain a discussion about a PST if we're seriously exploring and publicizing the changes that we're making in our public sector through independent analysis of where we could make significant improvements and efficiencies, better management styles, strategies, people who are not doing effective work within their job portfolio. Those kinds of changes have to be much more rigorously done.

I think that if we don't address the growing and burgeoning tax level, we are going to be passing on to future generations a tremendous boondoggle. We've heard already about the \$2 billion that we can anticipate in interest payments coming up. So I would welcome and I think this Legislature should welcome an adult conversation about where we're going to get the revenue to continue as well as finding the efficiencies in our spending.

Getting back to the original question that the Member for Lethbridge-East asked, I think that if we're not screening appropriately for drugs going into the correction centres, if we're not equipping the staff appropriately to do thoughtful engagement with people who may be coming off drugs or who may be addicted or who may be at risk and are desperate to do anything to get a fix because of the pain they're in, then we need to do something else.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand on behalf of the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville constituency to reply to the Speech from the Throne. I would again like to express my gratefulness for the opportunity that my constituents have given me to do this. I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, for sharing this government's direction for Alberta for the next year. The beginning of the speech honours the fact that this Legislature, our Legislature, is built on Treaty 6 territory, something that we should think about every time that we create and debate policy.

All the decisions that we make have lasting consequences and affect all relationships that we have with the people of Alberta. This has never been more important to me than after listening to stakeholders that came to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, where we're reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate Act. This is why I finally seized the opportunity from my friend Doug Heckbert to go out to his acreage to take part in my first sweat. On the walk there we saw a moose bed, a large spot that was made in the snow by a moose that was lying down on the side of the path. It reminded me of the interconnectedness that we have with the land. The elder that was there asked me why I was there, and I told him that it was to experience the lives of others.

Mr. Speaker, 70 per cent of the children that are in care are indigenous, and it's up to each one of us to engage and learn why that is. It was quite powerful. I shed a lot of tears in the dark. I heard a lot of stories, and the elder told me something that resonated with me and that I carry with me, that words are powerful. Words can

build us and each other up, and they can also tear us and each other apart. We must be careful with each word that we say.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Madam Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne we were reminded that Alberta is "an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice." It's those inclusive values that are the underpinnings of our government's work, like bringing in the Alberta child benefit and the enhanced Alberta family and employment tax credit that are helping hundreds of thousands of families make ends meet as we work towards economic recovery. That's just one way that our government is helping our communities.

Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, sets the framework for helping take part of the burden of school fees off families. A publicly funded education is supposed to be a right and a cornerstone to helping kids get the best start. Sadly, it's not the reality for many families. I've visited with many teachers that pay for supplies for families out of their own pockets because they see these students come into their classrooms every single day without the tools and basic necessities to learn.

Visiting St. John XXIII elementary in Fort Saskatchewan, I read to a group of grade 4 students who asked me questions afterward. One student stood up and asked me how his mom is going to be able to pay the rent. It wasn't because of the carbon levy. It wasn't because his mom lost her job. It is because this young man's family is part of the working poor in this province. Sadly, they are just one of many families who weren't planned for when government was making policy for the last 25 years.

My own mother, who relied on the welfare program, had her benefits cut, when I was about 11 years old, from \$800 a month, just enough to pay for rent, food, utilities, and maybe to take the bus every now and then – she had that cut in half to \$400. That meant that at the time she was forced to move in with her boyfriend, who was abusive, and it meant that at 11 years old I couldn't visit my mother anymore. I know that our case isn't special.

Growing up with my sister and my dad, socially funded programs like the Alberta child benefit stood between us and homelessness. This is why every time in this House and every time in my community I will stand and defend a \$15 minimum wage in this province. It's a steady increase, and it's an initiative that is supported by the Alberta Council for Women's Shelters. People like my mom, women that are stuck in minimum wage jobs, when they leave abusive situations – we know that it's the right thing to do.

Alberta's government kept the minimum wage depressed while the cost of everything else skyrocketed for almost a decade. So while we know, Madam Speaker, that families are being careful with their own hard-earned dollars, our government is making strategic, well-intentioned decisions when it comes to the money that belongs to the public. Spending almost \$35 billion on critical and long-neglected infrastructure and transportation projects will keep roughly 10,000 workers a year employed.

Two schools that are under way in the city of Fort Saskatchewan are a necessity to the current and future needs of a very young, expanding population of Fort Saskatchewan. SouthPointe elementary will have kindergarten to grade 9, and St. André Bessette, that broke ground last year and at which the Minister of Infrastructure was able to join us, will be home to students from grades 9 to 12. These schools were promised over and over and over again by multiple governments and never got a shovel in the ground. Finally, our government was elected. We understand and the government understands the value of investment in education in

our community. Music rooms, libraries, and school gyms will no longer need to be made into classrooms.

We have a situation in Fort Saskatchewan that remains a key infrastructure issue: the highway 15 bridge. Madam Speaker, let me draw a picture for you. You are driving out of Edmonton. It's the Manning freeway, and you're headed east. It's easy; it's twinned. Traffic moves along as people drive out from Edmonton from work or to visit Fort Saskatchewan or back to the farm or you're one of thousands that are employed in Alberta's Industrial Heartland: Dow, Sherritt, Shell, Plainsman, Stream, Kiara.

It's a beautiful drive as it turns into highway 15. It's still twinned. Traffic is moving, and then for no apparent reason four lanes of divided highway narrow down to a two-lane highway. Heavy traffic, tanker trucks, and large transport vehicles are speeding by you in the opposite direction at 110 or 120 kilometres an hour. You're feeling a little bit more anxious because all that divides you is a line on the road. Then the speed limit for some reason drops to 80.

10:30

Then you hit a light where there are two major highways that come out of major transportation corridors in our province, that create billions of dollars of GDP, that intersect with yours. There are traffic lights, and you grind to a halt, and you patiently take your turn for an hour. You get through the lights, and then for no apparent reason the speed goes up to 100 kilometres an hour around a hairpin turn in the highway down a steep hill. Then, finally, the speed goes down to 70 to cross a two-lane bridge, a bridge built in 1957 that didn't anticipate the size of the trucks that we have now and didn't expect the booming heavy industry. So you cross this bridge, and finally after getting out of that traffic jam that happens every morning, every evening, every day through a short valley between two banks, for no reason other than trying to deal with our province's planning shortfalls, it opens up to eight lanes in the city of Fort Saskatchewan. They tried to solve a problem, but they couldn't because they didn't have the partnership of a province.

The traffic situation is serious. On the evening that I was elected, the mayor of Fort Saskatchewan, Gale Katchur, came to visit me. She said, as she shook my hand for a photo: we need to talk about the bridge. Being part of Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association, Gale knows the economic growth that can happen if we invest in healthy trade corridors, and as mayor she knows that we have lost people on these roads and on that bridge. You don't have to imagine what happens when you go through a hairpin turn on highway 15 after being frustrated, stuck in traffic for an hour. You don't have to imagine what happens on that turn in the winter when the roads have ice and you have headlights in your eyes and you try to move your vehicle a little bit to the right and you hit the rumble strip and it jars your senses. That's what's happened. People have died on that turn and on that bridge. That is why I am continuing to ask our Minister of Transportation to help us find a solution because our core responsibility, Madam Speaker, is to make life better for every Albertan.

Madam Speaker, making life better also means looking forward to the future, creating the opportunity for our resource owners and resource developers to get a better return on those resources. It was incredible news to hear that our climate leadership plan, with a cap on oil sands development and a price on carbon, had secured us federal approval on a pipeline that gets us to Canadian tidewater. For too long we have been dependent on one customer at one price, and this will finally open up markets in a way that gets us a better price, more customers, and a better tax revenue to build the things that we need. This commitment to growing our economy also applies to my core principles, adding value to our

resources before shipping them away. This was perfectly aligned with our government's petrochemical diversification program, a program that has seen the announcement of two projects, one in the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville with Inter Pipeline. This will create thousands of jobs and diversify our economy.

It's this innovation that created our new royalty framework, that has led to the approval of 158 new wells that wouldn't have been otherwise drilled last year, a framework that rewards those that can reduce their costs and improve efficiency, a situation where Albertans and industry both win. It's for this reason that my constituents wait with intense anticipation for recommendations from the Energy Diversification Advisory Committee's discussions with industry, economists, academics, and labour to find ways to get better value and more jobs for our energy resources and to diversify our economy.

Madam Speaker, my constituency very much wants to be part of the conversation about orphan wells. This continues to be an issue with farm and land owners that have wells abandoned by bankrupt companies that have little to no recourse when trying to recoup payments or trying to get a well capped.

This year work continues to support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and job creators, job creators like Alberta's Two Sergeants pub and microbrewery, located in my home of Fort Saskatchewan. They continue to add new brews like the oatmeal stout and Bear Beer and to partner with other small businesses to create products like IPA beard oil, some of which I hope to buy for my new neighbour, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, or the buns that they serve with their elk smokies that use their own spelt grain that has been used for brewing.

Madam Speaker, our government is also working to help and protect victims of sexual and domestic violence with the introduction of legislation that eliminates barriers to pursuing justice. Bill 2 will eliminate limitation periods that are bound by time so that when a victim of sexual violence is ready, time has not gotten in the way of justice.

Madam Speaker, this government is making life better, and it's never too late to make progress so that we can protect families; so that we can include women in the future; so that indigenous people are not just partners but teachers; so that I can be an active part of our government building bridges to help heavy industry, our farming sector, our youth, our Muslim brothers and sisters who I prayed with in Vegreville after the attack in Quebec, our temporary foreign workers, that need a voice. I am here for them to make their lives better and ensure that they are included with the future that Alberta offers. On this International Women's Day and every day I am here to be part of a feminist agenda.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was pleased to hear the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville talk about the increased drilling that's gone on in the province and that this government's policies have increased that. I was wondering if the member could also give us her opinion on how those increased drilled wells would be protected by the orphan well policy that the government has and if this government is going to give more funding and more stabilization to those wells that are being abandoned. If the policy is going to be increasing well drilling, then how are the landowners, you know, many of whom are her constituents – how would that be protected by this new government?

Mrs. Littlewood: If I understood the question from the member properly, I think that there is a lot of discussion around how we address those issues. There are a lot of wells across the province that need to be remediated, and there could potentially be work there. The government will be talking with our federal counterparts and industry to see how we can address those issues because it is something that needs to be addressed.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), the hon. member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With much respect to the member who just shared her throne speech with us, I know that she has also talked openly and candidly about her experience with sexual assault. On this International Women's Day I think it's absolutely essential that we as men be in solidarity with women, all women. So I'd like to ask my hon. colleague and member how I as a man, from her perspective, can be a better ally to women who have experienced sexual and domestic violence.

Mrs. Littlewood: I want to thank the member for the question and recognize all the effort that you have made on this issue with your family and with your community and with your friends. You know, standing in the Legislature and talking about experiences like that is not easy because you put it on the record for everyone. It's important, though, to do that because we have the opportunity here to be that voice for those that aren't ready yet to speak about it themselves.

10:40

In the thought of what we can do, anyone, whether it's men or women, it's even just to listen and to be there if they're asking for support, to believe them. You know, the campaign I Believe You was such a remarkable message because the message was that you don't have to know what to say. You can just say, "I believe you," and that's enough until the person asks you for further support. It's a campaign that I believe in because even in my own family or friend circles it's actually still really common to talk about those things and experience that sort of slut shaming and victim blaming that happens with those conversations. Just having that initial step of empathy and believing someone is an incredible thing that you can give that person in that moment.

It was interesting when I had people coming to me, texting me, or e-mailing me and calling me after I shared my own story here. It was interesting how many people felt guilty about not sharing their own stories, and we have to ensure that we don't make those people feel like they have to yet. They can do it when they're ready.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to respond to the Speech from the Throne? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my great privilege and honour to rise in the House to respond to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. It's hard to believe that almost two years have passed since that wonderful orange wave brought our government into power. I mean, it's been an incredible learning experience for all of us. I guess one of the great things I've learned is just what amazing people we have the privilege to represent.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As many members are aware, my riding has a big stretch of highway 63 and highway 28, which were the main evacuation

routes during the Fort McMurray wildfire. Just the level of assistance and support without thought to personal cost or personal advantage that my constituents, of course, along with the rest of the province showed to people as they fled I think speaks to the incredible sort of bedrock morality that our society and our province is founded on. It's been this – I think the Lieutenant Governor referred to it as grit – grit that I think has allowed us to weather what have been very trying circumstances for many people. I mean, we've had, of course, the collapse in oil prices. We've had, you know, poor weather in many parts of the province. It's made agriculture quite challenging. Of course, in my own hometown we had our sawmill close, which had a huge local impact. With all these things happening, there could be a possibility that people would have maybe a bit of despair.

That's not something that I've seen. I've seen people being, you know, resilient and hopeful through that, and that extends to our business community as well. There are signs that things are picking up. I mean, one huge thing: Athabasca now has a Tim Hortons, which is a milestone in that community. Much more than that, though, two years ago the future of Athabasca University had clouds over it. I have to say that now it is absolutely clear that Athabasca University will continue to remain a world-class university and continue to remain in Athabasca. Things could have been much, much worse.

I grew up in Alberta, you know, as many of you have. I graduated in the late '80s. When I got out of high school, there was no work. What's more, there was no support. That was the beginning of the age of austerity. It went into Klein's time. I'm just so grateful and happy that we don't have to deal with the types of issues that afflicted us then. At a time when people need support and assistance the most, unlike in the past, that's been there for them. I mean, just think how much worse this could have been. We could have had to deal with laid-off teachers. We could have had to deal with laid-off social workers. We could have had to deal with laid-off nurses. We could have had to deal with closing hospitals. We could have had to deal with our infrastructure continuing to fall apart. We could have had to deal with the very necessary improvements to roads and transportation being frozen.

Just to sort of pause and think about that, just imagine what would have happened during the Fort McMurray wildfire if we hadn't proceeded to finish twinning highway 63 up to the Atmore corner.

Mrs. Pitt: Or budgeted properly.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. We won't get sidetracked there.

What would have happened if we'd frozen the work on the highway instead of taking out those suicide corners? I'm looking at Mr. Cyr, who I know is quite aware of some of those issues.

Mr. Cyr: Name. Name.

Mr. Piquette: I'm sorry. I was so proud of myself because I remembered to call the Lieutenant Governor the Lieutenant Governor. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

But, you know, how many lives have been saved and will be saved as a consequence?

I reflect on the additional money that our government gave to FCSS, which I know helped them deal with the spike in domestic violence and other issues that have come with some of the economic troubles with the collapse of oil. So I'll just say that I'm very proud and happy to be part of a government that, at the very least, has not made things worse and, in fact, has made things a lot better. In particular, in our riding has been the great success of the resource diversification program, with the renewed hope that those massive investments in petrochemical diversification will be coming

forward, and our continued support for the North West refinery phase 1, which has kept thousands of workers still working in a situation where there weren't really many other alternatives.

That kind of leads me to a wonderful line from the Speech from the Throne, which I think speaks, like I said, to Albertans' bedrock values and especially to the values that I see in my colleagues, that we understand that "we are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice." These are values that I know Albertans still believe in. Albertans believe in justice; however, it is not always straightforward to know what the right thing to do is even when you know that's what you want to do. Not only does the scope of our values change over time; how we interpret those values in the real world is always changing in light of new information, and that's always changing in the light of our own increasing maturity as individuals and as a society.

I think you can really see that in some of, you know, the important moves that our government has made recently; for example, the recognition of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. First Nations for far, far too long were regarded and treated by too many of us as second-class citizens. We have a lot of damage to undo, but at least I think we're on the right track, and I think that speaks to a growing moral awareness of what it means to treat other people with respect.

10:50

I think this is most definitely true with International Women's Day. Now, I should say, of course, that Alberta historically was among the very first, I think, in the dominion to recognize the rights of women to vote. That wasn't, I guess, because of the goodwill of the men of the province. I think we were kind of led to that and continue to be, but at least you could say for us that we have the good grace to know when to shut up and listen and to change our behaviour when it's needed.

I think this also speaks to, you know, in this past year the recognition of the contribution of Ukrainian immigrants to Albertan society. That's a big change. I remember reading memos that our predecessors, the Social Credit government, back in the late '50s wrote about asking the RCMP to spy on Ukrainians in northern Alberta because they thought they were untrustworthy foreign elements and they suspected them of maybe coming up with an insurrection. I hope you won't ask me to table that document. I can find it somewhere in the records.

Now, they also said that the other kind of really disreputable group that you needed to keep an eye on were those damn Frenchmen up there as well. I have to say that I'm very proud, and I know that my father – unfortunately, he's not here today. I know he'd be happy to see that. He missed that. It's, of course, due to the wonderful work of our Minister of Culture and Tourism that we're recognizing francophone – I'm trying to remember exactly what it's called. But we raised the flag. I think that the recognition of French Canadians as a central and equal element of Alberta society is something that I'm very proud our government has embraced, something that I think is long overdue.

It also just speaks to that real change in our maturity as a society. When my father spoke in the Legislature back in the '80s, for those people who are a little bit younger, I don't think you can really imagine just what an uproar it caused. Now, these were, of course, the days long before Facebook. However, that was also the day long before call display, so if you wanted to give death threats or threats to people, you could just leave a message on the telephone answering machine. We used to get these messages at home. They'd be things like, "Oh, you frogs should be taken up against the wall and shot," or, you know, "Get your ass back to Quebec," and things like that. It was a big deal.

Dr. Turner: Is that parliamentary?

Mr. Piquette: Don't do that. This is going to be in *Hansard*, you know, Dr. Turner.

Now it's noncontroversial. So I guess what this speaks to is that, I think, as a society we are maturing.

This brings me to, I think, my second-favourite job of all time. From 2006 to 2011 I had the privilege of teaching ethics in law and education at the University of Alberta. I had the opportunity to teach education students from around the province, everywhere from down in Hanna up to Peace River, High Level, and, of course, Edmonton and Calgary, all points in between. These students, to a person, shared one overwhelming characteristic, and that is that they all really wanted to do the right thing. Like I said, though, it's not always kind of clear what that right thing to do is. One thing I used to do to kind of shake them up, to get them thinking about moral reasoning was that I used to use a little exercise called Heinz's dilemma. Now, I'm not sure if members have heard of Heinz's dilemma, but it's just a very simple little story. It's a druggist named Heinz, and he had a drug, a very special drug, a very expensive drug, that could cure a very particular illness. Another gentleman's wife in that same community contracted that very illness. Unfortunately, he did not have the money to pay for the drug. So then the question you pose to the students is: what should this individual do?

Now, the answer is irrelevant. What's important is how you reason out your answer. Basically, a moral theorist called Lawrence Kohlberg used this as a way of kind of showing that the way you approach moral questions, the kinds of ways you relate to them, speaks to your maturity as a moral person. So at the very bottom stage, basically, you consider: "What's right to me? What's in it for me?" You know, what works for me is what's right, which basically corresponds to the toddler stage. Everything a toddler sees is "mine," right? But as we mature and if we work at it, we progress. From there, you go into basically looking for: what will make me popular? What's going to help me fit in? What do people see from me, right? That will be the stage of – it's a kind of advanced stage of: what's in it for me? But that's to avoid punishment and to be popular.

However, the goal as an adult is to reach the final stage, which is to think of the primary consideration of what's right and what's right in the sense of even if the role was reversed, if I'm making a decision about that person and even if I was in that person's position, I would still find the decision acceptable. So a universal ethic. It's treating all people as equal and worthy of moral consideration. That's what it means to be a mature person ethically, and that's what it means in the end to do the right thing.

Now, of course, this is nothing new. I mean, that final stage of moral development is something that, I think, expressed – of course, there's a famous little poem on it. Very quickly – actually, I don't think I'll have time to quote that poem. But let's just say that there was a very famous teacher that lived long ago that made that same point but a lot more succinctly: love your neighbour as you love yourself. It's this type of approach that I think we as elected officials need to take in all the decisions we make.

This is what, for me, makes it all the more disappointing to see the . . . [Mr. Piquette's speaking time expired] Oh, no. How could 10 minutes have shot by already?

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw under 29(2)(a). Is that correct?

Mr. Piquette: Could I say something before I sit down?

The Speaker: You need to sit down.

Mr. Sucha: I was enthralled by the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater's comments. I was wondering if he would care to elaborate some more.

Mr. Piquette: I was just going to point out that that's why I find the opposition's resistance to the climate leadership plan to be so disappointing, because as far as I can understand, the position that they have come to now is that they no longer – okay; well, I won't say no longer because that might be loaded. They do not deny the science of climate change. They do not deny that it is being influenced by human factors, by factors, you know, caused by us as a global community. What they deny is that it's our responsibility to do anything about it, right? What they deny is that we have a responsibility, and they use tactics that are, frankly, unethical. I mean, in ethics you'd call it special pleading.

The Speaker: I caution you, hon. member, in the use of the word "unethical."
Continue.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. I guess I think that along with our province it's time for our opposition to grow up. Thank you.
With that, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: You can't do that.

Mr. Piquette: I can't do that either?

The Speaker: I'm not able to accept the motion to adjourn. We're at 29(2)(a).
The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening to the member's comments, and I would like to take some time to thank the Transportation minister for reviewing highway 28 and making some alterations and taking the time to sit with me and my colleagues. I also acknowledge that this impacted a fellow constituency as well, and it's great to see that we can work together to fix some of Alberta's problems.

I would like to say this to your 29(2)(a) response. With jobs and unemployment being so high in our ridings right now, how do you feel about an Ontario company getting jobs to install light bulbs within Alberta, when you have constituents out of work just like me, under this new climate change plan that you've got going forward?

11:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. This is the type of thing that I think I was kind of referring to in the sense that I think that – well, I don't want to cast aspersions, so I'll just maybe quickly explain to the hon. member that we do have interprovincial trade agreements that restrict what types of jobs, you know, or contracts we can have only provincial bidders for. Our businesspeople depend on interprovincial trade, and interprovincial trade is a give-and-take, so we cannot expect other provinces to honour that agreement if we don't honour that agreement. What's more, though, is that this company has established an office in Calgary, and they are hiring all Alberta people to do the actual work, so we will be getting employment from this.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?
Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as I would love to hear about bright ideas and light bulbs from the other side, I'll move to adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees

[Debate adjourned March 7]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to be able to rise as a cosponsor and supporter of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. This was a campaign promise. It was something that resonated deeply with parents across Alberta and parents in my riding of Calgary-East. When I was door-knocking during the election and when I've been door-knocking recently and when I talk to people in my community, I often hear from them: "Hey. What's up with the school fees? Are you doing something about the school fees?" So I am so happy that we are doing something about the school fees.

The very nature of public education is that it's free. This is something that we've agreed on as a collective here in Alberta, that every child in our province has the right to a good, free public education. The issue of school fees and rising school fees has in recent years become a bit of a barrier to this promise that we have to children in Alberta.

Education is why I ran. It's why I ran in 2012; it's why I ran again in 2015, because as a teacher in schools in Alberta I felt that the government was not fulfilling its promise to students and to teachers and to public education in Alberta.

I remember in 2010, after I spent my first full year as a teacher in the public education system, that the government made some decisions about funding for education that were going to result in cuts to teachers in classrooms. Many of my friends who had been out of school, who had been teaching for a year, were told that their contracts weren't going to be renewed for the following year. There were going to be fewer teachers in classrooms. In my own school I saw the effects of that. My principal was an amazing woman who worked very hard to be able to keep all of us, and I thank her so much for the opportunity to have been able to keep my job through that situation. But our school did see a reduction in educational assistants, our school saw a reduction in technology that was available, and our school saw reductions in supports for ESL students' technology in the classroom.

It was these collective actions of the government of the day that led me to run for elected office. It led me to be here in this House today because that message, when I talked to parents in my constituency, resonated. People value education in this province. People know that education is the key to making the province better long term, into the future. If we educate all of our students well, to be critical thinkers, to be forward lookers, to be co-operative people, to solve problems, to be entrepreneurial, if we do that well, we are going to continue to have an amazing province well into the future. If we do education right, Mr. Speaker, it solves so many other problems. That is one thing I'm so proud of our government for, our enduring commitment to quality education for every student in this province.

Now, while I am very proud of our public education system in the province, the issue of school fees and their increase has been an

ongoing issue for families and can sometimes be a barrier to accessing public education. As a teacher in the Calgary board of education one of the things that I was responsible for at the beginning of the school year was collecting school fees, which is a downer for a lot of reasons. One, it takes time away from me being a teacher in the classroom. I have to spend time at the beginning of the year making sure that all of my students have collected fees, filing them appropriately, making sure that they get to the office. As those of you who know me know, organization and paperwork is not one of my strengths. This was something that, you know, was not a good use of my time, this collection of school fees.

But it was also a downer because I would have to send continuous letters. I would get letters from the office to tell me: "So-and-so hasn't paid their school fees. So-and-so hasn't paid their schools fees. Could you remind them, please, that they have to pay their school fees?" You know, there are reasons why families aren't paying school fees, and I think those reasons were outlined very well by the Member for Calgary-Shaw in his speech yesterday. Parents don't always want to admit that they don't have the extra money to pay these fees. There are systems in place where parents can apply for waivers so that they don't have to pay the school fees. However, that often involves filling in forms with very personal information, taking those forms to the school, and functionally telling all of the staff at the school that your family is too poor to pay for school fees. That can be embarrassing, and that's something that people don't necessarily want to do.

Sometimes parents would, you know, have to make hard decisions in order to pay these school fees. They might be making decisions about whether to buy their kids extra toys or whether to enrol their kids in lessons because they have to pay these school fees. So in a public education system this is a barrier, and this is a problem.

I do, though, want to say that I am very excited that we are finally moving forward on addressing this issue that affects so many families across the province. I do want to say that I am impressed by the considered and thoughtful approach that the ministry has taken on this issue. When I was at the doors, people would say, you know, "What are you doing about school fees?" And I would say: "The ministry is looking into it. They've been looking into it from the moment they got elected." Part of the issue is that we didn't know. We didn't have the data. We didn't know what school boards were collecting, what school fees. We didn't know how much were the school fees that were being charged. We didn't know what those school fees were being used for. So rather than charging ahead and just saying, "We're cutting school fees," we engaged in some very thoughtful consultation with school boards across the province to be able to see where school fees were being charged, what they were being charged for, and where we might be able to make a difference. This took some time, and we took some heat for taking time. But because of the nature of what we've done and because we've taken time, we're able to zone in on the particular fees that we're able to eliminate right away.

Some of the places that we've started: we've started with the elimination of materials fees and the elimination of busing fees to designated schools. Now, this is going to save parents a significant amount of money. If you look at Calgary, if you consider that you have two students in high school in Calgary and they both take the bus, this could be saving you nearly a thousand dollars a year if your child goes to a Calgary board of education school. You know, that's a significant amount of money. That's money that parents are going to have in their pockets at the end of the month to pay for other things.

I also just want to mention that we have had, if I can locate it, several people who have been onboard with this decision to reduce

school fees. Allison Pike, who's the president of the Alberta School Councils' Association, said:

We commend the Education Ministry for working to reduce school fees paid by Alberta parents. School councils look forward to consultations supporting this legislation as an important step in ensuring the success of all students.

Michelle Draper, who's the board chair of Edmonton public schools, said:

Edmonton Public Schools is supportive of the government continuing to invest in education and in Alberta families. We share a commitment to equity and accessibility of public education.

11:10

When I spoke to board trustees, I spoke to the chair of the Calgary board of education and my trustee on the Calgary board of education the day after the announcement came out, and they said that they were so happy for their families. They have kids in school, too, and they know that these fees can be burdensome, and they're happy for families. They are, of course, waiting to see what comes through in terms of funding to replace the school fees, but we have assured them that the Department of Education has found \$15 million worth of efficiencies in the budget, which we will be finding later, to be able to address the gap that will exist because of the elimination of these school fees.

Now, the other thing is transportation fees. We've managed to look at busing to designated schools. In my ideal world every student would have a school in their community that they could ride or walk to and busing wouldn't be necessary. Unfortunately, due to the growth of many of our communities, this isn't something that's happening, and we are working to address that shortfall with school builds. I, like many of my colleagues, am proud of the schools that we've been building around Alberta so that kids don't have to pay for bus fees, so that they can bike and walk to school every day. I do just want to note that it does absolutely take time to design a school, to find land for a school. It takes a long time, but the reality is that this government right now, today, is building those schools.

I sit on the Public Accounts Committee, and I did see the Auditor General's report that noted that the previous government didn't allocate the appropriate resources or have the planning in place to build all the schools that they had promised. I will quote from that report right now. It says:

The departments' systems and capacity to support the school-building program did not keep pace with the very large growth and complexity of the program. Our audit found that neither department has adequate systems to plan, deliver and report on the program. Both departments were individually responsible for certain aspects of the program, but no one was responsible for overall results, so information on project schedules, including completion dates, was not known. Internal reporting on project progress was lacking, and public reporting was consequently weak.

So while, certainly, the previous government was very good at announcing schools, they were not particularly good at actually building the schools.

I would like to thank our Transportation and Infrastructure ministries. I would like to thank all of the school boards who have collaborated with our Transportation and Infrastructure ministries to get those schools built, to get them designed. And I'd like to thank all of the students and staff. My neighbour across the street has just moved, and she's had to spend the first half of this year in a different school before she can move into her new school. That's a lot of work for teachers, to have to move schools in the middle of the year. But they're so happy to finally have new schools and to have new schools in their communities so that kids

don't have to bus to school. These are huge improvements that have been made.

While this bill reduces two types of fees immediately, the materials and instruction fees and the busing to designated school fees, in my mind the real benefit of this bill is that it allows the ministry to have more oversight into school fees: what's being charged, why these charges are being made, where we can make decisions to cut or reduce fees.

I think everyone agrees that kids need to be supervised at lunch, and I think everyone agrees that students need to have access to technology at school. However, I don't think that parents, certainly, agree that we need to pay for those things. The idea that a student has to go to school and then you have to pay for your student to remain at school over lunch is a little ridiculous to me. Clearly, people, you know, work and aren't necessarily sitting at home waiting for their children to come home at lunch, especially if you have to bus your child to school in the first place. So the idea that you would have to pay for your student to be supervised at lunch is a little ridiculous.

I do want to mention something that I hear a lot. I hear a lot that people say: "Well, why can't teachers just do the lunchtime supervision? Why can't teachers just sit in the classroom while the students eat lunch? Why isn't that a thing?" Well, because they're doing other things, Mr. Speaker. They're supervising extracurriculars. They're tutoring kids that need help. They're doing marking. They're working. They're often working over lunch hour, you know, and sometimes they're maybe not working. Sometimes they're eating. An amazing thing that you might be doing: you might be eating lunch as a teacher.

I would challenge anyone who makes the claim that teachers should be doing the lunch hour supervision to come to a school, stand in front of students for three to four hours, help them to learn, make sure they're not hurting each other, you know, create a warm, welcoming learning environment that all teachers do every day in school, and then I'd challenge them to feel that they don't deserve to have lunch like every other worker in Alberta. Every other worker in Alberta gets lunch. Teachers are allowed to have lunch, too.

You know, through this bill we will continue to look for solutions. We will continue to look for solutions for lunch fees, for technology fees, for all of the other fees that school boards charge. We will work with school boards and parents to make sure that school fee structures are more fair. Again, the public nature of education in this province means to me, anyway, that whether you're going to school in Cardston or Medicine Hat or Grande Prairie or Calgary, your school fees should be relatively the same. I mean, in an ideal world there wouldn't be any school fees at all, but regardless of that there should certainly be some equity and fairness among the school boards so that there's not this vast inequity that we see right now.

One of the things that we are doing is working on the definition of what constitutes a basic education because in order to determine what school fees can be charged and which can't be charged, we have to have a common understanding of what a basic education is, and that is something that we will be working on through consultation. Now, I would argue, again from my personal opinion, that a basic education includes things like technology. I had a smart board. It was helpful. I think . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Opposition House Leader on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, please. Thank you. It sounds like the member ran out of time, so I'd be riveted to hear the rest of her remarks, and

perhaps in those remarks she could also answer the question that I have. I was recently speaking to a school board trustee in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and they had expressed some concerns, particularly around busing fees. They have some parameters where kids inside 2.4 kilometres of the school pay a fee and those outside don't. I know that there is a wide range of busing fees that are applied and administered at the local level at the school board's discretion.

In a situation like that, where some people were already paying and others weren't, how exactly is the process going to work for them to make the necessary adjustments? Were all of those things calculated when they arrived at their total number? Can they receive any assurances that even though they have local policies around who is paying school fees and who isn't, those are going to be taken into consideration and not wind up in a situation where the government has created the illusion that there's not going to be school fees – and by school fees I mean busing fees in this case – and then next September the school board is going to feel some pressure when the government didn't consider how the local policy had been applied?

Ms Luff: I do want to finish my statement about what I would argue is a basic education. What I would argue is a basic education is access to technology. I would argue that it includes experiential learning outside of a school. I would argue that it includes things like music and art and programs that enrich, you know, every child's educational experience. Not every child loves math, unfortunately, but every child loves something, and I think it's important for students in school to have an opportunity to do what they love.

In terms of busing fees we recognize certainly that it is complicated and that different school boards have different standards when it comes to school fees. The ministry has done extensive work looking into different systems for different school boards and will continue to consult widely with school boards to make sure that, you know, everyone understands the standards that are laid out in this legislation.

11:20

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently myself and the Member for Calgary-Currie had an opportunity to go to the Member for Calgary-East's constituency to announce a pilot project that the government was launching in collaboration with a lot of our school boards in relation to nutrition programs. I was really excited to go there because it was where I grew up, and I know that that's going to pay dividends. I know that the Member for Calgary-East represents a lot of working-class constituents, so I would love to hear how this is going to have a very positive effect on her constituents in Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Shaw for that. I was going to speak a little bit about this, and then you'll catch a little bit more in my response to the Speech from the Throne if I get a chance to do that tomorrow. Certainly, I was thrilled when the school nutrition pilot program was announced. I was thrilled that the announcement was in my riding, and I was thrilled that all of the three schools that were chosen were schools in my riding. The reason that that was is because the need is greatest in my riding.

There are lots of kids, and there are lots of schools who are working with local nonprofits to be able to provide school meals already. Many of my schools in Calgary-East provide school nutrition programs, and they do that because they know that kids can't learn when they're hungry. They're seeing over and over

again that kids would come to school hungry. I have heard very sad stories about teachers who would see kids grabbing granola bars, you know, and filling their pockets on Fridays because when they would go home over the weekend, they knew that they weren't going to have anything to eat. So to be able to provide a program like this to families in my riding means a lot. It means a lot. It saves time. You don't have to pack lunch. You know your kids are going to be fed nutritious meals at school. They're going to be able to learn, and they're going to be able to succeed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round, but how are we going to pay for them to go round and round? In the 30 years that I taught school, transportation and school fees were always a discussion that we had every year. As an educator I would sit down with our administration, and we would review the school budgets. We would attempt to find that magical point somewhere between balancing our school budget and trying to meet the classroom needs of our students.

As educators we understood that one of the foundational cornerstones of a public education system was that all of our students, no matter what their financial circumstances, should have the opportunity to have a high-quality education. I think we've heard that shared on both sides of the House as we've talked about this. One of those amazing things that we have as Albertans is a commitment to ensuring that all of our students will have a high quality of education.

Now, that didn't mean that that educational experience wouldn't have some inequities, but as far as the core curriculum was concerned and as far as the educational outcomes were concerned, we believed and we continue to believe that they have to be accessible to all of our students free of charge. But in the diversity of the courses that we provide in our schools and in our school boards, of all of the educational offerings that we have for our students, there is great diversity, and there's often a huge amount of inconsistency from school to school, from school board to school board.

Often financial realities meant that some families in my school would struggle to make ends meet. Outside of school they would have to make tough choices about their kids and where they would find the money to be able to meet the financial needs of their family. Those questions and those concerns didn't end at just their lives outside of the school. They also had to encompass how they were going to find the money for some of those school fees. It was never easy as a schoolteacher, as an educator when a family was identified that was truly a hardship case, for the administration to try to step in and either make arrangements for some small monthly payments, putting them on a schedule, or whether we would have to try to find some form of discretionary funding in our school budget that would allow for the coverage of those school fees.

There was no doubt that there were some years that the school fees could add up very quickly in the lives of our families and of our children. Instructional fees such as photocopying, field trip fees, school books, resource book rentals, band instruments, physical education fees, cosmetology fees, welding fees, art fees, drama fees: there are a lot of places to spend money in education and in the lives of our students. The list went on and on, and it still didn't include the fees that could accompany extracurricular sporting activities or performance fees. I know that as a parent who chose to live as a single-income family, trying to live on a schoolteacher's wage, the

month, especially in September, often lasted a lot longer than our money in the bank.

Now, this system of handling school fees, while at times burdensome to our school administration, did have at least one advantage. The decisions were often made locally, often at the school level, and at the most at the school board level. The advantage of that is that these decisions about what to charge and how much to charge and how to pay were done at the local level. These were done within a community of people that knew each other. The decisions were always made knowing that the impact that they would have would be on our friends and on our neighbours and on kids, who we cared a great deal for. Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, while a well-intentioned piece of legislation, seems to come at this problem indirectly, and it is putting much of the consultation, much of the decision-making with regard to these school fees under the consultation that will occur after the bill is passed.

The Wildrose Party will be supporting this bill, but we do have some concerns. The first concern revolves around local decision-making. It is the Ministry of Education that will define instructional fees. It may appear easy for those not having taught in the front lines to try to decide what an instructional fee is, but it's not easy. You can't just simply define that fee. Because of the great diversity, it's a very difficult thing to do.

The government has said that an instructional fee will be textbooks, workbooks, photocopying, printing paper, and any common fees charged to an entire student body or grade cohort. This definition and, for that matter, any definition of instructional fees is going to be hard because every school and every school division offer in many cases very unique courses and educational opportunities that may not fit easily into this definition of instructional fees. Even the government understands this and understands the difficulty of this as they have reserved the right to further define what an instructional fee is through regulation.

11:30

Now, there are so many different types of courses and mandatory experiences within our education system that trying to figure out what should be an allowable instructional fee and trying to define and put a price on that instructional fee is going to be difficult. What about safety goggles for welding? What about gym clothes for physical education? What about supplies for a sports medicine class? What about school fees for noon-hour supervision or mandatory field trips? This could become as convoluted and as confusing as is the case presently in home education when trying to decide what a home education parent can claim as a reasonable expense when educating their child.

Home education expense reimbursements have become a fiasco. Great expense is being created within the bureaucracy of this government as they try to identify and list and catalogue and reimburse in an equitable fashion legitimate home education expenses. It is quite possible that the issue of school fees will go down this same path of confusion and mismanagement as schools, in an attempt to balance their budgets, look for creative school fees.

This is particularly of concern as we look at the government's future ready initiative. In an attempt to broaden our framework and thinking around what it means to go to school and how to relate what we learn in school to what we do outside of school, indeed as we consider that school no longer even has to be conducted within the four walls of a classroom, we wonder where the discussion on school fees begins and ends. We understand that many of these details will be discussed in the future, and I can only say that I hope that the consultation process will be robust and transparent as we attempt to try to understand how we can take what appears to be a

very narrow definition of instructional fees in Bill 1 and help it to serve the students that we educate and the parents that have to pay the fees.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 has set aside \$54 million to partially cover the costs of school fees and transportation, starting in the fall of 2017. Approximately \$39 million is set aside for school fees and another \$15 million for transportation fees. Now, our next concern focuses on where the government is going to find the money for this initiative. The government says that the money will be found through efficiencies. As the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills would say, hooray, but forgive us for not getting too excited until we can actually see a ledger that outlines exactly how this government is going to actually pay for this program. Is this coming from efficiencies found in the Education budget, is it going to come from some other portfolio like Health or Seniors and Housing, or is the government going to download once again onto the backs of school boards and expect the efficiencies to come from that level of government?

The Wildrose Party can and does support the elimination of mandatory instructional fees. We campaigned on that promise. Bill 1 does not come close to the Wildrose proposal, but it is, finally, a step in the right direction, assuming that they don't once again confuse the idea of government efficiencies with the concepts of borrowing and debt. Based on this government's track record with budgets, I do wonder if this government is simply going to find the money by posting another record-level deficit and contributing to an even greater debt burden on Albertans while trying to convince them that the instructional fees will come from efficiencies.

Lastly, this government's bill does not live up to the NDP promise to reduce school fees by 50 per cent and to eliminate the noon-hour supervision charges, so while we will give this conditional support, this move in the right direction, let us remember that it is still a broken NDP promise.

Bill 1 does not simply address instructional school fees; it also tries to hide the effects of the carbon tax on transportation costs in a bill that is titled as all about school fees. Having said that, trying to finally address the cost of the carbon tax will have our general support. The carbon tax is estimated to cost school boards somewhere between \$8 million and \$12 million. How the \$15 million is set aside for transportation costs and how this money will be allocated is, like with so many government bills, left up to regulation. Will a student whose designated school is full or where a parent chooses to register their student in a nondesignated school still be forced to pay a transportation fee?

Wildrose will support this bill, but we have many concerns and questions about this bill that the government would be wise to consider at Committee of the Whole. Will the wheels of the bus go round and round? For Albertans' sakes, we hope so, but it is quite probable that Bill 1 could find itself on the side of the road with several flat tires if the concerns of the Wildrose Party are not effectively addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Imagine that it's September. You've picked out new clothes, shoes, a shirt, and, if your child is like me, maybe you've bought them a new tie as well. School supply shopping is done. You walk your child to school, or maybe you bring them to the bus stop. They get on the bus, they go off, and you wish them a great first day. That's what a lot of my constituents and the families in my riding are going to be doing this September.

Now, your child is going to come home, and they're going to have a note from their teacher. It's going to say that you owe the school hundreds of dollars in fees, and this is in a publicly funded school, Mr. Speaker. You're being charged for textbooks, workbooks, instructional materials, and whatever they want to call these fees. That's sticker shock. There's going to be sticker shock there. A lot of parents will go: I thought education was free in this province. This is the reality that my constituents would face, will face this September if the government was not moving along with Bill 1.

Every single school, every single teacher, every single principal will say: "Well, we have an opt-out program. We have something for the parents that don't want to or cannot afford to pay these fees." Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that not a single parent and not a single family wants to be the person walking in saying: "Please, I need help. I can't afford these fees, and my child needs to go to school." Not a single parent wants to be put in that situation with that social stigmatization or any of those embarrassing circumstances.

In this year and last, Mr. Speaker, I'll have opened eight new schools that were, yes, announced by a former government but were not funded by a former government. If you want a school built, it takes more than just an announcement. You must actually put the money where your mouth is. Now, many of my constituents and families know that this government is committed to education, and opening those schools was step 1. It was just one of those many important steps.

I just met with a school group just outside this Chamber, took a photo with them. It was a group of bright grade 4s, and one of the first things that I heard from the parents accompanying them was: hey, we were talking about Bill 1 at our parent council meeting yesterday. These are the things that matter to families. These are the bills that help Albertans. These are the bills that make a difference in their pocketbooks at the end of the month.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Madam Speaker, that's why I'm so proud to be able to cosponsor this bill. That's why I'm so proud to be able to support this bill, a bill that will save Albertans \$50 million and each of my families up to a thousand dollars per year. I've heard from families, from parents, from school board trustees and teachers and so many more people that know the difference that this bill will make in the lives of an average family.

11:40

It was a platform commitment of this government, Madam Speaker. It was something that I was very proud to bring to the doorsteps of Edmonton-South West, and it was something that this government is taking action on to support families. Our government is making good on that promise. We know families are happy to see the relief, especially in these times of economic downturn, of economic hardship. We know families are happy to see that this government is standing up for them, is making the right choices, and is moving in a direction that helps Albertans. We're helping Albertans save money that they can spend on their mortgage, maybe their groceries, hockey for their child, or any number of other things that their kids may want to partake in, that they may want to partake in. It's something where families will be able to say: we can now do what we couldn't do before.

It's important to note, Madam Speaker, that we're able to do all of this without compromising education for our students. We're able to do all of this while making sure that school boards and schools and teachers and students and class sizes are funded exactly the same way they were before, that we are guaranteeing a high

standard of education in this province. Education is the core of our future. Education will improve the lives of all of the children in this province. This is one more step, one more small step, admittedly, that makes their education more accessible and makes students more successful. It's progressive, it's the right thing to do, and it will make families' lives better.

Madam Speaker, the opposition would have us let these fees grow. The opposition would have us tell families: "We can't help you with fees. We can't help you with that little bit of difference in September, with that little bit of an extra step. We can't do that." That's what the opposition would have us do. This government will not stand for that because we're committed to helping Albertans. This legislation gives the government the authority to make lives better. It gives the government the ability to save money for families. That's why I'm so glad that this government is our government, a government that cares about Albertans, a government that's thoughtful, a government that's looking out for my constituents and looking out for families.

The Alberta School Councils' Association reports that some families spend more on school fees than on presents for Christmas, Madam Speaker. That's something that we shouldn't stand for. Instructional and material fees are an equitable way that we are able to make a difference for those families. These benefits will be seen across almost every single school board in this province. The amendments that are being made to the School Act give the minister and the government that power to regulate these fees and help Albertan families. It will also introduce a brand new fee review process that will allow parents to have their concerns heard by the school board of their choosing and to address any issues that they may have around fees.

Madam Speaker, the Edmonton public school board and the Edmonton Catholic school district, the two largest boards that service my constituents right here in Edmonton-South West, have both stated that this legislation will allow their schools and their school board to act in a way that is more equitable and accessible for their students. It will ensure that all of their students and, by extension, my constituents can succeed at school.

Madam Speaker, this bill has my full support. It is simply the right thing to do for Albertan families. If we do not move on this, we are letting families down, we are letting my constituents down, and we are letting Albertans down. I urge all members to support this bill so that we can take action on making life more affordable for families right here right now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 1 as well.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

Bill 2 proposes amendments to the Limitations Act that would help survivors of sexual and domestic violence by allowing them the time they need to come forward and file a civil claim. If passed, this bill will eliminate limitations periods for civil claims related to sexual and domestic violence. Right now in Alberta if a person wants to sue for these types of assault, the action must be started

within two years of when the person knew about the incident. There are provisions in the current legislation that suspend the limitations period in certain circumstances. The provisions of Bill 2 would remove limitations periods for making the following types of claims: sexual assault or other sexual misconduct or nonsexual assault which involve a minor, intimate relationship, or dependant.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that for survivors of sexual and domestic violence the decision to come forward is extremely personal and often difficult. Removing limitations periods empowers survivors to come forward on their own terms, when they are ready. With respect to sexual assault the proposed amendments would put Alberta in line with the majority of the country. However, Alberta will be leading the way in addressing other sexual misconduct in intimate relationships as no other jurisdiction in Canada expressly states this in their legislation. Removing the limitations period for claims stemming from sexual misconduct in intimate relationships would increase recourse for people who have endured a broad range of unwelcome behaviours such as sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, or the distribution of sexually explicit photographs without the individual's consent.

The provisions of the bill would apply retroactively, meaning that claims that stem from incidents that predate its coming into force would be allowed. It's impossible to know how many historical claims would have been subject to the limitations period and will be brought forth as a result of removing these. Each survivor will have a unique journey, but this will open one more door for those seeking to hold their attacker accountable in the court system. Applying these changes retroactively is consistent with other jurisdictions and aligns with the purpose of the bill, the recognition that survivors of sexual and domestic violence may need to come forward.

This is a change Albertans have asked for, Madam Speaker, and it's the right thing to do. This government is listening to Albertans, and we're taking action to address their concerns. Every Albertan deserves to feel safe and respected in their communities, their homes, and their workplaces.

When we introduced this bill, we heard from a survivor and from organizations who work with survivors. They told us that this opens one more door for survivors to come forward and provides one more option for a survivor's journey.

Madam Speaker, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. We hope this bill will help to make their lives a little bit better. I urge my colleagues in the House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

11:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. I know that in this House we have heard and have all the statistics about how prevalent sexual assault and battery is. We've heard harrowing and heartfelt accounts from members in this House about their own experiences with this crime – and I'm extremely proud to serve alongside you for your bravery in stating that – and we've welcomed guests that have bravely come to share their stories about dealing with the trauma that accompanies crimes of this nature.

I'm very happy to speak to the bill before us today, recognizing that this is a step forward in how we as a province treat those who

have been victimized. The bill removes the limitations period for sexual assault or battery as well as for sexual misconduct or sexual assault or battery in certain circumstances, like being a minor, being in an intimate relationship with the accused, or being in some way dependent on the accused. These changes will help protect the rights of survivors and allow them more flexibility when they can bring forward civil cases against the accused.

This flexibility is important because in many cases there are very real traumas that prevent victims from coming forward immediately after these crimes. The intimate nature of the crimes being addressed by this bill makes victims that much more vulnerable to manipulation and intimidation from their abusers. Sometimes it takes many years for these people to escape the influence of those committing these crimes or many years before they feel comfortable sitting across from them in court.

Those considerations could be serious obstacles to achieving justice for survivors of sexual assault and battery, and the government has done excellent work with this bill by removing some of those obstacles. I'm pleased to lend my support to this bill, and I will be voting to see it passed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Today is the perfect day to be discussing this piece of legislation, on International Women's Day, as we all know that most of these acts are committed against women and girls. Every person should have the right to be free from sexual violence and assault, and we all have a role to play in ensuring that right is upheld.

Sexual assault is a legal term used in Canada to refer to any form of sexual contact without voluntary consent. For many people experiencing a sexual assault can be very difficult to understand, and sometimes the true trauma does not set in until very late in life, many, many years later. Many people often have no idea what to do or where to turn for help, support, or even understanding. Since every person's experience and recovery process is unique, each person must decide for themselves what is needed for healing, but it is important that these decisions be made by the victims and that we respect their own unique healing process. This means giving them time.

Sexual assault is a violent and heinous act. It can take years to overcome. Legislation meant to compensate victims and allow them to seek justice needs to reflect this, and this is why I am pleased to support Bill 2. Removing the statute of limitations brings us in line with the majority of other provinces. This is important. I look forward to seeing this bill move forward, offering to the debate, listening to the debate, and I encourage all members in this Legislature to support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Is there anybody wishing to speak on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The House will be adjourned till 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:55 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 8, 2017

Day 4

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Hon. members, I would just repeat a message that I've mentioned several times in the Assembly before. I would urge that we be as brief as we can on introductions of guests and visitors, and I hope that you will be able to at the same time give due respect to the parties that are here.

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today on your behalf to introduce Jennifer Franki-Smith, who is seated in your gallery. Jennifer Franki-Smith was born and raised in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. She completed her bachelor of arts in sociology and anthropology from the University of Prince Edward Island in 2016. Jennifer is the public affairs and communications intern with the office of the Clerk at the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories. Jennifer's main duties consist of conducting daily tours of the Assembly, assisting with the production of educational outreach programs, and updating content on the Legislative Assembly website. She is accompanied by Al Chapman, manager of visitor services for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and will be observing and learning about our approach to educational programming and public tours. I would now ask Jennifer to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's a great pleasure to introduce two strong Alberta women leaders from the Alberta coalition on human trafficking who are seated in the gallery across from me: this organization's executive director, Andrea Burkhardt, and a project manager, Amy Wilson. They work every day to ensure that we have an Alberta free from human trafficking. Please join me in welcoming them.

For the second introduction, Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate the contribution of women trailblazers, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you Starr Curry and Tamara Chivers, who are both women who live in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. I should also note that they're both seated behind me. Starr Curry works tirelessly to support women in politics. Starr's commitment speaks for itself with the diversity that you see here in our government caucus as she has campaigned for a very long time to get more women onto our NDP ballot. Tamara Chivers is a woman leader from Edmonton-Glenora who balances the challenges and responsibilities of being a mom with her work as a lawyer for the United Nurses of Alberta. She is also a tremendous advocate for equality and diversity, and she signed my nomination papers. Please join me in welcoming them both as well.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. You also have two other guests in your gallery today. Sarah Hurcomb and Karine Landry are with the Library of Parliament. If they could please stand, I'd like to introduce them to everyone in the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly Aminah Aboughoushe, who is a tireless volunteer in her community. On top of her role as a fundraiser at the MAC Rahma mosque in my riding, Aminah continues to be a busy hockey mom to three boys. She also serves as the secretary on the executive of the Wolf Willow country club community league, where recently she spoke eloquently at their annual general meeting about the rewards of volunteering to serve one's community and thereby convinced three more women to accept nominations to serve. I ask her now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very important guests from the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. With us today are His Worship Henk Devlieger, mayor of the town of Taber, and, as well, Cory Armfelt, chief administrative officer of the town of Taber. Both are here trying to meet with ministers to get answers about having the local FCSS moved from the agriplex into an AHS building that has sat empty for two years. I would ask these two individuals to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate a strong Albertan woman. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Jennifer Kauffield, vice-president and CFO for Titanium Corporation. Titanium's patented technology Creating Value from Waste recovers lost bitumen, solvent, and heavy minerals from the oil sands tailings stream, materially reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Titanium has also received valuable support from Alberta Energy. Ms Kauffield is a great example of a woman in an executive position in the oil and gas sector, with a career that spans over 17 years while raising three boys. I would like to ask Jennifer to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two extraordinary women from the riding of Edmonton-Decore. Tracy Patience is the executive director of Dickinsfield Amity House, and just like her favourite superhero, Wonder Woman, she takes her job just as seriously. We also have Badrieha Taha, who is a volunteer and special events co-ordinator at the KARA Family Resource Centre. I'm also proud to be able to say that she is also a constituent of Edmonton-Decore. Dickinsfield Amity House and KARA are both pillars in the community, and these women work tirelessly to help anyone in need. It's truly an honour to have them here today to celebrate International Women's Day. I would ask my guests behind me to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to introduce a fierce and loving advocate, Velvet Martin, from St. Albert. Velvet

is many things, but I believe her greatest joy is being a mom. Velvet's daughter Samantha was born with a rare chromosomal disorder and autism. Samantha died when she was only 13 years old, following many years in care separated from her family. Velvet responded to this life-changing loss by successfully lobbying for changes to Alberta's Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. These amendments were called Samantha's law. Velvet is president of the Alberta chapter of Protecting Canadian Children and has worked tirelessly for years to protect our children. She is one of the many women whom I'm very grateful for today. I ask her to rise. Please join me in thanking her and welcoming her to this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you two powerful women from my constituency of Edmonton-Riverview, Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble. Together they have published several books on the topic of women in politics. Most recently they are both editors of *Stalled: The Representation of Women in Canadian Governments*, which was published in 2013.

Jane Arscott is a member of the First Nations Caring Society and is a board member of Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women. She is a professor at Athabasca University doing research to promote gender parity in Legislatures. She is a proponent of the UN convention on the elimination of discrimination against women and an advocate for gender equality in Alberta and Canada.

Linda Trimble is a professor of political science at the University of Alberta. In 2005 she was awarded an Alberta centennial medal for her research in the area of women and politics and for her community work to persuade women to run for office. She has been counting the number of women elected in Canada for 25 years, and I'm proud to say that our government has given Professor Trimble more women to count.

I would ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two women who are strong leaders in their community. Jessie Trottier is a constituent of mine. She is an advocate for seniors' health and works to organize events and activities with her neighbours at Rosedale Estates, where she makes sure that I visit regularly. Annamaria Edwards is a contract analyst with Enbridge and serves as the president of the Cariwest Festival, a favourite summer event here in Edmonton-Centre that's been contributing to the vibrancy of our city for over 30 years. I ask that they both rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

1:40

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you four amazing women. From the department of oncology at the University of Alberta: Yvette Labiuk is a proud third-generation Ukrainian Albertan and a graduate program administrator who mothers over a hundred graduate students, and Anaïs Medina Martin, originally from Madrid, Spain, is a post-doctoral fellow in experimental oncology who has studied around

the world, including at Harvard. She's in Edmonton to pursue her dream of doing cancer research. From my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud: Judy Robinson is a community activist, artist, entrepreneur, and proud mother of three, and Vanessa Desa is a passionate advocate for vulnerable children, youth, and the integration of immigrants and refugees. She's a founding member of Brander Gardens ROCKS and has received a YWCA woman of distinction award. I ask Yvette, Anaïs, Judy, and Vanessa to stand and receive a warm welcome from this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this House my guest, Jan Reimer, the executive director of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. Jan is a trailblazer and an inspiration to women throughout our province as Edmonton's first female mayor. We all know about the important work her organization does to support Albertan women. Last December her team launched the Lift Her Up campaign, calling on all Albertans to stand up against sexist or violent language towards women. On this International Women's Day I would like to thank her for standing up for women throughout Alberta and across Canada. I would now request Ms Reimer to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am so proud to rise on International Women's Day to celebrate two extraordinary women. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you Wendy Rudiger and Lillian Lubyk. Wendy began working in a nursing home at the age of 14, helping seniors. She has since had a full career as a nurse, persevering through a hiring freeze to work at Calgary General hospital. She is very active in the community of Stony Plain, helping many people either by holding a hand or driving them to the Cross cancer clinic. Lillian is a proud grandmother who spent nine years teaching in Papua New Guinea and 20 years teaching in Canada. She resides in Carvel with her husband and is an active volunteer for CKUA, Folk Fest, and the Kids with Cancer Society. In my riding of Stony Plain the culture of volunteerism is always amazing but no more so than now, today, with these two women. I ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Linda Crockett of Alberta Bullying. Linda is a social worker who has dedicated many years to bullying research, and she was a great help in writing my private member's bill. I ask that Linda receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to celebrate two strong Alberta women for International Women's Day. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to this House two incredibly dedicated feminists and advocates for social justice from Amigas Latin-American Women Society, established in 2001, an organization committed to the individual and collective social development of women both

here in Edmonton and in other parts of the world. They're women of my community who I admire and who have been an inspiration in my life, for which I'm eternally grateful. I now ask Nelly Rosende and Marianela Iglesias to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and a great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Manal Alnajjar and Tripat Kaur from the Indo-Canadian Women's Association in Mill Woods. Manal moved from Palestine to Edmonton with her family in 2013 after pursuing her master's in education. She has shown leadership by advocating for women's rights, preventing violence against women, and helping to change attitudes. Tripat moved from India to Canada six years ago. She has a master's degree in public administration and a wealth of experience in community counselling. She has been busy helping new immigrants and women fleeing domestic violence.

I'm very pleased that they could join us to celebrate International Women's Day, and I ask them both now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this House my friend Dorothy Anderson. Dot is a member of the Gift Lake Métis settlement, is currently secretary for the Métis Settlements General Council, and has a long history of advocacy for Métis settlements, including working with the Métis Settlements Health Board to engage our government on Métis health issues. Dot is a leader and an inspiration to women in her community and across our province. This International Women's Day I'm thankful to her and to all women for the differences that they make in our communities. I would now ask her to stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two extraordinary women from my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Teresa Spinelli is the president of the Italian Centre, headquartered here in Little Italy, which is expanding across Edmonton and even to Calgary. She is an outstanding businessperson, also a founding member of the Viva Italia business association and very active in community and charitable events.

Habiba Abdulle is the executive director of the Alberta Somali Community Centre in my constituency. The centre provides a wide range of services to members of our local Somali community, including help with housing, jobs, training opportunities, child care, and others.

I would ask them to please rise now and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on International Women's Day to rise on behalf of my colleague from

Calgary-Foothills and myself to introduce one of the very prominent female reporters in the very, very strong Alberta press gallery here at the Legislature. She joins us regularly. She's a strong voice for a free and open press. She does a wonderful job here, as so many of the women in our press gallery do. I'd ask that Emma Graney rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I suspect you may have been here before.

The hon. Minister of Status of Women and of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on International Women's Day to celebrate strong Alberta women from my Ministry of Status of Women. Although they are a small group, these public servants work diligently to provide their best advice, focusing on initiatives that lead women out of lower income situations, reducing barriers that keep women from leadership positions or from running for office, and eliminating and preventing violence against women and girls. I'm pleased to have them here with us today on International Women's Day.

I also want to celebrate strong Alberta women working in their communities to advance women's equality. Joining us here today are Mary Jane James, Sara Cameron, and Annette Klevgaard from the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and Muriel Venne and Gwen Nahorney from the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. They are our partners in our work to improve the lives of women and girls. I ask them all to rise in this House, and I ask this House to please join me in providing these strong Alberta women with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other introductions? The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some of the smartest and hardest working students in all of Alberta, the students of Suzuki Charter School. It's located in the most humble constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They're accompanied by their teachers and parents: Ms Clare Young, Mr. Jason Callow, Ms Shannon Eremenko, and Mr. Stirling Perry. If they could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to you.

1:50

Ms Ganley: I rise to seek the unanimous consent of the House to allow the Routine to continue past 1:50.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Any further introductions? Please proceed, Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand today and introduce to you and through you a group of students – I think between 43 and 46 of them; we're not sure how many are here today – from the beautiful l'école Beau Meadow school in Beaumont. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Brad Hayes and Mrs. Jolanda Nichols, and a host of chaperones. I won't read them all because I know we have lots of things to do today, but if they would please rise, we could give them the traditional welcome of this House.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women.

International Women's Day

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to celebrate strong Alberta women. Today, on International Women's Day, we recognize the social, economic, cultural, and political accomplishments of women around the world and the ongoing struggle for equality. In 1975 the United Nations designated March 8 as International Women's Day to advance the status of women worldwide. Countries around the world unite every year on this day to restate our dedication to the principles of gender equality. We need this day. Decades later women are still not equally represented in corporate boardrooms or at decision-making tables in public office. In Alberta we have had a thousand male MLAs and only 99 female MLAs, 29 of whom are sitting as members today.

Sadly, Alberta women continue to face some of the highest rates of sexual violence in the country. Changing old ways is not easy, but the people of Alberta asked for change, and our government is honoured to answer that call. We started making history in 2015 by appointing Canada's first gender-balanced cabinet. We launched the Status of Women ministry with a commitment to make the lives of Alberta's women and girls better. And I'll tell you something about my ministry, Mr. Speaker: though she be little, she is fierce.

We are working hard to advance gender equality. After our first year Alberta now has a law that lets survivors of violence break a residential lease without fear of a financial penalty; a minimum wage that will keep increasing, to \$15 an hour, making sure that women who are clustered in the lowest range of pay have a little more at the end of the day; a new disclose-or-explain rule for publicly traded corporations to report on gender equality at the highest levels of their organizations; a grant program that supports community projects and programs that advance our ministry's mandate of leadership, economic empowerment, and ending violence; a partnership with the city of Edmonton and UN Women to reduce sexual violence in Edmonton; Ready for Her, a website to encourage women to see themselves as candidates in the upcoming municipal elections and resources to help them get on the ballot; entrenched gender expression and gender identity in the Human Rights Act, making it illegal to discriminate against anyone on those grounds. We joined the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and we invested an additional \$10 million to increase affordability, quality, and access to child care for Alberta families.

We are building on a legacy of women who fought in their day-to-day lives to be treated as equals. They were our role models, and now it's our turn in this House, in boardrooms, on sports fields, and in law courts. We will continue to be leaders of change. Your government is working hard to make life better for all Albertans, ensuring that the necessary policies, programs, and services are in place for the advancement of gender equality in Alberta. Women shouldn't have to spend the next century fighting for equality. It's time now.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the Assembly to join me in the fight for women's equality. [Standing ovation]

Mrs. Aheer: People may try to use their words to diminish women, our work, and our passion. I have the immense privilege of meeting people every day from every background, and just when I think I can't be surprised, someone will challenge me. Even if I disagree with the challenge, or the words are disagreeable, or the tone or

colour of their words rubs me the wrong way, or we differ in ideology, or if I disagree inherently with their values or their take on life, the content of their conversation, the rudeness, the kindness, the education, passion, the division, the sexual appropriateness or lack thereof, even then, and more often than not, I am so pleasantly surprised by the kindness and compassion of Albertans.

I'm a proud woman who stands here solid on the work of many women who came before me from all nations. India had two powerful women who ran that nation, Indira Gandhi and her daughter-in-law Sonia Gandhi. It's inspirational. Even more inspiring for me: in 1969 my mother-in-law at the tender age of 18 made her way across the ocean by herself, not reading or writing in any language, all the way to Canada to meet up with her older sister. She came from a culture and a village where it was impossible for her to leave the farm without an escort as she could have been raped or killed should she venture out on her own. But she travelled across the sea because her father wanted her to have a better life. She came from a culture and a life that did not always accept all of the freedoms that we are privileged to have here. Today, even though things have changed and she comes from a time that does not always align well with today's values, I seek her wisdom. I argue with her, I trust her, I don't always see eye to eye with her on many issues, but I respect the conversations and always leave the conversation having learned something.

As women we provide the humble template for that which we want to see: our hopes for future women and our desire to encourage and protect them as they make their way on their terms into careers where they are needed, where they belong, and where they are honoured. To me, this inspiration comes from the many pioneering women before me who are here now in this building. They are the faces of the women across the aisle and on this side, and my hope is that we will not engage in polarizing politics.

I have been attacked many times by those who don't agree with my politics, in horrible and distasteful ways, and, believe me, I do not stand and will not stand for it. However, words, to me, are an expression, and they've been used throughout history in poetry, music, to express, no matter how pretty or profane.

On this day, March 8, 2017, that celebrates International Women's Day and the awesomeness of being bold for change, this means ending discrimination and ending violence. Let's take action to empower, not to destroy, to elevate and not belittle, to honour those incredible souls that engage in discourse and common purpose that moves us forward.

To the women who have inspired me, to women who supported and encouraged me: you are my enduring heroes and my reason for continuing, no matter the insults, the condemnation, the platitudes, the nonsense . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member?

Mrs. Aheer: . . . and no matter what other . . .

The Speaker: Could you wrap up the comments?

Mrs. Aheer: I will respond, and I will not hide. You will not shame me because I'm a woman.

2:00

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent for responses from the third party and the two independent members.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of my Progressive Conservative colleagues to recognize International Women's Day. I'm especially proud to stand as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, a province where so much trail-blazing took place with respect to women's rights. Three of the Famous Five, the group of women who launched the famous Person's Case, sat in this very Chamber. Among them was Irene Parlby, who served as the MLA for Lacombe from 1921 to 1935 and was the first female ever appointed to cabinet in Alberta. It's a privilege to be a member of this Assembly where such remarkable women once served and continue to serve the people of Alberta.

Nearly 100 years after Irene Parlby and her colleagues Nellie McClung and Louise McKinney were elected, women in our province and around the world still face serious challenges when it comes to equality. Women still earn less than their male counterparts. Women are still vastly outnumbered by men in boardrooms and in leadership roles.

As we've seen time and time again in Alberta and elsewhere, female public figures face a level of online abuse that as a man I will never experience. This kind of abuse keeps other women from entering public life in the first place. I know I have more than one colleague in this Chamber today who has been subjected to this gendered, sexist, and misogynistic treatment. To all those who have faced online bullying and abuse being women, I am truly sorry that you had to experience that. This behaviour is a scourge on our society and is completely unacceptable. By rejecting this hateful, discriminatory element of our society and carrying on with their work, these courageous women set a remarkable example for all Albertans. They embody the 2017 International Women's Day theme, Be Bold for Change.

I join with all Albertans in celebrating the invaluable contributions that they all make as women in every facet of our lives and pledge to use every opportunity to take bold action myself to advance the goal of equality.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. An honour to stand with the Liberal caucus on this important day of celebrating women. Today we celebrate the achievements made in gender equality over many years. Just over 100 years ago women did not have the right to vote. Even 50 years ago the franchise was still withheld from our First Nations women. Today women hold 1 in 3 seats in this House. While there is still much progress that needs to be made on many women's issues, this is an encouraging trend. I look forward to seeing it continue into the future.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is Be Bold for Change. Across Canada, Alberta, and the world individuals and organizations are honouring this day by encouraging women to be bold and, by doing so, with the full support of real men, create real change.

I particularly want to acknowledge the work of Ask Her, a group in Calgary that's working to encourage the greater representation of women in municipal politics. Ask Her recognizes that one of the reasons so few women hold public office is that they are too rarely asked to run. As such, they encourage Calgarians to seek out strong, qualified women in their communities and ask them to take leadership roles. This year Ask Her will ask 20 women to run for Calgary city council. At present only two of the city's 14 councillors are women, a meagre 14 per cent. Ask Her aims to achieve 50 per cent

female representation on council after this fall's election, and they have my full support.

Our province, our country, our society are made better when strong, passionate, engaged women are involved in their communities and bring their voices to the table. This International Women's Day we have much to celebrate in the progress women have made. I encourage women, especially young women, to continue to press forward, be bold, and take the lead in creating the change we all so desperately need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to speak on International Women's Day. Yesterday my staff and I were talking about the controversies spurred by that reprehensible *The Red Pill* feminist ideology. Of course, I was shocked by the entire idea, but I have to admit that I was shocked even further to hear about the ingrained sexism that some of the women on my own staff have faced in their recent past.

I was told that in a recent role one of my staff was told that she wasn't capable of being on the communications team because, quote, women disrupt the morale of the men; or was encouraged to run for secretary, not VP, because women are better organized; or was called sweetie or darling at a board meeting; or was told that she was only hired in a senior role because the boss wanted to, quote, get it wet. If that makes you uncomfortable, it should. These sound like stories from 40 years ago, but they're stories from less than two years ago. This is what many women in Alberta struggle with every day.

Now, recently I was asked if I am a feminist. Well, I was raised by a strong single mother. My wife is a strong, smart leader who makes a difference every day, and I am honoured and lucky to be the father of two intelligent daughters, who deserve to grow up in a world where they don't worry about sexual assault or domestic violence and they have exactly the same opportunities as any man. So, yes, I am a feminist. The real question is: who is not a feminist?

Despite the challenges that persist in our society, I am encouraged by the work I see women doing every day to strive for equality even in situations where some want them to fail. Today the daughters of the vote sat in the House of Commons. These inspiring young women refuse to go unheard, and I hope they continue to inspire other young women to become involved in their communities. I want to recognize the countless women who live their own quiet activism every day, shaping communities and making change.

So I do have hope, hope that we will become more aware of the work still to be done to create a truly equal society. I have hope that the next generation of young women will live in a world where opportunities are limited only by their capabilities and desires, not by their gender. I hope to be able to work alongside the strong women in my life, both personally and professionally, and among all of you here to create a better world for all of our daughters.

If we call out sexism when we see it, if we seek to create opportunities for women to take on leadership roles in elected office, in senior staff positions, in business, in community, then we will be taking concrete steps towards building a truly equal society.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

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

Justice System Delays

Mr. Jean: Crime is up across the province, and over the last two years Alberta has seen very serious cases being dropped. The problem is only getting worse, and today we found out that the Justice minister sent out a brand new protocol just last week advising prosecutors that it may not be worth pursuing serious violent crimes due to the resources required. We're talking about murders and sexual assaults. This is sickening. This means victims will likely see the accused criminals walking free on our streets. How on earth did the Premier or anyone in this government possibly think this was a good idea?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opposition doesn't know whether they are coming or whether they are going. One day they call for cuts. The next day they're calling for more money. Yesterday another Wildrose bozo eruption, and today it's the Keystone Kops in this House. Those folks broke things. We're working to fix it. We've got real leadership from the minister. She'll be happy to answer the remainder of the questions, but I have to say: Wildrose talk is cheap; leadership is action.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:10

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's the NDP government's new position, and I quote: even once a file is determined to be prosecutable and is serious or violent and, therefore, a priority, it may still not be worth prosecuting to the fullest extent possible. End quote. Tell that to the victim of a sexual assault, tell that to the family who's lost a loved one, or tell that to the growing number of Albertans who are quickly losing any faith in the ability of our justice system to keep our streets safe. These victims deserve every single effort to make sure violent criminals are kept behind bars for as long as possible. Why are you doing this?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure that Albertans have a justice system that they can be confident in. Backlogs developed over decades. When the decision in Jordan came down, we had to respond very quickly. That's why we've given prosecutors the tool to focus on serious and violent crimes. The triage protocol is explicit. Things will not be lost as prosecutions merely because of timing, but prosecutors are empowered to make the decisions necessary to focus on serious and violent crimes.

Mr. Jean: Well, I think it's disgusting, Mr. Speaker.

Here's what Rick Woodburn, president of the Canadian Association of Crown Counsel, has to say, and I quote: how are you going to look into the eyes of a victim's family and say that we're not going to do that because we don't have enough money? That's ridiculous. Triage under the government now means fewer resources for serious and violent crimes. That's not how this is supposed to work, and this is not what you're supposed to do as a government. Today Albertans feel less safe than ever before. The NDP has been in charge for over two years. How are they letting this possibly happen?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, no victim ever wants to see their accused person walk free without a trial, and neither do we. That's why we've taken the necessary steps to ensure that our prosecutors can focus on serious and violent crimes. The opposition's story just

doesn't add up. One minute they call for more resources, the next minute they call to cut and slash, and now they're calling for more resources again. We're taking leadership to ensure that serious and violent crimes are prosecuted.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Policies

Mr. Jean: This government is blowing through a billion dollars just to destroy our coal sector here in Alberta. This policy is killing jobs, killing livelihoods, hurting historic Alberta communities, and it is hurting Alberta families. So I was shocked on Monday to see the economic development minister actually stand up and tell coal workers, "We have your back." Well, I'd hate to see what it looks like when you don't have their back. Does the Premier honestly believe that spending \$1 billion to destroy our coal sector is having coal workers' backs?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I know that math can be difficult for the members opposite, but let's review a couple of simple equations. Let's take one made-in-Alberta plan to deal with climate change plus the courage to try a new approach after years of the same old dead-end path that failed to get us new market access. What does that equal? Two new pipeline approvals and \$14 billion in direct investment, thousands of good jobs for Albertans. Our plan is working, and your plan just doesn't add up.

Mr. Jean: Well, I've been all around Alberta, and in Hanna I met a husband and wife that were forced to sell their home and now live in their car. This is not an abnormal story in Alberta anymore after this NDP government, and it's not a joke. This is serious. Your policies are hurting people's lives. I can tell Albertans one thing for sure. I haven't heard from any of these communities or these workers that you are listening to them at all. I'll ask the Premier a simple question: when will she and her ministers hold open town halls in these communities so they can look in the eyes of the men and women whose livelihoods they're destroying?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, our agreement last year with electricity companies opens the door to good, long-term, cleaner electricity jobs. This means that electricity will be green and long-term for Albertans who rely on those jobs. We've visited and met with community leaders in Hanna, Leduc, Wabamun and will be visiting soon with more impacted communities, including Edson and Forestburg. We're open. The only ones who are covering their ears are the members opposite.

Mr. Jean: Here's the reality of life outside of the dome for many Albertans right now. In Hanna, for instance, while you laugh, their mayor is estimating that 10 per cent of the workforce is going to disappear. Folks have seen a carbon tax come on their farms and their ranches and their businesses, and life is really tough right now. I know that the government thinks they're doing the right thing, but if they want to show Albertans they have their backs, here's some free advice from the Official Opposition. Premier, just reverse the carbon tax, stop the billion-dollar, job-killing coal shutdown, and start having Albertans' backs.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House has Albertans' backs. It's that side of the House that's completely out of touch. They want to paint a bleak picture and scare community leaders with misinformation about the workforce. They can choose to be apologists for coal and ignore the devastating health and environmental impacts of it, or they can stand up, be leaders. That's exactly

what this government is doing. We're going to keep standing up for Alberta families while they keep fearmongering. That's not leadership; this is.

Child Death Review System

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, last fall Albertans were shocked and outraged to learn about the tragic killing of four-year-old Serenity. We know that at the time of her death she was severely malnourished and underweight and she had bruising all over her body. She died more than two years ago. Sadly, we know she's not the only child in this province who has been failed by those in charge of protecting them. Can the minister please update Albertans on this file? Has a cause and manner of death been determined yet, do the police finally have everything they need, and is anyone over there – anyone – seeking justice for poor little Serenity?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his commitment to getting justice for all children in Alberta. Certainly, every single member in this House was outraged about the lack of support that we have for many children in care. You know, we really need to improve a system that has been broken for a long period of time. That's why we have the all-party panel, to work together to ensure that the processes improve and we finally do it right for those kids. I'm really thankful for the commitment of all the parties who are at the table, and I look forward to the ongoing work to bring forward recommendations to make it better, finally.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm part of the minister's panel on children in care, and each time that we've asked about Serenity, the NDP chair has shut us down because we aren't allowed to talk about her case. We aren't told what went wrong. At best we get the chance to ask one or two questions of presenters while so many questions are left unanswered. The NDP are even refusing to create transcripts of the panel meetings. Given that we can't actually talk about Serenity at this panel, does the minister think her panel will deliver justice for Serenity or any improvements for the next Serenity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I know that everyone in this House is committed to improving the system for our children in care. Obviously, the death review process needs some changes. That's why we have the panel in the first place. That panel is designed to improve the reviews in the first phase but then, moving into phase 2, to finally get to the root problems as to why children are in care in the first place and making the changes necessary to make life better for them and their families. This is not about a witch hunt on a particular case. This is about working to ensure that Alberta children in care finally get the care that they need.

Mr. Nixon: Albertans are angry when they hear about our system failing children in care. During the panel meetings we keep hearing that there were 73 reported deaths of children in care, and apparently 11 are proceeding to statutory review. Despite years having gone by, none of these reviews are finished. Senior bureaucrats say that it's very complicated work and it takes a long time, but our children don't have a long time. Serenity isn't even included in those 73 deaths. Will the minister please tell Albertans if Serenity's death is even being investigated by her department and why it takes so painfully long for her department to complete a review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every single one of us is outraged by what has happened in the past, and I am definitely one of those people. Obviously, the processes that were developed in the past are not okay. We need to change them, and we are moving forward to change them as quickly as we can. We are doing that through a process in which we engage families, we engage workers, we engage all those who have been affected by this to ensure that instead of the existing processes with many separate reviews, we can finally get down to the bottom of this and do this right going forward.

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

2:20

Justice System Delays (continued)

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's another day and another crisis in Alberta under the NDP. Our Justice minister is directing Crown prosecutors to let violent criminals go because they may take up too much court time, and that includes – wait for this – alleged murderers and sexual predators. A triage protocol, accepting plea bargains: why don't we just do the NDP's version of *Let's Make A Deal*? To the Justice minister: are you on the side of criminals, or are you on the side of victims?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government came into a system of significant court backlogs that built up under that party over there. We have been taking action to address those backlogs. We are moving forward because Jordan forced us to move very quickly with the triage protocol to ensure that serious and violent crimes are prioritized. We know that more resources are necessary, and we will have more to say about that very soon.

Mr. Ellis: Minister, I think you need to focus on the four fingers that are pointing back at you.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that last year I asked why you were cutting the budget for Crown prosecutors and given that your government put on a hiring freeze that left 35 positions open when 50 prosecutors were desperately needed and given that we warned the minister that the consequences of reducing the budget for Crown prosecutors would create havoc, to the Premier: is this job just too much for this minister?

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. We have one of the most competent, focused, diligent Justice ministers that this province has ever seen. And it is true that she inherited a heck of a mess from the guys who just asked that very same question. So guess what? She is focused on making sure that she moves forward with Jordan's decision as the guiding legislative focus. We have to; it's a court ruling. And she has to make sure that we're continuing to increase where we need it so that people can get justice. For the folks on the other side who are always calling for cuts, keep this in mind because it's important that we invest in making sure that we do get justice.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. We didn't call for cuts. We want to support the victims of crime.

Given that this government is proposing legislation right now that is supposed to strengthen the rights of victims of sexual... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, keep the volume down on this side.

Mr. Ellis: Given that this government is proposing legislation right now that is supposed to strengthen the rights of victims of sexual violence and given that the minister quietly provided a directive to drop sexual assault cases when the Crown has a, quote, slim likelihood of conviction, which is a major change from the current threshold, to the same minister: how can you one day be an advocate for victims of sexual assault and revictimize them the next day?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have empowered prosecutors to focus on serious and violent cases. It has always been the case that where there is no likelihood of conviction or it's not in the public interest, those individual Crown prosecutors have been empowered to exercise their discretion. We know the system is under significant pressure. There have been significant backlogs, and that's why we're taking action to get it fixed. I have no idea why the opposition can't get their stories straight. One minute they want me to cut; one minute they want me to spend. They have no idea what we're doing. We're moving forward with a real plan.

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

Opioid Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A briefing note I obtained from the Calgary Police Service shows the further impact that opioids, including fentanyl, are having on policing resources in the community. In 2016 the Calgary Police Service responded to 223 overdose calls, including 111 fentanyl-related charges. These numbers have risen dramatically every year for the last five years. There's also been a corresponding spike in property crime driven by addiction. To the Minister of Justice: if the government has all the resources it needs, why do these numbers keep going up?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that fentanyl and addictions are best attacked on a health front by ensuring that we have the necessary treatments, and that is why our Associate Minister of Health has been moving so quickly to ensure that we have treatment beds available, that we have replacement therapies available, that we have naloxone available. I'm in regular contact with the Calgary police and every other police service. They support the approach that we are taking, and we will move forward together.

Dr. Swann: That's a bit of a stretch given the chief of police's comments in the last month.

The danger of falling victim to an opioid overdose doesn't end once people are arrested. A letter I received from the Justice minister just last month admits an unprecedented 10 Albertans died in custody last year. Two of the deaths have been confirmed to be the result of overdoses; six more await the final ME, medical examiner, report. There were also 27 near deaths – 27 – that were prevented by emergency intervention in remand and corrections. To the minister: how are you investigating these deaths, what are the results, and what actions are you taking to prevent this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The safety of our inmates and our correctional workers is of the utmost priority in the correctional division. We know that fentanyl has a much more deadly effect than other drugs. We do know that that can cause some challenges. I think that we should await the actual statistics before we draw any conclusions on that, but corrections officers take steps every day, including searches, intelligence, and we're even investigating body scanners, to ensure that our inmates are as safe as we can make them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opioid crisis is pervasive, affecting urban, rural, First Nations, and all economic classes, and it crosses all government jurisdictions. Beyond Health it includes human services, Education, Justice, and First Nations. We need a clear, comprehensive, evidence-based strategy. So far the government has failed to deliver this. To the Premier: when will a comprehensive, government-wide strategy for the opioid crisis be tabled in the Legislature?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his question. My door continues to be open, and we've been pleased to receive some of his feedback as well as the feedback of others throughout the province, whether it's with regard to Health, Justice, human services, and so on. We continue to work on pulling all of those pieces together. The member is absolutely right that more can and must be done. I'm confident that the associate minister is taking those recommendations into consideration, and we'll be happy to update this House in a timely fashion as we continue to move forward.

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

Services for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary-Currie, organizations like the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured help people recover from brain injuries and strokes. They have recently come under funding pressure due to the United Way cutting back on their support. ARBI has responded with fundraising efforts and, where they can, cuts. However, it is not enough. To the Minister of Health: how is the ministry supporting organizations like ARBI?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. During tough economic times I understand that organizations funded by the United Way are feeling additional pressures lately. The Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured provides continued service to help Albertans with brain injuries, and we are grateful for the work that they do, integrated within the community, outside of hospital, or in long-term care as well as working with all partners. That's one of the reasons why AHS is currently providing \$400,000 in funding to ARBI to provide community-based care for Albertans in need of ongoing supports for brain injuries. I thank the member for bringing this additional point to my attention.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is good that we are continuing to fund these important services. However, again

to the minister: are there other sources of funding available to organizations like ARBI?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again to the member for the question. My department is certainly experiencing tough financial times like all are, but we know that it's important to consider extraneous situations as they do arise, so we're willing to hear from the member and other community organizations in an ongoing way. If an organization has a proposal, I'd be more than pleased to consider it and see if there's something that can be done. This afternoon we'll be considering supplementary supply. I think folks know that times are tough, but I think it's important that we do look at the realities that are happening on the ground in this specific situation as well as others.

2:30

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that organizations which provide support to PDD clients have also been affected due to the decrease in support from United Way, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what steps has your ministry taken to ensure that PDD service users continue to receive the support they deserve and need?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. For thousands of Albertans PDD is not just a program; it's a comprehensive set of supports to promote their safety and inclusion. That is why we have increased funding for PDD by \$22 million to meet this growing demand. We have been prioritizing access to PDD services for people who have health and safety risks to ensure that their needs are met in a timely fashion. Our government is protecting and strengthening the services that Alberta needs during tough times. Thank you.

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

Addiction and Mental Health Services

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Associate Minister of Health. There's an unfortunate lack of co-ordination, clarity, and collaboration between Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services. These two bloated bureaucracies historically have been ineffective in staying abreast of the health needs of Albertans, particularly in the areas of mental health and addictions. This is resulting in disengagement of the front-line workers and a drug abuse recurrence rate that is demoralizing both clients and staff. What is the minister doing to improve the working relationship of the two organizations to get Albertans the services they require?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As one of the major health providers within the province of Alberta, particularly when it comes to mental health, the role that Alberta Health Services plays is invaluable, which is why they've been a key stakeholder as we move forward with the recommendations from the Valuing Mental Health report. We will have more to say about that in the coming days. Certainly, we've been reaching out to community providers as well as across ministries throughout the government and within Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services to ensure that we've got co-ordinated efforts and supports for Albertans, regardless of where they live in our province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this health crisis is extremely complex and that complex issues require complex solutions and given that a holistic approach must balance harm reduction with other measures addressing mental health and addictions across the lifespan of an individual, with the intent of reaching all vulnerable children and teens, including First Nations and Métis youth, what has this government done to develop a balanced approach that addresses the underlying causes of addiction through mental health, rehabilitation, and education?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really thrilled for the opportunity to continue to talk about some of the collaborative work that we've been doing. A big piece of the response, particularly around mental health and addiction supports, has been to work with our partners in Education, Indigenous Relations, and within the communities to ensure that we've got the supports that are appropriate. Where possible we are reaching out to indigenous communities to ensure that there are culturally appropriate supports, recognizing that a lot of the challenges that are sometimes faced by indigenous peoples are rooted in a history of oppression and colonialism and that part of reconciliation is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Stoney Nakoda First Nation reports that up to 60 per cent of the adults living on the reserve are battling drug and alcohol addictions and given that many of the other First Nations communities in Alberta are also being devastated by drug and alcohol addiction and given that fentanyl tends to be the main cause of drug-related deaths within the larger mix of drug and alcohol abuse on-reserve, outside of providing naloxone, what help is this government giving to First Nations communities struggling with the fentanyl crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The impact of the opioid crisis on First Nations communities, both on- and off-reserve, is something that our government takes very seriously. One of the communities that has been most impacted is the Blood Tribe, which is why we're proud that the work of the Cardston Suboxone and methadone clinic has been able to support quite a number of members of the community both on the Blood reserve but also in the surrounding communities. We are continuing to work with First Nations partners to ensure that we're working together from a nation-to-nation perspective and providing culturally appropriate supports both on- and off-reserve.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Status of Women Ministry Initiatives

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this International Women's Day I want to commend the Member for Calgary-Varsity for her work as Minister of Status of Women, the ministry dedicated to the advancement of gender equity and the reduction of harm against women and girls.

Given that the ministry's most recent annual report on page 11 refers to stats that show Alberta has one of the highest rates of violence against women and given your collaboration with the city of Edmonton to create safer spaces, to the minister: how much safer

should a woman or girl in Edmonton feel today as a result of your work, and why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the lovely question. I'm very happy to report on some of the work that the city of Edmonton is doing with the United Nations safer cities initiative. They are currently working on the scoping part of that project. The ultimate goal is to make streets safer for women and girls in the city of Edmonton, and we're hopeful that we will gather learnings from other cities that have engaged in the safer cities initiative as well and that those learnings will then be able to be implemented across the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. McIver: "Scoping" and "learning" sounds early, so we'll hope for an update later on.

Again to the minister. Given that on page 13 of the same report you refer to progress in Albertans receiving high-quality programs and services and given that that sounds like it could be good but little detail is attached to that high-minded objective, here is a chance to brag, Minister. What does that progress actually look like, and how will Alberta women and girls recognize that progress in their daily lives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As he's pointed out, Alberta women and girls deserve to feel free from threats of violence. They ought to feel that they have choice and that they in reality do have choice, so our government has taken important steps to ensure that women and girls can seek leadership positions, have stronger economic outcomes, and be free of violence. To that end, we've increased funding for women's shelters so that more second-stage shelters are available. We also increased funding to 11 sexual assault centres. We joined the inquiry into missing and murdered . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I appreciate that. We'll look forward to prevention as well, but thank you for the answer.

Given that on page 23 of the ministry's annual report the Auditor General notes that "the ministry's work is mostly internal to government" and given that one of your main purposes, as stated on the same page, is "decreasing violence against women and girls in all its forms," to the ministers: when will you turn your efforts external to government so that your efforts will protect even more women and girls from violence in all its forms, not just in government but across Alberta?

Ms McLean: Thank you again for the question. I'd like to take the opportunity to address two things. First of all, our internal work does lead to external work.

The other thing is how we do that, Mr. Speaker. We've implemented a gender-based analysis requirement in all of the policies, across all ministries, so all decisions that are made take into account women and girls, how they benefit, and how they might be excluded from a policy. That has led to the additional funding that I mentioned. It includes our partnership with the I Believe You campaign and our continued funding of that on the prevention side. We've also invested additional dollars . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Economic Downturn in Calgary

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, while Calgarians are losing jobs, the city of Calgary has signalled that property taxes are going to go up. With the NDP government tinkering with the electricity market, Enmax can no longer pay a dividend to the city of Calgary to keep the property taxes low. To the Minister of Energy: why is your government making life more expensive for Calgarians in the middle of an economic crisis?

The Speaker: The Environment minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to answer on behalf of the Energy minister, who is of course promoting Alberta's energy industry in Houston this week. Of course, our government is making life better for Alberta families by capping electricity rates.

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

Ms Phillips: The members opposite would put Albertans back on a roller coaster of skyrocketing electricity prices from the failed deregulation experiments of the previous government. What we are doing is making life more affordable by capping those electricity rates for small farms, for small business, and for families. That's our commitment to Albertans.

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Panda: It's all hot air with this minister.

Mr. Speaker, given the 30 per cent vacancy rates in downtown Calgary the city is going to penalize business owners in the suburbs with higher property taxes because the NDP took away the Enmax dividend. Given that the NDP is also raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, to the minister of economic development. Under your watch thousands of small businesses in Calgary closed. How many more will you close to support your ideological policies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start off by saying that our government has introduced a number of initiatives to help cities like Calgary during this economic downturn. We recognize that they're going through a very difficult period. I do want to point out the fact that all of our initiatives – lowering the small-business tax, our investor tax credits, our headquarter attraction program for Calgary – this opposition voted against in the 2016 budget. As opposed to our government, that's taking action to partner with the city of Calgary and other communities around the province, this party just would rather do nothing and vote against any incentives.

Mr. Panda: Given that the unemployment rate in Calgary is over 10 per cent and my constituents still can't get retraining through Alberta Works though they are educated, experienced and they're just trying to save their house and retirement and given that Alberta Works contracts out services to third-party providers, who won't help my constituents unless they meet narrow criteria, to the minister of social services: how does a laid off 50-year-old qualify to access retraining?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We have increased funding to Alberta Works and all

its programs so that Albertans can get the supports they need. Under their plan they would have cut \$2 billion, which would have impacted these services that Alberta Works and other programs are providing, gone even further down, and made the situation worse. We are strengthening the services that Albertans need. That's the choice we made. They would cut, slash, and burn those services.

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

Drinking Water Regulations Health Services Building in Taber

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Red tape seems to spring like a well from this government, and unfortunately it has real consequences, as in the case of the Barn Store in the beautiful hamlet of Mountain View in my riding. The store owner was ordered by Alberta Environment to install a commercial source of water at a cost of millions of dollars in order to stop using the residential groundwater well that they have been using for generations. Such action would effectively shut their doors. To the minister of environment: if water is fit for human consumption, why differentiate between residential or small commercial?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I just wrote to the hon. member's constituent, signed the letter this morning. The fact of the matter is that Environment and Parks has a number of regulations to keep drinking water safe. We have those regulations in place, unlike the members across the way, who would repeal those regulations and simply, you know, leave Albertans without the clean, safe drinking water that they're looking for and without the infrastructure to support it because they would also cut those programs.

Mr. Hunter: I don't think they're going to be happy about that response, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that someone in the department of environment doesn't think groundwater is good enough for a small store and motel but it's fine for residential and given that Mountain View's Barn Store draws their water from the same aquifer as the school, the church, the art gallery, the garage, the seniors' care home, and other businesses, is the minister of environment prepared to stop this nonsense, rescind the noncompliance letter, or pony up for a 26-kilometre waterline to Cardston?

Ms Phillips: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have responded to the member's constituents directly, but second of all, this is a side of the House, the Wildrose, that would have cut our infrastructure budgets, that would have cut our water transportation funding. So it is a little bit rich from a side of the House that would have cut infrastructure investments by \$9 billion to now stand in their place and ask for more. They have to decide which side they're on. We're on the side of clean water and well-supported communities.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, they don't need any more light bulbs. They need good solutions.

Another example of red tape is found in the town of Taber. Given that AHS has a building that they aren't using and that the government has already indicated they would like to sell to the town of Taber and given that Taber needs the building to house the local FCSS, that is having to use a section of the Taber Agri-Plex, which, incidentally, they have to be out of by June, and given that the AHS building has sat empty for two years due to government red tape

and indecision, how long will the people of Taber have to wait before this government gets the deal done?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I am in the process of considering the ability to ask AHS whether or not they would like to dispose of the building itself to be able to hand that over to the town of Taber, which would have the first right of refusal, which might be able to facilitate that. So this is something that we are actively considering.

With regard to light bulbs, Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite don't want us to turn on the lights. They don't want us to shine a light on the fact that they continue to have these bozo eruptions on the other side. On this side of the House we're going to keep helping everyday Albertans save money on their electricity bills, and we're going to make their lives . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. I'm just trying to think of a good joke to bring a little humour in here.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Calgary Gravel Pit Operation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP claim to care about Albertans and claim to consult with them, but their words and actions often indicate the opposite. Many weeks ago along with the residents of Bridlewood I wrote a letter to the Transportation minister about the new monstrous gravel and asphalt plant in their community. I also sent him 13 pictures since we have no indication that he's seen it with his own eyes and have asked him personally about this. No public consultation was ever done on this, and notices were in mailboxes only after the plant was built. When will the minister provide detailed answers to the issues raised by the residents in that letter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've taken the letter that I've received from the member and I've had an opportunity to discuss it with him. I have asked the department to prepare a report so that I can give complete and full answers to him in this House, and when I've received that, I will do so.

Mr. Rodney: This is time sensitive, Mr. Speaker. Given that the plant did not appear on ministry maps and given that it is to run nonstop for several years from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every single day and given that the noise and smell and potential carcinogens very negatively impact the quality of life of the residents, can the minister please table in this Legislature here today all of the environmental and health studies that were conducted before the operation was built that would prove that all of the concerns of these fine Albertans are wrong about this megaproject in their neighbourhood?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated to the hon. member, the matter is under review, and when I have an answer for him, I will provide it.

Mr. Rodney: Don't cause damage and then do a review.

Given that there is a similar situation in West Springs – and we're happy to work for other MLAs as well – despite the concerns being illustrated in the media and given that workers on-site often must wear masks because of silicosis but that residents have been given

no information on this and given that there's been no public government response to anyone in either West Springs or Bridlewood and given that the residents are happy to work with government to ensure that these operations are located on sites that are most appropriate for all involved and given that critical consultation should have happened long ago, will the minister commit today to meeting face to face this week with residents from both communities about this urgent issue? If so, when? If not, Minister, why not?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the hon. member that one of these gravel pits is in the constituency of the Member for Calgary-Bow, and she has organized a meeting with her constituents. We had officials there from Transportation to answer questions, and we're pleased to do the same thing for this member should he choose to undertake it.

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

Opioid Use (continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In both this House and in my community I've spoken strongly in favour of harm reduction, practical policies and strategies that reduce the negative health, social, economic consequences of substance use. As such, I've been proud to support Access to Medically Supervised Injection Services Edmonton as they work to establish sites in our community. However, in talking with community residents, I found that some are unsure of the role our government has played and will play should their federal application prove successful. To the Associate Minister of Health: can you clarify what part our government has played and will play in this process?

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll take a moment to thank the member for his advocacy on this issue. As we look for ways to respond to the opioid crisis in our province, our government is proud to be expanding harm reduction efforts, including supporting supervised consumption services. This includes letters of support from the provincial Minister of Health, the chief medical officer, and the Minister of Justice, which will be forthcoming as part of the application process to the federal government. I was also pleased to stand alongside members of AMSISE as they launched their public consultation process, which was supported by a \$230,000 grant from this government.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that community members also have some concerns that investing in harm reduction alone is not enough and that it is also important to provide more opportunities for users to access treatment and supports to achieve sobriety, to the Associate Minister of Health: what actions are you taking to help Albertans break the cycle of substance abuse?

Ms Payne: Harm reduction, without a doubt, saves lives, but we know that addiction is a chronic issue that needs sustained and systemic action. We are taking those actions collectively, pulling together ministries and community groups through the valuing mental health initiative to help educate and prevent addiction, to intervene and treat substance abuse, and to give people the social supports they need to break the cycle. This includes expanding treatment beds available for children and youth, increasing access

to Suboxone and methadone clinics, and through primary care doctors.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Given that Ambrose Place, a local housing facility implementing principles of harm reduction, has successfully housed 42 individuals who were chronically homeless, drastically lowering the costs of supporting them through our health care or justice systems, what investments will you be making to help build and operate supportive housing across our city and throughout Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. Everyone deserves to live with dignity and opportunities to thrive. That's why we provided \$13 million in the '15-16 budget for housing projects that support complex-needs clients, and we have invested more than \$77 million in the housing first program throughout this province. We do know that housing first reduces the use of the corrections and health systems, and that is the reason that our government is protecting and strengthening these services to make a difference in the lives of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Drivers at Risk for Medical Reasons

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In early spring of last year I requested the government amend the Traffic Safety Act similar to that of our two neighbouring provinces, where they require mandatory reporting of medically at-risk drivers by physicians and optometrists. This legislation has been in place in British Columbia since 1996 and in Saskatchewan since 2004. To the Minister of Transportation: when will you join our neighbours, protect our citizens, and address this critical safety issue?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to recently review two fatality inquiry reports by judges here in the province. I read them both very carefully. Of course, it's always a tragedy, and these are designed to help us prevent the repeat of these tragedies. I'm looking very closely at the recommendations with respect to the medical issue that the hon. member has made, and all I can say is that I take that very seriously and he should stay tuned.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that bills 16 and 36 last year both opened the door for amendments to the Traffic Safety Act and given that on both occasions I approached this minister to add this important amendment but was denied on both occasions, to the Minister of Transportation: what is preventing you from dealing with this critical safety issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, nothing is preventing me from dealing with it. You know, with the greatest respect to the

hon. member, I take a judge's recommendation based on an inquiry into an actual situation very seriously, and we're going to be taking a look at that.

I get lots of suggestions for amendments that would tie up the whole Legislature with Transportation amendments, and as much as I would love that, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues would not.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, we recently received a copy of the fatality inquiry into what was determined to be the avoidable death of Megan Wolitski and now the recent passing of her classmate Maddie Guitard. This preventable tragedy devastated their families, the school, and our entire community. The most troubling part of this report to me was the statement that this tragedy could have been avoided by a simple \$25 SIMARD test, a screen for identification of cognitively impaired, medically at-risk drivers. To the Minister of Transportation: when will you respond to the recommendation of the inquiry and amend the Alberta Traffic Safety Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As I said in the answer to his first question, I've reviewed both of these recommendations based on the fatality inquiries. I have looked very closely at the recommendations therein. I'm considering what action needs to be taken, and he needs to stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the NDP formed government, Alberta's credit rating has been downgraded twice despite assurances to the contrary from the Finance minister. Major concerns of credit-rating agencies: our ongoing deficits and mounting provincial debt to the point that it may be perceived as unserviceable. Yet the minister says that he has a plan to get us back on track. To the Finance minister: will you commit to a responsible debt repayment plan today or give Albertans your predictions on postbudget credit downgrading? As the saying goes: say it ain't so, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I'm not sure who said: say it ain't so. A baseball player. Yogi Berra, I think.

What I can tell you is so is that the budget is coming out next Thursday, so you're going to have to wait to find out more about where our numbers are with regard to all of that. You know, this dire kind of gloom-and-doom presentation from across the floor just needs a little tuning up here. In this fiscal year we expect to spend 2.4 per cent of our revenue on debt servicing. Do you know where B.C. is at? They're at 5.5 per cent. We're in good shape. We have the fundamentals going. [interjection] You're not asking the question; he is.

The Speaker: Might I remind the two members that their comments should continue to go through the Speaker's chair.

First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and you're welcome, Joe. But it isn't a contest to try and beat British Columbia.

Given that this government was recently given a fiscal gift of \$1.3 billion and given that irresponsible fiscal behaviour delivered just \$100 million of that to Alberta's bottom line and given the spend-thrift ratio of revenue-to-deficit reduction would require a revenue increase of a paltry \$140 billion to deliver a balanced budget, to the

minister: how do you plan to generate such additional revenue by 2024 when neither a punitive carbon tax nor your musings about a PST could ever deliver a balanced budget to Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, it just astounds me: a fiscal gift? We qualified to get those payments for Fort McMurray from the federal government. We put those to Fort McMurray so that they wouldn't be suffering. We're not sure what they'd do under your government. We're focused on making life better not only for Fort McMurray but for everybody in this province. The collapse in oil prices has meant a significant dip in our resources, but we've got the back of Albertans. You would let them suffer.

The Speaker: Second point of order noted.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that by 2019 this government will have spilled so much red ink that a typical Alberta family of four will be burdened by over \$53,000 of provincial debt and given that this four-year debt burden would take each household 25 years to pay off at a rate of \$270 per month, again to the minister. You say that you have the backs of Albertans, but the real question is: how much debt will you load on the backs of Albertans before you slay the debt monkey and present a credible and responsible debt repayment plan?

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, debt is very important. We're carefully watching that as we go forward. But you know what that group couldn't do? They couldn't balance the budget on \$100 oil. They never did. We've got the lowest tax jurisdiction – maybe thanks for that – we've got no PST, we've got no premiums for health care, and we've got no sales tax. We're working through this, the most significant recession in a generation. You couldn't do it. We're doing it over here.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 7(7) to allow for the Routine to continue past 3.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: For the record, before we begin, I think there were a total of two points of order.

Members' Statements

Justice System Delays

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, a strong judiciary is the cornerstone of a strong democracy. Under the NDP government's watch we are watching that cornerstone crumble. When a victim comes forward after a crime has been committed, they need assurances that they will see their day in court. That should be the priority of our Crown prosecutors, and that should be the directive from this Justice minister. Instead, the priorities of the NDP government have been clearly shown in a memo sent to the Crown prosecutors entitled prosecution service practice protocol. It shows in black and white that fiscal constraints are hampering our justice system. It spells out that there is a clear gap between the resources allocated to Alberta's Crowns and the number of viable charges laid by the police, and the blame for that gap rests squarely on the shoulders of this government.

It tells our Crown prosecutors to accept the status quo. That status quo has seen charges stayed for first-degree murder, impaired driving, and assaulting a peace officer. This minister's directive tells sexual assault victims, whom they claim they support, that their case may not go to trial if there's a slim chance of conviction. It allows a system where, instead of focusing on the most serious cases and getting them to trial, it is acceptable to take a plea to a lesser offence. That could mean seeing someone who has killed a loved one be sentenced to second-degree murder when they full well could be charged with first-degree murder if they had their day in court.

Let's be clear. According to the president of the Canadian Association of Crown Counsel no other province is known to be staying cases because of a lack of resources. We need to do better. Our democracy relies on our judicial system to be responsive to the people and to instill confidence that justice will be served when a crime is committed. On behalf of women – no – on behalf of Albertans: shame on you.

International Women's Day Violence against Women

Ms Fitzpatrick: Today I take the United Nations challenge for International Women's Day, to be bold for change, and I take the opportunity to remember: to remember a daughter, a mother of three young children, a physician, Elana Fric, found dead December 1, 2016, at 40 years of age; to remember January 3, 2015, when members of the Edmonton Police Service entered a residence in north Edmonton to find Thuy Tien Truong, 35, along with seven others, murdered through an act of domestic violence; to remember and acknowledge all of the Jane and Janet Does throughout Alberta because every day in Alberta these scenes of horror play out for so many women and children on the run just to stay alive.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge that there is still much to be done. It was with horror this past week that I heard of the ruling finding a taxi driver not guilty of sexual assault on his passed-out, drunk female passenger because there wasn't enough evidence to prove the woman's lack of consent, with a blood alcohol level three times the legal limit to operate a motor vehicle. We cannot defend a system where the right to drive a car is more easily removed than the right to protection of person.

I will not forget the evidence dismissed, those who have suffered, those who have died, and those children who are left traumatized by domestic violence. Today I pledge to be bold for change, to do everything I can through words and action to bring an end to disrespect, an end to domestic violence. This is why I am a feminist. Will you join me . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Government Policies

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Uncertainty in this province is killing jobs and investment. No one is blaming this NDP government for the price of oil, but they are blaming this government for making the situation in Alberta worse with their policies.

There is uncertainty in the oil and gas sector. This government chose to do a royalty review soon after they were elected and implemented a carbon tax, which, when compounded with the low price of oil, further drove away investment.

There's uncertainty in the agricultural industry. This government passed Bill 6, which caused Alberta farmers much unneeded stress

and expense, and the carbon tax added yet another expense for them for things such as fertilizer.

There is uncertainty in the forest industry because of the mountain pine beetle and the caribou management plan and decreased timber allocations because of cutblock retention increases. Added to this, there's still no answer on whether a new softwood lumber agreement will be struck.

There is uncertainty in the coal industry as this government is shutting down coal-fired electricity generation.

There is uncertainty in municipal development. Developers will have to pay more off-site levies, and they do not yet know what that looks like.

There is uncertainty in the tourism industry in Alberta. Taxes that used to be collected and put directly back into tourism are now being siphoned off into general revenue, leaving yet another industry unsure as to this government's ability or desire to advocate for them.

There is uncertainty for families in the province because of increased gas prices, home heating, and food costs because of the NDP carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, this government needs to provide Albertans with certainty and stability in these tough economic times.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Latin American Women in Alberta

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Spanish]

The Speaker: Hon. member, you will be providing a copy of that in English.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation] It gives me great pleasure to provide a greeting of solidarity to all the women of Alberta and specifically to the Latin American women who have created in Alberta their own home. On this International Women's Day I want to acknowledge, thank, and celebrate the great contributions made by Latin American women in this province. We also commemorate many women who have passed away but who in life struggled to create equality and justice.

This history begins in the '70s with the first wave of Chileans fleeing the military dictatorship. The '80s and '90s, because of wars and persecution, brought the Central American wave. They came from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. In those years they also came from Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Peru. In the most recent wave they have come from Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico, largely for economic opportunities.

All these women, although from different countries, share a strong work ethic and a desire to make life better for their families and all Albertans through their immense contributions to our province and communities. They are our sisters, daughters, mothers, neighbours, and companions. They are businesswomen, professors, artists, activists, and students. They are doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, managers, politicians, and most, at the same time, mothers dedicated to the upbringing of the next generation.

This International Women's Day I thank all these Latin American women, who, like my mother, fight for their families, for gender equality, for human rights, and for the rights of Mother Earth. We owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Thank you very much. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

3:10

Symons Valley Ranch

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to tell you about an interesting property in Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, Symons Valley Ranch. The property was purchased by the Jones family in 1968 and has been transformed a number of times in its history. The rowdy barn dances of the late '60s and '70s led to the construction of three banquet halls, a lounge, and a restaurant in the 1980s.

Operations took a difficult turn in 1989, when a fire destroyed the three halls, but that didn't stop the party at the Symons Valley barbecue ranch. The ranch was reconstructed bigger and better with logs, vaulted ceilings, hardwood floors, western light fixtures, and private courtyards that improved the rustic cowboy castle and created a space for a farmers' market. Many memories were made at the ranch, including corporate Christmas parties, wedding receptions, and my own Stampede barbecue last year.

On January 26 around 6 a.m. a fire started at Symons Valley Ranch near the far north side of the riding. The property was home to the Symons Valley market, a year-round farmers' market with 33 vendors that has become a focal point for the neighborhood and drew customers from across the city. I liked going and buying fresh fruit and vegetables there, and there was always something interesting going on like showcasing local artists.

Recovering from the devastating fire has been a challenge that has been ably led by Tracy and Ken Aylesworth, the managing partners of the market. Since the fire they've organized a T-shirt drive to raise funds – you can purchase the T-shirts at many places around the city; check out www.symonsvalleyranch.com for information – and a pop-up market that over a thousand people visited last Saturday.

They're planning another pop-up market on the 18th at the ranch. Just head north on Symons Valley Road past the fire hall, and you'll see it on the left. I'd like to urge everyone in the Calgary area to visit the market, support our local small-business owners, and make sure you bring cash because they couldn't save the ATM from the fire.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How do you make a light bulb more expensive? It's simple, really. Get the government to buy it and install it for you. Sound ludicrous? Well, that's exactly what the Alberta NDP government is doing. Their new residential no-charge energy savings program will send installers house to house to replace night lights, light bulbs, shower heads, faucet aerators, power bars, and – you got it – thermostats.

Now, when you hear “no charge,” you think “free,” right? Well, no. That's not correct. This program will cost tens of millions of dollars. Who's paying for it? Well, you know the answer to that one. You are. You know that carbon tax that you see on your heating bills and fuel bills? Well, the government is using your money, that they've collected from you, to give you – you guessed it – light bulbs.

Now, obviously, I have serious concerns about this program. To start with, the NDP government hired Ecofitt, which is an Ontario-based company, to do the work. That means that regardless of where they hire installers from, at minimum the profits of this program will be going out of province. That's carbon tax money headed out of Alberta. The NDP must think Albertans are stupid. Why else would they hire Ontario-based Ecofitt to receive tens of millions in tax dollars for this boondoggle?

Unlike the NDP, Wildrose knows that everyday Albertans can see that it doesn't make sense to use taxpayers' own money to fund this program. Oh, and for those Albertans who upgraded their lights and thermostats on their own, they aren't going to see any benefit. The Albertans I talked to would rather have their money stay in their pockets instead of government taking their money and offering them free installation of power bars and light bulbs.

This was one of our concerns about the carbon tax, how the government would spend that money. Corporate welfare for an out-of-province company for a service that Albertans are fully capable of doing on their own is a classic example of government waste. At least now we know how many Albertans it takes to change a light bulb. The government has hired . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

**Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members are aware, Mr. Peter Hourihan, who has served this province well for many years as Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner, will be retiring from these roles in April. As it is not anticipated that the search committee appointed to find a successor will have completed its mandate at that time, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices has issued a report, which I am tabling today, that recommends the appointment of Mr. Joe Loran as Acting Ombudsman and Mr. Ted Miles as Acting Public Interest Commissioner until such time as a replacement for the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner is appointed. I have the requisite number of copies of the report here.

Introduction of Bills

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

**Bill 201
Justice System Accountability Act**

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce Bill 201, the Justice System Accountability Act.

I can't think of any more important bill to bring to this Legislature, especially at a time when we're losing out on opportunities to prosecute people that may be guilty of crimes. This particular piece of legislation would remove, first of all, the cloak of secrecy surrounding the performance of our justice system, and it would seek accountability for a system that is seeing serious charges being stayed, justice delayed, and justice denied.

The bill will compel the minister to track the length of investigations, track the length of trials, sources of adjournments, mistrials, and the number of charges withdrawn, reduced, and stayed by the Crown prosecutor or the judge. The minister will be also required to report this information to the Legislature on an annual basis – we believe in transparency here on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker – so that we can all work together to resolve the backlogs and bottlenecks preventing victims of crime from receiving justice and make sure that our streets are safe and Albertans understand that the streets will be safe in the future.

I trust that I can count on all of the members from all of the parties for their support on this particularly important bill, that will see justice finally come back to Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Interesting. We heard the opposition yell “take responsibility” a number of times in question period today, so indeed here’s their chance.

In a follow-up to yesterday’s documents, in the wake of the Wildrose on Campus declaration that feminism is cancer, the Wildrose opposition was quick to distance themselves from this club, but apparently the club appears to have been well entrenched in the culture of the party. I have five copies of a document here. This is the Wildrose newsletter from the 2015 annual general meeting in which the Wildrose on Campus club is . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, table the document. I’m sure they can read it.

Ms Jansen: . . . featured on the front page, and certainly in their AGM have a central place.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Jansen: I table the five copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Jansen: Wait. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I have some more tablings.

The Speaker: Oh, all right.

Ms Jansen: Thank you.

The Speaker: It took so long.

Ms Jansen: I wonder what they do for the clubs that they don’t vouch for.

Mr. Speaker, another photo from the Wildrose on Campus celebrating a visit from eight Wildrose MLAs and a lovely picture on Facebook. I table that.

Certainly, here’s a page from the antifeminist Wildrose on Campus featuring the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, and he actually appears as their special host at campus week. There you go. Thank you for that.

The Speaker: How many more do you have, hon. member?

Ms Jansen: Just a couple more, Mr. Speaker. I beg your indulgence.

The Speaker: Very quickly, please.

Ms Jansen: Certainly.

An article here from the *Gauntlet* magazine, where the antifeminist Wildrose on Campus endorses Jason Kenney, also, as it happens, endorsed by most of the PC caucus for leadership of a new far-right party. Here is the article for tabling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose on Campus, disavowed by many far-right politicians yet managing to attract so much attention from them . . .

3:20

The Speaker: Editorial comment limited, please.

Ms Jansen: Of course, Mr. Speaker.

And I have a large collection of, certainly, wonderful photos from the federal Conservative politicians.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One, a copy of a letter from the Justice minister from February 2, 2017, outlining some of the deaths in custody over the past year.

The other is from the strategic services division of the Calgary Police Service, outlining some of the activities of the police service related to the opioid crisis in Calgary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll avoid full on members’ statements for this. Yesterday we had a spirited debate of the political nature of the Public Affairs Bureau, when there was a point of order from the Government House Leader criticizing about calling out the Public Affairs Bureau as political. For the next 14 days of the sitting I’m going to be tabling a new quote every single day from the Government House Leader, where he calls the Public Affairs Bureau political in different ways. I’ll abstain from reading it because he has amassed a whole library.

The Speaker: I would appreciate that. Are you tabling it now? Is that right?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I have five copies to table today, and I have 14 more to table every single day of the sitting for the delight of the Government House Leader.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d just like to table the Cree prayer that I delivered in . . .

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker. I’m sorry. Just on a point of order and not because I wouldn’t enjoy seeing the various quotes, but *Hansard* is an official record of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think you’re just signalling at this stage in our discussion that there will be a point of order. We’ll deal with it after we finish this.

Could we start again, please. The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I just wanted to table the Cree prayer that I delivered in my response to the Speech from the Throne. It has the Cree translation and the English version as well.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act, Alberta College of Social Workers 2014 annual report, Alberta College of Social Workers 2015 annual report, College of Dietitians of Alberta 2015 annual report, College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta 2015 annual report, College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta 2015-2016 annual report.

The Speaker: I believe there is a total of four points of order if I recall correctly. The first one to the Government House Leader. Am I correct?

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yeah. That was a case of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek referring to the Minister of Finance by his first name in the House and speaking to him directly rather than through the chair.

The Speaker: Yes, I noted that. I actually referenced it. I think the hon. member corrected it on the record, but I would like him to reinforce that he did.

Mr. Gotfried: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw that comment, and I apologize to the minister.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Minister Ceci.

The Speaker: Opposition House Leader, I heard that as well.

I believe there was a point of order, in fact two, raised by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Is that correct?

Mr. Cooper: That is correct. I'd be happy to withdraw those on behalf of the member.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Back to the Government House Leader. I believe there was a fourth point of order.

Point of Order

Tabling Public Documents

Mr. Mason: Yes. Mr. Speaker, not that I didn't want to enjoy the daily exposure to my own wise words in this Assembly; however, as the *Hansard*, which the hon. Member from Strathmore-Brooks indicated he would be tabling, is already a record of the Assembly, it is not subject to tabling because it's already part of the record. In the past Speakers have ruled those kinds of tablings to be out of order.

The Speaker: Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to this point of order. While I know that my hon. colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills pointed out the brevity of which the Government House Leader has had the opportunity to serve here, I just might make two quick comments. One, I know that he is the dean of this House, and he would know that there is no standing order that would prevent the tabling of that. I also know that he would know that a long-standing tradition of the House is, yes, that one is able to table a *Hansard* document from a previous session, just not from a current session. I'm a little surprised to hear the argument today, and I know we all have lapses from time to time, but I'm certain that you, in fact, sir, will find this to not be a point of order at all.

The Speaker: Hon. members, given what I've heard from both sides of the House, I think I'm going to have to do a little research and come back with a ruling on this particular order.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2016-17, No. 2 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: Just before we get started, I'd like to remind everyone of the Standing Orders 59.02 and 59.01(6).

Hon. members, before we commence this afternoon's consideration of supplementary supply, I will review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply as follows:

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

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

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 5, approved by the Assembly on March 7, 2017, the time allotted for consideration is six hours: three hours this afternoon and three hours tomorrow morning.

The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates.

3:30

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to move the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund. When passed, these estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$1.6 billion in voted expense funding and \$125 million voted capital financing financial transactions for the government. These estimates will also authorize \$141 million of the previously approved voted amounts to be transferred amongst 14 departments.

The estimates are consistent with the fiscal plan as presented in the 2016-17 third-quarter fiscal update and will authorize an increase and transfer for the following 18 departments: Advanced Education, Agriculture and Forestry, Children's Services, Community and

Social Services, Culture and Tourism, Economic Development and Trade, Education, Environment and Parks, Health, Indigenous Relations, Infrastructure, Justice and Sol Gen, Labour, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Housing, Service Alberta, Transportation, and Treasury Board and Finance. The ministers for these departments, including myself, will be pleased to answer any questions from members of the Assembly.

Before we get into the discussion at Committee of Supply, I'd like to say just a few words about the largest element of this supplementary supply, the costs associated with the Wood Buffalo wildfires. While the numbers before you are in black and white, roughly \$499 million for the wildfire response and \$240 million for the wildfire recovery, they don't really tell the story of unimaginable courage and determination by first responders and the people of the affected communities. This wildfire was one of the most challenging disasters to have ever faced our province, indeed the country, and through this disaster Albertans came together like never before. I believe that all members of this Assembly can be proud of who we are as a province and of our commitment to one another in these tough times.

Let me wrap up these brief comments by expressing my enduring respect for the courage demonstrated by first responders who battled the beast this past year, and let me commit once again to those affected by the wildfire that this government and all Albertans indeed remember, support, and want you to know we have your back.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. Hon. member, do you want to go back and forth?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll go back and forth.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you so much.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for being here for the discussion and consideration of supplementary supply. I've missed you over the break, and I'm glad we could do this again. I'm going to ask questions that'll be mostly short and pointed, and I'd appreciate short, pointed answers on topic.

Of extreme concern – much of the supplementary supply here is connected to the third-quarter fiscal update provided a few weeks ago. In the third-quarter fiscal update the minister admitted to being in direct contravention of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This is in regard to \$1.1 billion for the early phase-out of coal. A part of this can be noted in a transfer to the Department of Economic Development and Trade, on page 34 of the supplementary supply. That is a fraction of the overall amounts allocated for the early phase-out of coal. The third-quarter update admits that it is in direct contravention of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act.

The government effectively had two different options. One, it could be in violation of public-sector accounting standards by not booking it all in one year, or it could book it in one year and be in violation of the legislation. The minister effectively had to pick one of those two. I'd like to give the minister a chance to explain why he chose to be in violation of his own legislation, passed about a year and a half ago.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Chair. Actually, there were two ways that this could have unfolded. The first was the way that the Auditor General had identified. The other was to do as we were planning to do, which is to treat this as a contingent liability that could be paid out over 14 years. That is also in compliance of

public-sector accounting standards. So there's no accuracy to what the member is saying.

Secondly, I do want to say that, you know, the 1 per cent in-year spending increase limit that was exceeded in '16-17 was due to a one-time anomaly that was not anticipated. We took the Auditor General's recommendation and booked that all in '16-17, reported the coal electricity plant phase-out expenses of \$1.1 billion as is identified in the Q3.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister. No, I want to bring this . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I recognize that during estimates outside of the House there's an ability to cut each other off, but because you committed to going back and forth, you have to wait till the . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: But I've already had an answer, and it's pointless.

The Deputy Chair: . . . you have to wait until the minister is finished speaking.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: He's entitled to 10 minutes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, I've already stated to the minister that he is in compliance with accounting standards because they booked it on a single year. He had two options for this spending. The \$1.1 billion is, in the opinion of this side of the House, money that is virtually incinerated, for which the taxpayers are getting absolutely nothing in return. That is beside the point, though. The point is that this is illegal spending, that it is in direct contravention of the act.

Now, this kind of legislation has no penalty for government. You don't go to jail. You don't pay a fine. You just have to pretty much admit that you broke the law.

I'm looking at page 15 of the government's own third-quarter fiscal update, where they state that they are in contravention of the act. The Auditor General said that this needed to be booked as a single year, bringing it in line with public-sector accounting standards, but it does bring it in violation of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. I'm looking for a simple yes or no, if the minister will admit that this is in contravention of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act.

Mr. Ceci: I'll read what it says in the Q3. "As there is no exclusion in the [Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act] for this extraordinary expense, the \$1,132 million increase in operating expense results in a lack of compliance with the FPTA." So it was a lack of compliance, and I've put it right here for everyone to see. And it was only because of the Auditor General's view, insistence, that we had to book it this year, though we could have booked it differently, over 14 years, and that would have also been in compliance with standards of public accounting.

3:40

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you. Yeah, I remember not being in compliance with my teachers and doing homework sometimes. There are normally penalties for it. But I appreciate the minister's candour, that they admit that they have broken the law, that they are not in compliance with the law.

Now, \$1.1 billion was transferred from Environment and Parks to cover the cost of administering the climate leadership action plan, otherwise known as the CLAP, for consumer rebates. My question

is: is this the entire amount needed to administer the CLAP rebates, or will this amount be needed every single year?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Ceci: You know, the Minister of Environment and Parks is not here right now. But they've provided me with some details.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, just to remind you not to reference anybody that may not be in the House, please.

Mr. Ceci: I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

The Deputy Chair: Just a reminder to refrain from referencing anybody who may or may not be in the House.

Mr. Ceci: Okay. Thanks.

I'm happy to have a minister of the Crown address this issue when they're in the Chamber later today or tomorrow during Committee of Supply.

The hon. member mentions \$1.1 billion again. I don't know. Are you going back to talking about the booking of this \$1.1 billion, or are you talking about the rebates, which is something different?

Mr. Fildebrandt: The rebates.

Mr. Ceci: You're talking about the rebates. I don't think those are the same amounts.

Mr. Fildebrandt: No, no. This is a different question you're talking about.

Mr. Ceci: But you mentioned \$1.1 billion.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, although you are going back and forth, if I could . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: I can clarify.

The Deputy Chair: Could we maybe get – yes – the Member for Strathmore-Brooks to clarify his question for you, Minister?

Mr. Ceci: That would be great. If he could clarify the exact amount and the exact page, then we would all be a lot clearer here.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm not sure if the minister is all here right now. No. Thank you.

Madam Chair, I'm referring to \$1.1 billion, not for anything to do with the early phase-out of coal; I'm referring specifically to rebates. Money was transferred from Environment and Parks to Treasury Board and Finance. I'm referring exclusively to rebates right now.

Mr. Ceci: You know, the money that was transferred is being transferred and made available to Treasury Board and Finance, and it will be accessed over time by CRA to address the rebate situation, going out to Albertans who qualify. So this is for more than one year, obviously. It's for several years. CRA has a contract with us. The \$1 million that's in my budget: that money is being remitted back to CRA for this service. So I can speak specifically to the service CRA is giving us. That's in the neighbourhood of \$1 million. The climate change levy monies that are going back to Albertans will

be more than that over the years. But that's not all in one year, so it's \$1 million.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'd like to thank the minister for the answer.

The cheques delivered to Albertans came, if I'm not mistaken, just one to two days into the new year. I'm not sure exactly how much carbon tax had been collected, my own tax evasion efforts aside. Not much tax had been collected, obviously, in order to be able to distribute that money first. The rebates were sent before people actually paid the taxes. Could the minister explain where the money for those rebates came from since the revenue had not yet been collected and if the government borrowed to issue them?

The Deputy Chair: Just to clarify, Member, do you know where that line item will be in the supplementary supply? Have you been able to find it?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I am referring to monies transferred to Environment and Parks for the rebates, and I'm asking specifically where the money came from in Environment and Parks to supply that money. There were rebates. Environment and Parks sent money to Treasury Board and Finance for rebates. I'm wondering where that money came from. It couldn't have been collected through the carbon tax because it was issued two days after the coming into effect of the carbon tax legislation. Where did that money come from, and was it borrowed?

The Deputy Chair: I'm just again trying to clarify what page it's on, though, and if it's in this actual document because we have to make sure we're sticking to actual questions that are related to supplementary supply.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It is. I'm referring very specifically.

The Deputy Chair: Would you be able to help me out to find the page? Page 44: does that sound right?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Page 44, line 10. Between pages 42 and 44 there's lots of information about transfers concerning the carbon tax rebates. I would like to know where the revenue generated for those rebates came from. In addition, was any of that borrowed?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Ceci: I think what the hon. member has done is that he's just pointed to the Environment and Parks section and said: it's somewhere in there. That's fine. The money was not borrowed. The money comes from the monies that were in Environment and Parks beforehand in 2016. That money was collected by Environment and Parks. I believe it was for SGER, and that money . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Sorry?

Mr. Ceci: The specified gas emitters program. That's the money that was – there were monies available. It wasn't borrowed.

It wasn't January 2; it was January 5 that cheques started to arrive.

Lastly, your tax evasion efforts weren't in January. They were on December 31, so I think you weren't paying any carbon levies at that point. It only came in after midnight.

The Deputy Chair: I'm just going to caution the both of you about the tax evasion comments. I mean, we could just move on to the next question.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, I still like talking about rebates if that's okay.

An Hon. Member: The chair's job is to save them.

An Hon. Member: From themselves.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I appreciate the commentary from the chair. Appropriate or not, it's taken well.

Mr. Cooper: She's helping.

Mr. Fildebrandt: She might be trying to help.

Thank you, Minister. Okay. So the money wasn't borrowed. You say that it came from the department, that the department already had money collected. Is that to say that the carbon tax rebate money provided to Albertans did not actually come from the carbon tax, then?

Mr. Ceci: No. It came from a similar payment around emissions, so it did come from carbon emissions payments.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Only one round of rebates was delivered to consumers thus far. How do we know that this is the entire cost needed to administer the plan if only one round of cheques has thus far gone out?

Mr. Ceci: You're talking about my ministry and the million dollars that CRA is under contract to provide for this year. So that's this year.

The Deputy Chair: I just want to be cautious that we're not sliding into the budget and that we're actually speaking to, again, the need for the money in the estimates.

Mr. Ceci: It's in here.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, I assure you that we're talking about the estimates. There is a significant amount of money transferred for these rebates, and we're trying to get to the bottom of this.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ceci: The administration of it.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Absolutely. This is in addition to money spent by the CRA. How many people were employed to administer these rebates?

Mr. Ceci: Madam Chair, that's up to the CRA. They are the ones who are doing the, I guess, cheque issuing based on qualifications of Albertans through their income taxes. It's not unlike the Alberta child benefit, that has been delivered to families since June 2016, I think, when the first Alberta child benefit cheques went out to families.

Mr. Sabir: August.

Mr. Ceci: August 2016.

Using the same approach, the CRA has, you know, appropriately resourced the number of people that they need to make that happen for Alberta. That's wherever that is in Ottawa.

3:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you. Eight hundred thousand dollars was transferred from Environment and Parks to provide information technology to administer the CLAP rebates. We were under the understanding that Canada Revenue Agency was going to send out these payments. What is the purpose of this \$800,000 if Canada Revenue Agency is administering these rebates?

Mr. Ceci: That's on the rebate side. On the collection side of the levies there needed to be upgrades with regard to, you know, the thousands of points of providing the monies to the government of Alberta. On the collection side there needed to be upgrades to IT. On the rebate side there is a contract with CRA.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Just to be clear, none of this \$800,000 has anything whatsoever to do with providing rebates. This is purely to do with collections.

Mr. Ceci: Sorry. Yes. That's my understanding, Madam Chair.

Mr. Fildebrandt: If Canada Revenue Agency had all the information on Albertans to send out the rebate cheques and they mailed them out, what did this money go towards – sorry. The \$1.1 billion from earlier: what money did that go towards that CRA did not do?

Mr. Ceci: Madam Chair, I think I just want to go back and address this in maybe a more holistic way. The operating expense transfer amount of \$1 million from Environment and Parks is requested to provide funding for the cost of administering the climate leadership plan consumer rebates.

Secondly, the capital investment transfer amount of \$800,000 from Environment and Parks is requested for information technology development to administer the climate leadership plan consumer rebates.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I want to bring this back to transfers for the early phase-out of coal in compliance with legislation, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. That's obviously an area of great concern to members of the Official Opposition and, I think, in fact, all private members of this House around governments complying with their own legislation. We'll recall that the Minister of Finance introduced a debt ceiling, I think, of 10 per cent of debt to GDP, 15 per cent of debt to GDP, which I think lasted approximately six months before they repealed it as it became apparent that the government would not be able to comply with their own legislation. They repealed other pieces of the fiscal accountability act, which had already been gutted by Premiers, but they replaced it with the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which was a pretty low bar to set. It did not allow the government to exceed 1 per cent of in-year expenditures without the authorization of the Legislature. That would seem to be a pretty low bar to set considering the strength that this legislation had in the early 2000s and the subsequent watering down we've had around our fiscal framework legislation.

Can the minister comment on: what are the chances of the government breaking its legislation around this again? He's called this an extraordinary exception. I know that he had to choose either to not comply with public-sector accounting standards or to not comply with the act. He's called it extraordinary, but we know they've repealed their own legislation in the past when they've found they were running into potentially violating it. Could the minister give the House any assurance that this is not going to be a regular function here, that they're either going to repeal their own legislation when they're in potential violation of it or just admit that they're in violation of it?

One of the basic functions of any Legislature since the Magna Carta has been that parliament has the sole authority to vote funds to the government. When the government can exceed those funds without the authorization of parliament, they are violating a sacred constitutional history handed down to us. If the minister would like to explain why his government is in violation of this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The next speaker. Member, would you like to go back and forth, or would you like to . . .

Mr. Hanson: I'll go back and forth, but I'd like to hear the answer to the previous question.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I appreciate you using up some of your time for this answer. You know, I just want to correct some anomalies with what was said across the aisle or some things that were wrong from across the aisle. The first thing is that there were two interpretations of public-sector accounting standards and the ways, the possible treatments, that \$1.1 billion could be booked. The other professionals and indeed professionals in my department felt we could book it over 14 years as a contingent liability. You know, being prudent with going forward and involving the Auditor General, we asked what the Auditor General would feel about this, and his views were different than ours, though ours weren't incorrect. It was an interpretation of the same public-sector accounting standards. People viewed them differently. His view was the one we ultimately supported, so we booked it over one year. We are doing that because of the views of the Auditor General.

Actual payments, though, to pay off this money – it's an accounting treatment – are going to be over 14 years, and those monies are coming from the climate leadership plan. This is strictly an accounting treatment. So we are doing that.

Subsequently, with regard to the 1 per cent rule I can tell you that Alberta's population continues to grow. Alberta's population has the fastest rate of growth amongst provinces, and combined with the economic downturn, this put tremendous pressure on government programs and services.

Our government was committed to providing those services, obviously: stable education, stable health care, and social services. Our student population ballooned larger than expected, and we wanted to fulfill an important commitment to provide per-student funding to all of the schools who had students in them. We increased our expense to the health area primarily because of supports to physician compensation and drug costs. Additionally, we addressed the funding for this person's caseload growth, which was in income support, persons with developmental disabilities, assured income for the severely handicapped, and child interventions.

So our government made the choice to ensure that all of these things would be covered as opposed to not doing them and recklessly, you know, throwing Albertans to the winds. That in large part is the reason why the financial transparency and the FPTA were breached. It also is the reason why we have identified that here.

With respect to any questions about the budget, that will come out next Thursday, you'll just have to wait and see where we are with regard to all of that, and I look forward to lots of discussion in the future about it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Most of my questions are regarding the Fort McMurray wildfire and the spending that has gone on and resulted from that. Regarding the wildfire

how much in total amongst all government departments is being requested in this supplementary supply towards wildfire response, relief, and recovery?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. As I said earlier, you know, the amount of – other ministers can probably address it more specifically, but I think I talked about two numbers here. One was \$499 million, and the other was \$250 million. I think that it was in the area of \$249 million.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. From a cursory review I see \$739 million from Municipal Affairs and an additional \$252 million from Ag and Forestry for wildfire disaster emergency assistance. That's a total of \$991 million, almost a billion dollars, two-thirds of this supplementary supply request. Would you say that this incredible sum might be the result of the original cuts to wildfire management, line 7.1 in the last spring's budget, or do you still consider our warnings about that as fearmongering?

4:00

Mr. Ceci: You know, I don't think I made those statements personally, but I will say that the amount in our budget with regard to wildfire preparation of \$200 million is appropriate and is something that we will continue to do going forward just as it has been done in the past. That gets you ready for wildfires; that's not the funding for wildfires. To that extent, I think Albertans would say that this government – and I've heard the mayor of Fort McMurray say it, too – had their backs, that whenever they requested support, we were there to make sure that they had the financial and other resources necessary to address that conflagration, the worst that Canada has ever seen. So rather than commenting on what you said or didn't say or what a person on this side said or didn't say, I will say that we appropriately funded every instance that was requested to address the wildfire.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hanson: Of the \$252 million for wildfire disaster/emergency assistance in the Ag and Forestry supplementary estimate, how much is for contracting of air tankers from out of province above and beyond our normal contract?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I apologize that I don't have that off the top of my head. Obviously, another ministry is responsible for that. I'm hoping that they'll be able to provide you with all of that information when next they are here.

I will just say that the supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry reflect additional investments in addition to wildfire protection, and though you haven't asked about this, but you may, they talk about crop insurance and agricultural support programs, energy efficiency programs, and value-added industry development. Those are all the things that that supplementary estimate, in addition to the one you're asking about, specifically addresses.

Mr. Hanson: Well, I'd appreciate it, if you don't have the information available, if we could get a written response to my question. That would be awesome.

You probably won't be able to answer this question as well, but how many days were the additional air tankers contracted for? Do you have that?

Mr. Ceci: I don't, no.

Mr. Hanson: Has the department reverted to a 123-day contracting period for air tanker groups?

Mr. Ceci: You know, I should be writing these down so that I can get you those follow-up answers, or you could provide them to me.

Mr. Hanson: I'll get you a copy. It will be on the record as well.

Mr. Ceci: Okay.

Mr. Hanson: Again, how many air tanker groups and aircraft are contracted from Alberta, how many are contracted from out of province, and how many total aircraft?

Mr. Ceci: I suspect that those answers would be on the top of the appropriate minister's head when he gets here.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister. A cautionary again. If you could refrain from mentioning anybody who may or may not be in the House, please.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Hanson: We can direct these to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why does the government insist on using AT-802 Fire Boss aircraft, which carry a fraction of the load and speed of a CL-415 Super Scooper?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, maybe the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry would like to answer the question.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much. Maybe he can help me. I'll repeat that question. Why does the government insist on using AT-802 Fire Boss aircraft, which carry a fraction of the load and speed of a CL-415 Super Scooper?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the question. I don't know for aircraft, but I do know that our wildfire disaster assistance is well funded. Last year is an example and 2015 is another example of where our resources that we have – our personnel, our first responders, whether they be wildfire personnel from Agriculture and Forestry or from the municipality or from other first responders – did a fantastic job, last year in the Fort McMurray fire and others as well.

With that, our air tanker crews that we contract out have also done an amazing job. You know, we'd seen some criticism last year about not having enough, but I had an opportunity to be there myself. Aircraft were back to back even in the sky, so we had no opportunity to add any more aircraft. I am confident that the aircraft that we are using are adequate. I have understanding from officials from my department that they have been adequate and continue to be so.

Other resources, if needed: as we've done in the past, we have had international contracts from our partners within the United States and, frankly, world-wide, including Mexico and South Africa. So I'm confident in the advice I've got from the department that the aircraft that we have are more than adequate.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Okay. We'll get to some money questions, and perhaps we can get some answers. It doesn't matter who answers, actually. Of the \$1 billion being asked to be voted to cover the cost

of this disaster, one, how much is to replace Crown assets lost in the fire? How much will be recovered from insurance on Crown assets? How much is to reimburse municipal fire crews from Fort McMurray and from outside of Fort McMurray, and how much will be required to cover private contractors hired to help put out the fire?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Treasury Board and Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Those specifics are not before us, obviously. They're with ministry officials, and those people could probably tell you. We're just talking about the rolled up amounts, and that description is not in this either.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hanson: A question for the Minister of Finance: has Treasury Board authorized the borrowing of funds to cover this \$1 billion fire?

Mr. Ceci: No, not specifically. The government of Alberta borrows money regularly to address our fiscal plan. This, obviously, was something that impacted our fiscal plan, and we have the assistance of the federal government in terms of remitting back to Alberta about \$500 million in coverage for some of this cost. The available monies within the government of Alberta were used to cover this. The various ministers came forward to address cost pressures, and through Treasury Board and Finance and, ultimately, Executive Council we supported those requests for finances. So borrowing specifically for this did not occur.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hanson: Have any bonds been posted on the market to obtain this funding?

Mr. Ceci: As I just said, borrowing for this purpose was not specifically done. The government of Alberta has borrowing needs, obviously, and those monies are laid in or borrowed in advance. This impacted our fiscal plan. We addressed it with monies that the government of Alberta had, and we got payment back from the federal government as quickly as we could to offset our expenditures.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hanson: I'll share some time with the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not here that often. I'm glad I was recognized easily. Good afternoon, everyone. As my role primarily here is Municipal Affairs, I'd like to address some questions to the minister.

Minister, congratulations on your new position. It's one of the ministries that does affect most people's lives in Alberta. I know it is a big, big, big act, about 800 pages. My book is that thick, and there are a lot of notes. I'm sure yours will get that way, too. I'd just like to glance over what we can today. If you have some information that you need to go and catch up on at some point perhaps, a written response would be much appreciated in respect to that, please.

4:10

So let's start, then. I'd like to direct you to the supply booklet, page 68, that's under Municipal Affairs. There are a number of items there that we're going to be talking about. Let's start with line

9, if you will. Line 9 basically says that there's \$748,000 there. We're just wondering: is that allocated mostly to the wildfire? Is that what it is related to, or how exactly is that being allocated within that budget line? For example, is it going to maybe a managing director's office, some new operations, or policy and support? Could anyone over there perhaps shed light on what that is for, please?

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I respect that he's got 15 years of municipal experience, so I'm looking forward to working with him going forward. Is it 15? I think it's 15. Sometimes I do my homework here.

Mr. Stier: On council for four.

Mr. S. Anderson: Is that what it was? Okay.

Yeah, you know, I do have that \$748,000 that you were talking about there for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. I don't have the specifics of how it was allotted, so the specifics I would have to get for you from my staff. I know that they're probably checking on that right now as we speak. Obviously, from May 23 to 26 the wildfire part of this was what was going on in the MD of Opportunity. As a state of emergency was called, more than 5,000 residents were displaced, so part of that was to go to there. When we're dealing with that, the DRP funding is what we're talking about.

Like I said, I'll have to get the specifics for you, but I have no problem doing that for you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you. To move on, then, let's have a look, therefore, at line 13, which kind of follows that line of thinking. We're just wondering: at what number does a disaster really get its own line in the budget like this? Perhaps the Finance minister might know more about that. I'm not sure. This is a separate line item. It wouldn't normally be there if it was in a regular year, but we've got Wood Buffalo there. Is there a number that a disaster has to reach before it gets into this kind of a document?

Mr. S. Anderson: Well, that's a great question. I'm not sure if there's an actual limit to get into a line item. That's something that I would like to know. I'll have to ask about that specific one. I mean, obviously, I do have the line items for the different ways that these were spent, you know, with urban interface wildfire, Red Cross, contingencies, and so on. But I don't know if there's a threshold on that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Yeah. Thanks. Okay. Thank you. I understand that's kind of a vague one at this time.

Let's move on to line 9, then, again. Just so you know, I recall from the budget estimates last year that the budget for disaster recovery is usually budgeted at \$200,000 despite the fact that since the '09-10 era the average disaster recovery supplementary budget is around \$214 million. That's the average. Even if we take out the 2013 flood, the average overall for a number years has been about \$54 million, so why does the department not budget a little bit more for these natural disasters? Why is it sitting at \$200,000?

Mr. S. Anderson: Back to the previous question about when there's a DRP. We just open up an event, and there's no number for it.

Sorry. That last line item that you were talking about, did you say 9?

Mr. Stier: Right.

Mr. S. Anderson: Did you mean 9 or 8?

Mr. Stier: Oh. Excuse me. I'm not working on the right number. I apologize. Once again the question was: normally every year we see \$200,000 in that line. You know, it seems that over the past 10 years there's been an ongoing amount of money spent as a result of disasters that do happen. Why do we always seem to have that number of \$200,000 in there?

Mr. S. Anderson: I think it's more of an accounting thing. We don't have a disaster every year, and we can't budget specifically for – you know, we deal in hypotheticals, I guess, right? So it's one of those things.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The second 20 minutes is now up. Who would like to go next from your caucus? You will carry on? Okay. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. So let's move away from that.

Municipal assessments and grant administration, page 68, line 3: can you explain where the \$146,000 may be going, please?

Mr. S. Anderson: That's line 3 you're looking at, the \$146,000 for municipal assessments and grant administration? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Stier: Right.

Mr. S. Anderson: Yeah. Okay. Sorry. I had it written down here different, too. Basically, with that money there Municipal Affairs is working with Transportation and Infrastructure on ways that the climate leadership plan can support our municipalities. So with an area of opportunity where we can work in partnership on climate change to protect health and environment and the economy, we will do so. We heard from AUMA and Calgary and Edmonton that to significantly reduce these greenhouse gas emissions, municipalities need to work together, you know, whether it be on energy efficiency or renewable energy or land-use planning or transit or what have you. So we have spoken with AUMA and these municipalities, and, you know, this is the number that we've used to allocate here. The funding that's in the supplementary estimates is part of the steps that we're taking to move in this direction. I'll be working with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation a little more on this going forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you. My next question actually goes back to line 8, again on page 68, and the question is: is the public safety increase of \$200,000 related again to the wildfire? If not, can you provide some context as to where this might be going?

Mr. S. Anderson: Sure. Yes, the \$200,000 that you're looking at on line 8, public safety, is an increase for the firefighter certification initiative, and it's funded by the increased revenue that's collected. Part of the ongoing commitment is that the office of the fire commissioner will administer provincial certifications to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the fire search and rescue training program. This will be across the province and with entities both public and private. So that \$200,000 is to support that initiative, and it's fully funded through exam and certification fees. It's consistent with the office of the fire commissioner's mandate to oversee the

fire search and rescue systems. It is covered by the fees for the exams and certification.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let's move on, then, if we could, Minister. Line 4 on the same page 68 is good old MSI, and it's under the operating side. It's coming in about \$1.7 million under budget. I did a quick check of the estimates back some years ago, 2009-2010, and at that time only once did MSI under operating run a surplus. It was internally transferred to capital. What was the cause of the unspent amount in this? Do you know? Was this a single municipality failing to use up all of their operating funds, or is the program as a whole reporting under budget?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. The MSI program was designed, you know, obviously, for municipalities so they can focus on their priorities. Last year five municipalities that received the MSI operating converted their funding to the MSI capital for that \$1.712 million. So the savings were found because of lower than budgeted gasoline and diesel sales in Edmonton and Calgary. The sales determine the amount of the basic municipal transportation grant that the two cities get, and under that BMTG each municipality receives a formula-based grant. It provides a sustainable, predictable level of funding for them. Lower than budgeted gasoline and diesel sales in Edmonton and Calgary meant the savings.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, if I could, on page 68 we'll move on now to line 6, if you will, Minister, grants in place of taxes. We've got \$1 million in there, and I'm just wondering again about that lesser amount. Was that the result of lower assessment values for provincial properties? If not, where is the savings coming from specifically, please?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: All right. Sure. Sorry; I'm just trying to find where I had my information in here. I've got lots of papers to go through.

The information I've got in front of me: if it doesn't answer your question, I'll get something else for you. The cut is part of our Municipal Affairs in-year saving of \$3 million. It doesn't affect the municipalities who are currently receiving GIPOT. The growth in GIPOT was less than anticipated due to lower construction and assessment growth, resulting in a savings of about a million dollars. We are committed to paying the GIPOT to municipalities with Crown property, and there are no plans to change that.

Mr. Stier: On that note, I'd just like to add a little bit here in my remarks on that same subject, same item. The grants in lieu of taxes was quite a significantly sensitive issue in the past couple of years, and to my memory, if I recall, there were a lot of municipalities not compensated for that. So I still remain a little bit curious about what that number is, what it represents, and why it is there. If you could perhaps elaborate on that now or in writing later, that would be fine.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Sure. Yeah. I will have to get you a little more information on that to give you a better breakdown if you don't mind. I don't have that off the top of my head.

Mr. Stier: That'd be fine. Thank you.

Line 7 on that same page is the Alberta community partnership, and there's \$1.5 million unspent. I'm just wondering where that's coming from, why that took place. Can you tell us a little bit about that community partnership, what it's about, why it is there, and what it normally serves, please?

Mr. S. Anderson: All right. Community partnership: I'll try to find that for you. Of course, you're asking me questions that – I didn't write down my information for that one. That's fantastic. You know what I said to you earlier: I don't like not having the answer. That's going to drive me crazy. I'm going to have to get that for you. I'm sorry about that, hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Yeah. Well, again, with these books that we get, sometimes a guy doesn't see every page in the book, I'm sure. There was quite a list of things there that we had questions on, so I can appreciate your situation.

Okay. Let's move on to capital grants, line 4, same page, MSI one more time. You know, it's probably looking like it's going to come in about \$17 million under budget. We went back through some of the budgets dating back to '11-12, et cetera, and not once in all those years did we have unspent money. It's been chronically underfunded over its entire life. I know that you can't talk about what's happening in the future. Is there any information that you have to give us more of an understanding of: why the \$17 million surplus? This might be a little bit redundant from a question earlier, but I think it would be something that we would like to have. You talked about lower gas and diesel costs and so on and so forth. Do you have any other information regarding that, please?

Mr. S. Anderson: No, I don't. You're right. From the answer before, the BMTG and so on: that's where that comes from. I don't really have any extra information for you on that, and some of the stuff we're still working on, you know. You'll be finding out a little more information coming down the road here. One of the ministers used the words "stay tuned." You'll find out more information soon.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Okay. There's another add-on to that. Is this perhaps initial money that's been transferred in from the federal government, as an example? By the way, related to that, is there more federal program money coming from the federal gas tax fund, the building Canada fund, or the small communities fund that we aren't aware of and doesn't show up in these documents that you might be able to enlighten us on, please?

Mr. S. Anderson: Sure. Yeah. The federal grant program: the federal gas tax fund obviously provides us with some predictable long-term funding, and obviously under this funding we can, you know, let our municipalities determine how this money is going to be used for their local priorities. There was last year an increase of \$1.162 million in the funding because of a carry-forward in unused funding from the previous year. As you well know, the funding is 100 per cent by the federal government for the gas tax fund.

The building Canada fund: the communities' component is designed for unique infrastructure needs. Obviously, they contribute to our strong communities with a cleaner environment. The projects are cost shared between all three levels, as you well know, and that \$558,000 increase is to carry forward unused administration

funding from the previous year. Like I said, we promised to support these needs of our small communities, so we'll continue to do that.

Mr. Stier: Madam Chair, I'd just like to thank the minister for his responses today in a tough situation. It's one of those first-time situations, and I really appreciate his work so far.

Now we have another speaker. The Member for Little Bow may be interested in talking now. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. My questions are for the Agriculture and Forestry minister. I see he isn't here. What would you suggest?

The Deputy Chair: If you could maybe just direct them to the Finance minister right now.

Mr. Schneider: Sure. He was here, but he kind of disappeared. He might come back.

Supplementary supply for agriculture – you know what, ma'am? The Agriculture and Forestry minister may hear what's going on in the House and determine to come back, so I'll let my colleague . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members of the House, I just need to remind you again: if we could please refrain from commenting on whether individuals are in the House or not in the House.

I will recognize the Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: All right. I have some questions for the Minister of Justice on supplementary supply. Under line item 2.1 of the operating budget you have an additional \$3 million there. Can you expand on what that might be for exactly?

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Ganley: Do I need permission to go back and forth, or are we good to do the . . .

The Deputy Chair: Would you like to go back and forth, Member?

Mrs. Pitt: Yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Please, Minister, go ahead.

Ms Ganley: That money is for resolution and court administration services. Those are employees who support the courts, not judges but things like court clerks and resolution clerks and those sorts of folks. That is just as a result of increased pressures on our justice system and trying to keep staffing levels up.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you.

Under 4.3 there's a request for a \$5 million increase for criminal and youth prosecutions. Can you tell me what those funds are going to?

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. Again, those funds are going to support staffing. Those will be both prosecutors and support staff. Some of those funds are to ensure that we can continue to retain people because even though they're management, opted-out employees and they don't get the same raises, sometimes the increment is in terms of levels. Those are to ensure that we can retain the staff we have currently. We've also had to hire some additional staff to deal with some caseload backlogs we're having and as a result of the bail review. So those are Crown prosecutors and support staff for those prosecutors.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you.

How many prosecutors? Sorry. We're up and down.

Ms Ganley: I do have that somewhere. I can tell you, for sure, that it includes 10 that we've hired recently and 15 more that we're in the process of hiring. I don't want to commit that that's the entire number, so I'll get back to you with more precise figures on that.

4:30

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. If there could be a breakdown of how many are actually in this particular line item on this one – I assume the next one will be in a future budget shortly – that would be handy.

At 6.1 you're requesting an additional \$600,000. It's a pretty low amount of money. Why is it so low? What is it for?

Ms Ganley: Yes, indeed, program support. I believe that that is additional money coming from the federal government for the aboriginal courtwork program, but I will write you a correction if it turns out that that is not the right number.

Mrs. Pitt: Sorry. I need clarification on that. That's money coming from the federal government? Why are you asking for money?

Ms Ganley: When the federal government makes an increase, they send the money to us, but then we have to ask for an increase in the estimates even to spend that money which is coming in. I understand that to be what's happening here.

Mrs. Pitt: Do those two numbers add up exactly?

Ms Ganley: They should do. I believe so.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Pitt: I like it when we sit down in other committees, not up and down.

At 6.6, under Public Trustee, you're spending \$1.7 million for the trustee, but why the spending there and not on prosecutor services?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. Most of those decisions were made when the office of the Public Trustee and guardian was still in its previous home under human services. It came to us. They are looking to replace their operating systems, and that money is offset by dedicated revenue, so we can't spend it anywhere else. We can only spend it there.

Mrs. Pitt: It's interest from the Public Trustee's fund? Is that correct? Is that the revenue increase?

Ms Ganley: I feel a little like a jack-in-the-box, but, yes, that's my understanding.

Mrs. Pitt: All right. Okay. So you're using the additional revenue from the Public Trustee's funds to pay for government systems changes?

Ms Ganley: Yeah. The project is fully offset by revenues. I mean, the reason for that replacement is that, obviously, they have rather sensitive information of many vulnerable people in their care and custody. My understanding is that they, essentially, need these upgrades.

It also relates to recommendations, as I recall, that came out of an Auditor General's report in terms of how they were tracking and storing data and tracking and keeping track of where things are. These additional systems will also help them to make sure that they

have greater transparency in terms of where their numbers are because they're able to keep track of them.

Mrs. Pitt: Is that an allowable use of funds from the Public Trustee's account, to pay for the systems change? I'm wondering if we're wading into, like, ethical concerns, maybe. I don't know.

Ms Ganley: I am assured that it's a perfectly normal process, but it sounds like my hon. colleague may have something to add.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I can supplement on that. I believe the Minister of Justice is right. Under the Public Trustee legislation there is a provision for the use of the funds from that account, so it is consistent with that legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. member, do you have any more questions?

Mrs. Pitt: Yes, I do. Correctional services, line item 8: you're requesting \$14 million. Can you let me know where it went and why it wasn't budgeted?

Ms Ganley: That increase of \$14 million is for manpower pressures. It's essentially to deal with increases in inmate population growth. We've seen a significant spike . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister. The first 60 minutes are now up.

We will be moving on now to the third party. I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to ask some questions.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, sorry. Are you going back and forth, or did you want to take your . . .

Mr. Gotfried: Back and forth, please.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: I'll start out with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It's understandable that the rebuilding from the Wood Buffalo wildfire is an important priority for our province. The \$1.3 billion in supplemental supply will hopefully go a long way to help tens of thousands of Albertans rebuild a community that has contributed so much to the vibrancy of Alberta's economy and to our public coffers through regional resource extraction. My first question is: what are the government's priorities in the Wood Buffalo rebuild?

Mr. S. Anderson: That's a pretty open question, I guess. The two words that we use are "recovery" and "repair." I think that what we want to make sure of is that the money is in the hands of the municipality, where it needs to be. They know what's going on on the ground, obviously, with the disaster funding and things like that. I had the opportunity to be up in Fort Mac a couple of weeks back to announce another \$20 million for them and to see the rebuilding, what's going on up there. I would say that our priority is the rebuild – there are a few different priorities, I would think – of the houses and the businesses that were lost, and I think the other one is making sure there's funding there for mental health, which is a huge, huge issue.

I was able to speak to a gentleman up there when I was there about the things he's doing. He's rebuilding his house. He's

probably one of the most positive people I've ever met in my entire life.

Yeah, we're trying to make sure that the priorities are that the money is there when they need it. We want to make sure that we have their backs. That encompasses a whole bunch of different line items in here, whether it's, you know, support services or grants or what have you. I mean, it's a pretty broad-based thing.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister. I know that you're relatively new to your portfolio. I'm sure you will be as diligent as you possibly can, but I think what's important to Albertans and to the residents of Wood Buffalo is this government understanding what the critical infrastructure and services are. I guess to that point: given that you're going to be turning a lot of this money over to the municipality, it sounds like, and, I'm sure, overseeing that, do you have a timeline on when the critical infrastructure – let's just call it that: critical infrastructure and services – will be fully restored in Wood Buffalo given this investment?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. Well, obviously, you know, one of the other things that is a priority is just supporting families. As far as a timeline goes, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is in charge of the rebuild. We're here kind of to, as I said, have their backs. So they would know best on the timelines and on how things are going. When I was up there, they did indicate that it's going well. Things are going fairly smoothly. There are some glitches, obviously, here and there. As far as a timeline, they haven't really told me when they think full recovery will come. They've cleared off all the debris, all the things that were there from the fire. All that is gone. So it's basically in rebuild phase now. But as far as a timeline, they would know best on what that is.

4:40

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you again, Minister.

Again, I understand that this is a very big investment for Albertans and also very critical to the restoration of the vibrancy of that community and a very strong part of our economic engine. This is a big investment. I would hope, again, that there's an opportunity for you to work more closely with the municipality to really identify that critical infrastructure and the critical services and to get timelines on that.

What I'm also interested in, again, is to ensure that Albertans are getting the value in terms of what we're doing with that. What are you doing to mitigate the impact of project cost inflation through oversight of competitive bidding or other controls, workforce housing to ensure that we have the labour in place, and things that we've heard of such as the drywall tariffs that are affecting some of the costs, particularly as it relates to the cost of rebuilding public infrastructure in the region?

Mr. S. Anderson: Well, I would say that we're in contact with the regional municipality on a constant basis – you know, I wouldn't say daily but frequently – to understand what issues they're going through. Like I say, we're in a support role for them right now. So when we get information, like you were saying, about drywall and things like that from them, then we can investigate or help them however they need. It really is one of those – response and recovery are happening, and we're supporting what they're doing. It's really the information we get from them day to day.

I know one of the things that we did up there for the home builders is an interim pilot program. Basically, we didn't want fly-by-night people coming in and taking advantage of vulnerable citizens, so we made sure that there's a little bit of checks and

balances as far as information goes on the builder side of it just to make sure that, you know, these people that are rebuilding aren't taken advantage of by shell companies and things like that. That's something that we're trying to do on our end to help out, and it's working well. People are getting the information they need. They know where these companies come from and what they've done before, if they're financially viable, and that it's not just a guy in a pickup truck coming out and building their house.

Anyway, we're doing little things on our end on that side, but we are relying heavily on the municipality to let us know if there are any issues that we can help with. It's an ongoing thing that's going to last a long time, but we'll be here as long as needed.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Minister.

Again, recognizing that this is a new portfolio for you and that it will take you some time to get up to speed, particularly with significant expenditures in this particular instance, have you had a chance to identify what expertise you may have in your department that can help Wood Buffalo, again going back to such items as procurement and, as you mentioned, maybe working with some of the province-wide associations like the Home Builders' Association to ensure that there's protection both within the industry and from different levels of government? Have you identified some critical areas with this investment that actually may be beefing up some of the resources in your department to assist Wood Buffalo?

Mr. S. Anderson: Sure. Yeah. I mean, obviously, the staff that's in our department has done some incredible work over the last year with the people in Wood Buffalo. We are working with the Canadian Home Builders' Association on some of these things, like I mentioned, making sure that these builders are competent and financially viable and things like that. Just like after every disaster, there's a third-party review that's ongoing. We're waiting for the information to hear, you know, what can maybe be done better or tweaked or what have you. We have made sure that the experts are in place that we need, but again that's using the municipality as well and their expertise and what they know of their builders on the ground and the people in the areas, too. Our Alberta emergency folks are unbelievable, so we've relied on them a lot, too, and on the people on the ground.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you. I'd like to switch questioning over to the Minister of Finance if I could and go back and forth if you're amenable to that, Minister.

The \$1.72 billion that we're seeing also includes over \$300 million in new spending. That's in addition to over \$200 million in savings achieved by Alberta's front-line workers despite increasing demands on Alberta's services. We saw \$215 million in savings in Health on page 46 – that's a whopping .0109 per cent, but savings are savings; we'll take that – and \$16 million in savings in Environment and Parks, page 42, and \$7 million in savings in Transportation on page 78.

Minister, since this government continues to claim that savings and efficiency can only come from cuts to front-line workers and services, which front-line workers and programs were cut to achieve these savings in these departments?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of Treasury Board.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, we're finding efficiencies all across government, and we are doing that by asking all the ministers. I've had a process of sitting down with all the

ministers, and then they come up with savings within their departments. For instance, on salaries and supplies, supplies was an area and salaries was an area where there was \$121 million achieved in the last year. That was because we reduced those budgets in '16-17 for services and supplies and for salaries.

We have a hiring restraint on, so not everyone is being put into positions that are vacant. Those requests are having to go up to the deputy minister level, and they're also having to go up to the Public Service Commissioner's level for outside of government.

The other savings achieved were \$28.5 million from freezing management salaries. We have just recently moved also on a compensation framework that'll achieve \$16 million in savings going forward for the highest paid CEOs of agencies, boards, and commissions. We have undertaken those efforts and will continue to do that in budgets going forward. It's just the way we do business, to find savings and to make sure it happens.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you. Minister, I find this very interesting because, again, I think we've been told many, many times in this House that there are no opportunities for cuts without cutting front-line workers, yet you've found millions and millions of dollars in savings here. To identify those savings, in my world you actually have to find them in the budget, find out where you can cut them, to quantify them to give us, certainly, millions and millions of dollars of savings. So I'm a little surprised that you can't present to us something a little bit more detailed, particularly in Health: \$215 million. You don't get that without sending everybody back into their budgets and finding things with a fine-tooth comb, recognizing that it is only .0109 per cent of the total budget. You did have to find those somewhere so you didn't have to cut front-line staff, again, as we've heard time and time again.

Let's look at maybe the Health budget: \$215 million in savings. Will you be able to deliver to us specifics on where those savings were achieved and demonstrate to Albertans that it wasn't from cutting front-line staff?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. With regard to Health, you know, there would have been additional costs and pressures in that area had there not been an amended agreement with the AMA. The AMA came back to the table in November 2016, and they amended an agreement that, had it not been amended, would have taken them to 2018. Some of those savings are in that area with physician costs – they would have been higher – savings resulting from the amended agreement signed by the AMA in November 2016.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you. Minister, that's actually a great example of the kind of detail I'm looking for. Could you give us the numbers on the savings from that AMA renegotiation or contract or agreement that are part of this \$215 million?

Mr. Ceci: Obviously, the particulars are most known by the minister responsible for those areas, but I can tell you that I regularly hear that minister talk about \$500 million in savings going forward over the next two years.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you. Minister, you brought that one up, so I thought maybe you had the numbers already in your hands there.

Minister, I think one of the concerns we've got is: are these one-time savings, or are these sustainable savings? I'd like you to tell us a little bit more. With these numbers, are these one-time events, or are any of these savings sustainable through future budget cycles?

Mr. Ceci: That's a great question. With regard to the AMA agreement, obviously it's during the term of that agreement. Subsequent to negotiations, we'll see where that agreement is in 2018. You know, I was a bit of a broken record with some of my colleagues that we needed to find in-year savings. We did that both in budgets '15 and '16. Some of those savings are on a one-time basis, and some will take money permanently out of their budgets and our overall operating budget, so the percentage is not something I can recall off the top of my head. But it is a good question to ask, if they're permanently out, and the answer is that some are one-time, which get us to our in-year savings goal, and some are permanently out, which will not come back.

4:50

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you again, Minister. Again a little bit short on some of the details I'd like to see, but I'm sure we'll see those as we go forward, particularly those that are sustainable savings, not just one-time, so that we can see some quantification of that.

What I'd like to ask you now is: what's being done to ensure that the savings achieved in this budget cycle by front-line programs and workers will not be wasted on spending growth that does not deliver additional value for money and front-line deliverables for Albertans? How are we going to actually make these savings work for us so that we don't affect front-line services but we sustain them by not spending them on other growth areas which do not deliver a benefit to Albertans?

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, I think I provided a bit of this answer before, but investment that's identified in this budget's spending is to provide stable funding for some key programs like education, health care, and social services. I kind of think that those are things that all Albertans value.

We wanted to fully fund student enrolment, and we have kept that promise. That is expected to address an underexpenditure in that area that caused schools to have larger than necessary classroom sizes.

We increased, obviously, the expense to Health, primarily to support physician compensation and drug costs. There were more people going to physicians, so these are driven not by the AMA agreement but more by the use of doctors. Those are good uses, we think, addressing things preventatively and as they need to be for individuals and will keep them out of more acute-care settings.

Additional, obviously, supports, driven by the downturn in our economy. Thankfully, that is starting to turn around, and we're starting to see some green shoots and more confidence from investors, more confidence from businesses and Albertans generally. Those people that were affected negatively by the recession came to our income support offices in large numbers, and we addressed that pressure. I think that that, again, is a good use of tax dollars, to make sure that Albertans aren't left out in the cold by their loss of employment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chair, I'm going to move on to just a slightly different line of questioning. I'm glad you brought out the green shoots because the trouble with green shoots is that they're very tender and delicious and tend to be consumed quickly before they actually get to grow. The \$1.72 billion request for additional funds represents a 3.78 per cent increase to the \$44.5 billion budget this government asked for last year. Alberta's population growth and inflation were around 1 per cent each, and that's on top of, of course, a 3.4 per cent increase over the prior year's budget. Given that the Finance minister has repeatedly said that it was a priority "to bend the curve," how do you explain this growth in spending, which far exceeds population growth plus inflation even without the funds required for Wood Buffalo recovery? Is this now called bending the subcurve, or are we still on the main curve?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You know, it's been a really challenging year, obviously. The Fort McMurray wildfire: you didn't take that out of this amount that you're talking about, 3.8 per cent or whatever, but those monies needed to be spent to address the significant natural disaster that was ongoing for 80,000 people. I think any government would spend those monies up front. They would not skimp on that sort of expenditure.

The other thing we did, of course, was to protect more broadly the programs and services Albertans rely on. Especially during the downturn, they were called on by greater numbers of Albertans coming to get the support they needed. We didn't skimp on that either. We thought that that would have hurt average families, and it would have made this downturn even more prolonged had we skimmed. So we chose to invest and not cut. We protected services rather than turn Albertans away from the doors of this government, and we'll continue to work to protect those things that are important to Albertans.

Health has been a particularly challenging area across this country. We are doing things to bend that curve, but that's a work-in-progress that will take some time. Instead of the 6 to 10 per cent increases to that budget that have occurred in the past, our target is to try and get it down to 3 per cent, lower than 3. There are some provinces that talk about success in that area. We need to look more into how they're doing those things.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We are now moving on to the next 20-minute block, for the members for Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Elbow. Do you plan to split the time?

Mr. Clark: Yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. So 10 minutes on the clock for you to go back and forth?

Mr. Clark: Yes, we'll go back and forth if that's all right with the ministers. Thank you very much. I don't suspect I will take the full 20 minutes, and I believe my hon. colleague here – I don't know if he has any questions for any ministers today but, I suppose, will reserve the right to do that. I don't expect I'll take the full 20 minutes.

I will start with Municipal Affairs and, with apologies to the minister . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I'm just going to interject. It's 20 minutes to be shared between the two of you. I will let the two

of you figure that out. But I just want to be clear that it's 20 minutes for both of you.

Mr. Clark: Yes, 20 minutes combined. Yes. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Yes. I don't expect that I'll take much of it.

Let's get after it here. Starting with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and, again, with apologies if some of this is ground that has already been covered, I am very interested in the \$240 million allocated to the recovery effort within Wood Buffalo. Instead of asking a general question about what that's for, I'm just curious if some or all of that is encompassed within the disaster recovery program. Is that DRP money, or is that going out through a different method?

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Mr. S. Anderson: You're talking about the recovery, the \$240 million right there? That's what you're talking about? Okay. I don't have the breakdown of that in front of me. I'll have to get the breakdown exactly for you so that I can give you the specifics of it. Yeah, I don't have it exactly, I don't think, how you would like it, and I don't want to give you a broad answer because I don't think that's what you're looking for. But we do get some of that back from the disaster funding. I'll get some more specifics for you, and we'll get that back to you.

Mr. Clark: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Just perhaps more specific questions, then, to just get on the record specifically as it relates to the disaster recovery program, and that's, as you've intuited, precisely where I'm going. Is there a certain percentage of this money – some or all; I don't suppose all – that we could expect back from the federal government in reimbursement from the disaster recovery program? That, I guess, itself is one stand-alone question. Is there money that we can expect back at some point through federal disaster recovery reimbursement?

Also, I'm very interested in knowing if you can let me know what number of DRP claims have been made by the municipality, by individuals, and by businesses as related to the Wood Buffalo wildfire, please.

Mr. S. Anderson: Yeah. To your first question there: about 90 per cent of the money back; they've advanced \$300 million already. Once it's all said and done, you know, like, it's going to take a long time for the money to come back to us.

But as far as the – you're looking at claims by individuals? Is that what you're asking about?

5:00

Mr. Clark: I'll just restate my question, and then we'll come back to the federal reimbursement afterwards. What I'm interested in is that, as I understand it, there are at least three categories of DRP claims. One is municipalities' potential DRP claims, one is from individuals, and another category would be for businesses. I'm curious if you have a breakdown of DRP claims filed by municipalities, by individuals, businesses, or by any other category that I haven't captured.

Mr. S. Anderson: I don't have those specifics on me, obviously, but I can look into that for you, for sure, and see what I can find. I don't have the private-sector DRPs because it is an insurable event, but I can ask through my staff and see what information we can get for you.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you very much. That's really what I'm interested in, is given that it's an insurable event if there are any DRP claims at all. I'm just curious if there are things that fall outside of the scope of what is insurable but potentially fall into DRP. Of course, why I'm interested in knowing that is: do these numbers potentially go up in the future? Are there some liabilities here that we're not aware of? I'd be very interested to know that. If there aren't, obviously, that would be wonderful as well.

Just back to that first question, and I guess I'm focusing specifically on the \$240 million for recovery. I just wonder if you could tell me if the \$300 million that has been advanced by the federal government is accounted for in the \$720 million or so that we're talking about here, or is that over and above the \$720 million? I guess what I'm curious about is this \$720 million number. Could we expect it to go down by \$300 million, or in fact is that \$720 million with the \$300 million from the federal government over and above. And is there more money coming potentially from the federal government that at some point would reduce this \$720 million figure?

Mr. S. Anderson: Yes, there is more money coming. I don't know what it is yet. But the \$300 million was advanced already. I don't think that counts in that \$720 million, but I'd have to check on that for you because I don't have that breakdown off the top of my head, obviously. I do know that it was advanced already, but I'd have to check into that there for you.

Mr. Clark: I don't want you to tell me what's in the budget next week because I know that would be . . .

Mr. Cooper: That would be a short term for cabinet.

Mr. Clark: That may set the world record for shortest time in cabinet, if you were to do that, so please don't.

However, what I'm interested in is whether you have given thought to increasing the amount you budget for disaster response. Generally what I've observed from past budgets is that the disaster response number in the budget is quite low, with the understanding that it's really either a subtext or a nudge and a wink or even perhaps an express goal of: look, if something happens, we'll spend whatever it takes to recover should there be a disaster. But I'm just curious if for budgetary purposes you have given some thought to increasing that number or coming up with a five- or 10-year actual average that you would use to budget as we go forward with this coming budget and future budgets as well?

Mr. S. Anderson: So, no, I'm not going to talk about the budget that's coming out on the 16th. But I think that part of what we're talking about – it's kind of hard to deal in hypotheticals. With that third-party review that's being done, you know, we're going to look at efficiencies and look at the way things were done and look at the way we can maybe do things better going forward. I can't speak to whether that's going to have any effect on how we determine budgets in the future. Like I said, I don't want to deal with hypotheticals.

We have stated before in the House that no matter what, whenever a disaster hits in Alberta, we will make sure that the money is there for whichever municipality, whoever needs it, at that time. We will make sure it's there. That's what the government is there for, to make sure they have the backs of their citizens. Regardless of what that's going to cost, we have to make sure that we're there for people.

I think that the Auditor General has actually indicated that our disaster recovery accounting has been – the best practice is to fund after the event rather than, as I said, hypotheticals, so we will see

what the third party says. You know, we're always looking at our departments and trying to make sure that we're doing things that are going to be best for Albertans, and we'll continue to do that.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, and congratulations to the new minister. I think you're acquitting yourself very nicely in this process. I will move on, and let you relax here for a moment. I will ask the Minister of Finance a couple of questions and then cede whatever time I have to my colleague here if he'd like to use it.

So to the Minister of Finance. I'm very interested in some of the requested increases directly in your ministry that, as I understand it here from the notes, are related to administration of the climate leadership plan rebates. I guess I'm just curious as to why we have an increase here of perhaps not the largest gross number, but what planning went into deciding that budget figure in the first place? Why is it that we need yet more money at this stage of the game for increased administration of the climate leadership plan?

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Why those items weren't in our Budget 2016: I can tell the hon. member that Budget 2016 introduced plans to implement a price on carbon through a carbon levy on purchases of transportation and heating fuels. Although the budget for Alberta's climate leadership plan is with the climate change office, which is in Environment and Parks, Treasury Board and Finance was expected to incur . . .

The Acting Chair: I apologize for interrupting, but the first 10 minutes is . . .

Mr. Ceci: Can I just finish this? It will just take a second.

The Acting Chair: Be brief, Minister.

Mr. Ceci: Okay. Thanks. Treasury Board and Finance was expected to incur implementation costs, both operating and capital, with regard to the administration of the carbon levy. Getting closer to the launch of that program, our costs and obligations under the legislation became clearer, and new estimates for our costs incurred and budgeted for the coming years were made.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: So are you continuing, Member for Calgary-Elbow, and then the remainder of the time will go to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

Mr. Clark: My hon. colleague for Calgary-Mountain View has indicated to me that he doesn't plan to use his time this afternoon, so I will use a little bit more of the time. I don't imagine I'll use the next full 10 minutes. If that's all right with the minister and the chair.

The Acting Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. I do want to ask – and I'm very interested as we're talking about the climate leadership plan and administering the consumer rebates – why it is that as the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board you feel that Albertans with a household income of nearly a hundred thousand dollars can't afford your policies, being the carbon tax in particular, why you're rebating 60 per cent of Alberta households or two-thirds of Alberta households by some measures. What's the magic number there? Why were those decisions made? As President of Treasury Board you have a role in approving some of these expenditures. I'm just very curious whether you feel rebates, in fact, defeat the purpose of

a program that is intended to disincent Albertans from certain activity by making it cost more.

Mr. Ceci: I know the hon. member knows that there was an expert panel that gave advice to government with respect to setting up the climate leadership plan for this province, that took us from being a laggard province to a leader province. You'll hear that several times over the coming weeks. Making life more affordable for Albertans is what this government is all about. The expert panel gave advice to government and said that, you know, to appropriately incent and to ameliorate the effects of carbon pricing on both transportation and home heating fuels, this would be the appropriate way to go. Rather than me second-guessing that expert leadership panel that set up the carbon plan, I agreed with it, as members of this government did, and we implemented it.

5:10

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'll finish with one final question, which really dovetails on that question as it relates to just new programs in general. We're looking at the seniors home adaptation and repair loan program. A certain amount of money, which I believe to be \$7 million, was originally allocated for that, but the supplementary estimate here is requesting yet another \$2 million. I'm just curious, again in your capacity as President of Treasury Board, if there's any sort of vetting that goes on, where you say: well, we can achieve a certain amount with this certain new program. Is there any sort of process where you would perhaps push back and say: well, this is what we thought it was going to be; this is all the money we have; and, no, there is in fact no more money no matter how important the program may be?

And let me hasten to add that I certainly take no issue with this particular program. I think it's an important one for seniors to allow them to stay in their homes. But I'm just very curious what that process looks like from your perspective as the one who ultimately controls the purse strings.

Mr. Ceci: Well, that program, obviously, is \$2 million higher than expected because of the applications that have come in to that program, asking for seniors to get loan money so they could repair their homes. It's a worthwhile and positive thing to do, to assist seniors with these costs up front, and it's recovered on the back end when they either sell their property or an estate takes care of that. You know, that's what we hear is important for seniors all over Alberta and, indeed, everywhere, that they want to stay in their homes as long as possible.

My review of that is that the minister comes forward with a desire to address this pressure because the pressure is for the number of applications that come forward. We have provided the minister with that support so they could make the program available to as many Albertans as possible. I look at these things within the context of available funds as well as within the context of whether it is delivering good value. And I can say on both levels, yes.

The Acting Chair: Member for Calgary-Elbow, you're finished with your time?

Mr. Clark: All done.

The Acting Chair: Member for Calgary-Mountain View, are you wishing to ask any questions?

Dr. Swann: No questions.

The Acting Chair: All right. So we're ceding the time for independent members.

The chair will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to lead things off over here. One of the problems, of course, when you're kind of last in line . . .

The Acting Chair: Sorry, Member. I just want to confirm that you're combining your time.

Mr. Nielsen: I am, yes, with your blessing, of course, and the minister's blessing as well.

. . . is that some of the good questions got used up here already. But if I may call upon our fantastic Municipal Affairs minister. Although I know you're new to the position, I'm sure that if you don't quite have the answers here, you can get back.

The Acting Chair: Member, through the chair.

Mr. Nielsen: Yes. Sorry.

Minister, I know that this was talked about a little bit earlier, and I'm not sure if I had caught the answer. I was just wondering why the basic municipal transportation grant was lower than budgeted.

Mr. S. Anderson: I did touch on it a little bit, but it is something that's actually a good thing to maybe repeat. The BMTG has different funding models for Edmonton and Calgary than it does for the rest of Alberta's municipalities. So the amount of the grant for Edmonton and Calgary is determined based on the proportion of gasoline and diesel fuel that's sold in Alberta whereas the remaining municipalities receive the grant based on a combination of population, length of primary highways, and other factors, depending on the size and type of municipality. So the reduction to the basic municipal transportation grant, as I had said before to another member, was due to lower than budgeted gasoline and diesel sales in Edmonton and Calgary, which determines the amount of the grant that's for the two largest cities in Alberta.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Minister. I know we had talked about the climate leadership plan here just a little bit earlier, and I was curious about how the funding of the climate leadership plan and implementation was used, and I'm also wondering how this will benefit our municipalities as well.

Mr. S. Anderson: Sure. As many of you know, there are a lot of municipalities out there that are doing great things as far as climate change and energy efficiency. You know, we heard from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose about what Wetaskiwin is doing with solar and a whole bunch of things that they're doing, and I would actually like to go for a tour and see all of it. I know that Leduc put a big solar array on their rec centre. Devon is doing some amazing things out there. Those are just examples that are close to us that I know of. We know that municipalities are doing some of these things on their own. They're very concerned out there about the future of our environment and sustainable energy, which is good. The funding that we have for our climate leadership plan: we're working, as was stated before, with Transportation and Infrastructure to look at ways that we can support these municipalities with our climate plan.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

It's a really big area of opportunity, I think, for partnerships in Alberta. You know, we talk about partnerships, whether it be with the MGA or whatever it is in collaboration, and I think this is part of that with our climate leadership plan. We want to make sure that our health and our environment and our economy are protected. I have little boys, so I want to make sure that we're doing what's right for them and, hopefully, for when I have grandkids, possibly, when

I'm a little older. I'm still pretty young. Just because I have white in my beard, it doesn't mean that I'm that old yet.

One of those things that we've been doing is that a few of us had a tour of the AUMA building here. They're doing some really neat things with energy efficiency, so we've been working with them and their members a fair amount to figure out what might work better for them, whether it be with energy efficiency, whether it be with renewables, land use, waste management. Transit is a big one, especially in the big cities but also in the surrounding areas, too, so if we can do things, you know, GreenTRIP funding and things like that.

These are the types of things that we're discussing with all these municipalities to try to help them and work, obviously, in partnership with them and try to make sure that we're doing the right things and sustainable things for the citizens out there. That's kind of a general overview of what that's being used for right now.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Nielsen: Madam Chair, we've had a lot of discussion here, of course, about the wildfires. I was just wondering, because you had alluded to it earlier, Minister: what is the firefighter certification initiative?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. Yes, I did kind of just touch on it briefly there. It's a commitment that we have to public safety for Albertans. It's working through the office of the fire commissioner. They provide training courses and certificates. I'm happy to say that the increase in funding reflects an increase in certification. That means that there are more firefighters and more boots on the ground. That's where that funding comes from. The additional \$200,000 that supports this initiative is fully funded through the exam and certification fees. You know, it's kind of one of those, I guess, good things that happened, in a sense, because we know that there are going to be more firefighters out there.

People, I think, have seen what's happened in the past, whether it be Slave Lake or with the fire up in Fort Mac, and they know that we need more help out there. There are a lot of citizens out there that want to do the right thing for their neighbours, and we see that reflected in that. That's a really positive thing, I think, that we're going to have more people out there on the ground in case there is an issue or a disaster of some sort. We don't ever want that, of course, but we know that we need to have people in place when things like that do happen.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just switching gears a little bit here, ministry support services saw savings of about \$500,000. How was this achieved, and are there any plans for future savings?

Mr. S. Anderson: Sorry. Can you repeat the first part of the question? I didn't hear it.

Mr. Nielsen: I believe I saw – and maybe I'm mistaken – that there were savings of around \$500,000 achieved. I was wondering how this was achieved. Are there future plans for those savings, or was this just one time?

Mr. S. Anderson: Sorry. My mind was still on the firefighting stuff.

Yeah, actually, it's kind of nice when we can save money, obviously, and find efficiencies through the ministry. You know,

all the ministers are asking our staff to find efficiencies and make sure that we're doing things that aren't redundant, things like that. One of the ones that we did – I mean, it might not sound like a ton of money, \$500,000, but we did find efficiencies in our IT programs. Because it was previously outsourced and we did bring that network maintenance in-house, we managed to save \$500,000. Going forward, of course, we're going to keep looking at things like that, and as technology evolves – I mean, I don't like to speak in hypotheticals, but who knows what we can find out there, right? It's something that we're always trying to do, be more efficient, and we found a \$500,000 efficiency in IT, which I'm happy that my staff did.

5:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks, Madam Chair. Those are all the questions that I have at this time. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has some, so I'll cede the time to him.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak from the government side?

Seeing none, we will now move to our five-minute rotation for the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Chair. Supplementary supply for Ag and Forestry is \$332,493,000 plus a little over \$5 million made available from lower than budgeted expenses, and \$6 million from the climate leadership plan has been brought forward for the farm energy program. Can you just tell us what exactly this energy program provides for farmers?

The Deputy Chair: Just to clarify, Member, are you going back and forth for the full 10 minutes?

Mr. Schneider: Back and forth, please, yeah. Sorry.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.
The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Member. Yeah, the farm energy program enhancements, we had that earlier. You're able to do those enhancements. There are four specific programs. There's on-farm energy management, on-farm solar photovoltaics, the irrigation efficiency, and the accelerating innovation program.

Mr. Schneider: Can I just ask about irrigation efficiency, a little bit of the details of what that might be?

Mr. Carlier: Yeah. Good question. They'll be able to find whatever efficiencies there might be in irrigation. There are already a lot, I'm sure the member realizes. They'll be able to convert to lower energy irrigation systems themselves: pumps, et cetera. I had the opportunity – as a matter of fact, I think it was in your district, Member – to view some pumps that looked to me like they were close to magic; they used so little energy. So whatever we can do around those efficiencies around irrigation. There's a whole suite of different things and new technologies as well.

Two years ago I had an opportunity to have a discussion with the Canadian Jewish council. The irrigations systems they have in Israel are the best because of the dry climate. Personally, I'd like to explore a little bit more what they're doing in other countries. I'm sure we could apply some of that technology here.

Thanks for the question.

Mr. Schneider: There's \$16,621,000 for the Alberta small brewery grant program. There are approximately 40 small breweries in Alberta, and that represents about \$400,000 per brewery. This program was announced late last June, and I just wonder why the government did not make sure there was enough funding available to cover off this program when it was announced.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Yes. Thank you, Member. That was announced in July last year. I believe the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said, "Beer is good." I think he's saying that a lot all over the province, and I would agree. Yeah, the funding will be available to candidates in this program. As you said, there are about 40 or so craft breweries right now. The program has been extremely successful, and we're looking forward to it being even more successful as well.

You know, it helps out, obviously, small business. It helps them innovate. It helps find that diversification that we all want. It's a good marketing strategy for our barley growers as well. We have some of the best malted barley in the world. I found out something really interesting just a few weeks ago. There's actually a barley grower north of Edmonton that's contracted to Heineken in Amsterdam. Their malted barley goes straight to Amsterdam. Of course, a lot of it goes to Japan as well because they do value our barley.

Thank you.

Mr. Schneider: Anheuser-Busch as well.

You announced this, I believe, as a \$20 million program, if I'm correct, in the summer, in July, apparently. There was a \$20 million program, and we have a budget here of \$16,621,000. I just wonder if there was 3 and a half million dollars paid somewhere else before today.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Yeah. In the supplementary estimates the \$16.621 million is extra money for the program. It has shown great success notwithstanding, you know, that some places around the country are a little bit jealous, maybe, of our breweries. But it has been a success. That's new money allocated for the new program.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you. There's \$35,723,000 for the department's grant to the AFSC insurance programs for the provincial share of insurance premiums. Now, do you not already have that money set aside? Is that normally money that would be set aside every year to pay the province's share of this program?

Mr. Carlier: That is the share of the premiums from the province. As I'm sure the member knows, the federal government's is 36 per cent, provincial 24 per cent, and the producers pick up the rest. That's just our statutory obligations to the AFSC for the portion. I suspect that has some flexibility year to year, but for this year that's the amount.

Mr. Schneider: So this is the total amount? I mean, \$35 million: is that what would be expected in the budget from '16-17, or is this more money? If so, why is there a shortfall, please?

Mr. Carlier: That is a good question. I think it's derived much like the emergency funding is as well. You see how the year has gone and what actually has to be paid out, you know, indemnities and

into the pockets of the farmers that have made the claims. It isn't decided until towards the end of the year. That's why it has to be a supplementary estimate. Because you don't know at the beginning of the year, you can't budget what it is exactly, so it has to come towards the end, when you finally get the numbers.

Mr. Schneider: Would some of this money be destined for the snowed-under crops north of Edmonton, north and east and west of Edmonton?

Mr. Carlier: That's exactly right, yeah, for that. There are, I think, five or six counties that actually declared a drought last year, too.

Mr. Schneider: There's \$25,503,000 for the department's grant to the AFSC agriculture income support program for the provincial share of AgriStability indemnities. I guess the question just is: was this shortfall due to the high level of claims on top of poor yields due to weather conditions last season?

Mr. Carlier: Absolutely. That question was on AgriStability, right? It's a little bit different there. AgriStability would go towards income support for lower than normal beef prices, for example. Another portion of that was \$6 million for the bovine tuberculosis wreck that we had in the southeast corner. That was included as well. Interesting to note there that originally the province had to allocate \$15 million for AgriStability, in particular for the bovine tuberculosis, but the federal government then reimbursed \$9 million, which goes then directly back to AFSC's bank.

Mr. Schneider: The \$252 million – some of this question was asked earlier – for wildfire disaster/emergency assistance to provide for wildfire management costs: is this shortfall a direct result of moving the start of the fire season back a month?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Member. You know, that's a good question. That has nothing to do with it because actually in the past five or six years or so, every year the previous government had bumped that back anyway, right? The changes we made last year to the farm and prairie protection amendment act made that permanent. That's not so much. We still have to have our base budget. That gets the equipment ready, the people ready – the hiring, the new recruiting, whatever that might be – gets the towers ready, the landing strips, all that kind of thing. This is just the money, then, that's needed to actually fight those wildfires that do pop up. That's the money we need to get the boots on the ground.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

5:30

Mr. Schneider: Will this ensure that we have the proper coverage of water tanker and other firefighting contracts in place for the season?

Mr. Carlier: You know, this is the supplementary estimates for what we need to cover our expenses now. I can't give anything away that's in the budget, but it's tempting. Yeah, this will be adequate to make sure that we have the equipment that we needed, you know, in the past year, to cover off all our expenses, whether the resource is our own or what we needed from our international partners.

Mr. Schneider: How much of this money is for contracting air tankers from out of province above and beyond our normal contracting?

Mr. Carlier: Good question, Member. I don't have the actual breakdown of what that might be from ours to theirs. I know that last year we had 1,338 wildfires, that burned 611,000 hectares. Now, if you recall, a big chunk of that would be the Fort McMurray fire. It's interesting to note there, as we know in the agriculture . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, hon. member.

We will now be moving to the third party. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Chair, do I have 10 minutes or 20 here?

The Deputy Chair: You have 10 combined if you'd like.

Mr. McIver: Okay. We'll go back and forth if that's okay with my esteemed colleagues across the aisle. Thank you, Chair.

First of all, to the Finance minister if I might. You're out by \$1.6 billion. I guess the first obvious question is: how could you miss by so much?

Mr. Ceci: Well, this was a significant and challenging year for Albertans and for their government. We made sure that we had Albertans' backs through this recession. We had expenditures that we hadn't anticipated, obviously, for emergencies that we addressed, whether those emergencies were in agriculture, whether those emergencies were as a result of the wildfire.

In addition to addressing those significant costs, we also addressed the challenges that Albertans had with not being employed during this recession or losing their work. Income support, persons with developmental disabilities, and assured income for the severely handicapped were all areas that had significant cost pressures that needed to be addressed.

Our student population grew larger than anticipated. We addressed that with full funding.

Lastly, there were health supports that needed to be addressed as well and things like drugs and physician compensation.

Mr. McIver: Okay. I'll ask that question again at another time and try to get a better answer.

In the meantime FTE changes. Can you tell us what difference there was in FTE changes at the end of the year that these supplementary supply estimates will be paying for? In other words, how many full-time equivalents are we adding as a result, please?

Mr. Ceci: Well, we can probably go back to Budget 2016 to see where the full-time equivalents are in that document, and with Budget 2017 we'll have an accounting again for the FTEs. I don't have that off the top of my head, though as I talked about, many of these expenditures are with regard to schools, health care, and income support. Many of these other monies, like for the income support, go directly to Albertans so that they can have a quality of life. I don't have the exact number, but it's coming in Budget 2017.

Mr. McIver: Okay. I'm not very lucky today, Chair. I'm zero for two in answers. But I'm optimistic, so I'm going to carry on.

Minister, do the supplementary supply estimates include any or all of the \$50 million a year in savings in education, or do those savings start later on? Is all or part of the \$50 million in savings reflected in these estimates? That is my question, kind of a yes or no thing.

Mr. Ceci: I believe yes.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Thank you. One for three. I'm good. I appreciate that. We're making progress here. Thank you, Minister.

Now, what were the areas specifically? Where exactly did we save that money in education, please? Since you've confirmed that some of those savings are in education, can you tell me, you know, whether – I'm just looking for exactly where the money was saved, please.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Yes. I apologize. That probably is something that he should direct to the other minister.

Mr. McIver: Okay. I'd like to ask that same question to the Education minister, please.

Mr. Ceci: Sorry. I know the full complement of – let me just take a look here. Today is Wednesday. I think there was an agreement, perhaps not with your party but with others, around who would be in seats at what time. That does not come up on Wednesday's agenda; it comes up on Thursday's.

Mr. McIver: Okay. We'll keep trying.

On page 18, on the climate leadership plan, it talks about the transfer of \$50,000 in capital grants to the Alberta energy efficient carbon-neutral greenhouse infrastructure modelling project. I'm tired just saying that. What did we buy for \$50,000 that qualifies as capital? And I only ask the question because of having been the minister of the major capital ministries. You don't get a lot in capital for \$50,000. So what did we need for \$50,000 in the climate leadership plan?

Mr. Ceci: I have a similar kind of answer. Perhaps your party wasn't part of the agreements around who should be in seats at what times. That person is identified, again, on Thursday and not Wednesday.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: This is most disappointing, Chair, I must say. I'm doing my best to direct my comments towards you. We keep trying.

Employment and income support, \$111 million; \$80 million for benefits for the unemployed. I can appreciate how we need more benefits for the unemployed when so many Albertans are unemployed under this NDP government. My question for the minister is: how much of the \$80 million is actually direct benefits to people, and how much of that is administration, please?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Member, for the question. My supplementary estimates amount is \$173.2 million, and in virtually all cases the funding will be used to address unavoidable caseload pressures in the following areas. One, that you identified, is income support to people expected to work. The caseload in this program area has grown from 15,622 in October of 2014 to 30,121 in October of 2016. That's an increase of 14,499 cases, or 92.8 per cent. This is a statutory program where somebody qualifies. The qualifications are given in the statute and regulations. The ministry has to provide that. So this \$80 million will go for the most part to providing additional benefits to those who need those benefits.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. McIver: I'd like to say to the minister that I appreciate the information he did give me. I do appreciate it a lot. It just wasn't

the information that I asked for, so I'll ask again. Of the \$80 million, how much actually went out to people in direct cheques or benefits, and how much was to pay for the administration end of it? If you don't mind, please.

The Deputy Chair: Minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. I can tell the member what is the split in the overall budget for the income support area per se. This \$80 million was needed to address the caseload pressures. I can say that this \$80 million, all of it, went to address the caseload pressures. Administration costs were there. There may have been some hiring for some positions, front-line positions, where it was absolutely unavoidable, to deal with the amount of caseload pressure. But for the most part, these are monies that were needed to get benefits to Albertans.

Secondly, these income support programs also provide training and retraining so that these people can get back into the job market. So it's going to that end as well.

5:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. McIver: Zero per cent administration. That's impressive.

An Hon. Member: That's not what he said.

Mr. McIver: That's not what he said. Okay.

Mr. Sabir: That's exactly not what I said. There are admin costs around this program. That's given in Budget 2016. That has been split, but this increase was needed to get Albertans the benefits they need.

Mr. McIver: Okay. So my question was . . .

Mr. Sabir: So the admin costs are already stated in the previous 2015-16 budget. They are given there in the line items, but these were to deal with the pressures that we were facing. Were we doing just hiring with that? No. For the most part, I am saying that this amount is going to get benefits to Albertans.

The Deputy Chair: Minister, thank you.

We are now moving on to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. No? Okay.

We will now move on to the government side. We will look to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Will you be going back and forth for a total of 10 minutes?

Loyola: Yes. Back and forth with the Minister of Seniors and Housing, please.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Loyola: Yeah. Thank you. Well, before I start, please let me take this opportunity to wish you a happy International Women's Day, Madam Chair. Since I'm asking questions to the Minister of Seniors and Housing, I'll wish her a happy International Women's Day as well.

Of course, I'm referring to page 70 in the document that we have before us. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing. I'm hoping that she can elaborate on the \$2 million that is expected for the seniors' home adaptation and repair loan program. What's the additional funding required for?

The Deputy Chair: Minister, please go ahead.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. Yes. We did ask for an additional \$2 million for that program because it has been enormously successful. Many Albertan seniors want to remain in their communities, and doing home renovations – sometimes we have mobility issues as we age, so sometimes renovating a home so there aren't carpets that can get in the way of a walker or putting bars around the bathtub, all sorts of things, really helps seniors be able to be comfortable and safe in their own home. This program, that we announced last summer, is a very successful program, and many seniors are asking for the funding of the program. So we have a larger uptake than we anticipated, which is a good thing; therefore, we do need an additional \$2 million. Of course, this is to fund the loan program. These funds will come back to us as a government, but it will help seniors now age in their communities, close to family and friends, which we know is where they want to be. It's an excellent program that's serving seniors in Alberta very well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. Once again, I know that the Minister of Seniors and Housing is pretty passionate about this program. In order to help us understand it a little better, I'm hoping that she can give us a particular success story that she's aware of and further elaborate on how this makes life better for seniors.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. Certainly, there are many success stories to be shared, but there is one in particular that I'm happy to share, and that's about a couple that live in Sherwood Park. Their names are Jill and David. Jill has multiple sclerosis. This is a degenerative disease, so she has progressive difficulty with going up stairs. They live in a split-level. This program helped them install a lift on their stairs so that she can access the basement and the second floor. They estimated that they can probably live there for 10 more years.

They have this magnificent home in Sherwood Park that they love, very close to their friends and family, a beautiful backyard that they've sort of lovingly nurtured over the years. This program is enabling them to be able to stay in that community, enjoying their surroundings. It's really giving them, you know, an enhanced quality of life. Unfortunately, Jill's disease, her multiple sclerosis, is degenerative, and over time it may get worse, and there may be a time when they're not able to stay in their home. But for now and for some time to come this program helps them. They said that they would have had to move, like, within the next six months, but because of this, it's given them about another 10 years to be able to stay in their own home because they could not afford those repairs without this home equity loan.

I'm very pleased to say that we are supporting seniors to stay in their own homes and their own communities and be able to do that safely and to really enjoy the pleasures of the home that they've lived in for many, many years. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you. While I've been door-knocking in my community – and I'm sure it's been the same for many MLAs here in the Assembly – I've heard from a number of seniors who have talked about the importance for them of aging in place and staying in their own homes. I understand how this program is a benefit for

that in a number of ways. I imagine that that's the reason for such a high demand on these programs. I'm hoping that you can elaborate, Minister, from your own experience, on why there's such a high demand on this program.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much. I mean, I think it shows that there is obviously a need in the community. People do want to stay in their own homes, and they want to make sure, you know, that they can be living safely when sometimes they have mobility concerns. We estimated – it was the first year of the program, so certainly the ministry did their best to estimate, and obviously we're a little bit short, \$2 million short. But it's all good. It's wonderful that so many seniors are seeing the program as an important and helpful way for them to be able to stay in their own homes.

You know, certainly, over time we'll have better data to be able to share about how come there's such a great uptake, but I think it has a lot to do with the need in the community and seniors being well informed about the program. We certainly work with networks of seniors' centres and different groups across the province so that they know about the program. We've done lots of promotion. Seniors see this as a very good opportunity for them to be able to do the renovations that they need in their home. It doesn't have to only be regarding sort of what I've described already. Sometimes you need a new roof, and you don't have the income to be able to do that.

The thing about this loan program is that it's simple interest. You don't have a monthly payment. You only pay when you sell your house or, you know, if the estate sells the house, so you don't have to have that burden of a monthly payment, and it's at prime. These are things that we offer: a much better deal than if you went to the bank.

I think all of these combined have demonstrated to seniors in this province that this program is, really, a helpful program that really supports them, so we're so pleased that there has been this great uptake of it. We're looking forward to supporting many more seniors to be able to age in their communities and their own homes in a safe way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you. It's wonderful to hear that the program is such an amazing success and that there are so many Alberta seniors out there that are taking advantage of the program. Minister, let me ask you: do you think that the increased demand is manageable?

5:50

Ms Sigurdson: Absolutely. We're very pleased that even more people than we anticipated have taken advantage of the seniors' home adaptation program. As I said, you know, seniors want to be in their communities, close to family and friends, and we're pleased to be able to support them to stay in their own homes.

Some of the things that they're doing are putting in energy efficient furnaces, maybe flooring, windows, things that will support them to have their homes well maintained and, you know, make sure that they're safe for them to stay in their communities. We absolutely have the capacity to support them, and we're pleased to give all these seniors the opportunity to do the maintenance that they really need to do on their homes and really enjoy being in the communities that they've lived in for many years.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.
The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Minister. You've given us quite a few examples of maintenance projects that seniors have been able to follow through with. I'm just wondering. Could you comment on: what are the most common repairs under the SHARP program? If you could elaborate on that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you so much. Certainly, you know, it's really up to the seniors what they identify as the needs they have to repair their home or renovate it in some way, but common ones are widening doorways or hallways to increase accessibility – someone might be in a wheelchair; therefore they need that wider access – and installing walk-in tubs. Oftentimes when you're sitting in a tub, it's difficult to get out. Walk-in tubs, of course, very much enable seniors to be able to have access without having the concern of not being able to get out, which, of course, is very important for their safety. Roof and window replacements: they may not have the funds to replace the windows that they want to have upgraded, and certainly roofs over time deteriorate. That's another common reason that they're asking for this funding.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We are now back to the Official Opposition for 10 minutes of back and forth if you would like. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate being able to talk with the Minister of Transportation about these supplementary supply estimates. I have some questions, found on page 78, first of all, Minister. If we could talk about that. In there it says that there's going to be \$210,000 for administering the climate leadership plan, the green infrastructure initiative. I just want clarity if I could. It looks like it's possibly operating dollars for three full-time equivalent employees: a manager, a couple of program service employees. Am I correct in this, Minister?

Mr. Mason: Yes, you are, hon. member.
Do I need to stand up?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, hon. minister, please.

Mr. Mason: I've been here longer than anyone else. I should be able to sit down and answer questions.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Mason: Yes.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Minister. Levity is appreciated.

Is the ADM of the safety, policy, and engineering division the oversight for this program administration?

Mr. Mason: Well, if you'll just give me a second to find my notes.

I think the \$210,000 in operating expense is to create a work area to lead and manage ministry climate change initiatives and to explore additional policies and programs. This area will develop, monitor, and evaluate policy and program options; work with stakeholders, municipalities, community leaders, and industry groups; and educate and inform the public about the new emission reduction initiatives. The funding is from the climate change and emissions management fund with the Ministry of Environment and Parks. There will be no impact on the deficit.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the 2016-2017 financial year, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I would like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, March 9, 2017

Day 5

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 9, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Let us reflect. As we conclude our work this week, let us keep in mind why we are here. Let us strive to help one another to reach our common goals and continue to work diligently on behalf of Albertans for the betterment of our province. Amen.

Please be seated.

Committee of Supply

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2016-17, No. 2 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we commence this morning's consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to remind you where the committee left off in the rotation. When the Committee of Supply reported progress yesterday, the Official Opposition had the floor, with eight minutes remaining in its 10-minute allotment with the minister. The committee had completed two hours and 24 minutes of consideration. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation under Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which means the rotation will then proceed as follows:

- (c) for the next [10] minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak.
- (d.1) for the next [10] minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak.
- (e) for the next [10] minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak.

The rotation will then repeat for any time remaining.

Speaking times are now limited to five minutes; however, provided that the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking time, with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period.

Finally, at the conclusion of six hours of consideration or earlier if no members are wishing to speak, the Committee of Supply shall vote on the supplementary supply estimates.

Are there any members from the Official Opposition wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My questions are regarding Health.

The Deputy Chair: Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Yao: I'm fine with back and forth if you guys are.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Yao: Excellent. To the hon. Minister of Finance or to the Minister of Health. The transfer of \$1.5 million from Environment and Parks is requested for green infrastructure as part of the climate leadership plan. The monies are being transferred from Environment and Parks for green infrastructure. Can you give specific examples for this \$1.5 million, please, and where exactly you're spending it?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. At this point, since it's such a small amount, we're focused on the easiest savings, which is through the replacement of inefficient light fixtures and electricity distribution of light in the facilities. It's primarily going to be used in acute care, all AHS facilities at this point, and it's going to be focused on the light bulbs, primarily, or the light fixtures.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Did you factor in any increased operational costs for our health care facilities due to the increased cost of energy? Where is the increase in the operating costs included? Or did you take the Wildrose suggestion and exempt health care facilities and other such?

Ms Hoffman: Health care facilities are very proud and happy to do their part in terms of being responsible energy consumers and curbing their electricity use where it's possible. That's one of the reasons why they're keen to take advantage of some of the opportunities that exist through low-hanging fruit like changing light bulbs to find ways to do some curbing of electricity.

We'll be considering the overall budget next week, and there may be opportunities for us to have some discussions following that about ways that there might be additional opportunities to curb electricity use or how we're going to adjust for the very small possible increase on the cost for usage in those facilities. We're happy to do our part as major health infrastructure throughout the province to curb our use to make sure that we're responsible on behalf of the taxpayer and using responsibly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The member, please.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much. Just to go back to that \$1.5 million, you said that that was for things like light bulbs, things like that. Is that not part of Ecofitt's mandate? Is this in addition, supplemental to those funds as well?

Ms Hoffman: I believe – and if I'm wrong, I'll be sure to follow up in writing – that rather than applying through Ecofitt, this is strictly a transfer of funds to focus specifically on those initiatives. They are the initiatives that I believe would be part of the green energy plan as a whole, but Health is fulfilling those themselves directly through the transfer of these funds rather than using other means that could be used to support residential Albertans so that the programs that are in place there can focus on supporting families. Alberta Health is doing their part to make sure that they do the transfer and try to move as effectively as possible in doing these initiatives that will help curb their usage.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: The sum of \$20 million for continuing care beds due to contractual obligations: can you explain the contractual obligations that result in that additional sum of \$19.454 million, please?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Happily, Madam Chair. The total ASLI projects were committed to over many years, and some of the funds were planned to be distributed next year. Good news: the projects are moving more quickly than they'd been planned, so this is money that was in next year's budget that we're moving into this year's current budget. It's money that was planned on being spent in the next fiscal year, but because we were able to move quickly with the construction, we're moving it up to this year.

Mr. Yao: You have \$54 million for primary care physician remuneration, \$210 million for specialist physician remuneration, so you're recording an increase to physician remuneration for primary care and specialists to the tune of \$264 million. Can you explain that? If that's contractual, shouldn't that have been budgeted for previously?

The Deputy Chair: The minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Absolutely a fair question. You probably recall that we did have a contract with the physicians of Alberta and we asked them to come back through the AMA to the table more than two years before their contract was set to expire. The targets that we put in the budget last year were very aggressive targets. We were in the midst of negotiating, and we were hopeful that we'd be able to see all of those potential savings. What we did see was up to \$500 million over two years. So we saw a significant portion of what we were hoping for and what we laid out in the budget documents. Obviously, through negotiation there's an ebb and a flow, and I'm very proud of the fact that we were able to work in partnership with the doctors to realize \$500 million in savings over two years, but it isn't as aggressive as we put in the budget documents, which were in the midst of negotiations.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: Thank you.

The last question. I'm astonished to see some savings here. I didn't think that was possible, so thank you so much for that. That said, it's only \$60,000. Can you explain where you found those savings? Like, was it infrastructure, was it equipment, fewer patients, like, a lower call volume? Can you explain those savings?

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe this is one of the questions that was asked yesterday that I have responses for today as well. So when we do have a chance to read in those responses, I won't read this one in for a second time. Thank you for the opportunity today.

Most of the savings initiatives that were undertaken are more long-term savings initiatives, so we're hopeful that we'll be able to see those savings in the out-years as well. For example, through the work that AHS has been doing in the 16 major hospitals around operational best practices, there are some areas in terms of delivery costs on the front line that have been able to change some of the staffing complement or find ways to realign patients and the way that they're being served. That's one of the major examples.

Another one is some of the significant savings that we saw through the RAPID eye program, which moves patients from a very high-cost drug that was used to treat macular degeneration to a far more affordable drug that we use to treat macular degeneration. That was in the midst of the fiscal year, so some of those savings were realized because of that.

These initiatives are going to continue for Albertans for years to come, and we've seen some very good results with those in the short term as well as changes that have been made to the schedule of medical benefits. Present projected adjustments to billing are expected to result in about \$100 million in savings over the next year without impacting quality or access to patients. That, of course, is a very good thing.

We're working on a new funding formula as well: blended capitation, as it's been referred to. It will enable patients who require more time with their physicians to spend a little bit of that, and the physicians will still be compensated in a way that won't punish them for spending more time with patients that sometimes have more complex care needs.

Some of these savings and initiatives are the ones that were realized this year, and we look forward to seeing opportunities to capitalize on those and others in the years to come.

9:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Yao: My apologies. I actually do have one last question.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Yao: We're spending a lot of money due to an increased number of claimants accessing brand name drugs. Can I just get clarity? I'm assuming that there are no generics available, that these are newer drugs that are fresh on the market, that are trying to accommodate our disease processes.

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely. Some of these are biologics or biosimilars that are looking at specifically treating hepatitis or other diseases that are quite complex. They are new treatments that are actually able to cure some of these illnesses. These are areas where there isn't a comparable generic right now.

Mr. Yao: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now move on to the third party. Are there any members wishing to speak? Hon. Member for Calgary-West, were you . . .

Mr. Ellis: No.

The Deputy Chair: You're good? All right.

We will move on, then, to the government side. There are no independent members here, so it will be the government side at this time. I recognize that the Minister of Health would like to read some information into the record. I'm just wondering if the government side would be willing to cede some time for her to be able to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead, Minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Some of this may actually elaborate further on the questions that were just asked from the critic from the Official Opposition.

With regard to \$250 million in savings that was realized this year, this was around savings that were surplus across the ministry, so this included things like \$64 million from physician compensation development programs, including physician benefits due to the amending agreement that we touched on; \$60 million in primary health care, which is due to the application of accumulated surpluses that were carried over from past years. I think that there is no more important time to access some of these savings than in

this current very difficult fiscal situation. I'm really proud of the fact that the primary care networks and my office and department were able to work on a plan that would enable us to use those savings. That was \$60 million that they had that wasn't going towards patient care.

We also had \$53 million in a variety of other drug and supplementary health benefit programs, including \$37 million from lower-than-anticipated outpatient specialized, high-cost drugs and lower-than-anticipated expenses for assured income for the severely handicapped benefits. That was a bit of a surprise, something that we can't necessarily bank on because it's always a demand-driven program, but demand didn't actually meet what the projections were on that line item this year.

The \$23 million in community programs and healthy living: most of this was reduced spending due to prior year surpluses that organizations had that they were able to capitalize on. Again acknowledging that we're in very difficult financial times, we're appreciating partners in the community stepping up when they do have surpluses that they can use to carry on their programs. They're doing that this year and last year. A \$4 million surplus, for example, in this area was realigned to resources to better meet the support of management and oversight in the health system within the ministry. That was offset by a corresponding \$4 million in the ministry support services. We're realigning some of those resources to meet demand where it's most significant.

We also had \$3 million due to vacant positions and reduced contract requirements within the department itself.

The \$3 million surplus in immunization support is due to the prior year's surplus. The prior year's immunizations weren't accessed to the same degree that was anticipated, so some of that surplus carried over. That meant we didn't spend it out of this year's allocation.

The \$5.6 million surplus in children's initiatives is due to some different areas, again, where they had surpluses in community that they used to carry over their funding and bridge it.

The \$5.4 million was unallocated grant areas this year. But we certainly have significant plans for that in the upcoming year: \$19 million for the information systems, cancer research and prevention investment as well as \$4 million for ministry support services, which is offset by that surplus that we had in the community programs and healthy living deficits and reflects the realignment of resources within the department to better support the management and oversight of those areas within the system.

These were some of the additional highlights that I wanted to mention that I know arose from questions yesterday. There was a second one, around agreement with the AMA, and I believe that we did discuss that in the member from Fort McMurray's question. I believe that that addresses any questions that were outstanding from yesterday.

I'd like to thank you, Madam Chair, and the House and my government colleagues for allowing me some time to read that into the record to ensure that those questions are adequately addressed while we engage in this exciting and lively debate this morning.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any government members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, we will now return to the Official Opposition. Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, would you like to go back and forth with the minister and combine your time?

Mr. Smith: Yeah. I'd like to go back and forth if I could, please.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Smith: Thank you for remembering where I come from, my roots.

I want to rise today to address the supplementary supply. I'll forgive the minister, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, if he thinks that he got rid of me earlier. Now I'm back, so this may be a nightmare – I don't know – but, no, this is real life, okay? Okay.

This transfer amount from Education: it appears to be about \$107 million. You're transferring it from capital investment into your operations and maintenance, and it appears that that is the only amount that you're really dealing with in the supply estimates here. So \$107 million is a lot of money. Where did you find the money from capital?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that, Madam Chair, and the hon. member for reminding me as well that this is, in fact, reality.

I'll just give you the whole kind of package, and then, you know, we can talk about it more specifically as you see fit. Based on these estimates, then, the department's 2016-17 spending targets have increased by \$106.7 million. This increase is actually a transfer – okay? – from capital investment to operating expense to provide funding for the operations and maintenance of school facilities. This transfer will not result in a net change to the overall government budget as there is also an offsetting \$106.7 million reduction in capital investment.

This action reflects better how school boards are using the funds provided through the infrastructure maintenance and renewal grant, otherwise known as IMR, to address minor repairs conducted to maintain their facilities. School boards will often charge these costs as operating expenses as opposed to capital investments, and this is an accounting procedure that follows their manual for accounting. These repairs do not extend the useful life of their buildings or assets. I should also just note that this transfer does not affect the total IMR envelope for 2016-17. That remains at \$138.8 million. It's basically a transfer from capital to upgrading, and it's a reflection of the accounting that takes place between our ministry, the department, and each of the school boards.

Let's not forget as well, Madam Chair, that basically we transfer more than 95 per cent of all of our monies that flow through Education to the school boards, so you'll see often quite a lot of differences. For example, their fiscal year is different from ours. Again, this IMR transfer that's just reflected here in the quarterly update is a reflection of some of those differences as well.

Thank you.

9:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess the question that I – I realize that it's going from capital to operations and maintenance, okay? But where did you find that money in the capital budget? I heard you say that it's going to go towards doing minor repairs, and that's a good thing. We do need to keep our schools maintained as we move forward. But did you consult? How did you come up with the figure of \$107 million? That \$107 million is coming out of capital. That money was targeted for something else, I would assume, so where did you find that money, \$107 million, a lot of money, to go from capital into operations and maintenance? Who was consulted?

The Deputy Chair: The minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you for that question. Again, each of the school boards is aware of this. They have different amounts on an annual basis, but the procedure or the circumstance is the same. In order to account for the money that is otherwise registered on the books of individual school boards as operating, this transfer is necessary. It's not a question of really finding money as such, but it's a way for us to account for and to balance those two columns between the school boards' ledgers and the way that they account for IMR funding and the government of Alberta's accounting. It is something, if you look back, that does take place in estimates usually at this time, and it's a way for us to sort of update the current situation as we move forward between IMR funding and capital expenses.

You know, just as an aside as well, certainly our capital expenditures and our way of flowing through capital monies to school boards and to projects has been going very well. We have built a just-in-time funding mechanism, by which we have school boards and projects submit their expenses instead of giving them just lump sums on a periodic basis, and I believe that's been part of the way we have increased the efficiency of both the speed of building our new projects and also the accounting of the money that pays for those projects. For example, I think about half of our projects from last October were behind, and we have reduced that considerably. The school boards would take that money on a periodic basis and just put it in the bank and get interest off it. Instead, we are keeping it in the government of Alberta's coffers and then doing the same in that way. I mean, it's a way by which we can rationalize the budgets between the operating and capital, and this is a reflection of that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay. I guess I still need a little bit more clarity. I'm glad that you did bring in the idea of previous school builds, and I want to touch on that as well as tying it to this conversation. I'm not sure that I understand exactly. I know that you put in gatekeeping. You just mentioned here that boards are coming back with their projected needs, and then you're meeting them at the time that they need that money and that funding. That seems like a reasonable way of doing things and probably a better way of doing things.

I guess the question I've got, then, is this. You talked about previous builds. You've got \$107 million that you're taking out of capital and now rearranging and placing back into operations and maintenance. I'm wondering: are there any schools that were slated for completion in 2015 that are not yet finished, and then how about 2016 and 2017? The reason I'm asking that is that I want to know how that relates to the \$107 million that you're transferring to operations and maintenance.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The minister.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Sure. That's great. In regard to your first question in regard to schools that were either as a new build or as a major renovation, for those ones that were delayed, I will be happy to get those numbers to you. I don't have them right here at my fingertips.

Then in regard to this transfer amount: again, this transfer amount provides funding for operations and maintenance of school facilities. We have it sitting on our books as capital, and they put it on their books as infrastructure and maintenance, so that's the only differential. You know, I have looked into the difference in the

accounting, and it is in keeping with standard accounting practice for individual school boards as per accounting manuals. I've also looked into the possibility of them making some alterations so that we have more alignment between the accounting principles that we use between the government of Alberta and individual school boards. That's an ongoing thing that I just thought would help to . . .
[A timer sounded]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Eggen: . . . you know, not have this particular pursuit here . . .

The Deputy Chair: Minister.

Mr. Eggen: . . . taking place on a quarterly basis. Was that the end of my . . .

The Deputy Chair: Your time is up.

Mr. Eggen: Oh. I'm sorry.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: I thought I'd heard a bell.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members from the third party wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are there any independent members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are there any members from the government? Would you like to go back and forth, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie?

Mr. Malkinson: Yes, I would, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Mr. Malkinson: My question is for the Minister of Health. I'm just wondering what measures the ministry is taking to reduce the cost of drugs for Albertans. I know this is an issue I hear at the doorstep in my riding rather often.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. It's something that we, I think, all hear about. There are studies that say that about 25 per cent of Canadians don't use their prescription drugs as prescribed because they're worried about the cost. This is something that, of course, has negative health impacts for them and potentially could impact long-term costs that they incur themselves and also that the system would should their conditions worsen and they come to the point where they might need to be patients within the system and then in an in-patient way. Certainly, it's, I believe, in everyone's best interest to make sure that we're taking significant efforts to move forward in making the cost of drugs more affordable for Albertans and Alberta families.

We are working with provinces and territories through the FPT work that we've been doing to negotiate reduced prices on those brand name drugs that we've referred to earlier. There are definitely some jurisdictions in the world that are getting better per-pill returns on their investment. One of the things that we've heard is that Canada's buying power just isn't as large as some of the other, more densely populated countries in the world. We are working to make sure that we, at a minimum, work as united jurisdictions throughout Canada. It still doesn't make Canada as large as the population in many other countries, but it does give us a far more significant buying power. So that is one of the areas.

As well, the majority of negotiations that we have been engaged in around product listing agreement rebates: we can't speak about those publicly because of confidential agreements within the pricing piece. What we pay for it is public. There are a number of different drug companies that actually do give rebates back to the province of Alberta. While we aren't able to talk about the amounts, know that that is an avenue that we pursue aggressively at every opportunity. Sometimes they are straight in-cash rebates. Sometimes they are benefits through research and development. These are some of the areas that – obviously, we have to respect the contract agreements – we do pursue whenever there is an opportunity.

9:30

Additionally, Alberta's price policy limits the three-year price increase that drugs manufacturers may request so that we have fixed prices for at least three years at a time. Again, through confidentiality agreements with manufacturers, if the brand drug is not subject to other price control mechanisms such as availability of generic alternatives or a product listing agreement, these price increases will be rebated back to Albertans through direct payments to the treasury. These are opportunities that we pursue wherever there is a possibility for us to access a few more dollars to go back into supporting Albertans and the programs that they rely on.

Make no mistake: drug costs are continuing to rise, though. Science is evolving – this is a good thing – and new drugs are coming on-label regularly, but the costs of them are very aggressive. I think it's important – period – that we work in a way that is professional and collaborative but also that we don't let ourselves be held hostage. It is challenging because we want to make sure that everyone has opportunities. Where science has proven that there could be benefits, we need to pursue those, absolutely.

The interest, of course, of the manufacturers: they have responsibilities to their shareholders as well as to the scientific community, and I respect that. We have responsibilities to the citizens who require those drugs as well as to taxpayers, and I hope they respect that as well. We're working to make sure that we make drugs as affordable as possible.

There has also been a working group created through the federal-provincial-territorial committee to make sure that we have opportunities to come up with ways that we might be able to expand on pharmacare within Canada. We know that we have drug plans for seniors. We have drug plans for very low-income Albertans. There are lots of other areas where for folks it's just such a barrier.

It's not within the Canada Health Act today, but we know that, for example, children in middle-income families who have extraordinary health costs can significantly benefit from having a provincial or, rather, a national pharmacare strategy. There is research happening within the federal-provincial-territorial groups being led by Ontario right now about what the costs would be as a whole and ways that we might be able to partner and call upon the federal government to support us in making sure that children who require drugs for a number of different conditions have access to those because, really, at the end of the day, money should never be a barrier to having good quality health care.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You know, it's interesting and timely. I talked with the Health minister. I remember I was visiting my grandma earlier this year, who was,

unfortunately, in the hospital for a little bit. After she came out of some surgery, she was in the hospital for a while, and during that time, actually, I saw the long-term care that was available at that particular hospital. From what I saw there and the good care that does happen in those facilities, it sort of reinforced my New Democratic principles. You know, we had a major platform commitment to build 2,000 new long-term care beds to help cut waiting times so that every Albertan, including my grandma, can get the help they need and also to reduce pressures on our hospitals.

I was wondering. To the Minister of Health: how does the \$19 million that's identified here in the supplements support that goal?

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. One of the things that I mentioned previously is that we've been very fortunate to have some of the construction move along more quickly than what was outlined within the budgets. Some of the projects that were planned on being at this point of development in the next fiscal year are actually ready now, and that's one of the reasons why we've asked that \$19 million be moved up to help us meet those contractual obligations through the Alberta supportive living initiative, also known as ASLI.

When we were elected, ASLI was well under way, and a number of projects had been preannounced, one might say, just before the election, and one of the things that the department – then it was under Seniors; now it's under Health – took upon themselves with, obviously, encouragement and support from us was to meet with the people who had been announced, find out which projects were viable into the long term and find out if there were any ways that we could address the needs in the communities better through these resource allocations for capital.

Through this, I have to say that 25 of the original 31 projects were able to move forward. That is very good news. For the ones that weren't, we just weren't willing to invest public resources if we weren't confident that they would be sustainable into the long term. We, of course, want to make sure that we're getting the very best return for every taxpayer dollar, every Albertan's dollar, as possible.

So we're moving forward with the 25 projects. There were over 2,200 long-term care and dementia care spaces just within those projects. We have been working diligently to make sure that the higher levels of care are available. Those who are, obviously, in hospital and it's not safe for them to be at home with home care or in lower levels of care should be our top priority. We are proud that we've been able to work in partnership with those service providers to make sure that they, wherever feasible, were able to deliver on those higher level of care beds that were needed.

So with that additional \$19 million: it's supporting those projects as they near completion and are beginning to come online. Of course, for anyone who's living in a hospital bed who would rather be in a home-like environment, it's important for those beds to come online as soon as possible. For anyone who's in the community in a way that they could be more safely cared for in an acute-care or dementia care space, it's very important. So I'm keen to be asking for this \$19 million to be spent this year rather than next year because, of course, it does help those folks live with dignity in an increased way, I would say. It also helps our hospitals use the spaces that are currently being used by folks who are ready to move into these spaces to reallocate those to patients who need to be in acute care and it's just not currently available.

I really do think that these 2,200 ASLI spaces coming online as quickly as possible is going to create better opportunities within our acute-care health care system as well as better living opportunities

for the folks that you mentioned, hon. member, just like your grandmother, who might need enhanced supports. There are so many folks in this province who really do require that, and of course I believe and we believe that it's the government's responsibility to meet that demand.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We will now return to the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. Will you be going back and forth?

Mr. Smith: I would appreciate that.

The Deputy Chair: Yeah. Please go ahead.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Minister, based on our conversation that we were having just a few minutes ago, I guess a question that came out of our conversation is: have you changed from last year to this year the accounting practices that you follow? I mean, I assumed that how you've handled IMR funding in the past is probably going to be similar to the way you've done the accounting for this past year. Why \$107 million for IMR funding this year if you've handled and done the same accounting practices as in the past?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks. I appreciate the question. Yes, I believe that it is the same procedure that did take place last year. The only difference is in the number amount, but in regard to the actual event and procedure I believe it's the same as it was before.

You know, again, as I said, I did investigate the difference between the accounting practices of individual school boards and the government of Alberta and did pursue that to see what we could do to align that, and that is still, I guess, being looked at. But for this time and this year this is what is happening. It's a transfer, so it doesn't affect the bottom line of how our budget goes forward. You know, like I say, the school boards will charge it as an operating even though it's capital. I mean, I guess there's some reason to suggest that there is an argument to say that it actually is capital because you're putting, let's say, shingles on a roof or changing windows and so forth. But, as I say, it doesn't affect the envelope that we provide for IMR funding for schools, so we're not shortchanging them in any way.

9:40

We definitely see the value of investing in maintenance. Especially with all these new schools that we're building, I want to make sure that there are proper protocols set into place that would have a proper regime for maintenance over the lifetime of a new building. We don't want to have all these new, wonderful schools built without, of course, putting the money aside and the procedures aside to ensure that they get the full life of that building by ensuring that there's proper maintenance being invested into each of those.

Yeah. Again, just to your question, I believe this is the procedure that we did follow from last year, and that is the way that we're doing this whole procedure.

I mean, there are lots of aging buildings and structures in our school boards around the province. You know, for example, in Calgary and Edmonton – I think Edmonton probably has at least 90 schools that are over 50 years of age, so we know that it's very important to invest in structures that are over 50 years of age. It's important to invest in people that are over 50 years of age as well, as you and I know both very well. I invest longer and longer every morning when I wake up to look as good as I do.

Anyway, to the point again, we, I think, in the future might look to streamlining some accounting ledgers between the individual school boards and the ministry, the government of Alberta, but this is certainly a thoroughly transparent mechanism that we do have here in place that does not affect either the IMR funding or the overall ledgers of either individual school boards or the Ministry of Education.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. minister, I want to make sure that nobody in Alberta figures that we're taking some of that \$107 million and investing it in this 50-year-old infrastructure here – okay? – maybe Health but probably not Education. Okay.

I hate to come back to this, but if you haven't changed your accounting principles and you had a budget that set aside a certain amount for IMR and a certain amount for capital, you are taking \$107 million out of the capital budget, your capital budget, and you're reassigning it into the IMR. I've got a question here. How can that not affect the capital plan? You've already told me that you haven't got all of your school builds completed. You've said that there are still schools, I understand, that are not finished and not completed, and now you're taking \$106 million out of the capital budget for badly needed schools in Alberta and giving it to IMR. Why? Is that not going to affect the capital plan that we have in the schools moving forward? Could we not use that \$107 million for where it was planned in the budget for those schools, or am I missing something here?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. You know, I certainly will check to get clarification on that. I do not believe that it has any effect on our capital commitments, but I certainly will check to get clarification on that.

Offhand, I know, of course, that capital projects proceed over an annual basis, right? Like, let's say that a typical example is a major modernization, which more typically end up overdue because you have kids in the school while you are doing the renovation. It's not as though capital monies are an annualized thing that disappears on an annual basis if you don't spend it, right? For example, if we have, you know, five projects that are overdue in this year, if they're not being ready and open in September, then that money and that continues on over the next number of months until we get the job done. Yeah, I mean, I was always concerned about that from the beginning, too, but of course our capital monies do stay with the projects from year to year or month to month even if they do move over the time that they did.

You know, in fact, what I've noticed with our just-in-time funding mechanism that we've put into place is that we might be retaining more of the capital monies that go to individual projects. We're only paying for something when a bill comes due – right? – so if they're putting in the next section of the building or the new modules or something like that, then that money moves over only when we need it there, not just being dropped into quarterly lump-sum payments to either Infrastructure or to individual school boards if they're building their own schools. That has created some difference on the capital side of things.

Certainly, hon. member, I appreciate your line of questioning. It's very legitimate. I will certainly pursue that and give you a written detailed answer as to the state of moving money to IMR and its effect on capital projects.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay. I'm getting a little more confused here as time goes on. If the money stays with the capital project for the entirety of that project and you're taking \$107 million out of capital, then only one of two things can happen. You have to be able to explain where you're getting that \$107 million worth of efficiencies from that capital project, or you have to be taking it out of next year's budget. Is that what you're doing? Where is that \$107 million coming from? What is it going to? Have you got projects for IMR? I'd like you to start first with that question. You've got monies that are staying with the capital project – that's what you just said – so then where is that \$107 million coming from, and how can it not be affecting the capital project as it moves forward?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. As I said, I will certainly pursue this in regard to the integrity of capital projects.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, your time is now up. Thank you.
Moving on now to the third party, are there any members wishing to speak at this time? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are you looking to go back and forth, or would you like to . . .

Mr. Gotfried: Yes, please. That would be preferred.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Gotfried: This question would be directed within the portfolio of Community and Social Services. Hopefully, we can get some answers from those in the House. After two iterations of this government's failed job-creation plans, it's left over a hundred thousand Albertans still unemployed, which is obviously of concern to all of us in this Legislature. I'd like to understand why Community and Social Services is only now asking for the \$111 million for still more employment and income support. That's on page 26.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will do my level best, and if there are further details, we'll be sure to table those in the House as soon as possible.

What I can say, given that we do cover the supplementary drug costs for those folks who are on those programs, is that during the year there's been an ebb and flow in terms of the number of applicants who are eligible for those types of coverage. It's, again, a program that's demand driven. If applications and approvals go up in one quarter, then we'll be needing to come forward for additional monies sometimes because the numbers ebb and flow throughout the year. It's not until that sort of fourth-quarter period that you know where you're going to come out for the whole year overall. That's why at this point there would be the request for a supplementary increase, because there isn't the certainty in Q1 that necessarily everyone who's on that program will still be on that program at Q4. I think there's some variability that results, based on the applications and the number of people who meet the criteria for those programs.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

9:50

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister. You know, I think we're in a period of time here where I'm hoping that Labour and Community and Social Services are working very close together. There are obviously lots of predictions to be done in terms of statistics, in terms of employment opportunities. We understand that there have been jobs created, some of those part-time, not full-time necessarily, which could still leave a lot of families under stress. I guess one of my questions is: with still over a hundred thousand unemployed Albertans and tens of thousands of underemployed Albertans, how are we going to be sure that they're getting what they need and value for money with this additional investment, that will help them through these difficult times and perhaps even help them to find alternate employment, not just income support?

The Deputy Chair: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you very much. Again, if there are further details that I am not aware of, we'll be happy to table those.

With regard to these programs many of them work in partnership with community agencies. I know, for example, in working with the Métis Nation of Alberta, they've been doing a lot of work around making sure that they have the right employment counselling in a variety of communities based on where the needs are. As well, there are a number of people helping navigate folks back into postsecondary. This is a perfect time for those opportunities to be embraced and harnessed. For example, I know that earlier this week the Minister of Advanced Education announced that another thousand tradespeople would be having opportunities to go back and further their education in this fiscal year. So part of it is about employment counselling, part of it is about harnessing opportunities for further training at this time, and part of it is that there are families who just straight up need these supports, monetary supports, and making sure that we have the options available to do all of those.

I would be happy to direct any supplementary responses on this line of questioning, if there are any, to my colleague the Minister of Finance.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Mr. Gotfried: I guess just one further question, which is sort of along the same line. Obviously, we're providing some funding for people to retrain and to find alternate employment opportunities. We're hearing a lot about new jobs, new economy jobs, green economy, and economic diversification. What specifically is the ministry doing to direct funds to those specific areas of training that will help employees to find jobs in the new economy and to fulfill the needs that we'll see, skills like maybe changing light bulbs and things like that?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. As Minister of Advanced Education I oversee the portfolio that plays a significant role in training and retraining Albertans for the jobs of tomorrow. Of course, as the Minister of Health rightly noted, we announced an expansion of the program to retrain unemployed apprentices or to allow unemployed apprentices to continue with their technical training. We had initially announced \$1.5 million available this year in that program. That program was very successful, and we expanded that by an additional million dollars, so we've got, you know, another

thousand apprentices who currently are unemployed but can continue with their technical training so that they can go on and pursue jobs in renewable energy, green energy, those kinds of fields, if that's related to their technical training.

You know, we've provided stable and predictable funding for every postsecondary education institute in the province, and that's played a key role in making sure that Albertans have the opportunities that they need to change their skills or upgrade their skills so that they can pursue new work opportunities. We see that enrolment is up at virtually every university and college in the province. Of course, now is the best time to be investing in students, and freezing tuition has made pursuing an education at that level much more affordable than it would have been under the previous government's plans to jack up tuition and increase market modifiers – right? – that would have raised the cost of tuition and put it out of reach for many Albertans. We're quite proud of the fact that we're supporting people who need these opportunities to retrain, to gain new skills, to seek new opportunities in new work areas. We're giving them those opportunities.

If the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has some further questions on the support that we're giving to Albertans who are pursuing advanced education so that they can seek new work opportunities, I'd be happy to continue this dialogue.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the minister for that response. This actually is a good segue into my next questions. The government is asking for \$121 million more to support student loans, page 14. You've noted that it's a good time for people to go back to school, but sadly, I mean, a lot of people are being forced to consider that option because there's no employment for them with their bachelor's degree. I know many students that are going back to further their education by taking master's degrees because there are no employment opportunities. Some of those are lucky enough to have either financial assistance from their families or to have reasonable part-time employment to support that. But the student loans, obviously, are going to be a big issue for people to continue on that path during the downturn in the economy.

With respect to the \$121 million I'd like to know how many students applied for but did not receive loans in the current cycle? Is that the reason for the request for the additional funds, or is this to bolster that going forward?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. What I can tell the member is that we've had a significant increase in the number of people who have received student loans. In the 2015-2016 budget year we had 68,613 student loan recipients, and the forecast for the upcoming year is 80,955 student loan recipients, so that's a significant uptick in the number of people who have applied for and received student loans. You know, of course, it's important right now to make sure that we have the finances available for students to pursue higher education, and that's why we're considering this request for an additional \$121 million to support those student loans.

We want to make sure that student loans are available to people who want to go to school, and we know that student loans are the lowest cost option that's available for borrowing money to finance their education. I'm quite proud of the system that Alberta has in terms of supporting students. Our system provides interest-free loans for the time that they're studying, and then when they get out of school, they only pay interest rates at prime, which is much more favourable than the Canadian student loan program, of course, which has prime plus a certain percentage. You know, Alberta does

quite a bit to make sure that student loans are affordable for the students of Alberta so that they can afford to finance a higher education.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister, for the answers.

Certainly, we're all concerned about the education of our youth and future employment opportunities. To get to the \$121 million, I guess, I'm sure that there were lots of metrics put in place to ensure that that was not only adequate but that there was some projection of where those funds would be allocated.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Moving on now to the independents, are there any members who are wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Would you like to go back and forth, sir?

Dr. Swann: Back and forth with the Health minister to begin. Thanks very much.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Dr. Swann: I'm obviously very interested in the minister's earlier comments and would appreciate at some point any reference in the supplementary estimates to the opioid crisis and whether any of the new funding was required for some of the extra demands that clearly have been on the system and how that is being disbursed.

I'm also a bit curious about the amended agreement with the AMA and how that's resulted in increased costs. I had thought that it was resulting in savings, especially in relation to primary care. Maybe we could have some clarification around that. I guess it relates to the specialist remuneration as well.

In relation to the increased seniors' drug benefit and nongroup drug benefits and brand name drugs how is that relating to our generic policy? Is it the fact that physicians aren't prioritizing generics or pharmacists are not providing generics? Why are we spending more on brand name drugs when we have made such an effort and spent heavily on promoting the generics?

The \$15 million for the pharmaceutical innovation and management program, I guess, raises the question now that pharmacists can do a whole bunch of things that they couldn't do before. They can now diagnose. They can now prescribe as well as dispense. I met with the pharmaceutical college and the association to talk about how they're supervising this second set of professionals who are fee-for-service billing. We have already identified that physician billing as a fee-for-service system is not optimal. It is rewarding volume. It's not rewarding quality of care, continuity of care. We now have another group of professionals who are able to bill up to \$125 for a drug review per year for people.

10:00

So as we do on physician billing, we have to have a way of overseeing and ensuring that those who are outliers, who are perhaps billing more than usual or not adding substantial value – we have to have a way of monitoring that use and ensuring that it's within guidelines and appropriate.

Finally, the \$19 million for continuing care beds due to contractual obligations: I assume that's salary, incremental salary stuff, operational costs. Perhaps you could comment on those.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I think what I would like to do, if it's okay, with the consent of the member or yourself, Madam Chair, is that I'd like to answer – I think there were five questions. I think for four of them definitely I'm best suited to do that, and the fifth one, around addictions and mental health: I think, if it would be appropriate, the associate minister will respond to that one. I'll let you consider that while I respond to the first four and then guide us on how to address that last, remaining question.

I'll do it in reverse order, starting with the continuing care piece. That was \$19 million for ASLI contracts, actually, so it's related to the construction of those buildings and being able to bring them online sooner than what was budgeted. That \$19 million would have been in next year's or out-years' budgets, but we were able to move forward on those projects more quickly. That's a quick response to that one.

With regard to pharmacy and the oversight in those areas, point taken. We are soon embarking on renegotiation with the pharmacy industry as well in terms of the pharmacists, and I think that the points you raise are well heeded. If you have additional feedback or other members do, I'd certainly be happy to take that into consideration as we prepare for conversations that we'll be having with pharmacists to ensure that we have a respectful, collaborative dialogue but also an efficient return for patients and for those who fund the treasury, those being Albertans. In terms of some of the oversight I think that those points are important, that we noted, and the \$125 for the review of sort of the scope of prescriptions and whatnot is an important piece.

Some of the other areas. The increased costs that we saw, which were \$50 million, as was noted, for the higher level of service around pharmaceutical innovation and management: I just want to highlight a few of the other pieces that are included under that scope. There are many, but a few, for example, are compensation for injections that are provided in pharmacy, modifying prescriptions based on patient need and feedback that's been given at the counter, prescription renewal and emergency prescription needs, which I think is a very important tool. I know many Albertans who access that service as well as tobacco cessation services and counselling around tobacco addiction; that is a useful service as well. Then, as was mentioned, the medication management, including management for things like diabetes, and publicly funded vaccines that are currently compensated for, including influenza. Those are a few of the points on that \$50 million. Again, it's a demand-driven line item, and I think it's important that we have some oversight in choosing wisely and using the best practices within all professions within the health system. I appreciate the points that were raised, and those will certainly be topics of discussion, I imagine, as negotiations continue.

With regard to the AMA the member is correct that we were able to achieve savings of about \$500 million over two years, \$100 million in the fiscal year that we're just reviewing and \$400 million in the next. The targets that were put in this budget were very aggressive targets, and they were done while we were in the midst of negotiating.

We were able to achieve significant savings in terms of that projected line of growth. Traditionally the physician compensation line item increased at about 7 to 9 per cent per year, and we've gotten that down to I believe it's about 3 per cent for projections for out-years – 3 to 5 per cent, I believe, is the range; if I'm wrong, I'll make sure that I follow up before the end of this time – which is significant progress. But we are still looking at having some growth

in terms of physician compensation, making sure that it's in the right places and that those physicians are being rewarded through blended capitation and ARPs to make sure that those who can and should be spending more time with patients are supported and appropriately compensated for such.

And then the last piece I wanted to touch on was the generics piece. Absolutely, when there is a generic available, the ministry is moving aggressively on getting people onside with prescribing that generic. There are still a number of drugs – and there continues to be evolution of drugs – where there aren't generics available: biologics or biosimilars, for example. There is work to make sure that biosimilars are tried first, but when there isn't a comparable biologic, because it is a living organism, available on the generic side, there are times where it's important to make sure that the patients get the drug that is continuing to work for them. Efforts are ongoing and will continue, but there will still be some patients who require brand-name pharmaceuticals, and we want to make sure that we're not compromising their health in the process of trying to get the most cost-effective measure.

Madam Chair, how did you want to handle the remaining question around opioids?

The Deputy Chair: If the associate minister would like to respond, please go ahead.

Ms Payne: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. To address the member's question, the funding with respect to addressing the opioid crisis has been previously allocated in the '16-17 budgets by both Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services. Of the funding that had been allocated, we had \$4.5 million in capital funding for treatment beds, \$3 million for Suboxone and methadone treatment, \$900,000 to expand the take-home naloxone kit program as well as \$300,000 to support data sharing and other work specifically targeted around making sure that we had the data available. We also had the \$230,000 in grant funding to AMSISE, the Edmonton group working on supervised consumption services, as well as \$500,000 for groups in other urban populations in Alberta to study potential need.

We were able to find those dollars via reallocating some of the proposed spending, and that is really just the beginning of some of the funding that we're working on. There will be more that we'll have to say about that in the coming weeks, with the upcoming budget.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Associate Minister.
The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The minister has, I think, philosophically embraced prevention and health promotion in a lot of respects, but this year we saw cuts to injury prevention. We saw no increase that I was able to detect in the prevention programs beyond injury, some of the lifestyle issues, the health promotion programs. Indeed, maybe she wouldn't be able to comment on it just yet but next time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members from the government side that would like to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Malkinson: Yes, I would.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Madam Chair. My questions are just going to continue where I left off with the Minister of Health. You know, as I was commenting before, as you know, my grandma was in the hospital, and one of the things that struck me was the great work that our doctors were doing in our health care system. I have a two-part question for the minister that relates to the recent AMA agreement with those doctors. The first part of my question is: how will the amended agreement slow the growth of spending in upcoming budget cycles? And the other part of that is: what has been the cost reduction this year in regard to the amended AMA agreement? If the minister could answer, that'd be great.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you for the question, again, to the member. A few points. We have already seen \$64 million in physician compensation and development programs, including the physician benefits, from the amended agreement within this year's fiscal as well as some other savings that do tally about \$100 million this year because of the fact that we were able to reach a new agreement mid-term. In next year's agreement it's projected that the savings will be about \$400 million.

10:10

Some of the main ways that this was able to be achieved were, first of all, by sitting down collaboratively. You don't have to look very far even within Canada to see what happens when jurisdictions have some conflict with their physicians. I'd say that at the end of the day, conflict happens but respect and a desire to have a partnership are far better for patient outcomes. I'm very proud of the fact that we've been able to do that.

There is work happening around the schedule of medical benefits, which again relates to some of the compensation that happens for individual components within the fee-for-service bundle. We're continuing to work with physicians around the Choosing Wisely campaign and making sure that they're aligning their resources appropriately.

One of the other pieces is that we're hoping to glean some intelligence from them as well as communities throughout the province. There is a component within this that looks at us having the ability to make sure that we do meet supply with demand. I'm sure there are members, particularly in rural communities, who have heard frustration from their constituents around a variety of health practitioners, including physicians, not being easily accessible within their communities. Of course, you've heard me many, many times, and you can probably say it with me: we want to make sure that Albertans get the right care in the right place at the right time. That includes working with practitioners, including physicians themselves, to help us develop that right approach, to make sure that we are attracting and retaining in the right places the professions and professionals who are most needed.

This isn't just about rural and remote, I want to assure everyone, including residents in the province of Alberta. There are areas of specialty within even Edmonton and Calgary where we're still really struggling. This is about making sure that we have a long-term plan, one that puts us in the right set to make sure that we can continue to have a strong and robust public health care system with the right professionals throughout the province.

Again I want to say how proud I am of the work that we've had with the AMA. I think that their past president as well as their current president are to be commended for the work that we're doing in partnership there. The past president, Carl Nohr, regularly talked about physicians as stewards and partnership in the health care system, and he couldn't be more right, Madam Chair. Many of

our costs, where we've seen overruns in the past – we want to make sure that physicians are working in partnership with us to be the best stewards of the system that they themselves have a direct influence on.

Those are a few of the highlights.

There is much work that has been accomplished. I think that \$500 million in two years will not only keep the same level of service, but arguably it's going to improve services because of things like the fact that we have the blended capitation model, that's going to enable physicians to spend more time with patients who need it.

I've heard many patients say that the amount of time they spend sitting in the waiting room often exceeds the amount of time they spend sitting with their health practitioners in clinic, and that is not the kind of health care system we want. I know I've lived that experience many times myself. I don't in the current primary care network that I'm a member of, and I think it's doing a fantastic job. But we want to make sure those best practices are the reality for Albertans throughout the province, so working in partnership with the physicians on both the monetary savings and also patient quality and access goes hand in hand.

I'm really quite proud to be able to share some of those highlights with this House and look forward to continuing to update members of this House and the public about the great strides we've made in this area.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Malkinson: I'm going to cede the remainder of my time to the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein if that'd be okay with you.

The Deputy Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Will you be going back and forth as well?

Mr. Coolahan: Yes, with the Minister of Children's Services. And if I haven't had the chance, congratulations on your appointment to this very important ministry.

Twenty million dollars being requested in supplementary funding for the Ministry of Children's Services: myself and Albertans are looking to know how that will make life better for children in Alberta.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, when we talk about investing money in Children's Services, we are not just, you know, talking about money theoretically; we're talking about truly an investment in the future of our province. You know, we often say that children are our future. It's expected that we make those investments to ensure that every child, no matter where they grow up or what their circumstances are, has the support they need to succeed and thrive.

At this time we're seeing significant growth in the number of children and youth in this province, which directly impacts many of the services and supports that we as the government of Alberta provide to Alberta's children and families. The reality is, of course, also that during tough economic times, the demand for some of our programs also increases. So these supplementary funds keep stable funding in place so we can continue to meet the needs of Alberta's children and families and continue to invest in the future of our province. We work closely with our partners to make sure that all children grow up in a safe environment.

In all cases the funding will be used to address caseload pressures. Obviously, again, caseloads are not just numbers on a

balance sheet but real people, real children in real families that we need to support to ensure that they have the best possible outcomes. In terms of where the caseload pressures are located, there's \$17 million for child intervention services, \$3 million for supports for permanency, and \$8 million for foster care supports.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Minister. You mentioned the \$17 million being directed to the child intervention services. I think I'd like to hear more about how that is going to improve services that keep children in a safe and caring environment.

The Deputy Chair: Minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, if we want to be a society that protects our children and ensures that they have every opportunity to succeed, we need to be there to invest in the supports that truly make a difference in their lives. Again, we need to be there for our children for their future and invest in the opportunities to allow their future to be bright. So we have invested \$4 million in family enhancement services to provide the kind of early wraparound services to families to ensure that children stay with their families when it is safe to do so and that they do not, ideally, have to enter into care if we can provide the kind of support to their family that allows them to have that safe future in the best place for them to be, which is with their family.

We've invested \$4.5 million in supports and financial assistance agreements to provide direct supports to clients to ensure that successful transition to adulthood.

Certainly, Madam Chair, you know, it's apparent and we all understand that when you turn 18, you don't just magically figure out how to become completely independent, with no support. So it's really essential that we provide the kind of supports to these youth for whom we as the government are acting in the role of parent, to provide that support and to help them with that transition to adulthood.

Of course, we've also invested \$8.5 million in child protection to provide adequate support to complex cases that remain in care, ensuring clients' critical needs are being met. You know, Madam Chair, all of that work is being delivered by the amazing staff, who are committed professionals and dedicated advocates that help Albertan families make small changes that make a big difference in their lives. Certainly, many of those workers are social workers, whom we honour this week.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

We are now on to the Official Opposition. Is there anyone wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Loewen: Pardon me?

The Deputy Chair: Would you like to share your time and go back and forth?

Mr. Loewen: Yes, please.

The Deputy Chair: Yeah. Please go ahead.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. The third-quarter update projects the carbon tax to raise \$230 million. How does that break down in terms

of the amount raised from specified gas emitters versus the amount raised from the carbon tax applied to gas, natural gas, things like that?

Mr. Ceci: You're asking about the breakdown of gas and natural gas for the SGER prior to December 31?

Mr. Loewen: Yes, for the third-quarter update.

Mr. Ceci: Okay. Yeah. I don't have the fuel source revenue breakdown here, but that's something I may be able to source for you.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you.

Now, the department is requesting approximately \$74 million in additional funding for the climate leadership plan. Is that \$74 million from the carbon tax?

10:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. The \$74 million is actually transferred out of the climate change and emissions management fund, which is the fund that was established under the previous government's specified gas emitters regulation and had developed within it.

I apologize, hon. member, that I don't have the revenue piece in front of me. I have the voted expense piece in front of me. So we'll get back to you on the breakdown between the SGER revenues and the other revenues.

But that's where those transfers are coming from, the CCEMF, as we call it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.
The member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. Now, can you please provide the specific subline item under section 10, Climate Leadership Plan, that each transfer listed on page 42 of the supplementary estimates is originating from?

Ms Phillips: Sure. Thank you, hon. member. The transfers are from the climate change and emissions management fund.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: So which subline item under section 10 does that fall under? I see adjustments for communities, green infrastructure, regulatory and operations, renewables/bioenergy, and other investments.

Ms Phillips: Yes. That's correct, hon. member. So those transfers to fund those line items come from the climate change and emissions management fund.

Mr. Loewen: Now, in the document I see here, I don't see that line item that you're referring to.

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair and hon. member. The transfers are from the climate change and emissions management fund, which was part of the budget plan for 2016. So those transfers were already expressed, that they would come from the climate change and emissions management fund. Hon. member, if you'd like, we can ensure that we follow up with you in writing about how those

mechanics work and the relevant section from Budget 2016 that underlies that.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. That would be great because, yeah, I don't quite follow there where those transfers don't come out of a line item that exists in the document here, these supplementary estimates. So it would be great if you could follow up on that.

Now, how is the money awarded from whatever fund I guess they're coming from? How do these monies – do the departments apply for specific grants to get these transfers, or what's the process that these transfers come from the Environment and Parks estimates?

Ms Phillips: Just for clarification, hon. member, you're asking about the green infrastructure line item and how those decisions were made? Which line are you referring to in terms of that?

Mr. Loewen: Sorry. What I'm referring to is on page 42, the list of transfers that come from Environment and Parks. What's the process that these departments apply to get these funds?

Ms Phillips: Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you, hon. member. In terms of transfers to other departments some of them are for things like the on-farm solar PV and efficiency programs. Of course, we dedicated \$10 million to those programs, and they have been fully subscribed. So some of those come from those kinds of programs.

Others. As the hon. Minister of Health indicated, there was \$1.5 million of low-hanging fruit, if you will, opportunities for some electricity-related retrofitting within health facilities that would save on operating costs going forward, that could be accomplished relatively quickly. Those transfers then support those activities.

In the main any of those transfers or green infrastructure projects have had to ensure that they are reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the lowest cost per tonne possible. So those are the projects that are being funded out of that.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. So, for instance, the \$1.5 million to Health: would Health have made an application to Environment and Parks to have those funds? How would that process have worked? You know, just using that as a for instance.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Member. We had received some applications from various departments for lowest cost per tonne initiatives that we could undertake in the early days of carbon pricing to ensure that we were meeting some of the lowest cost per tonne needs but not doing so in a way that would require large amounts of capital infrastructure spending. For example, in Health that was the initiative that was supported.

Other examples are a solar project in a park that we are upgrading anyway in Environment and Parks. There are a number of facilities that are being upgraded at Miquelon Lakes, and it was a low-cost initiative to add additional efficiency and a renewable capability to those pieces. That was also a very low-cost initiative that we could accomplish relatively quickly and also ensure increased employment for some of those projects.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Those are the considerations that underlie some of these smaller initiatives as we move forward and have a much more comprehensive approach to green infrastructure in the coming years both as we reinvest our carbon levy and the revenues from the

carbon competitiveness regulation into the economy but also as we ensure that we are partnering appropriately with federal infrastructure investments and not just the low-carbon fund but also the transit initiatives and other infrastructure investments that are flowing from the federal government.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. Just so I'm clear – and we can keep this answer really short – is there an application process that Health went through to apply for this funding to come into Health? Was there an application process? Was the decision made by Environment and Parks to approach Health? If you could just clarify that shortly, please.

Ms Phillips: Yes. Thank you, hon. member. The process is that Transportation, Infrastructure, other support, Health, and so on, have a committee in which they determine appropriate investments with metrics of low costs per tonne and ease of delivery of those particular investments. As we go forward, there will be a larger capital planning process, that exists already for our capital planning in the \$34 billion, for example, and a similar process for the green infrastructure investments.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The time for the Official Opposition is up for this rotation.

Is there anybody from the third party wishing to ask any question? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Yes. Great. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Would you like to go back and forth again?

Mr. Gottfried: Back and forth if I could. I'll continue on my line of questioning with the Minister of Advanced Education if that's fine. Minister, we talked prior about the increase of \$121 million to support student loans. Again, we talked about whether there are some metrics. Obviously, with \$121 million I'm sure that there's been lots of work behind the scenes to determine the requirement for those funds. I'd like to find out from you what the projection is in terms of how many years of education this is going to support for how many Albertans. And how many of those students will be in province versus out of province in terms of where they're going to be studying?

10:30

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his questions about student loans. You know, he asked a question about how many years of education this will support. Of course, the loans are disbursed on a yearly basis, so every loan is given for an academic year. We don't give loans out on a per-program basis, so it's impossible for me to say how many years of education this will go towards. I guess the thing that I would suggest is that a journey of a thousand miles starts with one step, so you can't complete a program until you do your first year. We know that a student loan that's disbursed this year will enable a student to attend a program of his or her choosing.

In terms of the number of students who travel outside of the province from Alberta to study, I don't have those exact figures with me today. I do know that the majority of students at our universities and colleges here in Alberta do come from Alberta. You know, most Alberta students stay close to home to pursue higher education here in the province, but regardless of whether or not a student pursues higher education here in the province of Alberta or pursues an education outside of the province, we are

investing in our people to make their lives better, of course, by pursuing higher education. We know that in terms of improving the quality of life, there's no better investment that can be made than into higher education. We know that people who have higher levels of education have improved health outcomes. They have improved employment outcomes.

So it's incumbent upon us as the government of Alberta to invest in our people so that they can better themselves, lead good lives, you know, and hopefully the quality of life, the opportunities that present themselves to people here in Alberta will attract the students who do pursue education outside of the province of Alberta to come back and contribute again to life in this wonderful province.

I know that I myself am a graduate of a university outside of the province of Alberta. There is no better place to live than this province, and that's why I chose to come back after I completed my education. At the time, though, that I pursued higher education, the government of the day decided not to invest in me. They did not allow me to have access to Alberta student loans, so I had to fund my education outside of the province of Alberta from the paltry amounts that the federal government extended to me, and then I had to live on the generosity of my parents, and I know that it was a tremendous hardship for them to support me while I was going through school. I am forever grateful that they were able to provide that support to me. The education that I was able to achieve with their support I'm sure will stand me in good stead one day. I have hopes that my university degree will pay off in some way.

I'm glad that the government has changed its attitude towards supporting students going to pursue education outside of the province of Alberta, Madam Chair, because we know that it's a significant investment in the lives of the people of Alberta. It improves their families, it improves their prospects of leading a good life, so we're proud of being able to continue that commitment to the sons and daughters of our province.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister.

Yeah. You know what? I'm actually sort of in the midst of that myself. I have two children in postsecondary and one graduating from grade 12, so I'm in the middle of juggling between RESPs and student loans and those things to help to finance my children's education, which, as you noted, is important.

I know that there were student loans available for out-of-province students as early as three or four years ago, when my son studied at Dalhousie in Halifax, so it's not something entirely new. Just a point of clarification on that.

I am interested in some of the work that you're doing behind the scenes with respect to not only funding those educations but also to helping postsecondary students make appropriate and strong choices in terms of employment opportunities. I talked earlier about the fact that we've got students graduating with strong bachelor's degrees in geology and engineering and law not being able to find employment in this province. That deeply concerns me. But I think we also have a duty to students to provide them with robust information about employment opportunities post postsecondary education. I know that in my time with Calgary Economic Development we did a lot of statistical work on employment opportunities and where the pockets of potential employees were, where the jobs were available not just in Alberta but across North America, to find opportunities for people that were graduating or to direct students.

I'd like to understand from you, for the Albertans that we're directing into these programs, whether we've done some background research and provided some insights and information about their ability to find employment through the completion of

their training programs, whether those are technical institutes or colleges, whether that's postsecondary. Of course, the lag time in a four-year degree can mean that things change substantially through that period, but I think we have a duty to try and inform students who are taking on significant debt, who will not only have student debt but, unfortunately, are going to also have public debt that's going to be layered on that, about \$14,000 per student by 2019. They're going to have that on top of their student debt.

My question to you is: have you done that research on the background of this funding, \$121 million, which we hope will be not only well spent by the taxpayer but well spent by the students as they move forward, recognizing that they have choices to make with respect to their choices in how they educate themselves and create a path for themselves in the future?

The Deputy Chair: The minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his question. He's quite right to highlight the importance of understanding the labour market in Alberta. You know, directly to answer his question – that is an unusual thing in this Chamber, I know, so going into a risky venture – the Department of Advanced Education doesn't collect any labour force statistics, of course. It's the Ministry of Labour that collects that information and projects into the out-years what the labour demand in particular occupations is going to be. Individual postsecondary institutions also do that work, and certainly the individual institutions collaborate to varying degrees with industry partners to determine whether the training programs that they're offering are appropriate for the employment situations that their graduates will find themselves in and also whether or not there will be demand for graduates from those programs. It varies from institution to institution. Colleges and technical institutes, of course, rely much more heavily on industry partnerships and labour market demand than universities do.

I'd remind the hon. member, certainly, about an investment in a degree in geology, a degree in mechanical engineering: while perhaps if you were a graduate last year, you'd be struggling for a couple of months to find immediate employment in your area of technical training and expertise, over the long term we see that investment in education of any kind results in improved employment outcomes, improved earnings – right? – and improved health outcomes. So, you know, regardless of whether or not they can get a job immediately upon graduation in a tough economy – we know that that's harder to do than it has been in years previous – over the long term the prospects for people with degrees or diplomas or certificates of any kind are much better.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We are now on to the other parties. Is there anyone wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll have some questions for environment and First Nations. Let me begin by congratulating the environment minister on her leadership on climate change. I've said before – and I think it needs to be said – that this is the first meaningful and bold initiative we've seen since I was elected, and we're starting to see some of the benefits in terms of people recognizing their own impact on the environment.

10:40

I am curious, though, to see why there is no supplementary estimate for the new park. Is that because nothing has been done this past year and it's going to be in a future budget, or is it under other categories?

I'm not clear either on the \$5.4 million for surface rights compensation grants. Oh, those are related to the unpaid oil and gas rental industry. I guess I'd missed that.

I'd be interested to hear how the flood hazard identification program is getting on and what progress is being made, how close we are to understanding the full flood mapping. Again, if you could comment with respect to water on the groundwater mapping that was to have been – well, it was started under the previous government, and I thought we were moving forward pretty close to completion or should have been by now. Is any of this relating to groundwater mapping in the province?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for his questions. On the topic of the new parks, the Castle wildland and provincial parks, in the capital plan we have \$20 million set aside for those parks and some of the adjacent planning, and those are capital investments that were already in the voted amounts last year. As for additional operations, those were already budgeted in the '16-17 budgets and going forward.

Regardless of what the management outcomes are, the operations piece remains relatively constant given that enforcement and other pieces are in a separate – well, the park rangers are within the operations, but then there are also conservation officers, which come out of the environment part of the budget, not parks. Then, of course, there are fish and wildlife officers, who are actually within the Justice and Solicitor General portfolio. Certainly, enforcement is a major undertaking of the province, but those were already in the '16-17 voted amounts.

As for the Surface Rights Board piece, we had an increase to surface rights compensation grants this year as a result of increased defaults to surface rights compensation payments by industry to landowners. The SRB has in fact experienced quite an increase in the volume of applications for recovery of unpaid rentals pursuant to section 36 of the Surface Rights Act. That is, of course, the section that addresses situations when a landowner has not been paid funds that are owed by an operator under a surface lease or under a right-of-entry order or a compensation order.

You know, for context, over the previous 11 years the Surface Rights Board received an average of fewer than 370 section 36 applications every year, but for the period of April 1, 2016, to August 31, 2016, for that five-month period, the Surface Rights Board had already received 1,064 section 36 applications. That has a lot to do, obviously, with the downturn in the price of oil. You know, under the act as we now have it, the Surface Rights Board provides that payment so that landowners are not left without.

As for flood mapping, the \$2.7 million increase is for continued studies under the provincial flood hazard identification program. There's been some reprofiling there as well from the national disaster mitigation program. We had some increase on one side of \$6.9 million from that national program, and then you had reprofiling to reflect the ongoing mitigation work that is not necessarily recovery of costs directly related to the 2013 flood.

Also, in flood infrastructure a couple of other items that these estimates reflect are a transfer of voted amounts, a decrease from capital and into expense. What that means is that we are providing mitigation projects with a grant instead of it being provincial capital. In this case it's \$12.4 million to provide funding to the hamlet of Bragg Creek to build berms on the Elbow River. This is part of what we committed to doing. When we made the decision to protect Calgary with the Springbank project, there were pieces in Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows that had to be done in order to keep those communities safe.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Dr. Swann: With respect to the groundwater mapping how much progress are we making there? There are serious concerns about understanding better our groundwater.

Ms Phillips: Absolutely, hon. member. We're looking at the groundwater and surface water management framework in the lower Athabasca regional plan, for example. That was a piece of work that had been sitting for some time under the previous government, and we're moving that along under the lower Athabasca regional plan. There are frameworks that contain within them triggers and thresholds so that we can better appreciate the cumulative effects. I'd be happy to follow up in greater detail in writing on where those processes are at and, once those management frameworks are complete, what changes they reflect in terms of how we manage cumulative effects on the landscape.

Dr. Swann: Just quickly to the First Nations minister: what impacts has the opiate crisis had on your department, and what in your budget reflects the concerns around the opiate crisis?

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. There is no particular request for a change in our supplementary income during this time with regard to the opiate crisis because that particular issue is being handled directly through Health, through the Associate Minister of Health, and as well through our Solicitor General. All of those programs are aligned and assigned through those two ministries, not through IR particularly, because they're the ministries that actually do the hiring of individuals who will do the work. In our ministry we are spending time working with the communities, of course, on relationships, building and working with both the reserve communities and the neighbouring communities. We already have a full contingent of people who are assigned to each reserve and who are working with that, so it becomes a particular focus of their work but doesn't change the number of people that are required. Therefore, no supplementary estimate is required at this time.

Dr. Swann: Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member. Thank you, Minister.

We will now move over to the government side. Are there any members wishing to speak at this time? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I could go back and forth with the Minister of Children's Services.

Thank you for all your previous answers in helping us understand how the request for \$28 million will be used. You mentioned the \$4 million in wraparound services that are being asked for. Maybe you could explain to us what those wraparound services actually are and how they will help the lives of Alberta's children.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, it's our responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of Alberta's children. You know, that is something that our government takes very much to heart, which is why we're always looking for ways to strengthen and improve these life-changing supports and services.

Children's Services is currently implementing strength-based approaches such as signs of safety that help staff to work in

partnership with families and children to increase safety and reduce risk and danger by focusing on strengths, resources, and networks the families have. Children's Services has also created a child intervention practice framework that includes respect for indigenous experience as a key principle. We are developing training for staff that will create greater understanding of indigenous culture and historical trauma, helping them to better support children and families across Alberta. We've also engaged in multiple practice initiatives to support staff to work with indigenous children and families in a different way, with the goal of supporting families to keep their children safe at home.

10:50

Again, Madam Chair, our staff are such committed professionals, and they truly do make Alberta a better place through their caring and advocacy. Absolutely, they are changing the world one client, one family, and one community at a time. As a public health nurse I worked with them on this, and I just want to say thank you again to all the social workers for the work that they do. This week we recognize the work that social workers do, making a difference in people's lives.

Again, this \$4 million for wraparound services provides those very staff the additional support that they need in order to ensure that families and children can stay together in a safe way.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you for that, Minister.

Of the \$28 million, there is a big chunk, \$8 million, that is going towards foster care support, to support kinship and foster caregivers. As we know, foster parents are an essential part of the continuum of care for children receiving services. How will the \$8 million improve foster care supports programming and provide stable supports for the foster parents?

The Deputy Chair: Minister, please go ahead.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, certainly, foster and kinship caregivers are amazing individuals who step up to offer children in need love and support and a place in their homes. Truly, they demonstrate the best of Alberta and show what community truly means. We continue to be very thankful for those who step up to the plate on this and continue to encourage more families in Alberta to consider becoming foster parents if at all possible.

The funding will address some caseload growth pressures in the foster care program to provide supports to foster and kinship caregivers, either directly or through agencies, to ensure children's needs are met in a home setting.

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

In December 2016 approximately 3,500 children and youth were in foster care, and an additional 2,000 children and youth were living with kinship caregivers. Alberta has approximately 1,800 foster homes and 1,750 kinship homes. Compared to last year, there's been a 4 per cent increase in the number of children and youth placed in foster and kinship care. Again, foster and kinship caregivers provide critical support to the children and youth of our province.

Children's Services has begun to implement the foundations of a caregiver support model to support the achievement of more positive outcomes for children and youth by ensuring they are nurtured by caregivers who respond to them in a developmentally appropriate way, interpret their behaviour through a trauma-informed lens, and have an appreciation for the impact of grief and loss.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Go ahead.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for that, Minister. I really appreciate that.

There's also \$3 million that's being slated for supports for permanency. Supports for permanency have been identified as a priority in recent recommendations from the Auditor General and the Child and Youth Advocate. What will the additional \$3 million do to protect and improve supports for permanency?

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, we know that every child deserves to grow up in a healthy, loving environment that supports their healthy development and prepares them for a bright future. This funding will address caseload growth in the program that provides supports for caregivers caring for children who were in permanent care but have been adopted or cared for under a private guardianship order. We must continue to support children and youth who cannot return to their biological families to benefit from lifelong permanent connections.

This program recognizes that many children who have been in care require additional support even after leaving care. This program provides much-needed supports for caregivers to meet their children's needs, whether through ongoing counselling, respite, or support to maintain cultural connections. We remain committed to working closely with First Nation and Métis leaders to ensure that legal permanency for children respects meaningful involvement of their families and communities. There has been a 4 per cent increase in the supports for permanency caseload compared to last year, so that's a reflection of why the additional dollars are required.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for that response, Minister. Let me just go back to child protection for a second, the \$8.5 million. Why are the additional costs necessary to ensure children's needs are being met in child protection?

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, certainly, we know that when families are facing tough economic times, they want a government that works to make their life better and ensure that the supports that they rely on are in place. Unfortunately, increases in child protection costs are driven by a growing number of children and youth receiving services and by increased costs per case resulting from greater complexity of cases, where children require additional psychological supports, therapy, and specialized placements.

The ministry works to provide children with a safe and nurturing environment that is free from abuse and neglect and that encourages the development of lifelong relationships. I'm certainly proud of a government that chooses to maintain stable services and the supports that the families of this province need and the children of these families need through these tough economic times. We'll continue to ensure that those supports are in place to make the lives of those children better.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for those answers. In reviewing the 2016 budget, can you tell us some of the successes that Children's Services has seen?

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've seen a leveling off of the savings attributable to the prevention and supporting families strategy. As a result of that, we're experiencing modest increases in costs. Including the supplemental funding, the increases under the Ministry of Children's Services still represent a reasonable 4.6 per cent increase over last year's actuals based on the 2016-17 forecast of \$1.173 billion compared to the '15-16 actuals of \$1.122 billion. We'll continue to, you know, focus on prevention and supporting families as the best strategy to keep children safe and with their families, and we'll continue to move forward to support those whose safety requires additional supports as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
Go ahead.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. You mentioned the funds going towards supporting Albertan families. I'd like to specifically ask you about how the delivery of child intervention services is supporting Albertan families.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, our government is protecting the things that matter by working to provide Alberta families the support that they need to keep their children safe and to raise loving, healthy families. Every child, regardless of whose care they are in, deserves to grow up in a safe, loving, nurturing environment with opportunities to thrive. When we give families the supports that they need to thrive as a family, we can keep families together. Alberta's child intervention system supports child safety and well-being and strives to keep families together whenever it is safe to do so. The child intervention program delivery continues to focus on supporting families as the primary means of protection. We are providing services to more children at home.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

At this point the time allotted is for the Official Opposition. Is there a member wishing to speak?

Mr. W. Anderson: Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Would you like to share your time? Go back and forth?

Mr. W. Anderson: I just was going to say – thank you, Madam Chairperson – back and forth with the Minister of Advanced Education if I may.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. W. Anderson: Further to what the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek had spoken to regarding the student loans increase, that being said and looking at the numbers, it's about a 20 to 25 per cent increase. My understanding is that that is due specifically to requested additional need by a lot of the students.

Now, a couple of points of clarification if I may. How much, if any, of those funds is being allocated toward administration costs

or processing fees? Then, secondly, in trying to move away from debt-loading students, was any opportunity given for additional bursaries or grants or scholarships from this ministry?

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Minister.

11:00

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. I want to welcome the member to his new role as Advanced Education critic. I know that I enjoyed my time and exchanges with the Member for Battle River-Wainwright when he filled that role, and I'm sure that the Member for Highwood and I will further have such good exchanges on the topic of advanced education, which is, of course, a topic that's so important to the people and the future of Alberta. I look forward to engaging with you in these roles.

With respect to the questions around student loans and the administrative costs, I don't have those details with me right now.

The member did ask about increases, of course, in bursaries and grants. We have created an indigenous student award, which offers, I believe, \$7.5 million to indigenous students pursuing courses of study at universities and colleges all across the province. That was a new award that our government created in the first budget that we brought down.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

As well, we created the apprentice training award, which was an initial \$1.5 million in additional training for apprentices who are currently unemployed so that they can continue with their technical training through their second, third, or fourth periods. That program was oversubscribed almost the day it was announced, and we expanded that by an additional million dollars. We expect that by the end of the year there will be approximately 2,500 unemployed apprentices who are continuing with their second, third, or fourth period of technical training.

You know, the member opposite, of course, asks the question about preventing student debt. Madam Chair, our government is very concerned about the level of student debt, and that's why we have decided to continue with the tuition freeze for a third academic year. We don't want the cost of tuition to skyrocket so that it's out of reach for most Albertans, which is in stark contrast to actually what the Member for Battle River-Wainwright said that he wanted to see when we announced the third year of the tuition freeze. Of course, he was in the media the next day stating that he thought that it would be wise for tuition to go up. Our government disagrees, and we continue to make sure that tuition is affordable so that every Albertan, regardless of how much money their parents have in the bank, have the opportunity to pursue a higher education.

Of course, we continue to look at and we are engaged in a tuition funding review. That work will continue throughout 2017 to make sure that we can maintain affordability for higher education for the students of Alberta. That will look at issues of tuition as well as student aid and the grants and bursaries that are available so that we can make sure that the money that we spend on supporting students achieving higher education is going towards those who are most in need and who will benefit the most from accessing a higher education.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you. Thank you to the minister for your kind accolades towards my opportunity to be the shadow minister.

Rest assured, I hope to provide you with some positive feedback so the taxpayers of Alberta receive the best return on their investment, and I look forward to receiving in writing your answer to the question of the administration costs regarding the student loans application process.

Further to my other question here, looking at the transfer of funds from Mount Royal University on a capital project requirement, my experience is that capital projects typically in any large institution or organization require a considerable amount of planning over a period of time. The building functionality or the buildings will put forward a budget and that capital project will be looked at and considered over a period of time. My question is – the \$700,000 that's being transferred from Environment and Parks is requested to provide climate leadership plan funding for green infrastructure. Now, this being a cap. ex. project, I would assume it had been going on for some time. I'm looking – well, they would have probably requested it internally for some time. That being said, when they required the funding as a cap. ex. project, did they ask for the money or request the funds from Advanced Ed, from Finance, or from Environment? If you could clarify that for me.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Highwood for this question. With respect to the administrative costs our office will of course make all efforts to direct you to the appropriate place to get the information on the administrative costs with respect to student loans.

With respect to the infrastructure the capital expansion question with respect to our supplementary supply ask, of course, I just want to build on something that the Minister of Environment and Parks stated in response to the question – I can't remember who asked the question – around the process of applying for the money for these green infrastructure investments. Of course, there is a crossgovernmental committee that is tasked with looking at how to make these investments. It takes in investment proposals from every department, and we evaluate the proposals against each other, and of course we spend the money on things that meet the criteria that have been established by that committee for wise investments of our green infrastructure dollars.

With respect to this, I think it's no secret that the deferred maintenance at postsecondary institutions in this province is significant due to a lack of investment from the previous government in maintenance and renewal on campuses all across the province. That has created a significant backlog of energy efficiency investments that could be made, energy improvement, upgrades in those kinds of things, that will result in significant energy savings at universities and campuses all across the province.

There's no shortage of asks that have been submitted to the department. They've been on the books for a significant period of time. It's just that the previous government never really made the money available to universities and colleges to make those investments. We, of course, are committed to making lives better for Albertans by making sure that our postsecondary institutions are in top shape. We have taken advantage of the money that's available from Environment and Parks to address some of these infrastructure, maintenance, and renewal issues because we know that those kinds of investments will result in significant energy efficiencies.

Of course, I'm sure that the Member for Highwood would agree that investments in energy efficiencies are not only good for that particular institution but good for the people of Alberta because the money that the institution will save can be better directed towards

classrooms, making sure that students have spaces and teachers so that they can learn the things that they need to learn to make their lives better.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. This being a long-standing cap. ex. project and now the funds are coming out of the Environment and Parks ministry, my question is – the request went through a committee process, as I understand, to you, to Finance, and to Environment, but the funds are coming from Environment. The capital that Environment has to provide for long-term cap. ex. projects, the funds: do they come from the carbon levy, or do they come from the other source that the minister had alluded to if I may ask?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, the money for this particular project comes from the existing fund that is made up of funds that have been collected from industry through the SGER process, and I'm guessing from the nods from the Minister of Environment and Parks that I'm right on that.

You know, I do want to commend the previous government for at least taking baby steps towards pricing carbon in this province. We know that pricing carbon is the right direction for the province of Alberta to be taking in order to improve its environmental outcomes and enhance energy efficiency in the province.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak from the third party? I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you, Madam Chair. I've got just one last question for the Minister of Advanced Education just following on the line. I think we've certainly pursued that.

One of my concerns with the student loan program right now – I think there was a federal writeoff just recently of significant amounts of money due to long-standing defaults or deferred payments. I'd like to understand, with the current situation with our student loans, obviously – we're now investing another \$121 million, and our hope is that those dollars are not at risk, that they can be repaid by those students as they find gainful employment in the future and pay that off diligently over the ensuing years.

11:10

My question is: how many student loans are at least being deferred by some of those past students now because of unemployment situations? How many have defaulted, and how many are you expecting to be written off due to the inability to pay in terms of the period of time that those would be considered as actually a full default and then written off by the government? I think that it might be good for us to understand those metrics not only looking backwards but looking forward with this additional \$121 million investment.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you to the member for the question. Of course, with respect to the default rate on student loans historically we have seen approximately, from my notes here, about a 6 per cent default rate on student loans. Of course, the student loan default rate is not evenly distributed across institutions, Madam Chair. We have a mix of public institutions, and that's where the bulk of our students go, but students in Alberta are also eligible for loans to

pursue studies at private career colleges. The member may be interested to know that the bulk of the defaults in our student loans come from students who have applied for and studied at private career colleges but find that the cost of the programs that they've taken far exceed the earnings that they can expect to make in the programs that they've studied. So they've paid thousands and thousands of dollars to take a program that will result in an occupation that pays a very small amount of money and, of course, can't afford the crushing student debt that they've been saddled with.

You know, our office gets stories all the time from students who have attended private career colleges in the province of Alberta. They feel that they've been treated unfairly by the student loan officers who they applied for student loans from that they couldn't possibly afford to pay back, Madam Chair. This is a significant issue that our government is very concerned about because we want our students to be successful, and we certainly don't want them to be saddled with student debt. So this issue around the default rate among students who are attending private career colleges is very concerning to everyone in this House, you know.

I don't think that anybody thinks that the people of Alberta are better off if we've spent thousands and thousands of public dollars on education that is yielding no appreciable outcome. You know, as our government continues to look at this issue around how to protect students who are looking at private career colleges as an education opportunity, I hope that the member opposite will support our efforts to make sure that students are protected when they choose that as an education path.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister. It just concerns me. I was just looking at some statistics federally, and last year it was over 32,000 student loans written off; the year before, 33,000; so about \$175 million a year. It's peaked as high as close to or even over \$300 million in the last five years, federally. So I'm just concerned. Obviously, we want to invest in our youth, but we also want to make sure that there's a reasonable opportunity for them to pay that back.

As was mentioned by the other member, you know, does this mean that we have to look at other options for them, whether there are additional grants or bursary programs that may assist them, particularly in those areas where we feel that there might be higher employment opportunities? But I hope that, again, your ministry is watching that metric closely as it is an investment, not just an investment for those students but an investment by us Albertans into our future, so it's a very, very key issue for us.

I'd like to shift gears. This is probably more geared towards Infrastructure and Education. Government members this week hinted at new schools for Albertans, but these estimates asked for \$107 million to be transferred from school capital to operations and maintenance on page 38. Knowing that we have an expert in the Minister of Finance, I'm sure you're well versed in all these requests coming towards you, Minister. I guess my question is: how many new student spaces would have been funded by this \$107 million that's now being moved over into operations and maintenance? How many spaces are we losing, and how many spaces are we assisting with possibly some much-needed operations and maintenance funding with this \$107 million switch of funds?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you for the question. My understanding is that this is money moved out of capital to operational spending because the

uses that school boards throughout the province put it to is for things that improve the life of the facility for less than five years. These kinds of improvements like painting and upgrades are not about increasing spaces in the education system. It's improving the quality of the spaces. That's why the movement took place.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister. Through the chair, I understand that, obviously, there's probably some deferred maintenance that needs to be caught up. We don't want older schools falling apart, so I understand that. With the allocation of that, obviously, there's \$107 million – it sounds like a lot of money; it is a lot of money – but we have lots of schools across the province. How will communities and schools be prioritized to receive this switching of support from capital funding to operations and maintenance? Is there a prioritization that we'll be able to see on how that's allocated, or is it on an as-needed basis? Or is everybody going to have to come to you and say, "I want a chunk of the \$107 million"? How is that going to be allocated through your department and through Infrastructure and Education as well?

Mr. Ceci: Actually, it's not through my department. Treasury Board received this input from Education, where they looked at the kinds of improvements that were being done with this money. It wasn't for the construction of new schools. That's a totally different line item. With the budget coming up shortly, you'll see where that is going for this government. The school boards were utilizing this money, to the tune of about \$117 million, for improvements to their schools across Alberta that were adding less than five years, as I said, extending the life of that facility for less than five years, so the kinds of things that I talked about earlier. So there was a determination made that if school boards are already using it for that purpose, then we'll book it for that purpose as opposed to in the capital plan.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to move some questions over to the topic of Indigenous Relations. The estimates that we've seen here on page 50 show that \$1.75 million was underspent in Indigenous Relations programs. I'd like to understand, and if the minister could explain: which programs had lower than budgeted expenses, how many FNMI Albertans were affected by that reduced spending, and how was that reduced?

Mr. Feehan: Thank you to the member for the question. The answer is all located in one section of the budget, and that is the southern Alberta flood program. The original estimates that were brought in under the previous government were moved forward in the budgets over the last couple of years. Last year, in Budget 2016, we had allocated \$6,557,000 in support of the Siksika and Stoney . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member.

We will now move on to the other parties.

Seeing none, we will now move on to the government side. Are there any government members wishing to speak?

Ms McKittrick: Madam Chair, I would like to ask a question to the Minister of Indigenous Relations. As I ask this question, I would like to take this opportunity on the work that the minister has done in terms of indigenous relations and the leadership that he's shown in helping indigenous communities. The question I have is: why did the Labour ministry transfer \$1 million and then another \$3,845,000 to Indigenous Relations?

11:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you to the member for the question and for the support. I'm happy to talk about the transfer of \$3.845 million from Labour into our ministry because it represents some pretty successful stories in terms of our support and advancement of including the indigenous community in the labour market in this province. We work closely, of course, with Advanced Education, Community and Social Services to deliver programs that enhance employment and training to Albertans and, specifically in this case, to indigenous Albertans. So this is a good-news story for everyone involved.

We have been collaborating particularly with a variety of market challenges and supporting unemployed and underemployed workers, of course, to get back and participate in the economy. Part of these collaborations have happened over the last little while. We have been running programs for a number of months or years, in fact, in this initiative and have found that the subscription to the program has been, really, much larger than anticipated. The Labour department was very helpful to us in finding new approaches to providing opportunities for indigenous people, and we're very pleased that we were able to provide quite a bit of money in a variety of areas. I'd be happy to detail that specifically for you.

In November 2016 Indigenous Relations worked with the Labour department to identify projects totalling \$1 million. This was the first piece that you asked about. From that, \$200,000 went to Trade Winds to Success, which is pretrades training for indigenous people, which I know has been very highly supported by members on both sides of the House. It's a very effective program. It is particularly focused on helping people get into trades and has a strong focus on indigenous women. So it's a very nice program to be supporting.

Another \$180,000 went to the Northeast Alberta Apprenticeship Initiative to support indigenous apprentices in the northeast area of the province to enrol in and complete trade certificates, which is the ongoing desire to help people move on to get their certificates and become red seal tradespeople.

Then \$150,000 in Lesser Slave Lake for a transition support worker, to help improve job retention for community members once they've completed training. We found that just simply having the training didn't always suffice in terms of allowing people to engage in the community and in the marketplace, so we provided that money to allow the workers to be supported in terms of preparing their job applications and attending interviews, those kinds of activities in supporting and helping make that life transition, which is often difficult for people going from school into the working world.

Finally, we had \$120,000 to the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council for a transition support worker to help with job retention in very much the same way.

There was \$40,000 to the Athabasca Tribal Council to provide driver training to five member communities as this is one of the biggest barriers in the north. The reality in the north is that if you don't have a driver's licence, it's very hard to get appropriate employment and that access to drivers' licences for communities that are often two or three hours away from any kind of a testing facility is very difficult and becomes a barrier for people moving forward. We know that once they have the skills necessary and once they have the jobs, the indigenous community are excellent workers, and we just want to make sure that there aren't barriers that stop them from moving through that process quickly and being successful.

Additionally, we provided \$105,000 to the Saamis Employment & Training Association for a pre-employment program in Lethbridge in collaboration with Community Futures Treaty Seven; \$85,000 to the Metis Settlements Strategic Training Initiatives for their forestry management program; \$25,000 to the Tribal Chiefs Employment and Training Services Association for safety ticket training; \$50,000 to Beaver First Nation for an employment readiness program; and \$50,000 to Community Futures Treaty Seven for their pre-employment program for youth at risk.

All of these things, as you can hear, are spread throughout the province, encouraging young First Nations people to be successful in advancing themselves from their primary education into the workforce. The outcomes are very strong, very good. We're supporting communities that have struggled historically with employment records, and we're seeing some very substantive change now as we enable these communities to work with their own youth, help them develop skills in their own communities, that they then employ in their own communities.

One of the things that we found in doing these programs is that not only are we actually helping the indigenous communities, but indeed we help the much larger communities around the First Nations. They find themselves with a stronger workforce, people with high levels of skills, and, of course, people who are going to stay in the area because they live in the area and they're committed to the land in the area. Having these kinds of programs is, you know, very important in terms of helping rural Alberta communities enhance their success on an economic basis.

Let me just go on to add a bit more information because there were two pieces to your question.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, each response cannot be longer than five minutes.

So if the member has a question?

Ms McKittrick: I do. Thank you. I wanted to thank the minister. The Member for Red Deer-North and myself actually visited one of these training programs in Bonnyville and were just delighted as to the extent of the program and how proud the tribal council and the community were of this training program. I'd like to echo your words on how helpful those programs are to provide employment and to break down barriers for indigenous communities.

My next question is around the \$6,805,000 that was transferred from the climate leadership plan to Indigenous Relations. I know that this has been a focus of your ministry, around climate change leadership in indigenous communities. There have been a number of solar energy projects and other green projects in indigenous communities. I was wondering what the money transferred from the climate leadership plan is going to be used for.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Again, this is an area that Indigenous Relations is very pleased to report about because it's about including the indigenous community in the major projects of this province, in this case the climate leadership plan, and ensuring that while we move ahead in the transition to a greener, more prosperous economy in terms of renewables, the indigenous community are there as true partners in this.

The money that you were speaking of, the \$6.805 million being transferred from the climate leadership plan, is divided into a number of areas. In our assessment of the work that was needed in indigenous communities, we found, of course, that while we wanted to ensure the focus remained largely on the reduction of GHGs in the environment, we also needed to ensure that the communities themselves were prepared to take advantage of the programs and to

develop the wherewithal to be a true partner. So some of the monies are allocated toward supporting leadership development and supporting educational programs.

Of course, we had two very successful pilot programs that were announced in the fall of this year with regard to doing a community audit so that there could be assessments of the First Nations communities, looking at ways in which they, first of all, could enhance their use of electricity through renewables and therefore reduce greenhouse gases but, furthermore, even to prepare themselves to participate in the larger electricity market, where they would be able to produce electricity as well as consume it within their First Nations and then perhaps, in time, sell that electricity into the larger market.

So there are a number of different programs that are established, from the very basic assessment and business plan preparation phase right through to the establishment of resources.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister. The time for the government side is now up.

We will move over to the Official Opposition. Is there anybody wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

11:30

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I noted that you're asking for \$562,000 to be transferred from the Ministry of Environment and Parks. I just want to know what the money is going to be used for.

My other observation is that in the last two budgets your ministry got \$400 million plus \$300 million, in total \$700 million. Was that all spent and this is over and above that? What is that going to be used for? How many jobs are going to be created?

Also, in total how much more money will come for this coal transition? Is that your department that is going to lead?

Minister, I would request you to be brief. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the member for the questions. I will endeavour to answer all of your questions, but brevity is not my strong suit. So \$562,000 is being transferred over from Environment and Parks, and this money is specifically used for the coal panel and the coal transition. This is money that's used to support the advisory panel that we stood up. There are three members on the coal advisory panel, that have already begun travelling to impacted communities, so part of this is dollars for them to engage in 10 facilitated discussions with stakeholders in the communities most affected by the retirement of coal-fired generation facilities.

I think it's really important to note right now that at this point in time these facilities – outside of our regulations, which would have them phase out by 2030, the federal government has in fact put a coal phase-out by 2029.

So this money is for the coal panel to engage with communities. They'll be meeting with municipal leaders, First Nations, community economic development organizations, small businesses, affected workers. Really, what they're doing is looking at the assets and strengths of the different communities, looking at the opportunities, whether with workers and what are the opportunities in the communities but as well looking at future opportunities.

The breakdown I can give the hon. member is that there is a portion of it that will be for salaries for three and one-half FTEs to support the panel. The panel themselves, I just want to say off

the top, are not paid. Their travel costs are covered, but they are not drawing any type of salary or stipend or anything from government. There is a little over \$150,000 that will support the engagement and the consultation. That's things like a facilitator, a writer, and event costs. There is \$2,000 for education outreach and marketing, again, ensuring that the communities are well aware that the panel is coming in. And then there's about \$16,000 earmarked for travel.

I can tell you that, you know, on the coal file working with the communities to transition is under my ministry, and that's part of the reason why it's transferred over. I myself was in three of the communities last week meeting with community leaders. So in addition to the work that the coal panel is doing, we are also, myself and my ministry, taking a very active role in working with the communities to help them identify opportunities moving forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Panda: I'll share my time with my colleague.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. I'd like to now recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move an amendment, please.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member. If you can just give me a second for the original. We've stopped the clock while I'm getting the amendment.

Please go ahead, Member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Cyr to move that the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, of the Ministry of Service Alberta be reduced by \$899,000 for procurement and administration services under reference 8.1 at page 75 so that the supplementary estimate to be voted at page 73 is \$1,000.

I would like to ask a few questions. Unfortunately, I would have liked to have done this at the end, but we're running out of time. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can you tell me how much you have spent on postage for the last three years?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, Service Alberta is committed to streamlining and standardizing government-shared services to ensure we deliver the best possible value to Albertans. Through continued improvements in technology and innovation we have avoided mail and print service costs of \$763,000 since 2013. It would be the equivalent of removing five vehicles from the road. The financial transactions budget is used in part to purchase postage inventory from Canada Post. Service Alberta either uses the postage for its own program needs or sells the postage to other government departments for their program needs. Service Alberta continually improves to ensure that the government-shared services process delivers the best possible value to the public as well as government stakeholders while avoiding unnecessary costs.

To reduce service costs, shared services has introduced efficiencies to the government's mail and print services that resulted in meaningful cost avoidance and environmental benefit. Consolidations in print services have avoided costs of \$300,000 while the adoption of technology innovation will enable 20 million pages of print materials to be diverted to electronic submissions. Government print and mail volumes continue to decline by approximately 3 per cent annually as ministries find online, electronic ways to deliver programs and services.

A review of centralized government print and mail services in 2013 demonstrated the continued need for these functions. Print and mail services are not only relevant, but they are a critical component of successful program delivery for all government ministries, including subsidy cheques to vulnerable Albertans, service usage and financial statements, health and identity documents – health cards, birth certificates, drivers' licences, et cetera – and program and service information.

Service Alberta received a supplementary estimate of \$900,000 for financial transactions. The estimate has gone from \$7,650,000 to \$8,550,000. The financial transactions budget is used in part to purchase postage inventory from Canada Post. Service Alberta either uses the postage for its own program needs or sells the postage to other government departments for their program needs.

The supplementary estimate will be used to address a larger than originally budgeted volume for search services in corporate and personal property registries, searches which are mailed out to the requesting party. As of December 31, 2016, year over year corporate search volumes have increased by 7 per cent, and personal property searches have increased by 3.7 per cent. Revenue for the two registry search fees had increased by \$910,000. Overall Service Alberta's financial transaction budget remains lower than previous years, reflecting the savings from the elimination of mailing out registration renewal reminders.

The supplementary estimate is being funded by a reallocation from the department's operating expenses. The department will surplus \$900,000 in operating to fund the increase to financial transactions. The long story short here, Madam Chair, is that these are not new dollars. We are simply moving dollars from one area to another.

11:40

The proposed amendment by the member opposite would mean that subsidy cheques would not go to vulnerable Albertans. That's something that he might be arguing for. It might be in line with their particular stance on not particularly caring about social issues. Perhaps the reduction is being proposed for the reason of not wanting to send out financial statements which would be in accordance with a goal to ensure a lack of transparency, perhaps so they could create some sort of political issue. However, I would suggest that's not in the best interests of Albertans nor anyone working for the government of Alberta.

Additionally . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: For the information of the member and all members in the House, the amendment will be referred to as A1. The amendment will be voted on once the committee has concluded and before the vote on the supplementary supply estimates, so it will not be voted on right now.

We will now be moving on to the third party if there's a member that would like to speak. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I had pursued a short line of questioning that we were both cut off on, so I'll defer back to the Minister of Indigenous Relations. We were talking about some underspending in his department and his programs, and I had asked: could you explain which programs had lower budget expenses and how the FNMI budgets were affected by reduced spending? Now, we've heard that the floods were part of that and flood mitigation, but could you tell us which communities specifically were directly

affected by the reduced Indigenous Relations program funding and what specific projects were deferred or cancelled because of that?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much to the hon. member for a chance to continue this conversation. I think it's a very important one. As I was indicating earlier, we had indeed allotted a little over 6 and a half million dollars to the funding for the Siksika and the Stoney Nakoda tribes for the flood recovery. At this time I can tell you that a little over \$2 million extra was given to the Stoney Nakoda Nation to hire additional staff required for painting, drywall, but also youth and student work programs that allowed youth in the communities to be trained to do the work for the flood recovery. It was a good program for developing skills in the trades. We used approximately \$500,000 to support the salary, benefits, and travel expenditures for five staff overall. I can tell you, though, that that money, including the \$4 million that was originally funded for the Stoney Nakoda, has all indeed been used appropriately. The houses have been completed in the fall of this year, and we have essentially put an end to that program because of the completion.

However, we found that in spite of the fact that all the house work was done – and we had indeed even included some employment training in the work that was done – the estimates that were originally provided by the previous government were an overestimate of the actual costs as might be predicted five or six years ahead of the time. So we were able to take \$1 million from that phase of the flood recovery program and were able to transfer it back to Treasury Board.

The program that is remaining, still in process right now, is the Siksika community program. That program has been a little bit slower in moving forward because the community itself chose to become the primary contractors for the building in their own community, and you may know that they faced some political opposition within their own community about the site of those houses. While they're working through that, there was some delay in the initiation of the building of those houses.

As a result, we have taken \$750,000 that has not yet been distributed to the community and held it to be deferred till next year in case in the finalization of the houses, which are to be completed over the next 12 months, I understand, there are any unexpected costs or things that were unanticipated. Then we would have that money to be able to facilitate any kind of finalization process as necessary.

The simple answer to your question is that no programs have been cancelled; nothing has been deferred. In fact, we've been extremely successful in moving this forward. I'm very pleased to return a million dollars back to Treasury Board and very pleased to have \$750,000 in the accounts for next year just as a backup. Perhaps next year I'll be offering some of that money back to Treasury Board again.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the minister for his response.

I see we have the Minister of Municipal Affairs available, so I'll shift gears into some questions around some funding there. This government cut \$19 million from Municipal Affairs, mostly by reducing the MSI, the municipal sustainability initiative, by \$17 million. We heard recently from municipal leaders, in fact just on Tuesday, that community infrastructure is desperately needed in this province. We also understand that some funds have to be reprofiled into future years due to project planning and construction issues. What are you doing to ensure that the reprofiled funds are

used for their intended purposes and that future new funding is not reduced due to funds reprofiled into the future so that we're not actually sort of stealing from future opportunities for funding? And what is your approach to this going forward in terms of that reduction and how we're going to help these municipalities to still achieve some of their infrastructure needs?

Mr. S. Anderson: Sir, are you referring to line 3? I just want to make sure I get the right . . .

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. That's correct. A \$17 million reduction of the MSI.

Mr. S. Anderson: The transfer from operating to capital?

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah.

Mr. S. Anderson: Okay. I kind of discussed it a bit yesterday. It's one of the ways we support the five mid-sized cities, by allowing them to transfer the MSI operating to capital. It happens every year. It's the way they have chosen to use their MSI funding. But as you rightly pointed out and as we are aware, it's the importance of that core infrastructure to the communities across Alberta.

The MSI agreements that are expiring on the 31st: those agreements are expiring, but the program is not, so we're still going to be supporting these municipalities going forward. As I indicated yesterday as well, the funding for the upcoming budget for these municipalities is still there. It's money that was allocated for them. We are going to be working with them to make sure that we find, I guess, a long-term, sustainable solution. What that looks like, I'm not sure yet because there's a lot of discussion, a lot of consultation ongoing.

I know your concerns. I think that since the first day I got elected, to be honest with you, MSI has come across my plate. Those particulars are going to have to be worked out with those local officials to find out what they think is going to be best going forward. I mean, you'll hear me say "sustainable" numerous times, but that's exactly what we're looking for, something that they can count on through these ups and downs for that infrastructure. For sure, it's going to be a hugely collaborative endeavour.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the minister for his response. Of course, sustainability is certainly an issue for all of us, but I'm sure you'll be hearing more from those affected municipalities as we go forward.

My second question is: what do you intend to do to enhance support for communities that depend on funding for the Alberta community partnerships, which was reduced by \$1.5 million, and on the grants in place of taxes program, which was reduced by \$1 million? What are you going to do with these communities to ensure that this does not affect their ability to do what they need to do in terms of providing support in their own communities? I know that you'll be hearing about this, but I'd like to hear what you have to say in terms of how you're going to address those concerns when they come back to you from the various parts of the province.

Mr. S. Anderson: Sure. I mean, we have talked about the grants in place of taxes. That's one of the issues that I spoke about yesterday. Some of our savings were because of anticipated lower construction assessment growth. That's, I think, one of those fluid things that every year changes a little bit. Again, I don't want to deal in hypotheticals with it, but it's, like I said, a fluid thing that it happens we have to work with those municipalities on.

The other part you were talking about was the Alberta community partnerships. Yeah, we did have savings there for municipal restructuring. I don't have the specifics, like, what the savings were there. I'm going to have to get the specifics for you on that. Definitely, you know, we always want to make sure the funding is there for these municipalities when they need it and make sure that it's being used in the way that is going to be viable for the communities, obviously. I know that there are lots of good examples about water and waste water, things that they've done. We need to work with them and make sure that it's being used appropriately. They're the boots on the ground, and they know better than us in that sense. Like I say, it's always kind of a fluid situation, where we have to make sure we're doing what's right for the residents of Alberta and making lives better for Albertans.

Thanks.

11:50

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister. I know that the municipalities and the regions are a very outspoken group, so I'm sure that you'll be hearing from them as they face funding shortfalls in specific areas. I know that we look forward to hearing how you address that going forward.

My next question is with reference to Children's Services. An additional \$28 million is requested for Children's Services on page 22. I'd like to understand which cities, communities, or regions this funding will be focused on. Is that . . . [A timer sounded] That was an easy one.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

We will now move to the government side. Are there any members wishing to speak at this time?

Seeing none, we will return to the Official Opposition. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to go back to the Minister of Service Alberta. I'd like to go with a five-minute block with a five-minute answer, please. I've got some prepared questions.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we will be rising and reporting at 11:55. I just want you to be aware.

Mr. Cyr: Fair enough. I'd like to table this document, please.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you can't table in supplementary supply. If you would like to table a document, you will need to do it after question period.

Mr. Cyr: Okay. Fair enough. I will table the document later. The one that I'm specifically going on is a press release of March 2, 2016, that is titled Alberta Modernizing Renewal Reminders. "Government will save taxpayers \$3 million a year by switching to electronic reminders for registration, licence and identification card renewals." My question to the minister, really quickly, is: how is it that we had \$1.2 million in the last two years of inventory with postage, and this year somehow we're out, and we're going for an emergency supplemental of \$900,000? That appears to be mismanagement at its best.

Next question. Postage was supposed to go down significantly, and we're seeing that that is not the case. The minister refused to answer what she had spent in this year with her last answer. So I'd like to know again: what are the last three years of postage? How is it that her office has managed it so poorly?

The next one: is this \$900,000 going into a postage inventory? If so, it appears that this government is deferring from one year's budget to a next year's budget. If that is the case, that appears to be very unethical. I would ask that the minister respond to this, either to me directly or in writing.

With that, I will end my questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll rise and respond on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta. The supplementary estimate is being used to address a larger than originally budgeted volume for search services, corporate searches and personal property searches as well.

The Deputy Chair: We need to rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the fiscal year 2016-2017, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again. I would also like to table copies of an amendment moved during Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? Those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing the time and the progress made this morning, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 9, 2017

Day 5

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and	<i>Alberta Hansard</i>	
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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
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Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Anderson, S.	Gotfried
Carson	Orr
Connolly	Piquette
Coolahan	Schneider
Dach	Schreiner
Drysdale	Taylor
Fitzpatrick	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleisteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleisteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleisteuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. S. Anderson

Barnes	Malkinson
Dach	Miller
Fildebrandt	Panda
Fraser	Renaud
Goehring	Turner
Gotfried	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleisteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 9, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Be careful the ice of March. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute honour to introduce to you and through you a man who I deeply respect and admire. He's a veteran Canadian politician whose social democratic values are shared by New Democrats across our country and here in this very Chamber, and this, of course, is former Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow. I'd love it if you stay standing, Premier Romanow, while I speak about you.

He led our neighbouring province for more than a decade. He's well known and should be honoured by us for his tremendous work as a staunch supporter of medicare, supporting and advocating for stable, accessible public health care for each and every Canadian. We had an opportunity to chat earlier today about how it's always important to make sure that the national stage is aware of your local needs, and he certainly did an excellent job of that. As head of the royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada Mr. Romanow fought hard for supporting stable, accessible public health care for all, and last June Mr. Romanow was named co-chair of the board of directors of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, adding his leadership and expertise to the national movement to eradicate homelessness across our country.

Even nearly 20 years after leaving political life, Mr. Romanow continues to dedicate himself to serving the Canadian people and helping make life better for our country's most vulnerable. I'd ask that former Saskatchewan Premier Romanow please accept the traditional warm welcome of all members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, sir.

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you Trevor Buttery, who is my office practicum student from MacEwan University in the social work program. He is in his first year and has been an outstanding addition to our team. He joins us today in recognition of Social Work Week, and I will be speaking more on this later this afternoon. Trevor, please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Fort Saskatchewan elementary school. There are 64 students up in the gallery behind me. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Laura Simpson, Mr. Tyler Nyznyk, and Mrs. Cindy Flaman, and they also have chaperones Mrs. Monique Bandura and Mr. George Braz. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize if I butcher the French here. M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire les étudiants de Broxton Park school. Les étudiants sont accompagnés par leurs enseignants, M. Benoit Mathieu et M. Marcel Turcotte. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Bonjour.

The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ai Tran. Many social workers like Ai, who works at the Edmonton Remand Centre, work within our justice system to ensure that our communities are safe and supported. We thank you all for your incredible hard work and your advocacy and making a difference in the lives of Albertans. I'd ask now that Ai please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

My oversight. Were there any other school groups, hon. members? Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions for you today. First, it is my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a group of compassionate and dedicated advocates for Alberta's children, families, and communities. As part of Social Work Week and in my ongoing work as Minister of Children's Services I'm making it a priority to recognize Alberta's social workers for the work they do to support children and families and to celebrate them for changing lives one client, one child, one family at a time. This week I've had the pleasure of meeting many of them, and I'm pleased to be joined by some of them today, including Lynn Labrecque King, Suzanne MacKinnon, Julie Mann-Johnson, and Charity Lui from the Alberta College of Social Workers; Lina Filomeno-Melchionna-Mcman at the Children's Mental Health Center; and from my own Ministry of Children's Services, Cody Murrell and Carmen Deehan. I ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Larivee: For my second introduction it's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my dear friend Tracey Marshall, who is a public health nurse here in Edmonton and who I worked with for several years. Along with her husband, Rob, she has parented two wonderful boys, Luke and Drake. Tracey and Rob recently moved to Fort Saskatchewan from my community of Slave Lake, and what has been Lesser Slave Lake's loss is Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville's gain. I miss them very much. I'm happy to see her today, and I ask Tracey to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of individuals representing Ministik and Uncas parent councils in the wonderful riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Today we have with us Pauline Gurnett and Elizabeth Buzenus from Ministik and Laura Rasmussen and Elyse Chatterton from Uncas. I would like to thank them for their dedication and

contribution to our rural education system. Their dedication is a continual source of inspiration to me. May my guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the social work community who work in Alberta's social and community service sector to make life better for Albertans each and every day. I am pleased that we are joined today by several social workers. They include Rick Guthrie from Alberta Community and Social Services; Nimir Rasiklal Raval and Martha Sellu from The Family Centre; Bernadette Iahtail from the Creating Hope Society of Alberta; Lovenia Satdeo from strengths foundation; Missa Mvuezolo, a student at Lurana Shelter; as well as Darcy Shields, Claire Ssembatha, and Bukola Salami, who are public members of Alberta College of Social Workers.

This week in Alberta we are recognizing Social Work Week and celebrating the accomplishments of these dedicated, hard-working professionals, and as a former social worker myself I have a tremendous appreciation for the work that these individuals do, and as minister I am continually thankful for their contribution to our province. I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Ms Jodi Miller. Jodi is on the Alberta Party board, and she's also the president of the Alberta Party Calgary-Elbow Constituency Association, which, as you all know, means that I have to do pretty much everything Jodi tells me. Jodi is a shining example of long-term commitment to our community, and she works very hard to make our province a better place every single day. If I can ask Jodi, please, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two of my constituents, Liz Hagell and Neil Kirkwood. Liz was a nursing instructor at Red Deer College for a number of years and is a champion equestrian and beekeeper. Neil has worked with special-needs students and taught high school social studies during a teaching career that has spanned over 30 years. He still substitutes from time to time. They've made a significant impact in the Red Deer area, and I'm honoured to welcome them here today. Will Liz and Neil please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Master Warrant Officer Scott Tanner. Scott has served in the military for 28 years and is currently appointed as a sergeant major of the 3rd Canadian Division Support Group signal squadron. He is here today as part of a course for the members' professional development plan through Algonquin College. I would like to thank Scott for his

service to Canada, and I'd like him to please rise and remain standing to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate introductions today. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you three accomplished professionals who are teaching a new generation of social workers as this week is Social Work Week in Alberta. This is a great time to acknowledge social workers and that I, too, am a social worker, to acknowledge my dear colleagues and friends. Please rise when I say your name. Rick Enns has practised as a registered social worker in Alberta since 1991 and holds a PhD from the University of Alberta and a master's of social work degree from the University of Manitoba. He's the associate dean in the Faculty of Social Work for the University of Calgary's central and northern Alberta region in Edmonton.

David Flomo is the program chair of social work at NorQuest College's Faculty of Health and Community Studies. He holds a master's degree in social work and is an active volunteer in the ACSW. He is also an international man, having come from Liberia, studied in Ghana, Kenya, the U.S., and now calls Alberta home.

Kathaleen Quinn is the director of the school of social work at MacEwan University. She holds a master's degree and has extensive years of practice in health care and education.

I'm honoured to acknowledge these leaders here today, and I'm proud to say that I've taught at all three of their faculties. I ask the members of the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Sigurdson: My second introduction is for Natasha Semenjok. Natasha is my constituency assistant in the magnificent riding of Edmonton-Riverview. She is also a social worker, with a diploma from MacEwan and a bachelor of social work from the University of Calgary. She is a field placement supervisor for social work students in Alberta and co-chair of the social action, social justice committee with the Alberta College of Social Workers. Natasha's dedication to constituents of Edmonton-Riverview is exemplary. I am so fortunate to work alongside her in the service to constituents. I ask the members to please give the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the social work community who work in our province's health care system. During Social Work Week we are joined by social workers who provide quality health care and support to Albertans with dedication and compassion and who work to make Alberta a better place. The ones I'd like to introduce you to today are Margaret Brown, Jo-Anne Beggs, and Andrew Mah from Alberta Health Services; Nana Mumford from Alberta Hospital; Nicole Darko from Leduc Home Care; and Neisau Sampson from St. Albert & Sturgeon Primary Care Network. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly Jennifer Hollett. Jennifer

is the head of news and government at Twitter Canada. An award-winning TV reporter and producer, Jennifer has over a decade of experience at CBC, CTV, and Much music. She helped to develop the super PAC app, helping to make political TV ads more transparent in the 2012 U.S. election. She studied public policy at Harvard University and is a strong advocate for women's and girl's rights. I would now like to ask Jennifer to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Social Work Week

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today to honour social workers here in Alberta and across Canada. This is an opportunity to show our gratitude and respect to the professionals who support Albertans in many different areas, including disability services, employment services, income support, and child intervention, to just name a few. This year the theme is The Power to Empower. I have the incredible opportunity to highlight the next generation of future social workers training for tomorrow.

Trevor Buttery, a placement student in my constituency office, is a first-year social work student at MacEwan University. He chose this profession after working at the Tegler Youth Centre in my colleague's riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. The youth centre empowered Trevor to see the value in creating authentic, lasting relationships that are an important part of a healthy community. These skills became essential and necessary, leading him to pursue a career in social work.

I have been able to observe Trevor as he sharpens his skills. I am so proud to see him grow in his practice of effective advocacy and communication over this past year. Trevor is a great example of the path that many take in becoming social workers. I myself was impacted by a social worker I met who then became a role model for me. She empowered me to pursue a career to help others.

As professionals, social workers make a difference in the lives of so many Albertans. They do so through their professionalism, compassion, and commitment to help and empower others to make a better life. I encourage everyone to continue to thank social workers throughout the year. To all the social workers across Alberta, know that you are appreciated. Your government thanks you for all of the work that you do. Happy Social Work Week.

Co-operation on Economic Development

Mr. Smith: Government is about vision. When conducted properly, it is a carefully orchestrated performance that combines the wishes of the people with the possibilities of the future to produce a harmonious vision, all orchestrated by leadership acting as the conductor of the symphony. When the individual sections are brought together properly, there is a synergy, and government can actually work for the people, as it is intended to do. All of society benefits.

We have seen on many occasions over the last two years how this government is not working for the people of Alberta. Some sections of the orchestra have never been consulted. The government wind section is blowing too much hot air too hard. The percussionists are banging an environmental drum that is drowning out the rest of the financial instruments. Sometimes the audience and musicologists in the opposition try to help the government keep up with the changing times and find a new tempo.

Every once in a while a different conductor takes charge and can make the sections of the band work together in new and harmonious ways. We have a new conductor in the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency, and we are beginning to hear the orchestra tune itself up. Under the direction of the regional hemp committee different sections such as Biocomposites and Hempco; the towns of Drayton Valley, Devon, Warburg, Calmar, and Breton; the counties of Brazeau, Wetaskiwin, Parkland, and Leduc; the Clean Energy Technology Centre; and the Leduc-Nisku business association are all tuning up to compose the industrial hemp supply chain that will diversify the regional economy and create jobs and wealth. A beautiful tune, indeed.

The business sector, local government, and even the provincial government are working together, and the symphony is about to begin. With a little seed capital to develop a few more notes to complete this musical score, Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Justice System Delays

Mr. Jean: Our justice system is in crisis, and it's taken the NDP two years to wake up. Today we finally heard the first Band-Aid to try and stop the tide of accused murderers, predators, and criminals from getting their own get-out-of-jail-free card from the NDP government. These positions are badly needed, but the fact remains that this Justice minister's edict to prosecutors to pull resources away from serious crimes has sent a chill throughout Alberta. Why hasn't the Premier asked her minister to immediately reverse this dangerous new NDP policy?

Ms Hoffman: The member opposite couldn't be further from the truth if he tried, Mr. Speaker. He spent 10 years in Ottawa and never once brought up justice resources. We've been working diligently to make sure that we follow the Jordan decision, which is required of the government, and make sure that we're staffing up with the appropriate resources when and where they need it. These guys on the other side like to pretend that they're Keystone Kops: cut one day; staff up the next. You know what? Speaking of Keystone, we're getting progress on three pipelines.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about dangerous criminals. This is a growing problem that's only going to get much worse. Last year in Ontario, believe it or not, 46 trials were stayed due to delays, but just in the last two months there have been over 200 cases in Alberta that have been stayed. In Ontario the Crown prosecutor association is anticipating that there could be an eventual 6,000 criminal cases stayed or withdrawn as a result of this decision. It's troubling. We need to keep Alberta safe. To the Premier: how many accused criminals does the NDP estimate will see their trials stayed this year?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is one thing for the Leader of the Official Opposition to talk about crime; it's quite another to actually do something about it. We are investing in the system. Let me talk about what the member opposite wanted to do about the justice system. When asked, he said: I think it's going to take a period of time to see where we end up on this matrix. He's

been watching too many movies. We are moving forward on ensuring that the necessary resources are in place.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been waiting over two years for that, and most of it from this government. The NDP soft-on-crime protocol that was released explicitly states that minor files shouldn't be given the same attention. The question is: what's a minor file to the victim of a crime? In what circumstances is a sexual assault ever minor? Will the grandma from Wetaskiwin who had a knife pulled on her last week in an attempted carjacking just have to accept that these things happen because of this NDP policy? There are real people who are the victims of these charges and crimes. What is the Premier going to say to those victims?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, if the member had taken the time to read the policy, he would see that it allows Crown prosecutors to focus on the most serious and violent crimes. A University of Calgary law professor and former Supreme Court of Canada clerk said that it was eminently reasonable and one hundred per cent consistent with prosecutorial discretion and that it was guided by principled and coherent policies. The inconsistencies on that side of the House just keep piling up: one day it's "Cut resources"; the next day it's "Add resources." They can't even decide . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Let's keep moving. The second main question.

Energy Industry Update

Mr. Jean: Just a couple of weeks ago the Finance minister said and assured Albertans that we had turned a corner in our economy, but that's not a reality outside of the dome, Mr. Speaker. Shell is waving goodbye to Alberta, selling almost all of their Alberta oil sands assets just today, and the price of oil has again plummeted under \$50 a barrel. The Premier's plan is not working. Albertans are desperate, hoping the government will finally give them a break and have their backs, but they don't. When will the NDP change course and admit that their plan is simply not working?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite wants that to be the case. He's perpetually cheering for Alberta to fail, but on this side of the House we are going to stand up for Albertans, for Alberta jobs, and for Alberta companies. I'm so encouraged that Canadian Natural president Steve Laut stated that over time, opportunities will be explored to increase the capacity of the Scotford upgrader so that more barrels of bitumen which are produced in Alberta will be upgraded in Alberta. That's good news. [interjections]

Mr. Jean: Tell that to the 200,000 Albertans that are out of work.

The Speaker: Keep it down, folks.

Mr. Jean: In the last few weeks I've been to New York, Toronto, and Washington, and I've asked potential investors what it would take to get our province back on track. They said that with the government we have in charge, we may as well hold up a sign that says: "Alberta is not for them. Alberta is out of business, and we are closed for business." U.S. oil supply is rising. Alberta is losing Shell, a carbon tax is now here, and a set of new regulations is being brought in by this government and is making us far less competitive. When will anyone in this government finally admit that it's time to change course?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we're proud to work alongside major employers in Alberta, including the president of Shell Canada, Michael Crothers, who said, "Shell has long called for effective carbon pricing frameworks. They create powerful economic incentives to reduce emissions and develop cleaner methods of production." We're working with industry. We're creating great opportunities as we move forward. They're standing with us. The only ones standing alone telling people to move their investment to other jurisdictions are the members opposite. I wish they'd stop cheering against Alberta.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, if you talk to real people, they'll tell you that times are tough in Alberta, and, no, they don't feel that it's getting any better whatsoever. They want common sense, and they want to know that common sense isn't spending a billion dollars to kill our coal industry when there are already 100,000 people unemployed. Common sense isn't increasing the cost of gas and heat when Albertans are facing record levels of consumer debt, and common sense isn't capping oil sands growth while we are desperately looking for investment. How can the NDP be so stubborn as to not just do what's best for this province? Use some common sense, and repeal these bad NDP policies.

Ms Hoffman: You know, I mentioned yesterday that I know math is difficult for the other side, so let's take the time to review another formula. We have two new pipeline approvals, Mr. Speaker. If you were to minus that thoughtful made-in-Alberta plan that got us to that point, what would that equal? Fourteen billion dollars less in investment, thousands more lost jobs, and a return to the same old dead-end approach that the member opposite tried for 10 years in Ottawa and failed on. The opposition: it's time to admit that you're wrong. Stop promising to repeal everything that's happened that's actually helping Alberta move forward, and get on board with our new pipelines.

Child Death Review System

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the minister whether her department is even investigating the death of little Serenity. Given that the Serenity case does not fall within the purview of the 73 reported deaths of children in care that the panel is currently discussing, we need to know what went wrong in the Serenity case specifically so similar tragic situations can be prevented in the future and, most importantly, to ensure justice for Serenity and her family. Given that the minister did not actually answer my question, I will ask again: is the Department of Children's Services internally investigating the death of Serenity? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Clearly, all Albertans, including the very passionate, committed staff within Children's Services, care deeply about the death of any child in the system. So, yes – yes – the staff are very passionate about figuring out what the opportunities are to do things differently. Ever since it's happened, they've been working on it. We need to change the death review process. That's what the panel is about. We need, going forward, to work on making the system better so there are not the same concerns that happened in this case because of the previously developed procedures.

Mr. Nixon: Another non answer, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this panel is not the first of its kind in recent years. In January 2014, experts participated in round-

tables to discuss improvements to the child welfare system as a result of deaths of children in care. The Child Intervention Implementation Oversight Committee was appointed to oversee the implementation of numerous recommendations that have come from different review bodies. Will the minister please explain to Albertans how her panel is better than the panels and round-tables of the past? What is the magic ingredient so that we will actually get meaningful change this time? Given her answers on Serenity I'm not holding my breath.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that our government has been on the record from long before becoming government, as an opposition, as very passionate about ensuring that change happened in the system.

Mr. Speaker, there is the commitment that resulted in a separate Minister of Children's Services, once again, the commitment that developed a panel that will engage in true engagement with the people who are on the front lines and the people out in indigenous communities and beyond to ensure that we get to the right answers on this and actually take action to ensure that the system is finally improved.

Mr. Nixon: In 2015 it was strongly recommended to the minister to create a multidisciplinary child death review committee led by the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. I requested that all panel members receive briefing notes prepared by or for the relevant government departments regarding this recommendation. We did not receive this. We were told in December 2016, three months ago, that the department's executive director met with the Chief Medical Examiner to explore this possibility. Will the minister please tell us why it took so long to have this meeting and whether the government will be proceeding with implementing this recommendation? Why or why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The whole intention of having the child intervention panel and looking at the death review process was to make sure that we made the very best choice going forward to reconcile the fact that right now there are as many as half a dozen separate reviews. I don't want to pre-empt the work of the panel. There is important work to be done there by all people working together within this House. I anticipate that those recommendations will provide some guidance as to how to reconcile the past processes that haven't worked and build a new one going forward that's in the best interests of the children, their families, and the staff who take care of them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The leader of the third party.

AIMCo Board of Directors

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night at the heritage fund standing committee meeting the CEO of AIMCo said that the removal of sections 5 and 6 of the regulations came as a surprise, and he called it "not a welcome surprise." AIMCo's governance structure and independence are, he said, "sacred cornerstones" that require directors to have financial expertise. Minister, AIMCo oversees \$90 billion of public funds, including the heritage fund. Why did you not even consult with AIMCo about removing the

requirement for board members to be qualified? Are you just smarter than the best investment team in the business?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've got great confidence in the professionals over at AIMCo, and they make sound investment decisions for Alberta. They are the best in the business. I want you to know that Mr. Uebelein also said something else. He also said this at the committee last night. He stated that independence "has not been encumbered." This government will not encumber their independence. They are doing the things we want them to do. [interjections] They are not being instructed to invest anywhere else. They are not ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you're going to keep talking to me, right?

Mr. McIver: Those professionals criticized you last night, Minister.

Let's look at your claim that section 5 is now redundant. We looked it up. It's not redundant. The repealed regulation said, "Individuals appointed to the board must have proven and demonstrable experience and expertise in investment management." The new ABC act vaguely mentions identifying skills, knowledge, and expertise in a generic framework, which is kind of vague. Will you commit right now, Minister, to not appointing any NDP hacks to AIMCo in order to push investments toward an NDP world view?

Mr. Ceci: You know, I'm not going to apologize for trying to make the appointment process more open and transparent across ABCs. I'm not going to apologize for getting people on boards for what they know as opposed to who they know on that side. I'm not going to apologize for opening up this process so it's online so that anybody can apply to ABCs, and they have to have qualifications. We got two excellent people recently as a result of our application process, Ken Kroner and Phyllis Clark. Both of them have stellar – stellar – credentials.

Mr. McIver: I guess the minister won't apologize for appointing Ray Martin to NAIT.

At last night's committee meeting opposition members asked for the minister to show up and defend his dangerous and politically motivated change to AIMCo. The committee has agreed to invite the minister to attend and address concerns about repealing sections 5 and 6. Minister, will you personally show up at the next meeting of the trust fund to answer for your reckless decision in cancelling sections 5 and 6? [interjections]

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier. [interjections] Order, please.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: The member opposite likes to throw mud and run away, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not going to let him do that. I'm going to be proud to stand up for the fact that somebody who has been a long-time public servant, somebody who has coached, somebody who has taught, somebody who's been a councillor, somebody who's served decades in the public, somebody who's on the Edmonton public school board making sure that kids in Alberta have an opportunity to have career pathways that stretch beyond the K to 12 system, well into postsecondary – in a letter NAIT actually said that Mr. Martin understands governance, having served on

several boards over the course of his career; it's clear that Mr. Martin cares deeply for our province and for its people.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. [interjections] Order, please. The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Transportation Infrastructure in Fort Saskatchewan

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud to represent the good people of Fort Saskatchewan in this Legislature. For forty years residents and industry have been frustrated by the lack of investment in critical infrastructure by previous governments, and the ongoing issues with highway 15 and the traffic congestion have only gotten worse with a booming population and steady growth in our oil and gas industry. What is the Minister of Transportation going to do to finally fix decades of neglect?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by thanking that hon. member for her advocacy on this and many other issues that affect her constituency.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the problems in Fort Saskatchewan relative to congestion . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Proceed, hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. If the hon. member is finished, Mr. Speaker, I'll resume.

The Speaker: Well, I want you to continue. Please keep going.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I think it's critical that we recognize that there are many problems around this province that have been neglected by the previous government. This is one of them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Littlewood: Mr. Speaker, I think it's unfortunate that members in this Assembly on the other side are making fun of the fact that people have died on that bridge and on those roads over the last number of years, and no one did anything about it. Given that the two-lane bridge creates a bottleneck and then major safety concerns that are not only frustration but accidents and loss of lives, what is this minister going to do to address these grave concerns?

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

The Speaker: Point of order noted. [interjection] Hon. member. The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Sad, Mr. Speaker, that after decades of neglect the Progressive Conservatives are still yapping about this.

Mr. Speaker, there are real, serious problems in Fort Saskatchewan with congestion and within the surrounding area. It's very unfortunate the previous government didn't deal with it. I can't really go any further than that at this time other than to say that there are many competing priorities in this province because the neglect of the previous government was so, so, so bad over so many years, but this government cares about Alberta families. We want to make life better for Alberta families.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Littlewood: Given how important this trade corridor is to the economic development of Alberta's Industrial Heartland and the

benefits that it brings to all of Alberta and given that this is the best time to move forward with investment in infrastructure, when can we expect improvement on this issue?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to making life better for Albertans, and that includes making sure that we improve the infrastructure and the transportation network of this province. We're committed to doing that. I can't give the hon. member any kind of specific answer at this time, but I want to tell her that this government cares about the people of Fort Saskatchewan and appreciates her strong advocacy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

AIMCo Board of Directors (continued)

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Finance minister repealed sections 5 and 6 of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation regulations, which means that the qualifications required to become an AIMCo board member are nonexistent within the regulation. Removing these qualifications erodes public confidence in the NDP government and could be seen as a way for the minister to appoint less-qualified people of the NDP's friends. The minister needs to be cognizant that this is how cronyism starts. Why does the minister feel that it's necessary for him to meddle with the Alberta heritage trust fund?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: Again, nothing could be further from the truth. What we're doing is we're opening up the appointment process, so anyone – anyone – can put their name forward. This is the kind of person you get when you do that. You get a Ken Kroner, who previously managed \$4 trillion in assets in a U.S. fund. You get a person like Phyllis Clark, who was a former vice-president of administration and CFO of the University of Alberta. You get stellar people.

It wasn't before it changed. You know, we changed the process on September 21, 2016. These people were appointed more than two months later.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it ain't broken, don't fix it.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that there seems to be a lot of skulduggery going on within this government and given that the financial state of the government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Cyr: . . . and their reckless, irresponsible spending and debt accumulation habits are a deep concern for Albertans and given that AIMCo was established as an independent body responsible for the Alberta heritage trust fund, pensions, and other major funds, to the minister: why are you trying to erode the independence of this body?

Mr. Ceci: You know, that's again further from the truth than I can even imagine. The opposition seems to think that because we've allowed AIMCo to invest more money in Alberta, we're somehow interfering with AIMCo. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Ceci: We are helping Albertans. We are helping companies in Alberta get through this downturn by a portion of the heritage trust fund going into good investments in this province. That's open. That's transparent. That's not interfering. Mr. Uebelein was quoted saying the same thing, that independence "has not been encumbered." That's what Uebelein said.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He wouldn't have spoken at all had you actually not put his independence at risk.

Given that last night the Deputy Minister of Finance stated that there were no changes in quality to the heritage trust fund management board nominee process and given that the management board CEO stated, "These recent changes to the AIMCo regulation actually did come as a surprise to us and, frankly, not a welcome surprise," Minister, who was right? The CEO or the deputy minister? Why did you fail to consult with this important body within Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: Again it's not accurate. There were consultations back and forth.

You know, the process, because it's more open and transparent . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Ceci: . . . is a problem for these people. You know, they don't want openness and transparency. They want to put their friends on different boards. We're not doing that. We've cut CEOs' salaries and the perks that these people put in place. Those club memberships were there. We cut them. We're not ever going to apologize for improving governance in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I really don't want to go out into the cold air, but the heat in this place encourages me to do so. Please keep it down and respectful.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Public Service Compensation

Dr. Starke: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The public service is comprised of dedicated and hard-working Albertans, and I appreciate their efforts in serving us. These workers recognize the financial difficulties facing our province. They see their friends and neighbours facing layoffs, reductions in hours worked, and wage rollbacks. Yet earlier this week a contract with over 13,000 AUPE members was ratified, giving wage increases of 1.2 and 0.8 per cent retroactively to April 1, 2015. Now, these are modest increases, but to the Labour minister: at a time when most Albertans are happy to just have a job, does she feel that the wage increases set an appropriate example?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, the member of the opposition started out correctly. He said that these were arbitrated settlements that go back to 2015 and '16. These will clean off the amount of organized settlements that need to be taken care of, and when we go forward to '17 and '18-19, we'll be taking care of those ourselves. The arbitration was not our decision.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the future. Given that the data on page 10 of the Bargaining Update 2017 document from the Labour ministry, which I will table, shows that 2017 wage settlements in Alberta for unionized public-sector workers average a 2.94 per cent increase and given that wages make up nearly 50 per cent of the government's budget, can the Minister of Finance explain how he will hold the line on government spending when public-sector union settlements are increasing by nearly 3 per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. You know, the opposition seems to think it's in the interests of Albertans to throw contracts and other things out the window or to negotiate here in the Legislature. We're not going to do that. We're going to negotiate at the table. We respect the hard work of individuals who work for public services. We're involved in many public-sector negotiations right now. That is going to occur at the table, and we'll show that the proof will be in the pudding when we bring those contracts in.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must say that it's a bit rich for this government to talk about tearing up contracts.

When the current government was over here in opposition, it was fond of accusing the previous government of what they called looking after our friends, but given that in 2016 Alberta's average weekly earnings decreased by 2.4 per cent while public-sector wage settlements increased by 2.2 per cent, to the Labour minister: does she feel it appropriate to look after her unionized friends while non-unionized Albertans face wage cuts and job losses?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk about some of the thoughtful and prudent actions we're taking to reduce staffing costs because that side doesn't seem to think we're doing anything. We've instituted a hiring restraint across the civil service. We've frozen the salaries of management and other non-union staff. We've frozen wages for all of the people in this Legislature: cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff. We've frozen managers' and other people's wages for two years, and we've gotten rid of high-priced salaries that you put in place over there and golf memberships as well.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yesterday, on International Women's Day, I looked to one of the strongest female leaders the world has ever known, Margaret Thatcher. The Iron Lady stands as an example to the world to follow of fiscal discipline, economic prosperity, and national revival. I see none of that in this government. The NDP promised to balance the budget by 2017, then by 2018 and '19, but since then they've abandoned even a theoretical return to balanced budgets altogether. When the minister tables his budget next week, will it include a specific and credible date for a return to balance?

Mr. Ceci: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me start off by saying that we're not going to invade Argentina, all right?

You know, what we're seeing in this province is a return to some growth. We're seeing the recession start to recede, and we're seeing a little more sunshine peeking through every day. Drilling activity is up, we're seeing capital investments up, and we're seeing jobs return. Those things will help us get back to balance a lot sooner than that side, who does nothing to help us get back to balance.

2:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: But they have declared war on taxpayers.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP have ignored repeated warnings from the opposition that their reckless fiscal policy would lead to a downgrade in Alberta's credit rating, in October 2015 the NDP repealed Alberta's fiscal accountability act and imposed a meaningless debt ceiling of 15 per cent of GDP. It was so meaningless that just six months later they repealed the legislated debt cap when it became clear that they would bust it. This led to an almost immediate downgrade in our hard-earned credit rating. Does the minister plan on breaking any more of our fiscal accountability laws or . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, our focus on this side of the House is on making life better for everyday Albertans. We're not going to take the collapse in oil prices as a way to mess up Albertans and make it more expensive for them. We're going to work with the stuff we've got, and the stuff we've got is goods, programs, and services. We've got great fundamentals in this province. We're going to invest in infrastructure, and we're going to take down the cost of government slowly but surely and get back to balance.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, in the government's fiscal update they announced that even though revenues were up, spending would be up even more. The biggest reason for this was a \$1.3 billion payout of the government's bungled early shutdown of the coal industry. This money was not authorized by the Legislature and according to the Auditor General was a direct violation of the NDP's own Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Yesterday the minister admitted that he did in fact break his own law. Will anyone be held accountable for breaking their own laws?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, you know, the hon. member across the way forgot to mention one really important expense line that we had in Q3. That expense line was over \$700 million for the people of Wood Buffalo so they wouldn't be put out of their homes any longer than was necessary. So the fire was fought. We did things that made life better for the people of Wood Buffalo, and we'll make things better for the people of Alberta going forward, too.

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

Support for Business

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is picking winners and losers among our businesses. One example of this is through the summer temporary employment program. To qualify for STEP funding, employers must be registered under an act of the Legislature, but the verification process requires a corporate number. I talked to a constituent of mine who has run a registered business for decades. She was denied this opportunity due to lack of a corporate number. We tried to work with the ministry before the deadline passed, but no solution was reached. Will the minister please explain this discrimination against sole proprietorships?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is very proud to have restored the summer temporary employment program, which has provided employment for nearly 3,000 young people. The PC government called it a crutch when they cancelled

the program, that had been in place since the Peter Lougheed days in 1972. Now, our government also did something historic. We made it available to small business for the first time, something the previous government had never considered. Small business is now being served by this program, and every year we review the program and make sure it's serving the best possible for Albertans.

Mr. van Dijken: Sole proprietorships still are not eligible.

Another example of picking winners and losers by this government. Given that 21 and a half million dollars from the residential no-charge energy savings program should have been welcome news for Alberta businesses already providing these products and services and given that Alberta entrepreneurs are being left on the sidelines as the NDP takes care of their big friend Ecofitt, will the minister please justify her decision not to engage the services of Alberta businesses that were already established throughout the province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this was a contract that was awarded leveraging the expertise of the private sector and ensuring that we have the lowest cost delivery mechanism possible. These programs will save Alberta homeowners \$6.3 million in electricity savings. Already 60,000 Albertans have signed up for the program. You know, we are not about to erect a number of interprovincial trade barriers, slam the door on external investment, as the Wildrose would do. We didn't have an energy efficiency program because the previous government failed . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that this government is seizing carbon tax dollars from everyday Albertans to pay for this Ecofitt program and given that the government has recently announced the residential and commercial solar program, also funded by carbon tax dollars, and given that Albertans want to be reassured that they will be supporting small businesses within Alberta's solar sector, will the minister please explain how Albertans can be confident that this government won't be sending more profits and tax dollars to companies from other jurisdictions?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it is only the Wildrose who wants to slam the door on the millions and, in fact, billions in investments in renewables, in efficiency, on all of the private-sector interest there is in Alberta right now. They do that because they are more interested in ideology than they are in moving our province forward. Our government, on this side, is worried about hard hats. On that side they're busy spreading, you know, conspiracy theories from the sewers of the Internet. They're more interested in tinfoil hats.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Agricultural Trade

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry recently returned from a trade mission to the United Arab Emirates and India. As I've said before, Alberta producers need the ability to expand to new markets and explore growth opportunities overseas, so I support him on these missions. The minister met with government officials from Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and India on this trade mission. To the minister: did you sign any new agreements with these countries to help expand export markets for Alberta's agricultural producers?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I very much appreciate the question from the member. Yes, indeed, I was on a recent trade mission to the United Arab Emirates and India. Interesting to note that I was actually the first minister of agriculture from Alberta ever to visit India. It's a growing market. It's on the cusp of being the third-largest economy in the world and is very close to being the most populous country in the world, too. It's very important we're there. It's very important that government is there to open those doors for our business to continue to thrive in that burgeoning economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Greenway asked the minister over a year ago to give an update on the status of the agricultural working group that was formed with Alberta's trade agreement with the state of Punjab in India and given that we still have not received an update from the minister to date, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: can you update the House on the status of this agricultural working group with India?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I actually had an opportunity to meet with officials from the various states in India. They were still very much interested in signing agreements with us. They are the world's largest democracy, and many of the states are in the midst of a political election right now. Even though they were very interested, they couldn't at this time make a commitment, but I absolutely understand what the member is saying.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you have been on two trade missions to Asia in the last six months and given that Alberta's ag exports in the last year have decreased by over \$3 million and given that in 2016 the number of agriculture jobs in Alberta has gone down by more than 6,000, to the minister: how many new agricultural jobs and markets for Albertans have your trade missions produced?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. You know, in 2015 we had a dry year. Last year we had some other challenges in agriculture. We always do. The fact is that our cash receipts in our farming communities are still going up. These markets are continuing to be extremely important. In India, for example, canola, wheat, and pulses continue to be our strong commodities. We have opportunity in swine genetics and in other commodities as well. Those are important. As we diversify the economy, the jobs will be there as we expand these markets.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

2:30

Educational Curriculum Review

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a teacher and parent I know how important it is that we have curriculum that is relevant. I've

had the chance to take part in curriculum sessions and have heard first-hand from participants – these are teachers and university professors – that they are very concerned about their privacy. To the Minister of Education: what reassurances can you provide to these hard-working volunteers and Albertans that they will not fall victim to attacks?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It should be noted that there are more than 300 individuals that are working on the curriculum, and they are all volunteers. They are undertaking these responsibilities in addition to their regular jobs. These are teachers and education professionals, not politicians and public figures, leading the work. Attacks on volunteers are irresponsible and reckless, and I will not tolerate them.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you. Given that my constituents are very keen to be involved in this process and that I've fielded many questions from the public on when they will be able to have more input into this process, to the same minister: when will further consultation take place?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important that Albertans know that they will be a part of this process every step of the way. The very first interaction: we had more than 32,000 responses with our survey. We have the curriculum working groups now working with that information, and then they will loop back, and again have public consultation. This will continue on over the next six years. This is the largest and most transparent process that Alberta Education has ever endeavoured to take on. During the course of this work there will be a variety of opportunities for Albertans to interact with the curriculum.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I hear from teachers every day and given that curriculum changes often increase workload for teachers, to the same minister: what supports will be put in place to ensure that teachers can implement this new curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. This is an important point, Mr. Speaker, because, of course, we can develop curriculum, but if it's not interfaced, if you don't have the training and the acceptance of teaching professionals and families and so forth, then it's not going to be successful. So we are working with the curriculum development and management application to interact with the curriculum in ways that have never been possible before. It's an entirely digital, bilingual platform that allows for comment and interaction and sharing information every step of the way. The curriculum then can also be updated as it's needed. It won't have to sit fallow like it did for between eight and 30 years.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Caribou Management

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone knows that this

government has a horrendous track record on consultation. Given that it appears this government has no plan to debate their caribou plan in the House before the federally mandated due date for provincial plans is reached, has the government initiated a socioeconomic impact assessment on the impacted regions and province as a whole, and why are local municipalities' expertise and concerns not being proactively addressed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we do have a number of deadlines looming from the federal government to file our range plans, which is why in some of the more difficult areas we put a draft range plan out for consultation. I myself have visited those communities and a number of the forestry facilities there as well. We've also had really good conversations with Saskatchewan and B.C., taking what I would argue is a common position to the federal government in terms of help and flexibility in ensuring that we recover these species, yes, but that we don't adversely impact our forestry and oil and gas sectors. I'll have more to say about that in supplementals.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. I guess no assessment plan is in the works. The communities definitely don't feel like they're being consulted.

Given that last summer we had a first look at the caribou draft plan and that since then there have been multiple studies and opinions on that plan and given that the federal government deadline is looming, to the minister: what parts of this draft plan are already being enacted?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it is simply not true that there haven't been a number of consultations, both from my office but also the minister of forestry, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Also, the federal government has committed to come and meet with the communities that are affected by these range plans. It was a commitment that Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Alberta worked towards securing at the federal-provincial-territorial meeting a couple of weeks ago, and the federal government will be ensuring that the socioeconomic effects of responding to the recovery of this species are adequately reflected in their response to our range plans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. I asked what parts of this draft plan are already being enacted, and I guess I got no answer to that.

Given that this government constantly uses the federal government mandate for species at risk as justification for these plans, has the minister met with her federal counterpart or colleagues from B.C. and Saskatchewan to discuss species at risk? If so, when, and what was discussed?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that's the problem when you pre-script your questions, that they're already answered. We, of course, have met with B.C. and Saskatchewan. We, of course, have met with the federal government, both the minister and the parliamentary secretary. We had a federal-provincial-territorial meeting that was in large part focused on caribou recovery plans. The fact of the matter is that we must recover this species. The fact of the matter is also that we have a number of different pressures on

that landscape, including a thriving forestry industry. We have made the commitment to jobs and making life more affordable in this province, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Opiod Use

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday every opposition caucus urged the government to call a public health emergency due to Alberta's opiod crisis, but government won't do so. Perhaps that's because it doesn't know its full extent. Minister, the Q4 opiod meds misuse report does not include final 2016 numbers for nonfentanyl-related opiod deaths. Why are those numbers missing, and doesn't that misrepresent to Albertans the magnitude of this crisis?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the fourth-quarter report that was recently tabled, we were able to get quite a number of metrics included in it; however, because of the process that we follow here in Alberta for the toxicology reports, some of the information has not yet been available. We are working diligently with our ministry and with Justice to have those numbers available as soon as possible, and we will be updating accordingly.

Mr. Gill: I have the numbers for that, Minister. I've done my work.

Given that the Q3 report listed 330 total opiod deaths, but those figures were not updated in the Q4, and given that if those deaths remain on track, the number would be 422, and given that we are in fact seeing far more than one death a day due to opiods, to the Premier: now that you understand that your government is facing a more frightening reality, will you finally declare an emergency?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've said repeatedly, we are continuing to evaluate the tools that we have available to us now as well as any that would become available should a public health emergency be declared. At this moment it is our assessment that all of the tools that we need to address this crisis are currently available. We are working diligently moving forward on addressing this crisis by addressing harm reduction, treatment, surveillance, and enforcement.

Mr. Gill: I guess two deaths a day aren't enough.

Given that the former government invested millions into the medical examiner's office to expand and modernize it and given that the newly renovated office includes a world-class toxicology lab and given that providing police and EMS with rapid information on opiod deaths will help them target resources where they need them the most, to the same minister: now that you know the full extent of the crisis, will you direct the ME's office to provide stats on opiod deaths faster than every three months?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that this is a major crisis in our province. That's why we've taken such rapid action on a number of fronts, including with the OCME. We have massively changed the way we take and code data. I'm incredibly proud to say that Alberta had the first-known test to detect carfentanil in blood. We've added two new medical examiners as well as a research officer so that they can help get

these statistics out the door. Albertans want action, and that's what this government is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Transportation Infrastructure in Cochrane

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The charming and historic town of Cochrane was the second-fastest growing small municipality in Canada according to the recent census. That's no surprise considering that Cochrane is a great place to live and raise a family. But the former Conservative government failed to support Cochrane's growth when they broke their promise and removed the critical infrastructure for the highway 1A and 22 intersection from the capital plan. [interjection] To the Minister of Transportation: when can the residents of Cochrane and all of those who use this important intersection . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Westhead: . . . expect to see shovels in the ground?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question, hon. member. You know, I want to thank him for his advocacy on this important issue. We know that Cochrane is a rapidly growing city. We know that there is serious congestion at the intersection of highways 22 and 1A and that this causes delays and safety concerns. All I can say is that the member will have to wait. There are many competing pressures on the capital plan, but we're going to try and make sure that we keep Albertans safe because we stand up for Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that highway 1A acts as a backup when there's an accident on the Trans-Canada and given that I've seen highway 1A jammed all the way to Seebe on these occasions, will the minister commit to upgrading the highway 1A and 22 intersection to ensure that it can handle these emergency situations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Obviously, emergency problems are a great concern. Safety is our top priority. This government is interested in making sure that the transportation network serves the needs to make life better for Albertans and Alberta families. We're committed to doing that. Other than that, I think the member knows that I can't make any commitments at the present time. There are many competing priorities for the capital plan, but I want him to know that we have the best interests of Cochrane at heart.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud that our government is committed to build the infrastructure that our communities need despite the opposition's calls for us to cut this funding. Again to the Minister of Infrastructure: will you at least ensure that the residents of Cochrane receive a fair share of this funding to support the growth of this vibrant community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have the Wildrose five-year fiscal plan here, and it does indicate that they would reduce capital spending in the province of Alberta, compared to what we're doing, by \$9 billion. That's a lot of roads that don't get built, a lot of hospitals and schools that don't. The opposition is interested in cutting. The government of Alberta is interested in making sure that we stand up for Alberta families.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Opioid Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week in a rare display of nonpartisan co-operation we held an important debate on the opioid crisis, and I thank my colleagues across both sides for that.

We also heard from two courageous advocates for better education and more action on the devastating effects of opioid abuse and addiction. Petra Schulz, who lost her son Danny, works with Moms Stop the Harm, a network of Canadian mothers and families whose loved ones have died from substance misuse. Rosalind Davis, who lost her partner Nathan, started the Changing the Face of Addiction organization, a not-for-profit seeking political change and reduced stigma on drug and addictions issues. They say that the government's refusal to recognize a state of emergency is unacceptable. It perpetuates stigma about opioid-related deaths.

To its credit, the government has taken a number of positive steps, but its approach has mainly been reactive, not integrated across government and nongovernment organizations. Opioid-related overdoses and deaths are reaching unprecedented levels and have now become a national crisis. We don't have the whole picture yet because the data is simply not available, but what we do know is deeply troubling. In 2016 there were 343 deaths just from fentanyl and many more from other opioids yet to be classified. This 33 per cent increase in one year shows that the crisis is growing at an alarming rate.

If we were getting ahead of it, then I might agree with the NDP, but we're five years into this, and the government, by its own admission, is still developing the strategy. We require focused leadership and a crossdepartment strategy that would provide co-ordination between all government ministries and nongovernment sectors of society.

Finally, we need to recognize this for what it is, an emergency, and use every means at our disposal to save Albertans' lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Refugees

Mr. Dang: A family sells everything they own so that a young boy and his brother can board a boat that's headed to a Malaysian refugee camp. At the same time, a young girl is eagerly reading a letter from her older sister who has landed as a refugee in Canada. Her sister is in school studying, trying to get a job to help bring her family over as economic immigrants. One of the boats in that convoy is raided by pirates, and many of their family and friends are killed.

Fortunately, those boys eventually make it here to Edmonton and Canada. They'll work minimum wage jobs. They'll try hard to make ends meet. Eventually one of those boys will go to NAIT, and

he'll complete an IT certificate program. He'll meet that young girl, who's now immigrated to Canada. They'll fall in love and get married on Canada Day. They'll have one daughter, Mr. Speaker, named Tiffany. She'll go on to attend the University of Toronto and Harvard University for her master's in landscape architecture. Now, they'll have one boy, as well. He's fairly average. He's a little bit of a nerd, but on May 5, 2015, he will become the youngest elected official ever in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this is the story of one refugee family. It's one story. My parents, Cindy and Daniel, were given the opportunity to earn everything while starting with nothing. I'm proud of my family's past. We worked hard for what we have.

But when the opposition attends rallies with so-called media organizations that suggest my family and families like it should not even have been allowed into this country, it shows just how far out of touch the opposition is from everyday Albertans. Refugees contribute to the rich history and culture of this province. They contribute to the economy, the diversity, and our society. Albertans know this, Mr. Speaker. They take pride in the welcoming and inclusive society we have built. Our government knows this and hears this, and I'm proud to be part of a government that stands up for compassion, tolerance, and opportunity.

The opposition has shown time and time again that they refuse to stand up for these values. Shame on them, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Rural School Councils

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the Rural Education Symposium, which is an annual forum for rural communities and schools to engage in a discussion about the role of education in the ever-resilient rural communities. Today I have invited to the Legislature a few hard-working representatives that contribute to my community and rural communities. In the constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Pauline and Liz are part of the Ministik school council, and Laura and Elyse are here on behalf of the Uncas school council.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the work and commitment of these women and all parent councils for their contribution to the school community. School council members work together to support student learning, whether it's fundraising for playgrounds, organizing special theme days, or school recreational activities. These parent councils are vital in providing their unique perspectives and ideas that contribute to school community and school district success. Participation in school councils not only allows parents the chance to demonstrate their support for their children, but it's also an opportunity to share their knowledge and skills and have a direct impact on their child's education. As representatives of other parents and school communities they are often called upon to be advocates, a voice for the collective as they consult with other stakeholders.

Recently I have seen this during the Ministik school closure consultation, and as a former educational assistant working in schools and as their MLA, I have experienced first-hand the value that they bring to the table. For their contributions I would like to thank them and parents throughout the province, for all of their hard work, for being a partner in education.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that is making the lives of parents throughout the province better. Whether it's by reducing school fees or by working and engaging with rural educators and parents, this government recognizes the importance of equitable access to education, regardless of location.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Government Policies

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Say what you will about his politics, but the late Premier Ralph Klein truly was a man of the people. With a larger-than-life personality, he gave Albertans a host of witty one-liners and analogies. One of his favourites was a condition, common to politicians who spend too much time in the Legislature, known as dome disease. According to Klein you're fully consumed with that disease when you start to think that unless it's happening under the dome, it is not happening at all.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, there's a growing disconnect between government and the vast majority of Albertans. Life under the dome is pretty cushy for friends of this government. There haven't been layoffs or even pay freezes for many of them. The government has gone out of its way to stack Alberta's senior political ranks and advisory panels with a tidal wave of activists. Outside the Legislature, everyday Albertans face a much harsher reality. Layoffs and business closures have devastated well over a hundred thousand Albertans. Calgary's unemployment rate has ballooned above 10 per cent. The city's downtown office space has 30 per cent availability.

Albertans know that it's a hand up, a business-friendly environment, not a government handout that's needed to restore investor confidence and bring back jobs. This government has increased taxes in almost every other possible way. This year the carbon tax will see government take \$3 billion from our struggling families to fund ideological projects, a tax that less than 35 per cent of Albertans support. At a time when so many folks are struggling just to get by, Albertans expect government to present policies that will get them back to work and not add burdensome taxes that are clearly out of touch with the present reality. That is what Premier Klein would call a telltale symptom. Mr. Speaker, this is what the doctor would diagnose as a chronic case of dome disease.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling of Public Documents Statements during Tablings

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think this might be an appropriate time for me to make a ruling on the point of order that was raised yesterday by the Government House Leader concerning a purported tabling by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks attempted to table an excerpt from *Alberta Hansard* pertaining to a past statement made by the Government House Leader in the Assembly. It should be noted that this document was not recorded in the March 8, 2017, edition of the Votes and Proceedings, pending my ruling on the point of order. The point of order was raised by the Government House Leader and is found on page 129 of yesterday's *Hansard* and has to do with the appropriateness of tabling *Alberta Hansard* excerpts.

I deferred my ruling to check rulings on the subject of tablings and the tabling of *Alberta Hansard* in particular. I found that there have indeed been rulings on this point by former presiding officers of this Assembly. On August 20, 1996, Deputy Speaker Tannas ruled that "excerpts from *Hansard* are not appropriate tablings, as the words contained are in fact on the record and tabling, therefore, is really a redundant action." This ruling can be found on page 2248 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. Similarly, Speaker Kowalski stated, "Public documents such as excerpts from *Hansard* or

statutes of Alberta should not be tabled” in his ruling from November 25, 1998, on the tabling of documents. This ruling can be found on 2089 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. Hon. members, after checking, I have concluded that it is not appropriate for members to table excerpts from *Hansard* even though there have been rare exceptions to this rule.

In addition to the prohibition against the tabling of *Alberta Hansard*, I want to take this opportunity to clarify some of the rules respecting tablings for the benefit of all hon. members. Comments about the tabling must be brief and should only describe the document itself and not elaborate on its contents. As some of you may have heard yesterday, I made a comment to one of the members about editorializing: it's not permitted. Tabling Returns and Reports should not be used as an opportunity to make a member's statement. Lastly, tablings are just that. They should not be used as props or exhibits.

Hon. members, I have learned that Alberta has some of the most permissive rules concerning tablings of anywhere in Canada. These few restrictions allow for wide latitude in tablings. Please do not move the boundaries any further.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respect your ruling. I wish to table on day 2 of my 14 days of tabling a letter from myself to the Government House Leader titled Dear Brian, You Said – and then I quote some *Hansard* – signed by myself. These are letters to the Government House Leader citing *Hansard*. I wish to table the five requisite copies concerning the Public Affairs Bureau.

The Speaker: I do hope that the boundaries have not moved, as I alluded to in the ruling.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They are letters.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is a copy of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation regulations, sections 5 and 6, indicating the high level of financial knowledge to be on the board, and also the public agencies governance framework, which indicates the much lower level of financial knowledge to be on the AIMCo board.

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will refrain from editorializing as I table five copies of an iPolitics article from yesterday, where opposition party mentor Preston Manning praises the carbon tax and tells conservatives to stop attacking it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Ms Jansen: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I just have two more if I can beg your indulgence.

The Speaker: Two more.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have here five copies of a Facebook page where the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, who attended the antifeminist Wildrose on Campus kickoff, says, “Wildrose spirit is alive and well in Calgary.”

The Speaker: Thank you. Keep going. Number 3.

Ms Jansen: Number 3, Mr. Speaker: another Facebook page where the Wildrose on Campus announces that they are featured on the Wildrose Party website.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter and a photocopy of a coin from Mr. and Mrs. Cluney of Willingdon. They have decided to return their entire Alberta seniors' benefit increase for this year, 2017. They are throwing in an extra penny to bring it up to a solid quarter. That's right. They each got an increase from the Alberta seniors' benefit of 1 cent per month.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the requisite number of copies of a document that I referenced during my question in question period today, entitled *Bargaining Update*, dated February 2017.

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a press release done by the Alberta government, Alberta Modernizing Renewal Reminders. It speaks of \$3 million a year that the government will save from sending out mail, if you will, in Service Alberta. I would like to remind the minister that there are still several questions that are unanswered as to why she needs \$900,000 added to her budget for postage.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Bilous, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, response to Written Question 18, asked for by Mr. Cooper on October 31, 2016: what are the deliverables from the Premier's trip from April 27 to 29, 2016, to Washington, DC?

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we had at least one point of order today. Is that correct? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Point of Order Intemperate Language

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I've been here for a little while. There's one member who's been on the job just slightly longer. I think others also know full well that the volume can increase in this Chamber on Thursdays, but that's no excuse for something that happened at approximately 2:09 today. I was actually, on this occasion, sitting back and watching the fireworks, minding my own business, when the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville looked straight at me and said out loud words – I'll phrase it this way – that rhyme with “what up.”

Mrs. Littlewood: That's not true.

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Rodney: They rhyme with “what up.” I'm pretty sure she wasn't just saying hello to me.

It's clearly unparliamentary. There are many citations, including 23(j). There are many precedents. But out of respect for the

proceedings of this House and the time to debate very important topics, I would like to suggest that perhaps the member could stand and apologize, and we could all get on with our day.

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, I haven't been in this Chamber for as long as some, but I think I have been here long enough to say that this is fairly frivolous. The member opposite knows very well what was said, and what he quoted was not it.

I'm disappointed to see that members opposite were heckling the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville while she asked a very important question involving lives lost by members of her constituency, and I'm equally disappointed that they would raise a point of order on this.

Oral Question Period is a time when members, including government members, are permitted to ask questions of a minister of the Crown about projects and initiatives that are important to them. It was absolutely in order for the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville to ask this question, and it's really quite ridiculous that, you know, when the members opposite were yelling heckles and trying to shout her down while she stood up for her constituents that when she turned and said, "Shame, shame" to them, they're now taking up these ridiculous antics. Unfortunately, it's unlikely that this was captured by the Blues, but I am assured that those were the words that were used.

Mr. Speaker, this is just an absurd use of the House's time.

The Speaker: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just in recognition of the decorum in the House and what we try to maintain as respect for one another, I know that the heckling does get a little bit out of hand sometimes. At the same time, you know, we've experienced flipping the birds and mouthings of... [interjection] Yeah, from the government side. This is a third example. The member wasn't the only one that saw it. There were other people that saw it.

So the proper thing to do would be to stand up, apologize, and withdraw.

The Speaker: Any other members that would like to speak to the point of order? The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say that as the seatmate of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I was able to hear precisely what she said. It was not what is being alleged by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. Please.

Hon. members, there have been other points of order on this kind of subject matter before. While it's not always popular, I sense, to say so, I did not hear or see the particular comment that was raised in the point of order. You have heard in the past that I've ruled because of that.

Nonetheless, hon. members, there were some words that were used that just recently we discussed in this House and that I made a ruling on with respect to comments made to the other parties. I just want both sides of the House to be, again, more conscious when they say things, whether I see it or not, that you are speaking to one of your fellow colleagues in this Legislature. When you show respect for the other members, you're showing respect for the people that they represent here. I would hope that you remember that each time any comment is made.

I leave that, simply. In this particular instance I did not have the privilege of hearing it, but I rule that there was no point of order. However, there were some other comments made that I thought were getting awfully close to the line.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good afternoon, members. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2016-17, No. 2 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we commence this afternoon's consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to remind you where the committee left off in the rotation. When the Committee of Supply reported progress this morning during the Official Opposition's allotment, the minister had four minutes remaining in her speaking time. The committee has 44 minutes of consideration remaining.

As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which means the rotation will then proceed as follows. For the next 10 minutes the members of the third party, if any, and the minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may speak. For the next 10 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent member and the minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may speak. For the next 10 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may speak. The rotation will then repeat for any time remaining.

Speaking times are now limited to five minutes; however, provided the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking time, with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period.

Finally, at the conclusion of six hours of consideration, or earlier if no members are wishing to speak, the Committee of Supply shall vote on the supplementary supply estimates.

The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2016-2017 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. The minister has four minutes left.

Seeing no minister wishing to speak, I will recognize the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Sorry. The third party. You guys were done.

Is there anybody from the third party that would like to speak? Any members? No.

Any government members?

Seeing none, I'll go back to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the minister for being willing to...

The Deputy Chair: Did you want to share your time back and forth?

Mr. Smith: Yeah. We'll share back and forth. That's fine.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Minister, for being willing to be here for me while I ask a couple of questions today. We're looking at page 71 in the supplementary supply. I'll be looking at line items 4.2 and 2.3 and 2.6, okay? Let's start with 4.2, the assistance to Alberta Social Housing Corporation. I see there that you're making a transfer to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation of \$500,000. This is for doing energy audits or facility audits, from my understanding, facility energy audits. So just a couple of questions. Who will be doing the audits, and how were these contracts tendered?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

3:10

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Yes. My ministry received \$500,000 from the climate leadership plan infrastructure initiative for facility audits, so housing management bodies in Alberta will have their facilities assessed so that they can see what would be the priorities, what would be the best use of dollars to have maintenance, to improve perhaps windows, or for energy-efficient furnaces. Sometimes it has to do with roofs.

We are very pleased to have these dollars to support housing management bodies to make sure that they have the most energy-efficient operating facilities possible. It's just such a significant improvement and support for housing management bodies that they can have this type of funding so that they can go ahead and make these improvements, you know, obviously being respectful and responsible for the energy that they're using in their facilities.

Certainly, the government's regular process of procurement will be used.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Smith: Madam Minister, could you please explain to us how these contracts were tendered? Was it sole-sourced or not? And do you have any idea who those contracts are going to be handed out to?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Certainly, you know, housing management bodies – there are over a hundred in this province. They are the public delivery of our housing management system in our province. We work very closely with them, and they themselves work on what they need in their facilities. The people who do the energy audits will be very much supporting them to make choices that make sense for their facility, the best use of dollars in that regard. Certainly, we work with housing management bodies, but housing management bodies each operate in their own communities. They make decisions regarding what's best for their community, and that process will continue to go ahead.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Am I to understand, then, that this is different than the company that's been hired to retrofit the light bulbs and to put in new light bulbs? Is this going to be a

decision that each of the housing managements are going to be making individually and there's no one individual company, that this could be many different local companies that will be doing the energy audits, that this is a local decision and not one that is coming through the wider body of your ministry?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, I mean, what's most important to us as a government is that we are using the principles of the Natural Resources Canada EnerGuide rating system. Those doing the audits will be using this standardized system to help guide them. Those are the guidelines that are being used. As I said, there are very diverse housing management bodies across the province, and they'll be working with this system to make decisions about, you know, what are the key things that they need to improve in their housing management body facilities to make sure that they are the most energy efficient.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm still not understanding something here. My question wasn't about what the guideline was that you were going to be using. My question was: who will be doing the audits, and how were those contracts tendered, and who's making the decision about that? This is the third or fourth time I've asked this question now, and I'm still not getting an answer from the minister. Could she please explain to me who will be making the decision about who will be doing the audits? Is it her ministry, or is it a local housing oversight? How were these contracts tendered? Please.

Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. Certainly, we're working with housing management bodies to make those decisions. As I said, the local housing management bodies are diverse. They're all across this province. The guideline that we're using is the Natural Resources Canada EnerGuide rating system. We work with housing bodies to determine, you know, who they're working with, but these are some standard things that we want. We want them to create a baseline so that we know what needs to be improved in their particular facilities, and we'll work very closely with housing management bodies to make those decisions.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Smith: Okay. I guess I'm not going to get my answer.

Why is it costing half a million dollars extra to do the audits? Could the minister please explain to us how much they've spent on the audits to this point and why they need this additional half a million dollars if that's indeed the case? Or is this the only amount of money that they're spending on energy audits?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, this \$500,000 is transferred to us, to our ministry, from Environment and Parks' climate leadership plan green infrastructure initiative. It's earmarked specifically for us to do energy audits in our housing management bodies across this province to ensure that housing management bodies are supported to know what are sort of the key things that will make a real difference for them to be energy efficient. We're very pleased to receive this funding.

That doesn't mean that there aren't other investments. This year we put \$57 million into maintenance and repairs, and many housing management bodies are using that for improving energy efficiency through furnaces, windows, roofs, a whole myriad of things. There's ongoing investment from the ministry, and these dollars will be an additional support to housing management bodies to ensure that citizens of this province have well-maintained, energy efficient facilities. Certainly, this will help the housing management bodies be able to have more energy efficient facilities, so they'll save money on the costs of energy, and this is all good for our province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. In answering my question, you suggested that there is \$57 million spent on providing better efficiency for our seniors, which is a good idea. I guess the question I've got is this, again back to my question: when these facilities make these decisions about putting in higher efficiency furnaces, et cetera, do they all have energy audits, and if so, how much have you spent on providing the energy audits that would lead you to believe that you need to do the upgrades that cost \$57 million to this province? How much money have you spent on energy audits, and how much more have you spent above and beyond the requested \$500,000?

The Deputy Chair: The minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to make sure that the member understands that it's \$57 million in investment for maintenance across the province.

Each year the housing management bodies submit their business plans to our ministry, and in that they have their top asks. They have the things that they know are outstanding and that they're concerned about, so we know each year. We look at that information they send us, and through that, we do allocate those funds. I just want you to know that that's a significant investment we've made and that certainly the housing management bodies are very pleased.

We inherited a billion dollars in repairs needing to be done when we became government. Housing management bodies have been waiting for some time, and they know a lot of the things that they need. They do need new windows. They do need energy efficient furnaces. They do need new roofs. They do need repairs regarding, you know, the sealing of doors. They need all sorts of things, so they are having this funding from us as a government.

This additional funding from Environment and Parks, specifically from the green infrastructure initiative, is further assisting housing management bodies, who, I must say, do an extraordinary job of supporting the vulnerable.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other members from the third party wishing to speak? No?

Are there any other members from the independent group wishing to speak?

Are there any other members from the government side wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. We have to go through everybody's rotation first, please.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today wishing to speak a bit more about the SHARP program, which I had the opportunity to cosponsor when the legislation passed through the House. Interest was very high in the program according to the minister as

she spoke yesterday about the matter. I know that during debate on this legislation the concern was expressed that it was unknown how many people may be interested in taking the government up on its proposal to allow them to borrow against the equity in their house to improve their home and adapt it so that they could live in it longer given that they may have disabilities that prevent them from staying in it without the adaptations. Given our interest in cross-collaboration with other ministries, I'm wondering if the minister is going to be tabulating how many jobs may be created as a result of the work that's being done on people's homes as they take advantage of the home equity loan program called SHARP.

3:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, the seniors home adaptation and repair program is really a program that we were asked about many times in the community.

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

People want to stay in their own homes, in their own communities, close to family and friends, but unfortunately sometimes as we age, we have some challenges with mobility. Therefore, the homes that we have lived in for many years are just not properly suited, and there could be safety concerns. For example, you know, regular tubs are very difficult sometimes for folks to get in and out of, so changing that to, like, a walk-in tub or putting on some bars for people to hold onto. This program is absolutely essential to supporting people to be able to stay in their own homes as long as they choose to. It gives people a great opportunity to do that.

As the member suggested, this also is investing in our economy because people can receive up to \$40,000 in repairs, and that means that they're employing folks in the community and, you know, having different repairs done that they need. It doesn't only have to be about mobility things. It can also be about getting your roof replaced or an energy efficient furnace or windows, rugs. It's a whole myriad of things. Seniors have really been very excited about this program. It's highly subscribed to, and we're very pleased. That shows us the success of the program.

As the member said, we are absolutely getting people working. It's difficult to estimate exactly how many people will be employed by this, but it's absolutely an infusion of dollars into the economy and looking at some significant investments in jobs. We're very pleased to be able to both support seniors to stay in their homes and their communities and to get people working in this province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Any other speakers? The Official Opposition has indicated that they are done. Anybody from the third party wishing to speak? Any other members from government wishing to speak?

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2016-17, No. 2 General Revenue Fund

The Acting Chair: We've reached the six hours of consideration in Committee of Supply and shall vote on the supplementary supply estimates at this time. We'll start with amendment A1 from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Agreed to:
Advanced Education
Financial Transactions \$121,000,000
Transfer from Environment and Parks to
Capital Investment \$760,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Agriculture and Forestry
Expense \$332,493,000
Transfer from Environment and Parks to
Expense \$150,000
Transfer from Environment and Parks to
Capital Investment \$104,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Children's Services
Expense \$28,000,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Community and Social Services
Expense \$173,200,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Culture and Tourism
Transfer from Environment and Parks to
Expense \$9,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Economic Development and Trade
Transfer from Environment and Parks to
Expense \$562,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Education
Transfer from Capital Investment to
Expense \$106,733,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Environment and Parks
Expense \$77,144,000
Transfer from Capital Investment to
Expense \$12,445,000
Transfer from Expense to
Capital Investment \$150,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

3:30

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Health
Expense \$202,060,000
Transfer from Environment and Parks to
Capital Investment \$1,500,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Indigenous Relations
Expense \$1,127,000
Transfer from Environment and Parks and
Labour to Expense \$9,045,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Infrastructure
Transfer from Environment and Parks to
Capital Investment \$135,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall it be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Justice and Solicitor General
Expense \$35,344,000
Transfer from Capital Investment to
Expense \$5,500,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Municipal Affairs

Expense	\$720,435,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Seniors and Housing

Financial Transactions	\$2,700,000
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Transfer from Environment and Parks to Expense	\$500,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Service Alberta

Financial Transactions	\$900,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Transportation

Expense	\$25,706,000
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Transfer from Environment and Parks to Expense	\$200,000
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Transfer from Environment and Parks to Capital Investment	\$1,000,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall it be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? So ordered.

Agreed to:

Treasury Board and Finance

Transfer from Environment and Parks to Expense	\$1,053,000
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Transfer from Environment and Parks to Capital Investment	\$800,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall it be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Committee of Supply shall now rise and report.

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I'd like to call on the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

3:40

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2017, have been approved.

Advanced Education: financial transactions, \$121,000,000.

Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$332,493,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$28,000,000.

Community and Social Services: expense, \$173,200,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$77,144,000.

Health: expense, \$202,060,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$1,127,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$35,344,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$720,435,000.

Seniors and Housing: financial transactions, \$2,700,000.

Service Alberta: financial transactions, \$900,000.

Transportation: expense, \$25,706,000.

Amounts to be transferred under section 3 of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017:

Transfer from the capital investment vote of Education to the expense vote of Education, \$106,733,000.

Transfer from the capital investment vote of Environment and Parks to the expense vote of Environment and Parks, \$12,445,000.

Transfer from the expense vote of Environment and Parks to the capital investment vote of Environment and Parks, \$150,000.

Transfers from the expense vote of Environment and Parks to the expense vote of Agriculture and Forestry, \$150,000; to the expense vote of Culture and Tourism, \$9,000; to the expense vote of Economic Development and Trade, \$562,000; to the expense vote of Indigenous Relations, \$5,200,000; to the expense vote of Seniors and Housing, \$500,000; to the expense vote of Transportation, \$200,000; to the expense vote of Treasury Board and Finance, \$1,053,000.

Transfers from the expense vote of Environment and Parks to the capital investment vote of Advanced Education, \$760,000; to the capital investment vote of Agriculture and Forestry, \$104,000; to the capital investment vote of Health, \$1,500,000; to the capital investment vote of Infrastructure, \$135,000; to the capital investment vote of Transportation, \$1,000,000; to the capital investment vote of Treasury Board and Finance, \$800,000.

Transfer from the capital investment vote of Justice and Solicitor General to the expense vote of Justice and Solicitor General, \$5,500,000.

Transfer from the expense vote of Labour to the expense vote of Indigenous Relations, \$3,845,000.

That concludes my report.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

I would like to alert hon. members that Standing Order 61(3) provides that upon the Assembly concurring with the report by Committee of Supply, the Assembly immediately reverts to the Introduction of Bills for introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

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

**Bill 4
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017**

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

**Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 8: Mr. Nielsen]

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is always an honour to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'm a centrist, and I am very proud of that fact. It is the opposite of not believing in anything. In fact, it's about believing in balance. That balance is not only possible but desirable. It's what we should be striving for in this Assembly. It is about thinking long term. It's about people. It's about quality of life. It's about planning. It's about good fiscal management, and it's about vision.

Unfortunately, this government has chosen only one side of the ledger. They've doubled down to target whomever they think their voters are. They've completely ignored the fact that doing so costs money and that money has to come from somewhere and that in tough times that somewhere means borrowed money and that borrowed money eventually needs to be paid back. Sadly, their plan seems to be the same as all governments before them: cross your fingers, and hope to goodness that the price of oil goes up.

On the other side of the equation we have an opposition party focused only on finance. They refuse to share any concrete or plausible plans to ensure that front-line services remain intact as they focus only on the deficit. We know the only logical outcomes of their plans are reduced access to public services, more children in every classroom, longer wait times for health care, and worse outcomes for vulnerable Albertans. If the opposition disagrees, please, by all means, prove me wrong. Show me your work. Show me how you would address Alberta's fiscal challenges without devastating front-line public services. Until then I'm going to continue to call you out on the devastating impact that your ideology would have on our province.

There is a bigger and even more fundamental question. What is the point of government? Is it simply to get re-elected every four years, or should there be something more? Nothing – and I mean nothing – in this Speech from the Throne tells me that this government has a plan beyond 2019. What is missing is a vision. Sadly, based on the tone of the House these past few days, it's clear that the election campaign has already begun. The government seems hell bent on flowing money targeted at their voting coalition

with absolutely no regard for the long-term consequences or even the medium-term consequences. If this works and the government somehow gets re-elected, I guess they'll deal with that problem when they get there, but if it doesn't, the next government will have to deal with the fiscal mess they've created. Significant cuts to front-line public services seem to be the strategy. Then at that point, when the government finds themselves in opposition, perhaps they play a strategy for the next election beyond that, and we whipsaw back and forth between two extremes.

That's not who we are as Albertans, and sadly it is not necessary. It doesn't need to be as bad as this government has made it. There are choices. There are options. Not only is it possible to find balance, but if we're going to succeed together as a province, it is absolutely necessary that we do so.

Instead of just complaining, here's my solution. I want to create sustained and shared prosperity in this province. To do that, it means we need to create a business environment that attracts investment and stimulates economic growth, and that investment needs to come from both domestic and international sources. We need to reframe and rethink our tax system to minimize tax leakage to other provinces and encourage entrepreneurship. We need to focus on shovel-ready capital projects that get Albertans back to work today. We need to monitor and take advantage of global market opportunities and trends. We need to not be afraid of what's going on in the rest of the world. We need to embrace that change, take advantage of it, and put Albertans back to work.

3:50

It also requires good fiscal management. We need a government that has a realistic plan to balance the budget. We need a government that has a plausible plan to actually start paying back debt. We need a government that commits to building up the heritage savings trust fund to become a renewable, viable, and valuable fiscal resource for this province.

We need to focus on poverty and harm reduction. We need to fund supports for the most vulnerable Albertans, think differently about prevention, and optimize service delivery. We need to transition from an acute-care to a long-term preventative model. We need to address systemic and root-cause issues behind addiction, homelessness, and poverty and implement stable, long-term mental health supports.

We need to create and maintain a high quality of life in this province, which means promoting and encouraging a vibrant Alberta arts and culture scene, supporting Alberta's diverse cultural heritage. We need to ensure that our communities are safe and that we support multiculturalism, respect the LGBTQ community, and work every day towards reconciliation with indigenous peoples. We need to ensure advanced education remains high quality, affordable, and accessible. We need to provide housing and career supports as people transition to new careers.

We must pursue environmental sustainability. The Alberta Party caucus and the Alberta Party as a whole: our members believe in human-caused climate change. We believe in the science of climate change. We don't see that as a threat to our province; we see that as the single greatest market opportunity of our lifetime. There's no benefit to Alberta in pretending climate change doesn't exist, in pretending it isn't a problem that needs to be addressed. Alberta has innovative big thinkers who can help solve the problems of tomorrow, help create entrepreneurial, innovative companies, and help create products that will help diversify our economy while addressing climate change and do so in a way that supports and celebrates Alberta's responsible energy industry.

I am a fiercely proud Albertan, and I am fiercely proud of our energy industry. We do not need to choose between the

environment and the economy. We do not need to choose between environmental sustainability and success with Alberta's energy industry. Those are the same thing.

We need to focus our academic institutions and industry on developing innovative technologies that reduce Alberta's carbon footprint and create technologies we can sell to the rest of the world. We need a reasonable rebate program that only helps those who actually need help instead of only supporting NDP re-election efforts. We need to deal with a growing abandoned well problem through innovative ideas like geothermal greenhouse projects and put Albertans back to work by reclaiming abandoned and orphaned wells.

Most of all, though, we need to end this false polarization where one side says that only they can look out for people and the environment and another side says that only they can help and look out for money. I'm an Albertan. I care about both of those things. I care about good fiscal management, I care about my neighbours, and I care about the environment. That's what Albertans believe in.

I stand here before you today optimistic about the future of our province because I'm optimistic about the capability of Albertans and what Albertans believe. I am proud to represent a party that believes that Alberta is the greatest place to live anywhere in the world because Albertans are the greatest people anywhere in the world. The Alberta Party is a party of Albertans by Albertans for Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to question or comment under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Transmittal of Estimates

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Acting Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I now wish to table the 2017-18 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government for the period of April 1, 2017, to May 31, 2017, inclusive. This interim funding authority will ensure continuity in the business of the province while the Legislature takes the time necessary to discuss, debate, and enact the full funding requirement for the government business for the 2017-18 fiscal year.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$30 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$7.8 billion in expense funding, \$936 million in capital investment

funding, \$149 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$241 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

[Adjourned debate March 8: Mr. Westhead]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1

An Act to Reduce School Fees

[Adjourned debate March 8: Mr. Dang]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Very often when I'm here in this House, I think I have a lot of déjà vu moments because for nine years I was a school trustee where the issue of school fees was something that we discussed on a weekly basis. So I was delighted when the Minister of Education introduced Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees.

Since we haven't debated this for a couple of days, I thought it might be good to speak again about the purpose of this bill. Bill 1 is a bill to reduce school fees. Through this bill a series of amendments and the creation of a new school fees regulation will effectively eliminate school boards' ability to charge two specific types of school fees, instructional fees and material fees and busing fees for eligible students travelling to their designated school. This legislation will also provide the government with increased authority over all school fees.

We all know that for a lot of parents every September the school fees are an incredible burden. School fees have impacted families, teachers, and school administrators. I really appreciated the Member for Calgary-East, who spoke so eloquently about her experience as a teacher and the impact of school fees. I think we have to remember that school fees are not just a burden on parents, but they also have created a lot of stress and burden on teachers and administrators.

4:00

As the House knows, because I discussed it in one of my speeches, I worked for many years in Asia, and for those of you who like me have lived in countries where there's a very poor education system and where parents have to pay incredible fees to access any kind of education system, you would, like me, really want to support a fully accessible public school system with no barriers to any family or child. That's why I stood up to be a school trustee in the public school system for nine years, because I knew that a quality, accessible, free education was what every child needed to achieve their potential.

I also have appreciated the experience of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, who spoke about the challenges school

fees presented for her family and how her family had to make choices about school fees and food or other necessities. I think every single member in this House has met families who also have struggled every single September to pay the school fees.

My own personal experience was that I had to go and beg the principal to have school fees waived for my children, and this was a very embarrassing moment. I know that I'm not the only member who may have had this experience and that you have heard from your constituents.

The other aspect of school fees that I feel is really fitting for us to discuss, even though it's one day past International Women's Day, is that school fees impact the low-income families, who are usually led by women, and I think this is something that we really have to know, that it's the women who really very often have had to find the money to pay for school fees and have wondered how they were going to manage their budgets: school fees, food, all the necessities in the home.

Today I also wanted us to be reminded that currently it's women who make up the bulk of school councils and parents' fundraising efforts. My colleague from Strathcona-Sherwood Park demonstrated that by the fact that she invited members of some of her rural school councils, and it was four women. The women who are involved in school councils and parents' fundraising committees have done an incredible job in raising funds for playgrounds, for school supplies, for nutrition, and also to help parents who cannot pay school fees.

Last year the government decided to increase funding to school boards, and this funding was to ensure that every child was funded for, so we funded for enrolment.

One of the things as a former school trustee that I appreciate the most from this bill is that, as the Minister of Education said the other day in the House, decisions on school fees in the regulations will be made in consultation with school boards. I think this is really, really important because it is school boards who presently have decided on the school fees. It is very important that school boards be involved in any decisions around school fees in terms of the regulation, so I wanted to thank the minister for his words on the involvement of school boards. I really appreciate that the regulations will be drafted only after consultations with school boards and other stakeholders in education.

I personally look forward to listening to the school boards in my own riding about what they think about Bill 1 and the kind of regulations that there will be, and I would like to urge all members to do the same thing, to talk to their school boards and to understand some of the constraints that school boards have every year in meeting budgets and to support the government and especially the minister in his consultation process in terms of drafting the regulations.

This bill will ease the burden on families. It will also ease the burden on teachers. I'm sure if the Member for Calgary-East was here, she would talk about the list that she has to make, the money that has to be collected. While I have never been a teacher in the school system, as a school trustee I definitely heard a lot from teachers how this is something that is really challenging for them and takes away from their instructional time.

I would like to urge all members in the House to support Bill 1 and to look to September, when the burden of school fees will be eased from their constituents. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway. Go ahead.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. As a parent of young children I know the importance of school fees. I know the annual cost to send my children to school. You know, the fees include the bus fees, the school fees, the field trips, and lunch supervision fees, just to name a few. Also, I heard from my own constituents to lower the school fees. So I think it's a step in the right direction, and that's why our Progressive Conservative caucus is in support of lowering the cost that Alberta families pay in school fees. When it comes to the lives of Albertans and their families, we'll always support lowering the costs they have to pay, especially in these troubling times.

However, what this caucus does not support is the sleight of hand that this NDP government is attempting to pull on Alberta families. Out of one pocket the NDP are taking more and more from Alberta families every day. From driving up the costs of our electricity by tampering with the Balancing Pool and their aggressive coal phase-out to the carbon tax, that will raise costs for daily goods, the NDP are costing families more. So for the Deputy Premier to stand before this House and say that they have the backs of Albertans and are working to make life affordable: sorry, Deputy Premier; we aren't buying it, and neither is any other Albertan because Albertans can see through the smoke and mirrors. While you put \$5 in reduced school fees into one pocket, you have taken \$20 from the other one, and the Deputy Premier expects a thank you.

However, you know, reducing school fees is a step in the right direction and a step, I believe, our caucus will support and can support. But if the NDP government wants the support of Albertans, they can start with cutting school fees and move on to cutting the carbon tax. I think that would be a real help for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, we all know that there is only one taxpayer. If the NDP says that the difference in the school fees will be covered by the Education department, a department funded by the taxpayer, at the end of the day, Albertans still pay. It's the same person, same family. It's all of our people who are still paying the tax. If you're truly committed to making life affordable for Albertans like you say you are, show your commitment to lower taxes, that you have driven up since taking office. Albertans have continuously told you that they don't support your policies that drive up the cost of living. You're saying that you're listening, but I don't see changes. You say that you have the backs of Albertans, yet how can they trust and believe anything you say when all they have seen is you driving up the cost for living with each of your policies?

Another concerning piece to this bill is the fact that the Education minister has committed to finding millions in department efficiencies to cover the cost of lowering the school fees. Since the NDP formed government, they have attempted to suggest that any form of government cost saving would be done by cutting front-line staff. Time and time again we heard the NDP justify their out-of-control spending by saying that the opposition party – their favourite words are cut, slash, burn – you know, will slash teachers and teaching assistants. I know, I know; the minister of economic development finds it very amusing because we hear it every day a few times in QP. Well, I would like to remind the NDP that they were the only ones talking about the cuts to the front-line workers.

4:10

But after nearly two years of the NDP saying the only way to rein in spending is to lay off teachers and nurses, we suddenly have found millions of dollars in the Education budget. As my colleague from Calgary-Hays asked, how many teachers were laid off to pay this bill? We didn't get an answer, and I don't think we're going to get any answer.

Madam Speaker, we know finding efficiencies are possible, like the efficiencies that were magically found in the Education ministry. Now that the government also knows it's possible, I look forward to seeing what other efficiencies they will be able to find soon in other departments.

I look forward to continued debate on this bill, Madam Speaker. Lowering school fees is the right thing to do. Making life affordable for Albertans and Alberta families is the right thing to do, and we'll continue to push this government to make life affordable for Albertans in all aspects, not just the sleight of hand they're attempting with the school fee legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member from St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Just a question for the Member for Calgary-Greenway. First of all – I don't know – I don't mind being called a taxpayer occasionally, but, you know, you guys really go there a lot. I think people like to be called moms and dads and parents and families. You know, just a thought. I was just wondering why you always use that label.

What you said, if I heard you correctly, is that the only way to put money into the pockets of Alberta families, or taxpayers, as you said, was to cut taxes. But you said earlier that you did support what we would do to actually put dollars into the pockets of families in September, when traditionally they would have to find hundreds of dollars that were really difficult to find to pay fees. I don't really understand because you sort of went both ways with that, so I'm wondering if you could clear that up for me.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for St. Albert. She is right, actually. You know, in September, like, the government will be putting money into taxpayers, Albertans, and moms and dads alike, all of us, the majority of us – sorry; I must apologize – who have children. However, by putting money in one month and then taking 11 months out of their pockets, I think it's hypocrisy. That's what I meant. That's why I went both ways.

Yes, government is doing a great thing. This is a great initiative, lowering school fees, which we all support. Most of us in this House will support it. However, you're taking money away from the Alberta families and moms and dads that the hon. Member for St. Albert mentioned. That's why I said it in that way. I hope I've made myself clear.

Ms Renaud: No, not really.

Mr. Gill: Not really? Okay, I can continue. I can continue.

Lowering the school fees by 25 per cent: that's great. But putting on, like, a carbon tax and adding in 4.5 cents a litre to gasoline and approximately five and a half cents to diesel? Ask the farmers how they're feeling, how much money you're taking away from their pockets. Ask the farmers how much fertilizers have gone up and how much transportation costs have gone up.

I don't think this government has consulted, and I don't think we expect them to consult because they've never done it so far in the last two years. That's why I'm saying, Madam Speaker, that, yes, the government is doing a great thing by lowering the school fees on one hand; however, on the other hand, they're just, like, taking money away. It's like highway robbery almost.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you in the chair. You're doing a wonderful job.

You know, I've heard the last few comments of: "Where did you get all this money? You said only efficiencies were found. That caused cutting teachers and educational assistants, front-line workers." The truth is, Madam Speaker, that initiatives like this take a responsibility for the government to make sure they find the efficiencies prior to making the cuts. I think that's the difference between the approach of the opposition of many years, just blindly cutting 2 per cent from budgets and having the results be felt in the front lines, and this government, who stabilizes the funding and then looks at making sure that they get an inventory of what's happening, making sure that they know how the cuts will affect the public services that the families depend on and then finds those efficiencies to make sure that there is a gain for the public services and the level of the public services.

Those members in the third party, Madam Speaker, had 44 years to find the efficiencies. It's rich. It's rich to say that, you know: we support it, but you said you couldn't find it. Well, no. It takes time. It takes time that you didn't take because you didn't prioritize it. You prioritized tax cuts. Please explain to me how those tax cuts helped the families that were sending their kids to school, the single mothers that didn't have the ability to pay those school fees. Those are the kinds of folks that these kinds of initiatives support. [interjections] I think for all of the initiatives that we have taken into account . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to stand and talk in favour of Bill 1. I know that other members are in favour of the bill, and I really appreciate that they're recognizing the importance of it. I think that they've raised points throughout their speeches that we're going to look at in Committee of the Whole.

But they say that it's going to be complicated and, you know: how are we going to address all of these other concerns? What I would say to them is that just because it's complicated doesn't mean it's not worth the time to investigate and find solutions. Some of those solutions are best to come through Committee of the Whole, through discussions and consultations, and in making sure that you include the school boards in assessing the overall school fees, how much that costs.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The fact is, Madam Speaker, that the opposition continuously backs away from hard decisions. You see that in their position on climate change, whether it's denial or just general ambivalence. The fact is that the members on the opposite side see something difficult and run away. At the end of the day, this government will continue to fight for public services that families depend on and will have the backs of women with children who go to school and who have the issue of school fees.

Let me tell you a story. I was an educational assistant since I was 18, Madam Speaker. I started that because of my mother's inspiration. She was a speech pathologist and taught me about behavioural strategies. She taught me to bring in strategies to help adapt the learning for students with special needs. Those are all very

difficult things to do in school. I started early on as an educational assistant to pay my way through school as well. In that position I can tell you numerous heartbreaking stories of the number of times that one of my roles for the day was to make sure that I put a letter in the backpack of a child that I knew did not have money because we had to provide the snacks for that child. That child could not sit still and could not take in the educational practices of that day or whatever curriculum we were doing because they had not had food in the morning, and that led to those behaviours. The fact is that we still had to provide a letter at the end of the day, knowing that it was going to come back unmet.

The fact is that, yes, we need to find a solution. It is important, and it helps level out who has access to public education and reduces the barriers, that shouldn't be there in the first place. Everyone deserves access to education regardless of their socioeconomic status, and that is something that I will always stand for.

4:20

The fact is that the opposition lists a whole bunch of issues and says: oh, we haven't looked at that. No. Well, you know what? What it takes is to build a foundation in order to look at those issues. What has the minister done prior to bringing the reduction of school fees act? He did an inventory list of what school fees are being charged across the province. You know what that is, Madam Speaker? That is a thoughtful approach to making sure that you don't just go and hammer something through. We don't want to negatively affect the public services. Can we not make it more clear to you by the fact that we've stabilized the funding? In fact, we will work to that . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you for the reminder to speak through you. I get very passionate about education. It is something that I have dedicated my life to and that I will continue to dedicate my life to. I know that at the end of day, one place to start was by stabilizing the funding. And we know that educational centres are also the places that we want to make sure the climate leadership plan is being seen. The fact is that those children – and you know what? The decisions that are being made now I'm going to live with my entire life and . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members.

Cortes-Vargas: You know, I'm the youngest female MLA ever elected to this Legislature. Trust me on this, Madam Speaker: I will live for years to see the effects of what is done here. And I am proud of absolutely every single initiative we have brought forward because they are thoughtful, they are looking to the future, and they are making sure that the jobs that my age group will see are sustainable jobs that they will have for a long period of time, that we won't have to continuously clean up by the negligence of the opposition.

We need to see a different approach, and that is what Albertans voted for. This government and the folks that sit next to me will all listen to their constituents, we'll continuously reach out, and we will look for solutions. They need to come from everyone. One thing that has been made clear over and over is that people want education prioritized. They did not want to see the kinds of cuts that we would have seen under them. The fact is, Madam Speaker, that even with the climate leadership plan – and they argue the way it's going to affect this. The fact is that we will work with the school boards to make sure that they can implement a way to build

sustainable buildings, to address the overall costs. We will find a way to do that, and it's important.

I'll give you an example. At Strathcona Christian Academy they're currently doing a project on aquaponics. That kind of innovation and doing projects that look at future technologies involves students and starts creating solutions at a young age. That's the kind of entrepreneurship that Albertans are known for. We need to continue developing that kind of innovation. In fact, the strength of our energy industry is our education base and the fact that we have been able to develop technologies that we haven't seen elsewhere. So, yes, we're bringing it to schools, and, yes, we need to make sure that they are properly funded for it, and, yes, we will do that. We have demonstrated that our commitment will not waver.

Then, Madam Speaker, I just want to keep talking about the reduction of and the meaning of the reduction of school fees and why it's a more important approach than just taking a tax cut or a blind cut, that the PCs were very well known for. People knew that that was coming. Announcing a 2 per cent tax cut without proper planning was likely to result in the firing of teachers and educational assistants. I was going to be one of them. The fact is that those kinds of effects – it was also going to cut ELL funding. It was also going to cut funding . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members. Enough, please.

Go ahead, Member.

Cortes-Vargas: It was going to cut a lot of things that actually impact the marginalized communities the most. You know, if we want to make sure that we integrate immigrant communities into our communities, we want to make sure that language acquisition is one of the first priorities. Yet that was one of the things that they were going to do during an economic downturn to further create a discrepancy of what they're able to contribute. The fact is that we have a responsibility to make sure that education is accessible to everyone regardless of their background. The kind of approach that is taken that prioritizes it just as, "If you have the money, then that's okay," continues to promote the cycle of poverty that we see, the continuous cycle of that.

You know, there are a lot of platitudes that happen in this House, Madam Speaker. I hear the opposition continue to say that they're in support of the LGBTQ community, that they're in support of the truth and reconciliation. I hear them say that. The trouble I have with it is that they don't follow the things that they say with action. Their proposals continuously disproportionately affect marginalized people. They continuously propose things that would affect women.

You want to talk about the great Klein years? You want to look at how we did in the United Nations in our ability to address the issues of women? You can see that in those years women were the most affected by those kinds of policy proposals. So for them to say that they stand for women and for the things that they do for our communities is absolutely ridiculous. It is not backed up by policy, by action. If you wanted to have nice words, fine, have nice words, but this government will make sure that we follow our platitudes with action, and that's what we're delivering when we do things like that.

The Alberta tax benefit, Madam Speaker. All of that is directed at making sure that we have the backs of all Albertans – and those are inclusive words, "all Albertans" – regardless of where you're from, what age you are, if you're an immigrant.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about the Alberta Legislature's history. I am the youngest female Alberta MLA, I'm the first Latin American Alberta MLA, and I'm the youngest government whip in Alberta's history. The fact that I'm the very first one means that you have not done enough to make this world inclusive. You have failed

people like me. The reason I was so motivated to run against folks that have your sort of policies is because I understand that my voice is not being felt in this Legislature.

I am proud to stand for families that want to look at thoughtful approaches. I talk to my constituents all the time about their educational needs. I had parent councils come this morning. I've been talking to them for the entire summer about some of the issues facing their schools. They moved to Strathcona county because they wanted to prioritize their families. I know that in Strathcona county, growing up there, every single thing we do is about making sure that families are protected. You know what's an integral part of that? Education. The fact that we supported education was a very important fact for them.

The fact that the opposition fails to realize that the policies they were putting forward would negatively affect just those things actually tells me that they're the ones that are not talking to Albertans. They're the ones that haven't heard their priorities. The fact that they are unable to stand next to a shadow budget, that indicates what their policies would do, tells me that they are too afraid to stand next to their policies for Albertans because maybe they have heard them and maybe they just say: if we don't have to commit to the things that we are proposing by putting it in a shadow budget, people might not know what we would do. The chaos that

we would be experiencing under the opposition because ...
[interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members. Enough, please.

Cortes-Vargas: As I said, I'm one of the first Latin American members, and in my culture sometimes we get a little passionate. It's not out of anger; it's just actually sometimes a way of conversing.

I really appreciate their engagement on this, and I literally hope that they can take it back and reflect about, you know, whether they're actually going to stand next to their policies and talk about the overall impacts that we would see under the policies that they would bring forward. I want to work with them on making sure that Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, properly addresses the concerns throughout the province. I want to work with them the same way that I work with my parent councils, the same way that I've worked and continue – I hear you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, March 9, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 82-89 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft.*), 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 2 — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 13, 2017

Day 6

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleisteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 13, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us bow our heads and reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us be reminded of the great gift it is to serve the people of Alberta. Allow us to be mindful and understanding of all those who call Alberta home. From our indigenous people to new Canadians we are one. We each share our Commonwealth.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite you to sing, each in your own language.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day Message from the Queen

The Speaker: Before we begin today, I would like to take a moment to recognize that today is Commonwealth Day. I have a message from the Queen, and I'd like to read it to you. Copies of this message have been placed on your desk for your reference: Commonwealth Day message of Her Majesty the Queen, head of the Commonwealth.

This Commonwealth Day, a Baton will set out from Buckingham Palace and begin a long and extraordinary journey. Over the next twelve months, the Baton will visit people living in the nations and territories of our Commonwealth family in every continent and ocean.

Carried on its way by thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds, by the time it reaches its final destination, the Queen's Baton will have brought together through its route and symbolism, almost 2.5 billion people who share the special connection of being Commonwealth citizens.

Contained within the Baton will be a written message that will be opened and read at the Commonwealth Games in Australia next year. However, there is an even more powerful message to be seen and experienced as the Baton passes from hand to hand, from seashore to mountaintop, through cities, towns, and villages. It is the message of a peace-building Commonwealth.

The cornerstones on which peace is founded are, quite simply, respect and understanding for one another. Working together, we build peace by defending the dignity of every individual and community.

By upholding justice and the rule of law, and by striving for societies that are fair and offer opportunities for all, we overcome division and find reconciliation, so that the benefits of progress and prosperity may be multiplied and shared.

As members of the Commonwealth family we can find much to be thankful for in the inheritances we have received from those who came before us. Through consensus and cooperation great things have been achieved.

We can find further reward and fulfilment by continuing to collaborate with others in a spirit of goodwill to build a peaceful and abundant future for all Commonwealth citizens.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to everyone in this Assembly 65 students, who are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery, from Stony Plain Central school in my riding of Stony Plain. They're accompanied by a number of teachers and chaperones: Mrs. Niebergall, Mrs. Fleming, Mrs. Wilms, Miss Van Delden, Miss Schaeber, Victoria Warsame, Mr. Dan Kiryluk, Mrs. Kerri Kiryluk, Helen Parent, Paul McCann, and Faye Ledwon. I ask that they all stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome, welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in your gallery today are four board members of the Royal Commonwealth Society of Edmonton. The Edmonton branch was founded in 2005 during the visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Alberta. The Royal Commonwealth Society has a long history, dating to 1868. It is committed to promoting the values of the Commonwealth. Through youth empowerment, education, and advocacy the Royal Commonwealth Society champions human rights, democracy, and sustainable development across the 52 member states. Our guests are here to recognize Commonwealth Day, which is celebrated annually on the second Monday in March. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Ms Nicky Kobly, Dr. John Dugan and his son Dr. John Dugan Jr., Mr. Gordon Smith, and Mr. Joe Zasada. It's my pleasure to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, and I'd ask that the House give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on your behalf and introduce to the Assembly Mr. Richard Brooks, a long-time friend of yours. After residing in Medicine Hat for 35 years, Mr. Brooks now lives in St. Albert. I would ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 19 hard-working civil servants who work at Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. They represent the many women and men who work hard to ensure that farm families and the forestry sector in our province are equipped with information and all the support they need to be successful. They also support my office in providing policies, legislation, regulations, and the services necessary for Alberta's agriculture, food, and forest sectors to grow, prosper, and diversify. I would like to ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you an Edmonton mother of a very special 10-year-old girl. Cathy Crowell's daughter Hosanna is in grade 5. Her favourite subject is history. She enjoys Mandarin lessons and playing baseball. She also lives with a blood condition that requires her to receive transfusions every two to three weeks. Her parents are very grateful for the generosity of Canadian blood donors, and they are regular donors themselves. Also with her is Pierre Cyr with the Canadian Blood Services, CBS, which operates Canada's blood supply and is a truly vital service to Albertans like the Crowells. We are very proud of our public voluntary blood donation system here in Alberta. I'd ask that the House extend the traditional warm welcome to both of our guests.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have two introductions today. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jane Lucille McIntyre. Jane was born in 1915 in North Dakota, grew up in Success, Saskatchewan, and has lived in Wisconsin, California, Saskatchewan, and here in Edmonton. She ran her family business until she was 75 years old and has been very active in countless community organizations. Jane's working philosophy was and still remains that when you can't find anyone to do it, you do it yourself. Jane has two children, eight grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild, many of whom live right here in Edmonton. She is joined today by several of her family members. I would ask that the family members please rise and that we give her and her family the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ellies and Tillie Chudyk. Ellies and Tillie are constituents of mine who have lived in Edmonton-Decore for the last 55 years, but a big congratulations to them as they recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. They were married on February 2, 1957. Both retired now, having worked as a trucker and a government employee, they have one son, one granddaughter, and three step-grandchildren. I would ask them now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you two very special women and friends of mine who are visiting today. These strong women are examples for all women, and they make it their personal responsibility to get involved and make positive change in the world. These women are not only talented and funny and inspiring and hardworking; they're also dedicated to improving Alberta. I would love to introduce Mrs. Leah Wood. Leah is the provincial director for the Wildrose Party and president of the Stony Plain CA. I also take great pleasure in introducing Ms Taylor Wood. Taylor is a university student at Grant MacEwan, studying elementary education, and is also the president of the Edmonton-Calder CA. Taylor has recently started a position in the opposition office as one

of our new receptionists. Taylor and Leah, may I please ask that you rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on this special day to introduce to you and through you a British citizen, my maternal cousin Sana Sajjad and her husband, Ammar Hussain, who recently got married and are starting their new life in the beautiful city of Calgary. I wish them all the very best and request that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of friends who are here today to hear my member's statement on the crisis in South Sudan. They're all leaders in their community and are working to organize relief efforts on the ground in their home country. I would ask them to rise when I say their names, and I apologize in advance for any mispronunciations. They are my good friends Khor Top, Stephen Yang, Tut Phot, Wuor Pal, Simon George, Bejien Wang, Wany Jock, and Thomas Gatleak. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is no secret that I'm proud to be the member representing Red Deer-North, within the third-largest city in Alberta. I rise today to bring light to the great organizations, attractions, and phenomenal community that Red Deerians embody. It is my privilege to represent the area and the people.

When I am in my constituency, I embrace opportunities to meet with all stakeholders regardless of title, status, or nature of concern. The open-door policy that I extend at times embraces constituents of the opposition, and that's fine by me. The Red Deer River, that winds through the heart of my city, touches nine other House members and 34 municipalities. My interest is that what happens in my constituency impacts others. We are interdependent.

The peculiar nature of Alberta's interdependence, however, is that there is a connectedness to Red Deer. My government hosts town halls in Red Deer to enlist the pulse of my constituents. Opposition parties visit Red Deer, just as they do in Edmonton and Calgary, because we are a central hub that connects the province. However, we are more than a place to gas up and stop at the Donut Mill for what Red Deerians brag are the best in the province.

Red Deer College draws our province's future, and during our beautiful summers Sylvan Lake experiences a strong influx of vacationers and cottagers. Our neighboring guests drive our economy and rely on our resources. We are interdependent.

All of our service-driven amenities lap in the north-south, east-west connectedness that Red Deer provides. Our steady growth in urban population speaks to the little gem that is Red Deer as well as how it draws to our rural partners. They may come to shop, to seek

care at the fourth-busiest hospital in the province, or to take care of business at the courthouse. Whatever they need, Red Deer has it.

My interchange welcomes constituents from every electoral district here and is a vital part of the landscape of the province, so let us dispel the myth that we are just Gasoline Alley.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

RCMP and Public Safety

Mrs. Pitt: This weekend I had the honour and pleasure of attending the RCMP Regimental Ball, an annual event organized for the benefit of the Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society and hosted by the Airdrie RCMP detachment. The RCMP has hosted these events in communities across this province for as long as they've been a force, dating back to the 1870s, when they were the North West Mounted Police.

Regimental balls allow RCMP officers and community members the opportunity to interact, network, and build relationships in a more positive setting than we're often used to, sharing food and fun, building trust and morale, and raising money for charity. We all know that our police services in Alberta are doing a great job at keeping us safe. It is so important that we take the time to thank these men and women, who often work long hours in high-stress situations and are often forced to deal with the absolute worst aspects of humanity and human behaviour. We place so much responsibility on their shoulders. Their public service is truly admirable, and we cannot ever thank them enough for it.

But despite all this good work, crime is on the rise in our province. When I talk to businesses around Airdrie, they tell me they are extremely concerned about crime in the area. This is no surprise since according to Stats Canada the latest crime severity index for Airdrie rose by 26 per cent. Property crimes in particular are increasing. Break and enters were up by 51 per cent. Robbery is almost up 29 per cent. Thefts over \$5,000 were up 24 per cent in the city while theft under \$5,000 soared to 46 per cent. Increasing crime means increasing strain on police resources and also on our courts.

It's time for action and to ensure that criminals aren't walking free due to the mounting delays in our courts, and we must act now. Albertans can rest assured that the Wildrose will always stand up for the victims and for safe communities.

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

Justice System Delays

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The administration of justice in Alberta is in disrepute due to the actions of this Justice minister. Allow me to make my case. Two weeks ago the minister issued a protocol directing Crown prosecutors to either stay charges or plea bargain to obtain guilty pleas for cases requiring too much court time. Since then hundreds of charges, including many involving violence and weapons, have been dropped.

There's more. Citizens victimized by these alleged criminals had to hear in the media that the offenders got off scot-free. The minister maintains that she had to take this drastic step because Alberta does not have enough prosecutors. Well, that did not come as a surprise because she's the one who cut funding to Crown prosecutors for two years running, and that left 35 positions vacant.

1:50

When the media revealed her court-clearing directive, the public reacted with outrage. The next day the minister found money to hire more prosecutors. Let's put this all in perspective. This NDP government is finally increasing funding for prosecutors, but that

\$14 million amounts to half the amount it is spending to – wait for it – change your light bulbs.

What is especially concerning about this whole escapade is that the minister attempted to conceal her unprecedented protocol. She hid the directive, and when her own prosecutors blew the whistle, she tried to quell the uproar by serving up millions of dollars.

In Alberta the administration of justice is a primary responsibility of the minister. I'm not just making that up; it's on the Justice website. Mr. Speaker, the court of public opinion is clear, and in this case it's the only one that counts. The minister's actions have eroded Alberta's faith in our justice system, and that means the minister has to go.

I rest my case, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Oil prices have slid more than 8 per cent since last Monday. We are under \$50 again as the U.S. ramps up its oil production. Today there is more uncertainty with changes coming to the labour code. While the NDP says that it's sunny days again, growth for the private sector in Alberta has been entirely non-existent. Major players in the oil and gas industry are leaving, ma-and-pa shops are feeling hammered by new regulations and tax increases, and life is more expensive for Albertans. When will the Premier admit that her plan is just not working?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that our government is absolutely and completely, entirely focused on making life better for Albertans. You know what? The way that we're going to do that is that we're going to focus on job creation, we're going to focus on protecting core public services, and we're going to focus on making Alberta more affordable. That's the work that we're doing, that's what Albertans have asked for, and that's what we are delivering on.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP government is out of focus because it's not working, and Albertans are right to be worried about the NDP's gross mismanagement of our economy. Today we heard that there will be consultation on changes to the labour code here in Alberta. We have seen what consultations with the NDP have looked like in the past. Just talk to farmers and ranchers in Alberta. Just talk to small businesses who saw minimum wage consultations quickly become come-and-tell-you sessions. Will the Premier commit to do what's best for Albertans and our economy or only bulldoze through her ideological, risky agenda for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing, actually, is working very hard on making life more affordable for Alberta families, as the member opposite just referred to. So we're rolling back school fees by 25 per cent, we're freezing tuition, and we're capping electricity rates. All three of those things the member opposite wanted Albertans to pay more for. We are focused on making life better for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that Albertans just don't trust this government to get changes to the labour code right. In the midst of the deepest downturn Albertans have seen in over a generation, the NDP

announced income tax hikes, business tax hikes, gas tax hikes, and topped it off with a brand new carbon tax. While small businesses were closing their doors they, the NDP, bulldozed ahead with mandated wage increases, and now expected changes to the labour code have every single Albertan on edge. Times aren't easy right now. Does the Premier understand why folks just don't trust this NDP government to get anything on the economy right?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we know is that Albertans trust us to be on their side. Albertans trust us to have their back when times are tough, and that's exactly what we have been doing, and that is exactly what we will continue to do. We will not engage in the billions of dollars of cuts that the members opposite want to take out of our public services and download onto the families of Albertans. That's not the way we will go forward. We will stand up for Alberta families.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Justice System Delays

Mr. Jean: Today is my first opportunity to ask the Premier questions about the crisis in our justice system. Forty-four criminal cases have been stayed in Calgary over the past four months, and 60 more cases have been stayed in Edmonton because of lack of resources. Serious charges are included in that list, like impaired driving, assaulting a police officer, and fraud over \$5,000. When these criminals walk free without having their day in court, it erodes confidence in Alberta's justice system. Why did the Premier wait until significant public pressure mounted to fund additional resources in our court systems?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government believes very clearly that one of the things that does make life better for Albertans is ensuring that they have a secure and safe community. It matters to us. It matters to me as a mother of kids who walk through our communities. That's why our government has been investing in our public safety system since we first got elected. We've been doing it up till now. We will continue to do it. We just announced more funding for prosecutors. We're going to make sure that we get this right.

Mr. Jean: The triage protocol the NDP government has put into place to address the crisis in our courts is, frankly, unacceptable. Fiscal constraints are front and centre in the protocol document and put pressure on Alberta's Crowns to put money ahead of justice. This isn't reasonable. In neighbouring British Columbia the vice-president of the Crown Counsel Association stated, and I quote: the fiscal realities of any particular government are far down the list for us when we consider how to proceed with a case. End quote. Why are the Alberta NDP's priorities so out of whack with the rest of the country?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, we are very concerned about ensuring that our justice system is well funded and that it works well. That is why we're taking action. We're investing more money into Crown prosecutors. We're investing more money into court workers, and last year we invested more money into legal aid. Our government doesn't just talk about things; we take action, and that's the difference.

Mr. Jean: Canada-wide new statistics are being released about how many charges may be stayed as a result of the Jordan decision. In

Ontario the Crown Attorneys Association estimates that 6,000 criminal cases could be stayed or withdrawn. In Alberta the NDP government, this government, has been silent about it. Can the Premier please disclose to Albertans how many cases in provincial court are currently exceeding 18 months, how many cases in Queen's Bench court are exceeding 30 months, and how many criminal cases as a result of this government will be stayed or withdrawn?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, our government is taking action. Our government is moving forward with investing more into our system of public safety. The member opposite simply wants to study the issue. He wants to raise fears. He wants to raise concerns. He wants to score political points, and then his solution is to study the issue. Say one thing, do another. We're not about studying the issue. We're going to take action. We are taking action, and Albertans will be safer as a result.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: This government seems to be incredibly proud of the residential no-cost energy savings program. The minister simply can't stop making announcements about it, but unfortunately it's all hat, no cattle, all sizzle, no steak. Albertans aren't being told any details whatsoever: how many light bulbs the government will install per house, whether cabins and cottages are eligible, or if the company chosen will be allowed to upsell Albertans when they're doing it. When will the Premier tell Albertans the details on how her government plans to waste their money on this ill-conceived NDP boondoggle?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I watched with some relish the member opposite making fun of people in Alberta who are concerned about bringing down their electricity costs and bringing down their electricity use. It was quite something. He had a great time making fun of the issue. But you know what? As of today 68,000 Alberta households have signed up for this program because – you know what? – Albertans want to make progress on this issue. I would suggest that if anybody is out of touch on this issue, it is the member opposite. [interjections]

The Speaker: Government House Leader.

First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Well, let's look at the facts. There are over 1.5 million private dwellings in Alberta. Ecofitt, the Ontario company that got this contract, is only hiring 70 people to manage and install the program. If you were to take an hour per install, including travel time, it'll take these 70 people over a decade to visit every home. Meanwhile Alberta-based energy retrofit companies say that this program from the NDP has killed their business. Why pay for light bulbs when the government is giving away free ones? Why won't this government send this Ontario company packing so that it doesn't unfairly put even more Albertans out of work, as they've done already?

2:00

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this energy efficiency program, the first one in Alberta after this province went for decades being the only jurisdiction in the country without an energy efficiency program, will save the average family over a hundred dollars per year. Now, I appreciate that the members opposite don't care about saving money for the average family, but we do. As a result of that, we are

moving forward with this plan, and because it is so popular, we look forward to making the changes that ensure that they're able to meet the demands of the very excited Albertans who are wanting to reduce their electricity use.

Mr. Jean: Speaking of boondoggles, Mr. Speaker, the Ecofitt deal is a bad deal for Albertans. Albertans know it, we know it, and I'm sure that even the NDP knows it. Other energy retrofit companies tell us this contract tendering was less than straightforward. Curiously, the short list of bidders for the request for proposal awarded to Ecofitt was never published. Will the Premier now, today, assure Albertans that the awarding of this contract was fairly done, that they didn't create a program that only Ontario-based Ecofitt could actually do, and will they release the list of other companies who bid for this contract? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, moving forward on this program was the result of a wide range of consultation done by experts in the area of reducing energy use, something that these folks wouldn't talk about too much because they don't really spend a lot of time thinking about reducing energy use. Nonetheless, the company that won the contract provides this service in Nova Scotia, in Ontario, in Manitoba, in Quebec, and in British Columbia, and the reason that we had to go out was because we didn't have a program here in Alberta before. But you know what? Now we do.

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

Oil Sands Investments

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, while the Premier was in Houston last week, she made such an impression on the energy industry that Shell withdrew 7 and a quarter billion dollars of investment from Alberta. To the Premier: while you were in Texas – I'd just like to know – did the leaders there give you a nice gift and a thank-you card in exchange for all the head office jobs that have been transferred from Calgary to Houston?

Ms Notley: Well, I do understand that while I was in Houston, the member opposite wasn't really watching that much about what was going on but, rather, was filing his suit against the Ethics Commissioner. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, had he been paying attention, he would have known that we had an opportunity then to talk with many, many leaders in the oil and gas industry about how we are working with them to reposition Alberta as a successful, progressive, long-term sustainable energy producer. The matter that the member opposite talks about is fearmongering. CNRL is taking over that work, and it's going to be good for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The first supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's another tale from the Premier's accomplishment book. In 2007 Statoil invested \$2.2 billion in the Alberta oil sands. In 2016, on this Premier's watch, they fire-sold that same investment for about \$832 million and left Alberta. Now, they're still in the energy business, just not here. To the Premier: how many more companies and good, mortgage-paying jobs will you and your policies drive out of Alberta before you reverse the carbon tax, the corporate taxes, and all the inconsistencies ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, our government is very concerned about promoting economic growth and about promoting job creation, and that is something that we've been very focused on. I'll tell you what. You know what helps bring investment to Alberta? Two pipelines, two pipelines that those guys over there couldn't get after 44 years. That's the kind of thing that is bringing investment to Alberta notwithstanding the drop in oil prices, and that's the kind of thing that will contribute to our ongoing prosperity under our government's leadership.

Mr. McIver: Last week they said that they wouldn't celebrate till there was oil flowing. I guess they've forgotten about that.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's hand-picked staff member Tzeporah Berman, co-chair of the oil sands advisory group, two weeks ago was telling Canadian universities to remove their investments from the Alberta oil sands. During the Premier's Houston trip she proclaimed her support for the oil sands, but we know that actions speak louder than words. To the Premier: before more investment leaves Alberta, will you fire Ms Berman, or will you continue to send mixed messages about our biggest industry?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I will be very proud to do is to continue our record of building relationships between people who previously were in opposite corners of the room, never speaking to each other, never making progress, never building pipelines, and never protecting the climate. We brought those people together. We've got those people making progress together. We are setting up a better economic environment and investment climate as a result, and I am very proud of that.

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

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Springbank off-stream reservoir, or SR1, is the cheapest, most effective, and fastest way to ensure that flood waters do not once again ravage downtown Calgary. But last week the Tsuut'ina Nation stepped up their opposition to the project, saying that they haven't been adequately consulted. I know the government has been in contact with representatives from Tsuut'ina, but clearly they still have concerns. To the Premier: have you personally met with Tsuut'ina leaders about this issue, and if not, will you?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I have met with the Tsuut'ina leadership on this issue. While we are very concerned that the Tsuut'ina have issues with the project, I think it's important to remember that we have met with them a number of times. I personally have met with them on this issue. There have been 10 site visits as well, Mr. Speaker, as well as three meetings with department officials and the Tsuut'ina, between the Tsuut'ina and the Transportation department, with respect to this matter, and we have provided over a hundred thousand dollars in funding.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a critical issue. I'd encourage and urge the Premier herself, please, to get involved.

Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada has been clear that indigenous peoples must be included in any projects that impact their traditional territories. Given this well-established fact, I would have thought that engagement with Tsuut'ina would have been a

priority for this government, but it appears not. Again to the Minister of Transportation: what is your plan to address the concerns of Tsuut'ina about their drinking water and the potential impact of SR1 on their lands?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't agree with the hon. member that we have not engaged with the Tsuut'ina. I've reached out since its release and hope to have a meeting with the chief very soon. We've engaged in an environmental impact process. That will be complete at the end of this month, and we're expecting that report to be available in early summer. That will shed a great deal of light on the issues that the hon. member has raised, and it will be the jumping-off point for further discussions with Tsuut'ina.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, every year that goes by without significant flood mitigation brings risk, and it's a concern I've raised in this House many times, including almost exactly one year ago to this day. But serious questions remain about when the project will be built, and I want an assurance from this government that they are still committed to SR1. My constituents are also asking me about the process for getting the project approved and construction started. Again to the Minister of Transportation: assuming that federal and provincial environmental approvals are in place that ensure drinking water is safe and lands are protected, is the consent of all parties required before moving ahead?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, well, we've certainly – and I've indicated already that we have – met a number of times with the Tsuut'ina, and we have a detailed log of all of the interactions, which is extensive. So we've been engaging the Tsuut'ina on this issue; we want to continue to do that. We want to find out what their additional concerns may be. We want to await the environmental impact assessment and discuss those issues further with the Tsuut'ina. We're very much committed to the Springbank project, and we certainly are looking hopefully forward to having Tsuut'ina agreement as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Red Deer Courthouse

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since my election one of the most frequent concerns I've heard is how Red Deer needs a new courthouse. The mayor of Red Deer has raised this issue on a number of occasions, as have the local legal community and the judiciary. I have brought these concerns to the minister before. To the Minister of Justice: when will Red Deer receive the courthouse it desperately needs?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, we have heard from the community of Red Deer as well and from Mayor Veer that they have considerable concerns regarding the need for a new courthouse. We are recognizing this and listening to all Albertans, and the hon. member will have to wait, like everybody else, to determine how those priorities were prioritized.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Red Deer's courthouse takes in matters from around the region and is a priority for both the city and the county and given that there are significant capacity pressures, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ease these pressures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question and for her advocacy on this issue. We understand that the court system is under considerable pressure in a number of places. That's why we're investing resources on multiple fronts. We have heard from the community that the Red Deer courthouse is a source of serious concern, and that will be weighed in the balance with government priorities.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the situation in Red Deer is dire and given that the previous government failed to fund a new courthouse for the people of Red Deer, to the Minister of Justice: will the government commit to a new courthouse today? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Access to justice is a priority for this government. We do know that that courthouse is a considerable concern. We are aware that the previous government over many years and decades failed to take any action on this issue, and we will definitely weigh the needs of Red Deerians, as we do all members of the province.

Thank you.

Oil Sands Investments

(continued)

Mr. Barnes: The deal that saw Shell sell most of its Canadian oil sands assets has been in the works for more than a year. That means since shortly after this government unveiled its climate action plan. Instead of stopping investment from fleeing the province, this government was blowing hot air, claiming that Shell was thrilled with the plan. Mr. Speaker, so thrilled, they're leaving. When Shell was lobbying the Premier for a carbon tax, did they explain that they meant the tax to only apply to everyone else while they moved capital to jurisdictions with no carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment and climate change.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it curious that the member opposite would ask us to interfere in the private dealings between two companies that both stood on the stage with the government in announcing the carbon pricing framework. Both CNRL and Shell supported and continue to support Alberta's climate leadership plan.

As for the details, we are pleased to see an Alberta company and one of Canada's largest energy firms increasing their holdings in the oil sands. This is good news for Albertans, and it's certainly good news for overtime opportunities . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Albertans are starting to notice a trend, Mr. Speaker. Companies only support the carbon tax after they've been exempted from paying it. Given that the OSAG panel is tasked with determining who will and who will not be paying a net carbon tax greater than the subsidies funded by our junior oil and gas industry and given that no juniors were welcome on this board, to the Energy minister: will Suncor, the biggest proponent of this government's carbon tax, receive more in subsidies than they pay in carbon tax because of the ruling of a panel that they are on?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I find it curious that the members opposite would talk down one of the largest employers in their own leader's riding. I find it curious that the members opposite are promising to scrap the very plan that resulted in pipeline approvals. They're doubling down on the same dead-end approach that resulted in no pipeline approvals. I find that it is actually beneath us as parliamentarians as well to root for Alberta to fail as we move forward with our climate leadership plan. Albertans deserve better, and they get better from this side of the House.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I work for Albertans, not the oil companies.

Albertans are tired of this government's reckless policy initiatives and the long-term instability they create for our number one jobs sector. Given that companies like Shell want to upgrade their portfolio and that under this NDP government's leadership Alberta didn't make the grade and given that this government's rush job on the 100-megatonne emissions cap bill failed to provide investors with certainty, when can Albertans expect to see the long-awaited results of the now overdue OSAG panel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all of the companies that the members of the Official Opposition have spent their time talking down today are contributing to the oil sands advisory group so that we can find ways to move forward with innovation and putting Alberta, really, on the world stage as an energy producer. The CEO of Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance praised the emissions cap when he said that "with the technology being developed in Alberta," the 13 oil companies that are part of COSIA "are confident Alberta can continue to grow its industry while reducing emissions." That is our vision for the future of the energy industry in this province. It is not a vision that is shared by the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Thank you.
The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Agricultural Trade with India

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In just the past two years Alberta's producers have increased their production of dried peas by 65 per cent and 400 per cent for lentils to feed India's demand. Furthermore, by 2020 India is expected to surpass China as the world's most populous nation. Guess what? Eighty per cent of Indians are vegetarian. Clearly, there's a great opportunity for Alberta to increase trade with India. To the agriculture minister: did you sign any trade agreements on your recent trip to India? Yes or no, Minister?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for bringing up this important trade issue. We have opportunities in India. As the member has stated, the population is growing. They have a very young population. They're going to continue being an important market area for our producers in pulses, wheat, and canola and other products as well. My mission to India saw opportunities to speak with many different members of industry and government, including state officials. Those talks continue as we continue this process.

Thank you.

Mr. Gill: Sounds like a no.

Given that the former government launched a major trade mission to India in 2014, led by the Premier, and given that three agreements were signed that year to increase market access but just like crops, these agreements need nurturing and given that Saskatchewan recently outstripped Alberta as an exporter of pulse crops, again to the minister: what is your government specifically doing to secure market access in India for Alberta's producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada is currently the second-largest producer of pulses in the world. We're the largest exporter of pulses in the world. I'm proud to say that Alberta is the largest exporter of yellow and green peas to India and around the world. That trade continues. We'll continue to do it. I was very proud of my trip to India. We can extend that market even further as the population of India grows.

Thank you.

Mr. Gill: No results by the minister.

Given that last week the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti asked the agriculture minister to provide an update on the status of the historic 2014 trade agreement between Alberta and the state of Punjab but the minister didn't do so and given that I asked the trade minister the same question one year ago and was told that I would receive an update, which has never happened, to the trade minister: what will it take to receive this long-promised update? Would the minister prefer if I sent a formal letter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very interesting to note that actually my visit to India was the first visit by a minister of agriculture from Alberta, the first one ever. That's important to note, that we obviously take that very seriously. We take that seriously to be able to support. This side of this House has given the support, and we support Alberta farmers and ranchers as we continue our market access.

Thank you.

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

2:20

Carbon Offsetting

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government told Albertans that the carbon tax and their policy changes were about reducing greenhouse gases, but a letter sent to large emitters proves that this isn't the case. Emitters have been told that in the future they will only be able to use GHG offset credits to pay for a maximum of 30 per cent of their carbon compliance charges, that the rest must be paid in cash. If the carbon tax and this government's policies are really about reducing greenhouse gases, then why is the NDP gutting the one and only policy that actually does that in favour of boosting government revenues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The changes that we are bringing to the offset protocol system and the compliance pieces to that have to do with the regularization of how we do things compared to other jurisdictions. We, of course, have a very robust offset market in this province, and we want to make sure that that aligns with where they also have carbon pricing frameworks in place, where we also find a 30 per cent cap on offsets. So we are aligning our system as the system grows and making sure that we are the leaders in this country in how our offset markets work.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, since large greenhouse gas emitters were told that the government won't allow companies to use GHG offset credits to pay for all of their compliance charges and that the NDP wants cash instead and since the use of credits, which result from actual and real reductions in GHGs, is "impacting the ability of government to implement meaningful long-term programming" and since NDP programs are more important than reducing greenhouse gases, will the Premier admit that this government's climate policies were never about climate and that this is just a tax grab and a green slush fund?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, what the opposition calls a green slush fund we on this side of the House call an indigenous solar program. What the opposition calls a slush fund we call an indigenous energy efficiency program. We call it an on-farm solar PV program. We call it an on-farm farm efficiency program. So what they dismiss as real reductions for Albertans and real ways that real communities can save money – they reject those things. They reject supporting communities in that way. They reject those programs because, at the end of the day, they reject the science of climate change.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, I'd like to give some actual information here. Mr. Speaker. Since this means that Alberta companies that actually made a difference in reducing GHGs in the past, actual greenhouse gases, will be punished so that the NDP can flow carbon tax money to their friends who are making NDP-approved investments in the future and given that this is bad for the environment, bad for the economy, bad for future investment, and bad for Albertans, why should any company invest in reducing greenhouse gases in Alberta if the NDP is going to change the rules on them whenever they need more cash?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, what's bad for the environment is an Official Opposition that doesn't believe climate change is real. What's bad for the environment is a group of folks that would rather spread conspiracies than actually tackle climate change. What's even worse is for an Official Opposition to undermine our energy industry and their good ideas for innovation and clean technology to reduce our emissions per barrel, to make our companies more competitive, and to put people to work while we're doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Rural Crime Prevention

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hard-working RCMP officers and peace officers in my riding have been working overtime to meet the challenges of rising crime. The facts are clear. Crime is up across rural Alberta, and Bonnyville-Cold Lake is no exception. Motor vehicle thefts have skyrocketed 80 per cent from 2015 to

2016; assault, up 36 per cent; break and enter, up 55 per cent. These numbers and more can be found in a report which I will be tabling today. To the minister: what specific steps are you and your government taking to address rural crime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for what is really a very important question. All Albertans deserve to live in safe communities. That's why we increased funding to ALERT, funding that was cut by the former federal Conservative government, to ensure that they were able to continue to do their important work, bringing together intelligence and bringing together all different services so that they could work to keep the province safe. That's why we're ensuring that we're making investments in our justice system in terms of legal aid, in terms of Crown prosecution services, in terms of the courts. It's why we've created more judicial positions to keep the system running.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is a serious issue, by not having a clear strategy to deal with rural crime, this government is flirting with disaster. Given that almost every category of serious crime went up in Bonnyville-Cold Lake from 2015 to 2016, including robbery, assault, and uttering threats, Minister, a constituent of my riding would like an answer to whether or not the minister could shift resources from the safer communities and neighborhoods unit or the sheriffs investigative support unit to secure the safety of my constituents and to help support the hard work . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I know that he and his constituents are very concerned about rural safety, and so are we. Ultimately, the RCMP has jurisdiction because they are the experts over how that deployment works. In terms of the SCAN program and the surveillance program that were formerly housed in ALERT, we've heard a lot from municipal leaders that those programs are absolutely critical to them. Those are programs that are involved in shutting down drug houses, in tracking organized crime, and we think that they're very important.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that crime in most categories has risen steadily since the start of the economic downturn and given that there's a clear connection between Albertans losing work and these troubling rates of rural crime as well as the fentanyl crisis and given that these are not just city problems, that rural Albertans are being the hardest hit due to their living in isolated locations, far away from police services, why has this government been too slow to meaningful action to address the problems in my communities and all rural communities?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I'm going to have to beg to differ on this government having moved slowly to action. This government has taken a number of steps to ensure that our justice system is functioning appropriately. We've inserted resources to ALERT. That's front-line policing. We've made sure that resources are

available for both defence and Crown prosecutors in the courts to ensure that things are being dealt with in a timely manner. We've passed a bill that ensures that front-line RCMP officers can spend more time on the street and less time doing paperwork. These are all concrete actions that this government is taking. Meanwhile the members opposite propose more study.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Provincial Debt-servicing Costs

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Buried in the government's '16-17 budget, we see the NDP spending almost a billion dollars to service taxpayer debt. That's more than the budgets of Indigenous Relations, Service Alberta, Status of Women, and Environment and Parks combined. To the Minister of Finance: so that we don't bury ourselves in servicing your ever-increasing debt, decimating funding for other valuable programs, when will you present a credible plan to return to a balanced budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stood up in this House before and said that by 2023-2024 we will get to balance if – if – we continue to invest in this province so that people have jobs and construction occurs province-wide, if we continue to support Albertans so that they can go to those jobs with training and education and other postsecondary supports. Those are the things I said, and those are the things we'll stick to in this House.

Mr. Gottfried: Sounds like never, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the same budget predicts that these interest payments will rise to \$1.4 billion in the following year and given that the total budget for Children's Services provided in the recent Q3 update sits at only \$1.1 billion, to the Minister of Children's Services: will you fight to reduce the budget deficit so that money being spent to fund irresponsible borrowing can instead be directed towards increased support of vulnerable children?

2:30

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Again, Mr. Speaker, I think I've also stood up in this House and said that debt-servicing costs in this province are lower than in B.C. We're at half again below B.C. You know, the kind of thing we won't do is that we won't cut services to Albertans. That side would cut \$9 billion – or \$2 billion. I get them mixed up because they all want to cut billions out of the budget. That would cut seniors' benefits, transportation services, special-needs students' funding, student aid. All that would be gone if they were in charge.

Mr. Gottfried: So I guess we'll find out when debt servicing trumps children.

Mr. Speaker, given that interest payments are projected to rise to \$2 billion in '18-19 and given that this government is expected to take \$1.2 billion out of the pockets of Albertans in carbon tax that same year, to the Finance minister: if you believe that \$1.2 billion in carbon taxes will convince Albertans to make better choices, why won't \$2 billion in debt-servicing costs convince your government to also make better choices?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's a bit rich hearing this from the other side, a gang who couldn't balance the budget at \$100 a barrel. Now they want average families to pay for their fiscal malpractice with reckless cuts to schools and hospitals. They want to hurt everyday Albertans. On this side of the House we're protecting what people need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Highway 40

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The beautiful riding of West Yellowhead is a major corridor for both tourism and industry. Highway 40 is a key road for traffic between the Yellowhead highway and Grande Cache. Since I was elected, local towns and counties have repeatedly told me that highway 40 is in desperate need of upgrading. To the Minister of Transportation: when will the residents of West Yellowhead see this road upgraded?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. He's an excellent advocate for his constituency, and I want to thank him for the question. We know that this road is critical for that area for industry, for goods, and for the accessibility to tourism. There's a lot of pressure being placed on highway 40 right now, hon. member, specifically from Grande Cache south to the Wapiti River. I can assure you that we've heard the concerns, and I have the department busy working on solutions. Thank you.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that the municipality has asked Alberta Transportation to widen narrow points of highway 40, to the same minister: how is the government going to address the safety concerns of my constituents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member needs to know that safety is a top priority for me as minister and for the Transportation department. We take those concerns very seriously, so we're currently working with the municipalities in the entire area to address the safety issues that the hon. member has raised today, and we're working towards a solution that will meet the needs of the residents to ensure they get to where they're going and arrive alive.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given how important highway 40 is to the economic development of the West Yellowhead region, when can my constituents expect improvements on the condition of highway 40?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for the question. You know, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the former government left us with significant infrastructure issues to address. We're committed to investing not only for safety and for convenience but to promote economic development in this region and other parts of the province, but I can't make any commitments at this time. As the hon. member knows, there are many competing priorities that we have to sort through, but I want him to know that we are looking very closely at the issues he's raised today.

Government Policies

(continued)

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, our province has struggled for almost two years under the NDP reign. In that time the Premier has told Albertans that they are our country's embarrassing cousins. She said that a hundred thousand families who are wrestling with

unemployment and ballooning prices from the NDP's disaster of a carbon tax are simply Chicken Little who need to, quote, make better choices. Premier, your policies are devastating Alberta families. For a government that has shown such gross incompetence, when is the Premier going to ask herself to make better choices?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In a tough economy it's so important to ensure that our government continues to have the backs of ordinary families that are working to make their life better. We're creating jobs. We're cutting school fees. We're freezing tuition. The members opposite just want to keep jacking those things up. We're focused on hard hats. They're spending a lot of time with sewer rats.*

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, people in my riding are worried about the effect NDP policies are having on families and communities. Given that my constituents have had to cut their business hours or shut down completely and since this government's policies are also responsible for driving out billions of dollars of investment from large players like Shell, Albertans want to know: when is the NDP going to stop waging war on Alberta's business community, and when are they going to start accepting common-sense solutions to get Albertans back to work?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I get that the member opposite is concerned about his political future and the political future of his party, but it's time that they got their head in the game. We are working every day to make life better for Alberta families. We're doing that by making sure we're securing two new pipelines, cutting small-business taxes, making sure that Albertans have construction projects to go to work at that will result in good long-term plans for the future and jobs. Instead of proposing that, they'd cut billions of dollars on the opposite side, which would be a threat to schools and hospitals, to the livelihoods that families count on. Our government is focused on doing the right thing for Alberta families.

Mr. Nixon: Insulting Albertans seems to be this NDP government's full-time job. Since they don't seem to understand that they are making a bad situation worse when it comes to the economy and since under their watch we have seen investment flee our province, I'll ask the Premier which one of her inspirational messages she thinks resonates the most with Albertans, calling those who oppose the carbon tax xenophobic or saying that if they can't afford the carbon tax, they should take the bus or walk?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is so out of touch. It is appalling. While he has people that he is being closely aligned with calling the fight for feminism an equivalent to cancer, those who live in glass houses decorated with hate should not be throwing stones. So I have to say: who do you want running this province, making decisions to make your life better? A government that's standing up for Alberta families, a government that's cutting school fees, a government that's capping electricity prices or the members opposite, who just want to jack everything up? I don't think so.

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

Services for Indigenous Peoples

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the child intervention panel continues its invaluable and, hopefully, life-saving work, Albertans continue to hear about the disparity in

outcomes faced by our indigenous children. No one is disputing that this government or previous governments care deeply about all children in care; however, this painfully obvious gap in outcomes must be addressed as quickly as possible. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: when will the indigenous children of Alberta experience the same level of care and similar outcomes as nonindigenous Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. We are obviously very concerned about the gap that has been created in this province between indigenous children and nonindigenous children by the previous governments over the last literally hundred years in this province. We've been working very hard closely with each of the bands and councils to develop plans to look at economic prosperity, to look at social changes, and to bring all of that together under the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We're very proud of the fact that we are a party and a government that is committed to these people.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Looking forward to hearing timelines.

Now, given that indigenous children are subject to particularly poor outcomes in these and other regards, as the minister knows, and given that much of the funding required to address this issue comes from the federal government, again to the minister, with great respect: what specific commitments have you secured from your federal counterpart in order to assist in rapidly closing this gap in outcomes that is experienced by indigenous youth here in the province of Alberta?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. We, of course, do believe that the federal government has a great responsibility for the indigenous people in this province. As a result, we've had multiple meetings over the last couple of years with the federal minister and all of their departments so that we can ensure that the programs that we are putting together in this province do indeed address not just simply the services required by the indigenous community but the gap between where the services have been provided in the past by other governments and what we are able to provide now.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Again, we're very interested in specifics.

Given that a culturally competent workforce clear across government is an integral aspect of an effective public service for all Albertans and given that the children's intervention panel along with the July 2016 Auditor General's report highlight the need for increased cultural understanding within government, again to the minister, as I've asked on a number of other occasions, please tell us: what new initiatives have you implemented to address the low level of First Nations representation amongst employees of all government departments and beyond?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We, of course, have accepted all of the Auditor General's recommendations. We're committed to working with indigenous

*See page 235, right column, paragraph 8

people. Additionally, we have worked with indigenous communities to help us establish protocol agreements in which all of the ministers in this House are meeting with indigenous communities from across northern Alberta, and soon we will have protocol agreements for the rest of Alberta. In those protocol agreements and at those tables we will have the opportunity to address specific programs required and asked for by the indigenous community. That's consultation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll go on to the next statement in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Edmonton-Decore Constituents' Milestones

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it clearly is no secret just how proud I am of my riding of Edmonton-Decore. Within the past two months there have been some pretty special events that have made me even more proud to be the MLA of this riding. On January 15 Jane McIntyre celebrated her 102nd birthday. My staff helped her celebrate this momentous occasion on February 16 at St. Michael's Long Term Care. From what I heard, it was a wonderful celebration filled with love, laughter, and, from what I hear, some great country music.

On February 2, 2017, two of my constituents, Tillie and Ellie Chudyk, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. I had the pleasure of meeting this lovely couple for the first time at the Ukrainian Day celebration at the Ukrainian heritage village, where their family name was unveiled as part of the genealogy project there. They are here today in the gallery, and I congratulate them personally on this momentous occasion that they're celebrating.

Finally, on March 17, Carl Huculak will be celebrating his 100th birthday party at St. Michael's millennium centre. I'm extremely honoured to have been invited to his birthday celebration, and I'm truly looking forward to wishing him a very happy birthday in person.

Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-Decore truly has some amazing constituents. These celebrations and many more milestones such as these are just some of the ways that I get to highlight how incredible these people are. Thank you all for allowing me to be your MLA in this riding.

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

South Sudanese Refugees

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary is home to the largest diaspora of South Sudanese in Canada. I celebrated with many of my friends in that community as they recognized the independence of their new country, the youngest in the world, formed in 2011.

Unfortunately, I now see these same friends struggling, worried about their friends and families as their new country is in the midst of a devastating civil war. In a country of 10 million, two million have been displaced from their homes and 450,000 have fled the country altogether. Currently it is the second-worst refugee crisis in the world.

There is widespread sexual violence. In the UN refugee camp in Juba, the capital, 75 per cent of women there have been victims of rape. Ethnic groups are being targeted, and people are being pulled from their homes in the night and killed. There is a possibility of genocide. On top of all of this, the UN has now declared a man-

made famine. With people fleeing their villages and living in the bush, they are unable to farm and grow food, and they are starving.

Two weeks ago I was honoured to be able to meet with a delegation of leaders from South Sudan that included opposition members from the previous government who have been forced to flee the country. They are travelling through Canada, speaking to politicians and community members to raise awareness about the extent of the crisis. Here in Canada all South Sudanese, from both sides of the conflict, are working together to advocate for peace in their country, calling on the federal government to support bringing refugees here to Canada and to support the UN intervention in the crisis.

I urge people to write to their MP or donate to organizations such as the Relief Organization for South Sudan, which is run by South Sudanese and is working on the ground with the UN to bring humanitarian aid such as food, health care, and education to people who need it. Mr. Speaker, most of us cannot imagine living through what is the current reality for those in South Sudan nor the anguish our fellow Albertans are feeling right now, but we can support them and use our voices to draw attention to the dire situation they are now facing.

Thank you.

Conservatism in Alberta

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP members, I dared to host a town hall meeting in Calgary to consult Albertans. I was very surprised and overwhelmed to see 250 people when it was minus 20. Those Albertans showed up to voice their concerns over the NDP's policies and how we cannot have another NDP government elected in Alberta. Albertans want this accidental government, bent on implementing its risky ideological agenda, tossed out. In a survey of Albertans after the last election 90 per cent of those who voted NDP did so because they wanted a new government and only 10 per cent because they supported the NDP's platform and policies.

When a straw poll was conducted at my town hall on uniting the Wildrose and PCs, over 95 per cent of those people in attendance voted in favour of unity. One key condition for unity was keeping Wildrose principles like fiscal conservatism, liberty, recall, and free votes. One member, one vote was also supported by a clear majority, and people wanted party constitutional changes to require so for majorities. A fair majority in the room supported the conservative party of Alberta or Alberta conservative party as the preferred name for the new entity. I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for attending and thank the Member for Calgary-Greenway for coming in as an observer. I heard from Albertans that unity is essential to get Alberta back on track, grow the economy, and get Albertans back to work.

Mr. Speaker, political realignment is under way, and in short order I'm one hundred per cent certain that conservatives across Alberta will unite into a single provincial party . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and in accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on the 2015 annual

report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate. Copies of the report are available through the committee office and online.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Bill 3 Voluntary Blood Donations Act

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act.

This new act will create a barrier to the establishment of private pay-for-plasma clinics in Alberta. We must ban paying for blood donations to ensure that Albertans have access to the blood and blood products that they need when they need them. Donating blood should not be looked at as a business venture. It's a valuable public resource that saves lives every day. This legislation is the best way for Alberta to have secure and reliable access to donated blood because, Mr. Speaker, to be frank, blood is just too precious to go to the highest bidder.

I look forward to discussing and hearing feedback from my colleagues on all sides of this House with regard to this important initiative.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two quick tablings, with your permission. First is a *Gauntlet* article from the University of Calgary dated March 7 entitled Wildrose on Campus Faces Heat for "Feminism is Cancer" Email with a quote from their former president saying: "They are anti-women, anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ."

The Speaker: There's no editorial. Let's go. Keep moving.

Ms Jansen: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for that.

A second tabling, Mr. Speaker. I have provided five copies here, of course. This is from the account of Conservative Maxime Bernier: a photo of the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks choosing the red pill, also known as an antifeminist symbol, in his support of Mr. Bernier.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of a report done by the local RCMP detachment for Cold Lake. It is of deep concern that we have rising crime that is happening within Cold Lake, and we'd like to see something done within all of rural Alberta by this Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a letter written by the Alberta Beef Producers. The letter states that they "are pleased that the Alberta Government has recognized the value of cattle grazing for managing and enhancing the health of ecosystems as outlined in the Castle Park Draft Management Plan" and indicates that they are pleased that the

government of Alberta "is committed to working with beef producers to develop a sustainable and long term livestock grazing plan to complement the park's conservation objectives."

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to briefly table two documents, both articles I wrote on the Springbank dam and flood mitigation. The first is entitled Flood Mitigation an Opportunity for NDP to Show Leadership, in which I urged the government to select the Springbank project, which they did, and I'm pleased that they did so. The second is entitled We Should Build a Dam in Springbank as Quickly as Possible, in which I lay out the case why two different governments selected that project over McLean Creek and other options.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to table five copies of the Children's Guide to the City – Medicine Hat. This unique guide provides a new perspective of the city of Medicine Hat through the original art and words of children who range in age from three to six years old.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was a point of order, but I've been advised that the Opposition House Leader has withdrawn that point of order.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201

Justice System Accountability Act

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

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. It's an absolute honour to rise today and to move my very first bill as a private member in Alberta and to actually have an opportunity to speak on it today, which I will take some time with.

It's no secret, Mr. Speaker, as you've heard from the Wildrose members on this side, that crime is rising across Alberta, and our government simply has not been able to keep up. In 2015 Alberta saw an actual 18 per cent increase. Eighteen per cent. That is just in police-reported crime according to Statistics Canada. As you know, many crimes go unreported, so that would suggest that there has been a tremendous increase in crime. That includes nearly a 12 per cent increase in violent crimes. That's what's so concerning as well.

Every part of Alberta is feeling the impact, including rural Alberta and urban Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I've heard many, many stories over the last 18 months to two years about urban horror stories, in particular in relation to fentanyl abuse and selling drugs, and also about rural crimes, in particular property crimes. Every part of Alberta is feeling the impact, and I think we need to be very cognizant of that. In fact, I've heard in Calgary that they've seen nearly a 30 per cent increase in crime itself. So there's certainly no particular community or part of Alberta that does not see the full impact.

There's no question that there's a growing number of families that are concerned about the state of the justice system, and many already knew that trials were taking too long. But I did want to talk

just a little bit because I did hear in question period one particular minister say that all we could do was come up with reports, that what we wanted to do instead of solving the issue was to report on the issue and to do studies on the issue. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is about keeping track of information that they already keep track of for the most part.

You know, in our court system we have judges, we have clerks, we have Crown prosecutors, and of course we have defence counsel. Well, Mr. Speaker, when you get into the court system itself, you have a clerk that's there, and they keep track of everything. They keep track of how many adjournments they have, how many attendances for trial, how many settings for trial, how many prelim requests there are, and many other things.

In fact, if you open up Bill 201, in particular 2(2)(c), it talks about the total number of adjournments requested, including the number requested

- (i) by the Crown,
- (ii) by the defence,
- (iii) by the court,
- (iv) due to a disclosure issue,
- (v) due to a witness issue,
- (vi) due to a change in counsel, and
- (vii) due to the absence of the accused.

I think it's very important to report things and to be transparent about things. In particular, as I understand it from talking to Crown prosecutors, for the most part we are already keeping track of all these things in court.

What we aren't keeping track of, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that Albertans know what actually is taking place. I believe, based upon my time in the court system in Alberta for 10 years, that most Albertans would be disgusted to find out that often the accused receive adjournment after adjournment and that trials are sometimes set down three or four years from when the case actually happened, when the complaint actually took place.

What we're seeking is not a further study, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's just the opposite. We're asking for this government to report on what's already given and kept track of by the court clerk and by the Crown prosecutors office. Let's find out when the original complaint was laid. Let's find out when the investigation was done by the RCMP. Did it take a month, or did it take a year? Then let's find out when the first appearance in court was, when the second appearance in court was. Why was an adjournment granted?

Mr. Speaker, much like we did back in the '90s with civil matters, divorce matters, family law, when we found out what was happening, we were able to make changes. We knew in that particular case that judges were not following a guideline set out in the federal guidelines for support payments, so the Parliament in their wisdom came up with a situation where if a judge went off those federal support guidelines, they'd have to write a judgment. They'd have to do a judgment as to why they didn't follow that.

What we're seeking in this case, Mr. Speaker, by this little bill, that's not very long, is that we are simply asking for this government to report on what's happening in our court system. Why is it taking so long for justice to happen? Why are 200 court cases being thrown out? Why are cases where people that have been accused of a crime being thrown out? Why are dozens of impaired charges being thrown out, people that actually get behind a wheel and continue to drive while intoxicated and kill people and cause serious damage to families? Why are they being thrown out? Why are serious sexual assaults or murders being thrown out? Well, I'll tell you why. It's because this government is not putting enough resources in place. I believe that this particular bill, a five-page bill, will track and report to Albertans why this government is not getting the job done.

We know, Mr. Speaker, particularly, that we are expensive here in Alberta for our court system. In fact, we're much more expensive than British Columbia. I think we're about 15 per cent more expensive for our justice system than British Columbia is. Now, they have much better tracking systems than we do. In fact, they actually have a computer system where you can log on and you can look and see where the court system is. Now, not everything is as detailed as I'm asking for but much the same: find out what's happening with court cases and what's happening to particular courts in the system. How long they're taking, how effective they are: that's what we're asking here.

3:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, I said that Alberta's was 15 per cent more expensive than B.C.'s justice system, but when you account and adjust for population, because their population is larger, we're actually 30 per cent more expensive. Our justice system here, which delivers far worse results than B.C.'s, is 30 per cent more expensive. This is an epidemic. It's not just our justice system, but it's also our health system. It's not throwing money that works; it's finding solutions.

This particular bill, Bill 201, is just asking for reporting to the people of Alberta so that we will know whether we need to throw more money at a particular place, or maybe it's a system, Mr. Speaker. I referred earlier to the guidelines and how judges would have to do a written judgment if they would go off the federal guidelines for support payments. Well, that's something that doesn't cost any money. It doesn't mean that you throw money at a system that doesn't work. It means you find a solution.

What I'm suggesting is if it's taking too long to do investigations, which I don't believe is the case except in very complicated matters, or if, in fact, it's taking too long to make sure the accused gets into court the first time or whether it's the adjournment request, which I believe is a large part of the problem, or, Mr. Speaker, if we don't get proper disclosure because we don't have the resources.

People don't understand this in Alberta, but defence lawyers maybe have 20 or 30 cases, Mr. Speaker, that are current. Twenty or 30 criminal cases, for the most part, would be a fairly good law practice, and they, of course, would have new ones come as old ones go.

I remember my time practising in the '90s, Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta, and I saw that the Crown counsel in Fort McMurray, for instance, actually had literally more than a hundred cases. When the Crown prosecutor has more than a hundred cases and defence counsel has significantly fewer than that, they are able to concentrate and put more effort into it and find more loopholes and more situations to represent the accused.

What we need to do is make sure that our Crown prosecutors have every single tool that they can possibly have, including Bill 201, Mr. Speaker, to find out why our court system is taking so long from point to point to point, to remove those barriers so that Albertans can make sure they have confidence in the justice system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would say to you that we need to also focus on not just Albertans at large to make sure that they feel confident in the justice system, whether somebody breaks into their home or steals their quad off their farm or if there's a violent attack in one of our urban centres. They need to know that when they make the complaint to the police, something is going to be carried through, that the police officer is going to charge that person, that then that person is going to go to court and that that person, when they get into the court system, is going to be held to account and receive due process but that if they are found guilty, they are going to do serious time for a serious crime. That's necessary.

But more important, I think, than making sure the accused actually gets justice – and I do think that's very important, especially, Mr. Speaker, because during the time that I practised, I saw that repeat offenders were the biggest problem we had in our court system. Not just people with no prior records that go into the court system and one-offs; it's the people that have one or two or three pages of prosecutor information sheets or records. Those people, sir, need to be focused on, and I do believe that Bill 201 will give us the tool necessary to be able to see that repeat offenders, people with serious records, are clogging up our court system.

But, Mr. Speaker, it's about victims, and for too long the victims in Canada, in particular in Alberta, have been ignored and have been ignored by this government and previous governments. Victims have to wait and wait to get the ordeal done before they can move on, both mentally and physically sometimes. When you're waiting two or three or four years for a trial to come forward, especially a trial that deals with a violent situation, it just revictimizes the victim time and time again.

When they have to come in for a trial and they come in and they're ready to testify, they don't just come to trial and say: oh, another day. They come to trial emotionally upset. They have to challenge themselves to go to trial. Then when the accused comes in and says, "I'm sorry, but I want an adjournment" and the reason is flimsy, all they're doing is revictimizing the victim, and I think we need to stop that. That's why the victims need to have certainty before they testify and to not be drawn back into court time and time again and especially not drawn back into court so they can see the charges dismissed, as this government has allowed to happen in over 200 cases in just the last four months in Alberta.

When victims see their attacker walk away without even getting a day in court, they lose faith in the justice system. They lose faith in their government. They recognize: why would they ever report an incident dealing with a crime that was committed against them if once it gets into the system, once they've gone through all the different processes to get it there, Mr. Speaker, the Crown prosecutor and the judge and the system allow that accused to walk away?

I'm not blaming the Crown prosecutors, Mr. Speaker, because I know they're overworked. I'm blaming the government because they're not giving them the resources necessary, and, yes, I'm blaming the previous government because they didn't set it up properly so that it was efficient. That's how we got to a place where we're 30 per cent more expensive than British Columbia's justice system.

So it's not about throwing money, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the 33 new Crown prosecutors that this government just appointed after they received some pressure from the Wildrose. I appreciate that. I think that's important. Every time we give them pressure, they seem to react, and I think that's a good thing because that's the way this government works.

But what happens when victims hear this and read this in the newspaper? Why would they, then, go and report a crime? Mr. Speaker, after that accused is let go, it's very possible that that victim may see that person on the street, or if that accused is a relative or somebody that that person knows and they're let off scot-free, what happens with that situation? I think it brings disrepute into our justice system. I think it threatens the very foundation, the cornerstone of our society. It's important that when Albertans go to a police officer, they know that something is going to happen, that they're going to be kept safe, that they're not going to be revictimized.

Police do also get frustrated, and I know they do. I had an opportunity to work with many good police officers, many RCMP members throughout the years, great individuals that work extremely hard and are dedicated. But I've also seen these police officers get very discouraged because after they put hours and hours into a

case, they see the accused get off scot-free. Mr. Speaker, these police officers work far beyond their normal hours to make sure that they do the best job possible to have the accused be held to account. When this happens, I think it discourages them. I have heard from many police officers about this particular situation in the past. This is not new, but it has become an epidemic just in the last few months here in Alberta.

There are true visions by criminals on how to slow down the system. When we slow down the system, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that people's memories become fuzzy. They don't recognize and don't remember quite as well in two years as they do today. That's why I believe that the faster we give justice to victims and the faster we give justice to the accused, the better the system will be, and ultimately Albertans will feel that their government has done a better job.

What I'm asking for is not additional studies. I heard that in question period. Additional studies are not what we're asking for, Mr. Speaker. What we're asking for is for this government to be transparent to Albertans about what's going on, about why the accused are walking away and why our justice system is so much more expensive than other justice systems across the country, where those provinces are under the same constitutional obligations that Alberta is.

Now, it is not unusual, Mr. Speaker, for victims to wait years and years for trials, but the only thing more unacceptable than a delay in a trial or an extensive period of time to have a trial – two or three or four years – is not to have that trial at all. I do understand the rights of the criminals, of the accused, but I believe that the victims' rights should far outweigh the rights of the accused in this case.

3:10

The failure of our court system to properly respond to the Supreme Court case in the Jordan situation is, as I said, allowing criminals to walk scot-free on our streets. This includes those accused of violent crimes, and that is the most disturbing thing because often I have found, through my experience, that the people that commit violent crimes have no hindrance to committing another one. The people I saw with big rap sheets and long records are usually repeat offenders, and those repeat offenders continue to get away with crimes. Why would they not if our system, once they get into it, doesn't even hold them accountable?

Now, we have pushed for more judges, Mr. Speaker. We have pushed for more federal appointments for Queen's Bench judges and for more provincial appointments, but it needs to be done more quickly.

Just in summary, I want to say this. I've taken 15 minutes, and I don't want to take any more time. Mr. Speaker, we have actually had the Privacy Commissioner recently state that our freedom of information system, the Justice freedom of information system, is the worst offender in Alberta, that it's one of the worst across the country, and that's not acceptable. That's why I think this justice accountability act would be so important. When we put in a request for freedom of information, we can't even get it from the Justice department, and if we do, it's months and months if not years away.

We need to be accountable to Albertans. They pay us, they hired us, and they deserve a justice system that keeps them safe and gives them confidence in our government. That's why I'm moving Bill 201, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask all members to support me in moving this.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are here today to discuss what is ultimately an incredibly critical issue. The justice

system balances the fundamental safety of all Albertans and the fundamental rights of Albertans. Nothing could possibly be more important. Our government is committed to ensuring that it works well.

Mr. Speaker, when I took office, I came into a system with incredible backlogs and delays. Much study and much academic writing and much ink has been spilled over this issue and what the appropriate solutions to it are. I began working on this issue immediately upon taking office, trying to figure out where the pressure points are, what needed more funding, what we needed to do to move this issue forward.

We took some initial steps. Almost immediately we launched a bail review to look into our system, to determine how it was working. That system is fundamental to the operation of the entire system of justice, and we've taken steps already to move on that particular bail review, Mr. Speaker. We also took steps to ensure that front-line police officers could spend more time on the streets and less time doing paperwork, to ensure that warrants weren't issued for things like C-Train tickets. That saves work in terms of both police and court officers.

Then the Jordan decision came down, Mr. Speaker. It came from the Supreme Court, and we are constitutionally required to follow it. It imposed time frames with no warning whatsoever. We had to respond incredibly quickly, and we did. In October I went out and I announced our initial response, which was to begin triaging matters, and the reason that that is so incredibly critical is to ensure that the courts aren't picking for us. It's to ensure that we have the opportunity to make sure that the most serious and most violent cases, those that are in the public interest, those for which we have the necessary evidence, are those which are being pursued. It sets direction for our Crown prosecutors to ensure that that is the case, and it is absolutely critical that we lead on this issue, that we take the time to make those decisions in a strategic and intelligent way to defend the rights and safety of all Albertans rather than letting the court pick matters at random.

Mr. Speaker, we took those steps immediately, and the Official Opposition came out and proposed cuts to the justice system. Then they came out with this bill and said that this was not a resource issue. Then the government stepped forward to put more resources in because we knew that, in fact, it was a resource issue. Once we had done that, the Official Opposition turned around and said that we hadn't done it fast enough even though they were calling for the opposite. The member opposite vacillated in his speech so many times between whether it cost too much money for the justice system or not enough that, frankly, I'm a little dizzy.

In terms of the federal justice appointment issue the member opposite actually sat on the federal justice commission . . .

Mr. Jean: Committee. Justice committee.

Ms Ganley: Committee.

In that time, when he had the opportunity to advocate for more judges for Alberta, to appoint more judges for Alberta, he said nothing. Nothing, Mr. Speaker.

This government has stepped forward. We've created nine additional positions on the Court of Queen's Bench and one on the Court of Appeal to ensure that we are able to get the necessary resources. We are working with our federal counterparts to achieve things that the former government was never capable of.

Mr. Speaker, our system is obviously facing considerable challenges. There is no question about that. That's why we're investing in so many different front-line things, including policing, including the courts, including legal aid, and including the Crown prosecution service. We, unlike the Official Opposition, have spoken to Crown

prosecutors, to defence lawyers, to the courts, to court clerks. Our largest concern with this bill is that resources which absolutely need to flow to the front lines would instead be focused on collecting statistics, statistics which would require significant additional investment, in terms of those front-line resources that we think belong in courtrooms, in order to collect. We need to avoid turning our front-line Crown prosecutors into statisticians unless it's the case that the information collected would be useful.

We are absolutely in favour of evidence-based solutions. We are absolutely in favour of looking at what statistics the justice system keeps. In fact, we've been looking at this problem for months. I realize that the Official Opposition has only realized recently that we're having a problem with the justice system, but we have been taking steps and making investments since we took office.

The member, when he introduced this bill, noted that it was going to take a period of time to see where we ended up on matrices and what's taking place before we should invest. Fundamentally, we simply disagree. That's why our government stepped up and announced that we're hiring 50 new prosecutors and 30 court administration staff. Mr. Speaker, we've been working with the judiciary, with the Crown prosecution service, and with defence lawyers to ensure that we have the right resources in place.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to vacillating back and forth on whether this is a resource issue or not, the member opposite also cites B.C.'s court system. He seems to love their system and what it is they're doing. In B.C. they have a rather different impaired-driving model than we have here. All across the country, in most parts except in B.C., impaired driving tends to be prosecuted by way of a criminal prosecution. That's true here in Alberta. In B.C. they have instead administrative sanctions. Here in Alberta we have both. We have the criminal prosecution and the administrative sanctions. So while the member is simultaneously saying that we should be more like B.C. and we should be less like B.C., it's a little bit confusing. He's suggesting, I can only imagine, that we should move to B.C.'s model of impaired driving, which doesn't involve a criminal prosecution, while simultaneously complaining that we've only used administrative sanctions. It's just dizzying.

We're well aware, Mr. Speaker, that the system, which has been underresourced for years, requires some changes. That's why we've taken, as I've noted, so many different actions to ensure that we're not wasting time on things that are not within the court's purview, like C-Train tickets, to ensure that front-line police officers are able to spend more time on the front lines and less time back at the office doing paperwork, to ensure that we have the right people running our bail system, and now to ensure that we are providing adequate funding not only to legal aid but to the Crown prosecution service and to all of the courts. We will continue to move forward to ensure that that is the case.

Now, the member opposite certainly cites B.C.'s data portal. It's a little bit different than what he's proposing here today. We will look at it absolutely with interest, Mr. Speaker. We're interested in gathering data. What we aren't interested in gathering is data that our stakeholders, when we canvassed them about this bill, have indicated will just not be very useful in terms of assessing what's going forward. We have had conversations with all system members, and many of them pointed out not only that this would take resources, much-needed resources, from the front lines in order to gather these statistics but that the contents of the bill are not even where we need to focus in terms of moving forward. We're happy to keep statistics; we'd just like them to be meaningful statistics.

3:20

They stressed their significant concerns over the lack of consultation on the bill and the lack of asking them, those front-line system

participants like Crown prosecutors, like court clerks, what it was that was necessary and what it was that was already kept, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite frequently cites that we have some great database somewhere where 100 per cent of these things are kept, but it's simply not true. The estimates on keeping those statistics are quite high.

Mr. Speaker, when a case comes into court, it's the case of an individual victim, the case of an individual accused person. It is one individual case. Certainly, the case file is noted in terms of what's happening with that particular case, but we don't look at those as an overall view. The reason for that is that there are certain dangers in that. There are certainly dangers in conflating incredibly high-complexity cases like murders with low-complexity cases.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we have a clear plan, and we're moving forward with it.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to commend the member for bringing this bill forward. You know, one thing I've learned is that knowledge, of course, is power. When we're talking about making informed decisions and we can bring data, whether it be compiled through police services or through Crown prosecutors, in order to improve the system, I think that is something that we as a society should be doing and, certainly, the justice system as well.

You know, it's important any time we are making decisions, especially as a House, that we consider all of the stakeholders. Certainly, something that has come to light most recently, over the last several weeks, has to do with victims, victims of crime and victims who are being revictimized. I can see that when we bring information as to decisions that were made by the Crown prosecutors or by the police officers that can be compiled, where data can be extrapolated in order to improve the system, to ensure that victims are being taken care of, to ensure, of course, to a certain degree that offenders are assured of their rights, that is something that, of course, is important as well.

You know, I have seen through practice in the police services that sometimes unintentional things happen. Sometimes there are errors in law done by sections of police services, sometimes done by whole police departments. That is why, of course, we have the trials, to ensure that that officer has been compliant with the Charter of Rights, compliant with the Criminal Code. It is the Criminal Code of Canada, not the criminal code of Alberta.

We also have to make sure that those victims, again, are assured that they have rights. It is important that everyone knows that victims do have rights. You know, the hon. member there touched on drunk drivers. There was a time when, I certainly believe, society did not really understand the magnitude of the danger that drunk drivers posed to society. What I mean by that is that at any given time any one of our loved ones could be at risk. We have to really think about that. I have been in those situations where we've arrested or I have specifically arrested somebody who was an impaired driver. I've arrested somebody that blew 400 milligram per cent. I think that was four or five times the legal limit. They were barely able to even function, yet that person was behind the wheel of an automobile. As a former certified breath technician for the province of Alberta I can tell you that drunk drivers pose a significant risk to society.

When we understand why cases may be thrown out, why they may be stayed, why there may have been an error, a judgment call, whatever the case may be, by the Crown or by the police officer, I think it is important as a justice system that we know so that we can

learn, so that we can give the necessary direction and advice to ensure that mistakes do not continue to happen.

I know the hon. member also mentioned in regard to police confidence in officers that he had dealt with personally in the RCMP. I can tell you that maintaining morale, maintaining confidence by front-line services is vitally, vitally important. Nothing is more discouraging for an officer than when they put in time and effort and assist the victim from the initial complaint all the way up until the trial and then, you know, for a reason sometimes unbeknownst to the officer, that file is thrown out or stayed. Then the police officer – the police officer – is the one that has to go and explain why that occurred to that poor victim of crime.

Now, I specifically dealt with a case where a young woman was a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault. We were able to work with her with the domestic conflict unit to give her the courage to testify against that offender. She was willing to do it. She got up there, and she said: I'm going to do it; I'm going to do it because it's the right thing to do. And that case was thrown out. So then the primary investigator went to the Crown and said: "Why? Why? Why? We put in all this effort, all this work. This woman was truly a victim of crime." The prosecutor said: "Well, in the end, it's his word against hers." It was that police officer that had to go back to that victim and say: I'm sorry; you're not going to receive any justice on this file.

So when we take data from a case like that, when we take data from successful cases, similar cases, sometimes we can extrapolate patterns, and in finding those patterns, we can use data, as outlined here in this Bill 201, that can help us in the future. I'm certainly surprised that I'm not seeing a government jumping at wanting to accept a bill like this. It's very simple; it's only a few pages. As I said, knowledge is power. If we can take that information from a bill like this in order to help the prosecutorial process, in order to help the police officers, why would we not do this?

I'm sure, you know, in brief conversations with the hon. member, the Leader of the Opposition, that they did the necessary work to ensure that this wasn't just thrown together, that stakeholders were consulted, that the data is already there. We just need to centralize it. It's like anything. In order to have a successful operation, we must have a central point of command, a central point where the data is taken, disseminated, and then decisions can be made. This is the government. This is the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. If information like this is going to come from anywhere, it's going to come from that department.

You know, I just want to say that I do support the hon. member in his bill that he's bringing forward, and I certainly encourage all members of this House to support this bill. I think it can only help the system, and I think that it could help victims of crime to ensure that victims are not revictimized in the system.

Thank you very much.

3:30

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree that the administration of justice is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. I do agree that those victimized by criminal activity deserve a timely resolution through the justice system. I do agree that statistics are a tool used to gain a snapshot of a moment in time within the justice system. I also agree that in this country the justice system does operate on a principle of presumed innocence.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Having said that, I rise to speak against this bill because I must. My perspective and my arguments come from working for over 30

years in the correctional system. My perspective is based on a correctional model dealing with exactly that, a model which assesses behaviour based on criminal involvement and everything surrounding it.

This perspective was solidified during several conversations I had with a former Conservative cabinet minister. During my tenure as regional executive vice-president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada in the national capital region, between 2008 and '11, I met with a former cabinet minister about several issues concerning public service workers. The former cabinet minister knew I came from the corrections field and always commented about that when we spoke. At the time the federal Conservative government had brought in justice legislation that didn't actually protect the public. I asked the former cabinet minister why this legislation was put forward because it would not make the public safer – I'll speak further about this a little later if I have time – it would cost billions of dollars more, and it would put staff and inmates alike at increased risk during incarceration. He laughed at me. He said that it didn't matter what the risk or the cost was as it was the perception of Conservative supporters that mattered. If they thought the government was doing something to tackle crime, they would continue to vote for them. It didn't matter whether they did it or not.

When I look at this bill, I see a similar perception being presented as was done by the federal Conservatives. They will say that they are doing something to protect the public by doing a study, which seems to be a process to delay action. I believe this bill is about creating busywork, with the illusion of change and protection. Adding the need to keep track of multiple statistics for police, court workers, and the prosecutors office is what one might consider adding busywork to an already overloaded workforce. It will take away from the work all of these people need to do to actually protect you. Justice system officials are already looking at it and keeping statistics for the issues that have an impact within the system. The fact is that if the previous government had hired more staff as they were needed, on an ongoing basis, we would not be in this huge backlog position.

Is the opposition, who is proposing this bill, speaking out to spend money on the public service by hiring many more employees to monitor statistics? Where will that money come from? In this bill they have not proposed how to pay for this increased workload, that will do nothing to protect the public or to move things through the court system in a more efficient manner, nor have they identified the cost of completing the statistics request identified in the bill.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, who introduced this bill, noted that the system required more of a legislative fix overall than a money fix. I would have to respond by saying that perhaps he is out to lunch within his cognitive thought processes as he does not understand in any way how the justice system works as a total entity. Perhaps he should spend some time within the system to understand the complexities of such a system. Certainly, legislation can and does play a role to direct the system for protection of the public and to do it in a way that actually reduces recidivism and crime. Of course, the beginning of any discourse is about treating people with respect, both victims and those charged with the offences.

Having come from working in the federal correctional system, I know that every cent spent on front-line services provides better protection to the public and reduces the cost to the system in the long run. I also know that providing sufficient resources to families – food, housing, education, health care, and the availability of prosocial activities for all kids – goes hand in hand to reduce the involvement of kids, young adults, and adults in criminal activity.

Another step in the process, which would be thwarted by this bill by tying up police time with a focus on keeping statistics – this

would be taking away from time the police need to do the community relationship building that is essential to knowing what's going on in the community, having conduits within the community which allow the police to be proactive in stopping crime from taking place, having the time to liaise with other groups to monitor volatile situations, having the time to build trust within the community. Once anybody has committed a crime, identifying the reasons why they committed their offences, utilizing complete assessments, addressing those reasons within programming, treatment, and support while transitioning back into a community all reduce the likelihood of an offender returning to criminal activity.

I am disappointed that I cannot support this bill. I am disappointed that the opportunity to put forward a bill that could provide positive and well-thought-out ideas is not in this document.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 201, from my hon. colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition. I think that before I really get into the meat of the matter, I'll just address a few of the comments that have been made here already this afternoon by the government and some wild, wild accusations made by the Member for Lethbridge-East about the intentions of the bill or what the Leader of the Opposition was intending to do. Certainly, she implied that he was efforting to make it look like he was doing something but, really, was doing nothing. You know, I certainly take offence to such comments. I'm not sure that the comments are helpful. They certainly don't add to the debate, and I also don't think that they are true.

3:40

You know, I've spoken in this House on numerous occasions and my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has spoken on numerous occasions about some of the challenges that we see inside the Justice department. You'll know, Madam Speaker, that the Justice department has been described by Canadian privacy professionals and experts as a rogue department.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Just last week I rose in the House to speak about the access to information that's required in order to hold this government to account. One of the things that the Official Opposition takes seriously is the information that is made available to Albertans because, as my colleague from Calgary-West mentioned, this knowledge and information can provide power. It can provide the ability to proceed. And this information that my colleague is asking for is available. We've seen at every turn that the current government has a total lack of respect for access to information. What this bill does is that it ensures that Albertans can have the information that is very important to them.

Access to justice is a fundamental of our society, and right now no matter what the reasons are, whether it's the old guys or the new guys, whatever the case may be, we've seen a significant departure from what Albertans expect when it comes to access to justice. Two hundred cases will be stayed, and that's not just cases like not paying a C-Train ticket, as the Minister of Justice would have you believe, but charges like impaired driving, charges like murder. Serious and violent offences are being stayed because the system is broken.

Now, in conversations that I've had with my colleague the Leader of the Opposition, I know that he is very aware that Bill 201 is not going to solve every problem inside the justice system. Bill 201 is

a building block to ensure that we don't wind up in this situation in the future. It's quite possible that information like this, had it been readily available, would have provided the opportunity for governments to make the right decision in advance of having to make a decision. We've seen this government not act when they ought to until members of the public, members of the opposition raise the alarm bells just like James Pickard of the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association has. It's taking members of the public to raise the alarm about something that the government should have been very aware of. A piece of legislation like Bill 201 will provide that fundamental building block so that we can ensure we have the information to remain ahead of providing access to justice for Albertans.

I know that something I've heard in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on a very regular basis is that Albertans are frustrated at the rise of crime and that, subsequently, now they are coming to understand that all over the province, whether you're rural, urban, north, south, east, or west, there has been this significant concern because we're seeing these charges stayed.

The information that Bill 201 provides will allow us to act on solutions. This is very much part of the solution because it's not going to require significant amounts of resources. Much of the data is readily available. This is information that would be FOIPable, but we all know the lack of success that this government has had when it comes to running a FOIP system. It seems that they can't run any system. They're having a hard time running the FOIP system. The Premier's office: one of the worst offenders. The Justice department has been described as a rogue department. They're having a hard time running the court system, the health system. And there's one common denominator in this whole process, Madam Speaker, and that's the government.

Now, listen; the government was left a mess by the previous government, but they've been two years at the rudder, and things are getting significantly worse. In every area of the justice system people are frustrated. The police are frustrated. Prosecutors are frustrated. Albertans are frustrated. Yet all the government wants to do is point the finger at the previous government and say: don't worry; we've hired 34 new prosecutors. For the record we're happy about that, but we need to do more. We can't just say that we're cleaning up the court system by minimizing the number of C-Train tickets that are clogging it up and saying that we've got 34 new prosecutors, yet there are hundreds of criminals who have had their cases stayed and hundreds of victims who will never see justice.

Bill 201 provides one small piece in making the system better, and the government is going to posture by saying that the opposition only wants to look like they're doing something. They're going to posture on the three or four items that they have delivered up to this point. This, Madam Speaker, is not helpful for Albertans. What Albertans want is a government that takes responsibility for the situation that we are in, and that's not what they're getting from this government.

Alberta prosecutors are – and I quote – at a breaking point. They're crying out for the government to do more. I know that my colleague has had a good opportunity to speak with a number of prosecutors that have said that this information not only would be helpful, but it would be useful, that it would shine light in areas that are important, that it would provide the information to best be able to move forward. Yet all we get from the government is: don't worry; we're already doing everything we can. Nothing could be further from the truth, and, Madam Speaker, I am more than a little disappointed that this government has chosen to do that.

If Bill 201, the Justice System Accountability Act, is passed, it would track the length of investigations and trials; sources of adjournment; the number of charges withdrawn, reduced, or stayed; and it would require the Justice minister to do that in an annual

report. As such, all of us would be in a much better place to be able to govern, in a much better place to ensure access to justice, and in a much better place to ensure that our justice system remains as open and transparent as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up to speak to this particular private member's bill, put forward by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin. You know, I think we can all agree in this House that every Albertan deserves to feel safe in their home and in their streets and in their community. Protecting Albertans' safety and providing a fair, efficient justice system is one of the first duties of government, and it's one that we take very seriously.

Recently, actually, while coming up here to Edmonton, I had my vehicle broken into, so when the minister talks about people wanting justice, I want justice, too. When we have instances like the one I personally experienced, with a vehicle broken into and some items stolen out of it, we want justice. However, I know that our government is taking the steps as well to help prevent the root causes of crime, which is something I haven't heard come up in the debate so far. I hear things that we're talking about, things like ATVs being stolen or, in my case, vehicles being broken into. There's a lot of research that would suggest that comes from those most vulnerable members of our society not being taken care of, those with addiction, those with mental health issues, those struggling with homelessness. The list goes on. It's important that we take care of those citizens, and our government has been taking action on that.

3:50

Now, when it comes to resources, we've heard a lot of chatter about that, that this particular bill is about finding solutions and that we don't need a legislative fix. Well, one thing I'm proud that our government has been doing is that we are in fact putting resources forward to help solve this problem, that I believe the hon. member's bill is trying to solve, which relates to perhaps that he feels that justice is taking an abnormal amount of time for victims to have their cases go through the court system. That's why our government has taken action. We are hiring 50 Crown prosecutors as well as 30 court clerks and staff. As well, since being elected, we've increased legal aid funding by more than 20 per cent.

Also, there are some legislative fixes that we've done. Those legislative fixes – for instance, the warrant reduction initiative, which the hon. Minister of Justice talked about earlier, ensures that police officers can get back to what they do best, which is being out in our community patrolling and following up on crimes that are reported by citizens and stopping criminals, instead of spending time on jailing people for not paying transit tickets, which does hold up the justice system. And while it's not a legislative fix per se, we have also taken over bail hearings and are hiring new Crowns to do just that. This will free up, again, police officers to go back out on the streets, and this is particularly valuable in the rural areas of our province.

I think we're also open to the idea of exploring the B.C. model of open data, because at the heart of this bill it's about statistics. But I wonder how we would provide that data without fully understanding how much it would cost and how many Crown prosecutors or clerks or other staff members of our justice system it would take to do that and would potentially harm the front-line resources that we need to continue to have our justice system move forward and prosecute and have individuals go through the system with due process.

Now, I heard the hon. member mention in his opening speech for this bill that he wants to make things faster, by his own admission,

and I think he and I can share a common agreement with that. He often spoke of a reason for things being held up, that, you know, lawyers or defence lawyers were perhaps saying “oh, we need an adjournment” for flimsy reasons. I think his opinion on that is perhaps why there’s a big section in his bill in regard to the stats related to that. Now, I’m not a lawyer, Madam Speaker, but it sounds a little bit like, perhaps, with the stats he might want to, you know, meddle in the arm’s lengthness of our court system.

In his bill he talks about the adjournments requested by the Crown. Well, I could perhaps think of a reason where that might be a good idea in order to further serve justice. If we wanted to move faster, well, that would require more resources, Madam Speaker. If it was by the defence, in order for us to have due process, there perhaps could be very legitimate reasons for doing that. Stats where an adjournment was required by the court or due to a disclosure issue: I believe that if there was an adjournment due to a disclosure issue, that’s important to ensure fair justice. But if there was a disclosure issue, that would perhaps be because there’s a lack of resources, which would of course cost money, or due to a witness issue – I could see reasons why that might happen as well as due to the absence of an accused or a change in counsel. I mean, if it’s due to an absence of the accused, I’m not sure how the member would suggest that we solve that, but I would imagine that a solution would be to have more resources out there in order to compel accused individuals to show up in court, which, again, requires more resources.

I find that interesting because our government has spent a lot of time putting more resources into various services all over government that deal with the root causes of crime as well as putting resources into our justice system, which I mentioned at length earlier. Now, the hon. member stands up pretty much every day in this Legislature and talks to our Premier about how he would like fewer resources, Madam Speaker. So whether it’s a spend day or a cut day, I feel like there’s a lack of consistency here where this bill, as well-intentioned – I believe stats are good. I think it’s been mentioned that I believe our government would be interested in perhaps looking at the B.C. model, but we have to make sure that we’re not taking away from those front-line services.

At the end of the day, we are doing that. We are putting the resources in place whereas the opposition only wants to study and say that the solution is cutting, cutting, cutting until it’s not.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to talk about Bill 201, a bill that our leader has brought forward after much consultation with Albertans while travelling the province. You know, the people of my riding and other communities have been witnessing an increasingly steady rise in crime over the last few years, and we know that these crimes have increased partly due to the economic downturn, a question the hon. member on the other side was asking. This bill is just one of the many necessary adjustments we need to implement in order to start to fight crime and begin the work of making our communities safe again.

We’re not just blowing smoke. Not only have the citizens in our riding been confirming this increase and are outraged by it – and, you know, they’re feeling violated by it – but also according to a recent crime severity index from Stats Canada there was an 18 per cent increase in reported crimes in 2015 and a 12 per cent increase in violent crimes. That’s outstanding. Currently Alberta has the third-highest crime severity index rating in all the Canadian provinces. Grande Prairie was recently rated as one of the most dangerous cities in Canada by Stats Canada, with both Red Deer and Edmonton

well above the national average. Crime is increasing right across the province, and the constituents of Battle River-Wainwright are not the only ones demanding solutions; all Albertans are.

Right here in our province accused criminals are walking free, and there’s little or no recourse for Albertans within our justice system. More needs to happen than just pouring money into the system. We need to change the system. We need more accountability.

This is staggering news. How did we get there? It’s not from a lack of overall spending. We spend about 15 per cent more than our neighbours in B.C. on Justice and Solicitor General, 30 per cent when you factor in the population difference. Either the resources are in the wrong place or the system is broken. Or both.

Last Tuesday I stood up in the Legislature to give a member’s statement on the current crime situation in my riding. You know, citizens are outraged. They’re worried about their safety and are beginning to worry that they will have to take matters into their own hands. They are demanding change. Crime is a government matter, not one that citizens need to worry about. The last thing our province needs is for the public to be vigilantes. I mentioned last week that our local ATB was robbed twice, once at gunpoint, last year. These are serious issues that need government intervention. We need better legislation, and we need to look at this from every angle possible.

4:00

There was a mother at home by herself with a one-year-old child that I spoke to. She went out to see what a noise was – she could hear a pickup trying to be started – only to have a gun pointed at her and be told to get back into the home. That was shocking. This is a very serious incident that could have turned very bad and ended up with a fatality, not to mention that I’m sure that this woman is now not feeling safe in her home anymore. Can you imagine that happening to any one of your family members? This is just one of the many cases that are happening in our communities, and this is when people in the rural communities are starting to take matters into their own hands. I’ve already heard from many that they’re arming themselves to protect their property and their loved ones.

Before we can fix these issues, we have to ask ourselves: why is there an increase in crime? What are the common factors? There are many reasons. The economic downturn in the province is one, of course, but the lack of legislative teeth federally and provincially, demands on our court system, and delays give criminals the upper hand. These are all reasons. Local officials in my riding and all over Alberta are saying: enough is enough. We need to work together to fix what is broken and, believe you me, there is a lot broken with our system.

Bill 201 is just one of the many ways through legislation that we need to update in order to make the changes that must happen. The Justice ministry has been deemed the worst for disrespecting public access to information. Bill 201, the Justice System Accountability Act, would help us clearly see the patterns that we know need clearing up in our justice system. If this bill is passed, it allows the ministry to track the length of the time of the investigation to trials, the source of adjournments, the sources of mistrials, and the number of charges withdrawn, reduced, or stayed by having the Justice minister present an annual report to all Albertans on all these metrics. This is vitally important. We need to see where the issues and the bottlenecks are in our justice system.

Too many times criminals are getting away with – well, with murder, literally, and crimes of a serious nature. This is nonsensical. There needs to be accountability. British Columbia is able to provide its systems with an open data portal to track statistics to the courts, prosecutors, offices, and corrections. Alberta’s Solicitor

General, meanwhile, is getting publicly shamed by our Privacy Commissioner for their contempt for the public information.

Not only is this a transparency issue, but it's also one of safety. By creating a system where the investigators in trials are more accountable, we would restore the public's trust. Right now there is no trust that the system is working properly. That needs to be addressed and restored. By failing to make these records public, we are in essence telling the public that there are things to hide in a broken system. Real accountability demonstrates the government's seriousness about changing course as well as the seriousness with government views on all offences. It would help restore the confidence of our citizens and restore the reputation we once had that our families and our properties are going to be protected.

Those who suffer at the hands of our criminals are entitled to see those who are responsible brought to justice as part of the healing process. I would like to see safety restored for the lady in my constituency, Melissa, who in one swift moment in time – the safety of her own home was stolen from her the day the gun was pointed at her and her child at her home. I would like for her and others to feel safe again when they're at home alone. I would like to see justice defuse the angry victims and those who might seek vengeance. I would believe that those who are not guilty of an offence are entitled to have their names cleared and not have to wait years to see that come to fruition. That, too, is very important. Where are the statistics on that?

We need to enter into a new era of accountability. We need to make sure that the courts and the judges make decisions, that there is a trail of evidence and reasoning for each and every verdict, why investigations and trials took the length of time that they did, and what were the source of adjournments, mistrials, number of charges withdrawn, reduced, stayed, and so forth. There is something the public and all of us have to do – and we have a right to know. Not only does the public deserve accountability but transparency in the system, that would also help those who are responsible for those who make decisions to make more educated and wiser decisions moving forward, knowing that those decisions will be held to account by the public.

Having the Justice minister report on these metrics is critical, and I sure hope that the other side of the House sees the importance it has for the security and safety of our citizens. I spoke about the increasing crimes and the use of firearms in my riding. Firearm thefts in Alberta have also jumped 66 per cent in the last three years according to the RCMP. Just eight days ago the *Edmonton Journal* wrote an article entitled Firearm Thefts in Alberta Jump 66 Per Cent in Three Years.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want less crime in this province. That should be the objective of every government to keep Albertans safe. How do we achieve that?

I'm an entrepreneur, I'm a businessperson, but this principle applies equally to government, that you can't manage something you don't measure. If you don't have the data, how do you know whether something is working properly? Part of the thing that we do in this Assembly: in essence, we're the board of governors or board of directors for the departments that operate in this province. The things that are happening inside those departments: well, they're a fact, whether we measure it or not. It's far better for us and through us the people of Alberta to have access to good, solid data that is reported in a consistent and regular fashion. That allows us to ensure that those in Alberta who are victims of crime have some assurance that the people who have perpetrated those crimes

will be brought to justice and, equally, that the accused is granted their constitutional rights to a swift and fair trial.

Unfortunately, in this province, for a variety of reasons that other members have gone into here over the course of the afternoon, that has not been the case in this province, and it's unclear as to exactly why that is. Not every solution to every problem is simply to add more staff or add more resources. Now, in this case, I do think that we need to address the significant resource shortcoming amongst Crown prosecutors in particular but also amongst judges and amongst the court staff that are required to ensure the swift administration of justice.

But there's one piece that I haven't heard this afternoon mentioned – and apologies to hon. members if others have mentioned this – and that's legal aid as well. All of these are aspects of our court systems. We see an increase in self-representation in our court system, which has contributed significantly to why we are seeing increased backlogs and delays. Why is that? What can we do as a government? What can we do as a province to ensure that either (a) people who choose to self-represent are given the tools and resources they need to do so effectively or that legal aid services are provided so they do not need to make that choice to self-represent?

4:10

All of those factors will be revealed to us if we properly gather data and we require that data to be disclosed on a regular basis, which is what this bill does. Now, I share some of the concern that there's a risk that some of the resources required to gather the data may in fact take away from front-line resources. I actually don't feel that that is a substantial or significant risk in this case. Much of the data is available. We know, for example – again, other members have quoted statistics, and I'll do the same – that we have access to some data. Obviously, that data is being collected in some form or fashion, not just in the ministry of Justice but in other ministries as well. Consolidating that data into meaningful information has been a challenge.

This ministry in particular is challenged with transparency, is challenged with responding to freedom of information requests to the point where as just a citizen of Alberta, certainly as a member of this Assembly I have very little faith in their ability or willingness to share that data with us. We require the Legislative Assembly to ensure that there is oversight of that data.

There are many reasons why we've seen delays in Alberta's court system. One is the just straight increase in the number of charges commenced province-wide. We've seen an 8.3 per cent increase in 2015-16 year over year and those facing multiple charges up nearly 10 per cent but our Crown prosecution services operating at levels that were equivalent to 2007, 10 years ago, so clearly there's a gap. The government has finally recognized that and has actually hired in some new Crown prosecutors or is in the process of doing that, and that's important.

We see also an increase in severity of crime, and other members have mentioned that. I am tremendously sympathetic to those who are victims of crime, who have faced that. It seems to be a particularly acute problem in rural Alberta, but certainly that rise in crime is happening all around the province. Now, there are some bigger discussions that I think we all ought to be having as to why that is. Some of it, of course, is going to be related to the economy, but much of it, I'm sure, is related to the opioid drug crisis, and that's something that is not a problem that we can arrest our way out of. It is a problem that has multiple layers and facets to it. There are many social determinants for why people find themselves in that position. There are many, again, compelling reasons why we need to tackle the root cause of these challenges.

Be that as it may, I can assure you that a victim of crime is not especially interested in the social determinants of why that person has assaulted them or why that person has stolen their property or broken into their home, frightening their family. That's a very scary situation. I think it's incumbent that we have good, transparent, and clear data that can ensure that Albertans have continued faith in their justice system. Not only is it important, of course, that justice is done, but it's important that it is seen to be done, that Albertans have faith.

The best way to ensure that Albertans have faith is that they have the data and the information at their disposal. That data and information may be uncomfortable for the government, but I can assure you that it is a fact, whether it is publicly disclosed or not. I think on balance it would be best if the government says: "You know what? I'd rather we know that information. I'd rather the opposition knows that information. I'd rather Albertans know that information so we can set about tackling the problem and actually addressing the issue." We need to measure what's happening in the system so we know where front-line resources are needed. Are we doing things as efficiently and effectively as we can be? Are there new ways of thinking about how we address some of the challenges in the justice system?

Now, there is obviously going to be some restriction, just based on rights of the accused and just simply the way the process works. Again, there may be an opportunity for us to relook at how we do things in this province, looking at other provinces and seeing if there are things that other provinces are doing differently that we could adopt. But, again, let's look at the data coming out of other provinces. Let's compare that to the information that we have here.

Just in conclusion, Madam Speaker, it is important for victims that justice is swift and justice is transparent. At the same time, it's important that the accused receive swift access to justice and that their constitutional rights are guaranteed and in fact are implemented. But the transparency, the measurement, and the reporting of data are the tools that we need in this province to ensure that victims see justice done and that the accused receive a swift and fair trial. That is why I will be supporting this bill at second reading, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 201. You know, I think back to when the member opposite was in the federal government, and there were calls from communities across our country for an inquiry into the long-standing crisis of murdered and missing aboriginal women. I recall that the government in which he served declared repeatedly that we didn't need another study but that what we needed was to be taking immediate action to address the issues that were driving the problem.

Well, today it would seem that these positions are reversed, with the member proposing legislation focused on studying the long-standing issues that have led to the bottlenecks in our justice system while our government is taking concrete action to address them.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm very happy that the new government of Canada moved forward with that inquiry into murdered and missing aboriginal women and that our government is actively supporting that work because that is an issue where we have much to learn about the challenges, complications, and issues of systemic discrimination that have led to such tragic consequences.

However, on the issue of the backlog in Alberta's justice and court systems we have a very clear understanding of how we've arrived where we are. Previous federal governments, including the

government in which the member opposite sat, failed to appoint judges, leaving multiple vacancies unfilled on the Court of Queen's Bench in Alberta. Likewise, previous provincial governments failed to appoint enough judges to keep pace with our rapid population growth or to provide adequate funding for Crown prosecutors, and both federal and provincial governments provided inadequate funding for legal aid, further delaying and tying up our system.

As was noted by journalist Paula Simons on a recent podcast, the Press Gallery – I recommend that everyone listen to it; it's very entertaining and insightful – previous Justice ministers in our province attempted to prove their tough-on-crime stance by pushing to prosecute every possible case, without due consideration of likelihood of conviction, and insisting on criminal charges in cases where maybe misdemeanors and fines could have been more appropriate, further adding stress and duress to our justice system. As a result, we have a system that's under great pressure. But as I just described, we are, in fact, quite clear about how we arrived where we are, and I think we're equally clear on what the solution is. We need to invest the resources that have been needed for so long, that previous governments failed to put in place.

Now, I know that the minister has been an active advocate for the federal government to fill vacancies on the Court of Queen's Bench, and she has been successful in getting them to do so, with four new judges appointed last June, and then this past October the Minister of Justice announced the creation of 10 new positions on the Court of Queen's Bench, with an additional seven new judges appointed by the federal government. Just last week the minister announced that our government will be hiring an additional 50 Crown prosecutors, 30 clerks and staff because, again, Madam Speaker, previous governments failed to invest in the resources needed to hire an adequate number of clerks for the courts here in the province of Alberta.

We are committed to continuing to fund legal aid at a level 20 per cent higher than that provided by previous governments. That, Madam Speaker, is concrete action that will yield immediate results in beginning to address the backlog in our system created by previous governments. Now, I'm not denying the value of collecting and studying appropriate data to improve and better target the provision of government services, but if I might reflect back again for a moment, I remember that the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin served with the government that chose to gut the long-form census across Canada, crippling Statistics Canada's ability to collect precisely that kind of crucial information. Now, I'm very happy to see that he's reconsidered that position and that he's come to recognize the value of collecting appropriate data again. That's good to see. Learning is important. However, in this particular case I'm not convinced that a bill legislating the additional collection and curation of particular data is going to address the problem at hand.

4:20

I was very pleased to hear that the minister did her due diligence upon hearing of this bill. She reached out to stakeholders, including Crown prosecutors, staff in the courts, defence counsel, to discuss the possible benefits or issues with the provisions of this legislation, and as she noted when she spoke today, all stakeholders she spoke with clearly stated that the statistics that this bill proposes to track are likely not ones that would be valuable to track and report.

Again, Madam Speaker, for all stakeholders, the people working on the front lines of our justice system with whom the minister spoke, everyone she spoke with stated that the data this bill proposes to collect would not have value in addressing these issues. I take them at their word, and I fail to see how the solution for an under-resourced system is to add additional burdens, in excess, on the staff

who are working in that system to track the effects of the lack of resources. The way to solve this problem is to address the lack of resources, to provide the resources that are needed to properly serve the people of Alberta, to provide them, again, with faith in their justice system, to see us have the opportunity to give our front-line staff the ability to do their jobs to the best of their abilities without the stress that's been created by years and years of neglect, not to add more burden on them to collect information that they themselves have said is not useful for addressing the problem.

Our overall focus needs to be on ensuring that our courts can focus on serious and violent crime. We need to deal with the repercussions of the Jordan decision. We recognize the challenge of that data to the system, and I've been pleased to see that the minister has responded quickly and is acting to ensure that we are able to better protect Albertans by providing the resources that are needed. I'm proud to serve with a government that will continue to make our decisions based on evidence and input from experts, including front-line employees, the people that do this work every day.

Now, certainly, what I've heard about the open portal from B.C. sounds very interesting. I'd be very open to considering the possibilities that could bring. I don't think we need a piece of legislation to make that happen. I know the city of Edmonton, for example, offers some open data and has been looking into that model, and that's certainly something I've seen many in the community use very well in many different respects. In that respect, I think that's something we should explore, and I note that the minister has expressed that she is interested in that model and exploring that further, so certainly I look for the opportunities to do that.

But, for myself, Madam Speaker, I do not see the value at this time in moving forward with this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise today and desire to speak in favour of Bill 201, the Justice System Accountability Act. I want to thank the members for everything that's been said today with regard to this act, even the previous member, who had many good things to say but who, I think, allowed his party politics to intervene when it came to the final conclusion that he needed to make, which was: let's gather appropriate data, and let's be less worried about party politics.

You know, I think all of us understand the serious nature of this. If we haven't been the victim of a crime, we've had friends that have been victims of a crime, Madam Speaker. I can think of the sense of betrayal that a friend of mine had when her house was broken into and just the dramatic change that that brought to the way she sort of viewed the world and to the comfort that she had. We all sort of believe that our house is our castle, that it's a place of safe refuge. When that has been violated, we walk away with a sense of real fear and distrust. It's staggering to think about how, as a victim of a crime, it can just absolutely change the way we look at our world.

You know, if there's one thing that we as a government should have the capacity to do, it's that we should be able to provide a system of justice, a system of law that allows us to realize that we have a modicum of safety and a belief that should that safety be betrayed, there will be a sense of justice, that we can address that crime and that justice will prevail. That's a really important thing. We have to have a system of justice that not only helps victims to receive justice but also to believe that the justice system delivers

justice. We need to take this issue, the whole issue of a backlog in the court system, very seriously.

Crime in Alberta, as we've heard people say today, has been on the rise, and there are many ways that we can address that. You know, we can promote education about personal safety, we can set into place precautions to try to prevent crime, and we can push to increase law enforcement. That is just one other vehicle that we can use, Madam Speaker, to gather the information, to gather the data that we need to make sure that we have an efficient system of law that delivers justice in a timely, consistent fashion.

As Albertans we have to learn to live in a world that sometimes is unsafe. I mean, in Alberta we saw an 18 per cent increase reported in crime in 2015. That includes a 12 per cent increase in violent crime. You've heard the Wildrose speak about the increase in rural crime before in this Chamber and about the devastating impact that that has on farms and rural families.

I can speak to examples from my own place. I live in Drayton Valley, where many of the businesses and the equipment yards where they store their equipment overnight have been vandalized and where equipment has been stolen on a regular basis. When you no longer believe that you can, with a modicum of safety, park your vehicles and your equipment, that you've spent years investing in so that you can make money for your family and for your business, when that's no longer safe, if you don't believe that the justice system can handle it, many want to sometimes take steps that they really shouldn't be taking.

For instance, a friend of mine was in his yard and saw a car stop across the alley and a bunch of jerry cans thrown over the back fence, and then it drove off. He couldn't figure out what was going on, so he and one of his employees stuck around to see. About half an hour later the same car came by, and they scaled the fence and started siphoning the gasoline out of these company vehicles. Now, how are we going to handle that? If you don't believe that that's happening, well, I'm sorry, but it is. For them, they had to explain to these young men that they had a choice: they could either leave, or they were going to be in a lot of trouble. I'm grateful that they didn't take justice into their own hands, but you know, they and the citizens in my constituency have to believe that the justice system has the ability to take care of these kinds of issues and where the victims are not victimized by the system.

You know, we need to make sure that we don't have a serious problem with backlogs in our courts that keep things going for so long through the court system that justice is denied. There has been some concern expressed by this side of the House with regard to the actions of the government as they attempt to deal with criminals. We've had discussions in the last week about the protocol that's come out from the NDP with regard to the triage that they're going to do when it comes to violent crime.

4:30

This government seems to lack the ability to understand that when a file is determined not to be prosecutable because simply, you know, they don't have the resources, that really sends a message to the ordinary Alberta citizen that you're normalizing a lack of prosecution because you don't have the resources and because you haven't done the job of making sure that our system of justice is capable of handling these issues. Fiscal constraints and increased demands on the justice system should not make it possible for criminals to walk free and for victims to be left without justice.

You know, I once, when I was much younger and, maybe in the minds of some of the kids that I taught, was maybe a little more cool ...

An Hon. Member: You're still cool.

Mr. Smith: I'm still cool. Thank you very much.

... was taking a bunch of kids out to have a barbecue and a wiener roast on a Friday night with our church and saw a car blitz through on highway 16 just out by CFRN – at the time there was a set of lights there – and just about wipe out two cars going through the intersection and then, about 300 or 400 yards down the road, saw the same car upside down in the ditch, a couple of lampposts sheared off, and the individual that had been driving the car in distress. You know, the first time I saw that car coming was when I looked in my rear-view mirror, and I saw it going about 60 miles an hour. It was about 30 yards behind me and at the last second jerked over, went through the intersection, and missed my car. I was that close to having five or six people that were in our vehicle wiped out.

Now, we have to have a justice system that doesn't give people the idea that a person that was as drunk as this individual was can get off scot-free because our system is so backlogged that we can't deal with it. That is not acceptable. We better start asking ourselves: why are our courts so backlogged, and what are the problems that are developing that are keeping us from dispensing justice? What happened to us that we have a justice system where criminals walk free while the victims are left to struggle? Why does our Alberta system have an underperforming system of justice?

Yes, we've admitted on both sides of this House that there was a problem with not having enough prosecutors and that the prosecutors we had were overburdened. We're glad that the government is taking steps to deal with that, but that sometimes is a symptom of a broken system. We have to start asking ourselves: where is our justice system failing Albertans, and what do we need to do in order to find out exactly where that's happening?

Bill 201 is a step in the right direction. It may not be the be-all and the end-all, but it's a positive step in the right direction by allowing us to gather information that will tell us why and where specifically our justice system is failing the people of Alberta. Bill 201 is about gathering data.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 201. I think it's important for us to recognize the problems in our system so we can act and make appropriate decisions moving forward. You know, in a recovery program the first step is admitting that you have a problem. We know we have a problem, and now we're putting part of the solution on the table. A constituent just the other day told me: please promise me that in 2019, when you're government and the opposition puts forward a good idea, you'll listen to them because it's better for all of Alberta.

Now, when it comes to the court system, there are many problems that it's facing right now, one of which is, you know, that potentially we're not going to be prosecuting criminals, especially if the case is difficult or unlikely to bring forward a conviction, which, Madam Speaker, is of serious concern for anyone who's ever been sexually assaulted. Those are most definitely difficult cases and could most definitely in the beginning be seen as unlikely to receive a conviction, but it doesn't matter anymore because this government has instructed our Crown prosecutors to not proceed with these cases. That's disgusting.

Now, my hope is that the government will see the error of their ways and will reverse this because there's a good piece of legislation on our Order Paper which will remove the statute of limitations on civil proceedings for survivors, which I think is a great move. It's a great step forward. That's a good initiative. That's

a great thing, and we'll talk about that more when that comes back on the paper. But it's a bit confusing that we see a new triage protocol that actually sends the opposite message to survivors. It's deplorable, and it needs to be reversed, and I hope – I hope – that that will be, and I will applaud that government on that day.

Now, Bill 201 would go to address some of the problems that are in our court systems because we're going to see where those problems are and what the holdups are. Instead of just not prosecuting cases and letting alleged criminals go, we're going to be able to fix some of the problems. This is part of the solution, Madam Speaker.

You know, we may see where defence lawyers are using adjournments as a strategy to wear down victims – traumatized victims – to wear down the will to continue to show up at court and try and testify. We may see that. Likely we will.

This will make the system more accountable by accumulating data between the Department of Justice and the courts. This isn't an overburden of work. This is something that's already being recorded. Maybe the system is outdated. I mean, we use a reel-to-reel system for data collection in Service Alberta. That's insane. I sure hope that's not the case in our courts, but we'd certainly find that out should Bill 201 be passed. A bottleneck in the system: that would be addressed. Bill 201 will track how many charges get dropped or lessened, and it's not necessarily a reflection of a soft-on-crime attitude but an overburdened system. We will see these problems.

Madam Speaker, I won't say much more in support of Bill 201 except that we need to look at the hypocrisy of what is happening right now between the triage protocol system and the cases, charges of sexual assault not even seeing their day in court because you're afraid of the Jordan ruling and its data. This is insane. This is absolutely insane. Someone, please tell me. Like, you don't see the hypocrisy of Bill 2 and the triage protocol? It doesn't work. One does not support the other. I urge this government to take a look at that, please. Those who have a voice and an ear of those who make decisions in this government, I urge you to use them. In the opposition we will support you in that one hundred per cent.

Now, please, I urge all members in this House to support Bill 201, to take a step forward in addressing some of the problems in our court system together as a House because this is a good idea. This is what the constituents of Airdrie would want us to do. I will be voting for 201, and, please, I urge all of you to do the same.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 201?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to close debate.

4:40

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can you imagine going to school every day, going for 12 years, or going for four years of university or getting a master's degree and having nobody grade what you do during that entire time? Can you imagine going from grade 1 to grade 12, and every day you come home with a report card that's empty, and nobody knows what you did all day in those classes? They don't know what class you went to. They don't know whether you showed up on time for those classes or whether you turned in your homework. Well, that's what they're suggesting, what the NDP government is suggesting, is the right thing to do with our justice system.

Now, Madam Speaker, I've been clear on this. I've been a lawyer for 25 years. For 25 years I've been a lawyer. I worked in the courts in Alberta for 10 years. When I drafted this bill, when I came about

the idea and started to talk to people, I talked to Crown prosecutors, talked to defence lawyers, talked to as many people as I could. I actually talked to one Crown prosecutor, one person that I'd actually practised with in Fort McMurray, and she's actually been a lawyer now for – wow – I bet you it's 40, 45 years. During that period of time she was a Crown prosecutor for at least 20 years, she was a defence attorney for at least 30 of those years, because she did both, and she did federal Crown work and provincial Crown work. Now, Madam Speaker, I can't think of anybody more experienced in the entire province than her. She's been at this full-time for over 40 years. She actually helped me in large part to draft this bill or to at least come to the point where I thought it was workable and made a lot of sense.

It does make a lot of sense. If you have an opportunity to do it – in fact, I heard from the other side that many of the people on the other side thought that keeping track of what we were actually doing, having us grade what people are doing, and finding out why they're doing certain things or why they're not getting certain things done would be a good thing. I think it would be a good thing.

Madam Speaker, I do want to clarify a couple of things. First of all, the NDP needs to know that the Criminal Code is a federal statute. It's not provincial; it's a federal statute. Therefore, across Canada all of those federal statutes are the same. Now, there are some administrative changes that are different in each province, but the federal statute is the same. Crown prosecutors are to make sure that that federal statute is kept up and that they're prosecuting people properly. It's not a provincial statute; it's a federal statute. The Criminal Code, as a whole, should be – and I implore all members here to think about this very specifically because the people of Alberta have lost faith in the justice system simply because of these 200 cases, and they see this government doing very little to react to it.

I can also assure the member that most crimes are committed – I mean, she was talking about what the basis of the crime committed is, and I know that a lot of studies have been done on this. For the most part, it's lust or greed, sometimes desperation. In Canada, hopefully, that's never the case because people shouldn't fall through the cracks in Canada.

But the simplest thing – and I implore the members on the other side to think about this because it appears to me that it's only the NDP that is voting against this bill, that is voting against keeping track of what we do in the justice system. I would implore them, Madam Speaker, with this: don't worry about it. You won't be here in two years to put this into action. You won't be here. You won't. I would suggest that what you should do is to put it in place. It's going to take you at least two years to get around to putting it in place or bringing up the rules and the regulations, like Bill 6. Why don't you just put it in place? We're more than happy to administer it because we think it's good government, and we'll be making sure that Albertans know, through transparency in the judicial system, exactly what this government is hiding from them.

I can't imagine anything more important than making sure that criminals are kept off our streets and the people of Alberta are kept safe. This government, by ignoring that and the principles of fundamental justice and the need for transparency and accountability in this bill and in our justice system, is ignoring the best interests of Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has moved second reading of Bill 201, Justice System Accountability Act.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Jean	Strankman
Clark	Loewen	Swann
Cooper	Pitt	Taylor
Cyr	Rodney	van Dijken
Gotfried	Schneider	Yao
Hanson	Smith	

5:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Miranda
Babcock	Horne	Phillips
Bilous	Jansen	Piquette
Carlier	Kazim	Renaud
Carson	Kleinstaub	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Turner
Goehring	McPherson	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woollard
Hinkley		

Totals:	For – 17	Against – 37
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 201 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Surgical and Diagnostic Wait Times

501. Mr. Jean moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to complete and make public within 120 days of the passage of this motion a report relating to surgical and diagnostic wait times that identifies the following: barriers causing excessive wait times; estimated costs of wait times in terms of factors including but not limited to lost productivity, health deterioration, and opioid addiction; and cost-effective solutions including those used in other provinces to reduce wait times within the limits of the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Jean: Well, Madam Speaker, one up, one down. Let's hope that we have a little bit more good fortune with the second one. Maybe this government will listen because I do think statistics are extremely important. They're important in our justice system. They're also very important in our health care system.

It's my pleasure to rise today to speak on my first private member's motion here in the House and to talk about an issue that's very near and dear to me. I think it's near and dear to every Albertan. You see, Madam Speaker, I do believe in universal health care. I believe that health care should be there when we need it. Access to health care is important, but actually getting the health care is even more important because access to a waiting line is not access to health care, just like access to a waiting line in the justice system is not access to the justice system. Unfortunately, we saw the members on the other side vote against the opportunity for additional access to the justice system and additional resources. I

would be ashamed if I were them. Fortunately, I don't have to worry about that because I'm standing up for everyday Albertans every single day I'm here, and I'm proud to do that.

My motion today calls on the NDP government to complete and make public within 120 days of the motion passing a report relating to surgical and diagnostic wait times. Madam Speaker, we live in the greatest country in the world, in the greatest province in that country. We have tremendous wealth, but it's not giving Albertans a proper return on investment. We know that because when we compare Alberta's medical system, our health care system, to anywhere else on the planet, we find that the amount we pay is not getting a proper return in outcomes. The amount we pay is one of the highest in the world. In fact, in a recent OECD country comparison to Alberta it was determined that we were the second most expensive out of these OECD countries and that we had the 28th worst outcomes – worst outcomes – not best outcomes but worst outcomes. That is shameful.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That's why I'm suggesting that a report be put forward relating to the surgical and diagnostic wait times that identifies barriers that cause these excessive wait times, that estimates as well the cost of wait times in terms of factors that maybe this government doesn't understand. These factors are important, factors including but not limited to lost productivity, health deterioration, and opioid addiction. These are important things to Albertans. Today we're almost losing one person per day from opioid abuse – one person a day – yet what is this government's response? You've heard it, Mr. Speaker, and you're going to hear it a lot: new light bulbs.

While Albertans are dying, our health care system doesn't respond properly. That's why this motion also asks for the government to prepare and submit a report that evaluates the cost-effective solutions, including those in other provinces, that are used to reduce wait times within, of course, the limits of the Canada Health Act.

Now, I was very happy to announce in 2014 my retirement from politics after 10 years, Mr. Speaker. I know the NDP would like me to retire even earlier than what I expect to do, and I'm hoping that they keep saying that because that's going to make me stay here longer. I can't think of anything better than to fight the ideological purpose of the NDP government in this place for the benefit of Albertans. When I left Ottawa and left the politics there – and I was very proud of my time. I was. We passed a lot of things. We built a lot of pipelines. We brought in some great laws, great criminal justice laws. [interjections] These people laugh about it because they don't know about it. I heard clearly from what they were talking about in the justice system that they don't know about the justice system either.

I'm hoping we get a better response on the health care system. Maybe they'll understand that the only reason I came back to politics here in Alberta was to make sure that what happened to my son doesn't happen to theirs or anybody here or anybody that's listening or any Albertan because it was negligence, nothing but negligence. It wasn't the people that were negligent; it was the system. That's why I'm here, to fix the system, and I'm going to fix more than those systems. With the help of my Wildrose caucus we're going to fix the justice system. We're going to make sure houses don't burn down anymore when a government doesn't respond. Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of work to do.

I wanted to spend more time with my family when I came back here. I wanted to come back to Alberta because I love Alberta. It is the greatest place in the world. But after watching four months, five months of delays, seven or eight misdiagnoses, and seven biopsies, my son died. I held his hand during most of those, Mr. Speaker.

Politics matter, Mr. Speaker. Politics matter because we bring in policies. This government brings in policies on justice, or not. They bring in decisions on health care, or not. They can make our system better right now, just like they could have done with the justice system by passing Bill 201, but they didn't. They voted against justice. We have an opportunity, a tremendous opportunity; 55 people, 56 people on the other side could make the decision to save additional children's lives in this province just by getting the system right, by making sure health care responds not just by way of treatment but by outcomes. People can be healed if they focus on outcomes.

I believe that today we can start making a positive change in the lives of Albertans by signalling our intent as a province to finally tackle wait times. I'm going to flip through this speech because I can't believe some of these stats. If you want an MRI in Alberta: 172 days, Mr. Speaker. For an MRI – I can tell you that I've seen the MRI machines in this province. They sit empty. They are not being utilized. They're sitting in rooms where nobody is operating them, millions and millions and millions of dollars of equipment. And what is the response from this government? Hmm; business as usual; let's spend more money. It's not a solution. We need to look at what we've got, the assets that we have. The MRI machines, the X-ray machines: let's use them 24 hours a day until we get rid of the backlog.

If you have a problem with your sight, a degenerative problem or you need cataract surgery, 224 days you have to wait. That's 90 per cent of the time, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and twenty-four days. January to August for cataract surgery when you can't see very well. And there's a backlog. But you can go to Calgary and decrease that backlog, apparently. You can't do it in Edmonton. That just shows that the system is failing. When you can go from one town to another town in the same province and have totally different outcomes, have totally different response times, something is wrong.

What's the response? Free light bulbs. Yeah. Let's get an Ontario company in and get Ontarians to work in Alberta, and we'll hit – what? We talked about it today.

5:10

An Hon. Member: They think it's funny over there.

Mr. Jean: They do think it's funny. They keep talking about how these things are funny. But they're not funny, Mr. Speaker. They're not funny when you have been a victim of a sexual assault and the judge throws out the case and you're a victim being revictimized. That's not funny. It's not funny when your son dies in a hospital because the system broke.

And it breaks every day. There are people dying in our health care system. There are people not getting the response that they should get. People pay their taxes here and they deserve to have a proper response from their government. They deserve to be able to go into a health care system that actually cures them and doesn't just shift them around. My son was refused by two hospitals before he was actually accepted by one, and he died less than eight months later. Refused, Mr. Speaker. Kicked out. Disgusting.

We need a health care system that reacts, that is better than the alternative that we have right now. I believe in universal health care. I believe that every Albertan deserves health care but health care that actually solves the problem, that doesn't just put them in a hospital bed. Mr. Speaker, hospital beds in this province cost up to \$15,000 a day to keep people in them. Fifteen thousand. That's what I said, Mr. Speaker: \$15,000 a day to keep them in.

My son waited two months for a test that cost five grand. What in the world is going on? I paid for two tests for my son. Finally, I

dragged out what tests he needed after two and a half months. I sent money for those tests. One cost \$10,000; another, \$2,500. Mr. Speaker, I was ready the first day he went into the hospital to pay that amount, but nobody told me. I had to beg. I literally went into that hospital just about every day to find out.

That's why we need to do something different, Mr. Speaker, because what we're doing is not working. I don't care what the Health minister says. Our system is broken, and throwing money at it is not going to solve the problem. If you need a knee replacement in Alberta: 237 days. That's how long you have to wait. For a hip replacement: 209 days.

There is a better way, where we put the needs of patients first, before any ideology. We protect taxpayers while respecting the Canada Health Act. I want to see the greatest health system in the world right here in Alberta. It can be done, and it will be done with a Wildrose government. We will get back to action where outcomes matter more than treatment because it is about outcomes. It's about making people better.

The productivity costs, the loss of the quality of life while we take care of our seniors when they might have a hip they have to wait for – it doesn't cost any more money today to get that hip replaced than it does in 209 days. It doesn't cost any more money to get that cataract surgery today than it does in 224 days. We need to get rid of the backlog.

Now, let's look at Saskatchewan because they're right next door. Their primary product is oil, much like ours. And congratulations to Saskatchewan. They're the number one place in the world right now to invest in the oil and gas sector. We're 48th in Alberta. We do get the same price, Mr. Speaker, and use the same pipelines, but we don't have quite the same government. In Saskatchewan they do have something that is called great wait times. In fact, they are considered clinically reasonable wait times by physicians.

In Saskatchewan they've hit or blown through many of their wait time targets for key surgeries like cataracts and hip and knee replacements. In Saskatchewan, 92 days, three months. In Alberta: 224 days, more than double. Something's wrong. For knee replacements patients in Saskatchewan are waiting 130 days; 237 days here in Alberta. And for hip replacements patients in Saskatchewan are waiting 128 days versus 209 days here in Alberta. It doesn't take a genius to see that something's wrong here in Alberta. If you want an MRI and then want to see a specialist and then want to get referred, well add that 200 to 200 and another 200, and a year and a half later you might see somebody to help you. That's not access to health care. That's access to a waiting list. It's different, and the Supreme Court of Canada said that it was different.

So let's have some difference. Let's have Alberta lead the country in wait time guarantee. Let's move forward, Mr. Speaker, on something that actually gets rid of the same, tired methods of health care that we've seen in this province for years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to give you a couple of examples of what I've seen the money go to. If you're moving from Lethbridge to Calgary and you work for Alberta Health Services, it's going to cost – well, I've seen it cost – \$138,000. It's \$138,000 if you work for AHS and you move from Lethbridge to Calgary. I'd say that the market rate is a little different.

Or we could talk about the AHS senior manager that had his assistant go and save a parking spot for his wife during Christmas shopping. Or better yet, why don't we talk about the AHS personnel that was sent down to the Mayo Clinic because he wanted a second opinion on his cancer. Guess who paid for that, Mr. Speaker? The taxpayers of Alberta did. It's disgusting that my son waited here, thinking he had health care, and Alberta Health Services sends some bureaucrat down to the Mayo Clinic for a second opinion.

While they banter and laugh on the other side, Mr. Speaker, people in this province are not getting access to health care. This government should take it seriously. This government needs to take it seriously because people's lives are on the line. It's not an issue of money. It's an issue of quality of life. It's an issue of productivity. It is an issue of life. There are innovations that people can make. There are things that people are doing in other jurisdictions.

I have to commend the minister. She has responded, from my understanding, to many of my caucus members that have issues in their particular ridings. I appreciate that, and I would suggest that she's one of the more competent ministers on that side. But that means, Mr. Speaker, that she cannot use any excuses. I've heard a lot of excuses today. She needs to take control of the bureaucracy and find some systems that work, and this particular motion provides one little help, one little helping hand for her.

I would ask that before turning it down, they take it into consideration because there's no reason Alberta shouldn't have the best health care system in the world, certainly in Canada. No reason. I think she's got the capability to make it the best health care system in Canada, and I assure you that the Wildrose members on this side of the House will work to make it that system while we're in opposition. We will work with the government in any way we can to improve our system in justice, our system in health care, our system in education. That's our commitment to the government. I don't want any family to have the same experience that I had. None.

I did not realize how important policy and politics were, not when I was in the federal government for 10 years passing laws, and I did pass a lot of laws. I was very proud of those laws. I was proud of the pipelines we built. I was proud of my private member's bill that was tough on organized crime, Mr. Speaker. I was proud that I asked for many more judges, both at the Queen's Bench level and at the Provincial Court level, because I was in the system for years and I understand how important it is for Crown prosecutors to have the resources, just like it's so important for our health care system to reflect the best practices from across the country and across the world. Right next door in Saskatchewan and in B.C. – you can go east or west – both have better systems than we do, and they do it for a lot less money. I don't care how much money it costs; just get it right because people's lives are at risk.

Let's not waste the money. I've talked to people that can buy a wheelchair for \$9,000 that AHS sells for \$15,000. These are not funny things, Mr. Speaker. People work hard for their money. Alberta Health Services has an obligation to the people of Alberta to get it right, to get a return on investment not just because of the money but because the return on investment is the person's life, their quality of life, their family's quality of life, the productivity of that person getting back to work.

Can you imagine if the whole backlog was gone tomorrow or even if this government moved forward with this motion and solved it so that we got rid of the backlog in a year, Mr. Speaker? Can you imagine? No more having to go and help family members buy groceries, go shopping, go for a haircut, go see the doctor. They would be back living a high-quality lifestyle. Their quality of life would be back to the point that they deserve, where they have a health care system that is the best in the world.

5:20

We all want the same things here. We just believe on this side of the House, the Wildrose, in transparency, accountability. That's why we need to publish these things. That's why we need to move forward, Mr. Speaker, so Albertans know what we're doing. Look around the rest of the country for best practices and implement those best practices. It's important. Until you see a loved one die,

until you go through the justice system and it fails you, you don't realize how important it is.

So on this issue today, on my Motion 501, I'm hoping that the NDP, on the other side, and all parties in this place will set aside partisan differences and will say: yes; we are here for Albertans, for Albertans first. That means we have to look at best practices around the world and around Canada and implement those best practices in our health care system.

We don't have to go far, Mr. Speaker. If the Health minister picked up her phone and called the Health minister in Saskatchewan, I bet you any money that they would be able to sit down and the Health minister from Saskatchewan would say: here's what we did; here's what we did to reduce our wait times to three months for just about every normal surgery, for every common surgery. While we here in Alberta have to wait 200-plus days. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that if we emulate systems and copy other jurisdictions that are successful, we will have success here.

Right now it's not an issue of money. We spend almost 50 per cent of our budget on health care, and I know that foundations across this great province raise millions and millions of dollars more. I myself was on the children's health foundation. I was the chair here in northern Alberta, raising money for the Stollery for many years, Mr. Speaker, back in the '90s.

I know how important it is. That's why I'm hoping they're going to support this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and respond to Motion 501. I want to say that I know everyone in this House wants to ensure that we have the very best health care system to serve every single Albertan. We know that wait times are important and that we need to be finding ways to continue to reduce them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of the fact that we have public reporting on these wait times through a wide range of sources, and the member has mentioned some of them. Alberta Health Services monitors and releases quarterly reports for wait times on coronary artery bypass grafts, scheduled contract cataract surgeries, hip replacement surgeries, knee replacement surgeries, hip fracture repair, and much more. Further, Alberta Health Services' website includes information on the EMS dashboard, which reports response times to life-threatening episodes as a quarterly metric as well. It also tracks real-time monitoring for emergency rooms in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer so far.

The Alberta wait time reporting system publicly tracks wait times for a number of those surgeries, as we mentioned, as well as diagnostic imaging and wait times for oncologists as well as radiation therapy. I'm proud that this information is publicly available through waittimes.alberta.ca. Additionally, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, CIHI, reports comparative wait times for key procedures such as hip and knee surgeries, cataract surgery, and radiation therapy across Canada. We use this information, Mr. Speaker, to target our resources and to help plan for a system that Albertans can depend on when they need it.

I want to also extend my condolences. The system doesn't always get a chance to help everyone in a way that is saving their lives.

Mr. Speaker, we're not afraid of evidence. We know that there is progress to be made on wait times, and we are committed to making progress. But I also want to be clear that if you are an urgent patient, you will be seen urgently. People triage patients through the system. This government will continue to protect public health care for all Albertans, which is one of the reasons why I'm so proud that we

restored the \$800 million in funding that was planned to be cut just prior to the last election. That represents a lot of patients who would have been waiting longer for care.

I know that it's tough to come up with solutions. I know that there have been proposals for massive cuts to the system and off-loading costs to everyday Albertans with health fees. Tell me, Mr. Speaker, how slashing resources can do anything but increase wait times and off-load costs onto Alberta patients and their families. Rather than continuing to describe our problem – we are thoroughly aware of it – this government is taking action on wait times. We are taking action for all Albertans, not just those who can afford to pay.

With this motion the member opposite is asking us to divert even more resources in providing information that's already publicly available to everyone. I want to say that I welcome feedback for concrete solutions from the member opposite and from all members of this Assembly. I know that we all have great ideas. We want them to continue coming forward, but I do not believe that this motion is a way to make that the reality, Mr. Speaker.

With that in mind, I'm urging my colleagues to vote against this motion as it stands today and to keep bringing recommendations forward as we work in a way that's collaborative to build a better system for all, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am humbled and honoured today to rise to speak to this motion, Motion 501, that's brought forward by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, the hon. opposition leader. I really want to thank him not just for his passion on this topic, which is personal, professional, and political, but also for how he's weighed it with a lot of research. It's a matter of the gut and the head and the heart, and I salute him for that.

Now, it's on record in *Hansard*, so I don't need to read it, sir. There are just so many ideas in here that are completely reasonable. Making it public within 120 days: it's simply asking that the government would complete a report related to surgical and diagnostic wait times, issues that are concerning Albertans in a big way, and they have for a long time. Barriers causing excessive wait times – excessive wait times – estimated costs of wait times, health deterioration, opioid addiction are immediate and urgent issues. This information is quite accessible; it's a matter of collating.

I'm sensing a serious trend here. That information is piecemeal right now in many issues that this government is dealing with. Let's put it together. Let's do the right thing, come up with the best options, implement them, and re-evaluate it for the benefit of Albertans, for their quality of life and the quality of their pocketbook. It's just common sense. It talks about "cost-effective solutions including those used in other provinces to reduce wait times within the limits of the Canada Health Act."

I really need to know – and I think Albertans have every right to know – why anyone on the other side of this Chamber could possibly vote against this. Please be specific. This is not binding in terms of a bill that was just voted down. This is a recommendation. It's a request. You wouldn't do anything wrong by voting for this, private members. Nothing. You would be helping your constituents. They'll be asking why you voted against this if you do. There's no threat, Mr. Speaker. It's just a reminder that this is an opportunity for people to work together for Albertans.

Now, I've heard for a long time about surgical and diagnostic wait times being extremely frustrating for people to work within, not just in this province, though, Mr. Speaker, and not just in this country. I remember from quite some time ago being the chair of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, and the Health minister

at the time and myself, over a decade ago, put on a health summit, and it actually focused on best practices from around Planet Earth. I can tell you that no one from any country there would ever – would ever – suggest that they had a monopoly on the great ideas for health care. Speaking at this moment, I don't know if the hon. member happened to be there at that time or not. I wish he had been.

In an ideal situation everyone would receive the very time-sensitive diagnostic tests or surgical procedures that they require, but the reality of the situation is that we have a finite system. It's a finite world. There's only a certain number of doctors and hospitals and time in which to serve an ever-expanding population. Now, I know from my time in cabinet, in wellness, that great gains were made in this respect, and I think it is extremely unfortunate that this government has dropped them. How can you drop the positive, proactive, preventive, happy, healthy, out-of-the-hospital healthy eating and active living? Without a budget. I don't get it.

5:30

Now, because of that and because of the fact that we have limited resources, obviously it's incumbent upon any government to be effective and efficient with the utilization of resources that we do have so that we can serve the greatest number of people. We've heard it said in this Chamber many, many times that dumping endless amounts of money into the system is clearly not the answer.

We all know that Alberta has one of the most expensive health care systems per capita, yet wait time statics leave us near average. We can do better, don't you think? Don't you think we deserve better? When I say "we," I mean Albertans. When the government or any major institution sets out to make a significant change, the best thing that they can be armed with is good data.

By taking the time to study the complete picture, with input and advice from relevant stakeholders, the government would be best equipped to fulfill their own priority, their initiative 2.7 from their own Ministry of Health business plan 2015-2018. The initiative states: "Implement a Wait Time Measurement and Waitlist Management Policy to address long wait times in the health care system." You said that you're going to do this. Here's an opportunity to do exactly what you suggested. Wouldn't it be nice for you to say, "Promise made, promise kept"? Then we could all walk out of here at 6 o'clock, have a nutritious meal, get back to work, and all Albertans would know that you've fulfilled your own promise.

I know that this initiative is a work-in-progress. But, honestly, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. You know that from Lao-tzu, don't you? I see no reason why this government would not want to seek out and analyze any and all data that's related to this ongoing issue. It will empower.

As I said, the motion is simply asking the government to within four months complete a report which dives into a number of issues that may be exacerbating wait times. It's finding solutions. I heard the minister a minute ago asking for solutions. That's what this is about.

By making the report public, there's nothing to hide here. The motion would increase the transparency in the health system, and has that not been a hallmark, at least a proclaimed hallmark, of this government? Here's another great opportunity to prove that you're doing what you were saying you are doing, by being open and transparent, this time in the health care system.

Albertans would love to have those insights into factors which impact wait times. By the way, if it made the previous government look a little worse, we're not afraid of that at all. Bring it on. When I say, "Bring it on," Mr. Speaker, that's not aggressive. What that means is: let's continue to solve these problems that continue to evolve and, in this case, get bigger and bigger. We need to reverse that process. This is a perfect opportunity to do exactly that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're only allotted a certain amount of time to speak on these. I won't be able to go into other details as to why I'm going to be voting on this motion in a very positive way and why others on this side of the House, I suspect, will as well. Everything about this motion is reasonable, including the timeline, so I'll vote for it. I'd encourage members from all sides of this House to rise in the time that we have and state why they will or will not vote for this. I know that we have esteemed members of a number of realms, including health care, who have incredible experience and expertise, and you know who you are.

Well, let's face it, everyone in this Chamber who has friends and family who have been through the system will have personal experience as well, so let's bring forward the personal, the professional, the political. Let's do the smart thing. Let's work together for Albertans in a cost-effective, quality-of-life sort of way that will make this province even better than it is today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to Motion 501. I'd like to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for bringing this important discussion on surgical wait times to the attention of the Legislature.

As a former operating room nurse at the Foothills hospital for nearly 10 years I think I can offer an important perspective to this debate. Mr. Speaker, the operating room is like no other place in our health care system, where patients put their complete trust in the team taking care of them while they're anaesthetized and unable to speak for themselves and where family members are not permitted to enter. Imagine how some people get nervous about visiting the dentist. Well, consider how nervous people are going in for brain surgery.

Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, the people who care for our patients undergoing surgery are some of the most dedicated and caring individuals I've ever met. I was honoured to work amongst them, people like Dr. Garnette Sutherland, whose team developed neuroArm, the first MRI-compatible neurosurgical robot, that was recently inducted into the Space Technology Hall of Fame. I know of many operating room nurses, anaesthetists, and surgeons who volunteer their time and skills to travel to places like Africa and Haiti at their own expense to help those less fortunate.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I was shocked when in this very Chamber on December 7 last year the Leader of the Official Opposition characterized me and my former colleagues as "people who don't know how hard it is to work a real job" and people "who don't understand the fears of working families across this province." I know it's the job of the Leader of the Opposition to oppose, but I think he's taking his job a bit too literally when he describes people on this side of the aisle, who worked as nurses, teachers, social workers, and doctors before being elected, as not working a real job. The arrogance and disrespect shown by the Leader of the Opposition to these hard-working public servants is stunning. Perhaps instead of talking down about hard-working Albertans and focusing on . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised, hon. member. Stop the clock.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to a point of order with respect to the Member for Banff-Cochrane clearly

making allegations against another member in the House, imputing false motives or unavowed motives to another member, using abusive language or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. While I appreciate the fact that the member may be reading from a quote inside the Chamber, the language that he's using on the opposite side of that quote is certainly language that's likely to create disorder.

He's also imputing false motives to the Leader of the Opposition in what he was or was not saying on that day in this House. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition has a very, very lengthy track record of defending front-line workers, a very, very lengthy track record of speaking highly of those who provide service. Even today, in what I would consider to be very, very, very passionate remarks about a very, very, very personal situation that he underwent inside this province, at no point did he speak specifically about front-line workers and nurses in an emergency room but merely about a system. Perhaps it would be advantageous to this House if that member would speak more along those lines and less about imputing motives to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the Member for Banff-Cochrane was talking about incidents that had happened in the past. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition had said those remarks. He didn't say anything that hadn't already been said. Understanding the passion that the Leader of the Official Opposition had – and we all recognize that – you know, that passion shouldn't give him or anyone else, for that matter, immunity to be able to say or do anything they want. I believe the Member for Banff-Cochrane has not said anything that would disrupt the duties of this House but things that had been on the record and had been said. He wasn't talking about front-line workers as the Opposition House Leader is talking about. He actually talked about members who in their previous occupation had been members of health services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

The Speaker: The House leader of the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. Standing Order 23(h) reads: "makes allegations against another Member." That indeed occurred. Standing Order 23(i): "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." It's not a matter of interpretation here. That's clearly what indeed has happened. I think it's extremely unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because I'm expecting that you and all Albertans really want to be debating this motion and not this sort of situation, which is completely, unnecessarily, and extremely deleteriously personal.

Standing Order 23(j) reads: "uses abusive or insulting language." I know that many people would feel that that is exactly what this is.

Now, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we could go on, but out of respect for this House and this debate and for this motion and for the people of Alberta I'm not going to go on. I'm simply going to suggest that a very quick, easy, efficient, and fair way to deal with this situation is simply for the member to rise, to apologize, to retract the statements. I'd love to hear the rest of the speech as it relates to this motion on this table at this time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm of the view that you continue to find reasons that you can antagonize each other across the hall. In this particular instance I don't have the Blues in front of me. I don't recall the exact words that you said. Nonetheless, there was a reference, which I believe the Opposition House Leader made, with respect to comments that were made in the House earlier. I would,

however, caution the member. I'm not sure that there is actually a point of order in this instance. However, please stick to the subject matter, avoid those statements that may be perceived as personal, and be respectful.

Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, perhaps instead of talking down about hard-working Albertans and focusing on his own internal party conflicts and bozo eruptions, he should go out and actually talk to some front-line workers. The Wildrose leader's contempt for public servants is only compounded by his demands to unilaterally impose wage freezes and toss collective bargaining out the window, something Wildrose previously opposed during the Bill 46 debate . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Westhead: . . . demonstrating just how far to the right they've shifted.

Mr. Yao: Easy, commie. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, if it wasn't bad enough for the opposition leader to publicly . . .

Mr. Carlier: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Carlier: Thank you. You know, heckling most certainly is part of the customs of this House. What we just heard went over and above that: "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." If you haven't heard the word that was said by the member, Mr. Speaker, it was actually the word "commie," which I would say most certainly fits into that definition.

Mr. Yao: I withdraw and apologize for those comments.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Banff-Cochrane, keep in mind the earlier comments, and be careful.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: First of all, on April 20 of last year in this Chamber the Official Opposition leader said with a straight face in *Hansard* the following quote with respect to Alberta's health care system: "When people quit or when people move out of the province, let's just not rehire them . . ." [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon member, particularly at this late hour, could you address your comments to the subject matter and try and avoid those clauses that you believe might be taken as causing disorder in the House.

Please continue.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I know I've touched a nerve on the other side telling the truth about the opposition, but I think I've got 10 minutes . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Westhead: Each member is afforded 10 minutes to make their case, and I'd appreciate the opportunity to do that, Mr. Speaker.

He said: "Let's just not rehire them for now . . . It would help morale . . . It would."

Mr. Cooper: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, on relevance, please.

The Speaker: Did I hear a point of order on relevance?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. That's correct.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about what the Official Opposition leader said with respect to surgical wait times and staffing in hospitals. I'm trying to make my point on why I'm not going to support the motion.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please proceed but keeping mindful for this third time that I've asked you to – you've seen what's happening on the other side, so please be conscious of that. Please proceed.

Mr. Westhead: Sure. Mr. Speaker, I can't be responsible . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.
Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, you heard me correctly. The Wildrose's solution to the unemployment situation and wait times is to leave front-line positions unfilled. Not only that, they actually think this would improve morale. I've heard some far-out things from the Wildrose brain trust, but this one ranks right up there with calling feminism a cancer.

Take it from me; these hare-brained Wildrose schemes would simply not work and would most definitely not help morale. Picture this, Mr. Speaker. Health care being a female-dominated workplace, with a relatively young workforce thanks to the cuts imposed in the '90s by the PCs, that eliminated a generation of nurses and blew up hospitals, there are hundreds if not thousands of front-line workers on maternity leave at any given time. Not only that, the short-term staffing situation was to such an extent when I worked at AHS that staff couldn't even get time off to attend their own wedding. Here we have the leader of the Wildrose saying that it would improve morale not to fill these positions. It's unbelievable. You can't make this stuff up.

I'm beginning to think that the Leader of the Opposition is concentrating more on keeping his job or dreaming up a name for the new party. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to suggest: the wild conservatives.

Wait, Mr. Speaker. Here's another Wildrose plan to make you facepalm. During the 2015 election campaign the Wildrose proposed a catchy-sounding wait time guarantee. The guarantee went like this: if a Wildrose government fails to meet its own wait time targets, which they most certainly would considering their plan to not fill vacant positions and cut billions from health care, Albertans could go to a private clinic or out of province for procedures and be reimbursed by the public system. In a press conference the Wildrose

leader said, and I quote: we expect people to go to other provinces; we expect people to go possibly to the United States. End quote. I wish I was making this up, but it's true.

Boil this down, Mr. Speaker, and what you get is the Wildrose plan to funnel public dollars to their friends at private clinics and export public health care dollars to the U.S. or other provinces and bring in a de facto two-tiered system, where the wealthy jump the queue. This is just . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.
Please continue.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, this is just another back-of-the-napkin Wildrose plan, that was clearly not thought through, just like the others, a plan that belongs with their shadow budgets, never to see the light of day. It's a shame, really. Albertans deserve better from their opposition.

Let's walk through an example of their plan, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose sends Mr. Jones to the U.S. for hip surgery. Mr. Jones pays out of his pocket for airfare for him and a companion and pays out of his pocket for a hotel room. Then Mr. Jones suffers a medical complication during surgery and has a stroke. As a result, Mr. Jones requires 24-hour care for the rest of his life and must be repatriated back to Alberta at significant expense. Who pays for all this, you might ask? Mr. Jones. "Sorry," the Wildrose says, "We only offered to pay for your hip surgery; you're on your own for the stroke."

On the other hand, here in Alberta . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: What's the point of order?

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Cooper: The point of order is that the member continues to use language and make allegations about the Wildrose, make allegations against members of this House . . .

The Speaker: Opposition House Leader, you've said that before. In this instance, I think the member is offering an opinion, which is the freedom . . . [interjections] Order, please. Are you finished with the point you wanted to make? I heard that before.

Mr. Cooper: No, I'm not finished with the point that I'd like to make because the hon. member is making assertions about things that aren't true. He is making assertions about a policy of the Wildrose Party that are false. He's not telling the truth, and that should be a problem for all members of this Chamber . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

5:50

Mr. Carlier: I think you said it best, Mr. Speaker. The member was just giving his opinions on things that have already happened in this House. In my wildest imaginings I do not see a point of order here. I think that right now they might agree with me that emotions are quite high at the moment, and that's probably what's giving rise to a lot of these points of order, not necessarily the facts of what's been said.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The House leader for the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, sir. Sections 23(h), referring to allegations, and 23(i), to false and unavowed motives. It's not a matter of

opinion, sir, when someone comes forward and says – and we don't need the Blues; we don't need smirking. If the member had read the motion, the last clause includes: "to reduce wait times within the limits of the Canada Health Act." He was going off on a huge tangent about private health care, et cetera. I've got to tell you that it's embarrassing when we can't have a level of decency and respect in this place to concentrate, sir, on the motion . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: On the motion. Let's keep the personalities out of it, please and thanks.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have two minutes left. It was a matter of opinion – I caution you again, for the fourth time – agreeing with your own deputy House leader. Be cautious of the time of day that you're at and the comments you make.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's see. Instead of investing in Alberta's health care system, like we are on this side of the House, Wildrose would rather cut billions and export public health care dollars to private providers outside of Alberta and support queue-jumping for those who can afford it.

Mr. Speaker, I can't support this motion or the Wildrose's preposterous and ill-considered solutions to shorten wait times. We already publicly report a significant amount of wait time information. More reports and studies that the Wildrose is calling for would divert resources away from the front lines.

I'm getting a bit tired of the Wildrose leader talking down about Albertans and hoping that the government fails for his own short-term political gain. This motion from the opposition leader was a chance for him to demonstrate leadership and propose some solutions, to show Albertans what he would do differently. If he bothered to look, he would have seen that wait time information is already publicly reported. He'd rather admire the problem and scapegoat and blame front-line workers.

Instead, what we need to do is take action, and that is exactly what this government is doing. We restored \$800 million in funding to health care and will continue finding efficiencies to offer more timely care and make improvements in wait times.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this motion and urge members to do likewise. Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. Quiet, please.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand in this Assembly and address Motion 501. I'll try to raise the level of debate from some of the members that have spoken earlier.

You know, every hour in Alberta we spend about \$2.4 million on health care. That's about \$58 million a day. I think that we have made it very clear and the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition has made it very clear that we support the public universal system of health care. We just desire, unlike, I guess, the NDP across the way, to make sure that it is efficient, that it is effective, and that it actually delivers health care rather than wait times. Unlike the musings of the individual that spoke prior to myself, we actually care what happens to Albertans when they enter the health care system.

Now, we are arguing in Motion 501, Mr. Speaker, that we simply produce a report and that that report look at the barriers that cause the excessive wait times. We can't argue, nobody in this Assembly can argue against the fact that we have horrendous wait times. It's obvious. The facts are there. Alberta, by one report, spends an

average of 22.9 weeks in wait time; Saskatchewan, 16.6; Quebec, 18.9; Ontario, 15.6. Surely to goodness, as legislators in this House we can have a conversation that looks at: what are the reasons, what are the barriers that create those wait times? Let's look at: what are the estimates that those wait times cost?

Let's take a look at the proposals so that we can evaluate cost-effective solutions for those wait times. This is something that is not particularly partisan. It's not left-wing; it's not right-wing. We've all agreed on universal health care in this Assembly. Surely to goodness, we don't have to look at the personal; rather, we can look at the system. Access to wait times is not access to health care. It is not access to healing. Let's take a look at the motion. Albertans wait nearly three weeks longer than the national average for treatment.

Wait times mean that patients continue in their suffering. I have a father, who had a knee replacement. It was done very well by the health care system in this province. The fact that he had to wait a significant amount of time, about, by the way, what I see the average is, about 224 days – if I remember correctly, my father had to wait maybe a little bit longer than that but approximately that wait time. Mr. Speaker, I know the pain that my father went through, and I know the kind of drugs that he was on, and I know that at 77, 78 years of age, when this was happening, he could hardly walk across the kitchen to be able to deal with making breakfast.

Wait times are important. Access to health care is important. We all have loved ones that have this same issue, so we in this Legislature should be dealing with this issue, and we should be dealing with it in a rational fashion. This motion simply asks us to go and create the ability to have a report that within 120 days will report on the wait times, on surgical and diagnostic wait times. That is a completely reasonable thing. I would suspect that all Albertans that listen to what we're doing here today would agree with that statement. I don't understand why the government would not be willing to support this motion.

You know, the Fraser report reports that the estimated cost of wait times can be as high as \$3,951 per person, for a total cost of \$3.5 billion to the Alberta taxpayer, Mr. Speaker. Those are significant costs. Now, you can argue the numbers, and that's fair enough. You can argue whether you like the Fraser Institute or you don't like the Fraser Institute or whether you believe their numbers or whether you don't. But this report would allow us to take a look and to come up with numbers that we want and reasons that we want. Estimated barriers and estimated costs: that's what this report is about, not some flights of fancy.

Alberta is presently facing an opioid crisis. One of the reasons – not the only reason but one of the reasons – that we have a problem with an opioid crisis is the fact that physicians have been prescribing opioids and people have become hooked. The longer we keep people on wait times, the longer they're on pain medication. The longer they're on pain medication, the more likelihood they have of becoming hooked.

Mr. Speaker, when I take a look at the wait times, I believe that it's important that we start to study this with Motion 501. Albertans demand this. Albertans will benefit from this. The social cost for families, the social cost for individuals suffering from mental health, the social costs and physical costs for people that are suffering from pain and from wait times and that need surgical and diagnostic data: this would help us progress those issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to adjourn the Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, March 14, 2017

Day 7

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Anderson, S.	Gotfried
Carson	Orr
Connolly	Piquette
Coolahan	Schneider
Dach	Schreiner
Drysdale	Taylor
Fitzpatrick	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. S. Anderson

Barnes	Malkinson
Dach	Miller
Fildebrandt	Panda
Fraser	Renaud
Goehring	Turner
Gotfried	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Please bow your heads. Let us reflect, each in our own way. Allow us to find solutions and resolve in our debate, acknowledging that conflict, if dealt with respectfully, will often lead to a resolution.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 9: Ms Ganley]

The Speaker: Would anyone else like to speak to the Lieutenant Governor's speech? Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you. I'm very pleased to stand today to respond to the Speech from the Throne by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor Lois Mitchell. I will try to focus my comments on a few things that were noted in the speech. I think that I will begin with the statements about strong public health care and education systems. Our government will build on its plan to protect and enhance health care and education. I know that things are not yet perfect. My objective as the MLA for Lethbridge-East is to continue to strive for perfection as we move forward in all of our legislation.

There have been issues identified which require action, and they are being addressed step by step as we go. In Lethbridge there are some challenges with triaging in emergency and pressure focused within the psychiatric area. Despite having such issues, we are working to address those, and every day we are working on improving our services and access to those services. We are also addressing the needs within our infrastructure. I thank with all my heart the nurses, doctors, cleaners, LPNs, lab technicians, teachers, aides, principals, administration, school boards, our ministers of Health and Education, and every one of you who makes our health care and education systems work.

In my community the new wing of the Chinook regional hospital was completed under our watch. Parents have come to me and thanked me and our government for not cutting funds to the hospital and for completing the new facilities that now house the incredible neonatal unit so that the facilities were there when their baby was born, where they needed them.

I am truly grateful for the cancer centre in Calgary, which services southern Alberta.

I am so pleased that we will make life better for vulnerable Albertans by the utilization of nurse practitioners on the front lines

to care for homeless women and youth in Calgary and Edmonton and eventually, I hope, in Lethbridge.

The Minister of Education asked that I attend the opening of a school close to my home in north Lethbridge and another in my neighbouring community of Coaldale during this past year. What a privilege it was to have represented him at these events and to see the excitement in the eyes of the students, their parents, and their teachers to be in and to be able to utilize such beautiful, state-of-the-art, functional facilities.

I was asked to be a member of the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. I take that work very seriously. My colleagues and I are focused on fixing the problems that have been identified so that our children can be protected. I am not focused on blaming. We are working in what I believe is a collaborative manner, using consensus decision-making. I feel that we are moving forward in a positive manner, which is what needs to happen to make our efforts a success.

I have advocated on behalf of my constituents and many from other constituencies to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities, and I am happy that this government is responding. Work is being done to provide timelier and more accessible services, a small step forward. I will continue to advocate on their behalf to further advance this file.

As you know, I've previously spoken to the issue of domestic violence and to a lack of equity for women. Since giving my statement, thousands of women and some men have contacted me about their particular issues around domestic violence and inequity. I listen and advocate on their behalf throughout our ministries when needed and when requested. It is almost overwhelming to see how much work needs to be done, but this pales in comparison to how overwhelming it is for those who are being victimized. We can't do everything all at once, as much as I would like to, so I guess I'll have to run in two more elections to make that happen. We and myself in particular are not daunted by what is required to be done, so we will continue to build on the work done through Bill 204. In this session we've introduced Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. I expect that I will be speaking on that bill in the next few days.

I'm really proud of our government and its support of communities. In Lethbridge we are the recent recipient of the largest private investment ever, \$350 million, with the announcement of the Cavendish farm project. When the city contacted me about six or seven months before the project was actually announced, I was thrilled to engage our government in the project and to solicit support.

Our government also supported the city and the county of Lethbridge in their Asian trade mission with letters of introduction and support from our offices in Asia. This resulted in a very positive response throughout the mission.

It would be lax of me if I did not speak about creating better conditions for our communities across Alberta, in particular the protection of our extraordinary natural heritage. I believe this to be an essential direction for our government to take.

I say this following two visits to the Castle Mountain wildlife area. I visited the area with the Oldman Watershed Council in the fall of 2015 and again in the summer of 2016. We visited a few of the same sites on both trips. I was witness to both the beauty and the magnitude of this area. While there in the fall, I saw a number of people random camping at campsites that were set in the woods. There were many, many deep tire tracks into the site for about 400 or 500 metres from the roadway. We walked through the woods to the creek. In some places barriers were laid down and some boulders and fallen trees to deter the crossing of the stream. I saw where diamond willow saplings were planted to deter anyone from

crossing the stream in vulnerable areas and areas where there were bridges available to cross without disturbing the stream.

10:10

During the summer excursion to the same area the ruts in the drive to the camping in the wooded area were greater and deeper. We again walked through the woods and down to the creek, but now I was seeing tire marks and deep ruts along the banks of the creek and then up the bank on the other side. I saw areas destroyed where barriers had been set up to protect the areas of the creek that were vulnerable, and where the diamond willow saplings had been planted, they too were destroyed. It was so sad to see, especially when there was a bridge so close by. I've spoken to a few people who are part of quad groups who tell me that everyone does not behave like this. They, too, are upset with those that do, and it ruins it for everyone.

I've also spoken to a number of random campers who are very careful to leave their campsites with no visible evidence that they were there when they leave. They have complained to me that the places where they have camped for years are being damaged by other groups who do not respect nature, make so much noise during the weekend that they make camping feel like they are still in the city, not what they expect when wanting to enjoy the tranquility of nature. I am proud of my government, that we have taken action and asked for public input before the final decisions are made.

I thank Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor Lois Mitchell for a throne speech which clearly lays out a positive path forward. Thank you.

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

Ms McKittrick: I know that the Member for Lethbridge-East is a passionate advocate for her community of Lethbridge and for the surrounding areas. I was just wondering: what are the most important things that she found in the throne speech that are going to empower her community and provide economic development for her community?

Ms Fitzpatrick: I think that within the throne speech, as I said, it was clearly laid out what the path forward would be, and I have to say that everything in the throne speech impacts my community. I believe that Lethbridge is an incredibly vibrant community. I've said in this House many times that I love Lethbridge, and I love it because of the community, because of the caring, wonderful people that are there. Despite the fact that sometimes we disagree about things, they care about our community.

They understand the impact of protecting our water supply. We're in the middle of the Palliser Triangle, which is a drought area, and they do understand that protecting the Castle area actually protects our watershed. If we don't have trees in the ground to hold that moisture in the mountains, we're not going to have water to drink in our community, and it's also going to probably end up flooding the Calgary area. So we recognize how important that is.

I think the throne speech overall really speaks to what needs to be done and the direction that our government is taking to do these things. Again, I'm really proud of what our government has done. Keep up the good work.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or observations under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm thankful for the phrase we heard from Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Mitchell, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, during her Speech from the Throne

on March 2. That phrase was Working to Make Life Better for Families. I'm thankful for this phrase because I believe it's precisely why I and my colleagues and, hopefully, my colleagues on the other side show up every day. We're here because we're all working to make life better for families. As we heard on March 2, now more than ever the fundamentals matter.

One of those fundamentals is creating jobs. I'm going to take a little bit of a turnaround in this area of creating jobs, creating good jobs across our economy by supporting small business and entrepreneurs and job creators, but I'd like to take some time to talk about those jobs for a population that is all too often overlooked and labelled as vulnerable, a people to be cared for, to be pitied: people with disabilities.

Recently the city of St. Albert created a much-needed policy of inclusive hiring. The purpose of this policy is to ensure full participation of people with disabilities as candidates for employment and as employees with the city of St. Albert. The actual policy states that "the City of St. Albert is committed to hiring Persons with Disabilities and strives to provide a respectful, Inclusive, and Barrier-free Workplace." I'm looking forward to hearing from St. Albert's mayor and council on the progress that they've made.

Until then, I can tell you a little bit about the outstanding inclusive employers that I know personally. The Superstore on St. Albert Trail is the employer of a number of people with disabilities and has been for many years. In fact, they are proud union members, actually, and have learned a great deal about managing their lives. Canadian Tire is another amazing employer in St. Albert and recently hosted a retirement party for one of their employees who had worked there assembling bicycles, with some assistance, for many years. Servus Place is another unique employer for someone with very complex needs, with autism, who after a long time job seeking found the perfect job at Servus Place and is doing quite well. The Youville Home hosts a number of people with disabilities and has for years, and McDonald's in St. Albert has employed Jon, a friend of mine, actually, for about 25 years. Other than being away to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, I don't think he's ever missed a shift.

Albertans with disabilities – mild, severe, intellectual, developmental, and physical – consistently experience low levels of employment. You'll hear rhetoric about who minimum wage earners are. I can tell you that they are disproportionately people with disabilities. People with disabilities are unemployed, and they're ready to work. Every person has a right to earn a living to support themselves and their families. That includes people with disabilities. I can tell you that many of them would be so happy to refuse AISH in favour of a good, mortgage-paying job and that indeed many have.

Take in some of the famous St. Albert events, and you'll see what inclusive employment and volunteerism looks like: the International Children's Festival, the Seven Music Fest, and the Rainmaker Rodeo.

I'm going to switch gears a little bit to housing, and I want to tell you a little bit of a story about my community, my constituency of St. Albert. Sometimes you see the beauty and the strength of people in the community in the face of adversity. Over the last year I've attended two hearings before the St. Albert Subdivision and Development Appeal Board. Sadly, this is not the first time I've had to do this, and I'm happy to report that in both cases the appeals were rejected.

The first was a group of neighbours appealing an application for four people with disabilities to share a home in their neighbourhood. It was painful to watch the faces of the people with disabilities who were actually applying to live in that community. It was horrifying to watch the look on the faces of their family

members and their friends. It was really sad to hear some of the reasons that people were fearful to have people with disabilities in their community. They were afraid of parking and traffic congestion. Let me tell you: people earning minimum wage and AISH don't tend to have cars. They were afraid of decreasing property values. They were afraid of the loss of enjoyment of their property. They were afraid of the negative impact on the character of their neighbourhood, and they were afraid for their personal safety.

The second appeal hearing I attended was a little bit different but no less painful or ugly. Six biological siblings who had been apprehended were set to move into a home supported by a local organization. The siblings ranged in age from one month to seven years old. The applicants again raised the following as reasons for the board to reject the application: traffic congestion, parking, loss of safety and security, decreasing property values. Many people showed up to support this, but what came afterwards was the beautiful part. Sane Albertans spoke up after the hearing. They spoke up privately. They spoke up publicly on social media. They spoke to the newspaper. They wrote letters to the editor, and they encouraged the mayor and council to make some changes to a process that is not working.

10:20

We need to be a community that welcomes children that have had a rough start in life, that welcomes people with disabilities, that welcomes people of every colour, every religion, every age, every background. We need to recognize that inclusive communities are valuable communities.

I wasn't sure that I was going to say this, but I am going to and not for a negative reason, because I do think that the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is indeed a good person, dedicated to his family and, no doubt, his constituents. However, during the winter session, November 2016, this member stood in the House and proudly shared the fact that he had participated in numerous appeals to prevent a group home from moving into a cul-de-sac in his community. The reason that I raise this is because it is incumbent on each and every one of us to create safe, inclusive communities. I will continue saying this, that inclusion is a verb. You don't get to say it without doing something. Certainly, we can always be better, and I have no doubt that we can all point to ways that things can be done in a better way. However, perspective is important, and I think people look to us for leadership.

Like so many, I was not born in Alberta, but I chose to live here and to raise my children here. Alberta is a beautiful place, full of people who are progressive and who reject the fearmongering and hate-spewing that far too many claiming to put Alberta first endorse. Opposition will tell you that people, Albertans, are overwhelmed by the lack of hope, but I reject that. The sane Albertans that I talk to reject that. Every day the beautiful city of St. Albert walks the talk of inclusion, acceptance, focused on a future that is hopeful and progressive.

The celebration of new schools after years of lots of signs but empty promises: the Lois E. Hole school opened, and students will begin attending in September, and l'École Alexandre-Taché is finally built, the first French Catholic school in St. Albert.

I try to get out at least once per week to meet my constituents one-on-one. I don't hear the hopelessness that the opposition endlessly talks about. I hear frustration with the constant spreading of misinformation, that the opposition is directly responsible for. I hear frustration with rhetoric intent on dividing and harming. I hear fear that professional provocateurs, spreaders of hate are becoming more acceptable, that hateful misogyny and racism are every day. We're not getting used to it. We reject it.

What I hear is gratitude. I hear gratitude for a reduction in school fees, for investment in infrastructure, gratitude for holding the line on education and health. I hear gratitude that massive infrastructure deficits like the Sturgeon hospital – we're thrilled that we got a boiler. We're not asking for a new hospital. We got a boiler because the previous government, that was in power for decades, refused to address the deficit in infrastructure. I heard gratitude for a government willing to create change and willing to stand up for Alberta families.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is going to be under . . .

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Malkinson: Yes. That's what I was going to clarify.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to thank the hon. member for her advocacy for Albertans with disabilities. You know, she talked a lot about how it's important that those with disabilities have a job. I was wondering if she could expand on how important minimum wage would be for those with disabilities as well as for those with disabilities to be in the community. I know I have several persons with disabilities who live in various residences around Calgary-Currie, and I know that Calgary-Currie is better for it. I was wondering if you could expand on what minimum wage means for those with disabilities.

As well, I know that as a passionate advocate the hon. member has been paying rapt attention to what the opposition has been saying, so I was wondering if she could expand on what she's been hearing from the opposition and perhaps contrast that with what we're doing differently.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Big question. What I can tell you is that I do know that people with disabilities are – the numbers of minimum wage earners are huge. You have to start at a place, and I think that place is that people with disabilities have the right to earn a living just like you and I. They have the right to live in the community just like you and I. No questions asked. Not up for debate. I think if we start there, then we forge ahead. We make a plan.

You know, I hear, "I am grateful for assured income for the severely handicapped," because there are people in Alberta that for whatever reason, be it medical or otherwise, are unable to earn a living and require that type of assistance. However, I can tell you that there are thousands that want to work. They want to work. They want to support themselves. They want to support their families. So I am grateful for a government that is going to look at progressive solutions to problems that have been stewing and festering for decades. We will look at the AISH problem and the challenges that we face with AISH by looking at creative ways of: how can we support employment for people with disabilities? How can we create real, meaningful lives for people with disabilities?

As far as the opposition is concerned, I'm not going to spend too much time talking about them because it's not really my favourite subject. I'll be honest. What I can tell you is that I've been asking for a very long time, I think since we were first elected, that we be careful with the language and the words and the labels that we assign people. It's people first. [interjection] I don't actually think it's that funny. I don't know what you're chuckling about. It is people first. It's not "the most vulnerable." It's not "those poor

people with Down's." It's people with disabilities. It's people first. It's about respect. That's step one to inclusion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I know the Member for St. Albert was the executive director of the Lo-Se-Ca Foundation before her election. She was a champion for people with disabilities. I know that it was a difficult decision for her to decide whether or not to run because of how much she loved that job and the difference that she was able to make in those people's lives. I just wonder if she could tell us a little bit more about the Lo-Se-Ca Foundation and the work that she did for people with disabilities.

Ms Renaud: Well, I think I might have to buy you lunch later.

Thank you for that question. I actually really appreciate it. It was a tough decision, but, you know, I think I was inspired by the vision and the platform, and I'm thrilled to be here. I'm also thrilled to represent the community that Lo-Se-Ca is housed in. Lo-Se-Ca was created by a group of family members, friends, and community supporters that saw a solution in community for their sons and daughters and relatives and friends in St. Albert. I believe they've grown at – when I was there, I think we employed between 125 to 150 people. I think they're up to close to 200 people now. I'm not entirely sure.

Their focus is on creating community living options for people with disabilities that are affordable, that are accessible, and that are meaningful. They work very hard to find meaningful employment. Where employment is not possible, they're looking for volunteer opportunities. They're also looking at some really creative ways to support people with disabilities to age in place. I think all of the things that you hear about . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do just want to take the opportunity before I start to wish everybody in the House a very happy Pi Day. It is Pi Day today, so I would encourage everyone to take a moment to really appreciate the mathematical majesty that is the circle.

I'm very honoured today to be able to rise to respond to the Speech from the Throne, whose central message was: making life better for families. The choices this government has made are doing that, especially in my riding of Calgary-East.

10:30

We are making life better for families by cracking down on predatory lending. Payday lenders have been multiplying in my neighbourhood for years, preying on vulnerable people who are in a pinch, who need cash to see them through to their next paycheque. We reined in the ridiculously high interest rates, we brought in payment schedules, and we increased financial literacy. I now see more and more financial literacy and savings programs being offered in my neighbourhood. Momentum has been doing them for years, but now Sunrise Community Link and the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association are also doing them, giving people skills to save money and matching their savings so they can go to school, buy a car, or make a down payment. That's making life better.

We're making life better for families by raising the minimum wage. Disproportionately more people who live in my riding make minimum wage, and \$15 per hour goes a long way towards having

a little bit of extra money in your pocket, to being able to buy your child a new book or to pay for some strawberries in the winter. Maybe it means that you don't have to work as many hours and that you have more time to spend with loved ones, more time to spend upgrading your education, more time to spend learning English. That's making life better.

We're making life better for families by introducing the Alberta child tax benefit, which helps approximately 235,000 children in 130,000 families. Again, many families in my riding benefit from this. Antipoverty advocacy groups have been asking for this for years. It's a frightening statistic to me that 30 per cent of children who are living with a single mother are living in poverty. Being poor makes life harder. This is a fact. You've heard from many members of our caucus, who speak from personal experience, about only getting five hours of sleep between work shifts, about being unable to buy a winter coat. This child benefit is making life better.

We're making life better by introducing a school nutrition pilot program, by providing free lunch to every single student in some schools every day. Nutritious, delicious food means that they won't be hungry and that they can learn more effectively. This is positive on so many fronts. Food and food security are community issues, health issues, time issues. Not having to worry about making your kids' lunch in the morning on top of everything else you have to do, knowing that your child will have food they enjoy eating and that's good for them: that's making life better.

We're making life better by reducing school fees. We campaigned on this promise and are following through. This will put hundreds of dollars back into people's pockets every year, all the while ensuring that our public education system remains accessible to everyone, which is what public education is supposed to be. That's something that's making life better.

We're making life better by freezing university tuition. This was something I had the benefit of under a New Democrat government in B.C. in the late 1990s. I knew how much my tuition was going to be every semester, and I was able to budget accordingly. Everyone deserves a postsecondary education. Research shows that in our economy your chances of being employed are significantly better if you have some postsecondary training. We are making that more achievable for people, and that's making life better.

We're making life better by helping apprentices continue their training. Many of my constituents work in the trades. These are good jobs, jobs that support families. Electricians, heavy-duty mechanics, carpenters: many of them are in the course of upgrading their training or pursuing a new trade. We're providing a \$1,000 grant to help with tuition and fees, and that is making life better.

We're making life better for families by investing in public transit. Later this year ground will be broken on the new 17th Avenue S.E. bus rapid transit, a project that was funded shortly after we were elected. People in my neighbourhood have been advocating for this project for at least a decade. It will make getting downtown faster, it will make it easier to live without a car, and it will mean that families like mine can bike to Inglewood on the river pathway in their own designated bike lane without having to worry about getting hit by a car on Blackfoot Trail. This, Mr. Speaker, is making life better.

We're making life better by banning door-to-door energy sales. I had these folks at my house multiple times last spring, and I had people calling me to tell me that they were out. I had community associations that were complaining at meetings. Having to deal with aggressive salespeople out to sell you things that you don't need under false pretenses is awful, and banning them is making life better.

We're making life better by making it easier for people to reduce their energy usage. People ask me all the time, especially when I'm

door-knocking: when will we see a program for solar panels? Soon. When will we be able to get rebates for energy efficient appliances? Soon. Not only will these initiatives lower power bills as well as carbon footprints, but they'll put people to work right here in Alberta. That's making life better, Mr. Speaker.

I could go on. I could go on for a long time: reducing the small-business tax, renewing a school curriculum that's 30 years old, helping survivors of sexual assault, increasing vaccination rates, making it easier to get a birth certificate, putting transgender rights in the Human Rights Act, making work safe for farm workers, getting big money out of politics, increasing the energy supply from renewable resources, investing in affordable housing. We are making life better for Albertans every day, and we're doing it while being hopeful and positive.

It's sometimes hard to be optimistic these days. The tone of discourse in the world and in this province makes me angry and it makes me sad, and it makes me worried for the future of my children. It makes me worried for the world that they're going to have to live in on a daily basis. People operate in silos on social media, where they don't have to hear opinions that differ from theirs, and when they do hear those different opinions, they choose to call names or worse. This is true on all sides. I'm not blaming anyone in particular, but I would just ask that people try to engage using facts, real facts, not alternative ones.

We can start here in this House. People ask me if I'm excited to be back in session, and unfortunately I cannot honestly tell them that I am. The Westminster parliamentary system, within which we exist, is patriarchal and colonialist. It's designed to be combative, to be adversarial, to be theatrical. It is not necessarily designed to encourage thoughtful debate on issues. I think about this a lot and about what the solutions might be. To be honest, short of redesigning the whole system, I'm not really sure what can be done, but I do think that we can try to improve the tone, to be more respectful, to listen to each other. In the wake of the dreadful tragedy in Quebec the Premier said something on the steps of this building that made me hopeful. She said: to those out there giving rise to lies and to hate and to injustice, know that you only strengthen our desire for truth, for love, and for justice.

Now, I also, like the Member for Edmonton-Centre, hear from my constituents very frequently: I've never seen an MLA here before. To me, this says that for too long too many people have been left out of the conversation: First Nations people, whose territory we live on; refugees who have fled their countries in fear for their lives; the LGBTQ community. At the Pride brunch in Calgary last year I heard from some folks who said: before the NDP government, we never got anything from the government that we didn't have to fight tooth and nail for.

Now, I know that one of my passions is democratic engagement. I represent a riding that has very low voter turnout, and I hear from a lot of people that they don't vote because they don't think that it will change anything, that they haven't felt heard, that previous politicians didn't call them back, wouldn't give them the time of day. I strive – and I know that all of my colleagues do – to be open, honest, and accountable to all of our constituents. I think of everyone who has called me or written me or come to see me to talk about issues that matter to them. They give me questions to ask, policy to think about, causes to advocate for. Having government that you can talk to makes life better for Albertans. Having government that does what it promises is making life better. Having government that bases its decisions on science and facts is making life better. Having government that thinks about long-term prosperity by caring about education, air, land, and water is making life better.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that is making life better for Albertans every day and is constantly trying to improve accessibility, transparency, and accountability. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park under 29(2)(a).

Ms McKittrick: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'm always very interested by the hon. member's discussion about her riding, and I wish I kind of knew her riding better. I understand that it's a very diverse riding with a lot of people who came here as immigrants and refugees and a lot of persons who do struggle. I was just wondering if the member could elaborate on how the direction of the throne speech is going to be beneficial, especially to the newcomers community.

10:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Luff: Yeah. Thanks very much to the member for that question. I do represent an incredibly diverse riding, one of the most diverse ridings in the whole province, I believe, and diverse because we have people from all over the world. There are certainly pockets where there are large populations of people from a certain country or geographical region, but we really have everyone in Calgary-East, and it's what makes my community so great. Within, you know, 10 blocks of my office I can eat food from probably over 20 countries, and I'm so fortunate to be able to have that.

I think a lot of the focus on education in the throne speech is going to be a huge help for newcomers to Canada. I know that education is a struggle for a lot of them because they come here and they have to retrain. I know, for instance, that Momentum does retraining opportunities to help people get involved in trades and to help people access good-paying jobs. Most of the people who access those programs are absolutely immigrants, so our apprenticeship training initiatives will help them hugely.

Reducing school fees: again, many of these people are, unfortunately, underemployed, so anything that can help to make their life better.

Raising minimum wage: a lot of them, unfortunately, are working minimum wage jobs, so making sure that the minimum wage is closer to a living wage is something that will help a lot of them as well as doing things like reducing school fees. A lot of them have a lot of kids. You know, if you have five or six kids, these school fee reductions are going to make a really big difference.

Also, before I sit down, I think I'd like to move to . . .

Mr. Bilous: No.

Ms Luff: No? Okay. I won't. I'll just sit down.

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate this opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne. I am very proud to be part of a government that is making some very concerted efforts toward improving lives for everyday Albertans, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak, particularly, to how we are improving lives for indigenous people in this province as well.

As Minister of Indigenous Relations I know I've had the opportunity to travel this great province for the past just over 12 months. In that time I've had the opportunity to visit with chiefs and councils and community members from pretty much every reserve in the province of Alberta. I personally have visited as well 34 of the reserves and three of the Métis settlements and hope to within the next few months complete my visits to all communities so that we can make sure that the indigenous people in this province

truly feel like they have an opportunity to be represented in this House, which they have every right to be, and of course over the last number of years they were never given that opportunity.

As some of the previous speakers have mentioned, when we show up at doorways and are told, "I have never seen an MLA" or "I have never seen a minister," we realize how small the contact group of the previous government was in terms of who they cared to talk to and therefore, I believe, in who they cared to represent. One of the things that we are doing that has not been done before is that we are making the basic assumption that we represent every single Albertan and not just special groups who are personal friends of the government. I think that's an important transition in this government.

As Indigenous Relations minister I go out into the communities. I speak to them about the things that are important to them, and I ask them that fundamental question: "What would make life better for you?" The response is: "We would really like to be considered to be Albertans for the very first time." Now, to me, that was almost a bizarre response. How can you imagine that you weren't Albertans all along? You live in Alberta, you've been in Alberta before Alberta became Alberta, and here you are.

They tell us that they've never been considered Albertans. The previous right-wing governments in this province have taken the position that there is a jurisdictional divide and that in that jurisdictional divide there is a responsibility for First Nations people that resides with the federal government, the major Crown, and that as the minor Crown we somehow look at this huge group of people in this province and say to them: "Well, I know that life is not very good. I know that on the United Nations scales your well-being is much less than the rest of the province. We know that the social determinants of health all indicate that your life is much more difficult and less successful than everyone else's. But we're still going to pass you off to someone else because we don't have to do anything."

To hear that that's been the response to this community over literally a hundred years in this province and, I think, particularly over the last 40 years, where we've had real resource revenue – we could have been working with the community to build communities, to build school systems, to build water systems, to enable people to come into the modern age and be equivalent to everyone else in this province. That hasn't been done, and I think it's time that we do that. This government thinks it's time that we do that, and we are taking a very bold and strong stance with regard to how we include the indigenous people in this province.

I'm very proud of a Speech from the Throne that says that the objective of this government is to ensure the well-being of people. Now, that's a word you hear a lot from us. We talk about people all the time. We talk about people with disabilities. We talk about people in the school systems. We talk about people receiving supports from child welfare. We talk about people who are building the economy through the development of industry and small businesses. But you'll notice that what we always do is that we talk about people first, and I think that's a primarily important difference in the way the government is working. Our concerns are about: how do we actually make life worth living in a way that is a life that we would all want? You know, many years ago a leader of our party, J.S. Woodsworth, said that we are to create for others what we would wish for ourselves. I think that's a fundamentally important truism, and it's one that this government has adopted.

When we look at families, we say: "What are some of the things that we know families are going to face? What are the things that are going to need to be addressed?" For example, families have children. That's a fundamental part of many families. So we have

increased the amount of monies that are available for families to raise those children. We have increased the supports for the school system so that those children have teachers in their schools. We have increased the number of free meals that are provided in the school system so that those children are well fed so they can learn well.

We have increased the opportunity for indigenous people to speak not only to, you know, how they learn the things that we typically learn in school but how they are personally reflected in the school. We have signed agreements with Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council and with Maskwacis, and we're working with other communities. We allow them to bring forward information that will help to transform the schools. In fact, one of the pillars of the transformation of the curriculum review is the involvement of indigenous people in defining their own history, their own life experience, and their own hopes and aspirations as indigenous people. All of those kinds of things are reflections of our commitment to making life better for people and, in this case, better for indigenous people. We have multiple layers of success in these areas.

We're looking forward to the budget on Thursday because there are going to be a number of other areas. We've said all along that you can't have people live in communities where they don't have the resources that we have off those communities, in places where they don't have water, in places where they don't have adequate housing and where they don't have the supports they need to be successful.

You know, it just shocks me, I guess, from time to time when I hear people on the other side of the House make the comments that they should just be left to their own devices. I can't imagine why any society would want a group of people who consistently are found to be struggling more than everyone else – and then be surprised when those people enter into the rest of our society and struggle and end up higher on the scale of the issues that we all regret in our society, issues such as family violence or involvement with the courts or mental health or even physical health in the hospitals.

10:50

What we have decided, then, if all those things are true, is that we need to go in and do specific things to change all of the terrible circumstances that lead to a structural deficit. It's not a deficit in the people; the people are wonderful. The people have aspirations and are just like all of us who care for their children, who want to have transitions occur in society so that they can truly become participants. What's gotten in their way is a complete and constant neglect in terms of providing the resources, providing the supports, and bringing that voice here, into this Legislature, and saying: "We as a government care about you. You are Albertans. We will back up our word to you with the resources that are necessary to ensure that your likelihood of success is as great and as forward as the likelihood of success of everyone who lives off-reserve."

This is the whole message behind our Speech from the Throne. This is the message, that we are a people first, that as government we are going to help society make a transition at difficult times. We deeply regret that the economy has been so terrible over the last number of years, and we regret the fact that the previous government, who had oil at \$100 a barrel, failed to find ways to ensure that they actually made lives different for people on a day-to-day basis.

How can that happen? We have all these resources. Instead, what they did was that they cut back and cut back and cut back, and they left us with, really, a perfect storm of a disaster: an economy that's based on a commodity that's not doing well, an infrastructure deficit that is devastating people's lives, and a history of neglect of the indigenous people. That's a three-part storm which has led to, I

think, complete devastation of a community that, if they were simply given the supports that are necessary to be successful – the schools that everyone else has, the medical services that everyone else has, the opportunity for employment that everyone else has – would show us their great resilience, their great determination to do well, their commitment to their families, and success overall, just as we would wish for all other Albertans. That which we wish for ourselves, we wish for others.

You know, it is my intention as the Minister of Indigenous Relations to ensure that that plays itself out over the next couple of years in very specific and concrete ways. We are working on a whole variety of projects that will allow that structural change to occur, everything from our review of the consultation agreement with the indigenous communities to ensuring that indigenous people get on the agencies, boards, and commissions, which they were clearly not represented on under the previous government, to changes in the school system, to changes in the health system, to changes in the child welfare system. It's that kind of commitment, with very specific outcomes, that I think is very important and that we will deliver on.

So all I can say is: watch us over the next two years; you're going to see some fantastic things. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Under 29(2)(a), the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. minister for his response to the throne speech. I was glad to hear him talk so much about his desire to reach out to indigenous people and Métis people.

I have a specific question. We have a great and huge Métis community in my constituency, in the Cypress Hills and southeastern Alberta, and not only have they contributed greatly to our culture and our way of life for hundreds of years; they've been an important part of our economy. At one of the meetings I was at with them recently, they expressed a great deal of concern about what they felt was an inequity, an unfairness where for some reason Métis people in the southern part of our province don't have harvest rights similar to what Métis people in the northern part of our province have. Please, Mr. Minister, I'd like to hear what you're hearing about this issue, what you can do to help our good people in the south, and what your solution might be.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. I do think this is a very important conversation to have. The Métis people clearly are great contributors to this province. In fact, you know, much of the development of Canada is based on Métis people coming across the country and developing the fur trade and opening up the west to settlers. In many ways they did so in a much more respectful way than many of the subsequent settlers in that they actually met with the local indigenous communities and joined in relationship with them and developed practices that were reflective and, I think, more respectful than perhaps we've ever done since. So we're very concerned about the Métis people.

Now, with regard to the specific question of Métis harvesting rights we have an unfortunate situation from the previous government where they simply cancelled the Métis harvesting rights across the province and sat down with their friends and said, "Let's pick a number of communities where we think Métis might exist" and literally pointed out on the map a number of communities, drew circles around those communities, and said, "There; Métis have harvesting rights in those communities," not based on any fundamental discussion about Métis people, where they live, or in consultation with the Métis people at all. For example, they didn't talk to the Metis Settlements General Council about this, did not talk

to the Métis Nation of Alberta. They simply, in somebody's office, sat down and picked small areas. One of the devastating outcomes of that was that very few people understood that Métis people live in some parts of Alberta such as Cypress Hills, and they weren't put on the map.

So under the present government's plan we have begun a process of working with the Metis Settlements General Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta and some of the Métis harvester groups to rewrite the policy on Métis harvesting. One of the commitments we make is that there will be one Métis harvesting policy for the province. We're not picking selected areas and saying: these people have harvesting rights; other people don't.

We are in the middle of that process now. It's written into the framework agreement for the Métis Nation, which we announced about a month ago, and of course it's written into our consultation agreement with the Metis Settlements General Council. We anticipate that over the year – we take time to do these things; we're truly a consultative government – we will develop a policy, and I really hope next year to be back in this House announcing a policy.

I'd be happy to chat with the member any time about the particular concerns in your area. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Health.

Member's Apology

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by saying that I've been frustrated by some of the vitriol that's become part of public debate. Yesterday I regret that in response to questions from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre I contributed to that. So I want to say that I sincerely apologize, and I'd ask that the members accept my apology and that my comment be withdrawn.*

I also ask that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1

An Act to Reduce School Fees

[Debate adjourned March 9: Cortes-Vargas speaking]

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, at second reading. In 2015 our government campaigned on a platform that would make life better for Alberta families, and among our major commitments was a pledge to reduce the burden of school fees on Alberta families. This follows decades of the erosion of what we've come to know of and are proud of in this province, a taxpayer-funded public education system. Over the years the fees that parents would have to pay increased to the point where September was a dreaded month. While parents may have looked forward to the return of children to school because they would not be underfoot in the home, they also dreaded and worried about how they were going to pay the ever-increasing amount of school fees that were shovelled onto their budgets to pay.

We've all seen first-hand and experienced the impact that these fees have had on Alberta families. My own experience comes from being raised in a family of six kids. My mom quit when they started coming in twos. The six children, of course, every fall were

*See page 206, left column, paragraph 3

marched down to a shoe store named Levine's Shoes, on 142nd Street. It actually had a myna bird that talked. It was one of the thrills of going for new shoes. That was one of the things we budgeted for each year.

11:00

The second thing that I now know my mother, in particular, really dreaded was: how was she going to pay for the school fees for those six kids that she proudly trooped off to school every September in those brand new shoes? It's something that I've really wondered about for a long time: how in the world did she pull that off with six kids, especially in the two-year period when my father suffered a construction accident and was on workers' compensation for two years?

I know I lost my first tooth changing lines when my brother and I were on the same house league hockey team. I had busted my stick the week before at a game, and we didn't have enough money to buy a second hockey stick, so as we changed lines, we'd pass the stick to each other. He inadvertently whacked me in the mouth, and that was how I lost my first tooth. Times were a little tough during that period of time, yet those school fees got paid because it was an embarrassment for any parent not to come up with that cash to pay for those school fees.

Those fees from the '60s, when I was going to school, up to this period of time have done nothing but continue to increase, and the scope of them has increased as well. It's definitely a policy of this government to change that, to return, as I say, to a taxpayer-funded public education system that is truly one that looks to all Albertans to shoulder the cost of public education over our tax base to avoid the dreaded September blues that parents now face and will hopefully feel some relief from as a result of this legislation.

To the best extent possible, we will be returning to a true taxpayer-funded public education system in an effort to really make a dent in the costs that parents now face and make a commitment come true, and that is to help Alberta families when they need it most and to really make a difference in their lives, make their lives better in a small way. We'll continue on this path, as the Minister of Education has indicated, but right now what we'd be looking at doing with this bill is covering about 25 per cent of those costs that parents now have to pay out of pocket through our taxpayer-funded public education system improvements and the removal of some of these fees.

I call this legislation uncommon sense. Many people talk about common-sense legislation. Mr. Speaker, I call this uncommon-sense legislation. I think a lot of the things that we have done since we've been elected really are a factor of what one could classify as uncommon sense because what's been going on in the province over the last 45 years really wasn't sensical and has gotten us into some deep, deep financial trouble, which we are slowly working our way out of. Uncommon sense is what we will continue to provide.

This legislation will also provide the government with increased authority over all school fees. We intend to fund the elimination of fees for instructional supplies and materials and busing students to their designated schools for the 2017-2018 school year. Families will save more than \$50 million annually as a result. Think about that, that transfer of money into the pockets of families, who can then do what they wish with it to benefit those individual children as they grow up. It could mean a myriad of things, but that is a very, very significant amount of money that families won't have to come up with.

It is part and parcel of what we truly believe to be a function of government, and that is to provide a publicly funded, taxpayer-paid-for education system that increases, as we progress throughout our

term and hopefully through our second term that we may be privileged to be granted, to fully eliminate school fees that parents now have to suffer as a result of the erosion of the taxpayer-funded public education system that took place over the last 40 years.

Now, this \$50 million annually is money that the parents of over 600,000 students can spend where they need to, on what they need to, and wherever they want to, whether that's on basics like groceries and the mortgage or saving for a family vacation. In consultation with educators and the school boards we'll redefine what a public education is and what parents should and should not be paying for.

School boards collect more than \$200 million from Alberta families in various fees, and Bill 1, as I mentioned before, would cut this by one-quarter. We have our eyes on making further reductions in the years ahead. We're doing what we can in a very difficult economic situation, but we are making progress, and we will continue with that commitment to Alberta families as we move forward in the future.

This bill for now will prevent charges for things like textbooks, workbooks, paper, and much more, the things that you expect they will be provided with when you send your child to school. Yet over the decades these things have become extras that parents have been expected to fork out for. Parents may know these fees by various descriptions: instructional fees, instructional materials, basic fees, among other names. Really, what they've been paying for are the necessities that children would have to have in order to be able to go to school. Period. Regardless of what they are called, they cause significant financial strain on our families.

I often wondered, as I said before, how my mother and father ended up paying those school fees for their six kids as we trooped off each September. If we roll back through our family photo album, one thing that would strike you through the successive years, if you look at photographs of my mother proudly beside her six children, is that she always had the same coat for a lot of years. I'm thinking probably close to 20 years. It's a grey cloth coat that was her winter coat, and that never changed for a long time.

That coat is symbolic of some of the sacrifices that my family made, my parents made to ensure that those school fees got paid. I look at that grey coat that my mother wore for close to 20 years without ever getting a new one and realize that those are some of the things that parents in this province have had to do, to sacrifice to make sure that those school fees were paid for and they didn't have to suffer the embarrassment of asking for a subsidy or some other means of having them paid for under the table by the local school so that their kids would be able to carry on with their school year.

As I mentioned, parents may know these fees by various descriptions, but regardless of what they are called, they cause significant financial strain on our families. When you just roll that number in your mind again, that \$50 million that with this Bill 1 we are going to be relieving Alberta families from having to pay, it's a monstrous amount of money that over the years has sort of built up as a deficit that was hidden.

We talk about the Alberta advantage and we talk about a low tax rate and so forth, but if you really go across all the pieces of legislation, all the departmental costs and fees, and you start adding these things up – \$200 million here, \$400 million in another, half a billion dollars in some other spot – fees that people are paying that aren't noted in the sort of Alberta tax rate advantage that was heralded by previous governments, you realize that there are lots of things that we ended up paying for under the table, disguised as some other type of a fee, in order that the previous government could herald itself as a low-tax regime, when in fact we were actually paying for things out of pocket in a way that wasn't really very progressive.

We're about to change that in the best way that we can: incrementally reducing the fees with Bill 1 that are charged to parents for instructional materials and basic fees, among other things. Poor planning and a lack of funding, as I said, from the previous government led to delays, so many have been left scrambling to arrange busing for their children to inner-city schools. In Calgary many families did their homework and chose a community to move to where it was expected that a new school would be built. That's just one more example of an inconvenience, of having to spend an hour a day travelling to and from school, as those families are charged \$330 in fees per child.

11:10

The instructional fees that Edmonton public schools set at the school level in elementary is usually quite low, but it rises to \$50 a child in junior high, and then it moves to \$145 per child in high school. Parents with multiple children are struggling to pay fees throughout the province. Now, these charges come over and above an instructional supplies and materials fee which is charged to all students and which tops out at more than \$200 for a student attending a high school with the Calgary board of education, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about a substantial amount of money.

I was actually quite taken aback when I heard that \$50 million represented just 25 per cent of the school fees that parents have to pay right now for basic instructional materials and busing that we're going to be addressing with Bill 1. It's astounding that it's something that we're not able to address all at once, but given the economic situation we're doing the best we can to allow this substantial amount of money to be paid for by taxpayers in general rather than to force parents to pay it out of pocket and have to budget specifically, perhaps to have to sacrifice in other ways, every September to pay these school fees for their kids to go to school.

Allison Pike with the Alberta School Councils' Association has told me that families report to her that their annual school fees cost more than their presents under their tree at Christmas. Now, that is astounding. I've heard reports of families taking out loans and borrowing money against their homes just to send their children to public schools. This is not an advantage to Albertans, and we're addressing this. It's not right, and we're taking action.

Our initial focus to make life better for Alberta families with this Bill 1 will be on instructional supplies and materials fees because it is where we see a measure of equity. Nearly every school board charges this fee at some level, and removing this fee will lead to immediate savings for the parents of nearly 600,000 Alberta students. That truly, Mr. Speaker, is making life better for Alberta families in a way that they will notice right away. There are many sitting in this House right here today who will benefit from this legislation to varying degrees, and you can only imagine, sir, the difference it will make on the household budgets of hundreds of thousands of families.

I'm very, very proud of this piece of legislation. I know from talking to people in my constituency that it's being extremely warmly received. "It's about time," they are saying to us, "that we don't have to be suffering the burden of these school fees every September. We were wondering what was happening to our public education system. Thank goodness you're protecting it. We didn't think we'd ever get back to normal."

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really enjoyed the member's speech. He mentioned a key phrase while he was speaking about common sense. I'm originally from Ontario,

and the phrase "common sense" is something that I had lived through in the '90s with the conservative government calling it the "common-sense revolution." Common sense for the Conservative government at the time was cutting money for things like education, just like the member was speaking about. It's kind of reminiscent of what happened here in Alberta and why we ended up the way we have today with high school fees. I'm proud that our government is finally taking action to put money back in Albertans' pockets.

On the phrase "common sense" I wonder if the member thinks it's common sense that the Wildrose has said publicly that they plan to undo everything that the NDP has done. You know, they want to raise tuition. They want to roll back minimum wage. Even things like the Ukrainian-Canadian Heritage Day Act is something that they would repeal. So, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Member for Edmonton-McClung can tell us: is the Wildrose plan to cut these things really common sense in his opinion?

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to respond to the member's question with respect to the terminology that I used. I did very carefully implement the terminology "uncommon sense," knowing full well that in the '90s in Ontario common sense as a phraseology was adopted to describe what the then Ontario government thought was the right way to go in terms of an austerity-type budget, where they slashed and cut public expenses in an effort to get to a balanced budget. The deficit that was created as a result wasn't seen on the balance sheet, but it was seen in human cost.

That's what we're avoiding here. We're adopting a different policy, and I call it uncommon sense. It's maybe against the flow of many of those in this House in the opposition who think that the way to go is to achieve a balanced budget. Although that's a positive goal in and of itself, it's not necessarily the be-all, end-all. It's not a panacea, that some would have you believe. You do obviously want to pay your borrowed money back over time. But to do so in a measured way that doesn't hurt people, that doesn't throw people out of work, that doesn't add to the unemployment problem, to me, sir, is uncommon sense.

Our whole platform really speaks to me about uncommon sense in opposition to what the other side would have us do, and that is to treat people with respect and dignity, to realize that we are here not to serve an economy, that we are Albertans and citizens and the economy serves us. We are not cogs in a wheel. We are human beings. We're a society where we have a government that as a government is here to serve and to ensure that we don't hurt people. Over the long term it's the best policy that a government can have.

It's difficult for governments to think in terms of the long term because of the election cycle, but we're bound and determined to do just that and employ an uncommon-sense attitude and theme in everything we do so that we do return to a taxpayer-, publicly funded education system with respect to Bill 1 and that across the board, no matter what department we end up considering, we employ uncommon sense to ensure that nobody in this province is treated as a cog in the wheel and that any policy that we employ considers the public cost, the human damage that might be caused by a race to return to a balanced budget in a way that forces unemployment and loss of public services.

Thank you.

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

The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise in the House today to speak in favour of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. I'm very proud to be part of the government

introducing this bill. I think it's not only something that will make life better for Alberta families; it also means that we're keeping another one of our election promises. We are committed to the idea that every Alberta student, no matter where they live or what level of income their family has, deserves a high-quality education. Not only that, they deserve to be able to live within their communities with dignity. I'll get to that in a moment.

Now, what Bill 1 will do specifically is that it will take away the ability of a school board to charge parents for instructional supplies or materials and fees for students taking the bus to their designated school. Just to be clear, these would be fees, you know, for mandatory programs that would impact all the students at the school. It's important to note here that this won't have a negative impact on school budgets. Alberta Education will be providing funding to the school boards to make up the difference, so these changes should not affect the level of education or services that schools are currently providing.

Now, prior to us moving on this, school fees have varied a lot from school board to school board and sometimes even between schools in the same region. This is definitely true of my own riding of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, where we have four different school divisions and they're charging anywhere from no school fees to very substantial fees. You know, in the parts of the riding where these higher school fees are being charged, these are definitely eating into family budgets and making it hard for lower income families to get by.

11:20

This is something that I heard, well, I mean, while campaigning and, of course, afterwards as well. It makes me think back to a family that I met at Carol's Country Kitchen. As an aside, if you're going through Redwater and you want a really fine steak sandwich, that's where you want to go. In any event, I was there talking to people, and I met this wonderful family, five kids, and both parents worked. At that time – this was Sturgeon – the family rate just for school transportation fees was about \$675 per family. This is something that was a struggle for this family, to come up with that money at the beginning of the school year.

I mean, many of us are parents here, and I think that we could all agree as parents that September is a particularly expensive month of the year for all of us. You've got only so many dollars and only so many things that you can spend that money on. What that meant for this family was that they weren't able to afford enrichment activities for their children along with their schooling. You know, because they had to pay these mandatory school fees, there were other types of educational activities that their children wouldn't be able to benefit from that others would.

Now, of course, this is something that when I spoke to people at the school boards – and I think I spoke to a principal about this as well – you know, they'd come back and say: well, I mean, if we have families that are facing some type of hardship, we can have these waived. In fact, a couple of them had a process like that. Now, that might be fine to say, but for those of us who represent – well, I don't want to say that it's just rural people in particular, but I definitely think it's true to say that for most rural people that I know, the very last thing they would ever do would be to go and ask for this type of waiver. Instead, they simply would not pay for the additions or struggle to be able to pay the fee. When I spoke at the beginning that I think this actually provides more of a dignified life, that's kind of what I'm talking about. It's not putting parents into this terrible position where they have to make that decision about whether they're going to ask, essentially, for charity or let their children do without.

It also, of course, speaks not just to additional educational activities but to how the child is going to be able to fit in with their peers because if you're struggling to come up with these types of school fees, there are other things that you aren't buying at the beginning of the year. In particular, you know, you're not going to be buying those nice new school clothes. Instead of going to school looking sharp like the other kids, you're going to be wearing maybe your older brother's hand-me-downs. Maybe you're going to have holes in your shoes. These are types of situations that I think it behooves us not to put children through if we don't have to. Thankfully, we're not a society that can't afford this type of support.

I think this is going to have maybe a bit of a disproportionate impact on the well-being of families for the amount of money that we'll spend, not simply because of the reduction in school fees themselves but when this actually impacts families and in what it allows families to do instead of paying the school fees. So I think it's definitely a benefit that way.

Now, my understanding is that overall across the province this should save families around \$50 million, which is pretty substantial just the same, and that nearly every family should see some benefit from the bill. Now, of course, this is going to be dependent, as I said, on, you know, how much in school fees their particular school board is charging, but in any jurisdiction where some type of mandatory fee is being charged, there'll be a benefit.

So I'm very happy that I don't have to go back and face that family in Redwater and say: I'm sorry; you know, we weren't able to keep our promises. Instead, I can go and say: well, I mean, maybe we haven't abolished school fees altogether, but we've made a start, and working with your school board and the other school boards in the province, we look forward to a day when the type of education and educational enrichment that children receive will be totally independent of the income that their parents are able to make.

I guess, finally, in this present situation, where so many families are unfortunately having trouble, you know, making ends meet in the month, every little bit helps, and this is more than just a little bit. I know that next fall you're going to be seeing a lot of these families in Alberta that are going to be a little bit happier and feeling a little bit more secure as the school year begins.

All right. I hope all the members vote in favour of this bill. Thank you.

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

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak this morning on Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. Certainly, when I was door-knocking during the election and ever since then, school fees have been a topic that's been catching the attention of my constituents, and it's something that they're really grateful that our government is finally able to move on.

I just want to begin my speech this morning talking and maybe comparing and contrasting a little bit to what the folks in the opposition might do if the tables were turned here. You know, we've seen that the Conservative opposition, the third party now, had a chance to reduce school fees. We all know that they'd been in government for many decades, and under their leadership school fees grew and grew and grew to the point we're at today, where we're trying to reduce them. And even though we are doing a good job reducing them, there still remain some school fees that parents have to pay for. We know that under their watch and under their leadership they were just downloading those costs to families, Mr. Speaker, and we know that given the chance they would do that again.

You know, consider the Official Opposition. We've heard people running for various leadership races and even the members across the aisle themselves have said publicly that they would plan to undo all of the legislation and policies that our government has put into place. Mr. Speaker, that includes the bill that we're debating today. Although it hasn't passed yet, you know, it seems to me that this is something that they've spoken about undoing. Other legislation that we've passed that they've spoken about was protecting communities from wildfire.

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

The Speaker: Point of order noted. What's the point of order?
Stop the clock, please.

Point of Order **Allegations against a Member**

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, I've heard just about enough of the member opposite making allegations. Under 23(h), "makes allegations against [a] Member," and (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." We've been very clear that there is nothing that this government is going to do in the next four years that cannot be undone. We have not specifically picked out any – well, in the next two years. There is nothing that this government – and I'll reaffirm that – is doing in their four-year term that cannot be undone in the next election, in 2019. We'll be very, very happy for Albertans to hear that.

An Hon. Member: No carbon tax?

Mr. Hanson: We will be looking at the carbon tax and Bill 6 specifically, but for the member to impute that we will be pulling the legislation in regard to Ukrainian day is absolutely ludicrous.

An Hon. Member: Or school fees.

Mr. Hanson: Or school fees. Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, I don't see this as a point of order. I actually don't know what it is we're talking about here because the member wasn't particularly clear, but I believe the hon. member was simply stating his view of the facts. They, obviously, have a different view of the facts. What we're talking about here is school fees. You know, obviously, this side of the House thinks that school fees should be lower. That's why we're introducing a bill to suggest that school fees should be lower. I'm perfectly well aware that if the members opposite were elected, they could go ahead and reverse that. They have every right to dislike the legislation; they have every right to object to the legislation. But I don't see how that's a point of order at all.

11:30

The Speaker: I must say that I don't believe this is a point of order in this situation as an opinion is being offered. The hon. members do have under 29(2)(a) an opportunity to address questions and issues to the speaker at the end, and I would encourage you to do that.

Please continue.

Mr. Westhead: Well, Mr. Speaker, the crankiness coming from the opposition . . .

The Speaker: Don't take advantage of it, hon. member.

Mr. Westhead: . . . is a good reminder about why we might want to revisit the daylight savings time, to see the effects it has on the opposition.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I know that sometimes it takes people a little while to make their point, and the opposition are master craftsmen at taking a long time to make their point. I would appreciate the same kind of courtesy that we've extended to them by not calling points of order when they don't like what we have to say. I mean, when the member just got up on the point of order, he talked about undoing protection for workers' rights, allowing Ottawa to bring in a carbon pricing scheme instead of having a made-in-Alberta approach. It goes to show, you know, that what I was saying about what the opposition would do is exactly true.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to maybe talk about some of the more positive aspects of the bill rather than how the opposition would make families pay more. I'd like to talk about leaders in my community that are working hard for schoolchildren, people like Carol Picard. She is the chair of the Canadian Rockies public school board. Actually, just last year she was nominated and won the award for citizen of the year for Canmore. It's people like her and the people who work on their board and, of course, also the people who work at the Rocky View school board, another board in my jurisdiction. These people are doing amazing work for our kids. I know that they're making the best use of the dollars that are available to them to provide education for our children, and we're seeing those results. We've got kids doing great in their test results.

Also, another really interesting thing that Canadian Rockies public schools is doing is that they attract international students from overseas, so that brings more money into the school board. That's kind of an innovative way that school boards are making the best use of the options that they're given, and I'd really like to salute our school board trustees.

Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that my wife and I don't have any children ourselves. I know that when I was younger, one of the things that I thought to myself, just being uninformed and maybe uneducated and, you know, learning life as I was going along – at that time, when I was much younger, I had a mortgage, a brand new mortgage – was: "Jeez, why am I paying school fees or taxes for schools? I don't have kids."

So I thought about it more and kind of informed myself and realized that in Canada we have a social safety net, and we also have people that give generously through their taxes to support that social safety net. Then I realized that even without kids I had a role to play in forming that social safety net as well. You know, children that have a good education grow up to get good jobs, and then they become people like doctors, nurses, teachers, and as I grow older and maybe need a long-term care home one day, these are the people that will take care of me. It really made sense to me when I thought about it more deeply and about how as Canadians we look out for one another.

The most fair way to do that is through paying taxes, especially progressive income taxes, Mr. Speaker, not like the flat tax, that these folks over here would rather have us pay, where their rich friends get off scot-free and put the burden of taxes on everybody else.

Connolly: Shame.

Mr. Westhead: It is a shame, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Wildrose has some pretty far-out ideas that would put the burden

back on Alberta families, and that's certainly not something I would support.

Speaking about taxes, something that we like to talk about on this side of the House is that Alberta, even with carbon pricing, still has the lowest taxes of any province in Canada, about a \$7.5 billion advantage, Mr. Speaker. As much as they would like to drag Alberta down and talk Alberta down on the other side, on this side of the House we know that Alberta retains its advantage.

You know, I think that this reducing school fees program also complements and bolsters other programs that we're doing for schools such as the school nutrition program, Mr. Speaker. These things sort of dovetail together. I know the school nutrition program is in a pilot stage at this point, and we're looking to see how well it's working and will reinvestigate that at a later point. These are all things that parents have to think about when they're getting their kids ready to go to school.

I think back again to when I was younger and was much less informed than I am now. When I was in high school, I always had a good lunch, and I remember that kids would come around – I would get bullied when I was a kid – and take parts of my lunch. We would call these people vultures, Mr. Speaker. Looking back on that, that was a terrible term. When I think about it now, looking back on those times when people would take my lunch, those were probably the kids whose parents didn't have the money to send them to school with a lunch. You know, I think that's a sad fact. Probably sometimes these kids might have been bullies because they didn't know what else to do. They were hungry, and they were cranky. Thinking back about the way we would call them vultures, I regret that nowadays because I realize the situation they may have been in.

Speaking about making things better for schoolchildren, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity a few years ago to volunteer for an organization called Stephen's backpacks. Now, this was a young man in Calgary. I think he might have been about 12 years old when he started this charity. He started the charity when he saw that kids didn't have school supplies when they went to school. What Stephen did was to create a charity where they would fill backpacks with school supplies and give them to less fortunate children. I had the opportunity to go and volunteer with this group, and it was a really heartwarming experience. Seeing everybody getting together and making it happen for those kids was great.

What else, Mr. Speaker? One thing I remember also as a young child was that a teacher really inspired me. I think it was in grade 2. I was really into creative writing. My sister was a writer, my dad was an English teacher in high school, so I really enjoyed writing. One of my teachers in grade 2 gave me a little notebook, and she said that she liked my writing so much that she wanted to encourage me to do that more. It was probably, like, a 50-cent notebook, but it's something I still remember to this day. It was pretty special.

Mr. Speaker, I just also want to talk a little bit about how this government, in addition to reducing school fees, is helping to build schools across the province. Coming up at the end of this month in the beautiful town of Cochrane, there is a brand new school opening, the RancheView school. It's pretty exciting because I know that Cochrane is a rapidly growing community. It was the second fastest growing municipality in Canada of the small municipalities according to the most recent census. I think they've grown by about 47 per cent over the last several years. In Cochrane, when a school like the RancheView school opens, it actually opens that capacity.

The PC governments failed to plan ahead for the growth that this vibrant and growing community was realizing. They made these announcements for schools, but they didn't put any funding behind them. The Auditor General has been clear about how much they

dropped the ball on that. I'm proud that we're committing the money to also building the schools. I mean, it's great to reduce school fees, but if you don't have the schools and the teachers and the teaching assistants to go in those schools or even the money to build them, as the PCs failed to do – that's something that's important for people in the town of Cochrane, for example.

11:40

I also know that in Banff the Banff elementary school is undergoing a renovation, an expansion. Banff is a very unique situation. Because it's a tourist town and there are a lot of service workers, there are also a really high number of folks with English as a second language in Banff, which is great. I mean, we've got people new to Canada calling Banff their home and living the Canadian dream. I mean, people from all across Canada want to come and visit Banff, and a lot of people also like to come and work there. You get to work and play in this mountain paradise. We've got young children learning English, and we need to make sure that we're funding teachers to go into these schools, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's all well and good to say that you support education, as the opposition does, but you actually have to put the money behind this to hire those teachers, too.

I know they've complained about the unemployment situation in our province, and certainly that's something we're concerned about. We've got a jobs plan. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade is doing a fantastic job promoting our industries at home and abroad. But if you were to follow the plans of the Wildrose and cut funding for these crucial public programs, they'd make the unemployment situation worse. We wouldn't have teachers and education assistants in our classrooms. We wouldn't have nurses and housekeepers in our hospitals. You can't fire people and think that that's going to help the employment situation. Albertans are smarter than that, and they know the Wildrose is just full of hot air.

Mr. Speaker, what else do I have to say here? Oh, that's one thing: young moms in the operating room where I used to work. The operating room was a really neat place because we tended to have a lot of young staff members, and of course nursing is primarily a female-oriented position. With a lot of these moms having brand new babies and going on maternity leave, one of the first things that they're thinking about is: how am I going to take care of my kid? They have a shift work type of job, so they're thinking about daycare. I also think that our reducing school fees plays into our \$25-a-day daycare program because it helps parents afford to take care of their kids and also send them to school.

So there are all of these different costs that parents have to afford, and what we're doing on this side of the House is making life more affordable for Albertans and making a difference in the things that matter in their lives whereas the folks in the opposition would rather jack those fees up.

You know, another thing about making life more affordable: those folks want to freeze the wages of these people making, like, \$20 an hour. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Westhead: They want to freeze wages and impose unilateral wage freezes on workers, and that's something they actually campaigned against in 2013, when we were having the Bill 46 debate, where the government was going to shove the wage freezes down the throats of public-sector workers.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for his time and his points. I have a question for you, and I just kind of want to come at it in four ways. I said in my response to the throne speech that I was so glad to be part of a Wildrose campaign and a Wildrose caucus, I guess, candidates that twice, in 2012 and 2015, campaigned on one hundred per cent reducing mandatory school fees. We campaigned on one hundred per cent reducing mandatory school fees. I have not heard a single thing from this side that shows any possibility that we would waver on that or that we would do it differently. So I wondered where your comments came from. I wondered where your information came from. I wondered where your head and your heart were, to be honest with you. Then I wonder how you feel about your cabinet and your government and your broken promise. If memory serves me correctly, Mr. Speaker, the NDP campaigned on a 50 per cent reduction of mandatory school fees and delivered a 25 per cent reduction. As I said in my response to the throne, I applaud that. It's a step forward for all Alberta families. But it's partly a failure. Your government, your colleagues said 50 per cent; they achieved 25.

To me, it's a question of priorities. So often when we stand up on this side, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about where the money goes and where it could be better spent. I was out shovelling my walk this weekend and talking to my great neighbour. Usually I have to beat him to it, to shovelling my walk. I applaud you for talking about how good our schoolteachers are. My neighbour is a former schoolteacher who has impacted the lives of many, many Albertans, as all of our great teachers have, as I've had similar experiences. Thank you for mentioning that. It's never to be forgotten how good our front-line workers are.

I said to my neighbour: what do you think about the direction of Alberta? What do you think? He said some good things, and then he said: what concerns me most is the deficit, the debt, and the interest. I thought of that again when you were speaking. I understand this year's interest expense, Mr. Speaker, is \$714 million. I heard from a colleague over here that this 25 per cent reduction is a \$50 million saving for Alberta families. So \$50 million into \$714 million: my goodness, that's 14 years that we could have paid the other half if we wouldn't have that interest expense making rich people richer, if we could have had our priorities to where that money wasn't going to corporations, to bondholders, to pensions, if we could get that money that we take from Albertans, Albertans that work hard, whether it's private people or public people, and put it to the front lines, put it where it's going to do the most good. So that not only concerns me the most, but it concerns my neighbour the most.

I spoke in question period yesterday about Shell taking their capital out of Alberta's oil sands. I'm reading today that this government gave Shell \$725 million . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're talking about school fees.

Mr. Barnes: I'm going to get there.

They gave them \$725 million in 2015. Compare that to the interest. My goodness, how many schools could we build? How many teachers could we hire? And now we've given one of the biggest corporations in the whole world 14 years of those school fees that your government broke their promise on.

You know, another suggestion. High per capita spending: even the CBC put out in the last little while about how Alberta has the highest per capita spending, \$2,700 per person per year. Surely to goodness, one of the things that I hear from Cypress-Medicine Hatters all the time is that where they are disappointed with your government is how it appears that you haven't looked for savings

of any significance. I stood up and applauded when you reduced the wages for high-level executives.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making lives better for families in Alberta through the act to reduce school fees, and I'm proud to be part of a government that is doing so. Overall this legislation will strike a balance between making life more affordable for Albertans immediately and giving us flexibility to see further reductions over time. Since Bill 1 was tabled last week, we have seen support from parents, teachers, school trustees, and many, many more.

I'm also incredibly proud of the hard work and collaboration demonstrated by schools in my riding of Stony Plain. Parkland school division, Evergreen Catholic, and a number of independent schools have decided to embrace a regional busing model, which benefits all of our children. As a region fewer buses are on our roads, and buses are being used more efficiently. This adds to safety for our children and certainty for all our families.

11:50

In the past few years Parkland school division has had to increase busing fees to families within the Parkland school division regional transportation service area in order to maintain the current level of transportation services available. Now, living in a rural area, where busing is not optional, this legislation will directly impact many families in my region every day by ensuring less financial strain on every family. Many of the children in rural areas live outside of walking distance.

For children living in town, it is incredibly important as well. With small children spending more time in child care, sometimes children leave from home and go to before school care or go to after school care and return home at the end of the day. This adds a measure of complication for our school divisions. And expecting a small child to walk long distances adds to the everyday worry for every parent. I know that as a parent it was incredibly important to me that I knew that my children were safe getting to and from school no matter where they had to travel from.

Mr. Speaker, the previous government had many, many opportunities to lower school fees. Today they tell us that they're concerned with making life more affordable for Albertans. I will say that the opposition likes to talk about how Albertans want a hand up, not a handout, and I hope they will consider this legislation a hand up for all Alberta families. I have never asked for a handout, but a hand up like this would have been very welcomed in my home.

When I was a single parent, I was spending my hard-earned money bettering myself and bettering the lives of my children by returning to college. The government of the day was not concerned about how much I as a parent dreaded September. There were many times I eked out \$30 a week for groceries and necessities. Can you imagine how much \$600 to \$800 in school fees impacted my careful budget, asking my eldest daughter to wait one more month for winter boots because my budget didn't allow for three pairs in one month the month after school fees were due?

My children never got kicked off the bus for nonpayment, although I know many families that have had to deal with that reality. Your child gets kicked off the bus for nonpayment, so as a parent you can't go to work because you have no one to watch your young child. Hopefully, your employer is understanding because otherwise you lose your job. How do you ever get out from under that? Families I know have had to rely on payday loans to pay school fees. The amount of time it takes and the impact to the

household budget to pay that off is incredible. The household bills, the rent due: they don't stop just because school fees are due. Not one family wants to be the family that has the stigma of having a meeting with the school to have those fees waived.

These are good, hard-working people, and they struggle to make ends meet every single month. They are not looking for charity, and most people I know wouldn't accept it if it were offered. They just need a break and a chance to get ahead.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members in this House to support this bill. It may seem insignificant to some, but to many families in Alberta it will be more significant than you can imagine.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Malkinson: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you. Just a couple of quick comments and a question for the hon. member. You know, she talked in depth about how in rural areas busing is indeed a necessity. We very recently heard at length from the parties opposite, specifically the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who also represents a rural riding, about priorities and that if we have a problem that is funding related, the solution is just worrying about how the money is spent. I was wondering what her thoughts were on that, considering that that same opposition, of course, wants to balance the budget overnight, as they've said on many occasions, and that the current deficit of this province, as we've mentioned many times during our budget debates, is more than the education and postsecondary budgets combined. I was wondering what your thoughts would be on that apparent position of the opposition, although they are for reducing school fees, which we can all agree is a very good thing. What are your thoughts on when there would be no teachers or schools for your kids to go to in their particular scenario?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I have to say that the priorities that I believe we stand for are making life every day a little bit more affordable for Alberta families, and by doing so, we are actually allowing every citizen of Alberta to get ahead, not just some folks that this wouldn't impact. I can tell you that three years ago my daughter was in a class of 37. This year my daughter is in a class of 24 because we've built schools in our districts. That same daughter has learning disabilities, and she has an EA now. Before she had to share an EA with five other students. I think that with the wants and the priorities that come with making life more affordable every day, it is a chance for us to help all families in Alberta just get ahead by a little bit.

You know, yes, our deficit is definitely something that we need to discuss, and there's a plan in place to work on that as well, but everyday Albertans shouldn't have their lives and their services and their jobs impacted by the deficit of our province. I will tell you that as a nurse I wouldn't have had a job if the cuts had happened that

the previous government had suggested should happen. I will tell you that a class of 37 would probably be one of the smaller classes that my daughter would have to attend if the cuts had happened that the government of the day was proposing.

Mr. Speaker, those are actually the reasons that I got into this position in the first place. As a parent and as a nurse watching my patients struggle to pay for things and watching my family struggle to pay for things and watching my child struggle in school and not having that help available to them and to find out that that little bit of help that was there was going to be taken away, this was not something that I was willing to put up with any longer. They say that in life there's got to be a time when you stand up, and that was my day to stand up, when that proposed budget came forward. I don't want my family and all of the families that I know, whether they live in the centre of Edmonton or the centre of Calgary or in our rural areas, impacted so negatively that we can't afford to send our children to school anymore. My child deserves just as good of an education, whether I'm a nurse, whether I'm a college student, or whether I'm an MLA, that everybody else's child in Alberta deserves.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for her speech. I know for myself when I was in high school, which wasn't too long ago, unlike many members of this House, in my English class there were over 40 kids. I think that was grade 11. If everyone showed up, there weren't enough chairs for everyone, and that was precisely from the cuts that were made by the previous government. There was a culture of cutting education and health care first and letting those people on the ground suffer the consequences.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just looking at the clock, and I was wondering if...

Connolly: Keep going.

Mr. Malkinson: Oh, okay. I will keep going, then.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand and speak on Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. You know, I do a lot of door-knocking in my riding of Calgary-Currie. It is a very diverse inner-city riding. What that means is that if I go down a block in my riding, I could have everything from a supportive living Calgary Housing subsidized housing development to original elderly residents from when the area was first developed, just after World War II, to new families and young professionals who are just starting their families, like so many families did previous to them in the riding.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in accordance with Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 14, 2017

Day 7

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstaub, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)

Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
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McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Kleisteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I would like to welcome the students and staff of l'école Richard Secord school for stopping by and visiting and looking first-hand at democracy in Alberta. L'école Richard Secord is one of the French immersion schools in my riding of Edmonton-Rutherford, and I couldn't be more happy that they're here today. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Ms Biette, Mr. Girard, and Mrs. Cooper, as well as parenting chaperones Ms Milne-Epp, Ms Musial, and Ms Amirsayafi. If I could ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House, please.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, M. le Président, I would like to introduce to you and through you Wes Hosford elementary school. The students are with their teachers, Richard Henderson and Tanya Landiak, and with chaperones Claire Pearson, Deb Giguere, Colleen Helwig, Cori Willis, Kim Goodwin, Leslie Elliott, and Janet Steeves. The students asked me some really great questions as I was talking with them, and they decided that the age of voting should be age 12. I would like them to rise and to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Carol Bigam. Carol Bigam is the president of the SouthWest Edmonton Seniors Association. There are over 20,000 people over the age of 55 in southwest Edmonton that her organization works to support. I'll be referring to SWESA in my member's statement. I would invite Carol to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Silvio Adamo who is the fire chief and director of protective services in the beautiful town of Banff. Chief Adamo has 30 years of experience keeping Albertans safe, and he was the incident commander during the Mount Royal Hotel fire last December in Banff, that successfully evacuated all guests without incident in the middle of the night. He is a brave and courageous leader and is supported by an equally talented and dedicated team of first responders. I'd like to thank Chief Adamo and his team for the work they do day in and day out to look out for our communities, and I will ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much. It's a real honour for me today to welcome to the Legislature and to you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ruben Nelson, who is a long-time advocate for real leadership, adaptive leadership, foresight. I think he may have coined the term "wicked problems," and I think all of us have some sense that those are part and parcel of our daily bread. I would welcome Ruben to stand and be recognized by the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Justice System

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, lately we've heard it all from members of the opposition when it comes to the justice system. Last week the Leader of the Official Opposition said that we shouldn't be investing in our courts because we need to place things on matrices to find out where the problems are first. This government fundamentally disagrees, which is why we are investing in more Crown prosecutors and court clerks as well as pushing the federal government for more judges. This government understands that we need clear evidence and we need innovation. We also need to fix decades of PC government underfunding. We can't cut our way out of these problems.

Then we heard the opposition attack the triage protocol, which prioritizes serious and violent crimes like sexual assaults in our courts. A criminal law professor at the University of Alberta said that the Alberta government should be "applauded . . . for attempting to tackle the problem in such a direct and principled manner."

Mr. Speaker, government is about leadership, and leadership means having to make decisions. The opposition's do-nothing approach would mean that more violent cases would be thrown out without a trial. Somehow the opposition believes that by focusing on nothing, we get further ahead. That would hurt Alberta families. Survivors and victims deserve better. Albertans deserve leadership.

Mr. Speaker, this government is also making changes to Alberta's bail system to ensure that the right information is in front of the right person during bail hearings. This will ensure that the safety of Albertans is top of mind when these decisions are made.

This minister is working to address the entire justice system, not just one part of it. She has made tackling serious and violent crimes a clear priority, and she should be applauded for that. This minister will not back down when Albertans need her.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Government Policies

Mr. Nixon: Here's the reality for most Albertans outside the dome here in Alberta. They're hurting. They're hurting a lot. They've seen friends and neighbours lose their jobs and ma-and-pa shops close their doors, their parks shut down with no consultation, their farms and businesses attacked with misguided legislation, their children's and grandchildren's futures leveraged with unprecedented deficit and debt. They're worried for their future, for their children's future, and they feel like the very best of Alberta is slipping away. Imagine their frustration when they consistently see the arrogance and condescension from this government almost every single day.

The list is growing long, Mr. Speaker. We are embarrassing cousins if we don't like the carbon tax. We're xenophobic. And here's some free advice from the Premier. Can't afford the carbon tax? Take a bus and, quote, make better choices. People in my riding don't like this kind of talk. They're proud people, they're common-

sense people, and they expect the government to have their backs. But old habits die hard with this NDP government. I asked simple questions about the devastating impacts of this government's policies on Albertans, and how did the Deputy Premier respond? She implied that opposition supporters and my constituents are "sewer rats."

It's shameful. Albertans can expect two more years of being talked down to, being treated like sewer rats instead of the great women and men who built this province. If the senior at A&W in Sundre is a sewer rat, if the rig worker from Peace River is a sewer rat, if the moms and dads in our cities who are worried about our province's future are sewer rats, if the over two-thirds of Albertans who hate the carbon tax are sewer rats, then I'm proud to stand with them.

We won't divide this province in half. We will unite our province behind common-sense values based on neighbourliness, compassion, and unbridled belief in the greatness of Albertans and the greatness of Alberta. And if that makes us sewer rats, Mr. Speaker, according to the NDP, then so be it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would note that the Minister of Health earlier in the session today apologized for the comment that she made earlier.

Blood Plasma Supply

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Health minister introduced the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. Many Canadians believe that we obtain our supply of blood and blood products solely from voluntary donations. We've been led to believe that that makes our blood supply safer and more secure, but it's not true.

1:40

Times change, Mr. Speaker, and so do medical treatments. Today Alberta spends some \$200 million annually purchasing blood and plasma products from U.S. suppliers who rely on donors who are paid for their donations. Some ask: why don't we produce these products here in Canada? Well, Canadian Blood Services simply can't provide the necessary plasma to meet the demand. After 20 years of trying, CBS obtains only 17 per cent of the plasma needed for Canadian purposes from volunteer donors, which then has to be exported to the U.S. for processing. The rest comes from paid U.S. donors.

Now a private company wants to establish 10 plasma collection centres across Canada as well as a Canadian plasma processing facility. They want to invest over \$400 million and employ 2,000 people in high-paying biomedical jobs, and they want to come to Alberta. They want to invest in our province, put Albertans to work, and diversify our economy. And the NDP's response: "Go away. We don't want you. We don't want your money, and we don't want your jobs." The NDP would rather send 200 million Alberta taxpayer dollars every year to highly profitable U.S. pharmaceutical corporations to buy plasma products obtained from paid American donors and then sink \$100 million more into preserving union jobs at Canadian Blood Services.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP says that they're all about helping Alberta families, but what they're really all about is looking after their friends in the unions and using taxpayer resources to do it. Now, the NDP calls that a better way. Albertans call it something else, and they want a better government.

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

Seniors' Town Hall Meeting in Edmonton-Whitemud

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have many seniors as constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud. These seniors want a healthy and

active life that is not burdened with difficulties maintaining their lifestyle, including family and community connections.

The SouthWest Edmonton Seniors Association, SWESA, operates in the burgeoning southwest quadrant of Edmonton. Besides providing opportunities to socialize, SWESA has educational sessions covering a wide variety of topics and several activity programs, including yoga and walking, to keep our seniors healthy and aging well in place. Mr. Speaker, I've heard from SWESA and many seniors in my riding that health care, particularly policies affecting the provision of pharmaceuticals, is a major concern for them.

On March 9 my constituency office organized a town hall at the Terwillegar rec centre. Presentations were made by pharmacists, professors from the University of Alberta, and the co-ordinator of Alberta comprehensive integrated services for seniors. Nearly 100 seniors were in attendance, and there was excellent community engagement throughout five presentations.

Five major recommendations emerged. First, Alberta needs a comprehensive, integrated care system to ensure that seniors have access to the services that they require. This would use community-based preventative and basic care and use both administrative and electronic supervision to treat the patient from initial assessment to palliative care. Second, programs like med-wise Alberta can teach seniors how to inquire about new medication, monitor its effectiveness and possible side effects, and follow up on their conditions. Third, pharmacists and nurses can reduce patient care costs by playing a larger role in providing health services. Fourth, the Alberta drug benefit list should prioritize clinical guidelines over cost efficiency when listing drugs. Fifth, Alberta needs a patient-based model where funding follows the patient through every stage of treatment.

These presentations were tied together by a common thread: our health system needs to improve collaboration among professionals, increase accountability at every stage of treatment, and commit to following best practices.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Farm Safety

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about how farm safety is important to me and to our government.

March 12 to 18 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. "Agriculture is a way of life, but one with inherent risks. When it comes to physical safety, [farming] is considered the third most hazardous in Canada, and in terms of absolute numbers of fatalities it is deemed to be the most dangerous occupation," according to the rural and farm safety Ag for Life site. Your family is your pride and joy. Whether you are raising children, watching out for your partner, or checking in on dad after a long day in the field, you would do anything to keep them safe while preserving the farm experience for future generations.

Last year the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association introduced a national three-year campaign, Be an AgSafe Family. The focus in 2016 was children's safety, and this year AgSafe's theme is Appealing to Adults, which I believe is a fitting shift since adults have the responsibility to educate our children and others.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency, the beautiful riding of Stony Plain, has a rich agricultural heritage and is considered an agricultural services community. For more than a century hard-working farmers and ranchers have lived in the area. They flourished through the good seasons and persevered through the challenging seasons to continue to be a lifeline of our society. Some evenings I stop at the side of the road and I watch the combines and farmers

hard at work. I know that although my day has been long, theirs has been much longer as I remember taking meals out to my stepdad in the field.

I believe safety is of paramount importance in our community. Mr. Speaker, our government provides a number of resources and tools available for farm owners, workers, and families to encourage the adoption of safe farm practices. FarmSafe Alberta is one tool that is available to help farmers to have safety management systems or a safety plan for their operations.

To all of our farmers province-wide: make every week farm safety week.

Thank you, sir.

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

Education Ministry Online Student Resources

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Serious concerns were raised by a parents' group about content on a site that can be accessed through Alberta Education's website. The government-funded site says: "a collective of resources specific to Alberta K-12 students, teachers, and school staff." According to the site itself it is funded by the Ministry of Education. The goal of this site is to provide a positive place where students can go to find resources, information and to find connections with local community supports.

We need to know that students are being listened to and supported, that teachers have the resources and the information and support that they need and that parents are consulted and informed and made aware of the materials that are presented to their children. Yesterday a parent group noticed that a link from the site went to a Facebook page with content that was not appropriate for children. Articles about sex positions, adult toys, sado-masochism and acts are not community resources for young students.

Can objectionable material be found on the Internet? Yes. And, obviously, children can access pretty much anything they want on the Internet through their phones and devices. But should we not have links to age-inappropriate government-approved websites? We should not. We need to respect students, parents, and teachers, who reasonably expect materials provided by and connected with our education system to be age appropriate and to promote a safe environment for all students.

I understand at this point that the Minister of Education has looked into this. We must respect the concerns of parents and make sure that the materials on and connected to our education resources contribute in a positive and healthy way to our education community.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table five copies of the report covering the committee's activities during the 29th Legislature from December 2015 to December 2016. This report fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 55 and section 6(4)(c) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. This report will be posted on the Assembly's website, and copies are also available at the committee office.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bill 202

Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 202, the Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act.

The intent of this bill is about ensuring Alberta has sufficient laws in place for victims of the sharing of nonconsensual intimate images, which is a crime. These changes will create a provincial tort law necessary to compensate victims of these devastating and humiliating acts. This bill will ensure that those who choose to use nonconsensual private images for financial gain will not be able to turn a profit at the expense of others.

This bill will also legislate protection for students under the School Act and the Education Act, to ensure student victims will not suffer further harm, by compelling principals to suspend the offender involved and possibly send the offender before a school board. Our hope is that there will also be an education component to this as well.

I hope that all members of this Assembly will work together with me, whether that will be through support or amendments, to ensure victims of the distribution of nonconsensual intimate images are protected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Wildrose priorities are to cut taxes, shrink the deficit, support Alberta families, and grow the economy so that Albertans can get back to work. No surprise here. Cutting taxes, shrinking the deficit, and supporting families are the top priorities for the majority of this province. The only name that I will call these people is concerned Albertans, worried about the future of our province. The Premier brought in a carbon tax with no mandate, that is raising costs for Alberta families by up to \$2,500 a year. Does the Premier believe that this step is making life more affordable for Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, what I do believe is that when you talk about affordability, it's probably helpful to begin with the right numbers.

But more important, Mr. Speaker, is that we absolutely believe that it is our job to make life more affordable for Albertans. That is why, as you've probably heard before, our government is introducing a bill to cut back school fees by 25 per cent. That is why our government is capping electricity rates so that regular families don't have to have anxiety attacks around the kitchen table every month when the heating bill comes in. These are the kinds of things that make a difference for Alberta families. We are proud to be moving forward with them, and we won't stop.

Mr. Jean: That fear around the kitchen table is caused by this government.

The majority of Albertans say that the NDP is moving too slowly to balance budgets, and they're right. In fact, I'd suggest that the majority of Albertans also don't appreciate being talked down to. They don't like being called the embarrassing cousin of our country. They don't like being referred to as sewer rats. All of these insults because they don't agree with this NDP government's agenda.

Will the Premier commit today to end this divisive and hurtful rhetoric and begin to respect all Albertans regardless of where they come from or who they vote for?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what I think actually would be hurtful to Albertans would be the agenda of the members opposite. For instance, they want to take \$2 billion out of our operating expenses. Do you know where that would leave us? Let's just walk through it a little bit: seniors' benefit program, the whole program, over \$350 million; all transportation for students, including rural students, \$350 million. But more: eliminating funding for all special-needs students. And there's more: ending all student aid. You know what? That doesn't get you to \$2 billion. There's more to come. The members opposite need to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. I'm going to repeat it again. Albertans clearly don't like being called the embarrassing cousin. They don't like being referred to as sewer rats. All of these insults because they don't agree. I'm asking today: will the Premier commit to end this divisive and hurtful rhetoric and begin to respect all Albertans regardless of where they come from or who they vote for? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what we are going to do is continue our focus on making life better for Alberta families, and we are going to do that by not telling them that it is their job to accept less and to cut back in their schools, to cut back in their hospitals, to throw people out of work just to balance the budget tomorrow, to me, an ideological agenda. That's not what Albertans voted for, and that is not what they will get.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Policies

Mr. Jean: The NDP's obsession with taxing carbon hurts our economy, and now it will hurt the environment, too. The environment minister has told large emitters that they can no longer pay their emission taxes with carbon offsets. Under the old system they could use offsets that came from projects like renewables that had actually reduced greenhouse gases. Now 70 per cent of the tax must be paid in cash so the NDP can then spend it on light bulbs, shower heads, and power bars. How exciting. This means less investment in reducing carbon and fewer jobs for Albertans. Why does the Premier possibly think this is a good idea?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to full compliance flexibility with respect to the specified gas emitters regulation. What we have done with the 30 per cent cap is that we have ensured that we have predictability for business. Historically the use of these credits has been just over 40 per cent, but it's dropped to as low as 3 per cent last year. The changes we made will help companies reduce emissions on-site, which is also a compliance option for companies. It's one companies take seriously. It's not one that the opposition takes seriously because they don't believe in climate change.

Mr. Jean: If our major emitters are discouraged from investing in renewables here in Alberta just to hand cash over to the government, how does that possibly help our province reduce emissions? This new regulation, put through, by the way, without consultation, has now sent another chill throughout our economy and our industry. It's created further uncertainty, it's hurting our competitiveness,

and it will only mean fewer jobs for Albertans over the long term. This isn't about actually reducing emissions; it's just about new NDP slush funds. Why won't the Premier simply admit it to Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when companies reduce their emissions, they also reduce their costs, and that allows them to free up capital in order to hire new people. It allows them to move the economy forward. Now, I know that the opposition has spent their time slinging mud at oil companies. Just yesterday he called out Suncor by name, dragging their reputation through the mud. On this side of the House we are committed to working with those companies to fund innovation, to reduce the carbon in the barrel, to repair our reputation, that that member sat in the federal House and did nothing about for a decade. [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Speaker: Excuse me.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! You're not part of these proceedings.

An Hon. Member: That's a Dipper.

The Speaker: Pardon me? Hon. member, the management of strangers is my responsibility.

The second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that this carbon tax has been extremely bad news for Albertans since the very beginning. For businesses big and small it's hurt their ability to compete. For families it's made life less affordable, with higher gas and fuel bills. It's raising the price of everything for Albertans, and it will just keep getting more expensive under the NDP for years and years to come, and all the NDP can show for it is new light bulbs and shower heads to be installed by a company from Ontario. The carbon tax isn't working and is just making things worse. When will anyone in this government actually see it, admit it, and change course?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I believe that 68,000 Albertans who have signed up already for the first phase of the efficiency programs will find it fairly shocking that they're being mocked and belittled by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

As to Cenovus, CNRL, Suncor, and a number of other companies, they believe they can reduce the carbon in the barrel, Mr. Speaker, but the Wildrose and the Leader of the Official Opposition talk them down, drag their reputation through the mud. These are some of the biggest employers in the province let alone the leader's own riding. These are companies that helped us out during the fire. They drive the Canadian economy, and all the Wildrose can do is insult them in this House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Third main question.

Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the only reason I came back to politics was to make sure that what happened to my son in our health care system doesn't happen to any other family in Alberta. That's why I'm here, to fix the system. The motion that I introduced yesterday was one piece of that puzzle: studying wait times in our health care system, the barriers and costs associated, and looking at other provinces for solutions. Eminently reasonable. Why, then, did the Premier instruct her caucus to vote against this motion?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that I think all members of this House do want to see better outcomes in our health care system. We care about the families who need our health care system, and we care about the people who are in our health care system. That's why we want to run it the best way we can. One of the things that we believe fundamentally on this side of the House is that the way to do that is to run a publicly delivered, publicly funded system that everybody has access to no matter how much money they have, and that is the fundamental point that our members on this side of the House are attempting to protect. We were concerned that that was not reflected in what the member opposite was proposing in his motion.

2:00

Mr. Jean: The exact opposite, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what this side of the House is protecting as well, and my story in the medical system isn't unique. I hear heartbreaking stories of families who have lost someone far too often. I apologize, but we all should be doing everything we possibly can to reduce barriers, to reduce wait times because there are very real results when we don't pay attention to the system. People die. If the Premier was in opposition, she would support this. She would support this motion. Does the Premier not believe in reducing wait times in our health care system, and if she doesn't believe in that, why not? Just say yes; pass the motion.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree that we do need to reduce wait times and that we do need to focus on doing better within our health care system, and that is absolutely what our government is committed to. I've met with and talked with people who've had the same kind of experiences that the member opposite talks about and has experienced himself, and we all know we need to do better. It is just not always the case that we agree on the best way to get there. The disagreement that we saw yesterday was that we just didn't agree on the best way to get there, but we all agree that we need to get there. We will continue to focus our efforts on doing that in the best way possible.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, part of the motion was to look next door at Saskatchewan and B.C. Both of them have better systems. For instance, their outcomes outperform ours. For cataracts they wait 92 days; in Alberta we wait 200 days. For knee replacements they wait 130 days; we wait over 200. For hips it's 128 days; for us it's, again, over 200. We want to help fix this, and we just simply ask the NDP to look next door, but the NDP showed yesterday that they have no interest in improving wait times, not even one little bit. Is it just ideology that prevents the Premier from acknowledging what works in other provinces, or does she just not care?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I've said repeatedly, we do very much care, but we have a genuine disagreement on the best way to get to these outcomes that we're looking for. In fact, the Minister of Health can report extensively on the number of wait times that have been reduced under our watch. What we will say, though, is that we are not going to expand private-sector delivery of health care so that only wealthy people can get health care in a timely way. That system doesn't work. You just have to look at the millions upon millions upon millions of people south of the border who have no access to health care to know that that is not the path that we want to go down, nor do Albertans.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Government Policies (continued)

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government's out-of-control spending is a concern to all members on this side of the House, and now we know it's a concern to all Albertans. A Main-street poll says that 58 per cent of Albertans believe the NDP is doing a poor job of handling the economy. Twenty-three per cent of Albertans say that reducing spending to lower the deficit is their number one priority. To the Premier. You've ignored Albertans on Bill 6; you've ignored Albertans on the carbon tax. Premier, will you ignore Albertans again when it comes to this ballooning provincial deficit, or will you just chalk it up to angry "sewer rats"?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, our government is committed to having the backs of Albertans during this difficult time. What we are doing is focusing on making life better for Albertans by making life more affordable, by investing in job creation, and by supporting those incredibly important public services that we were just talking about in the last set of questions. These are the priorities of Albertans. We will not back down from them because that's what we promised them when we were elected, and that is what we will deliver.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, our PC caucus today launched our balanced budget plan. It outlines a plan that listens to Albertans because they don't want their kids and grandkids to have to pay for NDP incompetence. It will balance our budget by 2020. It includes a no front-line cuts guarantee. To the Finance minister. Toss out your key messages and your fearmongering. Now that we have shown you don't need to rack up \$10 billion in debt every year, will you commit today to not create more billions when you introduce the next budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did have a quick chance to look at the proposal put forward by the member opposite, and I have to say that this group couldn't balance the budget when oil was at a hundred dollars a barrel. Now they are proposing that they can cut \$4 billion, slash taxes, protect health care, balance the budget in two and a half years. When exactly do they also plan to propose pigs and unicorns flying? They've got that amount of reality in their proposals.

Mr. McIver: No unicorns and lollipops, like the NDP, Mr. Speaker, but we are going to repeal the carbon tax. We would use the federal carbon tax. Instead of a green slush fund, we would actually use it to pay down the debt or make it revenue neutral and reduce other taxes to pay down the debt.

To the Finance minister: will you listen to what millions of Albertans are loudly telling you and repeal the carbon tax to pay off the debt faster? Or when you say that you have the backs of Albertans, do you really mean that you're on the backs of Albertans, making it heavier and heavier with the burden of future payments?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. You know, that gang over there: seven of the last eight years they couldn't balance the budget, as our Premier said, when oil was \$100 a barrel. We'll not take any lessons from that side. The kinds of things we're going to do are to prudently and cautiously bring down the deficit by keeping programs and services strong, by diversifying

the economy, and by investing across this province so that more and more Albertans are put back to work.

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

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2014 the Alberta Liberals led the province into the modern era by introducing legislation to make gay-straight alliances mandatory in any school where students request them. I'm proud to say that this is now the law. In recognition of this fact the Education minister wrote an open letter to Alberta students telling them: "You have rights that your schools will respect" and "I'm with you one hundred per cent." Now it appears that not all schools are respecting these rights. Is the Minister of Education still with these students one hundred per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks very much for the question. Every student in Alberta deserves a caring and respectful and safe school in which to learn. We know that experiencing bullying can stress students, and then people don't do well in school and otherwise. We've been working with each of the school boards across the province to build policy to ensure that they are compliant with the law. The right to create a club, a GSA or a QSA, is the law here in the province of Alberta, and we work with individual schools and school boards to ensure compliance.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister cited, quote, big cultural changes and certain religious beliefs as reasons why establishing GSAs in certain schools was complicated. Just yesterday he called some of the schools' attempts at creating GSA policies, quote, a bit clunky. End quote. I'm not sure what is complicated about these GSAs. It should be recognized that they also save lives, and the minister should be doing everything in his power to support them. So why isn't he? Why can't you declunkify this system?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you again for the question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, we are working diligently with all of our 61 school boards and all schools in the province of Alberta to build policy that's in compliance with the law. You know, we have seen the evolution of change in the province here over the last couple of years and before with the work on Bill 10 to create a safe and caring environment for students. We have seen progress, but I won't say that we have solved the issue thus far.

As per declunkifying, I'm certainly looking for more than just that. We're looking for a way by which . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, last year the Minister of Education ordered an investigation into schools refusing to comply with the GSA law. Apparently, the report revealed something so troubling that the minister now appears to be backtracking on his commitment and refusing to tell us why. Alberta students, parents, and school boards need clarity from the minister on this issue, not excuses. Do Albertans and Alberta students still have the legal right to form GSAs in all schools, or don't they?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The law is very clear that students do have the right to create clubs in their schools and

that if they choose to name it a GSA or a QSA, they are certainly within the law to do so.

In regard to a particular school that I did use an inquiry process on, the report will be out very soon. Yes, it is complicated, but, you know, it's worth it every step of the way to ensure that we do have safe and caring environments for every single student. It's not just students that are in jeopardy that benefit, but all Albertans benefit from the equality and social justice that this implies.

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

2:10 Misericordia and Royal Alexandra Hospitals

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many families in Edmonton-Meadowlark are concerned about the future of the Misericordia hospital. In Budget 2016 we allocated \$20 million to consult on the future of the Royal Alexandra and the Misericordia. My question is for the Minister of Health. Can the minister please give us any updates on this file?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I know that his constituents rely on both of these two acute-care hospitals, that for far too long were neglected under the former government. Certainly, he has been a very strong advocate for them. We are looking at finding ways that we can address the deferred maintenance that we've seen throughout our province. It is significant. The member is absolutely right that we spent \$20 million in last year's budget to make sure that we have the right plans moving forward to support these hospitals and Edmontonians requiring their care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you give us any details on the next steps in this process and what this means for funding moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the capital planning process is under way. The submissions from AHS as well as other stakeholders and feedback from the community are important pieces as we continue to move forward in planning. I want to say that I, too, along with the hon. member am outraged that the previous government left our major hospital facilities in such disrepair while handing out bonuses and perks to many of their friends and insiders and appointed positions. These certainly don't reflect the values of this government. We've taken concrete action to make sure that we repeal those bad practices that the last government had and that we're putting Albertans' money to support Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you give us any details on how the government plans to address concerns about emergency wait times at the Misericordia?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The emergency room at the Mis was one of the very first ERs that I had an opportunity to visit in this capacity. Like many Edmontonians, I know that it

can be better and that it should be better. In the past the opposition's only answer was to propose massive cuts and to continue to bring in health care premiums. Our government repealed those premiums and is working and moving forward in a prudent and fiscally responsible way. I look forward to keep working with the member who asked the question and with all Edmontonians to make sure that we're addressing this important, critical infrastructure in the city of Edmonton.

Municipal Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, municipalities around the province are scratching their heads, wondering where \$300 million from the nearly \$700 million in the building Canada fund/PTIF disappeared to? At the Resource Stewardship Committee on May 11, 2016, the Minister of Infrastructure indicated that federal Minister Sohi wanted \$300 million to go to municipal projects. Will the Minister of Infrastructure apologize for misleading the municipalities and getting their hopes up about the money?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry to disappoint the hon. member opposite, but over \$280 million of that \$300 million has been allocated already to municipal projects, with more to come. You know, he should check his facts.

Mr. Taylor: I'd like to see where that money is going to.

Given that Dave Breakwell, the ADM of corporate strategies and services at Alberta Infrastructure, indicated at Public Accounts on February 28, 2017, that "those projects have all gone forward since March 2016 for the federal government to approve the specific projects," to the Minister of Infrastructure: before we lose another construction season, why is the federal government vetoing the projects and holding up economic stimulus?

Mr. Mason: Well, I would say, Mr. Speaker, that I'm confused, but I really think it's the hon. member opposite that is confused. The federal government is not holding up projects. We've allocated over \$280 million of federal infrastructure money towards municipal projects, and there's more to come. We've applied to the federal government for funding for the Springbank flood mitigation project. We've applied for money for a number of important initiatives. I don't know if the hon. member is against those things, but we need to fund LRT transit projects, flood mitigation, all of that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Springbank still has a lot of hiccups and environmental things that have to happen both provincially and federally.

Given that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation has decided to allow Ottawa to dictate to him how it's going to be, will the minister commit to tabling in this House the list of the BCF PTIF projects across Alberta that are being held up by behind-the-scenes business so municipalities across the province will know which provincial projects are coming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where that hon. member gets his information. We're working very well with the federal government. We're working very well with Alberta municipalities. Our government stands to make life better for Albertans and for Alberta families, and we're doing that by working with our federal counterparts, with our municipal counterparts to deliver the infrastructure that Albertans need to improve the quality of life and to create jobs for Alberta families.

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

Serenity

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December, when every member of this House was expressing horror about Serenity's death, I suggested a small legislative change to immediately save the lives of children. It would simply amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to compel any adult to call police if they know that a child is in need of intervention. But the government said that it didn't have the time to draft the bill before the Christmas recess. To the Premier. Children are still at risk. Why did you not make Serenity's law Bill 1 for this session?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say without a doubt that I know that every single member of this Legislature is committed to getting it right for the children who are vulnerable in this province. That is why our government has ensured that the Department of Children's Services has the resources, the support that it needs to move forward with changes, and that is why we are working with all the members of this Legislature to figure out what the best possible actions are to go forward on this. As soon as those recommendations come from the panel, I look forward to acting on them within the near future.

Mr. Ellis: Why is she waiting for a panel? This law could be saving children's lives now.

Given that in the House last week the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre asked the new Children's Services minister twice if her ministry was investigating Serenity's death and twice she said nothing, so we'll take this as a definitive no and given that the RCMP are also critical to ensuring that Serenity gets justice, Minister, you must have been in contact with the RCMP. Are they investigating Serenity's death?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we were all deeply moved by the case involving Serenity, and that's why the Minister of Children's Services has been working so hard with all members of this House to ensure that moving forward, we have better processes in place. In terms of what the RCMP is or isn't investigating, the hon. member is well aware that I don't direct the RCMP's investigations. That would be highly inappropriate.

Mr. Ellis: Minister, this was a simple yes or no question.

Given that a little girl died in Alberta – she was starved, she was beaten, she was sexually assaulted, and her killer is still at large – and given that the ministerial panel is reviewing the death review process, but that will not provide justice for little Serenity, it seems that you want to forget about her. But we will not let you. To the same minister: what about Serenity? What are you doing about her? And use her name in the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without a doubt, every single member of this Legislature was very much touched by her story. Now, obviously, my answer saying that every single death triggers a review didn't, you know, lead to an answer and understanding. Absolutely we are reviewing Serenity's death. Absolutely. We want to ensure that we learn everything we can to make the system better. So, yes, we're investigating Serenity's

death, and yes, we are investigating the death of every child in care because we want only the best for the children . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

2:20

Workplace Legislation Review

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Labour minister announced a review of our province's workplace laws. These laws are not high on the radar of everyday Albertans I talk to. Thousands of Albertans are currently without work, and even those with a job are worried about losing it. This government's priorities are not helping a difficult situation. This government appears to be more focused on ideology and appeasing their labour activist friends than listening to the fears of everyday Albertans. Minister, will you please explain how you think this labour review will help create the jobs Albertans need now?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans deserve fair and family-friendly workplaces that support good jobs in a growing economy. Making life better for Albertans means helping them take care of their families and themselves. It means making sure that they have good jobs that will not fire them if they take time off to take care of a loved one who is ill or injured. Alberta businesses deserve the best laws that allow them to attract and retain the best in the business. We are going to review this workplace legislation, which has not been reviewed since the Calgary Winter Olympics.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans want to go to work to care for themselves and their families and given that this government has shaken investor confidence by breaking contracts, increasing the minimum wage, shutting down coal, and ramming through other legislation and given that this government is delaying our economy's recovery by again signalling to investors to stay away for now, will the minister please explain how it's family friendly to kill jobs by introducing more uncertainty into the labour market when thousands of Albertans are without a job?

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what I hear when the member opposite talks about us not doing this review is that he does not value the hard-working Albertans that we have in our province. It's very puzzling why the opposition would not want us talking to Albertans. Then, again, they do want to roll back the minimum wage. They're against cutting small-business taxes. They've opposed every action we've taken to make life better for families. So maybe it's not that surprising.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the labour review sends a signal that this government is going to continue to experiment with our economy by moving forward with their NDP ideology and given that entrepreneurs are sitting on the sidelines waiting for this government to provide a stable climate for investment and growth and given that this minister's priorities are not in line with the priorities of everyday Albertans, why is the minister sending negative signals to the market to wait and see what this government will do while we need jobs now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that we have workplace legislation that works for businesses and Albertans is a priority. It's something that every Albertan deserves. Right now Alberta has the shortest amount of time that someone can go on compassionate care leave in Canada. Other Canadians have access to rules that mirror the federal system, and Alberta does not because we haven't reviewed the system in that long. Making sure that we are talking to Albertans and looking at critical issues like that is part of our responsibility as government. Just saying, "No; don't touch things," or "No; we're going to repeal it," is not reasonable.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mental Health Services in Central Alberta

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lack of mental health beds in central Alberta hospitals is a growing issue. A Ponoka doctor told me that by a once temporary, now permanent system Calgary is sending eight mental health patients to take over beds created for local patients. I agree that Albertans should work together, but Calgary receives 1,300 per cent more capital health funding than all of central Alberta combined. How much more money do you need to give the Calgary health region before they can take care of their own mental health patients rather than sending them to underfunded central Alberta?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. Our government knows that we inherited a very fragmented and disjointed mental health system, which is why one of the first acts of our government was to appoint the mental health review panel to bring forward recommendations to our government on ways that we can improve system access across the province for Albertans in their home communities regardless of where they live.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans would rather hear what the minister will actually really do rather than spout talking points, we need to focus on outcomes, not rhetoric. This issue is really affecting the lives of my friends, my family, and my constituents. We already spend over \$2,000 more per capita than B.C. on health care. Other than raising taxes and throwing more money at the problem, by what real strategies will the minister fix AHS to ensure that central Albertans can actually receive mental health care in my region?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to elaborate further. Our government has committed \$5.6 million in new operating funds toward implementing the recommendations of the mental health review. An important piece of that is bringing together stakeholders from across our province, from rural Alberta, from urban Alberta, and from remote areas of Alberta, to make sure that we're all working together – government, nonprofit community agencies, and indeed the corporate sector – to build a system that works for all Albertans regardless of where they live. We'll have more to say about that in the coming days.

Mr. Orr: And how much of that money will end up in central Alberta?

Mr. Speaker, given that today is not a cut day, that it is a save day, saving the lives of Albertans, I want the minister to know that mental health patients in central Alberta are unable to access health care in the community due to underfunded and overcrowded hospitals being taken up by patients from outside the region. Given that central Alberta makes up roughly one-tenth of the population yet only receives one-twentieth of the capital funding, what will the minister do to equalize the amount spent in central Alberta with other parts of the province? Or is this deliberate health care rationing?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, our government is really committed to working to ensure that we have equitable health care access across the province, so that means expanding access where we can and with the limited resources we have because we're also committed to slowing down the growth in the health care system. You know what we're not committed to? We're not going to be cutting those capital projects that the member opposite is asking for us to invest in. We're not going to cut operating dollars for health care systems, unlike the members opposite keep asking us to. Mr. Speaker, we're investing in health care for Albertans.

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

AAMDC Spring Convention Ministerial Forum

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipal leaders from across rural Alberta will gather next week in Edmonton for the annual spring AAMD and C conference. The highlight of that convention will be the ministerial forum next Wednesday morning. Now, out of respect to those leaders, all of cabinet used to attend these forums. Last fall less than half of the NDP cabinet made it out to attend. Now, two sets of departmental estimates have been scheduled for next Wednesday morning. To the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future: why have you scheduled estimates for Culture and Tourism at the same time as the AAMD and C ministerial forum? [interjections]

The Speaker: Just a moment. [interjections] Quiet, please. [interjections] Please be seated.

Hon. member, the question was directed to whom?

Dr. Starke: The chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

The Speaker: Just seeing the notes, as the member well knows, as per page 506 from the second edition, "Questions to the Ministry or to a committee Chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee, including its order of reference, may not be raised," only schedule-related items.

Mr. Chair.

2:30

Mr. Sucha: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is actually the first I've heard of it because it's a discussion between House leaders on when this happens. I believe that that date is still embargoed, so I don't even know if we're supposed to be talking about it in the House at this time.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that wasn't that hard.

Given that rural leaders are vitally concerned about the many emerging issues in the Department of Education and given that I'm

sure the Education minister is also well aware of these issues and would be eager to answer questions at the AAMD and C ministerial forum, to the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities: why have you scheduled estimates for the Department of Education at the same time as the AAMD and C ministerial forum?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as a House leader the hon. member ought to realize that we do consult with the opposition with respect to the scheduling of budget estimates, and that has been the case in this instance. These dates have not been finalized. I take the hon. member's point, and we will consider carefully, in conjunction with opposition House leaders as we always do, the scheduling of these estimates.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that we've told them now three times about the conflict and they haven't changed the schedule yet, we're hoping the fourth time is the charm.

I'm going to ask a question of the new Municipal Affairs minister. Given that I'm sure you're wanting to cultivate a strong working relationship with rural municipal leaders, what are you doing, sir, to encourage all of your cabinet colleagues to attend next week's ministerial forum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Well, somebody over there said, "Whac-A-Mole," and it feels like *Groundhog Day* because the same thing keeps being said over and over.

I'm discussing with my caucus mates every day how important AAMD and C is to me. I can't wait to be there. Actually, in fact, the 21st is my birthday, and I'm going to be there from about 7 till who knows when because I'm committed to the members of the AAMD and C and to our municipal leaders. I'm very much looking forward to all of the conversations that I'm going to have and to working on municipal issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Capital Infrastructure Funding for Red Deer

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Red Deer-North I am proud to represent a diverse and growing region. I have heard from my constituents that our infrastructure is out of date and not keeping pace with our growing population and of our role as a regional hub on the QE II. To the Minister of Transportation: what have you done to improve road infrastructure in Red Deer?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. I appreciate her strong advocacy on behalf of the people of Red Deer and central Alberta. Red Deer is fast becoming a major economic centre and a cultural engine in our province. Last year our government moved forward on the Gaetz Avenue interchange project, an \$80 million project that will significantly improve critical transportation infrastructure. We stand up for the families of Alberta, including central Alberta. We're going to continue to do that through prudent investments in infrastructure.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Red Deer is an important centre for travellers and industry and that this growth has caused transportation infrastructure issues in areas such as the Taylor Drive intersection, highway 2A, and the Waskasoo Creek culvert, what future transportation projects can the residents of Red Deer count on in the upcoming year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Obviously, infrastructure throughout the province, including central Alberta, is a priority for this government as we strive to make life better for Alberta families. We're committed to supporting the infrastructure in the areas that the member has identified. I can't say more than that, but she needs to stay tuned.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Red Deer, the beautiful gem that it is, will continue to grow and given the significant infrastructure gap that was inherited from the previous government, what can the residents of Red Deer expect to see for infrastructure investment in their vibrant and diverse city?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member knows that I cannot talk about things that will be revealed in the budget on Thursday. But I can tell her that we put \$20 million in the current capital plan for the Red Deer multiplex project and \$9.7 million for the expansion of the obstetrics unit at Red Deer regional hospital.

Mr. Speaker, every time I drive down that highway, I see the work that's going on at Red Deer College, I see the interchange at Gaetz Avenue, I see Albertans' money at work to improve the quality of life for central Albertans' lives and families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Research and Innovation Initiatives

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I came to know that the federal government has an \$800 million fund for innovation networks and clusters and that they are expected to decide in April or May how the funds will be doled out. Based on our population, if Alberta gets 10 to 12 per cent, that would be \$80 million to \$96 million. Can the minister confirm or deny that Alberta Innovates is in line to receive funding from this federal government program?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. As the member should know, the federal government has not tabled their budget yet, and until they do, you know, provinces will be watching eagerly to see how the innovation dollars will be spent.

But what I can assure the member is that recently, within the last two months, I led a trade mission with the Minister of Advanced Education and the three university presidents to meet with five different federal cabinet ministers to talk about Alberta's innovation priorities, and I look forward to telling the member all about them in the next question.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given there are clusters and innovation networks popping up all over Alberta in new fields like geomatics in Lethbridge and unmanned vehicle systems in Medicine Hat and given that the fintech sector in Calgary and the computer gaming sector in Edmonton are showing signs of growth, what is the minister doing to ensure that Alberta's innovation networks and clusters like those in the master warehouse are able to access this funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. Just to fast-forward through the previous answer, there are three areas of priorities that we've collaborated on with the private sector, with entrepreneurs, with venture capitalists, with our post-secondaries, and researchers, and that's that we're focusing on health innovation, on smart agriculture, and on clean energy. These are Alberta's strengths. We're going to continue to leverage them and to work on them.

I'll tell you this much, Mr. Speaker. In the past year we consolidated the four Alberta Innovates corporations into one. We hired an incredible CEO to lead our Alberta Innovates. We are providing funding to ensure that we are supporting these industries. That party over there would cut . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that President Trump aims to reform H-1B visas such that computer programmers and entrepreneurs from India will no longer be indentured servants of Silicon Valley and given India's status as the number one country sending out migrants to the world, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that those economic immigrants leaving the U.S.A. choose Alberta as their home to create software and start-ups despite the NDP calling Albertans sewer rats?

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

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, you know, there are a number of initiatives that our government is undertaking, and I want to remind the member and members opposite who continually try to run down our province that our government is standing up for Alberta. Last year we had the largest private-sector capital investment in Canada. We are leading and will lead the country in economic growth in 2017 and in 2018. We have the highest weekly earnings, the highest employment rate. We have the youngest population in Canada, one of the most educated. Our government is investing and working with organizations like Edmonton Economic Development and Calgary Economic Development to attract talent and companies here to Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Progressive Conservative caucus released our balanced budget plan. In this plan we lay out how it would be possible to eliminate the deficit by 2020 and lay out a plan to pay off the debt. This was done by eliminating funding increases to the rate of population growth and without cutting funding to front-line services. To the Minister of Finance: will you admit to Albertans that we can return our provincial finances to balance without drastic cuts to services?

2:40

Mr. Ceci: Unlike the Premier, I haven't seen the plan that they talk about, two and a half years to balance, but it sounds like it's too good to be true. It sounds like a bit of a scam. If they were going door to door, they'd be illegal, I can tell you, in this province. What I can say is that we are prudently and thoughtfully bringing down the deficit, and then we'll attack the debt. Those are the things that Albertans will rely on in terms of programs and services and other things we're doing.

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

The Speaker: Point of order noted.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government likes to keep accusing us of always wanting to cut the budget and given that the PC balanced budget plan actually restores over a billion dollars in municipal infrastructure grants and almost a billion more to transportation funding, to the Minister of Finance: if our caucus can find a way to balance the budget four years earlier than your government while increasing funding for key priorities, why can't you?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. You know, someone in the back has done the math, and they say that the revenue math is wrong by \$933 million, so you might want to look at that first.

Dr. Starke: Your numbers.

Mr. Ceci: No. This is your stuff.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today I met with a young man named Yusef. Yusef and his father, Mohamed, are very concerned about the costs going forward in this province. That's why we brought in Bill 1, which will reduce the cost of school fees by 25 per cent. That will give them more money in their pockets. Those are the things we're going to continue to do for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our caucus's balanced budget plan uses your numbers for revenue projections, includes modest increases to funding to meet growth populations and enrolment, funds critical infrastructure, balances the budget four years earlier, and has a plan to pay off the NDP borrowing, to the Finance minister: do you just want to use our plan on Thursday?

Mr. Ceci: Well, you know, I think I'll stick with the government plan, Mr. Speaker, the one that thousands of hours have been put into, the one that hundreds and dozens of people have been assisting with. That's the one that I talked about when I went around the province in terms of trying to find out what Albertans think. All of that is in the budget. You'll have to check on Thursday to see if any of your plan makes it. Here's a little note in advance: no, it doesn't.

Introduction of Bills (continued)

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

Bill 203 Alberta Standard Time Act

Mr. Dang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act.

Mr. Speaker, our government was elected on a mandate of change, and I am going to change time for Albertans. Alberta is one of the sunniest provinces in this country, and Albertans have overwhelmingly told us that they want the sunshine at the end of their day. Albertans work hard, they play hard, and they just want to let the sun shine in.

This week Albertans had to change their clocks in their homes, their cars, their offices, and their phone booths. On my watch, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 will repeal the Daylight Saving Time Act and give hard-working Albertans consistent time year-round to save money, improve efficiencies, and make life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-North West, just before the returns and reports, I may have yesterday given you not enough time to explain, but again I ask that members, when introducing reports like this, are brief and are not including editorial comments.

Ms Jansen: Absolutely, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your patience.

I have three items to table, Mr. Speaker. The first is a *Gauntlet* article on the membership in Wildrose on Campus held by Wildrose MLAs and executives.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of the poster for the antifeminist movie *The Red Pill*, sponsored by Wildrose on Campus and promoted by Rebel media.

Finally, a copy of the Wildrose on Campus constitution, with a special section detailing the aim to promote the Wildrose Party.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a document written on March 9 by Steve Penney, a professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta, supporting the actions our Minister of Justice is taking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to table five copies of an article in the *Calgary Sun* called Anti-bully Minister Sandra Jansen MIA from the Alberta Legislature Since "Electrician" Blast against Len Webber, with a quote from the MLA for Calgary-North West that says that he "should go back to being an electrician."

The Clerk: Tablings to the Clerk.

Mr. Cyr: I have two tablings, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: To the Clerk?

Mr. Cyr: The first tabling is an article: Manitoba Revenge Porn Law Aims to Empower Victims.

The second tabling is Cyberbullying Has "Hugely Disproportionate Impact on Women and Girls."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. You seem so much alike.

Mr. Nixon: The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and I spend a lot of time together, but there is a slight height difference.

I just rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a column written by Rick Bell this morning called Mainstreet Poll Shows More Hurtin' Numbers for Notley NDP as They Attack Opposition "Sewer Rats." The column just goes on to show that it's not a good idea to try to shore up your polling numbers by calling Albertans sewer rats.

The Speaker: Could I use this opportunity to remind all members that there are differences between Tabling Returns and Reports and Tablings to the Clerk, so please pay more attention to that in the future.

I believe we are at points of order. Is that correct? It seemed for a moment that we may not have any today, but it appears that we have, from my count, four of them.

The first one was by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Falsehoods against a Member

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills in his question made the statement that the government was calling Albertans sewer rats. This is a dreadful misrepresentation. The hon. Deputy Premier spoke in the House this morning and apologized for that comment.

2:50

I was present at the time that it was made, and in no way did she intend or, actually, could any reasonable person infer that she was calling Albertans sewer rats, Mr. Speaker. It was intemperate language that the minister has apologized for in this House. Now, obviously, the opposition wants to make as much hay out of that as possible, but they are clearly misrepresenting the words and the intent of the Deputy Premier with respect to that and completely ignoring the fact that she has apologized and withdrawn those comments.

Mr. Speaker, 23(h) is making "allegations against another Member," in this case against all members on this side; 23(i) is imputing "false or unavowed motives to another Member"; and 23(j) is using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Nothing could be further from the truth than what the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills said. I understand his political motivation in trying to distort and to convince Albertans that the Deputy Premier meant something other than she did, but it ought not be accepted in this House. I'm quite concerned that in the various conservative parties across the way there seems to be a real looseness with the facts, and I'm compelled to stand up and point it out, Mr. Speaker, and ask that you bring the opposition to order with respect to this matter.

The Speaker: The deputy House leader.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to point out that the member that made the comment wasn't in the House when the minister made her sort of apology this morning. I'm going to say that this is a matter of debate. You know, we've called points of order to stop members of the government, including

senior ministers, from using derogatory statements about the opposition over and over and over again. We've continued to call points of order. They seem to ignore it even when it has been ruled as a point of order, so it doesn't seem to stop them. The Minister of Health used the reference to sewer rats, not us. She called down Albertans, not us. The term "sewer rats" will continue to be a matter of debate, as will embarrassing cousins, long into the future, so you might as well get used to it.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't help but pop up and react to the Government House Leader's remarks. In one statement he said that nothing offensive was said, and in the next statement he said that an apology was made. It can't be both, probably, so based on that alone, I would say that there's no point of order here. We all heard what was said in the House yesterday about sewer rats. It really points to a pattern on behalf of the government – calling Albertans sewer rats, embarrassing cousins, lots of other names, telling them that they make bad decisions, really being disrespectful to Albertans – and it's something that ought to stop.

The Speaker: On this particular matter I'd like to deliberate in consultation with checking precedent on this issue.

Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, I have a note that it was withdrawn. I'm assuming that's the case. Yes?

Member for Calgary-Lougheed, I believe you had a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Rodney: Yes. I trust this might be dispensed with quickly and efficiently. I'm calling the order at 2:40 p.m. The Minister of Finance used unparliamentary language, including words like "scam" and "illegal." There's a quick and easy answer, and that's simply that he apologize and withdraw the remarks.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. House leader always thinks that it's just a simple matter of agreeing with him that he's always right and that we should just do the right thing and say, "Sure," but it's not that easy. The hon. Minister of Finance in answer to the question indicated that what the Progressive Conservative opposition was doing really was to be misleading. I think that it was clearly a matter of debate. I'm not talking about any particular member being misleading but about statements that I think were not going to lead the public to the correct conclusion. He used the allusion to the act where we as a government have made it clear that door-to-door sales in which products are not properly represented are not allowed in this province anymore, a good piece of legislation.

Quite frankly, I don't think that the language was unparliamentary at all. I think it's simply a matter of debate. It was a disagreement between members, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The deputy House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it interesting that words like "misleading" and "scams" and "illegal" can be found as matters of debate, but terms like "sewer rats" are unparliamentary. I don't quite get the argument there. Either one is one or one is the other. You can't have both.

Now, I find it interesting that the Government House Leader used the situation of door-to-door sales. Now we have people, a company

from Ontario, coming into people's houses and trying to upgrade . . . [interjections] Well, what's the difference? It's the same thing.

The Speaker: Hon. member . . .

Mr. Hanson: It's a matter of debate as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please don't engage me when I'm speaking to you. Please. Are there any other points you'd like to make?

Mr. Hanson: That's fine. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to cite Standing Order 23(j): "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Calling a document that another party puts in the Legislature a scam and misleading and illegal is certainly designed to create disorder in the House and, as such, ought to be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, since apparently everyone is going twice. I just rise to dispute what the member has to say. The comment was made in reference to a document. There's a difference between talking about people and talking about ideas. It was made about an idea, and that idea is that we can have all the front-line services we want, we can have no taxes at all, and it will just all be free. I think that that idea is a little bit silly.

On this side of the House we believe that we have to invest in things in order to get the services we need. Mr. Speaker, ultimately, this is the fundamental conversation of democracy, right? You know, are you willing to invest in things? Are things important enough to you that you're willing to invest in them? That is the fundamental difference that we have with the members on the opposite side of the House. We need to be able to have those conversations. We need to be able to talk about those ideas. If this is a point of order, I'd suggest that we really can't debate anything at all.

Thank you.

The Speaker: When I first heard the comments – and I don't recall; I don't have the Blues in front of me with respect to the scam – I do remember hearing the word "illegal." On first blush on hearing that, I thought it was in jest that the minister was making the comment. But it's clear that words like that continue to be said in this House and seem to have escalated, particularly in the last two days. I have cautioned several times, and not many people seem to be listening because it's coming up on all sides of the House that words are being used.

3:00

I think that in the future it would be wise for all members of this House to not use words like "rats" and "illegal" and "scam." In this particular instance I would caution the minister to be cautious about using the words even though they may be in jest because, as you see, it does cause upheaval in this House, and I hope that in the future both sides of the House will do it.

I don't particularly see a point of order at this particular time.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Interim Supply Estimates 2017-18 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Chair: Before we commence this afternoon's consideration of interim supply, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which is as follows:

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

During the first rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the first rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

Provided that the Chair has been notified, a Minister and a private Member may combine their respective speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor over the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 7, approved by the Assembly on March 7, 2017, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2017-18 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$30 million for the Legislative Assembly and \$7.8 billion in expense funding, \$936 million in capital investment funding, and \$149 million in financial transactions and funding for the government, and \$241 million for the transfers from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund. These interim supply estimates provide funding authorization that will allow the normal business of the province to continue while the Assembly takes the necessary time to review, debate, and approve the government's budget plans for the 2017-18 fiscal year. I should also add that these estimates will be fully debated as part of that process.

Madam Chair, the amounts in these interim supply estimates will provide the government and the Legislative Assembly with two months of funding. I believe that providing two months of funding is a prudent approach. It provides sufficient time to fully debate the

budget, that I will table on Thursday, and therefore allows the Assembly the necessary time to do its work.

Madam Chair, for the benefit of the Assembly, let me say a few additional words about interim supply and how government arrived at the requested amounts that we have here for debate.

Treasury Board and Finance works with officials from across government to forecast the requirements for each department based on their expected costs, commitments, and the timing of payments that need to be made during the months of April and May 2017. Oftentimes as part of the regular course of business payments to certain partners are required at the beginning of the fiscal year. For example, in the case of Advanced Education certain payments are made to postsecondary institutions up front at the beginning of the fiscal year. Likewise, in the case of Agriculture and Forestry certain payments are made up front to the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. Therefore – and let me emphasize this point – one cannot assume that the amounts before the Assembly today will simply be one-sixth of each ministry's final budgetary figure.

I'd like to remind all members of the Chamber that the government's budget will be tabled on Thursday at 3:15, at which point the detailed estimates for the full fiscal year will be made clear. Once full-year estimates are made public, I'm sure that we'll have a good and robust debate in this Chamber.

Madam Chair, before we debate these estimates, let me emphasize that this government is squarely focused on making lives better for Albertans. This interim supply will make life better for Albertans. Without the funding, many of the services Albertans depend on, like hospitals, schools, and housing for seniors, would be in jeopardy. Simply put, this interim supply is required to ensure that the basic services that Albertans rely on from their government are available when they need it.

On that note, Madam Chair, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions as we continue our work to make life better for all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Do you wish to combine your time?

Mr. Hunter: Yes, I do, Madam Chair. Thank you.

Minister, spring is right around the corner, and with spring comes pothole season. Last year Alberta Transportation needed over \$372 million for the maintenance and preservation of provincial highways. Of the requested expense of over \$301 million, how much of this interim supply request is going to fund highway maintenance and preservation?

Mr. Mason: I would prefer it if the hon. member would take his time and ask his questions, and I'll try and answer them when he's completed.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: All right, Madam Chair. Minister, municipalities are also looking for grants for water, waste water, public transit, airports, local road bridges, and special cost-shared paving projects. Does the minister have a dollar amount for how much of the \$301 million in expense is going to the municipal grants?

Am I just reading this into the record, then, Madam Chair?

The Chair: It's my understanding that the minister would prefer to have all the questions. You get 10 minutes, and then he'll take 10 minutes to respond to it.

Am I understanding that correctly, Minister?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

3:10

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Last fall you signed agreements with the federal government for public transit and water and waste water. It is my understanding that there is still money left over from the federal grants that remains to be allocated to projects. Are there any federal dollars in this \$301 million expected to be voted on, and is there any provincial cost sharing with the federal grants that can be found in this interim expense for transportation?

The next question, Madam Chair: are any dollars of this expense being directed to traffic safety services to run advertising campaigns for highway safety?

Next, Minister, you also have \$218,640,000 in capital investment to spend in this interim supply, being capital projects like ring roads; highway twinning, widening, and expansion; interchanges, intersections, and safety upgrades; bridge construction rehabilitation; and water management infrastructure. Can the minister advise how many tenders are sitting on the shelf just waiting to be unleashed on the construction market once this money is voted on?

Next, can the minister indicate what is the dollar amount of the tenders on the shelf? If the minister does not have the tenders ready to go for all the capital investment, then I would like to understand why he needs this money now. I guess we'll stay tuned for the answers on that.

We know, Minister, that last year in your annual report you lapsed over \$125 million in capital investment. In 2014-15 the lapse for capital investment was \$343,696,000. My point is that if the minister cannot spend the money fast enough, why ask for it to be voted on now? Can the minister guarantee that the capital investment to be voted here in interim supply will be expended by June 1, 2017?

Madam Chair, can the minister advise how much of the \$218,640,000 that the minister wishes to spend is derived from federal dollars? How much of this over \$218 million is being directed to the Calgary ring road? Will there be any highway twinning; i.e., highway 3 in my area emerged from the \$218 million. Where and what projects will you be doing?

Will there be any spending on the Springbank dry dam out of this \$218 million? Can the minister advise how much of the \$218 million is for land buyouts from freehold landowners for the Springbank dry dam? Is there any compensation for the Tsuut'ina Nation in the \$218 million for the Springbank dry dam? Does the minister's legal opinion indicate consultation with Tsuut'ina is sufficient, or does the Tsuut'ina Nation have a veto over this project due to the impact on the reserve?

Does the minister agree that the McLean Creek option on our river to protect Calgary and other communities is starting to look a little bit more cost effective? What about the rehabilitation of other water control structures, like the Carseland-Bow headworks? Is there any funding here for that project?

Can the minister advise if there will be any interchanges, like highway 791 and highway 1, funded out of this \$218 million?

Minister, you have \$6,291,000 in financial transactions. Can you detail any land that will be bought, sold, or swapped with this amount? Consumables like gravel, sand, salt for highway maintenance also get recorded as financial transactions. Did you buy any for the provincial highways?

Finally, Minister, did the highways need more winter maintenance in winter 2016-17 than usual?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The member has asked a great many questions in his time, and I thank him very much for that. The questions that I can't answer right now: we'll endeavour to provide written answers to the member and to other members of the Assembly.

Madam Chair, just in general the spending for 2017 estimates – and this is based, of course, on last year's budget, about 17 per cent of last year's budget. So all of the issues that the member has raised have to fall within the previous budget. He's asked, for example, a number of questions that will be best answered in the actual budget that is coming down on Thursday. In other words, he's cleverly encouraging me to tell him what's in the budget on Thursday because he knows that I would get fired if I did that. I'm not saying that he's trying to get me fired, but, you know, in politics these kinds of things happen.

I can't really discuss what's going to be in the capital budget, but I can tell him that we are requesting – and the expenses: 2017-18 the estimated cash is \$1,771,356,000. Seventeen per cent of that, as the member has indicated, is \$301,131,000. Capital investment is based on \$1,276,319,000, of which 17.1 per cent on the capital side is \$218,640,000. Financial transactions is \$16,291,000 for a total for the interim supply, Madam Chair, of \$536,062,000.

It includes a number of things. The \$301 million which he's asked about includes funding for programs, services, and support; to provide leadership and guidance in investment and capital planning strategies; standards for transportation infrastructure procurement policies and processes; contract implementation; new strategic procurement initiatives. It includes traffic safety services, which provide leadership and direction for transportation safety programs.

Ministry support services, Madam Chair, is funding for my office, the deputy's office, communications, human resources, and other corporate services. We fund also the ongoing operations of the Alberta Transportation Safety Board, which conducts driver review hearings and independent appeals of driver, vehicle, and safety decisions.

We do, as the member asked, a considerable amount of maintenance, which supports the structural and operational maintenance of all provincial highways and bridges; for example, snow removal, grass cutting, pavement line paving, crack sealing, pothole patching, and maintenance on roadway signs and gravel roads.

The previous government, of course, had engaged in a number of long-term P3 contracts, and those have to be supported financially. It includes structural and operational maintenance of all the provincial ring roads.

Preservation is an important piece of the budget, Madam Chair, to support preventative and corrective bridge maintenance, geotechnical erosion and landslide remediation program, and preventative and corrective pavement maintenance program.

Finally, it also supports assessment and support systems, which includes maintenance of items such as rest areas, vehicle inspection stations, ferries, provincial park roads, and public roads and bridges on First Nations land.

I'll get into the capital grant funding because the member asked about that. The green transit incentives program, or GreenTRIP, provides support for local, regional, and intermunicipal public transit throughout Alberta.

There's the community transit fund, the strategic transportation infrastructure program, which I know the hon. member is interested in because it provides financial assistance to rural and smaller municipalities for developing and maintaining key local transportation for structures such as local bridges, community airports, and resource roads. This was a very popular program in rural Alberta which was defunded by the previous government, and we have restored funding. It's a limited amount of funding, but it is

significant to rural Alberta. It includes – let me just get the numbers here – \$100 million in the capital plan for the STIP program over two years. Those are all important.

3:20

Now, with respect to – and I'll just pick a few of the questions because there are so many of them – the question he's asked about twinning, there's a substantial amount set aside in this budget for twinning. Of course, it's based on a proportion of last year's budget, but that includes providing sections of highway twinning, widening, and expansion to provide a safe and efficient provincial highway system. It includes final paving on newly resurfaced roadways, widening of existing paved surfaces, bypasses, and new construction. There are also items in here for interchanges, intersections, and safety upgrades, bridge construction, provincial highway rehabilitation, water management infrastructure, and flooding.

Now, he's asked a number of questions about Springbank. I can tell the hon. member that the Springbank project is proceeding as planned. We are in the process of arranging site visits in order to do appraisals on the land. We've purchased a number of parcels already.

With respect to issues that have come up recently with respect to the Tsuut'ina Nation, there has been considerable consultation with the Tsuut'ina up until now. I was a little surprised to hear them say that it hadn't taken place. I've met personally with the chief and a number of members of the council, and there have been a number of other face-to-face meetings and quite a bit of correspondence, which we can provide a summary of, but that doesn't mean that we don't need to do more and to do it better. I've reached out to the new chief – there's a new chief – with respect to this matter.

Many of the issues that they've raised in connection with environmental impacts on their land, for example, should be addressed in the report on the environmental impact assessment. That's been a yearly process. We've been out conducting the study over a full year so that we get all four seasons, and that will be completed at the end of this month. That work will be completed, and we're expecting that report sometime in the early summer. It should address a number of the issues that have been raised. If there are flags there, you know, then that is a good point of departure for further discussions and consultation and mitigation if that's actually required.

As far as we are concerned, we did look at this carefully and tried to balance the benefits of Springbank versus McLean Creek, and we haven't changed our opinion with respect to that matter. Particularly, the McLean Creek project would be significantly more threatening to a number of protected species, and the environmental impact, I think, would be much more severe than at Springbank. Ultimately, though, hon. member, our job and our intention is to protect people downstream, in Calgary and other communities, from a repeat of the 2013 flooding impacts.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills. Did you wish to combine your time?

Mr. Panda: I'm going to direct my questions to the Finance minister in whichever way he feels comfortable.

The Chair: Is that acceptable?

Mr. Ceci: I'll try the same thing he tried, 10 and 10.

The Chair: Based on that he may have a long list of questions?

Mr. Ceci: Yeah.

Mr. Panda: Then how do I get answers? Will you make note of each question? [interjection] Oh, he is being assisted by all of the backbenchers.

The Chair: Hon. member, you'll have 10 minutes, then, that you can speak and ask your questions.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. Have you seen this document, Madam Chair? Do you have a copy of this on hand?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Panda: I'm going to refer to that. To me, Madam Chair, if the government was organized and if they had done their job, there would be no need for this interim supply. This interim supply is to keep the government running until the NDP do their job. I get that. They need to pass the budget. We understand that. But what are the reasons why your budget was not passed before interim supply was needed? We haven't heard that from the minister or any of the ministers. They haven't told us why they couldn't pass the budget before they asked for approval of this interim supply. I would like to hear that.

Mr. Yao: Why, Minister? Why?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Is this the only government to pass an interim supply? Absolutely not. We understand that. Are there governments that can pass a budget without the need for interim supply? Yes. Absolutely yes. Then why is this government not choosing the best practices for passing budgets? How many other things in this supply bill will go against best practices? We don't have any details. We have zero details. If you look at this document, there are line items – they list all the departments, and they ask for millions and millions of dollars but zero details on that. We don't know.

I mean, we called it last year a blank cheque. That's what we called this supply bill last year when a similar document came through the House. We asked for more details and were refused last year. That's why we're trying hard this year to see if we can get any details. We were told to wait for the budget, to vote on this with confidence in the NDP government, that they knew best. This year is no different. There are still no details to be found anywhere in these documents. If any of the backbenchers there are wise enough to find details, please pass that on to me.

How can the government ask elected officials to vote on spending when all we have is the final number? We do not know where the money is going and what it is allocated for, how much this budget number is compared to years previous. We don't have all those details. How much debt this adds: we have no details.

I know the Finance minister says that beer is good, but I can't get details of the beer tax on this either. That's why I'm confused.

This supply bill is for two months, yet many of these numbers are much higher than one-sixth of the total budget. Now, I know that spending is not equal every month and that more money needs to be spent at certain times of the year, but how can we tell that from these numbers? We can't. [interjection] I'm coming to that. How do we know that the money allocated in this bill will be for necessary spending and cannot be multiplied by six? You're asking for two months. Do we try to then multiply it by six to get to the annual budget? I don't know. If we had any details, we could eliminate that as an option, but again we have no details.

We are here to represent our ridings, the people that elected us. Mayor Nenshi, my city's mayor, announced today that he hopes there is a large amount of funding for him in the budget. Yeah. Like the central Alberta folks here: they were looking for, you know, big money. Same thing with my mayor. My job is to defend my mayor here. When he is saying that he has to increase property taxes because of your uncampaigned-on carbon tax, I have to believe him. I have to believe him.

3:30

Looking at the Infrastructure budget, for example, we have no idea if Mayor Nenshi's wishes were granted. Looking at the Municipal Affairs budget, we have no idea if Mayor Nenshi's asks were fulfilled. In fact, we have no idea if anyone will get any money. There are many MLAs who meet regularly with their local municipalities, same as I meet with my councillors. I know you don't like to do town halls, but I'm sure you may be meeting with municipal officials.

When they ask us why we voted for any particular line item of this interim supply without having details, I can't say that I have blind trust in the Finance minister because he's a fellow Calgarian. No. I can't say that because he's not doing anything to create jobs in Calgary, so it is tough for me to defend that. That's why when we are being asked to vote on this like a blind man judging an art competition – it looks like that – I'm not comfortable to do it. That's why I need more details.

Madam Chair, I'm sitting in today for my colleague the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks, but I also want to ask the minister of economic development, who is not here . . . [interjections] Sorry. I meant to say – the Deputy Premier is here. She represents all the ministries, so if I can direct my questions to her through you.

For example, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade requested \$400 million last year. I guess that was the money that they expensed last year. Now he is looking for \$59 million more, almost 15 per cent of his annual budget, for two months, which is less than the money needed for two months of operations of economic development. Looking at the reduction, I'm hoping that it's a signal to cut his overall budget. I'm hoping that you are hearing the concerns of Albertans to restrain spending. I'm hoping that you're trying to rein in the spending based on that indication.

Also, of that \$59 million that the economic development ministry is asking for, we don't know how much is going to AITC and CITC. Those are the two featured programs of this ministry, but we don't know which amounts are directed to those two programs. We don't know how much has been expended in 2016 on AITC and CITC. I've asked this minister and sometimes I've also asked other ministers: how many jobs have been created through these programs, AITC and CITC, during the 2016-17 fiscal year? Without knowing that, I don't know how to vote in favour of this money for 2017-18 because they haven't told us how many jobs they created in 2016-17.

I also note that \$390,000 is being expended in capital, but is this ministry spending it on new computers or photocopiers? Whatever they're doing, they haven't told us. The minister also listed \$8.335 million for financial transactions, implying that they had some consumables they might have used up. We don't know that. Those are the kinds of questions that we have, Madam Chair.

Of this approximately \$59 million – that's what the economic development minister is asking for – he needs to advise us how much is going to fund line 1, which is ministry support services. In the same way, how much of that \$59 million is going to line 2, which is economic development and small/medium enterprises? And of that \$59 million, how much is going to fund line 3, which is trade and investment attraction? Can the minister tell us how much is going to fund science and innovation, which is line 4? Is there any funding going to jobs, investment, and diversification?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the series of questions. I hope to be able to answer all of them. First of all, I just want to look at the preface for the interim supply and just read what it says. The hon. member was saying, you know: why isn't there more detail?

On the detail in the interim supply estimates, the preface says that it

reports the requirements for public monies from the General Revenue Fund to fund the operations of the Offices of the Legislative Assembly and the Government from April 1, 2017 to May 31, 2017, inclusive... The amounts in these estimates address only those funding requirements for which the Government will need to obtain authority under an appropriation act.

So this is not the full budget. This is just a portion of the budget, and we're bringing that forward. It's addressing two months of expenditures, and that will give us the time we need to put forward a thoughtful and prudent budget, that we will table on March 16 and start to debate shortly thereafter.

The hon. member also wondered why we were taking that time, and I can say clearly that our government is taking the time to consult with Albertans, hear their thoughts and ideas on the fiscal and economic challenges we face as a province. We will have a full debate on all aspects of the budget in this House.

Why does it come in the middle of March? Why doesn't it come earlier, he suggested, so that we could get it passed before the end of March? I can tell you that of the previous 10 budgets that were tabled in this House, four were presented in April, three were presented in March, and three were presented in February, so there really is no one way of doing things, Madam Chair. A number of different tablings of the budget have taken place over the years across those three months that I talked about. Obviously, if you're going to be presenting in April or late March, then you would need to come up with interim supply, so this is really not anything that's unusual.

The two months of spending that we are talking about, the appropriations that we're talking about, is to ensure, as I mentioned before, that the normal course of government business can be carried out as we take the necessary time, again, to discuss and debate the budget. The opposition and all of the members of this House will have that opportunity through the Committee of Supply process.

We have had to work across government, the officials in my area, to forecast the requirements for each of the departments. Based on their expected costs and commitments and other things that they are required to do, payments for the period between April 1 and May 31, we've arrived at the amount of about \$9.1 billion.

Madam Chair, if it's appropriate, I'll cede the rest of the answers to my colleague, who will address the specifics with regard to some of the ministries that the hon. member questioned.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just to elaborate with regard to the line items that the member asked about in Economic Development and Trade, as was mentioned by my colleague the Minister of Finance, this is standard process for all government departments. In essence, interim supply guarantees that passage of a portion of the year's monetary requirements to ensure that operations can continue.

3:40

Some of the operations, of course, in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade include our international trade offices, which are making really good progress and expanding opportunities in Asia in particular. We want to make sure that they can continue to operate for the up to two months that we want to allow for good, fulsome, and thoughtful debate in this House on the overall budget. We want to ensure that the community and regional economic supports intake happens on April 1 rather than having to wait for two months and leave families in the lurch. We want to continue

providing the supports that have been available through grant programs to Alberta small businesses and have the general operations of the ministry continue to move forward.

There are some items that I believe in past years have required more than one-sixth of the payment to be made during that same portion of time. For example, Alberta Innovates has a number of grant programs. Some of those are required to be paid out more than one-sixth of the annual cost during this upfront period. Another one could be, again, for those international offices that we have. We do transfers to the federal government, so again the timing doesn't always line up that it could just be one-sixth. There's some variance with regard to those line items for sure.

In general I want to assure all members of this Assembly that we look forward to a thoughtful, engaging discussion on the entire budget, beginning on Thursday when we all get a chance to review the final documents and move forward through comprehensive debate. The passage of this interim supply will in no way impede our ability to go through each of the line items at that point in much more detail. I want to assure all members that, certainly, the amount that we're asking for in interim supply for Economic Development and Trade will not be the entire budget for that ministry. We will certainly have room for feedback from all members of this Assembly in that regard. It is important to us that we continue to have the operations of government continue while we allow for good, thoughtful, democratic debate.

We actually have in the Chamber right now the president of one of the largest unions that we have in Alberta, who represents many workers in the public service. We want to make sure that we continue to provide stability for those workers and for the union. So thank you very much to Guy Smith from AUPE for being here to observe some of the proceedings this afternoon, to make sure that we provide that stability to the public service, to the citizens who make sure that the direction set in this Assembly is implemented in a way that moves us forward as a province, supporting Alberta families and making their lives better.

Certainly, Economic Development and Trade is a key area of interest. You've heard us say that we are focused on making sure that we work to diversify the economy, making sure that we are continuing to grow the number of mortgage-paying jobs in this province, and making life more affordable. Economic Development and Trade certainly plays a key function in those first two in particular.

We certainly look forward to ongoing discussions and deliberations. I'd be happy to comment on other areas, as would my colleagues. Certainly, any ministry is on the table. We look forward to hearing your feedback, comments, and questions.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you wish to add? You still have a few minutes.

Mr. Ceci: Yes. Just to kind of close off that comment and my own previous comment to say that, you know, the budget is going to be tabled on March 16, in a couple of days. The member has many questions about what's in, what's out, how much are things reduced, or what's getting increases. I would just say to that member and all of the members in this House that all of those questions will be answered on Thursday when the budget is released. They can go through all the line items at that point, and many of their questions will be addressed by what's in the budget.

Lastly, Madam Chair, there are a number of ministers here who are pleased to address different ministries that will be questioned. You know, questions from the other side can be directed to people here, and we'll figure out who is to stand up and address them.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Did you want to continue the . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. If I could go back and forth with the ministers, if that's all right.

This is Education, so whoever would like to take that opportunity with me, I'd be very honoured.

Mr. Ceci: That's me. If you could just direct your questions, I'll take them down and answer.

Mrs. Aheer: Certainly. Thank you very much. With Education, we have a couple of questions, of course, regarding the numbers, and hopefully we'll be able to get some answers about this. I was wondering about the \$721.5 million. What is this representing? What percentage of the upcoming budget does that represent? I'm assuming that we'll find out a little bit more about this coming up, but it would be very, very nice, I think, for Albertans to know at this point in time, in interim, what that percentage is and where that's going to be allocated.

Obviously, there are programs that need to be supplemented, so I think some of the questions we would have are around: what percentage of those dollars and what programs will be supplemented through those funds? There's not, obviously, a lot of clarity in these reports, so I think that that would be a very important piece of information to understand.

When we're going through these numbers and once we understand the percentage of that – the portion that I'd like to ask about is: is there an aspect within the ministry that is accountable for the expenditure of those funds, and who would that be? Again, the minister has talked many times about monitoring and evaluating the programs.

These are some questions that not only lie within interim supply but also other questions that we've been asking around the programs. Obviously, we're wondering about: what programs will be supplemented? How much is that going to cost? Who's going to be accountable for the expenditure? How is this monitored? How are the programs monitored, exactly? For example, outside of teachers' costs, how much of that \$721.5 million will go directly into the classrooms? This is definitely an aspect that Albertans are very interested in understanding given the fact that so much is going on that is lacking in clarity these days with Albertans. These are a lot of the questions that we're getting.

Another important aspect is that within the throne speech the Premier had mentioned some important aspects about special needs. How will the children with special learning needs be supported by these dollars? Are there dedicated dollars that are coming from this allotment that will be going towards special-needs programs?

Will this amount be used to pay the school fees, transportation reductions, as were just delivered in Bill 1? Is that where these dollars are coming from for September 2017, or will the efficiencies that the government spoke of in Bill 1 come from that operations line? Again, we're looking at \$15 million that has been promised by the government for transportation in Bill 1, so we're just wanting to know how that's being allocated and if that's coming from this particular budget.

In capital spending, in the supplementary supply bill you transferred almost \$107 million – correct? – from capital to operating expenses, and that's the major chunk that's there. Does the \$302-million in this interim supply reflect the reduced amount of capital funding, and how much would that be from that? If the previous transfer had not been made, would you then have required

this amount plus the transfer amount? That would then total almost \$409 million.

How many schools do you anticipate completing with this \$302 million? There's been a lot of talk about school completions, building schools. We're just curious about how much of that fits into this dollar amount in the capital expense in supplementary supply. Are these projects on time and on budget? Is this \$302 million what we can expect for expenses across the year, or is this amount weighted more heavily in the spring?

3:50

I just have a few more questions, Madam Chair. This is more about operations and maintenance and how they fall in the interim supply. Does the amount that's reflected in the transfer from capital reflect the transfer from capital in the supplementary supply? What operations and maintenance projects are being undertaken with this infusion of funds? Also, was the transfer in supplementary supply a direct attempt to offset the carbon levy? Again, this is something that's very important, I think, for Albertans to have clarity and to understand where the dollars are going. Will the increase to operations and maintenance be continued next year?

Could this funding for operations and maintenance include green or alternative energy initiatives? And if those initiatives are there, how are we going to make sure that Albertans understand that, the dollar figures, and how dollars are being directed from those projects into green initiative projects? Is there a priority list of these operations and maintenance projects? The list, again, would include the funding for the O and M, for the alternative energy request, transfers, all of that. Also, with regard to the priorities, what was the consultation process, and who participated?

Finally, Madam Chair, I just have a couple of questions on the financial transfers. What is this transaction? I would love some clarity on that. Where did the money come from, and where did it go to? What's it for? And how will that impact the upcoming budget?

Thank you so much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Thank you for the questions, hon. member. First of all, let me just say by way of background that Treasury Board and Finance has requested that ministries allow for interim supply for the period of April 1 to May 31, 2017, at which time it's anticipated that our Budget 2017 will be passed in the Legislative Assembly. That's why we've come forward with these requests for interim for Education and every other ministry. Based on the interim supply period of approximately two months in the new fiscal year, Education's spending targets are estimated to be just over \$1 billion.

It's broken down, as the hon. member has gone through – and I'll just for the basis of everyone here be clear – as \$721.5 million for operating of schools. So let's just spend a moment talking about the operating of schools and how that's undertaken. The school boards across the province are the delivery mechanisms for the operations of schools. They have identified budgets, and they bring those forward to the Education minister. That ministry works with those school boards to ensure that the needs identified in the request for funding meet the Education Act.

The Education Act is clear in terms of what needs to be done to address the primary education of Albertans and what those monies can be spent on. So there's an accountability or a compliance, if you will, with the request for funds and the kinds of things they could be spent on, and then that gets reported during the course of the year from the various school boards to the Ministry of Education. Those

operating dollars that are identified in the first line, \$721.5 million, have been allocated through agreements with the school boards. That's what they will go to do, to address the needs of two months' of funding for schools.

I would just maybe jump from that to something to do with Bill 1 that was asked about in terms of: you know, are these monies going to address the 25 per cent reduction in school fees, that this government has said we will institute as of September 2017? The quick answer is: no, none of these funds that are identified here will go to offset any reduction in fees starting in September 2017. That will be the subject of further work after the budget is passed. I would just clarify that point, I guess.

The next line number is \$302.6 million for capital investment in school facilities, and those monies will be used to deliver to school boards, who will be using some of those monies, not all of them – of course, some of those monies will be the subject of expenditures for new school buildings and modernizations of schools, and the cash flow there will continue to make those things possible. Off the top of my head I don't know the exact number of completions that will occur with this \$302.6 million or the exact number of modernizations that will conclude with these monies, but to be sure, some of those monies will be for those purposes.

Some of the monies will be going to school boards across this province, and they will use them for the improvement of their facilities as they have identified through budget plans, that are, as I said earlier, made available to the Ministry of Education and ultimately reconciled with: you know, does it meet the act, and if it does meet the act, are they funds that can then be disbursed for those purposes?

One other question on capital investment was asked, and that was in relation to, you know, the movement from capital to operational funding on improvements to schools that improve the facility less than five years. There's an effort to try and put monies in the operational budget that are appropriate for improvements to schools that aren't capital in nature and to take that money out of capital so that during the year there's not an additional hit to, I guess, the deficit or a request for funds to be moved from capital to operations and reported on an operational basis and that then increases the deficit during the year. So this is a positive thing that's being done.

With regard to that \$302.6 million I'm not able to confirm how much of that is changed as a result of this transfer of accounting difference so that we treat the expenditure of funds the proper way and account for them the proper way as opposed to putting them in capital and then, partway through the year, transferring them.

You know, the education of children in this province, I think we would all agree, is a top priority for everyone. The interim supply here means that stable funding for school boards can occur and that students currently enrolled in Alberta schools won't see any disruption in their attendance.

This is a continuation of business that we presented in Budget 2016 and covers the 2016-17 fiscal year, which ends on March 31. Stakeholders won't notice the difference in anything that's taking place as a result of coming forward with this interim supply as their current funding will be maintained. There will be no impact on them or their ability to provide services, nor will there be an impact on the ability of any young Albertan to go to school. The funding covers all regular operations, including school capital commitments, and it is a matter of regular course of business to present it here.

4:00

With regard to specific questions about special needs – you know, do they have to be concerned, perhaps, that something will change as a result of the numbers in this interim supply? – I would

just want to reiterate that no school business will change for anyone as a result of bringing forward this interim supply, debating it, and passing it later. It is business as usual for Alberta schoolchildren.

I'll just see if there are additional questions here that I can address. I think I answered the way the expenditure of funds is monitored, how much classrooms will or won't get, and the percentage of operating here.

As I said earlier in reference to my introductions, this is not to be construed as one-sixth of the total amount necessary for the Education ministry and the school boards around the province. It's a billion dollars, and it's broken up this way because in many cases school boards need some upfront funding to make sure that they have everything they require. We are making sure that in doing that, Madam Chair, we are taking care of the important youth who are in our schools. It's not to be construed as one-sixth; it is to be construed as necessary funds. It's necessary at this time for the work of school boards to continue. The budget that we will table on March 16, in two days, will have all of the line items identified in it, both increases, decreases and other kinds of things that people are looking for.

The Chair: That concludes the time for the Official Opposition, the first hour. Oh, I guess we've got six more minutes. Is there anyone else in the Official Opposition who would wish to ask any questions? No? Okay.

Then we'll move on to the next segment for the third party. Any hon. member from the third party wishing to ask questions? No? All right.

Then we would move on to any other party represented. No questions?

We will move, then, to private members of the government caucus. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Did you want to go back and forth?

Connolly: I would prefer to go back and forth, but it's up to the ministers. I'll mostly be talking to the Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Health if that's all right with you both, to go back and forth? Perfect. I assume that the head nod was a yes.

First of all, I'd like to thank you both, the Associate Minister of Health and the Minister of Health, for all the work you've been doing over the past year to make sure that we've constrained our spending in health care while maintaining front-line services. It's truly appreciated. I know I have a lot of nurses and doctors in my riding of Calgary-Hawkwood who truly appreciate that we are trying our best to support the front-line services while at the same time cutting spending where it is possible.

Actually, one of the main things that I've heard from my constituents is about the compensation for physicians. I understand that we need interim supply to fund operations, including the compensation for physicians, until the budget is passed, and I know that both the Associate Minister of Health and the Minister of Health worked tirelessly to talk to the Alberta Medical Association to try to curb doctors' compensation. I would just like to ask the ministers if either minister can give us an update on where we are at with implementation the new amending agreement we have with the Alberta Medical Association.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and to the member for the important question. Actually, this weekend was with the Alberta Medical Association at their spring representative

forum here in Edmonton, and I can tell you that the physician community and the surgeon community of Alberta shares their commitment to make life better for Alberta families and all Albertans.

We've already had some really great outcomes with regard to the amending agreement that are going to help us move to a more sustainable health care system. Obviously, one of the big drivers was to make sure that we were able to get the cost escalators that were about 10 per cent per year to a more reasonable rate of increase.

Another one of the drivers was to make sure that we had new models of compensation so that patients who regularly would say that they spent more time in the waiting room than they did talking to their physician about their complex cases, that that wouldn't be the case. It isn't the case today in all clinics, but it certainly is not as much of an exception as we would like it to be, Madam Chair. We want patients to spend more time with the right providers, not on the highway travelling to and from long waits.

The amending agreement in terms of the savings has already enabled us to save about \$100 million last year, and that's because the doctors did come to the table and worked with us on a schedule of medical benefits, which are the kinds of codes that are used when billing happens. This is certainly a very good first step. We anticipate up to about \$400 million in this next fiscal year through increased efforts in that regard.

There have already been two rounds of amendments to the schedule of medical benefits. Some were implemented in January – that's why we have about \$100 million in savings from the current fiscal year – and more are coming forward April 1. Again, that was done in partnership – actually, a lot of the recommendations that came to the table: you'd think that as this is about cost savings, they would only be from the employer side of the table, but a lot of the cost-saving initiatives that were proposed around the schedule for medical benefits came from the membership themselves.

I have to say that this is something that I think is a win-win. You don't have to look very far either in our past or across Canada to see what happens when the relationship isn't grounded on respect, on collaboration, and wanting to make sure that both sides are working for the betterment of all patients.

Another key area of focus in this agreement is the different types of specialties we're going to require. This is something critical to ensuring that patients have the right care in the right place at the right time. We have a real opportunity to get this right here in Alberta by looking at how we ensure that our students in our major medical schools here have opportunities to specialize in the areas where they are most needed, whether that be a type of practice or whether it be in excitement for preparing to go to one of the communities, for example, in the rural north. Madam Chair, I know that your constituents want to make sure that they have access to both physicians and other health care providers in their communities, and they absolutely deserve that.

The AMA deserves a seat at the table when we're doing that work to make sure that we develop the right plan. To the medical students and to the residents of the province of Alberta: we value their expertise and their skills, and there are many places for them to ensure that they can continue to work in the province of Alberta in those areas of specialization and in those communities that require their expertise.

Certainly, this is very good news, Madam Chair, and I am proud of the fact that I've been invited to every representative forum since becoming minister, and I have taken up that opportunity. I think this was the fourth one, I believe, this last weekend, and I really enjoyed the fact that we had the opportunity for me to deliver remarks, for many of the representatives to ask questions, and then for a lengthy

lunch with the students and the residents that extended beyond my time even, in that the CEO of Alberta Health Services and my deputy minister were both in attendance and both spent additional time with those students and residents.

They have excellent ideas. As future resources, as physicians wanting to make sure that they serve the province, that they themselves are in areas where their skills are going to be used to their fullest, they are very excited to be partners with us in addressing how we move forward. I believe some of the residents will be in the Chamber next week, and we'll have an opportunity to hear about some of their additional areas of focus as we move forward.

Certainly, it's been a very good partnership with the Alberta Medical Association. We've made significant amendments that resulted in up to half a billion dollars in savings over just two years, Madam Chair, as well as improving access and quality of care.

4:10

I really have to say that this is a win-win-win-win for the budget of Alberta, a win for the physicians and for their demonstration as being strong stewards of the system, and a win for patients and members of the Alberta public. I'm really proud of the work we've made there, and I'm happy to highlight some of it this afternoon in the Chamber.

Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate the answer. Thank you very much, Chair.

Just very quickly, you were mentioning that last week you were in Calgary talking about the health transfer deal the government has made with Ottawa. Just quickly, can you tell us what this means for our budget and if it has affected the total that you're asking for in the interim supply?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. Our discussions with the federal government have been lengthy, and at all times at the table our number one goal was to make sure that we got the best possible deal for Alberta families. We certainly believe, after lengthy conversations, that that is the result. We did not leave one dollar on the table that could have come to this province, so I'm proud of that.

We've done that in partnership with the federal government, and as a result we're going to see \$703 million in federal funding directed specifically to home care. We will also see \$580 million in additional support for mental health initiatives. These are two core pillars of what we promised Albertans we would do, and it's great to be able to dedicate additional funds in these specific areas.

We also preserved the per capita funding arrangement with the federal health transfers. This was a fundamental piece of what we sat down at the table hoping to achieve. We know that some jurisdictions have lobbied for a change in formula that would have seen our portion of the federal transfers go down even if the amount went up if they changed the way that that funding was distributed. So I'm very proud of the federal government and of the province of Alberta that we were able to maintain that arrangement. This funding will figure into the 2017-18 budget, and we are very happy to discuss that in greater detail beginning on Thursday.

Thank you for the question, and I look forward to helping these increased dollars be put to immediate use right here in the province.

Connolly: Thank you once again, Minister. You actually touched a little bit on mental health and mental health funding. I know that for myself, I've gone through quite a lot in regard to mental health. Luckily for me, I'm in a position where I have the resources to

access mental health funding and mental health resources that already exist. However, the great many Albertans and myself before I was elected weren't able to access these programs. For a short time, while I was under my parent's program, I was able to access it because, luckily, as she was a teacher, she was able to access that funding. For myself, however, in university, it was very difficult for myself as well as my peers in university to access mental health funding.

When it comes to these kinds of conversations, it can be easy to forget that the number one factor behind them is Alberta families and the patients who need care. Can you, really, give us an example of a specific service that comes to mind that interim supply will support, and how much of that is going to help with mental health funding?

Ms Payne: Yes. Thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, we know that access to mental health and mental health supports is a challenging issue here in our province, and our government has been diligently at work around the implementation of the recommendations from the evaluating mental health report. We will have more details to get into about that as we move through the budget process and in the coming days.

But just to, you know, comment on one important piece that I know is of real importance and of interest to this House, and that is the continued funding for addressing the opioid crisis. As the member is likely aware, as part of the negotiations around the Canada health transfer, we were also able to secure an additional \$6 million from the federal government in new funding to address the ongoing opioid crisis, which will be bundled with the existing dollars within the interim supply around continuing to move forward with our opioid action plan to address the ongoing opioid crisis in areas such as harm reduction, access to treatment, working with partners in Justice around enforcement as well as increasing and expanding education and awareness campaigns at various levels, not just generally in the public but also specifically with partners in Education and the school system.

With respect to mental health supports we know that the supports that families are able to access in different parts of the province can really vary. Without giving away too much of what we're going to be talking about more later on this week, just to flag that our government is continuing to invest in mental health supports and in ensuring that we have a co-ordinated and comprehensive system.

As we've been doing our work, we've heard from so many families and so many Albertans about the challenges that they've had in terms of accessing the system, navigating through it, and being able to find the right supports in their community. We've also heard so much about the differences in levels of support that are available for an Albertan from one of our large urban centres versus some of our smaller communities. Certainly, we are working very carefully to ensure that we are able to get as close to equitable access as we can because we know that issues like mental health and issues like substance use don't discriminate based on geography. They're issues that are felt all the way across our province.

Connolly: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: About six minutes.

Connolly: I'd like to cede my time. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any other private government member who wishes to speak? No further questions?

Then under the rotation it will now take us back to the beginning. If there are any further members of the Official Opposition who had any questions?

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, I just have one question, actually, for the Minister of Transportation. I had asked 19 questions, and of those 19 questions, I think that you probably answered a quarter of those questions. Now, I appreciate that you do have the opportunity of being able to state how you're going to be able to answer those questions, but you made a comment in your answer that you would be willing to get the answers to my questions in writing. I would like to know, Minister: would you be willing to get those answers to the questions prior to us voting on this interim supply? That's the question I have.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for the question, hon. member. That, unfortunately, is going to be difficult as the hon. member, Madam Chair, asked a number of detailed questions that require some looking up on the part of officials in the department in order to provide him with a clear and accurate answer. That's the problem in a supply situation like this when you fire off a bunch of very detailed questions like: what's the value of all the outstanding – what is the word? – tenders, you know, how many are there, and what are they worth? I'm sorry. I hate to disappoint you, hon. member. I don't carry that stuff around in my brain. But the department will get that information, and we will get back to the hon. member.

We need to keep in mind that this is a slice of last year's budget and all of the questions relating to the interim supply are questions that would have been asked about the budget that is just coming to an end. This is just a continuation of that for a brief period of time until the Assembly is able to go through the process of evaluating the new budget. We go through Committee of Supply, and we do the estimates on a department-by-department basis, and then we vote on the new budget. So in the meantime we're just carrying on for a brief period of time with the old budget.

4:20

There's no significant variation in the Transportation department in the interim supply from this budget year that's just coming to an end. It's the same budget, just extended a little bit till we can get the new budget passed. There are no surprises there, hon. member. A lot of your questions I think are very valid and interesting and I would love to answer them, but they have to do with next year's budget. They have to do with, you know: is there money in different capital projects? Well, that's a question that can't be answered until the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board tables his budget on Thursday, and then I would be happy to answer the questions, now that I know what . . .

The Chair: The time for that segment has ended, hon. minister.

Going to the third party, this is your last chance.

Any further government members, private members who wish to ask questions?

All right. If there are no more members who wish to speak, I will put the following questions.

Vote on Interim Supply Estimates 2017-18 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly

\$20,597,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Auditor General \$4,100,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Ombudsman \$555,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer \$1,264,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Ethics Commissioner \$161,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner \$1,146,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate \$2,207,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Public Interest Commissioner \$214,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Advanced Education
Expense \$618,564,000
Capital Investment \$244,440,000
Financial Transactions \$66,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Agriculture and Forestry
Expense \$314,300,000
Capital Investment \$2,600,000
Financial Transactions \$223,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Children's Services
Expense \$241,000,000
Capital Investment \$770,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:
Community and Social Services
Expense \$665,000,000
Capital Investment \$1,812,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Culture and Tourism
Expense \$87,004,000
Capital Investment \$340,000
Financial Transactions \$836,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Economic Development and Trade
Expense \$59,042,000
Capital Investment \$390,000
Financial Transactions \$8,335,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Education
Expense \$721,500,000
Capital Investment \$302,600,000
Financial Transactions \$3,200,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Energy

Expense \$34,909,000

Capital Investment \$902,000

Financial Transactions \$10,867,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Environment and Parks

Expense \$189,283,000

Capital Investment \$53,345,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Executive Council

Expense \$5,400,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Health

Expense \$3,684,014,000

Capital Investment \$8,490,000

Financial Transactions \$7,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:

Indigenous Relations

Expense \$32,000,000

Capital Investment \$4,000

Financial Transactions \$4,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Infrastructure

Expense \$118,000,000

Capital Investment \$77,000,000

Financial Transactions \$4,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Justice and Solicitor General

Expense \$253,689,000

Capital Investment \$742,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Labour

Expense \$32,662,000

Capital Investment 144,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Municipal Affairs

Expense \$272,599,000

Capital Investment \$1,409,000

Financial Transactions \$23,093,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Seniors and Housing

Expense \$70,230,000

Financial Transactions \$2,200,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

4:30

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Service Alberta

Expense \$55,532,000

Capital Investment \$21,900,000

Financial Transactions \$1,690,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Status of Women

Expense \$1,222,000

Capital Investment \$8,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Transportation	
Expense	\$301,131,000
Capital Investment	\$218,640,000
Financial Transactions	\$16,291,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Treasury Board and Finance	
Expense	\$27,509,000
Capital Investment	\$555,000
Financial Transactions	\$1,031,000
Transfer from the Lottery Fund	\$240,924,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Committee of Supply shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolution relating to the 2017-18 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund for the fiscal period from April 1, 2017, to May 31, 2017, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, \$20,597,000; office of the Auditor General, \$4,100,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$555,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$1,264,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$161,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$1,146,000; office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$2,207,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$214,000.

Advanced Education: expense, \$618,564,000; capital investment, \$244,440,000; financial transactions, \$66,000,000.

Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$314,300,000; capital investment, \$2,600,000; financial transactions, \$223,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$241,000,000; capital investment, \$770,000.

Community and Social Services: expense, \$665,000,000; capital investment, \$1,812,000.

Culture and Tourism: expense, \$87,004,000; capital investment, \$340,000; financial transactions, \$836,000.

Economic Development and Trade: expense, \$59,042,000; capital investment, \$390,000; financial transactions, \$8,335,000.

Education: expense, \$721,500,000; capital investment, \$302,600,000; financial transactions, \$3,200,000.

Energy: expense, \$34,909,000; capital investment, \$902,000; financial transactions, \$10,867,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$189,283,000; capital investment, \$53,345,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$5,400,000.

Health: expense, \$3,684,014,000; capital investment, \$8,490,000; financial transactions, \$7,000,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$32,000,000; capital investment, \$4,000; financial transactions, \$4,000,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$118,000,000; capital investment, \$77,000,000; financial transactions, \$4,000,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$253,689,000; capital investment, \$742,000.

Labour: expense, \$32,662,000; capital investment, \$144,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$272,599,000; capital investment, \$1,409,000; financial transactions, \$23,093,000.

Seniors and Housing: expense, \$70,230,000; financial transactions, \$2,200,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$55,532,000; capital investment, \$21,900,000; financial transactions, \$1,690,000.

Status of Women: expense, \$1,222,000; capital investment, \$8,000.

Transportation: expense, \$301,131,000; capital investment, \$218,640,000; financial transactions, \$16,291,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$27,509,000; capital investment, \$555,000; financial transactions, \$1,031,000; transfers from the lottery fund, \$240,924,000.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

I would like to alert hon. members that Standing Order 61(3) provides that upon the Assembly concurring in the report by the Committee of Supply, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

(reversion)

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

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 14: Ms Hoffman]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to this item?

Mr. Nixon: What are we on?

The Deputy Speaker: We're at the Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I could not hear you, but I thank you for clarifying that for me.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies. You've already spoken.

Mr. Nixon: I've never spoken to the throne speech. Not to this one.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. My notes must be in error. Go ahead.

4:40

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thought for a minute I might have missed the whole speech. On my life, I don't know how one could miss my speeches because they're just so spectacular. I know that my side of the House, I hope, agrees with me.

I rise today, of course, to respond to Her Honour's throne speech. You know, it was interesting for me. I, like many members of the Assembly, had some guests that came to watch the throne speech being read. Of course, for them, it was their first experience watching a throne speech, and they were quite interested in the process and the history of it. But as they began to listen to the speech, they expressed to me, they were quite shocked with many things that were in the speech, both some things that seemed quite contradictory to the government's actions as well as some positions that the government was taking in the throne speech that seemed out of touch with the majority of Albertans.

Now, to be quite honest, Madam Speaker, I don't think that one could address all of the concerns that I have as a result of the throne speech, that I've seen in the throne speech, but I will attempt with the short time that I have to try to talk about a couple, particularly areas that I think are impacting my constituents the most. One of the areas I would like to start to talk about is where the comments in the throne speech talk about protecting natural areas, protecting natural recreation activities like hunting and fishing, that Albertans enjoy. I certainly do agree that we have some of the nicest natural areas in the world right here in Alberta. I know that in my constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre we have a tremendous amount of what we affectionately call the west country, but that's really the eastern slopes of Alberta. Of course, west of Rocky Mountain House and west of Sundre are some of the most beautiful places, without a doubt, in the world.

My community has enjoyed recreation activities inside our backyard for many generations. In fact, our neighbours from the large urban areas come to our backyard to enjoy their recreation time on the weekends. The area outside of Rocky Mountain House, which is a town of about 7,000 people, and the county that surrounds it, with about 12,000 people, can go up to well over 100,000 people on the May long weekend, just for those three days. It's a beautiful place, and they enjoy it. So I don't take issue with the government saying that they want to protect that. I want to make sure that my children can enjoy the recreation activities that I've enjoyed in the west country and their children can enjoy those activities as well, but the action that this government has taken recently in regard to protecting recreation areas is directly in contradiction to what they are saying in the throne speech.

They say that they want to protect the ability of people to recreate in those areas and to make sure that they're preserved for a long time to come, but the reality is that what we've seen in the Castle is just the opposite. In fact, that's what the people down in the Castle were told during that process, that they would still be able to utilize the recreation trails that they have built. They put millions of dollars of their money or their club's money into the infrastructure. They were told that they would still be allowed to hunt and fish in those areas. Now we're hearing that cattle will probably be removed from those areas. Cattle, of course, have been grazed in those areas for over a hundred years in this province. That's directly the opposite of what groups were told at the beginning of the consultation process. That's not protecting the historic use of those areas.

Now, I want to preserve our west country. The west country is something very important to me. As you know, Madam Speaker, I lived in the forest reserve for seven years, running a lodge right on the Red Deer River, an hour from pavement. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I loved raising my young family in that area. It's important that we preserve it, but I want to preserve those areas and utilize them. I believe that we can preserve those areas and still be able to recreate in them.

I'll give you an example, Madam Speaker, which I think proves my point. The Ya Ha Tinda Ranch, which is on the Alberta side of the line of the national park, a place that I hold near and dear to my soul, one of my favourite places on Earth, was shut to the public back in the 1980s or the late '70s. There were some situations going on similar to what we've seen in the Castle or the west country around Sundre or Rocky Mountain House, where off-highway vehicles and trucks were being used in inappropriate ways. Camping was not working appropriately. There was a mess. Things were wrong. So they shut it, similar to what this government has just done with the Castle, just shut it to all the people that have used it since the beginning of Alberta, and it sat there. You know what? Nothing actually improved on the ranch during that time.

Then a decision was made about 23 years ago this year, I believe, to form an organization called the eastern slopes foundation, which was made up of volunteers who quad, are active in horseback riding, and who like to camp in the area. They took over all of the recreation side of the ranch in partnership with the national park. It is Alberta land because it's not in the park, but it's actually owned by the national park. It butts right up to it. It's where they train all the national park horses. It's where the Brewster brothers founded their ranch. Of course, most of us would be familiar with Brewster buses and Brewster tours inside Banff. That's where that whole history started, at that ranch.

Now, if you go there now, you will see some of the cleanest campgrounds, well-maintained trails, a very active place where people from all over Alberta, not just in my constituency, get to come and enjoy the weekend, ride their horses in some portions, drive their quads in some portions. So by utilizing the stakeholders, partnering with them, we were able to create something that was great, preserve a beautiful place for many generations to come and still be able to utilize it.

The problem now with what's going on in the Castle is that not only have they kicked all the people out of the area that they get to enjoy; they've now completely lost the trust of the people that are involved in there. So if we want to go to other areas of the province and we want to encourage those groups to build ATV trails, to maintain horse trails, to do those types of things, why would you? If you've put a million and a half to 2 million dollars' worth of infrastructure already into a place like the Castle just to have, you know, your deal basically broken – and there are letters from the minister saying that they would still be able to participate in there, from this minister, not from the minister of the last government, and

they already reversed that – why would clubs or people participate in that? That's just one of the things in the throne speech that I find in contradiction of what they're saying.

I'll give you another one. Two weekends ago, when I was back in my constituency, I was at a bull sale in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, in Ponoka county. I like going to bull sales. I don't know how many members on the other side of the House have had the opportunity to go to bull sales, but they're great. They're a lot of fun. They're a really good time for the community to get together, not only, of course, to buy bulls for their ranches but to be able to interact.

Every person that I spoke to at that bull sale wanted to talk about light bulbs. Now, I've got to say that it's the first time that I've ever been to a bull sale where people wanted to talk about light bulbs. They wanted to talk about the government's program for light bulbs, how they're spending the money that they're taking from the citizens of Alberta through the carbon tax and putting it into light bulbs. Most people, Madam Speaker, thought it was a joke. They actually, literally thought it was a joke. They thought that it was just something that somebody had put up on Facebook, like an urban legend. Nobody could believe that this government wanted to take the money out of hard-working Albertans' pockets and then spend it on an Ontario company going around Alberta and installing light bulbs. Nobody could believe that. They literally thought it was a joke. I had to convince them: "No, it isn't a joke. It's actually true. This is what the government is doing." Again, totally out of touch with the people of Alberta.

Another area in the throne speech talks about getting spending in control. In fact, I think what it says is: "Through [different] action and targeted reductions we are bringing the rate of spending growth down thoughtfully and prudently." Madam Speaker, we are seeing the largest deficits in the history of this province. We are seeing unprecedented debt, that is being borrowed against my children's future and the members opposite's children's future. My grandchildren's future and the members opposite's grandchildren's future. There is not one piece of evidence in the throne speech of any action that this government has done to date or has shown they will do in the future that shows that they are interested in getting our spending under control. Not one action. The complete opposite of what that throne speech is saying.

Now, if we were really going to do what the throne speech is saying, I would be all for it. I find appalling how much money we are borrowing against our children's future. I find appalling the consequences that we will see for Albertans as a result of the decisions of this government. I just don't think that that is realistic, what has been written in the throne speech, compared to what the hon. members' and the government's actions are.

Another one is, to me, actually, I think probably the most shocking. In the beginning of the throne speech it says:

We are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values: compassion, hard work, and justice. In an uncertain world these values are more important than ever, our North Star to guide us through our deliberations as we seek to build a better province for every Albertan, no matter their background, birthplace, or creed. We are one province, one people on a common journey towards a common future.

Those are great words, Madam Speaker.

When you take those in comparison to the government's words in other ways . . .

An Hon. Member: Actions.

Mr. Nixon: And actions.

But their words are what I want to talk about briefly. The government's words do not show this at all. They do not show this at all. While it is a great goal to go to, they do not show it at all.

We have, as you know, a Premier who has called Albertans embarrassing cousins. When you compare that to these sentences, I've got to tell you that the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre or the people that I talk to across Alberta do not see those words when being called embarrassing cousins.

Mr. Yao: Or sewer rats.

4:50

Mr. Nixon: We'll get there in a minute, for sure.

There is no way that calling Albertans embarrassing cousins lives up to what has been written in this throne speech.

Albertans across the province, over three-quarters of them, roughly, are fundamentally against the government's carbon tax. They're fundamentally against it. That's a big part of what's in the throne speech, the program that will come from that or the money that they want to spend on that. They're very much against that, and as they speak about it, they are called angry, or – here's the best – the Premier tells them to make better choices or to drive and take the bus.

Well, I know the Minister of Transportation will acknowledge that there is no bus or C-Train in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. People need to drive. The option of taking a Smart car does not even work on our roads. In fact, the hon. Minister of Transportation would not be able to get down the driveway to my home inside a Smart car. It just would not be able to do the climb, particularly if there was snow.

I can tell you that people in Sundre or Rocky Mountain House or Rimbey are still very deeply insulted by those comments from the Premier. They do not reflect what is in this throne speech. It shows a fundamental lack of understanding of a huge portion of our province and the way of life there and the realities of the situation that takes place inside our communities to tell them to just take the bus, a bus that does not exist. It's insulting, and it does not fit within it.

Now, I know we have lots to do, so I will bring this to a close shortly, but I will close with one other example that does not fit with the vision or the language in this throne speech: sewer rats, as the hon. member pointed out. To call constituents, to call Albertans, to call anybody sewer rats – and whatever version of that or whoever is being referred to as sewer rats, I'll let the government explain who those people are – is absolutely insulting to the people of Alberta. It is particularly insulting to my constituents. Now, I do understand that it was referred to people that I associate with. Well, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the people I associate with are my constituents, my family, my neighbours, my friends, my community. Those are ranchers, farmers, small-business owners, nurses, doctors, teachers, rig workers, SRD workers, forestry workers, fish and wildlife officers. Those are the people that I associate with, and they are not sewer rats. That does not live up to what is in this throne speech.

I think it's fair for Albertans to expect better from this government going forward. I challenge them to try to live up to what is in this throne speech because I think they're good words on where to go, but to continue to call our constituents embarrassing cousins, to continue to call the people that I represent sewer rats is appalling and does not fit with what is in this throne speech.

With that said, I will adjourn debate, Madam Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 1

An Act to Reduce School Fees

[Debate adjourned March 14: Mr. Malkinson speaking]

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise here once again and continue to speak on the importance of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. You know, the opposition talks lots. They tend to heckle, and one of their favourite terms is to say: Albertans are watching. Yes, indeed, Madam Speaker, they are. When I go out and door-knock in Calgary-Currie, I hear over and over again about the importance of quality education and the fact that having to pay those school fees can be a burden even on families that you perhaps would think would not traditionally be burdened by school fees. I hear that over and over again. That's why I'm so glad our government brought this forward. Because of school fees, parents are worried, and we are helping to alleviate that.

Now, from the opposition throughout the debate today and yesterday we have heard many heckles, many points of order, and, of course, many tweets on this matter. The Wildrose record is clear. It seems to be that no matter what we're debating in this House, whether it's important things like reducing school fees, the only answer is: cut, cut, cut. Unless it's not. We heard just today about ripping up contracts, which is something the opposition has mentioned previously, when it comes to our public service. We have heard them disparage our oil and gas companies, that the same families they claim to support rely on, that the families in Calgary-Currie rely on. Disparage them.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Malkinson: I hear some heckling of "shame," and I agree there, Madam Speaker.

I find it a little disingenuous. You can't be pro jobs if you're pro cuts to education and teachers. You know, I have heard that the Wildrose opposition wants no school fees. That's great, and we are moving there, Madam Speaker. But you can't say, "You have no school fees," when there are no schools, no teachers. It seems to me that if you were going out to the doorstep and you were saying to Albertans: we're going to have no school fees; we're going to have lower taxes; we are going to have nothing but, in fact, larger classes with fewer teachers – and for the opposition, which I've heard say that over and over again, to say that somehow that won't be the case, I would say that if they're telling Albertans that at the door, which they are because they say it in this House, that perhaps that is an extremely enthusiastic interpretation of the truth. Shame indeed.

In our platform we said that we were going to reduce school fees, and we are there. I've gone to doors in Calgary-Currie over and over again on issues like this, issues that matter to Albertans, and every time I go out, I'm so proud because when I talk to them, I have a new box that I can tick off on our platform of what we are doing to help Albertans. I mean, I realize that it might be strange for the former party to, you know, have politicians going to a doorstep and saying: yup, this is what we promised during the election, and we're getting there each step of the way, slowly, methodically working through our platform, that I proudly ran on in Calgary-Currie. [interjections] Indeed.

Now, of course, as I mentioned earlier, you know, many heckles, many tweets. I'm hearing heckles from the other side on our carbon levy. That's the same carbon levy that got us two pipelines in this

province, two pipelines that are getting our product to market, that are employing Albertans all throughout Alberta and in particular in Calgary-Currie, which is in the shadows of all the office towers in downtown Calgary, where there are professionals who are working in all corners of the oil and gas industry.

Even as I tour Calgary-Currie on a regular basis, I also tour my old workplace, where, again, there are many hard-working Albertans who are right on the shop floor working on heavy equipment, working on engines. I hear from them that the tide is turning. There is more work. More new units are going out the door, Madam Speaker. There are more repairs happening. Companies are spending again. There are green shoots in the economy. We've got to take care of Albertans.

Another thing I heard earlier in the debate was that when it comes to priorities for the Wildrose, one of their solutions in this mismatch between what they say that they can magically do while somehow lowering taxes is that it's just a matter of how the money is spent. Now, I wonder how they reconcile that when in debate today we heard that the amount of money that they want to cut is more than the total budget of our education system. So I wonder how they reconcile that. I go back to what I said earlier. To say that they're just going to cut all that . . .

Mrs. Littlewood: That's \$2 billion out of operations.

Mr. Malkinson: Two billion dollars out of operations.

. . . to say that they're going to do that and that somehow that will make Albertans better and that somehow that will put teachers in the classroom: well, again I would say that that is perhaps an extremely enthusiastic interpretation of the truth.

5:00

Now, of course, we hear – I say it again – many heckles, many tweets, and again I'm hearing: well, what about the debt? Well, it's a downturn. We had great advice from David Dodge, a former governor of the Bank of Canada. He said that this is exactly the thing you are supposed to do in a downturn: put Albertans to work, act as a shock absorber, make sure that Albertan families are taken care of. We will continue to do that.

They say: cut back. Again, it's cut, cut, cut. When they're going to families and saying, "When we cut back, somehow it's going to make life better for you," what they're saying to that person at the doorstep is: "We're going to make life better for you by cutting services and laying off your neighbours just because you're concerned your other neighbour was laid off." How does that help? It doesn't make sense.

That is why, Madam Speaker, I am so proud that Bill 1, where we're reducing school fees, is just one part of our continuing platform and our commitment to Albertans to make life better for Albertans. I want to say that again: to make life better for Albertans, to make it more affordable without having to resort to games and budgets that are as deep as a tweet even if they do happen to exist.

Our children are our future, Madam Speaker. Children should have a level playing field no matter what their economic background is, and that's leadership. That's leadership our government is taking. That is leadership that I will happily tell all of my constituents in Calgary-Currie about because we are making life better for Albertans everywhere.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

I'll recognize the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk about the government's Bill 1. Well, the government is consistent in one way. The last Bill 1 they had was an embarrassment, and this one is, too. The last Bill 1 that they had was to create a ministry that was already created.

Now, Madam Speaker, to be clear, I intend to vote for this bill because it's actually better for us than it is for the government. You know, reducing school fees is a good idea, but only this government, only the gang that couldn't shoot straight ever, would make it Bill 1. They are actually setting in legislation breaking an election promise – and they call it Bill 1 – because, of course, they promised to eliminate school fees, and this says that they're only going to do a quarter of eliminating school fees. They are calling that Bill 1.

They are actually setting in legislation breaking an election promise, so no one can miss it. I want to congratulate the government for being so up front with Albertans about how much they're going to disappoint them, leaving no room for doubt or misinterpretation in Albertans' minds that this government has broken this promise. They are so proud of breaking the promise that they've called it Bill 1. Wow. Nice work by this government, Madam Speaker, I have to tell you. I'm sure they're quite proud of that little piece of handiwork.

You know what, Madam Speaker? It gets better. When you look at this whole thing, if you read the bill, Alberta parents aren't fooled. They know that there are still risks here. They know that the schools that have collected those fees are going to have to collect that money from somewhere else, and the government has not yet made it clear that they are going straight to those schools and those school boards and replacing that money. And they may. We may find that out in the budget on Thursday, but they haven't made that clear yet.

You know what? The parents of Alberta are smarter than this government is because they know that if there are millions of dollars taken out of their schools and it's not replaced, then something is going to have to give. There are going to have to be fewer teachers, fewer field trips, fewer music lessons. Something is going to have to give. They're not fooled by that. Further, the other thing that I think they're going to be concerned about is the fact that if there are no transportation fees, how do they know that the fees in another area aren't going to go up to compensate for that?

You know what? Parents are smart enough to ask these questions – they've certainly asked me these questions – and the government hasn't answered them for Albertans. This government hasn't answered them for Albertans. So what you have here is the potential – you know, you can't blame the schools. I mean, bless their hearts, they're putting up with this government, too, like the rest of us. They get this thing announced to them, and they find out that this is happening, and they say: well, how are we going to replace that money that we've collected from parents for transportation and other things? If they're going to be short that money, I don't know what the school is going to do to pay their transportation bill, whether it's going to have to come, again, from textbooks or the classroom. The government hasn't answered these important questions. All they've really done is set in legislation that they're breaking a campaign promise, and they've seen fit to call that Bill 1.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to vote for it because reducing school fees is a good idea, but somebody ought to have a plan to go with it, a lot more detailed and a lot better than this government has been able to muster. As a result of that, I will be proud to tell everybody in Calgary-Hays about Bill 1 and how this government was so determined to break a campaign promise that they made a piece of legislation out of breaking that promise. I'm sure that Albertans will notice that. You know what? It's in a long line, unfortunately, of

bad decisions by the government, and it's one that Albertans have come to expect. It's certainly not a surprise to me that they have botched this job amongst so many other ones.

With that, I will sit down declaring my support for the bill where the government sets in legislation their breaking of a campaign promise.

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

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to Bill 1? [interjections] Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I apologize. Between myself and my colleague for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville we have a great deal of enthusiasm for this bill.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees in Alberta, another example of concrete action that our government is taking to make life more affordable, to make life better for Alberta families.

Now, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat the other day had a few comments regarding our failure with this bill, and certainly the Member for Calgary-Hays just had some comments along those lines as well. Certainly, we did make a bigger commitment in our platform that we had in the last election than we are currently putting forward with this bill. You know, my colleague the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park I think offered some very trenchant comments explaining many of the thoughts along these lines, but it appears that there's been a lack of understanding, so perhaps we need to review some of those concerns and questions again.

Now, in the past, you know, when we've had governments that have come in and have made the kinds of cuts that are being proposed again by members across the aisle, those cuts have not been implemented with thought or with care. Those cuts have generally been implemented recklessly, I think without much responsibility taken by those who were implementing those cuts. Indeed, Madam Speaker, they seem to have some understanding of the principle that the buck stops here, but certainly while the buck stopped there, no responsibility for the effects of cutting that buck seemed to rest with the people that were making those cuts. Instead, the theory seemed to be that you make the cut, and then you simply leave it to everybody else to figure out how they are going to deal with that.

5:10

That's left, then, to trickle down. Of course, we know that many of those across the aisle are big fans of trickle-down economics. They seem to be big fans of the trickle-down cut, where the cut is implemented without thought, without consideration, without taking the time to look at the impacts that it would have, and indeed without trying to ensure that when that cut was made, it did not impact the front-line services.

Now, I appreciate that the document that was put forward by some of the members of the third party today is offering a no-front-line-impact guarantee, so it seems that perhaps they've learned and may be looking to do better than they did in the past with some of these cuts. Of course, there are some other issues with that document, but that's not the topic of discussion here today. The real thing, Madam Speaker, is that the reason that we are not proceeding with a full repeal of school fees right now, why we took two years to look at and determine the best direction forward with this, is because our Minister of Education took a great deal of care and time to study the potential impacts these moves could make.

Now, I recognize that members across the aisle seem very concerned. I know the Member for Calgary-Hays just expounded at length about his concerns about the impacts this could have on

schools and where they're going to find the money, and again it's good to hear that this is a lesson that he's finally learned. It's good to know that this is something now that they think about and care about.

Our Minister of Education, of course, understood the necessity of doing just that. He undertook a careful study of all school fees in the province of Alberta, recognizing that different boards are charging different fees for different purposes. It's not a simple system. It's a complex system that, frankly, grew up over time, much like a thick forest of weeds, due to neglect of previous governments. Again, they implemented cuts that were not thought through, that were not carefully planned, that did not take into consideration the needs of individual school boards but, instead, simply downloaded the responsibility for that thought and care to the individual school boards and told them: deal with it.

As a result, we had basically this forest of school fees which sort of sprung up on that untended ground, leaving us with this complex system of different fees for different purposes all over the province, largely because previous governments consistently failed to properly fund the education system. The Minister of Education undertook to weave through those labyrinthine paths to determine what fees were happening where, to consolidate that data. We heard yesterday, apparently, that the members are very supportive of collecting proper data to understand problems, so I'm very happy that the minister undertook the time to do so, and I hope that they appreciate that. The minister took that information. He considered carefully what needed to be done, how we could best move forward in addressing these fees, and based on that careful consideration, he is moving forward with our first step towards fulfilling that campaign promise.

Now, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat observed that his caucus and his party would completely, one hundred per cent, eliminate all school fees. That would be wonderful to see. It would also be wonderful to see how they would actually plan to do so. Being as they intend to cut billions of dollars out of the Alberta budget and being as they intend to cut public services, one has to wonder, then, where they're going to find the millions of dollars required to eliminate all school fees. Perhaps they intend, as previous governments, to simply make that cut and let everybody else figure it out. Certainly, they have yet to show any calculations, even on the back of a napkin or an envelope. We look forward perhaps at some point to seeing some actual, concrete examples . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Edmonton-Centre has the floor, please.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I realize that this is something that they may feel a bit concerned about. Being as they don't have any information to put forward, they can instead only heckle. But we'll take it as it comes.

Now, we recognize that it is important that we move forward with this legislation, having done the careful time and study and the minister having worked within his ministry to find the efficiencies and the cost savings to be able to enable this step, again, Madam Speaker, taking care and attention that previous governments often did not take. That minister, having found those savings, now has the funding needed to compensate school authorities.

The Member for Calgary-Hays was very concerned about where the money was going to come from and that his school boards were going to have to cut other fees. No, Madam Speaker, they will not because this minister took the time to carefully study, find the savings, and provide the money that these school boards need so that they can look out for their students, providing proper funding

to support parents rather than asking parents, asking Alberta families to step up and pay more. So the funding needed to compensate those school authorities for this lost fee revenue will come from these efficiencies that were found, and details of that will be tabled in the budget this Thursday. I'm very encouraged that I'm seeing this work on behalf of our minister.

I know that the Minister of Health has been engaging in similar careful study to look at how we can make thoughtful, careful improvements in our health care system rather than rash, reckless cuts, knee-jerk reactions based on political ideology that do not take due care and consideration for the impact this has on Alberta families. I will tell you, Madam Speaker, that the impact of this bill on Alberta families will be to make life more affordable and to make life better. That is something that I find very encouraging because while I do not have children of my own, I do have 13 nieces and nephews ranging in age from about four years old up to about 24. They range across the grades in the school system, range across systems of schooling. I have some nieces and nephews that are home-schooled, others that are in school, in public schools. In fact, my oldest niece just began her first year in her career as a kindergarten teacher in St. Albert.

I have many friends who have children. I also hear regularly from parents in the communities I represent. In my work with the African and Caribbean communities here in Edmonton I've gotten to know many families who have children in our schools, many families who are new to Alberta, who are just getting their start here, who are working at minimum wage jobs as they work to get their certification, jobs which, thankfully, due to the actions of our government will pay more. Still, even with the increases to minimum wage these are families who are struggling as they try to build new lives here in this province. This is a bill that impacts them directly. This puts more money back in their pockets so that they can look after their families, so that they can spend that money in our local communities, helping boost our economy, helping to support the goods and services that we all need, much as our government is committed to supporting the services that all Albertans need. And I will make note that that was a commitment in our platform, and that is another commitment that we are keeping.

To tie it all together, Madam Speaker, I'm very proud that this is our Bill 1. I'm far more embarrassed for the members across the aisle, who can't seem to comprehend the value of this bill, the care and attention that has gone into developing this bill, how important and valued this is by Alberta families. I have not heard one negative comment from any family I've spoken with about the fact that they will no longer have to pay these particular school fees and that our government will continue to find careful savings and efficiencies to further reduce school fees in the future. That is our commitment, and we will stand by that.

I am proud to serve with a government that looks out for Albertans first, that is not beholden to political ideology, that will not make reckless cuts, that will not try to find efficiencies on the backs of other people in this province but will instead ensure that we have the stable, secure education system we need, one that does not place needless additional burden on parents just so that we can claim that we have such a sterling fiscal record. We're not here to cast illusions, Madam Speaker. We're here to do real work on behalf of the people of Alberta.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

5:20

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing as we had anticipated our discussion of interim supply to take rather longer and we've made some additional progress on top of what we

even anticipated doing, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, March 15, 2017

Day 8

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Bow your heads, and let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us continue to search for purpose in our work and continue to be inspired by the people of our province. Allow us to learn from diverse opinions and seek common ground.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 1

An Act to Reduce School Fees

[Adjourned debate March 14: Mr. Shepherd]

The Speaker: The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. Being Bill 1, this is something that is important to all families in Alberta. It's something that will make life more affordable for Alberta families. Even though it's something that has been a very long time coming in Alberta, I think now is a perfect time to help families that still need help in this economy.

My father would often laugh when people called education free because it was not free for him. Even though he was someone that didn't make a lot of money, he still had to find those few dollars that he could pull together at the beginning of the year to pay for things like textbook fees, to pay for things like pens and paper and binders. I know that it was something that was almost like Christmas in September every year because it was one of the few times of the year when we got something new.

Of course, there are a lot of details to work out, and the regulations of the bill will be the most important part because it will be through consultation with school boards and with parents to see what those most important things are to school boards and to families to make sure that the government is coming to bear with the resources to actually cut school fees by 25 per cent for families. It would mean for the \$200 million that currently school boards collect, we would be going through that with them to see where it makes the most sense to cut those fees by a quarter with this bill.

The initial focus will be instructional supplies and materials fees because that is where we see a measure of equity. Even though it is free to register your child in public education, there is still a lack of equity when it comes to families bringing their kids to school, when they come into the classroom. When I posted about this bill being introduced, I heard from a number of people that said that they often made excuses to their peers in class because they didn't want to bear the shame of not being able to afford something like a trip in class or not being able to afford to stay at school for lunch hour supervision or that they couldn't afford to pay for a bus pass. These fees being removed will instantly affect 600,000 Alberta students in a positive way.

The important thing that we see is that it's a further commitment to accessible public education for Alberta children and for Alberta

families, Mr. Speaker. I know this is something in my own constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville that is very important, where we have a lot of rural families that have to bus their children in to school. This will give them the ability to take that money that they pay and put it toward something like their kids' future education in postsecondary, or they will just be able to take those fees and do outdoor ed or something like that, which is currently inaccessible to them, something like putting their kids into hockey or putting their kids into golf. There are so many sports that families put their children into that are inaccessible to many.

Also, in a city like Fort Saskatchewan we have a very young population. The average age of a person in Fort Saskatchewan is very young because we had a huge boom in population over the last 10 years of families coming in from all over Canada to get good-paying jobs in the oil and gas sector near the heartland. We have a lot of people that came and had children and made Alberta their home, made Fort Saskatchewan their home.

That's part of the reason why I'm here and why we were elected, because education became a huge election issue for my constituency. Having a young population, we were feeling huge pressures with sizes of classrooms in Fort Saskatchewan, and it's why we needed to have two schools built. It's very rewarding to be able to deliver two schools to the city of Fort Saskatchewan, to have a public elementary and to have a Catholic high school to address those needs, schools that were announced two, three times over a number of governments that never broke ground. So that's part of the reason why I'm here.

Part of the reason is also because there were many school boards that talked to me about how concerned they were that there was going to be a three-year freeze on hiring teachers. So this is another step that shows that this government and I support having accessible education and a good education. Not having those students funded for enrolment for teachers for three years meant that class sizes would have risen 1.5 per cent. The research that has just been released shows that children have a harder head start in learning when their classrooms are larger. We hear from teachers about that all of the time, that they don't have enough support in classrooms today, that the more students they have, the less time they have to spend with each individual.

9:10

Also, part of the concerns that the school boards had was the threat to cut classroom supports by 3.1 per cent, 3.1 per cent of the money that helps support First Nations, Métis, and indigenous children; supports that help children with disabilities; supports that help English language learner students; supports that would help poor families like my own that have a hard time with that first step into education. Not every child has equal entrance into this world, and this is something that will tangibly be able to positively affect future generations. This is something that is not just an urban issue; it's a huge rural issue. In many small municipalities we have a lower average income, so I know that having these school fees reviewed will directly impact each of those families positively.

I know that there has been good support from the school boards in my area. And I understand the people that say that they are concerned about where this money is going to come from because, you know, two years ago they were being told that the reserve funds and surpluses that these school boards had would have to be used to pay for anything that they needed in the future. There was a quote from the then minister that school boards are school boards and not school banks. It showed a level of not really being in touch with the experience of these school boards, the lack of reliable, sustainable funding, always being under the threat of being cut.

Understandably, we still have the emotional and historical effects on these school boards when we talk about things like cutting fees.

I know that the Minister of Education has been very clear that this will be found within our current budget and that there are ways that we can make it work. This is a very important thing to do. We do have a large Education budget, but to have education be accessible for every single child in this province means that we need to take this responsibility on. It is for us as government and as legislators to make sure that we can figure out how to do this, to make sure that every kid has a fair shot in this world.

I'm very happy to be able to represent the Elk Island public board and the Elk Island Catholic board and the Battle River school board in this Legislature and to know that we have amazing partners in education in this province. It's with that that I want to say that I am incredibly supportive of this bill, and I hope that everybody else in this Legislature supports it. I know that the families and the school boards in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville are very, very, very happy to see this go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Government Motions

Member for Calgary-Hays

16. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that in accordance with section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Ethics Commissioner concerning the Member for Calgary-Hays dated January 4, 2017, and that the member be required to apologize to the Assembly and pay a fine of \$500.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not happy about doing this, but . . .

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

The Speaker: Yes. What's your point of order?

Point of Order Sub Judice Rule

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, sir. I raise an issue regarding Standing Order 23(g)(i). Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak briefly about this motion before it goes any further.

This issue is one with which we are all familiar. I believe that the matter being referred to in the motion is sub judice, so any discussion of the motion in this House will be a discussion of a sub judice matter and therefore subject to Standing Order 23(g)(ii). And I'll quote it. The "Member will be called to order by the Speaker . . ."

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sorry. What section were you quoting?

Mr. Rodney: It's 23(g)(ii).

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member

(g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination . . .

And it states:

(ii) of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding,

until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court, where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate.

I also refer everyone in the Chamber and beyond to Standing Order 48.

Motion out of order

48 Whenever the Speaker is of the opinion that a motion offered to the Assembly is contrary to the Standing Orders or privileges of the Assembly, he or she shall apprise the Member or the Assembly, as the case may be, at the earliest opportunity and shall cite the Standing Order or authority applicable to the case.

My short comments, to clarify, and one more citation include the fact that the Member for Calgary-Hays is currently involved in a suit with the Ethics Commissioner, a suit which concerns the very report addressed in this motion, and the principle of sub judice as it applies exists to ensure that an action in court is not unfairly prejudiced by proceedings in this House.

I also quote from O'Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2000.

The [sub judice] convention exists to guarantee everyone a fair trial and to prevent any undue influence prejudicing a judicial decision or a report of a tribunal of inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, this is a cut-and-dried example of a sub judice matter, and as such, the motion should not be discussed here today. Further, I believe that ruling this matter as sub judice is also consistent with your previous rulings on these matters. So I trust you will agree that with not only this reasoning but with these standing orders and these precedents, this matter will not proceed.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the matter is in order. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states very clearly that

The interpretation of this [sub judice] convention is left to the Speaker since no "rule" exists to prevent Parliament from discussing a matter which is sub judice.

That's at page 627.

More critically, it further states:

The practice has evolved so that it is the Speaker who decides what jurisdiction the Chair has over matters sub judice. In 1977, the First Report of the Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members recommended that the imposition of the convention should be done with discretion and, when there was any doubt in the mind of the Chair, a presumption should exist in favour of allowing debate and against the application of the convention. Since the presentation of the report, Speakers have followed these guidelines while using discretion.

Mr. Speaker, our own standing orders, namely Standing Order 23(g), similarly state that when there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be decided in favour of the debate.

Mr. Speaker, you yourself have been guided by the presumption that debate should take place; for example, in allowing questions in question period relating to the PPA issue, stating on October 31, November 1, and November 2 that debate could proceed while cautioning the members to be mindful of the convention. Previous Speakers in this Chamber have been guided by the same principle.

With regard to the more fundamental principle of why debate should take place, it is very clear that establishing and enforcing rules governing the conduct of its members is a matter for the Legislature.

Beauchesne's notes that the most fundamental privilege of the House as a whole is to establish rules and procedures for itself and to enforce them.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice notes on page 61:

The rights and powers of the House as a collectivity may be categorized as follows.

And it goes on to list:

- the exclusive right to regulate its own internal affairs . . .
- the power to discipline, that is, the right to punish persons guilty of breaches of privilege or contempts.

On page 78 it further notes:

The Supreme Court has indicated that the following categories of privilege have been recognized to exist.

And it goes on to list:

- disciplinary authority over Members.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, it's within the purview of the Assembly to set out rules for the conduct of the members. The Assembly has chosen to do so by enacting legislation, namely the Conflicts of Interest Act, as well as by the creation of an independent office of the Assembly, being the Ethics Commissioner. So we believe that it is entirely appropriate to debate the matter.

Just a couple of further points I'd like to make, Mr. Speaker. In section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act it says:

If in the report from the Ethics Commissioner the Ethics Commissioner has found that a Member or former Minister has breached this Act and the Ethics Commissioner has recommended a sanction, the Legislative Assembly shall debate and vote on the report within 15 days after the tabling of the report, or any other period that is determined by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, also, on pages 627 and 628 under sub judice in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* it says:

The sub judice convention is first and foremost a voluntary exercise of restraint on the part of the House to protect an accused person, or other party to a court action or judicial inquiry, from any prejudicial effect of public discussion of the issue. Secondly, the convention also exists, as Speaker Fraser noted, "to maintain a separation and mutual respect between legislative and judicial branches of government."

It is my view, and I think this will be borne out, that the authority of the legislative branch of government over these matters is paramount and that it is not in keeping with the principle of separation of powers for the judiciary to be involved in this. I believe that that is what the outcome is going to be.

It goes on to say that

as Speaker Sauvé explained, the sub judice convention has never stood in the way of the House considering a *prima facie* matter of privilege vital to the public interest or to the effective operation of the House and its Members.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not arguing that this is, in fact, a *prima facie* matter of privilege. I am however drawing a parallel to the exercise of discretion of the chair with respect to matters concerning the conduct of its members.

I'd argue, Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect to the hon. Progressive Conservative House leader, that, in fact, this is well within the jurisdiction of the Assembly and that the principle of sub judice does not apply.

The Speaker: The House leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak on what I'm sure will be some significant debate this morning with respect to Government Motion 16 and, in particular, the point of order raised by the House leader of the third party.

Let me be clear this morning that while I will speak in favour of this point of order, I make no judgment on the actions of the Member for Calgary-Hays. Whether he did or did not, whether the Ethics Commissioner's ruling was correct or was not in many respects is not integral to what will be a lot of comments that I will quite likely make this morning on this particular issue.

I do think, though, that what is important is around this issue of the role of the Assembly in this discussion this morning and, in particular, at present the discussion around this principle of sub judice. One of the things that needs to be established, I believe, Mr. Speaker, is your ability to determine whether or not the debate should continue, as has been clearly laid out by the Government House Leader and the House leader of the third party on this particular point about where there is doubt, the Speaker should rule in favour of the debate.

One of the challenges, I think, that you're going to face this morning is the fact that the territory that we are wading into provides you with little precedent, particularly inside this Chamber. There's little precedent where the Ethics Commissioner has ruled against a member of the Chamber and that, subsequently, a civil case has been proceeded with. So it's going to be very difficult for you, Mr. Speaker, to determine that doubt because one thing that you won't be able to know is whether or not this conversation this morning will prejudice the ruling that is well-established before the courts. You run the risk of wading into territory that hasn't been waded into prior, and you will make a decision this morning that could affect a lot of rulings in the future.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, around this issue of sub judice you yourself on November 1 rose in the Chamber and said these words:

I feel the need to once again remind the House about the [issue of the] sub judice principle. I wish to remind you of Standing Order 23(g), also known as the sub judice rule, which governs statements made in this Assembly about legal proceedings before the courts. Members should not be engaging in debate or asking questions which may [prejudice] a civil proceeding "that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding."

Let me say again that I understand that an application was filed in July of this year by the government of Alberta seeking a declaration with respect to several power purchase agreements. It's extremely challenging for me to make a determination on whether statements made in this Assembly might [prejudice] those proceedings without knowing all of the particulars of the case.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that case remains the same this morning. It is impossible for you to know all the particulars of the case that is before the courts and a member of this Assembly and the Ethics Commissioner.

You went on to say that you must rely on members and ministers who have greater knowledge of the effects to answer.

You also referenced *Beauchesne's* page 153, where it says:

Members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals which are courts of record. The purpose of this sub judice convention is to protect the parties in a case awaiting or undergoing trial and persons who stand to be affected by the outcome of a judicial inquiry.

In this particular case I think we need to take into consideration both of those people, the member of this Chamber and the Ethics Commissioner, who is a well-respected officer of the Assembly, and we need to ensure that both of those individuals are respected.

It is a voluntary restraint imposed by the House upon itself in the interest of justice and fair play.

It goes on on page 153 to say:

The convention applies to motions, references in debates, questions and supplementary questions, but does not apply to bills.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that sub judice should apply to this government motion that has been moved by the Government House Leader.

The Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members recommended that the responsibility of the Speaker during the question period should be minimal as regards the sub judice convention.

Though you on a number of occasions did interrupt question period to remind members of this particular sub judice ruling.

In 509, on page 153 of *Beauchesne's*, it says:

However, the Speaker should remain the final arbiter in the matter but should exercise discretion only in exceptional cases.

Mr. Speaker, I think what is before you is, in fact, an exceptional case because of the fact that the Chamber hasn't had to deal with this, because of the fact that the circumstances are very unique, with a fine being applied. Again, the content of the ruling is not necessarily as important as the process around this ruling, and perhaps we will have some time to debate the content of the ruling as well.

9:30

This is an exceptional circumstance. Clearly, the decision rests with you, but I think it's interesting that even on November 1 the Premier spoke specifically to her concern about sub judice when she said with respect to the detail of debate that was around the PPA agreements at that time:

Having said that, I think that, generally speaking, the matter is getting into a level of detail that is more appropriately reserved for the attention of the courts. This is not the appropriate forum for that detail.

She went on in a subsequent question to say:

Generally speaking, getting into the kinds of details that they're talking about is not appropriate for this forum, and what we are going to do is stand up for consumers.

But what didn't happen was debate on power purchase agreements.

Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you that today is your opportunity to rule in favour of sub judice to prevent the possibility that we would prejudice the Ethics Commissioner or, in this case, the Member for Calgary-Hays. In fact, on October 31 you also referred to this issue of sub judice and issued caution. While I can appreciate that it is clear in the conflict-of-interest legislation that the Assembly has a role to play in this motion, while it's clear that the Assembly has a role to play in the discipline of members, it is also clear that the sub judice rule should apply to a case of this nature, and I encourage you to rule in favour of reserving debate for a time that is much more appropriate.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak. You know, this is a very unique situation that you are in, that this Assembly is in, and I can tell you, from my experience, in my opinion, that we are talking about fundamental rights. We are talking about fundamental rights of freedom of speech, and we are talking about fundamental rights of due process.

An Hon. Member: And democracy.

Mr. Ellis: And democracy. Absolutely.

This matter is before the courts. There is a court date set for January 12, 2018. We are more than happy to table later on in the day, when appropriate, the appropriate documents also verifying that the court date is set for January 12, 2018.

Now, I must say that a few points have come to mind during a couple of the speakers, one, as I mentioned earlier, regarding freedom of speech. I think that if we look at article 9 of the English Bill of Rights, which starts in 1689, it states that "the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament." It is important that this starts, regarding freedom, as far back as the 1600s. This member has a right to represent his constituents. This member has a right to speak on issues. I can tell you that if we go down this road, there are many people that could be presumed, on both sides of this House, to be in conflict on many, many issues.

I would also like to say – sorry, I'm just looking at my notes here – that it would be appropriate to hear this motion only once the right to appeal has been exhausted by the courts. Separation and mutual respect between the judicial and legislative branches of government is overstepped if the matter is debated prior to the appeal being heard, and I think that it is also important to note that the balance of convenience favours adjourning this until after the court has ruled on this very, very important issue.

In conclusion, you know, I certainly thank you for the opportunity to speak. I do not believe that, without hearing what the courts have to say, this Assembly should be, in my opinion, overreaching and essentially possibly convicting somebody or finding a person held responsible without democracy, without due process, and without an actual trial. I think that is wrong.

I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, let me begin by saying that everything that I do and say in this chair underlines to me the importance of my responsibility to this House, and this particularly is a matter where I take additional responsibility and appreciate the importance of that because it's in respect of one of our hon. members. In anticipation that this matter may arise this morning, I did in fact do some research on this matter, in fact in some depth. Allow me to share it with the House.

The matter before the Assembly is consideration of the Ethics Commissioner's report dated January 4, 2017, concerning the Member for Calgary-Hays. The motion reads as follows:

Be it resolved that in accordance with section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Ethics Commissioner concerning the Member for Calgary-Hays dated January 4, 2017, and that the member be required to apologize to the Assembly and pay a fine of \$500.

I would note that the procedure that is in place concerning the handling of these types of reports is set out in section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, which reads as follows:

(3) If in the report from the Ethics Commissioner the Ethics Commissioner has found that a Member or former Minister has breached this Act and the Ethics Commissioner has recommended a sanction, the Legislative Assembly shall debate and vote on the report within 15 days after the tabling of the report, or any other period that is determined by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly.

The objective underlying the sub judice rule is to ensure that the legislative and the judicial branches of government are distinct and separate and that parties to a legal proceeding are not prejudiced by comments made in the Assembly. Whenever there is doubt as to prejudice, it is the role of the Speaker to rule in favour of debate. I note that the procedure for addressing a report from the Ethics Commissioner is set out in statute, but what is important to emphasize is that it strikes at the very core of the internal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and discipline of its members, which are part of the inherent privileges of the Assembly and are matters for determination in the legislative branch, not in a legal proceeding.

9:40

Although I'm reluctant to cite at length from case law authority on this point as this is not a court of law, I would point out that it is well established that one of the categories of privilege is that the Assembly retains its disciplinary authority over its members, and this is a part of the Assembly's corporate privileges, the right to regulate its internal affairs free from interference.

This has been acknowledged by the Supreme Court of Canada on several occasions, most recently in the 2005 decision in Canada's House of Commons versus Vaid, 1 SCR 667, at paragraph 10. This principle is also set out on page 185 of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, where the case of Bradlaugh versus Gossett, 1884, 12 QBD 271, is cited.

The House of Commons has the exclusive power of interpreting the statute, so far as the regulation of its own proceedings within its own walls is concerned; and that, even if that interpretation should be erroneous, the Court has no power to interfere with it directly or indirectly,

pages 280 to 281.

In other words, the power to discipline is necessary to the functioning of the Assembly, and it is part of its inherent privileges. The fact that there is no procedure set out in legislation does not imply that the Assembly has delegated nor has it surrendered these privileges to the jurisdiction of the court.

I would also cite paragraph 510 of *Beauchesne's*, where it is noted that the sub judice principle has never stood in the way of the House considering "a matter vital to the public interest or to the effective operation of the House" and its members.

In conclusion, I find there is no point of order, nor do I find that the sub judice rule should inhibit discussion on the government motion that is before the Assembly. The debate on the matter shall now proceed.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I heard you correctly, you just ruled that the debate will go ahead, and as I will be the subject of the debate, I think it could be argued that I have an interest, so I will, interestingly enough, excuse myself so that I'm not accused of having an interest in this debate.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to indicate for hon. members – well, I guess, first, I appreciate very much the ruling that the legislative branch is independent of and fully equal to the judicial branch and that we do not wait for the judicial branch to rule on whether it has jurisdiction but, rather, clearly assert that the legislative branch has jurisdiction. You've done that, and I think it was a very strong defence of our doctrine of separation of powers, which is fundamental to the parliamentary system under which we operate.

Now, I guess that if it was just my personal choice, I would just have the Ethics Commissioner deal with the issue, but the legislation, as I indicated earlier, requires a motion of the Assembly to concur in the recommendation on the matter. As I indicated, section 28(3) says, "The Legislative Assembly shall debate and vote on the report within 15 days after the tabling of the report, or any other period that is determined by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly." It's therefore required that there be a motion and a debate and a vote with respect to the recommendation of the Ethics Commissioner.

It's fair to say and I think the Official Opposition House Leader has commented that we are breaking new ground in this matter. But I think that we depend very much in this Chamber on the work of our independent officers, from the Auditor General to the Child and Youth Advocate to the Ethics Commissioner, and they play a critical role in regulating our democratic process. I think it's a point that's worth repeating before reviewing the specific facts of the case before us.

In November 2016 a complaint was made to the Ethics Commissioner against the Member for Calgary-Hays. The complaint noted that the member had made statements in the House regarding electrical utilities despite his direct associate, his spouse, being the sole shareholder and director of Brighter Futures Energy Inc., a competitive retailer in the energy market.

The Ethics Commissioner investigated the matter and on January 4, 2017, issued a ruling. The ruling found that the member contravened section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act when he asked a question during question period. The commissioner further states that the member

was trying to influence the Crown to drop both of these policies.

If he succeeded, it would protect his wife's company and if he failed there could be detrimental effect on her business.

The commissioner concludes:

Therefore, as a result of asking the question, in a manner which tried to influence [the] Crown, [the member] was in breach of s. 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act as he sought to influence the Crown's decision to implement (or prevent) certain policies, the unintended result of which, had he succeeded, would further the private interest of his direct associate.

Mr. Speaker, the commissioner concluded that the member contravened the act, and we agree with that ruling.

According to the act the commissioner does not set out penalties herself; rather, she makes recommendations to the Assembly. Her recommendation in this case is as follows:

Given the small size of the interest and the probability [that the member] was more interested in scoring political points than worried about his wife's business, it is my recommendation that an apology to the Legislative Assembly by [the member] and a fine of \$500 is the appropriate penalty for this breach of the Act.

Had there been a more direct interest that was evident in the investigation and a greater interest, Mr. Speaker, it's important to say that the penalty could have been very much more severe.

The Ethics Commissioner is an independent officer who was put in place by this Assembly. Her mandate includes investigating and making rules on behalf of all members under the Conflicts of Interest Act, which is an act of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker. She's investigated this case and found in no uncertain terms that the member was in breach of the act. Therefore, we're supporting the recommendation of the Ethics Commissioner and the penalty that she has recommended, as required by the Conflicts of Interest Act and within the time frame set out by the act.

I think it would be important to deal with this now. Mr. Speaker, I urge members to support the recommendation of the Ethics Commissioner in this matter, put it to rest, and get back to the business for which we were sent here.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to propose an amendment, that has been stamped by Parliamentary Counsel. It's an amendment to the motion. Would you like me to read it now, or would you like it circulated first, sir?

9:50

The Speaker: Please circulate it.

Mr. Rodney: I will take my chair until you ask me to proceed, sir.

If you like, I could read the first part – it takes a few seconds – after which we could read the amended motion as it would read.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. I move that Government Motion 16 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out “concur in” and substituting “receive”; (b) by adding “the Assembly defer its decision on the recommendation” before “that the member be required to apologize”; and (c) by adding “until such time as the Court of Queen’s Bench has given a ruling with respect to the judicial review filed by the Member for Calgary-Hays on February 23, 2017” after “\$500.”

In other words, colleagues and those watching beyond:

Be it resolved that in accordance with section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act the Legislative Assembly receive the report of the Ethics Commissioner concerning the Member for Calgary-Hays dated January 4, 2017, and the Assembly defer its decision on the recommendation that the member be required to apologize to the Assembly and pay a fine of \$500 until such time as the Court of Queen’s Bench has given a ruling with respect to the judicial review filed by the Member for Calgary-Hays on February 23, 2017.

It’s a matter of process, sir.

I propose this amendment, Mr. Speaker, because I believe that the work that we do in this House is of real importance and real value, and we have a number of conventions in this House, including those cited today, that assist us in making the most effective use of our time. I heard the Government House Leader say: let’s proceed, and let’s get on with the business of the day. Now, we all know that there are only a finite number of days. There are only so many sitting days available to us as legislators. Let us all be reminded that our first duty during that time is indeed the well-being of Albertans.

I would argue that to debate Government Motion 16 without judicial guidance as to the scope of section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act in relation to parliamentary privilege would constitute a gross dereliction of our duty as Alberta legislators. There are few of us in this House with the requisite legal expertise, and I would venture to submit that no member of this House considers themselves an expert in parliamentary law, so to debate this motion before us without a ruling on the scope of section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act is completely counterproductive at this time.

We should not hold ourselves above the courts but, rather, return to this motion – we’re not pushing it away; we’re saying that we should return to this motion – once those with the relevant judicial expertise have had their opportunity to weigh in. To do otherwise would suggest that the motion before us, Mr. Speaker, is less concerned with the substance of the issue and more concerned with political theatre, that I know Albertans are much less interested in. I implore this House to exercise its better judgment and allow the courts to deal with this issue in due time.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will refer to the amendment as A1.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, it’s pretty clear that the amendment seeks to accomplish the very same thing that the Progressive Conservative opposition just attempted to do with their point of order, and your ruling on that was quite clear.

You know, the hon. member says: well, we’re no experts in parliamentary law in this place. Well, I beg to differ. We don’t interpret legislation, but we have the authority from the people to actually draft, pass, and amend legislation. We don’t just interpret the laws in this place; we make the laws. We’ve been elected, and we get our mandate from the citizens of Alberta to do that. Moreover, we have received advice and you have received advice, Mr. Speaker, from the very expert in parliamentary law, which is our own Parliamentary Counsel. I would argue that they are the pre-eminent experts in parliamentary law. That is very clear.

The hon. member talks about deferring to judicial – I apologize. I don’t want to misquote him: basically, we should let the higher judicial authority make a ruling before we proceed on that matter. Mr. Speaker, that illustrates a serious lack of understanding of the doctrine of separation of powers in our system between the judiciary, the legislative, and the administrative. Now, in the American Constitution that is explicitly stated, but in the British parliamentary tradition, of which we are a part, it is part and parcel of the living, breathing Constitution that we have, and it’s a long-established principle.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West quoted from the English Bill of Rights of the 1600s, which precisely illustrated this point. I don’t know if he knew that he was actually supporting the argument that we’re making and that you made in your ruling, but it is very clear that parliament exercises an equal relationship and a separate relationship to the judiciary. We have rules against interfering in the judiciary’s role, and there are rules against them interfering in parliament’s role or the Legislative Assembly’s role. You clearly articulated that, Mr. Speaker. It’s not just a matter of waiting for the superior courts to make a ruling but, rather, standing and saying: “We are equal levels of government, and this is our jurisdiction. We are clearly, constitutionally mandated to exercise this jurisdiction, and we need to do that.”

The suggestion that we should pass this amendment is simply flying in the face, Mr. Speaker, of your ruling and a thousand years of constitutional tradition in the British parliamentary system, and we will not have it.

The Speaker: Speaking to amendment A1, the Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, sir. I would like to expand on, certainly, what I spoke of earlier and amendment A1, which I am in support of. With respect to Mr. McIver – sorry; the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. My apologies. Of course, the conflict-of-interest vote and debate under the Conflicts of Interest Act was likely, I believe, tabled on March 6, 2017. On February 23, 2017, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays did file for judicial review of the decision of the Ethics Commissioner, which was given on January 4, 2017.

The Ethics Commissioner found that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays was in breach of section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act for a question he asked in question period. Of course, section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act states:

A Member breaches this Act if the Member uses the Member’s office or powers to influence or to seek to influence a decision to be made by or on behalf of the Crown to further a private interest of the Member, a person directly associated with the Member or the Member’s minor child or to improperly further another person’s private interest.

Nowhere in the Conflicts of Interest Act does it state that section 3 displaces parliamentary privilege, nor does the *Hansard* from the passing of section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act in 2007 indicate such intent either.

10:00

There is no question that the parliamentary privileges as exist in the United Kingdom extend to the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. To the point that I had made earlier, which I do thank the hon. Government House Leader for bringing up again, the most fundamental privilege dwelling from article 9 of the English Bill of Rights 1689 states that “the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament.” I agree with that. The limit in scope of any parliamentary privilege is judicable by the court, and the court is the only body who can decide the scope of privilege.

The issue we have in this case is the decision of the Ethics Commissioner infringing upon the parliamentary privilege of freedom of speech. There exists no precedent for the Ethics Commissioner to impeach or question a member of the Assembly’s question posed during question period by way of report or investigation under the Conflicts of Interest Act. Note that the inherent privilege of freedom of speech forms part of the Constitution Act of 1867. Therefore, legislation like the Conflicts of Interest Act cannot infringe on that privilege.

In this case the Ethics Commissioner has interpreted section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act to extend to question period. She has done so under the proposition that the term “influence” includes questions in question period and that the term “the Crown” includes the majority party sitting in the Assembly during that period. Such an interpretation is not constitutional and goes beyond the pale. The resulting ability of the Ethics Commissioner to silence a member of the Assembly on an issue and therefore silence the entire populace of the electoral district of the member represents the said issue.

Section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act allows for an adjournment of a debate and vote regarding the tabling of the report of the investigation to any other period that is determined by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly. I would argue that there’s no haste here and that we could let the courts decide the privilege, the privilege of the Ethics Commissioner and also the privilege of the member of the Assembly, which would include every one of us.

This has an impact that affects not just Alberta but Canada if not the Commonwealth. This is a huge issue. Who has privilege? Is it the Ethics Commissioner, or is it a member of the Assembly? I think that this is something that is so huge and has such an impact that we cannot be debating it in this Legislature at this time without having an answer from the Court of Queen’s Bench on January 12, 2018, which would assist us. This is not, to me, an issue between the Member for Calgary-Hays and the Ethics Commissioner. This is about our fundamental freedom of speech and the ability to represent our constituents on all issues. We as opposition have a right, that goes back to the 1800s, to hold the government accountable, and we can’t do that if we are limited by the scope.

We have people here that are teachers. Well, you won’t be allowed to speak on issues involving teachers. We have social workers who won’t be allowed to speak on issues regarding social work. Labour. This is huge. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Ellis: This is not about a \$500 fine. This is not about a slap on the wrist. This is about our fundamental right of freedom of speech. I have a right to question this government on behalf of the people of Calgary-West, as does every single one of the people sitting on this side. That’s what this is about. All this amendment is saying is: please allow this to extend past January 12, and then we can have more information. As I indicated previously in this House, information is power. It allows us to make better informed

decisions. Why would we not do this? We cannot, essentially, convict somebody without knowing the facts, without knowing the scope, without knowing all of the evidence involved here. I think that is what is truly, truly important here.

For that reason, I do support this amendment. I encourage every single member to support this amendment if you believe in freedom of speech.

The Speaker: All right. Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the member?

The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You’re not under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Correct. On amendment A1, please, sir.

I rise to speak in favour of the amendment. I think that there have been a lot of comments made this morning about our role and the role of the courts. Let me be clear. I agree with the Government House Leader that it is our role to make legislation. But in the context of the Westminster parliamentary system, we are often good partners, neither one subservient to the other. While we certainly write legislation and make legislation, it is often interpreted by the courts, and when the courts interpret that legislation, it sometimes requires adjustments for elected bodies. We’ve seen that time and time again.

In fact, you’ll remember, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 7 from 2015 was a Supreme Court ruling that spurred action by Assemblies around some labour legislation. The government rose at length and spoke about the importance of that ruling. And now we hear the Government House Leader, while I appreciate his comments and while I agree we aren’t subservient of each other, essentially saying: “Don’t worry about the courts. You know, we’re here to do our own thing.”

We can’t have it both ways, and that’s a good thing. We need to be responsible to our Assembly. We need to be responsible to the people of Alberta, and we also need to be responsible and be responsive to the courts. Here we have a situation where we already know that the courts are going to make a ruling on a piece of legislation that is before them. The hon. Member for Calgary-West certainly laid out a number of reasons that make this case precedent setting. Certainly, there are going to be large and lengthy discussions around parliamentary privilege and whether or not those have been curtailed through the Ethics Commissioner’s ruling.

It’s not a matter of whether or not this should be dealt with; it’s a matter of when it should be dealt with. There is a very reasonable chance that we’re going to make a decision and that then the courts will rule, which will require an adjustment by the Assembly that may in fact result in an apology from the Assembly to the member. All that the motion states is: let’s take time and do this.

10:10

You know, unless the government is planning on calling an early election, this is not going to affect the outcome of the next election because it’s going to be dealt with in the early part of next year. While I appreciate the need for expediency and while I appreciate the need to respect the recommendations of an independent office of the Legislature in the form of the Ethics Commissioner, particularly because, as she noted and as the Government House Leader noted today, there is an element of politics at play – and the Ethics Commissioner makes the accusation that the member was trying to score political points. Well, often Ethics Commissioner rulings in the court of political opinion are equally as important as

the actual Ethics Commissioner's rulings. But the court of public opinion is much further away than January 2018, when this particular case would be heard, and when the ruling from that may require an adjustment of the Assembly.

One of the other interesting things to note, Mr. Speaker, is that the Government House Leader clearly laid out that the Assembly has a role to play in this decision. And, in fact in your ruling on sub judice and while we will likely agree to disagree, you also pointed out the important role that the Assembly has to play in this decision. But I think that if we look at the Conflicts of Interest Act in section 28, around the tabling of the report, it does not provide very clear guidance on what the government motion should say. It's the Government House Leader and cabinet in this case and, I can assume, the Premier's office and others who may have provided commentary on what the motion should read, and in their wisdom they chose, without much consultation I might add, to write the motion as it appears on the Order Paper.

Knowing that this particular case was before the courts, knowing it is of a precedent-setting nature, knowing the Assembly may have to respond to the decision of the courts, they could have just as easily written the motion keeping in mind all of those factors. But I would suggest to you that they, too, have a political opportunity here and political grounds to be made and that it's possible that the motion is equally about scoring political points for the government as it is about the Ethics Commissioner's ruling.

If we were primarily interested in good governance, if we were primarily interested in ensuring that we're making the right decision – and, again, let me be clear. I am not providing personal comment on whether or not the Member for Calgary-Hays was correct or incorrect. I think it's possible some of my colleagues – when we likely get back to debating the main motion, by all accounts it sounds like the Government House Leader isn't going to allow any of his team to change their position. When we get back to debating the main motion, it's quite possible that some of my colleagues will raise some concerns about the Ethics Commissioner's ruling as laid out in 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, that speaks specifically to debating the report.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the section you just noted?

Mr. Cooper: Section 28(3).

But it appears to me that the government is equally interested in scoring political points and not just getting to the best solution for all members of the Assembly because if they were, accepting a reasonable amendment like waiting till after the court has their opportunity to speak as well – again, let me be clear. It's not because we are subservient to the court but because we are partners in this process of democracy. We write the rules. They interpret the rules. When they interpret them, if we need to adjust, that is a requirement of us. It's not like we're saying that at this point in the morning the Ethics Commissioner got it wrong although I think that there are some folks inside the Chamber who don't agree with the Ethics Commissioner's ruling. We're merely saying that the process that we follow is critically important due to the precedent-setting nature of the process.

So, Mr. Speaker, I encourage members of the Assembly to consider the words of the Member for Calgary-West because of some of the implications that the ruling has and the fact that the court hasn't had its opportunity to speak. Because of the implications that it has around privilege – one of the things that I'm very passionate about, you know, that gets me excited in the morning, is parliamentary privilege, and there are literally tens and tens of people across this province that share that excitement with me. The fact of the matter is that the courts are going to be required

to rule on privilege, and it has a significant impact on the future of debate in this Chamber. Providing us with time to make the best available decision is certainly the best available option that the Chamber has before it, and I would encourage all members of the Assembly to do the same.

The Speaker: Anyone under 29(2)(a) to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will speak to the amendment, and I very much appreciate the opportunity to do so. As I often try to do in this House, I'm going to try my absolute best to take the politics out of this. That may not be possible, but I'm absolutely going to strive for that. I do sincerely hope that the government's side and all members present here as well as, of course, the hon. Government House Leader do reconsider this. I do believe there is a middle ground here and there is an opportunity to allow the courts to decide, in no way diminishing the independence of this Assembly.

I do want to reiterate the point made by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the Opposition House Leader, in the point of order initially. I in no way take a position one way or the other about the Ethics Commissioner's ruling and in no way question either her authority or expertise in making that ruling. This is not specifically about her ruling one way or the other.

What we have here, though, is an opportunity through this amendment to meet the requirements of section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act and be consistent with the ruling, Mr. Speaker, that you made this morning and allow the courts to make a ruling. All of those things are possible.

I will start with section 28(3). I imagine it's been referred to and read into the record previously, but I will do it again. In addition to the 15-day window for tabling the report, the last words of section 28(3) are as follows: "or any other period that is determined by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly." We as an Assembly, as members of this Chamber, have the opportunity by the law set out in 28(3) and, of course, respecting the principle of independence of the Assembly as a self-governing body to meet both of those tests. We have that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, you were correct this morning in your ruling that there is nothing requiring us by precedent or law to defer debate on this Government Motion 16, but equally there is nothing preventing us as a self-governing Chamber from choosing to do so. We will be consistent with your ruling, we will be consistent with what section 28(3) says, and we will allow the courts to make a ruling.

10:20

I would ask the government side: what is the downside in doing that? If the courts concur with the Ethics Commissioner and uphold her ruling, then at that time the Chamber can apply what is currently Government Motion 16, pass the sanctions on the hon. member, and go on about our business. If, however, the courts find against the Ethics Commissioner and with the Member for Calgary-Hays, then we know that fact and we can proceed accordingly.

We have an opportunity here to allow the courts to make a ruling. We know the date. It is not that far into the future. We will be consistent, Mr. Speaker, with your ruling, we will be consistent with parliamentary procedure and practice, we will be consistent with the independence of a self-governing body, and we will allow ourselves to know the outcome. So I would genuinely and sincerely urge the government side to reconsider this matter and to support this amendment to allow the member his day in court. I think that is a fundamental principle that we all in this Assembly ought to be upholding, but in no way does that abdicate our independence from

the courts. It just simply allows us to choose what we do as an Assembly, which is absolutely consistent with the principles of independence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions to the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to amendment A1?

Mr. Gill: Yes. I would like to speak to this amendment, and thank you for giving me the opportunity. Mr. Speaker, the majority of us know that I was born in India.

An Hon. Member: Were you?

Mr. Gill: Yes. It wasn't Scotland, actually. It was India.

But on a serious note, sir, we do not have freedom of speech. We do on paper; we do not. It only belongs to the elite. It's very suppressed. It's called the biggest democracy, India, but it's not really. It is not. It's controlled by a very few, the top. So for challenging the democracy here, challenging the freedom of speech here for people, I think we're going down a very dangerous road. As the members from Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-West, and the member from the Official Opposition said: let the court decide, and we can wait. You know, support this amendment. Let the court take its course. Like, we don't need to stop the process, control the process.

I want to warn all the members of this House. If we go down this road, it would open a lot of big cans of worms for the government, too, when we start talking about conflicts of interest. I'm sure that every member in this House knows what I'm talking about. I think we should support this amendment, wait for the court decision, and then we can come back to this debate.

That's all, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Barnes: No.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to rise and voice my support for the motion. I've been sitting here for about an hour, an hour and a half, listening to the debate, trying to get my head around the sides of this issue. Although Calgary-Elbow stood up and said that he didn't want to talk about politics, it appears to me that, clearly, it is only about politics at this point. It's clearly been mentioned by the Opposition House Leader and by Calgary-West that the courts can still continue, that the Legislature can still have its role after the court decision. As mentioned by the Opposition House Leader, it may avoid the government having to go through the embarrassment of an apology. But here we are charging ahead, anyway.

We've been talking about how this isn't around what the Ethics Commissioner's decision was. Of course, not having the benefits of the Blues, I absolutely believe that I heard the Government House Leader say: we agree with that ruling. A presupposition. We've had opportunities to have discretion exercised, and here we are moving along, moving along to where, as the Member for Calgary-Greenway just adequately said, we are about to open a can of worms and some different issues around the ruling. That greatly concerns me. One of the things I've heard many members say is: how do we do what's best for Albertans? How do we balance the opportunity

for open debate versus when we should be held back because of potential conflicts? Absolutely both worthy causes.

This, to me, is not only precedent setting, Mr. Speaker, where it can reverberate through other Canadian jurisdictions, other Commonwealth jurisdictions, as prior speakers have mentioned, but when we're all responsible to represent our constituents, the 4.1 million Albertans, open debate is the crux of the matter, where we need to hear all the good ideas. We need to hear all of what our constituents are thinking. We're in a situation now where conflicts may prevent that. As I said two or three minutes ago, lots of times that is absolutely necessary, that is absolutely the best thing for the protection of Albertans, but I am sitting here wondering why the government, as the third-party House leader mentioned right at the start, won't let this continue to where judicial experts will be about to voice their opinion in January of 2018 with the Member for Calgary-Hays' full and legal and due process right to an appeal.

So, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely believe at this point in time that if we lose this amendment, if we don't support this amendment, we are saying that we are more in favour of erring on the side of shutting down open debate in this House from all 87 of us than we are from a full opportunity for the 87 of us to hear from all 4.1 million Albertans to make Alberta the best we can.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely will be supporting this amendment. I will absolutely be supporting that we continue to ask the government to take politics out of this. Defer it till after the courts have their chance. Defer it to where we can make the best decision for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. You have a question under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. To the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, Mr. Speaker, he and I have had a valuable experience in our exploratory roles as representatives of our constituency, but we also experienced a situation where members of the Legislature decided and took it upon themselves to exercise their own rights that we have within this Chamber to cross the floor to the government of the time. As you may recognize, many of those members did not receive the future endorsement of their electorate and took those positions. He and also the Member for Livingstone-Macleod and myself did take the message from our electorate. I'd like the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to further explain the power of the electorate and his considerations of his representation of those people.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. Thank you to my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler for that. Boy, what an amazing three days and two months that was, and what a message sent by Albertans. You know, it reminded me of two things. First of all, our responsibility to our constituents, to the next generation to ensure that we don't overstep our power, to ensure we use our best abilities to listen to our constituents and engage with them with the extra knowledge that we have from this place and from, you know, quality staffers and information that we do get to ensure that Alberta remains and becomes the leader in Canada that we all want it to be. But then it reminded me that, you know, there are always unintended consequences with what we're doing in here.

10:30

This maybe seems like a small thing. It's ratifying a decision that maybe some of us agree with, some of us don't. But I don't think it

is a small thing, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a matter of limiting the ability for the 87 of us to have open debate. And, yes, again, it has to be limited by where we have conflicts, but let's not influence an individual member's opportunity for his full and complete due process. The individual is as important, but let's not limit what is best for Albertans out there. As my hon. colleague mentioned, sometimes the nature and the breadth of these things spill over to the point where, thankfully, Albertans get the last say every four years. You know, maybe this will become a big issue of the government playing politics rather than strengthening the House of the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Gotfried: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, I've listened with interest to the members' comments about the responsibilities we bring to the House, but I think, you know, on top of that, we also bring a lot of expertise to this House. We have nurses. We have teachers. We have doctors, social workers, technical experts of various sorts, transit workers, marketing executives, ranchers, farmers, airline employees, and more. We all bring expertise to this House, and I think our constituents expect us to use that expertise in this House. For us to address that opportunity to bring that expertise here, we need to have latitude, to not be found in conflict of interest on everything that we comment on because of our background, because of our experience, because of people we know or people we're connected with.

Those are the bridges that we build in our lives, and I'd like to think that torching bridges behind ourselves is not a good thing to do. In fact, that's why we're elected, to bring those bridges with us: the bridges to people, the bridges to organizations, the bridges to companies, the bridges to real Albertans.

It concerns me, when we are allowed to bring that expertise to our roles here, that it could be undermined. That, Mr. Speaker, is really at the heart of the issue that I think we're dealing with today. Are we allowed to bring that expertise to this House? I would argue that that expertise – I'm not sure. We have a few lawyers in the House, but I don't think we have any judges in the House. I think that this is an opportunity . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you. I think your time has lapsed.

Are there any other comments with respect to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move to adjourn debate on the amendment.

Mr. Cooper: Can I just double-check, Mr. Speaker, exactly the process here? We're just adjourning debate on the amendment? We will return to debate on the amendment following that?

Mr. Mason: It is the intent, Mr. Speaker, to adjourn debate on this motion. If we have to adjourn debate separately on the amendment – I'm not sure. I'd like a little guidance on how we do this.

The Speaker: As I understand it, we're adjourning debate at this point and juncture.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Appointments

14. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the March 2017 report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, sessional paper 15/2017, and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the following persons be appointed on an acting basis for the period beginning April 16, 2017, until such time as a replacement for the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner is appointed:
- (a) Mr. Joe Loran as Acting Ombudsman;
 - (b) Mr. Ted Miles as Acting Public Interest Commissioner.

The Speaker: Having heard the motion by the Government House Leader, Motion 14, does anyone wish to speak to the motion?

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Committee Membership Changes

15. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to:
- A. the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved: that Mr. Dach replace Mr. S. Anderson as deputy chair; that Mrs. Littlewood replace Mr. S. Anderson;
 - B. the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be approved: that Ms McPherson replace Mr. S. Anderson.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 15: Mrs. Littlewood]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. Our government campaigned on a platform to make life better for Alberta families. During the 2015 election campaign among these major commitments was a pledge to reduce the burden of school fees on Alberta families. In fact, on page 14 of the 2015 election platform, titled Alberta's NDP: Leadership for What Matters, you'll find under point (4.3) where it says: "We'll reduce school fees for essential services such as lunch supervision and bussing."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also point out that I was also a candidate in the 2012 election, and I recall again campaigning on the reduction of school fees at that time. I have to say that any time I mentioned the NDP plan to reduce school fees in both the 2012 and 2015 election campaigns, it was warmly received at the door. People told me how difficult it was to budget for children to go back to school in the fall with all the school supplies they had to worry about like textbooks, workbooks, papers, boxes of Kleenex tissues, among other things.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that it's a pleasure to speak to Bill 1 at second reading. This bill goes through a series of amendments, and the creation of new school fees regulations will focus on two specific types of school fees and busing fees for eligible students travelling to their designated schools.

Over the weekend, while door-knocking and discussing Bill 1 with parents, I spoke to a single mother with two children in Calgary-Northern Hills and talked about how this bill might help reduce their fees paid. She told me that the big one was the fees paid in June, costing about \$600 for two students, covering lunch hour supervision, and that a further one paid in September cost about \$200 for instructional materials. She said that any reduction in these fees would help big time. In total for the 2017-18 school year we expect that families will save more than \$50 million annually as a result of this government-funded reduction in school fees for instructional supplies and busing.

10:40

I also had the opportunity to speak to my school board trustees. A trustee for the Calgary board of education, the CBE, said that the school board was very happy for parents and families. However, she recognized that there might be some specific details that may need to be addressed as the bill moves forward. For example, some concerns were raised regarding bus transportation to designated high schools. Since there are not any CBE high schools in Calgary-Northern Hills, students need to take buses to other designated high schools in the city. In this case students do not travel with a yellow school bus but rather on Calgary Transit designated buses. There was some question about how the school bus fees would be reduced in these cases.

There were also some concerns about the necessity of supplemental class fees for specific classes. For example, in carpentry class students have the opportunity to pay for additional high-quality wood, and the supplemental class fee paid is the difference between whether students make a Muskoka chair or a birdhouse. Mr. Speaker, in the case of fashion class these supplemental fees are the difference of whether a student makes a tailored suit or a pillowcase. It is important to distinguish the difference in these fees because students are more engaged in their learning when they can further their interests and they can delve deeper into their passions through these specific courses.

When I discussed this bill with a trustee of the Calgary Catholic school district, the CCSD, she said that the board was pleased with the lessening of the financial burden that fees placed on parents. She said that boards have long advocated for predictable and sustainable funding that covers the cost of delivering quality education and that fees are charged on a cost-recovery basis. However, some concerns raised were about the school board's ability to provide programs of choice such as French immersion, fine arts, special-needs programs that allow fuller and richer educational opportunities for students. There were also concerns about fees for textbooks. For example, high schools have textbook rentals. Should these fees continue to be charged? But both trustees were optimistic and happy to collaborate with government and work through this bill and regulations.

In conclusion, we know that parents are struggling to pay school fees throughout the province. In Calgary many families did their homework and chose communities to live in where it was expected that new schools would be built – this is the case for many families in Calgary-Northern Hills – however, a lack of funding commitments from the previous government led to delays with school construction, and many parents have been left to arrange transportation for their children to the inner city.

But it's more than the inconvenience of having to spend an hour a day travelling to and from their designated school because those families are also charged \$335 in fees per child per year. That transportation charge is over and above the fee for instructional supplies and materials which is also charged to students, which can exceed more than \$130 for junior high. For a senior high school

student the ISM is more than \$150 with the CBE. Nearly every school board charges fees on instructional supplies and materials, and removing these fees will lead to immediate savings for parents of nearly 600,000 Alberta students.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Calgary-Northern Hills have told me consistently about educational fees since the moment I met them at the doorsteps in 2015. I'll be supporting Bill 1 at second reading, and I encourage others to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?

The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I also would like to rise to speak on Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. I am voting in favour of this and encourage everybody else to do so as well.

Part of this act is that it's simply making life more affordable for Alberta families, and this is just to show that we are taking action and showing that we do care about families and their pocketbooks and how they're balancing their budgets. During tough economic times this is one way we can help Albertans.

Also, on the very principle of this, the right to publicly funded education, we have to ask ourselves: is this a right that we support, or is it not? If we do support publicly funded education, we should not be charging extra fees. This is an Alberta value. It's unacceptable that we think that children – our kids, our grandkids – cannot have a publicly funded education simply because we are putting up financial barriers to this. The relief that we can provide helps us and helps parents know that their children will have access to education. Again, we get back to the principle of: what value is education? It is the tool for our future economic prosperity as well as our social prosperity. The one small action of reducing fees can have a major impact on students, families, and their financial well-being now and in the future.

This act is looking at certain types of school fees, and right now we are looking at supplies and material fees as well as reducing fees for those students who are travelling to their designated schools. This is important. Why do we even have buses for children in their designated areas? Could it be that there is simply an insufficient number of schools across the province, that we actually have a deficit in infrastructure of school buildings? While previous governments may have said that they balanced their budget, they balanced it on the backs of students. They did that by not building schools where population and student numbers merited that.

I look at my own family, where my grandsons could not go to their designated school, and their parents, my son and daughter-in-law, had to pay over \$300 a year extra for each child to go to a school that was not in their designated area because there was no school in that area. The fact that this bill is addressing part of that issue is of significance to me, and I think it will be of significance to other parents who are also concerned about busing in growing communities.

Now, this particular cut, even though it's only 25 per cent, represents \$50 million. You think about that: \$50 million that parents are taking out of their pockets and paying for free education. Something's not working there. It's also going to affect over 600 students by cutting these fees, so it's an act that will have a major impact across Alberta.

Now, there are those who suggest that we cut 100 per cent of the fees right now, and that would save Alberta families \$200 million. I think that eventually we will be moving toward that. This act does

not restrict us from this. It is the first step in doing that. But we also have to, during these times when we're trying to balance our budget, look at: if the parents don't pay that \$200 million, where is it going to come from? It's going to have to come from taxpayers. We do not want to put an additional burden on taxpayers as well at this time, so we will move prudently. We will move cautiously and make reductions as we can, as the budget is available for us. I really support the bill for that, that it's not just a big leap from here to there; it is going slowly but steadily.

Now, some of the other fees that I'm glad will be looked at in the future are fees that are charged for lunchroom supervision. This is not one that's being looked at right now, but the fact that it is being reviewed is encouraging for parents, who know that another fee for things that they didn't have to pay for will be addressed in the future. Also in the future is technology. Part of the school fees are for textbooks, but we know that in the future technology will be the way that most students are going to be learning. This also has been indicated as something that we will address.

In fact, section 39.1(2) of the act allows for more or potentially more reductions in different kinds of fees. It defines what those fees are. Whether it's lunch hour supervision or technology, the minister will have the ability to make decisions on that. I'm encouraged by that subpoint within the act as well.

Now, since we tabled Bill 1 last week, we have seen tremendous support for this not only from the families of those kids that are paying but other families as well. There has been constant support from parents, from teachers, school trustees, and when we've been door-knocking in our constituencies, people are saying: "I'm glad you're finally addressing this. This was one of your promises, to address it." We have taken that step. In fact, one of the other validators of this is the president of the Alberta Schools Councils' Association. The Schools Councils' Association is made up of parents whose kids are in school. They are supporting this. Specifically here in Edmonton, both the public schools and the Catholic schools have supported it. That's good news, and I think we're on the right track.

10:50

I just want to maybe look at the Calgary situation, both the public education and the Catholic schools. When we look at the fees that we are going to be helping with – and this is certainly one of the most expensive examples – in the public elementary schools their reduction per child is going to be \$660. For the elementary students that are attending the Calgary Catholic school district, their reduction is \$465. Now, both of those are quite high. Imagine, with two or three children, what your fees would be in September.

I'm comparing these two because they're dramatically different. One is \$660; the other is \$465. So there may be students and families who say: well, we want to give our child the public education, but we're going to have to move them to the Catholic school because it's \$200 less. So they're making a decision on where they will send that student just on the dollars, the cost, and we're saying that that should not be the reason why they're choosing a school. It should be based on the quality of education and not on which one is the cheapest or the least expensive.

When you look at the Calgary junior highs, both public and Catholic schools, the public schools charge \$552 per student in fees, and the Catholic schools are charging \$185, again a phenomenal difference. If I was a parent struggling with where I would send my child and I saw a bill of \$550 or a bill of \$185, I know where I would send my child, again, because of dollars and cents. We're saying that that should not be a factor in making that decision, so eliminate those fees.

Likewise, in high school, for a student to start in Calgary public, it's \$487; Calgary Catholic, \$305. Huge prices but again a difference, and it may influence where children will go.

Now, as an administrator – that was one of my previous careers before retirement and before being rehired; I was a school administrator – when we had to do our budgets every year, I actually counted on the parents contributing school fees so that I could balance my individual school budget. It was necessary for us to collect those fees from parents. It was necessary because there had been so many cuts in education ever since the '90s, when people bragged about having a balanced budget, but that had been downloaded onto schools, where we as principals had to tax our parents for supplies for their kids to come to our school because otherwise we would have a deficit at our school, and we were not allowed to. We had to balance the books.

So what did we do? We made the provincial government look good by having a balanced budget, but we taxed the parents for school fees. That was not fair. Why should I as a principal have to tax those parents? It was a problem for us to balance our books. I knew that in the small rural community that I was in at that time, in Smoky Lake, it was totally unfair to the parents of that community, but we had to do it.

Now, unfortunately, we would find that one-third to half of those parents did not pay their schools fees, so we had a huge problem. As many people have commented, the stigma of some families not being able to pay and some families paying those fees: not fair, not good community spirit, as far as I was concerned.

Now, we continued to have to change our fees and charge fees because the textbooks were always changing, the materials were always changing. One year it would be one subject, the next year another subject, but we always had to buy new textbooks. We did not want in our school some students having resources and other students not, so we did have to charge.

I am going to encourage all members of this Assembly to vote for Bill 1 as a very positive first step. Part of that is because I like the fact that the minister has found efficiencies within the Alberta Education department to pay for those. As an administrator I knew that if I didn't collect that money from the parents, I would have a deficit. Now I am reassured by the Minister of Education that that money will be coming in the allotment from the provincial government. So I'm happy that parents are not having to pay and I'm happy that I could have balanced my budget because the province is taking responsibility to make sure that public education is properly funded. This act goes a long way towards that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member talked about his previous experience as an administrator, as a principal, and working in a school. I know that he's got some first-hand experience of what it's like to be in a school. I just wonder if he might be interested in telling us a little bit more about his personal experience in the education system and all the experience that he brings with him to this position.

Mr. Hinkley: Well, I think I did allude that as an administrator every September we had to send out notices to parents that we would be charging school fees. I guess I was in education for over 30 years. It's just something you had to do for a long time. This is the first time in many, many years that there has been government support for that. I guess your question is partly: what authority would I have to speak on this subject? I guess it is because of my

background as an administrator. All principals, all teachers are very familiar with these issues, and we're just extremely glad that the minister has recognized that teachers were not in support of school fees, and by doing this, it is going to be of great benefit to the parents.

Also, I guess, when I say that I was an administrator, one of our tasks was that we had to balance budgets, so we were accountants. I guess I learned in my small-business career as well how to balance the books. I've done the books for businesses. I do the books for the school. We would have to make budget projections. The thing that administrators do is to look at how to eliminate deficits, how to balance their budget. I guess I'm supporting this bill because it is one tool to help administrators, to make it easier in their job of balancing the books. Having the school fees cut and the provincial government providing equal support will go a long way in doing that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did want to ask the member to add a little bit more precision to his answer because it is a question in my mind when we're talking about parents who were unable to pay. The member said, I think, that about 30 per cent of the parents, perhaps, wouldn't be able to pay the fees, leaving a deficit in the school's budget, and I'm still not certain exactly what consequences would result from that and how that deficit was actually made up, how it was addressed. Were programs cut? Were services cut? Were class sizes increased, or was there another way or a source of funds that you could request compensation from? Exactly what happened as a result of that hole in your budget?

Mr. Hinkley: Yeah. A very interesting question. That's right. We had to become very creative in solving those problems. When we realized we needed new textbooks, we just didn't get them. We had to use the old or do without.

We did end up cutting some programs as well, so that was another way. We cut programs. In Smoky Lake we did have a very strong parent council, who supported the school extremely well, and often when we would meet and they would ask what I needed, we would discuss, without naming names but very candidly, the fact that our budget could be short because we would not be able to collect all of the school fees. Our school council would do raffles. They did casinos. They did bingos. They provided us with that supplemental money. So the community spirit said: we recognize that for some families this is a hardship; it's a financial burden. The school council would come up with money to help us balance that budget. You know, sometimes there would be grumbling that if they weren't paying for school fees, that money that they raised could be for enrichment. It could be for field trips. It could be for other things.

11:00

I want to brag for just a second here about H.A. Kostach school in Smoky Lake. They have won the Archery Canada National Championships four years running. That school, even though it has just under 400 students, has the Canadian national archery champions. They have sent their students all over the world – to the United States, South Africa, and parts of Europe – to compete. The school council would help fund the travel of that archery group, but they lost the money to school fees.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to also rise and support Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. Our government does care about families, and we are really wanting to keep the dollars in the pockets of those families. We believe every student has a right to publicly funded education, and those fees should not be a barrier to kids getting a good start in life no matter the circumstances.

Times are tough right now. I think that over the last week and a bit we've heard a number of people talk about their realities growing up, raising children, and I think that that's more the norm than I would have thought, actually. I don't consider myself an expert at all on school fees. Actually, I've moved around a lot in my life. I've lived all over Canada and the United States as well. I can't even remember how many schools I went to, but I do recall being a little shocked at the cost of school fees when my son was young.

Now, as a single parent I was working. I'm pretty sure I was taking courses at the time as well. When my son was little, I decided I wanted to save for his postsecondary education because that was not something that had been done for me. As soon as he was born, of course, like many other Albertans, I set up an RESP, and the most that I could manage per month at the time was \$25. It doesn't sound like a lot, but when you're struggling, it is a lot. When you're not earning much more than minimum wage, it is a lot. You still have to pay child care fees so that you can be gone from the home. You have to pay for bus passes and all of those things. Those school fees are taxing, and I never wanted to stop contributing to his postsecondary education. Fast-forward to today: my son has a fellowship at the University of Alberta. He is a doctor of paleontology, not the useful kind, we like to say. Sorry, honey. I love you.

You know, that was my reality. That truly was my reality. As I was looking for some information about this – I love history; maybe that's where he gets the whole paleontology thing; he likes to study old, dead things – I looked at some of the information from the previous party. [interjections] I'm not calling you dinosaurs. Maybe a trilobite, but that's about it.

You know, one of the things I read which was quite interesting was an article in the *Globe and Mail* from March 2012. The then Premier, who shall not be named in this House because that's our rule, said that school fees are a symptom of a larger problem and that that larger problem is funding uncertainty for school boards. The then Premier and the then party, many of whom are here this morning, said that they were going to solve this problem for families with transformative change. Voila, transformative change.

I think the reason I brought this up is that, you know, we tended to hear a lot of that. I worked in the human services sector, and often I heard about an unwillingness to augment services or about a willingness to detract from services or to move dollars around. It was about transformative change. But they never called it cutting. They called it – I can't even remember the word – reassigning or redeploying or whatever the word was. I don't know. When I take my dog for a haircut, I don't redeploy her hair.

You know, the reason that I'm bringing this up is that history will always teach us things. If I've learned anything from my paleontologist son, it is that history teaches us a great deal and that the Earth is older than 2,000 years old.

An Hon. Member: And it's round.

Ms Renaud: And it's round.

The reason that I'm bringing this up is that it's important to know that the previous government, although they talk about, "Oh, my gosh, the government side isn't doing enough and are not changing

fast enough, and it's only 25 per cent; oh, my gosh, light my hair on fire," had decades to change this, and they did nothing. They did not change it. They made it worse.

They talk about valuing Alberta families. Really? A flat tax, school fees. [some applause] Yeah, you're clapping about that. So you can hear by the clapping sounds that it was okay that people struggled to raise a family, struggled to get their kids to school, struggled to feed their kids, clothe their kids, pay school fees, save for postsecondary education. That's okay. That's okay as long as it fits with their radical ideology.

The other interesting piece. Before, the two parties were quite separate, and, you know, soon they'll be dancing a lot closer together.

Mr. Coolahan: Slow dancing.

Ms Renaud: Not slow dancing.

When they were a little bit more separate, they took some shots. You know, I read some things from a Wildrose website that talked about: shame on the PCs for voting to keep school fees. That was October 2012. This is what it said: it's unfortunate that the PCs couldn't look beyond partisan politics. Imagine that. [interjection] Not really.

I just want to say, you know, that people will stand up. I'm pretty sure that when they go out and speak to their constituents, they hear from families that reducing school fees is a really, really good thing. They're not going to say that it's a bad thing.

Mrs. Pitt: It was our idea.

Ms Renaud: Well, you can take credit for it if you like, if that works for you.

What they will do is that they will not support a budget that spends this kind of money. They will not. They will not support it. They can say that they'll support it, but when it comes right down to it, they will not. They will stand up in this House. They will demand roads. They will demand more prosecutors. They will demand more hospitals. They will demand more home care, more mental health supports. They'll demand all kinds of things, schools in their ridings. But when it comes right down to it, when the rubber meets the road, they will not vote for it.

I just want to go back to saying that I am one of the people on this side of the House that is more than happy to support this. I am glad that we're taking a stand. It may not be perfect just yet – it's 25 per cent right now – but I have no doubt and I have complete faith that we'll get there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think I heard some laughing in the Chamber for a change.

Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Westhead: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In her speech the member talked a little bit about the flat tax that the former Conservative government had in place, also something that the opposition members were applauding. It's certainly something that people have talked about in leadership races that are occurring in the province. I know that when I was campaigning in the 2015 election, we campaigned on a platform of bringing in a progressive income tax system. This was a pretty fundamental change for Alberta. And, look, here we are. Campaigning for that type of more fair, progressive income tax system, that every other province in Canada has, including the federal government, seems to be the most fair way that we can pay for the services that we all need based on our ability to pay.

So it's pretty shameful to hear the members in the third party applauding for a flat tax that disadvantaged the people at the lower end of the income scale, creating more inequality, creating hardships for women, who tend to be lower wage earners. You know, that's something that they would bring back in. A flat tax also advantages the people at the high end of the income scale big time. We know that those folks in the PC and the Wildrose, for that matter, like to cozy up to their millionaire friends. There's nothing wrong with being a millionaire, but they have to pay their fair share for the things that we all enjoy in our society.

I just wonder if the member might want to talk about that, or, if she'd like, something she also might like to talk about would be . . .

11:10

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

I'm sorry. You were finishing your question?

Mr. Westhead: I'm still not done yet, Mr. Speaker.

I just wonder if she also might like to talk about the fact that she mentioned saving for postsecondary education for her children and about how saving on school fees would help parents nowadays also put money away for postsecondary training later on. Also, the fact that we froze tuitions: I wonder how that would help her as a family.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I for one was entirely grateful that we got rid of the flat tax. I will tell you that. I spent the majority of my life early on raising my kids. That's where I was. I was at the bottom section of the wage earners. Life is tough. You know, it's not always about . . . [interjection] What's that? It's not always about: pick yourself up by the bootstraps. Sometimes you need a little bit of help.

You know, I've been on a lot of sports teams, and I think the phrase that you're only as strong as your weakest player is very true. We have a responsibility to make sure that all Albertans have access to things that are vitally important, not just access but to feel included, to feel like: I'm not going to school knowing that I can't afford the things that other kids can afford, that I'm going to be singled out, and I'm going to feel bad. Our children, all of our children, have the right to be equal, and we need to do whatever we can to encourage that.

I'll tell you, you know, that it's not just women and it's not just single parents. It is also people with disabilities. This is a huge, huge portion of our population that we forget about. It's not just the person that you see on the commercial that happens to have Down syndrome. It is all kinds of people with all kinds of disabilities that are struggling, and they make up the group that are minimum wage earners. They are the people that are forced sometimes to be on assured income for the severely handicapped when, really, what they want to do is provide for their families. Can you imagine the struggle for them?

You know, there is a federal program, RDSP, much like RESPs or RSPs. It's for people with disabilities who want to establish some savings for when they're older, for when they retire or after 65. It's not that they're looking for a handout. They're looking for some help. They're looking for a hand up. They're looking for some equality.

I worked in the human services sector for a very long time when the third party was in power, and I'll tell you that every time the economy took a nosedive, we just braced ourselves for what kinds of atrocious cuts – and I remember the word now. It wasn't "cuts"; it was "realignments." I remember taking my dog for a hair realignment. You know, we just braced because that's where they

came. They came for services that were not going to impact the people that they were beholden to. That was my impression.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this was a platform commitment that I found really resonated with my voters. I have had a couple of people starting to ask me about it in my community, and I know they're all very happy to see that we are taking action to reduce school fees.

When I was out door-knocking in my community recently, I'd knock on the door and say: "Hello. My name is Trevor Horne. I'm your local MLA. Do you have any thoughts or concerns that you would like to share with me?" Usually their response was something like: "Well, I haven't really had a chance to think about it. You know, this is the first time I've seen an MLA on my doorstep. I don't know what to do with this." But recently they haven't.

Mr. Cooper: What have you been doing for two years?

Mr. Horne: I've been knocking on doors in my other communities.

Recently the response has been: thank you for reducing school fees. You know, Mr. Speaker, especially in these tough economic times, we know our families can really use that little bit extra.

We keep talking about September school fees and the bus fees and everything. You know, I reached out to my parents to see what they thought. I don't have kids of my own yet. I'm still pretty young. I have plenty of time to get on that. My parents reached out, and what they shared with me is that the schools always seemed to be asking for a little bit more, you know, whether it was a field trip or school supplies.

I remember that I had one music teacher who was a good music teacher, but she quite often liked to stage-manage quite a bit. It was an elementary school teacher, you know, stage-managing kindergarten students and grade 3 students. The day of a performance she would ask students to wear a specific colour or sometimes ask the boys to wear a tie. For many families this was the first time any of their students needed a tie, so that was an extra fee. That's an extra charge on their education. I know that for a lot of families this is really hard on them, and I am so happy to see that this government is taking steps to make education more accessible to our families.

Now, while I'm among the younger members in this House – I went through school, well, really, before I would have been allowed a laptop, let alone a cellphone. I know that now there are a lot of schools in my community and in communities across the province who are requiring students to bring their own devices, and now they're requiring smart devices. You know, it's not enough to have something capable of word processing; now you need a full iPad or a full laptop. For many families that's a lot to bear. We can talk about the cost: oh, well, one laptop; that's not too much. But when you have families of three or four kids, those costs add up, and especially in these economic times I know that that is very hard on them.

While I know that there was a larger commitment to go further, we have to start somewhere, and I'm glad to see that we are starting here. I would like to see, you know, more progress in the future, but I don't understand how anybody can't support this bill. This bill is something that is so important to our families. I have had teachers reach out to me and say that. You know, they'll talk to somebody, and without prompting, the first thing they say is: I am so happy we are reducing school fees.

Mrs. Pitt: We would have eliminated them.

Mr. Horne: That, Mr. Speaker, is enough reason, I believe, for every member in this House to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Westhead: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. During the member's speech the Member for Airdrie chirped out that the Wildrose would have eliminated school fees altogether. It's great for them to say that, but we haven't seen a shadow budget or anything like that from them to prove any kind of movement on school fees or any other kind of social improvements, for that matter. I just wonder if the member who was doing his speech could tell us or just comment on how much the Wildrose has dropped the ball by not proposing any kind of solutions or ways that we could pay for school fees. I mean, if they've got a way to do that, I think they owe it to all Albertans to table a budget and show us their path forward.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would absolutely agree with my colleague from Banff-Cochrane. You know, I have never been in opposition – you know, maybe in 20, 30 years or if I jump federally, maybe, one day – and I can only imagine how easy it would be to make a platform commitment and then completely ignore it. We have people across the aisle in what are currently two parties. We'll see in a few weeks, I suppose. But, you know, we have one party that campaigned on health care levies, and I haven't seen them argue for that since. They also argued for several new taxes and for cuts to services, including to education, and a flat tax as well. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Come on, guys.

11:20

Mr. Horne: We have another party who argued that, you know, they weren't going to bring in new taxes. They're now saying that there would be no changes to services, but somehow they're going to eliminate school fees. That would result in a direct cut to our schools. I fail to understand how these members can rationalize that. I don't see how that math adds up. So to answer the . . .

An Hon. Member: By realignment.

Mr. Horne: Perhaps by realignment. But where that money is coming from to be realigned is unclear to me.

Mr. Speaker, to answer the member's question, I don't think that it's possible for them to eliminate school fees and still protect the front-line services that they claim they would protect. This, to me, just doesn't connect.

Now, I know that the members keep saying: oh, well, you know, it's not our job to create a shadow budget. You know what? Mr. Speaker, I disagree. The job of an opposition is to show how they would do things differently, and thus far we have seen an independent member provide more opposition than either of the other two parties. I disagree with a lot of his proposals: you know, proposing a GST while simultaneously . . .

An Hon. Member: A PST.

Mr. Horne: A PST, rather. But he's at least provided us something.

The opposition has had two years now to provide a shadow budget. I haven't even heard the mention of a proposed shadow budget. The closest thing I have heard to a shadow budget goes back to the election, which was, on page 5: no new taxes, and we're going to protect our front-line services. I also note that when I last looked at page 5 of the Wildrose platform, I did not in fact see an elimination of school fees, which is curious to me. I also did not see a reduction in either the platform that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays campaigned on or on page 5. That, to me, is interesting.

You know, if the two parties across the aisle are still so committed to not increasing taxes and balancing the budget, especially in two years, then the only logical conclusion I can come to is that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. I appreciate the attention of government members. You might be a little surprised at the point which we will get to very shortly. As our caucus advocate for education I have a special interest in Bill 1, and I'd like to begin by – you heard it here first – applauding the efforts of this government to address school fees. I'm applauding you. You're not applauding that we're applauding? I'm shocked, but I've been shocked here many times, including this morning.

In all seriousness, Mr. Speaker, from first-hand experience I know that while school fees are always an issue for parents, during tougher economic times it's even more important. We need to ensure access for all Albertan families. That's beyond reproach.

There are other good, common-sense changes in this bill. School fees being required to be directed only towards what the fee is intended for is a good change. Sometimes these fees get lumped in with the total budget, and losing that connection with the intention of the fee reduces the incentive to innovate and reduce costs. So that's a good thing.

There are a few portions of this bill that I can support as an advocate for robust and diverse educational choice in Alberta. Now, part of this, Mr. Speaker, comes from being an Albertan parent. Part of it comes from being an educator, an administrator, from kindergarten to university, for over 14 years in three countries, and I'm humbled and honoured to have had that as a little part of my background, that I bring here to the Chamber.

I have experience enough to know that the devil is in the details. The first issue is one of the main issues with many of the bills that we see this government bringing forward, which is, of course, debt. The government is saying that eliminating the two types of fees that this bill addresses, instructional material fees and transportation fees for eligible students, will result in \$54 million in savings for Alberta families. Of course, Mr. Speaker, that money has to come from somewhere to make up for the revenue being lost by the school boards, who have expressed great reservations about this. They've called us, and they've told us that.

Of course, we know that the money is coming from borrowing, from kicking the can down the road because every time the government makes another funding announcement while they're wallowing in red ink, it's not really a funding announcement.

Mr. Gottfried: It's a borrowing announcement.

Mr. Rodney: It's a borrowing announcement. Exactly.

I'm sure that government members may protest that point because in their announcement they say that \$54 million is going to come from finding efficiencies and attrition, which is fascinating for those who've been paying attention because they've spent the

last number of years trying their best to convince Albertans that every single dollar in the Education budget was absolutely crucial to maintaining teachers' jobs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when they want to spend an additional \$50 million, suddenly there are all these efficiencies available to be drawn from, which, of course, begs the question: how many teachers will have to lose their jobs because of this announcement? And I think we all know what the answer is. It's zero. No teachers will lose their jobs as a result of this announcement, right? As our caucus has been saying for the past few years, there is room in ministry budgets to reduce spending without impacting front-line services. We've always said that. So I'd like to thank the government for proving that point, that if the political will is there, we can absolutely maintain current levels of service without increasing spending.

But back to my original point. The fact that the government is announcing this while they are in the midst of the biggest spending spree in the history of this province is unbelievable. It's very important to point out that the money they're borrowing is coming from only one source. We all know who it is. It's Albertans, except it's not just Albertans today who will bear the cost of this government's promises. Basic economics and common sense prove that. It's the next generation and the next and maybe the next that will have to deal with the legacy the government is building now.

So when they borrow money to fund a reduction in school fees, let's be accurate, please. What's actually happening? Well, they're making the young students of today pay for any reduction in school fees. It's a shell game in which they appear to be taking school fees away, but it's simply a matter of removing lots of money from one pocket, keeping a whole bunch, putting a comparatively tiny amount back in the other pocket, and then expecting a pat on the back, a thank you, or perhaps a vote in return.

This may appear to be favourable to students and parents because suddenly there is some extra cash in the pocket for the year, except it does the opposite with interest. When our students graduate, they'll get a graduation gift from this NDP government.

Mr. Cooper: How much?

Mr. Rodney: Well, it's going to be a great, big helping of provincial debt, the number yet to be decided. We're at 25 per cent now. If it's 100, well, I guess you can multiply it by four.

The debt that was incurred, not just in this respect: we're talking \$11 billion, \$12 billion a year every year on behalf of the NDP, their years of mismanagement resulting from an inability to make tough choices. Even though I commend the government for their willingness to address the issue of school fees, I just wish, Mr. Speaker, that they were not doing it on the backs of our students.

11:30

There is a way to get this province to a fiscal position in which we can help families with access to education without mortgaging their children's future. That is why, referring to the member who was asking for ideas earlier, we had the Engage document last year, and that's why just this week we tabled our PC caucus plan for balanced budgets. That's how we can help them. If we're going to be moving the burden of school fees from parents to children, let's be accurate about it, at the very least.

Now, additionally I ask: wouldn't it be appropriate for this government to be more thorough in consultation before they bring forth legislation? School boards have been telling us that while they support the goal of this bill, reducing the overall burden of school fees, they still don't have the details on how this legislation is going to work and how it's going to affect them, and they wish they'd been talked to beforehand. It's only fair.

Mr. Speaker, these kinds of details should be consulted on. They should be developed in partnership with the school boards to ensure that these programs can be put in place effectively. I do hope that the government will be more conscientious about consulting before they bring forward legislation in the future as opposed to legislating and then consulting or something like that as an afterthought, which happens with just about everything the government has been doing, sadly.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with all that being said, I will be supporting this bill because I do believe in the importance of strong public funding for all of our forms of education, and I do believe in the need to reduce the burden on Alberta families with school-aged children, especially in these tough economic times.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: Yes, under 29(2)(a). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member made reference to his perception that the government is averse to making tough decisions, so I wonder if the hon. member could give us a few examples of the tough decisions that his party would make if it was restored to office in this province.

Mr. Rodney: Well, the first thing that we would do is kill the carbon tax, of course, right? Okay? I can tell you and I remember fondly the day that . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, could I ask that you direct your comments through the chair and to the House?

Please listen to the answer. The question has been asked.

The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I remember fondly, very fondly, the day, almost a year ago exactly now, when the hon. Government House Leader asked for an autographed copy of our Engage document, in which we had a multibillion-dollar challenge on a number of ideas on how a number of government departments could maintain all front-line services and decrease their costs at the same time. Now, I could use the next five minutes to go through that document, but I was happy to send over a copy to him, and I know that he read it, and I appreciate that.

It was also suggested in question period the other day by the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway asking about the budget, which I believe is still on at 3 o'clock tomorrow, somewhat in jest that perhaps the government might want to take the document that we put forward just this week, the PC path to balanced budgets, because it's all in there. Rather than taking up extra time of the House to discuss that, I just encourage the hon. member and everyone, all Albertans, to take a look at the PC plan to balance budgets because there's very good stuff in there that, again, is for Albertans, and it's all about the opportunity to bring us back into balance and restore the Alberta advantage, that's been missing for two years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak under 29(2)(a). I believe I actually stood up faster than the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, which is always an accomplishment. It's the working out at the gym with Dr. Bob.

My question for the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is that he had mentioned that, you know, for years he had said that fees should go

where they are intended – and I agree – and that he supports this reduction. He also says that there has been room in ministry spending for years to have cutbacks. So my question to him is: why did he not do that when he was in government and when his party was in government, and why is it that this government had to make the decisions that he couldn't?

Mr. Rodney: I really appreciate the question. It's an opportunity to share the fact that a rather short time ago we had not only a heritage savings trust fund in multibillion dollars, the envy of literally every country in the free world, as well as a \$17 billion sustainability fund, which, of course, is now gone, in addition to in-year savings that are documented – and they're on that newfangled interweb; take a look; it's all there – in-year savings that we experienced every year. We were in the best net asset position of any country, any jurisdiction of the free world.

I'll give you an example of my very first government bill, that happened in 2004 or '05.

The Speaker: Hon. member, look to me, please.

Mr. Rodney: Oh, right. Happy to speak to you about it. It's a great-news story, Mr. Speaker.

When I was on the strategic tourism and marketing commission, the first government bill that I brought forward was the hotel levy. You know what? It was upsetting when we had people coming in from other jurisdictions on – you know, it was 5 per cent they were charged extra, and I thought: okay; let's bring that down to 4. All the money that's raised would go to remarketing Alberta. The hotel and tourism industry was extremely pleased with that. Everyone who ever slept in a bed in a hotel was extremely pleased with that. I can tell you, sir, that it was a multibillion – that's how tourism has been funded year after year, and it fuels itself. It goes directly back.

Unfortunately, this government has decided to bleed off all sorts of millions of dollars from that remarketing, which blows my mind. It is extremely important . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Rodney: . . . especially, Mr. Speaker, at a time when these staycations are so popular because everybody loves Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. These fees have been around for many, many years, even way back when I was in high school. There were five of us, and at the start of the school year my parents, between school fees, bus fees, supply fees for the classes, and school supplies, had to fork out over \$2,000 every September. That was a lot of money way back then. You know, \$140 for textbook rentals: that was just totally absurd, whereas the public system charged nothing.

These fees are still around. There is a set of twins in Edmonton that I know of that were accepted in an Ivy League school. They had to postpone their full scholarships by six months till the mother, a single mother, had paid off their school fees because they weren't awarded their diplomas until the school fees were paid in full. That shouldn't happen.

There's a school in Red Deer where the children from grades 2 to 4 have to take swimming lessons. It's part of the PE class. They charge \$35 per student, but then the kids have to come up with bathing suits. A lot of these children don't even own bathing suits. So the kids sit at school while the others participate in the swimming activities, and then they get ostracized and stigmatized, all because of a school fee.

Another one is skiing. I know of a school where grades 3 and 4 go skiing. So the parents have to come up with the money for the ski pass. It's for eight weeks, so eight ski passes. They have to come up with busing money and with ski rental. Parents can't afford it. The kids sit at school, and they, too, get stigmatized and ostracized. The fees have gotten just totally out of control.

11:40

I remember one year with my children I got a Kleenex fee: \$2 a month to buy a box of Kleenex for the class. You know, it's the little things, the things that nickel and dime you. If you want to take chemistry, you have to pay for equipment rental and the chemicals you use. Biology: you have to pay for a frog to dissect a frog. Like, these kinds of things should be included in your education.

I've talked to many, many parents who are just appalled by the way they're being charged. One parent told me that she'd bought a set of pencil crayons for her daughter. She'd gone to the dollar store because that's what she could afford, and the teacher sent them home and said: they don't match the rest of the class's; you must get the same one as the rest of the class. So she paid a dollar for pencil crayons instead of the \$6 for the other ones because she couldn't afford them, and the kid was made to bring them home because they weren't the right ones.

You know, parents struggle. They want what's best for their children. Reducing these fees is going to go a long way. Kids are being bused to schools because the schools in their area are full. I'm lucky. I've got a new school opening in Red Deer-South in September of '17, and that will relieve the pressure on some of the other schools, and these children won't have to be bused anymore.

Things were let slide too long, and they got too far. I just want to encourage everyone in the House to vote for this because our children deserve it, our children need it, and the parents welcome it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me here in the Chamber this morning. I appreciate your willingness to be part of such an important debate.

I would just like to say a few words with respect to the comments from the Member for Red Deer-South. I appreciate the bill that's been tabled before the Chamber. I know that many of the words that she spoke this morning about being of assistance to parents and September being a stressful time of month and some of the challenges that come along with students not having the appropriate resources in order to attend activities at school are very, very valid and legitimate. I look forward to supporting the bill. You know, I think we could work to pass the bill quickly and ensure that we get on to the regulations just as fast as possible. I appreciate her comments and thank her for them and for being part of the government, that is taking some small steps to reduce school fees.

During the debate this morning I also heard some folks talking about a shadow budget and how the Wildrose may or may not be active in reducing school fees, and I just might like to ask the member if she is aware of any time in the NDP's history while they spent an extensive period of time in opposition – if she would be able to table any of their shadow budgets.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) to the member.

Mr. Westhead: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The member talked very passionately about how much she cares for children in her speech, and I know that she's also very passionate about a complementary

program to reducing school fees, which is the school nutrition program. In fact, she's got a motion on the Order Paper to that effect. I know that's something that's very close to her heart. If it's something that she feels comfortable speaking about, how she feels the nutrition program will complement the reduction in school fees, if that's something she'd like to talk about, I'd like to hear that from her if that's okay with her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children are near and dear to my heart. I have spent many years working in the schools either as a volunteer, an educational assistant, school librarian, and I've seen first-hand the struggles of children. If the parents can't afford the school fees, the children get ostracized not only because of the clothes they wear but for what they bring for lunch or what they don't bring for lunch, so the school nutrition program was something I was just totally thrilled about when it came.

I know of children who brought a carrot to school every day for a month because that's what they had. I was one of the parents who always put extra in the lunch because I was able to. Children, when they had to go to the office and ask for a cheese sandwich – it didn't always happen because the kids were embarrassed. If other kids in the class said, "You know, I've got an extra muffin. Would you like this muffin?" they would take it rather than go down to the office and ask for a sandwich.

That's why I'm bringing my motion forward. We have to think about the kids. The kids are our future, and if we don't look after them, what kind of a future can we look forward to?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nielsen: Standing Order 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. I just want to thank my hon. colleague for her comments with regard to this bill moving forward. You know, like her, I don't necessarily share some of the youthfulness that some of my colleagues in the House here share, but I do happen to remember some of those times from the past. I was wondering if the hon. member might be willing to comment a little bit about: based on our experience from the past, when we used to have a flat tax and when we didn't have a progressive tax . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and delighted to rise today in the House to support Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. I would like to share my personal story of when I came to Canada. When I came, my family was looking for work. I grew up in a low-income family and didn't have many financial resources available to support extra fees related to school. When I joined my high school and I was enrolled in different courses, I remember the day when I had to pick an art course that was most interesting to me. The most appealing course to me was photography. Photography is a course that is one of the very expensive courses just because you have to get a camera. You have to get the photographic paper and everything. There are many accessories that need to be bought to basically take that course.

When I went in, I was automatically enrolled based on the forms I submitted, but when I went to see my academic counsellor, I was hesitant to say, "Yes, I want that course." That hesitation was obvious on my face, a little bit of sadness. I was asked, "Why is that?" I told them that I'm afraid that I might not be able to afford the expenses associated with that course. The reply I got was: "If

you want the course, if you want to learn it, we will take care of you.” Those were the magical words that changed my world view. That was the moment when I believed that when we have access to education, then how far we can get in our lives. When I heard those words and when I saw the financial assistance and the care and support that I got from the school, it helped me to realize how important it is to forward that care and support and how we can strengthen and build our communities. I was happily enrolled in that course. I had the honour of learning about photography, and I did very well in my school.

11:50

That change in the world view basically let me believe that anything is possible in the world and the world is a great place to live in. The possibilities are limitless. This short story, as you can see, changed my life in such a big way that today I’m standing in Alberta’s Legislative Assembly fighting for other children who do not have access to resources at schools or education just because they’re having some financial crisis or having some affordability issues. I’m so pleased to be part of the government that is standing up for the schoolkids, that is standing up for our future, that is standing up for our society to move our province forward.

It was a shocker for me when I learned that students have to pay a fee when they are enrolled in schools in different forms and it is

causing a burden on their parents because when I was in school, my parents didn’t even know how I managed to sail through school without even asking them for a single penny.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support this bill, and I’m very proud that our government is taking such great initiative. Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, does anyone else wish to speak to the matter?

I think the House is ready for closure on debate on the matter. I need a motion, don’t I? Member for Banff-Cochrane, you have a motion you’d like the House to consider?

Mr. Westhead: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Education I’d like to close debate on second reading of Bill 1.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I think that caps the morning. A wonderful piece of legislation has been carried unanimously by this House.

I would like to thank all members for their support and move that we call it 12 o’clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:54 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 15, 2017

Day 8

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful group of students and staff from Garneau elementary school. Garneau elementary is a school that believes education should be active and interactive. These fine young Albertans and their dedicated teachers have been able to tour this beautiful Legislature Building, a building that belongs to each and every one of them just as much as it belongs to those of us elected to be here. They got to see what it's like to be an MLA and learn first-hand how democracy works. They're seated in the gallery over there, and I invite all members of the Assembly to extend a warm welcome to these tremendously fabulous young students and teachers.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Premier, I'd acknowledge that I have some bias; I have two grandsons that graduated from that school.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 students from Kensington school. It's a grade 5/6 class. They study social studies and local government, and they decided to come and see what actually is going on here. Jaelene McEwen is their teacher. I've worked with her for so long, and she does a wonderful job in teaching about democracy. As well, along with Jaelene there are chaperones Alba Lina Narvaez, Charlene Munro, and Tamara Bailey. If they could all stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly a group of brilliant and talented grade 6 students from Virginia Park school. They're led by their teacher, Mrs. Shelley Hardie, and parents Nykolet Graham, Amber Rodriguez, Deanna Chou, and Kerri Gibson Loranger. There's a good reason that Virginia Park school is so beautiful: because it's filled wall to wall with art that the children there have created over many years. It's a core arts school, and it teaches enhanced visual arts, dance, drama, and music. I would ask these talented budding artists to please stand up and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups?

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent from the great constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Marla Zapach. Now, Marla actually hails

from Nordegg, the jewel of the David Thompson highway. I know that members from all of the parties in the Assembly have enjoyed the area around Nordegg and know what a great place Marla comes from. She owns an ecotourism business in the area. She's also the president of the chamber of commerce in the area and works as an emergency responder with the volunteer fire department in the area. I'd like her to rise, if she could, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are pleased to declare March as Children's Wish Month this year in Alberta. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you two great kids, eight-year-old Mable Tooke, who is the superhero that many have gotten to know as Spider-Mable. Welcome back. You probably recall that she faced cancer with courage and bravery, and the Children's Wish Foundation granted her the wish to be a superhero for a day. We also have Jaxon Garner, who has joined us as well in the members' gallery. He is six years old. He loves camping with his family. Jaxon and his family were given the wish of a trailer and spent a lot of their time last summer enjoying the outdoors. Also with us today we have Kyla Martin and her colleagues with the Children's Wish Foundation and Jim Kapeluck, who is with the foundation board.

This month is all about celebrating these kids and the power of wishes. I want to say thank you to the Children's Wish Foundation for granting nearly 25,000 wishes, for helping lift their spirits, and for making life a little bit easier for these great kids and their families. I'd ask that Jaxon, Mable, and their families as well as the representatives from the Children's Wish Foundation please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an amazing organization, that has a branch in my riding of Edmonton-Rutherford. Family Futures is a growing community organization that empowers families and truly improves the lives of everyday people in the province. Since our government is all about making life easier for Albertans, I wanted to recognize the efforts that they put in every day to assist families, with locations in Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and soon, I understand, opening up a very large new shop in Summerside. They are seeing hundreds of mothers, fathers, and children through their doors every month.

I wanted to take a second to give these hard-working folks a moment of well-deserved recognition as they are truly enhancing the lives of Albertans. Thank you for all the work that you do. I would welcome you to please stand as I call out your names – Charles Burns, Barbara Burns, Sue Hopgood, Chris Gidyk, and Shari-Lynne Gidyk of Family Futures Edmonton – to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Lieutenant Chris Power, CD. If I could ask him to rise, please. Lieutenant Power was born in Mount Pearl, Newfoundland, and joined the Canadian armed forces in 1996. Throughout his

career he has been posted in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Alberta and has been deployed to Bosnia and Afghanistan. He is currently posted to the 3rd Canadian Division Support Group in Edmonton and now lives in Fort Saskatchewan, since November, with his wife, Jan, and their four children: Alex, Breagha, Cullen, and Rachel.

I'd like thank the lieutenant for his service to Canada and for the time that he spent with me touring the Legislature this afternoon. I know that he is going to be coming back with his children, and I look forward to him being able to visit the area where we recognize the women that trailblazed for his own daughters. If I could ask all members to please extend the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Carbon Levy Rebate Adjustment Notices

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing outrageous stories from Albertans about their parents and grandparents having to refund the carbon tax rebates. Dreaded notices are coming from the Alberta climate leadership adjustment rebate demanding repayment after the death of a spouse.

The NDP government recently sent the carbon tax rebate to an 84-year-old grandmother, then sent a bill to her to pay half of it back. The amount was \$25. Another senior on a fixed income had to refund \$150. Why, Mr. Speaker? Their marital status had changed. It changed due to the unfortunate passing of their husbands. The government of Alberta demanded that these seniors, who are grieving the loss of their husbands, pay back some or all of the NDP carbon tax rebate because their spouses are no longer eligible.

This is appalling. The one bill for \$25 is not only an insult to the family and to the memory of this gentleman, but the cost of recovering that amount exceeds the refund requested. The idiocy of this is mind boggling. For the other senior the \$150 was not manageable on her fixed income, so her family had to pay the bill. On top of all of this, one funeral home added \$10.25 to the funeral bill to cover the cost of the carbon tax for cremation.

1:40

What is this government doing to Albertans? There are so many reasons to scrap the NDP's carbon tax – the 9 million in tax dollars spent advertising it, the dramatic spikes to power and heating bills, increased prices of all goods and services across Alberta – but, Mr. Speaker, this takes the cake. As the one daughter said: the NDP are not for Alberta. Let's hope that someone, somewhere shows a bit more common sense.

Thank you.

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

Edmonton-McClung Meet Your Neighbour Campaign

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 150th anniversary of Canada's Confederation should be a joyous time, yet I can't remember when a greater level of fear and suspicion permeated our public discourse or when the headlines of the day cast a longer shadow on so many lives. Six men shot dead in a mosque in Quebec City. Bomb threats against Jewish community centres. We face a global refugee crisis greater than any in a generation, yet some Canadian voices today demand that we close our doors entirely. I talk to people in Edmonton-McClung who feel scared, scared to do things

they should be able to take for granted like registering their kids for daycare at the mosque or going to worship at the synagogue.

I grew up in an Alberta where you knew your neighbours, respected their differences, and opened your doors to them, sir. That is the Alberta I want my grandchildren to grow up to know. That sense of community and openness: it's one of the things that Albertans count on the most, one of the things that makes our lives better. Every MLA has a duty to protect that fundamental value of caring for one another. That means restoring connections between Albertans, between neighbours. I believe that starts right at home, right at the doorstep.

Here's how I will do that this spring and summer in Edmonton-McClung. In celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary I will invite each of our seven community leagues to join me in a meet your neighbour door-knocking campaign. Families, faith groups, youth groups, and more will meet at each community hall and then fan out to meet at least 150 new neighbours. Later in the summer we'll have a grand finale reception at my summer barbeque, where we'll join together to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary.

I'm excited to think about the new connections between people that this campaign will generate. I hope this will encourage other hon. members to help counter the voices of division and fear surfacing in their own ridings, to help us all rediscover that welcoming sense of community that is found at the heart of Canada and our beloved province of Alberta.

Thank you, sir.

Progressive Conservative Budget Plan

Mr. Fraser: Yesterday our caucus delivered a plan for Alberta that would deliver a balanced budget in the 2019-20 fiscal year. This plan also made the commitment that we would not lay off any front-line workers. That means no nurses, no doctors, and no teachers would lose their jobs as we move towards balance.

Every member of this House ran for office because they wanted to do what was best for Albertans. While different members and different parties have different ideas on how to best serve the public interest, we should all acknowledge that in the end we are all working towards the goal of a better Alberta.

When we ask the government to show restraint on spending increases, when we ask them to rethink new taxes that they're introducing to an already hurting economy, we are not threatening cuts to thousands of front-line jobs. Despite government claims that we would target the livelihoods of nurses and teachers, our goal is actually to make sure that Albertans have the opportunity to succeed, whether they are male, whether they are female, gay, straight, religious, or atheist. That means protecting our health care and our education services, but it also means reducing the tax burden and debt for everyone.

That's why we released our balanced budget plan. We owe it to our constituents to show that there are more responsible, common-sense ways to manage tax dollars and that it doesn't mean we have to sacrifice essential services. The Progressive Conservative caucus is focused on solutions, on problems that Albertans face. While we may not all agree on how to get there, we hope all parties in this House will join us in that conversation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Resource Development in Peace River

Ms Jabbour: In October 2015 my constituency of Peace River was dealt an economic blow when Shell cancelled the Carmon Creek oil sands project. The opposition tried to blame our newly elected government for this even though Shell made it clear that the

decision was based on low oil prices and pipeline uncertainty. Shell, in fact, supported our environmental and regulatory policies.

A few months later I toured Shell's Peace River operations, including the Carmon Creek site. It was sad to see this massive industrial project as a virtual ghost town, the empty state-of-the-art camp facility, the partially constructed 690 megawatt cogeneration plant. Our community, however, remained hopeful, and we are now finally seeing positive signs of recovery. The climate leadership plan has led to two new pipeline approvals, and companies are embracing opportunities to invest in renewable energy technology.

In November Baytex increased investment in Peace River by purchasing \$65 million in heavy oil assets, with the goal of restarting shut-in production over the next few years. In February Kinetico purchased the Carmon Creek cogeneration plant, intending to repurpose the facility as a stand-alone power plant producing green energy and reducing emissions. A few days ago we learned that CNRL is acquiring Shell's assets in Peace River. As part of the agreement CNRL will continue to employ the 110 staff in Peace River and take over the Carmon Creek thermal oil sands assets and undeveloped leases.

These are positive opportunities for Peace River, a sign of investor confidence in economic recovery and growth in the north. However, instead of supporting things that will make life better for families in my constituency, the opposition has chosen to portray this as a negative statement against our government policies. Rather than offering encouragement and hope to Peace River families, the opposition is fearmongering and tearing down these signs of economic recovery.

In Peace River we are excited to see CNRL, Baytex, and Kinetico breathing new life into our economy. These Alberta-based companies will foster economic growth in our region, and with the help of our government's progressive and forward-looking policies, they will do this in a way that balances economic prosperity with environmental responsibility. This is good news.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Rajab Islamic Month

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rajab is the seventh month of the Islamic calendar and a prelude to the sacred months of Sha'ban and Ramadan. Thus, it is the key to the opening of the months of goodness and blessings.

The term "Rajab" is derived from the word "Rajaba," which means to respect. This year the month of Rajab is anticipated to begin on March 30, depending on the moon sighting. It is the month of the birth of Imam Ali, alaihi salaam, the first imam of Shia Muslims and fourth caliph of Sunni Muslims. Imam Ali, alaihi salaam, was first cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. He was born on the 13th day of the month inside the house of Allah, the Kaaba in Mecca. To define the significance of this month, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "In Paradise there is a canal named Rajab. Its water is whiter than milk, cooler than ice and sweeter than honey. The one who observes even a single fast in Rajab, he/she will be entitled to drink its water."

Muslims celebrate this month grandly by hosting Koonday, the tablecloth dinner. The celebration is the time for Muslims to remember the blessings of Allah and Ahlul Bayt, the family of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. It is one of the very significant months for Muslims to strengthen ties among the community with love, compassion, and peace. The month of Rajab is known for its superabundant favours and benefits, reverence and

sanctity and is linked to almighty Allah. Therefore, it is a month when Muslims fast, seek forgiveness, and engage in charity acts.

I would like to wish Rajab Mubarak to everyone and to all Muslims. Thank you.

Energy Policies

Mr. MacIntyre: On Monday and Tuesday I, along with over 500 stakeholders in the electricity sector, attended the 23rd annual Independent Power Producers conference. There was a noticeable atmosphere of uneasiness amongst the participants. Why? Because this government has declared war on the technological neutrality of our free-market electricity system, a system that's mission was affordability and reliability, where the market was free to choose what is best based on very few constraints, and the fewer the constraints, the more affordable and efficient the system.

Why? Because the industrial component of the carbon tax is designed to decline steadily, and we won't have funds available to pay for a capacity market. Why? Because EDC estimates that this government's plan is going to cost Albertans between \$20 billion and \$30 billion.

Why? Because this government has no respect for the fact that Alberta built the only electricity system in North America where taxpayers are not saddled with utility debt. Why? Because the taxpayer and the ratepayer are still the same person, and the system only works when the government respects that.

Why? Because all this government learned from the architects of the Ontario plan, that are now on Alberta's payroll, is how to hide the cost of green energy policies, not their ineffectiveness at reducing greenhouse gas emissions nor the pain that high power prices and tax bills create for families whose care this government is charged with.

1:50

Why? Because this government is more concerned with the revenue they're collecting for their green slush fund than they are with incumbent renewables, renewables that for a decade have reduced greenhouse gas emissions without centrally planned dictates of a technologically illiterate and overzealous politburo.

Why? Because every time the NDP try to carelessly patch up the holes they put in this ship, they make two more.

Speaker's Ruling

Imputing Falsehoods against a Member

The Speaker: I'd like to use this opportunity to rule on a point of order that was raised yesterday by the Government House Leader concerning a remark that the Member for Calgary-Foothills made during Oral Question Period. During question period the Member for Calgary-Foothills referenced a comment that the Deputy Premier had made on Monday with respect to the Official Opposition. You can find the Member for Calgary-Foothills' remarks on page 252 of the *Alberta Hansard* for March 14, 2017, and the Deputy Premier's remark can be found at page 206 of *Hansard* for the 13th.

I deferred my ruling so that I could review *Alberta Hansard* and see the full context of what has been said over the past number of days. Hon. members, for the last number of sitting days certain statements and expressions have been added to questions and responses in question period and also made during debate. These comments have really had little to do with questions or responses or contributed to the debate. Instead, these remarks seem to be made mainly in an effort to elicit response from the other side. They seem

to be deliberately provocative, and they have, clearly, repeatedly caused disorder.

I have ruled previously in the Assembly on language which, although not unparliamentary per se, nevertheless caused and does cause disorder. In those many instances I've cautioned members to avoid using intemperate language that was deliberately provocative. Members may find my rulings on page 1385 of the June 1, 2016, *Alberta Hansard*; page 1455 of the June 2, 2016, *Hansard*; and on page 782 of the December 2, 2015, *Hansard*.

I'd like to remind members, first of all, that while it is the job of the Speaker to maintain order and decorum, it is also the responsibility of each member to show a high degree of respect for their colleagues during all Assembly proceedings. "Respect" is certainly the watchword for members for their interactions in this Assembly.

In the instance we have before us, we have a reference to comments that were originally made by the Deputy Premier, remarks that were certainly intemperate. Indeed, there was a subsequent acknowledgement, however, that the remarks were not appropriate when the Deputy Premier unreservedly apologized and withdrew her comments, which may be found on page 235 of yesterday's *Alberta Hansard*.

I would note that typically in this Assembly when an apology is made and a comment is withdrawn, the effect of an apology and the withdrawal is honoured, and the Assembly moves on. By the same token, when an hon. member indicates that they never said what was attributed to them, members should also respect that.

Hon. members, I'm quite concerned about the deteriorating tone. Accordingly, I would like to thank the House leaders for agreeing to meet with me to discuss this decorum as well as other related issues. While there may not have been per se a point of order here in the exchange of remarks, it does little to improve the freedom of speech. Hon. members, it is our collective responsibility to address this matter as we move forward so that we can return to conducting the business that all Albertans expect of us and that they elected us to do.

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Levy Rebate Adjustment Notices

Mr. Jean: This government is out of control. Most Albertans are already angry enough over this carbon tax, but the NDP had another trick up their sleeve. There are some Albertans who received a relatively small rebate for the cost of the carbon tax earlier this year. Tragically, they passed away. Now the taxman is chasing them down trying to recoup that money from grieving loved ones, not to mention the offence of grieving families seeing a carbon tax line item in the funeral expenses of their loved ones. Did no one on the government benches realize that this was going to happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows as a result of the Minister of Finance already responding to this issue, this is a matter that we believe should not have happened. We absolutely don't think that it was right; we don't think it was fair. It was a request that was made by the Canada Revenue Agency, who's administering the rebate. Our officials have already reached out to them, and we are in discussions with them to ask that it not happen anymore because we agree that it is not appropriate. It is not fair. We stand with Albertans. We want to

make life better for them, not more confusing, particularly in those awful times, and we're going to take action.

Mr. Jean: Marie Casey received the so-called rebate in January. She died weeks later, but now this government is trying to claw back that hundred dollars from her estate while family members like Darlene Piche continue to grieve. She also got a bill for the carbon tax from the crematorium. It was for \$10. You can try to downplay that cost, but you can't excuse the insult or insensitivity. The Finance minister and the Premier seem clueless that this could even happen in the first place. How did no one on the government benches provide direction to the CRA on this, and will someone be fired for the insensitivity and lack of judgment?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the member opposite listen to the answers to the questions because sometimes they get them, as they just did.

Now, first of all, to sort of correct the record, this was not a letter that was sent by our government. It was sent by the CRA, the Canada Revenue Agency, and we have taken action to have the matter corrected. We also agree with the member opposite that it was not appropriate; it was not fair. It was absolutely not what that family needed to see at that time. That is why we are going to do everything we can to make sure that the Canada Revenue Agency stops this practice, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: It's less than three months into the implementation of the carbon tax. How could you possibly not know this would happen? Clawing back carbon tax money from grieving loved ones is more than what you've described, Premier. It's disgusting, it's shameful, and someone needs to be held to account. We've heard stories of widows, who have lost their husbands, having the CRA ask for more rebate money back. Daughters, sons, sisters, and brothers: they're all being chased down by the NDP government. And all the Finance minister can muster up is, and I quote: we will urge the CRA to stop it. Will anyone be held accountable for this, and if not, why won't they be?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it really is difficult to have these conversations when the members opposite insist on moving forward with pieces of information that they know are not correct. The member opposite suggested that they're being chased down by the NDP government when they know full well that this is something that happened with the Canada Revenue Agency and that the NDP government is standing up for Albertans and speaking to the CRA to ask them to stop the practice. I would like the member opposite to acknowledge the information that he's just been given not once, not twice, but three times.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Did you hear that, Mr. Speaker? It sounds like a lot of excuses out there.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: It's the eve of the NDP government's budget, and most Albertans are bracing for the impact of what bad news will be delivered tomorrow. The so-called shock absorber approach by the Finance minister is making a bad situation much worse. The real shock to the NDP government should be the 58 per cent of Albertans dissatisfied with their economic approach. What's the NDP's response to this? It's to say that the broad themes in Budget 2017 will be the same as 2016. To the Premier: why aren't you listening to the concerns of Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's really easy to throw stones when you don't offer up your own solutions. Thankfully, today the member opposite's caucus did walk forward with just a little bit of information when they said they would subject Albertans to, and I quote: a fiscal *Dragon's Den*. Think about that for a moment. The Wildrose want to turn Albertans' futures into a reality TV show. Who would run the gauntlet of their show? Children with special needs, long-term care patients, vulnerable children, parents, and students? Albertans deserve so much better.

2:00

Mr. Jean: For two years Albertans have buckled down to face the economic downturn as best as possible. They've made big sacrifices just so they can pay their bills and their mortgage. It's been a struggle. But for the NDP government it's: "Let the good times roll. Downturn? What downturn? Let's just rack up some more debt." The NDP ought to leave their offices every once in a while and talk to real Albertans. It would be important. They might actually hear some common sense for once. Why does the Premier think her government is above doing what all Albertans are doing around their kitchen table, finding savings?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what Albertans don't want is to risk their future so that the Wildrose can be reality TV stars. That is not good governance. Our government is committed to making life better for Albertans by making their life more affordable, by stimulating job growth, and by protecting the very services that protect and serve the families of Alberta. This is what we ran on, this is what we committed to, and this is the direction that we will continue to move forward with.

Mr. Jean: Albertans are not expecting a miracle overnight that'll get us out of the red, but they do expect effort to work towards reducing the debt and to tackle the debt. They know that spending today will fall on the hands of future generations to pay off. The Finance minister talks of bending the curve, but we've seen no plan at all to get back to balance. When Wildrose puts forward common-sense ideas to reduce the deficit without cuts to front-line services, we get insults, tired and condescending talking points, and no substance. Will the Premier tell me just one serious idea to reduce Alberta's deficit? Just one.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member opposite: when it comes to coming up with ideas to cut public spending, why is he even stopping at *Dragons' Den*? How about *Survivor*? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: Tune in next week to see who the Wildrose kicks off the island. Will it be seniors? Will it be students? Will it be people in hospital? Who are they going to throw off the island? We are going to have Albertans' backs. We will protect them, not the folks over there. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, when I call for order, please become quiet.

The third main question.

Mr. Jean: Easy answer, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are going to throw the NDP government off the island next election.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Part of the plan to balance will need to include finding efficiencies within government departments. A manager managing

a manager who reports to a director doesn't serve our system well. A bloated bureaucracy diverting funds away from front-line services, where they are needed most, doesn't help. When we spend \$1,100 more per capita than Ontario on health care to get longer wait times, something needs to change. To the Premier: what specific actions is she going to direct her government to take to find cost savings without impacting front-line services? Just one example.

Ms Notley: As we've said before, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to bringing down the deficit in a careful and prudent manner. We are not going to throw people under the bus in order to get to a balanced budget in a way that hurts our communities. The members opposite are talking about taking \$2 billion out of operating. Do you know what that would do? That would eliminate all of AISH, and they wouldn't be done. They would then also have to cut all of our public security spending. That wouldn't even get them there. They have no ideas. They're throwing out numbers. It's magical thinking, and there is no solution as a result.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government has a savings problem, a spending problem, and obviously a fearmongering problem. It's a boat with two large holes drilled in the side with only a thimble available to bail it out. It just won't work, and Albertans are looking desperately for their life vests. Albertans don't want tired talking points, blaming the world price of oil for the current situation we're in. They want action from this government. When will the Premier realize that she needs to listen to the majority of Albertans and get her government's finances in order?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans are looking for from this government is a government that will work on creating and stimulating job growth. They want a government that has their back, that wants to make their life more affordable through things like a cut in student fees, something that the members opposite apparently don't support. You know what else? They want a government that will preserve those important public services that families rely on so that they can invest in their future and plan for greater prosperity in years to come. That's what they're looking for. They're not looking for slashing and burning from those folks.

Mr. Jean: Like I said, get out from under the dome.

Many of the reasons the NDP government is taking on further debt are the result of self-inflicted wounds. Taking energy companies to court over PPAs and accelerating the shutdown of coal rests squarely on this NDP government's shoulders. Not only do these ill-advised schemes cost our province more; they send a signal to investors that is not helpful. It's simply saying: don't do business in Alberta. Will the Premier show that she isn't completely out of touch with Albertans and the business community and drop the PPA lawsuit today?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to investor certainty, one of the things that we heard from investors is that we needed to fix the broken electricity system. We needed to provide certainty to producers and to investors, both of which were waning because the system was broken. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: In addition, Mr. Speaker, we heard from consumers that they could not afford the wild price swings that the members opposite built into our electricity system. So, having Albertans' backs, we took action. We built a better system. It's going to attract investment, and it's going to be better for Albertans for decades to come.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Cabinet Ministers' Participation in Debate

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the NDP government shows disdain for Albertans in many ways. It talks down to them. It acts first and then only pretends to consult later. I could cite many examples, including the job-killing carbon tax and the coal phase-out, that totally disregards the very communities being devastated. As if this was not enough, the NDP regularly schedules cabinet meetings in the middle of Monday afternoons during the Assembly sitting. To the Premier: will you show some respect for this House and schedule your cabinet meetings when we're not sitting so that your ministers may attend?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, there's a lot of work that goes on when one is governing, but let me say this. We actually have 55 members in our caucus, all of whom are brilliant members of this Legislature, all of whom are able to move forward with debate on behalf of each of their constituents and to represent Albertans and to work on our project of making life more affordable and better for all Alberta families.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Well, the cabinet doesn't have to show up. I get it.

Mr. Speaker, given that rural Albertans in the agricultural sector are vital parts of our economy and given that Alberta's rural leaders will gather for the AAMD and C convention in Edmonton next week and given that these leaders need access and dialogue with senior members of this government – no cabinet meetings, in other words – so that, unlike the Bill 6 fiasco, they can talk to them, to the Premier: will you make sure your ministers are available for the AAMD and C so that you don't get booed out of the room again this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for asking me scheduling questions. Our members, our MLAs, and also our cabinet ministers have regularly attended AAMD and C meetings, AUMA meetings, and a number of other stakeholder meetings, and they have engaged thoughtfully and respectfully with the representatives from those organizations and many others, and I'm pleased to be able to tell the Assembly that they will continue to do that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, since this session started, for the first questions the Deputy Premier in particular has made a point of not even trying to answer the questions but, rather, run out a string of insults. The Premier has called Albertans embarrassing cousins, told them to take the bus, told them to make better decisions, and the Deputy Premier showed up with a rhyme that starts with: "We're focused on hard hats. They're spending . . ." Well, you know the end of the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. McIver: You know the end of the poem, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon member, please be seated. I just finished a caution asking that you be respectful. I would ask that you consider that advice about caution.

Mr. McIver: That's why I was going to say: we know the end of the poem. Mr. Speaker, I wasn't going to say it based on your remarks.

Premier, do you condone this characterization of Albertans by you and your Deputy Premier, and can we expect better from both of you in the future?

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Noted.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I reject the description that was offered by the member opposite in pretty much every way. But what I will say is that our government is committed to building a more inclusive, a more welcoming, a more diverse Alberta.

2:10

We are doing that in a number of ways. We're doing that by increasing the opportunities for women across our province, within our caucus, and within our cabinet. We are doing that by reaching out to members of all different religions and all different multicultural groups because they, too, need to be included. We are doing that by continuing to move forward by protecting minorities, who sometimes feel abused and put upon.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Provincial Budget Document Formats

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Transparency is the cornerstone of democracy. On January 3 of this year I sent a letter to the Minister of Finance requesting that he release all of the numbers from the upcoming budget in an open-data format so that all Albertans can more effectively engage in the democratic process. Now, given that the minister hasn't yet responded to my letter, I thought I might ask the question here now, today. To the Minister of Finance: will you release all of the data from the upcoming budget in an open electronic format and make it accessible to members of this Assembly, to the media and stakeholder groups, and to the public?

Mr. Ceci: You know, I know that the member opposite asked me that question right here, right in front of my desk, previously, a couple of weeks ago, and I explained to him that there will be some tables that will be released in an open-format basis but not all tables. Some of those tables can be manipulated, and it would be a bad thing to characterize the government's work in a manipulated form to Albertans. We don't want to share it that way. We'll share those that we're able to, for sure, but not everything.

Mr. Clark: Well, Mr. Speaker, that seems like a strange objection. It's like saying that we shouldn't have highways because some people might speed.

Again to the minister. I would like to know if you have any real, actual evidence that this information could be misused, or are you just worried that we'll use that information to prove to Albertans that there is a middle way that promotes Alberta innovation, actually balances the budget, and does so without front-line service cuts? It is possible, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I'll just repeat that some information will be shared in an open-format basis, not all of the information. Certainly, there will be hard copies. There will be

electronic stick copies of all of the budget. Albertans, if they want, can access that. It'll be on websites immediately after I start my speech as well, Mr. Speaker. Albertans will get the information they're looking for. We just don't want some to be potentially manipulated. I'm not saying by you, but I'm saying by others.

Mr. Clark: Well, it's funny that you mention the cost and the fact that you're going to release this in a printed version because today there was a report that said that each copy of the federal budget costs \$102 to print. I'm curious. To the Minister of Finance again: what does it cost to print each copy of the provincial budget, and will you commit to saving money and trees by distributing open electronic versions of the budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. This might be a better question to the Minister of Environment and Parks. I didn't say how much those printed versions would cost. I don't know. I'll find out. But, you know, Albertans can go online immediately after I start my speech, and they can see the entire budget – in full it's thousands of pages – and read it then.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Highway 813 Bridge

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The famous author and playwright George Ryga, the pride of Richmond Park, once wrote about travelling across the Athabasca River on the new highway 813 bridge, one the community had long been asking for. Of course, that was in 1955. A lot of things have changed since the 1950s, and so has that bridge but not for the better. This bridge has seen better days. To the Minister of Transportation: when will my constituents finally see this bridge replaced?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much to the hon. member for the question and for the work that he's done to bring this issue to my concern. You know, in the last year, Mr. Speaker, we've done quite a bit of patching on the south side of highway 813, but I agree that projects like replacing the aging bridge on highway 813 over the Athabasca River are important. It plays an important role in supporting the economy, in the agriculture and logging industries in northern Alberta. We've taken these concerns into account, hon. member, and we'll do our best to help.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a new bridge would not only remove what has been a real impediment to economic development in our region and given that for decades now citizens have been demanding a bridge that is wider and not under constant repair, what has the government done to move this project forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We're aware that the municipality considers the project to be a very high priority. I've met with the local officials on the council on this matter, and we are committed to improving infrastructure because our government wants to make life better for Albertans, and part and parcel of that is making sure that we have the infrastructure that they need to support education, health care, and particularly to support economic development. We want to

keep people safe; we want to make their lives better. That's what the government is committed to.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our region's businesses, especially in the tourism, energy, forestry, and agriculture sectors, are very eager to see shovels in the ground for this project, can the minister provide a timeline for when we will see this bridge replaced?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for that question. While I can't provide a specific timeline for the hon. member, I can assure him that he will have to wait less time than under the previous government, which, I guess, was probably 60, 70 years. I'm sure the time until we can fix this problem will be significantly less than the amount of time taken by the previous government.

Provincial Fiscal Policies (continued)

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker . . . [applause] Thank you. I'll try to be nice today.

Alberta has not had a balanced budget since 2007. A decade ago George Bush was President, Maroon 5 topped the charts, and popped collars were an acceptable fashion choice for grown men. Since then the net financial assets of our province have collapsed by \$50 billion. Successive Finance ministers and Premiers have all talked a game about balancing the budget but have never had a serious plan to get there. Will this Finance minister and Premier be any different when they table their budget tomorrow?

Mr. Ceci: I want to first say congratulations to the member opposite on the birth of his new daughter.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this government will continue to do the things we said we'll do all along. This government will act as a shock absorber. The Leader of the Official Opposition doesn't know what that means, I think. The shock absorber is all about protecting Albertans through this recession so they don't have to wear fewer services and send their children to larger classrooms and get into waiting rooms in hospitals that are horrendous for their needs. That's what we're going to continue to do.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. member, I am appreciating a much more quiet, mellow person for the next little while.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Don't get used to it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much, Minister, for the kind remarks.

On a completely unrelated topic, a hypothetical child born on March 11 at 10:04 p.m. would owe exactly \$6,929.29 of provincial debt the moment they were born. Based on current borrowing projections, by the time they're old enough to vote that child will owe almost \$50,000 of provincial debt. My question is simple. Does the minister believe this is fair to future generations?

Mr. Ceci: You know, this hypothetical child that we're talking about, Mr. Speaker: how did the hospital treat mom and child when they were there? Did they support them? We are doing that by supporting hospitals. This future child, when she goes to school, will she be in a classroom with 20 kids or 40 kids, like might happen over there? Families know we have their backs.

An Hon. Member: We missed you.

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I missed you, too, Minister.

Actually, the hospital was absolutely excellent.

Today Wildrose released our plan to balance the operating budget by 2019 and the total consolidated budget deficit by 2020. We proposed common-sense cost-cutting measures like a government-wide salary freeze to save \$210 million, reducing the number of bureaucrats through attrition to save \$312 million, and scrapping the carbon tax slush fund to save a very good \$1.2 billion. Is this government willing to be reasonable, sit down with the Opposition, and consider adopting some of these measures to get us to a balanced budget?

2:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, he talks cuts over there, but let me see. Conservative cuts are at odds with their spending requests. One request from that side was for a new hospital in Airdrie. Another request was for \$250 million from the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for five new intersections. One day they talk cuts. We also hear that they talk spend, spend, spend.

Mr. Fraser: Yesterday the PC caucus released our balanced budget. It's a plan that listens to the priorities of Albertans. It controls government spending without cutting any essential programs and protects every front-line job. When these common-sense alternatives were given to the Finance minister, though, he laughed it off and said: I won't be using any of those ideas. Minister, can you confirm your comments? Did you mean your budget won't consider modest spending and that you won't include a plan to pay back your out-of-control debt, or will it be a true NDP budget and none of the above?

Mr. Ceci: You know, I'll start out by saying: stay tuned. Be in this Legislature tomorrow at 3:15, and you'll hear the entire budget speech right from this very part.

The bigger question, I think, is: where is our economy going? Are we coming back? Do we see green shoots happening in our economy? I think the answer is starting to say yes to all of that. In the *Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune* yesterday: "Future of Oil, Gas in Peace Country Positive." In the *Globe and Mail* on the weekend: "Oil-field Service Firms Seeing New Signs of Life." The actions of this government and the people of Alberta are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans have been loud and clear that they don't support the NDP carbon tax and given that our balanced budget includes the fact that we'll repeal that carbon tax, Minister, we can't fix your carbon tax today, so will you do the right thing now and at least put some of the revenue generated from this carbon tax towards paying off the skyrocketing debt that you're accumulating?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I think we've been clear all along that the carbon levy, as a result of the climate leadership plan, has achieved two pipelines in this province. Approval for two pipelines is a direct result that the carbon levy is going back in terms of rebates. It's going back in terms of innovations. It's going back in terms of

diversifying our economy. Things like that are happening. The petrochemical diversification program is also happening. That all is taking place because of our work on the climate leadership plan.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our caucus doesn't support the federally imposed carbon tax and given that the federal government will still hit Albertans with a \$50 per tonne carbon tax in the near future, to the same minister: will you listen to Albertans when it comes to dealing with this heavy tax burden that they're about to face, and will you make the federal carbon tax revenue neutral and cut their personal taxes?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the important question. You know, the member doesn't talk about the important work we've already done with small businesses in terms of cutting their taxes from 3 per cent to 2 per cent. We're making life affordable not only for small businesses but for Albertans. We're reducing by 25 per cent the school fees. We haven't brought in a health care premium like you guys would have brought in over there. We're also making sure that taxes are fair and equitable for Albertans and putting them at the midpoint for all of Canada.

Carbon Policies

Mr. Barnes: With the implementation of the NDP carbon tax, innovators in our junior oil and gas sector are worried, worried about their financial future and the jobs they create. On Monday I asked the minister if the government planned to give large subsidies to energy companies that lobbied for a carbon tax, so large that these companies won't actually be paying any carbon tax, leaving junior oil and gas companies to foot the entire bill. She provided no answer, evading the question. To the minister: did you mean to say yes but evaded the question just because you're too embarrassed to admit it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're pleased to support energy companies in Alberta, all sizes. We are pleased, for example, that this week there was an announcement by an Alberta company investing in Alberta, doubling down not just as Albertans but doubling down on their investments in Alberta. It's disappointing that constantly on that side we're hearing about not support for Alberta companies but support for others. I have to say that on this side we are supporting Alberta business.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, protecting the 15 per cent of oil and gas companies that exchanged political cover with the NDP government for not having a carbon tax that would only be applied to their competitors does not build prosperity and fairness. Given that the climate leadership plan penalizes 85 per cent of the job creators in Alberta's largest industry with a crippling carbon tax and given that those carbon tax revenues are earmarked to be cycled back to subsidize their competitors, again to the Minister of Energy: when will this NDP government stop picking winners and losers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work with all our companies on the carbon price, and we're working with them on innovation. Our companies are amazing innovators, and the carbon levy is going to help support that innovation. Again disappointed that the opposition doesn't believe in the innovation of Alberta industry and our Alberta energy people.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, we have industry fleeing for other jurisdictions, moving billions of dollars in investment capital and thousands of jobs, and an Energy minister that cannot tell Albertans when they can expect the results of a now long-overdue OSAG panel. Given the OSAG panel's obvious ties to investor confidence, again to the Minister of Energy: when can our oil sands industry and their investors expect the findings of the OSAG panel, and will the results be fair and equitable to all players in the industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're working with the companies on carbon pricing. We're working on lowering our emissions. Our companies are amazing innovators, and they continue to innovate. They're driving down costs. When I was in Houston last week, that's what we heard from Cenovus and from other companies, about how they have lowered their emissions while lowering their prices, and they're remaining competitive in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I spoke with a constituent who has had to navigate the overly complicated guardian/trustee process. This process is meant to help Albertans looking to take on guardianship roles for vulnerable loved ones. Families often have to pay for lawyers to navigate this process, and more and more people are requesting legal assistance. To the Minister of Justice: what will you do to fix this process and make it user friendly?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, it's a fundamental commitment of this government to make sure that we're standing up for vulnerable Albertans and for all Albertans to make their lives a little bit easier. We're constantly reviewing all of our processes. As I understand, the process in question is subject to some recommendations from the Auditor General, so we're looking very closely at those and working very closely with them, and we will work with all Albertans to make sure that these processes meet their needs.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that guardians are forced to jump through many hoops – attend appointments, assessments, and verifications from professionals, professional associations, and law enforcement agencies – and given that the forms themselves are onerous, with two bundles, the first having up to 12 forms and the second bundle having up to five separate forms, how will this government work with families of vulnerable Albertans to navigate this process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, at the end of the day, what we have to understand is that the office of the public guardian and trustee is in place to make sure that vulnerable Albertans are taken care of. Sometimes that requires that those doing the caring submit to some screening checks to make sure that we're able to provide for those vulnerable individuals' care by people who are upstanding, good members of society who will take proper care of them, and sometimes we do need to have that oversight.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that the guardianship manual for the people to educate themselves is 63 pages with complicated language like the two-page section on the 54 acronyms the guardian is expected to know and given that guardians shouldn't have to use the two-page decoder just to read the government information package, will the minister commit to reviewing the information package for guardians seeking to help their loved ones?

2:30

Ms Ganley: Well, as we've said, Mr. Speaker, the office of the public guardian and trustee is fairly new to my ministry. Certainly, we are working with them on all sorts of processes as we speak. We will absolutely look at those forms to make sure that they are as legible as possible. As someone who once provided legal services to vulnerable Albertans, we know how important it is that they're able to access and understand that information.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

NAIT Board of Governors Chair Appointment

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Minister of Finance said in this House, "I'm not going to apologize for getting people on boards for what they know as opposed to who they know." Two days before that this government appointed Mr. Ray Martin, a former NDP MLA and former NDP leader, as the chair of the board of NAIT. This is the height of hypocrisy. To the Finance minister: can you tell Albertans, without smiling, that you're not embarrassed by this appointment? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ray Martin is a great Albertan who has served this province very well for decades. I'm ashamed to hear the member opposite drag his name through the mud and suggest that Mr. Martin isn't appropriate. Mr. Martin has a solid track record of serving the community, and he will continue to do so as the chair of the board of NAIT.

Mr. Gill: Hypocrisy it is.

Given that on December 7 the minister said in this House about the ministry's new process for appointing members to ABCs, "We are working so that this is not just an insiders', old boys' club" and given that according to the new guidebook, the minister or an office rep of the Premier's office must sit in on the interview, and cabinet approves this appointment, to the Advanced Education minister now: was Mr. Martin appointed because of what he knew or because he's an insider with an NDP world view?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, as I said in my previous answer, Mr. Martin has a successful track record of serving this province very well. He's experienced in the field of education. He worked as a teacher. He's been a member of the Edmonton public school board for many years. He will continue to serve the people, with a mandate for improving education in this province, as the chair of the board of NAIT, and I'm very proud to have been part of making that appointment.

Mr. Gill: World view it is.

Given that on November 3 the Finance minister said, "We are resetting the appointment process for the [ABCs] so [they] will look more like Albertans and less like that side" and given that the NDP tried to turn Alberta into Cuba, with Ms Berman calling the shots on the oil sands and appointing a good party comrade to the head of the NAIT board, Minister, when you told Albertans that ABCs

would look “less like that side,” did you mean that they would look more like your side?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, our boards do look more like this side, in that we have appointed an equal number of women to many boards. In fact, the hon. member might be pleased to know that there are more women on the board of NAIT than there are on that entire side of the House, and we will continue to make those appointments to make sure that our boards look like Albertans and not like that side of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Reynolds-Alberta Museum

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose is home to the award-winning Reynolds-Alberta Museum, a paradise of vintage automobiles, bicycles, agricultural implements, aircraft, and industrial equipment. However, this heritage is at stake due to a shortage of storage facilities. Given that my constituents advocated for Reynolds with the previous government with no success, to the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is this government doing to protect Alberta's transportation and industrial heritage?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that question. I want to also thank the member for his advocacy on this file. We know tourism makes life better for Albertans by attracting visitors and creating jobs. The Reynolds Museum is an important tourist attraction where all can learn about Alberta's transportation and industrial heritage. We are working on finding solutions to protect the existing artifacts, add to the collections, and of course celebrate Alberta's heritage. As you know, we are going to be releasing a new capital plan tomorrow, March 16, and more details will be made available.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Reynolds-Alberta Museum is not just a museum but also an internationally acclaimed restoration and conservation shop and one of only three fly-in museums in Canada, what is the Minister of Culture and Tourism doing to protect the Reynolds Museum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Reynolds Museum is indeed a great cultural attraction, bringing visitors from around the world. I've had the pleasure, of course, of attending the air show and the opening of the new Stan Reynolds permanent display last year. We are making decisions in the best interests of Albertans. We are making life better for Albertans. Those decisions will be made public tomorrow, when we release the budget and the capital plan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Reynolds is also an economic driver in my riding, what will the government do to help grow rural tourism in areas such as Wetaskiwin-Camrose?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With almost 39,000 visitors in 2016 the Reynolds Museum is a world-class destination. This is not only an economic driver for the community, but it's also helped to grow communities across the province. Last month I had the opportunity to attend the Growing Rural Tourism conference in the hon. member's constituency. We are always looking for ways of increasing visitation to the museums. We know that rural tourism is a key contributor to diversifying our economy, creating good jobs, and making Albertans' lives better.

Thank you.

Agricultural Concerns

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, last year was another tough one on Alberta farmers. Besides the uncertainty of the unpopular Bill 6 legislation, some had very wet conditions to deal with. Some areas of Alberta had declared agricultural disasters. Alberta has 1 million unharvested acres still laying in the field. Although insured through AFSC, many farms were concerned about paying bills as insurance payouts will not happen until spring. Why are farmers getting notices from AFSC that they'll be penalized for late payments on premiums when they still haven't been paid out from the same company for unharvested crops?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Without a doubt last season was a little bit of a roller coaster. We started out dry, became wet. In some counties it never stopped raining, without a doubt. But I am happy to report that 90 per cent of unharvested acres have been inspected, and currently there are only two farmers that are waiting to be inspected for their payouts. I'm very happy with the work that our public servants are doing at AFSC. They're doing a bang-up job. They'll continue to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: I can't comment.

Given that the farmers have limited options to deal with these crops: double disking, harrowing, perhaps burning, and given that Alberta crop business and development has advised clients to burn the cereal crops because of mycotoxins in the cereals and also because combining that crop could spread *Fusarium* through the entire field, minister: in light of the fire ban in Lamont county, has your department developed a plan with municipalities to deal with the destruction of these crops given the small timeline that farmers have before they have to start thinking about seeding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We have been in conversation with Lamont county and other counties as well to ensure that counties have the tools they need to be able to help their farmers to get the crops off so they're able to sow this spring. I'm hoping as well for a dry spring because otherwise we're going to be in a very similar situation. So we're absolutely talking to the counties, looking for those options to ensure that our farmers can again be successful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Given that a controlled burn of these crops may be the best option for farmers to reduce the chance of disease, pestilence, and to control vermin and given that these farmers understand that the fires could have impact on the environment – I hope you're beginning to see where I'm headed here – to the minister: what

assurances can you give to farmers that there will be no repercussions from your government should using controlled burns run afoul of your environmental vision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for the most peculiar question. Interesting in some aspects, I suspect, but you know a crop – you know, many options. It could be a very viable option to be able to burn those crops to get their things in. No way does that fit into the climate leadership plan. I'd encourage the member to read the climate leadership plan, and I'd encourage him to point out where it actually talks about burning the crops. I don't believe that it does.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Oil Sands Investments

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Social licence can be an important consideration for industry, including energy producers and pipeliners, but as we are finding out, it is not the only consideration. As Shell stood with the Premier to accept carbon taxes, they also began their pullout from the oil sands, redirecting scarce capital to more business-friendly jurisdictions. I call that a hug and a shove. To the Minister of Energy: even with your CLAP and carbon tax Shell still chose to divest itself of oil sands assets. What are you doing specifically today to stem the flight of international capital?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously said, we were very pleased this week when I was in Houston to find out that a good Alberta company doubled down not just on Albertans but doubled down on their investments in Alberta also. When I spoke to the president, he also assured me that he was going to look for opportunities to upgrade in Alberta and invest more in Alberta. The opposition continues to mislead this House and indeed Albertans for their own political gain. That side of the House is fearmongering. This side of the House is supporting Alberta energy.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, given that Shell, Statoil, Total, and Marathon have recently divested themselves of billions in oil sands assets and given that we are thankful that CNRL, Athabasca, and others were able to acquire them at significant discounts and are happy to see Canadian companies increase their holdings – we still have grave concerns with four multinationals pulling out of the oil sands – again to the minister: has your government driven investor confidence down so far that the oil sands are now only to be considered as a regional investment opportunity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On that side of the House earlier people cheered against us succeeding in getting a pipeline. We got not one, but we got two. You've criticized major companies before about investing in Alberta. We have Alberta companies investing in Alberta, and you criticize. We're focused on this side on making life better for Albertans. We're focused on helping our companies. We're proud for any company, Albertan or not, to invest in Alberta.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Gottfried: Who needs an enemy when you have the NDP?

Mr. Speaker, given that the government continues to employ Tzeporah Berman against the wishes of the vast majority of Albertans and given that Ms Berman recently called upon Queen's University to divest of their oil sands assets, akin to what some schools have done with tobacco, and given, I'm sure you would agree, that this comparison is absurd, again to the minister: with your government driving out the multinationals and your friends trying to drive out equity investment of Canadians, who will be left to invest in Alberta when you are done?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Albertans are investing in Albertans. The company this last week doubled down on their investment in Alberta, and they have confidence in Albertans. We, again, are growing tired of hearing the comments about bad deals and, frankly, not cheering for Albertans. That's not something we're doing. We are not going to stop till we get more investment in Alberta. With the pipelines we see shovels in the ground, something they continue to cheer against. Not on this side of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Affordable and Seniors' Housing

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I speak with housing advocates in my constituency, a significant issue that they raise is the state of Glenmore Manor. Given that the previous government failed to maintain this seniors' facility as needed and given that this government has announced approximately \$18 million for capital maintenance, to the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what is the government doing to address these concerns?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Seniors built this province, and they deserve to age in community, close to family and friends, where they want to be. While the previous government neglected affordable housing, leaving seniors and facilities with over a billion dollars worth of repairs to be done, we are making life better for seniors by investing in affordable housing so seniors can retire in dignity. I can confirm that as part of the announcement in December 2016, Glenmore Manor is receiving more than \$76,000 for a roof replacement.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta currently needs about \$1 billion in repairs for seniors' affordable housing, to the same minister: how did this backlog happen, and what strategies is this government planning to alleviate these pressures?

Ms Sigurdson: It's true that the previous government made life harder for Albertans by not prioritizing affordable housing. As part of the previous budget I'm proud that our government is investing \$1.2 billion during the next five years into building more homes. And let me say this. There are some in this Chamber who called for drastic cuts, in the billions of dollars. These cuts will only hurt seniors and Albertans who live in these facilities. It's clear that the

opposition wants to cut investments in seniors and affordable housing, and our government is investing in housing to make life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that seniors deserve to have a safe place to live and given the need to address affordable housing in Calgary, to the same minister: when will my constituents see movement on these matters?

Ms Sigurdson: I'm proud to say that this year more than \$343,000 has been allocated for repairs in the Calgary-Glenmore riding. This will go towards fixing sidewalks and replacing roofs for affordable housing. Cedarbrae and Oakridge are examples of projects receiving funds.

Earlier today we announced \$5.7 million for the planning of 14 affordable housing projects across this province. This includes Elbow Valley seniors' community, George C. King Tower replacement, and Southview 3 community housing. Again, Mr. Speaker, on this important issue our government is investing; the opposition wants to cut.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to compliment you. You not only had a baby shower today, but you got to 15 questions.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just two quick tablings today. First, a Facebook post from Wildrose on Campus featuring their role model, the leader of the Wildrose opposition.

One other quick one is from the social media page the Rebel media heralding their invitation to the Wildrose on Campus event along with opposition Wildrose members. One big happy family.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today and only today I have five tablings on behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance. First, I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board's 2016 annual report for the year ended December 31, 2016. The 2016 annual report was prepared under the board's direction in accordance with section 601(1) of the Insurance Act and must be tabled in accordance with section 601(2) of the act.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the response to Motion for a Return 36 for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks regarding documents prepared for the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance in preparation for a meeting with rating agencies in Toronto on April 25, 2016.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a response to Written Question 17: "What are the deliverables from the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance's trip from April 25 to 29, 2016, to Toronto and New York?" The international mission report for that trip is posted on the government of Alberta website, but I am pleased to table copies in this Chamber, which I think was included in that package there.

2:50

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a response to the MLA for Calgary-Elbow's Written Question 15:

What has been the impact on Alberta's projected debt-servicing costs since the downgrade in the credit rating by Standard &

Poor's, and what has been the impact on the debt-servicing costs since the notice of a credit review by Moody's and by Dominion Bond Rating Service during the 2015-2016 fiscal year?

Finally, I rise to table the response to the MLA for Calgary-Elbow's Written Question 16:

What has been the impact on Alberta's provincial bond yields since the downgrade in the credit rating by Standard & Poor's, and what has been the impact on the debt-servicing costs since the notice of a credit review by Moody's and by Dominion Bond Rating Service during the 2015-2016 fiscal year?

Mr. Speaker, that concludes today's presentation on behalf of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

The Speaker: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a report on the Alberta Teachers' Association website that states that membership in the Alberta New Democratic Party automatically gets you a New Democratic Party of Canada membership.

And because the Member for Calgary-North West is so fond of guilt by association, I've got five copies of the Leap Manifesto, that she is now part of.

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-Hays, do you have something to table?

Mr. McIver: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and proud to table five copies of the Progressive Conservative balanced budget plan, a model for this government.

The Speaker: Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I briefly have two tablings. The first is the letter I wrote to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board on January 3 of this year requesting that all budget documents be provided in an open-data format and noting that it would be a big help to get the budget data in Excel format or similar. I sure hope that's possible for this budget.

My second tabling is a news article from CBC today, which shows that it will cost over \$100 to print each copy of the federal budget, and I'm curious if our provincial budget will be the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have for tablings today the requisite number of copies of the outstanding Alberta Health motions for returns and written questions from the 29th Legislature, and in preparing these, I want to say thank you to the hard-working public servants who gathered this information so it could be put on the record.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, sir. I have two tablings if you will allow me. First, is a tabling, five copies, of the originating application for a judicial review dated March 2, 2017. This matter is between the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays and the office of the Ethics Commissioner.

The second tabling is five copies of the consent order. This is the Court of Queen's Bench order by Justice Jeffrey on the matter between the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays and the office of the Ethics Commissioner, set for a special hearing on January 12, 2018.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a copy of the Stats Canada report that refers to the crime severity index, that I referred to in my speech on Monday, and the alarming rate that it's gone up. The people in my riding of Battle River-Wainwright are very concerned about it. Here are your five copies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, did you have something?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on day 3 of 14 days of tablings about the Public Affairs Bureau. I rise with five requisite copies of a letter I wrote to the Government House Leader on March 9 quoting words of the Premier calling the Public Affairs Bureau political.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think there were two points of order that were raised today. The Opposition House Leader.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a point of order. In the Standing Orders it can be found in chapter 2, role of the Speaker, privilege, order and decorum. The Standing Order is 13(2): "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member."

Mr. Speaker, prior to question period you cautioned members of the Assembly about language that may create disorder. However, you ruled there was no point of order. And then during question period you interrupted the leader of the third party, which I'm more than happy to acknowledge is within your right. However, I am also just curious to know, under 13(2), some of the background behind your decision to do that in explaining your ruling.

One of the big concerns that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that if things that have been apologized for inside the Chamber are unable to be spoken about, then it would be my hope that the same requirement would be made of the government. For example, I apologized for something in this Chamber on March 7. It can be found in *Alberta Hansard* on page 68, where I apologized for statements that were made outside of this Chamber, that weren't made by me but, certainly, have been attributed to me and members of the opposition at length by many members of the government.

We have seen this in other circumstances where the government has chosen to use words like "climate change denier" and other inflammatory language towards the opposition. That, in fact, has been apologized for by the House.

So I'm hoping you can provide some clarity with respect to your ruling on how both sides of the House will be treated equally with respect to language that may or may not be used in the Chamber.

The Speaker: Are there any other individuals who'd like to speak to this point of order? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Under 13(2) "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." You know, I guess I just wanted to make one point with respect to what the Official Opposition House Leader had said because an apology made on behalf of people who are not members of the Assembly and are not present is not in any way covered. When we talk about apologies, it's by members for statements they have made in the House. In those cases, then, I certainly am of the view that the ruling was very much correct.

With respect to statements made by people outside the House, an apology does not have the same force and effect. It does not erase what was said. It is still a matter of public debate. So I would just draw that distinction to your attention.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The House leader for the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, sometimes clichés don't make people happy when they hear them, but the fact of the matter is that they've stood the test of time. What's good for the goose is good for the gander is what I'm referring to.

The fact of the matter is that, Mr. Speaker, all we're looking for, I think every one of us in this Chamber, is a level playing field, that the same rules apply to all corners of this room. I mean, we could use the example of how an apology has been made by the party to my right about something that happened in a different city, that was with a group that wasn't even necessarily attributed to them, yet we still get tablings even today on that.

I think all we're asking for is consistency, Mr. Speaker. I know that you're supportive of that, and I guess we just need some clarity going forward on exactly what that's going to look like. Is it the same on this side as it is on that side?

3:00

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, as I said at the outset in my comments when I ruled on the point of order from yesterday, that responsibility not only rests with the chair; it also rests with each of you. You may recall in the particular session today that I, in fact, ruled against the point of order that was raised by the Government House Leader, which was very difficult. It's one of those decisions that needs to be made.

The point that I want to raise is that when the rules were applied, I just had finished a caution to the House about the particular matter that has caused considerable eruption in the House in the last couple of days. So when I heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays raising what I thought was anticipating the area, I interjected and cautioned, and I believe that's entirely within the role of the Speaker to maintain decorum. You will continue to see the application of the principle of equity and fairness. There are many, many times I have the sense that I'm doing a reasonable job here on your collective behalf when I receive notes from each side of the House sometimes criticizing a decision I've made.

That's my reason, to the hon. Opposition House Leader, and you will continue to see my best efforts directed at fairness in application.

The next point of order is also by the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At approximately 1:45 during question period today the Minister of Energy used language that was: the opposition is misleading the House. There is a long, long, long line of precedent that would indicate that this language is unparliamentary. We're talking about Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j) for a citation: making allegations against another member. Under Speaker Carter on December 7, 1990: "is absolutely misleading" the House was ruled unparliamentary.

Let me just give you some more examples so you can be certain that that sort of language is likely to create disorder, that making allegations that the opposition is misleading the House is wildly inappropriate, and that the minister should know better.

On April 18, 2002, "misleading" was considered by Speaker Kowalski unparliamentary. "Misleading the House" was considered

unparliamentary November 3, 2010, by Deputy Speaker Cao; April 23, 2009, by Speaker Kowalski; April 12, 2007, by Speaker Kowalski; June 21, 1990, by Deputy Speaker Schumacher; May 18, 1988, by Chair Gogo; April 1, 1987 – it wasn't an April Fool's joke that day, either – by Speaker Carter. Then continuing on with just "misled": February 12, 1998, by Speaker Kowalski.

I think you get the picture, Mr. Speaker, that making an allegation that the opposition is misleading the House is wildly inappropriate, should be withdrawn and apologized for, and we can all move on with what is a very, very nice day.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have the Blues, and I am not sure what exactly the language was. If the language was "misleading the House," then I would agree with my hon. colleague. If the language is "misleading the public," that's a different matter and not, in my view, covered by the rulings that have been cited.

I await your wisdom on this matter, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Do you have another point?

Mr. Cooper: Just to add, if I might, that a long list under "misleading Albertans and the public" is also included in unparliamentary language.

The Speaker: I, too, do not have the benefit of the Blues or the *Hansard* in this regard. If, in fact, the statement was as the member said, I want to suggest that the House leader talk to the member concerned and encourage them to reconsider if that is, in fact, correct. There may not be, actually, a point of order in this instance, but it seems to me that if it's true, given the precedents that the Opposition House Leader has identified, then there may well be, in fact, a need for the member to apologize.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board it's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017.

The supplementary amounts provided by this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third fiscal quarter update, released on February 23. These amounts are necessary for the government to conduct business and to fulfill its commitments for the current fiscal year.

To remind members, these estimates include roughly \$1.6 billion in voted expense funding, roughly \$125 million in voted capital expense transactions. These estimates provide additional authorization for the following departments, Mr. Speaker: Advanced Education, Agriculture and Forestry, Children's Services, Community and Social Services, Culture and Tourism, Economic Development and Trade, Education, Environment and Parks, Health, Indigenous Relations, Infrastructure, Justice and Solicitor General, Labour, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Housing, Service Alberta, Transportation, and Treasury Board and Finance.

Mr. Speaker, as we discussed during Committee of Supply, the largest element of the supplementary supply is for the costs associated with the Wood Buffalo wildfire. This includes roughly \$499 million for the wildfire response and roughly \$240 million for

the wildfire recovery. Once again I would like to emphasize my enduring respect for the courage demonstrated by first responders who battled this fire this past year. I would emphasize once again that this government and all Albertans have the backs of our fellow citizens who were affected by the wildfire.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017. Here we have a case of the government running out of money and having to spend, spend, spend and needing more money. Actions like that will usually get an automatic no from the Wildrose. But we also have some very interesting jiggery-pokery going on in this bill, too. It seems like the government needs to move some money around from department to department and convert expenses to capital dollars and financial transactions.

Normally I wouldn't have a problem with transfers and conversions, but bear with me here. My shadow ministry, the Department of Environment and Parks, is transferring \$135,000 from expenses to capital investment in the Department of Infrastructure. What could this mean? I'd say that it looks like green infrastructure. The Committee of Supply documents say that it is for a climate leadership plan deeper greening project. Perhaps the minister could elaborate more about the deeper greening project. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I went online and tried to look on the government site to see what deeper greening was and on other sites, googling it, and nothing came up. I'm not quite sure what that one is, so I would appreciate some elaboration on that.

When I look at section 3(5) of Bill 4, there are more departments. There's money going from Environment's expense vote into capital investment in Advanced Education, \$760,000; into Agriculture and Forestry, \$104,000; \$1.5 million to Health; \$1 million to Transportation; \$800,000 to Treasury Board and Finance. Seriously, Treasury Board and Finance? It needs green capital investment? Well, I guess that apparently they need perhaps a little bit more technology to administer the carbon tax consumer rebates because they have to take money back and forth.

3:10

Transportation needs \$1 million in capital for the climate leadership plan light-emitting diode, or LED, highway lighting project. The word "project" gives me a sense that this might be a one-time pilot project as opposed to a permanent move to energy savings. The city of Edmonton has LED street lighting on Walterdale Hill, so go check them out sometime. I wonder if the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary has already done a study and has the data that could be shared and help the government to save some money.

Health does not give too many details about their \$1.5 million in green infrastructure from the climate leadership plan. If we could get some more details from the minister about this, I would really appreciate that, and that would be helpful.

Agriculture is using \$104,000 for the energy efficient carbon neutral greenhouse infrastructure modelling project, and the Farm Stewardship Centre showcases a solar photovoltaic project.

Then Advanced Education is getting an additional \$760,000 from the green slush fund for a power plant upgrade and connection at Mount Royal University. I hope the minister can please tell me when that ribbon-cutting will happen. My colleague the shadow minister of Advanced Education will have more to say on this project, and he'll have questions, I'm sure, too.

It all adds up to \$4,299,000 in expense turning into capital, leaving Environment and going elsewhere. On one hand, it looks like a giant green slush fund that all other departments of government get to pilfer for their pet projects.

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

The Speaker: Yes. Your point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Well, Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), I think all three, Mr. Speaker. He just said that this is a slush fund, which is fine – I'm sure they've got lots of quotes of me calling things slush funds when I was in opposition – but he talked about pilfering. Pilfering, whether the member realizes it or not, means theft, and if he's accusing government members of stealing, then he darn well better have some evidence, or he should apologize and withdraw the comment.

The Speaker: Hon. member, any comment?

Mr. Taylor: Yes. I apologize for using that word and withdraw it.

Debate Continued

Mr. Taylor: On the other hand, it looks like bureaucratic empire building. Yes, Environment and Parks is casting its tentacles into all the other government departments like a giant octopus. It is more like one giant expense in one department becoming capital in another. There is \$7,674,000 at section 3(4) that is going to expense in departments. The tentacles grow deeper: \$150,000 to Agriculture and Forestry, \$9,000 to the Department of Culture and Tourism, \$562,000 to the Department of Economic Development and Trade, \$5,200,000 to the Department of Indigenous Relations, \$500,000 to the Department of Seniors and Housing, \$200,000 to the Department of Transportation, \$1,053,000 to the Department of Treasury Board and Finance.

We are told in Committee of Supply that it's for more greening. For Agriculture it is for the Alberta energy efficient carbon neutral greenhouse infrastructure modelling project. For Culture and Tourism it is for the greenest building study. Excuse me? Why is Culture and Tourism doing something that Alberta Infrastructure might ask BOMA, the Building Owners and Managers Association, to undertake.

Economic Development and Trade is getting money to support the coal advisory panel. There are three members on the coal advisory panel that have already begun travelling to impacted communities, so part of the dollars are for them to engage in 10 facilitated discussions with stakeholders in the communities most affected by the retirement of coal-fired generation. I have to ask myself: why are we doing consultation now? Why didn't we have the consultation beforehand?

Mr. Rodney: Don't ask yourself; ask him.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. I'll ask the minister: why are we having the consultation now as opposed to before you announced that you were going to shut down these towns with their coal-fired generation?

Indigenous Relations helped themselves to the green money, too, so they could fund the climate leadership plan indigenous community support engagement study, the Alberta indigenous community energy program, the Alberta indigenous solar program, and the Lubicon Lake band green infrastructure assessment.

Seniors and Housing is getting money for the climate leadership plan green infrastructure initiative related to the facility of energy audit. When it comes to lowering operational expenses of publicly owned facilities, if you do an energy audit and find the wind drafts where the windows are leaking, the chimneys and the furnaces and all that and then incorporate the repairs into your regular maintenance program, eventually the government will save on operating costs. We're all about saving on operating costs. Believe me, I don't like any higher prices than you do, so we're all on board that way.

Now, Transportation is apparently going to use the climate leadership plan dollars from Environment to conduct an electric vehicle impact study and truck stop electrification technical and commercial feasibility study. Now, with Tesla and other automobile manufacturers putting electric cars on the road, electric recharging is critical. The Alberta Motor Association has a very good road map of all the charging stations in Alberta. What I don't understand is why we need to be hiring consultants for studies on things that private industry is already taking care of for us. Tesla has installed numerous charging stations all over Alberta for their vehicles, so why do we need a technical commercial feasibility study? Why not call up Tesla, sign an information-sharing agreement, call it a day, and save some taxpayer money?

Then we get into Treasury Board and Finance, where we finally find out that the cost to administer all those consumer rebate cheques is going to be \$1,053,000 plus that \$800,000 in capital for technology, almost \$2 million, to help administer the carbon tax.

To summarize, there is over \$7.6 million leaving Environment and Parks to other departments in expense to the green slush fund that you have for projects. There's another almost \$4.3 million in expense leaving Environment and turning into capital in other departments. That's a total of \$11.9 million in carbon tax related spending not in Environment and Parks. Mr. Speaker, the tentacles are spreading, and I look forward to seeing how entrenched they get with this Thursday's budget being finally finalized and figured out.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 4? I think Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 4, supplementary supply. Now, let me tell you that sometimes I wish I could run my household the way that this government runs. I do. Let me be more specific. I wish I had the same opportunity that this government is taking, the ability to spend all my money and then go back for more, the ability to be carefree about the obscene amounts of debt and still have an appetite for spending left unquenched.

3:20

But, see, I've learned that that's not the way things are in real life, Mr. Speaker. In real life, in real, everyday Alberta life, when you run out of money, you run out of money, unless I've been wrong. I've been in the wrong line of work my whole life. Maybe people don't go to their boss and ask for a raise to tide them over for an additional two months before the next contract comes in. Maybe I'm in the wrong line of work.

Now, as the Member for Calgary-Foothills said just yesterday afternoon: this government is not the first government to be unable to pass a budget that doesn't require additional funds later. This isn't the first time government has come back to this House asking, even demanding, more money. This isn't the first time it's happened, but that doesn't make it right, Mr. Speaker. Something I tell my kids and I'm sure that members opposite tell their children,

too: just because somebody else does it doesn't make it right; just because someone else thinks it's okay doesn't mean it's okay.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have become very aware that this government has a huge spending problem. It's a problem. Unfortunately, it coincides with their addiction to taxes. It's an addiction.

Mr. Speaker, you've heard it before. That's because it's true. Albertans are struggling. They have a hard time making ends meet. Tens of thousands of people are out of work, and they're taking on debt that they don't know how they're going to repay, similar to this government.

A BNN article from December 14, only three months ago, said that the Canadian household debt-to-income ratio has risen to 166.9 per cent. That's crazy. One hundred and sixty-seven per cent, 66.9. Mr. Speaker, that's a record high, but it's certainly not a record to be proud of. A CBC article from last May said that the average debt of an Albertan is over \$27,000. The *Edmonton Sun* reported just over a month ago that serious financial problems arose again last fall. That's a quote, Mr. Speaker. Consumer insolvencies increased over 26 per cent as of this past November, and bankruptcies were up even higher, with an increase of 28 and a half per cent.

Mr. Speaker, that's only consumer debt. It's only household debt. That hasn't even taken into account the debt that this government has plunged them into. That's another record that we are not proud of.

Now, I'm curious, you know, Mr. Speaker, to hear what the government has to say about their budget tomorrow afternoon. I'm curious, but I'm also nervous. I'm curious, but I'm also skeptical. I'm curious, but I'm also, quite frankly, scared. So are Albertans. The big question is: what's the new big red number? Will they budget for a full year without needing to come back to ask for more? I don't believe it. Will I be here again next year, prebudget, once again looking at a significant list of new spending items? Likely so.

Now, I know that I'll be here railing against unnecessary and extra spending. I mean, how can I not, when this government in its third-quarter update announced that their revenues were up? Revenues are up, yet we're still here. By how much? One point five billion dollars in revenue. Billion. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. Yet we're here. This government has a spending problem. I think that's very crystal clear.

Now, they may have found \$1.5 billion, but they spent an extra \$2.6 billion. An extra \$2.6 billion, Mr. Speaker. That's obscene. And it turns out that wasn't even enough because we're still here; \$2.6 billion in extra spending, \$1.5 billion in extra revenues, and we're still here. We're still here asking for more money just before the budget.

Now, confession, Mr. Speaker: I'm a fan of Gail Vaz-Oxlade, the no-holds-barred guru of financial management. I can distribute a copy. You know what she says all the time? You can't spend more than you make. That's it. Very simple. If you don't have the money, you can't spend the money. Well, guess what? We don't have the money. We don't have the money, yet this government continues to spend as if they've got a money tree in the back of the Legislature. I think this government thinks that there's a money tree behind this Legislature.

Mrs. Aheer: By the stairs.

Mrs. Pitt: Yep.

When I was six, I thought my parents had a money tree, but then I grew up and realized that money trees are not real. They're not real.

Now, there comes a point, Mr. Speaker, believe it or not, when you have to say: I'm sorry; I can't afford it. I'm sure many people

in this Legislature who have children say that to them all the time. Albertans say it all the time. Much more often these days than they used to, they say: I don't have the money. Our charities are feeling that all the time. Their donors say: I'm sorry. To the thousands of Albertans that need the food bank: I'm sorry; I just can't afford it. That's the reality. Sometimes you have to say no. Sometimes you just don't have the money.

But if you're NDP, you just say: "Well, heck, we'll tax you more. No problem. You can't pay, we can't pay, but we're going to make it just that much harder for you to balance your budget. But, here, have a free light bulb." What an insult to Albertans. Oh, by the way, that light bulb cost you at least twice as much as if you would have gone to the store and got it yourself. The self-reliant Albertans that I know have no problem doing that. In fact, most of them already have. But this government doesn't even want you to screw it in yourself. They don't trust you to screw in your own light bulb, Mr. Speaker. They don't trust you to do it, so they've hired someone from outside of this province to come to your home and screw in your light bulbs. And they make you pay for it.

If you're NDP, you promise jobs, but you shut down coal and you chase out investment. If you're NDP, you promise a balanced budget, but that promise constantly gets pushed back and delayed for several years: we'll do it later. Procrastination doesn't get you much. If you're NDP, you promise lower personal taxes, but then you add a new tax on top of everything. If you're NDP, you use old information to hand out rebate cheques but announce that you'll take it back if that old information is wrong. Oops. If you're NDP, you rebate money to attempt to cover the increase in expenses, and then you pull it back when people are hurting and grieving. Shame on you. Shame on the NDP, Mr. Speaker, because that is not okay. It is not okay. People are hurting and this government . . .

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

3:30

The Speaker: Hon. member, there's a point of order being raised. Is that right?

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to see disorder in this place. If the hon. member persists in saying that it is the NDP that is seeking the return of money from the rebates in the event of someone passing away or a change in marital circumstances, there will be because it's just not true. The Premier pointed out very clearly that this is a Canada Revenue Agency issue that we are striving to correct because we don't agree with the actions that the Canada Revenue Agency is taking. They were insensitive. This is not something that the government is doing, and if the hon. members opposite keep saying so, then not only does it cast aspersions, but it's completely unfounded, incorrect information, and it's bound to create disorder.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader. Please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to a point of order. I'm not entirely sure of the citation that the minister is making. I guess we can make the assumption that it's 23, maybe "makes allegations against another Member."

First of all, I guess it would be advantageous for the Government House Leader to be able to be in the Chamber while perhaps the Member for Banff-Cochrane is making wild allegations against the opposition, which we've seen a lot in the last few days. A lot of the allegations he was making are as factual as the allegation that the

Government House Leader is making about the comments that my hon. colleague from Airdrie is making.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, what we have here is a matter of debate. If there's one thing that we can be certain of, it's that the province of Alberta directed the CRA to execute a program. At the end of the day the government of Alberta and in this case the NDP are responsible. The buck stops at the NDP. To say that they're not responsible for the actions is like to say they're not responsible for policing in the province because that's the RCMP's jurisdiction. Well, the contract is held by the government. The government sets out the framework. The NDP sets out the framework. The NDP sets out the parameters of programs. This is what a policy-making organization does. It's their policy. While they can accept that it's not right, it's still them that are at the end of the day responsible for that.

What we clearly have is a matter of debate. While I agree that the Government House Leader thinks it's unfortunate that this has happened – it is unfortunate. It's horrible. But it is the government's fault. They are the ones that are responsible for it. My hon. colleague is merely pointing out that that is what has happened. I think it's unfortunate that the Government House Leader would call a point of order on this.

The Speaker: I've been advised that in early experiences that have been pointed out to me, no more than one opposition party is to speak to a point of order. I don't know if that's correct. I'm going to in this instance say that unless there's something new, I think the Opposition House Leader has approved it.

Yet again there seems to be language and words being used in this place that address the point that I've said so many times and as recently as this afternoon. I can hear on the government side and at other times the phrase has been: Wildrose has said certain things. In this instance the tables are reversed. I don't have a *Beauchesne*, at least not with enough time here to check this in detail, but could I ask that the member please be cautious about the words that she's using. There has been a representation, but as has been pointed out by the Opposition House Leader, there have been other instances. I will in fact read this tonight in *Beauchesne*, but please exercise caution, as I've said so many times in here, and get moving on with the issue.

Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was actually about to applaud the government in the next step before they got so offended by the truth in my speech, but I do apologize for causing something that might offend somebody. You know, that happens a lot these days.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise that I will not be supporting Bill 4, nor will my colleagues, and that's not because there aren't some good things in here. I will applaud you for the additional funds for Crown prosecutors. I think that's a great use of taxpayer money. Certainly, I think taxpayers are asking for that use of funds. But, you know, generally when you look at the whole picture in Bill 4 and the significant amount of money being spent and given that there has been a surprise increase in revenues, quite a significant number, there is no scenario within what has been given in which I can support Bill 4. I implore all members in this House to also not support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Airdrie?

The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 4, the 2016-17 supplementary supply. You know, sometimes I have heard these bills called the lack of planning bills. Sometimes I've heard them called the overspending bills . . .

Mr. Mason: Does keeping the lights on come to mind?

Mr. Cooper: Keeping the lights on bills I think could refer to the interim supply bills.

But, you know, someday, hopefully, in the future, when I have the opportunity to sit in the Government House Leader's seat, I guess, if I've done a good job here and the outstanding people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills return me to this Chamber – I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with the folks in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills yesterday, and we were chatting about some of the comments that have been made in the Chamber and how they were feeling about those. I know that there are a lot of folks that are disappointed with the direction this government is going in. We saw that in the Mainstreet poll that was released yesterday, with close to 60 per cent of Albertans disappointed with the direction of the government and them managing the economy.

You know, tomorrow we're going to see quite likely the largest deficit in Alberta's history, of course since the last NDP budget. But you get the point, Mr. Speaker, that they're running up significant amounts of debt year over year over year.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

While I was with the outstanding people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, as I said, you know, they expressed some concern around the language the government uses, whether it's calling them Chicken Little or other things. There is real concern about the economic realities that face Alberta. There's real concern about the amount of spending that this government is doing.

3:40

Thankfully, we've seen a modest increase in the oil price. Now, we've lost a lot of that over the last 10 days or so, but we've seen a very modest increase in the price of oil and, as such, a significant amount of new revenue. Some of that revenue certainly wasn't planned for by the government, and we saw that in the third-quarter update, this increase in revenue.

What we've also seen is the government's unquenchable thirst for spending. That's exactly what we see here in the supplementary supply bill, this government's refusal to do what they say they're going to do, which is – you know, I don't know how many times I've heard the Minister of Finance speak about bending the cost curve. Well, if he wanted to do that, he had the opportunity by sticking to the budget that they initially introduced last year, and we wouldn't need this supplementary supply. The government can't help themselves, Madam Speaker. We see time and time again this desire to spend beyond their means and make significant departures from the original budget that require us to be here today.

But, you know, one thing that grows tiresome is the government's accusation that spending in the Official Opposition's ridings – I heard the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud ask the Member for Airdrie: well, how do you like 24-hour care in your constituency? Madam Speaker, governing comes down to choices. The government would like you to think that spending in an opposition riding is more or less important than in a government riding and that the opposition also advocating, like I assume members of the government caucus do, for priority infrastructure projects across our province is somehow less reasonable than when they do it.

My point is not that it happens, that we advocate for infrastructure projects right across the province and, I might add, not just in our

constituencies but in other areas. A perfect example of that is in central Alberta. It's unfortunate that the members for Red Deer have not been as vocal as some others, but the amount of spending on health in central Alberta is disproportionately less than the amount of population that is in that area. When members of this side or perhaps the members from Red Deer are advocating on their behalf, it is about choices that have to be made. Where the opposition continually is frustrated by this government is that they have no desire to acknowledge that just because the government spends a dollar doesn't mean it's a good dollar spent. There are literally millions and millions and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars that are spent by this government that could be better spent.

It is about priorities that this government has or should have when it comes to spending in one area or another. The only solution that this government speaks about is spending more. They make the assumption that every single dollar spent is well spent. Madam Speaker, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that that's not true, that the government wastes incredible amounts of money. I mean, just today the Member for Strathmore-Brooks highlighted significant areas of potential savings. The government says, "We're bending the cost curve," yet they come back to the House for billions of dollars of supplementary supply.

Madam Speaker, Albertans expect a level of responsibility when it comes to government spending. While the government continually makes choices to not listen to the overwhelming majority of Albertans when they say that they're getting it wrong on the economy, when they say that they're getting it wrong on debt and borrowing – I know that the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the overwhelming majority of them, want me to come to the Chamber and advocate on their behalf because they understand the long-term ramifications of out-of-control spending. They understand that by the end of the NDP's reign we will be spending multiple billions of dollars a year on interest alone. Every time the government doesn't follow their own budget and they come back to this Assembly to add on to that pile of debt, there are consequences. The consequences aren't likely today, but they certainly will happen. It's unfortunate that the government is choosing to not acknowledge those but to only say: we're bending the curve.

The government has this habit of only pointing to spending like health care: well, the opposition must not want health care in their constituency. Or roads, as the House leader mentioned. Madam Speaker, when they make a statement like that, they imply that every dollar in health care is spent wisely, and I know that my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat, who spent a significant amount of time as a shadow minister for Health, identified millions of dollars of waste inside the health care system, yet the government refuses to acknowledge it. They say that the only thing the opposition wants is to eliminate all health care spending, to eliminate all front-line workers, to cut \$9 billion out of the budget. Even today my colleague from Strathmore-Brooks highlighted how that isn't the case but how there are real, common-sense solutions to getting our province's spending back on track. In order to do that, it's very clear that we're going to need a Wildrose government to ensure that that spending is back on track, where we can ensure the future of our province is at the top of mind to government and not just the problems of today.

You know, when I think of the future of the province, Madam Speaker, I think of my children. I think of the children that attend our Assembly each day and come and observe what happens here. While I agree that having a well-funded education system is significantly important to the future of our province, putting the future of our education system at risk because of billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars that will be spent on interest will

ultimately result in fewer dollars for the classroom, and that is a concern.

3:50

Madam Speaker, it's bills like supplementary supply, like interim supply, like the absolute train wreck of a budget that we're going to see tomorrow that will put our province on a track to a fiscal cliff that is not going to result in the long-term success of our province. As such, while there are some areas of spending inside this particular piece of legislation, the Finance minister himself acknowledged during the third-quarter update that some of the spending is not lawful because of the way that they had to end around some legislation that has been passed.

There should be no member of this Chamber that would like to support a piece of legislation like that, and that's exactly why I'll stand with many of my colleagues to vote against supplementary supply.

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

I'll recognize the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: I actually introduced this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: So you can't speak to it again.

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to move second reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017.

The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017, will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government for the period of April 1, 2017, to May 31, 2017, inclusive. The approval of this act will provide funds needed to continue the business of the province while the Assembly takes the time necessary to prepare, present, review, and debate the government's 2017-18 budget plans.

Madam Speaker, this funding is important. It keeps things like our schools and our hospitals open. These are the key services that Albertans rely on, and I want to remind all members of the Assembly that the details of the government's plan will be made clear tomorrow when the budget is unveiled. Once the budget is released, I'm sure we will have a fulsome debate in estimates and in this Chamber on the government's fiscal and capital plan. In the intervening period I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support the bill and to provide the necessary interim supply for the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Do we have a speaker wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's difficult to have substantive discussion on a bill that has so little information, really. When no commentary is provided, it's very hard to know what's going on. Here we are expected to vote on this money bill, interim supply, a bill that comes before us primarily because we are not

prepared with a full budget in time to get the budget passed before the new fiscal year begins, a very large money bill that is about two months' worth of operations for the government, it looks like. It would be nice to get a little bit more detail.

I respect the Government House Leader's comments with regard to that more detail will be coming tomorrow when the budget is introduced, and we'll be able to have some fulsome debate about that. But I think that over time people in government, and that includes all members of this House, become numb to some of the dollar figures that we're talking about here. When the government spends \$50 billion each year, the attitude becomes: "What's a few million dollars here? What's a few million dollars there?" Yet I quite often like to take it down to the level of the average Albertan or average Albertan families. When you think about Alberta families earning, say, \$60,000 annually and they see their hard-earned money deducted as taxes on their pay stubs, then they pay GST, then they pay property taxes, and then they pay carbon taxes, with what's left over – it's a reminder that we really have to be careful how we spend their money. The government needs to remember who it's serving and how it's benefiting Albertans with each and every line item on the financial statements.

Yesterday I had some questions for the Labour minister with regard to a labour review that has been introduced on Monday, and \$32.6 million in this interim supply estimates is for the Labour minister's department. Is some of this to pay for the government's labour review launch this week? We've been seeing a frightening volume of job losses in this province, Madam Speaker, and you would think that given the high unemployment rate and the rise in the number of families that are struggling to make ends meet, the NDP would be introducing policies that are enhancing investor confidence and encouraging people to start businesses and hire people. Instead, this government is coming out and saying that anything is on the table in their labour review in terms of our employment standards and our rules around unionization and collective bargaining. This government needs to get its priorities straight. At a time when we have limited resources at our disposal here and at a time when hundreds and thousands and even tens of thousands of people are unemployed, we need to be sure that we are spending this money in a way that will allow them to get back to work.

I also want to talk about the fact that this government isn't even trying to balance the budget until 2024. We get hints of green shoots and hints of bending the curve from the Finance minister but very little with respect to plans on how to reduce the bloated spending that is occurring at this time. And 2024: it's an arbitrary year in the future that is being tossed around so that right now the NDP can just spend, spend, and spend some more. It is as if this government realizes that they won't be re-elected and they won't be the government in power in 2024 so: "Who cares? Let's throw caution to the wind."

Over the last 10 years the Alberta government's spending has grown faster than inflation and population growth. Even a comment with regard to the throne speech, where it was pointed out that the previous government had up to 11 per cent increase in one fiscal year. In our third-quarter updates for this past fiscal year it looks like this government, at a time when we would think that we were looking for restraint in spending, is on a path to increase spending by just under 10 per cent, Madam Speaker.

Right now the economy is not its strongest, but it is not prudent to assume the situation won't get worse but in fact will get better so as to allow for the budget to be balanced in the years 2023 or 2024. I have yet to meet a person who can confidently and accurately predict the future. People can speculate, but they don't know what will happen, and it's very risky to gamble that we can take on billions of dollars in debt for several years and then expect the

situation to change and make way for balanced budgets, especially without a change in an approach to our spending.

Budgets do not balance themselves. Madam Speaker, as a farmer I've been able over the years to be challenged with the reality of commodity price ups and downs and the reality that there are two lines on our cash flow. We have to recognize that we have income and we have expense, and in order to manage a business successfully, both of those line items have to be taken into consideration. The attitude that we're just going to continue to borrow, borrow, borrow and not be concerned about our bloated spending in this province will lead us, I believe, into a very difficult situation.

4:00

Budgets don't balance themselves, Madam Speaker, especially with this government's policies. I wouldn't be confident that the economic situation will soon be changing for the better enough to allow the budget to balance in 2023. For one thing, the government is not proudly supporting and defending this province's oil industry, which has been so beneficial to this province and contributed to its prosperity. It is about the ability to manage the fluctuation in the commodity price. It's critical for any entity to be able to recognize that income is not going to be continually going up, up, up but that there is a possibility that we're going to see fluctuations in commodity prices, and we need to be able to manage through that by controlling our spending and controlling our efficiencies, looking for effective ways of delivery of programs and efficient ways to deliver these programs, that all Albertans are counting on us to be able to deliver for the long term.

This government likes to point out the previous government's failure to balance a budget at \$100 a barrel. I've heard that several times in the last couple weeks, where the government members will point to the third party and say: well, you couldn't balance the budget at \$100 a barrel. But the fact is, Madam Speaker, that this government, this NDP government's budget would fail to balance at even \$120 a barrel. So to be throwing stones at the previous government for not being able to balance at \$100, then this government has to also take a look in the mirror and see that their budget would fail to balance at \$120 a barrel.

The bloated public spending would require the personal income tax of every Albertan to almost double in order to come into balance. I do not believe that Albertans would see kindly to their personal income tax doubling in order to balance the books. The reality is that we have a \$10.8 billion deficit, and in this province we take in a little over \$11 billion of personal income tax to pay these operating costs, to keep the lights on and keep the operations going. I think Albertans are looking for government to find a way to do it more efficiently, more effectively and not be coming to them for more money.

It's about more than balanced budgets, Madam Speaker. Once you have a lot of debt, you need to do more than just match your revenue and your expenses. You need to have a plan to actually pay down that debt. This government's spending is not sustainable. The NDP love the word "sustainable," so they should practise what they preach when it comes to their budgeting.

Now that I've said all of this, allow me to ask a few questions just with regard to some of the details within interim supply that I would be seeking to have some clarification on. What percentage of the upcoming budget does the \$32.6 million on page 2 represent? Is it essentially one-sixth of the upcoming budget? How much is the government's labour review going to cost? When we're taking money at this time to do a labour review, is it the wisest thing to do that at this time? Is it necessary spending? How much of this spending will actually go to projects that create jobs for Albertans, where we can see that money being spent here is actually going towards

creating new jobs for Albertans? It's fine to do a labour review, but at this time is there going to be a significant increase in investor confidence to bring on these new jobs by doing the labour review?

Will the Labour ministry be focused on handing out taxpayer dollars to pay directly for jobs, or does this government agree that the goal should be an environment conducive to organic job creation? I believe that is the healthiest job creation that we can attain, and I believe that's a direction we should all be striving to accomplish.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I do feel that I should stand and speak as an opposition member who recognizes the importance of some of the new policy that's been brought forward and the recognition, too, that in these challenging times it's been important to look at new ways of sustaining some of the services that people need more significantly than they have in the past.

I've repeatedly raised questions with the government, both privately and publicly, that there needs to be a rigorous independent review of some of what we're doing in our public services. I think there are significant savings that can be made and efficiencies that can be gained. But apart from that, we recognize that we're in a significant deficit and debt situation in this province. I would like to think that as mature legislators we would be willing to have an adult conversation about revenue, and that includes the PST.

Are we going to pass this all on to our children, or are we going to start paying our share now of getting this debt under control? To talk about a PST, a 2 per cent increase, for example – that would take us back to what we were paying for many years under the federal GST. A harmonized PST would take us to 7 per cent, which we paid long ago, and if we're serious about trying to address intergenerational equity and not dump a whole bunch more burden and debt and increased cost of living onto our children and our grandchildren, we have to start talking about a PST. There is just no other option.

I hesitate to say that. Politically, nobody wants to say the word. When we are charged with some of the most important decisions for the future of the province, if we can't talk about it here, where can we talk about it? Out in the media it's often used as a whip to whip parties that talk in terms of a responsible stewardship for the future. The reality is that over decades we have built up a massive infrastructure debt and deficit. Since the Klein cuts of the '90s we have a social deficit that has not been addressed. We have an environmental debt that we are now starting to address in terms of stronger legislation around environment and regulations around the environment.

Whether or not it's all as efficiently spent as we would all like it to be – and we admonish the government to look assiduously at every budget in the public sector and hold the line on new contracts. At the same time we have to as responsible adults have an adult conversation about revenue and about a reasonable tax. We're still the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country, and we are adding very significant burdens onto future generations without even addressing the question of a PST. I find that really discouraging, frankly. I would hope that we can have an honest conversation about it, regardless of the fact that they may not be doing optimal management. We are going to be faced with a big debt in 2019. Let's talk about how we're going to at least start to make for some intergenerational equity and start paying some of our way.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I could, please, I'd just like to take a second and ask the hon. member a couple of things. The CBC a week or two ago again clearly pointed out Alberta's spending problem. The fact that our province spends \$2,700 more per year per capita than any other province – and as we've seen our wait times slip and we've seen our infrastructure problems, I would challenge you to explain where we get the value for that extra money.

4:10

Then when it comes to the PST, I often wonder: what does the Alberta advantage mean to the average family? Alberta in a good year gets \$8 billion, \$9 billion, or \$10 billion in royalties. Of course, no question that in the last couple of years it's been substantially lower, I think even in the \$2 billion to \$3 billion or \$4 billion vicinity, but, hon. member, I don't think any other province comes anywhere close to that. Most provinces hardly get anything, if any. We make more in royalties than other provinces receive in PST. How does that correlate, in your thinking, with what the Alberta advantage would be for the people that live in Alberta?

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, Madam Speaker, we're talking about apples and oranges. Most people in this province recognize that we have not saved our oil money for 30 years. Why is that? Why have we not saved it over 30 years? Under Peter Lougheed we were receiving 29 per cent royalties. In the last 15 years it's been about 7 to 9 per cent royalties, so either we're not bringing in enough money or we're not saving it in an appropriate fashion or both.

That doesn't address the question of the reality that we have been building debt and deficit for the last 25 years in this province. If we want the services, the schools, the hospitals, the roads, and the standard of living that we enjoy here, the real question, with respect, is: are you going to pass this on to your children, or are you going to start paying your share now? That's the question I think we have to ask.

When you get into power, we'll be asking you the same question. Can you maintain services and infrastructure with the budget you suggested? Impossible. Nobody believes that you're credible in talking about a balanced budget by 2017. It's just not credible. The numbers don't add up unless you make massive cuts to the services and the supports and the schools and the hospitals and the roads. It just doesn't add up, so let's get real about leaving a massive debt to our children and grandchildren: \$40 billion, \$50 billion, \$60 billion is not going to be paid off in a few years. Let's face it.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon, everybody. I know this is riveting – riveting – info. I know. I have two amazing sons. I'm sure you've all realized that by now. They are the centre of my world, and I would pretty much do anything for them. As a mom I've had to learn to set boundaries, and even more difficult I've had to learn to say no many, many, many times. I'm a tough mom. If you ever ask my kids, they'll certainly agree with you. Along with my husband, we've really, really worked hard to help our sons, who are 20 and 18, to be independent and self-starters, responsible with their money, how to invest, and reward for good behaviour. At least in my family those are really important things. I'm not tough to be mean or rude or cause them any grief or

any harm or to take anything away from them. I mean, they're amazing young men, and granted I'm obviously biased because they're mine.

Mrs. Pitt: They're pretty great.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

I need to ensure, and so does my husband, that they have the opportunity to learn to be self-reliant, self-sufficient, and self-supporting, autonomous adults in the ability that they have. That is the amazing part. For every other parent in here, I'm sure that you can agree that that's the joy and the challenge of being a parent. Often it would be so much simpler, especially when we're talking about cleaning, especially when I have two boys and a husband, whom I love immensely – but they don't clean the way that I do. It would be simpler for me to say, "Okay, I'll do it," and be okay with that. "I'll do that for you." My sons are at home right now while I'm here, so they're cooking, they're cleaning, and they're taking care of picking up the dog poop, all that fun stuff, that is their responsibility. Nevertheless, it is their job, and they're responsible for that, and that is the fun part of their responsibilities within our house. And they work, and they go to school.

In my mind, I'm sure I could probably do it faster and neater and better, but the important aspect here is that it's their responsibility to do those things, and we're trying to enforce that with them at home. I really don't want to deprive them of having the opportunity to prove to themselves, their employers, and everybody else who is going to eventually look up to them that they are capable of doing these things. If they're wanting advances on their paycheques or anything like that, they have to ask for it, they have to prove why, and they have to understand how that's going to impact the paycheque at the end of the day, and they don't get extra just because they ask for it. Again, as a parent I could easily solve their problems for them, but I choose to help my young men develop the skills and understanding that they need to be self-governing adults.

Which brings me to interim supply, Madam Speaker. The government needs to learn, like my young men, how to spend within their means and present a budget on time to ensure that they are able to continue with the important business of governing the province. I expect this from my government, and so do Albertans. We thought in 2015 and again last year: they're a new government. Having never been in government, it would be very, very difficult for me to try and understand the absolute complexity and difficulty that comes along with this massive undertaking. However, we are at a new time and a new session, and I'm quite sure and quite confident that the government knows – well, they should know – what they're doing. I mean, in the business world there are consequences for this.

Again this year we see them asking for more money and an advance to tide them over until they get the budget together. Again, I say this with great humility. I mean, I understand that budgets may not always be prepared. But, please, some clarity. Please. What really bothers me about interim supply is that we're essentially writing a blank cheque to the government again. Personally, I'm not buying into this, and neither are Albertans. There's no information that is provided that will allow Albertans to understand what this money will be used for and who is going to be accountable for the expenditures. Accountability, please. We are asked to make decisions about humongous amounts of money without knowing exactly where that money will be spent.

So, Madam Speaker, because I view this government and the people in this House as my political family, I am going to request much more information. Yesterday I asked a few questions, and the answers that I received were not very clear, so if I could, I would

like to ask for some clarity about the interim supply for the Education portfolio because I have some very real concerns about the expenses of \$721.5 million and the capital investment of almost \$303 million and the financial transactions of \$3.2 million in the Education portion of the interim supply.

Firstly, I would like to know what the government means when they say stable funding? Stable funding in my opinion – and in reference especially to my question about Education, because the government set a budget last year, Madam Speaker, and now we're concerned about stable funding, but it's their own funding model. This is based on, if I'm to understand it, the budget from last year. So did the government not build stability and sustainability into their budget process? I mean, I guess mistakes happen, but this is becoming the norm. If this is the future of budgeting, Houston, we have a problem.

An Hon. Member: Edmonton, we have a problem.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah.

Is the government not able, Madam Speaker, to prepare a sustainable budget that will take them across more than one year at a time? That's a stable funding model. The government continues to say that they want to make life better for Albertans, that there is a stable funding model. I'd like to see that.

The government also stated that there would be no disruption of funding under the Education capital plan and that stakeholders would not notice any difference and there would be no impact on the ability to provide services. I'm a little bit confused by that answer and would like some clarification.

In the interim supply bill the government is asking for an advance of almost \$303 million for capital expenditures, but in supplementary supply last week they transferred \$107 million from capital to operations. Maybe this just needs to be explained to me a little bit more clearly, but why would you transfer funds out of capital in one and then ask for an advance the next week? I don't know. It simply doesn't make sense to me. I love clarity, and if somebody can explain it to me, that would be wonderful.

4:20

Further, the government stated that the \$302 million plus was for modernizations and completions. I need some clarity on that as well. My question is around whether or not the modernizations and completions are the ones from the previous government's plan, that this government is finishing, or if these are new projects. The reason that I need clarity on this is that the budget requirements between projects that have begun, those that were in the planning stage, and those that are shovel ready to start from scratch are vastly different. The government keeps announcing that they built new schools in 20 months. Wow. One can only assume that some were started before this government was elected.

An Hon. Member: No way.

Mrs. Aheer: I know. Just saying.

I would also like to know if these projects are on time and on budget. Again, are we talking about previous projects, modernizations, projects that are in the works, ones that are starting? Where are we? What do we mean by modernizations and completions, and what are those dollar figures, please?

I would also like to know whether \$302 million is what we can expect for expenses month by month. Is this a recurring number across the year, or is this amount weighted more heavily for the spring? I mean, overall, the government is requesting – and I think this is correct – \$7.2 billion, a huge sum of money, massive dollars, to run the province until they can come up with the budget. That's

huge, and that amount is to keep the province running for two months. Am I understanding that correctly?

I have so many questions about this blank cheque that the government is requesting through this interim bill and how these dollars are going to be used. Albertans are asking how these dollars are going to be spent and used. The biggest questions, of course, are around the inability of the government to put together a fully informed, responsible fiscal plan that looks to reduce our deficit and get Albertans out of debt. Simply providing a blank cheque without accountability measures perpetuates the spending problem that this government struggles with. It doesn't provide a set of criteria against which the actions of the government may be measured, so we have no place to understand where the government is and where they're going.

Alberta has the highest – I repeat, and we've heard this again – per capita spending of the largest provinces in Canada. This is patchwork budgeting, at best. Many concerns could be hidden, so where's the transparency? Over the last 10 years spending has grown faster than inflation and population growth, and Albertans want an end to it.

At a time, Madam Speaker, when our economy is in shambles and thousands of Albertans are out of work and the government seems bent on making things worse, this interim budget reflects the NDP's inability to plan their budget timing properly, at the minimum. At the minimum. We can't get the budget in on time. I mean, don't Albertans deserve and shouldn't they expect real leadership not only on spending problems but the respect that they deserve on knowing that that budget will be presented when it should be presented, on time? These are just some of the questions that I have.

I mean, the government gives us grief, as they have today, for asking about spending dollars in our constituencies and on behalf of the province, but that's because we know that there are places where they can find efficiencies. This is in order to accommodate the actual needs of Albertans. We know the government is capable of doing this. We need to see action here.

Taxpayer dollars are not only relegated to the government. Every single person in this province – these are Albertans' dollars that we're responsible for here. We have a responsibility, when our constituencies bring issues forward, to ask and to request that the government look at our numbers, that we bring from this side, equally to those that come from that side. This isn't about slashing and spending; this is Albertans' money, their dollars.

If somebody asks me what's happening with their dollars and about infrastructure pieces, you can bet I'm going to ask about it. If there is a more efficient way that the government can spend those dollars to make sure that those services are provided, fantastic. But please do not berate me for doing my job and bringing concerns to this Legislature on behalf of my constituents when they have issues. They deserve to find out about their tax dollars.

I am very pleased, on one hand, to see that the interim budget is less than last year's, but I am extremely concerned, along with Albertans, that they're being asked to write a blank cheque without any information. What is more concerning to me is that I have not read or heard about any cost-saving measures from this government. If there was some way, Madam Speaker, that we could see that this interim supply is part of a complete fiscal plan that included cost savings and an approach to conservative economic strategies, I would be extremely inclined to support it.

These are tough times. We understand that. But tough times mean that governments need to be able to stand up on behalf of their people and say to them, "This is what we are doing for you," not through programs that tout ideas of light bulbs and other things that we've heard about but through real planning and thoughtful process

that actually engages Albertans so they understand that the government has their best interests at heart.

This interim supply is part of the government's approach to leaving Albertans so far in debt that our grandchildren will be paying for it, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View said, far, far, far into the future for decisions that are being made today.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Hon. Government House Leader, did you wish to close debate on this bill?

Mr. Mason: No. That's fine, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Bill 2

An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

[Adjourned debate March 9: Mr. Bilous]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 2? I will recognize Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Soon after I was elected in May of 2015 someone quite wise asked me what was important to me as an MLA. After thinking about it, I came up with three things that are important to me as an MLA and as a human being. I think Alberta should lead the world in energy innovation; I think that high-speed Internet connectivity should reach all people in Alberta, with a focus on rural and indigenous Albertans; and I think that women and girls should be able to walk alone, without fear.

Fear of harassment and fear of assault are real for many, many women and girls, and I wonder how much of the energy that we put into keeping ourselves safe could go into more productive pursuits like creating a more equitable society and collaborating to solve the big problems our world is facing. This is particularly important to me because I am a survivor of repeated sexual assaults as a child. Before I share my story, I want to caution anyone who may be sensitive that what I am sharing might trigger a reaction for them.

When I was five I went to spend a week with some family friends out of town. I was so excited to have so many sleepovers in a row with their daughter, who was around my age, and to explore a new town. I loved my life as a little kid. I was outgoing and bold and confident. I loved who I was and was probably annoying in my sheer joy about life. On the second or third night at my friend's house something woke me up in the dark. I remember feeling so afraid while my friend's older brother assaulted me. I didn't understand what was happening, and he told me that he would kill me if I said anything, and I believed him. He was a lot older and bigger than me. There was nothing I could do to save myself from what was happening. Overnight my confidence evaporated.

4:30

A few months later my family ended up moving to the same town as my abuser, and I continued to be abused at every opportunity he could find to assault me. I was an only child, and I found it very hard to make friends in my new town. I became the target of bullies in town. A group of older boys would tease me mercilessly. I was terrified of them. I would have done anything so that they wouldn't

touch me. I never spoke up. I never talked back. I never defended myself to them because I knew the danger in provoking older boys.

The assaults continued off and on until I was about 12 and I fought back. Like many small-town Alberta kids, I spent a lot of time at the rink. I was a figure skater, and my dad coached a hockey team. My abuser ended up playing hockey for my dad, and I saw him far more than I wanted to. He cornered me at the rink one day when he thought he could get away with assaulting me again. I used my knee to forcefully stop what he was doing. He never touched me again.

The experience changed me. Like many survivors, I've sought help for PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The easy confidence of my childhood disappeared and was replaced with distrust and isolation. Other survivors can face challenges with substance abuse and suicide attempts. I commend everyone who has ever sought to heal from sexual assault and those who keep on keeping on every day, who haven't sought out support yet to help them overcome what happened to them.

I never shared what happened to me until after I had my own children. It wasn't until about 10 years ago that I even knew that I could still report what happened to me, and I figured it was my responsibility to report the assaults so that his name would be on record in case anyone else ever came forward.

The process of reporting was difficult. After giving my statement at home, I had to go to police headquarters and relate what happened to me to a man that I didn't know, in a small room, with a closed door. I was very grateful when that was over.

The case got transferred to the RCMP because the events took place in their jurisdiction. Again I had to sit in a small room with a closed door and tell a man I didn't know about what happened to me when I was a child. The case was investigated, but there were never any charges laid.

I was reminded of the experience recently when I read a *Globe and Mail* article by Robyn Doolittle. It's called *Unfounded*. If you want to read it, it's very good. I'll table some copies tomorrow. One in 5 sexual assault claims are dismissed as baseless. Many others never result in charges.

The experience left me feeling empty and alone. It felt like the police didn't believe me, and I need to tell everyone here that the most important thing that you can say to a survivor is: I believe you. We have trouble believing what happened to us ourselves. It's traumatizing, it's shocking, and it's so hard to process it.

I want to share some statistics on sexual assault and abuse that I researched in preparing to speak to this bill today. There are varying numbers, depending on where you look, but overall the story is that the number of assaults reported is very low in comparison to the number of assaults that occur. Of those reported, survivors are unlikely to see the perpetrator convicted or jailed.

The percentage of sexual assaults reported to the police is 6 per cent. The percentage of date rape sexual assaults reported is 1 to 2 per cent. The percentage of sexual assault reports that are false is 2 to 4 per cent. It doesn't happen very often. The percentage of all sexual abuse and sexual assault victims that are under the age of 17, like I was, is 60 per cent. The percentage of sex crimes victims that are women is 80 per cent. The percentage of disabled women that will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime is 83 per cent. The percentage of sexual assault victims that are boys under 16 is 15 per cent. The percentage of assailants that are friends or family of the victim is 80 per cent. It's someone that you know, very likely.

I thought pretty hard about sharing my experience today, and I thank you for being so kind to me. [Standing ovation] Thanks.

I am grateful to people like Sheldon Kennedy, who transformed his experience into an oasis of support for kids like me in Calgary with the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre; Sean McCann,

a Canadian musician you probably know from Great Big Sea, who has recently shared his story of abuse and his struggle with alcoholism in order to give other people hope; Scottish MP Michelle Thomson, who heroically told her story as a survivor of sexual violence as a young woman in the U.K. House of Commons; and Elizabeth Halpin, who is the young woman who spoke at the announcement for Bill 2 and talked to the impact that this bill will have for victims if it passes.

Right now as the law stands, a survivor has to bring a civil case to court within two years. That's a very short time if you're in the process of putting your life back together, and it passes by very quickly. Healing takes time. It takes place over a lifetime. The more time we can give survivors to take care of their immediate needs and to grow stronger before considering a civil case, the better. With this legislation the time limit will be lifted for civil cases of either sexual or domestic violence.

I'm confident that everyone here wants to eradicate sexual assault and to hold perpetrators to account so that no one has to feel the fear and shame that go along with being a survivor ever again. We aren't there yet. The criminal justice system can't meet all of the need for being heard that survivors have. A time limit is the worst reason to not hold perpetrators accountable. This bill is an important step along the way, giving survivors the opportunity to have their voices heard in court and to clear the path to further healing.

Secrets grow in the dark. Let's shed light on this destructive problem.

I urge everyone to vote in favour of Bill 2. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to commend the hon. member for her courageousness and her courage. That was just amazing. Again, I commend you.

The Deputy Speaker: Chestermere-Rocky View under 29(2)(a).

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I'm beyond words. Thank you so much for the courage. I echo the words of my colleagues over here for sharing your story and shedding some very much-needed light. You're an inspiration to many, many young women who will be looking to this House to find out how to move forward. Because you're in such a public position, this must have been very difficult for you, and we certainly commend you for coming forward.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: We still have a few minutes under 29(2)(a). Did you wish to comment, Red Deer-North?

Mrs. Schreiner: Yes. Thank you. I don't have a question; I just have a comment. I just want to thank you on behalf of all Albertans for having the courage to tell your story today. I know it was a hard story to tell, but thank you from the bottom of my heart.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd also like to thank you for sharing. I know the powerful words that you've shared today are going to be so impactful to so many people that are struggling with this very issue. It's going to give them the strength to come forward.

Thank you so much.

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, through you, I would like to not only commend the member for these comments but for her continual

advocacy on this issue. She has been, as I've known her, an endless advocate for women and for women's rights and for ending sexual violence. That that passion comes from a very insightful place and a personal experience is something that I know many women share with her. Because of the statistics that she shared, we know that this is not only for you. It does take bravery to share a personal story, but it allows us to have that lens of personal experience, that diversity that having a caucus from different parts of life brings forward. How that translates into legislation is even bigger.

So for all of your contributions, not just your personal sharing, thank you so much.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't know how you could do what you just did, and like others, I want to thank you so much for sharing your story. It is going to have a huge impact, I trust, on people not just in Alberta but far beyond.

I wonder if the hon. member would like to make a comment. What specific advice would you have for someone who has been assaulted, male or female, any age? And what advice would you have for someone out there who might be thinking that they might want to assault someone, male or female? Those people need to hear very strong messages, too. Having been through it yourself, perhaps they will take it from you as to what to do and what not to do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, did you wish to respond?

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. My advice to anyone who hasn't reported is to seek help, seek support for yourself. That's the most important thing to be able to get through any difficult situation in life. We all deserve support. There's no shame to be had. It's not because of what you wore or what you did or what you said. It was the choice of someone else.

And to anyone who has assaulted someone else or who feels that urge to assault someone else, I would say something similar. Seek support. There is help. You know that what you want to do is wrong, and the impact on other people's lives is devastating. It takes so much for survivors to get through what they've experienced, and it's a waste of time and energy that could be spent on much more productive, beautiful things.

The Deputy Speaker: The time allotted for 29(2)(a) has expired.

Other members wishing to speak to the bill? I'll recognize Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again to the member: I'm so completely grateful.

This bill on so many levels is necessary. As you know, the younger of my two sons is special needs. When he was first diagnosed, when he was little, he was nonverbal. So many of the concerns that you have as a parent when your children are students and when they're in care are about making sure that they understand about the sanctity of their body and their mind and who they are, being able to speak up for themselves, being able to lay limitations and barriers to their comfort and what they're comfortable with. When they lack the ability to be verbal, that becomes a whole other side of things.

My son had the privilege of attending Renfrew special services in Calgary, and it was an amazing program. I volunteered excessively, probably, at that school simply because my son was nonverbal. There were so many children there, and they needed help with

everything from being fed, sometimes, to toileting and many, many other things like that. There's a great opportunity for volunteering and tremendous human beings which, you know, 90 per cent of the world are, but there is also tremendous opportunity to abuse in that situation.

One of the things that this bill will help to bring forward and which is especially important is for victims who are in the minor age category, which is what the member went through. During those times of trauma, even when you are able to speak, when you have a voice, when you've been traumatized that badly and you are afraid and you respect the person that is traumatizing you or you're expected to respect that person who is traumatizing you – and there are all sorts of things within the way that we live our lives, culturally and everything, that can contribute to how a person is going to interpret the actions that are being put upon them at that time. Sometimes it won't be until you're older and have processed or maybe have seen another friend or somebody else who's gone through this before you actually realize what you endured and what you survived. It's absolutely imperative that that's in there.

When you add special needs into that and with those shocking statistics, it becomes even more imperative that we not only say out loud that we believe the victims of these horrific, horrific situations but also that we are understanding and listening and looking for the signs and the body language. Are there things that are happening as a result of that? Not everybody will have the verbal capacity to be able to explain what has happened to them.

There are many, many opportunities within this bill for people to be able to, hopefully, move forward, find ways to heal, find help, communities to surround them with supports. One of the things that I've realized, not only in being here but just in life, is that when you have the courage to stand up and say those things, whether that's in a place like this or to your family, it's quite amazing to me how many people and the support that rallies around you. But you don't realize that until sometimes within a legislative body like this, where we actually give that push to make it be okay to speak out loud and to get rid of the stigma. There shouldn't be any. These young people that have experienced these horrific things that have happened to them need to be able to know that the people that are representing them in government are going to be the first ones to stand up for them and are going to be the ones that help them with that healing process.

The extended time to be able to go after an assailant is equally as important as making sure that for people who have been traumatized all along the spectrum and the timelines, there is time also to be able to – sometimes identifying the person that has assaulted you is probably one of the hardest things that can happen. In situations where they are friends or children of friends that are part of your family or especially if it's family members, there are, in the mind of the person who has been victimized, huge consequences for bringing forward the name of a family member or a neighbour or anybody else because of all of the things that are combined with that. They realize very quickly that they're not the only one that's impacted by this, and the idea that they're not able to protect themselves for the sake of what's going on around them is just horrible.

So being able to extend that time, giving people the ability to – again, it might come through therapy. It might come through a relationship or a discussion with somebody else, where all of a sudden you're triggered to understanding what happened to you. You'll remember or sometimes be able to put together the pieces of who assaulted you and that it was inappropriate. These are highly, highly important pieces, and I'm so, again, grateful that this legislation will be put in place.

I would like to add one other little piece. This just adds to this bill. It has to do with another piece of legislation that I feel needs to go hand in hand with this, and that is part of that triage protocol that we've been talking about. In situations like this we have to make sure that when people come forward and have this amount of courage to stand up and literally tell intimate and horrific details of what has happened to them, not only are they supported by legislation that gives them the time and the ability to come forward with that legislation but that they're also supported within the justice system. Those two things have to go hand in hand.

We have one piece here that's very, very important to the civil part of this, but we also need to make sure that the processing of these situations is not as difficult as it is right now. Along with that, it's very important – and I would suggest that with this incredible legislation we're also heavily looking into the triage protocol to make sure that prosecutors are not being instructed to not take on difficult cases. These are difficult cases.

4:50

As the member said, being believed is part of it, but proving what happened to her is a whole other piece. She wasn't always believed by the people that she told. And then she was taken into tiny, little spaces with people she didn't know to have to tell her story over and over and over again, as if the trauma itself wasn't enough.

So, please, along with this legislation, if I could ask this Legislature to look at the triage protocol to make sure that cases like the member's and other people's are looked at and are prosecuted appropriately and that we are cutting through the red tape of this situation so that these victims find justice and we also make sure that we are sending a message to the perpetrators of these horrible offences that we will not stand down and that we are going to protect our citizens of this province.

Thank you.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments with respect to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to commend the member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill for her incredible story. I luckily had the opportunity to spend some time with the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill's daughter when I was in London, and I can tell the House and the member that I can sense the strength and the intelligence that the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill instilled in her daughter. Unfortunately, I haven't met her son, but I believe that that's also instilled in both of her children.

I want to thank the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General for bringing forward this legislation. Since my colleague became the Solicitor General and Minister of Justice, she has worked tirelessly to help make Alberta's justice system fair for everyone. As we celebrated International Women's Day last week, I think it's important to recognize not only the work of my female colleagues but also highlight this important piece of legislation that makes life better for Albertans who are survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence and their families.

Let me just tell you what this legislation will do. The proposed amendments to the Limitations Act will remove limitations periods for the following civil claims: sexual assault; sexual misconduct involving a minor, intimate relationship, or dependent; and nonsexual assault involving a minor, intimate relationship, or dependent.

As the Limitations Act currently dictates, if a person wants to sue for assault, the action must be started within two years from when the person knows or should have known of the incident. This two-

year limitation can create a difficult barrier to justice for survivors. Our priority as government is to move Alberta forward and make life better for Albertans. That means looking out for some of our most vulnerable. Currently almost every other common law jurisdiction in the country, excluding Prince Edward Island, has either removed or updated their limitation period on sexual assault cases, making civil action more accessible to those who need it.

Some of my colleagues might be wondering why anyone would choose civil action. The advocate for survivors and executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton does an excellent job of explaining why anyone would choose civil action to seek justice against their abusers. She states, and I quote: because the burden of proof is so high in the criminal justice system, a very small fraction of assault survivors will ever see the inside of a courtroom. For survivors to be able to pursue a civil claim at a time when they are ready to do so and where the burden of proof is significantly less onerous is a change that is truly representative of a government that gets it. When survivors are believed, listened to, and supported, they can reclaim the life they had before the assault, a life that they most definitely deserve to have again. End quote.

Even in 2017 there is a stigma attached to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Many survivors feel ashamed. How could they let this happen, why didn't they fight back, why didn't they fight harder, and what could they have done differently? One thing is clear: sexual assault is always the abuser's fault, never the survivor's, period.

Some populations can feel even deeper shame. Men who experience assault are even less likely to report than their counterparts. Often they may need more time, and Bill 2 will give them that room to pursue action and move forward with dignity. The Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Services helps explain some of the myths surrounding sexual assault. Some wrongly believe that men cannot be sexually assaulted. According to AASAS, "Studies show that 10 to 20% of males (boys, youth, and adults) [will be] sexually violated" in their lifetime.

On the rare occasion when a sexual assault against a male gets reported, a victim is often labelled as gay or even blamed for what happened to them. We don't hear about male sexual assault because the men it happens to often choose to suffer its effects alone. Often the myths surrounding sexual assault silence survivors who may not fit the mould of what many believe someone who has been sexually assaulted looks like. They fall through the cracks.

When we talk about sexual assault and domestic violence, we often leave the LGBTQ-plus community out of the conversation. As an MLA and as a member of the LGBTQ-plus community it's imperative that I take the time to highlight LGBTQ-plus survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Many queer or gender-diverse survivors of sexual violence suffer in silence. They fear they will not be believed even though trans and gender-diverse Albertans are more likely to be sexually assaulted in their lifetime.

Unfortunately, in the past Alberta hasn't done as well as other provinces when recording rates of sexual violence, and therefore it can be difficult to understand the scope of violence here in Alberta. We know that according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives women in Albertan cities face higher rates of violence compared to women in other Canadian cities. Those rates of violence increase for trans women and gender-diverse Albertans who identify as queer, individuals with disabilities, individuals of colour, and indigenous women.

Beyond that, survivors from the LGBTQ-plus community are often excluded from dominant narratives of what sexual violence looks and feels like. This leads to a lack of institutional support and medical resources that address the unique experiences of those survivors. This, coupled with the intersections of race, class, ability,

language, and immigration status, means that many individuals may not be able to access resources that are located in their communities or that address their lived experiences. Survivors have varied and unique experiences, and their healing and forms of redress will be as unique.

Many people also hold off from seeking justice from their abusers because of fear. With the current legislation there is nothing stopping abusers, who may know the law and know how to work the system, from using the Limitations Act to their advantage, to instill fear for years until they know they are in the clear.

There is a myth that sexual assault is usually committed by strangers, but in about 80 per cent of the cases the sexual assault survivor knows the offender. It doesn't take a lawyer to understand how an abuser could use tactics such as threats and stalking to keep a survivor they are close to from coming forward. That is why this legislation will also lift the limitations on sexual misconduct.

The point I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that when we remove barriers that prevent survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence from coming forward, we strengthen and empower them. We help vulnerable Albertans from all walks of life. This legislation not only brings us in line with most of the provinces; it propels us forward. With this legislation Alberta will be a leader in addressing sexual misconduct in intimate relationships.

I must also acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my fellow cosponsors for Bill 2, the Member for Calgary-Bow and the Member for Calgary-North West. Both of my colleagues have faced their own challenges as women in politics. Unfortunately, being a woman in public life, as about half of my colleagues will know – well, caucus colleagues and members of the other side as well – often leads to receiving online threats of violence, and frequently those threats are sexualized and based on their gender. While I have received threats based on my age and sexual orientation, they were nowhere near the level of vitriol and hate that many of my colleagues have received. The strength and commitments that I have seen from my colleagues in the face of rape and death threats is empowering. Even though my colleagues face these threats, they do not back down. They continue to fight every day to help make life better for Alberta's women.

That's why together we are cosponsoring this legislation. Every Albertan deserves to feel safe and respected in their communities, homes, schools, universities, workplaces, and even here in the Legislature. Through consultation with front-line workers, non-profit shelters, and women's organizations, we know that this is something that Albertans want. The minister is listening and taking action to address these concerns. Bill 2 will help ensure survivors of sexual and domestic violence are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. I hope all members of the Legislature will support the bill.

Thank you.

5:00

The Speaker: Any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence: I would be remiss if I did not stand and speak to this bill, so I now stand in full support of the bill as a second step in this Legislature in addressing domestic and sexual violence.

I thank my colleague for her presentation on this bill and for her courage to stand up and tell her story. I can tell you from my personal experience that it takes an incredible strength to survive,

and that is the first baby step in moving forward. To reach the point of seeking support is often after many, many incidents of abuse, sexual or nonsexual in nature, as the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill said. It went on for years for her.

I, too, will advise you that what I am about to say may be a trigger moment for some in this Chamber. So now I'm going to ask you to help me with my presentation. I'm going to ask you to close your eyes. I want you to imagine that you are essentially alone. You have been isolated from your family, friends, and support systems. It feels like you're in a cold, bleak room. Someone tells you: "Do not move. Do not resist. Do not breath like that." If you don't obey, you know there will be dire consequences. You are being stripped naked both physically and emotionally, with no ability to stop what is happening. At this point, I ask you: how are you feeling? Are you afraid? Are you humiliated? Are you feeling shame? Do you feel sick? Do you have any ability to remove yourself from this situation?

Please open your eyes. If you really put yourself into this scenario through your imagination, you would feel your self-esteem being eroded and destroyed. You would feel the sense of being trapped. When this occurs to someone every day through actions just like this, actions that are aimed to break and control you, you lose control of everything around you.

How quickly can this happen? It is mind-boggling how quickly it can happen, and it doesn't matter how smart you are, what kind of family you come from, how much money you have. None of this matters anymore. The person you were is being destroyed.

I did seek help when the girls and I escaped. I had to. I had to deal with the stress I was feeling, the nightmares, the fear. I had to rebuild to grow into the person I am today. This is 35 years of support and growth. Physically, I seemed to be all right, until I wasn't. It took time to gradually learn the lessons, that I had been trapped in this hell, and they were as varied and as many as any other person caught in such a trap.

When my girls and I escaped, we left with what we could carry and the clothes on our backs. Had it not been for some family and friends who gave us support, we would have been at the mercy of whatever came our way.

I had an education. I had strength to do whatever I needed to do to protect my children, thank God. I never received a cent of support from my ex, so times were pretty tough. I had to draw on every ounce of inner strength that I had. The need to protect my children from both this harsh situation and the harsh realities of this world was almost unbearable. I worked hard. I scrimped and saved. I did things like buying material on sale and making clothes for the girls and myself because I didn't have the money for store-bought clothing. We lived on a very tight budget, and by the time I was able to get back on my feet and feel strong enough to pursue some financial support for the girls, it was too late.

How long do you think it would take you to regain your self-esteem, to actually acknowledge what had occurred, and to ask for help, ask for what should have been available for you and your family? How long, and how strong do you need to be to get back on your feet? By eliminating limitation periods, we are making the legal system more accessible to victims of sexual and domestic violence. Survivors need to become thrivers, and that takes time. Thrivers are those who have become empowered to come forward on their own terms and when they are ready, not when somebody else says that they are ready. This truly is not easy.

The judge who gave me a lecture on how expensive it would be to keep my ex in jail for the time that he had been sentenced was not respectful. He did not leave me with my dignity intact. I felt neither compassion nor respect. The decision to report sexual or domestic violence is deeply personal and can be extremely difficult.

It had taken me nine years to finally lay charges, and those charges were only on the last two incidents. He was charged with domestic violence. He was my husband, so they didn't charge him with rape. There was no rape kit or hospital examination despite the fact that he had raped me and that I had visible signs of that rape on me. There were some barriers every time I turned around. This bill will make some changes to that attitude.

I was surviving by doing the things I had to do to protect my daughters and myself. I was skilled. I was an educated adult. I was a parent, but I was a single parent. So when I applied for employment with the federal government, I was asked the normal questions for the position which I sought. I was also asked who would take care of my children if there were an accident or if they were sick while I was at work. I knew that if I said that I would leave and take care of my children, I would not get that job. I answered that by saying that I had family and friends who would support me, which I did, but I didn't answer that question because I would not have gotten that job. Have you ever been asked that question when you applied for a job? Did you every have to worry about finding someone to babysit your children ever? Do you have to worry about a supervisor making advances and threatening your livelihood if you're not compliant because he knows that you need the job?

Every Albertan deserves to feel safe and respected in their communities, their homes, and their workplaces. It took me 35 years to tell my story publicly. To do this was incredibly difficult. Barriers were everywhere. This bill will tear down some of those barriers. Our government is committed to ensuring survivors of sexual and domestic violence are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect.

I expect everyone in this Chamber, as several other members have said, to support this bill. Will you support this bill and be part of the solution, or will you be part of the problem?

5:10

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Lethbridge-East? The Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mostly just have comments. I want to commend the member for giving all Albertans real insight into what it's like for victims of domestic violence and how trapped somebody can feel in those circumstances and to thank her for her candour and generosity in sharing with us and also for giving hope to people and focusing on thriving. I think that's really important for anyone who has survived any assault.

The Speaker: Are there any other members under 29(2)(a)?
The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Before I begin, I'd just like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for her remarks as I have done in the past in this House when she has shared passionately and heartfully about what is a very horrific situation. I thank her for her bravery and her comments and the advocacy that she does on this very important issue that faces so many.

Mr. Speaker, it's so unfortunate that these horrific situations of sexual assault and domestic violence affect so many Albertans right across the province. As we know, 1 in 3 women will experience some form of sexual assault and sexual violence. You know, I wish that we lived in a place and in a society and in a world where it was zero. I think about my girls, and I think about my sisters, of which I have two. There is a very real possibility that of just those three,

one of them will experience an absolutely life-changing event that's horrific.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that I support Bill 2, that it's not just the government that is taking steps to pass legislation like Bill 2 but that it is certainly members of the opposition as well. There is a very cumulative desire to have Bill 2 enacted and to continue to make steps towards protecting victims of these most horrific crimes. I think that's an important point to make, that it is about making steps towards protecting victims.

Even after Bill 2 is passed here in this place, there will still be more work to do. We all have a responsibility to ensure that that work continues, whether it's around education, whether it's around providing additional resources, whether it's ensuring that we're doing what we can as individuals to make our society a safer place, whether it is speaking up publicly against sexual abuse and sexual violence and domestic violence. We all have a role to play, not just in legislation but day in and day out in speaking against those that would make light of these crimes, speaking out against those who would joke about this, speaking out against people who even make flippant remarks that are disparaging against women or disparaging against victims. We need to do our part in ensuring that women and victims of sexual abuse know that they will be believed, that they will be heard. We also need to make sure that we take proactive and swift steps to ensure that the judicial system is in a place where those individuals who have had crimes committed against them are assured that their case is being heard.

Members on this side of the House and others have advocated strongly over the last number of weeks to ensure that we have the resources in place, that those who come forward under circumstances – as you know, Mr. Speaker, many of these sort of crimes go unreported. It takes – you know, we've heard in the Chamber today that it often takes years and years and years to have the courage. We need to make sure that when that happens, those who are victims of sexual abuse, the vast majority of those being women, are supported through what is a very, very, very difficult time. So I'm proud to stand and speak in favour of Bill 2 and the steps that it takes to provide recourse for those women to extend the time for victims to file claims against those who have perpetrated the crimes.

It's important that we send messages from this Chamber that we believe that there is a desire, a societal desire, to ensure that we're doing as much as possible to ensure that these crimes aren't happening, that we encourage women who have been victims to come forward and to see justice served. I'm pleased that the government is taking this step. I am also pleased to see other legislation coming forward from other areas of the House that have to do with crimes predominantly against women in the form of Bill 202, which I know will be debated later in this session.

I am honoured to be able to support the government in this endeavour. I think it's something that we should all be doing, and I look forward to this bill becoming law and being part of that solution. It's not the end solution, but it's part of the solution, and I think we are all well served to ensure that women in our province and right across our country are treated with the dignity, the respect, the belief that they ought to be. I look forward to doing that through the rest of this debate as well.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Opposition House Leader?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 2? Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 2, the sexual and domestic violence limitation

act. I've heard many stories as to why this is important. As many members on our government bench have shared, I would just like to take a moment partly because there was a comment that was made afterwards, after some of the personal sharing, that went to express: wow; I didn't know that so many people around me have experienced this. I feel like that's a common comment because there seems to be still, like, a stigmatization of shame in expressing the stories, that it's still difficult to do, and to some extent not be put into a box of whether you are a victim or not.

5:20

Because of that I want to continue on that course and share a bit about my own story, Mr. Speaker. Of course, when we look at something like this, we're looking at how to reduce barriers. The reason I want to share my own story is because we also need to understand the limitations of the things that we move forward and the people that it may not reach.

Mr. Speaker, I myself have been a victim of sexual assault. I had this experience at five years old. I know that an act like this would not help a person in my position because, like many other immigrants, that experience did not happen in Canada. So you go into the barriers faced by folks that have experienced this, but when you add to it immigration and when you add to it different kinds of experiences, it complicates it. It's hard to understand that we can reduce barriers but that there still is going to be a level of discrepancy depending on what your background is. I think that that's part of the theory as well when studying gender theory and intersectionality and the effects that having a different background and being an immigrant could have on your impact to address the issues that come up. It's quite complicated.

Mr. Speaker, just to explain a little bit about my own story, one of the things that I'm proud that this bill reflects is the taking away of the limitation of time. I know for myself, having experienced that throughout my childhood and having it be very much like a lot of the statistics that say that it's a family member and it's someone that you know and someone that should be there to protect you, knowing that that's something that occurs regularly, it's something that we need to talk about. It's something that we continuously need to address and go further than just addressing the voices of those who were affected but also those who are committed to stop these acts and not be a part of them. Making sure that we develop a wellness curriculum that talks about healthy relationships is critically important in developing this change.

I know for myself there had been many times in telling my story where some of the responses I got were: well, that must also explain why you're gay. I think there's an element of stereotypes that happen for victims that they continuously experience when they share these stories. At the end of the day, it goes into blaming everybody except the perpetrator.

Because it happened to me as a child and it happened to me by a family member, I've even heard someone blame my mother for not protecting me. You know what? To so many extents I take issue with that because my mother is the very reason that I believe in resiliency, and there's no way that any experience that I'll have will bring me down. Mr. Speaker, it speaks to a culture, a culture of blame and stigmatizing everybody but the perpetrator. You know, the sole person responsible for what I experienced is the man himself. That is something that I want to continue to elevate.

You go into the experiences and say: "Well, why didn't this person catch it? Why didn't this person say it? Why didn't you speak up at a certain point?" And that brings me back to the limitation. Speaking up requires supports. It requires knowing that people, as the member said, will believe you, that people will not fault you for perhaps waiting. So when we look at something like a

time limitation, it really doesn't take into account the experience of the person that has been victimized in this situation. And if that's the most important part, then that's the part that needs to be prioritized.

In order to speak up – I remember the very first day that I had to talk about it. I didn't actually talk about it. I had a letter that had been written by the perpetrator about the situation that happened. That day it was the letter that I just handed to my mother, and I ran away from home. As the wise woman she is, she never pressured me to do anything or to talk about anything else faster than I could, but she told me one thing: whenever I do want to talk about it, she'll be there; whatever I need she would provide. If that meant taking clothes to my friend's house, where I was staying, that's where she would go.

The Speaker: Take your time, hon. member. You have supporters in this room.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, telling my mom was hard enough. Having to explain it to other people and having to hear the responses that are given – even though I know a lot of people go into, "Oh, that should have never happened," even within those comments those things that I've already mentioned, "Oh, well, why didn't someone catch it?" or later on, "Is that why you're gay?" come in – makes it extremely complicated to want to speak up because it is easy for people to attribute other factors to the story that you're telling, and then it's hard to control the narrative in which it's portrayed.

Mr. Speaker, removing this limitation isn't just a recognition of their experience, but it is something essential to respecting people's dignity and worth and making sure that it is up to them, that it is their choice as to when they do it, depending on their personal situation and, at the end of the day, knowing that no matter how much time has passed, what has been made wrong can never be made right.

We had a run in Strathcona county that talked about creating allies for asking for consent.

You know, even if it had only been one day, it would have changed the course of my life. Those kinds of situations forever change the way you interact in relationships. They change the way that you experience even sleeping, Mr. Speaker. It changes a lot of things about you. Chemically speaking, your brain changes as well as your capacity to interpret the world around you and risk assessments. In all of that, it complicates your capacity to speak up. It complicates all of that, so that element is extremely important.

You know, I wish that I had spoken up, but I can't change the past, and I know that I spoke up at the time that I needed to. Mr. Speaker, I know that at the end of the day, the more we talk about this and the more that people stand up and say, "Not only do I know what the effects are because I've heard these stories," but when they stand up and say, "I will be committed to learning about what a healthy relationship entails and what consent means," you know, those are the kinds of changes that really make substantial differences. For me, developing healthy relationships then became a big pillar of my life.

You know, for many reasons being part of the LGBTQ community is complicated, but one of the strengths that I have studied in being part of the LGBTQ community is that because a lot of societal expectations no longer apply to you, you get this freedom to redefine and re-create roles. Because, you know, you have two women in a female same-sex relationship, you get to redefine these things, and you get to talk about things that in heterosexual relationships might just be assumed or might just be a gender role that is kind of placed. These things are continuously negotiated, and that

is one of the many strengths of same-sex relationships and one of them that has been documented in many cases. Part of the benefit of that is actually being able to talk about personal boundaries, about how to deal with certain situations, because none of that is assumed.

5:30

Also, I wanted to talk both about my experience as an immigrant in experiencing this, because of the legal complications that it implies, but also about, being part of the queer community, how tired I am of that comment. You know, just for the record I have pictures from when I was four years old holding hands with women. Like, you know, I really don't like the song, but I was kind of *Born This Way*. The comments sometimes are tiring about GSAs, that we're creating a culture where we're cultivating someone turning gay or that having a cookie could make you that way. It's just exhausting because it just isn't possible, in my mind. I didn't choose this, I didn't choose those experiences, but what I do get to choose is what I do in regard to society's way of interpreting these circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, I may not do it right all the time, but I'm committed to being an advocate and to listening to how we can make things better. I know that one of the things that can do that is by telling a story, and while I'm not okay with telling a whole bunch of my own personal story, I will say that in a lot of ways it changed me. It was really painful to experience, and it was a terrifying experience, you know, that exercise of closing your eyes and experiencing those things and the feeling of being trapped. I think many people can identify with that that have gone through that experience. You don't know what to do. Again, it's about fighting the stigma of: "Why didn't you fight back? Why didn't you stop it? Why did you let it reoccur?" It was not my choice. It shall never be regarded as my choice. The only person responsible is the perpetrator. I refused to the end, and I reject that premise.

You know, one of the things I'm most proud of our government for is our capacity to bring into the Legislature people from diverse backgrounds. It's something that people talk about as being important, but the ability to accomplish it takes a lot of commitment. It takes more than just talking about being open. It takes the commitment of going out there and sometimes convincing people to step down to make space for others. It's hard to do, Mr. Speaker, and the reason that someone should choose to do that and make that commitment is because we see legislation like this, legislation that dramatically changes the tone and tenor of a justice system that for many years was a place that people associated as not understanding them. Many victims feel that their voice isn't being represented there. The fact that you have eyes viewing pieces of legislation that have experienced this provides a different form of decision-making and provides a more informed way to move forward than if you didn't.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for her comments. They are extremely heartfelt and wise. I might say that in my life I don't always get it right as well, but I, too, am learning. Hopefully, we continue to learn together. I just wanted to say thank you and also offer you the opportunity to conclude your remarks if you had any that were remaining.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you. You know, I'd just say: let's continue this work, because it's great. It's so important. Let's just keep doing what we're doing. I'm so happy to be surrounded by so many

colleagues across the way and beside me. Whenever I don't have the strength to do something myself, I know who I can fall back on.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for sharing your story. It's very important for all of us, especially those in the public systems that are supposed to be caring for people going through these challenging times. I think of the justice system, I also think of the social services system, and I also think of the health care system, where people are supposed to be prepared and trained and able to meaningfully help in the transition back to health and recovery, posttraumatic support, whatever. Tell us about your experience with the public services in Alberta and how they have met or not met your needs, if you chose to use them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you. Yes, I'd actually like to speak about an organization from my community, Saffron, the sexual assault centre of Strathcona county. I'm just going to say that it was one of the places I reached out to.

I think the complication, especially in our situation, was money. It was the cost associated with reaching out for those supports. There was part of it in developing a conversation and being able to talk about it that I had to go through, and accessing those supports was helpful that way. But timing was an issue for me. If I wasn't open to talking about it, I wouldn't be okay with getting the supports at that time. Sometimes it was the people that I had to discuss it with, if they didn't completely understand the lens through which I saw things culturally. You know, being part of the Spanish culture, the way of discussing difficult situations works a little bit differently. Having that cultural understanding sometimes makes that difference as well.

It's difficult to access those kinds of supports. I know that I started working with Multicultural Health Brokers in Edmonton because they actually do a lot of culturally sensitive work with community members, using brokers to assist in gathering those supports and building cultural sensitivity in the people delivering that support as well. That made a difference in a lot of ways.

I know that throughout it becomes a process. I might not be that old, but going through years of reaching out to different psychologists and things like that, it really came down to cost at the end of the day, the difficulty to continuously see the supports through. There were different points in my life where I was more open to receiving those supports than others. When I was, it wasn't necessarily in alignment to when I had the money or benefits to do that.

I was an educational assistant. I had three jobs when I was working through school, Mr. Speaker, and I didn't have benefits, so that was one of the times that I would have been okay, actually, going to see a psychologist, but I just didn't have the money to. The reason I was working three jobs was because it was really expensive to go to school. I had things to pay for. My parents were immigrants. They weren't able to save for my education, right? In those kinds of situations it's very complicated, which is, again, why I stand with this government in all of the investment in supports to the front-line services and to the administration that it takes to deliver those services in an effective way. It is very complicated to execute those things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you might allow the Speaker to make a personal observation, let me say to all of you that it is a

privilege on all sides of the House to be in a situation like this. As a father of four daughters and 11 grandchildren one thinks about these issues very, very much.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. I want to begin by just saying that I really do appreciate the stories that have been told today. I think it's fairly well known that no matter what kind of trauma we experience, when we're able to tell our stories, there's healing in the telling. I guess, especially for today, my prayer for those who have shared their stories would be that today, in fact, would be a day of ongoing healing and wholeness and discovering the inner beauty within.

Any time we think about creating a law, I think it sometimes helps to think a little bit about: why would we enact such a law? I've been sitting here thinking it through a little bit, and I just offer a few comments in that regard. You could ask the question: is the objective or is the end deterrence or restraint so that it doesn't happen again, so that others are protected? Of course, we would all hope and wish that that would be the case, and in some way it probably is part of the benefit of enacting this kind of a law, but there are also lots of studies out there that indicate that law doesn't necessarily really deter behaviour that's criminal or inappropriate.

Most of the legal philosophers that write on it that I've been able to read ultimately end up talking about the need for inner and personal restraint. While I realize that in our society some of the spiritual values of inner restraint and personal self-control and control of the passions are maybe not very popular, the reality is that maybe in our society we need to hear a little bit more about that because social or legal restraint often isn't as effective as we might wish that it would be.

We could also imagine that maybe the desire by enacting such a law would be justice for those who have been unjustly treated. While I think that maybe there is an element of justice there, on the other hand I also have this deep sort of feeling that any kind of legal action doesn't really ultimately create justice for the kinds of abuses that we're talking about. I don't know that there is real justice that can somehow restore everything and make it as if it didn't happen and it's all of a sudden all right again. So while justice has a part of it, I guess I struggle that that's even possible in these kinds of cases in this world.

Some might want to say that we enact these kinds of laws out of vengeance. I don't think that's the spirit of what this is about, and I think we all realize that vengeance often destroys ourselves more

than the other person anyway. This kind of a law isn't about vengeance. That's just more destruction.

I guess where I end up in the end is that maybe enacting a law like this, which takes away barriers, in effect will give a glimmer of hope, and maybe it will become a means by which those who have experienced this kind of injustice and all the rest of it will in fact be able to find it as part of their journey to wholeness. I guess that would be my biggest wish to see out of this kind of a law, that it would be a means, an aid, an opening of a pathway to inner healing, to the wholeness of the soul, to be able to move on and to grow and to be truly beautiful people because of what we enact here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Bill 4 **Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017** *(continued)*

The Speaker: Hon. members, in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on every appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Mr. Mason: If we've concluded the business of the day, Mr. Speaker, then I will move that we . . .

Mr. Cooper: We can vote on Bill 2 if you want.

Mr. Mason: Pardon me?

Mr. Cooper: We can vote on Bill 2 if you want.

Mr. Mason: I know. I think there are some members that would still like to speak to that.

So, Madam Speaker . . . [interjections] Well, we do it the other way all the time, so it's only fair. It's only fair, Mr. Speaker. But I'm sorry.

The Speaker: No, you're not.

Mr. Mason: The Speaker has tremendous insight.

I think we've made wonderful progress. The government will keep running. Things will carry on. I'll move that we call it 6 o'clock, Mr. Speaker, and adjourn until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, March 16, 2017

Day 9

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 16, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. As we conclude our work for the week, let us think on the work that has been accomplished, and let us focus on the many tasks that lie ahead of us.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 3

Voluntary Blood Donations Act

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we begin consideration of the bill, I've had a request to revert to introduction of guests. I need unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am incredibly pleased to introduce to you and through you today to the Assembly the mayor of Lethbridge, Chris Spearman.

I would also like to introduce to you two passionate advocates on PDD, Chris and Ben Rowley, who are my guests at the budget this afternoon. If you would please give the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 3

Voluntary Blood Donations Act

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. This legislation will ban paying individuals for blood donations. Additionally, it will support an integrated and co-ordinated national blood supply. I introduce my support because blood is both life sustaining and instrumental to providing the level of care Canada is renowned for. As a long-time blood donor it is gratifying knowing that lives are saved by this tremendous gift, and that is what it is: a gift. I began donating blood when I was a 23-year-old student at NAIT. I was a starving student, and my initial attraction, ironically, was the free cookies. Within a couple of months I received my donor card and began my lifelong commitment to being a blood donor. With conviction this is a principle I have bestowed within my family because I recognize that the gift of life is precious and cannot be bought and cannot be sold.

Madam Speaker, this new act will create a barrier to the establishment of private, pay-for-plasma clinics in Alberta that

render sustaining life a profitable business. We often hear of the miracles that happen when Albertans receive the gift of life through organ donations, and I support that voluntary blood donation remain just that: voluntary. For nearly two decades Canada's blood donations system has been successfully operated and managed by Canadian Blood Services.

Madam Speaker, on June 8, 2015, I had the pleasure of representing our government at the Red Deer location for National Blood Donor Week. While recognizing the almost 70,000 Albertans who donate blood, I also had the pleasure of recognizing a local blood donor, Ron Regehr, for sharing what matters most. Ron had been donating blood since he was 17 years old, and many years had gone past. We shared our conviction and dedication by donating blood together.

Paying donors is not a practice that is supported in the current system. Potentially it can lead to a disconnected and fragmented national blood system. Our current system through Canadian Blood Services is regulated as a biologics manufacturer of Health Canada and is primarily funded by the provincial and territorial ministries of Health. As such, it is a not-for-profit charitable organization in alignment with the recommendations of the 1997 Krever report.

Allowing private plasma clinics to set up operations in Alberta will only erode the voluntary whole blood donor base operated by Canadian Blood Services. In 2008 the government of Canada legislated National Blood Donor Week to recognize and celebrate blood donors across the country for their life-saving contributions. It is benchmarked to remind Canadians about the importance of donating blood and the ongoing need for new donors, hence the paramount importance of Bill 3.

Recently a private plasma collection clinic was established in Saskatchewan. Currently this clinic is collecting and stockpiling plasma until they can find a buyer. This is not good news for our country as private clinics can sell the plasma to the highest bidder anywhere in the world. As a result, Canada's much-needed plasma will leave our country, denying its life-gifting properties for Canadians and Albertans who need it.

That is why we are proposing in this legislation to ban private donations here in Alberta. The proposed legislation will ban payment to an individual donor, ban payment for blood donations advertising, exempt Canadian Blood Services so that they can continue with their current practices and any further activities, provide an exemption for blood given solely for the purpose of research, and provide for inspection and enforcement controls.

Madam Speaker, our province will not be the first province to ban the practice of paying for blood products. Currently Ontario and Quebec have already banned paid blood donations as well. By supporting the national blood system operated by Canadian Blood Services, we can ensure that whole blood as well as plasma is available to those who are in need. Our proposed legislation will prevent private blood collection industries from opening in Alberta. I stand behind Alberta banning paying for blood donations and creating a barrier to the establishment of private pay-for-plasma clinics in our province. This will guarantee that our blood remains in Canada and is used to benefit Canadian patients.

Donating blood should not be looked at as a business venture. It is a valuable public resource that saves lives every day. Therefore, banning paid blood donations will ensure Albertans and Canadians have life-gifting access to the blood they need in a safe and well co-ordinated manner. Our proposed legislation incorporates stiff penalties and enforcement measures. It will allow for inspectors to issue compliance orders, and it outlines clear penalties for individuals and corporations who violate the act.

We have heard people say that Canada is already using plasma, and I want to respond to that directly. It is true. Canada is not able

to meet our demands for plasma products at this time. Canadian Blood Services needs purchased plasma products from the international market to meet the demand for plasma markets in Canada. While we cannot control the actions of other countries, that does not mean we should simply accept that there are no other options to a paid system. Currently we do not have the ability to manufacture the majority of plasma products here in Canada.

For reference, plasma is the yellow-coloured liquid that makes up over half of our total blood volume. Plasma is obtained from either a regular whole donation or through a fractionation process. Plasma is the invaluable product that can be used to treat patients who are bleeding severely or require help to clot their blood. Plasma is also used to manufacture drugs that treat fluid loss in burn patients, transplant recipients, and trauma patients; to treat immune disorders and severe infections; and to treat bleeding disorders such as hemophilia.

9:10

We simply do not have the infrastructure to manufacture these products in Alberta or Canada. As a result, Canadian Blood Services has recognized this risk and is taking active steps to address it. They have developed plans to increase Canada's plasma product self-sufficiency to 50 per cent by the year 2024. Their plan is to expand existing blood collection sites, open new plasma collection sites, and recruit additional plasma donors. They have proven to be a valuable asset in Canada's national blood supply system.

We want to ensure that this legislation does not limit Canadian Blood Services' ability to continue to manage the national blood system, and for this reason, they will be exempt. This exemption will enable Canadian Blood Services to continue providing nonmonetary incentives and appreciation items to their invaluable gift-giving donors as well as not preventing them from considering paying donors for blood or plasma if it is absolutely necessary in the future or in emergency situations.

Madam Speaker, much thought and deliberation has gone into developing this legislation. These amendments are the best way for Alberta to protect the integrity of our publicly funded voluntary blood donor system. I wish to take the opportunity to encourage my colleagues to not only give blood but to support Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, and I look forward to hearing the debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'd like to confirm that you are moving second reading on behalf of the Minister of Health.

Mrs. Schreiner: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm here to speak about Bill 3, Voluntary Blood Donations Act. Quote:

No person shall, either directly or indirectly,

- (a) provide payment to any individual in return for the collection of blood ... or
- (b) offer to provide payment to any individual in return for the collection of blood.

At first glance this seems reasonable. We're Canadians. We believe in the free and equal access to health care. We don't believe in harvesting organs from prisoners. We rely on people donating organs voluntarily, usually upon their premature death. We are offended by anyone profiting in the financial sense from any person's hardships from their position of desperate need. When we talk about Canadian values, this is probably the epitome of our values. Someone who needs blood: they need it to survive, and

Canadians will gladly provide this valuable product freely with the understanding that the person using it needs it to live. They need it to live so that they can take care of their loved ones or be loved by their families or so they can contribute to our society. Whatever their reason for living, it is not ours to judge, only that they be given the opportunity to live. It's the most precious thing we have, life.

I've given blood personally and professionally as a paramedic. A woman who suffered a traumatic birth: she needed blood. A man who suffered major injuries with multiple traumas to his body: he needed blood. Surgical patients that I've attended to: they needed blood. Blood carries the oxygen in our bodies, it contains the platelets that help us heal, and it helps to remove the CO₂ that causes the acidosis in our bodies.

The underlying concern for this legislation is to ensure that there is no competition for blood, including collection, as here in Canada we seem to struggle keeping up to our demand. We are forced to buy these blood-based pharmaceuticals from American companies. These are products that our fellow Canadians need to live.

There is a hypocrisy in our Canadian society. It is the ability to buffer ourselves from ethically questionable methods, cultures, and societal norms that occur in other countries and saying: we would never to that. Yet we will buy a product that we need from other countries who may acquire it through the very means that repulse us. We are fine with paying American companies for this exact product, who collect it by compensating donors.

I believe Alberta spends at the current quote approximately \$200 million a year to these companies. That said, Saskatchewan and Manitoba currently allow for the free market in this regard, and they haven't demonstrated any issues. They do provide for an interesting hypothesis, though. By allowing it in their provinces, they can monitor it. They can influence it to ensure that it fits their ethics and ensure their own supply instead of relying on international companies.

If we are lacking in our domestic blood supply, the first solution, before legislation, that we should be trying to do is simply promotion and advertising. We need to raise awareness. It's what we politicians do. Let us encourage everyone, all Albertans, all Canadians to go out and donate blood. This government spent \$10 million on carbon tax advertising. Can you imagine if you spent that money on something useful instead of your propaganda to sell your tax? Can you imagine the kind of advertising that Canadian Blood Services could have accomplished with that money? If social media is as powerful as they say, the people in this House can influence every Albertan to donate blood. The media in the gallery can write about the need to donate. They can do stories on someone who's benefited from a blood donation. Let's work together to raise this awareness and need, and let's get people donating.

The issue is that we can't celebrate the movement for only a moment like we do with so many other special days. We have to continuously remind people to donate blood because, quite honestly, people hate needles. Taking blood is an invasive procedure. People faint, they get nauseated, it hurts, and it's uncomfortable: these are the pitfalls of such a procedure, and they sometimes discourage folks from donating blood.

Let's talk about the other aspects of this product. What is it used for? Processed plasma products: the medical industry uses this human product to create pharmaceutical products, especially but not limited to albumin. So that you all understand, albumin is a transport carrier; drugs adhere and bond to albumin, and it gets transported throughout the body. Clotting factors – that's our healing – and immunoglobulins, which are our antibodies: these products created from this fluid from the human body are used in turn for the benefit of humans, to help us heal. Period. Let us be clear on this. This product, that is actively replenished in our bodies,

is used to our benefit after it has been harvested by the medical industry.

Let's talk about this medical industry that uses this product. Let's talk about this sector that plays a major role in Canada's economic performance. This major employer, this key contributor to our economy involves equipment, supplies, medical devices, and pharmaceuticals. It's a sector that employs thousands, not just technical people, not just administrators, not just doctors, nurses, paramedics, and lab techs but scientists and researchers and mathematicians and computer programmers and engineers.

Let's talk about Alberta's future. Let's talk about the diversification of an economy. Here is a suggestion for this NDP government by this Wildrose opposition. If Albertans are looking to how we diversify our economy, how to break away from our natural resource based economy, then health is the key.

Health is what we deem to be a part of our Canadian identity. Health is the epitome of helping people, which is what we Canadians do. It's also our biggest expenditure.

The benefits of this sector are obvious, but more importantly we can provide it at a very high quality, and we have the educational base to support this industry. We have the educational institutions to develop the talent. We can develop biological physicians and lab technicians and the surgeons and the biochemists and the mathematical biologists and the bioinformatics people and the immunologists and the chemists and the physiologists and the neuroscientists.

We have a building code that reflects the strong standards of engineering associated with our high standards in health. We desire a high standard of cleanliness and hygiene. We measure the very air that permeates through these facilities. We have the rules and regulations, the standards of practice that ensure safe, high-quality environments.

Our workforce is educated in procedure and process. We follow guidelines that ensure isolation and sterility and hygiene. We have a high level of education. We're highly literate, with exceptional problem-solving capabilities.

Madam Speaker, we need to facilitate an environment that supports health innovation, an environment for health-related companies to develop and produce and distribute their life-saving products.

9:20

Bo Cooper, a friend and former colleague of mine, had acute lymphoblastic leukemia, and his experimental treatment trial was only available in the U.S. They had it 99 per cent beat. He still died, but he was so close. There's a young man in my constituency. He's 26 years old with a two-year-old daughter. A few years ago he was in an accident and became paralyzed, lost the use of his legs. This poor young man is trying to raise money to fund a procedure that uses stem cells and epidural stimulation to voluntarily move his legs. This procedure alone will cost him \$125,000 in Bangkok, Thailand. This poor young man is doing a Hail Mary, anything to walk.

I think we can do more to develop our research and development in health. Let us encourage an industry to blossom in our province, an industry that will beat all the things that ail us. Let's supplement what we have in our medical industry and plant a seed that could flourish in our province. This seed is allowing the pharmaceutical industry access to a product that we voluntarily give. What we grow could follow the lead of great Canadians, great innovators like Dr. Norman Bethune and Sir Frederick Banting.

When this government decided to do a royalty review, you shattered the confidence of an entire sector. I ask that this government send a message to the biomedical industry that we

support industries that support health. I'm asking this government to stop sending money to American companies. I'm asking Albertans to not be hypocritical about this. I'm asking for the members of this Legislature to reconsider this bill. I'm asking the hon. members of this House to repeal this bill and send a message that you are saying yes to the biomedical industry.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. "My name is the Member for Banff-Cochrane, and I'm here to ask for \$1,000 in exchange for 20 per cent of my plasma." That is how the Wildrose would have us do things here in Alberta, pitching essential services on a *Dragons' Den* style reality TV show, where nurses are pitted against teachers, special-needs children are . . .

Mr. Rodney: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been raised.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Rodney: I'm not too sure how many times this is going to happen, in which the hon. – and I'll say "honourable" – Member for Banff-Cochrane . . . [interjections] Through the chair, right? Right.

Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j): making allegations against a member, false or unavowed motives, abusive or insulting language. We don't need the Blues. We all heard it. It just happened here. Madam Speaker, I'm asking you to rule on this because this is a terrible trend, please. Check my tweets from this morning about our Health minister. We need to be respectful and have an exchange of ideas that is for the betterment of Albertans and not about party politics, especially when it comes to things like the very lives, health, and quality of life of Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure if it's a concentrated campaign on this particular member, the Member for Banff-Cochrane, but he had earlier in the week a similar situation where every time he got to speak, someone called a point of order. They were found to not be points of order, I think, four times in a row. This is another time – I think we're counting number 5 now – where this is again not a point of order. He's standing up, giving his opinion, and he barely started on that opinion when he already got a point of order. Now I'm sure that you'll rule that this is not a point of order yet again, but I for one am getting tired of this concentrated campaign against this particular member, and I wish it to stop.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's unfortunate that the member stood up before the hon. member got to "sewer rats," but we'll carry on from here. The question I have is that the member constantly gets up to speak to bills, but he never speaks to the topic at hand. He uses . . .

An Hon. Member: He was talking about plasma.

Mr. Hanson: He never even mentioned plasma.

Mr. Westhead: I did so.

Some Hon. Members: It was the first sentence.

Mr. Hanson: Selling his plasma. [interjections]
Through the chair, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has the floor, please.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. What we would ask is that when members – I've got a speech here on this issue. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo spoke quite eloquently, stuck to the matter at hand. That's all we're asking, that if we're going to have a debate on blood plasma and the sale of blood plasma in Canada or the purchasing of blood plasma in Canada, let's stick to the issue and have a debate on that issue. If you want to throw insults back and forth, we can do that in question period.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader has spoken. Did you wish to add something?

Mr. Westhead: Yes. May I add to the point of order, Madam Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Westhead: Madam Speaker, here in the Legislature what we're here to do is have an exchange of ideas, and those ideas should be subject to scrutiny.

An Hon. Member: Subject to standing orders.

Mr. Nixon: Subject to standing orders. Exactly.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Mr. Westhead: These ideas are subject to standing orders, Madam Speaker, and what I was simply doing is describing what the Wildrose said yesterday about how they would plan to vet essential public services against one another in a *Dragons' Den* style reality TV show. They said it themselves. So here I am trying to talk about plasma, how important it is to Albertans, an essential service, and I'm criticizing the ideas that the Wildrose has. I think they should allow me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents.

Mr. Yao: You work in the health industry.

Mr. Westhead: Exactly. I work in the health industry, and I know why this is important.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members. Hon. members, I don't want to see this morning deteriorate into another back and forth of points of order and insults being thrown across the aisle. I'm not going to find a point of order in this particular one, but I will caution the member – and I know this is not the first time; as pointed out by the Deputy Government House Leader, this will be the fifth time – to please be aware of relevance. We're speaking to this bill.

Please, all hon. members, be aware of the terminology that you use. We do not need to inflame each other. Let's be constructive here. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Madam Speaker, you know, the Wildrose can dish it out, but they can't take it. [interjections] Here we are talking about paid plasma donation . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Banff-Cochrane has the floor.

Mr. Westhead: Madam Speaker, plasma is too precious to be left up to the free market. That's the point I'm trying to make. If the members would stop interrupting, they might actually listen and learn from someone who's experienced in this field. I've thought about this long and hard, and I prepared what I was going to say today. These folks over here don't like to hear the truth, and they want to silence me because they know that what I have to say isn't helpful for their cause.

Madam Speaker, when we try to vet ideas against one another on things like *Dragons' Den*, there are winners and losers. They talk about picking winners and losers all the time. You know who shouldn't be losers? People in surgery that are undergoing emergency surgery. But these folks are opposed to the idea that we should allow people to voluntarily give their blood.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo talked in his speech about how we give blood freely and voluntarily, and on the other hand he then argued about how we should pay people to give blood, so he's talking out of both sides of his mouth. He's opposing the bill – and this is a trend in the Wildrose. They let evidence get away from them. They turn away from evidence.

9:30

Madam Speaker, he mentioned what the situation is in Saskatchewan and how Saskatchewan has moved to paid plasma donations. [interjections] You know, they're chirping over there about evidence and laughing about evidence, and that doesn't surprise me. I mean, look at what they said about climate change. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake said: show me the evidence. Well, the evidence is out there. You just have to look, hon. members. I think you need to do your jobs on behalf of your constituents and look at the evidence because what you're saying is absolutely wrong, and it's going to put Albertans at risk. It's going to put Albertans at risk.

I'd like to read at length from a CBC article, published just this past December, about the situation in Saskatchewan. The title of the article, Madam Speaker, is Canadian Blood Services Says Paid Plasma Clinics Are Harming Voluntary Donations. While these people over there idolize Saskatchewan, that has a provincial sales tax, health care premiums, and much higher taxes than we do here in Alberta – they're looking to Saskatchewan as a model. But I can tell you – and I'll read from the article to illustrate here – that what the Wildrose is proposing is dangerous for Albertans.

So let's have a listen to what the CBC had to say when they interviewed the experts in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Nixon: There's a good source.

Mr. Westhead: Well, you know, the hon. members on the other side question the CBC. This is our national broadcaster, Madam Speaker. I know that they prefer to listen to Rebel media. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Banff-Cochrane has the floor, and the hon. member will table the article once he's read it.

Go ahead.

Mr. Westhead: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. I'd be happy to table the article.

You know, on the other side they prefer Rebel media for their news, and on this . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been raised. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Nixon: We were just here, Madam Speaker. I think you were pretty clear about trying to keep the decorum and not using . . .

Mrs. Littlewood: Are you saying that that was insulting?

Mr. Nixon: Thanks to the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I've really enjoyed hearing her during the point of order. But I'm trying to talk to the Speaker.

Mrs. Littlewood: You're welcome.

Mr. Nixon: You were very clear about keeping the decorum and not making comments that would deteriorate it. The Speaker was very clear yesterday. This member continues to do that.

With that said, Madam Speaker, the member knows full well that he does not know which is the preferred media of anybody in the House. So it's just a silly argument, and he should maybe continue with some of the important things that he's trying to talk about.

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I find this quite perplexing, when the very member that stood up on that point of order just told the member that the CBC was not a good news source and then stood up, saying that you can't tell where an individual gets their news from. Very perplexing, very confusing.

Ms McLean: It's a matter of fact.

Mr. Carlier: That it is.

What it isn't is a point of order. Madam Speaker, this is a continuing campaign against this particular member. I wish it to stop, and I encourage you to not now tell the member that somehow, in any shape or form, he incited this. I don't believe in any shape or form that that's what happened. So one thing this is not is a point of order, and it's taking away from the work this Assembly should be doing.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Rodney: The Deputy Government House Leader, I think, as well as the Opposition House Leader, the third-party House leader, and every member in this House wants this to stop, as you've just said, and that will happen if we abide by these rules. We've referred to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) on a number of occasions. There was an allegation made. That was clear. That's (h). And (i): "false or unavowed motives." Why would he say that? It's (j): "abusive or insulting language." I will commend this member for the one statement that he made earlier. It was a good point. It was made in the third person. It made the point very well. It did not contravene any of these standing orders, including 23(h), (i), and (j). I would like to hear the rest of the speech. I would like to hear it according to the standing orders. They're there for a reason, so that people won't be interrupted on either side of the House.

I once again refer to the fact that this morning I wrote a rather complimentary tweet about the Health minister and the abuse she's received. I don't want him to receive abuse, but I can tell you that the world is watching. Please be respectful, and people will respect you.

Mr. Westhead: Just briefly on the point of order, Madam Speaker. We here in this Chamber are allowed to express opinions on the matter of debate. The fact that I think that their preferred news source is Rebel media is bolstered by the fact that they appear at rallies sponsored by this news organization. It's just my opinion, so I think they should allow me to express my opinion. That's all I'm asking for.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'm not going to call this a point of order, but, again, I did hear inflammatory comments from both sides. Please tone it down. Keep things to the bill at hand, and let's be conscious of the words that we use so that we are respectful. Please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I was getting to is talking about Canadian Blood Services. You know, I respect that this is a news article from CBC, which some members may not appreciate, but in the article they interview CBS, Canadian Blood Services, experts. So that's what I'm trying to get at.

Here we go.

The head of Canadian Blood Services . . . says the agency plans to open dozens more collection facilities in the coming years amid signs it is losing volunteer donors to a for-profit clinic that pays people to give plasma.

Canadian Plasma Resources, a private operator that gives gift cards to plasma donors, opened a collection facility in Saskatoon in February.

Although the national blood agency said in April that paying donors for plasma was an option, it has now ruled that out. Then they go on to describe what plasma is.

The CEO of Canadian Blood Services is quoted as saying:

"There's marked confusion as to who is operating in the Saskatoon market," . . . Donor numbers have also dropped in that city.

"We've begun to see some early impacts of having this private, for-profit enterprise operate in our jurisdiction."

The CEO goes on to say:

"It is early evidence, but it's certainly consistent with what other countries are seeing when you see large-scale ramp-up of the paid plasma industry side by side with the blood industry.

"We in Canada are at risk, if we don't collect more of our own plasma, that we're not going to be able to access the global supply of these plasma drugs," . . .

"We have to collect more plasma, control it, and keep it in Canada for Canadian patients, which the private industry is not obligated to do. They will sell it to the highest bidder."

Madam Speaker, that was the point that I was trying to make about *Dragons' Den*.

Demand for pharmaceuticals derived from plasma is increasing by up to 10 per cent a year in Canada . . . There's similar growth in the U.S., Australia and Europe, and it's anticipated China and India will clamour for more, too.

I'll skip to the part where it talks about undercutting volunteers.

Michael Decter was an adviser to the Krever Commission into the tainted blood scandal, and is a former deputy health minister in Ontario.

He is quoted as saying:

"As an economist I'm not surprised that once you allow paid plasma donation in, it's going to undercut the volunteer sector," . . . He's delighted with the change in direction at CBS.

That change in direction from CBS is a move against paying donors for plasma.

He says about CBS:

"It's a Christmas gift that they've come to their senses and they're going to try to collect more blood on a voluntary basis from Canadians."

Madam Speaker, I'm really proud of our Health minister. I think our Health minister is the best Health Minister Alberta has ever had. She is generous, she's kind, she's caring, and she listens to the people of Alberta. She restored the cuts that the PCs were proposing to make in the 2015 election, and she has done an admirable job with the board of AHS. She's worked collaboratively with them. She's also worked collaboratively with the doctors and saved Albertans \$500 million. That's what I call leadership. Our Health minister is working so hard every day that, you know, I don't know how she does it. She has to keep all of these things in her head. She's got a massive portfolio. She's also the Deputy Premier.

Madam Speaker, this is the kind of leadership that Albertans deserve.

Mrs. Littlewood: She visits everybody's hospitals.

9:40

Mr. Westhead: She visits everybody's hospitals.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about my personal experience as an operating room nurse. Earlier I talked a bit about how things like plasma are too precious to be left up to the devices of the free market. Albertans want to know that these types of products are there for them when they need it. I've had first-hand experience.

I respect the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo as a first responder. I can't imagine the things that he's seen. You know, I could never do that. I've seen a lot of things in the operating room, but I have a lot of respect for that member and for all first responders.

Madam Speaker, by the time people get to the operating room, they may have lost a lot of blood, and they expect the plasma to be there when they need it. I know that by banning paid donations, it'll ensure that we have a secure supply. We've seen in other jurisdictions where they have a profit-driven motive for people to sell their plasma that it depletes the donor base. [interjections] Well, you know, the members on the other side are disputing the evidence that I just read about, the Saskatoon experiment. It's an experiment. We're seeing the results of this experiment because it's new. We have to look at other jurisdictions that have gone through this.

I don't think we should leave our blood donor base up to an experiment, a wild, crazy idea from the folks over there, who don't even want to replace front-line workers when they quit, Madam Speaker. This is dangerous. The Wildrose can't be trusted with our health system. They want to send people to other provinces and to the U.S., and now they're talking about having people paid for their donations. We see in Saskatchewan that this is not working. It's not working. The CEO of Canadian Blood Services says that this is not working. That's why we are moving to ban paid donations. And it fits the evidence. That's what we need to make decisions on: evidence.

For example, I'll talk about one particular instance, that I recall, in the operating room. A gentleman was skiing in the winter – well, of course, in the winter – and he fell on his ski pole, Madam Speaker. It went into his abdomen. It didn't penetrate his abdomen, but he had a really hard blunt-trauma incident. I don't know which facility he was skiing at. You know, the closest one, maybe, would

be Nakiska. So think about the transport after he's been found and airlifted out of there, travelling to the Foothills medical centre. Then he has to go through emergency to be assessed. Oftentimes they have a CT scan to see what kinds of internal injuries they have, and then the trauma surgeons.

We kind of get called all of a sudden. It's like: okay; there's a patient coming to the operating room. If you were on your lunch break, you know, now you've got to go back to work. And we are proud of that, Madam Speaker. I'm not trying to disrespect other units, but in other units nurses would often, when they'd go on their breaks, leave the unit to try to get away from things. And I totally respect that. I did that, too. In the operating room – I'm not trying to say that operating room nurses are any better – we would make sure that we sat in the lunchroom that's close to the emergency operating room so that if there was an emergency, we could go back immediately, because we knew that things happened quickly.

That was the case in this situation, Madam Speaker. The gentleman came in. He was actually talking to us. He was alert, oriented, everything. He just seemed fine. So we put him to sleep. As soon as we put him to sleep, his blood pressure started to crash, and things happened really quickly.

If I remember correctly, I think this was actually one of my first trauma emergencies. I was feeling a bit confident, so I sent my fellow circulating nurse for her break. I'm, like: oh, I've got it under control. And that was a big mistake. As soon as the surgeons cut into the gentleman's abdomen, the blood hit the ceiling. He had so much internal bleeding and there was so much pressure inside his abdomen that there was blood everywhere. You know, I might've had to change my scrubs after that. It was a pretty traumatic moment. I called some help back right away because what you need right away is sponges. But you know what? Another thing you need right away, Madam Speaker, is plasma. We needed plasma for that patient.

I hesitate to consider what it would have been like if we had a paid plasma donation system. What if we left it up to the free market? What if people were more interested in selling their blood for profit? And I can't necessarily blame those people. They might be in a tough situation that they need the cash, and I get that, but that's why we're doing things like increasing the Alberta child benefit system to expand supports for low-income families. That's why we're reducing school fees for low-income families and, well, all families, for that matter. Madam Speaker, there are other ways that we can look after people that may be financially motivated to sell their blood products. This is too much of a precious thing to leave up to chance.

Albertans, when they're doing any kind of activity, want to know that there's a system there that is going to protect them and support them, and things like our public health care system . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect. Five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up on 29(2)(a). I have some questions and comments for my colleague the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, who I think made some very passionate points. As somebody who's a fellow skier, I hope to never fall on my ski pole because that sounds terrible. You know, I thank you for the work that you and other medical professionals do throughout the province to help those who have unexpected trauma incidents and who, I'm sure, get very fine care from the nurses and doctors in our health care system.

You just sort of talked at length about, you know, how selling to the highest bidder would be a problem versus our current system.

You also spoke about some logical inconsistencies that the opposition often puts forward. Since you had a bit of an interrupted speech due to various points of order – I think some of them related in an “I can dish but cannot take” sort of way – I was wondering if you could sort of draw a line through your argument of how selling to the highest bidder, Saskatchewan’s risky ideological experiment that they’ve been doing, hurts Albertans, how it doesn’t help everyday Albertans, and how the logical inconsistencies of what the opposition had been proposing also do not help everyday Albertans. I’m just wondering if you can give us a quick summary there just to sort of draw the line since you were a bit interrupted during your presentation.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much to the Member for Calgary-Currie for those insightful comments and the question. I’ll talk a little bit more about the Saskatchewan experiment, Madam Speaker. I’ll just read a little bit more from this article here because as I was listening to the member, I was kind of looking at this a bit further. This is a great article, actually. I encourage all members to read it once I table it this afternoon. It’s got a lot of quotes from experts, and that’s why I like this article. You know, sometimes news is some opinion mixed in with quotes, and this has a lot of quotes from experts.

I believe this is, again, the CEO for Canadian Blood Services that was quoted as saying: right now what’s happening is that the private companies are actually putting Saskatchewan at a deficit supply. He continues on: they’re not helping us become more self-sufficient, so we’re very happy that Canadian Blood Services is speaking out, but the government of Saskatchewan and our federal government have to listen.

They have to listen, Madam Speaker. That’s a key point. And what this government is doing is listening to people like Canadian Blood Services’ experts. They’re listening to people like front-line workers and doctors and nurses who know about this, who live this every day. Like I said earlier, this isn’t something that we can put up to chance. The free market works great for certain things. Like, when I want to go buy a car, it makes sense for me to shop around, look for the best deal I can find, and compare and contrast. That is a perfect example of the free market, and I support that a hundred per cent.

9:50

But things like health care – you know, we see instances in the United States where they have a profit-motivated system. People go bankrupt when they can’t afford that. They get cancer, and they lose their house, Madam Speaker, because they can’t afford to pay their bills. That’s not what it means to be Canadian. In Canada we look out for one another, and we do that in a fair way by paying taxes.

I may not know people who go into the health care system, but I know as a Canadian that it’s part of my duty to support people when they’re down. That’s why we have a social safety net in Canada. Here in Alberta we are an important part of that social safety net. I’m proud that on this side of the House we are supporting a publicly funded and publicly delivered health care system because that’s proven evidence and how you get results and how you take care of people.

Madam Speaker, I’m really proud to support the Health minister in this, and I’m really proud of our government for moving to ban plasma donations for profit. You know, I was listening to the Bill 2 debate . . .

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

Dr. Starke: Madam Speaker, thank you. It’s my pleasure to rise to speak today on Bill 3 with regard to voluntary blood donation. I

want to give a little bit of personal history first. My father in 1988 was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia. He succumbed to this illness some six years later. In the latter stages of the treatment for this disease he received several blood transfusions at the W.W. Cross cancer centre.

I’ve been a blood donor since I was in my teenage years. I first donated blood when I was a student at University of Alberta, and my motivation was that we wanted to beat the engineers, as ag students, and we did. The ag students always had a competition with the engineers. I had been a blood donor consistently up until about 20 years ago. This is after my dad had passed, and one of the reasons I always wanted to give blood is that I wanted to give back into the system that had supported my father. I got a letter from what at that point in time was Red Cross – it was before Canadian Blood Services was on the scene – telling me that there had been a false positive on a blood sample that I had provided for hepatitis B and that, therefore, I was asked not to donate blood anymore.

I will tell you that that is one of the saddest letters that I’ve ever received in my life. I fought the letter. In fact, I offered to have additional testing done. I wanted to stay on the donor list. But I was told that I wasn’t allowed to, and I haven’t been able to give blood since that time. That’s a source of great sadness to me, Madam Speaker, because I believe that it is important that, wherever possible, we provide this to other people in our society. I feel the same way about, for example, organ donation. I’ve signed my organ donor card, and I supported our government’s bill last Legislature to set up an organ and donor registry.

Madam Speaker, that’s my personal history. I want to make it very clear that I support voluntary blood donation. But I also want to say a few other things that have to be very clear in this debate, and that is that there are an awful lot of myths being perpetuated in this debate. Unfortunately, we are having the debate inflamed by some real rhetoric, and I have to say that’s on both sides. It’s unfortunate, bringing in issues that are completely unrelated to the debate at hand.

We’re talking here about plasma donations for the purpose of manufacturing plasma protein products. We’re not talking about plasma donations for transfusion. We need to be very clear on that. We’re not talking about blood donations. These are voluntary and will continue to be voluntary in Canada. In fact, in most countries there are voluntary and paid donor systems that run parallel to each other. In most of those countries the voluntary donor rate is, in fact, higher than our voluntary donor rate here in Canada. So to suggest somehow that this will be a negative or that this will somehow affect our voluntary donor base is not borne out by the evidence in other jurisdictions.

Now, the Saskatchewan example was brought forward. Well, that clinic has been operating for approximately a year. Maybe let’s look at the Manitoba example, where in Winnipeg there has been a paid-for plasma collection centre operating for 30 years, and Canadian Blood Services states on multiple occasions that it has not affected its voluntary donor base in any way.

Madam Speaker, I think it’s important that when we discuss an important issue like this, we do not cloud the issue with things that are not exactly true. Donations of plasma for plasma protein product development and manufacture are completely different from donations that are being used, for example, in the operating room for medical emergencies.

The problem is that Canada does not currently have enough donors of plasma to produce these products for our domestic needs, and we must purchase them from other countries, mostly from the U.S., and those countries pay their donors. In fact, there is not a single jurisdiction in the world, anywhere, that can meet its needs for plasma protein products from a purely voluntary donor base.

Nowhere. So to suggest that somehow, magically, we will be able to do it here in Canada by offering better cookies or better soup or a more enhanced donor program is preposterous. What Canadian Blood Services wants to do is to get \$100 million to build out a system that will still only collect enough plasma for 50 per cent of Canada's needs and only do that in eight years.

In the meantime there is a private company, which I know is something that is a little uncomfortable for some people, that's prepared to invest in jobs and prepared to invest in laboratory facilities for the processing of these materials because right now in Canada we don't have that.

Canadian Blood Services has failed Canadians, quite frankly. Our donor rates are falling. Our number of collection centres in rural Alberta and rural areas in general is decreasing. Canadian Blood Services is making it harder, not easier, to donate, and now, out of the blue, when all of a sudden there's some pressure from the private sector, they come up with this scheme as to how they're going to improve things. Now, look, I don't mean to be negative on Canadian Blood Services, but they have not done the job for Canadians, and they, quite frankly, need a bit of a wake-up call.

Madam Speaker, I think one of the biggest things that bothers me about this is the basic hypocrisy of this, and it's been talked about before. We don't like the idea of paying donors. We think that it's somehow dirty to pay donors, and it's been one of those sort of Canadian-American things for as long as I remember. You know, we could always sort of puff up our chests as Canadians and say: "Well, you know, we don't have to pay our donors; we have voluntary donations. Those Americans. They have to pay their donors." It gives us a bias against something, but the reality – and that's what we have to deal with – is that we cannot collect sufficient plasma for the needs.

Now, there are two main objections to this. One is that the payment will somehow impact voluntary donations. Well, I'm quoting here from a national round-table on plasma donations. This was held in 2013, and I'll table this document, but I will just quote from page 2 of the document.

Payment by a private company for plasma donations has never and will never have any impact on Canada's voluntary system for collecting blood for transfusion... This is a completely voluntary system and will remain so. Private companies in Canada do not collect blood or plasma for transfusion.

That's a critical thing to understand and to remember.

So the security of the supply, despite what, perhaps, the chair of Canadian Blood Services – and I'm going to suggest that he's got a bit of a vested interest in this. Regardless of what he says has been the limited time in operation of the Saskatoon clinic, I will tell you that the Winnipeg clinic has been operating for 30 years. Other clinics in other countries have been operating for years. Both the chair of Canadian Blood Services and Health Canada four years ago made this unequivocal statement that it will not affect the voluntary donor system.

10:00

I'll quote from this report.

The payment of plasma donors... for the purposes of creating pharmaceutically derived plasma products does not represent a change in practice for Canada. Private, for profit plasma collection has existed in Manitoba for several decades.

And I might point out: in Manitoba under primarily NDP governments.

Now, the other thing that is important is safety. Well, of course, we're very concerned about the safety of our blood supply in Canada, especially after what we went through in the '80s with the tainted blood scandal, where some 32,000 Canadians received blood that was infected with one or another virus, either the HIV

virus or one of the hepatitis viruses. It then gave birth to the Krever inquiry.

I know that the government says, "Well, this is consistent with the Krever inquiry," which was published in 1997. That inquiry is now 20 years old, and for that inquiry to say that we should rely on a purely voluntary basis is perhaps something that may have been realistic – maybe – in 1997, but with the burgeoning growth in demand for plasma protein products, it is simply impossible to meet that demand on a purely voluntary donor basis. No country has been able to do it, and I think we are fooling ourselves that somehow in Canada we can pretend we're going to go from 17 per cent to 100 per cent. Even Canadian Blood Services says that with a government infusion of \$100 million they hope to get to 50 per cent. Madam Speaker, that's the first myth.

The second myth is that somehow donations from private donors or from paid-for donors are somehow less safe. Let's put that myth to bed right now. There is absolutely zero – zero – evidence that donations from paid donors have any different safety profile than volunteer donors. In fact, that whole process is governed by Health Canada. We have one of the strongest and most stringent systems in place – that's why I'm no longer a blood donor – and those stringent systems are in place largely as a reaction to what happened in the '80s. Safety is not an issue. What is an issue is saying, you know, that CBS is so successful. CBS provides a service, but quite frankly we should all have some issues with the services Canadian Blood Services provides us, and its ever-shrinking donor base is because they are making it harder for people to donate, not easier.

Now, Madam Speaker, another important group that I have spoken with – I've taken some time to speak to them – is donors. I spoke earlier this week to a gentleman who donates and has made over 300 donations of plasma, of platelets, and of blood, and he speaks very proudly of his contribution to our system. He is concerned about how we would implement this. Certainly, it has to be implemented with care. I'm not pretending that this is something that could be done easily. I'm not pretending that this is something that could be done without at least some level of monitoring, but to pretend that we can go on purchasing annually some \$200 million worth of plasma protein products and other products from paid donors while we ban the practice here is the height of hypocrisy, the absolute height of hypocrisy. The only way morally and ethically we can stand on this would be to say that we will ban it here and that we will not accept plasma protein products from any jurisdiction that pays their donors. That's the only way we could take the moral high ground on this.

But I would say that then we have some other people, as the member said, we have to listen to. We have other people we need to answer to. We need to answer to, for example, five patient organizations that advocate for paid-for plasma donation: the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization, the Canadian Hemophilia Society, the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, Hereditary Angioedema Canada, and the Network of Rare Blood Disorder Organizations. These patient organizations all advocate for paid-for plasma donation here in Canada so that the plasma can be collected and eventually processed here in Canada. That's the plan of the company that is being criticized here. They want to develop a made-in-Canada plasma industry.

Let's not ignore the advances that are being made in biomedical technology. Let's not ignore the fact that treatments have evolved. We have to move forward. We cannot be applying the systems and the procedures from the 1980s and 1990s. Our world is changing. To continue to spend hundreds of millions of dollars paid to profitable United States pharmaceutical corporations: I don't think those folks are your friends. You're paying 200 million taxpayer dollars annually to profitable U.S. pharmaceutical corporations

whereas those dollars could stay here in Canada, could stay in Alberta if we get over this situation and recognize that there is a fundamental difference between plasma and blood donations for transfusion and plasma and blood donations for processing.

You know, I've also talked to other Health ministers. Specifically, the Health minister for Saskatchewan, obviously, supports this. But the Health minister for British Columbia, who is a former colleague of mine, a veterinarian, supports paid-for plasma donations as long as it is sufficiently regulated by Health Canada and by the Health department in his province. He has the utmost confidence that that can and will be done. But to ignore . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: I would just like to make a very quick comment, with a follow-up question. I certainly appreciated all of the research done, the personal expertise and experience. I know that the member has more to offer this Chamber and all Albertans, and I wonder if he would continue his remarks. I'd like to hear the end of his speech.

Dr. Starke: I thank the hon. member for the opportunity. You know, I really feel very strongly about this. I recognize that we have some biases, that we have some biases against the idea of paying people to donate blood, to donate plasma, to donate organs. I get that. I have a bias against it, too. But here's the thing, folks. If we ban this, all we are doing is pushing the problem somewhere else and trying to pretend that somehow we're better than others because we've banned it. That's just something that, to me, is unacceptable. If we're going to ban it, then we should make another statement, that we will not purchase products from paid donors, derived from paid donors. But if we do that, we are depriving Albertans of life-saving medical treatments.

So think about that. I think that that is a fundamental question. Now, is it an easy question to answer? No, it isn't. But we need to set aside sometimes as legislators, Madam Speaker, some of our pre-existing biases and learn about the broader context of things. For example, a plasma donation takes 90 minutes to make, not the roughly 20 minutes of a typical blood sample, and plasma donors are asked to donate weekly. It's because of those onerous requirements that voluntary plasma donors, for the huge amount of plasma that is required, are very hard to build up into that donor base. That is why plasma donors are paid. Like I say, it's a situation that recognizes the reality of what it takes to make these donations. Once again, I will point out that in other jurisdictions that have paid donations – Germany, Austria, the U.S. – their voluntary donation level, those rates, are in fact higher than Canada's.

You know, to suggest that somehow this will eat into our system that we use for transfusions, for both blood and plasma transfusion, is simply not true, and to say it and to repeat it is to simply try to create fear in Albertans, in Canadians, and that is wrong. It is wrong to do that. As legislators we should be seeking the truth, and we should be making our decisions based on those truths and getting over our personal biases.

Again, I have a personal bias in favour of voluntary donation, but in this particular case, in order to provide for the huge growth in demand for these life-saving products, where no other jurisdiction in the world has been able to provide the need through purely voluntary donations, we need to at least look at allowing paid-for plasma donations. To not allow it in Alberta, Madam Speaker, in my view, is hypocritical and is something that, you know, we should not stand for here in this Assembly.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and ask a couple of questions and make a few comments towards the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, a former high school colleague of mine. I'm always pleased to engage in debate with him because his opinions are usually considered and followed up with evidence.

One of the things that he did say during his comments and discussion of this debate with respect to providing blood products to Canadians and Albertans is that he is in favour of a voluntary system and supporting a voluntary system of blood donation and that that would be his preference, but he's suggesting that we've failed to do so, that Canadian Blood Services has failed to meet the demand. I think that that's what we all lament, that Canadian Blood Services has not come up to meet the challenge of supplying the Canadian demand or need for blood products. I think that a critical question we should be asking ourselves is why and whether we should be giving up on Canadian Blood Services as the route or channel through which we should be seeking to fulfill Canadian demands.

I'm not fine, either, with buying blood products to the tune of \$200 million a year. That's the figure that was quoted by the member most recently.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Time has expired for that standing order.

I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe that many of us, when we ran for office, ran because we have particular values and principles that we believe in. For me personally, I have to say that when it comes to this issue, it has to do with a very important principle that I will maintain till my dying days, and that is that life and even the gift of life should not be turned into a commodity.

You know, having come from another part of the world where you see these practices being implemented – perhaps they're not regulated the same way that we would do it here; that's a given – you see the negative side of people who are low income resorting to donating because they're trying to make ends meet. I ask people in this House: is that the kind of Alberta that we want to have here, where low-income people are selling their blood plasma because they're trying to make ends meet, make it to the end of the month? That's what's happening in other places in the world. Now, I hope that that would never be the case here, and that's why I stand up strongly to support Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act.

This act will create a barrier to the establishment of private pay-for-plasma clinics in Alberta. Our government-proposed legislation will prevent private blood collection industries from opening up in Alberta. I want to say that our province will not be the first province to ban the practice of paying for blood products. Ontario and Quebec have already banned paid blood donations as well, so we wouldn't be the first within Canada to do so.

Now, for me, at the end of the day, this is about a private, for-profit setting up a parallel system to compete for donors within our public system. That's something that we have to be very careful about. You know, the proposed legislation that we're bringing forward will ban payment to an individual donor, ban payment for blood donations advertising, exempt Canadian Blood Services so that they can continue with their current practices and any future activities, provide an exemption for blood given solely for the purpose of research, and provide for inspection and enforcement powers. Banning paid blood donations will ensure that Albertans and Canadians have access to the blood that they need in a safe and well co-ordinated manner.

The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville talked about how our government is hypocritical. [interjections] Pardon me. There you go. Vermilion-Lloydminster. The hon. member from across the way – sorry – talked about how it would be hypocritical, and I want to address that.

It's correct that currently approximately 80 per cent of the Canadian supply of plasma products is manufactured from the plasma-paid donors and primarily from the U.S.A. Less than 20 per cent of the plasma products used by Canadians is made from Canadian plasma that is collected from volunteer donors via Canadian Blood Services. One of the questions that we need to ask ourselves before we go to a private, for-profit setting of a parallel system, I would think, is: okay; well, how can we better support Canadian Blood Services and the work that they're doing so that we can meet the needs? Canadian Blood Services plans to increase Canada's plasma products self-sufficiency to 50 per cent by 2024 by expanding existing blood collection sites, opening new plasma collection sites, and recruiting additional plasma donors.

I want to go back to some of the examples that the hon. member from across the way was making, saying that Manitoba has been doing this for a while. Studies show that in countries where not-for-profit and for-profit blood collection organizations co-exist, it negatively impacts the voluntary donor base. Where paid-for plasma clinics exist, concerns have been raised that our national voluntary program may be impacted as donors may choose to donate where they will receive compensation. Not only that, over the past year, since Canadian Plasma Resources opened in Saskatoon, Canadian Blood Services observed a double-digit decline in Saskatoon donors between the ages of 17 and 24. So we've got to ask ourselves – okay; we have some data that says this, and we have other data that says the contrary, but the more research you do, it demonstrates that by having a parallel system, it actually drives down voluntary blood donors.

An Hon. Member: Germany. United States.

Loyola: There are other jurisdictions where it might be, but we're also seeing in some jurisdictions where it actually drives down voluntary blood donors. You know, the member across the way is saying that I'm telling falsehoods, when I'm actually saying: no; this is research that has demonstrated that this is what the case is.

Now, the other thing that we need to consider is that a private company collecting plasma would sell to the highest bidder on the international market, and there's no guarantee that that would come back to help Canadians. It's something that we have to be open to and acknowledge. I mean, that's the way that the free-market system works, right?

I'm sure that there's much more that could be said, but I want to go back to the important premise of which I started on, and that is that the gift of life should not be a commodity. That's the real reason why I'm standing up to speak in favour of this bill. I would encourage all members of this House, based on that principle alone, that we should vote this bill through.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It was a pleasure listening to the hon. member go on about, you know, his passion for this issue. I think one thing that was very interesting was that he, you know, drew a very nice line going through the facts. For the Canadian experience in Saskatchewan he quoted at length from their experience there on how by having paid plasma, it reduced the amount of donors to Canadian Blood Services.

10:20

I think he brought up some very excellent points about how when you have paid donors there's no guarantee that that plasma ends up back in the Canadian health care system. You know, I could really see how that would in fact increase the costs for our health care system as we are suddenly going to be bidding against the world for our plasma. I don't see how that would help us. I don't see how that would help the citizens of Alberta who rely on us to be good stewards of the public purse.

We also heard from a previous speaker as well, from Banff-Cochrane, who spoke at length on the same subject about the experience specifically in Saskatchewan from experts there who came to the same conclusion. I know there have been some comments that perhaps this may partially work in other countries, but the Canadian experience shows that it would negatively affect us.

The hon. member, as mentioned, is a passionate advocate and very true in his convictions that things like blood donation and plasma should be for the public benefit and not for the profit of companies. I was wondering if he would like to expand or elaborate any further on that or if he had any further words he didn't have a chance to say before time ran out.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I think that it's really important that we look at what's happening in other jurisdictions across the country, especially because we will get a better sense of how Canadians are interacting with the system. Now, we talked about Winnipeg. We've also talked about Saskatchewan. We talked about lower donations as a result of a parallel private system. I'll go back to my comments regarding Canadian Blood Services and looking into ways that we can help Canadian Blood Services reach the goals that it has and the goals that we have in common for the Canadian population so that we can work towards self-sufficiency in order to secure domestic blood products not only for today but for future generations to come.

I know that everybody in this House has their particular values. They have their particular principles. They have their way of looking at the world, but I need to stay true to my particular way of looking at the world and those principles. Blood should never be a commodity.

Again, I point to other places in the world, nondeveloped countries, where not only are individuals going and giving their blood for money but they're even going and giving organs for money. Now, I know that the members across the way would never want to see that happen here – would never want to see that happen here – and we have a good system whereby those who want to donate their organs to others can do so.

I encourage and I want to take this opportunity to all those who may be watching us: please make sure to sign up to be an organ donor, and please tell your family as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to start by saying that I've been a volunteer blood donor for years. My wife and I both go at every opportunity. Unfortunately, out in the rural areas the clinic only comes in about twice a year. We'd like to donate a lot more often, but we just can't seem to get there.

For starters, the federal government, through Health Canada, is ultimately responsible for regulating the safety of Canada's blood supply. That's a great thing; however, provinces and territories are responsible for distribution of the blood supply. Furthermore, the provinces and territories can decide to either allow or disallow payment for donors of blood or plasma. While we know that there is a problem with ensuring there's enough domestic supply of plasma here in Alberta and in Canada and the problem has to be fixed, limiting paid plasma collection in Alberta is not the answer.

All this bill ensures is that the U.S. paid plasma industry continues to thrive. The fact of the matter is that Canadian Blood Services provides almost 75 per cent of our plasma supply here in Canada for pharmaceutical use purchased from paid donors in the United States. Three-quarters of the plasma for Canadian pharmaceuticals is from paid U.S. donors. While the goal is admirable, to have a completely voluntary donor pool for blood and blood products, the mechanisms to achieve that goal are simply not introduced in this bill. Collecting enough plasma to be self-sufficient under a volunteer model is neither operationally nor economically feasible. In fact, in order to collect enough plasma from voluntary Canadian donors, there would need to be a 300 per cent increase in donors.

This is not about collecting blood or plasma for direct transfusion, as was brought forward by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. The blood we collect is for direct transfusion, and it will continue to be done through a publicly run, voluntary donor system. I will continue to donate blood on a volunteer basis even if there is a paid clinic to go to. I will continue to go. This is about collecting plasma required to manufacture pharmaceutical products, besides the fact that the U.S., Germany, and Australia, who are all countries with paid plasma programs, have some of the highest numbers of voluntary blood donations in the world.

Currently different provinces are taking different approaches to this complex issue. We've heard that Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia, and New Brunswick are allowing for-profit plasma donation clinics while Ontario and Quebec have outright banned these clinics. We have a Canadian company – that's right; a Canadian company – that is looking to expand, and they have stated that they intend to open 10 plasma collection centres. It would be great to have them here in Alberta. After they have secured their supply, they intend to build a facility, which would also be great to have here in Alberta, to transform the plasma into the pharmaceutical products so many Canadians need to live. They have a made-in-Canada and could be made-in-Alberta approach to our problem. Madam Speaker, they will increase the competition in the international plasma market, and competition is good. It can help lower the cost.

Quality isn't the question as there are no differences in safety from paid or unpaid plasma because every donor is treated the same through strict regulations, and it will be under the guidelines of the Canada Health Act.

I repeat that this is not about collecting blood or plasma for direct transfusion. That is and will continue to be done through a publicly run, voluntary donor system. What this is about is collecting the plasma required to manufacture pharmaceutical products, and the need for these products just keeps on growing. This is a fantastic opportunity for Canada and Alberta to diversify our economy, bring in high-paid, highly skilled jobs. B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and New Brunswick all welcome the development of a domestic plasma industry. They will welcome investment. We are going to lose an opportunity here. In fact, even the former NDP government in Manitoba was supportive of the domestic plasma industry. If this bill passes, this Canadian company simply will not invest in Alberta. Just another company that will not invest in Alberta.

I have a few questions for the government. First of all, how does this government plan on increasing the number of blood donation volunteers by 300 per cent? That's going to take a lot of advertising. What are the costs associated with only using voluntary plasma donors to fulfill our needs? If there's a market that can lead to an increased supply of plasma, why are we putting up barriers?

10:30

The cost for Canadian Blood Services to purchase plasma protein products internationally is very high and rising dramatically. We should carefully weigh the arguments to be sure that we're getting the best deal for Canadian taxpayers and Alberta taxpayers.

I would urge all my fellow colleagues to vote against this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to add to the debate on this bill, the consideration of banning the purchase of plasma here in the province of Alberta, moving to a system where we would allow payment for plasma donations. We've been listening to a lot of arguments here so far this morning from members on both sides of the House.

I did hear some members in the Opposition who were putting forward the idea that by allowing paid plasma donations, provinces can then better monitor and control the supply rather than relying on foreign countries. Now, I don't see how paid plasma donations would in any way actually increase control or supply because currently there is no shortage of plasma in the Canadian market. We have the plasma that we need to be able to treat patients. Hospitals are not running out, so the supply is present; it's currently there. In fact, Canada at times has some surplus plasma, left over after whole blood is broken down into its various components.

Now, yes, currently we do lack a facility in Canada to process that plasma, so that surplus plasma that is generated in Canada is sent to the U.S. to be made into plasma products, which are then imported back into the country, but as members have noted, currently the remainder of the plasma that we need for the Canadian market is in fact purchased under contract from the U.S. pharmaceutical firms. I agree, Madam Speaker, that this is not ideal. You know, I'm in favour of moving away from dependence on plasma from outside of Canada, much as I'm in favour of moving away from dependence on oil from outside of Canada. Indeed, I would far rather see Canadian products used in the Canadian market. However, moving to paid donations in Canada does not address that issue.

Now, we just heard a member who was standing and talking about saving costs. The CEO of Canadian Plasma Resources, the gentleman who is running the company that is collecting paid plasma currently in some other Canadian jurisdictions, said: we are not going to be substantially cheaper, but we will be able to compete with U.S. plasma. We are not going to be able to be substantially cheaper. The CEO of the company himself has said that he cannot provide any significant cost savings for what he is proposing. So that negates that argument from the opposition because the price, Madam Speaker, is not based on a shortage of plasma. It is instead set by the international pharmaceutical companies who control their supply of raw plasma through networks of paid plasma clinics throughout the U.S. They choose to collect more or less, as they feel that they need it, so there will be no savings in terms of cost.

Currently not one drop of the plasma being collected by CPR is going to help anyone in Canada or elsewhere. That plasma is

currently being stockpiled until they feel they have enough to offer for sale. Once they have collected that critical mass, there is no guarantee that that plasma will be sold here in Canada. There is no contract in place. There is no legislation. There is no regulation. It is a free market company which has the right to sell that plasma to whatever jurisdiction it feels will give it the best price.

I agree with what some of the members have said here this morning, that we do need to find ways to increase our own supply of plasma here in Canada, absolutely, but I am not comfortable with placing that in the hands of a private corporation who has no regulation and no requirement to put Canadians first, to put Albertans first, frankly. This is a company who can simply choose to do what they wish. Now, I would like to believe in their good intentions, but the private market does not exist for the purpose of always protecting people. That is why we have government regulation. That is why there are some things that we keep within the public sphere, just as in Canada we currently prohibit the sale of blood, organs, tissue, sperm, eggs, and embryos, and that is why Quebec and Ontario have both chosen to ban paid plasma in Canada.

Only a handful of countries currently permit people to sell their plasma. Yes, the U.S. is one, a few countries in Europe. But the World Health Organization and, in fact, the European Union maintain that voluntary blood donation, voluntary plasma donation is the preferable course to take. That's why I believe, Madam Speaker, that this is a prudent move on behalf of our government to protect the public, to set a reasonable precedent, to follow what has generally been the precedent in Canada, to not create financial products out of things that are essential for people's health and safety, specifically biological products.

Canadian Blood Services indeed recognizes that this is a problem. You know, we owe very much to Canadian Blood Services for safekeeping our voluntary blood supply, for providing so much for individuals for many, many years, Madam Speaker. Indeed, we recognize that on this front there is still work to be done, absolutely, but I would far, far rather see there be public discussion, public investment, and public control over improving this system than to simply hand it off into the hands of private industry. Now, I recognize that that is generally a preference of some members across the aisle for many, many aspects of services and other aspects that Albertans depend on. Fair enough. We're each entitled, I suppose, to our ideology, risky as it may be in whatever respect.

That said, my personal belief is that we should be working with Canadian Blood Services to build a better public system for the collection of plasma here in Alberta and indeed across Canada. I would be very happy to see a national discussion regarding how we can work together as provinces to improve the collection of plasma here in our country through voluntary means and build proper protections into our system to ensure that people are not being exploited, that those who are in need are not having to sell their very bodily fluids to try to support themselves, as we have seen happen in some jurisdictions.

Now, I appreciate what the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster noted, that in fact it is a more arduous process to donate plasma. It takes more time. Fair enough. That's something we need to consider and we need to take into account in how we can provide through the public system better incentives for people to participate. Certainly part of that, Madam Speaker, I think is going to be education because, frankly, until this issue came up as an issue of debate in some other jurisdictions, I personally was not aware of the issues that there are in the plasma system. I think that probably goes for a large portion of the public. So, if anything, I think this debate that we're having here in the Legislature is very beneficial in that

we have the opportunity now to raise more public awareness about this important need.

10:40

Certainly for myself, I think I will look into the opportunity and see if there is some way that I may be able to make a donation of plasma. I've had some challenges in the past because of some medications that I've been on, but I'm willing to look into that, and I think many members of the public would be, too, if they had a better understanding of that need. Frankly, Madam Speaker, I believe that we accomplish much more when we come together as a public. We accomplish much more, and we have much greater strength than when we simply always say: we will leave that to the market.

There are things that the market does very well, Madam Speaker. I believe absolutely that there are many, many, many products that are best served by the market, but when we are talking about people, real individuals with real needs, there are public services that should remain public. It's my opinion that one of those things is the collection and provision of blood and plasma products. I'm very happy that the Minister of Health has brought forward this bill. I think it's timely. I think it's appropriate. It gives us an opportunity to have a very important discussion, to follow in the footsteps of other jurisdictions, as I said, like Ontario and Quebec, who have seen fit to ban this practice and to show leadership as a province.

That is what Alberta does, Madam Speaker. We've shown leadership on many, many issues in the nearly two years since our government came into place. I'm proud of that work that we've done. Likewise, I am proud to stand by this principle and this decision to ensure that the blood we collect remains in Canada, and if there is need, then to work towards developing more of a biomedical industry here to support that, something to fractionate and create the plasma products here that we are currently buying from the U.S. Then, by all means, I say: let us have that discussion. That is a public good, that is something where we should come together, then, as public governments with the government of Canada and sit down and talk about how we can best support the Canadian people. I don't believe that something this important and this essential should simply be handed off to private industry, particularly when, as I noted, they can offer no significant cost savings.

I thank the minister, Madam Speaker, for bringing this bill forward. I thank her for her leadership in helping ensure that Alberta will protect the public, will protect our constituents, and work with Canadian Blood Services to develop a better public blood and plasma collection system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To be honest, to begin with, I'm not a big fan of Canadian Blood Services. I'm not allowed to give blood because I've had sex within the past 12 months, and as a man who has sex with men, I am... [interjection] Yes. Thank you. However, I'm not allowed to give blood. As an openly gay man who has sex with men, I am not allowed to give blood. So that is why I'm not a big fan of Canadian Blood Services.

I've never been able to give blood because, even before that, I think I had to be abstinent for seven years or something along those lines or three years. It was a very long time. Now it's one year, which is still a long time because I don't plan to be abstinent for a

full year just to give blood. Not that I'm trying to be kind of – what is the word? – selfish. That was the word that I was looking for.

I know that in Saskatchewan they are stockpiling plasma and looking for the highest bidder, which, for myself as an Albertan and as a Canadian, I am kind of worried about. If I am in need of blood or in need of plasma and there's a large stockpile in Saskatchewan but they don't want to sell to Alberta health care because we're not paying the same premium price that possibly someone in the States is giving, I find that dangerous, and I don't want that in Alberta. I don't want us to have to be worried about having large amounts of plasma available but not being able to access it because we don't have the money to pay for it.

I don't believe that the lowest paid individuals in our province should have to give blood in order to receive money to pay for groceries. I just don't think that that is a normal thing that society should have to do in order to live. I don't think that donations for pay is a good idea. So I'd like to ask the member perhaps to expand on what he was saying about paid donations and why he doesn't think it's a good idea.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you to the member for his comments and his questions. Madam Speaker, I represent a significant number of individuals in the Edmonton-Centre constituency who are part of Edmonton's LGBTQ-plus communities, and certainly that is something that I've heard from some of them as well, you know, for gay men who are in the course of their normal lives, as so many of us are, sexually active are not able to donate blood. That, indeed, is a problem.

That is something that I would call on Canadian Blood Services to address because, indeed, if we want to expand our base of donors, if we want to expand the number of people who are able to take part in the system and donate blood or plasma or some of these other things which we do need, then we should be making that as open as possible and looking to remove some of these traditional stereotypes about communities who are very civic minded and would love to have the opportunity to engage. Certainly, that's one area I think we need to look at addressing – I mean, that Canadian Blood Services does, and I hope that we can call on them to continue to look at that.

In regard to what the member was saying about stockpiling, I noted that when I was speaking, that indeed that's currently the situation. CPR is in fact stockpiling the plasma that they currently have, waiting until they feel they have a critical mass, which they then feel gives them enough to begin to operate and go to market.

That's part of my concern, Madam Speaker. Certainly, I respect that in the case of private industry, you know, when they make an investment – they invest in real estate; they invest in stock; they invest in other things – it's reasonable for them to decide how to dispose of that so that they get their best return. They may choose to sit on that for extended periods of time in order to improve their return or for other reasons, business reasons. I respect that. That's part of our market and that's part of our industry.

But that is not something that we need in our health care or in our health products. What needs to come first, Madam Speaker, is the public good. Now, that's not in any way to necessarily impugn CPR. I don't know them personally, and I don't know their intent. But that, in itself, is part of issue. We don't know, and we have no control. When it comes to things like our blood supply, our plasma supply . . .

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

Mr. Dach: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: No.

Mr. Dach: Speaking to the bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 3 and discuss our blood supply system in the country. We all, as hon. members in this House, lament the fact that our blood supply does not meet the need that we have for blood products in this country. But I think the real hypocrisy that would befall us is not to oppose the private supply of plasma products but would be to actually cave in and to buy these blood products from foreign suppliers on a continuing, ongoing basis without giving real consideration as to why we're in the situation we are in today.

I've alluded in previous remarks that I made in the House that other members have talked about the \$200 million a year that we spend in this province on purchasing blood products from foreign sources to supply our needs here in the province. I'm not fine with this at all. It was mentioned by other members in the House as well that CBS, if given a \$100 million infusion of capital, would then be able, over time, to supply up to 50 per cent of Canada's needs for blood products. So if you extrapolate those figures and if you take the \$200 million a year that we spend in Alberta buying blood products from foreign sources and suppose that that represents about 10 per cent of the cost that all Canadian provinces and territories, including the federal government, are spending on purchasing foreign blood supply products, that would give you a number of about \$2 billion a year that we're spending on bringing plasma products into the country.

10:50

If CBS says that they're able to expand our blood supply up to 50 per cent with an expenditure of \$100 million, it seems to me that if we spend a fraction of what we're spending right now on blood products to bolster the needs of CBS, we could very easily afford to have the CBS supply blood products right across the country in relatively short order, eliminating the need to go abroad and continue buying blood products and expending the kinds of dollars that we're doing right now, which seems to me to be about \$2 billion a year, which is a scary amount of money.

I think there have been efforts made in other health areas in Canada that demonstrate very well how a concerted education effort can channel the results that we want to health outcomes that we need. For example, in recent decades we've really focused on the reduction of smoking in Canada. What happened was that education was focused on young people, and it's young people now who are very effectively getting their parents to quit smoking.

That's the type of angle that I'd like to see us take and have CBS take and inculcate a real social responsibility upon all people in this country, starting with an education system to encourage people to see the real value in giving blood and not to give up on the voluntary system of blood donation that we have in this country.

It's a system that, I think, is too easily blamed for failing. We should be looking at reasons why CBS has failed to supply the demand here in Canada that is found to be supplied with foreign blood products and paid-for blood products. That, to me, calls out for a real examination of what CBS has been up to and why we've fallen to this point where CBS isn't living up to its mandate, in my opinion.

Many people across this country really, really depend upon CBS, and I think it's incumbent upon us to invest the dollars necessary from that pot of money that we're now shipping out of the country to spend on foreign blood products to make sure that our voluntary system of blood supply is maintained, improved, and perhaps becomes an example for the rest of the world of how to have a voluntary blood supply, satisfy your national needs not only in transfusion but in plasma products requirements.

We know that we don't have the infrastructure to manufacture these products in Alberta or Canada. CBS has actually recognized this risk and is taking steps to address it. It seems to me they really should be bolstered in that effort with capital that is now being spent on buying foreign blood products. They've developed plans to increase Canada's plasma product self-sufficiency to 50 per cent by 2024. Imagine how much more quickly that goal could be achieved if indeed some of the money we now ship outside of the country would be redirected towards that effort.

They're looking to expand existing blood collection sites, open new plasma collection sites, and recruit additional plasma donors. Well, Madam Speaker, what I'd suggest they do is to start right here in this House, this Legislature, this Assembly by at least twice a year holding a blood donor clinic on our grounds and having us challenge each other as members of the Assembly to see who gives the most blood. I was really, actually kind of shocked to learn that there wasn't a blood donation clinic regularly here at the Assembly – and this is something I'd really like to see – in an effort to raise awareness amongst us of the value of our blood donation system and how the voluntary system can really be used effectively, to challenge each other to serve the needs of Canadians in supplying our own blood products, whether it be for transfusion or for plasma development.

With that, I'll conclude my remarks.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate on behalf of the Minister of Health.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to take a moment to thank all the members on both sides of the House for participating in the debate today. I would like to reiterate that a lot of thought has gone into developing this legislation. These amendments are the best way for Alberta to protect the integrity of our publicly funded voluntary blood donor system.

For almost 20 years Canadian Blood Services has been successful in ensuring that Canadians have blood products when they need them, and I thank them for that. And I thank Canadian Blood Services for developing plans to increase Canada's plasma product self-sufficiency to 50 per cent by 2024 and for looking into expanding existing blood collection sites, opening new plasma collection sites, and looking into recruiting additional plasma donors.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to again remind all in the House today to please consider donating blood when you can, and I would like to close debate on Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 2

An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

[Debate adjourned March 15: Mr. Orr speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to rise to speak to Bill 2, the sexual and domestic violence limitations act, which is an incredibly important bill to me and to all of those people that I've

previously worked with over the years on issues surrounding domestic violence.

I was incredibly moved by members of our own caucus who shared their personal stories. As we all know, it's always challenging to get up and talk about your issues in this House. What is more challenging is to get up and talk about a personal experience that has affected you so profoundly and to be able to do it in a way that not only gets your message across but – to do it without becoming too emotional is a difficult thing to do, and it's a hard road to walk. For my female colleagues who shared their experiences in the past, I have so much admiration.

In a previous government, when I was associate minister of family and community safety and responsible for domestic violence supports, I was often asked the question when I did interviews: why don't women come forward and talk about what's happened to them? Why do they wait so long? Why do they go back to situations where they had previously been abused? Oftentimes people would express puzzlement that that was the case. It really speaks to a lack of understanding about the experience of domestic violence, what women go through, you know, long-term domestic violence, where you have been subjected to it year after year after year. I think a lot of people don't realize how it wears away your very sense of humanity.

For all those women who can turn around later to put their lives back together and to stand up and, as in the case of my female colleagues, become advocates for this, to me it's just an amazing thing. I am so grateful that they are using their voices in such a powerful way. And I'm so grateful to this government because for those people who don't have the courage, the strength initially to get up and to say those things and need to rely on other people to build that courage and need time to process what's happened to them, this bill becomes very important.

11:00

Oftentimes when we go through difficult times, we feel like we don't have the courage, and we need that support from our wonderful groups, our families, our support networks to help us get through and to a place where we can stand up and ask for justice to be served. Sometimes that can take two months, and sometimes that can take 10 years. Whether it is an attack or whether it is sustained, long-term sexual violence, you need to be able to have that time to process what's happened to you and to be able to come forward when you feel that you are in a safe enough place to do it. Sometimes that can take a very long time.

One of the things that I think can be a huge challenge is when a survivor feels worried about whether anyone is going to believe them. That's often a problem. When women come forward and talk about their experiences, quite often they're met with: "Well, why didn't you do this? Why didn't you leave? Why didn't you do that? You know, how can we believe you?" It still happens to this very day. It happens with all kinds of abuse, Madam Speaker.

We'd like to think that we are a progressive province. We have a progressive government, which is amazing, and I'm so proud to be a part of it, proud to be able to actually stand up and cosponsor a bill like this because it's so important. At the same time, there are still people in the province who believe that when someone goes through something like this, they still have to prove to the world that it happened, and that can be a very challenging thing.

You know, survivors need the kinds of supports that they haven't gotten enough of in this province so far, and we're acknowledging that with this bill and saying that they need more supports. They need to know that someone has their back when they are ready to come forward and talk about what they've been through, and I think it's wonderful that this government is saying that, is giving out that

very message: we have your backs when you're ready to come forward and when you're ready to tell your story.

Alberta's legal system cannot impose deadlines on survivors. We can say it, but now we're actually putting it into law. One of the most rewarding things we can do as legislators in this House is to craft the kind of legislation that makes lives better for Albertans, and this is one of those pieces. This is one of those pieces that we can look at where we can actually say, not only across our province, not only across our country but in the world, that we have a piece of legislation that ensures that this province in Canada is progressive, thoughtful, compassionate, and considerate of the lives of people who have suffered sexual and domestic violence.

You know, many of us had heard from survivors about their inability to take action because of a deadline, the struggles they've experienced, whether it's mental health struggles or physical health struggles. When we know that we have the ability to remove these barriers, what we're saying to people is that we're taking some of the pressure off them – and that's really important – so that they have the ability to heal in their own time and to come to terms with what's happened in their lives and then to move forward and take action when they're ready to.

Debra Tomlinson is the chief executive officer of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. She is a wonderful woman that I was very lucky to work with in my previous role in family and community safety. She has said that it's time to lift the veil of silence for survivors. She is absolutely right. That's exactly what this bill does.

Mary Jane James, the executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, said that when survivors are believed, when they're listened to, when they can reclaim the kind of life they had before their assault, they can most definitely reclaim a life that they deserve to have. That is incredibly important, and that's what this piece of legislation does.

There are people who will come forward as a result of this legislation and talk about their experiences and find closure. One of the things that I think is so incredibly important is that when they do that, they will begin to live a quality of life that they didn't have before, a quality of life they didn't have before this piece of legislation.

In closing, I would just like to say how proud I am that Bill 2 is going forward, that it speaks to so many people who need that helping hand. When the NDP talks about making lives better for Albertans, this piece of legislation is exactly that. It says: we are here behind you, and we want you to know that this government believes in you and believes that you deserve to be happy and that you deserve to have the kind of life that is free from sexual or domestic violence. That's why I'm very proud to cosponsor this bill.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak on Bill 2 this morning. I certainly appreciated the comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-North West and acknowledge the work that she did in her capacity as a former associate minister of family and community safety, and I appreciate that work that was done.

I will say, Madam Speaker, that this is a piece of legislation that I, too, am very much behind and very much in support of. This is the kind of thing that needs to be done in order to address a number of different concerns in the large and complex issue relating to

domestic violence. You know, I do commend the government for bringing this forward, and I certainly hope that it has the intended results it was designed to have.

What I want to talk about a little bit today – and I'm hoping that you will allow me a certain degree of latitude – is that while this is a good measure, as was the measure that was introduced by the Member for Calgary-Bow with regard to the breaking of residential tenancy leases, these are, unfortunately, measures that deal with the after-effects or at least deal with a response to an issue, a response to a problem. You know, once again borrowing on my medical background, I like to try to address root causes of problems. I like to try to drill down to: why did this get to this situation in the first place? As something that I'm not sure all members are aware of – I think that at some level many members may be aware of this intuitively – I'm going to bring forward some evidence and some results from some research that was done right here in Alberta, some outstanding research that was done right here in Alberta, that talks about the link between domestic violence and animal abuse.

The reason I talk about it in this context, Madam Speaker, is because if we can do a better job of recognizing the early stages of those who are at risk of becoming abusers, of those who potentially have a proclivity for domestic abuse, then perhaps we can address it at an earlier stage. Perhaps we can address these problems at an earlier stage.

I'm going to be quoting from a document which was published in 2013. It's entitled *The Cruelty Connection: The Relationships between Animal Cruelty, Child Abuse and Domestic Violence*. It was published by our very own Alberta SPCA. What is alarming, Madam Speaker, is some of the statistics that were found in the study that was done. Some 59 per cent of abused women delayed leaving their home, where abuse was occurring, because of concern for their animals. Some 36 per cent of abused women with animals reported that their abuser had threatened or harmed their animals. Some 85 per cent of the threats against those animals were carried out. Further, 85 per cent of the women with both children and animals reported that the children witnessed the threat or the harm to the animal, and in 50 per cent of those cases it was the child's own pet that was threatened or harmed.

11:10

What makes these statistics even more shocking and more disturbing is that those numbers are tracked in other jurisdictions, and the numbers in Alberta are actually higher than what they are in other jurisdictions. The link between animal abuse and domestic violence is becoming increasingly recognized and increasingly acted upon, but I think that in Alberta we have a tremendous opportunity to expand on that.

Last spring, Madam Speaker, I attended a weekend-long seminar on animal forensics. Now, that's part of my requirement to keep up my veterinary licence, which I have kept up. They say that in politics you should always have a backup plan. I have maintained my veterinary licence, and I'm required to do 30 hours of continuing veterinary medical education every year, so I signed up for this plan. Actually, it was my wife, who's also a veterinarian, who encouraged us to both sign up. We said that it would be a wonderful weekend away in Calgary.

I will tell you that it was perhaps one of the most difficult periods of continuing veterinary education that I've ever attended. The stories of animal abuse and the investigations by one of the world leaders in animal forensics that were presented there were disgusting. They were just absolutely heart-wrenching, the sorts of things that had happened to animals, and what makes it worse is that for most abusers it is a very small step to then do the same to another human being. You know, there was a comment made at the

end of one of our days when we were feeling particularly beat up. Our lecturer said to us, "You know, now we all need to go home and watch a Disney movie" because it was that disturbing. I will tell you that it was one of the most difficult things that I went through.

Recognizing this link I think is important, but what is more important is what we can do about it. What's encouraging is that, at least in the city of Calgary, there is co-operative work being done between the Calgary Police Service, the Calgary Humane Society, and the Calgary shelters for women. That's encouraging. For example, one of the problems we have is that most shelters in our province won't accept animals, so if you're in an abusive situation and are trying to escape and your dog or your cat is also being abused, you can take your kids but you can't take your dog or your cat. For a lot of people, as I've said, for 59 per cent, that delays their departure from that abusive situation, and that's a problem.

You know, even more heart-wrenching in some ways than the statistics I've quoted are some of the quotes from the survivors that told their stories. For example: "I had called 911 before, but I was too scared to leave. I didn't know what was going to happen to the dogs . . . so I just sucked it up and kept going on." Another quote: "The animals were a big part of why I didn't leave for a shelter, a really big part. I was their caretaker, they depended on me and supported me and I didn't want to let them down." Finally: "I went back to get the cats and they'd all been poisoned."

Madam Speaker, the link between animal abuse and domestic violence is so profound, in fact, that it can be traced back in the history of some of the most heinous criminals that we have seen, and that, too, is documented here in this document. For example, David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, who admitted to 13 charges of murder or attempted murder, had previously abused his neighbour's Labrador retriever, claiming that the dog was possessed and compelled to kill. Jeffrey Dahmer, who confessed to killing and dismembering 17 men and boys, as a child had impaled frogs, decapitated dogs, and staked cats to trees in his backyard.

Those are things that should have been noticed. Those are things that should have been recognized. Clearly, this is an individual that needs help, and one has to wonder, if help had been provided, if an intervention had been placed at a more appropriate time, if an intervention had been put in place, whether that, in fact, would have made a difference. You know, I guess it's hard to say after the fact.

Finally, Ted Bundy, which I think is a name that we all remember for terrorizing college campuses in the 1970s after killing three women at Florida State University. He's suspected of killing many, many more. During his childhood he witnessed his father's brutality toward animals, and he himself tortured animals. Madam Speaker, you know, it's sometimes been said that if you can do something to an animal that's mean or harmful or abusive, in your mind you don't recognize the separation between doing that to a human being.

I would only encourage our government – and I've spoken to some members about this – to look into some of what is going on in the city of Calgary and see if we can't expand it further across our province, expand the working relationship between animal shelters and animal welfare organizations, our police services, our social service agencies. I think we have to work with animal welfare agencies and our animal shelters so that we can set up some form of co-operative agreement so that women and families fleeing domestic abuse situations can know that they can take their pets with them when they're fleeing that situation and that that pet will then be cared for. If it's not in the shelter, which I think is the ideal situation, – let's remember that pets provide a critical support to people that are going through really difficult times – at the very least let's make sure that those pets could be housed, whether it be at nearby veterinary clinics or foster homes or by some other means.

In a very effective public service campaign in the United States that showed a woman who obviously had been abused and then in the other half of the poster showed a picture of a dog that also had been injured, the caption beneath said: she won't go back to save her toaster. But women do go back, and women put themselves at risk in order to save their pets. Recognizing and understanding how profound that linkage is, I think, is an important thing that we need to recognize and acknowledge in Alberta.

I think that one of the things we can be – I mean, it was talked about here in the course of the last debate, but this is no different. Where we can be leaders is in recognizing that things don't exist in silos and that if we work together across different jurisdictions and across different fields of expertise and fields of responsibility, in fact, we can do something that is beneficial for Albertans right across the board but especially to try to address and recognize and, hopefully, provide some intervention that is helpful before someone becomes an abuser. I mean, ultimately, that would be our goal. Ultimately, it would be to recognize that what is going on here in someone's young life has the potential of spiralling into something much more grisly, much more heinous as they get older.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to support Bill 2. I think this is a good piece of legislation. I'm glad that the government is bringing it forward, but I would encourage this government to go further. As opposed to, you know, looking at ways to remedy a situation that has already existed, I would encourage this government, whether it's the minister of social services, whether it's the Solicitor General and Minister of Justice, whether it's the Health minister, for that matter, to work with authorities that have expertise in this area to recognize this vital link between animal abuse and domestic violence, to recognize it for what it is, and to recognize that we can make a meaningful difference in our society if we take steps to address these problems in their infancy, before they spiral out of control.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

11:20

Ms Jansen: I want to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. We have spoken, of course, about this very topic in the past, and I appreciate so much his compassion in this area. You know, this is where, when we drop the partisanship and the name calling, we can work together and actually do great things.

The member actually said something that I thought was quite interesting. I think it's really important for us to first of all consider what he said very seriously, to look at the fact that these markers are out there, to understand that the police know that these markers are out there, and we have the ability to use this as a tool to identify victims in situations where there is a potential to go in and offer help but also to ensure that people who want to leave situations of domestic violence aren't prevented from doing so because they're worried about the vulnerability of their animals.

I want to ask the member. You mentioned briefly the idea of perhaps housing pets at veterinary clinics, and I'm wondering if as a veterinarian there is the potential to have a conversation with veterinarians across the province and find out if there is the ability to have a level of co-operation in ensuring some short-term care so that victims of domestic violence can leave and know that they have access to their pet even if the shelter they're in won't accept the pet.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, thank you. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. In fact, in some communities that's

already happening, which is certainly encouraging. After my wife and I attended this seminar last year, we actually called on the clinic that we used to be involved with and encouraged them to make that offer to our shelter in Lloydminster.

You know, the one thing, of course, that we have to really worry about is that abusers are nefarious people, and if we put, for example, these animals in a shelter, quite often shelters are run by volunteers, and if the abuser knows that that's the arrangement, the abuser can sometimes go in and say, "Oh, you know, that's my dog; I'll take him home now; he must have been a stray" or whatever, and they have to have very careful training to know about the security that would be required.

You know, I absolutely agree that we can develop networks, whether it's through veterinarians – and I think the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association would be very open to this. And not only that, whether it be in private homes, in safe houses, if you will – I mean, it sounds incredible to even say that – but temporary foster homes where these pets could be housed. Again, I would really encourage our network of women's shelters, whether they are primary- or secondary-level shelters, to consider providing for housing of pets because, again, the separation is one of the things that is an issue, and even if we house them in foster homes or in veterinary clinics, these pets are not only not with the people who care for them, but the pets care back for the people. That support travels, of course, both ways, so I think that ideally we'd want these pets to be housed in the shelters, but if that's not indeed possible, then we should look for alternative arrangements and make that well known so that women and children who are in these situations can know that they can leave safely and that their animals will be cared for. That's certainly something that I would like to see in Alberta. I think that would be a very positive development.

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

Seeing none, any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Just a few comments, Madam Speaker. Thank you. I very much appreciate this bill, long overdue. The statute of limitations has obviously been arbitrary and inappropriate in a number of cases. Child abuse, clearly, has been relieved of that statute of limitations, and this is certainly another area that should be relieved of it.

I would say that in the medical profession one of the gaps, I think, in our training for physicians is to ask every woman, especially women that come into emergency rooms, if they feel

safe at home. There's kind of a reluctance, it seems, to go there, and it would open up the door in a lot of cases for women who are reluctant to speak or who feel in danger but are unwilling to actually share the true cause of their bruise or their injury or their indication of threat. That's an important initiative that's gone through emergency rooms across Alberta. I hope it's being followed. Even our EMS colleagues could probably be helping by raising that question if it is unclear how an injury occurred and simply asking the woman or the man, if he's been abused, whether he or she feels safe at home.

The other issue that I will be raising later in the Legislature is whether this bill actually covers harassment. It doesn't appear to cover workplace harassment, and I hope I'll be bringing forward an amendment at some point to ask that that be included. I'm thinking obviously, or perhaps not obviously, of the Calgary Police Service concerns around women in the workplace and harassment. Many of them could not make their appeal to the Human Rights Commission because they were longer than two years since the incident. In fact, it's my understanding that none of them were within the two-year statute of limitations. So I would like to make sure that this bill covers harassment in the workplace.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to the bill?

Anybody to close debate?

All right. Then we will just proceed to the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. After getting rid of some pent-up energy this morning, we had a very good debate. I enjoyed the debate on both sides of the House, but now I would ask that same House to adjourn for the morning and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before I call that question, I would like to echo that. Thank you very much to all members of the House for the decorum this morning. I think we had a very wonderful debate. I enjoyed it. Let's continue on with this mood for this afternoon. It would be wonderful. I know the Speaker would appreciate it as well.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:27 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 16, 2017

Day 9

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

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Wildrose: 22

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 16, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly His Excellency Mizanur Rahman, high commissioner for Bangladesh. Accompanying him is Mr. Dewan Mahmudul Haque, first secretary at the high commission. Alberta shares a historic national relationship with Bangladesh as members of the Commonwealth. This has helped spur important ties in areas such as trade. There is excellent potential to continue to build on our relationship as both of our economies grow and diversify. Two areas where Alberta and Bangladesh may find further opportunities to collaborate are in energy and agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the energy and environmental leader the world needs for the 21st century. Effective nutrition and a healthy population are also goals that we share. Beyond trade, Alberta and Bangladesh have an important social relationship. Numerous Bangladeshi undergraduate and graduate students have chosen our universities to pursue their education in professions like engineering, sciences, medicine, and law.

Mr. Speaker, with a distinguished career in the Bangladesh foreign service that has included work in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Netherlands, and Poland, the high commissioner brings a wealth of experience to his posting here in Canada. I now ask the high commissioner to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, Your Excellency. Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to introduce to you and through you a wonderful school in my riding, Woodbridge Farms elementary school. The students are really keen on democracy and on us changing daylight saving time. The students are with their teachers: Mr. Garth Baker, Ms Antonia Triska, Ms Judy Andrekson, and Mrs. Sarita D'Lima. I would ask all the students to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House 22 students from Duffield school, one of the wonderful communities in the beautiful riding of Stony Plain. My guests will not be joining us at this moment; they'll be here a little bit later. So I would appreciate it if all members of this House would extend a warm traditional welcome to them now.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you 63 students from Woodhaven middle school. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Miss Jayna Butler and Mrs. Cleo Eddy, along with their chaperones: Mrs. Melissa MacDonald, Mr. Ray Mottershed-Yee, Mrs. Tammy Paulson, Mr. Verne Depeel, and Mrs. Jen Shymko. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some very special guests: Mr. Adam North Peigan and his wife, Lena Wildman, accompanied by 20 survivors of the '60s scoop. Mr. North Peigan has been tirelessly lobbying all levels of government, seeking an official apology for their part in this dark hour of our history. I would like to ask my special guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Angel Sumka, Mark Dorsey, Nicole Kraft, and Tina Guillette. Together they are the Alberta Sex Positive Education & Community Centre, an organization that does important work on promoting sex-positive values but, more importantly, consent. They are currently working on getting some new, larger accommodations for their community centre in Edmonton. I would now like to invite them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you and good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Mr. Brett Bowers. Mr. Bowers is the principal at large at Morinville Christian School and oversees the home education of 1,000 home ed students and for their families across Alberta. May I please ask that Brett Bowers stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you three amazing LGBTQ-plus advocates from Calgary. I ask them to rise as I say their names: Amelia Marie Newbert, Ace Peace, and his mother, Lindsay Peace. Ace, who is now 16 years old and one of the coolest teenagers I know, came out as trans in 2015 and was put on the wait-list for the Metta clinic soon after. The treatment that he received at the clinic saved his life. Amelia and Lindsay and Ace are advocating with the Skipping Stone Foundation for increased support to the Metta clinic as it currently only operates one half-day per month and has a wait-list of just under three years. I would like to thank Ace, Amelia, and Lindsay for their advocacy and contribution to Alberta and the LGBTQ-plus community. I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the love of my life for over 30 years, the mother of our five children, my wife, Barb.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two school friends from over 30 years ago that my wife and I were able to reconnect with today. One friend, Gloria Kapeller, is here as part of the thousands of children that were involved in the '60s scoop. Also, Connie Hilton is accompanying her on this day, and I'd like to give them the warm welcome of all.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two friends of mine from my constituency, from the great town of Rimbey, the home of Martha and Henry, or our hon. Premier Ralph Klein's Martha and Henry, for sure. My good friend His Worship Rick Pankiw is the mayor of the town of Rimbey, and with him today is Lori Hillis. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce, in your gallery today, to you and through you to all members of the House the love of my life for 29 years, the mother of our three boys, my wife, Frances. With Frances is our good friend, a hard, hard worker from Medicine Hat improving the culture of our community, one of our Speaker's good friends and my and my wife's good friend, Sandra Moore. Please rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Cathy Heron, who is currently a city councillor in St. Albert and also a board member of the AUMA. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I have the opportunity, I would like to introduce to the House someone who has already been here many, many times as part of the gallery, my husband, Jeremy Johnston. He does a lot of work for us and for me behind the scenes, and I just wanted to recognize him in the gallery today. If we could extend the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

Employment Fair in Northeast Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, it is well known that the most important part of getting into the workforce is getting started, but there are many people that are uncertain of how to get started or, in many cases, how to get started again. That is why in March 2016 I organized the Working in Your Community Employment Information Fair for those residents of Edmonton-Manning and the

northeast of the city that are looking for their first job, whether they are about to enter the workforce as young adults or as new Canadians or looking to transfer into a new career.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that this event returned to the northeast for the second time this year. This year I had the good fortune of partnering with the city of Edmonton's 1,000 families initiative, Clareview Multicultural Centre, and BGS Career & Corporate Development to deliver programs and breakout sessions to job seekers from Edmonton-Manning and beyond. They were able to help them build their resumé, develop their interview skills, and inform businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs of grants and programs available from the government of Alberta to support and start their business.

I'm also proud to tell you that we had the participation of Women Building Futures and North West Refining, who partnered to encourage women to engage in the construction industry; Alberta forestry products, with the session about transferring skills from the oil and gas industry into the forestry industry; and EPCOR, who presented an overview of the services and programs they provide.

Mr. Speaker, the face of the northeast of Edmonton and of Alberta as a whole is changing, with many people from around the world now calling this home. Therefore, this year also included two sessions on cultural expectations, one for job seekers and one for employers.

Mr. Speaker, by coming together for this annual event, I hope to encourage a beginning in our community, I hope to encourage progress in our community by keeping together, and I hope to encourage and successfully develop a community of us working together.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

'60s Scoop in Alberta

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. From the '60s through early '90s our country and provinces entered into a deplorable joint venture that, in hindsight, can only be seen as scandalous. Through a federal program implemented by the provinces through our child welfare systems, an estimated 20,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were removed from their families and their communities against their will. At the time it was estimated that in Alberta 40 to 50 per cent of children in government care were aboriginal, and most were scooped without any parental consent, many to be adopted out across the continent and some even overseas. The policy has been referred to as the '60s scoop.

When I first heard about this, I thought it was something from our distant past, perhaps a part of our dark colonial history. Sadly, this was not the case. This went on until the early '90s. Many of the people responsible are now enjoying their retirement while the children who were scooped from their communities try to come to terms with what happened to them and their families. Sadly, many couldn't come to terms with the horrors they faced and have taken their own lives.

Joining me today are 22 people who were victims of the '60s scoop. They want an apology from this government for Alberta's role in this atrocity. They approached me knowing they would get results after numerous attempts at communication with this government over the last two years had failed them. Manitoba has issued an apology. The Saskatchewan government has committed to an apology. Why the hesitation here in Alberta?

The government has promised open consultation and increased respect for indigenous communities. Sadly, as we can see from this,

their lack of action on this request, and from their dismal response to the kinship care issue, these issues seem to get only lip service. This government is all smoke and no fire. The government needs to stand up and acknowledge the mistakes and offer an apology to the victims of the '60s scoop, both living and deceased.

Thank you.

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

Parliamentary Debate and Public Discourse

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have observed with growing dismay the deterioration of civility in our political debate both inside and outside of this august Chamber. We see it nearly every day in question period, which some will dismiss as the thrust and parry of political theatre, but this week, particularly on Monday afternoon and earlier this morning, it became even more pervasive during our regular debates.

It is not something we should be proud of. When we stop listening to each other, when we stop being honourable members, we all do Albertans a disservice. But just as the deliberate use of over-the-top rhetoric is a problem, an attempt to inflame those with whom we disagree instead of finding some common middle ground and then working from that point, we entrench ourselves in nonproductive hyperpartisanship.

There are, of course, rare occasions where we agree and put partisan politics aside. Recent examples include government Bill 2 or the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake's Bill 202. These are good pieces of legislation. I applaud members on both sides of the Assembly for supporting them. These instances of collaboration instead of confrontation are refreshing, but sadly they are all too rare.

I know that it is popular or perhaps good politics to dredge up the past, but the reality is that we need to face today's problems today. Alberta has had no shortage of challenges that demand our energy and diligence, not acrimony and dissent. It's small wonder that people here in Alberta and around the world are becoming disenchanted and more disengaged in the political process.

Now, in a few hours this government will introduce its third budget. I will make a bold prediction that one side of the Assembly will see it as bold and brilliant and visionary, and the other side will see it as short-sighted and catastrophic. The reality is that both assessments are wrong. Just as our job as legislators is to go through this, we must go through this legislation, this budget, with the diligence that Albertans expect. Albertans expect and deserve nothing less.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Rural Internet and Cellphone Coverage

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to an issue which has a great deal of significance for many rural parts of our province. As our government has made clear, our province suffers from a critical infrastructure deficit, but it's not only physical infrastructure which is lacking in many areas. We suffer from a lack of high-speed Internet, access to the SuperNet, and mobile reception. This causes a number of disadvantages economically and in our daily lives. Access to information and communications is particularly vital for Albertans living in rural areas because for many this is the best way to access services.

I have personally experienced these issues and have heard from many constituents with similar concerns. They have reported an inability to secure constant speeds, traffic filtering, and disconnections from many of the major service providers. There are numerous

large areas where it's nearly impossible to even secure mobile services.

Decisions by the previous government have left us with contracts that don't serve rural Albertans. We know that Albertans deserve better. It is important that Albertans have quality, affordable access to the Internet, and I am proud to stand with a government that is making life better and more affordable for Albertans. I'm happy to hear that our government is reviewing their vision for SuperNet and rural broadband to ensure that Albertans have quality, affordable access to the Internet.

I wish to advocate on behalf of my constituents to help facilitate improved access to the fibre grid, the information infrastructure, and wireless communications technology for all rural areas.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Student Assessment

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Concerned teachers, parents, and students have been contacting me and raising concerns about a significant issue, grade inflation in Alberta's K to 12 schools. In 2016 96 per cent of students province-wide were given a passing grade in math 30-1 by their teachers, but only 71 per cent of students who took the math exam passed. That 25 per cent gap clearly shows that what's getting passing grade in the classroom and on standardized tests isn't adding up. To the minister: what exactly is your government doing to ensure that students don't fall behind?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. You know, our government has been investing in education to make life better for students and for families, particularly focusing on both curriculum and assessment, which I believe go hand in hand. For example, this spring, in June, for the grade 12 diplomas, I have added a written section to help buttress the assessment so that it is in line with the curriculum and what teachers are teaching in the classroom.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, grade inflation can have serious effects on the outcomes of students. Large discrepancies between classroom marks and diploma exam marks may affect whether students are ready for and accepted into postsecondary studies. We want to prepare our students for success. But when you look at the numbers, the discrepancy for most grade 12 classes is growing when you measure it over the past eight years. To the minister: what are you doing to address the problem? What tools are you giving school boards, and how do you plan to reverse this trend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, this is a very good question. The very first thing that you must make sure is that you're investing in teachers in the classroom to make sure that there are adequate class sizes there. It's what we've done to fund for enrolment over the last couple of budgets. The next one is coming up very soon, and I can't wait to show you how we're going to do that again.

You know, it's important to note that the standards that we have in our classrooms are very high. The professionalism of our teachers

is very high as well. We seek to improve that every day. This is a worthwhile study, and we will go back always and continually reassess how we approach this.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, that's good to hear, but we've heard before that the head of the ATA feels that classroom marks alone should reflect students' abilities and that standardized testing is not necessary.

We've also seen a reduction in the weighting of diploma exam marks from 50 to 30 per cent in the final grade. There have been many serious and valid concerns raised that this may result in postsecondary institutions looking only at diploma exam grades. To the minister: have you consulted with students, parents, and teachers about the possibility of returning to the weighting of 50 per cent in diploma exams?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The choice to move from 50 to 30 per cent was to put us in line with the rest of the country. The standard that is used for diploma exams and the weighting that is used for diploma exams: certainly, we've used that information. It's a very good way by which we can see where our students are going. We analyze that information very closely.

But, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you a little story. Last year we had a terrible fire in Fort McMurray. The kids had a choice of whether or not to write the diploma exams. Postsecondary institutions across the country and around the world accepted the classroom marks because they know that the standard of our teachers is that high.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

'60s Scoop in Alberta

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. An estimated 20,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were scooped from their families and communities against their will between the '60s and early '90s. The devastation to families and their communities is still felt today as the survivors struggle with what it meant to be part of the '60s scoop. Minister, Premier, put yourself in their place. How would you feel if the province came in and took your children?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that I agree completely with the member opposite. The '60s scoop is a tragedy. It's a tragedy that deprived indigenous children, particularly in Alberta, of the connection to their community and to their family, that would have made their lives so much better. We know that, so we will continue to work with survivors and a range of indigenous leaders to listen to their concerns. For some of the members who are here, we look forward to working with them as well as other indigenous leaders across the province on how we can move forward with respect to making an apology soon.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Mr. North Peigan has been in contact with the minister and the Premier on numerous occasions over the last few years and given that he has come to me in pure frustration with the lack of response he has received from this government and since this government is so proud of its track record on repairing the relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, why has the minister refused to give an apology to the victims of the '60s scoop?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This is, of course, a very serious issue, that we are deeply concerned about. As a social worker for 35 years in this province I've been aware of this issue and have advocated in a number of ways for us to move on this. We definitely feel that this is a serious mark against our province and our government over the last 40 years, and we are more than prepared to work with the communities. I have in fact met with Mr. North Peigan and will continue to try to find people to work with.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that other provinces have recognized the injustice done to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities through the '60s scoop and have offered formal apologies and considering that there were many young people that were not able to cope with these tragedies such as a young man from Fort Chip who had 28 placements over a 13-year period, starting at age four, before he committed suicide in 1984 at age 17, Mr. Minister, Madam Premier, when will you issue an official apology to the victims of the '60s scoop, both living and deceased?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We feel that it's very important that we work with the community and elders and other members of the community who can help us design a process to move forward on that is really respectful and truly an apology and isn't just simply about checking off a box so that we can say that we have done it. An apology absolutely has to have depth to it, and we are working on creating that depth so that we can move forward on this much-deserved apology.

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

Energy Policies

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the NDP government has implemented several harmful policies in our largest job-creation sector: higher business taxes, an ill-advised royalty review, a massive carbon tax, and a cap on our oil sands. Last summer the AER doubled the liability-management ratio, requiring companies to hold twice as many assets as liabilities, destroying transactional liquidity in our energy sector. One columnist wrote, and I quote: it's like the AER brought a gun to a knife fight. What has the minister done to help producers recover from this poor decision, that was only intended to be temporary?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to work with our federal government on this. Our plan would create jobs and tackle a long-standing environmental issue that we've inherited. Previous governments sat back and admired the problems, and we're not going to.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, again, in a time of economic uncertainty the last thing that any industry needs is risky new policies that damage their confidence in government. The NDP carbon tax asks 85 per cent of our energy producers to subsidize the largest players, who made backroom deals to exempt themselves from this same bad policy. This is unfair to small and mid-sized operators, who

have their own bills to pay. The backroom deals that this government signed are harming real families, who need to put food on their table. Why is this government making the same kind of harmful backroom deals . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member
The Minister of Environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is again shocking to me that the members of the Wildrose would drag the reputation of our largest employers through the mud as they have, the largest employers in their own leader's riding. It is utterly shameful that the Wildrose would want to slam the door on a plan that brings the environment and the economy together, that results in two pipeline approvals, and that moves this province forward. We are creating jobs. We're taking care of the environment. We're working with industry, not against them, as the Wildrose would do.

Mr. Barnes: This government is no friend of oil and gas companies. That might be the worst-kept secret in the world. As I speak, we're watching a situation unfold where Lexon is closing up shop in part due to this government's policies. Recently we saw Shell shift \$8 billion of capital out of Alberta and into jurisdictions with more stability; namely, the United States, where there is no carbon tax at all. Even Venezuela is more attractive to Shell so long as the NDP are in charge here. This is a disaster. How many companies, how much investment, how many jobs have to go before this NDP government . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Alberta is the energy and environmental leader the world needs for the 21st century. Last week an Alberta homegrown company doubled its assets and production capacity. This side of the House cheered for CNRL. That side of the House criticized CNRL, dragged their name through the mud. What I want to know for the record is: when did you start to hate Alberta oil and gas companies? [interjections]

The Speaker: It's a beautiful day outside, folks.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a full year since the NDP government released their \$11 billion deficit budget, and since then the tax burden on Albertans has grown every day. The cost of living has actually gone up with the NDP while Albertans are unemployed in troubling economic times. To the Premier: as your government continues to set historic records on taxing and spending, will you admit what Albertans already know, that the jobs plan was a failure and has made the tax burden worse for Alberta families?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I do find it interesting that the member opposite, who comes from a caucus that could not balance the budget when oil was at \$90 a barrel, is now complaining about the size of deficits with this government. You know, it was interesting that they did at least, unlike their friends over there, introduce a shadow budget, which was lovely. The problem is that it took less time to debunk the PC budget than it did for their leader to file a suit with the Ethics Commissioner. That's because their budget has more holes in it than the Kananaskis golf course. [interjections] The reality is that we're standing up for Albertans in tough times . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
First supplemental. [interjections]
Order, please.

Mr. Rodney: Stop blaming, and start governing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Rodney: If budget town halls were open to all Albertans instead of just the NDP . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, just wait a minute.
Let's quiet down, folks.
Stop the clock for just a moment.
Start again, please.

Mr. Rodney: Stop blaming. Start governing.

If budget town halls were open to all Albertans instead of just NDP buddies, you would know exactly what Albertans think. Now, since the last budget, we've seen the NDP cause real pain with policies like the carbon tax and then demanding rebate cheques back from grieving families. It suggests the NDP wants to take credit for dishing out cash but ignores the fact that this money already belongs to the taxpayer. To the Premier: will you begin to actually help Alberta families by taking real action on lowering tax burdens instead of taking a lot of money out of one of their pockets and giving just a little bit back in the other?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the member opposite is suggesting that we follow their lead, but the problem is that they're talking about taking over \$4 billion out of operating expenses in one year. They want to cut Culture and Tourism by \$50 million. They want to take – here's the best one – \$600 million out of Advanced Education. So when Albertans are looking for support during economic tough times, these guys want to close the doors of our universities to struggling families. We won't do that.

Mr. Rodney: Now back to reality. We don't need to wait until 3 o'clock to know that a typical NDP budget includes out-of-control spending, with credit downgrades to follow. To the Premier, who's currently reviewing collective bargaining in which the public-sector wage increases remain steady while the average wage of Albertans has decreased: will you further increase the tax burden on Albertans by handing over a better deal to union comrades while Albertans struggle? In other words, will you put union families above other Alberta families? Please say no.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as we've said many times before, our government respects the negotiated contracts, and we will negotiate with them with respect when those contracts come up. You know what we did do? We went into those insider deals for CEOs of agencies, boards, and commissions, and we passed legislation so that nobody could earn \$800,000 a year under their watch. We rolled those salaries back because that's what standing up for Albertans looks like.

Gravel Road Upgrading

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents in Lethbridge-East travel west for some peaceful recreation. We are close to the Castle area, known for its biodiversity and cultural and historical significance for indigenous people. Given that 11 kilometres of highway 774 are unpaved and in poor condition, to the Minister of Transportation: what has this government done to improve this highway?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I think this government has done an amazing thing in making the Castle wilderness a provincial park. We know, having made it a provincial park and the wonderful job that's been done by the Minister of Environment and Parks on that file, that more people will be wanting to access that park, so we're going to be taking steps to make sure that they can.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this highway is heavily used by tourists and Albertans supporting our vibrant tourist and recreation economy, to the same minister: what are the government's plans for paving gravel roads in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. You know, the government has no specific policy about paving every bit of gravel road in this province. We already have far more paved roads per capita in Alberta than any other province in Canada. However, there are a number of places where it could definitely benefit Albertans to travel safely and to visit the wonderful spaces that we have in our province such as the provincial park in the Castle.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's tourism and camping season is fast approaching and that this would be the ideal time to pave highway 774, does the government have a timeline for when Albertans can expect to see this important road paved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. Maintaining the safety of our highways is a critical priority. Making sure that people can travel safely and conveniently to important places like the Castle and many other points in our province is a critical priority. All I can say to the hon. member is that she needs to stay tuned. We want to support the wonderful development that the Minister of Environment and Parks has been working on to provide wonderful recreation activities and natural areas to the people of southern Alberta.

Electric Power System

Mr. MacIntyre: Well, the NDP raised taxes on power companies and then claimed that they didn't read the contracts, so now Albertans are being dinged big time, paying for any financial losses associated with the Balancing Pool carrying PPAs and the wholesale power market. Well, the Balancing Pool is losing money, Mr. Speaker, every month, and it's only recovering its fuel costs and carbon costs from its offers into the power market, not its fixed costs. To the Minister of Energy: have estimates of those losses and taxpayer exposure, which are expected to continue for four more years, been included in your budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's been a tough economy, and we're standing up for Albertans. We've taken action to remove the volatility from a system that we inherited. We

are protecting Albertans from power prices that spike, which is how the system was built. The opposition would want us to have our families pay more and do nothing about that, but we are picking our side, and we are picking our side on the side of Albertans.

2:10

The Speaker: I hope you'll notice the lovely tie that the Government House Leader is wearing today.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that we have about 1,400 megawatts of existing wind generation, whose owners are telling me that they're now at risk in a capacity market as these renewables traditionally are not considered to provide capacity, how will the Minister of Energy protect the legacy renewables built over the past several decades that now face a new market system prejudiced against them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are protecting Albertans. We're offering stable and more affordable prices, we're moving from harmful coal to clean power, and we're moving to a capacity market because we heard from industry and we heard from experts that this was the way to go. Again, the opposition would have us continue to have high prices for Albertans and punish families, continue with coal, and ignore the advice that we've gotten from experts in the industry and in Alberta.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. I don't believe the minister heard me the first time. Given that we have about 1,400 megawatts of existing wind generation, whose owners are telling me that it's now at risk in a capacity market as these renewables traditionally are not considered to provide capacity, how will the Minister of Energy protect the legacy renewables built over the past several decades that now face a new market system prejudiced against them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we worked with the AESO, we worked with industry, we worked with experts in the industry to develop a capacity market because the system we inherited is broken. It relies on volatility, and it is harmful to Alberta families. We are siding with Alberta families; they are not. I do not need people from the other side mansplaining to me about electricity.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Ms Phillips: Such a snowflake.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Two points of order. [interjections] Hon. members, please stop.

The Member for Calgary-West.

Police Street Checks

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before the House rose for Christmas, I asked the Justice minister for a second time about the police practice of randomly checking citizens and asking them for identification, a practice known as carding. Based on her response on December 7, I believe the minister and I may have a different interpretation about how the Charter applies to carding. To the Justice

minister, with all due respect: can you please advise this House and Albertans if you believe that police are allowed to detain and demand identification from citizens without reasonable suspicion?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we've been working very closely with communities on this particular file. It is absolutely not the case that people are required to provide information to the police. In fact, the thing we're consulting with communities and police about is whether police need to say in every instance: you are not required to provide this information. The police are permitted to have conversations with people. They are permitted to ask for information. People are permitted to volunteer that information if they want to, but they're also permitted to walk away.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that when I asked the Justice minister for her opinion on Ontario's new carding regulations, she referred to different policing concerns in Alberta and Ontario and given that community groups in Ontario and Alberta have expressed the same issues about carding being a form of racial and socioeconomic profiling, again to the minister: what are the different policing concerns in Ontario and Alberta, specifically in regard to carding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, we're aware of significant community concerns around this practice. That's why we've been working with the communities as well as working with the police. In Ontario, certainly, they took the path of just dropping something in. We think that there's a lot of common area. Ultimately, different community groups want to ensure that the police are there for them, that they feel safe and respected, and the police want to ensure that all communities feel that way about them. That's why everybody is willing to come together and willing to work together on moving this issue forward, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Justice minister stated in December that we need a made-in-Alberta solution and given that the issue of carding relates specifically to the Charter and this government has a track record of failing to grasp the essence of the Charter and given that section 9 of the Charter and related Supreme Court rulings guard against arbitrary detention for all Canadians, to the same minister: why do we need a different model for Albertans when the Charter applies equally to all citizens of Canada, when all peace officers simply need to do is abide by the reasonable suspicion standard as set by the Supreme Court of Canada?

Ms Ganley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not really sure where the member opposite got his law degree, but I might suggest he goes back to school. Certainly, it's the case that people are allowed to engage in conversations with the police if they're interested. As I've already stated, they absolutely have the right to walk away. We are working to ensure that there is a guideline around the practice of interacting with citizens in the community. When we take action on this issue, we will be only the second province in the country to do so. That's why we're moving forward. That's why we're working with communities, to put Alberta out front instead of behind, where those folks left it.

Mr. Rodney: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted. [interjections]
Order, please.

Health Care Wait Times

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, I was approached by a young constituent who has experienced some very bad wait times, resulting in chronic pain. She's only 36 years old. From detection to surgery was 27 months, at which point, when she was in that surgery, they said that she was beyond repair and that she would need a hip replacement, but she's too young, she's too low priority, and she'll have to wait 10 years before they consider her for that. To the Minister of Health. The earlier you get a diagnosis, the better chance you have at a good outcome. Will the minister look at this issue and look at the full cost to Albertans for these long wait times?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I've said in this House before and to the member personally, I'm happy to take contact information to be able to follow up and to make sure that we can facilitate as much as we can within – obviously, I'm not in a position to make decisions about somebody's medical care, but I am here to make sure that we have improvements in the system so that those who are the physicians and who are the experts on the front lines can make those decisions. That's one of the reasons why we restored \$800 million to health care that was planned to be cut under former Conservative governments. We know that both parties who are here want to see deep cuts. That would only make wait times worse. We're here to make them better and to help Alberta families.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, this issue affects the lives of my friends, my family, my constituents, and all Albertans. The average wait time for a hip replacement in Calgary is 42 weeks, yet the wait time for the same surgery in Edmonton is 36 weeks. That's a six-week difference. To the Minister of Health: why are there such major discrepancies for wait times in regions and centres given that they're all managed under the same umbrella, with the same guidelines and protocols, with the same access to the same specialists and consultants?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question and for also acknowledging, as I share with him, concerns that in the past there have certainly been decisions that I don't believe created the best opportunities for all Albertans to have access. That's one of the reasons why we have as a government made it a priority to make sure that we protect health care, to make sure that we're moving forward in aligning resources, to make sure that Albertans do get the best possible care. Some say that during these tough times the answer is to cut, to privatize, and to make things more expensive. Our government looks at things differently. We look at things by wanting to stand up for Alberta families, make life more affordable, and make their lives better by addressing things like these wait times, that should improve.

2:20

Mr. Yao: Given that these unreasonably long wait times can lead to the deterioration of health that results in increased costs and strains on the health care system and given that we already spend

more per capita on health care than both Saskatchewan and B.C., who both have shorter wait times for surgeries, and given that more money isn't always the solution, to the Minister of Health: what actions has your department taken to address this critical issue? You can identify the issues, but how are you addressing it?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the opportunity to do so, Mr. Speaker. For example, we're looking at ways to make sure that we triage the resources that we do have to find ways to make sure that they meet the needs of those who need them most. I have great news in terms of general surgery wait times. In the first year we were in government, the wait times for general surgery went down 20 per cent, a 21 per cent decrease for internal medicine, a 14 per cent decrease for specialists focusing on ears, noses, and throats. This is about making sure that we're aligning the resources. I have to tell you, that I get that they don't want to put more money into the system, but if you took billions of dollars – they're saying at least \$2.6 billion, a number that I heard most recently – out of the system, it would get a lot worse. You can't have it both ways.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Service Alberta Postage Use

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government was proud of their feeble efforts to control costs by ending a long-standing reminder to vehicle owners that their registration and licences needed to be renewed. Last March this minister promised Albertans that she would save \$3 million in printing and postage. This month the minister said that it would only be \$300,000. To the minister: is it \$3 million, or is it \$300,000? Can you please clarify?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the question. I have, frankly, no idea where the member opposite is getting his numbers from. I have said time and time again that we found \$3 million per year in savings by moving to electronic renewal reminders. Registry agents, our partners in this effort, have taken an active and proactive role in reminding drivers when their licence and registration needs to be renewed. There are free services online. There are free services in the form of stickers on the back of your licence plate, that day by day Albertans can check.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Cyr: That's a shame. There's no answer. [interjections]

The Speaker: Move along, folks.

Mr. Cyr: Given that I am being flooded with complaints from local business owners, citizens, and registries who are frustrated with this government's continued downloading of costs and the costs associated with producing licence renewal notices and given the lack of understanding Alberta Justice has had regarding fines for failure to renew licences and that it appears the justification for ending direct mail-out reminders has evaporated, to the minister. The NDP government was able to find \$10 million to advertise for its carbon tax, yet it couldn't take . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms McLean: Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the member opposite is getting his information from. It's certainly not me. It's certainly not the government services that are funding all of the registry services that Albertans access. On this particular file he

clearly doesn't have the facts. He is clearly really off base on this. Frankly, I don't even know how to address the question because he didn't ask anything very clearly at all and the entire basis of his question was completely off base. I'm happy to have a conversation with the member opposite and to educate him a little bit on the issue.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. [interjections]
Hon. members.
Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you've spent \$870,000 in postage left over from the 2015-2016 budget and your full budget for 2016-2017 and now you're begging the House for a handout of \$900,000 to make it to the end of the month and that this questions the competency of your strategic planning from your financial services department and given that a few days ago during debate on supplementary supply the minister threatened that a lack of funds for postage would cause our most vulnerable Albertans to miss out on critical support payments, can the minister promise a full review of the postage use within Service Alberta to avoid this clear negligence happening within her ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Again, I would like to reiterate to the member opposite that that was a reprofiling of funds, not new funds for postage. Again, a deeper understanding of how the ministry works would edify the member across the way, letting him know that, in fact, Service Alberta charges other ministries back for postage used by them. The member opposite's proposal was to reduce our budget to \$1,000. Frankly, I don't know how he would expect us to mail out cheques to vulnerable Albertans with \$1,000 postage, but I'd really love to hear that proposal.

Thank you.

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

Parks Canada Film Permit Denial

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the studio behind the upcoming film *Hard Powder* sought to film in and around Banff and Jasper; however, Parks Canada denied them a permit largely because a character in the movie, a gang leader, is indigenous. Now, the actor involved, Canadian icon Tom Jackson, reviewed the script and wrote to Parks Canada indicating that he did not believe that the script was disrespectful. To the Culture and Tourism minister. Parks Canada has directly interfered with the film industry in Alberta. What assurances have you sought or received from the federal government that this will not happen again?

The Speaker: The minister of culture.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that the film industry does generate good jobs in our province and diversifies our economy. This project that the member is referring to is under federal jurisdiction, so they do have a process that they have to go through. We will continue supporting the industry in this province. I invite the member to also follow up with the federal contacts from within the federal parks who can actually provide the permits that are necessary for this project.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Starke: With respect, Minister, that's your job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this film would have added to a long list of movies that have been shot in Alberta, that make free-marketing opportunities for Alberta tourism, and given that the film's producer stated that the crew intended to spend some \$5 million in Banff and Jasper over the course of the shoot, boosting local industry, employing Alberta film crews, and showcasing Alberta to the world, again to this minister: were you aware of this issue, and if so, why have you allowed Parks Canada to take millions of dollars away from both our film industry and our tourism industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, this particular project is not within the jurisdiction that I can do anything about. What we have done is that we continue to provide the support to an industry that we know provides good-paying jobs to our province, making lives better for Albertans. That's exactly what we'll continue to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that rural municipal stakeholders would like to discuss this issue along with a litany of other concerns about supports for tourism and cultural industries in rural Alberta with the minister and given that the AAMD and C meeting is exactly the forum where this discussion should take place, again to the minister: will you commit to attending the ministerial forum at AAMD and C to hear this and other concerns from rural leaders, or will you be skipping it for the second time in a row?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of culture.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the former minister, who at the time, well, had not really provided the kind of leadership that we have seen these days in our province when it comes to culture and tourism, that every day I come to work, I come to make sure that we're supporting the people of this province with good-paying jobs, ensuring that we're supporting culture and tourism. It's something that this government has done, that I personally have done, and that I will continue to do going forward.

Thank you.

Strathcona Community Hospital

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, the residents of Sherwood Park were curious about the services that would be offered in the newly built Strathcona county community hospital. The former government had promised a full-service hospital but had not delivered. Residents raised concerns about the potential lack of in-patient beds. However, I now hear only great things about the hospital, its staff, and emergency services. To the Minister of Health: what other services are now available at the hospital?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for her important question. The services that are included at the facility are 24/7 emergency care, ambulatory care, CT scans as well as diagnostic lab and imaging, primary care, family medicine, and allied health supports, including a physical therapist, psychologist, speech language therapy, and rehabilitation services, Mr. Speaker. These are the kinds of front-line services that Albertans count on that certainly do make their lives better.

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Health. Given that I have met with the leadership of the hospital and have been impressed with the forward-thinking ways that they provide follow-up care, could the minister please elaborate on those innovative services, that I don't think exist in any other hospitals?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her question. I had the honour of touring this facility very early in my time as Health minister alongside both MLAs for the county, and I have to say that the work that's happening there is fantastic. One of the standout community partnerships that's at play there is the work with Castle foundation, which is for child and adolescent family mental health. It's connected to the hospital. The families and the facility are able to work in partnership to make sure that they have those supports that surround the students. I'm proud that our government has supported Castle with \$17 million to further complete a number of initiatives and this mental health unit as well and work in partnership to surround those families with the services that they rely on so desperately.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear stories all the time from constituents about how great the hospital is and especially how great it is to go to the emergency department and not have to wait for a very, very long time. I was wondering if I could ask the Minister of Health: how do the wait times at the Strathcona county community hospital emergency department compare to the other hospitals in the region?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, emergency wait times are some of the times when we are most concerned about making sure that we get access to those front-line health care professionals, and we take these matters very seriously, not just at her community hospital but at all hospitals. That's one of the reasons why we've been tracking these, making sure that they're available to the public. You can call 811 or check the AHS website at any time to find the wait times. I have to say that the wait time news at Strathcona county hospital is very good. Often it's the shortest wait time in the Edmonton zone, about an hour shorter than the next closest wait time. I encourage members to choose an opportunity to explore their facility if it will meet their health needs.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Agricultural Insurance Payments

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall the county of Brazeau declared an agricultural disaster when 70 per cent of the crops were left unharvested in the field. Now I have local farmers coming to me concerned that they will not receive their AFSC insurance payout in time for them to plan for and physically get in a crop this spring. Many believe that they will need that payout by April 15 if they are to put in a crop. Will the minister ensure that

farmers across Alberta will receive their insurance payouts in time to put in a crop this spring?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I understand the hardships that the farmers have gone through last year with the early snow. I live in a county just next door to Brazeau, and I understand absolutely what's going on there. I have good news there. The AFSC has already paid out the vast majority of payments that are needed. If the member has particular constituents that are still waiting and have some concerns, I encourage them to get hold of me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Given that many farmers have purchased insurance through AFSC with the understanding that the insurance payouts would be made in time to cover losses and to continue to farm and given that so many are concerned they will not receive their insurance money in time to put in a crop and given that many believe that they are already battling the elements and they don't need to battle the government, too, why would a farmer in my riding continue to purchase crop insurance through AFSC when it does not work for them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The fact is that the AFSC suite of programs is well subscribed to by producers right across the province. They recognize the value that those products have. This government will continue and I will continue to support those Alberta farmers, as AFSC does, and look forward to having the good work that they continue to do. It is also true, as I said earlier, that AFSC has paid out the vast majority of those claims. If a member has constituents that are concerned, I encourage them to get hold of me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers and ranchers whose cattle became infected by TB were compensated in a timely fashion and that they were able to continue their operations largely uninterrupted and given that other Albertans have suffered devastating losses from emergencies and received compensation without losing business or income and since farmers in the Brazeau county are facing a very real crisis if they do not receive their insurance monies in time to get a crop, will these hard-working Albertan farmers be able to access AgriRecovery and carry on their operations this spring?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I already have said, the AFSC has done a great job. Inspectors were out. They were working extra hours to make sure that those counties that had the early snow last year, the high-moisture content, were getting their claims in. I understand that there are only two farmers that have yet to be assessed, and the vast majority of those payments are out. You know, we're still early in the year. There's still snow out there. If these producers are concerned about getting their payments before seeding is started, I encourage them to get hold of the AFSC office or my office.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Trampoline Safety

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January a young man from Spruce Grove sustained a very serious spinal cord injury while using equipment at a local trampoline park. The media attention that this incident attracted revealed that every day in Alberta an average of four children land in emergency rooms as a result of trampoline-related injuries. Anything that sends 1,400 Alberta children to hospital each year is surely worth our attention. To the Minister of Health: what action have you taken to address the growing issue of trampoline safety in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, any time the life of anyone is impacted through an accident that could have been prevented, I think we do owe it to look at ways that we might be able to support those families after the circumstance but also consider ways that we might be able to work to provide either education or opportunities for people to be informed about ways that they could change and reduce risk. I'd be happy to follow up with the member opposite if he would like to schedule a meeting to receive some more information from him and other organizations that he thinks might be worth pursuing further conversations with.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the latest serious injury occurred at a specialized recreation facility and given that there's currently no legislation governing these facilities, nor are there any regulatory requirements for staff training, minimum supervision levels, or even basic safety protocols, to the minister: can you tell the House and all Albertans how your government plans to address these inadequacies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is in partnership, in partnership with members from the other side who want to work with us as well as with members from the community. Once again, I'm very pleased to be able to find ways that we can improve lives for Alberta families, whether it's finding ways to increase safety for their children, for themselves, or for the workers, who I'm sure were also traumatized by the incident. I think this is something worth us having further conversations on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the majority of these injuries sustained by Alberta children do not happen in these facilities but, rather, on backyard trampolines and given that injuries include everything from sprains and broken bones to spinal cord and traumatic head injuries and even death, to the same minister: do you see any merit in developing provincial regulations to govern safety as it relates to backyard trampolines?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, I spent many a summer on trampolines, as a child mostly, and continue to watch children enjoy them throughout our communities. I think it's important that we do provide opportunities for them to engage in that activity, but I am open to recommendations and look forward to considering options in partnership with all members of this House if it comes to that

point. Obviously, education is one piece, and I think that it's important for us to have opportunities in public forums like this today to talk about some of the risks that are involved. So thank you to the member for the question.

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

Drinking Water Quality in Indigenous Communities

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a disproportionate number of indigenous communities are currently under a boil-water advisory, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: how is this government working to provide clean water to these communities regardless of the jurisdictional boundaries?

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I also want to acknowledge your ongoing support and work in the indigenous community and your advocacy. As we committed to in the throne speech, our government is working with First Nations and the federal government in a tripartite relationship to address this very critical need for access to clean drinking water and fulfilling our commitment to the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We look forward to learning more about that later today.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that First Nations across Alberta like the Alexander First Nation in the wonderful constituency of Spruce Grove-St. Albert deserve to have the same access to clean water as any other Canadian, to the same minister: has this government spoken to the federal Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs about this important issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I very much appreciate this question. I have indeed spent quite a bit of time with the federal minister, perhaps a dozen times over the last year, and most recently spoke with Minister Bennett at the fifth national indigenous summit, that was held in Toronto last week, and have obtained a commitment from her and she from me to work together to resolve this critical issue and to move forward in working with all of the First Nations in this province and to do what we all expect, and that is to provide clean drinking water for citizens of this province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The problem of clean drinking water on reserves has gone on for far too long. When will indigenous communities finally see progress and drinkable water on their reserves?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have indicated before, we've been working with all of the parties involved in a tripartite relationship, which is, frankly, quite new for this province, to actually work with everyone together. We are very proud of the fact that we are moving forward on this, and I encourage everyone to pay special attention to the budget today so that we can speak about this more in the future.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Buffalo Rubbing Stone School Opening

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last May I dedicated a member's statement to the buffalo rubbing stone landmark in Calgary-Northern Hills and the school it inspired. Prior to the opening of Buffalo Rubbing Stone school students attended Panorama Hills school and Alex Munro school in Huntington Hills. Attendance at both schools exceeded capacity. Cathy Turner, future principal of Buffalo Rubbing Stone school, was already working in these schools to meet students and build relationships with teachers.

On September 26, 2016, Buffalo Rubbing Stone school opened for the first time to give families a sneak peek at their new school. Principal Turner said that her favourite moments were watching the parents and kids, because it was their school, and everyone was so excited. As Principal Turner pointed out, when cities sprawl, we need schools in the outskirt neighbourhoods. After Buffalo Rubbing Stone school opened, 11 bus routes were cancelled, with students now able to walk or bike to their own neighbourhood school. Class sizes at all three area schools were reduced to an average of 22 students per class.

Buffalo Rubbing Stone school officially opened February 9, 2017, and the opening ceremonies were attended by hundreds of children and their parents along with Calgary board of education superintendent of schools David Stevenson; Calgary board area director Darlene Unruh; two Calgary board trustees, Lynn Ferguson and Joy Bowen-Eyre; and Elder Randy Bottle, or Saa'kokoto in Blackfoot. During the ceremony Elder Bottle spoke of the importance of the buffalo rubbing stone and its location in the Blackfoot territory and the herd of majestic bison that once roamed the area. Elder Bottle described how the Blackfoot regarded the bison as the ruler of the plains and a source of food and life for Nitsitapi peoples.

After Elder Bottle's inspiring speech, the kindergarten students showed a video they had made about their expectations for the new school, but in a disappointed tone they said: there ain't no buffalo here. Although the herds of bison have vanished . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Immigrants in Rural Alberta

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important to tell and celebrate the rural Alberta immigrant story. It's a positive story for central and rural Alberta, that has brought economic vitality, rich cultural diversity, and remembrance of our own immigrant roots.

First, let me mention the many Dutch immigrants in Lacombe-Ponoka. They own the majority of the dairy and chicken farms as well as greenhouses and field farms. In my past work as a rural pastor I personally welcomed around 100 new immigrants into our small country community. Many of these were Filipinos who were asked by employers to come, and they came at a time when there were no available Canadians to fill the jobs. The majority of rural immigrant workers are skilled or semiskilled and so are not just temporary. They came, wrote trade certification exams, received permanent resident status, brought their families, and today are contributing members of Alberta society.

Rural employers sought families because they value family and sought long-term commitment from stable employees. Families were helped with housing, furniture, ESL, trade-ticket preparation,

immigration, and cultural adaptation. Learning the Canadian rules of driving was one of the challenges. In return, employers got committed, skilled workers with good work ethics and personal morality.

The locals in the peaceful countryside have welcomed their new inhabitants. They work hard. They bought homes, even started businesses, and are strong contributors to our local economy. Employers paid the cost for workers. Churches, through private sponsorship, have brought refugees, providing homes, cars, and community all by donation. Individuals, like a 23-year-old Lacombe resident, donated one year of a house rent-free to a Syrian family. I believe Lacombe will soon have five refugee families, four Syrian and one Eritrean. Most immigrants to rural areas have chosen to stay. They feel welcome, and affordability is better than in urban areas.

Our immigrants are first-class people making a first-class contribution. That is why I celebrate them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a document to which I referred during debate this morning titled Canadian Blood Services Says Paid Plasma Clinics Are Harming Voluntary Donations.

The Speaker: The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. First I table the requisite number of copies of the monograph from Health Canada entitled Round Table Discussion on Payment of Plasma Donors in Canada – Summary Report.

My second tabling is the requisite five copies of a document I referred to during debate on Bill 2, entitled The Cruelty Connection: The Relationships between Animal Cruelty, Child Abuse and Domestic Violence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an article I referred to yesterday when I was speaking in support of Bill 2. It is from the February 3 edition of the *Globe and Mail*, an article by Robyn Doolittle called Unfounded: Why Police Dismiss 1 in 5 Sexual Assault Claims as Baseless.

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the spring 2017 budget main estimates schedule that was developed in consultation with House leaders as per Standing Order 59.01(3).

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table. The first one is regarding inventories for resale of postage. The Minister of Service Alberta can dispute my qualities as an accountant, but she can't actually dispute the facts.

The fact is that this next one I will be tabling is that Service Alberta had . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we talked about editorializing. Get to the point.

Mr. Cyr: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta had proudly announced that they'd save 41,000 trees, and I guess they stayed the execution to 2016-2017.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, responses to questions raised by Mr. Cyr, hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake; Mr. Clark, hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow; Mr. Orr, hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka; Mr. Hinkley, hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose; and Mr. Eilis, hon. Member for Calgary-West, on the May 2, 2016, Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General main estimates debate.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was a point of order that was raised yesterday that I said I would review, and I'd like to address that item now.

2:50

A point of order was raised yesterday by the Official Opposition House Leader with respect to a statement that the Minister of Energy made during Oral Question Period. I've had the chance to now review *Alberta Hansard* to determine what the minister said. In the minister's response to a question posed by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek she said, "The opposition continues to mislead this House and indeed Albertans for their own political gain." The minister's remarks can be found on page 303 of *Alberta Hansard* from March 15, 2017.

The Official Opposition House Leader in his arguments referenced a number of rulings made in this Assembly in which he argues that it was concluded that "mislead" and its various grammatical forms is unparliamentary. These arguments are found on pages 305 and 306 of yesterday's *Alberta Hansard*.

I would note for members that the entire phrase uttered by the Minister of Energy was: "The opposition continues to mislead this House." Hon. members, there are, in fact, a number of rulings on the terms "mislead," "misleading" and so on. Members may refer to Speaker Kowalski's rulings on April 12, 2011, found on pages 607 to 608 of the *Alberta Hansard* for that day, on June 4, 2008, on page 1212, and on April 26, 2005, on pages 1035 to 1036.

More relevant to the point of order before us now, on February 22, 1995, Speaker Schumacher encountered a very similar situation. In his ruling Speaker Schumacher indicated that the member against whom a point of order was raised did not use "mislead" in relation to an individual member of the Assembly. Instead, the member used the expression "in the corporate sense by accusing the government and not any particular member of the government of misleading the Assembly." Speaker Schumacher concluded that because of the context in which the word was used, he could not find the expression unparliamentary. This ruling is found on page 125 of the *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

On April 7, 2005, Speaker Kowalski ruled on the use of the term "misled." Quoting from the first edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* he stated: "Expressions which are considered unparliamentary when applied to an individual Member have not always been considered so when applied 'in a generic sense' or to

a party.” The entire ruling can be found on page 624 of the *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

In the instance before the Assembly now, the same observation made by my predecessors may also be made here. The Minister of Energy referenced the opposition and not a member in her response to the question. Therefore, in this particular case, as in the instances I have cited, I find no point of order.

I believe there were three other points of order today. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is in reference to section 23(j), when a member “uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.”

I don’t have the benefit of the Blues in front of me, Mr. Speaker, but I believe that the language that was used was something along the lines of: I don’t need a member from the opposition mansplaining the electric system to me. I would have to say that this clearly caused disorder and is insulting. When the Minister of Education speaks in a condescending tone to me, should I also call it mansplaining?

I do not believe in any way that this is helpful or constructive in this House. I would request that the Minister of Energy withdraw her comment and apologize to the member.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order. I can tell you a couple of different things. Number one, I will read the dictionary definition of mansplaining. “To comment on or explain something to a woman in a condescending, overconfident, and often inaccurate or oversimplified manner.” I’m doing this for the benefit of all the men in this room. The Energy minister felt that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was talking to her in a very condescending manner, explaining things that in her role as the Minister of Energy she’s very well briefed on.

I do want to mention that mansplaining is not an unparliamentary word either here in Alberta or in Ottawa. I want to point out the fact that in the *Hansard* of the House of Commons, actually, the MP for Lakeland, Shannon Stubbs, used the term “mansplain,” for which there was no point of order in Ottawa.

Therefore, this is no point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I can tell you that I have certainly learned and heard a lot of words in this House that I’ve never heard before. I also relearned – I knew this, but it came back to me when I was dealing with the point of order that I dealt with just now – that, in fact, in 2012 this House agreed that the catalogue of words that were not acceptable in this Assembly would no longer be maintained. I heard a couple of questions and exchanges today about saving trees. I suspect that may have been one of the reasons why they determined that the list was not necessary, because many, many, many trees may have been destroyed as a result of the dialogue in this room. There seems to be a desire also to set down this list of words, and then they can be used to say: well, you can’t say that, you can’t say that. It’s almost an impossible task, it seems to me.

I can only judge in this particular instance on the basis that – and I do have the Blues – the statement was: “I do not need people from the other side mansplaining to me about electricity.” This may well not be a formal point of order, but I would say to the hon. minister that it did have a reaction on the opposite side. I would ask that in

the future you avoid this because it’s quite obvious that that particular matter caused considerable disruption in the House.

The second point of order, I think, was raised by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the second point of order today, where at approximately 2:16, mere moments after my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View raised a point of order, that you have so appropriately dealt with, the minister of the environment very clearly across the bow called my colleague a snowflake.

I would just like to provide some context around the word “snowflake.” While I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that there may have been people who have used this sort of language not fully understanding all of the context, I’d like to provide some for you today and then encourage all members of this Chamber – all members of this Chamber – to refrain from doing so in the future. In Missouri in the early 1860s a “snowflake” was a person who was opposed to the abolition of slavery, the implication of the name being that such people valued white people over black people. The “snowflake” hoped slavery would survive in the country’s civil war, and there were contrasts with two other groups. Now I recognize that this language, the word “snowflake,” has been used in various forms throughout time, but the origins of “snowflake” are certainly not positive.

3:00

What we’re seeing, Mr. Speaker, is that this cabinet is putting together a string of insults directed at the opposition. We saw one that was apologized for earlier this week. We’ve seen “Chicken Little,” we’ve seen “xenophobes,” and now today we see “snowflake.” I would hope that the minister would be pleased to withdraw and apologize for the comment. We can all move forward. I hope that in the future members of the government will refrain from hurling insults at the opposition, which sometimes can be viewed as hurling insults at Albertans.

The Speaker: Before I allow the Deputy Government House Leader to speak, I want to remind members that we have a very important event to deal with at 3:15, and we are now past 3 o’clock.

How long would your comments be, hon. member?

Mr. Bilous: Not too long, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It might be really short. If you could make it, it might solve this matter.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. However, when I was still teaching and I said to my students “I’ll be brief,” they all knew that meant 10 to 15 minutes.

I just want to begin by saying, Mr. Speaker, that I do appreciate what the Opposition House Leader is saying. I want to begin by mentioning that I believe both sides of the House have had numerous incidents of saying things that maybe they want to take back, words that may have caused disorder in this House. I don’t think anyone believes that only one side is guilty of this, so I would like to remind the opposition that when they make similar types of comments that cause disorder on this side of the House, it is also equally applicable to causing disorder and causing Albertans to be unhappy.

Now, having said that, on behalf of the Minister of Environment and Parks I would like to apologize to the member and the opposition for that comment and would like it withdrawn.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Let me remind you yet again – you don't want to hear this – that the responsibility rests, yes, with this chair but also individually with each of you.

In order to allow adequate time to prepare for the Budget Address by the hon. President of Treasury Board – I'm sorry. I should have been more clear.

Go ahead.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I trust we can deal with this extremely expeditiously. I rise in reference to section 23.

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

For the sake of time I will not quote from (h) and (i).

The hon. Member for Calgary-West, with extensive formal training and teaching experience in his previous profession, in which he's very respected, in addition to years of real-life experience and expertise, did extensive research with a lawyer who is an expert in constitutional law. He asked an extremely important question of the Justice minister. Instead of answering the question, the minister made a personal attack. First, she said that she didn't know where he got his law degree from, which begs the question: will the minister only answer to lawyers? Her job is to answer questions of duly elected MLAs, who ask questions on behalf of Albertans, and that's exactly what the hon. member was in the process of doing before this happened.

It got worse at that moment, Mr. Speaker. The minister went on to tell the hon. member: I think he needs to go back to school. Now, this is insulting not only to the member but to all members of this House and, by extension, all Albertans, especially those who deserve an answer to this question, including all those who are extremely concerned about racism. We've had comments from the government on how important that is this week alone.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time this type of insult has been hurled from the NDP benches to our side of the House. You can ask the hon. Member from Calgary-Greenway all about that if he chooses to rise. Other references this morning – we had a meeting on decorum in this House.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're dealing with the specific point.

Mr. Rodney: Yes, I am.

This afternoon the member . . .

The Speaker: In light of the time, just get to this example because I think there might be . . .

Mr. Rodney: I am in the process, sir. I need . . .

The Speaker: Sir, wait. You must listen. I think there is an expeditious way of dealing with it if you could get to it. Please finish.

Mr. Rodney: Yes. That's what I'm doing, sir.

This afternoon the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster made a member's statement calling for an increase in respect in this Chamber and beyond. Yesterday I tweeted the following: the minister was wrong in her comment . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, could you speak to this and expedite this matter, please?

Please be seated, sir.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, emotions are running somewhat high in the House at this time. As a lawyer I obviously have deep feelings about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I feel very strongly that it's a deep and important thing, and I felt that perhaps the member was incorrect in his statement. It was inappropriate to take that a step further, as I did do. Obviously, I am required to answer to everyone in this House. I have a great deal of respect for the Member for Calgary-West and his commitment to serving the people of Alberta. I apologize and withdraw the comment.

The Speaker: And thus, hon. member, because of the time factor, that's why I gave the minister the opportunity.

Accordingly, to prepare for the Budget Address by the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, let us recess until 3:15, and I trust that 3:15 will still accomplish the task.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:06 p.m. to 3:18 p.m.]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Orders of the Day Transmittal of Estimates

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

The Speaker: Please rise. The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2017-18 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2017-18 government estimates. In addition, Mr. Speaker, I also wish to table the 2017-2020 government of Alberta strategic plan and the Budget 2017 ministry business plans.

3:20

Government Motions

Budget Address

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the government's Budget 2017 fiscal plan and move Government Motion 13.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 land.

I am pleased to present Budget 2017. Budget 2017 is about making life better for everyday Albertans. Jobs, affordability, protecting the services that families count on: these are Albertans' priorities. These are your government's priorities.

Let me begin by thanking Albertans for their input. I traveled from one end of this province to the other listening to their thoughts on this budget. So did my colleagues. Here's what we heard. Families want us to help create and protect jobs. Families want our government to keep investing in long overdue repairs and modernizations of our schools and hospitals, and they want us to keep improving our roads and highways. They want us to make things more affordable and bring the deficit down thoughtfully and prudently. Budget 2017 is aimed squarely at addressing those priorities. As a result, Alberta will recover from this downturn with a stronger, more resilient economy. Alberta will recover with good schools and hospitals because this time Alberta families have a government that is in their corner. On this side of the House we are going to stay in their corner.

Mr. Speaker, when the oil price shock hit our economy, Albertans were faced with a choice. Some said and still say that government should make deep cuts to public services such as health care and education. Some wanted to implement a health care tax that would have hurt families who could least afford it. Families would have been forced to pay more and get less with longer health care waitlists, overcrowded emergency rooms, much bigger class sizes, and lost jobs. That's why our government made a different choice. We stayed focused, and we are executing a plan to diversify our economy and help families through the downturn.

We're not out of the woods yet – far from it – but there are hopeful economic signs, what I refer to as green shoots. This year we expect our economy to grow by 2.6 per cent, the highest in Canada. That estimate is more conservative than some such as the Conference Board of Canada's, that predicts economic growth of 2.8 per cent. Either way, it's clear. Alberta's economy is set to grow. Our energy industry is on a more solid footing, drilling is increasing, with twice the number of rigs active compared to this time last year, and jobs are starting to come back: 19,000 since last July. Of course, the global economy remains volatile. Energy prices have stayed lower for longer. At the same time our population continues to grow. These factors have combined to put additional pressures on our social services.

Budget 2017 reflects that reality. Our commitment to have the backs of Albertans through these tough times remains unwavering, as is our commitment to continue to bring down the deficit thoughtfully and prudently. This year we are forecasting our deficit to decline to \$10.3 billion, half a billion dollars less than last year's budget deficit. Growth in government spending remains well below many of the increases of past governments. We are keeping spending growth lower than the combined rate of inflation and population growth. Our debt-to-GDP ratio is the lowest among provinces.

Bringing the deficit down requires us to consistently bring down the growth in government spending. We froze management salaries for agencies, boards, and commissions and launched a review of salary rates. A few weeks ago our government cut the salaries of some of the highest-paid CEOs at government agencies and got rid of golf club memberships and other perks that were accepted practice in the past. That one step will save nearly \$16 million a year.

We are also bringing down the rate of health spending growth while protecting patient care. We engaged Alberta's doctors in constructive discussions and signed a new agreement that saves up

to \$500 million over two years. We amalgamated or cut 26 agencies, boards, and commissions. We froze salaries for politicians, political staff, and management in the civil service. We reduced salaries and supplies last year to the tune of \$121 million. We streamlined programs such as Alberta Innovates and community partnership grants and suspended other nonessential programs. As a result, we found more than half a billion dollars of in-year savings and decreases in ministry expenses over the last two years, and we will continue to find more savings this year.

As important as it is to cut waste and reduce the growth of government spending, it is critical that through this downturn we remain focused on supporting families. That starts with creating and supporting good jobs. In last year's budget we launched the Alberta jobs plan, aimed at diversifying our economy and creating good jobs. The jobs plan is built on four key pillars: first, investing in infrastructure; next, supporting families and communities; then diversifying our energy industry; and last, diversifying our economy and supporting Alberta businesses. The jobs plan is doing its work. The economy is stabilizing, and jobs are beginning to return. Now is not the time to let our steady hand waiver.

As our economy recovers, we'll continue to bring down the deficit to balance, and we will do so without sacrificing the supports and services families need. We will remain focused on these fundamental priorities and help all Albertans weather this storm. That's our focus. That's our plan. This year we will continue to build on the jobs plan to make life better for everyday families.

Mr. Speaker, our kids deserve schools that are modern, safe, and equipped to prepare them for a great future. Right now we're dealing with issues of overcrowding and buildings that have been allowed to fall into disrepair. In some schools there's water damage and obsolete heating systems. In others roofs sag and the cold winter winds seep through aging window frames. That's not right. The decision to fix those issues for our kids shouldn't be dependent on oil price decisions made half a world away. Our kids deserve better, much better.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2017 includes funding for 24 new and modernized schools. From Airdrie to Bonnyville, Banff to Drayton Valley, Lethbridge to Grande Prairie, and in many, many more communities across Alberta our government is building and modernizing schools, improving the things that make a real difference in the lives of Alberta families. Calgary will see five new schools approved, and Edmonton will see four, with design work to be done on a fifth. Not only will these new schools help our kids get a better education, but because of our government's reductions to a range of mandatory school fees, it will cost less for parents to send their kids to a great public school.

3:30

We will also invest in new health care facilities. When we took office, glaring infrastructure issues in health care needed fixing. Here's an example. There's a bus in Lac La Biche where people have been forced for years to get their dialysis treatment. The bus doesn't move, which is odd for a bus. The reason this dialysis bus doesn't move: the wheels have literally come off. It just sits there, in a parking lot, up on blocks. Sometimes the power in the bus goes because the electricity link between the bus and the hospital isn't all that great, and when it's really cold out, dialysis care gets cancelled altogether. Families in the area have said for years that this is no way to be treated. They shouldn't have to trudge out into the cold, then climb up on a bus with no wheels. Mr. Speaker, we agree with those families. It isn't right.

The fact that it remained this way through the last oil boom is an insult to rural Albertans. Patients deserve better, and that's why we are fixing this problem, with construction work on a proper new

dialysis unit beginning this month. When our loved ones are sick, they deserve to be treated as close to home as possible, and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2017 moves forward on much-needed repairs, renovations, and modernizations of health facilities across the province and builds new hospitals that are long overdue.

In our first budget we ended all the dithering over the obvious need for a new cancer centre in Calgary. Families in Calgary and southern Alberta need that new facility, not a fresh round of excuses for why now is not the time. Construction continues this year on that crucial new facility.

In the same way that the cancer building in Calgary can't wait, this year we will move forward on necessary health infrastructure in Edmonton. Despite significant population growth in Alberta's capital a new hospital hasn't been built in Edmonton for more than a generation. Families can't wait any longer. The need is there, and it's growing. As a result of planning started last year, this year we are dedicating additional funds to get a new hospital built in Edmonton; \$400 million will be dedicated over the next four years to help turn those plans into reality.

While that new hospital is being built, we will invest in necessary upgrades and modernizations to the Misericordia community hospital to make sure it is able to handle more patients and care for them properly. This year new funding will be dedicated towards the Misericordia, including funds to build a modern new emergency department. Again, this work is long overdue and can't wait any longer.

While we tackle those urgent needs, we will continue to upgrade and increase public long-term care spaces, making further progress towards our commitment to build 2,000 long-term care beds across the province. In Calgary we will get to work on a new and much-needed long-term care facility. This facility will have 200 beds and will be designed to make sure people with complex care needs such as Alzheimer's and dementia get the safest, best care possible. At the Norwood Capital Care facility in Edmonton work will begin on new and renovated space to accommodate 350 enhanced long-term care beds, offering patients and families a broad range of support programs and services.

Necessary investments will also be made to better support child and adolescent mental health services at the Royal Alexandra hospital and the Glenrose rehabilitation hospital campus. These investments will create safer and healthier environments for patients, their families, and staff.

And after years of on-again, off-again funding promises, followed by the wildfire, work on the Willow Square long-term care facility in Fort McMurray is back on track and will continue this year.

In addition to these necessary investments in hospitals and long-term care homes, we are going to keep renovating and expanding hospitals, health centres, care homes, and health infrastructure across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, just as our modern and highly industrialized province needs great schools and hospitals to help families thrive, so too does it need highways and bridges to get people and goods where they need to be efficiently and safely. Budget 2017 will put more Albertans to work through necessary investments in our highways, bridges, and public transit.

Families in Fort Saskatchewan have been clear that the current highways and bridges in the area don't have enough capacity. The area has grown substantially over the last couple of decades, and more needs to be done to ease traffic congestion and help get people where they need to be. For this reason, we are going to twin the highway 15 bridge, which is the only river crossing in the area. Planning and design work will begin this year. This investment will

reduce travel times in the area and improve routes between Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, and the Industrial Heartland.

As well, together with the federal government and the city of Edmonton we have committed to a historic agreement to transform the Yellowhead highway through Edmonton, making sure this essential route is faster, safer, and able to support future growth and increased industry traffic.

We are also partnering with the city of Calgary to make sure that Deerfoot Trail is able to accommodate new and growing communities in the south, with a new interchange to be built in the southeast at 212 Avenue.

We will continue to work to improve public transit across the province. Also, this year we look forward to working with both the cities of Calgary and Edmonton to further develop their LRT projects.

In Alberta's north we will continue to make sure families and industry have the infrastructure they need to get around as safely and efficiently as possible. Last year we funded a new bridge in Peace River, an essential project to connect residents to schools and hospitals and connect critical transportation routes for industry in the area. The tender for this new bridge work will be awarded this year. Also this year, to improve life for families and to make sure loggers, oil sands workers, and agricultural producers have safe and efficient routes, we are going to replace the highway 813 bridge near Athabasca.

To make life better for indigenous communities, this year we are partnering with the federal government to make sure every household on a First Nation in Alberta has access to a clean and reliable source of drinking water. For Alberta's part we will invest \$100 million to integrate existing drinking water systems with federally supported water systems. By building these links between communities, we can end the long-standing and shameful number of boil-water advisories on First Nations and make important progress towards fulfilling our commitment to the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

In Red Deer we will rectify the community's long-standing concerns regarding the lack of appropriate courtroom space. Court space is so tight in Red Deer that some proceedings have been forced to take place in a local hotel. Community leaders have been clear that building a proper new courthouse is a major priority for their area. The previous government failed to act on this urgent and well-known priority. We won't repeat that mistake. This year we are going to get to work on building a new courthouse in Red Deer.

3:40

Another long-standing issue that cannot wait any longer to be fixed is the need for a new Provincial Operations Centre, or POC. During the Wood Buffalo wildfires, flooding in southern Alberta, and wildfires in Slave Lake Albertans saw first-hand how critical the POC is. It's a 24/7 hub of life-saving emergency management and disaster response. The women and men who staff our POC have done an amazing job managing in the aging and confined space from which they currently operate, but they need a better-designed, modern new space to manage future incidents and disasters. This year we'll improve our ability to respond to major emergencies and disasters by getting to work on a new and badly needed Provincial Operations Centre.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2017 also puts Albertans to work building and renovating affordable homes for seniors and families. All Albertans need this basic level of security in their lives, the security of knowing they have a roof over their heads, a warm place to sleep, study, and build a better life for themselves and the people they love. While some may use economic downturns as an excuse to gut public services and turn their backs on families who need help the

most, we won't. Budget 2017 builds badly needed affordable homes for Alberta seniors and families and continues to make long overdue repairs to existing housing.

Historically this is an area of the budget that has been starved for resources, which meant some units got really run down. There were units that were forced to close altogether because the foundations were so badly cracked. Others have leaky roofs, windows that won't open, and aging and unreliable heating systems. Families deserve better. Homes should be safe and comfortable. This year we will continue to build and modernize affordable homes and seniors' lodges in cities and towns across the province, from Clairmont to Fort Macleod, from Cold Lake to Canmore. Some of these communities will see new housing facilities built to replace old units while others will see expansions and renovations to make them better and safer for seniors and families.

Work that will get the green light this year includes at least 50 units of a seniors' lodge in Barrhead, 64 units of community housing in Leduc, 144 seniors' lodge units in Sherwood Park, and 132 affordable housing spaces in Banff. In the Londonderry community of Edmonton 220 affordable mixed-income units will be built while 24 units of supportive housing will be built in Calgary for people struggling with substance use. Affordable housing, help for families who need it most, and more good jobs: another key way Budget 2017 helps make life better.

Mr. Speaker, the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline along with the approval of line 3 is helping to recharge investment in our oil and gas industry. The failures of previous governments to get new pipelines approved to Canada's coast set our province back. We lost revenue. We lost jobs. We lost investment. Investors the world over were starting to think Alberta and Canada couldn't get their act together. Working families shouldn't have to choose between making a good living and protecting the environment for our kids and future generations. Getting a Canadian pipeline built to a Canadian coast is the best way for our world-class energy producers to sell our resources at world-class prices. That's exactly what we want, a better deal for our industry and the stability of our economy.

As was said in the throne speech, we won't celebrate until the first drop of oil leaves the Canadian coast from a new pipeline. Our work is far from done. That's why our government will continue to work respectfully and collaboratively with indigenous communities, provinces, and the federal government to do what previous federal and provincial governments couldn't: get a new pipeline built to the coast and break the landlock that's held Alberta back.

Mr. Speaker, while we diversify our energy markets, we need to do more to diversify our entire economy. Last year we launched the petrochemical diversification program, which leverages \$500 million in royalty credits to support nearly \$6 billion in new private investment in Alberta.

We will take further steps to diversify and strengthen other parts of our economy. Business leaders and innovators have told us that access to capital is key. That's why we extended capital to Alberta companies through ATB Financial and AIMCo. Through AIMCo \$185 million in new investments in Alberta business have been made, and ATB Financial has provided more than \$795 million in loans to nearly 3,500 small and mid-sized Alberta businesses.

In addition to expanding access to capital, new tax credits are helping to drive new investments in Alberta. The capital investment tax credit and the Alberta investor tax credit are in full operation and helping Alberta businesses grow and create jobs. Our government also cut taxes on small businesses by a third. We now have the second-lowest small-business tax rate in Canada. This year we will continue to identify opportunities to help drive innovation

and create jobs, especially in the areas of clean technology, health innovation, and value-added agriculture.

The Alberta small-brewery grant program is creating jobs and driving new investments. This year we are going to build on the success of our craft brewing program and work to model a similar program for Alberta's craft distillers. We'll also make more money available through the aboriginal business investment fund to help indigenous businesses and job creators grow and thrive. Taken together, these grants, credits, and investments in Alberta businesses create good jobs, help to strengthen and diversify our economy, and set our province's future on a stronger, more stable footing.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2017 maintains Alberta's huge tax advantage over all Canadian provinces. We have no sales tax, no payroll tax. The previous government wanted to saddle Albertans with an expensive health care tax. That would have meant thousands of dollars in new and unavoidable charges for families. We immediately scrapped that bad idea. Alberta has an \$8.7 billion tax advantage over British Columbia, a \$9 billion tax advantage over Saskatchewan, and a \$13.4 billion tax advantage over Ontario. Alberta is and always will be a great place to do business and raise a family.

But affordability doesn't begin and end with taxes. We have to do more by addressing the day-to-day costs that hit Albertans the hardest. Back home in Calgary, when I'm chatting with my neighbours and constituents, they tell me that school fees are way too high. For years families have said that enough is enough, yet school fees continued to grow. The previous government stood by and watched as costs for parents piled up every September. Mr. Speaker, that's just not right. By the start of the next school year school fees for families will be cut by 25 per cent. We will cover the cost of these reduced school fees entirely through efficiencies to be found from within the existing provincial budget.

Starting this fall, no Alberta family will be required to pay for textbooks, workbooks, printing, and paper costs incurred by their schools. We will also reduce fees charged to students who ride the bus more than 2.4 kilometres to their designated school. We believe families will save more than \$50 million. For a family in Calgary with three kids, this change could save them over \$1,000 every fall. Budget 2017 makes this possible. It will also make a university and college education more affordable for Alberta students. This year's budget increases support scholarships, provide more grants, expand funds for apprenticeship training, and make student loans more accessible.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, this year our government will help families improve the energy efficiency of their homes and save money. Earlier this month we invited Albertans to go online and sign up to have an energy efficiency technician come to their home and install a range of new energy efficient items from smart thermostats to high-efficiency lighting. The demand surpassed everyone's expectation. In the first 24 hours following the launch of Energy Efficiency Alberta's website, nearly 17,000 households signed up. That's grown to almost 70,000 households. We are now expecting that over 100,000 households will sign up this year. As a result, we will expand the availability of this hugely popular program to help meet this pent-up demand for energy efficiency in Alberta's households.

New programs, rebates, and incentives are on their way for homeowners, renters, municipalities, businesses, and nonprofits. Electricity rates will be capped this year to protect Albertans from the volatile price swings they saw under the previous government. We will expand our ban of door-to-door energy sales to better protect Albertans from scams, fraud, and bad deals.

Mr. Speaker, we are also helping families who need help the most. Every person in this House can agree that no child should go to school hungry or without the essentials, like a warm coat when it's cold outside. The Alberta child benefit program is one of the most significant antipoverty measures introduced by our government, perhaps one of the most significant in a generation. Budget 2017 continues this benefit, which provides support to Alberta's most vulnerable families and hundreds of thousands of Alberta's children.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2017 also helps families by keeping our commitment to provide long-term, stable funding for health care. Our health care system must meet the needs of our changing population. This year new investments will be made to better provide health care options in the community, improve home care, and expand mental health services. One in five Albertans is affected by mental health issues, and it is estimated that over 10 per cent of Albertans will need substance use treatment at some point in their lives. Mental health and substance use is the first key area we are focusing on to make community-based health care better for Alberta's families. This includes better co-ordination of services among hospitals, treatment facilities, and the community and ensuring Albertans can get the services they need as close to home as possible.

The same goes for home care. New funding this year will focus on making it safer and more sustainable for seniors to live healthy, independent lives. This will reduce pressures on our hospitals and long-term care facilities while making sure that we are doing everything we can to help seniors remain exactly where they want to be: in their homes.

Just as we are providing stable funding for health care, we are doing the same for education. Mr. Speaker, education is one of the most important investments we can make in our future. In a fast-changing world we owe it to every young Albertan to give them the tools they need to realize their dreams. We are fulfilling our commitment to fund enrolment growth, maintain a stable teacher workforce, and cut fees to make life more affordable. Alberta's kids deserve no less.

Once they graduate from high school, we are making sure that there is a place for them in Alberta's colleges, institutes, and universities. These institutions of learning provide our province with extraordinary economic advantages. They are turning research into new companies and new jobs. They are attracting some of the best talent from around the world, and they contribute to our rich cultural fabric. Most of all, they provide Albertans an opportunity to get a world-class postsecondary education right here at home. Budget 2017 provides for a base operating grant increase to institutions of 2 per cent per year. Providing stable postsecondary funding allows us to increase student loans and freeze tuitions.

Mr. Speaker, we said that we were going to do more to help Alberta's youngest and most vulnerable kids, and that's exactly what Budget 2017 does. This year we'll continue to address long-standing problems in the child intervention system, and we will increase support for front-line workers.

This budget will also take steps to address the historical underfunding of our justice system. Albertans deserve a strong and effective justice system, one they can be confident is keeping their families and communities safe. Building on our over 25 per cent increase in legal aid funding, this year we're addressing long-standing backlogs and staffing pressures by investing new money in Crown prosecution and other areas of our justice system, helping to fulfill the Supreme Court's Jordan decision.

Mr. Speaker, whether it's protecting public services, creating and supporting good jobs, making life more affordable, or bringing down the deficit, Budget 2017 is about staying in the corner of

everyday families and making sure we all emerge from this downturn stronger.

The other evening I took a walk through my neighbourhood in Calgary. It's a good neighbourhood: good schools, hockey rinks lit up in the winter, soccer fields bustling in the summer. When there's a big snowstorm, it's the kind of neighbourhood where you can always count on someone coming out of their warm house to help someone whose car got stuck, and in exchange for the help, the only thing anyone ever asks is for that good deed to be paid forward to someone else who needs a hand.

Mr. Speaker, we're all here to do good by our neighbours, our constituents, and each and every one of our fellow Albertans. When someone is out of work or wants to improve their skills, we want to help them by making sure training for a new job is available and affordable.

When a parent flicks that light on beside their child's bed and opens up their favourite bedtime book, we want to help them by making their electricity more affordable. And when that same parent sends their kids off to school, we want to help them by reducing the hundreds and hundreds of dollars in school fees they're forced to pay.

If one of our kids gets hurt on one of those hockey rinks or soccer fields, we want to make sure there's a hospital close by that's well staffed and gets their kids fixed up fast. If a loved one develops Alzheimer's, we want to do everything in our power to make sure they get care that's specialized, highly professional, and that treats them each and every moment with dignity and respect.

While some believe an economic downturn means government should cut and run from things like that, we don't. An economic downturn does not mean that our aging grandparents should get second-class health care. An economic downturn does not mean that people who already make the least should make even less. An economic downturn is not a reason to cram as many kids as possible into a classroom.

As our government has from the beginning, we will maintain our focus on making life better. Budget 2017 builds on that commitment, creating and supporting new jobs, making life more affordable, and protecting the public services Alberta families need. In focusing on making life better for families, it secures a better future for our province.

This budget helps patients get better care. This budget helps parents who want to know their kids are getting the best education possible. This budget makes sure every child, no matter the struggles they face, can have a good meal before school and a warm coat on a cold day.

This budget builds hospitals, schools, affordable homes, and better highways. This budget keeps taxes on families the lowest in Canada, and it makes life more affordable for families across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2017 helps people, and in doing so, it makes life better for Alberta families.

Thank you.

4:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While there will be much debate about the budget, today is not that day, so I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Finance minister and President of Treasury Board for his Budget Address.

I will now move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:01 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, March 16, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 2 — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 3 — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft, defeated on division*)

Bill 202 — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft, passed*)

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft, passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 20, 2017

Day 10

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

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Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 20, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Bonjour. Good day. Would you please bow your heads.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us acknowledge the value of human diversity and the importance of all cultures in our country, particularly on this International Francophonie Day. Let us celebrate the riches that the French language and culture have brought to our country and to our province.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great friend of mine and a great friend to Alberta, Jason Kenney. On this day it's important to note that he's fluently bilingual, which is an upgrade. Jason was elected leader of our PC Party on the weekend, and he is in your gallery today. I ask him to rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you the students, staff, and parents from Delburne school, located on the eastern side of the magnificent riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. We have instructor Derk Unterschultz accompanied by parents James Guynup, Beverly Christensen, Sharleen Klein, and Alison Southworth. If the students, staff, and parents would please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Merci, M. le Président. C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de vous présenter aujourd'hui, à vous et à tous les membres de cette Assemblée, des représentants de la communauté francophone de l'Alberta qui sont avec nous aujourd'hui pour célébrer la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie, le 19ième Rendez-vous de la

Francophonie: 40 élèves de l'école Maurice-Lavallée, une école francophone ici à Edmonton, ainsi que leur directrice, Mme Kim St. André-Brady, l'enseignante Chantal Grégoire, et Yic Camara, travailleur en établissement. J'offre à nos invités mes meilleurs vœux pour une agréable célébration, et je leur demande de se lever afin de recevoir l'accueil chaleureux et traditionnel de cette Assemblée.

Merci.

[Translation] In the gallery today are 40 students; the school principal, Kim St. André-Brady; their teacher, Chantal Grégoire; and Yic Camara, settlement officer from l'école Maurice-Lavallée. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Merci, M. le Président. C'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui, le jour de la Francophonie, pour introduire 37 étudiants de l'école Earl Buxton elementary. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Tony Foote and Mrs. Julie Serbinek, along with their chaperone, Dr. Samina Ali. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from Alberta's French-speaking community who are here today in celebration of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie and International Francophonie Day. They are Mr. Leo Piquette, former member of the NDP caucus and Member of the Legislative Assembly for Athabasca-Lac La Biche from 1986 to 1989; Ms Audrey Poitras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta; Mr. Jean Johnson, president of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta; Victoria Wishart, president of the Alberta branch of Canadian Parents for French; Mr. Dicky Dikamba, executive director of Canadian Volunteers United in Action; Ms Aminata Diallo, president of the Calgary Guinean association; and Evelynne Kemajou, co-ordinator of the Portail de l'Immigrant Association de l'Alberta. I would ask them to please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Miranda: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the wonderful staff of the Francophone Secretariat who are here today: Cindie LeBlanc, Antonine Bergeron, Rhéal Poirier, Denise Lavallée, and Martin Bouchard. I would ask them to please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta. With them today is Dr. Hilary Kornder. She is vice-president, leadership and education, on the executive board of the association. I was pleased to meet with her as well as many of her colleagues. Today marks the 10th anniversary of the Resident Physicians in the Legislature event. This year they are advocating specifically for increased awareness of advanced care planning and goals of care designation. They urge all Albertans to discuss this with their

primary care providers as well as their families. I ask that the staff and team members from PARA who are here today please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Merci, M. le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Alphonse Ahola Ndem, Audrey Poitras, Dulari Prithipaul, Emmanuel Mulumba, and Pierre-Yves Mocquais. I introduce them today to mark International Francophonie Day and to thank them for their invaluable contribution to the community and to Alberta. I invite them now to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

It's also my pleasure to introduce today the MP for Rimouski-Neigette-Témiscouata-Les Basques, Guy Caron. I invite him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Marie Gaudet. Marie is a proud descendant of one of the first Acadian families to come to North America. She has never forgotten her roots and is always happy to promote the French language and culture in all of its glorious diversity. I would like to thank Marie for her contribution to Sherwood Park and invite her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two councillors from Rocky View county. Liz Breakey and Margaret Bahcheli are in Edmonton for the AAMD and C conference. They are two of the most hard-working councillors I've had the privilege of meeting. I'm honoured to call them both colleagues and friends and to work together with them to serve rural Albertans. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise today to introduce two people in the public gallery from the great constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. David Ealey was an issues manager in the communications branch of Alberta environment and sustainable resource development and developed a role of providing support and mentorship to young students coming into that program. He continues to do this now that he's no longer working for the department. Today he's brought one of his mentees with him, Zvonimir Rac. Zvonimir is currently studying public relations at MacEwan University. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests today? The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House three devoted Albertans and tireless members of the unity campaign: Mr.

Tyler Shandro, Mr. Dan Heath, and Mr. Dan Williams. If I may just add, Tyler is a respected lawyer in the city of Calgary. He's a member of the Calgary Police Commission. He is the president of the Calgary-West constituency association. He is a beloved husband and father and a personal friend. If we could please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Or Children's Services.

The Speaker: I'll try that one.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, I would like to introduce three individuals today. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three members of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. I ask my guests to rise as I call their name. Dr. Peter Choate holds a PhD in addictions and a master of social work. He is an assistant professor of social work at Mount Royal University and a continuing education instructor at the University of Calgary. Bruce MacLaurin holds a master of social work and is a member of the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work. He teaches classes on child maltreatment, social work evaluation, and research social work policy related to child and family issues at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Dr. Patti LaBoucane-Benson has a PhD in human ecology, focusing on aboriginal family and community resilience. Dr. LaBoucane-Benson has worked for Native Counselling Services of Alberta for 21 years and is currently the director of research, training, and communication, providing leadership for research teams undertaking community-based applied research. Dr. LaBoucane-Benson is a proud Métis member in this province as well.

Mr. Speaker, these individuals bring to the table decades of experience working to make lives better for Alberta's children. Their thoughtfulness and caring perspectives contribute greatly to the panel's work. I ask all members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other guests? Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Merci, M. le Président. C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de vous présenter aujourd'hui my two daughters, Selena and Michelle Carter, who are in the gallery. They both are incredible supports to me, and Selena is a constituent. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Journée Internationale de la Francophonie

Miranda: Merci, M. le Président. Je suis heureux de me lever en Chambre aujourd'hui et de prendre la parole à l'occasion de la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie. Aujourd'hui, de concert avec les 80 autres états et gouvernements membres de l'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, nous célébrons la langue française et les cultures francophones ici en Alberta, partout au Canada et aussi à travers le monde.

À mon arrivée au Canada, je ne parlais ni l'anglais ni le français, mais je me suis engagé à adopter mon nouveau pays, et cela

signifiait apprendre les deux langues officielles. Même si ma langue maternelle est l'espagnol, je suis fier de me considérer franco-albertain au cœur, et je suis très fier de partager cette fière tradition linguistique et notre héritage dans notre province.

L'Alberta a fait de grandes avancées pour reconnaître les contributions des Albertains d'expression française et des communautés francophones. Il y a presque 30 ans aujourd'hui que dans cette Chambre Leo Piquette, alors Député d'Athabasca-Lac La Biche, s'est levé pour poser une question en français. Sa question a été rapidement interrompue, mais son audace a néanmoins suscité un débat sur les droits linguistiques des francophones en Alberta.

Les années quatre-vingt et quatre-vingt-dix ont été des décennies importantes pour les droits linguistiques au Canada et en Alberta. Par exemple, à la suite de l'adoption de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés en 1982, les francophones ont le droit de bénéficier d'une éducation en français langue première financée par la province de même qu'à une gouvernance scolaire francophone.

Aujourd'hui l'Alberta peut se féliciter de compter sur l'un des plus solides programmes de français langue première et de français langue seconde au pays. Un étudiant albertain sur trois est inscrit à un programme en français.

Je voudrais souligner que Leo Piquette a également participé à la promotion de l'éducation francophone dans le cadre de ce mouvement. Plus récemment il a vu son fils, mon honorable ami le député provincial d'Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, poursuivre son œuvre politique. Les efforts de M. Piquette père se faisaient au nom des communautés francophones, et ils ont rappelé aux Albertains que la diversité, peu importe son origine, a toujours été une réalité dans notre province. Reconnaître et célébrer les langues officielles du Canada et toute notre diversité rend aujourd'hui notre société plus forte et plus riche, ce qui rend la vie meilleure pour tous les Albertains.

Aujourd'hui, que ses membres soient des Franco-Albertains de plusieurs générations, des Québécois, des Acadiens, des descendants métis, ou des nouveaux arrivants en provenance de tous les coins du monde, la population francophone de l'Alberta prospère et continue de croître. Le français demeure la deuxième langue la plus parlée, après l'anglais, et est parlé par plus de 238,000 Albertains.

En tant que ministre responsable du Secrétariat francophone, je suis fier de travailler côte-à-côte avec cette communauté plurielle et dynamique sur une panoplie d'enjeux et d'opportunités. Dans cette optique nous pouvons mentionner le fait que l'Alberta est l'une des deux provinces canadiennes qui n'a pas de politique de services en français. Pour remédier à la situation, nous avons entrepris des consultations communautaires à la fin de l'année dernière, et pour la première fois le gouvernement de l'Alberta poursuit l'élaboration d'une politique en matière de francophonie visant à améliorer l'accès aux services gouvernementaux en français. L'objectif de cette politique est de renforcer l'avantage concurrentiel de l'Alberta, de renforcer nos relations avec la communauté francophone et de tirer parti du financement offert par le gouvernement fédéral.

Au cours du mois de mars Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie ont offert un important éventail de manifestations culturelles aux communautés d'expression française et ce afin de présenter et de célébrer leur patrimoine. Par exemple, le 3 mars, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la province, notre gouvernement a procédé au lever du drapeau franco-albertain sur les terrains de la Législature ici à Edmonton et sur ceux du Centre McDougall à Calgary.

M. le Président, j'encourage tous les Albertains d'apprendre davantage au sujet de l'histoire et des contributions de notre Francophonie à bâtir cette province afin de reconnaître tout ce que cette communauté importante, vibrante et culturellement en santé

apporte à notre quotidien et de célébrer l'Alberta en français en l'honneur de la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie.

Je vous remercie.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today on International Francophonie Day. Today, along with the 80 other member states and governments of the International Organization of la Francophonie, we celebrate the French language and francophone cultures here in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world.

When I arrived in Canada, I could not speak English or French, but I was committed to adopting my new country, and that meant learning the two official languages. Even though my mother tongue is Spanish, I am proud to consider myself Franco-Albertan in my heart, and I am very proud to share this great linguistic tradition and heritage in our province.

Alberta has come a long way in recognizing the contributions of French-speaking Albertans and francophone communities. It was almost 30 years ago today that in this very Chamber Leo Piquette, then the MLA for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, rose to ask a question in French. His question was cut short, but his effort nevertheless touched off a debate on language rights for francophones in Alberta.

The '80s and '90s were important decades for language rights in Canada and in Alberta. For example, as a result of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, francophones have the right to publicly funded French first-language education and the right to francophone governance. Today Alberta can pride itself on having one of the strongest French first-language and French as a second language education programs in the country. One in three students in Alberta is enrolled in a French-language program.

I should point out that Leo Piquette was also involved in championing francophone education as part of this movement. More recently he has seen his son Colin carry on his legacy in provincial politics as the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. While the elder Mr. Piquette's efforts were on behalf of francophone communities, they reminded Albertans that diversity of all types has always been a fact of life in our society. Recognizing and celebrating the official languages of Canada and this diversity makes our society stronger and richer today, which, in turn, makes life better for all Albertans.

Today, whether its members are Franco-Albertans of several generations, Québécois, Acadians, Métis descendants, or newcomers to Alberta from all corners of the world, Alberta's French-speaking population is thriving and continues to grow. French remains the second most spoken language after English and is spoken by more than 238,000 Albertans.

As minister responsible for the Francophone Secretariat I am proud to work with this diverse and vibrant community on wide-ranging issues and opportunities. Among those is the fact that Alberta remains one of two provinces in Canada without a French-language services policy. To remedy this, we undertook community consultations late last year, and for the first time the Alberta government is moving forward in developing a French policy to help improve access to government services in French. The aim is to enhance Alberta's competitive advantage, strengthen our relationship with the francophone community, and leverage Alberta's fair share of francophone funding from the federal government.

The month of March has seen an exciting array of cultural events called Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, an opportunity for French-speaking communities throughout the province to showcase and celebrate their heritage. For example, on March 3 our government, for the first time in the province's history, raised the Franco-Albertan flag on the Legislature Grounds here in Edmonton and in front of McDougall Centre in Calgary. It has flown in these places

of honour for the entire month of March. It is an important recognition of the historic presence of French culture and language in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage Albertans to learn more about the history and contribution of our Francophonie to the building of this province to recognize all that this important, vibrant, and culturally alive community brings to our way of life and to celebrate Alberta en français in honour of the Journée Internationale de la Francophonie, International Francophonie Day.

Thank you. [As submitted]

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

Mrs. Aheer: Aujourd'hui c'est la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie, où nous célébrons notre patrimoine canadien-français. C'est un patrimoine qui ne serait pas le même sans nos frères et nos sœurs français.

French was the first of the European languages spoken in our great province. Many of our communities were named by French missionaries, including Lacombe, Lac La Biche, Bonnyville, Legal, and many others. These towns were established in part to entrench French language and culture in the west. Today French is the mother tongue of over 80,000 Albertans. While approximately 238,000 speak the language, more than 390,000 Albertans are French descendants. This puts Alberta as the third-largest francophone population in Canada.

Le 22 mars commence la célébration des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, qui met l'accent sur les contributions que les francophones ont apporté à leurs communautés.

The official flag of the Alberta francophone community includes Albertan and francophone symbolism and combines the delicate but resilient wild rose with the light and life of the fleur-de-lys.

J'encourage tout le monde à participer à des événements dans leur communauté pour honorer et célébrer notre patrimoine francophone. Je suis fière de pouvoir parler cette belle langue, d'avoir cela dans mon patrimoine et de pouvoir le transmettre à mes beaux enfants.

Je vous remercie.

1:50

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader or designate of the third party and the other independent members to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, members. It's an honour to rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to acknowledge International Francophonie Day and the contributions from the francophone community to our province and indeed all of Canada. From St. Paul and Bonnyville to Beaumont and many other communities across this great province Alberta francophones have helped build this province for hundreds of years.

The Progressive Conservative caucus understands that our province thrives best when we work closely with all communities like the francophones in Alberta to add to our cultural mosaic, although they are at the core of our cultural mosaic. That is why the previous government was proud to establish the Francophone Secretariat to act as a liaison between the provincial government and the community. Since 1999 the role of the Francophone Secretariat has been to advocate for grant funding, public education, and vital information for the French community.

Moving forward, this caucus will encourage the provincial government to continue supporting this important initiative. Even centuries after French explorers made the voyage to what is now Alberta, the community continues to grow, and we are seeing an increase in our bilingual population. Over 81,000 Albertans speak French as their mother tongue, and nearly 240,000 are bilingual. As world-wide markets continue to become more globalized, it's critical to fund bilingual programs and train our province's future leaders to represent Alberta on a global scale.

Mr. Speaker, on International Francophonie Day we're proud to look back on the contribution made by Alberta's French community to our culture and economy that has truly helped build our province, but we also look forward to this continued partnership that we all benefit from.

M. le Président, au nom du Parti Progressiste-Conservateur je suis tellement fier de vous dire: vive la Francophonie Albertaine.

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

Mr. Clark: Merci, M. le Président. C'est mon honneur de me lever aujourd'hui, la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie, which we celebrate every March 20 in commemoration of the 1979 Nîmes convention, where French-speaking states aligned their mutual interests. The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie brings together 84 member states and governments from five continents, representing approximately 1 billion inhabitants, including 274 million francophones.

Now, francophones first came to Alberta in the 1780s as part of the fur trade. Today francophones are descendants from the Québécois, Acadians, and, of course, the Métis peoples. They have passed down their identity, their culture, and their language through the generations, and Alberta is much stronger for it. Many people don't know that until the 1870s, French was the primary European language spoken here in Alberta. Today the contribution of francophone Albertans remains strong, with approximately 85,000 Albertans claiming French as their first language and a further 240,000 being bilingual. Well, perhaps that's 240,000 and a half, as you will soon find out that my French is not quite good enough to be considered fully bilingual. But my daughters are taking French immersion in Alberta's tremendous public school system, and they have taught me a great deal. Alberta's francophone community is remarkably diverse, with over 10,000 newcomers of francophone descent from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East who call Alberta home.

Mais étant que la Francophonie est une mode de vie, c'est une culture distincte et une identité. C'est une famille et une aide composée que nous sommes comme des Canadiens et des Albertains et la nation de Métis. Elles sont des parties importantes de l'Alberta, et nous sommes les meilleurs pour cela.

Merci beaucoup.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent of the House to continue with the Routine until its completion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Budget 2017

Mr. Jean: The Premier says that her budget provides a steady hand. Well, here's what a steady hand from an NDP government looks like: a slumping economy; a \$10.3 billion deficit; \$71 billion in

provincial debt, where every single household in Alberta owes \$60,000; and, to top it all off, a carbon tax in the midst of one of the deepest economic downturns our province has ever seen that just keeps getting things more and more expensive. How is strangling growth, taxing families, and plummeting our province into debt a steady hand?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that our government refuses to sacrifice our children's future by forcing them into overcrowded classrooms, so we are funding enrolment, and we are building 24 new schools. We refuse to leave seniors who need care to languish on waiting lists, so we're funding health care, and we're building a new long-term care centre in Calgary. I refuse to hold our economy hostage by letting infrastructure crumble, so we're building a new bridge to Fort Saskatchewan and putting people to work while we do that. We're building our province. They want to tear it down.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that this Premier and her cabinet are living in a fantasy world. In their world raising people's heating and gas bills and making Alberta less competitive is good for Albertans, and in their world Alberta can drive our balance sheet off a cliff with zero consequences. But that's not reality. Moody's and DBRS are warning that this NDP budget will lead to more credit downgrades. That means billions more being siphoned away from hospitals and schools, that are so important to Albertans, so that the NDP can pay back the big banks. Does no one over there realize that this is a budget crisis?

Ms Notley: Well, speaking of billions, Mr. Speaker, here's what the opposition proposes to do. They promise to cut \$10 billion in funding from hospitals, schools, and roads. Why do they want to do that? So they can pay for tax giveaways at the very top. That means no new hospital in Edmonton, no cancer centre in Calgary, and no new schools. The opposition wants Albertans to set their sights lower. Our government wants to help Albertans move forward and do even better.

Mr. Jean: None of that is true, Mr. Speaker. But this is true: "I believe that this 15 per cent limit will not be breached." That was, of course, the Finance minister just a year and a half ago. Now Alberta is set to hit a 20 per cent ratio. Once debt free, soon we will have a higher debt burden than British Columbia. It means \$2.3 billion in annual interest payments that is not going to hire teachers or nurses as we need but to big banks. With more downgrades it will make it even more difficult for things to get back to balance. Why can't the Premier admit her government has a spending problem?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we're building up Alberta. We're building up Alberta. On that side of the House they want to tear Alberta down. What they want to do is raise tuition fees, raise school fees, raise energy bills. You know, if they're so concerned about our finances, why is it that they want to give \$600 million in giveaways to people who are struggling on \$300,000 a year or more?

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, here is how a credit downgrade works. It makes it more expensive to borrow. That means higher interest payments for everybody. That's money that doesn't even go to paying off the debt but just to keeping creditors happy. It hurts the

ability for our province to tell the world that we are open for business and that we are a safe place to invest. That's what Alberta should be about. But it means fewer jobs, fewer services, and higher taxes for Albertans. This is shameful. When will the Premier clue in and get us off this budget meltdown?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here is how cutting \$2 billion out of our operating expenses works. It means eliminating the whole child protection ministry. It means cutting the entire seniors ministry. It means getting rid of the Justice department. It is time for a realistic evaluation of what Alberta needs to go forward. We are a government that is supporting Alberta families, and we are proud to do that.

Mr. Jean: Well, here are a few easy ideas on how to save money and support Albertans. How about using the private sector to do linen services in Alberta instead of the government? The government can go ahead and cut the carbon tax – that would help – and the billions in green slush money that she wants to spend, billions and billions. Finally, how about not wasting billions on a job-killing coal shutdown and suing Alberta power companies? That not only saves taxpayers money, but instead of destroying communities in the province, it will actually save jobs. These ideas would help the budget and create jobs. What a concept. Why won't the Premier do any of them as we ask?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is investing in Alberta and investing in Albertans and investing in Alberta jobs. We are doing it through an ambitious capital plan, which is going to build the Calgary cancer centre, something that they would cut; build a new hospital in Edmonton, something that they would cut; build 24 new schools across the province, something that they wouldn't do. As a result of that, Albertans have paid for that year after year after year. The time for that kind of backward thinking is over. We are moving Albertans forward.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that the NDP jobs plan has been a total disaster; 81,000 full net jobs – it's ridiculous, Mr. Speaker – have disappeared since this government took power. Household incomes last year plummeted by thousands of dollars, and this budget is just one more of the same failed policies. We should be doing better right now, but we're not. NDP policies are strangling Alberta's potential, growth is almost nonexistent, and the budget is bathed in red ink. The Premier's plan has failed Albertans. When will she start to get some common sense and change course? Go in a different direction, Premier.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Albertans are struggling because of the drop in the international price of oil. We know that it is not something we can control, but what we can control is how we respond to that crisis. So we've invested in Alberta, and since June 19,000 new jobs have been created in Alberta. We will continue to support Albertans because we have their backs. [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks.

I could try and give the requests in French, but that would be very painful for you, so let's keep it down because that's the next station I'll go to.

The third main question.

Mr. Jean: Merci. When a family sits down to pay their bills, they look at how much money they have coming in and how much they

need to go back out for bills, their mortgage, and other expenses. Alberta families understand that when times are tough, they need to find a way to shave down expenses where they can. Well, by the time the NDP are done, they will have increased spending in Alberta by \$9 billion annually. How on earth is this bending the curve and showing some restraint?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I reject the numbers that the member opposite is putting forward, but what I will say is that we will not make drastic, unthought-out, dramatic cuts that will hurt Albertans. We are going to make life better for Alberta families. We are focusing on creating jobs, we are focusing on making life more affordable, and we are focusing on protecting those important public services that support Albertans day in and day out because, as I've said before, we have Albertans' backs.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is not the only one that's rejecting the numbers; Albertans are, too, and the NDP should get spending under control.

Although the NDP tried to stuff it away in their budget, the fact is that taxes are still going up this year big time. The carbon tax has already raised the cost of gas, fuel, and groceries, and with the NDP it's going to go up another 50 per cent this year and continue to increase until it costs a typical household \$2,500 or more per year. Why is the government misleading Albertans by claiming that there are no tax hikes in this year's budget?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, what that plan actually did is that it succeeded in getting Alberta something that the fellows over there could not make happen for over a decade. Our climate leadership plan is entirely related to how we got not one but two pipelines approved, the very pipelines that are going to bring jobs back to Alberta and put those families back to work.

Mr. Jean: The NDP keep showing how out of touch they are with families across this great province. Bringing in a carbon tax isn't affordable. Raising the price of that carbon tax definitely isn't making life more affordable for Albertans, and running a government that has raised taxes, capped growth on our oil sands, and mortgaged future generations at dangerous levels of borrowing isn't helping either. These policies are very bad news for Albertans and Albertans long term. When will the Premier finally give them a break?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what makes life more affordable for Albertans: dropping their school fees by 25 per cent, freezing tuition rates, and putting a cap on energy prices. Each one of those things the folks over there would have rejected and would undo. Albertans don't want that. They want to stick with our affordability.

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

School Fees

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has profiled their incompetence once more in the form of Bill 1, where they're actually legislating their failure to deliver on an election promise, as they will reduce school fees not by 100 per cent as promised but only 25. They claim they have found efficiencies in the Ministry of Education. I have not yet found in the budget any funds to make the school boards whole once they can no longer collect these fees. To

the Minister of Education: why are you penalizing school boards, who will now have to cut in other areas, disadvantaging the very children you claim to help in order to make cheap political points?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are only reducing school fees by 25 per cent, but that's because year after year after year after year, 44 years, the previous government allowed Alberta to develop the highest school fees in the country. They ignored people saying that school fees were out of control. They thought it made perfect sense to make hard-working families pay more for their public education. Our government took action. Our government said: no more. I think Albertans are probably pretty happy about that.

Mr. McIver: No answer for school boards, as expected.

Mr. Speaker, according to the NDP any discussion by previous governments around efficiency they have said meant laying off teachers and nurses. Now they claim to have found efficiencies. They can't have it both ways. I would like to ask the minister to give the real story. How many teachers or essential personnel will you be laying off, or if no layoffs, what will you be forcing school boards to shortchange Alberta kids by?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was so proud to table Bill 1. Certainly, the hon. member can choose to not, you know, vote for that same Bill 1 if he wants to, but if passed, it will put real reductions in school fees, which will help school boards and parents as well because it is a perennial problem that school boards have these fees. They tried their best over the years, but they did not have long-term, stable funding from the government. Now they do. Now we're working together to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. McIver: Oh, Mr. Speaker, we'll support the decrease. It's still a broken promise, and they still haven't answered the question, so I will ask it a third time. To the minister: isn't it time to tell Alberta school boards the truth for a change? Since you're not really making them whole from the fees they can no longer collect, what services will Alberta children now have to do without so that the NDP can have one good media day at children's expense?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's not just about media days and so forth; it's about making life better for regular Albertans, and that's what we have been doing day in and day out, and school boards have been behind this. Parent groups have been behind it as well. Albertans know that the school fees were too darn high. We're here to clean it up because – you know what? – there was a big mess to clean up after this previous government not funding long-term, stable funding for education. Now we're doing so, and I'm pretty darn proud of that.

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

2:10

Mental Health Patient Advocate

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Mental Health Patient Advocate's office was established in 1995 to protect patients' rights and improve the mental health system. Since 1990 the advocate's work has increased exponentially, but the resources have not. In fact, it went from being an independent office with its own budget to recently being rolled into the Alberta Health Advocate's office and sharing its funds. To the Minister of Health: if the government truly values mental health and rejects stigma and protects patients' rights, why does it keep shortchanging the mental health advocate's office?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I look forward to having an opportunity to engage in full budget discussions. One of the things that I'm so proud to make sure that everyone knows is that we've more than tripled the investment to make sure that addictions and mental health are addressed properly as we move forward. I'm incredibly proud of that. It's my understanding that at a specific point in time following the floods in southern Alberta that office was created, but there have been considerations of how best to serve the people, and I look forward to having opportunities to continue that dialogue with hon. members.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In her previous annual report the advocate said:

The past year posed challenges to fulfill our legislative mandate in a timely manner . . . largely due to the loss of a position along with the Government . . . restraint measures. It had a direct impact on the number of Albertans we served and the comprehensiveness of our investigations.

As a result, the office was unable to conduct a single formal investigation of a patient complaint. To the minister: do you not see that chronic underfunding of this important office is causing it to fail to live up to its mandate?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Just to follow up on a piece of the earlier question, funding for the mental health advocate in Budget 2017 is consistent with last year. In fact, the advocate has been appointed on an interim basis during the recruitment process for a new person to fill that role. Our government is very committed to ensuring that Albertans are able to access the mental health supports that they need, regardless of where they live in our province. To that end, we've committed more than \$5.6 million in new operating funds towards implementing the recommendations of the mental health review in addition to the funding that has been included to address the substance use crisis in our province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the mental health advocate speaks for mental health patients who are not happy with the way that the system is working. Mergers seem to be the rage these days. Now even the NDP is getting into the act. When Carol Robertson Baker finished her term as mental health advocate, the government didn't replace her; instead, the Minister of Health has simply merged the mental health and the Health Advocate, as I indicated. Apparently the government has no intention of empowering this office, which is odd given the increased complexity and the increased volume of cases we are now dealing with, especially with the opiate crisis. Clearly, the advocate needs independence and an increased budget . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to reiterate my answer from the last question. Currently the mental health advocate role is being combined with the Health Advocate on an interim basis. We are in the process of an open recruiting process, and we look forward to hiring a new person for that role. Frankly, we know that that is an important role within the system, and we continue to look for other ways that we can expand access to all Albertans. You

know what? The only way that we can get there is by continuing to work together to increase funding for mental health.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Calgary-Hawkwood.

Health Services for Transgender and Gender-diverse Albertans

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Metta clinic in Calgary was created as a pilot project in 2014 to provide trans and gender-diverse youth in the Calgary area with comprehensive health care and provide the care that these youth need in order to live happy, healthy lives. Since its creation wait-list times have risen from nine months to nearly three years. To the Associate Minister of Health: what are you doing to ensure that our youth have access to these invaluable services?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this question. This past January I had the opportunity to meet with the member as well as Lindsay Peace and her son Ace. Ace came out as transgender at the age of 14, and their family had made use of the medical services available at the Metta clinic. As they shared their story, they described the clinic as a supportive and vital resource. The clinic's mandate is to provide multidisciplinary assessment and consultation to transgendered youth in Calgary and in southern Alberta, with specialists from psychiatry, adolescent medicine, and endocrinology being brought together to find an allied and co-ordinated approach to care for transgendered youth.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the wait times for the Metta clinic continue to rise and given that the continued operation of the clinic is essential to ensure trans and gender-diverse youth are kept safe and healthy, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure the Metta clinic moves from a pilot program to a permanent program?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to the very critical services provided by the Metta clinic. Since its opening the Metta clinic has seen more than 60 patients and has received over 200 referrals. We know that these services save lives and that timely access is critical to youth, particularly as they approach puberty. I've asked AHS to bring forward options for improving access to these kinds of services, and we expect their recommendations on the next step to be brought forward later this spring. Outside of the clinic, we're also looking to expand service for transgendered youth depending on their needs, including service through family physicians, endocrinologists, and mental health services.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Connolly: Given that many trans and gender-diverse people have difficulty accessing health care due to transphobia and misinformation within the health care system and given that trans and gender-diverse individuals often need more medical attention in their lifetime than their cis counterparts, what is the minister doing to help educate doctors and nurses within the health care system about LGBTQ-plus issues?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. Albertans from the LGBTQ-plus community deserve to have access to care in safe, inclusive, and respectful settings. Our government is working to make life better by including protection for transgender Albertans through changes to the Human Rights Act. Additionally, we're attending to this at every level, from the front line to policy. Alberta Health offers regular training for its staff on LGBTQ-plus issues, and we're continually looking for ways to be more inclusive and supportive, working with our partners such as the College of Physicians & Surgeons, who've recently launched new training programs in this area.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Budget 2017 (continued)

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, we all know the guy: the rich kid who was given a brand new car and a credit card before he had to work for any of it. To him, wealth was something inherited or taken, not something that had to be worked for or earned. Soon he maxes out the credit card, and someone else has to pay. That guy now has Alberta's credit card, and on the spending bender he intends to triple Alberta's debt to \$71 billion in just two years. The first step to recovery is admitting that you have a problem. Will the Finance minister admit that he's a spendaholic?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, our government works very hard every day to put Albertans back to work. We're committed to putting businesses back in business and Albertans back to work. People with jobs pay taxes, and people who pay taxes can afford health care and education. The reckless cuts of billions of dollars proposed by this opposition will jeopardize the economic recovery before it even has a chance to get started.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The Minister of Finance should stand and answer for himself, Mr. Speaker.

Last week the Wildrose laid out our plan to cut taxes, reduce spending, and balance the budget. When the government released their budget last week, I said that not only do the NDP not have a credible plan to balance the budget; they have no intention of ever balancing the budget. When asked about this on the radio, the minister said: well, they don't have any plan either. Does the minister admit that he has NDP: no darn plan?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, it's the Wildrose that is proposing reckless cuts that would jeopardize our economic recovery before it even has a chance to take root, putting thousands of Albertans out of work and jeopardizing our health care, our education, the hiring of police officers, teachers, nurses, doctors. That party over there would cut that, and it would hurt Alberta, Albertans, and hurt our economy.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Rats.

When the NDP repealed . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, there are no preambles on supplementals.

2:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: When the NDP repealed their own meagre debt cap of 15 per cent of GDP, we warned that this would lead to a credit downgrade. The NDP claimed that we were being Chicken Little. Well, the sky might not be falling, but our credit rating sure

is. To date we have had four credit downgrades. Moody's and DBRS have now issued new warnings that the NDP's budget could risk yet another credit downgrade. Will the minister pick up the scissors, cut up the credit card, and go to credit counselling, or does he need an intervention?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I assume that the hon. member is not happy with the answer, and that's why he said "rats." I sure hope that that's the case.

But I want to tell the hon. member that the best way to build the economy in this province is not to lay off hundreds and thousands of teachers, nurses, police officers. The best way to rebuild this economy is to stimulate it, to put people back to work and help our businesses be successful, something that that party doesn't want.

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

Government Spending and Job Creation

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year at this time this NDP government unveiled Budget 2016. They called it the Alberta jobs plan, and it came with \$11 billion of debt. The Finance minister introduced it with these words. "Above all, the Alberta jobs plan . . . creates thousands of jobs." Back then Alberta's unemployment rate was 7.4 per cent; today it's 8.3 per cent. So much for job creation. To the Finance minister: why did the Alberta jobs plan fail to create any jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll take this opportunity to inform the hon. member that our jobs plan is working. If we look, since July over 19,000 full-time jobs have been created. The Conference Board of Canada, the TD Bank, and numerous banks have forecast that Alberta is set to grow at a rate higher than any province across the country, a rate of 2.7 per cent for this year and for next year. And you know why? We've got two pipelines and an infrastructure program through our capital budget that are going to help put thousands of Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gill: Only the NDP would take 10 jobs away and get two back.

Given that last year's ironically named Alberta jobs plan racked up \$11 billion in debt and that the result of all their spending was a further spike in unemployment and that Budget 2017 racks up at a minimum another \$10.3 billion in debt and given that more than 200,000 Albertans are seeking work, 24,000 more than last year at this very time, including devastating unemployment in Calgary and other communities, Minister, what is your specific target for Alberta's unemployment rate a year from now? The real number.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that our government recognizes the impact of the sustained drop in the world price of oil and the impact it's having on Alberta businesses and Alberta families. That is exactly why we introduced the Alberta jobs plan, exactly why we are investing in infrastructure, where both opposition parties would cut. It's not just about cutting schools and roads and bridges; it's about the tens of thousands of Albertans that they would put out of work, making the problem worse. We are making life better for Alberta families, and we're going to continue to do that.

Mr. Gill: Lots of excuses for this fail, Minister.

Given that the Premier and her ministers keep insisting that, quote, they have the backs of Albertans, unquote, and given that through this government's inability to curtail spending, Albertans will by the end of the NDP's only term carry well over \$70 billion worth of debt on their backs, Premier, just how strong are the backs of Albertans? Do you think they can carry \$100 billion, \$150 billion, \$200 billion? Is there even a limit?

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members: no preambles on supplementary questions. This last time you did two of them.

The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that Alberta families deserve a government that's got their back, and that's exactly why we've put in caps to make sure that electricity rates don't continue to hit the roof like they did under that party. That's why we put in a freeze on tuition, because under the former government it kept going higher and higher and higher. We know the opposition wants to jack up fees and make life more expensive for Alberta families. We're standing with them, and we are honouring the contracts that those guys negotiated, that now they want us to break. I have to say that their criticism is pretty rich.

Health Care Wait Times in Central Alberta

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, compared to everywhere else in Alberta, surgery cancellations in central Alberta are incredibly high. Red Deer hospital has triple the cancellations compared to the second-worst hospital. Red Deer had 325 cancellations, almost 10 times as many as the third-place hospital, and thousands of times higher than most others. Central region cancellations make up almost half of the total surgeries postponed in the entire province. We have asked for outcomes to change. The minister accuses us of asking for more money. What will the minister do to actually fix surgical outcomes in central Alberta?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to visit the Red Deer hospital, and I have to say that I commend the staff for their diligent work in making sure that they are taking care of patients and patient needs first. I want to remind everyone that during construction at the hospital last year, there was a flood that impacted emergency rooms and required some of those surgeries to be moved elsewhere, and that's because nothing is going to stand between patient safety and this government. We're always going to make sure that we have the backs of Alberta families, and we're working to make their lives better. Members opposite want us to bring forward deep, rash cuts. We're not going to do that. We're going to make sure that we're working thoughtfully, finding efficiencies, protecting Alberta families, and addressing wait times across the province.

Mr. Orr: Given that we have asked for a report that would immediately act to reduce surgical wait times for patients who are suffering and given that no explanation has been granted as to why central Alberta health outcomes are so far below the rest of the province – those who are having life-altering surgeries postponed are not having their days brightened by free light bulbs – if the government cannot tell us how they are going to fix the problem, can the minister at least tell us what metrics they are examining to identify the problem with surgical wait times in central Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: I get that the members opposite like to spend their time watching movies, Mr. Speaker, and identifying matrixes and matrices and where they want to land on those, but where we want to land is on moving Alberta families forward and having their backs. That's why we are building eight new youth detox beds right in Red Deer. That's why we've added a new, state-of-the-art MRI in Red Deer. That's why we're investing \$9.7 million in the extension of the obstetrics unit in Red Deer. The members opposite want to cut all of that. We're not going to let that happen. We're standing up for all Albertans, including the people living in Red Deer.

Mr. Orr: Given that wait times in other parts of the health care system are also failing, such as the requirement that seniors be placed in continuing care facilities within 30 days – recent data reveals that the 30-day limitation is being exceeded – it would seem that this is a systemic problem. The NDP have had two years to create solutions, yet we see a continuing downward spiral in placing seniors within the 30-day period. What is the NDP doing to ensure that seniors are in fact placed in care within the 30-day limit?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the fact that we are on track to meet our 2,000-bed commitment to make sure that Albertans can age in communities throughout our province. Thank you so much for the opportunity to highlight that we're investing in 550 long-term care beds in Budget 2017 alone. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to highlight that we know that the members opposite have no intention of investing in health and education. All they can say is: cut, cut, cut. Instead, Albertans have elected a government that's got their back, that's going to stand up for their right to age in community and have a quality of life, unlike the members opposite.

Castle Parks Management Plan

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, when the minister announced the creation of the Castle provincial park and the wildland provincial park in 2015, there wasn't any open, public consultation and the announcement was poorly communicated. Fast forward to January 2017 and the release of the parks' new draft management plan: again, no open, public consultation other than a heavily weighted survey. Minister, why didn't you consult with the general public before implementing these drastic changes?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, in the intervening 16 months between the announcement of the creation of the park and the release of the draft plan in January we spoke with ranchers, we spoke with municipalities, we spoke with those involved in the enforcement community, we spoke with the off-highway vehicle community, and we spoke with campers, hikers, fishermen, hunters, and others. We came to a draft management plan. Now, we are very proud that we are moving forward with protection of headwaters for southern Alberta. We are proud that we are moving forward with high-quality outdoor experiences for all Albertans to be able . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that that's totally true.

Given that the September 2015 announcement included random camping as an allowable permitted use but the 2017 announcement pulled out the rug and overturned that promise, to the minister: where, beyond a few so-called rustic group spots, will all the hundreds of random campers who want to experience the beauty of southern Alberta now go?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had also listened to his own constituents, the grazing lease holders, the municipalities in his constituency, he would have heard that there are many, many instances where due to the actions of the previous government unregulated, improperly enforced use of the land was conflicting with those trying to make a livelihood; that is, the grazing lease holders. We have responded, and we will proceed thoughtfully and carefully and actually invest in that area, unlike the previous government.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, once again this government is failing to consult on its decisions.

Given that the 2015 announcement included a promise that OHVs would maintain their access to approved trails and given that the January 2017 announcement revealed a new plan to phase out OHV use entirely and given that on March 10 the government disclosed a new new plan for OHV users to move to the Porcupine Hills, will the minister admit she made a mistake when she tried to bulldoze ahead with this ill-conceived plan before consulting the people first?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, what we have heard over many months was that years of inaction on enforcement and cuts, in fact, to the enforcement budgets by the PCs have left a number of conflicts on the landscape. They have left a situation where hunters did not have the access that they once did, where families could not fish in ways they used to be able to. We have a situation where we have a decline in our fish populations. We have a number of species at risk in that area. We are listening to municipalities, who would like us to increase enforcement and increase our planning. We are listening to grazing lease holders. We are listening to the Alberta Beef Producers and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Emergency Medical Service Funding

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the government has been very critical of the opposition in this House, saying that we would cut front-line services if we were allowed to exercise some spending restraint. Of course, this is false. Our caucus values the important work that is done by front-line staff. However, it appears that this government is less genuine in their commitment to front-line health staff as their budget cuts funding for emergency medical services by \$17 million. Minister, why was the funding cut for such a crucial front-line health service?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to clarify the record. There are a number of areas where there have been ambulances that have been paid off in the province, so amortization. It's good. Ambulances are paid in full, and that's good news. There are a number of other areas where AHS believes they can see some efficiencies. I want to make it very clear to the member opposite and to all members that I've made it

very clear that this cannot happen at the impact of front lines, so we're making sure that we're protecting front-line workers, who, in turn, protect all Albertans.

Mr. Fraser: Given the work that this government has done on the Health Professions Act for EMS, the work that I've praised this government for undertaking, and given that some of the progress made under this act will be threatened if there is a lack of resources for EMS, to the same minister: how can the minister provide any assurance that this cut won't affect resources for EMS and the paramedics dealing with posttraumatic stress syndrome and other complications stemming from the already out-of-control call volume?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I want to thank the member for bringing up some of the very good work that's been done in the past, including what we did around moving Quarry Park to make sure that we're able to find those efficiencies, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I show up to work every day working to make life better for Alberta families, and that's one of the reasons why we've made it very clear to AHS that we will not see contractions to the front lines and to the work that's being done diligently to make sure that EMS is there where and when Albertans need it. I know members opposite are pushing for billions of dollars in cuts in areas that would impact the front lines. We're not going to do that. We're going to make sure that we stand up for Alberta families and that we improve wait times.

Mr. Fraser: Given that emergency medical service is such a crucial front-line service and that when you add in the fentanyl crisis, weekly code reds in our major cities, high call acuity, and rising PTSD claims for paramedics that are already being pushed to the brink – cutting \$17 million from their budget would axe 11 ambulances and their staff – Minister, you can't possibly believe that this is in alignment with Alberta's priorities, or can you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Again, I just want to reiterate that I asked: how exactly are we going to make sure that this doesn't impact Albertans and the care that they require? The response, I have to say, was very assuring. It was around making sure that those ambulances were paid off and finding other efficiencies like we have through the dispatch in Quarry Park, Mr. Speaker. So this is good news.

I also want to provide my assurances to everyone who works in an ambulance as well as to the member opposite that I made it very clear that these savings, if they are achievable, cannot be achieved on the backs of front-line workers, including dispatchers and those who are working in ambulances. AHS believes that there is some more additional room, but they have assured me that they will not impact the front lines.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

GenA Youth Employment Program

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, everyone. Alberta's youth workers have a history of facing high barriers in the workforce, especially during difficult economic times. Given that youth today are facing higher unemployment and given that the long-term effects of lost wages negatively impact their future

earnings, to the Minister of Labour: what is the government doing to help youth in this province secure good jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have heard from young Albertans that they do need support getting into the workplace, and that's why we were pleased to announce a two-year pilot project with GenA and Prospect Human Services. This is a project that will help young Albertans have success in the job market and help employers connect with the best and the brightest. This follows our successful STEP program, that we reinstated after it was cancelled by the previous government.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to hear about the GenA program specifically targeting young Albertans.

Given that lost wages have economic impacts on many levels, to the same minister: how many young Albertans have benefited from this strategy, and how many more will stay in or enter the workforce through this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This program launched only last month and already has helped nearly a hundred young workers find or retain a job. GenA will help more than 1,200 young Albertans get that all-important first job. It will connect 200 employers with talented young prospective employees. As GenA client Aaron Peecheemow recently said: "The GenA Employment Placement Specialist (EPS) was essential in helping me with my current unemployment situation. The EPS was invaluable in helping to fine-tune my resume and find work. Needless to say, I got the job."

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Labour: given that social media and technology have changed how youth communicate, how will your ministry ensure that young Albertans are aware of this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. By partnering with Prospect Human Services on GenA, we're working with a successful organization that has a track record of getting young people into the workforce. Albertans in the Calgary or Edmonton regions between the ages of 18 to 30 are able to get career guidance and placement assistance through this program. That being said, I would encourage all members of this House to point their constituents to this important tool. More information is available at gena.works.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

2:40 Energy Industry Reclamation Costs

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lately there has been a lot in the news about the problems of orphaned wells in Alberta. The orphan well fund is funded by oil companies, as it should be. Lately there have been hints by both federal and provincial governments for programs which would basically amount to a taxpayer subsidy of the oil companies. To the Minister of Energy: what programs are you contemplating, and will tax-paying Albertans be footing that bill?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We continue to work with the federal government on this. Our plan is to create jobs and tackle a long-standing environmental problem. Previous governments did not tackle this and sat back and admired the problem. Our current plan is to work with industry, work with the federal government, and come up with a plan that's going to fix this problem.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like another cost to Albertan taxpayers.

Given that last week the minister refused to provide Albertans with an answer about why she hasn't done anything about the doubling of the liability management ratio that the AER imposed in June 2016 as a stopgap measure and given also that this measure reduces asset liquidity and thereby contributes to the problem of orphaned wells, to the Minister of Energy: why haven't you accomplished anything on this important file? It's been nearly a year.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Again, thank you for the question. As I mentioned before, we are working with industry and we're working with our federal partners to do a holistic plan for this issue, that has been left for a long time. Traditionally we've had a polluter-pay or duty-to-reclaim policy, and we're continuing with that. Our plan is going to make life better for Albertans by creating more jobs and also in tackling this environmental problem.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has some measure of an orphan well fund and given that the government is pushing forth renewables projects with little thought of ramifications and given that the government has voted down our amendment to create an equivalent reclamation fund for these projects, again to the minister: who will be saddled with the reclamation costs should these renewables projects fail, as they have in so many other places in the world?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, renewable projects are quite different from subsurface access. Certainly, they are located on private land, for starters, and are arrangements between the private landowners and the companies.

But it is very interesting to me that the members opposite, in the Wildrose in particular, talk down renewables investors at every available opportunity. They want to slam the door on all of those jobs throughout southern Alberta, certainly, and throughout all of Alberta, and that's not our approach on this side of the House. You know, Mr. Speaker, as the MLA for Lethbridge-West I'll take those jobs.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, thank you.
Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Canola Industry Development

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The canola industry continues to be an innovative powerhouse. The industry has been increasing its value-added production for decades. Alberta now exports not only raw canola but also ready-for-the-shelf products such as canola oil. Alberta's canola industry has made innovations in production of not only value-added foods but also health care, nutraceutical products as well as biolubricants, biodiesel, and

bioplastics. To the minister of agriculture: how are you helping the canola industry to further its efforts in value-added production in Alberta?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There's been a recent announcement from Richardson in Lethbridge to expand their production there. The Cargill plant in Camrose – it's been open for a while – has room to expand there. Too early to tell yet, but there is going to be an opportunity for a new plant even in Olds. There are hopefully going to be shovels in the ground this year.

So the canola industry does look good. It's robust. I'm happy to say that the markets around the world are also expanding: in the United Arab Emirates, India, China, South Korea, around the world. The canola industry looks good for this province, and I encourage those producers to put that in their rotation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that China is concerned about blackleg and has again threatened to slash dockage to levels of 1 per cent and given that China and Canada have been in talks for a long time to come up with a mutually agreeable trade deal and given that there's huge growth potential for canola exports to China, to the minister: can you please update this House on your progress in discussions with the federal minister of agriculture?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Last November the federal government – the federal agriculture minister, the Prime Minister – had an opportunity to talk to the Chinese government. They were able to stay the concerns that he had around blackleg. It's been stayed till, I believe, the year 2020, but those conversations continue on what more we can do to ensure that that situation doesn't arise again and making sure that China and the rest of the world enjoy our good products, including canola and canola oil.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that at the end of 2016 Alberta canola had committed \$3.46 million towards 28 active research projects and given that every dollar was matched by \$3.24 million from research partners and given that these important projects further strengthen and diversify this important Alberta industry, to the minister: how does the government plan to strengthen and support the good work that the canola councils are doing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I for one am very proud of what the canola producers in Alberta have done. They've made great strides with the product: being able to have higher production on the same number of acres, being able to have it more resistant to all these other, different kinds of chemicals, being able to market their product around the world. I'm very happy to be able to support them in their efforts in trade and research as they continue to grow their industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we will begin Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Progressive Conservative Party Convention

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Calgary-North West I was elected to this Assembly as a moderate, centrist Albertan. The events on the weekend are a clear reminder that my decision to sit in the NDP caucus was the right one.

My former party was disappearing in the wake of a hostile takeover and, with it, everything that was important to me. An increasing number of Albertans now feel politically homeless as a once strong party decided that power was much more important than principle. We have seen one incident after another, from campaign operatives charged with assault to fines for breaking campaign rules and candidates leaving due to harassment and intimidation. Add to that a campaign with no actual policy, and we can see that this exercise was all about winning.

The new Conservative leader bragged about endorsements from individuals who called for a coup d'état and others who pronounced that a woman's place was in the kitchen making sandwiches for the boys. Unite-the-right delegates booed at the convention when the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster cautioned that such a merger would only lead to more bozo eruptions from supporters who believe feminism is a cancer and that members of the LGBT community belong in a lake of fire.

I've heard from many Albertans who say that that kind of thinking belongs in the past. They are concerned about the values of a leader whose voting record clearly demonstrates a lack of respect for human rights. So, Mr. Speaker, I have found my new home in a caucus that embraces a modern, pragmatic approach and vision for Alberta, who knows that diversity is a strength and won't tell you what your Canadian values need to be.

2:50

Castle Parks Management Plan

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, the Castle region is arguably the most picturesque location in all of Canada. The region has been blessed with immense natural resources, including coal and timber, but its greatest resource is the people who call the Castle home. They are hard working and straight shooting. When you say you're going to do something, they trust you'll do it. Go to any local A&W, and you're as likely to see a sightseeing tour sealed with a handshake as you are a cup of coffee.

So when the environment minister suddenly announced in 2015 that the government would be designating a large portion of the Castle as a provincial park, Albertans had questions. What about OHV access? Would random camping continue to be allowed? "Don't worry; trust us," the government said. "The department will be conducting thorough consultations." Remember, the government's own permitted-use document released in 2015 committed to maintaining OHV and random camping.

Fast-forward to January 2017 and that same government's release of the new Castle draft management plan. It suddenly ended access to random camping. It suddenly restricted permitted uses, including a complete phase-out of OHVs. There were no general public notices or consultations on either topic. The only general public consultation meeting that was held, however, was organized at Bellevue by the local OHV and fish and game associations.

Then came the public rally in Lethbridge. Another one was held in Calgary, and another is being scheduled here in Edmonton. Reluctantly, the minister finally took action, extending the consultation period, maintaining current OHV access this year, and

committing to holding, finally, some open meetings. All of this mistrust and ill will could easily have been avoided had the minister just been open and transparent before decisions were made.

Wildrose will continue to monitor this issue. But once again the minister broke Albertans' trust, and the saddest part is that this government doesn't seem willing or interested in repairing it. I hope the government will change their ways, actually, and commit to open consultations. But with all the stakeholders . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Social Democracy

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, my father, who would have been 110 years old this year, could have easily provided insights into what I call the rise and surprise of social democracy. At the age of 10, 100 years ago, he arrived at the port of Shanghai, after being forced to flee Russia, as a refugee with little more than the clothes on his back, the eldest of five children, with his mother, a widow of the revolution. Some 32 years later, in 1949, a similar fate beset him at the hands of Maoist revolutionaries, and once again he was forced to seek refuge from political and economic upheaval, again escaping with little more than a handful of prized family possessions.

Mr. Speaker, as we in Alberta drift further into the abyss of social democracy, I cannot help but be reminded of his fate. Indeed, I reflect today on the rise and surprise of social democratic dogma, something little known to Albertans after 44 years of free enterprise, prosperity, and pride in the Alberta advantage. With great sacrifice and fortitude my father ended up as a landed immigrant on the shores of Canada and found refuge, safe haven, and hope right here in Alberta, where I had the privilege of being born.

Mr. Speaker, I'm saddened to hear many long-time Albertans tell me what they might do and what they will recommend to their children to do if we suffer the misfortune of a second NDP term. I hear constantly at the doors of constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek – their words, not mine – “I am an economic refugee from one or another NDP province of the past.” I do not relish that, with many Albertans, we may one day utter the same words with sadness in our hearts as we watch our province drown in yet another, very different sea of red, or perhaps in this case orange, irresponsible ink.

Sadly, I wonder what my father, with his experience and infinite wisdom, would be saying to me were he with us today. I'm afraid he would caution me and his grandchildren to beware of the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you. Your time is up.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Parents Empowering Parents

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to speak today about an event in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. I recently instituted a monthly town hall in order to better hear constituents' thoughts and concerns. My second town hall was focused on the organization Parents Empowering Parents, also known as PEP. The Parents Empowering Parents Society, which was created by parents for parents, provides education, innovative programming, support, and hope for individuals and families dealing with or concerned about substance abuse and addiction. This organization is committed to improving effective, accessible treatment and positive outcomes for substance abuse and addiction.

For parents, Mr. Speaker, these are vital concerns. Many families are profoundly affected by having children struggling with addictions. Some of the needs of the parents that my town hall identified were to create clear paths from detox to treatment to recovery, with

enough spaces or beds to ensure that addicted individuals get the treatment and supports they need when they need them; to create access and support for treatment in our health and mental health care systems, which are both needed to provide help to these children and youth; to listen to parents and provide parents the ability to make decisions on behalf of their children and, at times, adult children to ensure that they get the treatment and support they need; more recovery facilities to provide faster access and longer periods of recovery where needed as one size does not fit all; to educate the public about addictions to change the culture; to recognize the value of groups like PEP and other NGOs as means of filling the gaps in the addiction treatment system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Francophonie in Alberta

Ms McKittrick: Thank you. On this International Francophonie Day I want to first of all thank you, Mr. Speaker, the Clerk, and staff of the Legislative Assembly for the initiatives that have recognized and promoted the use of French in the Assembly. From the first day of the 29th Assembly the national anthem was sung in its bilingual version. The use of French in members' statements and speeches has been facilitated, and a number of members have used bilingual school introductions to introduce their immersion or francophone schools. We have come a long way since former Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche M. Leo Piquette was told by the Speaker not to speak French.

Merci. En tant que francophone j'ai eu le plaisir d'apercevoir l'ampleur de la Francophonie à travers le monde. J'ai enseigné le français à l'Alliance française en Thaïlande, pour la province du Québec dans un camp de réfugiés, parlé en français en Amérique latine, en Asie, en Afrique, et au Moyen-Orient. Aujourd'hui nous célébrons la vitalité de la Francophonie et son importance à travers le monde pour le commerce, la littérature et sa diversité culturelle.

Un exemple de la vitalité de la Francophonie en Alberta est le nombre de nouvelles écoles francophones dans la province. Une de ces nouvelles écoles se trouve dans ma circonscription, l'école Claudette-et-Denis-Tardif. La sénatrice Claudette Tardif et son mari, Denis, ont travaillé pendant des longues années avec la communauté francophone pour développer des services en français, des écoles francophones et le Campus Saint-Jean.

Moi-même, je connais bien l'importance d'étudier en français, car si je parle français maintenant, il est grâce au fait que j'ai pu étudier en français.

J'aimerais alors remercier tous les francophones qui ont travaillé pour assurer la vitalité maintenant présente dans notre communauté.

Merci.

[Translation] As a francophone I had the opportunity to see the reach of Francophonie throughout the world. I taught French at the Alliance Française in Thailand, for the province of Quebec, in a refugee camp. I have spoken French in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Today we are celebrating the vitality of Francophonie and its importance throughout the world for business, literature, and for its cultural diversity.

An example of the vitality of the Francophonie in Alberta is the number of francophone school boards, schools throughout the province. One of these new schools is in my riding, the Claudette-et-Denis-Tardif school. Senator Tardif and her husband, Denis, have worked for many years with the French community to develop services in French, francophone schools, and Campus Saint-Jean.

I know full well the importance of schooling in French because my ability to speak French now is because I had the opportunity to study in French for a large part of my K to 12 schooling.

I would like to thank all francophones who have worked tirelessly to ensure the vitality of our community, that has been demonstrated throughout this month.

Thank you. [As submitted]

Government and Opposition Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Nearly two years ago myself and 20 other members of the Wildrose caucus were elected to represent common-sense conservative Alberta values. When I ran, I told my constituents that if I was elected, I would always put Alberta first: Alberta first before myself and Alberta first before my party. Since the NDP came to power, they have undertaken a radical and forced remake of Alberta's economy, character, and culture. In increasing numbers Albertans are demanding that conservative forces in Alberta put Alberta first, before themselves and before their parties, to save this province.

In the coming months I'm optimistic that we will find a way to heal old wounds, to make new friends, and to lay the foundation of a coming common-sense revolution: a common-sense revolution that will peel the ideological claws of government out of our school curricula, a common-sense revolution that will end a tax on rural Alberta like Bill 6, a common-sense revolution that will repeal lock, stock, and barrel the carbon tax, a common-sense revolution that will cut taxes and regulation to make Alberta the roaring economy of North America, a common-sense revolution that would not commit the moral crime of saddling our children with a crushing debt but that will instead balance the budget and make us paid in full once again.

The NDP have sown the wind, and now they will reap the whirlwind. When we unite Albertans behind a single powerful force, we will not merely defeat them; we will erase the legacy of socialism from Alberta forever. In its place we will build a new Alberta advantage that will stand the test of time.

3:00

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2):

- (1) the petition of Bruce Libin, Yannai Segal, and Lorne Paperny of the city of Calgary for the Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017, and
- (2) the petition of Paula Jean Anderson of Red Deer county for the Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I could just remind each of you again. I'm not sure that everybody heard it the first time, but I want to remind you about the good judgment that you use on a go-forward basis. I'm going to just read a ruling by Speaker Schumacher in 1995, and I'm only paraphrasing components of it.

The tabling should consist merely of a brief almost mechanical description of the document being tabled. Members should resist the urge to embellish, expound upon, decorate, editorialize about, emphasize, ruminate, extrapolate, annotate.

He said at the time:

I think members get the general impression of what the Chair is getting at in regard to their tablings. A member may always follow up on a tabling during question period.

That was intended for all of the House, not just the member who is about to speak.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a recent article from the *Calgary Herald* on a new study from the Canadian Energy Research Institute indicating that the energy industry anticipates that they can reduce emissions intensities by as much as 80 per cent a barrel while also lowering supply costs by up to 46 per cent while still maintaining an increase of up to 5.5 million barrels within the next two decades under the emissions cap.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I promised the residents of Alberta, doctors who are practising that I'd be happy to table a document. It's called Advance Care Planning Goals of Care: Conversations Matter. The reason I'm tabling this is because about 60 per cent of Albertans surveyed said that they support having an advanced care conversation with their family members. Only about 20 per cent actually said that they'd done it. This is a very simple guide that I promised the doctors I'd be proud to table and urge all members and constituents to consider discussing with their families.

Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the requisite five copies of an article in response to statements in the House. This article, from the *Globe and Mail* on March 11, explains that the recent increase in support for the development of the oil sands is due to the effects of the climate leadership plan of the government.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of an article from the *Edmonton Journal* on March 15 titled Wildrose Party Calls for "Fiscal Dragon's Den" to Find Savings in Government Books.

The Speaker: Any others? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I just want to remind you – I'm not sure if all of the members heard it at the time, so just in case you might have missed it...

Mr. Fildebrandt: It was a most excellent ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Absolutely.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you. I have two tablings. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the 2017 Wildrose caucus prebudget recommendations.

And I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a letter I wrote to the hon. Government House Leader on March 9 citing statements from his caucus on the Public Affairs Bureau. Day 4 of 14.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the Hon. Ms Hoffman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, pursuant to the Alberta Health Act the Alberta Health Advocate and Seniors Advocate 2015-16 annual report; pursuant to the Mental Health Act the Mental Health Patient Advocate 2015-16 annual report; pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors 2015-16 annual report, Alberta College of Occupational Therapists 2015-16 annual report, Alberta College of Optometrists 2015 annual report, Alberta Dental Association and College 2015 annual report, College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta annual report 2016, College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2015-16, College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2015-16, College of Podiatric Physicians of Alberta 2014-15 annual report, College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta annual report 2016; pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board annual report 2014, Health Disciplines Board 2015 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon members, I just would like to compliment the House. I hope it's a pattern for the future. There were no points of order today.

Statement by the Speaker

Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day Program

The Speaker: I would like to make a brief announcement to each of you, fellow members of the Assembly. As you know, the Legislative Assembly is holding Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day, which will be held May 7 to 9, 2017, at the Alberta Legislature. There is only one week left to apply to the program. This is an opportunity for high school students from all corners of our province, all of our constituencies to learn about what we do here, and we want them to learn the right things about what we do here. Please remind your high schools that this three-day program is fully supported by the Legislative Assembly Office, so there is no cost to the students. Transportation and accommodation details will be arranged by our visitor services office. The application form is available on the Assembly website until March 24.

I urge you to support MLA for a Day by promoting students' participation from your constituency and also through your personal involvement in the program. I must tell you that the students I met last year as well as the various MLAs were really appreciative of that, and I want to encourage all 87 members to encourage their young students to participate.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 202

Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act.

I am pleased to bring this act to the Legislature for debate today because I believe that the cyberbullying protections in Alberta have

not kept up with the challenging technological environment that schoolchildren and indeed all Albertans face. Schoolchildren today face a very different environment growing up than many of the members here faced when they were younger. Today many, maybe even most people have a camera phone that is constantly connected to the Internet whereas even as recently as 10 years ago this just wasn't the case.

We've seen recently some high-profile, tragic cases where nonconsensual distribution of intimate images of young women were shared in Canada, with very devastating consequences. In both Amanda Todd's case and Rehtaeh Parsons' case the nonconsensual sharing of intimate images was a key contributor in their decision to end their own lives.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the facts of these cases are tragic and horrific. Allow me to talk about Amanda's case. When Amanda was only 13 or 14 years old, she began chatting online on a video chat to meet new people. A stranger convinced her to bare her breasts online, and an intimate image was captured. It was just that easy. This individual later blackmailed Amanda into giving him a show. That show was also recorded, and the police informed Amanda and her family that they had found the video circulating on the Internet. Amanda wrote online, in a video released shortly after her death, that this discovery was devastating for her, and the fact that she had been sexually exploited online led to anxiety, depression, and a panic disorder.

Amanda changed schools, but this individual made a new Facebook profile featuring her breasts as his new profile. Then he began contacting her new classmates. Amanda changed schools a second time, where things briefly improved for her. However, one of her peers began to contact her and even goaded other students into harassing her at school. A group of students assaulted Amanda while other students filmed the event. This led Amanda to her first suicide attempt, which she attempted by drinking bleach. Amanda survived, but the harassment at the school continued. Amanda attended counselling and had antidepressants prescribed, but the wounds she had suffered were too deep, Mr. Speaker. Amanda Todd ended her life on October 10, 2012.

Simply put, this is not and should not ever be accepted as an outcome for this country. I am pleased to note, Mr. Speaker, that the man who began this malicious pursuit of this terrible torment of Amanda was sentenced last week in the Netherlands to 10 years and 243 days in jail for exploiting Amanda and other young women. This man may also be extradited to Canada, where he may face further charges. While I am pleased to hear about this sentence, it is far better that we prevent such acts from happening in the first place.

Particularly in response to this case the federal government passed Bill C-13, which amended the Criminal Code to create the new offence of nonconsensual distribution of intimate images along with other, related things such as the recovery of expenses, the forfeiture of property used in the commission of an offence, and the restriction of computer use by the offender. C-13 was a start in the right direction in regard to updating the laws to prevent such tragedies from happening in the future.

The bill I have presented here, Bill 202, will build on where Bill C-13 left off at the provincial level. This bill does two simple things. The first thing this bill does is to create tort law which protects not just children but all Albertans against nonconsensual sharing of intimate images. Even though adults may consent to their intimate images being shared by someone they trust, that person who received said image would then in turn be prohibited from distributing that image to other people without the consent of the person in the image. If the receiver of that picture were to violate this, they would

be eligible to be sued under tort law, and this action could be brought without proof of damage. What that means in plain English, Mr. Speaker, is that the victims do not have to prove that they have suffered a financial loss in order to sue the distributor of the image for damages.

In addition, under section 7 courts may impose other conditions such as no-contact orders, restricting the Internet, and other such injunctions that courts can and sometimes do approve. Lastly, if the distributor were to post this intimate image online on a paywall or some such thing where they charge for viewing a video or an image, the profits shall be awarded to the plaintiff. Doing this will remove some of the incentive for this type of behaviour should this bill become law.

The second main portion of this bill is aimed at protecting children when an intimate image is shared of a child. This will provide children with firm protection in their schools to safeguard them from perpetrators. In the past, Mr. Speaker, in the cases of Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons, students within these girls' respective schools disseminated nonconsensual intimate images of these girls. This is not acceptable behaviour, and we should ensure that we all take on an individual responsibility to teach our children these things. However, as a parent well knows, kids don't always do what they're taught.

That is why this legislation proposes that school principals who become aware of one student sharing another student's image have not only the right but the obligation to suspend the student that is sharing the image. Spelling this out in such concrete terms will ensure that sanctions and punishments are fairly, consistently, and evenly applied to students throughout Alberta. This legislation will avoid a scenario where students in one school are punished more or less harshly than those in another school. It also gives school principals a clear tool to suspend students on explicit grounds through legislative authority to carry out their duties in administering discipline for this clear breach of privacy. School trustees will still retain authority to hear appeals on suspensions from the students and their parents.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, we here at the Wildrose believe that this bill will update our legislation so that those who are victimized by online exploitation have recourse in provincial courts. It will also clarify that this is a form of bullying and that students should face strong consequences for encouraging this behaviour. If one student torments another, the bullied student should not have to face the tormentor at school day to day. My hope is that this bill puts the rights and health of victims first and will lead to the reduction in the number of students who have to face this situation. I hope all members on this side and the members in the other parties will join me in supporting this very important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could I ask you to read into the record that you're moving second reading of Bill 202.

Mr. Cyr: That is correct.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to rise today. This will come, I think, as no surprise to members opposite since we have been working with them – and this is very similar to legislation proposed by the NDP government in Manitoba a couple of years ago – that I am rising to support this legislation. I think the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has done a fantastic job in setting this up. I want to thank him for his dedication to this issue and his willingness to work with us and with our colleagues in Education to make sure that this would fit with our overall scheme, I think, of legislation. The bill will create a cause of action, which is, I think, really very important.

You know, times are not, I suppose, as they were when I was growing up here in Alberta. Young people have access and the ability to send images immediately, and that puts them in a position where one wrong decision could essentially punish them for the rest of their lives. I think everyone in this House knows that that's not right. I think that many people here who have children or grandchildren, you know, would fear to have such an image of their loved one distributed, and I think putting this in place will really help to signal our support for both young people and adults who might find themselves in this position.

I think this legislation, Mr. Speaker, does a really good job of putting blame where it belongs: that is to say, on someone who is bullying or harassing or someone who is circulating intimate images of another person without their consent. It puts the blame on that individual, not on the victim, who has had the picture taken for whatever reason, and I think that that's a really critical piece of this. You know, a lot of young women and men are taught to be ashamed, and I think that that's wrong. It's not the fault of the young person that the image got out. It's the fault of the person who is using this to bully and to harass and to try to make the individual feel small. I think this is a fantastic bill. It goes a long way to supporting those individuals.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to one more time thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this matter forward. I think it's something that's really important. I know he had acted as my critic for a number of years, and we've had a very good relationship through that time, so I'd like to thank him generally for his service in the House.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in this House to speak to Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act, put forward by my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I'm so encouraged by the work that he's done in putting this bill together, and he should be very proud of the work that he's put forward and the discussions that stem from what has been presented here today.

Mr. Speaker, the sad thing about this bill is that it's actually necessary to even pass it. The world has changed so much that sharing of intimate images without consent has gotten completely out of control. In preparation for this debate, I looked up some information on the Internet. I don't know if you know this, but what I found is that 1 in 25 people – 1 in 25 – are victims of revenge porn. That means that we could expect three MLAs in this room to be a victim as well. We could expect roughly one victim in every classroom, two or three children on every school bus. Alberta has over 165,000 small businesses, businesses that employ fewer than a hundred people. That's four people in every one of those businesses. That's over half a million people. Every single one of those victims and potential victims is one too many.

What's even worse is that 1 in 10 women have been threatened with that possibility. Let's revisit some of those numbers I gave earlier, Mr. Speaker. That would be the equivalent of nine members of this Chamber being threatened, at least two in every classroom, seven on a large school bus, and over one and a half million in small businesses right across Alberta. That doesn't even take into account the medium or large businesses, where I'm sure we'd see an increase in those numbers. We need to do whatever we can to try and stop this hurtful and damaging practice.

I'd like to read for you a few comments that I found from victims of nonconsensual image sharing. I'll quote for you some comments made by a victim in an article that she wrote for the *Guardian*, which was published on November 19, 2013. It's somewhat lengthy, so sit tight, but it's very important for us to hear about the trauma that this woman endured. This began in February 2010. I will start.

For over a year thereafter, even though the auctions were down, and I blocked Joey's email addresses and phone numbers, I oscillated between panic and persistent anxiety. I would wake up at 3 am and check my email, my Facebook page, eBay, then Google my name, a ritual I performed three times before I could settle back down. In September 2011, I was thrown into panic again after I read an anonymous email alerting me to an online profile that featured nude pictures of me.

I Googled my name, and there I was, on a porn website. The profile included my full name, the city and the state where I live, the name of the college where I teach and the campus... My stomach hurt. I held my breath and printed every page of comments, all seventeen of them.

Afraid to be in public, I raced home and called the Maryland state police and the Baltimore division of the FBI. I left messages explaining what happened. Then I called my therapist who was treating me for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder for the past year and cancelled my session. I was too scared to leave my house. She insisted I go on medical leave from work.

... I sunk into despair so deep that I felt nothing. Because of the permanence of the internet, and lack of legislation, this torture was never going to end. I seriously contemplated ending my life. I would have been successful if it weren't for three things, my dog needed to be let out, my mom called, and the pills I took weren't fatal.

This is heartbreaking, Mr. Speaker. This is just one person's story, one of thousands. Even after reading those words, I cannot begin to imagine the depths of pain that are experienced by such victims. Such cruel actions affect one's work life, family life, social life, and, of course, one's personal life and well-being. They are left trying to pick up the pieces after such hateful actions have been taken, most often by someone who they were once in a close, intimate relationship with but sometimes by someone who has hacked into their computer or somehow gained access to their images.

This bill seeks to create tort law to protect all Albertans regardless of age or gender from the vicious acts of others. There is likely nothing that will completely fix and heal the pain caused when someone is betrayed by the nonconsensual sharing of intimate images, but this bill does take a strong step forward towards helping someone repair their life and their public image. It could help a victim move forward on the path to recovery and regaining control of their life, and it holds the perpetrator responsible.

This bill also seeks to protect children, Mr. Speaker, from school bullies intent on making life difficult. This bill carefully balances the needs of students, teachers, and schools to take appropriate action. It would be so difficult for a child or youth to attend school after having their privacy so completely breached. It would be even more difficult to have to sit in the same classroom as that person who shared those images. This bill amends the Education Act so that it is very clear that the sharing of someone's private images is considered bullying under the School Act and that is an offence that will likely result in the offender being suspended or expelled. This is great news.

Before I finish, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go back to the *Guardian* article that I referenced earlier so I can quote from it further. Earlier I read some of the writer's comments about the panic and the pain she felt and how she felt so out of control in her own life. This brave woman has gone on to become a force in the fight to protect victims.

This is to punish offenders of nonconsensual image sharing in order that the victims may achieve some level of peace. She wrote:

Since I don't have that peace, I still face some of the fears I did the day I first brought my case to law enforcement, but I have embraced my role as the voice for those who have yet not found their voices. And I will speak up.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that every member in this Chamber will speak up for victims of nonconsensual sharing, victims of revenge porn by supporting this bill. I thank my hon. colleague again, and I urge all members to support this bill as well.

Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I will be speaking in English this time, in case anybody was wondering.

I, too, would first of all like to thank the hon. member for putting forth this bill. I know that he's a caring person and that he has put much thought into how to stop the victimization of persons due to the nonconsensual distribution of intimate images, so thank you.

This issue is one that has been on the minds of many in our communities, mine included. Many have wondered how to stop the victimization of young people these days, when young people are glued to their phones and exchange photos through a number of apps and websites. I have a couple of young persons in my life, and I know how addicted young people are to taking pictures and just without thinking sending them out and not understanding the consequence of the picture. I'm lucky because I have one son who's a teacher, and through his education at the university he's been cautioned against doing that, but most young people have not.

3:30

In these days of immediate diffusion of images this bill will make people think as to the damage their action might cause and the consequence to themselves, and I think this is really, really important. I also know that those involved in the education of young persons – teachers, principals, and youth workers – and those who work with those fleeing domestic violence and anyone involved in counselling will welcome this law.

This proposed Bill 202 fits nicely with the intent of Bill 2, introduced by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, and is consistent with our government's commitment to supporting survivors of sexual violence. I also appreciate the member's co-operation with the government in terms of his approach to the legislation because I think this bill is going to be consistent with other legislation which the government has brought forth. Thank you.

Bill 202 actually does a number of things. It creates a tort, a specific ground for a civil lawsuit, to make it easier for survivors of nonconsensual sharing of intimate images to sue the person who distributed the images. In some cases this type of behaviour may be called revenge porn, and I think it's so sad that this is the kind of thing that is happening in our society. It also sets out that punishment in schools can result from a student distributing pornography. These are good steps that should give pause to people who might consider the extreme violation of trust that occurs when someone distributes intimate images without someone's permission. These types of violations of privacy and trust often make survivors feel unsafe in their work, schools, and communities.

This bill also largely follows a bill that the Manitoba NDP passed in 2015, and I'm assuming that the hon. member consulted that bill before drafting his. The bill uses similar language, bringing in clear grounds for a lawsuit based on the nonconsensual distribution of intimate images. It also follows in the steps of federal legislation, which makes it a criminal offence to distribute these images without consent. So far only one person has been sentenced to jail time under the federal act.

Albertans need to feel safe and comfortable in their work, schools, homes, and communities, and this bill will go a long way towards making that happen. The distribution of intimate images can have devastating effects on individuals. This has been particularly true for youth and members of communities that have historically been marginalized, and we all know some of the names of the victims. I really don't want to repeat their names because I think their names have been told so often. I'm so glad that today we're going to be doing something in this Legislative Assembly to stop this kind of victimization, young people taken advantage of by others to the extent that they feel so uncomfortable, so devastated that they took their own lives. I'm sure those victims, that we well know, are not the only ones who did so, except we never did talk about them or they weren't known to the public or died without telling anyone why they were committing those acts.

Anything we can do to help prevent this type of devastating tragedy from striking another person or family is a positive move, and I know that this bill will go some ways towards helping to comfort survivors of this type of behaviour and discourage others from those terrible violations of trust and privacy. I think this whole issue of discouraging others is going to be the most important consequence of this bill because as we speak about it, hopefully many will hear us and will know that there are consequences for this kind of behaviour.

Where an image is shared by someone under 18, the bill protects parents from a lawsuit unless the parents themselves were somehow complicit in the sharing of the image. I think this is really, really important.

It also allows the court to issue a publication ban on identifying information, and this should provide some comfort to those coming forward after such a blatant violation of their privacy that seeking justice will not result in further loss of privacy. I know that this is something that's really important. Any time someone has been victimized, every time their name is said publicly, it really very often revictimizes them.

It also creates some explicit power for schools and school boards to discipline students involved in the sharing of these images. I think it's going to really strengthen the role of teachers, principals, and school boards to take action when they see this is happening. They should protect youth and send a clear message to the young people that sharing these images is not acceptable. It is bullying, and there will be consequences.

I would like to end, Mr. Speaker, by saying that I'm so glad that the hon. member drew a low number on the bill roster, that you were so lucky that this bill could come forward so that as an Assembly we have the opportunity to vote on this and to support the hon. member in making this bill law.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say that when we were elected here, it never occurred to me that any of us would be receiving some of the feedback that we get through Twitter and the trolling that happens on there. It's small by comparison to what some of these folks have gone through, but even then your heart rate starts to go faster when you know that that person who usually trolls you on your Twitter feed is going to attack. These are small by comparison to what we're speaking to. It is, then, my privilege to speak to this bill. It's of critical importance. I would like to applaud my colleague and friend the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for tabling this bill and shining a much-needed light on this issue. His attention to a truly frightening form of bullying is unbelievably important.

Up until recently it seemed that while this form of digital harassment was regrettable, it was not ultimately punishable. Cyberbullying harassment has been sort of a subcategory of bullying, and it requires extra attention. But it's much more. It is a form of harassment that can follow a person, and it follows them and exploits them across the world. There's no protection from a predator who chooses to use this technology as the medium to betray intimacies, to get revenge for a breakup, or just to display an intimate image that was taken without the victim's knowledge or consent. It is absolutely critical, Mr. Speaker, that we change this reality to one that protects and that protects those who may be victimized by having intimate pictures splayed across the cyberworld. I think we need to provide clear consequences for those who abuse the privilege of privacy.

In discussing this issue with family, I had a family member who told me that when she was going to school in the 1970s, even then they would make rules about what pictures could be taken at social events and what would be done with those pictures and destroying negatives and all of that kind of thing. With the way that the world has changed – and there are so many more people, people of all ages, that are at much greater risk in so many ways, Mr. Speaker – the one thing that has stayed the same is that in the heat of the moment people do not always use a lot of common sense when they're more concerned about things like popularity or notoriety or they're experiencing jealousy or anger or frustration. When these images are sent around online or digitally, there are humongous, humongous implications.

My colleague eloquently spoke of the horrifying victimization of Amanda Todd that led to her suicide. We've heard and read about the horrifying rape of Rehtaeh Parsons and the sharing of those horrific images, that caused so much devastation and trauma. The thing we need to realize, Mr. Speaker, is that these images are quite often taken with the expectation of privacy and absolutely can be taken without the knowledge or consent of the person.

We know that it is a frequent occurrence for people, especially youth, to be targeted by stalkers on the Internet. The PREVNet site, which is Canada's authority on research and resources for bullying prevention, actually describes this type of cyberbullying.

Unlike other forms of bullying, the harassment, humiliation, intimidation and threatening of others through cyberbullying occurs 24 hours a day. It is relentless... [It is] aggressive, reaching kids at the dinner table while [they're] sitting with their parents, or in the privacy of their bedroom. There is no safe zone.

3:40

Bill C-13, Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act, amended the federal Criminal Code to provide for a new offence, the nonconsensual distribution of intimate images, with some accompanying provisions. This federal legislation changed the Criminal Code, and Bill 202 now allows the victim to seek damages from the person responsible.

In the Education Act I am pleased to see that the definition of bullying is expanded to include "the distribution of an intimate image of another person knowing that the person depicted in the image did not consent to the distribution, or being reckless as to whether or not that person consented to the distribution." It is absolutely important, Mr. Speaker, that students understand that they are accountable for their actions if they choose to distribute pictures without consent and that they can face suspension and perhaps even be put on the list of behaviours for which a student may be expelled.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is about protecting victims. The importance of including amendments to the School Act and the Education Act is that we have an opportunity to actually increase awareness in the

youth in our schools of the seriousness of distributing intimate images without consent. I hope it will continue the conversations around creating and maintaining safe and caring schools, specifically in the digital environment.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I really hope it raises awareness of the pervasiveness of the dangers of cyberbullying by actually describing clearly specific actions that are offences under the law. This is something that all Albertans are concerned about. This bill will mean that victims – victims – can now seek damages, and that will make it clear that this behaviour in schools will mean consequences for students who engage in this insidious form of bullying and harassment.

We've all said this a few times, but I'll repeat it. We live in a new world. We live in a world where there is no limit to the reach of predatory behaviour, and this behaviour would flash images of personal information across the world in seconds. To my colleague I would like to say that I fully support this bill, which may prevent further victimization and, just as importantly, may spark conversations in our schools, Mr. Speaker, about cyberbullying through invading a person's privacy and distributing it digitally and how that will not be tolerated.

Merci.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 202, the Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. Let me be very clear. Bill 202 is a good bill. It's a bill that emphasizes how absolutely unacceptable it is to exploit someone's right to privacy. It's a bill that talks about absolutely how wrong it is to take someone's trust and harm them that way. Bill 202, I find, ties in very nicely not only with Bill 2, as some of our members here today have already spoken about, but also with last session, when I moved Motion 507. I moved a motion on increasing the awareness of cyberbullying in schools, and I think that what the hon. member has crafted here ties in very nicely with that, and it's something that I can support because it's something that all students need to be aware of and supported with.

Mr. Speaker, what Bill 202 addresses is when we have students who break the trust of other people. What that means is that Bill 202 allows us to not only address the issues as they arise, but I think that it will allow us to increase education and awareness of these types of issues in schools because we know this type of scenario: perhaps you share an intimate image with your significant other, and six months later, 12 months later, a year later, two years later – you don't know when – that image may become shared through some means that you weren't expecting.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's very important that when we talk about these issues, we also talk about things like consent-based education, that we talk about things around educating people as to what is and what isn't okay for you to do with your partner. When do you need to ask for consent? What does consent mean? What does yes mean? What does no mean? I think these are questions that we really do need to be raising awareness in schools about. They're questions that we really do need to be educating our students about. It's one thing to say: if you break this law, if you do the wrong thing, we're going to punish you. Let me be very clear that it's absolutely the right thing that we should be doing. If people share non-consensual images through the Internet, through other mediums, whatever it is, we should absolutely be protecting those victims.

[Ms Woollard in the chair]

But on top of that, we also need to be educating the people who are doing that sharing. We need to be educating people who are

breaking that trust and that privacy. If they don't know why they shouldn't be doing this, if they don't understand what the concept of consent is, then we have failed in our duty as educators, and we have failed in our duty to be able to inform people on how to move forward with this.

Madam Speaker, I think that Bill 202 is a very good initiative. Bill 202 is something that should be applauded in this House. It's something that we can work together on. I'm very happy that the member across was so open and collaborative with the government in moving forward with this so that it could have all the components, I think, that make a good bill.

Madam Speaker, I'm very interested in the pieces that do amend the School Act in this bill. I think that the pieces that amend the School Act and give the ability for administration and for teachers and principals to move very quickly to react to cases where intimate images are shared is very important. I think that being able to move swiftly allows us to catch these instances immediately and allows us to protect the privacy of individuals and protect those victims as quickly as possible.

I won't get into any of the details of some of the tragedies we've heard about, Madam Speaker. I won't get into the details of any of the instances and examples because I think hon. members here already have done a very good job of explaining it, and I don't think that we need to keep bringing this back. But I think that what we do need to talk about is how these victims and these people who have been subjected to sexual harassment – and it really is that. It's sexual harassment. It's sexual assault. It's an absolute core violation of these people's rights.

[The Speaker in the chair]

When government and administration and teachers and schools aren't able to react, when people aren't able to move quickly enough, and when we sort of leave our most vulnerable – the people who have been exploited, the people who have been hurt – out to dry because we didn't have the framework in place, I think that is where you have the opportunity to do the most harm. By being able to support our victims, by being able to move forward and say, "We are here for you; we are ready to help you; what do you need?" by being able to do those types of things, Mr. Speaker, it is very valuable. It allows us to help our victims more.

Mr. Speaker, the very specific objectives of Bill 202 – creating the grounds for things like a civil lawsuit, setting the framework for immediate suspension or other types of school supports for our victims – I think are a step that moves us in the right direction. It's a step that moves us in the right direction, and I think it's something that all members of this House can support and can applaud. The fact is that the distribution of these images will have devastating effects on individuals. It will violate and make survivors feel unsafe in just their everyday environment.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, just imagine for one second that, perhaps with a significant other, you were to share an intimate image. You took that image in your home, and you shared that with somebody through whatever medium you would like. But just imagine that now every single time you look at that mirror that you took the image through, that every single time you look at that computer that you sent that image through, that Facebook account, whatever it is – they pop up in your newsfeed. Imagine being brought back to the pain. Imagine being brought back to the instance and suddenly remembering that your trust and your hope and everything that you believed in in that second and all those feelings and those emotions are right back to the forefront, because that's the reality of what

happens when this type of crime goes unpunished. That's the reality of what happens when this type of crime isn't addressed effectively.

I strongly believe, Mr. Speaker, that for every single Albertan, whether you are young, whether you are less young, whether you are in school or not in school, you deserve a safe space for yourself, whether that is in your work, in your school, in your home. Wherever that is, you should be able to feel safe. You should be able to feel as though you have nothing to be afraid of. Because you made a decision to share an intimate image, because you made a decision to trust somebody else, that feeling of safety shouldn't be compromised. You shouldn't lose your ability to be trusting, you shouldn't lose your ability to be safe, and you shouldn't lose your ability to care because somebody violated your trust and somebody violated your safety.

I think that as members of the Legislature and as people who sit in this House, as people who proclaim being honourable members, we have an obligation to help prevent this type of devastating tragedy. We have an obligation to help support and comfort survivors and discourage this type of behaviour and discourage this type of violation. Mr. Speaker, I think that this bill is a good bill. It uses good language, it's very clear, and it makes it very simple to know that distributing an intimate image without consent is the wrong thing.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very excited that we're able to work together with the opposition on this bill, but I do have one concern around some of what came up around the press release for this bill. I did have a concern around the headline that warned that a picture lasts forever. Now, this is certainly true, and the warning is actually very appropriate for youth. I think it's something that was drilled into my head when I was younger and in school, and it was something that we've heard over and over again. I think the focus of the bill itself is right, and I think the contents of the bill itself are right. My concerns around this headline are that I think that it doesn't do what we need to be doing with empowering survivors. It doesn't do what we need to be doing with educating people on consent-based education and consent-based work.

I think I'm running out of time here, Mr. Speaker, and I will leave it at that. I would gladly support this bill, and I'm excited that I think we're going to be able to pass this with members opposite.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am happy to support and speak to private member's Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. As other speakers have said, this bill certainly does fit well with government Bill 2. It provides additional tools for victims, creating grounds for a civil lawsuit, and sets out punishment in schools for those who distribute images without consent. This bill creates powers for schools and school boards to discipline students engaged in this activity while protecting parents who are not involved from lawsuits.

This bill correctly seeks to avoid and prevent victim blaming as it is not about the photo or the reason the photo was originally taken, but it's about the distribution of the photo without consent. I think we can all agree that revenge porn is about public shaming, creating mental anguish, causing harm, and violating a person's sense of privacy and well-being. This is about stopping, punishing, and preventing extreme violations of trust and privacy.

I would like to note that this private member's bill does follow a bill created by the Manitoba NDP in 2015. You know, Mr. Speaker, I have to give kudos to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing forward this very progressive bill that is squarely focused on people, protecting people, preventing abuse and hardship. I

didn't hear from this member directly, but I think I heard a story that some of the inspiration for this came as a result of a discussion with his young daughter. I think that is a beautiful story, so I'd like to thank him.

In preparation for this bill I did some research on the topic and was a little surprised at how widespread this type of abuse is. In a paper written by Samantha Bates of Simon Fraser University, I learned a number of disturbing facts, and I just want to give you a little snippet. Her paper is called "Stripped": An Analysis of Revenge Porn Victims' Lives after Victimization. She noted that the first revenge porn website was created in 2010 by someone named Hunter Moore. She also noted that during a three-month period in 2011 the revenge porn website received 10,000 photo submissions, and the website's owner received advertising revenue of approximately \$30,000 per month. Although this particular website has since shut down, more continue to pop up in its place.

It always astounds me how adults who themselves behave like bullies online act shocked when young people follow suit. We in this House need to set an example. Manage your social media pages. Act, or you condone and normalize this behaviour. This sets the stage for further abuse and more harmful abuse. Just rampant, even on the Twitter feeds related to this House, we see every day, probably every hour, name calling – disgusting name calling – and body shaming.

You know, I was particularly disturbed at – I can understand that some people were offended by some of the statements made in this House, and I was happy that there was a heartfelt apology, but what stunned me was just how for days and days and days the feeds were filled with the most disgusting body shaming of the person that chose to make that statement. It was all over pages that are supposed to be managed by the opposition parties, and they were not. It wasn't taken down. There wasn't a statement released. There wasn't any sort of intervention to stop it. I think that we have a responsibility to be role models. We have a responsibility to stop online bullying.

This past Sunday I attended an event, actually just yesterday, in St. Albert called Beautiful Me. I think this is about their fifth or sixth year of hosting this event. I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. It was held at Bellerose composite high school. They had different stations set out, and it was for young people who are typically marginalized, whether it is young people that struggle with a mental illness such as an eating disorder or a personality disorder of some kind, young people that have disabilities. There were some young women there that were obviously pregnant and were about to be young moms. There were people that had been bullied in school.

There was a collection of young people there, and they got to go through these stations. They had their hair done, they had makeup done, and they had professional photographs done. They got to write out some information about what made them beautiful, not beautiful just on the outside but on the inside. At one of the last stations they got to sit in a small group and have conversations with a couple of people. I did attend the event and sort of saw the stations, and then I found myself in the room listening to some stories. I'd like to share with you a couple of those stories.

One of the first stories that I heard was about a woman. She talked about her life as a youngster growing up in the Maritimes, and she was surrounded by a really, really dysfunctional home. She grew up in poverty. She had one of her parents who was abusive and had substance abuse problems. As a result, there was a lot of acting out and a lot of issues for her. She found herself at the age of 17 pregnant with her first child. Fast-forward to yesterday, and at age 39 she's a mother of five and a grandmother of I think it was three.

4:00

However, you know, she had a rough time as a young mom, but she made some choices years back to turn things around. She went to school. She had a job. She started being an engaged parent and mom, took care of things. She was clean and sober. She moved her family to Fort McMurray to start a new life, from the Maritimes to Fort McMurray.

Things were not going too badly until one of her young daughters started to have trouble at school. She saw her daughter at age 12 struggling with a black depression, just a deep depression, that she had not seen before. She didn't know what to do. She tried all kinds of things. One day after a really bad day she decided to look into her daughter's social media accounts, and what she found astounded her. She found messages on social media accounts and online from people in her school that were just tormenting her. They were making fun of how she looked, how she sounded, how she dressed. They were telling her to harm herself, to kill herself, that she was worthless, and it just went on and on and on. I can't tell you her whole story. She certainly did try to get help for her daughter and tried to stop the online abuse, but it didn't stop. She found her daughter at age 13 – she had died by suicide. She ended her life at age 13.

The second story is of a young woman who was at the event yesterday. She laughed because she said that the first time she went, she was one of those tough girls that said: you know, this isn't going to do anything for me. It turned out that she is a bit of a poster girl for that now, and she is actually mentoring young girls. She told her story. She talked about being in junior high and also looking a little bit different than the other kids. She was maybe taller. She was going through a little bit of a goth stage, she said, and she started to be tormented by bullies online as well. After the online bullying, it sort of spread into everyday life at school, that they, too, were telling her to kill herself, to cut herself, that she wasn't worth anything, that she was ugly, she was fat, she was useless. Her life was hell.

She actually took the advice she was given by those bullies, and she started to cut herself. She didn't think that her parents noticed. There would be blood on the sheets and things in the morning, but she didn't think that her parents would notice until one day the abuse got too bad. She said that it was like a movie – it sort of freaked her out a little bit – and all of the abuse that she had received, a lot of it online and on social media, just sort of started playing itself like a movie, so she picked up a knife. She went to cut, but that particular time she cut deeper than she ever had before, and the bleeding was profuse. Luckily, her mom was in the next room. She screamed. Her mom took her to the hospital. She was stitched up, she was cleaned up, and that was the first day that she was ever able to speak to a professional about her mental illness and about some of the bullying that was going on. But what happened after that is . . . [Ms Renaud's speaking time expired]

Thanks.

The Speaker: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this very important bill, and I'd also like to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for putting this forward. You know, I think that this bill also fits very well with our Bill 2 to make life better and remove the limitations for reporting sexual and domestic violence. When we have these kinds of complementary bills, that work with one another to support everyday Albertans, this is what we mean when we say that we're making life better for Albertans. I think investing in our children, investing in women and girls is something that we can be really

proud of and also be really proud of working with our opposition colleagues across the floor to make things better for people.

I was listening to the Bill 2 debates the other day, and I was blown away by the stories that were shared here, Mr. Speaker. I think that all the members in here would agree with me that the courage of the members who spoke on that bill and shared their personal stories – it was profoundly moving. It takes a lot of courage to do that and share your own personal stories.

I also thought it was interesting. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed asked a really good question, I thought, as well. You know, again, this is where we have great people in the opposition who are putting a lot of thought into this. The question he asked – I think it was to the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill – was not only just “what's your advice to people who may be victims?” but also “what's your advice to people who are thinking about committing these kinds of crimes; how do we help those people and stop this from happening in the first place?” This bill is great for protecting potential victims. If we can avoid having people put into these difficult situations in the first place, then we can avoid a lot of other negative outcomes.

I know that in the Bill 2 debates some members were talking about how being abused at any age is terrible, especially at such a young age. It changes your body and your brain, and even though you survive and move on – I know that the Member for Lethbridge-East talked about survivors and thrivers. People who've been affected by this: it takes time for them to come around, to be able to feel that they can speak out about this. But at some point in time we need to be there for them and give them the supports so that they feel that they have support from the government and that they know that when they come forward, they will have justice and things will be better for them.

I also think about my niece. I've got a four-year-old niece in Toronto. My sister and my brother-in-law are fantastic parents, and I know they do everything that they can for my niece to ensure that she's safe. But I also think about, you know, when my sister and I grew up, we didn't have cellphones and these digital recording devices. Parents nowadays face a very different kind of environment, where everybody's got at least one camera on them at all times. There's so much more possibility, I suppose, just having access to the device. It's right there. And people can sometimes act without thinking and do something that they would otherwise regret. You know, when I was growing up, we didn't have these kinds of devices.

I want to share a story of my own, and by no means do I think my story – my story pales in comparison with those that have been told before, but it's my story, so I'd like to tell a little bit about that. When I was in high school, I was really good friends with a buddy, and we had a falling-out, but we'd see each other often at parties and that kind of thing. And, like I say, we didn't have these kinds of devices back then, but we had, you know, those big cameras that you put on your shoulder, that you needed to plug into the wall like those old camcorders. We were at a party one night and, you know – we were in high school – drinking too much and having too much fun, and I had too much to drink, so I was being sick at my friend's house. It was terribly embarrassing. I mean, when you're that young and you've only had a few drinks on different occasions, it's hard to know what your limit is. Mr. Speaker, I figured out what my limit was that day.

That was a big mistake, but here's what happened. My ex-friend took the big video camera and filmed me being sick. I actually had been sick on my friend's kitchen floor, and I got some paper towels to try to clean it up, but it appeared as though I was swimming in my own sickness. I was trying to be responsible, even though I had had too much to drink, and clean up after myself, and this friend

who wasn't a friend came in and took advantage of my vulnerability. You know, even though we weren't friends, it's kind of a bullying scenario. Then, subsequently, what he would do with that video was have screenings at high school during lunch. It was pretty embarrassing. Like, everybody knew what I had done.

I was ashamed of myself, but that's what kids do, right? You know, we learn and we move on. But I hesitate to think, too, what – and I know my situation wasn't about pornography. I know the bill is more about pornography, but I'm just trying to use an analogy that when people violate your trust, it's hard to know how to trust people again. That's why when I think about my niece, I think about bills like this and how great it is that we've got people who are thinking about our children and our women and girls and protecting them.

4:10

What else, Mr. Speaker? I think that by supporting this bill, we're sending a very clear message that these kinds of extreme violations of trust and privacy are completely unacceptable, that this isn't something that we tolerate.

I think maybe part of the problem is that it's difficult for people to talk about this in public. We heard some very powerful stories, like I said, during the Bill 2 debate, and it's difficult for people to come forward and talk about that. So I'm really proud that we can put our political differences aside and talk about this very difficult issue. I think, you know, it's been said here before, but Albertans deserve to feel safe and comfortable in their schools and in their homes and in their communities.

You know, oftentimes we hear about abuse when children are very young, and they may not even know that this has happened to them. They may not understand the consequences and that this is something that could affect them for their entire life. I think that having legislation like this to protect kids so that they don't get into these situations, and we tell the perpetrators that society will not accept this – there is help available for these people. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed said: how do you prevent this? Well, we also need to help people who may be suffering from mental illness or addictions who might be tempted to perpetrate these kinds of crimes, so having a social safety net, having supports available for people who may be, like I say, tempted to perpetrate these kinds of acts.

I found an article online just the other day that really resonated with me, and I think it's very similar to what we've been talking about. I'll table the article tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. The article is from *Wired* magazine online and the title is Why There's No 'Silver Bullet' for Ridding the Web of Revenge Porn. Sure enough, I'm sure there's no silver bullet. While this bill is very good, there is more that we can do and more that needs to be done, but this is an excellent first start. So I'm really proud to support this. But I'd like to just read this to you. Because I don't have any personal experience with the topic of this bill, I wanted to look at other examples that are out there. [Mr. Westhead's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my honourable colleague for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for working so hard and bringing this important and, in my humble opinion, historic bill. Thank you very much, sir.

I believe that this is an area that needs to be addressed by the Legislatures of the entire country, all the provinces and the

territories, so that we can stop this kind of bullying and we can stop this kind of behaviour to protect our children. I'm proud that Alberta is taking a step, and it seems like all parties are supporting it, which is, you know, great news.

Listening to all my colleagues, I remember that when we were growing up – you know, I'm older than a few of my colleagues here – we didn't have these digital cameras and these iPads.

Mrs. Pitt: Did you have a computer?

Mr. Gill: No. There was no power in India – right? – so it wouldn't work even if we had one.

On a serious note, like, we didn't have that technology. The children of my era weren't threatened by who's recording it or who's sharing it. Now once we put anything on the Internet, there's no way you can delete it and stuff like that because it changes hands so quickly.

You know, with this technology the world has changed so much. Everybody has cameras and iPhones and all those digital devices. Every household has it. It seems like every child has it. I know that my kids have all the iPads and stuff like that, which sometimes I think I should take back from them. But sometimes I have to bribe them because I'm never home.

Mr. Rodney: You're busy working.

Mr. Gill: Yeah.

You know, there are fewer and fewer things in this day and age that we can protect from the world, like, when it comes to privacy. As I said, with digital media and social media it's so quick, especially all those trolls on Twitter and Facebook and all those social media things. People just change, they alter, they share, and we can never recover those things, especially when these images are targeting children. That's just sad. I mean, no children should be exposed to bullying when it comes to the sharing of these kinds of images. If somebody is sharing these images with or without consent, somebody is breaking that trust.

One thing that we can all agree on is that images of an intimate nature deserve the expectation of privacy, whether these images are taken with consent or without consent. Again, if they're shared against the wishes of the victim, it's a breach of trust with each other.

We've heard the stories about the young girl Amanda Todd. This happens all the time. I've seen it on TV, in newspapers. Perhaps it's even been with someone that we know, the devastating toll that the sharing of these images can take. Relentless cyberbullying leads to serious, long-lasting emotional scars. I believe that if we can somehow pass this legislation in this House, it will prevent these kinds of horrendous crimes against these vulnerable children.

I want to thank all members of the House and especially, once again, my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this forward. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of this House for supporting this great cause.

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

4:20

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join in the congratulations of my colleagues to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for presenting this private member's bill, Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act.

I rise, really, to speak as a father, an uncle, a brother, a husband, also on behalf of colleagues who've been subjected to this sort of thing as well as, actually, students. During my 40 years of working at the university, I've seen students damaged by similar things. It's

obvious that it's only over the last perhaps 10 years that the technology has existed that's described in this bill.

You know, it affects – it isn't just young girls. I think that's an important point that we've got to make here. These are intimate images of any gender. It can affect young women. It can affect young men. It can affect people that are transitioning. The key thing is: is it an intimate image, and has there been consent?

Now, I think that's something that I want to spend a little bit of time talking about, but before I do that, I actually want to congratulate the spirit of this debate. Once again we are actually working together to try to craft something that is going to be useful. It's similar to the spirit that was shown, for instance, on the bill that I spoke to about education for vaccination in the last sittings. I congratulated all of us, and I hoped that that spirit might be inoculated into the House, and I think it has been. I like seeing this collegiality and co-operation.

You know, it's also been evident in the discussion of Bill 1. I mean, there's some carping about the fact that we can't spend as much money as we'd like to spend and actually don't have to raise taxes as much as the opposition would to accomplish the same thing, but I think that in general we're in agreement that cutting school fees is a good thing, and all of us are working together. Similarly, with Bill 2; that's an act that all of us agree on. There may be some fine details in it that cause us some discussion, but we are working together. This is a good use of our time as members here to discuss this private member's bill.

I want to turn to the point about consent. I think it deserves a lot of discussion. You know, it isn't just consent for the transmission of intimate images that I want to talk about here. The concept of consent, particularly in the sexual relations context, is vital. There's been evidence just over the last couple of weeks that there are judges that don't really understand that concept very well and that need to be educated about what true consent is or when a person is unable to actually give that consent.

It's one of the things that I congratulate the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake on. In the bill it says:

A person who distributes an intimate image of another person knowing that the person depicted in the image did not consent to the distribution, or is reckless as to whether or not that person consented to the distribution, commits a tort against that other person.

That sort of language needs to be applied to other situations of consent. I think that if it were, there would be a lot of victims of this sort of behaviour that would actually see justice.

In that case that I'm referring to, where a judge thought that an inebriated woman could give consent, that woman has not seen justice and will never see justice and will live with that for the rest of her life, suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, I'm sure, and shame in the community and all these other things. So I really congratulate the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for putting that kind of language in this act.

I'm going to comment on consent from another point of view. I'm not sure why we have to go to these lengths, actually, to do this. I've been practising medicine for 40 years, and for 40 years if I wanted to take a picture of somebody's parts, I had to get a signed consent. I didn't have to be taught that. That's common sense. I mean, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks was talking about common sense in the budget. This is common sense on consent. If you take somebody's image and you want to use it, as I would use it, for instance, to teach about the medical problem or to document it in the medical file, I know that I have to get written consent for that and that I have to be able to produce that consent if I'm asked for it. I think that's really what the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is talking about.

Similarly, I've been doing clinical trials in hematology and medical oncology for 30 years. There's a thing called good clinical practice rules for that. The number one rule in good clinical practice is that you have to get an informed consent, informed consent meaning that the patient that signs that consent actually has been told about the benefits and risks of this treatment, and I have to document that the patient has actually understood that information and that the consent was not obtained by any form of coercion. For instance, I could not say to that patient: if you don't sign up for this trial, you're not going to get this treatment. That's forbidden in good clinical practice in clinical trials. I realize that, you know, in the Member for Banff-Cochrane's experience it might have been difficult to get an informed consent from him for the video there.

Anyway, yesterday I was at a fantastic event at the Boyle McCauley community centre. It was called the inner-city roast beef dinner. I was there with my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Centre. There were Edmonton Eskimos there. There were actually some Conservative Party of Canada, CPC, MPs there. We were happy to have our pictures taken. But, actually, I noticed that some of the attendees of this dinner actually had red dots applied on their coats. I overheard somebody say: well, that means that your image will not be taken by the TV cameras. So the professional videographers know about informed consent. Even when we're taking pictures of schoolchildren down here on the steps, some of them have FOIP waivers that mean that they don't actually go in the pictures. So this idea about consent for image use I think is very prevalent.

The other one that's really been striking to me is that I was the medical director of the blood transfusion service for many years. I actually had to testify before the Krever commission because Justice Krever made a lot of inquiries into the blood transfusion system of the '80s. You know, everybody thinks about the HIV and hepatitis C and hepatitis B infections that, unfortunately, happened in the '80s and early '90s. It was a very evocative time. Justice Krever did opine that there were things that the blood system needed to be doing to protect Canadians from those infections. But he also made a very important observation: up until that time one did not have to consent for blood transfusion.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

4:30

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to have the opportunity to stand today to speak to such a thoughtful and timely private member's bill. As many others have, I'd like to echo my thanks to the member across the aisle for bringing forward this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to get a bachelor of arts in professional communications. As part of that study one of my favourite portions of what I studied with that was the history of communications technology. That started all the way back from when we first moved as a human species from an oral culture to a written culture and looked at the implications of what making that kind of change does. The fascinating thing when you study the evolution of communications technology is that it doesn't just change what we do as individuals. It changes every aspect of how our society functions.

A change from traditionally having communicated mainly orally to all of a sudden communicating in writing meant a drastic change in how we communicated information. All of a sudden we didn't have to tell things in stories or in rhyme or other things like that that made it easier to remember. Suddenly we could communicate in different ways, in briefer ways. We could tell stories in different ways. Information could travel so much further. All of a sudden we

found that, you know, people could share thoughts and ideas over great distances. Suddenly people could communicate more, so far-flung groups became closer and more connected. You see that as time goes on. You see that as other things evolve. Over time that evolution of technology, that communications technology, happens faster and faster. The interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that you can never predict the result that a new technology is going to have until it's too late to actually remove that technology, until it's become so ingrained in our society that it can no longer actually be removed.

That's the interesting thing when we sort of come up to our present day, when we have technology that's moving so fast, so quickly. Certainly, with the evolution now of the smart phone and a camera built into every device, all of a sudden then we had a new technology that came in. It was adopted very quickly, and we were all very excited about it, but we didn't know the full ramifications of embracing that technology and it becoming ubiquitous in society until we reached a point where it's too late to put that genie back in the bottle.

Certainly, having this technology and having these opportunities confers a lot of benefits on us as a society. Certainly, for us as politicians the opportunity to be able to very quickly access social media, to snap a picture and send it out to thousands of people, to immediately be able to communicate is an amazing thing.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I might not agree with that.

Mr. Shepherd: At times we may regret that we've done so, indeed.

At the same time, you know, it's opened up a whole new area of intimacy in relationships. The ability to text, to send photos quickly, to be able to go back and forth, and to be able to share things. It's a great thing in many respects, but we certainly recognize that with it now has come new opportunities for abuse. That's a challenging thing because, again, Mr. Speaker, we cannot put this toothpaste back in the tube. It's out there, it's part of our lives, and we have to deal with the challenges and the possible consequences that can come from the use or misuse of this technology.

As I said, this is an incredibly timely bill from the member to give us the opportunity to address one of the issues that has come up. It's a combination, Mr. Speaker, as others have noted, of things that have always happened to some extent. We've always had bullying. We've always had, sadly, abuse. Frankly, that is what this comes down to. When we have people who are sharing these kinds of images nonconsensually, without permission, to attack another person, it comes down to control, whether someone is trying to control another person by blackmailing them over images that they may hold or whether it's someone that's angry and acting out of anger and rage and for revenge because they've lost control over another individual over whom they felt the right to have that control. This is a very smart and prudent step that allows us to move forward to ensure that that kind of abuse is not allowed to continue, that there are strict consequences for when it occurs, and that allows for immediate and important action.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot of talk today about the need for better understanding and better education, and that's another great benefit of this bill coming forward, the opportunity that we have to stand here today and have this debate in the Legislature; the media that this will generate; the opportunity that this is going to give to schools to educate students, to parents to have the kind of conversation that the member had with his daughter, that sparked this bill. It's an opportunity for us to raise awareness and through that to educate our young people about what healthy relationships should be.

Mr. Speaker, as others have noted, far too often currently we see that our young men and women do not always have a healthy

understanding of relationships, and particularly our young men do not always have a clear understanding of the kind of relationships they should be having with women, of how they should treat them, and of having a broad and inclusive view, frankly, a feminist view, understanding how to properly support women, not to exploit them, not to abuse them, not to try to take advantage of them or control them but to treat them as equals.

We've seen this time and again through social media, through recent things that have occurred. We've seen this. I don't bring it up in any way to get into partisan discussion or to bash one party or another, but we've seen the kinds of toxic world views that some young men in our society hold. Where they come from is that we're not setting better examples ourselves as leaders or as individuals, or they're not having the opportunity to have proper mentors who teach them how to respect women and build healthy relationships.

It's incredibly important that we have this bill, Mr. Speaker, to address the fact that we know that that occurs, that we know that this kind of misogyny, this kind of abuse is out there. Certainly, it does not happen only to women, but in a survey by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative they did find that 90 per cent of victims who reported to that survey were women; 93 per cent said that they suffered significant emotional distress due to being a victim of this sort of abuse; 49 per cent reported having been harassed or stalked by individuals who saw the illicit material. So as others have noted, this is not something that merely stays in cyberspace. It has very real impacts on women, the others that suffer this abuse or this form of harassment. It affects them emotionally, psychologically, can leave very deep scars and damage and can lead to real-world threats on their life. So it's entirely reasonable and appropriate to consider this bill.

I understand that as of last summer about 34 states in the U.S. had brought forward laws against nonconsensual sharing of images and revenge porn, most of those outlawing the dissemination of intimate images when there is a lack of consent. Of course, we heard that there was a similar bill that was passed by the former NDP government in Manitoba, and this aligns with the federal government's bill, Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act.

I particularly appreciate that the member took steps to give schools an opportunity and a route by which they can deal with this because, as I said, Mr. Speaker, it's incredibly important that we use this not just as a tool for punishment but as an opportunity for education. Certainly, we've seen in the cases that have been noted, Rehtaeh Parsons and others, that we had young people who did not seem to fully comprehend the scope and the effect of their actions. So perhaps by schools having the ability to take direct and swift action to address these problems before they spread out further in the community, before we have students that have had to endure months or years of shame, by being able to act quickly, set an example for other students and help them understand, help them, frankly, build empathy – that's one of the most difficult things I found when I was reading coverage of some of these stories: young men who were involved in the nonconsensual sharing of these images did not understand the impact that they had.

Thank you.

4:40

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my deep pleasure to rise today to support Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. First of all, I would like to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing forward such an amazing bill. I'm very much amazed to listen to the story of how it came out after the conversation with his daughter, and I

would personally like to write a note to her thanking her for this discussion on this.

I would like to begin by defining a few terms which are used very commonly and very often, but as a reminder I would still like to use the dictionary to define those terms; for example, the term “private.” When we talk about that something is private, it means that it’s protected from view or disturbance by others. When we talk about that something is safe, that means that it’s free from harm’s reach. This bill is basically providing assurance to an individual in society that through the use of media or through any other means, you are protected and you are safe where you are in society.

With this bill I would like to share a story. Throughout the time I was in school, in university, I have seen multiple situations where people have been targeted and their photos have been taken without their consent and shared on campus or anywhere among their families or friends. I have seen the consequences afterwards because these people will not be able to even show their face to their friends or even feel safe to step outside their homes. It’s a rejection, Mr. Speaker, that they experience. When we talk about inclusion, when we talk about justice, when we talk about peace, those ideologies or the steps that we take to promote those concepts – this particular situation, when the individual is not feeling safe stepping outside their house or home just because they’re exposed through technology, is basically not fair to that individual.

Also, research has shown that when somebody faces rejection, it activates the same pathways in the brain that are activated when we have a physical injury or when we have physical pain. Basically, the extent of the pain the person experiences at the time of rejection is actually no less than physical pain. Usually the treatment is the same: taking painkillers. So you can imagine that how much of an emotional impact that person is having is equivalent to physical injury.

When we talk about a situation like this, basically we are strengthening our community by basically allowing that person to sue the other individual who is using the images of the individual without consent. As an individual we have a right to make a choice. We have the freedom of choice as individuals in terms of what we agree to and what we do not agree to. Exposing the individual’s privacy or something that would damage or harm the image of that individual without their consent is basically a big damage to our society.

I would like to also mention that it’s a big social issue because when we are talking about strengthening our communities, the fundamental underlying concept behind building relationships and strengthening communities is trust. When privacy is breached, the trust is gone. And when the trust is gone, then how can we even move forward to ensure that we celebrate, you know, inclusivity, strong relationships? The fundamental concept that begins with one individual: when that does not exist, how can we build a bigger picture on that? We need to start with one individual, as we are talking about in this particular situation, which may sound a little minor. We’re targeting one individual and their consent for their photos to be used on social media or anywhere, but the importance of this concept in a bigger picture is so much, and it’s so significant that it’s oftentimes underestimated.

I’m very proud to say that I am Canadian. I belong to a nation where I enjoy freedom, where I enjoy safety, where I feel protected. This bill is actually in alignment with the federal government’s Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act. Basically, it is already something we have got on the federal level, and Alberta taking this initiative and discussing this in the Alberta Legislative Assembly makes me super proud, I would say. We are talking about the safety of our citizens in the province of Alberta as well as in the great nation of Canada.

Also, my other concern is that when we talk about the sharing of those images without consent, the problem is that oftentimes those images are edited. The era we are living in right now, through technology everything is possible. So when images are shared, they’re oftentimes edited and are not even true to portray that specific individual. It’s a very serious issue in our society. The consequences to that are – basically, it’s a false portrayal of that individual in the first place. That’s one thing that is not fair to that individual. Secondly, it is being shared with everybody and conveying wrong messages. It’s a target on that individual psychologically, physically, emotionally. By all means, it’s a target on that individual, and any type of target on an individual is basically a breach of safety and privacy.

Therefore, with great happiness and with great pride I would like to strongly support this bill. I’m very grateful to have this discussion ongoing in Alberta’s Legislative Assembly today. Thank you very much.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my absolute pleasure to stand and speak in support of Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. I don’t have much time, but I don’t need much time because it’s a great bill. It’s something that continues to send the message that we are supporting victims of sexual violence and sexual exploitation and that we want to make sure that the message is focused on that we’re not blaming someone for an image being shared, but we’re ensuring that the blame is rightly being put at the feet of the person who has actually shared that image without a person’s consent. That’s something that we need to continue to talk about: how we address consent through education in our province.

Unfortunately, when we have young people that are experiencing this new technology, we don’t have the legislation that can keep up with the decisions that they make. They have not developed the skills of being able to see what the effects of their decision-making are, those consequences. So it’s a good thing that we make sure that we can start talking about this more now and make sure that there are also rules in place to deter those that would do it.

It is something that disproportionately affects women. Ninety per cent of those that are affected, that have this done, that have revenge porn done, are women. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre was saying, 93 per cent of these people experience significant emotional distress, and as many as 51 per cent contemplate suicide. It’s that shame factor, that is still incredibly prevalent in today’s society, that makes this sort of sharing still so powerful even though we would hope that it would not be.

So it’s my absolute happiness that this bill has come forward from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and I know that I have total support on this side of the House. Thank you.

4:50

The Speaker: If there are no other members who wish to speak to the bill, I would go to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very much an honour to be able to stand in front of my caucus, the government side’s caucus, and the other caucuses and to hear their support for a bill that I’ve put forward. As mentioned, I do need to make sure that people understand that whenever we put a piece of legislation forward, it is important that we are going out to the different groups and ensuring that it’s the best piece of legislation that we can bring forward.

I do believe that cyberbullying is an unfortunate by-product of our technology moving forward. It is something that needs to be dealt with, and I believe that the bill that I'm going to be putting forward, Bill 202, will take a small part of some of the cyberbullying and give a second thought, if you will, to whether or not people want to pursue this terrible bane for all of our province and Albertans. For myself, I think that this is truly a nonpartisan bill that I'm bringing forward because we all have a loved one that potentially could be impacted with revenge porn. The fact is that when we're looking at moving forward, how is it that something so powerful can have so little legislation involved with it?

I do have to make sure that I acknowledge that the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Education did both sit down with me and gave me the opportunity to discuss my idea on these bills. I also have to thank the NDP caucus whip for also hearing the idea being brought forward and taking that idea to the caucus and being able to make sure that if there were contributions they wanted to make to this bill, they were able to. I'd like to thank the third party, and, well, the independent parties, if you will, independent members, for their support as well for this bill being brought forward.

The fact is that the idea was something that my youngest daughter had brought forward in a discussion that I had because this is something that I was concerned that some day she might have to deal with. I mean, this is something that, I think, is an unbelievable thing that you have to talk about with your daughter. She's 11 years old. I can't believe that I needed to have that conversation, and there are several other conversations. I think we all can acknowledge that she is going to be exposed to technology. The fact that we all have a cellphone that's available to us that can take high-quality pictures at any time and distribute them in a second is a powerful tool that can many times be used in a good way, but it also can be used against mainly our young women and our women of Alberta.

Legislation like this, I believe, brings accountability to both the youth and the adults within Alberta. We need to make sure that we all are able to hold those accountable that share these pictures because it's all of our responsibility to make sure that, in the end, our most vulnerable circumstances, which is when our privacy is breached, are protected. It doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. What matters is that privacy that we expect from our loved ones, whether they're our friends, our parents, our uncles, our aunts, our cousins, our best friends, or just a person that we know. All these people need to accept that taking a picture that is shared with them and putting it out for the rest of the world to see without your permission is wrong.

Now, I'm hoping that if there is some improvement that needs to be done to this bill, because I do believe that working together in all parties to ensure that this piece of legislation moves forward, that we have a good, strong . . . [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired].

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to move directly to private members' motions at this time.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Surgical and Diagnostic Wait Times

501. Mr. Jean moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to complete and make public within 120 days of

the passage of this motion a report relating to surgical and diagnostic wait times that identifies the following: barriers causing excessive wait times; estimated costs of wait times in terms of factors including but not limited to lost productivity, health deterioration, and opioid addiction; and cost-effective solutions including those used in other provinces to reduce wait times within the limits of the Canada Health Act.

[Debate adjourned March 13: Mr. Smith speaking]

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on Motion 501 to speak in favour of it. Motion 501 calls on the government to complete a report within 120 days of the passage of this motion that will look at surgical and diagnostic wait times.

We know that we do, on both sides of this House, support the concept of a universal public system of health care. The problem, however, is that sometimes that public system of health care does not provide timely access. It's important for us to identify the barriers that cause excessive wait times, it's important for us to estimate the costs of those wait times, and it's important for us to propose and evaluate cost-effective ways of dealing with these wait times. It's important for us to look at the best practices across this country and across the provinces and see what we can do about creating a more efficient system.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Albertans wait approximately three weeks longer than the national average for treatment, and Albertans wait at times five weeks longer to go from a specialist to treatment than, say, the citizens of Saskatchewan, our neighbours to the east. It's important for us to address the concept of wait times. Wait times mean that patients continue in their suffering. We know that access to wait times is not access to health care, so if we truly care about serving the needs of our fellow Albertans and improving our health care system, it's going to be important for us to address wait times.

Wait times mean that sometimes you can have a great deal of pain as you're dealing with whatever affliction it is that you're facing. Hip replacements can take 209 days for 90 per cent of the patients in this province. A knee replacement can be 224 days, Mr. Speaker, for 90 per cent of the patients that need a knee replacement. Those are 209 days and 224 days when they're in a great deal of pain. I was just talking to a friend of mine in my church on Sunday who's been dealing with knee pain. She is going to have to wait a significant amount of time before she can have anything dealt with.

If we just take a look at the cost that that means to our society, where people are incapable of working, incapable of taking care of their family because of the problems that they are dealing with, this is a serious thing. I think it's important for us to take Motion 501 and to apply the time necessary to study this to identify those barriers. Why is it that we take longer in this province to access appropriate health care?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to Motion 501? The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 501, put forward by my hon. colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition. In just a few short words there is so much offered by the Leader of the Opposition on ways that we can identify issues and challenges inside the system. I know and you'll know that he is passionate – passionate – about making a

positive impact on not just our province but our health care system as well. He has provided some comments earlier in the debate. As well, I'm sure he's looking forward to closing debate around just this very, very important issue.

This motion alone certainly isn't going to solve all of the problems within the context of our system. It's certainly not going to solve all the problems at AHS, but you know, Mr. Speaker, that knowledge is power. This is an opportunity for the government to provide that information. While I appreciate – and we've heard from the Minister of Health some comments earlier that much of this information is available, but what . . . [Mr. Cooper's speaking time expired] Oh, that's too bad.

The Speaker: The hon. member to close debate.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that all Albertans, all Canadians, for that matter, that have had a loved one, a member of their family in the health care system in Alberta or the rest of Canada are very concerned. First of all, they know that we have one of the greatest health care systems in the world as far as 90 per cent of the issues, but it's the 10 per cent. Many of the issues fall through the cracks because we're not paying attention or we don't have alternative options for those people.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that I'm very disappointed, first of all, that if the members of the government don't support this motion, it's for political reasons. I don't think that's helpful because this motion simply asks for some basic research on how to reduce our terrible wait times and show Albertans the evidence of what they find. We know, notwithstanding that we spend a lot more money than any other major province in Canada, that we have some of the worst outcomes of all the provinces except for Atlantic Canada. In fact, for wait times in particular, Saskatchewan has less than half of the number of days of wait time that we do for most regularly known procedures: knee surgeries, hip transplants, those types of things. It's 90 and 95 days compared to over 200 and 220 days in Alberta in some cases.

There's no reason why this government shouldn't support this, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are suffering needlessly, and we know that other jurisdictions in Canada, other constitutional obligations that are in other provinces similar to ours have better wait times, in fact, half the amount of wait times that we do as far as real data goes. I think that what we need to do is to have this government focus on the question of how to do wait times better and why other provinces are getting better outcomes.

I believe this NDP government is more worried about other issues related to health care than they are actual outcomes. I know that we have to focus on technology. We have to focus on finding improvements in our health care system, but truly, Mr. Speaker, right now, today, with what we know is going on in the rest of the country, we also know that we can do a lot better than what we're doing. We know that other jurisdictions get better results, and they get it for less money, so it's not an issue of money. Even though this particular part of our system, health care, takes up over 40 per cent of our budget – some say as much as 50 per cent of our budget – the truth is that other provinces spend less and get better results.

These wait times that we currently have are unacceptable. Waiting causes more complications, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned last time in my speech how it costs people not just money but how it costs people and Albertans productivity, in particular family members. In the long run this means that we're going to have more problems, that we'll have less of a quality of life, and that we will have more family members supporting those people that our health system let fall through the cracks.

Even when you consider addictions, Mr. Speaker, whether it be for a month of painkillers or three months or six months of painkillers, the situation is – being on painkillers for that long, as we know, does cause long-term complications, sometimes addiction to these painkillers, including fentanyl and other things. I would suggest that the less time we have people on wait-lists, the better off not just their quality of life is but the future ramifications of trying times and helping those people that can't help themselves.

There's a situation, Mr. Speaker, that frankly means that we're losing the opportunity. Today we had an opportunity, for instance, to make sure that this particular motion would pass with all-party support. I know the opposition parties are supporting me on this motion. I think the government could have come forward and said: "Yes, we will do this. We will come back to Albertans with the report indicating exactly why it's taking longer in Alberta to see a doctor, why it's taking longer in Alberta to get a surgery or to see a specialist than it is in other provinces, and why it's taking sometimes twice as long in Alberta as it does in other provinces."

Again, many of these people in other jurisdictions are paying out of their pocket at clinics in B.C. or Quebec or even in the United States, and I don't think that's what the government wants. I don't think the government wants Albertans to go to other jurisdictions. I don't think they want us to go to B.C. or Saskatchewan or the United States.

I think that what they want is a better solution here in Alberta for Albertans, one that actually responds to Albertans and clearly understands, through a number of studies of empirical evidence much like I'm suggesting here, that we can do better, Mr. Speaker. I don't think that waiting lists are just so that rich people can get by and go and find their own opportunities. I think waiting lists are clearly something that is in the way of good productivity and good health care. To have an operation today doesn't cost any more than having an operation in six months, and that's why I think we need to clear the backlog and get to the real details of why we are taking so much longer to fulfill the needs of our citizens than other jurisdictions in Canada are doing.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping that the government will change their mind, that they'll come forward and support us on this. We'll see what happens. The tinkering that this government is doing with health care is not going to help and solve the long-term ramifications of the system itself.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:08 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Loewen	Smith
Cyr	Panda	Strankman
Fildebrandt	Pitt	van Dijken
Gill	Rodney	Yao
Jean	Schneider	

Against the motion:

Babcock	Jansen	Miranda
Bilous	Kazim	Payne
Carlier	Kleinstaub	Phillips
Carson	Larivee	Piquette
Connolly	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dang	Luff	Sabir

Drever
Eggen
Feehan
Ganley
Gray
Hinkley
Horne

Malkinson
Mason
McCuaig-Boyd
McKitrick
McPherson
Miller

Schmidt
Schreiner
Shepherd
Turner
Westhead
Woollard

Totals:

For – 14

Against – 37

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seeing the time and the productive conversation that we've had today, I move that we adjourn until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, March 21, 2017

Day 11

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
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Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
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Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstaub, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)

Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
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Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
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Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
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Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
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Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
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Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk

Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House
Services

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and
Legal Research Officer

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms

Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKittrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKittrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKittrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. May we always remember that our strengths outweigh our weaknesses and that by effectively collaborating and co-operating, we can have positive outcomes that will benefit all Albertans.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and say a few words about Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017. The supplementary amounts provided by this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third-quarter fiscal update, released on February 23, which is likewise reflected in the forecast provided by Budget 2016. These amounts are necessary for the government to conduct business and fulfill its commitments for the current fiscal year. When passed, this bill will authorize approximately \$1.6 billion in voted expense funding and \$125 million in voted capital financial transactions for the government.

As the Minister of Finance previously mentioned in this Chamber, the single largest amount reflected in this bill is for the Fort McMurray wildfire disaster. I know that all members in this Chamber have a great deal of admiration and respect for the first responders who battled that terrible fire, and I know that all members of this Chamber have supported and will continue to support all Albertans who were affected by this disaster. At this time let me commit once again that this government and all Albertans have the backs of those who were affected by the fire then, today, and into the future.

Madam Chair, I know we have already had a good debate on these supplementary estimates during Committee of Supply and again during second reading. At this point let me just add a few additional comments.

In addition to the Wood Buffalo wildfire, this bill will provide authorization for additional monies and transfers for the following 18 departments: Advanced Education, Agriculture and Forestry, Children's Services, Community and Social Services, Culture and Tourism, Economic Development and Trade, Education, Environment and Parks, Health, Indigenous Relations, Infrastructure, Justice and Solicitor General, my favourite of Labour, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Housing, Service Alberta, Transportation, and Treasury Board and Finance.

In previous debates on this supplementary supply there was one point raised which deserves further elaboration. As was discussed in second reading, there are transfers between Environment and Parks and other ministries' budgets to align accountabilities for each ministry's role in the climate leadership plan. I want to be crystal clear for the benefit of all members in this House that these are transfers and not increases in overall spending.

As I wrap up my remarks, let me acknowledge what we all know. This was a challenging year for our province. Faced with the worst recession in a generation, this government made a choice to protect the core public services that Albertans rely on, invest in infrastructure, and continue to work to diversify the economy. As our economy turns the corner and returns to a position of growth, adding 19,000 jobs since July 2016, our government is squarely focused on making life better for Albertans. Whether that's keeping tuition frozen, reducing school fees, or capping electricity rates, this government has the backs of Albertans and will continue to have their backs into the future.

On that note, Madam Chair, I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support this supplementary supply bill and provide the government with the necessary spending authority to protect front-line services and pay for the Wood Buffalo wildfire.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Chair. How are you? It's good to be here today. My thoughts on Bill 4 – are we on Bill 4? I didn't know I was on the speakers list. I'm actually going to yield the floor.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak briefly to the bill to oppose it not because the government is preparing itself to establish systems and keep the government running, to keep things running smoothly – I think that's valuable – but I oppose it simply because it's a proxy for the entire budget, which I cannot support. That's my challenge with it. The point of interim is to keep the government running until the budget is passed. If I might use an analogy, this engine needs to be throttled back. An engine that overrevs very quickly self-destructs, and I would suggest that our government needs to be spending less, not racing ahead and just continuing to spend at the same pace it has been. It would be valuable for us to throttle back a little bit.

The truth is that the amount here reflects, really, the amount needed for the total budget, and that's where my challenge with it really is. It perpetuates an endless spending problem that we have currently. We are here this year and last year advancing the highest deficits that Alberta has ever had and the highest per capita deficits in modern Canadian history of any province. There is a sense of which we need to throttle this engine back a little bit, not just keep racing ahead, not just keep pouring more fuel into an engine that's already overrevving and headed for a significant self-destructive event.

There needs to be some care expressed here in terms of how much we're spending. We just plain are spending the highest amount per capita of any province in Canada. Over the last 10 years spending has increased much more than inflation and population rates, so really we're experiencing expansionary budgets here. These are not budgets that keep up with the cost of living, that keep up with population growth. These are expansionary budgets, where government is taking to itself the freedom to spend more on a percentage basis than is needed, and in a time of economic difficulty

at least holding the line would be wise. There's no need to follow the government's fearmongering and say that somebody else would maybe cut it and cast the province into chaos. At least holding the line would be the responsible thing to do. That would be the correct thing to do.

Alberta needs leadership on our spending problem. We have an addiction to spending as a people and as a government that we have not yet come to terms with, and we need to somehow get some help with that. There's so little accountability that some might say that there's no accountability on this spending spree. There are few program parameters that rein it in, and we just need to find some way to cut back some of our expenses, to cut back some of the misused spending, some of the excessive spending, and just act responsibly.

This is not a responsible budget. The media and the people have been extremely clear about that. They have been speaking to us over and over again that they wish that the government would be cutting back some. I have numbers and numbers of young people who have come to me and are very frustrated and say: "What are we going to do? We're going to be paying for somebody else's debt for decades to come." They're not happy as young people to be seeing a government that's spending their future today, so we need to cut back on spending. This interim supply does not indicate that. The government has increased taxes. It's increased costs in many different ways.

The Chair: Hon. member, I think you might be speaking to the next bill, Bill 5. We're on supplementary supply, not interim supply.

Mr. Orr: Supplementary supply. Yes.

The Chair: The bill that we're on is the supplementary supply, and that's what you're speaking to?

Mr. Orr: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay.

10:10

Mr. Orr: Thank you.

I speak to it this way because, quite frankly, supplementary supply is just, as I said, a proxy for the rest of the budget that's coming. It keeps the government going for a while. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. Supplementary. Interim. You're right. I will pass. Forgive me.

The Chair: All right. Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the supplementary supply bill, Bill 4? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to see how many people on the other side of the House are so excited to see me today. I generally get that reaction.

I am, of course, rising to speak to supplementary supply. I do appreciate the opportunity. Madam Chair, it's kind of interesting because we're discussing supplementary supply after we've now seen the government's budget, which was read last week in this Chamber, a budget which was, quite frankly, horrendous. One of the interesting things, having had an opportunity to go back home this weekend to Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and speak to people who have now seen the budget – there's a lot of shock, a lot of fear, certainly, to see what this government has brought forward. I mean, the largest debts in our history, massive deficits, no ability at all, no sign at all of attempting to control spending. This is primarily what we're hearing back home over the weekend.

The reason I bring that up when we're talking about supplementary supply is that for me a real important question is: should we expect another supplementary supply bill this time next year? Is the government going to have to do the same thing despite already projecting a \$71 billion or \$72 billion debt by the time the next election comes? That's with the projections that the government has put forward for oil, which most analyses say are not realistic, so we could be seeing significantly more debt.

These are all things, of course, that I'm hearing in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I expect that you're probably hearing the same in your constituencies, people deeply worried about this government's inability to get control of spending. We spend – and we often talk about it here – significantly more than our province to the west per capita, and we do not see significantly more services inside our province. I don't think anybody could put forward that argument. So the concern we have as we see these types of bills coming forward is that this government will not take steps to get our spending problem under control. Despite repeatedly being asked to show the plan on how they can do that, despite the opposition coming forward with many realistic options that we can get spending under control, we still do not see anything from the government.

In fact, they laugh when we talk about it, but I don't think laughing about borrowing against our children's future upwards of \$71 billion, \$72 billion, \$100 billion, wherever it's going to end up – I mean, as a father I find that scary. To me it's one of the largest intergenerational thefts that we've ever seen in this province, and I find that extremely troubling, particularly because this government is showing no sign, no appetite, no ideas on how to get our spending problem under control. We have a spending problem. Now, you don't have to be a business owner, though many of us are, and you don't have to be a farmer, which is, of course, a business, to be able to know that if you continue to spend more money than you're bringing in, you're eventually going to have a problem. How much debt can the province of Alberta take?

You know, this weekend when I was back home, I spent some time in Rimbey at their Fish and Game Association annual banquet, and some of the main topics that you would hear, when you would talk to people as we went through, were concerns over the money bills that this government is bringing forward, concerns that this government does not recognize that they're spending the good people of Alberta's money. The debt load is going to probably cause, maybe, credit downgrades again. We've already seen a credit downgrade under this government's tender. It's going to cause interest payments that are the equivalent of five, six, or seven government departments. That's a lot of hospitals. That is a lot of hospitals. But the government continues just to want to spend money, throw it in the black hole, and not get control.

That goes to the core of this bill and why there's a problem. The government is not showing the ability to manage the province. At its core managing our money and our finances is probably one of the most important jobs if not the most important job and role of government in our province. With \$71 billion worth of debt by their own projections – it probably will be significantly more because they're projecting a higher oil price than most people think is reasonable – to me, Madam Chair, that shows that this government is not doing their most important job, which is managing the finances of Albertans.

I've said before that if I go home on the weekend and my spouse informs me that she's now borrowing money at unprecedented levels for our household to pay for our electricity bill, that would probably be my first sign that I have a spending problem within my household. If it was within my business, if my accountant said to me, "You're spending more money than you're bringing in," that

again would be the first sign that I have a problem within my business, and I would need to restructure.

We have been warning this government about this since they started, and the government has continued blindly down the path of spending Albertans' money with no plan of getting the fiscal house in order, with no plan of dealing with the areas where we see a tremendous amount of spending.

Now, I do want to point out that there are some things within this supplementary supply that we support. Firstly, it is protecting front-line workers, something that is a big priority for the Wildrose Party. You know, we saw within my constituency last year an attempt to fire front-line nurses by the NDP government and Alberta Health Services. Luckily, we were able to convince them to back off from that, and I appreciate that by the government. Again, we're seeing signs that they don't actually support front-line workers, but this is a priority for us. Smaller classroom sizes. We definitely want to see those affected by the floods in 2013 finally helped all the way. Long-term care and affordable senior care: very important. Increased resources for our justice system, something this side of the House has been advocating for for a long time. We're seeing criminals literally being able to walk away after being criminally charged because of this government's incompetence. Often the government will mislead people about what is going on with that, but it is this government's incompetence.

We, of course, want the government to keep operating. Often when you talk about this, the government will say: "Hey, the opposition doesn't want the government to keep operating. That's why they want to vote against these bills." That's not true. We're not saying that we don't want to spend any money. We recognize that the province of Alberta has to spend money. We want Albertans to have the services that they need, but we don't want to keep spending more money than B.C. per capita with no increase in services to the people of Alberta.

You know, we often talk about how bloated our government is. Nothing – nothing – could prepare the people of Alberta for what they saw last week with this budget. We will be more bloated than we ever have been before, with no hope of this government taking the steps to fix it.

Now, I could tell you that this side of the House in a little over two years, when they're sitting on that side of the House, will take the steps to fix it once and for all. We will stand with Albertans. We will make sure they have the essential services they need, but we will work with our system to make it affordable, to make sure that it's cost-effective, to make sure that we can afford it, because that's how you would run a business. That's how you would run a household. The idea that you would continue to spend more money than other provinces, continue to push to have the largest debt that we've ever had in our history, continue to push deficits without getting spending under control: to just spend, spend, spend is fundamentally wrong.

Now, I talked about the interest payments, Madam Chair. Rocky Mountain House and Sundre are in dire need of a hospital. If you go to either of those communities, their infrastructure is crumbling. Reports have shown that those hospitals should have been replaced a long time ago. I could tell you that the interest payments that this government is going to create can buy a lot of hospitals across this province, can employ a lot of nurses. But, instead, they're going to continue to borrow so that we do not have the resources to be able to run the province.

For central Alberta, where I am from, the statistics that have come out about surgery cancellations out of Red Deer, for the communities that I represent and that many of my colleagues represent, are appalling – appalling – thousands and thousands more than for any other jurisdiction in the province. If somebody

has a heart attack right now in any of my communities, they are, like, 70-some per cent more likely to die because central Alberta is not getting the care they need. But we still have the largest debt in our history, the largest deficits. We keep spending money, but we're not getting our people the services.

If the government had a plan that actually showed that our bridges would be fixed and our roads would be working and actually had a plan on how to spend that money, then maybe you could justify spending more money than B.C., but we're getting less than them. Instead, all we are getting – all we are getting – is an enormous amount of debt, putting a tremendous amount of burden on our children and our grandchildren, and this government has no plan. The people of Alberta see through it. They know that this government has no plan. If they had a plan, they would rise and show us how they truly intend to get the deficit under control, how they intend to pay down our debt in the future so that we don't have to spend billions and billions a year on interest and so we can get the money into people's hands that we need to.

10:20

Instead, I think this government, the NDP government, will continue to mislead Albertans, as they always have, will continue to spend their money with no accountability, will continue to create an enormous debt problem, that generations to come are going to have to fix. That is why I intend to vote against this bill, and I encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this bill. I certainly hope – hope – that one day the members across the way, before their time is up, will do the right thing for the people of Alberta and stop putting their expensive ideological agenda on the great people of Alberta.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise on this bill, the supplementary supply bill of this government. I just think it needs to be said that if ever there was a testament that this government is out of control, this is it. When they've got a supplementary supply of \$1.6 billion with – what? – 14 days left in the fiscal year, they didn't miss by a little bit; this government missed by a ton. They can't shoot straight. If you look in the supplementary estimates across the number of ministries that require more money to finish the year, one can only draw the conclusion that almost nobody got it right.

You know, I appreciate that government is big and that it's complex. Even if there were three or four ministries that had very good reasons – something was a surprise, or somebody missed their budget by a little bit – one could say: "All right. Well, this is within the reasonable scale of what a reasonable government might require in order to finish the year." But with this crew, Madam Chair, almost every ministry is requiring a lot more money to finish this year, which really speaks to the fact, unfortunately for Alberta, that the current government has no idea what they're doing, and they're not very good at doing it. That's just the fact that's obvious here today.

Now, the previous speaker talked about some of the things that I'm concerned about: the fact that they're taking \$1.6 billion more to finish the year, which will land them at a \$10.8 billion deficit this year; no plan to pay penny one of it back any time in the next 10 years; no plan to balance the budget, certainly, in this term and according to the Finance minister probably not till the end of the next term; no plan to protect our children.

Now, the government should care about Albertans, but if they can't care about themselves and the hard-working people whose

jobs they're taking away now and killing by driving out investment in jobs and business, perhaps they should actually care about Alberta's children. I know that many of the members on the other side have children and grandchildren, and I'm sure they do care about their children. I guess that at this point I would ask them to not support this because they care about their children and grandchildren. With the path that they're going, all of their kids are going to be paying for 2017 light bulbs when they start working and trying to raise a family and trying to put a down payment together for their first home, and thanks to this NDP government that is going to be harder because of them than it was before this government.

It's really quite disturbing, you know, when you think about it, the strain that they're putting on the young people of the future. Right now there are kids in elementary school who are innocently going to school and learning the things that they need to learn from their teachers, and unfortunately they are in most cases blissfully unaware that the government of Alberta is going to make the rest of their life harder because of the irresponsible way in which they are managing the money that is entrusted to them by Albertans.

You know what? When you think about it, I don't know how they sleep at night over there, Madam Chair. I really don't. They could actually redeem themselves to a certain degree if they were to vote against this supplementary supply bill, but if they are going to support this with all of the other policies, mistakes, three jobless job plans in a row, they really don't have any good reason that they could give Albertans why Albertans should let them borrow another \$1.6 billion on their behalf, which is why I won't be supporting this. I would recommend that all members of the House don't support this because this is bad for Alberta, it's bad for adults in Alberta today, and it's particularly bad for Alberta's children.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise just for a couple of minutes to speak about my opposition to the need for supplementary supply. I find it so disingenuous and so irresponsible that the government talks about bending the cost curve, reducing the accelerated spending increases from 6 and a half per cent, way, way past population growth and inflation, to some side of 4 per cent or 3 and a half, depending on the department. But then, as the hon. colleague before me just pointed out, when you are so far over budget, it just renders all that talk meaningless.

Say what you want, you know, but it's actions that count, and we've seen from this government consistently in two years almost 10 per cent in spending increases year over year at the same time that Albertans are taking 20, 30, 40 per cent reductions in their payroll and at the same time that unemployment is the highest it's ever been. I think the numbers support that our GDP actually dropped 2 and a half per cent last year, and that's a real misnomer because GDP also includes government spending, which is going up like crazy. So how much is the actual private side of our economy dropping?

Again, I see so often how the government doesn't try to get value for tax dollars, hard-earned tax dollars. My Wildrose colleagues and I have talked at great length about our desire to have cut school fees more, about our desire to push hard-earned tax dollars right to the front lines to ensure that teaching assistants, teachers, nurses, allied professionals, social workers are there where Albertans need them. I guess that when I look at, you know, \$1.2 billion in interest next year, \$2.3 billion in interest coming from the Alberta taxpayer in just two years, I'm very, very fearful as to where those cuts will have to come from, and I'm also fearful, with that extra spending,

that interest, about how much business, how much investment it scares away.

I've seen estimates that up to \$256 billion have already been driven out of Alberta because of our high spending, because of our taxation increase. You know, that's a big number. That's hard to get your head around. When I was at a community supper on Friday and was talking to one of my friends whose two sons, late 20s, are both almost in their second year of not working, looking for work, that's when that number drives home.

I want to talk about a couple of specifics, a couple of ideas where we can save some money. I believe that parts of this supplementary supply and going forward, of course, are the tremendous costs of the Fort McMurray wildfire. Again, a shout-out to our front-line workers – our fire departments, our people up there – that did an absolutely stellar job. [some applause] Thank you. It's not only them; it's Albertans too. When you hear about 10,000 Edmontonians and more thousands of Albertans opening their homes and their wallets and their time to help all people, that's what Alberta is, that's what Alberta is made of, and that's obviously something that we build on. So the fire, the great cost of the fire.

It makes me think of the Cypress Hills, the highest elevation, the same elevation as Banff. I believe it's the highest elevation in all of Canada east of the Rockies. Up until about 1985 we used to have local grazing, local people who took care of how many cattle to put in and keep the grass down. That made sense because up until about 1850 about a million buffalo a year used to roll through the Cypress Hills and eat that down. Now we have a government bureaucracy that hasn't taken care of ensuring that that grass is eaten, ensuring that the deadfall is properly picked up. There's even a report out, Madam Chair, that with a forest fire in the Cypress Hills, every single one of those 400 cabins could be gone in 20 minutes. This is absolutely something that – God forbid, hopefully, we're not talking about this in two years or 10 years, about how we had to put money into supplementary supply to cover that or to cover a similar emergency somewhere in the province.

10:30

Government, you have two years left of your mandate. This is a serious problem. It's a problem that locals used to take care of, where locals would ensure that the grass and the deadfall were at a more acceptable level. So I caution you that there are all kinds of those things in our province that are being left undone. Please do not leave them undone so that we're talking about it again in a year or 10.

Another suggestion I want to leave with you is local decision-making. I had the good fortune to have a tour of our hospital addition in Medicine Hat about three or four weeks ago. I'm very, very grateful to the taxpayers of Alberta for providing this for us. But when you look at the history, it's hard not to chuckle a bit. Originally promised at \$450 million, then \$400 million, then \$200 million, it started at \$220 million and now is some side of \$60 million over budget – over budget – we think. We're waiting. It was supposed to open in October. It still hasn't opened. There's no date as to when it might. It's needed in our community. We service a hundred thousand Albertans in that area.

It's hard to be too critical because it looks like Alberta Health and Alberta Infrastructure got the addition right. I mean, it looks like it's going to be a fantastic facility. But when it's already at least \$40 million over budget and when I'm talking to locals who are saying to me, "If they just would have listened when I tried to say: do this instead; do this while we're doing this; send me a copy of the plans and a copy of the description as to how it's going to be built, and I can show you how we can save money long term" – the government had a deaf ear and a blind eye. Madam Chair, local decision-making

involving our good local people will get us way more value, will save us money. Government, in the brief few minutes I have, I ask you to try to do that for us wherever you can.

As many speakers before me have said, you know, a 9.9 per cent spending increase with little regard for actually trying to stay within our budgets is just not acceptable. It's not acceptable for the mother of the two 20-year-olds I had supper with on Friday, who can't find work because so many people have been scared out of this province and from creating jobs and investment. It's not acceptable for that six- or eight- or 10-year-old, who's born owing tens of thousands of dollars before they even begin. As I've stood up in this House and said many times, interest only goes to rich people and rich corporations, and it's going to cost all of us services but especially the next generation.

Madam Chair, I'll be voting against the bill at this point, and I'd ask all my colleagues to do the same.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 5 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. On behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance thank you for the opportunity to rise and say a few words in Committee of the Whole on the 2017-18 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government. Let me remind the members that when passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$30 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$7.8 billion in expense funding, \$936 million in capital investment funding, \$149 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$241 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

As the Minister of Finance mentioned previously, these interim supply estimates provide funding authorization that will allow the normal business of the province to continue while the Assembly takes the necessary time to review, debate, and approve the government's budget plans for the 2017-18 fiscal year. Madam Chair, the amounts in these interim supply estimates will provide the government and the Legislative Assembly with two months of funding. Providing two months of funding is the prudent approach. It provides sufficient time to fully debate the budget, that was tabled on Thursday, and therefore allows the Assembly the necessary time to do its work.

Madam Chair, for the benefit of the Assembly let me once again remind members about how government arrives at the requested amounts that we are here to debate. Treasury Board and Finance works with officials from across government to forecast the requirements of each department based on their expected costs, commitments, and the timing of payments that need to be made during the months of April and May 2017. Oftentimes, as part of

the regular course of business, payments to certain providers are required at the beginning of the fiscal year. For example, in the case of Advanced Education certain payments are made to postsecondary institutions up front, at the beginning of the fiscal year. Likewise, in the case of Agriculture and Forestry certain payments are made up front to the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation.

As budget information has now been tabled in this Chamber in the form of the fiscal and strategic plans, ministry business plans, and government estimates, members can now have a clear line of sight into the government's fiscal plan. I would like to remind all members that the government's budget and the spending priorities for all ministries will be debated for over 70 hours in estimates in the coming days and weeks. Therefore, I would encourage all members to prepare for those estimates, when the relevant minister and their officials will be available to answer questions in significant detail.

Finally, Madam Chair, let me remind all members that a full appropriation act will, as part of the regular course of business, come to this House once the estimates process is complete. On that note, I urge all members of this Assembly to support the interim supply bill so that we can keep our schools and hospitals open as we progress through the proper debate on Budget 2017.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll be happy to speak to Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017. I think I have the right one. It's really difficult to have a meaningful conversation on a bill that's basically a blank cheque and simply perpetuates the ever-expanding budget that we see year to year from this government. It's too bad that we can't actually figure out a way to produce power from our expanding budget. It would be a great way to produce some green power. Lots of energy there.

Basically, it's a bill that allows the government to continue to pay the bills until a budget is approved, and I understand that. In fact, when responding to this bill, the Government House Leader said that this funding is important as it keeps the lights on in our schools and our hospitals. I don't think anybody here wants to see anything shut down for two months while we wait for the budget to pass, so I agree that these are important issues. The government has the ability to plan ahead, though, so we could have actually come in in February and, you know, cut out a month of this budget just by starting the House early and getting things going that way.

Basically, the bill allows the government to keep the lights on. But don't worry. The Minister of Environment and Parks has a supercool plan that will not only give you light bulbs but also install them for you. Maybe that's part of the plan here. I don't know about you, Madam Chair, but most constituents I talk to know how to change a light bulb, and they're able to do it at a much lower cost than what the Ontario company this NDP government has hired to do the job will charge back to the government.

I'll give you an example. I had a call from a lady, one of my constituents. She was quite excited about this program, and she said: "You know, I've got 34 light bulbs in my house. If I call in here, they're going to come in and change these." So I talked to her a little bit about it, and I said, "At the current rate that they want to charge, it would come to, just for the light bulbs alone, \$816 plus the travel and installation to have this company come out and do it." I mean, they're not going to do this for nothing, so we're probably looking at somewhere in the order of \$1,500 to \$1,600 just

to get her light bulbs changed. I suggested to her – her husband is an oil field worker. He's fully capable of running a drilling rig, so he can probably install a couple of light bulbs. I said: you know, you can go to Costco. I looked up some pricing for her: the local co-op, six LED bulbs, \$19.99. So for a total of \$113 and a little bit of downtime on a Saturday her husband can save our province \$1,200, \$1,400. That's how Albertans save money, Madam Chair.

10:40

This bill is just another example of this government on the wrong track and not understanding how to time their budget properly. I know there are a lot of Albertans that are disappointed with the direction this government is taking. Over the last 10 years spending has grown at a faster rate than inflation and population growth. You know, like I said, if we could harness that expansion energy and produce some power from it, it would be awesome. Unfortunately, this government is more concerned with continuing on their current track of spend now and spend later as well.

It's very clear that this government has a serious spending problem, and this is simply a Band-Aid to get them through. This is the equivalent of paying your mortgage with your credit card and hoping your paycheque comes in before the minimum payment is due.

An Hon. Member: Yeah. Well said.

Mr. Hanson: Well, that's how a budget is. For anybody that actually understands finance, it makes sense.

That's not how most Albertans budget. Why is this how this NDP government chooses to budget our hard-earned tax dollars? How much of the money requested for this bill will have to be borrowed? It would be nice to have an answer to that, just some details. You know, I look at it, and all we have are line items. There have been some announcements recently, especially with the AAMD and C, that are going on right now. They're announcing projects and all that. It would be nice if we could have an update to this interim supply to just see how much of this stuff was actually budgeted for and where the money is going. It's not really too late to get some details on this. We do have until the end of May. I think we could probably see some line item additions in here.

Basically, on this side of the House we know that budgets don't balance themselves. I'd like to urge all my hon. colleagues to join me in voting against this bill because all it is – it just basically gives a blank cheque. It doesn't address any of the spending issues. It doesn't address any cost-saving measures at all. There's nothing in here that's going to help the budget in the future or deficits or the borrowing. I encourage my fellow members to vote against the interim supply.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 3 Voluntary Blood Donations Act

The Chair: Questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to address the bill before the House, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. I'm astounded by the sheer ignorance of the bill compared to the realities of blood donation. Blood donations, of course, are a matter of life and death, and we should be pursuing every avenue available to secure a healthy, safe supply for Albertans in need and, in addition to ensuring this supply, to develop a supply for vital pharmaceutical resources. We do collect enough blood under our voluntary system in Canada for transfusion needs, but we do not – we do not – collect enough for plasma protein products. These products also save lives.

Canadian Blood Services, the agency tasked with the procurement and distribution of blood products, purchases plasma protein products like IVIG, albumin, and various coagulation factors from the United States and Europe. Madam Chair, I'll say it again. Canadian Blood Services purchases plasma protein products.

In 2012 Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec purchased \$630 million of plasma products from the United States and Europe – \$630 million in 2012 – only to increase in 2013 to \$670 million of plasma protein products purchased from the United States and Europe. Madam Chair, every year these numbers increase, year after year. Of course, the reason that we are forced to purchase these products is because the current voluntary system has resulted in a shortage.

Canada's volunteer-only donation system does not have the donor base to support our demand. When I say this, I want to give a shout-out to Medicine Hat. In Medicine Hat the Canadian Blood Services show up about every two months. It is very, very well supported. It is supported by our citizens, supported by our media personnel, so many of whom volunteer their time and come out and spread the word through their media. I know so many people that, when I talk to them, have donated for the 60th time or the 80th time. It's overwhelming. It's fantastic. [interjection] You're up there? Forty-eight? Good for you. Thank you.

Madam Chair, I bring this up for a couple of reasons. Here we have a lot of good Albertans doing all they can when they can. It's a sacrifice to give blood, but a large number of us are overwhelmed by our desire to help fellow Albertans, fellow Canadians, and fellow human beings. It takes time. It means a day or so of a different diet and maybe a lighter exercise period that day. It's a sacrifice. Again, there are a lot of volunteers and a lot of people doing it, but we are not meeting our need. Over the last decade the Canadian Blood Services has seen a rise of 6 to 8 per cent each year in the usage of IVIG, one of the plasma products. As a matter of fact, Canada is already the largest per capita user of IVIG in the world.

What is also interesting to me is that the proponents of banning the purchase of blood often cite things like safety reasons, ignoring the fact that even if we were not purchasing blood from Albertans, we are still inevitably and obviously purchasing blood from countries that allow paid plasma donations. I think that in Alberta alone Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health spent \$200 million last year on the purchase of plasma products from the United States, where they pay people to donate blood. In fact, no country in the world has been able to meet their need for plasma with a solely volunteer model. No country in the world has been able to do this according to a joint March 2013 presentation by Health Canada and Canadian Blood Services. This was announced or talked about at a round-table discussion addressing the topic.

Madam Chair, yet another concern often cited by opponents of the platelet/plasma donation model is that paying donors will decrease the number of individuals who voluntarily donate blood. Only about 3 per cent of eligible Canadians donate blood now publicly, and that's in spite of all the publicity, all the strong efforts

by volunteers, all the strong efforts by those that have time and are healthy and have the ability to do it. We just can't meet our needs, and we are paying citizens of other countries to do this for us.

According to a 2014 projection by the CEO of Canadian Plasma Resources, Dr. Barzin Bahardoust quoted: before the end of the decade we will be spending over a billion dollars a year on plasma protein products as a country. We will be sending a billion dollars, a billion Canadian dollars, out of Canada to the United States and Europe, where they pay blood donors. The CEO went on to quote exactly that: this money will all go outside the country.

10:50

Madam Chair, by maintaining the voluntary system while offering tax receipts or a cash incentive, all Canadians regardless of income level are incentivized to donate blood more proactively. These procedures are harmless, and they save lives. There is no ethical consideration more important, there is nothing more important than ensuring that life-saving treatments are available to sick children or adults.

Canadian Blood Services has said in the past that it is possible to maintain both systems, noting that "the experiences of other countries suggest both paid and voluntary plasma donation can safely coexist." My guess, Madam Chair, is that it may actually raise the amount of voluntary blood donations as more Canadians get involved as the awareness level rises. How good would that be if we can pull our share in the world?

Now we are being asked to support a plan that would see Canadian Blood Services reach 50 per cent of our pharmaceutical needs by 2024, but that is a very slow rate of progress. Other provinces are opening the door to another avenue for collecting plasma products, and we should keep that door open in Alberta, too. Madam Chair, I want to say that again. Other provinces are opening the door to another avenue for collecting plasma products, and we should keep that door open in Alberta, too.

I believe the NDP is doing right now what we've seen consistently for two years. Of course, we're hearing about private companies that want to set this up in an effort to increase our supply and help Canadians. Here we have a government slamming the door on some innovation, slamming the door on increasing supply from Albertans and Canadians. But not really. It doesn't preclude Canadian Blood Services from doing it. It doesn't preclude B.C. or Saskatchewan or Ontario or Nova Scotia or anywhere else in Canada paying for blood collection. Again, I think the number was \$200 million last year of our hard-earned tax dollars that left the jurisdiction and went to Montana, to Texas, to Louisiana, wherever the states are that pay for it, that pay Americans for blood collection.

I'm against this bill, Madam Chair. Again, we're being hypocritical, we're being ideological, we're getting in the way of a solution, and kids, old people, and Albertans are going to suffer. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm here to rise on the NDP's bill that essentially declares that Canadian blood is dirtier than American blood. [interjections] It's what the bill says.

When you think about it, the bill attempts to head off anybody collecting blood except for the Canadian Blood Services, but in fact blood comes into this country now from other places, where it is purchased. So what this bill does, very simply, is say that you can buy the blood somewhere else but not here. So I don't know how the government can argue that their bill declares that Albertans' blood is dirtier than the blood of people from outside of Alberta. That's offensive, and I will not be supporting this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. The intent of the bill is good from the government's side. We recognize what they're trying to provide. They're trying to ensure that our Canadian Blood Services has an adequate supply of blood because we need blood to live. As Canadians we will all give that voluntarily. There is no doubt about that. But that needs to be addressed not just through one week a year when Canadian Blood Services promotes their blood collection. That has to be steady year-round. We have to continue to provide that blood.

One aspect that this bill misses on that I hope this government will consider is the aspect about the biomedical industry and diversification of our economy. When we're looking at getting off oil, when we're looking at alternatives, the medical industry is a huge facet of our culture that we don't necessarily emphasize, and it is where we can diversify our industry. The biomedical industry invests in research, which has generated so many new discoveries over the years. These discoveries improve our health. They extend our lives, and they raise our standard of living. The measures that we use in health, like morbidity and mortality, have decreased. They've vastly improved because of the biomedical industry. We're less likely to succumb to many of the scourges of the past. Victims of disease live fuller, better lives, and they live better lives due to improved methods of treatment.

The medical industry is not just the pharmaceutical industry. It is the biotech, it is the medical device, and it's also the diagnostic sector. They all feed off the biomedical industry, and the end results are just simply benefits to mankind, to humankind. Vaccinations: the government side strongly believes in vaccinations. That's where vaccinations were discovered and come from, the biomedical industry. If we want to resolve something in our human bodies, we need samples from our bodies. We need those tissues so that we can do those tests and do that research to better our lives and eliminate disease.

There have been some high-profile cases over the last couple of years of people that had to go to the United States for testing or for their treatments, whether it was Bo Cooper, that you folks heard me talk about, or Haley Chisholm, who was down south. We as Canadians benefit from the biomedical industry, and it is an industry that we need to support.

I'd like to read a short excerpt from a letter written by Kevin Chief, Manitoba's former NDP minister of jobs and economy, to Dr. Barzin Bahardoust, the CEO of Canadian Plasma Resources.

Manitoba is very supportive of establishing new businesses in the life sciences sector. Thank you for sharing your business plans with us. I can confirm at this time that there is no legislation in Manitoba that would prohibit private plasma collection, and there are no plans to enact such legislation.

The Government of Manitoba would be prepared to fully assess and evaluate this opportunity should Canadian Plasma Resources decide to open plasma collection centres in Manitoba.

As you can see, the concept of plasma collection centres is not diametrically opposed to NDP views. The former NDP government in Manitoba was very supportive and very much saw the benefits of this, the benefits of creating new jobs and the economic diversification.

As such, I'd like to rise today and introduce some amendments to this bill. I will give these to the pages to be distributed. May I read while she distributes?

The Chair: Just give it a second till I've seen the original.

Mr. Yao: Certainly.

Again, it is about the diversification of our economy. If we're looking for a path to take to get off oil, the medical industry is key. We have the educational base. We have great colleges, universities, even high schools which help train us so that we are that educated workforce that the medical industry needs, so that we can create those scientists and those folks that develop and create these life-saving measures. They're the ones who create these vaccinations. They're the ones who create these medications, and a lot of these things require human products in order to be developed. That's why I'm imploring this government to consider that, and that is what my amendment is.

I move that Bill 3, Voluntary Blood Donations Act, be amended as follows. Section 2(3) is amended by striking out "or" at the end of clause (a) and adding the following after clause (a):

(a.1) with respect to an organization that collects blood for the purpose of biomedical or pharmaceutical production, or and section 4(1) is amended by adding the following after clause (b):

(c) any business premises of the facility that uses blood for biomedical or pharmaceutical production.

11:00

Again, I'm just asking that we allow companies that will produce these life-saving measures to operate here in Alberta and that they have the ability to collect it and that we also ensure that they are under our regulations and that they are inspected by our people to ensure that they have the highest quality and that we are not susceptible to any diseases that have affected us in the past due to poor blood collection.

It's also, again, by ensuring that we're maintaining this here in Alberta, that we can monitor it and look at it, and if we see something that is unethical, we can influence that to make it better and allow that certain things don't happen.

These are things that we need to live. Bo Cooper had to go down to the United States to get a treatment. They were so close to being successful, 99 per cent close. Why aren't we developing these solutions, these innovations, these treatments here in Canada? We need to grow that industry, and that's the biomedical industry. So I'm asking the folks in this House, especially on the government side, to consider this amendment to this bill. It is a worthy amendment. It's fair, and I ask that you truly, truly consider it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any hon. members to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the amendment. At this point I think that it is probably something that is unnecessary in the bill. One of the reasons behind that is because the collection of plasma to the distribution of finished plasma products to patients – the system's purpose is to provide blood and plasma products to patients who need it – is best carried out by Canadian Blood Services. The role for private industry is and under this legislation will continue to be fractionation, turning plasma into life-sustaining and life-saving plasma products.

CBS currently contracts this service out as there are no domestically located or owned fractionators in Canada. CBS has vetted the fractionators it uses very carefully, and the contracts they have with them ensure that the plasma we bring is batch-made into plasma products to be distributed back to Canadians by CBS. This legislation has absolutely no bearing on the ability for private companies to bring their investments to Alberta, where we have a very bright workforce with a great deal of experience working with chemical processes, and in fact we hope they will consider Alberta. I believe CBS would be very excited by the option to fractionate

domestically, but at this time there is no option to do so, so we will not be supporting this at this time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays on amendment A1.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Having listened to the government-side member speak, it's clear that the NDP is trying to declare Alberta a job-free zone. This amendment is clearly designed to allow for jobs and business to operate here in Alberta to create economic activity and a good living for Alberta men and women to make to support themselves and their families. You know what? You would think a government that's had three failed jobs plans in a row might actually accept it when somebody throws them a bone of an amendment that will actually create some jobs here, but apparently they are that tone deaf.

Well, I'll be supporting this. I sincerely hope the government does, but based on what the government-side member just said, I don't have a lot of hope.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:04 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Swann
Barnes	McIver	Taylor
Ellis	Nixon	van Dijken
Fraser	Starke	Yao
Hanson	Strankman	

11:20

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hinkley	McPherson
Carlier	Hoffman	Miranda
Carson	Jansen	Phillips
Connolly	Kazim	Piquette
Coolahan	Larivee	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Drever	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Goehring	McKittrick	Westhead
Gray	McLean	

Totals:	For – 14	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Mr. Yao: Madam Chair, it's really disappointing and unfortunate that the government side doesn't support alternate industries and health, doesn't support innovation, doesn't support the science of health, doesn't support diversification of our economy. It is truly, truly disappointing. With that in mind, I recognize that they're in their ideological state and aren't really thinking straight. But with that, I hope that after reviewing this for the next few years and

monitoring it and identifying what the issues truly are about our blood collection that they would reconsider some of the aspects of this bill and reconsider the diversification of an economy, the building of an industry, the development of our health, the development of our own vaccinations and our own cures and investing in science to alleviate all that ails us.

With that, I'm moving that Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act be amended after section 11, so I'd like to submit another amendment, please. You know, Madam Chair, as it currently stands the Canadian Blood Services isn't even close to meeting our current demand for blood plasma for pharmaceutical production. The CBS has only just begun a process that, if the provinces agree, would bring us to only about half of our consumption by 2024. This is very slow progress, and the NDP is closing the doors on other options and is not moving us in the right direction.

With that, I move that the Voluntary Blood Donations Act be amended by adding the following after section 11:

Continuation by Legislative Assembly

(12) This Act expires on April 1, 2020, unless the Assembly adopts a resolution on or before April 1, 2019, that this Act be continued.

I'm asking for this sunset clause to re-evaluate our system and re-evaluate what will happen over the next few years, to see if we are reaching our goals and if not, to identify different ways of achieving those goals and rethinking our processes and looking to provinces like Saskatchewan and Manitoba to truly understand whether what they are doing is so malicious and so dangerous to people that they're promoting a negative lifestyle that is contrary to our Canadian beliefs and strengths.

The sunset clause would mean that we could reconsider this act so that, again, if there is not good progress made that we should reconsider and try to invite more industry into our province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. The sunset clause is completely unnecessary. Legislation is regularly reviewed as a matter of course. Once CBS has been bolstered, there should be no need for this. And if this act needs revisiting in the future, that can be considered at that time.

I would encourage members not to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Yes. Good morning, Madam Chair, and thank you. I have an amendment that I would like to propose. I'll hand it to the pages, and I'll wait before getting into it, before reading it into the record.

Madam Chair, I want to preface my comments by talking a little bit about the distinction between plasma donations for further pharmaceutical processing and plasma and blood donations for transfusion purposes. Now, I know that this was probably covered to a certain extent in the previous debate, two amendments ago, but I do want to make it very, very clear that I understand the trepidation that some members have with regard to paying, you know, essentially for something that the human body produces. That is

something that has been foreign to what we do in Canada. It blurs the line that even gets to the point where you might consider paying for things that would go beyond plasma and blood – for example, paying for organs or tissues – that can also be donated by live donors.

I understand that level of discomfort. But at the same time, Madam Chair, I think it's critically important that we understand that when people say, "well, lives are at stake," and "this is about life," and "this is about the very essence of life," that that's exactly true. The very essence of life is the blood that flows through our veins, and that is a very, very valuable thing. I risk calling it or even suggesting that it should be a commercial commodity. I can very clearly understand why that makes some members uncomfortable. It makes me uncomfortable to a certain extent as well.

You know, I will point out that I'm the only person in this Chamber that, I would say, has done blood transfusions on four different species out there. I can tell you that when you do that . . . [interjections] You laugh. You laugh, but the thing of it is that what you're doing is taking from a donor an amount of blood, that in your professional judgment you feel will not sufficiently weaken that donor, to provide it to a recipient that is in need of either the red cells themselves, the plasma, or the platelets, the clotting factors. There's something in that blood. And sometimes it's more than one thing that is in that blood that is available.

Now, before I get into the amendment, I will share with you a little bit that as a veterinarian – veterinarians typically own large dogs. One of the reasons we tend to own large dogs in preference to small dogs is because it is the veterinarian's dog that is most commonly the blood donor in most veterinary clinics. I have had in my career three large-breed dogs – an Airedale terrier, a golden retriever, and a Bernese mountain dog – and all of them have been frequent blood donors. I like to think that they're voluntary. But in many cases it was a situation where, quite simply, there was a need for a patient. That blood would be taken from the donor. In this case I'm talking about my own dog. I'm putting my own dog's life at a certain degree of minimal risk in order to provide something that is vitally important to a recipient patient. So that is something that is relatively, you know, quite profound.

11:30

I'll share with you another anecdote of how profound that is. About 30 years ago I had another patient – in this case it was a horse, a mare – that had received a very serious cut to a digital artery in the back of one of her pasterns. That's the part of the foot that's below the fetlock. If you don't know what the fetlock is, I'll get you an anatomy book.

The digital artery normally is not something that when severed puts a horse's life at risk, but this particular horse had been grazing on sweet clover. Some of that sweet clover hay had been mouldy, and it contained a substance called coumarin. Coumarin is related to the coumarin that we use as a blood thinner, as an anticoagulant in human medicine. Because of that, this patient's blood was not clotting. This mare, this 1,100-pound animal, was bleeding to death before our eyes. I fashioned up a situation where we found another horse that was a suitable donor. We took a rather large volume of blood, some three litres of blood, from that patient and transfused the mare in question and saved her life.

The owner of that horse is actually here in Edmonton today – he's the reeve of one of our nearby counties in east-central Alberta – and he has never forgotten that episode that we did. Every time I see him now, even 30 years later, he reminds me of the time we performed a blood transfusion on his horse in the middle of a pasture in order to save her life. So I understand, I think, full well how profound blood transfusion is.

You know, I have to say that as I look across the way and I see the hon. members opposite busily engrossed in their laptops, no doubt reading things that are extremely relevant to this debate, it is a little bit frustrating that when you try to add perspective to something that is being brought up in debate, you're not entirely sure whether those hon. members are in fact paying attention to what's going on. But that's quite all right. It's quite all right, Madam Chair. I suppose if members are on duty, they can choose to use that time in any way that they wish. [interjections]

Madam Chair, if I might continue having the floor. What we are dealing with here is something that I understand just exactly how important it is, so at this point I would like to move forward by proposing the following amendment. I move that Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, be amended in section 2(3) by striking out "or" at the end of clause (a), by adding "or" at the end of clause (b) and by adding the following after clause (b):

- (c) with respect to plasma collected for the purposes of further processing.

Madam Chair, the effect of this amendment is to recognize the separation in donor streams between a voluntary donor base and a paid donor base and that a voluntary donor base, as we have in Canada right now, is providing the blood for transfusion purposes, the plasma for transfusion purposes that we require but is nowhere near providing the necessary plasma that we require for Alberta's and Canada's needs for plasma protein products for further processing. It recognizes that in order to do so in every other country in the world, they have had to go to a paid-for-plasma arrangement.

Again, I understand that for members that may be uncomfortable, but the reality of it is that medical innovation has moved forward sufficiently that we are now at a point where that is something that is possible, that is something that can be done because of the innovations and advances, and that the amount of plasma products that are required is growing at a rate of approximately 10 per cent per year. That necessitates having a large donor pool, and there has been no country in the world that has been able to establish the necessary donor pool to provide those plasma products without actually paying donors.

Now, I know that one of the biggest concerns – and it has been expressed here – is that if we start paying plasma donors, it will affect the voluntary donor stream. Health Canada has itself refuted that. Health Canada in its conclusion has stated: "There is no evidence that paying plasma donors compromises the safety or weakens a country's volunteer blood donor system." There is no evidence. In fact, Madam Chair, we can look at some of the largest countries that do have a significant paid donor base, and their voluntary donor rate is significantly higher than Canada's.

For example, in Germany, which has had a paid donor industry for some time, their volunteer blood donor rate per thousand people is 58.1 – 5.8 per cent of people are regular donors – in Austria that number is 57.5, and in the U.S.A. that number is 56.9. These are all countries that have paid donor systems in order to provide the necessary material that's required for plasma protein products. Canada's rate, by comparison, is only 36.6, barely half of what these other countries are. In the U.K., in fact, it's even lower. That's another country that has a purely voluntary donor base. So to suggest that, by necessity, it is going to reduce the number of voluntary donors is simply not borne out in the experience of these other nations.

To further suggest that Canadian Blood Services, through the investment of a huge amount of money and expansion of donor facilities – you know, this is curious because Canadian Blood Services in the last number of years has in fact reduced the opportunity for people to donate blood – could now turn around and

reverse course and suddenly expand the means by which they could donate, have suggested a program whereby \$100 million would be invested nationwide to get us to 50 per cent, this still would not solve the problem of a lack of plasma material. To me, when we have a private company, when we have a company that is prepared, without government assistance, to develop a form of economic diversification, to invest in our economy, to create jobs, I cannot understand why we would be opposed to that when there is ample evidence that it will not compromise the safety of the blood supply and when there is ample evidence that it will not compromise our voluntary pool.

The reason for this amendment, Madam Chair, is to recognize that there are parallel streams and that these parallel streams can in fact operate without affecting each other in terms of safety and security of supply. What it does is that it removes us from what I mentioned in debate on second reading, and that is the base hypocrisy of sourcing these products from other nations that are prepared to pay donors, that, in fact, have to pay donors – because there is no country in the world that has been able to do it on a voluntary basis solely – that we are prepared to pay those countries and indirectly pay those donors and make profitable American corporations more profitable by making those purchases.

It seems to me that there is a base hypocrisy to doing that when we could be doing that within our own borders but doing it recognizing that it requires us to shift what we perhaps have as preconceived notions. One of the preconceived notions is that blood transfusions and blood products are products that should never be paid for.

You know, I shared the story during debate on second reading that if I was still eligible to give blood, I would gladly give blood, and I would do it on a regular basis. The fact that I could be paid for it wouldn't change that. I would still give blood. But I've also explained why I'm no longer eligible to do that.

11:40

One of the realities that we have in Canada, that is also a challenge, is that there are a number of things that are being done culturally that are reducing our donor pool: getting a tattoo, getting a piercing, if you lived in the U.K. in the '90s. These are all things that eliminate you from the donor pool, in some cases for a limited period of time, but nonetheless they eliminate you from the donor pool.

Madam Chair, that is what we are discussing. We are discussing preserving our voluntary donor pool yet at the same time allowing for an industry that could develop in Canada. It has been developed well in other countries, and we make use of that from other countries. In my view, if we refuse to allow for paid donations, the only way we can take the moral high ground on this is to refuse to buy any plasma protein products derived from paid donors, to make that statement that we will not buy plasma protein products that are derived from paid donors because we don't allow paid donors in our jurisdiction.

But then you'd have some people to answer to. You'd have to answer to the families of patients that require these products. Because they do require these products. They're dependent on these products just as are people who are dependent on whole blood products or people who have suffered injuries or, like my father, someone who required many blood transfusions as he was fighting cancer in the end stages of his life.

Madam Chair, I'm doing this and I'm moving this amendment in an effort to try to get people to get past an obstacle or get past an obstruction, you know, in terms of their thinking. Again, I want to make it clear that I understand that. I do understand the base objection. I get it. I absolutely get it. But at the same time, our job

as legislators is to consider the greater good of the people that we are serving and consider the greater good of some of the patients that require these products and consider how this affects our overall economy.

I know that there are people that have an objection to generating an income from illness. You know, they think that that's somehow not moral or not ethical. As someone who spent close to 30 years in veterinary practice, I will tell you that I never felt morally or ethically conflicted because I earned a living by providing a service to patients that were ill. I don't have an issue with that, and I think if you asked our physicians, if you asked nurses, if you asked people that work in our medical system, they will tell you that they are not conflicted with that. So to suggest that there are no dollars involved in medical care is just not recognizing reality.

We don't do these things for free. In fact, I think one of the great weaknesses in our system today is the notion that there is no connection between the cost of providing our health care services – and the Health minister will know this very well. The fact is that nobody really knows what it costs to get an MRI, to get a CT scan, to get a full battery of blood tests, which is now becoming very common when you go to the doctor.

I mean, I had a very unusual situation not too long ago – well, it's a little longer ago now because I've been retired for a few years – where I had a nurse bring in a patient, a dog. We did X-rays. We did full blood work. We did a number of other tests on this dog. And when she came to pick up the dog, you know, I presented her with her dog and a \$450 bill. She was furious. She was furious with me. I said, "Well, we discussed all of these costs beforehand." The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park had a motion with regard to that. We had discussed it. There was approval. She knew what the costs were going to be. She said, "I had no idea that this stuff was all so expensive," and I said: "Well, you're a nurse. You work in our medical system. You know, what do you think it costs when it's done on humans?" She said: "It's all free. It's all free. It doesn't cost anything."

That's a problem, when there's a disconnect with the fact that there is a cost to provide these services, that there is a cost to install and monitor a CT scan. There is a cost involved in doing that. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we should take veterinary medicine and superimpose it on human medicine. Good heavens, that's not the headline I want in the *Edmonton Journal* tomorrow. But, Madam Chair, I want to indicate, though, that unfortunately we have separated ourselves from an understanding that there's a significant cost in providing these services. That, I think, is one of the issues that is also a challenge.

I'm sure the Health minister is well aware of this challenge that people don't really understand that, you know, during a course of, for example, a pregnancy one ultrasound – that's a really good form of prenatal care. In some cases maybe two or three might be necessary, but to get six or seven in order to have a prenatal photo album and scrapbook at taxpayer cost: that's going a little overboard. But that is happening in our system, and it's wrong because it can't be justified medically. Madam Chair, I'm urging members to try to get – and I get it. Like I say, I fully get it because, I mean, I've got some of that in the back of my mind, too, but we have to get over this notion that there can't be any dollars involved in the system.

I will take my seat. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just to clarify: is this questions or comments or is this full debate?

The Chair: This is on amendment A3.

Ms Hoffman: Full debate on the amendment?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. Thank you for the clarification.

I just want to start by saying that absolutely there are times when members in this Chamber on both sides – I think right now about half the members on the other side have technology open. I respect them. I respect that they're doing their work, and I imagine that they are doing research and using that to further their education. I have to say, Madam Chair, that I find comments that try to speculate as to what people's behaviours are in this House disrespectful to both sides of this House. I think it's important that we have the tools available to us to do our jobs, and I want that on the record, Madam Chair.

I also want to tell the member opposite how much I appreciate his sharing of stories and his experience in making sure that he provided quality care to animals over many years. Those stories about blood transfusions in the field are beautiful stories, and I expect that that horse was happy to give of his or her blood without having to be paid for it, Madam Chair, because blood is just too precious to go to the highest bidder. A horse shouldn't stand in a field and say, "Okay. Now who's going to give me the most for this pint of blood?" just like a human shouldn't be doing that.

I'm very proud of the system that we have here in Canada that is rooted in the beliefs as ruled by the Krever commission that blood is just too precious to go to the highest bidder. Blood is just too important to put a price on in the international market. Blood is just too important to say that. There is a cost to medicine, but there is no cost to me in going and giving a blood donation.

It's true that the limits that the member opposite referred to as to some of the reasons why people can't donate blood are absolutely true. So is travel to certain jurisdictions in the world, so is loving somebody of the same sex and having sex with that person sometimes a limitation to being able to donate blood. He is absolutely right that there is an important opportunity for education. I think there's also an important opportunity for science to keep moving forward because blood is so necessary for so many people, and the demands for blood products continue to grow, Madam Chair.

I also want to clarify exactly what this amendment is intending to do, in my reading of it, and that's to put a massive loophole in to undermine the whole intention of the legislation. The intention of the legislation is to protect Canadian blood for Canadians, to protect the voluntary system, to say that this is something we are proud of and we are going to continue to build, and the intent of this amendment is to undermine that, Madam Chair. With that in mind and with the very simple value that we should be finding ways to remove barriers and support one another in giving something that takes us usually less than an hour if it's whole blood donations – it takes slightly more if you're donating plasma, and you can do it more frequently.

11:50

I have to say that another reason why you might not be able to donate blood – my mom donated I think it was 99 times at the point in which she was diagnosed with cancer and had chemo. When she had chemo, she could no longer donate blood, but she donated 99 times, mostly plasma, actually, because she could do it so frequently as a retired person, and she is so proud she did that. There are so many families who rely on their friends and their neighbours – and they don't even know them – to be donating these essential products to save lives. I love hearing people say that, you know, a

monetary payment wouldn't change their motives about donating or not. That's excellent. But saying that there is no evidence that payment does undermine the voluntary system just isn't true.

We don't have to look very far to see what's happening in Saskatchewan. It has been a trial project for a year, Madam Chair, and, yes, it's plasma that has the paid donations, and, yes, donating plasma has absolutely led to reduced donations in the plasma market of the voluntary system as well as in the whole blood donations. Let me tell you a couple of stories about why. Regularly there are mobile blood clinics that go to places like postsecondary institutions. I know that when I was at Concordia here in Edmonton, we arranged for one once a year to come and set up in the student centre, and people could donate blood very easily. The same thing happens in other jurisdictions.

What's been happening in some of the places in Saskatchewan is that those organizations that have regularly had a relationship with Canadian Blood Services in allowing mobile blood donor clinics to come to their university, their workplace, their church have been approached by the private, for-profit company. The company has gone there and has provided what people think is a very similar service, and they're actually getting paid for it or maybe the church is getting a donation. What's happening, Madam Chair, is that that blood is not staying within the Canadian markets. We don't even know where it's going right now. It has the ability to go to the highest payer anywhere in the world, and as a result, just in this last year there has been a 14 per cent reduction in the blood that Canadian Blood Services has collected in Saskatchewan. That's one very clear example.

Also, when they're calling through their regular donors and saying, "Hey. You're eligible to come in and donate again," people are regularly saying, "Oh, but I just donated last week" because, honestly, people don't necessarily take the time to read and distinguish between who they're donating to and for what purpose. And this is about making sure that we make it easier, Madam Chair, to donate to Canadian Blood Services, make it easier for people to know that when they see a sign saying, "Your donation could save up to five lives" or "This bench has enough room to provide services for five people," people understand that that's Canadian people, that's Canadian Blood Services, and it's a voluntary system.

Madam Chair, of course, it is far less expensive to have blood and plasma products through the voluntary system within your own nation. CBS has a very, I think, tangible plan that they are proposing on how to expand that opportunity and to get us to that 50 per cent mark while demand continues to grow. It is absolutely heading in the right direction, and I am not willing for us to close the doors where we need it to purchase extra products, and that's why we do have the exemption in the legislation for Canadian Blood Services to do that purchasing just like they do today, usually from the U.S. markets, which, yes, I know are regularly paid donors. We need to make sure that the Canadian blood supply is able to meet its needs as much through voluntary as possible. That's why I don't want to undermine our Canadian voluntary system by bringing in competition into this province but also by creating opportunities for CBS to be able to meet the demands that they have so that every patient gets the products they need throughout the country.

I just want to say, Madam Chair, that we've had an opportunity to look at other jurisdictions. We'll be the third one to bring in this legislation or something similar should we move forward on this path. Ontario was the first, and we were able to look at their legislation, take the very best pieces, and make sure that we're

implementing it in a way that will protect Canadian supply, protect Canadian donors, protect CBS, and enable them to still give things like a pin for recognition and provide a bowl of soup or a cookie after you've donated to make sure that you're well nourished and able to get back on the road. I think that our blood is, once again, just too important to be sold to the highest bidder no matter where they live.

Again, I think that's fantastic that that horse's life was saved. I think it's great to have donors and recipients. I was in Beaverlodge recently and talking to a woman who worked in emergency for many years, and she talked about how there were regularly instances where one of their physicians would hook himself up to the patient in the middle of surgery because he was a universal donor and they would do that. Obviously, we have a much higher standard than we did a hundred years ago when we did these blood transfusions on-site. I imagine that everyone wants to make sure that we're moving forward in that way.

The best way to provide strong integrity and a consistent supply is by supporting the Canadian Blood Services, not undermining them, Madam Chair, and that's why I'm so proud to bring forward this bill to provide that support to an integrated Canadian system that keeps all of us with peace of mind and assurances that if something happens, we're in good hands, that our blood will not be sold on the international markets, and that we're finding ways to strengthen opportunities for Canadian donations within the voluntary system instead of undermining them.

Again, given that I read this amendment as an intent to undermine the intention of the bill, to create a massive loophole for private, for-profit opportunities right here in the province when we're trying to make sure that we are working to support Albertans, support the blood supply, bend the cost curve, Madam Chair, I just can't in good conscience vote for this amendment. I will be opposing it and encourage my colleagues to consider doing so as well.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the Committee of the Whole must now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 4 and Bill 5. The committee also reports progress on the following bill: Bill 3. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? Say no. So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government Whip.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just considering the time, I move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn for lunch and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 21, 2017

Day 11

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

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Wildrose: 22

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Alberta Liberal: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today and introduce to you and through you a group of 49 grade 6 students from Ashmont elementary school along with teachers and chaperones Mrs. Kam, Ms Warholik, Ms Kuryliw, Mrs. Podloski, Mrs. Guinup, and Mrs. Weimeier. If I could get all of you to please stand. Congratulations on your new school that will be opening up, hopefully, in the fall.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you on behalf of the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater Thorhild central school. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Miss Jess Sereda, along with their chaperones, Mrs. Nicole Howard and Mrs. Christina Gabbey. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?
Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly April Steele. April is a nurse practitioner, a passionate advocate for health care in Alberta, and a long-time colleague of mine from my days as a public health nurse. April joins us today from my beautiful constituency of Lesser Slave Lake. I thank April for coming all this way to be with us today and ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's an honour to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Julia Vandersluis and Sonja Durinck. Julia, one of my incredibly dedicated constituency staff, has been a wonderful asset to my office and the Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency as a whole. Sonja is a strong advocate for continued improvements to our public health care system and for patients living with a rare or ultra-rare disease. I will speak more about Sonja in my member's statement today. I'd ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members from the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is in Strathcona

county. They are Bijan Aidun, George Collins, Shirin Ghobad, Jeremy Martin, Mary Martin, Betty Putters, Selam Somani, Parvaneh Tashakor, Rostam Tashakor, and Janice Yu. I'm pleased that they've come here today on this very important day for the Baha'i. I will be speaking later on in my member's statement about Nowruz. I would like to ask this group to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you several dietitians from communities in and around Edmonton. March has been declared dietitian month by our government, and earlier today our guests were in the lower rotunda sharing some of their information and expertise. The advice and information that dietitians provide is tailored to the needs and values of their clients and communities, and they help clients manage conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. I would ask that Karen Boyd, regional executive director with Dietitians of Canada; Doug Cook, registrar with the College of Dietitians of Alberta; and the other dietitians joining us today please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Sandra Azocar and Trevor Zimmerman. They are my guests from Friends of Medicare. Sandra is the executive director, and Trevor Zimmerman is in communications. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the first lady of Banff-Cochrane, my amazing wife, Marcella. We first met at Nipissing University, where we dissected rats in the neuroscience research lab together, and that was how the romance began. She is my rock, the smartest person I know, and bears the burden of snuggling our two fur babies while I'm away at the Legislature. I'd like to ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On this day 57 years ago 69 people were shot to death by police at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa. They were killed for protesting the legal systemic racism known as apartheid.

On January 29 of this year six men were shot dead as they attended evening prayers at a mosque in Quebec. At a vigil the next night I stood with our Premier, MLAs, and community leaders as

well as thousands of Albertans who came out on that freezing night. We stood together as members of one community and one race to remember those six individuals whose lives were cut short by a cold-blooded act, fueled by hatred against their religious beliefs. Since then, Mr. Speaker, we have learned a lot about hate, and let's call it hate because that's, quite simply, what it is, hate.

This year's theme for this day is Racial Profiling and Incitement to Hatred, Including in the Context of Migration. We know that there are people who can't accept that we are all inherently equal regardless of where we were born, the colour of our skin, our religious beliefs and regardless of our choices. When we think back to those killed in South Africa, those killed in Quebec, or those who are killed every day in acts of hate, we must never forget them nor their struggles for equality and to be treated with basic human decency. At the same time we must not forget all those who allowed or enabled those tragedies to happen, those who encouraged and benefited from a system that allowed them to flourish on the backs of others.

Today is more than a day to condemn racism. We need to look at our own words, our own actions and ask ourselves whether we serve those we have the privilege to represent. I know that many of us here today have seen discrimination or witnessed hatred in our communities in some form, and I know, Mr. Speaker, that all members of this House agree that no one should be discriminated against, no one should be hated for where they were born or the colour of their skin or the way they sound.

Lately, Mr. Speaker, those who weaponize hate seem to be getting stronger, louder, and more effective. It's deeply troubling when people around us promote voices that claim that the Quebec mosque shooting was a hoax, an inside job, a controversial subject with a shifting narrative. These are voices that claim that the problem with the mass murder of Muslims is that the facts just aren't clear enough. I'm not sure what Albertans should take away from that. They give a megaphone to the voices of hate in our communities and amplify them. Those standing with such hate-mongers must not forget that they are not only accomplices to these hate forces, but they are also motivating others to do the same.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I have personally experienced discrimination, and I have lived through hate. I know what it's like to be judged based on where I was born, the faith I was raised in, the colour of my skin, how I sound, how I don't wear my emotions on my sleeve and the like. For me, as with many Albertans, discrimination and hate are very real parts of our lives. For many of us it comes in the form of Islamophobia which is used to promote hatred and for the political profiling of Islam and its followers. For others it comes in the form of anti-Semitism or anti-indigenous sentiment or antiturban sentiment. Few of us have escaped racial slurs, jokes, or the racism of lowered expectations.

Mr. Speaker, it is something that tears us apart every day individually and as a society. Hatred and discrimination do not make our communities and our province safer. I know full well where I stand and who I stand for, and I hope that all members of this House will stand with me in condemning all forms of hate and discrimination, including Islamophobia.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour today to rise and address the House on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and, of course, to reaffirm my profound commitment to racial equality and religious freedoms in Canada and across the world. I'm so privileged to represent the riding of Fort McMurray-Conklin. It's a diverse riding. It's young, hard working,

and very ethnically diverse. In fact, at Syncrude itself I've been told that some 87 different languages are spoken at the plant site on any given day.

When you come to Fort McMurray, you'll see people of all races and religions pursuing a better life for themselves and their families. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you'll find many houses of worship right across Fort McMurray. That lends confidence to what we are doing in Fort McMurray as being accepting to all people, as we must be in Alberta and in Canada. I myself have a large aboriginal family in northern Alberta, living in three different communities. Our communities across Alberta, our provinces, and our country are testaments to the strength of inclusion, and we must use days like today to spread our message of success as a peaceful, multicultural nation.

What happened in Quebec, as the minister has said, is inexcusable. While we face many issues within our country and even in politics, still one thing is clear. Racism and hate have no place in this country. Racism hurts us, Mr. Speaker. Racism divides us. It destroys us. It destroys families, and it creates more problems than it will ever, ever solve. Racism holds us back from realizing our full potential as a nation. I want to take this opportunity to condemn racism in any form, whether it's on Canadian soil or internationally across the world.

We know that there are parts of the world that are riddled with death and despair because of racism. We see what's happening in many parts of the world, and we all sympathize with those nations and especially with those people. We pray for these people, and we pray for these places. We vow never to fall into that dark trap. We must always remember why we left that place. As we prepare to celebrate 150 years of Confederation, we must also remember the plight of all those who came before us and who struggled under the heavy weight of racism.

Mr. Speaker, we must also celebrate our leadership as a nation, a nation of peace and inclusion, and what we provide to the world as an example, an example of success, an example of inclusion, an example of where racism is not tolerated and hate has no place in the nation. We are truly here in Canada and in Alberta a beacon of hope, a beacon of hope for the world, and we must continue to pursue that path, the path of what is right, what is true, and what is just for all people. We are a nation who believes in the promise of this mighty land. May we be together in this forever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Oh, yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House grant unanimous consent to the leader of the third party and to the two independent members to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues, for the opportunity. I rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to recognize International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Today is an incredibly important day to acknowledge the efforts made to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and to continue those efforts because while we have made progress on eliminating racism in Alberta, we have so much more work to do.

This year's theme for International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is Racial Profiling and Incitement to Hatred. I'm proud of our PC caucus and our commitment to ending racial

profiling, particularly when it comes to efforts to end the act of police carding. Police carding, or the act of IDing community members solely based on their race or socioeconomic background, is against our fundamental rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Members of this caucus have worked closely with ethnic community groups and police services to educate the public about their rights regarding police carding and to help build bridges between law enforcement and Alberta's ethnic communities.

As the world of global politics becomes more polarized, our PC caucus continues to cut through the rhetoric and work towards tangible solutions. When it comes to ending racial discrimination, there are no party colours in this House, I believe, and we are proud to work with all members of this House to protect the rights of marginalized Albertans. It cannot be emphasized enough that the work being done to end racism in Alberta is vital to our province. As Nelson Mandela once said: to deny people their basic human rights is to challenge their basic humanity.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the PC caucus I'm proud to continue fighting for humanity and against racial discrimination with all members of this House.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus I'm very pleased to stand in observance of today's international day against racial discrimination. It's taken on increasing relevance in light of recent events here in Alberta and around the world. Unfortunately, there are still too many examples of hatred and discrimination based on race and religion. Just last week police in Calgary were called to investigate anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic graffiti in an off-leash park. And a recent attack in Quebec in the mosque has demonstrated that hatred has a cost, a cost that is paid in human lives. That is why we take a stand today to support and promote the Albertan and Canadian values of mutual respect, inclusion, and diversity. We must be clear that such hatred is not acceptable.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to call our attention to more subtle forms of racial discrimination, particularly against indigenous people. Already burdened with the long and destructive legacy of residential schools and racism, that we have only just begun to address, First Nations people continue to struggle with racial discrimination and stigma that robs them of opportunity, contributes to isolation, mental illness, suicide rates five times the average, and violence. I acknowledge the leadership of this provincial government and the federal government in this regard.

A recent *Maclean's* article compared aboriginal Canadians to African Americans and found that aboriginal Canadians were in a worse state on almost every metric, from median income to incarceration rate to life expectancy. We cannot be complacent about this racial discrimination happening beneath our noses, Mr. Speaker. So I stand with the members of this Assembly in condemning any and all forms of discrimination. All people among us are worthy and have the right to live free of discrimination. Clearly, we must do more individually and collectively to put these fine words into action with policies and funding every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:50

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to speak to the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is observed annually on the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, where police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid.

The theme this year is Racial Profiling and Incitement to Hatred. Every person around the world and in our province should be able to live their lives without discrimination, and they are entitled to full protection of their human rights. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world and even in our own province that is not true. Discriminatory practices, sadly, are widespread, including racial and ethnic profiling with the intent to incite hatred and violence. We have seen recent hateful acts in our own country like the shooting at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Sainte-Foy, Quebec.

In Alberta our diversity is a source of strength and pride. We condemn racism, hate, and xenophobia in all its forms, including those which we may find close to home. While I am proud of the vast, vast majority of Albertans' openness and acceptance of all people, the rise in intolerance in our province must be addressed. Indigenous people continue to face systemic exclusion and outright racism; vandalism of mosques, synagogues, and other places of worship continues; and online hatred is on the rise. Alberta is a remarkable place to call home, but it's up to all of us to ensure that it is safe and open for all, and that is what today is all about.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Budget 2017

Mr. Jean: The NDP has a spending problem. Rating agencies call the budget a disappointment. I call it a disaster. B.C. has a half a million more residents than Alberta does, yet according to DBRS rating agency B.C. will spend a full \$7 billion less this year than this NDP government. Because Alberta's three-year increases in this budget outpace B.C. by \$4 billion, by 2019 it's going to be much, much worse. B.C. is making efforts to control their expenses while this Premier and her cabinet and the NDP just can't seem to spend enough. What will it take for this Premier to finally admit that she has a spending problem and look to our provincial friends next door?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Wildrose would have more credibility on this fiscal issue if they weren't proposing a \$1.2 billion tax giveaway to those at the top. That's the choice that they have made. They would pay for it by cutting front-line services to families. So let me ask the Leader of the Opposition the question he ducked yesterday. If you're so concerned about our finances, why are you proposing over \$600 million in tax giveaways to Albertans struggling to make ends meet on \$300,000 a year?

Mr. Jean: It's time for the NDP to do a reality check, Mr. Speaker. Billions spent on killing coal jobs, free light bulbs for Albertans, and socialist-style laundry services that help their friends: it's a huge problem, a \$71 billion huge problem. That's how much the NDP expect to rack up by the time Albertans get a chance to kick them out of office. By then we'll have more debt per capita than Saskatchewan, B.C., Manitoba . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Jean: . . . and most of the Maritimes. This NDP government is racing Ontario for the first-place prize of the most subsovereign debt on the planet after Ontario. To the Premier: how will it take . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member work a little bit harder on getting his facts correct. Nonetheless, I will say this. Overall the math is not hard. Make Alberta families pay more and get less: that's the Wildrose plan. Wildrose is also planning to give a \$600 million tax break to the most profitable corporations. That's what they want to do. They want Albertans to pay for that giveaway by having fewer services, higher school fees, spiralling tuition. That's not standing up for Albertans, and that's not the way this government is going to govern.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we would need to see record world oil prices in order to see a balanced budget from these folks, and even then I would suggest that it's never going to happen. We're already on track to spend \$2.3 billion every year on debt servicing alone, and it's clear that interest rates are only going one way, and that's up. This Premier won't cut spending, she won't freeze salaries, and she won't address the problem. There is a real problem, and no government in history has taxed itself and spent its way back to prosperity. Why is the Premier jeopardizing public services of future generations by ignoring the problem right now, that she has created?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite want Albertans to believe they can do everything: massive tax giveaways to those at the top, cutting billions from public services without it impacting any front-line services, and then balancing the budget in a couple of years – and you know what else? – getting Elvis to play the Saddledome sometime next year. But here is the bottom line. Wildrose people want Albertans to buy in to their reckless agenda, but that isn't investing in Alberta's future. We are investing in Alberta's future.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: A future of high payments, Mr. Speaker, because of interest rates.

Albertans are seeing their taxes go up at a time when they can least afford it. While many families are already feeling the pinch of the carbon tax raising the cost of gas, groceries, and everything else, this year's budget confirmed that the NDP are increasing that carbon tax by 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker, and it'll go up again the year after that and again and again and again. Albertans didn't ask for this tax – they didn't campaign on this tax – and they don't want to see it continue to climb. Why won't the Premier listen to the people of Alberta and scrap the tax?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the thing. Here's what we can do. We can reverse the approval of two pipelines, and then we can ask the government of Canada to come in and make decisions about our climate change policy. But that's not what Albertans want. Albertans voted for a government that would take climate change seriously. We were very clear about that in the election. That's exactly what we're doing. In addition, we got two pipelines – two pipelines – compared to zero over there.

Mr. Jean: Today the Premier said that Albertans could rest assured that there won't be a PST introduced because during the election she, quote, specifically said that it would not be. End quote. Well, pardon me if I'm a little skeptical, if Albertans are still a bit wary as well because this Premier's taxation plans are just not the way she says they are. She didn't campaign on a carbon tax, then she brought in a carbon tax. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will see the debt continue to climb, and they know this is the work of this Premier,

who also didn't campaign on a \$3 billion carbon tax, that Alberta families are now paying more for everything than they ever have. Why on earth would Albertans take you at your word in relation . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

Hon. members, I have not heard it personally, so I'm at somewhat of a disadvantage. I have got the earphone with me today. If there is anyone saying things like "Don't tell the truth," I want to encourage you to no longer say that and to respect each hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the member opposite appears to be looking longingly to the east, to a regime that is poised to increase a consumption tax on voters, who were not told about it in the election. However, what we ran on was increasing affordability for Albertans, and that's exactly what we delivered in this budget. Cutting school fees, freezing tuition, capping electricity prices: these are the things that make things more affordable for Albertans, and we are proud of them.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see the Premier is looking around, because if she did, she'd see the warning signs in her own budget about her government's spending problem. That's right. The fiscal plan clearly spells out that rising interest rates coupled with the NDP's debt load will make borrowing and refinancing of debt more expensive. Future generations of Albertans will be saddled with paying off this debt that you're borrowing today, and it comes at a cost. Every single dollar going to debt is a dollar taken away from Alberta's front-line services. That's deplorable. Will the Premier acknowledge her plan is only doing long-term damage to our province?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Leader of the Opposition loves celebrating and talking down Alberta every time, every opportunity that they get. But let me quote some other folks. The mayor of Fort Saskatchewan: this budget is very good news for the prosperity of Alberta's Industrial Heartland. Or the chair of the Edmonton school board: we are pleased that this government is continuing to make education a priority. Or the mayor of Strathcona county: "This [budget] is good news for our community." If the member spent less time fighting for his job and more time talking to Albertans, he would know that they . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Third main question.

Federal Equalization and Transfer Payments

Mr. Jean: There's no doubt about it, Mr. Speaker. The equalization system has ripped Albertans off for years. Albertans don't like it, but the NDP don't even want to move an inch. There's an easy solution to fix this. We'll send Ottawa the message that Albertans want to be treated fairly, like the rest of Canada, after sending hundreds of billions of dollars out of province. A strong mandate from Albertans through a referendum would force Ottawa to the negotiating table. Yes, it would, Madam Premier. Does the Premier believe that this is a good idea, a referendum? Yes or no?

2:00

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite was in Ottawa for years and years when they were in government, and his new BFF was in cabinet in Ottawa for years and years when they were in government, and they came together and with the former PC government in this Legislature. They made no changes to the

equalization formula, no changes at all, so it's a little bit rich that this is a priority for them now. We're going to focus on our work here at home, and we're going to support Alberta families and carry on with our agenda to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: I wasn't there at that time, for renegotiation, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans send \$24 billion more to Ottawa than we receive back in transfers or services every year. Twenty-four billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are tired of being treated like pushovers. They want solutions from this Premier. The courts have been clear on this matter. If a province comes forward in a referendum with a definitive majority to renegotiate equalization, Ottawa would have to meet with them. Yes, that's right, Madam Premier. You have that opportunity. It's simple. It's easy. It could be held during municipal elections and would send a strong message to the rest of Canada. Will the Premier put this forward at this fall's municipal election? Yes or no?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to giving spending power over to Ottawa, what we won't do is give them spending power over our climate change leadership plan. We're going to develop that plan right here, not hand it over to Ottawa the way the folks over there want to. As I've said before, the member opposite was part of a government that fundamentally ignored this issue for a decade, and he just has no credibility on raising it now. And you know what? We are going to focus on the job that we can do here in Alberta. That's what we were elected to do.

Mr. Jean: So that is, Mr. Speaker, a no, that the NDP government won't stand up for Albertans. I understand.

Ottawa is trying to force Alberta to have a carbon tax. They're killing coal jobs and also benefiting from a generous equalization program. That's just not going to cut it anymore, Mr. Speaker. Peter Lougheed, a great Premier, was right to challenge the national energy program in the 1980s through a reference case. Alberta can do the same thing, asking why Ottawa feels it's entitled to include our nonrenewable resources when it collects equalization. They shouldn't be able to do that. This move would have the support of Albertans. Will the Premier give Albertans a chance for a fair shake in equalization? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it's a little premature for the member opposite to start trying to wrap himself in the cloak of Premier Lougheed. Give him another three or four months on it. You know what else? The fact of the matter is that for the last few months or years that the member has been the Leader of the Official Opposition, they've engaged in a strategy of yelling at Ottawa, yelling at people out east, yelling at people out west. You know what? Our government engages in constructive, mature, sophisticated engagement, and you know what happened as a result of that? Two pipelines. Two pipelines, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to keep at it.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, two pipelines won't save this government.

Budget 2017 (continued)

Mr. McIver: The Finance minister took his smoke-and-mirrors show called Budget 2017 to the Calgary Chamber yesterday. The

business community was not impressed. They called the budget a disappointment – and that was polite – \$10.8 billion in red ink this year, \$10.3 billion next year, no plan to balance. Not good. To the Premier: since it is business that creates jobs and wealth, not government, will you listen to the business community, or are you and your government tone deaf to these experts, who create the dollars you spend and who are left to pay back the obscene debt load you are creating?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, in fact, I have a great deal of respect for business leaders across this province, and that's why last year the minister of economic development moved very aggressively to support business. We cut small-business tax by one-third. We introduced a capital investment tax credit. We introduced an investment tax credit. We made capital available to help them with business development. We work closely with the business community. We will continue to do that as we focus on our job of creating jobs for all Albertans.

Mr. McIver: And they wiped out all that goodwill with the carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, the government is recklessly spending with no regard to the warnings from businesses, working Albertan families, and now even credit-rating agencies. After last year's budget credit-rating agencies put Alberta under review and then came back with downgrades. When this happens, it's more expensive for government to operate, and debt servicing in Alberta will soon exceed the cost of running Children's Services. To the Premier: since you say that you do good things with the money you take from Albertans, wouldn't it be a good idea to control debt-servicing costs and, as a result, maybe have some more money to spend on services?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, speaking of businesses, let me quote the CIBC: Alberta will have one of the lowest debt burdens among Canadian provinces and a significant tax advantage. But you know what? Let me quote a few other people because there are other people in the province of Alberta. The chair of the Edmonton Catholic school board: this new provincial budget again demonstrates that education remains a priority for this government. The mayor of Red Deer: a new Red Deer courthouse helps respond to the pressures on our local judicial system through access to timely justice. Our job is to serve all Albertans, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. McIver: And they've gone from a debt to GDP of 3.2 to well over 10 and getting worse. They're killing the advantages the Premier is talking about.

Budget 2017 is heading towards a staggering \$71 billion in debt by 2019-20. This will take our children and grandchildren decades to pay off. To the Premier. Think of Alberta's children. Is it fair to ask kids in elementary school today to pay for 27 light bulbs and operating costs when they're trying to start a home and start a family 10 or 20 years from now? Is that fair?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the member some questions about what he thinks is fair. His budget proposed taking \$4 billion of operating money out of our budget. He talks about children. That would mean cutting the Children's Services ministry eight times. Eight times. That is ridiculous. You know, let me talk about one thing that one other Albertan said, someone who is getting home care as a result of our changes to the budget: it's really important for us to be able to stay at home, next to our neighbours,

with our son and be able to keep the family together; it keeps me healthier. That's what . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Hon. members, as we move forward, just using that as an illustration, when we go past speaker 5, no preambles. The example of the last member may be what you don't want to do in terms of preamble. But since you're in the first five, you get away with it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, common sense says to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. This government is hoping for the best and hoping for even better. The Alberta Party's shadow budget uses a realistic oil price forecast but still balances within four years without cutting front-line public services. If the government's forecast is off by only \$2 a barrel, they are in deep trouble. To the Premier: how does an overly optimistic oil price forecast make life better . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, when the member opposite says that he can cut what he is cutting without affecting front-line services, he hasn't actually been in the room, going over the budget. I think that's the important thing to remember. The other thing to remember is that we've talked about balancing the budget by '23-24, but that is based on every risk adjustment going completely south, so it is the most conservative estimate possible. It takes into account the most conservative oil price projections over years and years and years. We're very confident that we've taken a cautious, careful approach, and Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Clark: If this is a cautious plan, I would hate to see a reckless plan, Mr. Speaker.

Now, our plan budgets \$500 million every year for disaster recovery and still balances in four years without cutting front-line public services. The government, on the other hand, budgets less than half that for disaster relief even though their budget is well below the 10-year average of what disaster relief costs this province. To the Premier: how does that make life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

2:10

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The way our budget makes life better for Albertans – and thank you so much to the member opposite for asking that question – is that we're cutting school fees by 25 per cent, we're putting a cap on electricity fees, we are freezing tuition, we're investing more in home care. Just today we announced 24 new schools being built for our growing communities across the province. We're ensuring that water for First Nations across the province will finally be drinkable. That is how we are making life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Party shadow budget prioritizes shovel-ready capital projects. The government, on the other hand, keeps announcing and reannouncing projects they can't build. How do we know that? Because last year they promised to build \$1.2 billion worth of projects they didn't deliver,

and the year before that it was \$1.3 billion. To the Premier: how do misleading announcements make life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member should know that last year this government moved out over a billion dollars more in spending on important infrastructure programs than the year before. We actually increased the number that we were able to get in the ground and get built because we want to improve lives for Alberta families. We want to give them the roads, the hospitals, the schools, the courthouses that they need in order to have the best possible life here in our province. We're doing that every day. We're working really hard to make sure that we make life better for Albertans.

Home-care Services

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, enhancing community-based health care means that more people can live at home in their community, enjoying the support of family and friends and saving greatly on health care costs. Given that the government recently announced a \$200 million increase to home care, bringing the total funding to over \$2 billion in 2017-18, to the Minister of Health: in the last fiscal year how many Albertans have benefited from publicly funded home care, and were there any fees?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the important question and for sharing some time with me in his constituency yesterday with one of his constituents, Jaye Fredrickson, who absolutely is able to continue living at home with her family. Being a mom, having a son who was only 16 years old when she was diagnosed with ALS, not only does it make her life better being able to stay at home, but it makes her son's life better, too. I have to say that her dedication, her determination, and her positive spirit are an inspiration to all, and we are very proud to increase those opportunities for Albertans throughout our province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of my constituents, like Jaye, have complex medical needs that often require acute-care admissions, to the same minister: can Albertans receive such services at home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. I am very proud of the variety of expertise that we're able to have dispatched into people's homes to support them right where they're living, including respite care, bathing and personal care, medication administration, physical therapy, and mental and social supports. Some members of this House want to see cuts that would absolutely impact these kinds of services and making sure that Albertans can get care when and where they need it. This government was elected to make life better for Albertans. We're proud to do this, and increasing investment in home care is one of the ways we're doing that.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Dr. Turner: Thank you to the minister for that very helpful information.

To the same minister: what do we expect to see as a rate of increase in the use of publicly funded home care in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year 116,000 Albertans accessed home care throughout our province. We've been able to increase that throughout the year so that by the end of the year we saw a 20 per cent increase over how it started at the beginning of the year. I know that we continue to have an aging population throughout our province. Speaking personally, nine years ago, when my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he wanted to stay at home. We knew that, and we were able to access those supports, including nurses and having a doctor come to visit. It absolutely enabled us to make sure that we could provide the very best transition for him and for our entire family.

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our office has received information about closures at Alberta Hospital Edmonton that is very concerning. The Minister of Health has made the unilateral decision to shut down 20 beds at the hospital next month. This decision was made without consulting doctors or front-line workers, who are completely against it. This is not in the best interests of the extremely vulnerable patients who need these spaces. Why is the Health minister closing down these beds against the best advice of those who deal with the most vulnerable?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I hazard to say this, but I expect that the member has misinformation. This is the kind of thing that we're getting used to hearing regularly from members on the opposite side of the House. They like to throw mud in this Chamber and at members of this House. I'd be happy to provide opportunities for people to raise concerns in an appropriate venue using facts. The assertion that was made by the member opposite is absolutely inconsistent with the facts.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can table the documents.

Given that these 20 critical spaces are being closed to fund new emergency beds at the Royal Alexandra hospital and since that will result in these acutely mentally ill, suicidal, and agitated patients being housed in an already overcrowded emergency room or perhaps even finding themselves on the street with no supports, can the minister explain why she is closing these beds when, if she listened to the advice of experts, she would know that these transitional beds are desperately needed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely work with experts each and every day to make sure that we have the best care so that all Albertans have access to the right care in the right place at the right time. I'll be happy to follow up on the assertions made by the member opposite, but I can assure you that this government is putting investment into front lines, including enhancing mental health and addiction supports, to make sure that we have more supports for Albertans, not fewer, unlike the members opposite who keep pushing for deep cuts, which would result in exactly the things that the member opposite is accusing us of. However, we are providing stable, consistent, and appropriate growth in the areas of

health to make sure that we have the backs of Alberta families and make their lives better.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Minister of Health received a letter from the doctors involved asking her to reconsider this disastrous decision and since the doctors have critical experience and information that should inform a decision like this, including a strong desire to ensure that the needs of patients are met, will the minister stop her heavy-handed decision to close the beds until she has consulted with the front-line staff, and will she consider other alternatives that don't leave vulnerable Albertans and their families without the critical supports that they need to address their mental health needs?

Ms Hoffman: Again I need to reinforce that the language that the member opposite is using is completely inflated and does not represent the facts of the experience, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I will be happy to discuss this with him and others.

In terms of the work that we are doing to make sure that we're supporting patients, there are opportunities for certain programs to be aligned to make sure that people have the best access possible. We're going to keep working with patients, their families, and health experts to make sure that we move forward in a way that supports all patients and makes life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, your volume is escalating. I can't hear to identify the other people, but I'm hearing yours.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Oil Price Forecasts

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's budget is no surprise, with ever-increasing spending and borrowing buoyed by unrealistic oil price projections. U of C economist Dr. Trevor Tombe points out that west Texas intermediate futures will remain stagnant through 2020 at around \$50 per barrel, yet the government is projecting WTI prices of \$55, \$59, and \$68 per barrel in that same period. To the Minister of Finance: even with your risk adjustment what will the additional debt burden be if oil prices match market predictions and not your questionable thumbnailing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. As the Premier has already indicated today, the approach that the government has taken is prudent and conservative with respect to predicting oil prices. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, risk adjustments have been built into the budget. I think the hon. member is just trying to sow fear and distrust, but I think that this government is right on track. Our budget is going to make life better for Alberta families in a thousand ways.

2:20

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that even with risk adjustments Albertans will be \$3.5 billion further in the hole than budgeted if oil prices remain at \$50 per barrel and given that overprojecting the price of oil by \$5, \$9, and \$18 represents a significant risk to Alberta's finances and given that Don Braid opened his budget column with "The NDP had better be right, or this province is screwed," again to the minister: have you overinflated oil prices to mask the fact that your spending is even more out of control than the irresponsible billions presented in red ink last week?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, no.

Mr. Gotfried: Always great to get a straight answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that we continuously hear this government state that they are getting off the oil roller coaster . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, no preamble comments at the front end, please. Keep going.

Mr. Gotfried: . . . and given that in his *Maclean's* column Dr. Tombe stated that "the government's projection for gradually declining deficits is entirely driven by rising future oil prices," again to the minister. Either there are additional revenue sources that Dr. Tombe has missed or your government has been spinning a line that is demonstrably false. Which is it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, neither. I happened to read the article by Dr. Tombe, and one of the things that he makes very clear is that the opposition's claims that doom-day is around the corner as a result of the government's budget are completely false. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Renewable Energy Site Reclamation

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the environment minister incorrectly told Albertans that renewable projects don't need a decommissioning plan for bankruptcy because "renewable projects are quite different from subsurface access . . . and are arrangements between the private landowners and the companies." A news flash to the minister: when a company owes its creditors more than it's worth, the creditors don't leave any money for necessary cleanup and reclamation. When will the government stop this recklessness and get real about protecting Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, reclamation plans are part of the process and part of the negotiation with landowners as these projects move forward in order to deliver an expanded property tax base to municipalities, revenue to landowners and to farmers, allowing people to stay in rural communities and allowing those communities to thrive because they create jobs and income. Those jobs and income: the Wildrose would slam the door on those opportunities, slam the door on the opportunity to diversify the economy and to ensure that rural communities can thrive . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: Renewables sites are like oil and gas leases, with rights-of-way, easements, access roads, rents to property owners, setbacks, creditors, yet this government seems to think that they're immune to failure, and given that this government is pursuing a rapid-fire renewables strategy requiring thousands of these sites to be dependent on government handouts, which will not be sustained, will this government take lessons already learned from our energy industry and protect landowners and taxpayers from the risks of insolvency?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose has consistently taken the position that they're going to talk down new investment in this province, billions of dollars of new investment, thousands of new

jobs, thousands of new dollars into the pockets of landowners, farmers, municipalities, and so on that benefit from these projects. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake went so far as to call renewables companies "hogs to the trough" in this Chamber. They are slamming the door on diversification, slamming the door on new developments in this province, and it is shameful.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: The average two-megawatt turbine is a hundred metres tall, requires 60 truckloads of concrete, 50 tonnes of rebar, and a foundation about 20 feet deep. Given that the contracts for renewables are lease agreements on prime farmland and given that the soil restoration will be left to someone should these companies fail, to the minister. After a hundred years of energy exploration Albertans expect industry to respect our province's legacy and return sites to pristine conditions. Will this government demand that renewables companies act equally responsibly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, in the approvals process there are reclamations and other requirements, including wildlife directives and other siting requirements. This is standard within the approvals process. Now, what is not standard is a group of people in this Chamber who dare to stand in their place and refuse new opportunities for Albertans to make a living. Albertans in southern Alberta, in northern Alberta are all looking for these opportunities, and the Wildrose has rejected all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Capital Projects in Central and Rural Alberta

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans just can't keep up with the constant infrastructure priority changes. With this NDP government promises made can be promises changed, and it seems like central and rural Alberta are going to be out of luck again. Another session and conditions are getting increasingly worse. At the Wainwright hospital pipes have burst, floors have been flooded, and 35-year-old backup generators are at risk of failing in an emergency. Why do projects that were once on the priority list, like the Wainwright hospital, disappear completely?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, it's important to us to make sure that we have appropriate investments throughout the province. That's one of the reasons why I'm so proud that we increased the infrastructure maintenance plan money that we have in our budget substantially over the last two years. For decades, since the deep cuts of the 1990s, we've seen investment in these important facilities that Albertans rely on languish, and on this side of the House we're not going to cut deeper. We're going to make sure that we're investing in facilities like the Wainwright hospital to make sure that they have opportunities to be there for generations to come.

Mr. Taylor: I still wonder why that priority list project was dropped.

Since health care infrastructure . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, no comments at the front end. Keep going.

Mr. Taylor: Since health care infrastructure in Alberta has not kept pace with the rest of the province and given that central Albertans are not able to access the care they need close to home, which we all know is a cause for longer wait times for the entire province, to the Minister of Infrastructure: why play these political games with central and rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't think anything could be further from the truth. We're not playing political games here. What we're doing is investing to make life better for Albertans throughout the province, from one end to the other.

Now, just recently, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has driven by Red Deer, he may have seen an infrastructure project under construction there. It's the Gaetz Avenue bypass. If he goes a little bit further north, he'll see construction that's taking place at Red Deer College. There are investments in the hospital in Red Deer. And by the way . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Since we can see that the new capital priority for the NDP government is Edmonton and Calgary and is purely politically motivated and that even though thousands of dollars, if not millions, have already been spent on documentation proving that central Alberta has worse infrastructure and has been neglected for years, this government continually gives central Albertans and doctors many reasons or excuses why they cannot attain the priority list. What is the real reason for not supporting central Alberta? Will you give us the plain truth, please?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, just to finish my last thought: by the way, the Minister of Justice has just announced a new courthouse for Red Deer. So whether it's justice, health care, schools, road infrastructure, central Alberta is well supported. And I might just also mention that we've approved a major new facility for the Reynolds Museum in Wetaskiwin. That may not be central enough for the hon. member, but the list goes on and on and on.

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

Budget 2017 (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During his budget speech the Finance minister stated, "We are keeping spending growth lower than the combined rate of inflation and population." But in his analysis Dr. Trevor Tombe noted that in the four years covered by the budget, total government spending rises by an average of 4.3 per cent while population growth plus inflation is actually 3.4 per cent. To the Premier: I am sure that the Finance minister did not mean to misspeak during his Budget Address, so would you like to take this opportunity to correct your numbers for the record?

2:30

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is focused on making sure that the budget supports Albertans and supports jobs in the private sector. As well, we are just coming out of a recession, and I think the opposition's radical agenda of cuts would jeopardize that recovery before it even got under way. You know, I can't be

lectured by a party that has a billion-dollar mistake in their budget preparation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's important to be accurate and that a recent Mainstreet poll indicated that over half of Albertans believe the NDP's plan to return to balanced budgets by 2024 is too slow and that almost a quarter of Albertans indicated that their first priority for the NDP – this is Albertans – was to reduce spending to lower the deficit and given that the NDP did not address either of these concerns in this budget, to the Premier: since you missed the mark again this year, will you rethink your prebudget consultation efforts so your fiscal decisions might have a chance of accurately representing the wishes of Albertans maybe next time?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to correct the hon. member. This government is focused, and this government was elected and has a mandate in order to protect the important public services that the previous government was going to cut. We have reversed their cuts to health care, which were massive. We've made sure that there are teachers in schools so that class sizes don't balloon. We've cancelled their health care premium tax, that they wanted to impose.

Speaking of polls, Mr. Speaker, I might also mention that polls showed before the last election that that party was going to win another term. They didn't. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Given that it's important to stop blaming and start governing and that despite repeated warnings about impending credit downgrades, the NDP has once again made absolutely no effort to constrain spending to any responsible level and given that Albertans have been pleading for this government to finally show some leadership by making good, forward-looking fiscal decisions just as Albertans do at home and at work, why is the NDP government handcuffing future generations and governments with reckless spending decisions? Do they realize that the hard choices they are skipping right now will not save their government in May of 2019?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just give one concrete example of something that we're doing in order to bring down spending in this province. The previous government appointed all sorts of friends and insiders to the various government boards and agencies. They were paid, in some cases, massive salaries, hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. They got free golf memberships. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we've done away with that. That kind of waste and that kind of financial largesse for the friends of the previous government has ended under this government because we're standing up for Alberta taxpayers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members and ministers.
Edmonton-McClung.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the lack, once again, of leadership under the previous government there has not been a significant investment in seniors' and affordable housing in decades. I

hear regularly from my constituents in Edmonton-McClung that there is an urgent need to create new spaces and renovate existing buildings. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: how is the government addressing the deficit in affordable housing in the city of Edmonton?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. In a tough economy everyday Albertans deserve a government that makes life better. Budget 2017 will be a continuation of our \$1.2 billion investment in seniors and affordable housing. The city of Edmonton will see projects like Londonderry move into construction, putting Albertans to work. Youngstown and Strathcona Place redevelopments also received planning dollars.

But let's talk about what the opposition would do. They would cut hospitals and affordable housing to pay for tax giveaways to their friends at the top.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oftentimes projects are announced and span a couple of years before completion. Given that the provincial affordable housing strategy is intended to guide the investments in affordable housing, can the minister update the House on the ongoing projects across this province and how these fit with the provincial affordable housing strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much. The previous government overpromised and underdelivered. Our government is building affordable housing. There are over 40 seniors' and affordable housing projects currently in the works. Budget 2017 will see new projects in Leduc, Calgary, Banff, Barrhead, and many more. Building affordable housing fits with our provincial affordable housing strategy, expected to be launched shortly. While this side of the House has a strategy to build affordable housing, the other strategy the opposition has is to cut funding to long-term affordable housing and seniors.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents are also concerned about affordable home ownership, to the same minister: what is the government doing to support low-income Albertans, particularly newcomers to Canada hoping to own a home?

Ms Sigurdson: Alberta is one of the first provinces to partner with Habitat for Humanity to make home ownership possible for low-income Albertans. Our government is proud to invest \$4.1 million to help fund 75 new affordable homes for families in Edmonton. Budget 2017 will invest to build 250 homes through Habitat for Humanity across this province. This summer we're taking part in the Carter work project, where President Jimmy Carter himself will help to build homes in the neighbourhood of Laurel. Mr. Speaker, again, on this side of the House we're working to make life better. On the other side they're . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Grain Disease Prevention

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers in my constituency are getting increasingly worried. Not only has the 2016 cereal

crop deteriorated over winter, but disease threatens this year's crop. Significant levels of toxicity and Fusarium were evident in fall-harvested cereal grains. Spring-threshed grains will possibly have little salvage value and increase the risk of disease spread. Can the minister give farmers assurance that he has been in consultation with his department officials and AFSC, and have they come up with a disease prevention plan that will lead to a successful 2017 crop?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There are a lot of pests and other diseases on the landscape out there. Weeds come into the landscape as well. In the southeast corner there was a new weed introduced a few years ago. Absolutely, the department is on top of this. We have the responsibility to make sure that all pests in the fields are controlled one way or the other. That work continues with all our public servants, AFSC, and our research people to make sure that we do what we can to support farmers.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that farmers are receiving mixed messages on the best path forward and given that AFSC insurance expects the crop to be harvested yet industry experts are concerned with the potential disease risk that this will have for the 2017 crop and given that these producers are asking whether they should thresh, burn, bale, disk, or whatever and given that there is an increased risk of disease for the 2017 crop with spring threshing, does the minister have a plan to deal with this disease risk, and when will producers know what that plan is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The options vary, and the options will vary depending on the conditions: geographic conditions, climate conditions, weather conditions, spring conditions, whatever that might be, including even certain bylaws in the county. So I would recommend and hope that all producers out there will contact the AFSC office. Also, they can phone 310.FARM to talk about existing programs before they take any action. I really encourage them to do so to make sure that everything is in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that there have been farmers from constituencies all over northern Alberta calling our offices for answers and given that these farmers need certainty from the department of agriculture on how to proceed and given that this is not about minimizing the insurance liability to AFSC but the potential disease risk for the industry and the 2017 crop – Minister, producers need certainty in order to ensure the success of this year's crop – will this minister ensure that his department has a disease prevention plan that will get released in a timely manner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Other things to take into consideration are wildlife damage, grade loss when the crops are left out. A lot of things must be considered, including those options. The farmers have options to consider. Again, I very much encourage them to contact their local AFSC office for those conditions. It's going to vary from condition to condition, field to field, site to site. There's not going to be one solution for everything.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:40

Bail Process Review

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago Constable Wynn was killed by a dangerous criminal who was out on bail. Since then I've been asking the minister to ensure that Crown prosecutors rather than police handle bail hearings. The minister, however, waited for a review of the bail-hearing system. When it finished, almost a year ago, the number one recommendation was that prosecutors preside over bail hearings, but the minister insisted on initiating a court ruling. Well, she recently got it, and Chief Justice Wittmann upheld the need for Crown prosecutors to handle bail hearings. To the minister: when is the life-saving measure finally going to occur?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know how critical our bail system is to ensuring both the rights and the fundamental safety of Albertans. That's why we took the step of doing a bail review, a process that this government undertook, which came forward with recommendations. There was a difference of opinion amongst our police partners in terms of how to best move forward, so we went to the court, and we asked for their opinion. We've gotten their answer back, and they have told us to have those forces in place by August 8. We will have them in place before then. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you've been forced to implement this critically important, life-saving measure two years after I first recommended it and one year after the Alberta bail review recommended it – now, I know that I'm just one of those uneducated Albertans – and given that we have had this unnecessary delay, which put the public safety at risk for two years, Minister, can you please tell Albertans what the cost was of obtaining this unnecessary court ruling?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of having launched the bail review and doing something about a system that that government set up. It ran along under that government, unlike every other province in the country, for a number of years. This government took office, and we examined it, and we are moving forward on making the necessary changes to ensure that all Albertans can be safe.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Chief Justice Wittmann, in his decision ordering that Crown prosecutors handle bail hearings, provided the government with a deadline, of course, of August 8 of this year and given that the Justice ministry has shown resistance to proactively implementing the Alberta bail review's number one recommendation, which is now a year old, just to reconfirm: Minister, will the Crown under your leadership, as you previously stated, for sure meet the court's August 8 deadline? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise once again in this House and say that we are taking

care of a situation that the last government ignored. We have launched the bail review, we went to the court, we got the opinion, and we are going to move forward with the changes that are necessary.

Mr. Speaker, while I have some extra time, I'd also like to talk about the fact that we're ensuring that the right information gets into the right hands in terms of bail, the most important thing in ensuring that Albertans are safe. We're very proud of the work we're doing, and we think it'll make lives better for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with statements.

Members' Statements

Nowruz

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, this day is not only the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, but it is also Nowruz, celebrated by people from western Asia, central Asia, the Caucasus Mountains, the Black Sea area, and the Balkans. Nowruz is also celebrated by people of the Baha'i and Zoroastrian faiths.

It has been a joy in my life to be introduced to many faiths and beliefs and to participate in celebrating important festivals. About 15 years ago I helped a hospital develop a religious and spiritual care department, and I had the opportunity to obtain a deeper understanding of many faiths and religious beliefs.

In Sherwood Park we have a Baha'i community, and I introduced some members to this Assembly earlier on. Nowruz is the traditional festival of spring, which starts at the exact moment of the vernal equinox. Traditions vary, depending on country of origin and faith, but like most celebrations it involves food and visits with families and friends. Of relevance, I think, to the hon. members of this Assembly is the belief that whatever a person does on Nowruz will affect the rest of the year. If a person is warm and kind to their relatives, friends, and neighbours on Nowruz, then the new year will be a good one. On the other hand, if there are fights and disagreements, the year will be a bad one. So let's make sure that today we all have a good year.

The Baha'i faith has been present in Canada since 1898. It is based on the teaching of Baha'ullah, who taught that there is only one God, that there is only one human family, and that all major religions represent unfolding chapters in God's teaching for humankind. Baha'is undertake various community-building initiatives aimed at empowering the residents of their communities to take charge of their own spiritual, social, and intellectual development. Members of the Sherwood Park Baha'i congregation are very involved in the Strathcona County Diversity Committee, for example.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to help me wish . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bill 202

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before anything else, I'm a father. That means taking a lifetime vow to love, cherish, and protect another human being. I take every opportunity to teach my children about right and wrong choices. But in a world that is changing so fast, I often find myself learning more from them than they are learning from me.

Kids today are growing up in a different world than we did, and this new digital world has brought a host of new challenges. It's up to us to keep pace with the rate of change online and protect our

kids from a new breed of criminals. Bill 202 does just that. It tackles an issue that affects too many girls and women; that is, revenge porn. We've all heard the stories of Amanda Todd, Rehtaeh Parsons. This issue is killing our kids, and it's only getting worse.

I got the idea for Bill 202 from a conversation with my oldest daughter. She explained to me how damaging this issue was for young girls. One poor decision can be a life sentence. We were all kids once. Kids all make mistakes. We can all probably look back at things we used to do and say: oh, boy, that was sure dangerous. Things are different now. One mistake means a lifetime of consequences. Let's not sugar-coat this: those who distribute intimate images online without consent are criminals.

Let's be a leader in this, not a follower. Alberta was one of the last provinces to mandate seat belt laws. We were also one of the last provinces to ban indoor smoking. Bill 202 will send a very powerful message to online predators.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Government and Opposition Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been in Alberta for 16 years now, and during that time I have been inspired by the enterprising and caring spirit of Albertans. I've also been a member of this Legislature for a year, and I've observed that the NDP's ideological agenda is out of sync with our great province. This government is hurtling us towards fiscal and cultural ruin. Something else I've noticed over the past year is that our PC caucus and our colleagues in the Wildrose caucus are in sync with Albertans and with each other.

2:50

That's why I am so pleased that the PC Party took a big and a positive step last weekend towards forging a strong, united alternative to this accidental government. Together let's offer Alberta a government that is fiscally conservative yet helps citizens who are less fortunate, supports and fights on behalf of all industry for they are all critical to our economic success, and holds taxes in check because that's the Alberta way, Mr. Speaker.

Most of all, Albertans need a government that reflects their values, Albertan values. They don't need a government which imposes dogma that is profoundly wrong. In just a few short years this NDP government has eroded the strong foundation that Albertans have spent the last century building. It is destroying our proud culture because it's too arrogant to care to understand it. That's why I'm urging all free-enterprise Albertans to join together under this big tent. Let us focus on what unites us and not on what divides us. We must free ourselves from this incompetent, socialist, mean-spirited, arrogant government for the sake of all Albertans, and we will do so at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Rare Disease Awareness

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I had the opportunity to introduce a wonderful constituent of Edmonton-Meadowlark, Sonja Durinck. I would like to share with this Assembly a little bit about Sonja and the work that she has done to raise awareness of the health challenges faced by those with a rare disease.

Sonja was diagnosed in 2011 with not just one ultra-rare disease but two. Sonja's condition went undiagnosed for a period of more

than 20 years. As a result, Sonja faces life-threatening challenges as she is adrenal insufficient and steroid dependent. Despite these daily challenges Sonja remains a very active community member and is determined to do what she can to help improve the lives of others.

Sonja is a patient expert and ambassador with the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, a board member on various national and international organizations, and a founding member of both the Alberta Pituitary Patient Society and the Canadian Pituitary Patient Network, among her many other accomplishments. She has done an incredible job bringing awareness and recognition of the unique challenges that come with having a rare disease.

Rare Disease Day is recognized on February 28 or on February 29 in the years that this rare date does occur. This day raises awareness of the millions of Canadians directly affected by over 6,000 rare diseases and disorders. On this year's Rare Disease Day Sonja organized for the city of Edmonton to light up the High Level Bridge in recognition of the day. She is also building awareness of national Cushing's syndrome awareness day, that will take place on April 8.

I would like to thank Sonja and others like her who maintain not only their strength to battle their condition but the dedication to improving the way we understand and treat these conditions. I am committed to being a partner and advocate in support of all Albertans to have access to the diagnostic and treatment services that they need. I am proud to be a member of a caucus that is committed to supporting the public health care system in this province.

Thank you very much.

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

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this day, March 21, 1960, police killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, protesting apartheid. Proclaiming this day in 1966, the UN General Assembly called to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, my experience is that this discrimination continues to lurk and manifests itself in subtle but insidious ways even today. One of my earliest memories in Canada as a child was watching other children ride their bikes in front of my home, yelling at my older brother as we played in the front yard to: go home, you dirty Chilean. These children, from my brother's school, had racialized him for being different and not yet being able to speak the language fluently. The behaviour of these children was learned, their actions a product of the predominant attitude of the time to racialize those who are foreign, which, unfortunately, continues to occur to this day.

Mr. Speaker, my hope for today is that this message reach every Albertan. I request them to have a heart-to-heart with their family members and discuss the importance of ridding our society, communities, and homes of the ugly reality of racial discrimination. I request that they pledge to condemn acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance against refugees and migrants and, most importantly, those nations that originally welcomed us here to their territory: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

We must decolonize ourselves and, throughout this process of action and reflection, focus and learn to treat one another with dignity and respect. I remind us all that our children are watching, just like those children that rode their bikes in front of my home all those years ago. It is important that we each be committed to counter the attitudes and behaviours related to racial discrimination,

particularly those regarding hate crimes, hate speech, and racial violence. Let us be the example future generations require. On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Local HERO Air Ambulance Service in Wood Buffalo

Mr. Yao: Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to rise today to highlight a local event that I had the pleasure of attending. It was a fundraiser for the Local HERO Foundation in Fort McMurray. It was an East Coast Lobster Party featuring world-renowned Canadian chef Michael Smith, and it was an absolutely fantastic evening that raised money to help keep HERO 1 in the air and save lives in our region. This money will help cover fuel, maintenance, and operations of our helicopter.

HERO is Wood Buffalo's regional rotary air ambulance program. The region, 65,000 square kilometres, is one of the largest in Alberta and Canada, with communities like Janvier and Conklin being over an hour away by ground. Industry has a large presence around Fort McMurray, with thousands of men and women working in outlying, isolated, and difficult-to-access areas. Though the characteristics of the region dictate the need for a rotary air ambulance, we could not afford STARS. Their proposal to our community was simply too expensive.

In my previous life as an emergency responder I can tell you how this service was so important to the quality of patient care throughout northeastern Alberta. The Local HERO Foundation exists to promote and deliver 24-hour, seven-days-a-week emergency helicopter services to respond to motor vehicle collisions, workplace accidents, and medical emergencies. Time-sensitive issues like trauma, strokes, and cardiac issues could be resolved much quicker than if they were two hours away. They could be accessed in far less time, and it helped improve patient outcomes.

Phoenix Heli-Flight has provided this service to Wood Buffalo since their inception 26 years ago. They are able to operate in conjunction with the Fort McMurray fire department, the local emergency services, with amazing paramedics and EMTs. They are able to operate based on industry contributions of 22 per cent, our local municipality's contribution of 50 per cent, and AHS currently pays a fee for service. As good fiscal conservatives this organization has been able to provide an excellent service for our region.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would move for unanimous consent to continue the Routine until its completion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, sir. Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five copies of a letter from the minister of jobs and the economy from Manitoba's former NDP government which I quoted this morning, in which it demonstrates that they do support the life sciences sector in their province. They weren't hypocrites.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I proudly rise to table five copies of the Alberta Party shadow budget Pathway to Prosperity, our detailed fiscal plan 2017 through 2021, which shows

that it is, in fact, possible to balance the budget within four years without cutting front-line public services Albertans rely on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of Dr. Trevor Tombe's March 18 *Maclean's* article titled Alberta Needs to Be Honest with Itself about the Budget.

Further, I table five copies of Don Braid's March 16 *Calgary Herald* article titled A Budget that Gambles with Alberta's Future.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other tablings?

I rise to table five copies of a letter from the House leader of the Progressive Conservative caucus dated March 20, 2017, stating that there are no changes to the PC caucus appointments and that the Member for Calgary-Hays will remain as PC caucus opposition leader.

Hon. Government House Leader, I think you had a point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today in question period during an answer that was being given by the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo at 2:15 yelled out: lies. It's not the first time, but I want to just review previous Speakers' rulings with respect to that. In terms of the word "liar" there was May 8, 2000; March 15, 1995; February 22, 1995; May 23, 1990; July 21, 1989; November 22, 1983; and then "lies," "lying" and so on, November 21, 2013; April 18, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, there are at least 20 citations in the past of previous Speakers' rulings with respect to this matter. This is unacceptable. The hon. member knows that this is unacceptable in this House. It is perhaps the most egregious word that can be spoken in this place, and it is never acceptable. I would ask that you rule that the hon. member is out of order and ask him to stand and apologize and withdraw those comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The opposition deputy House leader.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the Government House Leader that the word "lies" is unacceptable language in the House, so we will apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 16: Mr. Cooper]

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity today to speak, of course, about the budget and have a response in

relation to the budget. Obviously, I'm disappointed. I was hoping for something different, and I think most Albertans were hoping for something different. It's unfortunate that we see this particular direction from the NDP. It's just a spend, spend, spend budget.

You know, I understand that when times get tough, sometimes people think that they just can run out and spend a lot of money and it will make them feel better. But it doesn't make any of the people that work for this money feel any better. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the money that this government is spending is earned by the people of Alberta. They work very hard for it. So when they throw money around left and right and don't look for any efficiencies whatsoever, I think most Albertans are very disappointed with that.

I have to say, though, that although I was disappointed, I wasn't really that surprised. Even though we all know that Albertans are struggling right now and Albertans are having a tough time no matter where you go in the province, I wasn't surprised because I've worked with NDP governments before, and this NDP government is very similar to other NDP governments that I've had the opportunity to see. It's very ideological. It is blindfolded as it makes decisions because it doesn't make them on the basis of the facts that surround the circumstances.

What I mean by that is that right now we have a situation where we have a record number of Albertans, a hundred thousand Albertans, that are applying and trying to find the opportunity from the federal government to receive unemployment insurance. A hundred thousand, Mr. Speaker. Now, that's a record for Alberta, and it's very troubling. There's another hundred thousand people that are just out of work. We've lost 80,000 full-time jobs since the NDP came to power, over 20,000 just in January.

And what's the response? Spending more money without looking around to see what's going on. What's going on, Mr. Speaker, is that there are no taxes being paid because businesses are not making any profits. That's why corporate taxes are down. Of course, businesses can't pay taxes because there are no profits to pay taxes on.

It's the same with Albertans. The average Albertan family: their income went down \$3,500, 3.5 per cent. Now, that \$3,500 is just as a result of a change in the employment situation in Alberta. That's \$3,500 that comes out of the average Albertan family's pocket, not earned anymore. That's taken out of their pocket, Mr. Speaker. They don't have the opportunity to spend that like they did the year before.

In fact, if you take the carbon tax – and I know I've talked a lot about the carbon tax. I talk about it because as I travel the province, people really don't like the carbon tax. This carbon tax takes another thousand dollars out of people's pocket, but this time it goes to the government. It doesn't just disappear – well, it does disappear, but it disappears into the general revenues of the government, big slush funds, green slush funds. Mr. Speaker, I know you're concerned because \$2,000, \$3,000 is a lot of money for you. In fact, I'd suggest that it's a lot of money for all Albertans except for those Albertans that obviously have control of the public purse.

That's why I'm so disappointed. How can you explain the situation of having net financial assets of about \$20 billion when this government started – and that was less than two years ago when we had \$20 billion of net financial assets – and today we're about \$10 billion in the hole? Ten billion dollars in the hole in less than two years. I know that \$20 billion is a lot of money. Twenty billion dollars would pay for a lot of hospitals, pay for a lot of schools, hire a lot of front-line workers. But, Mr. Speaker, that's not the most troubling part. The most troubling part is that we're going to be in a net \$35 billion hole by the time the 2019 election rolls around. And, yes, that does equate to \$71 billion in debt, and there will be payments on that debt.

Since I was speaking about the \$3,500 that we don't have anymore and the thousand dollars of the carbon tax that goes into the government slush funds, we also need to talk about that \$71 billion in debt because that means another \$1,800 to \$2,000 in interest payments that Albertans will have to pay. And, yes, that is another \$1,800 out of their pocket, on the table. But this time it doesn't go like the first \$3,500 that just disappears because of bad NDP policies. It's not like the thousand dollars of carbon tax that goes into the government coffers and gets to be spent on slush funds. This money – Mr. Speaker, you're going to be so happy to hear it – this \$1,800 on that \$71 billion of debt goes to big banks. To big banks. That's right: big banks.

As I've said in this place before, I can't imagine anybody I'd rather give my money less to than big banks except for NDP governments. I don't think these big banks are going to provide schools for us. They're not going to provide teachers or nurses or front-line workers. They're not going to build any of that great infrastructure or bridges that we need. They're just going to take that money and give that money to their shareholders in New York or Beijing or Europe or wherever. That's money gone, Mr. Speaker.

So when you take \$3,500 from the average Alberta family, then another thousand that goes to the government, then another \$1,800 that goes to interest payments, that's a lot of money. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. We're talking serious percentages. Where they had the choice before of paying for their children's hockey or ballet, they can't do that anymore. They can't pay for that summer holiday that they were going to take and build their family up after a hard year of work, after they've had an aunt or an uncle laid off, and maybe somebody has moved into their home because they can't afford to live on their own. I know that's what's happening because I see it happening. And the idea that this government would blow our savings and then run up a credit card debt of \$45 billion in just four years is nothing short of hysterically bad news.

Now, I will give this government a little slack because we know that they did take over at a time when Alberta was already the biggest, largest spending government in Canada. We have seen that the previous government was able to balance the books from time to time because they would have a surplus in oil, they would have a royalty year like they did two years ago, three years ago of over \$10 billion, the biggest royalty year we ever had. But I don't think we're going to see those for a little while, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

That's why I would implore this government to be more particular about its fiscal prudence, about making sure that all of those things we need, whether it's a good justice system, where we keep criminals in jail and make sure that they see judges that throw them in jail, not just get out of going to trial because we don't have enough resources put in it by this government – justice is important. Until you are a victim of our justice system – and I do mean victim – you don't understand how important it is. Notwithstanding that we spend more money than almost any place in Canada on our justice system, we still don't have the results of other jurisdictions.

Even building schools, Mr. Speaker. I do applaud this government for some of their capital initiatives. I always said when I took this job that I would point out the good things but I would certainly point out the bad things, the things this government is doing wrong. They did build some schools. I know it took a long time for the previous government to get to the point where they would, but I'm glad to see that this government, this NDP government, took that file and moved forward with it. I think it's important.

I'm just really hoping that they don't follow the example of other NDP governments in Ontario, Nova Scotia, B.C. because we've seen time and time again NDP governments that are not effective

with capital investment. They don't look for the return on investment. They just take the money and shovel it out as fast as they can into the economy. That's not the right way to do it, Mr. Speaker.

We need someone that manages our economy properly, and that means managing the pennies because the dollars take care of themselves. Manage the pennies, Mr. Speaker? I would just be happy if they managed the \$100 million cheques that go out. This is a government that just increases spending every year, increasing spending now at a time when we have less revenues, less people, and we should as a result have less demand on our infrastructure and on our services.

Not every NDP government has spent inefficiently. I'm going to talk just briefly about Roy Romanow's government in Saskatchewan. Now, Mr. Speaker, when they got elected, they actually came in and they cut government spending by 15 per cent. Wow. I know, anybody standing in this Chamber would have fallen down on their chair recognizing that an NDP government looked for savings, but they did.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that that's why that government had successive success at re-election. Notwithstanding the cut, notwithstanding they looked for efficiencies in the services, the people in Saskatchewan actually rewarded them and they said: well, you did a good job, so we're going to keep re-electing you. They did lose their way, and that's why finally they were ejected from government, but they did spend some time in government even after looking for those savings.

I think most Albertans agree that there is no excuse for why we can't find savings in what we're doing today because, obviously, we have less money coming in. When Albertans are sitting around their kitchen tables and they're saying, "Okay; we have less money for Johnny or Sally; we have less money for that holiday or that vacation; we have less money for that new vehicle; we have to put it off another year," I think Albertans expect their government to do the same. I think this year the Finance minister should have gone out and got a new set of soles for his shoes or reconditioned them, not got a new pair because right now, Mr. Speaker, Albertans can't afford a new pair.

What we can afford is to lift the hard-working men and women up in this province and make sure they have jobs, and if not jobs, then make sure they have training, that they have access to education, that we get our schools and our universities and our colleges and our trade schools actively participating in recruiting unemployed people into their programs and get them retrained and educated today.

These are initiatives that have been tried by other governments, and that's why I said in question period today: please, Premier, please, NDP government, look around. Every government in Canada manages their government better than we do fiscally. They get a better return on investment than we get on just about any service we provide to Albertans, including health care. Better outcomes, better wait times, and less cost. They do, Mr. Speaker.

That's why I'm saying to this government to look around, go to Saskatchewan, pick up a phone and make a phone call, talk to British Columbia. My goodness gracious, talk to Manitoba. Actually, we would just ask that they talk to anybody outside of this dome because they have dome disease, Mr. Speaker. They don't leave here. They need to go and speak to the average Albertan in the places that their policies are affecting the most – Forestburg, Hanna, Grande Cache – places around this province that are seeing investor confidence drain, that are seeing businesses close down, houses close down because people are moving out of their homes and banks are taking them over.

I met a couple in Grande Cache when I was there just last time, and that couple, Mr. Speaker, were living in their car. I mentioned

this once before in this place. They moved out of their house. They lost their house three days before, and they were living in their car.

An Hon. Member: Unbelievable.

Mr. Jean: It is unbelievable that in a place like Alberta, when we're so rich in resources, where we have the amount of food that anybody wants to eat, we hope, have shelters around the province, the riches, the wealth, yet we have families living in their cars, losing their homes, losing their jobs, and losing hope.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what do we see when we travel the province? Well, we see a 30 per cent vacancy rate in downtown Calgary in those big, beautiful office towers. We see an unemployment rate in Calgary of 10 per cent, more or less, the highest unemployment rate of any city in Canada, and what's the response from this NDP government? Let's cap our oil sands. Let's make sure we have a cap on it so nobody wants to invest any further in Alberta and bring jobs to Alberta. Or let's bring in a carbon tax.

I know you're going to not believe it, Mr. Speaker, but I'm probably going to be talking about carbon tax for a long time. That's because it's so unpopular, and I've heard from working families shocked – absolutely shocked – to see their gas bill, and I know this because they send me their gas bills. If you look at my Facebook feed, I put them up on there. They send me their gas bills, and there's a 40 per cent increase. A 40 per cent increase. Most people can't even afford to balance their books today, and this government is imposing regulations and policy to change their gas bill by 40 per cent.

They say that they're making life better. I don't think they are. I think they're making life worse for a lot of people. I've talked to small-business people. They're seeing their costs skyrocket, whether it's delivery of product, whether it's their employees. It's not a good environment to be in business in, and it is as a result of the policies this government has brought in.

The clear direction I'm getting from across Alberta is this, and this is the best indication. The clear indication that I'm getting, the clear direction I'm getting from the majority of members of the Wildrose Party, the majority of the members of the PC Party, and the majority of Albertans is: "Unite. Get rid of these guys as quickly as possible. Let's just find a silver bullet and get rid of them." That's what's going on. Any option, just not this option.

They want them gone, and I think part of that reason is because they don't see them out around the province. They don't see them in Calgary, Mr. Speaker. They don't see them in any small town in Alberta. Many of the MLAs have moved out of their constituencies. I know that I have heard that from many people, that they don't show up in their constituencies. Now, I will tell you: I don't think that's the way to represent people, and I do believe that when politicians lose the ability to talk to their constituents, they lose the moral authority to govern. That's why they need to stay in touch with the people, and that's why I continue to implore them to go out and do that.

Now, I recognize that Albertans want a party that's uncompromising and that's an accountable and ethical government, and I'm hoping that we receive that privilege, Mr. Speaker, sometime because we can't see a situation where people, Albertans, politicians are using politics for their own personal gain. I do believe that these politicians would be well informed if they would go out and talk to people and to see how they feel, to talk to the everyday Albertan, to reach out to them and speak to them about the justice system and how they feel about the justice system or how they feel about the increase in taxes or how they feel about the increase in regulations, how they feel about the carbon tax, the accelerated shutdown of coal, the cap on the oil sands. All of these things are significant. All

of these things affect the people of Alberta. All of these things can be reversed.

Mr. Speaker, I do ask that this government consider talking to Albertans, because if they do have that opportunity and they see what's going on with the health care system, the education system, our justice system and talk to everyday Albertans that know they want to see something different, I think these fine folks would actually go in that other direction if they just had the opportunity to listen.

3:20

I have talked about this budget a bit, Mr. Speaker – and I'm not going to take any more of your time – but all I can tell you is that the government was extremely disappointing to me personally, to see this come forward. It's not a good budget. It's not one that is going in the right direction. It's actually a budget that sees an increase in spending, not a decline. At a time when we see fewer revenues, the first thing any government should do is do no further harm and make sure they get their finances in order, and I implore this government to consider that as they possibly go around Alberta and talk to the people of Alberta and get the authority to continue to govern the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: I enjoyed the Leader of the Opposition's speech, and I think he actually probably does have a couple more comments he would like to quickly make. I also suspect he would like to move to adjourn debate.

Mr. Jean: You know what, Mr. Speaker? I don't know how he did that. It was like he read my mind, but . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is raised.

Mr. Mason: I withdraw the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate that opportunity. As the House leader was about to say, I would move to adjourn debate.
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is where some of the confusion was. In fact, under 29(2)(a) you cannot adjourn the . . .

Mr. Jean: Unless there's unanimous consent.

The Speaker: I'm not sure about that even.
Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to rise to discuss the budget. I think the Leader of the Official Opposition did a really good job of articulating how I feel about it. I know that I and my constituents are quite shocked by how far this government is willing to go.

The Speaker: You're adjourning?

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I do have the floor right now. With that said, I would move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Yes, hon. member, you have the floor. I'm aware of that. There's no need for you to point that out to me.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Member for Calgary-Hays

16. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that in accordance with section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Ethics Commissioner concerning the Member for Calgary-Hays dated January 4, 2017, and that the member be required to apologize to the Assembly and pay a fine of \$500.

Mr. Rodney moved that the motion be amended as follows:

- (a) by striking out "concur in" and substituting "receive";
- (b) by adding "the Assembly defer its decision on the recommendation" before "that the Member be required to apologize";
- (c) by adding "until such time as the Court of Queen's Bench has given a ruling with respect to the judicial review filed by the Member for Calgary-Hays on February 23, 2017" after "\$500".

[Adjourned debate on amendment March 16: Cortes-Vargas]

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recuse myself from this debate.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Motion 16? It's on amendment A1. Anyone wishing to speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Speaker: I believe we are now back on the original motion.
On the original motion?

Mr. Hanson: Yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I wasn't going to speak to this, but the more I look at it, this motion actually kind of bothers me a little bit. Basically, what you're asking me and what this motion is asking all of us to do is to mete out a punishment to a person while his case is in appeal, before he's had his day in court, not for voting on a bill or promoting a bill, simply for asking a question in the House. That really troubles me because the implication for this, you know, could be very, very far reaching and set a precedent here that could affect all of us. For instance, does it mean that a teacher that's sitting as an MLA can't ask a question about education or the education system? Is that what it means? Does it mean that a doctor that is a practising doctor can't ask questions about the remuneration of doctors? I mean, we've had talks about that in the House. Does that mean that a doctor would have to recuse himself from discussion or from asking a question on health care?

Social workers: are they not allowed to talk about issues that affect their profession? We're going to be talking about labour laws in Alberta, and I know that a lot of the members opposite are probably past union representatives or maybe still hold memberships in unions. Is that going to mean that you can't be open in the discussion and ask questions on it?

What is the punishment here? We're looking at a \$500 fine and an apology. We seem to be in an all-fired-up rush to pass judgment before the man has had his day in court. I don't see what the rush is. It's a simple matter of waiting one more year, until next spring.

If he's found guilty by a judge – like, we're not judges. We don't have that right here. Let's leave it up to the judge. If he agrees with the Ethics Commissioner, then so be it. We'll mete out the punishment here in the House. That's our privilege. But what if not? What if we, you know, drag him up, slap him on the wrist, make him apologize and pay the \$500 fine, and then next January he's found innocent? How are you going to feel then? Put yourself in that place. It could happen to any one of you, to any one of us here. There are people here who have businesses on the side that have been very successful in life. Does that mean that they have to recuse themselves from question period because they're asking a question about the economy that could affect their livelihoods? This is ridiculous.

I ask all the members here: put yourself in the shoes of the hon. member that sits here accused, that has not had his appeal date in court, and vote against this motion because it could affect all of you at one time or another. Believe me, if there's an opportunity to call you on it, you're going to get called on it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the member?

Seeing and hearing none, are there any other individual members who would like to speak? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's the first chance that I've had to rise on this motion, and I will be brief. I think the last speaker articulated some of the concerns I have with the specific issue of whether or not the hon. member in question should have a fine or something levied against him. Really, it's not even up for debate at this stage. We live in a society that strongly believes in innocent until proven guilty. This is before the courts. For the government to proceed to use this, in my view, for political purposes without allowing the situation to play itself out and while doing so to force members of this Assembly to have to cast a vote with regard to another hon. member without knowing the end facts on something that's before the court is, I think, fundamentally wrong and, quite frankly, insulting.

You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that many people that I speak to back home find most shocking is how often opposition members are asked by this government to vote on legislation and items without adequate time to consult with their constituents or to consult with experts that are involved. If you talk to Members of Parliament, they are often shocked and appalled at the process that we have here in Alberta, how fast legislation can move through. It's the same thing.

You know, it's one thing when the government is attempting to use the process of the Assembly to move through legislation at breakneck speed without adequately consulting Albertans; it's another thing to ask hon. members to vote on something as serious as this with regard to one of their colleagues without allowing the process to play itself out.

It's fundamentally wrong, and I think that the government should reconsider it. If they don't, I will of course cast my vote against it, not because of anything that – you know, I haven't had time to determine whether or not it's valid, but I do know that something is before the court. It's fundamentally wrong and insulting that the government would continue with this.

The Speaker: Any others who wish to speak under 29(2)(a) to the member?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

3:30

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hold on, hon. member. I'm advised that you have spoken to the motion originally.

Mr. Rodney: Sir, I actually made an amendment. I didn't speak to the motion.

The Speaker: You spoke to the motion and then introduced the amendment. That's how you did it. So I'm advised that you are out of order in speaking.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to the original motion?

Mr. Rodney: Clarification, please.

The Speaker: Clarification?

Mr. Rodney: Simply that I went straight to the amendment. I did not debate the motion on purpose.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'm just getting the standing orders confirmed.

Hon. member, I stand by the ruling. Under Debate on Amendment, Standing Order 20(1), you are out of order.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: To close debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: To close debate? Adjourn?

Mr. Mason: To close debate.

The Speaker: Okay. You can sit down.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I just want to kind of reiterate what's already been said about this. This is something that's before the courts. The government, when we're asking questions in question period, often say: "This is before the courts, so we can't answer that question. We can't discuss that issue. We can't do anything about this because this is before the courts."

Mr. Speaker, I think it's only reasonable that the same rules apply at all times. This is before the court, and here we are coming up with a decision on a punishment for something that's before the court. I mean, it doesn't even make sense. I think the only proper thing to do would be to withdraw the motion, let the court finish, let a decision be made, and then we can go ahead based on whatever the court decides. But to do this before the court has decided, I think, is not a reasonable expectation of what we should be doing in this House. This isn't what's in the best interests of the time of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, under 29(2)(a)? I'm sorry. Yes, you. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: To the point of the last speaker, I appreciate his comments. Specifically, again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is for comments and questions. I wonder if he could consider clarifying a few important points for the House. This motion indeed refers to section 28(3) of the Conflicts of Interest Act. I'm sure he's aware that it actually states:

If in the report from the Ethics Commissioner the Ethics Commissioner has found that a Member or former Minister has breached this Act and the Ethics Commissioner has recommended a sanction, the Legislative Assembly shall debate and vote on the report within 15 days after the tabling of the report . . .

But it goes on:

... or any other period that is determined by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly.

So I'm guessing that this member is recommending, as I've heard from other members on this side of the House, that this would indeed occur at an appropriate date, which would of course be after the date it is heard in January.

Mr. Loewen: Sensible.

Mr. Rodney: It's only sensible. Thank you, Member.

So the first question is: why would the government motion be worded in a way that it would show unfair bias in favour of accepting the report that would seem to unfairly prejudice the debate in the House?

Now, we go back to section 28(3). Since the report has been tabled, we could have exercised the option to pass a resolution to debate and vote on this later.

I think there's a substantial argument – perhaps the hon. member would agree – that we should not pass this today because what the motion is proposing is that we punish a member of this Assembly for, really, doing his job and for exercising his use of free speech in the House. Does that not send a very chilling effect through everyone's bones in this Assembly? Does it not warn us all that there could be an extremely dangerous precedent for us all? And I don't mean just us here in this Chamber. I mean Legislatures and Parliaments around the world in the Commonwealth. This has not happened before in history.

Members come from almost every walk of life in this Chamber. I've seen it for four separate elections. I've admired the experience and expertise that so many people have brought to this Chamber. It makes for better debate and better policies when people are not afraid to speak. I am extremely concerned. I wonder if the member shares the concern that people will be afraid to speak up if this motion passes.

We could go through our seating plan, Mr. Speaker. No matter what a person's experience or expertise is, if they have experience or expertise in a field that is related to any ministry or they have a family member who does or they have any topic to discuss from which they have a personal, professional, or political background, will they be silenced from now on? That is a very serious question that needs to be asked in good time.

Would the member agree that the tradition of being able to speak freely on the floor of the Legislature is one of the primary privileges of this Assembly? Would he quote *Beauchesne's*, section 25? It is "the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the [member] ... on the floor of the House and in committee" as well. It's been upheld, Mr. Speaker, time and time again that a member not face sanctions for what's been said on the floor of the House. It's one of the key parliamentary privileges, and to abrogate that privilege should require far more than simply what's been stated here today, which is a government motion slid in at 3-something on this particular day.

This is the substance of the suit that has been brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Hays, to decide what context and to what extent the Conflicts of Interest Act can limit the parliamentary privilege of free speech. This is serious, serious stuff. It's a matter that we should allow the court to decide before we debate this further even today. Until then we have a duty to maintain and uphold the ability of members to speak freely in this House and be passionate advocates for their constituents. That's why we got elected.

I therefore ask members of this House to perhaps join this member and me and others to vote against this motion or potentially

risk sacrificing the parliamentary privilege of free speech, which is an extremely dangerous precedent on a go-forward basis.

I just wonder if this member has anything else that he would like to say with respect to any of these points, whether it's related to *Beauchesne's* or previous rulings in this jurisdiction or others around the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I might seek unanimous consent to revert to introductions for a moment. We've had some very important guests come into the gallery.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just glanced up in the gallery and saw a whole bunch of familiar faces that have arrived out of the blue. I do know them all, but I won't name them all in the interest of time. I see officials, both elected and staff, from the town of Rocky Mountain House, the village of Caroline, and, of course, the beautiful Clearwater county here in the Assembly watching a little bit of an interesting debate. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you. I hope that maybe you could share with the House at some point in the future how collegiality is practised in a very constructive fashion on your various councils. Welcome.

3:40

Government Motions Member for Calgary-Hays (continued)

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to the motion? The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't take too long. Since my election in 2012 and moving along here for the past number of years, I've seen several things that have come across this Assembly that have been fairly concerning, but this one stands out in my memory as being one of the most unusual and one that is very controversial. It would seem that it has a lot to do with the Conflicts of Interest Act, and it seems to have an awful lot to do with our basic roles and responsibilities as elected officials.

It is surprising to me that we're dealing with a matter that's before us like this when it is, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has mentioned, before the courts. I agree with all the points that were raised by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed during the questions he was posing to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, so I would like to add my name to the list of the names of those who have been speaking against this motion for the past several minutes in respect to this situation.

I would encourage all those in the House this afternoon to give this very serious thought before they vote on this matter today. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's an interesting question, one that I think we've been wrestling with for some time. I compare it, to some extent, to the issues that I would face, for example, as a physician – my wife is a physician – if I were to rise in the House and try to influence this House in relation to negotiations with physicians. I think I'm aware enough and I think I'm mature enough to recognize that there might be a perceived problem there.

We as a Legislature have identified and appointed officers of this Legislature to be watchdogs over us to ensure that we follow due process, that we recognize conflicts of interest, and that in many cases if there are issues to be passed on, we pass them on to a fellow party member, a caucus member, to address the issue rather than place ourselves in a conflict of interest. I've looked at a little bit of the literature. A similar occurrence has occurred in B.C. It was referred to the courts in B.C., and the B.C. courts sent it back to the Legislature, saying: this is a matter for the Legislature to decide.

I think it's fairly straightforward that when there's a pecuniary interest, when someone in our own family or ourselves are going to benefit from pressing on a certain issue, there is a conflict of interest. I think we do a disservice to this Legislature if we don't honour the appointments that we've made to those official independent officers – independent officers – who try to, you know, keep this august body accountable and ethical and act in the public interest to even in this mild way say: this is not an appropriate action in this particular case.

I don't doubt that the member was not aware and did not think about the possibility, but I will be supporting this motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Yes. I'd just like to clarify that the hon. member understands that the member wasn't voting on a motion, wasn't voting on a bill, that he was simply asking a question in the House.

Dr. Swann: I think it was very clear from *Hansard* that he was trying to influence the decision on the bill. That's the position that the Ethics Commissioner took, that he was trying to influence, through his influence as the leader of the party and through his particular position in this House, the decision of the government. Whether it was in the form of a question or it was actually in the form of an assertion, it was clear to many of us.

I defer to the Ethics Commissioner. I actually believe that she is acting in good conscience and acting on behalf of all of us to try and make sure that our reputation in the public is not tainted, that our reputation is upheld as honourable members that are acting strictly in the interests of the public. I stand by what I understood to be the *Hansard* remarks and the good office of the Ethics Commissioner, who I think is acting in the best interests of all of us in the final analysis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Mr. Rodney: Yes, please, and thanks. I appreciate that the member has spent almost exactly the same amount of time as I have in this House, and it's the first time both you and I have had anything like this in front of us, so I'd ask the hon. member: since the constitutional question has been raised and the Justice minister has been served, why do you think it's appropriate that this would be raised

at this point? Would it not be prudent for rulings of other bodies to be decided so that this is done in the correct order? Why would it not be adjourned until after the court decides on a constitutional matter? Do you think the Legislature does not have jurisdiction to interpret the Constitution or decide about the scope of its own privilege? That's for the courts. What are your comments on this topic, again, that will affect every member not only in this Chamber but in other Legislatures, the Parliament in Ottawa, and the Commonwealth beyond?

Dr. Swann: Well, I think this is the essential question that we're wrestling with, and none of us have dealt with this before. I guess what I'm saying is that based on what I have read and what I have seen in B.C., the B.C. court punted it right back to the Legislature, saying: "These are your rules. You should be able to interpret your rules, and you should honour the commitments that you've made through your appointed independent officers." I'm no expert on constitutional law. That's why we have an Ethics Commissioner. That's why we have courts, and ultimately I guess the courts can still overrule this decision readily if they choose to. I don't think we prejudice the court in any way. We vote, and we make our decisions here. If the courts decide that we are in error, then so be it, but the evidence from B.C. is that they want nothing to do with conflicts of interest related to the Legislature.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

Seeing and hearing none, are there any other members that wish to speak to the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, the Government House Leader to close.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yes. Thank you very much. I want to go over a few things here, and I want to respond to a few things that have been said. I want to go back to the ruling of the Ethics Commissioner, which was issued on January 4 of this year, to quote some of the sections of her report.

[The member] contravened s. 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act when he asked [a question] . . . during question period . . .

[The member] was trying to influence the Crown to drop both of these policies. If he succeeded, it would protect his wife's company and if he failed there could be detrimental effect on her business . . .

Therefore, as a result of asking the question, in a manner which tried to influence the Crown, [the member] was in breach of s. 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act as he sought to influence the Crown's decision to implement (or prevent) certain policies, the unintended result of which, had he succeeded, would further the private interest of his direct associate, in this case his wife.

Given the small size of the interest and the probability [the member] was more interested in scoring political points than worried about his wife's business, it is my recommendation that an apology to the Legislative Assembly by [the member] and a fine of \$500 is the appropriate penalty for this breach of the Act.

Now, in response to this report, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member at the time made the following statements. These are some quotes from that statement:

I respect and accept the Ethics Commissioner's findings regarding the conflict of interest that occurred during debate on Alberta's electricity market.

While the investigation clearly shows that my actions in the Legislative Assembly were not intended to protect my wife's business, there could have been unintended consequences and as such, I was in violation of the Act.

He went on to say:

I fully accept responsibility for my actions and going forward, I will continue to not participate in any question period activity, debate or vote in relation to Alberta's electricity utility industry until such a time that the Ethics Commissioner gives me permission to do so.

Mr. Speaker, we brought this forward in compliance with the Conflicts of Interest Act, which does require the Assembly to move and vote upon any findings or sanctions against a member in the Ethics Commissioner's report.

3:50

Now, to deal with a couple of points that have been raised again, I will again reiterate that in our system, the British parliamentary system, or the Westminster system, there is a division of powers that has been recognized by the courts. This is made more explicit in the American Constitution, but it comes from the British system, where it's a well-developed system that divides authority between the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch, Mr. Speaker. Each has authority within its own realm, and the courts have repeatedly refused to take jurisdiction in matters that are clearly within the Legislative Assembly's prerogative, and we believe that that is, by far and away, the most likely matter.

Now, the question of the principle of sub judice has been raised. You've ruled, Mr. Speaker, with respect to that, that it does not apply in this case. We are not talking about an external court case where we might influence a court. We're talking about something within our own area of jurisdiction, where the courts are very unlikely to intervene.

The last point that I'd like to make is that this in no way takes away the hon. member's recourse to the courts should he choose to. If he's dissatisfied with the process, if he's dissatisfied with the Ethics Commissioner's report, he still has recourse to the courts. Now, I suspect that the courts will not take jurisdiction in those matters, but we are in no way removing the rights of a member to take this forward to the courts if he chooses.

Mr. Speaker, I think we're acting within the law, within our area of responsibility, and our obligations as a legislative body to treat these matters in a very serious fashion. Not my favourite thing to do, but I think that it is exactly what has to be done, what our obligation and our responsibility are. So I'd urge hon. members to vote in favour of the motion to support the recommendations of the Ethics Commissioner in this matter.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 16 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Gray	Miller
Bilous	Horne	Miranda
Carlier	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Dach	Loyola	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Feehan	McKittrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	

4:10

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Hunter	Rodney
Ellis	MacIntyre	Starke
Gotfried	Nixon	Stier
Hanson	Panda	
Totals:	For – 35	Against – 11

[Government Motion 16 carried]

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, a point of privilege.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're rising on a point of privilege, as I understand it. Is that correct?

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do indeed rise on a point of privilege with regard to the passing of Government Motion 16. As I alluded to in my earlier remarks on this motion, the privilege of members of the Legislature to speak freely on this House floor is one of the most securely held privileges afforded to members. I refer, as my first citation, to *Erskine May*, 24th edition, page 203:

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of certain rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament; and by the Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals.

Further, from the same page:

Certain rights and immunities such as freedom from arrest or freedom of speech belong primarily to individual Members of each House and exist because the House cannot perform its functions without unimpeded use of the services of its Members.

I would argue, with the greatest respect, Mr. Speaker, that Motion 16 as debated and passed in this House constitutes a direct breach of the privilege of free speech in this House. Many points of privilege have been argued in this House, but the charge of infringing on the privilege of free speech is indeed very dire. I recognize that, and I trust that you also are aware of the gravity of the precedent you are setting.

To quote directly from *Beauchesne's*, the second citation is section 75. It reads:

The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee.

Now, the reason that the privilege of freedom of speech is so fundamental is that it deals directly with the ability of the member to perform their duties. If a member is precluded from speaking on the issues that affect his or her constituents, then that member is being obstructed in discharging the duties that they were elected to do.

Leaving aside the issue of whether or not the members opposite believe that the question asked by the Member for Calgary-Hays was unethical, he enjoys, as every single one of us does, the privilege to speak in this House about issues that matter to our constituents.

As citation 3, Mr. Speaker, page 222 of *Erskine May* states:

Subject to the rules of order in debate, a Member may state whatever he thinks fit in debate, however offensive it may be to the feelings, or injurious to the character, of individuals; and he is protected by parliamentary privilege from any action for defamation, as well as from any other question or molestation.

I would argue that the motion and debate here today were clearly in contravention of exactly this. A further quotation from the same page:

The Speaker having claimed and statutory recognition having been granted to the privilege of . . . speech, it becomes the duty of each Member to refrain from any course of action prejudicial to the privilege which he enjoys.

Mr. Speaker, I seriously question whether what transpired in this House just now and last week with regard to Motion 16 could be interpreted as anything other than prejudicial to the privilege of free speech.

I would like to be respectful of the members' time, so I will end my references there. I will simply say that I believe we have demonstrated a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege, and I urge you, encourage you, implore you, and thank you for making the prudent ruling here to protect and preserve the privileges of every one of the members of this House, Legislatures, and parliaments here and around the world within the Commonwealth.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from the third party has raised a question of privilege, which is, of course, a very serious matter. I was unaware that this point of privilege was coming forward. I would respectfully request time to prepare my response and, with the greatest of respect, ask that we be allowed to reply to this point of privilege tomorrow.

The Speaker: Hon. members, points of privilege are always very, very serious in this House, and for the particular point of privilege being raised today, I too would like to have some time to look at the issues. I want to also reflect upon the rulings that I granted earlier with respect to this subject matter, so I would like to defer the matter to a future date. We will bring the matter back for discussion, and at that time other members may wish to make some points with respect to the matter as well.

I think that for today I would leave that matter there and move on.

Ministry of Education Main Estimates

17. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 52.01(1)(a), the 2017-18 main estimates for the Ministry of Education be considered by the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Normally this would be considered by another standing committee, but when we looked at the workload for estimates of the various committees, we found that it was considerably imbalanced. In order to provide a more equal workload and to allow the estimates to proceed more efficiently, we are requesting that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be tasked with hearing the estimates of the Ministry of Education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone wish to speak to Motion 17?

[Government Motion 17 carried]

4:20 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 3

Voluntary Blood Donations Act

The Deputy Chair: We are currently on amendment A3. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment a second time and perhaps address some of the concerns that were raised this morning by the hon. Health minister. I'll start by apologizing to the members opposite for suggesting that in some way their perusing of their laptop computers was not related to debate. There is certainly every possibility that that's exactly what they were doing, and I should not have made the assumption that they were not engaged in that very worthwhile activity, so we'll set that aside for starters.

But I will say, Madam Chair, that while the Health minister seemed to be bemused by my sharing of stories and other members opposite suggested that, you know, perhaps donors in my veterinary practice were not financially compensated and that therefore neither should be extended, in point of fact what we are talking about here is indeed very serious.

I would like to say that I'm very proud of our system and proud of Canadian Blood Services, the work they do, but I think, actually, that Canadian Blood Services has some significant shortcomings that need to be addressed. While we like to say, you know, that our systems that we have here in our country are always working particularly well, I think that when we look at the statistics and we look at the donor rates of Canada compared to other nations, we in fact are not doing nearly as well.

In the case of Canadian Blood Services I feel that at least part of the reason for that is that they are not making it easier for people to donate. In fact, they're making it harder for people to donate. Canadian Blood Services used to make it very convenient for people. They would do donor days in rural areas. I know that they would regularly come to communities in my constituency, usually two or three times a year, with a mobile blood donation clinic. That was a day that, quite frankly, a lot of people from our community would get together on, and they would go out to donate. Those are hardly held anymore. To donate now, it is required for people to make an appointment and then travel down to the Canadian Blood Services office in Edmonton. This isn't always convenient, and this isn't always easy for people. I think some of this contributes to the reduction in the number of donors.

I also want to talk a little bit about the Krever commission and Justice Krever's inquiry that was initiated in 1993 on the heels of the worst public health disaster that we've ever had in our nation. That was, of course, the tainted blood scandal of the '80s, in which some 32,000 Canadians were inadvertently affected or infected by blood that had one or more viral agents in it. The main concern, of course, was HIV but also viruses such as hepatitis. In the aftermath of that very, very serious public health disaster, essentially, for Canada, the largest one of its kind in our history, Justice Krever was asked to look into our blood system.

It was at that time one of the recommendations was that the responsibility for the collection and distribution of blood and blood products be removed from the Canadian Red Cross and turned over to Canadian Blood Services. Of course, the Krever commission also made the recommendation, which has been documented and has been referenced a number of times, about having a completely voluntary system, that we have a system that is entirely reliant on volunteers.

One of the things, though, that we have to recognize is that the Krever commission and its recommendations are 20 years old. Those recommendations came down in 1997, when, in fact, the

processing of plasma for plasma protein products and the treatment of a number of conditions with these plasma protein products were indeed just in the stage of developing. It was in its infancy, and the possibility for attaining self-sufficiency in plasma products would have been much higher at the time of the Krever commission.

In point of fact, though, as the demand has grown and as we continue to see a need for more and more plasma so that we can have plasma protein products for the treatment of a variety of different conditions, it is certainly determined that more and more plasma is required and that having a purely voluntary system is simply not providing an adequate volume of plasma to meet our needs. Indeed, if we look right across the world, there is not a single jurisdiction where there is a sufficient volume of plasma collected on a purely voluntary basis in order to provide that.

You know, the Health minister did reference that one of the reasons for that and, I think, one of the things that is very important that people understand is that plasma donations are different from donating blood. Donating blood is a relatively short process that can happen in approximately 20 minutes, donating a unit of blood. In fact, sometimes the registration and the answering of the questionnaire that is part and parcel of a blood donation takes longer than the actual donation time itself. The other thing that is important in regard to donating blood is that donation takes only 20 minutes, but it can only be done in the case of men every 56 days, every eight weeks, as a maximum frequency and for women every 84 days, every 12 weeks, as a maximum frequency.

Plasma donations are quite different. A plasma donation takes an hour and a half, and that is because a plasma donation involves a situation where the blood is taken, the red cells are then separated from the plasma, and then the red cells are returned back to the donor. This also allows the donor to donate more often, up to once a week. In fact, the plasma that is lost is regenerated by the body in something that's quite incredible, a matter of about 24 hours. These are some of the things that I think we have to consider.

There's one other thing that I've hesitated to raise, but I do think it has to be addressed, and that is the motivation that is claimed by the folks that are moving this. The motivation behind this is the safety of the blood supply. I think I've pointed out that the safety of the blood supply is not impacted whatsoever, whether you have paid donors or voluntary donors. Plasma products specifically are processed to such an extent that there has never been a documented case of a disease being transmitted as a result of a plasma donation that came from a paid donor. There's not a single case of that, and Health Canada as well as Canadian Blood Services both agreed at the round-table that was done in 2013 that safety is not an issue. So we can set that one aside.

The second reason that is often given is the effect it will have on the donor base, and the Health minister referenced a decrease in donors in Saskatoon after the opening of that paid plasma centre. That's one year of data. That's one year of data in one specific instance, and somehow we're to take that as being more significant and more telling than 30 years of operation of the paid plasma donation centre in Winnipeg or the experience that has been seen in countries like Germany and Austria and the United States, where they do have parallel paid plasma situations.

While I agree that we should watch what is happening with the Saskatoon clinic very carefully, I think we should also drill down and look at those numbers a little bit more carefully. Can we attribute the entire decrease in the number of donations to that one single factor, opening that plasma resource collection centre? Could there potentially be other reasons? I think that needs to be looked at before we simply point to one situation with only a one-year track record and determine, therefore, that we shouldn't be embarking on this.

You know, I'd also point out that the Health minister mentioned that we wouldn't be the first province to do this. Ontario banned payment for blood and plasma donations relatively recently, in just the last couple of years. The Quebec ban on payment for blood and plasma donations has been going on. Actually, they passed their law approximately, I think it was, about 25 years ago. Quebec has had a long-standing ban on this. That's fine. Those provinces can make those decisions.

4:30

But I would point out that the province of Saskatchewan has approved this. The province of Manitoba has a long-standing approval of payment for plasma donors. The province of British Columbia has no opposition to this, and the Health minister of the province of British Columbia has indicated very clearly that there is no specific problem in his mind with paid-for plasma donations. The province of New Brunswick has similarly said that they do not have an issue, and the federal government has said that they will leave this up to the provinces because Health Canada does not have an issue from a safety standpoint with regard to payment of plasma donors. You know, we can bring out and say that, well, other jurisdictions are doing this. Well, thus far at least in Canada, that I'm aware of, only the provinces of Quebec and Ontario have banned paid-for blood and plasma donations.

The other issue that I'd like to raise – and I'd like, actually, to hear some responses to whether this is an issue or not – is that Canadian Blood Services is a union shop. Canadian Blood Services: the employees there are employed by CUPE. In fact, at the announcement that was made by the Health minister last week, the CUPE rep from Canadian Blood Services was on hand for the announcement.

Now, again, I've said in this Chamber before that I don't have a specific objection to labour unions. Labour unions have an important role to play in terms of representing the interests and representing collectively the needs of workers. I was once a labour union member, when I worked at the packing house in Edmonton as a student, and I think I also shared with the group that a labour union helped pay for a good deal of my education. So I have no reason to have an axe to grind with labour unions. But I do have an issue when jobs are being specifically protected and shielded in a union situation and when private-sector, non-unionized workers are being specifically, you know, prevented from entering a market in order to preserve and protect union jobs. I don't think that's right.

If, in fact, this is strictly, as the hon. member's office has repeatedly stated, because of a strong feeling that they should not have payment for blood products, I say, you know, that's fine. I think from a moral, ethical standpoint that's a hard position to take when you are taking blood products from paid donors in other jurisdictions and you know full well that they are paid donations and you know full well that even if we ramp up to a high extent the donations through Canadian Blood Services and that all of a sudden after a period of contracting and having fewer donor centres, they have now suddenly more donor centres – even after that and after an investment of \$100 million taxpayer dollars, you're going to have 50 per cent of the required plasma and still need to buy the other 50 per cent. I need to know whether members can stand up in the House and with absolutely, you know, clear statements say that this is not to protect CUPE union jobs at Canadian Blood Services.

If that's the case, well, that's fine. But I have to say that the past track record of this government doesn't necessarily indicate that's true. I would reference the decision made to invest \$200 million in a unionized laundry service for Alberta Health Services rather than continue to allow a private contractor to do it.

So, Madam Chair, I think that it is critically important that we take a very clear look at this. I'm going to say again and to those

who are listening who have a philosophical or a specific objection to payment for blood and blood products that I understand that. The purpose of this amendment is that for blood and plasma that is going to be used for transfusion, used in our own jurisdiction here, it would continue to be based on purely voluntary donations. It is my view that we could continue to have a sufficient voluntary donor base to meet the need.

But I have a problem when we have a situation where we have the potential to have a whole new industry employing people, diversifying our economy, and have new jobs created, have new investment, and, specifically, have plasma that is collected, processed, and the products produced here in Canada. That's not being done currently. Instead, we're taking taxpayers' dollars and paying highly profitable American pharmaceutical corporations, big pharma, which I know for a lot of people is something that they're not particularly keen on supporting, and we're taking taxpayers' dollars to keep big pharma profitable.

You know, the other thing that was talked about by the Health minister was that these products shouldn't be sold to the highest bidder. Well, in point of fact, Canada is one of the highest bidders right now because of our demand for plasma products and the fact that we simply don't have very many plasma products because we don't have the processing facilities here. If we're ever going to have the processing facilities here, if we're ever going to be in a situation where we can have Canadian plasma from Canadian donors, whether they're paid or voluntary, but Canadian plasma from Canadian donors, used to treat Canadian patients, that has been processed in a Canadian facility, the only way we're going to do that is if we have sufficient plasma that is collected.

I do not have a level of faith in Canadian Blood Services, given their past track record, that they will be able to build up the voluntary donor base to allow that to happen. Part of that is borne out by the experience in other countries. Canadian Blood Services, as I stated this morning, has only achieved roughly half the donor rate as other nations that have a paid and a voluntary parallel system. So to somehow now make the leap of faith that Canadian Blood Services is going to be able to do what no other nation has been able to do, what no other country, no other blood service anywhere in the world has been able to do, and make Canada self-sufficient in plasma donations for all purposes – you'll forgive me if I'm a bit skeptical about that.

In my view, it would make sense to do what many other provinces have done – B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and it's being considered for other provinces – to not shut down plasma donations that can then be used for Canadian patients, that can then be processed in Canadian facilities, which are yet to be built. I recognize that, but once those facilities are built, we will then have that opportunity here locally. I think that's something we shouldn't just shut down in its tracks. In fact, that's something that we should at least allow for. This amendment does that. This amendment at the same time preserves and recognizes the voluntary system for both transfusions of plasma and for blood.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I would encourage members of the Assembly to support this amendment to this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak?

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm very disappointed in the government side. I am disappointed that they do not desire to diversify our economy here in Alberta. I am disappointed that they have no support for the biomedical industry. I am disappointed that the Health minister has denied so many people from getting medications and other treatments that are only available in the United States and that given the opportunity to possibly do something to attract these very industries that can provide these life-saving adjuncts and medications, they still say no.

This is bigger than plasma. This is bigger than blood. We are talking about stem cells and so many other things. Stem cells alone are demonstrating to be a huge, huge breakthrough in medical therapies and treatments, and it would be so great to see an industry here in Alberta, where we would be the ones trying to solve all these ailments that impair us.

4:40

Madam Chair, I'm also disappointed in the government's comments about, you know, the fee-for-service aspect. I couldn't help but notice in this legislation that there is one group that is possibly allowed to do pay for service, and that is Canadian Blood Services. They're totally exempt from this. In my mind there are concerns about that.

But recognizing that oversight, we also have to recognize that there are other oversights in this, and that is that at the heart of this we don't want the people who are actually donating these fluids – the blood, the plasma – to be victims in all this.

With that, I would like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A4. If you can just wait till I have the original, and then please go ahead.

Mr. Yao: You know, it's interesting to note that provinces like Ontario and Quebec, that have banned payment for these products, made these rules a long time ago, over 20 years ago, when the report was released. Technology has changed. We are doing more. We have mapped out the genome. We've been experimenting more and more with even manipulating viruses into helping the body and to killing these cancers and whatnot. A member from across the way even pointed out that they still have old stereotypes of people, and that is why he cannot donate blood. These are ancient stereotypes that just don't exist, and it's unfortunate. We need to make sure that the donors in this case aren't affected in a negative fashion.

I move that Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, be amended in section 7 by adding the following after subsection (5):

(6) For greater clarity, an individual from whom blood is collected by an individual or corporation that contravenes section 2 is not guilty of an offence under this Act.

To clarify, we currently will fine companies that pay or offer to pay for these products from people. We also have to make sure that the people themselves aren't fined and penalized for this.

With that, I ask the government side to consider this and ensure that the people who are donating aren't held guilty under the law.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A4 as proposed by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to thank the member for bringing forth this amendment. You know, I think that his dedication to clarity is important. To be clear, the phrasing of this legislation already indicates that the prohibition and subsequent

punishment would not fall to the individuals who are motivated to accept payment for their plasma but rather to the entity that would seek to buy it. Though this amendment is a little redundant, we understand that it is in keeping with the spirit of the bill, and I would encourage all my colleagues in the House to vote in support of this.

I would however like to remind the member that there is no domestically owned or operated fractionation in Canada at this time, and the legislation, as we've stated numerous times today, has absolutely no bearing on the ability for a private company to come to Alberta, as we encourage them to do.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 1

An Act to Reduce School Fees

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to stand up and support this very important bill. I know we had some really important discussions a few days ago. Like I said before – I think it bears repeating – this is something that I hear all the time from parents. Every September they're thinking: how am I going to pay this bill? When people have large families, the bills add up very quickly. You know, sometimes families are wondering, when they have to buy back-to-school clothing. They may have gone on a summer vacation, so money can be tight around that time of year. This government is devoted to making life more affordable for Albertans by lowering their school fees.

Everybody has a right to a public education. One of the most fair ways that we can ensure all our children get the best possible education is through a fair taxation system. We obviously have to be very prudent and careful with taxes, and I'm proud to say that Alberta has the lowest taxes in Canada. We have a nearly \$9 billion tax advantage over the next lowest taxed province. The folks on the opposite side will idolize Saskatchewan, but we just heard today, or I read it in the news, that the Premier there is quoted as saying that people aren't going to like the Saskatchewan budget. I'm paraphrasing, but those were roughly his words. They're also contemplating increasing their provincial sales tax there, Madam Chair.

When provinces go through difficult times, there are multiple approaches that governments can take. We've seen the approach that the third party took when they were in government. They downloaded those costs to families. They sort of hid them in a way. One of the reasons that we ended up with school fees in the first place is because, despite their best intentions – like, school boards

have done an admirable job dealing with the situation that they were given by the previous government. But part of the problem was that there was no sustainable or predictable funding for school boards, so school boards were kind of forced into a position where with the flat tax, that the Conservatives had, it gave tax breaks to their wealthy friends but downloaded those costs to families.

4:50

This is something I hear they may be planning to do again with the flat tax. Instead of lowering school fees for hard-working families, they'd rather give tax cuts to profitable corporations. Madam Chair, this was something that we ran on as one of our election platforms, bringing in a fair corporate tax and also bringing in a fair progressive tax. You know, we were up front with Albertans about this, and I don't apologize for that. I think we deserve a fair taxation system. Like I said earlier, we obviously need to be careful about that. We need to maintain an advantage here in Alberta, and we've done that, so that's something that we can be proud of.

I guess what I'm trying to get at is that the money to pay for schools has to come from somewhere, and the way that the former Conservative government kind of managed to hide those things and make it look like they had artificially low taxes was by kind of taxing people on the other end and not calling it a tax. They called it a school fee.

You know, I don't have kids, but I think I deserve to pay my fair share of transportation costs and material costs because I know that it gets us a better kind of society, where kids grow up to get good jobs. I know that investing in our children's education is one of the most important investments a government can make in their province, and I'm proud of that, Madam Chair. I think it's something that we've done a really good job in. It's about setting your priorities. I would rather help make life more affordable for all Albertans by acting to reduce school fees and by having a fair taxation system.

We know that when kids get a good education, they grow up and tend to get good jobs, and when people have good jobs, they tend to be more healthy, so they tend to use the health care system less and rely on other social supports less. Socioeconomic status is highly linked to health outcomes. I've heard various figures, but the one I recall is that for every dollar we invest in public education, we save \$7 down the road on avoided costs to do with social security, health care, crime, all these kinds of things. You know, we refer to things as investments, and I think that's a good way to look at it because, sure, it costs us money, but it also avoids costing us money down the road.

It's kind of like, you know, when you're thinking about making a financial investment. You could buy a GIC that has a low interest rate, or you could pay off your mortgage, that may have a higher interest rate. Sometimes people think: well, I'm going to buy a GIC; it's a sure thing. But on the other side, if you think about a mortgage, you're going to owe that interest on the mortgage anyway, so you might as well pay down the mortgage to save. You actually get a higher return. It's kind of counterintuitive thinking.

Mrs. Aheer: That's a budget. It's a good idea.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Thank you. It is. Providing free financial advice here in the Legislature. I appreciate that. I'm not a financial adviser, but I do know about, you know, making wise investments in terms of: should you pay your mortgage down, or should you buy a GIC that has a lower interest rate than a mortgage?

You know, school fees are only one element of a good investment in our education system. Another good investment is ensuring that

we're funding for student enrolment to make sure that children have teachers in their classrooms. When we build these new schools, it costs money to build the schools – that's for sure – but they're something we need anyway. Alberta is a growing province, and when we build the schools, it's not enough just to have a building; you have to have people to run the buildings: janitors, principals, administration staff, educational support staff. These aren't optional things, Madam Chair. These are things that Alberta needs.

Even folks on the opposite side know that. They're good people, too. They know that they want to invest in education. I think everyone agrees on that. That's not what's in disagreement. It's a disagreement of sort of, I suppose: when do you pay the bill? My preference and I think the preference – I'd hazard a guess – of folks on this side is that because we need these things now, it makes sense to create jobs by building the schools. We know that there's an unemployment situation in our province, and by investing in infrastructure, it creates good jobs for folks.

Another thing that's really interesting in this kind of economy that we find ourselves in is that the bids for these construction projects are coming in much lower than we expected. If I recall correctly, I think the Minister of Education said that it was something around 10 per cent lower in terms of how low the bids are coming in. I can't recall that number precisely, but I think it's a countercyclical way of ensuring that we're investing in our province, creating jobs, building the things we need, and saving money all at the same time. It's a question of: when do you build these things?

I guess I'd be interested to hear from the folks in the opposition about their plan because they agree we need schools, that kids need teachers. But it's confusing for me, Madam Chair, the contradiction that I see. If you want to lower taxes, cut the spending, and build the schools all at the same time, those things seem to me a little bit – like, on all three of those things, low taxes, cutting funding for operations, and building schools, I'd like to learn from the opposite members how they could do those three things all at the same time. It seems a bit mutually exclusive to me.

When we have a crash in the price of oil that's affected our bottom line in the province, it doesn't mean that people don't still need health care and that people don't need education. When someone needs surgery, they don't want to be told: I'm sorry, but we don't have nurses for you because the oil price is low, so we've closed the hospitals for the day. It probably won't happen, but I guess the question for the members on the other side is: how do you replace a \$10 billion structural deficit when the revenue system collapses?

I think the way we need to deal with that is through diversifying our economy. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade has done a remarkable job in terms of going overseas to find new markets. There's an export program that he's developed. Not only that, but the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has also undertaken trade missions abroad where he's trying to help diversify the markets for agricultural products. There are different ways that governments can react to price shocks in the economy. We've said it before, and I think it also deserves repeating: we're trying to act as a shock absorber to our economy.

In Saskatchewan they have yet to release the details of their budget, but I think it's going to be an interesting kind of tale of two provinces. Sure, our economies are similar but different. Obviously, Alberta's economy is quite a bit bigger, but a lot of our revenue is based on nonrenewable resources. The Saskatchewan government is going to take a certain approach and we're going to take a certain approach, and we can kind of see how those different approaches play out in the different provinces. It's going to be a good case study

to see how things happen in Saskatchewan and how things happen here in Alberta.

I guess one other point I'd like to make before I conclude, Madam Chair, is that I think – sorry. I lost my train of thought. In Saskatchewan they're trying to deal with things differently. They've talked about a PST increase, but that also puts the burden on people who can least afford it. I think there are other ways that we can look at managing this kind of environment that we're in.

I'm really proud of the Minister of Education for the initiative that it took for him to work very closely with all the different school boards to find where it makes sense to lower these school fees because of the haphazard way that the PCs left the province and with the school boards taking various approaches. It was no small task for the minister to kind of find out how best to do that, so I applaud the minister for taking that action.

5:00

Well, I thank everyone for hearing me out this afternoon. I really look forward to hearing members on all sides of the House talk about the different approaches that we can take to address the situation and how, you know, the other side might do things differently. They had a plan to eliminate school fees entirely – and that's commendable – but we've yet to see any kind of plan on how that's going to happen, so perhaps they can enlighten us as to what they would have done differently.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have to say to the member across the way, Banff-Cochrane, that one of the things you said was that our children are a good investment. Actually, they are the investment. I couldn't agree with you more. I believe with all my heart that "investment" doesn't even begin to explain the necessity to make sure that our children have the education that they need, that the teachers have the supports that they need, that we have these buildings to hold our children as they go to school. I one hundred per cent agree with what the member said.

I would also like to say that just because a person doesn't have children doesn't necessarily mean that they don't have an excellent opinion and a perception about what should happen with education in this province. We need all voices and all thoughts on this to make sure that we're able to move the dial on what needs to happen with education, and that means that there are going to be a lot of different voices at the table. It's very, very necessary.

Yesterday we saw some amazing, tremendous actually, collaboration between the government and the opposition on my colleague's Bill 202, regarding the nonconsensual pictures. That was just fantastic. Education is like that, too. It shouldn't be politicized. I think that's happened in the past. When it comes to our kids, I just think we need to get back to the basics of what it is that we're trying to accomplish here.

As you can probably tell and as I've said very, very vocally and publicly, I support this bill, so I'm hoping that that trend will continue today and in the future because I'd like to bring forward some questions regarding the bill, an Act to Reduce School Fees. Like I said, I've been extremely public about how glad I was to see this government following through with their election promise – even though it's not the full 50 per cent, it's a start – on mandatory school fees. Quite frankly, I mean, within the Wildrose we would love to see that go even further. As you know, we campaigned on that, to eliminate mandatory school fees altogether. That's one of our policies and one that we would intend to fulfill given the

privilege of sitting where you are right now, as government, in the not-too-distant future.

As I said before, Bill 1 is a great start, and on behalf of Albertans – like all of us, I have the amazing opportunity to reach out and speak to people and get their feedback. So I'm hoping that some of the questions that I'm asking will stimulate these conversations to keep the momentum going on something that's a good start. The first question that I have is around the efficiencies that have been found. The Member for Banff-Cochrane was mentioning, you know, that you have to decide where your investments are going to be. We're talking about \$54 million in efficiencies that have been found to fund the reduction in school fees. In light of an economic downturn and even with the green shoots of optimism that our Minister of Finance put forward, I would like to know and I'm sure Albertans would love to know: where have the efficiencies come from?

I think this is a great opportunity for the government to shed some light on that and share with all of us how that happened. As we all know, it's easy to say those words and hope that no one asks any questions on how you get from point A to point B, but I'm asking. I would love to understand where those efficiencies came from. It's a big chunk of change. So congratulations, but we'd love to understand it because as we go forward, a lot of this will shake out in the wash. There are other questions around that, too, as to how those dollars are going to be spent.

If we're looking at school boards – and the member previous, who spoke on this, talked about how school boards had done a pretty good job and that they need stable funding. The school boards are concerned that they might actually be tasked with finding these efficiencies. Are they going to be seeing funding reductions to other programs in order to compensate for this? This is a question that – I've received quite a few about that.

I have to say to the Minister of Education that I'm so happy to see a bill enacted that attempts to follow the government mandate of making life better for Albertans – it's great, and this shows that – and that, if enacted, will take the appropriate steps to reduce some costs for families. I just wish that the legislation, this reduction in school fees, could have its maximum impact at a time when families need it the most. Unfortunately, as we all know, this is just going to make a very small dent in that. So while the bill is a small step in the right direction, let's not pat ourselves on the back too quickly. Albertans have wanted, as you know – and the minister would know this – these reductions for a long, long time. Even though this is a small reduction, given the current economic situation we very much appreciate the effort to start the process.

Madam Chair, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade only yesterday was talking about the potential for growth in this province. In addition, the government loves to tell us over and over and over again about the two pipelines that they take credit for and how this will obviously bring much-needed prosperity to our province. But, I mean, we actually need to see this critical infrastructure get in the ground and get built. So let's make sure that that happens. We can talk about the two pipelines, but let's get that going first because, obviously, with increased prosperity and with the efficiencies that the government has miraculously found, the monies to fund the reductions in the school fees at this time, I would hope that with increased prosperity and increased efficiencies, we can expect additional reductions to the school fees in the near future.

I mean, I can only assume that the government found the \$9 million to promote the climate leadership action plan. And the government is able to somehow find \$2.3 billion to basically give away to big banks for debt servicing. The member that just spoke previously talked about other governments downloading onto the

taxpayer. Well – hello? – welcome to the world of downloading. That's not acceptable. That could be anywhere from \$3,500 and up for a family. Plus, the government chooses to lose billions of dollars through the PPA debacle. That is not acceptable either.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

I would love to see the monies to fully fund education and not have families needing to foot the bill through school fees. Mr. Chair, imagine for a moment what those billions of dollars would have meant to the education system. Alberta families have entrusted this government with their hard-earned dollars. This is a tremendous, tremendous amount of trust, and unfortunately we've seen the government lose the trust of the people who elected them. Teachers have contacted me with concerns that their classroom supports are going to be cut or that new supports will not be funded as a result of the efficiencies. We are already seeing a shortage of resources to meet a huge array of students' learning needs across the province, and we want to be sure that our students are not going to suffer.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Other questions that I've heard include: is this reduction in school fees sustainable? Will school boards and parents be able to count on these lower fees for years to come? We have a start. It's getting going. We know that that's working. We know that this is happening. Are we going to be able to continue the process? It's one thing to start it right now, but are we going to be able to sustain that? More importantly, many, many people are concerned about what will be cut as a result of the reduced funding to these programs. This is again the question that comes. I would love to have some answers to these questions, to make sure that those reductions are coming through appropriately.

Another concern is that there's no clear definition of the basic instructional fees. So what we're wondering is if the fees associated with the future ready initiative such as fees related to learning outside of the classroom – field trips, technology, and a whole variety of the CTS courses and options – will be covered. If the government is committed to this idea of future ready and has a vision of preparing our students for the 21st century, these pieces of their education, I would assume, would be considered basic instructional fees and be partially refunded as well.

5:10

There have been a few other questions that have come through as well. Probably one of the biggest, one of the more prominent questions that has come through is the impact of the carbon tax on Albertans generally, of course, and on school boards specifically and how that will change the potential impact of the reduction in school fees. I've asked the question before. Was that taken into consideration in that 25 per cent? Is it considered a 25 per cent reduction in school fees when transportation is included in that? Is that technically the way that that breaks down? If we're talking about mandatory school fees, I think transportation is a different piece. Nevertheless, I would like to be able to assure Albertans that not only is it going to be sustainable but that the government has taken into consideration the fact that the carbon tax will have a direct impact on the amount of money that is going to actually impact the parents and the students.

While the government is using this bill to partially meet the promise to reduce mandatory school fees for parents, the government started this year by raising the cost of education in this province through the carbon tax. It will cost school boards tens of millions of dollars every single year, and that's money that will eventually come off the backs of parents and students. We estimate that when the carbon tax is fully implemented, at \$50 per tonne,

school boards could have an increase of nearly \$30 million per year. And busing fees as well as the cost for heat and electricity for schools will continue to climb as a direct result of the carbon tax.

It seems that through this bill the government is trying to apply a bandage to a gaping wound. On one hand you're increasing taxes and, on the other hand, insufficiently paying parents back by reducing some of the school fees. It just doesn't make a dent compared to the damage that's already been caused by other policies. If you had not placed such an onerous tax on the school boards, that ultimately will fall to the families to cover, then the impact of this reduction in school fees may have provided significant supports to families, especially now.

We have questions about the transportation fees as well. How will the transportation change, and for whom? Given that transportation costs will be increasing as a result of the carbon tax, some of the questions we have fielded from school boards include: will there be a benefit to the boards that have reduced their transportation fees already? There are already school boards that take care of this. They've already found efficiencies within their own systems where they're able to cover the transportation fees. Will all boards benefit or just those that have significant cost overruns on their transportation budget, and how is that being determined?

What happens when a school of choice actually is the only option available to meet a specific set of student learning needs? Is that going to be considered, then, a designated school or not? How are we going to determine that? I imagine that will be in some of the regulations and decisions coming forward. Will parents still bear the transportation cost to meet their child's special learning needs? I realize that there are going to be some discussions coming up about special needs and transportation. I think these are very, very important discussions, but we need to understand the dollars and cents. We need to make sure and be able to provide some clarity for families going forward that they will actually have a say in this and actually be provided for appropriately. Madam Chair, these are just some of the questions that we have been hearing from Albertans in response to this bill.

I have one additional concern. There is little or no specific detail in the bill. The government is asking us to vote on this bill, yet all the consultations with stakeholders and developing the entire set of regulations, that will provide substance to this bill, will actually happen after the bill goes through the legislative process. This is a continual pattern with this government with legislation. We're voting on a piece of legislation, but we actually have no idea of the outcomes. I'm just not completely comfortable with that. I don't think Albertans are comfortable with that. I think it would be great if the government could offer some clarity on the direction that this is going. I mean, again, I support the bill, obviously, but there's a ton of space here that things could move in a direction that may not be helpful.

We have seen how the consultation process has not worked well for the government in the past 20 months or so. So while I would love to think that the government will engage in a robust conversation with education stakeholders, including parents, I'm not so confident that this authentic discussion will help to formulate the regulations. We need to make sure that the government is providing equity across the province with respect to either the transportation or the instructional fees.

On the positive side, this is a cost savings to Alberta, \$54 million, starting the fall of 2017. These transportation changes will impact 140,000 children and their families, and the school fee changes will impact 590,000 children and their families.

I'm just hoping that the minister and the government are open to continued collaboration. I've heard that the door is open, so I fully intend to make use of that and to make sure that we continue to

collaborate on this to make sure that the direction goes in a way that we can collaboratively go together and make sure that we're reaching out to all these families and school boards.

So while I still have questions and concerns, I do support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for her questions. There were quite a few in there, you know, but I did write them down the first time, so I think that between the two we can have an exchange of information that helps to clarify Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, here in the province of Alberta. The title sort of really captures it very well. We're not eliminating school fees in the province of Alberta, but it's an act to reduce school fees and also to get a handle on the school fee landscape across the province.

For many years school boards were trying very hard to build their budgets and to deliver the high quality of education for which we have a very strong reputation across the country and around the world. But with the absence of long-term funding guarantees, the capacity to plan on long-term funding, school boards did what they could, and you ended up with this very uneven landscape of school fees across the province. So this is an act to reduce school fees, but really it's an act to rationalize the school fees situation here in the province of Alberta, too.

I mean, that's obviously going to be a process, and it's a process that I look forward to working on with everybody. It's a way, you know, not dissimilar to curriculum reform, where you open the doors and you allow people to give you the information of individual circumstances and individual schools and school boards and districts, and then we start to build something that's equitable and sustainable and actually has a meaningful reduction to the pocketbooks of Alberta families with children.

I believe that we have made a very, you know, significant stride here in difficult economic circumstances. Finding \$54 million is not easy at the best of times, so this is a reach into basic instructional fees and a reach into some of the busing circumstances that we see in the province as well. I won't pretend that it is an all-inclusive sort of reach into either of those categories, but it's certainly, I think, a strategic way of doing so.

From the beginning I had always said that we were canvassing all of our school boards and looking for some things in common that we could reduce school fees on. Basic instructional fees: I mean, there are lots of definitions of that out there in the province, but we have, by collecting information, looked for some common grounds between the 61 school boards that we are targeting in this particular bill. Those definitions seem to be common.

5:20

Yes, there are quite wide variations in what people do charge in this category. I do recognize that, but part of the way by which we can sort of clean up the situation, as I've been saying, is by saying: okay; we're going to have a category of fees that we eliminate, and then over time, over the next number of years, we look for a better way to tackle it and perhaps a better way to fund as well over time. I mean, these will all be discussions that we'll have.

I'm just going to try some of these questions that the hon. member did put forward and see if I can answer them to her satisfaction. The first one: do all school boards benefit from this, or is it just some? All children with families in school in the 61 school boards will benefit as instructional supplies and material fees are charged by all boards. All boards with the exception of two will

benefit as they charged fees in the reporting category that we used for the funding in the 2017-18 school year. We will have discussions with those other two boards to ensure that they have some flow of income for another initiative. Those two school boards in northern Alberta had made some provision to eliminate these instructional supply and material fees before, so we are doing so to make sure that they're not left out.

You know, of course, in the long-term, three-year plan we have put aside \$45 million over the next two years for the school fee strategy, but we just felt as a caucus and as a government that we needed to get started on this sooner rather than later because, of course, it'll take a while to sort through many of these other categories of fees. Plus, for parents and guardians and people who are putting up the money every fall, it is onerous. I mean, you have circumstances where people are paying hundreds of dollars or, if you have two or three kids, even more, a thousand more dollars, to school fees in the fall, so we thought we could get going on this a year sooner than we had planned. I feel really good about that choice, and I think that we've hit a chord, judging from the comments from all members, that we probably have done the right thing at the right time.

There are about 15 boards that are charging a fee for eligible transported students, about 140,000 students altogether, so it's these boards who will receive some funding to offset this revenue. Again, this is a start. It's not like we're eliminating school bus fees, but it's looking at a category that seemed, Madam Chair, most obvious to both myself and our department and those that I explained it to. That is a category of students that are travelling by bus to their eligible school. Of course, when I thought of the basic principle of, you know, public education, we don't have barriers to that basic education. Well, I thought that instructional supply and materials are very basic, and getting to that school, if you need to take a bus with the 2.4 kilometre designation, again, is an obvious thing that you need to get to school to learn.

Using that measuring stick, I think we hit it looking for the most kids, 660,000 kids, with the instructional supply and materials and with the eligible bus category, which will positively affect about 140,000 kids, too. Again, it's a start. I think it's quite a clever start, and we will carry on with that in close discussion with the public, with school boards, parents, teachers, and here in the Assembly Chamber.

Another question I heard, just looking through here – oh, you had the one, of course, on the efficiencies to pay for the bill. Will we see ongoing costs to cover the bill? We review our programming every year to see how our funds are best allocated. As we said, this is about a \$54 million savings for families. Now, it's important, Madam Chair, to always note that our education budget cycle is different from the government because we go September to September and the government goes March to March. So this year to pay for An Act to Reduce School Fees is a \$31.5 million responsibility. From that source of funding we in Alberta Education found efficiencies to the amount of about \$15 million, which include staff attrition and hiring restraints, a reduction in department travel and related costs, a reduction in supply costs, and review of existing grants and contracts with Education partners.

These reductions do not affect funding to school boards, so we are not passing those reductions on to school boards. This is very important information to repeat over and over again because there have been some people, I know, saying that this will be a cut to the classroom teachers and that they'll have to lay off people. That's not true, Madam Chair. We are making these reductions in Alberta Education through the Department of Education. It was not an easy process, but of course the results, as we can all see, everybody likes quite a lot.

We also have one grant reduction, and this is a \$5.6 million grant reduction to the credit enrolment unit cap. For all of us who may not know what that was or what it is, it is the method by which we fund high school credits. Probably everybody here went to high school, I'm guessing. You have credits for high school courses: five credits and three credits and so forth. Some people spend many years in high school, as I heard someone point out. That's great. Good for you. Anyway, the current boards – the enrolment unit cap that people were having allowed high school students to take up to 60 credits per year, but we saw that the average, Madam Chair, was about 37. I believe I moved it to 45, so that amounted to a savings of \$5.6 million in our annualized budget, that is a grant reduction.

Now, it should be noted, Madam Chair, that this reduction – there's also a phenomenon or an evolution of funding for high schools. High schools are moving away from the credits and to what we call high school redesign. It's been a very successful program. In fact, we've reached a point now where we have more high schools in high school redesign than we have using the strict credit system. So for all of those schools, you know, they don't see, really, a reduction at all, and then spread over the rest of the school system we see about a \$5.6 million reduction there. It is a reduction in grants. I mean, I had to look very carefully at each of the grants that we do provide for annualized funding for schools, and I found that this would be a place where we could go. That's where we found that.

Then the other \$10.9 million are from savings from other ministries and then reallocated to Education, so you see other efficiencies coming through from various ministries across the GOA. This is the means by which we could finance this through Treasury Board and direct it back to parents – right? – and to reduce school fees.

The future fiscal plan already allocates, Madam Chair, \$45 million annually for the reduction of fees, but, you know, we will obviously work to find the rest on an ongoing basis, which is perhaps the answer to the second question in regard to: is this a one-time thing, or is it moving forward? Yes, it is the new normal for school fees here in the province of Alberta, and it's part of our initiative over time to further reduce school fees and to rationalize the system in general. We all know that school fees were too high – right? – and this will be an ongoing budget line in Education and across the government of Alberta. It's not something that just comes and goes and flashes in the pan, not at all. In fact, if anything, it's the signalling of working even more on school fees to reduce schools fees here in the province of Alberta.

5:30

I mean, that's great. That's good news for people with kids. You know, it's a responsibility that we have. At various times we have children going through school, and we all sort of pitch in together in order to make sure that our kids get the best education and that it's affordable. This downloading of school fees onto Alberta families over the last number of years – a decade, for sure; it's been quite marked, probably, for the last 20 years – the gradual increase in school fees have not been acceptable to the pocketbooks of Alberta families.

But I think, you know, in regard to ideology – right? – that we have public schools, and public schools are a place where regardless of your ability to pay, you get the very highest quality of education possible. I mean, I confess here now, Madam Chair, that I am ideological, and I believe that publicly funded education must be of the very highest quality in the province of Alberta and that all students will have access to that public education regardless of their ability to pay.

It sounds like not such a scary ideology, really. I mean, it's quite practical. I can see many beneficiaries of that ideology play out

here, with the high quality of education and learnedness of our caucus and of members opposite as well.

An Hon. Member: Exhibit A.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Perhaps I'm exhibit A. I was in public school, of course, K to 12. There wasn't even a kindergarten when I went to school. There was just 1 to 12.

An Hon. Member: Dinosaurs.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We were fighting dinosaurs in the morning, and then – you know, that was kindergarten, I guess.

Anyway, let's stay on topic, shall we? The basic instructional fee. We defined it as including textbooks, workbooks, printing and paper costs, and so forth.

In regard to these other fees, you know, the member, obviously a fine product of public education as well, asked a very succinct question: what are we doing, then, with all of these future ready initiatives and dual credit programming and so forth? We are pushing in that direction, and we know that there's a definite benefit in that direction, but we do incur extra costs as a result. Yes, we will look at those things as we move forward, but it's not cheap, by any means.

I think that every time we weigh an individual fee, we have to look at, of course: is it essential to the instruction of that particular course and is it essential to the education of that person within the boundaries of what we consider public education as well? I mean, we don't want to build a school fee system that obstructs schools and school boards from charging some extra fees for services that parents might want to have for their kids like field trips or specialized sports programs and things like that. A good, balanced public education doesn't preclude those things from being offered, but I think we have to be very careful to not overstep people's expectations as to whether we pay for some of those fees as well.

Another question at the tip of many people's tongues – I think it came out a little bit wrong in the media for a little while there, and we corrected it, but let me correct it again – is that this is not eliminating lunchroom fees at this time either. An Act to Reduce School Fees does not cover lunchroom fees. I know that, again, there's lots of room for improvement in rationalizing lunchroom fees across the province. We have quite wide variations in what is charged for lunchroom fees. Some schools don't charge them at all, and some people charge a lot. You know, we need to obviously direct our attention to that as well, Madam Chair. But Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, here in the spring of 2017 does not address the school lunchroom fee situation, save to say that it does address the direction not in terms of reduction but of us making a proper analysis of those school fees and how they are charged, including lunchroom fees, around the province.

Other issues or questions that the hon. member asked. She asked about the carbon levy and its effect on school boards and families. I mean, it's all good fun to have numbers and throw them around, but I think we should be very careful with those things. You know, I've asked all of our school boards to give us an estimation of what that carbon line in their budgets will be, so we will put that information out. It will be their assessments; it won't be mine. As we get that, then let's use those numbers because – I won't even say the number you said, but . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Thirty million.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Right. Okay. It's not really that at all. I mean, we don't know. We'll see when it comes out through the system.

But part of the climate leadership initiative is to ensure that there's universality in the way that we attack this, and on a very practical

level what better place for us to start on the education process – indeed, our own children probably could educate many of us on these issues better than the other way around – than in our schools, right? It's the perfect place for a climate leadership strategy to reside.

Also, of course, what better place to start to make practical reductions in the use of energy in the province of Alberta than in those public institutions where we pay those energy bills, right? Obviously, schools, with their lights and their heat and their buses and so forth: what a great place to aim that and to look for efficiencies and to reduce those bills, because we end up paying those bills anyway, right? We might as well use some of those funds to attack that. You know, you save money. I mean, I'm all for reducing GHGs and so forth, but I'm definitely for saving public monies and reducing the bills that school boards have to pay, so it's a good place for it to be.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. In 2015 our government campaigned on making life more affordable for families. Reducing school fees was an important part of that platform, and I'm happy to see, with Bill 1, that we are doing exactly that. By reducing instructional materials and busing fees, we will save Alberta households \$54 million, which represents around a 25 per cent reduction in the overall cost of sending a child to school, which will affect about 600,000 students.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that during the 2015 election I had the opportunity to meet with thousands of constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark. Since then I have met with thousands more – on their doorsteps, in their homes, at local events – to hear more about their priorities, and I can tell you that the majority of them are and have been for a very long time concerned with the rising cost of school fees.

Madam Chair, though I don't have any children myself yet, I know first-hand the impact that school fees have on families in our community. I was raised by a single mother until about the age of 10, and I will add that she was very, very young. To put it into perspective for the House, she turned 40 this year. I know she made a lot of sacrifices along the way to give me a good quality of life, but there were many times when she had to make tough decisions when it came to budgeting, especially as she put herself through university as I went through the K to 12 education system.

When we talk about reducing the cost of education for Alberta families, we need to remember the incredibly diverse circumstances that families in our province face. Consider the cost to a new Canadian, a single mother or father, a parent with disabilities, the caregiver of a child with disabilities, or a large family that has struggled through the economic downturn. Each story is different, but the importance of ensuring our kids are in those classrooms stays the same.

Of course, Bill 1 is not the first initiative put forward by the government to make life easier for Albertans when it comes to education. We've seen pilot projects for school nutrition programs roll out. We've seen tuition freezes for three years in a row now and a commitment to do it again next year thanks to our government. Most importantly, we saw stable funding for population growth across our province. Though these initiatives might not sound like front-page news to the Assembly, I have seen the impact that they have had on my community.

When a constituent comes through my office concerned about the supports that they are getting in the classroom, I can't help but

imagine how much worse it may have been under our social conservative opposition parties. We heard the Member for Calgary-Hays stand up in this Legislature and tell us that we are not doing enough, that in two years of our mandate this government has not done enough. Well, Madam Chair, where was he over the last many decades when our infrastructure for our classrooms was crumbling and the cost of inflation on our students and our families continued to rise? I didn't hear them complaining then. He was in this government making those decisions. We heard their stance during the last election, Madam Chair: cut front-line staff, support market modifiers for postsecondary students, increase something like 57 taxes, including a health care levy that would go into general revenue.

5:40

The fact is that it looks like someone on that side of the House might be stepping down to force a by-election, which will cost our system upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars – that is money taken away from our classrooms, Madam Chair – not to mention that the opposition parties are hoping to replace one of their members with an ex-MP who also stepped down, forcing a by-election. After that happens, they will merge and ride into the sunset. I look forward to it.

My point here, Madam Chair, is that while the opposition fights over who is the natural-born leader of our province to lead their united social conservative party into the sunset, we as a government, as a social democratic government, are moving to make life better for Albertans. Since the introduction of this bill I've been having discussions with families in Edmonton-Meadowlark and across this province, and I've heard some of them talking that they may save upwards of \$1,000 per year, depending on the size of their family. I am very proud of our Education minister moving to make these changes, among many other changes that we've seen so far, and of the conversations that will continue into the future about making life more affordable for Albertans. I just would like to thank him for bringing this legislation forward, thank my colleagues for the continued discussions that we have about making life more affordable for Albertans.

I stand here to support Bill 1, and I would encourage all of my colleagues to do so as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To start, the minister talked briefly about credits, and most people will receive about 35 credits per year. Myself, because I was in drama and band and French immersion, I usually received approximately 51 credits, the one extra credit being from psychology because that's three credits per term, which adds up to six credits. I would actually be kind of depressed that I wouldn't be getting those extra six credits. However, I understand the need to find good places where we can reserve money so we can do things like Bill 1.

Now, I am very proud of Bill 1. Bill 1 is great for teachers, and it's great for students, and it's fantastic for all the parents who live in my riding as well. When I was running for election, I heard from many families asking me . . . [interjections] I know there's a lot of noise coming from the other side, but I'll try to speak a bit louder while they try to have their little side conversations.

I was very proud to stand on the doorsteps and talk to families in my constituency of Calgary-Hawkwood about reducing school fees. That was top of mind for many parents, young parents in my riding who have always had trouble paying those bills.

To be quite honest, my family could have greatly benefited from having a reduction in school fees. In 1996 – I'm going to date

myself – I was two years old, and my parents got divorced. I see the Clerk just holding his head in his hands. I know. I am fairly young. However, in 1996 my parents did get divorced. For me, I didn't notice. I was two years old. I was going to preschool at the time. I have two older siblings, who were both going to school. For my mom, who was a teacher who recently separated – and her mother, my grandmother, died later that year – it was very difficult to pay those school fees.

As a teacher my mom took a large pay cut because of the cuts by Ralph Klein. Because of those cuts, she was worried about putting food on the table. She was worried about clothing us and feeding us and then had these school fees right in September, when all of us were trying to go to school. I didn't know any different because, again: two. My sister was telling me that it was very emotional. She remembers my mother crying, trying to figure out how she was going to pay these school fees, how she was going to feed and clothe us while trying to go through a divorce. That's an incredible hardship to go through.

As a teacher she felt she needed to pay those school fees. She felt like if she signed the form saying that she couldn't afford those school fees, it was going to reflect poorly on her and therefore reflect poorly on Alberta Education. She didn't want to do that even though it would have greatly helped us. I wouldn't say that she was too proud to do it, but in the long run she was probably embarrassed because she didn't want to do that. She didn't want what the opposition calls a handout even though it's not a handout. It's more of a hand up. Those school fees are very burdensome. They are very difficult to pay. That's why I'm so proud of Bill 1, which will finally reduce school fees at least 25 per cent for the majority of Albertans.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Being a public servant and going to schools with kids who are in classrooms of over 40 kids – when I was in high school, in my English class, if every child showed up, there weren't enough chairs. Somebody had to either stand or sit on the ground, and that was directly because of the cuts from the previous government. That was directly from the cuts from the '90s and early 2000s that they put in place, cutting salaries of teachers, and then, on top of that, cutting resources for schools, cutting resources for hospitals and nurses. Almost every public service in this province took a cut just because they wanted to balance the budget for no other reason than to be able to hold up a sign that said: we balanced the budget. Balancing the budget means nothing if you have crumbling infrastructure, if you have crumbling schools, and if your classrooms are too large to even be able to teach all the children that are in those schools.

I am so proud to be part of a government that is careful about schools, that is making sure that all schools are funded equally, making sure that all schools are funded properly, making sure that hospitals are not crumbling, making sure we're not destroying hospitals. That's also another important thing, destroying things that we desperately need. I don't see why there was a reason to destroy the Calgary General hospital. It's a little bit off topic. Sorry. I'm just kind of going off. But destroying the Calgary General hospital is kind of a giant metaphor for what the Klein government did to my family and to many Albertans.

That's something I never want to see in this province again. I ran to make sure that Alberta Education was fully funded; to make sure that when children go to school, they feel safe and cared for; to make sure that teachers feel respected by their government; and to make sure that teachers have enough resources to teach students. These aren't people that go to work just for an extra paycheque.

They go to work because they care about the students. They go to work because they really want to make this province a better place, and that was the way they could do it. Cutting teachers, cutting resources for schools: that is something that I will never want to do as an MLA, and I never plan on doing that as an MLA.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Now, the previous government had a huge culture of disrespecting students and teachers. I remember that back when I was in high school, Madam Chair, I received a letter from the then Education minister, which was Thomas Lukaszuk, and he sent this to every student in the province. It said: if you have any ideas on how to improve Alberta Education, on how to help us move forward, please send them; either e-mail us or phone us or tweet us, and we'd be happy to receive those ideas. Then I, being a budding grade 11 or 12 student – I don't know exactly which year it was now – decided to tweet then Minister Lukaszuk and tell him exactly what I thought would be great for Alberta Education. [interjection] I know the Member for Calgary-Lougheed just yelled out "names." However, because he is a previous member, not a current member, I'm allowed to use his name.

I received that letter from Minister Lukaszuk and sent out about five tweets saying what we needed to do to improve Alberta Education. I put things like repeal Bill 44, which made it a human rights violation for teachers to talk about sexual orientation, sexuality, or religion in the classrooms without having written permission from a parent, which, really, was homophobic and discriminatory against LGBTQ-plus Albertans. On top of that, I said to add resources for schools, to build more schools so that when I went to school, I didn't have to sit in a classroom with 40 other kids, with people sitting on the floor. And then I said a bunch of other things.

5:50

Then he replied to me: that was a large number of tweets; did you save time for homework? It just showed how that government did not care about students and did not actually care about the ideas of youth. He was politically posturing, saying, "We care about education; we care about what you have to say," but in reality he just wanted to send a letter to say that he's the Minister of Education. I could not stand that, and that is why I ran in politics.

I ran in politics so that I could put bills forward like Bill 1, support Bill 1 because that is what we need in this province. We need more things like Bill 1. We need to help parents. We need to help teachers and nurses and students and all Albertans, help them have a real education, whether it be advanced education or K to 12 education. It's very important that we actually put these bills forward, that we give a hand up to these parents, and make sure that these students and these schools are not treated the same way that they were treated by the previous government.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll have my seat now.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to clarify a couple of things for the previous speaker from Calgary-Hawkwood, talking about the credits grant reduction. This was the only grant reduction that we did utilize in Education to pay for this Bill 1. It's a reduction of credits. Currently school boards could account for one student getting 60 credits in a year, so we've reduced it to 45, okay? The average I saw across the province, including summer school, was 37, so I thought 45 was still pretty good because I know

myself as a teacher that it's pretty rare for students to achieve that many credits. You can be taking some extraordinary programming, which can help. Sometimes people take summer school, and that tops it up, but with 45 I still think we can probably cover it off in a reasonable way. So I just wanted to clarify that.

Also, you know, when we were talking about specific questions about funding and buses, I had a question in regard to transportation service obligations – right? – so school boards that might choose to use municipal transit as their mode of transportation. It does not change the definition of eligible students, taking your school of choice that might be further away, but that is not covered by this, Madam Chair. I know that this is a bit of a sensitive topic, but again we're working within the parameters of a certain expenditure, a not insignificant expenditure of about \$54 million. But if you start to sort of branch that circle out, let's say, for people picking a school of choice – let's say that you're going across town to take German immersion or something like that – then, no, that is not covered under this bill. Again, we need to have clarity on that.

I know that there's lots of room for us to carry on with building more school fee reform, but that's where we're at now. I think we've taken a good stab at it. It doesn't cover all busing. It doesn't cover all school fees. But, then, that would have been quite a bit more money, and I think we all know that that's not something in large supply at this juncture for the government of Alberta and for parents, too, for that matter.

I just wanted to try to clarify those two pieces, and I certainly welcome more specific questions. You know, in a way Committee of the Whole is one of the best parts of the legislative process because you can have a discussion with people, and you can also sit in different chairs, so that gives you a different angle on our jobs as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for that, and I . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) I must now ask the committee to rise and report Bill 3 with some amendments and report progress on Bill 1.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 3. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With a view to the hour and the wonderful progress that has been made this afternoon, I would move that we advance the clock to 6 o'clock – this is not daylight savings time; I'm just saying – and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 22, 2017

Day 12

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
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Deputy Government House Leader
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND),
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Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk

Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House
Services

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and
Legal Research Officer

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms

Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKittrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKittrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKittrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

If everyone would just bow their heads and reflect or pray, each in your own way. Hon. members, in light of the tragic events unfolding as we speak at the House of Commons in London, U.K., let us take a moment to recognize the bravery and the diligence of the first responders and public servants as well as to offer our deepest sympathies to all those who have and will continue to be affected by this terrible incident. Let us in this Legislative Assembly never forget that it is the first responders who are on the front lines and who risk their lives so that we can exercise our right to speak freely in this Chamber and in this precinct.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly grade 6 students from the Covenant Canadian Reformed School. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Corlisa Pietersma, and chaperones Leo Knol, Judith Dejong, Mona Jissink, Marion Schepers, Michelle Peters, Jessica Peters, Gloria Werkman, and Karen Breukelman. I'm honoured to have them all watching question period here today and delighted that the students are learning more about the Legislature and about how democracy works. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you students from John A. McDougall school here in Edmonton-Centre. The students are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Evan S. Asmussen, Ms Veronica Chong, and Ms Silvia Choe. I'd invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you April and Chris MacKinnon from the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. April is a student of the government of Canada program at Algonquin College. She is joined today by her husband, Master Warrant Officer Chris MacKinnon, ETQMS, of the second battalion, PPCLI, based out of Manitoba. He has dedicated 23 years to the Canadian Forces. As a provincial government liaison to the Canadian Forces I want to thank you both for your dedication and service. I would now ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like everyone to give a warm welcome to a very familiar face who certainly attends our gallery, Mr. Les Landry and his wonderful service dog Annie. They are absolutely wonderful examples of passion and dedication in advocacy. Mr. Landry is the president of Respect the Service Dog, an organization raising awareness of service dogs in Alberta, and Annie is a dedicated companion. Mr. Landry is certainly a credit to the perseverance and remarkable attitude of an Alberta advocate. Thank you, Mr. Landry.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you one of my very important constituents, Page Moniz. She is also my constituency assistant and has spent tireless hours helping to organize our Working in Your Community job fair as well as ensuring that all the constituents in Edmonton-Manning are feeling heard and have the information that they need. I would just ask that she please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Avery Anna Roberge-Eadie and Andriy Krugliak. Last November two of our pages, Avery and Andriy, and I had the opportunity to go to Victoria for the eighth Commonwealth Youth Parliament. I will be speaking about this more in my member's statement later. I just had the incredible privilege of being there to witness them in the B.C. Legislature. I would ask that my guests please rise, stand, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all in this Assembly a friend of mine. One of the absolute joys for those of us that are beginning to show our years is the joy of long friendships. Mr. Bill Parsons and I have known each other since junior high. We have played together as kids, we've prayed together in church, we've attended the same university, we've led the same youth groups, we've attended each other's weddings, and we've helped raise each other's children. That is the value of long friendship. It makes me happy today to ask Bill to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the reeve and councillors of the MD of Taber, home of the best corn in the world: Brian Brewin, Tom Machacek, Merrill Harris, Bob Wallace, Dwight Tolton. And the staff: Jack Dunsmore, Craig Pittman, and Jeremy Wickson. If you could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests today, hon. members? The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I have 35 NAIT television and film arts students. They are here together with their instructor, Lamya Asiff. They are here to see the proceedings today, and I hope we can all give them a warm, traditional legislative welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a friend of mine and a constituent from Grande Prairie-Wapiti, a lifelong farmer and agricultural producer who in past years has served on the Northern Alberta Development Council, Andre Harpe. I think his term is up, and I believe he's in town for his last supper tonight with NADC. If he can stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce three outstanding folks from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They are fine public servants, that serve their constituents well. I see Rolly Ashdown in the gallery as well as Greg Boehlke and, I believe, Richard Barss. If they would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Crime Prevention

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are losing their sense of security. As this downturn continues, we're hearing more and more heartbreaking stories of crime, especially in rural communities. In Cold Lake vehicle thefts soared by 80 per cent last year. Grande Prairie was just named the most dangerous city in the country by Stats Canada. In Amisk, a village of just a few hundred people, the ATB was robbed twice in one week. In Airdrie our local CIBC was recently robbed as well, and in Red Deer a carjacking left an innocent man dead. Every day it's something new. The downturn has brought with it a disturbing rise in crime. In the most recent crime severity index Alberta reported an 18 per cent increase, the most of any province.

To make matters worse, victims are watching in disbelief as this government stays trials for those accused of everything from sexual assault to murder. Today on behalf of those victims and their families the Wildrose caucus has launched the Alberta Crime Task Force, saying: enough is enough. The task force will travel around the province, speak directly with Albertans affected by crime, and supply a report complete with recommendations on how best to tackle this crisis. We are also making a survey available online at crimetaskforce.ca so all Albertans can have their voices heard.

Albertans know the justice system is failing them. The government's plan to triage violent crimes is reckless, and Albertans reject it. But as this issue affects all of our constituents, I believe there is room for all of us to work together and find solutions. Recently we saw this government follow a recommendation from the opposition and commit to adding more court resources. This task force will provide a series of new recommendations to this government, recommendations that come straight from Albertans. I hope this

government takes those recommendations seriously and takes this opportunity to help us keep Albertans safe.

Thank you.

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

Response to Anti-Muslim and Anti-Semitic Incidents

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the Al-Salam Centre's first Visit Our Mosque event, organized by the Muslim Association of Canada's Calgary chapter. The Al-Salam Centre opened their doors to their new space just about 100 paces from my office in Ranchlands in September, and I can't tell you how proud I am to have this new space in my constituency. It was wonderful to see so many people from our community and across Calgary come out and show their support, learn more about the Muslim faith, and take part in prayer. Visit Our Mosque events are an important show of solidarity for the Muslim community in the face of Islamophobia.

Unfortunately, earlier this month somebody in Ranchlands spread anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic graffiti in one of our parks. When I spoke at the mosque, I reiterated what had been said to me over and over again by members of our community, that these actions do not represent the people of Ranchlands. Those small-minded and bigoted people who carried out these attacks on the Muslim and Jewish communities do not represent those who live in Ranchlands, and our community will not stand for it.

We have seen an increase in attacks on the Muslim and Jewish communities in these past few months and years. It's the job of every single Albertan, both here in the Legislature and outside, to stop this hate from spreading. When we see graffiti, we must erase it; when we hear Islamophobic or anti-Semitic discourse, we must confront it; and when we see our friends and neighbours being attacked for their race or beliefs, we must protect and support them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Parliamentary Debate

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The role we play as legislators is an important one. We're the direct conduit for the people we represent into this House. We champion their voices and their concerns, and we should be doing that with great humility. Our constituents' voices should not be reduced to a headline or a hash tag. We should treat their voices with reverence and respect because each voice is a child in need, a mother out of work, a father who can't make ends meet, a grandparent receiving palliative care.

Mr. Speaker, as we debate in this House, the best way to validate those voices is with solutions and answers. We would be wise to stop the semantics and the grandstanding because they are watching. The mother out of work doesn't care what the party name is. The father who can't make ends meet is focused on food on the table today, not what happened in the last 44 years. The child in need will recoil from the yelling that often takes place in this House and will more likely respond to a thoughtful, respectful dialogue and a tempered tongue. The grandparent in palliative care recognizes wisdom and compassion, not hyped-up rhetoric.

I'm not preaching to others, Mr. Speaker. These are the thoughts I put to myself each and every day as I prepare myself to go to work. I can only control what I say and what I do. To quote a friend, a young man wise beyond his years, Manmeet Bhullar: be better.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I will continue to come to this House with an open heart and an open mind, seeking knowledge which, hopefully, gains me the wisdom to best serve Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Commonwealth Youth Parliament

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This last November I had the incredible opportunity of attending the eighth Commonwealth Youth Parliament, held in Victoria, British Columbia, as a Canadian delegate representing Alberta's Legislature alongside Avery Anna Roberge-Eadie and Andriy Krugliak. Under the watchful eye of Speaker Linda Reid 67 youth from across the world divided into government and opposition parties, where each was required to defend their own positions on issues just like those here at home: climate change, natural resource development, trade policy, and the issue of private versus public delivery of services. At times, partly due to my own encouragement of desk pounding and a bit of heckling, it sounded a bit like home, too.

As a mentor to the youth in the opposition caucus alongside B.C. MLA Jodie Wickens and New South Wales MP Adam Marshall we assisted in speech writing, House business, and debate, teaching our young parliamentarians how to tell their own stories but, most importantly, how to tell the stories of others.

My heart burst, though, Mr. Speaker, when I witnessed our own Avery and Andriy each stand in the B.C. Legislature and share stories of Alberta. They told B.C. and the world about our incredible landscape of mountains, lakes, and great plains; about our resource-driven and dependent economy; our shared values of hard work; and our continued history of progressive social policy, being one of the first provinces where women won the right to vote and recently protecting gender identity and gender expression as human rights. Andriy and Avery are the new face of politics.

Secretary-General Akbar Khan of the Parliamentary Association shared a few words worth repeating, that democracy demands active and involved citizens of all ages taking action to make societies a better place, that young people are increasingly active on political issues that affect them, and how Parliaments must adapt to be more accessible and transparent to all citizens, including actively engaging young people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

LED Light Bulbs and Energy Efficiency

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly the poor light bulb has become a symbol for criticism. Well, let me try to illuminate some things for the opposition.

Contrary to this belief, the lowly light-emitting diode may be one of the bright ideas of the future. It is actually a compliment because it is an example of a superior idea, modern technology, cost savings, durability, and excellent performance. This technology is going to put money right back into the pockets of Alberta families. The LED bulbs can be six to seven times more energy efficient than conventional, incandescent lights. Unlike incandescent light bulbs, which release 90 per cent of their energy as heat, the LEDs use energy far more efficiently. LEDs can be used in a wide range of applications because of their unique characteristics: compact size, ease of maintenance, resistance to breakage, and the ability to focus the light in a single direction.

Mr. Speaker, this government's energy efficiency program is about helping families in Alberta save money at the end of the month. If the average Alberta family takes advantage of this program, they

will save \$112 on their power bill. This government has also made it easier for families and businesses to install solar panels, and we will move forward with the energy efficiency report's recommendations on programs like helping Albertans buy more efficient and energy-saving appliances.

Meanwhile, the opposition wants to remove our electricity rate cap, so families will go back to the days of price spikes and volatile power bills. We are going to keep moving forward to help families save money.

It's not just light bulbs. This government is going to help families identify opportunities to lower their bills by installing efficient faucets, efficient power bars, and programmable thermostats. Over 70,000 Alberta families are voting with their online clicks. This government is making life more affordable for Albertans.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Service Compensation

Mr. Jean: If the NDP doesn't change course soon, Alberta will have the highest debt in all of western Canada. It means more credit downgrades, higher interest rates for government borrowing, more tax hikes, of course, for Alberta families, and all that puts the sustainability of core programs at risk for Albertans. Alberta simply must get control of the cost of salaries across every sector of government. Telling the public sector that they're not getting a wage increase right now isn't unreasonable. It's actually common sense. We need to freeze spending now. Why won't the Premier and her cabinet just admit it?

1:50

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with our colleagues in the public service in a respectful way, that respects the contract they have, that respects labour legislation, and, quite frankly, that respects the demands of the Supreme Court of Canada. Grandstanding like the member opposite wants to do is only actually going to end up costing taxpayers more. That isn't good because, as you've probably heard, our government is committed to making life more affordable for Albertans, not less; and we're committed to making life better for Albertans, not worse. That's why we're on this side of the House.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the best public-sector workers in the world. They know and understand that when 80,000 full-time jobs in Alberta have disappeared in the private sector, when our finances have fallen off a cliff, we can't afford to pay for a raise. They get that. Saskatchewan is asking for a pay cut, and now Manitoba has just introduced legislation for a wage freeze. Meanwhile this NDP government is planning to spend billions and billions more for each of the next three years. It's ridiculous. Going deeper into debt and deficit now for public-sector raises simply jeopardizes the sustainability of the public sector in the very near future.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the member opposite is far more interested in doing things like giving \$600 million in tax giveaways to the folks in Alberta who are struggling to make ends meet on \$300,000 a year; however, that's not our focus. When it comes to dealing with the public servants, who work very hard for the people of Alberta, we will deal

with them with respect. Bargaining is commencing. We will engage with them at the bargaining table, which is exactly the right place for us to do that.

Mr. Jean: While life in government has never been so good, times have never been as tough as they are today out in the real world. Mr. Speaker, Enbridge today announced they were shedding another thousand jobs. Job losses, massive wage cuts, tax hikes, hours cut, businesses in Alberta are closing their doors, and the price of everything is going up under the NDP carbon tax. There's no more money left. This is about protecting the front lines for years to come for Alberta families. Will the Premier ensure that Albertans are not paying for further public-sector wage increases, and if not, why not?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I think the member opposite really has to stop with the fearmongering. As I'm sure he knows, the vast majority of the jobs that he's referring to from Enbridge are actually being cut in Texas, not in Alberta, and it is not helpful to try and scare Albertans with that kind of misinformation. Albertans deserve better from their public officials on these kinds of issues.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to engaging in a respectful way with our public servants. The member opposite knows full well that management salaries have been frozen, that grid increases have been frozen, and that, unlike his BFF over there, we also significantly brought down the outrageous corporate CEO ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second main question.

Energy Efficiency Rebate Program Contract

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I've been accused of fearmongering before, and that's not what is happening here. But I will tell you that other people are talking about it, too. Rating agencies, chambers of commerce, and Albertans in general know this NDP budget is a disaster. It increases taxes, increases debt, and has no path to balance and provides no hope whatsoever of sustainable provincial finances. They're literally spending billions of dollars to destroy Alberta jobs. They've shut our coal industry down, and now they're threatening homegrown energy efficiency businesses with their ridiculous deal to have an Ontario company give away free light bulbs. Why is the Premier spending so much money to destroy Alberta businesses?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, again with the fearmongering, Mr. Speaker, and the member opposite not taking the time to get the facts; for instance, on the issue of the successful applicant to work with our energy efficiency program, the Alberta bids on that particular program were three times that of the successful bidder. You don't need to have a game show to figure out what's in the best interest of Albertans. You don't need a *Dragon's Den*. You just make the right choice, and that's what we did.

Mr. Jean: The government has decided they should just cut the knees of everybody who is already in energy efficiency practices in Alberta. End quote. That's the CEO of AIM Energy Pros, David Gray. The NDP are destroying his business model, and he's not alone. It's obvious that this particular deal was a sweetheart contract for an Ontario company, and the NDP keeps promising that there's no cap to this boondoggle. We don't even know how bad it could get, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier release the request for proposal

specifically designed for Ontario Ecofitt, and if she won't, why won't she show Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to reinforce the answer I just gave in my last question. The matter is public. The Alberta bids were three times that of the successful bidder. That, to me, is a good decision on the part of Alberta taxpayers. Moreover, that Ontario company has announced that it's going to move its western Canada headquarters to Alberta and that it will be moving forward to hire Albertans, and it will do so at less cost to taxpayers than the other bids. It makes good sense, and I don't understand what the member opposite is opposed to.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this is NDP policy: spend money to destroy Alberta jobs. If they've got nothing to hide, show Albertans.

Here's an idea as well, Mr. Speaker. Instead of taking people's money to help Ontario businesses, how about keeping the money in people's pockets in the first place? What about that? The fact is that the Premier is taxing Alberta families by billions of new dollars so she can ask an Ontario company to install light bulbs in people's homes here in Alberta. How on earth does she expect any local businesses to survive when she's subsidizing an Ontario company to install free light bulbs for Albertans? Ridiculous.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've answered that question not once but twice, but what I will say once again is that our government is committed to affordability for Albertans. Unlike the members opposite we are focused on reducing school fees, we are focused on freezing tuition, we are focused on capping electricity rates, and we are focused on helping Albertans reduce their electricity costs by finding more efficiencies. All of this makes life better for Albertans: exactly what we promised we would do.

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Health why she is closing down beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. She replied, "The assertion that was made by the member opposite is absolutely inconsistent with the facts." Yet I have documents outlining the planned closure and a request from the physicians and multidisciplinary teams for the minister to engage in meaningful dialogue with them before taking this recklessly misguided step. Is the minister closing these ALC beds? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to table *Hansard* for the member opposite. He made all sorts of assertions that this was something that I was doing, that I was kicking people onto the streets. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are making sure that these people who are in these facilities have opportunities to be transitioned into both the community as well as the Royal Alex hospital downtown. We are absolutely open to meeting with the staff if requested and with others to make sure that the space and the beds that are there at Alberta Hospital Edmonton will be there for the long term to serve the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister said yesterday that she works "with experts each and every day" to ensure that "Albertans have access to the right care in the right place

at the right time,” but she won’t explain why a decision to move such an important mental health facility to an emergency ward was made without consultation with experts. The psychiatrists say that she has not consulted with them and that this decision is part of a disastrous trend of dismantling Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Why is the minister ignoring the front-line experts?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that they have concerns because under 44 years of Conservative reign in this province there was no support for Alberta Hospital Edmonton and regularly it was attacked. But I have to tell you that as long as there’s an NDP government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hold the clock.

Keep it down.

Start the clock again.

Continue.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As long as there’s an NDP government in Alberta, there will be Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and we are making sure that we support Alberta Hospital Edmonton, support community options, and support the Royal Alex hospital. That’s why we’re expanding services in this province, not making drastic cuts like the members opposite keep asking us to.

The Speaker: Second supplemental. [interjections]

Hold it down.

2:00

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there has been an erosion of trust between physicians and AHS management and given that physicians claim to fear retribution from AHS, including anxiety around contract renewals that they advocate for patients, and since a student was publicly reprimanded by a member of AHS management for voicing their concerns, will this minister lead by example and improve the work climate at AHS?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can’t help but point out some of the irony between this first set of questions and their questions now. They’re asking us to treat public servants with respect. We want to treat them with respect. That’s why we are offering opportunities to meet in person. That’s why we sit down at the table and have respectful negotiations and dialogue. I am more than happy to. I meet with doctors across this province every day, and I am honoured to continue that. Absolutely, members of the health profession have every right and responsibility to be advocating for their patients.

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

Economic Indicators

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this NDP government came into office, the debt-to-GDP ratio was an enviable 3.2 per cent, but even before the next election it will be 19.5 per cent, worse than B.C. and Saskatchewan, and further increasing at a rate of 4 per cent per year. At the rate this government is going, Alberta’s ratio will be the worst in Canada within one decade. So to the Minister of Finance: do you really think it’s a good idea to be boasting about such a massive failure?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, you know, nothing could be further from the truth, of course. This year it will be 13.4 per cent; 13.4 per cent at the end of this term is right in the low part of all provinces. All provinces far outstrip us in terms of debt to GDP. We’ll continue to have great fundamentals in this province. We’ll continue to have low taxes in this province all because this side of the House cares about making life more affordable for Albertans everywhere.

Mr. Rodney: Even after the incredible damage that this government has wreaked on the Alberta economy and way of life, the NDP are fond of boasting about Alberta’s projected economic growth of 2.4 per cent for 2017, which, by the way, is a far cry from Alberta continuously leading the country prior to the NDP taking office. We had growth rates of 3.9 per cent in both 2012, 2013 and 4 per cent in 2014. While the NDP has been in government, the economic growth rate has been negative 4 per cent in 2015, negative 2.4 per cent in 2016. The constriction of the Alberta economy is the opposite of a success, so again to the Minister of Finance: is it a good idea to be boasting about this?

Mr. Ceci: Has the hon. member not been part of life for the last two years? Do you not know that we’ve had a recession in this province? We didn’t cause that recession; world oil prices caused that recession. This year we’re going to lead the country in GDP growth at 2.6 per cent. Alberta is coming back, Mr. Speaker. They’re just in a fantasy, thinking that we on this side caused it. That’s not true.

Mr. Rodney: Back to reality. It’s called making a bad situation worse.

The Finance minister also regularly boasts about the NDP’s so-called job-creation strategy, but the facts tell a completely different story. Alberta’s unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, over the two years with the NDP government has been 6 per cent in 2015, 8 per cent in 2016, and a forecast of 8.4 per cent for 2017, and this is with 6,000 new FTEs created in government during that time. For the years prior the unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent in 2012, 4.7 per cent in both 2013 and 2014. To the Minister of Finance: do you really think it is such a great idea to be boasting about this other massive failure?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, I will get up each and every time and proclaim how good Alberta is. I will get up and stand up for this province. That side seems to think that if they talk about the negative things going on, somehow we’re going to fold our tent and go away. We’re not. We’re going to stand up for Alberta, for Alberta jobs, for Alberta people.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Mental Health Patient Advocate

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I raised concerns about how each year the Mental Health Patient Advocate office’s work increases but the resources do not. The 2015-16 annual report yesterday revealed a significant increase in caseload, yet it was only able to initiate one formal investigation in all of last year. Same staff count as 1990. The associate minister recognized the importance of the Mental Health Patient Advocate’s role but pointed out that funding in Budget 2017 will stay the same. Why isn’t the minister backing up her words with action?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. As we discussed on Monday, the Mental Health Patient Advocate is a very important position, and we are actively recruiting to fill that role. We also need to make sure that we're improving access to mental health supports for Albertans so that we can help diminish some of that caseload work by making sure that we've got services available to Albertans when and where they need them. I am proud to say that Budget 2017 is delivering on that promise.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this is about funding for the mental health advocate.

The commitment to new funding to implement the mental health review is promising. Unfortunately, it doesn't address the Mental Health Patient Advocate's inability to do formal investigations for people calling for help. Since 1990 the number of people has tripled, the number of issues has quadrupled, and investigations continue to take more time due to complexity. Why is the government allowing this situation to continue by not properly resourcing the advocate's office?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I said, we are very proud of the work that the mental health advocate has been able to do on behalf of Albertans, and we will continue to support that role and that office. We are also ensuring that we are able to expand access to services, working in the community and with mental health practitioners both inside and outside of Alberta Health Services as well as partners within the community. That is one way that we're working to make life better for Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about Albertans in this case. We're talking about a mental health advocate that has no resources to do her job.

One of the most interesting items in the 2015-16 annual report is the fact that the mental health advocate's office did not use its entire budget last year. It seems odd given the advocate's 2015 remarks that there was a critical lack of resources. I understand that approval is required to fill vacant positions and get additional staff even if the funds are available. To the minister: did the government impose last year a hiring and spending restraint on the advocate's office, and if so, why?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government has implemented hiring restraint measures across government, ensuring that when positions become vacant, they are being filled when they are critical to the role and to the work of government, including implementing our mandate. A huge part of our mandate is ensuring that Albertans have access to the mental health supports that they need. It is a reality that recruitment takes time and that for these important positions we want to make sure that we are filling them with the right person so that we are able to help make life better for Albertans.

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

Independent Postsecondary Institution Funding

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province deals with many inconsistencies in funding of independent academic institutions. These colleges and universities receive block funding that does not require any achievement in enrolment. In fact, some even

see declines in numbers. To the Minister of Advanced Education: why do we see these differences in funding?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, we inherited this system from the previous government, and we're committed to making it better. Campus Alberta grants are not purely enrolment based for any institution, be they independent or not. A review of this funding model is under way, and the member can look forward to recommendations later this year. I'd like all members of this Assembly to know that this government is protecting and improving postsecondary education and all the things that make life better for Albertans, and a better funding model will help to achieve this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that St. Mary's University in Calgary-Shaw has a lower amount of funding per student compared to many other postsecondary institutions in the province, to the same minister: how is this government going to address this going forward?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, firstly, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for being such a tireless advocate for his constituency. For independent schools like St. Mary's the operating grants go only to programs which are approved by government. Within these programs the funding per-student number is higher than it would be for the school overall. Budget 2017 for the third year in a row gives a 2 per cent increase to all postsecondary institutions, including St. Mary's. Our government is committed to stable and predictable funding for all of our institutions. As I said, the member can look forward to the results of the funding review that will be completed later this fall.

2:10

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government is looking into long-term funding sustainability of postsecondary education in Alberta, to the same minister: will independent postsecondaries have a voice in the conversation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assure the member that independent academic institutions like St. Mary's have been and will have a voice in these important conversations. St. Mary's in particular has played a significant role in our postsecondary system, and I'm proud of the work that they're doing in many areas such as their indigenous partnerships and initiatives. They've also been a great partner in this funding conversation, and I look forward to continuing to work together to make our system more affordable, accessible, and high quality for all of the students in Alberta.

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

Labour Legislation Review

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Historically Alberta has had a strong economy, with workers travelling from other jurisdictions to take the opportunity of our well-paying jobs. Data from the federal government shows that our province has fewer work stoppages and lost days of work relative to the rest of Canada, but this government claims a need to undertake a review of our Labour Relations Code, risking our labour peace. Will the minister please explain to Albertans what is wrong with our current labour

relations laws that warrants a review while Albertans need jobs and a stable economy? Is this review just to appease organized labour?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Standing up for families means making sure that Albertans have access to fair and family-friendly workplaces. We have workplace legislation in this province that has not been updated in decades. Making sure that Albertans are able to take advantage of things like bereavement leave or being able to take a day off to attend a funeral, items that other Canadians have, is something that I want to talk to Albertans about. This is an important conversation to have because having workplace legislation decades out of date is not reasonable.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has mandated Andrew Sims to assist the Labour ministry in carrying out this review and given that Mr. Sims already carried out an extensive review of our labour laws – his report was published in 2014 – and given that stakeholders asked the government not to implement the recommendations contained within that report, will the minister please explain why they are hiring Mr. Sims, a recent large donor to the NDP, to write another report? What will be different this time, and how is the minister ensuring Mr. Sims will return an independent report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to have Mr. Andrew Sims assisting us. This is a very important labour lawyer in the Alberta labour relations community, that the previous government also relied on for information. In 2014 he reviewed the construction section of the Labour Relations Code, not the entire Labour Relations Code. We have asked him to take a targeted review because it's important that Albertans are able to trust and rely that we have workplace legislation that will work for themselves and their families.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that this government's online survey to solicit feedback from the public is only on the employment standards portion of this labour review and not on labour relations and given that the decisions made about these laws have the potential to disrupt labour peace in this province and given that this review has employers and workers worried about what this review means for their futures, will the minister please tell us the criteria to receive an invitation to engage with Mr. Sims on these important matters, and what is she doing to ensure that the whole review process is fair and transparent?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta businesses deserve laws that help them attract the best and the brightest. Our legislation is out of date and out of practice with other jurisdictions. We need to make sure that Albertans are engaged in this process, and I invite all Albertans to come to the website to fill out the information, the survey, or to provide their thoughts on labour legislation. We will be contacting stakeholders and setting up meetings, and I will be making sure that all of the information submitted to the review is taken into account. It is puzzling to me that the opposition does not want us to engage in a consultation with Albertans. Then again, this is the opposition that would roll back minimum wage.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Fraser: When this NDP government came into power, they inherited a financial position that was the envy of jurisdictions around the world. Over the first few years of their term we've seen this once strong position rapidly decline into nothing short of financial chaos. For example, this government gleefully accepted a \$6.5 billion contingency fund, which they have since drained completely to spend on day-to-day activities of this administration. Minister, why does the budget state that the forecast year-end figure for the contingency fund will be \$2.3 billion, only for it to be drained once again this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Those are monies that will be borrowed for operational purposes and drawn down during the course of the year. You know, the PC balanced budget plan: I just want to take a minute to talk about the \$5.8 billion in cuts that you would propose to happen in one year. Those reckless cuts would make so much happen in Alberta that would hurt families. Your math is wrong. Your ideas are wrong. People don't want \$5 billion in cuts. They want stable services, they want investments across our economy, and they want stability.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that another thing that this government gleefully accepted was a very low level of debt that was accumulated under previous Progressive Conservative governments and given that the NDP government set a goal of not exceeding a debt-to-GDP ratio of 15 per cent and almost immediately broke that goal by borrowing even more, Minister, is your government prepared to put another GDP percentage limit in place, or are you afraid you're going to break that one, too?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I stood up here a few minutes ago and said that we'll continue to have one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios of all provinces in Canada. I also said that the \$5.8 billion in cuts would mean that the whole Advanced Education budget would have to go. Additionally, your cuts would mean that health care would have to be severely taken back. You have \$1.5 billion in cuts. Do you really think that's possible? I don't think so. Other notable cuts would mean that the whole Culture and Tourism ministry would have to go, Economic Development and Trade would have to go. All of these things would have to go.

Mr. Speaker, theirs don't add up. They would make . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Thank you. We are on the second supplemental, I believe.

Mr. Fraser: Given that this government is borrowing a total of \$2.8 billion more to pay for operating costs than they are spending on capital projects and given that borrowing to keep the lights on without funding efficiencies won't help pay for the critical infrastructure Albertans need, Minister, spending more time and money adding zeroes to debt I don't think jibes with Albertans and their priorities. Do you?

Mr. Ceci: What we know in these tough economic times is that Albertans want the security of knowing their government is investing in job creation, their government has stable services and programs like education and health care, and their government cares about doing the things they need on a daily basis for today

and the future. That's what this side of the House is concerned with. That side of the House is just concerned with putting down Albertans, doing things that would further make life difficult for Albertans by cutting billions and billions out of a current budget today. That's not good business sense for this province nor Albertans' future.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Crime Prevention

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are losing their sense of security. Day after day we're hearing new heartbreaking stories about violent crimes, especially in rural communities. Alberta's crime severity index ballooned by 18 per cent since 2015, the most in the country. Today Wildrose launched the Alberta Crime Task Force on behalf of victims and their families. We're saying that enough is enough. The task force will complete a report and provide this government with recommendations to protect Albertans. Will this government implement our recommendations and help us keep Albertans safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's obviously critical to every Albertan and every Alberta family that they live in safe communities. That's one of the main goals of my ministry, and we work very hard at it. We're willing to listen to ideas from absolutely anywhere. I had the opportunity to meet recently with experts on this issue and to meet with the new deputy commissioner of the RCMP. I'm convinced he will work very hard on this issue. I think we're going to continue to follow expert advice on this matter.

2:20

Mrs. Pitt: That's disappointing.

Mr. Speaker, this government recently embraced the opposition's call to add more court resources, and we're very grateful for that. But given that small communities like Amisk are seeing a startling increase in crime, including the local ATB being robbed twice in just one week, and given that the Justice minister failed to attend a meeting in Amisk on this issue of rural crime, why is this government reacting instead of leading and leaving it up to the opposition to fight for those affected by the rise in violent crime?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, pretty much everything in that preamble there was incorrect. To begin with, the Leader of the Official Opposition came out immediately, before we injected these resources, and said specifically, "It's not a resource problem; let's study the issue" and proposed a bill to do just that. We took action. We injected resources because that is the right course of action.

With respect to the folks in Amisk department officials have already reached out to them and met with them. Unfortunately, you know, with 20 minutes' notice, I was unable to make that meeting. But we are happy to meet with them in the future and to work with all communities to ensure that all Albertans feel safe.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this government has failed in protecting victims, and Albertans know that. Given that they've been triaging cases of violent crime, staying more than 200 criminal charges for alleged criminals accused of everything from sexual assault and first degree murder, will this government act like a leader instead of a follower, restore some faith in our justice system, and amend the ridiculous triage policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government has been taking concrete action. When the Jordan decision came down into a system that had been backlogged over decades, we took immediate action. We had two choices. We could either let serious and violent crimes be stayed by the court for being over the time frame, or we could take action to triage those matters to ensure that serious and violent crimes were prioritized and to protect the safety of all Albertans. That's exactly what we did. We injected resources when the opposition said that we should cut. We are taking real action. They have nothing but talk. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order. Thank you.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A code red was called last week in Calgary. Icy conditions caused ambulance calls to double on Thursday morning. According to the president of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, Calgary regularly experiences ambulance shortages. To alleviate these code reds, out-of-town EMS units are often utilized within our larger centres. Can you explain how this code red affects patient care in the surrounding areas, whose ambulances helped support Calgary during this most recent event?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that when you call 911, nothing is more important than knowing that help is on the way and that first responders are going to be there as quickly as possible to support you, and it's important to us. The 5,500 paramedics that we have in the province are responding to about 500,000 calls each and every year. We're committed to making sure that we work to support the front lines, making sure that any reductions to budgets that AHS thinks they can achieve will not impact the front lines. That's why we're working to make sure that life is getting better for Alberta families.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, despite Health's best attempts EMS response times still haven't improved. In fact, this government increased response time thresholds. Ambulances are still stuck at hospitals waiting for patient hand-offs, and we continue to have code reds despite utilizing out-of-town ambulances in our metropolitan cities. How well do you know your file, Minister of Health? How many times were code reds called last year?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A great deal of information is available online. We try to be very open and transparent about challenges that are happening in the system. But I also want to reinforce that while 32 per cent growth has happened since 2011, EMS response times have remained steady. I think that's important for us to know. It is important for us to make them even shorter, though, and that's one of the reasons why we're standing up for stable health care funding and investment, not reckless and extreme cuts like the members opposite are proposing.

Mr. Yao: It's unfortunate that you don't know your file.

Yesterday the Minister of Health stated that reductions to ambulance services would not affect front-line workers, that the cost savings were available due to the fact that we paid off our

ambulances. Given that ambulances and emergency medical equipment require regular maintenance and replacement, is it the minister's plan to leave our EMS services with an infrastructure debt?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know what it's like to inherit an infrastructure deficit because for decades under Conservative governments in this province we saw cut after cut and we saw the increase in delayed infrastructure maintenance happen throughout the province. Absolutely, I'm committed to making sure that we're investing and making sure that we're maintaining and catching up with the backlog that we've seen. I think it's good news that we have ambulances that are paid in full. I wish the members opposite would support Albertans, support us in finding ways to make sure that we can have strong public health care instead of always arguing for us to privatize it.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, developing initiatives and strategies to move individuals through the housing continuum from affordable housing to market rental and attainable home ownership is an integral part of any modern housing strategy. This government has been dragging its feet on delivering an affordable housing strategy. Worse, the minister has sown frustration and nervousness as she continually hints at rent controls and openly sets aside partnering with the private sector. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: when will the affordable housing strategy be released, and will it contain any innovative initiatives to move hard-working Albertans through the housing continuum?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government is dedicated to making sure people have the affordable housing they need in this province. That's why we invested \$1.2 billion in our capital plan. There are over 40 projects under way currently and more to come. Investment in maintenance was long overdue because that government did not invest and units had to be closed, so people do not have the homes they need. Our government, rest assured, is investing right now.

Mr. Gotfried: Interesting given that there are no RFPs out there.

Mr. Speaker, given that I personally championed attainable home ownership, developing one of Alberta's first CMHC-approved programs almost 10 years ago, and given that this program was a tremendous success because it avoided creating ghettos, assisted hard-working families in purchasing their first home, and despite this government's distaste created an effective public-private nonprofit partnership, again to the minister: given that private builders are ready and willing to collaborate with this government to deliver high-quality, affordable, and attainable homes, why do you continue with your stated predisposition for public ownership?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud to work with our housing management bodies all across this province who are dedicated to supporting people in their communities. We have over a hundred housing management bodies who are doing excellent work across the province. Just to speak about the provincial affordable housing strategy, we had extensive consultation. That report will be available in the spring – the

member will be hearing about it soon – and we're very proud of the work we're doing on that.

Mr. Gotfried: Spring has sprung, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the ministry's business plan contains no performance measures tied to delivering cost-effective affordable housing units and given the fact that leveraging money for the greatest benefit is an essential part of building all forms of social housing and given that the business plan contains no reference to the private sector, consistent with the minister's stated preference that social housing be built and operated by government, again to the minister: why are you ignoring evidence and advice from sector leaders by completely excluding the private sector from your business plan?

Ms Sigurdson: In tough economic times everyday Albertans deserve a government that makes life better, and we're supporting people to have homes to live in here. We inherited 15,000 families on wait-lists for affordable housing in this province. We're changing that completely by investing \$1.2 billion in our capital plan, and we're very proud of our work that we're doing with our housing management bodies, who are serving vulnerable Albertans very well.

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

Student Enrolment and School Construction

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Edmonton-South West is filled with young families that are worried about the future of their children because of growing enrolment pressures. Given the increasing demand for enrolment in schools across this province, to the Minister of Education: what is the government doing to ensure that schools are equipped to handle this growth in demand?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we're doing a great deal to deal with growth across the province. Announced through Budget 2017 for a third year in a row our government is funding for enrolment growth, which is around 1.8 per cent. That means 12,000 students have a place to go, have a teacher in front of them, and extra supports in the classroom. In the last three years we have put \$973 million more into that, in operating, than the previous government was going to do before they lost the election.

2:30

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that enrolment pressures mean that we need more schools for our children, to the same minister again: what is the minister doing to ensure that we are building enough schools for every child and enough space?

Mr. Eggen: Well, just yesterday our government announced that we have 26 new school projects across the province. We're providing funding for eight new schools, modernizations and building other schools and replacements as well. These projects will address the many growth areas across the province, revitalizing old schools in rural areas, in suburban areas, and in urban areas, a very, very proud program, Mr. Speaker. We're building these schools because we know that one of the most important investments you can make for the future is to make sure that education is strong in Alberta.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that existing high schools around my constituency are currently at capacity and filling up more and more every day, with the pressure coming from elementary and junior high schools, to the same minister: will the Minister of Education commit to building a new high school for the communities of Edmonton-South West?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I have demands from all over the province in regard to building new schools. We see continued growth, which I think is a strong indication of people making investment in Alberta, raising their families in Alberta and so forth. Under due consideration based on enrolment, based on need, based on geography, we have the deliberations over schools. Twenty-six school projects in these economic times: I think that's something we can be really, really proud of.

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

New School Construction in Rocky View County

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now the Rocky View school division is out of room for students and the school boards desperately need additional schools. The community has a school that is on the government's list but is still unfunded. The NDP government's reason for not moving forward on our school build is that our municipalities do not have serviced school sites ready. We heard that the site plan is ready, and residents expected a school built. To the minister: can you please explain to the Chestermere-Rocky View constituents what constitutes site ready?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we have to make decisions across the province based on site readiness and based on enrolment and so forth. I must say as well that Rocky View in general received two new schools in the announcement that we had yesterday. I recognize the need for said school that the hon. member was mentioning. We are certainly deliberating over those things. Because of our long-term investment in building infrastructure and investing in schools, at least the people in Chestermere-Rocky View will know that they will be satisfied in a very short time.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Given that Chestermere has grown by 34 per cent since 2011 and that 30 per cent of our residents are under the age of 20 and given that you have just said that we have funded for growth and enrolment and given that Chestermere schools take in kids from all surrounding areas and that our rural communities don't have very many alternatives – we can't just bus them to another school – when will Chestermere-Rocky View see our K to 9 school built? And what are the two schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we see these growth pressures in many areas such as Chestermere and Airdrie, in suburban Edmonton and Leduc and so forth, so we are meeting these needs over time. It's difficult because I know that the previous Conservative government had built up a huge backlog of infrastructure, that we are now satisfying and building towards. You can only do that by making investments and planning. You can't do that by cutting budgets. You can't build schools out of the air. We're building them with concrete and bricks and mortar and putting teachers in the schools.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Given that East Lake school can no longer support any more portables and is still overcrowded and given that Rainbow Creek needs four more portables and received one, leaving that school completely overcrowded as well, and since these are just examples from my riding – overcrowded schools and lack of spaces is a systemic problem, Minister – can you please clarify to school boards what the criteria is to have their priorities end up on your funded list? And what are the two schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The schools that will be built in the Rocky View school district area: one is Catholic and one is public. You can get the list, and I would be glad to show you. We announced it yesterday.

News flash: you can't build schools and put teachers in them and then advocate for cuts at the same time. So before you hitch your wagon, I would suggest that you hitch your wagon to some kind of neo-conservative brave new world. I would suggest that maybe you think about teachers and schools properly, categorically, and not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Access to Information

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the few tools the opposition has to hold the government to account is our ability to access information through FOIP requests. Any delay in accessing information under this act can be seen as an affront to democracy. Unfortunately, our office has experienced a number of significant delays, including directly from Executive Council. To the Premier: are your staff interfering in the FOIP process to prevent unflattering information from being released to the public?

Ms Hoffman: No way, Mr. Speaker. We inherited a system that was chronically underfunded. We've inherited an opposition that likes to call for deep cuts. This government is putting our money where our mouth is, including staffing FOIP offices at a level that will enable us to get far closer to achieving the guidelines outlined in the legislation than the Official Opposition would have us do. They call for cuts. They call for increased access. We're putting our money where it belongs, which is in making sure that we have the good services, including FOIP officers, to be able to meet the demand of increased requests.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Information and Privacy Commissioner recently concluded that FOIP requests made to PAB and Executive Council were taking an average of 50 days to process and given that these lengthy delays only serve to keep the opposition parties, the media, and everyday hard-working Albertans in the dark about the inner workings of the government, Premier: seriously, how do you account for these delays? Come on.

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have about a decade of experience in filing FOIP requests, so this is a very fun question to answer. There were times where I had to wait in excess of a year, under the former government, to get my FOIP back. We are very proud of the progress we're making. We're working in

collaboration with the public service and with all applicants, no matter who those applicants are, whether they're members of the public, the media, or other parties within this Legislature. We'll continue to make sure that we staff offices appropriately even when the members opposite are asking every day for us to cut billions of dollars. We're making sure that we put resources to make sure that we have transparency and make life better.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Gill: Let me try again. Given that Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner said that the freedom of information in government departments is, quote, fast approaching a crisis, unquote, and that Commissioner Clayton also said, and I quote, I hate to hear that FOIP is not being taken seriously, unquote, Premier: why is your government interfering with FOIP, and what are you trying to hide from Albertans?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nice try, Member. I have to say that in 2015, when we took office, FOIP requests were taking 12 to 15 months under that former government. Now we've got them down to three to six months at Executive Council. That's significant progress. Is it far enough? No. We want to go further. We want to achieve the timelines outlined in the legislation, and that's why we're continuing to make sure that we're allocating resources properly. But the assertions by the member opposite couldn't be further from reality. We've cut the wait times significantly from when your party was in power.

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

Housing for Persons with Complex Needs

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since my election I've had social workers and front-line staff approach me with concerns about the quality of housing available to individuals with complex needs. They tell me about substandard living conditions, a lack of proper supports. Indeed, some of the sites they've identified have had multiple suites condemned as unfit for human habitation. It seems clear to me that some needs of our society shouldn't be abandoned to the market, as previous governments have done. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: how is our government taking responsibility to ensure individuals with complex challenges can access safe, dignified, supportive places to live?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is protecting and improving things that make a difference. We believe that everyone deserves to live with dignity and have opportunities to thrive. We provided \$13 million in Budget '15-16 for housing projects that support individuals with complex needs, and this includes projects across this province. We will continue to ensure that the supports Albertans need are in place, and we won't make reckless cuts that will make life harder for Albertans.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that wraparound support services are essential to housing individuals who are chronically homeless due to physical or other mental health issues, developmental disabilities, substance use, or

combinations of all and given that these individuals are going without essential services like bathing because the only place they can afford to live is deemed unsafe for workers, what steps is the minister taking to increase support for wraparound services and new affordable housing projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is ensuring that individuals with complex needs facing homelessness have a safe place to call home. That is why in this year's budget we will be increasing funding for homeless and outreach support by \$6 million, for a total of \$187 million. This means we are strengthening the wraparound supports offered through the housing first program throughout this province. We know that housing first reduces the use of the corrections and health systems. Just compare the \$100,000 cost per person in the use of these systems versus \$40,000 through housing first initiatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that support services are only part of the equation and that there must also be investment in both maintenance to keep existing housing dignified and inhabitable as well as in constructing new housing for those in need, to the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what concrete investments is the government making to ensure my constituents can get the supports they need in safety and dignity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The previous government did not prioritize affordable housing, and that's why so many units are in disrepair. We are proud to be investing \$57 million in making sure that this affordable housing maintenance is taken care of. For Edmonton-Centre, the riding will receive approximately \$602,000 for repairs at facilities like Renfrew apartments and Kiwanis Place Lodge. While we're making life better for Albertans, the opposition would make life harder by cutting from these programs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll deal with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Energy Policies

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I will not be told by members on the NDP government side that I do not support our energy industry, members too cowardly to admit to Albertans that their toxic carbon tax forces the juniors to subsidize their competition.

Let me tell you what not supporting Alberta's energy industry looks like. This NDP government has come in and fostered division in a once united industry. This NDP government's managed decline of our key industry by capping the oil sands will leave Alberta's youth unemployed. This NDP government plays favorites and enacts harmful consequences for any company that dares not beat their drum while chanting favorably about the NDP's destructive, anti-Albertan world view. This NDP government attends international gala conferences on the dime of hard-working Albertans, only to sell out and apologize to the people that besmirch and demonize our industry.

This NDP government cowers in shame and apologizes to a federal government that wants to vilify our energy producers for meeting the needs of people seeking a better quality of life, a federal government too blinded by its misguided focus to recognize the immense number of their beloved social programs that would cease to exist without Alberta footing the bill for Quebec and Ontario through obscene equalization payments.

Alberta's energy industry is the most innovative, environmentally responsible, and socially generous in the entire world. This didn't happen because of social engineering, Mr. Speaker. It happened because of Albertans working in every level of industry, fighting tirelessly to protect and build up our province's legacy. These hard-working Albertans do not deserve a government that implements reckless policy after reckless policy, driving away investors. Those Albertans deserve a government that will enact policies that give all energy companies a level playing field.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Monday, March 20, 2017, in record time. As chair of the committee I can advise the Assembly that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204 Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

I'd like to begin by thanking Parliamentary Counsel once again. Without their assistance, this bill would not have been possible, so thank you very much.

This bill is a culmination of many years of advocacy, dating back to 2009, when the Alberta Land Stewardship Act was introduced. That legislation limited property rights without notice or adequate compensation. Bill 204 proposes to correct this through amending the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the Responsible Energy Development Act to ensure Albertans will again have the right to a fair hearing if their rights are affected and have recourse to the courts when their lands or interests are affected by a regional plan.

Another vital issue, though, that this bill now addresses is the loophole in the Land Titles Act that allows an individual to obtain title and ownership of land through something called adverse possession. Bill 204 will repeal section 74 of the Land Titles Act, finally ending adverse possession in Alberta. This change has been a very long time in coming. I'm proud to be introducing this bill, that addresses these long-standing grievances.

In closing, I look forward to discussing this bill with my colleagues on all sides of the House and ultimately winning their support for this important piece of legislation. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table two documents. The first is the requisite number of copies of a petition presented to me by constituents concerned about upcoming legal changes that may impact age-restricted condominiums.

The second is the requisite number of copies of the letters from the doctors at the Alberta Hospital Edmonton about the closing down of 20 alternative-level care beds.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings if I may. The first is a tabling with the appropriate number of copies from the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate annual report 2014-15, that I cited in question period on Monday and today, in which that advocate stated that lack of funding "had a direct impact on the number of Albertans . . . served and the comprehensiveness of our investigations" and that "the inability to conduct formal investigations were largely due to lack of resources." Thank you.

Another tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of the executive summary of the farm worker insurance study by Alberta agriculture and rural development, which shows (a) income loss from injury and death in Alberta farm workers, (b) a comparison of costs between commercial insurance and WCB coverage, and (c) a summary of uninsured farm worker economics. Overall the report recommended under the former PC government WCB coverage for farm workers.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter I wrote to the Government House Leader. In that letter to the Government House Leader I quote a statement from the Minister of Education decrying the Public Affairs Bureau as political.

2:50

The Speaker: I believe, hon. members, we're at points of order. I received a note. I understand that the Opposition House Leader withdraws the point of order.

In addition, there was a point of privilege raised yesterday, and there was a request by the government to speak to the matter. I'd recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Matters of privilege are, obviously, very serious, and we feel that they ought not be raised lightly. Unfortunately, I think that that is exactly what is happening here. The opposition are trying to revive a debate on a matter that has been dealt with by this House. This is clearly not a matter of privilege. Let's be clear about what it is. It's the latest tactic being used by the opposition to try to justify the unjustifiable, that being that the Member for Calgary-Hays has been found to be in violation of the Conflicts of Interest Act. For the first time ever the Ethics Commissioner has recommended a penalty be levied under the act, yet they want him to be off the hook or to delay the matter significantly.

In making my argument, I'll be referring to a number of citations that also came up last week when the members tried their first line of delay in arguing that the matter should be considered sub judice.

To summarize, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite refer to the Member for Calgary-Hays' privilege, but they ignore the fundamental privilege of the Assembly in setting and enforcing rules governing the conduct of its members. May's *Parliamentary Practice* on page 75 defines parliamentary privilege as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and by Members of each House individually." *Beauchesne's* is very clear that "the most fundamental privilege of the House as a whole is to establish rules of procedure for itself and to enforce them." It's very clear that the House as a collective body has collective privileges as well as the power to enforce those rules.

In some cases these powers could lead to far more significant discipline than what is being contemplated here. In *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* Maingot asserts that

the privilege of control over its own affairs and proceedings is one of the most significant attributes of an independent legislative institution,

further stating:

The right to regulate its own internal affairs and procedures free from interference includes:

1. The right to enforce discipline on Members of the House of Commons by suspension, commitment, and expulsion.

This is at page 183.

Maingot further expands on the collective rights of the House as follows.

The corporate or collective privileges of the Senate and of the House of Commons are the power to punish for contempt . . . the right to regulate its own constitution; the right to regulate its own internal affairs free from interference, which includes the right to discipline its own Members; the right to institute inquiries and call for witnesses . . . and the right to settle its own code of procedure.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the Assembly has the power to set and to enforce rules, and that is exactly what has happened here.

The Assembly in its wisdom passed legislation, namely the Conflicts of Interest Act, to govern specifically conflicts of interest. The act provides statutory authority for an independent officer of the Assembly, the Ethics Commissioner, to investigate matters, make rulings, and recommend penalties to the Assembly. The Ethics Commissioner investigated an allegation against the Member for Calgary-Hays, found the member in breach, and recommended a sanction.

What the member is suggesting is that the one and only time that such a power has ever been used, we should ignore them. Mr. Speaker, this doesn't just go to the fundamental privilege of the House but to the public's faith in us and our ability to be held accountable through the rules that we pass ourselves. The Assembly has now passed a motion to concur in the recommendation as it is a fundamental right and privilege of this Assembly.

With regard to the general principle of freedom of speech the members ought to know that freedom of speech is not unlimited, particularly for those of us who have duties flowing from the powers vested in us as members.

In *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, page 14, it is noted that the rights of members are subject to the procedures of the House.

While it will be seen that the Member enjoys all the immunity necessary to perform his parliamentary work, this privilege or right, such as freedom of speech, is nevertheless subject to the practices and procedures of the House.

Maingot further discusses freedom of speech on page 180 and states:

Since Article 9 of the Bill of Rights, 1689 prohibits the questioning of the proceedings of Parliament in any place outside Parliament, those participating in its proceedings, principally the

Members but also witnesses, petitioners and others, are protected against any outside interference for what they say or do within. These persons are also subject to the disciplinary powers of the House for their conduct during the proceedings.

We all know that the right to free speech in the Assembly is not unlimited. Chapter 18 of *Erskine May* notes a number of limits that the House may impose on the contents of speeches. To name the most obvious examples, we all know that members are not supposed to use unparliamentary language, nor are members allowed to knowingly mislead the House. Further, there are provisions within the standing orders such as Standing Order 21 on time allocation, which on occasion can be used to limit debate.

With regard to potential conflicts of interest *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, by O'Brien and Bosc, explicitly discusses the practice whereby members ought not to participate in matters where there may be a private interest. They state on page 128:

Members are required to disclose a private interest in a matter before the House or a committee and to refrain from participating in debate or voting on the question . . . If the Commissioner concludes that the Member has deliberately contravened the conflict of interest guidelines set down in the Code, the Commissioner may recommend appropriate sanctions. The Member is then subject to the disciplinary powers of the House, if the House chooses to take action.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who watches debate regularly in the House will have seen time to time members recusing themselves from participation in particular debate, often on recommendation of the Ethics Commissioner. In fact, in the caucus of the member who raised this matter, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster recused himself from debating a bill that would have had a pecuniary interest for his spouse. That took place on December 5, 2016, and can be found on page 2295 of *Hansard*.

On this point it is worth remembering that the initial reaction from the Member for Calgary-Hays when the Ethics Commissioner ruled that he had been in violation was to accept the ruling. He immediately issued a statement which included the following:

I fully accept responsibility for my actions and going forward, I will continue to not participate in any question period activity, debate or vote in relation to Alberta's electric utility industry until such a time that the Ethics Commissioner gives me permission to do so.

While he may have received some advice in the interim about delaying this matter, clearly he didn't believe at the time that this was a fundamental betrayal of his rights and privileges as a member.

Lastly, I will point out that Standing Order 15, which governs matters of privilege, requires that these be brought forward at the earliest opportunity. I don't believe that has been the case here since the matter was subject to significant debate prior to the adoption of Motion 16 yesterday.

I would note that the members opposite made the exact same points in speaking to the motion as they are now raising in the matter of privilege. The House heard the arguments and passed the motion nonetheless.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition? House leaders?

Thank you, hon. members. As I said yesterday, this kind of matter is probably one of the most intense and sensitive issues that we may be discussing. I will be deliberating, reviewing the decisions that I've made as well as others in this House as well as other sources, and that will be brought forward after I've had an opportunity to do that.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 21: Mr. Nixon]

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. “The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.” Margaret Thatcher spoke those words in her crusade to undo the malaise and decline that took root in Britain after the Second World War. What she said can be broken down into two parts. Eventually you run out of other people’s money: the implication here is that for some time you can run on other people’s money. An economy that is already prosperous can be plundered through taxes and other forms of wealth redistribution to support a socialist program for a time. As a century of social experiments, most recently Venezuela, have demonstrated, this ends in tears.

You can also run on other people’s money for a time generationally; that is, this generation can borrow from the next generation. But when it comes to finances, the sins of the father are the sins of the son. The father who borrows money in his son’s name can enjoy short-lived prosperity for a time, but eventually he runs out of his son’s money. And the funny thing about when socialists run out of other people’s money is that they are never the ones who have to pay it back.

NDP governments in Ontario and in Manitoba and in British Columbia have run out of other people’s money, and it is always someone else who has to clean up their mess. Cleaning up this mess, the mess from virtually any NDP government in this country, is almost always painful. Right now the NDP are sowing the seeds of a debt crisis in this province that, if not wrestled under control, will see our debt levels not only become an unfair burden on future generations but have very real impact on the quality of life of Albertans very soon.

During the election the NDP placed solemn hand over heavy heart and swore to Albertans that they could be trusted with the provincial credit card. They promised Albertans that they would balance the budget by 2018, but as we know, math is hard. Whoever wrote the NDP platform had a minor billion-dollar rounding error. We were told: “But, no worry; we’ll get ’er done by 2019. It’s just a billion dollars. It’s still good.” Just months after the NDP were elected, they dropped the 2019 date and punted it to 2020 and then 2021 and then 2022 and then 2023 and then 2024.

In the 2016 budget the NDP dropped any balanced budget date altogether. They paid lip service to a theoretical concept of a balanced budget but told us to just trust them. But in this budget, 2017-18, they have abdicated all pretenses whatsoever to modest, even theoretical fiscal responsibility. They denounce now even the concept of a balanced budget as some sort of right-wing, maniacal plot to abolish government whatsoever and return mankind to a state of nature. If Thomas Hobbes was alive today, he would surely describe the NDP’s term in government as nasty, brutish, and short. But while short this government may be, our deficits will not be.

We have run deficits in Alberta since 2007, even at times when oil exceeded \$100 a barrel. No matter how high our revenues have been, our expenditures have outpaced them for a decade. And instead of moving towards a balanced budget, as the NDP promised Albertans they would, they have taken Alberta into the largest

deficit in our history, a record nominal deficit of \$10 billion last year, matched only once in our history, this year. We have gone from paid in full and money in the bank only a decade ago to a crushing debt of at least \$71 billion by the next election, and that is under the best-case scenario.

To date this government has been unreliable at best in its revenue projections. In order to contain the debt at \$71 billion – and I say: contain – by 2019, oil prices must reach at least \$68 a barrel, pipelines must not only be under construction but must be actively pumping oil to market, and GDP growth must exceed 6 per cent. All members of this House agree that each of these variables is desirable, and we hope for them, but hope is not a plan. In fact, “hope” is probably being too charitable, Mr. Speaker. “Pray” is probably a more apt term. If our prayers for this trifecta of economic growth are not answered or if the NDP exceed projected spending in any of these upcoming years, then our debt will exceed \$71 billion.

We have no good reason whatsoever to believe the NDP when they say that they can stick to a budget. This is the third NDP budget, and every single year to date they have exceeded by billions of dollars their budgeted spending limits. In fact, the Minister of Finance admitted in this House just a few weeks ago that he broke his own law, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. He broke the law when he illegally and hypocritically spent \$1.1 billion not authorized by this Legislature. That \$1.1 billion was spent on one of the most wasteful and useless expenditures in the history of this province, the phase-out of clean-coal energy and the wiping out of several old and proud Alberta communities.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

By the time the NDP came to power, our financial accountability and responsibility legislation had already been badly watered down and damaged, but the NDP did away with them altogether and repealed outright the fiscal accountability act. In its place they introduced the aforementioned Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, an act which they are now in direct contravention of. The act originally contained a pledge from this government to never exceed a ratio of 15 per cent of debt to GDP. That 15 per cent limit was far higher than reasonable for Alberta to begin with, but the NDP pledged that this was something they would never exceed.

During estimates that year I personally questioned the Minister of Finance about this, and he solemnly pledged that he would never exceed it. When I pointed this out, that his revenue projections were too rosy and that I believed he would exceed his 15 per cent of debt to GDP, he said that I was wrong and just fearmongering. But just six months later they meekly crawled back into this Legislature to repeal their own 15 per cent debt-to-GDP debt ceiling. This government simply cannot be trusted to stick to their commitments. They simply cannot be trusted to stick to a budget.

We also warned that the reckless fiscal policy of this government would seriously jeopardize Alberta’s credit rating. Whenever we did that, however, the NDP accused us of being Chicken Little. But while the sky is not falling, our credit rating is. Just one day after the NDP repealed their already flaccid 15 per cent debt ceiling, our credit rating was downgraded. The minister did nothing, at least of substance. He did travel to Toronto to meet with credit-rating agencies and tell them that we’re still good for the money, and after meeting with him the credit-rating agencies responded by downgrading our debt even further. Such confidence the minister inspired in our lenders.

Now, less than 24 hours after the release of this budget, both Moody’s and DBRS are warning that they may yet again reduce our credit rating. When our credit rating goes down, it becomes even

more expensive to borrow money. A poor credit rating burns taxpayers' dollars uselessly. A better credit rating saves taxpayers' money and allows more dollars to actually accomplish something.

The minister needs to make our credit rating go up, but all signs of this budget point to more debt, more credit downgrades, and more taxpayers' money wasted on useless interest payments. They are reckless with taxpayers' money, they are careless with spending, they are limitless in their appetite to tax, and they are immorally jeopardizing our future by forcing our children to pay for the present.

3:10

The Finance minister is like a teenager who's just been given a brand new car and credit card by his rich mom and dad. He's quickly maxing out the credit card because he knows that someone else is going to pay for it. When families or businesses take on too much debt, there are real consequences. They themselves are responsible when the repo man comes or when creditors require significant changes to our lifestyles. They themselves must live with the consequences of financial irresponsibility. But not so politicians. When they spend other people's money irresponsibly, someone else has to live with the consequences. Taxpayers suffer as they see their tax bill go up. People who rely upon social services suffer as program spending is crowded out to pay for the increased cost of debt servicing, which in Alberta is about to reach \$2.3 billion a year, the equivalent of the departments of Energy, Justice, and Environment and Parks combined.

Everyone suffers but the politician himself, who got slapped on the back for being so generous with other people's money. The very worst that could befall that politician is that people wise up to what he's doing and vote him out of office. The very worst that could befall that politician is that after spending everyone else's money, he has to get a job outside of government when the fiscal house of cards comes crashing down, and he leaves a mess for someone else to clean up, who will have to make the tough decisions.

The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money. We are about to run out of other people's money, people of today and people of tomorrow. Those people are demanding change now. We plead with this Finance minister and this government to take this seriously and stop the madness before the wheels fall off. But if you do not, know that this will not end with the next election but with Alberta's next government taking apart piece by piece by piece the legacy of this budget and this government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the 2017-18 budget. I think a lot of what we are expressing in this House is degrees of comfort with debt and degrees of comfort with borrowing and degrees of comfort with protecting public services and infrastructure. What we have seen in the past at least 20 years, since I started paying attention, is a PC government that has not kept up with either infrastructure or human services needs. In fact, it has allowed those things to slip on the basis of balancing a bottom line that doesn't recognize environmental deficits, human deficits in access to services, care, housing and health care, and doesn't recognize that liabilities related to infrastructure don't go away if you don't spend the money.

During good times and bad we faced the same challenge in the previous 20 years at least, where we were not keeping up with some

of those key elements of a civil society. We're now facing a true challenge for all of us, and I think a lot of what we're debating here is how quickly we should be moving on some of these deficits and how much we should be borrowing and indeed how we should be paying for it. The latter I'll leave to the end, but I think that's a crucial one that we still haven't come to grips with in a lot of respects.

If we have a difference of opinion on this side in the Liberal caucus, it's primarily around the pacing of change in this province and the lack of connection to what's happening on the ground and a recognition that small business is continuing to suffer. There's a recognition also that some of these new, dramatic changes, all of which I think had to be brought into place, including the carbon levy – how we can balance those things out in a thoughtful way and try to reduce the impact on everything from small business to nonprofit organizations and various services and generally low-income earners that are going to be adversely impacted by the knock-on effect of all the changes at once that are increasing the cost of living? Obviously, we can't wait for oil prices, and this is the perfect time for borrowing for infrastructure. This is a stimulus for our economy, and it's going to keep people employed. The question is how much and how we're going to pay it off.

Clearly, if we're looking at trying to both minimize our impact on future generations and budget appropriately, health care has to be a primary focus for our attention. It is by far the biggest expenditure of government, and it has grown by up to 8 per cent per year for the last decade, again leaving us in a position where the expectations are there, public expectations and professional expectations, that it's going to continue and that they're always going to have exactly what they need. The Minister of Health is in a very difficult position trying to balance the needs of people and the professional demands and the infrastructure demands, the technology demands, the growth of all these new technologies.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But she has to make tough decisions, and I think some of the positive decisions that she's made are around the amending agreement with physicians, some of the drug cost issues that we've managed over the last few years to bring under some control. But there are a number of areas – and I'm a constant thorn in her side about prevention and early intervention and health promotion – which continue to get less and less relative to the population and cost-of-living increases.

We are gradually getting into the position where we are faced with a sickness care system. This is not a health care system anymore; it's a sickness care system. We spend virtually all of our money on managing people after they get sick and break down when there are tremendous studies showing evidence of reducing the incidence of mental illness, addictions, injuries, reducing the incidence of lifestyle diseases, heart disease, and cancer by working with families, especially high-risk families, those that often consume most of the health care system. In fact, as some of you may know, it's about 5 per cent of the population that consumes 50 per cent of our health resources because of their chronic, long-term, complicated illnesses. Many of those are seniors, but many of them simply are born with poor-functioning bodies and they need a lot of medical care in and out of hospital. If we focused more attention on some of those folks and managed them better, we would also reduce substantially some of the costs that we're dealing with.

It's disappointing not to see more significant changes in the health care system where we could substantially reduce, not tomorrow but in the years to come, the impacts on emergency departments, on EMS services, certainly on hospitalizations.

Alternate level of care beds is one that we've often talked about, spending somewhat over \$75 million a year on people that shouldn't be in hospital at all and that could be saved by getting them into long-term care. To their credit, they're building some new long-term care beds, but we're way behind the curve on that and wasting a tremendous amount of money and increasing the suffering of people because they're not where they want to be and they're not in the best place, in a hospital where they can get other infections and are often neglected at the preference of other people who are sicker.

The lack of an integrated plan for mental health. I've harangued the government on this for some time, and it's been brought to maybe a peak with the opiate crisis. We see so many different organizations doing their own thing without an integration across them all to serve people with the social services they need, the housing, understanding and communications between police and health services and social services and even the education departments and First Nations, that need to have much more thoughtful and open communication. These people come in and out and in and out and in and out, and we know what they need, but we're simply not providing them with the integrated, co-ordinated care that they need.

3:20

I've raised this week the office of the mental health advocate, who is there to deal with people who feel that they've been harmed by the health system, harmed by the mental health treatment they've received, and need an advocate for them, just as the children's advocate speaks out on issues of children in care who have not been adequately treated. With a staff of 40 he is addressing the serious issues of children in care and trying to address some of the deficits in their care. Well, the mental health advocate has two staff and has had the same number of staff since 1990.

How is it possible that we have left this advocate to wither and those patients who have just given up on the mental health system because they've never been able to get accountability from either doctors who have not properly managed them or institutions that have not recognized their rights or other services within the mental health system that have violated them in one way or another? With only a single formal review last year and no formal review of a mental health complaint in 2015, you have to know that there's a serious problem there. That is not about budget saving. That's about violating basic rights of human beings.

While I'm talking about kind of the relationship between and a more integrated approach, some of you may know about the drug courts. Drug courts keep people with mental illness, addictions out of jail.

An Hon. Member: Right place.

Dr. Swann: Yeah. Right place, right time, right people.

Calgary can manage 25 people in the drug courts. There are hundreds of people that would benefit from being diverted from jail into the community for appropriate services, rehabilitation, treatment and get them on track to lead a productive life. Instead, they're being sent to jail, which is the very worst place for people with mental illness and addiction. So the drug court needs to be substantially strengthened with finances, and that would reduce the cost on the policing system, EMS, emergency. Again, a tremendous cost savings if we can move on with that.

We have taken a position on this side that the ideal in terms of plasma for this country would be to have our own sustainable supply of blood. So far in the 50-odd years – maybe it's longer – that we've had a blood service here, we have not been able to get to

the point where we can manage more than 20 per cent of our own supply of plasma, so we're having to import it, recognizing that much of the imported blood has been from paid donors. My position is that the ideal would be to have all voluntary donors, all Canadian-made plasma and plasma products. It doesn't look like that's possible in the near term, maybe not at all, when you think about the fact that only 5 to 7 per cent of Canadians donate blood, and we need four times that much to sustain blood plus plasma products.

I've come to the position and our caucus has come to the position that, while it would be ideal, we have to start to recognize the health care system itself, the public funding for health cannot cover every possible service and product and support. In this case I'm willing to say, especially since we're importing paid plasma to the tune of 80 per cent today, that it's time for us to recognize that we will not get that in my lifetime. We need to start moving towards alternatives, ensuring that we have the best testing, the best, safest system possible and make sure that the people that we're working with have been properly screened before they're providing their donation.

The vaccination programs are still much below what they should be. We've heard from a number of the public health divisions that they're struggling with children getting only up to 60 or 70 per cent of their childhood vaccinations. We need to make those easier to get and more accessible for people. That also would reduce costs on the health care system, obviously.

I very much support the lowering of school fees and the recognition that in some cases families are not able to feed their kids appropriately because they are spending money on school fees. That's not an effective and appropriate issue. We can again find both savings and improved outcomes, but it's not clear to me whether we're borrowing for these savings. I think the challenge for us in this lowering of school fees is to recognize that there are all kinds of things that we should do, that we could do, and that we must do at some time, but piling this on top of so much other borrowing would not be, in my view, sustainable until we see a plan to repay.

I think that's part of what all of us are asking for on this side. Everything is possible with a credit card. The question is: how much are we going to start paying for ourselves? How much are we going to pass on to future generations? Will we have a heritage fund in the future? We're already down to what has been there for the last 30 years, about \$15 billion to \$16 billion. Thirty years. This is really a sad state to be in. Recognizing that oil prices have been low in the last few years, when are we going to get back to saving some of our nonrenewable resource revenue?

We do support the carbon levy, but we're not supportive of the way it's being implemented. It hasn't been clear how it's going to be disbursed. It hasn't been clear on what the limits are. There have been all kinds of promises for this carbon levy that would appear to exceed by far the \$3 billion that we're expecting to bring in. Again, it's going to stimulate different lifestyles. I think consumers and producers need to pay for our carbon emissions. There's no question that all of us are responsible for the carbon and the climate change problem. The question, I guess, is how we manage it. Preferably, in our view, the carbon levy should be revenue neutral for Albertans so they can continue to stimulate the economy with their own revenue.

Now, to be fair, the government is giving rebates to 66 per cent of Albertans. In some cases it's a little bit hard to know where that's going, especially given that it's all based on last year's tax, and people may not be here following last year. But with all due respect, it's a reasonable – in fact, I think it's too generous.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any members with questions or comments?

Seeing none, any others wishing to speak?

Ms Renaud: Madam Speaker, I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Finance to move third reading of Bill 4, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, this afternoon I rise to speak in opposition to Bill 4, the supplementary supply. My colleagues and I have been talking about this government and how it has a huge spending problem, and it has for almost a couple of years now. At every opportunity in this House they have repeatedly made ideological financial decisions for the entire province that really don't make much sense. No one would be allowed to spend the way the government does with their personal budget, and if they could, it wouldn't seem rational.

3:30

We've all heard the stories of what happens to people and their belongings when they don't care and run a bit too far into a deficit, maxing out credit cards, buying homes, big-ticket items that don't fit their budget. Eventually the interest and larger payments will make it tough in lean times ahead. All of a sudden the situation becomes dire, and the purchaser has to make a decision between paying the high payments and putting food on the table. This is when many have filed for bankruptcy, lost their homes, or, worse yet, lost their marriages. Any child dependent on their parents' income, unfortunately, will suffer the consequences of the parents' financial decisions.

We've all heard about situations like this, Madam Speaker, and they are heartbreaking. Unfortunately, we may have even questioned someone who has spent large amounts of money, income that he didn't have, and tried to warn others of the dangers. We've told them because we may have worried about the repercussions that that would have on their marriage and family. Sometimes there is little one can do when they see a loved one going down this path. We may warn them, of course, about the decision, but it's in their hands. They have that ultimate decision.

I believe that my colleagues and I have been warning this government for quite some time. I know we have been warning them about the spending problem that it has. We've offered many solutions. We've recently offered a proposal that lays out a sustainable three-part plan, the 2017 Pre-budget Recommendations, that would restore this province's fiscal health by paying down the deficit and paying off the debt and providing services that Albertans deserve.

They laughed. They scoffed and jeered at us, made false accusations regarding how we would cut and slash and how it would impact front-line workers. They have told Albertans that if we were making the decisions, we would have to cut jobs and lay

off workers. Instead of looking at the problem together constructively, they somehow made the problem, that they are orchestrating, ours. I don't know how they've done it, but that's what they've done. Unfortunately, this problem will be here to stay for Albertans, and Albertans are going to say that they want us to clean up that mess because I don't think this government has any desire to clean up that mess.

We've heard them say that they would have a balanced budget by 2019. Now it's looking like '23 or '24. Madam Speaker, this government is recklessly unleashing on us a financial burden that the entire province and future generations will have to deal with for many years to come. You know, that's our children and our grandchildren that will be suffering the consequences of this debt.

Does that mean they hear our plea and caution? No, they haven't heard us. Instead of dealing with the economic crisis the rest of the province is now shouldering, they have decided to come to this House with their hands out for more. Bill 10 from last year, the Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016, was another one of those bills where they came with their hands out asking for more. In fact, the government has taken off the cap for how much can be borrowed. So there is no restraint. We're looking at \$71 billion, but will it stop there? It doesn't have to.

I believe they've heard us. I think that some of them over there may even question this supplementary supply. They're thinking about it, and they silently think to themselves, but for the sake of the ideology they continue on headstrong, without a second thought, showing little or no respect for the many Albertans that have to pick up the tab.

Madam Speaker, this government's deficit has grown to \$10.3 billion this year alone. The current fiscal year, that ends on March 31, will leave the province with a \$10.8 billion deficit, and by the time they're done their term, they will have accumulated, again, like I said, over \$70 billion in debt for Albertans to have to pay back. For this reason, I will not and I cannot support their ask for additional funds for supplementary supply.

The debt-loaded 2016-17 budget is sending the province into a series of deficits that will lead to the eventual downgrade of Alberta's credit rating. This is a situation that occurs when bond-rating agencies feel that future prospects for security have been weakened, and companies like Moody's have said that they are concerned. To support the government in this way would be extremely irresponsible, and I ask others who care about the future of this province to do the same and to oppose this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising today to speak to supplementary supply. This is not the first time this government has brought forward a supplementary supply bill unnecessarily. Many governments have done it in the past. Not all supplementary supply is wrong-headed, but it is a concept regularly abused in our legislative system.

Supplementary supply is used far too often as a means for governments to spend beyond what was budgeted at the beginning of the year. We desperately need this government to be able to live within the sums in budgets at the beginning of the year. The sums of money that it is budgeting at the beginning of the year are still recklessly high, but by the end of the year this government consistently comes in spending more, and then they come to this House and they ask forgiveness. They ask permission. It's essentially: act first and ask forgiveness later rather than asking for the authorization of this House, this Legislature, up front.

You know, if this was the first time this government came forward with a supplementary supply and it was for genuine emergencies and unforeseen expenses, perhaps we could have an easier time stomaching it. There are some commendable items in this bill, but it contains far too many extraordinary expenses for it to pass muster with the Official Opposition.

I'll start with some of the pros. There are not many pros I would normally say about this government, but there are a few positive measures in this supplementary supply for things that the Wildrose Official Opposition consider to be a priority. There are funds to support smaller class sizes. That's something that's positive. That's something that we needed to move forward on. There is funding for those affected by the 2013 floods in southern Alberta. There is long-term care and affordable supportive living funding for seniors and increased resources for the justice system.

This is something that the Member for Airdrie has spent a lot of time focusing on, that we have enough Crown prosecutors to actually meet the caseloads that come before our courts. The fact that people can commit serious crimes in this province and not even come to trial is an absolute disgrace. The Member for Airdrie, the Official Opposition shadow minister of Justice, has passionately worked on this file as has the Member for Calgary-West, the third party's Justice critic. They have passionately advocated for having enough resources for our Crown prosecutors to ensure that when people commit crimes in this province, they can actually have a court date. So that's positive.

3:40

This is very interesting. They managed to find money to reduce school fees by 25 per cent despite the government running on a commitment to abolish school fees. They ran in their campaign to abolish school fees, not cut them by 25 per cent. Now, this is a positive step in the right direction, but we have not heard from this government if they intend to go the whole way towards a hundred per cent, with 25 per cent as a step on the road to achieving that, or if the 25 per cent is just where they intend to go and maybe a hundred per cent if they find some loose change under the cushions. But loose change under the cushions they did find, and this is very interesting.

The government says that any efficiencies, any savings whatsoever found in government would be cataclysmic, that it would return us to a state of nature where mankind would live, where life would be "nasty, brutish, and short," to quote Thomas Hobbes. Finding efficiencies within government will result in some sort of libertarian dystopia if the opposition does it, but if the government manages to find any savings, well, that's just good management. You see, that is the hypocrisy of this government, Madam Speaker. That is the hypocrisy of a government that says that you can't do something when one party does it, but if another party does it, well, that's just fine. It's hypocritical in the extreme for a government to act that way.

Now, we do commend them for finding some savings. They say that they're paying for the reduction in school fees through finding efficiencies within the Department of Education. That's fantastic news. Now the government has admitted that you can find efficiencies within a department, that you can actually deliver the same services for less money, that that is at least theoretically possible. The government has now admitted that openly. I look forward to the government standing up after this. Maybe we can engage in some back-and-forth debate. I would encourage them to stand up and tell us in what other areas they think they can find savings within the government to save taxpayers' money, to deliver quality public services but at a cheaper price point. Because we know they can.

We are spending 20 per cent more per capita on the cost of government in this province than British Columbia is. That's British Columbia with a Liberal government. [interjection] By the standards of Liberals I'd say they're pretty good, though. But British Columbia with a Liberal government, Madam Speaker, who manages to provide a very high-quality level of public services but manages to do it at 20 cents less per dollar of government than Alberta. They have similar demographics to us. They have a similar standard of living. They have a similar size of population. Among our ability to compare ourselves to other jurisdictions in the country, they're probably the closest that we can compare to, yet they manage to provide government 20 cents on the dollar cheaper than Alberta does. So we know we can find savings and efficiencies within government. When the NDP say that they do it, they can do it. But when we say that we can do it, it's going to be just abolishing government, and we're going to be living in some sort of Ayn Rand nightmare.

Now, the Official Opposition has provided a detailed document on how we can get back to balance, how we can balance our budget, how we can save some money. I'm going to run members of this House through a few of those recommendations, that I hope they'll take heed of. We have proposed finding in year 1 of our fiscal plan \$2.3 billion in operational savings alone. We believe that the government should – well, I'll run through some of that \$2.3 billion, some food for thought for members of the government side. We can reduce the bureaucracy through attrition and save \$312 million every single year. Seven to 10 per cent of Alberta's bureaucrats resign or retire every single year, and we currently have an unreasonably high managers-to-workers ratio. The Official Opposition believes that there is room for government departments and AHS to do more with less. Responsibility and authority if decentralized and reallocated to the front lines and if we only hire positions for the most essential front-line jobs: we can save \$312 million every single year.

Now, when we define bureaucrats here, we are speaking about strictly the GOA, government of Alberta, employees, with exceptions for some front-line employees, those being corrections workers, Crown prosecutors. We are excluding those categories of employees when we talk about this. We're talking mostly about bona fide bureaucrats working in office towers and bureaucrats within Alberta Health Services. Within Alberta Health Services we're not talking about doctors or nurses. We're talking about people who move paper around. Many of those people are necessary. You need to have bureaucrats, but we don't need to have the number of bureaucrats that we do. By reducing the number, freeing it through attrition while allowing for essential hiring for certain positions, we can save \$312 million.

If we freeze all other wages and salaries for government employees across the government, we can also save \$210 million a year. Average weekly earnings for Albertans right now are down significantly, with unemployment rates the highest in the country. Alberta still has one of the most expensive and highly paid governments in the country, however. While the private sector suffers, the public sector has not seen any changes whatsoever. We will make it clear across the government that not one penny will go to increases for salaries until we get back to a balanced budget.

When we're going through tough times as a province, we need to do it together. All Albertans, every single one of us, needs to shoulder the burden, and it is unreasonable to expect that the private sector has to carry a hundred per cent of the burden by itself, without any help from government. Instead, right now we shelter government. We act as if we are still in boom times. We act as if oil was still \$100 a barrel. We act as if we had a balanced budget. They're living in a fantasyland where the private sector carries the

entire burden by itself. So freezing wages across the government will save us another \$210 million.

Now, perhaps one of the stupidest things done by this government was to nationalize linen services. I can't think of a more boneheaded decision that this government could take than to say that it is unreasonable for the private sector to wash and press linens, that that is an essential role of the government. You know, I believe that government should do what the private sector cannot do reasonably by itself. One thing the private sector is very capable of doing, Madam Speaker, is washing clothes, changing light bulbs. These are things that, traditionally, free men and women have been able to do pretty well on their own for the existence of human history. We've managed to change our own light bulbs, we've managed to wash our own clothes, we've managed to press our own linens, but the government has seen fit to nationalize linens for our health care system.

This is an extremely expensive measure. It's not done to provide better services for Albertans; it's done purely to increase the power of NDP union bosses. It's done purely for political reasons, to increase the muscle of the AFL to be able to bully people around and buy political power in this province. It was done for purely political reasons. They have had to pay out a significant amount of money.

We believe we can save \$60 million over 10 years if we reprivatize linen services in Alberta. How crazy is that as a phrase, to have to be able to say, "reprivatize linen services"? You know we're living in the twilight zone or an NDP government if that's something I actually have to say, that we have to reprivatize linen services in Alberta. Now, that is \$60 million over 10 years. An internal analysis from AHS lists the buyout of this program at \$200 million, a \$200 million penalty for getting rid of private linen services. So if we were to scrap this boneheaded decision, we can save taxpayers \$206 million this year alone. If there's one piece of low-hanging fruit that saves some taxpayers' money around here, that's probably it, Madam Speaker.

3:50

Now, if we were to get in year 1 from all the different spending decreases that we've listed, that would bring our overall operational expenses down, meaning we'd borrow less money, meaning that even in that first year we would save \$45 million on interest payments alone. So by borrowing less money, we're going to have more money to be able to spend on actual government services and programs.

We're going to be spending under the NDP's plan \$2.6 billion – \$2.6 billion – every single year on debt interest payments alone. That could pay for the combined departments of Justice, Energy, Environment and Parks. Combined: \$2.3 billion. Now, that's a lot of money to just completely waste.

It reminds me of, you know, when the Joker piled all of his money up in a big pyramid, and he sat at the top, and he just poured gasoline and lit it on fire. When he lit a big pyramid of money on fire, he just wanted to watch it burn. In fact, they probably got more use out of just watching the money burn than the NDP gets out of simply giving it to the banks. You know, I never thought I'd see the day when the NDP are the party of big banks, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) does come into effect. Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker and to the whip for granting me permission to have a moment to engage on this and to say that I am shocked by the comparison between building

schools, building hospitals, maintaining public health care, public education, maintaining the current mix of private and public laundry service delivery in the province, maintaining these essential services that Albertans rely on so desperately – I am shocked at the comparison that having nurses in hospitals is the equivalent to lighting money on fire.

I am shocked by the comparison between staffing and doing the renovations, that have been long awaited, at the Strathmore hospital. For years and years and years they were promised by the previous government, and then those promises were broken. This government steps up, and we make good for the people of Strathmore-Brooks. We moved forward on the important renovations to their hospital: equated to lighting piles of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am shocked that the hard-working men and women who show up at those facilities to do the construction, to make sure that they're making life better for Alberta families, to make sure that they're putting food on the table for their own families are being referred to as the equivalent of lighting a pile of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am shocked that the commitment to build an overpass over Gaetz Avenue, a highway that many people in this Chamber drive on at least twice a week, is being seen as the equivalent of lighting a pile of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am shocked by the fact that the member opposite, who advocates regularly for us to spend more money in his own constituency, says that investing in communities and families throughout the province is the equivalent of lighting a pile of money on fire, Madam Speaker.

I am very disappointed that these are the kinds of remarks we're receiving from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition this afternoon. I think that the people of Alberta deserve a government that is on their side, that is continuing to build and maintain the infrastructure that was neglected for so many years, with so many failed promises in the past, Madam Speaker. Probably what I'm shocked by most is that this rhetoric shocks me because I hear it regularly. I think that we deserve a little less rhetoric, a little more reality, and a little more faith in the working men and women of this province, who work alongside every one of us every day to make life better for Alberta families.

I guess my question – no. Those are comments. I don't even have a question, Madam Speaker. That's all I have to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier is asking for a little less rhetoric, perhaps she'll stop referring to dirty rodents around here.

Now, the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier is deliberately misinterpreting the debate in this House. She is deliberately not understanding what we're saying, as she so often does in question period. Now, when we talk about wasted money, lighting money on fire, we're talking about interest payments. You know what taxpayers get for interest payments, Madam Speaker? Nothing. You know what Albertans get for interest payments? Nothing. Two point three billion dollars – \$2.3 billion – spent on interest payments: it only benefits one group of people, the bankers. Only the bankers benefit from this. The only people applauding this budget right now are bankers, who are rubbing their hands at the opportunity to be able to lend this government more money.

You know what? When this government talks about, you know, the dangers of payday loans, they really ought to consider their own bad borrowing habits right now. We're talking about a government that is practically a spending junkie. These guys – these guys –

cannot get their borrowing under control. They're addicted to it, and that is why under this government's fiscal plan our debt is going to climb to a record \$71 billion a year – \$71 billion a year – under best-case circumstances.

To keep it at \$71 billion and not any higher than that, oil must hit \$68 a barrel. There need to be multiple pipelines, not just under construction, not just even built but actually pumping oil to international markets at that time. To meet our revenue projections, we also need 6 per cent of GDP growth, a very handsome level of economic growth. Now, those three things, the trifecta of economic growth: I hope those things come true.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very honoured guests who have joined us in the gallery today. I understand that the Chinese national team for gymnastics is watching us in the galleries and observing the great traditions that we hold here in the Assembly. [Remarks in Mandarin] If they'd please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Welcome.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?

Hon. Minister of Justice, do you wish to close debate?

Ms Ganley: I close debate, Madam Speaker.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:58 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Hoffman	Piquette
Ceci	Horne	Renaud
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinsteinuber	Sabir
Dach	Larivee	Schreiner
Dang	Littlewood	Shepherd

Drever	Luff	Sucha
Eggen	Malkinson	Sweet
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Ganley	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard
Gray	Payne	

Against the motion:

Barnes	Fraser	Pitt
Cooper	Gill	Taylor
Ellis	Gotfried	van Dijken
Fildebrandt		

Totals: For – 38 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Bill 5

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance and move third reading of Bill 5, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to oppose Bill 5, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017. You know, I realize what the function of this bill is, and it's just to be able to keep the lights on and make the operation of government be able to continue past April 1. It's not that action that I oppose. What I'm opposed to is the lack of clarity in this bill.

Bill 5 is very much like a blank cheque that the government wants us to approve. If I was to agree with this bill, which I would not, I would in essence be saying to my constituents that I explicitly understand what the money is going to be spent on. Frankly, I don't know what the money is going to be spent on explicitly. There are only six measly pages in this Bill 5. We have four of them with some numbers on them, and it doesn't really help you a lot. It doesn't explain where the money is going to be spent specifically. This is what I would say is a job that's either done too quickly or is done to hide some facts: four pages from Health, Education, Advanced Education, all the way to Treasury Board and Finance and everything in between, including my shadow Ministry of Infrastructure. There are, frankly, no explanations, and that's simply not going to cut it.

Voting on something this vague wouldn't be fair to the people that I represent. I don't think anyone would want me to agree with the handouts of their hard-earned dollars without a decent explanation. They are simply asking for a handout, something that I'm not interested in agreeing to. The interim supply, obviously, does not have any savings in it, as far as I can tell, to at least counter the bloated spending. I cannot see any budget constraints or any wisdom used in the process. Is this a continuation of last year's budget, when the government was \$10.8 billion in the hole, or is it based on this year's budget, where they're going to be \$10.3 billion in the hole by the time we're done? I don't even know which one it's based on.

Last year and now this year we seem to be going through the same exercise, where the government holds its hand out and through supplementary supply blows past the promises made in the

past. They can't seem to keep to a budget, and it's like they don't even care. I can see this government next year asking for another interim supply blank cheque just because they don't know how to keep their promises. They can't seem to rein in the spending. This government clearly has a spending problem, and my colleagues and I are not in favour of it. This so-called advance on a paycheque that provides no real details is lacking leadership. Albertans need real leadership, and sticking to a budget and being accountable with the money being spent is leadership that the Wildrose would provide.

4:20

Let's call this what it is. This is just an extension of a budget that should have been completed in a year's time. If the NDP were an employee, that would be like this NDP government basically asking for 14 months of paycheques for one year's work. Folks, that's an additional 20 per cent pay increase. I could possibly understand if this was the NDP's first budget and we knew they needed to take a bit more time to figure things out, but this is not the first budget. This is the third budget. It's the third time at the rodeo, and we haven't seen one delivered on time. Each time we have to have interim supply. Each and every time the government keeps asking for a blank cheque at the end with the interim supply. It's unbelievable.

My colleagues and I have many questions about what is contained in Bill 5, and we're being laughed at with our questions and not being taken seriously. We want to know if there will be grants that will be slid through because of lack of transparency. What will the money go towards? As a person that has run several businesses in the past, I have always wanted to know where my hard-earned money was going to go before I approved any of the bills that came across my desk. This goes against what I believe and what I suppose should be any logical businessperson's concept of running an efficient business.

I would ask the following questions, Madam Speaker, in a business transaction. What am I as a businessman buying when I'm purchasing something? How much am I paying? I suppose that with this I know how much the cost is, so I've got that one part out of here. But what am I getting in exchange for what I've just bought? What are the deliverables? What are the goods and the services? Are there satisfactory checks and balances? This is why I'm so concerned here. I don't think any of these questions, frankly, have been answered, let alone addressed.

There are too many unknowns here, and for those reasons I cannot support Bill 5. I would encourage all the members of this House to consider what I've said and vote against this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 5? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for his comments. I think he gave a very good overview of the Official Opposition's concerns with this bill and interim supply.

I'll focus my remarks on one area in particular, though, contained in this bill, and that is the government's breaking of their own law, the government's own Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This act was brought in by this government themselves, when they repealed the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Now, the Fiscal Responsibility Act was introduced by Ralph Klein and Jim Dinning in the 1990s to try to prevent the kind of out-of-control, reckless spending that had taken place in the 1980s and early 1990s that led to the first big debt crisis in this province. I shouldn't say the first. We had had debt crises before under Premier Aberhart. But we had been facing

a growing debt crisis in this province, a budget problem, and a large degree of unaccountability in our finances, and Ralph Klein and Jim Dinning imposed one of the strictest and most fulsome fiscal accountability laws in the country to keep government on track.

Over the last decade that piece of legislation was slowly watered down to allow for more borrowing, to allow more leniency for government to spend money that was not budgeted, and it had predictable consequences. By the time the NDP came to power, that piece of legislation had been severely weakened. But that was not good enough for the NDP; they had to outright kill it. So they repealed the Fiscal Responsibility Act in its entirety, and they replaced it with their own Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. That act included a debt ratio of 15 per cent of debt to GDP and gave the government a generous 1 per cent grace room in going over budget on operational spending. If the government spent, let's just say, 100 units on operational spending, they were allowed to go up to 1 per cent beyond that without the authorization of this Legislature. That was intended mostly for emergencies and contingencies that would be unforeseen. One per cent: that's a fairly generous amount of room.

The other major part of that bill was a debt cap of 50 per cent of debt to GDP. As I spoke of earlier, that debt cap of 50 per cent of debt to GDP lasted about six months before this government repealed their very own debt cap. They gutted that part of their own legislation because they couldn't stick to it. We warned them that that debt cap was going to be exceeded, that their revenue projections were far too optimistic, and that we expected that they would exceed their spending estimates in budgets. And, sure enough, only six months after they introduced it, they repealed their own debt cap. We warned that that would happen. They said that we were fearmongers for it, but then they did it themselves very meekly.

They didn't send out any news releases about that. They send out new releases about every positive news story that they think they can get. I must have missed it somewhere – maybe my e-mail wasn't working that day – but I didn't get the news release when the government announced that they were repealing their own debt cap. But repeal it they did. They weren't very proud of it because they didn't like to talk about it, and they still don't like to talk about it.

I would encourage the Deputy Premier or a member on the government side to rise – the Member for Calgary-Currie likes to engage in these debates with me. He's actually pretty good at this stuff. I hope he'll get up. I think he will. He's a very, very good debater. I encourage the Member for Calgary-Currie to get up and engage on this issue and explain why the government repealed their own debt cap. He should stand up and defend the interests of his constituents in this House and why it was necessary to repeal their own debt cap.

That was one part of the government's own Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act that they gutted.

Now, the other major part, as I said, was the contingency that allows the government to spend 1 per cent over their budget. Shockingly, when the government released their third-quarter fiscal and economic update, they admitted that they broke their own law. They did that because they spent \$1.1 billion – \$1.1 billion – illegally on the early shutdown of coal, to buy out these coal companies. I want to just tell those coal companies: don't cash that cheque just yet. We need to keep Hanna alive. We need to keep Forestburg alive. We're going to save these communities and undo the destructive shutdown of coal that the NDP are doing right now.

The shutdown of coal is not just bad for those communities, trying to wipe them off the map, and it's not just bad for electricity prices in Alberta. It's also bad for taxpayers because taxpayers have to pony up \$1.1 billion for the early shutdown of coal. That is

money that is completely wasted. We may as well have just had a nice bonfire with it. At least, we could have heated the place without paying the carbon tax for a while. Instead, the government decided to spend \$1.1 billion for the early phase-out of coal.

4:30

Now, that's not where it ends. That money was spent illegally. Illegally spent money. When normal people break the law, there's normally a consequence. If you speed and you get a ticket, you pay a fine. If a member across were to be very upset with me and hit me, they would get charged with assault, and there would be a criminal offence. There are consequences for breaking laws for normal people. But when politicians break their own laws, you know what the consequences are? Nothing. Nothing, Madam Speaker, when they break their own laws. All they had to do was admit that they broke their own laws, and the Finance minister under questioning did in fact admit that he broke his own laws. It's essentially like – you know, I figured out a trick when I was little kid that if my parents caught me doing something that I wasn't supposed to be doing, I would get in trouble, but if I did something bad and I just went and told them that I did it, at least for a few times I figured out that my parents would say: "I'm very glad you were honest with me, son. You're not going to be in trouble."

That's what the NDP have figured out here. They can break the law. They can break their own laws that they wrote and they passed. They can break their own laws and just say: well, I'm sorry, Albertans, that we broke the law, but I hope you'll be happy that we've been forthright with you that we broke that law. But they didn't send out a news release saying it because they weren't very proud of it. They put it in small print at the bottom of the third-quarter fiscal update, that they are in technical violation of the law. Well, a technical violation of the law is still a violation of the law, and it's not merely technical. They broke it because they spent \$1.1 billion without the authority of this Legislature.

Now, the reason we have a Legislature right now in Alberta is the long parliamentary tradition of Westminster coming from England, which goes back over 500 years, and the fight between Parliament and King for control of the budget. You know, England fought civil wars over the right of Parliament to have ultimate spending authority, that the king, essentially the executive and cabinet, could not spend money without the direct authorization of Parliament. That is the very fundamental, most important role of Parliament, of Legislatures, that the government is not allowed to spend money not authorized by Parliament, and that is what this government has done. They have spent money not authorized by Parliament and not just some loose change found in the couch: \$1.1 billion. For that \$1.1 billion we get absolutely nothing in return. It's completely wasted money.

This is a disrespect of this Legislature. It is a disrespect of the history of this institution of a Westminster parliament that we have the sole discretion to authorize the government, the Crown, the cabinet acting on behalf of the Crown to spend public monies. They have done it without the authorization of this House. It is completely disrespectful to every member of this House that they would spend money without its authorization, and it is disrespectful to the traditions of this place and the traditions that came before us in Westminster.

Mr. Cooper: Haven't they been found in contempt over this?

Mr. Fildebrandt: This government has been found in contempt of this Legislature. They may actually be the only government ever found in contempt of this Legislature, Madam Speaker. Hopefully, they will be the last. It may be one of several times that they are

found because they are acting illegally. They are breaking their own laws. We need at least one member of the government on the other side to stand up and explain clearly why they broke the law, why they saw it necessary to go around traditions that go back half a millennium, that are the very foundation of this institution, that gives parliament the unquestioned, supreme right to authorize spending for government. The government is not parliament. Those are two technically different things.

I would encourage the Deputy Premier or, even better, the Member for Calgary-Currie . . .

Ms Hoffman: Better?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm sorry, Deputy Premier. We haven't really got into it yet. The Member for Calgary-Currie and I have a bit of a tradition. Every year the Member for Calgary-Currie and I normally put a little money on the table to bet about how the budget is going to work out. You know, I've found that the Member for Calgary-Currie is a very healthy supplement to my salary. I have found our relationship to be most profitable and most enjoyable. He is an excellent debater. You know, I'll make a bet with him right now. I'm going to bet that the government is projecting a \$71 billion debt by fiscal year 2019-20. I'll bet him 20 bucks right now, with 2 to 1 odds. I'll give him 2 to 1 odds that that debt will be bigger than \$71 billion by the time that fiscal year concludes.

I'll close my debate on that.

An Hon. Member: Can I bet?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's a standing offer to anyone who wants to take it, but it's particularly offered to the Member for Calgary-Currie, and if the Deputy Premier feels a little left out from that, I will offer her 2 to 1 odds as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Any other speakers to the bill under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Right after 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Go ahead, then, hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Cooper: It's okay. It's Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and I actually only rise to request unanimous consent of the House to go to one-minute bells, please.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Next speaker to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question? The hon. minister to close debate.

Ms Ganley: So closed, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved third reading of Bill 5, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:37 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carlier	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Dach	Larivee	Sabir
Dang	Littlewood	Schreiner
Drever	Luff	Shepherd
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Ganley	McLean	Turner
Goehring	Miller	Westhead
Gray	Payne	Woollard
Hinkley		

4:40

Against the motion:

Barnes	Gill	Swann
Cooper	Gottfried	Taylor
Ellis	Pitt	van Dijken
Fildebrandt		

Totals: For – 37 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 2 An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I look forward to tabling an amendment that I've raised privately with the minister and I hope will be favourable to just adding the scope to the bill and clarity to the bill.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I very much support the intent of this bill. I am slightly concerned that its protections may not be afforded to all survivors due to a technicality. Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, currently covers survivors who are either a minor, in an intimate relationship with or dependent on the perpetrator at the time that the sexual misconduct or nonsexual assault occurred. It is the term "dependency" that concerns me.

A relationship with dependency might not be an accurate description of incidents where the survivor and the perpetrators are co-workers with the same level of seniority such as the recent high-profile case of female police officers who were affected in the Calgary Police Service after enduring years of harassment from colleagues. It's not clear if dependency applies to harassment or

exploitation of an adult student by a university professor or a postsecondary instructor. It's unfortunate that the specific mention of co-workers was left out as it would give confidence, I think, and encourage people to come forward. Even though it may be implied, it's not explicit.

The bill cannot be amended at this time to include references to co-workers since that would involve altering the legislation, which is not under current consideration.

Consequently, I would like to propose an amendment aimed at reducing the bill's ambiguity by inserting an additional category of protection. I have the appropriate number of copies as circulated, and my amendment reads as follows. I move that Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, be amended in section 3 in the proposed section 3.1(1) as follows: in clause (b) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (ii), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following after subclause (iii):

- (iv) the person who committed the misconduct was in a position of trust or authority in relation to the person with the claim.

The second part, (b), in clause (c) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (ii), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following subclause (iv):

- (iv) the person who committed the assault or battery was in a position of trust or authority in relation to the person with the claim.

Essentially, the amendment seeks to amend Bill 2 to ensure that its protections apply to a broader category of survivors; namely, that the person who committed the misconduct was in the position of trust or authority in relation to the person with the claim. A "position of trust or authority" is admittedly a general term, and that's exactly the point. My amendment seeks to ensure these limitations apply to a broader category of survivors.

Unfortunately, short of rewriting the entire proposed section 3.1, which I'm sure the government members would not support, my amendment cannot capture everything in terms of eliminating the limitation period for sexual harassment claims. Instead, it builds on the bill's original wording but doesn't radically alter it. Since the sexual misconduct section deals primarily with power differentials, this proposed bill is in line with the government's intent. Regrettably, it will not include situations where workplace sexual harassment occurs among relative equals, such as the situation in Calgary that I mentioned.

Again, I hope the government would consider bringing forward further legislation that would deal explicitly with workplace sexual harassment, but for now the government may wish to argue that what my amendment seeks to accomplish is already covered by subclause (iii), which deals with situations of dependency, as in financial, emotional, physical, or otherwise. However, this is far from certain in cases of workplace dynamics or adult educational settings, and I think we owe it to survivors to be as inclusive as possible.

I call on my colleagues to support the amendment to ensure that more survivors feel included under these important protections and will more readily come forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak against the amendment in this case. We were very clear in selecting incredibly broad and inclusive language. This, in fact, puts Alberta, which was behind every other province in the country, out in front so that we have the most inclusive language of any province. As

I've said several times, this will include sexual assault as well as sexual misconduct and assault in certain relationships.

The relationship that the member mentions, one of dependence, is quite broadly drafted. It includes financial dependence, emotional dependence, and it would definitely cover what he is proposing. I think we're pretty confident that the language we have chosen is inclusive of the same people that the member's amendment would include. We're confident that we'll be removing barriers for survivors of sexual and domestic violence and that we will be ahead compared to any other jurisdiction.

Because the amendment proposed is covered by the language in our act, there's some concern that accepting the amendment would create additional confusion for the courts. Courts have specific rules around if you've already included something and then you include a second provision trying to include a subset of the first thing you've included. It creates unnecessary confusion and can result in people that you didn't intend to exclude being excluded.

Madam Chair, I think it is important that we stick with the broad and inclusive language that we already have. I think that is pretty much all I have to say about that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none, I'll call the question:

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just speak briefly and generally to the bill. I'm pleased to be able to speak to this, and I want to thank my colleagues on all sides of the House for being willing to support this bill.

It proposes amendments to the Limitations Act that would help survivors of sexual and domestic violence by allowing them the time they need to come forward and file a civil claim. Right now in Alberta, Madam Chair, as I've mentioned, if a person wants to sue for this type of assault, the action must be started within two years of the person knowing about the incident. There are provisions in the current legislation that suspend the limitation period in certain circumstances such as those involving minors and fraudulent concealment or disability, but we know that many survivors need more time.

4:50

It's time to do more to help protect those who have experienced sexual and domestic violence. As I just referenced, Bill 2 would remove the limitation period for sexual assault or other sexual misconduct and nonsexual assault involving a minor, intimate relationship, or a dependant. We recognize that survivors of sexual and domestic violence have a difficult journey ahead, and sometimes the decision to come forward can be exceptionally personal. Each survivor will have their own journey. Removing the limitation period empowers survivors to come forward on their own terms when they are ready.

Madam Chair, this is the message we received when we introduced the bill. Organizations that work with survivors told us that this opens one more door for survivors to come forward and provides one more option for a survivor's journey. This change in legislation gives survivors time to heal and allows them to hold perpetrators to account if and when they choose. The same message is what prompted us to draft the legislation in the first place. This is a change that Albertans have asked for, and we know it's the right thing to do.

Madam Chair, I'll just speak very briefly to the term "sexual misconduct." Removing the limitation period for claims stemming from sexual misconduct in intimate relationships would increase recourse for people who have endured a broad range of unwelcome behaviours. These behaviours would include but are not limited to sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, or distributing sexually explicit photographs or videos without an individual's consent.

The provisions of the bill would apply retroactively, meaning that it would allow claims that stem from incidents which predate its coming into force. Applying these changes retroactively is consistent with other jurisdictions and aligns with the purpose of the bill, which is to recognize that survivors of sexual and domestic violence may need more time to come forward and no survivor should be limited by a legal deadline.

During second reading we heard from many of my colleagues who were brave enough to speak about their own experiences. I want to thank them for their courage. These many individual experiences highlight how each survivor has their own journey. They also illustrate how tragically prevalent these crimes are. I hope they will remind survivors out there that they are never alone. I would also like to thank the many agencies that work to support survivors on these journeys.

Madam Chair, every Albertan deserves to feel safe and respected in their communities, homes, and workplaces. One in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. We hope that this bill will make their lives a little bit better. I'm gratified by the support this bill has received so far, and I look forward to further discussion.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment I would like to pass out.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to introduce a very simple and clear amendment to extend the protection provided by this very important bill. I remember that we heard the personal and very touching statements by members on both sides of the House last week, you know, and it made me think: how can we work together in collaboration to make this bill stronger to help Albertans? The bill before us now removes the time limit to file an action for victims of sexual misconduct and domestic violence for three groups, which are minors, persons in an intimate relationship, and dependants.

This amendment adds protection for a fourth group; that is, disabled persons. This amendment recognizes that those vulnerable Albertans would also benefit from additional time to file a civil action against those who perpetuate sexual misconduct or domestic violence. Madam Chair, the existing Limitations Act pauses the clock for persons under disability for the period when they're disabled, but we should ensure that all individuals who are victimized when they are disabled or victims who later become disabled, perhaps due to the misconduct or domestic violence itself, have full opportunity to this act.

This amendment would change section 3 of the current bill. I would move that Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, be amended in section 3, in the proposed section 3.1(1), as follows, that (a) in clause (b) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (ii), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following after subclause (iii):

(iv) the person with the claim was a person under disability. And the second part, (b), in clause (c) by striking out “or” at the end of subclause (ii), by adding “or” to the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following after subclause (iii):

(iv) the person with the claim was a person under disability.

I hope that all members of this House see why this simple amendment to this bill can go a long way to protecting a person with a disability. I want to congratulate the hon. Minister of Justice for drafting this bill and working very hard, especially working with all the different agencies to protect vulnerable Albertans. I think that by adding this fourth group it would strengthen this bill, and I hope all members of this House would support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I’d like to thank the member for this amendment. I’d also like to thank the member for working very closely with our government and with the Minister of Justice and her office as well to create this amendment, which, in our view, really does help in a way. The way the bill is worded now, chances are that this situation would be already under the bill. However, it really more kind of brings it all in if the individual comes out of a guardianship situation, for instance. As it sits right now, it does already help those who are under guardianship or have someone above them if they are being attacked by that person.

I’d really like to thank the member for this amendment. I’d suggest that all members of the Assembly vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of amendment A2 by my colleague from the third party. I’d just like to thank him for that. I would also just like to extend some thanks to the government side. It’s always nice when we can see a good idea for a good idea and that the source of that idea isn’t necessarily a stumbling block to good governance. When the government does the right thing, I’m not afraid to acknowledge that and say thank you.

I’ll be encouraging all of my colleagues on this side of the House to support this. It’s important in this process of supporting Bill 2, supporting those who are victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence, that we do everything that we can to ensure that all who need to be protected are protected, certainly if only in clarifying the legislation, which I think is our responsibility, to have the best piece of legislation the first to pass this Legislature as opposed to having to come back and create clarity in the future.

I appreciate the amendment. I look forward to supporting it and thank the government for doing the same.

5:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak in support of my hon. colleague’s amendment to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Bill 2 is an exceptional piece of legislation which I’m sure will garner support from all sides of this House, and I’m very pleased to note that that appears to be the case. Further, the debate around this bill has been very emotional, and I’ve been inspired by the strength of many members who have chosen to share their personal experiences, under, I’m sure, very difficult circumstances to do so, with sexual and domestic violence.

Madam Chair, these crimes are repugnant, and I feel this debate was strengthened and grounded by these personal stories. I’d like to share as well that I have someone close to me who also suffered abuse in the past and had, you know, a brave opportunity to come forward with that, but it would have not been allowed under this previous legislation. My wife’s family also has a cousin who is physically disabled and living in affordable housing, supported by AISH. It is a very mixed residence, and there are people there that have had many different challenges in their lives before, and we worry about her safety because of her naïveté and some of the protected environment that she’s grown up in. She’s 63 years old but is in a position of vulnerability, I would say, in many cases, and we worry about her and watch closely over her. It’s very heart-warming for me to see the acceptance of an amendment here, again, where we have the opportunity to strengthen legislation through collaboration and co-operation. I think that’s a very positive thing.

Any additional avenues for justice, whether they be civil or criminal, that we can provide to victims of these horrific acts is something we should all support. That’s why I’m proud to support this amendment from the Member for Calgary-Greenway and to thank him for his thoughtfulness in bringing this forward. Persons living with a disability are often very reliant on those who help care for them, whether that be a health care or community supports professional, friend, or family member. As repulsive, Madam Chair, as this may seem, it is often these people, that are close to the victims, in positions of power that sometimes use this reliance and their vulnerability to perpetrate sexual and physical abuse. This abuse can often continue without being reported because of their vulnerability and of the power that a caregiver or worker, that is ostensibly supporting them and providing services to them as a disabled individual over time, especially if that individual has a diminished mental or even physical capacity that may mean that they are further dependent.

By extending the indefinite timeline to disabled Albertans who wish to file a civil claim when they are victims of domestic or sexual violence, we’re ensuring that this vulnerable group has additional avenues to seek civil justice and restitution without limitations to time, which I think is extremely important because sometimes people take time to come grips with their ability to have the strength to come forward and challenge those who have perpetrated this on them.

In closing, I feel that this is a friendly amendment. I applaud the Member for Calgary-Greenway and the Minister of Justice for working closely and collaborating on this. This bill is for all Albertans. My understanding is that the minister has been well consulted and included in the development of this amendment as well, and I’m glad to hear some members of the other side also speaking in favour of this.

For these reasons, I will be supporting this amendment, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I’ll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’m just so happy to stand here today and support Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Back in 2015 my private member’s bill, Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015, passed in

this House unanimously. The reason I chose to do my private member's bill on helping victims of domestic violence is because I'm passionate on ending violence against women and girls. In preparing that bill, I spoke to dozens of survivors as well as people who work with them. I heard wrenching stories as well as stories of hope, but one thing that came through in every single one was that people do not and cannot come forward until they are ready. But today Alberta law doesn't fully recognize that fact. Instead, the Limitations Act creates barriers for women and victims, for anyone who endured sexual or domestic assault. It sets an artificial calendar with a strict two-year deadline. It is out of touch with the reality that so many face.

In fact, it saddens me to say that Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Canada. I hope that we can all agree that Alberta's laws should protect people from sexual assault and domestic violence, but now the Limitations Act protects not those who suffer from those assaults but their attackers. A civil suit is more than just restitution, even though that restitution can be important. It's about accountability, and it can be about closure. We want our civil justice system in Alberta to support people in their healing, not to turn them away because that healing hasn't happened quickly enough. Thinking back to my consultations for my private member's bill, there were words that came up again and again – dignity, respect, and compassion – things everyone deserves to find in our justice system and nobody more so than people who have survived sexual assault or intimate partner violence.

Let's talk for a moment about domestic violence. For many women who are in abusive relationships, it can be hard to leave an abusive partner, and statistics say that it can take up to seven times for someone to leave their abusive partner. It can also be really hard to report this violence, let alone take that partner to court, especially if the alternative is homelessness or poverty. For immigrant women or women facing other issues, the obstacles can be even more daunting. For them to finally find the courage and the resources to leave and then come forward is a momentous step, and it can be empowering. It can be a tremendous relief, but it's often very difficult.

It's also important to note that violence doesn't discriminate. It can affect everyone and anyone, but the reality is that women are far more targeted, and this includes trans women, disabled women, women of colour, and women of all faiths. The last thing our justice system should tell them is: sorry; time is up.

I would like to take a moment to talk about a staggering reality for many indigenous women. Indigenous women face life-threatening gender-based violence and disproportionately experience violent crimes because of hatred and racism. By better understanding the severity of these issues, we can better work towards breaking down the cycle of violence. Statistics Canada reported that indigenous women are more likely to experience more severe and potentially life-threatening forms of domestic and family violence than nonindigenous women. For example, 54 per cent of indigenous women reported severe forms of family violence such as being beaten, being choked, having a gun or knife used against them, or being sexually assaulted versus 37 per cent of nonindigenous women. Indigenous women 15 years and older are three to five times more likely to experience violence than nonindigenous women, and rates of spousal assault against indigenous women are more than three times higher than those against nonindigenous women.

In Calgary alone there are 16,000 domestic calls and complaints every year. That doesn't count the women who will never report it, who will endure pain and violence in fear and silence.

5:10

Let me say this, Madam Chair. Apart from a bill's legal impact, conversations that help to reduce stigma encourage more people to come forward. They want to tell Albertans everywhere: if you know of violence – sorry. I just want to say that throughout my consultation something that came up over and over again was that if someone was witnessing violence, it is important to report it. If you are the person who is experiencing violence, it is so important to report it because it can be the difference between life or death. I know that it is a scary thing to report violence, but if it's someone you love or even if it's someone you don't know, you could save their life. I just wanted to put that on record.

One person sharing their story can make a difference for hundreds, even thousands of people. I focused on domestic violence, but that applies to sexual assault just as much, which is why I've been so moved by my colleagues who have come forward in this debate to tell their own stories of survival. I hope that they know what it's meant for survivors of assault across Alberta and beyond. Maybe that's how this bill will have its most important impact. Yes, the changes we're making will help people seek the restitution they deserve. This bill will hold the perpetrators of assault responsible not only criminally but for the human impact of their crimes. More than all of that, it will make it possible for many more people to come forward through the legal system and tell their stories, and not just from this point forward. By making these changes retroactive, we're saying that nobody's stories should be erased by time and that no perpetrator of assault should be able to hide behind the calendar of years gone by.

We're ensuring that survivors can sue to recoup the cost of pain and suffering and also the very tangible costs of everything from lost wages to counselling. This bill tells every Albertan who has faced this kind of violence: we stand with you and we have your back. I'm so proud to be part of a government that has this as a priority. Albertans have waited for too long for this change to come, and I'm proud that it's our government that has finally taken this action, that's been needed for far too long.

This issue is very close to my heart – as many of you know, my sister was recently murdered, and I wish that she would have had this chance – and the hearts of everyone who has experienced this kind of violence in their lives. I want to thank the Solicitor General and the cosponsors for bringing this piece of legislation forward, and I encourage everyone to vote for it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise today in support of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, and it was a privilege to join our Minister of Justice and Solicitor General along with the Minister of Status of Women for the announcement of Bill 2 at the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton in my community of Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Over the last two years I've had the incredible honour of building a relationship with SACE. Through this relationship I've been given the opportunity to learn so much from those who work in the community to assist and support survivors of sexual violence here in Alberta. This experience has taught me to examine my own myths and assumptions about sexual violence. Sexual assault is not barred by income level, gender, ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, or spiritual belief. Anyone can be affected, so sexual and domestic violence is an issue that affects all Albertans.

There are many false beliefs regarding sexual violence, but by definition, in the simplest terms it is any forced sexual contact without the expressed and voluntary consent of the receiving individual. Sexual assault is a crime, and at its foundation it is an act of power and control. Therefore, as responders, if our goal is to dismantle the systems that hinder survivors, we must approach the issue through these same terms. What power do we have as a government to empower and support survivors? How can we remove barriers to ensure that survivors are able to come forward on their own terms?

I stand in support of the proposed amendments to the Limitations Act to remove the existing limitation period for civil actions for sexual assault; for misconduct of a sexual nature for dependants, minors, and those in intimate relationships; and for nonsexual assault for dependants, minors, and those in intimate relationships. It is our duty as legislators and representatives of all Albertans to provide individuals with the best possible opportunities for success and empowerment by creating safe spaces. We can do this as a government by eliminating barriers and making the legal system more accessible.

It is my belief that every Albertan has the right to feel safe, protected, and respected in their communities, and this should be reflected in our legislation. Currently all common-law jurisdictions across Canada, excluding only Alberta and P.E.I., have removed or amended the limitations period for sexual assault cases. It is time that Alberta catch up with the other provinces of Canada and demonstrate our support for the dignity of survivors of sexual and domestic violence by amending the Limitations Act. Supporting this amendment would put Alberta ahead of what other provinces have currently enacted by eliminating deadlines for people who are victims of family violence, minors, dependants, and intimate partners.

Overcoming sexual and domestic violence is a uniquely private, exceedingly difficult, and deeply personal experience, and it affects each survivor differently. By removing arbitrary timelines for reporting, we place the power back in the hands of the individual and recognize that each survivor will take a different path to healing. Furthermore, having a limitation on reporting only helps to perpetuate myths around the statistics and prevalence of sexual violence in Alberta. Cultural attitudes enforced by false myths and ideas around sexual violence enable those who are the abusers, thereby creating a social environment where survivors are silenced and criticized for what someone else has done to them. We need to respect that it may take time for survivors to come forward about their experiences. We need to support survivors by opening doors for empowerment, not closing them.

I want to thank everyone in this Assembly who has so far shown support for this bill, especially those members who have stood up and shared their own stories of sexual and domestic violence. I am so proud to stand with you in this House, and I know that Albertans are watching and so proud, and I know that it will help them along their own journeys. Thank you very much.

Finally, I would also like to thank Mary Jane James and the entire board of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton as well as the

Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, the YWCA, and everyone else in our province who works to support survivors of domestic and sexual assault every day.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise. I'd just like to very briefly rise and thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for her kind and passionate words on this very important issue. It was a pleasure to see her back in the House earlier this week. On behalf of all of our colleagues here on this side of the House and, certainly, the Wildrose caucus I'd like to pass along our condolences. She has been in our thoughts and prayers, and it's just wonderful to have her back.

5:20

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Westhead: I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Considering the significant progress we've made today, I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 23, 2017

Day 13

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 23, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect. As we finish our work for the week and prepare to return to our home constituencies, let us reflect on the positive things we have accomplished this week, and let us continue to always seek opportunities to make life better for the families and communities we serve.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two classes from beautiful Guthrie school, the grade 5/6 and grade 6. They are accompanied by Mrs. Colleen Tremblay and Mrs. Janet Quaghebeur, the teachers, and by parent volunteers Mr. Dave Parlin and Mrs. Cher Sherwood. Would the students and attendants please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a group of grade 6 students from the more-than-extraordinary constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. These students go to Glenora elementary school and are joined by their teacher, Ms Craven. These students are hard working and smart. I had the honour of visiting them in October. We were at the celebration of the 75th anniversary of their school and the building and opening of their new playground, which is far more accessible than the traditional ones. I want to ask now that Ms Craven as well as the supervisors, Miss Leard and Mr. Kluthe, please rise with the students and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I actually have two introductions this afternoon. The first introduction is on behalf of you. I rise to introduce the Alberta Girls' Parliament group, who will be joining us in the members' gallery at 2 p.m. The group consists of 47 youth and nine adults and is led by Mrs. Shannen Hoffman. The girls are here today to see the interworking of the Legislative Assembly and to expand their knowledge of the parliamentary system. Please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

For my second introduction it's a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Alberta Hindi Parishad. Their organization was founded in 1985 and continues to provide regular classes to teach Hindi. I would like them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other school groups to be introduced?

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly representatives from Festival Place in Strathcona county: Her Worship Roxanne Carr, the outstanding mayor of Strathcona county; Gavin Farmer, the executive director of Festival Place, the place to be to watch musical acts; Charles Rees, board member of the Festival Place foundation; and Ted Barris, award-winning author and military historian. Mr. Barris will lead a presentation tomorrow night at Festival Place to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Canada's most celebrated military victory, a pivotal moment in the formation of Canada's nationhood. I believe Mr. Barris is also doing a presentation at the Federal building tonight. I would ask them to stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to introduce to all members of the Assembly Mikhayla Patterson. Mikhayla is a first-year Grant MacEwan social work student who is completing her practicum in the Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency office. She has been an incredible asset to our community. Mikhayla is joined today by her classmates: Renée Hébert-Tomalty, Jennifer Nicole Burbach, Louise Speakman, Jessica Silva, and Kevyn Hernandez. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three friends of mine who also happen to be constituents: Daniel Grynke, his daughter Wendy Lotholz, and Wendy's husband, Randy Lotholz. Daniel raised his family on a farm in the Vega area, just north of the town of Barrhead, and Wendy and Randy are currently farming in the southern part of the county of Barrhead. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Denise Walton. Denise is a first-year social work student at MacEwan University who has been volunteering in the Spruce Grove-St. Albert constituency office since last fall. Denise is passionate about helping others and is looking forward to a great career offering support to those in need. If Denise could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the Indian Students' Association of the University of Alberta. INDSA started small in 1991 and has grown to include hundreds of students and alumni. They preserve, nurture, and extend the cultural traditions and colours of India within the university. I would like them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Alberta Gujarati Association. The AGA is one of the largest cultural organizations in western Canada, with thousands of Gujarati-speaking members. I had the privilege of attending their Navaratri celebration in October. I'd like to welcome their treasurer, Nipam Kotia, and the rest of the new executive. I'd like them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two introductions for you this afternoon. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly executive members of the Council of India Societies of Edmonton from my home constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods: Krishan Chawla, Mrinal Mandal, Amar Bhasin, Dhirubhai Laowa, Pramod Kumar, and Ashok Sharma. The Council of India Societies of Edmonton is a not-for-profit organization representing and supporting Indo-Canadians throughout the capital region. I thank them for joining us today and ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

For my second introduction, Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Raeleen Minchuk. As a child Raeleen often visited her father, who was a construction contractor, when he was working, but it wasn't until 2014, at age 36, that Raeleen was diagnosed with mesothelioma, a deadly form of cancer caused by early exposure to asbestos at her father's workplace. The doctors told her she had months to live, but Raeleen is a fighter. Faced with this diagnosis, Raeleen and her son Tyce moved from Saskatchewan to Alberta for treatment at Calgary's Foothills hospital and the Tom Baker cancer centre. Since then she has undergone numerous surgeries, impacting every major organ in her abdomen, to fight this cancer and extend her life. Raeleen is using the time she has left to raise awareness of the dangers of asbestos so that no Canadian has to go through what she and her family have gone through. I want to thank her for her passionate advocacy and for allowing me to share some of her story today. I now ask Raeleen and her guests to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you the members of the Hindu Society of Alberta. Congratulations on their 50th anniversary. Fifty years ago they were the first East Indian association in western Canada. I would now like them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you members of the Edmonton Epilepsy Association. The province has declared March 26 Epilepsy Awareness Day. The purple ribbon is dedicated to spreading awareness about epilepsy and supporting people living with epilepsy. I'd ask that Gary Sampley, executive director of the Edmonton Epilepsy Association; Cheryl Renzenbrink, president of the association; and their association delegation please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other guests? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise with pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine, Adrienne Webb. Adrienne is a community activist and a fighter for increased access to service dogs in the province of Alberta, and she's the secretary of Respect the Service Dog. She's been diligently working with my office in Edmonton-Rutherford and others in Edmonton in order to see a brighter future for those who need access to certified service animals. Alongside her today is her service dog, Jellybean. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Serenity and the Child Intervention System

Mr. Sucha: Thank you Madam Speaker. This morning I was devastated when I saw the front page of the *Edmonton Journal*. I, like many Albertans, will never forget the first time I heard Serenity's story. I'll never forget the outrage that I felt that our system did not protect this little girl. I will never forget the passion I witnessed in this Assembly from all members.

Serenity's mother shared these photos because she doesn't want her daughter to be forgotten, and, Madam Speaker, I will not forget her. As many of my colleagues know, I am a father of three wonderful children, and as a parent these photos are particularly hard for me to see. It's up to all of us to work together and protect children we have a shared responsibility to care for.

For the past two months I have been a member of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, and it may be one of the most important jobs I have in this Assembly. As we focus on strengthening the Alberta child death review process, I am reminded of how important it is that we make sure this system does what it is intended to do, that it serves not only as a reminder of those children we have lost but as a call to action to improve our system in whatever way we can to prevent further tragic losses. It is a call to all members of this House to be united in our commitment to address poverty and historical injustices and to ensure families have the supports they need.

As we've seen an OCYA investigation into Serenity and heard various internal reviews into this case, it is clear that our system can and must be improved, and while we feel many things when we see these photos and hear these stories, we must never feel hopeless or helpless because we have work to do, all of us.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members of the Assembly to stay committed to working together to make these changes to our child intervention system that have been needed for so long.

Thank you.

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, in Charles Dickens' story we read of Ebenezer Scrooge, who meets three ghosts: the ghosts of Christmas past, Christmas present, and Christmas future. An article in the *Financial Post* reminded me of the part where Scrooge meets the ghost of Christmas future. We have an opportunity to look into our future through the lens of Ontario's actions, and it's scary stuff indeed.

It once boasted one of the continent's lowest electricity rates. One business had their electricity bill double from last year, to over \$49,000. On January 1 Ontario brought in cap and trade, an environmental initiative that hikes energy costs for businesses that burn natural gas or fuel. Manufacturers in Ontario spent money

switching their plants to electricity from natural gas in order to access the government grants. Now electricity is so outrageously expensive that manufacturers are wondering how they can keep their doors open.

Mississippi and Ohio, to name a few states, are actively calling manufacturers from Ontario in an attempt to lure them south. And why not? Mississippi's power rates are about one-third of those of Ontario. The city of Toronto's statistics show that it has lost 20 per cent of its manufacturing jobs in the past decade. Twenty per cent, Madam Speaker. Every power bill in Ontario comes with a global adjustment charge that eats up over 50 per cent of the bill. Included in the charge are Ontario's payments to solar and wind energy makers at far more than the market rate. Even the cost of replacing light bulbs with LEDs are in there and – you guessed it – Ecofitt is right there at the trough.

Why would this government follow in the footsteps of that failed Ontario model? Madam Speaker, I am hearing everywhere I go that Albertans are happy that conservatives are working to get together because Albertans are so ready to send this destructive NDP government packing in the next election.

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

Women's Reproductive Rights

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the mid-90s I made one of the toughest decisions of my life. I was pregnant and did what thousands of Canadian women have done before me. I made the decision to have an abortion.

The morning I went to the Royal Alexandra hospital I was so lost and confused by the signage because there wasn't any. I was intimidated by the amount of security. It was over quickly, and at the same time it wasn't. My life went on; the stigma remained. It's important to talk about the stigma because even though women in this country have won hard-fought reproductive rights, those rights are still overshadowed by partisan misinformation. Dog-whistle politics.

It was only in 1969 that birth control and abortion were decriminalized. Until 1988 abortions were illegal. Chants of, "Lock her up" were real. Federal law dictates legality; however, the provinces set health care policy and influence access. We continue to see worrisome signals that women's reproductive rights are being questioned by those hungry for power.

Certain politicians hide behind spin on this subject, but we see their voting records. We are told not to talk about it, not to reopen debate. They say it is just an attempt to hijack the conversation. No. These are not lifestyle decisions. These are heart-wrenching and life-and-death decisions in many cases made by a woman and her doctor.

I chose to share my experience on social media, and so many women reached out to me after that. Not one regretted the decision. They were just afraid of abuse, so they keep their secrets. There is no shame in expressing and exercising our rights over our bodies.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Federal Budget

Mr. Jean: Now, I know that the Premier has been busy auditioning for the job of Leader of the Opposition in Saskatchewan, but yesterday Ottawa delivered another kick in the teeth to our energy

sector here in Alberta. Even if she knows that Albertans are going to vote her out after the next election, instead of rubber-stamping Ottawa's massive tax increases that include jacking up taxes for Alberta's oil and gas industry, she could maybe stick up for our province for once. How could she possibly say that Ottawa's budget was good news for Alberta?

1:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In fact, with respect to the tax changes in the oil and gas sector that the member is talking about, what we've indicated is that we are studying the matter, and we are going to be doing more advocacy on them because the bad news with respect to those is scheduled to start in about 2020. In the meantime this year, though, we got \$30 million as a result of advocacy by this government in order to support orphan well reclamation. That came from working with members in the oil and gas sector, asking what it was they needed and what we could do to help, and we did that.

Mr. Jean: Wow, Madam Speaker. Can you imagine? Thirty million dollars: that's about the same amount as the GST on our new carbon tax that we send to Ottawa every year.

This is serious. Eighty-one thousand full-time jobs have been lost under the NDP's watch, and the Premier was completely silent yesterday. It's embarrassing. It sends a bad signal; it puts us at a further disadvantage to the United States: that's Tim McMillan from CAPP, and he's right. This will hurt our small oil and gas producers right here in Alberta and, ultimately, Albertans. I'll translate for the Premier. That means fewer jobs for Albertans, less investment in our province as capital flees to the United States. What does she have to say to the men and women in this province who will now lose work?

Ms Notley: Madam Speaker, what I can say is that our government has been hard at work standing up for our oil and gas sector and standing up for the people who work in it. I've been doing that, first of all, by ensuring that we can make real progress on the orphan well file in order to get people back to work right away. As well, what we've done is we've worked with the federal government to get approval on two pipelines – two pipelines – tens of thousands of jobs. That's the kind of work that we are doing each and every day.

Mr. Jean: Wow. We get approval, and Bombardier gets \$400 million.

What Alberta got yesterday was absolutely peanuts. It is barely more money than the GST Ottawa is getting on the NDP's new carbon tax. Albertans send \$24 billion more to Ottawa than we get back in transfers just about every single year. What do Albertans get for this generosity? Well, our Premier is endorsing Ottawa's plans for crippling carbon taxes, \$2,500 per household, Madam Speaker, and now tax hikes to our oil and gas sector while we have record unemployment. Who does she care about more, the Prime Minister's office or Albertans?

Ms Notley: Madam Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. I care about Albertans, and that is why I chose not to stand in the corner and yell at Ottawa. I chose instead to work with Ottawa in order to get Albertans two pipelines – two pipelines – which are absolutely fundamental to the economic growth and prosperity of this province, and that is what we will continue to do.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Second main question.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: Talk is cheap, Madam Speaker. If the NDP ever had time to get back to governing in Alberta, here are some things they should actually start worrying about. Alberta will now have the highest business taxes in western Canada at the end of this year. The carbon tax is going up by 50 per cent this year and is only making things much more expensive for all Albertans in every facet of life. The U.S. has no carbon tax and is cutting their business taxes big time. That's less capital, less investment, and less jobs here in Alberta. Does the Premier even realize that this is a problem for the people of Alberta?

Ms Notley: Madam Speaker, what we know is what a tax on everything actually looks like. Thanks to the platform of the conservative party that was just released yesterday to the east of us, we now know that it looks like a 6 per cent tax on every bit of construction done in the province. You know what that does? It pulls money out of the economy, and it kills jobs, and that's the plan that the folks over there will not come clean with Albertans on.

Mr. Jean: Madam Speaker, why won't our own Premier focus on Alberta instead of some other province across Canada?

Alberta is quickly becoming the fiscal basket case of Canada. The NDP will have increased the size of government in Alberta by \$9 billion when it's all said and done. Nine billion dollars. If the Premier wants to compare budget plans, the NDP's looks a lot like Ontario's, a carbon copy I might add, crippling levels of debt, taxation, and green experiments. It's been a disaster in Ontario, and it will not work in Alberta. Debt means less for programs, higher taxes, and a weaker economy. Why doesn't the Premier get it?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Madam Speaker, yesterday the Saskatchewan government popped the opposition's balloon and released the Wildrose conservative platform. You know what? There's huge taxes on everything from job-creating construction to children's clothes, a 6 per cent tax increase, massive cuts to education, and taxes. And you know why? All so that they can give a tax break to the top 10 per cent of people living in that province. That's their plan, and I would like them to tell Albertans why they should support that.

Mr. Jean: I've never heard anything more hypocritical than what I've heard from the Premier over the last 24 hours. She's brought in a carbon tax that literally takes billions of dollars out of the pockets of hard-working Albertans every single year. Heating bills and gas prices at the pump will go up. Madam Speaker, her policies have helped destroy jobs and businesses, big and small. Coal workers, farmers, ranchers, energy workers in Alberta: all out of work as a result of their policies. How, then, can the Premier have the nerve to actually suggest that her policies are helping families in Alberta, with her record? It's disgusting.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, when the price of oil internationally went down, we had two choices. Two choices. We could stand up for Albertans. We could have their backs. We could support job creation. We could ensure more affordability for those families who are struggling, and we could support important public services. Or we could adopt the Wildrose conservative plan. We could jack prices and taxes up for everybody. We could slash education and health care. We could do that all so that we could give a tax break to the top 10 per cent of the citizens. You know what? We chose the first option, and that's what Albertans voted for.

The Deputy Speaker: Third main question. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Serenity and the Child Intervention System

Mr. Nixon: Let me quote Serenity's mom: reports can be hidden by the government; these pictures can't. The pictures she refers to show a dying 4-year-old girl emaciated with welts, cuts, and deep bruises that extended down the length of her leg. Madam Speaker, I will keep standing in this House and asking for answers and justice for Serenity and her family. I will keep asking until someone is held accountable and until Albertans get answers. Will the Premier tell Albertans when the people responsible for this heinous crime will be held accountable for raping, starving, and beating this precious little girl to death?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I first heard the story of Serenity, my heart was completely broken. When I saw those pictures in the paper, same thing. My heart was broken all over again. Clearly, everyone in this House was outraged by what happened. It was not okay. Her death in 2014 identified major issues in our system, and that is why our Premier ensured that there was a Minister of Children's Services. That's why every member of this House committed to getting it right, and I'm thankful for the participation of all members of this House and commitment to the ministerial panel.

Mr. Nixon: Albertans are demanding criminal charges, but we also need answers from the ministry. Policies were broken when Serenity was placed in a home without all the adult residents undergoing a criminal record check. Warnings were expressed about Serenity's well-being, and we now know that no one followed up. A panel discussing policy is not helpful if the policies aren't followed. Will the minister tell us if anyone ever gets punished for ignoring policies, and if not, how in the world her panel's work is going to make a difference?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again, it was completely unacceptable, the outcome that happened for Serenity. Her story has touched all of us. Clearly, her death in 2014 showed us that the system was completely broken. There were clearly systemic challenges. Our staff did not have the support they needed to take care of Alberta's children. I'm committing to make sure they have every support that they need to do the work that needs to be done, that they are so committed to do, which is to ensure the safety and well-being of the children that they are responsible for.

Mr. Nixon: This minister has a responsibility to tell Albertans what happened and to make sure it never happens again. On March 14 the minister told the Member from Calgary-West: "Absolutely we are reviewing Serenity's death. Absolutely." Madam Speaker, there is no evidence that such a review is under way. Will the minister please confirm who exactly "we" is referring to, and will she tell Albertans what she – what she – is doing to stop this sort of situation from ever happening again?

2:00

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason that we know about what happened to Serenity – and I'm so very thankful to the Child and Youth Advocate for the report that he did as an independent officer of the Legislature. Also, the statutory director continues to do the internal review that's expected in terms of all

these situations. Everyone was touched by that, including all of the committed staff of Children's Services. We continue to ensure and move forward along with the Child and Youth Advocate, along with the panel, along with all of those interested to ensure . . .

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, like my colleague who sits on the children in care panel with me, I felt shock, anger, and profound sadness over what happened to Serenity, as detailed in Paula Simon's column. On the panel Serenity's case has been raised and each time immediately shut down by the chair under orders from the minister. Hiding the problem is no way to find a solution. To the Premier: will you instruct your Minister of Children's Services to allow questions related to Serenity's case to be asked and answered so we can work together to avoid a recurrence?

Ms Notley: Madam Speaker, the member opposite knows that when he first proposed the committee, we sat down, and we talked about the mandate of the committee. It, of course, grew out of a collective concern, a collective shock about the tragedy of Serenity's circumstances and the need for all of us to work together on the solutions rather than trying to politicize and score political points and not make progress. We desperately want to try to make progress. The member opposite knows that the matter is being investigated by the RCMP. The member opposite knows that the matter is being investigated internally. The member opposite knows that the matter is being . . .

Mr. McIver: That was a difficult, difficult refusal to hear, Madam Speaker.

Serenity died not because established protocols are flawed, although they are, but because those protocols were not followed. In other words, one or more employees made a fatal error in judgment. Nobody wants a witch hunt, but I think it's important to ask the Premier how she thinks anything will change if we can't publicly examine what happened in the year up to Serenity's death. To the Premier: is the person or persons who made the errors in judgment contributing to Serenity's abuse and death still making judgments affecting children in care, and if so, why?

Ms Notley: Madam Speaker, as I was in the process of saying – the notion that the member opposite wants us to simply look at what happened after Serenity's death is troubling. In fact, if we're going to get to the fundamental issues that are going to solve this, we need to look at them holistically. We made a decision with respect to all the members of the committee to focus first on coming up with a better death review process, to get that done, and then to go into the larger considerations of the issues we need to manage, all of which would involve an opportunity to discuss the details of not only Serenity's tragedy but a lot of them. But we need to take time to do it carefully.

Mr. McIver: Again a refusal to say that the people who were responsible for Serenity are still not in charge of children.

According to the column child workers removed Serenity from a foster home where they were thriving and placed her with relatives who did not receive kinship care training. A woeful job was done on background checks on the adults living in the residence, and reports of potential mistreatment were not investigated, but that was given full legal custody. I know that working with kids in care is tough, but in light of the irresponsible actions around Serenity's death under your leadership, Premier, have there been or will there ever be any consequences at all for Serenity?

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, to be clear, the RCMP have the file. They are investigating it. They are speaking with the Crown,

and they will tell us what their recommendations are. It is not our job to direct the RCMP, nor is it our job to direct the Crown in terms of how they dispense with cases. I mean, this happened a year and a half before the last election, so the member opposite needs to understand that what we have to do together is to fix the system and not focus on trying to score political points. That is what the committee is trying to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder, hon. members, that for the next set of questions there will be no preambles on supplementaries.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last year tourism was a big contributor to the Alberta economy. As a Calgarian this is great news, given that many of my constituents work in the tourism industry and at the Calgary airport as airline agents, ground staff, CATSA, CBSA, commissary, and cargo, and then there are those that work around the neighbouring hotels. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: how is Budget 2017 supporting the tourism industry in Calgary?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We know that tourism makes life better for Albertans by creating good jobs and diversifying our economy. I'm very proud to say that Budget 2017 provides \$60.8 million in funding support to further grow Alberta's tourism destinations for domestic and international travellers. This includes getting ready for our inaugural direct flight from Mexico City to Calgary, which is scheduled by Aeromexico for June of this year. It also includes investments in world-class tourism infrastructure such as the Calgary Zoo as well as capital investments in Calgary's WinSport and other places around the city. We're very proud of the work that we've done.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As a former airline professional I think that the new direct flight from Mexico City to Calgary by Aeromexico is great news not only for the airline industry but for Alberta tourism as well. To the same minister: what effect will the newly scheduled flight have on my constituents working or seeking opportunities in Calgary?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to say that as a former airline professional myself I, too, am very excited by this new flight. These flights will make life better for Albertans by boosting tourism in addition to creating investment, trade, and cultural opportunities for Albertans between our two countries. The new Aeromexico flight from Calgary to Mexico City is estimated to create about 300 new jobs and generate \$46 million in economic output for this province, something I'm very, very proud to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given Alberta's diverse landscape are there any potential areas that you are looking at as new tourism hot spots outside the already sought-after mountain parks?

Miranda: Madam Speaker, we continue to make strategic investments and work with industry stakeholders to grow tourism

destinations across the province and make life better for all Albertans. Our focus will be placed on agritourism, cultural attractions, indigenous tourism development, and outdoor and nature-based tourism opportunities. We'll also continue to work with Travel Alberta and the tourism industry to encourage visitors to travel beyond the mountain parks and discover all the beautiful, hidden gems that our province has to offer.

Thank you.

Budget 2017

Mr. Fildebrandt: The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money. When a government runs deficits, it eventually has to pay the piper. To fix the problem, we can either rip off the Band-Aid, or we can peel it off slowly, prolonging the pain, potentially reopening the wound. We are entering our 10th consecutive year of deficits, and the minister has no credible plan to balance the budget within the next decade. Is the minister knowingly ignoring the deficit with an expectation that he won't be here in two years?

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much for the question. Madam Speaker, you know, the deficit is an issue for us, of course. We're prudently and thoughtfully working to bring that down, and we're doing that because that's in the best interest of Albertans. If we want to see the problems that are created when you quickly pull down a deficit, look east, because the people of Saskatchewan are going to be suffering. Even Gainer the Gopher is not safe in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Fildebrandt: And rats are not safe either, Madam Speaker.

Given that the minister was not feeling very much love from the opposition, he went to meet with the Calgary Chamber of commerce on Monday, but there wasn't very much love there either. They said that they were disappointed with this government's . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, that sounds like a preamble to me. Could you please get to the question?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam, I said "given."

They said that they were disappointed with this government for failing to take any action. Given that the Calgary Chamber of commerce didn't like this budget and Calgarians don't like this budget and this government is out of touch with Calgarians, has the NDP written off Calgary already?

2:10

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much again for the question. Madam Speaker, you know, I did have a conversation with the president of the Calgary Chamber of commerce, and that person said that he's been rough on every government forever. He talked about being challenging to the Prentice government. He talked about the same thing with the Redford government, so we're no different. We're working. We've got the backs of Albertans. We are protecting services. We are working to bring down the deficit thoughtfully and prudently. That is in the best interest of Albertans and Calgarians.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They are no different than the Redford government, Madam Speaker.

Given, Madam Speaker, that this government has a lousy record of meeting its budget targets and that under this budget our debt is set to reach an incredible \$71 billion by 2019 in the best-case scenario and given that this scenario requires oil to be at least \$68 a barrel and GDP growth over 6 per cent and given that the minister is so keen to gamble with Alberta's future, let's make a bet. I'll give

the minister 2 to 1 odds on 20 bucks that by 2019 the debt will exceed \$71 billion.

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, I think that I'm always generous with money, but it's my own money that I'm generous with, never taxpayers' money. Although I do have some friends who would say that there's no truth to the first statement, they would say there's plenty of truth to the second statement.

Dr. Cooke Extended Care Centre in Lloydminster

Dr. Starke: Madam Speaker, long-term care is a major concern for people across Alberta. The residents of Lloydminster were very pleased when the new Lloydminster extended care centre opened in 2015, so they noted with some interest and puzzlement that \$6 million has been allocated for that facility over the next three years in the Health ministry's five-year capital plan. They asked me: why is \$6 million being spent on a brand new facility? Can the Health minister confirm for the citizens of Lloydminster what the \$6 million in the capital plan is being spent on?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd be very happy to get the specific details. Often what happens with contracts when a new facility is being built is that there are holdovers based on money being held back for finalizations to be done to achieve the contract conditions, so sometimes there are out-years where the contractor still needs to provide services to ensure that everything has met the criteria. I'd be happy to follow up with the specific details about the new Dr. Cooke in the community of Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, it's not, in fact, the new Dr. Cooke. It's the old Dr. Cooke that they're talking about. The fate of that extended care centre, specifically the central and south wings, has been a major concern of the citizens of Lloydminster for some time. Given that the minister visited Lloydminster in July 2015 and indicated that no final decision would be made on the old Dr. Cooke without fulsome community consultation and given that that consultation has not yet happened, to the minister: when will you conduct the fulsome community consultation that you promised the citizens of Lloydminster nearly two years ago?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member is right that in my very first summer as Health minister I took it upon myself to visit the community and, alongside the member opposite, met with a number of people from the community. He is right in his iteration of the facts of that day. As a result, I've had the CEO of Alberta Health Services and my deputy minister both go and visit Lloydminster and meet with a number of individuals, and they are working on a further engagement plan. Absolutely, I signed up for this job to do things with community, and we look forward to working with them.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, we're certainly looking forward to that.

Given that the CEO of AHS as well as the deputy minister, as the minister just said, visited Lloydminster last October and given that those meetings were very short and occurred with only a very small,

hand-selected group of local individuals and given that the community still does not feel that the government has done the proper consultation with regard to the Dr. Cooke, to the minister: can you confirm whether the \$6 million will be used for repurposing the Dr. Cooke extended care centre, or is the money there to pay for some other course of action?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. I have followed up with both of the officials that were identified and said that I believe we need to have further consultation with the community. I can tell you, though, that when I had a chance to tour that facility alongside the member opposite, it certainly didn't appear to be the kind of place that would have longevity or a quality of life moving forward for residents if it were to continue as a long-term care facility. We want to make sure that they can get into the bathroom in a wheelchair, that staff can use a lift and take care of the patients in the facility. Certainly, this old facility is past its best-before date, but we're going to work with the community to figure out the best path as we move forward, and I invite the member opposite to help us with that.

Job Creation and Unemployment

Mr. Panda: Madam Speaker, last year the Minister of Economic Development and Trade introduced his 100,000 jobs plan for Alberta. Albertans were excited for this plan until we all found out what it actually meant. Now, a year later, Alberta has shed 81,000 jobs, well on the way to his goal of killing 100,000 jobs. How soon does the minister plan to reach his goal of killing 100,000 jobs, and why did the Premier give him this goal?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, Madam Speaker. You know, with regard to the challenging times that Alberta is in, the government is making life better for Albertans by continuing to invest in capital, by continuing to diversify our economy. We are supporting new capital coming to the fore by the Alberta investor tax credit, which is offering opportunities for tax credits for investment that will help diversify our economy. As well, once those companies have that money, they're going to be able to get some additional tax credits to buy capital so that they can diversify their capital needs.

Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Given that the NDP talking points accused the opposition of slashing and burning while they're the ones slashing and burning the economy with the carbon tax, increases to corporate and personal taxes, suing power companies, and shutting down clean coal mines and given that the 100,000 job-killing plan is not telling the private businesses to hire the masses of unemployed Albertans that need to get back to work, what is the minister's target for killing jobs next year? Why is he standing in the way of creating jobs?

Mr. Ceci: This side of the House is standing with Albertans, Madam Speaker. We are ensuring that there's an opportunity to invest across this province, and two pipelines will draw that money into this province for investment. We're also protecting services while Albertans are challenged. We have their back. That side would cut many programs and services just like Saskatchewan talks about. I want to say that with regard to investment it's starting to turn around: 2.6 per cent GDP growth in this province; 0.8 per cent in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Panda: Given that under the NDP 4,000 jobs were lost at Precision Drilling, 1,700 lost at Suncor, 14,000 jobs lost at Husky, 1,000 more lost at Shell, TransCanada, Cenovus and just yesterday, Madam Speaker, a thousand jobs were lost at Enbridge and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, to the question, please.

Mr. Panda: . . . given that there is the NDP fantasy and there is the hard economic reality, Calgarians and Albertans want to know: when will this government end their 100,000 job-killing plan?

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, it just amazes me. The other side doesn't seem to understand that there's been a two-year recession brought on by the drop in world oil prices. That was not a plan from this side. That had been occurring before we got to office. We've been working to invest in this province, to diversify our economy, and to support Albertans. Why won't they support Albertans?

2:20

High-risk Offenders

Mr. Cooper: Last week repeat child sex offender Curtis Poburan was released into Edmonton for the fourth time, and the Edmonton Police Service has rightly warned Albertans that he's a high risk and a danger to society. Minister, Albertans have the right to know: if dangerous and violent pedophiles like Curtis Poburan reoffend, will backlogged courtrooms and failed NDP policies triage him out of facing a judge?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As the member is well aware, court backlogs that had built up over a long time were the case when we came into government. The Jordan decision came down, and it represented a marked change in the law. We had two options. We could ensure that people, exactly like the person referenced by the member opposite, saw their trial in a timely manner by focusing on serious and violent matters with our triage protocol and by investing resources that the other side wouldn't have invested, or we could have let the decision just take its course on its own.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Given that the Alberta Justice website shows 85 high-risk offenders in Alberta, with 48 of those here in the Edmonton area, and given that victims who have suffered at the hands of those criminals are now forced to live in communities with those who have preyed upon them, Minister, who is responsible for monitoring high-risk offenders, and who is answerable when they reoffend?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We're actually very proud that here in Alberta our Crown prosecution system brings more of these dangerous and violent offender applications because those give us the ability to hold people in jail for longer. They give us the ability to monitor violent offenders when they are released by the system. So I'm very pleased that we make those applications, and I'm very proud of the job that our Crown does and that we do throughout our ministry to make sure that we're monitoring these offenders.

Mr. Cooper: Given that the tracking of dangerous offenders is critical to the safety and peace of mind of Alberta victims and since we've seen a steep increase in the rate of violent crimes in our province, what is the NDP doing to put the right tools into the hands

of law enforcement officers like ankle bracelets to ensure criminals that need to be tracked will be tracked?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very proud of the work that this government has done since coming into office to ensure that our justice system is used in a proportionate way to ensure that the justice system can focus on the most serious and violent offenders. In order to ensure that, we need to do things like invest in mental health supports. We need to do things like invest in social housing. Those things take people out of the system who don't belong there and allow us to focus on serious and violent offenders. And they would cut them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta's forest producers are working to stop the spread of mountain pine beetle. These producers are making concerted efforts to harvest affected timber first and through innovative processes make use of the trees that have been infested with the beetle. If not stopped, the pine beetle could destroy our forests and threaten the environment and economy. To the minister of forestry: to what extent are you supporting the efforts of the forest industry against the mountain pine beetle?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government remains committed to the control of the mountain pine beetle. The member is right. The mountain pine beetle is prevalent still within the province. There are approximately 10 contractors that do work throughout the winter in taking out infected trees. That is our most effective form of control. This year, by the end of this month, they will have taken out and harvested about 90,000 trees, again, the most effective form of control that we have.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that the mountain pine beetle is threatening many forests in Jasper national park and given that these parks, although they are in Alberta, are managed under the direction of the federal government, to the minister: to what extent are you working with your federal counterpart to create a strategy for the pine beetle in the national parks of Alberta?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. There's a bit of a good story, bad story here. The infestation that was happening in the Whitecourt-Grande Prairie area is actually about a 35 per cent decrease in what it had been, so our efforts there have been successful. As well, Mother Nature has played a role there. The bad story of that – the member is absolutely right – is that the infestation in the Hinton-Edson area has gotten worse. Depending on what area you are in, it's one to four times as bad as it had been. So we're going to be concentrating our efforts to control the mountain pine beetle in that area in particular. As for

the mountain pine beetles coming out of the national park, I'm afraid they have come out. They're infesting that area now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that last year Alberta suffered devastating fires in Fort McMurray and given that the damage from the pine beetles leaves forests extremely vulnerable to fires and given that the national parks are not clearing out trees infested with the beetle, so these large areas are just matches waiting to be struck, to the minister: how are you ensuring the safety of Albertans in areas like Hinton when the beetle-damaged trees in Jasper national park could fuel another Fort McMurray fire?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for the important question. My understanding is that there's a new superintendent in Jasper national park that is looking at this issue a little more seriously than perhaps another supervisor of the park had. Our staff continues to work with the staff of Jasper national park to see what more can be done. At the same time as a department what we do have control over is the control of the infestation in the Hinton-Edson area. Like I said before, we're going to concentrate our efforts there over the coming years as we see that infestation as amongst the worst in the province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Support for Seniors

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Families in Edmonton-Castle Downs rely on the seniors' facilities to provide the space and support that their loved ones require, so it is no surprise that a significant concern raised by the constituents is the wait times to get into these facilities. Given that Edmonton is currently in a seniors' facility deficit, to the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what approaches has this government taken to ensure that seniors are supported and have accessible, safe, and affordable housing options?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seniors built this province, and they deserve to retire in dignity. That's why our government is investing \$1.2 billion over five years in the seniors' lodges and affordable housing. I'm proud to say that over 40 projects are currently on the go. Our government is investing in seniors. The opposition wants reckless cuts. We are making life better. They are making life worse for seniors.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Another concern among my constituents is programs that are offered to independent seniors. To the same minister: what supports are available for seniors wanting to stay in their communities, especially those who are single or widowed?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. Seniors want to age in a community close to family and friends, and our government supports this. I'm

so proud that Budget 2017 is protecting and improving seniors' programs like the Alberta seniors' benefit. We also increased funding to the seniors' home adaptation repair program, a program that supports seniors with \$40,000 in low-interest home equity loans. Madam Speaker, when we introduced this program to support seniors, the opposition voted against it. Our government is protecting programs for seniors. They want to cut them.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that information about these programs and services is most easily accessed online and given that not everyone has access to computers, to the same minister: how is the government ensuring that information remains accessible to all Albertans?

Ms Sigurdson: Every Albertan receives an information package through the mail that provides full details of seniors' programs before they reach 65. The updated information guide will be available in July 2017. But, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you what the seniors' information package would look like if it were the opposition's. It would be much thinner than ours because they would be recklessly cutting programs. We're investing in seniors in this province. They would be cutting. We're building seniors' housing. They'd be cutting that.

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

Job Creation and Unemployment (continued)

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For the past quarter century Alberta's unemployment rate has not exceeded the national average, but all that went out the window when the NDP came to power. Now our unemployment rate sits at a daunting 8.3 per cent. On Monday the Economic Development and Trade minister said, "Our jobs plan is working." To the Premier: with more than 80,000 jobs lost, 100,000 on EI, and an unemployment rate that exceeds the national average, do you really think that your plan is working?

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Let me tell you about the Wildrose plan. The Wildrose plan is to cut \$9 billion from construction, which would mean construction jobs were lost in this province instead of supported and moving forward. The Wildrose plan is to cut operating funding, billions of dollars, which would mean that public sector, health care, education, all of these jobs as well as the services that families count on day in and day out would be lost. Our jobs plan is working. We're continuing to add more jobs and stimulate areas of the economy so that Alberta families know that their government is here and that we have their backs.

The Deputy Speaker: I may be mistaken, but I thought I heard someone on this side say: tell the truth. I'm hoping I was mistaken.

Mr. Barnes: Madam Speaker, given that employment is on the rise in energy-dependent provinces like B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba and given that both Saskatchewan and Manitoba managed to keep their deficits below a billion dollars while B.C. is set to deliver its fifth straight balanced budget, does the Premier think that maybe, just maybe, her bad policies and not oil prices are to blame for the fact that under this NDP government's watch Alberta has fallen completely off the rails?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Wildrose cannot be trusted to support Alberta families. They're working to make life more expensive. They want us to cut minimum wage. They want us to jack up tuition for postsecondary institutions. They want us to pretend that we don't care. They don't want to move forward with child care. On this side of the House we've got Albertans' backs. We're making sure that even though the price of oil has dropped, we're not turning our backs on Alberta families. We're finding ways to make their life more affordable, not worse, as the members opposite keep lobbying for every day in this House. Enough is enough.

Mr. Barnes: Madam Speaker, we want Albertans back to work. This government has one plan: hope and pray for oil prices and GDP to go up. Meanwhile Albertans are suffering. Given that in February the number of people seeking employment dropped by 14,000 people and given that ATB Financial now advertises to assist Albertans facing hard times and notes this fall . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, to the question, please.

Mr. Barnes: . . . indicates that those in search of work are starting to feel discouraged, is this NDP government ashamed that under their gross mismanagement of this province Albertans have lost hope?

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, Albertans are strong. Albertans are resilient. Albertans are building a better country one day at a time. That's why we are supporting those young Albertans by hiring teachers to go into their classrooms. That's why we're supporting aging Albertans by making sure that we build 2,000 long-term care and dementia spaces so that they have somewhere to age with dignity. That's why we're increasing home care supports so that people can live at home in a respectful, dignified manner. If you want to talk about what's happening in some of those other provinces, bring it on, but I have to say that we're proud to have Albertans' backs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Youth Transitioning Out of Care

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. All Albertans know about Serenity's tragedy, and recently the office of the Child and Youth Advocate reviewed the tragic case of Peter, who was murdered nine months after child intervention involvement had ended. Quoting from the report, "Peter asked for help many times; and, many times he voiced his anxiety about reaching adulthood without a plan, alone and struggling with addictions." To the Minister of Children's Services: since those leaving the child welfare system are vulnerable and require resources, what specific initiatives are you undertaking to address the gaps in services found during transition?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The death of that young man was a tragic loss. It shows a number of things, including the impact of inter-generational trauma on our indigenous peoples and reminds us of the need to work towards reconciliation. It also talks to us about the importance of building caring relationships with the young people that we work with. It is so critical that we ensure that we are able to support them as they move to young adults. You know, moving to

adulthood is hard for anyone, but for these kids it is a mountainous challenge, and I commit to working with them.

Mr. Rodney: Given that the report highlights the horrors that this young man experienced, including the loss of his parents and grandparents before he was 15, his brother's fatal overdose when he was 17 and given the fact that he often did not have a stable, safe place to go and given that the previous report from December 2015 also called for the ministry to ensure that young people within the system who have experienced trauma are adequately assessed and offered proper resources, again to the minister: what is your government doing today to improve outcomes for children in care who have experienced traumatic events so that what happened with Peter just never happens to anyone else ever again?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, that series of traumatic events is the real life of many youth that I talk to in my own riding. What happens to these children, what happens to many of our indigenous youth is so traumatic, and they absolutely need support. We've begun implementing changes to better recognize and address the long-term impacts of grief, trauma, and loss on the youth that we support, and we will continue to work with the Child and Youth Advocate to strengthen the ways that we support Alberta's children and youth.

Mr. Rodney: Given that many stakeholders have called upon the government to give the office of the Child and Youth Advocate greater teeth in having their recommendations acted upon in a concrete manner by the government and given that following recommendations from the office in a serious and expedient manner would improve the system for all children, again to the minister. It is too late for Peter, but it's not too late for other children in transition. Are you considering expanding the powers of the Child and Youth Advocate to ensure that all recommendations are addressed and acted upon in a timely and meaningful manner?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, in the report the advocate noted that transition policies were in place. However, every young person faces different challenges, and we need to recognize their unique circumstances. I met with the Child and Youth Advocate just this morning and had an incredibly productive meeting as we committed to working collaboratively together in full recognition of the fact that we both desperately want the same thing, and that is to improve the outcomes for Alberta's children in care. I commit to working as closely as I can with him to make sure that that happens.

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

Rockyview General Hospital

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Residents in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore often raise concerns about the state of nearby hospital facilities, which can be congested with lengthy wait times. Given that the government has also earmarked \$600 million over the next four years for infrastructure maintenance on existing health facilities, what improvements can my constituents expect to see at the Rockyview general hospital?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question and for her advocacy. You know, the folks on the other side like to raise the alarm about deficits, but I never hear their concerns about the serious infrastructure deficits left to our province's buildings and infrastructure. That's what massive cuts do. They leave our hospitals to crumble. That's not what we believe in on this side. We are investing \$143 million this year alone in infrastructure upgrades to help facilities. That means new floors, improved security systems, and an updated electricity generator for the Rockyview. That's not flashy, but it's critical to keeping our health facilities running and making life better for Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, hon. minister, and thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that we know Calgary is facing a high rate of mental health crises, to the Associate Minister of Health: what resources are available for people needing mental health interventions and supports at the Rockyview hospital?

Ms Payne: Mental health is a top priority for our government, and we are improving the entire health care system to ensure that people have the supports they need in their communities. We are opening a new mental health assessment unit at the Rockyview general hospital to better help mental health patients get the timely care they need. This unit will get people out of the ER and into beds. Then, when they are ready, this unit will help connect people to Rockyview's excellent mental health day programs, community services, and social supports. We believe that the health of Albertans should be central, and we're working to put patients, not systems, first. That's part of our commitment to making life better for Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that much of the hospital investment in Calgary is going to our world-class cancer centres and to further research, can the Associate Minister of Health please elaborate on how this funding will support work on preventing and treating diseases like ovarian cancer?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We know that Alberta is home to world-class research in health and medicine, and this government is proud to support that work. Budget 2017 allocates \$25 million for cancer research and prevention, which includes innovative clinical trials targeting ovarian cancer through the Tom Baker centre in Calgary and the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton. This work will help detect ovarian cancer sooner and get people into improved treatments faster. I look forward to keeping the member updated as this work progresses and as we continue to make those investments to make life better for Albertans.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Truth and Reconciliation Art Project

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. After the election my constituency office was left with bare walls. As Spruce Grove-St. Albert contains several high schools, we began to co-ordinate with their art programs to host student artwork. This relationship has

provided the office with ever-updating artwork and the students with a great opportunity for public exposure.

In December we hosted one particular art project. The students of the Spruce Grove composite high school did an art project on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In this mixed-media project students endeavoured to express what they learned of the realities of the boarding schools. The artwork represents the students' understanding of what truth and reconciliation means to them and a gesture of respect. After hosting this project into January, the project was moved to the Spruce Grove library. Following a blessing and a smudging several students voluntarily came forward to discuss their pieces, the inspiration, and their thoughts on the process.

Madam Speaker, there were a few threads that wove through each of the student's presentations. Images of butterflies having their wings shorn off, of the differences in one boy from the time he entered the school in traditional garments and the time when he left the school, and of the schools themselves were present in many of the pieces. The students spoke about the destruction of indigenous identity, about the challenges of being forced to redefine yourself down to your name, and about the years lost to families as a result of the residential schools.

Madam Speaker, I recently had a conversation with one elder, who said: we are very good at talking about the truth, but we have a lot of work to do towards reconciliation.

Madam Speaker, as we all work through the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and work to implement the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, it is important to remember that truth needs to be paired with reconciliation. The first steps are uncomfortable, and they are often painful, but projects like this provide a template for that first conversation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Challenge in the Rockies Hockey Tournament

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I'm delighted to rise to talk about the fourth annual Challenge in the Rockies. This fun hockey event takes place in Hinton and Jasper from March 29 to April 2. It's the result of a vision to host an event that continues to enhance youth sport experience and raise funds for future programming.

This affair is a testament to the dedication of the organizers and the more than 200 volunteers who support the athletes, families, and coaches participating in venues in both Hinton and Jasper. It involves over five days of hockey, with 34 teams from novice to midget, and more than 500 players in more than 90 games. Girls and boys aged four to 18 face off on the ice with a focus on physical literacy and staying active. Games are played strictly for the love of the sport. The Saturday evening game features four Oilers alumni along with six celebrities, including the Hanson brothers, and others celebrating the 40th anniversary of the classic movie *Slap Shot*.

Proceeds from the challenge go to supporting minor sport and recreation across West Yellowhead. As 1,500 people converge in the area, book more than 2,000 hotel rooms, and support local businesses, they will bring thousands of dollars into the local economy.

I would like to thank the organizers, volunteers, and more than 25 sponsors that make this event possible.

Please come on out to West Yellowhead and join us at the Challenge in the Rockies, from March 29 to April 2. I look forward to seeing you there.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Violence against Women and Girls

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On March 8 world-wide communities came together to celebrate the accomplishments of the struggle for equality. Millions marked International Women's Day sharing stories of accomplishments and of hope.

This year that struggle for safety and equality rubbed raw. Only a month ago my family and I lost my dear sister, Victoria, and it was a pain like no other. I know nothing can change what happened to her, but I vowed for her and for my nieces that I would do anything in my power to end violence against women and girls.

Madam Speaker, half of Canadian women have suffered at least one act of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16, and over a quarter have been assaulted by a spouse. Every six days a woman in Canada is killed in domestic violence. In the 66 days that we will sit here in this Chamber, 11 women will die.

Our government has taken action on the work to end gender-based violence, and I'm proud that my private member's bill, the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015, became law. I have been flooded with messages of gratitude from women leaving violence. Since then 134 Albertans have been able to escape their perpetrators without financial penalty. And the work continues. Our government has introduced Bill 2, an act to eliminate limitation periods for launching a civil claim related to sexual or domestic violence. Survivors should feel empowered to come forward on their own terms when they are ready.

Madam Speaker, our government will continue to work to make change. We will continue to work to make the lives of Albertans better. We will continue to work to support those living with trauma. This is our government, a government for all Albertans.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is five copies of a document entitled *Taxation Habit Bad for Health*. It reminds us that "taxes are the arterial sclerosis of the economy."

Also, I have a tabling of five copies of a letter from a member of the Hotshots curling league. They're concerned about the AGLC's enforcement of the 50-50 rules, and they're requesting that the law allow for draws under \$500 to be exempt.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies to table of a letter received from The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools expressing their concerns about being excluded in Bill 1 despite the fact that they are public schools.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other tablings today?

Hon. members, we had a point of order raised during question period. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I was going to raise a point of order with respect to the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks' use of preambles, but it seemed to be somewhat widespread today, and I think you've dealt with it a couple of times. So I will withdraw the point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. I appreciate you withdrawing the point of order.

2:50

Statement by the Speaker

Preambles to Supplementary Questions

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to offer a little bit of clarification, however, on preambles with the use of “given.” It doesn’t give you blanket permission to just string together a bunch of unrelated comments simply because you’ve said “given” in between them. I’d encourage you, hon. members, to please keep your supplementals relevant to the first question.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 3

Voluntary Blood Donations Act

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, on behalf of the Minister of Health.

Bill 3 has certainly caused lively debate, and I’m very pleased with the support that it is getting. It’s clear to me that we can all agree that our public blood supply is an important topic that many of you are passionate about.

Bill 3 will ensure that our voluntary donor base does not become eroded. The legislation will ban payment to an individual donor, ban paid blood donation advertising, exempt Canadian Blood Services so they can continue with their current practices and any future activities, provide an exemption for blood given solely for the purpose of research, and provide for inspection and enforcement.

I acknowledge that there are some concerns raised by the opposition, and I would like to respond to a couple; for instance, the funding that Alberta provides for the collection and manufacturing of plasma. In 2016-17 Alberta Health budgeted approximately \$200 million for transfusable blood, fresh plasma, and plasma for manufactured products. Nearly 60 per cent, or \$120 million, of that line will be spent on finished plasma products made from plasma collected both domestically and abroad. This funding helped ensure that Canadian Blood Services could collect voluntary donations of plasma and ensured that there was an adequate supply of plasma in Alberta to meet the demand for transfusions.

In 2015-16 Alberta also spent \$111 million on plasma for manufactured products. This plasma was manufactured into drugs that treat fluid loss in burn patients, transplant recipients, and trauma patients. It treats immune disorders and severe infections, and it also treats bleeding disorders such as hemophilia. We don’t currently have the infrastructure to manufacture these products in Alberta or in Canada. Plasma is a perishable product, and if it’s not used or manufactured in a timely manner, it may go to waste, and we can’t allow that to happen.

The system that Canadian Blood Services has established helps ensure that we have the blood, plasma, and drugs manufactured from plasma that we need when we need them. They do this in part by purchasing plasma products from the international market to meet the Canadian demand. This is why the legislation helps to protect Canadian Blood Services’ ability to continue to manage the national blood system, and for this reason they will be exempt.

The ban on paid donations will help ensure that Alberta patients have secure and reliable access to donated blood when they need it. I need to emphasize, Madam Speaker, that donating blood cannot be viewed as a business venture. We cannot allow our system to be driven by individuals who are only donating to receive a payment. This is not how we protect our vulnerable population and not how we should ensure that products are available to those Albertans who need them when they need them.

Private businesses that pay for donations are looking to sell their product to the highest bidder. This may cause our blood and plasma to go to another country that offers more money for it. Bill 3 will help us support a national blood supply by preventing private clinics that pay their donors for blood donations from setting up in the province.

The legislation will also help prevent Alberta’s voluntary blood donor pool, that Canadian Blood Services relies upon, from being depleted. Supporting our national blood system, operated by Canadian Blood Services, helps ensure we can maintain a sufficient supply of blood and blood products in Canada. A blood donation system based on payment can lead to a disconnected and fragmented national blood system. In addition, financially motivated donors may choose to donate to a private clinic. This may in turn lead to a depleted blood supply as individuals choose private plasma collection clinics instead of donating to the voluntary clinics.

This legislation brings Alberta in line with Ontario and Quebec. These provinces have already banned paid blood donation to protect the voluntary donation system.

It is important to recognize that the World Health Organization also encourages countries to support voluntary blood donation systems. The organization has indicated that this system presents the safest, most reliable source of donation and does not exploit vulnerable populations.

Our blood supply is one of the most important resources we have. Donating blood should not be looked at as a way for Albertans to make money. It’s a valuable public resource that saves lives every day. This legislation is intended to make sure paid donations do not erode the voluntary donation base needed by Canadian Blood Services. With Bill 3 our government will work closely with Canadian Blood Services to ensure Albertans continue to have secure access to this resource when and where it’s needed. We support the voluntary blood donation system.

I’d also just like to add a few quotes from some research from the Ontario Legislature. I’d like to quote Christine Elliott, health critic for the Ontario Conservatives and two-time leadership candidate and wife of the late Jim Flaherty. Elliott said that

blood is a public resource. This value must guide the blood supply system, as voluntary donors are doing it for the benefit of other persons in Canada and not for any other motivations. For this reason, profits should not be made from donated blood, and the operator of the blood system should act as a trustee of this valuable public resource.

This is from the Ontario *Hansard*, March 24, 2014, at 16:40.

The Ontario bill went on to pass unanimously, with PCs, Liberals, and New Democrats all in agreement. Later that year the Ontario PCs went on to campaign unsuccessfully on the promise to abolish 100,000 public-sector jobs. So the notion that the Ontario bill they voted for, or our Alberta bill, is simply a favour to the unions is absurd on its face.

I would like to add my voice to all of the people that have gone before me and encourage every member of this House to support the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak on Bill 3 in third reading. You know, really, this boils down to one question and one question very clearly, and that is: should we pay Canadians for donating plasma, or should we continue to pay for plasma products derived from paid American donors, full stop? That is the question at hand here. To bring in other issues is to really cloud that fundamental question.

One of the things that concerns me in this – and we heard it in the speech that was just made – is that there is a concern about two factors. One is – and I'll use the term – “cannibalizing” the volunteer base. The second is risk of viral transmission. Well, let's put the second one to bed right away. In 25 years of collecting plasma and processing it for use in patient care, there has not been a single case of viral transmission due to a plasma transfusion, and that is with the use of a paid or processed plasma product. The safety is ensured by Health Canada, and after what we went through in the '80s, we have one of the most stringent systems in the world. It's one we should be proud of. That is what safeguards patients, and those standards apply whether we are talking about blood products that are collected from voluntary donors or from paid donors. There is no difference in the standard. So to suggest in any way that deriving products from paid donors is in any way more risky than deriving products from voluntary donors is simply false.

The Krever commission 20 years ago recommended going primarily with voluntary blood donors, but it also recognized that a lot of the problems we faced in the '80s were due to problems in the organizations that were doing the blood collection, not in the factor of whether we're using voluntary or paid-for donors. I know there are organizations that are very concerned and are still holding to the recommendations of the Krever inquiry report, a 20-year-old report from a time when plasma use and the use of plasma protein products, processed plasma, was in its infancy. Since that time that use is burgeoning. It's growing by double digits every year. So let's put that one to bed right away.

3:00

The second objection is the one about how it would affect the voluntary donor base. You know, at face value, if you were to walk into a coffee shop and say, “If we started paying people for plasma donations, do you think it would affect the voluntary donor base?” people might say: “Well, yeah. Why would I volunteer if I could get paid for it?” But there's a problem. There's a difference between donating plasma for the purpose of plasma protein products and donating blood or plasma for transfusion purposes.

When you donate blood, you can only do it once every eight weeks if you're a man, once every 12 weeks if you're a woman, and it takes about 20 minutes. If you're donating plasma, it takes 90 minutes, and you do it once a week. Because of those requirements, there is not a single country in the world that has been able to establish a self-sufficiency in plasma supply on a purely voluntary donor basis. Nowhere. It's just simply because of the difference in donation between plasma and blood.

You know, a lot of people aren't aware of that. A lot of people aren't aware that we're purchasing 70 per cent of the plasma products we need in Canada from out of the country, from donors who generally are paid. You know, it also ignores the fact – and we've heard a few times the statistics, one year old, from the facility that is now open in Saskatoon. That's fine, and that should continue to be monitored. But against that one single piece of evidence that it might affect the voluntary donor pool, we have 30 years of evidence in Manitoba, in Winnipeg, where there's been a paid-for plasma collection centre for 30 years, and both Canadian Blood Services and Health Canada have said that it does not affect their voluntary donor pool.

In addition, we have the evidence from countries like Germany, Austria, and the United States, where they have parallel voluntary and paid-for donor pools, and their voluntary donor rates are nearly double the Canadian donor rate of 3.6 per 100 people. Their voluntary donor rates run in the 5.7 and 5.6 ranges, yet they also have a paid-for system. The idea that you're somehow going to affect your paid-for system is simply not borne out by the evidence. Other countries have proven that.

Why would you be against this? Well, I'm going to put a very fine point on this right now. This government is protecting its union friends, full stop. They are protecting union jobs in CUPE at Canadian Blood Services, full stop. They are protecting Canadian Blood Services, which is a closed union shop, and they are trying to stop any development of any competition to Canadian Blood Services. That's the motivation here. That's who they're trying to protect. Instead of providing for plasma that could be collected and processed in a whole new biomedical – call it an industry. I thought you were in favour of diversifying the economy. I thought you were in favour of new jobs. I thought you were in favour of investment. You want to shut these all down. That is what you want by doing this.

Now, Canadian Blood Services say that they have a plan, that they have a plan to invest 100 million taxpayer dollars to take their current system from 20 per cent all the way up to 50 per cent of the required supply. Even with an investment of 100 million taxpayer dollars, they still wouldn't get us to where we need to be. We would still need to purchase additional supplies.

It ignores the reality that there is no country in the world that has achieved plasma self-sufficiency. To suggest somehow that Canada would be able to overcome that hurdle because of some factor that has yet to be identified by the proponents of this bill is simply not true. The people we should be listening to, Madam Speaker, are patients, patients that depend on these plasma products.

I would like to quote from an editorial by Durhane Wong-Rieger, who was formerly the president of the Canadian Hemophilia Society. This is what she said.

One of the most important things I learned from my four years as president of the Canadian Hemophilia Society during the public inquiry was that fear, prejudice and politics could trump science and reason in blood-related decisions.

This is a government that always says that they want to rely on science. This is a government that says that it wants to rely on the data. Well, it should look at the data surrounding blood transfusion and plasma transfusion specifically when we're dealing with patients.

I'd like to furthermore quote from the same letter:

Patients with rare disorders, as well as many others, rely on plasma-derived products... On the one hand, Canada can continue to rely on products made with plasma from paid American donors. Most of our patients whose lives literally depend on these products already know and have no concerns that the donors are paid. On the other hand, if Canada were successful in setting up paid plasma donor clinics, not only might we have greater security of supply but we would be contributing to a worldwide need for safe plasma.

But, no, Madam Speaker. This government wants to shut that down. This government wants to keep those evil blood brokers out of Alberta. It's okay for them to set up in B.C. and it's okay for them to set up in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and New Brunswick because all of those provinces have welcomed this because they were forward thinking and they understand that this is a way to diversify the economy.

They keep on pointing to Ontario and to Quebec. Well, the law in Quebec is nearly 30 years old, and Héma-Québec – that's the blood service in the province of Quebec; it's not Canadian Blood

Services – is desperately looking for ways to increase their plasma donor pool. They are looking at spending millions and millions of dollars in advertising to try to build up that pool because they cannot monetarily compensate donors. Doesn't it just make more sense to compensate the donors and not pay all those dollars to advertising firms?

Madam Speaker, that is the issue. We've got five specific patient groups who have come out – and there are others – but specifically the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization, CIPO. In their brief they comment:

Not allowing paid plasma donations in Canada will encourage Canada's overreliance on the US for plasma. We are concerned that only three of some 30 plasma-derived products used by Canadians are manufactured in whole or in part by plasma collected from unpaid donors by [Canadian Blood Services] and Héma-Québec.

That, indeed, Madam Speaker, is the challenge we have. To simply walk away and to simply say no to the investment of \$400 million; to 2,000 jobs that include nurses, laboratory technicians, medical professionals; to not recognize what British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and New Brunswick have already recognized, that this is a medical reality and that the need for these products is only increasing, is to stick our proverbial heads in the sand, which, by the way, ostriches don't do, and ignore reality. It is to ignore the reality that the need for these products will only grow.

You know, in 2013 there was a national round-table on blood products and what should be done with regard to paid plasma transfusions, and one of the conclusions of that round-table, coming out of Justice Krever's recommendation, was that Canada should have an open blood system but that it should consult with the public before changing the voluntary system. Because it is a public policy issue that impacts all Canadians, there was a recommendation for a cross-country public consultation, and patients that use plasma products were identified as a key stakeholder group that must be consulted on this issue as they are the ones that are familiar with the safety issues and they are the most concerned with security of supply.

I ask the minister: were they consulted? Did you talk to this key stakeholder group? My bet is that you talked to the folks that you had at your press conference; yes, the president of CUPE from Canadian Blood Services, who was on the podium with you that day.

3:10

That is the crux of the argument, Madam Speaker. It is: who are you speaking for? Are you speaking for patients? No, you're not. The patients are very clearly saying that they want to see paid-for plasma donations in Canada. That is very clear. Are you speaking for unemployed Albertans, who could be employed in these operations, who could work in these plasma collection centres? Very clearly, you aren't because you're saying no to this potential source of economic diversification. You are speaking for your union friends, and that is it. It is time to speak and to broaden your perspective beyond just keeping your friends in the unions happy. That is your job in here when you come into this Chamber. You have a duty to all Albertans, and that duty extends beyond your friends in the unions. That is what needs to be done in terms of the decision-making here.

There is overwhelming evidence, Madam Speaker, unbiased scientific evidence, that shows that paid plasma donations are safe, that paid plasma donations do not cannibalize the voluntary donor supply, and that paid plasma donations would provide a source of economic benefit to our province and to Canada in general and would help secure our safety and security of Canadian supply from Canadian donors. But these folks want to shut that down.

Madam Speaker, in my view, Bill 3, which will close off that opportunity because Canadian Plasma Resources has said very clearly that they will go elsewhere, to where they are, in fact, welcome to set up, is one more example of how this government chases away the entrepreneur, the investor, the people who actually want to come to Alberta. Despite what they will tell you, that is what they are doing here. It is shameful, and I'm opposed to Bill 3.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Bill 3, the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, is not just about promoting volunteerism and blood donations. It's the linchpin that will discourage the biomedical industry from developing life-saving drugs and adjuncts here in Alberta. The health industry promotes economic and health benefits. This is an industry that provides more than 11 per cent of Canada's GDP. Health is a major employer. Over 45,000 Canadians are employed in pharmaceutical, medical equipment, and medical supply manufacturing alone. Directly or indirectly this sector influences the careers of thousands of Canadians, all highly educated and who qualify as well-paid folks who pay taxes. They purchase goods and technology and services from every sector in our economy, helping to drive our economy. This sector is a major foundation of science and technological research. Advancements in the life sciences sector result in improved health for everybody.

Madam Speaker, did you know that at the beginning of the 20th century the average life expectancy was 50 years? In 1961 we could expect to live to 71 years, in 2006 to 80 years. In the span of a century we've gained 30 years of life for the average person. Some of this is due to benefits that come from more education and increased income, but more importantly it's the result of research and innovation that was translated into health care services and treatments.

We are a country that has been shifting the basis of our workforce. We are diversifying beyond the natural resource sector, where we fished and we farmed and we harvested trees and we mined oil and gold and diamonds, to one that is leading to more knowledge-based work, with science and technology as the base.

Canada produces great innovators in health. Pabulum, the infant food, was initially developed by three Canadians to prevent and treat rickets. It is now helping hundreds of millions of children across the world. T-cell receptors and the gene that produces them was discovered by Canadians. Understanding how T cells work helped us develop drugs that fight infection, autoimmune disorders, cancer, and posttransplant rejection. Cancer patients receive radiation treatments from cobalt-based units as opposed to using radium. This allowed an affordable treatment that could penetrate deep tumors in the body, another Canadian contribution to health.

Stem cells. Stem cells are the master cells of the human body. It was a Canadian and Scottish research collaboration that was able to generate stem cells more easily from the human body. This process allows for the person's own cells to replace cells that cause devastating diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and diabetes. This research continues on, but it was innovation here that has enabled this research to progress. Need I mention Sir Frederick Banting, who helped develop insulin? Prior to this innovation diabetes meant certain death for children.

This is an industry that uses scientists, people from many disciplines like biochemistry, molecular biology, genetics, cellular biology, and medicinal chemistry. Of interest to note: each aspect of this industry requires human samples as the base to develop these innovations.

This bill isn't just about stopping greedy companies from paying for human products from disadvantaged citizens; it's a precursor to stopping any access to voluntary donors for biomedical companies, which, in turn, use these products to create medicines and for other life-saving measures. This is a sector that relies on human tissues to create solutions to disease.

Why does this NDP government hate science? Why does this NDP government not support industry that creates breakthroughs in medicine and diagnosis and treatment of disease? Why does this government not support the biosciences sector? Why does this NDP government choose to take the moral high ground yet choose to buy products from the United States, that collects and processes these things in the very same manner to which this government objects? Why does this NDP government choose to support international companies? Actually, on that point, we shouldn't be surprised. They're supporting an Ontario company over Alberta companies to buy light bulbs. Why does this government choose to exempt one organization from paying for this human product?

Is this government obtuse, or are they ignorant? Their superficial view demonstrates a lack of consultation, especially with patient advocacy groups that rely on medications and treatments born of these questionably ethical methods, groups like the Canadian Immunodeficiencies Patient Organization and the Canadian Hemophilia Society.

I'm pleading with this government to consider diversification of our economy instead of pursuing ideological beliefs. I am pleading with this government to reconsider this bill. If this government is simply trying to protect a few union jobs, that would be unfortunate because you're sending a message that will discourage an entire industry from blossoming here in Alberta, and that's the real crime here. This is an NDP government choosing ideology over practicality and reality. Keep your blinders on, NDP. Keep Albertans down. Keep your reliance on out-of-province solutions.

Let this vote on this bill be about the true issue here. Madam Speaker, to vote no to this bill is to say yes to the diversification of our economy. To say yes to this bill is simply hypocritical, narrow minded, and short sighted.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Turner: Well, first of all, I'm surprised that the member opposite would actually call this side of the House a word that starts with "I." I think it's actually unparliamentary. I take a great deal of umbrage at that, and I hope that he thinks better of it in future debate.

An Hon. Member: Did he call us intellectual?

Dr. Turner: He didn't call us intellectual.

An Hon. Member: Oh. Sorry. I missed it.

Dr. Turner: Right.

The other thing I take umbrage at is being called unscientific. How many of us on this side have actually studied science in high school or taken courses at university or even studied to be a nurse or studied to be a doctor or a psychologist? I think maybe only the bus driver on this side hasn't taken the course. I think this sort of debate really debases the collegial atmosphere that we're supposed to be enjoying in this. As I said, Madam Speaker, I really resent it. I do want to get back to my comments, though, on the gist of what was being said.

3:20

The collection of blood plasma by a private corporation goes against all of the precepts of the blood system that's been built up. Actually, Dr. Norman Bethune, who was a hero of both the Spanish war and the Second World War in China, was the originator, a Canadian who actually established the first mobile blood transfusion unit. I'm proud to say that I'm a graduate of the same medical school that he taught at. So we have a long tradition here in Canada of a voluntary blood transfusion service that is dependent upon the altruistic commitment of something like 50,000 Albertans a year as well as probably – I think it translates into half a million Canadians a year giving blood. What this bill attempts to do is to protect that voluntary blood system, and we should all be working together.

Now, there's a lot of vilification in some of the comments that were being made about the CBS and what a horrible organization it is. Remember that the CBS is a totality of 10 different provinces as well as three territories, that have come together to organize a voluntary blood system. As was said, Héma-Québec is separate. Otherwise, there is a common blood system that is actually run by the provinces. The province of Alberta has a seat on the board of Canadian Blood Services, and it is that board that determines the policies, not the unions, not the citizens of Alberta. The board of Canadian Blood Services determines the policies, and they have been charged with collecting sufficient red cells, platelets, plasma for transfusion as well as plasma for fractionation.

Again, that last point is what is being missed on the other side. We don't have a plasma fractionation plant in Canada, and we haven't had one since the late '80s, when Connaught labs closed, because it is not economic given the size of our economy to have that. We have depended for over 20 years on getting plasma fractionation elsewhere.

The exception to that is in Manitoba, which has been mentioned. Manitoba has a phenomenal private plasma collection system. It is called the Rh institute, and it was created by the Bowman brothers in Manitoba. It's actually owned by a company called Cangene now, and the so-called paid donors actually are women. There's a group of women who have become heavily immunized against the Rh factor that actually would donate except that they're paid for their time to come in and donate. That is a source of the Rh factor that prevents Rh disease. That's the disease where if a woman is Rh negative and has a baby that is Rh positive, that baby will die unless they get the Rh treatment.

The Deputy Speaker: We no longer have any time left under 29(2)(a). My apologies.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by Stony Plain.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This bill is one I've really struggled with. I want to be clear that my instinct when I first saw the bill was to support it because I would like to be part of a province that has a voluntary system that meets all of our needs, that supports the principles of public health care, that supports the principles of accessibility and safety. These are things that I hold dear.

But as I looked deeper into this issue, starting with the premise that blood is sacred, that it is precious, far too precious or sacred to be bought or sold, that we ought to ensure that voluntary donations meet our needs – well, we've heard from previous speakers and through debate on this bill that that simply isn't true. In fact, it's hypocritical for us to say that we will never rely on paid donations for anything because we do. We rely on at least 80 per cent of our plasma supply coming from paid donors in the United States. So I asked myself: what's the difference?

I'm going to try hard not to make this too ideological an issue, and what I try to do on most occasions is to rely on the evidence. I've spent a lot of time doing research on this, and I want to acknowledge and recognize and thank the library staff here at the Legislative Assembly, who've done remarkable work on very short notice to find some journal articles for me. Val Footz and staff are remarkable. I want to acknowledge them.

I want to look at the impact, firstly, of incentives on what should be an altruistic transaction in the case of blood donation. What is the impact of incentives on altruism? I found that there's a long-held principle, dating back to the 1970s, that monetary incentives may crowd out altruistic donors because, ironically, altruistic donors will stop donating if there's a cash reward involved, which is, you'd think, counterintuitive. But people get what, believe it or not, the academic literature calls, quote, a warm glow from an altruistic activity. If that is replaced by a cold, monetary transaction, people who are motivated by intrinsic reward and that warm glow will stop doing it. Are we simply going to crowd out and displace voluntary donors by paying people? That is a principle called motivational crowd out. That is something from economics literature.

There was an article written in 2013 called *Not All Incentives Wash Out the Warm Glow: The Case of Blood Donation Revisited*. I want to quote a couple of lines from that. One of the most interesting points from this is that the intrinsic motivation that comes from giving may just simply go unnoticed if payment is offered. It's not that people do not feel that intrinsic motivation, but it's just not something that's noticed or recorded in the academic literature. What they found – I think this is an important point – is that there's "no evidence of potential crowding out when non-monetary rewards are involved," things like a lapel pin or a pen or a T-shirt or something like that.

So then we think, "Aha; that means that so long as we allow for nonmonetary rewards, people will continue to volunteer and donate altruistically," which is the way it works now, which this bill doesn't prevent. We think: "Okay. That's good, then. We can support Bill 3 in its current form. That would be fine." But not so fast because that refers, in this particular research, to whole blood donation, not to plasma donation.

Then we move on to finding: how can we reconcile that? Is it possible, then, to have a voluntary blood donation system alongside a paid plasma donation system? I did some further research into that, and it turns out that it is possible. One of the ways we can do that is to make the rewards optional. Now, I equate this, although the scale and the impact of these two things are very, very different, to when you bring your own shopping bags to the grocery store. They'll say: would you like a 5-cent bag credit, or would you like that to go to charity? Well, you can take the money, or you can feel good about yourself, and you can give that to charity. What if we had a system in Alberta where plasma donation was potentially rewarded through a monetary incentive or you had the option of saying, "No; I'd rather donate my portion of that incentive to charity?"

Unfortunately, Bill 3 prevents us from ever going down that path. We will never know in Alberta if maybe this parallel system, where we allow incentive for those who are rewarded extrinsically, who will do something that is rewarded through financial gain, alongside people who are rewarded intrinsically, who do it out of the goodness of their heart because they want that warm glow of knowing they did the right thing – how will we ever know that that may in fact increase the number of plasma donations? Now, as I think has been brought up in this debate on this bill – and if it hasn't, I'll bring it up – plasma donation is both more intrusive and takes longer, and it can be done more frequently than whole blood donations.

Allowing that incentive for some to donate, creating an external incentive is important.

3:30

There's an article which I'll refer to, *When Extrinsic Incentives Displace Intrinsic Motivation: Designing Legal Carrots and Sticks to Confront the Challenge of Motivational Crowding-out*. I would be lying to you if I told you I read all 68 pages of this article, but there are some very, very interesting and, I think, important elements that I have just indicated there.

Another option that this particular article talks about is simply providing information about the nature of the task. In the case of plasma donation, that may address the concern. For example, as I've just said, a plasma donation is inherently a different thing than a whole blood donation. It takes longer. You have a needle in your arm for a longer period of time. It can take up to two hours, but that's a substantial impact. If we tell people, "You can donate plasma. It will take longer. It might be a little more uncomfortable, but in exchange for that we're willing to pay you," people may say, "Oh, I see. I'm getting paid because there's more involved. I feel okay about that." So people who feel intrinsically motivated to give blood because it's the right thing to do will not be put off by the fact that they may get paid for plasma donation. What if we paid people for plasma donation but not whole blood donation?

There is some evidence, then, that I found further on in that same article that shows that it is possible – and I won't quote the specific article, but that basically makes the point I have just made there – to have those two side by side. So if we have that option to retain financial incentives, we can – oh, sorry. Another point I want to make before I get to safety. I do want to address safety because I know that's a very important point.

If we pass Bill 3, we do not have an option to provide a financial incentive in a time of high need. What if there is a financial incentive at times of holidays, where there's a time of high demand but a time of low supply, one of those holidays being the Christmas season? What if people needed a few extra dollars at Christmas to get themselves through that season and they were able to accept that reward or that incentive at that time only because perhaps that was the only time that reward or incentive was offered? It's not always offered, but it's only offered in times when we really need it. That helps smooth out the ups and downs of the supply and demand for blood and blood products. But under Bill 3 we're no longer able to do that. That is not an option, so we continue to procure plasma and plasma products from paid sources in the United States.

Let's talk about safety. When I looked at the evidence about safety as to whether or not paid donations impact blood safety, the simple answer is that in the 21st century it does not. We've heard from previous speakers about that fact. There was a 2008 German study that showed voluntary and paid donations are in fact the same in terms of safety, which is primarily because of modern testing methods and screening methods which keep our blood and plasma systems safe.

As a result of all of those reasons, Madam Speaker, I will vote against Bill 3 because I think it's important we retain the option at least to provide incentives to donate plasma. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Calgary-Hays.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I was a nurse working in acute care, we saw people every day who may be in need of a blood transfusion. I never had to fear that the blood my patient

needed wouldn't be there when I went down to the blood bank, and I never had to tell a family that we couldn't save their loved one because we didn't have access to blood products needed, thanks to the CBS.

Blood transfusion is a core service within our health care system, and individuals who donate their blood provide a unique contribution to the health and survival of others. Protecting our voluntary blood donation system is paramount. Albertans will have secure and reliable access to donated blood when they need it most under this proposed legislation. This bill will also prevent Alberta's voluntary blood donor pool, which Canadian Blood Services relies on, from being depleted. This bill will create a barrier to the establishment of private pay-for-plasma clinics and ensures they will not operate that business in this province.

Every country faces an ongoing challenge to collect sufficient blood from donors to meet national requirements. The donation of blood by voluntary, unpaid blood donors is recognized as being crucial for the sustainability of national blood supplies, as shown in Saskatchewan, where CBS reported a 14 per cent drop in overall donors in the first year that the paid CPR clinic was open, which especially impacted the youngest generation of donors.

Internationally there are systems based on replacement donation by family and friends of patients requiring transfusion, which are rarely able to meet clinical demands for their blood. The World Health Organization and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies aim to support national blood donor programs in building a stable base of the best possible blood donors to ensure sufficiency and sustainability of national blood supplies.

Part of the strategy to accomplish this goal is the formation of the foundation for the establishment of World Blood Donor Day, jointly sponsored by the WHO, the IFRC, the International Federation of Blood Donor Organizations, and the International Society of Blood Transfusion. That day is now celebrated each year throughout the world on June 14 to raise awareness of the importance of blood donation and recognize the contribution of voluntary, unpaid blood donors in saving lives and improving health. Analysis shows that countries with voluntary blood donation instead of just paid have a higher proportion of regular blood donors and that this has been maintained over a number of years.

Further, in countries where the percentage of voluntary blood donations has risen, there has also been an upward trend in the percentage of regular blood donations. This shows that voluntary blood donors are more likely to donate on a regular basis than any other type of donor. A panel of voluntary donors who donate blood regularly enables blood collection to be planned systematically to meet the requirements for blood by blood groups and components. This enables the blood transfusion service to maintain a constant and reliable supply of blood when required in every clinical setting practising transfusion. One paid donor equals exactly one fewer potential voluntary donor.

In systems based on voluntary blood donation, patients have improved access to safe blood transfusion in routine and emergency situations, without which their survival or quality of life may be threatened. The blood and blood products they receive carry a low risk of infection that may further compromise their health. They're not placed under pressure to find blood donors in order to receive treatment and feel a sense of being cared for by others who they will never meet. In turn, this may motivate the spirit of generosity and a desire for reciprocal volunteering in the future. Madam Speaker, you know that we all see that a little bit when we go to Tim Hortons in the morning and we do a pay-it-forward. It's the same kind of feeling you get, just a little bigger.

Voluntary donors are recognized to be motivated by altruism and the desire to help others. As could be the case in a paid plasma

scenario, donors are not there because they need the money; therefore, they have no reason to withhold any information about their lifestyles or medical conditions that may make them unsuitable to donate. They are not placed under pressure by hospital staff, family members, or the community to donate blood, and they entrust their blood donations to be used as needed rather than for specific patients. The only reward that they receive is personal satisfaction, self-esteem, and pride.

In well-organized blood donor programs, voluntary donors, in particular regular donors, are well informed about the donation selection criteria. If they aren't eligible to donate right now, they're more likely to make the decision themselves to postpone their donation. That reduces the need for temporary or permanent deferrals. Blood donation is the gift of life that cannot be valued in monetary terms. The commercialization of blood donation is in breach of the fundamental principle of altruism, which voluntary blood donation enshrines.

Voluntary blood donors themselves benefit from health education and encouragement to maintain healthy lifestyles as well as regular health checks and referral for medical care if needed. Provided that they receive good donor care when they donate blood, they often feel personal satisfaction, which provides a sense of social engagement and belonging that is recognized and valued by the community.

Voluntary blood donors serve as effective donor educators, recruiters, and health promoters. I know that the first time I went and donated blood, I was taken by a friend of mine who was a regular donor. Studies have shown that the influence of active blood donors is one of the most effective strategies for donor recruitment. Voluntary donors also play a valuable role as active agents in health promotion. They help us build healthy communities through their influence among their peers and their families. Even donors who are no longer able to donate due to age or medical conditions can still play an important role in promoting voluntary blood donation in their families, workplaces, and communities. In my constituency of Stony Plain there is a family in which three generations are actively donating blood. The matriarch, Mrs. Hennig, has donated well over 800 times in her life. As she says: there is so much blood needed, and we can give the gift of life; it's gold, liquid gold for people who are in jeopardy of dying.

3:40

The commitment and support of the government for an effective national blood program is a prerequisite for the achievement of 100 per cent voluntary blood donation. The community must have confidence in its blood transfusion service. Without trust in its integrity and efficiency and the safety of its procedures, few people would choose to donate their blood. This trust is earned over a long period of time but can be undermined very quickly, resulting in a negative effect on the loyalty and continuing support of individual blood donors, the community, and partner organizations. Canadian Blood Services has earned our trust. Alberta has a long and proud history of support for the blood system. Donating blood is a valuable public resource that should not be a business. Donating blood saves lives.

This is what it comes down to, Madam Speaker. We know that for-profit, paid blood donation drives out voluntary donation, and that's why this bill is so important. It's about protecting our blood supply. Voluntary donation means that when you or someone you love needs blood the most, it'll be there. Voluntary donation means that you know that blood or blood products will be there for you in satisfactory amounts. Voluntary donation saves lives, and it helps to build a culture of trust and community.

I'd like to also mention, Madam Speaker, that, as we've stated numerous times in this debate, this legislation has absolutely no

bearing on the ability for private businesses to come into Alberta and be part of the fractionation process or further processing. It will not stop that. We encourage that. I would remind the members opposite also that we did consult with patients. BloodWatch, which is the advocate and watchdog comprised of patients and survivors from the '80s who support the Krever report's firm stance that blood and plasma collection remain public, have implored all members of this House to please support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you once again, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for a very reasoned presentation on the importance of a voluntary blood donation system. I'm very impressed with that discussion. It was one of the things that Justice Horace Krever said in his report. I would actually commend the reading of that report to this Legislature. It's actually three volumes, but his commendation of the voluntary blood transfusion system that we have here in Canada was one of the most important recommendations that he made.

He made that recommendation because at the time – and he was looking at the blood system from 30 years ago – the blood system had been under a great deal of stress because of the appearance of new viruses like the human immunodeficiency virus as well as hepatitis C, which had previously been called non-A, non-B. The blood system had been dealing with hepatitis B, and it's interesting that the blood system is still dealing with problems with infection with hepatitis B. With all of the technology that there is in the system now, the most common blood-transmitted viral infection is hepatitis B. It's hepatitis B, actually, that we want to be most vigilant about in terms of preventing.

A person is at risk for carrying hepatitis B for lots of different reasons, but one of those reasons could be substance abuse. As we all know, substance abuse is prevalent in populations that are vulnerable, that may be affected by poverty or may be affected by mental health issues. It's exactly those populations that might be attracted to a paid plasma donation system. These are populations living in inner-city parts of our larger cities. They are populations that are perhaps transitioning from a First Nations environment to the urban environment, any population that's severely affected by poverty. Then when you compound this problem with the inducement of a payment for donation, there's a real concern.

I do want to tell an anecdote that came up at the Krever commission, and it's often thrown up in the face of us so-called left-wingers because it was Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas that actually organized a form of paid plasma donation in the prisons of Arkansas and actually sold the plasma that he collected. There are some analogies to what is going on. I don't want to make those analogies too close, but there are some analogies to that, to the blood brokers who then basically said: oh, this blood is very safe, and you can go ahead and use it. In fact, many Canadian hemophiliacs and other persons dependent upon plasma products got infected in the 1980s, and I've never actually forgiven Bill Clinton for that. In fact, if I'd had the opportunity, I would have abstained from voting for him largely because of that even though he is a good left-winger. So Justice Krever was very clear that we need to be vigilant in terms of protecting our blood supply.

Another comment that I want to make – and it was mentioned in my colleague's comments – is that we do not have a plasma-fractionation industry here in Canada. The plasma that's being collected by this private company is currently in storage, and it's going to be sold to the highest bidder. That plasma isn't necessarily

going to help Canadians become more self-sufficient in our plasma-fractionation products. I think that what we need to do – and it's actually up to all of us that are involved in the system – is look at how much of these plasma fractionation products... [A timer sounded] Sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been trying to listen carefully to the comments here, and this is what I've heard: that through Bill Clinton blood came from the U.S. that was paid for, and it wasn't very good, or it wasn't safe. What this bill will end up if it goes through, that the government has put on the table – it will virtually guarantee that a lot of blood that comes into the system will come from the United States because that's where it comes from now. This will block Albertans' ability to replace some or all of that blood that comes from the United States with blood that's here in Alberta.

So what conclusions could one draw other than the fact that the NDP government seems to think Albertans' blood isn't as good as Americans' blood, because they're really only saying that everybody can get paid to give blood except Albertans. They must consider Albertans and their blood to be inferior in some way to the rest of the world, not much of an advertisement for someone who is governing Albertans and probably has a pipe dream of being re-elected by them one day.

Madam Speaker, it just does not stand up to scrutiny. You know what? The good doctor that just finished speaking really made the case for me that you cannot say that Albertans' blood is less safe than what we're getting from the United States right now. In fact, as my learned colleague from Vermillion-Lloydminster pointed out to the House, there haven't been any examples of a problem with blood that is known, so if you look at that – and I think even my friend, the doctor from Calgary-Mountain View, agrees – this kind of indicates that Albertans' blood isn't as good as what we're getting now, because that is what the government is saying. What else could they be saying? What other conclusion could you draw when the government says: we'll take anybody's blood in the world except Albertans. That's essentially what this legislation says.

3:50

In fact, at the very least it says: Albertans can't give blood that we need but Americans can. Somehow this government has decided that blood that comes from the United States is of a superior quality, safety, and content from that which Albertans have flowing through their veins. I reject that, Madam Speaker. I completely reject that.

Further, the government-side members, unfortunately, are twisting themselves into pretzels to try to make excuses for what this really is. The hon. member who's a nurse spoke a couple speakers ago and said that every donation that's paid for is one less donation that's donated. She said that we know that, when, in fact, it's been demonstrated here that we actually know exactly the opposite, and the hon. member knows that, too. Again, my learned colleague from Vermillion-Lloydminster quoted a whole bunch of research that indicates that. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, my friends on the government side are making it up. So you have to ask yourself why they are creating statements that they know are not true on this topic. They absolutely know it.

You know what? The other thing that this does for a government that has had three failed jobs plans in a row – you would think, when they've got an opportunity knocking on the door for someone to provide investment and jobs here in Alberta, that they would be rolling out the red carpet or the orange carpet if they prefer and saying: come to Alberta. They should be rolling out the orange

carpet to people that want to get in the blood business, rolling out the carpet and saying: please bring in that \$400 million worth of investment; please bring in those 2,000 jobs. That'll be 1,999 more than their jobs plans have produced in the last two years. They should be saying: come in.

The government should be saying: we are so confident in our incredible ability to administer things that we'll make sure that when you're doing this business, we'll inspect you and make sure that you are as safe or safer than the blood that's coming in from the United States today. Yet, Madam Speaker, this particular government caucus has chosen to say none of those things. You know what? They are talking about things that – they're trying to raise bogeymen about hep B and hep C. We should be afraid of hepatitis B and C and all those things. I agree with that, but for some reason it's not to be feared from the United States, yet it's to be feared from Albertans.

It's just the way this legislation is written. It's what it's done. All it is meant to do is lock Albertans out from the ability to get paid for giving their blood. It's meant to lock Albertans out of a couple thousand full-time jobs, not the part-time jobs that are replacing the full-time jobs that were in Alberta before we had this NDP government.

When you think about this, Madam Speaker, when all the other arguments that my friends on the government side are making are self-defeating, even with what they say themselves – they've said things that prove their arguments aren't true – what's left? What's left is protecting their big-money friends that are in the business now. They want to maintain a monopoly for those who actually pull the chain of this government and that this government dances to the tune of. That is what this legislation is about. It's His Master's Voice from, you know, the old record player company. They've heard their master's voice.

Mr. Mason: RCA.

Mr. McIver: RCA. Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

You know when the dog is listening in to his master's voice? That is what this government has heard. They've heard their master's voice, and their master says: "Keep us in the monopoly of the blood business. Don't allow new jobs into Alberta because that will hurt our monopoly. Don't allow new investment into Alberta because that will hurt our monopoly. Tell Albertans their blood is dirtier than Americans' because otherwise that will hurt our monopoly." That is what this government is doing with this legislation, and that is why I will boldly and proudly vote against it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) if I may.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: I was listening intently to the last member but also to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster when he was speaking. He talked about the American system, and one of the things he said, which I found interesting, is that notwithstanding that they have this for-profit collection system in the United States, they also have a parallel voluntary donation system and that they have a higher rate of participation in the voluntary system than we do in Canada. I thought that was interesting.

Then he went on to argue, as did the hon. leader of the third party, that this is an attempt by the government to simply create or protect union jobs. But if the American model was implemented, then it would seem to me that it doesn't threaten the Canadian Blood Services if, in fact, it's quite possible to go ahead. But the

opposition is making this real leap of logic, Madam Speaker, that the only motivation here is not to protect the voluntary blood system in our country but to protect union jobs. Clearly, it's the case that if we had the American system, the union jobs or the Canadian Blood Services voluntary system would not be threatened. Can the hon. member explain that contradiction and how he reached this far-out conclusion that the only motivation left for this legislation was to protect union jobs at the expense of the interests of the public?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. Well, the hon. member seems to be making an argument that if we had paid blood donations, you would actually also have more voluntary blood donation, like the U.S. That's what he has just suggested. [interjection] That's what he just said. But that's not my argument; that's the hon. member's argument. If that was true, that would be another good reason to vote against this legislation. If having a paid system would actually create more voluntary blood donors, well, wouldn't that be terrific?

While the hon. member suggested that that may be the case – we'll call it his claim and not mine; I don't know that that's true – that's just one more reason to vote against this legislation, one more reason to vote against maintaining a monopoly forever and ever, one more reason to say no to this legislation and say yes to investment in Alberta, to say yes to jobs in Alberta, to say yes to the opportunity of expanding some industry in biology that could spring out of the knowledge that the additional professionals here in the blood business may have. It may spring into some other industry having to do with biology. Actually, I appreciate the Government House Leader making my case for me, that that's just one more reason to vote against this legislation. It doesn't add up.

The only thing, Madam Speaker, that adds up is that this legislation is purely and for no other reason designed to maintain the monopoly of the government's big-money friends, the master's voice, whom they hear constantly. The master's voice who tells them what legislation to put forward and what legislation not to put forward is the only thing that's left. In fact, what should be troubling for those on the government side is that their own arguments have debunked their reasons for supporting this legislation. There's not much more to say.

They have talked about how unsafe the blood is that potentially could be out of the United States, yet they don't want the blood from Alberta. They've said that having a paid system could actually spur more people to give voluntarily. I don't know whether it will or not. That was a suggestion that I just heard from the Government House Leader. It's a pretty interesting one, but one I could neither support nor go against. It's the first time I've heard that theory.

Madam Speaker, all the reasons that the government-side members have given when they've stood in this House to support this legislation, if you follow the logic through in a very simple and direct way, it's actually an argument to not support this legislation. So with the lack of logic and with the lack of support by science, the lack of support by everything else, it doesn't add up.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired for 29(2)(a).

Are there any further speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for St. Albert on behalf of the Minister of Health to close debate.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. While it's been a pleasure discussing this very important bill and listening to story-time from across the floor, it is my pleasure to close debate on the Voluntary Blood Donations Act.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:01 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Nielsen
Babcock	Horne	Payne
Carlier	Kazim	Renaud
Carson	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Ceci	Loyola	Sabir
Connolly	Luff	Schreiner
Coolahan	Malkinson	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Sigurdson
Dach	McKittrick	Sucha
Dang	McPherson	Sweet
Drever	Miller	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Woollard
Ganley		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gill	Swann
Clark	Hanson	Taylor
Drysdale	McIver	van Dijken

Totals: For – 37 Against – 9

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 19(1)(c) the Assembly must vote on the motion for consideration of Her Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor's speech.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

11. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Deputy Speaker: This is a debatable motion if any hon. members wish to speak to it. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I'll be brief. I will just say, Madam Speaker, that my concern with the Speech from the Throne – of course, I hold the Lieutenant Governor in the highest of personal regard and professional regard and every other form of regard that I can muster. Let me be clear about that.

4:20

I have to say that when you look at some of the main titles of the Speech from the Throne – Working to Make Life Better for Families, Building New Pipelines, and Creating and Supporting Jobs – unfortunately, the government hasn't really lived up to these things, particularly when you look at all the new burdens that they're going to put on families with taxes: personal, corporate, and carbon taxes. While the new pipelines that have been approved are a wonderful thing but done by the federal government, the fact is that at the same time a pipeline previously approved, the Northern Gateway, was killed under this government's watch. There are just too many things in the Speech from the Throne, Madam Chair, that do not live up to Albertans' reasonable expectations.

With that, I will cease talking, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: One thing I just wanted to mention in closing: for those members that are curious, the definition of "engross" is to produce a legal document in its final or definitive form.

Having defined what we are doing, I am happy to close debate, Madam Speaker.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. In view of the hour and the momentous progress that we have made and the fact that we are all about to return to our constituencies to re-engage with our voters, with our citizens, I will move that we call it 4:30 and adjourn for the day, Madam Speaker, and wish everyone a great constituency week.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:22 p.m. to Monday, April 3, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, March 23, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202 — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft, passed*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 3, 2017

Day 14

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
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Deputy Government House Leader
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
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Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 3, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. Let us remember those who have served our province in earlier years and who have now passed on. As current MLAs it is important that we learn from the experience of those who went before us. Let it offer guidance in order to help establish better public policy for the benefit of all Albertans.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of the Assembly who have passed away since we last met. With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of the families who shared the burden of public office and public service.

Mr. Leonard Wendelin Mitzel
February 18, 1946, to March 19, 2017

The Speaker: Leonard (Len) Wendelin Mitzel was with us from February 18, 1946, to March 19, 2017. Mr. Len Mitzel served Albertans for many years in many ways. His first foray into public office was as a councillor and then reeve for the county of Forty Mile. Mr. Mitzel then served two terms as the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat from 2004 until 2012. During his second term he served as Deputy Chair of Committees, 2008 to 2011, and parliamentary assistant for Transportation, 2011 to 2012.

Mr. Mitzel remained an active voice for southeastern Alberta, promoting area businesses and tourism, developing water usage strategies, and mentoring participation in local government. Mr. Mitzel's dedication to southeastern Alberta continued to the very end, with his last major contribution to the region coming in this past year with the opening of a short-line railway to help farmers move their products to market. I personally knew Mr. Mitzel and saw in real terms his contribution to the community.

In a moment of silent reflection I ask you to remember Mr. Mitzel as you may have known him.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of the national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration, respect, and gratitude to the members of the family who shared the burden of public office and public service, today I would like to welcome members of the Mitzel family who are present in the Speaker's

gallery. Please rise as I call your name and remain standing until all have been introduced: Lara Mitzel-Smith, daughter of Mr. Mitzel; Karra Smith, granddaughter of Mr. Mitzel; Dixie Houghton, family friend of Mr. Mitzel; Terry Toth, family friend of Mr. Mitzel; and Laurie Toth, family friend of Mr. Mitzel. Welcome. We're pleased you can be with us today.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House a school that resides in my riding. I have to say that St. Dominic school is a fair representative of what we have for schoolkids because, I will tell you, the questions they asked me downstairs were incredibly thoughtful. I'm glad to hear that they liked our mock Legislature. I would like to welcome the teachers and the chaperones – if they could stand first, please – Chantel, Benoit, Liz, Cindy, Erica, Trevor, Jessica, and Kyla. Thank you for bringing these children to the House. We really thank you for it. Now, if the rest of the kids can stand, we can acknowledge you through the House and welcome you to this great Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?
The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you Betty Henderson, Nelson Modin, and his wife, Hazel Modin. They are proud family members of Alice Modin. Betty is her daughter, and Nelson is her son. In 1985 Alice Modin campaigned for Alberta's first Seniors' Day, which paved the way for the now province-wide Seniors' Week. In honour of her contribution to Alberta the minister's seniors' service awards will now include the Alice Modin award to annually recognize a senior who provides outstanding service to their community. Alice's contributions were felt both locally and across the province, and it is my honour to have her family here today. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two representatives from Strathcona county Economic Development and Tourism, Shane Olson, acting director, and Sean McRitchie, manager of industrial development. Through their department Shane and Sean strive to support a strong, diversified, and resilient economy while balancing social responsibility and environmental stewardship. I would ask my guests to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

1:40

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the rest of the House the newly elected executive and the interim executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS. CAUS represents over 100,000 undergraduate students from the universities of Alberta, Calgary, Lethbridge, Mount Royal, and MacEwan. They're in Edmonton this week for their annual advocacy week, meeting with

MLAs and their staff to advocate on issues of fairness and transparency in the postsecondary system. I ask them to rise as I say their names and be warmly welcomed by the House: Hailey Babb, Branden Cave, Reed Larsen, Stephanie Nedoshytko, Conner Peta, Parvin Sedighi, Shubir Shaikh, Whitney Hunter, Camilo Gil, and Josh McKeown. Let's give them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to introduce to you and through you Shifrah Gadamsetti and Dexter Bruneau. Shifrah is the current president of the Students' Association of Mount Royal University. She graduated from MRU with a degree in nursing and is now a practising RN. She decided to continue her education at MRU and is pursuing a degree in sociology with a minor in women's studies. One of her biggest projects this year is to push for a campus sexual assault policy, which I think is very important. Dexter is the current vice-president external of the Students' Association of Mount Royal University as well as the chair of the Council of Alberta University Students, CAUS. He will be graduating this spring with a degree in criminal justice, honours. One of Dexter's biggest projects this year is the execution of SAMRU's Student Connect event. I ask that my guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Chris and Laura Grant. Both are avid cyclists, as you know I am, and work to promote safe cycling in the community. Together they created Alberta Bike Swap, a safe place to buy, sell, and donate bikes across the province. The next event is in Edmonton on May 13 at Northlands, and I'd ask members to look at the Alberta Bike Swap website to find details. Chris and Laura are positive, empowering community builders who believe in labours of love, who inspire those around them, and who have worked very hard to keep cyclists safe in our communities. I would ask them to stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of the province's best field hockey players from the Edmonton region: Brien Murphy, Robin Virk and his father, Harsohail Parmar and his parents. They are here to celebrate players who've been selected to join Canada's men's junior developmental squad. I'd also like to recognize Canada's men's field hockey team as they have advanced to the world league semifinals after a top-two finish at world league round 2 in Trinidad and Tobago.

I'd like to add that Field Hockey Alberta is hosting a try-it event in my wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods tomorrow for anyone who wants to get out and get a little active in the evening.

I thank everyone for joining us today and now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some leaders and coaches in the sport of field hockey in our great province. Field hockey is the second most played sport in the world, played in 112 countries. In Alberta the sport is flourishing, with junior programs, provincial teams, and school programs popping up across the province. Recently Field Hockey Canada announced the men's junior development squad as it begins the journey to the 2020 world junior cup. Today we are joined by Peadar O'Riain, president of the field hockey association of Alberta; Burgundy Biletski, women's indoor national team 2005, 2007, and 2014 and executive director of Field Hockey Alberta; Jagdish Singh Dhaliwal, head coach King's XI hockey club; and Dilpal Singh Seehra, coach of Hawks Hockey Academy in Calgary. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly also field hockey players from Calgary who have been named to the 2017 junior development squad. First, from Kings XI field hockey club I welcome Avi Dhaliwal, Shazab Shahzad, Parmvir Sidhu, Tanveer Singh Kullar, Harjot Dhaliwal, Jaskarn Dhaliwal. Second, from Hawks Field Hockey Academy I welcome Dildeep Seehra and Tanvir Kang. I hope all members will join me in congratulating them all on this tremendous accomplishment. Joining them is also my constituency manager, Roop Rai. I now ask all my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Vriend Decision Anniversary and LGBTQ Rights

Connolly: Mr. Speaker, yesterday was the 19th anniversary of the Supreme Court of Canada's Vriend decision, which marks a crucial moment for human rights and equality in Alberta. Delwin Vriend worked for years as a chemistry instructor. He also happened to be gay. He was fired from his job solely because he was gay. For seven years Mr. Vriend fought for his rights, taking his case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. The court found that our Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects everyone from workplace discrimination, no matter their sexual orientation. As a result, the court ordered that sexual orientation be read into Alberta's human rights legislation. It was a victory for Delwin Vriend and for us all as it expanded the legal human rights protection of every Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, some in our province denounced the decision. The PCs contemplated using the Constitution's notwithstanding clause so that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation would be legal. Thankfully, wiser heads prevailed. But not everyone welcomed that. As an MP Jason Kenney spoke out constantly against the Vriend decision. In Parliament he stated the usual excuse that the human rights of LGBTQ-plus Canadians should be lower on the roster than others. He smeared the decision-making of the highest judiciary in the country.

But he went further than simply slamming the equal rights of all. Mr. Kenney said that protecting the human rights of LGBTQ-plus people, quote, opens the window for a provincial, populist party with conservative values. He called for a new party with far-right,

anti-LGBTQ ideology. I wonder where Albertans have seen that before, Mr. Speaker.

I am proud that 19 years later, this government protects the human rights of all Albertans regardless of their identity. I am also ecstatically proud that those social conservative voices of the 1990s are not in government today. Let us celebrate how far we've come as a province and a country, when everyone can fully participate rather than be cast aside.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Okotoks Water Supply

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An urgent issue affecting residents of Okotoks that has been brought up and postponed time and time again due to this government's inefficiency is the challenge of the devastating water shortage in the community. Since 2015 municipal representatives and I have urged this government to collaborate to fix the shortage of water that has been precipitated by the rapid and dramatic growth this community has seen in the past decade. We've sent letters and even brought the critical nature of this issue up in this House last year.

The prebudget water pipeline proposal that was required was sent to the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and the Minister of Transportation. This project has been shovel ready now for several years, and due to the inactivity and denial from this government our community is unable to move forward with this critical infrastructure project, resulting in the inability to attract investors and encourage established businesses, in essence stifling community growth.

This government has been aware that since 2002 the town of Okotoks has taken very aggressive environmental action pertaining to the conservation and the management of their water resources. They also now, due to the town's effort, have been recognized by various agencies and associations. Just recently Okotoks town management received a 2015 FCM sustainable communities award.

1:50

But it seems that these environmental stewards have not been recognized for their efforts and have had barriers presented to them each and every time they've met with this government. This government has been playing games by changing the rules and have not recognized this community for their efforts to comply with this government's wish list.

This government has received sufficient funding from their federal counterparts for exactly these types of water projects, but more accurately there is still about \$60 million that has not been allocated from the federal clean water, waste water fund. This government is obligated to provide Okotoks with the resources they not only deserve but they desperately need. Do the right thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: It was another busy week for the Premier, pitting herself as the leading opponent to the most pro oil and gas jurisdiction in Canada. If the Premier is so concerned about Saskatchewan sending letters, here's some free advice she can – can consider. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. This is just so shocking, given she has seen Albertans – actually, she had over 81,000 jobs. I just can't get it out. She should

try some things. Here are some recommendations: stop attacking energy and agriculture; stop the labour review; stop, reverse, and repeal the NDP tax increases; stop shutting down coal; and stop suing Alberta power companies. Now, does the Premier think any of these might be good ideas to stop my stuttering and to stop Alberta shedding jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I do think is a good idea is that as Premier of the province I'm going to promote Alberta. I'm going to stand up for Alberta. I'm going to stand up for why Alberta is a place people should come to, for the fact that we have the lowest taxes in the country, by \$8.7 billion compared to the next closest jurisdiction, and for the fact that Calgary is a great place to grow and start and build a business and that people shouldn't be leaving them. You know what? My minister of economic development is not in Saskatchewan learning lessons from somebody trying to steal jobs from Alberta. That's right.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

Mr. Jean: Well, it sure would be nice, Mr. Speaker, to see the Premier get as angry about Quebec attacking the pipelines we need as she does about the Saskatchewan budget. It would be helpful, indeed.

Alberta now saw another multinational actually leave Alberta and wave goodbye to our province. ConocoPhillips now sees the United States as a better place to invest than Alberta is. The fact is that under this Premier we've lost thousands of head office jobs in Calgary, and 30 per cent of downtown Calgary is vacant, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier not understand that her policies have had a direct hand in pushing businesses out of Alberta and into other jurisdictions?

Ms Notley: Well, again, you know, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems very, very interested in cheerleading for Alberta's demise, and I really believe that that ought to stop. Now, the fact of the matter is that we've had two excellent homegrown companies expand their investment in the oil sands on behalf of all Albertans. I'm so proud of that, and I'm very happy to be able to work with them as we move forward in building a responsible, sustainable, modern, progressive oil and gas industry that can compete for years to come throughout the world.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, just wait. You haven't seen anything yet. They're only two years into their mandate, and she should be more worried about other places than just Saskatchewan. Like it or not, the United States is our number one competitor and has no carbon tax, is building lots of pipelines, and is stripping down costly, inefficient regulations for energy companies. Now, we are talking about tens of billions of dollars of investment that is either leaving Alberta or is simply not coming our way and should be. Does the Premier not believe this is a serious problem, or will she just keep taxing and regulating Alberta businesses out of existence?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the consolidation and reorganization within the oil sands that the member opposite is Chicken Little-ing over right now is actually something that makes the business more efficient and more productive over the long haul. Let me just quote from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, what they believe about the deal that the member opposite is so worried about: this deal signals a strong, long-term view of the value of Canada's oil and natural gas assets; among our competitors for global oil

supply Canada leads in energy security, regulatory stringency, and environmental protection.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second main question.

Power Purchase Arrangements and the Balancing Pool

Mr. Jean: One way that this Premier likes to try and get rid of a problem is just to pile up debt. We've seen that, Mr. Speaker. There's no better example than the absolute debacle of their boneheaded policies with our electricity grid. Before the NDP the Balancing Pool had a \$700 million surplus. Now because of the NDP and their mismanagement it is set to cost Albertans over \$4 billion. Yes, \$4 billion. That's more than what the NDP plans to scoop up from the carbon tax. How many more billions of dollars of debt will this Premier borrow to pay for her costly and failed electricity experiments?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as is rather usual with the member opposite, he's taken a number and then grown it by – I don't know – 400 or 500 per cent, whatever he pulled out of the hat at that particular time. In terms of the work that we've done with the Balancing Pool, if we had not acted, average families would be forced to pay charges as high as \$8.40 per month, and we kept those charges to 67 cents per month. That's because our government is focused on ensuring affordability for Albertans, predictability for Albertans, standing up for Albertans, and having their backs when the members opposite go ahead and sign a bad deal that throws Albertans under the bus.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: Let me explain to the Premier and her cabinet why it's their fault. They raised taxes on power producers without any consultation. NDP mistakes mean that instead of getting big rebates from the Balancing Pool, Albertans are now on the hook for borrowing billions of dollars for electricity losses as a result of the NDP government's decision. This NDP government keeps trying to mislead Albertans that their green experiments won't hurt Albertans. Well, they are wrong. They're clearly wrong. I'll ask again: how many billions of dollars of debt will Albertans have to pay for over the next decade because of NDP negligence?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems the members opposite really cannot restrain themselves from mansplaining to members on the other side, I gotta tell you. Let me just go over there and say to them that the fact of the matter is that a deal was signed, and it was a bad deal. It was a bad deal for Alberta consumers and for Alberta taxpayers. Those folks over there want to stand up to defend that bad deal, and they want to make sure that Albertans pay billions of dollars as a result of that bad deal. What our government did is that we said: "You know what? We were elected by Albertans. We were elected to represent consumers. We were elected to represent investors."

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this is a multibillion-dollar screw-up that will cost Albertans big time for years and years. In November the Premier said that she was reasonably close to reaching a deal with Calgary-owned Enmax after trying to rip up their 16-year-old contract. It's been crickets since then, and the Premier wonders why she has a hard time getting any investment to Alberta. Well, will the Premier tell Albertans why her government is still suing Calgary-

owned Enmax and how much this court case is going to cost Albertans suing Enmax to sue other Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we were very pleased as part of the work that we did last fall to be able to enter into agreements with three of the four power companies that were impacted by the matter that the member opposite identifies. As well, we're continuing to work to support and protect consumers. That's why we put a cap on electricity prices, and that's why we are moving forward to ensure that Alberta consumers are protected. We will not apologize for that.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Jean: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. A cap equals higher taxes.

AIMCo Governance

Mr. Jean: There are few files as important to Alberta's financial future and security as AIMCo, but under the NDP's watch they are slowly eroding AIMCo's arm's-length independence from this government. Previously individuals appointed to AIMCo's board had to have proven expertise in investment management, finance, accounting and law, or experience as an executive or director in a senior publicly traded company. Why did the Premier repeal these excellent requirements to oversee a fund worth over \$80 billion, \$90 billion?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member opposite ought to probably judge us by our actions. For instance, we've recently appointed to AIMCo Mr. Ken Kroner, who was previously a managing director of a fund that managed more than \$4 trillion in assets – I'm pretty sure that meets the criteria the member opposite is talking about – and Phyllis Clark, formerly the vice-president and CFO of the University of Alberta and currently on the board of the Bank of Canada. These are the kinds of folks that we think will make sure that they can make the right decisions on behalf of the people of Alberta, who we've asked them to work for, with their independent judgement.

2:00

Mr. Jean: It isn't just the fact that the NDP has chosen to get rid of two key sections of AIMCo's regulations; it's about how they actually went about doing it, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the AIMCo CEO told the legislative committee that "these recent changes to the AIMCo regulation actually did come as a surprise to us and, frankly, not a welcome surprise." This isn't conjecture. He is the person ultimately responsible for AIMCo. Will the Premier listen to the valid concerns that have been raised and bring back these rules, which actually protected Albertans and Albertans' money?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will listen to the concerns, and in fact I'll quote them back to the member opposite. I quote from that person:

I would not sit here and look this group in the eye if [I] were being compromised in terms of our independence in investment decision-making ... it is a line that this government has not crossed. I would be the first to tell you if they [ever] did.

Mr. Jean: Well, here's your opportunity to do so. Newly obtained FOIP documents show just how in over its head the NDP is with AIMCo. They reveal ongoing political interference into AIMCo and political staff ignoring warnings from AIMCo's employees about major mishandling of sensitive files. This is terrible, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier's staff attempt to tell AIMCo employees how to do their jobs, they jeopardize the independence

of this corporation. Will the Premier commit to putting an end to her spin doctors interfering in AIMCo's business? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely appropriate for the government of Alberta to consult with its agencies, boards, and commissions on things that they communicate, and that's exactly what we did and what we will continue to do.

But on the issue of investment integrity let me just say again to the member the following: "I would not sit here and look this group in the eye if we were being compromised in terms of our independence in investment decision-making." That is from the chair of AIMCo answering questions of the members opposite. They just don't like the answers, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. We just heard the NDP textbook: five bad quotes, and they only read the one good one that they can find.

Investment in Alberta and Job Creation

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, our future prosperity is based on confidence. Investors risk their capital when they have confidence of a reasonable chance of return on their investment, called profit, which is not a four-letter word. Investors once flocked to our province to invest in the oil sands, and with this confidence came billions of dollars and thousands of jobs. Well, the multinationals have spoken with their feet by leaving. To the Premier. ConocoPhillips is the most recent of the departed, with their vote of nonconfidence in you and your government. When will you reverse your course on these policies that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've already identified, I think it's fair to say that CNRL and Cenovus, two excellent Alberta-based companies, have a great deal of confidence in the oil and gas sector, and I'm very proud that they have more confidence than the members opposite, who seem to revel in cheerleading this notion of telling a sad story. But you know what? That's not how you attract investment to Alberta. Thankfully, we're the ones that are doing just that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. The companies the Premier named earned most of their money when we didn't have a socialist government in Alberta.

I believe that reality escapes all of us, but it does on a regular basis escape this government. To the Premier. You talk about job creation with all your grant programs and subsidies, but why don't you reduce impediments to job creation and let the free market do what it did so very well before you and your ministers were getting in the way of creating jobs and investment in Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that our government is working very carefully, very aggressively, and with a tremendous amount of energy on stimulating the economy, growing the number of jobs, and having Albertans' backs at this difficult time. We are not going to make a bad situation worse. We are going to reverse the previous trends, and what we are going to do is have Albertans' backs. We're going to support their families, we're going to support their pocketbook, and we're going to support job creation. That's why Alberta is the fastest growing economy in the country this year.

Mr. McIver: After killing the economy for two straight years, it's no wonder it's getting up off the mat right now, and no thanks to you, Premier.

This government has been overburdening industry with regulations and taxes and then turning around to offer grants and incentives to undo the damage that their taxes have caused to industry and caused to homeowners. To the Premier: with the crisis of confidence in an NDP Alberta as a place to invest, will you commit to taking a look at the challenges that both businesses and families are facing under your increasing tax burden, increasing regulation, increasing bad policy? Will you actually think about Albertans for once?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the member opposite must have missed the survey that came out that talked about how small businesses actually have an increase in confidence just right now. So that's good news. The other thing is the Conference Board of Canada suggesting that Alberta will lead the growth throughout the whole country in 2017, and the TD Bank actually said that as a result of the budget that we tabled just a couple of weeks ago, Alberta will grow and lead the rest of the country because we are stimulating the economy. That's what we're doing to grow the economy.

Saskatchewan's Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: When Saskatchewan released its budget, our Premier hastily called a news conference to prophesy of the woes that will befall our eastern neighbours if, God forbid, they ever balance the budget. She warned of the calamity that would befall Gainer the Gopher if the government didn't operate money-losing bus companies anymore. But when the federal government released its budget . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . with \$372 million for Bombardier, \$200 million for Ford, and nothing but equalization rip-offs for Alberta, silence. Let me ask the Premier: what's more important for Alberta, Saskatchewan's budget or the federal budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, we had a choice in this province, of course. We were going to support Albertans, we were going to make sure that investments occurred across this province, and we are going to diversify our economy. Now, Saskatchewan has taken the opposite approach. They are cutting back programs and services. They are making it tougher for their citizens. We're not doing that. We've got the backs of Albertans. They're leaving their citizens to drift.

Mr. Fildebrandt: April Fool's Day is over, Mr. Speaker.

Brad Wall has been undoing the legacy of the NDP in his province for a decade, building a Saskatchewan advantage. Since the NDP launched their attack on free enterprise two years ago, our comparative Alberta advantage has declined. But Saskatchewan is only able to woo Alberta businesses because of the less than welcoming business environment created by the NDP. Rather than complain about businesses potentially moving to Saskatchewan, why doesn't this government focus on making sure that businesses want to stay in Alberta?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. You know, this province is focused on supporting Alberta companies and Albertans. In Saskatchewan they're taking a different approach. They're making it far tougher. TD Economics said that our budget is going to have a stimulative effect and impact on Alberta. Theirs is going to have restrictions. They're not stimulating their economy. We're doing those things that will put us in better shape when we come out of this recession, and we are, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Saskatchewan is right to build their own competitive advantage but has exceeded that in offering subsidies that we believe may be in violation of the New West Partnership. The partnership should be respected by all provinces, but the NDP have twice lost in court for violations of internal trade law when they imposed tariffs on out-of-province beers. Now they provide direct subsidies to brewers strikingly similar to the kind they are accusing Saskatchewan of proposing. Does this government's repeated violation of the partnership help to justify what Saskatchewan is doing? [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ceci: First, with regard to the injunction regarding beer, that's before the courts, so that's not really something that's subject to discussion here. [interjections]

I want to tell you other things Saskatchewan is doing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Please stop the clock. I cannot hear the minister speaking. Stop the clock. [interjections] Hon. members.

Start the clock.

Please proceed.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the recent budget in Saskatchewan had the impact of raising about a 6 per cent tax increase on construction projects there. If that doesn't stop projects, I don't know what will. You know, they're not growing jobs in Saskatchewan. We're growing jobs in this province. We've come back 20,000 jobs since . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, spring has sprung. Let's all try and keep it down. Handle your energy a little more constructively.

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Cortes-Vargas: The new leader of the Conservatives has stated that his preference is to take away the privacy of students given that he wants to immediately notify parents if their child enrolls in a GSA. Outing them could be devastating when forming a healthy identity. Albertans are worried about this far-right ideology that could negatively define these groups moving forward. To the Minister of Education: how will this government assure LGBTQ-plus students that their hard-fought GSA will continue to be a compassionate and safe space for them?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much for the question. I have made it clear that schools in Alberta must obey the law. The law ensures that students have the right to feel safe and welcome in school and that they have the right to form gay-straight alliances and name them as such. As minister I have been working with school boards, encouraged by the progress we've made. We

know that there's more work to be done, but certainly the vast majority of Albertans are on the side of our children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be very clear. GSAs save lives.

Given that LGBTQ-plus students are at higher risk for suicidal ideation and are more likely to experience youth homelessness, to the same minister: what does the evidence show about the impacts of GSAs in schools?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that GSAs provide safe spaces for students to talk through experiences and to find support from their peers. We know as well that GSAs provide leadership opportunities and reduce homophobic and transphobic discrimination in schools. Unlike the leader of the Conservative opposition, our government does not out students. We support students in GSAs, and we're going to keep it that way.

Mr. Rodney: Point of order.

The Speaker: I think there was a point of order that was made.

Your second supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in Alberta in over 2,000 schools there are only about 150 GSAs and given that this kind of archaic discussion perpetuates the shame for kids that come out bravely, this is disgraceful. To the same minister: what kind of resources are available to Albertan students looking to form GSAs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our ministry has already shared several resources with school authorities to provide supports in creating safe and caring learning environments for LGBTQ students. There will be more coming forward in the coming weeks. Students can reach out directly to the staff in our ministry at studentsupport@gov.ab.ca.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose have received another letter from a psychiatrist at Alberta Hospital Edmonton rebutting the arguments that there will be 37 new mental health beds to compensate for the closures at the hospital. According to the front-line workers 12 of those beds are reopening after renovations, and the 15 transitional beds are not an adequate level of care for those currently in specialized beds. In total, 20 beds are being closed down, with no new beds suitable for those vulnerable patients. Will the Health minister listen to the front-line workers and reverse this decision?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to update the member. He's acting with outdated information. The letter he received, I believe, was dated March 22. I did meet with the front-line physicians, including the president of the Medical Association at the site on March 24. On the 31st we also had subsequent conversations. We're going to keep working with them in making sure that they're working with Alberta Health Services as opposed

to proposing deep, \$9 billion cuts and operational cuts on the other side of the House. We know what would happen with health care under the members opposite.

Mr. Smith: The minister previously stated that she'd provide transitional beds in the community and at the Royal Alex. The front-line workers dispute that, saying: to propose that transitional placements in the community provide the same level of care as the ALC unit and are therefore interchangeable is a gross misjudgment and can lead to tragic outcomes. Given that the psychiatrists have extended an invitation to meet with the minister and to date have received no response up until now, can the minister tell us if she is willing to reverse the call that she has made?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I tried to help the member catch up in the first answer. We did meet on the 24th at the facility itself. This isn't how AHS is going to align their resources, but I've made it very clear that as long as there's an NDP government in Alberta, there will be Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

We know what's going to happen if the members opposite get their hands on health care. They're proposing deep, deep cuts. We saw what happened under others who had a deep ideology of cuts. Deep cuts, brutal cuts: we know that's all that the members opposite are proposing. We're standing up for front-line health care. I'm happy to engage with those health care providers, and I've done so. Time to catch up.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister maintains that she wants to treat staff at Alberta hospitals with respect and since she's responsible for the staff at AHS and given that the psychiatrists at the hospital state that a sickening culture of staff intimidation at AHS management requires that those of us who chose to advocate for our vulnerable patients remain anonymous and since the minister has stated that health professionals have every right and responsibility to advocate for their patients, when will this minister match her rhetoric with actions to promote a collaborative work environment dedicated to first-class patient care?

Ms Hoffman: So anonymous, Mr. Speaker, that we sat down and had a face-to-face meeting. I have to say that the member opposite is very wrong with his assertions that he's making today. We are proud to support health care in all parts of our province, including Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Guess what? We're putting our money where our mouth is not only in our own ridings but in the members opposite's ridings as well. Which facilities do they want us to cut? Important investments that we're making in the Strathmore hospital, the Brooks hospital, Ponoka? The list goes on. Enough is enough, you guys. Stop talking out of both sides of your mouth. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm not able to determine who particularly it was, but we're all hon. members. I heard someone say a couple of times: tell the truth. [interjections] Excuse me. I want to caution all of you that if there is anybody saying that, I'm expecting as hon. members that you will no longer say that.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Pulse Crops and Soil Health

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Growing pulse crops is good for soil health. Peas, lentils, beans, and chickpeas are not only

highly nutritious but are also a profitable crop for farmers who grow them. Many consumers in the U.S. and Canada are unfamiliar with the great taste, nutrition, and versatility of pulses. Pulse Canada has been working with the media to generate attention for pulses and increase demand. To the minister of agriculture: what are you doing to support Alberta pulse crops' market development?

2:20

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the hon. member for the question. Just to update him and the House, I was very recently on a trade mission to India. We were able to promote the good crops that pulses are. At the same time we were able to advocate for an issue they had around fumigation. I'd like the member to know and the House to know that the federal government has now negotiated a three-month deal on that operation, so we don't have to worry about the fumigation issue going forward. But I continue promoting pulses as the good crops that they are for all Albertans and for the world.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers can benefit agronomically as well as economically from bringing lentils into their crop rotation and given that the biggest winner in the practice is the environment because legume crops like lentils can fix nitrogen and given that this can reduce nitrogen fertilizer application and further reduce farmers' carbon footprint, to the minister: how are you encouraging farmers to rotate lentils into their crops?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. He's absolutely right. The more pulses can grow, the more we can get nitrogen into the soil. I'm happy to work with Alberta Canola on their plan of continuing to grow that crop. It's a fact that Canada is the second-largest producer of pulses in the world. Alberta is one of the world's largest producers of yellow and green peas. That's a market that continues to grow, as our market continues to grow. We're very happy to promote that for our producers and for the health of all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers want to grow healthy and high-yielding crops and given that it is increasingly important for farmers to know more and more about their soil so that they continue to grow them and given that what's grown in the soil has received decades of research but what's actually in the soil and how to improve soil health has much yet to be discovered, to the minister: how are you working to help farmers better understand soil biological function so they can have the knowledge and information to improve it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. I've had the opportunity to talk to many farmers across the province. One young farmer in particular really stuck out at a Hutterite colony. His interest and knowledge of soil science was magnificent. I think there at the farmer level they're very interested in the health of their soil as it would contribute to the health of their crops. We continue to work with department people and producers

across the province on continuing that healthy soil so they can continue with healthy crops.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Education Ministry Online Student Resources

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the Department of Education provides is access to online resources for students, which is extremely important. Over the past couple of weeks we've seen several instances where content linked to the Alberta Education website is clearly inappropriate for students, containing graphic and sexual content. Yes, kids can find anything on the Internet, but Alberta Education shouldn't play a part by condoning inappropriate content. Does this minister recognize that this is a problem, and will he apologize to parents?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Yes, I believe that the member is talking about an incident that took place a few weeks ago, and at the very moment that we found this link, which was several steps removed, we had the people take it down. It's very important that we are working with our schools and our school board and our ministry together. Online is a very important way by which we communicate information, and we have to make sure that the integrity is intact.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: I agree about the integrity. There have actually been more links since.

When it comes to our kids, resources that Alberta Education approves matter. Given that the NDP government pulled down the link from the Facebook page with the content that was not appropriate for students, with articles about sexual positions and other explicit material, and given that there are still links to the material that no parent would say is appropriate for kids, especially elementary school-age children, through the Alberta Education website, will the minister tell parents whose fault this is, why no one is monitoring this, and who is going to be held accountable?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as I said, the incident that was initially brought up we dealt with immediately. I believe it was a link to a link, and then it was an open-forum community sort of thing. Certainly, we have worked to address this, and if the hon. member has any other specific issues, she should make sure that she brings it to our attention because we can deal with it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Providing supports to all students is imperative, but giving students access to explicit content is wrong. The minister knows it, and – believe me – parents know it. Given the mandate for the education system to promote safe and caring spaces and given that we have seen that no changes have been made to ensure that Alberta Education monitors the site so that it does contain links with appropriate content, will the minister please tell Albertans when this will be fixed, and if it won't be fixed, why not?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as I had outlined in my first two replies, we dealt with this in an expeditious manner, and we will. If I can get information from the individual member, I would be happy to pursue that as well. You know, we work hard to make sure that we provide a safe and caring environment for all of our students, including having gay-straight alliances in our schools and not talking about outing students in those same very vulnerable situations. So I think we've got some pretty solid ground to stand on, and we're proud of the work that we do in education.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Postsecondary Institutions' Capital Funding

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I address this question to the Minister of Advanced Education. A few weeks ago, during discussions regarding supplementary budget, I inquired as to the financing of a power plant upgrade at a public institution and why for this capital project the funds were coming from the environment ministry. For the record can you elaborate as to why the environment ministry is funding capital projects for public institutions and not from Infrastructure as per their mandate?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the member opposite is referring to upgrades in energy efficiency measures undertaken at Mount Royal University, efficiency measures that we're proud to make investments in as the government of Alberta. Of course, the members opposite want to bury their heads in the sand when it comes to dealing with climate change. They refuse to do anything about it. Our government is taking action, and our public institutions are leading the way, showing Albertans how to deal with improving energy efficiency in dealing with climate change.

Mr. W. Anderson: Oh, boy. Given that the funds are coming from environment line item Climate Change and Emissions Management Fund and since this project is merely an upgrade and not some nebulous green project, again, why is the environment ministry funding capital projects for public institutions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the money is going to improving energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions at our universities. I find it odd that the members opposite are working themselves into a swivet over investing money in green infrastructure and energy efficiency. That just shows the people of Alberta that they are opposed to taking action on climate change, they are opposed to energy efficiency measures, and that, given the chance, they would destroy everything this government is doing.

Mr. W. Anderson: I won't say anything about the truth. Given that it seems that Environment is now responsible for funding public institutions' capital projects and not Infrastructure, as per its mandate, is the carbon tax slush fund simply meant to provide money to backstop this government's mismanagement of their capital projects, and can this or any minister explain to the taxpayers of Alberta why this is so and come clean about the wealth transfer tax grab?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, whether or not you believe that the climate is changing due to human impacts on the planet . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . I think we should all agree that investing in energy efficiency is good for everybody, Mr. Speaker. Those energy efficiency measures will save the taxpayers of Alberta millions of dollars over the next few years. The member opposite should hang his head in shame the next time he lectures us on being financially responsible.

The Speaker: Please, do we have representatives of universities here today? Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Finance Minister's Attendance at Heritage Fund Committee Meetings

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the March 8 meeting of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund the chair, at the request of the members, said that he would send the minister a direct invitation to attend the next meeting, and given that the committee chair and the Finance minister can co-ordinate schedules to determine a day that works for both the committee and the minister, to the committee chair: will you commit today to schedule the next committee meeting on a date that allows the minister to be present?

2:30

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's being scheduled right now, so we will try and do that. There's a standing . . .

An Hon. Member: Yes or no?

Mr. Coolahan: It's possible. It's possible.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Chair. Given that at the March 8 meeting of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee members were so confused about conflicting messages from Treasury Board and AIMCo that they requested that the minister attend their next meeting and given that we have just heard that the committee chair may co-ordinate an acceptable meeting date with the minister in good faith, to the Minister of Finance: will you commit to attending the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Heritage Savings Trust Fund?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, I want to just clarify. There is no confusion at all. I just want to say that the standing committee heard from Mr. Uebelein, who said: "I do want to reinforce that at present our independence in investment decision-making, as I think I reassure you at every quarterly meeting, has not been encumbered in any way." There's no confusion between administration at Treasury Board and AIMCo.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky . . . [interjections] I'm trying to make another point to another member.

The volume is getting excessive at times, hon. member. I'd ask that you contain it.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that whether the minister will commit to attending a meeting is really a yes or no answer and

given that this is my third try for an answer to a very direct and important question for all Albertans, Minister of Finance, will you or will you not attend the next heritage trust fund committee meeting?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans get it, that there is no confusion. The only ones who are confused are that side of the House. I've stood up and said that Mr. Uebelein believes . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Thank you.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I've stood up several times and said that Mr. Uebelein is not concerned about any independence being taken away from them. The government of Alberta supports AIMCo at every turn, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-Hays, keep your volume down.

Mr. McIver: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Health Services for Migrant Workers and Children

Loyola: Mr. Speaker, this government has shown a strong commitment to protecting the rights of all Albertans regardless of where they come from. However, residents in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie have raised concerns for the health and wellness of Canadian-born children of migrant undocumented parents. Given that access to health care is a fundamental human right, to the Minister of Health: what coverage is available for these Canadian-born children?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. As of January 2016 our government extended full Alberta health insurance coverage to include Canadian-born children of migrant workers. We understand Alberta residency guidelines, and we want to make sure that these young Albertans, who were born in the province, are properly insured and that their parents don't have to worry about their health care. It's important to us that we make their lives better.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has confirmed that these children are covered by Alberta health care, what steps can be taken to ensure that migrant undocumented workers are aware of this coverage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his advocacy on this matter and his engagement with those who share those very concerns. Recognizing that language and cultural barriers can be a significant issue, we continue to develop information in multiple languages and support translation services throughout the Alberta health care system. Some people call these important services in the public service bureaucrats. We call them important service providers, and we're going to make sure that we continue to provide supports for Alberta families who speak a variety of languages because it's important to us that they have access to the services that they deserve.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that refugee and migrant families are some of the most disadvantaged people in our province, with a wide range of concerns, what other steps are being taken to ensure that they are connected to comprehensive community health supports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, some of the largest populations of migrants and newcomers are in Edmonton and Calgary. In Edmonton we have the East Edmonton health centre, which works with these populations to make sure that they get comprehensive supports, including social services and ongoing health management as well as education related to health care. In Calgary we have the Mosaic refugee health clinic, which is a significant resource for particularly low-income, high-risk families who are new to Canada. We're working to expand these services throughout Alberta in ways that are accessible, including supporting 211, which is a partnership with Alberta Health Services as well as the Canadian Mental Health Association.

The Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Resource Industries in Northeastern Alberta

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Alberta's economy has been suffering from an economic downturn, and this is especially true of communities in northeastern Alberta who are heavily reliant on the natural resource sector. In other communities the NDP economic diversification plan has resulted in the entire shutdown of the coal industry, meaning thousands of jobs being cut. Albertans in my riding and northeastern Alberta are concerned that a similar fate might happen to them. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what is your plan to make sure that this doesn't happen to the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is working respectfully with coal communities. I know this one was asked about in terms of a specific one, but I can tell you that the process we're using is to work with local officials and the federal government to transition these plants and keep them working. We're keeping those working. We're going to assist those coal communities. We've made some forays into the current ones that are there and will continue to work with them. There's nothing different in how we're going to work with the one that he's talking about than with the ones we're already working with.

Mr. Cyr: That's distressing to hear.

Given that certain agricultural crops such as hemp, lentils, and pulse crops have been developed in northeastern Alberta and given that the Alberta Biomaterials Development Centre can produce one tonne of hemp straw per hour, which is insufficient for Alberta's current hemp fibre industry, to the minister of economic development: what are you doing to attract private, large-scale processing capacity for hemp feedstock and other crops within northeastern Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Hemp is fast becoming a very important crop for Alberta. We have approximately 20,000 acres or so in production now. There is room to grow in that not only as food, which many of us enjoy, but also for the stocks themselves for fibre. It's a plant that's

been grown for thousands of years and has been very successful in many parts of the world. I think that now it's right for Alberta to take advantage of that market world-wide.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rental vacancy rates in Cold Lake have skyrocketed to an overall vacancy rate of 26.2 per cent, which is a stark comparison to the national vacancy rate of 3.7 per cent, and given that several new plants and expansions to existing oil and gas plants have been announced by several different companies, which assuredly means housing will be needed, to the Minister of Energy: do you have a plan to encourage oil companies to work together with community leaders to hire locals and to ensure that nonlocal workers will be placed in the communities they serve instead of forcing them into . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to work with all communities in our oil and gas industry, but where they are housed is the choice of where the project is and what company it is. As we go forward, we will always work with our companies to make life better for Albertans and make life better for industry.

Energy Exploration Incentives

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, when the federal government released their budget, I know that many Albertans were hoping that we'd see some help from Ottawa with our struggling economy or, at the very least, nothing to hurt us further. I and many other Albertans, especially in our vital energy industry, were therefore alarmed to discover that the federal government was ending the Canadian exploration expense, an important tool for junior energy companies to raise capital. To the Energy minister: were you consulted on this change, and if so, did you try to do anything to stop it?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

2:40

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The day we heard about that, I was actually in Calgary speaking to EPAC. I did express some dismay about that change, but I also asked them to work with us and help us support their thoughts about that tax to the federal government, and we are doing that work right now.

Mr. Fraser: Given that the Canadian exploration expense has been replaced with the Canadian development expense, which spreads the tax incentives out over many years as opposed to providing an up-front benefit, and given that junior energy companies don't have access to the large capital reserves available to larger players and rely on the Canadian exploration expense to fund exploration of new assets, to the same minister: does your government have any estimates on how much damage this change will cause to our economy and what it will cost small and medium-sized energy companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, I have reached out to groups such as the companies that are represented by EPAC, and I have asked them to help me assess what the impact is of that tax. As I know more about what that impact is,

I will be working with them and their members to express that to the federal government.

Mr. Fraser: Given that the majority of energy juniors operating in Alberta are started and operated by Albertans and given that the growth of these junior energy companies is a vital part of the economic recovery in this province and given that the removal of the Canadian exploration expense will seriously limit the ability of companies to expand and succeed, Minister, I'm glad to hear that you're standing up for these companies. How much more are you going to help them out? Because they are struggling.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely know that those junior companies are critical to the whole oil and gas industry. They are the ones that do the early exploration, and they bring a lot of growth and value to our province. As I mentioned, it's continuing work. I'll have more to report in the days to come.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Grande Prairie-Wapiti Constituency

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share with the House some of the great things in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. There are many successful Alberta-based businesses thriving in the Grande Prairie area, run by and employing Albertans. There are two microbreweries, the Grain Bin Brewing Company and the GP Brewing Company, who are using locally sourced barley and local spring water in their production.

The Evergreen centre for resource excellence was originally developed in 2009 as a collaborative effort between industry and government. They continue to focus on solving environmental issues in an economically sustainable way. The Evergreen centre provides an educational and training facility for environmental best-management practices.

The Grande Prairie Regional College is celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. GPRC is invested in indigenous education and has signed a protocol agreement to build on the college's commitment to indigenous students and communities in northwestern Alberta.

The National Bee Diagnostic Centre is the result of a partnership with GPRC research and innovation, Alberta Agriculture, and Agri-Food Canada. The diagnostic centre is the first comprehensive lab in Canada to provide a full array of diagnostic services for honeybee pests, pathogens, and parasites.

Weyerhaeuser has again been named the 2017 world's most ethical company by the Ethisphere Institute, a global leader in defining and advancing the standards of ethical business practices.

The Norbord mill in Grande Prairie recently celebrated 20 years of success. Norbord Inc. is the leading global manufacturer of wood-based panels and is the world's largest producer of oriented strandboard, and it employs almost 200 people in Grande Prairie alone.

That, Mr. Speaker, is just the tip of the iceberg, but there are lots of great things happening in Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Thank you.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I was elected to serve as the MLA for Calgary-Bow, I was a student at Mount Royal University working towards a bachelor of arts in sociology. Having the opportunity to attend postsecondary exposed me to a whole new world of critical thinking. Through this critical thinking I found my voice in activism.

During my time in university there was a lot of discussion and anxiety among students around increasingly unaffordable tuition fees and massive cuts that the previous government made. Those cuts resulted in the loss of nursing enrolment of one-third, an engineering program, a disability transfer program, and a performing arts program. It meant larger classroom sizes and higher instructional fees. This burden on students made postsecondary less accessible.

The loss of accessibility and affordability of university programs resonated with many students at MRU, and something had to be done. Shortly after this news surfaced, many students and faculty came together in solidarity to rally against these deep cuts. Over 300 people marched to former Premier Redford's constituency office, which was conveniently across the street from campus. When we arrived at her office, we discovered that she was not there to talk to us. It was like our voice didn't matter, and that felt discouraging.

I fundamentally believe that everyone benefits from a society that has equitable access to affordable education. Students exercised their voice and elected a government on that principle. It is why we have extended our tuition freeze for a third year, introduced new awards for indigenous students, doubled the amount of available funds for the Alberta low-income grant, made apprentices eligible for student aid, and made it easier for all students to access student aid.

I am so proud of the role that our government is playing in making the lives of Albertans better. It is good to know that students and faculty will no longer have to face these deep cuts.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer Courthouse

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Central Alberta has seen incredible growth in recent years. Since the Red Deer courthouse was built, in the early '80s, the city's population has almost doubled. As a result, space in the current courthouse is limited. Red Deer pressed the previous government for several years to recognize that our region is in dire need of a new courthouse, but the provincial government was silent until now.

Thankfully, with Budget 2017 our government did more than just recognize the need. While we are still finalizing the total cost, we are committed to investing \$97 million over the next four years for a new Red Deer justice centre. Mr. Speaker, this new justice centre is desperately needed. It will increase the number of courtrooms from seven to 12, but it will also go beyond providing more courtrooms. The new Red Deer justice centre will also be a place where people can go for justice outside as well as inside court. That's because there will also be a resolution services wing, which will help Albertans resolve disputes faster. It'll provide more access to a variety of services like education, assessment, dispute resolution, mediation, and other alternatives to court.

Mr. Speaker, Red Deer's new justice centre is just one of several measures by our government to address pressures in Alberta's justice system. We're hiring more Crown prosecutors and court staff, we're appointing judges and working with Ottawa to do the same, we've introduced legislation into the House that, if passed, will increase access to the legal system for survivors of sexual and domestic violence, and we've increased legal aid funding so people who cannot afford a lawyer can still have one. Together these and other measures are helping to ensure that Albertans have access to a fair and innovative justice system.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that takes concrete – literally concrete – action on issues that will make life better for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:50

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about world autism day, which took place yesterday across the country. Autism spectrum disorder is the name of a group of developmental disorders which includes a wide range of symptoms, skills, and levels of disability. Yesterday groups from all over Alberta gathered to raise awareness for those affected and their families, who provide them with much-needed love and support these very able individuals.

One group in my riding, called Rednecks with a Cause, threw a fantastic, sold-out dinner dance and auction, which raised monies which will directly benefit families of the community and provide support and help to identify individuals affected. I'm so proud of my Redneck community. To all of the volunteers who put this on, thank you. To all of the generous donors who attended, thank you. I definitely agree with the organizers of this that this was not a benchmark for success but a true phenomenon which touches people of all backgrounds.

I hope that more people will take time to learn how someone with autism thinks and experiences their surroundings. These are people with different thought processes. Let's change the discussion from pity to joy, from tolerance to acceptance. Let's embrace neurodiversity and get to know some of these truly amazing individuals. There have been some truly amazing people with autism – for instance, Mozart and Einstein were believed to be on the spectrum – and the world is a better place to have these unique individuals.

I thank Rednecks with a Cause for their hard work and their kindness and for helping people in my community of Bonnyville-Cold Lake who are living with the autism spectrum disorder.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As required by the Statutes Repeal Act, I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the unproclaimed legislation that is more than five years old. Legislation on this list will automatically be repealed on December 31, 2017, unless proclaimed before that date or the Legislative Assembly adopts a resolution that it not be repealed.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll table the appropriate number of copies of a request from a constituent of Edmonton-

Glenora for a plan to save the provincial royal museum based on the study of significance, that I'm presenting here, from the historic resource management program and that it be protected from demolition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and, with your indulgence, do three tablings today. First, I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the survey results, that I put forward, showing that 27,000 Albertans support ending the time change.

Mr. Speaker, second, I would like to table 950 pages of online feedback I have received in support of having one time year-round. I'll hold off on those ones.

Finally, the third doc that I would like to table, Mr. Speaker: I have the requisite number of copies of 644 pages of e-mails that I have received in support of Bill 203 and ending the time change.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I can see that we're going to have to recruit more pages.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table five copies of a member's statement given by Jason Kenney, where he smeared the decision-making power of the Supreme Court of Canada regarding the Vriend decision.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I rise to table five copies of the report by Paul Fraser, QC, Acting Ethics Commissioner, into allegations involving the hon. Alison Redford, dated March 29, 2017, pursuant to section 25(12) of the Conflicts of Interest Act.

I'm sorry. Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of a letter I wrote to the Government House Leader referencing things that he said in regard to the Public Affairs Bureau being a partisan government body of the previous government. I wrote a letter to the minister that I'm tabling today on the sixth day of fantastic PAB tablings.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the Hon. Mr. S. Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs, responses to questions raised by Mr. Stier, hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, and Mr. Clark, hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, on March 8, 2017, 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates debate; also, responses to questions raised by Mr. Gotfried, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, on March 9, 2017, 2016-17 supplementary supply estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think we had two points of order today. The first one, I believe, was by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Rotation of Questions

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't need to take very much time with respect to this matter. During question period today, when it was the MLA for Calgary-Elbow's turn to ask a

question, the minister or the Member – I'm confused about titles today – for Strathmore-Brooks stood up. Now, I know that the trading of questions has been historically permitted in the Assembly, but I would ask that House leaders be notified of those kinds of changes in advance.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise. I didn't catch the citation from the Government House Leader, so I'm not entirely sure if it's a point of order, but I'm happy to speak to it. There certainly was a trade that took place earlier today. While we did take the time to inform the Speaker's office, in the future I will endeavour to ensure that the Government House Leader is informed as well.

The Speaker: I'm sure there's no snacking in the House, is there? No.

There was communication to our office, but thank you. I think the onus is on members to let the Government House Leader know.

The second is a point of order by the Member for Calgary-Hays, I believe. Is that correct?

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cite from the standing orders, 23(h), (i), (j), and (l). Now, I don't have the Blues in front of me, so I'll paraphrase as best I can, but (h) is making allegations of another member, (i) is "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," (j) is using "language of a nature likely to create disorder," and (l) is, of course, "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly."

Now, if I heard it correctly, Mr. Speaker, I think an hon. member accused me in the one question of being not in favour of GSAs and wanting to out gay kids. For those watching, I certainly was in this Legislature and voted in favour of Bill 10, which was introduced by our government before the last election. Also, I certainly do not have the opinion attributed to me of wanting to out gay kids. It's not been my position, and I don't expect it will ever be my position. So for that reason I hope that you will hold the point of order and ask the member to withdraw the remarks.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the Blues, and I didn't hear that particular reference. What I did hear was the hon. member referring to the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and his advocacy in favour of informing parents when a student requests to join a gay-straight alliance. That was characterized as akin to outing the students.

3:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is the view of many people who are experts in this field and others that this particular proposition on the part of the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, Mr. Kenney, is extraordinarily damaging and will undo the good that GSAs do. I want to just indicate that gay-straight alliances are student-led clubs that aim to make the school community a safer place for all students regardless of their sexual orientation. Their members include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning, LGBTQ, youth and their straight allies.

I just want to quote from this author from the University of British Columbia.

"We know that LGBTQ students are at higher risk for suicide, in part because they are more often targeted for bullying and discrimination," says [the author of the study]. "But heterosexual students can also be the target of homophobic bullying. When policies and supportive programs like GSAs are in place long enough to change the environment of the school, it's better for students' mental health, no matter what their orientation."

The Speaker: Government House Leader, to the procedural question, not the substance of debate.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the hon. member is referring to. As I said, I didn't hear the reference to him. I heard references to his new leader clearly taking a position that's very, very harmful and undermines the efforts to protect gay and lesbian students in our schools. If the reference was to the hon. member and his position, I take him at his word that he has been supportive of this bill in the past even though his new leader is committed to repealing it.

I don't believe there's a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The House leader of the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's good to hear that the hon. Government House Leader indeed understands that if it was in reference to our hon. caucus leader, then (h), (i), and (j) would apply.

Now, a seldom utilized standing order is (l), to which our hon. caucus leader has referred, and since it is not often utilized, I'll simply repeat it.

23 A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

(l) introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.

One of the practices and precedents of this Assembly, of course, as you know very, very well, Mr. Speaker, is that those who are outside of this House and, therefore, cannot defend themselves should not be referred to. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Rodney: Now, there have been a number of misquotations utilized both . . . [interjections] Excuse me?

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you.

. . . in this Chamber and on social media, so I shall read a short statement that refers directly, Mr. Speaker, to this allegation.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I drew this to the attention of the Government House Leader as well. It's not the substance of the discussion. I think the point is what was said and whether it was aimed, as I understand the Member for Calgary-Hays, at a particular member. So please stick to that subject matter and not stuff outside the House.

Mr. Rodney: Yes. That's exactly what this is: a very few sentences that will set the record straight.

The Speaker: I hope they are, because you know what? I'm going to can it real fast if it's not.

Mr. Rodney: I wouldn't waste your time. I promise you that.

"Some are falsely claiming that I want to force schools to 'out' children to their parents. This simply is not true."

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm going to rule your comment out of order. Please be seated.

I do have a copy of the Blues. "The new leader of the Conservatives has stated that his preference is to take away the privacy of students." This was the particular statement that hon. members had referenced. The exchange did not impute motives in connection with a specific member; it may have, perhaps, to someone outside this House.

Clearly, it may not be a point of order. However, to the hon. member, I think you had a good suspicion of what that particular comment might have caused.

Cortes-Vargas: It offended me, too, Mr. Speaker. It's hurtful, and it offended me.

The Speaker: Please don't exchange dialogue with me, hon. member.

I would caution all of you that these kinds of comments are not constructive to good public policy and democracy. There is a freedom of speech option that exists in this House. It's more than an option; it's a rule. It's not without conditions attached to it. Therefore, while this may not officially be a point of order, I want to caution you yet again about the comments that you make here and the uproar that it sometimes causes in this Assembly.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: Hon. members, I want to rule on a point of privilege. [interjections] Hon. members, are we ready to go?

I'm prepared to rule on the question of privilege that was raised by the third party House leader on March 21, 2017, as set out on pages 420 and 421 of the *Alberta Hansard* for that day. I note that the hon. member raised this matter immediately following the vote on Government Motion 16. Given that the purported question of privilege relates to the passage of this motion, I find that the member raised the matter at the earliest opportunity. Therefore, the notice requirement for the purpose of Standing Order 15 has been met, in particular Standing Order 15(6), which specifically provides for this situation.

Government Motion 16 provides for concurrence in a report from the Ethics Commissioner concerning recommended sanctions for a breach of the Conflicts of Interest Act involving the Member for Calgary-Hays. As I noted on March 15, 2017, when ruling on a point of order as to whether this was sub judice, this motion is the next step in a process set out in section 28(3) of that act. As I indicated in my ruling, the Assembly has delegated the investigation of matters concerning conflicts of interest to the Ethics Commissioner. This is a part of the Assembly's inherent privileges relating to its internal proceedings and the conduct and discipline of members.

The third party House leader is essentially arguing that the Assembly's motion is violating one of the member's privileges, namely freedom of speech. However, I would say that the essence of the member's argument pertains to the findings of the Ethics Commissioner rather than the sanctions that she recommended. In other words, I would say that the argument is that the finding that the Member for Calgary-Hays was in breach of the act for asking a question during question period violates his freedom of speech.

On this point I agree with the Deputy Government House Leader's argument that rights of members are subject to the procedures of the Assembly, as noted on pages 13 and 14 of *Maingot's Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition.

While it will be seen that the Member enjoys all the immunity necessary to perform his [particular] parliamentary work, this privilege or right, such as freedom of speech, is nevertheless subject to the practices and procedures of the House.

A similar statement can be found in section 77 of *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, which reads as follows:

Freedom of speech does not mean that Members have an unlimited or unrestrained right to speak on every issue. The rules of the House impose limits on the participation of Members and it is the duty of the Speaker to restrain those who abuse the rules.

I cannot imagine how the passage of a motion that deals with a matter relating to the internal proceedings of this Assembly and discipline of its members would constitute a *prima facie* question of privilege. There have been rulings in this Assembly on similar matters where members have raised questions of privilege relating to decisions that the Assembly has taken pursuant to its own rules.

3:10

For instance, the most recent ruling on this point occurred on December 1, 2011, and I would refer members to page 1590 of *Alberta Hansard*, where the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood argued that a government motion concerning evening sittings violated his privileges. Speaker Kowalski found that there was no *prima facie* question of privilege and noted that he could not imagine how sittings of the Assembly or the standing orders violated members' privileges.

A similar argument was raised in 1996 concerning a government motion establishing subcommittees of supply. Again, the Speaker concluded that there was no *prima facie* question of privilege. I'd like to quote from Speaker Schumacher's ruling on February 26, 1996, at page 224 of *Alberta Hansard*, where he stated:

In this instance, if the Chair were to find that a *prima facie* question of privilege existed or that a contempt had been committed, the Chair would in effect have to find that the Standing Orders violated the privileges of the members. To make such a finding could cast doubt upon the House's ability to control its own proceedings, which the Chair is not about to do.

This Assembly has made a decision on a motion following a debate that has been conducted according to its own rules, in which all members were able to participate. For the reasons stated earlier, I find that there is no *prima facie* question of privilege. This concludes the matter.

The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Member's Apology

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the requirement of Government Motion 16, which accepts the January 4, 2017, report of the Ethics Commissioner and upholds both her ruling and her proposed sanctions for words I spoke in this House on November 22, 2016. I have no choice but to accept that Government Motion 16 has passed, and I am required to apologize to the Assembly. I must say that if I thought at any point, at the time that I said it, that it was wrong, I certainly would not have said those words.

Mr. Speaker, subsequently I retained independent counsel to find out what indeed I had done wrong and have sought to have this matter adjudicated to the Court of Queen's Bench. At a preliminary hearing held recently in Calgary, a judge in that court found my complaint to be such that the judge ordered a hearing on the matter, which is scheduled for January of 2018. I can only guess that if my complaint had not been worthy of a hearing, I wouldn't be getting one, and I would have accepted that judgment, knowing that I had indeed said something offside in this House.

But the judge did not throw my complaint out, and we await a decision on whether my privilege as a Member of this Legislative Assembly and by extension the privilege of every Member of this Legislative Assembly to speak freely on the floor of this House is subordinate to the Conflicts of Interest Act, an interesting question indeed, one that not only impacts members of this Assembly but elected members of Assemblies and parliaments across Canada and the Commonwealth. I regret that it has come to this, where a sitting government would attempt to limit the privilege of an opposition member to speak freely in the Assembly.

As my colleague the Member for Calgary-Lougheed pointed out, *Beauchesne's* section 75 states: "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee." It appears, Mr. Speaker, that this may not be the case in Calgary any longer, and that really is an affront to this democratic institution and, in my opinion, to democracy itself. The fact that I'm being censored for raising an issue of importance not only to my constituents but to all Albertans is deeply concerning and all because the government could not handle answering tough questions on their own policies.

Mr. Speaker, it is sad. It is sad that the Premier can no longer do her job and have any involvement in upcoming labour negotiations with the public sector because her husband . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I do hope that you keep your conversation related to the point of privilege matter.

Mr. McIver: It is sad indeed, Mr. Speaker. It is sad that the Premier can no longer do her job and have any involvement . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Would you like me to start again, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: No. I would like you to deal with the matter of privilege and speak to the motion.

Mr. McIver: I believe that I'm required to do this, Mr. Speaker, and I'm fulfilling the requirements.

Mr. Speaker, it is sad. It is sad that the Premier can no longer do her job and have any involvement in upcoming labour negotiations with the public sector because her husband earns his living as a union executive. It is sad that the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General will have to resign her position because her husband is a police officer with the Calgary Police Service, because given the Ethics Commissioner's ruling how could she not be in conflict by making decisions that directly impact the Calgary Police Service, the one that employs her husband?

If the occupations and ways in which our spouses earn their living bears directly on what we as members can say in this House, it surely comes to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have any closing arguments with respect to the action that has been approved by this Assembly?

Mr. McIver: I am delivering them right now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No. You're using it as an opportunity, hon. member, to speak to other members of this Assembly and not to the substance of the matter before us today. If that's what you choose to continue to do, I am fearful that I'm going to need to rule you out of order for speaking in reference to other members. Speak to the matter of the point of order, not to the other members of this Legislature on matters that you believe might have something to do with this.

Do you have any other comments you'd like to make on the motion as approved by the Assembly other than those comments with respect to other members of the Assembly?

Mr. McIver: I will continue but only with your permission, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: If you have words with respect to the motion approved by the Assembly, then absolutely, but if you are continuing to make references to other individuals of this House and their family members, I would . . . [interjections]

Hon. member, could you abide by my request and speak to the motion. If you have something that you'd like to say with respect to the motion approved by the Assembly with respect to your actions, please proceed. I would ask that you stick to that subject matter, though, please.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of my words have been about the ruling, and all of my words from now on will continue to be about the ruling.

If the occupations and ways in which our spouses earn their living bears directly on what we as members can say in this House, it surely comes to bear on the work ministers of the Crown do as well. They manage large portfolios and wield tremendous power. How can Albertans trust that they are not using it to further their interests and, by extension, their own interests if it has been decided that my wife's very small business precludes me from asking questions on a topic related to that industry? If it sounds ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, that's because it is, but sadly that's where we find ourselves today.

What a shame it is for the government to seek to limit my ability to do my job as the representative for Calgary-Hays and a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, and in so doing, they also move to limit the ability of each member of the Assembly to do her or his job. The precedent they seek to set will also limit the ability of each and every elected representative in the Commonwealth to do their jobs. How, Mr. Speaker, does this serve the public interest? How are these government members doing right by Albertans?

Beyond this, Mr. Speaker, I'm also sorry that the government has seen fit in this case to appoint itself judge, jury, and executioner on a matter that is indeed before the courts. As my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed also pointed out in his remarks, it is not our job to evaluate the scope of section 3 of the Conflicts of Interest Act, especially not when the very question is before the courts. The idea that this government would rather score a win today than wait for the judge's decision speaks to how much the political discourse in the province has devolved since the last election.

To be clear, partisanship has its place, but the extent to which this government has blurred the line between their role as government and their role as NDP MLAs is a real disappointment. In fact, if the previous government, Mr. Speaker, had even tried to pull this stunt, the NDP opposition would have been all over us for censorship and abuse of power, and they would have been right in that case.

Because I take my job as the MLA for Calgary-Hays and Progressive Conservative member very seriously, I'm standing in this House today to meet my obligation, as I am required to do, but it's also the government that owes an apology to all Albertans for attempting to subvert the efforts of opposition members to hold them accountable for their actions and policies. They owe an apology to the judiciary in our province for presuming to do the job of an independent and impartial court and to every member of assemblies and parliaments in the Commonwealth for attempting to set a precedent that could limit the most sacred of parliamentary privileges, that of freedom of speech, a precedent that could be used by other governments to limit opposition's ability to be effective.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I now make my official apology to this House. I am sorry for the words that I said.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

3:20

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 203

Alberta Standard Time Act

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act.

Since 1972 Albertans have been changing their clocks twice a year in accordance with the Daylight Saving Time Act. But Alberta is not the Alberta that existed 45 years ago, and Albertans have told me that they want one time. While the practice of changing their clocks may come easily to some, to many others it really does not. Let me be clear: these Albertans experience adverse effects due to this time change.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is about supporting Albertans and making their lives better. I've heard from tens of thousands of Albertans who have strong opinions regarding the practice of changing their clocks. Many of my colleagues in this House echo that daylight saving time is a topic of real concern for their constituents. These concerns are present and real. Just a few short weeks ago Albertans across the province were feeling the effects of losing an hour. This bill will address those concerns and establish a consistent, year-round time for Albertans that will provide stability for families, parents, employers, and working Albertans.

This bill is an example of the real and practical changes that I believe can help Albertans, because with this bill I'm working to make life better for all Albertans and to ensure that their concerns, from individuals to businesses, are reflected by not only addressing daylight saving time but by also crafting a bill based on what Albertans have told me. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill is about addressing Albertans' concerns, and it's about making a difference that every single Albertan will feel.

Under the current Daylight Saving Time Act Albertans are paying through increases in road accidents, workplace injuries, destabilizing the family's routine, and through our agriculture partners, who see decreases in production. To address these concerns, Bill 203 will repeal the Daylight Saving Time Act and establish a year-round Alberta standard time, Coordinated Universal Time minus six hours. It creates a made-in-Alberta time zone, and as mentioned, this will provide stability for families, communities, and businesses.

Both prior to and since the bill's introduction I've received much positive feedback. I certainly continue to welcome any and all input on this bill as we continue to debate it today in the House. My goal is to address the concerns of Albertans regarding daylight saving time through a bill that's reflective of the needs and desires of the population. We've engaged well over 30,000 people in my office and through our survey, Mr. Speaker, and I tabled those documents for you today. It's been wonderful to hear the perspectives on how this bill can help impact individuals' lives. I've spoken to constituents directly. I've spoken to them in my office, in town halls. In fact, I've been stopped on the street by people who simply must tell me that daylight saving time must go. The staff in my office have received and responded to well over a thousand e-mails

and phone calls. In fact, we received over 700 phone calls in one day regarding this bill, and we're still hearing from hundreds of Albertans every week.

This is an issue that Albertans are passionate about. The consultations I have done have been extremely positive, and we continue to hear voices and perspectives. The message is clear. This is a much-needed change. It's something that will impact our families. Seventy-three per cent of Albertans agree that it's time for one time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that's been raised before. There have been two petitions tabled in the Legislature over the last few years. Ruby Kassian from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville tabled a petition in 2015 and was one of the very strong voices on abolishing daylight saving time. We also heard from another petition last year. This is something that we hear not only from the cities, not only from the rural areas; this is something that we are hearing across the province.

It's something that will make life better for industries whose livelihood is dependent on things like animals, who don't read a clock but are regulated only by the setting and rising of the sun. It's something that will make life better for families and parents, who struggle to maintain a schedule with their children following the twice-yearly shift. It's something that will make life better for shift workers like nurses and postal workers, who will no longer have to add another hour to their already strenuous shifts, and it will make life better for seniors, who need to follow very strict schedules for their medications and their personal health, Mr. Speaker. These are only some of the voices that we are most familiar with.

There are impacts on many whom we may have never considered and for whom this change or ceasing of change will make life better. It will make life better for Albertans and caregivers of Albertans who are battling Alzheimer's. We heard through consultation that this disease is one that doesn't just involve memory loss but also deep bouts of anxiety, anxiety that can be triggered and magnified by the setting sun through a syndrome known as sundowning. For these patients their anxiety worsens in the fall and accelerates dramatically as the clocks fall back.

Now, as one of the respondents who contacted us stated, caregivers know this change is coming, and it adds to an already extremely stressful situation, Mr. Speaker, for both themselves and for their patients and their patients' families. This human perspective concerning the effects of the loss of evening light resonated with us, and I realized the positive impact that this bill could have on the lives of so many others. As a caregiver reminded me, abolishing daylight saving time will not cure Alzheimer's, but it will certainly make life easier for the sufferers and their caregivers. All members of this Legislature, I hope, can agree that improving the things that make a difference in the lives of every single individual should be at the forefront of this Assembly.

It's going to make life better, Mr. Speaker, for working Albertans. We actually were reached out to by assistant business manager Scott Crichton of IBEW local 424. In a written statement he said:

IBEW Local 424 supports MLA Thomas Dang's private member's bill on time change. It will be good for our workers, many of whom work in isolated conditions, and will no longer have the hassle of re-setting their clocks. This bill is a positive step forward for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, during our consultation we were also made aware of the impacts that daylight saving time has on our health care system. We heard from one of the managers of medical equipment at a local hospital about the impact that DST has on the work being done to care for Albertans. Many of the life-support devices, including defibrillators and dialysis machines, have integrated

clocks in their systems that require manual resetting and changing to accommodate the time change. Now, this is very costly in human power, but more than that, it can take weeks to locate every single piece of equipment and make the necessary changes throughout an entire hospital. This can result in errors being made on patient charting records and legal documents, that are so important to ensure that we have a continuum of care for our patients. All of this incorrect data happens simply because of DST.

What this means is that we have an opportunity today, Mr. Speaker. We have an opportunity in this Assembly to make a difference in the lives of Albertans and improve patient care by voting in favour of this bill. It's something that I am proud to be able to vote on today.

Mr. Speaker, in considering this bill, I conducted a survey from February 15 to March 4 of this year with nearly 26,000 respondents, with 82 per cent indicating that they wanted to do away with DST. The tabling of this bill is in direct response to what Albertans told us. The crafting of this bill comes directly from what I heard from Albertans. We asked Albertans what life after daylight saving time should be like. We asked them what they wanted to see moving forward. We not only asked people if they felt that it was time to end this change, but I also asked them: when did they value their daylight hours most? The results were overwhelmingly clear. When asked whether they preferred more light in the morning or the evening, two-thirds of Albertans chose the evening. Almost 60 per cent of Albertans chose the evening as well for the wintertime. So Albertans value their evening hours in the sun.

I'm proud that Alberta standard time and the Alberta Standard Time Act are going to reflect that. Alberta standard time is a time zone that Albertans are already familiar with. It's the time that we have right now, Mr. Speaker. It's the time that we have for the majority of the year already, and it's a time that resonates with Albertans. I'm proud that I chose a time that works for us, and it's a time that I believe reflects the will of the people we were elected to represent. This bill will improve the lives of Albertans by creating a consistent, year-round time for all of Alberta. What I heard is that it's time we had one time.

I look forward to hearing the debate from all members of this Assembly, and I really do hope that we are able to move forward on this important legislation. Thank you.

3:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act. This bill is certainly evoking some interesting debate on whether or not we should spring forward and fall back.

A little bit of history could add some context to this debate. In 1898 George Hudson, frustrated with the duties of normal work hours and the lack of sunlight hours in his summer evenings, created a time system which rolls the clock forward one hour in the summer months. The idea is that instead of having an hour of sun before everyone gets up, the sun sets later so that in summer people can enjoy evening sunlight. The clock then reverts from DST back to standard time in the winter by rolling it back one hour to what is known as standard time. In Alberta and most of Canada on the second Sunday of every March we set our clocks forward one hour, and then on the first Sunday of November we go back.

This is a debate that has long been waged within Alberta. Daylight saving time took two referendums to originally put in place. The first took place in the 1967 Alberta general election in a province-wide plebiscite, which was defeated by a slim margin, with 51.25 per cent voting against it. The second referendum took

place in the 1971 general election, when Alberta's voters also voted for a province-wide plebiscite, but this time it passed with a wide margin of 61.37 per cent of the vote.

This debate will affect everyone, and I have been surprised by the number of people who have stopped me on the street just to give me their thoughts on daylight saving time. I've heard from many for and a few against, but one thing is clear. Albertans need to have their say. Some like the advantages of early winter mornings and late summer evenings under the current system. Others hate the time change, and there's a debate over whether we should stay on daylight saving or standard time if we stop changing the clocks. History can teach us some very good lessons if we're willing to listen and learn from the past. Decisions of this magnitude must be taken to the people. We must listen to all stakeholders.

Recently the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames management officials all came out against Alberta standard time. Bob Nicholson, vice-chairman and CEO of the Oilers Entertainment Group, recently gave an interview in Calgary on this bill. I'd like to read some of his quotes to the House.

Quote: I've had some discussions with the Calgary Flames, and they are in agreement with us. We are very concerned with the possible shift away from daylight saving time. There are a few key things. One is that our fans enjoy 7 p.m. games. It's great for our fans to allow families to get to the game, and doubleheaders are a big part of hockey now with television contracts. They're working well. The audience likes it, and for us they would be like 9 o'clock and 9:30 games. They'd get over after midnight. We just can't do that to our fans. And it's not just the fans in the arena; it's the television audience. Television is tough enough without adding that to it. There are a lot of things that you have to look at when it comes to switching schedules for everyone. We're going to find out the proper way to have a discussion with the government to make sure we understand their points of view, but I want to discuss our point of view, which is why it's better to get up twice a year and change the clocks. Unquote.

Mr. Speaker, this is only the start of the list of stakeholders becoming concerned about what exactly time change means to them. What concerns me more than the hockey teams' expressed concerns is that we haven't heard from a number of industries either way. It tells me we need more time. I believe that more conversations need to take place, and as legislators we need to think about whether this is a discussion that we should make unilaterally. This was brought into Alberta in its form with two plebiscites, and this is something that may need to happen again.

I know that I'm not the only one that has some concern about overturning a referendum by people without another referendum. I look forward to hearing what the other members have to say on this debate, and I'll listen closely, very closely, on how the bill debate unfolds. But I want the House to consider whether this should go to committee for further study and ultimately be decided in a referendum since that is how it was brought in.

I commend the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing in this bill. I do believe that it brings passion and a lot of discussion, and I think that this is something that the House can always use.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to stand and speak about this bill given that it is something that has been an active topic of conversation in my constituency since the day I was elected. Previously there was a signature-gathering petition that was undertaken by Ruby Kassian, who the member referenced, where she got almost 3,000 signatures in the

area of Vegreville. Given that Vegreville is a town of 6,000, that is quite an overwhelming response from the people around there in support of it.

I think, as the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake mentioned, it is partly about starting a conversation in the wider public sphere. He is absolutely right. It's something that has been enacted for 45 years, and over that time the province and the people have gone through incredible changes. Innovations and technology that have changed the way that we conduct our lives have made a world where we are integrated with each other unlike ever before. One of the things that we see in talking with our agricultural sector is how our supply chain managed industries, dairy and poultry, are affected by this. If someone is working in this industry, they know how sensitive livestock are to changes. I had the opportunity of conducting a town hall with the Member for Edmonton-South West, and that was something that we heard. A gentleman who had a dairy operation was saying that it takes a month for him to slowly change the routine of his animals to make sure that the productivity of them in terms of milk production was not substantively affected.

What we are talking about is a bill that would make life better for Albertans from across the province. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-South West also spoke at length on how these changes are practical. They're practical and beneficial, something that would help families and communities and our Alberta businesses.

I just want to reiterate that many Albertans struggle through these yearly time changes. Working in health care, where I used to work, in long-term care, there were seniors that took medication four, sometimes five times a day, so if you're talking about moving a medication by an hour, that is actually quite substantial for that person.

I'm familiar with a drug that I had to administer to people that lived in long-term care homes. If someone had osteoporosis, they would be put onto calcium, and once a week they took a medication an hour before breakfast, so I had to make sure that I was in this person's room and administering this medication that would take the calcium that they are prescribed every day and actually bond it to their bones. One of the things that people that take this medication will tell you is that they actually feel a pain in their chest after they take this medication because the first place that your bones take the calcium out of your system and apply it is in your sternum. So an hour's change of medication in a seasonal change twice a year is something that people are quite affected by.

3:40

My constituents have absolutely expressed a lot of concerns with this. They're concerned that when we see changes to the time, there are increases in car accidents, that when we see a change in time, there is an increase to heart attacks, and there is research to show corollary evidence of this.

This is something that I think probably all members of this Assembly have actually heard from their constituents on. I think it's something that, because it is a nonpartisan issue, is an opportunity for us to engage on this and create change in a bipartisan way. Having a year-round time would be a practical change for this province. It's quite timely. I know that I had many constituents reach out to my office that were hoping for this bill to actually get passed before this year's time change that we just had. Unfortunately, we were not able to circumvent that. However, I think that, going forward, we can look at how to best implement it for the province.

The member has gone through extensive consultation, and I've had my own discussions with many people from all municipalities and all counties: Vegreville, Chipman, Mundare, Lamont, Fort Saskatchewan, Andrew, Tofield, Bruderheim, the counties of

Minburn, Lamont, Beaver, and Strathcona. Every single municipality that I represent has come or sent me e-mails and phone calls and talked to me in the community about this, wanting the change, to have one single time zone.

Of course, I think it would be prudent to continue to listen to Albertans' feedback on this. I think it is absolutely prudent to discuss this more as we have this under our advice in the House. I know that this is something where we have heard from tens of thousands of people. I know that we saw stacks of that feedback tabled by the Member for Edmonton-South West just earlier today. The message is loud and clear, that Albertans want to see an end to daylight saving. Whether that means that we stay on the time that it is now or that we fall back and then stay there, people want to have one time year-round.

It's something that would help support our agriculture industry, as I stated earlier, and it's something that teachers, with their students, have also spoken to us about, that they notice a change in their students when they have to deal with a very fatigued child in their class for a week after. This is something that has also been discussed in quite reputable magazines. *Forbes* on March 11, 2017, discussed that there was a study done by Jennifer Welsh and Sarah Kramer of *Business Insider*, and they estimate that it costs \$2 billion just to change the clocks. *Fortune* magazine from March 12, 2016, had a study that they referred to from SleepBetter that estimates the cost to the United States being \$434 million in lost productivity. I think it's very interesting to discuss this from all angles. I know that it has not been discussed as a money bill, but it has incredible implications, when it comes to the costs, to actually implement this change.

I think the jury is still out. I think we still need to discuss which time zone people want to go with, and I find it very interesting that people have very personal interests which time zone they want to go to. If they have more ties or more integration with Saskatchewan, they definitely want to have a time closer to that, and when they have ties or land or other property or family in B.C., they want to go to a time that's closer to B.C. time. Given the issues that have been raised because of discussing these issues, such as one of our most important Canadian stakeholders, our hockey here in Canada, I think that it behooves us to make sure that we continue to discuss this more.

With that, I will just say that I am incredibly supportive of this bill, and I know that the majority of my constituents are also supportive of this bill. I hope to hear more conversation on the topic as we go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 203. It's not too often we have bills that are both interesting and have agreement across party lines, and I think that we may be in one of those circumstances. I know that not all members will be agreed upon it, but this is a genuinely nonideological and nonpartisan issue, that will either unite us or disunite us depending on what hockey teams we go for and our own, personal daily routines.

We would be creating an Alberta standard time or, effectively, a permanent daylight saving time, and if you'll excuse the indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to dub it Dang-light saving time.

I want to commend the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill forward. It has sparked an incredible amount of debate across the province. It is, admittedly, perhaps not the most important issue we have before us, but it is still important, and it certainly has grabbed the attention of a lot of people. I've had a lot

of constituents come up to me. Normally they're either supportive or angry about one thing or another, but a lot of people have come up to give me their personal two cents about this.

This morning on my Facebook page between 10:30 and 11 I just asked constituents to share their thoughts with me about what they think about this, and I'll read a few. I have, let's say, cut out some of the less productive comments that have appeared. I just wanted to share a smattering of them. I do mean this. These are the nicest ones I found. I don't mean these as digs at government members. I genuinely support this bill.

Carmen Stopanski says, "Get rid of it! It may be the one and only thing the dippers suggest that I agree with."

"This might be the only [time] the NDP have got [it] right. Please vote for this and get rid of Daylight Savings time. The more we can be like Brad Wall and Saskatchewan, the better." Now, I know that's not the intention of the Member for Edmonton-South West. It's not his intention to be more like Brad Wall, but we appreciate the sentiment.

Dustin McCombe says:

Leave it the way it is. I don't think people fully understand the way it works. All they want is their convenience. Saskatchewan isn't really on Central time. Power bills both at home, and [in] the cities ... go up in the winter. It won't be light out until mid morning. That [won't] save energy at all. It'll wreak havoc [upon the] people who go to BC in the winter to work, or play with the 2 hour time difference. Dumbest idea ever.

That's obviously not a supportive constituent.

Bobby SP says, "Consider voting in favour of daylight savings time. So, we can have the same time year round. I don't see any value in switching times ... it's a hindrance. One issue I agree with the NDP [on]."

Lou Williams says:

Brilliant idea. I live in both Calgary and Foam Lake [Saskatchewan], and have always liked the [idea of] no time change in [Saskatchewan]. Vote for it, it will be [the] only chance to support something the NDP [does bring] forward before they lose the next election!

I am trying to be nice, Mr. Speaker. I mean this genuinely.

Brock Warkentin – I think he might be from the Grande Prairie area – says, "Loving how the time is right now, leave it and never touch it again."

Lois Eagles says:

Finally ONE thing the NDP is doing right! Get rid of [the] time change and stick with the same time as [Saskatchewan].

As a parent – I am SO sick of the time change agony for kids! [As] an employee – driving an hour to work after [the] time change [sucks].

I'll leave it there. These are among the more polite responses I've received for parliamentary consumption, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

Now, while I'm broadly supportive of the bill, my main concern, that I've had expressed to me, is from Canucks fans who are very concerned about having to stay up very late on weeknights watching Canucks games. Obviously, we're going to have to hear from that very important stakeholder group, as we move forward, about how we can address concerns of our Canucks fans. Nonetheless, I think it is still broadly the right way to go.

I broadly support this. I would say that it would be advantageous to put this bill to a committee for proper study. While I broadly support it, I don't think that myself or anybody except for perhaps the Member for Edmonton-South West considers themselves an expert on the topic of daylight savings time and springing forward and falling back. I'd like to hear from expert witnesses about the best path forward for this. Is this truly the way we want to go?

Again, this is something I will vote for in second reading. I broadly support it, but this is exactly the kind of bill that we should have some expert witness on to determine if it is, in fact, the right way. I can be convinced either way.

I want to again commend the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this forward. I think it's a great way to go. Dang for PM.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just wanted you to be aware that infants, when they're hungry, don't care whether it's one time or the other.

Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really excited to stand up and speak about this bill that we have up here today, Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act. Now, I'm going to reflect first on a story about when I did like the time change, which was when I was 19, and I was a student in Ottawa. I was at the bar, and 2 o'clock came, and then we rolled back an hour, and I got to stay out there longer. Then I sadly realized that I had to work an 11 a.m. shift – and that was not good either – the next day. I only really liked that for a few hours.

Then fast-forward to two years later, when I had a new baby in my arms, and it was very wonky about when it wanted to be fed after we changed the time zone. I changed my tune very, very quickly there, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the Member for Strathmore-Brooks for some of the comments that he made about having experts, people from within the industry speaking about this.

I'm going to reflect back to speak about what I know, which is being a manager in the service industry. Now, it's always funny to look back, because I refer to my father, who still calls businesses before he goes out because back when we implemented the time change, a lot of businesses were actually closed on Sundays. That's not the case anymore. Businesses are open all the time. They're open on New Year's Day now. Even businesses are open on Christmas. You can go to Shoppers Drug Mart and get a bag of potato chips on Christmas Day. So the relevance of this really changes remarkably.

I managed a restaurant, and we were open on Sundays. We did a Sunday brunch service. I recall the challenges that we used to face both when we rolled back the time and then when we sprung forward. Actually, I want to thank my colleagues from the restaurant industry. I spent some of my time over constituency week reaching out to them and asking them about the implications that have been happening because I've been away from the industry for about two years now. Actually, credit some of them that they did notice that it did create a lot of challenges. What I actually sought out is – I spoke to one of my colleagues from Milestones at Market Mall.

If I can throw this in there: if you want a really good eggs Benedict that's made with fresh hollandaise sauce daily, go to Milestones at Market Mall. Apparently, they had a really good manager there at one point, too.

With that being said, I took a look at about three years worth of data from them. They kindly allowed me to look at their logbook notes, and I want to make sure that I don't divulge too many trade secrets from those. With that being said, I looked at both October and November, when we rolled back, to see if there were any implications. Actually, there was no change, really, to their revenue sales because since they added the extra hour, people were coming in a bit more sporadically, but revenue-wise there wasn't much change.

However, productivitywise they dealt with some challenges because people were sort of off-kilter when it came to their time.

However, when I looked at the March season, when they lost the hour, I was actually quite surprised to see that there was an impact. Depending on the year, it was a decline in sales compared to the previous week and the following week of anywhere between \$300 to \$1,000 in net revenue. I reflect that as being only one business. I would suggest that that may have occurred because their people were sort of off-kilter with their time, so they were skipping a meal, or they weren't going out for dinner.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Realistically, it had an implication for our business, and I can only envision what implications it has for other businesses. I recall, having worked at a different branch restaurant, seeing a decline in our intake of guests during that time, not to mention that when we lost the hour, we would always deal with issues of staff showing up late. In fact, in the logbook notes I noticed that that was an issue. We also dealt with people who were quite grumpy, so our comps were actually higher on that day. So when I reflect back, it actually had a negative impact on our business operations. Now, I can't speak in relation to all the other retail sectors that are out there, but I can speak to how it impacted the restaurant industry, and it was quite negative for us.

With that being said, because I can only speak to this one field, I firmly believe that we do need to have further discussion with a lot of other businesses. I think it's actually quite prudent that we parallel what's happening in Saskatchewan. If you look at it IT-wise – now, I'm not going to encourage a business I've invested in to come to Alberta. However, I think that when we parallel what they see in Saskatchewan, if you look at adopting your IT software, there wouldn't be many challenges that you'd have. It would actually be lower cost.

A lot of businesses here in Alberta do work with eastern seaboard businesses, so the closer we can be to the time zones you see in Ontario or New York, the better because sometimes you have a lot of employees that end up having to go into downtown Calgary early in the morning because they have to be doing a lot of work in conference calls, especially because we can Skype now and go live via video conferencing. They do a lot of work with these partners, so being closer to them because they are business partners and trade partners would be very prudent as well.

Now, I reflect back to when this started getting lively, when the Member for Edmonton-South West originally proposed this, back in December. I remember visiting a Silvera seniors' complex in Shawnessy, and the number of seniors that came to me to talk about how we should eliminate daylight savings time and eliminate the time change was remarkable. I had a senior tell me that she threw away her clock because she didn't know how to change it. I had quite a few of the nursing aides who talked about the challenges they had with regulating medications and the fact that it really threw them off-kilter, and it was a big challenge for many of the people working within that sector. You know, that's speaking in relation to what the Member for Edmonton-South West spoke about, the challenges that we see within health care.

You know, when I have interacted with some of the people within the farming community in the last little while, they don't really see the relevance either. I've heard comments around: the cow doesn't know what time it is, so it only really changes what's going to go on with us.

At the end of the day, it was something we implemented a little while back, and maybe it made sense at that time, but when I start

hearing from constituents, it's quite overwhelming where they sit on this side of the spectrum.

Now, I've heard the comments in relation to what we heard with some of the hockey teams here. At first, when I heard it from the Edmonton Oilers, I started dismissing it because: the Oilers. However, they did reference the Calgary Flames, so I started listening a bit more. With that being said, you know, that's one of the voices that was being heard.

I do commend the Member for Edmonton-South East – sorry; South West. My apologies. I live sort of in the east end of Calgary, so the east is a lot nicer. Either way, I commend him for the outreach that he's done to really try to get a lot of perspectives at the table here. I think, you know, the more we can open up this dialogue and discussion, the better to really inform ourselves.

4:00

This will have implications on our industry. Being the first province to do this and to eliminate our time change could have a lot of ramifications down the line. I think a lot of other provinces right now are watching very closely. I would not be surprised if some of the U.S. states that we do a lot of work with are watching this quite closely, and if we were to be the first to move forward with this, they would follow suit. So if we do it, we need to make sure that we get it right.

Now, with that being said, one of the things that I made sure I did leading up to this was reach out to constituents through our newsletters, and I asked them to provide me with feedback. I do that with many different issues every single month to really get some of the comments that are coming from constituents in my riding. I was overwhelmed with how many people reached out to us. I have not had a single issue that I have received more feedback on than this one. I think it really speaks volumes to the fact that this is extraordinarily important to Albertans, that they take this quite seriously, and I think they're going to take quite a bit of pride in this once we've moved through this bill.

With that being said, you know, I reflect back to being a parent myself and the challenges that I have getting my kids synced up to the right time and the challenges I have getting them off to bed. It's a quality of life thing. While it may seem like it's something small, even the little things sometimes make a big difference in people's lives.

You know, I appreciate the member for bringing this bill forward to really try to make life better for all Albertans. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mrs. Pitt: Wonderful. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203. I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward. This has created a flurry of activity in my office. It's such a great conversation piece to have with constituents of mine. Our local media have appreciated the discussion as well. So we've had a good time with this. The people of Airdrie are certainly interested in Bill 203 and the intent and purpose and the outcome of what this is supposed to bring. In fact, I could actually honestly say that at this point I've had one correspondence with a constituent that doesn't think this is a good idea. One. It's sort of like it hit the nail on the head bang on. I would probably have a big problem in my constituency of Airdrie should I vote against this bill.

The discussion is great. The reasons here, you know, I think we've all heard before. I've even heard the comment that the cows don't care what time it is. But you know what? This is actually truly important, I think, to a lot of people. When you turn on the news on

the day that the time has changed, whichever way it's changed, we see an increase in the number of motor vehicle accidents. The emergency rooms will report higher numbers as well for sure. I think there's a safety component that is being addressed by this piece of legislation, which I hope will be proclaimed before the fallback time. That would be really great because we can just get this thing over and done with and be good. I know that, certainly, the people of Airdrie want to see that as well. And that's actually what I've heard a lot from the feedback, too: "Yes. Let's vote for this. Let's get it done, and let's move on."

So I'm relaying the message from the constituents of Airdrie to this Assembly, and I urge my colleagues to vote for this piece of legislation. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for raising this issue, that seems to have captured a lot of attention in Alberta, though not in my constituency. Calgary-Mountain View seems to be fairly quiet about this issue. I assume that, like many, they are enjoying the long evenings that come with daylight saving time and time with children and time with family activities afterwards.

The bill proposes to shift and be consistent with Saskatchewan Central Time year-round, ending the practice of putting clocks forward by one hour in the spring and turning them back an hour in the fall. This would preserve the province's long summer evenings but would result in much later sunrises and darker mornings in the winter and would put us out of sync with the west coast by two hours instead of one hour. It stipulates that Alberta standard time will be the only time used or observed in Alberta.

We actually had a resolution before our spring policy convention with the Alberta Liberal Party, and it was narrowly defeated, to say in brief. What I may say is that because of the mixed response and the, really, lack of interest in my constituency about changing the daylight saving time, we will probably oppose the bill and suggest that we push this to committee for a full discussion there and more consultation with Albertans.

There are values, I gather, that daylight saving time actually consumes more energy in Alberta, more electricity, more fossil fuels, and that, to me, should suggest that we may want to change it. But on the other hand, there is more daylight time, and people are more active, so they're healthier and doing more things outdoors, and there's good family time and stress relief time. So I'm kind of torn myself. I think I could probably live with either. I've lived with daylight saving time for many years, and I could probably live without it, but it's not a big enough issue in my constituency to get too concerned about.

There is some evidence that heart attacks and strokes and car accidents in some ways go along with daylight saving time, and there are these pros and cons. But if we switched, I guess, the other reflection we've had in our caucus is that we would want it synchronized, as it is today, with many of the northwest United States, which are also on this, even the southwest United States: Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Montana, Idaho, and Colorado.

It's a mixed bag. I guess what I would say from this side is that without a referral or a hoist, I don't think we could support it as it is. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the proposed Bill 203, the daylight saving time bill. I do agree that there should be a full airing of expert views in a forum

that satisfies Albertans with respect to proposed amendments to daylight saving time that Bill 203 contemplates.

I know that in my constituency I've asked individuals about this almost every time that I come into contact with them, and they overwhelmingly, particularly the younger people with families, are really supportive of this change and really not liking changing their clocks twice a year and finding it quite disruptive.

On the other side of the fence, I've had two individuals with whom I've had contact with for decades, long-time friends and associates, who found it fit to actually text me saying: now, this is personal. They were really quite upset about it. On either side of the fence people have passion on this issue, but the overwhelming majority that I've run into in my constituency are definitely supportive of Bill 203.

I think I'm in support of measures which would make sure that all Albertans are happy with the legislation that we end up finally supporting in terms of investigating all avenues of concern with respect to it. That may be from industry. I think agriculture has generally expressed themselves in favour, but there may be airline industries, restaurants, or other industries which have schedules that are affected by the daylight saving time changes, that they would like to express that themselves.

4:10

I think it's incumbent on us that we do hear all those views while there's an opportunity to do so, before the legislation is finally passed. Notwithstanding the huge outpouring of responses that we had from Albertans on the surveys and also the good attendance at meetings that were held here in the Federal building, one of which I attended, I still think that many individuals consider that an airing of expert opinion might be worth while to ensure that there are no sour grapes at the end of the day.

I agree with the Member for Airdrie that the overwhelming response from Albertans is to go ahead and do this and get the change made and move on, but I think in a final analysis we should make sure that no voices have been unheard and that we consider with respect those that do oppose it for one reason or another. I think the opportunity for those voices to be heard in a forum that may go deeper than an online survey would be something to consider.

With those remarks, I'll let it be known that I'm kind of agnostic personally on the matter, but I think the overwhelming majority of people in the province have expressed themselves quite clearly that they are tired of changing their clocks twice a year.

I know that I'm probably one of the people in this House who is in a minority as far as having experienced the implementation of daylight saving time in 1972. I do remember enjoying the longer summer hours after that was implemented. I do remember enjoying, I guess, being able to shovel the sidewalks in the morning with my brother in the darkness because it didn't seem quite as early as we continued to keep our sidewalks clear on a corner lot that I lived on. If you wanted your porridge, you got the sidewalks shovelled. If you didn't get them done, you're going hungry until they get done. We shovelled away in the darkness, but we certainly enjoyed the long summer evenings. I know that when our family finally got a boat and we took it out water-skiing, my brothers and sisters and I certainly enjoyed the calm waters in the late hours and the glass on the lake to learn and hone our water-skiing skills those long summer evenings. Campers especially, I think, in Alberta enjoy those long summer evenings. So while I may have told you earlier that I'm agnostic on the idea, there certainly are some benefits to the daylight saving time or the Central Time that this bill proposes to potentially adopt that appeal very much to me.

It actually kind of surprised me when I heard from constituents in conversation that without hesitation, especially those that had

family members and children, they would tell me right now: let's not bother changing the clocks anymore. I was more than surprised at how disruptive it was to them and how quickly they cast their vote in favour of not changing the clocks. I must say that my kids have long since left the house. They're in their thirties now and producing grandchildren, so I haven't had my house disrupted by clock changes in a long time. That, I guess, I needed to be reminded of. Those are the individuals that I've spoken to who have really gone on to say most quickly that they really would like us to do away with the process of changing the clocks every fall and every spring.

I'm not really overly concerned about the difference in time between us and British Columbia. In the winter it will be a couple of hours, but I think that's not an overly strong objection. That's my personal view on it. However, the thing I'm most looking forward to personally is the long summer evenings, which I think we've come to value and enjoy and appreciate. If it is decided that we'll adopt the Central Time, Saskatchewan time, and call it Alberta standard time, then I'll continue to enjoy those summer evenings.

One thing I know that I was concerned about was that we would end up calling it Central Time or Saskatchewan time, and I'm happy to see that the proposal is to call it Alberta standard time. It is an Alberta time zone that we're contemplating here. I know we'll kind of lose the historical Mountain Standard Time designation that we had, but in order to be clear that we're adopting a time zone that's different from Mountain Standard Time, which is a time zone that runs sort of vertically north-south into the States, we'll be adopting Alberta standard time, which has a year-long, nonchanging designation. That designation will be published in all kinds of schedules globally and identified specifically as a time zone that Albertans will follow year-round without changing.

Therefore, we will become known as one of those jurisdictions in North America and globally which have decided to adjust their thinking with respect to daylight saving time and changing their clocks twice a year and probably will become, as others have mentioned in this House, a leader in adopting these changes. I certainly can see the debate branching out beyond our borders and into other western economic jurisdictions and perhaps even Europe when they hear from their public how unpopular the practice of changing their clocks twice a year is. We once again will be seen as a very forward-thinking jurisdiction. Even people from, I'm sure, jurisdictions like Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills seem to agree with those from Airdrie that changing the clocks twice a year is an unnecessary burden and a practice they would prefer to do away with.

Now, with those remarks, I'll listen to others with interest as they add to this debate and, hopefully, decide that we'll allow all Albertans to express themselves fully and completely, and when the decision is finally made, we'll be able to put the issue to bed with everybody being happy campers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise. I intend to move a motion which will refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future because I think there are a number of interests at play here. Not all of them are, you know, going in the same direction, and it's important that we make sure that all points of view are heard and that the impact or potential impact of these changes be fully canvassed with everyone so that we are fully informed on this matter. I think there's been some really good debate on this, and I know that out there people are quite seized by the issue in many respects and very, very, very interested in it.

Obviously, everyone has an opinion on the matter. I know that the sponsor of the bill undertook extensive consultation before bringing it forward, and I expect that we've all been hearing from our constituents about it. There have been a number of concerns expressed as well by different organizations, for example both NHL teams here in the province, so I think that that consultation is a good thing. It's been very good so far, but I believe also that it should continue.

For that reason, Madam Speaker, I would like to move the following amendment, that the motion for second reading of Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2 and that the committee report the bill back to the Assembly on or before October 4, 2017.

Madam Speaker, I have the requisite number of copies of this amendment, which has been approved by Parliamentary Counsel, and I would ask that the extremely efficient pages could now distribute it.

Thank you very much.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: This referral amendment is debatable. Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise, Madam Speaker, and speak to the amendment. I might just like to point out a very brief couple of items. I know that you will know that I have spent some time in this House encouraging the government to refer pieces of legislation to committee. In fact, I have done it north of 25 times. I will find out the exact number because I know that members are riveted to know how many times it's actually happened. I will rise and speak in support of such a motion. I think that any time we can make the best use of making good decisions, not just fast decisions but good decisions – I do find it a little interesting that the Government House Leader has spoken at length about not referring pieces of legislation to standing committees and the need for the business of the House to proceed. I look forward to using some of his quotes from this afternoon in the very, very near future with respect to consultation and the importance of getting it right. Without the benefit of the Blues I wouldn't want to misquote him, but I do look forward to that.

You know, in the name of how things happen around this place, I think that it's interesting that a member of cabinet might come back to actively participate and encourage private members to perhaps go in one direction or another. I know that in the past he may have been a little excited about these sorts of things, but one thing I will say is that the Government House Leader is a good, good parliamentarian. He has taught me a lot, so I look forward to continuing to learn how to do these sorts of things, about having a change of heart, when I, too, am in government.

It's great to be able to support the motion. In all seriousness, I think that getting it right is very important. I perhaps look forward to moving a motion at committee, and maybe we'll make this Daylight saving time. There are lots of options available to us at committee, and I know that the best opportunity for the best idea to win takes place at committee and not necessarily here in the confines of the House.

I look forward to supporting the amendment. I encourage all members of the Assembly to do the same, and hopefully we can move expeditiously.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to rise today and thank all members who spoke both to the main motion and who've spoken to this referral amendment. I do believe my team did amazing work and pulled long hours to ensure that we did have as thorough a consultation as I possibly could. We heard from tens of thousands of people through my office and through the survey, and that's why we did have, after the bill was tabled, an ongoing consultation form that we put back up on our website. I do believe in hearing from Albertans and that legislation is a living, growing process and that we should keep moving forward on this.

While I do believe that my team and I put in a great deal of work that I think does reflect Albertans and does reflect their will, if this is the will of the Assembly, if this is what the House requires so that we are able to move forward with this legislation – I'm encouraged to see that there's a due date for this referral. If this is what the House wills, then I'd be happy to work with the committee, with Alberta's Economic Future Committee, and ensure that this legislation is thoroughly consulted on, thoroughly fleshed out, and is the best possible legislation it can be.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

You can't speak to the amendment again.

Mr. Mason: Not to close?

The Deputy Speaker: No.

Mr. Mason: Oh, really.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other members wishing to speak to the amendment, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

Bill 204 Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon. For the official part of this little presentation I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 204, the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Thank you for being here this afternoon. Finally, we get to a topic that's near and dear to my heart and has been for several years. It is something that we actually brought forward for first reading in Bill 210 this fall, but that kind of disappeared with the change of session and so on and so forth. So we have brought that bill back, in essence, but we've also added in something that's vitally important in 204, and that is squatters' rights.

Let me just start, then, by saying that, you know, over the years since our party came into being, there were a number of things that took place that generated that. One of those was actually back in the 2008 and 2009 era, when the government of the day launched a series of bills that became quite controversial. This all stemmed from many years prior, when the same government had been feeling a lot of pressure from the environment side and the oil and gas side

to make some changes. They wanted to therefore look at also land-use planning as being the crux of the situation, so they brought in a series of bills that would more or less give the government of the day power to make some decisions without necessarily having all of the different rights and concerns of landowners first in mind, it seemed.

They brought out bills 19, 24, 36, and 50 in those days. Bill 50 was eventually repealed, which was to do with the electricity power line grid. Bill 19 was the land assembly act, which actually was able to come along and set aside lands without a lot of rights as well when the government might need land for roads and so on and so forth. That one was done. Then Bill 24, which is still kind of on the books as a pore space one: that one is still kind of hanging around for carbon capture and storage. But the most controversial one was Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, in short ALSA. ALSA had several sections in it that gave an awful lot of people around the rural area and the business world an awful lot of concern.

Really, what this all was about was that the government wanted to change how land-use planning was being done. They set about, around the '07-08 era, the new land-use policy document, which became the land-use framework. It set aside a whole new set of endeavours to control how land-use planning was done. They went ahead and they decided to cut the province of Alberta into seven regions. They were going to do regional plans, so it was a change to the regional planning model.

4:30

Regional planning had been done years and years before, but it didn't work out too well in those days. Over the period of time in the '80s and '90s we had municipalities working with themselves individually, as they almost are in many respects today, without a regional plan. So they decided to put in regional planning. That became a problem. People were having arguments, urban and rural, so eventually the government decided to run back to the regional planning model. Now, as we've seen in the past year and a half here in this Assembly, we have gone back to where municipalities are having to do their municipal development plans, their intermunicipal development plans, land-use bylaws and that to conform to these regional plans.

Within the context of Bill 36, though, which was the legislation that put the regional plans into legislation and gave them the power to do what they were doing, were several clauses that were quite controversial and that raised the ire of a lot of people out in the business world and the rural landowner world. Those clauses more or less said in many respects that the cabinet of the day, in creating these regional plans, could dictate to the local governments and municipalities how to plan. That caused a sense of angst with the municipalities because it kind of cut down on their autonomy, so the municipalities weren't too pleased with it. Moreover, the landowners were a little concerned about several clauses that were in there.

There were also clauses, at the same time, in the responsible energy act that gave them some problems. Basically, I'd just like to read out a few of these clauses to draw your attention to them. I only have a few minutes in this second reading process to address a lot of this. Section 11 talks about the ability of the government to amend or rescind existing rights, including development rights, resource extraction rights, mining rights, water licences, grazing leases, et cetera. Those are called statutory consents. Those are extremely important documents that people struggle to get through for their own business needs or to run the affairs of their farm properties or feedlots or dairy farms or what have you. Statutory consents are really important in oil and gas, of course, because that includes oil and gas leases. There are different kinds of things in

forestry where we get statutory consents. So this act actually allowed the government to come along and amend or rescind those things.

Further, in some of the other clauses in the act they also eliminated the rights of the courts, the ability to make a claim against the government when some of the government decisions were handed down from the cabinet like that. They also limited the ability for the landowner or the business owner to seek compensation. So we're trying to clean that up.

I realize I've only got three and a half minutes now, Mr. Speaker, so I'm going to move along. We're looking at the responsible energy act, too. As I mentioned, the responsible energy act had at one time come along, in the first year, I believe, of when I was elected. They took out a lot of the red tape that was in the previous act that governed this, the Energy Resources Conservation Act, which allowed for notice to the landowner and the ability to have the right to speak at a hearing regarding oil and gas type operations on the property. What we're doing with this is that we're going to take some of the old, previous, proper notification rules that were in the Energy Resources Conservation Act and put that back into place. That would have been section 26 of that previous act. And we're amending the responsible energy act to include proper notification and those kinds of opportunities for landowners to go and have those hearings.

Further, and most importantly, I think, in addition to all of those things, we have now decided to go ahead and add into Bill 204 the issue of adverse possession. Many people, I believe, in this House were involved in a committee meeting earlier these past few months regarding property rights and adverse possession. This is a situation, Mr. Speaker, where – and I'll just read the legislation quickly.

When, during a period of 10 years (1), a person has been in exclusive, continuous, open or visible and notorious (2) actual possession or occupation of land of which he is not the registered owner and which is not Crown land (3) or municipal land (4), that person may apply to the courts to recover a judgment declaring that he is entitled to the exclusive right to use the land or that he is . . . in the exclusive possession of the land.

In other words, what this is basically saying is that he can apply and actually seek and gain title of the land if he and the original owner have not had some sort of an agreement or any interaction for a period of 10 years. This has been one of the most archaic rules that's been around in Canada. There are only two provinces, ours and Nova Scotia, I understand, that still have this rule in effect. There have been, unfortunately, some unfortunate situations, particularly in the south part of the country just lately, where land has actually had to change hands because of this old rule.

The motion that was made by our party during the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship regarding this was:

Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship recommend that the government introduce legislation abolishing the common-law doctrine of adverse possession in Alberta and all statutory references supporting adverse possession in Alberta legislation.

That actually passed during that committee meeting. We thought it a great opportunity to bring it into this bill. It's a very important property right. It is a key piece of this legislation, and I would ask all members to have a look. Feel free to contact me if you need more information during the upcoming debates on this bill. It is extremely important to all Albertans. I know that the governing party in the past had supported this kind of stuff.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any members who wish to speak to Bill 204? The Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give my enthusiastic support to Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. What this bill really does is that it paves the way to fix some of the more troublesome aspects of bills that were brought forth by previous governments that, I would say, had a direct and negative impact on property rights in Alberta.

Property rights, of course, refers to the rights of the landowner. I think you'll find that this particular point will be made several times throughout my speech. These rights are those basic rights to financial security and prosperity. They're the very foundation that landowners rely on. Landowners want to know when they make an investment to purchase land that that investment is protected and its value will not be adversely affected by others, including government at any level, without just compensation.

I cannot stress enough to everyone today that these landowners are the primary group most impacted by energy projects in Alberta. Remember that it is these projects, be they pipelines, well sites, or transmission lines, that primarily occur on private land. Now, sometimes they can happen on Crown land, but very rarely do energy companies actually own the land that the project occurs on. This is a very important distinction to make because as it turns out in Alberta, landowners have very little say when it comes to energy projects on their land or access to their land for the project. The fact is that the energy company can come and will get a right-of-entry order under the Surface Rights Act and force their way onto the land. What this bill does is try to fix this process that allows access and how land is accessed and appealed when possible damages and disagreements pop up.

We are really here today because in 2009 and 2010 the government of the day passed laws that attacked property rights and the rule of law. At that time the government saw rights and courts as obstacles to their planning and policy goals. Whether this was simply the bureaucracy run amok or not, the politicians of the day went along with it every step of the way. They brought in legislation that severely curtailed the property rights of Albertans through Bills 19, 24, 36, and 50. In addition, Bill 2 in 2012, the energy development act, lacked the adequate notification, hearing, and appeal rights for landowners. On top of that, they failed to address the issue of the law of adverse possession, known more commonly as squatters' rights. This made Alberta one of only two provinces not to repeal this outdated practice.

Now, fortunately, some of the more outrageous bills have been fixed or repealed. Bill 19, The Land Assembly Project Area Act, for instance, gave cabinet the power to freeze a person's land for an extended period of time without compensation. For instance, a farmer or landowner could not develop his own property or in any way change the land to suit his own needs, to suit his livelihood without the consent of the government. This basically devalued the land's worth. Thankfully, however, the bill was repealed in 2015 before it was ever used.

4:40

Now, Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, was used to force through a few energy projects, including Fort McMurray east and west. These are projects that we are still hearing landowners' complaints on today. These projects forced these builds through largely privately held land, and while some objections did manage to modify the proposed route, there was little recourse under existing law for landowners other than to make the best deal for compensation that they possibly could. Noncompliance, as mentioned earlier, was not an option, and right-of-entry orders

were always a big stick that energy companies could wield. This particular bill, Bill 50, was also repealed, but the current projects were grandfathered in, and damage to property rights was done.

Mr. Speaker, that's not to say that these are the only ill-conceived pieces of legislation that tended to curtail property rights in Alberta. Not at all. There are still several others that simply need to be addressed. That is what Bill 204 seeks to address. As my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod stated when he introduced his bill: "[Bill 204] is a culmination of many years of advocacy, dating back to 2009, when the Alberta Land Stewardship Act was introduced."

As we know, that particular piece of legislation limited property rights without notice or adequate compensation. Bill 204 proposes to correct this by amending the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the Responsible Energy Development Act to ensure Albertans will once more have the right to a fair hearing if their rights are affected and have the right of recourse to the courts where their lands or vested interests are affected by a regional plan.

Furthermore, this bill finally deals with squatters' rights, or adverse possession if you'd rather, by repealing Section 74 of the Land Titles Act and amending the act accordingly. Let me talk about adverse possession for a moment. Can you imagine losing your hard-earned titled land without recourse or compensation simply because someone else happened to occupy it for 10 years? Imagine that, a law that permits untitled occupants of land of 10 years or longer to take possession of that same land without a valid agreement with the original owner. It is simply unacceptable, and as several Albertan landowners have discovered to their dismay, this is the law of the land.

Now, it is important to remember that this isn't just a rural issue. Several of the precedents over adverse possession have occurred within an urban setting. This could just as easily be an issue over a poorly surveyed fence line or a garage that could conceivably be partly owned by your neighbour just because of an unfortunate oversight. Hopefully, with the help of every member of this Assembly we can make right a wrong in this province. While this will do little to correct past decisions, it will prevent this unjust law from penalizing future Alberta landowners. This really shouldn't be a hard sell in this House. After all, it was just months ago that the Wildrose motion on adverse possession was passed unanimously by all parties in committee. Property rights, Mr. Speaker, is not a partisan issue. On that I think we can all agree.

Now, I've looked back in *Hansard* and read numerous quotes from government members when they were in opposition. In fact, the now Minister of Infrastructure once remarked, "I find it ironic in a way that it's the New Democrat opposition that is standing up and has stood up from the beginning for the rights of property owners in this province."

A statement like that leaves me little doubt that he will be one of the staunchest advocates for what this bill is trying to accomplish. In fact, I have an entire document that the New Democratic Party published – it's called *Your Land, Your Rights* – that extols the premise that together we can change these laws that trample on important rights of citizens. This is powerful stuff, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to table this document if you'd like. But it is certainly nice to know that we have a bill here that seems to me is exactly what the New Democratic Party in Alberta fought so very hard to fix when they were in opposition. This should make for a very fulsome exchange of ideas as this bill progresses along.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend my colleague from the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod for his tireless work on this topic. I've been involved in many conversations with him, and

he has long championed this fight, as have several of my other peers.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, Bill 204, speaks to fundamental rights that all Albertans deserve, and it is my sincere hope that all members of this House feel the same. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is a pleasure and an honour to stand in regard to defending property rights. As many know, it has been part of my activist role, previous to attaining status in this Chamber, to defend property rights, not necessarily in regard to land but in regard to the ownership of the fruits of your own labour, and I think that relates to the NDP government, the NDP vision of the use of their own hands and their own achievement of wealth and attaining that by using their own labour.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a liberty here and relate an approximately 500-word column related to that that I created and presented in my community. It relates only to one portion of what the Member for Livingstone-Macleod talks about in his bill. [An electronic device sounded] Well, I guess I'm cut off.

It's entitled *Eliminating Squatters' Rights*, Bill 204. As I said, it relates to one portion of this bill.

Your rights to own property are not protected in the way most Albertans believe they should be. In recent years, we've seen flawed legislation come into effect that does not protect Albertans' rights to own property and that gives government sweeping powers to negatively affect landowners who get in the way of its centralized land-use plans.

In Alberta, a lesser known negative still exists known as adverse possession, or squatters' rights. In Alberta property law, squatters' rights allow individuals with no legal or moral right the ability to claim possession of another individual's property. This can be achieved simply by an individual who does not have title or ownership occupying or using a portion of land for a legally specified number of years. They can then claim legal use to that portion of property.

Currently, only Alberta and Nova Scotia have a law like this on the books. In 2014, the Alberta Property Rights Advocate recommended scrapping this law and just last February, a Wildrose motion on abolishing squatters' rights received all-party support from a Legislature committee. There is a strong will to get this done for Alberta landowners.

Recently, Wildrose Livingstone-Macleod MLA Pat Stier introduced the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, an enhanced Bill to protect property rights that would remove squatters' rights from Alberta law.

"It's high time we caught up to the rest of the country and abolished squatters' rights in this province," [the Member for Livingstone-Macleod] said. "This is the big issue that so many hardworking landowners have been waiting patiently to see fixed. It's time for the NDP to put its money where its mouth is and get this done for Alberta landowners."

Bill 204 would accomplish other good things for landowners like amending Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA), which has been categorized by legal experts as "draconian." The ministerial powers that exist within ALSA are so sweeping and all-powerful they've been dubbed the "Henry VIII clauses."

Under section 19.1 of ALSA, landowners impacted by regional planning saw their rights to seek legal remedy through the courts eliminated completely. If Bill 204 passes, this will no longer be the case.

If I could just ad lib, Mr. Speaker, my hat is off to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

4:50

Bill 204 will also protect the rights of statutory consents (such as forestry permits, intensive livestock operation licenses, oil and gas leases, and grazing leases) to recover financial or property losses through the courts should they be negatively impacted by regional planning decisions. The Bill also proposes amending the Responsible Energy Development Act to incorporate the rights from section 26 of the Energy Resources Conservation Act so that owners of private land will be properly notified of access requests, learn and challenge the facts supporting an energy resource application and be fully involved with the hearing.

[This government] used to support property rights and oppose Bill 36, but since they've been in power, we've been slow to see any effort to fix these issues in Alberta property law.

As the Wildrose Shadow Minister for Property and Surface Rights, I'm proud to support [my compatriot member's] Bill 204, and I urge [this government] to do right by landowners and support the Bill too.

Wildrose will continue to fight for property rights to ensure the future protection of Albertans' ability to create, maintain and accumulate their own earned wealth.

Mr. Speaker, it's primary to a free and democratic society for people to understand that property rights are not necessarily only about access to what some would know as the dirt. In this case we are talking primarily about access to physical property, where people operate their farms and ranches, forestry operations, and other such operations or explore for oil and such. Under our Westminster system we have a tiered system of physical property ownership such that the mineral rights underneath the ground are owned by the Crown, and they sell the rights to those energy resources to other companies. Then the access to those mineral rights is needed by the surface landowners, and this creates issues. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod knows full well and respects and understands that there are requirements needed for proper consultation and legal remedies in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber we've also talked about renewable resources and the access for those entities who are seeking facilities to develop renewable resources, whether they be by wind or solar. To date we do not have proper regulatory legislation for the development of those facilities, and the minister of environment has stated that those contracts would be held between the landowner and the developer for that property. There is a whole tier of issues that are about to be developed there and are happening in my constituency and other constituencies throughout the province that are going to cause great concern as we go forward without the government's proper regulatory issuance of legislation in that regard.

The primary subject, I guess, of our discussion today, though, is Bill 204, and I view that as the most important part of our discussion. I look forward to having the support of all members in the Chamber in the development and the passing of the private member's Bill 204.

With that, in closing, I'd like to say that with my activism in the past of defending property rights – and some people take it in a flippant manner. I do not because I had an opportunity to confer at one stage with the Prime Minister in this regard, and I was able to tell him, Mr. Speaker, that I was the only man in this Chamber who was able to go to jail before I came into the Legislature, many actually going to jail after or with their involvement with the Chamber. I'm proud to be able to say that, so I thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 204? The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, may I ask a question first? If I speak now and we run out of time, will I be able to speak again in second reading?

The Speaker: You will have five minutes left.

Mr. Hinkley: At another time?

The Speaker: At another time.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 204, the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. I am proud to be part of a government and a caucus that has always stood up for landowners in Alberta and will continue to do so. We believe in property rights, including due process, proper notification, and fair compensation. We have made a commitment to address these issues, and that's what we are doing. It's important to Albertans, and it's important to our government. Our government has already begun working with stakeholders to make positive change on these important issues and is working to make Albertans' lives better by ensuring that the public has access to appropriate protections and avenues for resolution where issues arise involving private property. Bill 204 aims to address these important concerns.

I think the spirit of the bill is an important one. I would like to thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for bringing that forward. However, I am left with several questions about how it is currently drafted. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 creates more questions than it addresses, so I am interested in hearing more from the member and my colleagues here in the House about these issues.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, protecting landowners' rights is of great importance to our government and has long been an issue championed by members of our caucus. One of the key changes that Bill 204 proposes to create is to provide additional rights to compensation for any statutory consents that are affected, amended, or rescinded by a regional plan made under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. In fact, Bill 204 would add a clause to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act which states:

Notwithstanding section 13, if a regional plan affects, amends or rescinds a statutory consent or the terms or conditions of a statutory consent, the holder of the statutory consent may bring a claim against the Crown ...

I want to repeat that part: "may bring a claim against the Crown."

... for any losses the holder may suffer as a result of any effect on or amendment or rescission of the statutory consent under a regional plan.

Again, I understand the intent of the member in putting forward this amendment, and we support that intent. However, I worry that this bill looks at the issue from only one perspective and misses some other important perspectives. Looking at an issue from all sides is what we do in this government and what we should do in this House as well.

As I understand it, Bill 204 also creates private compensation mandates for public goods such as water and Crown lands. Private compensation for public goods: I just have some questions about that. It's not that I'm opposing what is being said, but I do need some clarification. I think we can all agree that property rights are complex, and finding the balance between public good, private property owners' rights, and responsible development is key to addressing these issues.

There are currently over 86,000 active Crown mineral agreements in Alberta, and many of these may be potentially impacted by regional plans. If Bill 204 becomes law as it is currently drafted and if regional plans directly affect, amend, or rescind Crown mineral agreements, this could leave the government

and Alberta taxpayers potentially liable for compensation. So I think we really need to look at that.

I want to provide one example here. Bill 204 proposes to change subsection 19.1(1)(a) of the ALSA to redefine “compensable taking” to mean “the diminution or abrogation of a property right, title or interest” – who wrote this a long time ago? – “directly resulting from a regional plan or an amendment to a regional plan.” This would create a new clause of action that is not currently recognized in the law. The potential implications to government in terms of compensation would be broad-reaching. This would broaden the scope of those who could be entitled to compensation. For example, with my understanding of the proposed changes, a mining firm whose coal extraction rights are impacted by a regional plan may qualify for compensation more easily following this amendment even if that firm would not have been entitled to compensation at common law.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but the time limit for consideration of this business item at this time is concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Electricity Rates

502. Dr. Swann moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to amend the regulated rate option regulation, Alta. reg. 262/2005, by replacing the regulated rate option with a new default rate for electricity that is to be calculated using a weighted average of the wholesale price of electricity.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move Motion 502. Since becoming an MLA, one of my most frequent concerns, as raised by my constituents, is the high cost and volatility of electricity bills. The system did not seem to be delivering on the promise of low energy costs and reduced price volatility that was made when the market was deregulated. This NDP government is planning a series of measures in an attempt to deal with this. However, like other policies, I find they are ideologically based and are failing to take into consideration some of the price and volatility issues that Albertans are concerned about.

Albertans need a practical solution based on evidence, so I've decided to research this issue in depth. Motion 502 is the culmination of substantial consultation over two years with stakeholders in Alberta's electricity energy market. In particular, I'd like to thank Nick Jansen, an academic researcher, and Rob Spragins, who previously served as Alberta's Utilities Consumer Advocate. Both were instrumental in researching, drafting, and encouraging me to bring this motion forward today. I'd also like to thank my constituents and other Albertans who over the years took the time to write to me about these concerns.

Before going further into the rationale for the motion, perhaps it would be helpful to review the history of the deregulated energy market and the regulated rate option, the RRO. Since 2001 Albertans have been able to choose to receive their electricity either from a retailer that is regulated by the Alberta Utilities Commission, the AUC, or from a competitive retailer, in which case they would sign a contract for a set price for electricity such as a fixed price for a defined time period.

The regulated rate option was established to provide a default option for consumers who decide not to choose a competitive retail product. The regulated rate option does not ensure a single low rate.

Rather, rates change from month to month, depending on the price of power. In 2006 the regulated rate option was changed to encourage customers to switch from the regulated rate option to a competitive retail product and to foster the development of the competitive retail energy market. Section 11 of the regulated rate option regulation determines this rate based on the weighted average of forward contracts to a 120-day period prior to the month of consumption. This is called forward pricing.

The problem with using this method, as experience has clearly shown, is that it actually leads to higher electricity costs for consumers. In addition, now that the competitive market has been in operation for 11 years, it's time to revise this policy to something more in line with current market conditions. Something needs to be done in order to ensure that the default option for electricity is affordable, protects consumers, encourages industry participation, and reinforces proper market functioning.

My motion to change the regulated rate option calculation to use the weighted average monthly pool prices instead of the forward market for four months is aimed at doing just that. Motion 502 reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to amend the regulated rate option regulation, Alta. reg. 262/2005, by replacing the regulated rate option with a new default rate for electricity that is to be calculated using a weighted average of the wholesale price of electricity.

Not unlike the electricity market itself, I understand how this motion may seem complicated at first glance. It was to me. But what it essentially seeks to do is to replace the current formula for calculating the regulated rate option with a new one that is based on the actual price of power.

There are numerous benefits to using the weighted average pool price. First of all, it's consistent with the original intent of the deregulated electricity market. Our electricity market was founded on the notion that markets provide consumers with choice and that truly competitive markets will result in lower prices than the regulated markets.

Under my proposed changes consumers would continue to have choice through competitive markets. Unlike attempts to reregulate the market, it preserves the integrity of the competitive retail market and may even make it more competitive. It also allows the equitable allocation of risk and reward to the stakeholders: the investors, the retailers, and the consumers. All can win. Furthermore, it achieves a significant reduction in the complexity and the cost associated with the regulatory approval of regulated rate option rates by the Alberta Utilities Commission.

Customers would also receive savings by receiving the flow-through weighted average wholesale rate. These savings will help to offset the increases in the cost of electricity distribution and transmission service, the power purchase agreement liability, and the high cost of living in Alberta. They could potentially be used for expenditures on energy efficiency upgrades, energy services, and helping to grow future-ready industries, clean tech.

Strategically it is also a good time to implement a change in the regulated rate option due to the current low level of pool prices relative to historic levels. These low pricing levels are expected to continue for the next three to four years, primarily because of the overcapacity of our generating supply. Any of the negative impacts of this proposal on vulnerable consumers could be readily offset through subsidies and rebates, as we've heard the government is prepared to do.

In addition to providing choice, strengthening the retail market, and passing on savings to consumers, the weighted average of monthly pool prices offers the most effective price signal possible. This means that the price paid by consumers will be the actual cost

of power. Consumers may not understand that there is a significant cost premium built into the current regulated rate option which advances the price over four months. This new method of regulated rate option calculation will establish a price reference point by standardizing the default cost across Alberta. It would also facilitate comparability of nonenergy costs such as the distribution, administration, and return margins amongst different regulated retailers throughout Alberta. Consumers could then use this information to conduct a proper cost-benefit analysis of competitive retail options.

While I support the government's efforts to create a market for renewables and diversify our province's electricity generation very much, simply putting a price cap on the regulated rate option is not the answer. In fact, it could potentially cause serious problems down the line and discourage new investment. Consumers should always have a price reference based on the actual cost of electricity in order to make the most efficient and effective energy consumption and investment choices. If energy costs are deemed to be too high, the government has the option to utilize rebates and subsidies for those that need it, not across the board to all Albertans. It should never mask the price signal that would encourage people to do the right thing as far as finding energy efficiency and using less. Otherwise, we may end up in a situation like Ontario.

The price cap will not reduce the cost of electricity for consumers; it merely defers payment to a later date and to our future generations. If we don't pay our way now, somebody is going to have to pay it later. Also, it will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the viability of a competitive retail market by eliminating the incentive for consumers to sign the fixed-price contracts. It also has the potential to distort the price signal, which may cause consumers to make poor decisions regarding their energy purchases and investment.

More importantly, a price cap will actually increase the cost of power to regulated rate option customers. If the market price of energy exceeds 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour, the cap, retailers will be purchasing supply at a higher price and selling it at a lower price. The difference will still need to be paid by consumers. This difference would likely be put in a deferral account and repaid over a period of time. Regulated rate option retailers will incur a financing charge, which will result in an increase to the cost of the regulated rate option. Consumers will be under the false illusion that total energy costs are lower as a result of the price cap when, in fact, they will be higher due to the cost of financing the deferral account, another extra expense in electricity.

Another possible issue associated with a price cap is the possibility of unintended consequences. The regulated rate option price is extremely complicated and is probably only understood by a handful of people in Alberta. Because of the variability of pool prices and forward prices, there is a risk that the deferral account could run out of control, which could significantly increase the cost of the regulated rate option to consumers. If the government plans on using a price cap, it would make sense for it to adopt my proposal to change the regulated rate calculation as this would significantly reduce the deferral account risk and would help to achieve the government's ultimate goal, which is to protect consumers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and listen intently to what will undoubtedly be a shockingly current debate which will electrify the Assembly with positive and negative charges.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

5:10

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That'll be a tough one to follow. I'm honoured to rise and speak to Motion 502. I can't support it, but I'll give you the reasons why.

Changing the regulated rate option to a pool price flow mechanism, as the motion suggests, will not help electricity consumers. In fact, this change will expose Albertans to greater price swings than the ones they've already experienced under the existing system. We are working to make life more affordable for Albertan families. We need to keep electricity prices in check, but this motion would do the opposite. It would expose Albertans to even wilder electricity price swings than what we've already seen in the past, and we won't let that happen to Albertan families.

Now, I appreciate what the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is trying to do. Our electricity system is broken. It doesn't work for investors, it doesn't work for consumers, and we need to fix it. Price spikes are built into the energy market that we inherited from the previous government, and ratepayers have the scars to prove it. During the first half of this decade prices swung wildly, well above the price cap that we are implementing. They were over 7 cents most of the time, over 10 cents, over 12 cents, and sometimes over 15 cents. That system took Albertans on a roller coaster of electricity prices, and it wasn't a pleasant ride, and the government at the controls didn't want to let us off.

I think we're all open to finding ways to fix the broken system we inherited and to end that roller-coaster ride, but, Mr. Speaker, this motion won't help. We have done the analysis. There is no guarantee that following pool prices will result in lower costs. In fact, it would worsen the price volatility that was purposely built into the energy system we inherited. Our government will not expose consumers to great price volatility.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we're doing the work necessary to get the electricity retail system and the broader generation system right to benefit consumers and investors, work like transitioning our electricity market system to a proven structure, one that is more attractive to investors and will provide Albertans with more stable, predictable electricity prices. As we do this work, we are protecting consumers and making life more affordable for Albertans.

For example, we are implementing a four-year price cap on electricity rates under the RRO, or regulated rate option. Beginning June 1, electricity consumers who are on the RRO can be assured that their electricity rates will not rise above 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. This cap will protect Alberta families and entrepreneurs should electricity rates spike without warning, which we've become too accustomed to seeing in past years. This will make energy bills more predictable.

Albertans will no longer be subjected to the volatility of a broken system, a system where electricity rates have been a roller-coaster ride, constantly rising and falling from month to month. Albertans deserve more certainty in pricing and a more stable electricity system. That's why we're making changes, changes that will protect the pocketbooks of families and make life better for Albertans.

While we make the necessary reforms, our government will be looking at ways we can transition the RRO so that it offers greater stability and predictability to consumers. There are a number of options to consider, and we will work with experts to find the best fit for Albertans. In the meantime the price cap will keep electricity rates reasonable and protect Albertans from the unaffordable spikes of the past.

Mr. Speaker, we have done our homework. Amending the RRO in the way put forward by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is not in the best interests of electricity consumers. It does not address the issue of price volatility. In fact, consumers would be exposed to prices that are even more volatile than the current RRO prices. They would not get more certainty with their monthly electricity bill; they would get less. This action will not protect

electricity consumers, it will not make life better for Albertans, and for these reasons I cannot support the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Motion 502. Just a little bit of a mention about the RRO to begin with. The RRO is offered to residential and small-business customers who consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours a year. It is the rate that customers receive who have not chosen to enter into a contract with an electricity retail supplier.

This option was originally set up to ensure that consumers who had not selected a retail supplier would continue to receive electricity service. So if you are an RRO customer, you may choose to do nothing and remain on the RRO in the province. That rate will fluctuate monthly. Power fluctuates monthly as a blend of short-term purchases at the market price and long-term hedges, that are used to determine the RRO. Now, the consumer who does stay with an RRO can expect the amount that they pay per kilowatt hour to change every month. There are, however, numerous other options available to an electricity consumer – for example, a fixed price per kilowatt hour or even a flow-through market price – if they so choose. Those options are available to consumers. The RRO was intended to be a default rate for people who did not make such a choice.

The RRO for electricity fluctuates each month to reflect the changes in the wholesale electricity market using a process that was approved by the Alberta Utilities Commission. By far the biggest influence on the monthly rate is supply and demand. The rate also includes an electric energy charge, which is a fixed charge for costs related to the supply of electricity, and an administrative charge for billing, customer care, and administration.

It is the AUC's responsibility to review the RRO provider's energy charges to make sure that they are being passed along accurately to consumers. The AUC does not regulate the rates or the service of competitive retailers. Retailer charges include the energy commodity charges, calculated by multiplying the amount of electricity used in the billing period by the applicable rate per kilowatt hour, and nonenergy rates. Nonenergy rates are charges that recover the retailer's costs of billing consumers for electricity and providing customer service.

That's just a little background on the RRO and how it works.

Some of the things we need to take a look at here are that the prolonged low rates that we're currently experiencing cannot – cannot – be expected to stay low. When they rise – and they will rise due to this government's 30 by 2030 policy on coal phase-out – we're now going to be exposing customers to volatility on their bills. That cannot be avoided. The wholesale price is calculated hourly. If anything, this makes billing equally complicated for each hour of every day the actual pool price is a weighted average. Power distributors take energy from the Power Pool and pay the declared hourly pool price for the energy they buy.

This option that the hon. member is putting forward will not actually remove any of the complexities that are associated with calculating the appropriate rates. The AUC will still have to determine the related management and administrative costs that the hon. member cited as needing to be added to the bill. Wholesale prices, of course, will be calculated hourly.

Now, it's not that I'm opposed to discussing changes to the default rate. Not at all. The hon. member is correct in pointing out the very recent benefits to customers that elected to be on the more volatile flow-through rate, but at the same time I understand why the previous government introduced the RRO: to provide

consumers with a hedge and less volatility. That's been a priority. As I see this motion before us, I'm not sure that that really will address that and accomplish what the hon. member thinks it will.

Some of the other issues that I have with the motion are that it appears to me that the member failed to use industry-accepted terms and language. In my opinion, by politicizing that language within this motion at the expense of accuracy, it makes the motion problematic.

We're left with a motion which has been brought forward with the best of intentions – I understand that – but frankly in its current form I think it needs help. It's convoluted, and as a result I cannot support it. I did read the hon. member's brief, that he provided to us, and I thank the hon. member for that brief. It was very thorough. But as I was reading through the brief, line by line by line, one thing I noticed was that the brief didn't really match the motion. They didn't seem to me to be necessarily congruent through and through. That was problematic. So although the brief sounds like the hon. member wants to change the default rate to the flow-through rate, it never explicitly states that.

5:20

At the end of the day, I cannot support the motion that's before us right now. I don't believe it will accomplish what was the hon. member's intent. I believe that as we go forward, this is not going to protect consumers from volatility, so I cannot support the motion as it is written right now.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for presenting this motion, and also thank you to my other colleagues who have spoken to this. Their presentations have actually pointed to the importance of this measure. I think it's vital that this Legislature actually spend some time considering all of these things.

From my perspective, the work that was done last fall – and many of us discussed this at the time – on Bill 34 has actually probably pre-empted much of what's in this motion. The Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 2016, allows the Balancing Pool to borrow money from the province to manage its funding obligations. This change supports electricity costs remaining low and stable. The Balancing Pool at the present time gives consumers a credit of \$1.95 on their monthly bills. Without Bill 34, the Balancing Pool would have had to apply a charge as large as \$8.40 starting last January 1 and continuing until the end of 2020. By passing Bill 34, we've actually protected consumers from volatility, which I think is one of the main concerns of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

The old system, I will call it: I think it was a disastrous system, in which this was one of the few electricity markets in North America – I believe there was only one other jurisdiction that had a similar one. This is the thing that we needed to change into what's called a capacity market, which is what the rest of North America uses. In a capacity market we're actually going to be able to prevent those ups and downs. In the old system there were times when the spot market for electricity was very, very high, and there were times when the regulated rate option was actually up to 15 cents. Now, as has been said, the regulated rate option is much lower, but even if it goes higher, as some of the members have suggested, we've put a cap on that, and that cap is going to prevent consumers from being damaged. I mean, people are going to be able to predict what their electricity costs are.

They're also going to be encouraged through our other legislation to actually do some energy efficiency. I know that the opposition

sometimes decries whether or not replacing fluorescent bulbs with LED light bulbs would be a good idea. I can tell you that I have done that in my constituency office already, and the people of Alberta are actually benefiting because my power bill to light my constituency office is a small fraction of what it was before those LED lights were installed. So we're already making some advances on that.

This sort of encouragement, I can tell you – it was a constituency week last week. I did four town halls last week. I actually ran out of the cards that I have to give to people about efficiencyalberta.ca. I would encourage all members here, if they've not registered their homes or their other properties, to go on that site and register so that we can get started on getting things like LED lights put in, programmable thermostats, the use of weatherstripping, appropriate furnaces, and other things. My constituents are very, very interested in reducing their carbon footprint, if you wish, or their greenhouse gas emission rate, and combined with Bill 34 and with the energy efficiency activities, we can actually help these constituents along.

Changing the regulated rate option to a price flow mechanism could expose consumers to wild price swings if prices were to spike in a particular month of high demand or during large generation outages. This has happened in the past, folks. We need to remember that history. There's no guarantee that following pool prices will result in lower costs in the future. Our government has stated that it's not going to expose consumers to this great volatility.

Instead, we're doing the right thing necessary to get the electricity retail system and the broader generation system right. We've announced a four-year, 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour cap on the RRO. This cap will protect consumers should electricity rates spike without warning. The price cap is just one of the many steps we're taking to create an electricity system that is more reliable, stable, affordable. I repeat "affordable," and that's a key thing. I mean, we could talk about that we should be paying as we go, but in fact if your electricity bills are so high that you can't afford to pay your rent or your food bills, I really wonder.

It's also attractive to investors. We know that the capacity market has attracted a lot of interest among a whole range of investors. That along with the renewables auction is going to be bringing stability to this province.

In summary, colleagues, I think that while the intent behind the motion is laudable, it is actually redundant. We should basically work together as a whole to make sure that the combination of Bill 34 as well as the energy efficiency measures and the renewables act can bring stability and affordability to the province.

The Speaker: Speaking to Motion 502, the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this motion. I do believe his intentions are honourable as well, and I also believe that it acknowledges the fact that, as my other colleague said, the old system needed some changes and that we are doing that.

Unfortunately, though, I don't think his motion accomplishes exactly what it sets out to do. In fact, it actually may have the opposite impact. In fact, as we've heard already, it might actually lead to more volatility in the price for consumers as it will fluctuate a great deal more than it would under a cap like we have put forward, which is 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, and as we've heard a lot of people say as well, the generation, sale, and delivery of electricity: it is very complex, and so is the RRO very complex. There's a delicate balance between keeping consumer prices low and encouraging investment in electricity generation. This motion does not factor in

this last piece. I think that's what's being omitted here, investment and generation. The statistics provided by the hon. member who put forward this motion ignore the fact that these businesses need to earn a return, and it ignores that the profit has to be built into the price that the consumer will pay.

While I appreciate that on the surface reducing the forward market to 30 days from 120 days would provide more accuracy on the actual price of electricity, it would actually likely be more expensive because when you do it over 120 days, it actually has time, on a weighted average, to level out to a more affordable rate for consumers.

5:30

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I mean, this government is moving towards greater stability and affordability of electricity for consumers, and it's creating a new competitive generation market through the capacity market for all the province's generators and other businesses who now want to get into generation. Unfortunately, this motion impedes what this government is trying to do and rather successfully, actually.

Renewable energy is anticipated to attract at least \$10.5 billion in investment over the next 13 years or so. So we don't want to detract from this type of investment in the province, the type of investment that will create jobs and clean energy. You know, in spite of the opposition's fearmongering with Ontario references, the fact of the matter is that there is a lot of interest in renewable energy in this province right now.

I don't want to jeopardize this interest in renewable energy by supporting this motion. I do appreciate it being brought forward, but I will not be supporting it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Motion 502?

Seeing and hearing none, I will allow the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close debate.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, thank you to all members for giving their views on this, a complex issue, to be sure. While I disagree fundamentally with the government on this and their unwillingness to allow some market mechanisms, some clear price signals – by all means, rebate and support people who can't afford particular price spikes. I think they're in fact undermining the very basis by which this is trying to provide not more stability – there will be some volatility – but lower prices overall. That's what the graph showed over the last 10 years. Albertans actually spent up to a billion dollars more over 10 years than they would have if they were on this altered regulated rate option.

There's been quite a bit of reaction since I proposed this back in January. There are concerns that this change will do little to protect consumers from volatility. This is where the motion works well with the other potential solutions. It ensures that consumers are paying the actual price of power, which is what new investors want to see. Consumers will still have the option to choose other retail products that can better manage price volatility. However, the Retail Market Review Committee report of 2012 which surveyed Alberta consumers found that the majority of Albertans were comfortable with price volatility as long as they got the lowest price. This regulated rate option would provide them with the lowest price by about \$10 to \$15 a month. That's why the main objective in my motion is to reduce the overall cost to consumers.

Using the weighted average wholesale price of electricity will result in lower overall prices and significant savings over the long term. Any of the negative impacts on energy producers, retailers, or

vulnerable consumers can be offset through subsidies or rebates to those who need them. We don't need to be giving everybody in Alberta a free ride on electricity, only those who really need it, which I thought would have appealed to this government.

Others have said that the amount of savings would be insignificant. That's unfair to consumers. The implication is that savings of between \$600 and \$800 over the next four to five years is trivial. I'm sorry; the evidence speaks otherwise. The motion proposes a simple change that would be implemented over four to six months and would immediately start to generate savings for consumers.

Some have also called into question the potential for future price savings. Historic evidence indicates that there is a strong likelihood that there will be a positive differential between forward and pool prices. The Alberta Market Surveillance Administrator examined the historic relationship between the last forward price for a given month and the average price for that month between 2008 and 2016 and concluded, quote, forward prices still remain above pool prices in most months.

It's also been mentioned that customers already have an option by choosing a flow-through contract. This is true. However, these contracts constitute a relatively small portion of competitive retail contracts, which are primarily fixed-price contracts. The Market Surveillance Administrator retail statistics indicate that as of September 2016 46 per cent of residential customers had switched to competitive contracts, but most, 54 per cent, remained on the default, regulated rate option. So despite the availability of a flow-through product from competitive retailers, consumers have not chosen it. In fact, the majority of Albertans still are on the regulated rate option default product. My proposal would eliminate the flow-through contract option. However, it could potentially increase the demand for fixed-price contracts, and competitive retailers could see an increase in fixed-price contracts that would offset lost revenue and profits from the flow-through regulated rate option.

One of the key issues will be the impact of my proposal on the forward market. The forward market is used by some sellers of

energy to hedge the price of electricity. A significant volume of forward contracts is related to the regulated rate option. Changing the regulated rate option calculation to the weighted average pool price might jeopardize the integrity of the forward market, causing it to lose its effectiveness as a mechanism for price hedging. However, energy buyers and sellers don't require the forward market for hedging, which can still be accomplished through negotiation.

Finally, the current regulated rate option regulation forces retailers to purchase contracts in the forward market. A long-standing concern has been that sellers can game the market and arbitrarily push up prices. My proposal would eliminate that.

In conclusion, Motion 502 is an evidence-based solution that strikes the right balance between protecting consumers and improving the functioning of our electricity market. For these reasons and many more, I will be voting in favour of this motion.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've made some great progress this afternoon. Seeing the time, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

The Speaker: The legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This evening Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Justice and Solicitor General in the Parkland Room, and Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Executive Council in the Rocky Mountain Room. Tomorrow morning Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Environment and Parks in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:38 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 4, 2017

Day 15

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let's bow and reflect or pray, each in our own way. Allow us to recognize the important work we do in the Chamber. Let us be inspired by our constituents as well as by our fellow colleagues as collaboration and co-operation are the keys to assuring people of our success and that future generations of our province are successful.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly students, staff, and chaperones from the great school of C.W. Perry in Airdrie. Now, this is group 1 of 3 this week because there are so many grade 6 students coming out of this school. I'm not sure if everyone knows, but Airdrie and Rocky View schools are the fifth-largest school division outside of Calgary and Edmonton. That's why you're going to see so many kids here.

I'll start by introducing – and please rise as I call your names – Mrs. Pamela Burke, Ms. Krissa Donahue, Mr. Roel Suasini, and chaperones Mr. Jason Wiles; Mr. Brock Penner; Mrs. Melanie Mansfield, who's also a friend of mine; Mrs. Claire Barbieri; Mr. Dwayne Giesbrecht; Mrs. Tracy Minter; Tonya Leary; Crystal Adamo, a wonderful realtor from Airdrie; Linda Sefcik; Dawn Fallow; Mr. David Gerrard; and Tammy McTighe. Now I ask that the students rise as well and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you the parents and teachers and staff of Blessed Sacrament school in the awesome town of Wainwright. I feel really honoured to be able to introduce these people because, you know, I taught at Blessed Sacrament school back in the '90s. It's a great school, so I'm really pleased to be able to ask these people to rise when I call their names: Mrs. Hermanson, Mrs. Hedin, Miss McMann, Mrs. Cusack, Mr. Haun, and the students, too, please. Can you give a warm welcome to the students and staff of Blessed Sacrament school.

The Speaker: Your guests may not be here yet.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a class of inquisitive grade 6 students from Lendrum elementary school in the magnificent constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Crissy Andrews, and parent volunteer Violeta Stefanoska. I would ask that the students and their supervisors rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Sigurdson: It is also my honour to introduce to you and through you representatives of the Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing Association, or ASCHA. The association serves over 30,000 seniors, empowering them to have choice and lives of purpose where they're honoured, valued, and respected citizens of this province. In attendance today are President Raymond Swoneck, Executive Director Irene Martin-Lindsay, and a north region director, Wendy King. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the entire Chamber the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS. Please stand and remain standing as I call your names: Dexter Bruneau, Carley Casebeer, Fahim Rahman, Mike Sandare, Stephan Guscott, Tristan Bray, Cam Howey, Cody Ciona, Shifrah Gadamssetti, Danika McConnell, and Josh McKeown. Most of this group have almost finished their tenures as CAUS executives, and I feel a great kinship with them as my first year or so as minister has run parallel to their year at CAUS. Together we've grappled with the issues that make a difference for Alberta students, issues like affordable tuition, mental health, and access to world-class education at world-class universities. Alberta students have been in good hands with their incredible leadership, and I know that this means that Alberta's future will be in good hands, too. Thank you. I ask that the Assembly give them the warm traditional greeting of this Chamber.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to introduce to you and through you several people who have travelled quite a long distance to join us here today for the introduction of some legislation that I'm looking forward to speaking on. I would like to introduce President Gerald Cunningham of the Metis Settlements General Council; Ken Noskey, past president of the Metis Settlements General Council, and Ken is also currently on the Northern Alberta Development Council; Rita Marten, director of education for the Athabasca Tribal Council and member of Mikisew Cree First Nation; Beth Ann Auger, who has been working hard to develop a school council for Mistassiniy school in Wabasca and is a member of the Bigstone Cree First Nation; and Lois Byers, who's the official trustee for Northland school division. I'd ask them all, please, to rise and to accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'm happy to introduce the staff of the Calgary-Currie constituency office, Signe Spence and Lizette Tejada. They are passionate about serving our constituents and have built many positive relationships in the community. They are here in Edmonton to help me with the consultations on my private member's bill. Without their help and dedication, I would not be able to serve the citizens of Calgary-Currie the way that they deserve to be served, which until 2015 has in fact not been the case. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's a privilege to be able to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Arif Khan from the Bangladesh Canada Association of Edmonton. They have been in operation since 1979, providing cultural and social events for Bangladeshi Edmontonians.

I would also like to introduce Mr. Sam Ghosh, president of the Edmonton Bengali Association, a nonprofit organization that organizes cultural events for Hindu Bengali people right here in Edmonton.

I would now ask that they both please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the honour of introducing guests who represent four different Bangladeshi organizations that are here in honour of Bengali New Year, which occurs on April 14. Representing the Bangladesh PressClub Centre of Alberta, Delwar Jahid, the president, and Asheque Chowdury, a visiting journalist. If they would please rise. Representing the Bangladesh Heritage and Ethnic Society of Alberta, Mohammad Bhuiyan, the president, and Ruhul Amin, the general secretary. Representing the Mahinur Jahid Memorial Foundation sports club and Bangladesh Heritage Museum, Ashan Ullah, the president; Anamur Rahman, the vice-president; and Mica Mohammad, member of the executive. Representing *Asian News and Views* publishing, Syfur Hasan, the editor, and Zulfiquer Ahmed, the assistant editor. I would ask them all, please, to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have three groups of introductions to make. Today along with my colleagues I was honoured to welcome leaders from Alberta's Bengali community to Edmonton to celebrate Bengali New Year. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House representatives from three Bengali-Albertan organizations. First, from the Alberta Bengali society I welcome Mr. Halder, who's vice-president; Mr. Chanda, secretary; and Mr. Chowdhury, also secretary.

Second, from Amra Sabai of Calgary, a nonprofit cultural organization focused on hosting cultural events and social activities which provide exposure to Bengali heritage and tradition, I welcome Mr. Datta, who is president.

Third, from the Southern Alberta Heritage Language Association, an organization that represents a community language school teaching over 40 languages, I welcome Mr. Vinay Dey, who's president of that. I also want to add that Vinay Dey ran for the NDP in Calgary six times before I ran in 2015, so I thank him for his dedication, his contributions. Welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome. You're undecided whether or not you won or lost.

Also, hon. members, I hope that you help the Bengali community celebrate the new year by being joyous and constructive with each other over the next while here.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Bengali New Year

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to represent the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek, which has one of the most prominent Bengali communities in Alberta. I'm honoured today to wish everyone Shubh Nav Varsh, which I probably mispronounced, which means Happy New Year. Bengali New Year, or Pohela Boishakh, is the first day of the Bengali calendar, celebrated on April 14 in Bangladesh and in many other South Asian countries.

Bengali New Year, a national holiday in Bangladesh, begins at dawn and continues with fairs, festivals, and singers performing traditional songs to welcome the new year. Traditionally businesses start the day with a new ledger, clearing out the old. Like other festivals of the region, the day is marked by visiting relatives, friends, neighbours, and people preparing special dishes for their guests. It's a tradition to enjoy a meal of fermented rice and hilsa fish on this day.

The festivities from the deep heartland of Bengal have now evolved to become vast events in the cities, especially in the capital, Dhaka, and other large cities, where festivals begin with people gathering under a large tree or on a bank of a lake or river to witness the sunrise. A huge part of the festivities in the capital is a vivid procession organized by the students and Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Dhaka, which has a different theme relevant to the country's culture and politics every year. Different cultural organizations and bands also perform on this occasion, and fairs celebrating Bengali culture are organized throughout the country.

Of all the major holidays celebrated in Bangladesh, only Pohela Boishakh comes without any pre-existing expectation. It's about celebrating the simpler, rural heartland roots of Bengal.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Labour Legislation Review

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, in a time of recession and layoffs the goal of government should be to do no more harm, but this government has been a disappointment for Albertans. Last year this government called its budget the Alberta jobs plan. The NDP at least pretended that their focus was on getting Albertans back to work even if they actually killed more jobs with their policies than they made. The coal phase-out, carbon tax, and increased minimum wage come to mind. There are many Albertans who have been without a stable job for a long time, but this government has already moved on much too soon.

No longer is the focus on jobs; it's about modernizing our labour laws. The laws are not inherently problematic because they have not been significantly changed in a long time. Our labour laws have served us well and provided a framework for a prosperous, peaceful province. With its labour review this government is being driven by ideology and allowing itself to be pushed around by organized labour.

This government will have a legislative committee review on the Alberta Standard Time Act, but it won't afford our labour laws the same due diligence. Ontario is taking at least two years to review its labour laws. This government wants to bulldoze through the process in five weeks, putting decades of labour peace at serious risk. This government is being deceitful by making it look like its review is a legitimate public consultation. In reality the public is

only being surveyed for its opinions on the employment standards portion of this labour review. The big questions about union certification and collective bargaining are being done in a secretive, unaccountable manner.

I urge this government to push the brakes on its ideological agenda. I implore this government to commit to providing a stable economic climate for investment and to return their focus to getting Albertans back to work.

Thank you.

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

AIMCo Governance and the Heritage Fund

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the NDP took power, we've seen time and time again this government evoke the name of Peter Lougheed. We know the former PC Premier, a true visionary, set out a clear plan that helped lead to the Alberta advantage that our province was so well known for, well, until the NDP started driving the ship. As part of Lougheed's vision he created the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. This initiative has greatly benefited the province through investments in critical capital projects and medicine, protecting our environment, and the list goes on and on. But despite the proven track record for this trust fund, the NDP have other plans. We're seeing signs that the NDP are attempting to misuse the funds for political gain such as paying off their ridiculous debt.

Albertans have been concerned to see the interference permeate into AIMCo. First, the Finance minister meddled with the board appointments. Then the Premier's office attempted to influence media coverage on AIMCo. Now the latest reports reveal that there could be up to seven spots on AIMCo's board up for grabs.

Mr. Speaker, I want to warn this NDP government that Albertans are watching your next move. Do not stack the AIMCo board with comrades with an NDP world view. Do not misuse the heritage trust fund for your own political agenda. We know that the NDP have trouble listening to the priorities of Albertans, so I will remind them today. Albertans have been loud and clear in the past that the funds should be used to benefit future generations and focus on generating long-term investments. You would do well to hear these priorities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Gay-straight Alliances in School

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, let me set the scene: a warm September day, the beginning of a school year, a parent at home washing dishes, cleaning up around the house. A family dog is barking in the background. And then the phone rings. The caller ID says that it's the school. That's odd. I hope nothing is wrong. Dad picks up the phone. It's the school principal. "I'm calling to inform you that your daughter is a member of the model parliament."

"Model parliament? Well, that sounds interesting."

"Well, it's certainly concerning. We thought you needed to know that your child is associating with kids who are interested in politics."

"Well, is there something wrong with that?"

"Well, that's not for me to say. There might be. There might not be. It could be a passing phase. But it's possible that it might lead to your daughter becoming an elected official and associating with politicians. We thought you needed to know."

"Okay, then. Have a good day."

"You too. And let me assure you that if your daughter becomes involved in any other clubs, we will be the first to let you know."

Mr. Speaker, I know that sounds absurd, but the implication of Jason Kenney's position when he says that parents should be informed if their kids join a GSA, that there is something wrong with children associating with their peers in a gay-straight alliance club, shows how profoundly out of touch our Progressive Conservative leader is with Albertans' basic common sense and their basic common decency. Mr. Kenney has tied himself in knots trying to explain his position. But the simple fact remains: Mr. Kenney thinks there is something wrong with young people joining a GSA, and the core of his argument is that it's not okay for gay kids and straight kids to hang out together. It's absurd, but for young people it is a problem. They deserve better, and so does every single Albertan.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Official Opposition leader.

AIMCo Governance

Mr. Jean: Another day and more news of mismanagement from the NDP. There's no doubt about it; the Premier and her Finance minister are meddling in our independent investment fund. Albertans know this government can't be trusted with a single penny of their money, but now the Premier is trying to interfere in how our pensions and heritage fund are actually managed. The fund is the result of decades of savings by Albertans, and the NDP, who only understand how to spend, want to get their hands on the billions of dollars that are invested in it. How can anyone trust this Premier to not drive our investments into the ground even further than she has?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, I answered this question yesterday. The fact of the matter is that the head of AIMCo has assured the members opposite repeatedly that our government is not doing what the member opposite suggests. That's really kind of the problem. I don't know exactly what else has to happen except for them to listen to the answer.

But, Mr. Speaker, what is true is that AIMCo actually had excellent investment returns last year. I think they were better than we expected, and that's because they're working just like we are to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: It's clear from new e-mails released to the *Edmonton Sun* that AIMCo, teachers, nurses, bureaucrats, municipal workers, and first responders are extremely worried about these choices that this Premier is making. It compromises the integrity of our investment fund. It shows that the Premier's office now sees AIMCo as a political tool and spin office as opposed to an independent branch of government to be respected. By the end of this month there will be seven vacancies on the AIMCo board. How can Albertans possibly trust this Premier to get any of these appointments right?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have a process to bring appointments forward and get them done in a timely fashion so that the board of AIMCo will be fully staffed up. I'm not going to stand here and apologize for making the appointment process more open and transparent. All Albertans know that there are appointments available now on every agency, board, and commission. They know that they can put their name forward. Not all Albertans are going to be qualified. The best will get on the boards, and they will give back to Alberta and give their best.

Mr. Jean: Thank you for that answer, Premier.

The change to the appointment process should be immediately reversed. No politician in Alberta should have the power to interfere in AIMCo like this government now has the power to do. The fact is that this government brought in the biggest tax increase in Alberta's history without even campaigning on it. Last fall they tried to push AIMCo to publicly sponsor their ridiculous climate scheme. How can the Premier possibly expect anyone at all to believe that they won't abuse new appointments, with their government's record of broken trust with Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that the appointments to AIMCo have always been done by OIC. They've been done by OIC under this government, and they've been done by OIC by the new best friends of the Leader of the Opposition when they were in government. The difference is that we now advertise openly. We advertise to all Albertans, we tell all Albertans that we want them to be able to participate in the important boards and agencies that govern their lives, and we ensure that there is transparency in how that process goes forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Now we're all going to remember it's Bengali New Year, so we need to celebrate it together.

Second main question.

Executive Council Budget

Mr. Jean: While life in Alberta has never been harder, life in government under the NDP has never been better. The Premier's office continues to balloon this year: eight new staff, and her chief of staff is one of the best compensated in all of Canada. Actually, her chief of staff is better paid than the White House chief of staff. Meanwhile there are 100,000 Albertans on employment insurance, new carbon taxes on everything that Albertans pay, including on charities, families, and groceries. How can the Premier possibly justify this waste and excess while so many Albertans are suffering so much?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that the member opposite knows that the first statement that he made was patently untrue. It's clear on *Hansard*. He knows it, and he's misleading this House.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Ms Notley: Secondly, he also knows that the person that he's talking about is paid in line with the general range of what people are paid and in fact less than previous chiefs of staff under their new best friend's previous regime. But you know what that staffperson doesn't get? A golf club membership. He doesn't get that. But you should talk to your new friends because they're really pleased with those kinds of plans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Bad government in the past is no excuse for bad government now, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that Albertans expect leadership from the top. Instead, from the NDP they get bloated spending increases and wasteful spending. Here's one example. The Premier has somehow found nearly \$10 million to try and shore up public support for her own reckless and dangerous policies like carbon taxes and record debt and record deficits. Albertans are sick and tired of it. They are tired of surprises from this NDP

government. How much money does the Premier plan to spend this year promoting her own job-killing policies?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very excited to move forward this year, carrying on with our government's agenda to make life better for Albertans. You know how we're going to do that? We're going to go on with our efforts to make life more affordable for Albertans rather than trying to take money out of their pockets, we're going to move forward with protecting those important public services that Albertans count on, and we're going to move forward with those major investments in infrastructure that help Alberta communities and create job after job after job.

Mr. Jean: So far two years and zero jobs, Mr. Speaker. Actually, minus 81,000.

Albertans think that every single penny going towards these ads is an entire waste of money. Two-thirds of Albertans think that they should be thrown in the trash heap. I agree with them. Even the Premier's own Public Affairs Bureau, which this NDP government has used to stuff with partisan insiders, has seen its lowest approval for government communications in nearly 20 years, Mr. Speaker, an impressive feat. Bloated salaries, ballooning costs for the Premier's office, and millions of dollars wasted on shameless self-promotion. Does the Premier really expect Albertans to believe there's no room to cut spending at the top?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, to hear the member opposite speak, you would almost think that Executive Council didn't introduce a budget that had them spending exactly the same amount of money that we were spending the year before. So no increases. You know, the member opposite – there's hyperbole, and then there's what they're doing, which is way beyond it. That doesn't help the debate. That doesn't help us get our work done here. That doesn't help us make life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Labour Legislation Review

Mr. Jean: The NDP government has mastered the art of pretending to consult after they have already made up their minds. The most recent example is the review of our labour laws here in Alberta, which has been given five whole weeks for Albertans to provide feedback on what many are worried will be a major overhaul. A similar review in Ontario took two years, Mr. Speaker. Even a backbench bill on daylight saving time is being given more consideration than this review of our labour laws. Why is the Premier putting decades of labour peace in Alberta at risk by allowing very little time for feedback from Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are engaging with Albertans on these issues, and we have been since we've been elected. You know what? The last time the labour code was reviewed in Alberta, Rick Astley was in the top 10. You know, it is time for us to move forward, to modernize our labour laws, to bring Alberta into the 21st century when it comes to labour laws. We're going to do that in a balanced way that talks to people from both sides and moves the matter forward in a way that strengthens our economy and creates more jobs for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Not only is the NDP government's labour consultation process far too short; it's also not asking the right questions. The public is only being solicited for its opinions on the employment standards portion of the review. Card check certification and rules around union dues aren't even up for public consideration. Will the

Premier admit that the fix is in on this labour review and that they are trying to overhaul a labour system that has worked well in Alberta for many decades?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let us begin by acknowledging that there are multiple components of the labour code, which, to be clear, hasn't been really amended since the late '80s, that have actually been challenged under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, so it's not actually working quite as well as they'd like everyone to believe. That being said, you know, our government has asked Andy Sims to engage in a fulsome, thoughtful engagement with employers and with unions, and that's because it's a very complex area and these are the folks that understand the issues. We're also looking at what's going on across the country, and we're going to make sure that we move forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Interesting answer, Mr. Speaker.

You don't have to take my word for that. The NDP minds are made up. Just look at the union notice put together by UFCW 401. It's no secret that they are close friends with the NDP, and their brief actually talks about eliminating secret ballots and replacing them with a card check and introducing sectoral bargaining that will remove differentiation between businesses in the same sector, ramifications of a serious nature. Why is the Premier refusing to listen to the serious concerns of workers and businesses in Alberta and pushing these labour measures in only five weeks for Albertans to have any feedback? It's ridiculous, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is identifying one set of proposals that has come from one group, and in fact there are other proposals coming from other groups, which would be the exact opposite from that, and other proposals from a broad range of groups. That is evidence that we are in fact consulting with people and the people who understand the issues are getting a chance to make their representations. That's exactly what the consultation is for, so I thank the member for pointing out that it's working.

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

AAMDC Convention Ministerial Forum Questions

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the NDP for not being booed at the spring AAMD and C meeting. One elected official there pointed out that their local seniors' home will have a \$25,000 carbon tax bill this year. He was told not to load that cost on the bill of seniors. Sounds good. He asked the minister if he should bridge the gap by giving the seniors less food or less heat. The minister said, "we are in partnership," and hinted at a whole list of initiatives. These words won't keep seniors fed, and it won't keep them warm. To the Premier: can you offer rural Alberta a better answer for your carbon tax funding gap . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud to have those partnerships with the housing management bodies across this province. We work very closely with them. We meet with them regularly. We increased their operating budgets by 2 per cent, and we've invested \$57 million this year to support them

to do energy efficiency upgrades. We're committed to supporting them and working very closely together.

Mr. McIver: The carbon tax takes away more than the minister gave.

Mr. Speaker, another elected official asked about policing in rural areas. Crime is up, and the response is too slow. At a double murder in Chipman this week it took RCMP over 40 minutes to respond. The Finance minister could only muster a comment about fine revenues going to municipalities, which is nice but a drop in the bucket. It doesn't answer the question. To the Premier: since your Justice minister was not there again to answer the question and your Finance minister didn't know the answer, can you put rural Albertans' minds at ease today and actually give them an answer on crime and police response in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I actually had the opportunity to deliver an address that AAMD and C had asked for the very day before, and we were able to discuss a number of issues, including rural crime and the upcoming legalization of marijuana. That's actually all been working very, very well.

In terms of rural crime rates we absolutely are concerned. We do hear concerns from our municipal partners. We are working very closely with them, and the province continues to provide over half a billion dollars in funding to policing throughout the province.

Mr. McIver: Cat's got the Premier's tongue today.

Municipal leaders need assurances that solar farm operators will be required to remediate land if solar farms fail or when they're just old and need to be removed. The Energy minister made it clear that landowners are on their own, and in the minister's words: it's between the landowner and the company, not my problem. While I have no reason to disbelieve your minister, Premier, the answer given did not sit well. Does your government plan to create a requirement for land reclamation on solar projects, or will they get a pass?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in the answer there, the renewables will be a contract between the landowner and the proponent, and there is information given to landowners for that on how to do the proper contract. Reclamation will be part of that, and that is what I said at the time.

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

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Advanced Education minister. Many of our postsecondary institutions have critically needed mental health services on campus. This government has said that it's committed to funding mental health but failed to increase the mental health budget, which now is shared between 26 institutions in Alberta. It chose to maintain status quo funding of \$3.6 million, and the minister called this, quote, a placeholder item. He promised to say more about this in the future. With the Council of Alberta University Students in the gallery can the minister tell us when and how we'll see postsecondary institutions with adequate, stable mental health funding?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for his good work in supporting mental health work here in the province of Alberta. Of course, on this side of the House we're concerned about providing mental health supports for students as well, and the member, quite rightly, points out that we committed \$3.6 million. We also struck an advisory panel that is looking at how we can better provide mental health supports for students on campus. Our department is in the process of reviewing those recommendations, and once we've reviewed those recommendations, we will decide how those recommendations will be implemented and how the money will be spent.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, when you get down to it, this amounts to about \$14 per student per year, which does not stretch very far. However, not all postsecondary institutions receive the same amount. Last year, for example, the U of A received \$1 million and the University of Calgary, \$900,000. This is now going to be distributed between 26 institutions across the province. Can the minister tell us how the money is going to be allocated?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the member, quite rightly, points out some of the inequities in the system that was established under the previous government, and we're of course committed to fixing those as best we can. That was one of the tasks that the mental health panel was given, and of course we're looking at its recommendations for how to better support the mental health programs that exist on campuses across the province so that students, whether they're going to school in Edmonton or Lethbridge or any other communities, have access to the mental health supports they need when they need them. We'll be working on that, and we'll have more to say about that in the future.

Dr. Swann: Well, I would like to see a little clearer indication of when, Mr. Minister.

The 2016 national college health assessment indicated that nearly two-thirds of Canadian students have feelings of loneliness, 13 per cent have considered suicide, and 2 per cent have actually attempted suicide on our campuses. It's getting worse. In the case of campus mental health funding, decisions are not just numbers; we're dealing literally with life and death. Given that the mental health budget was not increased and there's no indication of future commitments to allow planning, will the minister tell us which campus services we're going to cut: proactive care or crisis counselling?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'm very concerned about providing mental health supports, just as the member is opposite and just as the people on this side of the House are. As I said before, we've committed \$3.6 million to providing further mental health supports, and we're working with our colleagues in Alberta Health to continue to identify resources that are available to provide mental health supports to students on campus. What won't help mental health is the radical cuts that the members opposite want to make. That will only make students' lives worse, and of course that's not what we – we are here to support our students.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Public Transit Funding for Edmonton

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Families in Edmonton-Meadowlark have long been asking for improved access to public transit throughout our city. I also know that the Capital Region Board has identified funding of the valley line LRT as a priority. To the Minister of Transportation: can you provide the House with details of the government's commitment to Edmonton's valley line LRT?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks very much for the question. Transit funding is important. It helps improve the quality of life of people. It supports safe, affordable, accessible, and environmentally sustainable transportation options for people. We're proud to support Edmonton's valley LRT line. We've committed \$424 million in funding for the line, \$275 million is under GreenTRIP, and \$150 million in provincial matching funds for the federal new building Canada fund. We're committed to assisting both our major cities with their LRT systems and transit throughout the province.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As residents in west Edmonton require access to amenities across our city and with young families making decisions about settling into our community, can the minister please provide timelines for when we might see shovels in the ground for the west leg of the valley line LRT?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has announced funding related to design and planning related to LRT expansion. We're working with the city of Edmonton to get a better sense of how much provincial support may be sought to complete the next phase and when this funding might be required. I understand that the city of Edmonton is in the process of finalizing various aspects of their expansions and refining their project costs. We are committed to supporting Edmonton, Calgary, and all municipalities with their transit needs. This government is in favour of making sure that people have environmentally sustainable mobility for all of their needs.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that accessible public transit is critical to the growth and sustainability of our province, to the same minister: can you detail some of the other investments that you've made throughout the city to provide improved transportation options for our residents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We've committed \$216 million in 2016-17 for other transit projects, \$72 million for GreenTRIP, \$144 million in federal contributions under PTIF – and that includes funding the Metro Line from NAIT to Blatchford – funding for preliminary design of an extension to the Capital Line, safety improvements, and numerous renewal projects for buses and LRT stations. Unlike those on the other side, who would like to cut

capital budgets by \$4 billion, we're committed to improving the lives of Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

A good transportation system so that they can get to the Bangladesh party.

Energy Policies

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are waiting for the NDP to take credit for AIMCo's recent acquisition of Savanna Energy's debt. The government compromised AIMCo's independence by admitting that a loan given to oil service company Calfrac was, quote, part of the NDP's climate leadership scheme. Albertans are worried about how socialist this government will go. AIMCo invests on behalf of Albertans. Does this government not understand that politicizing AIMCo puts Albertans at risk and only drives private investment away?

Mr. Ceci: You know, nothing could be further from the truth, of course. Mr. Speaker, we are involved with normal communications with AIMCo and other agencies, boards, and commissions all the time. When they're public-facing communications, we try and make sure that we're on the same page, and that's what we did.

Investment in this province: this province gets the most private-sector investment of any province in Canada. That's not at risk. We're not driving anything away. In fact, our economy will grow 2.8 per cent this year, if you listen to the Conference Board of Canada, and will lead the nation again next year. We're doing fine here. Those folks don't help.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, we know that political staff have been bullying AIMCo workers when they talk to the media. Maybe ATB has some independence left. Given that ATB just released a report showing that energy exports and private investment are down across the province from January to February and given that they're calling this a disappointment, with oil prices ticking up and energy exports trending down, is the Premier ready to quit blaming low oil prices and admit that her bad ideas are holding back our recovery and dragging down our economy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Ceci: You know, maybe I'll put some facts on the table. While Alberta's exports declined 3.9 per cent in February, they're still up sharply so far this year, 26 per cent, Mr. Speaker, and year over year 37 per cent. Alberta's exports are highly volatile – we all know that – and highly influenced by changes in exchange rates and commodity prices. We're going to be doing fine if just that side would support Alberta for once instead of looking east to Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government doesn't know good energy policy from bad. The Premier even declared the federal Liberal budget good news for Albertans. Given that Trudeau's overhaul of the Canadian exploration expense credit is just another kick in the teeth for Alberta's industry and given that CAPP president Tim McMillan said that this sends a bad signal, putting us at a disadvantage, can the Premier explain why she's

once again putting the interests of Justin Trudeau before the interests of struggling Alberta businesses and families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, you know, mature and adult conversations with our cousins to the far east in Ottawa is the work we're going to do. The other side would rather throw stones. The other side would rather sue. They've done that before. We're not doing that. In tough times we've got Albertans' backs. The opposition would make sure that the oil and gas roller coaster continued, that the boom-and-bust cycle continued. We're diversifying this province. They want to go back to the 1950s. We're going forward to the 21st and 22nd centuries.

AIMCo Investments

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, recent news articles highlight this government's interference in the independent operations of AIMCo. Notable was the director of the infamous out-of-province issues managers directing AIMCo executives to call the authors of the original exposé. Then political staff ironically directed AIMCo to massage public messaging in press releases and talking points to counter impressions that AIMCo's independence was compromised. To the Minister of Finance: can you please explain to Albertans how meddling in AIMCo's operations by the Premier's office preserves their independence?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've stood up and said that there is no meddling with regard to the independence of AIMCo. The president and CEO of AIMCo has said the same thing to people at the heritage trust committee. I don't know how much clearer we can be. I'm going to be meeting later this afternoon with the chair and the president of AIMCo because we work together. That's what's expected. Albertans want their Crown agencies to work closely with government to make sure we all work in the best interests of Albertans.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that if AIMCo is truly independent, decisions and investments should not be guided by the NDP world view, nor should political credit be taken, and given that the interference highlighted in the articles indicates that the NDP tried to spin an AIMCo investment that was used for debt refinancing as somehow diversifying the economy and creating jobs, to the Premier: if AIMCo is indeed independent, why are you reannouncing their deals, spinning them for political gain, and treating AIMCo as your own green slush fund?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I said, I'll be meeting later this afternoon with the president and the chair of AIMCo. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Ceci: We continue to have discussions about everything, Mr. Speaker, not about investment decisions so much because that's their operations ability. You know, it's more about: do AIMCo and the government align? Are we aligned? With regard to normal communications with government and public-serving agencies, we are aligned.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that that's aligned with the NDP world view and given that the articles note that the minister of economic development was fully aware that Calfrac had not signed off on government news releases and given that the minister's lack of due diligence caused the unnecessary confusion, prompting the Premier's office's demands for a briefing out no later than first thing tomorrow morning and direct involvement in drafting a press release blaming AIMCo for providing flawed guidance, to the minister of economic development. We all make mistakes. Why did you make AIMCo executives take blame for yours?

2:20

Mr. Ceci: I want to assure this House that I have great confidence in the people at AIMCo. I have great confidence in the independent decisions they are making on investments at AIMCo. They are doing a great job for Albertans and bringing money back to the treasury that we use to address the programs and services. That side would cut programs and services. That side would leave Albertans adrift, just like the Premier of Saskatchewan is leaving his citizens adrift.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

FOIP Request Process

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a letter dated April 23, 2014, the NDP House leader demanded an investigation into FOIP processes. He accused partisan press secretaries of reviewing outgoing releases, adding that timely access to freedom of information is absolutely critical to a functioning democracy. To the Minister of Service Alberta: are partisan political staffers interfering with FOIP, and why are processing times increasing under your watch?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Even though the number of information requests from Executive Council has tripled since 2015, we have been making a lot of progress in these processing times. In fact, the Privacy Commissioner highlighted that processing times are down from 12 to 15 months to just three to six months. We are making concerted efforts and putting resources on this issue, resources that the opposition is asking us to cut. They would prefer that we do not take openness and transparency as our number one priority.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are watching this government. Given that there are dozens of rulings in 2017 alone where the NDP government has been found guilty of violating FOIP laws and given that every time Wildrose has raised this issue with the Minister of Service Alberta, she has either flat out dismissed this as a problem or devolved into absolutely absurd personal attacks, telling members to either read a book or read about it, to the Premier: will Albertans wait to have a 2019 government that will bring forward transparency, accountability ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take openness and transparency very seriously. That is why our government has been proactive in posting all of our employees' salaries in ministers' offices and the Premier's office, something that the Conservatives

did not do. We posted all sole-source contracts over \$10,000 online, something the prior government didn't do. I won't be lectured on transparency by the Conservatives, who are known for their backroom dealing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Keep it positive, folks.

Mr. Cyr: What I'd like are the FOIPs I requested.

Given that today the Wildrose caucus made a firm commitment to transparency in government by presenting a 10-point plan to address FOIP and given that this system according to the Privacy Commissioner is broken and needs serious and immediate attention, will the Premier ensure that her cabinet is doing its job and following the Wildrose's lead and implementing our 10-point plan and addressing the FOIP problems that are currently facing Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Ms McLean: Mr. Speaker, I find it absolutely rich, coming from the opposition, that they would refer to questions they've asked me around FOIP when they have failed to actually ask me what I am doing about FOIP. I am happy to report that a number of the recommendations that the opposition has proposed are already in place and already being enacted, so I'm surprised they didn't do their due diligence.

I am also happy to report that on March 30, 2017, we received a letter from Jill Clayton, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, stating, "As I commented publicly, I am pleased by the initial steps taken ..."

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Unharvested 2016 Crops

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many farmers in northern Alberta are facing a major decision, continuing to try to harvest last year's crop or destroying it so that they can get this year's crop in the ground. With mainly cereal crops in our area remaining, many farmers are finding crops contaminated with dead mice and deer feces, making even salvageable grain unusable. To the minister: what options are available through AFSC to declare these crops 100 per cent lost so that farmers can get on with it and get the 2017 crop in the ground and avoid another lost season?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. He's absolutely right. It's true that 90 per cent of the crops from last year are in the bin, but it's that 10 per cent that we are concerned with. I'm very proud of the public servants in AFSC for the good work they've done in being able to process those claims. The vast majority have been processed.

But that's only one side, Mr. Speaker. Those farmers, you know, get some support and financial support, but what they really want to do is put that seed in the ground and grow the crops for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that AFSC estimates that there are 975,000 acres of cropland still to be harvested and given that that doesn't take into consideration uninsured crops and

given that that is roughly 6,100 quarter sections of land to be monitored by AFSC over the next four weeks, to the minister: how much manpower does AFSC have on the ground, and will farmers be held ransom waiting for an agent to declare their crops usable or a 100 per cent writeoff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I've been assured by AFSC that all their manpower is concentrating on the claims that are out there now. They've been doing a great job. There are only four claims that are still outstanding. I think you would agree that there have been great strides in that. I want to encourage all producers out there that before they pick any of the options that they have to get rid of the crops that are there now, they first contact their AFSC office or perhaps phone 310.FARM.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hanson: I must have gotten lucky because one phone call found me a person that hadn't been approached by AFSC yet.

Given that there are close to 1 million acres of cropland that may have to be burned off to allow access for the 2017 growing season and given that most municipalities rely on volunteer fire departments, that could be stretched to their limits covering fires across vast areas of cropland, to the minister: is there a plan in place to assist municipalities in co-ordinating and financing in the event that any of these fires get out of control, or am I just fearmongering?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member has talked about burning off those crops. That is only one option that could be available. We've already heard in this House and in the media that there are some counties that don't even allow burning. So it is options. Again, I encourage all producers out there to make sure they contact their AFSC office before they implement any of the options that are available to them and continue to do so. Again, I want to repeat that number they can phone, 310.FARM.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students (continued)

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January 2013 the previous government committed \$3 million over three years to university mental health initiatives across Alberta, and in 2014 this funding was extended to two more universities. This funding was set to expire in June 2016, and I applaud the minister for continuing the great work into this year. However, we've heard from students and postsecondary institutional leaders that they're concerned about long-term funding. To the minister: when will we see a renewed multiyear commitment to postsecondary mental health initiatives?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to talk about the supports that our government is going to provide for students' mental health programs on campuses. The member quite rightly points out that we've committed \$3.6 million. In my answer to the previous questions on this matter I also highlighted the fact that we're working with our colleagues at Health to identify more resources and supports that we can provide to students.

What won't help students is cutting \$600 million from the budget of Advanced Education like the members opposite are proposing to do in their draft budget.

2:30

Mr. Rodney: Given that the students deserve answers as to when so they can plan and given that mental health issues are not issues that are exclusive to university campuses only despite the focus that these institutions receive and given that students at vocational schools, technical institutions, and colleges are also affected by the same stresses which impact the mental health of university students, again to the minister: what specific initiatives are you undertaking to expand on-campus mental health programs outside the university setting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mental health advisory panel that we struck has made its recommendations. They were given the task of looking at mental health supports not just on university campuses but on the campuses of all of our colleges and technical institutes as well. I look forward to reviewing those recommendations and implementing them.

Again, I think that the member opposite, when he's speaking to students, should tell them what impact the \$600 million that they want to cut from Advanced Education budgets would have on mental health supports that are already existing.

Mr. Rodney: Given that although on-campus mental health supports have been increasing over the past four years and that when students experiencing mental health issues graduate from postsecondary, these issues do not magically disappear and given that we continue to hear that the transition away from campus-based mental health programs and supports can be very traumatic for those students who have come to rely on those resources, to the minister: what work are you doing with the Minister of Health to bridge the gap in services that can occur as students graduate from postsecondary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the member raises an important issue with transitioning from a postsecondary world into the world of work. Our government is committed to supporting students in all of the difficulties that they face in making the transition, including supports for mental health. As I told the member in my previous answer, the mental health advisory panel has submitted its recommendations to the department, and in full course we will review those and implement them.

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

London Road Gateway Housing Project in Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Lethbridge Housing Authority has a long wait-list for affordable housing. Budget 2017 included funding for the London Road Gateway affordable housing project. Given that the city of Lethbridge has been waiting for this announcement for nearly seven years, can the minister tell us how this project was chosen and how many Lethbridge families will this move off the wait-list?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're pleased to follow through with our commitment to invest \$1.2 billion over five years for affordable housing in this province. In Budget 2017 our capital plan reinforced this investment for building housing units and renovating existing ones, making life better for all Albertans. I understand that Lethbridge had experienced a strong demand for affordable housing, and that's why I'm pleased to say that the London Road Gateway project is approved to proceed and, once complete, will offer 14 new affordable housing units for the Lethbridge community.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the project has been on the city's radar for so long, can the minister tell us when the construction of the project is expected to start and when we can expect completion of the project?

Ms Sigurdson: The London Road Gateway project is expected to begin construction this year. The building will be complete and ready to move into by the fall of 2018. This project will provide more affordable housing for Lethbridge residents, and we're pleased to work with the Lethbridge Housing Authority and the city of Lethbridge to make this happen. Our government is protecting and improving the things that make a difference in the lives of Albertans, like having a safe and affordable place to call home.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that those living with disabilities often have a difficult time finding accessible and affordable housing and they deserve to live with dignity and with access to green space like everyone else, can the minister tell the Chamber how the London Road Gateway project will be accessible for those living with disabilities?

Ms Sigurdson: The London Road Gateway project will have three barrier-free studios that will be suitable for residents living with disabilities. The location is close to downtown, close to public transit, and close to the regional hospital. The project will also be built to LEED platinum requirements for energy efficiency, with larger windows for natural light and good air quality. As an infill project the London Road Gateway will be designed to fit within the character of the community, and I look forward to its completion.

Thank you.

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

Provincial Debt

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Premier has taken the tack of going after Saskatchewan for their budget. Let's look closer to home, shall we? The NDP will amass over \$70 billion in debt in four short years. The recurring cost to Albertans in order to service that debt will be over \$2 billion, which, incidentally, works out to a burden of over \$1,200 added to every household in Alberta each year. To the Premier: does she not recognize that adding debt is tantamount to piling taxes onto the backs of future Albertans?

Mr. Ceci: You know, in tough economic times this government has the backs of Albertans so that we can get through this recession and into positive growth. The Saskatchewan budget was brought up. Should I just remind people that the Saskatchewan budget had huge tax increases on everything from children's clothing to construction, Mr. Speaker? We've kept taxes flat this year. We did

not raise taxes. We are bringing in support for Albertans in every respect. You know, in Saskatchewan they had massive cuts to education, health care, and hundreds of millions of dollars are gone from their economy.

Mr. Hunter: A levy is a tax.

Given that some fairly competent bean counters told me that it will take a generation to pay off this government's reckless four-year spending spree and given that I have talked to university students who are happy about the government freezing their tuition but fear that jobs when they get out of school will not be there, to the Premier: what will those students think when they realize that it was you who sold their future by indenturing them to a staggering provincial debt with no jobs to help pay it off?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this side cares about Albertans, both current Albertans and in the future, and what their lives are going to be like. We're prudently and thoughtfully taking down the deficit as we go forward but will not throw Albertans under the bus like that side would. I want you to know that the Conference Board of Canada said that the budget for Saskatchewan won't be stimulative to that province. We are doing things that stimulate our economy. Saskatchewan is doing the opposite thing, and they're going to suffer for it.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier says, quote, you're living in a fantasyland for believing you can balance the books without impacting front-line services or hiking taxes, end quote, every time any of the opposition parties propose cost-cutting measures for the NDP to get their spending under control, can the Premier square the circle and help Albertans understand the NDP world view on how the budget will balance by 2024? Or do budgets balance themselves, as her new BFF in Ottawa believes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we're thoughtfully working with Albertans and bringing the programs and services forward that they require. They require good health care. They require good education. We are doing everything in our power to make sure those are solid so that our economy continues to fire on all cylinders. Investment is coming back to this province. We have the highest weekly wage earnings of any province. Things are pretty good here. I just wish they would notice it and be cheerleaders for Alberta instead of Saskatchewan.

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

Age Discrimination and the Human Rights Act

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A January court ruling directing the province to include age in the Alberta Human Rights Act as prohibited grounds for discrimination could have repercussions for the population it is meant to protect unless the province takes action. Recognizing this, the court has given the province one year to deal with the unanticipated issues. Minister, how and when will you consult with Albertans about these upcoming legislative changes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. As he quite rightly notes, there was a lawsuit filed, and the province agreed to include age in the legislation. We asked for some time to determine what the

ramifications would be for a number of industries, including the insurance industry, and to determine, you know, what the impact might be on things like affordable housing projects designed specifically for seniors. When we have finished that analysis, we will have more to say.

2:40

Mr. Gill: Given that in Ontario age is already prohibited grounds for discrimination and, as a result, adults-only housing is no longer available in that province and given that the Alberta court ruling was prompted by a seniors' advocacy group which benefits the most from options for age-restricted accommodations, to the minister: what is Alberta's plan for dealing with the legal quandary of residents currently living in adults-only housing complexes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member quite rightly points out, there are concerns around the inclusion of age and adults-only buildings, particularly those that are aimed at vulnerable senior populations. You know, we will be working forward to consult with those groups. That is why we asked for that year, to take those things under advisement and to make sure that we're continuing to protect those populations.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the judge provided the province with a one-year delay in complying with the court ruling to allow the government time to introduce exemptions for unforeseen consequences and given that prohibiting age-restricted condominiums is one of those unforeseen circumstances, Minister, is your ministry considering exemptions that will continue to let Albertans choose adults-only housing or, at the very least, grandfather in the existing ones?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, a very important question. This is, of course, one of the issues that we are working on considering. Going forward, we will be speaking to Albertans on this issue, and we will be ensuring that we are able to protect the private decisions of individuals in terms of where they live as well as buildings that may be specifically targeted at populations who may otherwise be vulnerable. Once again I'd like to thank the member for the important question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll go to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Refugee Rights

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is Refugee Rights Day. In Canada Refugee Rights Day marks the anniversary of what is known as the Singh decision. In its 1985 decision the Supreme Court found that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protected the fundamental rights of refugee claimants. The court decided that the term "everyone" in the Human Rights Act included refugee claimants. The decision marked an important moment for refugee protection in Canada and provided the right of refugee claimants to have an oral hearing.

I meet refugees nearly every day in my job, some who are brand new to Canada and some who have been here for decades. What I think is important to remember about refugees is that they did not come to Canada by choice. They came here because they were fleeing war, violence, or persecution for religious or political reasons. They came here because to stay in their home country could have meant death.

I want to take the time today to address two incorrect perceptions that I often hear from Albertans, too often. The first is some version of the story that refugees in Canada are entitled to more resources than Canadian pensioners. This is false. Government-sponsored refugees receive a one-time settlement allowance, around \$1,800, then approximately \$700 a month for a year. A privately sponsored refugee gets nothing.

The second concern that I hear from Albertans is that refugees will continue to live off the system indefinitely, taking resources away from working Canadians. This is also false as within a year of coming to Canada, 80 per cent of adult refugees are working full-time. This is comparable to the nonrefugee population. If you take into account that the folks often have to take English classes, upgrade workplace skills, and pay back transportation loans, that statistic becomes even more impressive. I trust that all members of this House do everything that they can to dispel these inaccurate facts when they hear them.

Refugee rights are under attack around the world. While Canada is a leader in protecting the rights of refugees, we cannot take our support for refugees for granted. Racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic messages surround us daily. It's imperative we call out these acts when we see them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Battle River-Wainwright Constituency Events

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a great weekend in Battle River-Wainwright. It was victorious for both the village of Irma and the Wainwright junior B Bisons hockey team. Because of the hard work and determined people in these communities, that's why we had such a great week.

First, I would like to acknowledge the committee, the village of Irma, and all who played a part in working tirelessly to put together a reasoned, responsible argument that ensured that the school of Irma met the criteria for a new school build. On Saturday the Irma school gymnasium expansion fundraiser was held, and I was honoured to have been part of that. The motto was Bigger is Better, and boy, from a town of 521 people they went big. About 450 people attended that fundraiser, that included a live band, a scrumptious banquet, a live and silent auction. By the end of the evening they had raised \$212,000. That's big and impressive.

Another victory this past Sunday was for the Wainwright junior B Bisons. They also went big. The Wainwright junior B Bisons had their sights set on a provincial gold medal, and they met their ultimate goal, winning the gold medal in St. Paul on Sunday, April 2. During this gold medal game against the Cochrane Generals the two teams played a highly competitive and clean game. Schubada opened the scoring for the Bisons and got the Bisons out in front early. The Generals took the lead near the midway point of the period; however, McKinley would tie it back up in the final minute of the first period. At the end of the third period: tied at four. In the overtime period Mackay scored the final goal of the tournament to win the Bisons their first-ever provincial gold medal.

So to those who worked tirelessly for our new Irma school and to the parents and the coaches of the junior B Bisons, they're the real

winners, not just because of how well they did but because of the hard work and determination that got them there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think there might be an opportunity for a good poem there as well.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Bill 6 Northland School Division Act

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to acknowledge that of course we are on the traditional territory of Treaty 6 as I rise today with great privilege to introduce the first reading of Bill 6, the Northland School Division Act.

This legislation will set us on a path to restoring a democratically elected board of trustees in Northland school division. Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the House I would like to inform you that the division provides education to approximately 2,700 students in 23 schools spread across the northern half of our province. Ninety-five per cent of the students learning in Northland are First Nations or Métis, and the division has been without an elected board since 2010. We are changing that and taking an important step to improve student learning, attendance, and supports in the region.

I am joined in the Legislature today by Northland community leaders who helped to develop the important bill through an ongoing engagement process with some of my ministry officials who worked very hard over the last number of months and years to get the job done. I could not be more proud of our government for stepping up to improve education for our students in this unique region and for making life better for Albertans in the process.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

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

2:50 Bill Pr. 1 Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017.

I would like to table the bill as well.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Bill Pr. 2 Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 2, Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege of tabling a letter I wrote to the Government House Leader on the 9th

of March, 2017. It is from the current Premier, who was actually making a tabling on behalf of the now Government House Leader, where she tabled “copies of a memo from the acting manager . . . of the Public Affairs Bureau to bureau staff directing them to use overtly political messaging in all the supposedly nonpartisan government communications they produce.” This is a tabling of a tabling.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of a WCB advocate in Calgary I would like to table the requisite five copies of a document entitled *Principles of Administrative Law*, Jones and de Villars, fifth edition, Carswell, 2009.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ve got two tablings. The first one is a letter that I had mentioned in question period from the hon. Minister of Transportation back when he was in opposition dated April 23, 2014, that refers to the Alberta government at the time possibly violating section 10(1) and section 11(1) of the FOIP Act.

The second tabling is the new 10-point plan that Wildrose has created and authored, which is working to fix the FOIP process.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to table five copies of an article, referenced in question period today, in the *Financial Post* by Kevin Libin dated March 27, 2017, entitled Emails Show Rachel Notley’s NDP Meddling Further in the Running of Alberta’s Heritage Fund.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Hon. members, I am tabling five copies of a memo from the Clerk to the Member for Calgary-Hays concerning the receipt of \$500 in conjunction with the passing of Government Motion 16.

I believe we have two points of order today. The first one was by the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Cooper: Well, I thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise today and speak to a point of order. Just for the Government House Leader’s reference and for yours I’ll be speaking specifically about Standing Order 23(h) and (i). At approximately 1:54 during question period today the Premier made an allegation against another member and she may have also imputed false motives to a member of the Assembly when she either said – well, I might add that I’m without the benefit of the Blues, Mr. Speaker – that “the member is misleading this House” or that “he’s misleading this House,” referring specifically to the Leader of the Official Opposition when he had just previously asked a question.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it wasn’t that long ago inside the Chamber when we had a fairly robust discussion around whether the word “misleading” was inappropriate use of language inside the Chamber, and I made a case that certainly it was. I laid out a number of Speakers’ rulings, and subsequently you didn’t entirely see the world as I did with respect to the use of the word “misleading.” On March 16 you ruled that the Energy minister wasn’t out of order

when she said that the Official Opposition was misleading the House, but you went on to say in your ruling that if she had cited an individual – in fact, it says:

In the instance before the Assembly now, the same observation made by my predecessors [is] also . . . made here [today], which was this broad use of the word.

The Minister of Energy referenced the opposition and not a member in her response to the question.

Now, today we saw a very different circumstance. While I don't entirely see the world exactly as you, because I think it could lead to some abuse of the word "misleading" inside the Chamber, the Premier clearly has said that this member is "misleading this House." She has made allegations about what the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was or wasn't doing, and I think it would be very reasonable and prudent for her to withdraw and apologize so that we can all move on with the estimates of the day.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to make a few comments with respect to this matter. Now, during question period today the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the Premier and made an allegation that the number of FTEs in Executive Council had increased by eight staff. The Premier responded that that was not true, that it had been discussed in the estimates, and that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition knew it was not true.

I've got the *Hansard* Blues here from the Executive Council estimates last night, and it quotes the Leader of the Official Opposition saying:

Madam Premier, I'm also wondering, according to your fiscal plan it shows that you're estimating an additional eight staff for Executive Council. I have a few questions . . . if you don't mind. I'm wondering if you could tell what positions those are, what vacancies they're going to fill, how they affect the budget obviously.

It goes on, but these are the main questions.

The Premier responded that the number effectively – she says:

In fact, if you go back to estimates, and neither of us were here for obvious reasons . . .

She's referring to the previous year.

. . . in the last time that we had estimates, but at that estimates the Deputy Premier reported to your House leader that in fact the number effectively should have been 179 not 178 because the budget was printed as we were adding an FTE.

So the Leader of the Official Opposition says:

So seven instead of eight new employees?

The Premier says:

That's right, right there. So that was what happened there, and then in my office we've been doing some reorganizing. What has happened this time around is that we ended up reporting both the outcome of that reorganizing as well as the vacancies that have existed for a while that it is not our intention to fill. So it's not actually seven new positions. It's three new positions.

The Leader of the Official Opposition says:

Thank you, Premier.

And the Premier goes on to say:

And the other four will not be filled.

3:00

So, Mr. Speaker, it's clear from the record that during estimates the Leader of the Official Opposition asked about the number of positions in Executive Council, that the Premier provided the information, and that the hon. Official Opposition leader knew that there were not eight new positions. That was clarified and made

very clear last night by the Premier. That's what the Premier was referring to, that she had discussed this with the Leader of the Opposition in estimates and that she had made it clear that there were not eight new positions. Yet that was what he was doing, repeating that number, that allegation, which he knew was not the case, in the House. The Premier then accused the member of misleading the House.

Mr. Speaker, it is my submission that the Leader of the Official Opposition did in fact provide information to the House that he knew not to be true, and that gave direct rise to the Premier's response. I know the rules of this place, more or less, after all the years that I've been here, and I am aware that misleading the House is a serious offence which requires a motion of privilege to be brought at the earliest opportunity against the member who may have misled the House. That is not my intention at this time. In not doing so, I also understand that the rules of this House are that one ought not accuse a member of misleading the House unless you're prepared to bring a point of privilege, but I don't believe there's any benefit to doing that at this point.

I believe that we've set the record straight. The Premier made a true statement; however, that statement is contrary to the rules. Therefore, on behalf of the hon. Premier I will apologize and withdraw her true statement.

The Speaker: Thank you, I think.

Mr. McIver: I thank the Government House Leader. He leaves out a couple of things, the possibility that the Leader of the Official Opposition may not have believed the answer that he got from the Premier last night or indeed believed that she was mistaken, but *Beauchesne's* section . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the hon. Government House Leader has withdrawn the comment, and I've accepted that. I think the matter is closed.

I think we had a second point of order by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A timely reminder to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek that one ought not use names even if one is reading from a document one is tabling.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that point was raised on both sides of the House today where names were used. I would remind all of the House to reinforce the statement made by the Government House Leader. It's not on one or the other; it is both.

Hon. members, the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Justice and Solicitor General in the Rocky Mountain Room. Tomorrow morning Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Environment and Parks in the Rocky Mountain Room, and Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Advanced Education in the Parkland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:05 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 5, 2017

Day 16

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
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Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray or reflect, each in our own way. Let us share a sense of pride for the work we do, particularly when we reach unanimous agreements in this Assembly. Let us acknowledge our responsibilities and our commitment to the communities we represent, to our province, and to our nation.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the parents, staff, and students of C.W. Perry. This is the second of three groups from this school. There are almost 600 grade 6 students in the school. As I mentioned earlier, Airdrie is the fifth-largest school district in the province, just outside of Edmonton and Calgary, and we grow at an annual rate of about 5 per cent, which is about two schools every year needed to keep up with growth. I just should point out that we only got one in this year's budget. I would like to introduce first the teachers and then the parents. Please rise as I call your name: Ms Tracey Bishop, Mr. Steven Prediger, Mr. Carlin Olynky, Mrs. Heather Nikkel, Mrs. Regina Dollimount, Jonathan Wiersma, Miranda Harbourne. Will the students rise as well. Please receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am really thrilled today to introduce to you and through you Ridgeview central school students. These are truly an amazing group of young people. They travelled on the bus eight hours from La Crête to get here, and not one of them said: are we there yet? I would like to introduce Mr. Fred Kirby, Lana Halladay, Chris Fehr, Dorothy Unrau, Barry Neufeld, Andrew Doerksen, Willy Schellenberg, Willie Friesen, and a special mention to Henry Harder – he's the bus driver, and he's back at the hotel, resting up for the return home – and the rest of the class from Ridgeview school. Please stand and accept the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly constituents of mine who are also family members of one of our current pages, Jordyn Reed. Seated in the Speaker's gallery are Tracey and Kelly Neufeld, Jordyn's parents, as well as her younger sister Kaeleigh. Tracey is a lab technician at J. Percy Page, and Kelly is an architectural technologist, who has designed many homes in and around Edmonton. Kaeleigh is interested in learning more about what Jordyn does here as a page, and they are here in the Speaker's gallery today to watch Jordyn in her role, a position she has held

since the autumn of 2015. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Welcome to you. We're particularly proud, all of us collectively, of the work that the pages do every day in this place. They're much more rational and competent than me. [interjection] I won't say anything else about the other members here in the House.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two constituents of mine who are also here to watch Jordyn Reed in her role as a page. Sue and Rudy Neufeld, Jordyn's grandparents, are both retired. They enjoy skiing, square dancing, and travelling. Sue and Rudy are seated in the Speaker's gallery with Jordyn's other family members, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you.

The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two people who have been instrumental in providing services to my constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood presents some very, very difficult cases from time to time.

Mr. Cooper: That's just you.

Mr. Mason: Besides me.

Both of these staff people have done an outstanding job. Donna Forbes is a part-time constituency assistant in my office. She is just completing her master's of social work degree at the University of Calgary and previously worked for six years in the Victoria, B.C., constituency offices of MLA Carole James and MP Denise Savoie.

Kali Gregg is studying social work at MacEwan University and has been a practicum student in my office since last September. She'll be going on to work on her bachelor's degree in social work this fall, and we all wish her the very best in her future pursuits.

I would ask them to please rise now and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. You must be very patient people.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an absolute privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House two of my favourite people in the world: my beautiful mother, Lorraine McQuiggin, and my oldest son, Allan. I'm so excited that you're here with us today. My mom has just recently retired, so it's such an honour to have her join us. My son is a fourth-year generation insulator who's also an alumni of NAIT. Thank you both for all of your love and support. I would not be here without you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kelly Lynn Spafford, program manager for the community action for healthy relationships network. She is also an indefatigable community volunteer and a real asset to Athabasca and area. I would ask that she now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Tim Shum and Mr. Andrew Shum. Tim is a member of the Alberta public service, and Andrew is a registered nurse working for AHS. Tim and Andrew – if they may rise – are celebrating their adult interdependent partnership today. My new friends have chosen us to celebrate their day with. Please join me in giving Tim and Andrew the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly and a hearty congratulations on their new life together.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Olds College Gala

Mr. Strankman: Recently it was my privilege to attend along with many of my Wildrose colleagues the Olds College gala. Every year members of our caucus proudly support this worthy agricultural event. One of the highlights of this gala is the live auction of a steer, cut and wrapped through the meat-cutting course offered by Olds College. My colleagues and I were fortunate enough to pool our resources together, winning the bid. We enjoyed our opportunity immensely.

1:40

The absolute peak of this evening had to be the generous donation of \$16 million by Alberta entrepreneur, oil field industry leader, and dedicated philanthropist David P. Werklund and his partner, Sue Norman. This gift is historically unprecedented and is the largest ever personal donation to an Alberta college or technical institution. Their generosity begins with an initial \$2 million cash donation, followed up by \$4 million in a matching component. Finally, in order to ensure this great institution's sustainability, he has provided for \$10 million as a gift from his estate. This donation will result in the creation of the Werklund agriculture institute, which will specialize in smart agriculture. This institute will engage students, researchers, and industry in smart and sustainable agriculture and agribusiness solutions.

Mr. Speaker, David Werklund is known on this side of the Chamber. David grew up in the same area as my colleague from Grande Prairie-Smoky. In fact, my colleague's family owns and operates farmland in the area David grew up in. David's ties to agriculture and the energy sector span many years and stretch across all of our beautiful province. In fact, his cousin farms just down the road from my farm.

I tried unsuccessfully to convince David and Sue to attend here today so that we could formally recognize and acknowledge this significant act of generosity, but true to form they quietly declined with a smile.

Government Achievements

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to serve with a government that keeps its promises. In two years we've fulfilled 73 per cent of our 2015 election platform, with another 15 per cent in process: a royalty review within six months, with implementation in a year, leading to a 50 per cent increase in rig activity; increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018; working to diversify our economy; banning corporate and union donations to political parties; extending the sunshine list to agencies, boards, and commissions; reversing cuts to health care, education, and children's

support services; providing stable, predictable funding for health services, school boards, postsecondaries, and municipalities; repairing hospitals and seniors' facilities across Alberta; eliminating fee increases proposed by the third party, including a regressive health care levy; returning Alberta to a reasonable, progressive tax system.

We're funding schools for enrolment and building new ones where they're needed, not for political gain; freezing tuition; restoring the summer temporary employment program; reducing school fees for essential services and transportation; phasing in targeted school lunch programs for elementary students; investing in child care capped at \$25 a day; improving the Alberta family employment tax credit and introducing the Alberta child benefit; creating a Ministry of Status of Women; reviewing employment standards to support family-friendly workplaces; creating more spaces in women's shelters.

We're also leading on climate change by crafting solutions with stakeholders, other provinces, and the federal government; phasing out coal-fired electricity; establishing an energy efficiency strategy and green retrofit program; protecting the Castle wildlife area; repealing the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act; working with federal and indigenous governments to resolve land claims; ensuring that indigenous communities have access to safe, clean drinking water; improving representation of indigenous culture and history in our schools.

Meanwhile our opposition promises to cut billions out of infrastructure and public services, repeal the carbon levy that enabled crucial pipeline access to tidewater, and break both the letter and the spirit of legislation protecting LGBTQ students.

Mr. Speaker, I think I'll stand with our promises and our commitment to make life better for Albertans.

Government Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, a segue to reality. Let me set the scene. A cold December in 2018 at the end of another long hard year, a cat is meowing in the background, and the family is gathered, fretting over the overdraft on their bank statement, their maxed-out credit card bill, and a foreclosure letter on their home of 23 years. Mother Raquel, a coal industry administrator, has been unemployed for over two years, and the family has been surviving on Father Joseph's modest salary of \$45,000. Even with sacrifices and austerity household expenses for the family of five exceed \$55,000 per year, and the kids have had to give up hockey, ringette, and dance. EI has run out, RRSPs are spent, RESPs are cashed in, and there is little equity left in the house. Normalcy has left this once vibrant home. The family is buried in unserviceable debt, and utilities have been cut off twice due to unpaid bills.

Then the phone rings. The caller ID says it's from Ontario.

"This is Ecofitt. I'm calling to inform you that we will be installing your free light bulbs next week."

"Free light bulbs? Well, that sounds interesting, but we won't be here."

"Well, that's unfortunate. Can we book another time?"

"We won't be here. We are facing eviction and bankruptcy. We will likely be at a shelter or maybe moving back to Saskatchewan, where we hope to find work and start over. We just can't survive here any longer with our expenses exceeding our income. We can't even afford to pay the interest anymore. We never thought it would come to this."

"So you won't be needing light bulbs and thermostats?"

"You're not listening to me. We won't have any lamps or even a furnace, let alone a home. They're of no use to me if I can't afford a roof over my head. They're of no use to me when I have to use

my credit card to put food on the table. They're of no use to us when we can't even support our family."

Mr. Speaker, these are the stories we hear every day as a result of the decimation of the Alberta advantage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Family and Gender-based Violence

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be part of a government that works hard to make life better for all Albertans. Recently we passed legislation that helps to address family violence by making it easier for victims to get out of leases to remove themselves from dangerous situations. This session we've also brought forward Bill 2. If passed, this bill would remove barriers for victims of domestic and sexual violence who want to pursue civil action.

So much of this work in combating family violence would not be possible without the expertise and dedication of nonprofit agencies. In Athabasca and surrounding regions the Athabasca and Area Prevention of Relationship Abuse Action Committee and their partners, Healthy Families Healthy Futures and Community Action for Healthy Relationships, play an absolutely critical role in this. These organizations have been essential in our community, providing support services to people struggling with relationship abuse, family violence, and gender-based violence. Their expertise is particularly valuable in rural areas, where it can be difficult to access these services and where there is a high demand.

Not only do these organizations provide outstanding front-line supports, but they contribute to the community through outreach and education. The events they hold to raise funds also raise awareness. I myself have been pleased, though it might be a strong word, to participate in the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event in Athabasca, held annually. I was also honoured to be a sponsor and attend the first production ever of *The Vagina Monologues* in Athabasca, with all proceeds going to this organization. This was a spectacularly successful volunteer production and a complete sellout.

Our government is proud to support organizations such as these with stable grant funding. Unfortunately, despite the great work being done to address family violence and gender-based violence in our communities, it remains an ongoing and grave issue, and we will continue to work with them to make life better for those at risk from such violence.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Samuel W. Shaw Middle School

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like all MLAs, I carry a strong amount of pride for all the schools in my riding, but I've been amazed by the work I have seen from a particular one, Samuel W. Shaw middle school.

Last fall I had the opportunity to attend the opening ceremonies of the 2016 Junior High Leadership Conference. With the theme Spark: Ignite. Kindle. Catch Fire, the school held a successful conference for over 500 student delegates and teacher advisers from all over the province. Congratulations to student executive directors Jim Qi, Jasper Hollings, McKenna Olson, Alex Sinik, Lianna Dennis, Anna Hambrook, and Christine Changoor, who helped bring this conference to a CBE school for the first time. A strong credit also needs to be given to the leadership group at Samuel Shaw school as it is no small feat to host such a large event.

Mr. Speaker, while I was leaving, I was proud to see a poster for its inaugural GSA, showing the strong leadership that the school has demonstrated.

Not to be outdone, last month Samuel Shaw held another successful drive through its Shave Your Lid for a Kid, that united people from all around the community, not just the school. Students and teachers shaved their heads, many inspired by people in their lives impacted by cancer, including Heather Farrell, who shaved her head in memory of a student who passed away two years ago. When it was all said and done, Samuel Shaw raised just over \$19,000 towards Kids Cancer Care. Thank you to teacher Phill Noel, who enthusiastically put on this event.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I am proud of Samuel Shaw middle school in Calgary-Shaw as just one example of the goodwill of my constituents, who are, like this government, working to make life better for Albertans.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Labour Legislation Review

Mr. Jean: Yesterday I asked the Premier questions about the labour legislation review. Her answers were anything but forthcoming and certainly didn't provide comfort to concerned workers and business owners who are facing so much uncertainty in Alberta right now. Our economy is already hurting, and we've seen enough strife in the labour movement here. All signs point to the NDP hoping for more unionization as a result of this review. Does the Premier seriously think that more unionization will encourage investment and jobs in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms. Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly understand why people in Alberta would be concerned about issues of uncertainty given that the member opposite can't take a position or keep a position for more than three or four hours at a time. However, on this side we know exactly what we're doing, and what we are doing is engaging in a consultation on employment standards, family-friendly employment standards levels and labour legislation review, something that hasn't been reviewed since Roger Rabbit was in the theatres. What we are doing is moving forward to engage in a meaningful consultation . . .

An Hon. Member: Time.

Ms. Notley: . . . to modernize our labour legislation to actually . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Just to the House, remember that the time – I really rely on these people. They tell me when it's time, so there is no need to mention "time." It's being looked after here.

Mr. Jean: Albertans want stability on the jobs front, not more uncertainty.

Yesterday the Premier said that she'll look at other provinces and – what? – she'll pick from them her favourite labour practices to put in place here in Alberta. Well, that clearly opens the door for the elimination of secret ballot votes for union certification in favour of a union-friendly card-check process. Removing secret ballots would eliminate the workers' right to anonymously vote on whether to unionize away from union leader pressure. The Premier

needs to be clear. Is she intending to do away with the secret ballot for certification? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I did in fact answer this question yesterday, but I can understand that the member opposite might, because of his own experience, think that it's important to check positions every day to see if we still have the same position. But I will say that I still have the same position, and that position is that we are consulting with Albertans on this issue. We will review the outcome of that consultation, and then we will have a discussion on how we proceed to go forward in this Legislature if that should be the plan.

Mr. Jean: When she looks at labour legislation in other provinces, I hope the Premier realizes that half the country has already rejected card check in favour of secret ballots.

She could however learn from our neighbours on how to properly consult on these changes. After Bill 6, I think, she could use a lesson. In 2014 Ontario began reviewing labour legislation. Guess what? It's 2017, and they're still consulting, something unique for this government. In Alberta the NDP plan is to consult for a month on these changes. Since the Premier is looking across the country, will she now pump the brakes and allow two years, which is reasonable, for this labour review?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I understand that given the member opposite's demonstrated inability to reach and keep a decision, dithering is a way to go. However, that is not what we are going to do. What we are going to do is that we are going to consult. We're going to consult with parties on all sides, understanding that there are key issues that people are fully aware of and have been consulted on year after year after year even though no change has been made for decades. We are then going to move forward after fully considering all sides because that is what Albertans elected us to do.

Mr. Jean: So no consultation, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy Costs and Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: Life under the carbon tax means higher costs for seniors' facilities, for social housing, and for other nonprofits. New documents from Wildrose show the repeated attempts late last year by housing management boards, town councillors, and nonprofits to find out how in the world they are supposed to deal with the rising costs of the carbon tax, a tax which will continue to actually cost Albertans more every single year under this NDP government. The answer from the minister: get more energy efficient. Come on. It's shameful. How is taking millions of dollars from seniors and homeless shelters doing anything but making life far worse for Albertans?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the member opposite would be happy to know that a significant portion of people who received the rebate in January from the carbon levy was, in fact, seniors because in many cases seniors are lower and middle-income people. In fact, seniors are ahead of the game right now. Moreover, our minister is moving forward to work with businesses and nonprofits in terms of how they can especially focus on increasing

their efficiency and reducing their energy use, and that will be good for all Albertans.

Mr. Jean: According to these documents seniors are being charged an extra \$120 per year, Mr. Speaker, as a result just of the carbon tax. That number could rise to up to \$300 under this NDP government's plan. What's the carbon tax paying for? Well, a sweetheart deal for an Ontario renewable company. Today the minister confirmed that Ecofitt wasn't the lowest bidder or even the second-lowest bidder for their free light bulb program. How unique. The disrespect this government shows for the hard-earned dollars of vulnerable seniors is shameful. Will the Premier explain to Albertans why the NDP ignored the best deals for the taxpayers and chose to go with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the lowest bids were ones that were found to be incomplete. I'm not surprised that the Official Opposition, the Wildrose, would prefer that we move forward with no energy efficiency program given that they do not want to save Albertans \$112 per year, which is what the direct install residential program will save Albertans. They do not want to create jobs. They want to fire those 70 people that have been hired to deliver that program, and they want to make sure that we're not helping Calgary move forward as we put the energy efficiency agency in that city.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: I agree with an energy efficiency program, Mr. Speaker. I can't think of anything better than an efficiency program to get rid of the NDP.

The CEO of the Kerby Centre, a Calgary organization dedicated to helping older adults and seniors, has said that he expects that the carbon tax will be devastating to nonprofits in Alberta. Charities, nonprofits, and seniors' groups are struggling because of this Premier's carbon tax. Seniors need to be able to afford to pay for a roof over their heads. They're not interested in free light bulbs. Can the Premier please explain how taxing seniors to pay for inflated contracts for out-of-province energy companies helps to make life more affordable for our province's most vulnerable?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago the member opposite was tearing down our energy efficiency program, saying that he was absolutely opposed to it and absolutely opposed to the \$112 a year that the average Albertan would save as a result of that. Now, apparently, he thinks that \$112 per year is something that's really important, and we agree. The member opposite, again, changes his position more often than someone attending yoga classes in my riding. We just can't keep up. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Order. Quiet, please.

Electric Power System

Mr. MacIntyre: On Monday the Premier made it clear that she doesn't know how much the PPA debacle is costing Albertans: well, direct borrowing for the Balancing Pool, \$2 billion; \$151 million from the PPA settlements gone; the 2016 balance that the Balancing Pool had to liquidate, \$705 million, gone; an added consumer charge paid for by ratepayers, \$260 million, and \$1 billion

plus in consumer credit, all gone. Why is this Premier pursuing a course that will cost Albertans over \$4 billion?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the members opposite would not necessarily be familiar with this, but sometimes when you are faced with a very difficult situation that you inherited, you have to make a series of tough decisions. Now, I appreciate that the member opposite is struggling a bit with the issue of decision-making. However, we are not. We knew that when we came in, we had an electricity system that was in the process of melting down and that we had to take action to protect consumers, to protect investors, to protect Alberta industry, and that's exactly what we did.

Mr. MacIntyre: Bad PPA policies will cost Albertans more than \$4 billion. That is more revenue than the carbon tax is expected to generate.

The bad decisions that led us to this point started in the spring of 2015. Just weeks after being elected, the NDP made a decision without consultation to increase the carbon tax on Alberta's electricity generators, resulting in the mass cancellation of PPAs and this hefty \$4 billion in losses. The cost benefit? Albertans would have saved money if the old heavy emitters carbon tax had never been touched. Why won't the Premier roll back this terrible policy?

2:00

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, our government's plan to move forward with pricing carbon in Alberta is directly linked to our successful acquisition of not one but two – two – pipelines, something that, as I've said before, the members opposite, when working together with their cousins in Ottawa, simply couldn't make happen. Sometimes change is tough, but that's what leadership looks like. We are leading the country, we are leading the continent in being a progressive, sustainable energy industry, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. MacIntyre: Killing communities is not leadership.

This NDP government just cannot get anything right on the electricity file. Today we found out the NDP's radical shift to the capacity market led to a credit downgrade for two Albertan job creators. DBRS has chosen to downgrade both Capital Power and TransAlta to a triple-B credit rating. In their reports they specifically cite NDP changes to wholesale power, coal phase-out, and the climate leadership plan. Why won't the Premier stop meddling in the electricity sector, stop hurting our job creators, and stop hurting Alberta families?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I will not do is stick my head in the sand and pretend that there is no problem when there is one. When we were elected, the electricity system was in the process of melting down. The only way to fix it would have been to allow price volatility to increase by 1,000 per cent. That would have been bad for industry, investors, coal companies, consumers, seniors' homes, food banks, everybody. We said no. We stood up for Albertans. We did the right thing.

The Speaker: Hon. members, did you know that today is Deep Dish Pizza Day?

The leader of the third party.

AIMCo Governance

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AIMCo looks after \$90 billion, including many Albertans' pension funds. This is a sacred trust to guarantee the retirement of thousands of hard-working civil servants who have built Alberta over decades. At the heritage fund

meeting AIMCo president, Mr. Uebelein, in response to removal of sections 5 and 6 said, "We respectfully disagree that this is an improvement in our governance" and: we think our governance structure is good. He didn't like the changes. To the Premier: will you take that expert advice and reverse these changes in order to protect the retirement nest egg of thousands of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Finance minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, on this side of the House we absolutely have great confidence in the professionals at AIMCo and respect their independence each and every day. The opposition is misleading Albertans, however.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Ceci: You know, pension plans set out their own broad parameters around the investments they want to occur, and AIMCo carries those things out. The CEO of AIMCo has said that he's assured members of this House repeatedly that there's no involvement with their independence. Their independence is intact. What else does the CEO need to do, to say to the opposition?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The board of AIMCo will require seven new members in the very near future. These will be the first appointed since the changes in regulation removing the requirement that appointees have in-depth financial knowledge. To the Premier. You stated in this House yesterday that the final decisions on board appointments will be made by cabinet. Can you assure this House and thousands of civil servants whose pensions are tied up in what they look after that the new appointees will have the strongest possible financial business acumen to ensure that their pension investment is not compromised?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm getting, I hope, better at answering this question. It's been posed to me many times. The openness and transparencies of ABCs is critically important. All Albertans need to have the opportunity to put their names forward for important ABCs. Only those that have the best credentials for boards like AIMCo will get appointed to those. We have appointed two people, Ken Kroner and Phyllis Clark, with exceptional credentials. They are on the board. I met with the CEO and the chair yesterday, talked about appointments, and they will be coming forward shortly.

Mr. McIver: Those appointments were before the regulations changed, Mr. Speaker.

The Finance minister has been asked repeatedly if he would commit to attending the next committee meeting of the heritage savings trust fund to explain the removal of sections 5 and 6. Even the NDP Party committee chair said: "We could direct an invitation. Absolutely." I will table those quotes today. To the Premier. Since your minister has refused over and over again to confirm his willingness to attend for us, will you at least direct your minister to attend for the NDP members who have also expressed a desire to hear from the minister?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've answered the same question nine times in this House. I want to say that the changes to the openness and transparency for the appointment process are in the best interest of not only AIMCo but of every agency, board, and commission. We have got good people on that board. We are bringing forward and cabinet will approve new appointments to that board soon, and they will have all the board they need.

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

School Fees in Charter Schools

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When Bill 1 was announced, a government news release said, "Alberta parents will no longer have to pay school fees for instructional supplies or materials." As it turns out, this doesn't mean all parents. Rather, to borrow an Orwellian phrase, some parents are more equal than others. In particular, parents who have students in charter schools aren't getting a break on school fees. This is wrong since charter schools operate entirely within the public education system. Their parents should be entitled to the same school fee reductions. To the minister: why is the Minister of Education discriminating against charter school parents?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, by reducing school fees in An Act to Reduce School Fees, we're not eliminating them, but we are making important inroads to reduce school fees across the province. We had to make choices around elimination of different fees in different places. It was very difficult to find the money to in fact do this, you know, but it's worth it because we are putting money back into the pockets of parents when they need it the most. For the 61 school boards here in the province of Alberta that are publicly funded, that is exactly what we are doing.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, according to the government's Charter Schools Handbook, "A charter school is a public school that provides a basic education in a different . . . way." In fact, many charter schools serve marginalized, low-income, and special-needs students. The Association of Public Charter Schools is quite concerned by the decision to exclude them since they are full-fledged members of the public school community. End quote. However, the NDP didn't create charter schools, so perhaps they view them differently. To the minister: does the minister still consider charter schools public? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Charter schools are what they are. They are charter schools. The funding for the reduction of school fees, again, was not in its complete form but that, rather, we are looking to reduce school fees over time. So that is exactly what we are doing. I am very proud of the moves that we have made to reduce school fees, and I think that many Alberta families would concur.

Dr. Swann: Curious, Mr. Speaker, that the criterion was whether they were public or charter, so called, when it's socioeconomic status that would most benefit families. It's quite clear that the NDP government is singling out charter schools for different treatment, one that is more in line with private schools. That's certainly what Public Interest Alberta advocates in their recent media release that urged the government also "to phase out the public funding of private schools . . . and reallocate the money to fulfill its education-related campaign promises." Interestingly, this is exactly the scenario that

Bill 1 sets up. If the minister is planning to defund charter schools, why isn't he telling the Legislature?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, we are putting in money for enrolment and we've increased the enrolment funding for all schools, including charter schools and private schools, too. That is the bulk of where schools actually function. I made a choice – we all did – around reducing school fees for schools here in the province of Alberta. We have done so. I think it's a very proud decision to make to reduce school fees. It will put money back into the pockets of Alberta families and make life easier for Albertans.

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

Carbon Levy and Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the climate leadership plan was announced, one of the main questions I receive from my constituents is around the purpose of the carbon levy. The government projected that the levy would garner \$9.6 billion in total over the levy's first five years. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: how are the funds from the new carbon levy being used?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, two-thirds of Albertans have received a rebate or will over the course of this year to ensure there is no unfair burden to household budgets. Small businesses will see a 33 per cent tax reduction to offset additional costs. That's a tax reduction on small businesses that was not supported by either right-wing party in this House. The carbon levy will also fund energy efficiency programs that will help Albertans lower their emissions, that will help ensure affordability of their bills. That makes life better for everyone even as it creates jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:10

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the various incentives and programs announced by the government, to the same minister: how will Albertans benefit from efficiency programs? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections]
Quiet.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the previous government left Alberta as the only jurisdiction in North America without an energy efficiency program. For example, in our first phase of residential direct install the average family will save \$112 per year. Up to 70 Albertans have already been hired to do this work. Those are good jobs that we're ensuring are reinvesting the carbon levy right back into our communities. We'll have more programs to announce in the coming weeks and months that will save families more money.

You know, it's very confusing to me that the other parties would pick . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the carbon levy grow the economy in this province and get us off the resource roller coaster?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the climate leadership plan led to the approval of two pipelines. Trans Mountain will create 22,000 construction jobs and raise the price of oil. [interjections]

The Speaker: Stop the clock, please. Could we keep the volume down?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Keep the volume down.

Start the clock.

Ms Phillips: Of course, the pipeline approval for Trans Mountain will create 22,000 jobs. It will raise the price of oil by \$3 per barrel.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite in both parties, the Leader of the Official Opposition and his new frenemy over there in the PCs, are looking for a made-in-Ottawa solution. I guess their time in Ottawa makes them feel like a plan imposed on us from the east would make better sense. We know that that's not what's good for Alberta families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway. [interjections] Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Gill: Oh, my friend. Sorry; we kind of look the same. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet. It was my error. Quiet, please.

Hon. member, proceed.

Oil Sands Emissions Cap

Mr. Panda: When the Premier announced her 100-megatonne cap on oil sands development, she was flanked by four major oil companies. Three of them are now buying up the rest of the oil sands operations. Foreign investors, including Shell, who once endorsed her plan, are waving good-bye to Alberta. Now that the big three control the market within the 100-megatonne cap, there is no room for new players. Can the Premier confirm or deny the market rumour that the big three got a sweetheart deal and will be the only ones who will be permitted to grow under the cap?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Phillips: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, the announcement of the climate leadership plan was supported by the oil sands industry and continues to be. I look forward in the supplementals to the members opposite detailing all the ways in which all of our biggest job creators in this province are doing their business wrong. I look forward to them detailing that in the supplementals, dragging their corporate reputations through the mud once again, and I look forward to hearing how they're going to talk Alberta down and hope that we do not succeed in this province. On this side of the House we're putting in place a system whereby our energy industry succeeds and is strong.

Mr. Panda: Given that during Bill 25 Wildrose predicted the cap would cause M and A in the oil sands and that support services jobs like HR and IT would be laid off and given that due to this government's misguided policies, companies are taking their business and moving to investment-friendly regimes like Saskatchewan and Texas, can the Premier explain to all the unemployed Calgarians why putting forward job-killing policies is the right thing to do?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward once again to our right-wing friends over here detailing how Athabasca Oil, CNRL, Cenovus are conducting their business wrong, how they are, in fact, not right in how they are moving forward with making our energy industry strong. The Wildrose opposition should be cheering for these Canadian companies, who have expanded their operations in the oil sands not just with existing assets but with future development assets. Instead, they are talking down Alberta every chance they get, they're not supporting our energy industry, and they're slamming the door on the renewables. It's shameful.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that all the leases snatched by the big three will not be developed because of the risky policies of this government and given that the Crown sold off these leases for the benefit of royalties and jobs, which are now gone, knowing that the resources will not be developed in any timely manner, is the Premier now going to force the oil sands leaseholders to put their undeveloped leases back on the open market for sale, or will the Crown be forced to buy them back, and at what price?

Ms Phillips: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised anymore. This is a side of the House that denies the science of climate change, that doesn't want to support our energy industry to take on the greatest challenge of our time. This is a side . . .

Mr. Panda: Point of order.

The Speaker: Could you please continue, hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this is a side of the House that provides direct funds to films that call into question the science of climate change, propaganda films essentially. This is also a side of the House that disputes what people like the CEO of Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance have said, who have praised moving forward with innovation and technology, saying that they are confident . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Calgary LRT Green Line Funding

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 6 I asked the minister about funding for Calgary's green line LRT, and I was told to go back to school. Well, I did go back to school and found out that in this year's budget there is still no provincial money for this project while the city and the federal government are both committing \$1.53 billion each. To the minister: when will the province come onboard with its one-third share of the funding? Or do I need to go back to school again?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is very committed to supporting LRT development in both Edmonton and Calgary, unlike the opposition, that would cut billions of dollars out of the capital program of our government and make it unaffordable to support these LRT projects to go ahead with them. I've said all along – and we've supported with millions of dollars for planning for that line – that when that design is finalized and we have clear numbers and we get a formal request from the city of Calgary, we will give it very careful consideration.

Mr. Gill: It is ready. The city is ready, Minister.

Given that in this year's Budget Address the Finance minister said, "We look forward to working with both the cities of Calgary and Edmonton to further develop their LRT projects" and given that this government is dedicating \$2.2 billion worth of carbon tax revenue to fund green infrastructure projects, especially low-emission public transit, Minister, since you won't commit to the funding, will you at least confirm that the green line LRT is the kind of project that is an ideal candidate for this kind of funding?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting that the opposition doesn't want us to collect anything under the carbon levy, but they want us to commit it to LRT funding. Well, you can't have it both ways. This government is very, very committed to not only making responsible responses to climate change but to supporting our municipalities to build the LRT systems that they have and to support transit and other things that will reduce the carbon footprint of this government and of this province. The people of Alberta support that.

2:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gill: The carbon tax is killing more revenue than it brings in.

Given that on June 22, 2015, in reply to the Member for Calgary-Hays, the minister said, "When I have a fuller view of the opinions and needs of the city of Calgary, we will be moving forward in due course" and given that Calgary has been hearing the same minister make the same statement for two years now and people are anxious for the jobs that will come with the \$4.6 billion project, to the minister: will it take another two years for you to move forward, which, by the way, is 2019 and, by the way, is election year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I stand by the previous statements that I've made. I'll remind the member that we announced in December of this past year close to \$150 million to support the development of the green line. He's trying to forget that or wants to make sure that people forget it.

As I've said, when the project is finalized, when we get a formal request . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, if I might . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

I'll take care of them, hon. member. Please proceed.

Mr. Mason: He asks a question, but he doesn't want to hear the answer, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: So if I may . . .

The Speaker: I'm going to give you 10 seconds to finish.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the city of Calgary makes a request, we will give it careful consideration. They haven't done that. If the member expects me to respond to him and give him . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Workers' Compensation Board

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, rebates have been issued to employers in past years because of WCB surpluses. WCB policy stipulates refunds to be automatically triggered once the WCB funding ratio exceeds 128 per cent. Preliminary reports peg the fund

at over 131 per cent. This government has been making it harder for businesses to grow and be profitable, especially during this economic downturn, making these rebates all the more important. Minister, will employers indeed be receiving a refund, as in past years, and when can they expect to receive these refunds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We embarked on a review of the Workers' Compensation Board because it is so important that Albertans feel confident that WCB provides fair compensation as well as meaningful rehabilitation. The WCB manages its own funds and will make decisions of its own mind as to what to do with surpluses or other funds. At this point we are currently working with the WCB to make sure we have a system that works for both employers and workers.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that refunds provide an incentive for businesses to maintain safe practices and given that these rebates enable deserving employers with good safety records to focus on growing their businesses, creating jobs and investing in new and safer equipment, and given that the new board members of the WCB have now been appointed and given that the WCB already receives more than adequate funding to carry out its mandate, will the minister let us know if there are any possible justifications for the WCB to withhold refunds, and if so, what are they?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are currently undergoing a review of the WCB so that we can ensure that there is adequate funding, to ensure that we are providing adequate services, to make sure that it is fiscally sustainable because the system had not been reviewed in over 15 years. That was irresponsible. We need to make sure that we have a system that is operating for workers and employers, and that review is currently ongoing.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that the Labour minister announced the review of the Workers' Compensation Board in March 2016 and given that this review examines WCB practices and policies and given that job creators in this province are hearing rumours that the WCB will be increasing premiums despite operating with massive surpluses, will the minister please tell us when the WCB review panel will publish its report, and what is she hearing? Are there any intentions of increasing WCB premiums? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Because it had been over 15 years since the last review, we appointed a three-person panel to take a serious look at the Workers' Compensation Board system. They have been meeting to review all aspects of workers' compensation policy, funding, et cetera. They are submitting their report to me in spring of this year. I'm looking forward to their recommendations. I do not yet know what their recommendations will be finalized as and therefore cannot speculate, but I do know that I'm looking forward to reviewing those recommendations.

Police Services Funding

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, crime is on the rise, and Albertans are worried about their homes, their businesses, and their families. They want assurances that when they call 911, the police will be there. Despite these facts the NDP's budget made no increase to municipal policing. Even worse, the minister told us that she has

not even factored in the new carbon tax. Instead, she told police departments to apply for green efficiency grants. This government is scrimping on police funding. To the minister: are you suggesting a P3 approach, also known as a provincial Prius police force?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I told the member yesterday and will be happy to tell her again, this province provides over half a billion dollars in police funding. We transfer more money to municipalities to support policing than any of our western neighbours. We are incredibly glad that we didn't have to make the deep cuts called for over there that would have slashed that funding. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that money spent on law enforcement should be directed straight to the front-line police officers and given that the government is going to provide millions of dollars solely for the purpose of making police officers and their mode of transportation more efficient, to the minister: is your intention to increase the cavalry? Where will the horses live?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said in my previous answer, this province continues to provide over half a billion dollars in police funding. When the Conservatives in Ottawa, those guys' BFFs, cut the funding for ALERT, this government stepped in and provided that funding.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that the minister hasn't done the math on their risky ideological carbon tax on everything and given that the biggest cost for police is actually the salaries paid to front-line staff and police officers and since the Premier told Albertans to deal with the carbon tax by taking a bus, is the minister expecting municipalities to pick up the tab for the obvious shortfalls, or can our men and women in blue expect bus passes for policing our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we will continue to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet down.

Ms Ganley: . . . provide over half a billion dollars to police in funding. That is something that would not have been possible under the opposition's plan to slash 10 per cent from my budget. That would have impacted the front lines directly. You know, we will continue to fund. They want to slash and burn. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Support for Persons Affected by Violent Crimes

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tragically, on April 15, 2014, Kaiti Perras, Lawrence Hong, Jordan Segura, Josh Hunter, and Zackariah Rathwell were murdered by Matthew de Groot in the worst homicide in Calgary's history. Because Mr. de Groot was classified as not criminally responsible, a mental health review is convened periodically to assess him, and I know that the families

of the victims intend to attend all of these panels on a go-forward basis. To the Minister of Justice. With great respect, these families are continually reliving this horrific incident. Have you met with them in person, and if so, what supports have you offered?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

2:30

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for a very important question. Of course, all families of victims of homicide are incredibly affected by the experience. That's why I've taken so much time to meet with victim support advocates, to meet with a support group for the families of murdered individuals. We know that this is a tragic and difficult circumstance for these people, and that's why we're moving forward with a review of victims of crime funding, to see what additional supports we can provide.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Given that this horrific crime continues to have an impact on Calgary at large but, more specifically, on those who knew the victims as well as all of those who attended postsecondary institutions which the victims were studying at when they were murdered and given that the rights of the victims should always come first, again to the minister: what specific supports has your government put in place to assist with suffering and loss, which numerous Albertans continue to experience because of this horrible crime?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. The government provides an enormous amount of programming through the victims of crime fund that people have access to in order to seek the supports that they need. That victims of crime fund, as people will be well aware, has been reviewed by the Auditor General because of the increasing surplus over the last decade. We are moving forward to ensure that we're doing a gaps analysis, and we're moving forward to make sure that that money gets to where it's intended, to make sure that victims of crime are properly supported.

Mr. Rodney: Families and friends would love to see specifics.

Now, given that this case was presided over by a Court of Queen's Bench justice and is therefore a matter which is within the purview of a federal Minister of Justice and given that the structure of the mental health review panel means that families and friends of the victims must continually relive this tragic incident, something none of us want to see, again to the minister: have you contacted your federal counterpart about this case to advocate on behalf of the victims, families, and friends in order to reduce their suffering in every way possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member will no doubt be aware, the government of Canada is looking at several fronts in terms of reviewing Criminal Code processes. They have acknowledged that this is a shared responsibility between the federal government and the provincial governments, which is great news because the previous government wouldn't do it. Moving forward, we have been having conversations about how to streamline this process and make it easier for everyone, including victims of crime as well as the public.

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

Hospitals in Edmonton

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents and all Albertans deserve the best for their health care and given that the previous government ignored Edmonton's hospital infrastructure for decades, to the Minister of Health: what is this government doing to deliver quality health care to Albertans in Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. For decades Edmontonians saw the previous government ignore their needs when it came to ensuring that their hospitals were maintained and that new growth was addressed. That has come to an end. This government is working to make life better for Albertans living in the city of Edmonton and those who rely on the resources here by announcing a new hospital for the city of Edmonton, work at the Misericordia hospital for the emergency, and important investments at the Royal Alex as well, and I'm so proud to do that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the quality of care in our hospitals is directly related to maintaining staffing in our hospitals and health care centres, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure we have sufficient staffing in all facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of our very first actions as a government was to reverse the reckless cuts that were proposed by the outgoing government. We are so proud to have the lines of men and women who work on the front lines to support our health care system and the families who require those important public services. The last thing Albertans need during a difficult economic downturn is to worry about whether or not a hospital is going to be in their neighbourhood when they have a case of emergency. We're proud to support the public and the public health care system in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Budget 2017 announced \$400 million for a new hospital in the Edmonton region, my constituents want to know: where will this hospital be, and what else can the minister tell us about these plans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the member's riding is full of new houses and young families that are in desperate need of expanded health care services throughout our city of Edmonton and in other parts of the city as well. We're continuing to consider a number of options for the new site, but I have to say that I'm so proud that after waiting decades – the last new hospital for the city of Edmonton was built in the 1980s. The children in the gallery probably can't even imagine what life was like in the '80s. But guess what? In the future their lives are going to be better because this

government is working hard to make sure that we're making their lives better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Coal Strategy

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Environment and Parks business plan on page 66 under Key Strategies it says that the government is "phasing out emissions from coal-fired sources of electricity." That clearly says "phasing out emissions," not phasing out coal. To the minister: do you agree with that statement from your business plan? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very clear that we are phasing out emissions from coal-fired electricity and working with the incumbent generators and the post-2030 plants. We are working with the federal government as well to ensure that if the companies decide to do a conversion, the regulatory environment is there to support that decision and a number of other initiatives. You know, the folks opposite would prefer that we spend \$10 billion, at a minimum – \$10 billion, at a minimum – to invest in risky and unproven CCS technology. That is not an ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah, \$10 billion sounds like the deficit for each of the last two years.

Given that metallurgical coal is used to make iron and steel and that Alberta is home to an immense deposit of high-quality, low-sulphur metallurgical coal and given that the government talks a lot about diversifying the economy and that metallurgical coal has the potential to do just that as it is exported, to the minister: is it your department's plan to phase out metallurgical coal or to stop any new metallurgical coal projects?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is no. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Loewen: Well, finally an answer after hundreds of questions.

If science shows that coal can be burned as clean as other alternatives like natural gas, biomass, et cetera, will you still pursue the complete elimination of coal-fired power?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there's a difference between metallurgical coal and thermal coal, which is why I answered no to that previous question.

Now, it is true that there are some unproven technologies out there and some proven technologies that are extremely expensive, which, I suppose, is why our friends across the way would prefer that we spend \$10 billion on phasing out coal emissions in order to improve Albertans' health and so on. That is not our approach. We are going to ensure that we are helping the generators of those post-2030 plants transition accordingly, Mr. Speaker. We're going to make sure that we create jobs ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Fertilizer Management

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Effective fertilizer management does not only safeguard the environment but also protects farm productivity. Research is being done through funding by the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund to look at crop rotation and fertilizer programs to reduce the production of nitrous oxide. Fertilizer management educated by this kind of research can greatly reduce emissions per bushel of crop. To the minister of agriculture: what program is your government offering farmers to adapt their management practices to reduce intensity of emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I think, first off, we have to recognize the farmers and producers out there for the great work they are doing. The innovation often comes from the industry itself around varied application of not only fertilizers but other chemicals as well, that are seeing improvement and continued improvement in the farming industry right across Alberta, technology that's even exported around the world. I'm proud of our producers and farmers in this province for the innovation work that they are doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers are seeking ways to maximize nitrogen uptake by their crops and given that this helps them ensure that they will get high yields and makes sure there is not excessive available nitrogen not taken up by the crops, to the minister: how are you collecting definitive data for farmers about new fertilizers so they can use it and ensure that these new technologies will work for their practices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the previous answer I talked about the good work farmers are doing. I also want to talk about the good work that our researchers, both federally and provincially, are doing around this. We have two centres in Alberta, the Crop Diversification Centre North and the Crop Diversification Centre South, that are continuously doing work around fertilizers and crops, new and even emerging crops around that fertilizer, applications of it, the development of new ones, et cetera. I'm very proud of the work that our public servants are doing to help. They can do what we are doing, and that makes life better for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that an Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund study done on fertilizer technology and management led to the creation of the Alberta farm fertilizer information and recommendation manager, or AFFIRM, and given that this online tool helps producers apply the right amount of fertilizer while maximizing their yields and profits, to the minister: what are you doing to make more tools like AFFIRM available for farmers to be the best environmental stewards of their land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. The member has also acknowledged that good stewardship that the

farmers are already doing, and he mentioned the manual, that it's not a static manual. Everything should be changing. As all technology changes, so does technology on farms change. There are some extremely interesting things and some very innovative things going out there now. Government will continue to support that innovation through various funding, both through Agriculture and Forestry and Economic Development and Trade, as we go forward in that great, wide, new frontier that farming is.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Members, 30 seconds for those who don't want to stay and enjoy this wonderful experience.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba NDP just passed a new party resolution called – surprise, surprise – Keep It in the Ground. The resolution opposes “the expansion and development of any new pipelines to transport tar sands oil through Manitoba.” This puts them squarely onside with their comrades in B.C. who oppose pipelines like Kinder Morgan. This evokes memories of when the federal NDP held a convention right here in Alberta and voted for the Leap Manifesto, the most radical anti-oil, anti-Alberta doctrine ever put forward in Canadian politics.

We all know the NDP is one big party. There is no B.C. NDP or Manitoba NDP; there is just the NDP. For some reason, however, the members opposite think they're different than their comrades in B.C. and Manitoba. My guess is that they're not basing that assessment on the Premier's hand-picking energy advisers at the oil sands advisory group. After all, Tzeporah Berman calls our oil sands the tar sands, and she compared Fort McMurray to Mordor.

Then we have Karen Mahon. She's campaigned against Kinder Morgan, but she's taking her activism to the next level. As the director of ForestEthics, Mahon is raising money to stop this project. In a letter dated March 26 she urged members to bog the pipeline down in lawsuits and kill it and the thousands of jobs it would have provided. She even moderated a panel last week on how – and I quote from her e-mail – resistance can stop pipelines. After the panel she released a how-to video on protesting and destroying pipelines. Mr. Speaker, an action a day.

The fact that decent, hard-working Albertans are subsidizing Mahon's activities is a disgrace, and this government should be ashamed. The Premier has had many opportunities to do the right thing and show Mahon the door, but she just laughs and shrugs it off. Albertans know this NDP government is working behind the scenes to stop . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Order. Excuse me. I've already said it once. Order, please.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my question today I said that I would table the evidence of the NDP member asking for the minister to come to speak at the next committee meeting, and true to my word, I hope, that's what I'm doing.

The Speaker: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on day 8 of fantastic Public Affairs Bureau tablings. I'm tabling a letter that I wrote on the 9th of March to the hon. Government House Leader. The title of the letter is "On March 21st 2013 [you] said." I have the five requisite copies.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a news release from Public Interest Alberta from February 23 that I mentioned in my question, which urges the government to eliminate private school funding to pay for NDP election promises. I'll table a backgrounder also on private and charter schools from Public Interest Alberta, in which they say: charter schools "are really just private schools that are subsidized by taxpayers." They give reasons for eliminating their funding as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. S. Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2016.

On behalf of the hon. Ms McLean, Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women, a letter dated March 30, 2017, from Jill Clayton, Information and Privacy Commissioner, to Marcia Nelson, Deputy Minister of Executive Council, regarding investigation reports.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you can understand that I don't have the Blues in front of me, but the hon. Finance minister used the word "misleading." Without going into too much detail, I will cite *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, under section 489, where it's labelled as an unparliamentary word, and also on page 148 in section 490 it's an unparliamentary word. I think it's pretty obvious based on that alone that the hon. minister should apologize and withdraw those remarks.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that it's particularly egregious since you warned about this just yesterday and the hon. Government House Leader had to withdraw a similar remark from the Premier just yesterday, yet he hasn't instructed his people to live up to your ruling.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to me that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays knows what I have and have not instructed my caucus to do.

It's clear as well, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member was not really paying attention to the nuances of the ruling because in this particular case the reference was not to an individual member of the Assembly but to the opposition. I remember quite clearly that he talked about: the opposition is misleading. My recollection of the rulings that you've made and other Speakers have made make quite a distinction between accusing a specific member of misleading or, on the other hand, accusing the government or the opposition, in this case, of misleading.

It's pretty clear that there is a difference of opinion with respect to the facts. The hon. minister was suggesting that the opposition is attempting to mislead the public, something with which I concur. All you have to do is take a look at the various statements that they have made with respect to this and other issues to realize that what they're trying to get the public to believe and what the facts are are two quite different things in many cases.

With respect, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that there is a point of order here.

2:50

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

I wonder if he'd turn his chair around.

Thank you.

Let me be clear on what the Blues do say. "The opposition is misleading Albertans, however." That was the sentence. The point that the Government House Leader made is correct. It is always context in which one interprets the use of the words. In the instance yesterday there was a specific member that was identified and a specific phrase, in fact reinforced twice. That matter was withdrawn. In this instance it was to a general – so technically I don't believe it was a point of order.

However, how many times do you want to use the words "misleading," "context," "untrue," et cetera? It just, you know... [interjections] Hon. members, please don't interrupt when I'm speaking. Try and decide as a group amongst yourselves if this is productive use of time in this place. I'm sure you can go on and on forever about this, but you've heard me talk so many times about this, so I guess you have to share responsibility along with me. So not technically a point of order, but I would ask that all of the members be conscious of the way in which you use the words.

Second point, the Opposition House Leader, I think.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to this point of order and speak directly to comments that were made by the Minister of Education when he used abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder, which, for those following along at home, is Standing Order 23(j). While I am certain that the comments that the Minister of Education made will not be recorded in the Blues as they certainly...

The Speaker: Hon. member, if I can just clarify the process: are you speaking to a point of order that might have been initially raised by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks?

Mr. Cooper: That's correct.

Mr. Mason: Can you say what time it was?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. I'm getting there.

I'll be the first to admit that from time to time the temperature rises in the Chamber. Mr. Speaker, you will know that this is not a classroom, nor should it be one. This is a place where we battle for ideas that are important to Albertans. So from time to time the ire will get raised. While the minister may think the opposition are idiots, it would be wildly inappropriate of him to use that language in this Chamber. The minister certainly will know that that is what he said although it may not appear in *Hansard*, and I'm certain that it's not in the Blues. He knows, and he should withdraw and apologize for the language that he used.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, any comments?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I recognize that question period brings out all kinds of aspects of people's personalities and so on which may appear to people on the other side as strange or different or otherwise, you know, unexplainable. That probably goes on both sides. I think that maybe the minister had some of those thoughts about the activities of the Member for Calgary-Greenway when I was trying to answer his questions. I think he was rather excited. However, I don't think that his behaviour deserved to be called, as has been suggested, idiotic.

I know that the Official Opposition House Leader doesn't really expect people to admit to their errors, but I did receive a note from the Minister of Education, who had to be at another important meeting. He said: I think the Wildrose might have called a point of order on me when I called the Calgary-Greenway member an idiot; I'm sorry. On behalf of the Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker, I am authorized to offer an apology, and I do so and withdraw the comments. Calgary-Greenway is not an idiot.

The Speaker: It's withdrawn. I just wish that the temperature would stay at this level rather than the other levels it gets to.

Thank you to the member.

Opposition House Leader, I think we have point of order 3. Is that correct?

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Foothills, again, language that's likely to create disorder. On numerous occasions inside this Chamber my hon. colleague from Calgary-Foothills, who is a very respected engineer outside of this place and is a passionate believer in science and is certainly not a climate change denier – during his question the minister of the environment made accusations about being a climate change denier. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you've spoken at length about the context. I know that you have specifically warned the minister of the environment about making such allegations directed towards the Member for Calgary-Foothills. I would suggest that it would be helpful for decorum in this House if she would refrain from using that language, making those allegations, just as you have also suggested, sir.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I did listen carefully to the exchange. You know, contrary to the previous rule about not naming a specific member and it not being an offence to talk about a group, government or opposition, as misleading – I think that this is kind of the opposite, where the minister was actually talking about specific members on the other side.

Now, the Wildrose has been at great pains to stand up and say: you can't call us as a group climate change deniers. What they really mean is: well, Mr. Speaker, you can't do that because some of us are not. However, the opposite of that is that some of them are, and in this particular case the minister was referring, I think,

specifically to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat's actions in funding a film or a video that denies climate change. On that basis she was referring, not using the term "climate change deniers," to some members on the opposite side who deny the science of climate change. As I recall, those were the words that she used. It's pretty evident that that's true. It ought not cause disorder.

I recognize that Calgary-Foothills has been at great pains to stand up and to clarify his position that he, unlike some of his colleagues, does not deny the science of climate change. I accept that. I believe clearly that that member has a scientific approach to this issue and is not a denier of human-caused climate change, as most of the scientists in the world and most serious and responsible political . . . [interjections] You see there, Mr. Speaker? They're arguing that most scientists in the world do not believe in human – so it's just evidence that, you know, if you just toss out a few little fish, there are going to be some dolphins that are going to jump out of the water, and they just can't help themselves.

3:00

It's pretty clear that there's a good bunch over there that, you know, have serious doubts about the scientific consensus about the impact on the planet, but that doesn't mean all of them do. In that respect I acknowledge that the Member for Calgary-Foothills does not deny the science of climate change, but others may do that. The minister was stating that, and I think that she was on very solid ground in doing so, so I do not believe that there is a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, what was said, which I believe was the matter on point, was: "This is a side of the House that denies the science of climate change, that doesn't want to support our energy industry to take on the greatest challenge of our time." That was the word. It is not in other situations technically a point of order.

Again to the same point, I'm not sure if it resonates with this Assembly or not, but how many times can we ask that members stay away from words like "misleading," "climate change"? That phrase has caused . . . [interjections] When do you want to change the place, folks? It's up to you. Do you want to discuss . . . [interjection] Please. Enough points of order. Excuse me. It's so much on my mind that it sticks with me.

Hon. members, the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of main estimates. This afternoon Families . . . [interjections] I know you are all very attentive. This afternoon Families and Communities will consider the estimates of Status of Women in the Rocky Mountain Room. Tomorrow morning Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Community and Social Services in the Rocky Mountain Room, and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates of Transportation in the Parkland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:03 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, April 6, 2017

Day 17

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel	Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer		Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKittrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKittrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKittrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
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Barnes	Malkinson
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Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 6, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

If we could all bow our heads and pray or reflect, each in our own way. As we conclude our work for this week in this Assembly, allow us to return to our constituencies and be reminded of the powerful diversity that exists in our communities. These communities are home to various cultural, ethnic, and diverse people who give this province and our country its very unique and special identity. Let us embrace, recognize, celebrate, and show respect for them by finding ways in which we can agree in here.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very distinguished visitor, the consul general of Israel, Galit Baram. She's accompanied by Stan Fedun, government relations officer at the consulate in Toronto. The consul general brings a wealth of international experience to her posting in Canada, including serving as counsellor for Public Affairs and Academic Affairs at the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, counsellor for Economic Affairs in Cairo, and most recently as director for the Department for Palestinian Affairs and Regional Cooperation. Canada and Israel are long-time friends and also share a free trade agreement. Most Albertans would be surprised to know that Israel has significant reserves of oil and gas. Alberta, of course, has considerable experience in this field and welcomes opportunities for further collaboration. I'd like to thank the consul general for her visit to Alberta and ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to our Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to rise again for the third day in a row to introduce part 3 of the staff, students, and parents from C.W. Perry school in the wonderful and beautiful constituency of Airdrie, which is also part of the fifth-largest school district in the entire province, the Rocky View school division. I will introduce the teachers and then the chaperones. Please rise as I call your name: Mr. Rob Saipé, Ms Katelyn Dutton, Mr. Brian Jackson, Ms Stephanie Wilson, Miss Michelle De Cruz, and chaperones Mr. Rick Roberge, Mrs. Veronica Gutierrez, Mrs. Jenifer Landels, Mr. Gary Seabrook, Mrs. Erin Forsyth – she's a relation, maybe, to our former leader – Mrs. Jamillah Folkes, Mr. Michael Stormont, Mrs. Shelley Huebner, Mr. Shane Vincent, Mrs. Sarah Hughes, and Mrs. Andrea Van Sluys. Students please rise as well and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

I realize that the Member for Airdrie has filled the galleries with students today, but I do need to check: are there any other members who have classes with us today?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly Miss Mila Pesevic and Ms Brittney Vander Linden. Mila is a grade 6 student from Dunluce school in Edmonton, and she is studying the different roles in the Alberta Legislature. Today she is visiting to learn about the project she is doing on the Speaker of the House, and of course she wants to see us all on our very best behavior. She is accompanied by her teacher, Ms Brittney Vander Linden. Mila and Brittney are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from Strathcona county library, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary and the bookmobile's 35th. Today with us we have Sharon Siga, the CEO; Diana Balbar, the bookmobile manager; Sally Neal, communications specialist; and Leah Lewis, who is a member of the board. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine, Brian Crawford, and his mother, Venora Galon. Brian has been an off-leash ambassador since the beginning of 2013 and is a volunteer for Working Dogs Day, that is held in Calgary annually. May I say that I always look forward to this event. These talented dogs are vital in helping serve Albertans every day. His mother, Venora, lives here in Edmonton, and she is a corporate tax consultant and is also a volunteer for Working Dogs Day. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the Alberta Common Ground Alliance, representing some of Alberta's leading companies with buried infrastructure. Every year thousands of buried facilities are accidentally damaged by digging activities, disrupting services or, worse, causing injury or death. Research shows that over \$1 billion in damage is caused every year in Canada to buried infrastructure. April is national dig safe awareness month, and many hon. members are wearing the Dig Safe pin today and will be taking part in awareness activities. The alliance is working hard to keep Albertans safe by raising awareness. I'd like to personally remind Albertans to click before you dig for any projects affecting buried infrastructure even if it's as simple as putting a fence in your backyard. I thank the alliance for joining us and for their advocacy. If you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Joe Sparling, president of the Postdoctoral Association of the University of Calgary and chair of the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars. Dr. Sparling holds a PhD in neuroscience from the University of British Columbia, researching treatments for spinal cord injuries. His postdoctoral work at the Hotchkiss Brain Institute at the University of Calgary is focused on understanding the nature of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. I thank Dr. Sparling for his contributions to the academy and Alberta, and I ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

School Nutrition Program

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has announced an expansion of its school nutrition program. It's a meal program that will help students get a healthy start to their day and help them focus on their learning. It's one way that this government is making lives better for Albertans, and I couldn't be prouder. This program will now be available to every school district in the province. That means students from every single corner of Alberta will now have fresh, nutritious meals and snacks. At some of the schools the kids themselves get to be involved in the preparation of the food.

Now, I'm so proud that this budget is funding this program's expansion, but I was shocked to learn that the Leader of the Opposition questioned the value of a wholesome nutrition program for kids. He seemed to doubt that kids ever go to school hungry. He didn't seem to understand that well-intentioned parents sometimes don't have the means to pack a healthy lunch for their kids. The Leader of the Opposition seemed to suggest we should cut this program. When the Wildrose says that Alberta can't afford school nutrition for kids, it shocks me, Mr. Speaker, because you can't balance a budget on the back of ham sandwiches and apple slices.

Mr. Speaker, I say that we can't afford a generation of kids who go through school hungry. I say that we can't afford to have kids worry about not bringing lunch rather than working on their class projects. And I say that we can't afford these heartless Wildrose and Conservatives who can't recognize after 44 years in power that there are hungry children in schools and we need to fix that. In a province like ours every single child deserves a shot at learning, with a full belly instead of a rumbling one, and I can't think of a better way to make lives better for children across Alberta.

Thank you.

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

1:40

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The spirit of any great nation stems from great moments in their histories, moments that define them. Sadly, these moments are often conjured during war, where the true soul of a country is laid bare. For Canada no one need look any further than the Battle of Vimy Ridge to understand the defining spirit of what it means to be a Canadian.

In 1917, just 50 years removed from Confederation, our country was still considered by many of the world to be part of the British Empire. Far from home 100 years ago we had one of the greatest moments. We accomplished what had been deemed by many to be

impossible, the capture of Vimy Ridge. The French and the British both had paid a terrible toll in previous attempts to capture the ridge. The ridge had become a symbol itself of the Great War, a symbol of death and despair.

Young, wide-eyed Canadians in their olive-green uniforms trained and trained for months in preparation for this battle. This was the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps would work together as one Canadian unit. On that cold Easter morning, in the face of enemy fire, snow, and sleet, we lost thousands. But our soldiers advanced, and they captured the ridge piece by piece. It was an absolutely stunning victory.

Our effort was celebrated the world over as a distinctly Canadian effort. No more was Canada just a dominion of the British Empire. At Vimy Ridge a nation, the nation of Canada, was truly born. So strongly had we distinguished ourselves that when the Treaty of Versailles was signed, ending the war, we weren't included with the British Empire; we stood proudly as Canada.

It's been 100 years this weekend since that great battle. We owe everything to these brave Canadians who stood for freedom, who fought for all of us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chronic wasting disease, CWD, is a highly contagious, fatal, transmissible brain disease that threatens both wildlife and the entire agricultural sector. CWD spreads among cervids – deer, elk, moose, and caribou – and persists and remains infectious in the environment. An expert scientific panel years ago confirmed that CWD came to Alberta through captive elk imported from the U.S. in the '80s. It is a sister disease to BSE, or mad cow disease, which crippled the agriculture sector in the U.K. and seriously compromised our own beef industry for a decade.

CWD is vastly more difficult to contain than BSE because the infectious prions move readily between living animals and have repeatedly actually jumped species barriers. The 2016 Alberta government update indicated that "the geographic distribution of CWD continues to expand" and now includes the Milk River, Red Deer River, North Saskatchewan River and northeast Alberta.

CWD poses a significant threat on at least two levels. The first is biological. In addition to animal-to-animal transfer, it persists in the environment and can infect other cervids through the soil and infect root systems of the plants growing in CWD-infected soils. This jeopardizes wildlife ecosystems and hunting- and wildlife-based communities such as our First Nations, who depend on deer and elk for food.

The second threat is economic. With the science and biological threats now documented, it's only a matter of time before large markets such as Europe recognize CWD as a risk to their own wildlife, their landscapes, and their economies. This may result in a ban on North American agricultural products. Without immediate action to address these risks, repercussions are enormous. Only immediate, aggressive, and co-operative interprovincial control measures will mitigate this growing risk in both sectors. We need to remember the lessons from BSE and do something to get ahead of this.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Urban Development in Calgary-Klein Constituency

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Urban development is a fine balance of creating density with livability, public transportation, and maintaining safe and enjoyable green space. In Calgary's greatest riding, Calgary-Klein, a four-tower development that could be home to nearly 2,000 people is being proposed on the site of a former nine-hole golf course.

Recently the affected community associations, Highland Park and Thorncliffe Greenview, as well as several community members throughout the area and the nonprofit group Calgary River Valleys held the Rally in the Valley. The Rally in the Valley highlighted the concerns that residents have in regard to the proposed development. This development will see the removal of nearly 600 mature trees of all varieties that are home to many species of birds. The area is also a thriving wetland that serves as a stormwater management solution for north-central Calgary. Confederation Creek also runs through the area but has been vaulted for many years. It, too, helps with moving rainwater from the area.

Mr. Speaker, I know the people of these communities, and they are not NIMBYists. They believe in densification and livable, vibrant communities. They just want it done right, and they don't believe that the project should have been approved before the regional water study was available. In Edmonton the buried Mill Creek was daylighted, and the same could be done for Confederation Creek. Instead, Confederation Creek is slated to be buried beneath tonnes of backfill, potentially increasing the risk of flooding.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, an opportunity is being missed where purposeful urban planning and conservation come together to create a development that truly adds to the city of Calgary. Ultimately, the development could have been more innovative and thoughtful, and the city of Calgary should have pushed for design excellence before approving the plan. Conservation and meaningful community engagement should not be an afterthought for development but an integral part of development. Rest assured that we haven't heard the last from these communities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Strathcona County Library 40th Anniversary

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Strathcona county library is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. My guests today are representatives from the library's initiatives that are made possible because of them. I am proud to be part of a government that is making life better by supporting these local initiatives. The library's tagline is Your Place for Literacy, Leisure and Learning. I have personally experienced all of that and more.

I immigrated to Canada from Colombia when I was six years old, and I have fond memories of going from school to the Strathcona county library in its then temporary location of many years. I had immigrant parents who had limited money, but they always provided me with opportunities, and walking into that library was just that, with every resource at your fingertips. I found the library to be a safe, welcoming place where I could gather information about my new home, and sometimes settling into a new community is hard. The library resources and services which were not otherwise available to me allowed me to explore a new way of life and new surroundings.

I know my appreciation of the library is not unique. So many people in our community use these services. To expand its reach and to provide services to rural communities, the bookmobile was

established 35 years ago. The first bookmobile was converted from a donated school bus. In 2012 its unique design won an award for innovation in public service.

I stand here today to congratulate the organization and to thank them for the positive impact they've had on me and on our community.

Thank you.

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

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the best decisions by government are made at the most local level by the people that are most directly affected, and I believe that the Charter of Rights and the Alberta Bill of Rights are trusted tools to be used to create a just society that lives in harmony. I believe that parents have the primary responsibility for making the key decisions in their minor children's lives, and while the government has the right to act and make laws, those actions and laws must represent the will of the people and respect their rights. A democratic government has the right to rule, but it is restricted by the rule of law and what would be considered reasonable in a free and democratic society.

I've been told by many Albertans that the actions of this government are very worrisome. This government supported an amendment that challenged the right of parents to a diversity of educational choice and then withdrew it under pressure from the opposition. This government used their power to deny 3,500 students and parents their school of choice, and it took the courts to force the government to address the issue in a reasonable, democratic fashion. The Minister of Education inserted himself into a locally developed course because he believed the course to be a throwback to the 1950s and therefore not what schools should be teaching modern young women. Not the minister's call. The government has threatened to defund and to deregulate two independent religious schools, and the minister has ordered schools not to inform parents under any circumstances if their children attend a GSA as if he believes the government is the guardian of those children.

While the government has a duty of protection, it cannot use that as an excuse to restrict parental authority and informed decision-making as outlined by the law. While the government has the responsibility to oversee education, it must respect the rights of parents, diversity of educational delivery, the right to equitable access to taxpayer funding for education, the right to freedom of religious belief, and the rule of law. This kind of balance, this restricted use of power, is the hallmark of democratic decision-making and one that I will defend on behalf of my constituents.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Service Contract Negotiations

Mr. Jean: Here is the state of Alberta today: 81,000 full-time jobs have disappeared since this government came into power; 100,000 Albertans are on unemployment insurance; and for those that have exhausted all other options, well, there are nearly 55,000 Albertans relying on income support. That's 20,000 more than just two years ago. This is what's going on outside of the dome here at the Legislature. People are suffering. Albertans are out of work and cannot afford more pay hikes and perks. Why, then, does the Premier refuse to take pay hikes off the table for the public sector?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I have said I don't know how many times now – a lot of times – our government is absolutely committed to negotiating in good faith with the good people who work hard for the people of Alberta in the best interests of Albertans and in the best interests of taxpayers. But in order to ensure that we do that well, we are also going to respect the collective bargaining process, and that is where we are going to do that job. We are not going to do it in this House with the member opposite screaming for people's heads. That gets us nowhere.

Mr. Jean: As of April 1 74 collective bargaining agreements ran out; 400 will be gone in 2017. In just two years public-sector compensation is already on course to go up by a billion dollars. A billion dollars. Alberta is on track to be \$71 billion in debt. That means billions of dollars going towards billions of dollars of interest payments every single year instead of what we need them to go towards, sustaining the public service. This is simple. We don't have any more money left. We can't risk digging ourselves into even a deeper hole. Why doesn't the Premier agree with this?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think, you know, it's interesting when the member talks about what we have money for and what we don't have money for. The member opposite wants us to move forward aggressively on giving \$600 million back to the wealthiest Albertans, who are struggling to make ends meet on \$300,000 a year, and at the same time the member opposite needs six or seven weeks to figure out if he's in support of a mere \$10 million program to feed hungry kids in school. There are choices that are being made, and I think we're making the right ones.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Average weekly earnings were nearly 4 per cent less at the end of January than when the NDP took power, Mr. Speaker. Four per cent. Life for Albertans outside of the cozy halls of this government has been brutal. I've looked families in the eyes who have lost everything, their jobs and their homes. Borrowing indefinitely with no plan to pay it back is simply wrong. It is the wrong move. We can protect jobs without driving our province further into debt. We can. Why can't the Premier just tell the public sector right now that there is no money left, freeze salaries?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the taxpayers of Alberta are really lucky . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Notley: . . . that we're in the process, that we're in the chair, and that we're the ones that are leading bargaining because if the member opposite were in charge, you know what would happen? The whole bargaining process would be sent to the courts, and we'd have the Supreme Court of Canada telling us to redo it five years from now, creating a whole bunch of confusion and uncertainty for Albertans, for their families, for investors, and everyone else. Thankfully, we understand the bargaining process even though they don't. We will respect it. We will do the best we can for Albertans, and that's what they elected us to do.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement

Mr. Jean: The most up-to-date crime statistics available in our province show that crime is on the rise in our big cities and in our

rural areas all across Alberta. Albertans want to feel safe where they live. They want to know that when a crime is committed, the accused will see their day in court. I know the Justice minister has made progress with Crown appointments, and that is good news, but we know that that alone won't be enough. It's simply not going to be enough. What is the Premier doing to ensure that resources are properly allocated and that we reduce backlog in our courts as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting. One question is a cut question; the next question is a spend question. It's really hard to kind of keep track of it all. Thankfully, though, we have a minister in this government, the minister in charge of Justice, who has been advocating very strongly to improve and to strengthen our system of justice to ensure that our communities are safe, that our rural communities are safe, that our courts are working better. She's done brilliant work, not yelling at the federal government but talking with the federal government, getting us judges that we've been waiting a decade for. All of this stuff is getting results for Alberta families and building security.

Mr. Jean: Actually, Mr. Speaker, it's about good management of money that doesn't belong to them; it belongs to the people of Alberta.

Recently the Justice minister talked about the importance of police spending more time on the streets and less time filling out paperwork. I think that's a good idea. I couldn't agree more. Efficient use of our existing resources is crucial to ensure that justice is actually served. We hear stories of communities trying to do what they can for law enforcement. They have now done that because of the cap on resources, Mr. Speaker. What specifically is the Premier doing to reduce red tape and time filling out paperwork so that our police can spend their time on the streets instead of filling out that paperwork?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to get up and talk about this. In the last session we passed a bill that made it the case that warrants won't be issued for minor criminal offences so that police are not spending their time on C-Train tickets but on more serious things. Also included in that bill was a portion that allowed them to do e-ticketing so that they don't have to fill out paperwork. In addition, our Crown prosecutors will be taking over bail as a result of a bail review we did, and that will put way more police officers back out on the streets. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Jean: I know there were many frustrated residents in Chipman last week after a double homicide took place. While the officers who responded to the call were able to apprehend a suspect – and I thank the RCMP for their hard work – there were serious concerns about the extended length of time it took for the officers to arrive on the scene. It diminished the feeling of safety in the community, Mr. Speaker, and I think all Albertans believe that it diminishes the feeling of security. What actions is the Premier taking to ensure that when an Albertan calls 911, help is on the way in a timely manner, especially when a violent crime is occurring?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, every Albertan deserves to feel that they live in a safe community. That's why we work very closely with the RCMP on such issues. Certainly, deployment is a matter within their jurisdiction, but one of the things that helps police the most is to ensure that they aren't spending a lot of their time at calls that are maybe not best placed with police. That's ensuring that people have access to housing. It's ensuring that people have access to education and hot lunches at that education. It also involves ensuring that they have access to the health care system. So we are making those investments to ensure that the police can be used for dangerous criminals.

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

Care Worker Safety

Mr. Nixon: Valerie Wolski was a 41-year-old care worker assigned to care for a developmentally disabled man. He had a history of aggression, especially towards females, and was a giant of a man. Pages of his file were hidden from Valerie's employer. Although it had taken several RCMP officers to previously subdue him, Valerie was left alone to supervise him. As a result, Valerie was strangled to death in 2011. It wasn't until February that the fatality inquiry was released. What has the minister done to ensure that what happened to Valerie will never happen again?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the front-line workers that provide care for vulnerable individuals and disabled individuals in our province do an amazing job in supporting and protecting them. The sacrifices that they make should never mean that they aren't supported to do their job safely. These tragic, terrible events clearly highlight the importance of ensuring that we provide the safety to our staff.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in terms of supporting our care providers, we remain committed to their safety and well-being, and we remain committed to continuing to work through our ministry and with contract providers ...

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: What happened to Valerie wasn't a new problem. There was already a recommendation to mitigate the hazards of working alone. The judge wrote, "One is left to wonder whether [Valerie] would be alive today if the recommendations made ... back in 2008 had been followed." The ministry should be tracking and implementing the recommendations that come out of these expensive public fatality inquiries. Will the minister confirm that recommendations are being tracked, and if so, why can't even our judges find out whether her department is paying attention to these recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Well, of course, the member opposite is absolutely right. Throughout the history of this process recommendations arising from fatality inquiries have not been tracked. That is why our government is moving forward to develop a database so that we can follow up on these recommendations, so we can track responses by both outside agencies and by government.

Mr. Nixon: The judge's fatality inquiry report rerecommended that at no time should a caseworker be assigned to a resident that the caseworker cannot physically manage, but just a few days after the report was released to the public, there was another serious attack on a caseworker at Elk Island youth ranch. Heather Vanderzee was alone and was almost murdered by two teenage boys. Will the minister please update us on the status of that rerecommendation and tell us what she is doing to make sure that our hard-working, compassionate care workers are protected and will not be killed at work?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It goes without saying that we should be doing everything we can to protect the workers who make the sacrifices to take care of Albertans. You know, after that terrible event we've certainly been working with the Elk Island youth ranch, had their licence on conditional status, and are working with day-to-day oversight with them. There are a number of investigations that looked into that. The RCMP are investigating. Certainly, internally we're doing a review of policy and licensing requirements, and we will act quickly on any findings because, absolutely, we need safety for our contracted staff and we remain committed to ensuring that happens.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. leader of the third party.

Job Creation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For months this government has been spinning like tops, trying to convince Albertans that they have a handle on the economy. The Finance minister goes on about green shoots while more Albertans than ever need public income support programs to make ends meet. According to U of C public policy more than 50,000 Albertans are currently on income supports as of January, and the numbers are only climbing. To the Premier: since your income diversification and job creation plans have failed so miserably, what are you doing so that more Albertans than ever don't need income support?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much to the member for that important question because, of course, we do know that as a result of the drop in the price of oil and the recession that our province is just trying to come out of right now, people have lost their jobs and families have lost their incomes. One of the things that this government is doing is having their backs. That's something that wouldn't happen if \$4 billion was taken out of our operating in one given year, which is exactly what the member opposite proposed to do when they introduced their draft budget. Thankfully, our government is in charge. We're doing everything we can to support Albertans, and we are continuing to work on job creation.

Mr. McIver: The government has Albertans' tax, not their backs.

While government handouts might be saving some Alberta families a few bucks here and there, what they really need are jobs: good-paying, full-time jobs, not the temporary and part-time jobs this government constantly settles for. U of C researchers say that the number of people relying on income assistance is as useful an indicator of economic health as GDP or unemployment data, and by all of these measures the NDP is failing miserably. To the Premier: what do you have to say to the tens of thousands of Albertans forced to rely on income assistance because your

government has failed to create the jobs over three jobs programs that you promised? What are you going to do?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll direct the member to look at the Alberta jobs plan document, which is what our government is doing to help diversify the economy through a number of initiatives. We introduced two new historic tax credits, ones that the business community asked the previous government for for decades, which they failed to deliver on. It took a New Democrat government to listen to businesses, to come up with two tax credits that are going to help grow and diversify our economy.

Mr. McIver: The shiny magazine isn't getting people jobs, Mr. Speaker.

As we've said time and again, nobody blames the government for the price of oil. It's how they've responded that's made it so much worse for Albertans: several job creation plans that have created no jobs, an economic diversification strategy that is relying on the craft brewing industry to pull all of us out of the recession, reckless and irresponsible spending today at the expense of the prosperity of our children and grandchildren. We all like beer, Premier, but don't you think it's time that some of the other economy got some help from you? Albertans need help. They need jobs. They need economic opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's why our government is doing things like investing \$30 billion in infrastructure, creating 8,000 to 12,000 jobs a year. That's why our government is making capital available to small businesses and to entrepreneurs. That's why our government cut the small-business tax by one-third. Those are all things that we are doing to diversify the economy. You know what else we're doing? We're investing in renewable energy and becoming a North American destination for renewable energy infrastructure and investment. There's so much that we're doing. I'm very excited, and we'll keep at it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 20 years I've worked with families and individuals accessing AISH, and there have been serious issues about this program, including accessibility, efficiency, and transparency. Given that the Auditor General raised these same concerns about long-lasting issues plaguing AISH, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what action is this government taking to address these important concerns?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I'm proud to be part of a government that is making life better for more than 55,000 Albertans who rely on this important program. We inherited long-standing issues with this program, and we took action, and we publicly posted our plan that will help us improve this program. As well, I've also posted a video for those who rely on this support to understand this plan. We are making significant changes, and we hope that will make life better for many who rely on this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the AG's report he raises concerns about accessibility of the AISH program. Given that people accessing this program are among the most vulnerable people in Alberta and that they rely on successful and timely access to AISH, what steps is the government taking to make sure that the AISH program is easier to access and use by Albertans who need it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We are absolutely committed to making sure that the program responds to the needs of Albertans. I am very proud that we are improving the accessibility by making the AISH application simpler, launching a new website with user-friendly information, and developing guides for Albertans who need help. We are also improving the appeal process and public reporting to ensure the program works for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to hear that this government is taking action after so many years of neglect. To the same minister: when will these changes be implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, again. We are committed to making significant changes to the AISH program to make it work better, and we plan to have all the work completed by December 2017. During the coming months ahead we will keep Albertans up to date on what is being done to improve this program. Most importantly, we will continue to listen to the people with disabilities to make sure that all of the provincial programs relating to disabilities work for their benefit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Energy Efficiency Rebate Program Contract

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When asked if the bid package was designed specifically for their Ontario friends at Ecofitt, the environment minister was incensed, claiming the process was open and transparent, and, quote, they were the lowest cost provider, end quote. Well, it looks like this government has misled Albertans again. According to the same minister during estimates yesterday, Ecofitt was actually the third-lowest bid. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: was the government lying when it said that Ecofitt was the lowest cost, or did they mean to say it was the lowest cost from a company with an NDP world view?

2:10

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to reiterate what was said yesterday by the minister, there were a number of criteria, including the completeness of the package and the ability to deliver the full program, that were taken into consideration. In terms of the completeness of the package and the ability to fulfill, this was the lowest bid that met all of the criteria. But I want to say to the member who asked the question that in the city of Grande Prairie there are over a thousand people who have signed up for this

program, and when people discredit it, they discredit those Albertans who are finding these programs useful and helping them save money and are choosing to sign up for it. I think that's really disrespectful to the people who gave that member his job.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government lied and it's just the latest reason Albertans can't trust this government and given that the NDP is ripping millions of dollars away from charities and . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you surprise me that you would, after all of the discussions we've had on this matter, so early on be so emphatic with that kind of comment. Before you move on any further, please reconsider the words that you're using in this House.

You have 20 seconds. [interjections]

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government misled . . .

The Speaker: Excuse me. I don't need comments from other members as well when I make a ruling. Please, hon. member.

Proceed. You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government misled the people and it's just the latest reason Albertans can't trust this government and given that the NDP is ripping millions of dollars away from charities and families and destroying local energy efficiency businesses, all to the benefit of their friends in Ontario, that aren't even giving us the best deal, does the minister realize how insulting this is to Albertans? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to highlight some of the other good work that's happening in attracting businesses from across this country to set up offices in Calgary. The members opposite talk about the outrage at having vacancies in Calgary, and we're doing something to make sure that those are filled. We're attracting good investment to the province of Alberta. Let's talk about some other ridings represented by the Official Opposition. What about in Fort McMurray, where over 800 households have signed up for this very program? They're putting \$112 back in their own pockets, and we're proud to be the government that's making that happen.

The Speaker: Your second supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. Given that this was a pretty simple question and the government didn't tell the truth to Albertans when it was said that this was the lowest cost provider, did the minister know Ecofitt was not the lowest cost bid? If she did know, why did the government not tell Albertans the truth?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would ask that you please withdraw the statement "did not tell the truth." Would you please withdraw the statement? Hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: I apologize for the way I said what I meant.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work our government is doing to make sure that we're making life more affordable for Alberta families. That's why we're taking a made-in-Alberta solution. I know the members opposite are used to getting direction from Ottawa, but we're taking a made-in-Alberta solution. We're moving forward to make sure that Albertans can put money back in their own pockets, and Albertans are signing up for this program. In the city of Calgary alone over 37,000 households have signed up

for this very program. We're proud to support these residents and residents in all parts of Alberta in making their lives more affordable.

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

Marijuana Legalization

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has said that it will introduce legislation to legalize marijuana in a few weeks, but over the past year it has made it clear that its legislation will leave much of the regulation and administration of recreational marijuana to the provinces. Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia have all been busy analyzing their policy options and even introducing stopgap legislation. To the minister: other than travelling to Colorado, what specific areas of policy work is your ministry working on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We'll probably have to take the answer offline since I won't get it out in 35 seconds. Some of the areas we've started working on have to do with who's going to handle retail, who's going to handle distribution. How do we best keep pot out of the hands of young people in our province? How do we continue to keep our roadways safe as legalization comes forward? Those are our sort of main areas of focus and priority, but we will have lots and lots to say about this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the Justice minister has admitted that there's an enormous amount of work that needs to be done in the province to prepare for recreational marijuana and given that provincially controlled issues include making decisions about, you know, where marijuana can be sold, the age of consumption, the sale of edibles, permitted places to smoke, allowing landlords to make rules governing grow ops, again to the minister – maybe I'll allow you to expand on this – will you please indicate your government's preferred direction on at least one of the above issues?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we have been doing an enormous amount of policy work around this. As I've said, our primary areas of focus are ensuring that we keep marijuana out of the hands of children and ensuring that we're keeping our roadways safe. But a lot of this will turn on the consultation that we ultimately have with Albertans. We're going to be going out, as the Premier has said, to talk to them about age of consumption, about their safety concerns, about, you know, what they want to see protected in their neighbourhoods and in terms of their children. Certainly, some of those policy directions we have already, but some of them are certainly going to be waiting until we've spoken to Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consultation is vital on this major cultural shift.

Given that roadside saliva testing is not yet available but provinces have the ability to set the same administrative rules for

drug-impaired driving as they do for alcohol and given that Alberta has a successful zero tolerance rule in place for alcohol, that could be extended to marijuana, to the minister – let me just ask a very specific question – are you at least considering the same zero tolerance rules for novice drivers for marijuana that we currently have for alcohol?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member quite rightly points out, Alberta can be incredibly proud of its administrative sanctions, which have reduced greatly the amount of impaired driving on our roads, and the government is certainly examining what we can do with respect to those sorts of administrative sanctions when it comes to marijuana-impaired driving. As the member has correctly pointed out, the challenge is that there is no sort of per se limit as of yet in terms of where impairment occurs, but we are examining all of our options.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Health Care Capital Funding in Central Alberta

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care professionals organized a public meeting in Red Deer on February 28. The room was packed as they presented information regarding health funding shortfalls within the regional capital plan. In fact, central Alberta makes up roughly 10 per cent of Alberta's population yet receives only 5 per cent of the capital funding. To the Health minister: what is being done to equalize the amount spent in central Alberta with other parts of the province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's important that no matter where you live in this province, you get . . .

Mr. Cooper: Right health care.

Ms Hoffman: . . . the right care . . .

Mr. Cooper: Right place.

Ms Hoffman: . . . in the right place . . .

Mr. Cooper: Right time.

Ms Hoffman: . . . at the right time. Even the members opposite are starting to remember what my mantra is. I like that, Mr. Speaker.

That's one of the reasons why as soon as we were elected, we reversed the deep cuts that were coming under the former government, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why we're providing stable, predictable funding to the front lines. That's one of the reasons why we're investing, in the Red Deer hospital alone, \$21 million to ensure that infrastructure upgrades are done in the Red Deer health facilities, that we require. I'm proud of that.

Mr. Strankman: Again, Mr. Speaker, given that rural residents are seeing resources unfairly directed towards cities and given that an unjust allocation of resources away from smaller centres and rural areas actually puts more strain on centralized facilities, increasing wait times and decreasing positive outcomes, to the Minister of Health: how can you justify the inequity of resource allocation per capita in the central region?

2:20

Ms Hoffman: Well, it's fun to imagine what types of investment would happen in the province of Alberta if the party that's asking the very question moved forward with their plan – thank goodness the voters didn't give them that opportunity – because they wanted to cut \$9 billion, Mr. Speaker, just from infrastructure projects. That certainly would make sure that things were far worse not just in one part of the province but in every part of the province. I'm so proud that we're working in partnership, working with a number of community leaders in local ways to move forward on ensuring that we do get that right care throughout our entire province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that all Albertans deserve a high standard of health care and don't need governments picking projects for political reasons and given that this issue is affecting the lives of those in seven central Alberta constituencies, to the Minister of Health. In the central Alberta health region stats show a dramatic shortfall. Who is responsible for this unfair resource allocation?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, he does speak about inequities over many years; some might say 44 years. So next time he's dancing with his new best friends, I encourage him to ask them that very same question, Mr. Speaker. I have to say how proud I am to be part of a government that's making sure that we're putting investments into health care . . .

An Hon. Member: You can dance if you want to.

Ms Hoffman: . . . into education, into the front lines instead of moving forward with cuts that both opposition parties are pushing for, which would make life far worse. Instead, we have a government making life better for Alberta families.

The Speaker: I heard "dancing." I missed something in the event. [interjections] I don't know. National dance week.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the NDP. They have increased their support in Alberta by 160 per cent. They went from 1 per cent of the vote in the Medicine Hat by-election to an average of 2.6 – 2.6 – per cent of the vote in two recent Calgary by-elections. Clearly, the Minister of Finance is doing something right. Perhaps it's the \$5 billion carbon tax, or perhaps it's the \$10 billion deficit. Does the minister consider the level of Calgarian support for his party to be an endorsement of their fiscal plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, what we are doing on this side is we're making tough times better for Albertans. We're assisting Albertans by supporting them each and every day. We're not cutting back their programs and services, something that that side would do without blinking an eye. We are supporting Albertans. We'll continue to support Albertans. We'll continue to work for Alberta.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, asking this minister a question is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. I ask a question, and he gives a haiku about some irrelevant topic that nobody asked about.

Yesterday the Member for Calgary-West asked the minister three – three – times if he would appear before the heritage fund committee to address accusations of political meddling in AIMCo . . .

The Speaker: I think that's a preamble. What's the question, hon. member?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given that three times the Jell-O just slid down the wall, I'll ask the minister real slow: will you or will you not appear before the committee?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been clear several times in this House that there is no interference, and if I went to the committee, I'd say the same thing there. There is no interference with regard to AIMCo. Their independence is assured. They invest their money for pension funds, and they do it at their own leisure. They do it, and they do a good job. They were able to get about a 9 per cent return on their investments. They're doing a job. They continue to invest independently.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would respectfully ask that you contain the preambles. In fact, you already know that's not accepted, so please ask your question without the preamble. Please proceed. Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I smell a rat, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there's no need for that comment.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, it's called question period, not answer period, for a reason.

When you're responsible for a \$54 billion budget, Albertans expect real answers, not talking points written by some partisan out-of-province apparatchiks. Given that he refuses to answer questions about AIMCo, he refuses to answer questions about our credit downgrades, he refuses to answer questions about how . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. [interjections] Hon. ministers. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Tourism Data Collection

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether you love the Fraser Institute or you hate it, it's hard to argue with their motto: If It Matters, Measure It. That's why it was so stunning last month in estimates when the tourism minister stated:

. . . it is not useful to do an economic impact assessment on an annual basis. The relatively small changes in overall tourism revenues on a year-to-year basis do not have a significant impact on economic measures such as jobs, companies supported, and taxes.

Wow.

Minister, if you measure what matters but you're not measuring tourism, are you saying that tourism doesn't matter?

The Speaker: The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that tourism makes life better for Albertans by bringing people to our province, creating good-paying jobs, and diversifying our economy. The issue that the member is raising is something that he himself is familiar with, an issue that we've had for a very long time, and that's that the methodology that's being used by Stats Canada is not the most reliable one. So we're looking for ways in order to increase the transparency and to find a way to measure all of these things in forms that we can actually use to make informed decisions.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that noted management guru Peter Drucker stated that what gets measured gets managed and given that managing the tourism industry demands measurement of

economic activity, jobs created, businesses impacted, and tax revenues generated and given that the tourism minister is responsible for providing leadership and vision for Alberta's tourism industry and given that this tourism minister intends to fly the tourism flame in the fog, in the dark, with no chart, compass, altimeter, or instruments of any kind, to the minister: how are you going to provide strategic leadership to the tourism industry when you can't even be sure which direction it is headed?

Miranda: Mr. Speaker, speaking of flights, we can announce that we've just added a new flight from Mexico directly to Calgary in addition to the ones we have. Obviously, I know a thing or two about flights.

What I can tell the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, is that when we look at tourism, we know that it actually diversifies our economy. It supports good-paying jobs. We're very happy about what we've seen. We're going to continue doing what we're doing right now because it's actually working.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: You say that it's working. You have no clue whether it is or not.

Given that this government is constantly telling Albertans how tourism is a key component of economic diversification – we just heard it – and given that Drs. Trevor Tombe and Robert Mansell of the U of C's School of Public Policy recently published a research paper entitled *If It Matters, Measure it: Unpacking Diversification in Canada* and given that the tourism minister has decided that measuring the impact of tourism is not useful, to the minister. You've stopped making measurements, you've stopped collecting data, yet you still claim that tourism is growing and diversifying the economy. You just did. Without any metrics, how are you going to prove it?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I explained to the member during the estimates, we are looking at the methodology to actually determine the best way forward. There is no consensus between the different jurisdictions on how to measure tourism because somebody landing in Vancouver who makes their way to Calgary, for example, is counted as a tourist in Vancouver but not in Calgary because they're travelling by land. There are disparities in the way by which you measure these things, so we're trying to find a way to come up with a methodology that makes sense. However . . .

An Hon. Member: Time.

Miranda: . . . we're very proud of the work we're doing in this province to support good-paying jobs . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Point of order noted.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Gender Identity and Expression in Human Rights Act

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ten years after a Supreme Court ruling the government finally amended the Alberta Human Rights Act by adding gender identity and gender expression. Recently we've heard the new leader of the third party, a supposed self-proclaimed human rights champion – he said that he would repeal all of the legislation our government has passed. To the

Minister of Justice: how has this legislation impacted the lives of Albertans?

2:30

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I was very proud to be able to add gender identity and gender expression to the Human Rights Act. No Albertan should be discriminated against on the basis of who they are and who they choose to be, and no one should be denied basic services just based on who they are. We have heard from many stakeholders that this protection makes a huge difference in the lives of individual Albertans and it makes their lives better.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new leader of the third party stated in an interview with *Maclean's* magazine that he found the idea of a woman wearing a niqab in public profoundly offensive, to the same minister: what is the government doing to protect Albertans and ensure that their rights are respected and preserved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. The Alberta Human Rights Act specifically prohibits discrimination on several bases, including race, colour, ancestry, gender, and religious beliefs. It's no secret that the purpose of the act is to ensure that all Albertans are offered an equal opportunity to earn a living, a place to live, and to enjoy services that are available to the public. We're very proud to defend that record, and I think it should go without saying, but we expect everyone to respect the law.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Albertans are concerned regarding comments made about repealing all of the legislative changes made since 2015 and given that these changes protect the rights of the LGBTQ community, to the same minister: what impact would repealing this legislation have on Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This legislation was passed to empower transgender Albertans to confront stereotypes and discrimination, which we know still exist throughout society. Repealing the legislation would take Alberta back to the past. Our government is working towards a future, a future where life is better for all Albertans.

Veterans' Licence Plate Eligibility

Mr. Cooper: Outstanding constituent Neil Lowes has served his country for 35 years, including a short stint in the Canadian armed forces and a long and distinguished career with the RCMP. Mr. Lowes contacted me about being denied access to veterans' plates despite being available to retired RCMP officers in other provinces. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why won't your government show respect for the brave men and women of Alberta that have served our country, this small but important recognition of veteran plates?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our department is actually very proud of our Support Our Troops plates. When the Support Our Troops plates were brought in, it was done in consultation with a number of community groups, including our legions, in order to determine which groups were going to be recognized. One of the issues around this plate is the identification of where funds from the plate would go to, and those funds go to support our troops. We're very proud of this plate and the funds that it provides to military officers who are retired or who are in tough times as a result of their service, so it does support the community.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the executive director of the Royal Canadian Legion has written to the minister endorsing the use of veterans' plates by retired RCMP members and since retired officers are also advocating for the use of these plates, it seems to me that the only person who doesn't think this is a good idea is the Minister of Service Alberta. Why won't the minister respect the Royal Canadian Legion, respect the RCMP, and grant these retired members access to veterans' plates?

Ms McLean: Thank you again for the question. Mr. Speaker, the contract for our plates certainly allows us additional flexibility, and our department has been looking into additional plate options that we can provide to Albertans. I'm certainly happy to be doing that work, and we are going to continue to provide specialty plates to individuals across Alberta as our resources permit. I certainly have had my department have discussions with the Legion about this very issue, so we have followed up on it.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Your department told them no.

Mr. Speaker, given that the retired RCMP members who have served abroad are entitled to these plates and given that retired RCMP members from other provinces have access to these plates, why did the minister write the Legion's executive director stating that the NDP had no plans to amend the regulations which prohibit Alberta's retired RCMP members from receiving this small but very important recognition?

Ms McLean: Mr. Speaker, certainly we receive a number of requests from the community to change a number of our regulations. Service Alberta, I'm happy to say, actually has the most laws and regulations of all of the departments, but, you know, we're very happy to have discussions with the individuals that the member is referring to to discuss what possible plans we can make going forward in order to ensure that we can have capacity within our legislative agenda to ensure that we can make changes that are important to Albertans and make life better for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Support for Unemployed Albertans

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hypothetical family in my member's statement was struggling to make ends meet due to the failure of a variety of disastrous NDP policies. This morning Social Policy Trends was released by the U of C School of Public Policy, highlighting – guess what? – skyrocketing and troubling social assistance caseloads over the last two years. To the Minister of Labour: noting that the proposed PC budget increased Community and Social Services funding by \$33 million, what

specific initiatives is your government undertaking to assist Albertans in seeking gainful employment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been focused very concertedly on making sure that there are resources available for Albertans who are currently looking for work. Through the Ministry of Labour we have a number of workforce strategy programs as well as partnerships with the federal government for labour market development agreements to make sure that there are funds available to support those looking for training or retraining both through employers and through agencies set out to help unemployed Albertans.

Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, it's not working. Given that the number of income support caseloads skyrocketed, reaching over 54,000 in January, with no signs of plateauing or even curve bending, and given that these numbers are especially troubling as a last resort after other supports such as EI run out and given that these already troubling numbers do not include AISH, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what are you doing in support of struggling Alberta families to address this alarming crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Yes, the income support caseload has gone up, and what we have done is that we have added more money into it instead of cutting funding, as that side has proposed; \$5.8 billion or \$2.6 billion. That would have made the situation worse. We have increased funding for that. We have come out with a new Alberta child benefit. We came up with a new investment in FCSS. We came up with a \$15 minimum wage. We are doing a number of things to help Albertans retrain, get back . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the number of individuals exhausting EI and being forced to collect provincial income supports continues to increase rapidly month after month and given that the unemployment rate in January 2017 was 8.8 per cent, up from 7.5 per cent in January 2016, and given your flagship job-creation strategy, which was an integral part of your campaign platform, was cancelled after creating only one job, to the minister of economic development: you claim to be diversifying the economy and creating jobs, so how do you explain these damning statistics?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member. What I will clarify for the member is that since last June 19,000 full-time jobs have been created in our province. I can tell you as well that the Conference Board of Canada, TD Bank, and a number of economists are all forecasting that Alberta will lead the country in growth this year and next year, more than any province, and you know why? Because the budget that we've tabled is stimulating the economy. It's creating jobs. It's diversifying the economy. It's protecting front lines. That government couldn't get it right, and this one would be a disaster.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

2:40

Rural Education

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout rural Alberta school boards are facing unique challenges and are seeing growing gaps between urban school boards and rural school boards because economies of scale simply don't carry over to rural life. Given that some rural schools may be in a position where they'll be forced to close, to the Minister of Education: how is the government addressing equity in education funding for rural school boards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Our government certainly supports small and rural communities. Our funding takes into account that rural school authorities often need and have unique challenges. The equity opportunity grant, for example, and the small school by necessity grant are designed to help rural school boards overcome these challenges. These grants are approximately \$113 million and \$50 million per year respectively. Certainly, we're working hard to ensure the viability of small schools and rural schools. We know how important they are to the community, and we are investing in them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's per-student funding model doesn't account for the basic costs of operating a school. Given that enrolment may fluctuate over a school's lifetime yet the cost to keep the lights on and the doors open remains fundamentally the same, to the same minister: how is the government working to ensure the long-term sustainability of our rural schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I mean, that's a very good question. School construction and modernization represents one of the most important investments that we can make in our children's futures and in the future of the province. That's why we've invested more than \$1.9 billion today to support more than 200 school construction projects, and over half of these projects are located outside of our urban centres, projects like the new schools in Irma, Huntsville, the Camilla school replacement. These are projects that will be home to thousands of children over their lifespan and become important community centres for those communities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: besides the names he has mentioned, what is the government doing now to support rural education?

Mr. Eggen: Well – and this is very important indeed – throughout Budget 2017, despite the significant economic challenges by the province, we are supporting our students by continuing to provide school authorities with stable funding. Alberta Education and, for example, Ag and Forestry have partnered together to fund a research report on the impact of schools in rural communities. A progress report was presented by a research team in 2016, Alberta Rural Education Symposium. The report is forthcoming. Our government is also providing rural transportation grants to the tune of about \$141 million, which is almost 50 per cent of all of our transportation . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, I have a request for unanimous consent to introduce a group who has arrived.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a class from The King's University. This class is here to learn about climate change and how the government functions. I was pleased to hire one student from a similar class last summer, and I know that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and I share a great respect for the students of The King's University and their instructors. I would ask the class and their instructors, Dr. Michael DeMoor and Dr. John Hiemstra, to rise and receive the customary welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Cooper: I'd like a point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order. Okay

You have 20 seconds. We could clear those who wish to leave.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) I'm rising to advise the House that on the next available Monday written questions 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, and 10 will be accepted, and written questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 will be dealt with. Also on the next available Monday, Mr. Speaker, Motion for a Return 6 will be accepted, and motions for returns 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 will be dealt with.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 7

An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining.

Our government is committed to fair legislation that makes life better for hard-working Albertans, and we are committed to complying with the Supreme Court of Canada decision guaranteeing Canadian workers the right to strike. Bill 7 would modernize the labour relations model for the postsecondary sector so that labour rights at Alberta's universities and colleges are consistent with the rest of Alberta's public sector and with the postsecondary sector across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta with the power to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of persons with disabilities. Creating an advocate will make the lives of Albertans better. It will provide much-needed support to people with disabilities and their families in this province. I am pleased to say that this bill responds directly to concerns that I've heard for many years from the disability community.

I look very much forward to the discussion with my colleagues in this House, and I thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, with your indulgence. The first is the latest report from a group of experts in North America from the Alliance for Public Wildlife: The Challenge of CWD.

The second is a reprint of a science article from Norway highlighting that Norway plans to exterminate a whole herd of reindeer to stop the fatal infectious brain disease.

Dr. Starke: Who will pull Santa's sleigh?

Dr. Swann: Not funny at all.

The third is actually a restaurateur in Calgary-Mountain View who has identified that the carbon tax is going to increase his costs by \$10,000, local property tax increases have added to his losses, and the minimum wage increase has meant a total loss of about \$40,000 per year from his restaurant business, The Main Dish, and Jason Zaran is the owner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today with respect to the questions asked by our caucus leader and myself. One is an urgent media advisory from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy titled Increase in Social Assistance Caseloads in Alberta: Numbers Rocketing Upwards with No Sign of Plateau.

The second tabling is also from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, titled Social Policy Trends: Income Support Caseloads in Alberta.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies to table of yet another paper from the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary, by Dr. Trevor Tombe and Robert Mansell, which I referenced in my questions in question period. It's entitled If It Matters, Measure It: Unpacking Diversification in Canada.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and table a letter written by the hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women to a Ms Tammy Wheeler, the executive director of Royal Canadian Legion Alberta-NWT Command, giving the legion

an indication that the government would not be acting on what is a very, very reasonable request.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I believe we may have arrived now at the points of order. I came to work with a lunch kit in my hand and a song in my heart, but it has been an interesting day.

I think, Opposition House Leader, it was a point of order that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre raised.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you. On behalf of my colleague from the riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre – oh, I'm speaking, for those of you following along at home, from Standing Order 23(j), language of an abusive nature likely to create disorder.

Mr. Speaker, it's a little unfortunate to have to rise two days in a row. I know that the language that was used by the Minister of Municipal Affairs is unlikely to be found in the Blues because it certainly wasn't directed at you. From time to time language across the bow, as you might say, does increase in a manner that isn't positive. Yesterday we saw the government calling the opposition idiots. Today the minister called us a bunch of morons. I don't think that either of these is parliamentary. I would ask if he would withdraw and apologize because that's certainly what members on this side of the House heard him say.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am informed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he did not say those words, so I don't know where the Official Opposition House Leader is getting it from.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as the Opposition House Leader has indicated, I did not hear the phrase, and I'm not, therefore, in a position to rule on it. I accept the hon. members at their word, but I would therefore move on.

Government House Leader, you have a point of order.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's been a busy day. In explanation for my short memory, this morning was my estimates, so I'm a little bit shell shocked, but that's fine. It all went fine.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky said the word "lie," Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Could you sit down, please?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Sure.

The Speaker: I believe, if that's the matter that we're dealing with, I received an acknowledgement from the member, which, rightly or wrongly, I accepted. If it's the reference to the member for Calgary Wapiti, I accepted... [interjections] Grande Prairie-Wapiti. My apologies. Sorry. It's been a busy day. My apologies. For those who are listening, it was not Grande Prairie-Wapiti. Grande Prairie-Smoky. I accepted the apology from the member, and therefore I would respectfully like to suggest that we move on to the third point of order.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That being equal, I'm rising, then, on a point of order. The point of order that I am rising

on is under Standing Order 13(2), "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." It does happen to be on this particular point that we almost had a discussion with respect to the use of language inside the Chamber.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, you made a ruling in this House that words like "misled," in fact, if they weren't directed at one member of the Chamber, were not unparliamentary. My colleague from Grande Prairie certainly did not say that any member of the government had lied but only said that the government was lying or had lied. It is significantly different. The Minister of Energy had an opportunity to say that the opposition misled this House, which you ruled wasn't out of order. As such...

The Speaker: Hon. member, which point of order are you speaking to? Which matter?

Mr. Cooper: The point of order is under 13(2), where you required an apology from a member of the House, my colleague from Grande Prairie. You required an apology from him, yet there have been times when the government has used unparliamentary language in making an accusation against the opposition, saying that we misled the House, which is in our opinion unparliamentary, but because they said that all of the opposition misled the House, you ruled that it wasn't.

In this case my hon. colleague said that the government had lied to Albertans, which is virtually the same thing as misled, and you asked him for an apology, yet you didn't from the government side. So I'm just looking for some clarification on your ruling, on why you would make that ruling in this case and not in another.

The Speaker: I've determined that it's the same issue that you're talking about. The explanation is that – we have discussed this many times in this House – it's about context, the context in which words are used. The fact of the matter is that we've had a considerable waste of time, quite frankly, in my humble opinion, in the last three to four days about uses of various words in this House. In this situation I cautioned not only today but also two days before about using these words, and we saw the consequences of that in here.

So my explanation is exactly the same one that I've used in the past: you cannot continue to use those kinds of words, particularly once I've asked that they not be referred to. In fact, in this instance I did accept an apology, but as is apt occasionally in this place, sometimes there are conditional apologies that are offered. All of us ought to look to using sincere words when we do make such apologies.

I believe in the same way that I addressed the Government House Leader with respect to the explanation of the use of apologies, I would consider, with the ample information that we all know, the matter closed.

Are there any other points of order?

Point of Clarification

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because points of order aren't heard during question period, as you know, I raised this point of order at the end of question period. It is again with respect to a ruling that you made during question period and seeking some clarification so that we can ensure an orderly functioning of the House on an ongoing basis. I'm seeking clarification as to why you chose to withdraw a question or to not allow the question to be completed when my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks was asking the Minister of Finance a question about whether or not he would be attending a committee. As you know, the standing orders

allow for any member to seek some clarification from you, so that's what I intend to do.

3:00

Preambles, Mr. Speaker, inside the Chamber here in Alberta have been an issue of significant discussion over a long period of time. There has been a lot of precedent that has gone into the use of preambles and what indicates a preamble and what doesn't. As you know, I have advocated on behalf of the rules of the Assembly to have a much clearer rule as well as getting away from preambles; however, we have not arrived there yet.

As such, my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks had on numerous occasions throughout his question – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I believe written on his question here is, in fact, three times where he utilized the word “given,” which traditionally in this House has been accepted as the continuation of one question. That then allows a member and the opposition side of the House to do what we are here to do; that is, to hold the government to account. As such, he was engaging in utilizing language that has been traditionally accepted in this House. However, you, sir, chose to go in a different direction and removed both his opportunity to finish and the minister's opportunity to answer. I'm just looking for some clarification around how we will know when you will and when you will not be removing questions and potentially infringing on the speech of members here in the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it is very apparent to me that the Official Opposition is engaging in a campaign of testing the limits of the House. They repeatedly tried to provoke the government as well as yourself in question period today by using terms that they know are unparliamentary like “lie” and are attempting to challenge the role that the Speaker plays.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks started his supplementary question with the words “I smell a rat, Mr. Speaker.” Well, we let that slide. We easily could have raised a point of order. But it's clear that the opposition wants to make as many points of order as possible, trying to prove some sort of a point because they didn't like a ruling the other day. It's rather childish, and it's really beginning to affect the ability of this House to conduct the business of the public. We need to deal with it, and I think that you have been doing an excellent job today with respect to that.

I wanted to read from *O'Brien and Bosc*, page 497, Mr. Speaker. It says:

Presiding over the daily Question Period is regarded as one of the most onerous and difficult tasks undertaken by the Speaker.

I think you have probably plenty of sympathy from Speakers past, Mr. Speaker, around the Commonwealth.

The Speaker ensures that Question Period is conducted in a civil manner, that questions and answers do not lead to debate and that both sides of the House get to participate. As Speaker Fraser noted in *The House of Commons at Work*:

Question Period places heavy demands on the Speaker of the House. He must at all times remain keenly alert and attentive, keep a perceptive eye on the whole assembly, be aware of the mood of the House and be familiar with the national and international issues likely to be raised.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, you've gone on at some length. Brevity, please, to the point.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Okay. I've skipped a bunch to get right to the point, Mr. Speaker.

In ruling a question out of order, the Chair may suggest that it be rephrased in order to make it acceptable to the House. Or, the Speaker may recognize another Member to pose the next question.

Mr. Speaker, it is my view that you're well within your authority given the attempts by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks to create disorder in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Today the member frequently disregarded my interventions and requests in the use of his language. Particularly, the use of the phrase “I smell a rat” is quite significant and could in fact reflect on this House. It's entirely the Speaker's prerogative and, in fact, I would submit, responsibility to proceed to the next question given the kind of disregard that I saw today. For background I would cite page 169 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. If a member persists in refusing to obey the direction of the Speaker in the chair, he refuses to recognize. I did not name the member; however, to me, it was quite obvious that my responsibility was to address the particular comments that were made, that clearly had an impact on the tone of this House.

Might I say to you again, members, that maybe House leaders want to get together and see if you can find a better way of communicating with each other other than the language that's used.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate March 22: Ms Renaud]

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

Mr. McIver: On the budget?

The Speaker: Government Motion 13.

Mr. McIver: Government Motion 13. Okay, here we go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed. The business plans and the budget. That's what I was looking for, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I'll be brief because I have to get to the children in care committee continuation that occurs at 3:30 today, Mr. Speaker.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Or Madam Speaker. I think I was right both times because they just switched. Usually I'm wrong both times, but we'll call that a happy circumstance.

Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise to speak briefly on the government's budget and business plans. Sadly, Madam Speaker, I wish I had happier things to say about the government's budget and business plans, but, alas, they are not in the best interest of Albertans. They're not in the best interest of Albertans today, and they're not in the best interest of Albertans in the future.

Madam Speaker, yesterday in this House I think it was quite telling that the environment minister stood up during a couple or three of her answers and emphatically talked about \$10 billion. The only thing she didn't do was bite her knuckle like that guy from *Austin Powers* when she said: \$10 billion. To be clear, she didn't bite her knuckle like the guy from *Austin Powers*, but outside of that, it sounded just like that. And she was right in making the point that \$10 billion is a lot of money. I agree with the environment

minister that \$10 billion is a lot of money. I think I can make that point without biting my knuckle either right now, Madam Speaker.

The fact is that that's what the government's deficit is this year and was last year, more than \$10 billion. The environment minister, I think, gives all of us quite a lesson about what a negative path this government is going down, taking us into a \$10 billion plus deficit every year, with no plans or promises from the Finance minister to even balance the budget for more than five years. I think it's about 2024.

Madam Speaker, the government I think reduced their deficit this year by one-tenth of a billion dollars. So using that math, at this rate it will take them 102 years to balance the budget. Then it will take them — oh, I don't know — 500 to a thousand more years to actually pay it all back after they're done that. I don't think anybody in this House thinks that's reasonable, yet that unreasonable path is exactly the one that this government is on on behalf of Albertans, and it's unconscionable.

3:10

What we do know from the government's numbers, not mine, is that in three or four years we're going to be in debt, that Albertans will be in debt courtesy of the NDP government \$71 billion. Horrendous. Everybody in Alberta should be concerned about that, especially when we hear in recent weeks the Finance minister saying: well, Albertans shouldn't have to pay for that. Well, Madam Speaker, there's no one but Albertans to pay for that. No one is going to ride in and pay for it. This isn't like your first credit card when somebody helps you out if you get in trouble with it. No one is going to ride in and pay Albertans' debt, but the NDP government doesn't seem to have any concept or understanding or appreciation of that fact. They are just piling obligation after obligation onto today's children and grandchildren and, more immediately, Albertans that are out of work.

If there's anything that accentuated just what a bad job this government is doing and what a bad budget they've put forward, it's the University of Calgary's research, that was tabled by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek today, showing 55,000 people on income support, 20,000 more than a few months ago. That's not 20,000 more than when the previous government was here; 20,000 more than a year ago with this government.

As much as this government likes to say, "Oh, it's all the oil price; that's the only thing that's bad," the oil price has been low for the whole two years, and it's getting worse and worse and worse because this government is making it worse and worse and worse with every move they make. And the biggest moves they make to make it worse and worse and worse are the moves that they make with their annual budgets, driving Alberta into the ditch financially, laying huge burdens on our children and grandchildren.

Thirty years and 20 years and 10 years from now when children in Alberta who are today in elementary school are trying to get their first job after they're finished school, are maybe trying to get married, maybe trying to save up to buy their first house, they are going to be burdened with the yoke of a huge debt that they have to pay before they can raise dollar one for that down payment on that house. Why? Because they're going to be paying for light bulbs that this NDP government has bought in 2017. Disgraceful, despicable, unconscionable. I'm sure there are a lot more words. This government and these NDP MLAs are part of supporting a budget that is completely against the best interests of Alberta.

Now, the only good news that I can give you on this, Madam Speaker, is that at least in two Calgary ridings where there was a federal by-election this week, 97.4 per cent of people rejected the NDP. Why do I know that? Because only 2.6 per cent of them voted for the NDP. That's 2.6. You know what? That should be a lesson

to these members. You know, I would advise the members who are not in cabinet that the next time you're in a caucus meeting, you might want to take your cabinet and your Premier behind the woodshed and tell them that they need to put Alberta on a better path. [interjections] They need to put Alberta on a better path.

I can see I'm under their skin because they're trying to take my time here, Madam Speaker. I'm sure they feel so passionately about it that they'll be happy to pop up and defend \$71 billion in debt. They'll be willing to get on their feet and defend 55,000 people on income support, many of whom are there because of policies that their government has put in place and defends today and that will put more people on the unemployment line in the weeks and months and years to come. They are the cause, and Albertans know that. At least, all but 2.6 per cent of them seem to know it, as measured most accurately by an election that took place this week.

Madam Speaker, this is a very bad budget. This is a budget that destroys jobs instead of building them. This is a budget that drives investment out of Alberta instead of bringing it in. In fact, we've seen evidence of that, too. You know what? The NDP has largely killed international investment coming into Alberta. Not only have they made it harder to bring international investment in, but billions of dollars of international investment that were in Alberta have left in recent weeks. Shell oil: billions of dollars. [interjection] Yes. You know what? CNRL bought that. CNRL is a Canadian company, and they're fantastic, and I'm so grateful that they bailed Alberta out and partly bailed this NDP government out, but it doesn't change the fact that it cut off billions of dollars of international investment that used to be here and isn't here now.

Now, I'm probably talking to the six people that are watching on television because I'm not sure that the government members have any intent to appreciate what's good for Alberta. I guess we'll know that when they vote for this budget. That'll be all the evidence we need that there's no intention to vote for the betterment of Alberta because it's clear to all but 2.6 per cent of the people that this is bad for Alberta. It's as obvious as the day is long.

Madam Speaker, when I talk to Albertans, whether I'm in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere else, what I still constantly get is angry support, and what I mean by that is that people grab me by the lapels and say: you better be ready to become government in two years because they've got to get rid of that government. It's not because they love me so much; it's because they have to get rid of the government they have today. They are disgusted by it. They know it's killing their economic future. They know that it's killing their future today. They know that they all have somebody that they love that has lost their job or will lose their job because of the policies of this government. They're driving businesses out of business. You know, 30 per cent of the towers in downtown Calgary are out of business.

The biggest export this government has is jobs to Houston from Calgary, high-paying jobs. They used to pay for the schools, they used to pay for the hospitals, they used to pay for the roads, and they used to pay for the social services because those high-paying jobs come with a big tax load as well. The jobs went out, the tax load went out, and the cupboards are becoming more bare every day as a result of this budget of this NDP government and the harm and damage that they are doing to Alberta. I believe it will take two, three decades to undo the damage, starting in 2019, that these people are doing.

Why do I think that? The analogy that I use is that if you give somebody a shoelace and give them 10 minutes to tie knots in it, it will take a lot more than 10 minutes to untie the knots in that shoelace. This government is tying so many knots in the shoelace that Alberta is depending upon that it is shameful. They are setting this province back decades before this province will have any

chance of being back to the economic powerhouse that it was before they started their efforts to trash it in 2015.

Madam Speaker, I have to get to another committee. I know the government actually needs to hear more from me. It would do them some good. It would really do them some good if they actually heeded the good advice in the warnings that I'm giving them.

I'll say this in closing. Between now and 2019: tick-tock, tick-tock. There is very little time for this government to start making better decisions than the abysmal decisions they've made up until now, which is why I do not support this. Why do I not support this budget? Because I love Alberta, and I support Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Mrs. Littlewood: Is there 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, there is. The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I always love to hear what the Member for Calgary-Hays has to say about budgets in this province. He asks if we support the spending and support the decisions that we're making in this budget, and I absolutely support the decisions that we're making in this budget.

I read something a while ago, and it talked about people that come into government with progressive points of view who believe in social safety nets, people that believe in investment, people that believe in taking care of each other. It said that the longer those people are in government, unfortunately they start to lose sight of the things that they were elected on. I think about that every day when I do this job. I think about the impacts that I make to every single person that needs help in this province.

I think about my mom, and I've talked about my mom a number of times in this House. Taking care of her since I was about 14 has not been easy, and I know that it's a story that a lot of people in Alberta share. So when I think about the things that we spend money on and that we have something coming forward in investing an extra \$200 million in home care, I know that it makes an impact on real, everyday, hard-working Albertans that need support.

3:20

If I need to remember why I do this job and why I care about every single person in my community, I go to my mom's house and I do things that I don't love to do. I go into my mom's house and I clean her shower. I go into my mom's house, and she deals with incontinence at her age, and that's a tough thing to deal with. So I go in and I wash her floor, and that reminds me every single time why I care about doing what we are doing. Every time I go into her house and I see the medication that she gets home care to assist her with, that someone comes to her home twice a day to make sure that she has her antidepressants, that she has her medication that helps with hallucinations, I know that those things are not just my story. I know that those things affect people in every corner of this province.

Investment is something that is important, and to decry that investment is just such a shame. It tells me that there are people that have been doing this for too long and have become disconnected from the real struggle that people have in this province.

That's what I do. I think that it's important and incumbent on every one of us to do things every day that make us uncomfortable because it reminds us of how important it is. It reminds us why we ran. It reminds us of why it is so important to go out into our community and talk to people about what they are still struggling with.

I am so proud that we have a government that stands up for people like my mom, somebody who has been on disability for almost her entire life because she has struggled so hard with mental health. It makes me so proud to finally have a government that cares about that, that doesn't just do piecemeal work to allay the worst that happens that we see. In recent history, in the last 40 years, it's only when we have the worst outcry from the public that something is done.

I want to be proactive. I want to invest in things like home care and health care and continuing care and long-term care. I want to invest in making sure that we are looking at how AISH serves Albertans. I am so proud that I can go to my mom and I can tell her that we care about her and that we are doing something about it. We are not just talking about it, and we are not just making it a platform pledge or an election pledge. We are actually doing something about it.

Those people that come and help my mom: they are godsend because without them it is very difficult, being an MLA, to take care of my mom. With that support I can actually make a difference in her life, and I can make a difference in the lives of every hard-working Albertan in this province.

With that, I will conclude my remarks and just say that I am so proud of this budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Miller: Madam Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I'll circulate, and I will proceed when I hear from you.

The Deputy Chair: I just need the original, Member, and then you can go ahead.

Dr. Swann: My amendment reads as follows. I move that Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, be amended by striking out section 4.

Let me start by saying that I support the intent of the bill and what the bill does to make life more affordable for parents, guardians, and students in school. In fact, the Alberta Liberals believe the government should go even further by eliminating school fees altogether. However, I recognize that the government has chosen to take a step in that direction by reducing school fees.

I'd like also to point out that the government needs to find a more sustainable way to continue to reduce school fees other than, quote, finding efficiencies. There needs to be a funding plan that will continue to reduce fees over the long term, especially as our population grows and our education system becomes more costly. I expect the government may have an idea about where it wants to find these funds, and I will speak more about that in a moment.

When Bill 1 was announced, a government news release indicated: "If the bill is passed, Alberta parents will no longer have to pay school fees for instructional supplies or materials or for eligible students taking the bus to their designated schools." This was great news and well received by many if not all Albertans. But when people started to take a closer look, it turned out that the term "Alberta parents" did not mean that all parents will no longer have to pay school fees. In particular, those who have students in charter schools can expect to get a different treatment altogether. Why is that?

Well, let's take a look at what a charter school is. According to the government of Alberta's Charter Schools Handbook:

A charter school is a public school that provides a basic education in a different or enhanced way to improve student learning.

... In general, charter schools complement the educational services provided in the local public system. They represent an opportunity for successful educational practices to be recognized and adopted by other public schools for the benefit of more Albertans. Although types of charter schools vary ... they do have the following common characteristics.

Access – Charter schools cannot deny access [to any particular individual or group] ...

Choice – A charter school will provide enhanced or innovative delivery of public education to students. This means that parents and students have increased opportunity to choose an education that best serves [their child's] needs.

Curriculum – The curriculum delivered by charter schools will be structured around a basic education as defined by Alberta Education and described in the Programs of Study. Generally, education programs must meet the conditions outlined in section 39 of the School Act. This allows students to transfer to or from any public school with a minimum of disruption and to obtain a high school diploma ...

Funding – Charter schools are eligible for the same provincial funding per student as any other public school ...

Tuition Fees – Charter schools shall not charge tuition fees. However, they may charge parents for fees for instructional supplies or materials, as may all schools in the public education system.

It seems pretty clear to me, Madam Chair, from the government's own description that charter schools are, in fact, public schools. Again I ask: why the special treatment? Why are they not receiving a reduction in school fees?

I received a letter from the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools in which they write:

As full-fledged members of the public school community, we find the decision to exclude us from Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees quite concerning.

... This is an excerpt from this letter:

"In publications and the Minister's letter to parents ...

And this is from the government side.

... we read, 'Our government understands that times are tough for Alberta families and is working to make education more affordable. We believe that all students deserve access to a quality education in an Alberta school, and we are committed to reducing financial barriers such as school fees.'

Given this laudable and strong statement of support for Alberta families during tough times, we [in the charter school community] believe it may have been an oversight not to include those families who choose a public charter school for their child(ren)'s learning environment."

Now, here is where I would disagree. I don't believe this is an oversight at all. The association is likely being diplomatic in their language to the minister. It's quite clear to me that the government is intentionally singling out charter schools for different treatment. My question is: why? Why is it not being transparent about its

intentions? It appears to me the government wants to draw a line in the sand with regard to funding. On one side are the public schools; on the other are private schools. Clearly, in this bill the government is lumping charter schools together with private schools.

Now, if anyone was curious about the motivations, they would need look no further than Public Interest Alberta's media release of February 23, 2017, in which they with 13 other organizations said, "[We] urge the provincial government to phase out the public funding of private schools ... over three years and reallocate the money to fulfill its education-related campaign promises." I think this is exactly the scenario the government is setting up with this bill, and if it is, they should be honest about it and not do it covertly through regulations. They should come right out with it and tell charter schools, their students, and parents that the government is going to reduce fees for everyone else, gradually raise fees for charter schools so that parents can get accustomed to paying more, and then slowly defund charter schools.

3:30

To be clear, Alberta Liberals believe public funds should go to support public education. Furthermore, we believe accredited private schools either need to be incorporated into the public system and be subject to all the same requirements or not receive public funding.

But charter schools are not private schools; they are public schools. In fact, many of these charter schools serve marginalized, low-income, and less abled students. They're providing an essential support for some of the most vulnerable people in the province. For example, Almadina School Society serves the lowest income families in Calgary. The Boyle Street Education Centre in Edmonton is the same. The Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence Institute serves special needs in Medicine Hat. These charter schools and others like them play a valuable role in society and Alberta education. They are not cherry-picking students. They are filling a need, a need that has been recognized and accepted by the government.

Limited resources. If the government has acknowledged that – and they have – then limited resources should surely be directed to the lowest socioeconomic status schools, whether charter or other public. If we're going to cherry-pick, let's cherry-pick those who are most vulnerable financially. This is a move to help families with affordability and access to education. Do not discriminate against those who are most vulnerable. It's against your principles. Do they not deserve the same treatment, especially given their vulnerability, many of them? Do the parents of their students not deserve the same reduction? When people see noncharter public schools not getting breaks, what does that do to enrolment?

The minister appears to be establishing one set of rules for those with school boards and a completely different set of rules for the charter schools. The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools doesn't think this is right, and I don't believe that the government is being transparent on this matter. If the government wants to eliminate funding for charter schools, say so. Otherwise, the government should treat them like all other public schools and include them in the reduction of school fees.

This is why I'm proposing an amendment to strike out that section of Bill 1 and leave the original wording in the School Act. This would keep charter schools together with public schools, and any changes to the fees they can charge would be applied consistently across all public schools and to all parents, as was promised when the bill was announced.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to thank the member for the amendment. I think that there are some concerns that I have about this amendment. To be very clear, the government made a decision to invest over \$50 million with An Act to Reduce School Fees. That's a first-step measure, right? We're moving in a direction that – this is something that affects the most number of students we possibly can. That's over 600,000 students that are going to be affected by this legislation. What this amendment would do is that it would create a situation where charter schools would no longer be able to charge fees – either they already have or need those funds – without necessarily having that funding recovered. That would create a situation where we could see detriments to student education.

I think that because of that, because this is a first step, as we move forward, the conversation will evolve and continue. This is An Act to Reduce School Fees, not to eliminate them. But as we move forward, there will be many more discussions to have. I look forward to those in this House, but right now I think that we should focus on this over \$50 million that's going to support over 600,000 students. To maintain that quality of education for all students, I would encourage my colleagues to vote this down.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none, are you ready for the question on the amendment?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:35 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cyr	Schneider	Swann
Gotfried	Strankman	Yao
Hanson		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Payne
Babcock	Hoffman	Piquette
Bilous	Horne	Renaud
Carlier	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Ceci	Littlewood	Schmidt
Connolly	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	McKittrick	Shepherd
Dach	McLean	Sigurdson
Dang	Miller	Turner
Eggen	Nielsen	Woollard
Feehan		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 34
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 1. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of the amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Northland School Division Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce Bill 6 and to speak to it in second reading, the new Northland School Division Act. This is an important piece of legislation that was built in the communities of . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, I'm sorry to interrupt. Are you moving second reading?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry. I'm moving second reading.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Eggen: I'm sorry. Madam Speaker, I apologize. You know, sometimes these things slip by me.

Okay. Here we are. This important piece of legislation was built in the communities of our Northland schools, and it is, Madam Speaker, a very, very large community. I just want to give you . . .

Cortes-Vargas: Can you just say that and read it?

Mr. Eggen: Oh. I am moving second reading of Bill 6, Madam Speaker.

Connolly: I'm sorry; I missed it.

Mr. Eggen: You can read *Hansard* later.

All right. For those of you who are not familiar, the Northland School Division Act was first proclaimed in 1965, and it was, I believe, even previous to that, in 1960. At this time Métis schools in our province were run by a government organization, and many of the First Nation students in the area at the time were attending residential schools run by missions or were not able to access schools at all. The Northland school division was seen as a way to bring those students into the public education system and to

improve educational outcomes for First Nations and Métis students and students living in remote northern communities.

The large geographic area that is Northland was established by the first act, and this area remains largely unchanged today. While Northland is made up of just 23 schools, we know that it is spread over an area that is just a little bit short of the size of Germany. So it's big, very big.

Now, we know that historically the governance model of Northland did shift, but for at least the last 30 years the division's corporate board was made up of 23 chairs, which were called local school board committees. In 2010 former Minister of Education Dave Hancock dissolved that board and put an official trustee in place. I have had a chance to discuss the circumstances with the former minister, and he has said to me that, among other things, the governance model that was previously in place was not working for students. It was much too large, and there was a blurring of lines on roles and responsibilities between the corporate board and the staff in Northland schools.

Cost was also an issue as we know that Northland was spending about \$300 per student just on governance while some of our other school boards in the province, just to give some perspective, spend as little as \$30 per student on governance.

Last year I made the decision to put a new official trustee in place by the name of Lois Byers. Her role and her work are largely focused on making her own position obsolete, the classic job where you end up working yourself out of a job. Ms Byers has been tasked with helping my department re-establish this elected board.

This Northland School Division Act sets out a path by which to do so. Through Bill 6 we will be moving the division to a ward structure that is typical of our 60 public Alberta school boards, but Northland will be a bit larger, with a composition of between seven and 11 trustees. This is a recognition of the very large size of the division, Madam Speaker. We will also replace the local school board committees with more traditional parent school councils, and we will enshrine a formal engagement process that will require routine discussions about education at the local level, the ward level, and the jurisdiction level.

The details of this act were developed through a series of consultations that go back several years, but the most important piece of that was a series of 24 engagement sessions that we held between last November and February of this year. First, we held pre-engagement discussions with community leaders and other influential representatives in Northland communities. We followed that up with a series of open houses that all members of the community could attend. Then we held one-on-one meetings between my department and some of those who attended the previous sessions. Together we reached more than 200 people through this process.

4:00

I also have personally contacted the Treaty 8 organization and had a good discussion with Grand Chief Rupert Meneen as well as Billy Joe Laboucan, chief of Lubicon Lake, and Chester Auger, education director for Bigstone Cree Nation. I've also met multiple times with Gerald Cunningham, president of the Metis Settlements General Council, and I was proud to have him stand by my side as we introduced Bill 6 here in the Legislature.

President Cunningham said on that day, and I quote: the Métis settlements are very inclusive when it comes to our governance and decision-making processes, so restoring a democratically elected board for Northland school division is a positive step towards giving our people a greater say in who makes decisions at the school board level. Unquote. Then he also went on to say, quote: because this system is a significant enough shift from the way Northland has

been governed in the past, we are optimistic that it will allow for greater investment toward the success of our Métis settlement learners.

I was also joined in the Legislature media room by Beth Ann Auger, who had been working very diligently to set up a school council in Mistassiniy school in Wabasca. She grew up in a Northland school, and she described that over time the community had lost its way a bit. Some of the challenges with the governance structure of the division were removing the focus away from the students. One of the highlights of my time as minister was hearing her speak in favour of this act. It did move her to tears, Madam Speaker. Beth Ann and the other members of the Northland community know that this legislation is good, but it's only a start. It marks the first step to improving student attendance, achievement, and the quality of education being provided.

I have stated that I intend to put in more funding as well, Madam Speaker, and have support and resources for Northland once we have the new board in place. I will be working with my department to increase per-student funding, and this will give the new board the tools to make a real change in the division.

We know that we can do better, Madam Speaker. We can invest in improvements to our curriculum and introduce indigenous content, history, and perspectives at every grade level. As this House likely knows, we are also in the middle of a six-year development of new curriculum across six subjects, and we have numerous First Nations, Métis, and Inuit representatives involved in that work.

In Northland we can also work to improve their already impressive school nutrition program, which is available to every Northland student, and we can undertake much-needed modernization projects in Northland schools that were way, way overdue, Madam Speaker. There's lots and lots of work that just wasn't done for many, many years.

When I look back to Mistassiniy school, for example, where Beth Ann is working so hard on her school council, we know that the community was promised a modernization by the previous government, but that work had been stalled. Certainly, we can do much better – we have to do better – and it begins with the return to democratic elections in Northland this fall.

Should this bill be passed and then proclaimed, we will do another round of consultation almost immediately on the final ward boundaries for this fall's election so that we have those set by June 1. As I said, the act will set out that Northland will be represented by between seven and 11 trustees. The act also maintains the practice of having Albertans living both on-reserve and off-reserve be allowed to vote in Northland elections because we know that 95 per cent of Northland's 2,700 students are First Nations or Métis and that the entire community needs to have a say over local representation. Once the board is established, they will work both with myself as minister and our official trustee to set a new direction for the division.

Quite frankly, I can't wait to get started on this work, Madam Speaker. This legislation will protect and improve education for students in Northland, and I believe it will mark a start of our efforts to make life better for Alberta families with kids attending Northland schools.

I would ask for support from all members on both sides of the House for this legislation, and I thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is an issue that is very close to my heart because this is a school organization that is supposed to support schools and constituents in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. These are my constituents.

For over 50 years the school board has been in place, and for over 50 years it has not met the needs of the students. The epitome of this lack of support is the fact that the Red Earth Creek school left the Northland school division and joined the Peace River school division. The irony is that the Northland school division is headquartered in Peace River.

In 2016, last year, Madam Speaker, the chief and council from Janvier expressed interest in writing to the MLA for Fort McMurray-Conklin for Father R. Perin school to leave the Northland school division and join a local school board, whether separate or public, within the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

So we know that the board did not meet the needs of the students. There are very low levels of high school graduation and student achievement rates. There was also a very dismal attendance record. Kids simply did not go to school, and when they were there, not a lot happened. The board was fired in 2010, and there's been an appointed trustee ever since. What has changed? Nothing.

Now, I understand why this government would wish to reinvigorate the school division despite its history of failing to provide education to our indigenous and Métis peoples. I hope that this bill is a good start and forms a reset for the schools in the Northland school division, but we need to see changes on the ground and changes to outcomes for students. What I don't want to see is for us to simply throw additional funds at the problem, create a process for a new administration and a fresh mandate, with a couple of tweaked guidelines, and then forget about it: it's done; we have a board taking care of it.

I believe that this is a nonpartisan issue and that we all have a part to play in supporting education in our rural and indigenous areas. I believe that this bill presents us as legislators and representatives of the citizens, regardless of their bloodlines, to challenge, support, and work with the communities who are directly affected by this bill. I would like to see what is happening in other jurisdictions with similar issues across the country. While I'm not so sure that the ward system will be any more effective than the previous system, I do believe that we're on the right path by reinstating an elected school board.

I must emphasize that this just isn't the Ministry of Education that needs to focus on this. We need the Ministry of Indigenous Relations to also participate, and we also need the Ministry of Community and Social Services to contribute to this. As well, Her Majesty's Loyal Official Opposition is here, waiting to help assist our good ministers. The shadow minister of Indigenous Relations, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, would like to assist not only as a part of his portfolio but also as someone whose constituents are affected by this bill. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, who is our shadow minister of Education, desires to ensure that these Albertans are fully supported with a comparable education. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre greatly desires to help these Albertans as he understands their underlying concerns in this very complex issue. I am sure that the members for Peace River, Lesser Slave Lake, and, of course, the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin and others will also want to participate in this as this is something that we can all contribute to in a positive fashion.

I would propose that this bill be used as an opportunity to open the channels of discussion with our indigenous partners, to challenge these communities with embracing a school division that can provide them with support that ensures a quality school. We

need to challenge them to support these schools and these teachers and this process. We need to challenge them that they play a large role in the success of the school, that they're the ones who need to get their kids to school and that they're the ones who need to ensure that these kids are being properly supported to succeed in school.

It's the communities that need to ensure that their children attend and are respectful to teachers and need to instill in our youth the desire to learn. When it comes to success in our school system, there are multiple partners involved in ensuring this: the school boards who support the schools, the teachers and principals who facilitate that direct education, the students who attend these schools, and, most importantly, the parents and the community who must embrace, support, and encourage their children to succeed.

I ask this government that we not be the typical bureaucrats and politicians who throw money at a bill and then move on. This is an issue that will require direct support over a duration of years. My hope is that this government, this 29th Legislature will be the one that makes a true difference in the Northland school division and all of our indigenous brothers and sisters.

Thank you very much.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm delighted to speak in favour of Bill 6. I have a long history with Northland school division. I have taught within the division. I worked as an educational psychologist within the division. I visited over half of the schools in the division through my time there.

I have been so interested in the process of getting the board back up and running. I knew about the appointed, you know, board member to run the school in 2010, when it happened, when the old board was dissolved. When I heard that it was up and running, I started on a process of seeing what people I still knew within the division and letting the Ministry of Education know some people throughout Northlands who would be good people to go to, good resource people.

One thing I found interesting is that so many of the people were still working within the division. This is a school division in which there are so many people that stay. They've got very deep roots in that division. They care what happens to the students. They are involved with the schools. These are parents, these are teachers, these are support workers and bus drivers and administrators of all kinds. They are totally invested in what is going on in their schools. This matters to them.

We all want what's best for the students in these schools, but it's not a simple solution. If it was a simple solution or it could have been changed simply, it could have been done years ago.

Walking into the schools, you have never seen such warm, caring, helpful places to be. There's a really, really good bunch of people at work here.

I'll just quickly read – I know I haven't got too much time, but I've got some more things to say. This is a little passage written by – you mentioned Beth Ann Auger from Mistassiniy school. Being as I taught in a neighbouring school, at St. Theresa school in Wabasca, I thought I'd read this. She said:

I completed grade 9 out in Mistassiniy school in the '60s, so that was a pretty long time ago, and it used to be a pretty good school, and we got some pretty good successes out of Northland. I went on to Grouard, then over to Athabasca, and then came to Edmonton to get a college program and went to work for the government. I moved back to my community after leaving for 44 years, intending to retire. That didn't work very well.

Then I started meetings at the PTA back at Mistassiniy. I realized that there were a lot of things that we could do there. My grandkids are all First Nation. They're going to be going through the school program from kindergarten through high school, and I want them all to attend university or college. I'm just so excited. I see this model coming up as a holistic approach to education. That's how I grew up, in a tiny little community with no roads, no water, no lights, and everybody knew each other. There's a lot of work to be done to bring all of that together, and this new model, this new act is going that direction.

I feel so blessed to be here today, to be able to speak about it and to be invited here. This is so overwhelming. It's touching, and I want to thank you for doing the work that you're doing.

That's one representative.

One other thing that I was noticing when I was preparing to come and speak to this bill is that when I went through the list of the people who are on the local school committees right now, so many of them are people that I knew through the years working there. These are people that care about what happened, and they are working towards the success of this division. This is important to people. This matters, and people will do what needs to be done to make it keep on working.

Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none – sorry. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was waiting to see if any of the opposition wanted to jump in and get in on this conversation.

I am very, very excited to see this piece of legislation before us today. I know that you, Madam Speaker, and several members know that I myself am a member of the Métis nation, and I try to go to many of their events. This is something that I know is very important to many of the Métis people.

This is one of the largest jurisdictions that I know of in the province, the Northland school division, ranging effectively from Grande Cache all the way up to Fort Chip. That is truly a massive undertaking, to try to manage all of that. I can't imagine the challenges that that would pose. I think that there are many good

steps in here towards that end, trying to balance that. You know, there's a slightly higher number of trustees than usual, and I think that that's a good measure to address the massive geography of the Northland school division.

I am aware that the government underwent several phases of consultation on this. I myself was unable to be there, unlike a few of our members, but I did hear about these consultations from many members of the community. They were really heartened to see the amount of dialogue there. Yeah. I know that there will be ongoing engagement, in particular on what the wards look like and the initial structures of the school board, that will then be under the school board's authority, but we have to make sure it's all set up first. We have to figure that out before the elections are held in the fall.

You know, this act: a big part of the reason why I'm so happy to see this is that it's really renewing the democratic processes for the families that are part of the Northland school division, and I think that is something that is very important to see, to see the levels of community engagement. I know that many of the schools had a council system, some of which continued even when the board itself was no longer in place, and I think that that really speaks to the demographics that make use of it. That community discussion based approach to governance is something that is very important to many First Nations and Métis peoples. I think it's good to see that that is still present in this bill going forward. I'm just really happy to see that there is a new level of democracy in there, with the community engagement piece automatically built in. I think that's a really good balance here.

I am happy to rise in support of this bill, and I hope all members of the Assembly rise and do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Anybody wish to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, anybody wishing to speak to the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, seeing the progress of the day, talking about the budget, two bills, I'd say that we move to call it 4:30 and come back on Monday at 1:30. I move to adjourn the House.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:20 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, April 6, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft, defeated on division*)

Bill 202 — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 205 — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 10, 2017

Day 18

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 10, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. members, let us each in our own way pray and/or reflect. April 9 marked the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. If we as a province and as a nation want to know where we are going, it is important to know where we have been. Vimy Ridge is a part of where we have been. Vimy Ridge is one of those tragic events in our Canadian history that serves as a signpost for our future provincial, national, and global journey. We must never allow tragic events like Vimy Ridge, the Second World War, and, yes, the trouble and chaos of our current world to be erased from the minds of future generations. These events must serve as a constant reminder that when government leaders stop talking, people start dying. Lest we forget.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 students from Muriel Martin school in the wonderful constituency of Spruce Grove-St. Albert. The students are accompanied today by their teachers Mrs. Jody Bialowas – I'm sorry if I've mispronounced that – and Mrs. Jacqueline Kelly. If they could all rise today and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Lori Sigurdson it is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the grade 6 students from l'école Notre-Dame school.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just would remind you that we don't quote the names. You intended, I think, to say "the minister."

Ms Larivee: Yes, I did. Thank you.

There are almost 40 of them here today with their teacher Ms Paulin Larochelle. I would ask that the students, their teacher, and their helpers all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other children's groups to be introduced today?

Seeing and hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions. I rise today to introduce to you and through you members seated in your gallery representing the antecedent units from Alberta of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, who fought as one for the first time as Canadian Corps in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. They have come here today in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and to receive the declaration our government made on April 9, 2017. Please rise as I say your unit's name: 41 Canadian Brigade Group; the South Alberta Light Horse regiment; the King's Own Calgary Regiment; 20th Field Artillery Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery; 41 Combat Engineer Regiment, Royal Canadian Engineers; 41 Signal Regiment, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals; the Loyal Edmonton Regiment; the Calgary Highlanders; 41 Service Battalion; 1 Military Police Regiment. On behalf of all Albertans I thank you and the antecedent members of your regiment or corps for service given both in conflict and in peace. I would ask all members to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For my second introduction I rise today to introduce to you and through you Adriana A. Davies. She's a social historian whose achievements include being the executive director of the Alberta Museums Association and creating the Alberta Online Encyclopedia. She has been honoured with the Order of Canada, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal, the Alberta centennial medal, and others. It is a privilege to have her here today with us for the centenary of Vimy Ridge as she is also the editor of *The Frontier of Patriotism: Alberta and the First World War*, which is an in-depth look at Albertans' experience with the war, both on the battlefield and on the home front. I would ask that she please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and to introduce to you and through you to the whole Assembly a number of people from my ministry, beginning with Fran Hyndman, who is a team lead with the Alberta aboriginal internship program within the ministry. With her is a group of interns that have recently taken positions within the ministry. Today they are visiting our beautiful Legislature, and I want to take a few moments to recognize the hard work that these interns are about to dive into. I cannot stress enough the importance of the work that my Ministry of Indigenous Relations is doing to improve the lives of indigenous people in Alberta. I'm eager to have fresh faces taking on new roles within the ministry. If you could all rise as I read out your names: Paul Wilson, Gus Michalik, Kris Murray, Jessica Punko, Maddii Hoffmann, Fran Hyndman, Amanda Giang, Karen Delver, Trista Simpson, and Breanna Tardif. If we could all please provide them the warm reception of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it is an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the president of the Alberta School Boards Association, Mary Martin. ASBA has as its membership all 61 public, separate, and francophone school boards in Alberta. Mary is a strong advocate for schools and students. We found many shared values when Municipal Affairs engaged with school boards on how we can amend the MGA to better support how schools are planned. This is one more way that our government will make a difference for schools and families, and I thank Mary for all the important input we heard from her as part of the MGA review. Mary is seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that she stand as you join me in giving her the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 18 staff from the Department of Municipal Affairs. I won't name them all. On the day that I introduce an MGA amendment bill, it is my great pleasure to recognize some of these fine folks that have helped to make this happen. I'm very proud of how open and transparent the consultation on the MGA has been for Albertans, and much of this excellent work was done by these members of the major legislative projects and strategic planning branch and legal services. I believe they are here to see with their own eyes that the final bill we'll draw up of the MGA review is really, truly happening today. I ask this accomplished group of people seated in the members' gallery to stand as you join me in giving them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a remarkable young lady from Lethbridge. She is a soldier representing the Lethbridge 20th Independent Field Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery. She has served seven years, and she is a master bombardier. I met her for the first time at the Vimy Ridge Armoury on Saturday night at the 100th commemoration of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The 20th battery was the first artillery battery raised in Alberta and participated in the battle of Vimy. There were 25 members that were recruited from Edmonton, 25 from Calgary, and the rest from the Lethbridge area, making it a truly Albertan unit. She is sitting in the public gallery. I would ask Master Bombardier Stacey Harris to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly the staff of Falcon Enterprises. Falcon Enterprises is an integral part of the Wainwright community that is a fully inclusive, community-based support service provider. They're under the provincial contract to provide support services in employment preparation, employment placement, community access supports, and specialized community supports. Please rise as I call out your names: Clive Switzer, Shannon Sherred, Sandy Lychak, and all the employees of Falcon Enterprises. Please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome to this group.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you the Alberta Students' Executive Council. We've got four members here today, and I ask that they please rise. Alberta Students' Executive Council, or ASEC, represents over a dozen postsecondary institutions that offer world-class learning environments across the province, providing Albertans education in everything from applied research to technical training, from sciences to fine arts, and from academic upgrading to green tech programs. The leaders here today are strong advocates of what matters to Alberta's students, and our government is with them on mental health supports, sustainability, and ensuring that every Albertan who wants a higher education can afford and access one no matter where they live. I ask that the members of the House please give the members of ASEC the traditional warm greeting.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all my colleagues in the House a caring Albertan, an Albertan who cares about all of our children, an Albertan who cares about our families and our communities and puts her considerable time and effort to make that happen. My wife and I still talk about how she helped us over 20 years ago. She is here today because she has made a button that clearly states to include parents because she advocates for supporting parental responsibility and parental involvement in our education system. If I could please ask Maureen Prince to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Dr. Derek Peddle from the Alberta Terrestrial Imaging Centre and the department of Geography at the University of Lethbridge. He is also a Newfoundlander who came up yesterday from Lethbridge so he could attend the world curling championship final game last night, in which another fantastic Newfoundlander, Brad Gushue, and his team were the victors. Dr. Peddle, would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One hundred years ago on April 9, 1917, a new word entered the language of Canadians. That word is Vimy. The Battle of Vimy Ridge, the capture of a German stronghold near Vimy, France, cost Canadians dearly: 3,598 lives lost and 7,000 wounded. Even still, Vimy Ridge was a bright spot in a war that had few of them. The numbers of dead and injured, unimaginable as they are, were far fewer than in other battles, including previous attempts at taking Vimy Ridge.

The battle on Easter Monday, 1917, brought together all four Canadian divisions in the war for the first time. The force that launched the attack at Vimy reflected the country. There were people from across the nation. There were immigrants and

Canadians of many ethnic backgrounds. Many, such as indigenous Canadians and Asian Canadians, were fighting for their country at Vimy despite the fact that their country did not fully recognize their rights.

Albertans joined the war effort in great numbers, to a greater percentage than any other province; some 45,000 Albertans served overseas. There were Albertans at Vimy such as Lance Corporal Henry “Ducky” Norwest, a Métis marksman with Calgary’s 50th battalion, who was awarded the military medal for his actions at Vimy Ridge; and Lieutenant Joseph Stauffer, also with the 50th battalion, who was a member of this very Assembly when he died at Vimy trying to take Hill 145. He was buried where he fell.

While death was, as always, a feature of war at Vimy Ridge, many other things about the battle were different. In an embrace of new, state-of-the-art techniques soldiers received training and rehearsed on a life-sized mock-up of the battlefield. Instead of being thrown blindly into the maelstrom, they were each assigned roles, their movements planned to the minute. This made all the difference as the fighting went according to plan. Instead of the grinding, wearying months of the Battle of the Somme or Passchendaele, the main battle at Vimy Ridge was over in a day. Vimy Ridge was not the only Canadian victory of the war, but it captured the imagination of the public, and it seemed to say that Canada at last could stand on its own. It helped give Canada a seat at the table at war’s end and loosened the colonial bonds.

Looking back at the First World War, we are struck by the folly that caused it and the mind-boggling tragedy that defined it. We can be forgiven for thinking that there is nothing to celebrate about the war, but we cannot forget it. To forget it would be to forget the major historical events in the lives of our grandparents or great-grandparents. It would be to forget the mothers and fathers, siblings, relatives, spouses, and children of those gone to war, a whole society of Canadians who lived for years under the pain of separation and, all too often, bore the deafening silence of loss to the end of their days. It would be to forget some 3,000 Canadian women who served as nurses in overseas hospitals or here at home, who bravely shouldered the burden of misery as the injured and the dying were delivered to their hands for aid and comfort, and it would be to forget the tens of thousands of young men, many hardly more than boys, the pride and hope of their families, who joined the war effort out of patriotic duty and a sense of adventure, and who found themselves mired in the quicksand of history.

Mr. Speaker, today the soaring marble monument at Vimy Ridge stands at the site of a decisive victory. Let us not forget that it is dedicated to 11,285 Canadians who died in the First World War and have no known grave. April 9, 2017, has been declared the Battle of Vimy Ridge day in Alberta. Today we continue to remember them and all who serve today.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

1:50

Mr. Jean: Both my son and my father served in the Canadian Corps. One hundred years ago the war to end all wars came at a great cost to Canadians. Over 61,000 lives were lost and 172,000 Canadians wounded, the fields of Belgium and France stained with the blood of young Canadians serving their country and their neighbours out of a profound sense of duty.

There were many tragedies during the war, but there was a battle that created one of the greatest moments in our country’s history. It became the founding battle of our nation. I had the chance five years ago to visit that sacred ground, Vimy Ridge. No one else could capture the ridge. Canada, still under the authority of the British Empire, was charged with the task. As Brigadier-General Alexander Ross said about the day: “It was Canada from the

Atlantic to the Pacific on parade. I thought then, and I think today, that in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation.”

It began early morning on a cold Easter Monday, with Canada’s four divisions, 100,000 strong, united for the very first time. The Canadians pounded the German lines through creeping barrage, with the infantry attacking above and under the trenches and in tunnels. After four days of fighting and more than 10,000 dead or wounded, Canada took the ridge. It brought out great stories of heroism and self-sacrifice. Four of our soldiers that day won the very highest award for bravery, the Victoria Cross. These men fought and died for our freedoms and brought our country one step closer to putting an end to this war.

Marked in the halls of remembrance and tombstones across western Europe, we find these words: “Greater love hath no [one] than this, to lay down [one’s] life for [one’s] friends.” Today we look back at these brave soldiers and say thank you. Thank you for our many freedoms, thank you for your sacrifice, thank you for fighting for us, and thank you for your great service. May we always – always – honour their sacrifice, lest we ever forget.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the House to permit a response from the leader of the third party or his designate and from the two independent members.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The leader of the PC opposition.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a great honour for me today to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. It’s so great to see the men and women in uniform here, half of which I’m honoured to call personal friends.

On April 9, 1917, the Canadian Corps led an attack on the German army in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France in World War I. It was a battle that lasted for three days but saw all four divisions of the Canadian Expeditionary Force victorious. In this battle these brave soldiers displayed characteristics that Canada is now known for across the globe: commitment, determination, pride, and bravery. Four members of the Canadian Corps also received Victoria Crosses, including Private John George Pattison of the 50th battalion from Calgary.

This victory came with a heavy price. In the Battle of Vimy Ridge nearly 3,600 Canadians lost their lives and over 7,000 were wounded. We remember the brave Canadians who laid down their lives to protect the freedoms we enjoy today. We thank them for their ultimate sacrifice, and we will never forget.

Mr. Speaker, we are joined here today by a number of veterans and active members of our Canadian armed forces. They represent the army units from across Alberta that fought at Vimy Ridge 100 years ago. To the brave Canadian men and women defending our freedom, we are forever indebted to you. Your commitment to keeping the True North strong and free is an inspiration to us all. One hundred years later you continue to carry on the legacy of Vimy Ridge as you tirelessly defend our peace and freedom.

As author Larry Worthington wrote in *Amid the Guns Below*:

The battle of Vimy Ridge was a moment in Canadian history that we will always be proud of. A national spirit was born, and now to be British was not enough. We were Canadian and could do a good job of paddling our own canoe. Our country was born.

As I look up to the gallery today to see our armed forces, I can only say thank you for the great paddling you continue to do today on all our behalf. These words remain true today. May God bless you and all of those that served so bravely before you. [Standing ovation]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this day a hundred years ago a great battle of triumph and tragedy was raging on Vimy Ridge. I'm honoured today to rise in this democratically elected Assembly to be able to speak freely about these brave men and women, about the survivors, their families, and pay tribute to the fallen. Indeed, this is one of the gifts these courageous warriors gave to all of us, not just freedom from oppression and tyranny but the freedom to exercise our rights of self-determination and recognition of our inalienable human rights.

The price they paid was high: an entire generation lost. Vimy Ridge remains the single bloodiest battle Canadians fought, with about 3,600 lives being laid down in the fields in France. It was a defining moment, both in terms of the Great War as well as the birthing of this great nation, Canada. It fills us with pride to remember the victory that was wrought on Vimy Ridge. It also reminds us of the preciousness of life, the duty of public service, and the eternal vigilance required to protect our rights and freedoms and the rule of law.

Finally, I'd be amiss if I did not speak about the unspeakable horror of war and the need for each of us to work always and everywhere to create the conditions for peace. The average age of Canadian soldiers in World War I was 26; the oldest, 80; the youngest reported, 10 years old. What they were to experience in those fields was unimaginable for these young minds. While many lives were lost at Vimy, many more were forever changed. Those who did not die had been surrounded by death and terror on a daily basis: unrelenting physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma.

When they returned home, they were enthusiastically welcomed by a truly grateful nation. But how could anyone who had not been there and experienced the devastation begin to understand the effect it would have on the survivors and their families? This was a time when knowledge of mental health and particularly the lasting impacts of trauma was in its infancy. To be a man often meant then and still means maintaining a bravado of strength, refusing to ask for help, and suffering in silence. Many if not all of those returning from the battlefield agonized under the torment of posttraumatic illness. Too often this led to mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, and family violence. Although the guns had gone quiet, there was still a war raging in their minds, reverberating through intimate family members, and a different peace that remained to be won.

Our understanding of this disorder has come a long way since, but there are many hills we have yet to climb together. More needs to be done to support our brave servicemen, women, and families who faced and are facing today the devastations of war. We need to end the stigma and make it clear that admitting mental illness does not make us weak. In fact, it takes great strength and bravery. Bravery comes in many forms.

Let us earnestly, then, work in this House and in our communities to preserve the peace through respectful discourse, reducing inequality, and justice for all, remembering the peace that was purchased at such a high price.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First World War veteran Reginald Roy said:

I became a Canadian on Vimy Ridge. We became a nation there in the eyes of the world. It cut across French and English, rich and poor, urban and rural. Vimy Ridge confirmed that we were as good as, if not better than, any European power.

Attacking together for the first time, four Canadian divisions stormed the ridge at 5:30 a.m. on April 9, 1917, and fought for three days until they were victorious.

2:00

The Canadian success at Vimy Ridge was a result of meticulous planning and rehearsals behind our own lines, including digging tunnels through no-man's-land into German territory. It was only recently, 2001, that stone carvings made by Canadians awaiting orders to commence the Vimy attack were discovered in these tunnels. They range from elaborately carved regimental banners bearing names like the Canadian Scottish 15th battalion and the 48th Highlanders to the names of soldiers, their wives, mothers, or girlfriends, or, in true Canadian style, even a tongue-in-cheek mailbox for mail bound from France to Toronto, Canada.

Now, this reminds us of the humanity of the people who served in the Canadian armed forces at Vimy Ridge, people like Private Joseph Goldie Fairholm, an Edmonton soldier whose diary includes details of the preparations for Vimy and of the battle's legacy. He wrote: "During this vacant space behind, we rehearsed the whole detail of our now famous Victory of Vimy Ridge. Even in the days after that battle, it appears the soldiers already knew the place it would hold in history." It was the preparation, military innovations, and disciplined execution of the Vimy battle plan that earned Canada the reputation for being a tenacious and trustworthy ally. We became a nation in the eyes of the world rather than simply a colony of Britain, but we know this victory came at a heavy cost: 3,598 Canadians were killed, and another 7,000 were wounded.

One of the Albertans to take part was Métis sharpshooter Henry Norwest from Fort Saskatchewan, who joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in January 1915 and eventually fought with Calgary's 50th battalion. He was awarded a medal for his efforts to help Allied forces capture a significant point along Vimy Ridge. In his award citation officials said that he showed great bravery and saved a great many men's lives. But just three months before the end of the First World War Norwest himself became the target of a German sharpshooter, and the 33-year-old was killed in the Battle of Amiens. On his temporary grave marker one of his fellow soldiers wrote, "It must have been a damned good sniper that got Norwest." It was only very recently, in 2008, that the name Henry Norwest was added to the cenotaph at the Fort Saskatchewan Legion.

As we commemorate the great Canadians who helped secure victory at Vimy Ridge, I think of the Canadian men and women who serve our country today. They walk in the footsteps of the thousands of soldiers who have gone before them and honour our country every day with their bravery.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Judge and Lawyer Training on Sexual Offences

Mr. Jean: Many Albertans have been surprised to learn that a lawyer or judge in Alberta that is involved in trials related to sexual offences does not need specific training on dealing with victims. In

our province we have seen at least four instances where judges have had an outdated understanding of the law that has ruined confidence in our judicial system. It's why I will be bringing forward a motion on Thursday supporting training for judges and lawyers in the province if the House agrees. Does the Premier support the intent of this motion?

Ms Notley: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, we absolutely support the intent. That's why our government has been working very hard to increase awareness of victims' rights and increase awareness around matters of domestic violence and sexual violence in our courts and in our justice system. The principle is certainly a very good one, and I anticipate that our minister will work very hard to make that principle real within the rules that we have in place.

Mr. Jean: Training judges and training lawyers would strengthen Albertans' trust in the judicial system and, hopefully, put an end to errors based on outdated myths and stereotypes related to sexual offences. These types of comments are what make sexual assault victims think twice about coming forward and reporting crime. We need to respect the independence of the judiciary, but we also need to ensure that we bring our courts into the 21st century immediately. Does the Premier agree that comments like those made by Justice Camp asking why a complainant didn't, quote, just keep her knees together, end quote, have no place whatsoever in Alberta courts?

Ms Notley: Of course, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that that was inappropriate. That's why I was very proud of our Justice minister for, frankly, leading the efforts to ensure that that judge was reviewed by the appropriate body and had the appropriate consequences go his way. I thank our Justice minister for her leadership on that issue because, of course, all victims deserve to be treated with dignity in our courts, and it is about time that victims of domestic and sexual violence are treated with the dignity that they deserve.

Mr. Jean: Sexual assault continues to be chronically underreported in Canada, with about 90 per cent, Mr. Speaker, of victims never bringing their cases or complaints forward. When someone does bring forward the story of their assault, we need to ensure that they are not revictimized. Mistakes made because of an outdated understanding of the law are not acceptable. Will the Premier agree that trust in our judicial system will be strengthened if Albertans know that the legal system is trained to handle cases of sexual assault or misconduct in an appropriate manner?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have to do everything that we can do to ensure, as I said before, that survivors of sexual violence and domestic violence are treated with, exactly, compassion and with dignity and with respect in our judicial system, so of course we're going to do everything we can. I mean, the member opposite, of course, was part of the caucus of the cabinet that appointed this particular judge that's generating this conversation. I'm glad to see that they see the import of this issue now. We certainly do, and we'll continue . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second main question.

Job Creation

Mr. Jean: Sixty-three thousand Albertans have been unemployed for six months or longer. There are now over 55,000 Albertans relying on income support. While life for the public sector has never

been better, there are tens of thousands of Albertans that are suffering right across this province. These are the women and men forgotten by the NDP as they introduce policies that strangle the ability for businesses to hire and for businesses to grow in Alberta. Carbon taxes, big pay and big perks for government insiders, and risky labour legislation won't help. Why can't the Premier just give Albertans a break now?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty thousand full-time jobs: the most in Canada. Now, I know that the Leader of the Opposition thinks that tax breaks for high-income earners are the only way to create jobs, but yesterday's numbers or last week's numbers show that that's not true. What our government is doing is supporting Albertans, having their backs, helping them through these tough times, and working to create jobs each and every day, and it's starting to work.

Mr. Jean: Well, the backs they have, Mr. Speaker; let's listen. The public sector has bloomed, with 36,000 new positions since the NDP took power here in Alberta. Meanwhile over 35,000 Albertans have been unemployed for over a year, with big losses in the oil patch. These are families and an industry who are not being helped by policies from the NDP and their pals in Ottawa, policies that raise taxes on the oil and gas sector while protecting the pay and perks across the public sector. This is wrong. Our top industries continue to be pummeled with bad policies from this NDP government. When is it going to stop?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, to be clear, our government is very proud of the job numbers that were announced last week, the 20,000 full-time jobs created in Alberta, leading the country. And while we are working on job creation, we are also working to support families. I'm still waiting for the member opposite to finish his six-week deliberation on whether or not feeding hungry children in school is a good idea.

Mr. Jean: Surprisingly, our economy with labour reviews isn't helping at all, Premier.

While Ontario had a two-year consultation period for changes to their labour code, the NDP here in Alberta has given Albertans less than five weeks with something so important. It's clear to a growing number of businesses and Albertans that the NDP has already made up their minds, obviously. It's created a further climate of uncertainty at a time when businesses cannot afford it and Albertans are out of work. One policy pumped by NDP appointee and insider Gil McGowan is to scrap the workers' right to secret ballots. [interjections] I know they're laughing over there, Mr. Speaker, but this is serious. Is the Premier going to commit to this policy? Yes or no?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

2:10

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, if it's dithering for six weeks on whether feeding hungry children is important or dithering for two years on a piece of legislation that hasn't been amended for 29, both of those things create uncertainty. But you know what doesn't create uncertainty? Twenty thousand new jobs; two new pipelines; \$30 billion in capital investment; ensuring that our schools and our hospitals are there for Albertans when they need them. This is what creates certainty, and this is what helps Albertans' lives get better.

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

Government Procurement Process

Mr. Panda: A new provincial trade deal is good news for Alberta, but the minister's plan to create the new Crown corporation for handing out infrastructure contracts is questionable. This means more spending and more taxes for Albertans. If the minister wants to create new Crown corporations to handle the work his government should be doing, he's going to have to explain himself. Premier: why can't the most expensive government in Canada award contracts in a way that is fast, fair, and affordable?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there are many great mysteries in this place, and one of them is where that hon. member got the information that we're setting up a Crown corporation. We are working on improving our infrastructure and transportation tendering process so that we foster innovation, so that we give work to Alberta companies and Alberta workers, and so that we work to green the economy. Those are all positive things supported by private industry. Maybe in his next question he can answer where he gets this idea of this Crown corporation from.

Mr. Panda: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are speculating what this government will do next. Albertans have seen how the NDP politicized its arm's-length agencies across the province with the hiring of the AIMCo board, the chairs of NAIT, and the chair of the U of A. When they talk about creating Crown corporations, which they might, we all know that that's the NDP's code for creating jobs for their friends. Will the minister give up on his dream to bring back the 1980s and drop this Crown corporation scheme if it is in the pipeline?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things we might do, but if I can just suggest to the hon. member, it might be a good idea to ask a question about real government policy.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the *Globe and Mail* reminds us the minister almost killed the new interprovincial trade deal he is celebrating by demanding a 20 per cent exemption for local public procurement contracts. I'm told that other provinces were so angered by his actions, they were prepared to build a trade firewall around Alberta. Instead, they gave Alberta four years to comply. With no free trade in beer, wine, and spirits in this agreement, was the minister purposely trying to sabotage this trade deal?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the new Canadian free trade agreement and the fact that Alberta finally has a fair and balanced trade agreement with all provinces and territories across this country. Not only have we now levelled the playing field – for decades Alberta had the most open borders, yet it wasn't reciprocated across the country – but now Alberta businesses have the equal access to other provinces and territories that they've enjoyed for decades.

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

AIMCo Governance

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I remain troubled by the dark path this government is taking the pension funds of our civil servants on. Sections 5 and 6 of the AIMCo regulation were put in place to ensure that the rationale for making investment decisions would be based on sound expertise in financial matters. Pensions are no place for political cronyism. To the Premier. The people that have worked

hard for this province want to know their retirement funds are being managed to provide a worry-free retirement. Will you do the right thing and reverse this dangerous decision that could threaten . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got to tell you that it is really rich to hear that coming from the member opposite. I remember a time when we had 5,000 public servants on the steps out there because of the retrograde changes they were trying to make to the very pension plans that they claim to be protecting right now. It is really quite rich coming from over there. You know what? We do have the backs of Albertans who have their money in that pension plan. We will make sure that it's invested well on their behalf, and we will make sure that the people that are running the board are appointed on the basis of their skill and their abilities and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current board was appointed by a former process that provided us with people with impeccable credentials on AIMCo. Simply put, this is a solution in search of a problem. This year there are seven new members coming up, and we're just told, "Trust me," by the NDP. To the Premier: before you endanger the retirement of government employees, what are you hiding, what is your real agenda, and why the need to repeal requirements to have qualified people making decisions on \$90 billion?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member opposite is incorrect in his characterization of what has happened. What we have done is that we've made sure that our agencies, boards, and commissions are open to all Albertans, so all Albertans are welcome to apply. Of course, they will be appointed on the basis of their qualifications. I ask the member to look at the appointments coming forward, and I'm sure that he will agree that that's exactly what happens. Nobody is more committed to protecting defined benefit contribution pension plans for the people of this province than this government.

Mr. McIver: Regardless of what the Premier says, she has opened the door for unqualified people, and she needs to shut that door.

Along with the Member for Calgary-West I have repeatedly asked the Minister of Finance whether he would respond to requests by members of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee to attend the next meeting and explain this bizarre move. He has never answered the question yet. To the Premier: will you direct your Minister of Finance to attend the next meeting of the heritage savings committee and explain?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, there's truly no need to do that because the Minister of Finance answered the question last week on Monday, and then he answered it again on Tuesday, and I believe he answered it again on Wednesday, and it's very possible that he answered it again on Thursday. [interjections] Now, I appreciate that the members opposite may have trouble hearing answers over all this yelling that they're doing right now, but the reality is that the answer has been given, and there is absolutely nothing to hide. We are completely focused on protecting the pension funds of Alberta workers, unlike all of the members opposite. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Opioid Use Prevention and Mitigation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday Alberta Health posted the first near quarter interim report on opioids, further detailing the devastating impact this epidemic is having. An issue as serious as this should have been accompanied by a greater public response. Instead, this government was busy making funding announcements. In the first six weeks of 2017 51 Albertans died from fentanyl-related overdoses, nearly twice as many as last year, yet this government still refuses to call this an emergency. To the associate minister: what will it take for you to call this an emergency?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The interim numbers that were released last week by the chief medical officer of health confirmed what we've heard clearly from front-line health care workers and community agencies, that synthetic opioids remain a deadly threat to Albertans living with substance use, their families, and first responders. That's why we're multiplying our efforts and will spend up to \$56 million over the next year to help Albertans get the treatment that they need to reduce the harm of substance use and to raise public awareness.

Dr. Swann: This minister has repeatedly told us that the government has already got enough resources to deal with the crisis. However, Albertans with mental health and addiction illnesses are not getting the supports they need to recover. Access to treatment clinics outside of our two largest cities is a major issue. I don't know of any clinics that are open evenings and weekends. We continue to see a piecemeal approach instead of a coherent strategy, one that involves government and nongovernment organizations, police, human services, and indigenous groups. To the minister: when will we see a comprehensive provincial opioid strategy aimed at getting ahead of this crisis?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our response to the opioid crisis is being led by the chief medical officer of health, something that the member opposite has supported. We're going to make sure that we have all of the tools available, but we believe fundamentally that this is a public health issue. What we will not do is subscribe to the discredited war-on-drugs approach that the Official Opposition supports. Certainly, access to opioid replacement therapy is a critical part of our government's response, and part of the money allocated in Budget 2017 is to expand the overall capacity and geographic reach of our clinical systems.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's clearly beyond the current chief medical officer.

Following the flood that ravaged southern Alberta in 2013, the previous government established the office of the chief addictions and mental health officer to provide psychological and social help to the flood victims. Later he began to focus on harm reduction issues, including fentanyl and opioids. Instead of supporting this expanded scope for the chief addictions and mental health officer, the minister eliminated the position. My question is now to the Health minister. In hindsight, this may have been a mistake. When

will we see the reappointment of the chief addictions and mental health officer to lead this government's response?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I noted earlier, our response to the crisis is being led by the chief medical officer of health, who's working very closely with experts in the field to ensure that our plan is heading in the right direction. What we are doing is that we have expanded the reach and scope of our naloxone kit program, which has expanded to more than a thousand registered sites across our province, without a prescription and at no cost to Albertans. We are expanding access to opioid dependency treatments across our province, making use of telehealth and other services to ensure . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Associate Minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta Hospital is an important part of the Edmonton-Manning constituency and is a significant part of our mental health network, can the minister please speak to the plans that the government has for keeping Alberta Hospital open?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I was pleased just a few short weeks ago to meet with a number of physicians at Alberta Hospital Edmonton in Edmonton-Manning with the member opposite, and we had a very good conversation. I confirmed to them then, as I will now and forevermore and in no uncertain terms, that as long as there is an NDP government in Alberta, there will be Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Alberta Hospital meets the needs of individuals transitioning to community, can the minister please tell Albertans what the government is doing to ensure that the current wards at Alberta Hospital are meeting the needs of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Again, from the start mental health has been a priority for this government, and our priorities have been backed up with real action and real investments. We are looking at ways that we can use the facility at Alberta Hospital Edmonton to the best of its capabilities. The opposition's plan to cut \$9 billion from capital and \$2 billion from operations would certainly reduce the ability for us to be able to do that. That's why I'm so proud to be part of a government that's making life better for Alberta families, not far worse, which is the Official Opposition's plan.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the hospital has identified the need for an ECT machine and has been promised that that machine will be returned to the site, can the minister please tell my constituents when this will be delivered and ready to be used?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that it's best to bring services to patients because they deserve to have the right care in the right place at the right time, and that's why we're so proud that this device is going to be coming back to Alberta Hospital Edmonton. We expect it to be up and working in the next few weeks. Certainly, in the month of May we'll be able to ensure that we reduce those transportation times and keep the service close to home. So May, and I'm proud of that.

Brewing Industry Trade Barriers

Mr. Fildebrandt: Last week governments signed on to the Canadian free trade agreement. This is a big step forward for Canada finally functioning as our founding fathers intended. Alas, there are still areas of trade not yet covered by this agreement, though. Chief among them is beer. Alberta's brewers face significant nontariff trade barriers, though, when selling to places like B.C. and Ontario, where governments continue to maintain a high level of direct control over the market. What is the government doing to break down trade barriers faced by Alberta's brewing industry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the very important question. Through the Canadian free trade agreement negotiations, that took us about two and a half years, there are a number of outstanding issues. One of them is alcohol and access to other markets. We know that Alberta brewers have faced a disadvantage and continue to when they're trying to sell their products into other provinces' markets. That is going to be addressed over the next 12 months through a round-table from all provinces and territories. We will continue to work hard to ensure that Alberta brewers have access to all Canadian markets.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that while other provinces have nontariff trade barriers, this government has introduced the most overtly protectionist beer tax in the country, which has resulted in multiple successful court challenges from breweries in other provinces, and given that, first, it was a full-blown tariff to be paid for by Alberta beer drinkers and that when the government lost in court it was a preferential subsidy, which fits the definition of a backdoor tariff, is the government . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member. Hon. member, please sit down when I stand.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listen. First of all, the policy that the Minister of Finance brought forward levels the playing field for brewers in this province. As far as the small-brewers grant, I encourage the hon. member opposite to look at other provinces like Ontario which have had similar programs for many, many years. They are trade compliant as far as what we're doing. What I'd love to know is why the hon. member continues to advocate for Alberta subsidizing beers from other provinces. We want to work with Alberta brewers. We want a level playing field for brewers across the country, but we're going to stand up for Alberta brewers.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that when the minister introduced this beer tariff in 2015, we warned that it was unconstitutional and given that he lost in court, given that when the

minister introduced the backdoor subsidy plan, we again warned that it was unconstitutional, given – given – that he scoffed until brewers took him to court again, until he may well lose again, given that the minister's protectionist policy is exposing Alberta's brewing industry to massive uncertainty – given, given – will the minister, if he loses in court again, finally respect free trade?

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: Hon. members, as hon. members I would hope that all of you, but particularly in this instance I would cite the member who just asked what I think might have been a question buried in there, would not use words like "given" in a way that is disrespectful. You were using it, in my opinion, in a sardonic tone, that somehow these various comments that you wanted him to reject needed to be prefaced by "given." To you, to all of you, don't take advantage of the phraseology by lightening and embellishing your comments without getting to the point and asking the policy question that I know you're very concerned about.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Brewing Industry Trade Barriers (continued)

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Much of the hon. member's preamble is actually incorrect. Alberta has and has always had the most open market for beer sales in Canada. What we've done is ensured that the same markup applies to all provinces. I want to inform the member that Alberta lists 7,475 beer products, including some from Saskatchewan. That is not reciprocated for Alberta brewers in other provinces. Unlike what the opposition is proposing, our government will continue to stand up for Alberta brewers.

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

AIMCo Governance (continued)

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you invite a guest to dinner and that guest refuses to give you an answer, that could be construed as impolite, but I'm sure the Finance minister did not mean to be discourteous when he refused to RSVP the members of the heritage trust fund committee. To the minister: let me give you another chance. Will you attend the next meeting of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have stood up and repeatedly said that I'm in constant communication with the AIMCo chair and board of directors, and I'm also talking with the CEO at all points in time. So we'll continue to have good discussions with AIMCo. We'll continue to work on their behalf on this side of the government, and we will ensure that they have all they need to do the great job they do on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this direct question has now been asked at least six times and the minister still will not answer and given that the committee chair has said this about accommodating the minister's schedule, that the meeting is "being scheduled right now, so we will try and do that," and given that

because the minister refuses to answer questions about his attendance, we can only assume that he has decided not to attend, to the minister: will you please tell Albertans why you won't attend the next Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee meeting?

Mr. Ceci: You know, the things that people are interested in, I think, are with regard to the appointments. Just last week there were interviews for board members. A number of interviews took place, so those decisions are being made right now in terms of the six or so appointments that need to come forward. I think members on the other side should judge this government on the quality of the appointments that will come forward soon.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans are alarmed that the NDP is politically interfering with AIMCo and they fear that this meddling can lead anywhere and given that Albertans are concerned that this government views the \$90 billion worth of pensions, endowments, and their heritage fund as easy pickings, will you promise, Minister, to Albertans today that you will not dip into the heritage trust fund or any other fund managed by AIMCo to cover up your gross financial mismanagement of our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. You know, the ridiculousness of the allegations from the other side I don't want to even address. What I will say is that AIMCo is a great company that works on behalf of Albertans, invests a great deal of money. I have confidence in them. I think the other side should have confidence in them as well, but they exhibit a lack of confidence. We'll see where those appointments are shortly when they come forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Pure North S'Energy Foundation

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been concerning reports in the media about Pure North, a nonprofit foundation that promotes the use of multivitamins and supplements. The reports suggest that government provided funding and support for what were called medical experiments on vulnerable people without their fully informed consent. Apparently, these people were given very high doses of vitamin D and other nutrients in a way that can pose a health risk. To the Health minister: did this actually happen, and is this type of program consistent with the guidelines on ethical experiments on people?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This is something that, in the detailed coverage that has been available, happened under the previous government, that grants were given out for these types of programs that certainly weren't respectful, I think, of the dignity that we want to ensure that all Albertans have through our billable services. So, please, to the member: I hope that the next time he's slow dancing with the third party, he asks them that specific question because if that happened, which I have no specific knowledge of, that certainly would be very concerning, and we would want to make sure that we follow it up appropriately.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, given that according to these media reports Alberta Health officials raised very serious safety, ethics, evidence,

and liability issues about Pure North's alternative health program and given that senior ministry officials advised the previous government against providing Pure North with a grant and given that the documentation cited in these media reports came from FOIPed information from the Health minister, will the Health minister tell us if and when she was aware of the concerns of Alberta Health experts when she provided even more funding to Pure North?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. To help inform the member opposite and any others who have concerns, there are two different programs, one that was funded under the former government which, I believe, could have been for things that aren't covered under Alberta Health billable services, and a second program, which is a nurse practitioner program. I hope all members of this House are keen in wanting to work with us to expand the practice of nurse practitioners in primary care. The grant that he's speaking of is about primary care with nurses, LPNs, RNs, and nurse practitioners as well. This is a completely different program. This is a government of Alberta nurse practitioner program, and I think we can wait and see the results of that. But certainly not any other . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, six days before the funding agreement was signed by the previous government, the grant's stated purpose was changed from a research project to simply an expansion of Pure North's existing seniors' program. It appears that a group can circumvent ethical guidelines through creating a program rather than conducting a legitimate medical experiment. To the Health minister: is it acceptable to frame a research project as a program in order to get around ethical guidelines?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I don't believe it is. I think that that question is probably best directed to the former associate minister of Health, who happens to be the MLA for Calgary-Lougheed, at the time at which this was signed. I have very grave concerns about this. As I said previously, maybe when you're square dancing with members of the third party, feel free to ask them that exact question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Justice System Delays

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is well aware of rising crime in rural Alberta but have lollygagged around before doing something about it. The Wetaskiwin Crown prosecutor's office, which serves the Ponoka area, saw a 36 per cent increase in the number of charges commenced this year compared to last, the highest in the province. In response, even after the appointment of new judges, the minister wants to triage crime. Will a miscarriage of justice be the result of the minister picking which crimes will not be prosecuted, or how will she triage crime and maintain the integrity of the law?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member has referenced, there are a number of cases that are at risk under Jordan, and given the intense backlogs that have built in the system

over a long time, that is a significant concern. That's why this government took immediate action to ensure that we are injecting the necessary resources into the system. It's also why we ensured that Crown prosecutors were able to focus on the most serious and violent crimes, so that it wasn't being picked just on the length of time but that we were doing this in a thoughtful manner that protected the safety of Albertans.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, rising crime levels combined with a lack of staff mean that criminals are being let go under the Jordan timeline. Given that both the minister and the Wetaskiwin prosecutor's office have outlined staffing as the main cause of this problem, which has caused 2,100 charges to be unconcluded or just dropped this year alone, and given that we have heard over and over about the staff shortage at the Alberta Crown prosecutors' offices long before the Jordan ruling, why did the minister wait so long to address these issues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand up and confirm that there is hiring under way for a new Crown prosecutor in Wetaskiwin. In terms of the numbers the member opposite cited, I don't think that those are correct. It is certainly the case that the result of the Jordan decision in combination with systemic backlogs has created quite a situation, and that's why this government moved to invest resources where the members opposite would have cut.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, the numbers come from the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association, so if they're wrong, it's them.

Given that prosecution is only one aspect of the problem, the other being enforcement of the law, and that an 18-year veteran of the Edmonton police force recently told me that small crimes are the training grounds for major felonies, yet these are overlooked due to lack of resources, and given that experts know that petty crimes lead to major crimes, what is this government doing to nip the small criminals in the bud before they're back in our court system for a major crime?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, I have to absolutely disagree with the member opposite. Taking individuals who are suffering from mental health challenges or addictions problems and throwing them in jail has never solved anything. We need to provide these individuals with access to the treatment they need so that our criminal justice system can focus on serious and violent offenders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Whirling Disease in Alberta Fish Populations

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In February the government released a statement regarding whirling disease in the Bow River basin watershed outlining steps that will be taken to contain the disease such as testing provincial aquaculture facilities and class A fish farms. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you please update this House on the status of whirling disease in Alberta?

2:40

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I appreciate it very much, and I appreciate the opportunity to update the House on this particular matter. It is a pressing matter for the health of the fisheries in

southern Alberta; there's no question. That is why we have proposed \$9 million extra within this year's budget in order to address the problem of whirling disease, in order to expand our education efforts among anglers and boaters, and to ensure that we are quarantining commercial fish farms and that we are deploying resources for monitoring and further testing so that we can at least know where the disease is and contain it appropriately.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that hundreds of recreational and commercial fish culture licences are under review by the government and given that stocking season is days away, to the same minister: what is the status of these reviews, and when can those waiting expect a decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We have been able to test many of these commercial fish operations. I would be happy to follow up with the member to give him a full status report on which ones have been cleared and which others still require further action. We're working with those commercial fish farms in order to have a response plan that works for them as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the entire aquaculture industry plays an important role in Alberta's economic diversification and given that this industry is estimated to have an impact of up to \$14 million per year and is losing investment every day that decisions aren't made, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what is being done to support the long-term viability of these family-run fish farms so that they can support your efforts to diversify the Alberta economy and grow the fish farm industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that whirling disease poses a challenge to commercial fisheries as well as to our wild fish populations, which is why we have taken the actions that we have. We have invested more resources into monitoring, testing, and working with those commercial fish hatcheries to ensure that we can work with them to develop a plan going into the future that works for them and that works for anglers and for the tourism industry.

Thank you.

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

Calgary Gas Plus Brownfield Site

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents from Calgary-Bow have had ongoing concerns that date back many years about the Gas Plus brownfield site. This empty site is a detriment to local businesses and a major concern to community members, a problem that was inherited from the previous government. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: why has it taken so long for the community to get resolution of this concern?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to start off by acknowledging the advocacy work that has been done by the Member for Calgary-Bow. I appreciate her efforts to advocate on behalf of her constituents very much. Similarly, the city of Calgary has been a good partner to us as we try to find a resolution to this matter. We're in legal proceedings right now to access the site so that we can assess its status, and the matter continues to be before the courts. As the legal action on the file proceeds, we have already taken a number of actions to support community members in the Member for Calgary-Bow's riding, including . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what has the Department of Environment and Parks done to support community members in Calgary-Bow to address this ongoing problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Environment and Parks has begun remediating materials and off-site migration on the outskirts of the site. We are also finishing the field portion of the remedial approach pilot test and completing the remedial pilot activities and findings report from 2016. We're also completing many of the preparatory activities to support implementation of the remedial action plan. In order to support all of those efforts, we're hosting an open house to ensure ongoing communications with community members in Calgary-Bow and to update them on the status of the site, the work done to date, and the actions going forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the brownfield site represents not only problems but also opportunities, to the same minister: what is the government doing to support the 2012 Alberta Urban Municipalities Association's recommendations around brownfield site remediation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have heard loud and clear from municipalities that they would like to see us move forward in terms of reviewing the regulation and operation of the remediation certificate program, so we are pleased to do so. A number of the steps that we've taken so far include release of the updated tier 1 and tier 2 Alberta soil and water guidelines. We've recently hired a brownfield co-ordinator in our department. We've created a crossministry contaminated-site steering committee. We are also updating the Municipal Government Act very soon, concerning taxation powers, to support brownfield redevelopment and negotiations on big-city charters. We are committed to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Victims of Crime

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Victims' services units across the province are seeing a rise in their case files. Victims' services provides a range of services from helping victims through the criminal justice system, providing court support, making sure that victims know their rights, and informing clients of the different

packages available through the Alberta government for financial benefits. Yet despite these facts, they have found no increase in their budget. To the minister: how are you ensuring that victims of crime have access to the services they need?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's important that all victims have access to services throughout the province. That's why we're looking very closely at the system. On the recommendation of the Auditor General we are doing a full evaluation. We have completed a gaps analysis in terms of what needs to be done to move forward. Once we have completed an analysis of how best to measure the outcomes in that matter, we will absolutely be moving forward to help resolve this issue.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that the victims of crime fund has come under fire, as stated by the minister as well, from the Auditor General for its lack of plans to deal with the extra money and given that victims' services units across this province are seeing a sharp increase in case files and given that Alberta has seen an 18 per cent increase in crime, the largest of any province or territory, will the minister direct the surplus monies to the front-line workers who support victims of violent crime?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we've been working very closely with groups that advocate for victims. We have been meeting with them as well as their members to ensure that they do have the resources they need. As we move forward doing our work, it's important not just that that money goes out the door but that it gets to the place where it's directed, that it, in fact, be used to address the needs of victims. That's why we're ensuring that we do the work first and get the money out the door second.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that under the Victims of Crime Act the minister has under section 10(a) the ability to make regulations to make payments from the fund and given the rise in crime and the need for victims' services units and other invaluable victims' services, will the minister amend the regulations today to ensure that victims in our province do not go without support?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the members opposite aren't interested in getting the evidence to make sure that money is used effectively, but on this side of the House we think that it's important to ensure that we have the gaps analysis so that we have an understanding of what the needs of victims are to make sure that that money is going to do what it's supposed to do; that is to say, to support the needs of victims, exactly as we've been asked to do by the Auditor General.

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

Transportation Infrastructure in Fort Saskatchewan

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago, to great fanfare and a superb photo op, the Premier and the Transportation minister announced that Fort Saskatchewan would see a new bridge built. Just like that, everyone applauded. This project was well received; the community was happy. But let's drill down a little bit. In all this applause perhaps the people missed that the total funds dedicated to this project are only \$10 million. Minister, what will

come with the \$10 million? What kind of bridge, a Lego bridge or something?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. [interjections] Obviously, the capital plan ...

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Mason: ... as the member ought to know, extends over a number of years. It's a four-year capital plan, Mr. Speaker. Some projects take more than that. Certain amounts are allocated to that in a given year. That will get the bridge started, and then we'll finish it.
2:50

Mr. Gill: Given that the project is set to begin in 2019 with a three-year build-out, which brings us to 2022, and given that the government has only committed \$10 million to this multiyear project, without any further indication that it'll provide the remaining funds, and given that the people of Alberta are sick and tired of this NDP government's buying announcements, to the same minister: when will the government commit the rest of the funds to this project in 2019? Again, an election year promise ...

The Speaker: Hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, it's really, really interesting that the hon. member opposite thinks that we're not going to finish the bridge. He may not have noticed, but there's a change in government, and we do things differently now than they used to do. That bridge was due for twinning 10 years ago. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Mason: The amount of traffic on that bridge should have triggered this action 10 years ago. That government sat around for eight of those years and did nothing, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sure it was an oversight.

To the hon. member: be cautious of the preambles.

Mr. Gill: Given that we used to pay our debts on time and given that there was a lot of fanfare and a lot of photo ops for \$10 million and given that the Industrial Heartland has been and will continue to be a much-needed economic generator for our province and given that this bridge must provide full access for heavy industries on the other side of the river, Minister, can you commit to Albertans today that this will be a wide heavy-load bridge ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

Mr. Gill: ... to accommodate traffic to ...

Speaker's Ruling Addressing the Chair

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you. Hon. member, when you're looking at the chair, you'll know when he's standing up. When you're looking to the other side, you sometimes miss it. I encourage you to look at the chair in the future so that you can sit down on time.

The Minister of Transportation.

Transportation Infrastructure in Fort Saskatchewan

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to look at the chair. The view is much better.

Now, the mayor of Fort Saskatchewan says: this announcement is very good news for the prosperity of Alberta's Industrial Heartland and the quality of life for our residents; we look forward to continued dialogue with the province and our community as the project unfolds and more information is available. Mr. Speaker, we are supportive of the Industrial Heartland and the economic development that that generates for our entire province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Highway 2 Gaetz Avenue Interchange in Red Deer

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Red Deer-North I see first-hand that my city is an important hub for provincial travel. Given that its unique location on highway 2 is both a defining feature of the city and also a lifelong infrastructure challenge for my constituents as they deal with significant congestion issues, to the Minister of Transportation: what is the government doing to improve road infrastructure in Red Deer along the QE II?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member and her colleague from Red Deer for their strong advocacy on behalf of the people of Red Deer and the surrounding area. Red Deer is in fact becoming a fast-growing economic engine of our province, driving our economy forward. Last year our government moved forward on the Gaetz Avenue interchange project, an \$80 million project that will significantly improve critical infrastructure in the area. I'm very proud of the significant infrastructure investments we've made in the Red Deer region, making life better for all ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents have expressed concerns regarding significant traffic congestion and slow-moving traffic on and off the highway, to the Minister of Transportation: will this interchange improve my residents' frustrations with traffic in this highly used area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. I certainly hope so, Mr. Speaker. The new interchange will accommodate increased traffic volumes on highway 2 by providing three lanes in each direction. It will improve safety – and this is very important – for motorists by separating high- and low-speed traffic getting to and from the highway. And it will integrate the Taylor Drive and Gaetz Avenue interchanges into one full interchange system. These much-needed improvements will help create jobs and sustain economic growth and make life better for the people of Red Deer.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Red Deer has become an important centre for travellers and industry; however, provincial infrastructure has not kept pace with our growth. Given that road

infrastructure needs will likely continue to increase in our growing city, what has our government committed to in Budget 2017 to ensure continued improvements at this important intersection?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, as part of our four-year capital plan we're investing nearly \$5.2 billion in our provincial highway network. It includes a commitment of \$64 million over the next four years to this project, which will help connect communities and make life better for residents in Red Deer. Gaetz Avenue interchange project is well under way, and multiple construction activities are planned for the upcoming season. It will support the city as it hosts the 2019 Canada Winter Games, one of the many reasons our government supported this important project.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, did you have a motion?

Mr. Mason: Oh. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to extend the Routine until its completion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Members' Statements

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

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the incredible sacrifice made 100 years ago at the Battle of Vimy Ridge. As the government of Alberta's liaison to the Canadian armed forces I have had the privilege of meeting and speaking with our guests in the gallery as well as many more members of the Canadian forces and their families at commemorations across our province.

On April 9, 1917, our brave Canadian soldiers began the infamous creeping barrage at 5:30 a.m. Over 3,598 Canadian soldiers were killed and 7,004 wounded in this historic battle.

The Vimy Ridge monument was erected in 1936 to commemorate Canada's fallen sons and the sacrifice so many made for freedom on those fields in France. There are 20 symbolic statues on the monument, but one in particular stood out to me. It was the statue of Canada Bereft, or, as many commonly know her, Mother Canada. She is symbolic of the spirit of Canada weeping for her fallen sons.

Many of you were here in the House when I introduced my eldest son last week. He is the same age as so many who died fighting for Canada at Vimy Ridge. As a mother I am awestruck by the strength of so many Canadian mothers and fathers who said goodbye to their sons not knowing if they would ever see them again. I can't even begin to fathom the sense of loss and grief that so many mothers, fathers, spouses, and children must have endured after this historic battle.

Yesterday I was proud to be part of a declaration by the government of Alberta that recognized April 9, 2017, as the Battle of Vimy Ridge Day here in Alberta. This declaration cannot bring back the fallen, but this recognition and the other commemorations around the province and the world can demonstrate in a small way our gratitude and the honour in which we hold all who fought and still fight for our freedom.

To all Canadians who sacrificed that day, to their families and loved ones, and to those who continue to protect our rights and freedoms: we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

3:00

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Schneider: In my riding next to the Lethbridge Airport is the home of the 20th Independent Field Battery, Royal Canadian

Artillery. At the outbreak of World War I Major John Smith Stewart raised the first Alberta artillery battery, to be known as the 20th battery, augmented with members from Edmonton and Calgary. The 20th would be joined in France shortly afterward by another Lethbridge battery, the 39th. It's interesting to note that during the planning for the battle a trench was marked on the battle map, to be known as Stafford Street in honour of the battery commander of the 39th, Major Alexander Boswell Stafford. Both of these units fought with distinction at Vimy Ridge.

To recognize the importance and close connection these two units have with this historic victory, their armoury was rededicated and renamed as Vimy Ridge Armoury on November 9, 2001. This year, in order to commemorate and mark the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a parade and salute with their howitzers were held on April 8 at Lethbridge city hall. This parade also included cadets from Fort Macleod, Lethbridge, and Taber. That evening the 20th battery held their annual Vimy Ridge dinner, which this year commemorated the 100th anniversary of the battle.

Canada's military achievements during the remainder of the war raised our international stature and helped us earn a separate signature on the Treaty of Versailles, that formally ended the war.

Today on land granted to Canada for all time by a grateful France, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial sits atop Hill 145 as a lasting legacy. This great monument is inscribed with the names of 11,285 Canadian soldiers who were listed as missing, presumed dead in France during the First World War. Whenever Canadians visit the memorial today, one can't help but leave with a renewed sense of patriotism, similar, no doubt, to the sense of pride felt after the victory by the Canadian Corps. It stands as a tribute to all who served our country in the conflict and paid the ultimate price to help ensure that peace and freedom are alive and well today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Employment and Labour Code Consultations

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone can agree that Bill 6 was an unmitigated disaster. Even the minister of agriculture admitted that their communication efforts were lacklustre and that they would need to improve in the future. However, this government just cannot learn from their mistakes. Instead of broadly consulting openly and with wide-ranging engagement efforts across our province, this government is rushing ahead, with limited consultation and minimal ministerial representation, on significant changes to both employment standards and the Labour Relations Code.

The Minister of Labour is utilizing a 36-day online survey to consult only on potential changes to employment standards. Not only is this timeline wholly insufficient; the questions appear to be leading respondents to a predetermined outcome. Thirty-six days is shorter than the consultation period for both daylight saving time and the Castle park management plan and will take less than one-tenth the time this government has spent reviewing WCB. The Calgary Chamber describes the process as completely, woefully inadequate.

Multiple stakeholders are concerned about government bias towards making it easier for unions to certify, moving away from the democratic secret ballot to a card check process, yet despite all the concerns from stakeholders across this province, the government still feels they know best. The minister has stated publicly: the timeline we've set out is very reasonable. Their favourite son, Gil McGowan, stated: we don't need two years of consultation to say what's obvious. Well, the irony of the statement is that Ontario is taking two years to consult before making similar changes.

I would like to take the time to offer this government some friendly advice: remember Bill 6. Take your time, consult widely,

and build as broad based a consensus between business and labour, Albertans all, as you can. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is struggling to recover. These changes could have a serious impact, and the short-term gain of pleasing your elite, union-boss friends will be far outweighed by the damage you do to Alberta businesses and our fragile economy.

Thank you.

Henson Trusts for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Malkinson: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address a question asked by every Albertan parent who has a child with a disability: how will they ensure that their child has the support they need even after they pass away? I know that this question keeps many Albertan parents and caregivers up at night.

Many parents across Canada can ensure that their children receive the support they need after they pass through something called a Henson trust, also known as an absolute discretionary trust, for the lawyers in the room. If Alberta had Henson trust legislation, this would ensure that persons with disabilities who inherit assets following a parent's death will not be penalized, as Frances Harley explained to me, for being too rich. That's shameful. Since my being elected to this House, parents like Frances, Farhood, Mina, and many others have shared with me their worry that their child's AISH would be cut or that their child would no longer be able to afford the medication or supportive housing they need. What these families, what the parents are seeking, Mr. Speaker, is continuity of care.

I have heard these concerns in Calgary-Currie, Mr. Speaker, and they have motivated me to investigate the idea of Henson trust legislation here in Alberta. This is why over the past two weeks my office has begun a series of consultations in both Calgary and Edmonton on the best way to introduce Henson trusts here in Alberta. These consultations could not have been better attended. Self-advocates, disability advocates, and organizations like Connections Counselling and the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary all attended. But I now appeal to my fellow Albertans. I ask them to contact my office and share how such legislation could offer them peace of mind, knowing that loved ones will be cared for after they are gone.

As legislators we should work to make life better. Our laws should ensure that all are able to live dignified lives, but right now in this case ours do the opposite, and that needs to change.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Women's Suffrage Anniversary

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Voting is a hallmark of Canadian citizenship, and I would wager that every single Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, past and present, holds the right to vote in very high regard. Political franchise is a precious right and one of the tenets of democracy. The authority of government flows from the people. It's based on their consent.

Imagine living in a society that didn't recognize you as a person. You could be an accomplished professional. Maybe you're the first female judge in the British Empire or the first woman elected to a Legislature in the British Empire. Maybe you're the first female cabinet minister in the province or the founder of a charitable foundation that cares for people in the community, that still exists today. Imagine that you are well-informed and engaged, not just

engaged but passionate about the place you live, passionate about ensuring better working conditions for women, better wages for women, passionate about protecting children. Now imagine that you have no say in these matters because you are not legally recognized as a person.

The passion to change women's status was what led the Famous Five – Emily Murphy, Irene Parlby, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, and Henrietta Edwards – to ask the Supreme Court of Canada if the word "persons" in section 24 of the British North America Act meant women, too. Because of their efforts the Equal Suffrage Statutory Law Amendment Act was passed in April 1916, giving most women in Alberta the right to vote, ending a time when women had been deemed to have no place in political life, an ideology that maligned women as lacking logic, solely belonging at home to raise children, and incapable of making good choices.

I am incredibly grateful for the courage and commitment of these women and their supporters, Mr. Speaker, because the 29 women that are current members of this Assembly probably wouldn't be here representing the interests of half the population or marking the 101st anniversary of women's suffrage in Alberta, and that would be a travesty.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Rocky View School District Funding

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the importance of education and the need for us as parliamentarians to work together to ensure that schools are being built in the communities that need them most. The Rocky View school district is one of the fastest growing school boards, and Airdrie alone needs an average of two schools built per year just to keep up with the growth. This highlights the desperate need to address infrastructure deficits. Obviously, schools can only fit so many teachers, students, and classrooms.

According to a recent report it appears that Rocky View school district is one of the lowest funded school divisions in Alberta, based on geography and student populations. Encompassed in this district is, of course, the beautiful city of Airdrie. Since 2006 Airdrie's population has more than doubled. It continues to grow by an average of 3,000 people per year, and that is the same as other communities within the Rocky View school division like the rapidly growing city of Chestermere and the hamlet of Langdon. What this means is obvious, Mr. Speaker: more people and more families looking to raise their children in Airdrie.

But schools are not the only problem. Recent changes to the types of school fees that schools can charge have also made it more difficult for schools to fund essential operations like busing for students who live 2.4 kilometres or greater from their designated school. School fees are definitely something that, we can all agree, needed to be addressed, but the current offsets are leaving schools at a loss to cover these programs. In my area the \$3.5 million in offset funding will still leave them with an operating deficit of a quarter of a million dollars. It is my understanding that some discussions have begun to take place with the minister, and I'm grateful for that.

I would also encourage that these discussions continue so that we can all work together in the best interests of students to ensure that schools are in place and that there is adequate funding to support them.

Thank you very much.

3:10 Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour of submitting on behalf of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future its final report, pursuant to Standing Order 52.07(2) and (4), Growing and Diversifying Alberta's Agrifood and Agribusiness Sectors. For the past six months we received feedback from over 100 stakeholders in Alberta and invited nearly 50 presenters to appear in front of the committee. This report provides 13 recommendations, that received unanimous support from all parties in this House. I'd like to thank all members who participated, all submitters who provided feedback, and research services for their hard work on this.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and present a petition that I sponsored in recognition of Vimy Ridge. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to make a proclamation establishing a Day to Commemorate the 100th Year Anniversary of the Victory by the Canadian Expeditionary Force at Vimy Ridge in World War One.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government.

During the summer tour last year and another round of engagement over the winter we heard these ideas for how our government could make a real difference for families and communities. These amendments would strengthen how school boards and municipalities work together on school sites and provide a way for councillors to take parental leave. This bill would make Alberta a leader in how municipalities collaborate on community infrastructure like rec centres and libraries and how municipalities can strengthen relationships with neighbouring indigenous communities. The proposed amendments are a result of extensive and open engagement, which is the hallmark of the MGA review. This is yet another way that we're listening to Albertans and responding to their ideas for how our government can make practical changes that make their lives better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a misnumbered survey circulated by the Wildrose in St. Albert a couple weeks ago, including the question: "Do you believe global warming is primarily caused by

human activity?" I note that both the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and the Leader of the Official Opposition were present for this.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today when I was asking about the new Crown corporation to handle infrastructure procurement by this provincial government, the Minister of Infrastructure made fun. You know, he wanted to know where I was coming from, so I rise here to table five copies of an excerpt from Canada's free trade agreement, which states, "Alberta gives notice of its intention to create a Crown corporation which will be responsible for all the infrastructure procurement . . ."

The Speaker: Hon. member, are you ready . . .

Mr. Panda: Yeah, I'm ready to table this.

The Speaker: Let's move it along. Let's move it along, please.
The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a copy of a letter from the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association which does indicate a 36 per cent increase in charges in Wetaskiwin court as well as more than 2,100 charges that were not concluded in the last year.

Thank you.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to submit the requisite number of copies of an NDP-written document called Your Land, Your Rights, that talks about land rights for landowners in Alberta. I referred to it in a speech I made last week on Bill 204, the private member's property rights bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise and table the requisite five copies of a letter I wrote to the hon. Government House Leader on March 9, where I quote the Premier when she was in opposition. She said, "Really, quite frankly, you know, we've had lots of conversation about how this government has been using Public Affairs Bureau money to essentially engage in pre-election campaigning." This is a great letter I wrote to the minister that I hope he will read very carefully.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8 in order to proceed immediately to debate on Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 202
Protecting Victims of Non-consensual
Distribution of Intimate Images Act

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. It gives me great pleasure today to move into the Committee of the Whole on Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. As the sponsor of this bill it is with great pride that I'm able to say that through co-operation from all parties, I've been able to get this bill to the point where we can actually start to improve the bill through adding amendments at this step here.

I will say that when it comes to the co-operation the government has shown in this, I need to ensure that they understand that while it is important that we are all working together, it is also important that we are trying to improve legislation. I will say they have done their part, and I would like to thank them.

This bill is an important piece of legislation which falls in line with the good work of the federal Conservatives, who made it illegal to distribute the intimate images of individuals.

3:20

My bill seeks to accomplish three important issues. First, it creates the tort law for victims of this egregious crime to seek reparations from a person distributing this issue without their consent. Second, it ensures that for anyone seeking to use intimate images of others without their consent for the purpose of making a profit, all financial gains can be returned to the victim. Third, it gives the principal of the school district discretionary power to recommend further punishments for a student who has chosen to distribute the images of their peers.

Last week we heard about the extradition of a gentleman, a Dutch citizen, who has lost his appeal against extradition to Canada for his role in the cyberbullying case of 15 year-old Amanda Todd, who took her own life, tragically, in October of 2012. Amanda Todd committed suicide at her home in Port Coquitlam, B.C. Prior to her death Todd posted a heart-wrenching video on YouTube in which she told her story of being blackmailed into exposing her breasts via webcam and of being bullied and physically assaulted.

It is my hope that this will never happen again and that we can protect our children from future predators. When I think about my own girls at home, I think about how they may fall victim to these predators. It is important that all parents talk honestly about this topic with their children. With the advent of new technology there is a permanence to what they do online, and actions made in a moment could last forever. It is my hope that this government will take this a step further by providing educational components about the dangers of online predators for our students and everyday Albertans. The Internet and new technologies provide us with new ways to connect with each other, but we need to remind Albertans that privacy isn't just a thing of the past. These are real consequences for respecting this fact, and this bill cements that into law.

Madam Chair, I would like to move an amendment to my bill, and I'll wait until the copies are distributed. I'd like to keep a copy if that's fine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: This will be amendment A1.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Cyr to move that Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act, be amended in section 7 by renumbering it as section 7(1) and by adding the following after subsection (1):

(2) In awarding damages in an action for the distribution of an intimate image without consent, the court must not have regard to any order made under subsection (1)(b).

Signed by myself today.

Madam Chair, this will amend section 7 to prohibit the court from reducing damages when a defendant has been required to account for the profits accrued as a result of the distribution of an image. In effect, this will mean that any damages must be awarded in addition to returning any profits to the victim rather than collapsing these two categories together.

With that being said, I urge all members to support this bill, I urge all members to support this amendment, and I'd like to take again the time to tell the NDP government – they had a concern forwarded to my office. This is correcting an error that had been found, and I want to thank the NDP government for asking me to move this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am very happy to speak to this amendment. I'm going to be happy to speak to the bill later on in committee. I think that the member opposite has done a lot of very good work on this bill. I think he's been very forthcoming and open to working with other members in this Assembly. I think that this amendment in particular does speak to that. I think that what the member said already about this amendment is very important.

I do want to touch a bit on how this amendment does indeed help victims and it does indeed help provide that closure moving forward because as we do see from this amendment, it encompasses a broader range of effects that you might become victim to. It encompasses a broader range of things that you might feel and experience and be affected by moving forward. Without this amendment and without this section a court would look at Alberta's legislation and try to determine why Alberta did not include this provision moving forward, and a likely result would be that the courts could interpret that Alberta's legislation was not keeping those items separate.

It brings us in line with some other provinces such as Manitoba, where we see the Intimate Image Protection Act, which has this section. Under Manitoba's legislation, for example, a victim would be able to recover for things like job loss or suffering or reputational damage. Someone having shared their image without consent as well as anyone being able to take profits, that person who shared their image would no longer be able to keep those profits. This would allow the recovering of those profits and any other damages such as for job losses or reputational damage.

I'm happy to see that the member has taken those considerations into account. I'm happy to see that these types of damages are going to be brought in line here in Alberta as in other jurisdictions. I think that that's something where we are able to ensure that victims are properly compensated and have all of those grounds covered, not just in one aspect but in aspects financially, emotionally, and whatever it may be, that we can close the door on all these types of things moving forward. It's only fair that when you breach someone's trust in such an intimate way, when you break somebody's most sacred and most internal being in such a way, you should not have an opportunity to reduce your own costs by profiting off that breach of trust. You shouldn't have the

opportunity to be able to further your own interests and not be able to be punished for that.

I do want to thank the member for accepting the suggestion to bring forward this amendment. I do want to thank the member for the co-operation brought forward on this amendment and this bill overall, Madam Chair. I'm happy to be able to support this amendment.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is a very reasonable amendment, and I'd like to applaud not only the member but, you know, also the government in co-operating on a very, very important bill. This is one of those bills and amendments that transcend beyond party lines. This is about certainly doing what is right for victims, and I just want to commend not only the hon. member but also the government for listening and co-operating reasonably in order to come to a positive outcome, hopefully, in the conclusion of not only Committee of the Whole but, hopefully, third reading as well. I certainly want to stand up again and continue to support this amendment and this bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for your time.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill.

Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just to start, I actually wanted to talk a little bit about when I was in my first year of university. Actually, it was 2012, that was exactly when Amanda Todd's case was coming out, and I remember not debating it but discussing it in our classroom and how passionate people were because in our time as youth we have all known people who've given out or sent intimate images of themselves and others. Since I was in high school was when camera phones really started getting going, so that's when we started to see more and more of these things come forward and more and more issues. Even when I was in junior high – although I didn't even have a phone in junior high, a lot of my peers did, and I remember it starting even then.

The problem is that it's not usually some random person online. A lot of the times it's someone that you're even dating. Sometimes there's a really hard breakup, and then they decide to send that out to whomever. Or it's a friend of a friend, and the intimate partner has shown it to that person, and they decide to send it to all their friends.

3:30

It's very hard to keep track of these photos, and people need to know that there are consequences to their actions. However, when you trust someone with an intimate photo, there's a sense of hope, and you assume that they're not going to break that trust. You have a trust with them, and they're not to break that. However, sometimes that does happen, so people need to make sure that if they are sending intimate photos, they are careful of exactly where they go.

I actually have an amendment to Bill 202 to strengthen the bill, I believe. Just to explain a little bit, it changes only a couple of small things. I'll wait till you have a copy, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Connolly: Perfect. Member Connolly to move that Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act, be amended by striking out section 5 and substituting the following:

5 In an action for the distribution of an intimate image without consent, a person depicted in the image does not lose the expectation of privacy in respect of the image if that person

- (a) consented to another person recording the images, or
- (b) provided the image to another person,

in circumstances where that other person knew or ought reasonably to have known that a person depicted in the image did not consent to the further distribution of the image.

To start with, the first change, in the first sentence, is from "the person" to "a person." In a lot of intimate photos there can be more than one person depicted in that photo, so it's making sure that it's not just the one person that's distributing the photo that's in charge of it – they should be – but it's to make sure that the other people in that photo, whether it be one other person or more, are also protected under this law.

The second part that it changes is the end. A lot of the times with our new dating apps they'll save one photo, and you can send that photo to a number of different people. If somebody decides to take an intimate photo and send it to one person or multiple people, then they should still be covered under the law to make sure that that person then does not have the right to distribute that one image to other people. So person A can send it to person B, but person B does not have the right to send it to persons C, D, E, and F. That's what this amendment is supposed to do.

Actually, the idea for the amendment was brought to me by a friend named Joshua Shaw, who actually brought my attention to the problem via Instagram. It really shows that not only are our images more important now than ever, but we can find on apps where people are looking at legislation and making changes as well, not just through Twitter or Facebook but through venues that are meant more for fun and are less policy driven. I'm really glad that he was able to bring this to my attention because, quite honestly, I didn't see a problem with it before I viewed it.

I'm glad to be able to put this amendment forward. I've been able to speak with the opposition and the member who brought forward this bill, and I believe that we have some sort of agreement that it does strengthen the bill for future generations. I really hope that all members of the Assembly will support this amendment.

The Chair: Just a reminder, hon. members, that the custom of the House is that we do not use names even when reading from an amendment. I encourage you to always use the constituency name instead.

On amendment A2, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to support the amendment and to thank the hon. member for putting it forward. It's a thoughtful improvement to the legislation. I think it covers some ground where the legislation, without it, would have been noticed and would have had to have been corrected later, so better to correct it right at the front.

Further, thank you to the hon. member for taking the trouble to speak with the sponsor of the bill to get on the same page. That will make all this go better. I think this amendment improves a bill that is timely, important, and I'm sure it will make a lot of difference to a lot of Albertans in the future. I have every intention of supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to amendment A2. You know, one of the things that I think we have seen in the House, particularly on Mondays, is a real desire to work together to ensure that we get legislation that is the best possible piece of legislation. I think we saw that in previous sessions with the Member for Calgary-Bow, we've seen that on a number of occasions around private members' business, and I think that's what we're seeing here today. I know that my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake would like to speak to this particular amendment as well.

I think it's a thoughtful amendment. I think that in consultation with Albertans we've seen a possible gap in the legislation, so we're closing that gap. I think that whenever we pass legislation, it's important that we try to get it as complete as possible, first past the post. That's not always going to be the case. You know, the very need for this type of legislation didn't exist a few years ago, so as technology changes, it's possible that legislation will also need to change. It's really important that we close as many gaps as possible, and this really is about the best idea winning. I think that we have that opportunity here this afternoon, certainly, on amendment A2. I intend to support it, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to do so as well.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've had foreknowledge of this amendment coming forward, and I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood for giving me a bit of a heads-up, if you will, on this amendment moving forward. Whenever you hear – and we'll go to the start of it – that you're going to be striking a section out of your bill, you obviously have some concerns coming up, but again it's just a part of the parliamentary procedure here. By him moving this forward, we're able to discuss it and really get an understanding of what he is trying to accomplish with this. I have to commend him for finding a gap that was within the bill and correcting that gap. That's what we're here for: to strengthen legislation, work together, and make the best possible law within Alberta.

Now, I have to say that when it comes to the expectation of privacy, it just makes sense that you would want to make sure that groups of people would be included in that expectation of privacy, not just singular photos. The fact that the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood was able to reach out to stakeholders in his own constituency on a bill that I'm presenting here is showing advocacy, and I have to say thank you to that member. It's something that we should all be doing whenever we've got a bill. Now, I do know that we go through these bills fairly quickly in the House and that we don't always have that opportunity, but with the private members' bills it does seem like we're able to have a little bit more time. The fact that we were able to have a lot of people putting a lot of effort into trying to strengthen this is something that I think everybody in this Legislature should always aspire to, the best possible legislation.

I will be supporting this amendment, and I would hope that everybody in the House would support this amendment. I again thank the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood for putting this forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:40

The Chair: I'll recognize Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to echo some of the comments that have been made by the hon. members. That expectation of privacy: it's exactly right. You have that expectation. You automatically think that when you are sharing something with

somebody, that is as far as that's going to go. The fact that you were able to reach in and find some other spaces where that may not have been the common denominator: this is excellent. I just quickly wanted to say thank you so much for strengthening this legislation for our children and people and for anybody who may be impacted by this horrible invasion of privacy.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood on amendment A2.

Connolly: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank all members of the opposition for accepting the legislation. I haven't heard from the other two parties. However, I'd like to thank both the main opposition parties for accepting the amendment. It is very important. I do hear from a lot of people, whether it be in my riding or around the province, that privacy is a large issue for them. I know a lot of apps like Grindr and Tinder and Hornet. There are, like, 16 different dating apps now.

An Hon. Member: Name them.

Connolly: I can't. Those are the only three I can name off the top of my head. I don't use them anymore. I have a partner now. So there you go. [interjection] Yeah. It's been one year now, so that's been very nice.

Anyway, beyond that, I hear from a lot of stakeholders that it is an issue for them. Sometimes they go on these apps, and from what I've heard, they send an intimate photo to someone else, and then another person sends the exact same photo back to them, saying: look what I found. Now with this amendment and with this bill, thanks to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that will be illegal. It will be in law that you cannot go around and share intimate photos of somebody else with the rest of the world.

From what I hear, it's very scary, and it can be rather humiliating seeing these photos of yourself being posted, whether it be online or that a friend saw an intimate photo of you. It can be very disturbing. And like what we've seen with the cases such as Amanda Todd and others around the country and even around the world, such violence – well, I wouldn't say violence, but sometimes it can feel like violence – can lead to suicide and depression, and it really becomes a cycle.

I just read an article recently where somebody has been fighting for years. They would google videos of themselves posted online and would then e-mail these websites and say: "Take this down. This is my photo. Please get rid of it." She would do that every single day. An ex had taken an intimate video and decided to post it online, and then that video was online forever. People have it saved on their computers and can send it out to any number of websites and are able to take money from that because of those images.

I really thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for coming forward with this very important bill, and I really hope that this amendment will be able to strengthen this bill. Thanks.

The Chair: Edmonton-South West on amendment A2.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-South West.

I do want to thank the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood for bringing this amendment forward. I think it's something that's so important. I do want to point out that I think he can actually name more dating apps than I can. That's something that's probably quite commendable as well.

This amendment is something that I find very important. When I read it, I had one thought: this should already be implicit. This isn't something we should have to put down in words. This is something that every single Albertan should already know. But with that comes the idea that it's something that not every Albertan does know. It's something that not every single person implicitly does understand, and that's why we are making it explicit. That's why I'm so happy that every single party in this House has said that they are willing to support it.

I think it's something that does strengthen this legislation. I think it's something that does make it stronger, does ensure that if you are on one of those dating apps, if you are on your Snapchat, if you are on your Facebook Messenger or whatever it is, if you're going out there and having consensual communications with other people, if you're going out there and enjoying yourself however you would like, you should be able to expect that you are safe. You should be able to expect that what you did is safe and what you do is safe, and you shouldn't have to be concerned that there is some loophole that because once you consented, that consent is going to be in perpetuity.

We know consent doesn't work that way, Madam Chair. We know that that isn't how we work with consent, but this makes that explicit. This sets that into writing and says to us that we know what is right and what is wrong and if you choose to break someone's trust in the future, well, that is wrong and that is something that we cannot let you do.

Madam Chair, I think that this amendment strengthens the bill moving forward. I think that it creates something that all parties and all members of this House can be proud of as we move forward and will help protect people and will help protect our children as we move forward. I'm so happy to be able to rise and support my colleague from Calgary-Hawkwood. I'm so happy to support this amendment, and I look forward to seeing it pass and help move this bill forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this amendment as well as the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for the initial bill, too.

You know, touching on a few themes that kind of went out there, the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood alluded to victims who used to google themselves, and it really reflected back to something that we used to see in the workforce when we were hiring people and when we would do vetting, when we would do reference checks. There's a new reference check that has been established in the last 20 years, and that's us googling the employees that we're seeking to hire. I'm sure that even within political vetting some of us are probably familiar with political parties that will google members before they even move forward through the process to see if there are any issues.

This leads to revictimization. It leads to a situation where an employer can find an individual online and find unfortunate and compromising images about this individual, and it can lead to a situation where there is a small facet, a very small group of individual employers, who might have malicious intents who will hire these employees because of these things that are occurring, and it can lead to further abuse. I think that this amendment that's been brought forth here by the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood will allow us to strengthen and remove some of these opportunities that will happen as well.

You know, being born in 1986, I unfortunately am tied in with or have been told that I am a millennial. Some of the things that I've gotten to see growing up as a millennial is that technology has evolved, and it's evolved at a rapid rate. I remember that when I was entering the workforce, it was around the same time that camera phones became something, and that was really neat. How cool. I could take a really pixelated photo of my dog and bring my phone to work and show everyone my dog.

I didn't think twice about it being used for bad purposes until one time when I was at work. As an 18-year-old, to date myself again, there was an individual who actually took a compromising photo of his girlfriend at the time, and he was showing it around at the workplace. It was a very intimate photo that she was not aware that we were seeing, and I remember speaking up and telling him that this was inappropriate. But at the time the only means to share it, because data plans weren't as good and social media hadn't caught on, was for him to bring it into the workplace and share that. I felt that that was extraordinarily invasive, and it was only 10 people seeing this.

Now billions of people can have access to these invasive images. It's very unfortunate, and it's very inappropriate. With that being said, I think anything that we can do to avoid these things from occurring, any way that we can reinforce and strengthen this bill that's been brought forward, anything that we can do to make sure that this occurs is very important.

I want to thank all members who've really done their due diligence, really read this bill thoroughly, and the member who's done a lot of research to really look into this very important issue. That's why I'll be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:50 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fitzpatrick	Nixon
Anderson, W.	Goehring	Piquette
Babcock	Hinkley	Pitt
Carson	Horne	Rosendahl
Clark	Jansen	Schneider
Connolly	Kazim	Schreiner
Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sucha
Cyr	Luff	Sweet
Dang	Malkinson	Turner
Drever	McIver	Westhead
Ellis	McKittrick	Woollard
Fildebrandt	Miller	Yao

Totals: For – 39 Against – 0

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm delighted to speak about this bill, and once again I really wanted to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this bill forward and for his acceptance of the amendment from the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. Unlike the two previous members who've spoken, I'm from an older generation, but I do have two sons who are of the age of the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, so this whole issue of images that may have been taken against their consent, images that may make their way onto the Internet and through various social apps, is one that has really preoccupied me as a mother because I just know how easy it is for these images to be used in ways that are either meant to dishonour the person or sometimes just – as a lot of young people do, they enjoy joking or enjoy teasing each other. I was very, very concerned about this.

Fortunately, one of my sons is a teacher. During his schooling in university they were told about the challenges if teachers do post things or are involved in any social media activity that discredits their role as teachers. Having talked a lot to my son, whom I'm hoping members will get to meet because he's coming back from teaching overseas this year – we've had many conversations about how careful he is in using social media and that he goes overboard in terms of protecting any images of himself that could be construed to be offensive to the role of teachers. But as we all know, those things happen, and I'm so glad that the member has thought to protect young people. Also, I think that the bill is really a cautionary bill for all of us, especially for young adults who, even though they're above the age of 18, may not really understand how they need to continue to protect their own images.

4:10

The other thing I wanted to mention in the House is that this bill also clearly gives victims some path for them to seek compensation and some path for them to feel that their victimization has been heard. I think that as we pass this bill and as we discuss it, we really need to remember the victims. As we mentioned in this House before, in Canada we have had a number of young persons who've been victims. I'm assuming that there are probably hundreds more who have been victimized by the inappropriate distribution of intimate images but that we don't know about because they've never gone to the police, have never gone to an adult or to others to let them know.

As I am going to vote for this bill, I'm going to remember not only the past victims, but also I'm going to really think about how this bill is going to prevent the victimization of other young persons in the future because it's going to be a caution to everyone to ensure that they do not get involved in any activities that inappropriately distribute intimate images of anyone that they know. I think that's really important, too.

Madam Chair, I am so delighted that the member has worked with all members of this House on this bill, and I'm also very delighted that as an Assembly we've recognized the importance of protecting victims from this kind of behaviour. I'm really looking forward to the enactment of this bill if the House decides to vote in favour and to how any kind of public media, any kind of communication is going to ensure that it's made very clear to people that this kind of sharing of inappropriate images is going to result in some serious punishments and some serious consequences.

I want to thank the member once again, and I'm looking forward to the House voting in favour of this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I would like to thank my friend the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and all of

the members that have contributed to this bill. There's been so much great work that's been done in the House. It's very, very heartening.

I fully support this bill. I think it adds a critical component to online safety for all Albertans. This bill allows someone to sue a person who oversteps personal boundaries by publishing private pictures, and the bill will establish provincial tort law to allow the individual to sue another one who distributes intimate images without consent. The tort law provides compensation for people who've been injured or whose property has been damaged by the wrongdoing of others. This goes anywhere. It's a vast area of private law that has evolved into technology and social issues and has been used by a growing number of victims of crime to help them seek justice against perpetrators. It's also been at the centre of recent high-profile Canadian cases involving the abuse of children, the liability of governments for failing to protect citizens from contagious diseases and from defective medical devices.

The focus here with the tort law is that it will support both the federal and other provincial laws that address cyberbullying and in general the distribution of pictures without consent. The penalty under Bill 202 brings home some of the reality of the impact of publishing pictures without consent, and there will be fines attached. The victim could seek damages for harm done.

The School Act will also be amended by adding a clause which will allow teachers and principals the discretion to suspend a student and seek various forms of punishment. The school trustees still retain the authority to hear appeals from the student and their parents.

Of high importance for me – and the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood had also mentioned this. He was speaking about how the removal of these images is very, very difficult. So Bill C-31 at the federal level amended the Criminal Code to provide for a new offence of nonconsensual distribution of intimate images, which includes “complementary amendments to authorize the removal of such images from the Internet,” but as we know, that is still very, very difficult to accomplish, and also “the forfeiture of property used in the commission of the offence.” As you can imagine, as these pictures are published and sent out into the world, it is very, very difficult to find out where they've gone and to actually have that property returned. Well, not even returned to the person but removed so that it can't be used over and over again. It's a very important part of this legislation.

If we're teaching our youth early on about the consequences of this, we'll have a much better opportunity to make sure that at the monetary level they're hit in the pocketbook initially but will also understand the consequences should a person be able to google their name and see that this horrible piece of their personal life is still distributed across the Internet. We have to make sure that that stuff comes down.

Bill 202 is also consistent with recent legislation passed in Manitoba, which I think was brought up by one of the other hon. members. Just to be clear about that, the Intimate Image Protection Act created new tort law to address nonconsensual distribution of intimate images. This will allow a person whose intimate image was distributed without consent to sue the person who distributed the image. The Manitoba law also includes provisions similar to the federal law in that it requires the government to make supports available to assist people who have an intimate image distributed without consent.

Very, very importantly, especially with regard to what I had just mentioned previously, is that there are people who may even believe that their image is about to be distributed. That's also very important. With the instantaneous outreach of Snapchat and the various other apps that were mentioned, that I have, truthfully, no clue about, this is instant – instant – information that's put out there.

So if a person is concerned that their image may be put out there, that is a very, very important aspect of this legislation as well. This is highly proactive and allows a potential victim to head off potentially damaging situations. Assistance under the Manitoba legislation can include having an image removed from the Internet as well as information on some of the legal remedies and protection for persons concerned about the distribution of this intimate image.

What this legislation does is that it brings the focus to a new form of victimization that is no longer localized. I say “new” because it’s newer to me. Other generations it’s not so new to, but for those of us who are just wading into this with our own children and with the complexity of this, it’s really, really important that we understand that this information can go viral and can go universal in nanoseconds and can follow a victim around the world for the rest of their lives.

Can you imagine that for a young person in a developing part of their life, to have this image follow them for the rest of their lives no matter what they do? If an employer is looking up things about them, this might be a central facet of what is to learn about them in this area. So it’s one of the more important pieces of this legislation. Of course, to again mention the tragic consequences we’ve seen through digital victimization, we have people committing suicide, and we continue to mourn with their family and friends.

The other thing, Madam Chair, is that our laws have to keep pace with our world, and Bill 202 provides all Albertans with a way of seeking restitution that will hit the victimizer in the wallet. If we can start there, there’s ample opportunity to fix the other things that follow.

Madam Chair, the bill is about protecting victims, people who are having face-to-face consequences of having intimate pictures of themselves shared across the Internet. The Internet is a 24-hour ability to bully somebody, 24 hours and no safe spaces ever. I’m hoping to see that the consequences of this legislation are discussed amongst Albertans at home, around the water cooler, while you’re shopping, whenever people have conversations, that people will talk about this and have discussions about what constitutes acceptable behaviour in today’s digital world. I’m hoping that shining a spotlight on digital victimization will spark conversations to destigmatize being a victim of digital exploitation.

4:20

We all have the right to expect that what we do in private remains private unless and until we give specific permission to share. When private actions are shared without consent or knowledge, as we have seen with Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons, the consequences can be absolutely tragic. My hope is that this bill will raise awareness of the pervasiveness of the dangers of cyberbullying by actually describing specific actions that are offences under the law.

Again I’d like to thank my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the other members who have provided amendments to this legislation to strengthen it so that we can provide mechanisms of restitution to victims.

Thank you.

The Chair: I’ll recognize Calgary-North West, followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is a bill that feels very close to my heart. When I was associate minister of family and community safety, I had an opportunity to go to Vancouver and meet with Carol Todd, Amanda’s mom, as she was going through the period before they found out who the suspect was at the time in Amanda’s case. I was just out in Vancouver a week and a half ago

and went for lunch with Carol. We’ve had many opportunities over the last number of years, as we’ve become good friends, to talk about what happened with Amanda, to talk about what we need to see in this country in terms of legislation, and to talk about kids and what kids go through.

You know, as the mom of a 16-, almost 17-year-old now, for those of us in the Chamber who have kids somewhere in that age group, if you’re anything like me, your kids are much smarter than you and not always interested in taking your advice. So when it comes to warnings that we have about who you’re chatting with on the Internet, often our kids will say, “Oh, my God, mom; I think I would know if I was speaking to a 40-year-old man,” except that it’s not always that easy. Our kids think they know all these things, but we need to make sure that we have these additional protections in there because, as we saw in the case with Amanda, she didn’t know who she was talking to. She assumed it was a young person. Therein lies the danger of the Internet, something that my generation didn’t have to deal with. [interjection] Exactly. My generation certainly didn’t have to deal with this.

I look at, you know, what they have to deal with now, and it’s not just the propensity of cyberbullying that happens within their own peer group that can happen in schools; it is the fact that these sorts of things then have no global boundaries. So you have no idea if someone chatting with your 16-year-old daughter is another 16-year-old girl or boy or a 50-year-old-man who lives halfway across the world. We have to really think – and I like this piece of legislation because I think it encourages us to really spend time and think about what kids face when they’re on the Internet today.

You know, if there’s one thing that I feel grateful about, it was the opportunity in my former position to speak with a lot of people who had experience in this area, who talked about the effects it had on their families and how important it was that governments listen to the families who have gone through this and understand that when we take the time to make sure we have these added protections for our children, we make our kids safer and we make our communities safer and we give parents peace of mind in knowing that this is on the books and is something there to help.

It’s also a piece that encourages us to sit down and have a conversation with our kids and to talk to them once again, even though sometimes they get very tired of having the conversation, to layer in the conversation about where they spend their time on social media and the choices they make and how those choices can end up being very scary. You know, when I look at this, I applaud this, and I applaud the member for bringing this forward.

If it does anything to spur a new conversation for those of us who are parents and our kids – and some of us are parents who have kids that aren’t quite at that point where this is becoming a discussion, but certainly it’s going to be a discussion for a lot of folks in here maybe in the distant future or the not-so-distant future. I hope that it gives these parents a better understanding of what’s happening out there on social media and the risks their children could face in the future and do face right now and that they will use that opportunity to sit down and have that conversation with their kids. Maybe the conversation at a younger age is as simple as: remember that the people that you talk to on social media aren’t necessarily who you think. Then as they get a little older, layer into that conversation not only about making sure that you make good choices but also about knowing that you have rights yourself. Whether you’re 10 years old or you’re 15 years old or you’re 18 years old, you have rights yourself.

I want to thank the member for this. I will certainly be supporting his bill and hope as well that it encourages a new level of conversation between parents and their kids about what’s happening out there on social media. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-North West for sharing her comments. Thank you in particular to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this forward and to the Member for Calgary-Hawwood and others for bringing forward your amendments and sharing your stories.

It's been nice to be here this afternoon as we work together as legislators across party lines, within and between different caucuses, working together for something that's very important and something that's bigger than any one of us or any of our partisan differences. It would be nice if we were able to do this a little more often, actually. I think this Assembly would work a little better, and I think Albertans would think more highly of the political process. It's nice that we're able to do that today, and let's hope it will continue for a long time to come.

Just this past weekend my daughter celebrated her 13th birthday. She celebrated with a few friends and celebrated with her first electronic device, that she now can take to school and text, I'm guessing, 3,000 or 4,000 times a day with her friends. That's just the way of the world these days. That's just the way it is. We've talked a lot in the months leading up to her birthday and her getting this new device about what is appropriate and what is not appropriate.

Now, I have a great deal of faith in my daughter. I think she, luckily, takes after her mother and is a very, very sensible young woman. She's incredibly bright, and I couldn't be more proud of her. I could spend the rest of my 10 minutes here just talking about my daughter. She might not like it, but I think she really is a remarkable person. I don't worry that she might make bad choices because she is a sensible young woman, but things happen. Things happen that are beyond the control of individuals. Certainly, things happen in school, and I'm not so naive as to think that someone in my own family might not make a poor choice at one point.

What if some things happen that are beyond your control? We all carry our phones. We all have these cameras on our phones. You know, what if images are taken that are not consensual? What if images are taken without the knowledge of the person who's in the image? Now, we know that's illegal. There is federal legislation that says that that's illegal, but what are the consequences for the people who would not only take intimate images but distribute those images without consent? That is what this bill seeks to address and why I'm such an enthusiastic supporter of this bill because it allows for civil action to be taken against someone who has distributed intimate images.

The amendments that have been brought have covered off some of the potential gaps in the legislation, and I think it's a very positive thing that we've been able to work together to do that. It also allows for school principals and others in the education system to bring consequences upon anyone who is in the school system who would distribute intimate images. I think that brings some real consequence to what is a very, very difficult thing to properly police.

4:30

I hope this bill gets sufficient media coverage, that we get sufficient coverage on social media in particular so that people know about it, so that people will think twice before they would do such a thing as sharing intimate images in spite, as a way of getting back at someone, for profit or personal gain or even just as a joke, thinking it might be sort of funny to get this out there. As we've heard in some of the stories here from other hon. members, once an

image is out there – the Internet is forever – it is almost impossible to get rid of it. The only way to really, truly avoid these images being shared around is by not having them online in the first place. So knowing that there's a consequence should you do that, I think, is a very, very important way of ensuring that people maintain control over their own images and that we don't end up in these very difficult situations where people are bullied, where images are shared without consent, and people will no longer have to fear suffering the consequences. Unfortunately, some of the benefits that modern technology has brought have also brought some substantial risks and downsides and negatives.

With that, I'll again thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this important bill forward and will enthusiastically support it at all stages of the bill. I encourage all of my hon. colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I want to reflect back, first, to kind of how we got to this bill here and to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, who brought forth this bill. From the roots of it, how I sort of see why this came about, and something that I can deeply understand is that, like myself, he's a father. As much as he and I may disagree on certain principles in this House, I can acknowledge that from what I've seen, he's a great father. I reflect back to when we were in ethics and accountability and he brought his daughter in and she watched him from the gallery last summer, just kind of that bond that he likes to have with her. So I can kind of reflect back to that.

It kind of reminded me of this weekend. Actually, on Saturday I was thinking of taking my kids to Nanton because, you know, my kids have seen a lot of work the government has been doing in promoting rural Alberta, and they've seen a lot of the promotions there, so I was going to take them down to Nanton and visit the candy store and see some of the tea shops. But I found out about a sort of meeting we were going to have at the Women's Centre of Calgary to talk about Bill 2 with a lot of stakeholders. I felt it important to go, so I actually brought my kids with me. My daughter got extraordinarily shy when we were there, and she wrapped her arms around my neck – she's about two and a half – and she wouldn't let me go because she knew I would keep her safe. Now, having a nine-year-old now, I know those moments don't last forever, and it's going to be harder to keep our kids a bit more safe because they're experiencing the world, and we need to allow them the opportunity to make mistakes.

Which brings me back to, you know, where we are at with technology and alluding to the fact of the millennial, which I've talked about before. You know, I love technology. I love the fact that I can go onto the WWE Network and watch any pay-per-view for just \$9.99. I enjoy the fact that I can listen to any songs I want to on Apple Music or watch Netflix and see any movie that I really want to. I can go online and search about Ukrainian history here in Alberta if I want to, and I can use my smart phone to do all these things. But the unfortunate thing around that smart phone is that as much as it's a tool, it's almost a weapon.

You know, I reflect back to when Alfred Nobel invented dynamite. He did it for the right reason. He did it because glycerine was highly volatile and people were dying transporting this material, that was used for mining, so he invented dynamite because it was more secure and people wouldn't die. In return, unfortunately, people started using it as a weapon, even though it was something that was invented for good.

As government it's our duty to ensure that we move forward with reasonable legislation that allows us to protect the citizens and our youth that are in this province. Unfortunately, technology can be used for things like voyeurism, revenge porn, nudes leaks that happen. There was a high-profile one recently with, you know, the iCloud leak. There was another high-profile one, that's been all over the news media, which was when former professional wrestler Hulk Hogan had a leak that was leaked on Gawker. Actually, some of the legislation that was in place in the United States allowed him to sue Gawker, and he actually won. So that lawsuit has finished, and I think he was able to get a big settlement and was able to get all of that information taken down, which shows that while he's still a victim of those leaks, he's able to start the healing process.

We've already said that, you know, here in Canada we've seen the high-profile case of Amanda Todd. It hurt a lot of us when we heard about this because we all think about how that could be our child or someone we love, and this led to new legislation that we saw from the federal government, moving forward to protect from these online crimes that were happening as well.

Moving forward, looking at this legislation allows us to have five main things which create a tort, or grounds for civil lawsuit, which is something that I alluded to earlier. That allows people to redeem themselves over the situation because, you know, as I've talked about, a lot of employers now are doing online searches of individuals before they hire. So I could understand that a person could have trouble seeking a new career if there was a leak, even if it happened 10 or 15 years ago, and they're a qualified professional but can't find a job because their name gets Google searched. You know, if you Google search my name, you're going to find out everything about me because mine is a pretty uncommon name.

You know, it creates broad powers to award remedies related to distribution of these images. It allows parents the power to take civil action if their children are under 18. It's important to recognize that these parents can have that opportunity to really try to protect that child long term because, as I've alluded to, there are going to be challenges for that individual in potentially seeking employment. It will allow the courts to issue bans on identifying information as well, and it will allow them to try to really pull back on some of the information that's been released online that can be very damaging to that individual.

Furthermore, it allows schools and school boards to have some disciplinary measures because a lot of these mistakes, unfortunately, happen with a lot of youth. Sometimes there are situations where someone has made a mistake and has shared this information, and the person who has shared that explicit photo doesn't fully comprehend the impact that it's had.

While our work is not done with this legislation – there's important work that we need to do educating youth and educating our kids about this – I think this is a very important step that we're taking, and I want to thank all members of this House who have contributed to it as well.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 202, put forward by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I want to thank him for bringing this bill forward as well as the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood for his helpful addition to the bill.

Today is one of those sometimes too rare days where we actually manage to find agreement among all parties and work fruitfully for the people of Alberta. We seem to have had a few of those lately, and it certainly is a pleasant change in tone from the usual

combateness of this place that we all love so much. This bill is the kind of thing that Albertans want to see as a concrete step forward for protecting people, in particular young people, who are most likely to fall victim to the nonconsensual sharing of intimate images.

This bill will create a tort, giving people the power to sue and seek compensation when intimate images are taken of them and are shared, normally online, without their consent. A lot of people have stood here and raised their own experiences as mothers and fathers as reasons for wanting to support this bill, and as someone who has recently joined the club, I can appreciate more than ever where they're coming from.

4:40

You know, I'm the youngest member on the opposition side of the House, which makes me significantly older still than the youngest member on the government side of the House, but our generation, those of us in our early 30s, grew up with lots of opportunities to get into trouble where cameras were more readily available than any generation before us. Younger people today are in a whole other category when it comes to the availability of cameras and the ease with which images can be distributed online now. I can only imagine the trouble that members of this House would be in if we had easily accessible cameras on us 24 hours a day as kids and the ability to redistribute images. We can just imagine that one day there'll probably be a President of the United States who has very embarrassing photos of parties and drinking while they were in college. In fact, we may have already had those.

The hon. government whip actually spoke very well to this at an early stage of the debate, where it was not the exact kind of case, you know, but where he perhaps imbibed a bit much as a teenager and found himself the object of hurtful hilarity. I think many people can sympathize with that and how hurtful that was on a smaller level. But a video like that taken in our generation: as hurtful as that might be, it's not on the Internet.

As the hon. leader of the party stated, what happens on the Internet stays on the Internet. When young people get into trouble either consensually or nonconsensually with these kinds of things today, it lasts forever. When people put this kind of thing online – we colloquially refer to it as revenge porn – for whatever reasons they have, it's not a temporary laugh at someone's expense. It is deeply hurtful and stays with them forever and can seriously affect what they do going forward. You can just imagine that if a young girl was fearing that this was out there, she might be much less willing to take big risks in life and do something like run for public office knowing that someone could take those images and use them against her. So she might not reach her full potential in life.

We need to create the strongest disincentives possible against exactly this kind of action. You know, once something is posted online like that, there are ways to try to get it taken down, but the process is long and expensive and arduous and never truly and fully complete, and the damage is done. We have to build our laws in such a way as to prevent this from happening in the first place.

I'm so pleased to see that members of the government, the Official Opposition, the third party, and the two independent members are in unanimous agreement about this bill. In fact, we've had a friendly amendment from the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood which I think improves it. We're going to make sure that those who share these images and distribute them are also subject to penalties in addition to those who post them originally.

So I won't belabour the point too much. Members on all sides have spoken adequately to this bill. I want to thank the Member for

Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing it forward and all members for supporting it.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Madam Chair, I stand in support of this bill. How could I not? I'll begin by thanking the member, first of all, for having the conversation with your daughter and then for putting the bill forward.

As the member is aware, in my previous career I worked in the field of corrections for over 30 years, and this was a topic of conversation with a number of my colleagues on a number of occasions. We discussed how easily it could happen and how devastating it would be to the person being victimized. We discussed the difficulty previously of knowing that these images were being shared without consent and recognized that now it's a little easier to track and find out that they're happening, because I come from that older generation.

Now I'll share a little story about my childhood and how one perceives things. This is a good story but shows how easily young people can get caught up with the stories of others. I think often about myself as a child. I grew up in a family that had many members, all of whom had what Newfoundlanders call the gift of the gab. All of my uncles were renowned storytellers. I remember several of my uncles coming from away to visit the family back in Newfoundland. When they visited, there was always a conversation around the kitchen table, which went on for hours. It really was a kitchen table party. We as children were absolutely hanging on every word of the stories that were being told. Bed was out of the question because even if we were sent to bed, we would very quietly arrive back on the stair to listen to the rest of the story.

I realized, as I grew older, that each uncle tried to out-storytell his brothers. We were certainly entertained, but having said that, I realize that the stories were certainly embellished. There was always an element of truth in the story, but it was stretched to the very limit to make a more interesting story.

I've led with this story because, as I learned through my own life experiences, whether we meet others in person or online, the story that is told is most often accepted as truthful. We expect others to act as we would act. I've also learned that, in fact, many others do not act in this way. As an adult, if I could be taken in by a story that was shared with me, leading me to trust another person, then how much more easily are children and younger adults taken in?

Once taken in, it is but a short step to sharing intimate things, whether that is about your feelings, intimate details about your life, or perhaps pictures. At first those pictures may be just a picture of you and the dog, but eventually the sharing may move to more intimate pictures or pictures or videos taken without one's knowledge. Sharing something, especially something intimate, would be with an expectation of privacy. You would not even think of asking that it not be shared because that's your expectation, that if you're sharing something private, it will remain private.

However, if it is shared, your privacy is breached. You have been violated even if you're not aware of it. Now, with the advent of the technology we have available at our fingertips, this violation becomes public very quickly. The level of damage which is done through the commission of this offence is unfathomable. If you are an adult and this happens to you, how do you feel? When you are e-mailing or facebooking with a friend, is it your friend, or has your account been hacked?

4:50

I would suspect that you are reasonably careful about what you say or share on any electronic device. My grandson is about the same age as the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. Perhaps he is sick of me harping on him to be careful about what he says, receives, or shares on social media. Like the Member for Calgary-North West, all I can do is share with him my cautions. I have shared the stories of other persons who have been drawn into this quagmire of violation.

The question for me is always: why would somebody do this? However, they do. Certainly, one can take action when you find out this is happening. Punitive consequences are one response. Any monetary gain by the perpetrator must be removed, and it should be used for the plaintiff. One may never heal from such a violation as the images remain in the Ethernet forever.

I absolutely applaud the member for bringing this forward, and I certainly support it with all my heart. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments on this bill?

Seeing none, you're ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 202 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 202. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Written Questions

[The Acting Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Urban Indigenous People

- Q1. Mr. Hanson:
What progress has been made on the research project on service delivery models and best practices to urban indigenous people who are transitioning to urban centres, as referenced on page 17 of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations annual report 2015-16?

Urban Transition Strategy

- Q2. Mr. Hanson:
What progress has been made on the development of an urban transition strategy, as referenced on page 17 of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations annual report 2015-16?

Highway Resurfacing

- Q7. Mr. van Dijken:
As of March 1, 2017, what is the cost to resurface one kilometre of highway with gravel at both 11-metre and 13-metre widths?

Highway Resurfacing

- Q8. Mr. van Dijken:
As of March 1, 2017, what is the cost to resurface one kilometre of highway with asphalt at both 11-metre and 13-metre widths?

Alberta Innovates

- Q9. Mr. Panda:
How many new businesses have been created or financed by Alberta Innovates, Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions, Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions, Alberta Innovates: Energy and Environment Solutions, and Alberta Innovates: Technology Solutions in each fiscal year from 2014-15 to 2016-17?

Alberta Innovates

- Q10. Mr. Panda:
Was any technology commercialized by Alberta Innovates, Alberta Innovates: Bio Solutions, Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions, Alberta Innovates: Energy and Environment Solutions, and Alberta Innovates: Technology Solutions in each fiscal year from 2014-15 to 2016-17, and if so, what revenue was generated for each product?

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to call it 5 o'clock and proceed immediately to Motion 504 on the Order Paper, notwithstanding the order as set out by the draw provided for in Standing Order 41(1), and that Motion 503 be called for consideration on the next available Monday.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

School Nutrition Programs

504. Ms Miller moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider expanding the number of communities that are served by school nutrition programs.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to a concern that families in my constituency and Alberta have, access to nutritious food for their children. I would also like to thank the hon. Minister of Education for his announcement last week regarding the expansion of Alberta's school nutrition program for the 2017-18 school year. The additional investment of \$10 million for this program is yet another

example of our government's commitment to improving the lives of Alberta families and children. We are all aware that Alberta's economy has been in a difficult position, and this side of the House is keenly aware of the effect this is having on Albertans. Let me be clear. The previous government's failure to diversify our economy after 44 years in government is adding pressure to Albertans' pocketbooks. That's exactly why investments in programs such as expanding Alberta's school nutrition program are so vital.

Back in the early '90s, when my children were in school, was when I first observed the large number of children coming to school with little or no lunch. I was part of a nutrition committee for 120 kindergarten students. Our budget was 12 and a half cents a day per child to provide a small snack. The problem was that about a third of the children were relying on that snack to substitute for both breakfast and lunch. Through generous donations from the community we were able to provide a substantial meal for the children.

During this same period my six-year-old daughter came home from school one day quite upset. She asked me if it was okay to tell a white lie. I asked her to explain, and she told me that one of her friends had brought the same carrot for lunch and didn't eat it. She said that the carrot was black. My daughter asked if it was okay to take extra lunch every day and share with this girl. She said that the girl was embarrassed when she was sent to the office to get a sandwich. My daughter wanted to tell a white lie. She wanted to tell her friend that she would be in trouble if she didn't eat all her food and that her friend should help her. The next day and every day that my kids were in school, they all took double lunches to share with other students.

That's why this motion is important. It is my goal that every community and school in the province have access to this program because on this side of the House, Madam Speaker, we are ensuring that life is more affordable for everyone. On this side of the House we are making practical changes that are making life better for Albertans. The opposition would cut \$9 billion out of the budget, meaning that vital programs like this would be on the chopping block along with increases in school fees and larger classrooms. That is why I'm standing here today. I am advocating on behalf of all my constituents who have reached out to me and have shared their concern with me to ensure that all children who are unable to receive healthy, nutritious foods have access to them.

5:00

I was pleased when the pilot program was introduced not only because it addressed another campaign promise our government had made but because the pilot program was potentially the start of a larger framework. As I've seen the program roll out, I am confident in supporting not only the recent announcement but in urging the government to continue measuring its progress, successes, and challenges so that this program becomes accessible to all children and families who need it, because on this side we want to make life better for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you why I'm confident in supporting the school nutrition program and why I want the government to consider continued expansion. Numerous studies have shown the link between students having access to nutritious food and their success. We have a duty as members of this Legislature to ensure that our children have the tools they need to ensure success. Given that the first year of this program is expected to see approximately 520,000 breakfasts, 530,000 lunches, and 490,000 snacks for students, I am confident that many families and children who need the support are receiving it.

As I mentioned, with the expansion to the remaining 46 schools our government is fulfilling a campaign promise. Not only are

children receiving food that is improving their outcomes, but many families are learning about nutritious foods that they can prepare easily and cheaply at home. I am pleased to see that this aspect has been incorporated into Alberta's school nutrition program because establishing strong health promotion and healthy dietary habits is vital to promoting long-term health for families and communities.

This is why this program, which follows the Alberta nutrition guidelines for children and youth, is so important. It ensures that the food students receive is the right food for their growing bodies and minds. We are holding schools accountable by having school boards demonstrate that their program follows the Alberta nutrition guidelines to ensure effectiveness and protection of public dollars.

We are aware that Albertans are resilient and hard-working, so by providing families with information on nutritious foods, families are becoming empowered. Participating school authorities are required to include a nutrition education component as part of their program. The fact is that when parents are involved in nutrition programs, it has a lasting effect on children, so we need to ensure parents also have the tools to support their children by engaging in healthy eating.

We have already seen examples of children and youth empowerment because of this program. For example, the culinary arts students at J.A. Williams high school prepare and deliver lunches for the Vera M. Welsh elementary school in Lac La Biche, which means students are earning credits, gaining valuable work experience, and learning about healthy eating habits.

Our government is making life better, even in a tough economy, and ensuring programs like Alberta's school nutrition program remain vibrant. As the hon. Premier stated last week, we know students can't focus in class if they have an empty stomach. Giving students access to a daily nutritious meal not only ensures they have the fuel they need to get through the school day; it also helps develop the skills that ensure lifelong healthy nutrition. That's how we are working to make life better for Alberta families.

While the opposition doesn't share our priorities and almost always opposes policies that will make life better for Albertans, I encourage them and all members of this Legislature to support this motion and ensure all children in Alberta have access to nutritious, healthy foods.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Red Deer-South, could I just confirm that you are moving this motion?

Ms Miller: Yes. I am moving this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Motion 504, correct?

Ms Miller: Yes.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of the motion. I will be interested to hear what my hon. colleagues from the Official Opposition have to say as well. It would surprise me very much if there's a member of this Assembly that doesn't support expanding the number of communities served by school nutrition programs. It is something, I think, that is essential and fundamental.

You know, we're here on private members' day to talk about private members' business. We've just come from, I think, a very productive discussion about Bill 202, very cohesive, from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and I think that we agree as members that together, irrespective of which side of the House we

sit on, which party we represent, we are going to work together to do things that are important for Albertans.

While I do absolutely support this motion, I would say that I am disappointed in the partisan tone that the member took, repeatedly taking shots at the Official Opposition and those of us on this side, repeatedly parroting the government's catchphrase for this particular budget cycle. I think that that really doesn't serve the public interest in terms of what we're trying to achieve here. It takes away from the important issue of school nutrition.

While I support the principle behind this motion – and I will vote in favour of it – my question is: is the government's path the only possible path to follow to achieve the outcomes? Is the government's sole job to build community? I think and I would argue that government typically doesn't do a great job in building community itself. I think it can create some of the structures to allow that to happen, but ultimately it's about community, and it's about the people in the community that make it happen.

Let me just get to first principles here, and that is that I think it is remarkable the impact that going to school hungry has on the ability of students to learn, which exacerbates and furthers a cycle of poverty, which means certain groups of students do not learn as well as others and therefore find themselves, as they become adults, in a situation where they do not have the educational tools that they need to succeed, to break that cycle of poverty.

School nutrition is really, really important in ensuring that every kid in this province has the equality of opportunity, has a chance for a great life. That's why I believe in public education. I think a high-quality public education system allows for that equality of opportunity, not equality of result, necessarily. Ultimately, everybody needs to carve their own path, and you ought to be rewarded for your own honest efforts, but that's the whole idea behind the social contract that I think we represent here in this Assembly, that everyone ought to have the same chance in life. Making sure that you don't go to school hungry, making sure that you have a great education system: that is our job.

But the question is: how? How do we go about doing this? When the government comes in with a plan that's \$10 million for pilot projects, which works out to, as I understand it, roughly \$250,000 per school per year, when you have organizations like Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids – they provide 3,200 meals a day across 205 schools in Calgary and area. Using the metric of \$250,000 per school, if we were to multiply that by 205 schools served by Brown Bagging, that would be \$51 million per year. Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids serves 3,200 students a day in 205 schools, and they do that for \$1.3 million, one-fiftieth, literally, of the cost that this program would take.

Now, that isn't to say that there's no place for a government-funded program. It isn't to say that there's no place for ensuring that gaps are filled. It isn't to say that the Brown Bagging model would work perfectly everywhere else in the province. But I think it's incumbent on government to understand that there are volunteers willing to step up to help their neighbours, to help their community. That is community building.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Organizations like Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids – and there are others; I Can for Kids is another one that I know about in Calgary, and I'm sure that there are other organizations elsewhere in the province that follow a similar model – meet a need. They identify who needs help, and they provide that help. They don't create a need; they meet a need. They understand who needs that help, and they provide it, and they provide it in a way that engages further community members in solving a problem. There are

hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of volunteers for Brown Bagging who put together the lunch packages, there are school nutrition education programs – and that is highly, highly successful – and they do all of that without a dime of government support.

Now, there are cases – and I think this is one of them – where there's a role for the government to play in helping ensure that these sorts of programs are applied equally throughout the province. I applaud the government for going down the path of at least trying to address this issue.

5:10

There is a need to address this issue so long as what the government does actually addresses the problem and is focused on addressing the issue, not on furthering a particular world view on how things ought to work, not about just creating more jobs for government workers, not just about creating a larger footprint of government. You have organizations that work well in the not-for-profit sector relying on volunteer effort to help bring costs down and keep quality high. Those are models the government ought to be looking at. Be very, very careful about displacing with government services any of these sorts of models that exist because they're incredibly efficient, incredibly effective. They do tremendous work, and not only do they solve that problem of child hunger, but they build community. They build capacity in our community. They channel that natural, true Alberta instinct of helping our neighbours. They are remarkable people doing remarkable things in our community.

I will support this motion because I would be surprised if any member of this House would vote against a motion that resolves that the Assembly “urge the government to consider expanding the number of communities that are served by school nutrition programs.” That should be an imperative of this government and of any other. The question that is essential here is on how we go about doing that. My answer to that question is that it's not either/or. It is not just community and not just not-for-profit, and it is not just for government. It should be both.

There is a need for both, but I urge the government to be very careful in how you go about doing that, to not cause structures that are expensive and clumsy and bureaucratic that may not fully solve the problem when you have very, very efficient and highly effective organizations that are doing this work already in Alberta that have been created by hard-working, dedicated, thoughtful, community-minded people. Ask those people their opinion and their perspective. I hope the government has done that. If and when you are asking for the opinion and perspective of people who are already doing this work, I really hope you're listening to those folks because they're tremendous people, and they do great, great work.

I hope that we don't get bogged down in too much partisanship. That's part of this job that bothers me, that we get caught up in this stuff and the partisan side. I really urge the government to make sure that your focus is in the right place, that the focus is on building community and making sure that we're actually solving the problem in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really want to start off by just thanking the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this motion forward. I've had many conversations with her over the course of working with her, and I know that she's been a tireless advocate and volunteer. She's worked in schools, she has volunteered in schools over a very long time, and she has seen the effects of hunger on children personally. That story that she told in her speech was not

the only one that I've heard her tell. I know that she knows that this affects students personally every day, so I thank her for her work in putting this motion forward.

I wanted to speak to this motion because all three schools that are currently participating in the pilot in Calgary are in my riding. The three schools that are in my riding are Holy Family school, St. Peter school, and Marlborough elementary. I've had the opportunity to visit those schools and see the lunch program in action and see that it is really making a difference in the lives of students. I was speaking to one grade 6 class at Holy Family about government, and, you know, one of the things that the students brought up – it wasn't me – was, “Hey, isn't that lunch program that we are getting now part of something that you are doing?” and I was able to answer, “Yes, it is.”

I did have an opportunity just to shoot a quick e-mail off to the principal of one of those schools to ask him how it was going in preparation for this motion today, and he sent me back just a quick response. He said:

Things are going great . . . There have been minimal issues which have been easily resolved. We are holding a Family Cook Night on Tuesday so hopefully that will be a success. We continue to have a fantastic relationship with Meals on Wheels and their food is well-received by our students. By all accounts, the food is good, children are eating more nutritious meals at school, they are seeking fruits and veggies at home that they never had before, their behavior at school is more settled and focused. Everyone is happy! As we do our year-end assessments in the coming weeks, I am hopeful we will see big gains. I look forward to comparing the students' achievement from year to year.

Thanks for checking in.

That was from the principal of one of the schools. By all accounts it's going very well, and I hope to be able to drop by soon to see how it's going further.

I do just want to mention in this, prior to what the Member for Calgary-Elbow said, that many of the school nutrition programs are partnering with local nonprofits to be able to deliver the programs in an effective way. I know that in Calgary there have been lots of nonprofits who have been working with schools all along to be able to provide these kinds of services. When looking at the pilot program and looking at the most efficient way to do things through this extra spending and to be able to bring nutrition programs to more schools, many of the school programs have partnered with nonprofits such as Meals on Wheels, which is one of the partners in my riding. Really, these nutrition programs in my riding are part of what I consider and see to be a burgeoning interest in food and in food security and in healthy eating because people are recognizing that the more we eat healthy, the better outcomes we're going to have for everyone.

In my community I'm seeing more community gardens popping up. The Albert Park, Radisson Heights community has a community garden. It's a neighbourhood that has a high population of renters. A community garden is helping them to grow food and be more food secure in their neighbourhood.

The Alex Community Food Centre is a wonderful establishment in the Member for Calgary-Fort's riding that encourages healthy eating, healthy cooking. It teaches people to cook healthily. People can come and have community lunches on Wednesdays.

Also, the Mosaic primary care network recognizes that food security and nutrition is an issue in east Calgary. They have a lot of programs that help teach people to cook and eat healthily and have nutritionists on staff.

The school nutrition program is really a piece in a whole movement of food and food security and recognizing that people are better off when they're eating more healthily.

One other really important thing that I think the Member for Red Deer-South mentioned was the nutrition curriculum that comes along with this program. Part of the program is ensuring that kids are learning about healthy eating in addition to eating healthily. Now, I know as a teacher that for years we've had healthy food, nutrition programming in school. You know, you learn about the Canada food guide, and you learn what you're supposed to be eating every day, but to have lessons about healthy eating separated from actual healthy eating doesn't always balance out particularly well. The nutrition curriculum component is really important, but seeing the food happening and kids being able to eat and learn how to cook healthy foods and things like having a family cook night really work together to create the environment for students to be able to eat healthier in the long run.

I was a former junior high school teacher. The kids know what's healthy. Kids know. You can ask them. They know what they should be eating, but quite often they come back at lunchtime with, you know, a Slurpee, like, a very large Slurpee, and a bag of ketchup chips, and that's what they were planning to have for lunch. It's delicious, absolutely. But when you have to try and teach math after a bunch of 13-year-olds have just consumed that much sugar, it can be really problematic. Any teacher knows this. They know that the kind of nutrition kids have fundamentally affects how they're learning in class.

You know, I used to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, do you suppose we should continue to serve the sugar in the coffee shop back here before coming to the Legislature?

Ms Luff: Maybe that's the problem. Maybe we need to be consuming healthier beverages here at work.

Yeah. There's really a limited window of when kids learn well. I was always happy on days when I had PE first thing because kids would come in and we'd exercise for 45 minutes, and then I'd have two periods of math and science right after exercise, where kids were, like, really focused, and they learned really, really well. Then that same two periods of math and science that I had after lunch, after kids had spent 45 minutes drinking pop and other, you know, unhealthy things – the difference between the learning that the kids in the morning did and the kids in the afternoon did was profound.

I would like to just mention that I think moving this program – and when we expand it, expanding it into junior high schools and high schools to give kids a reason to stay at school over the lunch break, to eat a healthy meal. It might encourage them to eat more healthily, and also they will be able to learn better after lunch. You know, just from personal experience I think that's important.

5:20

Also, I really appreciated that the focus of this pilot was on areas of high socioeconomic need. We really do have an amazing public school system in Alberta, and it educates all of our children in an incredible fashion, in an excellent fashion, but it's absolutely no secret that some schools deal with more difficult circumstances than others. There are schools with high ESL populations, schools with higher populations of students on IPPs. There are schools in my riding that don't have parent fundraising societies, that aren't able to provide those extras that so many schools have. We also know that there are schools where higher proportions of students are hungry, schools where the lunch that a student gets at school might be the only healthy and nutritionally balanced meal that they get all day.

It's no secret to me the inequalities between schools have very little to do with curriculum, they have very little to do with teacher

quality, but they have a lot to do with student poverty. It has a lot to do with issues that arise from poverty, and this is the main reason why every year when the Fraser Institute comes out with its school ranking report, it drives me absolutely crazy. I have to explain all of the things that they don't include in that report when they're ranking schools.

It's also the reason why this government is committed to addressing root inequalities that lead to a cycle of poverty. The school nutrition program is one in a series of things that we're doing to try and address root causes of poverty. We have created the Alberta child tax benefit. We're raising minimum wage. We're freezing university tuition. We're piloting affordable quality child care, which I'm also getting in my riding, which I am also excited about. And, yes, we are also providing school lunch. These things in concert are things that really help to lift children out of poverty and help to improve their outcomes.

Numerous studies link quality nutrition to the ability to learn because if you're hungry and if you don't have the right vitamins, you can't learn. Many differences in outcomes for kids are linked to poverty, and when you address poverty, you improve outcomes because the truth of the matter is that social issues affect economic issues, and a thing like a nutritious lunch can make all of the difference. In concert with all of the other initiatives that I mentioned, school lunch can make a big difference.

So I'm absolutely in support of this motion to expand the school nutrition program. I've seen how it's working in schools in my riding, and I anticipate that schools all across the province will begin to see the benefits from this. We are working in concert with nonprofits that were already providing this service to be able to do it in the most efficient manner. If it helps kids to learn, it's going to improve their outcomes. It's going to lead to a better future for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to read out the motion. "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider expanding the number of communities that are served by school nutrition programs."

I, first of all, wanted to thank the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing this forward. Thank you very much. I'm honoured, of course, to rise and speak to Motion 504 regarding school nutrition programs. Just to be clear, there's a lot of misleading commentary with regard to feeding hungry children, and I'm pretty sure that I can speak on behalf of everybody in this Chamber that we understand the importance of ensuring that children are well fed. Let me be clear.

Many of us here are parents from all sorts of socioeconomic backgrounds. We all want the same things for our children and as parents the ability for our children to grow up healthy, safe, and overcome challenges, reach the potential that is inherently within them to do so. Research may suggest all these things; so does parenting. When children go to school with a full belly, they will obviously perform better, and this in turn will help them achieve in school and in life.

As an adult, even in this space working in this job for the last two years, I can't tell you how many times I've come into this Chamber hangry, right? That's not because somebody didn't give me the opportunity to eat. I just didn't find the time. I think I'm pretty much common sense. I could probably figure it out, to go and have an apple but just didn't do it, to my own detriment. Even with that, absolutely, the imperativeness of making sure that children

understand that they don't fall into the cycle of the things that I do to myself and my body – my own son is like that, too. We are the kind of people that once we get a project in our minds, we'll just go the entire day without even looking at food, let alone hydrating. These are life skills that are very important, that can be taught at a school level with regular intervention, with making sure food is there in between classes and, like you were saying to the member, not having pop necessarily versus other good choices. There are lots of things that we can do. But let me be clear. We are all in agreement here about that.

One of the things that's important when we talk about the role for the province in this issue is actually not only just talking about nutrition and about what it is that children need, but we need to also be part of the solution that empowers local school boards, as the hon. member had mentioned earlier. Now, local school boards already to a large degree – and kudos to them – explore various ways that children and youth may be helped, especially when it comes to nutrition. There are so many school boards that are already doing these kinds of things, and I would like to thank them and also the other community organizations that rally around families in all sorts of areas of socioeconomic distress.

For example, we've heard stories about the money being used to enable high school students to learn how to cook while at the same time providing nutritious meals to other children within the school system. Now, these programs are not necessarily about food and bellies. If I understand this correctly, the dollars that are going into this are to expand the number of communities that are served by a nutrition program, not necessarily putting food in bellies. So if that's what we're talking about, we have to make sure that communities, school boards, and everybody is involved to make sure that we rally around these kids. This is an excellent example of how we can use funds to meet several different needs, from ensuring that children who need a meal in the morning are fed and ensuring that the youth learn about these healthy choices and learn about becoming more self-sufficient by teaching them how to cook.

As far as I understand it, too, the money can also be used to fund partnerships with communities and organizations in order to best meet the needs of children. These partnerships that are involving the community are an inherent part of how we make sure nutrition programs are working and providing what it is that we're wanting to get into the school system.

One organization – I'm sorry to repeat it again, but I will for the sake of this amazing group that I have a great deal of admiration for – is the Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids. They work in partnership with Calgary schools every day to make and deliver free healthy lunches to students who would otherwise go hungry. This is an excellent example of exactly what this motion should entail and should promote. That cost every single day is one dollar, one dollar per meal, and is supported by literally thousands of volunteers. When you have community buy-in into an area of need, where children need food, where it's absolutely necessary to make sure that those kids have food in their bellies, you will have a sustainable amount of people, community buy-in, involvement, and dollars to make sure that those kids aren't only getting fed this year but for 15 years down the road if that's what's necessary.

When the government works as a partner to support a community and to strengthen society, that's what makes Alberta better. Food in the bellies: this is what we're talking about, and there's no reason for government services to compete with the community services when collaboration, obviously, would mean best results. This would also further empower these organizations to meet the needs of the communities that they're so invested in and have knowledge of. By collaborating with the communities that are actually showing that they have this ability, you already have insight into communities and

what their needs are. This is an efficient use of dollars, an efficient use of manpower, and making sure that kids are getting fed.

There is such a great potential with this motion, Mr. Speaker, and I have some questions, like always. These revolve around the government's recent announcements last week. I think we just need some answers. For example, the 14 school boards that were part of the pilot were receiving \$250,000, but the remaining 46 school boards are going to get a reduced amount of \$141,000. Why is there this disparity of funds? Is this based on socioeconomic? Like, how was that decided? One school board may have more schools than another, so I'm very interested in understanding why there is a disparity in those funds. Obviously, a good meal will help our children in their studies.

I also have a question about whether or not the Ministry of Education is the right place to run this program. Would it be more feasible or even more efficient if the program ran out of, for example, Health or Children's Services? I'm just thinking out loud as to whether there is an opportunity to also look within other ministries to continue ideas on how this funding would work and be sustainable.

5:30

I also mentioned before – and I will reiterate this as many times as I can through this debate – the ability to collaborate in supporting community organizations and nonprofits, not work against them, to continue the good work that they're already doing on this issue.

Another question I have is: what mechanisms are in place to ensure the integrity of the program? The hon. member had mentioned that there is a humongous amount of oversight to make sure that the dollars are going to where the program is going. How are you ensuring the integrity of the program, and are you collecting data on metrics to make sure that these children are actually being helped out in the manner that we want to see them helped out?

Also, the studies and assessments that have been done and are being done to ensure that the assistance is being allocated where it's most needed: is that a priority of this program? As the other hon. member mentioned, these pilot programs were put into high areas of need. Is the idea to continue on with that process, or is there a larger mechanism that's going to come out as a result of this?

How do you look at incorporating parents into this program and ensuring that they also have tools and resources as well? The member was saying that children were coming into the school and having these nutritious meals and then going home and demanding that at home. Well, for a parent that may not be able to afford that, it is a tremendously difficult thing for a mom or a dad to potentially be able to say: I'm sorry; we can't afford that in our household. As we all know, there are many families out there that are struggling right now. Are you going to also incorporate into your programs making sure that parents are involved with that to make sure that this is a collaboration between children and parents so that children and parents also understand what they're able to do within the means that they have in place?

Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to reiterate what I said at the beginning. All of us here want what's best for our children. To say anything else is nothing less than divisive. We all care deeply about them not only just because they're our children, but this represents the future of our province. I mean, obviously, I support the consideration requested in this motion. I hope and trust that some of these questions that I raise today will be thoughtfully considered by the government should this motion be passed, and I hope that all hon. members here will be encouraged to also ask additional questions so that we have a truly robust conversation and that we can actually have a conversation. I'm saying this. If the government chooses to politicize this issue, ultimately that's the government's

prerogative and you can take responsibility for that, but I would hope that this motion is ultimately about the children and less about politics.

Thank you.

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

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Member for Red Deer-South for putting forward this motion. I'm so proud to be part of a government that is making life more affordable for Albertan families. By expanding the school nutrition program, our government is fulfilling another campaign promise and ensuring that children and families struggling to have access to nutritious food will have it.

I don't think that any child should have to go to school hungry because if you're hungry, it's hard to focus, and that would affect your grades and overall learning. As the Member for Red Deer-South has mentioned, there have been numerous studies that have shown the links between students having access to nutritious food and their success. We have a duty as legislators to make sure that the children of this province are healthy and are enjoying their educational experience.

I would like to talk about how this has helped my constituents in Calgary-Bow. Back in February I was happy to visit a school in my riding that was approved for the school nutrition program. The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood also joined me at Bowcroft elementary school to chat with the students and faculty about the benefits of this program. We sat down with the students and talked about how the food was not only delicious but also helped them stay focused.

There was one particular student that stood out to me, Trinity. She is a grade 5 student at Bowcroft, and she was telling me that she is very passionate about helping others in Bowness. Bowness is very community oriented. There are many volunteers that help with many different things. There is something going on every day in Bowness. One of the things that I love is that we have an annual Christmas dinner that feeds around 500 to 1,000 people, so it's quite impressive. Trinity actually saved up all her Christmas money that she got and donated it to the Bowness Community Association. I just thought that was amazing, and I just want to thank her again for her efforts on that.

You know, I think that not only is this nutrition program helping feed our students, but it's also teaching them life lessons. I think that seeing the government come through and help others and having volunteers come in and help feed students every day shows Trinity that it's important to help others, and I think that's why she did what she did.

I've also had conversations with Principal Rudy Stein about how this program has made a difference for the students at Bowcroft. She was telling me that there were many times where students would come to her office and ask if she had any food for them, and oftentimes teachers would have to buy food with money from their own pockets to make sure that students at least had something in their stomachs. She was extremely grateful for this program and thanked our government for putting this pilot program forward.

I would like to commend the principal for her actions to help students at Bowcroft stay healthy. They actually just put in 17 stationary bikes, or Spark bikes, with the intent of helping kids who are feeling restless or frustrated. Students have said that hopping on a stationary bike for about 10 minutes makes them feel calmer and helps them focus better on their studies. I think that maybe that's something we could try here in the Legislature. That aside, Bowcroft is actually the only school in Calgary that has tried this initiative, but I really hope that other schools will follow along.

I think it's safe to say that exercise and eating healthy helps children do better in school, and it also strengthens our communities. I'm just so proud to stand here and say that our government is making life better for all Albertans, even in tough economic times. Our government won't cut vital services like this one, unlike the opposition, that would have cut \$9 billion out of the budget. Not only would that have increased school fees; it also would have cut this program. I'm glad that our government has Albertans' backs.

I would like to again thank the Member for Red Deer-South for putting this very important motion forward, and I encourage everyone to vote for it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank the Member for Red Deer-South for bringing forward Motion 504, urging the government to consider expanding the number of communities that are served by school nutrition programs.

Mr. Speaker, I was very happy that a school in my constituency of Red Deer-North, Fairview elementary, was a recipient of the school nutrition pilot program. I believe that the first provincially funded lunch in that school was served on December 12 of last year. I have been very fortunate to be able to visit the school over the lunch hour once a month since the program was first rolled out.

I have spoken with the principal and staff, who shared how pleased they are with the program. They talked about the difference in the children's lunch hour and their school day. Some of the students in this elementary school did not come to school with a lunch, and we all know that we cannot learn when our stomachs are hungry. Absenteeism numbers are now better, and the staff believe that the reason is directly because of the school nutrition program. They believe that some parents felt that they would get into trouble for sending their children to school without a lunch, so they kept their children home. Now that students are attending more days in school, grades are up. Mr. Speaker, it cannot get any better than that.

I have thoroughly enjoyed spending lunchtime with the students at Fairview school over the past few months. The students love the program. They love trying something that they have never been served before. Some of the students had never tried spaghetti or even celery. The program is teaching the students about the Canadian health food guide and the importance of healthy choices. Mr. Speaker, the children tell stories of going home and teaching their families about healthy and inexpensive choices. I polled the students and asked them what their favourite menu items are, and I was told: boiled eggs, green peppers, and, by far, smoothie days. All healthy choices, I might add.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't be more proud to be part of a government that is making life more affordable for our province's families. As a government we have an obligation to ensure that children and families struggling to have access to nutritious food will have it.

Again I thank the member for bringing this motion forward, and I encourage all in the House today to vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to get up to speak in support of the motion. As many members know, I was an educational assistant for many years. One of the jobs that I oversaw in a lot of the different schools that I worked with was nutrition.

That wasn't because it was mandated by the IPPs, which is part of the individualized support programs that you do for students with disabilities to make sure that their learning is there, but it was because the nutrition aspect prevented that educational work from being conducted. It usually looked like a behavioural outburst or something like that, in which case I knew that that child needed to be fed before we could even talk about being educated.

I know that a program like this, especially when it comes to expanding it to other communities, allows the parent groups and the involvement of community to really be about the enhancement of education for the needs of communities. Food is a basic need that everyone has, and we know that from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We know that in order to make sure that everyone has opportunities and has equal access to those opportunities, we need to put those resources in place.

I know there are many organizations that help with the nutritional supports in schools. But in many cases and in many situations throughout my experience as an educational assistant it came down to creative solutions. It came down to sometimes funding it myself with teachers. It came down to recognizing that sometimes those students did have food from home, but sometimes it was mouldy, and sometimes they would hide it because they didn't want to eat it.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, something like this is incredibly important. I think for communities that experience multiple, various pressures of marginalization from being immigrants, from being a person of colour, or for indigenous communities, there are a whole lot of reasons why it's important to make sure that the public school board system and the boards have the ability to address the local needs. Putting a program in and expanding the nutritional support program does that.

I've heard throughout the debate, you know, to not create in this a partisan issue. I think, from our perspective, that it's not about creating a partisan issue out of it. But the reality still exists that in the vacuum of information that we don't have as to what would not make the cutting block in the opposition's cuts, we don't understand what the priorities would be. I think that no one here would argue that everyone has good intentions, that the intention of feeding kids is important. But what does that beat out? And would it make the cut?

Those kinds of things require an actual perspective because protecting those services is what members like myself ran for, to protect those things. Because austerity budgets of the past have done exactly that. When budgets were cut, the operational funding for school boards was cut. When issues like these presented themselves, they had fewer resources to address the auxiliary needs of the students outside of the educational practices. So the principals were put in a very difficult spot where they recognized that, yes, that child can't eat, but at the same time it's not the responsibility of the school to feed them. They don't have the funding for that, so what can they do?

Then educational assistants, teachers, speech pathologists, all groups of people that could be focusing on supporting the educational needs of that child, are thinking about how to feed that child. It's not the best use of those funds for those specialized services whereas if we could find a program and put those things in place, that time can actually be best utilized by educating the child and making sure that when they're sitting in that classroom, they're not losing focus because of lack of food.

The thing is that programs like this require funds, and the commitment from the opposition to fund these programs is questionable. That is questionable because we don't have a shadow budget to look at. We don't have a firm commitment. We have a history from the past; even last week their position on GSAs

switched in the middle of the week. We have an opposition that continuously thinks of public services as, you know, inefficiencies. We don't know what's going to make the *Dragon's Den*, and I think it's of utmost importance to discuss those things in this House.

This is where these things need to be discussed because those are the political ramifications for the positions of austerity budgets. I think it is imperative for members of this House to respect that we have differences of opinions, but that doesn't make them wrong to express it. You might not want to hear it, but the members opposite still need to know the other side of the effects of your positions.

The Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair.

Cortes-Vargas: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

I think this program in a lot of ways speaks to the importance of expanding those nutritional supports throughout the province. I think it is of utmost importance. Making sure that we look at what programs are in place and what works efficiently is something that we have been committed to doing this entire time, making sure that those programs are supported through community initiatives but also recognizing that, likely, the communities that experience the issue of a high need for nutritional programs such as this also have a variety of other issues that they could work to support instead of the nutritional values.

They could make sure that – it's a group, I think, of some of the classrooms I work on where it was a high population of immigrant communities that were just getting adjusted and food was one of the problems, but if they didn't have to worry about that, they could really focus on increasing the supports for learning English in the classrooms. That could go incredibly further in making sure that there is enhancement to those things. By saying, you know, that it might not be the province's responsibility to do those things – we need to make sure that we work in partnership, absolutely, and we need to make sure that the programs we put in place are accountable to the people that they serve. We need to make sure that they are the best programs for that situation, but we also need to understand that the communities that will experience a high need for the nutritional supports that these programs would address would also be the ones that would have issues with fundraising in order to make those things possible.

There are absolutely exceptions, and there will always be exceptions to those rules. I forget the name, but we were at Ben Calf Robe in Edmonton. They actually have a fantastic nutritional program. They have a focus on local food, and they've partnered with different organizations, but just that was tremendously difficult to put in place, took hours and hours of parental work. They're also working on many different fronts to confront the experiences that are produced from the cycle of poverty.

At the end of the day, we need to recognize, in order to make sure that everyone has equal opportunity, that these programs are a vital solution to that. The thing is that we are making Albertans' lives better when we put these things in place. It's in the same light as the perspective of a budget that could look much different than this. Cuts to operational funding or cuts to programs like this could have a very negative effect on those very people. I think we're all very conscious of that within this Chamber, but I honestly think that it's hard to say, that from our perspective of listening to the opposition, their intention might be good, but we don't know what that would look like and to what limits that would go.

I think there are different ways of going around things. There are always ways to look for solutions, and we're always open to working together. I think we saw that earlier today as we worked through the first bill. I think it's important with issues like this, that are important to all of us, to make sure that we are looking for those

solutions and that we are clear as to what our positions are. I think that creates an atmosphere of stability for Albertans to know that this is an issue that is important to all of us and that everyone is committed to addressing it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Speaker: The House leader for the opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 504, "that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider expanding the number of communities that are served by school nutrition programs." It's an absolute pleasure to rise and not only speak to Motion 504 but speak in favour of Motion 504.

Mr. Speaker, you know and I know and members of this Assembly know that we all have a role to play in ensuring that in a province like ours, with the abundant resources that we have, there should be no reason why there are children who are attending school who don't have access to the food that gives them the ability to learn and to function in such a capacity.

As we've heard today, there's no doubt that the government has a role to play in this, and there's no doubt that there are great programs that exist all across the province. It's my hope that in the projects that the government announces, we will see a partnering with those great programs that are happening all across the province. If there's one thing that I know for certain, Mr. Speaker, it's that a one-size-fits-all model isn't often the best to meet the needs of individual communities and individual schools.

As the government increases access to school nutrition programs – I met with the school division just during the constituency break, and I know that one of their concerns was that a program might come from Edmonton but not specifically address the needs in that school division. It's so critically important that as we move forward, we ensure that those who are on the ground, the best deliverers of those programs, are in fact delivering those programs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 8(3) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion to close debate. I would invite the hon. Member for Red Deer-South to close debate on Motion 504.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of the House for the debate here today. You know, I am proud to be part of a government that is making life more affordable for Alberta families. By expanding the school nutrition program, our government

is fulfilling yet another campaign promise. Our government's program not only ensures that children receive food that is critical to improving their education outcomes, but it also allows many families to learn about nutritious foods that they can prepare at home. By proposing this motion, my hope is that every community and school in the province will someday have access to this program so that all children and families in Alberta struggling to access nutritious food will have it.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is our job as elected representatives to make life more affordable for Albertans, and that is why I'm standing here today. I am advocating on behalf of constituents who have reached out to me and shared their stories to ensure that all children in the province have access to healthy, nutritious foods. As I have already stated, Mr. Speaker, evidence has shown a link between students having access to nutritious food and their success. I believe that it's our duty as members of this Legislature to ensure that our children have the tools they need to ensure success.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this Legislature to support this motion and set the goal for ourselves to make sure that all children in Alberta have access to nutritious, healthy foods.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

The Speaker: The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, seeing the progress today, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and come back tomorrow . . .

Mr. Cooper: At the appropriate time.

Cortes-Vargas: . . . at the appropriate time, 1:30. Sorry. It's estimates.

The Speaker: The legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This evening Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Health in the Rocky Mountain Room, and Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Economic Development and Trade in the Parkland Room. Tomorrow morning Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Labour in the Parkland Room, and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Energy in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 11, 2017

Day 19

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Allow us time to reflect on the past, recognizing the significant achievements that we have made along the way. Let us concentrate on the present and have a vision for the future that makes life better for our province and for our world.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Ms Gray: M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire Greenvue elementary school. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mme Cheri Krywko and Mrs. Angela Sharun, along with their chaperones: Mr. Bob Graham, Mrs. Terri White, and Mrs. Michele Schuldhuis. There are two classes visiting today, approximately 47 students, learning about the important history of this place and those who have had the privilege of serving here. I would like them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 44 bright young students, two classes, from Overlanders school in the incredible constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They're accompanied by their two teachers, Mrs. Nabe and Ms Torrance, and four chaperones: Kiera Batchelar, Rafia Moazam, Sarah Antoniuk, and Damir Skeric. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members? The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my – oh. It's a student as opposed to a school group. Is that ...

The Speaker: You've got the floor.

Ms Larivee: I'm here anyway. Okay.

On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Seniors and Housing it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jack Stoddard. Jack is an honours student in grade 9 at l'école Joseph-Moreau and is very involved with cadets, having achieved the rank of master corporal in 2836 Edmonton 1st Combat Engineer Regiment in the Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps. He is also keenly interested in politics and is here today to observe both question period and to watch the pages at work since he is interested in learning more about the page program. I would ask him to rise as a student here today and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I hope you still want to return and become a page after you watch this event.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you a number of folks who are here today because it's Dental Hygienists Week and April is Oral Health Month, including dental hygienists. Dental hygienists are the sixth-largest health profession in Canada. They play a crucial role in promoting oral health and preventing disease. In their honour I remind my esteemed colleagues to brush, floss, and get regular checkups, please. I now ask Paulette Dahlseide, Denise Kokaram, Alysha Ferguson, and Marthe Benoit to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly officers of the Parkinson Alberta board, clients, and care partners, who are here as we recognize Parkinson's Day. The chief executive officer of Parkinson Alberta is John Petryshen. He's joined today by members of the Parkinson Alberta board and, as I mentioned, clients and care partners: Dr. Wayne Martin, neurologist and Parkinson Alberta board member; Brandi La Bonte, operations manager of Parkinson Alberta; George Plouffe; Paulette Plouffe; Ron Ebbers; Brad Freysteinson; Brandy Freysteinson; Blair Harwood; Dr. Harold Dhliwayo; Lucia Dhliwayo; Jim Maxwell; Gina Tedeschini; and Doug de Vries. The tulips we wear today symbolize that hope will bloom this spring. I would like to recognize and applaud the efforts of Parkinson Alberta as they rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly board members and staff from Alberta Ballet, including the daughter of one of the founders: Larry Clausen, George Goldhoff, Josh Bilyk, Jennifer Faulkner, Margaret Dalwood, Candice Harris. I look forward to doing my member's statement later today on Alberta Ballet and its 50th anniversary season. I would like them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to be able to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Pastor Jim Lochhead. Jim is the pastor at the fine church of McClure United, and I will be speaking more about Jim later in my member's statement. I would now ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It is my privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four members seated in your gallery from the northeast division of the Edmonton Police Service located in the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. I would like to introduce Acting Superintendent Teri Uhryn, Staff Sergeant Dave Goodkey, Patrol Sergeant Shelley Fisher, and Sergeant Cory Huculak. I will be speaking more to these four members and the

entire Edmonton Police Service northeast division in my member's statement this afternoon.

I would also like to introduce Gerard Amani, the newest addition to the Edmonton-Manning constituency office. Gerard was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and came to Canada with his family at the age of 18 as a refugee and has given back to his community ever since. I look forward to working with Gerard now and in the future.

I would like to ask them all now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly representatives from the Sikh community who are joining us today: Tejinder Sidhu, Vikram Sahiwal, Dr. Hans, Deep Shergill, Vishal Comer, Prabhjeet Grewal, Varinder Sidhu, Pavan Elapavuluri, and Arohi Elapavuluri. Last Friday along with my colleagues I was honoured to declare April 2017 to be Sikh Heritage Month in Alberta, and my guests are joining us here for the reception tonight. I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of agriculture stakeholders who are visiting today. They represent the many hard-working men and women of the Alberta Beef Producers and Alberta Lamb Producers. Bob Lowe, a rancher from Nanton, Alberta, is the board chair of the Alberta Beef Producers. He's joined by Roland Cailliau, vice-chair, and Tom Lynch-Staunton, government relations with ABP. Darlene Stein is the board chair of the Alberta Lamb Producers. She's joined by Bernadette Nikkel, member and producer, and with them are future lamb producers Lexi Stein and Rebekah Nikkel. I would like to ask them all now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

McClure United Church Gifts to Central America

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year I provided some pencils, pens, and pins to Pastor Jim Lochhead from McClure United church. He was bicycling through Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama and needed some small gifts for schools and children in the area. This is just one example of how his church is making lives better for people here and elsewhere.

Recently I was absolutely delighted to receive this e-mail from Pastor Lochhead and wanted to take the opportunity through this member's statement to share it with everyone.

I want to thank you for the pencils, pens and pins that you provided me with to share while traveling in Central America. I was able to distribute all of the pencils and pens along the way. One of the most heartwarming moments doing this occurred during a ride between Rivas and San Juan Del Sur in Nicaragua. It was a hot, dusty ride along a gravel road. Children were standing alongside the road shouting "hello" as we went by; obviously practicing the English they were learning at school. I carried the pencils and pens in my shirt as I rode. I would take a

pencil and a pen [out] for each child as I rode, throwing them to them, or passing them if able. At one point three children were in the middle of the road having greeted riders ahead of me. Seeing me coming they began to move to the side, two younger siblings encouraged by the older sister who was 9 or 10. The older sister saw me taking the items from my pocket and reached for them as I handed them to her. I could hear her shouting, "Gracias! Gracias!" as I continued along the road. Other riders commented on her delight for the gift. It is an area of Nicaragua that appeared both isolated and impoverished. I was grateful for the opportunity to offer a little (however small) help along the way.

Thank you, Pastor Lochhead, for all your hard work bringing joy to these children. I'm very proud to have you and your parish in my riding, and I can't thank you enough for all that you do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wonder if we might have unanimous consent. I neglected two introductions today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Legislature I'd like to introduce four residents of Edmonton-Whitemud and two residents of Edmonton-Centre who are here today to meet with representatives of the Ministry of Service Alberta to discuss the evolution of condominium and life lease regulations and to witness question period. As I read their names, I would ask our constituents to rise: from Edmonton-Whitemud, Bernice Neufeld, Carol Stirrett, Judy Slavutych, and Marilyn Richardson; and from Edmonton-Centre, Carol Moeller and Tom Hodgson. I would ask my colleagues to extend their usual recognition.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Status of Women and of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine in the gallery, Jean Munn. She is an accomplished immigration and refugee lawyer in the city of Calgary and a partner at Caron & Partners. She has also been a professor from time to time at the University of Calgary, and I had the opportunity of learning under her tutelage the topics of immigration and refugee law. I ask that she rise and be given the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Thank you, hon. members.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Residential No-charge Energy Savings Program

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans didn't like the residential no-charge energy savings program right from the start. They saw it for what it was, a blatant waste of money funded by the equally insulting carbon tax. When legitimate questions are raised on this program, instead of addressing Albertans' concerns, the government suggests that we don't respect those that have signed

up for the program. Nothing could be further from the truth. One person who signed up and saw the video of the question period exchange where the Deputy Premier suggested that the Wildrose disrespected those who did sign up said this to the government, quote: don't – and I say don't – involve me in your lies. End quote.

The environment minister has made a few dubious claims as well, including that this was the most cost-effective way to run an energy efficiency program. I can't imagine that paying a company from Ontario to install light bulbs in Albertans' homes is the most cost-effective way of improving energy efficiency in this province. As we delve deeper into this program, we find some totally inappropriate clauses, including that installers ask personal questions, including the number of people in the home, income range, utility account number, and rate codes. For a government who constantly touts their ban on door-to-door energy sales, how can it justify requiring installers to upsell energy programs and products? Unfortunately, this is yet another example of hypocrisy from this NDP government.

We know that some installers will be Albertans just doing their best, but to have this kind of wording in the bid package is alarming. Finding out that the government misled them when the environment minister said that the Ecofitt bid was the lowest cost provider was disturbing. Now we learn that not only was Ecofitt not even the second-lowest; it was actually the third-lowest bid. A person doesn't just accidentally mistake the lowest bid for the third-lowest bid.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the government, in the words of the Energy minister, continues to mislead this House and indeed Albertans for their own political gain. Now, that's just unacceptable.

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

Calgary-Lougheed Town Hall Meeting

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I held a town hall in Calgary-Lougheed, and the attendees asked me to deliver the following unanimous messages to the NDP. They said that the debt should be repaid and the government should eliminate its deficit. They should cut personal, business, and carbon taxes, and the size of the Alberta government should be reduced. There should be a public-sector salary freeze, no negotiated increases in public service contracts, and across-the-board spending controls. The government should renegotiate a better equalization agreement. The NDP should work with the energy industry and the New West Partnership, not against them. Government spending over \$30 million on advertising for the climate leadership plan, on light bulbs, shower heads, power bars, and thermostats is a misuse of taxpayer money. Instead, job creation should be the top priority for this government. There should be no secrecy regarding the revamp of the education curriculum. Serenity's bill should be passed. And the NDP needs to start listening and stop taxing the average middle-class Albertan into nonexistence.

On this point one constituent was so incensed that they wrote this. Our voices are not being heard by this totally incompetent NDP government. They stand on higher ground in the belief that we as Albertans are accepting of the policies that have been shoved down our throats, but I will be silent no longer. As a single parent I have struggled to make ends meet. I am very proud I have stood on my own two feet and raised my children to be self-sustaining adults and proud Albertans. Please use me as an example of what a typical Alberta family is facing and tell the NDP they have done nothing to improve the quality of life for Albertans. Tell them that we do not accept this. Yours truly, Tracey.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP would do well to listen to Tracey, the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed, and indeed all Albertans. Thank you.

Alberta Ballet

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, when I was a young girl growing up in Paris, I was fortunate to attend ballet performances at the Palais Garnier opera house. My love of ballet and appreciation for the artistic, physical, and musical demands on the dancers have stayed with me.

Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate here in Alberta to have Canada's second-largest ballet company, renowned for their contemporary and classical ballets, available to both Edmonton and Calgary audiences. This year Alberta Ballet celebrates its 50th anniversary season. Alberta Ballet is comprised of 28 classically trained professional dancers from as far away as Japan to as close as my own riding of Sherwood Park. This season we've enjoyed performances of traditional ballets such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *Dracula* and three visiting contemporary dance groups.

I was pleased this year to introduce my 90-year-old mother-in-law to ballet. She had never been to a performance before. She now has insisted that she be my date for the next season.

Jean Grand-Maitre, the company's artistic director, has been with the company since 2002 and has raised the profile of Alberta Ballet to a world-wide audience. The company has caught the world's attention for its portrait ballets, collaborations with popular music icons such as Joni Mitchell, Elton John, and k.d. lang.

1:50

I am delighted that the final performance of this season is *Our Canada*, the latest portrait ballet, featuring the music of singer-songwriter Gordon Lightfoot, the first singer-songwriter I learned to love when I moved to Canada. *Our Canada* commemorates the nation's 150th birthday. It tells the story of all Canadians and honours the cultural diversities which define us. Performances will be May 4 to 6 in Calgary and 12 to 13 in Edmonton.

This government is proud to support the work of organizations which try to make life better for Albertans through art and culture. I am not sure how many MLAs have had the pleasure of attending a performance of Alberta Ballet . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Residential No-charge Energy Savings Program

Mr. Jean: Here are some real-world issues for the Premier: 100,000 Albertans are on unemployment insurance right now in Alberta; over 60,000 haven't been able to find work for six months. What has been the NDP's response to this? Well, they've raised everyone's taxes with the largest tax grab in Alberta history. Billions of dollars from families, billions of dollars from businesses, and for what? To pay for a sweetheart contract to an Ontario company to install taxpayer-funded light bulbs. Premier, this program is turning into a real boondoggle. How much will it cost Albertans by the end of this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again the member opposite is showing his tendency to flip and flop just a

little bit. Last week the Wildrose was complaining that we had an energy efficiency program. This week in their press release they're complaining that our energy efficiency program isn't big enough. You know, at least the light bulbs are starting to turn on over there. What we will say is that Albertans are excited about saving money. What they're not excited about is the Wildrose opposition, that wants to reverse our cut to school fees, that wants to reverse our tuition freeze, that wants to reverse our school lunch program. They know we're working to make their lives . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Non answer number one, Mr. Speaker.

The government once claimed that Ecofitt was the lowest cost provider, but we know that's simply not true. Now we see in the request for proposal that the NDP is asking Ecofitt to upsell Albertans on "all other energy efficiency opportunities in the home" and to "cross-promote other energy . . . programs and services available." That's after, of course, Ecofitt gets into their homes. The NDP claims to be against door-to-door sales tactics but have asked Ecofitt to do just that. Why is the NDP allowing Ecofitt to push other products once they get into Albertans' homes?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the member is right in the fact that this government did ban door-to-door sales. And you know what? We're very proud of that. What we didn't ban was helping Albertans save money on their energy bills. That is what this program does. Now, given that the Wildrose is opposed to cutting school fees, freezing tuition, capping electricity rates, it is hardly surprising that they're also opposed to helping people save on their energy bills. But you know what? We're going to help Albertans do just that because that's what this government promised to do.

Mr. Jean: Non answer number two, Mr. Speaker.

Here's why this whole program is one of the most boneheaded government policies we've ever heard of. Albertans don't need the government to spend their money to hire workers to come into their homes and then educate and upsell them in their own houses. On this side of the House we believe that keeping life more affordable means not taking Albertans' money in the first place. We trust that Albertans know how to install their own light bulbs. Maybe if you need some help, you could ask on this side of the House. Why not just scrap the carbon tax and trust that Albertans know how to spend their own money better than you do?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, over 90,000 Alberta households have signed up to save money on their energy bills. Now, you might think that the Wildrose would say that this is a good thing, but not this gang. I'll tell you what. We know that the Leader of the Opposition has trouble taking a position on a number of different issues, and we know that he has trouble getting consensus from his caucus on a number of different issues where he's failing to take a position. I suggest that he go back and take about six weeks to consider whether he might actually support Albertans wanting to save money on their energy bills.

Mr. Jean: Non answer number three, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Premier's Trip to Washington, DC

Mr. Jean: While 35,000 Albertans have been out of work for over a year and are having trouble actually putting food on the table, this

NDP government is quickly developing a taste for excess, for waste, and for mismanagement. Here's one example. Last month the Premier travelled to Washington for a three-day visit. The cost: \$42,000 to the people of Alberta and without meeting any senior cabinet officials whatsoever. Now, the Premier of Saskatchewan, just next door, finished his trip. The cost according to his office: \$10,000. How can the Premier possibly justify spending four times as much for the same trip as the Premier of Saskatchewan?

Ms Notley: Well, frankly, Mr. Speaker, if I were the member opposite, I truly would be a little cautious about holding up the Premier to the east of us as an example to follow. But, as I'm sure the member knows, the Auditor General directed our government to include the full expenses of everybody involved in the trip, and that's why our numbers are higher, because they are counted differently. He's comparing apples to oranges. That's hardly new, just another example of how the member opposite tends to exaggerate things to the people in this Assembly and to the province. [interjections]

The Speaker: It's getting noisy, folks. Keep it down.

Mr. Jean: We understand the need for the Premier's security and a strong voice in Washington. It's very important, now more than ever. But taxpayers in Alberta deserve to see good value for money spent. Saskatchewan's Premier met the Commerce secretary, the President's point man on NAFTA. They met the Energy secretary, and they met the head of the EPA. A \$42,000 trip? That's what the Premier gave us, new professional diplomats and, of course, the social licence that was promised to come with massive new carbon taxes, yet not a single meeting with a senior member of the President's cabinet. Not one. Why does the Premier possibly think that is?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows, I had the opportunity to meet with oil and gas executives as well as forestry leaders, manufacturing leaders, and agriculture leaders before we went to Washington. We were proud to be the first province down in Washington advocating on behalf of our industry to support strong trade relationships and to support those industry representatives. Just on Friday members from my office met with those leaders from the energy industry, and they said that they were exceptionally pleased with the work that we've done, that they'd heard tremendous feedback, and that people are getting our message, so I believe . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The NDP spent \$1.3 million to maintain Alberta's presence in Washington. Just a year ago they fired a very well-connected envoy in favour of professional diplomats because they said that it would get us a better deal. Apparently not, Mr. Speaker. Not even a meeting, in fact. Saskatchewan has the former U.S. ambassador advocating for them and setting up meetings with senior members of the President's cabinet. It cost a third of the NDP's hand-picked Washington office. Tens of thousands more for trips, hundreds of thousands more for offices, and minimal access if access at all. How can the Premier justify this ineffective use of Alberta's tax dollars?

Ms Notley: Well, I appreciate the interesting choice of the member opposite to use his opportunity to ask me questions to defend a former political friend and insider on an issue that's two years old.

However, Mr. Speaker, I'm focused on promoting Alberta jobs, Alberta industry, Alberta business in Washington and across the border, and that's exactly what we've been doing. We've been doing it objectively with excellent support both from the federal government and from our own officials, and we will continue to do that because that is the kind of professional work that Albertans expect.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Canadian Free Trade Agreement

Mr. Jean: Yesterday the NDP showed how little they know about the deals that they made on behalf of Albertans. When asked about a new Crown corporation they agreed to create in last week's free trade deal, the minister said that he had no idea where we're getting our information. Well, here's a hint. Read the agreement that you signed. "Alberta gives notice of its intention to create a Crown corporation which will be responsible for all infrastructure procurement." We didn't make this up. It's in the agreement you signed. Will the Premier please confirm that they've signed us up for a new Crown corporation, or have they still not actually read the agreement that they signed?

2:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the answer that I gave to the hon. member yesterday was correct. We have no intention whatsoever of setting up a Crown corporation for infrastructure. In the previous agreement the only way to exempt Alberta companies from free trade requirements under the agreement was to set up a Crown corporation. Other provinces had done that. But I want to say that the minister of economic development has negotiated a new agreement, a new free trade agreement, that protects Alberta businesses. We don't need the Crown corporation, and we have no intention of setting it up.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, yes, no, no, yes, but they include it in the agreement? Come on. Albertans should be concerned about the NDP pattern of making decisions without understanding what they're actually signing Albertans up for. The last time that happened, taxpayers found themselves on the hook for a \$2.3 billion bailout of the power agreements under this government. Now we have a brand new Crown corporation coming without the NDP providing any information whatsoever on what this body will do or what it will cost the taxpayers, but they included it in an agreement. Once the NDP get a chance to read this agreement that they signed, will the Premier please release details about just ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections] Quiet down, folks.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I wish the hon. member would listen to the answer for a change because the answer is: we're not setting up a Crown corporation; therefore, the Crown corporation will have no costs because the Crown corporation will not exist. And because it does not exist, there will be no costs. I don't know if he's following me, but we're not setting up a Crown corporation, and there are no costs, just to be clear. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, everyone. [interjections] Quiet down, please, hon. members.

Mr. Jean: Now, there were rumours about the negotiations on the free trade agreement with the NDP government, that they were the

odd person out and were actually pushing protectionist policies. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to believe that that's not the truth, but now we're in a spot where the government's front bench doesn't even know the contents of a major trade agreement that they signed. Albertans don't want protectionist policies. They don't want a secret agenda from these folks. They want to show that Alberta is open for business and attracting investment, not turning it away. Why on earth did the Premier sign Albertans up for a Crown corporation that they didn't ask for and that they don't need but that is in an agreement they drafted and had signed? [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections] Quiet, please. [interjection] Hon. minister, please.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? For decades the previous government failed to take meaningful action to stand up for Alberta businesses. The Canadian free trade agreement is a good deal because it finally levels the playing field for Alberta. It's now easier for Albertans to get their world-class products and services to Canadian markets. At the same time, we worked hard to ensure that this is fair treatment for Albertans at home. We will not apologize for negotiating exemptions that mean we can put Albertans back to work rebuilding Fort McMurray. [interjections]

The Speaker: Calm, folks.

The leader of the third party

Children's Charter

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, Albertans were consulted on an Alberta children's charter in 2013, leading to the 2013 Children First Act. Bill 25 passed unanimously, with senior members of the current government in the Assembly. Albertans expected the charter would be adopted in 2015, but instead the NDP government has done nothing. The website childcharter.alberta.ca has since disappeared. I will table the document Together We Raise Tomorrow and provide a copy to the minister today in case she hasn't seen it. To the Minister of Children's Services: why has this government stalled work on adopting and implementing the children's charter?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is that this government has unapologetically stood up for children and families here in Alberta, and we've committed to making the lives of Albertan children better. That's why we have a Children's Services department once again, to focus on providing support and making life affordable for everyday families through the child benefit, investing in new child care spaces. If there is anyone who is child centred and focusing on placing children first in this Legislature, it's the members on this side of the room.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Well, perhaps the government could try answering the question, because that's her ministry.

Given that the government-dominated Legislative Offices Committee has been reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate Act and related matters since September 2015 and given that the Alberta children's charter has not been discussed since then, again to the minister, and it is your ministry: when do you intend to fulfill the obligation under section 2(1) of the Children First Act to establish a children's charter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a demonstration of how centred and focused we are on children in this province, we established the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. There were many tragic outcomes within the child intervention system, a system that has clearly had substantial challenges for years, so this government is taking action to put children first. We established the ministerial panel, and I look forward to working again with all of my colleagues to deal with this challenging issue, to take some real action to ensure that Alberta's children really have the support they need to move forward and have the very best outcomes.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister ought to be less chippy when she doesn't know her own file, so I'll give her another chance. Given that protection of children and, particularly, vulnerable children in care has been a heightened priority for all Albertans and given that this is now the third session without work on the children's charter, again to the same minister: when will Albertans and this Assembly expect to see a draft of the children's charter as required by section 2(1)? Will you do your job, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While others within this Legislature would focus on cuts that would not give families the leg-up that they need in tough times, this government is taking action to make life better and more affordable. We're not talking about words here. We're going to take real action and we have taken real action to focus on families, to be child centred, and to move forward in ways that we haven't seen in the past to really take that real, strong action to make life affordable, to provide those services to children and families. [An hon. member raised an object]

The Speaker: Hon. member, would you please put that down. You're interfering with my view of the member whose turn it is to now speak.

Calgary-Elbow.

Acute Health Care System Costs

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had an unexpected opportunity for an up-close-and-personal tour of our health care system, and I am proud to say that it was there for me when I needed it. I know that there are people who fall through the cracks and that we still have a lot of work to do in this province on prevention, chronic disease, and mental health, but our acute-care system is truly world class. Every single front-line worker I encountered, from the admissions clerk to the amazing nurses, from all the porters and doctors and cleaning staff to everyone in between, all were compassionate and professional. We're truly lucky to have them. To the Minister of Health: what are you doing to ensure that the voices of people on the front lines are being heard and that the suggestions they make are being listened to?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member, and welcome back. We're pleased that you had a successful experience.

One of the things that I personally do regularly – and I know that our CEO for Alberta Health Services does as well – is site visits. For example, this morning I met with staff at the Boyle McCauley health centre. Regularly we tour AHS facilities as well and have opportunities to chat with some of the staff on the front lines and

meet with their elected representatives through their unions as well. It's important that they have a voice, that their voice is heard within their organization and is respected by their government, and that's what they have in this government.

Mr. Clark: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to hear that because while I was in hospital, staff told me about some of the challenges they face and shared with me some ideas about how to fix them. I was told that it takes \$8 to process every single blanket they use. I learned that it cost \$500,000 to paint a small space in emergency and that an ordinary office desk that costs about \$1,500 at Staples cost more than \$12,000 when it was acquired through the AHS procurement process. These are just stories that I heard in the little more than 24 hours in hospital. Again to the Minister of Health: do you hear these sorts of stories from the front lines, and when you do, what do you do about them?

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. I welcome the member to pass along those details to my office. I'd be very happy to share them with Alberta Health Services. Definitely, I have a regular meeting with the CEO of AHS and the deputy minister. It's important that we're at the same table, that we have an opportunity to raise specific questions and concerns with each other and to make sure that we're bringing about the very best result, using our investment effectively, and finding ways to improve efficiencies. That's why we're also looking at operational best practices, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like a lot of the complaints I heard stem from the procurement process. This government has been in power for nearly two years, and they haven't made any meaningful changes to these old, broken, and expensive processes. Now, I realize that there are special considerations when buying medical equipment or renovating a hospital, but there's a huge missed opportunity here for savings. Again to the Minister of Health: outside of nationalizing laundry and lab services, do you have any plans to improve AHS procurement to focus on real savings in areas that won't hurt front-line care?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. The hyperbole around how we're going to protect Albertans and make sure that we have effective and efficient systems I'll be happy to expand on tonight in estimates, I imagine.

I also want to say that I'm happy to talk about procurement. We've brought in a number of initiatives through Alberta Health Services. They've been very effective in finding many areas for significant savings. I'll be happy to detail those through a tabling later this session. We always are looking for more ways to be efficient, Mr. Speaker, rather than just pushing the slash-and-burn budgets that the Official Opposition and the third party, their best friends, are pushing. We're effective in making sure we can find ways to use Albertans' money most effectively.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Life Lease Housing

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, my constituents, particularly seniors, are really pleased with our government protecting consumers by banning door-to-door sales of various products. These changes have helped our seniors be at less risk of losing their peace of mind and

their financial stability. In a similar vein, I've met many seniors in my constituency who reside in life lease units that are not covered by our current condominium act. Residents have expressed concern that they have little or no input into management of the facility and have difficulty in disposing of the units. My question is to the minister responsible for Service Alberta. Are there currently any protections in place for constituents like mine who are life lease holders?

Ms McLean: Mr. Speaker, there is no legislation specific to life leases in the province of Alberta. As a result, the terms and conditions of the life lease are governed by the contract between the resident and the life lease owner or operator, including the fees and calculation of those fees. It is important for life lease holders to read their contract carefully and obtain legal advice, as they would for any housing transaction. Some life lease agreements include a dispute resolution process. However, in the absence of this, disputes that cannot be worked out proceed through the court system like any other contractual dispute.

Dr. Turner: Given that amendments were passed to the condominium act in 2014 and given my constituents' concern about increased consumer protection, what is the minister doing to ensure both consumers and condo boards are consulted with on any future changes?

Ms McLean: Service Alberta will be consulting with all condominium stakeholders as part of the consultations for the development of the regulations. Condo boards will be included as part of the consultation, as will condominium owners, managers, developers, members of the legal community, and others who are part of the condo industry. My department expects to be inviting feedback later this year so that all condominium owners can make their voices heard.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Minister. Given that life leases are a hybrid financial product, combining aspects of condominiums and rental units, to the minister: can life lease issues be incorporated into the consultation for consideration?

Ms McLean: Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, there is currently no legislation applicable to life leases. Life leases are a legal contract the person can enter into, and it lies between the owner and the resident. That being said, the planned condominium property consultation will allow for Albertans to engage the government on important issues such as but not limited to governance, insurance, reserve funds, dispute resolution, voting procedures, and general public comments. Service Alberta certainly welcomes the opportunity to hear the important and diverse set of perspectives from Albertans.

Thank you.

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

School Nutrition Programs and Special-needs Children

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A boy with autism was sent to eat in the hallway because he brought banana bread for lunch. This child was unnecessarily traumatized by having to sit in the hallway, away from his classmates. Getting healthy food into children with aversions is a lifelong strategy for a family. Teaching proper nutritional choices in the classroom is essential. However, this should not be done in a way that snack shames children. To the minister: is this snack shaming part of the curriculum?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question from the hon. member. It's very important to understand what individual circumstances might have been in a situation like this. I did say that this was not an appropriate circumstance, by any means, but it's also important for us to look further, investigating and seeing what the individual case might be. Yes, I did read about this as well, and I did find it disturbing. It's nothing to do with the curriculum. It could have been some kind of misstep in regard to whoever the responsible adult might have been.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, given that the parents are feeling the impact of an authoritarian behaviour run amok over snacks and given that parents know what their children will eat and will not eat and don't need government telling them how to feed their children, especially when their food sensitivity is an obvious issue, and given that pudding, granola bars, and applesauce have been banned in this classroom, the parents are now contemplating moving their child to another school. To the minister: what approach should schools and boards take to encourage healthy eating in the classrooms and, more specifically, for children with special needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, if this hon. member knows more specific circumstances about this individual case, I would be glad if she might share those with us afterwards. In general, certainly, it's entirely inappropriate to connect an individual circumstance around food and banana bread and one of the most effective education programs that we have put out in a generation, which is the school nutrition program here in the province of Alberta. We're expanding that now, using the local community to help us do so, making choices in the community. I can tell you that it's one of the most effective ways not just for nutrition but for education.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Aheer: This is not effective for children with special needs. Since banana bread to this little guy was not only food for his body and comforting and consistent and delicious to him, this is not a reason that a child should be excluded from that classroom, and given that it is important to avoid making food choice a chronic source of conflict, children with disability need specific, thoughtful, and supportive care in the classroom, not reprimands and associated stigmas. Does the minister provide resources for teachers and parents through Alberta Education to accommodate instead of berating parents and children?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, if we might share individual information about this circumstance. Certainly, from the reports that I did receive, it was probably not the most appropriate thing to have happened, although we don't have all the details. Maybe there's something to do with allergies. We don't really know what the individual's circumstances are, but we certainly know that the general circumstance of school nutrition in our schools and with our families is very, very strong. The school nutrition program – I was just at one in Wetaskiwin this morning. They said that it was one of the most meaningful nutrition and education experiences that they had ever endeavoured in that school.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Coal Strategy

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, this government is sending Albertans mixed messages on coal. The Health and Environment ministers tell Albertans that coal is bad, it's dirty, and that to save the planet, we must stop using it to generate electricity. But the Energy minister tells Albertans that coal is good, that it's clean, that it provides jobs and tax revenue, and that our coal is highly sought after. As if to prove the point, last night the economic development minister told Albertans that he is actively seeking export markets for our coal. To the Environment minister: help us out here. Is coal good, bad, or does it just depend on which minister is speaking?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a difference between thermal and metallurgical coal. Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the phase-out of coal-fired electricity is a key pillar of this government's climate leadership plan and given that while we are shutting down our 18 coal-fired plants, some 2,400 coal-fired plants are either under construction or being planned world-wide and given that the economic development minister says that he supports exporting our thermal coal, to the environment minister: if Alberta's coal is burned in a power plant overseas, GHGs are still emitted, so why is it acceptable to simply shift GHG production to a different part of the same planet?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

2:20

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand up and respond to this again. With our climate leadership plan we're phasing out coal-fired electricity emissions, and if the coal plants decide, if coal mining wants to continue their operations and look to potentially exporting, then they are completely entitled to do that.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Canada is the world's third-largest exporter of metallurgical coal, coal that is essential in making the steel that is needed for manufacture of things like – oh, say – wind turbines and given that Alberta has eight proposed metallurgical coal projects that could generate \$10 billion to \$13 billion in government revenue and their proponents have been waiting in some cases for over a year for any word on their applications, to the environment minister: why the delay, Minister? When might these job-creating enterprises anticipate a response from your ministry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. With respect to metallurgic mines and export mines, this is not part of the coal phase-out, as we've said, but they do need to go through the process with the AER in consultation and get the correct permits and all that before they can go. They're treated just the same as any other energy project in Alberta.

The Speaker: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Residential No-charge Energy Savings Program (continued)

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, following the release of the free light bulb RFP from the environment minister, it

was discovered that not only are we not getting the best deal, but the government is breaking its own rules on door-to-door energy sales. The RFP gives Ecofitt the okay to notify residents "of all other energy efficiency opportunities in the home . . . and cross-promote other energy efficiency programs and services." That sounds like high-pressure selling to me. Why is this company getting the green light to break Alberta law?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for an opportunity to ask him why in this House yesterday he came forward with a button on, with six other members of his caucus, that clearly was offensive towards children who are trying to create gay-straight alliances. [interjections] They introduced and had all of us cheer for somebody who just equated GSAs with residential schools. That's shameful. Stand up, and tell us why you did that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks, calm down. I'm trying to think of something wise to – I'm having difficulty.

First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a bait and switch. Given that seniors on fixed incomes are desperately looking for ways to reduce their costs in these tough economic times and given that this government is aggressively selling this supposed no-cost energy retrofit program but at the same time giving Ontario-based Ecofitt the green light to utilize high-pressure sales tactics in Alberta homes, will the minister issue a notice that any Ecofitt worker caught upselling through their retrofit program will be charged under the Fair Trading Act as per Alberta law?

Ms Hoffman: We're proud to stand up and protect Alberta consumers, Alberta seniors, and Alberta children, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want to know why the former Education critic from that party moved on with six other colleagues, clearly in opposition to what his leader has been saying about protecting children and GSAs. We're proud to protect seniors. We're also proud to protect children. Stand up and tell us if you thought that button was appropriate while your leader and your Education critic clearly disagreed with you.

Mr. Smith: Let's try this again, Mr. Speaker. Last week, following the release of a free light bulb RFP from the environment minister, it was discovered that not only are we not getting the best deal, but the government is breaking its own rules on door-to-door energy sales. The RFP gives Ecofitt the okay to notify residents of, and I quote . . .

The Speaker: Could you get to your question, hon. member? Get to your question.

Mr. Smith: Why is this company getting the green light to break Alberta law? Minister, answer the question.

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose is so opposed to saving Albertans money that they're making things up again. This is not a program that will break the door-to-door sales ban. What it will do is introduce door-to-door savings, which is something that the Wildrose is opposed to. They want to reach into seniors' and others' pockets and take out \$112 per year. That's over 90,000 Albertans who are going to get those savings, Mr. Speaker, and they are so enamoured with their climate change denial, so

enamoured with their ideological fixation on rejecting the science of climate change that they can't find it in their hearts . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we heard from Suncor's CEO recently that oil sands investments are coming to an end, not just for Suncor but for the industry, for a considerable period, probably in excess of 10 years. Suncor has no plans to be going ahead with major capital investment in either mining or in situ in the foreseeable future. Can the Premier tell this House how she's planning to replace thousands of good-paying jobs from hundreds of approved projects not going ahead for at least a decade?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to talk about our Alberta jobs plan. Through our capital plan it's creating 10,000 jobs a year. That was suggested to us by the former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge. As far as our petrochemical diversification program, that will create 5,000 jobs. Who laid the groundwork for that? Well, let's go back in time. That was actually Peter Lougheed, something that both parties have moved far away from. We are investing in jobs. We are investing in Alberta businesses. We have their backs, and we are going to continue to get Alberta's economy back on its feet.

Mr. Panda: Back to reality, Mr. Speaker. Given that thousands of engineers have been let go from EPC firms like Amec, Bantrel, Fluor, Golder, Jacobs, SNC-Lavalin, Stantec, WorleyParsons and given that it is believed that over 20 per cent of Alberta's engineers and 60 per cent of geoscientists are out of work, what is this government doing to keep our highest skilled workers in Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again, there are a number of initiatives in our Alberta jobs plan from two different tax credits that will help incent investment right now, when the economy needs it the most.

I just want to talk a little bit about some of the companies that are actually increasing their investment in our province this year. On that note, the Conference Board of Canada, TD Bank, and other banks have all said that Alberta's economy is going to grow the most in 2017 and 2018, faster and more than any other province in the country, growing at a rate of 2.7 per cent. Do you want to know why? Because we got two pipelines, and we're investing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Zero answers, Mr. Speaker.

Given that new oil sands mining development won't be happening soon and given that Alberta has plenty of metallurgical and thermal coal projects that could boost the mining industry and given that coal is needed to make the steel for wind turbines and light rail tracks and the coal is already travelling across Alberta from the U.S.A anyway for export to Prince Rupert, will the Premier commit to cutting the red tape and ramping up coal mining to put Albertans back to work, back to real work, not imaginary work?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, metallurgic coal is not part of our coal phase-out. In fact, we do agree that it's good for manufacturing. It has a place. So those projects, as mentioned, are treated the same as any other energy project. They go through the AER standards consultation and all that sort. It's impacting communities. It will provide jobs.

I have to say on another front that recently we met with engineers, and I have to give the Labour department . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Employment and Labour Code Consultations

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, when introducing the infamous Bill 6, this government handled the process so poorly that thousands of Albertans protested across the province and on the steps of this Legislature before the government dispatched their ministers to actually speak with Albertans, a novel idea indeed. Now, with proposed changes to employment standards and the labour code, we once again see this government's distaste for open, transparent consultation with Albertans. To the Minister of Labour. Your ministry only set up four invitation-only consultations. Can you tell Albertans how many of those you personally attended?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are very proud to have embarked on a review of Alberta's workplace legislation because it has not been reviewed since 1988, since Tom Hanks starred in the movie *Big*. We're making sure that we are having that conversation with Albertans and engaging with them to determine what their thoughts are on: should Albertans have job-protected sick leave the way other Canadians have? This is the conversation we're having. I'm very pleased with the results we're getting from our round-tables thus far.

Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, I'll take that as a zero.

Given that this government decided that four sessions, 36 days, and online consultations were adequate to understand Albertans' concerns around potential changes to the employment standards and to the labour code and given that this Legislature sent a private member's bill on daylight saving time to committee for further consultation and has given three months of consultation for the Castle park management plan, again to the minister: how can you defend a 36-day consultation as adequate for such important legislation when your government and members support much greater engagement for legislation of significantly less impact?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government believes in consulting adequately on each issue. In the case of our Employment Standards Code and Labour Relations Code we are asking some very focused questions. We are asking Albertans whether they believe compassionate care leave, that other Canadians have access to – that Albertans should have access to leave of the same length. We are asking about job-protected sick leave. We are asking some very targeted questions both online, where over 3,000 Albertans have submitted their opinions, and in round-tables. Making sure that we hear from Albertans is important to me, and we are through this process.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, zero plus zero is zero.

Given that Ontario is taking over two years to consult and work towards broad-based consensus on similar labour-related legislation and given that the minister has described Alberta's 36-day consultation window as very reasonable despite key stakeholders such as the Calgary Chamber describing the process as completely, woefully inadequate, again to the Minister of Labour: Minister, without even talking about content, will you do the right thing and extend and enhance the consultation process with business and labour to better inform the impactful changes you are contemplating? [interjection]

The Speaker: I can't exactly tell, but there's a very loud voice coming from that corner. I'd ask you to contain your volume, please.

The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is embarking on a focused review. There are other reviews happening in this country, much broader, bigger reviews that are talking about things like: who is an employee? We are asking Albertans if they believe they should have job-protected sick leave. We are asking some very targeted questions. The amount of time that we've allocated in order for Albertans to submit their feedback has been adequate. In fact, we still have another week. I would invite all Albertans, including the members opposite and their constituents, anyone interested, to please submit your feedback because the consultation is still active . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Recreational Use of Public Lands

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Community members in my constituency of West Yellowhead enjoy spending time out on the land, particularly in the natural areas. Given that there have been rumours that off-highway vehicles, or OHVs, may be newly prohibited in popular OHV-use areas in West Yellowhead, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: has this government undertaken any plans to prohibit OHVs in many areas in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer to the hon. Member for West Yellowhead's question is no.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that OHVs are a popular recreational pastime in Alberta and given that the Castle wildland park draft management plan is currently under consultation, to the same minister: how is the government working with OHV users in the Castle area as the plan is being finalized?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, what is in the draft management plan is a staged phase-out of OHV use in environmentally sensitive areas. Also, the House will note that in the budget papers currently there is a proposal for \$3 million over the next two years to invest in trail rehabilitation and infrastructure in adjacent areas so that that activity can be well supported where those opportunities are most appropriate and are best supported by the best available science.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans enjoy a variety of activities in our great provincial outdoors, to the same minister: how will the Castle wildland draft management plan affect other land-use pastimes such as hunting and fishing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact what we've done is that we've extended hunting opportunities in the provincial park portion of the Castle in response to requests from ranchers and landowners. The draft plan also works with hunters on access routes and proposes some of those changes for the retrieval of game. We're also making sure our fishing opportunities are there for Albertans for all generations by rehabilitating habitat that's been damaged through erosion, through illegal stream crossing, and so on. We've also increased our enforcement presence in response to requests from ranchers and municipalities and others to ensure . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Labour Legislation and Regulation Consultations

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, recently I had the privilege of holding some town halls in my riding with the Leader of the Opposition. It was an opportunity to hear from our constituents. During these meetings I met a prominent member of the Farmworkers Union. He asked me to openly advocate for a quick resolution to the round-table regulations so that, quote, farmers can strike. End quote. To the Minister of Labour: is the fix in on writing these labour regulations in order to bolster the ranks of the unions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I understand that the member might not be well versed in labour relations and other things. I understand that perfectly well, but you're more than welcome to educate him on that. Other provinces that have had rights for these workers for decades are . . . [interjections] Yes, I do. They have had these rights for decades, and there isn't every farm that's unionized. I think he's very misinformed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the folks across the aisle really don't want to upset the folks that actually door-knock for them.

Mr. Speaker, given that this government has announced its intention to rewrite several parts of the labour laws and given that any recommendations from the farm safety round-tables on labour can be undone by this upcoming labour rewrite, Minister, if the government intended all along to rewrite the labour laws, then was this farm safety round-table nothing more than a PR exercise to take some heat off this government for an ill-conceived Bill 6?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We believe firmly in the rights of all workers, including farm workers, and in basic human rights. I'm perfectly willing to sit down with any member from over there and help to educate them on those basic human rights. We feel that these farm workers should

have similar rights that every other farm worker in Canada has. These workers now have those same rights here in Alberta, and that's something this government is proud of. We're making Albertans' lives better.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, I think the question had a lot more substance than the answer. If this is not a PR stunt . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hold it. You may continue.

Mr. Schneider: If it's not a PR stunt, then given that farm safety round-tables have been going on for many months and given that your government is rewriting several aspects of the labour code and the employment standards and that the question has more substance than the answers I've been getting, Minister: why are you only giving Albertans a five-week consultation when the farm safety aspects alone were given several months?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I have the opportunity to educate the member a little bit. This group of workers didn't have these rights ever in the history of Alberta. For decades the workers have been denied these rights and are now going to be getting these rights. It takes a little bit more work when they had no rights in the first place. Here's an opportunity to give these basic human rights to these workers as all other workers in Alberta have right across the country. That, I'm proud of. That, this government is proud of. We're sticking up for Albertans.

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

2:40 Crown Prosecution Services Funding

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent stats point to a dramatic increase in crime as well as the severity of crime in the last two years. Actually, criminal prosecutions rose accordingly during the same time period, yet in 2015-16 this government cut the Alberta Crown prosecutors budget by \$5 million and left 35 positions unfilled. Then the Jordan decision caught Alberta's justice system in a vise. To the minister: why did you reduce the Crown's budget in each of your first two years in office?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member alluded to, backlogs in our court system had built up over a long time, and this government, when it took office, came into a fiscal situation that was very tight, which is why we were ensuring that we found the necessary efficiencies in every department. Obviously, just as the member has alluded to, the Jordan decision had a massive change in direction in terms of the court system, so we have responded accordingly. We will continue to respond to the facts on the ground because that's what good governance looks like.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Justice minister was asked a direct question about cutting the Crown prosecution service during the NDP's first two years and given that the cuts resulted in "exercising restraint in filling vacancies" and given that those vacancies involved 35 prosecutor positions, yet she points to the former government for "intense backlogs," Minister, will you not accept responsibility for the role you played in creating the backlog?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member, of course, is absolutely right. We did have the file for two years; they had it for 44. But I'm sure those things are perfectly comparable. When the situation changed when the Jordan decision came down, we knew we had to do things differently, and that is why we injected resources, unlike the members over there, who propose 10 per cuts to that same department.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that during those same two years the Justice minister increased funding to Legal Aid by more than 26 per cent and given that this enhanced funding for legal aid clearly showed the minister knew the system was dealing with higher caseloads and given that the minister still went on to cut the prosecutors budget two years running: Minister, what was your plan here? Were you simply expecting Crown prosecutors to do more with less?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the increases of funding to Legal Aid were as a result of decades of underfunding by the previous government because apparently they don't understand that all elements of the system need to work together in order to have a functioning justice system. The rights of vulnerable individuals in Alberta are things that need protecting as are the rights of all Albertans, and we will continue to stand up for them.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Edmonton Police Service 125th Anniversary

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes, communities, and workplaces. The Edmonton Police Service plays a critical role in ensuring that they do. Today I am proud to recognize the work of the Edmonton Police Service, an organization which just celebrated its 125th anniversary.

A strong, well-functioning law enforcement system is one of the cornerstones of any thriving city. Over the last 125 years Edmonton has grown larger and even more complex. Each change in growth also comes with unexpected new challenges, including opportunities for criminal activity. EPS has consistently risen to meet these challenges, finding innovative ways to maintain the peace and deal with the forces that disrupt it.

Mr. Speaker, that mission would be impossible to carry out without the brave men and women of the Edmonton Police Service. These officers put on their uniforms each day without knowing what dangers may cross their path. We ask so much of these officers. We require them to be courageous in the face of physical danger, to be resourceful and quick thinking in the case of medical emergencies, and to be compassionate in their dealings with victims of violence. Their ability to perform these challenging tasks with grace and integrity is nothing short of remarkable. They leave their homes and families every day, not knowing if they will return, and when they do, they bear the burden of things they have seen and the

time they must spend away from their loved ones. These sacrifices are to ensure that we can live and enjoy safe communities.

Our government, especially the Minister of Justice, enjoys an open and honest and well-respected relationship with the Edmonton Police Service. They are an integral part of ensuring that we can continue to make life better for all Albertans.

I want to ask all members of this House to join me in expressing my gratitude to the northeast division and to the Edmonton Police Service. Thank you.

Easter

Mr. Orr: Over 700 years before the first Easter one of many prophecies made by the prophet Isaiah was, "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering . . . he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

This week Christians around the world are recognizing this sacrifice made by their Lord and Saviour 2,000 years ago. Christians begin their remembrance by honouring Palm Sunday, when Jesus, their King, rode into Jerusalem on a humble donkey. Later that week, after a meal with His closest friends Jesus was betrayed. On Good Friday the Romans crucified Him for a crime He didn't commit, in one of the cruelest expressions of evil. For Christians around the world the killing of Jesus, the guiltless one with a message of peace, is a proxy for the death that we all deserve. His death forces us to confront our own faults and shortcomings.

But there is hope: the resurrection, the most profound moment in human history, when, as Christians believe, the all-powerful God of the universe, come in human flesh, died and came back to life. The God of great mercy and power makes right what is wrong, the power of death as condemnation for our sins is broken, injustice is made right, and a life cruelly taken is restored. This is the ultimate divine intervention. This is God revealing His true nature of compassion and righteousness, providing a pathway of redemption and restoration. This is the assurance that there is hope for humanity.

Because of Easter we know that God accepts us. We also know that He invites us to be changed and to choose change within. We have lived long enough in our old ways. Let us now live with joy for Him, moved by thanks and love rather than fear. At Easter God extends the free gift of life to all. It remains only for us to embrace this priceless gift.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 9

Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to introduce Bill 9, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017.

Bill 9 will help to restore one of the fundamental principles and intents of this legislation, which is to empower Alberta's agriculture producers and organizations to set the direction for their own industries. The Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, or MAPA, enables our province's agriculture commissions to collect service charges to fund their operations as well as activities that benefit our

broader agriculture industries such as research and marketing. The amendment I am introducing today will provide commissions and their member producers with the choice to implement the service charge model, either refundable or nonrefundable, that works best for them. Mr. Speaker, we recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't make sense in today's diverse agriculture industry. This amendment will also bring us closer in line with other jurisdictions across the country. I ask all members to support this important legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a document I shared with the Minister of Children's Services today, entitled *Together We Raise Tomorrow*, summing up the consultation for the children's charter in 2013.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a copy of an e-mail from the Calgary board of education to Calgary parents. It highlights the concerns the board has about not understanding the impacts on fees and service levels for families, on transportation, and therefore on delays to preregistration for the 2017-18 school year, seeking clarification on what constitutes instructional materials and supplies.

I also table the letter from the Education minister to parents and guardians. Thank you.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings that I referred to in estimates this morning with the Minister of Labour. The first one is from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, a document that is titled *Cost Impacts Affecting Employment Outcomes in Alberta: Considerations Regarding Further Provincial Minimum Wage Increases*.

The second tabling I have is a document prepared by the University of Calgary entitled *If It Matters, Measure It: Unpacking Diversification in Canada*. It references that Alberta and Saskatchewan are the most diverse economies in Canada.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a publication entitled *Metallurgical Coal: Building the Future*, which clearly outlines the differences between metallurgical and thermal coal.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I rise today to table five copies of the Information and Privacy Commissioner's investigation report F2017-IR-03, entitled *Investigation into Allegation of Delays and Possible Interference in Responding to Access Requests*.

I would also like to table five copies of the commissioner's special report and request for legislative amendment, submitted to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, entitled *Producing Records to the Commissioner: Restoring Independent and Effective Oversight under the FOIP Act*.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Hon. Mr. Mason, Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation, responses to Written Question 7 and Written Question 8, asked for by Mr. van Dijken on April 10, 2017: Written Question 7, as of March 1, 2017, what is the cost to resurface one kilometre of highway with gravel at both 11-metre and 13-metre widths; and Written Question 8, as of March 1, 2017, what is the cost to resurface one kilometre of highway with asphalt at both 11-metre and 13-metre widths?

Speaker's Ruling Language Creating Disorder

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like to make a comment if I could. Earlier today the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky in his comments referred, I believe – I don't have the Blues in front of me – to the word “lie” or to lying related to that. As we all know and discuss in this House – I've discussed many times – context is always the situation that comes into play in this House. I want to remind that member and all of the members that when they are citing from documents, they cannot “use language which would be out of order if spoken by a Member.” I would refer the member to page 609 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I'd ask that you all pay attention to that.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Cooper: I'm just seeking some clarification from you to ensure that we won't make that mistake in the future. Under 13(2) “The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member.” It appears to me, Mr. Speaker, that you made a ruling about language that was used by my colleague in a member's statement where he quoted the Energy minister utilizing language that was deemed parliamentary by you in a ruling. He was using it in a very similar context today, that the government – in fact, the

only change was the word “government” for “opposition” in the quote that he had made. I'm having a hard time understanding how the context is significantly different, and I'm having a hard time understanding how today that language could be ruled out of order when it wasn't when the government used it. If you could provide some clarification so that on a go-forward we have a much better understanding of exactly how you would like this rule applied, that would be very helpful to this side of the House.

The Speaker: Well, let me just – first of all, Government House Leader, did you have a comment you wanted to make?

Mr. Mason: I did.

The Speaker: Sorry. I may be out of order in this regard.

I will respond to the Opposition House Leader. First of all, I want to remind you of the comments I made at the outset, that it has everything to do with context, and they are different each time. That includes things like references to tone, et cetera. Nonetheless, in this particular instance you can't say – I also indicated that the specific fact that was addressed to this particular comment was on page 609. Maybe you missed it. I don't believe that applied before, but I stand to be corrected. Again, another part of page 609 is that you can't do indirectly what you can't do directly. I think it's wise for all of the House to avoid those words like “liar,” “lie.” It's not constructive. It's not helpful. Yes, each context or situation is different, and I want to remind you of paying attention to that in the future.

Hon. members, the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

Please be seated. Just a minute. I'm not finished yet.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for the consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Health in the Rocky Mountain Room. Tomorrow morning Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Service Alberta in the Parkland Room, and Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Infrastructure in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:58 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 12, 2017

Day 20

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Please bow your heads. Let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, today is the International Day of Pink, a day against bullying and discrimination. Each of us might want to reflect on those times when one of us may have been have a victim but also maybe a time when we may have been the perpetrator. Bullying is a threat to rights and freedoms and therefore a threat to democracy and to this Chamber.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is always a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all of the members of this Assembly one of the school classes that visit this Legislature from my constituency. One of the best ways of learning anything is to do it, and by visiting the Legislature, these young minds have the opportunity to put a real face to the terms “MLA” or “Premier” or the “Speaker of the House.” It is with great pleasure that I would ask the staff and the students of St. Anthony school in Drayton Valley to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Energy a number of bright young minds from Heart Valley Christian School in the beautiful constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. They are accompanied by their teacher Harley Toews and four parent chaperones: Burt and Cindy Barkman, Herman and Judy Neudorf. I’d ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. First, a school group. I rise today to welcome Mr. Tyson Mastel and the grade 6 students from Brightview elementary school. I know Brightview well and Tyson as well. He is always the first teacher to invite me to read during Read In Week, and I’m looking forward to getting that call again, Tyson. I now ask that Tyson, his colleagues Allyson Tanner and Cindy Annala, and the Brightview students please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups?

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. Now for my other guests. My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize the province’s optometrists and the care that they provide to Albertans every day. Today is eye health day,

and I hope my colleagues were able to stop by the display downstairs, have their eyes examined, and learn a little bit more about Alberta’s eye health situation. I now ask that Dr. Kim Bugera and Dr. Nasir Khan from the Alberta College of Optometrists as well as Dr. Troy Brady, Dr. Kevin Hesterman, and Dr. Brian Wik from the Alberta Association of Optometrists please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly. Thank you for being here.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly Vanessa Schonekess. Vanessa is a paramedic in the Stony Plain constituency with a remarkable history of dedication to the emergency services. I’d ask Vanessa to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you an amazing young woman named Rachel Brown, and she’s here today with her mom, Sharon. Rachel attends Richard S. Fowler, where she recently met Bear, a therapy dog, and that has inspired her journey and quest to get her own service dog, so we’re thankful for our government’s recent changes to the regulations on service dogs. I’d like you to join me in welcoming them to the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two board members from the Reel Fun Film Festival. Please rise when I say your names. Cathy McKee is the festival director. In her first life she was a teacher with the Calgary Catholic and public school boards. Cathy left her career to raise four children, and then as she got older, she began working for the Calgary International Film Festival. Her love of films led to the launch of the Reel Fun Film Festival.

Debbie Muller was a high school science teacher with the Calgary separate school board. She retired to raise her four children and worked as a volunteer at her community school and church. She later became a board member for the film festival. I would now ask that my colleagues extend the traditional greeting of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Miss Jessica Bos. Jessica’s mother, Shannon Hamelin, is a friend of all of us in the opposition caucus. She works side by side with us each day, holding this government to account, and Jessica is here with her mother today. She’s a strong fiscal conservative dedicated to working with us to make sure that this government is replaced in 2019, and I would ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Lonnie Pilkington. Lonnie is a volunteer with the Reel Fun Film Festival in Calgary, which my colleague from Calgary-Northern Hills will discuss further in his member's statement, and is also a constituent of Edmonton-Meadowlark. Prior to her retirement Lonnie worked for Service Alberta for 35 years, and we thank her for her ongoing commitment to our province. I'd ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my constituents from the exemplary riding of Calgary-Foothills that are here today along with their colleagues on behalf of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, better known as CPAWS: Gord James, who is the chair of the CPAWS Southern Alberta Board and a former colleague of mine at Suncor Energy; and Phil Nykyforuk, who is the vice-chair of the CPAWS Southern Alberta Board and a partner at the law firm Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP in Calgary. I would ask all our guests from CPAWS to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ethane Jarvis and his son Derek. Ethane is my assistant in the Grande Prairie office. If you could please rise, Ethane and Derek, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Government Policies

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I have been trying to work with the government to get to the bottom of important economic issues for two years now with little success. Just this week both the Minister of Infrastructure and the Premier laughed at my serious questions about the Crown corporation and refused to give any real answers. There has been a pattern from this front bench of undemocratic, insulting behaviour at a time when Albertans are looking for leadership.

Last year the minister of economic development bragged about how he was going to create 100,000 jobs. Since then tens of thousands of Albertans have lost work and seen the introduction of many job-killing policies, like the 100-megatonne cap and the \$5 billion carbon tax and other tax hikes. The minister brags about creating part-time retail jobs while tens of thousands of highly skilled workers sit at home or leave the province after they've run out of EI.

1:40

The CEO of Suncor, a bellwether company of the industry, just warned that there could be no new oil sands investment for the next 10 years. The minister naively tells oil sands producers to use AITC and CITC to create jobs. It's ridiculous. Those \$5 million tax credits have no relevance in developing oil sands projects. This is a crisis situation. How does the NDP respond? By killing thousands of well-paying coal jobs with an ideologically confused coal phase-out plan. Even the cabinet seems to be unaligned or in disagreement.

I have been trying to meet with the minister for three months to discuss these important questions, and he has no time for me, while I can get appointments on short notice with four ministers from Saskatchewan. Albertans expect government to work with them. The Premier and cabinet must do better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Reel Fun Film Festival in Calgary

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2006 the Reel Fun Film Festival has provided youth and families with the very best in film. This year marks the 10th anniversary. Running for a full week each year, the festival partners with Landmark Cinemas in Calgary-Northern Hills to showcase international, award-winning films, including Canadian premieres, to audiences of all ages. This year films were viewed by 6,640 kindergarten through grade 12 students from 41 Calgary classrooms.

On day 2 I stopped by to meet the festival director and cofounder, Cathy McKee. To select films, Cathy and teacher liaison Debbie Muller scour the planet looking for international, award-winning, family-friendly films with high-quality content, suitable language, and affordable screening costs. During the festival volunteers pitch in to organize the school groups, and they have concessions ready for them when they arrive. Yes, popcorn and drinks are available.

This year they screened 18 films from 16 countries, one an international premiere, nine Canadian premieres, and three western Canadian premieres, one made by a local Calgary writer and director.

When I asked what students learn by attending the festival, Cathy told me that the experience of seeing award-winning global films that can be linked to curriculum is unique, and the experience extends beyond the theatre into the classrooms and homes. One such film is *Fanny's Journey*, a film about Jewish children forced to flee Nazi-occupied France for Switzerland during World War II. I attended the screening and noted few dry eyes in the theatre.

Calgary-Northern Hills is certainly fortunate to have community-minded folks like Cathy McKee, Debbie Muller, Lonnie Pilkington, and many other volunteers who have made this event such a success over the past decade. The festival has been operated for 10 years by 100 per cent volunteers with sponsorship to cover costs from the local film industry and private business donations and sponsorship.

I wish them every success as Cathy and her team carry this film festival on into the future for the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Vaisakhi

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a proud Sikh it is an honour to rise today to acknowledge Vaisakhi, which is a special time of year for my family and my community. Vaisakhi is a historical and a religious festival in Sikhism. It is celebrated on the first day of the month of Vaisakh of the Sikh calendar every year. Vaisakhi marks the Sikh new year and commemorates the formation of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh, our 10th guru, in 1699.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a thriving Sikh community. In our province our community has been a proud contributor to our economy, provincial culture, the Alberta way of life, and leadership. And I can't help but remember our dear friend Manmeet today.

Vaisakhi is time for seva, or selfless service, which fits in well with the province because Albertans are well known for selfless

service, always willing to lend a hand to those in need, expecting nothing in return, which we all saw in the Fort McMurray wildfire last year.

Mr. Speaker, there will be a number of Sikh celebrations for Vaisakhi around the province this weekend, and I urge all members of this House to attend one near them. Those who have attended can attest to the excitement of this colourful celebration.

Our 10th guru created Khalsa Panth and gave us the principles of Sikhism and expected Sikhs to live by those principles. A few days before Vaisakhi I want to challenge all the Sikhs living in Alberta and around the world with a simple question: are we living by the principles given to us by our guru on this important day? The principles are protecting the truth, equality, protecting the underprivileged, living a life of integrity, dedication, and meditation on the divine name with love and devotion. My challenge to you today is that we continue to make our 10th guru proud.

To all the Sikhs around the world: I wish you a happy Vaisakhi and a very happy and prosperous new year. [Remarks in Punjabi] Hail the Khalsa who belong to the Lord God. Hail the Lord God to whom belongs the victory. [As submitted]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Stony Plain Emergency Services

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my privilege to rise and speak about the amazing staff of emergency services in the constituency of Stony Plain. These people are on the front line of health care and public safety, working every day to keep us safe and healthy. I am so proud to be part of a government that supports our front-line workers.

Recently I had the honour of attending the unsung heroes award gala. This gala was held to honour those individuals from emergency services that go above and beyond the call of duty. Not only do these people put themselves in harm's way in order to help others and work demanding shifts; they also reach out to the community to engage, teach, and bring awareness about all aspects of protective services.

The recipient for paramedics was Vanessa Schonekess, who I had the honour of introducing earlier. Vanessa started with the EMS in Leduc in 1982, volunteering with the Tri-county EMS team. Soon she was recruited by the Parkland Ambulance Authority, and she moved to Stony Plain in 1983. Vanessa was one of only two paramedics in Parkland county at the time, and because of this, she worked many demanding shifts and provided advanced life support backup for our communities until more paramedics were trained.

Vanessa has worked as a supervisor and teacher in both basic and advanced life support for adults and pediatrics. She continues to mentor new staff and students, bringing new courses and training to EMS as well as teaching the first LEAP course to paramedics, which centres around the care of palliative patients. She has worked closely with RCMP, victims' services, peace officers, and fire services for many years and richly deserves this recognition.

Along with Vanessa two other outstanding individuals in our community, RCMP officer Constable Patricia Chornoby and Stony Plain Fire Chief Trevor Mistal, were also recognized for their services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

World Curling Championships

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nuance and strategy of the game are as varied as a chess game. It requires the endurance of a marathoner, the agility of a gymnast. The game to which I refer is curling, a sport which has been played in Canada for longer than my lifetime. Now, I've heard some people say that watching curling is like watching paint dry. I say: absolutely not so.

Last week in Edmonton the world spotlight was on Alberta. Edmonton hosted the 2017 World Men's Curling Championship. Thousands of fans attended from across Canada and the world. An exciting and historic win was delivered by fellow Newfoundlander and hometown hero Brad Gushue and his team of Nichols, Gallant, and Walker. The brilliant Gushue team was the first team to go undefeated in the world men's championship since 1995. Gushue has also led his team to a gold medal at the Olympics in Torino and a gold medal in the junior international championships, from my research the only curler to have done so.

Now, this was not the only recent win for Canada in curling. On March 26 Rachel Homan and her team – Miskew, Courtney, and Weagle – from Ontario won the World Women's Curling Championship in Beijing. Her team also went undefeated in that championship, and this was the first gold for Canada since 2008.

Canada has a lot to be proud of with the accomplishments of these great athletes.

I will have the honour of bringing greetings to the World Senior Curling Championships, which will be held in Lethbridge beginning on April 22. This will be another opportunity for Alberta to shine on the world stage, and I invite all of Alberta to Lethbridge.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, before we start the clock, I just want to, as a courtesy to all, remind members of the memo that was distributed to everyone, I think, on February 13. Just to refresh your memory, "Members may use their mobile devices during Oral Question Period but must only use them as reading devices and not for streaming, sending or receiving messages."

Start the clock.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

1:50

Oral Question Period

Residential No-charge Energy Savings Program

Mr. Jean: The NDP is dripping with hypocrisy. They say that they're protecting Albertans from private-sector energy sales agents at their doors while mandating that the installers of their free light bulb program have sales experience. Now, Mr. Speaker, Ecofitt is told to poke around inside people's homes to identify ways to upsell further energy efficiency solutions. They are salespeople. That's the mandate the NDP has given them. They're not just installing lightbulbs. Does the Premier see the hypocrisy of sending companies into Albertans' homes to upsell and act as PR agents for the NDP government?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I very clearly distinguished between door-to-door sales and helping Albertans save money on their energy bills. I'm not going to go back to that quite yet.

When it comes to hypocrisy, the member opposite sat in a government for nine years and not a peep about equalization that whole time, but he comes here and talks about it. He sat in government for nine years, watched the judges problem grow and grow and grow, said not a word, came back here and complains

about it. He sat in government for nine years, didn't get any pipelines, came back here . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: There is no denying it, Mr. Speaker. This contract with Ecofitt is a sweetheart deal that is a kick in the teeth to Alberta businesses. It's a massive competitive advantage for Ecofitt as they get tens of millions of dollars from the NDP to build their Ontario business. Ecofitt currently advertises things that don't even fall under the no-charge savings program; for instance, energy monitors, pre-rinse sprayers, window and door caulking, shrink-fit window kits, weather strips, and the list goes on and on. How can the NDP guarantee these products won't be pushed on Albertans door to door when Ecofitt comes into their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, what we have done is ensured a ban on door-to-door energy sales and some of the predatory practices that we saw seniors, in particular, being subjected to. It was not a ban that was supported by the conservative parties because they're not interested in making life better for Albertans. What we have not done is banned door-to-door savings because we are making life more affordable for all Albertans.

Mr. Jean: The Premier keeps insisting that she's trying to help Albertans with their energy bills, but here are the facts. She is crushing Albertans with a massive new carbon tax. Heating bills, gas bills, and groceries are all going to be more expensive this year, and – wait for it – she plans to raise the tax by 150 per cent next year. She is sending a company into people's homes with taxpayer money to install light bulbs and poke around their homes to educate and upsell homeowners on their products. Now, how can the Premier possibly stand behind her government's own gross hypocrisy?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what our government is focused on doing is making life more affordable for Albertans, and that's exactly what we are doing. So low- and middle-income Albertans are getting rebates. So all Albertans, 90,000 households at last count, are getting help with saving on their energy bills. So families across Alberta are getting help with their school fees. So students all across Alberta are getting help with their tuition fees. You know what? We're just getting started. I know the members opposite don't want to help make life more affordable for Albertans, but we are just . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second main question.

Canadian Free Trade Agreement

Mr. Jean: The ink is barely dry on the Canadian free trade agreement, and the NDP are already making our trade partners extremely nervous. You see, they drove a hard bargain in free trade talks, telling other provinces that they'd have to deal with a brand new Crown corporation that Alberta would create to handle procurement. The NDP went as far as insisting it be in the final trade agreement. Now they want us to believe it was all just a joke, a farce, that they never really meant it. What are our provincial trade partners and potential investors to think when only days after the trade deal is signed by this government, the NDP are putting the entire commitment of the contract in doubt?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the minister yesterday made it very, very clear that we have no intention of moving forward with

a Crown corporation. You know what? The other thing that the minister said and that bears repeating is that our government is absolutely committed to standing up for Alberta jobs, and that's exactly what we did in that agreement. If the member opposite wants to go outside onto the streets of Edmonton or the streets of Calgary and explain why he's angry that we aren't creating jobs in Saskatchewan and Ontario, I suggest he go right ahead and that he come back and let us know how that worked for him.

Mr. Jean: Along with the creation of a new Crown corporation, the NDP negotiated exceptions to this trade agreement dealing with the disposition of Crown lands, residency requirements for hunting permits, alcohol, resource extraction, and power contracts. Free trade agreement? My goodness. It's all in the agreement that the NDP signed, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps all of that, too, was some part of an elaborate ruse to hoodwink our provincial neighbours. I'm wondering when the Premier plans to fill in her counterparts across the country as well as Albertans at home on what other parts of this free trade agreement she doesn't actually plan to honour. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member for Regina-Somewhere is very concerned about the jobs in Saskatchewan and jobs in Quebec and jobs in Ontario. He's doing a lovely job for them, but you know what? Our government is focused on jobs for Albertans, and that is exactly what that deal is going to deliver.

Mr. Jean: The NDP government's handling of this file is so confusing that it's hard to tell what they really want as an outcome. Thankfully for all of us, there were others at the table when Alberta bungled negotiations. For instance, she's right. Saskatchewan's Economy minister has stated that, and I quote, it was a consistent Alberta position, that both at the officials level and the political level Alberta has been very consistent that they intended to create a Crown. End quote. Will the Premier just come clean and either admit that they were in over their heads negotiating or that they actually are creating a Crown corporation? Come clean with Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe the first question has been answered several times in that we are not moving forward in terms of creating a Crown corporation. Here's what we are moving forward on. We are investing over \$30 billion in infrastructure for Alberta families and Alberta communities. You know what? We're going to do everything we can to make sure that it's Albertans that work on those projects. You know what else we are doing? We are working with the people of Fort McMurray as they rebuild, and we are making sure that it is businesses from Fort McMurray that get those contracts. You know what else? We are moving forward to a new renewable energy . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Let me remind everyone in the House: 35 seconds each.
The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Information and Privacy Commissioner Report

Mr. Cooper: A new report from the Privacy Commissioner released yesterday is another black mark on this government. They have quickly adopted a shocking pattern of secrecy and dishonesty.

I've never seen comments from the Privacy Commissioner in Alberta dripping with such contempt for a government that consistently blocks access to information and Albertans getting it. It's outrageous. It's clear that the NDP can no longer be trusted. Why does the Premier think it's okay to block the Privacy Commissioner from doing her job?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be helpful if the member opposite were to read the report a little closer because the report addresses investigations of conduct that occurred between 2009 and 2014, conduct that was delivered by their new slow-dance partners slightly over to the left or to the right. Who knows? That's what the report is about. Our government has been working diligently on improving transparency and access for Albertans, and I look forward to our Minister of Justice talking about just how we're doing that.

Mr. Cooper: "What should have been a relatively straightforward investigation has concluded under a shadow that . . . has the potential to erode public confidence in an open and accountable government." This is under the Premier's watch. She has the ability to release the information today, but they continue to block the Privacy Commissioner from getting that information. What is the Premier hiding? Why is she trying so very hard to hide this information from Albertans?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, I urge the member opposite to read the timeline in the report that he's referring to. The investigations and the requests were made in March 2015, at which point the whole thing went to the courts, and everything essentially stopped because the Supreme Court of Canada was reviewing the issues. We indicated that once that decision was made and once the Privacy Commissioner made recommendations, we would consider them and look at how we can move forward. We got that report yesterday, and we look forward to acting on many of those recommendations to improve freedom of information . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has access to the information today, yesterday, and two years ago, and she ought to release it. This is the third report in three months condemning the actions of this government. This is the type of nonsense that the government promised would stop when they took over, and it hasn't. The government is continuing to abuse the system. They're politically interfering to cover up information, and it's all being done under the guise of solicitor-client privilege. Will the Premier fix the law? If not, why not, and what are you hiding? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please, everyone. [interjection] Hon. member. The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a lovely display of drama. The only thing is that the member opposite should have turned another 45 degrees to his left and asked his new slow-dance partner that beautifully delivered question because that's what the report is about. Just yesterday the Privacy Commissioner tabled recommendations that arose as a result of the November decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. We have committed that we will look at those recommendations, and we will move forward to build on the work that we have already done to improve transparency, to improve response times, and to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The leader of the third party.

Employment and Labour Code Consultations

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has benefited from labour peace over the years. Workers have been paid. Business has been allowed to make a profit. These things go well together, and they create prosperity. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce has concerns that the current labour consultations are inadequate in light of the significant changes contemplated. The minister has the letter. To the Premier: since your minister has refused to fix the consultation process, will you now direct that that consultation period be extended in order to get proper input from business, organized labour, and all working Albertans?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite suggests that everything was working fine and that workers were getting paid, and in most cases they were unless they were sick, in which case they wouldn't get paid, they wouldn't get access to EI that many other people in Canada would get, and they might get fired. You know what? That wasn't actually working so well for all Albertans. It is time that these issues get reviewed. That's what we committed to doing. That's what we are doing. We're getting all the information. We will ensure that everyone will have been heard from, and then we will move forward in a responsible way that benefits all Albertans.

Mr. McIver: Well, 5 per cent unemployment was a lot better than the Premier's 10.

Though it's reasonable for the minister to want to update labour legislation, it can be said that with only 45 labour stoppages in the last decade, this is not an urgent situation. It could be called a solution looking for a problem. Labour peace, high employment, and profits are a formula for prosperity and a high standard of living. Premier, since workers have benefited from the current system for years, including in unionized workplaces, can you assure Albertans that you have no plan to subject workers to intimidation by taking away the secret ballot provision in the legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that members of the Supreme Court of Canada will be interested to hear that the member opposite sees them as a solution looking for a problem. You know what? We don't think that is true. We think it is time for us to move forward, to modernize things, and to also do so in a way that encourages wide-ranging consultation and good discussions. That's exactly what we will do.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the Premier mentioned a wide range of consultation because the credibility of labour relations is based on balance between labour interests and business interests at the Labour Relations Board. With the latest order in council four out of the six new picks were from the labour side. To the Premier: since you like to say that you bring different voices to the table, can you assure Alberta workers and businesses that you will maintain the balance between business and labour at the Labour Relations Board?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do find it interesting that the member opposite suggests there was balance when back when they were in government, they had a Minister of Labour who refused in

principle to ever meet with the leader of the Federation of Labour while he was Minister of Labour. Notwithstanding that, we absolutely believe in balance, and that's absolutely the way we would move forward. It just happened that the vacancies that came up were worker ones. Of course, the labour board must maintain balance, and we are absolutely committed to that.

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

Information and Privacy Commissioner Report (continued)

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The very first thing I did as an MLA was try to put a stop to unauthorized shredding. Transparency and openness are core values of the Alberta Party, and we expected that this new government would take their once-in-a-generation victory as an opportunity to make real changes to Alberta's FOIP laws. Yesterday the Privacy Commissioner issued a report that says that there was "possible political interference" and that she has "been thwarted by the refusal of the former and current governments" to grant access to records. To the Premier: what's going on over there? What caused the commissioner to accuse your government of withholding records?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the commissioner also notes that there have been improvements under our government, and that is because we have taken action to hire more FOIP co-ordinators, something that was necessary. The commissioner identified that there was a long-standing resourcing problem, so we've moved forward with that. Even while waiting for the decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, the Minister of Justice has asked her officials to do work on significantly narrowing the application of the solicitor-client privilege exception, that had been overused by the previous government. We are taking action. We know there's more to do. We look forward to doing that.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Clark: "Former and current governments," Mr. Speaker.

It never ceases to amaze me how quickly a new government acquires bad habits. When in opposition, the NDP loudly and correctly criticized the PCs for withholding information. You also complained about their partisan advertising budget, using their majority to push through controversial legislation, and gratuitous puffball questions. My, how things change. Again to the Premier: is your government obstructing the work of the Privacy Commissioner because now that you're in charge, you'd rather keep things secret? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Notley: What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is supporting the work of the Privacy Commissioner as a result of the initiatives taken by our Minister of Justice and as a result of just yesterday receiving the recommendations from the Privacy Commissioner now that she's responded to the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, that wasn't made until November 2016. As a result of that work having just been finished, we look forward to working with her and ultimately with members of this Assembly to improve our transparency, to improve access to information because that benefits all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very straightforward and simple question. The Privacy Commissioner made a clear request for simple changes to Alberta's FOIP Act to address her concerns. Given that it's only going to take a couple of weeks from the time labour consultations wrap up until we see substantial legislative changes in this House, a simple question to the Premier: will you accept the commissioner's request and bring changes to the FOIP Act this spring?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, we just received the request and the report from the FOIP commissioner yesterday, so we will review it. We will review it as part of likely a broader review of the freedom of information legislation and probably a broader review that would happen in an all-party committee. As we know from the last time that the member opposite participated in what was supposed to be a very clear discussion in an all-party meeting, things kind of went off the rails, and it took a little bit longer than expected. [interjection]

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

Ms Notley: We certainly do plan to move forward on improving transparency, and we look forward to working with the commissioner, taking into account her recommendations, and having further discussions going forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Calgary-Northern Hills.

School Construction

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Budget 2017 this government committed to making significant investments in new schools and modernization projects, having allocated \$500 million this year for new school projects. Given that we're catching up on school construction and that we've inherited a school infrastructure deficit from the previous government, to the Minister of Education: how does this government plan to deal with the backlog of crucial school infrastructure that Albertans need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, since we've taken this term, we have been building schools, with 26 new school projects in this budget. Yes, there has been a considerable backlog, but we had the Auditor General help us to build a way to streamline the situation to make sure that we are building schools and giving long-term planning to those school infrastructure projects. For more than a decade the government failed to do so. I'm here to help clean it up and build schools in every corner of this province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that members opposite would make reckless cuts that would only worsen the issue of school infrastructure, to the same minister: how does our government plan to address the issue of much-needed high schools in Alberta such as the north-central high school in Coventry Hills in my constituency. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I've heard loud and clear from the constituents in Calgary-Northern Hills. We know that there is a high school needed there. There are schools right across the whole province that we are required to build. I've been working closely with school boards and their lists that they give us, and we update those over time. Certainly, we are taking prudent, practical steps to make sure that we build the schools where we need them, to have teachers in the classroom, support staff, and the whole deal because we care about education. We want to make life better for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents are concerned about a high school in the area, to the same minister: can you clarify, please, how schools are prioritized and selected for funding?

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I'd be very glad to do so. We use the school boards' capital lists. We work with geography. We work with imminent safety concerns. For example, in Drayton Valley there was a school that needed to be taken care of there. Of course, enrolment is the biggest factor because we still see very dramatic growth in all of our population centres, especially in suburban centres. We certainly will address those coming because we have a long-term plan to build schools, make life better for Alberta families, and get the job done.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Labour Legislation Review

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have expressed their frustration and concerns with the government's labour laws review. This government has consistently failed to properly consult Albertans. To date Ontario has allowed two years for its consultation while Albertans have been given a mere 36 days to provide feedback. The changes to our labour laws back in 1988 were a result of unions, companies, and associations working together for more than a year, and these laws withstood the test of time. Stakeholders in Alberta have asked the minister to extend and enhance the consultation for her labour laws review. My question is: will she?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite referenced, the labour legislation that we are reviewing has not been updated since the movie *Beetlejuice* was released. We want to make sure that we have fair and family-friendly workplaces that contribute to a strong Alberta economy. To do that, we are working with companies . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Ms Gray: . . . and organizations that represent businesses. We're working with labour, and we are collecting excellent feedback from Albertans so that we can make sure we have the best workplace legislation in our country.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that yesterday during the budget estimates the minister said that Ontario was different because they're "doing a soup-to-nuts review" and given that this minister's mandate letter to Andy Sims is very broad and includes foundational questions

such as the very definition of an employee, processes to choose, change, or cancel union representation, whether to mandate a Rand formula in collective agreements, broadening the Labour Relations Board mandate, and many more issues, will the minister please clarify how her labour relations review is very focused compared to Ontario's "soup-to-nuts review"?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For our review of employment standards and labour relations we have chosen to do a focused review where we're looking at a number of key issues. For example, in Alberta someone who needs to take time off because they themselves are sick or their child is sick could lose their job because we do not have job-protected sick leave. We do not need weeks and weeks to talk about that although I understand it can take the members opposite a lot of time to decide if they need to feed hungry kids or not. In this case we are talking to the key players to make sure that we have labour legislation that works for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, you will note that I've been using this of late, and I note that increasingly there are a number of you using it. It has to do with the overall volume of this place. I ask on all sides, not only as individuals but also as a group, to please keep it down if you want to influence the policy into the future.

Labour Legislation Review (continued)

Mr. van Dijken: Given the minister's business plan states that "the ministry must meet high expectations for transparency and engagement when making any legislative changes" and given that this minister said, "we absolutely look at making sure that we are meeting our own high expectations" and given it appears that this minister's high expectations are well below the expectations of many Albertans, Minister, tell us why you're not taking more time to hear from Albertans on matters like union certification and collective bargaining. Is it because you already know the results you want?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very important that we consult with employers and employee groups as well as everyday Albertans. Our consultation is ongoing, and I invite all Albertans to go to work.alberta.ca. If you have interest in employment standards or the Labour Relations Code, please weigh in on these important issues. We will continue to accept that feedback as well as work with labour lawyer Andy Sims to make sure that we have reasonable, fair, and responsible legislation for Alberta dealing with issues like that where currently . . .

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Gray: . . . someone can get fired if they take a sick day. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Quiet. Hon. member – you – be quiet. Thank you. Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain

House-Sundre, I asked you to be quiet. Please, when I ask you to do that, respect this chair.

Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Wellness Strategy

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP claim to be bending the curve on costs, but their budget is the largest in Alberta history. Let me remind them that wellness programs are positive, proactive, and preventative. They keep people happy, healthy, and out of the hospital, and they increase quality of life while decreasing health care costs. When will the Minister of Health reimplement internationally respected programs, including Alberta's strategic approach to wellness, International Wellness Symposium, provincial wellness forum, workplace wellness summit, Healthy U, Be a Health Champion, aboriginal youth intervention, Communities ChooseWell, injury prevention programs, and more?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the former member of the government, who was associate minister of wellness when a lot of programs actually were cut that did impact people's health and safety, including wellness. I have to say that we know that in this House members opposite tell us to cut each and every day. They tell us that we're being too generous, that we're spending too much money on supporting Albertans. On this side of the House we're going to continue to have Albertans' backs. We're going to make their lives better, and that includes making sure that we have strategic, focused investments in wellness. We know the members opposite want to cut. We're going to protect Albertans.

Mr. Rodney: Those who benefited from these programs would like a real answer.

Perhaps this one. Given the success of programs that helped Albertans make healthier choices, including other ones like Ever Active Schools, MEND, and healthy schools, healthy futures, and given the invaluable work done by Albertans during the provincial wellness engagement tours as well as partnerships embarked upon with Participation – get out for sport, concussions, informed dining, and sodium strategies – when will the minister build on the successes of these programs, and when will she proclaim the Alberta physical activity amendment credit so that Alberta can be the leader in wellness that it was intended to be in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always interesting when people on the other side of the House, who had a chance to proclaim legislation and did not, ask us why we're not acting on things that they did not act on themselves. I have to say that it's pretty rich coming from the members opposite, who like to make lots of campaign announcements without actually ever following through on them. We're working with Albertans. For example, this morning I met with parks and rec to work at ways that we're continuing to support communities through grants and local initiatives like community gardens. We are continuing to have Albertans' backs, make their lives better, and not with the deep cuts that the members opposite are proposing.

Mr. Rodney: They're looking backwards, and they're going backwards.

Given that the Alberta Get Outdoors Weekend, or GO Weekend, brought together students and seniors and people at work in an

invaluable tradition of energizing Albertans after a long, cold winter and given that GO mobilized amateur and professional athletes as well as those who simply enjoy a walk in the great outdoors to reap limitless physical and mental benefits and given that this cost taxpayers absolutely nothing and was passed by all parties in this Legislature, why did the NDP again not do anything about Alberta Get Outdoors Weekend, which was to be celebrated last weekend? Is that a matter of oops; you did it again?

Ms Hoffman: In terms of a Britney quote, I know the member opposite likes to pretend everything he did was perfect. But guess what the members opposite did. They did a lot of announcements that actually had no action behind them. We're actually moving forward with communities, with partners and making sure we're working in partnership. We are of course continuing to support Albertans throughout our province. We're glad to have a good, strong future, Mr. Speaker, not pushing for drastic, erratic cuts like the members opposite are and having announcements that they don't actually have any plans to fulfill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Carbon Levy and Vulnerable Albertans

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 2, 2016, Seniors and Housing received two letters from housing management bodies explaining that they'd have to levy a \$10 fee to cover the cost of their carbon tax. They pointed out that 95 per cent of their clients would be receiving the carbon rebates, yet the housing management bodies would be the ones paying the cost of the tax. The government's manager of stakeholder relations ordered the housing management bodies not to charge the \$10 fee, that their decision would be reviewed once we have the evidence of the actual effect. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what has your ministry done to alleviate the impact on the housing management bodies due to the effects of the carbon tax?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we're working very closely with our housing management bodies to support them through this time of transition. We've invested \$57 million to support them for energy efficiency upgrades, for furnaces, triple-pane windows, that kind of thing. Certainly, seniors themselves are receiving the rebate; 260,000 seniors will receive up to \$300 in rebates. We're working very closely with seniors and housing management bodies to support them during this time.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, nonprofit organizations have to cover the cost of this NDP, job-killing carbon tax. The increase in the minimum wage is going to impact their already stretched budgets, and all these increases could cost as much as an extra \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year. Given that nonprofit organizations cannot run up endless debts by creating spending deficits each year like this government does, can the minister explain why they expect nonprofits to live within their means and meet the needs of their vulnerable clients when they are being hit by this job-killing carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we're working with nonprofit agencies also. We've rolled out energy efficiency programs to support them to have energy

efficiency upgrades, and we certainly are supporting them to serve their clients well. We know that the opposition doesn't care about those programs and would be cutting billions of dollars from the budget. We're working with nonprofits and housing management bodies and seniors to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, the opposition recently told this government that a job-killing carbon tax would increase the cost of everything and hurt nonprofit organizations. Given that I've talked with at least one nonprofit organization that does not know how it will absorb this carbon tax and given that this policy is having a negative impact on some of the most vulnerable within our society, to the minister: when will you scrap this carbon tax on nonprofits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, nonprofits, housing management bodies serve vulnerable seniors throughout the province, and we're very grateful for their service to us. We work closely with them. We're investing in energy efficiency programs for them. We're doing energy audits to support them to know what the best investment is of that \$57 million that we're working on. We know that the opposition want to be climate deniers and not take care of any of these issues, so we're very pleased to be making life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Judge and Lawyer Training on Sexual Offences

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All across this country Canadians have taken to the streets to protest outdated, outrageous, and outright sexist comments coming from our courts. Sexual assault myths and stereotypes and victim-shaming comments like "why couldn't you just keep your knees together?" deter victims from coming forward and can even revictimize the person. Minister, considering lawyers, both defence and Crown attorneys, have a role to play in ensuring a respectful victim process, does the minister support mandatory training for lawyers who represent sexual assault victims?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government firmly believes that these sorts of myths and stereotypes have no place in the courtroom. That's why I wrote the letter which initiated the complaint against Mr. Justice Camp and resulted in his ultimate removal, and we are very proud of that. We continue to believe that these sorts of myths and stereotypes absolutely have no place at all within the law, and we'll continue to support education not only for judges but also for lawyers.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that four Alberta court judges have recently come under fire for their disgustingly insensitive comments and given that Alberta's Chief Justice Neil Wittmann has advocated for more training for the judiciary on topics of sexual violence and given that he has also stated his outright disagreement that education opportunities infringe on judicial independence, to the minister: will your government support introducing voluntary training on sexual misconduct for judges under the purview of the Chief Justice?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not only do we support voluntary training for judges on sexual assault law; it's already provided. In fact, just last year at the judges' conference they did a very long working group on this. We pay a grant to the National Judicial Institute to ensure that they have access to all of these materials. But in addition to education, this is a larger problem. It speaks to the quality of appointments being made to the bench. That is why we are so careful in ensuring that we are appointing Albertans who have experience in these sorts of matters.

An Hon. Member: And the NDP world view.

Mr. Mason: Who appointed them?

The Speaker: Government House Leader. [interjections] Government House Leader.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that protecting sexual assault victims from revictimization and court reforms are nonpartisan issues and given that this is also being addressed at a national level, where Thomas Mulcair and the NDP have put forward a motion to fast-track the Conservative leader's bill, will this NDP government also take action and allow for unanimous consent to debate a motion to dispel rape and sexual assault myths and stereotypes from our courts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it interesting that as we were having a conversation about the importance of appointing people who want to respect the law and respect survivors of sexual assault, the members opposite were screaming about the NDP world view. Well, they're absolutely correct. It is the world view of this side of the House that survivors of sexual assault deserve respect. They deserve respect in the courts, and they deserve respect in this House.

Employment and Labour Code Consultations (continued)

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, when government introduces sweeping changes to legislation, it's important that as many affected stakeholders as possible are able to speak directly with the minister responsible in order to ensure, of course, that all sides of the issue are truly heard. Upcoming changes to employment standards and labour code are a perfect example of changes in government policy which will affect hundreds of thousands of Albertans. Again to the Minister of Labour, Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, and Lethbridge: which, if any, of these did you actually attend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that our lives are up to date with today's modern workplaces is a priority for this government. Making sure that we have a consultation where we're able to hear from Albertans, making sure that we have representatives from labour organizations and employers is important. I did attend some of the consultations, and I am pleased to be able to report that we had common ground with all members. Employers, in fact, were surprised that Alberta does not have job-protected sick leave. Most didn't realize we were so out of step with other jurisdictions.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that affected stakeholders would simply like the opportunity to have an honest conversation with the minister and to inform her of potentially serious consequences of

proposed policy changes and given that we heard that invitation-only consultations to date have been light on business representation while union presence has been consistently and notably strong, again to the minister: which businesses or business advocacy groups have you personally consulted with regarding proposed policy changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Talking about Alberta's workplace legislation is one of my core responsibilities, and I have been doing that since my appointment, including talking to Alberta Chambers of Commerce, Edmonton chamber, Calgary chambers, chambers across this province, CFIB, other organizations throughout this process. All of these organizations have been invited to participate in this process. We are making sure that we are hearing from a balance of voices: from the employer side, the labour side, all Albertans. Anyone interested in employment standards or labour relations should go online and commit their thoughts on this process, which is open right now.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has already failed to consult on numerous occasions with impacted stakeholders prior to introducing controversial legislation in this House and given that thousands of Albertans have repeatedly and loudly expressed their distaste for this type of behaviour right here on the steps of the Legislature and given that government should listen to all viewpoints, not just the ones which align with their world view, again to the minister: stakeholders want to be heard. Will you do the right thing and extend and enhance consultations? Albertans want to know.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is very important to us that we have family-friendly, fair, and modern workplace legislation, that Alberta has been lacking. We are making sure that we are engaging fully, including over 700 employers having completed the survey online, including nearly 50 employer representatives attending the meetings that were held across Alberta. We have been engaging completely with Albertans. I am looking forward to seeing the results of the consultation, and again I invite anyone who wants to participate to do so now.

Support for Indigenous Women

Mr. Malkinson: Mr. Speaker, this year I once again participated in the Valentine's Day missing and murdered indigenous women's march at Scarboro church in my riding, and once again I heard heart-wrenching stories of indigenous families who have lost a daughter or a mother. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what has your ministry done to support the work of the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question and his ongoing advocacy in this area. Alberta, of course, is in full support of the national inquiry and has been one of the original people to call for the inquiry in this country. We also believe it's important to consult with the members of families who have lost a family member, a girl or a woman, as we did in our fall conference with family members here in Edmonton.

Shortly after we were elected, we made the call, and subsequently we have put in the orders in council to ensure that the commissioners, when they come to Alberta, have all of the jurisdiction that they need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, could you please keep the volume down.

First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I understand the province is playing a role in helping families who have loved ones go missing, again to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what formal structures have been put in place to provide support for these families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The federal government has set aside \$11.7 million for provinces and territories to establish family information liaison units. The Alberta unit will be fully staffed by mid-April 2017. The FILUs will be a one-stop information and support service for families of missing and murdered indigenous women rather than referring families to other services. These units are to help relatives of missing and murdered indigenous women navigate the justice system and to offer support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what other measures are being taken to address the needs of indigenous women in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are very pleased with our progress in working with the indigenous women in this province. In December we appointed 32 women to the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and the Métis Women's Economic Security Council, and for the very first time we provided core funding for the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and have expanded programs of antiviolence such as the I Am a Kind Man campaign and the Moose Hide campaign. Other ministries in this government have also provided services such as Children's Services, which is providing funding for pregnancy pathways, an inner-city program for pregnant and homeless indigenous women.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Water Co-operatives Funding

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Minister, as you know, for decades water co-ops have been formed, and there is an Alberta water co-op association with dozens of member boards. These are normally funded by joint federal and provincial programs. In this year's federal budget, actually, is a program for \$165 million destined for Alberta known as the green infrastructure clean water and waste-water fund to supply communities with clean, dependable drinking water. Minister, has your ministry received this funding, please?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, the member raises an important question, which is access to clean drinking water. Now, in terms of the provincial funding, which I'll deal with first, our program does not contain enough resources to support everybody that is seeking to expand their water supply, so we limit it to certain types of programs, and they're limited to municipalities and water commissions. Currently it does not cover water co-ops. As much as I would like to do that, we're going to have to find a way to do that. That is going to take a bit of time. Perhaps the federal program may assist us in . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Stier: Again to the minister, Mr. Speaker: given that the Leavings Water Co-op near Claresholm is out of a local supply of water and has met you and your ministry regarding their urgent need to supply over 550 people with reliable, clean water and have been refused on the basis that there are apparently no grants available for this purpose and given that the \$165 million provincial clean water funds seem destined for these types of critical needs, why has this Leavings Water Co-op proposal not been given an opportunity to apply for this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct that I have met with the Leavings co-op. I have great sympathy for their situation. They're dependent on well water, and they would like to extend the water line to bring a number of farms into the program. Unfortunately, with the limited funds available and the criteria under the existing water for life the municipal water or waste-water program does not cover co-ops. It is intended for municipalities and water commissions and waste-water commissions only.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given, though, that very recently the Minister of Environment and Parks announced new funding for a water line in my constituency from Cowley to Beaver Mines that was backed apparently by both federal and provincial governments and valued at approximately the same value as the Leavings Co-op, around \$5 million, near Claresholm, yet that one is for a much greater urgent need here near Claresholm – Minister, these people have travelled with their hats in their hands. They're out of water. Why has this government not provided the co-op board with information on how to apply for this new federal-provincial clean water grant?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have offered support to connect the Leavings Water Co-op. There are a number of options that they have, including water rates for their members, that could help close the gap. But I will undertake, thanks to the hon. member, to look further into this matter to see if we can alleviate the situation through the use of the federal program.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Government Policies

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, over the past two years the NDP have made things go from bad to worse, and their actions show a blatant disrespect for the good people of Alberta. Saskatchewan used to be Alberta's closest partner, but the Premier found it wise to spend her time picking fights with Brad Wall, severely damaging that relationship.

Remember the long lost days of provincial surpluses? The Premier's last disaster of a budget was a harsh reminder that the NDP just can't seem to help themselves from trying to spend their way to prosperity. Albertans know that running a \$10 billion deficit and racking up a \$70 billion debt isn't the way to get our province back on track.

It's no secret that money management isn't a strength of the NDP, but even the opposition was shocked to learn that the environment minister picked the third-lowest bidder for the Ecofitt boondoggle of installing light bulbs using the carbon tax slush fund, most shockingly because she told Albertans that she selected the most competitive bid.

The NDP also changed the rules for AIMCo, an independent organization responsible for investing Alberta's heritage savings trust fund, otherwise known as Alberta's future, Mr. Speaker. Why did they do this? So that the NDP can plant political insiders in high-ranking positions. What's worse is that the Premier's own staff have already been caught red-handed politically interfering with AIMCo.

When it comes to operating a transparent government, the NDP is an embarrassment. Yesterday the Privacy Commissioner slammed the NDP for their failure to provide accountability, showing that they have embraced the secretive practices that they once decried. The NDP has deeply damaged our province. My message to Albertans is simple.

The opposition will continue to fight to make Alberta a competitive marketplace, a safe community, and the best place in the world to raise a family and start a business. In 2019 Albertans will cast their ballot, and the orange experiment will be a painful but distant memory. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the five copies necessary: with regard to labour laws, a letter to the editor in the *Edmonton Journal* this morning by Mr. Bert MacKay, quoting that he was part of the process that took over one year to work out the new labour legislation at that time.

The Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks, you had something?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Since I have to stick around, I thought that I may as well make another tabling on day 10 of fun tablings. On the 9th of March I wrote a letter to the hon. Government House Leader quoting the now Premier calling the Public Affairs Bureau someone who recharacterizes the truth and spins it. I'll table the requisite five copies for the delight of the Government House Leader.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we had a point of order.
The Government House Leader.

Point of Order Oral Questions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During question period today the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was asking the Minister of Labour questions about her attendance at an event, a conference of some sort, that he felt she should be at. It's well known in the House that questions ought to be on a matter of government policy. It's not an opportunity for the opposition to take attendance; it is an opportunity for them to hold the government accountable for the policy positions that the government takes. I'd ask that those types of questions be ruled out of order in the future.

Mr. Rodney: I'm quite surprised that there was no citation given, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how there can be a point of order, first of all, as there is no citation.

Secondly, we were not referring to any absence in the House. In fact, the question was: "To the Minister of Labour, Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, and Lethbridge: which, if any, of these did you actually attend?" It was directly related to government policy, that being stakeholder consultation with respect to changes in legislation to the employment standards and labour code.

Mr. Speaker, it was a bizarre day again in this House, and I'm really surprised that this would be picked on. Again, no citation, related to policy, having nothing to do with absences in the House: I think that we should move on.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think in this instance I agree with the opposition. I do not see a point of order in this situation.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I know that there is lots going on today, but I'd just like to briefly rise, if I may, on a point of order. Under 13(2) "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member."

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just briefly point to *Beauchesne's* with respect to decorum in the House and what may or may not be appropriate with respect to clothing inside the Chamber. You will find in *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, page 98, under 329, a fairly extensive discussion about what may or may not be permitted inside the Chamber.

I know that earlier today we saw three members of the government – and I understand that they may have some affiliations with northern Alberta and, in particular, enjoyment of one hockey team or another. Perhaps you saw some Oilers jerseys inside the Chamber earlier today as well, but *Beauchesne's* is fairly clear about what is appropriate to wear inside the Chamber and what isn't appropriate. I can only imagine that they would have asked permission from you, Mr. Speaker, to wear such a jersey in such an important place like this. If you could explain why you would allow

an Oilers jersey in this place when everyone knows that a Flames jersey would be much more appropriate. [laughter]

2:50

The Speaker: Gosh, it's nice to hear laughter in this place.

Mr. Rodney: Actually, there's a long history of this, I'd point out, through the Speaker, to the hon. Opposition House Leader. The fact of the matter is that indeed written permission would be required. Mr. Speaker, if you do that, then that's just great. I think anything that we can do for the spirit of Edmonton, for the spirit of Calgary, for the spirit of Alberta is a great thing to do.

That being said, traditionally in the past previous Speakers have ruled this way: either written permission or – and I'm not making this up – a person is permitted to wear such a uniform if they provide every other member of the Legislature with the same jersey. You can look it up, sir. I've seen it on a few occasions, including from this area of the province a while back when that junior hockey team was doing well. Perhaps you could provide the Opposition House Leader with some clarity and the rest of us because – let's face it – the battle of Alberta could be great, but it could be ugly, right? Go Flames.

The Speaker: To the point of order, Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, under section 13(2) – and this is the citation – "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." It is my understanding that the decision of the Speaker with respect to this limited the wearing of jerseys to Alberta teams. I simply have to ask: why not Montreal?

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is probably one of the most challenging rulings I've been called upon to make. I feel that out of respect for this House – I want you to know that I'd better take some time; we'd all better take some time. Under this vestment there's something orange and something red.

An Hon. Member: Oh, nonpartisan.

The Speaker: That's exactly correct.

Hon. members, the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the House stands adjourned till tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

Don't leave yet.

The legislative policy committees will convene in the afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Municipal Affairs in the Rocky Mountain Room. Tomorrow morning Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Indigenous Relations in the Parkland Room, and Families and Communities will consider the estimates of Seniors and Housing in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:54 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, April 13, 2017

Day 21

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 13, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, many Albertans of the Jewish faith are celebrating Passover, and the large Christian community this weekend will be celebrating Easter. Let us in this House respect and appreciate those persons of faith, who make this province so rich and diverse.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my very great privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 students from Lakeland Country School, which is a very small school north of the community of Dewberry. Dewberry is not a really big place, but it's a very exciting place. I spent my last two Friday nights there, and we can talk about that later. These fine folks are from a Mennonite community. I visited their school. They open every day with a cappella singing, that is very much part of the Mennonite tradition, and they asked me not to sing and join them. That's also one more way to make it nicer. They are here with their teachers Brenda Koehn and Nola Toews and a number of chaperones that have very Mennonite-sounding names like Toews and Warkentin and Penner and that sort of thing. I would invite them to rise and enjoy and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, it speaks to the education of our children in this province that they would be wise enough to not ask you to sing that.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you the many students of High Prairie elementary who were able to join us here today. They are accompanied by a number of teachers – Ms Joanne Murphy, Miss Andrea Pollock, and Mrs. Melissa Isaac – along with a number of chaperones to assist them today as well: Brad Cunningham, Mathew Robinson, Cody Quevillon, Becki Cardinal, Rachel Roberts, Judy Willier, Christine Bradley, Richard Romick, Michael Strebchuk, Mitch Hammond, Jamie Bilyk, Clancey Neill, Dennis McNabb, Martha Rosychuk, Janelle Pratt, and Verna Isaac. A big thank you to Colleen for showing them around today. I would ask the students and all of their chaperones and teachers to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you 17 students from Duffield school in the fabulous riding of Stony Plain. They'll be joining us shortly with their teachers, Mr. John MacDonald and Ms Ann Marie Gillie, and their chaperone, Mrs. Michelle Kaiser. I would appreciate it if all members could join me in welcoming them in anticipation of their arrival.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly our Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms Paul Link's family. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and they include Paul's wife, Hamdee Fythe; mother, Mercedes Link, who is visiting us from Gibsons, B.C.; cousin John Zubkowski, who is a resident of the Sherwood Park community; and family friend Val Oczkowski. They gave me this because I'm Ukrainian, and I tripped on your names. I'm so sorry. [Remarks in Ukrainian] Would Paul and his guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. It's a privilege to have you here.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two councillors and the mayor from the town of Vegreville. Please stand as I say your name. Mayor Myron Hayduk, councillors Taneen Rudyk, Tim MacPhee, and I see that Marielle Brodziak has had the opportunity to join us. They had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Labour and I this morning. These are small-business owners, volunteers, and people that are committed to raising their families in rural Alberta, in Vegreville. This is why we fight together to keep the immigration case processing centre in Vegreville. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

The Hangar Flight Museum in Calgary

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "To inspire dreams of flight," this is the vision of The Hangar Flight Museum in Calgary. Alberta has an ongoing history in flight that our province can be very proud of. It's been an important contributor to the oil and gas industry, northern exploration, the development of passenger airlines, and providing assistance to northern communities.

Calgary's first commercial airport was established in 1914 and was named after Captain Fred McCall, a World War I ace. The first aviation museum in Calgary, the Air Museum of Canada, was founded in 1960 and was largely a collection of privately owned aircraft. Disbanded in 1971, the museum's aircraft and assets were turned over to the city of Calgary and housed at the city's planetarium.

In 1975 the Aero Space Museum Association of Calgary was registered as a nonprofit and took over the care and upkeep of these artifacts. Aircraft include the Avro Lancaster bomber, the *Lady Orchid*, a DC-3, and restored Anson and Harvard trainers that were used by the British Commonwealth air training plan in WW II to train Commonwealth pilots, and a Sopwith triplane similar to those flown over the fields of Vimy and Passchendaele.

In 1985 the aerospace museum of Calgary moved to its current location at the south end of the Calgary International Airport, and they changed their name to The Hangar Flight Museum last year. Over 36,000 people visited the museum last year, including 5,000 Alberta students who took part in curriculum-related school

programming. There are hands-on programs to participate in, and the museum is open seven days a week and operates with a small core of staff and over a hundred very dedicated volunteers.

I was honoured to attend the RCAF Mess Dinner last month at the museum, where those in attendance dined among the planes and aeronautic memorabilia, and I'd like to encourage all members and those listening to take time to visit the museum and learn about our flying history.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Passover

Mr. MacIntyre: Throughout the ages the Jewish people have commemorated the Exodus in remembrance of how the God of Abraham with a mighty hand and outstretched arm delivered the children of Israel from slavery to the Promised Land. This celebration is known as the Passover. The patriarch Abraham and his wife, Sarah, went to the land of Canaan, where he became founder of a great nation. From the book of Genesis we learn that God told Abraham: know this for certain; your descendants will be strangers in a strange land, be enslaved and oppressed, but know that in the end I shall bring judgment on the oppressors.

During a time of famine Abraham's descendants sought refuge in Egypt, where the Hebrew people lived and prospered until a new pharaoh arose. Fear of their numbers led to the oppression of the Hebrew people, culminating in an order to drown all Hebrew boys in the Nile River, but the mother of a little boy refused, and this boy would be named Moses. God would remember his covenant and call to Moses. As a man Moses obeyed the instructions of God and demanded of the pharaoh: set my people free. Nine times the pharaoh refused, and each time God sent a plague. After the ninth plague Moses told the Hebrew slaves to mark their doorposts and lintels with the blood of a lamb, telling them: none of you shall go out for God will pass through to smite the first-born of the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood, God will pass over your doors. Finally, when God brought down the 10th plague, the pharaoh broke, allowing Moses to take his people and deliver them to a new land.

It is my hope that during this feast of unleavened bread Jewish families are brought together and that God will bless the children of Abraham around the world with freedom and prosperity.

1:40

Provincial Budget

Mr. Clark: Budgets are about choices. They tell us what your values and priorities are, and they show us whether you think long term or short term. This government's budget shows they care more about their chances in the next election than they do about the long-term well-being of our province. Their budget shows that they don't even want to try to find savings, even if it is absolutely possible to do so without impacting front-line service delivery. They've said, in essence, that they're not worried about paying back debt because they'll deal with that problem when it comes. Yes, there are choices.

Unfortunately, we don't know what the right-wing parties would do to address Alberta's budget challenges. They poke holes in the government's plans, but they are totally unwilling to level with Albertans about how they would balance the budget and what impact that would have on the public services Albertans rely on.

Choices. The Alberta Party's shadow budget shows Albertans in great detail what choices we would make, how we would address the problems facing Alberta, how we would put our province back

on a pathway to prosperity. It's a matter of finding just 1 per cent savings across government each year for four years. Yes, it is possible to find 1 per cent in a \$53 billion budget without impacting front-line services. You can do it. You just have to try.

We would ensure that core services receive funding increases to match population growth. This ensures class sizes stay small, health care wait times are reasonable, and our vulnerable neighbours are looked after. We would continue making big investments in infrastructure to ensure that we don't turn a financial deficit into a human and infrastructure deficit as the right-wing parties would do. We would cap the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue we use for operations and put any surplus into capital spending, debt repayment, and then into the heritage fund. This ensures that Alberta's debt-servicing costs don't spiral out of control as they will do under the NDP's plan. We would make Alberta's carbon tax revenue neutral through cuts to personal and corporate taxes and through innovation credits to ensure that Alberta is a leader in the next economy, just like we are in the current economy.

These are the choices the Alberta Party would make. Our choices are balanced . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Affordable Child Care

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to be part of a government that stands up every day for Albertans and makes life better in important areas like health, education, and child care; to be part of a government that is willing to protect the citizens of this province from the worst recession we have seen in decades; a government that is finding cost savings without compromising care, doing so with improved planning and innovation.

Mr. Speaker, I know how hard it is for Albertans to find quality, affordable child care. In Edmonton-Meadowlark several of the daycares have waiting lists and can cost families upwards of \$1,000 a month for caring for one child. There is also a lack of flexibility in operating hours for these spaces. Most of them are open only for the daytime, which does not give adequate support for families who work evening shifts.

That is why our government is innovating child care in this province by increasing access to quality, affordable child care. The recent announcement about the creation of 22 early learning and child care centres in communities across our province is a good start towards making \$25-a-day child care available on a wider basis. These centres will ensure that children have the best possibilities for the start of their life by offering almost 1,300 child care spaces, and they will make life better for all Albertans by creating new jobs for child care practitioners and offering flexible and extended hours to support parents working part-time or attending school. This will provide extra support for vulnerable families in these tough economic times.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen recently that choosing cuts over families can lead to the loss of child care opportunities like preschool programming, delivering a further blow to struggling families. Albertans chose a party that protects services and is willing to invest in our families, and I will continue to be a tireless advocate for the residents of Edmonton-Meadowlark within a government that supports the values that I was elected to represent.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Obstetrics Expansion

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm speaking not only to thank the government for an essential investment in my community but also to offer congratulations. Congratulations to the Clark family and their new baby daughter, Ilandra, the first baby born at the Red Deer regional hospital's new expanded labour and delivery unit. The \$9.7 million investment into the Red Deer regional hospital will help with the growing needs in Red Deer and central Alberta while putting expectant mothers at ease knowing they have access to a state-of-the-art facility.

The project that created two new obstetrical surgery rooms creates a better quality of life for central Albertans hoping to create a family. Not only is this a win for mothers and infants, but it will make life better for all other hospital users as well. The new obstetrical operating rooms will free up space in general operating rooms in the Red Deer hospital, allowing for 330 more general surgeries per year. The addition of two dedicated obstetrical operating rooms also offers greater privacy to mothers requiring an emergency delivery, who were previously transported to a general operating room in a separate wing. This is also going to create jobs on top of the ones created during construction. Nurses, clinical staff, and nonclinical staff will all be added to the strong network of employees that AHS employs in our region.

A sincere thank you goes out to the Red Deer Regional Health Foundation for their donation of \$1.2 million for equipment and to all of those who worked to advocate on this expansion.

Mr. Speaker, this government is showing that it is committed to improving the health care provided to central Albertans and Red Deer residents. We know health care is a vital issue in central Alberta, and this government will continue working to improve things that make a difference in the lives of Albertans, like the quality of care my constituents and those in surrounding areas receive.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Vaisakhi

Mr. Panda: [Remarks in Punjabi] Greetings. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to mark the East Indian festival of Vaisakhi. Vaisakhi commemorates the formalization of Sikh religion practices 318 years ago. Guru Gobind Singh then formed the Khalsa and gave the Sikh faith Amrit Sanchar. Vaisakhi also marks the traditional harvest festival season for Punjabis and the Sikh new year, the Hindu solar new year, and features parades, fairs, flag raisings, and Amrit Sanchar, also known as baptisms.

Guru Gobind Singh gave all Sikhs the opportunity to live lives of courage, sacrifice, and equality. In Canada the Sikh community very much enjoys these values, including freedom of speech, equality of life, and justice. In Canada Sikhs have made their mark in all walks of life, whether it's public service, charity, sports, culture, or entrepreneurship. They contributed to the economic and social success of Alberta and Canada.

In India, although Sikhs are less than 2 per cent of the nation's population, Sikh community members have held the highest offices like President, Prime Minister, Chief Justice, chief of armed forces, and, most importantly, captains of India's cricket team and field hockey team.

Vaisakhi is a unifying holiday in India. This time of year trains are full of holiday travellers heading home to celebrate Vaisakhi with their loved ones. In celebrating Vaisakhi, Albertans, both Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, are brought together in a spirit of

friendship and unity. I look forward to celebrating the Vaisakhi on Saturday in Calgary. [Remarks in Punjabi] Wonderful Lord's Khalsa, victory is to the wonderful Lord. [As submitted]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also, on behalf of our Wildrose caucus, to all of the Christian brothers and sisters celebrating this weekend, Happy Easter.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work collaboratively with the Law Society of Alberta and the Provincial Court Judges' Association of Alberta to ensure that anyone being considered for appointment as a judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta has successfully completed a comprehensive education on the current state of the law with regard to any crime of a sexual nature and that continuing education plans for judges and lawyers involved with victims of sexual offences are adequate in respect of matters related to crimes of a sexual nature, including instruction in evidentiary prohibitions, principles of consent, and the conduct of sexual offence proceedings as well as education regarding myths and stereotypes associated with sexual offence complainants.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: Reuters is reporting this morning that Chevron is getting ready to wave goodbye to all of its assets in the oil sands. It's just another day in the NDP's Alberta. Shell, ConocoPhillips, and now Chevron: just add it to the growing list of multinationals fleeing Alberta under this NDP government's watch. Carbon taxes, breaking power contracts, labour reviews, shutting down our coal industry, instability at its best: this is the Premier's record. How many more oil companies can we expect to see flee Alberta under your government's watch, Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member opposite is just so negative. We know that the last two years have been tough on our oil and gas industry and on the economy, but every step of the way our government has made a commitment to stand shoulder to shoulder with Albertans. There's more work ahead to do, but we're making progress: 20,000 jobs just last month, more than the rest of the country combined; exports up 37 per cent; housing starts up 35,000. Here's what the president of CNRL says: this is a very exciting time; we're moving back to more stable times. Albertans are looking forward with confidence. It's about time that the member opposite joined them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: Well, it's very clear that what this government is doing is not working. The policies aren't working. Their work is not working. Mr. Speaker, oil and gas workers in Alberta continue to suffer, and families are being picked bone dry by this government through their brand new carbon tax. Now we find out today that despite the NDP saying that it would stop, grieving widows are still

being asked by the NDP government through CRA to pay back the government's carbon tax rebates. How ridiculous. It's just another reason why no one in Alberta trusts this government to keep their word. How can the Premier keep letting this happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, the Minister of Finance has already said very clearly that this is not to happen and that we have said very clearly that people who receive these notices in error will not have to pay that money back because we have already determined with the Canada Revenue Agency that we are not going to ask for that money back. We are now in the process of ensuring that. We know that this is a stressful time for people who are receiving those notices, and we have said very clearly that we have no expectation that they pay that money back, and we apologize for the confusion that's been created.

Mr. Jean: Well, maybe, just maybe, Mr. Speaker, she should pick up the phone and tell CRA because they haven't gotten the memo.

This whole carbon tax scheme is ridiculous. Alberta will soon have the highest carbon tax in North America. It's making life more expensive for every single family, and for what? To have an Ecofitt agent come into their home to install light bulbs and act as a PR rep for this government? To have the taxman bullying grieving widows? NDP policies are putting us at a massive disadvantage with the United States. Our competitive advantage is gone. Is the Premier going to do anything to respond to the devastating effects of her carbon tax and what it's doing to normal, everyday Albertans?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the real threat to investment in this province is the opposition trying to scare away investment for cheap political points, promising to repeal the very plan that got us not one but two pipelines. You know what else is going on? Job growth in eight of the last nine months, manufacturing sales up 16 per cent. John Rogers from MEG Energy says that the industry is re-emerging stronger and more powerful than it has in the past. There is more to do. We know that. Alberta families want their government to have their back, and we do.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Information and Privacy Commissioner Report

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner is being stonewalled by this NDP government on a continuous basis. Yesterday the Premier pinned all the blame on this previous government. The Privacy Commissioner is clear, however. The NDP own this file. Don't take my word for it. The Privacy Commissioner just told the *Edmonton Journal*: "A part of me thought it would change when the government changed. It didn't. There was no change." Why won't the Premier take responsibility for all the bad practices of her current NDP government?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned and as I explained yesterday, the Privacy Commissioner's report looks at behaviour that occurred between 2009 and 2014. I don't need to give the members opposite a history lesson, but we weren't part of that. After March 13 the dispute between the government of Alberta and the Privacy Commissioner was before the courts, so we determined that we would wait for the courts to make their decision, which they did in November 2016, at

which point we waited for the Privacy Commissioner to give us her recommendations. She did two days ago, and we are looking forward to working with her on how to improve the system . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. Let's tell the truth here. This is happening today under the nose of this Premier and her cabinet. They're hiding something, or they're wilfully politicizing the FOIP process. The Privacy Commissioner says that she's "speechless," that she's "frustrated," and that she's "angry" about what is happening under this NDP government, not some other government in the past. Yesterday the Premier said that she was committed to improving the transparency of the system, but will she demonstrate this commitment by providing the Privacy Commissioner the unredacted documents that she's asked for? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, that matter was adjudicated by the Supreme Court of Canada, and the position of the government was supported by the Supreme Court of Canada. Meanwhile our Minister of Justice has been very clear that, going forward, we want to limit the scope of the application of the solicitor-client privilege exception because we do believe in enhancing transparency. There is a great deal of other work going on to go forward with that, and we look forward to reporting on that as we achieve it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Here's what else the Privacy Commissioner had to say. The bad ministers of the past are all gone, but "the deputies are still there." Some of these deputies oversaw and covered up and continue to cover up government scandals. Now they're helping this NDP government to keep these sneaky secret practices as well. It's a culture of secrecy and crookedness that Albertans are, frankly, sick of and kicked out in the last election. Why doesn't the Premier or anyone in this government stand up, have the stomach to clean this up?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member opposite might want to be a little bit careful because the scandals he claims that people are trying to cover up are the scandals that were undertaken by their new slow-dance partners over there. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Ms Notley: I think they really might want to think about whether those are the folks that they want to be going into the next election holding hands with, Mr. Speaker.

But that being said, our ministers are working tirelessly to improve transparency, to improve response times, to improve the scope of response. I know we're putting more resources into it, and we will continue that work, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The third main question.

Judge and Lawyer Training on Sexual Offences

Mr. Jean:

It is, indeed, very rare in the House for leaders of political parties to support each other's private member's bills, but when the issue is how our judicial system handles cases of sexual assault, we all have to come together and say that we believe survivors.

It is with sincere respect for the Leader of the Opposition that I move the following motion.

Now, those were the words of Tom Mulcair supporting Conservative leader Rona Ambrose's private member's bill just a little while ago. Can we expect the same sort of support from the Premier later today on my private motion? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that our government has been working very hard to support survivors of sexual and domestic abuse. We increased funding for FCSS. We increased funding for women's shelters by 40 per cent. We introduced tenant protection for people fleeing violence. We introduced legislation to expand the limitation period for people to claim compensation. Of course we will support the member's motion.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Appropriate training for judges and lawyers on the laws relating to crimes of a sexual nature should be above partisanship, and I'm glad to see that it is. The same goes with ensuring that those in the judicial system understand the myths and the stereotypes associated with sexual assault. The government supporting my motion is a goodwill gesture to show that while our Legislature respects the independence of the judiciary, we need to remove the stigma associated with sexual assault. I'm hoping as well that she will direct her caucus, all of them, to support my motion. That would make our judicial system a better place for sexual assault survivors.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we've indicated, that's likely going to happen. But it would also be very helpful if the members opposite would support our government's work to support victims and survivors of sexual and domestic assault throughout our community. It would also be helpful if they would support our efforts to support prevention of sexual and domestic violence and assault throughout our community. A lot of that work involves supporting our antipoverty efforts, supporting community-based groups, supporting FCSS, and supporting the provisions and the spending on that. Asking the government to cut \$2 billion out of operating is not a way to address those issues.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ignoring the out-of-touch understanding of sexual assault in our judicial system won't make it go away. I want to assure the Premier that Wildrose will always support common-sense policies that will help the most vulnerable. But Alberta has seen stark examples of sexual assault cases being mishandled by our justice system. Albertans do deserve better, and I'm glad to see her support my motion. Sexual assault victims deserve better, and as legislators we need to continuously, every day, send a strong signal that training in the law needs to be better. Even Alberta's Chief Justice supports this type of training. Will the Premier assure this House and all Albertans that we'll continue to have the resources necessary . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no stronger advocate for putting appropriate resources into our justice system than our Minister of Justice right now. And let me tell you that that's a hard thing to do when the folks over there are constantly calling on us to

cut billions and billions of dollars out of our annual operating. It's kind of hard to have both. Nonetheless, we are striking the right balance. We are standing up for survivors of domestic and sexual assault, and we will continue to do that.

The Speaker: Now for the leader of the third party.

Minister of Justice

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, during question period yesterday the Minister of Justice, Alberta's top justice official, in response to the Member for Airdrie, who asked about judges' training, said: "But in addition to education, this is a larger problem. It speaks to the quality of appointments being made to the bench." The Law Society under its code of conduct, section 5.6-1, says, "A lawyer must encourage public respect for and try to improve the administration of justice." To the Premier: do you agree with your minister, who has characterized judges as a larger problem?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting because the judge who triggered this discussion as a result of some of the outrageous statements he made during a trial was a judge who was appointed first to the Provincial Court by the third party when they were in government and then to the Federal Court by the Conservative government that the leader of that party was a part of. That judge himself said: when I was appointed, I wasn't qualified. That was one of his very direct statements.

We also have a job to do to make sure that we work collaboratively to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue here is that the minister is clearly offside with the rules of the Law Society. The standard-of-conduct rule 7.4-1 for lawyers in public office states that "a lawyer who holds public office must, in the discharge of official duties, adhere to standards of conduct as high as those required of a lawyer engaged in the practice of law." To the Premier: are you confident that this minister is living up to this code of conduct sufficiently when she's criticizing judges who hold this important post? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the minister has not criticized any judges, and it is an outrageous reach for the member opposite to suggest that the minister has done that. We have respect for our judiciary. We need to work collaboratively with them with respect to the process of appointing judges and, quite frankly, to respect the work that they do to keep themselves educated, knowing that they work very hard. And that's exactly what they do.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has ignored that her Justice minister yesterday clearly cast aspersions on the ability of every judge appointed before her appointment to cabinet. The minister has fallen short of both sections 5.6 and 7.4 of the Law Society rules. To the Premier. As Premier and as a lawyer yourself you know this is wrong. Will you do the right thing today and demand that the minister apologize to Alberta judges and then fire that minister?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite completely mischaracterizes everything that has been said and also mischaracterizes the meaning of it and also mischaracterizes the application of the sections that he's quoting. Of course I would not do that because we have a good working, respectful, distant relationship with the judiciary, just as we need to have. We look forward to working with them in the ways that are appropriate to make sure that we can all strengthen our justice system for the people who matter most, which are Albertans.

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

Vegreville Immigration Centre

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last October the federal government announced its intentions to close Vegreville's immigration case processing centre. According to a Nichols impact study commissioned by the town of Vegreville, this would mean a loss of 130 students from local schools, a 30 per cent drop in housing prices, and \$11.6 million lost in labour income. To the Minister of Labour: what action has this government taken to urge the federal Liberal government to reverse such an ill-judged decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I remain deeply disappointed in the federal government's decision to close this centre with no regard to the impact on the committed staff and town. I want to commend the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for her ongoing advocacy. Since the day this was announced, we have been urging the federal government to reconsider. Today I met with the mayor and councillors from Vegreville and had a very productive discussion. I thank these representatives for meeting with me today and sharing their ideas on how to ensure that the federal government understands the negative impacts of their decision.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. Given the critical work that this centre does processing the claims of immigrants and refugees and the top quality of work that they do, to the Minister of Labour: how else can the province support mortgage-paying jobs that create critical rural economic development in Alberta and in Vegreville?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank Vegreville for the town hall meetings held in November and February. The town continues to discuss ideas on how to keep the centre in Vegreville and increase its value in the eyes of the federal government. To everyone in Vegreville, Alberta, and across Canada that's concerned about this, I encourage you all to continue calling, writing, and voicing your concerns to the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. Given the letters sent from Alberta ministers, MLAs, and the support of PSAC on the Respect Vegreville campaign, which I have a button for, to the Minister of Labour: how else can our members and the town advocate for Vegreville so as to reverse this decision and finally get the federal Liberal minister of immigration to take responsibility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Along with continuing to support Vegreville, I would like to say that we are continuing to support making life better for Albertans in Vegreville by creating good jobs in a diversified economy. Our government operates an InnoTech Alberta site in Vegreville, focused on the growth, development, and commercialization of new technologies. Vegreville also has the Business Development Centre incubator that supports small and start-up businesses looking for assistance, networking, and shared services. These are just a few of the works we are doing. Our government will be there for Vegreville no matter what Ottawa decides.

2:10

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Two thousand and seventeen marks the tragic 100-year anniversary of the income tax. Promised as a temporary, short-term measure for the war effort, most Canadians accepted it as a necessary evil, but there's nothing so permanent as a temporary government program. Overbooked taxpayers have come to be reaccommodated to this, but since coming to power, the NDP has introduced or raised 63 different taxes. Can the Minister of Finance tell us if any of these taxes are temporary?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the fact that we put forward a budget that protects Alberta families and makes sure that we have the services that they require to make sure that they have good, successful communities, families, and social supports. We did bring forward a budget. Every year budgets are reviewed. We stand by the importance of setting a path that protects families instead of pushing rash, erratic, deep cuts. We're proud of the budget we've brought forward for Albertans.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, not only did the minister not answer the question; the wrong minister gave the wrong non answer.

Given that the NDP did not run on a carbon tax during the election but that when they introduced one anyway, it was supposed to be \$3 billion and given that it was just temporary as a few months later they raised it to \$5 billion but that NDP allies demand that it be even higher for it to actually reduce greenhouse gases, just how temporary is the \$5 billion target for the carbon tax?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, when you set a budget, you have a choice. You have a choice between pushing forward with a rash ideology that's going to make life more difficult during an economic downturn. You have a choice to stand up for families. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Ms Hoffman: As I said, you have a choice between moving forward with your rash, deep cuts that are driven by your ideology or protecting Alberta families and making sure that they have the class sizes they deserve, that nurses and teachers have jobs, and that front lines are supported. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that we brought forward a budget that's putting food on the table, literally, for children in schools who are hungry. I'm glad that the Leader of the Official Opposition is finally onboard.

Mr. Fildebrandt: One thing that we all agree will be temporary is the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, given that when Trudeau the second said that he would run a deficit, he said that it would be temporary but that under current projections they will remain in deficit for 34 years and given that Alberta's temporary deficit is in its ninth year and that the Finance minister can't provide a shred of evidence that it will be anything but permanent, will the Minister of Finance, not the Deputy Premier, stand up and tell us if this temporary deficit will be as permanent as the income tax?

Ms Hoffman: The member opposite talks about nine years of deficits. Let's talk about one of those years, when a person who was sitting in the House of Commons in Ottawa said, "Short-term deficit-financed spending is necessary to jolt the country's economy and replace lost jobs." [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Hoffman: "We are taking a hit today to invest in tomorrow . . . It's better to pay on a mortgage than it is to rent a house and [you] think this is no different in this particular case." Mr. Speaker, that was in the *Calgary Herald* in 2009, and that person giving that quote was the member opposite's leader.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Interprovincial and International Trade

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Economic Development and Trade signed the new Canadian free trade agreement. The government promises that the CFTA will make it easier for Alberta businesses to get their goods and services to Canadian markets. However, many issues remain unsolved in this new deal, including food labelling, trucking regulations, and movement of professionals and tradespeople. To the minister of economic development: what is your plan to work with other provinces to solve the gaps in this new CFTA?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. This new free trade agreement, the Canadian free trade agreement, was about two and a half years' worth of negotiations. Alberta for decades has been disadvantaged compared to market access in other provinces and other jurisdictions. What the previous government did was to negotiate an agreement that opened up Alberta's borders and markets so other provinces' businesses could compete in Alberta, yet it wasn't reciprocated. Our businesses didn't have the same opportunity. This new free trade agreement levels that playing field.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's exports to the rest of Canada totaled \$63 billion in 2015 but given that trucking regulations across the country remain unharmonized, which hampers movement of goods across the country, and given that the newly signed CFTA offers no new mechanisms enabling businesses to operate in multiple Canadian jurisdictions, to the Minister of Transportation: when will we see synchronized trucking regulations with the rest of Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. This is one of those issues, again, that that table, the provincial-territorial trade ministers, were trying to work through. There are a number of outstanding issues that we weren't able to resolve in that round of negotiations. There are a number of tables that will be followed up on. Our work is not done. I recognize that the issue that the member raised is a challenge for companies, so we are committed to continuing to work with our partners across this country to resolve as many issues as we can if not all of them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the trucking industry in Canada and the U.S. is a vital component of the multimodal transportation sector and given that the regulatory differences between Canada and the U.S. prevent the trucking industry from operating at peak performance, to the Minister of Transportation: what's left to improve compatibility with the U.S., and how are you working with the federal minister to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member again for his very, very good questions. There are a number of things that we are doing, not only working with the federal government but, again, working with our other counterparts provincially across this country. We recognize that, obviously, Alberta is an export province. We need to get our goods to market, so we are looking at all the different modes of transport and how we can make it easier to be more competitive, to get our goods and services to the coast, whether it's via trucks or elsewhere. There are a number of outlets that we have . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Public Consultation

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a horrible track record on consultation. We need only look at Bill 6 to see how poorly this government even understands the word "consultation." The sad part is that they don't seem to be learning. Whether it is the Castle park management plan or the invite-only budget consultation, they just don't get it. Now this government is reviewing labour legislation. A similar review in Ontario is taking two years, but our government insists that they can consult in only 35 days. Why won't this government just tell Albertans the truth? You've already made your decisions, and your consultations are just a sham.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have not taken a serious look at our employment or labour legislation since the Christmas classic *Die Hard* was first in theatres. It is important that we make sure that the government has workplace legislation that works for employees and employers, and we are confident that our consultation process will allow both employers and employees to be heard. We've held four round-tables to ask whether leaves like protected sick leave make sense for Alberta. Those round-tables were attended by nearly 50 employers and employer groups, including the Alberta chambers . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Loewen: Given that on July 1, 2016, Environment and Parks sent out a memorandum titled Notice of Changes Affecting Alberta Trappers and given that two of these changes include submitting fur sales receipts and not allowing conditional relinquishments, which allow trappers to sell their traplines to whomever they choose, to the minister: why was there absolutely no consultation with trappers before these changes were implemented? Furthermore, what problems were these changes attempting to solve?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It remains a mystery how trapping regulations are related to labour law, but let me do my best. We continue to work with the Alberta Trappers Association and others. There are a number of stakeholders in this. Wildlife regulations and other regulations governing these sorts of activities are updated on an annual basis. I'm pleased to provide the member with more information on these matters as a follow-up and to update the House as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Given that this government seems to be mystified by the word "consultation" – even the minister doesn't seem to understand – and given that the government has produced a caribou draft plan and has insisted that it is consulting on the plan with the communities and industries affected and given that the government has admitted that it has already started to implement several parts of this draft plan before a final plan has been produced, to the minister: how can this government continue to mislead this House and, in fact, all Albertans when they say they are consulting when they obviously have their decisions predetermined?

The Speaker: Again I want to caution all of the members on words that have an inflammatory value in this room. I want to caution you all to be careful how you answer those, ask those.

The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, on the topic of consultation, of course, many months ago we released a draft plan. As a result of that we've had many, many meetings with various stakeholders on this matter, whether it's municipalities, workers, sawmills, and others. I just spoke with the town of Grande Cache even this morning on the matter. Yes, we have committed some resources to range restoration in terms of seismic restoration. That creates good jobs. I'm not surprised that the members opposite are opposed to that measure because, of course, that makes life better for folks in northwest Alberta. We'll continue to work with the federal government, as we said we would, and we continue to do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Renewable Energy Land Leases

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of the environment has repeatedly stated that renewable projects are arrangements between the private landowners and the companies. This simplistic view of the situation is far from complete. Many landowners are telling us that some companies are buying up surface rights for renewable development for the sole purpose of flipping them to larger companies when the time is right. To the Minister of Energy: in the rush to jam through the renewable

agenda, what safeguards are there to protect landowners and surface lease holders from unscrupulous companies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, on this side of the House we are interested in job creation. We are interested in economic diversification. [interjections] We're interested in investment coming into this province, and that's why we have created the largest renewable energy opportunity in the country . . .

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Phillips: . . . ushering in \$11 billion at a minimum of new private-sector investment and creating thousands of jobs. We welcome that kind of economic activity on this side of the House. We are an energy province: oil and gas, yes; renewables, also yes. It is unfortunate that the folks opposite want to slam the door on those kinds of jobs.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Strankman: I'll rephrase, Mr. Speaker. Given that the oil and gas sector needs to use a licensed land agent and given that no such regulation exists for an equivalent for renewable contracts, to the minister: what protections is this government going to put in place to ensure that both renewable companies and landowners are protected from predatory speculation in the wind and solar contract market?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that, in fact, many landowners and farmers are very excited about the opportunities in solar power. To provide them, we've just launched the first competition for 400 megawatts of renewable power. That's going to bring 7,000 jobs, \$10 billion of investment. But we also have resources under the Farmers' Advocate and under the AUC that landowners can avail themselves of should they wish to enter contracts with those providers.

Mr. Strankman: From another angle, Mr. Speaker. Given that when oil and gas industry company agents are taking an interest in land, they fall under specific land agent regulations that must be abided by, again to the minister: why are similar agents representing renewables not regulated and licensed in the same manner as land agents are in the oil and gas industry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, there are resources available through the AUC, the Alberta Utilities Commission . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: . . . and the Farmers' Advocate for landowners. There are different arrangements under surface rights. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Oil and gas projects have a different set of rules. To be clear, landowners and farmers do not need to go into these agreements should they wish not to. There is no way to compel them . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: . . . but should they wish to do that, they can consult the Farmers' Advocate or the AUC for help with those resources.

Municipal Minimum Property Tax

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the one consistent thing about this NDP government is its inconsistency. The Health and Labour ministers lecture us about bringing Alberta in line with other provinces, but other ministers disagree. The Minister of Municipal Affairs refused to eliminate the punitive and unfair minimum tax provision found only in Alberta. The Doing Things Differently Gang failed once again. But now we have a new minister, so there's hope. Minister, you've already introduced amendments to the newly passed MGA. We're the only province that allows minimum tax. Will you bring Alberta in line and eliminate it? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hold it.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. [interjections]

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. S. Anderson: I appreciate standing up. You know, I'd like to follow up after with the opposition member on some specifics for him if he'd like. I am very proud of the work we're doing in this government, especially with the MGA, as the president of the Chambers of Commerce calls it, the gold standard of consultation. [interjections] You're welcome. When it comes to issues, especially out in rural areas, I have been speaking directly with municipal officials . . .

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. S. Anderson: . . . and my staff has been speaking with municipal officials constantly. We are involved day by day with consultation, and I am proud of Bill 8.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, gold for the MGA, lead for the labour code.

Given that some municipalities are now facing expensive litigation in determining the legality of minimum tax and given that this litigation can result in small villages spending tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars paying lawyers rather than providing essential services and given that the new minister could be a hero to these small municipalities if he ordered a judicial review into this issue rather than having protracted litigation, to the minister. Municipalities need clarity. Will you instigate a judicial review into the issue of minimum tax? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I'd like to say is that this government has consulted vigorously, obviously on this act. We are there to support municipalities. We always have been, and we always will be. We are making lives better for Albertans out there. That's our job, and that's what I commit to do.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

2:30

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time is of the essence, and given that the minister's beard has had a longer tenure than

some of his predecessors in this ministry and given that the minimum tax robs from the poor to subsidize the rich and given that this reverse Robin Hood policy surely runs contrary to the NDP world view, to the minister. You have the chance to bring Alberta in line with other provinces. You have the chance to end minimum tax and be the real Robin Hood. Minister, what's it going to be? Robin Hood or evil Prince John?

The Speaker: I hope no one gets lost going through the park when they're on their way home.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll say it again. We will continue to consult with municipalities, as we have since day one. We are always listening to what the issues are out there. I am proud that we're giving 26 cents of every capital dollar to municipalities because we know how important they are, and they support towns and villages and big cities all across this province. Everything they do touches everyday Albertans' lives. So I am proud to stand here and represent those values, and I will support them going forward.

Affordable Housing

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, this is a good-news question. My community was delighted with the recent capital announcement of funding to rebuild the Clover Bar Lodge in Strathcona county. I have had the pleasure of visiting with residents of this lodge, and I know how important this funding is to their safety and quality of life. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: how will these funds be used to rebuild the Clover Bar Lodge?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Budget 2017 we will be investing in new housing units and renovating existing ones to make life better for Albertans. For Sherwood Park a new and larger Clover Bar Lodge is one of the projects that will proceed under our capital plan. Funding has been provided to Heartland Housing Foundation for planning and design of the lodge and the site. I look forward to joining Heartland Housing Foundation and Strathcona county to officially announce the project in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that good news. Given that Strathcona county residents only have access to the direct rent supplement program through an Edmonton-based agency, to the same minister: is this government going to increase rent supplements for the residents of Strathcona county and Fort Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The direct rent supplement program is one way this government helps low-income Albertans find a safe and affordable place to call home. Last year we increased overall funding support for the rent supplement program by approximately \$1.3 million. Capital Region Housing Corporation administers the program for tenants across the capital region, and they have seen an increase for the rent supplement program. This means more residents of Strathcona county, Fort Saskatchewan will move off wait-lists and into their own homes.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some of the residents in my constituency are living in a housing co-operative called Brittany Lane, to the same minister: how will the province work with the federal government's affordable housing strategy to maintain subsidies for low-income tenants in housing co-operatives?

Ms Sigurdson: Housing co-operatives are an important option for affordable housing in Alberta communities. We have provided rent supplement subsidies for low-income co-op housing tenants. We process monthly rent subsidy claims that are submitted from the housing co-ops throughout the province, including Strathcona county. We will continue to work with the federal government to ensure that Albertans have a safe and affordable place to call home. I myself lived in co-op housing when I was a young single mom and a student, and it's a wonderful way to support people of low income.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Carbon Levy in Border Communities

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year the government announced a grant program to help fuel retailers on the Alberta side of Lloydminster. The grant is to help offset inequities that retailers close to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border experience due to the carbon tax. The carbon tax is affecting retailers in Provost and Lloydminster, towns that are close to the border, and that's a competitive disadvantage. Is the NDP government going to recognize the retailers in towns located a short distance from the border whose sales have been negatively affected by the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising this issue. Of course, we worked with the city of Lloydminster, and we'll continue to work with other communities on some of these pieces, as the national carbon tax has not been phased in yet, and on some of the differences between the Saskatchewan PST and the lack of a PST on the Alberta side. We'll continue to work on that. Certainly, I'm happy to follow up with the community of Provost, or the Finance minister will do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Taylor: Given that the town of Provost is located mere minutes from the Saskatchewan border and from the town of Macklin in Saskatchewan and given that I've heard that the sales for fuel in Provost have gone down inversely to sales in Saskatchewan – that's carbon leakage, my friends – will the government commit to implementing the same grant that applies to Lloydminster in other communities that are in close proximity to the border so that the retailers can be compensated for the loss due to the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We, of course, are working to make life more affordable for Albertans and Alberta families, and we recognize the unique challenges of fuel dealers . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Hoffman: . . . many of whom are families, that own these fuel stations in the border town of Lloydminster. In terms of that

community, we were pleased to work with them to ensure that our fuel taxes were properly aligned, and we are continuing to do that in the city of Lloydminster. Offsetting the levy for fuel dealers continues to be the practice.

Mr. Taylor: Given that the carbon tax is affecting communities and competitiveness across Alberta and given that businesses are leaving rural Alberta at an alarming rate and given that prior to the carbon tax Saskatchewan had a program so that the fuel cost would be the same on both sides of the border, again to the minister: will the NDP commit to bringing in the same grant that applies to Lloydminster to other communities so that those who sell fuel, groceries, and products won't lose business as a result of where they live?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we will continue to engage with communities in terms of ways that we can best support reinvestment of carbon levy revenues, in particular for the commitment made to municipalities, some several billion in municipal infrastructure investments. But I will point out that this province has an \$8.7 billion tax advantage over Saskatchewan given that Saskatchewan has extended the PST to things like children's clothing and construction. That tax advantage in Alberta has only increased since the introduction of the Saskatchewan budget.

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

Employment and Labour Code Consultations

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's hasty workplace legislation consultation includes changes to the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code. The Employment Standards Code has the greatest impact on small and medium-sized businesses, and they are understandably concerned with the NDP's unwillingness to engage them in a meaningful consultation. To the minister: will you please regroup and initiate a more robust consultation process to ensure that you're listening to Alberta's business owners, who are the actual job creators in this province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are confident that our consultation process will allow both employers and employees to be heard. We've met with the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, the Calgary Chamber, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We've had 700 Albertans who've identified themselves as employers respond to our online survey. We're meeting with many business partners, and certainly we're listening very well.

Thank you.

Mr. Gill: I was hoping for the Labour minister to answer.

Given that the invitation-only consultation involved few, if any, actual business owners and given that the only direct opportunity for a business to participate is through a public online survey that does not validate that business owners are even responding and given that on Tuesday the minister said, "We have publicly communicated April 18 for the online portion, but I think we intend to have conversations continuing past that," Minister: considering

this statement, will you commit to consulting on the findings of the Sims report before enacting changes to the existing legislation?

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I am going to say it again. These are representatives of the business community: the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, the Calgary Chamber, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Certainly, Andy Sims has been consulting with employers. As I said, 700 Alberta employers have submitted responses to our survey, so we're having a robust consultation process and hearing from businesses in Alberta.

Mr. Gill: I'd still like to hear from the Labour minister.

Given that Ontario's two-year labour consultation puts Alberta's six-week process to absolute shame and given that part of Ontario's process includes direct engagement with business owners and business representatives, frequent meetings with the minister, and the tabling of a 300-page interim report and given that Alberta is circumventing all of those processes in an apparent rush to introduce legislation, to the same minister: is this government planning to introduce amendments to the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code this session?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta hasn't reviewed the labour laws since 1988, and a lot has changed in that time. For example, in Alberta, if you lose your job and you're sick, you can't access employment insurance. Every other jurisdiction in Canada has that provision. That's just not fair. This is the type of legislation to support workers in Alberta, and we want to make it more fair, so we're very proud to be reviewing the legislation at this time.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. I'll try not to waste time with them. The first tabling is five copies of the relevant sections of the Law Society codes that I referred to in my earlier question to the Premier.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of a letter to the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade from the Calgary engineers and designers forum, talking about engineering jobs in Alberta and asking for help.

The next tabling is five copies of a letter from the president of APEGA and from the Calgary engineers and designers forum again asking for government help for engineering work that is done online in other countries instead of here.

For my last tabling, Mr. Speaker – I hope I'm going fast enough for you – I'm pleased to table copies of a letter to the CEO of Engineers Canada from the Calgary engineers and designers forum still looking for government help for engineering jobs that are being done online instead of here.

The Speaker: The hon. Health minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the requisite number of copies of the quotes that I referred to today where at the time, in 2009, the current Leader of the Official Opposition defended five straight deficit budgets. Five.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table four documents today. The first is an article from the University of Calgary Faculty of Law: When Judicial Decisions Go from Wrong to Wrongful – How Should the Legal System Respond? This is from November 3, 2015, by Alice Woolley. There are five copies.

The second is an article from the *Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2017: Rona Ambrose Played Role in Robin Camp Appointment, Former Justice Minister Says. There are five copies.

A letter from the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General of Alberta dated December 22, 2015, to the hon. chairperson of the Canadian Judicial Council questioning the conduct of Justice Camp. There are five copies.

And the report and recommendation from the Canadian Judicial Council dated November 29, 2016, in the matter of an inquiry pursuant to section 63(1) of the Judges Act regarding the hon. Justice Camp.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table an article from the *Edmonton Journal* of April 12, 2017, by Paula Simons titled Why Is Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner Being Kept in the Dark? It clearly shows that despite the government's protests they are responsible for the current FOIP mess.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Judge and Lawyer Training on Sexual Offences

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Standing Order 42. The standing order reads as follows:

A motion may, in case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover, be made by unanimous consent of the Assembly without notice having been given under Standing Order 39.

I thank the Premier today, Mr. Speaker, for saying that she would support this motion, and I'm hoping that her entire caucus will and, of course, all members of this House. I'm requesting, of course, unanimous consent from the members of this Assembly to support my motion.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of urgent necessity as the issue is right now before many Legislative Assemblies and, of course, the Parliament in Ottawa and is being widely discussed not just in the media but in other Houses and, of course, in the federal regime. Many members of the legal community also are seized with this. There has been discussion by judges' groups, by judges and professionals right across the country. Lawmakers, victims, and members of the public have said that there is a fundamental problem with a lack of understanding around the current state of the law when it comes to crimes of a sexual nature.

Mr. Speaker, as somebody that practised law for some period of time, I can tell you for certain that the law changes. It's constantly moving, and we need to make sure that all professionals – judges, lawyers, Crown prosecutors – continue to be kept to the highest

possible standard, as they should be in Alberta. I would say, as somebody that practised in Alberta for 10 years, that I believe that the Alberta Bar Association and the Law Society of Alberta keep our particular bar – the Crown prosecutors, the legal profession, defence lawyers – as one of the highest in all of Canada and, I would suggest, one of the highest in all the world as far as expectation on education. They even require, as has been pointed out in the past, that an education program and an education plan be put forward.

I do believe that the Alberta government has required one of the best educational programs, and of course LESA, the Legal Education Society of Alberta, and the Law Society of Alberta have required one of the best educations for our lawyers that is possible. I do believe that because of the nature of sexual offences and sexual assaults and the vulnerability of the particular complainants, the victims, usually, of these crimes, it's absolutely necessary.

As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge that all members of the Assembly support this motion today, and I would appreciate that as I do believe that also the victims of crime would recognize this. I have received a lot of correspondence on this particular motion in support of it, sometimes even from victims that have gone through the court system and think this is absolutely essential. I would appreciate the support of all members on this motion.

Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Jean moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work collaboratively with the Law Society of Alberta and the Provincial Court Judges' Association of Alberta to ensure that anyone being considered for appointment as a judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta has successfully completed a comprehensive education on the current state of the law with regard to any crime of a sexual nature and that continuing education plans for judges and lawyers involved with victims of sexual offences are adequate in respect of matters related to crimes of a sexual nature, including instruction in evidentiary prohibitions, principles of consent, and the conduct of sexual offence proceedings as well as education regarding myths and stereotypes associated with sexual offence complainants.

2:50

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased to see this today as we have in the past co-operated with the NDP on some particular bills, taking, of course, corporate money out of politics, and on some other good laws that we have passed. I appreciate the fact that today they're standing up for victims across Alberta and making sure that we have the opportunity to have as good a training as possible for our legal teams, no matter whether they speak for the accused or the Crown.

Of course, judges are also encouraged – it is, I think, absolutely essential – that all members that are on the bar that have the opportunity and the necessity to work with these victims have the full education possible on the current state of the law. The fewer mistakes that are made, obviously, the better the chance that real justice will be seen by not just the victims but by the accused themselves.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The fact is that the conviction rate for sexual assault cases remains far lower than any other cases, Madam Speaker, and I would point particularly to the fact that for sexual cases in Canada the conviction rate is 45 per cent. That means that ultimately very

few people are actually charged with these types of offences relative to other cases. Indeed, other sexual offences besides sexual assault have a conviction rate of 57 per cent. About half of the trials or even less than half of the trials actually lead to some form of conviction. This means that complainants – and often that person is obviously the victim of a sexual assault or a sexual misconduct or is, in fact, a minor – are put under extreme scrutiny by the judicial community as well as by both the Crown and the accused. I would suggest that they need to be on the same page to make sure that these people are treated with respect and are given the best opportunity to have justice.

Now, 44 per cent of sexual assault cases and only 34 per cent of other sexual offence cases are actually stayed or withdrawn. That means that even though you may receive a charge of a sexual nature or a sexual assault under the Criminal Code, 44 per cent of those sexual assault cases are actually dropped by the Crown for a variety of reasons, either as a result of a stay or a withdrawal, even before they get to trial. Of the ones that do get to trial, only 50 per cent of them get convicted. Now, I would suggest that it's very important not just to have convictions but to actually have justice. We need to make sure that justice is real and that the complainant, the accused as well as the entire system are kept honest and in the best interest of the justice system without forgetting the actual victim.

We should all in the House be well familiar with the comments that we've heard from judges that, I believe, are totally out of touch with reality in our current system and are unacceptable. Our courtrooms have actually, as a result of these comments, aggravated the situation, and I believe that as a result of that, Albertans and Canadians as a whole are less willing to come forward and make complaints against particular people because they feel that they will sometimes not be able to lead to a conviction, that they will not be listened to, or, in fact, that they will be treated with disrespect.

We know that the case of a Calgary courtroom where a victim was told to "keep your knees together" in a sexual assault trial is completely unacceptable. Frankly, Madam Speaker, I noticed your reaction to that, and I would agree with you. It's completely unacceptable.

Last April another example was that a lower court judge here in Alberta actually issued an acquittal because a 15-year-old girl, a young girl, a young woman, appeared complacent even though she said no twice. Now, Madam Speaker, that type of behaviour by our court system obviously brings the disrepute of justice into real question. It has, I think, a stigma to drive people away from seeking justice. Justice is not just about the current person that is the victim but to also avoid future victims, to make sure that these people are kept off the streets and are actually punished for what they've done.

Recently, as a result of a lack of resources that are put into our justice system, Madam Speaker, we've seen 200 cases that were dismissed just in a few short months earlier this year, 200 cases as a result of not enough resources put forward by this government. Now, we've asked a number of times for this government to take it more seriously. We know that they spend one of the highest amounts on justice per capita of any jurisdiction in Canada. Yet 200 cases – 200 cases – with one person accused of murder, were thrown out as a result of lack of resources, lack of judges, and lack of Crown prosecutors. That's not acceptable. Two sexual assault cases were thrown out in the same group of 200 and over a dozen impaired operation offences. People that were actually caught red-handed and accused of careless driving or impaired driving are back on the street without any punishment whatsoever.

Another Alberta judge recently was rebuked for relying on "discredited myths and stereotypes." It's important, Madam Speaker, although I feel emotion for this, because I know how important it is that we have actual justice. We know that during the

trials themselves we have to be absolutely certain that not only the people involved – the judges, the Crown prosecutors, and the defence lawyers – know the current state of the law, but we also know that they have to understand what's happened to those people, as in that particular case where the Alberta judge was rebuked recently for relying on "discredited myths and stereotypes."

I saw this in the law, Madam Speaker. I saw this when I practised law in Alberta in the '90s, that there are a lot of myths and stereotypes, and people don't understand why they can't be brought up in court. That's why it's so important that judges and lawyers don't allow that to happen because there can be the case of mistrials, stays, and it can help the accused. Frankly, if the accused is guilty of the crime, it can often, as the result of a mistrial, cause serious ramifications for the trial itself.

In that case, Madam Speaker, the judge actually questioned why two young girls didn't tell anyone earlier about abuse at the hands of their stepfather. Now, that's unacceptable. You know that time has no relevance in relation to these types of charges, and when complainants bring them forward, we need to believe these people. It's absolutely essential that the people of Alberta know that they will receive justice. In that case, even though it was against the accused's two stepdaughters, that man had also been accused of sexually abusing his own daughter. Now, this type of situation is absolutely unbelievable and unacceptable, but they do happen in our court system, and that's why we need to make sure that when the complainants come forward, they are believed and that they have the opportunity to have due process and justice.

The federal and other provincial governments are discussing right now how training and education should take place to address these problems, and it's critically important that the Alberta government participate in this conversation. I was very thankful to see the Premier stand up today and accept our motion, to move forward with this motion. Of course, the real issue is in the details, and we're hoping the government will work with other jurisdictions, including the federal government, to come up with a good law to support victims and our justice system.

Victims of sexual assault in and across Alberta have seen their trust in our justice system shaken as a result of these stories that come forward, as a result of 200 cases not being prosecuted and dismissed, where the training may have been available and wasn't taken. That is also very disturbing because, of course, the Alberta government puts a lot of resources into this, as does the Law Society of Alberta, and we need to encourage all lawyers and judges to take this training on an ongoing basis.

We cannot infringe on judges' independence, and that is very clear with this particular motion. What we've said in this motion is that not during the judges' tenure but before the judges are actually appointed, they should take up-to-date education on the current state of the law. We believe also that the judges – and the Chief Justice should encourage them – should take ongoing legal training to make sure that they continue to provide to Albertans real justice and that people recognize that in Alberta we have one of the best justice systems in the world. That's what we need clarity of in the public. They need to know that when they go and make a complaint to the RCMP or the city police, they are able to be believed and go forward with that charge and hold the accused accountable if indeed they're guilty of the crime.

Myths do exist, myths like: women will struggle and use all their force to try to avoid an assault. Oftentimes these are situations where somebody is in a power position, where somebody is familiar to them, and often young people and people that are vulnerable will not respond in a way that most people would think is normal. Or even that a woman can't be assaulted by someone she knows: it's absolutely not the case. In fact, more times than not that's what

happens. That lifestyle choices in particular discredit a woman's testimony: that's absolutely unacceptable. Or that if a woman is assaulted, she will go to the police right away: that never should be perpetuated by the courts, Madam Speaker. These myths just discredit our entire justice system.

3:00

Judges know how to react to this if they're properly trained. Crown prosecutors know how to treat the complainants if they're properly trained. With all three of the main people in this particular situation being educated properly and being at a consistent level of high education, I believe we'll actually see better trials, more justice seen, and, as a result, victims being treated in a way that they actually feel they're not being revictimized, which I hear time and time again.

Of course, Madam Speaker, I'm glad to hear this isn't a partisanship issue, that we've put partisanship to the side. I know that the Justice minister was for a period of time hesitant in coming out to support this motion even this week and earlier. I sincerely hope that she along with the rest of her caucus, as the Premier has stated, will stand up and support the motion.

She has stated that she wouldn't want to interfere in the justice system, with the judges. We heard that clearly and loudly, and we looked at and analyzed the state of the law across Canada. That's why we came forward with a different type of model than what was brought forward at the federal level. Many people don't know this, but most of the cases that deal with sexual assault and sexual misconduct are actually at the provincial court level, and those judges are actually appointed by the provincial government here, by the NDP Premier. That's why it's so important. Those are the judges that are actually seized with most of these sexual misconduct cases, and we know that if they're trained early on, we'll have fewer problems as time goes.

The wording of the motion actually respects the independence of the judiciary and of all the respective bodies, including the Law Society of Alberta and the judges' association. In a private member's bill before the federal House of Commons right now being driven by my former colleague and Leader of the Opposition Rona Ambrose – the chief justices, including the Chief Justice here in Alberta and many other lawyers and judges, have come out to support this idea, support the idea of ongoing education. I can't think of anything more important than training and education for judges and lawyers on the state of the law, making sure it's up to date, because laws do change every day. The work must be supported by lawyers, by Crown prosecutors.

This work will continue to go on for some period of time, and that's why I hope that we don't just see this motion shovelled under the carpet, and somebody accepts it. The Premier has grabbed it, and the NDP government has grabbed it, but I want to see them move forward with it. That's why I'm hoping to see some real plans. We'll continue to ask about these questions in this House because, of course, this work is supported by a lot of lawyers.

But let's look past lawyers because what's important is the victims and their advocates. They want change. They know that this is a situation that has gone on for years and years, and there is a delicate balance. We can't interfere with the judiciary, but what we can do is to support victims when they come forward, to make sure that they're treated right, with respect.

It also has the full support of federal opposition, including, I might add, the NDP Party federally. We were glad to see that crosspartisan exchange. Here's another quote from NDP leader Thomas Mulcair: "When the issue is how our judicial system handles cases of sexual assault, we all have to come together and say that we believe survivors." Right now the House of Commons

Committee on the Status of Women is considering a private member's bill by Rona Ambrose.

The information from those testifying is important for us, too. I quote from a CBC article from April 12 on the president of the Association of Justice Counsel, Ursula Hendel, which represents 2,600 federal lawyers and prosecutors.

She supports more education for judges but says they're not the only ones who need it.

I continue with the quote.

The truth of the matter is that no training of any kind is actually mandatory for Crown prosecutors.

That's what she told MPs at that committee meeting. She went on to say, Madam Speaker:

I'd like to see training made mandatory for prosecutors, and particularly for prosecutors who conduct sexual assault cases – and early in their career. I didn't get training until I was at least five years in and by then it was a little late.

I think she indicated in the article that she'd actually tried 500 cases by that time. That's one case a week. I would suggest that that's a lot of cases that she was involved in as a Crown prosecutor, and without adequate and up-to-date training it's a little bit shocking.

Federal Crowns get most of their training from the Public Prosecution Service of Canada's prosecutors' school. Now, in that prosecutors' school they go to school once every year for a five-day course that's offered for them. I would suggest that here in Alberta since – actually, my understanding is that currently the Law Society expects a legal education plan from each lawyer, to submit that plan, and to follow through with that plan.

The Legal Education Society of Alberta, which provides a lot of the training for the Law Society of Alberta, actually has a lot of great courses. I know and I believe and would submit to you that they would be able to pull this idea across the country and listen to all of the evidence presented here today and, of course, in the committee hearing in Ottawa and other places in other jurisdictions, including Ontario, and put forward good ideas that will implement a better justice system for all of us.

The goal of this motion is simple: for the government to work together with the Law Society, with the Provincial Court Judges' Association to ensure that anybody considered for an appointment is duly educated on it and continues, hopefully, to receive education if indeed the Chief Justice would impose that upon the judges. I believe, based upon their comments, that they will do that. I think it's very important that the minister work with the Law Society, with judges, with the Crown prosecutors' association, with the trial lawyers associations, and with other people. We've seen consultation by this government before such as the labour review in 36 days or Bill 6 in just a very short period of time, and I really think that this is so important that we need to make sure that victims are heard, victims' voices.

Sheldon Kennedy, for instance, is somebody that's a huge advocate for young people and for those that are the most vulnerable in our society. I had an opportunity to meet with him just weeks ago, and I can tell you that he continues with his struggle and his plan to make sure that he does as much as he can for victims and survivors. I would suggest that that would be a good place to start for this government, to listen to not just lawyers but also those people that have been on the other side of the situation and have been in court and have suffered as a result of what I would consider to be not adequate education for the judges and some of the other people involved in the cases.

As to the first part of the motion, it is the minister that decides whether someone is appointed as a judge here, and we know that those people, before they apply, might have not even practised criminal law. Can you imagine going into a court system, and all

your life you do family law, and then you're appointed as a Provincial Court judge? Now, I don't know if you're aware, Madam Speaker, but Provincial Court judges deal with most trials, most criminal trials, especially. In fact, I would suggest that just about every matter goes through Provincial Court as far as applications go, as far as an opportunity to hear, before a Queen's Bench trial, a preliminary inquiry in Provincial Court.

All of these Provincial Court judges are absolutely essential. It's absolutely essential for them to be trained because when these people do come in from especially rural communities, I think, where sometimes the training is not provided – I would suggest that that's the place that we need to make sure that all the judges are at the same level, all the lawyers are at the same level, the best level possible to serve and to make sure that justice is served. The first part of the motion, of course, will ensure that no new appointees to the bench are unprepared, and I think that is also important.

Madam Speaker, I'm so happy to see today this House and all opposition parties and the government itself stand up and support victims and stand up and support this Wildrose motion.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to preface my comments by saying that many people who have endured sexual assault prefer to be referred to as survivors rather than victims, and I am definitely speaking for myself.

Our government believes that survivors of sexual assault in Alberta should be treated with respect and dignity in the justice system. We also believe that it's vital for Alberta to have qualified, compassionate judges. Judges should know and should properly apply our sexual assault laws in our court system. There's no room for sexual myths and stereotypes in our justice system. That's why in 2015 our Minister of Justice asked for a formal inquiry into Justice Camp's conduct, which recommended his removal from the bench, and why this government introduced Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Our government believes it's vital for sexual assault survivors to hear that these sorts of actions, comments, and conduct are not accepted in our society and most certainly not accepted in our courtrooms.

3:10

We're happy to agree with this motion in principle. We all have a role to play in ensuring that not only do we provide compassion to survivors of sexual violence but that we work to reduce sexual violence in the first place. We all have a role to play in education related to sexual violence throughout society, including how prevalent it is. Education alone is not enough. We must ensure that our society does not reward another Justice Camp. Despite the benefit of education he continued to hold archaic, sexist beliefs.

One of the biggest keys to combating sexual violence is making sure that powerful positions in society like the bench are held by people with reasoned views of sexual violence and equality. I understand there may be some challenges related to the constitutionality of legislating training for justices, so government needs to be careful not to be mandating what the judiciary learns, to avoid influencing the decisions of another branch of government. This is a foundational principle of our democracy, but government definitely has a significant role to play in supporting the education of judges.

By and large, our judiciary is comprised of committed Albertans that have given service to the law and committed to their communities, and this is vital. Perhaps government's most critical role is ensuring that appointments to the bench are people who are learned in the law and have the compassion and empathy to consider the context of the matters in front of them. Clearly, there's a need to ensure that people appointed to the Provincial Court have empathy towards sexual assault survivors as well as a background in the area of the law they preside over prior to hearing a case related to sexual violence. I'm happy to see that this government's appointments have respected that, including the appointment of a number of Crown prosecutors and defence counsel to the criminal court that are well versed in the laws around sexual assault as well as individuals who have volunteered with survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

This issue is also being considered by the federal government, and it will be useful to see what steps they take. I understand as well that our Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has raised the need to further remove barriers for victims of sexual assault across the justice system with her federal and provincial colleagues.

We're happy to accept this motion in principle and look forward to continuing to work with the Provincial Court and the Law Society to make sure that the resources appropriate for training are available to lawyers and judges.

This is an extremely important issue. We took action on this issue in 2015 when we asked for a formal review of Justice Camp's conduct. Where was the opposition then? After all, it was their former Conservative government in Ottawa that gave him a promotion after his inappropriate conduct in the 2014 sexual assault case.

On this side of the House we believe judges should have a wide variety of expertise and appointments should be merit based. Many of the appointments the Justice minister has made include professionals who have backgrounds working with sexual assault and domestic violence organizations like the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, the Zebra Child Protection Centre, the Sheldon Kennedy centre, and the YWCA battered women support group.

I'm proud that Alberta's appointments have been focused on bringing more women to the bench and bringing in indigenous Albertans and members of the LGBTQ community, traditionally underrepresented amongst our judiciary. It's vital that Albertans entering courtrooms see themselves reflected in the judge before them. We will continue to work to ensure that our appointments are diverse, reflect Albertans, and have expertise in the area of law over which they preside.

The report and recommendation of the Inquiry Committee of the Canadian Judicial Council in the matter of Justice Camp states:

It is difficult to understand how Justice Camp could conclude – particularly after his intensive sessions with Justice McCawley, Dr. Haskell and Professor Cossman – that his acknowledgement of misconduct did not involve sexism and gender bias, and that it did not implicate profound issues of equality. His evidence leaves the Committee doubtful about whether he is fully engaged in the necessary ongoing process of constant self-reflection about which Dr. Haskell testified and which the public has a right to expect of members of the judiciary.

Judges need more than just one training course; they need to be committed to continual learning, as we all do, respecting the law and applying it fairly, and to not be stuck in old-fashioned thinking when society and the law have obviously moved beyond that. That's why we strongly encourage judges to take a wide range of training courses, including sexual assault, tailored to the nature of their own knowledge and the area where they will be practising.

In fact, currently there is more training and mentorship available to judges in Alberta than ever before. We provide almost \$200,000 in grants toward training support for judges in Alberta. Training for judges in Alberta is provided by the Alberta Provincial Judges' Association, the National Judicial Institute, the Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges, and through the office of the chief judge education committee. All new members of the judiciary are required to attend new training upon being appointed to the bench. This initial training is provided by the Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges. The Alberta Provincial Judges' Association organizes two education conferences per year. The APJA conference last year focused on sexual assault and indigenous issues.

In 2015 the Provincial Court formalized a mentoring program for all newly appointed judges. All new judges shadow more experienced judges after their appointment. Continuing legal education for Provincial Court judges covers a range of areas, including sexual assault law, and involves ongoing mentoring from more judges. The work that our Provincial Court has done in recent years under the leadership of Chief Judge Matchett is impressive and should be applauded. In addition, the National Judicial Institute, whose executive director is Alberta Court of Queen's Bench Justice Adele Kent, has committed to expanding the availability of online learning opportunities for judges regarding sexual assault. This is an important step as National Judicial Institute materials are available to provincially and federally appointed judges thanks in part to the provincial government's grant to the institute.

But there is an individual responsibility on judges and lawyers as well. They have to believe that they are appropriately versed in the law prior to hearing a case or remain open to hearing arguments from counsel and further researching areas that are novel to them. That is what good judges do, and it's critical that we appoint people that will make a lifelong commitment to be a student of the law.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak on this very important motion, which I was hoping would be nonpartisan, the motion that takes aim at reforming the judicial system to ensure that judges and lawyers dealing with sexual assault cases are properly educated on the myths and stereotypes of sexual violence.

When a victim decides to come forward to the authorities with their story, it can be one of the most difficult times in their life. The pain, the emotional trauma, and the fear of not being believed are all too real, and I, for one, want to know that when a victim comes forward, the system is supporting him or her through these difficult times with respect and empathy. Justice Robin Camp's absolutely deplorable comments regarding a rape victim's account have quite rightly drawn the ire of Albertans, Canadians, and the entire international community. In this case the now former judge stated to the victim in court that "sex and pain sometimes go together." I can't imagine how he thought that would be appropriate. He questioned why she wouldn't sink her bottom into the base of a sink so the assailant couldn't penetrate her. And then, of course, the keep the knees together comment.

3:20

These statements encompass the fundamental ignorance that perpetuates myths and stereotypes and deters victims from coming forward in the first place. Rape and sexual misconduct often go unreported because of instances like this. Why would a victim ever

come forward and tell the most haunting and personal story only to be ridiculed by an officer of the court?

I'd like to highlight three common myths, which the Leader of the Official Opposition touched on as well, that are readily apparent in these statements made by Justice Camp. The first myth: a woman will always try to fight back to avoid being sexually assaulted; that is, she will always fight back, struggle, and she will use force to stop her attacker. We know that this isn't true. Everyone reacts in a different manner to various situations, and this is especially so with something as serious as sexual assault. Further, there's absolutely no surety that struggling will stop the attack. In fact, some may argue that it may result in further harm to the victim. These attacks are about control almost every single time and have very little to do with the sexual nature of what's going on.

The second myth contained in these statements: woman should not be believed if they are on social assistance, have mental health challenges, dress provocatively, drink, or use drugs. This myth is crazy, and it's probably one of the most common and in some aspects actually suggests that the victim somehow is asking for it. Reputation, clothing, lifestyle choices, and other superficial circumstances do not somehow invalidate the claim that a sexual assault or rape has occurred.

The third myth contained here is the idea that a woman is either a saint or a sinning whore. Justice Camp in his comment of "keep your knees together" fell directly into this category by failing to consider this instance as an isolated event. According to the law each and every sexual incident requires consent. Reputation does not play a role in determining whether or not a sexual assault has occurred. Let me repeat: reputation should not play a role in determining whether or not a crime has happened.

Sadly, no, this is not the only instance in which a victim has been ridiculed by a member of the judiciary. Recently four judges – not one; there are four – have been rebuked for their serious errors in judgment, which adds further evidence that it is unacceptable to continue to allow our judges to operate without any knowledge or training in this area.

In a recently overturned case it was found that Judge Michael Savaryn had used seriously erroneous logic to find a 15-year-old boy not guilty of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl, this despite video evidence and despite that she had told him "no" and fended him off with a water bottle. Judge Savaryn concluded: "The complainant tried so hard to laugh it all off, that I do not believe she was successful in communicating her discomfort . . . and even at the end, I am not convinced she clearly expressed her objections." In Justice Juliana Topolniski's decision to overturn the acquittal she wrote, "The word 'No' coupled with fending off an attacker with a water bottle does not mean 'Yes.' There is nothing ambiguous about it."

Saying that these judges need an education is an understatement.

What we are all asking here today is very simple. We want accountable judges who have been educated on the laws that are expected to be enforced. This is something that many judges are in favour of. Alberta's Chief Justice has publicly stated that training in this area of law is something that is sorely needed and, contrary to dissenting opinion, this does not infringe on judicial independence.

The other aspect to this motion revolves around the lawyers and ensuring that they, too, are properly educated on the facts around sexual assault. Some attorneys say that this erodes their independence as well, but I quite frankly do not see how providing an education on sexual assault would do that. It's about holding our courts and the officers to a higher standard, as we would expect, to ensure that erroneous and harmful positions are not used which could ultimately revictimize the person. Lawyers that are wishing to become judges should be looking for opportunities to expand

their understanding of the law, and this does just that. This motion does that.

At the end of the day, what we are talking about here is the need to ensure our system is finding justice for individuals and not adding to the problem. This is a nonpartisan issue. I will treat this as a nonpartisan issue, and I do want to thank my colleagues for supporting our motion on this side of the House, on the other side of the House. This is a very important topic. I know that at the federal level this is a nonpartisan issue as well, with the NDP and the Conservatives working together, and I hope that we will see this Chamber work together moving forward. Together as legislators we can show that I believe you with real reforms to educate the courts on sexual assault.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to pick up on where the Member for Airdrie left off and on the partisan or nonpartisan nature of this debate. I'm really glad to see that the temperature is turned down in the House now as we got a couple of speakers in, but frankly as I sat here and watched what happened with the first couple of speakers, we had partisan bombs being chucked across the aisle at one another. Enough of that. Shame on all of you for doing that. This is not . . . [interjections] Hang on. Listen to me. [interjections] Listen. Honestly, this issue . . .

The Acting Speaker: Member, if you could speak through me, please.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will do that.

It frustrates me, Madam Speaker. It frustrates me very much that issues that are as important as preventing sexual assault, ensuring that judges get the training they need – and I'm speaking in favour of this motion, undeniably. But things get bogged down so much here. You know, the Member for Airdrie, I think, struck exactly the right tone, and I think there's an opportunity here for us to ensure that both sides are focusing on the issue.

We're here to ensure that survivors of sexual assault, victims of sexual assault, whatever people who have had sexual assault perpetrated against them would like to be called – that isn't the issue that we're debating. The issue we're debating is: how do we prevent that? How do we ensure that people who perpetrate sexual assault are held accountable and that, overall, the rates of sexual violence drop in our province? That's what we should be focusing on.

That's what I hope this motion can achieve, which is, again, why I support that. We know that Alberta has some of the highest rates of sexual offences in the country. My data show that we have the third-highest level of sexual offences in this country. A motion like this and training for judges can ensure that we change those statistics. I'd like to see an increased focus from our government and from society as a whole to ensure that we do in fact change that.

Really, this motion, I think, is one of the things that we can do to take real steps towards reducing the prevalence of sexual violence in all its forms. It's certainly in no way the only thing that we should be doing as a province, but it is an important motion.

It's important that professional development continues within the judiciary, that it happens with Crown prosecutors and in all aspects of our justice system, including police, that it is gender and culturally sensitive. We need to ensure that judges, police officers, Crown prosecutors, and court employees have comprehensive understanding of the impact of sexual trauma on individuals, how it happens, how it manifests itself, and whether those people who are part of our judicial system have their ability to participate in

these investigations or prosecutions clouded by their biases, whether they know about those biases or not. That's where training comes in.

3:30

I recognize that there are some jurisdictional issues or some limitations. The judiciary clearly must be independent from the legislative branch; therefore it's limited, what we can do. But, again, this motion has addressed that particular concern. This motion is future-focused and focused on training, and I think that is absolutely right.

But back to bias. I think we need to always remember that myths and stereotypes about sexual assault and about sexuality persist within our system, as do racial and other biases. Those persist in society, and they exist also within our judicial system. There have been many examples here, that we've heard today, that play that out, of course.

I would like to see that a term of employment for Crown prosecutors is proper sexual assault training. I think that should be mandatory.

We should ensure that training procedures are in place for police officers. All police, I think, should ensure that they have a standard operating procedure that is common across the province so they understand and are on the same page when it comes to handling investigations of sexual assault cases.

Now, I know that some police forces, perhaps all, have dedicated resources to sexual assault. I'd like to ensure that those staff have the resources they need to ensure that those who come forward with sexual assault complaints are taken seriously, that they are believed, that those prosecutions move forward, and that the people who are bringing those charges forward are supported throughout the process.

It should be said that the judicial system and judges are just one part of the problem, one part of the system. We need to ensure, again, that hospitals, of course – and I know there are dedicated resources in hospitals – have the resources that they need.

I know that governments in this province have done a lot to prevent violence against women and girls. I think that's important work, and it must continue, but more needs to be done in that regard.

I'll note just in conclusion that I understand that there was a 2013 document called Best Practices for Investigating and Prosecuting Sexual Assault. I'd be interested to know whether that does include mandatory training and, if it does not, to ensure that it is updated.

I will certainly stand in support of this motion and look forward to continuing the debate, and I sincerely hope that my colleagues on all sides of the House do support it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll begin my comments by saying that I accept this motion in principle. The Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned that a fairly high number of cases were withdrawn or stayed. I know personally how difficult it is to lay that charge. It took me nine years to lay the first charge. It wasn't because I hadn't been physically or sexually assaulted previously. It was because of the fear of the threats of injury and death from my ex-husband. I know that those kinds of threats that one receives between the laying of the charge and going to court are so scary that one can be paralyzed with fear. Many women withdraw because it is too much to handle.

Now, I believe that everyone who comes before a court should be treated with respect and with dignity, whether that is a plaintiff

or a defendant. I also believe that every judge who sits on a bench is there because they have been educated. They've received a law degree, they've passed the bar, and they've had some experience practising law. I expect that anyone who sits in the position of a judge to be completely impartial. He or she would look at the facts of a case, hear testimony, weigh those facts against any mitigating circumstances, and make a decision based on the law. I would expect that the judge should be compassionate and understand the vulnerabilities of the plaintiff in a sexual assault or domestic violence case just given the nature of that case.

In my own experience I believe the judge did make the correct decision in finding my ex-husband guilty based on the evidence of the case and the law. However, he did not treat me with dignity, respect, or actually offer me any protection. His comments to me, telling me that it was a marital problem and to get a divorce and leave, were disrespectful at the very least. Suspending the sentence and allowing my ex to leave the court a free man put me and my children at immediate risk. He didn't even give me a chance to get a divorce and leave. His failure to take any further action when my ex threatened to kill me as he was walking out of the courtroom exacerbated that risk and should never have happened.

In Alberta I believe by and large that judges do an excellent job of assessing the evidence, weighing the facts, and making good decisions based on the law. By and large I believe the judges to be compassionate and treat both plaintiffs and defendants with respect and dignity within the justice system. I also know that that is not always the case, and that is why I was pleased when the Minister of Justice asked for the formal inquiry into Judge Camp's conduct, which recommended his removal from the bench.

Our government has taken action. Additional action was taken with Bill 2, and I look forward to further action in the future on the issue of sexual assault and domestic violence.

The motion has called to ensure that anyone being considered for an appointment actually be educated further. I don't disagree that further education is a good thing. As I said, I believe that to become a judge, one first has to graduate from law school. They have to pass the bar exam, and they have to have experience as a lawyer. I think that all of those things are part of the education piece. However, one can't be taught to be compassionate. You have that inside you, and I think those are things that you learn as you're growing up. It's reinforced by the acceptance of your peers of the behaviour that you portray, and when you portray bad behaviour and your peers give you kudos for that, it exacerbates bad behaviour.

I believe that – well, I need to back up. Given my statement in November 2015 about my personal experience of domestic violence I was subjected to behaviour reminiscent of that which my ex-husband exhibited. Despite the fact that I gave my statement publicly right here in this Legislature, I was subjected to that behaviour.

I believe what is most important to change are the attitudes and beliefs that one holds in one's mind and soul, so I find it, as the Premier might say, rich that the opposition is putting this motion forward. When the media first reported on Judge Camp's comments and behaviour, the opposition said nothing. In fact, as my colleague had said, the government in Ottawa at the time gave Judge Camp a promotion after his inappropriate behaviour in that sexual assault case in 2014, and the new leader of the third party, Mr. Kenney, was involved in appointing Mr. Camp to the Federal Court. Now, isn't he the one who's the new best friend of the Leader of the Official Opposition?

This is an extremely important issue to me, and it should be for everyone in this House and everyone outside. I've said over and over again that this kind of behaviour will change when we as

women do not accept being treated disrespectfully, demeaned, and devalued. We all have a role to play to stop this.

As I stated at the beginning, in principle I support this motion. However, I would suggest that if the members opposite really want to fix this, the heightened rhetoric heaved at the female members of our cabinet should change. The man-something-explaining to ministers would cease, and the collaboration with the government, that is working to make life better for Albertans, would actually begin.

Thank you.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to be brief and contain my remarks to the basics, but let me just say that I am going to support this motion because I think it's a sincere attempt to make it better for survivors or victims of sexual assault to get the treatment and the dignity as human beings that they deserve. I think – I hope – this is the type of issue that does bring the House together.

On that note, I'm going to take a couple of minutes here and just compliment the government. Yes. There's no: yeah, but. There's nothing. I want to compliment the government on Bill 2. Nice work. Real nice work, which I support.

I heard lots of speeches and talk from members of this House, very personal, in some cases painful, tough stories about their experiences, and I thank all the members of this House for that. I just want to say that this is an issue there – we have so many things to fight about. Let's not fight about this one. Let's work together on it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to preface my speech by saying that if I use words that aren't necessarily accepted by the government, it's just because those words resonate more with myself. Please understand that I will endeavour to make sure that the language I use is respectful to all people and their various spaces and where they're at in various places with regard to their particular trauma. Please understand that it's not an insult to anybody in this House.

I also wanted to mention with regard to the last hon. member who spoke that, unfortunately, sometimes within the opposition the things that we say and how we react are not taken into the media. There were many of us who spoke out against those particular things, but our local media and our little rural newspapers don't get pushed out into the regular media. So please understand that that is also a huge misnomer, and I would really appreciate that if statements like that are made, you do a little bit more research before you cast aspersions on this side of the House.

Secondly, I'd also like to say that it's a huge honour to rise today and speak to this very important motion. I think that the most important thing is that it takes aim at ensuring that our courts are safe spaces for victims who have survived violent sexual assault. The believe her campaigns and the I Believe You campaigns are absolutely imperative to making sure that the language and the dialogue change.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation and Statistics Canada, women self-reported 553,000 sexual assaults in 2014. Those are only the reported ones. We don't even know how many were not reported as a result. On average, women were 10 times more likely than men to be the victim of violent sexual assault and

account for almost 92 per cent of those who have been victimized and have fallen victim to sexual assault.

The crime is so heinous, so vile, and so fundamentally evil that it's hard for people who have not been victimized or even those who are really close to people who have been to realize the trauma that is associated with sexual violence and rape. The humiliation, the violation, the stigma are endless. All are reasons why, too often, women and men who suffer this atrocity rarely come forward. Another reason is the perception that those who have been victimized will be revictimized by the system.

One of the things that I wanted to mention about what the hon. member had said before – I believe she was saying in her speech that judges that are there have already gone through becoming lawyers, have gone through all of that instance and everything – is that as much as I agree with that, I think there's a process that needs to happen earlier on to make sure that these folks that are applying to become judges have this kind of training so that judges like Justice Camp are well aware of what their responsibilities are and that those horrible and horrific things that those people say never see the light of day. This is exactly why we must ensure that when they do come forward, these people, these survivors, are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

Over the last year we have watched as judges and other court officials have directly contributed to the sentiment behind why the believe-her movement is important. Instead of endeavouring to find the truth, these people in these positions have contributed to the negative myths and stereotypes about sexual assault that revictimize and also pose an affront to principles of justice such as fair and equitable treatment under the law.

Justice Camp – I mean, I'm going to repeat what's been said before, but I believe that with the absolutely disgusting behaviour that has been seen here by this man, it's worth saying again – who is now a former and disgraced member of the court, has eroded public confidence in the system, and now here we are. His infamous comments when he asked the 19-year-old alleged assault victim, "Why couldn't you just keep your knees together?" highlights the appalling misunderstandings, and I use "misunderstandings" loosely here. I don't think that appropriately describes that behaviour. But it still exists, and it's ridiculously prevalent in the court of law. This is a problem that's happening right across the country.

I would like to take a moment to comment also on a Nova Scotia judge and his ruling that someone so intoxicated that they had passed out in the back of a taxi and urinated on themselves could somehow consent. This topic of consent is of utmost concern to me. We need to have confidence in our judiciary, that they are trained, that they are respectful, and that they truly understand the complex nuances of this issue of consent.

Just to provide another perspective, too, I think of a situation of a person who has special needs, a child or an adult who may be on the autism spectrum and may have some sort of developmental disability, who may not even fully understand the social aspects of personal space. In this hypothetical suppose that this individual grabbed someone and hugged them at a rather inappropriate time or without their consent. I would expect – in fact, I would demand it – that the judges are informed about what constitutes malicious assault versus a misunderstanding in the circumstances and that it matches with the appropriate punishment.

Clearly, judges need to be allowed to use their discretion, but sometimes they also need a base from which to form their knowledge, and this is something that the minister absolutely has the power to change at the point where she appoints a judge, which this motion reaffirms.

I would like to take a moment to thank the Minister of Justice for her advocacy in dealing with Justice Camp. It took tremendous courage for her to do that, and we're extremely, extremely honoured and grateful that she pushed that forward, so thank you to the government for that.

We must all work together to educate our judges, to ensure that no more persons who have been victimized by sexual assault are blamed and that the perpetuating myths of these stereotypes stop.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

3:50

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our government believes and I believe that sexual assault cases in Alberta should be treated with respect and dignity in the justice system. We believe that it's vital for Alberta to have qualified, compassionate judges. Judges should know and should properly apply our sexual assault laws in our court system.

There is no room for sexual myths and stereotypes in our justice system, and that's why in 2015 our Minister of Justice asked for a formal inquiry into Justice Camp's conduct, which recommended his removal from the bench. It's why this government introduced Bill 2, which would remove barriers for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. Our government believes that it's vital for sexual assault survivors to hear that these sorts of actions, comments, and conduct are not accepted in our society, most certainly, and not accepted in our courtrooms.

This is, Madam Speaker, an extremely important issue. I am proud that our government took action on this back in 2015 and asked for a review. It was the right thing to do, and I wish that we would have heard from more members of this Assembly at the time that it happened. I was particularly proud of the Member for Lethbridge-East when she shared her story back in 2015. It was a groundbreaking thing to happen in this Chamber.

I think that sometimes when we have comments that come around this Chamber it does – you know, we model. When we speak in this Chamber, we model for everyone that is in Alberta and anyone that engages with our social media from across the world, which we can see from issues like GSAs being reflected at us from across the pond. I find it unfortunate that it's taken until now to actually have this kind of motion put forward.

It was the former Conservative government in Ottawa that gave Justice Camp a promotion after his inappropriate conduct in a 2014 sexual assault case, and it was Peter MacKay, former Minister of Justice and cabinet colleague of Mr. Jason Kenney, who said that regional ministers like Jason Kenney and Rona Ambrose signed off on those appointments. Mr. Kenney hasn't seemed to be around in the last couple of weeks; however, I understand that he has been speaking a lot to the Leader of the Official Opposition lately. I encourage members opposite to ask about Justice Robin Camp, who, thankfully, is no longer a justice, about that appointment the next time they see him.

On reviewing the court transcript, our Justice minister felt it was important that victims know that this was not an acceptable way to be treated by the justice system. It's important to know that they will be treated with respect and dignity, not subjected to sexual myths and stereotypes. It's vital for sexual assault victims to hear that this sort of conduct and these comments are not acceptable in our society. It's why the minister wrote and requested an inquiry. The minister's complaint states:

In my respectful opinion, the conduct of Justice Camp throughout the proceedings . . . was so manifestly and profoundly destructive

of the concept of the impartiality, integrity, and independence of the judicial role that public confidence has been sufficiently undermined to render Justice Camp incapable of executing his judicial office.

She then goes on to question the myths and stereotypes reflected in the trial judge's comments, comments like calling the survivor in that case the accused. He called this person, who, let us not forget, was homeless at the time, the accused.

That speaks to the fact that this is not just an issue where we have one thing that we can do to address this. This is a complex institutionalized problem that needs to be addressed from multiple aspects of people that do not have access to services, people that don't have access to the ladder you can move up with employment. There are many different issues at work here.

Also, there is emerging research that shows that this isn't just about power. It is about power in part, but lots of times this is happening because someone just doesn't think that it's wrong. When I had the opportunity to share my experience in December, after it was recommended by the inquiry that Justice Robin Camp be removed, I was talking about my own story, and I have to tell you that I don't love talking about it. I'm happy to share it because I think it's important and I think creating a dialogue is important and that to speak for people that are not ready to is important. But I don't love talking about it.

That being said, in my experience I was on a date. I was at someone's home, and I thought I was in a safe place. You know, without going into details, we ended up in bed together, and what was happening had thus far been consensual. Then I ended up pinned underneath someone much larger than me and very quickly realized that I had no strength or power that could match what was happening. One of those myths, you know, is that women have to fight back and have to scrap, as if it takes that to mean no. A person can just say no, but when you're in that moment, you are concerned about your survival. It, thankfully, ended quickly, but when I spoke to that person the next day and he wondered why I didn't want to go on another date, I told him: well, it's because you raped me. He said: well, that's what you all say.

It was so scary. It reinforced to me all I needed to know about why I didn't want to go to the police and why I didn't want to try that case because I didn't have any good reason that anyone would believe me. Because of the case that at the time I couldn't prove a struggle, I couldn't prove signs of trauma, it would have just been my word against his.

This is an ongoing issue, and it is important to have people that are appointed to these benches who reflect us and to ensure that we have ourselves seen, that Albertans see themselves reflected in these benches. This is why it's important to put women in these positions. This is why it's important that the minister appointed the first disabled judge to the bench a couple of months ago. Those things create the faith that we need to have in our justice system. Also, we need to make sure that those judges are qualified.

One of the quotes that confounded me the most when I was looking at all of the coverage that had happened was Justice Camp saying: my colleagues knew my knowledge of Canadian law was very minimal; it was nonexistent. So when we talk about the training that these judges need to go through, I was looking at the report and recommendations, and it stated:

Justice Deborah McCawley has been a judge of the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench since 1997. She has been at the vanguard of social context education for Canadian judges. Beginning in December 2015, she and Justice Camp met on a number of occasions and had dozens of weekly mentoring calls. They attended together a two-day conference on the conduct of sexual

assault trials and a two-day conference on judicial ethics, both provided by the National Judicial Institute.

The report then goes on to say:

It is difficult to understand how Justice Camp could conclude – particularly after his intensive sessions with Justice McCawley, Dr. Haskell and Professor Cossman – that his acknowledgement of misconduct did not involve sexism and gender bias, and that it did not implicate profound issues of equality. His evidence leaves the Committee doubtful about whether he is fully engaged in the necessary ongoing process of constant self-reflection about which Dr. Haskell testified and which the public has a right to expect of members of the judiciary.

4:00

What I find so shocking about the appointment was that he acknowledged that there was existing law, and then he rejected it. He tried to make a case for returning to the bench by taking on training and still only talked about these views as old-fashioned. It shows that he never understood that this was sexism that was born out of an inequality of genders over the entire span of time. It speaks to the character of the appointment that he was provided those opportunities to learn and apparently didn't see them as necessary, and he actually also spoke of the fact that – in the findings of the inquiry that recommended that he be removed, he mocked the idea of consent.

That's something that we need to work on from a provincial point of view, with things like education revamp and curriculum. There are many ways that you can talk about comprehensive sexual education, and one of the most important things is verbal consent or consent at all. That's one of the things that I'm proud that our government supports.

Our provincial courts in Edmonton and Calgary are divided, based on the matters, into criminal, family and youth, and civil court, and it's important to make sure that these people that are coming into these appointments have a criminal law background. You know, for some reason previous governments did not see this as being a crucial step in the appointments.

I just want to touch on consent and something that is actually easy to remember. It's about FRIES: consent is freely given, consent is reversible, consent is informed, consent must be enthusiastic, and consent must be specific.

We have learned that Jason Kenney plans to be a part of this Legislature. It seems that he played a pivotal role in the political screening process for Justice Camp, approving this promotion, so I would want to hear further as to why he thought that Robin Camp was appropriate to be appointed to the Queen's Bench.

I am very, very happy that we finally have a government that sees things differently, that fundamentally sees things differently, and that when we appoint these people with legal backgrounds on the types of matters that come before them, they have long histories of helping survivors and serving marginalized communities. I'm proud that this government is looking at character over politics when we're looking at these appointments.

Just one other thing that I would like to point out that continues to keep me up at night is that 99 per cent of offenders in sexual assault cases are men, and 90 per cent of the victims are women. This speaks to a fundamental issue of equality when we are talking about sexual violence and how we can find better paths forward.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my comments. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to the motion. I just want to provide some very brief comments, as I assume it to be wrapping up today, around what is a very important issue. You know, we've seen some to-ing and fro-ing here in the Chamber this afternoon around the role of individuals who may or may not and who have been involved in judicial appointments. We've seen some choose to engage in much more partisan discussion.

You know, this Chamber is a place where ideas and issues are dealt with passionately, and that is a wonderful thing. Sometimes it is a little bit frustrating when I know that it was the desire of this side of the House to highlight this very important issue, to highlight some of the horrific things that have happened, not to dwell on those horrors but to highlight them so that we can move forward from the challenges that we've seen in the past.

There are occasions when members of the Chamber choose to make accusations or say things on social media about members of this side of the House, the assertions that they might be making, and expressing their disappointment that Wildrose MLAs were saying that most who've been sexually assaulted preferred victim over survivor, and nothing could be further from the truth. Now, it is possible that there are individuals on this side of the House who said "victims," and it is possible, Madam Speaker, that out of a heart of trying to help, they may not have been aware of either the word that they used or perhaps even the appropriate language to use.

I know that every single day in this Chamber and outside of the Chamber I endeavour to do better. I endeavour to learn more. I can tell you there are lots and lots and lots and lots of things that I didn't know 24 months ago, and many of those things I have learned from members of that side of the House. I believe that today I am a better person, I'm a better parliamentarian, I'm a better servant because of some of the things that I've learned from members on that side of the House. They include some of the advocacy work around PDD. They include some of the advocacy work around this very issue. They include some of the work that takes place in our LGBTQ community, things that I didn't know but because of people in this place I now have a better understanding of.

But I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that I have a lot more to learn. So it's so much better when we can help each other in this Chamber instead of making assertions about what an individual did or did not intend to do.

I think that it's a great opportunity today, on this motion, to do just that, to raise the level of awareness around such an important issue, to raise the level of awareness of the requirement for training among our lawyers and judges. Madam Speaker, some of the comments I've heard this afternoon were around lawyers that, you know, may have been trained because they received a law degree. But part of the challenge is that just because you're a lawyer doesn't mean – and you might be a very good lawyer that's appointed to become a judge, but you might be an expert in immigration or environmental law and not in the area of consent, sexual abuse, and other very, very important issues that that individual may hear as a member of the bench.

4:10

This idea of training is so critically important, this idea of ensuring that we are offering our very best to the bench, that we're offering the best to our judicial system, that is going to provide the best outcome so that the survivors of these horrific crimes can be treated in a way with the dignity and respect that they deserve so that on a go-forward basis we can ensure – and the truth of the matter is that even this measure isn't going to fully ensure that that be the case, but it's our role and responsibility to remove those

barriers so that we have the best opportunity for our judicial system to work the best.

It's staggering to think that 1 in 3 women will experience some form of sexual violence or assault in their lifetime. We need to as responsible legislators, as servants of the public, as moms and dads, and as Albertans ensure that we are doing everything possible. That includes helping one another inside this Chamber. It includes, particularly on issues such as this, that we put the needs of those survivors, that we put the needs of those who have been affected by this ahead of all of the other things that often encompass this Chamber.

I commend the government. I know that they've done some good work on this particular file. I know that they've done good work on Bill 2, which the opposition was in support of. I know that members on this side of the House spoke in the form of press releases and public commentary around the disgusting comments that have been made and highlighted this afternoon. I won't go back into those, but I think it's important that we endeavour on a lot of these very, very, very important issues to keep the main things as the main things.

I want to thank the members opposite for their support of this motion. I want to thank all members of the Chamber for providing unanimous consent. We all have a role and a responsibility, whether it's in the training of judges and lawyers in the future or whether

it's speaking out against sexual violence publicly or whether it's working to educate both men and women on the horrific nature of these events or whether it's just speaking out against those that would perpetrate these crimes or if it's in believing those who've disclosed. We all have a very important role, and I thank all members of the Assembly for supporting the motion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

I will put the question.

[Motion carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It has been a heavy afternoon. There is a heavy snowfall warning. I move that the House stand adjourned until Tuesday, April 18, at 1:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker: You're calling the time 4:30 p.m.?

Ms Hoffman: Yes. I move that the House rise.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:15 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, April 13, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 8 — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 205 — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 18, 2017

Day 22

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. As we all return from our celebration time with our families and communities, let us express our appreciation, gratitude, and respect to our fellow MLAs for the opportunity to work with them.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two groups of students from Patricia Heights elementary school. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Keri Clifford and Shane Little, and also by their chaperones, Scott Karaim, Rhonda Phibbs, Elizabeth Martin, and Ms Kendra Blumenhagen. I wish them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you 50 students from the beautiful and, I may add, diverse constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie from Meyokumin school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Megan Davis and Ms Cindy MacLeod. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?
Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise today on your behalf to recognize Stephanie Nedoshytko. Stephanie has been an integral member of the Legislative Assembly for the past five years and recently resigned to take up a new position as the president of the Students' Association of MacEwan University. Stephanie began her time here as a page, then continued on as a part-time office assistant in the Speaker's office, where I know both you and I greatly appreciated her hard work on our behalf. Today she's joined by her parents, Mary and Ihor Nedoshytko. Mary is a

junior high teacher at Holy Family Catholic school. Ihor is a retired teacher and musician who currently spends his time in various organizations as an instructor and band member. They're also very active in the Ukrainian community. We'd like to give our sincere thanks to Stephanie for your dedicated service to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. They're seated in your gallery, and I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce two compassionate professionals from Alberta Health Services advanced care planning goals of care team. April 16 was National Advance Care Planning Day, and we are encouraging all Albertans to talk about their health care goals with their families and their care providers and to write them down in a personal directive. I now ask Sharon Iversen, AHS project lead for advanced planning, and her colleague Sarah Hall to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members skin cancer survivor Violetta Ambrozuk and Chelsea Draeger, executive director of the Canadian Cancer Society. I'll be speaking to this in my coming member's statement. Joining Violetta and Chelsea is Angeline Webb, who works with the Canadian Cancer Society in health policy and promotion. The CCS is a strong voice informing Albertans about the need to avoid excessive UV exposure. I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the customary welcome of this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a remarkable Canadian, Ai Tran. Ai left Vietnam as a 20-year-old person and lived as a stateless refugee in a camp in the Philippines for 12 years. In 2000 he married his childhood friend, who lived in Canada, and came here the following year. Here he built upon an already remarkable life, graduating from McGill with honours before moving to Edmonton to become a social worker, which is how I met him and heard his story. I ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce a good friend of mine, Garnett Genuis, the Member of Parliament for Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan. Garnett and I were close family friends. His wife, Dr. Rebecca Genuis, came from Goa in India. Today Garnett is accompanied by his beautiful daughter, Gianna. His wife and younger son, Judah, couldn't be here. Garnett and I were two of those 70 losers for Wildrose in 2012, but today we both are here. Although he is the youngest parliamentarian, he spoke most of the words in the Commons, and he actually used a creative standing order to introduce me and the Member for Strathmore-Brooks in Parliament in February. I ask everyone to extend a warm welcome for him and his daughter today. Please rise.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to welcome through you and to you three guests this afternoon. Blake Radovanovic is a grade 12 student at Eastglen high school, whom I met last week at a GSA meeting at his school. He is joined today by his parents, David Leslie and Nick Stadnyk. I enjoyed meeting Blake and David last week, where we discussed the importance of GSAs for students in Alberta and the work our government is doing to ensure that all of our schools are welcome, caring, and safe. I'd ask them to please rise and for everyone to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent, Marilyn Spilchen. Marilyn is the manager of corporate support with One! International Poverty Relief, which her daughter Tania founded in 2001. One! International operates three schools in Mumbai, India, for children who would not otherwise have the opportunity to obtain an education, a cause that is very close to my own heart. The organization wants to thank the government of Alberta for helping them to make a difference by providing a yearly grant since 2012. I would ask Marilyn to stand up to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce some outstanding constituents from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. You know, there are few people in your life who you can call at 3 a.m. and know that they will answer the phone, but some of those folks are up in the gallery today. We are joined by some very, very dear friends of ours, Trevor and Kristin Whitlow, and their two children, Julia and David. If you'll please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Reynolds-Alberta Museum

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak today about the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in my Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum opened in 1992 to interpret the impact of technological change in transportation, aviation, agriculture, and industry from the 1890s to present. The museum now contains thousands of vintage artifacts and is family friendly, offering school tours and group programs.

Director Noel Ratch was here on budget day to hear about the three-year, \$39.5 million investment to develop and expand artifact acquisition, storage, restoration, and display. It was great news for local job creation, tourism, and economic stimulation, and I wanted to share some of what the museum has to offer.

For car enthusiasts this June 10 and 11 will be the ultimate car show, featuring more than 700 cars, trucks, and motorcycles spanning a century of automotive history. Imagine the thrill of driving a manual transmission classic car. This year on July 16 young drivers between the age of 15 and 25 will learn how to start, operate, and drive one

of these classics. August 19 will be a great day for motorcyclists from across Alberta as the museum hosts the Motorcycle Ride to Reynolds. Throughout the summer, for a fee, you can take a two-seater biplane open-cockpit flight, which flies over my home, so be sure to wave when you go by. Chauffeur-driven tours of the grounds in select 1920s to 1950s vintage vehicles give you the rare chance to hear and feel the motion of these venerable links to our past. More than just a viewing museum, Reynolds is world-renowned for its vehicle restoration workshops. Professional restorers offer one-, three-, and five-day courses. All of these can be found at the museum website.

I am proud of our government for its continued support in Alberta heritage. Thank you.

Conservatism

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks I have noticed that the NDP continue to up their shrill, acerbic attacks. Now the PCs and Wildrose are being lumped into one category, conservatives, almost as if that is something to be ashamed of, so I decided to use my member's statement to define what it means to me to be a conservative.

This definition comes from the founder of the Heritage Foundation, Ed Feulner. He starts:

The purpose of politics is . . . to carve out a system of justice under the rule of law . . . and freedom . . .

When governments seek utopia, they end in oppression, because man and society are infinitely complex and cannot be reshaped by any institution of experts.

He goes on to say:

Conservatives . . . understand that power is a zero-sum game. When power is assumed by government, it is lost by individuals. There must be a stopping point in every program and plan beyond which no government should be allowed to go, not merely because of budgetary concerns but because of the inevitable loss of freedom . . .

Conservatives believe in the necessity of change, yes. But not in radical change based on abstract theories and the passions of the moment.

He finishes by saying that the value of conservatism isn't their persuasive leaders, but the power of their ideas – and the applications of those ideas to the problems of the day.

There it is, Mr. Speaker, the difference between socialists and conservatives.

Conservatives are all about outcomes. As a case in point, my van is presently in the mechanic's shop. The mechanic is a very nice person, but I can tell you that if he didn't fix the vehicle or did a shoddy job, he wouldn't get my business because I need to see acceptable outcomes, not pie-in-the-sky best of intentions as we have seen over the past two years from this NDP government.

I conclude by imploring the individual MLAs opposite to look at the outcomes of the past two years as well as the outcomes of past NDP governments in other provinces and ask themselves: do we really want that kind of legacy?

Emergency Medical Services Funding

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, leadership is defined in different ways, and it's subjective to how the leadership is applied. For instance, the NHL captain on a hockey team is responsible for something entirely different than the captain of a fire hall. Another example: a CEO of a multinational company deals with different consequences of their leadership than the CEO of a local charity society. What they all have in common, though, is the accountability to the people that they lead, which brings us to the responsibility of government

to lead. What they say and what they do is intensely scrutinized because they're the government and they're in charge and, at the very least, until the next election they are directly responsible to Alberta and its citizens.

The provincial government bears an immense responsibility to Albertans, and one of the most important aspects of that responsibility is to provide the services necessary to ensure that Albertans have timely access to treatment in a medical emergency. What I find perplexing is that even with regard to the most basic responsibilities of a government, the responsibility to provide public safety and emergency care, the government is cutting corners. The government is putting emergency medical services in a no-win situation. You can't say that front-line services matter and then cut their budget by \$17 million. EMS workers are the very definition of front-line services, often being the first point of contact for Albertans in medical distress.

Mr. Speaker, I don't say this lightly, and I don't say this without understanding or experience. I have the experience, I have the understanding, and, what's more, I have the confidence and support of the EMS community on this issue. There's been a lot of discussion about bringing people of different backgrounds and different experiences into this House as representatives so that we can be more effective voices for those communities. Today I'm in this House speaking for concerned paramedics across this province. Paramedics across Alberta are asking this minister to restore the \$17 million cut to emergency medical services. In fact, they're asking the government to recognize them as a major partner in the delivery of health care in this province, not to be treated as an afterthought. Minister, they're asking you to lead in this regard. I'm asking you as a registered paramedic, me to you. Don't let us down.

Daffodil Month

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, April is Daffodil Month, the month when Canadians unite in the fight against cancer. This April the Canadian Cancer Society is marking the 60th anniversary of Daffodil Month by asking all of us to show support for persons living with cancer and to honour those who have died by wearing a daffodil pin and buying fresh daffodils. Money raised goes to cancer research, education, and advocacy, and to support compassionate programs.

Mr. Speaker, as an oncologist I'm very proud of the advances made in cancer treatment over the last 40 years. My leukemia research has been very well supported by the Canadian Cancer Society, and there are, thankfully, many Albertan survivors of all types of cancers treated by my colleagues in CancerControl Alberta. I'm also keenly aware that the majority of cancer cases could be prevented by lifestyle modification, and this is the focus of this month's efforts of the CCS.

The CCS is encouraging youth to creatively educate their peers and families about cancer prevention and to advocate for policy changes in their communities that support four topics. Topic 1: expose the deceitful and manipulative ways that big tobacco markets to youth. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be part of a government which banned flavoured tobacco as one of its first actions after the election two years ago. We also are pursuing repayment of health costs from big tobacco, just two ways we're making life better for Albertans. Topic 2: learning about the fun and the positive benefits of regular physical activity. Twenty minutes a day of aerobic exercise is the best preventative for cancer of all types. Topic 3: embracing their natural glow while avoiding excessive sun exposure or using tanning beds. Topic 4: educating their peers about choosing healthy beverages. This applies to both alcohol and to high-sugar drinks that the food industry is marketing to our youth.

Mr. Speaker, youth are being encouraged to act, and they are responding. As legislators we are opinion leaders in our communities and bear responsibility to act as well. The CCS and I ask that we all use our abilities to support this fight against cancer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

1:50

Easter

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Renewal of faith and hope. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten calendar for many Christians. Lent gives Christians the opportunity to focus on their love for one another and God's love for them. Those practising Lent sacrifice something meaningful and, instead, spend time on their relationship with God.

World-wide there are over 2 billion people that observe Easter, one of the most important dates on the Christian calendar. God's love is so great that he gave the life of his only son, Jesus Christ, so that Christians may have eternal life. Christians believe in the miracle of Christ rising from the dead three days after he was crucified, showing Christians that their faith is well placed.

There's also a secular aspect to Easter that many people celebrate and that has us looking under the couch and around the fridge for chocolate eggs and rabbits. During Easter many people come together with their families and their friends to celebrate peace and love.

It's important for us to honour the role that Christians have played and continue to play in the culture of our province. There are more than a dozen churches in Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, and I know that many constituents came together on Sunday to celebrate the day that Christ rose from the dead.

I hope that everyone here and those who are watching and listening had a peaceful Easter.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Employment and Labour Code Consultations

Mr. Jean: In less than 12 hours the clock will run out on labour review consultations. I'll forgive everyone if they thought they just started; however, here in Alberta they're just ending. Ontario consulted for two years on similar changes to labour legislation, but here at home: 36 days. Albertans got just over a month. No wonder small-business owners are seriously worried about the ramifications. When the NDP ran out of taxes to raise, they created new ones. They threatened lawsuits to break contracts, and now they're rushing through significant changes to labour legislation. Why won't the NDP simply slow down, extend the consultation period, and listen to Alberta businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 1988 singer Bobby McFerrin released the hit single *Don't Worry, Be Happy*, which is the same thing that right-wing parties have been saying to Alberta workers ever since. Can't access job-protected sick leave? Don't worry; be happy. Well, I'm not happy about it and neither are many Albertans. We are working with stakeholders to ensure we have fair, balanced, and effective workplace legislation for all. We've received over 4,600 submissions so far, and I look forward to seeing how many more we receive today.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, everybody wants a good song; we just want to take some time to write it.

While there's no doubt that a need for some fine-tuning is there, Alberta has enjoyed relative labour peace for over 30 years. This is important. Any major overhaul that catches job creators by surprise will have some major ramifications for jobs, the economy, and, ultimately, Albertans. It's important. It's clear the fix is in. Invitation-only meetings, Mr. Speaker, no public events, and a cloud of secrecy have surrounded this government and what exactly they plan to do with this legislation. If the NDP won't extend consultations to a reasonable time, will they at least tell Albertans what they plan to do and when they will see . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In a tough economy everyday Albertans deserve a government that's working to make life better. In Alberta you can lose your job if you get sick, and even though Albertans pay into employment insurance, we don't have access to some of the leave that other Canadians do. So we've reached out to Albertans about these kinds of practices and whether they need to be updated and modernized. We've received over 4,600 responses to date, including over a thousand from employers. We've held round-table discussions to discuss some of these issues, and we look forward to reviewing the results of the consultation and working to make life better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are clear. They want a government that actually listens and consults, an easy idea that would put a lot of people's minds at ease, because they are worried. We know that the Premier's own appointees, who serve as partisan big union bosses, are pushing to get rid of a worker's right to a secret ballot. That is wrong and will cause chaos throughout businesses and companies across Alberta. It will. It's a fundamental democratic right of a worker. Will the Premier take at least this off the table, or will she continue to cozy up to her big union boss friends, who right now want to take away this right from Alberta workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The issues that we're discussing with Albertans have developed over decades. The previous government had years and years to make changes, and they never lifted a finger, even after conducting their own reviews. They would prefer that Albertans have no protections and fewer rights than other Canadians. We are going to work with stakeholders to make sure we're bringing forward fair and balanced changes that will improve the Alberta economy and workplaces for all.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Interprovincial Relations

Mr. Jean: The Premier said last week that political staff are not allowed to campaign for their counterparts in the B.C. NDP. The only problem is that that memo didn't seem to make its way into the hands of the Premier's chief of staff, John Heaney. His name is currently on the advertising sponsor list with Elections BC. Heaney was chief of staff to the current B.C. NDP leader and was called an invaluable adviser. Can the Premier please reassure Albertans that

this is simply an oversight and that her chief of staff is no longer on the sponsor list for the antipipeline B.C. NDP Party? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Heaney is not involved in the B.C. election. The third-party advertising report that was posted was from the 2005 and '09 elections.

In speaking about memos, perhaps the member opposite missed the ableg hash tag where his colleague the Member for Strathmore-Brooks says: "Actually seems like an honest mistake. Genuinely pleased the Premier has put the kibosh on [NDP] staffers campaigning [in] B.C."

Mr. Jean: Alberta's relationship with neighbouring provinces has never been worse, Mr. Speaker. On the one side, the NDP holds press conferences to slam the budget of a provincial neighbour while threatening them with trade sanctions. On the other side, the Premier's chief of staff is registered as a third-party adviser in the B.C. election still. Oh, and let's not forget the bait-and-switch negotiating tactics that the NDP employed in negotiating the Canada free trade agreement. Can someone over there admit that it might be just time to start making friends and stop making enemies of our allies? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet. [interjections] Quiet.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer the question from the member for Regina-Somewhere or maybe it's Kelowna-Somewhere. On this side of the House we're standing up for Albertans. Every day we're going to make sure that we work to make Alberta lives better, and that's what we're doing, whether it's negotiations with our partners at the table for the western trade agreement, whether it's across Canada, or whether it's our Premier and her chief of staff working to make sure that we expand market access in Japan through pipeline access on the west coast. I am proud of the work that we're doing every day and the results we're getting for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: A hundred thousand Albertans on unemployment insurance, Mr. Speaker, a record.

The Premier is chalking up a long list of adversaries at the provincial level. The cracks are beginning to show. The two contending parties in the B.C. election: neither are friends to this Premier. We know her comments on the B.C. NDP. The Premier of B.C. said just last week that, and I quote, Alberta is going broke under this NDP government's watch. I couldn't agree more. This Premier has positioned our province to be the enemy of B.C. regardless of who wins that election. When will the Premier realize that her divisiveness and bad economic policies are only hurting Alberta with what should be some of our closest allies, that we should be working together with?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly proud of the work that our Premier and our government are doing to make life better for Alberta families. That's why we are behaving in a mature, responsible fashion in working with them rather than spouting off angry tweets at partners from across the country who were working to actually continue to gain market access through expanded pipelines. We're going to continue being respectful, working with our partners, and getting results for Albertans,

including the 20,000 net new jobs that we got, full-time jobs, in Alberta in just the month of March. That's good results for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The third main question.

Marijuana Legalization

Mr. Jean: In just over a year recreational marijuana use will be legal. It's a dramatic change and demands immediate action from this government and the province. There are still a lot of questions about how effective saliva and other roadside tests will be and where the new training or technology will actually come from. Police forces are anxiously waiting to see how this will be administered. What roadside tools is this government thinking about giving our men and women in uniform to ensure that they have all the tools they need to keep our roads safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, keeping roads safe and keeping marijuana out of the hands of children are the province's top priorities as we move forward. We're happy to see that those are priorities shared by our federal counterparts. We do know that they have to recognize the test under the Criminal Code in order for it to be legal. I understand that they're working very hard to have that under way. In the interim it is now and remains illegal to drive under the influence of any drug.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Last year 144 Albertans, tragically, died on the job. That number rose despite the economic slowdown. Oil, gas, and construction managers know the deadly consequences of on-the-job drug use. As such, they've developed strict drug-testing practices to keep their workers safe. However, employers are concerned that current technology can't accurately detect the level of marijuana impairment. What restrictions will the government consider on marijuana use in safety-sensitive workplaces to ensure that all workers get home safe and sound at the end of the workday?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans should have safe workplaces, and that means workplaces that are free from impairment. Workers' safety is too critical for us to sit and wait and see what the federal marijuana regulations will look like, so as a province we are working with our partners across other jurisdictions to make sure that we have a plan. That includes making sure that employers can ensure their worksites are safe, and a significant aspect of this is ensuring that workers are fit to perform their tasks. We will work with Labour departments across Canada to fashion a pan-Canadian approach to this.

Mr. Jean: This rushed timeline for marijuana legislation is creating significant challenges for Alberta's municipalities as well. The AUMA has said that it needs more time than a few hundred days to develop policy to support this major drug reform from the federal government. They're calling for more support from the provincial and federal governments, and who can blame them? It's important. What is the government doing to support all communities to ensure that they have the tools necessary to meet this rapid 2018 deadline?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member correctly points out, all levels of government will have a role to play

in this. That's why I've already taken the initial steps of meeting with leadership from the AUMA and the AAMD and C. I also touched on this at my address to the AAMD and C just recently. As we move forward, we'll continue to work together. I do know that there's a lot of heavy lifting to do on both parts, but the safety of Albertans is at stake, so we will ensure that we get there.

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

Labour Relations Code Review

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this NDP government, in its haste to amend the labour code far beyond what the Supreme Court requires, has not taken the time to properly consult with Alberta's business leaders, as it failed to do with the farming community during the Bill 6 fiasco. The prospect of removing the secret-ballot provisions in union certification drives and the opportunity to intimidate workers by forcing them to stand up and show their hand will concern many Alberta workers. To the Minister of Labour. It's a simple question that requires a straight answer. Are you planning to remove the secret-ballot provision?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, in this tough economy everyday Albertans deserve a government that's working to make life better. We have been reaching out to stakeholders to make sure that we are proposing fair, balanced, and effective workplace legislation for all. We've had over a thousand employers who've provided their feedback as well as over 4,600 Albertans. I look forward to reviewing their feedback so that we can move forward with reasonable changes that make sense for Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, a non answer sometimes speaks louder than an answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that we have had incredible labour peace in Alberta for decades and given that the minister and her comrades have chosen to bulldoze ahead with these changes far beyond the Supreme Court directive and further put the Alberta economy at risk, again to the minister: will you be clear and tell this House and all Alberta workers that you have no plans to remove the secret-ballot provision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Did you know that in 1988 the singer Bon Jovi released his hit track *Bad Medicine*? That's exactly what not being able to take a sick day looks like, bad medicine. Not being able to take a sick day for fear of losing one's job shows that we have outdated laws, and we are talking to Albertans right now about how we might fix that. We are focused on making sure we have fair and balanced workplace legislation that supports a strong Alberta economy, and Albertans have responded very well to our consultation. I look forward to reviewing those results.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the Labour minister uses examples of *Beetlejuice* and Bon Jovi from 1988, when the current labour standards were passed. She is at the same time, as she confirmed in estimates, using as a guideline the International Labour Organization's eight core principles, that go back to 1930, when the Marx Brothers' movie *Animal Crackers* was released. Minister, since time is obviously not the real reason for your rush to a

decision on the labour standards changes, what is the real reason? [interjections]

The Speaker: Whoa. Quiet.

Go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite seems proud that we still do not meet standards that were implemented in the 1930s. The former government had years, years, and years to review these workplace legislations. In fact, they did review, but they did not put in basic workplace rights like job-protected sick leave. They would prefer that Albertans have no protections, they would prefer that we have fewer rights than other Canadians, and their new dance partners in the Wildrose seem to agree. We want to make sure life is better for Albertans, including reviewing workplace legislation. [laughter]

The Speaker: Many of you are laughing – that’s a good thing – but you’re all very noisy. That’s not a good thing.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Poverty Reduction Strategy

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Party believes passionately in the importance of tackling poverty in our province, and I assume the NDP government would as well, but in the two years since the election there’s been no effort to create a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. In fact, the word “poverty” doesn’t appear in the Speech from the Throne even once, nor is it anywhere in the budget. Actions speak louder than words, but in this case we don’t have either. A simple question to the Premier: when is your government going to create a poverty reduction strategy? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet. Quiet, please.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I certainly agree that actions speak louder than words. We added \$25 million to FCSS. I guess that action speaks louder than words. We added a new child benefit and enhanced the existing child and family benefit, a \$340 million investment, so certainly our actions speak very loud for the families throughout the province. Certainly, we have Albertans’ backs, and we are working to make sure that all Albertans benefit from the prosperity that Albertans enjoy.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, my concern is with this government’s patchwork approach and lack of a plan. Many not-for-profits I’ve talked with don’t know where they stand among the hodgepodge of quickly evolving government programs. An Alberta poverty reduction strategy would allow not-for-profits to align their important work with government programs. Again to the Premier: in the absence of a strategy, can you tell us what you think the role of government is and what role not-for-profits should play in poverty reduction?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I’m happy to take this one and then go back to the minister for the final one. I want to talk about some of the work that we continue to do to make life better for Alberta families, including having reasonable, planned increases to the minimum wage for some of the lowest earners in Alberta; making sure that we’re expanding access to affordable daycare because we believe that every child deserves to have a safe

place to be while their parents are at work; making sure that hungry children, when they go to school, have a balanced, nutritious meal and that their parents don’t have to worry about whether or not they can buy that, Mr. Speaker. These are some of the concrete actions that we’re very proud to take in partnership regularly with the not-for-profit organizations in Alberta, and we continue to continue working with them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EndPovertyEdmonton says that people “experience poverty when they lack or are denied economic, social and cultural resources.” Calgary’s enough for all plan says simply, “My neighbour’s strength is my strength.” I want to end poverty. There is clear evidence that the most effective, efficient policy tool to end poverty is a guaranteed income targeted at those who genuinely need help. To the Premier: will you replace your damaging minimum wage plan with a guaranteed annual income for those who really need it?

2:10

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There were a lot of oohs in many parts of this House with that last question. I have to say that we are very proud to make sure that Albertans who work full-time, who are at a job for 40 hours a week, have the ability to pay their rent and put food on the table. This is something that we believe is important, to make sure that everyone has access to live with dignity and respect. While I appreciate that other ideas are being proposed rather than just opposition, we think that the reasonable thing to do is to make sure that we have planned increases to make sure the minimum wage can support Alberta families, and we’re proud to be the government doing that.

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

Educational Curriculum Redesign Arabic Language Educational Curricula

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government is currently taking part in the largest curriculum redevelopment in Alberta’s history and just last week spoke about the results of the fall curriculum survey, to the Minister of Education: what were some of the areas that Albertans want to see focused on in the curriculum redevelopment?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we found a number of areas where the vast majority of Albertans surveyed want a new focus on curriculum. A vast majority of participants were looking for pathways to career and other postsecondary opportunities. We also saw some very interesting commentary, that we’re following up on, in regard to financial literacy, coding, working with business groups, energy, and especially language advocates.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents of Edmonton-Decore have expressed how important Arabic language programming is, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that the curriculum redevelopment will benefit those seeking Arabic language arts programming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While some school boards do offer other languages, including Arabic language prototypes, I'm very happy to tell you that we're in development of a provincial Arab language arts curriculum here in the province of Alberta, that should be ready about one year from now. This is something that we've needed in our province for many years. We've worked very hard in conjunction with language groups, and we've seen that they are very willing and happy to help us.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance this language program will have on this vibrant community, to the same minister. We already heard the hint. When can we see and expect this programming to be in place?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to announce that we are identifying the resources here over the next 12 months, building on programs that have existed in Edmonton already, working through the translations and so forth so that we can have something in place by the fall of 2018. I want to thank the members of the Alberta Arab community for their very hard work and advocacy to help make this happen.

Carbon Levy Revenue Utilization

Mr. Fildebrandt: Normally getting the Minister of Finance to answer a question is a bit like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall, but this morning in estimates we finally got to pin the minister down on a few things. Like Muhammad Ali, he danced around questions like a butterfly but stung taxpayers like a bee. But we finally got him to admit that the carbon tax slush fund is kept off the main set of books, unlike any other expenditure in the government. This falsely makes it look like they're spending less money than they are. Why is the government misleading Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We made a commitment to fully reinvest those revenues from the climate leadership plan back into Albertans' pockets, and we clearly laid that out in our budget. We have page 61 of the fiscal plan, and it shows clearly how those climate leadership plan expenses match revenue over time and will have no net impact on our bottom line. We're going to continue to do that because that's what Albertans expect.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The NDP say "reinvest taxes" like United means "reaccommode passengers."

Given, Mr. Speaker, that just because a tax is dedicated to a specific expenditure doesn't mean it doesn't count as spending – we spend money raised from the alcohol tax, the tobacco tax, and the lottery fund, and all of these count as operational spending – and given that when asked today why spending from the carbon tax doesn't count on their books, the minister said that it's "just this one," why?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I need to remind you again. I'm very patient, very generous with the opportunities. I do want to tell you that when you're asking questions, though, you might want to listen to some of your peers as to what is a preamble and what is not.

Let us go to the answer to the question. The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is the first full year of the climate leadership revenue and expenditure.

Making year-over-year comparisons would not provide an accurate picture with regard to the changes in our operating expenses. We will do that going forward in the '18-19 year.

Mr. Fildebrandt: This minister could dance around a question like *Dancing with the Stars*.

The Speaker: That's a preamble.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that if I had a nickel for every time the minister didn't answer the question I asked him, I could balance the budget, but given – let's try again – that if a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, did it really fall? Or . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: I've got a point of order.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I'm incredibly proud of the budget we have laid before Albertans. Working to make life better for Albertans is what we have committed to do. We're doing that by ensuring that operating expenses for programs and services like health care, education, and social services remain strong. This is the first full year of the climate leadership revenue and expenditures, and going forward, we will include those in our budget fully.

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

Agency, Board, and Commission Appointments

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Institute of Corporate Directors, or ICD, is Canada's leading organization for fostering excellence in corporate governance. Graduates of ICD's director education program include high-ranking Alberta officials such as the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, and the deputy ministers of Environment and Parks and Status of Women. Now, one would think that being an ICD graduate would be a huge benefit to any board, but apparently this NDP government does not. To the Premier: can you confirm that ICD graduates are no longer being considered for appointment to the boards of Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions?

Ms Hoffman: No, I can't, Mr. Speaker, because that is not indeed a fact. But what I can confirm is that it shouldn't be a course that costs in excess of \$10,000 for you to even be considered to serve your province. So while we are very pleased to receive applications from people who do have the ICD credential, we are opening the application process to all Albertans. We're posting them publicly, and we're proud to do so.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly not what ICD graduates have been telling us.

Given that the ICD director education program is recognized world-wide as the leader in delivering competence in board governance and given that improved board governance is surely something that the NDP wants to see in all of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions and given that many ICD graduates have been told that they should either not apply for board reappointment or not disclose that they are ICD graduates in their application to government boards, to the Premier. Cabinet makes dozens of appointments. How many ICD graduates have you appointed to Alberta's boards, agencies, and commissions?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly happy to receive applications from all Albertans. One of the things that we reviewed in the past was that sometimes having an ICD credential was listed explicitly to ensure that other Albertans who didn't have \$10,000 that they could afford to put into that course wouldn't even be eligible to put their names forward. While we're very happy to receive applications from people who do have ICD credentials, they're not the only people who are welcome to serve Albertans, to be part of our agencies, boards, and commissions. We encourage all Albertans to please look at the website. There are many postings available right now, and we want them to put their names forward.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, given that this NDP government has made it clear that it wants wholesale changes in the governance boards of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions and given that many current board members are being told not to reapply but are not being told why and given that board vacancies are being filled using methods that are certainly far removed from the universally accepted practice of analyzing gaps in competency matrices, to the Premier: which affiliation is best for Albertans applying to the BODs of the ABCs, ICD or NDP?

2:20

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the fun question coming from the former member of the most secretive government in Canada. Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the fact that we have an open and transparent process. All of the applications are posted on our website. We are happy to receive applications from all experienced applicants, including people who've been involved in any party represented in this House or otherwise. We want Albertans to step forward, be part of the process, be part of making life better for all Albertans, and we are happy to welcome all applicants to the process of serving their government.

The Speaker: Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health Quality Council of Alberta

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we learned that the Health Quality Council of Alberta has received very few requests from this NDP government. The state of our health care in Alberta is inconsistent. We see significantly higher rates of C. difficile contamination in Edmonton hospitals. Hip surgeries are 19 weeks slower in Red Deer than in Edmonton, and as an urgent patient you wait over an hour longer to see an ER doctor in St. Albert than you will in Medicine Hat. To the Minister of Health: why doesn't your government ask the HQCA to investigate these discrepancies and identify solutions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We're very proud to have the Health Quality Council of Alberta and to put them to work in a number of very key areas of focus. For example, in the past few years HQCA has done work to support us in a co-ordinated fashion with the implementation of medical assistance in dying, a huge public policy initiative that we're very proud to have their support on; worked to review lab services, that play a key part in the development of our overall provincial framework; developed the website FOCUS, which has updates on emergency departments. We are proud to have them working in partnership with us, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, we've also learned that the Health Quality Council has decided to eliminate a patient satisfaction survey. Given that within AHS there are major departments called community engagement and communications, another one called community engagement, operational best practices, quality and patient safety, and so on, and so on, again to the Minister of Health: was this survey removed due to all the unnecessary overlap between AHS, Alberta Health, and the Health Quality Council, or is the state of our health care system so bad that you had to do away with this independent quality measure?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. I'm having a little déjà vu to estimates because I believe the member at estimates was asking me to cut a number of initiatives that were taking place in other areas because he thought they were redundant. Mr. Speaker, this isn't a proposal that we brought forward. The Health Quality Council thought that they had ample information in this area, and they were happy to work with partners to continue to update that information. But we look at their expertise, and on occasion we do call them to do specific work for us in areas of research, including the support we had on medical assistance in dying.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, in this most recent budget this NDP government increased the budget for the Health Quality Council. Interestingly enough, the Health Quality Council stated that they have current capacity to do more and they've had fewer requests for its services from Alberta Health Services and this NDP government. To the Minister of Health. Can you please clarify: despite giving them fewer requests and the Health Quality Council indicating that they can do so much more and multiple departments within AHS and Alberta Health providing similar roles, why did you increase their budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's my understanding that they requested two additional staff to support them in meeting some of the timelines that they were struggling with. One of the reasons why we are making sure that we have this is to make sure that we have open, upfront work done. For example, they're continuing to do work on continuity of patient care, surveys of families in long-term care on their experience, and gathering physician participation, that was brought alongside to help expand the physician panel work on the provincial scale. We're proud of the work that they're doing, and we're continuing to work in partnership to make sure that Alberta's health care system is the best it possibly can be instead of deep . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Employment and Labour Code Consultations (continued)

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again this NDP government has found itself in trouble for not consulting before it bulldozes ahead with ideological legislation. Today Alberta's opposition parties stood on stage with Alberta's business community and called on the government to extend its consultation process on upcoming labour legislation changes, citing a severe lack of engagement. This government has committed in the past to raising the bar for transparency and engagement. Will the minister

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. As we all return from our celebration time with our families and communities, let us express our appreciation, gratitude, and respect to our fellow MLAs for the opportunity to work with them.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two groups of students from Patricia Heights elementary school. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Keri Clifford and Shane Little, and also by their chaperones, Scott Karaim, Rhonda Phibbs, Elizabeth Martin, and Ms Kendra Blumenhagen. I wish them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you 50 students from the beautiful and, I may add, diverse constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie from Meyokumin school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Megan Davis and Ms Cindy MacLeod. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?
Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise today on your behalf to recognize Stephanie Nedoshytko. Stephanie has been an integral member of the Legislative Assembly for the past five years and recently resigned to take up a new position as the president of the Students' Association of MacEwan University. Stephanie began her time here as a page, then continued on as a part-time office assistant in the Speaker's office, where I know both you and I greatly appreciated her hard work on our behalf. Today she's joined by her parents, Mary and Ihor Nedoshytko. Mary is a

junior high teacher at Holy Family Catholic school. Ihor is a retired teacher and musician who currently spends his time in various organizations as an instructor and band member. They're also very active in the Ukrainian community. We'd like to give our sincere thanks to Stephanie for your dedicated service to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. They're seated in your gallery, and I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce two compassionate professionals from Alberta Health Services advanced care planning goals of care team. April 16 was National Advance Care Planning Day, and we are encouraging all Albertans to talk about their health care goals with their families and their care providers and to write them down in a personal directive. I now ask Sharon Iversen, AHS project lead for advanced planning, and her colleague Sarah Hall to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members skin cancer survivor Violetta Ambrozuk and Chelsea Draeger, executive director of the Canadian Cancer Society. I'll be speaking to this in my coming member's statement. Joining Violetta and Chelsea is Angeline Webb, who works with the Canadian Cancer Society in health policy and promotion. The CCS is a strong voice informing Albertans about the need to avoid excessive UV exposure. I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the customary welcome of this Chamber.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a remarkable Canadian, Ai Tran. Ai left Vietnam as a 20-year-old person and lived as a stateless refugee in a camp in the Philippines for 12 years. In 2000 he married his childhood friend, who lived in Canada, and came here the following year. Here he built upon an already remarkable life, graduating from McGill with honours before moving to Edmonton to become a social worker, which is how I met him and heard his story. I ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce a good friend of mine, Garnett Genuis, the Member of Parliament for Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan. Garnett and I were close family friends. His wife, Dr. Rebecca Genuis, came from Goa in India. Today Garnett is accompanied by his beautiful daughter, Gianna. His wife and younger son, Judah, couldn't be here. Garnett and I were two of those 70 losers for Wildrose in 2012, but today we both are here. Although he is the youngest parliamentarian, he spoke most of the words in the Commons, and he actually used a creative standing order to introduce me and the Member for Strathmore-Brooks in Parliament in February. I ask everyone to extend a warm welcome for him and his daughter today. Please rise.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to welcome through you and to you three guests this afternoon. Blake Radovanovic is a grade 12 student at Eastglen high school, whom I met last week at a GSA meeting at his school. He is joined today by his parents, David Leslie and Nick Stadnyk. I enjoyed meeting Blake and David last week, where we discussed the importance of GSAs for students in Alberta and the work our government is doing to ensure that all of our schools are welcome, caring, and safe. I'd ask them to please rise and for everyone to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent, Marilyn Spilchen. Marilyn is the manager of corporate support with One! International Poverty Relief, which her daughter Tania founded in 2001. One! International operates three schools in Mumbai, India, for children who would not otherwise have the opportunity to obtain an education, a cause that is very close to my own heart. The organization wants to thank the government of Alberta for helping them to make a difference by providing a yearly grant since 2012. I would ask Marilyn to stand up to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce some outstanding constituents from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. You know, there are few people in your life who you can call at 3 a.m. and know that they will answer the phone, but some of those folks are up in the gallery today. We are joined by some very, very dear friends of ours, Trevor and Kristin Whitlow, and their two children, Julia and David. If you'll please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Reynolds-Alberta Museum

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak today about the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in my Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum opened in 1992 to interpret the impact of technological change in transportation, aviation, agriculture, and industry from the 1890s to present. The museum now contains thousands of vintage artifacts and is family friendly, offering school tours and group programs.

Director Noel Ratch was here on budget day to hear about the three-year, \$39.5 million investment to develop and expand artifact acquisition, storage, restoration, and display. It was great news for local job creation, tourism, and economic stimulation, and I wanted to share some of what the museum has to offer.

For car enthusiasts this June 10 and 11 will be the ultimate car show, featuring more than 700 cars, trucks, and motorcycles spanning a century of automotive history. Imagine the thrill of driving a manual transmission classic car. This year on July 16 young drivers between the age of 15 and 25 will learn how to start, operate, and drive one

of these classics. August 19 will be a great day for motorcyclists from across Alberta as the museum hosts the Motorcycle Ride to Reynolds. Throughout the summer, for a fee, you can take a two-seater biplane open-cockpit flight, which flies over my home, so be sure to wave when you go by. Chauffeur-driven tours of the grounds in select 1920s to 1950s vintage vehicles give you the rare chance to hear and feel the motion of these venerable links to our past. More than just a viewing museum, Reynolds is world-renowned for its vehicle restoration workshops. Professional restorers offer one-, three-, and five-day courses. All of these can be found at the museum website.

I am proud of our government for its continued support in Alberta heritage. Thank you.

Conservatism

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks I have noticed that the NDP continue to up their shrill, acerbic attacks. Now the PCs and Wildrose are being lumped into one category, conservatives, almost as if that is something to be ashamed of, so I decided to use my member's statement to define what it means to me to be a conservative.

This definition comes from the founder of the Heritage Foundation, Ed Feulner. He starts:

The purpose of politics is . . . to carve out a system of justice under the rule of law . . . and freedom . . .

When governments seek utopia, they end in oppression, because man and society are infinitely complex and cannot be reshaped by any institution of experts.

He goes on to say:

Conservatives . . . understand that power is a zero-sum game. When power is assumed by government, it is lost by individuals. There must be a stopping point in every program and plan beyond which no government should be allowed to go, not merely because of budgetary concerns but because of the inevitable loss of freedom . . .

Conservatives believe in the necessity of change, yes. But not in radical change based on abstract theories and the passions of the moment.

He finishes by saying that the value of conservatism isn't their persuasive leaders, but the power of their ideas – and the applications of those ideas to the problems of the day.

There it is, Mr. Speaker, the difference between socialists and conservatives.

Conservatives are all about outcomes. As a case in point, my van is presently in the mechanic's shop. The mechanic is a very nice person, but I can tell you that if he didn't fix the vehicle or did a shoddy job, he wouldn't get my business because I need to see acceptable outcomes, not pie-in-the-sky best of intentions as we have seen over the past two years from this NDP government.

I conclude by imploring the individual MLAs opposite to look at the outcomes of the past two years as well as the outcomes of past NDP governments in other provinces and ask themselves: do we really want that kind of legacy?

Emergency Medical Services Funding

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, leadership is defined in different ways, and it's subjective to how the leadership is applied. For instance, the NHL captain on a hockey team is responsible for something entirely different than the captain of a fire hall. Another example: a CEO of a multinational company deals with different consequences of their leadership than the CEO of a local charity society. What they all have in common, though, is the accountability to the people that they lead, which brings us to the responsibility of government

to lead. What they say and what they do is intensely scrutinized because they're the government and they're in charge and, at the very least, until the next election they are directly responsible to Alberta and its citizens.

The provincial government bears an immense responsibility to Albertans, and one of the most important aspects of that responsibility is to provide the services necessary to ensure that Albertans have timely access to treatment in a medical emergency. What I find perplexing is that even with regard to the most basic responsibilities of a government, the responsibility to provide public safety and emergency care, the government is cutting corners. The government is putting emergency medical services in a no-win situation. You can't say that front-line services matter and then cut their budget by \$17 million. EMS workers are the very definition of front-line services, often being the first point of contact for Albertans in medical distress.

Mr. Speaker, I don't say this lightly, and I don't say this without understanding or experience. I have the experience, I have the understanding, and, what's more, I have the confidence and support of the EMS community on this issue. There's been a lot of discussion about bringing people of different backgrounds and different experiences into this House as representatives so that we can be more effective voices for those communities. Today I'm in this House speaking for concerned paramedics across this province. Paramedics across Alberta are asking this minister to restore the \$17 million cut to emergency medical services. In fact, they're asking the government to recognize them as a major partner in the delivery of health care in this province, not to be treated as an afterthought. Minister, they're asking you to lead in this regard. I'm asking you as a registered paramedic, me to you. Don't let us down.

Daffodil Month

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, April is Daffodil Month, the month when Canadians unite in the fight against cancer. This April the Canadian Cancer Society is marking the 60th anniversary of Daffodil Month by asking all of us to show support for persons living with cancer and to honour those who have died by wearing a daffodil pin and buying fresh daffodils. Money raised goes to cancer research, education, and advocacy, and to support compassionate programs.

Mr. Speaker, as an oncologist I'm very proud of the advances made in cancer treatment over the last 40 years. My leukemia research has been very well supported by the Canadian Cancer Society, and there are, thankfully, many Albertan survivors of all types of cancers treated by my colleagues in CancerControl Alberta. I'm also keenly aware that the majority of cancer cases could be prevented by lifestyle modification, and this is the focus of this month's efforts of the CCS.

The CCS is encouraging youth to creatively educate their peers and families about cancer prevention and to advocate for policy changes in their communities that support four topics. Topic 1: expose the deceitful and manipulative ways that big tobacco markets to youth. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be part of a government which banned flavoured tobacco as one of its first actions after the election two years ago. We also are pursuing repayment of health costs from big tobacco, just two ways we're making life better for Albertans. Topic 2: learning about the fun and the positive benefits of regular physical activity. Twenty minutes a day of aerobic exercise is the best preventative for cancer of all types. Topic 3: embracing their natural glow while avoiding excessive sun exposure or using tanning beds. Topic 4: educating their peers about choosing healthy beverages. This applies to both alcohol and to high-sugar drinks that the food industry is marketing to our youth.

Mr. Speaker, youth are being encouraged to act, and they are responding. As legislators we are opinion leaders in our communities and bear responsibility to act as well. The CCS and I ask that we all use our abilities to support this fight against cancer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

1:50

Easter

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Renewal of faith and hope. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten calendar for many Christians. Lent gives Christians the opportunity to focus on their love for one another and God's love for them. Those practising Lent sacrifice something meaningful and, instead, spend time on their relationship with God.

World-wide there are over 2 billion people that observe Easter, one of the most important dates on the Christian calendar. God's love is so great that he gave the life of his only son, Jesus Christ, so that Christians may have eternal life. Christians believe in the miracle of Christ rising from the dead three days after he was crucified, showing Christians that their faith is well placed.

There's also a secular aspect to Easter that many people celebrate and that has us looking under the couch and around the fridge for chocolate eggs and rabbits. During Easter many people come together with their families and their friends to celebrate peace and love.

It's important for us to honour the role that Christians have played and continue to play in the culture of our province. There are more than a dozen churches in Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, and I know that many constituents came together on Sunday to celebrate the day that Christ rose from the dead.

I hope that everyone here and those who are watching and listening had a peaceful Easter.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Employment and Labour Code Consultations

Mr. Jean: In less than 12 hours the clock will run out on labour review consultations. I'll forgive everyone if they thought they just started; however, here in Alberta they're just ending. Ontario consulted for two years on similar changes to labour legislation, but here at home: 36 days. Albertans got just over a month. No wonder small-business owners are seriously worried about the ramifications. When the NDP ran out of taxes to raise, they created new ones. They threatened lawsuits to break contracts, and now they're rushing through significant changes to labour legislation. Why won't the NDP simply slow down, extend the consultation period, and listen to Alberta businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 1988 singer Bobby McFerrin released the hit single *Don't Worry, Be Happy*, which is the same thing that right-wing parties have been saying to Alberta workers ever since. Can't access job-protected sick leave? Don't worry; be happy. Well, I'm not happy about it and neither are many Albertans. We are working with stakeholders to ensure we have fair, balanced, and effective workplace legislation for all. We've received over 4,600 submissions so far, and I look forward to seeing how many more we receive today.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, everybody wants a good song; we just want to take some time to write it.

While there's no doubt that a need for some fine-tuning is there, Alberta has enjoyed relative labour peace for over 30 years. This is important. Any major overhaul that catches job creators by surprise will have some major ramifications for jobs, the economy, and, ultimately, Albertans. It's important. It's clear the fix is in. Invitation-only meetings, Mr. Speaker, no public events, and a cloud of secrecy have surrounded this government and what exactly they plan to do with this legislation. If the NDP won't extend consultations to a reasonable time, will they at least tell Albertans what they plan to do and when they will see . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In a tough economy everyday Albertans deserve a government that's working to make life better. In Alberta you can lose your job if you get sick, and even though Albertans pay into employment insurance, we don't have access to some of the leave that other Canadians do. So we've reached out to Albertans about these kinds of practices and whether they need to be updated and modernized. We've received over 4,600 responses to date, including over a thousand from employers. We've held round-table discussions to discuss some of these issues, and we look forward to reviewing the results of the consultation and working to make life better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are clear. They want a government that actually listens and consults, an easy idea that would put a lot of people's minds at ease, because they are worried. We know that the Premier's own appointees, who serve as partisan big union bosses, are pushing to get rid of a worker's right to a secret ballot. That is wrong and will cause chaos throughout businesses and companies across Alberta. It will. It's a fundamental democratic right of a worker. Will the Premier take at least this off the table, or will she continue to cozy up to her big union boss friends, who right now want to take away this right from Alberta workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The issues that we're discussing with Albertans have developed over decades. The previous government had years and years to make changes, and they never lifted a finger, even after conducting their own reviews. They would prefer that Albertans have no protections and fewer rights than other Canadians. We are going to work with stakeholders to make sure we're bringing forward fair and balanced changes that will improve the Alberta economy and workplaces for all.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Interprovincial Relations

Mr. Jean: The Premier said last week that political staff are not allowed to campaign for their counterparts in the B.C. NDP. The only problem is that that memo didn't seem to make its way into the hands of the Premier's chief of staff, John Heaney. His name is currently on the advertising sponsor list with Elections BC. Heaney was chief of staff to the current B.C. NDP leader and was called an invaluable adviser. Can the Premier please reassure Albertans that

this is simply an oversight and that her chief of staff is no longer on the sponsor list for the antipipeline B.C. NDP Party? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Heaney is not involved in the B.C. election. The third-party advertising report that was posted was from the 2005 and '09 elections.

In speaking about memos, perhaps the member opposite missed the ableg hash tag where his colleague the Member for Strathmore-Brooks says: "Actually seems like an honest mistake. Genuinely pleased the Premier has put the kibosh on [NDP] staffers campaigning [in] B.C."

Mr. Jean: Alberta's relationship with neighbouring provinces has never been worse, Mr. Speaker. On the one side, the NDP holds press conferences to slam the budget of a provincial neighbour while threatening them with trade sanctions. On the other side, the Premier's chief of staff is registered as a third-party adviser in the B.C. election still. Oh, and let's not forget the bait-and-switch negotiating tactics that the NDP employed in negotiating the Canada free trade agreement. Can someone over there admit that it might be just time to start making friends and stop making enemies of our allies? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet. [interjections] Quiet.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer the question from the member for Regina-Somewhere or maybe it's Kelowna-Somewhere. On this side of the House we're standing up for Albertans. Every day we're going to make sure that we work to make Alberta lives better, and that's what we're doing, whether it's negotiations with our partners at the table for the western trade agreement, whether it's across Canada, or whether it's our Premier and her chief of staff working to make sure that we expand market access in Japan through pipeline access on the west coast. I am proud of the work that we're doing every day and the results we're getting for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: A hundred thousand Albertans on unemployment insurance, Mr. Speaker, a record.

The Premier is chalking up a long list of adversaries at the provincial level. The cracks are beginning to show. The two contending parties in the B.C. election: neither are friends to this Premier. We know her comments on the B.C. NDP. The Premier of B.C. said just last week that, and I quote, Alberta is going broke under this NDP government's watch. I couldn't agree more. This Premier has positioned our province to be the enemy of B.C. regardless of who wins that election. When will the Premier realize that her divisiveness and bad economic policies are only hurting Alberta with what should be some of our closest allies, that we should be working together with?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly proud of the work that our Premier and our government are doing to make life better for Alberta families. That's why we are behaving in a mature, responsible fashion in working with them rather than spouting off angry tweets at partners from across the country who were working to actually continue to gain market access through expanded pipelines. We're going to continue being respectful, working with our partners, and getting results for Albertans,

including the 20,000 net new jobs that we got, full-time jobs, in Alberta in just the month of March. That's good results for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The third main question.

Marijuana Legalization

Mr. Jean: In just over a year recreational marijuana use will be legal. It's a dramatic change and demands immediate action from this government and the province. There are still a lot of questions about how effective saliva and other roadside tests will be and where the new training or technology will actually come from. Police forces are anxiously waiting to see how this will be administered. What roadside tools is this government thinking about giving our men and women in uniform to ensure that they have all the tools they need to keep our roads safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, keeping roads safe and keeping marijuana out of the hands of children are the province's top priorities as we move forward. We're happy to see that those are priorities shared by our federal counterparts. We do know that they have to recognize the test under the Criminal Code in order for it to be legal. I understand that they're working very hard to have that under way. In the interim it is now and remains illegal to drive under the influence of any drug.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Last year 144 Albertans, tragically, died on the job. That number rose despite the economic slowdown. Oil, gas, and construction managers know the deadly consequences of on-the-job drug use. As such, they've developed strict drug-testing practices to keep their workers safe. However, employers are concerned that current technology can't accurately detect the level of marijuana impairment. What restrictions will the government consider on marijuana use in safety-sensitive workplaces to ensure that all workers get home safe and sound at the end of the workday?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans should have safe workplaces, and that means workplaces that are free from impairment. Workers' safety is too critical for us to sit and wait and see what the federal marijuana regulations will look like, so as a province we are working with our partners across other jurisdictions to make sure that we have a plan. That includes making sure that employers can ensure their worksites are safe, and a significant aspect of this is ensuring that workers are fit to perform their tasks. We will work with Labour departments across Canada to fashion a pan-Canadian approach to this.

Mr. Jean: This rushed timeline for marijuana legislation is creating significant challenges for Alberta's municipalities as well. The AUMA has said that it needs more time than a few hundred days to develop policy to support this major drug reform from the federal government. They're calling for more support from the provincial and federal governments, and who can blame them? It's important. What is the government doing to support all communities to ensure that they have the tools necessary to meet this rapid 2018 deadline?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member correctly points out, all levels of government will have a role to play

in this. That's why I've already taken the initial steps of meeting with leadership from the AUMA and the AAMD and C. I also touched on this at my address to the AAMD and C just recently. As we move forward, we'll continue to work together. I do know that there's a lot of heavy lifting to do on both parts, but the safety of Albertans is at stake, so we will ensure that we get there.

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

Labour Relations Code Review

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this NDP government, in its haste to amend the labour code far beyond what the Supreme Court requires, has not taken the time to properly consult with Alberta's business leaders, as it failed to do with the farming community during the Bill 6 fiasco. The prospect of removing the secret-ballot provisions in union certification drives and the opportunity to intimidate workers by forcing them to stand up and show their hand will concern many Alberta workers. To the Minister of Labour. It's a simple question that requires a straight answer. Are you planning to remove the secret-ballot provision?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, in this tough economy everyday Albertans deserve a government that's working to make life better. We have been reaching out to stakeholders to make sure that we are proposing fair, balanced, and effective workplace legislation for all. We've had over a thousand employers who've provided their feedback as well as over 4,600 Albertans. I look forward to reviewing their feedback so that we can move forward with reasonable changes that make sense for Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, a non answer sometimes speaks louder than an answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that we have had incredible labour peace in Alberta for decades and given that the minister and her comrades have chosen to bulldoze ahead with these changes far beyond the Supreme Court directive and further put the Alberta economy at risk, again to the minister: will you be clear and tell this House and all Alberta workers that you have no plans to remove the secret-ballot provision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Did you know that in 1988 the singer Bon Jovi released his hit track *Bad Medicine*? That's exactly what not being able to take a sick day looks like, bad medicine. Not being able to take a sick day for fear of losing one's job shows that we have outdated laws, and we are talking to Albertans right now about how we might fix that. We are focused on making sure we have fair and balanced workplace legislation that supports a strong Alberta economy, and Albertans have responded very well to our consultation. I look forward to reviewing those results.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the Labour minister uses examples of *Beetlejuice* and Bon Jovi from 1988, when the current labour standards were passed. She is at the same time, as she confirmed in estimates, using as a guideline the International Labour Organization's eight core principles, that go back to 1930, when the Marx Brothers' movie *Animal Crackers* was released. Minister, since time is obviously not the real reason for your rush to a

decision on the labour standards changes, what is the real reason? [interjections]

The Speaker: Whoa. Quiet.
Go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite seems proud that we still do not meet standards that were implemented in the 1930s. The former government had years, years, and years to review these workplace legislations. In fact, they did review, but they did not put in basic workplace rights like job-protected sick leave. They would prefer that Albertans have no protections, they would prefer that we have fewer rights than other Canadians, and their new dance partners in the Wildrose seem to agree. We want to make sure life is better for Albertans, including reviewing workplace legislation. [laughter]

The Speaker: Many of you are laughing – that’s a good thing – but you’re all very noisy. That’s not a good thing.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Poverty Reduction Strategy

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Party believes passionately in the importance of tackling poverty in our province, and I assume the NDP government would as well, but in the two years since the election there’s been no effort to create a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. In fact, the word “poverty” doesn’t appear in the Speech from the Throne even once, nor is it anywhere in the budget. Actions speak louder than words, but in this case we don’t have either. A simple question to the Premier: when is your government going to create a poverty reduction strategy? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet. Quiet, please.
The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I certainly agree that actions speak louder than words. We added \$25 million to FCSS. I guess that action speaks louder than words. We added a new child benefit and enhanced the existing child and family benefit, a \$340 million investment, so certainly our actions speak very loud for the families throughout the province. Certainly, we have Albertans’ backs, and we are working to make sure that all Albertans benefit from the prosperity that Albertans enjoy.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, my concern is with this government’s patchwork approach and lack of a plan. Many not-for-profits I’ve talked with don’t know where they stand among the hodgepodge of quickly evolving government programs. An Alberta poverty reduction strategy would allow not-for-profits to align their important work with government programs. Again to the Premier: in the absence of a strategy, can you tell us what you think the role of government is and what role not-for-profits should play in poverty reduction?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I’m happy to take this one and then go back to the minister for the final one. I want to talk about some of the work that we continue to do to make life better for Alberta families, including having reasonable, planned increases to the minimum wage for some of the lowest earners in Alberta; making sure that we’re expanding access to affordable daycare because we believe that every child deserves to have a safe

place to be while their parents are at work; making sure that hungry children, when they go to school, have a balanced, nutritious meal and that their parents don’t have to worry about whether or not they can buy that, Mr. Speaker. These are some of the concrete actions that we’re very proud to take in partnership regularly with the not-for-profit organizations in Alberta, and we continue to continue working with them.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EndPovertyEdmonton says that people “experience poverty when they lack or are denied economic, social and cultural resources.” Calgary’s enough for all plan says simply, “My neighbour’s strength is my strength.” I want to end poverty. There is clear evidence that the most effective, efficient policy tool to end poverty is a guaranteed income targeted at those who genuinely need help. To the Premier: will you replace your damaging minimum wage plan with a guaranteed annual income for those who really need it?

2:10

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There were a lot of oohs in many parts of this House with that last question. I have to say that we are very proud to make sure that Albertans who work full-time, who are at a job for 40 hours a week, have the ability to pay their rent and put food on the table. This is something that we believe is important, to make sure that everyone has access to live with dignity and respect. While I appreciate that other ideas are being proposed rather than just opposition, we think that the reasonable thing to do is to make sure that we have planned increases to make sure the minimum wage can support Alberta families, and we’re proud to be the government doing that.

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

Educational Curriculum Redesign Arabic Language Educational Curricula

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government is currently taking part in the largest curriculum redevelopment in Alberta’s history and just last week spoke about the results of the fall curriculum survey, to the Minister of Education: what were some of the areas that Albertans want to see focused on in the curriculum redevelopment?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we found a number of areas where the vast majority of Albertans surveyed want a new focus on curriculum. A vast majority of participants were looking for pathways to career and other postsecondary opportunities. We also saw some very interesting commentary, that we’re following up on, in regard to financial literacy, coding, working with business groups, energy, and especially language advocates.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents of Edmonton-Decore have expressed how important Arabic language programming is, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that the curriculum redevelopment will benefit those seeking Arabic language arts programming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While some school boards do offer other languages, including Arabic language prototypes, I'm very happy to tell you that we're in development of a provincial Arab language arts curriculum here in the province of Alberta, that should be ready about one year from now. This is something that we've needed in our province for many years. We've worked very hard in conjunction with language groups, and we've seen that they are very willing and happy to help us.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance this language program will have on this vibrant community, to the same minister. We already heard the hint. When can we see and expect this programming to be in place?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to announce that we are identifying the resources here over the next 12 months, building on programs that have existed in Edmonton already, working through the translations and so forth so that we can have something in place by the fall of 2018. I want to thank the members of the Alberta Arab community for their very hard work and advocacy to help make this happen.

Carbon Levy Revenue Utilization

Mr. Fildebrandt: Normally getting the Minister of Finance to answer a question is a bit like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall, but this morning in estimates we finally got to pin the minister down on a few things. Like Muhammad Ali, he danced around questions like a butterfly but stung taxpayers like a bee. But we finally got him to admit that the carbon tax slush fund is kept off the main set of books, unlike any other expenditure in the government. This falsely makes it look like they're spending less money than they are. Why is the government misleading Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We made a commitment to fully reinvest those revenues from the climate leadership plan back into Albertans' pockets, and we clearly laid that out in our budget. We have page 61 of the fiscal plan, and it shows clearly how those climate leadership plan expenses match revenue over time and will have no net impact on our bottom line. We're going to continue to do that because that's what Albertans expect.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The NDP say "reinvest taxes" like United means "reaccommode passengers."

Given, Mr. Speaker, that just because a tax is dedicated to a specific expenditure doesn't mean it doesn't count as spending – we spend money raised from the alcohol tax, the tobacco tax, and the lottery fund, and all of these count as operational spending – and given that when asked today why spending from the carbon tax doesn't count on their books, the minister said that it's "just this one," why?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I need to remind you again. I'm very patient, very generous with the opportunities. I do want to tell you that when you're asking questions, though, you might want to listen to some of your peers as to what is a preamble and what is not.

Let us go to the answer to the question. The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is the first full year of the climate leadership revenue and expenditure.

Making year-over-year comparisons would not provide an accurate picture with regard to the changes in our operating expenses. We will do that going forward in the '18-19 year.

Mr. Fildebrandt: This minister could dance around a question like *Dancing with the Stars*.

The Speaker: That's a preamble.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that if I had a nickel for every time the minister didn't answer the question I asked him, I could balance the budget, but given – let's try again – that if a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, did it really fall? Or . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: I've got a point of order.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I'm incredibly proud of the budget we have laid before Albertans. Working to make life better for Albertans is what we have committed to do. We're doing that by ensuring that operating expenses for programs and services like health care, education, and social services remain strong. This is the first full year of the climate leadership revenue and expenditures, and going forward, we will include those in our budget fully.

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

Agency, Board, and Commission Appointments

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Institute of Corporate Directors, or ICD, is Canada's leading organization for fostering excellence in corporate governance. Graduates of ICD's director education program include high-ranking Alberta officials such as the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, and the deputy ministers of Environment and Parks and Status of Women. Now, one would think that being an ICD graduate would be a huge benefit to any board, but apparently this NDP government does not. To the Premier: can you confirm that ICD graduates are no longer being considered for appointment to the boards of Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions?

Ms Hoffman: No, I can't, Mr. Speaker, because that is not indeed a fact. But what I can confirm is that it shouldn't be a course that costs in excess of \$10,000 for you to even be considered to serve your province. So while we are very pleased to receive applications from people who do have the ICD credential, we are opening the application process to all Albertans. We're posting them publicly, and we're proud to do so.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly not what ICD graduates have been telling us.

Given that the ICD director education program is recognized world-wide as the leader in delivering competence in board governance and given that improved board governance is surely something that the NDP wants to see in all of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions and given that many ICD graduates have been told that they should either not apply for board reappointment or not disclose that they are ICD graduates in their application to government boards, to the Premier. Cabinet makes dozens of appointments. How many ICD graduates have you appointed to Alberta's boards, agencies, and commissions?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly happy to receive applications from all Albertans. One of the things that we reviewed in the past was that sometimes having an ICD credential was listed explicitly to ensure that other Albertans who didn't have \$10,000 that they could afford to put into that course wouldn't even be eligible to put their names forward. While we're very happy to receive applications from people who do have ICD credentials, they're not the only people who are welcome to serve Albertans, to be part of our agencies, boards, and commissions. We encourage all Albertans to please look at the website. There are many postings available right now, and we want them to put their names forward.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, given that this NDP government has made it clear that it wants wholesale changes in the governance boards of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions and given that many current board members are being told not to reapply but are not being told why and given that board vacancies are being filled using methods that are certainly far removed from the universally accepted practice of analyzing gaps in competency matrices, to the Premier: which affiliation is best for Albertans applying to the BODs of the ABCs, ICD or NDP?

2:20

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the fun question coming from the former member of the most secretive government in Canada. Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the fact that we have an open and transparent process. All of the applications are posted on our website. We are happy to receive applications from all experienced applicants, including people who've been involved in any party represented in this House or otherwise. We want Albertans to step forward, be part of the process, be part of making life better for all Albertans, and we are happy to welcome all applicants to the process of serving their government.

The Speaker: Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health Quality Council of Alberta

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we learned that the Health Quality Council of Alberta has received very few requests from this NDP government. The state of our health care in Alberta is inconsistent. We see significantly higher rates of C. difficile contamination in Edmonton hospitals. Hip surgeries are 19 weeks slower in Red Deer than in Edmonton, and as an urgent patient you wait over an hour longer to see an ER doctor in St. Albert than you will in Medicine Hat. To the Minister of Health: why doesn't your government ask the HQCA to investigate these discrepancies and identify solutions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We're very proud to have the Health Quality Council of Alberta and to put them to work in a number of very key areas of focus. For example, in the past few years HQCA has done work to support us in a co-ordinated fashion with the implementation of medical assistance in dying, a huge public policy initiative that we're very proud to have their support on; worked to review lab services, that play a key part in the development of our overall provincial framework; developed the website FOCUS, which has updates on emergency departments. We are proud to have them working in partnership with us, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, we've also learned that the Health Quality Council has decided to eliminate a patient satisfaction survey. Given that within AHS there are major departments called community engagement and communications, another one called community engagement, operational best practices, quality and patient safety, and so on, and so on, again to the Minister of Health: was this survey removed due to all the unnecessary overlap between AHS, Alberta Health, and the Health Quality Council, or is the state of our health care system so bad that you had to do away with this independent quality measure?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. I'm having a little déjà vu to estimates because I believe the member at estimates was asking me to cut a number of initiatives that were taking place in other areas because he thought they were redundant. Mr. Speaker, this isn't a proposal that we brought forward. The Health Quality Council thought that they had ample information in this area, and they were happy to work with partners to continue to update that information. But we look at their expertise, and on occasion we do call them to do specific work for us in areas of research, including the support we had on medical assistance in dying.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, in this most recent budget this NDP government increased the budget for the Health Quality Council. Interestingly enough, the Health Quality Council stated that they have current capacity to do more and they've had fewer requests for its services from Alberta Health Services and this NDP government. To the Minister of Health. Can you please clarify: despite giving them fewer requests and the Health Quality Council indicating that they can do so much more and multiple departments within AHS and Alberta Health providing similar roles, why did you increase their budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's my understanding that they requested two additional staff to support them in meeting some of the timelines that they were struggling with. One of the reasons why we are making sure that we have this is to make sure that we have open, upfront work done. For example, they're continuing to do work on continuity of patient care, surveys of families in long-term care on their experience, and gathering physician participation, that was brought alongside to help expand the physician panel work on the provincial scale. We're proud of the work that they're doing, and we're continuing to work in partnership to make sure that Alberta's health care system is the best it possibly can be instead of deep . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Employment and Labour Code Consultations (continued)

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again this NDP government has found itself in trouble for not consulting before it bulldozes ahead with ideological legislation. Today Alberta's opposition parties stood on stage with Alberta's business community and called on the government to extend its consultation process on upcoming labour legislation changes, citing a severe lack of engagement. This government has committed in the past to raising the bar for transparency and engagement. Will the minister

listen to business, work with the opposition, and extend and enhance the consultation process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In a tough economy hard-working Albertans deserve a government that makes life better. Alberta has changed a lot. With labour codes that were enacted in 1988, we have a responsibility to ensure that our employment and labour practices are fair and balanced for all Albertans. We have ensured that we have engaged all stakeholders through this process, including members of the CFIB and chambers who are part of our round-tables, as well as received over a thousand submissions from employers. I look forward to reviewing those results.

Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that this NDP government has given Andy Sims, the hand-picked union lawyer tasked with completing a review of labour relations changes, no deadline for completing his report and given that it would be foolhardy and ideological to move ahead with sweeping labour changes without at least having this report in hand, is the minister going to give Mr. Sims ample time to write this report and make it public before making any changes to Alberta's labour relations legislation? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Being disrespectful does not become the member opposite. Mr. Andrew Sims is one of the most experienced and respected labour lawyers in our province. He has a deep understanding of labour law. He was used in consultations by the previous government. He is a former chair of the Labour Relations Board. I am very honoured to have his expertise at my disposal for this important review so that we can make sure we have fair and balanced workplace legislation for all Albertans.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that in estimates I asked the minister if she would consider enacting an all-party committee to discuss any potential labour legislation changes, to which she replied, "Thank you for the suggestion," and given most Albertans would agree that an all-party committee would meet a higher bar for transparency and engagement, will the government initiate an all-party committee to ensure that a wide variety of expert voices are heard on this critical issue?

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it seems like only tomorrow, but did you know it was 1988 when the band Guns N' Roses released their hit single *Sweet Child o' Mine*? Speaking of children, did you know that Alberta women have to work far longer than women in any other jurisdiction before they qualify for and can claim maternity leave? Alberta's labour laws have not been revised since we first heard Slash's guitar solo, and while that amazing solo has stood the test of time, our labour laws have not. We will continue to work with stakeholders to make sure we have fair and balanced workplace legislation that serves all Albertans.

The Speaker: I have some eight-tracks of those.
The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Applied Research and Forage Associations

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's agriculture associations are a key part of the agricultural industry. They develop partnerships with municipal and industry sources to enhance the work of ag producers through collaboration and

innovation. The applied research they create through these partnerships is used to enhance profitability, sustainability, and responsible stewardship of the land as well as to contribute to rural development across Alberta. To the minister of agriculture: do you support the work of Alberta's applied research and forage associations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I absolutely support research. Any kind of research done in agriculture can only benefit our producers, our farming community, and agricultural industry right across the province. It's important that all players in the field there contribute to research. Agriculture in this country and, as a matter of fact, world-wide has advanced because of that research, and we'll continue to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these groups do much of the extension work for the agricultural industry and given that these groups are working hard to enhance agricultural practices through research and innovation and given that Alberta agriculture relies on these groups to do extension work to enhance the work of ag producers, to the minister: what benefit do these groups have for Alberta's agricultural industry as a whole?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I said in my previous answer, any research within agriculture is beneficial and crucial to the advancement of agriculture, as it always has been. Canada and Alberta, in particular, have had some great success stories over the years, applying that research directly into the field and continue to do so. The province of Alberta has had some great successes around research. Crop Diversification Centre North and Crop Diversification Centre South do great work, as just some examples. As producers do some more research themselves, it can only advance Albertans, as this government does, to make sure that all Albertans benefit.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are 12 applied research and forage associations that receive funding through the agriculture opportunities fund and given that these groups partner with others to expand the AOF funding they receive and given that the extension work they do would not be possible without the AOF funding, to the minister: will you commit to stable funding for these applied research and forage associations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Research in agriculture, as I said before, is crucial to advancement. There have been some great projects, great programs by a lot of the commissions, whether it's canola, wheat. Forage has had some great projects, some great plans for their future to advance their industry for the advancement of their own producers here in the province and for those buyers of their products right across the nation, across the globe. This government is particularly proud of making Alberta farmers' lives better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years postsecondary institutions have been severely underfunded, which has led to a buildup of significant deferred maintenance liabilities. Given that this lack of adequate funding by the previous government has resulted in much fixing up being needed, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what is this government doing to address these issues at the University of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. In a tough economy we're working to make life better for Albertans looking to return to school to upgrade their skills, and a crucial part of that is making sure that we have the facilities on campus to deliver a world-class education. We've heard from students and from our institutions that the previous government did leave a significant deferred maintenance liability, and it's one that our government is committed to addressing. That's why Budget 2017 provides \$154 million for maintenance and repair work and identifies \$676 million over the next four years at our postsecondary institutions.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is home to world-class postsecondary institutions which are in dire need of repairs due to previous government inaction, to the same minister: what other investments is the minister making in our postsecondary institutions across the province? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear the members opposite decrying the lack of toughness in the question. However, they didn't make those investments, that our government is making, for 44 years. I'm quite proud of the fact that we're investing \$451 million in new and continuing capital projects, including two major renewals of existing facilities at our two largest universities. The University of Alberta will get the new dentistry and pharmacy restoration, and in Calgary we're committed to redeveloping and renovating the MacKimmie complex, which will create more than 500 new spaces for students at that university.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that well-maintained facilities are crucial to all of our postsecondary institutions but students require many more supports than that, to the same minister: what else is the government doing to support our students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We're committed to making sure that Alberta students are able to access affordable, high-quality education on campuses all across the province. We proudly announced in this budget that we've extended the tuition freeze for a third year, and we've been consulting with students on the creation of a long-term framework for tuition. We've also allocated \$3.6 million for mental health supports. This is a continuation of previous funding. After the completion of the pilot project, we're looking forward to rolling out a long-term strategy and funding for student mental health. We've

been working with our colleagues at the Ministry of Health to be able to deliver this important program supporting students.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Air Ambulance Service in Southern Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as southern Alberta's ground ambulance dispatch was centralized to Calgary, diverting rural ambulances to do Calgary's day-to-day work, so too goes southern Alberta's fixed-wing medevac service. The recent award of the medevac contract has southern Alberta fearing that medevac services will be pulled from southern Alberta airports and centralized in Calgary, resulting in longer transfer times. Can the Minister of Health confirm or deny that southern Alberta's medevacs are being consolidated to Calgary?

Ms Hoffman: That's not true, Mr. Speaker. They are not.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that there is no hangar space in Medicine Hat, affecting the ability of the new medevac provider to set up base, and given that it will take time to set up new facilities to originate medevacs from these cities for the critical health care that southern Albertans need, what assurances can the minister give that if the medevac operator cannot establish bases in southern Alberta in a timely fashion, this service will not be impacted and consolidated to a busy and congested Alberta international airport?

Ms Hoffman: I hope that the member heard the answer to the first question. The scope of the contract that went out for RFP was to continue to have those local services provided locally. So, Mr. Speaker, that's the contract that was bid on. They certainly have an opportunity to fulfill their end of the contract, as the person who was successful in that application. He's asking hearsay questions or theoretical questions. All I can tell you is that the intent and the plan is and will continue to be to have those air ambulances housed locally.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we have heard these kinds of answers before, and they proved false.

Can the minister assure this House that if the awarded company is not able to establish the bases or have the new aircraft delivered in time, the contract will be retendered so that companies who have the ability to fulfill these obligations are able to vie for the work?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in a grade 6 class they asked me about fake news, and now I'm hearing some fake questions. I have to say that we are committed to making sure that we're moving forward in an open and transparent way. There is an appeal process, I believe, under way. But everything is going to continue to be done locally, as the tender laid out.

Emergency Medical Services Funding

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the members of this House will be familiar with the term "shell game," where skilled hands working at a furious pace attempt to confuse the observer. We all know that game and how it applies to the art of government budgeting. Now, I'm sure the government is waiting for a zinger or a gotcha-politics question, but I believe that in this case it's the government that's being deceived. To the Minister of Health. I'm speaking to you as a paramedic, embedded in that community with experience. You don't honestly believe that once you pay off an ambulance, you can

cut the EMS budget for the cost of that ambulance, do you? Please answer carefully because paramedics are watching.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's clear that it is coming from a paramedic, not a conservative, because the conservatives of both parties have pushed for billions of dollars of cuts. While we are working with AHS to make sure that they continue to protect and support the front lines, we've made it very clear that we want to see their budget held harmless, and we've done so by arranging a meeting, that I was happy to facilitate, between paramedic representatives as well as with AHS, and that message was delivered very clearly. We're going to continue to support our front-line workers who every day work to support Albertans.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, given that the Health Sciences Association of Alberta president, who is also a paramedic, has denounced this budget cut and given that EMS is already underfunded to the tune of \$20 million necessary to make a greater contribution to the health care system here in Alberta and given that this is over and above the \$17 million that you in the Health department are going to cut, to the same minister: Minister, do you realize that in order for AHS, EMS not to cut front-line services, you need to restore the \$17 million? Will you do that?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question from the member, who does rightfully refer to the fact that the president of the HSAA is a paramedic. Mr. Speaker, the president with the HSAA sat down in a meeting with myself and the president of Alberta Health Services, and we articulated very clearly that we expect to maintain those front-line services, that it will be done by ensuring that we protect front-line workers and making sure that they have the resources that they require. We're waiting to see the AHS proposal for their budget, and when it is received, it will be posted publicly, and paramedics will be able to see that AHS is fulfilling their commitments that were made during that meeting.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you have said time and time again that your government will invest in the most crucial of front-line services and given that there is a fentanyl crisis, a rise in posttraumatic stress syndrome, call volumes on the rise, the seriousness of calls on the rise, increasing hospital waits that are killing the morale of paramedics, Minister, I implore you to revisit this cut to front-line services.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'm very proud of the work that our paramedics do each and every day. I was proud to visit a number of them just last weekend here in Edmonton. I have to say that the work they do is crucially important to saving lives across Alberta. That's one of the reasons why we had this conversation, a face-to-face opportunity to have discussions with Alberta Health Services. They have also communicated with HSAA that they're going to make sure that they hold harmless the front lines. We're going to make sure that we protect them. I'm glad that the member opposite is standing up for paramedics. I hope that he will stand up for all Albertans because his party certainly is pushing for a far more drastic reality than the one that he is arguing for.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Condominium Property Act

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans throughout the province, including many of my constituents of Edmonton-McClung, are buying new condominiums. Buyers of condos must provide a significant cash deposit toward a unit before it's actually completed. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how will changes to the Condominium Property Act protect these customers and ensure that they get the unit that they pay for?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his question. This government cares about everyday Albertans, and we believe that Albertans deserve to be protected, especially when making a large purchase as important as a home. That's why the amendments to the Condominium Property Act will ensure that anyone holding a purchase deposit in trust is subject to specific rules and held to high standards. The act will also ensure that homebuyers have options if developers make any changes to units between the time that they are bought and the time they are actually being built.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there may be years between the day the purchase agreement is signed and the construction of the actual unit, to the same minister: how will the government make sure that purchasers ultimately get the unit they were promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The act makes it clear that the developer must notify the buyer whenever there is a material change to the homebuyer's unit. Where a change happens, homebuyers will have clear notice and the ability to take action if needed. Since taking office, we began exploring and implementing ways to expedite developing these new rules. This is just one example of how we're taking action and making life more affordable for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, given that purchasers' deposit monies may be held in trust for a long period of time, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that those funds are safeguarded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard from Albertans, loud and clear, that when a developer does not finish on time, buyers ought to have the option to cancel the agreement and get their deposits back. The act makes it clear that all purchase money will be held by a specific trustee. Work is currently under way to develop regulations to set requirements for these trustees. Once these rules are in place, Albertans will be able to take comfort, knowing that their purchase deposits are safe and subject to regulatory standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thirty seconds for members to leave the House.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Energy Industry Jobs

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville asked a question to the Labour minister regarding the federal government's decision to close the immigration case processing centre in Vegreville. They both cited concerns about the loss of jobs, loss of students, and the impact to the local economy. I, too, am very concerned about this closure, and I have written to the federal minister of immigration, as have my local MP and many of my colleagues. Closing this centre will definitely have an impact on Vegreville and the surrounding area, much like the coal generation shutdowns have a devastating effect on communities like Hanna and Forestburg. Unlike my colleagues on the government side, we are concerned about all Alberta jobs.

Unfortunately, what we see is that governments often have their minds made up, either for political reasons or ideology, long before announcements are made. Why don't the government members concentrate on saving Alberta jobs they can actually do something about by stopping the attacks on our coal industry? I wonder if either of the members has advocated for the people in Hanna, Forestburg, or any of the other communities that will be affected by their own ideological policies, or are they just poor-policy deniers?

Fort Saskatchewan is a huge industrial economy here in Alberta, heavily dependent on pipelines and continued development in the oil and gas industry. I wonder if their local MLA has discussed the implications of the Leap Manifesto with local industry leaders and their workers.

We are seeing in the election to the west that the Leap Manifesto line dance is alive and well within the NDP even though our local NDP government pretends not to know the steps. This government as well as its dance partners to the west and federally need to come clean with Albertans on what their actual intentions are. Albertans know exactly how this group actually feels about pipelines and our oil and gas industry. It's not much of a leap unless, of course, you're a poor-policy denier.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, both from companies who feel they have not had adequate time or access to the consultation process around the changes to labour legislation. One is Mustang Well Services Ltd. from Calgary, and the other is the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to table eight letters from different organizations also calling for an extension and enhancement of a more robust consultation process with respect to labour and employment legislation. I have those from George Goldhoff, president and CEO of Pure Canadian Gaming; Rod Rundell, general manager of Chinook Drilling; John Voorhorst, C.V. Benefits Inc.; John Yates, director of IT for Pure Canadian Gaming . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, that information is in the report?

Mr. Gotfried: I'm tabling these.

The Speaker: How many more names are there?

Mr. Gotfried: . . . Sandra Legere, VP of human resources, Pure Canadian Gaming; Maaiké Ezinga, vice-president, human resources, Trico Group of Companies; and Mark von Schellwitz . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think we got the substance. Pass it around. Let's go. We're done, okay?

Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from the Sylvan Lake Chamber of Commerce with regard to the workplace legislation review and their concern that they were not properly informed and engaged with regard to the review. I have the five copies available.

I also have a letter from Hurley Well Service, county of Grande Prairie, with regard to employment standards and Labour Relations Code review. They are concerned that they were not properly engaged in the review process.

I have a letter here from Pure Canadian Gaming. This letter, actually CCed to me, was sent to the Hon. Christina Gray, Minister of Labour, with concerns over the labour legislation review. That's come from Jeff Craik, general manager, Casino Edmonton.

I have another letter from Pure Canadian Gaming with the same concerns. The minister has this letter; it was sent to her. It's from Tony Chen, executive manager of business development.

My last tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is from Pure Canadian Gaming. It is a letter with regard to the workplace legislation review and their concerns that there was not proper consultation done. This is from Vince Pao, executive director of marketing, Pure Canadian Gaming.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to offer five copies of letters from constituents who are opposed to, as they say, the NDP slamming through workplace legislation and are pleading with the government to slow down and truly consult with real Alberta stakeholders to ensure that the Alberta labour code truly reflects their reality's past, present, and future. Now, there are 41 different constituents who wrote in. Would you like me to read each of their names?

The Speaker: No, I sure would not.

Mr. Rodney: They sure would like their names to be known. I'll be happy to table them instead, and you can all read them for yourselves.

The Speaker: Thank you. [interjections] Quiet.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from a friend of mine, Mr. Pak Wong, who operates a hotel and a restaurant in nearby Provost, Alberta. He employs 26 people, and he, too, has concerns over the lack of consultation regarding the labour relations act.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter I wrote on March 9 to the hon. Government House Leader quoting what the Premier said on the 20th of April, including that the "Alberta NDP policy is to replace the Public Affairs Bureau with a smaller group of communications professionals."

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter here addressed to the Minister of Labour from the Pacific Western Group of Companies, who employs 3,500 employees just in Alberta. They're very concerned about the time they need for better consultation, so they're asking them to consider their request to extend the time with regard to the workplace legislation review. I have the requisite copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe that we have one point of order today. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Preambles to Supplementary Questions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rose today during question period, during, I believe, the second supplemental of a question from the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. I didn't write it all down, but I got a fraction of it that will give the sense of it. The hon. member used "given" and then proceeded into an unrelated speech, which included "if a tree falls in a forest." You know that saying.

Now, you've ruled on this before, Mr. Speaker. "Given" is permitted and does not constitute a preamble if you're stating some premise for the question that follows or some fact upon which the question is based. Otherwise, I would ask that you rule that it's an inappropriate use and simply an attempt to get around the rule against preambles on supplementary questions.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, on April 6 in *Hansard* on page 549 you cautioned the same member: "Hon. member, I would respectfully ask that you contain the preambles. In fact, you already know that's not accepted, so please ask your question without the preamble. Please proceed." The hon. member is quite aware of this issue.

Now, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, citation 410(8) says, "Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles. Supplementary questions should flow from the answers of Ministers."

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, 2009, says:

The same guidelines which apply to initial questions apply to supplementary questions. They are to be constructed as "a follow-up device flowing from the response and ought to be a precise question put directly and immediately to the Minister, without any further statement."

Mr. Speaker, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* under principles and guidelines for oral questions it states, from Speaker Jerome in 1975, that:

Speaker Bosley elaborated further . . .

And he's talking about brevity.

There can be no doubt that the greatest enemy of the Question Period is the Member who offends this most important principle. In putting the original question on any subject, a Member may require an explanatory remark, but there is no reason for such a preamble to exceed one, carefully drawn sentence.

And, Mr. Speaker, to quote another Speaker of note, on page 472 of *Alberta Hansard* the Deputy Speaker – I'm sorry; I thought it was you – said:

I would like to offer a little bit of clarification, however, on preambles with the use of "given." It doesn't give you blanket permission to just string together a bunch of unrelated comments simply because you've said "given" in between them. I'd encourage you, hon. members, to please keep your supplementals relevant to the first question.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the use of "given" is something that I'm very familiar with in this House, but it is based upon a premise for the supplemental question and is not simply something that you can say and then go on with some unrelated speech. So I would ask that you rule that in the future the rule against preambles ought not be circumvented in this way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the point of order this afternoon. I'd like to thank the Government House Leader for providing some context, which I believe made the case for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks very specifically today asked three questions with respect to the use of a particular accounting tool that the government is using, some would suggest, to not provide all of the facts to Albertans. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks was merely highlighting that fact. I know that you have provided some feedback to the member inside this Chamber, and I also know that the member is efforting to ensure that he, too, is using the tools that are at the disposal of the opposition in the form of the use of "given" in our desire and ability to put together information that is reasonable and required for the question.

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While I appreciate that these preambles sometimes – and I know that the Government House Leader mentioned that he would be brief; however, he wasn't. This tool is a very, very, very important tool that the opposition uses and will likely need to continue to use.

The Speaker: I'm not sure that I entirely agree with the Government House Leader with respect to the use of the word "given" because in my experience here in the last two years, that seems to have been a practice that's been accepted. By the way, I think you used the word "desire."

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Notwithstanding that, to the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks: we've discussed this several times today. I did hear it, and for the record this is what was said:

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Hon. members, the daily Routine is now concluded. The legislative policy committee will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. Alberta's Economic Future Committee will consider the estimates for Education in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:04 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years postsecondary institutions have been severely underfunded, which has led to a buildup of significant deferred maintenance liabilities. Given that this lack of adequate funding by the previous government has resulted in much fixing up being needed, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what is this government doing to address these issues at the University of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. In a tough economy we're working to make life better for Albertans looking to return to school to upgrade their skills, and a crucial part of that is making sure that we have the facilities on campus to deliver a world-class education. We've heard from students and from our institutions that the previous government did leave a significant deferred maintenance liability, and it's one that our government is committed to addressing. That's why Budget 2017 provides \$154 million for maintenance and repair work and identifies \$676 million over the next four years at our postsecondary institutions.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is home to world-class postsecondary institutions which are in dire need of repairs due to previous government inaction, to the same minister: what other investments is the minister making in our postsecondary institutions across the province? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear the members opposite decrying the lack of toughness in the question. However, they didn't make those investments, that our government is making, for 44 years. I'm quite proud of the fact that we're investing \$451 million in new and continuing capital projects, including two major renewals of existing facilities at our two largest universities. The University of Alberta will get the new dentistry and pharmacy restoration, and in Calgary we're committed to redeveloping and renovating the MacKimmie complex, which will create more than 500 new spaces for students at that university.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that well-maintained facilities are crucial to all of our postsecondary institutions but students require many more supports than that, to the same minister: what else is the government doing to support our students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We're committed to making sure that Alberta students are able to access affordable, high-quality education on campuses all across the province. We proudly announced in this budget that we've extended the tuition freeze for a third year, and we've been consulting with students on the creation of a long-term framework for tuition. We've also allocated \$3.6 million for mental health supports. This is a continuation of previous funding. After the completion of the pilot project, we're looking forward to rolling out a long-term strategy and funding for student mental health. We've

been working with our colleagues at the Ministry of Health to be able to deliver this important program supporting students.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Air Ambulance Service in Southern Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as southern Alberta's ground ambulance dispatch was centralized to Calgary, diverting rural ambulances to do Calgary's day-to-day work, so too goes southern Alberta's fixed-wing medevac service. The recent award of the medevac contract has southern Alberta fearing that medevac services will be pulled from southern Alberta airports and centralized in Calgary, resulting in longer transfer times. Can the Minister of Health confirm or deny that southern Alberta's medevacs are being consolidated to Calgary?

Ms Hoffman: That's not true, Mr. Speaker. They are not.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that there is no hangar space in Medicine Hat, affecting the ability of the new medevac provider to set up base, and given that it will take time to set up new facilities to originate medevacs from these cities for the critical health care that southern Albertans need, what assurances can the minister give that if the medevac operator cannot establish bases in southern Alberta in a timely fashion, this service will not be impacted and consolidated to a busy and congested Alberta international airport?

Ms Hoffman: I hope that the member heard the answer to the first question. The scope of the contract that went out for RFP was to continue to have those local services provided locally. So, Mr. Speaker, that's the contract that was bid on. They certainly have an opportunity to fulfill their end of the contract, as the person who was successful in that application. He's asking hearsay questions or theoretical questions. All I can tell you is that the intent and the plan is and will continue to be to have those air ambulances housed locally.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we have heard these kinds of answers before, and they proved false.

Can the minister assure this House that if the awarded company is not able to establish the bases or have the new aircraft delivered in time, the contract will be retendered so that companies who have the ability to fulfill these obligations are able to vie for the work?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in a grade 6 class they asked me about fake news, and now I'm hearing some fake questions. I have to say that we are committed to making sure that we're moving forward in an open and transparent way. There is an appeal process, I believe, under way. But everything is going to continue to be done locally, as the tender laid out.

Emergency Medical Services Funding

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the members of this House will be familiar with the term "shell game," where skilled hands working at a furious pace attempt to confuse the observer. We all know that game and how it applies to the art of government budgeting. Now, I'm sure the government is waiting for a zinger or a gotcha-politics question, but I believe that in this case it's the government that's being deceived. To the Minister of Health. I'm speaking to you as a paramedic, embedded in that community with experience. You don't honestly believe that once you pay off an ambulance, you can

cut the EMS budget for the cost of that ambulance, do you? Please answer carefully because paramedics are watching.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's clear that it is coming from a paramedic, not a conservative, because the conservatives of both parties have pushed for billions of dollars of cuts. While we are working with AHS to make sure that they continue to protect and support the front lines, we've made it very clear that we want to see their budget held harmless, and we've done so by arranging a meeting, that I was happy to facilitate, between paramedic representatives as well as with AHS, and that message was delivered very clearly. We're going to continue to support our front-line workers who every day work to support Albertans.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, given that the Health Sciences Association of Alberta president, who is also a paramedic, has denounced this budget cut and given that EMS is already underfunded to the tune of \$20 million necessary to make a greater contribution to the health care system here in Alberta and given that this is over and above the \$17 million that you in the Health department are going to cut, to the same minister: Minister, do you realize that in order for AHS, EMS not to cut front-line services, you need to restore the \$17 million? Will you do that?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question from the member, who does rightfully refer to the fact that the president of the HSAA is a paramedic. Mr. Speaker, the president with the HSAA sat down in a meeting with myself and the president of Alberta Health Services, and we articulated very clearly that we expect to maintain those front-line services, that it will be done by ensuring that we protect front-line workers and making sure that they have the resources that they require. We're waiting to see the AHS proposal for their budget, and when it is received, it will be posted publicly, and paramedics will be able to see that AHS is fulfilling their commitments that were made during that meeting.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you have said time and time again that your government will invest in the most crucial of front-line services and given that there is a fentanyl crisis, a rise in posttraumatic stress syndrome, call volumes on the rise, the seriousness of calls on the rise, increasing hospital waits that are killing the morale of paramedics, Minister, I implore you to revisit this cut to front-line services.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'm very proud of the work that our paramedics do each and every day. I was proud to visit a number of them just last weekend here in Edmonton. I have to say that the work they do is crucially important to saving lives across Alberta. That's one of the reasons why we had this conversation, a face-to-face opportunity to have discussions with Alberta Health Services. They have also communicated with HSAA that they're going to make sure that they hold harmless the front lines. We're going to make sure that we protect them. I'm glad that the member opposite is standing up for paramedics. I hope that he will stand up for all Albertans because his party certainly is pushing for a far more drastic reality than the one that he is arguing for.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Condominium Property Act

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans throughout the province, including many of my constituents of Edmonton-McClung, are buying new condominiums. Buyers of condos must provide a significant cash deposit toward a unit before it's actually completed. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how will changes to the Condominium Property Act protect these customers and ensure that they get the unit that they pay for?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his question. This government cares about everyday Albertans, and we believe that Albertans deserve to be protected, especially when making a large purchase as important as a home. That's why the amendments to the Condominium Property Act will ensure that anyone holding a purchase deposit in trust is subject to specific rules and held to high standards. The act will also ensure that homebuyers have options if developers make any changes to units between the time that they are bought and the time they are actually being built.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there may be years between the day the purchase agreement is signed and the construction of the actual unit, to the same minister: how will the government make sure that purchasers ultimately get the unit they were promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The act makes it clear that the developer must notify the buyer whenever there is a material change to the homebuyer's unit. Where a change happens, homebuyers will have clear notice and the ability to take action if needed. Since taking office, we began exploring and implementing ways to expedite developing these new rules. This is just one example of how we're taking action and making life more affordable for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, given that purchasers' deposit monies may be held in trust for a long period of time, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that those funds are safeguarded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard from Albertans, loud and clear, that when a developer does not finish on time, buyers ought to have the option to cancel the agreement and get their deposits back. The act makes it clear that all purchase money will be held by a specific trustee. Work is currently under way to develop regulations to set requirements for these trustees. Once these rules are in place, Albertans will be able to take comfort, knowing that their purchase deposits are safe and subject to regulatory standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thirty seconds for members to leave the House.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Energy Industry Jobs

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville asked a question to the Labour minister regarding the federal government's decision to close the immigration case processing centre in Vegreville. They both cited concerns about the loss of jobs, loss of students, and the impact to the local economy. I, too, am very concerned about this closure, and I have written to the federal minister of immigration, as have my local MP and many of my colleagues. Closing this centre will definitely have an impact on Vegreville and the surrounding area, much like the coal generation shutdowns have a devastating effect on communities like Hanna and Forestburg. Unlike my colleagues on the government side, we are concerned about all Alberta jobs.

Unfortunately, what we see is that governments often have their minds made up, either for political reasons or ideology, long before announcements are made. Why don't the government members concentrate on saving Alberta jobs they can actually do something about by stopping the attacks on our coal industry? I wonder if either of the members has advocated for the people in Hanna, Forestburg, or any of the other communities that will be affected by their own ideological policies, or are they just poor-policy deniers?

Fort Saskatchewan is a huge industrial economy here in Alberta, heavily dependent on pipelines and continued development in the oil and gas industry. I wonder if their local MLA has discussed the implications of the Leap Manifesto with local industry leaders and their workers.

We are seeing in the election to the west that the Leap Manifesto line dance is alive and well within the NDP even though our local NDP government pretends not to know the steps. This government as well as its dance partners to the west and federally need to come clean with Albertans on what their actual intentions are. Albertans know exactly how this group actually feels about pipelines and our oil and gas industry. It's not much of a leap unless, of course, you're a poor-policy denier.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, both from companies who feel they have not had adequate time or access to the consultation process around the changes to labour legislation. One is Mustang Well Services Ltd. from Calgary, and the other is the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to table eight letters from different organizations also calling for an extension and enhancement of a more robust consultation process with respect to labour and employment legislation. I have those from George Goldhoff, president and CEO of Pure Canadian Gaming; Rod Rundell, general manager of Chinook Drilling; John Voorhorst, C.V. Benefits Inc.; John Yates, director of IT for Pure Canadian Gaming . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, that information is in the report?

Mr. Gotfried: I'm tabling these.

The Speaker: How many more names are there?

Mr. Gotfried: . . . Sandra Legere, VP of human resources, Pure Canadian Gaming; Maaiké Ezinga, vice-president, human resources, Trico Group of Companies; and Mark von Schellwitz . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think we got the substance. Pass it around. Let's go. We're done, okay?

Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from the Sylvan Lake Chamber of Commerce with regard to the workplace legislation review and their concern that they were not properly informed and engaged with regard to the review. I have the five copies available.

I also have a letter from Hurley Well Service, county of Grande Prairie, with regard to employment standards and Labour Relations Code review. They are concerned that they were not properly engaged in the review process.

I have a letter here from Pure Canadian Gaming. This letter, actually CCed to me, was sent to the Hon. Christina Gray, Minister of Labour, with concerns over the labour legislation review. That's come from Jeff Craik, general manager, Casino Edmonton.

I have another letter from Pure Canadian Gaming with the same concerns. The minister has this letter; it was sent to her. It's from Tony Chen, executive manager of business development.

My last tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is from Pure Canadian Gaming. It is a letter with regard to the workplace legislation review and their concerns that there was not proper consultation done. This is from Vince Pao, executive director of marketing, Pure Canadian Gaming.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to offer five copies of letters from constituents who are opposed to, as they say, the NDP slamming through workplace legislation and are pleading with the government to slow down and truly consult with real Alberta stakeholders to ensure that the Alberta labour code truly reflects their reality's past, present, and future. Now, there are 41 different constituents who wrote in. Would you like me to read each of their names?

The Speaker: No, I sure would not.

Mr. Rodney: They sure would like their names to be known. I'll be happy to table them instead, and you can all read them for yourselves.

The Speaker: Thank you. [interjections] Quiet.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from a friend of mine, Mr. Pak Wong, who operates a hotel and a restaurant in nearby Provost, Alberta. He employs 26 people, and he, too, has concerns over the lack of consultation regarding the labour relations act.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter I wrote on March 9 to the hon. Government House Leader quoting what the Premier said on the 20th of April, including that the "Alberta NDP policy is to replace the Public Affairs Bureau with a smaller group of communications professionals."

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter here addressed to the Minister of Labour from the Pacific Western Group of Companies, who employs 3,500 employees just in Alberta. They're very concerned about the time they need for better consultation, so they're asking them to consider their request to extend the time with regard to the workplace legislation review. I have the requisite copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe that we have one point of order today. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Preambles to Supplementary Questions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rose today during question period, during, I believe, the second supplemental of a question from the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. I didn't write it all down, but I got a fraction of it that will give the sense of it. The hon. member used "given" and then proceeded into an unrelated speech, which included "if a tree falls in a forest." You know that saying.

Now, you've ruled on this before, Mr. Speaker. "Given" is permitted and does not constitute a preamble if you're stating some premise for the question that follows or some fact upon which the question is based. Otherwise, I would ask that you rule that it's an inappropriate use and simply an attempt to get around the rule against preambles on supplementary questions.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, on April 6 in *Hansard* on page 549 you cautioned the same member: "Hon. member, I would respectfully ask that you contain the preambles. In fact, you already know that's not accepted, so please ask your question without the preamble. Please proceed." The hon. member is quite aware of this issue.

Now, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, citation 410(8) says, "Preambles to questions should be brief and supplementary questions require no preambles. Supplementary questions should flow from the answers of Ministers."

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, 2009, says:

The same guidelines which apply to initial questions apply to supplementary questions. They are to be constructed as "a follow-up device flowing from the response and ought to be a precise question put directly and immediately to the Minister, without any further statement."

Mr. Speaker, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* under principles and guidelines for oral questions it states, from Speaker Jerome in 1975, that:

Speaker Bosley elaborated further . . .

And he's talking about brevity.

There can be no doubt that the greatest enemy of the Question Period is the Member who offends this most important principle. In putting the original question on any subject, a Member may require an explanatory remark, but there is no reason for such a preamble to exceed one, carefully drawn sentence.

And, Mr. Speaker, to quote another Speaker of note, on page 472 of *Alberta Hansard* the Deputy Speaker – I'm sorry; I thought it was you – said:

I would like to offer a little bit of clarification, however, on preambles with the use of "given." It doesn't give you blanket permission to just string together a bunch of unrelated comments simply because you've said "given" in between them. I'd encourage you, hon. members, to please keep your supplementals relevant to the first question.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the use of "given" is something that I'm very familiar with in this House, but it is based upon a premise for the supplemental question and is not simply something that you can say and then go on with some unrelated speech. So I would ask that you rule that in the future the rule against preambles ought not be circumvented in this way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the point of order this afternoon. I'd like to thank the Government House Leader for providing some context, which I believe made the case for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks very specifically today asked three questions with respect to the use of a particular accounting tool that the government is using, some would suggest, to not provide all of the facts to Albertans. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks was merely highlighting that fact. I know that you have provided some feedback to the member inside this Chamber, and I also know that the member is efforting to ensure that he, too, is using the tools that are at the disposal of the opposition in the form of the use of "given" in our desire and ability to put together information that is reasonable and required for the question.

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 19, 2017

Day 23

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House
Services

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and
Legal Research Officer

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

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Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. Today marks the 101st anniversary of women receiving the right to vote, a milestone that should never be forgotten. Allow that event to serve as a reminder of the power of equality and that we are stronger when we are equal.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you 22 amazing students from Meyokumin school in the beautiful and ethnically diverse constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Susan Rehacek, and one of the parents, Dennis Baleja, who I've had the pleasure of meeting and discussing policy with at community events. I'd ask them all to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 28 students from the excellent Meyonohk school in Edmonton in the greater community of Mill Woods. This is one of the handful of schools in Edmonton that offers a Mandarin bilingual program. Meyonohk school incorporates Chinese culture into their learning, and students in the grades 4 to 6 regular English program also receive French as a second language. Meyonohk, translated from the Cree language, means a nice place to be. I can assure you that it is. With them is their teacher, Ms Danielle Woodman. I'd like to request all of the students and their teacher to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly 23 students who come from the wonderful St. Martha school in Edmonton-McClung. I'm pleased to announce they are accompanied by teachers Paul McNeely, Sylvia Franklin, and Nicole Aasgard as well as chaperone Dolores Sandalo. It's a very active school, which has featured movie nights, pyjama dance nights, a silent auction soon to happen, a very active parent council, and I'm happy to participate with them. I wish for them to be welcomed by the Assembly in the traditional way now.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups? The Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the grade 6 social class from G.H. Dawe public school in my riding of Red Deer-North. With the help of great educators such as Deanna Labranche and Daryl Puzey, these students are here today to gain first-hand experience regarding provincial governance to assist in understanding the context of their curriculum. I ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Dale Smith. Dale was a page in this Assembly from 1994 to 1996. He currently resides in Ottawa and is a freelance journalist in the Canadian parliamentary press gallery. Dale has written for the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *National Post*, *Maclean's*, *Canadian Business*, Canadian Press, iPolitics.ca, and *The Hill Times*, and he's recently released a book titled *The Unbroken Machine: Canada's Democracy in Action*. Dale is seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you an amazing group of community leaders from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. They are members of the Castle Downs Recreation Society, also known as CDRS, and I will be speaking about this later in my member's statement. Please rise as I say your name: Lynnette Thompson, president of CDRS; Nadine Meads, president of Castle Downs Variety Show; Lorna Lewis, chair of the CDRS bingo; and Vini Buecken, member of CDRS International. Thank you so much for making it here today, and please accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce guests who are leaders in the Ukrainian community involved in a cross-country project to raise awareness of the Holodomor. The Holodomor mobile classroom arrived in Alberta to educate and engage students and visitors about this tragic period of Ukrainian history. This classroom on wheels is at our front steps today until 4 p.m. and will be visiting a number of schools throughout Alberta thereafter. I ask that Mr. Bohdan Onyschuk, Canada Ukraine Foundation president; Mrs. Roma Dzerowicz, Canadian executive director of the Holodomor bus; as well as Ms Olesia Luciw-Andryjowycz, president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council; and Mrs. Slavka Shulakewych, provincial co-ordinator of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House and our appreciation.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today Julia Hayter, my fabulous

constituency assistant. It is very fitting that she is here today. She is also a very strong feminist and an excellent role model to her three children. She always has a friendly face, and she has boundless energy. I would certainly be lost without her. I am also proud to call her my friend. Here with her today is her son Liam Hayter. They are in Edmonton from Calgary so that Liam could compete in his dance competitions as it is dance season. He has performed a ballet duet and received high silver today. Very impressive. I'd ask that they stand to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Government Policies

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government things have gone from bad to worse for Albertans. In just two short years they've imposed a radical agenda of economic experiments and job-killing tax hikes. Eighty-four thousand full-time jobs are now gone, a hundred thousand Albertans are on EI, and a record number of people are crowding into homeless shelters and food banks. While Albertans are suffering, the NDP is calling them names like, and I quote, embarrassing cousins and sewer rats.

The government's lawsuit against power companies and the flip-flop on a new Crown corporation have investors worried that they don't respect contracts or the rule of law.

Amidst all of this the \$5 billion carbon tax is bleeding families dry. The NDP didn't campaign on it, and Albertans don't want it despite this government spending over \$10 million on carbon tax propaganda. The Premier swore up and down that all this money would stay in Alberta. Here's the truth, though. The carbon tax will transfer \$140 million straight to Ottawa. But that's their MO. They're using carbon tax money to transfer wealth like when they gave Ecofitt, an NDP-friendly company from Ontario, tens of millions of dollars to screw in free light bulbs.

The writing is on the wall for business, also. Shell, ConocoPhillips, major international companies: they're all getting out of Dodge. Meanwhile our Premier is making political enemies of our closest allies in Saskatchewan and B.C. It's just one disaster after another from this government.

So let's take a look at where we're going. They've sent us down a road that leads to nowhere but more credit downgrades and a record \$74 billion of debt. This will soon cost us billions every year in interest payments. The NDP just doesn't understand Alberta no matter how hard they try. Albertans, though, don't play second fiddle or aim for the middle. Albertans lead. This government doesn't understand that, but Albertans do, and they can't wait to put Albertans back in charge of this province in 2019.

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

1:40

Passover

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Passover, or Pesach in Hebrew, is an eight-day festival celebrated from the 15th through the 22nd of the Hebrew month of Nissan. The tradition in ancient Israel held that the first day of Nissan would not start until the barley was ripe. It is one of the most widely observed Jewish holidays. It commemorates the freedom of the people of Israel from slavery in ancient Egypt. God helped the children of Israel escape from the Pharaoh's slavery in Egypt by inflicting 10 plagues upon the ancient Egyptians. While doing so, God spared the children of Israel, passing over their homes, hence the name of the holiday. Pharaoh's resistance broke, and 600,000 adult males plus many

more women and children fled slavery that day and began their trek to freedom and Mount Sinai.

It is said that they left in such a hurry that they could not wait for bread dough to rise, or leaven. With only this food they relied on the Almighty to provide sustenance for the entire Jewish nation: men, women and children. Each year, to remember this, unleavened bread called matzo is eaten on the first two nights of Passover.

People of the Jewish community also observe Passover through celebrations such as Seder, where people gather to retell the story of their liberation from Egypt and take part in the Seder ceremony. Passover for the Jewish community is also a festival of freedom, commemorating not only their history but also the importance of this basic human right.

Mr. Speaker, we are blessed to live in a province with a rich multicultural history and with the freedom to express our faith in the manner of our choosing.

Passover was celebrated this year from April 10th to April 18th. In Calgary-Glenmore the celebration was held in the homes of constituents and in the Calgary Jewish Community Centre and Beth Tzedec synagogue. I hope this year's celebration of freedom, hope, and new life was enjoyed by all members of the Jewish community.

Thank you.

Armenian Genocide

Mr. Rodney: I rise to remember the Armenian genocide, which was perpetrated against the Ottoman Empire's Armenian population between 1915 and 1923. Two hundred and fifty Armenian intellectuals and community leaders were imprisoned, deported, and assassinated. A law was passed authorizing the deportation of the entire Armenian population. There were mass murders of entire villages. Women and children were burned alive or drowned in the Black Sea very close to where my maternal grandmother was born.

Those who did not meet this gruesome fate were deported by the hundreds of thousands and marched into the desert to die of thirst, hunger, disease, and exposure. Deportees who somehow survived these miracle marches were sent to die in one of the 25 concentration camps along what is now Turkey's border with Syria and Iraq. One and a half million Armenian lives were exterminated as the international community watched, powerless to stop the atrocities. Two decades later the world witnessed a genocide again in the form of the Holocaust.

Mr. Speaker, here in Canada our new leader cosponsored the parliamentary motion recognizing the Armenian genocide, and Prime Minister Harper was the first to recognize it on behalf of the government of Canada. They did so because we have a duty to remember and to learn from this first genocide of the 20th century.

Tragically, the hatred that leads to genocide exists in our time. Armenians and other indigenous minorities have faced attempted genocide at the hands of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, which is one of the reasons why Canada has welcomed hundreds of Armenians and thousands of other resettled refugees from that region.

I pray for the hundreds of thousands of lives lost and for those still in harm's way, and I join Armenians across Alberta and around the globe in remembering the crimes perpetrated against their people. Let us strengthen our collective resolve to never again allow hatred to turn into the mass violence of genocide. We owe it to the 1 and a half million Armenians and the millions more who have lost their lives in acts of genocide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Castle Downs Recreation Society

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to highlight the incredible work of the Castle Downs Recreation Society, also known as the CDRS, in the magnificent community of Edmonton-Castle Downs. The society was first established in 1983 and includes CDRS International and the Castle Downs Variety Show. The board itself is made up of representatives from six community leagues who work collaboratively with the city of Edmonton and the Castle Downs Family YMCA. This allows for over 60,000 residents of northwest Edmonton to be served by the society. The society prides itself on community engagement. Just a few of the many successful events are Canada Day, Winter Fest, and the annual Castle Downs Variety Show. These have all become family traditions for those who live in north Edmonton.

I highly recommend attending the variety show, which just wrapped up their 32nd season. Volunteers return year after year, showcasing their incredible talents and making memories. Last year was very exciting as the cast and crew received a community facility enhancement program grant to upgrade their staging and their sound equipment. Our government was happy and proud to support the Castle Downs Variety Show and continues to promote initiatives across Alberta that encourage community engagement.

To Lynnette Thompson, a 30-year member and current president of the CDRS board as well as the chair of park development; Nadine Meads, board member and current chair for the Castle Downs Variety Show and president for the Dunluce Community League; Lorna Lewis, current member and bingo chair; and Vini Buecken, a member of CDRS International: thanks for all the dedication and commitment of those here today as well as the many others who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that Castle Downs Recreation Society is a vibrant pillar in our community.

As a resident of Castle Downs for more than 20 years and now working so closely and collaboratively with you, I thank you for welcoming my office into the fold and for all of your hard work for the residents of north Edmonton.

Thank you.

Government Innovations

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, April 15 to 21 each year is World Creativity and Innovation Week. It begins on Leonardo da Vinci's birthday and ends on World Creativity and Innovation Day. Its purpose is to provide time to encourage and enable new thinking, to create new futures, to make the world a better place, and to make space and time to generate new ideas. This initiative is spearheaded locally in Canmore by Marci Segal, who has achieved recognition for her efforts from the United Nations.

In honour of this week, I'd like to recognize our government's creative and innovative approach that is making life better for Albertans. We are taking an innovative approach to address climate change that is getting results and leading the country. Two pipeline approvals are proof of that. Imagine: a government embarking on a school nutrition program or a \$25-a-day daycare program. Ah. No need to imagine that, Mr. Speaker. It's a dream come true.

That's what happens when you elect a government that is nearly gender balanced, reflects our province's diversity, and has Albertans' backs. Social issues aren't stale. On the contrary, they provide opportunities for creative solutions that make a meaningful difference in the lives of Albertans. For instance, it took the election of this forward-thinking government to remove limitations for survivors of sexual and domestic violence to file a claim and to ensure gender identity and gender expression as basic human rights. Even the oil sands emissions cap, the modernized royalty framework,

and the 30 per cent renewable energy target are resulting in creative and innovative market-based solutions in Alberta's energy sector.

I'm glad that this government is thinking out of the box. In Banff-Cochrane we have public transit, affordable housing, and the approval of a decade-overdue intersection to show for it. I'm proud to be part of a government that is focused on creative and innovative ways to make life better.

Thank you.

Brooks Bandits Junior Hockey Championship

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, 2017 is a great year for Alberta hockey. The Flames are in the playoffs, the Oilers are in the playoffs, but last night wasn't very good for the orange team. They're still in the running. But before we lose all hope about another missed championship, I implore all members to have faith in the Brooks Bandits. The Brooks Bandits have charged their way through the Alberta Junior Hockey League championship. When they won the Alberta Gas Drive Cup last night, they swept the Whitecourt Wolverines 4-nothing in the championship series. They're going all the way to the western Canadian finals.

Now, speaking of Whitecourt, I made a friendly wager for a six-pack of delicious Wild Rose beer with the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne that the Calgary Flames would outlast the Edmonton Oilers in the playoffs. Most members of this House know that I have made a few wagers from time to time, and so far I've won, but in this case I feel the need to probably hedge my bets a bit. But since he didn't bet on his own team in Whitecourt, I think we might be even. I can understand him not wanting to bet against the Bandits, though. They are led by our captain, Nick Prkusic, and the coach, Ryan Papaioannou, to make the Brooks Bandits positively unstoppable this year.

1:50

We also have our not-so-secret weapon, Cale Makar, who is ninth in line for the NHL draft pick. My hope is that when Cale has finished his time with the Bandits, he will be drafted by Alberta's only real NHL team, the Flames. Many Flames fans on this side of the House will not shed a tear when the orange team loses in the playoffs or in 2019, but, friends, let's not let this divide us. Regardless of our politics or how long our two big teams may last in the playoffs, we can all agree that the Brooks Bandits are Alberta's team.

Statement by the Speaker

Referring to a Member by Name

The Speaker: Hon. members, just as sort of a reminder, I did not hear this personally, but it's been pointed out to me that during what is affectionately now known in the House as heckling, first names may have been used. I would remind you that first names are not used in the House, and that's not only in terms of speeches but also with respect to comments.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

GST on Carbon Levy

Mr. Jean: This NDP carbon tax is one of the biggest rip-offs in Alberta history. It's nickel and diming families and businesses everywhere they turn: on their groceries, at the pumps, and on their home heating bills. Now new information confirms that the NDP

carbon tax is just another tax on tax, giving Ottawa hundreds of millions of dollars in new revenue from the GST. The NDP have known for months that their carbon tax is just another gift to Ottawa from Albertans. Why didn't the NDP do anything to stop this fiasco?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member should know that the GST applies to provincial levies and taxes. Why should he know that? Because when he ran federally, he campaigned with a promise to remove the GST from these situations. And what did he do when he was in Ottawa? He broke that promise. Say one thing; do another: it's a pattern with the Leader of the Official Opposition. This is a situation that he promised he'd fix, and instead he only made it worse.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Factless, totally factless.

Now, I know the NDP don't want to hurt the feelings of their political allies in Ottawa, their new BFFs, but here are the facts. Albertans already send \$24 billion more to Ottawa every single year than we get back in transfers or services from Ottawa, and while tens of thousands of oil and gas workers are out of a job, Ottawa just raised taxes on our oil and gas industry. It's unfair, and it's just not right. We know the Premier refuses to do the sensible thing and repeal the carbon tax – we wish she would – but why won't the Premier fight Ottawa for an exemption on the GST on the carbon tax?

Ms Hoffman: The real question, Mr. Speaker, is: why did the member opposite promise to do something and then do nothing when he actually had the opportunity for 10 years in Ottawa? I know the member opposite is used to getting direction from Ottawa, and that seems to be the case again today, but let me tell you some real facts. Today the Business Development Bank's chief economist, Pierre Cl  roux, said that Alberta is going to have better growth than Saskatchewan, than Newfoundland, that we're seeing more investment right now in Alberta. This is going to be a great year for Alberta. There's going to be a turnaround, and we're going to build on that from this year forward. Those are the real facts.

Mr. Jean: A load of carbon tax.

The fact is that Albertans need fuel to live and work, and they really don't like government taking more from their pockets to do simple things like driving their kids to school, for instance, or maybe to an extracurricular activity. The Premier along with the Prime Minister have insisted that the money collected from the carbon tax will stay in Alberta. Well, we know that that is simply not the truth. All this tax does is make people poorer while growing the size of this government. Why did the Premier refuse to tell Albertans the full truth on the costs of the carbon tax they don't want?

Ms Hoffman: Here's the truth, Mr. Speaker. We know the cost of doing nothing because that's exactly what happened when the member opposite was in Ottawa with his new best friend. That's because on that side of the House they don't want Alberta to succeed. They are not proud of the fact that we got two – two – new pipeline approvals. We did that because we showed courage. We did that because we're working in partnership. We're working with industry. They stand with us. The job creators stand with us. Alberta is on the way up, and the members opposite know it.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: On the way up, Mr. Speaker? Record unemployment numbers are here in Alberta today because of the NDP.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: The NDP's new energy efficiency program, announced yesterday, creates an instant rebate program for things like LED lights, programmable thermostats, water-saving devices, and smart power strips. It sounds familiar, mostly because they're the same products offered in the NDP's Ecofitt boondoggle, and the way I see it, the NDP either realize how awful their Ecofitt program is, or they realized Albertans are actually capable of screwing in their own light bulbs. When will the Premier come clean to Albertans and cancel this wasteful duplication of a program?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about the great energy efficiency program that we have here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are excited about the opportunity to save energy and to save money on their power bills and put that back in their own pockets. Alberta contractors are excited about what this will mean for them in terms of new jobs. This is just the beginning. Last month we added 20,000 new full-time jobs in Alberta. These programs are going to add more. This government is getting real action and real results by our jobs plan.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that the NDP government must realize how bad their Ecofitt boondoggle is. Why else would they announce two programs just a couple of months apart which do the same thing? It doesn't make sense. They're spending Albertans' hard-earned money collected through the carbon tax like it's Monopoly money. There is no doubt that the energy efficiency program announced yesterday will be more cost-effective than the NDP actually hiring an Ontario company to go into houses in Alberta to change Albertans' light bulbs, that's for sure. Will the Premier face the facts and cancel her Ecofitt boondoggle, or do we expect a third one in a couple of months?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are excited to have an opportunity to work with a government that's helping them save money, and some of these things sound familiar because they've been happening for decades across North America. Where weren't they happening? In Alberta. The members opposite want to pretend that they can ignore reality, but we're not doing that. We're helping Albertans save money, we're getting access with two new pipeline approvals, and 350 contractors, Alberta contractors, have already registered to be part of this program. [interjections]

The Speaker: Would you keep the volume down, please.

Mr. Jean: We all know that a favourite pastime of this government is pushing the NDP world view on Albertans. Both the Ecofitt boondoggle and the new energy efficiency program require time set aside for training of program participants. When Ecofitt comes into your home to change your light bulbs, you will also get the privilege of getting lectured on the NDP world view. It seems that Alberta contractors will be trained in that lecturing, too. Will the Premier tell us what chapter of the Leap Manifesto she'll be pushing on Albertans through these programs? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please. [interjections] Quiet, please.
The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the residential no-cost program is going to save Albertans an average of about \$112 per year. The only ones who are unhappy about that are the Wildrose, who continue to make fun of the 90,000 Albertans who have signed up for that program. With the new programs announced yesterday – the rebates for windows, for tankless hot water heaters, and for insulation – again the Wildrose continues to make fun of those Albertans. So many of them were interested in it yesterday that the website crashed. Albertans want to save money. The Wildrose want to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, when I stand, would you please sit down? Thank you.

I think we're at the third main question.

Educational Curriculum Review Survey

Mr. Jean: It will come as no surprise to many Albertans that the NDP government has been less than forthcoming about the results of their curriculum review survey. While more than 32,000 Albertans took the time to participate in the survey, obviously important, the Education minister chose to only reveal hand-picked results from the review. Why? Well, I can only guess that they wanted to push results that aligned with the NDP world view or maybe the Leap Manifesto. Will the Premier commit to more openness and transparency and make the full results of the curriculum survey available to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. It highlights the survey that we had with Albertans, the largest survey that we've ever had with Alberta Education, more than 32,000 participants, and we published the results. Quite frankly, we published the good, the bad, and the slightly awkward even. There were 50 people who said that we should get rid of Shakespeare. As an English teacher we're not going to do that. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Jean: When I travel our province, I hear time and time again about how worried our parents are about their students being prepared in things like math and reading. They want Alberta to return to basics and to once again be a world leader in education, as we were 25 years ago. The curriculum survey itself asked leading questions that certainly don't allow parents to focus on these concerns that are important. Will the Premier commit to putting an end to our children being treated like guinea pigs in the classroom and listen to the concerned parents, who very much care about their children's welfare?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly invite both the hon. Leader of the Opposition and all Albertans to fill out the next questionnaire, talking about the scope and sequence for our education system. You know, so many Albertans did participate in this enterprise because they are concerned, and every step of the way we are putting this out in a very transparent manner. We know that we can make life better for Albertans, better than any other investment, by putting it into our education system. Our caucus has done so. We've built a budget that will support that, and I would advise the hon. member to support that budget, too, for Education.

Mr. Jean: The rollout of results from the curriculum survey clearly points to the NDP government working towards a predetermined end result that will satisfy government bureaucrats and no one else, certainly not Albertans. Without seeing how concerned Albertans actually answered the survey, we'll just have to take the NDP's word for it. That doesn't really sit well with me, and it doesn't sit well with parents who want to see their children succeed. Unless the Premier has something to hide, she should have no problems whatsoever in releasing the survey results. Premier, my question is simple. Will you release the actual results to Albertans? Yes or no? What are you hiding from Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, sometimes you learn a lot from putting out surveys. For example, we perhaps need to have better education for opposition members to read survey results, which are published in their fulsome wholesomeness for everybody to read. Certainly, it gives us lots of interesting directions to go to, a sense of transparency every step of the way, to make sure that we provide the best education for Alberta students.

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

Energy Efficiency Programs (continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government's energy inefficiency program sees people travelling across three provinces to screw in Alberta light bulbs. Not the brightest idea. The government claims that over 90,000 people have applied for the program even though a small fraction will be able to take advantage. A lot of valuable data is being collected for any number of uses. Albertans have a right to know what will happen to this data and their privacy. To the Premier: can you assure this House that all Albertans' information will not be mined by the NDP for your re-election purposes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.
The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we can assure the House that that is the case.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is misleading Albertans. The government's Energy Efficiency Alberta website has a section, which I will table today, which says: "Energy Efficiency Alberta's official agents will visit your home or business only when invited and will provide you with official identification. They are not selling anything, and they will never ask you for money." We know that they are expected to offer goods and services that are not a hundred per cent free. To the minister: if your official agent with identification won't be asking for money and selling, who will be? When will you correct the misleading website?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Albertans will be able to sign up and receive no-cost residential installation of select products which will save them, on average, about \$112 a year. In

addition, yesterday we announced a contractor program in which Alberta homeowners can receive rebates for the installation of new insulation, high-efficiency windows, and tankless hot water heaters. Those will also make life more affordable for Albertans and actually repair the fact that we're the only place in North America without an energy efficiency strategy thanks to the PC government.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: The minister just admitted that someone will be asking for money because that's the only way it can be rebated. She didn't answer the question.

The NDP are vote buying with free stuff and subsidized stuff through Energy Efficiency Alberta. To make matters worse, the CRA says that the carbon tax will cost \$150 million a year when this program gets into full flight. To the Premier: when will you realize that you don't work for those people in Ontario whom you've hired to deliver this program? Start putting Albertans first. They need a Premier that loves them, too.

Ms Hoffman: Speaking of Ontario, Mr. Speaker, I hope that that member asks his new leader why he didn't in fact fix the very situation that his party campaigned to fix many, many years ago. This isn't new. It's not news to the member opposite. We're working to make sure that we increase market access; get good results for Albertans, like two pipelines; and save money, putting \$212 back into a typical Albertan family's household pocket. This is good news, and I'm proud to stand up for it.

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

Highway 2 Gaetz Avenue Interchange in Red Deer

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Gaetz Avenue interchange project was announced with great fanfare in 2016. In addition to the safety improvements for all who travel the QE II, the people of Red Deer and central Alberta are relying on the project to be completed in time to handle the increased traffic that will come from the 2019 Canada Winter Games. But the last few times I drove by, I couldn't help but notice the lack of activity. So I looked into it, and it appears that all may not be well with the project. To the Minister of Transportation: has work stopped on the Gaetz Avenue interchange project, and if so, will it be done on time?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm not aware of what the hon. member is referring to. I do not believe that work has stopped on the project. But since he believes that to be the case, I will certainly look into it and get back to him.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that the minister will look into it.

I have been told by the people in Red Deer that there are challenges with the project. I understand and was told that there's a stop-work order on the project because the steel used is not up to standards. Again to the Minister of Transportation: is that true?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Well, I know that the hon. member's question is getting members on the other side excited, Mr. Speaker.

I am unaware of this issue. I will look into it, and I will get back to the member.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I understand also that the procurement process on this particular project has been different than the ones they've used in the past. The question is to the Minister of Transportation again. Is it true, in fact, and if so, did the new process lead to delays with the project?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for that question. Mr. Speaker, as I said, I'll get back to the hon. member.

I want to tell the House that this government is contributing over \$4 billion towards projects that are putting people back to work, Mr. Speaker, that are getting Albertans building things throughout the province. That project will improve safety in the Red Deer area. It will put hundreds of people to work, and it will really boost this economy, something this government is doing to make life better for Alberta families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Public Transit Capital Funding

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Calgary-Northern Hills I represent a growing and newer residential community. Living on the northern edge of Calgary, one of the greatest challenges residents of my community face is efficient and more frequent and accessible public transit. To the Minister of Transportation: do you have a plan to help fund Calgary's priority transit project, the green line?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to assure the hon. member of this government's commitment to public transit, including supporting both major cities on their LRT network. The city of Calgary has yet to refine the details of the project in terms of its scope, its timing, and total cost. I've indicated to the city of Calgary – and I've had many conversations with the mayor on this matter – that when they have a final ask in terms of this, we are certainly going to sit down with them and consider it because public transportation is a key priority of this government.

2:10

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Albertans, including residents of Calgary-Northern Hills, are eager to see transit projects move forward, to the Minister of Transportation: will you make a firm commitment to funding public transit infrastructure in the coming year? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to tell the hon. member that that has already taken place. We're investing, as part of our four-year capital plan, \$1.3 billion in transit funding initiatives to connect communities, to enhance access to markets and services, and to make life better for Albertans. It includes \$305 million over four years for new transit initiatives to support both regional and green transit infrastructure projects in Alberta. This government is committed to making life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's economy has been experiencing a downturn and many Albertans are in need of work, including Calgarians, again to the Minister of Transportation: how does the plan to build public transit put Albertans to work and help support economic diversification?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Mason: I know, Mr. Speaker, that the economy is on many people's minds. That's why our government is investing in infrastructure throughout the province. We create jobs in construction, in engineering, design, and many of these jobs are in the city of Calgary, I just might say. It provides affordable alternatives to single-family vehicles for Alberta families, part of our commitment to make life more affordable for Alberta families.

Continuing Care Wait Times

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, when a senior needs continuing care, extended wait times can be catastrophic for everyone. I've seen what a wait time for a loved one suffering from Alzheimer's can do, and I've seen it almost kill the spouse as they tried to care for the most important person in their life. According to the AHS third-quarter performance report Alberta seniors have only a 56 per cent chance of finding a continuing care placement within 30 days. To the minister: when can our seniors, the men and women who built this province, expect better results?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. This certainly is one of the issues that matter a lot to Alberta families. When you are aging and you require additional supports, you deserve to be able to have access to that in a timely fashion, to live in a homelike environment. That's one of the reasons why while the opposition and the third party were lobbying for big, deep cuts in the last campaign, we were campaigning on building 2,000 new long-term care and continuing care beds. We're really proud to keep moving forward with that initiative. There is still much more work to be done, but we are working to make sure that we make life better for Alberta seniors.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these long wait times are getting worse under this government's watch and that families are suffering and given that in southern Alberta, or the south zone, seniors only have a 48 per cent chance of being placed within 30 days – the system is obviously failing seniors – and given that in the summary of the report it states, and I quote, that the south and the north zones have remained stable, does the minister really think that a failing grade is stable, or do southern Alberta seniors just not matter in the eyes of this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Albertan matters to this side of the House. We are working diligently to make sure that we are building those 2,000 very much-needed long-term care and dementia beds. We're making sure that we're working in

partnership with communities to make sure that everyone can age with dignity and respect. That's important to us, and that's one of the reasons why not only are we moving forward with the capital projects that are much needed in this province, but we're actually providing operating funding to make sure that those beds can actually be staffed, that seniors can have dignity, instead of pushing for billions of dollars in cuts, which the members opposite are advocating for.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that self-managed care increases the quality of life for seniors and lowers costs on the system and given that we have heard that AHS enacted changes in the fall of 2016 so that clients residing in privately operated supported living settings are no longer eligible to receive self-managed care funding, why is the NDP stopping seniors from receiving self-managed care funding in private settings at a time when seniors are facing long wait times for continuing care placements?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Each potential home-care client is assessed individually to determine whether or not he or she has any unmet health care needs that could be addressed under self-managed care. Clients receive funding to hire and pay for their own unmet personal care. So there would be individual assessments that are done to determine if there is unmet care. We did touch on this in estimates. I'm happy to discuss this matter further if the member would choose to, but I think that there's perhaps some lack of information, and I'd be happy to provide it to the member.

Workplace Legislation Review

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, yesterday opposition parties shared Albertans' concerns about the inadequacy of consultation with respect to broad changes being considered by this government to both the labour code and employment standards. These changes will impact every business in Alberta, with small and medium-sized enterprises being particularly affected. All that these individuals and businesses ask for is meaningful consultation and for their views to be heard and considered. To the Minister of Labour: will you do the right thing, reopen consultation, enhance it, and extend it at least until the end of the calendar year? And, please, this is not a question about 1980s pop trivia.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During tough economic times Albertans need legislation that protects families. The former government held consultations and did reports on Alberta's workplace legislation, too, but then what did they do with it? They did nothing. The member opposite is speaking about the concerns of Alberta businesses. I'm very much interested in working with businesses as we move forward, but I'm also listening to the concerns of Alberta workers, concerns like talking to Andrew, whose wife had to work through chemotherapy because she couldn't get access to job-protected sick leave.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, given that we continue to hear concerns from stakeholders that this government's hasty consultation

is a sign that the minister already knows what the final legislation will look like and given that many individuals and organizations have expressed concern that the government will use pro-union legislation as an olive branch or quid pro quo in upcoming labour negotiations with their ideological friends, again to the minister: did you design consultation to meet a predetermined outcome... [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Gotfried: ... and will you use ill-considered legislation to appease union leadership as part of upcoming public-sector negotiations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that this legislation has not been updated in so much time, it was responsible and important for this government to start reviewing workplace legislation. In regard to the consultation process, particularly with the Labour Relations Code, we have engaged expert Mr. Andrew Sims, and I have spoken in this House before about my respect for this gentleman. Also, the Member for Calgary-Hays has spoken about his respect and has suggested that getting advice from Andrew Sims is a good idea, that he is one of the smartest people you will ever meet on labour laws. I am confident in our consultation.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that part of the concern with inadequate consultation is this government's and the NDP's deep and obvious constitutional and personal ties to a variety of unions and labour groups and given that because of these strong ideological ties there's an assumption that this government will facilitate greater ease in the formation of unions by getting rid of the privacy and anonymity of the secret-ballot process, again to the minister, a question that is important to all Alberta employers and employees: are you planning on get rid of the secret-ballot requirement for unionization? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our consultation closed just yesterday at midnight, so we are going to be reviewing what over 4,800 Albertans had to say on the matter, what over 1,000 employers had to say, and 340 written submissions. I want to see what Albertans have had to say and then move forward with fair and balanced legislation that will make sure we're supporting a strong economy here in Alberta, making sure we're returning some basic rights to our workers like job-protected sick leave.

2:20 Municipal Government Act and Wood Buffalo

Mr. Yao: It was nearly a year ago that the Premier rose in this place and called the Leader of the Official Opposition a fearmongerer after he raised concerns about the wildfire that would eventually devastate Fort McMurray. Eleven months ago this government said that it would stand side by side with Fort McMurray as it rebuilt. Five months ago the former Minister of Municipal Affairs said, and I quote: Bill 21 grandfathers the current ratio indefinitely. End quote. Now we have Bill 8, which exposes Fort McMurray to massive property tax hikes. Why should my constituents and all Albertans trust this government after this massive flip-flop?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We spoke about it yesterday, and as I told him yesterday, that ratio of 5 to 1 is in regulations that will be coming out soon and that we're going to collect feedback on. We've been working hand in hand with RMWB on this. They've been working very closely with industry on this, and we're waiting to hear feedback on what they come up with and what all these other municipalities have to say on it, like we have been doing constantly.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, many people in my riding are struggling since this government came to power. Given that local businesses are closing shop and many homeowners that are trying to rebuild are still stuck in limbo and given that this bill could be another blow to a community that has faced so many challenges in the last few years, will the Premier please explain, given the economic situation in Alberta and Wood Buffalo, how she can justify sticking these homeowners with a policy that could lead to massive increases in Fort McMurray's residential tax rates?

Mr. S. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I don't deal in hypotheticals. We're working together with Fort McMurray. We're working together with municipalities across this province. The MGA is the gold standard of consultation. I've said it before, and I continue to say it. We are going to make sure that we have the backs of the people of the RMWB. We said it last year, we've continued to say it, and we will continue saying it and having their backs going forward.

Mr. Yao: There's nothing hypothetical about this bill, sir.

Mr. Speaker, for many years Fort McMurray was forgotten and left to fend for itself by provincial decision-makers. As such, our municipality took matters into its own hands to ensure that people in our region had the services that we needed. Given that previous government decisions drove housing prices through the roof, affordable rent disappeared, wages had to be compensated for the high cost of living, and the RMWB built infrastructure with no provincial funds, is this Premier taking her advice from the same bureaucrats responsible for creating these very same issues?

Mr. S. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate, the disrespect coming from the opposition's side for our people that work so hard to make sure that the people in Fort McMurray were taken care of and continue to be taken care of. I can't believe that he's saying this. I am proud of the people in my ministry, how hard they work, the effort they put in day in and day out. I will continue to support them, and I will continue to support the RMWB going forward, as I've said.

Okotoks Water Supply

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week in estimates when asked about whether or not the Okotoks water pipeline was a funding issue, the Minister of Transportation said that he believed the main and only remaining hurdle for the town to procure potable water from Calgary was a licensing issue. He said, "There are no more licences to draw water, so it's a matter of negotiating, I think, between Okotoks and Calgary." Pretty profound. Does the minister still agree that this issue would be resolved if the town could obtain water from the city of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the town has made an application under the water for life program with respect to this matter, and that is under consideration. I'm not at liberty to

disclose the results of that application because it has yet to be determined.

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, given that in 2014 the city of Calgary issued a letter stating, “I am pleased to inform you that Calgary City Council has confirmed that The City of Calgary is prepared to provide treated water to the Town of Okotoks to supplement [their water supply]” and given that this letter should allow Okotoks to begin discussions with the province of Alberta to provide funding assistance for the pipeline, as they did, why is the province standing in the way of this important project for the town of Okotoks?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have also had conversations with both the town of Okotoks and the city of Calgary on the water licensing issue, and we continue to work on it within Environment and Parks because, of course, our commitment to clean drinking water for all Albertans is a shared responsibility between the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Environment and Parks. That remains our commitment to make sure that all Albertans have access to that drinking water infrastructure that they need in order to make life better for everyone.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, to either minister. Which one? They seem unaware that the details of the situation are well known.

Since I’ve raised this issue several times in the past two years, when will the minister put an end to the bureaucratic red tape and roadblocks, move forward on this file, and give Okotoks the much-needed water pipeline they deserve? Do the right thing.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Environment and Parks has said, we’re committed to making sure that Albertans have . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.
Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We’re committed to making sure that Albertans have access to clean drinking water. We’ve expanded the program, for example, in order to provide drinking water . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Mason: Will you knock it off?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, finish quickly.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We’re committed to making sure that Albertans have access to clean and safe drinking water, and we’ve extended the program \$100 million over four years to extend water lines to First Nations as well, which is a very serious problem. In terms of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Fentanyl- and Carfentanil-related Deaths

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drug dealers have upped the death toll by lacing opioids with carfentanil, an elephant tranquilizer. We learned this news through an interim AHS opioid abuse report highlighting that carfentanil not only killed 30 Albertans in 2016, but it has already killed 15 people in the first six

weeks of this year. When this government learned of the alarming death toll spike, it did not raise an alert. Minister, why, at the very minimum, did you not warn the public the moment you learned that carfentanil was killing Albertans?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As was highlighted by the member, earlier this month we released the interim fentanyl death report, which showed that 51 Albertans died from fentanyl overdoses, which compares to 28 deaths in the same six-week period in 2016. We know that this crisis is escalating, and with the emergence of carfentanil we are very concerned as well, which is why when the first cases of carfentanil were detected in Alberta, a public statement was made by our government officials. We continue to warn Albertans about the dangers of fentanyl and carfentanil.

Mr. Ellis: A report is not a warning.

Given that carfentanil is 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times more toxic than fentanyl and given that someone overdosing on carfentanil may need multiple doses of naloxone and people assisting them need to know this and given that carfentanil’s extreme toxicity also puts first responders in danger, to the minister: why have you not created a system that will alert all Albertans of surges and locations of fentanyl-related incidents to assist in saving lives and co-ordinating resources?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government officials have been working very closely with law enforcement as well as with first responders, sharing data as well as information about emerging trends. What we are finding, of course, is that law enforcement and first responders, in particular, tend to see trends emerging sooner than we maybe see them across the province. Having those open lines of communication and working together in a collaborative effort is how we’re going to work together to respond to this crisis.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that six weeks into 2017 fentanyl-related deaths are estimated at 51 – that’s almost twice the number as last year at this time – and given that fatalities could be astronomic this year alone and given that in the United States, where 91 people are dying every day and this death toll crisis is being compared to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and Alberta was ground zero for it, to the minister: how many Albertans have to die before you finally declare a public health emergency and bring all resources to bear on this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are aware of what a serious crisis this is, and that is why we’re multiplying our efforts in Budget 2017, spending up to \$56 million over the next year to help Albertans get the treatment they need to reduce the harm of substance use and to raise public awareness. I sincerely hope that when we get to the budget estimates in Committee of Supply later today, the members will vote in favour of our Health budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:30

Unharvested 2016 Crops

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents' livelihoods depend on agriculture, but given the recent disastrous harvest season these hard-working farmers have raised specific concerns they want this government to address. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how is this government prepared to mitigate the disastrous harvest this past year, and what proactive measures are being taken to ensure that our farmers are protected in the future?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Last season was certainly a difficult one for producers, from dry conditions early on to wet. While we can't control weather conditions, we can control our response, and we can prepare for these types of tough growing seasons. That is why our government continues to invest heavily in business risk management programs like AgriInsurance, AgriStability, and AgriInvest. These programs are available to help producers mitigate the potential effects of these kinds of conditions and is one of the ways that our government works to make life better for producers.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the concern my constituents have with wait times, to the same minister: has this government supported AFSC to ensure that they have enough adjusters to assess last year's crop damage in a reasonable time frame?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department is working closely with AFSC to track their response to the poor season, to make sure that producers are looked after. As of March 24 over \$32.3 million has been paid out to producers, and 95 per cent of eligible unharvested acres benefit claims have been processed. I've been in touch with AFSC to ensure that they have an aggressive strategy in place to effectively allocate resources. I'm pleased to hear that AFSC has been working diligently to ensure that resources are allocated effectively and that claims are processed as quickly as possible. I would urge all producers to work closely with their local AFSC office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers are expected to leave rows of unharvested crop for assessment, which may render cross-contamination of the new crop, to the same minister: how is the government preparing to mitigate that issue?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, if a producer is eager to get the crop off the field, I strongly urge them to reach out to the AFSC prior to doing anything. Some producers may be asked to leave rows for assessment, but I've been told that AFSC will assess as soon as possible. Producers concerned about contamination should call 310.FARM to explore options. There are many unique crop scenarios for AFSC to consider, and AFSC will recommend a variety of actions according to the unique circumstances of that crop and that region.

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

New School Construction in Rocky View County

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chestermere is one of the fastest growing cities in Canada, and Chestermere high school serves the communities of Langdon, Indus, Conrich, Chestermere, Dalemead, Delacour, Balzac, and Kathryn and has for 54 years and is overcrowded and old. The Auditor General report states that the departments of Education and Infrastructure do not have adequate systems to plan, deliver, or report on school build plans. Chestermere high school is on the second year of the Rocky View capital plan and, hopefully, will be built far away from the highway that took Jaydon Sommerfeld. To the minister: what will it take to get a school built in Chestermere-Rocky View?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Certainly, we were just in six hours of estimates the last two days, and we did discuss capital projects in quite a large degree of fulsomeness. One of the features that we have built in as a result of the Auditor General's report is extra money to help individual school boards get site ready in terms of site ready for the sewage and for the electricity and for drainage and so forth. We are directing these extra monies and supports to make sure that we get schools built on time to make life better for Albertans.

Mrs. Aheer: Given that the Auditor General's report stated that each of the departments of Education and Infrastructure is responsible for specific pieces of school builds but neither is responsible for the overall results, so the information on project schedules, including completion dates, is lost and given that the AG said that internal reporting on the project progress is lacking and public reporting is therefore consequently weak and that in Langdon we have a school that is on the first-year capital plan, to the minister: what has your ministry done to work with the Ministry of Infrastructure to address the specific concerns in the AG's report and get our schools built?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in fact, we did ask the Auditor General to produce that very report because we were concerned about the scheduling of how the previous government was building schools. We found that more than half of them were behind schedule. Based on that report that we actually asked the Auditor General to do, we built a very sophisticated system by which we communicate with Alberta Infrastructure. We have meetings, and we have just-in-time funding. We meet with the larger school boards who are building their own projects. It's working. We're saving Albertans money. We're getting schools built. Certainly, I'm well aware of the circumstances in Rocky View school...

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, given that the Auditor General stated that neither of the departments of Education or Infrastructure has the systems to support school building programs, nor could they keep pace with the very large growth and complexity of the school build program and given that there seems to be no clear method of reporting school projects' progress, which the surrounding communities desperately need, to the minister: will you be able to build a school in Chestermere-Rocky View?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Eggen: Again, thank you very much, and yes, yes, yes. We certainly are working on this in the most fulsome sort of way, and I'm well aware. I met with the Rocky View school board last week, and it's one of the fastest growing enrolment situations in the province of Alberta. So we are working very closely with them, including getting site readiness for schools like Chestermere, making life better for Alberta families.

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

Fentanyl Use in Indigenous Communities

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During estimates for indigenous affairs the minister spoke about the need to fully consult with First Nations before implementing aspects of the climate leadership plan that affected those communities. He said that decisions could not be made unilaterally and must include government-to-government dialogue, but I've heard from First Nations leaders who feel that their input was not fully considered regarding declaring a public health emergency with respect to fentanyl. To the minister: what consultation occurred, if any, specifically with First Nations groups regarding the fentanyl crisis?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. We know that indigenous communities have been particularly hard hit by the fentanyl epidemic, which is why we're working with leaders in those communities. Further, we've been working with health centres on- and off-reserve to ensure that supplies of naloxone are readily available as well as that the adequate screening is there so that those kits are able to save lives.

Mr. Rodney: Given the shared responsibility between provincial and federal governments with respect to indigenous relations and health spending and given that the federal government has designated money to be put aside to combat opioid abuse and given that in estimates the Minister of Indigenous Relations agreed with me that we have a fentanyl and opioid crisis on our hands, to the same minister: would the declaration of a public health emergency help First Nations to access more resources to deal with opioid addiction and the scourge of fentanyl, and if so, what is your government doing to help them access additional federal support? The Minister of Indigenous Relations, please.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. We are continuing to work with indigenous leaders both on- and off-reserve to ensure that we have adequate and culturally appropriate treatments and supports available to all indigenous peoples, whether they live on-reserve or off-reserve. To that end, we are also working to establish supervised consumption services in areas where there is the highest level of need.

Mr. Rodney: I didn't know we had a new Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Now, given the need to foster dialogue with First Nations so that the fentanyl crisis is quickly and efficiently addressed and given that other ministries such as Health rely on the expertise of Indigenous Relations to help them develop culturally appropriate

practices and given the unique challenges that each of these treaty groups has in dealing with this crisis, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: will you facilitate meetings with treaties 6, 7, and 8 and their representatives to help co-ordinate the provincial response to fentanyl with culturally appropriate best practices for each . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We have actually taken a crossministerial approach to the fentanyl crisis, working quite closely with partners in law enforcement, with Indigenous Relations as well as Advanced Education and Education. This is a very important issue and one that we take incredibly seriously as government, which is why we've also been working quite closely with the federal government, not just on how we're going to best and most effectively implement the resources for people using the federal funding that we received at the end of last year but also with matching funds from our government. Again, I urge the members across the way to support the Health budget so we can continue to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The member for Calgary-East.

2:40

Affordable Child Care

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the main concerns that I hear from my constituents in Calgary-East is access to affordable, quality child care. Many parents in my riding are shift workers and require flexible hours, and as a mother I am keenly aware of how difficult it is to find a licensed space that meets your children's needs. To the Minister of Children's Services: will the government's recent investments increase access to spaces for parents in Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a mom I know how important the place that you drop your kids off every day is, but when the cost of child care is as much as a second mortgage, many parents are forced to choose between child care and pursuing their career, and the struggles that moms and dads face when trying to provide the best opportunities for their kids have been ignored in this province for far too long. That's why we're making life better and more affordable for families with our early learning and child care pilot centres, costing no more than \$25 a day.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that research shows the preschool years are absolutely critical for child development and given that parents deserve a child care centre that meets the learning needs of their children, how will the 22 new centres ensure that children with diverse needs can access the care that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While our goal is to make child care more affordable, we are also focused on addressing gaps that already exist in Alberta's child care system. Early learning and child care centres will be welcoming, supportive places for children with developmental and other disabilities, indigenous and newcomer families and will offer the kinds of flexible hours that have been missing in Alberta for so long. Centres will fit the needs

of their communities, meaning parents can trust that their kids are getting the kind of care that they need.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the interest my constituents have expressed in the pilot program and given that early learning centres are already receiving a high volume of calls for spaces, can Albertans expect to see this program expanded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know these centres won't come close to addressing the demand for quality child care in Alberta. They are just a start, a pilot, and we'll be watching closely as they evolve, and we'll apply what we learn as we expand this pilot as the province's finances permit. For families who won't be able to take their kids to the centres right away, we are continuing to invest in the child care subsidy program to provide supports for early learning and child care professionals. Unlike the Official Opposition, who has called this program a waste of money, we made the choice to make this investment in affordable, quality child care for Alberta families now and in the future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll proceed in 30 seconds.

Hon. members, if you're exiting, please exit. Hon. members, either sit down or exit.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings. The first, from Great White North Franchisee Association-Tim Hortons storeowners requesting consideration in the ongoing discussions around consultations with business and the labour code.

The second is from the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada.

The third is from the Motor Dealers' Association of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I've got a couple of tablings here. The first one is a screenshot of the Energy Efficiency Alberta website that I referred to today about not selling anything and not asking for money.

The second one is an article from the *Edmonton Journal* talking about how the carbon tax could raise another \$280 million in revenue for the federal government on the surtax on the carbon tax.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for your note today. I have three letters for tabling with respect to a call for an extension and enhancement of the consultation on labour and employment standards. The first is a letter from Marc Rheume, vice-president, Hospitality Inns, Delta Hotels. The second one is from Jessie Lail, chief investment officer, Indevolutions Corp. The third is from Mr. Dean Koeller, president, Calvert Home Mortgage Investment Corporation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies to table of a letter I wrote to the hon. Government House Leader on March 9, 2017, with this one particular quote: "I was interested earlier when the Premier was going on and on about how the terrible opposition parties with their tiny resources had been able to brainwash the entire population of the province on postsecondary education." That was the minister in 2005.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In estimates the committee chair asked if I would table five copies of the following. It is indeed the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta's December 2016 newsletter. The reason he asked me to table it is this quotation: "We have – and will continue – to support choice in education as well, whether students are learning in a bricks-and-mortar school or at home under the watchful eyes of their parents." That was said, of course, by the hon. Minister of Education.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from the Calgary Motor Dealers Association about the workplace legislation review. They're not satisfied with the consultation process. They felt it was flawed, and they wanted more time for the consultation.

The Speaker: The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a copy of a letter that was CCed to me. It was sent to the Minister of Labour, writing to request additional time and better local and regional access with respect to the workplace legislation review. This letter is from Kelly Temple, the dealer principal at Eastside Kia in Calgary.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House that we return to Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees. In the order of proceedings we seem to have missed something.

[Unanimous consent denied]

2:50

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Hon. members, prior to beginning, the chair will outline the process for this afternoon. The Committee of Supply will first call on the chairs of the legislative policy committees to report on their meetings with the various ministries under their mandate. No vote is required when these reports are presented according to Standing Order 59.01(10).

The committee will then proceed to the vote on the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly. The estimates of two ministries will then be voted on separately pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1)(b) and in accordance with notice provided by the Official Opposition House Leader to the Clerk and the Chair of Committees on April 18, 2017. The final vote for the main estimates will consist of the remainder of the ministries not yet voted upon.

Finally, the chair would like to remind all hon. members of Standing Order 32(3.1), which provides that after the first division is called in Committee of Supply during the vote on the main

estimates, the interval between division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent divisions.

Committee Reports

The Chair: I would now invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future to present the committee's report.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I'm pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2017-2018 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: the Ministry of Advanced Education, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, the Ministry of Executive Council, the Ministry of Infrastructure, and the Ministry of Labour.

Pursuant to Government Motion 17 the committee has also reviewed the 2017-2018 proposed estimates and business plan for the Ministry of Education.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities to present the committee's report.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2017-2018 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: the Ministry of Children's Services, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, the Ministry of Seniors and Housing, the Ministry of Service Alberta, and the Ministry of Status of Women.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2017-2018 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Environment and Parks, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Ministry of Transportation, and the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance.

Thank you.

Vote on Main Estimates 2017-18

The Chair: We shall now proceed to the vote on the 2017-18 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(5), which requires that these estimates be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the following question on all matters related to the 2017-18 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

Agreed to:
Offices of the Legislative Assembly \$128,440,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Now we will proceed to the vote on the estimates of the two ministries which will be voted on separately pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1)(b) and in accordance with notice provided by the Official Opposition House Leader to the Clerk and the Chair of Committees on April 18, 2017.

Agreed to:	
Ministry of Children's Services	
Expense	\$1,205,824,000
Capital Investment	\$1,539,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Agreed to:	
Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General	
Expense	\$1,336,428,000
Capital Investment	\$4,452,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

We shall now proceed to the final vote on the main estimates. Those members in favour of the remaining resolutions for the 2017-18 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, please say aye.

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:55 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms. Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:		
Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carlier	Horne	Payne
Carson	Jansen	Phillips
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sabir
Dach	Luff	Schmidt
Dang	Malkinson	Schreiner
Drever	Mason	Shepherd
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Feehan	McKittrick	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard

Against the motion:		
Aheer	Fraser	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Gill	Schneider
Clark	Gotfried	Smith
Cooper	Hanson	Starke
Cyr	Hunter	Strankman

Drysdale	McIver	Swann
Ellis	Orr	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Pitt	Yao
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 24

[The remaining estimates of the general revenue fund and lottery fund were carried]

The Chair: Moving on, shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

I would now invite the hon. acting Deputy Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2017-18 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2017-18 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2017-18 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2017-18 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly: support to the Legislative Assembly, \$68,657,000; office of the Auditor General, \$26,754,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$3,265,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$7,436,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$949,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$6,873,000; office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$13,242,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$1,264,000.

Government main estimates.

Advanced Education: expense, \$2,763,355,000; capital investment, \$450,556,000; financial transactions, \$630,000,000.

Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$743,901,000; capital investment, \$17,189,000; financial transactions, \$1,310,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$1,205,824,000; capital investment, \$1,539,000.

Community and Social Services: expense, \$3,326,108,000; capital investment, \$3,623,000.

Culture and Tourism: expense, \$335,056,000; capital investment, \$2,041,000; financial transactions, \$5,017,000.

Economic Development and Trade: expense, \$354,180,000; capital investment, \$2,340,000; financial transactions, \$50,000,000.

Education: expense, \$4,703,858,000; capital investment, \$1,290,904,000; financial transactions, \$14,348,000.

Energy: expense, \$208,881,000; capital investment, \$5,399,000; financial transactions, \$65,025,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$950,482,000; capital investment, \$226,766,000; financial transactions, \$100,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$26,807,000.

Health: expense, \$20,356,900,000; capital investment, \$174,791,000; financial transactions, \$66,200,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$192,811,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$24,901,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$589,026,000; capital investment, \$766,898,000; financial transactions, \$23,727,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$1,336,428,000; capital investment, \$4,452,000.

Labour: expense, \$204,139,000; capital investment, \$900,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$1,687,610,000; capital investment, \$8,437,000; financial transactions, \$138,279,000.

Seniors and Housing: expense, \$532,729,000; capital investment, \$166,580,000; financial transactions, \$17,500,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$333,193,000; capital investment, \$131,155,000; financial transactions, \$10,150,000.

Status of Women: expense, \$7,329,000; capital investment, \$50,000.

Transportation: expense, \$1,771,356,000; capital investment, \$1,276,319,000; financial transactions, \$95,831,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$165,052,000; capital investment, \$3,328,000; financial transactions, \$6,187,000; transfer from the lottery fund, \$1,445,544,000.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my report.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Appropriation Act, 2017. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved first reading of Bill 10, the Appropriation Act, 2017.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:22 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Nielsen
Babcock	Jansen	Phillips
Carlier	Kazim	Rosendahl
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Sweet
Ganley	McLean	Turner

Goehring	McPherson	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woollard
Hinkley	Miranda	
Against the motion:		
Aheer	Gill	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Schneider
Clark	Hanson	Starke
Drysdale	Hunter	Strankman
Ellis	McIver	Swann
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Fraser	Pitt	
Totals:	For – 38	Against – 20

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

3:40 **Government Bills and Orders** **Committee of the Whole**

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 6 **Northland School Division Act**

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Are we speaking on the bill? Okay.

Madam Chair, I'm very pleased to be able to speak about the Northland School Division Act. Some of the things that I was thinking about – I've given it a lot of thought. Northland school division was created not like every other school division in Alberta, not like most of them. It was created out of whole cloth in the '60s to fill a gap. That gap was providing some form of school system for the various northern communities that had their educational needs tended to by the churches or by a few local, very individual school divisions but nothing in which there was cohesive effort to make sure that their standard of education was the level or the equivalent of other people, other students in Alberta. They took care of the very small, some medium, some very isolated communities. There were farming communities; there were very definitely bush communities all over north-central Alberta, Métis settlements, and a lot of different areas.

One of the things that I find intriguing is that while there were commonalities to them – the population was 95 per cent indigenous at the time of creation – there was diversity, differences among them. Just for instance, I remember my class in Wabasca where the students found it very funny to listen to a tape of children from one of the farther east Northland schools speaking Cree because the accent was so different from their own. It was the same language, but it definitely had regional variations.

I want to talk about a few of the communities within the Northland division just to give kind of an illustration of how challenging running a school division like that, like Northland and that is Northland, can be. One community where I spent some time working as a psychologist is Susa Creek. Susa Creek is south of Grande Cache. It's just along highway 40, so when you go north from Hinton, you go up along that highway. Susa Creek is a very small community, and it's a co-op. It is not a reserve. It is not a settlement. It is a co-op. There are little co-ops set along that highway, groups of people who were displaced from Jasper national park when it was created.

What happened is that the Susa Creek people and the other people in the various co-ops along there were offspring of the Cree people and the Iroquois voyageurs who wound up settling in around Jasper. They farmed. They had a very nice farming community in the Athabasca River valley. If you go to Jasper park now and you go to Snaring River campground and you turn left to go towards Celestine Lake, you'll come to this big, beautiful valley surrounded by mountains, and you'll see some of the original farmhouses and outbuildings of the people that lived there. It's just lovely. But the park, when it was created, really didn't have a place for them there, so they were given these little pieces of land up along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and, basically, to the best of my knowledge, what I've been able to understand, were told: away you go. It was a year's march – that's in the Grande Cache visitor centre, which also works as a museum – to get all their belongings and their farm animals all that way on their own. So they settled there, and they've managed to have pretty active communities.

The only one of the co-ops that has its own school is Susa Creek, maybe just because it was the largest of the co-ops. The people there, as in many of the Northland communities, are always walking that tightrope, wanting the best for their children, like parents everywhere do, which means giving them options to do different things when they grow up. They want an education that's needed, but they want them to be aware of and to learn about their traditional way of life.

I had a long conversation with one parent in that community who said that every once in a while she and her husband would become aware that the children were becoming too affected by the modern conveniences. It didn't necessarily mean that she didn't want them spending all their time watching TV or playing video games but that they were missing out on learning how to do the things that were important in the culture. So their solution, which they did on a semiannual basis, my guess would be, was to move everybody into the wilderness for a period of time. They had a wilderness area where they would live, and they would set up a home, and they would provide for themselves.

Of course, the children would learn everything they'd need to know: the old ways of doing things and the ways you took care of things, how you get your food, how to get your water, how to build your housing. This was really important. It's such a challenge but, obviously, a very rewarding one because they want to maintain the traditional way of life and to have an education be available for the children, so they will come back into the community for the schooling to make sure that they're not missing it.

One of the things that becomes very clear the longer that you work up north is that to go in and have any expectation that the people in the various northern communities are going to somehow transform into people that are more like, you know, their urban neighbours, is not really realistic. That wouldn't be them.

I had a long conversation one time with a family up in Fort Chipewyan, and it involved raising grandchildren. When children sometimes would disappear into the delights and the money of Fort McMurray and not necessarily come back, the grandparents would be left with the children. Again, they'd be working very hard to maintain the traditional ways and to make sure that the children grew up with the skills of their culture but also to support them being successful at school.

Again, I heard parents talking about that one concern some of them had in one of the more southern schools was how important it was that children learn math and science: well, you know, don't dumb things down; don't oversimplify things. They wanted their children, when they graduated, if they wanted to go to NAIT or university, to be able to do it, so what they were being taught in

school needed to be at a level that would benefit them, that would be worth while for their futures.

Of course, it is bearing fruit. I'm noticing now that in a lot of the Northland schools more and more of the people working in the schools, the teachers and other professional people, are people from the communities, so that's success right there. Things are working.

One of the problems sometimes is that people want it to work really fast. They want things to change overnight. I can tell you, as anybody who's lived up north knows, that if you spend 40 years up there, if you're lucky, you're going to see a change, but you're not going to see great big, huge landslide changes.

It's recognizing, acknowledging, celebrating the culture, and it's also making sure that the education, as I've said, is something that will benefit students in the long run. It's making sure – and I do agree with that – children have the opportunity to learn about their cultures in school, so it's not just saying, "You know, on weekends you can go and be with your families and learn about your cultures," but to get a big picture of where their cultures fit into the big mosaic of being a Canadian, being an Albertan. It's really important to make sure that they know they are important in the fabric of their country and their community.

In the variation, as I've said, about Susa Creek, Wabasca-Desmarais, which are quite big communities, there's another comparison because they're not exactly urban but by comparison they are. They've got stores, they've got hotels, and they've got gas stations. There are a few more temptations for families. Sometimes, as a result, families will leave those centres as being a little bit too modern and will go live in the wilderness for a while, for six months or a year, just to be able to get back to their roots. I've known people who did that. It's not only sometimes for the children but for themselves, so they can find out where they are, remember who they are, remember what's important, and then they come back. This is fairly common.

3:50

There are people who, you know, are next to highways. The Mackenzie highway goes right by a couple of schools out there. There are the people of the fly-in communities, Chip Lake in the summer, and other places. Well, Susa Creek, being near Grande Cache, is pretty central. It's just that the more I look at it, the more interesting, the more diverse, the more varied it is, and the more we need to support having a board.

I was just having a look at some of the old reviews and some of the studies of Northland, and one of the things they said was that if you try to break up Northland and try to just put everybody with the nearest local community, you're going to be discounting the nature of the people that make up Northland. To help Northland and to help the children there and to celebrate who they are and what they're doing, they need to have their own schools and they need to be fostered, celebrated, and helped to prosper.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek for just wonderful information and for your obvious passion for the people in your outreach out there. Thank you so much for that. It was really, really wonderful to hear your background and your understanding of those folks. It's spectacular. Thank you so much. It actually plays a lot into the things that I want to speak about with regard to this bill, so thank you so much.

One of those things is that need for consultation, especially in spaces like this, where you have so many people and such diverse communities. As you were saying, Cree is spoken differently in one area than it is in the other. It's a beautiful and an unusual and very – I don't know – unique, I guess, aspect of those folks that may not get a chance to see each other and may have been, you know, separated by distance for a very, very long time so that they ultimately get their own accents and colour and feelings and words to describe the same things. Thank you so much for sharing that because I didn't know that and it gives a lot of personal anecdotal information to bills like this.

You talked about the cultural diversity, but there's also huge geographical diversity as well, isn't there? When you have that vast territory that's covering so much of Alberta's north, it provides learning opportunities that must be inclusive of First Nations and Métis students. We don't want – and I was saying this to the minister earlier today. This isn't about incidental inclusion; this is about actual inclusion and the obvious decisions that need to be made around making sure that those kids actually go to school, right? Obviously, based on a lot of the information that you've shared, hopefully, that's helping to determine the way this bill will move forward, too, because a lot of the information that you brought forward, I think, should be part of how the determination comes about on how to put this school board together. I think, ultimately, that information that you gave is going to help get kids into schools, get bums in seats, as it were.

There are approximately 2,900 students and 500 staff in those 23 schools. Of course, we've already listed some of the challenges that they've faced in these last 50 years. One of the things that we see with this particular area is low rates of school attendance and poor levels of student achievement and low high school graduation rates. I would love it if the member at some point would also maybe be able to speak to her knowledge about maybe why that is as well because I think that again could help in determining how this bill should go forward and the regulations that go with it.

The division was operated with appointed trustees. That started in 1961 and went to 1983. At that time, the first local school board committees were elected. Then from 1983 to 2010 the division's board was comprised of chairpersons from all of those local school board committees. On January 21, 2010, the Minister of Education at the time dismissed the board and then appointed an official trustee.

The Auditor General actually made three recommendations to improve governance and student performance in Northland, and the first one of those was to develop a plan for student attendance. Now, that sounds fairly obvious, but I think in this particular situation that this is probably one of the more important pieces of this. The second piece is: what is the oversight of the department to be in this? The third piece is: how do we monitor and engage students so that they're attending school?

I am very, very glad to see that this legislation will reinstall the democratic process of electing the trustees out there. I think that will make the Northland school division – well, it will bring them in line with other school divisions. With elected trustees generally I think we're going to feel that they're representing those local constituents better on their various issues. Then that model will also reflect the school board formation across the province and provide local representatives an opportunity to share in local issues and local decision-making. Again, with the uniqueness of this area this is super important because every one of these is a thumbprint. They're unique, they need their space, and they need people who understand those areas to be helping to make those decisions.

There are some good changes that will be made so that the board can adapt to circumstances that change. I mean, I'm assuming – and this is one of the places where I think this outreach is going to be so important. Maybe the minister might be able to clarify some of these things as well. If it is a good idea or if a reduction in the number of wards is the right way to go here to reduce the overall administrative costs, to help streamline the decision-making, that's a good thing. But we want to make sure that the information is thoughtfully gathered through stakeholder outreach consultation and, in some cases, consensus with some of these groups.

I didn't know about the co-ops. That was a really, really neat piece of information. Thank you for sharing that.

The caution, of course, that I would say, as always, is that we need some clarification of the roles and the responsibilities of that administrative structure. Starting with the administrative structure is important, obviously, but again we have to look at learning outcomes and getting kids into classrooms. I think that's the priority here. I felt that was a very strong part of the discussion that we had around education with Northland schools, that it was about really engaging with these students and getting them into the classrooms. I mean, obviously, administration and governance are important to any school division, but kids come first. We've got to get them into school.

We know that the previous board – I don't know if it's the right thing to say that they weren't successful in meeting the learning needs of students, but it certainly wasn't working. In whatever capacity that was happening before, we were seeing that the learning needs of students as a result – their extremely low levels of high school graduation, as I said before. The student achievement rates have to be the priority in this situation, in my opinion. I guess that in my understanding – and please correct me if I'm wrong – that was the reason the board was fired and an official trustee was installed, I believe, at that point.

Here are my questions to the minister. What does the legislation really change? We know that we're going to streamline the administration, but what does it actually change for the folks out there to really honour the uniqueness of this area that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek brought up?

Secondly, what makes you believe that a different administrative structure will positively impact the lives of those students serviced by the Northland school division? I truly believe – and I think we could all agree – that there is such a need to help reinvigorate that school division. I really hope that that new administrative structure is able to provide an opportunity for the schools in the Northland division to find the supports that they need to meet their students' needs, again, consultation being key with the folks that work and live in that unique area and understand the needs. I think that if the appropriate administration, the right people in those right places, is paired with changes in classrooms to improve educational opportunities for the students, we'll see a turnaround. Again, this is going to be about making sure that that education is really reflective of what goes on in that area.

4:00

The member was saying some interesting things about how sometimes the parents take the kids out into the bush for a little while and live and work out there to understand those areas. Maybe that's something that can be brought into the educational piece as far as outdoor education or – I'm not quite sure, not knowing what it is that they're doing while they're out there, but I'm certain that curriculum could certainly be constructed around those pieces. I think that would be very fun. Obviously, I mean, this is a nonpartisan issue, so all of us have a very, very important role in supporting education in those northern, rural, and indigenous areas.

I really feel that in here we need to support the work of these communities who are directly affected by this bill to ensure that every single decision that we make puts student learning first. I would propose that we use the opportunity that we have here to have some really meaningful discussions and conversations around what's going on with our indigenous partners and how to play a larger role in making this division a success. Of course, that can only happen if we're equal partners with the First Nations folks and co-operatives that are working out there so that we make sure that we understand where we're coming from, that we're not just throwing what we think is the right idea at them and assuming that they should fit into our mould. I think we should really make sure we're taking a look at this and that it works for these people.

We really want to see them improve their chances for academic success for all of these students and these families. In order to do that, we're going to need the support for this school division, the schools, the administrators and the teachers, and ultimately the students.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek as well as Chestermere-Rocky View. I am very interested to see this bill move forward. I'm here to answer questions specifically, so for the hon. member's questions around what we are changing with Bill 6 from the existing governance structure: well, it's a way by which we can have elected trustees to represent areas and mostly represent probably more than one school. Again, I wasn't around personally to see how the original system was working with a trustee from each of the 23 schools, but I could probably see that it would be cumbersome. I have talked to trustees that were part of that system, and they found it to be – you know, each person was defending their own individual school, and then people weren't having that sort of broader picture of looking after the whole system together. I think that is definitely a change as well.

Also, this bill compels this newly elected Northlands school board to have school councils and to be meeting with them on a regular basis but also a ward council having a schedule – I think a quarterly schedule – to meet with the ward council and then also having a general council elected that meets once every term, which would be representation from all of Northlands school division. Again, that's a unique structure. I mean, this is the only school board that has its own act. That's the unique structure that forms the framework of this bill.

Also, I know that if we do pass this Bill 6, we are making a commitment to increasing funding to Northlands school division here over a period of a number of years, which we are paying for internally, Mr. Finance Minister. He was looking at me. You know, this is important, too, because, yes, we will, I think, make some great advances by having a democratically elected board back in place, but we need to send a message that we are supporting them as well.

We know that attendance and graduation rates from this particular school division are the most challenged, let's say, in the entire province. We know there are a lot of kids that just aren't going to school up there, Madam Chair. I think people talking about the elections, talking about increased funding, trying to entice teachers to make a long-term commitment to work at these schools will generate a lot of interest, and people will start to go back to school.

We think there are 2,300 kids enrolled right now, but it's probably even less than that now because we see a lot of people

coming and going, different seasonal basis. Yeah. You know, you mentioned 2,900, but really our actual numbers are quite a bit lower than that. So that's a challenge for all of us, to get more kids into school. I know there are way more kids up there that aren't going to school at all, so that's what we're going to aim for. We make our measurements based on graduation rates and attendance, so those are the improvements we hope to achieve.

Teacher retention is a big deal, for sure, to be able to get teachers to come and to stay longer, to get First Nations, Métis, and Inuit teachers into place not just as teachers but as administrators. I'm endeavouring to do that as well. Every step of the way we want to make sure that we're building a partnership where people are making their own decisions about their education future in the schools in the Northland school division. That's very, very important. You know, we have Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council as a partner with Northland schools, and I think that's a nice way to show how things can change over time, Madam Chair, that we can have an evolution of governance and how Northland looks like over time. I'm not suggesting that this bill would cast in stone how Northland would move forward forever, but rather it's the reinstatement of democracy for people to make choices about how Northland will look in the future, so that's an important consideration.

The consultation and the choices that people make in those democratic elections – they can make changes over time, just like all the other school boards, in terms of structure, composition, wards, direction, education, the whole nine yards. But the key is to take the power back to where it belongs, with the people, democracy in Northland, and to know that we are here to support change and that we will stand behind our choices here to improve education for students in Northland school division every step of the way.

Thanks.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: If I may, Madam Chair, I just would like to ask for some clarity on a few things that the minister had mentioned.

Minister, you had mentioned about compelling the school boards. Would you mind expanding on that a little bit in regard to the ministry's oversight with respect to compelling the school boards. Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Yeah. Built into the bill that we're debating here today is that the structure will be in place to have a school council, the trustees to have regular meetings with the school council, and then a ward-level sort of council as well. Then, you know, I've instructed the trustee that I have appointed there, the interim trustee who will stay for a period of 18 months after, to get things moving, to make sure that these things do come to pass.

You know, we want to have representation from elders and from youth to be encouraged on each of these levels of council because we believe that those are the two places where there's the most to be gained from both the cultural perspective from elders and from the buy-in from young people up in the school division. So the oversight comes through the channels of my elected trustee and on a transition basis. But then, you know, it will be built into legislation if we pass this bill, and that will drive it, right? I mean, obviously, it's not like we're building a speed trap law or something like that here. It's not like we're going to catch them and make sure they do it. But, I mean, we have mechanisms to work together in partnerships to compel those structures to be in place.

We're trying to build, like you've heard before, that level of input that is so valued in the northern communities – I mean, it's valued

everywhere – that idea of people coming together and forming some consensus. It becomes obvious where you need to go to move forward, and we want to honour and value that, too. As part of our consultation, which will be ongoing here in the next coming weeks and months, too, you know, we are making sure that – like, I spoke to some of the political organizations up there with Treaty 8 and the Métis settlements association to let them know that, again, we're not just making decrees from Edmonton here. This is a bill that will set things free to restore the democratic choices that should reside in Northland school division.

This is not the bill. That's why I'm holding up the back side. It's actually Bill 10.

4:10

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Ms Ganley: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 6.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees.

Madam Speaker, it's been very heartening to see so many members rise in this House to support this legislation. When I think about our government's efforts to make life more affordable, there are few initiatives that I can think of that will have this level of impact with so many families, and I believe it will be felt almost immediately and certainly in the fall.

With the bill, if proclaimed, we will be removing the burden of instructional supplies and materials for nearly 600,000 students and families, and we will be removing these fees for busing to

designated schools for more than 145,000 students. I just want to be clear in my response to the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View in relation to one of her questions that we will be funding the busing for special-needs students as well. All told, Alberta families will be saving more than \$54 million this September. You know, Madam Speaker, of course, I'm a teacher myself and have witnessed first-hand so many families struggling to come up with money to pay for fees, and the fee structure was just kind of let go, so it's a very bumpy landscape out there, to be sure.

I know that many members of this House will be watching closely as we develop regulations, and I expect them to do so, of course. We also will do so in partnership with all of our school boards, including those from charter schools, too, because the other part of this bill is that it's an act to reduce school fees but also an act to get school fees in check somehow so that we have a more uniform landscape, using the same simile or metaphor, if you will. I know that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was talking about this in regard to the school fee situation, and I'm glad that he did bring it up because it helps us to understand that this is a discussion moving forward. It's an act to reduce school fees; it's not an act to eliminate school fees.

I think it was a remarkable support from our caucus and cabinet and Premier to come up with this to reduce school fees a year earlier than what I had built in a long-term budget, and I think we did a good job as an act to reduce school fees.

We believe that every student in Alberta has the right to an education and to have it affordable and of the highest quality, but we also, Madam Speaker, do care profoundly about Alberta's families and their pocketbooks. We were supported, as part of our platform, to make these changes and to improve and protect education and to make life better for Alberta families, so that's exactly what we did. I have been very heartened and encouraged by the support and encouraging words that I've had from other parties in this House as well. I can't wait for September, when people can see their school fees reduced, and we get some money back into Alberta families' pockets.

You know, one other issue I just wanted to bring forward here today: I've been getting some reports here and there where schools and school boards are putting out information suggesting that they would be short as a result of An Act to Reduce School Fees, that they might have to cut programs or fire or lay off teachers and so forth. We are covering this here from the government of Alberta, the finances to reduce school fees. We made reductions in other areas and other ministries, and I thank them for that very much. Schools and school boards will not be shorted as a result of An Act to Reduce School Fees. Any suggestion of that is perhaps confusion or something else, that I'm less happy about. We will get that information out very clearly once again for everybody to know that this is not in any way going to compromise the staffing or the programming or any of the offerings that school boards have right through this fine, fine province of ours.

I'm very happy at this point to once again thank everybody for helping us to build a very coherent and helpful bill for Alberta families, and I thank you for this time.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First of all, I'd like to thank the minister for the announcement on being able to bus our very able and wonderful special-needs kids. I do have a question for you about that, and I'll include it in my little speech here. That's just wonderful news. It's a great way to start this part of the discussion. Thank you so much for that.

As always, I'm very pleased to speak to this bill. We've had a great chance to debate the bill, and I've heard some very positive pieces as well. We have a few concerns as well, and I'll reiterate those just a little bit as we're going forward because regulations will come, so this, you know, will hopefully help with going forward on those regulations as this bill starts to take form.

Overall, of course, we're pleased to see that the government took some leadership to address the Wild West of school fees, as they've been called, and to find ways to mitigate the impact of what's happening with families right now. Especially with the carbon tax and other things, reducing those transportation costs is going to be somewhat helpful, for sure. As you know, these issues are very, very close to the hearts and minds of the Wildrose and its caucus. We would like to of course see the eventual elimination of school fees.

My concerns, though, fall into a couple of specific categories. One of them is just with respect to the school fees. I've asked this question before, and I suppose that this may come forward in the regulations, but this is with respect to how they're defined. It seems a little bit inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the ministry's business plan. In the plan the government states, "Children and students are provided with an education that enriches their lives, prepares them for flexible careers in a diversified economy, and prepares them for success." Depending upon the school, their needs are going to be slightly different, one from the other. In the documents around the curriculum rewrite we read, "We are looking ahead to the future and working to ensure that provincial curriculum continues to give... students the best possible start in [a] life" that meets the demands of living in the 21st century.

4:20

With that large umbrella over what our education system could and should look like as we prepare our children for this world, all discussion of fees: we have to understand what's going to be reimbursed and link them. Are we linking them to paper and pencil like what we grew up with, or are we linking them to technology? Like, what are we looking at when we're talking about where the fees are going to be, where they're going to be taken from, and what is actually going to be covered? We've heard from the government that they'll define what constitutes school fees, and so far we've heard this much: workbooks, photocopying, printing, paper, and common fees charged to entire school bodies or a grade cohort.

The concerns are more around if the ministry is going to define the school fees across the province. Are we going to find that it's sort of a one-size-fits-all, that may not necessarily be helpful for certain school boards? It's just a thought and, as you go forward with regulations, just something to consider. Is it going to be difficult to define what constitutes mandatory fees? That will be, I would think, a critical part of implementing this bill.

Like I was saying earlier, school communities are so different across the province in the way that they meet their students' learning needs. We were just talking about Northland. I mean, this is perfect timing. We're talking about a school division that is extremely unique and may require different kinds of resources. If the government is going to support those families by reducing school fees, I would think that it would make sense to have some flexibility in determining what that's going to look like instead of sort of a centrally determined school fee. Again, this is just something to look at in the regulations. For example, in some schools workbooks and photocopying may constitute fees, but in others costs might be more related to digital media or learning activities with communities or as part of work experience or CTS, where those may constitute fees.

I heard during the budget estimates that the minister intends to expand the dual credit program as well, so that's a wonderful opportunity to allow students to see some really great academic success in new ways. The school fees for a high school that offers a wealth of dual credit options could look extremely different from the fees in a high school that has a more traditional classroom program.

We've also heard from stakeholders that are a little concerned that how school fees are defined may not support their efforts to provide learning experiences that will prepare them for life in the 21st century. I think that some clarity around those pieces and consultation, I think, especially around that, going into the regulation phase of this, once the bill passes, will be very, very important.

I'm also very interested to see how the bill will be implemented and how the regulations are going to be developed. As the minister said, we'll be watching extremely closely to see how that happens and to see the impact of that. Are the funds going to go just to general revenue, or are they going to be used at the complete discretion of the local authorities? Obviously, we support local decision-making, so if the funding is intended to reduce school fees for families, are we going to see some measures of accountability as well to ensure that families are actually enjoying the benefit of these reductions in the funding?

On the website it reads, "In the long term, the proposed amendments would provide government with increased authority over all school board fee types related to publicly funded education programming." If maybe the minister has a moment to talk a little bit more about the increased level of authority. That raises some concern and also will impact the way that the bill is implemented. That's actually determined after the bill is passed, so I would like to have some clarity on that if that's possible.

The collaboration of Albertans prior to the enactment of any legislation: I think if there's one thing that we've learned since we've been in this House, it's that piece. Albertans have been really disappointed. They feel like they've been sidelined. I mean, we could bring up Bill 6. There are lots of examples. It can be deeply hurtful and destructive and very divisive if governments don't engage meaningfully and with consultations prior to enacting legislation. The bill seems to follow in that pattern: you know, table legislation, pass it through the process, proclaim it, and then consult. I feel it's very, very important that Albertans understand not just the fact that we're reducing school fees – that's excellent – but that there are other pieces to this bill that will not be determined until it's actually passed.

Again I wanted thank the minister for his consideration of special-needs students. My question with regard to that: is that just to designated schools, or is that going to be able to take kids to schools that might specifically be for their needs? Not all kids with special needs or disabilities can go to the school that's designated. That's just my question around that.

Also, the government speaks about ensuring that our students have the best possible education experience. The distance allocations to designated schools may actually put families at a disadvantage. Again, within the regulations, that might be something that you want to look at, those distances. The more kids we can get on those buses, the better. I think there are efficiencies to be had there. The minister was actually speaking today about areas where children can be picked up and a couple of other things. Maybe you could expand upon that as well.

I'm also wanting to just again ask – and I know I've asked this a hundred times; I'll ask a hundred times more – about the impact of the carbon tax on transportation costs. The cost of carbon tax to boards is expected to be between \$8 million to \$12 million over the

next year. This change and the expected payment of \$15 million to boards will not really begin to cover the cost of the carbon tax and the reduction of the school fees.

These are just a few of my concerns, Madam Speaker. The minister is quite aware of my concerns, but I just thought it might be time to bring some of these up again and maybe get some more clarity on those. It's a good first step in trying to ease the financial burden on Albertans, reducing the school fees. I really do look forward to further conversations around implementing the bill and the regulations.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise at third reading of Bill 1 to speak in favour of the bill and will be voting in favour of An Act to Reduce School Fees. Clearly, it's important that we make public education as absolutely accessible as it possibly can be. School fees and other fees do act as a barrier for many parents. I know that many parents have a very difficult time paying those. Of course, I'd love to see it be an act, in fact, to eliminate school fees because I know this is something that really is a burden for many Albertans. But this bill in its current form is at least a step in the right direction, so I will support the bill.

Having said that, I do have some concerns. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View had brought an amendment, of which I was certainly supportive, to address the gap, what this bill does for all public schools but, quite curiously, leaving out charter schools, whereas we know, of course, that charter schools are in fact public schools. It is very interesting that the government has chosen to ignore charter schools when reducing school fees, and I do wonder, frankly, if that is a deliberate choice on behalf of this government. Clearly, it is, because they rejected the amendment and have kept it in the bill.

When this bill was first introduced, it was interesting. A lot of parents, I think, were left with the impression that there would be no school fees, and those parents, of course, included parents of children who were in charter schools. The news release itself indicated that Alberta parents will no longer have to pay school fees for certain categories of fees – those included instructional supplies or materials and eligible students taking the bus to their designated schools – but, obviously, not all Alberta parents and not all public schools because charter schools were excluded. So I wonder about that.

Of course, charter schools are public schools as per the legislation that governs them. They provide the same basic education as per the curriculum that is laid out by Alberta Education, and they do so in a way that's different or to enhance overall student learning. Now, there are a lot of questions about charter schools, whether or not they cherry-pick students, whether all charter schools are, in fact, accessible. And I believe very much that they are. They cannot deny access to any individual or group. They cannot charge tuition. They can charge the same school fees as other public schools currently can. That will change under this bill, where other public schools have a reduction in their school fees and, again, charter schools do not.

4:30

I wonder why that is, and all I can surmise is that the government is lumping together charter schools with private schools, and they are not private schools. It is very much a different thing. I just wonder if this is part of what I would consider a passive-aggressive attempt to divide schoolchildren between those who are seeking

their public education through a charter school and those that are seeking their public education through a traditional public school rather than the government choosing to make a definitive statement.

Now, I've heard the minister, and he and I have actually had a conversation directly in the past about whether this government does in fact support charter schools, what their plans are going forward. He's indicated that charter schools will remain part of Alberta's education system, and I sincerely hope that is the case. He also indicated earlier today that he will look into what he deems an oversight, to not include charter schools. I don't believe it is an oversight. It seems to have been a deliberate choice.

I hope, though, that it is not a way of starting a chipping away at charter schools. I think they provide a tremendous service to the students who participate in them. They enrich our province and enrich the overall educational experience and have driven public school boards in those similar jurisdictions and around the province to add programs similar although not always identical to the programs that are provided by charter schools. That also is a good thing. It is innovation in our education system within the public frame, and as a supporter of public education I can only think that that's a very good thing.

It's a worry when a minister is establishing one set of rules for public schools and another set of rules for a different group within the public schools. I don't think it's right, and I would obviously encourage the minister to fix that going forward.

In the end, though, I will support the bill because I think it's important to reduce school fees, much as I would have liked to have seen the charter schools included in that. I'll take the minister at his word that he's going to look into this, and I would hope it would be something he would address going forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and answers if anyone wishes to take advantage.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. I think it's a good step in the right direction to lighten the load for Alberta's parents, but as did my colleague from Calgary-Elbow, I want to focus specifically on the bill as it pertains to charter schools.

I have a great small rural charter school in my area, Valhalla Community School. It is the smallest charter school in Alberta and the only truly rural charter school in Alberta. It is a K to 9 school that serves the population in the surrounding 3,600 square kilometres around the hamlet of Valhalla. It is a rural school that serves families in Valhalla Centre as well as the surrounding farming community.

The school has a direct instructional model of teaching and learning through a phonics-based reading and writing program starting in kindergarten. The highly structured and sequenced approach to education meets with a very high level of parent satisfaction, increasing levels of academic success on the part of the students, and it sees increasing enrolment registration numbers for early elementary school. All of the kids and parents of Valhalla Community School attend school council meetings to get a sense of being involved in rural communities. This school believes that the long-term goal of rural education is to develop the skills, knowledge, and values that will enable students to become strong and contributing leaders of tomorrow. I think I can speak for all of us and say that we share this belief in our next generation of Albertans.

Bill 1 is designed to reduce school fees for parents of children attending public schools. Let me be very clear. Charter schools in Alberta are public schools, so if this government aims to help the parents of children who attend public schools, then children who attend charter schools must be included. Unfortunately, this is not the government's plan. The government is reimbursing public schools through grants, but charter schools are not eligible to receive those grants. If another public school in a designated area can receive a government grant so that they don't have to charge parents school fees, why can't a rural charter school like Valhalla Community School receive the same grant? The expenses are going to be the same at both schools. The difference is that the designated public school can get money from the government, and the charter school can't.

Transportation funding is a long-standing issue. Transportation funding in rural Alberta is divided into base funding and distance funding. Kids who are in Peace Wapiti get funding for both base and distance funding. The transportation for Valhalla kids would only be eligible for base funding. In a \$1.4 million budget base transportation funding would be \$90,000. To cover transportation costs in full would likely take another \$90,000, which is 7 per cent of the budget, which would have to come out of the operation funds, which is basically a teacher's salary.

With this distinction in funding, the parents of children who attend charter schools will have to pay more than parents who send their kids to a public school in their designated area even though they are both public schools. If parents want to send their kids to a charter school like Valhalla because they think it's the best choice for their children's education, they are now at a financial disadvantage. Moving to a designated school from a chartered school that they believe in, due to finances, is not a choice we should be forcing our parents to make.

I support the work that the rural charter school of Valhalla is doing to educate rural kids in my area, and I hope that this government can see that disadvantaging these schools by inequity in funding is not the way forward. I urge the Minister of Education to carefully consider how the money going to school boards could be more efficiently distributed to also lessen the school fees load for our Alberta charter schools.

I'm not quite sure and am not clear on the minister's plan going forward, you know, on how he's going to finance these. I just hope, going forward, that he doesn't reward the bad operators and punish the good ones. I know of large rural schools that have large areas that actually lose a lot of funding in transportation, and they cover that cost from the classroom funding. They don't charge transportation school fees. Yet I know large schools in cities where the school boards actually make money on transportation and use that money to subsidize the classroom. And guess what? They charge school fees for transportation. I don't think it's quite right that he punishes the good operators and rewards the bad ones.

Those are my comments. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Minister of Education to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you and for everyone's comments. I appreciate the commentary. Certainly, once again if I can express that this is An Act to Reduce School Fees. We gave it that title for a reason. We will have a fulsome discussion about reducing more school fees as we move forward.

Talk about something that literally epitomizes and defines making life better for Alberta families with children: this is it. I'm

really glad that people do kind of see the forest for the trees on that. The comments that each member made I will certainly take into fulsome consideration.

Otherwise, Madam Speaker, I would ask to close debate on this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

4:40

Bill 2

An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to rise today and move third reading of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

I want to thank my colleagues on all sides of the House for their willingness to support this bill and for the constructive debate we've had so far. Bill 2 proposes amendments to the Limitations Act that would help survivors of sexual and domestic violence by allowing them the time they need to come forward and file a civil claim. If passed, the bill will eliminate the limitation period for commencing a civil claim related to sexual assault or other sexual misconduct and nonsexual assault involving a minor, an intimate relationship, or a dependant.

We have heard from survivors that the current time frame, two years, is often not enough time to heal from their traumatic experiences. Madam Speaker, we know it's time to do more to support and protect people who have experienced sexual and domestic violence. We recognize that for survivors, the decision to come forward is extremely personal and difficult. Removing the existing limitations period empowers survivors to come forward on their own terms when they are ready.

If passed, the legislation will make Alberta a leader in addressing other sexual misconduct in intimate relationships as no other jurisdiction in Canada expressly states this in their legislation. Removing the limitation period for these types of claims would help people who have experienced a broad range of behaviours. This includes sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, or distributing sexually explicit photographs or videos without an individual's consent. The provisions of this bill would apply retroactively, meaning it would allow claims that stem from incidents that predate its coming into force.

Madam Speaker, every Albertan deserves to feel respected in their communities, homes, and workplaces. Organizations that work with survivors call this legislation an inspiration. They told us that the bill opens one more door for survivors to come forward and provides one more option for a survivor's journey. Survivors will have time to heal. Ultimately, this is about choice. It's about allowing survivors to come forward and hold their perpetrators to account when they choose to do so.

I'm gratified by the support this bill has received so far, and I have been moved by many of my colleagues in the House who were brave enough to speak about their own experiences during second reading. Their ordeals and those of countless other survivors underscore how common these crimes are and the need for legislation like this.

Madam Speaker, the evidence certainly suggests that when a survivor is healing from sexual or domestic violence, these journeys take all sorts of different paths and that we need to empower these individuals to have the tools they need to come forward when they are ready to make the decisions that are right for them in each individual case. Not everyone will take advantage of this

legislation, but at the end of the day, this is about giving survivors a choice, a choice of when they feel ready and when they choose the path forward.

I stand here today seeking continued support from the House for this bill. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. As we all know, sexual assault, assault on minors, domestic violence are some of the most disgusting crimes present in our society.

You know, as a former law enforcement officer I, sadly, have had much experience in dealing with many victims of crimes, especially those pertaining to sexual and domestic violence. These crimes violate the fundamental feelings of security that are a necessary condition for feeling safe within our community. All too often that feeling of security is further harmed when the victims of these crimes attempt to seek justice. While the men and women who work in our police services and in the criminal judiciary system do amazing work, the reality is that our justice system is not always accommodating to victims.

The high burden of proof that we demand in our criminal justice cases to prevent wrongful conviction and maintain innocence until the proof of guilt can be traumatic for someone that has recently suffered. While the civil prosecution system offers an alternative method of obtaining justice, where the burden of proof is lower, there are still many factors that would discourage a victim from coming forward.

One of these factors is a reluctance to face the person who wronged them so soon after that event. Given the nature of the offences that this bill is focused on, there are very strong emotions involved in bringing an accusation forward, and the experience of testifying, attending court day after day, and hoping to obtain some measure of peace can be extremely trying. The idea of having to go through all of that can discourage people from bringing forward accusations, and that can become a barrier to achieving justice.

While the bill before us today doesn't make the experience any easier, it does give more time to heal before having to go through with it. I think that is a positive step, a way of acknowledging that we know how hard the process can be, that if you need to take longer than the two years previously allowed, you can do that, and you can do that without worrying that justice won't be served because you waited.

For that reason, I will support this bill as a show of support for anyone who finds themselves in a situation. Along with that support, though, I do have a note of caution for the government. I see that the bill makes the removal of limitations retroactive, and I don't have a problem with that, but I do want to make sure that the government has the resources in place so that when these older cases start to go through the system, they do get the attention that they deserve. For many of these people seeking to bring older cases, some of them have lost faith in the ability of the system to help them, and if they try again after any number of years to address past wrongdoings and the system fails them again, well, that will be another traumatic experience that they simply just do not need.

I will be, of course, voting for this bill, and I hope that the government will dedicate the necessary resources to make it a success. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to the third reading of Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. It's a bill that I will certainly be supporting and, I should add, all members of my caucus as well.

Now, this bill is an opportunity for all of us to work together and collectively show that we support survivors. It's important for us to recognize the absolute horrors of sexual assault and that we as legislators reflect this understanding by addressing barriers to justice for these crimes.

Sexual abuse and any form of sexual violence, including rape, molestation, incest, and similar forms of nonconsensual sexual contact – most sexual abuse experts agree that sexual abuse is never only about sex. Instead, it's often about an attempt to gain power over victims. We have an obligation to Albertans to ensure that we put the power back into the hands of victims. Removing the time limitations on civil matters of sexual abuse will allow victims to seek their own form of justice that they might not otherwise have been able to, whether that be due to trials being stayed or dismissed or for some other reason.

Sexual assaults can leave victims with a feeling that their body is not their own. Victims often feel shame, terror, depression, and may even blame themselves for the attack. When a survivor finally comes forward, it can be sometimes decades later. According to some studies in the U.S. approximately 73 per cent of child victims do not disclose the abuse for a year or more, and 45 per cent do not disclose it until more than five years have passed. Many victims of childhood sexual abuse never tell anyone about the abuse. It is important that when they are ready to seek justice, they still have options.

I want to thank all parties in this Assembly for joining the call to put victims first, and I thank the minister for her very hard work on this file. Good job. I urge all of my colleagues to support and stand in favour of this bill.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for questions or comments.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in strong support of this bill, and I think the best way to start the conversation and my comments is just to quote the minister. First, I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward and thank the government for taking real steps that I think will help survivors of sexual and domestic violence in a meaningful way. Quoting the minister, it allows them "to come forward when they are ready. We respect the time it may take to do this. If passed, Bill 2 will improve the lives of these Albertans."

I think we in this House can agree with all that, all of those words and this sentiment. It's good when we can focus on an issue together in this House that is a huge problem in our community but also come forward with a solution that we can all agree is the right one. I do take the Member for Calgary-West's point, that resources in our court system are an important aspect and an important issue and something that we do need to ensure we focus on, and I will continue to hold the government to account for their role in ensuring that the court system continues to function well.

But as it relates specifically to this bill, it's timely, and it helps make Alberta a leader in addressing sexual assault and sexual misconduct. It helps address what is a chronic and substantial problem in this province and, sadly, has been in Alberta for many, many years. The statistics are sobering. Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual

violence; 74 per cent of Albertans, three-quarters of Albertans, say that they have personally known at least one woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse.

A number of years ago I volunteered with HomeFront, the domestic violence specialized court in Calgary, a remarkable organization that focuses on survivors of domestic violence and ensures that we tackle the root cause of why it happens, ensures that perpetrators are brought to trial quickly. But the focus is not purely on punishment. The focus is on counselling, not just for the perpetrator but for the victims, for the survivors and their families, to really get into the root causes of why domestic violence happens and to try to, in the tag line of the organization at the time, stop it where it starts.

I'll tell you a brief story from that time. A volunteer rode with the Calgary police domestic conflict unit that night, and they said: all right; we're going to sit and listen to every single domestic violence call that comes in, and we're going to try, lights flashing, to get to every single one tonight if we can. It was absolutely impossible. They'd get a call in one corner of the city, and while they're on their way, a minute later they'd have to be going to the next call and to the next call and the next. It was absolutely not possible to respond to every single domestic call that evening, and that just tells you about the scale of the problem.

My statistics here show me that the Calgary Police Service responds to 19,000 domestic violence calls every year. So we get a sense of the scale of this issue, and by no means will Bill 2 address every single aspect of the issue – far from it – but it's an important step to allow survivors, victims of domestic violence and sexual assault to, in their own time, bring action that can help them with their healing journey.

With that, I will absolutely support this bill, and I again thank the government for bringing it forward. Thank you.

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

Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Minister of Justice to close debate.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I don't think that much remains to be said on this bill. I'd like to thank again my colleagues on all sides of the House for their support of this bill and particularly my colleagues who shared their stories at second reading. I think that really signals to the public just how prevalent these sorts of offences can be and how they reach through sort of all different areas of society and touch the lives of all Albertans in a really devastating way. I'm very glad that we were able to move forward on this bill to ensure that survivors can come forward in their own time and to make it just a little bit easier for them.

Thank you, again, very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7 An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining.

Our government is committed to fair legislation that makes life better for hard-working Albertans. This includes the proposed bill, that will modernize Alberta's labour relations model for the postsecondary sector.

In 2016 our government introduced changes to the legislation governing essential services. These changes extended the right to strike to Alberta's public services and health care sector; however, it did not include academic bargaining in the postsecondary sector. This gave postsecondary employers and employees additional time to transition and established a thorough consultation process to better understand the unique details of labour relations in the postsecondary sector and the needs of stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, we are bringing this bill forward after extensive consultation with stakeholders. As a result, I believe the changes we are introducing do take into consideration the unique nature of the postsecondary sector while also extending constitutionally protected rights to postsecondary faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows.

Bill 7 proposes sections of the Post-secondary Learning Act to be repealed and creates a new division in the Labour Relations Code for the postsecondary sector. If passed, academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows would fall under the Labour Relations Code, giving them the right to strike and becoming subject to essential services legislation. This means that for the first time in Canada postdoctoral fellows would fall under legislation that formally recognizes their status as employees and would improve and protect their rights to fair and respectful workplaces.

Our government believes in the collective bargaining process that respects both workers and employers. That's why postsecondary institutions would be required to negotiate essential services agreements with bargaining units and would be covered by the lockout provisions under the Labour Relations Code.

With the proposed changes, graduate students and postdoctoral fellow associations would be responsible for bargaining with the institutions for mutually beneficial collective agreements. Ending compulsory arbitration will allow faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows and their institutions to come to prudent agreements that respect workers' constitutional rights, protect students, and ensure affordability for taxpayers.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has long been out of step with the rest of Canada, and it's time to ensure that postsecondary employees have the same rights as other Canadians. The changes that we are proposing would extend the right to strike, with protection of essential services, to faculty so that labour relations in Alberta's universities and colleges are consistent with the rest of Alberta's public sector and with the postsecondary sector across Canada. In addition, by modernizing our labour model, we are ensuring that our workplace rules comply with the Supreme Court of Canada's 2015 decision.

Over the past year we've worked with well-known labour lawyer Andy Sims to better understand the needs and considerations of our stakeholders. Since the introduction of the bill last week, many of our stakeholders have shared their satisfaction with the proposed changes. Many graduate students and postdoctoral fellows have applauded this government for considering their unique situations and for pushing for these changes. We know there'll be questions, and we will continue to take careful and measured approaches to provide stability.

Over the next five years the government will work closely with institutions to transition postsecondary staff to a collective bargaining process that addresses their unique needs.

5:00

While we recognize that these changes directly affect staff on our postsecondary campuses, students will also have questions about the impacts to their education. That's why we'll work with institutions to ensure that adequate contingency plans are developed to address strikes and lockouts and ensure minimal impacts to students. This includes reviewing and making contingency plans that address student aid, grants, and bursaries because we know, Madam Speaker, that these are the things that make a difference in the lives of students and Albertans.

This bill demonstrates our government's work to make life better now and into the future by making practical changes, changes that ensure that workplace rules are strengthened and that hard-working Albertans have good, fair jobs that support a strong and modern economy because that's what Albertans deserve.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining. First, I want to say that the bill itself seems a bit misleading. What the NDP have introduced here is not going to enhance anything except the likelihood of professors on picket lines. But maybe that's what the desired outcome is. As a matter of fact, we know that not only will it make bargaining more combative; it also caused quite a stir in the academic world. The government admitted in its discussion document that this could have been sorted out within the existing postsecondary act. We agree with some of the faculty associations that basically turning these associations into labour unions under the postsecondary act is once again a case of this government going a little too far in pursuing its ideology.

Many stakeholders and faculty and staff have been in contact with me and are not in support and have not felt that they have been heard. The objective in consultation was to seek stakeholder feedback to make informed options for potential legislation, or at least one would hope. This, however, is not what happened to many. They made submissions and even explained what the obstacles were and would present, but once again it seems like ideology has taken precedence over common sense. Most agree that some changes to bargaining are needed to comply with the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour case. It is seen as strengthening Canada's public-sector workers' right to strike unless they are actually deemed essential.

Granting this to academics, I'll note, is not out of line with a number of other provinces, for better or for worse. But as usual, the NDP government couldn't help themselves and went too far with something that is not very popular with a number of faculty associations. Many stakeholders that we have spoken to do not like the contents of this bill and certainly have felt that they have not been heard.

Today I will stand in the gap and tell the House what I've heard from some of the ones who have not felt that they've been heard. What I've heard, Madam Speaker, is that many aspects of the model, except the strike lockout, are already covered in their collective agreements. What they don't desire is to be unionized, but would prefer to work the strike lockout and essential services element into the Post-secondary Learning Act.

The very nature of the uniqueness of postsecondary education is such that it should have its own labour regulations and have its own regulations arrangement. The academics play an integral role in the management and direction of the university and its friendly

atmosphere, and that's the way they want to keep it. Instead of being perceived as academics and intellectuals in a leadership role, the government is trying to turn the faculty associations into trade unions, diminishing and diluting their status to fit into the NDP world view, where either you're a boss trying to exploit workers or a worker who will be exploited unless you have a powerful union.

I want to make it clear that I'm not trying to belittle one sector for the sake of another. What I'm trying to say here is that these academics are just different, and they should not be moulded or attached to any other just to fit this government's agenda. Apples should not be compared to oranges. An overwhelming majority would prefer the status quo, especially as it relates to bargaining, because it allows faculty associations to exist as integral partners of the governance and operation of the institutions. Statutory rights of faculty associations have tempered a potential adversarial relationship between management and faculty. The other issue is that after five years these faculty associations could be replaced by trade unions.

As well meaning as this government might be, it always has to take it one step too far. There are some good things that have been decided upon, but do the associations need to be moved from the PSLA to the labour act to achieve these outcomes? As a matter of fact, moving associations from the PSLA to the labour act creates more problems and conflict and more points of confusion than what really needs to be dealt with.

Bill 7 provides no transition period for bargaining that's already in progress, and unfortunately there will be plenty of colleges and at least one university that we know of that will lose their ability to go to arbitration should there be an impasse at the bargaining table, which is what the rules were when they started the process. In other words, with this bill the government is pulling their existing right to binding arbitration in the middle of negotiations. With the new legislation in place the only binding dispute resolution mechanism is to strike or, better yet, to get locked out.

Now, let me be clear about one thing. Many of my colleagues think the binding arbitration that public sectors have relied on is a mixed blessing. Yes, it means that there have been virtually no work stoppages in Alberta, but it also meant that the government has not been able to get the best deal for taxpayers because pay for government workers has been decided on by arbitrators.

I'm not against changing the rules, but I do think that if we're going to change the rules, it's pretty surprising that this supposedly pro-labour government is doing it mid-negotiation – why? – because you're giving them the right to strike, and they probably can't use that because they never thought they would have to prepare for it. No protocols are set up, and more importantly they have no contingency fund.

Legislation should have been very clear that an appropriate amount of time be allowed for the transition. There is no order and no arrangements have been made that will provide stability going into a nonstrike environment and none where strikes are now allowed. Some forethought should have been given to how this would affect the institutions, faculty, grad students, and postdoctoral fellows. We understand that you took extra time just so you could justify making the heavy changes, but without actually listening carefully to all sides involved, only ideology will be achieved.

Designing an appropriate labour code provision to the PSLA would have been less disruptive. The fact that faculty members wear different hats only justifies a unique approach to labour

relations within the PSLA or even a separate section of the labour code. I'm almost positive that if you would have asked some of these faculty associations to help you design such a regime, they would have been more than happy to help.

Other recommendations have been made, and you have and you are possibly incorporating similar language as in the B.C. College and Institute Act. This would only strengthen the authority of the academic councils in that the board of governors would have to consult academic councils on the development of educational policy for matters outlined at least 10 working days before the board of governors deals with the matter.

Currently PSLA states that an academic council "shall make recommendations . . . to the board with respect to any matter that the board refers to the academic council." In other words, academic councils currently have no more than an advisory role on matters that the boards refer to them.

Another change that has been recommended is that certain matters be the joint responsibility of both the board of governors and the academic councils. If agreements cannot be made, the matter is then referred to the minister. It has its pros and cons, but I'd like to hear this government's thoughts on that.

Another item discussed was that the composition and election of academic councils must be clearly defined. Many examples of this have been presented to you.

Moving ahead, I know you've heard that instead of appealing to the Labour Relations Board, ideally the board of governors and faculty associations should jointly be responsible for the designated decision, with the right to appeal the designated decision to an independent third party.

In closing, due to the overwhelming evidence that has been presented to me in regard to this legislation, I have no other option, then, but to oppose this government's bill in its current form and ask them to at least make some changes to reflect the wishes of those who this bill will affect.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill?

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education to close debate.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, I have listened intently to the Member for Highwood's statements, and I look forward to perhaps getting into the details of some of the changes that he and the people he represents would like to see in Committee of the Whole. But for this afternoon I think we've enjoyed a vigorous and stimulating debate, and I would like to close debate on this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing the really fantastic progress that we have managed to make today – I'm very impressed with us and our ability to work together on moving these things forward – I move that we call it 6 and adjourn for the day.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, April 20, 2017

Day 24

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Deputy Government House Leader
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House
Services

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and
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Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
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Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Horne	Shepherd
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Drever	Nixon
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Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
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Horne	van Dijken
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Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKittrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Cooper	Nielsen
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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, April 20, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. As we come to the end of our week and prepare to head back to our home constituencies, let us reflect on the good work we've accomplished here together these past weeks. May we return refreshed and energized for the important work that still remains to be done.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 9

Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 9, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017.

The main objective of the bill is to empower our province's agricultural producers by allowing a vote on their commission's service charge model. The Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, which we commonly call MAPA, was always intended to empower Alberta's agricultural producers and their organizations to set the directions of their own industries.

One key part of MAPA is that it enables our province's agricultural commissions to collect service charges, also known as check-offs, to fund their operations as well as activities that benefit our broader agricultural industries. These activities include product marketing and promotion, trade missions to maintain and build market access, and support for industry research. However, in 2009 the previous government amended MAPA to make all service charges refundable for any members who requested refunds. This forced our wide range of agricultural sectors into all adopting the same model for their check-offs. We know that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't make sense in today's diverse agricultural industry.

The purpose of this amendment to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act is to restore MAPA to its original intent by allowing commissions to work with their memberships to determine whether they want their check-off dollars to be refundable or nonrefundable. The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has heard from commissions and individual producers who want the commissions to have the flexibility to make this choice and not have the service charge model dictated by government. Our government wants to empower agricultural commissions and their members with autonomy, showing our deep respect for them to be able to work with their producers to figure out which service charge model works best for them. Many commissions and producers may want to keep things the way they are with the refundable model. Some commissions may choose to consult their member producers and discuss changing to a nonrefundable model.

This amendment is not about one model being better than the other but about giving commissions back the flexibility. At the end

of the day, this decision will result from agricultural commissions and their members. If a commission chooses to make a change to its service charge model, they will have to conduct a plebiscite of their members to ensure producers are consulted. Our clear expectation is that any change must follow a fair and transparent process. That allows the opportunity for producers to voice their opinions.

The Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council, which was established through MAPA and provides oversight of agricultural commissions, would work with each commission to determine specific plebiscite requirements, ensuring they would be appropriate to the size and nature of each specific sector. The government is here to support producers, commissions, and our province's marketing council in ensuring this process includes opportunities for all voices to be heard. But we are not here to dictate how every sector should shape their service charge models. This amendment would also bring us closer in line with other jurisdictions across the country, with Alberta being the only province with mandatory refundable service charges.

I ask for the support of all members of the Assembly for Bill 9 to restore this flexibility and autonomy to commissions in our agricultural sector. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, can I confirm that you are moving second reading on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry?

Mr. Rosendahl: Yes. That is correct.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up to speak on this bill this morning. Before I start, I'm just a little unsure with the rulings in this House lately. I want to be up front and say that I own a farm. I've been a farmer all my life. My brothers farm, my relatives farm, and my family has been farming in Alberta for a hundred years, so I'm not sure if I'm in conflict here or not, but unless you rule otherwise, I'm happy to speak to the bill. I won't apologize for speaking up for Alberta agricultural producers. In the meantime, unless you rule differently, it's a pleasure to speak on this bill.

I'm going to support the bill. I think it's absolutely the right thing to do. I want to congratulate the minister for bringing it forward. You know, it's a pretty simple bill. It just gives the commissions the power to change whether their check-offs are refundable or not, and they have to do it with a producer plebiscite, so the producers in Alberta will have a say whether their check-offs are refundable or not. I think it's absolutely the right thing to do. I support it, and I encourage all my colleagues in the House to support this bill as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I gather that some of the conflict rules are related to if you have a fiduciary interest. All the farmers I know: I don't think they make much money, so I don't think there's any danger there.

Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the ruling that you gave. I myself am an agricultural producer. I've got the same problem. In fact, we checked with the Ethics Commissioner yesterday to make sure because I didn't want

anything I said in this House to be something that someone else could take a shot at, et cetera, et cetera. I think we all know where that was heading.

Anyway, I rise today to discuss the upcoming changes to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, commonly known as MAPA. Now, Bill 9 would see MAPA return to the same state it was prior to Bill 43 being passed in 2009. The proposed amendment to MAPA is to allow the producer membership as a whole to choose via plebiscite either a refundable or nonrefundable service charge model for the commission.

Alberta's seven marketing boards operate under a supply management system. This often occurs through national organizations. The boards set and negotiate a price, and they have a nonrefundable service charge model. The Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017, applies to only Alberta's 13 agriculture commissions. This legislation does not apply to the marketing boards. These 13 commissions represent a variety of crop and livestock commodities and currently use a refundable model.

It's no secret that the Wildrose believes in letting grassroots members determine their direction. Having grassroots determine how things go is what the entire Wildrose organization is all about. That is what I believe this amendment actually returns Alberta's commissions to. Through a plebiscite the commissions can allow members to self-determine the model for service charges, or check-offs, as they are also often called. This puts the decision back into the commissions and into their members' hands. Although the commissions do require all producers of regulated products to be members, some commissions have provisions where producers who produce on a smaller scale can be exempt from the commission, something like a bee producer or sometimes potato growers that don't grow enough products for sale. This can then exempt them from the provisions of the related commission.

9:10

Members on this side of the House understand the role these commissions play. We have members of the beef, barley, pulse, canola, and wheat commissions represented right here. In my own instance I commit to check-offs every time that I sell spring wheat, every time I sell canola, peas, or barley. Certainly, when I was involved with the cattle industry as a cow-calf producer, I had a check-off each time I sold cows or calves. Through check-offs deducted from my grain cheques, each time I deliver grain to the elevator, I'm automatically a member of all kinds of research and development organizations. I don't have to sign a membership card or pay a fee or even show up at a meeting. If they have taken my check-off, I'm automatically a member of that organization.

As a producer you may be trying to determine if you need micronutrients for your crop. There are mountains of information to find on subjects like that due to research that's been done. Trying to figure out what might be the best time to sell your canola? The Alberta canola commission has ICE canola futures on that page. Many commissions have current market outlooks on their websites. Not sure what damage Fusarium in a wheat crop could cause? Well, the Alberta Wheat Commission has a funded research page that will give you all kinds of info on that subject. When my grain is hauled or cattle is sold, the check-off helps pay for research of all kinds, and that is value added to the membership.

You know, with the money received from check-offs each year, you're funding some pretty impressive research. In fact, it's so impressive that the Canada Revenue Agency will give you an investment tax credit through the scientific research and experimental development program. Each year the feds take a look at organizations that are actively involved in research for their

commissions. Then the CRA has some criteria that has to be met, and spending on research has to meet those conditions, but when the air is all cleared on that, the CRA allows a tax reduction from your income on that particular crop.

Now, it's understood that each commission assesses and collects service charges, and as of 2009 and Bill 43 these service charges are refundable. That means that members can indeed apply to have these charges returned to them. These groups operate in a self-funded model, where service charges assessed and collected from members are often the main source of income for these operations and include research and marketing as well as day-to-day business costs. Investment in programs through service charges is designed to benefit all producer members, including those who request refunds.

While some detractors equate this funding to a tax on their livelihood, many commissions that have a refundable system in place report that the refund rate percentage is in the single digits and that this is a nonissue. Others feel that going to a nonrefundable model would take away the only form of protest that members had, and that was to withhold funding to the commission by applying for a refund. While we've certainly listened to both sides of the argument, the fact remains that there are still mechanisms in place to ensure that members are represented. It may be through lobbying members to vote a certain way and making your opinion known, but options do exist.

While it is never perfect – and it's never going to be – democracy is still the best option, in my view. That's why allowing a plebiscite to change the funding model or to remain with the status quo is so important. Each commission will be able to determine the method and rules around the individual plebiscites or if there is even desire by members to hold one.

Madam Speaker, MAPA established a government-appointed provincial agency called the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council. This marketing council provides advice to the minister on Alberta's marketing boards and commissions to oversee their operations and administer regulations under MAPA. It is this body that will oversee the plebiscite and work with the commissions to ensure the entire process is transparent and completely above board. The power to determine the direction that each commission will ultimately take will reside in the membership. It is they who have the power to initiate change or not.

This amendment to MAPA brings our legislation in line with all other jurisdictions. They all have legislation in place which enables the producer bodies as a whole to choose their respective service charge model. It's time we returned Alberta to this model, and this is why I'll be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect if anyone has questions or comments.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up and respond to this bill, in support of Bill 9, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017. It's an important step to do at this time because, of course, the beef industry along with other industries is looking for ways in which they can better support their producers in areas such as research, such as trade discussions with other jurisdictions around the world.

Of course, a lot of those things do require resources. The Alberta Beef Producers, for example, take in approximately \$7 million a year in check-off fees, but something like fighting the country of origin labelling, otherwise known as COOL, was something that

cost \$6 million. It was something that was done in the interests of all beef producers in Alberta to ensure that trade markets remain open for our Alberta producers with other places like the United States. [A cellphone rang] Sorry; I'll just let the member address his phone.

When we see something in the order of 34 per cent of check-offs being refunded from an amount of \$7 million, it's a sizable amount of money. It's \$2.4 million that are withdrawn. The research and the trade discussions that are undertaken by Alberta Beef Producers are something that benefits all members. In the event that a member doesn't believe that the commission is fulfilling what their needs are, they can take their money out, but the producer commission still works for that member regardless of whether their money has been left in or not.

I have had constituents that have come to my office feeling like the system hasn't been fair. While this doesn't make it nonrefundable, what this will do is actually put that vote back in the hands of the producers. There are other measures of accountability such as if 20 per cent of the members of that commission come together and ask for a plebiscite or for something to be addressed, then they can also use those mechanisms of accountability to ensure that their voices are being heard. This is something that has come from many small and medium producers that are in my constituency that believe in the work that is done on their behalf. They want to see the research that is going on around the world in terms of efficiency, in terms of finding that sort of cutting-edge research that actually propels their industry forward on a world stage.

It's interesting to read back in history on the Bill 43 that was passed a number of years ago, about eight years ago, about this issue. Really, there just were not a lot of commissions and members that were asking for it. I have some material from a press release that came out from the Potato Growers of Alberta that was saying that they didn't believe that the Alberta government was understanding the value of their commission, that they didn't believe that this was something that was actually asked for by their industry. Also, there was a press release from the Alberta Beef Producers at the time that was saying that the government was ignoring democracy, that they saw the bitter irony of having democratically elected MLAs in the Legislature making decisions that would take away their own democratic process of having a vote on something like whatever their check-off model is. In going through the *Hansard* from different members, from members such as who is now the hon. Minister of Transportation and of Infrastructure, at the time when he spoke about it, he was talking about the need to have power not just concentrated in the hands of large producers.

9:20

Unfortunately, that can be one of the implications of taking check-off fees back into a company. It's based on a per head model, so while you have lots of people that might have 400 head, if you have a company that has 100,000 head, it tends to displace the power of how those check-offs are impacting the industry as a whole.

This is something that is very important to many in the industry like the potato commission to make sure that the research dollars are available to leverage. One of the things that I have heard about in multiple meetings with different agricultural producers is that they want there to be those dollars available to leverage on a 2 to 1 ratio or a 5 to 1 ratio of the actual returns that they get in the end, the actual value of the scientific research that can be done at places like the University of Alberta. This is something that will restore the autonomy back to industry groups if it is something that the groups want to do. That's just the thing. It doesn't make it

nonrefundable; what it does is that it just gives the power of that decision back to the producers.

I had the great opportunity to go to an Alberta Beef Producers meeting in Smoky Lake with the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater and to talk to local producers in his area and in my area – the zone is quite large – and talk about what it is that people want to see going forward. The power of the membership is that they can have producer-driven conversations on what they want and ensure that there is good accountability and have that strong local voice. We have zones across Alberta where the producers come from many different parts of the sector. They can talk to their directors, and they can elect directors at their groups to make sure that they are the ones that step forward and want to be that voice for change as a director or who just has that good involvement with their group at a local level to be addressing their needs.

Alberta currently is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a mandatory refundable model for commissions. This is something that will bring us closer in line to the rest of the country. I know that in looking at the conversation that happened eight years ago, there were not a lot of members that were even speaking in favour of taking this democratic ability away from the groups. They weren't really talking about why it was something that was important except for talking about choice, but to truly have choices is having a vote, so I'm very pleased that this is the direction that this bill is going in.

It will require, still, a plebiscite for changes to happen in a commission if that's what they choose, but just like other members were saying, it's true that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The agriculture industry in our province as well as the rest of the world continues to become more diverse as climate changes and as food preferences change, so we have to have models that change and morph with it to actually respond to the needs of producers.

With that, I will just encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of the bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments? Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, ma'am.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity. It's with great interest that I take umbrage at the comments coming forward here because I, too, have direct interest in our family farming operation. Madam Speaker, to your position, I guess I would call it, in regard to the potentiality of conflict of interest, I too want to make it publicly known and known in this Chamber that I'm pleased and proud of my associations directly with agriculture. I do take great pride and stock in that I do provide food for Albertans coming forward.

To the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville: she talked on many subjects, and I'm happy to do a back and forth. I have a series of questions here. The member specifically talked about international trade and country of origin labelling and how that potentially could be affected by this, the bill coming forward, which I think is progressive and open minded. But the member did talk about COOL, or country of origin labelling. I don't know if the member is aware of an organization in the U.S. called R-CALF. R-CALF has considerable concerns about the check-off organizations that we do have in Canada. The member also mentioned potato growing and such like that.

I was wondering if the member could give us some understanding of how this may or may not affect international trade based on the opinions of an American-based organization like R-CALF. Also, I

was also wondering if she could table any information to confirm the comments that she made about the different levels of displacement of power. The member talked, Madam Speaker, about some organizations that may have, like, 400 head and other organizations that may have 10,000 or even up as high as 100,000 head. She talked about the displacement of power based on those organizations. The member was talking about a check-off based on a per head basis, but in the case of potato growers was she talking about a check-off based on a per-acre basis?

We also have wheat growers, of which I'm one, and barley growers and such like that who pay a check-off on a per-tonne basis, but the tonnage is based on an acreage of production.

I was just wondering if the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville could give us some background on her understanding of those relationships. It is important with a prominent bill like this that's come forward that we don't create any disruptive international trade barriers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the interest. The potato growers pay 7 cents per 100 pounds sold for processing; they pay 2 cents for each 100 pounds of culled potatoes sold for processing; \$25 per harvested acre of potatoes produced for table use; \$35 per certified harvested seed acre; and .75 per cent of annual gross income sales or transfers of plantlets or potatoes derived from an undertaking consisting of a facility or operation of one or more laboratory greenhouses.

For the year – I think this was for 2015 – they collected approximately \$1.4 million and saw a refund basis of approximately 5 per cent, which meant \$70,000. That's \$70,000 that gets refunded that is then not able to be put towards things like leveraging scientific research for that industry.

9:30

In the case of COOL, the commission uses the fees that are paid to them for a number of things like making sure that the trade barriers are not something that preclude their producers from having a level playing field in other jurisdictions. That is something that they worked quite hard to take off.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaker's Ruling Conflicts of Interest

The Deputy Speaker: Before we continue on, I just want to clarify for members of the House that the role of the Speaker is not to make decisions regarding conflicts of interest. That is something that rests strictly with the Ethics Commissioner, and the Speaker does not decide if somebody is in a conflict. The Speaker may have a role in bringing forward the Ethics Commissioner's decision to the House, but the Speaker does not make that decision. Just so that you are aware.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater-Sturgeon.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. It's my privilege to rise in the House today to speak in favour of Bill 9. This is something that I know that I've

heard from producers in my area on, you know, particularly members of the Alberta Beef Producers but not only them, where they thought that the previous administration had made a bit of a wrong step back in 2009 in changing a system that had been working well for the majority of producers.

Now, of course, the whole point of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act in its original conception: it was intended to empower Alberta's ag producers and their organizations to set their own directions. That's why it was set up. It wasn't something directly run through Agriculture. It was something where producers had their own say, and it's kind of important, when it comes to key decisions about their organizations, that that be respected. Since 2009 that hasn't necessarily been the case.

Pretty key to these organizations is, of course, check-offs. Now more than ever these funds are critically necessary for them to be able to adequately fund their operations and to do research to benefit the broader industry and, of course, then, all of us. These activities – and I know other members have alluded to that – would include marketing, promotion, trade missions to build market access, support for industry research, and ongoing outreach and education efforts. It's one thing that I know I've been happy to be a beneficiary of, the work of members of, in particular, the Alberta Beef Producers up in my area, that have been more active, to educate us on some of the concerns that they have and to do it in a really I don't know if I could say rural kind of friendly way. I know that I had a great opportunity some months back to have a delicious Alberta beef dinner – actually, they even do recipes with Colin Campbell, who's the vice-president of one of the zones in my riding. He's part of, you know, the discussion.

This is something that is kind of important to respect. I mean, since 2009 you've had a wide range of sectors that have been forced to adopt essentially the same model for their check-offs. This sort of one-size-fits-all approach doesn't really make sense in industry today. It's really important to restore MAPA to its original intent. This is something that I know the minister has heard from many different quarters on, from both commissions and individual producers. I think this is sort of a good middle way, right? I mean, it's not imposing a particular solution on any particular check-off organization. Rather, it's giving them the flexibility to make that choice for themselves and not have the service charge model dictated, well, by us.

Now, of course, there are producers out there and there are commissions that are still committed to having the refundable model. I mean, that's something where if a majority of their members believe the same thing, they can keep things essentially the way they are whereas there are other organizations where it's not quite the same situation, where a majority of members might well want the opportunity to go back to the nonrefundable model. It just sort of depends on where they're at in the industry.

I've heard a lot from producers where they really resent – I guess I'm trying to think of a diplomatic way of saying it. I mean, it sort of comes down to the whole problem of the free ride, where they feel like you have some members of the organization that are, you know, asking for the refunds, but they're able to benefit from the research, from the marketing, and from the advocacy efforts that their associations provide without actually providing funds to support that. For those that do provide those funds, they find that not only kind of irksome, but they also find it where it leaves these organizations sometimes with perhaps not enough funds to be able to fulfill their mandates.

It's particularly important – I know that other members have alluded to this today – in this very uncertain time. We have a very export-oriented agricultural industry in most sectors, and we're facing a very complicated international environment, where you

have other governments, you know, heavily subsidizing their producers. I mean, I know that members alluded to some American organizations. You have some organizations that are pushing hard for backtracking on the advances we made with the country of origin labelling.

Then, of course, we have the challenge of climate change both in the kind of research that's required to adjust agricultural operations to keep them efficient and also to be able to meet climate change goals. I know that people in the industry and people that are interested in the industry, you know, are gratified to see that there have been some really pretty interesting developments on changes to husbandry practices, changes to feed, and all the things that are leading us to our goals. But these things require money, they require research, and then they require education. These are all things that these check-off organizations I know provide.

The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville was happy to accompany me to Smoky Lake, actually, partly because, I think, most of that zone is in her riding and not mine. But it was a very interesting event in that all those different aspects were combined in one regional meeting. There were presentations on best practices in shipping, there were presentations on – actually, there was a lot of different information. It really went down the whole gamut: updates in research, updates for education, discussions on advocacy. I found the whole thing very helpful.

It's difficult to see how our industries could flourish the way that they have without robust organizations such as these working. To be able to give these organizations the type of flexibility where, if their membership so decides, they can make sure that all the members of the organization contribute to it, when it's appropriate: I think that's all very good.

Considering that it seems we have unanimous consent so far, it's a very good sign that we're taking a step in the right direction with this. Well, I guess that most members have already made their minds up, but if there are any members wavering on this, you know, unanimous support for this bill would, I think, send a great message to our producers.

With that, I'd like to rest my comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? I'll recognize Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate being able to talk about this and ask a question to the hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. I just want to say, first of all, that I do believe that I am in favour of this bill; however, there are some concerns that I have. I also want to state that I'm not a farmer or rancher, so in terms of being able to speak about this bill from that perspective, I don't believe I have that right or ability.

But I do want to ask the hon. member about the issue of being able to balance a democratic right for producers to be able to vote for this check-off or not or receiving the check-off back or not versus the importance of property rights. I'll give you an example. You talked about how some of the members of these commissions feel like other members were getting a free ride. From what I understand, if you are a producer and you want to sell your product elsewhere, you have to be involved in one of these commissions. In order for you to be able to sell your goods, being mandatorily required to be part of this – a little bit of your freedom is being taken away. So your right of property, the ability of property, can be affected by this mandatory compulsion to be involved in this commission.

9:40

Again, I don't think that any bill is perfect, and I believe that this bill is allowing that democracy, and I think that that's very

important. I applaud the agriculture minister for bringing that forward. However, for that member or for that producer who feels he or she is not getting the benefit of that check-off, they could be under the tyranny of the majority, be required to have to pay this. So it affects their property rights, their ability to produce what they believe is in their best interest. This is the only concern that I have with this bill.

We have seen it, actually, in this House, where the tyranny of the majority decides for an individual what the consequence is going to be. In the event that someone felt like they just didn't agree with one individual, the majority could vote against that individual. This is why in our western society we have a balance between democracy and the rule of law, that individuals have certain freedoms that we need to balance, and I think that it's extremely important for us to make sure that we get that proper balance.

Again, I just want the member to maybe give us a little more information and provide a little more detail on what he thinks is the proper balance in terms of what this commission is mandating individual producers to do versus their, I guess, right in our country for property rights.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. I'd like to thank the hon. member for a very interesting question, one that's, I'd say, fairly weighty for this early in the morning. It's a question that, of course, we as human beings have been debating in various forms for millennia. So I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to wrap this up with a nice bow on it, but, you know, I do want to recognize that I think the member is absolutely correct, and I think it's something that applies to every decision that we make in this House. There's always going to be that tension between individual autonomy and the well-being of the group. The question is: well, where do you draw that line?

I mean, we do have a guide, I guess, of sorts. Well, I shouldn't say of sorts. We do have a very firm guide in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and where that line is drawn is what's called "reasonable." So what's reasonable and demonstrably just? [Mr. Piquette's speaking time expired] Oh. Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. member to close debate on behalf of the minister.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've got to thank everyone who spoke on this bill this morning. I move to close debate on second reading of Bill 9.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 9 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 9, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017. The saga continues.

I must divulge here that I did grow up on a farm; I am a farmer. In my younger days, in the '60s and '70s, the whole discussion around marketing boards, marketing commissions, and the establishment of a marketing council and all of that was a very hot topic around the kitchen table with friends and neighbours and family as I grew up. Those discussions were always very passionate and very much about trying to get to the bottom of who we were going to allow to decide for us and how we would establish a system that allows it to work in the best interests of the industry, the farms, yet not give up the freedom to choose how we market our products. Those are ongoing today again.

I remember back in 2009, when Bill 43 was introduced. The government of the day felt it was important to allow four of the industries to have the same rights to a refundable service charge that nine of the commissions already had. What we're finding today is that we see that we have possibly nine of the commissions that never had the opportunity for nonrefundable service charges wanting us to adjust to a position – well, I would suggest it's all 13 of the commissions we're considering here – to a system that would give the producers, the members of those associations, those commissions, the opportunity to have their say through a democratic vote, through a very fair and transparent process.

The Marketing of Agricultural Products Act essentially established the Alberta Ag Products Marketing Council, which is an agency operating for the ministry, for the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. As we move forward on this, I believe that the marketing council is essentially charged with ensuring that these decisions and these processes, that the commissions will go forward with if they choose to, are conducted with a very fair and transparent mechanism, in a fair and transparent way, so that all producers are properly represented in that they have a fair representation of their concerns within that.

When the marketing council and the minister, essentially, have to make their decisions on, "Is this fair, and is this transparent?" one of the things that will possibly come into it is what the definition of a fair process is. I'm not sure that there's any indication in this at this time of what the minister of the day considers fair, but there is concern that possibly 50 per cent plus one would make the change for everything. That's 50 per cent plus one of members of the association as opposed to two-thirds of members of the association and commission. Is that fair? I guess that's up to interpretation. At the same time, 50 per cent of membership might be responsible for only 20 per cent, 25 per cent of production. So then the conversations go around – and I remember these conversations as a child – well, how is it fair that 50 per cent of the members get to decide when they only produce 10, 20, 25 per cent of the product?

9:50

So I suspect the saga will continue even after today. I believe that we are improving it today but that those discussions will continue on, and we'll continue to try and evolve to where we can land at another place that can be interpreted as treating all people fair, all producers, in trying to come to a system that will work for each producer in those commodity groups.

Like I said before, you know, in 2009 there were nine commissions that already had the choice of a refundable service charge. I'm not sure what the history on that is, whether that was how the marketing council decided to set those commissions up, but at that time they already had that in place. I would suspect that they would at that time have been able to change if their memberships

so wished. Essentially, in 2009 we had the beef, the pork, the lamb, and the potato growers getting the option to have the refundable. The way their commissions were set up was that they didn't have that option. They were essentially nonrefundable. They couldn't have even voted to go nonrefundable, from the way I understand it. So in 2009 it changed to what we are currently at, and now we are looking to move into a situation where we let the producers and the members of the commissions make the choice of: do they wish to move to a refundable or nonrefundable service charge?

I believe that is the proper direction to go at this time, so I am in favour of Bill 9 as we are putting it forward today. But I do have questions with regard to indications on fair and transparent, how the minister would view that, how those regulations would come into play. I do believe that memberships should determine what direction their associations and their commissions go. I am concerned that we are now in a position where we have the marketing council, again, making a decision based off of their interpretation of the process being proposed by each commission on how to move forward.

Then, also, there are always the concerns that the industry has to then decide how they implement their service charge. Is it every time the animal is sold that they're charged the service charge? I believe the lamb commission ties it in with their identification tags, where you pay a service charge whenever you purchase those identification tags. So that's a one-time thing, for each animal essentially. Is there any indication as to: will there be some mechanism, or are we essentially leaving it in the hands of the commissions to try and figure out what that fair service charge is?

I do believe that part of the discussions back in the day – I was in the hog industry at the time, and I have produced beef over the years. But part of the discussion at that time was that for the beef animal, when you sold the calf, you paid a charge. When you sold that feeder animal, feeder steer, you paid the charge. Then for the finished animal you paid a charge. So that may be paid three, four, five times during the lifetime of that animal. I guess the commissions have to try and find a way to allow it to be fair, where each producer feels like they're being treated equally in the whole process. It's all about finding policies that work for everyone and trying to find that balance.

One other question I do have is with regard to moving forward as the commissions make a decision. You know, some have made a decision, I believe, already, where they will stay to the refundable check-off unless they're lobbied by their members to move to a nonrefundable check-off. My question would be: moving forward from there, can the commission at any time in the future bring it back to the table for a vote? So if they decide this year or next whether or not they're going to go to the nonrefundable, is it, then, in two years' time after that where they have the option to have another vote? Is that going to create a certain amount of divisiveness within the industry, where we're going to have the different producers and the different organizations – in the beef industry you have the cow-calf producers, you have the feedlot operators, and it can become very divisive because their interests don't totally align at any given time. If I could get some clarification on the process moving forward, whether this is something that the minister sees as ongoing, where the commissions continue to have the opportunity to have a vote at any time moving forward.

I think those are all the questions I have at this time. I'd like to thank the minister for bringing this forward. I do think this is an improvement on what we have. It puts the onus back to the industry and the decision-making back to the industry. But, again, the saga will continue because the talks around the kitchen table will be very passionate on how we move forward and how to best represent all producers.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to use the notes that I have here about situations that would require a plebiscite vote because, of course, that is what would be required to change the structure for how producer groups use their check-off fees. So this is saying what situations require a plebiscite vote. Under sections 16 and 24 of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act a plebiscite vote is required to establish a marketing board; amend the regulation of a marketing board if the amendment relates directly to the control or regulation of the production or marketing, or both, of a regulated product under the plan; terminate a marketing board or commission that was established pursuant to a plebiscite of the producers; terminate a marketing board or commission that was in operation immediately before July 27, 1987; determine, if the marketing council considers it appropriate, the opinion of the producers under the plan as to whether the plan should be amended, continued, revised, or terminated.

Then there are the criteria for conducting a plebiscite. Once the plebiscite request has been recommended by the marketing council and approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the marketing council is required to arrange to conduct a plebiscite, and then the marketing council, by regulation, with the approval of the minister, must determine what constitutes (a) an eligible producer, (b) a sufficient number of eligible producers, and (c) a sufficient portion of the total agricultural product that is marketed or is capable of being produced by the eligible producers. When a sufficient number of eligible producers have, one, voluntarily registered with the marketing council in order for a plebiscite to be held and, two, the eligible producers registered for conducting the plebiscite market or are capable of producing a sufficient portion of the agricultural product, then a plebiscite would be held. Both criteria must be achieved in order for the plebiscite to be valid.

10:00

To date, the marketing council's decision on how many producers must register and what portion of production is required in order to meet the minimum requirements for a plebiscite has been based on several factors, including previous plebiscite requirements; recommendations from the marketing board, commission, or industry as to what they think would be sufficient numbers; the level of importance associated with the proposed change and plebiscite; the number of producers producing that product; the amount of production and concentration of production; and the ability to contact producers.

There have been a number of plebiscites in the past, including, in the year 2000, the pork board's. There was a plebiscite to become a commission and split from the Western Hog Exchange, where 20 per cent of producers was the minimum number of producers that would need to be registered, and 30 per cent of production was required to be registered. In that vote there were 73 per cent that were in favour.

Also, in 2002 there was the milk plan to become a marketing board, where 25 per cent of producers would need to register and 25 per cent of production. In that specific example, 50.5 per cent of producers had registered along with 50.7 per cent of production, or 335 million litres of milk, that they represented. When they did that vote, they voted 91.8 per cent in favour.

It's also worth adding that producers currently do have a mechanism to ask for redress in their marketing commissions, where 20 per cent of producers can petition the marketing council. MAPA, section 21, considers petitions from producers under a plan whereby producers request that a plan be amended, continued,

revised, or terminated, and a marketing council shall only accept a producer petition where the petition (a) clearly states the intent, (b) is signed by at least 20 per cent of the producers under the plan, (c) sets forth the name, address, and signature of each petitioner, and (d) is submitted to council within 12 months from the date the first petitioner signed the petition.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this bill. First of all, I'd like to say that I support it. I think that taking advice from my colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti, who's forgotten more about farming since he woke up this morning than I'll ever know, is a pretty good source of information for me.

But I have to say that I was interested in some of the comments from some of the members on the government side. For instance, they talked – and I agree with this – about providing autonomy for producers, which is a very good idea. I have to say, Madam Chair, that it is in sharp contrast to Bill 6. To the government's credit, I'll compliment them for improving their line of thinking, but I will remind them that it's exactly the opposite of what they did in Bill 6, which is to take away the autonomy. Also, I heard a government member talk about: one size doesn't fit all. Again, I couldn't agree more. Again, that's in sharp, sharp contrast to Bill 6, where apparently, with WCB, one size, they decided, does fit all. It's good that they've learned something since Bill 6, and there's still time, in my view, before they fully implement that, to reverse course and correct that.

So I will compliment the government on this bill, and I do that without reservation, but I will do that along with a recommendation to the government that they actually expand the learnings that they seem to have shown in this bill across the other pieces of legislation, including the labour bill, where one size is going to fit all and without much consultation to get people to agree with it where they come forward. If they would use the more clear thinking that they've used to come up with this bill and apply it to the rest of the work that the NDP government does, that would be to Alberta's benefit.

I'm happy to support this bill and hope that the government will indeed use their clearer level of thinking that they've had in creating this bill and apply it to other things that they do.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Yes. The important thing is that we've got to consider that these amendments will return to producers the freedom of choice – and that's what's important here – so that the producers can choose what they want. That's the main message of this thing. It's important we consider that, that we return that freedom of choice to them so that they can choose what they want to do. That's the whole idea of this bill. It returns that important aspect and gives producers that ability to choose.

I just wanted to add that. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments?

Mr. van Dijken: Just some more comments with regard to – thank you to the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for bringing up some of the details for the questions that I was asking. I'm just going through the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. You know, we talk about section 21, that it's in the hands of producers, but then at the end of the day, it is actually in the hands of cabinet.

I'm trying to find it back here, but under one of the previous sections it's in the hands of cabinet as to the very definition of a producer. Then we get into a discussion about, "Is that definition going to be a producer eligible for that year, or is it a producer that produced the product in the last five years maybe?" those types of things. So it will continue to evolve.

I do believe that we're moving in the right direction here, where we do have the producers decide. But I do believe that we're going to have ongoing discussions, and the minister has to be very aware of this – I'm sure he is – with regard to the nuances of how to implement in a way that all producers can feel that they're being heard and that their concerns are being raised.

The member did allude that in 2000 we had a plebiscite in the hog industry. I was happy to be part of that and was a member of the founding board of the Western Hog Exchange. Yes, the producers at that time did vote. Pretty much three-quarters of the eligible producers voted in favour of moving in the direction that was being proposed at the time.

Yes. I just found it, section 16.

(2) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may exempt a proposed plan from the operation of subsection (1)...

Then further on:

(3) ... the Council shall ... [with] approval of the Minister determine what constitutes

- (a) an eligible producer,
- (b) a sufficient number of eligible producers, and
- (c) a sufficient portion of the total agricultural product that is marketed or is capable of being produced by the eligible producers.

There are going to need to be decisions made as to how to keep this fair. I haven't produced a calf for I'm going to say 20 years, more than 20 years, 25 years probably, yet when did I no longer become a calf producer? When I sold my cows, or when I divested of the facilities that allowed me to be a calf producer? You know, that's the kind of nuance that will come forward. I haven't been a hog producer since 2008, yet I own facilities that I could raise hogs in today, so am I currently a hog producer? What is the definition of the hog producer? There are points in time where hog production can be very – we're cleaning out a herd or a situation like that where they're not actively selling a commodity, yet they can be actively participating in the industry.

10:10

These are just nuances I bring up just to alert everyone to the fact that we're not done. You know, it is going to continue to evolve. I trust that the minister is going to be moving forward in a way that recognizes the will of the producers and tries to move forward in as fair a manner as possible.

I'm sure there are going to be certain unintended consequences that come out of this, that we're going to learn as we go again. Actually, in 2009 there was kind of a sense of: oh, I think we might have landed somewhere here where, yeah, this is fair. But we're finding out that, no, we're moving now in the direction where it's putting it in the hands of the producers, where it needs to be, and the membership decides.

The Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. Just to quickly respond, I mean, what this is is enabling legislation. Those decisions on how the marketing council determines who an eligible producer is: that's not changing. What is changing is just putting the power of the vote for how the model is in place or could be in place in the future, that democratic right, back into the hands of the producer.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Sweet: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 9.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance it's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 10, the Appropriation Act, 2017.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2017-18 fiscal year. The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail in the 2017-18 government and Legislative Assembly estimates, tabled on March 16, 2017. These estimates were subsequently debated by standing committees and voted on in Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2017 makes practical changes that will make life more affordable for Albertans. Our budget supports a reduction in school fees for kindergarten to grade 12 students. This will deliver real relief to Alberta families, from the cost of busing to instructional supplies and materials, when they send their children to school.

For postsecondary students we are extending our freeze on tuition to the third year in a row. Young adults will be able to pursue a career in their chosen field without being priced out of a good education.

This government is also committed to reducing electricity costs for Alberta families. We are capping electricity prices to ensure stable and affordable power over the next four years. This will give families more certainty as they plan their household budget. Our budget includes measures to help Albertans reduce their carbon footprint and energy costs. Energy Efficiency Alberta will deliver a variety of programs and services for energy efficiency and small-

scale renewables. These are just a few of the ways Budget 2017 helps make life more affordable for Albertans.

The changes we're making could not come at a better time. We know that Alberta families are still feeling the impact of the recession. People are worried about their jobs and making their rent or mortgage payments. They wonder if they can afford to keep their kids in hockey or dance classes. Budget 2017 is making life more affordable for them by helping them with everyday costs.

The budget also continues our plan to build a diversified economy and get people working again. We are coming off a couple of tough years, marked by low oil prices and extraordinary circumstances like the Wood Buffalo wildfire, but we have a plan to get Albertans working again.

Budget 2017 continues government's commitment to build and improve modern infrastructure. Our capital plan commits \$32.8 billion during the next four years. This will build health care facilities, schools, and other public institutions where Albertans can access the services they need. Keeping our interchanges, bridges, and highways in good working order will ensure that goods and services can be moved efficiently. Efficient transportation networks are essential for Alberta's export-based economy. Investing in building projects will create and sustain thousands of good-paying jobs for Albertans.

We are also bolstering our economy with tax credit programs to attract and keep investment dollars here in Alberta. Our government is into its second year of our \$250 million investment to support job creators and encourage business capital investment. As part of our plan we're encouraging business innovation and investment in our province. This includes building green infrastructure and other initiatives such as supporting Energy Efficiency Alberta as outlined in our climate leadership plan.

Over the next three years \$5.4 billion will be fully reinvested to reduce emissions, save energy, diversify the economy, and to help households, businesses, and communities adjust to the carbon price. The leadership our government is showing on the economy and environment will take time for the full effects to be felt. It's not going to happen overnight, but we know that our plan to get Albertans working again sets the foundation for economic recovery.

Alberta families can be assured that the programs and services they rely on to help them through the rough patch will be there for them. This budget contains an important promise to protect and improve services Albertans rely on. Last year saw significant caseload growth in income supports, AISH, and other support programs for our most vulnerable. This is directly correlated to the economic downturn. We had a choice as a government to either make deep cuts to the government programs and services that Albertans rely on or protect these programs and services. Our government is choosing to be there for Alberta families, especially during these tough times.

We are also committed to finding savings. We have a plan to gradually reduce the deficit year over year and return to balance by 2024. This will be achieved by keeping spending increases below population plus inflation growth. We're committed to finding \$200 million in savings this year. That's on top of the \$250 million in savings we realized last year and the \$500 million we'll save over two years from the physicians' compensation agreement signed in November 2016.

We're putting an executive compensation framework in place for 23 public agencies, which is expected to save nearly \$16 million a year once fully implemented. We're continuing the salary freeze for political staff and managers in government departments and public agencies. These measures along with others outlined in the fiscal plan will help us along our path to balance.

Madam Speaker, to summarize, Budget 2017 is our government's plan to support job growth and build a diversified economy. It's a promise to protect and improve the services and supports that make a difference in the lives of Albertans, and it is our pledge to lay the foundation for returned economic growth. This year our province will see a return to economic growth, and we'll get there through leadership in climate change, building critical infrastructure, and supporting job creation while protecting the services and programs that help Albertans most.

I along with my government colleagues look forward to implementing Budget 2017 and making the lives of Albertans better. I urge you to support this bill today.

I now move that we adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:20

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to give second reading to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government.

After years of hard work, consultation, forward thinking, and relationship building, this bill is the third and final round of legislative amendments under the MGA review that we're aiming to put in place before the elections this fall. A comprehensive review of the Municipal Government Act started in 2012. The first set of amendments was tabled as the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. This bill dealt with consensus issues and was unanimously passed in March 2015. The second round of amendments was tabled in May 2016 as the Modernized Municipal Government Act. This legislation addressed more complex and wide-reaching changes like the shift from competition to collaboration between Alberta municipalities.

Our government committed to open and accessible consultation with Albertans on the Modernized Municipal Government Act, and we took the time to do it right. Last summer our government held 21 sessions across the province to hear directly from Albertans about what matters for their communities. There are so many people across Alberta who care about their communities, who want to see smart planning and growth where they live, and who are active participants in their local governance. We heard from these people about how our government can make practical changes to make their lives and communities better. So we made some of the changes in the form of 40 additional amendments to the Modernized Municipal Government Act last fall before it was passed unanimously in December 2016.

Today is about the rest of what we heard, which included new ideas for how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities. We heard these ideas from municipal leaders, families, young people, school boards, indigenous communities, small businesses, and industry. We took those ideas back to all Albertans last fall, and we heard strong support for nearly every policy proposal. We also held meetings with municipalities, school boards, indigenous communities, business, and industry to further discuss these ideas before developing this bill.

With this bill we are delivering on those ideas that we heard from Albertans. Let me tell you about a few of these ideas and how they became the amendments before us today. A key focus of the MGA's modernization is community collaboration. We believe that all Albertans benefit when municipalities are good neighbours, working together to provide services and strengthen the economy.

Over the last year we heard from leaders in many First Nations and Métis settlements that they want to see better relationships with their neighbouring municipalities. We are therefore extending the spirit of municipal collaboration to include Alberta's indigenous communities.

The amendments tabled today would require that municipalities give First Nations and Métis settlements the same notification opportunity to comment on statutory plans that is provided to all other adjacent municipalities. These changes would set a Canadian precedent to build stronger relationships between municipalities and First Nations and Métis settlements. We are also empowering municipalities to enter into agreements with indigenous communities. These changes are a small but significant step to strengthening relationships between indigenous communities and municipalities.

We're also aiming to make political life more accessible for women and Albertans with young families. These amendments would enable councils to make parental leave bylaws for councillors. We heard this great idea from the city of Edmonton, and I need to give credit to Councillor Bev Esslinger and Mayor Don Iveson as two of the key people in making this happen. Our elected councils need to better reflect the communities they serve, including young people, new families, and women. Half of Alberta's population are women, but right now in Alberta women only make up 26 per cent of municipal councillors, and 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on them. Our government also wants to encourage young women and men to get involved so their voices can be heard, and having a child or wanting to have a family as a locally elected official is something that we would support with this change.

As you know, our government is committed to building schools to serve our young and growing province and to protecting and improving education for Alberta students. The education of our children is incredibly important to the well-being and prosperity of our communities, and schools are at the hearts of our neighbourhoods. We heard from municipalities and school boards that we can do better in how school sites are planned and serviced for communities. That's why this bill proposes that municipalities and school boards enter into joint-use and planning agreements to work together on integrated long-term planning for school sites and facilities. This will be good for students, for families, and for all communities.

These amendments and the rest of An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government are designed to make life better for Albertans no matter where they live. I encourage Albertans to go online, see the amendments and how they reflect the ideas we heard, and follow the debate as the bill moves forward. These latest amendments to the MGA will make our communities stronger and more sustainable. To develop this bill, we listened to Albertans. We are acting on what we heard, and we are working to have a modernized MGA and its regulations come into effect before this fall's municipal elections.

I'm proud to present for a second time Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. I move that the bill be read a second time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here today to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. I'd like to thank the minister for his remarks this morning. As always, enlightening as they were, we certainly have a lot of work to do here. We noted that there were

44 items in this bill, again, only a couple of months after we had a bill that was almost quadruple that size. Anyway, we're going to do our best in the limited time we have to try to present some information this morning during second reading.

While Bill 8 is not nearly as robust as the Modernized Municipal Government Act, that was debated in the fall, by my count it looks like there are about 50 different proposals in Bill 8, as I've just said. I'd love to discuss every one of them this morning, but that simply isn't possible, so I'll look to do my best to focus on about 10 of the major priority items we've identified and look forward to continuing the discussion during future stages of the debate.

In a previous life I had the honour of serving as a municipal councillor on the MD of Foothills council, which many in here may know, and I enjoyed my time there immensely and had the opportunity to work with some amazing people there. I look back on that time with a lot of pride, actually. There were an awful lot of interesting developments that took place that close to a major city, which I benefited from, for sure. It was a great experience.

Another of the important things I learned during that time was the value of the associations that represent the municipalities in this province.

The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association [or AUMA] represents urban municipalities including cities, towns, villages, summer villages and specialized municipalities and more than 85% of Albertans. It is a dynamic and evolving association, advocating the interest of members to the provincial and federal orders of government and other stakeholders.

The other association, representing Alberta's rural municipalities, is the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, of course, or AAMD and C, which describes itself on its website as "an independent association comprising Alberta's 69 counties and municipal districts. Since 1909, we have helped rural municipalities achieve strong, effective local government."

These two grassroots organizations do amazing research and amazing work in policy development and, due to the many overlapping areas of focus, often collaborate. I valued their insight during my time as a councillor and continue to value their insight and input today in my role as an MLA representing my constituents here in the Legislature and as the Official Opposition's critic for Municipal Affairs.

While both the AUMA and the AAMD and C were consulted and provided feedback to the government during the development of Bill 8, I think it's important to include, therefore, some of their feedback for the record here in the Chamber this morning. I'll clarify, though, that the AUMA and the AAMD and C submissions I'm going to be referencing here were referring to the document that was sent out by the department called Continuing the Conversation, which was released in November, just after the last amendments to the MGA were done under Bill 21.

I'd like to start with the 5 to 1 ratio issue because it is a very controversial issue that was dealt with before and that we're going to get into a bit again this morning. I won't spend too much time on it, really, but one of my esteemed colleagues is planning to speak on the topic in more detail a little bit later today. Essentially, in Bill 21, which was passed in the fall, they established this linkage between residential and nonresidential tax rates. Since the MGA was first amended, way back in the mid-1990s, there has been a growing divergence between the property tax rate a municipality charged on nonresidential property and the tax rate it charged on residential property. In almost all cases this difference was not really that large, you know: 1 to 3, 1 to 4, something like that for the most part. However, in about a dozen municipalities the divergence had then grown in excess of five times the rate being charged on a residential property.

Bill 21 actually established a cap that prevented this gap from exceeding a ratio of 5 to 1. Essentially, with Bill 21 a municipality's highest nonresidential property tax rate could no longer exceed five times the rate of the municipality's lower residential property tax rate. As I mentioned, for most municipalities this presented no problem as they already fell below that limit for the most part. However, in the case of, I believe, 19 or 20 municipalities their ratio at the time Bill 21 was first introduced exceeded the 5 to 1 setting. Bill 21 therefore allowed municipalities that exceeded the ratio to maintain whatever their current ratio was, be it 5 and a half to 1 or 11 to 1. However, it prevented the municipality from going beyond that in the future.

10:30

What Bill 8 seems to be proposing to do is bring those municipalities that exceed the ratio in line with the 5 to 1 ratio only after three months of passing Bill 21, which allowed those jurisdictions to be grandfathered into the formal rule. We don't know why the government is suddenly changing their stance on this, but it was quite a surprise to get that. It doesn't outline any sort of timeline for this to be done, either. It leaves all of that to regulation, apparently, and we all know here in the House that we don't debate regulations, unfortunately.

All I will say at this point, anyway, as we're going to go into it in detail later, is that there are a lot of reasons why a municipality structures their tax burdens the way they do and that there are often legitimate reasons why certain municipalities feel justified in setting the higher tax rates in the way that they do. I think that the AUMA and AAMD and C have some good insight on this, and I'd like to put up a couple of quotes here. The AUMA states in their submission that the AUMA "supports providing the Minister with the authority to exempt a municipality indefinitely from the 5:1 ratio." Likewise, the AAMD and C states in their submission that "the AAMDC supports the ability for municipalities to be exempt where appropriate or extenuating circumstances require it."

I'll end my comments on this particular topic now by reiterating that I suspect the municipalities that exceed the 5 to 1 ratio have legitimate reasons why. Likewise, if the government feels that it needs to bring all municipalities in compliance with the 5 to 1 ratio, it should provide the details and the proposed timelines within the legislation itself so that all MLAs have a chance to debate it and discuss it.

Let's move on, Madam Speaker, to intermunicipal off-site levies. This one here is a proposal to enable municipalities to jointly implement off-site levies for eligible projects that provide benefit to both municipalities. Bill 21 actually expanded the types of infrastructure that could be funded through off-site levies to include libraries, police stations, fire halls, and recreation centres. It also established that the percentage of the benefit would dictate the amount a municipality could collect from a levy. For example, if a new development was determined to derive 30 per cent of the benefit from a proposed recreation centre, the municipality could collect up to 30 per cent of the cost of the recreation centre from the levy it charged the developer.

AUMA states in their submission:

Permitting intermunicipal off-site levies between jurisdictions would allow for a more coordinated regional approach and allow neighbouring municipalities to share a common philosophy, and better support development of projects.

They also go on to say that

consideration must also be given to how an appeal would function for an intermunicipal levy, the process in cases where a municipality does not wish to contribute/participate, and the mechanisms each municipality has in order to access appeals.

Very important comments. I would concur with the AUMA, actually, on that, that the details around how these levies are going to work need to be established in the legislation because, as I've said before, we don't get into regulations, but these are very important circumstances that need to be debated.

When it comes to the AAMD and C on this, they state that "intermunicipal off-site levies should be voluntary only and should not be imposed by one municipality on another." With that I'm in total agreement as well. If the government's goal is to indeed improve intermunicipal collaboration, then off-site levies must remain voluntary. I look forward to the minister providing a lot more detail over the course of the debate on the issue that this brings to rise, and hopefully we can get some details on this for our municipalities.

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to speak a bit on conservation reserves. This was a new one that came up with Bill 21, and it's the ability for a municipality to establish one of those. It was to address an issue that municipalities were facing when they were dealing with developments that often as not may have included some areas where environmental reserves were already being considered. You know, there was also an extra capability with Bill 21 to take extra lands, but in this case those lands that were to be dedicated in that regard as conservation reserves would require compensation to the developer. That's what happened in Bill 21.

The issue that the reserve hoped to solve was for an area that was developable but was identified as having environmental significance such as wildlife corridors, significant tree stands, or other environmentally significant features that the municipality wished to conserve. Since these areas were developable areas, the municipality was responsible for providing that they would give appropriate compensation to the developer.

The proposed changes now, though, in Bill 8 will allow reimbursement of purchase costs to be considered during the annexation processes and that those funds must be used for conservation purposes, exempt conservation reserves from paying municipal taxes, clarify that municipalities may include conservation goals and objectives in their statutory plans, and allow municipalities the ability to reclassify a conservation reserve if substantive changes occur that eliminate lands' conservation values. For example, when a tornado or something comes in and there's a significant riparian area that's destroyed, that kind of thing could come into play in that circumstance.

The AUMA is

supportive of this change as it will ensure that the municipality that derives benefit from . . . reserve lands are the ones who pay for it; however, limiting the amount to what the municipality originally paid for the land should be removed and municipalities should have the ability to negotiate remuneration.

We certainly agree with that. There should be some sort of a negotiation put in place in such a situation.

In the AAMD and C's response to the proposed change, they say that they "will ensure that this tool is effective through shifts in boundaries." So it sounds like they will want to make sure that there are regulations in there when boundary shifts occur, that this conservation reserve topic is taken into account, which we certainly support.

Taxation of provincial agencies is another item that's come to the forefront. The government is proposing an amendment that would make property held by provincial corporations taxable for the purpose of property taxation. AUMA says that they're "supportive of adding these properties to the municipal tax base to compensate municipalities for the services the municipality provides (such as water, sewer, and fire protection)," et cetera. Likewise, AAMD and C say that they are "supportive of adding these properties to the

municipal tax base.” While both AAMD and C and AUMA were supportive of the changes proposed in Bill 8, they want to see the property tax exemptions set out in the Financial Administration Act and the MGA, you know, including in there Alberta Health Services, housing management bodies, schools, colleges, and universities, be removed.

I’d like to now move to the electric energy exemption regulation elevation that is in Bill 8, which proposes to enable the minister to exempt certain properties from education property tax where they are used for or in the generation of electricity. On this particular proposal there are a few questions. I know that a long-time complaint of municipalities has been that they are ultimately responsible for the education property tax that the provincial government mandates the municipalities collect on a province’s behalf. Whether they are able to collect the tax from property owners is of no concern to the province. This results in the municipality holding the bag if a property owner refuses to pay or is unable to pay their property taxes.

I appreciate that this appears to partially deal with the issue, but if the province is planning on dealing with all the electricity generation, then I can see the value of this amendment. That being said, I would like the minister to explain how this is not just another example of this government hand-picking winners and losers. Furthermore, if the minister could explain how this is not a poorly hidden attempt at subsidizing solar and wind electricity generation, I would appreciate that, and I’m all ears.

Now I’d like to move back to off-site levies again this time, Madam Speaker, but going towards where they relate to provincial highways. Bill 8 is proposing to enable off-site levies being collected for a municipal road project that connects to provincial highways. Furthermore, when a municipal statutory plan comes within 1.6 kilometres of a provincial highway, the plan must be referred to the Minister of Transportation for review and comment.

10:40

The AUMA has a comment here on this which is worth while. It says that they

[do] not support municipalities collecting offsite levies to pay for the provincial transportation system. The system should be funded through provincial revenues not local fees and charges.

The levies may manipulate the prioritization of provincial infrastructure projects and distort property prices in some communities.

I think that’s an important quote to note.

AAMD and C, on the other hand, “supports the proposed change,” but also in their case they were directing a request in the summer of 2016 regarding this to Municipal Affairs, and they’re waiting to hear a response. However, they do share AUMA’s concern that this provision could result in the prioritization of provincial infrastructure where a municipality had the ability to subsidize a portion of the cost.

Moving on to enforcement of ministerial orders now, Madam Speaker, Bill 8 is proposing to grant the minister additional remedies to address municipalities that are in noncompliance with an order by the minister. The proposal is to provide the minister with the same powers as are currently available to address noncompliance with an ALSA regional plan. In addition, Bill 8 would clarify that an order of the minister remains in effect while a review by the court is under way and furthermore requires that the minister receive 10 days’ notice of anyone intending to apply for injunctive relief against the decision of the minister.

The AUMA raises a number of concerns with this proposal, including:

The Minister should not be able to suspend authority to make bylaws/resolutions or withhold money from an entire council for the actions of an individual councillor.

AUMA also goes on to say that

- suspending a council’s authority to make resolutions or bylaws may be problematic when the council is unable to pass a bylaw that is necessary for the operation of the municipality (e.g. tax rate annual bylaw)

and that

- withholding money payable to a municipality may also be problematic when a municipality has contractual obligations that rely on grants to be funded, which may lead to legal or financial repercussions if funds are withheld.

So there seems to be a recognition by the AUMA that there’s a very strong problem in this suggestion in Bill 8, and I look forward to hearing about that.

The AAMD and C also adds in their submission that

the powers to suspend a council’s authority to make resolutions and bylaws should be reconsidered to ensure that municipalities have the decision making authority to allow for continuous operation of [their] duties.

Another great bit of information there to consider.

Both of these associations, therefore, are raising legitimate concerns with the government’s proposed amendments on this issue. However, I understand there are cases where the minister must act to ensure that a municipality is not operating in an irregular, improper, or improvident manner and that Albertans expect their elected officials to fulfill their duties with the dignity and respect that their role as an elected representative demands. I know I must sound like a broken record, but I look forward to the minister providing further details on this proposed amendment as well so that I can make an informed decision on the overall bill.

Madam Speaker, I’m going to have to end my comments here. It’s difficult because there’s so much more to say and there are so many topics in this bill and there are so many significant issues, as I’ve outlined, and so many concerns by the two most important associations in the municipal world, the AUMA and the AAMD and C. I look forward to hearing from all members in the Assembly as we continue this debate in the upcoming weeks on that, and my colleagues will be speaking more about this in the next hour or so this morning.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’m proud to rise today to talk about the proposed changes to the Municipal Government Act and more specifically the proposed changes to create mandatory joint-use and planning agreements, or JUPAs for short. This amendment will require creating mandatory JUPAs between municipalities and school boards. There is general support among major stakeholders on both sides for this amendment but not without some concerns. As with any piece of legislation that comes through the House, the devil is generally in the details, and there are several areas where more detail is needed.

AUMA, as my colleague just spoke about, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, for instance, is generally supportive of this amendment as they have long advocated for greater co-operation between school boards and municipalities. They have a particular interest in regard to school reserves and the planning and servicing of schools and the disposition of school property and school reserve sites. AUMA is also advocating for increased

transparency when dealing with where future school sites are located.

AAMD and C – of course, that's the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties – believes that the amendment to require a joint-use agreement between municipalities and school boards will result in avoiding conflict provided these agreements are enforced and kept current. While supportive, I share their concerns about the parameters of this joint-use agreement as it deals with committee accountability and membership. This needs to be reviewed to ensure that the governance is appropriate and municipal representation is of proper proportions. Terminology needs to be clear to differentiate between a joint-use agreement, which speaks to the utilization of a facility, versus joint planning.

It is paramount that municipalities need to retain the authority to follow their own planning needs. This is especially important to those municipalities that have to deal with multiple school boards including Catholic, public, francophone, or charter schools. Consideration of these circumstances needs to be addressed.

Furthermore, provisions must also address a municipality's ability to repurpose surplus school sites as there have been instances where a municipality's access has been restricted in prior situations. It's also vital that certain provisions should be made that require joint-use agreements to address how reserves are collected in one municipality, will be used to contribute to school site acquisition and development in another municipality to which the first municipality sends its students. That may sound off the wall when we come to a city, but in rural Alberta this is a fact in a lot of places.

AAMD and C also expressed concern by identifying problems around the future of school sites where a school was never built. These lands are often held by the school authority with a market valuation despite the lands being initially provided to the school authority by the municipality at no cost. AAMD and C believes a process should be in place for school sites that are no longer to be used for such purpose to be returned to the municipality at no cost. Madam Speaker, this will all be rendered moot if there is no mechanism in this joint-use agreement that includes the province as an active partner or participant in these agreements. The province is, of course, central to any of the infrastructure decisions regarding school sites and, as such, must be part of the process from the beginning.

Since we are now on the topic of how important the province is to ensuring any joint-use agreement is successful, it's a bit disconcerting to see the lack of any funding to initiate these new responsibilities. Given that this government is responsible for making everything more expensive with their ill-conceived carbon tax, it's troubling that the province has downloaded the bulk of the responsibility for administration of this amendment onto municipalities and school boards without any funding whatsoever to follow. These are the same school boards and municipalities who have come forward with numerous examples of how the carbon tax is making things harder for their citizens: heating costs, increased costs for busing, that hurts municipalities and hurts school boards. The province wants them to do more with less, all the while taking more money from these boards and municipalities and, furthermore, requiring them to do all this planning without any additional funding. I cannot help but wonder: how does the province expect municipalities and school boards to do all this without adequate funding?

Madam Speaker, I sat as a rural municipal councillor for six years. We had a cordial relationship with the school board in our county, but we really didn't require regularly scheduled sit-down meetings. This new addition to the MGA will require school boards and municipalities to meet and put together mandatory joint-use plans. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with sitting down

and meeting. Exchanges of information are always important. However, this will cost both the municipality and the school board money in order to complete such a document at a time when an increase in taxes for both entities is taking much-needed money out of their coffers.

10:50

For municipalities alone, they have also had several mandatory agreements downloaded onto them by the provincial government, municipal development plans and intermunicipal collaboration frameworks. For those that do a tight three-year timeline has been put on the completion of these now statutory documents. These documents are not a simple process for municipalities, especially smaller municipalities like several of the ones in my riding. It's become a troubling theme with this government, one that sees it put forward legislation without, seemingly, a thought of the result. As my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler is fond of saying, this government never considers the unintended consequences of its actions.

Now, as we continue to discuss this bill, I would ask that we all bear in mind the diversity of municipalities in this province, especially in terms of size. We have the city of Calgary with about 1.2 million, Edmonton with a population of 900,000. The numbers are close. We have other cities such as Red Deer and Lethbridge with around a hundred thousand residents each. Then there are large counties in this province like Parkland, with 30,000 people; smaller ones like the county I come from, which has about 6,800 residents. This province has more than a hundred towns and around a hundred villages, which often only have a couple hundred people. The village of Carmangay, in my riding, has 367 people. The village of Milo, in my riding, has 122 people. The reason I'm bringing this forward is because I want to point out that the government cannot always treat all municipalities the same. Each have vastly different levels of capacity. Small municipalities obviously don't have access to the same number of staff with administration and planning as a bigger city or county does.

I think that's why I support the AUMA and the AAMD and C's request that the province provide the funding to develop additional resources to assist the municipalities with these new challenges. I'm hoping the government will soon provide details on how it is they'll be helping smaller municipalities comply with these requirements. Are we talking about a financial grant to each village to help them put together and administer these JUPAs? Perhaps a small sum of money to be used by the municipality is most effective at getting the job done. Will every municipality get the same amount of money, or how will the funding be determined? Will funding be based on population? Another question is whether there are multiple municipalities and school boards having to work together. Is that a possibility? Those kinds of questions haven't been answered.

You know, is this government not planning to provide any financial support to municipalities? Will they, instead, provide assistance by posting instructions and templates online as suggested by the AAMD and C? Will the government be setting up a helpline that municipal staff and school boards can call on when they need this resource? I have no doubt these resources would be helpful. I'm positive, Madam Speaker, that municipalities are hoping for more details and guidance in this area, and I expect the sooner, the better. Municipalities need these details as soon as possible so that they can begin making arrangements, especially since the government is moving this bill forward as we speak.

While I'm generally in favour of municipalities and school boards setting up these joint-use agreements, I hope that this government will provide boards and municipalities with more

details and address the concerns that have been expressed by stakeholders and here in this Chamber.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my privilege to rise and speak and join the debate in this Legislature on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. I speak in support of this bill. I will begin by saying that I am so pleased with the amount of consultation that has occurred and how the amendments are based on the feedback received from Albertans and stakeholders through the discussion paper *Continuing the Conversation*. This is a good segue into my comments on several areas of the act on which I feel compelled to provide comment.

The first is the area of collaboration. This area is exactly what my city and county are already doing. I've several examples I'd like to point out to you. Lethbridge and Lethbridge county have already collaborated to develop a new intermunicipal development plan, and they're collaborating on an airport master plan. Lethbridge also provides various services to the county from time to time as they are needed. I'm really delighted to see this bill as it affirms the collaboration that is already happening between our municipalities.

Another piece on the collaboration spectrum is a requirement for municipalities to have joint-use agreements with school divisions regarding the allocation and use of school grounds and fields. Personally, I feel Lethbridge has been the leader in this area. This has been a well-established practice in Lethbridge since 1959, long before many in this room were born.

The next piece I will speak to is that Lethbridge has already begun engaging our neighbours in the Blackfoot Confederacy in our new municipal planning that's under way. I believe this fits with the new requirement to notify adjacent indigenous communities when proposing new municipal development plans or area structure plans. What a great step between the Blackfoot Confederacy and my city.

The next area I will speak about is parental leave, an area which is near and dear to my heart. This proposed change would enable municipalities to establish a councillor parental leave bylaw and amend it to exempt councillors from disqualification when absent under the provisions of a local parental leave bylaw. I am very pleased with this proposed change which would open the door for more women to step forward and run in municipal elections.

During consultation Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, AUMA; the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, AAMDC; Calgary; and Edmonton were all in support of this addition. In fact, AUMA president Lisa Holmes has personally called for this to be mandatory for all municipalities. Many women such as myself have stayed away from being more involved in municipal politics, in fact, any kind of politics. For me, it was because I was raising a family, and for a number of years it was as a single parent. This was a huge barrier for me as I am sure it was for many others. Because of our own experiences in being the caregiver and breadwinner within our families versus the previously more traditional family dynamic, it provides us with a much different perspective on governance and action. Our well-honed skills in multitasking lead us to look for more efficient ways of organizing and completing tasks. These are definitely an asset when looking at municipal responsibilities and intersectionality of those responsibilities. Areas such as applying an environmental or

family responsibility lens when making decisions really do come from a different perspective with that kind of experience.

That leads me to the next area about which I would like to speak, and that is: fostering environmental well-being. The proposed change in the bill is supported by our two largest cities. It is also supported to a great degree by my city, Lethbridge. The Lethbridge city council has identified this in its strategic plan. It is compatible with the approved waste diversion strategy for the industrial, commercial, and institutional sector and the city's decision to implement curbside recycling.

11:00

The final piece on which I would like to comment is the imposition of a maximum property tax ratio between nonresidential and residential property taxes. This would be a nonfactor for my city, Lethbridge, because the ratio applied in Lethbridge is 2.39 to 1, which is well below the maximum ratio of 5 to 1 that's being proposed. At this point I have to say that I am so proud of the progressive mayor and council we have at the helm in Lethbridge and also the reeve and council in Lethbridge county.

Now, I would like to point out that the MGA review began in 2012. Bills amending the MGA were introduced by government in 2015 and 2016. The Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, Bill 20, was passed unanimously on March 24, 2015, and the Modernized Municipal Government Act, Bill 21, was passed unanimously on December 6, 2016. Bill 21 was then reviewed by Albertans and stakeholders during the summer of 2016, and they provided very fulsome feedback on this bill. I think this has been very successful because this process has been both transparent and comprehensive. This is a wonderful example which shows how our government is listening to Albertans, and because of this, we are making lives better for Albertans.

I support the amendments in this bill, that strengthen municipal collaboration and environmental well-being, and I am so very proud of how the municipalities in my region are already leading the way in these areas.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any members to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to rise and speak about Bill 8, entitled An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. I want to congratulate the government on some of the things in this bill. There are certainly some positive things, and I'm happy to acknowledge that. I will start with one that could be seen as window dressing, but I don't see it as that. I see it as important. The collaboration with indigenous communities, particularly with the reserves, I think is a very positive thing, and it must be. The only reason that some might consider it window dressing is because with the First Nations, of course, we can't force them to collaborate. But extending the friendly hand of government and Alberta municipalities to First Nations and indigenous communities I view as a very positive thing, so that is certainly something I support.

In my view, members of indigenous communities are a hundred per cent Albertan, the same as any other Albertan. The more that we can work together, I see it as a benefit for indigenous people on an equal footing with nonindigenous people. I thank the government for this particular encouragement for municipalities to reach out and have that collaboration and that sense of community and working together. I don't think that's an extra. I think that's something that is positive and, in my view, very much welcomed.

The enforcement of municipal orders that is in the act certainly requires 10 days' notice of intent to apply for injunctive relief against a decision or order of the minister. We'll see how that plays out. I'm not going to criticize it. I just think it's something that needs to be monitored by the government to make sure that there are no negative or unintended consequences.

Parental leave. I think that particular area of the act is welcome. It's certainly clear that municipalities before now could have put in a parental leave policy if they wanted to. In some ways it's a nonchange, but I suppose in another way it's legislative encouragement for municipalities to consider that.

I'm happy to see that the government is looking at the catchment area contributions, which will provide municipalities with increased flexibility to use a catchment area contribution structure that would support land dedication and development parameters with respect to the assembly of parks and school sites. Again, I would encourage the government to monitor that to make sure that there are no unintended negative consequences, but there's certainly the opportunity for good things to come out of that.

Now, the mandatory joint-use planning agreements is an area that municipalities have said that they have some concerns with. I know that a lot of municipalities already have joint-use planning agreements. Certainly, when I was with the city of Calgary, we had one with parks and the school boards, and it was a positive thing, in my estimation, although not without wrinkles. There was probably the odd unpleasant meeting over some of the issues involved; nonetheless, providing that platform or that place for the parties to come together, the municipality and the school boards, could be seen as a positive thing.

The same could be said for the off-site levies changes in the legislation. It's nice that intermunicipal off-site levies are available again so that municipalities that choose to work together to build a seniors' lodge, to build a recreation centre, an arena, whatever it happens to be that both municipalities agree on, have a framework for them to work together and both contribute to. I see the potential for good things to happen there, but again I would respectfully caution the minister and the government to monitor that and make sure that no unfortunate disagreements grow out of what I truly believe is a well-intended section in the act.

Again, I'm looking at some of the contributions from AAMD and C and AUMA, which I think are voices that need to be paid attention to here. On the AUMA website it says, "While the Bill contains a number of promising policy changes, there is still some uncertainty on their applicability and feasibility since much of the detail is not yet known and, similar to other MGA Bills, will be specified in a future regulation."

Unfortunately, this is a habit that this government has of passing legislation and saying: trust me on the regulations. I don't trust this government on the regulations. I'm sure they'll get some of them right, and other ones I'm sure they won't, and I would be much more comfortable if the government actually disclosed all or most of the regulations at this point before passing the legislation so that municipalities actually knew what was coming down the pike in changes that they will have to live up to.

AAMD and C and AUMA have both made comments that they want the government, when they require municipalities to meet certain regulations or certain requirements, to provide funding to do that, which I think is a reasonable requirement and, certainly, one that was asked for at the time that I spent eight years on the AUMA board. It's been pretty consistent from the AAMD and C side, too, that when the government downloads responsibilities and requirements onto municipalities, they ought to actually also download the dollars to pay for the meeting of those responsibilities

and requirements. I think that's a reasonable request of the municipalities and something that, in my view, the government should consider.

11:10

It's a concern that I have heard from some municipalities that in areas where the government is enforcing the 5 to 1 ratio, it takes away some of the autonomy of municipalities to do that. I have to say that my personal view is that 5 to 1 is probably a bigger ratio than there should be. Having said that, I think it's more important to respect the fact that municipalities are duly elected bodies, and if they put the taxes out of whack with what the people in the municipality agree with, then the people in the municipality will give themselves a new council or new council members at the appropriate time once every four years.

My concern, again, with the limit, the 5 to 1 ratio, is that while in principle I think it in most cases probably would be considered a reasonable ratio, it does impinge upon the duly elected nature of municipal councils. I think that respecting their independence is important, particularly when one considers that the set and body of persons who elect municipalities across Alberta is exactly the same set and body of persons that elects people to this Chamber, to this Legislature. So when you consider that whatever authority we have comes from the people, I think it needs to be acknowledged that the authority for municipalities comes from exactly the same source as the authority for us in this Legislature in terms of who votes to choose who gets to exercise that authority. That's why I'm always concerned when the government impinges on the ability of a duly elected body to make decisions that are clearly within the authority of that duly elected body.

Now, the AUMA has acknowledged the province's depiction of the bill as being the "finishing touches," which I suppose is a legitimate concern because some of this is coming — well, let me just use their words. "Depiction of this Bill as being the 'finishing touches' before the municipal election is disappointing since many issues have not been resolved." That is why one thing that is disappointing to me as well is that this Legislature is being asked to vote on something that we don't really know what the net effect on municipalities will be because so many of the regulations that will be attached to this have not yet been disclosed.

Again, this is the continuation of a very bad habit on the part of this government, and while I intend to vote for this legislation, it's not without concern. It's not without concern as expressed by municipalities, by AAMD and C and AUMA, and our party, the PCs, will continue to stay in touch with AUMA and AAMD and C and advocate for the government to listen to them, though it seems they're hell bent to not fill in the blanks on what this legislation will really mean once the regulations are added to it, and for the government to correct that habit in the future and to not take the attitude, which, in my view, is somewhat demeaning to municipalities, to say: just trust us; it'll all be fine.

I think a much more productive, a much more constructive, a much more collaborative approach with municipalities would be to show them a set of the regulations that the government intends to bring forward for comment because some of those regulations, if they were to be changed on the advice of municipalities, actually might require the government to come back and change the legislation again. It would seem to me much more co-operative and much more efficient and, really, better manners for the government to do that ahead of time.

So there it is, Madam Speaker. I will be supporting the legislation but with the proviso that while there's probably more good than bad in there, there are issues the government has yet to resolve. I hope that the government will take the advice not only from the

opposition but from Alberta municipalities to co-operate better in the future before they bring legislation forward.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm privileged to rise in the House today to speak in favour of Bill 8. This is a bill that I've been very privileged to have been a cosponsor on the amendments for, well, it seems like a long time. Now, Otto von Bismarck is credited with saying that to retain respect for sausages and laws, one must not watch them in the making. I'm not sure how they made sausages in Germany last century. I've seen sausages being made, and I still enjoy them. I've been able to watch this law and amendments get made, and I think this is – and I think I'm not alone in this – really the gold standard for consultation and transparency and collaboration among stakeholders in developing legislation that serves all interested parties effectively.

Now, I've been privileged as well to attend several of the consultation sessions in communities last summer. I was able to attend the consultations in Two Hills, in Lac La Biche, in Athabasca, and in Rocky Mountain House. I thought that these consultations were a model of how this kind of thing should be done. You know, in that, I'm kind of speaking as a former educator, where you're always keen to make sure that you don't just have a few loud voices dominate these proceedings. How these things are structured is really critical in that. With that, I'd have to once again commend Municipal Affairs for just the fantastic job that they've done in facilitating these consultations.

I think that speaks to the reason why it once again looks like we have a good chance of coming to unanimous support for this bill. I guess it speaks to when you do your consultations properly and effectively, although you're always going to be in a situation where there are going to be compromises – I mean, that's just the nature of politics in general – at least you know that you're on firm ground when you make those types of changes.

I do want to once again also extend credit to the previous administration, when they began this process in 2012, for choosing this type of model. I mean, I think it was well chosen. But I also think this speaks to why Albertans made the choice they did back in May of 2015. Now, the previous administration had gone forward with some of the consensus recommendations in March, but they left a lot of the more problematic issues still on the table. I think it took a fresh government, one not afraid of rolling up their sleeves and doing the heavy lifting needed for some long-overdue changes, to bring this process forward to where it is today.

This is something that's critical. I mean, previously the MGA hadn't been reviewed since 1994. You know, a lot has changed since that time. This is particularly important because, speaking as primarily a rural MLA, the MGA is really central to the continued viability and sustainability of a lot of rural municipalities. I mean, it's no secret that we're facing some pretty serious challenges in some of these municipalities. I think it really speaks well to the ministry and my colleagues in that seeing this crisis – well, I mean, a slow-moving crisis but a crisis nonetheless – they were left with decision points on kind of where you can put this balance. So you have a balance struck between competition and collaboration among municipalities and also a balance between sort of a top-down approach versus a bottom-up approach.

11:20

I'm gratified. I think our government has struck the balance kind of in the right place. Instead of dictating to municipalities exactly how, in detail, they're meant to interact with other municipalities, we've provided them with the process and the tools to be able to work out agreements that are going to be able to work for all of them. So we're able to get the synergies and efficiencies working, you know, where you've got overlapping services, overlapping areas of concern. Instead of dictating – and it's always dangerous because you don't see everything from Edmonton, right? People on the ground see a lot more, and they're able to make those types of decisions for themselves. But at the same time sometimes they do need a little bit of encouragement. Once again, I think it's striking the right balance, and I'm glad to see that we've maintained that through this process.

Now, I didn't want to reply directly to some of the concerns brought up by the opposition on second reading. There will be plenty of opportunity, I think, in Committee of Whole, but there is just one little one, and I'd like to just speak directly to that. Generally speaking – and I've spoken about this in earlier iterations of this – I think the opposition has been doing its job in holding us to account on this legislation.

However, you know, the idea that there's a lack of trust between the government and municipalities and particularly between AAMDC and AUMA is not something that I've seen reflected in my own experience whatsoever. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case. They seem to be, from the individuals that I've spoken to, very happy with how this process has been unfolding, how responsive and open the government has been in dealing with their concerns going forward as well as the recognition that we have kept our promises about the consultation over the regulations and that we've listened and made adjustments where it's been necessary.

I think this idea that there's a lack of trust is a bit of a red herring. Maybe in Committee of the Whole there might be information that comes out that could make me revise that. But at this present time it's just not something that I'm seeing, and it's not because I haven't been talking to people. Of course, I did go to the consultations. As well, I've been to many AAMDC events, had an opportunity to speak directly with their board, and I represent quite a few municipalities in my own riding, too, and that's something that we've been talking about. I mean, of course, there are always going to be concerns. There are always going to be questions when there's change. But when you have that trust – and I think this is a trust that's earned – we're able to work together to, you know, kind of get through those to a better outcome for everybody.

Once again, I think this bill is really kind of a good model for how work should be done, this legislation. I guess in another way it speaks fundamentally to the strength of Albertan democracy where, you know, in all the discussions I've had with people and when people bring up their objections, the different viewpoints are coming from different places, where people are viewing popular interests a bit differently. Of course, we see the world from where we are, not the way the world is necessarily, and this is true of this. But what I want to say about this is that these concerns have been brought forward based on people's sincere understanding of the situations in their community rather than self-interest or sort of a narrow parochialism. I think that's something that speaks well for our continued future as a vibrant democracy. So I'm happy about that.

Particularly to this set of amendments, you know, I don't want to go over too much of what my colleagues have spoken about, but some of it is just too good to not highlight again. In particular, the amendments affecting indigenous communities, that the hon.

member just talked about, are definitely not window dressing. It's another step in restoring balance to a relationship that for far too many years has been one of neglect and one of ignorance. Far too often when you have these reserves and these Métis settlements, it's almost as if there's a wall separating the community outside from the community inside when it comes to discussion and deliberation and participation. Now, that wall exists there, but it doesn't exist in any sort of a real sense.

I'm really appreciative of how our Ministry of Municipal Affairs and our Ministry of Indigenous Relations have understood, you know, that we can't prosper when we have large elements of our community that are being excluded. It's absolutely critical to the future of indigenous peoples in Alberta and people in Alberta generally that we collaborate going forward and that we facilitate communication and co-operation. I think this is a really important step in doing so. So I think this is great.

Other new amendments coming forward that I think are really welcome and do strike that right balance are around providing opportunities for municipalities to be able to provide parental leave. Now, coming from a small rural community myself, one of the critical requirements of smaller communities is being able to effectively include young residents, that when you have young families coming into your community, they feel that they have a stake there, that they're not excluded by, you know, sort of the old boys' network that runs a lot of these communities. If you don't make those types of provisions to make participation in municipal government more accessible for these individuals, they don't step forward, and that's one less tie to keep them with the community. That's just absolutely, fundamentally critical so that when we do attract young families into our communities, they stay and raise their families there and continue to contribute.

The other issue, of course, when you have municipal leaders that are very similar in their background, their age, and their gender, is that they don't know what they don't know, right? You unintentionally can have quite poor decision-making because that diversity just isn't at the table. So any steps that municipalities can take to provide for more diverse people at that table, the better the decisions are going to be for their communities. I think this is critical. Well, it's always critical on a basic-equity-between-people level, but it's critical to just simply good governance to be able to have these types of provisions. I think this is very forward thinking, and I'm glad to see that there's substantial support for this.

I guess I could wrap up my comments for now, just to reiterate that I think that these amendments speak directly to our central mandate as a government to make lives better for Albertans. No matter where they live, I think that this set of amendments, with the whole process, is a big win for rural Alberta and is going to set the stage for continued vibrancy and sustainability in the years to come. In fact, I think this is a historic occasion for this province.

I'm kind of slightly disappointed that there is nobody up in the galleries watching, but I guess it's one of those things where you – I think this is maybe some of the frustration that BlackBerry has been having in trying to do its marketing, right? I'm a big BlackBerry fanatic, as I know many other members here are as well. Part of the frustration they have with their marketing is that when you have good security, nothing happens. I think part of the reason why this set of amendments hasn't been getting the level of public ... [Mr. Piquette's speaking time expired] Well, anyway, thank you, Madam Speaker.

11:30

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments for the previous speaker?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Very good. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always a pleasure to get up to speak in the House and today on Bill 8. It's always nice to stand up to speak after my colleague from Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. I'd just like to point out a couple of things. First of all, Bill 8 is An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. There are a few things I'd like clarification on.

But before I get into that, I'd just like to make some comments on comments that were made about your not getting any negative feedback from municipal councillors or reeves or anything like that. I'd just like to remind you that that's probably the result of politeness and diplomacy, not necessarily wanting to tell you the truth. I have sat in joint municipality meetings with you in Smoky Lake, in that area, where they've chewed on you pretty hard, so I know that you've been beaten up a few times. I'd also like to point out, you know, the AAMD and C and the AUMA conferences where the panel of ministers has been booed, where the standing ovation that was attempted only had MLAs and NDP staffers standing up. Everybody else did ... [interjections] I was there, too.

An Hon. Member: At my panel they stood. Maybe yours didn't.

Mr. Hanson: Absolutely, they didn't. I guarantee you that.

Anyway, I'd like to get some clarification on the taxation of provincial agencies because I'm not really clear on where we're going. It's been kind of bouncing around a little bit. What I've got is from the Municipal Government Act review. It says:

What's currently in place: A recent decision by a Composite Assessment Review Board ... has overturned a long-standing practice that properties leased by provincial agencies are subject to property tax.

Then it goes back down, and it says:

What this means: This change requires provincial agencies, as defined in the Financial Administration Act, to support the municipalities in which they operate in consideration of the municipal services they receive (such as fire protection) through property taxes.

It goes on to say:

Properties that are associated with health regions that receive financial assistance from the province, housing management bodies established under the Alberta Housing Act, schools, colleges, and universities will continue to be exempt.

Now, we've heard from both AUMA and AAMD and C that they would like to have those exemptions stricken from there.

I'm just going to give you one example, the small town of St. Paul, population of anywhere between 5,000 and 6,000 people. We have five schools. I mean, I'm bragging a little bit because these things are great to have, right? We have students from all over the county that are bused in there to these schools. They have a huge footprint, with their playgrounds and all that stuff, which is all wonderful stuff, but it takes up quite a big footprint in the town. We have a college. We have Portage College in town, right on Main Street, and again it's a huge asset to our community. We have a courthouse and a provincial building that cover I want to say two square blocks right in the centre of town.

You know, this legislation and this particular part has a significant effect on the town of St. Paul. We also have a major RCMP detachment, AHS facilities. We have a hospital. We've got clinics and AHS nursing facilities as well. You know, if we're just talking about one small school or something in a small town, it may not be that significant, but when you put all of these things together, the five schools, the college, the courthouse, the RCMP detachment, all the traffic that comes in with that, which is great for

the businesses in town as well – you know, I'm not going to say anything against that – when all of these buildings are exempt from paying any municipal taxes, it can be quite a burden, that has to be spread around onto the regular taxpayers and small businesses in town.

I'd just like some clarification on whether some of these are going to be pulled out or whether the government is going to reinstate the grants in lieu of taxes, which used to cover this, that were pulled out, I believe, in 2015. If we could get some clarification on that so we can pass that on to our town council, that would be great. Like I say, you know, I'm bragging a little bit about St. Paul, but there are a lot of other communities in Alberta that face the same type of impact from the provincial buildings that are in town.

What else would I like to cover? The electric energy exemption regulation. I just want some clarification on that because currently it says: to elevate the policy regulation directly into the MGA, thereby enabling the minister by order to exempt certain components of properties from education property tax where these components are used for or in the generation of electricity. The clarification that I'm seeking is whether this is specifically industrial, or does this count a small business or a larger business that, you know, covers the roof of their building with solar panels or, in the same case, a resident that puts up solar panels? I just want some clarification on that because I think it could get fairly complicated.

Then while I have the floor here, I'd just also like to touch base on the 5 to 1 tax ratio because it does affect communities up in my area, specifically the county of Lac La Biche and north. They're currently sitting at about, I believe, 7.3 to 1 with their industrial. What we have to take into account is that it's fairly sparsely populated other than the centre of Lac La Biche itself, but we do have a lot of industrial development up in that area, so what we don't pass on to the shadow population that comes is the taxation. The population of Lac La Biche is around 3,000 people. Especially back in 2013-2014, when we had heavy industrial moving through there, we had camps, you know, people staying in camps. There was a lot of infrastructure that was being used by oil and gas. If it's equipment being hauled, water being hauled, or oil tankers, all the equipment that goes to Fort McMurray runs right through the county, whether it's highway 63 or 881.

All of these things combined: this is why these municipalities have to have this differential in taxation because you can't just keep passing this on to the poor guy that's living in town or on an acreage outside of town. It's very important that we take those guys into consideration before we change this. They were quite surprised to hear because they had been told and promised that that was going to be grandfathered in. It is far worse when you take into consideration the municipality of Wood Buffalo, where, you know, they're up into the 12 or 13 to 1 ratios.

To get back down to a 5 to 1 ratio, you either have to drastically cut the industrial or drastically increase the residential in order to get to that, and I think it's very unfair to – you know, these municipalities are basically the driving force of our province. Everybody in the province benefits from the oil and gas industry, and these communities are the ones that live in it and have to put up with the added cost to their infrastructure: the roads through town, sidewalks, all that stuff. It all takes a bit of a beating, especially with some of the heavier traffic. I'd really like to see that being reconsidered by the minister and the government.

That being said, I think I will adjourn debate on Bill 8 for the time being. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017 (continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 10? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak to Bill 10, the budget appropriations. Looking at the government's record in making Albertans' lives miserable and unaffordable, I can't support this bill. If you look at the recent tax hikes and excessive regulatory burden and the carbon tax, that they never campaigned on, and the 100-megatonne cap on oil sands development and the electricity mess and the coal phase-out and the attack on farmers and on and on and on, with this government's record I can't truly support this budget. There are portions of it, however, like child care support and support for the justice system which the good people of Calgary-Foothills would like me to support, but overall the budget is not creating the jobs that this government promised. It's actually killing jobs.

11:40

That said, I mean . . . [interjections] I know I hear some noises on the other side. I can talk in detail about a particular file I follow, Economic Development and Trade. I have done budget estimate reviews with the minister, and I asked so many questions. I didn't get any response here. I can share some of that with the members that were not present during the estimates. Specifically, you know, about Economic Development and Trade, while the minister is out there promoting Alberta as a place to invest, back here at home I'm seeing all kinds of dubious programs, corporate welfare, and a department that lacks transparency with respect to the programs that have a dubious reputation of creating jobs.

This year, Madam Speaker, Economic Development and Trade plans to spend over \$354 million in operating expenses, and there is \$2.34 million in capital being transferred in large part to Alberta Innovates Corporation and \$50 million in financial transactions. In the financial transactions this year is the transfer of \$50 million to Alberta Enterprise Corporation, AEC, so this Crown corporation can actually invest the money into venture capital funds. Apparently, Alberta has a lack of venture capital, so instead of investing directly in businesses, the government invests in venture capital funds that invest in Alberta businesses. That all sounds good, but the results tell us a different story. In fact, Alberta has lost money on these venture capital funds 5 out of 6 years since the Enterprise Corporation has existed, and it has required an annual operating subsidy and recapitalization, an investment of good money after bad.

The largest funded line item in Economic Development and Trade's – EDT, I'll call it – estimates is the transfer to AIC, Alberta Innovates Corporation. I tried to ask the minister, along with my colleagues, who also asked some questions, detailed questions about what's going on over at Alberta Innovates Corporation, but because the minister has conveniently hidden or not published AIC's 2017 business plan, he blocked and stonewalled every question we asked. I bet that as soon as these appropriations are approved, Bill 10 is approved here, the magical missing document will appear again, but he doesn't want to share with us during estimates.

We did manage to find out that components of AIC will be funded as follows: health solutions, one of the four Innovates corporations in AIC, gets the biggest funding, \$71 million; technology futures gets \$65 million; energy and environment gets

\$28 million; and bio solutions gets \$12 million; in total \$176 million for these four Innovates.

When I asked how many non taxpayer-funded jobs Alberta Innovates created last year, the minister indicated that he does not track that information. In fact, the minister used weasel words to project Innovates onto the entire industry, a very slick way of avoiding the question, Madam Speaker. It's unacceptable to me and my caucus colleagues here. We need to track the number of jobs Innovates is creating in the private sector, especially when the ministry is spending \$176 million. When the minister goes off on a tangent bragging about creating 20,000 new jobs but can't point to the exact source of the job creation or tie Alberta Innovates to those jobs, that's a big problem, Madam Speaker. He's bragging about creating 20,000 temporary jobs – no one knows where they are because they don't track them; they can't tell me, at least – while a hundred thousand Albertans are looking for work. Most of those were good-paying jobs lost in the oil sands because of this government's policies. I asked so many times: how do we get those Albertans back to work? I didn't get any answer in the OQP sense.

Now, let's talk about the CARES program, which is the community and regional economic support program. This year there is \$10 million for program delivery support in the estimates for CARES and about \$30 million over two years. The minister indicated that he has 63 out of 88 applications approved for \$4.83 million in funding in the first round. Again, the minister did not know how many jobs had been created to date by CARES even though the program seems to be designed to employ management consultants.

Under program delivery support in the estimates he's responsible for the export expansion package. There is a \$3 million program that had 102 export support fund grants approved totalling more than \$640,000 for 2016-17 alone. On the trade mission to China companies received approximately \$40,000 towards their involvement in the mission. Those are the people that accompanied the minister to China. Again, when asked about the number of jobs this program created, the minister had no idea.

With respect to the export readiness program, where seminars, events, and workshops were held and access to the Alberta Innovates microvoucher program was provided, again the minister had no idea how many jobs were created.

Then the minister talked about the Alberta investment tax credit program, and he said:

As of March 31 of 2017 there were 126 eligible business corporations, two venture capital corporations. By sector 87 per cent were research, development, commercialization of proprietary technology and products and processes.

The minister also indicated that EDT does not release the names of the companies that are receiving AITC and CITC funds. Those are supposed to be the flagship programs of this EDT ministry, but they don't want to release the names of those companies that are receiving those funds. They are not posted. People want corporate welfare, and then they cry uncle if their name shows up for competitive purposes. That's a blatant lack of transparency, Madam Speaker, of all the things this government speaks about. Again, the minister had no clue as to how many jobs AITC and CITC had created to date.

Madam Speaker, recently when I asked about the 100,000 well-paid jobs that were lost in oil and gas, the minister naively tells me to tell those oil sands developers to apply for funding from AITC and CITC. Those are billions of dollars of projects that oil sands developers were investing before. This \$5 million tax credit that the ministry is talking about doesn't even apply to those oil sands developers, but that was his answer. I was so surprised to hear that. There is a common theme here. The minister has no clue about how

many jobs his programs are creating, which is not acceptable to Albertans.

11:50

When we look at the minister's expenses, the ministry's support services are up over \$1.3 million largely for strategic policy and corporate services. At \$75,000 a contract – just hypothetically, about \$75,000 per contract – that works out to 18 consultants or shadow bureaucrats that might be or could be hired in this part of the department.

In economic development the ministry is actually down over \$3.5 million despite offering \$10 million for the CARES program.

Now, talking about trade, investment, and attraction, there is \$3.5 million in savings from economic development, and that gets moved here to fund the export expansion programs and add trade policy capacity. It's laughable, Madam Speaker, that the export expansion programs are funding translation services for Asian languages and some other languages for Alberta's private sector when the minister does not even have Alberta's promotional website available in other foreign languages. So our own government website is not giving any options for other foreign languages, but we are funding the private sector for translating. It should start first with the government.

In the innovation and science part of the department, Madam Speaker, technology partnerships and investments are up by \$1.5 million. Alberta Innovates Corporation is up by \$6.6 million.

Finally, we have \$10 million for innovation and technology from the climate leadership action plan, the carbon tax slush fund that even painted Economic Development and Trade with its brush, Madam Speaker, that green slush fund.

There you have it: \$354.18 million in operating expenses, \$2.34 million in capital, and \$50 million in financial transactions and the minister cannot point to one private-sector job created from one dollar of spending in his department. He has no clue.

Even with our international offices, Madam Speaker, some of which I recently visited on my own – I did my own trade mission at my own expense to India and Japan. I was trying to debrief the minister based on my observations. For more than three months I couldn't get an appointment with him. I'm still waiting for an appointment. Some of those offices are really providing good service, and they were providing excellent reports and performance measures in the department's annual report despite having achieved 44 economic outcomes facilitated. I asked the minister about the economic outcomes facilitated: what does it mean? He couldn't define that for me. Could he say if those were 44 jobs or 4,400 jobs? The minister did not know. He didn't have any clue.

Giving the minister over \$356 million to blow this year while being unable to point to specific jobs he has created from last year's money can only mean one thing. Wildrose does not trust this minister with the money he wishes to spend and cannot support his plans.

That said, Madam Speaker, that's just one department. This government is overseeing a \$50 billion budget for Albertans, and they can't tell us where they created a single job in the private sector. They couldn't. I've been asking them. I have been asking them. Some of those backbenchers sat on the committee, and they heard the minister not able to answer. That is just one department, but that is the pattern, and that's the template of this government.

Now, on this side of the House I have caucus colleagues who are the critics for various portfolios. I'm sure they'll bring up their points in the debate here. They had interesting things to say during their budget estimates.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, this government is unable to create jobs, so actually they're not making life better. They're

making life miserable for Albertans. They're making life unaffordable for Albertans with all their tax hikes and all. In my city of Calgary Mayor Nenshi says that he has to increase property taxes because of this government's ideological policies.

Mr. Sucha: Not true.

Mr. Panda: He's on the record.

Having said that – I don't want to take too much time – although there are parts that my colleagues here would like to support for child care and the justice system, overall this budget is not good for Albertans. So I won't support it, and I ask all my colleagues across the aisle to not support this budget.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 10, and it is an honour to be able to talk to my colleagues in this House and to talk about the money the Lieutenant Governor in Council has requested this elected Legislative Assembly approve. As Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition's shadow minister for Transportation I will address the spending in that role.

Madam Speaker, there's a lot of spending for the Transportation ministry this year. On page 6 of this eight-page bill we see Transportation having an operating expense of over \$1.7 billion. Contained in this is \$32.2 million to run the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, communications, and strategic services. This is largely salaries for hard-working public servants, servants of the Alberta public working on behalf of everyday working families, and I applaud their efforts. Then we have \$28.2 million in here for programs, services, and support and \$35.7 million for traffic safety services. We all know how important it is to promote being safe on Alberta's highways. There's \$2.3 million in here to support the Transportation Safety Board. If anyone in this House loses their driver's licence for drunk driving, you'll be appearing before this board to get it back. The same if you want to open a short-line industrial railway: you will have to come talk to these fine people.

Next we come to a bone of contention across Alberta, provincial highway maintenance and preservation. In the constituencies we routinely get letters about the cuts to highway maintenance, which has been cut \$46 million from three years ago. It now stands at \$254 million. There is less crack sealing being done. This is a recipe for disaster, Madam Speaker. Water gets into the cracks, freezes, thaws, repeats, and you get potholes. In some cases, like the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky said, you even get grass and flowers growing up through the cracks in major provincial highways like highway 43. Plant roots cause damage to provincial highways. All of this damage only means higher capital expenses and early rehabilitation expenses.

We have even heard how bad the highway maintenance is out there from the minister. The minister in estimates indicated that he is extending the contracts for highway maintenance contractors for two years while a review is conducted to try and get value for money. One of his highway maintenance contractors, Carillion, bid so low on the contract that they couldn't make ends meet and needed an increase in payment for services for the next two years. That makes you wonder, Madam Speaker, what kind of an outfit a unionized Carillion is if they need more money when other providers like Volker Stevin don't. All told, the highway maintenance and preservation budget is over \$358 million this year to look after the largest number of roads per capita of any province in the country.

The government saw well to maintain the assessment and support systems for provincial highway maintenance and preservation at \$21 million, and I applaud them for that. They also managed to eliminate the minister's slush fund, the capital for emergent projects. I also commend them for that.

Municipal transit and transportation grant programs jumped almost five times in value.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, April 20, 2017

Day 24

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 20, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through to the rest of the members of the House two classrooms from St. Augustine school in beautiful Ponoka. Their teachers are Mr. Ken Hackett and Mrs. Sharon Hackett. There are also some chaperones: Stephanie Gartner, Amanda Henderson-Kada, and Jennifer LaForge. I'd ask that they'd all please stand, the students included, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I assume they must be sitting up behind me. It's my pleasure to stand and introduce to you and through you the grade 6 students from Glen Avon school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Karen Kendel. Although she doesn't look it, she's counting down the days to retirement. She actually taught both of my kids in grade 4. She is accompanied by teachers Terri-Lynne Nickason, Tanya Fontaine, and Nadine Silver and chaperones Pat Ryning, Shelley Hawthorne, Dwayne Girard, and Brian Reaney. I would like them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

She aged much better than you, hon. member.

Are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Blessed Oscar Romero Catholic high school cheer team and their head coach, Melissa Kolodenko. They won the 2017 Alberta provincial division 1 senior cheer championships for the second year in a row earlier this month in Athabasca. In the constituency of Edmonton-McClung we are very proud of the accomplishments of these student athletes, the coaching staff, and parent volunteers.

I'd like to thank Mr. Speaker for agreeing to pose with us earlier today for a photograph in the rotunda. I'd ask all the students and staff and teachers to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the fine, hard-working volunteers of the Canadian Transplant Association who have organized today's organ and tissue awareness event in the lower rotunda. I'm going to read their names: Hirde Paul Jassal Singh, Jaspal Singh, Neil Folkins, Malkeet Singh, Rakesh Apra, Harmanpreet Kaur, Arsh Singh, Ashok Kumar, Jack McJannett, Barb Esdale, Amandeep Singh Dhanju, and Jageer Singh Dhanju.

On behalf of all recipients and from the bottom of my heart I want to say thank you to you and your wonderful organization for saving lives. My guests are in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you it is my honour to introduce several guests who have been integral parts of the health care teams at several Edmonton hospitals for many years. I'll be highlighting their service in my member's statement coming. Brenda Shim and Peggy Teixeira are with volunteer services at the Misericordia hospital. Patricia Fields is a key member of the all-volunteer team that has operated the gift shop at the Royal Alexandra hospital for over 100 years, not Pat herself. Shirley and Alan Gaudet are long-time Cross Cancer Institute colleagues providing patient information and rides to and from the Cross. I ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of my colleagues.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a good friend of mine, Mr. Jason Green. Jason and I met in the last election, and he is now the CFO of the Wildrose Drayton Valley-Devon Constituency Association. He's doing a great job, and I predict that he could give the Minister of Finance a run for his money as he seems to be able to not only balance our constituency budget, but he ensures that we have a healthy, positive bottom line. It's my pleasure, then, to introduce Jason to the Assembly. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a valuable constituent of Edmonton-Ellerslie, Greta Gerstner, the founder of Strategic Alliance for Alberta Students with Learning Challenges. This group was born out of Greta's strong desire to change the education system to help all students with learning challenges. I've been working closely with her as she hopes to change how the system works, specifically focusing on how to eliminate roadblocks. She hopes to bring awareness to all Albertans that by not providing the students with learning challenges the help they need to succeed, we will add a long-term cost to the health care, justice, and social services systems. However, if we invest in appropriate supports now, these students can be productive and contributing members of society. I ask her to please stand and for all of us to welcome her with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

Holocaust Remembrance Day

Miranda: I rise today to speak about Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, a most solemn day in Jewish history, a day observed in memory of the 11 million people who died during the Nazi genocide, 6 million of whom were Jews. The Shoah was a

crime where the elderly and the young, over a million and a half of them innocent children, were systemically and with both extreme cruelty and savagery starved, experimented on, shot, buried alive, strangled, given lethal injections, gassed, burned, and reduced to ashes only because they were deemed guilty of the crime of being different, a crime without parallel in human history.

This Monday, April 24, Jews in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world will commemorate by recalling the darkest period in our collective memory. Two days ago we marked the end of Pesach, the Passover, celebrating our ancestors' freedom from slavery in ancient Egypt as told in the Book of Exodus. Generation after generation of Jews have experienced oppression. In fact, history is plagued by examples where anti-Semitism has taken up roots across cultures, faiths, and generations. However, despite the worst machinations by emperors, czars, pharaohs, kings, Caesars, kaisers, and führers, the Jewish people have endured and remain as testament to the belief in an ancient promise found in the Book of Genesis foretelling that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

But why is it important to remember? In the words of Holocaust survivor, renowned writer, and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel: "Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future."

Many years ago I had the opportunity to visit Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. During my visit to the Children's Memorial we were reminded that entire families were annihilated, with no one left to say Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, in their memory. It was there that I and many others committed ourselves to each remembering one name and performed what I see as a sacred duty to remember. So today I remember Alvaro Coen. He was a Sephardi, a Spanish Jew. He was born in Rome, Italy, in 1936. During the war he was deported to Auschwitz, Poland, where, still a child, he was murdered.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, no matter how difficult it is to remind ourselves of the horrors of the Holocaust, no matter how unimaginable it seems, Yom ha-Shoah implores us to remember. It is only by remembering that we can work together as a society to prevent such tragedies from ever happening again because as difficult as it is to remember, what is even more difficult is the realization that the ignorance which colluded with hatred and the indifference that turned its back on human compassion and the most basic of human decencies, those seeds of hatred, the ones that paved the way for the Shoah in the first place, still remain with us today.

This is most evident during times of change, of anxiety, of uncertainty, of economic troubles, where there appears to be a willingness to give in to a base desire to find someone else, someone different to blame for those struggles. Refusing to forget helps us to take concrete action against the hate and discrimination which pose the greatest dangers to an inclusive, peaceful, and accepting way of life. We must remain vigilant against anti-Semitism and indeed all forms of discrimination, be it homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, misogyny, or racism. We must guard against the hatred and bigotry and give them no room to take up root or even grow in our province. Alberta must continue to be a welcome and inclusive place for all those who seek a better home and a better life.

As Hillel the elder once wrote: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation. Now go and learn."

As Jews around the world mourn and remember, let us all join with them. As legislators let us continue to build a society where people from all backgrounds, religions, cultures, sexual identities,

and gender expressions are celebrated for those differences because let us not forget that alongside the victims who were forced to wear yellow stars, there were victims who were forced to wear pink triangles.

Let us remember and use that memory of the Holocaust to inspire our efforts to make this world free from all forms of discrimination. When we can all fully commit to this, we will have rightfully honoured all who died during those very dark times. As we put this into practice, we actually do practise one of the underlying values of Judaism, *tikkun olam*, Hebrew for "repairing the world."

Because it is not enough to remember, we must also act. One way to act is by continuing to work together in building a world of peace and tolerance for all. In the words of Yehuda Bauer, "Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander."

Mr. Speaker, to honour this coming Yom ha-Shoah, I encourage all Albertans to learn about the Holocaust, to find out what steps each of us can take to support our province's Jewish communities and to stop anti-Semitism wherever it occurs.

In closing, I want to pay tribute to the Yiddishkeit, or the Jewish spirit, and hold it up as an example of the human capacity for resilience in the face of the most inhuman savagery that the world has ever seen.

They came for us. They did their best to try and destroy our spirit, and through it all here we are. We remain. Never again.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pause and reflect in solemn remembrance of the atrocities committed against Jewish men, women, and children sometime ago in the Holocaust, also known as Shoah.

Holocaust Remembrance Day is an opportunity to honour those people, the 11 million people, humanity, whose lives were taken and, of course, the 6 million Jews amongst those that were systematically murdered at the hands of the brutal Nazi regime. Days like Holocaust Remembrance Day are important. The lessons learned from the Holocaust must guide our actions today and into the future.

Anti-Semitism or discrimination of any kind is not acceptable. It has no place in our society. We must combat fear and exclusion with acceptance and understanding for everyone. Canada and Alberta are home to a very proud Jewish community. We must work with this community as we must work with all communities to share their stories, to understand their history.

We must also as a whole work together to reflect on the horrors of the Shoah so that it can never be repeated and never happen again to anyone, no matter what the choice. Together we must recognize the unspeakable atrocities committed, honour the survivors, and also recognize those who showed such bravery in risking their lives to save others.

I did attend the Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Israel, and it was very moving. I also had the opportunity to visit a concentration camp in Europe. Unacceptable. Yom ha-Shoah allows us to reflect on the strength and the perseverance of survivors, those people that do survive. The innocent men and women and children who were killed and are no longer with us: we must remember their legacy. We must honour their legacy as we reflect on one of the darkest moments that I think could be possible in human history.

On Holocaust Remembrance Day let us always remember the individuals around the world that continue today to face persecution and discrimination simply for who they are. This cannot happen and

must not happen here. We must be a shining beacon to the world of what can be, with peace and acceptance and understanding and tolerance.

This injustice must be a call to action. We must never sit on the sidelines, be complacent. The Holocaust must be a harsh reminder for all of us on how far humanity can take persecution and how much the human spirit can actually accept the unacceptable, terror and injustice upon humanity. We must preserve the record of one of the darkest chapters and never forget. We must share the message and never forget.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to allow responses from the third party and the two independent members should they so choose.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to observe 16 years of Holocaust Memorial Day, or Yom ha-Shoah, in Alberta. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to recognize the memory of the sponsor of this act, former MLA for Calgary-Glenmore Ron Stevens. On November 16, 2000, when this legislation was passed, the hon. Mr. Stevens said:

There are voices calling out to us from history, and they have much to teach us if we listen . . . They teach us about the dangers of simply being bystanders and of remaining silent . . . The voices of history teach us the need to commit to a legacy of remembrance, education, and conscience.

Today we pay homage to the more than 6 million Jews and many others targeted and brutally slaughtered by Hitler's Nazi regime. Included in this gruesome figure are 13,000 killed during the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Mr. Speaker, in April of 1943 the Warsaw ghetto bravely resisted Nazi attempts to transport them to their deaths in the Treblinka concentration camp. The resistance lasted just under a month and ended when the SS ordered the ghetto burned to the ground. Block by block all remaining residents were either burned alive or suffocated in the fires. This act of defiance was the single largest Jewish revolt against extermination. It exemplifies the bravery with which every Jewish man, woman, and child faced the horrors of the Holocaust.

Then there was the Łódź ghetto. Over 200,000 ghetto residents died or were exterminated in the nearby Chelmno camp. On September 4, 1942, the fateful "Give me your children" speech led to the methodical extraction of over 15,000 Jews. The sick, children under 10, and the elderly were exterminated, mostly in mobile gas vans, forcibly separated from their families.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, my father was a Polish-born Jew from Łódź. His fateful refuge in Shanghai in 1917 saved his immediate family, now survived by my family. Among the victims of the Holocaust, as far as we know to this day, were all of the members of my father's extended family – grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins – an entire bloodline wiped off the face of this Earth. These are the stories of horror and blind hatred that few are left to tell.

Mr. Speaker, there are thriving Jewish communities across Alberta established in large part by refugees from senseless genocide and brutality and Holocaust survivors who sought refuge in Canada during and after the war. Names such as Aron Eichler and Bronia and Sid Cyngiser come to mind for sharing their stories with all Alberta. Their stories are inextricably linked to Alberta's

story; their past traumas, our traumas. Their grief is our grief. Remember, this happened not just because evil people did evil things but because good people did nothing and said nothing. At sundown on Sunday, April 23, all Albertans will stand in solidarity with Jewish communities across the province to remember all who have perished at the hands of such evil.

As we face an uncertain future in a world that struggles with terrorism, mass refugee migration, and extremism, let us renew our vow to never again stand idly by as such heinous crimes as those perpetrated during the Holocaust are committed because, Mr. Speaker, the single greatest act of remembrance we can engage in on behalf of victims and survivors amongst us and around the world is to do our mitzvah, our good deed, and do all we can to reaffirm our commitment to upholding human rights, to fight for and protect freedom and democracy, to value diversity in all its forms, and to help those fleeing violence and persecution in a way which embraces the multicultural richness we enjoy and cherish in Alberta as a tolerant, respectful, and inclusive society.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This coming Sunday marks Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, and today we stand in the Legislature to remember the millions of Jewish children, women, and men brutally murdered by the Nazi regime. We acknowledge that this is one day after we recognized the genocide of Holodomor, Stalin's Ukrainian genocide. The only crime of this Jewish community was being what Adolf Hitler and his government hated and feared, being different. Because of their religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation they deviated from the Nazi ideal of a pure Aryan nation and so were exterminated.

The official name of Yom ha-Shoah translates to Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, and while we remember humanity at its darkest and mourn those lost, we also acknowledge the incredible strength of the human spirit. Opposition to the Nazi regime took incredible courage, and obviously millions lost their lives in resisting. Nevertheless, resistance was widespread once ordinary men and women became heroes as they fought back in countless ways. Their bravery gave others a glimmer of hope, a candle in this darkness.

As the Holocaust fades into the past, we risk forgetting the consequences of not being vigilant against racism, hatred, genocide in all its forms and must be prepared to act when we see evidence anywhere, any time across our world. "Never again" is more than a hope; it's a promise to act. When we say these words, we promise that we will to the best of our ability follow the example of those who stood up and resisted to fight to ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust are never repeated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's not often or not often enough that we get unanimous consent in this House on certain issues, I believe. The presentations, the last four I heard – we have a responsibility to never forget and to never let this happen again.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

GST on Carbon Levy

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we asked some very simple questions about the fact that Ottawa is plucking hundreds of millions of dollars more out of Alberta as a direct result of the

NDP's carbon tax on Alberta workers and Alberta businesses. Talking to the press, the Finance minister seemed completely clueless that this particular issue was even a problem, saying that he wants to "get a little more information." Well, he does manage a \$52 billion economy. It's very important. I think that answer is simply not good enough. It's been 24 hours. Does he have the information? How much is this tax on tax costing Alberta families?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by setting the stage about exactly what we spoke about yesterday. This is not a surprise. This tax-on-tax situation that the member speaks of was something he lobbied that he would change when he was in Ottawa. Then what happened when he got to Ottawa? He didn't change it. So guess what? This happens in Alberta. This happens in B.C. This happens in Ontario. It would be great if it could be changed, and the member opposite had the chance to do something about it. Instead of putting our head in the sand, we're going to move forward. Guess what? We got two pipelines for Alberta.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the minister is aware, but we did have an actual reduction of the GST by two percentage points, from 7 to 5 per cent. That was a promise made and a promise kept.

The NDP, however, brought in a \$5 billion carbon tax and never did their research on it. They had no idea, none whatsoever, Mr. Speaker, that their plan meant asking grieving widows to give money back to the NDP government coffers. They said that they'd fix it, and they haven't, twice. They didn't have an economic impact study done at all when they passed the carbon tax. They had no idea of the ramifications. Since I know the Deputy Premier wants to answer this question, I'll try the Finance minister anyway, even though she'll probably pop up. If the Premier . . .

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are sick of an opposition that claims that the only way to move forward is by moving back. Let's move back, though, and acknowledge the record. He wants to talk about promises. He made a promise to fix the situation where the GST is charged on other levies and taxes, and he failed to do that. We're not going to make excuses. We're going to move forward and get real results for the province of Alberta. That's what we're doing. We are reinvesting revenues from the price on carbon right here in Alberta's economy, and we're proud to do so. [interjections]

The Speaker: Someone remarked that my tension sometimes escalates. I'm really working on finding positive ways to enjoy this place.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, here's another tax hike the NDP never thought through. A new report from the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy shows that labour earnings for the average two-income household will drop by – wait for it – \$830 per year as a direct result of this government's 20 per cent tax hike on business taxes across Alberta. Now Alberta will have the highest business tax among the western provinces, and it means less money for families to put bread on the table. To top it off, we collected almost a billion dollars less in revenues last year alone. Will the NDP admit that this tax hike has failed Albertans, and will they ask Ottawa to fight for an exemption to the GST on the tax?

Ms Hoffman: I know the member opposite is used to getting direction from Ottawa.

We worked to bring in a made-in-Alberta solution, Mr. Speaker, and we're so proud to do that. Let's talk about what's happening in the economy. Yesterday a chief economist with the Business Development Bank said that this is going to be a year of turnaround, that we're going to build on that from this year on. This is going to take some time before everybody sees it, but this is a first step. It's going in the right direction. He's talking about Alberta, Alberta's economy, and the great efforts that are moving forward. That's why last month we got 20,000 new full-time jobs, and we are so proud of that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Could I ask again: keep the volume down.
Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would appreciate it if we got an answer to a question.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Mr. Jean: I wish a light bulb would go on over the Premier's head to make her realize that Albertans don't need Ecofitt from Ontario to come into their houses to change their light bulbs. The fact is that the Premier is throwing Albertans' hard-earned money, that they are syphoning off through carbon taxes, at these programs to see what actually sticks. Now that the NDP have introduced Ecofitt 2.0, a more reasonable energy efficiency program, I would suggest, does that mean that the Ecofitt 1.0 boondoggle is going to be cancelled? Obviously, we know it's redundant, wasteful, and needs to be done away with. Does that mean that the Premier . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. As of April 4, Mr. Speaker, 98,576 families had signed up for the Energy Efficiency Alberta program. I am so proud that our government is there to have the backs of 900 Fort McMurray residents who are accessing this program. We're helping them to ensure that they have \$112 they can put back into their own pockets. The members opposite want to scrap this plan. Instead, we want to make sure that we're supporting Albertans and saving money, and we're not going to apologize for expanding on opportunities to do that.

Mr. Jean: Of course they're going to apply for getting their money back, Mr. Speaker. It's their money. That's what the NDP forget. They're just getting a refund.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the NDP government is hoping they can pull the wool over Albertans' eyes about having two programs doing the same thing – exactly the same thing – but Albertans are savvy. They understand what's going on, and they know that this Ecofitt program, where salespeople actually go into your house, believe it or not, to upsell products, doesn't make any sense. They know that the NDP government is actually using their own money to try to bribe them. If the Premier won't listen to me, will she listen to Albertans and scrap this Ecofitt 2.0 boondoggle?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the more than 350 local Alberta contractors who have already signed up to help Albertans save money through this program. This is job creating. It's supporting local families and saving money, and we're not going to apologize for making sure we have an opportunity to act responsibly on supporting the environment, supporting families,

ensuring that they can have greater efficiencies, the last jurisdiction in North America to finally catch up. I'm not going to apologize for standing up for Alberta families, working to make their lives better. We're going to keep doing that.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the NDP are just showing a lack of respect for Albertans' hard-earned money. Why have one program when you can have two? That's, of course, the NDP way. Albertans deserve to know the price of installing these products by an Ecofitt salesman compared to an everyday Albertan buying one at their neighbourhood Alberta hardware store. Will the Premier release these figures, or does she not want Albertans to see how her government is actually wasting their money?

Ms Hoffman: It's no doubt that the Leader of the Official Opposition wants to turn the lights out. He wants to turn the lights out on Alberta families who are struggling to pay for tuition. We've capped that. He wants to turn the lights out on Alberta families who are struggling to pay their power bills. We've capped those, Mr. Speaker. He wants to turn the lights out on a climate leadership plan that brought us approval for two – two – pipelines. We're not going to turn the lights out. We're going to keep moving forward, and we're going to support Alberta families and our economy.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Electricity Power Purchase Arrangements

Mr. Jean: The NDP government's multibillion-dollar screw-up on our electricity system by first raising taxes and then trying to break contracts with Alberta-owned companies is something Alberta taxpayers will be paying a lot of money on for many years. Last fall we found out the Energy department asked the Balancing Pool to delete e-mails related to Enmax returning their PPA because they were, quote, sensitive. Now the Privacy Commissioner is investigating. Will the NDP release all of the documents for the investigation, and if not, why not?

Ms Hoffman: I'm pleased to tell the House and Albertans that we are happy to welcome the oversight provided by the Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Speaker, and we are pleased to talk about the government's plan to transition responsibly to a power system that takes care of everyday Albertans. We have been fully transparent and accountable, and we will continue to do so in every bit of the transition. We're happy to comply with and support the Privacy Commissioner in her work.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's why this all matters. The government is still fighting Enmax in the court for returning their Battle River PPA to the Balancing Pool. The government continues to make up stories that they had no idea that making massive increases to the carbon tax would break contracts that were long on the public record. Now, if the NDP forced this PPA back into Enmax, it means property tax hikes for Calgarians will go way up. Why doesn't the NDP start telling the truth to Albertans about this multibillion-dollar NDP screw-up?

Ms Hoffman: Want to talk about what screw-ups led to this situation, Mr. Speaker? It was the lack of transparent and accountable discussions, that happened behind closed doors, that were entered into in secret, backroom talks that off-loaded liabilities from businesses that were profitable onto the backs of

Alberta families. That's how we ended up in this situation. We're not going to move forward in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I cannot hear the answer to the question. [interjections] Hon. members, please.

Ten seconds to finish off.

Ms Hoffman: It's clear that the opposition has chosen which side they're going to be on, the side of their slow-dance partners, who put liabilities, in their opinion, back onto Albertans. Instead, we're going to stand up for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, so many excuses and only one party to blame, them. They should take the blame. They're not serving Albertans.

We know that the NDP now has a history of stonewalling information to the Privacy Commissioner. If you have nothing to hide, why delete the e-mails? They are hiding over 466 pages that the Privacy Commissioner has asked for, and we know that they are in the practice of deleting sensitive e-mails when it comes to multibillion-dollar screw-ups. Let's face it. The fact is that no one trusts this NDP government. Their policies are reckless, they're secretive, and they continue to wage legal battles with Alberta-owned corporations and Albertans. How many investigations do Albertans need before we start hearing the truth from this NDP government?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the member of the opposition wants to hear some truth and he won't take my word for it, then let's take the truth from Brian Ferguson, CEO of Cenovus, who yesterday told the Calgary Chamber that the recent decision to invest billions of dollars more in Alberta was based in large part on the confidence in the government policies. That's this government. He said: it's my belief that the carbon policy in Alberta was one of the key reasons the federal government was able to get its mind around approving these two new pipelines. This is a good result. We're going to keep working with the Information and Privacy Commissioner, but we're also going to work with Alberta businesses and employers. [interjections]

The Speaker: A couple of members I could hear above the tumult. I don't want to draw, at this stage at least, individual attention to them. I think you might know who you are.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Residential No-charge Energy Savings Program

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in QP the environment minister admitted that someone would be selling things to Albertans while in their homes under the Energy Efficiency Alberta program. What the minister did not answer was who that would be. The Energy Efficiency Alberta people will have official identification, or so the website says. To the Premier: who will be doing the selling in Alberta homes after getting entry via your government program through Energy Efficiency Alberta? Their officials or somebody else?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me google that for you.

The Program . . . will introduce homeowners and tenants to the benefits of energy efficiency by delivering immediate energy savings at no cost to them. Engaging with residents offers opportunities to build trust and recognition of Energy Efficiency Alberta, cross-promote other efficiency programs, and can drive demand for larger investments and deeper energy savings.

This is if the homeowner so chooses. The program – it's very clear from the RFP, which is posted publicly – is about making sure that there is no cost directly to the individuals who are welcoming these people into their homes.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is still misleading Albertans. Beyond the minister's admission yesterday, the very website, on a page I will table today, says on the left side of the page that home improvements are for sale. On the right side of the page it says, "They are not selling anything, and they will never ask you for money." It can't be both. To the minister: since your webpage is obviously wrong on one side or the other, will you have it corrected today, or will you allow this misinformation to remain another day after it has been shown to you that you're giving Albertans false information?

The Speaker: I want to caution the member and the members. We've had many hours wasted on discussions about what's true, what's not true, misleading, false, et cetera. I want to caution everyone to be careful. The responsibility rests with all of you, not with me, with respect to that matter.

The Minister of Environment and Parks.

2:10

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have done is introduced now three programs, in fact. One is a residential installation that Albertans can sign up for. As we've heard, almost 100,000 Albertans are going to avail themselves of those savings, saving them about \$100 a year, a little more, with those installations. We've also unveiled the contractor installation program. Albertans who want to install new windows, insulation, or tankless hot water heaters may avail themselves of the over 350 contractors that have registered to provide those services. We're saving Albertans money. The previous government never got around to it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Their website is still wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The government is asking Albertans to let Energy Efficiency Alberta into their homes to install electrical equipment and devices. Here is what the website says under terms of service. "To the full extent permissible by applicable law, we disclaim all warranties, conditions and guarantees, express or implied, including implied warranties, conditions or guarantees of merchantable quality, fitness for a . . ."

The Speaker: Hon. member, I have to be able to hear the question, and I can't. [interjection] Hon. member. [interjection] Hon. member.

Mr. McIver: I was reading, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: I just wasn't certain if you were reading in English or some other language because I couldn't understand it. I'm not sure if there was a question in there or not.

Mr. McIver: It's here. I'm not finished, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yeah, I know that, but it seems to me that you're taking advantage of the issue.

Would the government like to respond? Who may have heard a question?

Mr. Rodney: He has 10 seconds.

The Speaker: Okay. Then I've cautioned you before. You've got nine seconds.

Mr. McIver: I apologize for speed-reading.

To the Premier: don't you think you can give Albertans a little more comfort before asking them to open up their homes under your government's say-so?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, almost 100,000 Albertans have signed up for the residential no-cost program, which will save homeowners a little over \$100 a year on average. In addition, there are other programs that we have announced. In addition to that, there are the solar programs we've announced. Now, the previous government left us in a situation where we're the only jurisdiction in North America without an energy efficiency program. Of course, the Wildrose denies the science of climate change, so they, too, would not invest in such a program. Might I suggest that all of these goings-on about energy efficiency are designed to distract from the fact that we have an internal caucus revolt happening over . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, I'm surprised. I thought we would have a very friendly discussion today because everyone would be anxious to get home.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Gravel Extraction in Flood Plains

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as a Liberal you might expect me to be asking some questions about marijuana today, but instead of weed I want to talk about rocks and water. Like human lungs, alluvial aquifers around rivers and streams are essential for exchanging surface water and groundwater, but gravel extraction in our flood plains is threatening to choke out our vital water supply. To be blunt, Alberta has the largest scale gravel extraction in the country.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think your time has lapsed.

Dr. Swann: Impossible. Impossible.

The Speaker: I'm sure that the minister . . . [interjection] Hon. member, I think you need to sit down.

What a wonderful day in the neighbourhood.

I'm not sure if there was a question in there.

The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I share the hon. member's concern about, of course, water quality and gravel extraction, as we all do. We all want to make sure that safe drinking water and riparian habitat are appropriately maintained in this province. That's why, for example, we've invested in more river and stream monitoring as part of our consolidation of monitoring in the province, and we're working with the Sand and Gravel Association and the municipalities on these matters of gravel extraction, ensuring they're done in the best way possible.

Dr. Swann: Well, to the contrary, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that there's a potential for permanent environmental damage when we continue to allow gravel extraction in flood plains. I'll be tabling photographs from all over Alberta later today. The Minister of Environment and Parks has taken action on science-based evidence in the Castle, so I'm sure that there's a commitment to using science to make better decisions. Why is science enough to restrict industry activity in the Castle but not in flood plains? Why the double standard?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, our department along with Municipal Affairs is working with the Sand and Gravel Association and other stakeholders to ensure that sand and gravel and all aggregate extraction is done in ways that protect our air, land, and water. Certainly, the Sand and Gravel Association has been a good partner to us in that. In many cases we work on a case-by-case basis with the affected municipalities to make sure that we're upholding the highest standards.

Dr. Swann: The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the Sand and Gravel Association has a very cozy relationship with municipalities and Municipal Affairs, and they're the ones financially benefiting from the developments on flood plains. Allowing them to police is like asking a pot user to guard the brownies. What's needed is for the environment minister to remove the temptation and protect our water. When will you take real action and institute a total ban on gravel extraction in flood plains?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. We will certainly take his views under advisement as we speak to communities who have concerns about flood plains gravel and other aggregate extraction. We're always looking for a productive conversation with the communities that are affected by these projects.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Services for Seniors

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From time to time my office will get calls from local seniors inquiring about benefits, and my staff will usually refer them to the information guide. This guide documents seniors' programs and services. It is a useful tool, but some of the information will soon be outdated. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what is the government doing to ensure that seniors get the accurate information they need in a timely fashion?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's vital that seniors are aware of programs available to them. We've appointed a Seniors Advocate, Dr. Sheree Kwong See, who is assisting seniors in navigating government services. Last year we sent out 40,000 information guides, and we update printed materials annually. Seniors receiving provincial benefits are sent information each July so that they are aware of available programs and services. I'm proud that we're making life better for seniors by protecting and improving programs and benefits here in Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that transportation is often a challenge for rural seniors, especially for those with mobility issues, to the same minister: how is the government helping seniors in rural Alberta who need transportation, particularly accessible transportation?

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, seniors built this province, and they deserve to retire in dignity. We have supported the development of transportation tool kits for seniors in communities working to create their own programs. This tool kit helps communities create transportation alternatives that are more suitable to the needs of seniors. We continue to support the research and programs being developed by the University of Alberta's Medically At-Risk Driver Centre, and I'm proud that our government is also investing \$1.3 billion over four years in public transportation.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents have expressed concerns with the existing financial benefit for seniors travelling long distances to attend medical appointments, will the government commit to examining the benefits schedule?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for your advocacy for seniors' issues in your constituency. My ministry's special-needs assistance program currently provides financial support to low-income seniors. We are aware that some seniors incur significant costs travelling to receive specialized care in larger centres. It's an important issue, and we are looking at what we can do additionally to support seniors.

Agrifood and Agribusiness Carbon Levy Costs

Mr. Schneider: Recently it was moved by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future undertake a study of how to grow and diversify the agrifood and agribusiness sectors and that the scope of this study be focused on value-added production, small-business opportunities, and local food production and promotion, but now we have had numerous agri-related businesses telling us that this government's policies are doing just the opposite. To the Minister of Energy: why did you jam through carbon tax legislation, that effectively runs counter to motions proposed by your own MLA?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this province has been attracting a lot of investment and a lot of attention in the agribusiness sector. I'm thinking here of the \$120 million expansion to Richardson Oilseed in Lethbridge and a commitment from Cavendish Farms for the largest private-sector investment in Lethbridge history, which is going to be a great economic driver for southern Alberta, certainly, for both my constituency and the Member for Little Bow's.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Schneider: It's great that we got a minister there.

Given that many of these agrifood businesses are already in the value-added production business and given that you didn't run on the platform of a carbon tax and given that several of these value-added agribusinesses are now considering relocating operations out of Alberta, to the minister of ag. Minister, this is serious. If you

truly are supportive of the agribusinesses, will you stand up for them and fight your caucus to exempt agrifood producers from the carbon tax?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this province has brought in a carbon pricing framework that is a made-in-Alberta solution such that a made-in-Ottawa solution is not imposed on us. You know, it's very clear that the Wildrose and their new frenemies over there in the PCs would rather a made-in-Ottawa plan. Given the rich, made-in-Ottawa pensions that both right-wing leaders are lining up for, I'm not surprised that they like things that are made in Ottawa.

Mr. Schneider: Given that this government was loudly bragging about the Cavendish Farms expansion and how it reflected well on this government and given that government MLAs leapt at the chance to tout this \$350 million private investment, Minister, and that we are hearing from multiple sources that the expansion is now on indefinite hold due to economic uncertainty caused by your government's poor policies, how can you claim that your policies are improving the lives of Albertans while investors are reconsidering business here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the fact that Alberta's carbon pricing framework was so widely praised, certainly, by energy executives and others yesterday is simply because we have put in place a system of output-based allocations to ensure that all industries do not end up with competitive trade pressures as happened in B.C., and then B.C. moved forward with a different kind of framework similar to what Alberta is putting in place. Now, of course, the Wildrose would not like to welcome new jobs to Alberta, but on this side of the House . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Time is up.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Springbank Flood Mitigation Project

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following intense flooding in southern Alberta four years ago there was a consensus that the government needed to do something fast to mitigate against another flood event, so we did. Several projects were examined, and the one chosen seemed to be the quickest, easiest, most affordable solution, but for many reasons local landowners, residents, towns, and the Tsuut'ina Nation are all allied to stop the dam from being built at this location. To the Minister of Infrastructure: please explain to all Albertans how exactly you came to the decision on the Springbank dam project versus other options.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot of consultation done on the mitigation plans. Our government is focused on building strong, collaborative relationships with all First Nations. Just a little over a few weeks ago the minister did meet with the Tsuut'ina group and plans to continue meeting as the plans go forward.

Mr. Rodney: That is not what we're hearing at all.

Given that the proposed Springbank dam was expected to be the most viable solution to ensure Calgary and surrounding communities were properly protected from future flooding and given that I have heard grave concerns that this project will not be as quick or cost-effective as initially hoped and given that there has been a second option on the table for quite some time, which may actually be a better option now, again to the Minister of Infrastructure: has there been a significant increase in the cost estimates for the project, and if so, why?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member asks about what led to the decision-making around the Springbank project. Of course, it was the former PC government who began that decision-making process and the weighing of the two options. The other option was the McLean Creek option, which was an in-river dam that had many, many construction risks associated with it, a much longer timeline for its environmental assessments, many more environmental effects to take into account, and more long-term environmental effects given that Springbank is a dry dam.

Mr. Rodney: With respect, you're the decision-makers on this now.

Given that I along with all Albertans appreciate the commitment to flood mitigation and given that I've met personally with families who will lose their land, that they have ranched for five generations, along with Chief Crowchild, who fears that Tsuut'ina land as well as Redwood Meadows and Bragg Creek will be threatened by this potential dam, again to the minister: will you meet with the Premier personally, and will you commit to meeting about this specific issue with Chief Crowchild and affected landowners and residents to work towards a positive solution before construction begins?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the 2013 floods were devastating in Alberta. In fact, I was one of the people stuck in Canmore for quite awhile. We don't want that to ever happen again. It caused over \$6 billion in damage. We are working with the First Nations. As I mentioned, the minister met with them a few weeks ago. He plans on continuing to meet with the band as well as other people involved in this plan.

Interprovincial Relations and Pipeline Support

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, for decades the NDP and its ideological OSAG members railed against pipelines. The result: 60 per cent of British Columbia voters now support political parties opposed to pipelines. While the NDP in Alberta had a conversion on the road to government, their provincial cousins to the east and west would cause a train wreck to derail Alberta's economic recovery. Can the Deputy Premier explain how the NDP is rolling back decades of pipeline opposition to get British Columbians onside?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for an opportunity to talk about how proud we are of the great progress we've been making in getting approvals for pipelines to new markets. That includes, of course, getting new market access on the west coast. Right now our Premier is continuing to work to make sure that Asia Pacific markets are welcoming. She was in British Columbia earlier meeting with a number of individuals, and

we're going to continue to work to honour their concerns but make sure that we get new market access, which failed to happen under our Conservative governments both in Ottawa and Alberta.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP held a press conference to attack the Saskatchewan budget while erecting a tariff wall and sparking a trade war with Saskatchewan over beer and given that the Premier of British Columbia launched her re-election bid by lambasting the government of Alberta on how bad Alberta's finances are under the NDP, to the Deputy Premier. You have isolated Alberta in trade and created enemies out of allies. How are you going to repair our intergovernmental relationships?

Ms Hoffman: Every day we're going to stand up for Alberta families and work to make their lives better, Mr. Speaker. That's why we are so proud that with thoughtful, reasonable collaboration with a number of individuals, including oil and gas executives, they are onside. For example, this morning energy CEOs praised Alberta's carbon tax at a Calgary Chamber event. Business leaders speaking at the Calgary Chamber of commerce event were empathetic, saying that a carbon tax makes sense. They went on to say that this government is doing the right thing and that they're proud to invest in Alberta. We're proud that they're investing here and that we're getting new market access.

2:30

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's appointees on her oil sands advisory group are busy trying to stop Alberta oil by making instructional videos on how to stop pipeline construction and given that industry uncertainty spurred by the NDP's cap on our oil sands development is stopping investment and killing jobs, when will the Premier deliver consequences to these radical, taxpayer-funded OSAG members who are trying to stop pipelines in B.C. instead of doing their jobs here in Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I am so proud of our reputation and the work that we're doing to make life better for Alberta families, including Tim McMillan, who I have respect for, from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, who said: Canada's reputation as a place that can move projects forward took a step forward today; we have seen today that our governments support energy projects that meet the high standards here in Canada. We also have the Calgary Chamber and others. Berkshire Hathaway Energy said that Alberta has struck a nice middle ground on carbon tax and electricity generation. They said that we have a fund . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Premier.
The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Unharvested 2016 Crops

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The situation in northern Alberta is beyond dire for many local farmers, and many are not getting help from AFSC. Last Thursday, when it looked like we might get in the fields to harvest some of the 2016 crop, we got hit with another foot of wet, heavy snow. It is now questionable if area farmers will be able to start seeding on time, let alone get last year's crops off. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Last year's remaining crop is a writeoff in many areas. When will you step in and instruct AFSC to get those assessments completed?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I wish to thank the member for giving me the opportunity to highlight the good work that AFSC has been doing. It is true that it was a bit of a roller-coaster season last year. It started out dry, and it ended wet for many farmers. But as of March 24 over \$32.3 million has been paid to producers. Ninety-five per cent of all unharvested acre claims have been processed, so I would disagree with the member. We're actually very well on track. Our inspectors are doing a good job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that farmers are expected to pay their premiums on time and given that a local farmer, when calling in to the AFSC, was given the following response, "I could give you my supervisor's phone number, but she won't answer anyway; you will get put on hold and be given the runaround," and given that AFSC has only paid out 25 per cent of the insurance to some of these farmers, again to the minister of agriculture: when will you step in? This is a provincial program. Will this supervisor's attitude be dealt with, and how is this making life better for Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I do know is that we have 120 inspectors, you know, working out there in the field right now, boots on the ground, making sure that the very few remaining claims are processed. As for the individual the member is talking about, I'd encourage him to give me more information, and we'll look into it. Otherwise, all farmers can contact their AFSC office or phone 310.FARM.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hanson: As a matter of fact, Minister, the lady sent the same letter that she sent to me to your office as well.

Mr. Speaker, given that there are still thousands of fields that need to be assessed and there is no time for a full assessment and given that we discussed this probability with the minister just weeks ago and it's now April 20 and the situation has only gotten worse, to the minister of agriculture. These crops are ruined, period. When will you instruct AFSC to do a blanket assessment based on a nominal site visit and pay out what is owed to our hard-working Alberta farm families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Again, I am proud of the work that the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation is doing, that the 120 inspectors are doing. Ninety-five per cent of those claims that he's talking about have been paid out on those unharvested acres.

As for the weather, I'm willing to inform the Assembly that I and this government have nothing to do with the weather, but what we do have is on those policies that AFSC is administering. They're going to continue to do a good job. We're going to continue having the backs of those farmers and continue having the backs of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Workplace Legislation Review

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has pulled a shroud of secrecy over its plans to change the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code. For instance, the Premier and the Minister of Labour have refused to tell Albertans if they will eliminate the secret-ballot provision. Minister, please come clean with Albertans. Are you planning to remove secret ballots? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for his question. Whether it's the MGA or workplace legislation, our government is working to get consultations right. We have heard from hundreds of stakeholders on both consultations, and we are going to be listening to what stakeholders have said while we are designing legislation. The consultations have only just closed. I am still reviewing what has been submitted. But it is important to us that we make sure we have fair and balanced legislation that is right for Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I did not hear an answer . . .
Did anyone else?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Gill: . . . and given that all Albertans, including my colleagues on this side of the House, want an answer, Minister, let me ask again. Are you planning to get rid of secret ballots? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to me that when conducting consultations, I review the submissions and then make any decisions about what legislation might be brought forward. We've heard from almost 5,000 Albertans, including over a thousand employers. We are looking forward to reviewing that and bringing forward legislation that makes sure we have a workplace system that is fair and balanced for workers and employers. Since we have legislation that hasn't been updated since 1988, it's very important that we make sure we are bringing forward legislation that works for everyone.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that on April 13 I asked if this minister was bringing forward legislative changes to the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code in the spring session and given that I wasn't able to get an answer to the question that day, I will ask again, and I hope she does not once again trivialize these changes with insulting and disgusting pop music references. Minister, do you plan to sneak through NDP-friendly legislative changes at the eleventh hour? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our consultation in engaging with Albertans brought forward letters from people like Susan, who was concerned about the lack of bereavement leave when her husband's brother passed away in 2015. She wrote to me and said that during this period it was especially difficult to balance grieving, rationing vacation, and arranging child care while maintaining workloads for when they returned. I am taking this seriously. We need to review what's been submitted, and then I will make any decisions about what makes sense for Alberta. The previous government had done reviews and done nothing. I will do something.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Employer Liaison Service

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the province's economy improves, it is crucial to get Albertans back to work, so I was glad to see that our government is taking steps to ensure that employers in Alberta get the support they need to connect with unemployed Albertans before turning to foreign options. To the Minister of Labour: how is the new approach to hiring temporary foreign workers going to help put more Albertans back to work?

2:40

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In tough economic times hard-working Albertans deserve a government that has their back. That's why our government approached the government of Canada to ensure that Albertans in 29 high-skilled occupations have the first shot at available jobs. I'm talking about plumbers, carpenters, industrial electricians. When employers apply for workers in these job categories, our dedicated employer liaison officers will reach out and help them connect with Albertans who are looking for those jobs. We want to help Albertans get back . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this program is about connecting Alberta employers with Albertans and that it's also a new service, to the same minister: what is the expected cost to run this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This pilot program has no additional costs for either the Alberta government or the federal government. Alberta Labour already has 19 amazing employer liaison officers across the province. They are already helping employers understand their responsibilities and connect with supports like the summer temporary employment program or the Canada-Alberta job grant. This is simply an expansion of their role. Over the next 24 months our employer liaison officers will be working hard to connect employers with high-skilled Albertans and put them back to work.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is a pilot project for which the government of Alberta and the federal government have high expectations, to the same minister: how is the government ensuring that Alberta employers are aware of the

employer liaison service and know where to get support to navigate the new system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was thrilled to launch the employer liaison service pilot yesterday with the federal Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour. We want to make sure that employers operating workplaces with workers in these 29 categories know that Alberta Labour can help them find highly skilled Albertans. This pilot will help job-seeking Albertans receiving EI benefits or those signed up for the job bank receive notifications that match their skills and experience. We encourage employers to contact us for support in creating a plan to help them recruit these Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Access to Information and Legal Privilege

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner has now released three scathing reports on government openness and transparency in the last two months, yet this government has not seen itself as the main problem within the FOIP process. When I asked in December about the government's practice of involving lawyers from start to finish in order to invoke solicitor-client privilege, the Minister of Service Alberta said that the allegations were absolutely absurd. Does the minister still believe this is absurd, or is she starting to see that we were right all along?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It is true that the Information and Privacy Commissioner recently released a report into actions of the previous government. They were critical of some of the processes going on during that time. It is certainly the case that there were some concerns about the presence of counsel in some of those meetings. That process was set up under the previous government, but going forward we absolutely will examine it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government argues that Justice lawyers are only used to decide legal privilege in freedom of information requests and given that the Privacy Commissioner's April investigation report contradicts that by showing that a government lawyer counselling a FOIP co-ordinator is enough to invoke legal privilege to block information requests, will the minister admit that the government is using the presence of lawyers to be able to invoke privilege whenever the government is concerned about the records it is about to release?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was the case that when we took government, we felt that the way in which legal privilege was claimed was overly protective of the government. Therefore, last year I gave instructions to the lawyers throughout government to only claim legal privilege when it was actually necessary and to sort of walk that back a little bit because this government absolutely has an interest in ensuring transparency.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Minister. Given that the Minister of Service Alberta has insisted several times that the presence of government lawyers is not being abused and given that I will table a memo from Service Alberta that states that "counsel from Justice and Solicitor General Central Legal Services will be in attendance when the policy decision is finalized," to the minister: why do you continue to deny the role that government lawyers play in so-called freedom of information when your own deputy minister signed the memo to the contrary?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I have no certainty . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Excuse me. There may be an acceptance of heckling in the House, but there will be no booing and also remarking upon the speaking style of any member. So please contain it.

The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not sure what memo the hon. member is referring to. I'm happy to review it and happy to review same with my department and my deputy minister. Certainly, there are memos that are transported between individuals, that not everything goes through the minister. So I'm very happy to look into the matter and follow up with the member.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll begin Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Blessed Oscar Romero Catholic School Achievements

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cheerleading is an important sport for many young women and men in Alberta. It was recognized as a sport by the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association, the ASAA, in 1984, and it has grown to comprise dozens of events for both schools and individual cheer clubs.

Today I rise to celebrate a very special group of cheerleading athletes who are with us here in the Chamber and the gallery, the Blessed Oscar Romero high school Ravens. Training day in and day out and demonstrating remarkable athleticism and dedication to their sport, these students have shown what hard work is all about.

I was there in March during the Edmonton competition. Spectators in that packed gymnasium really gained an appreciation for the sport, with the athletes tumbling through the air, doing backflips or cartwheels with complete and unbroken concentration. The Ravens won that competition and moved on to the provincial championship, that took place in Athabasca on April 7 and 8. They won that competition as well, and the Ravens became the ASAA senior high division 1 Alberta provincial champion cheer team for the second year in a row. We in Edmonton-McClung are very proud of their accomplishment and wish to extend to the team members, coaches, staff assistants, and parent volunteers our heartiest congratulations.

I would also like to recognize the principal of Blessed Oscar Romero Catholic high school, Simon Pryma. Mr. Pryma will be retiring this year after over 35 years of working in the front lines of teaching, and I'm proud to be a part of a government that supports front-line educators, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Pryma has been a dedicated educator and exemplary school administrator. He extended to me

every opportunity to participate as the local MLA in Edmonton-McClung in the life and activities of the school in a very welcoming way, and I thank him for that and also thank him for his years of service. We hope he will visit the school from time to time to encourage his staff and students to continue their tradition of hard work and excellence and encourage the cheer team to do their best to compete for a championship each and every year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Provincial Election Second Anniversary

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been absorbing shocks to their system for nearly two years now. The first shock happened on May 5, 2015. In my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake the number of dazed expressions that I witnessed in reaction to the surprising NDP win is not soon to be forgotten. The shocks for not only my constituents but also Albertans didn't end there. Rather, it's just the beginning because the NDP took the opportunity presented for an immediate push to make changes that made an already shaky economy turn rocky. In came a 20 per cent business tax increase. In came a royalty review. Investors in my constituency looked for opportunities elsewhere.

To celebrate their win a year later, the NDP chose to introduce a new tax called the carbon tax. That was levied on every Albertan and every wallet. The surprise tax increase sent charities, schools, housing management bodies scrambling to find ways to pay their bills without sacrificing their services.

2:50

As the NDP are about to celebrate the end of their second year, in came the announcement of a labour review. My constituents and the people in Alberta are wondering: when will it end? They just want it to stop. We are out of work. We are relying on social assistance when we used to be relying on ourselves. We are losing hope. Will this confrontational NDP labour review send another shock wave that will put our local oil sands projects at risk? Why does this government choose to do this review just before Imperial Oil, CNRL, and Cenovus are working on a plan for their summer building season? Will this shock bring a prolonged deferral on building within my constituency? Only time will tell. As with everything, Mr. Speaker, a body can only absorb so many shocks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the economy. Now, we know that some members opposite are quite fond of quoting Thomas Hobbes and are especially fond of quoting the phrase "nasty, [mean], brutish, and short" in various contexts. It's interesting to note that Thomas Hobbes' venerable book, *Leviathan*, was actually arguing for a return to an absolute monarchy. It's also interesting that the opposition relies so heavily on a book that was written over 350 years ago.

Now, I would like to recommend some more recent publications to the opposition. As reported in the Edmonton *Metro*, a recent Business Development Bank of Canada report stated that Alberta's economy is turning around faster than other oil-producing provinces. According to the BDC chief economist Pierre Cl  roux: "Alberta is going to have better growth than Saskatchewan or Newfoundland. We are seeing more investment right now in Alberta."

Aided by the approval of two pipelines and by the construction of infrastructure, Alberta's oil and gas sector is set to rebound

stronger than other oil provinces. That, Mr. Speaker, is a direct result of actions taken by this government. This growth has been led by value-added jobs that are taking our agricultural product and creating a finished product right here in Alberta. Beer and honey production, in particular, are growing.

Mr. Speaker, the economy is diversifying, oil and gas is recovering, and Albertans are seeing the benefits of the investments in infrastructure made during this economic downturn instead of carrying out the reckless cuts that the opposition proposes.

Instead of relying on 350-year-old books, we are relying on organizations like the International Monetary Fund, who have come to question the long-term value of austerity measures. We are relying on the former governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, who recommended that investment in infrastructure during a downturn is good fiscal policy. We are relying on institutions and people who are firmly rooted in today's economies and today's economics.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Energy Industry Support for the Carbon Levy

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the great things about this Chamber and being an MLA is learning about Alberta's economy and how we fit into a world perspective. I have heard the opposition claiming that Alberta's climate leadership plan is destroying Alberta's oil and gas industry and putting them at a competitive disadvantage with the rest of the world, so I was very interested to hear about yesterday's event hosted by the Calgary Chamber of commerce.

Mr. Speaker, CEOs of some of Alberta's largest energy companies spoke in front of a crowd of businesspeople and said publicly that Alberta's carbon levy and related subsidies strike an appropriate balance. The CEO of Berkshire Hathaway Energy Canada stated that the carbon levy has not affected their company's view on Alberta and that they believe in the province and are bullish in investing.

Furthermore, the CEO of Cenovus, Brian Ferguson, was reported as saying that they have confidence in Alberta's carbon pricing policies, enough confidence, Mr. Speaker, that they felt comfortable investing billions of dollars more in Alberta's oil sands. He went on to reiterate that he believed the carbon pricing policy here in Alberta is a major factor in the federal government approval of the Trans Mountain and line 3 pipeline approvals and that these pipeline expansions would have a major benefit for Alberta and Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we all welcome debate in this Chamber, and we all know that the opposition must take an opposing view on many issues. They've certainly taken an opposing view on the climate leadership plan. However, when I heard the leaders of Alberta's oil and gas industry stand up at a Calgary Chamber of commerce event and say that our government's carbon pricing policies have struck an appropriate balance and that we are doing a good job in this area, I know whose expertise I will trust, and I know who I will listen to, and it is not the members across the way.

Thank you very much.

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

Stop Abuse in Families Society of St. Albert

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This coming Saturday night I will be attending an annual fundraiser in St. Albert called the Red Shoe Gala. The Red Shoe Gala is hosted by the SAIF society of St.

Albert. SAIF is an acronym for stop abuse in families. Since 1989 this St. Albert organization has offered services to people experiencing abuse and the devastating effects that abuse has on families. SAIF provides individual and group counselling, prevention programming to schools and communities, offers workshops and an intensive 22-week program for women and children who have experienced and witnessed abuse.

I'm sad to report that the need for this kind of support is in high demand all over Alberta, including St. Albert. We have much work to do. Fifty-one per cent of Canadian women have experienced at least one act of physical and sexual violence since the age of 16. Twenty-nine per cent of Canadian women have been assaulted by a spouse or someone claiming to love them. Add to this the astounding and disgusting abuse, shaming, and threats women receive online from people they don't know, and the picture is clear.

This doesn't make me a snowflake, by the way; it makes me a feminist.

What I would like to say to all of you is: be an example. Be a role model. Monitor your social media accounts. Set a standard. There is much we can do in this House to contribute to this massive public health crisis. Prevention will always be vital, as vital as addressing the root causes.

It's estimated that the measurable health-related costs associated with violence against women in Canada is \$4.2 billion a year. We know that women and children leaving abusive relationships face economic hardships, poverty. This is why a higher minimum wage, school lunch programs, reduced school fees are some of the great ways that we are supporting women and children. I know St. Albert values the work . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent to allow the Routine to continue past 3 p.m.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

National Volunteer Week

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The third week in April is National Volunteer Week. Celebrated in all communities across Canada, it is a time for paying tribute to Canada's volunteers. It also increases awareness of the important role of volunteers and the nonprofit voluntary sector and encourages volunteerism. As the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead put it, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world."

Volunteers like people. They relish new experiences and challenges to make a difference in their communities. Alberta Health Services says: "Volunteers are ... our most valuable [resource]. Their time and energy provide immeasurable support to our busy staff. They add extra care to the quality health care" provided by AHS.

Recently, at the announcement of the \$61 million for renovation of the ER at the Misericordia hospital, I learned about the vital role that volunteers have played in improving patient experience there in less than satisfactory conditions caused by the infrastructure deficit at that hospital.

Another example is the Royal Alexandra hospital gift shop, which is entirely staffed by volunteers who manage and staff a complex small-business enterprise, organize enhancement of patient care in common areas, and contribute to vulnerable patient support.

My main place of work for 40 years has been the Cross Cancer Institute. The dedicated volunteers there, many of whom I call friends, are indispensable to the positive outcomes of my patients. Examples of contributions of CCI volunteers include providing patient information, running the gift shop, cafe, and tea cart [interjections] . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Dr. Turner: . . . in the OPD and on wards, and driving patients to and from clinic visits.

Simply put, the Cross couldn't function without our great volunteers and all three groups of hospital volunteers, who, like this government, work to make life better for Albertans and are shining examples of what we should celebrate in volunteer week.

3:00

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. On behalf of the Government House Leader, pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) I'm rising to advise the House that on the next available Monday written questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 will be accepted. Also, on the next available Monday motions for returns 13, 14, 17, 18, and 20 will be accepted, and motions for returns 15, 16, and 19 will be dealt with.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of an article from the CBC that I referenced in my member's statement; namely, Energy CEOs Praise Alberta's Carbon Tax at Calgary Chamber Event.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings that I alluded to in my questions today, letters from Dale Christian from Red Deer county relating to the risks of gravel extraction in flood plains, including some aerial maps of areas that show significant risk, especially during flood periods.

I also have copies of the WPAC response to Alberta Environment and Parks' sand and gravel program review of March 2017, where they make eight recommendations, including stopping water extraction on flood plains.

In addition to those tablings, Mr. Speaker, I have a tabling from Jeanne Phéné, a registered engineer who is also concerned about the need for greater consultation on the labour changes coming up. She's a Calgary engineer with concerns about new restrictions on their practice.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the *Metro* news article I referenced in my member's statement. It includes a lot of discussion on the 20,000 new full-time jobs and, of course, includes the quote in my statement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just standing to table a copy of the letter that was sent to myself as well as the Minister of Ag and Forestry regarding the frustration of the Boychuk family with AFSC.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the requisite five copies of an article from the *Edmonton Journal* published on April 10, 2017, that talks about the increased number of jobs in the Edmonton area. Particularly, it affects people who live in my riding.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one I referenced in my question today. From Energy Efficiency Alberta, it's the page that says on one side that they're selling things; on the other side it says that they're not selling things.

My second one is the terms of service for Energy Efficiency Alberta, which, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, you were too offended to let me read today.

The Speaker: The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four letters to table today, the first one being from the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada, the voice of progressive unionized employers in Canada's construction industry. They're requesting that the Labour minister consider extending and enhancing the review of the labour code. It's a letter from Mr. Paul De Jong and also was sent to the minister, I believe.

I have three other letters. This letter is from Silverado Site Services – this is in Fort Saskatchewan – from Les Brownlie, equipment manager, requesting an extension and enhancement of the labour review.

A letter from Golderado Contracting Corp., from Laura Wood, manager, is requesting an extension and enhancement of the labour review.

Also, a letter from PME Inc. This letter is signed by Dennis Johnston, general manager, requesting an extension and enhancement of the labour review.

The Speaker: Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies to table of a constituent's letter regarding the changes to the Labour Relations Code.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter to table from Service Alberta. It's written by Tim Grant and Philip Bryden, deputy ministers, and it's regarding FOIP requests for all deputy ministers across Alberta.

The second one is a letter from Shauna McHarg regarding FOIP concerns that she's brought up several times over the last several years. It's important that we start to take FOIP more seriously.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I choose this opportunity to encourage you to have safe travels, those who might be travelling today.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

[Adjourned debate April 20: Mr. Hanson]

The Speaker: The opposition leader.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. I had an opportunity to go through my speech and prepare it and think about how I was going to deliver it. When I finally finished, I couldn't come up with, actually, a proper title for it, so I thought what would be best is to reflect generally about what's happened to my community, Fort McMurray in particular, Bill 8, and what it's planning on imposing on my citizens.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I thought about a good title for the speech. Originally, I started off with How to Boil a Frog: They Don't Notice until It's Too Late, which is sort of like our community, Madam Speaker. As you may know, we've had a few things hit us lately. A frog doesn't really know when it's in the pot and there's boiling water. I've never tried this personally, but somebody can turn up the flame a bit, and actually the frog doesn't even notice. He thinks the water just gets warm gradually. All of a sudden, something happens, and the frog is not there any longer. I thought that was sort of appropriate because of what's happening in Fort McMurray and, of course, you know, the different things: the cap on the oil sands emissions, the fire, generally our economy, the carbon tax, and all of those other things. It's sort of like a frog in that situation. But then I thought: that's not really that appropriate.

I kept thinking about, you know, what else I could call it. I thought maybe How to Close Down a Resource Town in 10 Easy Steps. But I know that that song is already taken by the accelerated shutdown of coal that this government has brought in on five or six other communities across Alberta. I thought that song was already taken, and it wouldn't be appropriate to use it on a community like Fort McMurray when so many others already have that.

I looked at some music melodies that I thought would be appropriate, the Talking Heads' *Burning down the House*. I like the band; I don't like the song anymore. *Paper Towns* had *Runaway*, *Burning*, and *Look Outside*, three good songs that I thought would be appropriate. Then, of course, there's the Pretenders' *My City Was Gone*. That was another song that would be great to talk about today because that's ultimately what's happening here with the pile on that this government is doing to my community, my hometown, Madam Speaker. Like, it's my home. It's not just where I work. It's where I live, where I was raised, where my children were born, and where I plan on dying. It's my home, and they're not treating it with respect.

I kept going through the list, and I thought that, well, John Mayer's *Please Be Patient with Me* would be a more appropriate song because, Madam Speaker, I'm not really worried about my house burning down anymore; I'm worried about this government. I'm worried about what they're doing. They are treating my community and the citizens like frogs in a boiling pot of water. That's what's happening. They don't even see it, and that's one of my major problems with this government, not only their lack of any accountability whatsoever but their lack of actually talking to people and getting out from under the dome and recognizing the pain that they're inflicting upon their citizens.

That's why I thought, you know, that the most appropriate would be something along the lines of Audio Adrenaline, who came up with a song called *Goodbye*. I went through the lyrics, and I thought that that would be an appropriate song because what I'm planning on working on full-time is to overthrow this government. I know that's what my citizens want me to do. A recent poll in my community said that 80 per cent of my community members are in favour of what Wildrose and its leader and our shadow minister of Health are doing for the people of Fort McMurray. So *Goodbye* would be the most appropriate melody.

In fact, I looked at it a little bit more, and I wanted to send this song out to the people of Fort McMurray because I believe this government owes the people of Fort McMurray answers, answers to why the fire happened in the first place, why the protection was not there for them, and then to the response to that fire. We're going to get into that, Madam Speaker, I promise you. There are going to be many opportunities in the future, and we will get to the bottom of it, and there will be blame. There will be blame. [interjections] They can say what they want, and they can laugh and snicker, but there will be blame thrown on this.

3:10

It is the government's responsibility to keep their citizens safe. You know why I get upset, Madam Speaker? Because they don't recognize the importance of the actions they do here today, that happen to the people of Alberta. They don't. It sickens me. [interjections] They're making fun over there. They should come and see my community, talk to those people, but they're too afraid. They should come and talk to them. As it says in the song *Goodbye* by Audio Adrenaline, "You'll be fine tomorrow, the sun will [shine]." And it will, because the sun will shine again on Fort McMurray when the NDP government is gone. It will shine again on Alberta. The light will be back on Alberta, the light of prosperity. We will be a beacon on the hill again, the example to the rest of the world of what good governments can do.

Now, Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to talk about Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, and I'm hoping that's their long-term plan. Unfortunately, the melody that they keep singing is: boil the frog, and let's see if they notice. Well, I notice, and the people in Fort McMurray are awake, and they notice too, as do the people of Alberta. That's why the polls are so bad for this government, why the people of Alberta have rejected them, rejected them everywhere, just about. It's soon going to be very much close to this place that they will reject them, because I know Albertans are smart, and they see that this government is not serving them well at all.

Now, I have the privilege of being from Fort McMurray. I love the place. I do believe it's the greatest place in the world to live, to raise a family, to work, to have dreams, to fulfill those dreams. It does that for many, many people, thousands of people. People right across this province and people right across this country recognize how important Fort McMurray, the oil sands, and, generally, the quality of life there are.

When I moved there, there were 1,700 people. Most people don't recognize that Fort McMurray is, by itself, quite a ways away from any major population. In fact, it's quite a ways away from any other population except for the citizens of the regional municipality or Fort MacKay or Anzac, Conklin, Fort Chipewyan, many of the small communities that surround Fort McMurray. For the most part, we do our shopping in Fort McMurray because you have to make a five-hour car ride to be able to shop in Edmonton, the only other large shopping centre outside of Fort McMurray.

You know, the people of Fort McMurray are resourceful. They're entrepreneurial. They're hard working. They're creative people.

There are a lot of patents that come out of that area. There's a lot of work that comes out of that area. There are a lot of taxes that come out of that area, a lot of premiums for unemployment insurance, lots of premiums for the Canada pension plan that come out of the workers in that area, that they don't see. It's not really an insurance plan. It's just taking money to give to Ottawa so they can decide who gets it. That's what unemployment insurance is in this country. You know and I know, Madam Speaker, that only 38 per cent of Albertans actually get coverage for unemployment insurance while other parts of the country, including Quebec and others, get 58 per cent or 100 per cent in some cases.

Now, that's because, Madam Speaker, we've been treated less than well in northern Alberta for some period of time by not just this government but by previous governments. That's why I came back to government just a few years ago and wanted to have the opportunity to run again for the people of Fort McMurray, so I could see if we could make a difference: a difference in health care, a difference in education, a difference in a long-term facility for our seniors.

In fact, I made a list. I was trying to think of all the things that the province and the federal government have ignored for the people of Fort McMurray for some time. You're not going to believe this, Madam Speaker. I know there was a recent investment in a long-term care facility in Leduc, for instance. I don't begrudge that at all. I think it's good to invest in long-term care because our governments in the last 15, 20 years have really ignored our seniors, have done a terrible job, a horrendous job of managing our seniors' care. I went through a list, and the first one where we've been ignored and, frankly, not treated right was in long-term care.

The second one was highway 63, Madam Speaker. For many years it was called the highway of death. In fact, in 2005, when I was a federal MP, I asked my citizens to come forward and sign a petition. About 6,000, 7,000 people signed a petition in less than two months. I took that petition, and I gave it to the Premier at the time here in Alberta, and I also gave it to the Prime Minister. I tabled it in both Houses, got it to both levels of government. You know what? Within five months of that being tabled, we had a \$150 million commitment from the federal government to twin highway 63. That was supposed to be done in four years. I was the parliamentary secretary of Transport at the time. I was very proud to make that announcement. The provincial government at the time was putting in about 55 per cent of the total funds. It was supposed to take four years to be done. It took 10 years. The PC government was not the greatest at efficiency. This government is no better. In fact, I would say it's worse. But we finally got most of it twinned, and it's a good highway.

I believe that as a result of that twinning and as a result of governments in February 2006 coming forward with the funds to twin that highway, lives were saved. Lives were saved. We drove against the traffic leaving the fire, my friend the shadow minister of Health and I. He was actually driving. I was in my seat belt, and I was pretty nervous. Five lanes of traffic coming toward us. There's no way we would have had no loss of life, in my opinion, without that twinned highway. That's because policies matter and politics matter, and if that fire would have happened three years earlier, I believe there would have been deaths, a serious number, and I believe most experts that have analyzed the fire would believe that as well. So that's number two.

Land prices. Let me tell you about land prices. In 1997 we had a PC minister come to Fort McMurray, and she asked a group of people whether they wanted more land released. The group of people, Madam Speaker? Landowners. Good one. Let's ask all the landowners if they want more Alberta government land to be released to the public. That should be a really clear answer: no. No?

Why? Because they have a monopoly on the land, just like this government and the previous government had a monopoly on the land around Fort McMurray. They managed it so badly that for a lot in Fort McMurray, a small zero lot line, you pay \$450,000. Now, this isn't downtown city centre. This is out in the boonies. You know, in 1993 I paid \$81,000 for a house in Fort McMurray. That house sold for \$570,000 about 10 years later. I bought one for \$185,000 in 2003 and it sold for \$750,000 just about 15 years later. Those houses are not affordable for normal people. And they're not big houses. They're normal, little houses. The one that I bought for \$81,000 was about 800 square feet on the main level, a very humble home.

Albertans are put in this situation, Fort McMurray residents are put in this situation by this government and the previous government. Bad management of our resources and bad management of tax dollars: that's what it is. As a result of that, our land prices are too much, and they don't want to release land because then – guess what? – land prices go down, and everybody gets mad because they paid \$750,000, a million dollars for a home that in Calgary would be worth \$500,000 and in rural Alberta maybe \$150,000. Like, these houses that we buy in Fort McMurray: the high average price of houses and land is a result of the negligence of this government and the previous one. And I'm only on number three, Madam Speaker.

Congestion. When you have 20,000 or 30,000 people that go down the same highway every day, back and forth 35 kilometres for work, maybe – just maybe – a government could plan better so that people, my citizens, my family don't have to wait two hours in line to go 35 kilometres after a 12-hour workday. Maybe before a 12-hour workday they wouldn't have to wait two hours in line. Maybe a government that has the ability to understand how many workers are going to be coming to Alberta and to Fort McMurray specifically for the oil sands, which is every single government because they lease the land and they approve the plant, so they must know what's going to happen. Why wouldn't they build enough infrastructure so that those people that have to travel that 30 or 35 kilometres don't have to wait two hours in traffic morning and night? That's four hours of their work life after a 12-hour shift. Now, that's happened for years, Madam Speaker.

I didn't put this on my list, but I just thought of how many times I've had an opportunity to get a Tim Hortons coffee in Fort McMurray. Well, Madam Speaker, I can do it now, but two years ago: 20 people in line ahead of me. In fact, it was so bad that they had to stop allowing people to line up on the major artery because it was causing traffic problems with a major piece of road.

Infrastructure. Congestion is not just when going to work and back. It's everywhere. There is a lineup to get through town to get to the highway to get to the plant sites. It's crazy. I invite you to come and see crazy. It's lack of infrastructure, lack of planning, lack of good management.

3:20

Health care. Now, the plant sites are required to have their own health facility, and they do, but if you go to the emergency room in Fort McMurray – wow – bring your sleeping bag because it's going to be a while. That's what we've had to deal with not just in the last week or the last month or the last year. We've dealt with that for 15 years. Not enough government management. Well, maybe I should rephrase that: not enough good government management. Our health care is important, and when your child is sick and you've only got one regional hospital – one hospital – you would like some timeliness for the fact that your child is ill. You would like the opportunity to know that you can get into the emergency room in Fort McMurray faster than you can in Edmonton after a five-hour

drive, but that's not the case, and it hasn't been the case. That's what people do; they go to Edmonton instead of waiting in our emergency area. That's crazy. That's crazy, especially when we're supposed to have universal health care. Now, a lineup for a waiting list is not universal health care. That's universal waiting list. That's not real.

That's why the job these folks do – maybe snickering and giggling is good for them, but it's not good for the people that listen and watch this. They want this government to take it seriously because it is their life, and their life is hurting. They are in pain. Right now a record for Alberta: a hundred thousand people collecting unemployment insurance. Wow. What a record to brag about after only two years in government. Twenty thousand jobs last month? Seriously? Madam Speaker, there's at least that number of people, a hundred thousand people, that are unemployed in Alberta that are not collecting unemployment insurance, and they don't even have it in the records that they're unemployed. There are way more than a hundred thousand Albertans unemployed. Go to the real world. You can see them there.

Now, number five is about a tax increase, and that is hurting people, too, because the tax increase, of course, is going to be on the municipal taxes that we're talking about here. At one time this government said that it would be an indefinite grandfathering of the people of the municipalities that are currently under their ratio. Then it went: well, maybe not indefinitely. Now it's to the point where we're changing the legislation so we can sneak in late at night and do it when you're not watching. That's what they're doing. That's what regulations mean. They don't have to bring it back here. They just do a regulation to say: when nobody is watching, we're going to change the law, and we're going to make sure, for the people of the Wood Buffalo municipality, that their taxes go up. They won't even know it. That's not transparency. That's not good governance. That's not accountability. That's hiding what you're doing to the people. It's disgusting, Madam Speaker, especially after the fire, especially after what they've done with income taxes, the cap on oil sands emissions.

Cancelling the Northern Gateway. That was number 7. People say: well, we got two pipelines. Well, I haven't seen any pipelines in the ground. I haven't seen any shovels anywhere. I've been looking for that social licence; can't find that either. But I do know one thing for sure. The NDP in B.C., if they get elected, are not going to allow that pipeline. Madam Speaker, we all know and you know, of course, that the NDP are one big, happy party right across the country, and they plan these little fun sessions about strategy together. We know that. The Northern Gateway pipeline would have brought a lot of investment, a lot of investment into Alberta and a lot of investment into Canada. It would have been very good for the people of northwestern B.C., very good for the aboriginal communities there. I've seen the success in northern Alberta, working side by side with the aboriginal communities. It's incredible to see. The benefits are amazing, long term, and great. I'd like to see those benefits in northwestern British Columbia. I think both the Prime Minister and this Premier missed a tremendous opportunity. A tremendous opportunity.

Now, Madam Speaker, number eight was getting both B.C. parties mad at them. These are our neighbours. These are the people that we need to talk to in relation to laws, in relation to pipelines going through their province, in relation to having their energy come to us if necessary, good relationships. But it's not just the Liberal Party of B.C., that's currently in power, that is mad and doesn't like this government, based upon their comments. They more or less said just a few weeks ago, when kicking off the campaign, that the Alberta NDP is just spending money like crazy

and is going to put our province into the drink, and that's what's happening.

It's not just the Liberal government in B.C. that can't get along with these folks. It's the NDP government in B.C. as well, so with both governments, no matter which one gets elected in B.C., we're not going to have good relationships. That's not what we need to do in politics. Although my job is to be Mr. Negative here in this place – that's what I was elected to do, to oppose and to be Mr. Negative – I'm a very positive person, so it's difficult for me. Madam Speaker, how do you make both left-leaning governments in B.C. mad at you at the same time? Like, it's bizarre.

Now we've got number nine, not talking to the Saskatchewan government. Now, that's the people on the other side of our province. On the west side both parties are mad at us, and the only party that really has a realistic chance of winning in Saskatchewan is the Saskatchewan Party, and they don't even talk to them. They don't get along. Now, if you don't get along with your neighbours, maybe it's time to pack up and move, and I could think of nothing that would please Albertans more than these folks packing up and leaving government.

Now, Madam Speaker, I did have number 11 as the cap on oil sands emissions. You know, it's already oversubscribed. They've already sold more leases and approved more projects than can be done under this cap, so there's going to be some more legal battles. The NDP government, this government, is famous for it. They even have Alberta companies suing Albertans. That's amazing. I can't believe that, but that's what they do.

Number 13 was business taxes. They do hurt, Madam Speaker, businesses taxes. It's very expensive to employ people in Fort McMurray, and when you pay more for people's wages and when you pay more for taxes, it makes you less competitive. It often means that because of some of the other challenges that face them in Fort McMurray – and there are some tough challenges to being in business – they're not going to be in business there. They're going to pack up because they can sell from Edmonton all their products in Fort McMurray. That's what we've been fighting for a long time in local businesses. I heard some talk today about a priority on local hiring. I think that's a good practice. I can't imagine anything more important than the people of Fort McMurray getting the first shot at all the jobs in Fort McMurray, just like I hope the people of Edmonton get the first shot at all the jobs in Edmonton and Albertans get all the jobs in Alberta. Definitely they should get the first shot and then, I would suggest, Canadians and others if the need is there. Hopefully, the need is not there if the government is managing things properly.

Now, Madam Speaker, they've also brought in increased regulation on the oil and gas sector and, of course, increased taxes. Those all hurt.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader, I'm having some difficulty tying all of your comments to Bill 8, so I would encourage if you could just kind of, you know, be a little more direct to the bill. Thank you. Please continue.

Mr. Jean: Sure, Madam Speaker. You see, this bill is actually bringing in place a tax system that is not fair for the people of Fort McMurray, just like all these other things are not fair for the people of Fort McMurray.

I was on number 13, but I'm going to go to number 15 because that's the carbon tax. It's very similar to this situation, where they come in and they say: yes, we're going to do something. Or they don't mention it. Like, in this case, the carbon tax is very similar because they said that we were going to be grandfathered because they recognize the extraordinary circumstances of communities like

Fort McMurray and Cold Lake and others, but they snuck it in. They didn't campaign on it, like the carbon tax that's going to cost Albertans \$3 billion, \$5 billion in just a couple of years. That's \$2,500 out of each family's pockets in Alberta. That's how it's similar; of course, they said one thing and did the exact opposite. They're trying to sneak it in through regulations so nobody notices and they can do whatever they want.

That's why it's so similar, Madam Speaker, just like number 15, the GST on the carbon tax. They never even checked it out. They didn't know there was going to be GST on the carbon tax. Did they know that the MGA was going to bring in regulations that actually change it in the dark of night, when nobody's watching? Just like the carbon tax, just like the GST on the carbon tax: they didn't even know it was going to be applied, yet we now find that it could be over a hundred million dollars that the people of Alberta are stuck paying because this government didn't do their homework, because they didn't understand what the ramifications are, even the Minister of Finance suggesting that. Shocking.

Now, number 17, Madam Speaker, was the fire burning down our houses. That is another one very similar to the MGA, where we have a government that's responsible to bring in an act, responsible to bring in regulations and be transparent with the people of Alberta and protect the people of Alberta, protect their economy. Now, the Municipal Government Act specifically says, if you want to know the relevance, "to provide good government." It does. It says that in section 3. It outlines the purposes of a municipality, and I can't imagine a more important purpose for this government than to prevent fires from burning down houses and to take all steps possible. That's a pretty tough blow to take, and the people of Fort McMurray really have a lot of questions on that.

3:30

I did a town hall the other day, and it was so oversubscribed that the phones shut down. They shut down, Madam Speaker, because there were too many people on the line and too many people wanted to talk. I can tell you that I heard it very clearly from people that they could not believe that this government was not held to account for what happened in Fort McMurray. They just don't understand it, and they want answers. They're not getting them, and I think that they've been more than patient.

Now, the Municipal Government Act also talks about what the relationship between the provincial government and municipal government should be. The provincial government is in charge. That's why it's called the Municipal Government Act, because the Premier, the province are in charge of the municipality and in charge of delegating authority to them. Madam Speaker, it's ultimately the province's responsibility to keep the people of Fort McMurray safe and to keep the economy of Alberta in good shape. It's important that they do that. They're not doing that, and they haven't done that.

Madam Speaker, the biggest shock in all of this and the most obvious negligence that I've seen in this place since I've been here and in governments before is the amount of time it took for them to approve the rebuild. They seem to forget that there are 2,500 families that don't have homes. Not only that, but probably a thousand of those people didn't know when they could rebuild their houses.

How would you like it if today your house was burned down and you didn't know for five and a half months that you could even rebuild it? What do you think you would do? You're the frog in the pot of boiling water. You know what you're going to do? You're going to leave town, and that's why right now 10,000 to 15,000 of my family, friends, and residents and the people that count on me to fight their fight here are not going back to Fort McMurray. I

believe most of it is a result of this government not allowing us to know when to rebuild our homes, when we could rebuild them, and when we were allowed to get back in. I believe it was their responsibility, Madam Speaker, and I blame them, and I'm going to make sure that the people of Fort McMurray know that, because it is.

Certainty in your government is just like stability in your government. Those are signals you can send to the people, and this government has screwed that up. They should have got on the ground, let people know when it was safe to come back, and allowed them certainty in the regulations and the understanding: "My house was burned down by a fire. I'm not allowed to rebuild it because of a flood. Now I can rebuild it because of a flood after five and a half months under certain conditions. I never started the fire. I never let it burn. Why should I not be allowed to rebuild my house the same way it was for 30 years before that?" Because of governance. Because of this government. Madam Speaker, I don't think that's fair.

Now, I'm on 11, but I want to talk about business taxes. That's number 12. Business taxes, Madam Speaker, are the highest – highest – of all the prairie provinces in western Canada. Those business taxes, we heard today, are about \$830 a year. Because it's a 20 per cent increase in corporate taxes, it's going to come out of people's pockets. It does affect the people in Fort McMurray a lot because when corporations don't have enough money to pay their staff, they find solutions to it. Right now their solution is: let's fly them in and out of camps to work in the oil sands. That's not a solution. That's a Band-Aid, and it's a Band-Aid that is hurting the people of Fort McMurray and, I think, in my mind, creating a lot of instability. I understand why the oil sands companies do that, because they have to answer to their shareholder, but I think there needs to be an incentive for people to stay in Fort McMurray and to live there and build families and to create a beautiful environment. It is the greatest place in the world to live, but people need to give it a chance, and when their government is not on their side, they won't give it a chance. That's why people have left. That's why people are not happy there.

I know some people there that have been there 50 years, Madam Speaker. She told me a few months ago: I can't live here any longer; I don't feel safe. Their house was not burned down, but they don't feel safe. Fifty years. Her husband is a bush pilot and had a bush pilot plane company that flew in some of the most dangerous places and weathers that is imaginable for a small plane, and his wife doesn't feel safe in her home after living there for 50 years. The stories go on. The increased regulations from this government are slowing down the oil sands and are causing a tremendous amount of problems on the ground.

Now, Madam Speaker, I know I only have an hour and a half, but I do want to talk a little bit about what we have seen in Fort McMurray because I know everybody wants to hear from me for the next 90 minutes. From 2000 until 2015 the population of Fort McMurray grew by 143 per cent – 143 per cent. Wow. That's like taking the population of Alberta today, 4.3 million people, and in 15 years it would be 10.5 million. Can you imagine a population growth in Alberta by that much? It's staggering. The entire province of Alberta in the same time period only grew by 38 per cent, just by way of comparison. Those changes, that boom-bust cycle in Fort McMurray, causes other problems. That's why we need to be treated differently, just like other resource communities. We do because what we have is, all of a sudden, a tremendous amount of pressure on our infrastructure, and nobody comes to our aid, including the provincial government and especially the federal

government. That's why we feel like a frog boiling in a pot of water. We're just not sure how close we are to seeing that water boil.

I've seen both booms and busts in our town, and I've seen the impact of bad government policy. I remember one policy that I never thought would be outdone, the policy of the national energy program by Pierre Trudeau. I didn't think we would see anything worse. As you know, Madam Speaker, I sold office supplies and printing and office furniture door to door during that period of time in Fort McMurray, and almost no businesses survived that. In fact, many people moved out of town, and many people lost their homes and their houses. They lost all hope, and that's what bad government policies do. As I mentioned, I never thought I'd see a worse one until this carbon tax came in with no plan. It was not campaigned on, and now the federal government has almost doubled it. I think it's a bad tax because it's going to cost everybody so much money.

I've seen the local stresses that are caused by lack of involvement by both the provincial and the federal government levels. It's easy to look down on the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and say: "Oh, those folks have lots of money. They have lots of infrastructure. They have everything they could possibly need." Let me tell you a little bit about my house, my house that was built in Uranium City. It was built in Uranium City, Madam Speaker, out of cedar. It was an older house. It was built in the '50s, I think in '54. The back alley: not paved. It was a dirt road. Front street: the strip was paved but right in front of my house was not paved. Dirt. Now, it's a small lot: 44 feet wide, 130 feet long. I promise you that it was nothing special, but it was my home, and my infrastructure doesn't compare to any infrastructure I've seen around this province, not the municipal infrastructure.

We've now seen some changes, some good changes. We've seen the MacDonald Island complex. That is an incredible beacon of success, I believe. It was a very expensive bit of success, but it's an indoor facility for the people of Fort McMurray to enjoy some of the hockey activities they like and swimming and a water park and a whole bunch of other things, and it was partially paid for – you've got it, Madam Speaker – by oil companies because their employees used it, and I thought that was good partnership between the private sector and the public sector on that.

But, Madam Speaker, we didn't get the support we needed, and as a result of that, when our population went up to 125,000 from just 51,000, we all suffered. We suffered, notwithstanding that the government knew that it was coming. I saw all the reports. I saw people come to the chamber of commerce, who said: "It's coming. It's coming. It's coming. It's going to happen." I saw it in the '90s. Everybody knew what was coming on. I saw reports from all the plant sites. The federal government, when I got there in 2004, knew it was coming. The provincial government knew it was coming, yet nobody planned for it. They just thought we would just take it and be done with it.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader, again, your speech sounds like it's more of a response to the throne speech or the Budget Address, or I could even see it in the context of maybe Bill 10, but with Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, I'm just really struggling to find a connection, so if you could please keep your comments more on point, I'd appreciate it.

3:40

Mr. Jean: I will, Madam Speaker, and thanks for pointing that out. In fact, in section 3 of the Municipal Government Act it specifically says "to provide services, facilities or other things." This is a facility, so talking about MacDonald Island in Fort McMurray is exactly what the Municipal Government Act is supposed to do, and

that's why it's relevant to today. MacDonald Island: a great facility, but it's one shining light out of the entire community that doesn't feel like they're treated properly.

You know, the infrastructure is, of course, under the Municipal Government Act because it is governed by the province of Alberta, and the Alberta government is in charge of the Municipal Government Act and puts that authority down to the local municipality to administer, but it doesn't mean that just because the Alberta government gives up the authority, they don't have the responsibility, Madam Speaker. That's what I'm talking about today, under the Municipal Government Act the responsibility of this government. When they do a bait and switch, when they say one thing and do another, that doesn't show good governance. It doesn't at all.

I would say that it does also say, "to develop and maintain safe and viable communities." Now, speaking of safe, we have one of the largest RCMP detachments in western Canada, I think number two largest, about 170 officers or so. We have one of the largest, during the boom times, crime rates of any city our size. Yet the average experience for an officer in Fort McMurray, when I was there practising law, was three years out of depot – three years – because, Madam Speaker, of the tax situation in Fort McMurray and the other investments, the services, and facilities that we have there that aren't adequate, that aren't anything like the ones here in Edmonton, nothing like the ones in Calgary.

That's why I'm saying to you, Madam Speaker, right now – right now here – and I'm saying to the government: please, hold back the legislation that enables you to bring in regulations in the middle of the night to impose a dramatic tax increase to my citizens. Give them certainty. Give them stability. Let them know that this government is going to stand behind them after the great fire. Let them know that they're not going to see a tax increase that's double or triple for their house that they can't afford at a time when they're picking on the people in the oil and gas industry. Yes, I say "picking on" because that's exactly what this NDP government is doing. They are trying to boil the frog and shut down the oil sector. Now, they think the frog doesn't notice, but I'm noticing. I'm going to do everything I can every single day here to stop them from turning up the heat. Madam Speaker, I can't wait to sing that song *Goodbye*, just like I think most Albertans want to sing, too.

It's no secret that our party believes firmly in getting better value for taxpayers' money. I believe that. I don't believe that we should just willy-nilly throw money around. I think that it's important to have a good system and to have good management of that money. But there are other issues here: the long-term predictability and stability that this government could give the people of Fort McMurray right now to understand that they're not going to stab them in the back, Madam Speaker. They're going to have their back. They're going to protect them. They're going to make sure that they can continue to work and live in Fort McMurray and in northern Alberta.

Cold Lake has the same issues. Madam Speaker, we can't all move to Edmonton and Calgary because a lot of jobs are outside of there. There are jobs like the resource sector that create a lot of wealth. There are jobs like our coal sector that did create a lot of wealth until this government shut it down. Our farm sector: that was doing extremely well, but, of course, Bill 6. It's the lack of consultation and trying to sneak something through in the middle of the night. It doesn't help. Trying to create regulations so they can do whatever they want doesn't help. It doesn't send the stability to our community.

But it is the government, this government, the Alberta government, that's ultimately responsible for what happens in Fort McMurray and for all of Alberta, what happens to our municipal government

rate of taxation, what happens ultimately for people moving out of Alberta or staying in Alberta. They talk about 20,000 jobs. Well, you have to look at the 100,000 they lost and look at it in its totality. They lost 80,000 jobs since they got elected, Madam Speaker, and it does change month to month, but overall we've seen one of the highest unemployment rates we've ever seen in Calgary, 10 per cent. It's the highest rate of any city in Canada: 10 per cent in Calgary.

That's primarily as a result of this government's policies on the oil and gas sector. We know Saskatchewan is still the fourth-best place in the world to invest in the oil and gas industry. Alberta is not even in the top 40, and that's because of government policies. We use the same pipelines. We have almost the same laws, the same constitutional obligations. Yet Saskatchewan is doing so well, and we're doing so poorly. It is the government, Madam Speaker. It's the NDP government. It's either negligence, or they're trying to boil the frog. I don't think it's good because I don't think people like it, and I think people see clearly what's going on.

Given what we've done as far as contributions to the entire country, Madam Speaker, those lineups, those 12-hour shifts, the lack of infrastructure, all of those things are reasons to look at this situation differently. One of the reasons why I got back into this was just simply to try to get a fair shake. We don't want anything special. We just want to be treated fairly, and "fairly" means that when you have a situation where a population can explode in 15 years by 150 per cent, you have to treat it differently. We had a previous government that didn't release enough land, so the land prices skyrocketed, and almost no one in the world could afford a house there. I think we should be treated differently as a result and managed into a situation over time, and giving long-term, predictable changes to that legislation and regulation would be a good start.

Now, in Bill 8 we see how the government is giving itself the power to decide a change to the 5 to 1 ratio. With all due respect to my colleagues on the other side, I don't think there's a lot of trust from the people of Alberta. I can assure them, if they haven't heard it, that the people of Fort McMurray do not have any trust for this government anymore. They don't. They don't feel like they can take this government at their word right now. That's why I'm saying to them: "Back up a little bit. We know what you're going to do, and the people of Alberta and Fort McMurray know what you're going to do. They're very upset. We know that this signal that you send will have long-term ramifications, just like the royalty review did." That's right, Madam Speaker. You know.

I went to Toronto, I went to New York, and I went to Washington. I talked to business investors there. They said: "Only one way you're going to get us to invest in Alberta again. Change the government." That's what they said, Madam Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Really?

Mr. Jean: Yes, that's what they said. They did say it.

In fact, not just one but every single one I talked to knew what was going on in Alberta, and they said: if you want us to invest there, get rid of the government. Now, the fact is that we need this government to change course. We need it to go in a different direction. We need it to, honestly, Madam Speaker, do what they say and say what they do.

Now, they say that they have the backs of the people of Fort McMurray. Show us. Show us that you have the backs of the people of Alberta. Reverse these taxes. Eliminate the carbon tax. Stand up against the Prime Minister and say: "Justin Trudeau, no. If you want to come and take away our rights, our resources, which belong to us under the Constitution, you have to go through us first." Have a

Premier that actually has our back. Have a Premier that actually stands up and fights for us.

Bill 8 is just another example, Madam Speaker, of a government that's ignoring the issues that we've had to deal with for years, the issues of not just Fort McMurray, not just Cold Lake but the issues of many communities around Alberta. The signals that are sent to the AUMA and many other organizations, municipal organizations, are the signals that are causing so much distrust, so many situations that are not very friendly to this government, and something that I personally find not the best step forward for democracy. If it's not handled properly, if this is not implemented correctly and managed appropriately, there will be more significant consequences. Those consequences will be foreclosures on houses, on businesses, just like in Grande Cache a few months ago, where a couple moved from their home into their car. I saw it in the '80s. It's happening now again.

This government needs to be there for them, to send the proper signals, to make sure they don't send the wrong ones, and to understand that we are in a unique position, like many areas around the province, and respond accordingly. Let's remember the amount of pain and the frustration that the people of Fort McMurray actually went through last year, the shock. Madam Speaker, I can assure you that it's not over. It's not. People are in pain, and how this government has responded has not been mature. It's not been a good way to respond.

3:50

But it's not too late. They can turn the corner. They can support the people of Fort McMurray, and they can support the people of Alberta through good policies on municipal governments. Madam Speaker, there is still time to correct this problem. I know the Minister of Finance was listening to me with passion earlier. I'm hoping maybe he'll reverse his decision on this. There is still time to do it, to amend the legislation, and to ensure that the residents of Wood Buffalo are not punished for what I consider to be terrible management of our economy. It's not too late. We all learn from mistakes.

I would really hope that they reach out to the opposition, which has two members here in the House from Fort McMurray, and that they have an opportunity to listen to us. Five hours' drive away is a long way away. I know the Premier is busy, I know the ministers are busy, but these are real people, with real lives and real families. They just want something positive to happen instead of something negative. This government is just bringing a whole bunch of negative, and I wish they would just stop.

Now, Madam Speaker, I am done with my speech, but I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned April 20: Mr. Hunter speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. You still have 11 minutes.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was in the middle of talking about Bill 10 and talking about the municipal transit and transportation grant programs, that they've jumped almost five times in value this year over last year, from \$125 million to over \$619 million this year. The largest piece of this is the GreenTRIP, coming in at over \$484 million. This is because the province needs to partner with federal public transit infrastructure funds worth

almost \$285 million in Alberta. We can expect lots of light rail transit expansion in Edmonton and Calgary as well as new buses in other centres like Cold Lake and Lethbridge.

With GreenTRIP sunsetting, a new replacement program for transit has come along. The Alberta community transit fund has \$40 million in it. I look forward to hearing the details of what this all entails. The minister denied that this is his rural Greyhound replacement. He also indicated that more details are to be worked out on existing rural handibuses like the Rocky View handibus service and medical transportation.

A favourite program of municipalities, the strategic transportation infrastructure program, is back, with \$35 million for community airports, local road bridges, resource roads, and local municipal initiatives. The minister indicates he has 170 requests, totalling \$140 million, vying for the only \$35 million that they've allotted.

Another municipal favourite is the municipal waste-water program, coming in at \$50 million. Water for life, at \$55 million, along with partnering money from the federal clean water/waste-water fund worth \$165 million, and another \$25 million for First Nations water: record amounts of money are being spent on water infrastructure in Alberta, \$295 million in total. Even at these levels of funding, places like Okotoks can't get confirmation of provincial funding for a waterline from Calgary. Rural water co-ops are still ineligible for water grants or getting funding for hooking up to existing municipal systems. Add on over \$94 million in debt-servicing charges, and there you have it, Madam Speaker, over \$1.77 billion in operating expenses for Alberta Transportation.

But that's not the whole picture. There's still over \$1.2 billion in capital investments to be made. We have some office hardware like computers and stuff in strategic services getting over \$4 million in funding. Then we have the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads getting over \$273 million in funding this year. Most of that is for the southwest Calgary ring road, a project that has been on the drawing board for decades. There is \$30 million for highway 63 twinning work that needs to wrap up, stuff like the second-stage paving.

But the big money this year goes to highway twinning, widening, and expansion projects. I asked the minister about two important projects: the Ray Gibbon Drive and highway 2 realignment around St. Albert, and the highway 3 twinning, like, the Fort Macleod bypass or through the Crowsnest Pass. While some of highway 3 is on the radar, much remains to be done.

We in southern Alberta have been asking for highway 3 to be twinned for over a decade. Here we are the least impacted by the energy sector downturn, with a strong, sustainable, and growing agricultural base, and we're being left in the field, as it were. I just wanted to be on the record as reminding the minister that we pay our taxes, too, down in southern Alberta, and we need to be able to have this road twinned. Funding the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads is important, but so, too, is funding the twinning of highway 3.

We watched with envy as highway 63, albeit only 200 kilometres of it, got twinned. Though the traffic counts weren't there, the accident count was. The lack of action on highway 3 is causing resentment against this government throughout southern Alberta. With the minister making waves in the Castle area touting tourism and new metallurgical coal developments proposed in the Crowsnest Pass, push is going to come to shove. There will be people killed on the highway, and eventually this road will get the scream that it needs to be twinned. I implore the minister and his department to do the right thing and get on with this project from the west end and work their way east.

What Transportation also did this year was that they cut the budget for interchanges, intersections, and safety upgrades by over

\$32 million over two years, to only a little over \$61 million. This will barely buy one and a half diamond interchanges. Meanwhile Chestermere needs three, and the Balzac one on highway 2 needs to be fixed, the one that the minister made CrossIron Mills pay for in order to install a partial interchange to relieve congestion. The CrossIron Mills fix wasn't enough.

Bridge construction projects has \$68 million in it this year. The minister and I in estimates discussed at length the new twinned bridge for Fort Saskatchewan, teasing out details, and the minister admitted in so many words that Alberta Transportation messed up by not twinning this bridge sooner.

Remember when I was talking about crack filling? If the crack filling does not get done in a timely fashion, it results in a higher rehabilitation cost. Here it is up almost \$111 million over two years. Provincial rehabilitation will run \$388 million this year. There is a lot of paving that needs to be done.

My colleague the MLA for Battle River-Wainwright managed to tease an answer out of the minister about the building Canada fund national and regional projects component. Of the \$476 million remaining, there is \$18.7 million for bridge renewal, \$25.8 million for intersection reconstruction projects, and \$21 million for highway rehabilitation. The minister is waiting for federal approval to spend this money for projects that include the Springbank off-stream reservoir to protect Calgary from flooding; the bridge in Peace River; Sandy Lake water treatment; projects on highways 2, 19, 43, and 63; and major pavement rehabilitation projects in central and southern Alberta.

This leads me to water management infrastructure, the dams. There is over \$39 million on this, and it is not for Springbank or McLean Creek to protect Calgary. The minister says that it's in the Environment department's budget, but we know that the Infrastructure department is waiting for approval from Ottawa to spend building Canada fund money to pay for this project. The minister might want to clarify on the funding for Springbank his department's role in delivering on various parts of the budget. The minister will also want to clarify around the murky nature about this building Canada fund money and the lack of transparency until my colleague for Battle River-Wainwright asked the questions in estimates.

4:00

Finally, there is an \$18 million line item to help with flood mitigation and recovery from the 2013 flood in southern Alberta, for a grand total of just over \$1.2 billion in capital. But there is more. You see, there are financial transactions that are recorded and that occur. Salt, sand, and gravel are needed for the roads for \$50 million as is the debt repayment on the ring roads for just over \$45 million, for a total financial transaction of just over \$95 million.

There is a lot of spending here, Madam Speaker. While efforts are under way to find ways to reduce costs, the industry is going to have to find ways to deliver infrastructure at better prices.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments for the hon. member?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to Bill 10? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to enter some questions into the record on this particular portfolio. This is under line item 2.3, ticket processing, and this is in respect to photoradar. This line item was stated in the business plan. Under line item 2.3, for processing photoradar tickets issued by municipalities, my questions are as follows in that respect: what provincial oversight is there to ensure that sites for these locations are following the automated enforcement guidelines; has the minister been approving the locations listed in appendix A; has the minister ever rejected a location; and finally, when was the last time appendix A was updated, and why isn't it listed in open data?

My next questions, Madam Speaker, are to the Minister of Service Alberta. This is under outcome 2, that government is transparent and information is secure, and this is with key strategy 2.4, to enhance the availability and usability of information on Alberta's open data portal. My question for that is: why are the photoradar locations not listed in open data?

There were some corrections systems that had come under fire for certain cultures which discourage females from entering the workforce. This is under line item 8.2, with the adult remand and correctional centres, and I have a couple of questions with that. What is the female-to-male ratio of management and supervisory level FTEs? My second question is: has your ministry asked the Minister of Status of Women to conduct any GBA plus analysis to ensure that procedures and cultures are creating respectful workplaces for all employees? My third question with that is: has your ministry established an anticorruption task force to address serious drug smuggling allegations, amongst others, within corrections? Then I have two more questions. Are Narcan kits available to our corrections staff in the prison system? The next question is: how many Narcan kits have been administered in the Edmonton Remand Centre and the Calgary Remand Centre?

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, I believe you had moved second reading of the bill on behalf of the Minister of Finance. Did you wish to close debate?

Mr. S. Anderson: We don't want to close debate on it, no.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Then I will call the vote.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing the progress we have made today and the fact that it is Thursday afternoon, I move that we call it 4:30 and adjourn.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:05 p.m. to Monday, May 1, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, April 20, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 8 — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 205 — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 1, 2017

Day 25

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 1, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let each of us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, National Day of Mourning took place on Friday, April 28. Allow us to take a moment to remember and honour those who lost their lives and those who are injured due to workplace tragedy. Let us be reminded of our commitment to continue to improve the health and safety of all workers in our province and in our country. Let us ensure that we take action to prevent any further injuries, illnesses, and deaths.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute to members and former members of the Assembly who have passed away since we last met. With our admiration and our respect there is gratitude to the members of the families who share the burdens of public office and public service.

Mr. Bohdan (Bud) Zip
March 5, 1929, to April 19, 2017

The Speaker: Bohdan (Bud) Zip was with us from March 5, 1929, to April 19, 2017. Mr. Bud Zip served one term as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, from November 2, 1982, to May 7, 1986. Born in Saskatchewan, he completed his master of arts in economics at the University of Toronto in 1951. He drew upon this knowledge to contribute to the various committees on which he served during his term in office, including Public Accounts and the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee. Mr. Zip was active in Alberta's Ukrainian community, serving as treasurer and president of St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox congregation and president of the Calgary Ukrainian-Canadian committee.

In a moment of silent prayer or reflection I ask you to remember Mr. Zip.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration, respect, and gratitude to the members of the families who share the burdens of public office and public service, today I would like to welcome members of the Zip family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your name and remain standing until all members of your family have been introduced: Mr. David Zip, son of Mr. Zip; Catherine Zip, daughter of Mr. Zip; David Michael

Ford, grandson; Theresa Zip, daughter-in-law of Mr. Zip. Please accept our appreciation and thanks.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you students and staff from Westbrook school. Nestled away in the northwest side of my riding, the school strives to celebrate diversity in learning, to encourage students to think critically, and to develop lifelong thinkers. I get a great group of students whenever I meet with this school. I'm very pleased to have them here today, and I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much. A great privilege and pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the House the very special community school of Sunnyside school in the constituency of Calgary-Mountain View. Along with their teachers and staff – I'd like to introduce the principal, Sandra Trumper; Anne MacQuarrie, staff; Laura Clarke-Brubacher, assistant – a special welcome to Robyn Wanner, your daughter, Mr. Speaker; Kirsten Archuleta, my daughter, and her son, my grandson, Kace Archuleta, his second visit to the Legislature; and Tracey McLean, another parent, along with Steff Stephansson, another volunteer parent. Please stand – and all the students rise – and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: If you would allow me a special welcome here today. It's interesting that as you're in this activity, we cross paths in so many different ways. It's what makes us strong.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Merci, M. le Président. C'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour vous présenter une classe d'étudiants de l'école Monsignor William Irwin school in Edmonton-Whitemud. Pendant cette semaine ils vont participer à l'École à la Législature. Les étudiants et étudiantes sont accompagnés par leur enseignante, Mme Carol Dyck. Veuillez-vous lever, s'il vous plaît, pour recevoir la bienvenue chaleureuse de l'Assemblée.

The Speaker: Welcome.

You're going to be working on that language, right, hon. member?

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests that we have today in the gallery. First of all, Lieutenant Colonel, retired, Mr. Ray Hook, who has 40 years of proud service in uniform. With Ray is his wife, Elaine, and they have with them this afternoon Mikkel Storm Møller, who is a 17-year-old from Svendborg, Denmark. The Hooks have hosted Mikkel as part of the Camrose Rotary Club, so when Mikkel rises, you'll see all of the pins and buttons that he has as a proud Rotarian international exchange student. Today's visit is part of Mikkel's must-do of things to do while in Alberta, to come to our Assembly. He is also a guest of the Sergeant-at-Arms, and they've had the tour. If they would please rise – they have; thank you very much – and if we

could greet them with the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I hope you see this as an opportunity and not necessarily a burden.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Stephanie Shostak. Stephanie is a dedicated community volunteer. She's a board member with TESA. She's an active, politically engaged citizen and has most recently brought her skills to help organize with the Alberta Party. If I could ask Stephanie to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Scouts Venturer youth and Rover youth from Lac La Biche. Scouts Canada provides coed youth aged 5 to 26 the opportunity to enjoy outdoor adventures, to care for the environment, and to learn about teamwork and leadership. Today in the gallery we have Evan-Lee Alook, Zoe Bourassa, Leanne Cote, Madison Gawryletz, Tialandis Guinand, Aywastin Lewis, Sakastew Lewis, Dominic Simpson, Meagan Theroux, Christian Guinand, and Scott Lloyd. If they could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

National Day of Mourning

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every year on April 28 we honour and remember those who died from workplace-related illness and injury. It is known as the Day of Mourning. While I'm glad that we set aside a day each year to honour and remember those who died from workplace-related illness and injury, it's heartbreaking that this day is necessary and that every year some Albertans do not make it home at the end of the workday. Every worker has the right to come home safely at the end of the day, from the very first shift through to retirement. My hope is that the Day of Mourning motivates employers, workers, and government to continue working together to improve occupational health and safety in all industries across this province.

In 2016 there were 144 deaths related to workplace illnesses and injuries. These 144 people died because they went to work, but they were more than just workers. They were someone's grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, children, and friends. They were children's sports coaches and community volunteers. They touched lives and made their communities better places. Their contributions made our lives richer, and their absence makes our lives poorer. It's tragic to see families ripped apart, friends left heartbroken, co-workers traumatized, and our communities suffering. We can and we must do better. I believe employers, workers, and government all have a responsibility to create healthier, safer workplaces and a better world.

Mr. Speaker, this year's Day of Mourning also marks the 25th anniversary of the Westray mine disaster in Nova Scotia. On May 9, 1992, a large explosion in the Westray mine, in Plymouth, killed 26 underground miners, that day's entire shift of workers who were underground. A subsequent public inquiry blamed mine management and government regulators for what was deemed a preventable disaster. In response to the Westray mine disaster the federal government amended the Criminal Code to allow criminal charges in serious cases of workplace fatalities or injuries. That law applies to anyone on a work site who directs the work of others.

Mr. Speaker, I was proud last Friday when our government signed the Westray memorandum of understanding with 10 police services across the province. This memorandum will define protocols between occupational health and safety officers and police officers when investigating serious workplace incidents to help determine if criminal charges are warranted. By defining roles and protocols, police can focus on any criminal activity that may have occurred and investigators can ensure that their time is spent on the incident investigation, to the benefit of all Albertans. This was an important action for our government to take because it will help OH and S and police better serve and protect Albertans and help ensure that every worker comes home safe at the end of the day.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this Legislature and all Albertans to take a moment and remember those who lost their lives due to workplace illness or injury. And as we go forward, I encourage all Albertans to commit to working together to create healthier, safer workspaces.

Thank you.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Work is an important aspect of daily living. Having a job, earning one's own living, and being able to provide for our families and others plays a large part in life satisfaction and personal fulfillment. By working, people serve their communities and create value in this world. All jobs and all workers matter and make a difference.

Unfortunately, sometimes accidents at work have long-term or even fatal consequences. We must remember and honour all of those who have died, been injured, or made ill while on the job. In 2016 we, sadly, lost 144 Albertans to workplace illnesses or injuries. As a community we must take care of those who, while working, were victims of an accident that made them unable to continue to work, and we must also support the families who have tragically lost a loved one to a workplace incident. Let us as a government, as an employer, or as a worker learn from these tragedies and do better going forward. All people should feel safe and be safe when they go to work.

The first National Day of Mourning was held in 1991 in Canada, and I'm grateful for this annual opportunity for us to pause, reflect, and remember those lost to workplace injury or illness. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to request the unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader of the third party and the two independent members to respond to the ministerial statement if they wish to do so.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I rise today on behalf of my Progressive Conservative colleagues to speak to the National Day of Mourning for workers killed on the job, which, of course, took place on April 28. Mr. Speaker, 144 Albertans were killed as a result of workplace injury or illness last year, and this is a devastating number, a number made all the more heart-wrenching because 19 more Albertans lost their lives on the job in 2016 than in 2015. It is more than just a statistic. It's 144 people with wives and husbands, children and parents, siblings and friends, people whose lives are forever changed by tragedy.

These 144 people also made invaluable contributions to the fabric of Alberta. Regardless of what job they did or what industry sector they worked in, they were a part of what makes Alberta great, and we are all poorer for their loss. Mr. Speaker, one death, illness, or injury on the job is always one too many, and whether our workplace is an office tower, a construction site, or the open road, we all have a right to expect that we'll make it home safely at the end of each day. That is why workplace safety is so important and why all of us – employers, employees, and government – have a role to play in eliminating workplace fatalities once and for all. It's clear from the 15 per cent increase in these fatalities that we have more work to do.

On the National Day of Mourning I can't help but also remember our colleague PC Member Manmeet Singh Bhullar, who was on his way to work at this Legislature when he was struck and killed in a tragic motor vehicle accident. His loss left a hole in our caucus and in our hearts that will never be filled. We know intimately the pain of losing a colleague, and our hearts go out to the colleagues and family and friends of these 144 Albertans as they begin their journey in life without these important people.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to stand in this House and remember 144 people whose lives were cut too short as a result of workplace illness or injury in 2016. Let us all honour their memories by working together to do more to reduce and, hopefully, one day put an end to these senseless and unnecessary deaths.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Having attended the Friday memorial service in Lethbridge, a very emotional tribute to the workers lost in the Lethbridge area, I'm pleased to stand with a response to the ministerial statement on the National Day of Mourning. At this time we pause to remember and mourn Albertans who have suffered injuries, disease, and death in the workplace. The risk, especially for inexperienced and summer workers, is significant, and each worker must know of their right to refuse unsafe work. This upward trend simply cannot continue, especially given that these workplace incidents are all preventable. If we're to avoid further tragedies, we must strive to create a culture of safety.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, this is the first year that the deaths of paid farm workers are included in the WCB statistics, a result of the much-delayed Bill 6. For far too long farm workers went without the basic legal protection that every other worker in the country has. However, more work needs to be done to reduce barriers to claiming WCB coverage for ranch and farm workers and to encourage both workers and employers alike to file claims for incidents that occur.

1:50

By remembering the injuries and deaths of Alberta workers and by supporting the families they leave behind, our commitment to building a safe work environment will be strengthened. It is our solemn duty in this House and the responsibility of each one of us

to do all that we can to ensure every man and woman who goes to work returns home safely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One workplace death is too many. On the National Day of Mourning, last Friday, I thought about everyone who lost their life on the job, and I thought about the families they left behind. Many Albertans put themselves in danger each day simply doing their jobs, and every single one of them deserves to come home safe to their families. As we reflect this week on the tragedy in Fort McMurray, I think of first responders across the province who put their lives on the line every day. I also think about the 144 people who did not come home last year as a result of a workplace fatality or from illnesses contracted in the workplace. These numbers are too high, and there's now a missing piece in the lives of their loved ones that will never be filled.

Alberta occupational health and safety does important work promoting workplace safety, and I'd like to thank each and every worker and student in the field for their contributions to safer work sites. Creating a culture of safety on the job is paramount. I reflect on my own time working in the oil and gas industry, watching the safety culture evolve and grow in importance. Although recent workplace incidents show there is still work to do, it's heartening to see safety taken so seriously in one of Alberta's riskiest industries, and I know safety is an important issue for business owners all across Alberta.

My thoughts are with those who worry each and every day about their loved ones on job sites across the province, who fear hearing devastating news each time there's a workplace accident. I have faith in Albertans to take workplace safety seriously because even one workplace death is too many.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Air Tanker Use

Mr. Jean: One year ago the Horse River fire was discovered just outside my home in Fort McMurray. A year later many families are rebuilding but are still searching for answers. Everyone in Fort McMurray has questions about whether or not there was more that could have been done to prevent the fire and better prepare for evacuations, but Albertans are still waiting on reports to be released by this government. Flight logs show that only two air tankers were battling the fire the day before the evacuation, less than half from the day before. To the Premier: why did this happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, a year is a short period of time, especially when you're dealing with a tragedy like we all witnessed in Fort McMurray, and to the member and to all of his friends and neighbours, our hearts are with you. That specific day decisions needed to be made by firefighters on the front lines, including protecting pilots, and the airspace was limited because of the smoke. Of course, they weren't going to dispatch more air tankers into the airspace if it was going to cause increased risk for those pilots and other firefighters.

Mr. Jean: When we asked forestry officials about this in Public Accounts, they blamed a temperature inversion for trapping smoke, causing safety issues, but if safety was a concern, how did two planes still perform 23 separate bombing runs? The fire chief noted that there was a temperature inversion on the morning of May 3 as well, but the government sent 12 tankers into the air to fight the fire that day. I'll ask again: how is it possible there were only two planes attacking a fire that was just outside one of Alberta's most populous cities?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. The decisions that are made around specific decisions are made by people who have the expertise, including the firefighters, who are working to make sure that they protect all cities, all citizens, and all parts of our province. What they have explained to us is that they chose to have two of the biggest water tankers deployed to make sure that there was safety, that as much water could be transported as possible without putting increased pilots or firefighters at risk. Politicians don't make these decisions. We make sure that the resources are available, and it's up to the front lines and those who have the expertise to make the decisions about how to deploy them.

Mr. Jean: No, Mr. Speaker, but politicians are responsible for what happens.

On May 2 Alberta had four wildfires and only five planes fighting all of them. The next day, on May 3, we had 20 planes in the air fighting fires, including 12 in Fort McMurray. This is a huge discrepancy. It raises real and serious questions that people all across Alberta want answered by this government. There is no question that this fire was somewhat unique, but Albertans deserve to know if more should have and could have been done. How, then, could there only be five tankers fighting fires in the entire province on May 2 when our province had 16 tankers at their disposal?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are proud to have the backs of those who make the decisions to ensure the safest deployment and to protect Albertans, including Albertans who could have been fighting the fires in airplanes, that could have been unsafe if there was not a clear flight path. Making sure that we have the resources available, which were there, and that they were deployed by the people who were in the best position to make decisions on the front lines: that's their job. They're experts. They did an excellent job. I wish more houses could have been saved, but I'm very proud of the work that happened and the lives that were saved, and I think we should all owe deep gratitude to the people who did lead the charge.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Second main question.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Jean: Alberta's GDP decreased 3.8 per cent in 2016, after a similar drop in 2015. The last time that the GDP in Alberta fell for two consecutive years occurred in 1982 and 1983, and for only the second time in 21 years Alberta had negative net interprovincial migration. The NDP government's solution to a shrinking economy: to impose a \$3 billion carbon tax, that hurts Alberta families and businesses when they can least afford it. This is not reasonable. Will the Premier acknowledge that Albertans can't

afford this carbon tax during the worst downturn in over 30 years and scrap the tax?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of the fact that our government is working to protect Albertans and to make their lives better. That's one of the reasons why I am so thrilled that we're up a hundred per cent in drilling ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Hoffman: ... by 210 rigs. That's over the numbers at the same time last year. That's why I'm proud that exports are up 37 per cent. That's why I'm proud that wholesale trade rose for the fifth month in a row and reached the highest levels since June 2015. Our jobs plan is working, and I'm proud to continue supporting Alberta families.

The Speaker: I would again remind the members: let's keep the volume and comments to a minimum, please.
First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Ignoring the facts won't solve them, and under the NDP world view you don't face the facts; you throw more money at the problem consistently. The NDP government's solution to the overwhelming discontent with their carbon tax is to try to buy off Albertans with their own money, with overlapping and ill-conceived programs. If the Premier actually listened to Albertans, she'd know that they are more than capable of screwing in their own light bulbs. Will the Premier agree that Albertans deserve better than her government wasting their tax dollars on duplicate programs and cancel the Ecofitt boondoggle?

Ms Hoffman: You know, Mr. Speaker, the families that are accessing this program: they say thank you. They are glad to have the opportunity to save over \$100 a year, to be able to reduce their energy costs. I wish we would honour the fact that good work is happening. It's the last jurisdiction in Canada to finally catch up and make sure that we have an energy efficiency program available to Albertans. We're going to keep working to make sure that we protect Albertans, make their lives more affordable, and have the opportunities with our initiatives under the climate leadership plan to get two new pipelines built, which are fundamental to having tens of thousands of jobs to support our economy moving forward.

Mr. Jean: The NDP government thinks it's okay to siphon money away from Alberta families and put it into a pool of money, where they can have a free-for-all at taxpayers' expense. In the latest iteration of the carbon tax slush fund the NDP government is giving instant rebates without any checks or balances whatsoever. With direct rebates at the till, no limits on how many times products can be purchased, and no measures to stop purchases by non-Alberta residents, this program is ripe for abuse. Will the Premier face the fact that Albertans know how to spend their money better than government and scrap the tax?

Ms Hoffman: It's pretty rich, Mr. Speaker, that in the first question the member says that Albertans can buy and install their own light bulbs, and then in the third question he says that we shouldn't be letting them buy their own light bulbs. You can't have it both ways. I myself was out this weekend at Costco, and there were lots of people buying reduced-price light bulbs as well as signing up for the in-house program. This program is working. People are accessing opportunities to save money. I am proud that Albertans are stepping up to the plate. It's time for the Official Opposition to

acknowledge that Albertans deserve a government that's on their side, helping them save money, and that's what they've got.

The Speaker: The third main question.

2:00 Labour Legislation Review

Mr. Jean: Wildrose continues to hear the very valid concerns of business owners and employees surrounding the NDP government's labour review. It's almost as though maybe just a month wasn't long enough to hear from Albertans about how changes will affect their province. Now there are rumblings that legislation will actually be coming forward to overhaul our labour code as soon as this spring. Will the Premier assure Albertans that her government will not introduce legislation until consultation has truly occurred and Andy Sims has completed his report in full?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are talking to Albertans about what needs to be updated and modernized in our labour and employment standards legislation, and we've received almost 5,000 survey responses, with over a thousand from employers, 340 written submissions. We've held round-table discussions across the province with employer groups, labour organizations, municipalities, academics, First Nations, and we continue to engage with Mr. Andrew Sims to make sure that we are bringing legislation that makes sense for Alberta and make sure that we have legislation that works for all workers.

Mr. Jean: The NDP's idea of consultation equals online survey and closed-door, invite-only consultations. That is seriously lacking any substance. Thankfully, the Calgary Chamber of commerce did the work for the NDP government, and blankly the NDP government should have done it. When it comes to removing secret ballot for union certification, the feedback couldn't be more clear. Seventy-four per cent believe that eliminating the secret ballot would have a negative impact. Only 4 per cent think it would have any sort of positive impact. Will the Premier guarantee that the NDP government will not eliminate a secret ballot? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have received a great deal of submissions on both our employment standards and our Labour Relations Code review. We are currently reviewing the feedback from Albertans, from employers, from employer representative groups. We will be reviewing that and making sure that we bring forward fair and balanced legislation that makes sure that Alberta is the strongest business economy in the country and also has fairness for Alberta's workers.

Mr. Jean: Employees in Alberta have every right to be concerned that intimidation tactics would be used during the union certification process. Secret ballot protects their rights, which is incredibly important when you consider how much the NDP world view impacts unions in this province. Just this weekend at an AFL conference sometimes NDP spokesman and Progress Alberta head Duncan Kinney said, "We're the [organization] that kicks conservatives in the teeth." Will the Premier denounce these remarks, or is this NDP world view the treatment conservatives can expect during a union certification process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud that our government has engaged in a fulsome review with employers, workers, labour organizations, that we've put out a survey that allowed nearly 5,000 Albertans to provide their feedback, that we've heard from Albertans like Amanda, who sent in a letter to my office, writing: my employment was recently terminated because I requested compassionate care leave after my seven-year-old son was diagnosed with leukemia. Amanda has lost her job. We have heard stories from Albertans across the province. I look forward to reviewing the feedback and bringing forward discussion to Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Progress Alberta Executive Director's Remarks

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Let's try again, Mr. Speaker. Our party has rightly denounced violent rhetoric directed towards the Premier. While we strongly can disagree on issues, there's no need or place for such language, which is why I was also disturbed to hear the words from the NDP's propaganda arm this weekend. At the Alberta Federation of Labour's convention executive director Duncan Kinney stated: "You may be wondering who @ProgressAlberta is . . . We're the [organization] that kicks conservatives in the teeth." To the Premier: do you stand by these comments from your surrogates at Progress Alberta, or will you denounce them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'm glad to hear that the member plans on denouncing comments around violence against any individual. Certainly, it would be useful if that was done in a timely fashion. With regard to this I would be happy to look into further details, but certainly we don't condone violence toward anyone. It doesn't reflect language that this side of the House chose to use, and we wouldn't condone that language being used towards any individual.

Mr. McIver: Well, that's good, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the Deputy Premier doesn't condone it because he is connected to the NDP, appearing on a carbon tax discussion panel on CTV's *Alberta Primetime* last December. Host Shawna Randolph gave us a glimpse into Progress Alberta's links to the NDP. I quote: we did ask for a few cabinet ministers in the provincial government to join us, and we were told that actually nobody from the government was available, and the province referred us to Duncan Kinney with Progress Alberta. Hardly independent. To the Deputy Premier: will you denounce Mr. Kinney in Progress Alberta or will you be kicking . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections] Hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This side of the House has certainly been referred to in ways that were demeaning, disrespectful, and had death threats. We don't condone that for anyone on this side of the House or anyone in this House. It's important that we treat each other with respect and dignity. No matter what question the member opposite asks, I will continue to treat him with respect and dignity.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's something that the Deputy Premier and our party can agree on: there's no place for this. We know Mr. Kinney's comments because the Alberta Federation of Labour found them so acceptable that it was the AFL that live-tweeted them on Saturday afternoon. The NDP cannot claim they have no links to the AFL because the AFL has specific representation enshrined in the NDP's constitution. So to the Deputy Premier: will you live up to your words, condemn these remarks, and condemn the person that said them?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, after the week that we've all spent in our constituencies, I hope working to find out ways that we can continue to support our constituents and make their lives better – I've made it very clear in my first two responses that I do not support those remarks or condone them. I'm going to say that we're going to continue to focus on making life better for Alberta families. That's one of the reasons why I was so proud to talk to constituents and residents from Alberta across the province about the work we're doing to cut school fees, the work we're doing to support health care and education, the work we're doing around making sure that 20,000 more Alberta workers have jobs this month than did last month. There's lots of good work happening. I wish the members opposite would keep focused on the things that matter to Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Condominium and Housing Co-operative Governance

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are condo owners or members of housing co-ops. Of those, many of the condo owners in my riding have expressed concerns in relation to decisions being made about governance models or issues surrounding management companies. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what safeguards are in place to ensure that these boards and management organizations are accountable to their members?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is dedicated to ensuring that we have condo legislation that balances the relationship between boards and owners and provides the tools necessary for condominium corporations to govern strong condo communities. This means we believe all Albertans deserve to be protected as well as know all of the facts when they make a purchase as large as buying a home. Currently we're looking into amendments to the Condominium Property Act and looking specifically at ways to ensure more transparency and accountability. One of the main priorities for the condo act amendments will be to provide efficiencies to the day-to-day governance of condominium corporations. We encourage any and all constituents to send their contact information through . . .

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I have heard concerns expressed about conflicts of interest within some condominium boards, to the same minister: what are the government's plans to ensure that these boards are transparent to their members?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. These are important issues to our government and to the member, obviously. However, it's clear the opposition, with their laughter, does not take these issues as seriously. More transparency from condo boards is definitely something that we are hearing from everyday Albertans. These new changes we'll be bringing in as a direct result of the feedback we've heard from our consultations. We've heard loud and clear that an accessible dispute resolution process is essential to condo living, and we're working towards establishing a tribunal to resolve condo disputes between condo boards in a more efficient and cost-effective manner.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that housing co-ops are governed differently than condos and given that when a housing co-op mortgage is finished, it is no longer accountable to the CMHC, to the same minister: what strategies are in place that ensure that these co-ops do not run into governance issues?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his question. Our government cares about everyday Albertans and believes Albertans deserve to have transparency and accountability on their housing boards. Co-operatives are governed by their own bylaws and articles of incorporation by their directors and members of the co-op. Unlike other co-operatives, housing co-operatives are required by legislation to address dispute resolution in their bylaws. Amendments to bylaws must be voted on by co-op members. There are two associations in Alberta, Northern Alberta Co-operative Housing Association and Southern Alberta Co-operative Housing Association, that provide guidance to boards and members to assist with best practices. We understand that housing governance is a real concern for many people, so I encourage anyone to write or call my office.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Unharvested 2016 Crops

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, we have talked about unharvested crops with the minister for about a month, now. We talked about mechanisms laid out in the AFSC regulations that are impeding resolve to this problem. It's now been brought to our attention that adjusters could be weeks away from getting out into fields to complete a preharvest assessment. Minister, you had the power under the act to dismiss an entire board. Do you have the power to override these regulations under these extraordinary circumstances and help these affected farmers to get this preharvest requirement done?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Without a doubt there are some farmers who have varied concerns. With the weather conditions we're looking for some warmer, drier conditions this week. I hope yet that those farmers are able to get out in the field. No farmer looks to farm for insurance. They want to farm, put the seed in the ground. I have asked AFSC to streamline a lot of their processes, to speed up so that when and if those drying conditions don't improve, they're able

to hit the ground running and able to make those claims as speedy as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Given that it was apparent last fall the possibility that there could be millions of dollars in unharvested crops still lying in the fields come spring and given that there is a large number of farmers dissatisfied with AFSC progress to date and given that waiting for warm weather to help the situation out is hardly a viable contingency plan, Minister, why have the adjusters not been allowed to use a triage approach to the problem and determine large areas where there is no question as to crop quality instead of being forced to use the case-by-case, time-consuming status quo?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There are 120 inspection staff, all boots on the ground. All of them have been directed to go onto those areas that are most badly affected. I'm happy to announce that unharvested acreage claims are all but complete. Those inspectors now will focus on wildlife and preharvest inspections. I'm very proud of the work the AFSC is doing right across the province, especially in those inspected areas, and continues to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Given that waiting for good weather is not an appropriate contingency plan and given that every day that goes by shortens the growing season and yield potential of the 2017 crop, Minister, despite your talk last week about streamlining the policies for inspections, there have been complaints of little to no communication to farmers or AFSC offices beyond web updates. Can you answer this question that I'm getting from farmers: where is the communication failure here between AFSC and farmers, and who's going to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. If he has incidences of a communication breakdown, a very specific interest, I'm more than happy to address those. As such, AFSC has been directed to tweak the programs. As an example, inspectors have cut by half the number of inspections they have to do for wildlife and preharvest inspections. AFSC is doing a good job. I'm proud of the work they're doing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a little repetitive, but that shows how important it is. Last week the minister of agriculture met with the Alberta crop commissions to discuss farmers' concerns about the unharvested crops. There are at least one million unharvested acres still in the field, and producers have called for immediate action to help them through this. With the late snowfalls, harvesting is still not an option in some areas due to wet conditions. To the minister of agriculture: how are you changing things, specifically, based on these meetings with the commissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. It's important that we expedite the crop insurance claims with the premiums that farmers make all across the province. Without a doubt this year, last year, and the beginning of this year it's been challenging, with moisture conditions way above normal

in some areas. AFSC has been instructed to make many changes. I mentioned before with the previous member the question of the number of inspections. They are forgoing grain samples on harvested acres. Preharvest inspections on severe lodged crop were low to pick up equipment because it was unharvestable, and other...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are still ongoing crop insurance claims unresolved and given that you've committed to providing farmers with a plan to streamline the remaining crop insurance assessment process, to the same minister: specifically, how will you be streamlining this process moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. There are a number of examples that AFSC is streamlining the process. I am happy to report that unharvested acreage claims are all but complete. Now those same inspectors can concentrate on the wildlife and preharvest inspections. Again I ask every producer out there: keep in contact with AFSC. Whatever the options they so choose, make sure that they contact AFSC so that they have best option possible going forward. I'm happy that we have farmers' backs and that we're making Albertans' lives better, including producers'.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are now into May and given that it is still too wet to get out in the field to seed new crops and given that if this situation continues, it is becoming a crisis, to the minister of agriculture: how are you helping farmers get through the setbacks from last year and ensure that this year's crop is viable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. Without a doubt, we need to get past the problems and the concerns that carried over from last fall and start concentrating on the new growing season. With that, AFSC has streamlined their process, and they have all 120 inspectors, boots on the ground, to be able to do so. I have confidence in the AFSC programs, the suite of programs, as most producers do. They're looking forward to that good weather to ensure that we can get that crop in the ground and, whatever options those farmers pick, the pick that works best for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oil Price Forecasting

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is making really bad bets with Albertans' future. They foolishly bet on oil to average \$55 a barrel this year, a price we haven't seen since 2015. Now, with the first fiscal quarter coming to a close, WTI has yet to hit \$55 even once, never mind average \$55. Today oil sits at just \$48. Why is this government betting the budget on these long-shot projections that are falling flat right before our eyes?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. You know, this government is committed to building Alberta's economic recovery, creating jobs, creating tax revenue for this government. We're confident in our oil and gas sector in this province. They're a key driver of the economy, and it is the people of Alberta themselves that are our most treasured resource. This is going to be a government that will build for the future.

2:20

Mr. Barnes: In NDP fantasyland it's all blue skies ahead, but Albertans are experiencing a very different reality. Given that these irresponsible oil forecasts are exposing hard-working Alberta families to more debt, more deficit, and even more tax increases and given that we're already on track for an unthinkable \$71 billion of debt by just 2019, Mr. Speaker, how much more debt will Albertans owe by 2019 if this reckless NDP government keeps swinging and missing on oil prices?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. You know, we created more than 20,000 full-time jobs last month. Despite the doom and gloom on the other side, the people that don't have faith in the future of this province, rigs are drilling up to a hundred per cent more from the year 2010. Our exports are up 37 per cent. This Alberta economy will lead the country to recovery. The policies of this government are rebuilding our economy, putting people to work, and creating prosperity.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Given a reality that an energy executive recently told me about, that international companies are fleeing Alberta because our regulatory conditions don't allow for them to make money at a basic stress test of \$30 a barrel, and given that these companies, who weren't lucky enough to make backroom exemption deals with this NDP government, are suffering because of the carbon tax and the cap on emissions, Mr. Speaker, why is this government making a bad situation unbearable for international companies, who are planning to leave Alberta for good under this NDP government's watch?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think we need a bit of a reality check for the opposition over there because, you know, Steve Laut, the president of CNRL, says that this is a very exciting time, that we're moving back to a more stable time, and that Canadian companies are well positioned. That's from the horse's mouth. I want also to say that the *Financial Post* has said, "Canadian oilfield services companies ... are reporting higher prices, buoyant business activity and robust bookings for the remainder of the year." If Albertans believe the opposition, they're just going to get depressed.

Fixed Election Dates

Mr. Fildebrandt: Alberta's fixed election date legislation was passed so that governments could not manipulate the timing of elections for their own narrow, partisan advantage. All parties voted for it as a big step forward for fair elections in Alberta, but as we know, the letter of this legislation did not live up to its spirit when an early election was called last time around. Even though most Albertans would love a chance to vote right now, the law is the law. Will the Premier commit right now, unequivocally that she will

respect our fixed election date legislation and not call an early election before 2019?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The question is really exciting, especially coming from somebody who is such a close dance partner with the party that called the last election a year early, so I have to say that we certainly do not intend to call the election early. We have dates in line in the legislation. The question is coming from nowhere, so to be honest, I'm not prepared to answer at this time. But I'm going to keep working hard for my constituency, and I am proud to have the mandate that we do to make life better for Alberta families, and we're going to keep doing that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, riddle me this, Mr. Speaker. Given that you can't help but get the impression that this government is afraid of facing Albertans – they don't face them at town hall meetings ...

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: ... and they don't face them when they write their legislation. Given, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP got just 2 per cent of the vote in recent Calgary by-elections and, as you know, 1 per cent in Medicine Hat, this all gives me the impression that the NDP are terrified of facing a single, united Conservative Party in the next election. Will the Premier commit unequivocally that she will stick to the fixed election date and not delay the election until 2020?

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, you seem to need more direction, consistency in terms of preambles that you use and the manner in which you do it. I must tell you that there are several people on your side of the House that are excellent at making preambles, and I hope you might get some advice from them.

The Deputy Premier.

Fixed Election Dates (continued)

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you for the feedback from the member opposite as well as from the third party, which we know called the snap election. Certainly, we are happy to heed his advice with regard to this matter, but at this point this question is coming from nowhere. Again, we're focused on delivering the mandate that Albertans elected us to do, and we are happy to do that. We're not going to address hypothetical scenarios. We're going to keep working to make life better for Alberta families by fulfilling the mandate they gave us, including lowering school fees. We're proud of that.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, we're going to have to try again, Mr. Speaker. It's not that the NDP are lying; it's that everything they said made absolutely no sense and they refuse to answer a simple question. I'll ask it again: will they or will they not respect our fixed election date law and commit that they will not delay the next election until 2020?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only ones talking about election dates in this House are the members opposite. On this side of the House we're working to make sure that we're implementing the mandate that we were given, and we're going to keep doing that. Of

course, there are no plans to deviate from the legislation. We're going to keep working to make sure that we make life more affordable, that we protect health and education, services that the members opposite are always pushing us to cut and make sure that we pull \$9 billion out of infrastructure, which would impact projects that are happening in the member's own riding. I bet you that he doesn't want to be advocating for that in the middle of an election. If he does want to keep pushing for deep cuts, feel free.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Budget 2017

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it's likely this week that we will see the passing of the government's 2017 budget, and the government will accuse us in the opposition of not supporting necessary spending on health care and other essential services if we choose not to vote for their budget, but this is simply untrue. When we vote against the largest debt and deficit in Alberta's history, we're simply representing Albertans across the province who want this government to do a better job, prioritizing fiscal prudence and living within their means. To the Deputy Premier: do you truly believe that this budget respects the priorities of Albertans who believe that fiscal prudence is important?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget that was tabled by the Minister of Finance has very, very important and clear priorities. It's important to note that these were the priorities this government was elected on, and those are to protect our basic services, to protect our health care, unlike the party that's asking the question, who would have cut \$1 billion out of health care on the budget that they ran on and lost the election on.

Mr. Fraser: Given that this government has chosen to tip the scales in favour of unions versus quality private companies when it comes to laundry services and vital plasma collection and production in this province despite the huge potential savings for taxpayers and given that the increase to the corporate income tax is taking \$830 a year out of household budgets despite providing less revenue than it did previously, to the same minister: if your priority is really making life more affordable for Albertans, why does it seem that life is becoming more costly for the middle-class Albertan?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This government is committed to making life more affordable. That's why we froze tuition fees for the third year in a row, unlike the previous government that kept increasing them. We are reducing school fees. We are capping electricity prices, unlike the roller-coaster electricity ride that the previous government took us on. This government is clearly committed to making life more affordable and better for Albertans and their families.

2:30

Mr. Fraser: Given that your government has no plan to pay down the debt during your time in office and given that Alberta's GDP shrank by 3.8 per cent in 2016 after shrinking by 3.7 per cent in 2015 and given that a shrinking economy and ballooning debt-servicing costs are going to have a lasting effect on the ability of future governments to appropriately fund important programs, to the same minister: have you given any thought to how your budgeting is going to hurt future generations, and is future generational debt actually a priority for your government? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. What is important to this government is making sure that in the future our kids have good schools, that we have health care there when we need it, that people can afford child care, that people can make sure that their aging parents are well cared for. I want to say that the Conference Board of Canada, just on this question, projects that Alberta will lead the country in growth in 2017, quite the opposite of what the member is trying to suggest.

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

Energy Efficiency Programs

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While two-thirds of Albertans are eligible for the carbon levy rebate payments under the climate leadership plan, many of my constituents are concerned that they're not eligible for this rebate. Given the need to support all Albertans affected by the carbon levy, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: what opportunities are there for all Albertans, including those who don't qualify for rebates, to benefit from the carbon levy funds and save money?

The Speaker: The minister of environment and climate change.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans do have a chance to save money from the recently announced energy efficiency programs, which include rebates for rooftop solar panels, rebates of up to \$3,500 for home improvement products such as insulation, tankless water heaters, and triple-glazed windows. Albertans can also receive in-store and online rebates on a number of products, and the full list of those products is at efficiencyalberta.ca.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of my constituents have also been inquiring about how these programs might help their local community organizations with long-needed renovations, to the same minister: how do these programs help community organizations to green their common spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some weeks ago we announced the nonprofit energy efficiency grant which allows nonprofits to undertake audits. In addition to that, we do have the business, nonprofit, and institutional energy savings program, which offers incentives to encourage organizations to choose high-efficiency products. Once an organization has installed those products, they can apply for the rebate to receive a cheque. Once again, all of the details are at efficiencyalberta.ca.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the interest my constituents have shown towards reducing their energy consumption, to the same minister: how can people who are interested in these opportunities sign up?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For example, the residential no-cost install program: many people are taking advantage of that, including people with disabilities, elderly people, new Canadians, and very low-income Albertans. You know, the members opposite continue to make fun of those people for availing themselves of those

programs and looking to save themselves money over time, but on this side of the House we want to make life more affordable for everyone. Efficiencyalberta.ca is where people can get more information on those things.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Renewable Energy Land Leases

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had farmers sharing some of their serious concerns about renewable energy projects. Wind and solar energy companies, through unregistered landmen, are approaching these farmers and trying to lock in their property for renewable energy production on their land. Many of these farmers are being simply shown the rich lease payments and royalties, and they are not being given the basic information as to how these leases work or any of the possible negative consequences of these lucrative leases. To the Minister of Energy: what's being done to protect farmers from what have been called terrible contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe I was asked this question last week. A similar answer. We know that there are many farmers and landowners who are excited about the possibilities and opportunities for wind and solar. We've had groups of folks going around the province to advise that there is help available through the AUC or through the Farmers' Advocate. We have some resources out, a nice little checklist of what they need to know before entering into contracts.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that negotiating a lease with a renewable energy company is not the same as negotiating with the oil and gas industry and given that there is no right-of-entry or expropriation process for renewable energy in Alberta, which means that farmers approached by a wind or solar company have the right to say no to wind turbines or solar panels being installed on their land and given, however, that once a contract is signed, their neighbours have no right to stop that same company from building infrastructure on their land to tie the project to the grid, to the minister: what's being done to ensure that these hard-working Albertans are informed of their rights prior to signing any contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I mentioned, there are some resources available through the AUC and through the Farmers' Advocate, or have them contact my office, and we can walk them through the process. I would say that if you know that your neighbours are planning or have an interest in that, as a neighbour you'll also find out about your rights. To be clear, contracts do not need to be signed, nor do landowners have to take a project onto their property.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hanson: I think this would be a great place for a wind turbine, Mr. Speaker.

Given that unlike oil and gas leases landowners involved with renewable energy projects are not able to appeal to the Surface Rights Board if the developer stops paying its leases and given that there is not currently any orphan program that would fund reclaiming old

turbines and solar panels in the event that a company became insolvent and given that people have been told by legal counsel that these are the worst contracts they have ever seen, to the Minister of Energy: has this government put ideology and the NDP world view ahead of protecting property rights in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, there are resources available. In addition to those resources, I would suggest that if people are interested, they talk to the counties of Vulcan, Cypress, Stettler, the town of Carmangay, Pincher Creek MD, and others. Those are all areas that have these projects, and they all have very positive things to say and would be glad to provide advice on future projects.

Workplace Legislation Review

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, countless employers and business organizations have contacted us expressing serious concern with the consultation process used by the NDP to gather input for changes to the labour code and employment standards. The minister rushed this process, and many stakeholders have expressed concern that this government already knows what the legislation looks like and simply hosted obligatory consultation in a failed attempt to appease them. To the Minister of Labour: will you be introducing legislation which changes either the labour code or employment standards during the current spring sitting of the House?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for his question about consultation. Whether it's for the MGA or royalty review, our government is getting consultations right. We've heard from hundreds of stakeholders on both consultations, and we will continue to listen to them as we review what we've received.

I'd like to read a quote from a former PC Minister of Labour: my department has embarked upon a six-week consultation process to review the Alberta employment standards legislation. Six weeks, Mr. Speaker, and only an online consultation. The opposition is talking out of both sides of their mouth . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that an inadequate consultation process has left many stakeholders feeling that this government is only listening to labour bosses and given that they also feel the government's close relationship with union leadership means that the changes to the labour code and employment standards will lead to heavy-handed, undemocratic changes such as removing the anonymous balloting process, again to the minister: will you be pushing removal of the democratic private ballot currently used to certify unions? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have received information from nearly 5,000 Albertans, including a thousand employers or employer representatives, countless numbers of written submissions, and we continue to engage. The principles that we are keeping in mind through all of this are fairness and balance, making sure that we can implement process improvements for the benefit of all. I continue to review the feedback we've received to date, and I look forward to making sure that Alberta has fair and updated, modern labour legislation and employment standards.

2:40

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, we'll take that as a yes.

Given that the government has yet again failed to properly consult stakeholders holding opinions that do not align with the NDP world view and given that introducing sweeping changes potentially impacting the survival of many businesses across Alberta with little or no consultation shows that this government puts the interests of big labour ahead of small to medium-sized job creators, who have yet to be directly engaged, again to the minister: will you do the right thing, reopen consultation, enhance it, and extend it at least until the end of the current calendar year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been very pleased to engage with small, medium, and large businesses throughout this consultation, including personally meeting with the Alberta Enterprise Group, meeting with chambers on this, and engaging to make sure that we are working with all stakeholders to ensure fair, balanced, and effective workplace legislation for all. We need workplace legislation that works for both businesses and workers because this legislation has not changed since 1988. We have a responsibility to make sure that we have legislation that works for Albertans. The previous government did consultations . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Ray Gibbon Drive

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Half of working residents in St. Albert commute to Edmonton every day. With only a few transportation options and routes this leads to frustration during their daily commute. Given that the Capital Region Board has recognized the significance of twinning Ray Gibbon Drive and given that they have included this project as a top priority, to the Minister of Transportation: how do the priorities of regional bodies like the CRB impact the consideration of projects like Ray Gibbon Drive?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his pertinent question. Many factors are actually taken into account when we decide long-term road infrastructure plans, including the priorities of municipalities, so I meet regularly with mayors and reeves in the capital region and, for that matter, throughout the province to better understand their infrastructure and transportation needs. As part of the government of Alberta's \$29.5 billion capital plan, Transportation is investing more than \$5 billion in our provincial highways network to help connect communities and improve safety and travel on our roads.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given the importance of Ray Gibbon Drive to St. Albert and the region, to the same minister: how is the province supporting this vital infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of Ray Gibbon Drive to the plans of St. Albert and region going forward, I want to say that, first of all, it is something

that we've been discussing with the city. I've talked to the mayor about this, and they have a plan, a proposal to take over the ownership of Ray Gibbon Drive, and that would result in highway 2 being transferred to the city of St. Albert.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that increased routes would facilitate the development on the west side of St. Albert and support the development of local businesses, to the same minister: how is the government supporting my constituents' transportation needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to making sure that the transportation needs of Albertans in St. Albert and throughout the province are met, and that's why we're spending so much money to upgrade the infrastructure throughout the province. We made several investments: building public transit with park-and-ride, funding for electric buses, repaving, and roadwork in a number of areas as well. We're going to continue to invest in this infrastructure so that Albertans can get safely to and from work and family meetings.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll commence in 30 seconds.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Agricultural Supply Management Marketing System

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2015 supply-managed commodities accounted for \$891.6 million of our agricultural production in Alberta. As a New Democrat I am proud of our dairy sector along with all of our supply-managed industries, that are an important part of our agricultural mix, and as the Albertan MLA representing Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I'm proud of the many farms that make our province strong. When I put cream in my coffee, when I put cheese on my burger, I know that my food is safe and that it's been produced locally and that it creates good, family-supporting, stable jobs.

There has been a lot of international news lately about supply-managed agriculture in Canada, so it has been with great interest and concern that I have been listening to our leaders.

Working together to determine what supply is needed from the farm to match the demands of families around the table creates a made-in-Canada system, that producers count on for economic sustainability. I visited locally owned farms like the Scotford colony to see what their modern dairy production looks like, where cows and technology come together to create clean and incredibly efficient operations. On the Glasman farm Lenora and Robert from Strathcona county are proud family farmers and continue to farm dairy, beef, and grain on their home quarter while raising three children and volunteering in their local community. They can do this because they have a stable source of income and because they love and take pride in what they do.

On April 21 Alberta's dairy stated: "We're not going to shy away or be bullied from promoting our proudly Canadian product."

Mr. Speaker, our government and our agriculture minister know that our marketing system works for Canada, and I know that we

will continue to fight for our farmers and that agriculture will continue to be a centrepiece of a diversified Albertan economy.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government will be remembered as one of the most secretive governments ever to hold office in Alberta, and their track record is only getting worse. November 2016: Privacy Commissioner Jill Clayton states that access to information is nearing a crisis situation in Alberta. February 2017: Clayton again says that the NDP are failing Albertans by imposing unacceptable processing delays, showing a complete lack of respect for freedom of information and for transparency. April 2017: Alberta's Privacy Commissioner states that she is angry and frustrated, with the government working so hard to prevent her from doing her job. Now we have evidence that this government's political staff are systematically meddling with FOIP requests made by the media and opposition parties.

Last month, Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose released a report with 10 recommendations that could help to fix Alberta's broken FOIP system, but did the NDP adopt any of these common-sense solutions? No. Why? Because they aren't serious about improving access to information and transparency. They tried to turn the temperature down on this issue by hiring a few new FOIP staff, but similar to the AIMCo scandal, senior government staffers have been caught with their hand in the cookie jar yet again, this time obstructing and interfering with the FOIP system. The NDP is halfway through this mandate, and all they've done is cultivate a toxic culture of secrecy.

What's worse, Mr. Speaker, is that they're actively working to embed the deplorable actions they once decried. Instead of delaying and interfering with the release of information, they should prioritize making it public. How many times does the Privacy Commissioner, the media, the opposition have to catch this government in the act before they start taking transparency seriously? Albertans are tired of it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Provincial Election Second Anniversary

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week will mark two years since the NDP won the right to form government in Alberta: good for the NDP, bad for Alberta. A lot has changed in two years. In two short years the NDP government has taken us from a \$1.1 billion budget surplus to two consecutive deficits over \$10 billion, with more than half of that going just to keep the government lights on, leaving our children and grandchildren to foot the bill for light bulbs that will long since have burned out by the time they even become taxpayers.

The Finance minister likes to brag about green shoots. I saw green shoots in my wife's garden this weekend but not one as a result of anything this government has done.

In two years the Finance minister's favourite fiscal metric, the debt-to-GDP ratio, has soared from 3.4 per cent in May 2015 to the mind-blowing 13.8 in this year's budget. He brags about maintaining Alberta's tax advantage while actively and systematically destroying it. He has no plan to repay the \$71 billion in debt he will strap on the backs of our children, yet he promised in estimates to exactly balance the budget to the dollar in 2024.

2:50

In two years Alberta's unemployment rate has gone from 5 to well over 8 per cent. This represents a loss of well over 100,000

full-time jobs compared to 2015. At the same time, there are 61,400 more part-time jobs than there were when this government took office. For all this government's rhetoric about making life better for Alberta families, the only thing they've done is to replace good, mortgage-paying jobs with part-time jobs. For the 88,470 Albertans that are surviving on employment insurance today, a number which is double from what it was two years ago, it's clear the NDP's efforts are not good enough.

Mr. Speaker, things sure have changed in Alberta over the last two years, and we still have another two to go before Albertans can throw this government out of office, as they intend to do. But based on what I hear from people across the province every day who are fed up with the NDP and their massive failures, I am confident we will be in a position to start cleaning up this mess in 2019.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater Constituency Update

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we approach the second anniversary of our government and my own as an MLA, I'd like to take a few moments to reflect on some of the progress that's been made in my own riding of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

When I was first elected, there were many outstanding issues, some long overdue, that needed to be addressed. For instance, the bridge over the Athabasca River on highway 813 had been in need of replacement since my father was the MLA. Now, thanks to the commitment of our government to make good on years of previous neglect, this is finally happening. The completion of highway 63's twinning and the multiple upgrades and curve reductions on highway 28 have made driving much safer for my constituents and indeed for all those who live and work in northeastern Alberta.

Two years ago Athabasca University's status was uncertain. Now, thanks to our new government, a sustainable future has been assured for the university and for the community that depends on it. Happily, I would need more than two minutes to list all the improvements to health care facilities, schools, and seniors' facilities that we have been fortunate to receive as well. These investments speak well to the government's commitment to the health, education, and well-being of rural Albertans.

The Industrial Heartland is not only of utmost strategic importance to Alberta's long-term prospects; its local importance cannot be overstated. Thanks to our continued support for the North West refinery's phase 1, our petrochemicals diversification program, and, of course, our success in reframing our reputation as a responsible energy producer, investor confidence has been restored and new projects announced. But with increasing development in the Industrial Heartland, traffic has reached critical levels, severely impacting workers, local residents, and jeopardizing future growth. Working closely with municipal and industry partners, we have introduced badly needed intersection improvements to help clear congestion and improve safety.

We've made great progress on these issues and on many others, of course, but there's always much more work that needs to be done, and we will continue . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Rosendahl: Mr. Speaker, April 28 was the Day of Mourning. Every year we reflect on and mourn those who have lost their lives or have been injured or disabled as the result of workplace injuries or occupational diseases. We extend our condolences to the family

and friends who have lost loved ones and to the co-workers who worked by their sides.

Mr. Speaker, we know that workplace accidents do happen. In 2016 alone Alberta lost 144 men and women to workplace injury or illness. Of those 144, 27 were directly caused by mesothelioma, 19 from asbestosis, and one from silicosis. It is heartbreaking to read of the many workers who have died due to exposure to asbestos because the health risks of asbestos exposure were known for years before the government and industry moved to stop its use. This is why it's so important that laws and regulations regarding the workplace are reviewed and updated constantly.

It is also why I support the current review of our employment standards and labour relations law. Some of these codes have not been updated since 1988. This is simply wrong, Mr. Speaker. It's shocking that some of the opposition members want to delay its review even more. I would also strongly support a review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. No one should have to fear for their life while they do their job. Our government is committed to this belief, and we've been working to extend safety legislation to workers who were previously exempt. Many workers in my riding of West Yellowhead work in high-risk jobs.

To recognize this Day of Mourning, we should do everything . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

HALO Medical Rescue Helicopter Funding

Mr. Barnes: On July 25, 2016, in southern Alberta a large truck rear-ended another large truck on a country road. HALO air rescue helicopter was called in to save lives that day. When Deandra Zeller was thrown from her horse while caring for cattle, she suffered a brain injury in the middle of a field in the rolling hills of Cypress-Medicine Hat. Travelling by ambulance on bumpy, unpaved farm roads could have put her at risk of further injury, but HALO air rescue was there to transport Deandra to the hospital safely.

In my years representing Cypress-Medicine Hat, I have heard time and again about the heroic work that the front-line responders from HALO do to service my region. HALO rescue shows up when they are needed and saves the lives of critically injured or ill southern Albertans. Rapid rescue response times decrease mortality and increase patient success. HALO rescue is the only dedicated medical rescue helicopter stationed in southern Alberta which can respond within a reasonable time frame.

Mr. Speaker, HALO fills STARS ambulance's blind spot. The only reason that HALO can help people is because of the generous contributions from the corporate, private, ranching sectors and caring donors. This government refuses to cover the high standby costs, only contributing a fee for service. Not only is this life-or-death service underfunded by this government; the NDP's war on economic prosperity and implementation of the carbon tax have only made it more difficult for Albertans to give generously to charities and not-for-profits.

Cypress-Medicine Hat has given so much to this province monetarily with the development of our natural gas resources, so I am left with just one question for the NDP: why is my part of the province treated with so little respect? The Medicine Hat region and HALO air rescue deserve to be a priority.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I would like to report that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows: the committee recommends that Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017, and Bill Pr. 2, Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act, proceed in the Assembly. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Do the members concur in the report? All those in agreement please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: All opposed say no. So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I think we'll almost make it here, but in an abundance of caution I will request unanimous consent from the House to continue past 3 o'clock to finish the Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of a petition sponsored by KAIROS urging the government of Alberta to implement a curriculum for K to 12 that is in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. They recommend consulting and collaborating with survivors, indigenous people, and educators to make mandatory age-appropriate curricula on residential schools, treaties, and indigenous people's history and contemporary contributions to Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the hon. minister responsible for democratic renewal I would like to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that bill being Bill 11, Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. I never thought I would be introducing a Bill 11, but here it is.

3:00 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of written answers to questions which I was required to take notice of during estimates for the Ministry of Energy at the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship on April 11, 2017.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a letter from Synergy Projects construction professionals Senior Vice-president Barry Robertson sent to the Premier requesting an enhancement and extension of the Alberta Labour Relations Code review.

My second tabling is from Darryl Wiebe of Kerr Interior Systems Ltd., the president of that organization, sending a letter to the

Premier requesting an enhanced and extended review of the Alberta Labour Relations Code.

The Speaker: Any others? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table five copies of a letter I wrote to the Government House Leader on the 9th of March quoting something he said on the 16th of March, 2004, where he refers to the Public Affairs Bureau as a Tory propaganda organ.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Deputy Premier, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta Health Services 2015-16 annual report.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent to waive SO 8 to allow immediate consideration of third reading of Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 202 Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure and pride to rise to move third and final reading of Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act.

I want to first thank members on all sides of the House for their support for this private member's bill.

Mr. Speaker, I originally proposed this bill after discussions with my oldest daughter, Amelia. I hope that this bill will make Alberta a little better for all Alberta children across this incredibly great province.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I and many members have spoken at length about the harm that the non-consensual sharing of intimate images can inflict on victims. This bill aims through tort law, school discipline, and other measures to limit the harm that is caused. This Assembly has all spoken in support of standing on the side of victims and giving them recourse when their trust has been violated in the worst possible way.

As I have mentioned, this bill creates tort law for victims of this crime so that they can get reparations from those who commit such acts. It contains provisions so that financial gains that were a result of distributing these pictures can be awarded to the victim, not to the perpetrator.

Earlier I believe someone from the other side of the House noted that a website founder distributing such images was making

\$30,000 a month on advertising revenues from distributing these pictures. Thankfully, that particular website was shut down, but many more have sprouted up to take their place, unfortunately.

I also want to thank the members on the other side who proposed an amendment which will have the effect of tightening up this aspect of the legislation. I think that the amendment is a good example of how we can improve legislation by carefully considering what has been proposed.

Lastly, this bill will encourage fair and consistent punishment across Alberta schools for students who engage in such behaviours. This will discourage students who engage in distribution, and their suspension will send a message to other students who engage in such behaviour that this will have real consequences. This message will be sent in a fair and consistent manner, Madam Speaker.

The number of images that we capture today in this modern world is both astounding and, to be honest, a little overwhelming. In 2011 it was estimated that Facebook had over 10,000 times the number of photos that the Library of Congress does, and this was six years ago. The advent of camera phones means that we are also capturing more images than ever. This has had some undesirable effects such as people becoming addicted to their phones and the easy sharing of some images that were never meant to be shared, Madam Speaker.

The unwanted sharing of intimate images can have a devastating effect on people's lives. I have already outlined previous cases in Canada of young persons taking their own lives because intimate images of them were shared. It is unacceptable, Madam Speaker. We shall not and will not stand for those types of outcomes.

The passage of this bill will send a message that this Assembly and all Albertans stand with the victims of this heinous practice. I want to make it clear, Madam Speaker, that although within this debate we have spoken a lot about juveniles both as victims and perpetrators, they are not the only ones that are affected by this. Anyone of any age can be affected by such behaviours.

Unfortunately, there is not much data on this subject in this country, Madam Speaker, so please allow me to cite a study from our neighbours. McAfee in the U.S. conducted a study in late 2012 which surveyed 1,182 adults who were aged from 18 to 54. The study revealed that even amongst adults, when relationships break down, some partners, about 1 in 10, had threatened to send intimate images of their partners or their ex-partners to their ex-partners' friends and employers. About 6 per cent of those partners actually followed through with this threat. This is truly tragic. In addition, 13 per cent of the survey participants have had their personal content leaked to others without permission. This may be a password, bank account number, social security number, in addition to intimate images.

Despite the seeming prevalence of these unfortunate acts, the legislation has not kept up with the technological and societal change that we have experienced. This legislation will let us close the gap just a little bit and make Alberta a safer place for our children and indeed all Albertans.

However, legislation is not the only recourse, nor is it a sufficient recourse. We must impart upon our children safe online practices to help them navigate this increasingly complex world. That is not only the responsibility of parents but schools and other mentors as well. Operating safely online these days is just as important as teaching children how to cross the street safely.

As I've mentioned, Madam Speaker, the inspiration for this bill came in conversations with my daughter. It is a parental responsibility that we all should take seriously, and I think we can all agree that it is something that destroys our youth's lives. I'm hoping to see that this bill will come to fruition.

I want to thank the members opposite and the members in the third party and the other independent parties for their support of this bill. I'd like to also think that this highlights that together in the House here we can benefit Albertans' lives and make Alberta a safer place.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to end my speech. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And, once again, thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for Bill 202, which I have said before in this Chamber I think is outstanding. I particularly love the fact that his first consultation was with his daughter. I think that it's incredibly important to bring in the voices of children and, well, of course, to listen to your daughter.

3:10

Bill 202 fits nicely with the intent of Bill 2, actually, introduced by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, and is consistent with our government's commitment to supporting survivors of sexual violence. I think it's really important to be careful with the language that we use, and it's important to use the word "survivor."

By working together, I think we are sending a very clear message that these extreme violations of trust, as described by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, are violations of trust and privacy, and they are completely unacceptable. This is particularly true for youth and members of the communities that have historically been marginalized. We hope this bill will go a long way towards helping to comfort survivors of this type of behaviour and discourage others from engaging in these terrible violations of trust and privacy.

Bill 202 also follows in the steps of the federal government's Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act, which made it a criminal offence to distribute these images without consent.

As I mentioned earlier, the bill aligns nicely with our government's commitment to support survivors of sexual violence and reinforces the commitment made in this session when we introduced Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Amongst other things, Bill 2 removes limitation periods for sexual misconduct where the victim is in an intimate relationship, a dependant, or a minor. Coupled with Bill 202, this would ensure that someone who may not feel comfortable pursuing a lawsuit immediately when intimate images are distributed without their consent – we all know that survivors may indeed need extra time until they feel they are healed enough to pursue this.

Bill 202 also creates many good tools for survivors to seek remedies from people that share images without their permission. Just the sharing of the image without their consent is enough. They don't have to show that it led to public shaming or job loss or even mental anguish, and this is a positive move. Madam Speaker, this bill is a very good initiative. It provides additional tools for survivors of revenge pornography to seek damages against the person who distributed the images.

However, I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that I was also concerned by the headline in the Wildrose press release on this bill. The headline warned that a picture lasts forever. While this is certainly true and the warning caution is appropriate for youth, we should ensure that our primary message is clear. It is absolutely unacceptable to exploit someone's right to privacy by distributing intimate images without their consent. The focus of this bill itself is in the right place, on empowering survivors after a serious violation

of trust, but we need to send a very clear message, and we need to support survivors with that clear message. And that message is that the people who are in the wrong are the ones that share the images. It's not the people that choose to share the images or send the images.

You know, I also want to say that I think one of the really reinforcing things about this bill is that it is one more step towards combating cyberbullying. I think, obviously, as the member said earlier, that social media and smart phones are very popular, very addictive – in fact, I see lots of people using them at this very moment – but I think that it's important that we address some of the problems that are associated. I think about how easy and disturbing and hurtful it is when people steal images from our own sites to create stupid memes with stupid headlines on them to insult opposition members or government members. I think about how much that hurts. Translate that to a very intimate and private image, the kind that we're referring to when we talk about this revenge porn.

I think this is a very good start. It sends great messages to our children and, hopefully, to all of us. Once again, I would like to thank the member for Bill 202 and again commend his outstanding consultation with his daughter and his community and, of course, other organizations and just say that I'm very happy to support this, and I can't wait for it to pass.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to speak on Bill 202, Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. I'm proud to stand and offer my support for this common-sense bill brought forward by my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

In a consistently and ever-advancing technological world now more than ever it is important that our laws match real-life circumstances. It is a simple reality that children and some adults choose to use their smart phones for snapping intimate pictures of themselves for whatever reasons those may be. And while, obviously, these private pictures should stay just that – private – in this day and age there are very few things which do not end up on the Internet. When intimate images are shared without the person's consent, the effects can be extremely traumatic. We have seen what online bullying attacks have done to victims like Amanda Todd. Young people are increasingly exchanging intimate images, which may later become fodder for humiliating cyberbullying attacks, with these images spreading quickly and often uncontrollably.

This is something the former Harper government recognized when they brought in the federal Criminal Code violations against acts of cyberbullying. This bill expands on the Conservative principles of putting victims first by creating the provincial tort law necessary to seek financial compensation and return any profits from said photos to the victim.

This bill also recognizes that these are serious incidents which are happening within our schools by creating legislation which empowers the principals and individual school boards to deal with issues of nonconsensual image distribution.

I would like to read a passage from the government of Canada's website on cyberbullying and intimate images. This passage helps to provide the context of just how widespread the issue is. I'll table a copy tomorrow, of course.

A recent survey of adults between the ages of 18 and 54 found that 1 in 10 ex-partners have threatened to expose intimate photos of their ex on-line, and according to the survey, these threats have

been carried out in 60% of the cases. With respect to young people, an online survey of 1,280 respondents (653 teens ages 13-19 and 627 young adults aged 20-26) in 2008 commissioned by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy found that 20% of teens and 33% of young adults had sent nude pictures of themselves via text or email (a practice referred to as “sexting”). A 2012 study published in the American journal *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* that surveyed 948 high school students in Texas, also found that 28% of the respondents had engaged in sexting. A third recent study of 606 high school students at a single private school, representing nearly the entire student body, found that nearly 20% sent a sexually explicit image of themselves, and that 25% indicated that they had forwarded such an image to others.

This information clearly highlights the need for the laws to catch up to the technology.

As shadow minister for Justice and Solicitor General I’ve been proud to see how all parties in this Assembly have worked together to move forward to help put our victims first. It has been refreshing to listen to the thoughtful debate and hear some personal experience of Albertans and members of this Assembly.

I again urge all my colleagues in this Assembly to rise and support the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake’s private member’s bill, Bill 202. Together we can help create the legislation necessary to protect victims of nonconsensual distribution of intimate images.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. It’s a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 202. You know, it’s not every day that the Assembly has the opportunity to work so well together, but I think that when it does happen, it is always a pleasure to be a part of. We’ve seen this take place on a number of occasions. I think that on an issue of such importance, when it comes to providing protections for those who are involved in such horrible crimes, involved in ways that some of the most intimate and sensitive portions of our lives are exposed publicly, it is good to see that our legislation here in the province of Alberta is catching up with many other jurisdictions.

3:20

I’d like to thank my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake for spearheading this initiative. I’d like to thank members of the Chamber for supporting what really is a good idea. It’s just so important, whether it’s raising the level of conversation, whether it’s changing legislation, that we do everything that we can in this Assembly to protect those who are survivors of crimes like this and that we collectively raise the bar and ensure that we do our part so that these types of horrific acts can’t take place in the future.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I look forward to the passage of the legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I’ll call on the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say that hearing some of the insights that all of the members within this Legislature have brought forward to Alberta, Albertans specifically, regarding the sharing of intimate images with nonconsensual, I guess, direction is something that is heartwarming, that we can all work together as a group. What happens is that it shows that in Alberta

when all of us work together, we can actually strengthen legislation to the point where we’re excited to pass this legislation. I myself am honoured to be the one that brought forward Bill 202. [interjections] Thank you.

The fact that the idea stemmed from a conversation I had with my oldest daughter is something that shows that real-life issues come forward that we are not thinking may affect us, but we don’t realize that it affects others so much. I will tell you that when I look at this bill and the fact that we had one of the members from the government put an amendment forward and that we also had suggestions from both the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education on strengthening this bill, it is something that we can all take pride in moving forward, the fact that we can really move together as a cohesive group.

I would encourage everybody in this Chamber to vote for this bill. I believe that we will all be strengthened because of it, and I look forward to seeing this pass and put into legislation and that protection for victims is put forward in Alberta regarding the sharing of intimate images. I thank everybody for their suggestions and look forward to seeing how this turns out.

Thank you. I move to close debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Horne	Piquette
Carson	Jansen	Pitt
Clark	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Rodney
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cooper	Loewen	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schneider
Cyr	Luff	Schreiner
Dach	Malkinson	Shepherd
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Smith
Drever	McIver	Strankman
Eggen	McKittrick	Sucha
Fildebrandt	McPherson	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring	Nixon	Yao
Hinkley	Panda	

3:40

Totals: For – 50 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 202 read a third time]

Written Questions

[The Acting Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Public Property Theft

Q11. Mr. Cooper:

What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to

theft in each ministry in each fiscal year from 2012-13 to 2016-17?

Budget Consultations

Q12. Mr. Fildebrandt:

What groups were given invitations to the government's Budget 2017 consultations?

Government Staffing

Q13. Mr. Fildebrandt:

As of March 1, 2017, how many individuals were employed by the government, and of that number, how many were classified as managers or above?

Public Affairs Bureau Managing Director

Q14. Mr. Fildebrandt:

Was an open competition held to fill the most recent vacancy of the managing director for the Public Affairs Bureau, and if so, how many days was it advertised, where was it advertised, and how many applications were received?

Pension Plans

Q15. Mr. Fildebrandt:

As of March 1, 2017, what was the unfunded liability for each of the following public-sector pension plans: the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, the management employees pension plan, and the special forces pension plan?

Carbon Offsets

Q16. Mr. MacIntyre:

Has the government spent any money on carbon offsets, and if so, what is the amount, broken down by ministry, in each fiscal year from 2013-14 to 2016-17?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Automated Traffic Enforcement Tickets

Q3. Mr. Cyr asked that the following question be accepted.

How much has the government spent on administering municipal automated traffic enforcement tickets in each fiscal year from 2010-11 to 2016-17?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak about my written question regarding how much the government has spent on administering municipal automated traffic enforcement tickets. This government has talked the big talk when it comes to transparency, and this serves as yet another example of the government failing to provide Albertans with their own information. These numbers should not be hard to find. They are line items in the budget and should be able to be tracked. In all of my years and experience there has been one fact that I've come to learn, that the government is very good at determining what you owe the government. Why are we not tracking and reviewing our government programs to evaluate cost-effectiveness? It should go without saying that the government should know its administration costs. How else do you plan a budget? I hope the minister endeavours to find this information out. When they do, please table it in this House.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am rising to ask for this written question to be rejected. My department does not have a way of accurately determining the answer to this question. Court clerks are involved to varying degrees in processing tickets but also carry out duties on other court matters. There is no way for the government to track, or they do not track at the time, the amount spent on administering specific types of tickets. Rather, we track the total amount spent on administering all types of tickets. If the member is interested in the answer to that question, it's found in our budget.

Government staff at all levels are essentially involved in this, but their duties will involve some ticket processing and some other processing. Furthermore, judges and justices of the peace deal with a variety of matters, including traffic tickets, but all of their time can't necessarily be attributed to these matters. All of this makes it difficult to determine the specific amount spent; therefore, I ask that this question be rejected.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's very sad to hear that this question is going to be rejected when it looks like we're being burdened by our photoradar system. It is important to understand the cost and the fact that this system seems to be something that really needs to be reviewed. I believe in putting forward this question that this is something the government should know, and if it doesn't know it, then I believe it's something that the government needs to close the gap on so that we can understand or better understand the implications that photoradar have on our entire Alberta justice system.

Please vote for my written question.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:48 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	McIver	Schneider
Cyr	Pitt	Smith
Fildebrandt	Rodney	Strankman

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hinkley	Miller
Carson	Horne	Miranda
Connolly	Jansen	Piquette
Coolahan	Kazim	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Dach	Littlewood	Sabir
Dang	Loyola	Schreiner
Drever	Luff	Shepherd
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Ganley	McKitrick	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	Woollard
Gray		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 37
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[Written Question 3 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Correctional Services Protocols

Q4. Mr. Cyr asked that the following question be accepted.
What are the protocols for Alberta correctional services staff when dealing with an inmate in isolation?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak on a written question regarding our correctional services staff when it comes to inmate isolation. Our corrections staff play a vital role in our justice system. They put their lives on the line just like our police officers, and it is important that they keep our corrections facilities running efficiently and safely. I'm a great believer in training, and the correctional staff, both sworn and nonsworn, can never get enough. We have all heard at one time or another that learning is a lifelong process, and this is an adage that is important for all of us to remember as legislators and policy-makers. This question will provide the Legislature with information into how we deal with our most violent offenders and the procedures they use to secure them in prison. We want to ensure that our front-line staff are properly trained and that the procedures they are using are in the best interests of everyone.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm proposing that we amend this written question. The amendment is simply to replace the word "isolation" with the word "segregation" as "segregation" is the term used in correctional services. As the question is currently worded, nothing would be responsive to it because that's not the term that's used.

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to note that I'm very pleased to see the members opposite, you know, referring to the important and vital work that our correctional services officers do. They work very hard each and every day to ensure that they're keeping the population of this province safe. With an expanding inmate population and increasing incompatibles in the populations, their jobs are very, very difficult. We work hard to ensure that they are trained in all matters to deal with all aspects of their job, but despite that, their jobs can be incredibly stressful and difficult for them, which is why it's so important that they have access to things like different forms of peer support for the difficult job that they do, which can often cause sort of emotional difficulties for them. So I thank the member very much for noting that.

That being said, the reason we're looking to amend this is because "segregation" is the term used, so then there will be policies responsive to that. Inmates are placed in either a disciplinary or administrative segregation under certain circumstances. We'll be happy to answer that question.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Written Question 4, moved by my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I would just like to thank the minister for the amendment. I think it's reasonable. I think, you know, that any time the department or the government works to try to find a solution to get the answer to the question that we're asking for is always appreciated. I know that this information is very important, not only to my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake but to

Albertans, to see the work that's taking place in our correctional facilities.

I might just add that I have a sneaking suspicion that the government isn't going to be quite as co-operative with some of the other written questions and motions for returns. I would just like to point out that the Minister of Justice has found a way to find a solution to get the information that's so critically important to Albertans. I encourage all members of the front bench to seek her guidance and leadership on these sorts of issues. Hopefully, as we progress today to what are some very important issues before the Assembly, we will be able to find compromises.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of the amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

[Motion on amendment carried]

4:10

The Acting Speaker: Back on the original. Are there any members wishing to speak on the amended question?

Seeing none, we'll call the question on the amended question.

[Written Question 4 as amended carried]

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

Impaired Driving Charges

Q5. Mr. Cooper asked on behalf of Mr. Cyr that the following question be accepted.

Does the government collect information on the number of impaired driving charges that are due to marijuana, and if so, how many charges have been laid in each fiscal year from 2010-11 to 2016-17?

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake to speak to Written Question 5. As you know, we have seen significant progress, if that's what you'd call it, from the federal government with respect to the Prime Minister's commitment to legalize marijuana, as we all know, next July 1.

There seems, unfortunately, to be a lot more questions than answers with respect to the announcement that we just saw in the last 10 days or so around what legalization is exactly going to look like, and I think it's very important that we progress in a manner that is reasonable with as many facts as possible. It sounds like a lot of the questions that people are asking with respect to federal and provincial jurisdiction, many of those will wind up on the shoulders of the provincial government, so it will be interesting to see how this government navigates what will certainly be some very interesting waters.

The heart of the question in many respects is to try and identify information and the hard facts about keeping our roads safe, and it's critically important that no matter what happens through the legalization process of marijuana, that is one of our primary concerns, we keep the roads safe. We need to find ways that we ensure that we're keeping impaired drivers off our streets and keeping all of those others safe.

It's important finding out how many driving charges are currently being issued for marijuana impairment. We need to be able to monitor the situation to see how trends may be increasing or decreasing. It is particularly important as we move toward legalization to see if, in fact, those sorts of impaired driving charges

would increase postlegalization, so it's very important that we have a point to measure now.

I understand that this data may not be readily available and that it's possible that our current laws might not differentiate between the types of impaired charges, but I think that it's critically important that we do whatever work we can to ensure that we have the best information possible so that the Justice minister has the best opportunity to make the best available decision, not just for the Assembly but for all of Alberta in ensuring that our roads are kept safe.

It's my hope that the Justice minister can in fact provide this information, and I look forward to the response.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am rising today to ask that this written question be rejected. As the hon. member quite correctly pointed out, all impaired driving charges regardless of reason for impairment, whether it's due to cannabis, alcohol, or any other drug, would fall under section 253(1)(a) of the Criminal Code, which means that those charges would encompass everything. That would require us to go through individual cases to determine what those exact numbers are.

Impairment charges can also occur due to a number of substances and/or a combination of substances. For instance, we know from speaking with authorities in Colorado that after legalization they noticed that impaired drivers suspected of cannabis impairment were also frequently impaired by other substances such as alcohol. As a result, it's difficult to separate these out. It's also true that officers may not know the drug of impairment despite laying charges based on signs of impairment, so that also makes it difficult to come up with these exact numbers.

It would be difficult to provide accurate numbers. However, I have to note that the hon. member is actually also correct in saying that we are going to have to figure out, going forward, a way to handle this better. We will be working on that with my officials as we work towards legalization. As he has pointed out, there are a significant number of issues, and there is a lot of work to do in the timeframe we have been provided. One of our top three priorities is to ensure that we are keeping our roads safe as this legalization process occurs. We're very glad to see that the federal government shares this goal, and we will keep working with them on this.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, we don't have the information available at this time, so I'm asking to reject this question, but we will be working in future to ensure that we have adequate data to keep Albertans and our roads safe.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I'll ask the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to close.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I guess it's a pleasure to rise and speak to Written Question 5 in closing debate. I think it's rather unfortunate that we don't have this type of information. It's very clear, as the minister pointed out, that there are various forms of impairment, and it would be reasonable that we take the necessary steps to focus our attention on those various types of impairment.

We see significant work done by organizations like MADD, specifically about driving impaired by alcohol and about the risks of drinking and driving, but without this sort of information, without this very critical information about how other forms of

impairment affect the safety of our streets, it doesn't allow for that same sort of advocacy. It doesn't allow for that same sort of baseline information that's so critically important to good policy-making. I think it's a real disappointment that we're not going to be able to get this information, that we're not going to have access to these very important stats.

Madam Speaker, you'll know that this government has a horrible track record when it comes to access to information. While I can appreciate that this particular piece of information may not be solely in their purview in terms of them not providing it, at every turn we see this government really letting Albertans down when it comes to access to information. Now we have another case where it's going to be difficult to make policy decisions because we don't have the statistics on impairment with respect to marijuana or other forms of impairment.

4:20

I encourage, implore, call upon the Minister of Justice to consider these sorts of questions as she may be making decisions in the future with respect to the data that they do or don't collect and how through the legalization process it's going to be critical to finding out if trends are increasing or decreasing, if our roads are more safe or less safe. We all have a duty to ensure that that is the case.

While I can appreciate the fact that the information may not have been kept, I'm certain that with the appropriate amount of research we could go back and find that information. Perhaps that would be cost prohibitive. As such, I certainly encourage the government to keep this very, very, very important information so that we can all make the best available decisions on a go-forward basis with respect to keeping our streets safe.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Written Question 5 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Inmate Injuries

Q6. Mr. Cyr asked that the following question be accepted.

In each fiscal year from 2010-11 to 2016-17 how many incidents were there in Alberta correctional and remand centres that resulted in serious injury to inmates?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is important for the public to know that our prisons are being monitored and that people charged and convicted are safe from violence. Understanding how the systems work and what the current state of our prison system is is as important for us as parliamentarians as it is for Albertans. We need access to this type of information so that we all can make a better decision when it comes to keeping our guards and inmates safe. Public scrutiny of this data will add further scrutiny to a very important piece of the judicial system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proposing an amendment to this written question. The amendment is simply to add the word "assault" before the word "incidents." Unfortunately, "incidents" is a broad term that would not provide meaningful results. It would also potentially capture some things that we maybe don't want to capture, which includes, you know, people who've had an accidental fall or people who've had a medical incident in the correctional facility, which does happen sometimes as well. My

understanding is that specifying “assault incidents” is acceptable to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and would provide the information that he is interested in. Therefore, I am proposing that we move forward with this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of Justice for moving forward with clarity for this. I think that it would have been, I guess, unfortunate information if we would have gotten a massive lump of incidents. It would have really meant very little in the grand scope, so I thank the minister for moving forward and ensuring that we get the information that we are looking to get out of this written question.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: We are now back on the amended question. Anybody wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm looking forward to seeing exactly the serious assaults that are happening within our correctional facilities so that we can see the results of what exactly is going on within our facilities. I know that there have been two written questions that we weren't able to get answers to, and that's unfortunate, but we got two that we did get answers to. Again, I would like to thank the Minister of Justice even though I didn't get everything I wanted.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Written Question 6 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Acting Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Carbon Levy Impact

M6. Mr. MacIntyre:

A return showing copies of all economic impact assessments and consultation reports prepared by the government between May 24, 2015, and March 1, 2017, regarding the carbon levy.

Policy Co-ordination Office Deputy Minister

M13. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing a copy of the current job description for the deputy minister of the policy co-ordination office.

Ministerial Travel

M14. Mr. Cooper:

A return showing copies of all current protocols surrounding

the proposal and selection process for approving ministers' out-of-province travel plans.

Budget Restraint Memos

M17. Mr. Fildebrandt:

A return showing copies of all budget restraint memos issued by the government between April 1, 2013, and March 1, 2017.

Public Affairs Bureau Jobs

M18. Mr. Fildebrandt:

A return showing copies of the current job descriptions for all positions in the Public Affairs Bureau.

Midwives in Alberta

M20. Mrs. Pitt:

A return showing copies of all documents prepared by or on behalf of the government between March 1, 2015, and March 1, 2017, relating to plans to increase the number of midwives practising in Alberta.

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

FOIP Request Processing

M1. Mr. Cooper moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents relating to Alberta Justice's role in processing requests made to other government ministries under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion for a Return 1. Over the past number of days and weeks we have seen significant toing and froing from this government speaking specifically about how incredible they are with respect to the FOIP process and how much better they are getting, yet we continue to see the Privacy Commissioner tell a very different story. We have seen the Department of Justice described as rogue. I had the opportunity to provide a member's statement today about this government and the way that they have interacted with the FOIP system.

We have seen the Privacy Commissioner speak about a crisis situation. We've seen the Privacy Commissioner speak about unacceptable processing delays. She refers to two departments in her report, one being the Premier's office and the other being the Department of Justice, engaging in the freedom of information requests process in a manner that some would say is unbecoming of the government. They are putting in place large amounts of unacceptable processing delays: those are the Privacy Commissioner's words, not mine. The Privacy Commissioner has also spoken about how she's angry and frustrated with respect to how the government is preventing her from doing her job.

4:30

I know I asked a question the week prior about the importance of access to information. This government likes to blame the last government. But, Madam Speaker, what happened and what's happening is that the Privacy Commissioner in her report said that she had hoped that when there was a change in government, there would be a change in culture around secrecy and access to information, but in fact it's gotten worse. I'm just speculating here, but given the fact that it doesn't sound as though we're going to get full co-operation around this particular issue, again, it's this

troubling trend around a lack of transparency, a lack of desire by this government to be open and transparent about freedom of information. This type of information is very important.

One of the reasons why we asked this question is because we actually FOIPed this information, and Justice had said that it's not possible or it came in a very redacted form. The great thing about the Assembly, Madam Speaker – and you'll know this better than anyone in the Chamber – is the ability that the Speaker has to call for documents or the ability that the Assembly has to call for documents. And if it's the will of the Assembly, it can happen even if Justice has some reservations, even if cabinet has some concerns. If people inside the Chamber, if members that are speaking on behalf of their constituents are concerned about issues around access to information, this is the opportunity to ensure that we can get the access to information, that is so important, that Albertans are calling for.

I know it's hard to believe because from time to time FOIP isn't the most interesting topic of the day, but in fact there are people in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that, because they know I'm a passionate advocate on this particular issue, have come to the office and are starting to share stories on an individual level about how they are having such a hard time getting access to information and how they're disappointed that the government isn't as open and transparent as they ought to be. Certainly, I hope that whatever the government has to say about this very important question, they will be able to in fact provide the information just specifically about Alberta Justice's role in processing the requests made.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Not only is it important today, but just today in a CBC article, that has been widely shared on social media, it speaks very specifically about Alberta Justice's role. I'll just pull up a quote from the article about Alberta Justice's role in running political interference on freedom of information. The journalist FOIPed a number of questions, and it actually took over a year for him to get that information back. He thought that was ridiculous – I share his opinion in that case – so he actually FOIPed his FOIP about how this was possible, around why it took so long.

One of the things it says – and I'm happy to table the article in a written format tomorrow – is: "My ADM, Gerald Lamoureux, has advised me that the Ministry's Office would like to receive [copies] of records release packages for Access to Information Requests made by Opposition Parties and the media," reads an e-mail from Richard Marks, the director of FOIP records management. If this isn't a clear example of Alberta Justice politically interfering with the FOIP process, I don't know that there has been a more clear example of this. It should be concerning to every member of this Chamber.

At one point in time members of that front bench spoke adamantly in this House. I remember a pointed exchange between the now Government House Leader and the then minister, the Deputy Premier at the time, Mr. Lukaszuk, and them having some very heated exchanges about the Premier's office at the time engaging in political interference in the FOIP process. Now we have evidence of that taking place under this NDP government. They promised to do things differently, Mr. Speaker, and what we have is them doing the exact same.

We have it in the form of FOIP requests. We have clear evidence of political interference, in this case the ADM suggesting that all requests from media or the opposition parties need to go through the ministry. A FOIP request should be blind to the writer. It shouldn't matter if it's coming from the media or the opposition or

members of the public. They should be treated the same, not that they should be going back to Justice officials or any other, the Premier's office or otherwise, to manage the political risk.

It is more than a bit disappointing. I hope that the information that we've asked for will be provided in its fullest extent. I hope that they won't hide under the guise of solicitor-client privilege. We've already seen them using a wide swath to protect themselves and the Privacy Commissioner speaking out at length about that. We spoke about that in the last 10 days as well.

I look forward to hearing the minister provide a full and robust response to providing all the information that is so important to the people of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this particular motion, and I'm thrilled to get a chance to address all of the comments that the member opposite made. Certainly, it is the case that the CBC published an article today. They've quite helpfully included a link to the e-mail in question, which says that here is a copy of the information "released" – past tense – clearly making the case that, you know, the minister's office was being told that information had been released at some time in the past. Absent a time machine, that makes it pretty much impossible for me to interfere with anything at that stage.

Mr. Speaker, I think I'd like to make it clear, given the allegations being made in the House today, that there is no political interference occurring. It's not possible to interfere with something that has happened in the past. If they say that this is information that was sent out in the past, we can't possibly be interfering. [interjection] Yes. It does say that. In fact, helpfully, the article links to the e-mail in question.

Mr. Speaker, I think these allegations are just a little bit absurd. You know, there have been concerns around privilege for a long time. I absolutely agree that that has been the case. I can absolutely tell the House full stop that there has been no political interference. It is the case that ministers' offices get a heads-up on already approved documents. There is no asking for what they think about the documents. There's none of that. They're simply provided, potentially, with a package, in certain circumstances, saying that this is the information that has been approved and is going to whoever the claimant is. There is no political interference at that stage, and I don't think that's a very fair allegation.

It certainly is the case that sometimes ministers are called to respond to such documents, and we like to be prepared to do so because we have a great interest in transparency and ensuring that the public gets all of the necessary information. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's totally fair for ministers to be versed in their portfolios and prepared and ready to speak to and address any concerns that come up in the public because, honestly, I think that's our job.

4:40

I am proposing today an amendment to this, and I'll just go a little bit into detail on why I'm proposing this particular amendment. As you will be aware, Mr. Speaker, Justice provides lawyers who provide legal advice on a lot of subjects. It is often the case that access to that legal advice would be, obviously, extremely beneficial to parties on the other side of cases. It's often the case that the government will have some very pricey litigation. I think specifically of tobacco litigation. That has been at issue a lot. That litigation is worth billions of dollars to the taxpayers of Alberta. At the end of the day, that billions of dollars is important. We're in a situation where, you know, those health care costs have gone out

the door. We've paid for those health care costs, and potentially there can be some recovery. That's in the interest of all Albertans, having that money come back from tobacco companies, who caused the injury in the first place, instead of having taxpayers bear the burden of that. I think that all sides of the House should be able to agree that it is in the interest of Albertans to ensure that that litigation proceeds and that the government is on its best foot to be able to proceed in that litigation.

Mr. Speaker, it's obviously the case, you know, that opposing parties are seeking privileged documents about those cases in order to improve their position in litigation and to impact negatively the position of not just the government but all Albertans, which is who, at the end of the day, the government acts for. We have an interest in protecting that information. It's absolutely critical. The interests of Albertans and billions of dollars in various litigation suits are important, and I think that they would expect us and do expect us to protect those interests. That's exactly what we're going to do, which is why we are amending this.

The amendment would add to the end of the motion the phrase "excluding documents containing legal advice." Essentially, what we want to exclude is any documents that contain legal advice. I think I've outlined in fairly graphic detail the reasons for that. I have no concerns with providing the documents relating to the role of Justice and Solicitor General in assisting other ministries with the FOIP requests they receive, subject, obviously, to those documents which contain legal advice. Again, the amendments are only to ensure that documents which are subject to privilege are not included in the motion.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm actually quite happy with the work that Justice officials have been doing. I instructed them over a year ago to go through and try to take a more reasonable and holistic approach to claiming privilege. There had been some concerns that privilege was being overclaimed, that documents that were not in fact subject to solicitor-client privilege – just to be clear, solicitor-client privilege occurs when actual advising is occurring, when somebody is asking questions of their lawyer, when the lawyer is giving them advice or answering those questions. It doesn't occur every time someone who's a lawyer happens to be in a room or on an e-mail. I have asked them to make sure that they're claiming privilege in an appropriate way and that they're claiming privilege in a consistent and rational manner so that it's applied the same to everything, so that there is equal application so that we can protect Albertans' interests in certain types of litigation while simultaneously ensuring that we're also protecting their interests in ensuring that they have access to information that they have a right to. We've been doing, I think, a better job of balancing that.

I think another critical piece of this has to do with staffing. Over the past number of years the number of FOIP requests received by the government has increased by several hundred per cent. Several hundred per cent with the same number of bodies doing the work: obviously, that results in backlogs. I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure that one out. What we've done in my department is that we've increased staff from 10 to 18, and that is to ensure that we're able to deal with these things in a timely manner. Mr. Speaker, that's an approach that we've taken across government to ensure that we have the individuals available to do the work in order to provide this information to Albertans because it's important to us. When something is important to you, you invest in it, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Mr. Speaker, I do find it a little rich that while the opposition calls for us to cut these sorts of jobs, to cut these sorts of what they call administrative jobs, at the same time they're asking for the people who are there to do hundreds of percentage points more work while doing it in the same time frame. I mean, that's obviously just not

going to work. So we had to make a choice. Because we feel that the interest of Albertans in this information is so critical, we made the choice to increase that staff, and we're starting to see higher clearance rates.

Obviously, you know, backlog takes awhile to build up, and it takes awhile to take care of, so as we have more and more of those people in those positions, more and more of that work will get done, and we will move forward in a more transparent manner. I do understand that the Information and Privacy Commissioner has been frustrated, and we certainly hope that, again, as we bring in the number of staff that's appropriate to the number of requests that the government is now getting that we're able to do that in a much more timely manner.

I think that pretty much covers most of what's going on. Again, as I've said, you know, subject to ensuring that we are protecting Albertans' interests in a lot of different litigation matters that the government has going on currently and ensuring that we're protecting Albertans' interests in future or past matters, essentially matters where the opposing party might be interested in the legal advice being provided, we are protecting that legal advice because that information, at the end of the day, allows us to pursue the interests of Albertans.

We are moving to add the phrase "excluding documents containing legal advice" to the end of this, but with that, we are happy to accept it and move forward.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the amendment. I guess I appreciate the minister again trying to find a way to get some of the information out.

One of the challenges that we still face is that there is no check or balance on whether or not we'll know if they've provided all of the documents excluding the ones that contain legal advice and to what extent the legal advice will be applied and how robustly that will be applied. I'm, on one hand, thankful that they're trying to get us some of the information, but on the other there will be no way for us to know if we have in fact received all of the information. I am sympathetic to or understand the minister's point in that there are some pieces of information that are difficult to release around legal matters and matters that are currently before the courts and that would not benefit the province of Alberta, so I can appreciate her comments in that regard.

Part of the challenge, again, is around no way of knowing how the department is going to apply this exemption, no way of knowing the breadth and the width of that. While I appreciate us moving in a better direction of trying to get the information, I hope and implore the minister to ensure that it's not prohibitive in any regard around information that possibly should have been released but, in fact, is legal advice that would have a negative impact on our province.

With that, I will reluctantly vote in favour of the amendment, but I think, again, we need to make sure that we're taking much more proactive steps around this particular file, Justice already having a bad reputation for not being as forthcoming as they ought to be.

4:50

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have some concerns regarding this amendment. I understand where the government is coming from when putting forward this amendment. They are trying to protect privileged documents. That is actually admirable.

I guess my concern here lies in that they're actually using solicitor-client privilege on us as a defence against what we're looking for. I guess the question that I've got is: if there is advice between two government agencies not regarding any specific Albertan or corporation or whatever entities out there, will that be considered to be legal advice? Let's say that we've got Service Alberta asking for advice on how to move forward with some of their policies and we get specific advice on that. I'd like to see where the minister and the ministry are coming from. If that is included within this group, then that's fine, but if it's excluded from this group, it's these exact discussions that we're trying to find so that you will bring forward a finished document, that the government already doesn't seem to be following.

I guess the question here is that when we've got solicitor-client privilege, that is apparently being used within this, excluding documents that contain legal advice, we again have Justice deciding on, I guess, what paperwork they're going to be releasing. And with them not being responsible, in my opinion, in this area – and there's frustration across, I would say, all of Alberta when it comes to accountability and transparency – I would say that this is disparaging that we see this amendment come forward.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I will vote for this amendment because in the end it does release some information, but if this does exclude advice between the government agencies that have nothing to do with Albertans specifically, I don't believe that that correspondence should ever be excluded.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: We are now back on the original motion for a return. Anyone wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. I'd like to reference the April 2017 Privacy Commissioner's report, a special report and request for legislative amendment submitted to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Now, we've heard from the Minister of Justice that she's given direction to her ministry on exactly how she should be handling solicitor-client privilege. A quote that I would like to mention here from this report, directly from the Privacy Commissioner, is:

I am requesting that the FOIP Act be amended to explicitly state that I have the power to require public bodies to produce to me records over which solicitor-client privilege and other similar privileges are claimed, when in my opinion it is necessary to review those records (such as when a public body does not provide enough evidence to satisfy me that the records are privileged).

Right now I haven't heard that the minister is looking to bring forward any amendments to the FOIP Act, and this is a concern which means that our policy is all the more important, which is what this motion for a return is trying to get at. It's saying: "Okay. Fine. If you're not looking to amend the FOIP Act, then explain to us how it is that you're coming to this because in the end you're denying information from going to the Privacy Commissioner." If that is denied, then we have a real problem because now what we've got is a government that is more or less its own guardian, if you will,

and there's nobody that is doing independent oversight on this, which is what the purpose of the Privacy Commissioner is.

I'll read this second quote from the same report. "The Legislature established the position of Information and Privacy Commissioner to provide for an accessible, affordable and timely process for reviewing access to information decisions made by public bodies."

Now, this is important when we go on to this next part. Bear with me here.

Access to information enhances citizens' trust in government.

Transparency in the functioning of government permits citizens to participate in their democracy and promotes government accountability. For this reason, the right of access has been deemed quasi-constitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada.

This is important. This is very important.

Here is the actual quote that sums this all up. "For nearly 18 years, public bodies accepted that the Legislature intended . . . that my predecessors and I could review records over which solicitor-client privilege was being claimed."

I believe that when we look at legislation, we need to also look at what the intent of that legislation was. In this case we set up a Privacy Commissioner. The Privacy Commissioner was to look into ensuring that we have accountability and transparency and bring, really, a confidence to Albertans when it comes to our government bodies. By allowing the Justice department or the Ministry of Justice to start to review what documents it feels are privileged and which ones aren't, we put in a process where we end up having a gatekeeper that may be acting more in its own self-defence than in the best interests of Albertans.

Now, I'm not pointing fingers at the Minister of Justice because I do believe that when the minister gave direction to her staff, it was well intended. But then we have the e-mail – this was tabled on the last Thursday we were in the House – where we actually see that the Deputy Minister of Justice and the Deputy Minister of Service Alberta were creating rules that contradict what the Minister of Justice is saying. So I am curious about the timing of when she gave that decision because what we're looking at here is that if she said that it happened a year ago – and this was in May – this memo came out in June, so right after . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Water Storage

503. Mr. Loewen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to improve water storage in our ecosystems by consulting with the construction industry to develop requirements that provide for wetland remediation where development disturbs or removes a wetland, requires fill soil, or is designed to store water for industrial use.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to rise this afternoon and move Motion 503. This motion calls on the government to engage the construction industry in developing wetlands remediation policy that incorporates industrial disturbances such as urban and industrial expansion, resource extraction, and road construction. Many within the industry are already actively doing

this, and by engaging industry experts, remediation policies can be designed in a way that both creates wetlands and offsets the loss that occurs as part of the development process.

Wetlands are unlike any other naturally occurring water body because they come in many different forms and are not easily defined. When someone says that they went to the lake for the weekend, most people are able to envision the lake in their mind. Sure, not every lake is alike – a prairie lake will likely be shallower than a lake located in the Canadian Shield or the Rocky Mountains – but for the most part, a lake is a lake. Likewise, a river is almost universally understood. While there are differences between any two rivers – some of them are fast-moving currents; some are slow and meandering – most people understand what a river is and can quickly picture a river. A wetland, on the other hand, is something of a mystery to people, even here in Alberta, where so much of our province is covered by wetlands.

Wetlands Alberta defines wetlands as

low-lying areas of land covered by water long enough to support aquatic plants and wildlife for part of their life cycle. Wetlands are highly diverse, productive ecosystems that provide a host of ecological services and form an integral component of Alberta's diverse landscapes.

While they are not clearly understood, wetlands are an integral part of our water system. They act as a natural filter. They reduce the impact of both floods and drought. They act as carbon sinks and support biodiversity. According to the Environmental Protection Agency "wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rain forests and coral reefs."

You'd think that for something that covers over 20 per cent of Alberta's surface and provides so much benefit, protecting wetlands would have been a no-brainer, but too often wetlands were seen as a hindrance to development. Over time, as the benefit of wetlands began to be better understood, particularly how they reduce the impact of both flooding and drought, the agriculture industry has become leaders in promoting water and wetland conservation. Resource extraction, the construction industry, and urban and industrial development have shown they care deeply for our environment and understand the importance of wetland and water conservation.

Unfortunately, instead of being considered standard practice, wetland and water conservation requires wading through a myriad of red tape and bureaucracy. I recently had an opportunity to tour an energy company and their projects. What I found most interesting was that they had already created holding ponds that were designed to be more natural, not just straight-walled dugouts for holding water but a pond with shallows and structure. In order to build these water storage ponds, they needed to get approval from the government to design them in a way that was more natural. Unfortunately, the process they went through to create these natural-looking ponds should have been easy. It should have been standard procedure.

I think I can speak for most of us here this afternoon when I say that conservation efforts should never be held up because of bureaucracy, because bureaucracy hasn't caught up with industry yet. If government can be proactive and facilitate a conversation with industry partners so that building and development take into account conservation right from the beginning of the project, ultimately that is what I'm hoping to address with Motion 503. Too often construction and industry in general are seen as incompatible with conservation and environmental stewardship. This leads to the development of policies that purposely stifle development, usually through the addition of ever more layers of bureaucratic red tape. These added layers of red tape result in additional costs, which are ultimately downloaded onto the end-user, whether it be the

taxpayers or consumers. Things like this reduce our competitiveness.

Motion 503 urges the government to start changing its relationship with industry and start treating them as joint stewards of the environment. By consulting with industry directly, we can ensure that the changes that are made don't create any further burdens while Alberta's economy looks to recover and we can reduce the burden of reclamation after the project is completed. Motion 503 would result in the seamless integration of wetland mitigation into the project.

Another reason Motion 503 is so vitally important is because Alberta has experienced loss of historical fish-bearing habitat and wetlands, and the current reclamation requirements for many industries fail to take that into account. By including permanent wetland creation as part of the development approval process, we can make water and wetland conservation easier and cheaper while increasing the number of fish habitat in our province, which ultimately leads to even larger fish populations and opportunities to pass along the gift of fishing to the next generation.

An example of where this could have a great impact is along highways. I drive highway 43 at least twice a week during the session, and what I've noticed is that along this highway there are a number of dugouts along the roadside where soil and dirt have been removed during the road construction process. When a highway is being constructed, in order to build up the base of the roadway, it is common for soil to be removed from along the construction site, leaving large dugouts. Instead of simply being left as a straight-walled pit, consider the opportunity to turn that into a pond with some wetlands and fish. It would not only provide great benefit to the local ecosystem; it would provide motorists the opportunity to stop and cast a few lines in a pond and catch some fish. Not only would we be conserving and expanding our wetlands; we'd be improving angling opportunities for people who may never have considered fishing before. This would not only create habitat for fish and other wetland species, but it would create water storage for a changing climate. All projects would be developed in a cost-effective manner that best represents natural wetlands and fish habitat.

Wetlands and our fisheries represent a large section of Alberta's ecosystems across the province. This motion would make water storage more natural and sustainable for fish and wildlife without adding any additional costs to industry. Where we have the opportunity, we should always ensure we are protecting these unique habitats across Alberta.

Motion 503 presents a real plan to improve our environment, and I hope it receives support from all sides of the Legislature. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to take a moment to speak in support of Motion 503. I'd also like to thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for bringing this issue forward. Our government recognizes the importance of wetlands, and we are committed to their protection. Ensuring our future water security through care for our wetlands is necessary to our health and well-being and to Alberta's economic prosperity. Industry, particularly the construction industry, is a key partner in the protection and conservation of wetlands. For this reason the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks has engaged extensively with representatives from multiple sectors, including the construction industry, via the Alberta Urban Development Institute, the recognized

voice for Alberta's land development industry, along with the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association.

In 2016 our government identified wetlands as a provincial priority by implementing Alberta's wetland policy, developed through extensive engagement and collaboration. The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky references in the motion the reality that development can disturb wetlands, but let me remind the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky that the Alberta wetland policy states that its intention is "to conserve, restore, protect, and manage Alberta's wetlands to sustain the benefits they provide to the environment, society, and the economy." The Alberta wetland policy indicates the need "to avoid and minimize [potential] impacts on wetlands." When all avoidance and mitigation measures have been considered, Alberta's wetland policy directs that wetlands which cannot be saved should be replaced. This replacement is usually achieved through compensation with the wetland policy directing that wetlands be replaced or compensated at the same or a higher level than the wetlands being lost.

5:10

In addition, Madam Speaker, the Alberta wetland policy acknowledges the importance of urban and constructive wetlands, allowing these urban and constructive wetlands to be considered for wetland offset programs. The Minister of Environment and Parks is working with the Alberta Association for Conservation Offsets to develop a wetland restoration directive and a wetland construction directive, complete with a technical guide informed by the association's industry stakeholders.

At a time when climate change threatens to disrupt reliance on known precipitation patterns, it's prudent to optimize the health of our wetlands and their ability to store and purify water. A well-managed landscape and healthy wetlands can help Alberta's communities adapt to a changing climate in which severe weather and unexpected precipitation patterns become more common.

Madam Speaker, it is evident that this motion is well intended, and again I'd like to thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for bringing it forward. Although our government has already been working on the issues raised by this motion, we support efforts to strengthen Alberta's wetland policy and opportunities to collaborate with key stakeholders to promote environmental sustainability.

For that reason, Madam Speaker, I'd like to support this motion, and I encourage others to do so as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 503, put forward by my hon. colleague from Grande Prairie-Smoky. As the hon. member has pointed out, it is vital that we take proactive steps to work with industry to conserve one of Alberta's most important ecosystems. Strong wetlands yield a plentiful and healthy environment for our wildlife and for the people of Alberta. We all benefit when we have strong wetlands, strong riparian areas, strong streams and rivers.

Madam Speaker, as you know, on this side of the House we are conservatives. It is in our nature to conserve, and that includes . . . [interjections] I don't understand. We are about to pass a motion about conserving wetlands, and they don't think we want to do it. I don't get them.

Madam Speaker, you will know more than anyone that they're an interesting mob over there. There are some things about the

government I will just never understand, and there are some things about this side of the House that the government will just never understand. I'm just so glad that we live in a place that doesn't result in parliamentary brouhaha, as we see in other jurisdictions around the world, and that we have the opportunity to robustly debate. Even with issues that we agree on, apparently, we get laughed at. But I digress.

Clearly, Madam Speaker, you won't be surprised that this portion of my remarks wasn't in my notes, but I do thank the government for the opportunity to again point out that we are about to, as an Assembly it seems, pass a motion about conserving wetlands, as put forward by my hon. colleague from Grande Prairie-Smoky, who is a conservative who's interested in conserving wetlands because at the heart of being a conservative is that desire to conserve. [interjections] I still don't understand.

It is integral that we maintain this natural treasure that is our province. I know that in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills we have some fantastic wetlands and some areas that I know members of the community take great pride in ensuring are conserved.

What's integral about this particular desire is how we partner with industry. Part of this consultation includes that very critical conversation with industry and that conversation around the requirement for wetland remediation where development disturbs or removes wetlands.

I know that just in the past month I've had the opportunity to attend a number of fundraisers with some of the largest conservers of wetlands. Interestingly enough, most of the people in attendance at these particular fundraisers, that are often put on by Ducks Unlimited in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – both in Olds and in Didsbury there's one; I invite everyone to come down – the vast majority of people that were there, that were concerned about conserving wetlands, weren't actually NDP voters but, in fact, were conservative voters because oftentimes – oftentimes, Madam Speaker – the thing that conservatives do much differently than this government is that conservatives put their money where their mouth is and do things on their own and don't just wait for government to come along. Literally – literally – hundreds of conservatives in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills were there putting their money on the line to help conserve wetlands because it is a critical resource for our province.

It has to do with partnership, so I'm glad that the government is going to be working on partnering with industry. It has to do with partnering with those who also like to use and recreate around those wetlands. Alberta's industry is a world leader at environmental remediation, with many industries already using the best practices. It's incumbent upon all of us and the government to engage with these leaders, to engage with these users to find the best way that we can utilize their experience to create policy that protects our environment while ensuring Alberta remains competitive with our neighbours as well. Failing to adequately consult with industry or stakeholders will not yield that competitive advantage. It will not yield the best practices, and it will not yield the conservation of our wetlands in a way that it ought to.

Mr. Rodney: So what are you trying to say?

Mr. Cooper: I'm trying to say that sometimes I get a little bit cautious about the government and their track record on consultation. We've seen a pretty shaky track record on consultation around Bill 6, a pretty shaky consultation around the labour review consultations, Madam Speaker, so I do have some reservations. It is of critical importance that we ensure that we are consulting with all of our stakeholders to ensure that we are working to build a stronger

network of wetlands across our province, that we are working to build a stronger and more prosperous Alberta for generations to come. Conserving wetlands is part of that much bigger picture.

It's my pleasure to stand here today to support this environmentally friendly motion. It's important to support this motion, that respects industry and ensures that we will have the best possible – the best possible – go-forward plan, balancing all of those very, very key stakeholders while ensuring that the Alberta that we leave behind for our children is a better Alberta than we found when we arrived at this place. That is exactly what this motion has the opportunity to do, to create a framework where that's possible. It sounds like the government is going to be supporting it. I appreciate their support on behalf of my colleague from Grande Prairie-Smoky and encourage all members of this Assembly to come to Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and meet fellow conservatives like me who also want to conserve the great resources that are here in our province.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, am very pleased to rise in support of Motion 503, which urges

the government to improve water storage in our ecosystems by consulting with the construction industry to develop requirements that provide for wetland remediation where development disturbs or removes a wetland, requires fill soil, or is designed to store water for industrial use.

I was actually really enthused about this motion when the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky presented it. Then I listened to the member for the outstanding riding of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and I am now really confused because I thought this was a motion about conserving our wetlands and doing everything we could to conserve our wetlands rather than some sort of contest about how big our environmental credibility is. I'm really surprised at that. In fact, I would advise the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to maybe think about the impact of criticizing the good wishes of those people that would ordinarily support his colleague's motion. I think that maybe he should take some advice from this side of the House. When we see a good motion like the one that's been put forward by the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, like my colleague from Calgary-Northern Hills, we're fulsome in support of it. We haven't done any sort of ad hominem type reaction to it.

Having said all that, why are we limiting this to just the involvement of industry in this motion? It's probably one of my main questions. Just last Saturday I attended a phenomenal event in the outstanding riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. It actually was an event that was at the border of the outstanding ridings of Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-South West. It was actually an outstanding event organized by the Edmonton and Area Land Trust. It was an event that saw the conjunction of the city of Edmonton; a private developer, Melcor; and a very generous and altruistic family donation from the Poole family, the owners of the Poole construction . . .

Mr. McIver: PCL.

Dr. Turner: PCL. You know what I'm talking about. Sorry.

. . . and in addition the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, which is a nonprofit organization, that's obviously centred here in Edmonton, that, I think, has 17 different projects similar to the one I'm going to describe. This project, which is in the fantastic riding

of Edmonton-Whitemud, is going to enhance the quality of life of those that are living near it, is going to protect wetlands, and is going to add immeasurably to the mitigation of climate change. I was happy to hear one of the previous speakers talk about the importance of this wetlands mediation on our climate. If we can produce more land that will actually absorb some carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, this is going to be a big push.

Maybe I should go on and talk a bit more about this project. The main proponent of the project is Peter Poole, who is a businessman from Banff and who has inherited his parents' real regard for the environment. He was describing, actually, what his experience was just walking through this 59-acre environmental reserve or conservation area. He was describing seeing coyote tracks. He described seeing moose in this area, moose of all ages, actually, several moose. This is within the Henday. This is on the inside of the Henday. Just imagine what a schoolchild going for a walk through this area would experience if they could see the animals in their natural environment, undisturbed and how we could get those schoolchildren to get engaged and invested in preserving this environment. It's a fantastic result. I'm really pleased with that sort of thing. It's the kind of thing that I think that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky is actually promoting here.

I'm going to give a little bit of history not about Edmonton-Whitemud but about Alberta and what's called the Palliser Triangle. The Palliser Triangle extends, with its vertex in southern Manitoba and its base basically along the Rocky Mountains. This was described by Palliser. He did this 150 years ago, and he was very concerned about the fact that it was basically a desert in this area. His main contribution was the recognition that we need to preserve our water resources in this area and particularly in Alberta, which was the driest part of the Palliser Triangle.

It's very important in terms of making sure that we have not only fish habitat and moose habitat and carbon dioxide sinks, but it's very important in terms of making sure that we've got headwater protection or water protection and that our aquifers are maintained. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act was a product of the Dirty Thirties, or, if you want to call them that, the dry thirties, where the federal government basically mandated that the farmers and the agricultural users in the Palliser Triangle area needed to build dugouts and build other structures that were going to maintain the water.

Now, sort of as a side benefit, Ducks Unlimited loves this. Ducks Unlimited has come to this area, to all of the Palliser Triangle area and have fund raised and helped with the conservation of wetlands. This is all going on now. Then you've got people like CPAWS, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society; Clearwater county; Vermilion county. There are a bunch of folks that are really working hard on this. This sort of work is ongoing.

This is why our government, our government members at least – I can speak on behalf of the members – are so fulsomely supportive of all of this. You know, I'm really pleased that we're able to basically express this support for this important measure.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to stand and speak on Motion Other than Government Motion 503. I'd like to congratulate the member that brought it forward.

You know, Madam Speaker, during the nine years I spent on city council in Calgary, we actually spent a great deal of time talking

about wetlands. What I think I've learned from some of those discussions, where many times we brought in, really, environmental experts to speak to us, is that wetlands are very much nature's way of cleaning the groundwater, and they need to be maintained. They not only are responsible for how clean the groundwater is but also for how high the groundwater is, which makes a great deal of difference not only in the agricultural sector in rural Alberta but, certainly, in urban Alberta, too, where in this climate it's on average drier than a lot of places in the world. Having that groundwater charged up makes a big difference in the survival of trees and other vegetation that, certainly, in parts of Alberta are more complicated to grow than they are in an area with more rainfall, higher humidity, those types of things.

5:30

I think this is a thoughtful motion. The other thing that I think is particularly worth while, based on what I remember from my time on city council in Calgary, is that rather than have the municipalities have in place up to 350 different wetlands policies, I think that for Alberta at some point it does make sense to have an overriding, consistent, thoughtful wetlands policy for the whole province.

For those reasons and on that basis, I'd like to thank the member for bringing this motion forward. After passing it, I think it's going to be environmentally important if we do it right. I certainly will be looking forward to voting in favour, and I hope that other members of this Legislature choose to do the same thing.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I'd like to request unanimous consent of the House to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today, and I wouldn't normally do this because, as you know, my children have the opportunity to come to the gallery on a fairly regular basis, and it is always a pleasure to see their smiling faces in the gallery. But today is a very special day for the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills because accompanying the finest children in the history of the world is the best dad in the history of the world. And I'm not speaking of myself; I am speaking of my father, who joins us in the gallery today. It's always a pleasure to be able to introduce one of the two people who made this all happen. If he would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Welcome.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Water Storage

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Ms McKittrick: Madam Speaker, it's always hard to follow the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, but I did want to let him know that he does have some NDP members in his riding, not just conservatives . . .

Mr. Cooper: I know both of them.

Ms McKittrick: I think there are definitely a few more, and I could definitely introduce him to some.

Anyway, it's really an honour to rise and speak about a motion that protects Alberta's environment and especially its water resources. I really appreciate the motion from the member opposite. It demonstrates his support for the effect of man on the environment, including, I hope, his understanding of man's impact on the environment due to climate change.

Wetlands are among the most fertile, complex, and productive ecosystems on Earth. They play an important role in improving the quality and quantity of our water supplies in addition to providing valuable wildlife habitat. More and more, wetlands are recognized and appreciated for their contribution to the health and wellness of Alberta's environment, water quality, biodiversity, and economy.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the economy because wetlands provide opportunities for tourism. I think that in most of our ridings we have wetlands where people go to bird-watch, to do nature photography, hunting, fishing, and other activities.

As many people in this Assembly know, I am an avid road cyclist. [interjections] Surprise, right? This allows me to see first-hand the wetlands and their importance to birds in their migration and a multitude of large and small animals. There's nothing like running across a moose when you're on your road bike. I enjoy watching how the wetlands in rural Strathcona county change over the months in terms of vegetation, water level, and type of wildlife. Cycling in the evening is particularly rewarding when it comes to watching wildlife in the wetlands.

The specialized municipality of Strathcona county has been very proactive in terms of ensuring that wetlands are conserved in both its urban and rural areas. When I worked for the county, I was first exposed to the Strathcona county wetland conservation policy. This policy works to ensure that no net loss of wetlands occurs in the urban and rural areas of the county. All development initiated by either a landowner or a third party, including Strathcona county, is subject to this policy.

I had first-hand experience of this policy as I sat in planning development meetings and listened to discussion on how developers had to mitigate the loss of wetlands in their development and the changes that they had to make to the subdivisions to preserve the existing wetlands. This is why throughout subdivisions in Sherwood Park developers have had to build new wetlands and ponds to remediate the destruction of wetlands when subdivisions were built.

The Strathcona county policy is clear as to the no net loss of wetlands direction and how degraded lands must be remediated. The county also works with residents to support the conservation of wetlands by suggesting that residents should recreate on trails and keep dogs on leash to maintain a safe habitat for birds and other wildlife, place litter in the garbage to make sure that it doesn't enter the water, reduce fertilizer and pesticide use to keep wetlands healthy and prevent algae blooms and odours, take unused chemicals to the enviroservice station for proper disposal to prevent accidental release, and ensure that the drains on people's property are not disturbed. The county also suggests that watering cattle and other livestock has to be done in another area than wetlands or dugouts.

Madam Speaker, the example of what Strathcona county is doing, linked to provincial policies and direction, is an indication of the importance of wetlands and their remediation and of the interest by both municipal and provincial governments in this issue.

I will vote in favour of the motion but would like to remind the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky that it's not only consultation with the construction industry that is needed but all

sectors whose activity disturbs wetlands, including the users of off-road vehicles and other industries such as oil and gas and farming.

We are fortunate to have in Alberta a number of organizations whose mandate is to support the provincial and municipal governments' conservation efforts, including the Edmonton and Area Land Trust, which the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talked about. The Edmonton and Area Land Trust is preserving a number of important wetlands in Strathcona county, including a wetland that is a very important migration resting site for migrating birds.

Madam Speaker, I would like to close by thanking the member for putting forth this motion, and I will urge everyone to vote in favour. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague from Grande Prairie-Smoky for his work in creating this motion. Obviously, in northeastern Alberta we have a lot of wetlands, and this is actually very important to my constituency.

I'd like to go back to an article that my local editor from Cold Lake had written, Wetlands "Pressured" by Development. This was written by Peter Lozinski. It was written on February 10, 2015, so for many of us this was before we actually took the House as new members. But some of us were here during this time.

It's important that I reference some of the points in this article because, you know, this development that is happening, especially in northern Alberta, is something that is impacting our wetlands, and it's important that we understand what it is that wetlands do. I'll read through parts of this.

To start off with, it says, "Local wetlands are 'pressured,' especially near development, according to Beaver River Watershed Alliance program manager Harry Keess. Feb. 2 was world wetlands day." Now, I didn't realize that there was a World Wetlands Day, but it does make sense that my riding would be celebrating that important day.

5:40

You know, I will say that I've been to a couple of the Beaver River Watershed Alliance AGMs. There are good people on that board that are trying to make sure that our local watershed is protected. This is very admirable. This is something that we all need to be conscious of. It's important that we are working with – and I'll go back to the original motion here. It says that we're "consulting with the construction industry," that is looking to grow. We need to have balance. We do need to recognize that there are road requirements that my riding needs. We do need to recognize that there are industry projects that need to move forward. That does mean that there are going to be disturbances. So how do we mitigate that?

Going back to this, we've got one way, and it's very admirable. The MD of Bonnyville has come up with an environmental reserve bylaw, and this allows the MD to designate an area of shoreline as an environmental reserve that is protecting the riparian vegetation from development and modification. Riparian or shoreline vegetation is a type of wetland that grows along the shore of a body of water, storing water and filtering out toxins. This is something that we need to be looking forward to, these really interesting ways that our local municipalities can look at in defending the wetlands. We are stewards, and we are all responsible in this House for the wetlands.

It goes on – and this is a direct quote from Keess – to say, "Restoring or preserving wetlands [is] an investment because

wetlands are able to filter out and prevent pollutants from reaching water systems." Let's look at this. Cold Lake is our main regional source for water across my riding. This is something that is producing an incredible source for us to be able to feed our needs across our entire constituency when it comes to ensuring that we've got enough water. If we were to pollute that water source, that affects everybody, which is why, making sure that when we look at conservation, we look at conservatism, and we look at this as a goal for this government, that's admirable. The fact that my colleague was identifying this as a problem and saying, "Let's look for solutions; let's bring forward a motion that is going to show a direction for this government": this is responsible.

I will tell you that I take pride that this was a motion that was brought forward by the Wildrose Party. It was brought forward by the shadow minister of environment. You know what? This shows that we are looking to be as responsible with our environment as I know the government across is trying to be as well. When we're looking at moving forward in environmental conservatism, moving forward in wetlands, we are looking out for my riding, and I would like to say thank you to everybody in this Chamber for supporting that.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for providing me the opportunity to speak in relation to Motion 503. You know, it's funny. When you look at this from the outside and as an ordinary citizen – and I would have been even naive to this three years ago, before I started digging into this job as an MLA and learning a lot of new things – you would think that this is really a rural issue or an issue that small counties or small municipalities would have to deal with. It isn't, actually. I think the Member for Calgary-Hays kind of outlined some of that as well, that large cities have to tackle this and deal with this as well. Being near the outskirts of the city of Calgary and near the edge, it's actually been remarkable the number of times that I have had to have interactions and talk with developers in relation to wetland development and wetland remediation.

Recently we've had an area in my constituency of Calgary-Shaw, in Shawnee Slopes, where they're developing an old golf course. Unfortunately, some of the residents were unhappy about this. The development actually started when I took this role. There wasn't really much we could do to reverse any of it because pretty much the entire pitch had been torn apart, but the one thing that was remarkable is that there was actually a wetland there. The wetland was always there, and they made it part of the golf course.

Then subsequently, when they were developing the area, they had to start doing environmental assessments. They were going to move the wetland a little bit, but they had to make sure that they reclaimed parts of the space there as well. Moving forward, it was remarkable to see the due diligence that came from Environment and Parks when they were working with them, the long process, the environmental assessments that they had to do. It's great to see that the Ministry of Environment and Parks is looking to make sure that we are doing what we can to protect them further, making sure that we have the right amount of studies and that we're working with developers.

But I also have to underline what the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud pointed out, that as we move forward, it shouldn't just be with the development and the construction industries. I learned that right after the election. I probably alluded to this before in this House, about a challenge that we had with ATCO Gas running a

natural gas pipeline through Fish Creek park. It was something I had to deal with literally two days after the election because (a) the challenge was that the residents in the area felt like they hadn't been consulted appropriately, and (b) there was a huge environmental output that was going to happen because of that, and there was a lot of concern in relation to how it was going to impact the park and actually some waterways as well.

The one thing that was remarkable about this is that while I had to make phone calls to the AUC to learn about regulatory law and I had to connect with the ministry of agriculture because part of that fell under their jurisdiction and I had to connect with some of the bureaucrats within parks, the most important information that I learned in relation to the impacts on the environment and the construction of this was actually from a bunch of old, retired people who had been involved in the industry for 40 years who happened to settle in houses adjacent to Fish Creek park. So I think it's important that we also make sure that we engage with residents because many of them are experts in their field regardless of where they come from.

You know, it's funny when you look at the city of Calgary, too, because early on in that city there wasn't a lot of care. It's no one in this Chamber's fault. Most people who made those decisions are long gone. But at the time the due diligence and the care weren't necessarily put in in relation to the wetlands.

I actually remember my elementary school teacher telling me that when she was visiting Calgary as a child, the area where I grew up, which is Marlborough Park, was a wetland. It was swampland. A lot of people actually attribute some of the challenges we have with our cracking – I shouldn't say "our" because I don't live there anymore. The issues that people have in relation to cracking roads and cracking sidewalks is because they didn't properly reclaim that land, and they didn't have appropriate stormwater ponds and areas for the water to go. Eventually they actually had to develop dry ponds in those areas, too, so that the water actually had a place to go when there was heavy rainfall, and that's something that wetlands protect as well.

Looking deep into the south, as we're developing some of the ring road and doing some of the alternative routes, there's a lot of work that's going on with our developers, with the city of Calgary, and with Environment and Parks to make sure that we aren't causing any negative ramifications towards the wetlands that are in that south end, just south of Stoney Trail along Macleod Trail, because that is a pretty pristine area of land, and I know that a lot of people would be upset to see that. It's also important, as we do further developments, that we also look at developing the stormwater ponds that we see on a lot of adjacent roadways, which are kind of the man-made wetlands that we have, and those can come from old gravel pits to many areas within the land that we see.

You know, it's a huge balancing act that we face within municipalities trying to balance the urban sprawl that we see in Calgary, the quality of life that people have come to expect, whether it's the garage and the yard and the large area that they have, with protecting our environment and protecting our wetlands that we have here as well. That's why with a lot of the newer developments we always see that mandates are made with the developers to ensure that they're protecting existing wetland spaces, or at least developing new ones, to ensure that we can actually clean the water, just as the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake alluded to earlier, using the environment and allowing nature to take its course to clean and purify itself, to make sure that at the end of the day, when we're having major storms and when major water events are happening, we find places for the water to go.

5:50

I think it's important to note that we've seen a ton of leadership from many of our oil and gas companies when we're dealing with this. Suncor and Enbridge have been huge supporters of Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. We've seen some strong stakeholders that have already stepped forward and taken that leadership before we've even approached them as government to move forward.

With that, Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for bringing forth this motion. I think it really parallels some of the great work that our government is doing to make sure that we do what we can to conserve wetland spaces so that we can make sure we maintain a pristine environment for our kids and for future generations. So I will be supporting this motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, I will now call on the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky to close debate.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I brought forward Motion 503 to facilitate what is either already taking place or what industry is desiring to do. We already have wetland policies in Alberta, but we need to be able to streamline those wetland policies so that they make sense to all Albertans and to industry. I think that by discussing these issues with industry, we can come up with suitable solutions that protect our environment but aren't a burden to industry.

I guess what I noticed, too, was a lost opportunity when I toured that energy company that I talked about earlier and we saw the holding ponds that they had developed years ago, that were just straight-walled holding ponds, and we saw the ones that they've developed recently, where they had made shallow water into wetlands and created a little bit more natural holding ponds for water. It just seemed like it was a lot more suitable for wildlife, for waterfowl, and for fisheries. I just looked at that as a lost opportunity, where in order for that company to develop that natural-looking pond, they actually had to get permission from government, had to go through an extra process to get that done. That just didn't seem right. It seemed like that should be the way it should be done, not that these companies should have to go through extra work and extra bureaucracy to make it happen.

Another thing I thought of is that with these holding ponds, when they're finished with them, they may have to reclaim them, drain them and fill them back up. That just doesn't make sense when we have an opportunity to use these holding ponds as habitat for fisheries, for waterfowl, and for other aquatic life. It would be just great to have that water storage.

Now, I talked about the ponds along the side of the highway. There are some lakes that we have in Alberta that are great fisheries that are no bigger than those ponds, those dugouts, that are along the side of the highway. So it only makes sense that those things be designed in a way that people could fish them, you know, that migratory birds, ducks, geese, whatever, could nest on them. It would just make a lot more sense if these were designed a little bit more friendly to wildlife.

For those people that know me, they know I love the outdoors, that I love wildlife. Those that know me know I don't fish that much – I enjoy fishing once in a while – but I have a deep respect for people that do spend a lot of time on the water fishing, enjoying that pastime. There's no reason why we can't have more opportunity here in Alberta. By this motion, we could possibly have more

fishing opportunity for the anglers in Alberta. There's a lot of opportunity. Like I said, some of the lakes that we fish now are no bigger than some of these ponds that are created by industry, so there's no reason why we can't use these ponds as fisheries and give extra opportunity for Alberta anglers.

There needs to be consistency in policy. Things need to be simplified when dealing with wetlands. Right now there's a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of red tape, and we can simplify those things. We can work with industry to make it so that they're more competitive in their businesses, and we still can protect our environment and protect our wetlands.

I appreciate the support from all sides of the House on this motion, and I appreciate hearing everybody's comments here today. My colleague behind me here talked about World Wetlands Day. My colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake talked about World

Wetlands Day on February 2. I thought we should probably call it world ice day because we don't have much that looks like wetlands in February here. Again, I appreciate the support, appreciate everybody's comments here today. I'll wrap this up and ask for everybody's support, and we'll vote on this now.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, seeing the progress today and the collaboration across the aisle, I move to call it 6 o'clock and adjourn the House.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 2, 2017

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Please join me in a moment of reflection. As we near the anniversary of the Fort McMurray fire, let us always remember the power of community and the strength that working together can bring. In times of crisis working as one, co-operating, is the only way we can make it through.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 6

Northland School Division Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 6, the Northland School Division Act.

Madam Speaker, since introducing this bill a couple of weeks ago, we have received a great deal of feedback from communities in the Northland school division, and our official trustee has continued travelling around to our 23 schools in the district to discuss this legislation with communities. Our partners in the region have largely recognized that this legislation is an important first step to improving education and support for our students in the Northland region, with the restoration of democracy and a democratically elected trustee board in said region.

It's very important to recognize that while this bill will move Northland to a more typical board structure, as we might see in the rest of the province, we also put in a great deal of effort on maintaining a community voice and building unique structures within this bill to address this. We will be working to establish the school councils, as described in the bill, in each of our 23 schools, and we will be as well establishing ward councils, that will be made up of the resident trustee, the school council members, and other members of the community as the population sees fit. We will also be enshrining jurisdiction-wide meetings at least once every electoral term to allow the community to come together and to have a collective discussion on protecting and improving education in the region.

As was described so well by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who has worked in Northland school division for many years, the people in Northland are very kind and caring and committed to students. There are deep roots in the community, and we must work with elders, youth, and others to effect change, to improve attendance, to improve graduation rates, to improve the sense of community that can reside in each of our schools.

As I said previously, this legislation marks the start of a larger plan for the division, and we will be introducing new funding and supports once we do have a new school board established. I'm looking, Madam Speaker, for us to use creativity and a sense of collaboration between all school boards in the region in northern Alberta to work together to improve those outcomes I have described – attendance, graduation rates, and the sense of belonging and community – in each of those schools. We'll be continuing to

work with other ministries through the steering committee that has been established, working with Health, working with Children's Services and Infrastructure as well, you know, to look at some of the physical buildings that we have in the region that might require some assistance for the teacherages in each of the school areas as well.

All of us should feel very proud that we are taking action to restore democracy in Northland after seven years. We are turning the direction of education back to the community, and we will be here to offer guidance and support. The legislation, Madam Speaker, is about improving education for our students and about preparing them for future success, to be leaders in their community, and, of course, making life better for Alberta families throughout northern Alberta.

I ask for support from all members here for this bill, and I thank you very much for your time.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to rise to speak to this bill on third reading, and I really, really hope that this bill opens the doors to changing the rates of student success.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek again. When we were speaking about this bill last, I just thought it was inspirational, the way that you spoke about the people and, especially with your background in educational psychology, your tremendous work as a teacher throughout that region, the amount of work that you've done getting kids ready for university. You've done a ton of work out there. You're probably the best expert that could be in this space right now to make sure that this bill is everything that it is intended to be. Thank you so much for that. Again, it really, really influences a lot of us that don't maybe know those areas as well, and you're a great representative for those people. Thank you for doing that.

A couple of things I would like to add in as we go forward. As the minister said, and I agree completely: this is one step in probably a very long process – and I think, as the member had mentioned, they're called co-operatives if I remember correctly – in order to make sure that that is honoured and that those co-operatives work together to make sure that they have the best outcomes for those kids out there.

The question is: well, then, how do you ensure student success? This is a very, very fleeting comment, even. It's an easy political thing to say, but the actual question is: how do you do that within the structures of how you put those things together? Ultimately, at the end of the day, that's what we're looking to achieve. The questions, then, are: is it an administrative, legislative framework, or is it addressing those student needs that you spoke about? Do we focus on an electoral process, or do we get bums in seats, kids in the classroom?

As the member had also mentioned, a typical classroom in these areas may not be what we would typically see throughout the rest of the province. We have, I believe, a 95 per cent Métis and First Nations group of people out there. There's a massive amount of influence in that part, where we need to bring in elders and family and all of those different supports to make sure that the education is meaningful for these families and for these children.

My questions, I suppose – and this is not in any way not to support the bill. This is in ways – I'd like to ensure that the bill does what it's intended to do. Do we start at the furthest point from the students, or do we start with the actual students: their learning, their needs, their interests, their backgrounds, and their teachers?

An example that I'd like to use is a personal example. It's slightly different because my focus and the way that I teach are different because I only get my kids maybe for an hour and a half a week if I'm lucky, so the influence that you have is a little bit smaller. But in a community like where I'm from, Chestermere, where hockey is, like, the top priority – right? – in terms of extracurricular activities, as a music teacher trying to inspire young boys and girls to come to a music studio when sport is really at the top of the agenda, it was a very interesting dynamic, but it worked.

The reason is because you focus on what those kids need and what is meaningful. Sometimes if you're looking from a classical perspective – you have to learn your scales; you have to learn the theory and all that, and there are students and there are people that are prepped to do that. That's what they want to do, and they go through that process. But there are many groups of kids and their parents that want to see those outcomes as well. If you're wanting to learn a Tom Petty song, you're not necessarily going to go through all of the scales and everything that you would learn to be able to learn a Bach piano concerto, right? It's a completely different mechanism, and that meaning is going to be slightly different.

In order to learn a Tom Petty song at Christmas for the concert, for their parents to be able to see that this child can play and sing together, you're going to have a slightly different mechanism to make sure that that's meaningful, and that's not necessarily the structure of the building or the stairs going up to that building or the administration that you create around that. That actually is going to come, hopefully, from the teacher and the relationship with that teacher and that student. We just want to make sure that – we want these kids to be successful. We want the communities to be successful. We want them to end up in the classroom. I didn't focus on zoning laws when I was reaching out to students. You're wanting them to be engaged in music at whatever level that is.

10:10

Once the students are in your studio and you've got them all committed to you, you create these beautiful things together. It's such an overwhelmingly positive process. I could only hope that within the mechanism that's being put forward, that positive process will also engage and bring this group of very unique school boards together and produce something that they can all be proud of and that they can put forward and that we have the numbers to show it.

As I understand it, when the trustee that was elected went forward to meet with all of these schools, they're looking at trying to get a 5 per cent increase in attendance per year. I certainly hope that this structure is able to actually do that, but the bill doesn't give us any insight as to how we're going to build those. It just is an administrative piece of legislation.

We want to make sure that those resources for the students engage them in a meaningful way. We want to make sure that they want to show off to us and everybody else in their communities what it is that they're learning – right? – that they're engaged, that they're showing that, you know, if you're going to teach Cree, for example, if that's one of the languages that is important and meaningful, they're able to produce something that is worthy of those people and them and that those teachers are engaged and they've brought that together. Well, how do you do that? Is that through this framework? I don't know.

This is certainly a starting point, but what I'm really looking for is to see how this bill actually produces that end result, that outcome. I recognize the need to make sure that the administration is there and that the legislation is all in line, but as the minister said, this is truly a starting point, isn't it? We want to make sure that that

best legal, administrative foundation is there, but if the students are not in the classroom, then we have failed. We want to make sure that that's not what happens here. It's already been unmeaningful. They've already seen that, so how do we get to this other side?

That's why I'm asking these questions, because in the AG report that came forward – and I don't know if those were listed in order of priority – the top of the list was student attendance and then, of course, monitoring and making sure that they're staying there and also making sure that there is a structure whereby these students will want to come to school, right? Like I said, I don't know if that was in order of priority, but it certainly would be for me, that student engagement piece.

I don't know. Maybe the minister will have an opportunity to answer this, but is there a reason, then, that the legislative framework took precedence over putting together the wards and the boards versus – and maybe this outreach was done also, along with presenting the administrative foundation, what it was that you were going to do to reach out and engage with these families, students, school authorities, and everything to make sure that children are engaged, that they are in their seats, because Bill 6 doesn't address the teacher or the classroom. With the legislative framework, where do we go from here?

I agree. The Minister of Education was saying that there's a strong appetite for improving educational outcomes across Northland, but this bill doesn't address low attendance, does it? It doesn't address student achievement rates. I understand that that is, hopefully, the outcome, but I really believe that in a piece of legislation, when you're bringing that forward, you want to also understand how that's going to impact the outcomes. It's one thing to say it; it's a whole other thing to follow through with that. Thank goodness that that member is there because I'm sure that you will follow through to make sure that that happens.

There's a lot of strength and wisdom that comes from reaching out to these areas. I support it, and I will be watching to make sure that those next steps are addressed in attendance and learning. I think there's a lot that we can learn from this area. I think that if the outcomes are shown to be positive and we're seeing that 5 per cent or whatever – sometimes these numbers are just random. Who knows what the outcomes will be, right? But let's hope that we see some change in outcomes and that some of those things can be applied to maybe some of the other situations. It might be very interesting to see because it is a unique area.

I believe all Albertans will be watching to see if this electoral change actually translates into student learning. I think that that, Madam Speaker, is actually at the guts of what needs to happen here. Are we actually seeing student outcomes? Are we actually seeing students in their seats? Are we actually seeing meaningful education that relates to the world around these folks? We really hope that the communities will rally around these elections and become engaged in their children's success. We also would expect and would demand that the teachers are supported and have the resources they need to ensure that their students are successful.

Again, I really do hope that this bill opens the door to changing success rates for the students of this school board. Thank you.

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, tansi. That's hello in Cree, by the way. Hopefully, I pronounced it right. The elders that I work with in West Yellowhead are continually trying to teach me a few of the words to use.

Anyhow, through the Northland School Division Act we're continuing to make life better for children and families in Alberta, and that's the important aspect that we need to consider. We are committed to protecting and improving education in the Northland school division for the Susa Creek school, which lies in my

beautiful constituency of West Yellowhead. I had the opportunity to visit that school a few days ago, and they were so excited that an MLA actually showed up to visit with the principal, the teachers, and the students in that school. It's quite a small school. It's made up of a collection of portables and that kind of thing. But they were really excited, and they had no idea what to do because they've never had an MLA show up there before, and they certainly wonder why nobody has ever been there before now. I don't know. I can't speak to that. But they were sure excited when I showed up there.

In looking at this, the students are really the most vulnerable in the whole region. Their social and cultural needs are very unique. Of course, most of the students that attend Susa Creek are totally indigenous. The community history and cultural heritage in that school must be considered, and their education needs must reflect who they are and the many additional struggles they continue to face. Their education must honestly address the multigenerational impacts of unfortunate government policies of the past like the issue of the residential schools and, of course, the '60s scoop.

Many parents in these communities have not completed high school and may not have had the best experiences with education. That's understandable when you look at what has happened in the past, especially with the '60s scoop and the issue of the residential schools and what's happened to those people right from the point when they were removed from Jasper national park and they settled in the area. Their trust in what the governments of the day did was not good, so a lot of them didn't even attend school for fear that things were going to happen and that the kids were going to be removed from them. That is something that is really difficult to work around because the parents really didn't have the education and they didn't understand, so it creates a whole problem in itself.

Many parents in these communities, like I said, have not completed high school at all. These factors have produced some of the lowest academic achievement scores and some of the highest dropout rates in all of Alberta. It's understandable when you look at what has happened to some of these people. So it creates a problem in trying to improve dropout rates and have the students continue their education. The school division leadership must be keenly aware of these struggles in order to move forward. They have to recognize that these problems are there and try to work through them. Cultural and community-specific responses are totally essential to working with these people.

10:20

Through the introduction of Bill 6, the Northland School Division Act, we are taking the step of re-establishing an elected board of trustees during municipal elections this fall. That is something that's very important, that we need to do. Specifically, the new Northland School Division Act will introduce a governance structure with between seven and 11 wards, each with an elected trustee. I think that principle is something that's very important. It will replace the existing local school board committees with school councils and have similar roles and responsibilities as other school councils in Alberta, so that structure will be the same as in other jurisdictions.

These school councils can include nonelected members, which is important for community involvement. In this way, elders, youth, parents, and other interested community people will be supported and become involved. That's one way in which we can try and improve things in the school division. If we have an inclusive society where everybody feels that they're involved, they will hopefully support education for their children.

This act will establish a formal engagement process that strengthens community voice, including the involvement, like I said, of elders, youth, First Nations, Métis, nonstatus, treaty, and all

other communities for whom the division provides educational services. Like I said, we have to be inclusive. With these changes, we will be working as a government towards strengthening educational environments for Northland school division communities.

I personally support this bill because we are working towards building communities and schools. It's very important that these people recognize that this is the direction our government is taking, where First Nations people are included as equals and are supported in contributing to everyone's well-being – it's something that is very fundamental, that we need to ensure that we are doing – where schools work to teach everyone, not just aboriginal students, to understand and respect the indigenous culture. That is fundamental in order to keep the students going to school, because if we don't do that, they don't have a feeling of belonging, so subsequently they drop out and don't attend. It's where indigenous children learn about their people's history and practices alongside their nonindigenous classmates. Like I said, it's important that we promote that. It's where learning about indigenous history and practices is viewed as being of equal importance to passing along knowledge from nonindigenous societies.

It was important when I asked the principal at Susa Creek, for example, how they work with the culture in the area of Susa Creek, and he said that they have a huge input from the elders that attend the school regularly to ensure that the students there understand the culture and beliefs that they practise. It's important that we promote that so that the students have a feeling of belonging. It's where students of all backgrounds and abilities are encouraged to advance their knowledge of aboriginal cultures. That, like I said, is why I'd asked that question of the principal, to make sure that the students are getting a knowledge of the culture that exists in that area.

It's where teachers are given the books and resources that they want and need to include indigenous perspectives, history, culture, and stories in the curricula. It's where all school staff, for instance, can pronounce and spell the names of all local indigenous peoples, and in some cases that is a problem where the teachers can't pronounce their last names. It's a way of inclusion and of respect for them. It's where all teachers, for example, are able to explain the significance of indigenous structures and important indigenous community events. That is also important so that they feel included. It's where respect is shown for the indigenous peoples of each area by including elders from these traditional territories in important school events and, of course, a large part of forming the educational program.

It's where indigenous children, for example, are challenged throughout their learning to support them in reaching their highest potential. That is something that we really need to do in order to keep these students motivated so that they have the idea that school is a place of learning. It's where indigenous children are expected, for example, to graduate with full credentials and to pursue higher learning either at the college or university level or even, for that matter, to enter the trades. It's where indigenous students, for example, are supported in feeling that they are important, equal, and highly valued members of both the educational and the greater community. With that in itself, if we practise that, we may get higher attendance at schools where their cultures, like I said, are respected. It's where we all work together, both indigenous and nonindigenous, to build a better society that works for all of us. I think that's the goal that we need to really consider here.

Northland school division needs our support, and our government is committed to make life better for students and families in the northern region such as Susa Creek. Like I said, I recently visited Susa Creek school and met a lot of amazing kids who are hungry for knowledge but need specialized support to be able to continue

with their education. The biggest problem they have is when they complete grade 8 and end up going to the public school in Grande Cache, for example. The transition issue is huge. Maybe somewhere along the line we can address that. I don't know if that's at this point, but it's certainly something that we need to look at doing.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the principal and teachers at Susa Creek school for their contributions and great work as part of this very unique school division. Like I said, I had a great visit with them, and they were very excited that I was there. Meeting in person and having the opportunity to see them at their school has helped me to better understand how special and important schools like Susa Creek are for the culture and for the community of Susa Creek. That was a very important aspect for them.

We will also be providing additional funding to the division in the years ahead and working to improve teacher retention. Of course, teacher retention is a huge problem in places like Susa Creek. How do you get teachers to move up to such a remote area and then retain them? That is a huge issue that we need to look at going forward. Transportation and other support services definitely need to be front and centre to help student learning.

Ultimately, the newly elected board will determine how this additional funding is used to support the students in their learning, to produce better outcomes, and it is important that we do that.

Our government launched three phases of community engagement regarding the Northland school division back in November. We held initial talks with community leaders to get a sense of their support for a path for Northland. There were sessions in nine communities from December 2016 to January 2017 as part of how the engagement process was carried out. We then held postengagements that involved one-on-one discussions with individuals who participated in the sessions to gain their personal feedback, which was important.

Finally, these discussions will continue over the summer as we work hard to encourage greater understanding and awareness of the plan, and that's important to promote the plan moving forward. By talking with everyone involved, we will be building relationships to strengthen and support community engagement.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments to the hon. member. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Yeah. The hon. member made some great points. I would care to hear the remainder of his conversation and hear if he could elaborate a bit more about his school division.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you very much. Like I said, the discussions will continue over the summer. It's important that we continue to do that so that we can make sure that we're looking out for the best interests of the school division itself and especially by supporting the Susa Creek school. Like I said, they were so excited that I showed up there. It was just something else. Our government is working hard to ensure that they're able to make the most of educational opportunities for all children living in the most remote regions of the province, and that is something that we need to continue.

I'd like to end with that. Thank you very much. I hope that we can all support this bill.

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

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a great joy for me today to be able to stand here alongside my colleague the Minister of Education in support of this legislation, that has been many years in coming. I was actually working as a researcher for the now Premier at the time this board was abolished, and it came as a surprise. I don't think a lot of people saw this as something that the government was anticipating doing.

When the announcement of the official administrator, or the not a trustee, for lack of a better term, was made to run the organization for what many thought would be a year or two, this was in 2010, right before the then school board elections. Colin was fantastic, I have to say. I think his heart, I think his expertise were all in the right place. I think he thought he'd be stepping up for a couple of years maybe to help them through a tough patch, to make sure that they hired a superintendent, that their student achievement got focused in the areas it needed to be, and to work with the community to develop a model that would be effective, moving forward, to ensure adequate participation, engagement, and voice for those who live in the region and who are parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbours of the children. I have to say that he sure served a lot longer than a year or two. I believe it was about six years, actually, that he was in the role. I want to thank him for the work that he did during that period of time and the now interim trustee, not a board member, as well, who has past experience, I believe, being an elected school board member.

But no matter how well intending they were, I think it was a disservice that the community didn't have an opportunity to be fully engaged and provide direction through an organized structure. I had a chance to ask, before I was elected to this House, the then Education minister about his plans, and I was deeply saddened that under former ministers it seemed like this wasn't even something that was on the radar, giving democracy back to communities that had had their voice taken away from them for so many years. So it is with great pride that I stand today beside our Education minister working to make sure that engagement is brought back to the community.

I have to say that in our mission for truth and reconciliation acknowledging the truths of residential schools is one piece, but true reconciliation is making sure that we do not have to say sorry twice. Today's bill is a step in that direction: making sure that we're engaged in having communities make decisions for their own children, making sure that we honour traditional knowledge and teachings, making sure that we acknowledge the historical legacy and the intergenerational trauma that occurred over generations. I have to say that if this were a school board in another part of the province, I don't think it would have taken a change in government to make this exercising of democracy come back to the people of northern Alberta who are First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, who, just like all other representatives in the province, deserve to have a voice in making local decisions to support their children.

Is this bill absolutely perfect? I think it's great. I think it's far better than where we came from today and the system that we have in place today, and I think that the community will continue to work to evolve the system. But I am very proud that we'll be bringing back a local voice. I think that the ward system will be well served in this community, and I think it's important for children that when their family members, their neighbours, and their friends want to be engaged in their education system, we put in every means possible

for that to happen, because it's good for democracy but also because it's good for student achievement.

I recall many surveys and academic papers from my time at the U of A and as a school board member that showed that student achievement is higher when children know that their parents, their family members care about their educational success and when they're engaged in it. For some kids, that might look like sitting down with your mum and dad and doing your homework together at the end of the day. For others, it might be your mum waking you up in the morning and saying: it's really important that you go to school; I want you to be successful. For others, it might be having a parent volunteer. For others, it might be about being part of a democratically elected governance structure. But kids need to know that their family is engaged and committed to their achievement, and if they know that, they themselves are far more likely to achieve.

It's something that seems so basic, but when for generations we've stripped children away from their families and told them that their parents don't have the expertise to help make those decisions, when they were sent to residential schools and told that the system knew better, we certainly did not respect the role of their families, the role of their communities, or the importance that it was to that child's own success to have family members engaged in their education and their well-being.

I have to say again to my colleague the Education minister that it's such a proud moment today that we're doing this to respect the communities, to fulfill in a small way our commitments to reconciliation, to ensure that voice and opportunity for guidance and for kids to know that their community cares, that it isn't just about some outside experts making decisions about their education. This is about making sure that their own communities are involved and making sure that they have those opportunities. I do in my heart of hearts, as well as from looking at educational research, believe that this is going to make a difference for student achievement as well as honouring the many people who are committed to making sure that they have an opportunity to serve their children and the community.

I think it's going to be still a long journey, I think there are lots of challenges, and I think that Northland has been a great model. I hope that we're able to support these students in achieving the same educational opportunities as any other child in our province, and I think that this is certainly a very good step forward in that regard.

To the people who are thinking about running in the upcoming elections, because it's not that long from now – it'll be in the fall – it has been far too long since they've had an opportunity to do that. In 2010 they didn't have an election, in 2013 they didn't have an election, but this year they will have an opportunity to elect and ensure that they have a voice moving forward. I hope that there is great interest in Northland school division for participation in this regard, and I would encourage anyone who is interested in being involved to reach out to their local school, possibly to an elections office, or to the minister's office to learn about how they themselves can be engaged in this democratic process. I hope that we have many contested opportunities to lead in this community and that all positions are filled in short order as well as with other elections that are happening in other parts of the province.

10:40

I think this is very good news. I think that the structure that's been created has enough voices at the table that it will be able to acknowledge the regional perspectives as well as a reasonable number to conduct a meeting, which is also important, I think, making sure that decisions can be made in an efficient, effective

manner and that people can themselves participate in the meetings, whether it's through technology or face-to-face encounters.

I want to thank the minister and his team for the work they've done to prepare this, to work in partnership with the community, to honour the hopes and concerns that they have, and to make sure that we find a win-win, and I think that this bill certainly does just that.

Again, today is a great day of pride, and I imagine that many former trustees, who are watching this with great interest, are proud as well as we move forward today. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill?

The hon. Education minister to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I was struck by the wise and thoughtful comments by all members here this morning and indeed throughout the process of bringing this bill to fruition. Again, I hope that we might have all members voting in favour of this bill. We need to move forward to re-establish democratically elected trustees in Northland school division.

You know, this is a way by which we can restore decision-making power to the people in Northland school division, and I think that's very important. We know that strong leadership improves student outcomes from start to finish. We can track it very clearly from school board to school board across the province and, really, across the country as well. We have a lot to offer. We have a strong school and education system here in the province.

When you're trying to improve student outcomes in terms of attendance and achievement, I always aim for where you can find most improvement, and indeed in Northland school division there's lots of room for that. I believe that there are many students there in the region that will be going to school as a result of the work that we will do together with this new, democratically elected board.

The idea is for us to support and not just sort of hand back Northland and not provide the financial and logistical support to improve student outcomes. I've already made it clear that we are willing to increase our student funding in Northland over the next number of years. As well, we're working together with postsecondary institutions and so forth to provide more First Nation, Métis, and Inuit leadership in terms of teachers, administrators, and even to the highest level of superintendents, who have people from the region representing the school system at all levels.

Again, as my hon. colleague talked about the elections coming up, I encourage many people to run in this fall election. It will be an exciting time, a historic moment, and a very fulfilling choice to help to shepherd the new Northland school division and to build a brighter future and to make life better for Alberta families in the region.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Bill 9

Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move third reading of Bill 9, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017.

I enjoyed this morning so far and the discussion on Bill 6, another great Bill 6, a bill that reintroduced a measure of democracy, as does Bill 9.

I would like to thank all my colleagues for their thoughtful questions and comments on this bill. We've had a number of MLAs here who have offered very valuable feedback on what this bill will mean for producers in the province. I was encouraged to hear support from my colleagues, from both sides of the House, for the important principles this bill brings forward. This government is well aware that the one-size-fits-all approach does not work for our diverse province nor for our diverse agricultural industries. That is why this government is restoring autonomy to agriculture commission members by providing them with a choice to implement the service charge model that works best for them, whether refundable or nonrefundable.

During the second reading debate we discussed several implications of the legislation, and I would like to address those questions in supplement to the answers provided by my colleague the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

The MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock had a question about whether or not there will be any directive given to the commissions on what a service charge would be. No, there will not be. It is up to the commissions and their membership on what those charges look like. I would consider that to be included in the issues that ought to be left up to producers to decide on.

There was another question by the member about the frequency with which a commission's membership can hold a plebiscite. In the legislation there's no limitation on how often a plebiscite can be held. As outlined by the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, plebiscites could be held for a variety of reasons beyond issues to do with service charge models. This is clearly enabling legislation meant to give members the choice they're entitled to on what occurs within their commission. To put any sort of limitation on how often they should be able to make those choices at a membership level would go against the intention of this bill, which is to provide flexibility and autonomy. While the marketing council can disallow a plebiscite, they are trusted with the responsibility of ensuring that commissions are run in accordance with legislation in the best interests of the membership. That said, a plebiscite is a laborious undertaking for a commission and its membership, and producers understand that. I do not think it is something that will be taken lightly or overused.

The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock also inquired about how eligible producers are determined and by whom. I want to clarify that the section of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act the member cited referred to determination when a new commission is first established, which outlines how eligible producers are determined through the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council. However, for existing agriculture commissions eligible producers are defined in the commission's plan regulation, which is specific to each agricultural commodity.

As for decisions around the criteria needed to meet the minimum requirements of a plebiscite, the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville discussed those criteria in detail. As the MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock noted, there is some flexibility in those criteria, including the role of the minister and Lieutenant Governor in Council. The important purpose of these criteria is to provide a clear framework but not to be something so rigid that the legislation starts to stray into the one-size-fits-all territory. Each commission's membership and industry is completely unique, and the variability between them absolutely must be considered when deliberating a plebiscite's conditions. Once again, this process honours the diversity of industry and puts power and choice in the

hands of producers, who could help communicate what those unique conditions may mean for a plebiscite.

Last month I appointed a new marketing council. The board members were selected as a result of a thorough recruitment process. They have a wealth of experience in agriculture, agribusiness, governance, human resources, interpreting legislation, financial management, and risk management that will serve them well as they help ensure that the marketing council continues to meet the needs of the 20 marketing boards and commissions and the agriculture sector. The experience, diversity in representation, and skill that they bring to the table are what gives me the utmost confidence in their ability to work with the commissions.

With the passing of this bill there will be a strong expectation that the marketing council will be working together closely with the commissions. I as minister will want to see evidence of robust consultation with the commissions by the council, and board membership at the commission level in turn will be expected to consult with their membership. It's important that it's ensured that the plebiscite process is open, fair, and transparent and gives producers a clear voice in the decision.

Members' support of Bill 9 reinforces the commitment of this Assembly to the importance of flexibility for agriculture commissions and our respect for Alberta's agricultural producers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

10:50

Mr. Schneider: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I very briefly rise today to lend my voice in support of Bill 9, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017, commonly referred to as MAPA. As discussed through all readings of this bill, the MAPA amendment applies only to agricultural commissions. This proposed amendment to MAPA will once again allow the producer membership as a whole to choose via plebiscite either a refundable or nonrefundable service charge model for their individual commission. That's why allowing a plebiscite to change the funding model or to remain with the status quo is so, so important. Each commission will be given the wherewithal to determine the method and the rules around the individual plebiscites or if indeed there is even a desire by the members to hold one. The ability to determine the direction that each commission will ultimately take will reside with the membership. It will be those folks as a membership that have the ability to initiate change or not.

Our caucus and our party have always believed in letting grassroots members determine their own path, and members on this side of the House understand the role that these commissions play. Actually, we have members of the beef, barley, canola, wheat, and pulse commissions represented right here. These groups operate in a self-funded model, where service charges assessed and collected from members are often the main source of income for operations. There have been some concerns raised by colleagues in opposition, but despite that, I believe that it's time we returned Alberta to the pre-2009 model.

This amendment to MAPA will now bring legislation in line with other jurisdictions in Canada. Additionally, this amendment returns commission members to a state of self-determination with their respective commissions. It is for these reasons, Madam Speaker, that I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, it's my honour to rise and speak in relation to Bill 9 and my support of Bill 9. I know that there are a few eyebrows raised about this person who lives in suburban Calgary speaking about something that really impacts the farm. Well, I am the grandson of a farmer who settled in Innisfail from Slovakia.

I've had this very unique opportunity to actually sit with the Member for Little Bow as the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, and we looked at ways for us to explore the expansion of value-added in the agrifood sector. When we were doing deliberations, it was quite fulfilling. I felt like I was sitting on a metaphorical yacht because we all kind of worked together, just as we have been today, to find some very positive feedback that came in relation to what we proposed. It was similar to when we were talking about wetlands earlier today and speaking in relation to Ducks Unlimited, how they protect ecosystems, protect things like frogs, and many of those other facets.

Reflecting on when we were in deliberations for diversifying the agrifood and agribusiness sector, one of the things that was very important was that we could actually seek out information from many of these commissions, and they were very key stakeholders that brought us a lot of feedback. It was great because they brought feedback from grassroots members. You know, while we're wearing our sandals and relaxing in the summer, they are bringing forth the food that we put on our table and are working extraordinarily hard to ensure that we are all well fed and well organized.

They outlined some very important things. They outlined the importance of us looking into expanding into foreign markets, and they provided us with significant feedback. They provided us and the ministry a lot of support while the government has been doing tours of the Asian markets. These commissions provided us with significant feedback to expand the continental drift to the European markets and the Asian markets while we deal with a lot of the uncertainty in the U.S. We continue to expand this industry, an industry that's been growing by 7 per cent year over year despite the fact that there's been some uncertainty coming from the U.S. markets while they determine what direction they want to go in relation to trade.

You know, I've heard comments in relation to a one-size-fits-all model not necessarily working. I think that's why it's important for our commissions to have that autonomy to make the decisions on what direction they want to go in relation to the refunding of these monies. Another thing that we outlined when we were in our meetings was the need for education, especially domestic education, in relation to what we're doing in farming.

To share a story of what I've seen from some of these commissions, just recently I went to Aggie Days in Calgary. The Calgary Stampede puts it on. It's an agricultural fair that educates students, and schools will bring kids to the grounds to learn about this. It's put on for free by the Stampede board, and some of the key partners that actually help support this are some of the commissions as well. When I went there with my kids on the weekend, I saw big bristol board signs that talked about things from pulses to beef producers, chicken producers. Basically, almost any field that's covered within our agriculture sector was covered at this event. I think one of the most empowering things about this was that it was the grassroots memberships, really, that were providing us with a lot of this education, really educating my kids and letting them know something that they took for granted, which is the food on

their plates and where it comes from, and sort of providing that important respect that they need to have for the farms in Alberta.

One of the things we also look at as we diversify our economy locally is that buying local has become a huge, huge factor for a lot of the restaurant industries and for a lot of the commercial industries, and some of the important people that we really need to rely on for distribution and to support this growing trend are a lot of the commissions. Allowing them to have that grassroots feedback that they can provide, allowing them to have these votes on how they want to direct themselves, how they want to direct their funds is crucially important because, at the end of the day, they need to have that support, and they also need to be the experts in their fields because they're the ones talking to a lot of these individual producers.

You know, when we were in deliberations on diversifying the agrifood sector, one of the things that was most remarkable was when we were talking to a distillery operator. It was remarkable because he's over capacity. He stopped taking orders because he can't produce any more. He said that one of the most remarkable things that he can do is to talk to local farmers, actually go across the street and just have those conversations with the farmer about his barley purchases and the direction that he wants to go in expanding his business. So it's a very collaborative approach that we have, whether it's the individual farmers or whether it's the commissions actually talking to producers, whether it's value-added foods, the processing of food, whether it's the manufacturing of our craft industry, whether it be craft liquors or craft beers. It's really putting us on the map, and a lot of that is led by the individual commissions that are really driving this process.

One of the most fulfilling things I saw when we were talking about this and what I was learning about when I had the opportunity to sit in our six-month deliberations looking at value-added within the agrifood sector was how much information and how much feedback and how much these commissions support our economic development. You know, it's easy for us to say one day that we want to set up a Freezies factory, but at the end of the day we need individual stakeholders, individual commissions to really drive the narrative and really provide us with positive feedback for their stakeholders and be stakeholder directed to help us really grow our industry and grow our economy here in Alberta.

You know, if there's anything I can really say to a lot of these commissions and to a lot of these individual farmers – and I don't think they get the praise and the appreciation that they need – it's: thank you for that support and, honestly, thank you for providing us with that crucial feedback during the deliberations. That really helped us to come together as united members and to pass 13 motions unanimously. I can only envision that if they weren't in that united form how unproductive we might have been, but because they brought so much information to the table and provided us with data-based feedback, we were able to get a lot done in that committee and move forward and actually see a positive direction with our already growing and influential agrifood and agribusiness sector.

With that being said, I'm happy to support Bill 9, and I encourage all members to do the same as well.

11:00

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

No other speakers to the bill?

The hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are many life and work experiences in this House. We have doctors. We have

businesspeople, including farmers, social workers, nurses, educators. The list goes on. Now we are politicians, and once in a while we get to reintroduce a level of democracy, perhaps in a little way but I think not insignificant. This bill, Bill 9, does just that.

I've heard from every commission in the province, many individual producers. All to some degree do not oppose this; they were supportive of it. Some of the individual producers and commissions welcome this change with great enthusiasm, and I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, some with a level of emotion attached to that. This is something they've been looking for, well, 10 years now, I suppose. It's something that they felt was needed, as I do.

I really welcomed the discussion and the debate in the House and the support of everyone in the House for this. We all recognize that if you're looking for a level of democracy or a level of governance, it's best done closest to the source. This brings this closer to the source, to the producers themselves, and is able to shape their check-offs, to refund or nonrefundable, to their commissions.

There are some that will work hard at this to make what they feel are those necessary changes with the voice from their membership, from the producers, and there are others that won't, so it's going to be a mixed bag. It's going to be interesting to see this development over the next year or so about where folks go. I'm looking forward to continuing working with these commissions on this, on how the marketing council will assist them with their plebiscites and other issues that they have, knowing that the commissions are, I believe without a doubt, doing the best they possibly can for their membership in marketing their products and doing research and the many things that they do with this check-off money. It's not just check-off funds to run their organizations; it's to do the good work that they've all done.

We live, you know, in somewhat uncertain times, I suppose, if I could use those words, in marketing to our largest trading partner, but it's still our largest trading partner. It remains vital. I think this change for some of the commissions will go a long way in standing up to some of those challenges and looking for those opportunities, whether it is to our, you know, great big neighbour to the south or marketing abilities right across the globe, including Asia and Europe.

There are, I think, some great emerging markets. It's funny how we still talk about China as an emerging market. It's not. It has emerged, right? It is there. We are marketing a lot of our products, you know, not just agriculture but other products as well to Asia, including China, but I find India to be a very fascinating market. It is in line to become the third-largest economy in the world here in a few years. Having the ability for our commissions to have the funds necessary to take advantage of that I think is important and to bring that democracy to their producers, to be able to do that. Other commissions perhaps aren't going to be looking for a change because that's what their producers want.

I want to thank everyone in this House for the support of this Bill 9 and welcome them if they have any questions or concerns past this, perhaps from their own commissions that maybe some people from across the hall belong to. I'd be welcome to answer those questions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak on Bill 10, and I want to put on record that I'm not in favour of Bill 10 because . . .

Mr. Cooper: That's for sure.

Mr. Taylor: That's for sure, yeah.

I'm not in favour of Bill 10. We're looking at a \$10.3 billion deficit, and that frankly is a lot of money that we'll be going into debt for. There's a consequence to debt. As debt grows, so do interest payments and servicing the debt. When we have more debt, the expenditures grow over time and over time will not go to services. The money will not be going to services if we have too much debt because we're servicing that debt. To me, frankly, that gives me certain concerns, concerns over: where is the money going to be for schools? There will be less money for schools. There'll be less money for teachers. There's going to be less money for front-line staff as we service that debt, and that's a problem.

Albertans pay taxes for services. They expect good return for their hard-earned taxes, that hard-earned money that they worked for to compensate for what they've given to the government. That's just a fact. It's not an ideological statement. Those are monies that are being taken away from Albertans and being used just to pay for interest. In exchange for the money they expect hospitals, schools, roads, law enforcement. All these things are important to Albertans.

The debt servicing is unsustainable. We'll be at \$71 billion by the next election, and this is being passed to future generations, so it's going to be our children, our grandchildren that will be paying this debt because it's frankly unlikely that I'll be living long enough to be that person that's going to be contributing. By the way, I have a grandchild as of April 21. I don't know how indebted my grandson is, but it is part of what the process is. My grandson will be having to pay for part of this debt that we are now building up.

I had some questions that were not able to be answered during the estimates process. There was not enough time. I was going to use some of this time to be able to ask these questions, to be able to put them into the record. Some of the questions that I would like to get into there also dealt with health facility questions. At the time I was told by the Minister of Infrastructure that these were questions that dealt with Health and that he was not able to answer them as opposed to being able to give me an answer at the time.

11:10

The infrastructure. Being out of Wainwright – this is a question that he may remember. There's a hospital in Wainwright. We need to have one, but a hospital takes between seven and 10 years. That's just a fact, that they take between seven and 10 years from the time that they plan a hospital to the time that they actually have the patients ready to move in, they're ready to do the work, and they're ready to carry on and have patients going through the hospital. That's 10 years after it's been given the green light to build, so we're talking a substantial amount of time, Madam Chair, for this.

On the list on page 46 of the capital plan for 2017 to 2021 there's something missing here because the Wainwright hospital was there. The Wainwright hospital went from number 2 on the project list for Alberta Health's capital list to not appearing at all, so I would like to know if the minister, the Minister of Health or the Minister of Infrastructure, can explain to the people of Wainwright and area

why they are not a priority and why there isn't at least a little dribble of planning dollars sent to this.

Another question here. Why have facilities like the Wainwright hospital been identified and addressed as a major priority then later on removed from being priority projects at all? There must have been a rationale. There must have been a purpose as to why they were put up to that part of the list, but now, like I say, they are removed from that list. I'm sure there are probably explanations because part of the staff that are probably sitting in the government right now would have known what the hospital was like when it was number 2 on the priority list, so they should be able to help give an explanation for that to the minister as part of that question.

The Minister of Infrastructure – this is another question – mentioned that this next question would have to be directed to the Minister of Health. Since there's nothing designated in the budget for more beds for the Red Deer hospital – 96 acute-care and 18 emergency beds have been needed since 2015 – does the ministry realize that the patients are waiting for days for an in-patient bed at the emergency ward and surgeries are being cancelled, causing a huge backlog in the system, which causes rural residents to be redirected towards cities, increasing costs of transportation via ambulance and increasing delays in the Calgary and Edmonton hospitals?

I see it in our hospital. They're regularly being taken via the ambulance to Edmonton, to Red Deer, to Camrose. That's a costly expense when they could have a room, they could be in a room in Wainwright and be looked after, but instead we're being transported out, which causes another problem. When the ambulances are transporting patients out, they're not there in Wainwright; they're just now shuffling people back. But if we have an emergency and the ambulance is, like I say, taking patients from Wainwright to Edmonton or to Red Deer or to Camrose, we're leaving ourselves exposed, exposed to a code red. Again I ask: does the ministry realize that patients are waiting for days and that these delays are causing problems in Calgary and Edmonton hospitals?

Another question that I, frankly, didn't get an answer to and one that was directed to the Minister of Health is the constant struggle to attract and keep medical professionals in these communities when there isn't proper infrastructure and equipment provided in rural communities. You know, time and time again we hear from doctors about a lack of adequate infrastructure and equipment that is holding them back from taking a position in many of our rural areas. What is the ministry doing to address the infrastructure deficits in hospitals in central Alberta?

We have a wonderful ability in our hospital to be able to have cataract surgeries done, but because of a lack of infrastructure in Wainwright we cannot do those cataract surgeries. That was brought forward. It was passed. Everything was good to go. We were green-lighted on that until they looked at our operating theatres and they looked at the infrastructure of the hospital itself. Infrastructure deficits in hospitals in central Alberta: a huge question for us.

Now, if we go to estimates on page 176, ministry support services, let's discuss ministry support services. Well, I can see here that if you look at the whole, there's been a slight decrease, and if you look back to 2015, this section was increased by \$1.6 million. Then if we go to line 1.4 in 2015, there was a \$137,000 increase in human resources. You mentioned at that time that the reason for the increase was "due to the finalization of the reallocation of budgets that are [being] associated with the . . . reorganization," which you mentioned would "ensure that the organization is designed, structured, and aligned properly to fulfill the mandate," understanding that this may occur when there's a switch of governments. Now, since the switchover is done – we've got a new

government; you've been there for two years – why are we still seeing these slight increases?

This is the next question. The October 2016 AG report states that Infrastructure needs better processes to prioritize projects that ministries submit. This recommendation has been outstanding since 2007. This long overdue recommendation has had obvious costly ramifications because it's not been properly taken care of. Has this government come up with a rational plan and better processes to prioritize these projects? This is the next question. What has the ministry done to correct this problem in the current budget?

Another question. The Wildrose government would support local decision-making and take all Albertans' health care needs into consideration and devise a capital project list to benefit all Albertans to fix these issues. Now, where is the Infrastructure sunshine list that the ministry promised during the campaign, and will they prioritize that list so that we know what is going to be on the top of the list and what is going to be done maybe in one, two, four years from now?

Are there any building Canada fund projects in Alberta being held up waiting for federal approval? How much of the building Canada fund money remains unallocated? Did they transfer the money to the ministry or Treasury Board and Finance, and is it sitting in some sort of investment vehicle? Albertans would like to know that if their money is sitting there, it's sitting in some kind of investment vehicle at least making some kind of return so that we can offset some of the money being lost with all the interest payments that we, frankly, are paying out. How much interest has the money sitting there generated? Can you please provide me with a number?

This is on a different part of the budget. You went and talked about a deeper greening project for Infrastructure. I would like for you to be able to explain to me what that deeper greening project is because I couldn't frankly find anything on the Internet that explained what that was.

11:20

Next question. Infrastructure has received some of the funding. What is the funding used for on the deeper greening? What kind of infrastructure projects would you be looking at funding with this? Can stakeholders also apply for this funding?

Finally, in the capital plan 2017-2021 page 2 of 10 details the 200 new and modernized school projects. We see a grand total of \$1.5 billion will be spent over the next four years. Why is there no detail? The pages, frankly, are blank. There's no detail as to what's going on with it. Can you explain how much money will be spent on each of these schools? I'm just asking you to be able to fill in those blanks.

For the reasons I've explained beforehand and some of these questions, I will not be supporting Bill 10. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments?

Any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for this opportunity. You know, this government has said that it has Alberta's back, but when we have a budget that is in around \$55 billion, with no pretense that it has even tried to find efficiencies to reduce government spending in any way, it's somewhat disingenuous at best. In reality it's insulting to Albertans for this NDP government to claim that it's doing them a favour with its out-of-control spending.

I haven't even touched on the fact that this is the NDP's third multibillion-dollar deficit. This is the latest budget that will put us

a further \$10.3 billion as we soar towards a whopping \$71 billion debtload by the end of the NDP's only term in office. We know it's likely to run even higher than \$10.3 billion because, as we've seen in the past, if more revenues unexpectedly come in, the NDP finds unexpected ways to spend the funds.

In the latest round of government estimates a number of trends became very clear. For one, we see a lot of blaming the past government for a fiscal record that ironically was in some perspectives the envy of North America. Let me remind everyone that when the former PC government left office, it bequeathed the NDP a \$1.1 billion surplus, a \$6.5 billion contingency account, a triple-A credit rating, and a 3.2 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio. Now Alberta has no savings, a \$45 billion debt by the end of the fiscal year, an alert that our credit rating is going to fall once again, and a debt-to-GDP ratio of almost 14 per cent. Please explain how this is helping Albertans.

The NDP's deflect-and-blame game became very evident to me when the Justice minister cut the Alberta Crown prosecutor's office budget by \$5 million over two years. A year ago she proudly pointed to reducing the prosecutors' budget through finding efficiencies, which included leaving 35 prosecutor positions open. Then the Supreme Court brought down the Jordan decision, and Alberta had to scramble. So while this budget injects needed dollars into the justice system to hire more prosecutors, this government refuses to take responsibility for its role in causing the backlog in the court system. Let's go back over that tactic once again. It cut the prosecutors' budget, got caught, and then blamed the past government.

If that doesn't shake your faith in its ability to budget, here's another one. In estimates for Children's Services I asked the minister to please explain how our government came up with the figure of \$25 a day for affordable daycare, and she did not have an answer. As a father of three, of course I fully support the concept of affordable child care. As a former police officer who has seen parents in all levels of society struggle to raise their families, of course I support programs that assist them. But the NDP government has \$10 million in this year's budget for its \$25-a-day daycare pilot project, that is an experiment. If this experiment works, the government wants to roll it out across Alberta. But the plan has no foundation. They are going to try this, they're going to try that, and they will see how it all unfolds.

I asked the minister why she settled on \$25 a day. Why not \$20? Why not \$30? Why not \$10? I discovered that \$25 a day is truly just an arbitrary number. They picked something that sounded really good and built an entire program around it. Furthermore, this new program is supposedly aimed to assist families most in need, but clients are not income tested. So how does this government know it's helping those who really, truly will benefit the most out of this?

Another experiment involves, of course, the infamous light bulbs. The NDP proudly pointed out the, quote, we'll change your light bulb program as a success because so many Albertans signed up for it. Of course they did. They're free. Who wouldn't sign up for this? People want some of their money back that the NDP took from them. It only makes sense.

I could go on, but you get the point. Albertans know that the NDP are experimenting with their money. While the government may not see it that way, the budget is just one of the many indications of how out of touch the current government is with the people of Alberta. That's why I will not support this NDP budget.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for this time.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 10? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to be able to rise today and speak with respect to this budget and some of the concerns that I have and some of the concerns that I'm hearing from my constituents and Albertans on a broad basis.

Madam Chair, it's interesting when we look out there and we talk to Albertans and they tell us that they try and use common sense in their households and they would expect us to use common sense and bring that entrepreneurial spirit and prairie work ethic to the table when we're trying to decide not only what's best for us but also what's best for them, their ability to not only sustain their families today but to look out for the future generations ahead, their children and grandchildren to come, that they are so concerned about and so concerned about the future of this province.

Madam Chair, I'll draw a picture here because when we hear about \$55 billion and \$45 billion and \$10.3 billion, those numbers, that number of zeros, are overwhelming for most people, for most Albertans. It's hard to comprehend and hard for us to grasp that we could drive this province \$10 billion into debt every year.

Let's take a look at a typical Alberta household. Let's just say that we've got a household that owns their own home, a modest home, and have 10 per cent equity in that home. Let's say that it's a \$400,000 single-family home in one of the major cities. They've got 10 per cent equity in that home, about \$40,000, that they've worked hard to save, to invest in that home and to build up over a period of time. It's a young family, say, a family of four. They've got a net household income of around \$45,000, but they've found that to try and sustain their family in a reasonable lifestyle and to provide for their children, they have to spend about \$55,000 a year. Their annual deficit for that household is about \$10,000, Madam Chair, \$10,000 that they're spending that they're not earning every year. Let's add some zeros to that. It kind of sounds like \$10 billion.

It only takes them four years, four short years, to burn through the entire equity that they've got in their household, which means that they have no assets left, no net equity left. Let's say that that goes on for another four years. They now are going into deeper debt just to try to put groceries on the table, perhaps, and keep their kids in sports and various other things.

Madam Chair, those are the kinds of numbers that scare me. If we add all those zeros back on, that's the household we live in. That's this House. We've got \$45 billion in income and \$55 billion, give or take, in expenses and a \$10.3 billion deficit every year, and we're already going into the hole.

11:30

Madam Chair, I like numbers. I look at the numbers, and I try to see the impact and what the implications are on Albertans. We're looking at a \$71 billion debt by 2019-2020 and a population projection of about 4.4 million people. That works out to about \$16,000 of debt per person. For a family of four that's about \$65,000 worth of net debt that they own on behalf of this province, on behalf of this government. These numbers are a little bit frightening when I start doing some extrapolations on them. For that \$65,000 the family of four would have to pay about \$378 a month to pay that off. Guess for how long? For the next 25 years. That's \$378 a month for 25 years. That's paying back the \$65,000. There's another \$48,000 in interest that they're going to pay over that period of time, for a total of \$113,000 that it's going to cost them for irresponsible spending today. That means that their children born today will be 25 years old. That may limit their ability to do some other things like put money into an RESP for those children, like pay off debt.

Now, Madam Chair, I did some numbers on this. If they took that same \$378 a month and put it into long-term savings for their retirement, for their family at a nominal interest rate — let's say that

they're very lucky in the investment marketplace with their RRSPs and they get a 5 per cent annualized compound return on investment – they would have \$227,000 of savings at the end of that 25 years instead of having paid \$113,000 to pay off that debt that they took irresponsibly in year 1.

Madam Chair, these numbers – when we again look at a household, we look at common sense. We look at the way, I think, that Albertans expect us to live, the way that they would live, the way that they would live in their households so that they can sustain their family today, so that they can invest in their family for tomorrow and they can know that the future of their children and grandchildren is something they can count on without being buried in debt.

I was just at the Calgary Counselling Centre. We know that debt is having a huge impact on people in terms of their mental health, their physical health, and the crises that they're facing in terms of losing their homes and other things.

Madam Chair, we need to be more responsible in this province. This budget: last year \$10.8 billion, this year \$10.3 billion. This keeps on mounting and with no plan to repay any debt. When you take on a mortgage, you start paying it the next day so that you make sure you're being responsible with that asset. I've got no problem with us investing in good assets for Albertans, but we need to have a plan to pay them off, and we need to start that plan today. We need to be responsible with those dollars.

I'm worried on behalf of this House, on behalf of this government, on behalf of Albertans that we've got a shovel – and it's a big one – and we don't know when to throw it away. That hole keeps getting bigger and deeper, and we just don't seem to have that common sense to know when to throw that shovel away or to maybe get some people around us with some more shovels and fill that hole back in the way Albertans expect us to.

So, Madam Chair, I will not be supporting this budget because I believe it's an irresponsible attack on Albertans today and into the future. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to talk about this appropriation bill that's before us and specifically to the issues regarding the fiscal plan and carbon taxation. I've read through this fiscal plan. I see a lot of mention of the climate leadership action plan that this government has brought upon Alberta. There are projections within this fiscal plan that indicate an increase in carbon tax revenue over the years, but it's based on the premise that our industries are going to somehow magically rebound and that we're going to see this huge increase in economic activity and, therefore, an increase in revenue through carbon taxation.

But I want to talk a little bit about something this government doesn't like to look at, and that is trade exposure and carbon leakage. I see this line item for carbon tax, and I see it collecting revenue as it's already been enacted, yet this government still hasn't clarified who is going to receive the industry-wide best-in-class benchmarks and thus be exempted from this tax. We were told in the climate action plan that the best in class across industries would be exempted from paying the carbon tax. It was boasted about extensively as a way to reward efficiencies, the idea being that the very efficient, the most efficient in an industry sector would become the benchmark, and then any companies who were manufacturing or emitting pollution to a level that was worse than that would be subject to carbon taxation. Those companies that were best in class would be the benchmark, and they would be exempted.

But we've never seen such a list, and I have had industry coming to me asking: where is this; how do we know; where is the analysis?

They've asked the government, too, and they get no answers. Every time I speak with industry, they still do not know who will be exempt and who won't be and where these benchmarks are.

Now, as an Alberta MLA and the MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake I am deeply worried about the impact this is going to have in my province and specifically in my community. I'm worried about the jobs. I'm also worried about our legacy of clean air and water, and I know that carbon leakage is a very real threat to our legacy. It is a threat that pushes jobs to other jurisdictions. It pushes wealth to other jurisdictions. But it also pushes pollution to other jurisdictions that do not have the responsible environmental legacy that we here in Alberta have had for decades. Yes, decades. Because contrary to the NDP's world view, our people, everyday Albertans, have been actively environmentally responsible for decades.

I want to speak about three such responsible industries that were part of Alberta's diversification drive a generation or so ago. Again, contrary to the NDP's world view, Alberta was diversifying, has been doing it for a long time. One of the industries I want to talk about is the cement industry. Here in our province we have only two cement producers, and they are major employers. They give back to their local communities, supporting all kinds of projects and community activities. They pay significant amounts in taxes. They significantly diversify our economy. They bring millions of export dollars into our province. They are significantly trade exposed. The two producers also happen to be two of the most energy-efficient cement producers in Canada, and because they operate in Alberta, we know that their reclamation standards go above and beyond what is done in most other jurisdictions and that their concern for things like water safety and usage are paramount to them.

Now, these two companies export something in the order of half of everything they produce. A lot of it goes to British Columbia for now – for now – and across the border into our neighbouring U.S. The reason they export to B.C., by the way – that's at the moment, at least – is because B.C. had introduced a carbon tax and Alberta hadn't. That effectively doubled the cost of natural gas to B.C.'s cement producers. It resulted in an almost instantaneous 40 per cent increase in imported cement from Asia and other jurisdictions, and these B.C. producers became very disadvantaged. That is carbon leakage at work, and there is a direct relation between the introduction of a carbon tax in B.C. and the loss of business to B.C.'s cement producers. Here we are going down the very same path.

Look, this is an industry that relies heavily on coal and natural gas, and like all industries in Alberta, they need power and a lot of it. To give you an idea of how much, the Exshaw plant alone consumes as much electricity as the entire city of Red Deer. Coal has a dual use for them. Along with the heat that it produces, it also produces fly ash, which is a significant contribution to the cement recipe.

11:40

Now, the United States isn't going to be implementing a carbon tax, and the United States happens to be a huge market and without a carbon tax. Now our Alberta companies are not going to be competitive. Given the amount of export that these companies are involved in, this is a significant threat. It's a threat to jobs. It's a threat to even the amount of money that they can give locally to community functions. It's also a threat to the taxation this government expects to be raising from our heavy industries. The thing about this carbon tax is that because it's not implemented evenly across all jurisdictions, our government, by imposing it, is giving the competitive advantage to everyone outside of Alberta. This carbon tax is sending away jobs, it's sending away wealth, and it's sending away pollution.

There'll be no global reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This government might be able to wave some kind of a green flag in here and say: look, we've reduced greenhouse gas emissions here in the province of Alberta. Meanwhile every jurisdiction where we've sent jobs and wealth and economic activity that doesn't have the environmental responsibility we do: those jurisdictions' pollution is going to increase. So there's no net benefit of this carbon tax globally. That's why places like Australia and France are ditching it. Our own government might as well be providing a subsidy to American cement producers and Asian cement producers because that's what this tax is doing. You're penalizing Alberta companies, which then gives an economic benefit to companies outside of this province to send their products here.

Now, let's talk about global greenhouse emissions a little bit more. We're going to be actually increasing them while we're harming Alberta's economy. How intelligent is that? Does anyone on that other side over there have any sense of how globally counterproductive this carbon tax is on pollution and how locally counterproductive this carbon tax is on jobs and economic activity?

Within this government's fiscal plan we see revenue from the carbon levy, as they call it. I'm going to call it a carbon tax because it's a tax. If you look at that carbon tax, this government is estimating it to increase every year. This government has failed to meet every projection they have made since coming to office. I have no reason to suspect that there's going to be the economic recovery that this government is hoping and praying for. This government is counterproductive. It is no longer a business-friendly environment in this province. We've seen billions, tens of billions, of investment dollars flee. We've seen hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Albertans out of work now, and this government continues to blame low oil prices, but again, repeatedly, we look around the globe at jurisdictions that are paying the same commodity prices we are, that are getting the same commodity prices for oil that we are, and guess what? They're busy. They have economic activity that we do not have.

What we're going to do with this very counterproductive carbon tax is that we're going to move production to jurisdictions that do not care about their water like we do. They don't care about abatement technologies that clean their air like we do. They're going to be in jurisdictions that care less about site reclamation than we do. It's not even just GHGs, Madam Chair. You're just going to move production, and we don't want to talk about these particular industries. So it's okay to ship those industries someplace else and let them pollute someplace else. That's okay to do so that you can wave your flag here in Alberta about the great job you're doing here. Look, less-developed nations that don't have our historical environmental heritage are happy about us having this carbon tax. It's going to be providing them lots of jobs and wealth. The developing world is not a dumping ground for industries that are energy intensive, that you don't like and that you don't understand.

Let me make this really clear to this Assembly. Alberta does heavy industry better, cleaner, and more responsibly than anywhere else in the world, right here in this province, and this government has put the whole thing at risk for nothing more than ideological blindness. Blindness. You don't get it. This government does not understand basic economic activity.

Now, the cement industry is just one of a number, and it needs certainty. It needs to know who is going to be exempted. They need to know what the benchmark is going to be because the fact of the matter is that they can import cement into this province. The price of cement coming out of Asian countries to the North American market is already lower than what it can be produced for here. There's already a competitive threat. We're making it worse by having this carbon tax in this province. This government really

needs to ask itself a question: is refusing to provide a full exemption to Alberta's cement industry really the best thing for the global environment? Do you really grasp the concept of carbon leakage? I don't see any evidence of this in this bill, this fiscal plan, or in your policies.

Let me talk about another industry, the fibreglass industry. I don't know if this government realizes it, but about 60 per cent of the glass consumed by the fibreglass manufacturing plant that we have in this province is recycled glass, and that recycled glass is spun into glass wool and used to make insulation, which is an energy efficiency measure in all of our houses here. So here we have an industry that is part of the recycle, reuse system within this province, which is great. We've got somewhere for our glass to go to be turned into something very useful, insulation for our homes. What a great thing that is. Yet this company, this industry is being penalized because they use huge amounts of natural gas in the process of creating fibreglass wool.

I didn't see any impact assessment from this government ever on this carbon tax. I didn't see any indication whatsoever that this government took the time to look at all of the consequences of carbon taxation on our industries, our industries that were already contributing to diversification, to greenhouse gas reduction, to waste avoidance to our dumps, taking all that glass and making something good out of it. Well, here's an impact on an industry that is a significant contributor to economic diversification and a significant contributor to our recycling industry in our province. Sixty per cent is recycled glass bottles. It reduces, it reuses, it recycles. It's the mantra we teach our children, yet here we are with a government policy that hurts this industry and risks its closure. It takes huge amounts of natural gas to make this fiberglass. They're also very trade exposed domestically. They're a multinational corporation that could take their technology and go anywhere with it.

Let me take just a second to talk about net book value. Some of these industries that we have in this province that have been here for a full generation, they have depreciated away the capital expense to build them. They're approaching zero on their books for the value of that plant. So now the corporate head office, wherever it may be located, is looking at a plant here in Alberta and saying: hmm, well, it's going to take \$100 million to refurbish that plant, but is that worth doing? And when they do the analysis, they will do a comparative risk analysis. They'll compare the risk of doing that investment here or doing it at another plant in another jurisdiction, and the risk analysis is going to include competitive advantage or disadvantage.

Mr. Orr: Political risk.

11:50

Mr. MacIntyre: Yes, political risk is part of that formula. Thank you.

They will look at that, and right now we're not faring so well in this province because of this government's policies, because of this government's attitude toward heavy industries and this government's carbon taxation. So these companies that need huge amounts of energy, whether it be natural gas or electricity, and are hugely trade exposed are at risk. Alberta jobs are at risk. If we have a few more of these closures, that's all it's going to take and this government's projections aren't worth the paper they're written on.

Carbon taxation is never going to be homogeneous across Canada, and as a result of that, Alberta is going to be put at a very significant trade disadvantage, and we will lose industries as multinational corporations look at Alberta and say: we may as well locate in Wyoming, or maybe we need to upgrade that plant in

Buffalo, or maybe we need to upgrade that plant in Saskatchewan instead. They're just going to leave. They don't have to stay here. There's nothing forcing them to remain here. They go where there is the best economic advantage, and at one time Alberta had that advantage. It was right here in this province.

Let's talk about another diversified industry. We have in this province a manufacturing plant that takes grains and converts it into pet food. It's a multinational corporation and, of course, a great value-add to our agricultural sector. But they also use huge amounts of natural gas for dehydration, for baking, and for processing to create dry pet food. Just like Johns Manville, they too are a multinational, and they don't need to be here. They don't need to stay here. There's nothing we can do to force them to stay here. They will stay here or not based on the best economics.

Again, we have a factory whose net book value is probably approaching zero. It's been here for a generation now. So the decision is going to be made in Europe whether or not to remain here, refurbish, rebuild, upgrade, or simply move production to another existing factory somewhere else in Canada or the United States. A comparative risk analysis is done. They look at the taxation situation, the policy and regulation situation, and they take a look at the whole risk involved in that, whatever hundreds of millions of dollars it's going to be to invest, and they do what is best economically for them. They don't do what is best economically for us. We have to create the environment that is business friendly, and we had that at one time. That's why you saw so much diversification happening in this province.

If we don't have things produced here, we become subject to other jurisdictions. For example, we had a tainted dog food scandal that affected pet owners right across North America because of Chinese tainted grains. That should tell you everything you need to know about the globalization of the pet food industry, and with globalization comes the very real risk of carbon leakage.

We've got to understand that there's nothing whatsoever forcing these companies to operate here in Alberta. It is very simple for them to just leave, especially when the net book value of these factories is approaching zero. It means that the longer they have been here, the more integrated they are into Alberta communities, the less likely they are to stay because the value of the plant has diminished over its lifetime. They don't have to be here.

I put forward a couple of amendments – multiple amendments, actually – to shield sectors of our economy that this government hadn't thought about. While they rejected those amendments en masse on the floor here, it appears that in some sectors at least you've come to your senses, especially when we saw the partial greenhouse exemption.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 10.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've discharged our duties for this morning, so I will move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 2, 2017

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House members of the Cement Association of Canada. They are led, of course, by Michael McSweeney, their director. Representatives of the Cement Association of Canada have been meeting with MLAs to discuss environmental sustainability and the leadership of their members. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you a wonderful school that is within my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. This school is incredibly large. We have over 90 children here today. It's great to see such a large showing from a school within my riding. I would like to ask the teachers to stand as I name them: Vonda, Kelly, Dustin, and Travis. I'd also like to ask the chaperones to stand as well: Karla, Krystal, Kathie-Lee, Mandy, Kerri, Mark, and Tracy. I'd also like all of the students to stand now as well. I thank them and encourage them to come back and see us again, and please enjoy this wonderful place.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the family of Noreen Walker. Here today is her daughter Katherine Walker, grandchildren Matilda and Maizie Walker, sons Ken and Richard Walker, and daughter Sharlene Van Etten. Noreen was a founding member of the Alberta Association of Midwives and was instrumental in having midwifery recognized and regulated here in Alberta. Katherine is following in Noreen's footsteps and continuing her mother's practice, Passages Midwifery, in Stony Plain. I would ask that they now receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests from the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster who are joining us today. They are good friends of mine. They have been tireless advocates on behalf of social justice causes for many, many years in rural Alberta, and it's indeed my privilege to have them here and to introduce them today. Would you please extend a warm welcome to Grant Bergman and Peggy Smith, seated in the gallery.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Midwife Noreen Walker

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Friday is the International Day of the Midwife, and I rise today to pay tribute to a woman from my constituency who literally touched the lives of thousands of Albertans over the span of her career, Noreen Walker. Noreen was a heroine to many and a pioneer that helped shape maternal care in this province and will be missed by friends and family and the almost 4,000 families that she served.

Noreen's career as a midwife spanned more than 40 years. She was one of the founders of the Alberta Association of Midwives in 1986 and operated Passages Midwifery in Stony Plain. The profession itself was not formally recognized and regulated in Alberta until 1991, and it was Noreen's charge in 1990 of practising medicine without a licence, of which she was acquitted in 1991, that contributed to this recognition. A September 1991 article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* speaks to Noreen's dedication to her profession, reporting that "she felt 'honoured to be the last midwife in Alberta to be prosecuted' under the Medical Profession Act."

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the birth of a child and what that looks like is so very important, with each soon-to-be mother having their own deeply personal vision. I am profoundly grateful that here in Alberta we have options as a result of the hard work and advocacy of pioneers like Noreen Walker and other midwives. It is women like Noreen that make a difference and improve the lives of everyone they touch, and this is clear from the words of those she served. "You provided such beautiful care to the mothers in labour, you became a part of their family, you loved their kids as if they were your own," and "She gave us the gift of beauty and calm on the most special days of our lives." She was "so brave, so honourable, and loved" according to her patients.

Mr. Speaker, the loss of Noreen has left many saddened, and I offer my condolences to her friends, family, and the birthing community. I invite the members of this House to join me in honouring her and the legacy she leaves behind.

Thank you.

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

Education System

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education Week gives us the opportunity to reflect on the history of our education system to assess where we are today and to look to the future. The backbone of our education system is the amazing professionals who devote countless hours to empower our students and prepare them for life – the teachers, the aides in the education system, the countless other individuals behind the scenes – who see the value and potential of each and every student and who want to see them grow and flourish to the best of their abilities.

Of course, no child stops learning when the bell rings to mark the end of the school day. The moms and dads, the grandparents, and guardians across the province who were their child's first teachers and who are there with their children every step of the way are a key to a child's success.

What sets our school system apart from others is the array of choice that we enjoy. No two students are the same, and different education models work best for different students. Choice in

education empowers parents to find the schools that work best for their child.

We are at a crossroads in our education system with the current curriculum review, and if we don't get it right, it could hurt generations of Albertans. Changes made for change's sake do not serve our students, nor does treating them like guinea pigs with the latest educational fads. For parents across this province numeracy and literacy have to be a focus for our curriculum review, and we must ensure that the curricula provide a solid foundation and a meaningful foundation of basic skills – the standard algorithms, how to add and subtract, how to multiply and divide – and lay the foundation for students' success.

We have a real opportunity here to return Alberta to the top of the country and indeed the world when it comes to our education system. It is imperative that we trust and engage our parents, our teachers, and our students, and that is how we will get there.

Thank you.

29th Legislature Midterm Reflections

Mr. Clark: As the halfway point of this Legislature approaches, I've been reflecting on what it means to be an MLA. I think about the tone of the Assembly and about whether private members, both opposition and government, really have a say in how our province is governed. Mr. Speaker, I think I might be having a mid-term crisis.

In my optimistic moments I'm encouraged. Just today I sat down with a minister who reached out to me to offer me 20 minutes of her time to replace the time I missed in estimates when I was out sick. The first phase of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention was very effective, with MLAs from all parties freely discussing an urgent issue by bringing their own ideas and experiences, not just talking points. And in this House we've unanimously passed private members' bills and opposition amendments to government legislation.

Unfortunately, those examples are far too rare. Most days the opposition will ask rhetorical questions designed to look good on YouTube, and the government will respond with rhetoric and accusations of their own. Then the yelling will begin, and the schoolchildren will wonder if this is how adults really are supposed to act.

1:40

If you think I'm only talking about other opposition parties, I'm not. At times I have stepped over the line, and in the second half of this term I will try to do better. Now, that isn't to say that I will agree with the government on everything because I absolutely won't, and there will be times when I get angry because I believe their choices are hurting Albertans. But I will never assume that this government doesn't want the best for Alberta even when I disagree with their policies. I will never assume that the opposition doesn't want the best for Alberta even when I disagree with their approach.

My hope is that this House can return to being what it is supposed to be, a place where private members are elected to represent the interests of their constituents and their province in equal measure and where we have a government that genuinely listens to their input while charting a course for our province through difficult times. We've proven it's possible. We've seen it in this House. Now we just need to do it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids Lunch Program

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids lunch program works with 210 schools, impacting 3,200 kids a day who would go hungry without it. Since 1990 volunteers have formed the backbone of this organization. Today I am honoured to highlight the contribution made by volunteers from Harbours of Newport Retirement Residence in Calgary-Northern Hills.

Since 2011 residents have gathered twice a week to make lunches for hungry kids in Calgary. I recently dropped by to see the current Harbours of Newport team at work. They can put together 100 lunches in half an hour. Tanya Koshowski, executive director of Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids, explained that lunches include each of the four food groups recommended by Canada's food guide. Whole wheat bread is made into sandwiches containing protein. Raw carrots, orange slices, and yogurt tubes, with the appropriate *Star Wars* and *Finding Dory* themes, complete the lunches, which are packed into bins and delivered to six area schools by Marie-Pier Fortin, lifestyle and program manager.

Anne Janke, 94, has been helping since the program began at the residence six years ago. She does a lot of volunteering and says that it's another way to be helpful. Ann Bradshaw has been volunteering for three years now, saying that packing lunches is a good way to help out, that it's something to do, and that it's constructive. Rose Seranillo, Mary Dueck, Isabel Michie, and Pat Stack complete the team. Also volunteering that morning were Communications and Special Projects Co-ordinator Jessica Zutz and Community Co-ordinator Jill Birch.

Mr. Speaker, by participating in the Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids lunch program, seniors at Harbours of Newport have forged a strong bond with the community's schools and its kids. Former marketing and communications manager Stacey Senger set up this volunteer opportunity saying, "When you mention children in need to seniors, the desire to help is instant." Feeding hungry kids is now their passion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

March for Science

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 500 cities on seven continents scientists and their supporters gathered to march for science. People marched because there is no planet B. Failure to expend political capital to address the catastrophic implications of climate change will result in massive damages to property, infrastructure, lost productivity, and mass migration.

Some of the March for Science signs said it best. Here are a few: The Good Thing about Science Is That It's True Whether or Not You Believe in It; At the Start of Every Disaster Movie There's a Scientist Being Ignored; Without Data You're Just Another Person with an Opinion.

I know it's tough for the Wildrose and PCs, or whatever they're called, to accept this, but global warming is settled science and denial is the hoax. More carbon dioxide equals more warming. The permafrost is melting. As one of the March for Science signs read: Ice Has No Agenda; It Just Melts. Storm intensity is growing. There is and will continue to be negative impacts on our lives. Negatively impacted agricultural productivity is but one example.

On April 22, just outside this House, I stood with hundreds of scientists, one of which is my son, as they mused and discussed the sad reality we now find ourselves facing, the need to march for science. Also heard at this march: "You know it's bad when nerdy,

introverted scientists demonstrate publicly,” “I’m not a mad scientist; I’m absolutely furious,” and “I evolved; have you?”

All joking aside, the one sign and message I most want to highlight today is that science is evidence based, peer reviewed, and it’s fact. Climate change is real. It threatens our economy, well-being, and future. Funding denial films isn’t supporting free speech; it’s denying true challenges that are facing us, and it’s playing cheap politics that will have a hefty price.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’ve had a request for unanimous consent to introduce a guest who has just arrived.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine, Bernice Hoi. In 2005 Bernice moved to Canada from Hong Kong with her daughters, Kylie and Yani. She settled in St. Albert while her husband stayed in Hong Kong to work. Bernice is a project leader for an IT company. As the mother of our head page, Kylie Kwok, Bernice is in the Speaker’s gallery today to watch Kylie in her role as page, a position she’s held since 2003. I’m sorry. Since 2013. I don’t think you were even born then. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members’ Statements

(continued)

Prescription Drug Coverage for Rare Diseases

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, on several occasions in the past two years various members of my caucus and myself, including the Leader of the Official Opposition, have questioned this government about Haley Chisholm, a young teenager in Highwood whose extremely rare kidney condition, called C3 glomerulopathy, requires treatment with the rare drug Soliris. This drug is currently unavailable to her because of its cost and its off-label status.

When I questioned the minister in March, I brought to light that the previous government waived the rules for a similar case and made sure funding was available through the specialized high-cost drug program, and I asked the government to do the same. To date I’ve heard absolutely nothing. The girl and her family are suffering.

The minister stated previously that she wanted to work with medical professionals for the best outcome. Well, the medical professionals have spoken, and they say that Soliris is a treatment recommended for patients like Haley. In March the Health minister stated that manufacturers are putting impediments in place, but that they may be able to increase access. Well, guess what? I’ve contacted my federal counterpart in Highwood, and he assured me that he’ll be speaking with the federal Minister of Health to open the door to have a conversation with our provincial Health minister because, as I’ve stated before, the precedent has been set where if both ministers create an open dialogue with the drug manufacturer, a compromise can be made. By working with the manufacturer, critical barriers may be mitigated. Adjustments based on population and need in Canada can and should be made for this drug to make it affordable and available through a specialized high-cost drug program.

I’m once again requesting that this government follow up and do the right thing for a young girl who’s suffering and call the federal Health minister to get the ball rolling so that Haley and her family can once again return to a pain-free and normal life.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Bill 11

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise today and introduce Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017.

This bill will help ensure government accountability, ethics, and transparency in Alberta. It will do this by helping to increase the chances of wrongdoing being both reported and addressed. I’m proud to say that the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee reviewed the existing legislation and put forward a number of recommendations, all of which we seriously considered, and I’d like to thank the committee for their work. I’m confident our proposed legislation will be among the strongest in Canada.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair

Mr. Jean: We know the Premier has helped the B.C. NDP in a past life. We know she’s stood hand in hand with Thomas Mulcair. We know that most of her staff, including her chief of staff, have helped build up the NDP in B.C. for decades. It was good politics to ask her staff not to help out on the B.C. election campaign, given the antipipeline crusade her former close colleagues are on, but now her chief oil sands appointee, Tzeponah Berman, is campaigning for the B.C. NDP. Will she stick to her promise and fire her?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member opposite is really reaching for straws. Do you know who else is on the oil sands advisory committee? Dave Collyer, former head of CAPP. Do you know who else is on the oil sands advisory committee? The VP of CNRL. Do you know who else? A VP of Suncor. You know what? In none of those cases would I purport to suggest that I can tell those people what to do in their free time, political or otherwise. It is ridiculous. The members opposite are really, really reaching.

Mr. Jean: The Premier broke her promise. Albertans are not going to tolerate this anymore. The Premier has literally put the fox in charge of the henhouse. There’s no way these antipipeline extremists should be anywhere near our oil sands or making decisions, but the Premier and her government continue to defend them. The environment minister seems to think that agreeing on the importance of reducing emissions in the oil sands makes Berman somehow qualified. That’s absolute nonsense, and everyone over there should be ashamed of themselves. People’s livelihoods, their jobs, their quality of life are at stake. Why won’t the Premier listen to Albertans and fire Berman?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All of the members of the oil sands advisory group are working on the issue of how we responsibly distribute the space underneath the 100-megatonne cap, and the reason they're doing that is because that's part of our climate leadership plan, the very climate leadership plan that the federal government cited when they approved Kinder Morgan, a pipeline that would never have seen the light of day under the leadership, so-called, of the members opposite.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that's not even the worst of it. Berman and other antipipeline extremists sitting on the oil sands advisory group are being paid – listen for it – \$600 a day for every single meeting, with full expenses on top of that. It's sickening to think that rig workers right now, who have seen their hours cut or have been laid off, are paying even a penny to these people. But the NDP are more interested in impressing Leap Manifesto authors than regular working people in Alberta. If the Premier won't fire her, will she tell Albertans right now how much money out of their taxpayer dollars these people are getting?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe the member opposite just cited what the advisory panel members are receiving to be on the panel. They are working very hard on a critical component of our climate leadership plan, which is in and of itself a critical component to our goal, which we are very close to meeting, of repositioning Alberta's energy industry so that we are more successful at diversifying our markets and getting our product to the Asia Pacific, something that will be good for all Albertans as we move this province forward.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Trade with the United States

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton Oilers fans did more for Canada-U.S. relations by singing the American national anthem this week than anything that's ever been done by this NDP government. The fact is that under the Premier's watch, her cabinet has been largely silent on the pressing issues related to NAFTA under President Trump. These are serious issues. As a major player in trade, with exports of energy, agriculture, petrochemicals, and lumber to the United States, having our voice heard is absolutely crucial. Why, then, is the Premier dropping the ball and allowing other jurisdictions to dominate the trade conversations with our closest ally?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased, actually, to be the first Premier to go to Washington under the new administration to make the case on behalf of our energy industry, our forestry industry, our manufacturing industry, our agricultural industry, understanding how important it is to maintain those important trade relationships.

At the same time, what we need to do is diversify our markets. That's why I'm so proud to have been to China with our minister of economic development, who led the largest ever delegation to Asia in the history of this government, because when we say that we're going to diversify, Mr. Speaker, that's what we do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I know she went to Washington. I was there a week before, meeting with pretty much exactly the same people.

Our neighbouring provinces and Canada's federal government understand the significance of Canada-U.S. relations and the threat of NAFTA being tweaked or withdrawn. It's why B.C. Premier Christy Clark has vowed to fight for the forestry industry over the renewed softwood lumber dispute and is using every single tool at her disposal to do so. I wish the NDP government right here across from us would do the same thing, but instead they have been largely silent on the topic. Why does the Premier refuse to stand up for Alberta's interests and jobs and be an effective voice for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that I reject categorically the assertions that the member opposite has said about what our government has done on the softwood lumber agreement as well as how it compares to what's been going on in other jurisdictions. One of the key things that we need to do, of course, is to diversify our lumber markets. That's what we were just working on doing as this matter came to a head, something that we, of course, knew was going to happen. We're working with the Forest Products Association. We're funding Canada Wood to help them grow their market in Japan. We're meeting with investors in Japan and China to grow our market to help our industry through this difficult time.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The facts speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker, and our economy is suffering under this NDP government.

It's absolutely crazy to think that Alberta can ignore our trading relationship with the United States by focusing on other trade partners. China isn't investing in our oil sands right now, and 90 per cent – 90 per cent – of our energy exports today head stateside. The Premier treats Keystone like it's a dirty word, and all we've got from this NDP government is a \$45,000 taxpayer-funded trip to get second-rate meetings in DC. When will the Premier realize that economic prosperity in Alberta depends on a strong relationship with the United States and that she should work on it? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's not that it's actually true that the member opposite met with all the people that I did, but it is interesting that he just referred to the people he met with as second rate. I'm sure that's going to go a long way to building relationships with our important trade partners. Thankfully, he's not in charge of it; we are. We're working very hard on it, and we will stand up for Alberta jobs.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Provincial Credit Rating

Mr. Jean: Speaking of whoppers, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister delivered a few more whoppers yesterday on the state of Alberta's finances. He said that he had heard no concerns about further downgrades from credit agencies. In fall 2015 he said the same thing, with only four downgrades to follow. Maybe he should try reading their press releases. According to Moody's his budget puts, quote, significant pressure, end quote, on Alberta's rating.

DBRS has said that “Alberta’s debt may exceed levels acceptable for the current ratings.” How can the Premier seriously believe that no credit downgrades are coming to Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite’s favourite pastime is to cheer for the failure of Albertans. There’s no question that that’s what he really loves to do. Nonetheless, what our government is doing is having the backs of Albertans in tough economic times. We made a choice. We made a choice to invest in jobs, to invest in schools, to invest in health care, to invest in infrastructure because we would stand with Albertans. We would not tear them down during this time. I still believe that choice is the right one, and more and more we are seeing evidence that things are turning around because we did make the right choice.

Mr. Jean: Here’s another whopper from the Finance minister, Mr. Speaker. He said that while a downgrade would be disappointing, Alberta’s balance sheets are still in rosy shape. Here’s a wake-up call. Despite being debt free not just so long ago, Alberta will soon have more debt than the province of British Columbia. Alberta will soon be spending \$2.3 billion in interest payments each and every year to big banks instead of on services or tax cuts in Alberta. A credit downgrade will only make life worse for every single Albertan. Why doesn’t anyone over there, including the Premier, understand this?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, as I said, it’s all about making choices. Now, the member opposite wants to compare us to British Columbia. In British Columbia, if you are disabled, you earn slightly less than two-thirds of what you do in Alberta. You would get about \$400 a month less. So my question to the member opposite is: as he focuses on this path to getting us through these difficult times, which disabled Albertans is he going to cut by 30 to 40 per cent? Which ones?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, fewer jobs, higher taxes, higher interest payments, and higher spending ultimately are going to be extremely bad for the people of Alberta, all the people of Alberta. This is the NDP record. More credit downgrades and higher interest payments mean less money for hospitals, for schools, for teachers and nurses for the long run so that the NDP can binge on billions for things like new light bulbs or a carbon tax ad, maybe, and killing jobs in our coal industry. That’s all they’re doing. Promising to maybe balance the budget in a decade if oil prices skyrocket isn’t a plan; it’s a fantasy. It’s a game of Russian roulette with our finances. Why does the Premier continue to refuse to make any real cuts?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I’ve said before, we are focused on making life better for Albertans by making it more affordable, by creating jobs, and by investing in those important public services that Albertans need more than ever. We will not cut AISH by one-third. The members opposite may think that that’s the plan to follow, but it is not the way we will go. We will not close half the libraries in this province. We will not roll back Advanced Education by 8 per cent. We won’t do that because in the long run Albertans pay, and that debt doesn’t go away. We have a moderate, managed plan to get to balance. It is the responsible way to go and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The leader of the third party.

Teachers’ Working Time

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, someone has leaked the new teachers’ agreement to the *Edmonton Journal*. It’s reported that instructional hours have been capped in the agreement. We understand a zero per cent increase means our hard-working teachers are not gaining anything in extra pay or benefits. As a result, school boards will now have less flexibility in how they deploy teachers to get the best results for our kids. To the Education minister: as a result of agreeing to a cap on assigned time, which includes instructional hours, how many more teachers will you now need to hire to do the work done today by the teachers already in the system?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the collective agreement has not been ratified yet. We still have a few weeks for the teachers and for the school boards to ratify it, but I can say that we’re very proud that, at least on paper, so far we have negotiated two zeros for the next negotiating period for salaries. Teachers recognize that they will make improvements to the classroom and classroom conditions for children their top priority for our government and for themselves as well. School boards recognize this, and I think that we have the makings of a very sound deal.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the *Journal* reports that there will be a cap on instructional hours for teachers in Alberta. I will table the *Journal* column today. I know teachers are committed to students and want to make students as successful as possible. I wonder if those teachers who often work long hours to assist kids in need of extra help will now be prevented from doing so as they bump up against the cap. To the minister: is there any chance under the cap that teachers will be told they cannot give extra help to kids when they need it after they get past their maximum assigned hours?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the agreement, as I said, has not been ratified yet, so I don’t want to discuss too many of the details save to say that the hours that have been negotiated that are in the agreement are very sound, and we’ve seen very positive reaction from the school boards and from the teachers as well. We know as well that we have to be very fiscally responsible during these times, so potentially I’m very excited about this teachers’ agreement because – you know what? – it shows that when the chips are down, teachers and parents and school boards are there to make life better for students.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that teachers and kids won’t benefit from the cap on assignable hours. If a parent calls a teacher outside of assigned hours, we don’t know whether the teacher will be allowed to take the call. Now, we know that teachers, kids, and parents all lose as a result of this agreement. The obvious question is: who gains? Certainly, the union will collect more dues for educating the same number of kids. To the minister: since you’re putting your union-boss friends ahead of kids, parents, and teachers in the education system, are there any benefits for Alberta kids with capping assigned time?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Education has already said, this is a matter that is still being considered for ratification, so we’re not going to get into the details of it. But we’re quite proud, and we look forward to being able to talk about it.

One thing I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that kids would have had less access to their teachers if they'd been fired. You know what else? They would have had less access to education if their special-needs assistants had been fired, and that is exactly what the outcome would have been under the budget proposed by the third party across the way. So it's a little rich right now. Nonetheless, we are very proud of our record on education. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On November 21, 2016, the Minister of Advanced Education committed in this House to provide "predictable, sustainable funding for every university and college in this province." That sounds pretty good. But during estimates he admitted that although backfill funding was provided for the first two years of the tuition freeze, a third year of backfill funding is nowhere in sight. Now, this has left Alberta's postsecondary institutions in a bind. To the minister: will you provide backfill funding to ensure stability for postsecondary institutions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a government we believe that investing in learning is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our province, the future of our students, and that is why we are providing stable funding to Alberta colleges and universities, with a 2 per cent annual increase to their base operating grants. We have taken a number of steps that will help students. We are working with our partners, university partners and student bodies, to make sure that students have every opportunity to learn and be successful in this province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about the tuition freeze. It's interesting that neither student groups nor the institutions themselves ever asked for a tuition freeze. That's because they didn't want to sacrifice quality due to budget constraints. Students are concerned that when the freeze ends, they will be faced with a massive tuition hike. Now, there's a simple solution: legislate a tuition cap that increases by no more than inflation. To the same minister: will you take the advice of postsecondary stakeholder groups, cap tuition increases, and move the tuition regulation back under the Post-secondary Learning Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are committed to working with student groups, universities, and, in particular, those 250,000 students who are benefiting from that tuition freeze. We are working to make life better for Albertans, and these are 250,000 students who are benefiting from this freeze, and we are proud of our work that we are doing to make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Clark: Well, let's try again. I'm going to talk about mental health this time. Mental health is one of the most urgent issues across campuses in Alberta, but funding is allocated haphazardly, with some institutions receiving more than others and some getting none at all. The Alberta Students' Executive Council recommends that mental health funding be based on a per-student model. At \$25 a student it would cost only \$6.7 million, and that would include the

115,000 students who currently do not receive any support. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education: why have you not committed to stable, predictable, and sufficient funding for postsecondary mental health?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are working to make life better by protecting the things that make a difference, and that includes mental health supports. In Budget 2017 we have \$3.6 million in funding to support the mental health supports, and we are also working with the Minister of Health on this issue. That's a priority for us, to provide the supports that Albertans need to be successful, and certainly we are doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past winter was fairly warm with no sustained periods of cold. This has led to a spread of pine beetles in the Hinton area, which poses a serious threat to the area's pine forest. Given that if left unmanaged the infestation could spread to surrounding areas in West Yellowhead, to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: what is the state of pine beetle infestation in Hinton, and what areas in my constituency are currently infected?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Mountain pine beetle remains a substantial and imminent threat to the health of Alberta's forests. Infestations threaten Alberta's social, economic, and environmental resources, which is why we take this issue so seriously. The infestation is affecting a quarter of Alberta's pine forests, with the most severe concentrations being in the west-central pine belt. This does include areas within the member's constituency, the Hinton area being of the greatest concern. We are working closely with our stakeholders and are taking a number of focused approaches to managing the spread.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the spread of pine beetle threatens the livelihoods of many of my hard-working constituents in the forestry sector, to the same minister: what has this government done to address this additional spread?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we take this issue very seriously, which is why this year my department has allocated substantial resources to manage the infestation and minimize the impacts caused by mountain pine beetle. Priority objectives are to minimize the spread of beetles north and south along the eastern slopes and prevent beetles from spreading further east in the boreal forest. Other objectives include rehabilitating stands with significant tree mortality and the protection of endangered tree species and critical habitat. Removing infested trees is our most effective tool to control the spread of pine beetles in our forests. Another principal tool is industry harvest of pine stands to decrease the spread of infestation.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this unforeseen pine beetle spread was a result of inaction within Jasper national park, to the same minister: how is this government working with Jasper national park to ensure proper mitigation strategies are in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working closely with all of our stakeholders, including park officials and the federal government, on how to effectively control the spread. In recent years my department has built a strong working relationship with Parks Canada, identifying and assessing the impact and spread of mountain pine beetle. Through this co-operation and monitoring we have been able to strategically act based on that data. We support the implementation of Jasper national park's mountain pine beetle management strategy, specifically the goal to slow or limit the spread of mountain pine beetle through Jasper national park. We will continue to engage our federal counterparts to ensure that everyone is doing their part to protect our forests.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that one of the largest property development companies in Alberta for 35 years, the Walton International Group, has received creditor protection. Investors in Calgary and Edmonton are worried they're about to receive pennies on the dollar invested. Walton laid off 370 people. How does the Premier think her piddling job programs will help investors about to lose their pensions and retirement savings?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. I mean, first of all, let me begin by saying that it's always disappointing to hear of job losses. We know that this has a significant impact on families, on everyday Albertans. In these tough times families need a government that has their backs and that is working to make life better, and that's exactly why we've been focusing on economic diversification and job creation. I want to point out that the approval of two new pipelines means the creation of up to 22,000 new jobs in western Canada and will provide increased market access.

In addition, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given the current recession having a direct impact on the Alberta real estate market, the steep drop in new home permits and starts, fewer people moving to Alberta, and high unemployment and given that Alberta's GDP contracted 3.8 per cent in 2016, the second year in a row and not seen even since the NEP era, how do the Premier's reckless policies – the high taxes, debt-financed operations, and corporate welfare – actually get Albertans back to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to point out a couple of other things. Last month alone, Alberta created more than 20,000 full-time jobs, leading the country. I can tell you that rig drilling is up a hundred per cent from last year, to over 210. Despite what the opposition may say, in 2016 we led the country in private capital investment at \$53.8 billion. We know that Alberta continues to remain the best place in the world to invest, and this is why investment continues to be attracted to our province.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the approvals are in place for expansion projects in the oil sands like CNRL Kirby North, Suncor Meadow Creek, Cenovus Grand Rapids and given these three companies are the Premier's new BFFs, singing the carbon tax *Kumbaya*, and are taking the lead in consolidating the oil sands assets, is the Premier going to beg these companies to get the projects started, or will the Premier continue her job-killing reign of economic terrorism?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'll attempt to respond to the member's question. Again, first of all, drilling forecasts for our province are up to 2,700 wells from the original estimate. Husky Energy raised its production forecast to 320,000 barrels per day and increased its capital expenditures to \$2.7 billion. CNRL reported that they're committing \$1.35 billion to restart the Kirby North SAGD project, which will produce 40,000 barrels a day. Cenovus is boosting their capital spending by 24 per cent. Baytex is increasing their capital spending by 70 per cent. Companies are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Government House Leader, was there a point of order?

Mr. Mason: There sure was.

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

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair (continued)

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Tzeponah Berman was appointed co-chair of the NDP's oil sands advisory panel, the Premier defended her decision by insisting that despite Ms Berman's past as a vocal anti oil sands, antipipeline advocate, her voice would add value to this discussion. Now Ms Berman is once again actively campaigning against Alberta's interests by campaigning for the B.C. NDP, a party that has vowed to do everything in its power to permanently cripple Alberta's economy. To the Premier: do you still think it's appropriate for Ms Berman, a B.C. resident, to serve on your oil sands advisory panel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we believe that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand. That's how we secured two pipelines. New pipelines mean a brighter future for our oil and gas industry, with 22,000 jobs associated with those projects, and opportunities for tens of thousands of working families, billions in new investment. That's what happens when you have a government on this side of the House that understands that climate change is real, for starters, wants to work with the oil and gas industry, the oil sands operators, that also sit on the oil sands advisory group, and find a way to reduce the carbon in the barrel, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's no secret that Ms Berman is no fan of the Alberta oil sands, disparaging our industry at every possible opportunity, and given that these views are in direct contradiction to what you say your government wants when it comes to the future of the oil sands, again to the Premier: what possible benefit does her presence on the panel serve since she continues to demonstrate she's not receptive to other points of view?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have an oil sands advisory group, that is comprised of First Nations: indigenous representation, something that the PCs don't seem to care is also there. We have an oil sands advisory group that has municipal representation: again, not listening to those communities in 44 years of government over there. We have Cenovus, Suncor, CNRL, other oil sands companies on that oil sands advisory group. They have told us they want to reduce the carbon in the barrel. We want to work with them. That government did nothing.

Mrs. Aheer: Where's the report?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just a few weeks ago the Premier issued a directive that banned NDP MLAs and staff from participating in the B.C. election campaign and given that the Premier gave the direction because she knew that having NDP staffers support the election of a party that has vowed to block any pipeline carrying Alberta oil to the west coast would destroy her credibility when she claims she supports our oil and gas industry, again to the Premier: will you prove that your government has not been misleading Albertans from the start and fire Ms Berman from the oil sands advisory panel today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's not at all surprising that the PC caucus does not want Alberta to succeed in this matter. Of course, they did not get pipelines approved, and this government did. It's also not surprising that they don't want to take action on climate change. After all, their new leader questions the science of climate change, and over here we have a caucus where, you know, we have many, many opinions on climate change. Their leader for now tends to condone them. We'll see about the future. We never know. These are the same people who spent over a decade shouting down those with different views. We're not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Police Disclosure of Homicide Victims' Names

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the RCMP in Alberta has become increasingly transparent in releasing the names of homicide victims, some police services have begun to withhold more and more names. As a result, this information is being released inconsistently. Almost half of the victims of homicides in Edmonton in 2017 have had their names withheld. At its core this is an issue of transparency. Does the Minister of Justice believe that this is a troubling trend, and are changes being made?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Police services do make operational decisions independent of the ministry. I do know that they consider very carefully a number of different factors, including transparency but also including the fact that in some instances where there is no danger to the public, the family and particularly the children of the victim may be negatively impacted by releasing the names. This is obviously a complex issue, that's

very difficult for both families and for the public, and we understand that the service takes their responsibility very seriously.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When families choose, that's one thing; when the police choose to not release the names, that's another.

Given that withholding information from the public can pose a significant threat to Alberta's communities and even limit the investigative efforts of the police and considering that, as Sergeant Jack Poitras with the RCMP K Division says, "the community wants to know what's going on, we try to get those names out there. It's a concern for the citizens when heinous crimes occur that they are informed," does the minister believe that transparency and openness should be the default, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I've said, police make these decisions considering several factors. Transparency is absolutely one of those factors. Additional factors include the safety of the public. When there's an issue of safety, obviously the name needs to be released. But one of those factors is, in fact, the victims and the families of the victims, and their needs need to be taken into account as well. You know, they have a very difficult decision to make, and I think they take their obligations very seriously in making those choices.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that it's really no secret that Alberta Justice is the worst department when it comes to withholding information and that Albertans need to have confidence that critical information is being appropriately reported and given that section 32 of FOIP states that a public body must not keep secret any information "the disclosure of which is, for any . . . reason, clearly in the public interest" and given that Albertans have the right to expect consistency for critical issues like this one but that there is some confusion here, Minister, this is your opportunity. Show some leadership; provide clarity. Albertans want transparency on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said twice before, these are very challenging cases. These are very difficult decisions for police to make. They do absolutely consider the interest in transparency. They do absolutely consider the interest in public safety. But in an instance where the perpetrator is already known, as in an instance of two people in the same family where the children may ultimately be harmed or other family members may ultimately be harmed by the release of that information, sometimes they make a difficult choice.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Minimum Wage Increase and Nonprofit Organizations

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is tragic. We warned that raising the minimum wage would hurt charities. We begged the government to do an economic impact study before going ahead with their ideological plan. Now we have charities telling us that children, seniors, and those with disabilities will suffer from this minimum wage increase unless something is done. Helping families out of poverty is critically important, but hurting charities is the absolute wrong way to do it. Will the minister continue to raise the

minimum wage on the backs of nonprofits since it actually hurts children, seniors, and disabled people?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All hard-working Albertans deserve to make enough money to support themselves and their families. Research tells us that we have 300,000 Albertans who are earning less than \$15 an hour. The majority of them are adults; 100,000 of them have children. The majority of them are women. These are hard-working Albertans who go to work full-time and sometimes need to stop at the food bank on their way home because their minimum wage does not allow them to take care of their families. We are committed to a \$15 minimum wage.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Well, there's no compassion there for the disabled.

The Lacombe action group compiled the data to show how much more the minimum wage will cost their group to take care of adults and children with disabilities. Given that they've already been subsidizing staff wages from their own administrative budget, now they'll have no other option because they will soon be over \$120,000 a year in the hole. Given that they are going to have to reduce services for those with disabilities, will the minister allow this to happen by continuing with the minimum wage increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work with businesses throughout Alberta to make sure that we are supporting them by decreasing small-business taxes, by making sure that there are grants available. At the same time, we need to make sure that we are taking care of the lowest earning Albertans in our province. Many business owners have said that they're in support of the increase in minimum wage for various reasons, including improved employee retention and making sure that their employees do not have to stop at the food bank on their way home from work.

Mr. Orr: I'm ashamed and the minister should also be ashamed that it's come to this.

Given that these are the services that the Lacombe action group will not be able to fully fund in the years to come – personal care aides, domestic child care, extraordinary child care, behavioural care, and specialized care for the disabled – and given that the unsustainable raise in minimum wage means that the Lacombe action group cannot fund all of these programs, will the minister tell them which program is the least important so they know which program to cut?

2:30

Mr. Sabir: As a government we are absolutely . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Sabir: . . . committed to making sure that persons with disabilities get the support they need, and that's why we have increased funding for the AISH program, for the PDD program. Under their plan they would have cut \$2.6 billion. Under their plan everyone would have suffered, including persons with disabilities. We are proud of the work we have done in this sector.

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

School Trustee Election Campaign Finance

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the NDP removed large union and corporate donations from provincial politics and the Justice minister claimed that they had put the power back in the hands of Alberta citizens rather than those with the deepest pockets, our caucus voted for that bill, and I would hope that the government will support this cause at all levels of government. Now, previously when I asked the minister about unions funding trustee elections, there was no answer, so let's try this a different way. To the Minister of Education: will you ensure that the same laws introduced in Bill 1 in June 2015 will be applied to the upcoming trustee elections?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we know that the municipal level of government, including trustees, is a very important part of our democratic process, and we know that it is a level of governance and so forth that has very modest campaign money that is attached to it, so the procedure for this level of government at this time remains the same as the last election.

Mr. Rodney: Wow.

Now, given the degree to which large financial donations can alter elections is amplified at the school board trustee level due to the relatively small number of voters in these elections and given that even trustees who have received large union donations in the past have signed a petition banning union donations for trustees as put forward by Kids Come First and the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils, again to the minister: if trustees who took large union donations are supporting the intentions of this petition, why won't you commit to doing the exact same thing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been proud to take action on democratic reform on critical issues like taking big money out of politics and making real change within this system. In many cases legislation that impacts our democratic system had not been updated in decades, much like workplace legislation, much like legislation throughout this government. We will continue to work with Albertans to make sure that our democratic institutions and systems are as strong as they can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Rodney: Given that the bill, which abolished large donations for provincial parties, was introduced two years ago and given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs' spokesperson has stated that it was too close to election time to implement the requested donation limit changes for trustee elections and given that the NDP should have acted much sooner if they truly did not agree with large donations in elections because they impair democracy and concentrate power in the hands of those with money to spare, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why did you or your predecessor not address these concerns in the past two years, and will you act now, before it's too late?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We believe that Albertans should decide elections, and that is why we introduced the Fair Elections Financing Act. That is why we are taking real action. The previous party benefited from a pay-to-play system for

44 years without lifting a finger to make important democratic changes to give the power back to everyday Albertans. PC entitlement was in play for decades. We are taking action to make changes to our democratic system and to return power through legislation like the public interest disclosure act amendments introduced today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Recovery

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time last year a fire was burning that would devastate the hard-working communities of Fort McMurray and the rest of Wood Buffalo. Given that families there are still re-establishing their lives after the loss of their homes, being displaced, sometimes for months, and still dealing with the struggle of rebuilding and given that every penny goes a long way, especially when your life has been so entirely disrupted, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the government doing to support the recovery of families who had their homes destroyed during the wildfire?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. When Fort McMurray was in need, this province banded together to support those families. Our commitment to the people of Wood Buffalo is unwavering. This week we announced an additional \$7.1 million in education property tax relief for both 2016 and '17. Recovery is never a short road, and our government and the people of Alberta are committed to the people of Wood Buffalo to ensure that they get the support they need every step of the way.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Given that stressful circumstances like losing your home make navigating complicated systems more challenging, prolonging the amount of time to rebuild and feel settled, to the same minister: how will the residents of Wood Buffalo know if they are eligible, and how will the monies be dispersed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. One of our goals in the recovery effort is to ensure that we support the people of Wood Buffalo in the rebuild of their community, and therefore the tax relief will be given to residents who are still in the process of rebuilding their home and have yet to receive their occupancy permit. The Wood Buffalo council will set the criteria for administering the compensation to residents. The relief is just one of the ways that our government is standing with them in the recovery, and to date our government has allocated \$743 million in disaster assistance for Wood Buffalo.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Given that for any support program to work, it needs to actually reach the people who are eligible, again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how is the government ensuring that residents are aware of the support so that they can take advantage of the program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I was in Fort McMurray yesterday, where I made this funding announcement. This funding was requested by the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and will be distributed on the ground by the municipality. Yesterday I was on the ground, and it was hard not to be proud. I saw homes being rebuilt, stores getting back to business, and kids heading off to school. It's that resilience that makes us proud as Albertans, and our government will continue to support this community going forward.

Thank you.

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

Union Certification and Strike Voting Procedures

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2012 Ontario's Tim Hudak unveiled the labour reform package calling for the implementation of secret ballots when organizations vote whether to unionize or not, to which Ontario's minister of agriculture responded: what a joke. The secret ballot prevents intimidation and thuggery against employees that disagree with unionization. Does our esteemed Minister of Labour also agree that secret ballots in union certification are a joke?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been very proud to engage with Albertans about our outdated workplace legislation, which has not been updated since 1988. We've received nearly 5,000 submissions, we've had people participate in round-table discussions, and I'm currently reviewing the views of Albertans. I look forward to bringing forward more ideas and discussion to this House after I've had an opportunity to review what Albertans have had to say.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given what we have seen in Ontario and given that multiple cases such as Graham Brothers Construction Ltd. versus Labourers' International Union of North America clearly show unions bullying people into voting in favour of unionization and given that this is just one case in dozens where this intimidation and bullying by unions has occurred, will the minister do the right thing and protect Alberta workers from this form of bullying and thuggery by assuring us that she is not going to do away with the secret ballot?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After engaging with Albertans on the topics around labour legislation, employment standards, making sure that Albertans have access to job-protected sick leave, and key issues, I'm now reviewing the feedback that we've received from Albertans to make sure that we can have fair and balanced workplace legislation, legislation that offers improvements and effective workplaces for all Albertans, something that works for employers and employees. I look forward to discussing this further.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta NDP's BFFs in Ontario believe that a secret ballot for elections and strike votes is regressive and given that these fellow NDP world viewers also think that a secret ballot is part of a race to the bottom, is it the current minister's labour plan to stop the bottom feeding in Alberta

and embrace a hug-a-thug union world view in order to eliminate the right to a secret ballot? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the member asking the question's BFFs did study after study and never changed workplace legislation, I have to know if it's the member's hope that we never change anything in this province. We need to make sure that we have up-to-date, fair, and balanced workplace legislation, that we make sure that we can support a strong economy and fairness for our workers. This is important to our government. We have Albertans' backs. I will review the feedback we've received and be happy to move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, I'm glad that's over. I can hardly wait for tomorrow.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with other business.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. member, go ahead.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, letters. One letter is addressed to the Premier with regard to the consultation on the Labour Relations Code from McSween, Nelson Martin, CET, the operations manager of McSween Custom Fabricating, asking for extended and enhanced consultation on the Labour Relations Code.

My second tabling is addressed to the Minister of Labour. It comes from Willbros Canada, Jeremy Kinch, asking again for the Labour minister to consider an extension on the labour code review.

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

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, I've got two tablings. The first is a letter from the *Calgary Herald* complaining about an NDP Holocaust speech at a synagogue where the 6 million Jewish victims were not mentioned.

The second one is the newspaper article from the *Journal* that I made reference to in my question today.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter to table that I wrote to the hon. Government House Leader on the 9th of March, 2017. This is my 14th day of fabulous tablings. It says, "I think these professionals are being utilized for clear partisan political benefit of the government . . . particularly in the areas of electricity . . . gas prices, education." That sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? This is for the benefit of the Government House Leader.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document written by the Alberta Students' Executive Council entitled Post-Secondary That Works for Students. It advocates for a stable, predictable tuition funding model – not a tuition freeze – funding for mental health, postsecondary education governance changes amongst many other things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a cover letter from the executive director of the Lacombe action centre which basically ends by saying that unless the issues around minimum wage are resolved, services to individuals will need to be cut.

The second is a spreadsheet detailing the hourly rates for various positions as it applies to the years 2016, '17, and '18 and which, by the time we get to '18, shows a \$120,000-a-year deficit.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies to table of constituents' letters regarding changes to the Labour Relations Code.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four letters here addressed to the Premier from Rob Wierenga, Neeralta Manufacturing Inc.; Barry Robertson, senior VP and COO, Synergy Products Ltd.; Nancy Bach-Hansen, Slimdor Contracting Ltd.; and Darryl Wiebe, president and CE, Kerr Interior Systems.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there was one point of order today. If I could clarify with the Government House Leader, if the point of order was made with respect to a comment made by the Member for Calgary-Foothills concerning economic terrorism, I've received an apology from the member.

Mr. Mason: I would like to make my point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Very briefly, then.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, at about 2:16 the Member for Calgary-Foothills used words to the effect: would the Premier continue her reign of economic terrorism? So I'm rising under 23(h), (i), and (j), and I want to just read you the definition, very briefly, of terrorism in the *Oxford* dictionary: "The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims." I think that we can agree that terrorism is a heinous criminal act, and for one hon. member to suggest that another hon. member, in this case the Premier, is engaged in terrorism is far beyond the pale, and I ask you to rule so.

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe you have a statement to make.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, my question was about job-killing policies, and I was talking about the extreme economic pain faced by the residents of Calgary-Foothills. In that context I was asking the Premier if she could use her good offices to talk to those companies that she claims every day to be her supporters. I said: would you please request those companies to bring those projects back so we can have jobs? In that context I said that word, but I meant to say: extreme economic pain. If my word is unparliamentary, I withdraw that, and I apologize unconditionally.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

[Adjourned debate May 1: Mr. Jean]

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity today to rise to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. You know, certainly, the opportunity for partnership and collaboration with municipal governments across this province is one of the most important opportunities and indeed responsibilities that we have as a provincial government. There is so much, I have found for myself, of course, being the representative of Edmonton-Centre, which is right here in the heart of the city and home to Edmonton's city council and city hall, in having the opportunity to work very closely with my municipal colleague. I've certainly seen the value of those opportunities in how we're able to co-ordinate so many things together.

2:50

Certainly, I've heard many good things from our city council here in the city, both from the mayor and many members of council, about the good work we've been able to do as a government in building a more collaborative relationship with municipalities across the province. Indeed, I'll note that Lisa Holmes, the president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, stated that "collaboration ensures strong communities and increased quality of life for Albertans."

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that just today Edmonton city council passed a motion and approved writing a letter of support for safe injection sites here in the city of Edmonton, something that's going to go forward along with the work we've been doing as a province and that the Edmonton Police Service and many others have stepped forward to support. That's just another example of how collaboration between municipal and provincial government can indeed make life better for many Albertans. I think that's an important step forward, and I'm very proud to be part of that.

In much the same way, Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy and very proud to be supporting Bill 8, which continues the good work that our ministers of Municipal Affairs have done. Indeed, Mr. Ken Kobly of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce called the MGA review "the gold standard for government consultation." I'm very proud that our government has been so thorough and worked so hard on this and that indeed we have the opportunity now to bring forward yet another piece of legislation which will continue to improve on that work, reflect what we heard back from Albertans, from our stakeholders in municipalities, and make some further changes which are going to continue to improve that opportunity for relationships and collaboration that we have with our municipal partners, at the same time providing them with additional tools which they can use to do the work that they do in service of Albertans in many jurisdictions across our province. Again, very happy, very proud to have the opportunity to take part in supporting this bill.

Indeed, one part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, that I was looking at and was happy to see was the intermunicipal off-site levies. Now, I know that the city of Edmonton and the surrounding municipalities have been very forward thinking in working through the Capital

Region Board and trying to build that collaboration, indeed building those relationships as an economic voice for our communities, and in finding ways that we can work together as municipalities to benefit everybody. Currently municipalities may collect off-site levies from new developments that are within their municipal boundaries in order to pay for land facilities that are related to things like water service or sanitary sewage or storm sewage drains or municipal roads or some of these important services.

Now with the MMGA, with this new piece of legislation and indeed some of the amendments that come forward here in Bill 8, we're expanding that list to include off-site infrastructure like libraries and police stations, fire halls and community recreation facilities. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I know we do share many of those things in common, and I know that we have many in our communities around Edmonton who come in to work in our city and take the opportunity to participate in many of the great activities. Indeed, some of this key infrastructure benefits more than just one community.

It also implements mandatory regional planning mechanisms that allow for land-use planning. That requires municipalities, then, to work together to figure out the best way to provide these services and to share the costs. Mr. Speaker, I think that's an important step forward, again, as I spoke about, with us being able as a provincial government to be better partners and collaborators with local municipalities. Indeed, it's great to see these steps, moving forward, to help municipalities be able to collaborate with each other.

I am also very happy, Mr. Speaker, to see the pieces of this legislation which are enabling joint-use and planning agreements for schools. Currently the MGA provides the flexibility for municipalities to be able to enter into joint-use agreements with school boards, but they aren't mandatory. Those agreements, then, outline how the different pieces of land that they're working with will be allocated between the municipality and each school board within the boundaries, but in the absence of a joint-use agreement, the subdivision authority then has to determine both the needs of the municipality and the school board. Instead, now moving forward with mandatory joint-use and planning agreements will allow school boards and municipalities to be able to work together more effectively. It establishes a process by which they can discuss some of the matters that are involved with planning and developing, making use of school sites on municipal reserves, school reserves, and the municipal and school reserves in each municipality. It allows for the transfer of municipal reserves, school reserves, and municipal and school reserves within a municipality.

It allows for easier disposal of school sites. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I know that here in downtown Edmonton we have a former school site which has been able to be moved on. We're now having opportunities within the Oliver community, and the Oliver Community League and others are involved and having discussions about redeveloping that now as a housing site, possibly particularly as an affordable housing site. These are incredible opportunities that come forward when we provide and make it easier for school boards to collaborate with municipalities to dispose of former school lands.

This also provides, then, for the servicing of school sites on municipal reserves, school reserves, and municipal and school reserves in the municipality as well as for the use of school facilities and municipal facilities, the use of playing fields on municipal reserves, and it includes matters related to the maintenance of the facilities and the fields and the payment of fees. It outlines how the municipalities and the school boards can work together collaboratively as well as a process for resolving disputes. It also provides a time frame for them to have regular review of these

agreements as well as any other provisions that they consider being necessary.

It's wonderful, Mr. Speaker, to see that both the AUMA and the AAMD and C, both the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, the Alberta School Boards Association, and developers that we spoke with were all supportive of this piece of legislation.

I look forward to the opportunities that are going to come forward with this. You know, Mr. Speaker, I've heard members in this House who have spoken of the opportunities for collaboration between schools and municipalities; for example, building a new school and having a public library as part of that school. That's something, then, that benefits the community, gives people from the community more connection with their local school, more opportunities to make use of that space, and saves money for both school boards and for the municipality.

There are many opportunities. Indeed, public health clinics in our local schools could be very beneficial as well, Mr. Speaker, particularly in areas where we may have families that are lower income who may have difficulty with transportation or being able to get to many of these other locations. Having municipal services consolidated in a site where their children are also going to school can be greatly beneficial for these families.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm very happy to see the changes that are coming forward through this act. I greatly appreciate the work that the new Minister of Municipal Affairs has done in getting up to speed on these issues. I think he's done yeoman's work in learning the issues, working on these files, and, indeed, getting out and speaking with stakeholders in the community to ensure that when he brought forward this piece of legislation, in fact it was what was being asked for.

Lastly, I'd just like to talk about another great thing that's coming forward in this bill, that being provisions for parental leave. Now, we've talked quite a bit in this Legislature about trying to make our Legislature more family friendly and trying to provide more opportunities for members to be able to look after their children. Indeed, we've had the pleasure of having some of those children here in this House, and I look forward to seeing many more because, as you've noted previously, Mr. Speaker, that may in fact help sometimes with the tone. Nothing calms a room down like a young child, well, depending on the mood of that child, I suppose.

That said, Mr. Speaker, currently municipal councils have the authority to permit extended councillor absences without disqualification on a case-by-case basis, but they don't have the clear authority to actually just establish an ongoing standard that would provide for extended parental leave on a system-wide basis. Right now they can decide it on a case-by-case basis, but they don't have the ability, actually, to just create a new rule, much like we've done through some of our committees here in the Legislature.

We've heard from stakeholders that they're, in fact, interested in opening up this discussion and giving that opportunity. Municipal councillors are interested. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, as we are coming up on municipal elections, I know that many members on both sides of this aisle are working to see increased diversity in our public life. There are some great campaigns that are happening right now in this province to encourage more women, of all political stripes, to get involved in the process to help increase the diversity of our province. I'm very proud that with the election of this current Legislature we saw a great increase in the number of women here. Of course, we're still only at about one-third in this Legislature, so I look forward to that diversity continuing to increase in the future until it reaches gender parity perhaps, much like our current cabinet. We almost reach it on this side of the House.

Indeed, the opportunities for more women to be involved in politics – not to say that women are the only ones who would be

taking parental leave, but certainly this is something that provides more of a barrier, I think, traditionally for women than men. This opportunity now in Bill 8 provides municipalities with the opportunity to be enabled to provide for extended parental leave for councillors by bylaw. This means that municipalities now will actually be able to enact specific policies and indeed pass a bylaw which would provide for extended parental leave. We're making the move now to amend that, therefore allowing local councils to have more opportunity to locally determine their parental leave process, addressing any concerns that might come up about extended absences.

3:00

This was something that was requested indeed by the city of Edmonton, and it's been supported by the AUMA, the AAMDC, and also by the city of Calgary. Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say thank you to the minister for his work on this. Thank you to those who have served in that position previously for their work in moving this act forward. I look forward to seeing this bill passed in this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Edmonton-Centre?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on Bill 8, the changes to the Municipal Government Act. I think, as I said earlier in the House, the act on balance is worth supporting, but it would be good to remind the government of some of the shortfalls in the bill, not as . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm advised that, in fact, you have already spoken to this bill, and I therefore need to rule you out of order.

Mr. McIver: I'll wait for another reading, Mr. Speaker. There is so much to say.

The Speaker: I'm sure there is.

Are there any other members? The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it still possible to speak under 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: No. You're to speak to the motion now.

Mr. Dach: All right. Then I would certainly be glad to speak to the bill itself, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and talk about An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. Our government is delivering on its promise to modernize the Municipal Government Act in time for municipal elections this fall. We're making the MGA a responsive and forward-looking piece of legislation that gives municipalities practical tools and resources to support strong and sustainable communities.

One of the things that I'm really quite pleased about is the forward-looking effort at collaboration between ourselves and municipalities and indigenous reserves, that formerly were really disregarded when it came to expansion of municipalities into adjacent lands neighbouring reserves or when there were developments on reserves that required tying into municipal services that ended up in protracted negotiations which really had no framework to lead the discussion. What comes to mind is the negotiations that took place between the Enoch reserve and the city

of Edmonton with respect to providing water when the hotel and casino were built a number of years ago. There still is, I think, an ongoing debate over the road that is bordering the northern portion there. Hopefully, that'll be settled through negotiations, which will be made much easier by the collaborative effort and framework that's provided by the legislation that the minister has brought forward.

I truly believe that this recognition is long overdue. I think that it's being welcomed by the indigenous communities. The ones that I'm most familiar with, of course, are close to the west Edmonton border, where my riding is proximate to. I know of the difficulty that has been experienced over the years, the long time it's taken for development to actually occur after very difficult, tense negotiations which really didn't go anywhere for a long time.

The act itself is definitely a result of lots of consultation and respectful talks and discussions with indigenous communities throughout the province. To their dismay, I think, they are finally being respectfully recognized in legislation as equal partners in negotiations when it comes to municipalities looking to interact with them on developments which have effect over their lands when municipal developments encroach on their borders. It gives economic opportunities that wouldn't have been available to the municipalities and the indigenous body, that they wouldn't have had opportunities to proceed with because the mechanisms weren't there. The respectful channels of communication weren't open. Now this opens up a lot of opportunity for a lot of economic development that would have been stalled because the communication lines weren't there.

It really gives me great pleasure to know that a lot of the projects that people have wanted, both municipalities and indigenous groups, for many, many years will now bear some fruit. I don't know how many millions and millions of dollars of economic activity this change will result in, but I venture to say that it will be a very healthy amount of economic activity and benefit for the province that is going to happen as a result of this change to the MGA and this invitation for municipalities and indigenous groups to work together in a respectful way that benefits them, the province, and the indigenous groups in terms of employment, economic development, social improvements, and infrastructure improvements, I would say, for both the nonindigenous and indigenous communities on either side of the lands that are affected. That's one element of this piece of legislation that I'm most impressed with, and I really think it's going to go a long way to improve the relationship between indigenous peoples in this province and the municipal level of government as well as our province.

I would leave it there for now. I may comment on other elements of the legislation later on, but I was particularly impressed with this piece of the legislation. I think it's something we should be very, very proud of.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Edmonton-McClung?

Seeing and hearing none, hon. members, are there any other members that would like to speak to second reading of Bill 8? The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. You know, we made many changes a year ago, actually, in the form of 40 additional amendments to modernize the Municipal Government Act last fall as it was passed unanimously in December 2016. Today is about the rest of what we

heard from the municipalities, from municipal leaders, from families, from young people, school boards, indigenous communities, small business, and industry, which includes new ideas for how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities. We took those ideas back to all municipalities, school boards, and indigenous communities last fall, and we've heard strong support for nearly every policy proposal. With this bill we are delivering on those ideas that we have heard from Albertans.

Now, one of those new amendments, Mr. Speaker, relates to indigenous communities. A key focus of the MGA modernization is the municipal collaboration that we believe all Albertans benefit from when municipalities are good neighbours working together to provide services and strengthen the economy, including with our indigenous neighbours. The amendments tabled today would require that municipalities give First Nations and Métis settlements the same notification and opportunity to comment on statutory plans that is provided to all other adjacent municipalities. These changes would set a Canadian precedent to build a stronger relationship between municipalities and First Nations and Métis settlements and just mean that municipalities are being good neighbours. It also is a small but significant step to strengthen relationships between indigenous communities and municipalities and further implement the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Another amendment, Madam Speaker, is that we are also aiming to make political life more accessible for women and Albertans with young families by making amendments that would enable councils to make parental leave bylaws for councillors. Our elected councils need to better reflect the communities they serve, which include young people, new families, and women, which is why in QP today we heard from Calgary-Lougheed, for example. He essentially asked questions in QP today to the effect of: why haven't you fixed all our problems that we ignored for 44 years? While he was looking in the past for all that he and his party didn't do over the last 44 years, we were looking forward when it comes to new families and women.

Our budget supports women, families, young men and women who are starting their new lives. We're doing things like \$25-a-day daycare, new schools, reducing school fees. All the while the opposition talks about why they didn't fix municipal elections, something which I'm sure would be addressed at some point in the future. Again, they look at the past, about why they didn't take action in the last 44 years. We're looking forward.

3:10

The opposition again speaks against our oil industries. Cypress-Medicine Hat finances climate change denial films, and just today Innisfail-Sylvan Lake spoke about how denying climate change is somehow not going to hurt our oil industry, asking to stay behind and to be run over instead of leading. Well, Madam Speaker, one of those ways we are leading is with this Municipal Government Act because we believe that our municipal councils should have parental leave. Half of Alberta's population is women, but right now in Alberta women only make up 26 per cent of municipal councillors, and 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on them.

Policies that this government brings into the House it seems like every day of the week – again, the opposition wants to look to the past or to deny climate change or to talk down our oil industries, wanting us to get run over by the future instead of boldly leading into it. That comes from having a diverse background on this bench.

That is what we want to encourage through this Municipal Government Act.

One of the other new amendments is schools. Our government, of course, is committed to building schools to serve our young and growing province and to protecting and improving education for Alberta students. Again, just today, when we were debating our budget earlier, we heard from the opposition doom and gloom, about how we must instantly cut back, about how a temporary deficit to act as a shock absorber in this downturn, which keeps men and women of this province working, is somehow a bad thing.

The cutbacks that would be required would hurt teachers. It almost seems to me, Madam Speaker, like the opposition's solution to every problem is a fiscal one, and it relates to: if it's a downturn, the solution is to lay off your neighbour just because they happen to work in the public service or happen to teach your children. That's shameful, which is why, again, I'm so happy to speak in support of this bill. The education of our children is incredibly important to the well-being of our communities and our schools and is at the heart of our neighbourhoods.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, if I could have your attention. We're not in committee, and each member is expected to be in their own seat.

Please continue, hon. member.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We heard from municipalities and school boards that we can do better in how school sites are planned and serviced for our communities. This bill proposes joint-use planning arrangements to work together on integrated, long-term planning for school sites and facilities. This would benefit students, families, and all communities, and again it's a small part about how this government is working to make life better for all Alberta families.

An Hon. Member: It got left to charities.

Mr. Malkinson: In conclusion, while the opposition beaks off about our \$15 minimum wage, it is raising the quality of life for those Albertans who are working at minimum wage, who now will no longer have to go to the food bank when they come home from their job and, hopefully, will not have to use the charities that that minister is talking about because they are getting paid a fair wage. They can have the dignity to work for themselves and to raise their family or do other activities that they choose to do as dignified individuals. We are doing real change here in Alberta.

These amendments and the rest of An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government are designed to make life better for Albertans no matter where they live. Albertans can go online and see these amendments and how they reflect the ideas we heard, and I encourage them to follow this debate as we move forward as well as all debate in this House. I believe Albertans will see quite a contrast in how we approach governing in this province.

With that, Madam Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinstuber: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, at second reading. Our government is delivering on its promise to modernize the Municipal Government Act in time for the municipal elections this fall.

The changes in this bill come directly from Albertans. We consulted, and we consulted, despite what the opposition contends. I would suspect that is why Ken Kobly, the president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce said that the MGA review is the gold standard for government consultation. The changes in this bill come directly from Albertans. We're making changes to improve things based on the feedback and ideas we have heard. Last summer our government held 21 sessions across the province. Years of hard work have brought us to this third and final round of legislative amendments. Madam Speaker, Bill 8 is about what we have heard from municipal leaders, young people, families, school boards, indigenous communities, small businesses, and industries. There were also new ideas on how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to now take a moment to discuss some concerns I heard from the Calgary school boards last summer. As the MLA for Calgary-Northern Hills I heard less than favourable comments about some of the existing school sites and the design of neighbourhoods when the communities were built. This is related to the current joint-use and planning agreements for schools. The MGA currently provides flexibility for municipalities to enter into joint-use agreements with school boards, but they are not mandatory. In the absence of a joint-use agreement, the subdivision authority determines the needs of the municipality and the school boards. We heard from municipalities and school boards that we can do better in how these sites are planned and communities serviced. Albertans also agreed. This proposal received 72 per cent support in our survey.

In this bill mandatory joint-use and planning agreements would be required between municipalities and school boards through amendments to the MGA and the School Act. This change would require all municipalities to have joint-use and planning agreements with school boards operating within their borders. This would result in integrated, long-term planning for school sites and facilities. Madam Speaker, this is what school boards and trustees asked for in Calgary, and I'm confident that this will benefit students, families, and all communities.

I know that schools represent the central networking hubs of the community. They provide after-hours programming, after-hours child care in some cases, sports opportunities, neighbourhood cultural performances, among others. It's important that these school sites are planned in prominent locations in future neighbourhoods. Current issues with school sites in Calgary-Northern Hills could be adequate street parking, slope, topography considerations, and how close these sites get to neighbouring houses.

To sum things up, Madam Speaker, these amendments and the rest of the act will strengthen municipal governments. They're designed to make life better for Albertans, whether they are lucky enough to live in Calgary-Northern Hills or elsewhere in the province. Of course, I will be supporting this bill, and I encourage others to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments for the previous speaker?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to close debate.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the members who stood today to speak on some of the most pressing issues that are in this bill that we are trying to address. I appreciate that one of the most important ones for me was the collaboration with indigenous communities. To me, you know, it's 2017. These

are our friends, our family, and our neighbours, and it's about time that we give them the dignity and respect that they deserve. You know, I've had a lot of conversations with First Nations and Métis around the province, and I've had some really good feedback. It's been really quite a positive experience for me.

3:20

I just want to say thank you again to everybody that's been involved with this. My staff have worked tirelessly. It's been quite the process. I mean, it's ongoing. It's the second-largest piece of legislation in Alberta. The biggest is insurance, which is quite boring compared to the MGA. I'm slightly biased, I would say, but there is a lot going on in the MGA. It's quite comprehensive. I'm proud of everything that's gone on with the consultation. I know that there's a lot of work to be done going forward, and I know that we will have lots more to say in Committee of the Whole.

With that, I will end debate and call the vote.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:21 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hanson	Nielsen
Anderson, W.	Hinkley	Payne
Babcock	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Connolly	Hunter	Renaud
Coolahan	Jansen	Rosendahl
Cyr	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Dach	Larivee	Schreiner
Dang	Littlewood	Shepherd
Drever	Loewen	Sigurdson
Eggen	Malkinson	Starke
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Turner
Fraser	McPherson	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 8 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 8 An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. The Municipal Government Act, or MGA, is the second-largest piece of legislation in the province, and it touches the daily lives of every Albertan. It ensures that our children have a place to borrow books and play hockey, that our communities are protected by police

officers and firefighters. It ensures that local governments are responsive to the needs of their citizens. The government believes this bill will give municipalities and businesses the additional tools they need to maintain and build strong and sustainable communities.

As members of this committee have heard and will hear, modernizing the MGA has been a journey. It came to a crescendo in the summer of 2016 when the department, led by my predecessor, the former minister, toured the province to ask Albertans for their input on Bill 21, the Modernized Municipal Government Act. They had heard a lot, but a lot of what the team heard fell outside the scope of that bill, so the team composed a discussion guidebook called *Continuing the Conversation*. This book was a compilation of ideas that they heard directly from Albertans, and the department posted it online for feedback back in November. Well, Municipal Affairs received more than 1,100 responses and 35 official submissions. Those responses are detailed in the *What We Heard* summary that can be found on the MGA review website.

3:40

We heard strong support for many of the amendments in Bill 8. Strong support for these ideas came from Albertans. The result of this consultation informed the basis for Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. I present it here for your discussion, and I'm looking forward to a lively debate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. One key area of this bill I would like to talk about is the changes to the assessment and taxation that this bill proposes. The exemption from taxation for provincial bodies is a sore point for our rural areas and our cities. Currently, as the MGA is worded, any property interest held by a provincial agency is exempt from taxation. Yet, of course, these provincial offices or agencies still use the municipalities' services for things like sewage, garbage collection and so on and so forth, imposing a service burden on those municipalities in which they reside.

While the province currently provides a grant in place of taxes to municipalities, the province can decide on a whim that it simply does not wish to continue funding the grant. We have seen this very thing happen by this government when they, with total disregard for their municipal partners, ended the grants in lieu of taxes program on provincial housing and seniors' facilities. This bill purports to improve this a little bit by stating that properties owned, leased, and held by provincial agencies, as defined by the Financial Administration Act, are now taxable. While this is an improvement, it doesn't go far enough as AHS buildings, housing management bodies, schools, colleges, universities are still exempt.

As I mentioned, there is a grant program that exists to offset some of these costs, but the real issue is that there remains today the issue of stable, predictable funding for municipalities, and without that, municipalities are at the whim of the province. So you're left with the situation where, for example, a seniors' facility utilizes municipal services, yet the province shirks its responsibility and refuses to pay its fair share. The average homeowner, however, is forced to take on more of the burden, resulting in higher property taxes for everyone else. This is just another example of this government making life more difficult for Albertans.

A better proposal would be to establish a funding model that provides stable, predictable funding for municipalities. This would

go a long way in showing that this government is finally taking responsibility to fund its fair share of the costs of municipal services. This would have the effect of giving our municipalities more certainty and ensuring that our municipalities will thrive into the future. Anything we can do to improve certainty for our municipalities during this low oil downturn is worth while, Madam Chair.

One other change that I wanted to talk about, Madam Chair, is the access to designated industrial assessment information. The MGA as written currently does not allow municipalities to access information regarding how designated industrial assessment is prepared. The new changes will allow a municipality to request information regarding the assessments of designated industrial property. In this case a provincial assessor would have to comply with this request except when there is an active complaint on a property by the municipality.

As the legislation is written, the municipalities can ask for all DIPs except where a complaint is registered. Therefore, they can ask for most assessments, and I assume they intend to. The provincial assessor cannot say no to these requests, so this begs the question: what is the purpose of asking this person to provide this information if they can't say no? That being said, this is an improvement over the current system, where the municipalities do not get this information in any manner.

Thank you for listening to my concerns regarding this bill.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 8 in Committee of the Whole today. I have a couple of things I'd like to mention, and I'd also like to talk a little bit about the municipalities in my constituency.

Municipalities like Canmore and Banff are on the leading edge of green initiatives, and I'm really proud of the activities that they've undertaken to take their responsibility for the environment seriously. A couple of examples of things that they've done are investing in public transit. There's a regional public transit system that travels between Canmore and Banff. Banff also has a transit system that runs within the town's boundaries, and the town of Canmore has just recently brought in a transit system within the town. This is not only a unique way to save money for transit, but also it helps to connect these two towns.

The mayors of Canmore and Banff are quite friendly with one another, and it's great to see them collaborate. They say: it's two towns but one community. There are a lot of people that live in one town like Canmore and they work in Banff or vice versa. People travel back and forth all the time. Folks that have made the trip before know it's maybe about a 20-minute trip or something like that, so having the transit system go between the two municipalities, where people travel back and forth quite a lot, is really handy.

The town of Canmore did a pretty unique thing that I applaud them for. When they first brought in the transit system, they had free fares for at least a month, maybe two months, because they wanted to get people used to trying the transit out and, you know, seeing how it works, to make sure that people understand where the routes go and sort of get them used to travelling on transit. That seemed to be pretty successful, and they've done quite well with that.

I'm really proud that our government gave them, the Bow Valley corridor from about Exshaw to Lake Louise, about \$14 million in GreenTRIP funding, Madam Chair. This is a pretty significant investment in green initiatives. It takes cars off the road.

Another big thing: it really helps with tourism. We all know that this summer the entry fee for Parks Canada is free, and the town of Banff is really anticipating a huge influx of visitors, and they're really quite concerned with how they're going to manage all that traffic.

As people know, the experience a visitor has is partly dependent on the municipality and the work that they do. A municipality is charged with wayfinding, signage in town, and the costs that it undertakes to show visitors where to go. Banff has a unique challenge in that they get a lot of international visitors that may not speak English, so they have a challenge in terms of – you know, you have to have signage that's understandable for visitors that may not speak English or French to find their way around and to make sure that that's visible to visitors. There's a balancing act because you can't have massive signs everywhere – it's sort of unsightly – but you also have to be able to show visitors where to go.

Banff also has some restrictions in terms of the design criteria. Because they're in the national park, there are design and architectural requirements that they're required to abide by, so this is another added expense for municipalities and another level of planning complexity that they have to consider when they have their deliberations at municipal council.

3:50

The town of Banff has done a remarkable job in terms of making the visitor experience the best they possibly can. I'm really proud, too, that they've worked very collaboratively with Parks Canada to ensure that the visitors that are expected to come this summer have the best possible experience.

We know that last summer, even when the park entry fee was in effect, tourists were actually getting turned away at Lake Louise. Could you imagine if you came from anywhere, really, in Canada or around the world, if you had taken your whole family and said, "We are going to go see Lake Louise. Finally, our dream vacation: we're going to go visit Lake Louise. We've always wanted to do this," and then you get there, and they say, "Sorry. We're full. You're going to have to turn around"? It's a daylong thing. You know, people park in the morning, and then they go hiking, might have lunch there, and they spend pretty much the entire day in the town. Once the town is full first thing in the morning, nobody else can come in. So it's quite frustrating for visitors because they spend a lot of money to get here, and they want to have a good experience when they're visiting.

You know, municipalities, especially tourism municipalities, are tasked with – the mayor of Banff has a saying. She says: we flush toilets for 40,000 people on a tax base of 9,000 people. They have a significant challenge. They have to have more frequent garbage collection, a higher capacity for drinking water and waste water, and these are things that they have to take into consideration. I was really interested to learn, talking to the CAO of the town of Banff, Robert Earl – he told me that they actually have a 100-year capital plan for the town. They think so far ahead that they've costed out all their capital requirements and all that kind of thing well into the future. It's that kind of planning that keeps municipalities vibrant and really sets a good example, too. I know that in the town of Canmore they're quite an innovative group as well.

Affordable housing is a huge issue in the Bow Valley in particular, and I was really pleased just last week, actually, that the Minister of Seniors and Housing was visiting Canmore and Banff. We made two significant announcements, that I'm quite proud of, that really helped the municipalities out. First of all, in Banff we broke ground on a 132-unit affordable housing project called Deer Lane. It was fantastic because this is something that the mayor and the council have been working on for many, many years. In

particular, this situation was a collaboration between all three levels of government. Parks Canada chipped in. They gave the land to the municipality at a very reduced cost. The provincial government contributed nearly \$12 million, as did the town of Banff. This is a significant milestone in the history of the town of Banff. They've typically had about a zero per cent vacancy rate.

It's an interesting paradox because sometimes people say that the Alberta economy isn't doing all that great, but, you know, we're set to lead the country in growth this year thanks to the hard work of our government. The tourism industry in particular, especially in the Bow Valley, is booming, particularly because of the low Canadian dollar. This is good news in a way, but the problem is that the employers, the hotel and food and beverage industries, have a challenge getting workers to come and stay. The pay is decent, but it's not that great. You know, I'm glad that we're committed to the \$15 minimum wage. That's going to help people out there for sure, although they tend to get paid more than minimum wage just because you have to in the Bow Valley in order to afford housing.

What I'm getting at is that the difficulty for the employers there is that they need housekeepers, they need servers, and in order for those folks to be attracted – a lot of the time it's their dream job to work in Banff. They don't care what job they do. They could be doing anything. They just want to live in Banff. The problem is that they can't find a place to live. This creates some difficulties in terms of potential social problems as well and health and mental health. People sometimes live in their cars because the draw and attraction of living in this spectacular mountain paradise is so strong that people are willing to wait it out and live in their car while they're waiting for housing. What I'm really proud of is that this government has worked so closely with the municipalities that we're helping them address these significant issues.

The town of Banff exists within the national park for the sole reason of tourism. That is everybody's focus in Banff. You know, certainly, there are ancillary services, but everyone there is dedicated to supporting the tourism sector. We have a role to play in that as well: diversify our economy. We have to support these types of towns so that they can do the work that they need to do.

Just last week I was also mentioning another project in Canmore that the Minister of Seniors and Housing was there to announce. At the Bow River seniors' lodge we are providing funding for a second phase. They're just about finished the renovations on phase 1, but phase 2 funding was just announced last week. Thank you to the Minister of Seniors and Housing for that commitment. Sixty new long-term care spaces at the dementia care standards are going to be built in Canmore, and this is a significant investment in this municipality.

You know, there's kind of a misconception sometimes that people that live in Canmore and Banff are all wealthy. If you tour around the town, you see these beautiful, beautiful homes. The downtown and the town look really, really nice, so there's sometimes a misconception that everybody is well-to-do and that we don't need to direct provincial funding to these types of municipalities because – like, the former government didn't invest in these communities. They said: "Ah, they can afford it. They don't need our help. They've got a big tax base. They can figure it out on their own." Well, you know what, Madam Chair? That's just not true because in the Bow Valley, like I said, a lot of people work in the service industry, and those jobs don't pay all that well. Those people have got families to feed, and the rents are astronomical. If you can imagine having such a low vacancy rate, you know, sometimes landlords can charge almost whatever they want, and people are lining up to pay for it.

I'm really proud of our Minister of Municipal Affairs, that has worked so closely with these municipalities to support them. It's a

broad array of supports that have been provided: you know, public transit, affordable housing. I know that last summer we provided funding for Canmore's waste-water facility and upgrading that to meet future demands.

You know what? Another thing. I like to talk about Canmore and Banff a lot because not only are they beautiful towns, but they've got some very innovative policies there, too. Actually, in Canmore and Banff the mayors of those two towns were validators and endorsed our climate leadership plan. They were actually on the press release, Madam Chair. I'm really proud that they stood up and they said: look; we're proud of taking action on the environment. They don't have any misconceptions or misapprehensions of whether climate change is real; they know that it is. When visitors come from abroad to places like that, they want to know that not only the municipalities but also the businesses take their responsibility for the environment seriously.

People like to shop for Alberta products, locally raised food. For businesses to be able to market themselves as being locally driven is a huge draw for tourists. They come in, and they say: "I want to try Alberta beef. I've heard that Alberta beef is the best beef in the world." It is, and they have a great chance to try that out.

4:00

The towns of Banff and Canmore have also created initiatives in terms of solar panels. Those two municipalities also provide incentives for folks to put solar panels on their homes, and those programs have been oversubscribed. They're so popular, just like the programs that the minister of environment has proposed. Albertans are very excited about these, very similarly to the way the citizens of Banff and Canmore are about those local initiatives.

In the municipal district of Bighorn, which is neighbouring Canmore, the Stoney Nakoda reserve as well as the town of Cochrane, a local councillor there – I can't think of his name right now, but it'll come to me – is the chairperson for what's called the Southern Alberta Energy from Waste Association project. The acronym is SAEWA. This is a collaboration between many municipalities in southern Alberta as an innovative way to deal with their waste stream. They're in discussions. It's a partnership, like I said, between municipalities in terms of: what do we do with our solid waste? If you bury the solid waste, it can create methane emissions, which we know is a very potent greenhouse gas that's even more powerful than CO₂.

One of the ways that they've thought of to innovatively deal with their waste is to incinerate the waste and generate energy from that. It's interesting in this example because a lot of times there's this "not in my backyard" approach to dealing with solid waste. Most municipalities say, "Well, we don't want that. People don't want that in their backyard," but the SAEWA project is actually quite the inverse of that. A lot of the municipalities are vying to have this facility located in their municipal district. The reasons are manifold. Of course, they pay taxes on their property, but also it actually generates a lot of economic activity. You know, you're burning the waste to generate electricity, so that's good news.

There's also waste heat that's generated through the incineration of garbage, of course. What they can do with that waste heat and the CO₂, for that matter: one of the things they're proposing is to have greenhouses next to or located relatively close to the – I don't think incineration is maybe the right technical term, but that's what comes to mind. Anyway, with the waste heat and CO₂ from the plant, they can ship that over to the greenhouse, and they've got free heat, and the CO₂ helps the plants grow faster.

You see, municipalities are clamouring for this project to be put in their municipality because there's a lot of economic activity that's generated through that. I'm pretty happy about the leadership

that's demonstrated in the municipal district of Bighorn. Paul Ryan is the councillor's name. It just came to me. He is a very dedicated individual. I meet with him on a regular basis. It's great to see the enthusiasm and how municipalities from across southern Alberta are coming together to support this initiative.

You know, to talk about collaboration a bit, I'd like to talk about FCSS services and how they relate to municipalities. Most people know that FCSS is kind of a three-way collaboration between the province, the municipality, and the FCSS entities themselves. I'm really proud that for the first time in many, many years our government increased the funding to FCSS. It's an essential service to the towns that have this, and what I find particularly interesting is that it's all locally driven. Each FCSS is different from the next because they make decisions based on what's best for the municipality that they're located in.

I'm really fortunate. Actually, the FCSS directors are having a provincial meeting in Canmore on Thursday this week. They're all getting together to learn from one another about things that they've noticed in other parts of the province and learn from one another and share best practices. FCSS is a really unique way that municipalities can have boots on the ground, and they stimulate volunteer activity. They provide food hampers.

A really interesting thing in Banff and Canmore is that there's a very young population there. Unfortunately, that also means there's a lot of sexual activity amongst these young individuals, and sexually transmitted infections are a serious problem that has to be dealt with. FCSS and the primary care networks in the Bow Valley have a really important role to play in providing community health teaching and providing condoms for folks. It's a really neat program.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm incredibly happy to get up again, well, to get up for the first time during Committee of the Whole, to speak to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, and certainly to speak in support of this bill. I'll begin by saying two initial things. The first is to give my heartfelt congratulations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and his staff for the incredible work they've done on this act. Thank you. The second is to say that I am so pleased with the amount of consultation that has occurred and how the amendments are based on feedback received from Albertans and stakeholders through the discussion paper *Continuing the Conversation*.

Now to my comments. First, a huge municipal issue in Lethbridge. We have been entertained during the current WHL hockey season, and I offer my hearty congratulations to the players and management of the Lethbridge Hurricanes for this incredible season, a season which gave so much energy and delight to the citizens of Lethbridge and surrounding communities. Thank you.

Now to another area of the bill, parental leave. As you probably know, I have been an activist on women's issues for a large chunk of my life. I heard throughout my life that women have equal access to any job for which they are interested and have the qualifications; however, my life experience did not show this to be true. Those experiences were one of the reasons why I had not considered political life until 2014, when my family was grown and I was so ticked off with the state of affairs in our province at the time. I have advocated for almost 30 years now for equal pay for work of equal value. I have advocated for women to have equal access to participate in political life. Political life should be more accessible for women as well as Albertans with young families. We are aiming to make that political life more accessible through this amendment

as it would enable councils to make parental leave bylaws for councillors. Right now 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on them. This amendment will open the doors to many more women who are of child-bearing age. One more barrier has been removed.

One of the questions that came to me about parental leave was: why should people who choose to run for office be able to opt out of their work for a long period of time? Other working Albertans are entitled to unpaid leaves for the birth of a child or to care for the newly born or adopted child, as laid out in the existing Alberta employment standards legislation. This proposal enables municipalities to create a policy that gives elected representatives more flexibility, and I say: about time.

4:10

The next item I'll speak about is the incredible collaboration that occurs in my community and Lethbridge county and, in fact, all of the municipalities of southern Alberta. On the first Friday of every month in the morning there is a meeting of all the communities along highway 3. The purpose of this committee is to eventually twin the highway. This committee has been in existence for 25 years. As I said, this meeting happens in the morning at the city hall in Lethbridge. In the afternoon most of the people who attended that morning meeting stay for the meeting of the mayors and reeves of southern Alberta, again a collaboration of all the municipalities, to discuss issues common to all, to suggest some solutions, to take action. Fabulous collaboration. I go to as many of those meetings as I can, so I know how collaborative they are.

I will reiterate what I said in the second reading of this bill. There are several specific examples I'd like to point out to you. Lethbridge and Lethbridge county have already collaborated to develop a new intermunicipal development plan, and they are collaborating on an airport master plan. If we're going to grow, it's important that we do that so we have an airport that will sustain the economy that we want to have. Lethbridge also provides various other services to the county from time to time as they are needed. I am really delighted to see this bill as it affirms collaboration that is already happening between our municipalities.

Another piece on the collaboration spectrum is a requirement for municipalities to have joint-use agreements with school divisions regarding allocation and use of school grounds and fields. As I said before, during the second reading of this bill, I believe Lethbridge has been a leader, and I say that because there has been a well-established practice in Lethbridge since 1959, long before many people in this room were born. That collaboration continues so that we have joint-use agreements.

The next piece that I'll speak to is that Lethbridge has already begun engaging with our neighbours in the Blackfoot Confederacy on our new municipal planning that's under way. This fits with the new requirement to notify adjacent indigenous communities when proposing new municipal development plans or area structure plans. What a great step between the Blackfoot Confederacy and my city.

Now I'll sit down, but I may get up again if something else comes up that I want to speak to. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, am rising to speak in favour of this bill. I'm standing partly to talk a little bit more about the issue of parental leave for elected representatives. I have the distinct honour of being the second sitting MLA in the history of

the province of Alberta to give birth while in office, and I have to say that the first happened six months before me.

You know, when I was making the decision to run for election in 2015, nearly two years ago – wow. Time is flying. When I was making that choice, my husband and I had actually been planning to expand our family. I think that sometimes people have a misperception that a person wouldn't possibly want to have a baby while they're in office. I'm here to say that maybe I'm just that crazy. But the fact of the matter is that people decide to expand their families at all stages of their lives. Frankly, the decision about whether or not to run for office really shouldn't be made based on whether or not you're going to be able to provide care for your child should you be successful in your election bid.

By allowing municipalities to set their own parental leave policies, this act is going to enable municipalities to set up bylaws that make sense for their community and bylaws that are going to be able to provide that little bit of clarity for potential and would-be city councillors or town councillors that I didn't have when I was making the decision to run. You know, like, when we were talking this over as a family, there wasn't – no one had ever done this before in the province of Alberta. There was no model. There was no discussion in the standing orders for the Legislature about: what do we do with children? What happens if an MLA has a baby and needs to perhaps nurse their baby while they're sitting in the House? What happens if that baby needs a diaper change? All of these little pieces. Or what happens after giving birth in those first couple of weeks when that bonding is so important?

By enabling municipalities to make these decisions and set policies that are right for their communities based on their own individual municipality, it's making political life that little bit more accessible to all Albertans. I think that, you know, Madam Chair, that also helps to make life better for Albertans. I truly believe that governments do better when they're more reflective of the people they represent, and I'm really proud to be part of a caucus that looks a lot like the people of Alberta. We've got that range of ages, from our friends who were just in the middle of their university degrees when they came here to folks who are towards the end of their careers. We have that diversity of experience, from different incomes and different employment sectors that we all came from. You know, we also have that gender diversity and sexual identity piece, things like that, that I think help us as a caucus and as a government to better represent those people whom we're serving.

Madam Chair, I have to tell you that it's a little disconcerting for me to hear that only 26 per cent of the city councillors, municipal councillors, across our province are women when more than half of the people in our province are women. I actually have to say that as an Alberta woman I found it even more concerning that 23 per cent of municipalities have no women representatives at all. I think that there are some systemic barriers that exist there, and I think that by doing things like enabling maternity and parental leave policies, we're able to encourage more people to take that bold step of putting their name on a ballot, of stepping forward to serve their communities.

Madam Chair, I know that every person in this Assembly and every elected representative across our province gives up time with our families to do these roles because we believe so strongly in making life better for Albertans. We know that, you know, we're not going to see our kids, our grandkids, our spouses, or, in some cases, our cats and dogs quite as much as we used to, but we do that because we believe in our communities. We believe that it's important to serve. Frankly, I think that anything that we can do to help enable that and to help enable that for people no matter what phase of their life they're at is so much more important. You know, our conversations here in the Legislature are better informed when

we have people who are currently trying to figure out how to make child care payments, who are figuring out how to balance young children and working full-time. That is the reality of Albertans across this province.

Madam Chair, I remember, you know, right before Cassidy was born talking to some people who were like: wow; how are you going to make it work? Ultimately, I'm not that different from many other mothers across our province. Mothers across Alberta go back to work shortly after the birth of their children, maybe taking a couple weeks off to heal from some of the medical aspects of their childbirth. Mothers across this province are breadwinners. Mothers across this province are working, some of them struggling with more than one full-time job, trying to make ends meet. That's why I'm also proud of a government that has decided to address the issue of minimum wage and bring it closer in line to the living wage.

Madam Chair, I've heard some people, some people in this House even, saying things like "If you're going to run for office, you shouldn't have kids," or "If you're going to run for office, you should wait till your kids are older," and I categorically reject those statements. I think that's telling Albertans that, you know, some people who aren't them know better than they do about what their life choices should be. It's like saying that – you know what? – if you're a woman of child-bearing age or maybe a dad who wants to be involved in your kid's life and you have young children, you have no right in these halls, and that is not true. This is our government, and it belongs to all of the people in Alberta, and there is a spot for everyone at this table.

4:20

Now, Madam Chair, there are some logistical questions, of course, that come along with having a baby when you are an elected representative, and let me tell you that over the last nine and a bit months I've learned a lot about that process. Certainly, one of the questions that might come up is: how are constituents represented when an elected representative is on their parental leave? And I have to say that I think, again, that's why it's great that these policies are going to be determined at the local level.

I mean, here in the House we have the rules around missing only a set number of sitting days. We've also done simple things to help expand access and ensure that parents with young kids are able to still be part of it and still represent their constituents. We have things like, you know, mobile devices. We have our phones, our tablets, and these have been really great in terms of being able to keep that representation going.

It's also things like allowing infants into our Chamber and making it so that a parent with a young child that they're caring for is still able to be a part of the debate and the discussion here in the House whilst simultaneously looking after their little one. Now, I have to say that around nine months mine has kind of reached the age where she'd probably be crawling all over the place, so she does a little bit better when she's not hanging out in here. That said, I think it's a really important thing to consider, and there are these little tweaks that can be made.

Another piece that we've done, of course, is limiting evening sittings as well as bringing the hours of our sessions in line and more consistent with regular business hours, which then enables elected representatives with young children the opportunity to use traditional child care options and not just limiting choices to maybe family members or friends or private nannies.

The other thing that I certainly benefited from – and I'd like to take this moment to publicly acknowledge them – is the support of my colleagues. I think, you know, we have an incredibly supportive government around this and, certainly, members of my caucus. I've had so many offers for babysitting from this caucus. They're all

wonderful. I've even had members across the way saying that they'd be happy to look after kiddo for me, so I have to take this moment to say thank you. I also wanted to extend a very special thanks to two members of my caucus in particular, who in the early days after my daughter was born did a really great job supporting my constituents in co-ordination with my constituency office and my really fantastic team there. I'd like to take a moment to thank the Member for Calgary-Shaw and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, two neighbouring constituencies, for all the support that they were able to offer my constituents.

Madam Chair, I think there are a lot of really fantastic things in this bill, and I think my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs has done an excellent job putting together a bill that has some really great pieces that are going to really help make life better for Albertans. I just really want to say that this piece in particular is fantastic, and I really hope that should this bill be passed, other municipalities and other levels of government will move forward with creating parental leave policies.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to open up by saying that I proudly call myself a feminist, and I say this in a very self-interested sort of way because being a feminist has empowered me as a father to be more involved in my children's lives than the previous generation before me. Credit to all those who paved the way and stood up, especially all the women, for equality because, at the end of the day, it gave me more opportunity as a man than I would have had 20 or 30 years ago.

Now, as has been alluded to by a couple of members before me who have spoken in relation to the issue within the MGA related to parental leave, I've alluded many times in this House that when I ran in 2015, I was actually on parental leave. It was a decision that was made with the scales of economy in mind and with the fact that I wanted to be involved in my daughter's life early on in that part, but everything changed full stop and was turned around on May 5. It's easy for one to campaign and carry a stroller or carry a little one with you, and it's easy for you to be at those announcements with a baby in your arms. Unfortunately, for a lot of our city councils at the time of my election and in this Chamber I had to stop being that full-time dad because there was just no system in place to allow us to raise our children, to be that involved parent.

I heard the Associate Minister of Health thank me for the supports that I provided in her constituency, and it was my thrill because she and the Minister of Service Alberta have paved the way so that what happened when I became an MLA doesn't have to happen to any other father moving forward. I'll admit that it was a very huge struggle and it was very lonely and it was very depressing right after the election because you go from seeing your child every single day, seeing these milestones, being involved with her life to literally seeing her maybe just on weekends and not knowing if it's appropriate for you to bring your kids to events and being worried about being stigmatized as a father in doing so.

It's been remarkable because in the last year I have seen so many members involve their kids in this job in a very positive light. I've seen the Member for Calgary-East bring her children to many great events, expose them to many great things, that in the last few months I felt it's okay, and I've had the opportunity to share this part of my life, this remarkable privilege that I have had of being the Member for Calgary-Shaw, with my kids' lives and have had them meet and interact with some amazing people and allow the community to get to know me as an individual MLA a lot better as well.

With that being said, unfortunately, the system that we have in place has not translated yet to the municipal governments until now. You know, I was on Twitter a little bit earlier, and I saw that I think his name is Nate Erskine-Smith, who's a Liberal MP, brought his child into the Chamber for votes. I wish that I had had the opportunity to be that involved parent when we initially started this process together because I think it would have made the transition a lot easier and a lot smoother. Don't get me wrong. I have no regrets in relation to this process, but as many newer parents can attribute to, it is very tough to transition into an already very intense role when you're having to leave your family behind and when there are many situations where you can't bring them with you.

I think that it's important that we take these next steps to move forward with all levels of government. The federal government has already taken steps, the provincial governments have already taken steps, and we have now allowed our municipal governments to take steps to empower them to be progressive and to have a full range of voices throughout communities. There are so many stigmas that exist out there that prevent people from either getting involved in the system or being involved parents, and there's no reason why those two can't go hand in hand and can't go in tangent. At the end of the day, it makes our system a lot stronger moving forward.

Now I want to touch base on a couple of other items that have been brought forth, specifically some of the concerns that we've heard in relation to the school boards through the MGA process. Going back to the process, I thought it was pretty remarkable to see how it unfolded. Fortunately, I had an opportunity to be part of the consultations. When the deliberations of consultations were moving through the province, the Minister of Municipal Affairs had the full intent of being heavily involved. Unfortunately, the wildfires in Fort McMurray prevented her from being able to attend all of the meetings, so she relied on many of us to carry some of the load and to go out.

I had the opportunity to head out to Hanna and to talk to many of the people within the counties there. It was remarkable because there were certain elements – and I've talked about this before. Whether it be with the agriculture or the parks or the energy sectors, it was remarkable to learn about some of the challenges that smaller municipalities face, things that we in the urban centres take for granted. You know, when we were at the AUMA meetings, we heard about how crucial provincial support is for water and bridges whereas in a large city these things just kind of happen. In cities like Calgary and Edmonton they just figure it out.

4:30

You know, as we move forward, it's great to see that our government is fully in support of the water for life program and our infrastructure funding. That's going to allow us to get really caught up with a lot of our bridges. The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville will always allude to how great and how overdue these projects really were. In a city like Calgary these projects probably would have happened because there's the huge tax base and there's the huge support to move forward with them right away. But I digress. I've sort of gone off on a tangent in relation to it.

Going back to the consultation hearings, there were so many elements that were brought up on issues in relation to brownfields, but one of the crucial things was that we heard from a lot of our school board stakeholders. It was one thing going into this process that I was taken aback by. I didn't know the implications that the MGA had for school boards and the way that we could really, really improve some of the collaborations.

I want to really take this opportunity to give praise and thanks to my Catholic school board trustee, with whom I've had a great

opportunity to build a two-years-strong working relationship with, Mary Martin, who had the opportunity to take on the position as president of the ASBA just recently. She, credit to her, came to me very early on. She's always done her due diligence to make sure that she reads any legislation that will impact her, and in return, if there's any legislation that's going to impact any of our 61 school boards, I make sure that I forward it to her.

She commented just recently:

We appreciated working closely with [the Ministry of] Municipal Affairs on this legislation. The government has heard our concerns and acted on them – in particular, introducing mandatory joint use and planning agreements. It benefits Alberta families and communities when municipalities and school boards work together on integrated long-term planning for school sites and facilities. Further clarifying exemptions for off-site levies is also good news for schools boards, because it means more dollars remain in our classrooms.

The Calgary Catholic board is a pretty unique one, and it's similar to many other boards that you see, for example the Palliser boards, because they don't cover just one county and they don't just cover one municipality. They actually go outside of other jurisdictions. You see them specifically within the Foothills region, in municipalities like Airdrie and Chestermere, and then also covering the greater Calgary area. It's important that we really provide some of these clarifications because it's so difficult for them to negotiate with both the city of Calgary and then, on the other hand, trying to keep caught up with some of their school builds, with individual counties.

To try to create a situation in which they can have long-term planning is very difficult when they have to consistently deal with different regulations and different rules and different ways that things are being done, not to mention that we always have to deal with changes in government and the challenges that come in relation to building new relationships with different partners altogether, not to mention multiple different partners. You know, at the end of the day, it's really great for us to make sure that we're moving forward with a joint-use partnership agreement to really ensure that everyone is coming to the table in this discussion and that they're working collaboratively to do what is best for our kids, ultimately.

You know, at the end of the day, one of the things that's really remarkable – and this is something that we've dealt with heavily within the city of Calgary – is that as we see new developments, there are commitments made in relation to new schools. The thing is that "commitment" is a very loose term. We've heard where in some developments it is said: come move to this community because there's going to be a new school here. In reality, there's allotted land from a developer, that has to be allotted because of the MGA, for a school to be built on that site. Now, the challenge is that there are so many other parameters that could delay a school from being built there, prevent a school from being built there, or even ultimately create a lot of challenges in relation to them moving forward. Having a strong joint-use partnership between a municipality and a school board can ensure that as we move forward with some of the developments of these sites, we can ensure that these schools are being built effectively and efficiently and on time.

Also, in relation to off-site levies, this has been a huge discussion that's moved forward, and as we develop new areas and new communities, especially small municipalities that tend to grow really, really fast like your Cochranes, your High Rivers, your Chestermeres, your Okotoks – I only say them because they're really close to where I am – they're crucial for ensuring that

municipal infrastructure can move forward and that we can stay caught up in relation to it. Because in sprawling cities like this – and I include Calgary – it's very easy for you to fall behind on these developments.

With that being said, the exemptions to schools are, I think, a very crucial thing to make sure that we're moving forward on and that we're allowing a lot of the capital to stay within the classrooms and stay with the students. I appreciate the support that has come from the AUMA in relation to moving forward with this.

You know, speaking in relation to this, I think that it's great that we're moving forward, that we're strengthening this, that we've come back to the table with a second set of feedback and amendments to the MGA to make sure that we continue to strengthen it. I think it's very relevant that we ensure that we're coming forward with new ideas in relation to some of our legislation. The way we do things, the way communities are built, technology, the way we educate our students, even how individuals are working changes over time, and cultures change over time. So it's important that we always ensure that these legislations are happening.

Now, before I take my seat, I want to comment in relation to the Member for Lethbridge-East on her WHL team. I think it's great that they've moved forward. I like the H because there's another WHL team that starts with H that is phenomenal and that's probably going to do a lot better next year.

Thank you, all, very much. I'm glad to support this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be speaking today on Bill 8 in my role as shadow minister for Indigenous Relations. That being said, I'd like to recognize that we are standing on Treaty 6 territory today. Very happy to be here.

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government is a massive bill that suggests changes to many aspects of the Municipal Government Act, and it will have quite an impact on communities in my area of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and all across the province. The bill brings forward many different changes to the MGA, and I will highlight the changes being made specifically in regard to Indigenous Relations.

Last year's Bill 21 sought to increase collaboration amongst adjacent municipalities by having municipalities create co-operation agreements. This bill further sets that goal of collaboration by asking municipalities to voluntarily work towards similar agreements – and that is taking place throughout my area quite regularly – but also with neighbouring indigenous communities. Some areas of the province are quite successful at that, and others are just kind of starting to get on to that. But it is worth noting that it is voluntary due to the fact that the province really doesn't have any jurisdiction over First Nations or to enforce this collaboration. While this could result in improved communication and dialogue between municipalities and indigenous communities, it's crucial that we ensure that all the communications are respectful of their customs and traditions.

The changes encourage, for example, municipalities to voluntarily work with First Nations reserves or Métis settlements on their borders. The only mandatory step is a notification requirement that mandates municipalities to notify indigenous communities of any statutory plan changes to communities within their jurisdiction that are bordering on indigenous communities. That includes infrastructure plans, waterlines, that kind of thing. It would be a surprise to me if a lot of these municipalities aren't already doing that kind of a notification. It makes it more of an aspirational goal of sorts.

4:40

It's important that we recognize that many municipalities already have excellent working relationships with their neighbouring indigenous communities. Many of them are already surpassing the requirements laid out within this act. I would like to offer my appreciation to those municipalities, and I hope that they offer their advice and insight to municipalities that are seeking to strengthen their relationships with neighbouring indigenous communities. I know that the county of St. Paul and the town of St. Paul are trying to work collaboratively with Saddle Lake and Goodfish Lake First Nations on some joint initiatives that may be of benefit to all the people in all the communities.

There is a need for further clarification to define neighbouring community and adjacent. This could potentially add complexity as to which indigenous communities are to be included and if this also applies to traditional indigenous lands. Furthermore, there will need to be appropriate dispute resolution processes available to ensure the development of fulsome relationships between indigenous and nonindigenous communities. Again I have to stress the respect for the unique communities that are our First Nations. More nations are not actually considered in the same right as a municipality.

This change could encourage municipalities and indigenous communities to work collaboratively to find and improve efficiencies in the delivery of services to both indigenous and nonindigenous communities. I think that is a common goal that everybody can work together on if it's done respectfully. In Alberta there are 140 reserves, 45 First Nations, eight Métis settlements spread across three treaty areas. These groups are not homogeneous. We know that just from interactions we've had with First Nations up in the north and, for instance, Siksika down in the south. Their demographics, their conditions, their treaty lands, their native lands are totally different, and they need to be treated that way and with respect as well.

The bill fails to recognize that Métis settlements and First Nation reserves are not simply an extension of municipalities. They are distinct in nature, and they need to be respected as such. Again, I'm going to stress that we need to make sure that we're communicating to our municipalities that they're not just dealing with another county that's adjacent to their borders, that this is actually a nation in its own right and that it has to be treated with that respect and is due that respect.

I would argue that indigenous awareness training would be a good step towards helping develop respectful communications between indigenous and nonindigenous communities. I was a little troubled by seeing that that is something that has been taken out of this act. Respect and understanding are paramount when it comes to building and developing relationships, and this is particularly true for relationships between indigenous and nonindigenous communities. I would hope that the government communicates to municipal governments, both urban and rural, that any interactions they are having or expect to have with First Nations are done very respectfully and through the proper channels, and that would ensure their chances of success.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. Just a couple of points I'd like to touch on from the member there. I really appreciate the words that you brought up, especially as you spoke about the indigenous peoples and Métis. We are working closely with Indigenous Relations because they are their own nations. You are completely right. It's a different way. You know, we need to make sure we respect their traditions and the way that they want to do things, for

sure. The conversations I had, which were very good, were positive, and they understood that it's a first step, just saying: "You know what? We need to respect you guys. You guys are our neighbours, our friends, our family. It's about time that we treat you how you should be treated, which is just like one of us, because you are."

As for the education part of it, you're exactly right. That's something that we had discussed, but once we started kind of sussing out the information with some of the nations, we knew that we wouldn't have time to institute it before the municipal elections, so it is something that we are going to be working with Indigenous Relations on. It's extremely important because we need to make sure we get the nations and the Métis involved to make sure from their side. I mean, we don't want to come from the top down. We want to make sure that it's a collaborative effort and that education is there, because it's sorely needed and a lot of people want it, for sure, on all sides of the spectrum. Yeah, that's a huge one for us, and I appreciate you bringing that up because it's very important to me as well.

I'm looking forward to those discussions. I think they're going to be really good. As well, what we're doing here with the MGA as far as making sure that we inform First Nations and Métis peoples, just like we would any other municipality, hasn't been done in Canada yet, so we're leading the way again. Alberta is leading the way, which is fantastic. I am very excited about that, and I know it's something, as you said, that across the board we can all get on the same page on. I think it's a very positive turn of events, and I'm looking forward to the work ahead.

You know, there's a lot of hard work to be done, but I never shy away from hard work. I tell people that it's a lot of fun to do this, and sometimes they look at me a little different, but I'll tell you that it is a lot of fun. Municipal Affairs is quite the amazing ministry to be involved in because it touches every Albertan out there every day. So, yeah, we have a lot of work to do, and there's a lot more to go through this session, and I'd like to hear discussion from a lot of other members.

Thanks for your feedback.

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

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, everyone. I have a matter that is of significance on Bill 8 that I think many people on the government side may or may not be aware of, but it is a fairly important issue. As we talk about a lot of the topics we have in Municipal Affairs, of course there are so many topics that affect so many lives and so many people in different ways. It's a huge, huge ministry, and I compliment the minister for his work on the ministry so far. It's a great undertaking, and it's a fabulous ministry to be involved with. I've enjoyed it for many years as a long-time municipal councillor and appeal board member and all the other committees I've served on. It's probably been the best experience of my life.

With the Bill 8 segment that I'm going to be speaking on today there is a certain amount of difficulty that can be involved when government decides to change the manner in which they tax or have their municipalities decide how they tax. Of course, it's probably one of the most sensitive areas for taxpayers. In this regard I'm speaking about one particular issue, and that is the proposed changes to the difference between the residential taxes – the mill rates, in other words – and the nonresidential taxes, the mill rates for those. In the previous bill last fall the government raised this issue and decided that they should set a limit on the difference of the rates from those two types of developments. Once again, I'm comparing residential to nonresidential. In Bill 21, that we reviewed

last fall, the government said that they would like to see all municipalities conform to a new maximum rate, a ratio of, in fact, 5 to 1. In other words, no taxes and tax rates – mill rates, in other words – should be set at a ratio of more than five times what the residential rate would be.

This is problematic because around Alberta there are all kinds of different industrial improvements to a lot of lands. There are all kinds of commercial improvements. There are all kinds of huge, huge manufacturing and oil and gas processing facilities, and these kinds of operations can cause a municipality an awful lot of added work and maintenance and costs to have them within their district, so taxing these kinds of facilities in the appropriate manner helps to offset some of the burdens that they bring.

Anyway, to get into a few points that we've got on this, it's not a new topic, Madam Chair. Before the current Municipal Government Act, or the MGA, was enacted in '95, actually, the municipal act then mandated that residential property taxes – and I say: residential – could not be less than 75 per cent of the nonresidential property taxes. That's the way they did it then.

4:50

But they removed it in '95, and nonresidential and residential property tax rates have remained unlinked since that time. It was left up to the municipalities with the new MGA in the mid-90s, when I first got involved, to look at how they could set their levels with respect to the various classifications they had in their districts. But that changed, as I said earlier, this past fall when Bill 21, the modernized act, came along and proposed this cap of five times the lowest residential rate in that municipality.

When you looked at the existing ratios of most municipalities at the time this was introduced, actually, there were a large number of municipalities that were compliant. In fact, although I don't have the exact number, I believe it was only around 19 municipalities that had nonresidential rates, or industrial, let's call it, or commercial, that exceeded five times their lowest residential. These municipalities that we're talking about, though, have been overwhelmingly involved in large oil and gas resources and facilities within their boundaries and all other kinds of different industries. While every municipality is different and unique, one of the underlying issues, again, that has caused so many problems is that there are a lot of different things that occurred during the boom of the past few decades, and it's put a huge strain on a lot of municipalities with regard to infrastructure: their roads, their water, their waste water, all the other kinds of services they have to provide.

They were ultimately, you know, faced with an issue where there was an awful lot of stuff that had to be upgraded and expanded or replaced, but they could not necessarily do that on the backs of everyday Albertans, who even in the boom times could not afford a five-digit property tax requisition. In order to balance the personal and financial well-being of its citizens with the need for critical infrastructure and services, municipalities were left with virtually no choice but to place the burden on the nonresidential tax base; in other words, the commercial and industrial sectors.

This would seem fair. If a large amount of industry comes into a municipality, just like any other developer, when you're developing land for whatever purpose, normally speaking, the municipality seeks to have the developer or the developer's investors provide some sort of support in the nature of local road improvements, local utility improvements, et cetera, et cetera, depending on the complexity of the development.

With that being the case, though, and the current climate we're in businesswise, it can be something of a bit of an issue. We understand, you know, that one of the major pillars of what once

was the Alberta advantage was that Alberta at one time had a competitive tax environment. The property tax rate, though, in some municipalities has begun to impact their ability to attract and retain investment now with the changes in the new government and the new government's intentions on tax rates.

We need to ensure, though, that after all this is said and done, we figure out a way to remain attractive to companies and businesses that are considering doing business here. Now, how do we do that? Well, Bill 21, which was, as I said, passed last fall, proposed this limit of 5 to 1. In that bill, actually, I think they did some good in that respect because they said that those communities that exceeded that ratio were going to be called nonconforming municipalities. Now, for those of you unfamiliar with the term, we have in the Municipal Government Act a lot of different sections that use those kinds of bits of language: nonconforming buildings, various other kinds of nonconforming improvements. That means that when it was approved many years ago, although the new laws might have changed, that building, because it was approved prior to the change in the law, would be deemed to be nonconforming.

Normally those are thought of as something that can carry on for an indefinite period of time because they were built or improved upon or developed prior to that law change that I mentioned. In this case the government with Bill 21 said that nonconforming municipalities, then, would not be required – would not be required – to meet the ratio of 5 to 1. That meant that they were going to be grandfathered. We call that a grandfathering clause. They did stipulate, however, that they could not increase their ratio any higher than what it was, and if the ratio was ever lowered, that would establish a new cap, set at whatever the lower ratio eventually would be, whether it was 17 to 1, or 7 to 1, or 6 to 1. In the case of a huge, huge industrial area like Fort McMurray, they're actually at 18 to 1.

Now, with what has taken place, McMurray was extremely concerned. As a lot of people are probably aware, they've had some difficulties in the past year, of course. We're on the anniversary week of the famous fire, the horrible, horrible fire. Now the government has decided to come along and change the bill that they just passed in the fall. They have more or less thrown out the grandfathering clause. They have said, in fact, then, that they are going to require that these municipalities become compliant to the 5 to 1 ratio. They've also included that the minister is to become the sole decision-maker of when a nonconforming municipality would have to become compliant.

There's no actual definite time set in the bill for this change. The bill says here under section (31)(b)(3.1) of Bill 8, and it's referring to section 358.1 of the MGA:

If in any year after 2016 a non-conforming municipality has a tax ratio that is greater than 5:1, the non-conforming municipality shall reduce its tax ratio for subsequent years in accordance with the regulations.

I do say, in all fairness, that they say that they will have to do that in subsequent years with regulations.

They go on to say in section (31)(d)(8):

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, for the purposes of subsection (3.1), make regulations establishing one or more ranges of tax ratios that must be reduced to 5:1 within a specified period.

At least they're talking about some sort of specified period, but we don't know when, and they're talking about doing it by regulation, not in this bill. So we don't have any clear, definite time frame for those municipalities affected – and probably the most affected would be Fort McMurray – for the council and the administration to plan for how they're going to work with this new requirement.

We're not opposed to the idea of moving to 5 to 1. Wildrose is not opposed to that. But we do think that there must be a delicate balance, and we must first and foremost look out for Albertans. Rushing a noncompliant municipality into complying with the 5 to 1 ratio could possibly have devastating effects on families and communities. One is that, some might say, if a noncompliant municipality has got a much higher tax ratio and they have to reduce the higher tax ratio, which is the industrial type of development, then the other types of classifications will be negatively impacted by having to face the burden of paying more. In other words, we could have in some of these places – and let's use McMurray because it's probably one of the biggest ones that we can talk about that will be affected the most. If the tax ratio is going to move eventually to 5 to 1, homeowners are going to have to pay much higher taxes: three, four, five times over. Who knows what it would be?

It's an extremely difficult thing to imagine, with all of the things that Fort McMurray has gone through, that we're going to put into place, possibly, if this bill passes as written without amendments, a huge, huge tax increase to residential owners in that municipality. I think this would be a disaster for the Alberta families that live there. They're already struggling with their economy. How are they going to possibly be able to even sell, if they wanted to get out from underneath their property, if it is known that they're going to be faced with a huge, huge tax increase like that? That's where the problem arises for us with this.

5:00

As I've stated earlier, each municipality is unique, and there are unique reasons for why their property tax rates are where they are. The underlying issues that need to be addressed are not things that can easily be fixed in only one, two, or even five years when you have situations like this. Just imagine that you're in your own home and the municipality sent you a note that said: "Oh, by the way, just to let you know, the government has imposed a new rule in terms of tax. We now have to charge you at least three to four times more for your taxes because the government has decided to change the ratio." Some municipalities will not be burdened so much by it, but a lot of them will be. How do they address this? That's the key. And it's going to take some time.

We would have liked to have seen some kind of date set so that there could have been some certainty and some predictability in this legislation. If this has to be done – and we don't disagree that perhaps it is the right way to go – I think it would have been much better if they had set some sort of dates, some sort of method to phase this in over a certain amount of time so that those municipalities that have to do three-year plans, five-year plans have, when they're doing their financial plans, some way of understanding where their targets are going to have to be in terms of revenues and how they're going to get those revenues when they have to alter their mill rate so drastically.

How do you provide that certainty? You know, to the minister: five years may be enough time for some. But I think it would be appreciated here, Minister, if you could address what the purpose was of changing the bill this way just so recently after the last bill was passed. I might remind you, Minister, that your predecessor had sent a letter to the people in Fort McMurray and the local media that said: "Not to worry. This is not going to apply to you. You're going to be grandfathered. This is something that you don't have to worry about for a long period of time."

Perhaps the minister could provide a little clarity on how long a timeline you're thinking of here, how that's going to work, and

what happened with regard to the grandfathering clause. If that could be addressed, Minister, I'd really appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you. For sure. You know, I knew this was something that was going to be brought up. I was well aware of that. Just to make it clear, there are no changes from this bill. This is simply a regulation enabling the ability to do this going forward. So when we talk about timelines, what we are looking for in this bill is the flexibility to create this regulation in consultation with the RMWB among the, I think, 22 municipalities that are above the 5 to 1 ratio.

What's happening here is that we want to take the time to get this done right. That's the whole point. I've had very good discussions with the RMWB. I was there yesterday, spoke with them. I spoke with the chamber of commerce there. I spoke with many people about it when I was at the AAMD and C conference. We want to make sure that we do this right and that we find a balance and have something that's sustainable, obviously. We know that when the energy industry does well, Fort Mac does well, Canada does well. We want to make sure that we have a plan going forward in conjunction with the RMWB, who is basically the benchmark because they're at the highest right now, to see what that's going to look like.

Right now this regulation – there's no time frame on it because we want to make sure that it gets done right. We've been in discussions, as I said, with RMWB. We aren't going to have this in place by the municipal election this fall. We knew that. If it takes six months to get this regulation done right, it takes six. If it takes a year, it takes a year. We're waiting for feedback this spring from these municipalities, once these regulations are posted, to hear what they say, to see what kind of time frames they have. I don't want to sit here and mandate because there are unique circumstances all across the province. RMWB is the big one, but there are other unique circumstances as well.

We want to make sure that we have something that's accountable, sustainable, that isn't going to hurt the local residents, obviously. That's a big concern of ours. We know that it's going to take some time, and we know that, you know, there are certain ways that we can look at things – the capital plan, for example, or assessment growth, things like that – in these municipalities. But, as I said, nothing is changing right now. There's nothing to worry about in that sense. I know there was some concern, but I did alleviate those fears yesterday when I was in the RMWB. We want to make sure that during the economic downturn that we've gone through, and especially in RMWB, we are aware of residents' concerns.

So we haven't set that timeline because we're waiting to hear that feedback from them, what they say. I know the member had mentioned something about five years. While that might work for one jurisdiction, it might not work for another. We'll see what we hear. As I said, there are 22 municipalities above that ratio. There's going to be a lot more feedback coming in. We've received, you know, a fair amount already, but we are anticipating a lot more once the regulations get posted here, and then we'll go from there.

Yeah. Any time I can clarify, or if there are any other questions in that respect, I'd always be willing to do so and get some information back to any of the members that are looking for it.

So that's where we're at right now. Nothing is set in stone in that respect for the timelines. We've got to make sure that we listen to the people. The MGA has been like that all along – right? – and I'm not going to change that. I want to make sure that the consultation is done right and that we hear from everybody who's involved and

make sure that we get a balanced, sustainable decision going forward.

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

Mr. Stier: Yes. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for that great response. I appreciate your frankness in the response you gave to us. I'd just like to explore a little further if I could. You know, there are a lot of things going on with Fort McMurray. And you're quite correct that there are other municipalities that are affected by this. One of the problems with having no set kind of timeline or no set kind of knowledge of what the regulations might look like and so on and so forth is that the speculation market starts going crazy, and people with uncertainty and unpredictability can be negatively impacted by that.

Typically, this time of year is your construction season, when people throw their house up for sale. All kinds of different things happen. With this kind of a cloud that, frankly, has been promoted and distributed a lot by the media, of course locally, it puts a different perspective on the situation, I might suggest, sir.

I would also like to take into account some of the comments from the two large associations we have, the AUMA and the AAMD and C. Perhaps you're aware of what they have said, but I'd just like for the rest of the people that are listening here this afternoon to perhaps be aware of that. I'd like to start with the AUMA. The AUMA has suggested that although they have been advocating for the removal of this 5 to 1 ratio – they have not been happy with it, in other words, they're saying – they are supportive of this amendment in some respects “as it will reduce the potential for inconsistencies across the province.” Certainly, that could be true if you have 22 municipalities that are significantly different than the rest. That would make sense. But they also suggest that there should be an allowance for the minister to set a schedule to account for the lowering of that tax ratio, with local needs taken into perspective and a timeline for that. They also suggest that the minister should be provided “with the authority to exempt a municipality indefinitely from the 5:1 ratio as this would allow for specialized municipalities,” and they use the example of Jasper, “to be accommodated under the framework.”

So they are talking about a timeline. They're talking about what kinds of different things could be done. They're not fully supportive of this move, but they see where you're going. But they again, as I have said, are indicating that a timeline would be appropriate. I've seen timelines used in the act in other areas where some kinds of changes are being considered, but this one at this point is not.

5:10

I'd like to move on to the AAMD and C comments, where they, too, say here in their submission – and this is their most recent document, April 2017 – that they support “the ability for municipalities to be exempt [from] the 5:1 ratio where [deemed] appropriate.” Where deemed appropriate. “The AAMDC will look to be involved in the development of this regulation.” They're offering to assist with the regulation change. They're also saying that “the previous iteration of the proposed legislation found in the Continuing the Conversation document,” that was distributed earlier, “included the option for the Minister to exempt” and that they will be looking for that same exemption to be in the regulation.

So my point to the group here today and to the minister and to you, Madam Chair, is that my statements in this regard are not the only statements. They're supported by the two major associations, the AAMD and C and the AUMA. I would urge you to take this back to your department and give this proper consideration.

We will be bringing forward, by the way, Madam Chair – I believe this is up again tomorrow at a certain time – a couple of amendments to this particular section of this bill, and we will look forward to hearing comments after we have put these amendments forward.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill 8. As I've mentioned before, this is a bill that – well, I mean, in its different formulations I've been privileged to be the cosponsor with, well, at least one minister. I'm very proud to be associated with this bill because I think that – and this is something that's been reiterated by organizations such as the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and municipalities – this is going to be the gold standard for consultation and how to get good legislation passed.

I mean, part of that is, you know, that when you propose something, there are always going to be some unanticipated consequences. Sometimes you can't put a timeline on things because it's just simply the matter that to do so would be to artificially foreclose options and inadvertently cause discomfort to the stakeholders you're working with. I think that throughout this entire process our minister and the ministry that he represents have taken a wise tack in that.

Now, what I wanted to talk about more specifically in my comments today is that, first, I wanted to just maybe touch on a little bit about centralized industrial assessment because I know that's something that has caused a little bit of confusion in some municipalities, not so much because of the – and I say not so much, but I'd say that it's not because of the messaging coming out of Municipal Affairs. I mean, in an ideal world, of course, everybody would understand every single aspect of the Municipal Government Act, exciting as it is, you know, the scintillating reading that there has been. But, unfortunately, not everybody has a full and accurate grasp of the entire bill, and I think that would actually include some assessors who are out there. As well, sometimes you might have journalists that might get things confused; say, for example, linear assessment and centralized assessment.

For the record and to make this a hundred per cent clear, when it comes to linear assessment, there is no intention whatsoever to be pooling those revenues provincially. If there is anyone out there, you know, who thinks that's what is afoot, please rest assured that there is no intention of this happening, so just to be very, very clear. I know our minister has made that point many times. I know other members have. But there are still situations that I've come across where that confusion kind of still exists. People can rest assured that that's not going to happen.

Now, when it comes to centralized assessments, just to be clear, there is no pooling or anything like that involved with that as well. We're just talking about working on the very, you know, basic requirements for industrial development, for continuing industrial development, that there is a level playing field for industry where, well, to put it one way, you don't have essentially exactly the same industrial equipment being assessed one way in one municipality and another way in another municipality. That's really what this is about.

I think that as it proceeds, we'll see that there is no agenda whatsoever with that and that, in fact, this is something that's going to be to the benefit of municipalities. That's, of course, because industry has stepped up and said that they're going to be paying for these assessments. This is something that they've asked for, so I

think this is actually a positive development for municipalities and for the continued prosperity of the province as a whole.

Now, just moving on from that, recently we were fortunate to have Doug Griffiths come and do a presentation in Boyle. Now, I'm sure that many members of the Assembly have had Mr. Griffiths come out, and the presentation he does is 13 Ways to Kill Your Community. Of course, he's not really giving advice on how to kill your community – it's a way to get attention – but how he's framed it is really as how to avoid killing your community. Of course, Mr. Griffiths was a previous Minister of Municipal Affairs, you know. Plus, growing up in Coronation, he has, I think, some insight into it.

You know, I was happy to attend the presentation, had a good chat with Mr. Griffiths. I'm not sure if I agreed with him on everything, but I think that he made some really valid points, that were in accord with my understanding and experience. What made me reflect on that and bring it up today is that a lot of the points that he makes in his presentation are indeed points that I think the MGA amendments speak directly to and help to facilitate communities making the kind of changes that have been recommended.

Bear with me for a moment. I'm just going to go through those 13 points. Now, the number one that he talks about is water quality, saying that if you want to kill a community, one of the best ways of doing it is to not pay attention to your water quality, right? Bad water: people don't move in; people move out.

Now, how does this speak directly to the type of changes that we're making? Well, I mean, I think that by putting forward the ICFs and associated tools for encouraging collaboration, we're making it easier for communities to be able to co-operate with their neighbours to get high-quality drinking water. There are successful water commissions around the province that are run by joint municipalities, but you don't see co-operation in other areas where it might be needed. In particular, you don't necessarily see that co-operation with adjacent indigenous communities. With the concentration on collaboration and indeed the requirement to sit down and talk to your neighbours and work out any issues that might be in the way, I think that that's going to help more communities improve their water systems.

I think that also speaks to, of course, some of the big bills that many of our smaller municipalities are going to be facing in the upcoming years to renew their sewer systems. I mean, you have some systems out there that have wooden pipes. You have other systems that are, you know, 30 or 40 years beyond their date, and you have communities that might not have the tax base to be able to afford to rebuild those systems. That's definitely something that's a strike against sustainability.

With the whole ICF framework, I think that there's a better chance that some sort of equitable sharing arrangements can be worked out between municipalities to be able to help address some of these along with, of course, the provincial programs – you know, the water for life program – the federal government, and MSI funding. But a more equitable sharing, with agreement, of revenue for municipalities at their own discretion, facilitated by the types of change we made in the MGA, I think could be something that can help bring that forward.

5:20

The second point that Doug Griffiths makes about killing communities is: don't attract new businesses; you know, don't facilitate new businesses. Now, we don't have to go over there, but we do have increased flexibility for municipalities in how they attract new businesses and how they work in new areas. I think that kind of speaks directly to that.

Youth involvement. Basically, one way to make a town die is: don't provide space for younger residents to participate. This is where – and I think I mentioned this at second reading – I think the parental leave facilitation, where municipal councils will now have the ability to put in provisions for parental leave, will facilitate the inclusion of more younger residents directly in decision-making. For communities that are trying to attract and retain young residents, it's really hard to do that when you don't have any direct insight into how they think and feel about things. You don't have that direct insight potentially because you don't have any younger members actually on these councils. Part of that reason could well be because, you know, they have young families that they need to work with, or they're planning to have more children, and this is seen as an impediment. Anything that can be done to facilitate having younger families involved in municipal governance is something that I think is going to really help with having greater youth retainment.

The next one is basically failing to assess what your community needs are and what your assets are. As we've gone through sort of a process – and this is something that has been controversial at points, basically due to, I think, a lack of understanding of it: the necessity for even smaller communities to do, you know, these municipal development plans. This is something, I think, that is critical for a community regardless of its size because if you don't know what you have and you don't know where you're going, chances are that you're really not going to get there, right? If you're at a stage where, I mean, you're not even together enough to be able to make those basic determinations, that doesn't speak well to the long-term viability of your community. This is something that I think is great, and I'm very happy to see that with the amendments coming forward, these aspects have been retained.

Now, the other ones are maybe not quite as relevant. It would have been nice if it had gone through the same 13. I'm not sure if it speaks directly to shopping locally or not. It would be nice if we could put something in there on that, but that's something that we can't really do.

Since this is Committee of the Whole, I guess I can, you know, maybe stop right there for the moment. Actually, it looks like we might have a bit of time. I might be happy to contribute again in a little bit.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that when the committee next rises and reports, it report progress on Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to get up and actually speak to Bill 10, our appropriations bill. You know, it was actually very interesting. In the debate we just had on Bill 8, I actually had a chance to talk a little bit about the work our government is doing on the budget. We've heard a lot from the opposition, that they are not wanting to support this budget, and I wanted to respectfully disagree with them and talk a little bit about the good that our budget is indeed doing.

As many of the opposition would know, this is now the third time I am standing up in support of another NDP budget. I've debated

our last three NDP budgets very proudly in this House, against the opposition's different view of how the province should go forward, because this is a budget that makes life better for Albertans, for the residents of Calgary-Currie. It focuses on jobs, affordability, protecting the services that families depend on. These are the priorities of Albertans, and these are the priorities of this government.

Over the constituency break, Madam Chair, I had a chance to knock on doors and visit several local businesses. When knocking on those doors, you know, I heard about the good that our government is doing there, things like the almost \$1.3 million invested in Calgary-Currie alone for housing and seniors. This means that in Calgary-Currie people are able to have a home, that seniors are able to live in dignity. That \$1.3 million is just one small part of a much larger budget that is possible because of this. It means that seniors are getting new windows in their facilities. There are new boilers and other much-needed maintenance for affordable housing and seniors' housing in Calgary-Currie and across the province.

The reason why we are having to step up and do that is because it is the right thing to do for our seniors and those low-income individuals who need housing. It is also something we need to do because the previous government for so long had neglected our seniors and those who need housing by failing to invest in and maintain that much-needed infrastructure.

It was very interesting. In question period earlier we, you know, heard a lot of talk about how their government did so well. It was interesting to hear that because it was almost as if in question period the questions they were asking us about our budget and about the work we're doing were asking us how come we haven't fixed the things they hadn't bothered to fix. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek likes to bring up that point on a rather regular basis as well.

Going around my routes, let's see some of the other stuff that's happening in my riding. This budget is reducing school fees for young families in Calgary-Currie. That is something we talked about on the campaign trail. That is something every member on this side of the House talked about on the campaign trail and something I talked about when I had not one, not two, but three all-candidate leadership debates. When it came election time, the constituents of Calgary-Currie decided that they wanted to go in a new direction, one where a government actually keeps their promises and focuses spending on the need to make life better for Albertans as opposed to just building a budget by waiting for, you know, oil to rescue them, spending haphazardly with the rise and fall of the price of oil. That's not the way to run a province, Madam Chair.

5:30

Another thing I'm very happy about is that our government is now completing the southwest section of the Calgary ring road. I was very happy to be at a job fair there, where there will be at a minimum, at least in its first wave of hiring, 200 jobs as a direct result of that project and as a direct result of the infrastructure spending that is in this budget, Madam Chair.

It's something we hear the opposition speak against on a regular basis. How many times have we been in this House during question period where a member of the opposition, particularly the Official Opposition, gets up and says: "Why are you spending money? We want you to magically spend less, yet we want a hospital in our riding. We want schools. We want you to magically roll back wages of the public sector until the deficit has been solved." What they are actually saying is a fantasy. You can't do that. When I go to the doors and talk to people on the doorstep, they understand that

because they can see the direct benefit that this budget is providing to them, everyday Albertans.

Now, I know the opposition, of course, really likes to talk about debt. In particular, the previous party, of course, likes to talk about it as well, which is always quite ironic because they were the government that couldn't balance the budget at \$100 oil.

Mrs. Littlewood: They couldn't what?

Mr. Malkinson: They couldn't balance the budget at \$100 oil.

Mrs. Littlewood: That's shocking.

Mr. Malkinson: It is most definitely so.

Connolly: That's kind of staggering, isn't it?

Mr. Malkinson: It's quite staggering. [interjections] I would say that that wasn't the best example to follow. You know it's good when their Wildrose friends are agreeing with me on that one.

Mr. Hanson: How many hospitals are you going to build with \$2 billion in debt servicing?

Mr. Malkinson: Talking about that debt, you know, we have been able to bring forward a plan that focuses, again, on Albertans, and we have a plan to go back to balance prudently, Madam Chair. It involves no fee or tax increases. There are no fee or tax increases in this budget.

You know, we often hear the opposition talk about the tax advantage. I remember last year they talked often about how they loved Brad Wall, especially the Wildrose opposition, how we should follow Brad Wall's example. Well, Brad Wall's example seems to involve a 5 per cent cut across the board: cutting libraries; cutting transportation, that's much needed by their rural constituents to go to medical appointments; cutting teachers. And not only do they have a PST in Saskatchewan; they most recently raised it.

Mrs. Littlewood: And they're raising taxes on children.

Mr. Malkinson: Raising taxes. That's something the Wildrose supports, it would seem.

You know, one of my favourite pages in this budget, Madam Chair, is in the fiscal plan on page 93. There's an excellent graph in there, and it talks about Alberta's tax advantage. [interjections] On that page, if you're all following along, it shows our tax advantage relative to all of the other provinces, and what it shows is that we have an \$8.7 billion tax advantage.

Mr. Westhead: How much?

Mr. Malkinson: An \$8.7 billion tax advantage over our provincial friends. [interjections]

Of course, as we speak, you know, there's lots of beaking from the previous party, that, again, couldn't balance the budget at \$110 oil, couldn't on \$110 oil. Not only could they not balance the budget at \$110-a-barrel oil; they couldn't invest in schools, Madam Chair. They couldn't properly fund all the students that were entering into the public school system. They could not do that. The former party over there, again, continues to beak about how great they were, yet there they sit.

Let's talk about another part of our budget. While we are spending on much-needed infrastructure and services that make life better for Albertans, we are also restraining spending, Madam Chair. We are holding spending at a rate that is under inflation plus

population growth because that is a prudent fiscal thing to do. [interjections] As I say this, the former governing party is again beaking off and laughing, yet they couldn't do it. There were increases sometimes of up to 8 per cent a year as they rolled with the royalty roller coaster. Shame. We have clear, restrained spending, spending on things that matter to Albertans.

You know what? We are starting to see green shoots in the economy. When I was out in Calgary-Currie, I visited many local businesses, Madam Chair, and the questions I asked them: "How's business going? How are things going?" Well, what I am hearing from everywhere, from the pizza place to the machine shop to my former employers in the oil and gas industry, is that things are picking up again.

I'm going to give you just one example. I visited my local machine shop. This is a sole proprietor, a single owner that has always been a sole proprietor of this particular shop. This particular person specializes in machining components and doing custom work that other shops can't do. As you can imagine, this is the type of shop where business flows with the economy. A couple of months ago I was there, and that particular shop had work, but he was saying: you know, it's a little bit slow. But I was there just last week, and I was asking him: how's it going? He's like: well, you know what, Brian – I apologize, Madam Chair. I'm naming myself, which I realize is against convention. He's like: "You know what? I am busy. I was working last Saturday, and in the last couple of months my business has increased. My shop is full. Things are looking up for me."

Although, of course, that one particular shop is not an indicator of the overall economy, it is a sign that I see throughout my riding that business is picking up, green shoots are sprouting, and I believe that Alberta is beginning to lead the way from a recession that was caused by the unprecedented drop in the price of oil and only by the unprecedented drop in the price of oil. This government through previous budgets has put in the things we need in order to lead, Madam Chair, lead on climate change as we come out of this recession, on getting our oil products to market. Let's not forget that we got not one but two pipelines.

Mrs. Littlewood: Three. Keystone.

Mr. Malkinson: Sorry. I forgot about Keystone, Madam Chair. How could I forget about Keystone? Three pipelines. [interjections]

You know, again we hear lots of beaking from the opposition, and they ask the question of: well, how many barrels are going out of those pipelines? Well, Madam Chair, because we've been working co-operatively with our neighbours to get a pipeline built, something that that opposition did not do, we got approval for pipelines. We got approval for our pipelines.

5:40

What that means, Madam Chair, is that as we move into the building season – I expect by the time our election happens that those pipelines will be under construction, providing valuable jobs for all Albertans, providing valuable jobs for my constituents in Calgary-Currie. When that happens, I hope that all the members of this House, including those of the opposition, will most definitely be singing our praises at that point. I hear some pounding of desks of the opposition. I really do appreciate their support on that particular matter.

Madam Chair, I believe I've said enough on our budget for the moment, and I'm going to sit down. I will of course pop up later should the need arise, but at this point I'd love to hear from other members of the House on what their views are on our budget.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report on Bill 10 and rise and report progress on Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 10. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 8.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing the time and the progress we've made today, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and rise until tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:43 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 3, 2017

Day 27

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect together. May we always continue to be inspired by the communities we serve and appreciate their passion, their commitment, and their willingness to make changes as we work together for the betterment of this province.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 10

Appropriation Act, 2017

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to move third reading of Bill 10, the Appropriation Act, 2017. I along with my colleagues here in government am proud to implement Budget 2017 and its initiatives. Those initiatives will make life more affordable for Albertans. They will assist in creating jobs and diversifying our economy, they will protect and improve services Albertans rely on daily, and they will invest in infrastructure.

During the course of this debate we've heard two broad visions of the province and a fair amount of debate about deficits and debt. There's no doubt low oil prices have had a dramatic effect on government revenue and, of course, on the daily lives of regular Albertans. Madam Speaker, faced with the worst recession in a generation, now is not the time to abandon Albertans and make reckless cuts to programs and services when they are needed most by Albertans. Now is the time to support Albertans and support the recovery in our province.

As I've made clear, Budget 2017 is a commitment to education, health care, social services, and needed infrastructure throughout this province. It's our commitment to Albertans. We have a plan to return to balance by 2024, a short six and a half years in the future, and we're committed to staying on that path. At the end of the day, we are controlling what we can by restraining operating expense increases below population growth and inflation while still preserving the vital programs and services Albertans count on every day. Following this approach, the deficit is forecasted to climb significantly over the next two and a half years.

Our plan also supports economic diversification and jobs to get Albertans working and build an even stronger economy as our province recovers from the downturn, and recovering we are. As I've made clear, we are going to continue with our infrastructure plan. That plan will help build badly needed schools, hospitals, roads, and bridges throughout the province, all these things that were neglected for far too long under previous government.

Madam Speaker, I want to wrap up these brief remarks by saying that we have and will continue to have the backs of Albertans during this downturn, and each and every day our government is squarely focused on making their lives better. As we continue to roll out our fiscal plan, let me add that our plan is working. As we have all

heard, Alberta is focused to lead this country in economic growth this year and next. Jobs are starting to return to Alberta, and all of the key economic indicators are starting to move in the right direction. Now is not the time to reverse course. Now is the time to continue investing to make life more affordable for Albertans and support economic recovery in this great province.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I ask all members of the House to support this bill so that we can get on with the important task of implementing Budget 2017 and assisting in the recovery of this great province. Thank you.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for joining us today. I welcome him from his time in Toronto, and I'm glad he can be here for this phase of the budget debate. The minister's time in Toronto very specifically highlights the fundamental flaw with this budget. This is a budget that papers over virtually every single difficult decision the government was faced with. Instead, they have taken the tough decisions of today and made our future generations make even tougher decisions.

The Minister of Finance was meeting with credit-rating agencies and financial institutions in Toronto. Now, I recall last year when the Minister of Finance went to meet with credit-rating agencies. They were so disturbed by the lack of any plan for a return to balance that within 24 hours we suffered credit downgrades. Within 24 hours. The Minister of Finance believed that Alberta just deserved a triple-A credit rating but didn't have to show any math about why we deserved a triple-A credit rating. We simply said: "We deserve it. We're entitled to it. We once had a strong fiscal position. We're good for the money."

It reminds me of the time – I think it was almost 20 years ago. There was a *Simpsons* episode where Lisa Simpson was President, and she was cleaning up after the mess of President Donald Trump, who left the United States bankrupt. She had to deal with the creditors in China and other countries, so she hired Bart Simpson to come along because he was so good at explaining his way out of debt. He would just say: I'm good for it, man; trust me, dude. That is effectively the strategy of this government. This is a Bart Simpson fiscal plan.

There is absolutely no path to return to balance in this budget whatsoever. The minister is simply not telling the truth if he says that there is a path to return to balance by 2024. It's very simple. Anyone can open up this budget, open it up right now, and you will see the last year for which there is even a fiscal projection is 2019, fiscal year 2019-20. March 2020 is the last year for which there is a single projection of any number in the entire document, at four years – four years – short of where the minister says that they're going to balance the budget. So I'm curious to know why they say that they're going to balance the budget by 2024.

I recall an exchange that we had in the estimates process. I like estimates because unlike question period, you really have the ability to pin someone down and get questions – if you're tough, you can stop them from wiggling off the hook, and we actually got some enlightened answers. We actually enlightened the situation a bit with our questions and answers with the Minister of Finance. I was asking about this topic very specifically, and I said: do you know what the deficit will be in 2024? You say you're going to get to a balanced budget in 2024. What will the surplus be in that year? And he said: zero. So by that calculation the Minister of Finance has reached all the way into the future and calculated our expenditures and our revenues down to the penny, and we are going to have a precisely balanced budget. Not a surplus, technically, not a deficit,

technically, but a zero-dollar balanced budget. I mean, that is impressive. That is impressive if anyone can reach that far into the future and pinpoint to the dollar an exact balanced budget. The Minister of Finance said this with a straight face.

But I had a hard time believing that he'd done this, so I said: okay; if you've figured out that you're going to have an exact balanced budget, not a surplus, not a deficit, but an exact balanced budget, what is spending going to be in that year? The minister couldn't tell us. If I'm wrong, the minister should stand up right now, when I'm done here, and tell us what spending will be in 2024. I asked him what revenues would be in 2024, and he couldn't tell us. If I'm wrong, the Minister of Finance should stand up and tell us what revenues will be in 2024.

You know, these things are not difficult. This is pretty basic stuff. For the better part of two decades in Alberta, when Ralph Klein and Jim Dinning took hold of the finances of this province, they brought in strong financial reporting legislation to ensure that the fiscal disasters of the Getty years couldn't be repeated. For the last few Premiers we've seen our financial reporting legislation successively weakened, until this government completely did away with it altogether.

9:10

They only project out for three years. If the Minister of Finance was worth his salt on these projections, he should be able to tell us really simple numbers. I'm not asking for a lot of detail here but really simple numbers like: what will expenditures be and what will revenues be? If he can tell me that the budget will be balanced that year, surely he knows what expenditures will be that year. Surely he knows what revenues will be that year. But he doesn't. He doesn't know what they are.

I asked the minister: fine; do you know what the debt will be by then? We know that by end of fiscal 2019-20 the debt is projected to reach \$71 billion. I think there's a significant chance it'll be even greater than that because we'll be approaching an election period, and the NDP will be spending every last dollar that they can borrow to try and save themselves. Under current projections we will have an accumulated deficit of \$71 billion by 2019-20.

The minister says that, you know, if these guys were theoretically re-elected in some nightmare scenario, they would balance the budget by 2024. So what would the debt be by 2024? If you're saying that 2023 is the last year for which you're going to borrow money and you're going to balance the budget in 2024, surely you should know how much money you will have borrowed by the time you stop borrowing money. Any simple, rudimentary, and elementary projection of a balanced budget plan would tell you how much debt will be accumulated by the time you stop taking on more debt.

The minister first said that he didn't know, but under repeated questioning in estimates he finally came up and said: yeah, we do know; we do know how much it'll be. I said: how much? He said: I won't tell you. The minister admitted that they know how much Albertans are going to owe on the provincial debt by 2024, by the time they've theoretically balanced the budget, a date that they probably won't meet anyway. He says that they know how much it will be. I said: "Will you table how much that number will be? What is the number? How much debt will Albertans owe before the budget is theoretically balanced?" He refused – he refused – to table that number. The minister is withholding vital information from this Legislature and from Albertans. Taxpayers, who are going to have to pay for this for generations, have a right to know how much debt we will owe by the time their pixie dust balanced budget plan is finished, but he refuses to disclose this information.

Albertans apparently don't have a right to know how much money they're going to owe. They don't have a right to know how

much we're going to be spending in 2024. They don't have a right to know what our revenues will be in 2024. You know why? It's because they don't know. They don't know. They say they know; they probably don't.

I'm interested to know what information the credit-rating agencies asked the minister for a few days ago. They said: we need more information. You know, if I was a credit-rating agency and I'm talking to Bart Simpson, I'd say: "Okay. You say you're going to balance the budget by 2024. All right. If we're going to believe you on that, you're going to have to show us your math. You're going to have to show us what your expenditures are going to be and what your revenues are going to be, even a ballpark number. We're going to have to know how much debt you intend to accrue by that time because how much debt you accrue by that time is going to be the decisive determinant in how much interest you're going to be paying at that time. That's going to figure into your bottom line of your fiscal capacity to actually manage debt safely." Any credit agency would ask that of Bart Simpson when he comes and says: I'm good for it, dude.

I've got a pretty strong suspicion that when the minister sat down with DBRS and Standard & Poor's, they said: "Okay. Dude, how much are you going to be spending in 2024? What are your revenues going to be, and how much are you going to owe?" If we don't get a credit downgrade within 24 hours, then I bet the minister probably told them. But if our credit-rating agencies have a right to know what our debt level will be, surely Albertans who have to pay for it have a right to know.

We also recall that when we were debating the budget at this time last year, included in the budget was repealing the NDP's own legislated debt ceiling. Now, I remember. This Legislature was new. We all kind of got along for a brief little *Kumbaya* moment of a few months. Most of us were pretty happy that we had turned a page in Alberta, and we'd hoped that if the NDP wouldn't at least be sane economic managers, they would at least believe in accountability and transparency.

They imposed a debt ceiling on themselves of 15 per cent of GDP. We warned them that it was a meaningless debt ceiling. They were continuing to weaken our fiscal accountability and discipline legislation. This debt ceiling that they brought in was actually a significant increase in how much governments had been allowed to borrow previously. We warned that it was toothless. It would mean nothing, just like the United States' debt ceiling, which Congress has increased about twice every year on average for the last 100 years. We warned that like Congress, they would throw this debt ceiling away at the earliest sign of inconvenience. I thought they'd at least last a year.

Apparently, we give them too much credit sometimes, no pun intended. Within less than a year of introducing their own 15 per cent debt-to-GDP debt ceiling, they repealed their own debt ceiling. They repealed their own legislation within less than a year. What happened while we were debating? I stood right here, and the Minister of Finance stood right there, and I said: "If you do this, you're going to jeopardize our credit rating. Repealing our already weak and largely meaningless debt ceiling is going to result in a credit downgrade." The minister stood over there and said: "You're being Chicken Little. You're playing down Alberta." What happened? The next day we came in here with a credit downgrade, and the minister had nothing to say for it other than, "I'm good for the money, dude."

Also, speaking of governments breaking the law, at that time they repealed their own law before they would technically break it, but just a few months ago they broke their own laws. The new equivalent of the fiscal accountability act states that government is not allowed to exceed a certain amount of spending every year that

is not budgeted for. Governments are allowed to spend about 1 per cent on operations every year that's not budgeted for. It's at least, in theory, supposed to be for emergencies and whatnot. But, boy, we had a curious case of what might be considered an emergency this year. As a part of the government's climate leadership action plan, the CLAP, they are phasing out coal. This is not only going to drive the real cost of electricity through the roof in Alberta; it's not only going to destroy communities like Hanna, but it is going to cost taxpayers a bundle of money. We have to pay these guys out for the early phase-out of coal, between \$1.1 billion and \$1.4 billion. That's a pretty hefty chunk of change.

I drove past Sheerness just on the way up here on Sunday afternoon, and that big plant – boy, Hanna is just a little outside my community, and we are going to save Hanna. We're going to save Hanna and keep it open. This government might not care about Hanna because there are not very many NDP voters, if any, in Hanna, but we're going to save it regardless of what this government does.

They're going to pay \$1.1 billion to \$1.4 billion for the early phase-out of coal. Now, that's not just a waste of money, though, but it's illegal – it's illegal – because that money was not budgeted. That money was not budgeted. They booked it in a single year. They had an option. They could be in violation of basic public-sector accounting standards, or they could be in violation of the fiscal transparency act. They chose to be in violation of their own piece of legislation. The Minister of Finance has admitted that he broke the law.

Not only did he break the law – all of us speed from time to time – he broke his own law, a law that he wrote. Now, if I was writing a law and I thought, "Maybe I'm going to break it," I'd probably carve out an exemption for myself in advance. I'd say, you know, if we're talking speeding, that the speed limit is 110 on this road except for highway 1 between Brooks and Strathmore. I'd say that if you drive a red truck between Brooks and Strathmore and you get pulled over, you don't get a ticket. I'd have carved out a little something.

9:20

But these guys instead have brought in a law that they didn't even think ahead to carve out how they would break it. So the Minister of Finance illegally spent \$1.1 billion to \$1.4 billion of taxpayers' money without the consent of this Legislature. Now, the opposition in our structure is not given very much formal power. The Legislature, especially in a majority government, is controlled by the executive, and the Legislature – well, we're really just supposed to be here to rubber-stamp all the money they want to spend, but at least we have the pretense that we are the ones who authorize spending in the budget. The English fought civil wars and chopped off kings' heads for this right hundreds of years ago, but apparently we don't have the right to that anymore. Now the government has asserted the right of ancient kings to spend money without the consent of the Legislature. That is a slap in the face of hundreds of years of parliamentary tradition and the history of Westminster.

The Minister of Finance has not apologized for it. He merely acknowledged it. There's no penalty for breaking the law, apparently, when you're the politician who writes the law. The Minister of Finance: we asked the Minister of Finance in estimates: what's the consequence for you breaking the law? He said, "We just have to acknowledge that we broke the law." Well, jeez, I would love that. If I got pulled over for a speeding ticket, I get to say, "I'm sorry, officer." He says, "Do you know how fast you were going?" I say, "Yes, I do," and that's the end of the story. "Yes, I know how fast I was going," and he says: "Carry on. You're a politician." Well, that's effectively the way it works with this government. All they do is that they acknowledge: "We broke the law. What are you

going to do about it?" The only accountability, it seems, that will be levied will be at the next election.

Now, the government is also deceiving – very intentionally deceiving – Albertans about spending in this budget. The Minister of Finance is falsely claiming that they're keeping operational spending below the combined rates of inflation and population growth. Bollocks. I believe "bollocks" is a parliamentary word.

An Hon. Member: I don't think so.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We'll have to test that.

His assertion that they are keeping spending below inflation and population is bollocks because the Minister of Finance has written the budget to take all of the spending associated with the CLAP out of the budget. He has a mini budget.

Now, I remember that when the former leader of the NDP, now the Government House Leader, was in opposition, he got very upset when the previous government started cooking the books. You'll remember that they divided one budget into three budgets, and they played a bit of shell game and moved everything around. It confused everybody. He was very upset about that, and he had a right to be upset about that. We actually got along on that issue, I think.

Now their government is doing the same thing, but instead of breaking out a savings, capital, and operational budget, they've instead taken an operational budget and taken out the CLAP. They've taken out all of the spending and the revenue associated with the carbon tax. Under questioning the Minister of Finance gave a very interesting albeit not enlightening answer as to why that was. I said: "Why is all of the spending associated with the CLAP taken out of operational spending? If you include all of the spending from the carbon tax and the CLAP in operational spending, which it clearly is, it is . . ."

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Am I over time?

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. If you take all of that spending out, it becomes . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we have a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Well, the hon. member has been pushing for one, so I'm going to raise these. He's used a couple of words that I think are unparliamentary, "bollocks" and, referring to the climate leadership plan, "the CLAP." Madam Speaker, I think these are unparliamentary, and under 23(h), (i), and (j) I ask you to so rule.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wish to respond on that side to the point of order?

Mr. Hanson: You know, the use of acronyms is quite common in the House, used all the time. CLP: it's a pretty innocuous little descriptor, but I'll just look quickly in unparliamentary language for – is it "bollocks"? It doesn't appear to be in the book.

Ms Jansen: Google it. It means testicles.

Mr. Hanson: All I'm saying is that it's not in *Parliamentary Rules & Forms*. It doesn't show up. We can't keep inventing words in the House that somebody finds . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there is a list of unparliamentary terms. However, as we know, language does change over time, and it's all about the context and how it's used.

However, I think you were using some terms that are perhaps questionable and inappropriate, somewhat vulgar, so I would suggest: temper the use of your language, please, and let's move on.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: If you'll pardon me just this one time: never mind the bollocks. It's a Sex Pistols reference for the new kids.

Madam Speaker, this government is intentionally hiding operational spending in the budget. They are keeping the entire climate leadership action plan, if you will, out of the operational spending. Now, under any sane definition that counts as spending. Now, the minister said that his reason for excluding that was: "Well, we bring in all the money at one end, and we spend it on another. Because it's a dedicated tax, it doesn't count as spending."

Well, how does the tobacco tax work? How does the alcohol tax work? These are taxes on specific things the government collects revenue for and largely, at least in theory, is supposed to spend on measures related to the collection of that revenue. What about the lottery fund? The lottery fund is money collected and money distributed relative to the source of the revenue. It is the exact same as the carbon tax or the climate leadership action plan, if you will, and the minister should be honest about the spending in this budget.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. Under 29(2)(a)? Oh, there is no 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: No. It doesn't apply until the third speaker.

Mr. Shepherd: I apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley . . .

Mr. Smith: Devon.

The Deputy Speaker: Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I guess, while I understand that I do have trouble sometimes remembering where other members serve, it seems like every speaker can't remember that Devon is in my constituency. But that's okay. Thank you for allowing me to rise today and speak to Bill 10, the Appropriation Act.

You know, seniors are the fastest growing population in the province of Alberta. They're the fastest growing demographic in Alberta. In light of a \$42 billion budget that is borrowing approximately \$10 billion worth of debt and helping to balloon the provincial debt, the seniors portion of the 2017 budget would appear to be quite reasonable, a quite reasonable expenditure of funds, at a steady \$533 million. But in all budgets, Madam Speaker, the devil is in the details. The seniors portion of the 2017 budget, the \$533 million, must always be held up to the light of the costs of the provincial debt and the deficit spending of this NDP government.

Seniors are definitely one group in our society that understands the meaning of financial sacrifice. I don't know too many people that, after having lived most of their lives, haven't had to make wise choices with their finances, to sacrifice for their kids, for education. They've had to learn to balance budgets. They've had to learn to make those hard choices and those hard decisions about how they're

going to manage their funds. They've had to learn to live within their means, and they've had to learn to plan for the future.

9:30

Perhaps of all the groups in society, definitely, seniors are one that understands that debt and deficits cannot continue forever. Seniors in this province therefore want a budget that takes care of their needs, absolutely, but not while sacrificing the birthright of their grandchildren. Seniors understand that when a government racks up billions of dollars of debt and has deficits year after year and when a government budgets on \$55-a-barrel oil and then is shocked when oil prices are consistently under that price, provincial debt is actually going to be far more than reported.

Seniors, we know, believe that it's really the vulnerable in society that get hurt when we do not responsibly balance budgets, when we're not fiscally responsible. It's the seniors, it's the poor, and it's the young that are affected the most by the poor decisions of this present government. And while seniors and the poor want and deserve a responsible budget that will meet their needs, they also understand that creating a massive debt for future generations to pay off is not compassion; it's irresponsibility. Creating a massive future debt, that by 2019 will number somewhere around \$70 billion and will cost future citizens somewhere around \$2.3 billion in interest payments each year, is fiscally irresponsible. Madam Speaker, I believe that Albertans demand better of this Legislature and of this government. Seniors demand better. Albertans that depend on affordable housing understand that if you want to continue to have access to quality affordable housing and that if seniors want to continue to have access to affordable quality continuing care that the government must make wise and fiscally responsible budgets.

When I consider the Seniors and Housing budget lines, this budget has set aside \$167 million for capital investment. Approximately \$100 million of that is for home management bodies and seniors in affordable housing, and another \$67 million is for the rental assistance program. No one will argue the necessity of housing our seniors or renovating seniors' lodges or providing adequate affordable housing for Albertans, but we need to make sure that this government has proper oversight and distribution of the economic resources that Albertans have provided them with.

The Minister of Seniors and Housing has said that \$120 million is being set aside to provide affordable housing for off-reserve indigenous populations in the province in the five-year capital plan, and commendably the minister is embarking this month on a listening tour with First Nations indigenous people. It's a good thing. But there are no details and no policies in the budget plan for how we're going to ensure that this key strategy of the government will be achieved in a cost-effective manner, no details on the cost of the tour, no details on how they're going to move forward on this five-year capital plan, just a raw figure provided by the minister. The lack of detail is concerning.

Line 2.1 of the budget, program planning and delivery, covers the cost of training on elder abuse, again, a very worthwhile program as we have had a constant stream of e-mails coming to the opposition from concerned family and seniors regarding how seniors are being taken care of in both private and public facilities. The problem is real, yet we could not ascertain how much of the seniors' budget was set aside for this training program on elder abuse. It's even more concerning when the performance indicators provided by the government themselves for awareness of elder abuse appear to be declining even in spite of the training program. It's concerning when the ability to respond to elder abuse by the people who have that responsibility tell us that they believe, by the indicators of this government, that it's in decline. So we're

spending money on a very worthwhile program and project, but the indicators are telling us that this government is failing.

When you have a budget that is going into debt and is producing deficit after deficit and when they are spending money on worthwhile programs but appear to be failing, it's a concern that this government needs to be aware of and that we have pointed out to them. The hard-earned tax dollars that this government is responsible for at the very least need to be spent in effective ways, and the minister has had this brought to her attention.

It is clear that this budget is ill prepared to deal with the increases that the home management bodies and the continuing care facilities are going to face with the implementation of a carbon tax or, for that matter, with the increase in the minimum wage. I know that we've received many e-mails from concerned Albertans and from people within the industry wondering how they're going to cover things like the carbon tax and the minimum wage. While the minister can make the case that she's set aside \$57 million for energy efficiency efforts and another \$500,000 for energy audits, the fact still remains that the people that are charged with taking care of our seniors are telling us that in most cases these efforts of the government will not cover the real-time costs of the carbon tax. They are telling us that there's been little or no attempt by this government to build into this budget a method for how to address the impact of the minimum wage increases that they have to deal with. In a budget that has, for seniors at least, pretty much held the line, this government has increased the costs. That's a concern.

How will the people that are charged with taking care of our seniors, who have to ensure that they are getting quality care, going to cover the increased costs of the minimum wage, and how will they cover the increased benefits that will accompany the increases in the minimum wage? They have not built it into their budget. And they have told the people responsible in many cases, essentially: deal with it. But they have not given them the resources to deal with it.

9:40

There are some issues that we've identified for the minister in this budget when it comes to the SHARP loan program and the SHARP grant program. This budget has set aside \$10 million for the SHARP loan program and another \$2 million for the SHARP grant program. Seniors that have come into my office and into many of the offices in this province are telling us that they're often very confused. They want to apply for a SHARP grant, but they have to first apply for a loan. I've had many conversations with seniors that say: I don't want a loan; I don't want a loan. They see that house as the nest egg for either when they get a little older and they need the money that comes from the equity that they have built up in that facility, that house, or they see it as a nest egg that they can pass on to their children, something to help their children and their grandchildren. They're very concerned and they're very confused: why do I have to ask for a loan in order to get a grant?

So we've had the conversations with the minister in budget estimates that the minister should try to take the time to review the administration of this program to see if there is some way of separating the two so that seniors do not have to wade through the front-end confusion that comes with trying to meet their needs with this program. While we were happy to see that a Seniors Advocate is in place to help seniors as they try to manipulate and manage their way through the bureaucracy of government, this minister needs to remember that 70 per cent of the calls for help that the Seniors Advocate receives revolve around the complex system of services and financial information programs that are available through her ministry. Seniors get lost in all of the pages and web pages. Trying to figure out how to manipulate and work through them is, for many

seniors, a chore that is just beyond them. The minister needs to consider that a reallocation of resources may need to occur within her department in order to address this problem for seniors.

One of the things that we have talked with the minister about is transportation . . . [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect. The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a question for the member. He talked a lot in his speech about caring for seniors and housing for seniors, and I really appreciate that. I think that's admirable. But I guess I have a question for the member in terms of that in this Chamber last November he talked about how he and his neighbours opposed a group home for troubled youth in their neighbourhood. So I find it a bit rich that he would, you know, promote seniors' housing on one hand and oppose group homes for troubled youth on the other. I just wonder if the member can walk us through his thought process on how he chooses which vulnerable groups to oppose and which ones to support and the various criteria he uses to pick winners and losers when it comes to helping vulnerable, disadvantaged individuals.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the hon. member would like to come talk to me about that particular issue as there are times when a dialogue needs to take place – and he needs to get his facts. I guess the only thing I'll say about that is that the concerns that the neighbourhood and the community had with regard to this were backed up at a panel of appeal. Maybe he needs to come talk to me about getting some of the facts straight.

If he wants to talk about hypocrisy, Madam Speaker, let's bring the hypocrisy of the NDP government to the forefront. Let's remember that they like to talk about compassion, they like to talk about serving the needs of the people, and then they saddle the generations of children in this province with future debt. How can they, after having this brought to their attention time after time after time, be so hypocritical as to suggest that they are the only party in Alberta and they are the only people in Alberta that actually seem to have compassion when all they can really do is saddle Albertans with debt after debt after debt and deficit after deficit after deficit simply because they are unwilling to make the hard choices in life? They were elected to govern. They do govern, just not very well, in the minds of many Albertans, and a part of that reason is because they refuse to make the hard choices and to understand that there are fiscal realities in this province that not even the NDP can ignore.

So the hon. member can talk about hypocrisy, but like many things we are told, he had better look in the mirror first, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Centre under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, the member that was sharing here spoke quite a bit about speaking with seniors in his constituency and the concerns that they've brought forward. Last week I had the opportunity to visit eight seniors' residences here in Edmonton-Centre. I have a number of them here. I still have not had the opportunity to visit them all, but I did visit eight of the many that I have. At each of those I took the opportunity to share a bit about the work our government is doing and share a bit about our budget, and I did also give the opportunity for all those seniors to ask questions and have discussions about their thoughts on these issues.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that none of those seniors I spoke to raised the concerns that this member did. In speaking with those seniors, in fact, here in Edmonton-Centre, those seniors are very appreciative of the work our government is doing. Those seniors spoke in favour of our choice to spend on important things. They spoke in favour of investing in infrastructure, of not saddling their children with schools that do not have adequate teachers or with failing health infrastructure, which we are still catching up on from the last Premier, which many of these members love to speak about in hagiography, who left us with a balanced budget but with a crippling infrastructure debt, which we are still to this day recovering from, who left us with many of people that are currently on the streets of my constituency, who were turned out of mental health care and support and for whom we must now account and for whom we must now be investing to build the supportive housing that's needed to provide these people with the care and the services which were cut.

These are apparently the tough choices that they want to speak about but which, Madam Speaker, they do not wish to actually detail. They love to talk about them in the abstract, absolutely. They love to stand and talk about how they would make these important choices.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I begin my speech in support of Bill 10, I wanted to talk about rational thoughts and about the opportunity that I've had to learn how to make sure that my arguments go from A to B to C. I wanted to address some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon because he spoke a lot about how he is worried about people living in poverty and seniors, but then he went on and on and on about how raising the minimum wage was a really bad thing and how the programs that the government has put in place for seniors were a really bad thing. I was left with the conclusion that while the member spoke about his interest in supporting people living in poverty and of seniors that, in real fact, he didn't really understand that the budget is supporting these people that he talked about.

For example, we've put quite a lot of money into long-term care and into seniors' housing. We've raised the minimum wage because people who live – even at the minimum wage people very often are still living in poverty. So I would really like to encourage the member, if he's talking about people living in poverty, that he should be supporting our minimum wage, the efforts to have child care at \$25 a day, the money that we've put into the SHARP program, and so on. I'm always amazed at how irrational the thoughts from the opposition are as they discuss the budget and the debt.

9:50

I want to talk about the debt. I've often wondered, when we talk about leaving the debt for our children and grandchildren, if we understand how much education costs for our children and our grandchildren. I haven't had the time to do all the additions, but I would encourage the members opposite, especially some of them who have new children – I understand the Member for Strathmore-Brooks has a new child – to really add up the amount of funding that the provincial government is spending in terms of education, health care, roads, and so on, that are going to benefit your children and grandchildren. You know, how lucky we are to have all these supports in our province and in Canada.

Now, I really want to speak about my support for Bill 10, the Appropriation Act, 2017. I want to remind everyone about the minister's words as he introduced the budget on March 16, 2017.

"Budget 2017 is about making life better for everyday Albertans." I talked a little bit about how the budget is making life better for people who are living in poverty and for seniors, but I wanted to especially talk about how the budget is impacting people in my constituency. A reduction in school fees will allow parents to not be so panicked every September as they struggle to set aside the funds. As a parent I know what it is like to figure out over the summer how to pay for summer camps, summer child care, school clothes, and sports fees and then remember that in September I still have to pay. Members opposite have often told us that they're really concerned about people living in poverty, so I would really like to urge them to remember that the budget is going to help those people living in poverty by the reduction in school fees.

The government is continuing to fund increased enrolment growth in each school district. Everyone involved in the education of our K to 12 students knows the importance of small teacher-student ratios, supports for students needing additional supports, and how this investment is and will continue to ensure that our children will have the skills needed in the future. It's not only our kids who will benefit, but it's the economy of Alberta. There is ample research that shows that investment in education is going to pay off in terms of economic development for our province.

I am so pleased that the young people in my riding will have their tuition frozen for a third year. We know the importance of postsecondary education to future employment and earning a good wage to support a family. I would like to remind the members of the House that we will soon be getting the data from the national census, and that census data will have some really good information on how education is coupled with increased wages.

Seniors in my community, as in other communities, face challenges in accessing accommodations that they can afford. Just like the Member for Edmonton-Centre, I hear this every day as I door-knock, meet constituents, and casually meet residents on the street or at the supermarket. I am so thankful for the investment our government is providing in funds for housing authorities and other bodies to build low-cost seniors' housing. One of these investments is in my own constituency. Like many of the projects supported by the capital plan, I can assure the members of the opposition that this much-needed project has been on the list of needed projects for a very long time, and it wasn't built under the previous government.

I want to talk a little bit about the SHARP program. The reason the SHARP program is in place is to allow seniors to stay in their own home, so that we don't need to build specialized housing for them because they can stay in their own home, continue their gardening, be with their friends and close to the neighbourhood that they know, and they can have the adaptation that they need. It's a great program, and I really hope that more and more seniors take the opportunity of the SHARP program and enjoy the benefits of living in their own home, among the things that they know. This budget also provides an increase in home care, allowing seniors to stay in their homes longer.

The government investment and diversification project is not going unnoticed in the Industrial Heartland, an area that I share with other MLAs and that is a key region for the economic recovery and growth in Alberta. Last week I attended an event which involved the major industries as well as elected officials and community members. The government's support for industry diversification was mentioned by a mayor and points out how welcome the government's support is for the oil and gas sector. The support for new apprentice and training opportunities through \$14 million in the budget will ensure that industry has the needed trained workers and that young people and those workers seeking retraining and seeking to invest in a career in one of the trades will have the support they need.

I would like to really suggest to all members of the House that instead of always telling negative things about our budget and so on, they encourage the young people in their ridings to take up the opportunities that the government is providing because – you know what? – if you don't tell them, they'll be missing out, and it's our job as MLAs to really encourage everyone to know what the government is doing. I happen to know the riding of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks quite well, and I'm really hoping that the member is telling people in Brooks and Strathmore and the rural communities that there are projects in the area that are going benefit them.

A bill passed in the fall session provided a path for tax credits for investors. In this budget \$71 million supports job creators with two tax credits to encourage investors to support eligible small and medium-sized enterprise in Alberta and encourage businesses to make capital investments. Please let's remember how much of the budget is going to really support the industries in all of our communities, not only just in mine. The CARES program has already provided support for regional economic development initiatives and will provide a total of \$30 million to communities to diversify and expand their economic initiatives.

A program dear to the Finance minister and to many of my fellow MLAs is the support for small breweries. This program has already seen great results, and I hope that many of the members of this House have tried the local beers and spirits which are a benefit of this program. I myself wish that the climate in Alberta would support growing grapes and the wine industry, although I do note that we have at least two fruit winemakers, one in Barrhead and one in Strathcona county, so I may actually lobby the Finance minister for some tax credits for winemaking, too.

The Minister of Finance has stated that Alberta's economy is stabilizing and that jobs are returning. As our economy recovers, we will continue to bring the deficit down to balance, and we will do so without sacrificing the supports and services families need. And it appears that not only the Minister of Finance is optimistic about the economy. I don't want to give a whole list of newspaper articles and media reports that have also indicated that the economy is recovering. We should be optimistic, and we should really stop always saying negative things about Alberta and what's happening, because it's not doing anything good. [interjections] It might really be funny to members of the opposition but – you know what? – in my riding people are optimistic. We are building. The industries are building.

I want to address government spending because I know that the Finance minister and all ministers have taken important steps in reducing government spending. The budget includes a new agreement with physicians that saves up to half a billion dollars over two years. We have amalgamated agencies, boards, and commissions or have cut them, have limited salaries, and have removed perks such as golf memberships. We have also frozen salaries for politicians, political staff, and management in the civil service. We have streamlined programs such as Alberta Innovates, and we have streamlined community partnership grants and suspended other nonessential programs.

As important as it is to cut waste and reduce the growth of government spending, I am glad I am part of a government that sees it as critical that through this downturn in the economy it remains focused on supporting families, supporting education, building the needed infrastructure, and growing the economy.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the civil servants in the Treasury Board and Finance department, who have worked long hours to prepare the budget documents, the fiscal plan, and to ensure that the information is accurate. I think sometimes we don't really honour our civil servants enough, who

really work hard to make sure that we have the information that we need.

10:00

Madam Speaker, I would like to encourage all members to support Bill 10, the Appropriation Act, that will support Albertan families, seniors, people living in poverty, encourage diversification, build the needed affordable housing and seniors' lodges, and support accessible postsecondary education. I would also like to ask all members to be positive and really try to understand that Alberta is doing quite well – and we are leading in many indicators – because negativism isn't going to be helpful.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), I'll recognize Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am so sorry the opposition has said mean things about the budget. I'm sorry that we couldn't find very much positive in \$71 billion of debt to leave our children. I'm sorry.

Mr. Hinkley: Speculation.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Speculation? It's in your own budget.

Madam Speaker, I am tickling with laughter at the government this morning. One of the government members here just said that the \$71 billion of debt in this budget is speculation. Let me print a copy of the budget for him, or maybe someone could pull up a page number while I'm talking here and hand it to me and we'll share a page number, one of the dozens of page numbers that show \$71 billion of debt before Albertans get to throw these guys out in 2019.

Mr. Hinkley: Future speculation. Exaggeration.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I will get the page number for him in just a moment here.

But, yeah, I'm very sorry to the Member for Sherwood Park that the opposition has mean things to say about the budget. Because you know what? We can't find very much good in this. She said that she is grateful for the things that the government is doing. She's a part of it. Is she grateful to herself? What kind of self-congratulatory universe is this government living in where, you know: "I'm grateful that I bought myself breakfast this morning. I'm grateful that I could put my tie on." This government is grateful that it can spend money.

The member talked about the minimum wage, about the minimum wage and how it's necessary to bring up the minimum wage to fight poverty. I'm sure she's well intentioned in this respect but economically illiterate. She said that at \$15 an hour you're still living in poverty, and for many people that would certainly be true. But they believe that by raising the minimum wage, you will instantly raise people's incomes without any negative effects on the economy. If that is so, why don't they just double the minimum wage to \$30? If raising the minimum wage has no negative effect on the economy, why not have a \$100 minimum wage? At what point do we stop raising the minimum wage? If there is zero negative effect on minimum wage, we should just have a \$1 million minimum wage. They know their arguments don't hold water. It's pure ideology to cover up for economic illiteracy.

The member talked about how my child will probably be so happy to inherit all the debt. Now, I did the numbers. On the day my daughter was born, March 11 at 10:04 p.m., I calculated that she was born with exactly \$6,929.29 of debt the second that she was born. She doesn't really understand very much right now, but I

think one of the first lessons that we're going to teach her is that socialism is theft. The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money, and this government is spending other people's money. They're spending other people's money who are working for it now, and they're spending other people's money who don't even have a right to vote yet.

I also did the math. By the time my daughter is old enough to even vote, when she turns 18, on her 18th birthday, she will owe more than \$50,000. Fifty thousand dollars of provincial government debt, just Alberta. Forget what the federal government is doing or municipal governments. Fifty thousand dollars of provincial debt alone by the time she is old enough to vote.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order. Go ahead, hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Question-and-Comment Period

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, the 29(2)(a) rule is to provide for a brief comment or a question to the member who has just finished speaking. It is not an opportunity for a member of the opposition to stand up for five minutes and continue his speech. So I would ask you to rule on the way that we use this rule, in a way that's fair and is consistent with the intention of the Assembly when the change to the standing order was made, which is that it would allow for a brief comment or question from a member of the House to the person who has finished speaking, and it necessarily, in my view, entails a right of response by the member who is being asked the question.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Speaker, you well know the sheer hypocrisy in the Government House Leader's argument here. He has been doing this for decades. Government members still do it during 29(2)(a). They will stand up. They will make comments. Sometimes they're short comments; sometimes they're longer comments. You know, they do this regularly themselves. They can give it, but they can't take it. They might be a little sad that the opposition has mean things to say about the budget, but that is . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . the job of the Official Opposition, to criticize . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Another point of order?

Point of Order

Points of Order

Mr. Mason: Yes, and along a similar line. The opportunity to respond to a point of order is usually an opportunity to actually respond to the point of order and not to continue the speech of the member. This member doesn't seem to know what the tools are in this Assembly and how to use them. Each thing is merely exploited in order to continue his tirade with respect to the issue that is on his mind. I think it's an abuse of his right to respond to a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills on the point of order.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a very interesting Wednesday morning. I'm very glad that I stood in for my counterpart the House leader for the opposition. Points of order, responses to points of order. We've been called out on using

acronyms today. We've been called out on the extent of the time period for responses under 29(2)(a). The Government House Leader knows full well that members on his side – actually, his assistant or deputy himself has stood up on 29(2)(a) and railed against the opposition and the third party, totally off topic for the full five minutes. You know, we can easily go back into *Hansard* and find this if you need it. We can definitely do that. We'll get somebody in research to look up some of this stuff.

But some of these points of order are just approaching ridiculous this morning, and I think we should carry on with debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, on a number of occasions we have dealt with the question of what is appropriate under Standing Order 29(2)(a), and the tradition of this House has been to provide a great deal of leeway to all hon. members rather than holding to the strict interpretation of that rule. I do believe that the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks was addressing comments that the Member for Sherwood Park had made. There is no requirement on time or whether there's a response. It is comments, could be questions. The intent is to have a dialogue, though, so I would encourage all members to allow for that when you do make your comments so that the previous speaker would have the chance to perhaps comment.

Continue, please.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I actually do look forward to the Member for Sherwood Park's response to my comments here. You know, they're talking about saddling future generations with debt, and they never mention it whatsoever. They talk about the nice things for the short term, right now only. I value education and health care for our children, and all members of this House support that, but we want these things to be sustainable. They are talking about funding these things only in the short term, right now for the short cycle of an election, for an election cycle only, and then it's someone else's problem to pay for it. Perhaps many of them don't expect to be around long enough to actually have to clean up the mess. But members on this side of the House know that we're going to have a very tough job after the next election cleaning up.

Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: On Bill 10, I'll recognize Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an interesting time to rise here in debate to talk about the budget bill. What I find fascinating about this place is that things seem to be completely binary. The choices are either: we are the only people in the world who could possibly care about anyone, and the only possible way to go forward is with our budget; and the only other choice is dramatically on the other end of the spectrum, that only they will be able to save our province from the dastardly NDP and all the terrible things they've done.

There is actually a middle way here, Madam Speaker, and I'm going to talk about that. There is actually a middle way where we cannot incur massive, massive amounts of debt and where we cannot devastate our public services. It is about choices. Every budget is about the choices that we make. Those are not easy choices. But this government has very clearly laid bare for all Albertans to see what their values and what their priorities are. It's about options. [interjections] They're over there desk-thumping, saying that only they care about people, but the people of this province ultimately have to pay back this money.

My question for the government, in all seriousness, is: where does the money come from? Where does the money come from to pay for your programs? Well, you have some choices. You borrow the money, if you don't raise enough from tax-paying Albertans, but ultimately Albertans have to pay the freight. Ultimately, Albertans have to pay the freight.

They're talking about caring only about people and the environment and caring only about the economy over on this side. I care about both. It is not a binary choice, one or the other, because eventually you're going to hit the wall. You're eventually going to hit the wall.

Look, I want to be very clear that when oil prices drop as precipitously as they did just before and just after this government was elected, no government in the world – no responsible government, anyway – would balance the budget instantly. I understand and I appreciate that. But it doesn't need to be as bad as you've made it. It really does not need to be as bad as you've made it. You have not even made an effort to find savings anywhere in government. And when you have more revenue from unanticipated increases in oil prices, what do you do? Your health care spending goes up, greater than the fiscal management act says it should. So you break your own laws, that you yourself have brought in and amended.

By 2019 government will have grown by 20 per cent, in the face of one of the greatest recessions in Alberta history. Debt will be at \$71 billion in what was once a debt-free province. Interest costs, debt-servicing costs will be more than the combined spending of Children's Services, Culture and Tourism, and Indigenous Relations. Combined. The choices that this government is making, ironically enough, will ultimately hurt Albertans. I understand that what they're trying to do, they think, comes from a good place: we're going to look out for people. I get that, and that's what government should do. I understand that. But there are choices you have made that have made things worse than they needed to be.

There are some things in this budget that I agree with. There are some things that you've done in this budget that I agree with. I agree with increased spending in the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General to ensure that our justice system continues to work well. I agree with substantial investments in capital to catch up on Alberta's infrastructure deficits. I do question how much money gets reprofiled from one year to another and whether, in fact, we have the capacity to actually deploy the capital spending that's in the budget. I agree with attempts to reduce school fees. I think the physician deal makes sense although I do have questions about whether that premise or concept could and should be applied to other areas. When I talk about choices, these are things where I think the choices this government has made have not gone far enough in many areas, that being one of them.

We have an Official Opposition that feels, and I think the Member for Strathmore-Brooks had said, that our job is to oppose the government. Half of our job on this side is to oppose the government and hold the government to account. The other half of the job is to propose ideas and tell Albertans what we would actually do here on this side. It's actually really easy. It is really easy: when the government says black, we say white. It's actually really easy to do that. It's really easy just simply to oppose, that whatever the government says, we just go against it.

Well, that's not my style. There are a lot of things this government is doing that I think are not on the right path – and I've been very clear on what I think some of those things are – but what I haven't heard from anyone else on this side of the House, aside from me and the Alberta Party, is: what would they do any differently? I think the government, rightly, will criticize on certain days when one question is about where spending cuts need to be

made and the next question is about where a particular project in a constituency needs to be done. It doesn't hang together.

I think that the Official Opposition owes Albertans an explanation of where they would make cuts specifically, of how they would ensure wait times don't get out of hand, of how they would ensure that front-line public service workers would not be cut. Their \$10.6 billion in cuts that would be required to balance the budget would devastate Alberta's public service. That's 20 per cent of the public service. It's irresponsible to suggest that it's a simple matter of, quote, unquote, finding efficiencies and that that's all that's needed. That's not all that's needed, but it's certainly part of what is needed.

The Alberta Party's shadow budget, our third shadow budget by the way, the only party in this Assembly that produces a shadow budget, is 45 pages long. We've gone into great detail, line item detail, about what choices we would make. We put that out to Albertans, and they've provided feedback. It's been a really interesting process because not every choice that we've made is a choice that every Albertan would make. And that's good. That's what we ought to be doing on the opposition side, putting out our ideas, proposing ideas, not just opposing the government. That's not what Albertans expect of us. Our job in opposition is to tell Albertans how we would put Alberta back on a pathway to prosperity, to shared prosperity, across this province.

We believe we can find 1 per cent savings across the \$53 billion budget that this government has put forward each year for four years. I think it is absolutely possible. In fact, it's irresponsible not to try to find at least 1 per cent in operational spending savings across government. It's not easy, but it's also not that hard. It's certainly more difficult if you don't even try, if you don't even challenge the public service and say: "Folks, it's a difficult time. We need to find ways of doing more with less. We need to find ways of continuing to deliver high-quality public service, in fact maybe even deliver higher quality public service more efficiently, more effectively." I see little or no effort from the government to actually find efficiencies.

Our shadow budget, Pathway to Prosperity, ensures core services receive funding increases for the major front-line service areas to match population growth. That ensures that class sizes stay small, that health care wait times are reasonable, and that we look after our vulnerable neighbours. We would ask our dedicated public servants to take a negotiated pay freeze that is cost neutral to government. We'll have to see the details of the teachers' agreement to see whether, in fact, it meets that test, but in a very difficult economic climate I don't think it's too much to ask of those dedicated public servants to get paid the same next year as they got paid this year, at a time when Albertans all around this province, more than a hundred thousand Albertans, have no job at all, when others have taken a pay cut, and when others have taken reduced work hours.

We would also continue to make big investments in infrastructure. The Official Opposition's plan would replace a fiscal deficit with a human and an infrastructure deficit. That's not what Albertans want. That is not in the best interests of Albertans. We would invest in economic capacity in this province. That's what infrastructure does, both social infrastructure and physical infrastructure.

The other big concern I have with this government is the fact that they continue to rely on nonrenewable resource revenues as the only saviour for any sort of budget deficit that we have in this province. Their entire plan is crossing their fingers and hoping to goodness the price of oil goes up. Every government, leading back decades in this province, has done the same thing. This House leader has railed against the government in the past for overrelying on nonrenewable resource revenues. That's not a responsible budget

plan. The Alberta Party would cap the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that we assume we would ever have at \$3 billion. Anything above that would go to debt repayment, go to capital spending, and ultimately go to the heritage fund.

10:20

We would make the carbon tax, which, by the way, I believe in in principle, revenue neutral. If we believe that climate change is (a) real, (b) a problem, and (c) something we ought to do something about – by the way, I believe climate change is real, I believe climate change is a problem, and I believe that climate change is something we ought to do something about – let's use the least economically damaging way of doing that. Let's create a frame for innovation, for Alberta companies and Alberta technologies to be sold to the rest of the world to help address the carbon emission problem. That can be Alberta's contribution to solving climate change.

Unfortunately, the way this government has gone about it has created devastating economic consequences. It's highly political. They're hiding what is ordinary operational and capital spending under the climate leadership plan, and I'm worried that this government may have spoiled what could be a very sound policy in the minds of Albertans. They may have turned Albertans against what can be a very, very sound policy. The Alberta Party would make the carbon tax revenue neutral through cuts to personal and corporate taxes, through innovation tax credits, ensuring Alberta remains a leader in the current economy, that our oil and gas industry remains strong, and that we take a step into the next economy. I believe very much that Alberta can be part of the "and economy": oil and gas and innovation and green technology.

We also would review the entitlements delivered by government to ensure that those who really need help get help and that those who don't will no longer receive tax dollars when they don't really need them.

Those are the choices the Alberta Party would make. We believe that they're balanced, that they are fair, and they prove that we are the only party on this side of the House that has a long-term plan for Alberta. I would argue that the Alberta Party is the only group that truly has a compelling, believable, long-term plan for Alberta. That is the very least that Albertans should expect from their political leaders on both sides. It's a shame that no one else in this House seems to agree.

I can't, in the end, Madam Speaker, support this budget because budgets are about choices, and the choices this government has made are not good for Alberta. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), I'll recognize Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate the member's speech. I appreciate that he is the only opposition member to propose some alternatives, and I think that's admirable. It's interesting that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks earlier talked about economic literacy, and he's the one who can't write a shadow budget, talking about economic literacy.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow talked a bit about not having cuts in the budget, and I think that's a bit disingenuous because, you know, we can look at examples. The Finance minister has taken great leadership in reforming salaries for ABCs and cutting out golf club memberships, these kinds of perks, the outrageous CEO salaries. I'd like to hear from the Member for Calgary-Elbow. He said that there's no attempt at cuts, and I find that a bit disingenuous, so I want to give him a chance to address that.

I'd also like to ask him about his plan to balance the budget, because from what I understand, a lot of that balance is predicated on imposing wage freezes on public-sector workers. I'd like to point out that collective bargaining is called collective bargaining for a reason. It's not about going in and imposing on one side or the other. You know, the former government tried that with I believe it was either Bill 45 or 46 – I can't quite recall – but it didn't work out very well for them when they tried to impose those public-sector wage freezes in a unilateral fashion. I wonder if the Member for Calgary-Elbow can tell us about his plan to balance the budget on the backs of our hard-working public-sector workers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll address the first question first. He talked about the entitlements, the ABC review. Absolutely, I support reviewing those salaries. It seems outrageous and old-fashioned that golf course memberships would be part of any compensation package paid for by Alberta taxpayers, so absolutely I agree with that. How much money is that going to save? And it should. I'm not saying that we shouldn't do that. Absolutely, we should. I think the number that I've heard is \$28 million. That's not nothing, but it certainly isn't \$10.3 billion.

I also think that there's a very important question in all of that: how do we ensure that we attract and retain top talent to run what are large, complex organizations? There could be some unintended consequence there of finding people who are actually less skilled and qualified to run highly complex organizations that is to the financial and operational detriment of our province. While these reviews are a good idea and I support them one hundred per cent and I think we do need to look at entitlements to ensure they're modernized and it fits and makes sense and is a defensible use of public dollars, I also think we need to look at the scale of what that's actually going to deliver.

You talked about the public-sector wage freeze, and the one word that you missed in my speech, which I'm one hundred per cent certain will be in *Hansard* – and it wasn't before, it will be now – is that it must be a negotiated wage freeze. It must be negotiated, where you actually sit down with public-sector unions and their representatives. We lay all the numbers on the table, and we talk with them about what the situation is that our province finds itself in. Look, the answer is that at some point we run out of money, right? You know, this government talks a lot about debt-to-GDP ratio and that we're so much better than every other province. The number we're at today matters, of course. The number, though, that we're going to be at in the future matters just as much if not more.

Our credit rating is absolutely under threat. We've already seen it fall under this government. We're going to see, I think – and I don't think this is a radical prediction – the credit rating of this province drop again. Well, what that means is that the \$2.3 billion in debt servicing, the \$2.3 billion in interest payments that our province is going to have to pay in just two years' time, that number is going to go up, and we live in an environment where interest rates in general are going up. So now all of a sudden our debt-servicing costs start to outstrip our larger departments, not just some of the smaller departments. Those are choices that this government has made to put us in a very, very difficult position.

So, no, I don't think that we need to impose wage freezes or rollbacks on the public sector, but I do think that public-sector workers of all kinds understand the challenge that our province faces. I don't think that this government has tried nearly hard enough to sit down with them and engage them in a genuine way and say: look, folks, when your neighbours are ... [The time limit

for questions and comments expired] Oh. Darn. We'll have to come back to it.

The Deputy Speaker: On Bill 10, I will recognize the Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I want to make a few comments with respect to Bill 10 and, in particular, would like to respond to some of the comments made by the opposition Finance critic in his speech.

I want to go back to the situation that this province found itself in at the time of the election two years ago. Leading up to that election, of course, there was a dramatic fall in world oil prices as a result of actions by the Saudi Arabian government and other governments to basically flood the world markets with cheap oil in an attempt to push out higher cost production, including shale gas and oil in the United States and, of course, the oil sands here and others in the world.

That resulted in a dramatic drop in revenue. In fact, in the first year before our government took office, \$2 billion of government revenue was vaporized, just vaporized, \$2 billion that the previous government had used to fund program expenditures. At that time, before that happened, about 30 per cent of program expenditures in this province were paid for by nonrenewable resource revenue. I sat in opposition when the previous Premier, Premier Stelmach, put together a blue-chip panel, headed up by David Emerson, that identified this as a huge problem, the lack of diversification not only in the economy but in the resource base of the government and its overdependence on very volatile royalty revenue. That was in 2007. Well, nothing was done, Madam Speaker – nothing was done – by the previous government to correct that situation.

When the election happened, Mr. Prentice in his budget recognized some of the problems that were lying ahead, but he laid out a plan in his budget that clearly was not going to satisfy anybody on any side of the question. It included a billion-dollar health care user fee being restored. It involved a billion dollars of cuts in health care. It involved no money to hire new teachers for thousands of new students that were entering the system and so on and so on and so on.

10:30

The result is that in the election people had a clear choice between one party that wanted to cut services, impose unfair taxes, and go back to the same old way that this province had been governed by for many years or a new approach, which was to protect the services that people really cared about. That was the basis of the decision. That was, in fact, basically the ballot question in the last election, and the result was the election of a new government, a majority government, with a mandate from the public in the election to protect public services, to protect our health care, to protect our education.

The Wildrose also ran in that election, of course. Somewhat to the PCs' surprise they managed to displace them. They thought they were dead, but they weren't. Their plan was for about a 20 per cent reduction in government spending. That's about \$9 billion on the operating side and about a \$2 billion cut to capital expenditures. Now, the Wildrose likes to pretend that you can find \$9 billion in this budget, about a 20 per cent reduction, without doing anything to front-line services. They seem to think, even after the years of Ralph Klein and the austerity and so on that we went through, that there are so many bureaucrats just spinning their wheels that we could just trim that all up and it won't affect service delivery. Madam Speaker, that is disingenuous – and that's a very polite word – because that is, I would say, something that completely, you

know, is at variance with the truth. They would like people to believe that, but they know that they can't deliver that.

I know why, and that's because they haven't been able to deliver a shadow budget. They have refused so far to say exactly what they would do in terms of the budget. We know that the Alberta Party has done that. It's an interesting document. I've looked at it. But I know that the Wildrose . . . [interjections] It's not that I think that they're incapable, Madam Speaker. I don't think that the Finance critic, who is busy chirping at me over there, is incapable of developing a shadow budget, but here's the thing. If they did a shadow budget and they cut \$9 billion out of the budget, they would have to show massive cuts to services, and they don't want the people to know that that's what they're planning to do. So that's why there's no shadow budget. It's not because they're incapable of doing one. No. But it would show what they really stand for. It would tip their hand, and the public would really know what they're going to get if they elect whatever monstrous creation is formed by the union of those two parties. The act of creation is something I shudder to even think about.

You know, governments have choices. There are only three. It's actually very basic in terms of trying to deal with budgetary issues. They can raise revenues, which is very difficult in an economic situation. You can raise taxes on corporations, but if because of a recession they're not earning profits, they don't pay any taxes no matter what you set it at. High or low: it doesn't matter. Or you can borrow. Or you can cut. I just want to make the case. I know that they don't agree with the approach this government has taken. I know that many conservatives don't agree with the approach that we've taken, but both alternatives – well, three alternatives – were put forward to the public in the election. The people chose and gave us a mandate to do as we are doing. That has never been respected by the people opposite. The expressed will of the voters in the election has never been respected by the Finance critic in the opposition or the Official Opposition generally.

Now, Madam Speaker, we have talked quite a bit in question period in response to questions about the state of the Alberta economy. There's no question that we've gone through a difficult recession, but we've created new jobs, and these are full-time jobs, not part-time jobs, as they would like to tell us or would like the public to believe. Leading economic think tanks, banks, all of the people in the actual economy, in the oil industry itself are saying that this province is on the right track and that we're going to create more jobs and we're going to lead this country back to prosperity. The opposition is beginning to realize that that's happening, that our program is working, and the fact that Alberta is going to come back from the recession, create new jobs, and lead the economy of the country once again is something they hate. They hate that because it proves us right. It proves them wrong. It creates a situation where we're actually doing better economically than they are.

I would make the statement here. It might shock some people, but I don't really think the people opposite understand business. I don't think they do, because every day in question period they stand up and they contradict what business leaders are saying. They contradict what the oil companies are saying. They contradict what the banks are saying. They contradict every economic think tank. They don't get business. I think that's the problem. That's the problem. When the NDP has got a better handle on business and the economy than the conservative parties, it's a sad day for the conservatives indeed, Madam Speaker.

Just to conclude, different people draw on different economists, different financial people for their guidance in terms of things. Some go back to Adam Smith, a classical economist. Another one: David Ricardo, another of the classical economists. Some people

draw on him. Some, with a little more modern outlook perhaps, draw on John Maynard Keynes for inspiration, and some conservatives even draw upon people like Milton Friedman and so on. The Finance critic for the Wildrose is busy applauding the name of Milton Friedman, whose program, by the way, was put in place by the Chilean junta after the coup and resulted in a disastrous economic situation for the country of Chile. That at least would be a real economist, but no, Madam Speaker, the Wildrose Finance critic draws on *The Simpsons* for his inspiration. I think that if you dig a little deeper into his inspiration for Wildrose economic policy, you'll find at its heart is Mr. Burns.

Madam Speaker, Albertans have a choice: a sensible government that's going to protect public services, make life more affordable for Albertans, and lead this country back to recovery and full employment, or *The Simpsons*. I think the choice is clear.

As a result, I've concluded my comments, and I would move that we adjourn debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:40 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Payne
Carson	Kazim	Phillips
Clark	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Sabir
Dang	Luff	Schmidt
Eggen	Malkinson	Schreiner
Feehan	Mason	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Gray	McKittrick	Sweet
Hinkley	McPherson	Turner
Hoffman	Miller	Westhead
Horne	Miranda	

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gill	Schneider
Cyr	Hanson	Smith
Fildebrandt	Loewen	Strankman
Fraser	Panda	

Totals: For – 38 Against – 11

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 7 An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 7 here at committee. I just want to open my remarks by saying

that in principle I will likely support the bill, but there is one particular aspect of the bill that I've heard from a couple of different stakeholder groups is a concern to them. So with that brief introduction, I will propose an amendment.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

11:00

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining, be amended as follows. In part A section 1(2) is amended by striking out the proposed section 58.7 and substituting the following:

Transitional provisions

58.7(1) On the coming into force of this section, collective bargaining that commenced under an agreement entered into under section 87 or 96 of the Post-secondary Learning Act continues subject to the Labour Relations Code.

(2) If, before January 1, 2020, a dispute that arises during the negotiation of an agreement is referred to binding arbitration pursuant to an agreement under section 87 or 96 of the Post-secondary Learning Act or referred to binding arbitration under section 88 of that Act, the arbitration continues as the dispute resolution process for that dispute unless the parties agree to terminate the arbitration.

(3) If, on or after January 1, 2020,

- (a) a dispute that arises during the negotiation of an agreement is referred to binding arbitration pursuant to an agreement under section 87 or 96 of the Post-secondary Learning Act or referred to binding arbitration under section 88 of that Act, the arbitration is terminated and any award made is void, and
- (b) a provision in an agreement under section 87 or 96 of the Post-secondary Learning Act that requires disputes that arise during the negotiation of a future agreement to be resolved by binding arbitration is unenforceable.

(4) An agreement under section 87 or 96 of the Post-secondary Learning Act that operates for an unspecified term is deemed, despite section 129 of this Act, to provide for its operation for a term of 3 years beginning on the date the Bill to enact An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining receives Royal Assent or for a shorter period agreed on by the parties.

(5) For greater certainty, nothing in this section prevents the parties from referring matters in dispute to voluntary arbitration under section 93.

(6) A party to an agreement affected by this section may apply to the Board for a determination respecting the application of this section, and the Board's decision is final and binding.

Under part B section 4 is struck out.

That's a long amendment, Madam Chair, and I will take a moment to do a couple of things. First off, I want to just formally thank Parliamentary Counsel for their assistance in drafting that amendment. As you can see, it's not the most straightforward or simple amendment, so thank you very much to them for their usual great work in helping my team draft that amendment and their responsiveness and professionalism in doing so.

This amendment comes from a concern raised by stakeholders in faculty associations, one of which is in my constituency, and also another faculty association that I'm aware of. They support the bill in principle and general terms. I obviously don't want to speak for them, but generally I've heard some supportive words as they relate to this bill from stakeholders in faculty associations. But the concern is that the changes take effect immediately and that that will change the rules for negotiations that are already in progress currently without providing necessary time for those faculty associations to transition to what a strike/lockout world might mean. One of those things, of course, for them would be to build a strike fund.

I'm just going to read a brief quote from one of the stakeholders who sent me a letter that said that the real risk is that, at some institutions, bargaining could be harder than otherwise would have been the case on the premise that lack of sufficient preparation could be viewed as an opportunity to achieve concessions by the other party.

Now, they are quick to note that they don't anticipate necessarily that that would be the case for them and don't necessarily see that, but they do raise the concern that that is possible. They believe that what I am bringing forward in an amendment here, again on their recommendation – they see it as a pragmatic compromise. They see it as a win-win for both stakeholders and the government. It doesn't alter the substance of the bill. Ultimately, the goals of Bill 7, which they agree with, are still achieved, but it does in fact address their concerns as a stakeholder.

They've talked about a phase-out period under what is called the statutory reset option. They believe the January 1, 2020, date is appropriate. In practical terms, what this means is that any bargaining that's started on or after the reset date would occur under the strike/lockout regime, essentially after January 1, 2020. Bargaining that occurred prior to that reset would occur under the compulsory binding arbitration provisions that are currently in place. This is a concern that I've heard. I imagine the minister has heard those concerns as well.

We did share this proposed amendment with the minister's office, so I will take my seat and eagerly anticipate the response from the minister.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to stand and speak to this amendment. Our government will not be supporting this amendment. We certainly have been engaged with our stakeholders in extensive consultations. We began consulting with stakeholders on this issue in October 2015. The faculty associations and grad students were a part of the broader consultations that we engaged in with respect to public-sector employee relations, broadly speaking.

Of course, Madam Chair, all of this was prompted by the Supreme Court's decision in the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour case that came down in early 2015, that deemed that all public-sector employees had the right to collectively bargain and the right to remove their labour as part of free association in a trade union, a faculty association, or some kind of collective bargaining agent.

It should come as no surprise to any faculty association here in the province of Alberta that we will be moving to a strike/lockout model because we've been moving in this direction for the last two years, Madam Chair. Some faculty associations have expressed concern to me, and they expressed concern throughout the consultation process about the transition time. Other faculty associations are well prepared to take on the role of bargaining on behalf of their members under a strike/lockout model immediately.

We believe, Madam Chair, that because of the length of time between the introduction of this bill, the lengthy consultation process that we've engaged in with our stakeholders since October 2015, and the fact that this decision came down in early 2015, the faculty associations have had approximately two years to prepare for a transition to this strike/lockout model. We believe that the transition time that has been given and is recognized in this bill is appropriate and just.

The other point that I would like to raise, Madam Chair, is that, you know, what the member opposite is proposing is denying their

rights under the Supreme Court ruling, the rights of faculty association members to freely bargain and freely associate as members of faculty associations. They're denying them those rights for an extra three years, and I don't see and our government doesn't see any good reason to continue to deny faculty members in this province their Charter rights, that have been guaranteed by the Supreme Court, for an additional three years. They've been waiting far too long for these rights, and it's time that they received the rights that they're entitled to. That's what this legislation does, so we will not be supporting this amendment.

I thank the chair for her time.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I just want to briefly respond to the minister's comments. I can tell you that although he says it doesn't come as a surprise to faculty associations, I'm aware of two for sure that this comes as a great surprise. It's quite different from what they heard or the feedback they've provided to the minister during consultation.

For the minister to say that they consulted starting back in October 2015 so that none of this comes as a surprise – when you consult, I think the idea is that you're asking for input, and then you take that input and put it forward in legislation. That is the point at which everyone knows what's happening. For you to expect that faculty associations should have assumed back in October 2015 that, by virtue of being asked a question, the outcome is preordained, well, that's unsettling. If we talk about labour legislation, is the outcome preordained on the, quote, unquote, consultation that has happened on employment standards and the labour code? I sure hope not. Should employers be making provisions to change based on feedback provided by a certain subset of stakeholders? I sure hope not. That's not the way consultation is meant to work.

It is unfortunate that the minister has taken the position that he has. To his comment that transition provision would deny rights, I think that it's very clear that faculty associations can still freely bargain under the binding arbitration provisions which exist today. In no way, in my opinion, does that subvert the Supreme Court ruling. All this does is provide a reasonable transition period to allow the faculty associations to prepare to bargain in a new way. It's not that they're not able to bargain, remembering that this comes as a request from a faculty association who, I would argue without any hesitation, understands what is best for them and their members. Remembering that this comes from them, I think it's important to understand that that is the source of this amendment, so I would ask the minister and the government to reconsider.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

11:10

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to respond to a couple of the points that the Member for Calgary-Elbow raised in his supplementary comments.

First of all, we were quite clear from the outset of the consultation process that we were moving to a strike/lockout model. That outcome was absolutely established as our goal from the outset, so we were not asking an open question as to whether or not we should grant faculty associations the right to strike and institutions the right to lock out their employees. We were clear from the very beginning of this consultation, Madam Chair, that that's what we wanted to end up with, and that's absolutely what we've reflected.

The consultations were around how we move to that model, right? That was the open-ended consultation that we had. So for the

member opposite to say, you know, that we're not engaging in genuine consultations and not listening to our stakeholders I think is a comment that's beneath the Member for Calgary-Elbow, and he knows full well the scope of the consultations that we undertook. And then for him to jump to conclusions about the process that we've undertaken with respect to the Employment Standards Code and labour code is, I think, a political cheap shot and not pertinent to these discussions.

With respect to the transition period and saying that they currently have the rights to collectively bargain and freely associate: they don't, Madam Chair. The Supreme Court of Canada was quite clear that the labour relations model that exists under the Post-secondary Learning Act is not compliant with the Charter rights. Faculty association members don't have the rights right now. So to say that the transition period grants them their rights right now is patently wrong. The member opposite is wrong when he says that they can freely bargain. The Supreme Court says that unless faculty association members have the right to remove their labour, they don't have the complete right to freely bargain and freely associate. We're giving them their rights now. We don't see that there's any point in waiting for an additional three years. Faculty association members deserve the rights that the Supreme Court of Canada has said that they deserve all the way back in 2015. It's time that they were given those rights.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill, are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again I rise to speak to Bill 7, an act to confuse postsecondary bargaining. This bill is not ready. It's a complete overreach, and as usual the government can't seem to keep their ideologies out of a piece of legislation. We agree that some changes to bargaining are needed to comply with the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision guaranteeing workers the right to strike unless, of course, they are essential, but this bill far overreaches what is needed in such a way that it's just to satisfy the ideology of this government. The question that remains is why they decided to completely overhaul the legislation and take it completely out of the Post-secondary Learning Act. This seems to be overkill.

Now, let's set the record straight. In no way am I opposing granting the right to strike. This is a constitutional right. In fact, we believe that this mandatory arbitration across the public sector has led to higher costs. So when I go to oppose this bill, it's not to the right to strike but to the overworked way this government is trying to implement it.

Moving associations from PSLA to the labour act is really creating a huge headache for all involved, particularly because things are being done way too quickly. There are many issues in the interim which, hopefully, won't affect the institutions and employees negatively. However, what is really mind boggling is that this government has admitted in its own discussion document and consultation that all of this could have been dealt with within the existing Post-secondary Learning Act. Here we are discussing something that they themselves also agree is contentious. That, my friends, is our government starting to understand the consequences of what they've done, but they go back to the realization that they need to keep in line with their ideology. Perhaps some more time

should have been taken to iron out all the details in getting ready to make a difference in this legislation.

We know that certain universities and colleges think that this is an overreach, and after talking to a few that are supporting these fundamental changes, we concluded that even they would like to see a more mindful approach towards their colleagues and institutions who either are in active bargaining currently or would be actively bargaining fairly soon. There is worry that because there is no phase-out period for compulsory binding arbitration, bargaining could become an issue due to the lack of sufficient preparation from either side. We, too, agree that those who are currently in the middle of negotiations shouldn't have the rules changed so radically partway through unless, of course, the government has some really good explanation for this haste. I'd like an explanation on that.

Without a phase-out period or a short transition period to allow everyone involved to get up to speed, we could very likely see an erosion of the employer-employee relations, which could cause and breed mistrust and then labour tensions on campuses. This is not something we wish to see happen given how many stakeholders hold the line on this very issue. That in itself should be an indicator to this ministry that they should amend their bill to reflect at least these changes. I mean, granting the right to strike doesn't mean much when you've never had a reason to build a contingency fund or prepare properly and put safeguards in place.

We, on the other hand, also see this bill as a way for government to impose their ideological agenda and force union mentality. If it wasn't so, why did they have to take this bill to such an extreme? There was enough room in the PSLA and built into the 2015 Supreme Court decision without transferring this to the labour act.

You know, large successful organizations tend to make slow, methodical changes and sometimes take years to accomplish this. The reason they do this is to first consider the overall cost and the subsequent impact to make changes, mitigate risk, and create unity amongst all those in the change. It's called change management. At present institutions have not had the time to develop any protocols in case of a strike. Some may be worried that faculty associations are no longer going to be perceived as academics, intellectuals, and leaders that, perhaps not right away but in time, will be labelled with the union mentality. Over time this could possibly diminish who they distinctly are. Of course, again, only time will tell. I'll mark the date.

Obviously, a huge problem I see with this bill is that trade unions could very well replace faculty associations after the five-year mark stipulated in the bill. With worry that the bill will take more time and become more combative and with things moving too quickly, with no phase-out period to deal with the act of collective bargaining, and the government itself admitting in its discussions document that this could have been sorted out with the existing postsecondary act, government beginning the process to turn associations into labour unions, ideological decisions – I'm sure you get what I'm alluding to – I have no other option than to oppose this bill in its current form and ask to make some necessary changes. I want these changes to reflect the wishes of those whom this bill will ultimately affect.

Madam Speaker, at this time I would like to bring forward an amendment to the bill.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. W. Anderson: I move that Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining, be amended in section 1(2) in the proposed section 58.2(2) by striking out "2022" and substituting

“2027.” The amendment here is to propose that faculty associations remain the representative academics for a 10-year period instead of the five-year benchmark this government has established. If the government’s intent is not to replace these faculty associations with unions, they shouldn’t have a problem with this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I’m just waiting for the copies of the amendment to be distributed. I hope that our diligent pages are – excellent. You know, I think it warrants mentioning again the good work that the pages do here in the House. We are certainly privileged to be served by them every day, and I want to thank them again for diligently ensuring that I have a copy of the amendment that the Member for Highwood has brought.

11:20

I rise, of course, to speak against this amendment, Madam Chair. If I understand the amendment correctly, the Member for Highwood is proposing delaying the point at which faculty associations and grad student associations could freely choose their bargaining agent from 2022 to 2027. Of course, the Member for Highwood expresses some concerns about our government moving forward with an ideology to unionize everybody and their dog in the province. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. We simply want people to be able to have the right to choose who their collective bargaining agent is, who is representing them when they’re dealing with their employer. Right now, under the legislation that exists, faculty associations and grad student associations don’t have that choice. Of course, they won’t have that choice until 2022 as we recognize that there is some need to transition faculty associations and grad student associations into the new model so that they are well positioned to represent their members at the bargaining table.

Madam Chair, once 2022 rolls around, if the members of those faculty associations and grad student associations feel that their associations are not doing a good job of representing them at the bargaining table, they will have the right to choose somebody else that they think is more capable of doing that. You know, our government firmly believes that people have the right to access the best bargaining talent that’s available to them and, certainly, to choose to have the best people representing their interests at the bargaining table. Faculty associations and grad student associations will have that right consistent with every other jurisdiction in the country and, certainly, consistent with the way other bargaining agents are certified and decertified in this province. We’re very consistent, of course, with the approach that is taken by every other jurisdiction in the country on this matter and, certainly, bargaining processes that exist for other sectors in the province.

We feel that 2022 is certainly an adequate transition time. Five years will give every faculty association and grad student association ample time to prepare for that date. We see no reason to extend that date to 2027, Madam Chair, so we will be voting against this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: I just wish to respond to the minister and to thank him so much for his answer. I just don’t recall mentioning anything about canines or anybody else in the animal kingdom, but if the member opposite wishes to attempt to unionize them, I guess it’s well within his right.

Just as a reference point several academics and academic institutions have reached out to me and suggested merely that a temporal frame to be expanded to 10 years would be much more appropriate than the five-year term, hence the reason for my amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I’ll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:23 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Fraser	Schneider
Cyr	Gill	Smith
Fildebrandt	Hanson	Strankman

11:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Miranda
Bilous	Kazim	Phillips
Carson	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Sabir
Dang	Luff	Schmidt
Eggen	Malkinson	Schreiner
Feehan	Mason	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Gray	McKitrick	Sweet
Hinkley	McPherson	Turner
Horne	Miller	Westhead

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We’re back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have heard some of the discussions that have been going on in the Chamber, and I did a little bit of looking on the government website at some of the consultation that has been put forward by the government. The document that I’m referring to is work.alberta.ca/documents/essential-services-psla-what-we-heard.pdf. I did that for *Hansard*, by the way. [interjection] That was very impressive, I understand.

I think we all can agree that the Supreme Court ruling said that we needed to make some changes. One of our concerns is that we may be moving this in too fast a direction, so I went and looked at the concerns that the Alberta government had posted on their own website here. The impacts of a strike and lockout came to me as something that – there seems to be widespread concern at all levels that work at these postsecondary institutions.

I’m going to read through the points really quickly and comment as I go. The first one under Impact of Strike/Lockout is:

- Notwithstanding whether academic staff members are essential, stakeholders broadly expressed concern regarding the impact of a strike/lockout in this sector.

We've got some of the academics themselves that are showing some concern, and this is something that I think – we heard the member from the independent party bring forward an extension saying that maybe we need to be looking at possibly going further and my own colleague from Highwood saying: "You know what? We're making some great changes here. Why wouldn't we want to give these groups the time to be able to move forward with this?"

Now let's talk about the different groups. We've established that there are concerns.

- Students in particular worry about the impact of a strike . . . and believe that tuition should be refunded in the event of lost class time. In addition, students strongly argued that even a refund of tuition fees would not adequately compensate them for the negative impact of a strike/lockout including, for example, the cost of delayed entry into the labour market for students who miss graduation due to a strike/lockout.

These are the students. They're saying: "Okay. Fine. We understand that there's going to be this process." But what are we putting in place for the students themselves that are caught in this time frame? I don't know if that is caught up by the minister by saying how they're going to be dealing with the students who are caught in a strike or lockout situation.

Now, let's go on.

- Delayed graduation may impact students who have obtained employment that is contingent on their graduation, classes delayed into summer can affect students' ability to complete summer work/study arrangements and the visa status of international students could be put in jeopardy.

Now, again, we've got more students here, but these are nearing the end of their careers normally when it comes to graduate students. When we start looking at what the impacts are going to be, moving forward with this, how exactly is the Alberta government going to deal with continuing these programs so that our students aren't put at a disadvantage compared to, say, other jurisdictions? I think that is a reasonable concern.

This one here is actually one that will affect my riding probably more directly.

- The impact of a strike or lockout on apprenticeship training would be more severe than for other forms of post-secondary training due to the shorter duration of training, which typically lasts for 6-8 weeks such that a strike of 2 weeks' duration could be sufficient to cause a cancellation of an entire training period. Capacity issues within the apprenticeship training system are such that an apprentice whose training period is cancelled would likely be forced to wait until the next academic year to re-enroll in training.

Now, I have to say that when it comes to our area, a lot of the students try to get into apprenticeship training when the oil sands aren't actually building. When we've got these apprenticeships, they've really got a very short of window of time to be able to get into these classes. I'm curious if the government has put in any real thought when it comes to our student population. I'm sure they have because, obviously, this is their document, the document that they are bringing forward.

What we're looking at here is a group of stakeholders that are asking to be heard and who would like to know exactly what our minister is going to be able to move forward as a solution to ensure that they're not put at a disadvantage going into their careers, and I

think that that is a reasonable concern. Again, I'm not here to argue about the fact that this legislation does need to move forward – the Supreme Court made it very clear that this needs to move forward – but maybe not in the way that it is being moved forward, the vehicle, as my colleague for Highwood has mentioned. Maybe we could have done this in the Post-secondary Learning Act. Maybe we could have done it in a few different ways. But what we're looking at here are the impacts to the stakeholders that are going to be involved in this. While we're doing this, are we actually going to be harming some of our student population that is going to be moving forward with their careers?

Now, I myself have gone through postsecondary, and I can tell you that, for myself, disruption by a strike that was, say, three or four months long for my teachers at the time would have probably added an additional year to my education. For myself, I ended up with a management degree from the University of Lethbridge, and it was a five-year program because I had a double major in accounting and finance. So that would have added another year, a sixth year, to that program. Now, we already know that a lot of times students have to get student loans and they have to work summer jobs, but what happens is that by deferring this, we could possibly create some real issues.

What I would like to hear, again, is that we are going to be bringing stability within the system, that we are going to see that these strikes and lockouts, possibly, are dealt with in a professional manner, and that we are making sure we have alternate routes to be able to provide our students who are within the system the ability to continue with their education if they've got that strike or lockout happening. In the end, by disrupting that earlier part in your life, that could mean that we have students who end up not going back to school. I believe that that would harm all of Alberta because education, in my opinion, having gone through the system, is important for your future career. By putting elements or barriers in front of our students by creating times where they are no longer able to get their education or by possibly disrupting more than one semester, maybe two or even three semesters, that would be very harmful to I think our entire postsecondary system.

I would love to hear what the minister has to say regarding our students, and I'm sure, having seen the same document that I'm looking at here, he's worked out some solutions. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

11:50

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake's concern about supporting students. Of course, our government has made several investments in students through this budget, that was just the topic of discussion earlier this morning.

Madam Chair, I think it's appropriate for us to review the good things that we're doing through our budget to support students, to allay the concerns that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has raised. Of course, we're providing predictable, stable funding for each university and college in the province, and we're also freezing tuition for a third year. That will give students access to an affordable education at the university or college of their choice. Of course, if the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is concerned about supporting students, he would vote for our budget because our budget supports students greatly.

With respect to expanding access to classrooms, I was just in Cold Lake on Monday, Madam Chair, announcing an investment into some planning resources for the expansion of the Portage College campus in Cold Lake, and if that goes forward, that will

provide students in the Cold Lake area with higher education opportunities that are currently not available to them. Of course, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake would be wise to vote for those investments to support the students in his own community so that those students have the opportunity to get the higher education in their hometown that they currently are denied. I look forward to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake putting his money where his mouth is and voting in favour of our budget so that students in his hometown have the opportunity that he says he wants them to have.

With respect to supporting students in case of a strike or lockout, Madam Chair, the labour relations model that we're proposing under this legislation, of course, gives the government of Alberta the opportunity to convene a public emergency tribunal in case a strike or lockout drags on too long and academic years are put at risk. If the government feels that students will be unduly harmed by an extended strike or lockout, we will have the option of convening this public emergency tribunal to make sure that students' interests are protected.

The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake raised some concerns about the costs that will be refunded. You know, I find it odd that a party that wants to jack up tuition is concerned about student costs. But with respect to costs that may be lost during a strike or lockout, the government is invested in exploring options to make sure that students don't lose out in case of strikes or lockouts, labour relations problems that are beyond their control.

He raises the issue, particularly, of apprentices and the enrolment thing. Of course, enrolment in apprenticeship training periods is rolling. Apprenticeship period training happens every eight weeks, so we're confident that there will be ample opportunities for apprentices who may lose a period of technical training due to a strike or lockout. We hope that's never the case, but should that ever happen, of course, there are ample opportunities for those apprenticed students to enroll in further technical training shortly after because of the availability of apprenticeship training opportunities.

Certainly, the member opposite also referred to some faculty concerns about what happens in case of a strike or lockout. That's why we've decided to require faculty associations and grad student associations to negotiate essential services agreements, Madam Chair. Consistent with the approach that we took to public-sector employment relations, faculty associations and grad student associations under this legislation will be required to negotiate

essential services agreements before they can engage in collective bargaining to make sure that the operations of a university or college can continue in the event of a strike or lockout. That should allay some of the concerns that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has raised in terms of maintaining the operational integrity of the university or college.

I believe, Madam Chair, that I've addressed concerns. You know, I just want to restate that our government is deeply committed to making sure that students have access to high-quality, affordable education, which the member opposite says that he's also interested in. Not only do I look forward to the member opposite voting in favour of this bill, but I also look forward to the member opposite voting in favour of the budget, that we were discussing earlier this morning, because it does so much to support students in his hometown and, of course, all across Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is good progress, so as we are just very few minutes from adjourning anyway, I move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 3, 2017

Day 27

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms

Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Connolly	Orr
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Drysdale	Schreiner
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Gotfried	

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Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
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Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

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Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
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Gotfried	Turner
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Luff	

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Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

I would just remind the House that a year ago today some very tragic events happened in our province. I know that each and every one of you share and appreciate the strength that those good people have had and continue to have.

Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three state senators representing the Council of State Governments – West, or CSG – West, of which Alberta is an associate member. They are Montana Senator Sue Malek, Washington State Senator Sam Hunt, and Idaho Senator Bart Davis. They are accompanied by Martha Castañeda, program manager for CSG – West.

Mr. Speaker, CSG – West is a regional multilateral forum that brings together legislators and government leaders from 13 states as well as a number of U.S. protectorates. Alberta first became a member in 2000, and we appreciate the opportunity CSG – West offers to meet face to face with state lawmakers of our largest trading partner. The CSG – West region is an economic powerhouse, with a combined annual GDP of more than \$4 trillion. This economic activity drives job creation on both sides of the border. In fact, there are 172,000 jobs created in the CSG – West region as a result of U.S. merchandise and service exports to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we welcome the visit of senators Malek, Davis, and Hunt. It's a chance to build on our important trade relationship with the United States. I would ask all members of the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome, neighbours.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you several groups from River Valley school in my hometown of Sundre. I believe that there are three classrooms here today. With them are a lot of chaperones. I will try not to name them all, but there are two chaperones that I want to briefly mention. The first is His Worship Terry Leslie, who is no stranger to this Assembly. I have introduced him here before. He is the mayor of Sundre, but today I want to introduce him in his old capacity, which is as an educator in the community of Sundre. In fact, he was a teacher of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for a while, so if you're looking for some advice on how to keep the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills under control, His Worship may have some advice. With him, of course, is the deputy mayor of Sundre, Chris Vardas, and several chaperones from River Valley school.

I will also briefly mention that River Valley school is the school that all of my children are attending or have attended. I'm just happy to see that we have so many people from home here today,

and I'd ask that they all rise – stand on up – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. There might be mixed opinion in this House as to how well you did at the teaching job.

Are there any other school groups today, hon. members?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose. I'd ask them to rise as I say their names: board of directors secretary, Michelle Pederson; Amateur Drag King 2014 Angelo Mercy; Miss Mary Christmas 2016 GiGi Gaynor; Imperial Crown Prince XLI Jack N. Ginger; Imperial Crown Princess XLI Morgen Fair; president of the board, Rob Browatzke; Majesty Emperor XLI Bull Dozr; and Majesty Empress XLI Ruby Hymen. I'd like to thank them for their dedication and support to our community and the fundraising they do to support charities and LGBTQ-plus organizations here in Edmonton and around the province. I'd ask them to now receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you three constituents who live in the wonderful riding of Edmonton-Rutherford. Not only do they call Edmonton-Rutherford their home, but they have also established two thriving businesses there. The Stone and Wheel Pizzeria and Square 1 Coffee have a notable presence in the riding, initially for serving, of course, the adjacent neighbourhoods delicious food and coffee, but they also have committed themselves to fostering community spirit and hosting a variety of events in the community and collaborating with the local community leagues in their area. I can truly testify that my staff and I enjoy attending at their businesses and meeting with them on a regular basis. I'd like to personally congratulate Jonathon, Brandy, and Sarah Brozny for having their successful businesses, and I'd ask them – they have already risen – to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests today? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Lindsey Marofke and her parents, Sandy and Don Van Tetering. Lindsey's daughter Greta is three years old and is currently fighting her second battle with liver cancer. In her three years Greta has endured many rounds of chemotherapy, multiple surgeries, and has had 70 per cent of her liver removed. She needs a liver transplant, which is not available in Alberta. Greta has to travel to Cincinnati to receive this life-saving operation, which is currently not funded. The brave little girl's family is here, and I would ask her mom and grandparents to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair

Mr. Barnes: This NDP government has spent two years claiming that they're doing what Albertans want. They say that young people who can't find work want a carbon tax, they say that business

owners in the red want to double their labour costs, they say that young families struggling to keep a roof over their heads want higher personal taxes, and they say that energy companies who are leaving in droves want ideological caps on production. They're wrong. The evidence is everywhere. Just go out and actually speak to the families and businesses who are suffering.

No part of this NDP government is more ideological or out of touch than the extremists on the Premier's oil sands advisory group, particularly Tzeporah Berman. Ms Berman is the Premier's top adviser on the oil sands or, as she calls them, the tar sands and even Mordor. She's been working around the clock to kill Kinder Morgan and Keystone XL, and she just officially endorsed the B.C. NDP's plan to cripple Alberta's economy. To make matters worse, today we learned that the taxpayers of this province have paid her \$23,000. This NDP government is actually subsidizing the killing of pipelines with taxpayers' money, paying Ms Berman while she works to elect the B.C. NDP, and our Premier is complicit. Shame on them.

I can think of only one positive to Ms Berman being here. The fact that she hasn't been fired tells Albertans everything they need to know about this government. From the Education minister, who chanted, "No new approvals," to the Environment minister, who helped pen a how-to guide on sabotaging pipelines, this government truly doesn't want pipelines to succeed and doesn't want our energy industry to thrive. If they did, they would have shown Ms Berman the door a long, long time ago. Fortunately, Albertans will soon get what they want, to fire this NDP government and restore the Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

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

1:40 Fort McMurray Wildfire Anniversary

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a difficult topic that is still fresh in the minds of Albertans and will be for many years to come. One year ago today the world watched as more than 90,000 residents of Fort McMurray, including my family and friends, were forced to flee their homes as a massive wildfire quickly descended on their community. In that moment we learned just what Albertans are made of, and I would like to extend my gratitude and the gratitude of this government and the entire province to those who assisted the community.

I would like to thank the first responders, who fought in the few short days leading up to the evacuation to contain the fire as it broke. Individuals like Dave Mulock and firefighter brothers Scott and Kent Jennings were in the thick of the fire from the beginning. Once it was clear that evacuation was necessary, first responders, many of whom were volunteers, ensured that residents were removed from danger and then remained in the city and forest to fight the fire and protect infrastructure and property. We owe them all a great deal of gratitude and appreciation for their incredible hard work.

I would also like to thank the numerous individuals like the social workers and other front-line service providers who continue to work with the community as Fort McMurray rebuilds. The work you do and have done so far is no small task. Know that the province and this government is here to support you all as you recover and rebuild.

I would also like to thank Albertans, who came out in support of their neighbours by making donations, taking evacuees in, and volunteering at evacuation centres. The generosity and selflessness displayed on May 3 and in the following weeks was nothing short of amazing.

Finally, I would like to thank our fellow Canadians, who donated almost \$200 million to the Red Cross to support residents, businesses, and community groups.

Mr. Speaker, we know there is still much to be done as Fort McMurray rebuilds, but I invite all members to reflect on all that there is to be grateful for and to offer thanks, especially to our first responders and front-line service workers who ensured that one year ago today an entire city was evacuated.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Industry Environmental Initiatives

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share with you some of the innovative ways of how companies in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti are reducing their carbon footprint. The Weyerhaeuser pulp mill is one of the biggest electricity users in our region, but now they generate 140 megawatts of green energy, which is enough to power not just their own project but also to add 25 megawatts to Alberta's grid.

Canfor's green biomass cogeneration facility provides 18 megawatts of renewable electricity for their Grande Prairie sawmill and to the provincial grid. They not only use their own wood waste but also use wood waste from other forest producers in the region. Canfor strives for self-sufficiency of their mills by making smart investments to reduce their dependence on natural gas and using wood residues to dry lumber and heat their facilities.

Aquatera's bioreactor landfill gas-to-energy project is reducing greenhouse gas emissions by capturing methane gas from their decomposing landfill waste. This project alone is reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 63,000 tonnes per year, or the equivalent of taking 14,000 vehicles off the road. Aquatera is producing 15 million kilowatt hours, which is enough electricity to power 14,000 homes per year, and 33,000 gigajoules of heat annually, or enough to heat 200 homes.

Mr. Speaker, companies like Weyerhaeuser, Canfor, and Aquatera in my constituency have done way more on their own to reduce Alberta's carbon footprint than this government's carbon tax and light bulb handouts.

Thank you.

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

Bullying in the Workplace

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a teenager I spent every Saturday morning watching Stampede Wrestling from the old Ogden Legion hall and hearing fabulous commentary from a young man named Mauro Ranallo. He was a big part of the appeal of this revitalized promotion, so I was more than excited when I heard this Canadian commentator make his debut on WWE SmackDown over a year ago. This great commentator, with ties to Calgary, added an extra flair to an already exciting product.

However, my thrill soon turned to disappointment because of his absence from WrestleMania this year. At first it was reported as a personal challenge, but the situation has now led to many media and online allegations around workplace bullying in the WWE. It appears now that Ranallo dealt with substantial hazing and abuse from co-workers in this promotion. More people have since come forward talking about the culture in the company and the fear of one losing their job should they come forward.

The WWE has been a leader in many things from substance abuse control to charitable work. Last year, when I was attending the Special Olympics awards lunch, the director of marketing and

communications for the Olympics told me that the WWE has been a tremendous partner and a huge support to their Olympians. They are also an employer to many Albertans, including Calgary's Natalya Neidhart, Tyson Kidd, and the number one contender for the WWE title, Jinder Mahal.

I have spoken to many people involved in the wrestling business like Alberta's Prairie Wrestling Alliance, and they have assured me that this conduct is unacceptable and that it should not occur and that they would not tolerate it in their organization. When events like these happen, it is an important reminder that we must stand up to workplace bullying and violence and harassment. Hazing is not okay.

Our government has demonstrated leadership on this front, and when the WWE comes to Edmonton on June 16, I would be happy to introduce them to some of the policy-makers who have shown leadership on this matter, including members like the Member for Calgary-Klein, who had a private member's bill on this issue. We should all work together to smack down bullying in the workplace, no matter where it happens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 23 to 29 was National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week, which is dedicated to encouraging conversations about organ donor practices. The discussion about donating organs and tissues can be a difficult conversation to have, but it is the only way to ensure that your wishes are known. The gift of life is the greatest thing we have been given, and to pass that along to someone is an amazing opportunity. Being an organ donor takes courage and empathy, but it's a small gesture that can make a huge impact in the lives of many others. A donor can save up to eight lives and enhance the lives of 80 others through tissue donation. Donation programs can save and improve the lives of others who otherwise wouldn't have a second chance.

Historically Canada has one of the worst organ donor rates, and Alberta has been the worst province, but awareness programs like ultimategiftalberta.ca are making a difference. Since its launch three years ago more than 350,000 Albertans have registered. This is a great step in the right direction, but I think we can build on this momentum. Let's continue to look at the possibilities that are created through organ donation, and let's recognize that it can be a great thing for a family or individual in need. As just one example, my husband will get a new cornea because of this initiative.

I implore my colleagues in this House and all Albertans to consider starting a discussion about donating organs and tissues in the hopes that more lives are saved in the future. We should all extend our warmest thanks to the families who have made the difficult decision to donate a loved one's organs and tissues in order to make someone else's life better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Anniversary

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A year ago today the Premier called the Leader of the Official Opposition a fearmonger simply because he had asked a question about the cancellation of water bomber contracts during one of the driest springs on record. That very afternoon, while the leader was asking his questions, unknown to any of us, his neighbourhood, his home, and his city were on fire.

May 3, 2016, saw the beginning of the largest mass evacuation in Alberta's history. A city of over 80,000 was forced to flee at a moment's notice. Entire families, not even allowed to go home and grab essentials, headed down highway 63, some north but mostly to the south.

The rest of Alberta responded. In Lac La Biche, Boyle, Athabasca, and Grassland people immediately realized that those fleeing would not have had time to stop for fuel, water, and supplies. While four lanes of traffic headed south, a convoy of regular Albertans headed north, at their own expense, hauling gasoline, diesel, fresh water, and food to help those that were stranded along the highway and to supply the first responders and firefighters, who had stayed behind to battle the inferno.

Entire communities opened their doors and their hearts and set up evacuation centres for the thousands of individuals, families, and even their pets. Donations poured in from all over the province to the point of overabundance. Volunteer fire departments from communities all over Alberta headed north to assist fellow Albertans in their time of need. I'm very proud of the generosity shown, especially by the great people in the community of Lac La Biche, who saw the immediate need and dropped everything to help out.

1:50

To all the volunteers, firefighters, and first responders that put their own lives on hold and at risk: the community of Fort McMurray and our province owes you a great debt, and we thank you. One thing we have learned over the last year and something I have always known: Albertans are very generous and resilient. Alberta and Fort McMurray will survive this tragic event, and we will even survive another two years of NDP government.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Deaths of Children and Caregivers

Mr. Cooper: A government is often judged by how it treats the most vulnerable, and there are few as vulnerable as the children who are placed into the care of the province. When a child dies in care, it is a devastating tragedy, and we need to balance transparency with family privacy. It was shocking to hear that bureaucrats were pushing for publication bans to not be discussed at the child death review panel. Will the minister explain to Albertans how the refusal to discuss this very important topic is accountable to victims that have died in care?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. Obviously, it is a great tragedy when any child dies, particularly the ones that are entrusted to the care of us as a province. We would like to thank all sides of the House for putting Alberta's vulnerable children first in doing this important work.

The first part of the work of the panel has wrapped up. Investigations and considerations around the publication ban, as highlighted by the member opposite, will be done in phase 2 of this panel's very important work.

Mr. Cooper: One little girl who was failed by the system was Serenity. The death of any child is an absolute tragedy, but when it is the result of violence, it's a crime. I can't help but compare the tragic death of Serenity to the little 19-month-old boy who was found outside of a church in Edmonton in April. Both of these

children were covered in bruises at the time of their death, but only one case has seen charges laid. Why is justice more available and moved upon more swiftly for children not in the care of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, both these cases were incredibly difficult for the public, for this government, and I think for all members of this House. Ultimately, these decisions are made by the investigating body, who is the RCMP. I do believe that they take their responsibility to all children and to all communities to keep them safe very, very seriously. You know, we will have to await the outcomes of their investigations.

Mr. Cooper: It seems like one case is going to be held accountable and the other is getting swept away.

Just as we need to be doing more for our most vulnerable, we also need to ensure that those who care for the most vulnerable have the tools that they need. That includes caregivers who put themselves in situations that can be dangerous. We've seen the most extreme examples of what can happen when a worker is alone, like the tragic death of Valerie Wolski and the traumatic attack of Heather Vanderzee. What concrete steps have been taken, not what have you talked about but have been taken, to ensure that what happened . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Obviously, these are very concerning cases. Every worker, wherever they work in our province, has the right to come home safely at the end of the day, and that is why our government has worked in collaboration with members across the way on the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention as well as the work that we're undertaking within the departments to ensure that people's safety comes first as well as to ensure that the rights of all Albertans are protected.

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

Mathematics Curriculum and Assessment

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. The Minister of Education has announced a large-scale curriculum review that is going to span up to six years and will reportedly offer more chances for consultation although the minister will not share who is involved in the working groups. A student in kindergarten now will be halfway to graduation by the time this review is complete if it's done on time. Parents just want common-sense solutions to common-sense problems. They're tired of wishy-washy methods, bad testing practices, and indecipherable report cards. The math section of the review is critically important. How long will Albertans have to wait till they see the results?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much for the question. Yes, we are undertaking a very comprehensive curriculum review because it was long past due. Some of our curricula were more than 30 years old. Certainly, during the six-year process of building curricula, it doesn't mean that the best practices that we find along the way will not be implemented immediately. For example, I have put in a no-calculator portion into the grade 9 PAT exams, and I've reinstated the written portion of the math 30 exam. So whatever best practices we have, we will use immediately to improve numeracy, basic math skills, and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Aheer: While the NDP curriculum survey questions were with a bunch of sort of meaningless buzzwords, one message did manage to break through: Albertans are frustrated about math scores and outcomes for our students. The only reason that we can track performance is because of standardized testing. Without these tests parents are given less information on top of increasingly fuzzy standards for report cards, that are handed out each year. Premier, the student learning assessment model is failing students. Will the government reverse their decision and reinstate provincial achievement tests for grade 3 students?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, we have been working hard together with curriculum and assessment to build a stronger system and to make sure we have accountability every step of the way. You know, the best way by which to do that is to make sure that you fund education properly, which is something that our government has chosen to do. You can't do that by cutting. You can't have it both ways. We have chosen the way to make life better for Alberta's children.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, the mathematics review prepared for the Education minister and the Premier last fall recommended that there should be "an increased availability and access to high-quality professional development and training opportunities specific to the teaching of Mathematics." In December the NDP announced a math bursary program for teachers to support further postsecondary courses in math and that the details of the program were to be finalized. We asked about this program in estimates, and we found out that the funding fell into the large abyss line item 2.7 with no further details, so to the minister: what are the details, how many teachers are planning to participate, and how many teachers are enough?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we believe that ongoing training for teachers and for new emerging teachers is very important. That's why I've been working with postsecondary institutions to set up specific math training programs, especially for division 1 student teachers, because we believe that we must ensure the very best quality. We have a very high standard of education here in the province of Alberta, and as long as you have a strong New Democratic government here, it'll continue to grow and become stronger every step of the way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Anniversary

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, a year ago today QP didn't start out very well. The Premier called the Leader of the Official Opposition a fearmonger when he questioned cancelling water bomber contracts during the driest spring on record. Luckily, Albertans did their best to respond to the fires that tore through Fort McMurray. To the firefighters, first responders, volunteers, and even this government: a heartfelt thank you to everyone that worked so hard to protect Fort McMurray. Can the Premier update this House and all Albertans on the progress of the rebuild and recovery in Fort McMurray?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today certainly is a day of remembrance for all of us in this province. We are making the most of a very difficult time in Alberta's most tragic natural disaster and indeed in Canadian history. We're marking the bravery and mourning the loss of two Albertans. Many homes were lost, and lives were changed forever. In tough times like this, people expect their government to stand with them, and that's exactly what is happening today in Fort McMurray and every day as the recovery continues.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, a year ago today there was a massive, out-of-control fire within a stone's throw of a major community, yet no special efforts were being made to allocate additional resources to the fire in the days leading up to the evacuation. You would think we would have learned something from the disaster at Slave Lake. You would think that we would have implemented lessons learned from that fire. To the Premier: has the policy changed so that we have as a first priority the protection of our northern and remote communities?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: I am so proud of the work the firefighters, including those who were in the best position to make the lead decisions about recovery, were making on that day, a year ago today, and on the days leading up to it and on the days that followed as well, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that the support has been well received by the mayor of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, who said:

We are pleased that the Government of Alberta has agreed to provide this much-needed support to [residents of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo]. We appreciate the Province's continued assistance as we navigate the impacts of the 2016 wildfire and work towards long-term recovery.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's been a year. Fort McMurray is still struggling, yet later today, on the anniversary of the largest mass evacuation in Alberta's history, this government will be debating a bill that kicks Fort McMurray in the teeth again. Fortunately, Fort McMurray has shown that it is very resilient. Can anyone over there tell me what policies have changed so that next time a forest fire starts near a town or city, that community will be better protected?

Ms Hoffman: I have to say how disappointed I am by the disrespect that's coming from that side of the House towards both this government as well as those who worked diligently to make sure that families had the opportunities to be well received and supported through the evacuation, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Ms Hoffman: Even the Leader of the Official Opposition, that member's leader, has commended the Premier for her leadership and co-operation at a time of unifying us to stand up for Albertans in an unparalleled challenge for this community, Mr. Speaker. We continue to move forward in protecting Albertans in Fort McMurray and in all parts of the province, and I'm proud to do so.

The Speaker: I do this as a general oversight, hon. members. We've talked about this many times, but use of certain words which depict violence such as "kicking in the teeth" ought to be avoided in this House. There are clearly other words that are used, but I would ask that we avoid use of that kind of language.

The leader of the third party.

Out-of-country Health Care Funding

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last November I rose in the House to acknowledge and honour the brave fight that well over 160 Alberta families will wage annually when they hear the word that their child has cancer. Today I introduced you to Lindsey Marofke, whose three-year-old daughter, Greta, is fighting for her life. While she has been afforded the very best care we have in Alberta by oncologists at the Alberta Children's hospital, her parents now have to take that fight to Cincinnati to get the life-saving treatment and liver transplant that she needs to survive. To the Minister of Health: why has this government not done more to date to help pay for wee Greta to get this liver transplant?

Ms Hoffman: Our hearts and thoughts go out to Greta and her family during this incredibly difficult time. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-North West for meeting with the family and bringing their heartbreaking situation to my attention. My office has also reached out to the family, as has the department, to ensure that they are aware of options that are available to them. Of course, this is a very tragic situation, a very difficult one, and we continue to provide options, including information about other medical opinions that might be available to the family. We'll work with them to ensure they know what options are available to them. This is, of course, very difficult, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Greta needs an operation, unfortunately, not pamphlets.

Greta's doctor in Cincinnati believes she has a good chance of survival with this transplant, which is not available in Canada. On Friday she was placed on the transplant waiting list, but it will cost this family a million U.S. dollars in order to get the surgery done using a live donor and thereby pushing the surgical procedure and her treatment ahead of the slow pace of progress for children with hepatoblastoma. To the Minister of Health: do you think it's okay for her parents and grandparents to risk bankruptcy and rely on sympathetic Albertans to fund raise for Greta's transplant?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as I've said previously and in other situations, it's incredibly important for health professionals to be making these decisions. That's why there is a committee of physicians, the Out-of-country Health Services Committee, which is comprised of physicians that review these specific circumstances. We've talked with the family about options that might continue to be available. I have to say that I understand the desire to do everything possible to try to create an opportunity to save a child's life – I would probably do the exact same thing the parents are doing – but we need to make sure that physicians are the ones driving these decisions, and we have the physicians in place that do that. Again, we'll work with the family to consider other options.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, it takes the will for the government to do the right thing. There are rules. They don't have to be written in stone. The Health minister could give permission to fund the surgery and thereby give Greta a chance at life. Without the surgery there is little hope except for a miracle, and there is no time for miracles. We need the government to act. Let's get our priorities

straight. To the minister. You have the authority. Will you promise to meet with Greta's mum today, and will you make everybody's day by promising to fund this life-saving surgery?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a politician I respect that doctors must make treatment decisions that sometimes are very difficult based on effectiveness for specific patients on a case-by-case basis. The Out-of-country Health Services Committee is an arm's-length committee comprised, again, of physician experts. My office has been in contact, as has my MLA colleague. Of course I'd be willing to meet with the family. We will continue to provide support to them. Again, thank you to my colleague from Calgary-North West for her work to make sure that this family is supported.

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

Provincial Credit Rating and Fiscal Policies

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When Alberta borrows money, the amount we pay to borrow is based on our credit rating, which is determined by how risky it is to do business with Alberta. We used to have the best credit rating in the country, but thanks to decisions made by this government, our credit rating has dropped, and it costs Albertans more to borrow money. Debt-servicing costs are already forecast to be \$2.3 billion a year, and these interest payments will not go to front-line health care, to kids in the classroom, or to helping our most vulnerable neighbours. To the Minister of Finance: when Alberta suffers our next credit-rating downgrade, how much more will it cost Albertans?

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much for asking about the meetings that took place on Monday down in Toronto. Those meetings were productive, Mr. Speaker. We're choosing to bring down the deficit thoughtfully and prudently. We had a choice with Budget 2017. We ensured that we invested in infrastructure, we protected services, and we ensured that teachers were in classrooms and that nurses were in hospitals. Our budget, TD Economics says, will be stimulative in nature, and we will grow the most of any province, by 2.6 per cent, in 2017. That is the message I took down to Toronto. That is the message credit agencies and investors heard from me.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has relied for far too long on the price of oil to save our budget bacon. What do credit-rating agencies have to say about the NDP's oil price forecasts? They say that they are wildly optimistic. They say that the government's oil forecasts are at the upper end of or above agency forecasts, so unless the NDP gets incredibly lucky, our deficit will be higher than planned yet again. To the Minister of Finance: what happens if your forecasts are wrong?

Mr. Ceci: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 to adjust our budget, and we have done that in the past. It's important for us to go to Toronto to talk to people – investors, credit-rating agencies, economists – to ensure they know the full story of the plan we have, which is a plan to clearly balance in 2024 by bringing down our spending to the point of inflation plus growth. That's our commitment. That's what I shared with them.

Mr. Clark: The minister shared a plan with credit-rating agencies. I hope he shares it with the House.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Party has long argued that our province needs to get off the resource revenue roller coaster. The Alberta Party's pathway to prosperity plan would cap royalty revenues at \$3 billion a year for operations, with the rest going into debt repayment, infrastructure spending, and the heritage fund. If by some miracle oil exceeds expectations, I want to know what the government is going to do with the money. Again to the Minister of Finance: if you get lucky, what are your plans? Will spending skyrocket, or do you have any real plan to get Alberta off the resource revenue roller coaster?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you again for the question. I'd note that you probably have the only shadow budget available of all this group. Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. That plan is to diversify our economy. Our economy is showing green shoots already. We're showing that the petrochemical diversification program had great uptake. We will get investment. We will diversify our economy. Our Economic Development and Trade minister was in China, and that country will be able to support the exports that we want to send there. There will be diversification. That's our plan.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:10 Industrial Heartland Transportation Infrastructure

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sweet area northeast of Edmonton known as the Industrial Heartland is a growing centre for industrial investment. It is home to 40 companies, several of them with international reach. Given that this region's growth has resulted in increased traffic volume, to the Minister of Transportation: what have you done to ensure improved road infrastructure in this area?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for her question. As part of our \$29.5 billion capital plan Transportation is investing more than \$5 billion in provincial highway networks to put Albertans back to work, connect communities, and improve safety and travel on our highways. That includes the twinning of the highway 15 bridge over the North Saskatchewan River into Fort Saskatchewan, and it will support economic development in the Industrial Heartland. We're also making significant intersection improvements at highways 15, 37, and 825 as well as at highways 28 and 37.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the entire Industrial Heartland area requires road infrastructure supports now and into the future, to the Minister of Transportation: how are you determining the best way to manage growth in this area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. To proactively address these concerns, we have three studies under way. These include a study of the northeast river crossing; a provincial high-load corridor study, which is critical to support the heavy industry in our province, including in the Industrial Heartland; and a study for the entire northeast sector. We're going to be developing long-term infrastructure and developing a plan for

the Industrial Heartland, with a focus on making life better and to build our economy and create jobs for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some proposed long-term projects could result in further loss of valuable agricultural land which produces some of the province's highest quality produce, to the Minister of Transportation: what steps are you taking to ensure this land is protected and will continue to thrive as it is an important resource?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We know that there is extremely valuable farmland northeast of Edmonton. It's a very special area with its own microclimate that produces all sorts of market garden products, so I had the study revised, the terms of reference, to require that there would be environmental sustainability and that protection of prime agricultural land will be included in the terms of reference of the study.

Provincial Credit Rating and Fiscal Policies (continued)

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, before we begin, I'd like to point out that I've sent you my questions written in advance.

I'd like to welcome the Minister of Finance back from Toronto, where he was meeting with credit-rating agencies, who are rightly concerned with the ability of the minister to competently do his job. But the minister must not have done his homework because they sent him away, asking for more information to determine if Alberta will face yet another credit downgrade. What information that wasn't in the budget did they ask for, and will the minister disclose it to Albertans?

The Speaker: Thank you to the member. For the record I just received a note from the hon. member, but I have not had an opportunity to read it.

To the Finance minister: please proceed.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, I said that those were productive meetings. I meant that. They were an opportunity to clarify what our plan is to ensure we have the backs of Albertans by the programs and services we are funding, to make sure they're strong. They wanted to know more about the diversification, they wanted to know more about oil pricing and our forecasts, and we were able to share that information back and forth. That's what these meetings are all about, and when they come out to Alberta, they'll do further clarification.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, given that when the minister met with credit-rating agencies last year, they had all of the information they needed to make a credit downgrade – just meeting the minister was seemingly enough for a downgrade that costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars a year, but to the minister's credit it's been 24 hours, and we haven't had another downgrade yet – and given that credit-rating agencies are saying that this government's reckless borrowing program puts downward pressure on our credit rating, can we expect another downgrade?

Mr. Ceci: You know, the difference between last year and this year is that we are in recovery in Alberta. We are going to be growing the most by GDP of any province in this country, 2.6 per cent. The Conference Board of Canada says 2.8 per cent. I like their numbers

better, Mr. Speaker, if we had a choice. TD Economics is also saying that our budget is stimulative whereas other budgets are austerity and they're not stimulating their economy. We are now leading the nation in terms of new full-time job growth in March, more than the rest of Canada. We have housing starts growing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll take that as a yes.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that under current projections Alberta's debt will reach a blistering \$71 billion by 2019 but that the government refuses to even provide an estimate of what our debt will be by 2024 and given that under questioning during the budgeting process the minister admitted that he does in fact have an estimate of what the debt will be by then but that he refuses to make that number public, my question is simple: will the minister tell Albertans how much debt they will owe by 2024? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Or we could focus on the things Albertans want, and those things are making sure that the classrooms their children go to aren't huge like this place. Those things are making sure that health care is delivered in a timely fashion. That's what Albertans tell us. [interjections] They want to make sure that their programs and services are strong, and we're keeping them strong.

The Speaker: Hon. members, you were doing so well.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Recovery

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, today marks one year since the wildfires that devastated Fort McMurray. Now, the response to that crisis by thousands of Albertans was both heroic and heartwarming, but, as we know, the recovery will extend for many years. Now, earlier this week the Municipal Affairs minister made a welcome announcement regarding property tax relief, but other government ministries must also be involved in providing wraparound, co-ordinated support to the ongoing recovery effort. To the Associate Minister of Health: what ongoing mental health supports have been put in place for those requiring assistance in the aftermath of the Fort McMurray wildfires?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that anniversaries such as this can trigger additional mental health concerns for people, so I would encourage anyone living in the Fort McMurray area or throughout the province who's experiencing any concerns to please contact Health Link and ask to be connected with a mental health professional.

Additionally, our government has invested over \$24 million through the wildfire recovery task force in psychosocial health supports such as mental health supports, particularly for people within the Fort McMurray area.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the environmental impact of the wildfires was profound and will last for many years and given that Alberta Environment has been extensively involved in monitoring the environmental impact and the condition of land, air, water, and wildlife in the region, my question to the environment minister: what is the status of ongoing assessment of the environmental impact of the wildfires, and when might Albertans expect to see a comprehensive report detailing those impacts?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, during the Fort McMurray wildfire Alberta Environment and Parks staff were no different from the rest of the Alberta public service in that they responded immediately. I know that I received many stories of staff that were redeployed, working hundreds of hours to assist in the response to that fire. During the fire Environment and Parks collaborated with monitoring partners. We enhanced our monitoring during the fire. From what I have been briefed, we have not detected any long-term, enduring negative environmental impacts beyond what happened during the fire.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope there's a more comprehensive report than that coming.

The wildfires also had profound impacts on education in Fort McMurray. Now, given that returning to school life and having to return to some sense of normalcy is not only necessary but very important to the recovery effort and given that students face additional challenges due to displacement from their homes, friends moving away, and attending, in some cases, different schools, to the Education minister: what additional supports are being provided to students and staff of Fort McMurray schools, and are provisions in place for supplemental mental health supports for Fort McMurray students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the very insightful question. Yes. Certainly, we recognize that the impact of the fires on our education system in Fort McMurray was not insignificant. We have put in \$4.3 million of stabilization money this year to offset perhaps declining enrolment, which actually didn't go down that much. It's a good sign that families did move back to Fort McMurray. In addition to that, we have put in a \$1.7 million funding allocation for training for professional development for educators, specifically in regard to dealing with psychosocial supports.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:20 Emergency Medical Dispatch Services

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, the problems in Alberta's centralized ambulance dispatch system continue to go from bad to worse. A major problem with this broken system is the new \$370 million radio network, that is creating vast communications dead zones across rural Alberta. Plus, paramedics are actually forbidden from using former backup radios. Province-wide EMS workers are speaking out, saying that this system causes frighteningly long wait times, puts the public at risk, and will cost lives. Can the minister explain what is being done to fix this faulty and failing system?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Certainly, he has raised this topic with me, as have other members, including the Member for Banff-Cochrane. We are working to make sure that, no matter what, when you call, there is an ability to get that support that you need. Transition times can be challenging. I'm certainly aware of the AFRRCs requests, and we are considering ways that we can best support everyone in having the assurances that they need as we move forward, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given that a recent meeting with the minister resulted in the Foothills Regional Emergency Services

Commission being refused in their request to dispatch directly to fix that while the Banff area, which is represented by an NDP MLA, was granted a request to leave this faulty system, can the minister explain why the good people of Banff were exempted from this broken dispatch system but not the great people of Okotoks, High River, Turner Valley, Black Diamond, or the MDs of Foothills and Willow Creek?

Ms Hoffman: The member should have a review of some of the facts. I'd encourage him to lean over to his dance partners sitting beside him and ask about dispatch and how important it is to make sure that we get it right, Mr. Speaker. We have definitely experienced a lot of change over the past seven or eight years when it comes to emergency dispatch. Our job on this side of the House is to make sure that those challenges and changes actually make life better for Albertans, and that's what we're doing. The two issues that the member is referring to are conflated. They're not at all tied together. I'm proud to continue to work to make life better for all Albertans and ensure their safety.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given that I have fought this issue for five years now and seen that it hasn't improved and I've realized that central operators, who just don't understand southern Alberta's unique regional transportation landscape, are putting lives at risk and given that this is causing EMS workers to show up at local fire halls in search of proper directions after being sent on wild goose chases, can the minister stop this chaos, remove the entire Foothills region from this broken dispatch system today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given how much time the members opposite are spending in the backrooms of the Federal building talking to each other, I'm surprised they're not ready to defend each other's records. They themselves and their new dance partners are the ones that pushed this process forward. We're making sure that we have the right safety and supports in place for Albertans. I encourage the members opposite to . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Canadian Free Trade Agreement

Mr. MacIntyre: In Alberta's highly trade-exposed economy free trade agreements are of paramount importance. That's why I was shocked to find the makings of a trade war in the recently signed Canadian free trade agreement. Ontario has reserved the right to discriminate against any renewable energy project from Alberta in response to the Alberta NDP discriminating against all other provinces. To the Energy minister: why be so foolish as to risk making your estimated \$30 billion transition to renewables even more expensive?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm quite proud of the work that we did in negotiating a new Canadian free trade agreement that finally levels the playing field for Alberta companies to have the same access to other provinces as their companies have enjoyed for decades because of the poor negotiation that previous governments did. We reached an agreement. It took about two and a half years. It finally levels the

playing field, and I'm quite proud that Alberta businesses finally have the same access other provinces have enjoyed for decades.

Mr. MacIntyre: Anti free trade measures hurt more than just consumers and taxpayers; they put Alberta-headquartered companies at risk. Given that Alberta companies have made significant investments in run-of-the-river hydro and wind energy in Ontario and given that further investment of these types of renewable developments are now at risk because of anti free trade actions taken by this government, does the Energy minister understand the risk to Alberta-headquartered companies from her government demanding protectionist measures against renewable projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I mean, not only am I proud of this agreement; our government is working to diversify our economy through a number of ways. One of those is by phasing out coal, which the world is moving past, and investing in renewables. There's an incredible opportunity for Alberta companies to participate within our electricity system and within the renewable space. I'm quite proud of the work that we're doing through our trade agreements and look forward to the thousands of jobs that will be created right here in Alberta because of our action on climate.

Mr. MacIntyre: Fact: this NDP government put up more annexes to trade barriers than any other province in the entire free trade agreement. Given that Alberta is a province with an economy dependent on exports, meaning that we'd benefit greatly from the removal of trade barriers, and given that these anti free trade measures put Alberta businesses at risk of facing costly retaliatory measures, to the minister of trade: how does provoking a trade war with other provinces help Alberta's fledgling alternative energy industry?

Mr. Bilous: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll encourage the member opposite to look closely at the previous AIT and the Canadian free trade agreement. Unlike that party, that would continue to leave Alberta disadvantaged to the rest of the country, we've now levelled the playing field, where Alberta companies have the same access to other provinces that other provinces have enjoyed for decades. Quite frankly, it's quite frustrating that Alberta businesses have been shut out of other provinces because of previous trade agreements, that clearly this member and that party would continue to do. What we've done is that we've levelled the playing field and ensured that Alberta businesses have the same opportunities.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-South East.

Sexual Assault

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many of us are aware, May is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The need for that awareness is demonstrated by the fact that while rates of other violent crimes are decreasing, the incidence of sexual assault is on the rise. The statistics show that we are actually failing to address the issue of sexual assault and failing to protect Albertans from these crimes. While this government has made some progress in making civil prosecutions easier and abusive relationships easier to escape, more needs to be done to prevent these crimes from

occurring in the first place. To the Justice minister: what are your plans to address the rising incidence of sexual assault?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is proud of our record in dealing with survivors of sexual assault. We passed Bill 2 quite recently, as the hon. member quite rightly noted, which helps survivors access the justice system. We also think that it's important that survivors know that in a criminal system when they come to court, they will be protected. That's why when a judge didn't do that for a survivor of sexual assault, we filed a complaint, and that complaint ultimately resulted in the removal of that judge. We think that all survivors deserve to be respected.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Given that an important aspect of preventing sexual assault is education and awareness and given that the government can assist by including a greater awareness of gender-based issues when making policy and given that during the recent Status of Women estimates the minister and I discussed the benefits of gender-based analysis plus, to the Deputy Premier: how is your ministry working toward increasing awareness to try to address the rising number of sexual assaults, and how many of your colleagues have you convinced to take the GBA plus training?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we do take gender-based violence very seriously and all women's health issues. That's why we're moving forward very carefully to make sure that we have integrated responses to a number of situations, including women's health options. We're proud to make sure that we're moving forward in that regard as well as working with health practitioners to ensure that they're well supported and in supporting those who have survived sexual assault as well.

2:30

Mr. Fraser: Given that as elected representatives we can be powerful voices for bringing attention to the issues when we have the right educational resources and given the Legislature's long tradition of inviting groups to the lower rotunda to share information with members and given that such a presentation would only be an introduction to this complex topic but it would still help all members better advocate for survivors of sexual assault, to the same minister: will you consider extending an invitation to some of the many organizations doing great work around educating about sexual assault to the Legislature?

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We are always interested in making sure that we have opportunities to support a variety of opportunities for education. Regularly we bring in colleges of professional associations to share information about the work they do. Perhaps we'll reach out to the College of Social Workers or others who are directly involved often in supporting survivors and making sure that they have the supports that they require.

There are also extensive supports online for anyone who's available so that they don't have to wait for that to be arranged. We'd be happy to e-mail that information to the offices of all MLAs so that they can continue to inform themselves about the supports that are available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Electric Power Costs to Consumers

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I door-knocked in my constituency last week, the top concern I heard was utility bills. Albertans have traditionally been exposed to volatile electricity rates, and given that my constituents are concerned about their ability to pay their bills if those rates spike again, to the Minister of Energy: what is the government doing to protect Albertans and ensure that electricity is affordable?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, all of us, I think, on both sides of the house hear often in our constituency offices about utility bills. What we're doing is fixing the system that we inherited of volatility in the energy-only market. We're capping electricity rates because previously bills could fluctuate up to \$70 a month just on the electricity prices alone. In the long term Albertans deserve a system that is stable and predictable, and we're reforming that system.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you. Given that my constituents are also concerned about other components of their bills such as delivery charges and rate riders, to the same minister: how is this government ensuring that these charges are fair and that consumers are not being overcharged for their utility services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Albertans are concerned about the whole bill. We're working to reform the electricity system, but we're also looking at the transmission costs and the transmission policies to see if there are some changes we can make. We have the AUC and the UCA, who work together to make life more affordable. What isn't affordable is if the opposition keeps making the promises of reversing everything done and returning our province to a volatile system. [interjections]

The Speaker: In case any of you forgot, when I stand up, please stop talking.

The Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that utility bills can also be complex, can change without warning, and have various fee lines that may be hard to understand and seem unfair, to the Minister of Service Alberta: what options do my constituents have if they're concerned about their utility bills?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta to my hon. friend's question. The Utilities Consumer Advocate can not only explain the various components of a gas or power bill but can also serve as the go-between if a consumer is in a dispute with a company over a bill. The UCA's website has detailed explanation of sample bills and a new feature that they added last year, a cost-comparison tool that allows consumers to comparison shop between companies for natural gas and electricity. We're very proud of the work that the UCA does, and Albertans can feel confident that if they have any uncertainty, discomfort, or any worry about their bills, help is only a phone call away.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

School Fees and Education Funding

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildrose applauded the government's intent of Bill 1 to ease the burden of school fees on parents. We understood that the government would increase funding to school divisions for this change. Since some school divisions had already begun reducing fees and others had not, how will you fairly distribute the funds to replace school fees across school divisions given the disparity in how different divisions handled school fees?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you very much for the question. This is a central point to Bill 1, and the key here is that we are trying to clean up the school fees situation, which was basically like the Wild West over the last 20 years or so. The opportunity now to reduce school fees for instructional supplies and materials and for busing to a designated site really will put money into the pockets of parents when they need it most, certainly, and we certainly will over time look at the irregularity between school divisions so that we have a level playing field.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: No answer on how they're going to do it fairly.

Given that school authorities have been contacting us with concerns that they will not be able to offer the kinds of courses students need because this government has decided to cap funding at 45 credits per student per year and given that school authorities do not want this reduction, how will this funding cap reducing education opportunities fulfill the government's mandate of meeting the best educational interests of students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, to the point where we allow schools and school boards to make choices where they're best for students, the majority of high schools are now on the high school redesign programming so that the whole credit way of financing is not relevant in that regard. In other ways, I mean, certainly, this side always talks about looking for efficiencies and making choices, so that's what we did in Education. We made some choices and efficiencies so that we could reduce school fees here in the province of Alberta and make life better for Alberta families.

Mr. Loewen: Well, that sounds like a cut to Education to me.

The Speaker: Hon. member, try to remember to not preface your comments.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the dual credit, work experience, RAP, and green programs are programs that are helpful for students who are looking into trades or wanting to get a head start on their postsecondary education and given that this government has capped credit funding that is likely to affect these programs and given that school authorities say, contrary to what the minister said in estimates, that your department has cut the funding for the dual-credit program, why would you take away opportunities that have been helpful to give students a head start?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we recognize the value of the dual-credit program, and we are taking steps to not just continue it but to strengthen it very substantially. So we're working with postsecondary institutions, working with our schools as well. They know that we are going to carry on with the dual-credit

program, and they're very excited about that. This is a good-news story for us to be moving forward to make life better for Alberta families and to improve education, as we have always been doing here on this side of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Forest Industry Concerns

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new 24 per cent tariff on Canadian softwood lumber exports to the U.S. hurts Alberta's forest producers. The ongoing dispute will hurt industry, hurt jobs, and harm Alberta's export growth. One of the biggest problems for Canada to negotiate the new agreement is achieving consensus amongst all provinces. To the minister of forestry: how are you working with other provinces and the federal government to resolve the softwood lumber dispute?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is standing shoulder to shoulder with the forest industry and the communities that rely on lumber as we go through this dispute. We will defend ourselves vigorously and work closely with our industry and other Canadian governments to mount the most effective defence we can. The Alberta Forest Products Association has praised our government's attention to this file by saying: "We greatly appreciate the dedication of Premier Notley and her government to this very important file." We want to see a long-term solution, and we'll continue to work with my colleagues right across the country to do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the big uncertainty caused by having no softwood lumber agreement and given all the other uncertainties faced by the forest industry such as the caribou management plan, mountain pine beetle, cutblock retention, and the carbon tax, to the same minister: what can you do to work with the industry to help relieve some of these other uncertainties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Together with the federal government we're exploring options about how we can support those important jobs in the forestry industry in Alberta, but there are also other things that can mitigate some of these issues like increasing our trade to Asia, for instance, which we continue to do. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the Premier just came back. We're promoting all our trade in Asia. We'll continue to do that, those trade missions. I take part in a federal-provincial task force, as do the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister as well, to ensure that we get these programs the best we can to support our industries here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the forest industry needs to expand to markets around the globe to diversify Alberta's export market for forest industry products and given that the United States' tariff on Canadian softwood lumber enhances the urgency to find new markets, to the minister of forestry: what are

you doing to find other markets for Alberta forest producers so that we aren't so reliant on the U.S. market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There's more we can do right here in Alberta to encourage more use. We've initiated a wood charter here in the province to encourage more use of wood within building projects here in Alberta. Trade missions to Asia: we continue to support Canada Wood, for example, in Asian markets to support our industry in those markets. We have increased our trade with Asia, and we can do more there. We fundamentally disagree with the United States' stand that we somehow subsidize our industry. This is the fifth time we've had this fight. We're going to be successful.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 22 of the Auditor General Act I'm pleased to table five copies of the following report: the report of the Auditor General of Alberta for May 2017. Copies of this report will be provided to all members.

The Speaker: The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings today. The first one is from the High River and District Chamber of Commerce. It's sent with concerns with regard to the review on the employment standards and Labour Relations Code. They believe that "the current time allocated to this discussion is seriously insufficient" and would like to see an enhanced and extended review.

I have five copies of a letter that I received from Karen Lisoway of Dynamysk with very similar concerns, that the Labour Relations Code review was needing more time and to be enhanced.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was a point of order, but the point of order has been withdrawn.

Mr. Rodney: I stood up, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I only heard one point of order.

Mr. Rodney: We rose at the same time.

The Speaker: At what point in the agenda did you raise a point of order?

Mr. Rodney: At exactly the same moment as the Opposition House Leader. We were raising it at the same time. It's very quick, sir.

The Speaker: Okay.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, earlier today – and I don't think we need the benefit of the Blues; we all heard it – there was a reference by the government side to conversations in a bathroom.

Some Hon. Members: Backroom.

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Rodney: And that makes my point. Thank you. Under 23(h), (i), and (j)

a Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

(h) makes allegations against another Member;

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;

and especially this:

(j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

We just saw disorder. The disorder occurred at that moment, and it's occurred, Mr. Speaker, with great respect, in the last number of weeks when references are made to "dance partner," "slow dancing," "BFFs." [interjections] Yeah, think about it, folks.

This side of the House must be accountable, Mr. Speaker, to you. The government side must be accountable as well. We have had from Albertans the point that this sort of language is immature at best. It's unprofessional, it's undignified, and it's unbecoming of an elected official. I'm going to guess that there will not be a point of order here, but what I would ask for you to do is to ask the government side to use words that do not contravene 23(h), (i), and (j).

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Well, perhaps the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, would prefer it if we used the term "courtship," but there's no question – and I don't know why he's even trying to deny it – that there are talks . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, get to the point.

Mr. Mason: Well, the point is that it's a ridiculous suggestion that this violates any of those three clauses in the standing orders that the hon. member mentioned. This is entirely within the scope of parliamentary language and is not different – it's, in fact, much milder than many of the allegations, suggestions, and connotations that the opposition uses. I just would submit, Mr. Speaker, very humbly and with respect that it is an absurd point of order, and I don't know what they're trying to hide.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. member, I have been provided, if I understand correctly – and I apologize if I didn't see the point of order initially. I thought it was withdrawn by the Opposition House Leader. I believe you might have thought that the comment was: the bathrooms of the Federal building. I do have a copy of the Blues, which say, "the backrooms of the Federal building." I would use that as a reminder that when there are fewer comments made, clarity of the actual fact is easier to hear. You're corrected. Be conscious of that so that all members can hear.

I think we are now at Orders of the Day.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 7

An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. I'm privileged to rise in the House today to speak in favour of Bill 7, an amendment to postsecondary labour relations legislation. I think it's very fortunate that I get to do this because, well, as one reason, I have a major university in my riding. I'm very happy that Athabasca is the home of Athabasca University. As well, I have experience teaching at Alberta postsecondary institutions. I used to be an instructor in Education at the University of Alberta, so I not only have that experience; I've had the opportunity to make a lot of friends that share similar experiences. So I'll, you know, maybe give a bit of insight into why this is, some elements in particular, so necessary.

What Bill 7 does is basically to put Alberta in accord with the law of the land and with every other province in Canada. It, you know, restores to instructors at postsecondary institutions their constitutionally protected right to strike. How it does that is actually pretty straightforward. What it does is to repeal sections of the existing PSLA and create a new postsecondary sector, a specific division within the labour organization.

It impacts bargaining in the following ways. Number one, mandatory binding arbitration provisions in the PSLA will be repealed. Going forward, academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows, which is something I'm going to highlight a bit later, will be moved under the LRC. This extends the right to strike to employees but also restores lockout provisions for institutions as well as brings them at the same time under essential services legislation. The academic designation process will be updated to include more consultation with academic bargaining units and will also add the provision to take disputes to the Labour Relations Board. There will be a five-year minimum transition period provided for bargaining agents. As it stands now, all current bargaining agents will retain their membership, and no outside agents will be allowed for that five years. This can actually be extended at the discretion of cabinet.

Now, this bill has been, you know, sort of out for a bit now. I have to say that the reaction has been pretty positive from the feedback that I've been getting. Of course, there are some concerns. There's no legislation change that's going to be able to make everybody absolutely happy. This is really fundamental to the nature of change itself. The existing system: no matter how dysfunctional, no matter how much change is overdue, you're always going to be having some parties within it that benefit from the old way. The people that would benefit from changes haven't experienced those changes yet. That's why change tends to be very controversial.

Now, the fact that this isn't, I think, speaks very well to just how fulsome the consultative process has been. When you have a situation where stakeholders feel heard and respected and where the minister is, you know, fully engaged in ensuring that they take people along the way with them, that tends to cause a lot of concerns you would otherwise see to get diminished.

The minister is actually in the House right now, and I'd just like to extend . . . [interjection] Oh, is that unparliamentary? Okay. I would like to congratulate the minister on the very hard work that I know he has done in his consultation process and in reaching out to faculty and students across the province. I was actually at a recent meeting with university students from across the province, and one of the delegates from the University of Alberta made the comment:

you know, we've seen Minister Schmidt more often in the past year than we've seen the last two Advanced Education ministers. I think that speaks very well to just how hard-working our minister is, and I think that the results are being shown in how generally accepted this legislation is.

Now, I know that my colleagues are going to go into some of the other details of the proposed legislation. I'd just like to spotlight the provisions around postdoctoral fellows. I think this is a change that's long overdue and one that's desperately needed. Now, for those in the House, you know, who are unsure what postdoctoral fellows do – usually we call them postdocs – right now it's an occupation that was meant to be very temporary, where you might have someone who's finished their doctorate. It's very, very difficult in many fields to get to a tenure-track position. Sometimes even contract teaching positions might be hard to get.

As anyone who has taken an advanced degree is aware, if you're not working within that field and within academia, if you're not out at conferences presenting, if you're not being active in research, if you're not engaged with your faculty, your credentials age very quickly. You can find yourself where seven to 11 years of your life, tens of thousands of dollars basically make you overqualified for the jobs outside of your field. You're aging out. What that means is that without any protection, you are very vulnerable to being exploited, exploited in the sense where you can feel compelled to accept, you know, long working hours with inadequate pay, no benefits, and with not very clear means to deal with disrespect and harassment from supervisors.

This is sort of going back in time to where, you know, most workers were in that sort of marginal circumstance where they were at the mercy of their employers in huge part. Now, how did other workers get out of that? Well, they organized, right? They worked collectively, they developed unions, and, through that, they were able to negotiate some basic employment rights. They were able to ensure that they got benefits, that they'd be eligible for pensions, and so on. With the change, extending that provision to postdoctoral fellows, the general hope is that over time they'll be able to regularize this activity so they no longer face potential exploitation and these other issues.

Now, that being said, I don't want to paint all postdoctoral fellowships and supervisors with that type of brush. Of course, there are many, and I know them, right? I've known professors that had postdoctoral fellows, and I've worked with them myself. You know, it's just one of those bad apple type of situations. It just takes a few to ruin it for other people. For those that are caught in that precarious position, I think that this is something that is long overdue and very welcome, and I think it speaks very well to our government's ongoing commitment to make life better for people. I do hope that my colleagues feel that same way.

In conclusion, I'd like to commend our minister and his ministry for, I think, coming up with a good, balanced approach to respecting the collective bargaining rights of postsecondaries while taking other stakeholders' concerns into careful account. Because of that, I think we've come up with a good, balanced approach that respects academic traditions and culture, protects research but at the same time, you know, makes sure that workers in our postsecondary institutions receive the same constitutionally protected rights that other workers do.

I urge members to support this, and I hope that we can receive unanimous consent for this bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:00

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Just a cautionary reminder to all members that we do not refer to the presence or absence of another member in the House, and as well we do not use proper names or surnames of members.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 7, you know, because I'm proud to say that my constituency of Edmonton-Centre includes three of our city's postsecondary institutions, the first being Grant MacEwan University, of which I'm personally a proud graduate, who will be opening their new centre for the arts and communications in Edmonton-Centre in September. I'm very excited for that growth and for those new students that that's going to bring. Of course, that being sort of the program I came out of, having gone through the Grant MacEwan music program, I'm very happy to have that coming now to my doorstep.

We also have NorQuest College. NorQuest College, Madam Chair, is an institution I've had a real pleasure getting to know, particularly for the amazing programs and supports that they offer for new Canadians and for indigenous students. NorQuest College does a lot of work in the community helping people who are a lot of times struggling with different issues or are working on low income to be able to access new careers and to be able to work towards new economic opportunities. I truly appreciate the work that NorQuest does.

Then also in Edmonton-Centre, over at Enterprise Square, we do have some departments of the University of Alberta.

I also know, Madam Chair, from correspondence that I've received at my office and from doors that I've knocked on and indeed from some who have contacted me through social media that I represent a large number of staff and faculty from these institutions. These are hard-working Albertans that are dedicated to providing quality postsecondary education and conducting world-class research here in our province. So it's an honour to have the opportunity to rise and stand as cosponsor of Bill 7, legislation that I truly believe will make their lives better.

This bill represents our government's belief in a fair and balanced collective bargaining process that respects both the workers and the employers. Now, Madam Chair, of course, as you're aware and as we've discussed, in January 2015 the Supreme Court of Canada released a ruling that workers in all occupations, including essential services, must be allowed the right to strike. Of course, we brought forward our first piece of legislation last year to enact the necessary steps to comply with that Supreme Court ruling. At that time we did not have the opportunity – well, we chose not to include academic employees at postsecondary institutions. We recognized that that was an area that we wanted to do more consultation on, that that was something where we needed to speak with the stakeholders and get more input on how that legislation would work to best represent them. That was critical. That was very important because we wanted to be sure we really understood all of the unique details of labour relations in the postsecondary sector and the needs of all the stakeholders involved. Indeed, we have conducted some excellent consultation in that regard.

I think it's important just to stop after some of the discussion we've had today, concerns being raised about folks not being heard or not having opportunities to fully understand the steps that were being taken or the directions things were going – and I think the minister did a good job of outlining some of that, but I'd like to outline some of it again.

The Minister of Advanced Education built on the foundation of the initial consultations that were started in 2015. So we started with the initial conversations about essential services, which post-secondary was invited to be part of. Then we recognized that further

work needed to be done, so the hon. Minister of Advanced Education built on that initial foundation. There was a period of six months, from August to December of 2016, that included an online survey, face-to-face meetings with ministry staff, and round-table discussions that were facilitated by Mr. Andy Sims, an individual we've spoken of many times in House, a well-respected expert in labour law who's authored hundreds of reported decisions in both Canadian and Alberta Labour Relations Board reports and labour arbitration cases. Following that consultation and having had those conversations in person, through surveys, and having had many opportunities, the minister has brought forward now Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining.

There had been some concerns raised by some members across the aisle this morning. I wanted to take a moment, Madam Chair, to address a few of those. First of all, there were some concerns that were raised by one of the members, I believe the Member for Highwood, and he commented on this several times and on his personal belief that this was an ideological bill. Now, ideology, of course, runs both ways, and we're certainly aware that there is, perhaps, some animosity amongst some members on the other side of this House towards unions. Certainly, words like "thuggery" have been tossed around this House recently.

Madam Chair, personally, I see that there are benefits on both sides of that equation. I think we need to have good, strong companies with the opportunity to look after their workers, with the freedom to make some good choices. At the same time, I think unions can serve a very useful purpose. I've had the opportunity to work in many occupations where there were unions, and you know, I was very thankful for the excellent benefits and the good pay I was able to enjoy there that enabled me to build the life and career that I now enjoy today. So I think it's important that we have fair balance on both sides, much like what we're looking to achieve with this bill.

In terms of this particular bill, of course, the accusations that were being flung were that this bill was created specifically for the reason of unionizing academic staff associations at our universities. But the fact is, Madam Chair, that the basic rules for academic staff associations do not change under Bill 7. They remain established as statutory associations under the Post-secondary Learning Act, and they have the same bylaw powers and rights with respect to the institutional governance that they do now. The only thing that changes is that the same basic labour rules that apply in every other part of the public and private sector would now apply in Alberta.

Now, again, Madam Chair, one of the things with this bill is that this generally just puts Alberta on the same playing field and brings us up to the same level as every other province in Canada. Of course, we've seen that there are some strains in this House, certainly, I think, amongst some members, of what I would call an Alberta exceptionalism, believing that Alberta has to be absolutely different on absolutely everything, being very proud of that fact in many respects. Indeed, there are times when one should be proud of being unique and standing alone and doing things differently, but there are some things on which you have to look and say: why is it that we do things differently from everywhere else? There are times that it is because previous governments have chosen not to deal with issues that should have been dealt with far longer ago. Other governments have instead taken the leadership on that, things like, say, perhaps, farm workers' rights, where those were covered in many other parts of Canada long before they were covered here in Alberta.

In this case, Madam Chair, we are simply bringing Alberta in line with other jurisdictions. We're meeting the requirements of the Supreme Court. This provision is simply now saying that these academic staff associations will fall under the same coverage as any

other organization that is being asked to fairly represent their members and is bringing in rules prohibiting unfair labour practices. So I just wanted to address that.

Now, in regard to the consultations, I did touch on and speak about, you know, how thorough the consultations were that the minister carried out. I'd like to just note indeed that in regard to that, in regard to folks that may feel they've not been heard, there was one stakeholder actually in an editorial – so it's publicly spoken. We've certainly heard members that have spoken of people they've spoken with, but, Madam Chair, so far I have not heard them actually identify any of the groups they've spoken with or even, in fact, how many different organizations they've spoken with. That might provide some helpful context.

But I will note that in a recent editorial one of the stakeholders stated:

This is legislation that is long overdue, and it is clear [that] the extra year of consultation and research . . .

Again, Madam Chair, an extra year of consultation and research.

. . . resulted in the government getting it almost exactly right. After 43 years of fake and contrived after-the-fact "consultations," it is refreshing to see a government consult genuinely with all stakeholders and actually integrate what they heard into legislation.

That is one of the stakeholders who participated in the consultation, Madam Chair. I will note that. [interjection] I am sorry that one of the members of the previous government feels that that's laughable. Perhaps he did not actually take part in their previous consultations. But that is the perspective of an actual stakeholder.

Moving on, Madam Chair, there were some concerns that this would take away some of the rights of folks during the bargaining process. Particularly, I think the concern being raised was that for those who are currently in the middle of negotiations, this might take away their right to binding arbitration. Now, the fact is that nobody will lose the right to use binding arbitration if Bill 7 is passed. In fact, it remains available on a voluntary basis, with agreement from both parties, under section 93 of the Labour Relations Code.

3:10

Certainly, Madam Chair, what we often hear from the other side is that they are in favour of choice and providing people as much choice as possible and allowing them to choose, you know, which organizations they choose to work with, where they choose to send their children to school, many other things. This simply provides those who are in these associations with further choice.

What Bill 7 does is that it ensures that associations and institutions are no longer compelled to use binding arbitration to resolve their disputes. I think that's a fair thing to do. Indeed, I think it's a fiscally responsible thing to do, and it's required in light of the Supreme Court decision and legislation. Again, Madam Chair, I think it's a fair provision and one that will not, in fact, unduly disadvantage anybody in this process or through these negotiations.

In terms, then, of clarifying a couple of the things, Madam Chair, that this bill will do and being clear, again, for those who raised some concerns about what the bill is in fact not doing, I'll just take a moment to recognize some of the other things that this bill will do. Basically, Bill 7 is proposing that some sections of the Post-secondary Learning Act would be repealed and then creating a new division in the Labour Relations Code for the postsecondary sector. If passed, as we've discussed, academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows – again, this is offering more opportunity to more members of the academic field to have better protection and to be able to better advocate for themselves in their positions and to have better choice in who they choose to have advocate on their behalf. It gives them the right to strike as required by the Supreme

Court, and they then become subject to essential services legislation.

Of course, as we've discussed here in the House today, we do recognize that postsecondary education is indeed an essential service. We've talked about the great value that it brings to students. We've talked about the importance that it has in building their careers and opportunities. Certainly, Madam Chair, we recognize that it has great importance, too, for the research which goes forward. So it's important that we have the essential services piece and that we consider it in that light so that essential research, things that are ongoing, so that if there does need to be a strike or something else, those things are still protected so that people are still able to look after necessary research and ensure that it can continue while they may not be able to actually be there at work. Again, this is the first time in Canada that postdoctoral fellows would fall under the legislation, and I think the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater certainly spoke well of that. I'm sure some others will as well.

Madam Chair, our government believes in the collective bargaining process and in a process that respects both workers and employers, as indeed we are demonstrating as we go forward with negotiations with public servants in many areas of government at the moment. That's why postsecondary institutions would be required to negotiate essential services agreements with their bargaining units, again, making sure that those things are in place to protect students, to protect research and other essential things which need to continue. This means that postsecondary institutions will also then be covered by the lockout provisions under the Labour Relations Code.

With these proposed changes, basically, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows associations would have the responsibility and the opportunity to bargain with the institutions for mutually beneficial collective agreements. By ending compulsive arbitration, by not making that mandatory, by making that now a choice for those who are negotiating and those who are bargaining, it will allow the faculty, the graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and the institutions to come to more prudent agreements that respect workers' constitutional rights. That will protect students. That will ensure affordability for taxpayers.

Over the next five years we're going to work closely with these institutions to help them transition. There have been some concerns that have been raised today, Madam Chair, regarding that transition period. Again, I think the minister was quite clear that he was very clear throughout the consultation process about the model that they're moving towards. Indeed, that model would be the model that we've brought forward here today, and the discussions were about how we could best implement that model. The stakeholders that were involved were aware this model was coming, but now we're giving an additional five years where we have the opportunity for us to work and to help transition the postsecondary staff in terms of the collective bargaining process to ensure it addresses their unique needs.

The faculty associations now, who are effectively serving as the bargaining units, are going to have the opportunity to indeed, if they wish, work with their members to develop a strike fund, to put together other things which may be needed, other things which may be necessary to prepare themselves, then, for the bargaining process over the next five years.

That's why it's important for us, I think, as government to continue to work with institutions to ensure that adequate plans are developed to address any potential strikes or lockouts and to make sure that impacts, in fact, would be minimal for students. As the minister noted earlier today, I think that's going to include making

some contingency plans, if necessary, to address student aid, grants, and bursaries. I think that's absolutely important, Madam Chair. Indeed, not only do I represent many staff from these institutions; I certainly also within Edmonton-Centre represent a large number of students. It's very important to me to ensure that, in fact, they are protected, to ensure that they are not put in a bad situation, that they're able to continue their education, and indeed that all necessary funding that they may be receiving from the government, funding which, I'm proud to say, we have continued and, in fact, in some respects increased, I believe, will continue to remain available to them so that they will be able to continue their schooling.

Madam Chair, in general I'm just proud that our government is taking, I believe, a very careful and measured approach to provide stability. It's yet another reason why I support this legislation, because I truly believe this is something that will make a positive difference in the lives of our postsecondary staff here in the province and indeed of students as well. Indeed, given our current economic climate I think it makes sense that we try to find labour negotiation models that are going to ensure that we use public dollars responsibly.

We know that compulsory arbitration in the past has at times tended to result in higher wage increases. That's something that's not sustainable, and we certainly recognize that it is not the direction to be going in for the province right now as we are just beginning to recover from the effects of the recession, which has generally, as some economists noted, concluded, and we're beginning to see some upturn. But we still have some time where our province is going to need to work towards recovery, so controlling our costs where we can through the negotiation process with the folks that work and are paid through government I think is a smart and prudent thing and something that is truly to be supported through this legislation. I think this bill truly demonstrates, again, our government's work to make life better for all Albertans and all people who are both involved in the postsecondary industry and, of course, all those who are simply paying taxes, who may have children in school, who may have relatives in school, or who may themselves even be considering going back for further postsecondary education, as, in fact, I did myself at a late stage in life.

With that, Madam Chair, I believe I'll conclude my remarks, but I'd like to thank the minister again for his thoroughness in working towards this legislation and consulting with the community and for bringing forward what I believe is a fairly and truly balanced piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very happy to get up and speak on Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Postsecondary Academic Bargaining. I really would like to thank the hon. Minister of Advanced Education for bringing this bill forward. I'd also like to thank my colleagues from Edmonton-Centre, who just spoke at length about the importance of this particular bill, as well as the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, who also talked very passionately in support of this bill as well.

You know, our government is committed to fair legislation that makes life better for hard-working Albertans and complies with the recent Supreme Court ruling. Our government believes in a collective bargaining process that respects both workers and employers. As such, this bill considers the unique nature of the postsecondary sector. While our government extended these rights to the Alberta public services and the health care sector in 2016, we

gave postsecondary stakeholders additional time to transition and establish, through consultation, their issues in their particular field. Our government has taken a careful, measured approach to providing stability during the transition period.

3:20

Now, in my riding of Calgary-Currie, Madam Chair, Currie Barracks, which is the namesake of my riding, is actually just on the other side of the road from Mount Royal University, which actually has a long history with Currie Barracks and a long history in the riding as well. If you go back in time to the many boundary redraws that, you know, happen every two elections in this province, Mount Royal University is either in or out of my riding – it seems to be about once a decade – so I very much consider it a part of my riding, and considering that mine is by name one of the oldest ridings in Calgary, Mount Royal has been a part of the riding since the '70s. Even though Mount Royal is, like I said, just across the street from my riding, of course when I'm out and about knocking on doors and at events, I run into many of the students and faculty of Mount Royal University.

I've also been able to go to several events at Mount Royal University hosted by their student association, which I did a member's statement on recently, actually, talking about some of the great work they do for the students of Mount Royal University and some of the interesting and thought-provoking events that they do. They did one recently on Black History Month. Also, when there, I get to talk to the faculty, the staff.

They have a great communication and broadcast program there. I actually got to go to the graduation ceremony for that, where Marc Chikinda, who had been leading that program for many years and is now retired – I got to be there for one of his last convocations. If you've ever heard Marc Chikinda talk, he's got quite the boisterous voice, that I think would rival our singer who does the national anthem here in this House on Monday.

Also, you know, I got a book, actually, from a history professor who recently got his tenure that was about Mount Royal University and World War I and how Mount Royal University helped recruit and train students and helped promote and encourage men in 1914 to join up for World War I, with their proximity and historical connection to Currie Barracks, which is, of course, part of my riding. It was a very interesting essay about that, and it was well researched and speaks to the pleasure that the faculty of Mount Royal University take in teaching students. As it was described to me by this particular professor, he often gets his students to help him with research. He regaled me with stories of going through archives. I'm sure that is interesting, but as you know, I'm a mechanic, so the idea of spending hours upon hours in an archive is not necessarily my cup of tea.

I think it speaks to the importance of this piece of legislation to make sure that those faculty members, you know, have the ability to strike should they choose to.

I'm going to do one more example of the fine work that the Mount Royal University faculty does. Actually, there's a class at Mount Royal University called controversies in science, which I feel is often our debate in the House on a rather regular basis. Mandy Sobhanzadeh – I'm sorry for mispronouncing that, of course – every semester invites me and members from the opposition party to speak at her class as a guest lecturer, and she invites members of all the parties. I was there recently. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks from the Wildrose opposition caucus has spoken at the same class, when I was there as well, as well as the representative from the Liberal Party in this House.

It makes for, I think, a very engaging class for the students each week to have a different perspective on the particular unit they do,

which is on climate change and the science around it and what the challenges are that we as elected officials face when addressing that problem. They get to see various perspectives about it, and it's one of the three units in that class, and it makes for a very engaging discussion. When I'm there, I always get some very good, hard-hitting questions, and it's a very lively discussion. Every time I'm there, I speak for an hour and a half with the students and take questions for the remainder of the class, and it's quite an engaging debate, actually. I encourage all members of the House, should they ever get invited to speak at that class, to do so. It's quite enlightening.

I'm going to circle back a bit to the legislation here. You know, why did the postsecondary labour model need to be updated? Well, as you know, the previous speakers mentioned at length that our government is committed to fair legislation that gives all workers the right to strike and also complies with the 2015 Supreme Court ruling on this particular matter. Previous provisions for academic staff and graduate students in Alberta in postsecondaries did not include the right to strike. These changes were introduced to take into consideration the unique nature of the postsecondary education sector while also extending the constitutionally protected rights to postsecondary faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows. Part of modernizing our labour model includes adding the right to strike in Alberta's postsecondary institutions, which brings us in line with all other provinces and, of course, complies with that Supreme Court ruling.

What is this bill changing? Well, this proposed legislation repeals a section of the Post-secondary Learning Act and creates a new postsecondary sector specific division in the Labour Relations Code. In general some of the changes include that academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows will now fall under the Labour Relations Code, essentially giving them the right to strike and become subject to the essential services legislation. They will retain the right to arbitration as long as both parties request an arbitrated decision to a dispute.

As well, postsecondary institutions will be required to negotiate essential services agreements with their bargaining units and will have provisions for lockout under the Labour Relations Code.

As well, current associations will retain their current membership and will be protected from any changes to membership for a minimum of five years. This goes to the importance of having a transition as this legislation comes in, which was something that was spoken of at length by the Member for Edmonton-Centre as well as the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, who spoke earlier this afternoon on this.

As you know, I've spoken at length about how I talk to the Mount Royal faculty and students on a regular basis. Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow is, I believe, technically still a student at Mount Royal University, I think an excellent example of the fine calibre of students and people that Mount Royal University attracts.

I actually had a chance to chat with some of the faculty. The Mount Royal Faculty Association sent me a couple of notes on what their thoughts were on the bill. You know, they mentioned that in general they were pleased to note that Bill 7 conforms to almost all of their recommendations that they went through during the government's consultation, that happened in the fall of 2016, and they have actually extended their thanks in a letter that they sent to the minister and to the members of his ministry as well for their work on this bill. They mentioned that they greatly appreciate the meaningful consultation undertaken in advance of drafting of Bill 7, and they also mentioned that they are very thankful for the high level of availability and responsiveness shown by the ministry staff.

I think that that quote that I'm taking from the letter that they sent to the minister is, you know, an example of the great consultation that the minister and his staff put forward and of the approach this government takes to consultation when it comes to pieces of legislation, Madam Chair. We always try, whenever we have a new piece of legislation coming in, to allow opportunities for all members of the public and relevant stakeholders to avail themselves of the ability to consult, to write letters to the minister and staff as well as phoning them, and that speaks to our commitment to transparency and to consulting on pieces of legislation.

They go on to note that they welcome the move to a more extensive and well-tested framework in the Labour Relations Code, with its many benefits such as the codification of prohibited labour practices and the duty of fair representation, a statement of employee and employer rights as well as recourse to Alberta's Labour Relations Board should they not be able to work it out themselves.

3:30

You know, they also go on to say that they acknowledge that this change respects the facility's constitutionally protected right to freedom of association by removing the employer's unilateral power to designate employees as academic staff without recourse and therefore to decide who is and who is not in the faculty association.

Last, they welcome the restoration of the right to strike and of the employer to lock out as a fundamental aspect of meaningful collective bargaining, as confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Now, they did note that there was strike/lockout language that existed in the collective bargaining agreement that they had at Mount Royal University, that was there until 2004; however, that's when provincial legislation was changed to impose compulsory binding arbitration as the final dispute resolution mechanism. I think they got rid of that particular provision.

They do note that during that time they never had an actual strike or lockout. The Mount Royal Faculty Association and Mount Royal University, from my discussions with them, have had thus far an amicable relationship, where they have not needed to go as far as to strike or for Mount Royal University to lock out their teaching faculty.

Of course, as I mentioned before, their passion for academic disciplines and professional work, and they talk about – you know, Mount Royal University has got over a century of putting students and the quality of their education first. I think it speaks to their dedication to teaching and their dedication to their students. As I mentioned in a member's statement previously, the student union carries on that spirit as well from the students' side, putting on great events, working for their students as well as putting on classes and other educational opportunities to allow students to discuss and share ideas. I think it speaks to the value of education that Mount Royal instills in its students as well as the value of citizenship and working with their neighbours and the spirit of enlightened and respectful debate.

We talked a lot about what this means for the faculty. We've talked about what this means for postsecondary institutions such as Mount Royal University, but what would this mean for Alberta's students? Is there any potential that they could lose credits if there's a strike or lockout, for example? Well, Madam Chair, you know, we recognize that there are some concerns regarding the ability for academic staff, faculty members, and professionals to stop work. All other jurisdictions in Canada have similar strike/lockout provisions in their labour legislation, and in order to ensure minimal impact to students, government will work with postsecondary

institutions to make sure that they develop contingency plans to address strikes and lockouts should they occur.

Government will also review and make contingency plans where necessary to address student aids, grants, and bursaries, and I believe that that work would of course be carried out and led by our Minister of Advanced Education.

In case there was a dispute, how will bargaining disputes be settled under this new legislation? Well, Madam Chair, the proposed legislation ensures that Alberta's postsecondary academic staff are extended their constitutionally protected right to strike and that institutions have provisions for lockouts, which will bring us, of course, in line with all other jurisdictions. If no agreement can be reached, the provisions for strikes or lockouts under the current Labour Relations Code do apply.

Another question that I haven't quite heard addressed here is: will our institutions be allowed to use replacement workers in the event of a strike? Well, essential services are those public services that, if interrupted, would endanger life, personal safety, or the health of the public, or the rule of law and public security. Postsecondary institutions are already required to work with their bargaining units to develop essential services agreements.

The proposed legislation will just add academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows to this ongoing work. Similar to all other public sectors, postsecondary institutions that identify essential services will negotiate essential services agreements with their bargaining units, which will ensure that workers have the right to strike while essential services are maintained. Institutions with essential service agreements will not be able to hire replacement workers in the event of a strike. As well, institutions that apply and receive exemptions under the essential services legislation as having no essential services will be able to hire temporary workers in the event of a strike.

I understand that some postsecondary stakeholders do not want to move under the Labour Relations Code and want to retain mandatory arbitration provisions. The reason why we did this is that this is something that must be done. Our government is committed to fair legislation that gives all workers the right to strike and also to comply with the 2015 Supreme Court ruling. The easiest answer to, you know, that question, of course, is that the Supreme Court made us do it. As all members know, when the Supreme Court says so, that is a sign that there was a serious problem in the legislation that we need to fix.

Madam Chair, I think that with that, I will wrap up my comments here and encourage all members of the House to vote in support of this bill as well as in support of their local postsecondary institution, whether it be Mount Royal University, whether it be MacEwan, whether it be the University of Calgary or the University of Alberta or Bow Valley College or whatever the one may be that is local to your riding. I would encourage that after this debate we all take a moment to appreciate the hard-working faculty and teachers of our postsecondary institutions as well as, of course, the students, who are being taught and will be doing, I'm sure, great things in the future with the education that they learn from Alberta's excellent postsecondary institutions.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining: with great respect, I wish the act did exactly what it purports to do.

Mr. Cooper: What does it do?

Mr. Rodney: Well, sadly, hon. members, in my experience, this bill demonstrates one more time that the government did not listen to Albertans in its so-called consultations. It seems the minister does not understand the needs or interests of the relevant stakeholders because, for one example, in a rare circumstance the presidents of Alberta's comprehensive academic and research institutions, faculty associations, graduate students' associations, and graduate students themselves disagree with the government's direction in Bill 7.

In brief, I can tell you that Bill 7 seeks to implement a Supreme Court ruling to enable Alberta's postsecondary educators to strike, which is a necessary change. No opposition whatsoever on that. The problem is that Bill 7 seeks to severely interfere with the way that our supposedly autonomous universities conduct their labour relations. Not only that, Madam Chair. This bill does nothing to address the actual concerns of university workers, including faculty promotion, job security, and tenure. It also completely and utterly fails to address the social concerns often raised by the government itself, including gender and other diversity, inclusion of indigenous peoples as leaders and students, improving work-life balance for families, or reliability of universities as partners in innovation and economic diversification. That shocks and surprises me.

Now, for decades governments have recognized that universities should be places of free thought, expression, and research and have refrained from dictating how publicly funded universities govern themselves. Governments have also recognized that universities are not just a usual cookie-cutter sort of industrial workplace that can be regulated under employment standards that would apply to most workplaces. They're different.

3:40

Now, universities' collegial governance models recognize merit and service and contributions in ways that are found almost nowhere else in labour management. Indeed, governments have been generally reluctant to regulate universities until requested by those universities themselves. Now, where most workplaces clearly draw lines to separate responsibilities among workers represented by different bargaining groups, the shared responsibility for teaching and learning at a university means that in many cases everyone shares in the work of everything. Having worked at a university, I have experienced this. That runs contrary to the usual idea that each union has exclusivity to bargain over their particular type of work at a shared workplace, but collegial governance in Alberta and abroad has ensured that negotiated agreements mean that usually no task is left without a taker.

Faculty associations of Alberta's comprehensive academic and research universities are not currently prohibited from striking. Now, currently the Post-secondary Learning Act mandates that disputes are resolved through compulsory binding arbitration. That decision to bargain away their ability to strike was made by faculty and management, recognizing that the practical ability to strike does not exist because of the unique collegial governance models at universities. Now, during consultations universities, faculty associations, and graduate students told the minister that they wanted to remain under the Post-secondary Learning Act, that would recognize the unique collegial governance models at Alberta universities. Almost every stakeholder advised against moving into the Labour Relations Code, which does not have the legislative authority or the expertise to protect academic freedoms, intellectual property, and rights of researchers, faculty, or students.

Now, even though most university staff are unionized into four or more groups on most campuses – namely, support staff, graduate students, faculty, and professional staff – the members of each group can routinely have responsibilities in teaching and research,

administration, and management. Consequently, an introductory course may be taught by a department head who is also a senior researcher and include labs prepared and overseen by graduate students and seminars organized by a postdoctoral fellow, just for one example. The summer version of that same course may be entirely run by just a single contracted instructor. Now, a research laboratory might have chemicals prepared by support staff, with business administrated by a postdoctoral fellow and experiments operated by honours undergraduate students alongside research associates holding PhDs. Maybe some members here have had that sort of experience.

Understandably, though, not necessarily everyone thinks about this. The group with the least bargaining power is the graduate students, and they often get tasked with the least professionally rewarding responsibilities such as invigilating and grading student work and preparing labs and filing paperwork. Within that group, responsibilities and compensation of master's students, who are present at an institution for, say, one or three years, are often worse than PhD students, whose positions are typically secure for four or more years. That's just the way it works.

If Bill 7 is passed, teaching, research, administration, and management will become the responsibility of one more bargaining group, and that's the postdoctoral fellows' associations. While there are thousands of faculty and graduate students can number in the hundreds at each institution, there are an estimated hundred or so postdoctoral fellows at any time in all of Alberta. A postdoctoral fellowship might only be for one year or less. Guess which of the three bargaining units will have the least bargaining power. Undesired work will be pushed to the weakest union, the postdocs, who have the fewest numbers and the least experience and resources to bargain effectively.

Let's face it. Most postdocs have more pressing research priorities in their six to 24 months at an Albertan university, so the postdoctoral fellows' associations may not be representative or have time to build knowledge or experience to be effective when the negotiations roll around every three or five years. It's not even clear that the actual postdoctoral fellows themselves wanted to form new associations to represent them. As a matter of fact, it's questionable that government even effectively consulted with postdoctoral fellows since there was no plan to reach out to the then nonexistent postdoctoral fellows' associations. Indeed, many postdoctoral fellows are satisfied with being represented by the graduate students' associations or faculty associations in the few areas where their work is directed and funded by an Albertan university.

Despite two rounds of consultation that unanimously advised against moving universities from the Post-secondary Learning Act to the Labour Relations Code, Bill 7 proposes to move labour disputes from a university's board of governors, academic senate, faculty association, and graduate students' association to the Labour Relations Board, which has minimal experience and capacity to learn, understand, and resolve university labour disputes. At any given time up to 50 per cent of a university's faculty and graduate students perform management functions, and this bill does little to make it clear how management functions are to be treated at the Labour Relations Board.

Additionally, this bill would invalidate agreements freely reached between management and faculty and graduate students' associations about binding arbitration. Now, let's face it. Disempowering a university's democratically elected bodies to resolve their own issues strikes at the heart of the autonomy of a university to self-govern and substitutes a government overseer to judge that which it simply cannot understand. As administrators, faculty, and graduate students have rightly pointed out, all that's

necessary to comply with the Supreme Court decision is to guarantee the right to strike for faculty and graduate students who are not performing essential services, full stop. Gutting a university's ability to determine its own labour relations is completely unnecessary to comply with the Supreme Court ruling, and it reeks of a government expanding its powers in an area where the government does not trust Albertans to act in their own interests. That's beyond unfortunate.

As all stakeholders other than the government agree, this bill needs to be curtailed to remove everything unrelated to complying to the Supreme Court ruling. If it did that, Minister, we'd be happy to vote for it, but it doesn't. Unfortunately, this government has chosen to use the Supreme Court ruling as an excuse to expand the scope of the LRB, making it the priority rather than putting university workers at the forefront of the bill, which I think all Albertans would have appreciated.

Madam Chair, the introduction of this bill and changes to collective bargaining come at a peculiar time. The postsecondary review will not be completed until later this year, obviously after the bill. Two major changes, not one but two major changes, to Alberta's universities doesn't lead to certainty for institutions or faculty or students. The prospect of disruptive strikes and denial of access to jointly owned research materials and equipment also does not strengthen universities' positions as potential research and collaboration partners with domestic and international businesses interested in innovation.

Madam Chair, for these reasons and others I implore all members from all parties to join me in voting against a heavy-handed bill that's fraught with a lack of consultation and obvious overreach. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I do have to respond to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I'm not sure whether he was giving a lecture in creative writing or perhaps a lecture in drama dedicated to comedic performance, but what the Member for Calgary-Lougheed did not do was state a single fact pertinent to the bill that is before us today.

3:50

He alleges that we are meddling with collegial governance. There is nothing in this bill that affects or changes collegial governance at the universities or colleges in Alberta. In fact, universities and colleges in every other province in the country that are under this same labour relations model have a collegial governance system that's in place and has been functioning for a long time, Madam Chair.

With respect to binding arbitration, there is nothing in this bill that prevents employers and employees from choosing to go to binding arbitration if both parties agree to do that, Madam Chair. We are pleased that binding arbitration will continue to be an option for faculty associations and grad student associations going forward as long as all of the parties at the table can agree to do that.

Now, the member incorrectly states that we are moving people out of the Post-secondary Learning Act and under the Labour Relations Code. Of course, if he would take the time to read the bill, he would find that that is not true whatsoever, Madam Chair. All of the faculty associations and the grad student associations remain established under the Post-secondary Learning Act, and in fact the postdoctoral associations will also be created as entities under the Post-secondary Learning Act.

The member also went on to suggest that by allowing the Labour Relations Board to rule on disputes related to labour relations, we're turning it over to an entity that knows nothing about university or college governance. Of course, had the member done his homework, Madam Chair, he would have known that we are creating a special division of the Labour Relations Board dedicated specifically to dealing only with issues in the postsecondary sector. So all of these issues that will be arbitrated will be arbitrated by people with expertise and experience in matters related to labour relations on campus. We're confident that the legislation that we're bringing forward will continue to recognize the uniqueness of labour relations on university and college campuses, just as has been done up until this point.

Where the Member for Calgary-Lougheed really drove into the ditch, Madam Chair, is with respect to postdoctoral fellows. He started off his statement by saying that at any given time in the province of Alberta there are only 100 postdoctoral fellows, which, of course, is wrong by a factor of 10. So, you know, I'm glad that they're not in charge of the budget with those kinds of order-of-magnitude errors. Of course, we know that at any given time there are at least 1,000 postdoctoral fellows at our comprehensive academic research institutes.

I wish that that was the only error that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed had in his speech with respect to postdoctoral fellows, but it's not, Madam Chair. He claims that by setting up postdoctoral fellows in associations and recognizing them as employees, we're going to somehow weaken their bargaining position. That's the complete opposite of what we're doing. We are giving postdoctoral fellows bargaining power that they've never had, that that government didn't give them for 44 years. We are the first jurisdiction under this government to proactively recognize postdoctoral fellows as employees, something that no other province has ever done without being taken to court to do so. I'm proud of the fact that we are recognizing postdoctoral fellows as employees proactively and giving them the right to bargain on behalf of their members for the first time in any Canadian province's history.

An Hon. Member: It's like you're not afraid of academia.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah.

Anyway, Madam Chair, I believe I have successfully rebutted every erroneous point that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed gave. If I were a faculty member, I would give him an F minus for his speech, and I would encourage the member to go home and do his homework before he continues to oppose this legislation.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Congratulations. That's a new low for you. [interjections] Okay. I'll call a point of order. Shall we? Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Point of order. Go ahead.

Point of Order Intemperate Language

Mr. Rodney: Earlier today there was a point of order, and there was a reference to the fact that words such as "immature," "unprofessional," and "undignified" were unbecoming of an elected official. I know that the NDP is used to being in opposition. I know that being in government is new, but take it from us who are now on this side, to act entitled, to be personally insulting – I didn't do that in my speech, Madam Chair. There were many, many

references that were personal attacks, where we could rise under 23(j).

I would suggest that – and I think this would be true of these folks before they were elected – when they look to a government, they look to a government that is calm and confident, clearly communicates, and consults. I would hope they would learn from mistakes of the past, as I would trust we all would, and I would just suggest humbly to every minister of every Crown that when speaking to others, you do so with respect. I would hope that it would work both ways. Perhaps just a little encouragement to stick to the facts and not make personal attacks.

The Chair: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: You'll forgive me, Madam Chair. I think this started as a point of order. I'm going to assume that we're under 23(h), (i), and (j). Obviously, there is a significant dispute between the members as to what the facts are. They both believe the other to be incorrect. I did listen with interest to what the hon. Minister of Advanced Education said, and what he critiqued was the argument. He was quite clear that he was talking about the argument. He didn't think the argument as regards postdoctoral fellows was correct. He didn't think the argument as regards the Labour Relations Board's lack of expertise to determine who is and isn't an employee was correct. He didn't think the argument with respect to the board of governors was correct. I think that this is quite clearly a dispute as to the facts.

I didn't hear anything that resembled a personal attack, Madam Chair. I certainly heard a very vigorous attack of the argument, which is, from what I understand, what we're all here to do today. With respect, I don't believe this is a point of order.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the point of order?

There is certainly a difference of opinion in how things are interpreted. Certainly, personal attacks are not in order in this House, and I would admonish all members to be very, very careful in their use of language to avoid that kind of thing, but certainly there can be a difference of opinion as to how things are stated. I would, however, caution all members to watch when you are attempting to use humour. Sometimes that can be taken in a very personal way. Let's just be a little more careful in the language that we use.

I'll call on the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my privilege to stand and speak in support of Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Postsecondary Academic Bargaining. This is an act that is further commitment from the government to ensure that there is fair legislation that makes life better for hard-working Albertans. It's a bill that would modernize Alberta's labour relations model for our postsecondary sector, and in 2016 it's something that would extend the essential services legislation that was introduced last year and passed in the House. It would be extending the bargaining rights of what that bill does.

What this does in part is that it is recognition of postdoctoral fellow associations' feedback. There was feedback that was received from Alberta's three existing postdoctoral fellow associations during the consultation process. That is what I am hoping to speak to today. For anyone that would like to look at the executive summary of the 108 pages that were provided to the government and to the public, because they were sought out for advice and for feedback during this consultation process, I have five

copies that I will table. It is titled Postdoctoral Associations of Alberta Post-secondary Labour Relations Consultation Report for Alberta Advanced Education, January 2017. It is written in part by the University of Lethbridge Postdoctoral Fellows Association, the University of Alberta Postdoctoral Fellows Association, the Postdoctoral Association of the University of Calgary, and the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars. I will not try to pronounce what it translates to in French.

4:00

There are some very important things that are in amongst this. The time right now that we're at is that there was time that was needed for the postsecondary institutions to discuss more what the impacts of the Supreme Court ruling would be on this in guaranteeing these rights of collective bargaining to Canadians and by extension, of course, to Albertans.

I'm happy to stand and support these changes that are from the hon. Minister of Advanced Education. What this does is that it extends the constitutionally protected rights to postsecondary faculty, graduate students, and, for the first time in Canada, to postdoctoral fellows, who will be formally recognized as employees. Also, what it will do is to repeal and create a new division in the Labour Relations Code for the postsecondary sector. It means that for the first time in Canada we will be formally recognizing the status of postdoctoral fellows as employees so that they can have improved rights and protected rights and have fair and respectful workplaces.

Also, with the proposed changes, these graduate students' and postdoctoral fellows' associations would be responsible for bargaining with institutions for mutually beneficial collective agreements. These postdoctoral fellows would be able to come to prudent agreements that respect workers' constitutional rights. It's something that, going forward, is in the interest of the public dollars.

The introduction of this bill last week – we have heard from many stakeholders about the proposed changes. I have been reached out to by a constituent of mine from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I will share that person's thoughts about this with the Member for Calgary-Lougheed because apparently he did not hear positive feedback from any postdoctoral fellows or ones that are part of that agreement right now with the postsecondary institutions.

I was contacted by a Dr. Miranda Brun. She serves in the department of agricultural, food, and nutritional science at the Li Ka Shing Centre for Health Research Innovation at the University of Alberta. She was someone that actually had reached out to me about a year ago because she was concerned that when we are looking at making sure that rights of women and opportunities for women and parents in general are being addressed by this new government in Alberta, we are ensuring that we're giving those opportunities to everyone. While she has started her family and won't be able to enjoy these rights, to finally be able to bargain for and ensure these maternity and parental rights, she wanted to make sure that this was something that I had been made aware of and that I advocated for because she wanted to make sure that it was something that was available for people after her, that would finally be able to have families while pursuing these fellowships at universities.

Some of the numbers that are in this very long submission to government. These people are of family age. I think the average age is 34. They're in these very long career tracks, trying to attain tenure at a university. We don't want these people to feel as though they have to put their entire lives on hold in the interests of having children.

Some of the points that are also in this submission. There's a group called the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars, which I will refer to from here on out as CAPS. In the CAPS 2016 survey data there were some very interesting and alarming statistics for those that are working as postdocs in Alberta: 16 per cent lack dental insurance, 29 per cent lack drug plan coverage, 34 per cent lack health insurance for their family, 35 per cent lack extended health coverage, 60 per cent lack vision and eye care, 76 per cent lack life insurance, and 84 per cent lack long-term disability. One of the other statistics is that only 31 per cent of these postdoctoral fellows have access to benefits from other sources such as a spouse, so the lack of standard employee benefits represents an additional financial burden for postdocs and their families.

I just want to pull out some very relevant information from their submission. I'll quote a bit from it. The presidents of the Postdoctoral Association of the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta Postdoctoral Fellows Association, and the University of Lethbridge Postdoctoral Fellows Association were bringing forward these concerns and aspirations on behalf of approximately 1,000 postdoctoral fellows and scholars who work in Alberta.

These postdocs do incredibly important work. They are highly skilled scientists and educators who hold a PhD, an MD, or equivalent, are members of the academic research community, and are critical drivers for our innovation-based economy. Due to their extensive training, postdocs are positioned to tackle complex research and innovation challenges in our province. Of course, Madam Chair, this is something that is incredibly important when we want to make sure that we have a strong, diversified economy, that we are making sure that Alberta is a valued place to come and do work. Due to this, it gives them the ability to tackle these complex issues in our province.

The typical duration of a postdoctoral fellowship has evolved from a temporary, one- to two-year position to a two- to five-year plus period.

Alberta universities attract many world-class postdocs.

The designation of the Alberta postdocs as trainees has resulted – in their opinion, they have ended up as a very ill-defined mixture between student and employee. The majority of Alberta's postdocs are precluded from contributing to EI and CPP. Their trainee status also makes them ineligible for many of the resources that are afforded to staff and students such as assistance with immigration issues, access to career services, and on-campus health and mental health programs.

It's noted that the challenges faced by postdocs at Alberta universities are not unique, that the labour relations boards in other provinces have also faced similar issues. In January 2012 the Ontario Labour Relations Board ruled that the University of Toronto postdocs were employees, and that enabled their group to unionize. In its decision the board rejected the university's argument that postdocs are academic trainees more similar to students than to faculty members. A similar ruling was also reached in Quebec in 2011, where the labour relations board ruled that postdoctoral fellows were employees.

Postdoctoral fellowship individuals across Canada and around the world continue to face these challenges. What this will do is that it will make Alberta a leader, and that is how we will continue to attract exceptional postdocs to Alberta and strengthen our economy through high-quality research and development in academia, industry, and the private sector.

4:10

You might ask what a postdoc is. Postdocs are highly trained and skilled individuals with a PhD, an MD, or an equivalent.

The postdocs help to drive the research and innovation and advanced education agenda of Alberta, and their work directly benefits their faculty supervisors and the institutions where they work, thus indirectly benefiting all Albertans.

Postdocs primarily work to gain experience and recognition in their field and in order to be competitive for highly coveted tenure-track faculty positions at postsecondary institutions. It makes it hard for it to be a career goal without enough faculty positions that can accommodate them, which is why they see these changes, being able to have CPP and EI, to have employment benefits, as being incredibly important.

According to the data collected in the CAPS 2016 survey, the average postdoc working in Alberta in 2016 was 34, married or living in a common-law relationship. A third of them, Madam Chair, were parents, and of those that were parents, a third had more than one child.

Of the postdocs surveyed, 35 per cent were Canadian citizens, 20 per cent permanent residents or landed immigrants, and 45 per cent were international postdocs holding work permits.

To give a bit of a snapshot of what an average postdoc makes – it's fairly humble – the gross annual income for postdocs working in Alberta was \$49,530 on average, with a median income of \$47,500.

It's worth noting that postdocs in Alberta pay full provincial and federal income tax, yet the vast majority of them are not classified as employees and are therefore denied access to social support programs, including employment insurance and the Canada pension plan. Based on tax forms collected, they saw that only 16 per cent of those working at the U of A, the U of C, and Lethbridge were classified as employees. Of course, in the absence of employee status some of Alberta's postdocs are also denied access to standard benefits such as dental insurance, drug plans, vision and eye care, and employee retirement plans.

They talk about the age of the postdoctoral fellows, postdocs, and it's saying that, you know, it's an age where people are saving for retirement. They're settling down, they're trying to buy a home, and they're trying to start a family. Of course, I'll just remind the House that this is why I received a phone call, because we are talking about maternity and paternal benefits for average, hard-working Albertans that are just trying to make a life for themselves.

There are a few notes here, in particular about postdocs that would be pregnant, and it's making mention of the fact that there is no guaranteed paid maternity leave and that expectant new mothers are typically reluctant to come forward and raise this issue publicly. As postdocs they generally lack any representation, support, or power to negotiate with their host institutions.

Also, part of it was a question on what these postdocs believe was the most important, and among those surveyed, the top three ended up being employment insurance, Canada pension plan, and parental leave, and then at the end was vision and eye care and a retirement plan.

There are just a few more notes that I would like to share with the House: 80 per cent of the 231 postdoc respondents working in Alberta in early 2016 indicated that asking for these statutory employment benefits should be an essential or high priority for those that are representing them right now, and it's for this reason that they provide this chart. It actually has some fairly alarming things to look at when we're talking about labour code amendments and Employment Standards Code amendments because it really gives quite a jarring picture of the things that some of us take very for granted.

Looking at the guidelines and policies for postdocs at Alberta's postsecondary research institutions, you'll see that what they have in common is that as their primary employment status they are

mostly considered trainees; there is either very little or nonexistent access to EI and CPP; it's very difficult to get paid maternity leave unless you can get an external award for that and the same with paternal leave; there is either very little or no paid bereavement leave if a loved one dies; there is no paid sick leave, no job-loss coverage, no compassionate care leave; and there is no access to employer pension plan programs.

There are some arguments that they make in their submission if the Member for Calgary-Lougheed would like to look at it for his own information. It's talking about that Alberta postdocs believe they meet the requirements to be considered employees, and some of those reasons are that they have set hours of work, that they use the tools and equipment that are there, that they are part of the workplace, that they receive this training, and that they are included in most of the things that under normal circumstances make an Albertan an employee.

Some of the other numbers that they talk about are that postdocs spend the majority of their time engaged in research and academic work, which means that 92 per cent of their time is focused on research and academic work and that only 8 per cent of their time is focused on career development. What concerns them as a group is that if they fulfill their fellowship and they don't attain a tenure track in the university, not being an employee means that they are not able to take care of themselves and their family when they are unemployed.

The other key pieces here are that many postdocs working in other provinces are classified as employees, but that's only because the groups in Ontario and Quebec fought this in the courts. So I'm very proud and pleased that Alberta is going to be a leader in including these groups as part of the legislation and that we are being proactive, addressing these constitutional rights in a proactive way.

A couple of the other things that I found very important were . . . [Mrs. Littlewood's speaking time expired] Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Stony Plain-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Spruce Grove-St. Albert. Crossboundary road, totally different community, but they do get along very well, so I suppose it's on topic.

As I was just commenting, I have these two cities in my riding, Spruce Grove and St. Albert. The two of them don't really interact too much, which creates a lot of challenges, but where they do interact a lot is with the counties and communities that are more direct neighbours to them. Spruce Grove has a rather well-known

relationship with the town of Stony Plain, right next door, as well as the county of Parkland, that surrounds both of those communities.

4:20

These three communities, of course, have come together on various occasions in support of the community and to further various projects, most notably the tri leisure centre, which was supported by all three communities coming together with some assistance from other places, most notably TransAlta in the construction of the tri leisure centre. The centre, of course, includes a gym, and it hosts several events. Just last month there was the tri-community expo, which hosted a lot of small businesses, and they put on a bit of a trade show. Both myself and the Member for Stony Plain were present, and it was very well attended. This is just indicative of the type of events that happen in the community and that are supported by all three municipalities.

Now, Madam Chair, another great example is St. Albert. I don't know how many members in this House know, but historically St. Albert and Sturgeon county and at some points in history even St. Albert and Edmonton didn't get along that well, in part because Edmonton kept trying to annex it, but that's another story. After the last municipal election the county councillors began hosting some minglers for all of the elected officials. These communities have really improved relationships, especially at the administrative level, and there have been some discussions on how they can better support each other. These conversations, of course, include places like the towns of Morinville, Redwater, various other communities in Sturgeon county. I think that these two are models of municipal collaboration and co-operation, and I think they're great examples of the sorts of things that Albertans hope to see from their elected officials.

Now, on a bit of a larger level and kind of related to Edmonton trying to annex St. Albert are boards like the Capital Region Board, and much co-operation has grown out of that. You know, Madam Chair, there was a recent report on how the Edmonton region can become a global competitor, and there was a lot of discussion amongst several of the mayors. They commissioned a report, and it indicated a lot of very interesting things like collaboration on transportation and on economic development. I'm really glad to see that this is a growing trend here in Alberta and, as far as I can tell, across the country, and I think that there's a lot of reason for optimism there. You know, this is a great trend to see, this collaboration and move towards supporting all of our citizens in a co-operative manner.

Ms McKittrick: Why wouldn't you use the word "collaborative"?

Mr. Horne: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park is commenting on my use of the word "collaborative," but I think that's about the sixth time I've used it in this speech.

I think that's just a great, great suggestion or a great comment on the direction that we're starting to see in the area. We are by no means perfect, neither in the tri region nor in a relationship between Sturgeon county and St. Albert nor within the capital region. Indeed, I don't think any of the relationships across the province are perfect, but that, I suppose, is more of an indication that I don't believe there is such a thing as a perfect relationship. There's always room for improvement. There's always something that we could be working better on. Perhaps it's communication between, in this case, administrations, or perhaps it's trying to find a common project that both communities want and that we can work together on.

Another example of such a project is what is now Servus Place in St. Albert. This project, when it was first proposed, was originally proposed as a collaboration between St. Albert, Sturgeon county, and Morinville, but as these projects are quite expensive, these recreation centres, they really wanted to try to spread the cost out a bit. Now, there's a lot of insider baseball that happened. It went from being located just outside of St. Albert in Sturgeon county to being located in Riel Business Park inside of St. Albert. Very quickly the county and the town expressed their unease with this move, and both communities backed out. Now the citizens of St. Albert are left as the sole tax base for that facility.

This comes up a lot in my community. There are a lot of people who, you know, go to Servus Place and they see people from Morinville, from the county, and indeed sometimes they'll see people from Redwater or other communities drive in. There's nothing wrong with that; they're certainly entitled to. It's a great facility. If you haven't had a chance, Madam Chair, I would highly recommend checking out either the tri leisure or Servus Place. You know, when you have such an expensive project, it makes it a lot more challenging for citizens to stomach that when we're stuck with the entirety of the bill. Of course, there are user fees, but the actual construction of that we're still paying off.

We're starting to outgrow Servus Place as well. Across the capital region we're still seeing a lot of population growth. Spruce Grove had a 5 per cent growth rate last year, which is one of its slowest years in recent years. The population of Spruce Grove has doubled in the past 10 years.

Mr. S. Anderson: That would be Beaumont.

Mr. Horne: The minister is commenting on Beaumont, which, unfortunately, took the place of Spruce Grove as the fastest growing community, but that might be because they had a smaller population, I would suggest.

Mr. S. Anderson: It's because I live there.

Mr. Horne: I'm not so sure it's because the minister lives there, but indeed all three – Beaumont, Spruce Grove, and St. Albert – are among the best communities in the country to raise a family in. There are multiple lists that those three communities have made it to in terms of raising a family, starting a business. I highly recommend looking into those communities as examples of what we can do across the province.

Just as an aside, I think I would be remiss if I didn't comment that the mayor of Spruce Grove, at every opportunity he gets, tries to convince everybody to move to Spruce Grove. He has even tried to convince the mayor of Calgary to move to Spruce Grove. I don't think he's winning that, but he's very passionate about his community.

You know, I think that this bill really supports that co-operation between communities. It furthers it from last session's Bill 21. One thing I was really happy to see is the opportunity to include our indigenous communities in those collaborative frameworks.

4:30

You know, I represent the Alexander First Nation as well as those two cities, and I think that there are a lot of opportunities for us to include communities like the Alexander First Nation in conversations with Sturgeon county. Indeed, in the tri-community – they're outside of my riding; they're in the Member for Stony Plain's riding – you have the Paul band and the Enoch band. Just outside, a bit further north – I'm trying to remember the name of the county – in the minister of agriculture's riding, you have the Alexis First Nation. Those three communities work very closely

with their cities already, and I think that there are probably a lot of opportunities there to support both the bands and the cities in their infrastructure.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. Horne: Whitecourt-St. Anne. Thank you.

I think that this is a great move. I think it's in keeping with the commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, and I really congratulate the minister on his work on that.

You know, we're starting to see that co-operation between those communities more and more. Just recently Spruce Grove had their first city-sponsored truth and reconciliation event. Some of the students out of the high school had done some artwork on the theme of truth and reconciliation, really focusing on the intergenerational trauma that the residential schools has caused. It was a really interesting event. It was hosted at the library.

The city brought out an elder from – I forget. I don't recall at the moment what band he was from, what nation he was from, but he came out, you know, understanding his audience and how new of an experience this was for a lot of the people there. He took the time to walk through what a smudging represents and how to do a proper smudging in his culture, and I think that was very well received. Certainly, it was one of the first times that somebody had walked through the symbolism behind all of it for me. It wasn't, of course, my first smudging, but it was one of the first times that somebody had walked through it. So that was good.

Then there were some speeches from the students on what their artwork represented, followed by a statement from myself and the mayor. The school board also participated in that as well, which is great, especially as it was the students' artwork that brought us there that day.

I think that events like that are starting to open up those connections between the cities and indeed between school boards and their First Nations, really trying to strengthen those relationships and come together not just in the interest of truth and reconciliation but also in supporting their communities. You know, there are a lot of First Nations people who make a lot of use of the local rec centres. I think cities and First Nations will really like to make use of that dialogue on that.

Now, moving a bit forward, we have a lot of opportunities here. I'm just really happy to see that we're moving towards co-operation between all of the different facets that make up the Alberta municipal world. You know, we're seeing groups like the Capital Region Board. I can never remember the name of the board in Calgary, but there's a similar organization that's starting to form. I think that's a great step forward.

You know, as I commented on the other day, Madam Chair, almost half of the working residents of St. Albert commute in to Edmonton every day, and a large portion of the population of Spruce Grove commutes into Edmonton every day, but they haven't always historically been included in the discussion on how Edmonton has to look at its transportation flow. I think having this co-operative framework, this collaborative framework, really opens the door to those conversations so that we can support the citizens of Edmonton as they plan and move forward with their planning but also so that we can support people in the surrounding communities.

A prime example is actually just kind of off to the east here, I believe it is. At the transit centre there is a St. Albert bus stop, and that was the bus that I used to take almost every day both when I lived a bit closer to the transit station in St. Albert and as a student. There's a direct line that runs from the St. Albert Centre station just outside of my riding, but I digress on that. That line runs straight

from there, well, it used to run – the next stop was MacEwan University, so that was very convenient for me. After that there are, I think, two or three stops, and then it arrives here at Government Centre. I think that that's a good indication of just how much of the St. Albert population commutes into not just the downtown core but indeed to the government buildings.

Now, of course, Spruce Grove also has a lot of working, commuting population. I don't recall the exact percentage off the top of my head, but it is quite sizable. But it's also shifting, Madam Chair. Historically Spruce Grove was a farming community, but as it has been growing and as it has been – you know, it's one of the cheaper communities in the area in terms of residential housing prices, so there's a lot of growth in Spruce Grove. What we're seeing is a shift from a lot of retiring farmers and professionals that are supporting the farming community, and we're moving more towards people choosing to live there as a bit of a step between the big city and the small town, as they're moving to the Edmonton region, whether it's for work or to be closer to family. In some cases there are also students who are graduating, people just beginning to start their family, start their life, and they're choosing Spruce Grove.

That's driven a lot of the growth in Spruce Grove, I believe. This growth has meant that Spruce Grove is really kind of on the cusp of reflecting on their identity, on what it means to be Spruce Grove. Ten years ago, even, it was a lot older of a city in terms of its average age, you know, a lot of the people had an agriculture background, and you can still see that a lot today.

Thank you.

4:40

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next member to speak, I'd just like to remind everyone that the purpose of bill debate in Committee of the Whole is to actually look at the clauses of the bill, discuss portions of it, submit amendments, and that sort of thing rather than giving speeches that are sort of just generalities, that are perhaps more appropriate for a response to the Speech from the Throne or something like that. It's helpful, so we can get on with the business, if we do it in a more proper way.

I'd like to recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wholeheartedly agree that the MGA is fantastic and exciting and quite interesting. There's a lot in there and a lot we can talk about. As you know, we have consulted extensively on this, and we've heard from thousands of people and organizations.

What I'd like to do now is actually bring forward an amendment if I could.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. We heard recently that we shouldn't miss the opportunity to make this change while the act is open, so we prepared an amendment regarding business improvement areas. Currently the status quo is that business owners pay the levy for the business improvement area. Municipalities and BIAs are asking for this change to improve community collaboration. The proposed change is to update the MGA so that business improvement area levies may be applied to property owners so that both business owners and property owners may be members of a business improvement area. This amendment is widely supported throughout the BIA community as well as by the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, where most of the Alberta BIAs are located.

We heard from the business improvement area council of Edmonton recently that while this is a small change around wording, it is critical to BIA success. We heard from the business improvement area in Calgary that this amendment will support BIAs in their work to improve a business area and increase property values. We heard from the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton that they strongly support this amendment and that their local consultation revealed widespread support for it as well.

This is a consensus item among stakeholders, and I am happy to bring forward this amendment in response to their request. We've always said that this act is all about collaboration, and this amendment is in keeping with this spirit and will ensure that both business owners and property owners collaborate as members of BIAs. I would encourage all members to support this. I'm happy to explain or take questions where there are some.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment, to provide some additional time for us to consider the amendment. What I will do is speak to the clauses of the bill and, in particular, the clauses of this very important amendment that was moved by my colleague from across the way the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

You know, one of the things that from time to time can be a little concerning about the lack of use of the committee process here in the Chamber – and I know, Madam Chair, you will be familiar with me rising from time to time to speak to pieces of legislation where I make a recommendation that we send that particular piece of legislation to committee. One of the great strengths of that and one of the great strengths of the Westminster parliamentary system – most jurisdictions, in fact, use a much more robust committee system – is that it would have allowed an opportunity for all members of the Chamber to speak directly to the very stakeholders that my colleague from across the way the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Member for Leduc-Beaumont mentioned and those supporters of this particular amendment. It would have allowed them to speak to all members of the Chamber and, in fact, would have allowed the Official Opposition the opportunity to peruse and have a much better understanding of why they would be recommending an amendment like this.

Unfortunately, what we have before us is an amendment that is of significant length, and I know that my colleague from across the way, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Member for Leduc-Beaumont, did have the opportunity to reach out to my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod very briefly yesterday and speak for just a couple of moments about some of the intention of the amendment. However, it was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a full briefing on this particular amendment but was, as I understand it, much more what we heard from the minister today.

It does present a bit of a challenge for the opposition when it comes to making decisions on the fly about supporting an amendment or not. I think many folks will be familiar with this quote: "Trust, but verify." While I appreciate the comments from my colleague on the other side of the House, the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Member for Leduc-Beaumont, and would like to take him at his word around his opportunity to reach out to the stakeholders of these different districts, I and, I would expect, members on this side of the House haven't had that same opportunity. So we're going to very briefly make a decision on this amendment based upon the comments from the minister and our ability, and I see my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod very

quickly reading through the rest of the amendment. It would be helpful if we could do these things in a much different setting.

The other thing that I might just point out is that while I am a big fan of getting legislation right the first time it comes through the Chamber, I from time to time do find it curious that we see the introduction of a piece of government legislation that they assure all members of the Assembly they had consulted on widely. In fact, they'd released the Continuing the Conversation document during the last legislative session and, to their credit, did continue that conversation with a number of the associations and the rural districts and with business and industry. I know that we'll talk at some length about the need to balance those stakeholders, particularly around taxation ratios. While, you know, it's very important that we create certainty for municipalities, it's also important that we create certainty for industry, and I know that Bill 8 doesn't quite do that. To their credit, they have done a significant amount of continuing that conversation.

But I am a little surprised that this particular amendment was unable to be included in the original legislation. I'm wondering if the minister might just provide a little bit of context for us as to what exactly transpired between the introduction of the bill and whatever stakeholder consultation took place that would change the government's mind enough that they would then go ahead and decide to make a fairly significant change to the legislation only a few days after it was introduced. I wondered if he might provide a little bit more context as to how and why that happened.

4:50

Perhaps he could go into a little bit more detail as I understand that some of this particular amendment changes the way that a municipality may be able to tax – as you know, Madam Chair, I received it less than 30 seconds prior to standing – changing some of the structure around the way a municipality could tax a business inside a larger strip mall or mall, changing some structure around that. If he could provide some context, I know that members on this side of the House certainly would appreciate that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Sure. Thank you very much to the member across for mentioning my riding multiple times. It is a fantastic riding.

This is not a massive, significant piece of legislation or amendment that we're bringing through. To be honest, it is simply that right now the status quo is that municipalities tax the business owners. All the BIAs and the cities and the municipalities have come forward and said that they would like the opportunity to do either business or property. It's simply an enabling tool for them so that they can come together around the table. For some of the property owners, if they aren't taxed, if they don't have that ability where people can get them, say, a vacant piece of land or what have you, it's really hard to track them down and find out who they are. This is one of the things the BIAs talked about with the property owners and things like that and said: "Well, this is a way that we could have you at the table. You want to be at the table. Municipalities want it; cities want it." To be honest, it is very straightforward. You know, you don't have to take me at my word. I know that. You want to get verification. But it's a pretty straightforward amendment that we're doing here.

We have heard from and I've had letters from the Alberta BIA council, Edmonton and Calgary. We do have a lot of feedback on this. It had come up, you know, before I was Minister of Municipal Affairs, way back in the day, not that long ago, I guess. It was something that I met with the BIAs on about two weeks ago. To be

honest, I think it was just something where, with all the other things that were going on, the regulations and the legislation, somehow we just hadn't worked it in there. They came back to us and said: "Hey, you know what? This is a consensus issue. We're not really understanding why it wasn't added into it." We said: "You know what? You're right. This is a pretty straightforward amendment. Let's have a discussion."

So we got letters from some of the different BIAs just to confirm that that was what they wanted still, and they did, and we got approval from them. That's why we brought it forward. It's pretty simple. It is straightforward. You know, I talked to the member opposite yesterday about it, and we were waiting on some approvals and some of these letters to come in just for confirmation. We got those, and now here we are.

The Chair: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. To my colleague from across the way, the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Member for Leduc-Beaumont: I appreciate your remarks. I appreciate the fact that you've gotten some feedback from the BIAs and the municipality. If you can help me to understand, I would appreciate it. Does this change the way that a municipality is able to tax an individual business? Have you heard from industry, not just the BIAs? Have you heard from small-business owners that this change may or may not impact? I appreciate that while it might be a simple amendment, I don't necessarily have the full grasp of exactly how the change affects the end-user. Have you heard back from small businesses that may be impacted, or are they unlikely to be impacted? Or is it just feedback from the BIAs?

Mr. S. Anderson: It's actually a levy that the municipalities already have in place. It's not something we're introducing brand new. It's something where the municipalities have a levy on business owners in business improvement areas. So, yes, it's small business. It's all the businesses that are involved in these municipalities that would be involved in the BIAs. That's where it comes from. All it is is that instead of only pointing out particular businesses, you also have the opportunity to have that levy on a property; for example, if you have a vacant or destitute building, something like that. That's all it is.

It's just making it so that it can be either/or rather than only making it on business. That's how this works. Municipalities and small businesses who are part of these BIAs: these are the ones who asked us for this. It is quite straightforward in that respect. That's kind of why I say that. These small businesses are all involved in this, and these are the ones that are asking for it. That's really all it is. It's really quite straightforward, to be honest with you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 8? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, everyone, once again. I would like to first of all let the pages know that I am going to be introducing an amendment in a couple of moments.

Firstly, I'd like to talk a little bit about the area of concern I have. My topic this afternoon once again is going to be the 5 to 1 tax ratio which is part of Bill 8. We spoke about this at great length yesterday

afternoon. With the results of those conversations, Madam Chair, I would like to therefore get back to that topic after all the other topics we've had today. I may be speaking a little bit at length here after we distribute this amendment. Basically, this is an amendment about the uncertainty of time and the lack of a specified time frame in the clauses referring to the 5 to 1 tax ratio. That's what this amendment is about.

I'll hand that over right now. I'll provide some time for the distribution, and then I'll be back up again.

Thank you.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I'll proceed. I know some members haven't received it as yet, but I think I can go ahead because some have. Basically, just to refresh everyone's memory, the 5 to 1 ratio, once again, is a change in the mill rate that a lot of municipalities have been used to in the past couple of decades, really, in most respects. Those 19 to 22 communities, and I'm not sure which is the correct number right now, where the communities have a tax ratio that's more than – I see 20 from the minister right now. [interjections] Okay.

Anyway, I'll just read it out loud if that's okay, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, be amended in section 1(31)

- (a) by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:
- (b) by adding the following after subsection (3):
 - (3.1) If in any year after 2016 a non-conforming municipality has a tax ratio that is greater than 5:1, the non-conforming municipality shall reduce its tax ratio to 5:1 on or before May 1, 2029.
- (b) by striking out clause (d).

5:00

Just to give you an understanding of what that really means, we had said yesterday – and we are fairly firm on this – that we believe that the clauses in Bill 8 should have included, instead of an unspecified time, some sort of a time that municipalities know they can plan for in the future where these changes have to be made. We recognize that in terms of industry needs and all other kinds of things for the economy of Alberta, there needs to be some time when these tax ratios are in some regard remedied from where they are now, but we don't think it's fair to not specify a time because we don't think that municipalities and residents and Albertans can plan without knowing when the deadline is going to occur.

I would like, in that regard, to support this with a message. This might seem a little bit unconventional in some respects for today, but as you know, today is the one-year anniversary of the wildfire that devastated the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. My colleague and friend the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition is there today, actually, as are others, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo as well, to participate in the festivities honouring all those who were displaced by the wildfire. Since my colleagues are unable to participate here today, they asked if I would read a letter into the record on their behalf, which I will do now, Madam Chair.

Good Afternoon fellow colleagues,

I am sorry that I am unable to be there in person with all of you today to participate in debate on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government and more importantly to speak in support of the amendment my colleague has just moved.

The residents of RMWB are facing the prospect of our seeing our taxes being raised [by almost as much as] 300%. If the proposed amendment is defeated and Bill 8 is passed unamended, it would result in the residential property taxes in RMWB and 21

other municipalities being raised significantly, potentially without warning, on the whim of the Minister.

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, strength. I think if I was to describe the community of Fort McMurray and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in a word that word would be strength.

Strength – Is what you call loading up 60 frightened kids, whose parents were unreachable and evacuating out of Fort McMurray, not knowing where it was in fact you were going. Think about that. Fire is literally biting at your ankles and you've got 60 of your community's most vulnerable citizens packed on a bus, none of whom have been able to connect with their parents, you don't know what's happening, or even where you are going. Hours later you finally end up in Edmonton, 450 kms from where you began. Tired and hungry. Scared. But alive. That's strength.

Strength – Is hearing about the hundreds of people who fled their homes only to become stranded on the highway because they've run out of gas; and loading up your pickup truck with 500 liters of diesel and gasoline and driving towards the inferno. Think about that for a moment. Your first response to one of the largest natural disasters in our nation's history is to fill your vehicle up to the brim with gasoline and diesel and drive as close to the fire as possible and then spend the next 40 hours saving hundreds of your fellow citizens. That's strength.

Strength – Is fighting desperately for more than 24 hours without sleep, to save a stranger's house while your own home burns to the ground in front of you. When you finally get a moment to breathe you spend it calling your wife and telling her the house where you've made your lives together. The home in which your children were born into. The home you lived in. Laughed in. Cried in. Loved in was gone. That's strength.

A year has passed since my community was tested by "the beast". I am proud of the resilience of my community and the outpouring of support we have received from every corner of this magnificent province. Fort McMurray and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo will rebuild, better, and stronger than before. But just as we needed your help and support during the devastating wildfire of one year ago, we need your help and support again today [here in this House].

It was signed:

Sincerely,

Hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

In closing, without the proposed amendment, the minister would be the sole decision-maker for when and how a municipality that currently exceeds a nonresidential-to-residential property tax ratio of 5 to 1 must comply. For any community that is unprecedented. For a community in the early stages of recovering from one of the world's natural disasters, the worst one in our nation's history, it is totally unacceptable.

This amendment balances the need for municipalities in the province to become a competitive and attractive place to do business with the needs of everyday Albertans to live in safe and viable communities. Unfortunately, the issues that are caused with this nonresidential property tax increasing beyond the 5 to 1 ratio are not easily fixed in one, two, three, or even five years. The process of lowering the property tax ratio will take time. Municipalities need certainty. Business and industry need certainty. The best way for the government to provide municipalities with certainty is to pass this amendment, setting a definite timeline, setting in some predictability, setting in some sort of balancing idea that will strike a balance between taxing and encouraging business to thrive and grow and prosper.

I would ask the House to seriously look at this amendment for setting a prescribed timeline so that it won't impact some of the speculative real estate market and all of that as badly as it likely will if it's not amended in this way. It is a 12-year timeline that we're

asking for, and I hope that all of you can give it serious consideration and, hopefully, your approval.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the chance to stand and speak to this amendment, and I appreciate the member bringing this forward. I understand why he's brought this forward. One of the things I'd like to know is: why 2029? Why 12 years? I don't know where that number came from.

We committed to work with RMWB and industry on time frames, and we committed to wait until they were done working with industry on what would work for them. That's what I'm going to do. That was my commitment. I've committed that to other municipalities as well. I understand when we talk about certainty and things like that, you know, out there for these guys, industry and municipalities.

I do want to say that, you know, the point about residential taxes rising 300 per cent is patently untrue, Madam Chair. I'm not sure why that keeps getting said. It was said on the radio today, too, and it's unfortunate to spread misinformation. I don't like doing that. I don't agree with it.

You know, I'm going to work with the RMWB, and we will make sure that we find something that works for them. Maybe it's 10 years. Maybe it's 14 years. Maybe it's 15 years. I don't know yet until we've heard from them exactly what they think they can do, what time frame they think they can do this in and what would work for them.

I've been in Wood Buffalo a few times now. I've spoken with the council. I've spoken to industry. I've spoken with the chamber of commerce about this. You know, something that I want to make sure that I do is to hear from the people that are being affected by this. I was there on Sunday night and on Monday, and I talked to residents that were there. I talked to people that were affected by the wildfire, and it is a really tough day for a lot of them. A lot of them want to get over it, and they want to try to move forward in a positive way.

You know, I met with a fellow when I was there in February named Steve Menard, who's building his own house. He lost everything, and he's building his own house. I got to have lunch with him again when I was there on Monday. I'll tell you that I think everybody in this province needs to meet Steve Menard and hear the way he looks at things. He lost everything, but he remembers when he was young that he had a hockey coach that said: you're an ACE, Steve; you need to run your life like you're an ACE. That's attitude, character, and enthusiasm. That's the way he works. So when he meets people on the street that are having hard times or they've lost everything, he brings them up, he lifts them up, and he talks to them about the positive things that we can do.

For me, working with the RMWB and all the municipalities out there on these ratios is a hugely positive thing. Communication is key. That's part of who I am and what I do. I've always been that way. That's how I was brought up. You know, I look a person in the face, and I shake their hand. That's the way I am. So when I told these guys in RMWB that my commitment was to wait until they came forward with their recommendations, I was telling them the truth, and I will stand by that.

5:10

I appreciate where the member is coming from. I do. I understand what he's trying to say. But I have been there and have spoken with these people numerous times. My staff, my administration: it's a constant communication. I want to make sure that everybody knows

that. I don't do things just on a whim. It's not who I am. I make sure I have facts. I don't speculate. I don't use assumptions. I don't get fears out there for people when they don't need that right now. They know that we have their back. They know that my Municipal Affairs ministry has their back, and I've told them I have their back. I'm not going to go out there and talk about apocalyptic things that are out there that possibly could happen in the future when I haven't heard back from them. Speculation isn't going to do any of us any good. Once we have information from the RMWB and industry, then we can make the decisions.

Until that point in time – I appreciate what the member across has brought forward, and like I said, I understand it, but I will not be voting for this amendment.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I'd like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for his comments and his clarification. I would especially like to thank the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod for putting this forward.

What I just heard has made me more than ever want to be in support of a clause like this. I don't doubt for a second that the hon. minister is totally honourable to his word and will consult with the RM of Wood Buffalo and everyone else, any other municipalities that are in a similar situation, but in the five years that I've been here, he may be the eighth or 10th Minister of Municipal Affairs. To me, that makes it all the more important why we have to have something in writing, so the certainty is there for industry, so the certainty is there for the good people of Wood Buffalo and Fort McMurray, as both hon. speakers talked so strongly about. It's absolutely not questionable.

The way I read this amendment, it's 12 years at the most. If the hon. minister and the people of Wood Buffalo decide to do it over 11 years or nine years or six, they can. You know, whatever it works out to.

So often when you try to compare things to the Legislature and law, I look back to what you do in your family, what you do in your household, or I look back to what you do in your business. When I've had the opportunity to be sitting with a colleague or a supplier or a contractor that I wanted to do business with in the future, the more you get in writing, the better. It's so easy to think: what was meant by that; was that what was really said?

Well, this is such a great, succinct clause. The minister and the municipality have tons of local decision-making, tons of authority and oversight on this until May 1, 2029. For these very reasons, Madam Chair and colleagues, it's always better to get it in writing. There have been several different ministers in Municipal Affairs. This doesn't remove any opportunity that the minister has to work it out directly other than by May 1, 2029.

I again will thank my hon. colleague for this great amendment, and I will be supporting it.

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

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat. Also, thank you to the minister for his remarks. I'd just like to take an opportunity to address some of the remarks he did make and add a little bit of context to the situation.

I think it's important to realize that no one can predict how a municipality will make such a large adjustment, as in the case of Wood Buffalo, from 18 to 1 down to 5 to 1, over the period of time that we arrive at. One can only conclude that if we're going to be adjusting from that high of a ratio down, somewhere along the way the residents will be impacted by a fairly significant increase in their

taxes. Certainly, we know that McMurray has been going through an awful lot of difficulties this past year. There's no question about that.

I would also like to remind the minister, with all due respect, and his predecessor that earlier last fall during the debates on Bill 21 this subject was raised as a concern. This subject was addressed in Bill 21, was something that we felt was relatively palatable, and that was the grandfather clause that was in Bill 21 that allowed for those municipalities that were beyond the 5 to 1 ratio to be declared as nonconforming municipalities. Therefore, they would not be required to commit to this change. That was also supported by a letter that was written by the minister at the time. His predecessor again, by the way, I'm referring to: I think her constituency is Lesser Slave Lake if I recall. She said in the local newspaper that there was going to be a commitment to sticking with this, that they should not worry, that this was not going to change, and that they looked forward to working with the municipality, as the current minister has talked about as well. That grandfather clause was there.

This new bill that has been brought out has caused, in my view, a flip-flop on that particular circumstance, and that's the way the people are reading it. It may not be written in stone somewhere that it is a flip-flop, but that's the way people are viewing it, that's the way the residents are viewing it, and that's the way the municipality views it. Frankly, Minister, I understand that that may be contradicting what you understand, and I respect you for your position.

But it was from conversations one-on-one with some of the representatives from the municipality that we are here today discussing this to this length. It was they, in fact, who suggested to us that the 12-year window that is in this amendment today would be something that they thought they could work towards and perhaps work with.

Once again I ask for consideration of this. I ask for this timeline of 12 years to be a solid consideration, and hopefully some other members may wish to speak in support of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment brought forward by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod. I just want to very briefly echo some of the comments that have been made by my colleagues because I appreciate the fact that the government is looking to create some certainty broadly across the province. I appreciate that taxation rates in some parts of the province have, particularly for nonresidents – as such, for businesses and our largest providers or our largest employers and all sorts of other great benefits that they provide, taxes have been passed along to them at a ratio that does create some competitive disadvantages perhaps to some of our neighbours. So there is an element of trying to create uniformity all across the province and provide industry a very, very competitive environment. Obviously, people on this side of the House have at length spoken about the need for us to do that.

But something that's equally as important as the taxation rate is certainty in business. I'm certain that if industry had a very clear path forward, they would be willing to accept a longer timeline because what this legislation is going to do is to triple the taxes of residents in Fort McMurray in quite possibly as little as three years. This is, you know, at a time when residents are rebuilding, at a time when many of them are still out of their homes. This does not create the long-term stability. Even in the discussion document that the government will sometimes reference, around a timeline of five years, it's all based in the regulations.

5:20

We spoke earlier today about: trust, but verify. As it turns out, we've heard the minister say similar sorts of things: "Don't worry. We're not going to have a negative impact. We're going to make sure we work closely with the municipality." But the easiest way to create certainty for both the municipality – and the municipality is the first to recognize that there is a need to work together. Create that stability and predictability for the municipality over a long period of time or a longer period of time and the same for industry.

This, I think, is a very reasonable compromise. It is going to allow certainty for the municipality to plan for what that will look like when they get down to a 5 to 1 ratio and certainty for business, where they have an end target of exactly what that will look like. We've seen regulations go sideways on numerous occasions, and this would prevent that from happening. I think it's reasonable. I encourage all members to support it, particularly in light of the fact that even though the government says, "Don't worry; municipal taxes aren't going to increase in Fort McMurray," there is no other path forward for them to get to 5 to 1 and still be able to operate the municipality in a manner that they're used to.

The other thing that's, I think, important to note is that it's not just the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. There are others that are impacted by this, and it would provide the same certainty for those that it would for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

So I encourage the hon. member. If, in fact, we can trust him, that they're going to do it over a long period of time, there should be no problem, then, to put some dates to exactly what that looks like.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would certainly second what previous speakers have said, but I'd also like to point out a couple of other nuances to the realities of Bill 8 with regard to the 5 to 1 ratio and the amendment that's before us.

Let me first of all begin by saying that the tax divergence, which is what we're talking about, incurs almost entirely in rural communities. Those are communities with large industry-caused expenses. Those large industries require certain amounts of infrastructure in order for them to function: heavy roads, which are much more expensive to build than just local roads. They require infrastructure in terms of health facilities, in terms of policing. Those are some of the obvious ones. There are others as well, though.

Yet while they cause this expense to the municipality, the reality is that the majority of their workers in many cases are what I'm going to call drive-in or fly-in employees. They don't actually live in the municipality that they are working in and in which this industry causes the expense to occur. This is part of the reason why we have this problem of extreme tax ratio. The tax base actually is fly-in or drive-in. Many of the people who work there, who cause the expenses, the industry itself that causes the expenses: in many cases those employees don't actually work there. They're camp workers, and they don't pay tax. These rural municipalities, on top of having this large industry-caused expense, also have, actually, minimal local populations, relatively speaking, in many cases.

Now what we're doing by not taking a very careful approach to how we re-equalize this tax issue is that we're going to be throwing the costs of industry onto the backs of the ordinary, local people. That's exactly what's going to happen. In many ways it's unjust.

The ordinary people who actually live in these regions and don't fly home to somewhere else – even in Lacombe-Ponoka, for

instance, it happens because the large Joffre gas plant, which is in Lacombe county, actually receives most of its employees from the city of Red Deer. All of those employees do not pay taxes in that county. So in a very real way the local farm community around the plant, that, really, in many respects doesn't want it there in the first place, that doesn't particularly benefit from it, is the one that is actually going to see their taxes raised, that is going to see significant tax rises, and, with that, especially in some of the farther out rural areas, a potential loss of property value, declines in population. Really, this is going to be on the backs of the local people in the end.

Bill 21 did have the grandfather clause in it, protected the timeline with which this would happen. Bill 8 now calls these communities nonconforming, and there's no certainty, no guarantee for them on how quickly this will happen, how the transition is going to take place, what's going to happen.

Another part of this that concerns me, which is a little bit different but still important to the broader picture, is that in some respects what's happening here is that the provincial government or, in this case, the minister is taking the decision-making authority away from the local authorities and giving it to the minister. This is in some respects, in some areas viewed as a power grab. It's the continuing principle of the centralization of everything. It's a discrimination, and it's a bias. It's an inequity against the authority of the rural areas. It really is taking the decision-making from the local municipal governments to the provincial government.

The solution is not some sudden decree by the minister, which is potential in the way it currently stands, but a reasonable horizon, the security of a reasonable horizon. Let the municipalities figure it out in a reasonable horizon. Respect the local decision-making of those authorities, and don't drive the cost of industry back onto the backs of the local landowners and the local residents.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise and request that we rise and report progress.

The Chair: Is that motion to rise and report progress on Bill 8 . . .

Mr. Cooper: Correct on Bill 8.

The Chair: . . . and to rise and report Bill 7?

Mr. Cooper: Oh, yeah. Bill 7 is fine.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Sweet: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 7. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 8. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 10 Appropriation Act, 2017

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great privilege to speak to third reading of Bill 10, the government's Appropriation Act, 2017, and this indeed is the discussion of the government's budget and their plans for spending for the upcoming fiscal year.

As has been my habit in the past when looking at budgets, I like to try to say at least a couple of things that I see in the budget that I think are positives and that I think are good things that I support. For example, one of them – and this was covered in our estimates with the Health minister – is that I certainly support the effort of the minister to try to get a handle on, specifically, physician compensation. I give her as well as the Alberta Medical Association a great deal of credit in this regard because certainly physician costs, hospital costs, and pharmaceutical costs are the three principal drivers that have increased the health care budget consistently greater than the rate of inflation plus population growth.

It's a difficult curve to bend. It is, in fact, interesting to see how other provinces are finding the same sorts of struggles. I have been seeing some of the advertising coming across from the British Columbia election, and it's interesting to see that despite the fact that B.C. has one of the highest performing health care systems in our nation, there are still significant issues in the B.C. health care system. The Ontario health care system also has issues, so this is something that is not unique to Alberta, but I do applaud the minister in her efforts to try to bend the curve specifically on physician compensation and specifically in the area where we're trying to move more doctors to an alternate compensation model as opposed to strictly being fee for service.

The province of Alberta has for years had the highest percentage of physicians who are primarily compensated on a fee-for-service basis, and it is one of the principal cost drivers. As we found when we conducted the rural health review, it is also one of the things that creates distortions in our health care system that are not helpful to the delivery of health care services in our province.

The second area that I'm going to commend the government on – and this is sort of across a number of ministries – is their ongoing commitment to infrastructure construction, not just to new construction but also to infrastructure maintenance. This is a positive thing, and I will tell you that this is something that, in my assessment, in my candid assessment of our past government – although we hear a lot from the other side about the many and various failings of our 12 consecutive Conservative majority governments, I do believe that this is something that history will show was a shortcoming of our government. I think it's important that if we're going to have a candid assessment, we acknowledge things that we fell short on. I think that this is one of them. I do think that it is extremely important that not only do we build new infrastructure but that we also maintain it. This government's commitment to increasing infrastructure maintenance budgets is an important part of that.

Now, I do have to say that I found some of the changes in the capital plan section a little bit interesting. The fact that it went from a five-year capital plan to a four-year capital plan was interesting, and I asked three different ministers why that change had been made, and I got three different answers. I found that somewhat curious. I would have expected a more consistent answer between

ministers as to why the capital plan horizon had changed from a five-year horizon to a four-year horizon and why there were significant shifts in how certain projects had been costed out.

Specifically, in the Department of Education I note that this year there is an announcement for the construction in the out-years of the budget of an additional 36 schools. Certainly, last year's capital budget did not have any provision for new schools beyond the completion of the capital plan and the school build that was initiated by the previous government. We know that these schools are now being opened and are coming on stream. Certainly, some of them were delayed by a variety of factors, some of which were not within the control of the government, some of which were local matters, but I know that, for example, I attended a school opening in our constituency last November, and this was a school that from announcement to opening of the doors was a two-year time frame. So schools can be built very quickly, and schools can be built very efficiently, and there are a lot of factors that contribute to that.

But I do have a number of concerns, and I think it would be remiss if I didn't at least discuss what my concerns are. Perhaps principal amongst them are the deficit and the debt that this budget takes on. Now, we can have a lot of discussions – and some of them will be philosophically driven – as to what level of deficit and debt is appropriate. Now, the Finance minister is very comfortable with a high level of deficit, and he seems very comfortable with a high level of debt. In order to ease his comfort in terms of these ever-increasing levels of debt, he has created a situation where there is an ever-increasing debt-to-GDP ratio, which is found to be acceptable. You know, that concerns me because a lot of other jurisdictions in Canada, a lot of other provinces are in fact moving to balanced budgets and are in fact curving the debt-to-GDP ratio in their provinces. Even the province of Quebec has a balanced budget this year and is contributing some \$2 billion within their \$100 billion budget towards debt repayment. You know, I hope that we can get to a point in Alberta where we're doing that sooner rather than later. It certainly concerns me that the Finance minister seems to show no commitment to a specific plan for paying down the debt.

In fact, I suppose the cynic could say that the 2016 budgeted deficit was \$10.4 billion and this year's budgeted deficit is \$10.3 billion and that at the current rate of progress it will take this government 102 more years to come to a balanced budget. It's perhaps a simplistic analysis, but it is every bit as valid as the one that the Finance minister has offered this House because he has just given a series of pie-in-the-sky and wishful-thinking dates that we will return to a balanced budget. You know, I am hopeful, certainly, that that is something that we will move towards.

The second area of concern is our much-vaunted tax advantage. Now, at the time that this government took office in 2015, that tax advantage over the next lowest taxed jurisdiction in our nation was some \$11 billion. One third of that advantage has already been frittered away by this administration. They've gone from an \$11 billion advantage to a \$7.5 billion advantage, which will increase – I'm sure the Finance minister is about to heckle me – to \$8.7 billion this year through no action of his. That increase is purely because other jurisdictions are moving and you have decided not to. So don't take credit for things that you can't take credit for.

But I point out again that that advantage used to be \$11 billion, and I worry that that is an advantage that we should actually be working towards trying to maintain rather than treating it as if that's the room we have to play with before we're no longer the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the nation. I don't think that there's any indication that this minister thinks that that is still an important advantage to have. I don't think that we are seeing a commitment on behalf of this minister or this government to maintain Alberta as

the lowest taxed jurisdiction. In fact, I hear a lot from some members of this government that indicates that being the lowest taxed jurisdiction is something we shouldn't be proud of, and I think that's a concern.

A third area is a major concern of mine that came up during the course of estimates – and it's very specific to one ministry, but I have to raise it because it is an area that I'm particularly concerned with – and that is in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The Culture and Tourism minister told us at estimates that they would no longer be doing specific calculations as to the economic impact of tourism to our economy. That's a stunning revelation.

5:40

The tourism industry is driven by numbers, Madam Speaker. The tourism industry always had a very clear picture of how many businesses, how many jobs, what the economic impact was, and what the contribution to the provincial coffers was each and every year, yet we were told in estimates that that was something that was felt to be no longer useful. I find it interesting that in every press release that comes from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, they are still quoting numbers to indicate how great the economic impact of the tourism industry is to our province, yet they are quoting the last set of numbers that they have, and those, in fact, are numbers from 2014.

Unless the minister can demonstrate to this House a clear commitment to provide the kinds of measurements and statistics and numbers that allow the tourism industry to mark its progress as it grows and changes and develops and supposedly acts as a diversification driver, which I'm sure it could do, my question is: if you're not measuring it, how do you know? You have no clue as to whether tourism is in fact acting as a diversifier of our economy.

You know, the other end of things that has been kind of interesting has been some of the myths. I don't have time to go through all of the myths that have been perpetuated during the course of this debate by members of the government, but I do want to go after one, and that is the myth that they're doing a serious attempt at restraint of expenditure. Whenever we bring up the restraint of expenditure point, the only thing that they're able to bring forward is their recent review of CEO salaries and compensation packages for the ABCs.

Now, I support that review, and I support the idea that we have to bring these salaries more into line, and, no, I'm not advocating on behalf of golf course memberships, but I do want to say: let's keep this in perspective. That review will save the government \$16 million. Sixteen million dollars is a good saving, but \$16 million represents 0.03 per cent of the budget. If you're going to even get to a balanced budget, Minister, you have to do that 643 more times. So far we've seen no evidence that you're even prepared to do it one more time, never mind 643.

You know, we hear other things in relation to the budget. We hear the Minister of Economic Development and Trade saying how the world is moving past coal as a source of generation for electricity. That seems odd given that there are 2,400 coal-fired electricity generation plants either under construction or being planned worldwide. If the world is moving past coal, it seems odd that they would be building all of these plants. I think we are actually missing a huge opportunity, Madam Speaker, in terms of providing Alberta technology that could provide the world, those 2,400 coal plants, with some of the technology to reduce the emissions, to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, to reduce the carbon footprint.

I mean, I will give you an example. If there was technology developed in Alberta to reduce the emissions from those 2,400 plants by 5 per cent, that would be the equivalent of taking 120 coal plants out of commission, yet this government trumpets that it's

taking 19 coal plants out of commission. Wouldn't it be better for Alberta technology, our ingenuity, to develop a process that could be marketed, that could be sold, that could be exported world-wide and applied? Even if it's applied to only half of those 2,400 plants, that's still 60 coal plants that you're essentially taking out of commission.

The last one that I actually have real enjoyment about is green shoots. Green shoots. Now, I will confess, Madam Speaker – and you can ask my wife – I am not skilled at horticulture. If there are houseplants in our house that she leaves to my care, I can basically guarantee they will be dead within a week. Green shoots. The minister consistently talks about how we're going to have green shoots and that we're seeing these signs – don't get me wrong; I applaud every sign that our economy is recovering. I think it's very positive.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 64(5) I now must put the question on the appropriation bill for third reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading of Bill 10 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:45 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Miranda
Babcock	Jansen	Nielsen
Bilous	Kazim	Phillips
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Ceci	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Luff	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	Mason	Shepherd
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Sweet
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woollard
Hinkley		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gill	Schneider
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	McIver	Stier
Drysdale	Orr	Taylor
Ellis	Pitt	van Dijken
Fraser	Rodney	

Totals:	For – 37	Against – 17
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[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly now stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:03 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 4, 2017

Day 28

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND),
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel	Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer		Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 4, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. members, let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. Once again, let us reflect on the strength of our local communities and the skills and abilities our local leaders and community members bring to our province in order to make it a better place for all of us to live. Let us continue to advocate and commend our community for the great work they do. And May the 4th be with you.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Cancellation of Morning Sitting

18. Mr. Carlier moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 3(1), the morning sitting of the Assembly on Tuesday, May 9, 2017, be cancelled.

Mr. Carlier: Madam Speaker, on March 21, 2017, your office sent a memo to all parties requesting the use of the Chamber for high school students partaking in the MLA for a Day event. This motion will allow the Chamber to be used for that important event on the morning of May 9, 2017.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion?

[Government Motion 18 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 11

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise and move on behalf of the Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, for second reading.

If passed, this legislation would further the principles of open government in Alberta by increasing accountability, ethics, and transparency. By strengthening existing legislation and by better protecting whistle-blowers from reprisal, we hope to encourage more people to come forward when a matter needs to be investigated.

Madam Speaker, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which was made up of representatives from all parties, reviewed the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act and made recommendations for improvement. I would like to thank all members of the committee for their hard work in this regard.

One of the most important goals of this legislation is to protect whistle-blowers from any sort of punishment or retaliation from their employer. In order to help achieve this goal, the all-party committee recommended that the act be amended to ensure that whistle-blowers are entitled to some sort of remedy if they suffer a reprisal. Under the old legislation, while an employer in the public sector could be charged for committing a reprisal, it did not contemplate what sort of restitution should be made to the whistle-blower.

To solve this problem, we have accepted the all-party committee's recommendation, and this bill will enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies. The board would appoint one of its senior members, either the chair or one of the vice-chairs, to hear the matter and order the remedy. Hearings would be conducted as determined by the board. They would be able to summon witnesses, and their decision would be final. For example, the board may decide that the whistle-blower should get their job back if they were fired blowing the whistle. In other cases they may be entitled to compensation for lost wages.

Ultimately, it will be up to the board to decide what is appropriate, and the act would set out new enforcement powers which would allow the board to enforce its orders. The board would also be required to provide a copy of all of the restitution orders to the commissioner for inclusion in the commissioner's annual report. Madam Speaker, when someone reports a serious wrongdoing, that person is acting in the public interest, and these changes will help ensure they are protected.

The all-party committee also recommended that the act be amended so that it more clearly applies to ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly. The way the act stands, it does not afford any protection to political staff working in ministers' offices or the Premier's office. Likewise, it's unclear whether or not ministers may have the whistle blown on them. Staff in constituency offices are already covered by the act. However, the act currently does not allow these staff or anyone else to blow the whistle on elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Madam Speaker, as you can tell, this can be rather confusing, but our amendments will help clear this up.

The bill clearly lays out that, subject to parliamentary privilege, MLAs, ministers, and the Premier can all be investigated when a disclosure is made to the Public Interest Commissioner. Likewise, political staff will be protected from reprisal should they choose to blow the whistle. Currently no other jurisdiction in Canada has whistle-blower legislation that applies to MLAs in this way, and Ontario is the only jurisdiction that covers ministers. As a result, accepting this recommendation would help make our government one of the most honest, transparent, and accountable governments in Canada.

The new legislation would also allow the Public Interest Commissioner to investigate a wider variety of wrongdoings, including some forms of mismanagement or abuse of human resources in the public sector. Under certain circumstances this may include bullying and harassment in the workplace. Of course, other options already exist to address human resource issues and breaches of code of conduct. We already have human rights legislation and ordinary employment law and collective bargaining mechanisms to help ensure a healthy work environment in the public sector. To be clear, in the event of a wrongdoing related to workplace bullying or harassment in the public, any collective agreement or employer policies would be accessed first, but if these processes are not adequate to resolve the problem, this bill would allow the Public Interest Commissioner to investigate egregious and systemic cases of bullying and harassment.

In addition, this bill would help improve the process whistle-blowers must go through to report a wrongdoing and ensure they are protected when they need it. Under the old legislation a potential whistle-blower is required to report the details of the alleged wrongdoing to a designated officer. Our new legislation would allow potential whistle-blowers to bypass their designated officer and report directly to the Public Interest Commissioner if they so choose. Furthermore, the new act would clarify that a whistle-blower may approach their boss about a wrongdoing, and their protection from reprisal would start at that very moment. In some cases a potential whistle-blower may not know their designated officer, and as a result they may be more comfortable speaking with their supervisor before going to that designated officer. In other cases a potential whistle-blower may prefer to go directly to the commissioner.

The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, would also strengthen the commissioner's investigative powers. With our amendments the commissioner's power to access information would be equivalent to the Auditor General's ability to access information. In other words, the commissioner will be given the right to access records and data at an employer's work site. This is a definite strengthening of the commissioner's powers. It also helps ensure that information requests will remain focused and relevant, thereby avoiding an undue burden on public entities.

The all-party committee also noted that there are many outsourced government functions or governmentlike functions that do not fall within the scope of the act but for which government spends a lot of money to provide a service to the public. In other words, those who carry out activities on behalf of the government should feel safe and free from reprisal when they report serious wrongdoings rather than just those who are directly employed by the government. At the same time, these entities should also be investigated if there is an alleged wrongdoing related to their work in the public sector.

However, the all-party committee also recommended that the act not be expanded to include the private sector. At this time we are accepting the all-party committee's recommendations, but much more work needs to be done to determine how to cover public-sector services carried out by third parties without stepping over the line into the private sector. If this act is passed, we will consult with government contractors and delegated service providers to determine how best to move forward on the details of the recommendation.

9:10

Lastly, our legislation would also better protect the identity of whistle-blowers. For example, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act does not apply to records held by the Public Interest Commissioner, but if a designated officer initiates an investigation rather than the commissioner, it is possible for a third party to submit a FOIP request asking for records connected to the investigation. Our new legislation will ensure that the name of the whistle-blower and other identifying information are exempted from these FOIP requests.

As members of the all-party committee will know, there were many more recommendations, and our government considered each and every one carefully. While I have covered the major amendments, I would encourage all members to read through the bill to see other amendments related to process or administration, all of which stem from the all-party committee's recommendations.

Madam Speaker, our government recognizes that the truest reason for exposing a wrongdoing is often not to criticize but to help make amends. In other words, when someone blows the whistle,

they should be celebrated, not cast out. This is the foundation of this legislation, and this is what it was built on.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 11, the strengthening the public interest disclosure whistle-blower act. I'd just like to begin by echoing a few of the comments of my colleague from across the way with respect to the good work that was done on the all-party committee. Certainly, this was the first task that the committee was working on and one that worked really well. Unfortunately, the whole committee didn't end as effectively, if I may say, as it started. Things went along quite well through this portion of the committee work, and then, as you'll know, the government started to make some changes to the way political parties were going to be funded. As my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre had mentioned on a number of occasions, it appeared that they were trying to stack the deck in favour of the NDP, so that committee didn't end quite as co-operatively as it began.

But that's not to say that good work wasn't accomplished, and certainly Bill 11 is a reflection of that good work that was done, so I would like to thank the former chair and the interim chair, I think, of the committee as well as the Minister of Labour, the then chair of the committee, for the work that was done. Strengthening the public interest disclosure act will make it safer for government employees to expose gross mismanagement of taxpayer-funded resources, and that's something that we should all be focused on, ensuring that those who have the information can provide information that will ensure there isn't mismanagement and that they are protected and able and willing to reveal that information. Employees need the peace of mind to know that they will be free from reprisal when they come forward to report wrongdoing.

This bill is a step forward in eliminating a culture of secrecy, a culture of secrecy that we have seen in Alberta over some period of time. Certainly, it's the opinion of this side of the House that that has continued under this current government. You know, Madam Speaker, that I have risen in this House on numerous occasions to speak specifically about the FOIP challenges that we have and the culture of secrecy that exists in the Department of Justice, the political interference that we've seen the FOIP commissioner speak about inside the Premier's office. We would encourage the government, and we have been, to ensure that they are taking even more steps to rectify those challenges just like – and I'll be happy to applaud them in this case – they have taken steps to ensure there is better protection for whistle-blowers and, as such, that that will hopefully be part of shining light on some of the darker parts of the government.

As I mentioned, last summer the all-party Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee did meaningful work to improve the legislation, and it was good to see that government members had opened up to good ideas. In fact, there were amendments passed, I believe, that were proposed by all parties in this Chamber, including the two independent members that are at the end of the Chamber here. The bill reflects 20 of the 21 recommendations in the committee's final report.

There needs to be more transparency whenever taxpayer dollars are being spent, especially at the levers of power, including the Premier's office, ministers' staff. These offices needed to be included in this legislation. We have seen political interference on a number of different occasions from this government, so it's important that our public employees or employees in ministers'

offices feel that they have the ability to ensure that light is shone where it ought to be.

Expanding the scope of the act to government-contracted service providers is also important. These contractors provide services in many areas like taking care of our seniors or our children, just to name a few. There are some very, very significant service providers in terms of total amount of resources as well as total amount of responsibility. It's very important that those contractors also feel that they have the ability to shine light or to blow the whistle on areas where it needs to be and also to not fear for their contracts. We know that there is a significant amount of fear in this province when it comes to speaking out against this government, and we need to make sure that that fear is mitigated and that whistle-blowers are able to respond as they see fit.

Whistle-blower legislation doesn't work if employees are too intimidated to come forward. A whistle-blower may not feel comfortable filing a disclosure with their boss or even their boss's boss. It's good to see that in this legislation, the bill provides the provision for whistle-blowers to report directly and anonymously to the office of the Public Interest Commissioner. This is a very positive change. As you can imagine as the Deputy Chair of Committees, there may be some concern if you had a direct challenge or concern with your immediate supervisor. If you only had the ability to disclose to that supervisor your concern, there may be some reservation in your desire to do it. Now, with Bill 11 it provides other avenues to employees, other than their employer, to disclose this information, which I think is certainly a step in the right direction.

Whistle-blowers who have been brave enough to report wrongdoing have unfortunately had their career or their work life suffer at the hands of the people who have committed mismanagement. To ensure that they can remain anonymous and can utilize the Public Interest Commissioner is a much better and more open and transparent manner for the whistle-blower to ensure that there won't be consequences for shining light on a subject. Under the new act those who disclose wrongdoing and face reprisal will be able to seek restitution through the Labour Relations Board.

9:20

One of the concerns that we have – and we recognize that there are some very sensitive issues around this concern – is that, unfortunately, the NDP have chosen not to expand the whistle-blower legislation to protect physicians who are in alternative relationship plans or who have received other forms of payment from this government. Of course, there are some unique circumstances around physicians, which ones are contractors and which ones are AHS employees, et cetera, but all physicians should be protected to ensure that they can receive the same whistle-blower protections as any physician here. The minister should answer why her government thinks it's better to deal with something like this behind closed doors at a later time when the committee recommended that this action be done now.

The bill calls for more detail when the office of the Public Interest Commissioner conducts its annual reporting, which, of course, is very positive. It's important that we have the best available information to make the best available decisions. The Public Interest Commissioner now reports on the types of proven wrongdoing in the disclosure it receives, a summary of the findings in cases where wrongdoing or acts of reprisal are found to have been committed, the specific recommendations made to public entities or offices of the Legislature and the responses to those recommendations, and any offences committed or penalties given under the act.

One of the things that's equally as important as a whistle-blower's ability to report is the public's ability to understand and know what has happened as well as the consequences of those actions. Expanding the ability for the commissioner to report is of critical importance, and it's one of the reasons why we were pleased to see it included in the recommendations.

There are a number of very positive things about this legislation. Certainly, the legislation does significantly more good than harm. That's one of the reasons why I support and encourage all members of our team and of the Official Opposition to support Bill 11. I hope that on a go-forward basis we will be able to do much more work at the committee level just like was done here on the whistle-blower protection act. So much of the bill comes out of that committee.

Now, there was one recommendation and some other discussion that wasn't able to be included in the legislation, and I'm sure some other colleagues will speak specifically to that as they were very passionate about those particular recommendations. It is often the best opportunity for ideas from all sides of the Chamber to win.

The other thing that is great about committee work being done is the time that we have to review important issues, the amount of consultation and feedback that we all receive, not just that the government receives. I know that the government speaks about the consultation and the work they do, whether it's on labour legislation – and we all know that that consultation was rushed. That is information that the government has and is not available to the opposition. So one might be concerned with the government going rogue and not providing the results or not providing all of the content to the opposition.

Really, the opposition's role is to provide those checks and balances. In some ways we are whistle-blowers on the government, so we want to make sure that the consultation is done. When we do it in committee like this, we have the opportunity as well to have access to the experts. I know the commissioner came on a number of occasions to the committee and provided the same information. I know my colleagues from Bonnyville-Cold Lake and Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Highwood had some very positive and robust discussions around these particular issues, and as such, I know that they're all very willing to speak in favour of what ultimately is a good piece of legislation and a step forward for our province.

So I look forward to the debate. I look forward to the passage of Bill 11 and ensuring that those who have information are willing to provide it as well as to do so without the fear of significant negative consequences.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to talk about Bill 11. Let me say that because Bill 11 to a large degree grew out of an all-party committee, I think that's an example that we should consider following in the future because there's a lot of work here that is better done in an all-party committee, in a less adversarial environment than the one we're in right now. I think this bill is an example of some of the good things that can grow out of people in this important Legislature being put into an environment where we can work together in a more collegial atmosphere than indeed is in this room many times.

Madam Speaker, there's a lot to like about this bill, but I wonder why committee recommendation 18, on solicitor-client privilege, was deferred. Hopefully, we'll hear some explanation from the government side on that before this debate is completed.

There was a proposed authority for the commissioner to compel testimony. That doesn't seem to explicitly be a recommendation. I'd certainly be interested in hearing what the government side has to say about that.

One of the things that the member said when she was talking and introducing the bill this morning was about that the decision is final. I think that any time you give authority to somebody when the decision is final, unfortunately, you're depending upon the perfection of that person or that body. Certainly, our independent officers are important in the Legislature, Madam Speaker, but just because we're all human beings, I think that depending on someone being perfect and making every decision well, I have to say, personally, or putting in a rule or a recommendation or a piece of legislation or anything that says that all decisions are final is, I think, troubling at all times.

You know, even in the highest courts in the land the decisions are appealable. I think that's something that we need to think about as we go forward. I'm sure that it's well intended. I'm certainly not suggesting otherwise. But depending upon the perfection of every decision of any human being walking this planet is risky. Let's certainly hope that the commissioner is more perfect than I am if all decisions are final. Let me say that much.

9:30

There are several things that are worthy of supporting here. There's a section, I believe, that says that gross mismanagement is defined as an act or omission that is deliberate and that shows a reckless or wilful disregard for the proper management of government resources. I think that's something or I certainly hope that that's something that all members of this House could agree with and get behind. But I cannot help but ponder whether dragging the taxpayers \$71 billion into debt without any plan to pay back even dollar one might even qualify as a reckless and wilful disregard for the management of government resources. That's a question for another day, but it seems to me that that's almost what that section describes. What's happening with the budget that the government was so proud of passing yesterday may actually fall under this category.

Madam Speaker, I think that protecting people at work from unfair management practices, protecting the taxpayers from misuse of government funds, protecting workers that have the courage to step forward and point out wrongdoing and make the world a better place, make their government a better place, make their workplace a better place are all worthy goals that, in my estimation, this legislation strives to achieve. I applaud what I believe are those intentions, and that's why I'm highly likely to support this. As I said, I have a couple of concerns, which I've tried to articulate in the first couple of minutes of my debate, and I'm sincerely hopeful that the government will make some attempt to answer those concerns before the debate concludes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been my privilege to stand and speak on this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to second reading of Bill 11.

I'll start with some of the background that perhaps some of my colleagues may have touched on in their previous comments about how this bill came to be, where the recommendations that are contained in the bill came from. I really hope – and those who were in the House for my member's statement earlier this week will

understand where this is coming from – that this is another one of those good examples of what it looks like when committees are allowed to do their work freely, where debate is allowed and encouraged by members from all sides, and that good legislation then comes as a result of that.

What I'm really encouraged by in this bill is that it does make Alberta's whistle-blower protection among if not the strongest in the country. That's a great thing. That's something that we in this House all ought to strive for on every front. Everything that we do in this House we ought to be striving to make it the best and also to do that for the right reasons. If there are things that are not being done properly at some place in the provincial government, then I think it's absolutely without question in the public interest that Albertans know about that.

To go back in history a little bit and answer that question of how it is that this bill came to be, where the different portions of this bill came from, it, of course, has its roots in the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. That committee was tasked with reviewing four pieces of legislation, the whistle-blower protection act being the first among them. It took a while. It took, I think, the better part of eight months, if my memory serves, for that committee to actually get into the process of deliberating and making recommendations on the whistle-blower protection act. That committee made 21 recommendations, and by my count 19 and a half of those recommendations have appeared in this bill. That's pretty remarkable.

Again, I want to thank the government and the minister who has brought this forward for their work in incorporating nearly all of the recommendations coming out of that committee. The one and a half recommendations that are not included, the half being to do with physicians on alternative remuneration plans, or ARPs: my understanding is that those changes need to happen in regulation and either can't or for whatever practical purposes have been chosen not to be in the bill itself. I will certainly take the government at their word that that is, in fact, a requirement and also that that is in fact coming at some point down the road once this legislation is passed. That was, again, one of those thoughtful recommendations that were made by that committee.

The other one that isn't there has to do with solicitor-client privilege. Now, I know that, not being a lawyer, I don't have all of the facts about this, but I do know that solicitor-client privilege is a very fundamental aspect of the law and has a lot of very specific meanings and very specific protections that are fundamental to justice. I would like to hear at some point in the debate from the minister what her rationale is for not having solicitor-client privilege included in this bill because I think that is one of those areas, as we've seen from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, that could be used inappropriately or to frustrate the process. We've seen that in FOIP requests where it certainly appears from the Information and Privacy Commissioner's perspective – and I would agree with her – that solicitor-client privilege is used to frustrate the process. It appears that that happens inappropriately. I would certainly hope that that is not something that we have left the door open to by excluding that specific recommendation from this bill.

Again, as the debate moves forward, I would be very interested to hear from the minister or from other members why it is that that has been excluded and if that's something that the government will contemplate including at some point in the future or if they feel that there are other ways of addressing that particular challenge. Again, as much as I love lawyers, any time there's an opportunity for the process to be frustrated through what appear to the outside world as technicalities, potentially putting whistle-blowers at risk or potentially allowing perpetrators of either gross mismanagement or

of intimidation or of inappropriate behaviour within any aspect of the public service, then I think we need to be very careful about enabling anyone to allow that to happen.

Now, I want to be very clear that I don't think that that's happening in any sort of widespread way through Alberta's very capable and very professional public service. But the point of whistle-blower protection is that when you have tens or even hundreds of thousands of employees, just through sheer statistical probability there are going to be a very, very small number of them that may at some point do inappropriate things. There may be gross mismanagement. There may be bullying and intimidation. The committee heard some examples of that, and we've seen some cases where the Public Interest Commissioner has ruled that that has in fact been the case. That's the purpose of having whistle-blower protection. It is absolutely in the public interest to not only have whistle-blower protection but to have very strong whistle-blower protection to make sure that anyone within Alberta's public service has the protection that they deserve should they identify something that's inappropriate: that money is being wasted, that people in a particular department are being bullied. That's why we have whistle-blower protection. That's not to say that these problems are rampant, but it's also not to say that they're nonexistent either.

9:40

So I'm certainly encouraged by the contents of the bill. Again, I'm interested in hearing what the minister has to say about the solicitor-client privilege issue, about some of the issues that the Member for Calgary-Hays has raised as well, some of those questions. I guess I don't want to go so far as to call them issues, but these are questions that I have as well. In general terms I'm very pleased to see that it is in fact possible to have a committee, in this case the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, work well together on this particular area. It's come up with thoughtful recommendations and put those recommendations forward in the form of the bill which is brought before this Assembly and which we have an opportunity now to debate.

At the end of the day, I think without question this improves whistle-blower protection in Alberta. I think, not being an expert on whistle-blower protection around the country, just based on the recommendations that we made, having been on that committee myself and gone through that process, it certainly feels like we've taken a big step forward. It certainly feels like we are now on the cutting edge of whistle-blower protection in the country but also potentially on the cutting edge of whistle-blower protection around the world.

You know, one of the things that we did on the committee was a crossjurisdictional analysis, and this gives me a fabulous opportunity to thank the very, very capable, very hard-working, dedicated people in research services who did remarkable work in providing us with very succinct but thorough research, crossjurisdictional research not only in Canada but other Commonwealth nations, about whistle-blower protection. I know all of us at one point or another have been on a committee where we interact with the people from research services, and they do really, really remarkable work. So I hope they're listening, and I do want to make sure that they know how much we, all of us, I know, appreciate the work that they do. It really enables us to do our work.

It is possible for that committee structure to work. I won't go into some of the things that happened later on in the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. That was unfortunate. It tells me, unfortunately, that it really, I don't think, needed to be that way. That is what it is, but for whistle-blower protection anyway we've proven that that committee process can work and be very effective.

Certainly, I have every intention of supporting Bill 11. I think it's a good piece of legislation. I think it improves the accountability within the public service. It improves transparency for the people of Alberta. It makes it most likely that we will identify any gross mismanagement that may be going on and address that to ensure that we are, in fact, good stewards of Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars that they send to the provincial government.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will return to my place and thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I've purposely waited until later in the debate. I was hopeful that the effects of some local anaesthetic from some dental work that I had done earlier today would have worn off, but it is a testimony to the excellence of our dental hygienists in our province that my infraorbital nerve block, which has rendered the right side of my face largely anaesthetized, is still very much in effect. So if it does appear to members of the House that I am suffering from some minor form of palsy, that indeed is not the case, but as this will result in my remarks being necessarily brief, I will also remark that this makes it likely that my colleagues in the House will suggest that I obtain dental work on a daily basis.

However, Madam Speaker, I do want to say a few remarks just on the heels of the remarks made by the members for Calgary-Elbow and Calgary-Hays and also Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I also appreciate the remarks that were made by the Member for St. Albert in introducing Bill 11. I would certainly echo the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Elbow as a member of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. We were on a journey in the past year. I think that the resulting bill, Bill 11, is in my view an example of how things can work or perhaps should work when things work well. I think it is, in fact, the result of a collaborative effort on behalf of members of all parties.

I know that my colleague the Member for Calgary-North West and I as well as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and members from the Official Opposition and the government worked very hard. In fact, of the roughly 12 months that the committee's mandate was in place, this was the piece of work that took up the bulk of the time. It was done carefully and conscientiously, and it was done very thoroughly.

I think that's reflected in this bill. I think this bill does provide improvements to the existing Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act that was passed in 2013. These improvements were in many cases recommended by the Public Interest Commissioner but also by other bodies and came about as a result of a very thorough and exhaustive crossjurisdictional survey which was conducted and I think was very useful.

I would like to say that I think some of the particular improvements are the allowing for the direct reporting to the Public Interest Commissioner, which I think is a very positive step. The increase in investigative powers of the Public Interest Commissioner is also positive, and increasing the scope of the act to include parties doing work on behalf of government as contractors without necessarily being government employees is also positive.

I'd also like to point out that, whether this was because of the way the committee approached this issue or something else, this act does not do something that unfortunately we have seen in a number of other pieces of legislation put forward by this government, and

that is that it does not fall into the trap of overreach. There was one recommendation that was put forward – and this wasn't a recommendation of the committee; it was a recommendation to the committee – and that was that whistle-blower protection be extended to the private sector. We considered that recommendation very, very carefully, and after some consideration, it was decided that that would not be something that we felt was a positive step for this legislation in Alberta.

I think that's a reflection of the balance that you have when you have an all-party committee studying these issues. You know, I would say that we've seen many examples of legislation brought forward by this government that represent overreach because that balance was not present in the development of the legislation. I think that's an example of how legislation can in fact be improved if a conscientious and thorough approach is taken.

I wanted to make just a couple of cautionary comments, though. The one that I'm a little concerned about is, again, the expanded role of the Labour Relations Board. We just had discussion on Bill 7, which creates a whole new section of the Labour Relations Board to specifically deal with postsecondary institutions. In this bill the Labour Relations Board is being charged to decide issues of reprisal and whether restitution for those who have suffered reprisals is appropriate and what the level of that restitution should be. This is, again, an expansion of the scope of the Labour Relations Board. I think this is something we need to keep an eye on. I'm not saying that the Labour Relations Board is a body that isn't capable or isn't competent to deal with these things, but I think we are adding additional duties to that board at an alarming rate. I think it's something that we have to keep an eye on, and that is also included in this piece of legislation.

9:50

I do want to loop back, though, to something that was said by the hon. Member for St. Albert and to a certain extent echoed by the Member for Calgary-Elbow when they were speaking about how this gives Alberta the most comprehensive whistle-blower protection act or legislation perhaps in Canada. That does not necessarily translate into making us, as the Member for St. Albert asserted, the most honest and transparent government in Canada. Having really good whistle-blower protection is extremely important, but in order to have good, transparent government, there has to be a culture that encourages whistle-blowing. It doesn't matter how good the protection for whistle-blowers is; if the workers within an organization are not encouraged to point out and to report upon wrongdoings when they see them and when they note them, then it doesn't matter how good the whistle-blower protection is.

I especially note that in my dealings with Alberta Health Services specifically. I think that is an organization we have some very profound challenges with because here within Alberta Health Services we have very dedicated individuals, but my experience when we conducted the rural health services review – and all of the workers for Alberta Health Services would have been protected by whistle-blower protection – was that there was still a reluctance to point out areas where employees of Alberta Health Services were prepared to disclose to our panel issues that they felt were important.

I think we have to be very cautious that we do not equate stronger legislation necessarily with more transparency. Stronger legislation is a tool and an important tool that could bring about or help bring about more honesty and transparency and openness in government. But it does not, in and of itself, create that. What creates that is a culture that, in fact, encourages whistle-blowing, that encourages an open and transparent government.

So I, too, will join with the other members who have spoken in supporting Bill 11. We are looking at the legislation very carefully, and we do believe that there are some minor amendments that would improve the legislation in terms of providing some additional clarity in certain clauses, and we will be running those through Legislative Counsel and seeing if we can bring those forward.

But overall, certainly, I'd like to thank the government for bringing this forward. This was a necessary part of the original public interest disclosure act, that this legislation be reviewed on a regular basis. That review has now been conducted. We have in front of us the updated bill, which I do think provides a number of significant improvements to the original bill, and I'm certainly going to be very supportive of the passage of Bill 11.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Yes. Under 29(2)(a), just a couple of comments. I first want to say that despite the fact that the member had local anaesthetic, it's great to see that he's still as articulate as always. The second thing is that I just wanted to thank my dentist for accommodating me tomorrow morning as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Going back and as has been referenced in relation to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, I had the opportunity to join this committee sort of mid-phase following the cabinet shuffle that we had back last February, and I really thought it was a great opportunity. I don't know if my midi-chlorian counts were a little bit higher, but I found that the bulk of times in committee we have had a lot of success of moving through reviews and moving through legislation, whether it's the Alberta's Economic Future Committee or whether it was us going through the whistle-blowers act.

For the record I would like to thank some of the people in this room who have really contributed to the hard work, whether it's our government whip, the members for Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Bow, Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-Whitemud – he wasn't on the committee, but he substituted pretty much all of the time – St. Albert, Vermilion-Lloydminster. I apologize if I missed anyone in relation to that.

I would be remiss on a day like today to not sort of reference popular culture in relation to the whistle-blower act. I took my kids to see *Rogue One* last December. Galen Erso was forced by the empire to build a death star, and I often think that a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away if there was whistle-blower protection and he didn't have fear of reprisal for coming forward, he might not have had to leak these death star plans, you know, and we wouldn't have had a hundred thousand people die when Luke Skywalker destroyed it.

Now, I know the Member for Edmonton-Decore is a *Star Trek* fan, so I want to also kind of give a *Star Trek* reference to this because I don't want to discriminate here. In the episode listed as Pegasus – and this is in the future now. Unfortunately, they have lost whistle-blower protections in the future. Commander Riker was forced to do this experiment with his captain – this was when he was an ensign – and it was unethical, and they weren't following some of the rules within Starfleet, and a lot of individuals unfortunately passed away. Fortunately, Riker moved up as

commander, and then he could come forward to his captain about this, but he was actually very concerned about fear of reprisal. It's quite interesting to see that these references get brought forward.

I'm going to kind of underline a lot about reprisal. In my member's statement yesterday I referenced some of the issues that have been happening in workplace bullying with some of our local talent in the WWE. One of the things that has been outlined in that workplace is the fear of reprisal and them not having systems in place to protect people who are coming forward or any systems where someone can go to report any of these claims. It's disconcerting because that's actually a publicly traded company, and if people don't feel comfortable going to their superiors, where can they go when, unfortunately, there is no system in place?

It's remarkable, and it's important for us to really make sure that we're moving forward in relation to this. It was referenced that we wanted to avoid involving the private sector within the whistle-blower protection act. I actually agree, and I think we should avoid it because, in fact, a lot of the private sector has actually shown a lot of leadership in relation to it. In some instances – I would say that I will stand corrected once this bill is passed – there are some private-sector companies that actually exceed whistle-blower protection, and they have whether it's ethical lines or ethics lines or things like that, where you can actually protect your identity and come forward. Not only that, but they'll have remediation situations where if you've lost your job and it's been unethical, you can go back and either be posted somewhere else or have your job returned or receive some benefits in relation to it.

Speaking in relation to comments that were said by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, you know, I have a lot of faith that as a lot more work is being put towards the Labour Relations Board, we'll continue to monitor this. But I think it's important that people who are experts on these matters, people who are trained to review a lot of this information, take on this leadership moving forward to help remediate a lot of the process here.

With that being said and since I've kind of made my *Star Wars* references, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:00 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would now like to call the committee to order.

Bill 8 An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

The Deputy Chair: We are on amendment A2. Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, everyone in the House today. I see that the Minister of Municipal Affairs may not be here. I had some questions for him, but I can ask some other . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Okay. I apologize. I can't say that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stier: All right. Anyway, I noticed that, so I'll try to rephrase some of the stuff I was going to say, therefore. We're on an

amendment, just to remind folks, with respect to the topic of a 5 to 1 ratio, and what we're seeking here is approval to set a timeline for this 5 to 1 ratio to be in place.

The current idea that is in the act that we're debating today is actually without a set timeline. We're concerned on this side, greatly, about that affecting the stability and the predictability of the area in terms of its commerce and trade. We're worried that the oil and gas industry in Alberta will be not able to plan as well if they don't know when these changes would be made exactly. How do you make a plan if you don't know when it's going to change? The current act does not specify. It just has sort of a nice, smooth, goody-goody, "We're going to do it one day" kind of a thing.

I would urge members in the House to have a look at the amendment that we're talking about. What I proposed here was to insert a change and put in a timeline that would give municipalities 10 years to comply with this idea rather than it being left out in the open. It has got some wording. In case you were not in the House when this was being presented before – and I don't know if you have the amendment in front of you today – I'll just read it quickly if I may, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, be amended in section 1(31)

(a) by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:

(b) by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) If in any year after 2016 a non-conforming municipality has a tax ratio that is greater than 5:1, the non-conforming municipality shall reduce its tax ratio . . . on or before May 1, 2029.

That is a request of 12 years from when this bill is proclaimed, to change it to be coming into effect then, more or less setting a threshold . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are you introducing a new amendment?

Mr. Stier: No. This is A2. I'm just supplementing my comments on A2.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. As long as you're speaking to A2.

Mr. Stier: We're asking for a 12-year timeline for municipalities, especially some that have a higher tax ratio – there are about 22 of them – so that they know when the time horizon is set and so that the oil and gas industry knows when to see some of these phased-in changes so they can plan themselves. I remind everyone that municipalities are required to do three- and five-year finance plans in their budgets, et cetera, et cetera, capital plans. Without some specific timeline being put in, there is no real clear way that they can budget when they don't know what their revenue streams are going to look like.

Thank you, Madam Chair. That's all I have to add to this one, and I look forward to support on this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will put the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to stand once again to speak on Bill 8, and I guess I want to begin by reiterating how extensive the consultation was on this bill.

Certainly, I had many, many people in my constituency talk to me about it, from city councillors, the mayor, to people who were in my neighbourhood. I heard lots and lots of questions, so I want to share some of those questions with you this morning.

One of the questions I received was: shouldn't the courts remain the last safeguard to protect the rights of municipal councils and councillors? The response that I received was that the proposed change would not circumvent the court system, which would remain the final authority on such complaints and decisions. The courts would still have the ability to review a ministerial order, but the ministerial order would stay in effect until any court action or decision is made, to ensure smooth, seamless operations of municipalities. Allowing ministerial decisions to remain in place during the court challenges would be in the best interest of the public, whom the municipalities serve. I certainly believe that my municipality does an incredible job of serving my community, and I'm very thankful for that.

One of the other questions I received was: where would this leave councillors or municipal councils who disagree with the decisions of the Minister of Municipal Affairs? The council members could still go to the courts for review but would be required to alert the minister beforehand, which I think would be pretty basic protocol. The minister will only step in after careful review and study. The minister is not entitled to act arbitrarily. Through these proposed changes the minister would have more tools to ensure municipal compliance with ministerial decisions in the very rare instances where this scenario arises.

Third question. The municipal associations have raised concerns regarding the minister's ability to suspend bylaws, resolution-making authority, or to withhold money from an entire council for the actions of an individual councillor. Why is the government still considering these amendments? The proposed changes allow for an expanded suite of tools and enforcement mechanisms so the minister does not have to resort to dismissal immediately. These powers are only available to the minister as a last resort, after specific directives have been issued to a municipality and the municipality has failed to take the steps necessary, with corrective action set out in a directive.

The requirement to use any of these powers is not expected to arise except on rare occasions, as I said earlier. All reasonable efforts to resolve the situation must occur prior to the use of these tools. The proposed changes provide the minister with more tools to support compliance with ministerial orders and to address inter- and intramunicipal conflict. It will also empower the minister to respond in situations where an official administrator is in place.

Some questions were about environmental well-being. Don't municipalities already take environmental issues into consideration when making decisions? Many do, and certainly my community does, but specifically enabling municipalities to consider environmental well-being will encourage them to take a leadership role in addressing this critical issue and will better position them as key partners with the government of Alberta in addressing environmental matters.

10:10

Might this policy give municipalities a blank cheque to take land for environmental purposes? No. This wouldn't allow municipalities to adopt any policies or bylaws that are inconsistent with provincial policy or legislation. It would also not allow municipalities to take environmentally sensitive or valued land without proper compensation. This would empower municipalities to include environmental well-being in their planning and development policies.

Under off-site levies: will setting up such a system be difficult? Off-site levies are an enabling tool for municipalities. This amendment simply adds one more aspect of this tool. It will be up to municipalities to determine whether they wish to use this tool. Municipalities may choose to collaborate on shared off-site levies if they believe there are cross-boundary impacts and that an intermunicipal off-site levy makes sense to share the costs of the facility. Municipal Affairs is working with stakeholders throughout the province to develop further regulatory provisions that will also provide guidance on the requirements for establishing these levies.

On conservation reserves, identification transfers, compensation, disposal funds: why is there a need for clarification of the new conservation reserve category? Some stakeholders have expressed confusion regarding the differences between environmental reserves, ERs, and the new conservation reserve category. This clarification will address that confusion. Many municipalities saw ERs as a way to protect environmentally sensitive lands from development, but ERs are limited to lands that are undevelopable: gullies, swamps, and similar pieces of land. The ER designation is not specifically related to environmental conservation, although it may be a side effect in some cases. Conservation reserves are specifically meant to protect environmentally sensitive land – tree stands, wildlife corridors, et cetera – that could be developed if not protected. Municipalities must offer fair compensation to the developers to preserve these lands.

Why is the province allowing the removal of the conservation reserve designation? Isn't there always an environmental value to such land? In some instances the environmental value of the land may be lost due to unforeseen circumstances outside of the control of the municipalities such as wildfires or floods. In cases where there is no chance of rehabilitation of that land, the MGA could help municipalities better use that land, instead of having it stand empty, while ensuring that the proceeds remain for conservation purposes.

How will you ensure that municipalities don't use the conservation reserve designation and removal of the designation as a way to grab land for future development? Municipalities will have to pay appropriate compensation to the developers for conservation reserves. If the municipality wishes to remove the conservation reserve designation, it will be required to hold a public hearing to allow residents to have a say in that decision. Further, any proceeds from selling former conservation reserve lands will be required to be dedicated to conservation purposes. The municipality wouldn't be able to put their money into general revenue.

On compliance with linked tax rate ratio: why wasn't a sunset clause put into the original policy change under the Modernized Municipal Government Act? Certainly, this speaks to the previous member's comments. We want to hear from municipalities, industry, and residents on how best to support affected municipalities in lowering high ratios. I know that in my community the ratio is 2.59 to 1, so we're well underneath the ratio, and I certainly hope that the 22 communities that aren't are going to get there.

We want to make sure that municipalities don't have to make drastic changes and have sufficient time to adjust to assessment growth rather than changes to residential tax rates. Municipal Affairs will work with the affected municipalities and other stakeholders in developing the regulation. The regulation will be posted online for public engagement over a 60-day period for feedback. There is no rush to put timelines in place. We will take the time to get this right. This regulation would not be put in place before the municipal election this fall.

If a sunset clause does move forward, won't residential taxpayers have to pay more? No. If the nonresidential tax base also grows in these municipalities, it may not be necessary to raise residential tax

rates to move to compliance over a reasonable period of time. The province is committed to working with municipalities and taxpayers to develop a reasonable approach to achieving the 5 to 1 ratio, one that minimizes the impact on residential property owners. As they always must, municipal councils will have to make reasonable budgetary decisions for their community.

What time frame does the minister consider appropriate for municipalities to become compliant? We recognize that affected municipalities will require the time to adjust and plan for that change. What is in the bill is the flexibility to create a regulation in close consultation with affected communities. If a regulation is created, it will not be done quickly. It will be developed by working closely with those affected municipalities in an open and transparent way that values community feedback.

On access to assessment information: why is this change necessary or needed? Municipalities don't currently have the right to access assessment information on designated industrial property, DIP, over which Municipal Affairs will take responsibility through changes to the MGA. Municipalities will need this information as one of the partners in the assessment process. Municipalities have a stake in ensuring that assessments are prepared properly. Giving them a right to access assessment information would ensure that the assessment process is transparent.

If I'm an industry representative, how can I know that sensitive information about my company will be kept confidential if municipalities have access? Municipalities will have to sign a confidentiality agreement to protect sensitive information. This change will ensure the new, centralized industrial assessment process is transparent and fair to all parties involved. This will help build trust as the province assumes responsibility for the industrial assessment.

10:20

Tax receipts. A good time to talk about this. Why can't taxpayers automatically receive tax receipts for their payments? Taxpayers may request and receive receipts from their municipality any time they'd like. It is costly and time consuming for municipalities to provide receipts, particularly where it may be largely unnecessary. This change helps municipalities to save money, reducing the cost to taxpayers.

What is the government trying to hide by not providing tax receipts? All taxpayers will receive receipts when they ask for them.

Will there be a fee for taxpayers to receive receipts? There will be no fee for this service.

Taxation of provincial agencies. Why are you bringing a change that maintains current practice? In other words, why is there a need for clarity for Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions on paying their municipal taxes? A recent assessment appeal decision found that one of Alberta's agencies should be exempted from property tax. This decision has highlighted that the MGA was not clear enough in setting out the intention that provincial agencies, boards, and commissions should be paying property tax. This formally adds clarity to the MGA that Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions as defined under the Financial Administration Act must pay municipal taxes as good corporate citizens.

How many agencies, boards, and commissions don't pay their municipal taxes? At the moment we are only aware of one case based upon an assessment appeal decision, but without this amendment other agencies may wish to file similar appeals. The majority of provincial agencies that lease properties pay property taxes through their lease.

Why are you requiring these ABCs to pay taxes instead of the government paying grants in lieu of taxes to the municipalities for these properties, as the province itself does on property it owns?

Having ABCs paying taxes directly is more administratively efficient through the existing tax structure and provides greater certainty for the affected municipalities.

What about the property tax exemption set out in the MGA such as those for Alberta Health Services, housing management bodies, schools, colleges, and universities? Will they continue to be exempt? Yes. The amendments do not impact these exemptions. Exemptions will continue to be provided to qualifying properties in recognition of their public benefit.

Do other provinces in Canada tax their provincial agencies, boards, and commissions? In every province property owned or occupied by the federal or provincial government is exempt from taxation. However, the provinces vary in the taxation of provincial agencies, boards, and commissions. In B.C. ABCs such as the provincial lottery corporation and BC Assessment are subject to property taxes. In Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario only ABCs named specifically through relevant legislation are exempt from property tax, but they are still subject to a grant in lieu. Other ABCs in these provinces are subject to taxation.

All of those questions are questions that came from stakeholders and citizens, so I think this exemplifies just how much and the kind and quality of consultation that has occurred with the development of this act.

With that, I'll sit down and take another break. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm having a lot of trouble with all the paperwork here today – it's covering my microphone – and all other kinds of things at once.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for her remarks today. They're appreciated. Certainly, our side here does understand the nature of a lot of the segments of the bill that have come forward, and we don't have a lot of issues with a lot of these things – conservation and parental care and all that kind of stuff, aboriginal issues, et cetera, all great things – but we still take a lot of issue with this 5 to 1 ratio. So, Madam Chair, I would like to bring to the House another amendment, please. If I could get the pages to come and pick that up, and then I'll make some comments as soon as that's delivered.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A3. Please go ahead.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you. I was just waiting for the delivery. It's being held up.

Ladies and gentlemen and hon. members, in other words, I'd just like to talk a little bit more about the subject at hand. We talked about it a little this morning. I want to talk about, certainly, three or four words that are coming to mind here on this issue. One of the three words is "uncertainty." Uncertainty is a very, very difficult thing to nail down, but uncertainty in a marketplace, uncertainty in business, uncertainty in your life is extremely important. The way this bill is currently worded, it is full of that, and in this particular segment, the 5 to 1 ratio, there's no certainty of time.

I'm just going to read now. I think a lot of you have got that amendment close to you now. It basically is the same wording as the previous amendment, but I do have to read that out loud. I move that Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, be amended in section 1(31)

- (a) by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:
- (b) by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) If in any year after 2016 a non-conforming municipality has a tax ratio that is greater than 5:1, the non-conforming municipality shall reduce its tax ratio to 5:1 on or before May 1, 2027.

This is a 10-year horizon that we're suggesting. The last one was 12. We are, please, asking for some sort of guaranteed timeline to be put in with some sort of phased approach – it's all we're looking for – a deadline, some sort of an idea that the people in the municipality administration can plan for, where the people in the offices of downtown Calgary, where we're having such difficulty today, can plan for prosperity, hopefully. The oil and gas industry so much needs these kinds of predictability issues and sustainability. What we have now in the act as it is is basically a trust-me clause: trust me that at some point we're going to come and we're going to put something in. How can municipalities plan on a trust-me clause? How can they do their three- and five-year plans when they do not know what their revenue stream is going to be like?

We've talked a lot about Fort McMurray with this, of course, because it's one of the 22 municipalities that has the largest variance. That is a rural municipality, and it's interesting to see what the AAMD and C has to say about this clause. I'm quoting from the AAMD and C briefing on Bill 8, April 2017, on page 12.

The AAMDC supports the ability for municipalities to be exempt for the 5:1 ratio where appropriate. The AAMDC will look to be involved in the development of this [proposed] regulation.

The previous iteration of the proposed legislation found that the Continuing the Conversation document included the option for the Minister to exempt a municipality from the 5:1 ratio. The AAMDC will be looking for the inclusion of this exemption in the regulation.

Wood Buffalo is a rural municipality, and I think that their comments are relevant.

10:30

Now, let's just have a look at the AUMA while we're at it. The AUMA said similar things in some respects. They said on page 19 of their document that

AUMA also supports providing the Minister with the authority to exempt a municipality indefinitely from the 5:1 ratio as this would allow for specialized municipalities, such as Jasper . . .

They used that as an example.

. . . to be accommodated under the framework.

I would suggest to you that the two most important associations in the municipal world have some concerns with the way the bill is written. We're suggesting that we can fix their concerns. We're suggesting that the way to fix that is to put a timeline in. We have been in touch and I know that the government has been in touch with municipalities like Wood Buffalo. They have suggested a timeline. A definite period would be so important to them. We've talked to the oil and gas industry, and it is a revenue generator for this country we call Canada. They need predictability. The investment market needs predictability. They do not need uncertainty. They need to have some sort of way to look forward and say: yes, we can plan now because we know how this is going to go and when it's going to go.

Some of those big projects in that area, as an example in Fort McMurray, take a long time. Knowing what's going to be going ahead 10 years from now is vitally important. I do not understand this, and I know that the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, is extremely concerned about this. We are fine with the rest of this bill, but we may have a problem supporting this bill if a timeline is not put into this clause.

I would ask all members to please look at this amendment that I have. It's A3. It's in front of you now. It's a 10-year horizon. It's a

10-year timeline. I would urge all members to give this, please, some good, serious consideration.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. You'll be able to table copies of the two reports you referenced this afternoon, please? Thank you.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the amendment and the spirit that it was offered in. However, I'm going to have to recommend to my colleagues that we vote down the amendment, and that's for good reason.

Now, the hon. member just spoke about Wood Buffalo specifically and their concerns. However, of course, there are 20 municipalities in the province that are affected by the indexing. In the consultations earlier – and I know that the members of the opposition received those documents. I mean, that's one part where consensus was a little bit more difficult to find. Of course, sometimes you just need to make decisions, but sometimes you don't get consensus for good reasons, and in this sense this seems to be one of those, in that 10 years just might not be long enough for some municipalities. It may work for some but perhaps not for others. Indeed, some municipalities may require longer than 10 years in order to get to the ratio. This is why we want to consult with municipalities over the next year or so to determine what can work specifically for municipalities. You know, 10 years maybe in some instances would work, but it does not provide the ability to develop a plan that's going to work for every municipality. I'm sorry. Well, 2027: it is 10 years.

Once again, I do appreciate the intent behind the amendment. I think we're on the same page in the sense that, you know, over time we need to do something about these indexes. I think that providing some integrated flexibility into the process is going to be to the benefit of the municipalities in question as well as the province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Well, I'll be brief, but I can't help but notice and remember that yesterday the government argued that the 12-year time span that the hon. member brought forward with an earlier amendment was too long, and we just heard that the 10-year is too short. Perhaps we're zeroing in on the right number. Perhaps the government wants 11. I just can't help but notice, and it's so obvious that it just needs to be said out loud, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. Predictable, stable funding: that is what is key here. With all due respect to the previous government, they didn't really provide that to a lot of the municipalities, in particular Fort McMurray. Quite honestly, we had to fend for ourselves up there at a time when they were allocating so many leases to these oil companies, expanding them, tripling them, hundreds and hundreds of hectares of land being provided to be developed for oil sands. Not once did they consider twinning that highway to allow those large vessels to go by that people like me had to follow behind at 30 kilometres an hour. They did not consider the hazards of all this.

They didn't consider the fact that Fort McMurray is a landlocked community, and because it was landlocked by Crown land, of all things, we could not expand. We could not buy a farm on our

border's edge and develop this piece of land that's already cleared, already drained, and is growing what might have been a crop and turned that into a housing division. Fort McMurray has never ever had that opportunity. It was always restrained by this provincial government. That is why that community had to take into its own hands that 18 to 1 ratio. They didn't choose 18 to 1; it just evolved into that.

It goes back to the predictability and the stable funding formula that was never provided. The reason why it wasn't provided is because, quite honestly, our province experienced more boom-and-bust cycles than any other province out there. It was very cyclical events that were occurring in this province, and, you know, I don't believe that our provincial governments at the time truly understood these dynamics. The people who were advising those politicians truly didn't grasp what was going on while these cycles were happening, but certainly when you live in a community, you experience it greatly, especially when it is so far, so isolated, and, quite honestly, so restrained in its ability to grow.

It's an interesting thing, this Bill 8. Actually, there's a lot of housekeeping and whatnot. There are a lot of things like, if I understood correctly when I read it, that 90 per cent of it seemed to be quite decent and good for a lot of other municipalities. The problem is that we do have a diversity of regions in our province here, and even though there are many municipalities that are outside that 5 to 1 range, it is the one community in particular which chances on being impacted negatively the most. It would absolutely destroy the community. Now, I understand this government wants to do that because of the oil sands and whatnot. No, I understand, Madam Chair. You guys are being pragmatic. That's why you still keep pipeline protestors on your council. It's an interesting thing.

On the flip side, this is interesting as we're starting to find out that communities that aren't at that 5 to 1 are very much looking towards this because it gives them a reason to raise their taxes. I think that it is very unfortunate if they do that because they've gotten to their tax ratios because they've evolved to a system they thought was appropriate. For them to simply use this as an excuse to raise their tax ratios to 5 to 1: that's another negative implication of this, which I think this government needs to truly reassess.

That said, my good friend from Livingstone-Macleod has really provided a reasonable amendment, 10 years. If you choose to make an amendment to this to be more specific toward one community, I would not argue that, but understand that these things cannot happen overnight, and they can't happen over just a few years. Again, it's about whether your desire is to destroy a community quickly or a little bit slower.

10:40

You know, 10 years is reasonable for a community to adapt. They've hired a good conservative CEO who believes in fiscal responsibility, and she's doing her best to try to identify ways that we can reduce our spending in that community. Recognize that we did have to do a lot of our own stuff. We had to build a lot of our own roads, a lot of our own infrastructure, things that other communities might have to take for granted because they had elected that right MLA from previous governments to stand up for them, but Fort McMurray hasn't always been so lucky. For the most part, we've always had people on the outside. We just enjoyed being the opposition up there, where we had backbenchers who really didn't say a lot. Ten years is a reasonable amount, and I think a community like Fort McMurray could certainly adapt to that.

Again, we have to look at the reasons why. We were given no support, no finances, no money. We had to build our own things. We had to apply and buy land from the government in order to develop it so that we could build homes for the workers.

Unfortunately, the province provided so little to them, to Fort McMurray, that the oil companies built their own airports. There are approximately six, seven, or eight airports up in that region, around there anyway, scattered throughout that entire region, full-fledged airports with full-on emergency crash, fire personnel that attend to these things. These companies fly these people in and out of that region. They're not just flying to Edmonton and Calgary. They're flying to Newfoundland. They're flying to Toronto. They're flying to Kelowna. All these people that are coming up to work aren't even paying taxes in our province because they're claiming it all when they go home.

They use the local hospital. I asked our Health minister in estimates if they have an idea of how much, and she could not identify that number, but from my previous history in my previous job and my role being privy to a lot of this information, we were gathering that number at approximately a million a year that the Northern Lights hospital was losing to out-of-town, out-of-province people who are using our services, our doctors, our nurses, our medical care but were not paying in the Alberta health care, were not paying taxes here in Alberta. They did not claim it back in New Brunswick or Quebec or Ontario or B.C. or wherever they are from. Again, these are little things that add to the impacts, but these are also things that compound the situation where a community like Fort McMurray had to come up with its own methods.

Quite honestly, that is the epitome right across our province of how each municipality had to adapt. Fortunately for them, they have a Wildrose opposition now who believes in some stable funding that is predictable and would provide every municipality with some good ability to forecast and to grow appropriately and to plan. I know these things might be unheard of, but it's very possible.

I do appreciate the fact that the member across the way mentioned that 10 years might not be long enough for some communities, and I agree with him. How long is a reasonable time? Again, the government side is saying all the right things, that we have to consult and discuss, but also understand that the first times you said that you were discussing and consulting with the municipality of Wood Buffalo, the municipality of Wood Buffalo hadn't been approached yet. So I would certainly counter some of those arguments, but it's neither here nor there. You're now talking to us up there. You know, I was even able to talk to the leader of the government there yesterday at a fine restaurant in Fort McMurray, who assured me: we will be discussing, and we will work with the municipality. I certainly cross my fingers and hope that she wouldn't mislead me, but we will see.

That said, I would ask that we do support this clause, this amendment from my good friend from Livingstone-Macleod and, at the very least, that you consider – if you don't quite like this amendment, then make an amendment to the amendment to make it what you think would fit, but recognize that 10 years is a reasonable amount. If you vote against this, I will be just so saddened by that. I will hope that we can come to an agreement on this because we are fighting for our many municipalities. It's not your fault. It's them. All right? They set up the stage for us from previous years, which is why every municipality is out of whack, but understand that you can't fix everything that they did overnight. It's reasonable to ask for a period of time, all right?

Mr. Hanson: Ten years.

Mr. Yao: Ten years. Address each community individually. Recognize the hurdles that they have. If you don't understand the hurdles, then I ask that you guys come up to Fort McMurray. I want you to do a caucus retreat up there. You guys can all stay at my pad. I'll host you, and I'll show you guys what Fort McMurray is all

about and what a community there is. We'll show you everything that Fort McMurray had to build on its own, without any provincial support. I will show you an overpass that an oil company built. My good friend from Calgary-Foothills, actually, was the manager of that project, where an oil company actually had to build highway structures. Syncrude Canada also built some highway. It is considered one of the largest dams in the world. They had to build their own road because, again, the province wasn't providing at a time when they decided to give \$400 or \$800.

You know, God bless our former Premier. I really liked him, but his last manoeuvres were a bit – I refer to Premier Klein. I loved the man, but his last decision to hand out money instead of building infrastructure was disappointing. But he knew his finances; he knew how to balance budgets. I wish you guys would learn something from him, perhaps.

With that, I will stand down. [interjection] I know. It's easy to spend money, isn't it? Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the member from Wood Buffalo. Obviously, we recognize that municipalities require time to adjust. In fact, the ministry has been in touch with the mayor in Wood Buffalo, well, since September, anyway, trying to work on this. I believe that the amount of time for any of the 22 municipalities to adjust may vary. That's why we'll certainly work with each municipality to develop a plan. Ten years may be a good time frame for one municipality, but what about the others? We need to develop local plans to ensure stability and the right plan for that municipality. I appreciate that you've put that forward, but I think that we have to work with each municipality, and then we'll see how things will actually settle in the end.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:48 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Starke
Anderson, W.	MacIntyre	Stier
Gotfried	McIver	van Dijken
Hanson	Schneider	Yao

Against the motion:

Bilous	Kazim	Phillips
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Ceci	Larivee	Renaud
Coolahan	Luff	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Sabir
Dach	Mason	Schmidt
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Feehan	McLean	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Sucha
Ganley	Miller	Turner
Goehring	Miranda	Westhead

Horne Jansen	Nielsen	Woollard
Totals:	For – 12	Against – 37

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you and good morning, everyone. I'm happy to speak on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. This is in respect to a couple of aspects. The first piece I'd like to speak to is the joint use of the agreements, and the second piece is with respect to parental leave.

Generally the AUMA, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and the AAMD and C, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and Wildrose are supportive of this legislation, and they would definitely advocate for greater co-operation. There are questions around the collaborative pieces, around work and best practices with respect to school divisions. Some of these clarifications are around utilization versus joint planning. Planning incorporates the aspects of school properties and reserves, the planning and servicing and understanding of those future builds.

How is the government going to make sure that transparency will be created in those joint-use agreements? What are the templates that are going to be used to help facilitate these agreements? What will the process look like? It's one thing to state that there is going to be a process, and it's another thing to know and understand what that process will actually be.

As I've stated, we support the agreement, but we need some definitions, and the committee accountability has yet to be addressed. As the AUMA has stated with respect to determining access for facilities, municipalities at times have had their access denied, so how is the government planning on dealing with these situations in the most transparent and accountable way without being heavy handed and also inclusive of local decision-making?

I've personally not seen any information with respect to stakeholder outreach to school authorities to understand how this joint agreement impacts school divisions, so I'd like to hear from the minister about that consultation and what he might be hearing from school boards. We have multiple school divisions in some municipalities, which, for obvious reasons, will make these potential agreements a whole lot more complex.

I think it's probably reasonable to ask about some sort of template with regard to the understanding of how these municipalities and school divisions are going to hash out the details of their usage of these sites. I think that those templates really need to be provided. Will the government be using its oversight to assist with these templates? There are a lot of details that need to be addressed, and as the municipal associations have long advocated for these changes, it is imperative that all stakeholders have been and will continue to be brought into those discussions.

Aside from those questions, I also have a few other questions with respect to the agreements. How does the government plan to provide conflict resolution and make sure that the agreements are indeed agreed upon and then followed through on? How will the government address the joint use of land development and the use of monies that are available, whether that is individually through school boards and through the municipalities or in those joint uses?

One especially interesting situation is when one municipality sends its students to another municipality for school. This is evident in my constituency. There are students from Conrich and other

surrounding areas that populate our schools in Chestermere. What happens when a school building and land are no longer in use and the municipality is interested in repurposing a building? Should the building and land be returned to the municipality at no cost? That's just one question.

Our school boards and municipalities have many complex details to work out between them. There are many different municipalities, obviously, and they are diverse and unique in their needs. We have large cities, medium-sized cities, towns, hamlets, and everything in between, so a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

11:10

Equally distinct are the school boards. In fact, we just passed the Northland School Division Act based on the unique needs of a school board and the wards and the councils in that area. How is the ministry going to help with the consultations with all of these unique and distinct areas, the follow-up, and then the negotiations all the while respecting the autonomy of the municipalities and the school boards? How will funding be determined, if there is any, for providing assistance for online templates, as suggested by the AAMD and C? We have a lot of small municipalities – small, small, small municipalities – and they're going to need some assistance with organizing these templates and creating those templates in order to make sure that these joint agreements work. I would appreciate any answers that the minister can give me on this topic.

The second topic I'd like to speak about is with respect to parental leave. Many in the House have already spoken with respect to this. Bill 8, obviously, within its mandate aims to improve accountability in municipalities, to increase transparency, to help nurture viable communities, to help build relationships between municipalities and the province. With respect to changes to parental leave, as has been stated, there are already provisions for those municipal councillors who may require leave and were given leave on a case-by-case basis for extended parental leave without fear of disqualification but that lack the authority presently to provide ongoing standards for this leave. This would be a change within that entire system.

There's an opportunity for municipalities to be able to create environments that will bring in many more people, young families if they're able to accommodate the need for extended leave. Public service, as we all know, is extremely overwhelming and really changes the dynamics of family life. We want to see many of these people come forward, including new parents, to run for office at various levels of government – this just makes for better communities – and to provide workplaces that allow for folks to be able to come forward and represent to their ability.

The amendment will allow parental leave without fear of disqualification as councillors will be exempt from this outcome. The amendment does not take away from local autonomy as it clearly states that the council will determine the how, especially as a gap will be created with that leave. That local autonomy, obviously, is incredibly important for a council to be able to understand how to make sure that the business of council continues when an important member is missing as a result of parental leave.

This part of the legislation is really about the ability to engage more Albertans and to encourage more people to run. We support this. This is positive, and it strengthens the legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to move an amendment to Bill 8. I have the requisite number of copies here.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Just wait until I have the original, please.

Mr. Gotfried: I will.

The Deputy Chair: Your amendment will be referred to as A4. Please go ahead.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the members for indulging me in this. It's a fairly long amendment, so I hope that you'll all have a chance to peruse the intentions and the wording.

Madam Chair, this amendment is intended to provide balance in the business and contractual relationship and, hopefully, goodwill between land developers and municipalities by preventing a situation which could be costly for all concerned with respect to the cancellation or significant amendment of a previously agreed to conservation reserve designation, hence impacting land and housing affordability in a situation where a municipality designates a conservation reserve in good faith, but then when the time comes to complete the transaction for the designated land parcel, they reconsider due to financial or other considerations, thereby disrupting the entire development process, adding time and costs to the development, which ultimately affect the end purchasers, and/or using the change in priorities, preferences, or direction as a latent negotiating tactic.

What might also be a consideration, particularly in a year of municipal elections, is the potential for significant change in the direction of government or elected officials, thereby challenging the sanctity and goodwill of prior commitments. I reluctantly mention cancelled PPAs and resulting lawsuits in the same breath as an example of risks associated for both parties with long-term capital investments.

Madam Chair, we need housing for Albertans, we need affordability for housing for Albertans, and we need to respect that the private sector as our partners are the primary providers of the risk, capital, and expertise needed to meet the housing needs of Albertans. As much as we need to ensure sustainability on the municipal side of this equation, which we agree with and which has been almost unanimously endorsed by the development community in Alberta, we also need to ensure viability, sustainability, or, at the very least, certainty to investors, professional land developers, and builders in their relationships with local authorities in delivering quality, cost-effective housing solutions.

Madam Chair, may I remind this House that the industry we speak of here is not a gathering of big, bad, greedy capitalists but a group of community-spirited Albertans, renowned for their philanthropy and reinvestment in the communities in which they develop and build. I cite the good work of the Resolve campaign in Calgary, a gathering of community-spirited leaders, both individually and corporately, from the development and building industry in that city, a bold \$120 million reach goal to assist some of our province's most compassionate and experienced nonprofit housing organizations by providing 3,000 affordable rental units through nine housing organizations: Accessible Housing Society; Alpha House; Calgary Homeless Foundation; Silvera for Seniors; the Mustard Seed; Trinity Place Foundation; Horizon Housing, where I just attended a sod-turning last week presided over by your own Minister of Seniors and Housing; and more.

Madam Chair, Resolve has a leadership group of 11 Calgary-based philanthropic builders providing funding expertise and leadership and raising funds for our most vulnerable. I will also note that this is an industry that not only provides a risk capital but that in doing so, employs thousands of Albertans, not just employing

them but providing a model for workplace success, safety, and good, stable, mortgage-paying jobs.

Madam Chair, I was blessed to work for one of those companies and community-spirited leaders, not just one of Canada's platinum 50 best-managed companies but also a decade-long plus recognition as one of Canada's best workplaces as voted primarily through an employee survey. The same ownership group has provided significant philanthropic support for such organizations or causes as kids cancer research, Chinese Community Service, Children's Hospital Foundation, University of Calgary medical research, Bow Valley College, Immigrant Services Calgary, SAIT, UNICEF, Canadian Red Cross, Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters, Kids Up Front, GlobalFest, Habitat for Humanity, and more. I believe our Minister of Advanced Education was just at an event, also, cutting ribbons for a new facility partially funded by that organization.

Madam Chair, I can cite dozens of examples of similar acts of philanthropy and community commitments from many, many other members of the building and development community. Many have also received trailblazer awards from the Alberta Construction Safety Association and have been recognized by WCB for thousands of hours of incident-free work sites, another very important factor and consideration for Albertans. Make no mistake. This industry represents more than just a successful, hard-working, risk-taking group of builders and developers; they are indeed community builders.

Is it an unreasonable request to ask for a small, added measure of certainty in the risks associated with their capital investment? How else will we meet the needs of our economy? If we are in fact blessed with modest economic growth and positive net immigration in the near future, who will we rely upon to provide housing supply and affordability? Who will we turn to for funding, expertise, and leadership in meeting our affordable housing needs? And who will we turn to in supporting our vulnerable, particularly when government coffers are challenged and many charities and nonprofits rely on the generosity and philanthropy of the private sector, which I would argue is overrepresented with respect to members of the development and building industry relative to the size of their operations, revenue, jobs, and profits they generate?

Let's also not forget the risks associated with such long-term investments, particularly during times of economic uncertainty, as sadly reflected in the recent seeking of creditor protection by a well-established Alberta company with over 35 years of market experience. Such are the risks associated with significant capital outlays and long-term, patient investment each and every day.

11:20

To be clear, we fully support the concept that a municipality may include policies addressing a newly proposed conservation reserve designation, including identifying additional types and locations of environmentally significant areas with the environmental purpose of conservation and how it might serve to further enhance the nature and design of new communities. We have heard no arguments from the building industry on that point, but we also believe that the identification and a firm commitment to conservation reserve lands must be done as early in the planning process as possible and include some certainty.

A key component that is missing from the proposed policies, Madam Chair, is that a more balanced and respectful approach would include provisions that require municipalities to follow through with the purchase of lands once they have been identified and designated as conservation reserve in statutory plans. This would ensure no waste of time, resources, or the burden of unnecessary costs being added to the development process, which, by the way, is always passed on to the end customer, often with

added carrying costs, and, as importantly, puts some structure to the goodwill that I think we would all expect in such an agreement, commitment, or transaction.

Madam Chair, I am imploring all members of this House to do the right thing by not only supporting the municipalities and communities we serve but to incorporate and protect the right to fair and balanced practices with respect to those companies and individuals who truly build our communities, who take risks every day, who are entitled to reasonable returns on that risk as we in government provide the structure, infrastructure, and stability to encourage such investments for the betterment of life and affordability for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Chair. On behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs I'd like to sincerely thank the member for his amendment. Now, Minister Anderson and Municipal Affairs have put significant analysis into the proposed changes. They understand what the member is trying to do with this amendment and do respect the spirit of what he's trying to do; however, we're not prepared to support it, and just give me a few moments to explain why.

Conservation reserve is a new tool that we introduced into the MGA in Bill 21 last year, as no doubt the member is aware. What was in place before was only environmental reserve. Now, through consultation we heard concerns over the differing interpretations on the intention of an environmental reserve, and it was this lack of clarity about the purpose and definition of such a reserve that led to an inconsistent application of the provisions, which – and I think the member addressed it, too – was probably a little unfair to developers. That's indeed why we've created a new type of reserve called conservation reserve, and this conservation reserve allows municipalities to protect lands of environmental value but would also require the municipalities to provide adequate compensation to developers for conservation reserve since the land will be set aside and conserved instead of being developed.

Now, we've carefully constructed this conservation reserve tool, and we think that making this amendment, especially with regard to inserting language around municipal development plans or area structure plans, would severely hamstring municipalities. Municipal development plans and area structure plans are long-range strategic planning instruments that identify broad patterns of development at a higher level than the detail that this amendment proposes. Because of this, we can't support this amendment. What we're doing is we're looking to find balance with this new tool of conservation reserve, and we're going to need to allow conservation reserve time to be implemented before entertaining further amendments, not to say that that might not happen sometime down the road.

Once again we'd like to thank the member for the time and consideration he put into this well-intentioned proposal and for sharing it with us 24 hours in advance, just as we did with the House amendment considered yesterday. At the end of the day, we're all doing our best to serve Albertans, and we sincerely appreciate the member's contribution to this important conversation about the MGA, but unfortunately I cannot recommend that colleagues support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Mr. Gotfried: If I'm allowed a small response, Madam Chair, that would be – and thank you to the member for your comments – that indeed we have worked hard to try and make this a palatable amendment that could be accepted. To the member, I hope that as time goes on we'll have an opportunity to review the viability and the current structure of the legislation.

It is my concern, of course, that hamstringing is certainly something that could occur. However, if developers choose not to bring their projects forward because of the enhanced or increased risk around the conservation reserves, that may not come to bear and they may not have the work that they need and we may not see that investment in the land. We may be hitting the pause button in Alberta at this point in time, which is allowing, I think, an industry which has often gone at breakneck pace to catch up.

However, if we see positive net migration continuing, we will hopefully be back in a situation in the future whereby we need to ensure that both municipalities and the developers are working very closely together to ensure that we have not just the land supply, which is one issue in itself, but the housing supply so that we don't see the rapid escalation in prices through the coming forth of many speculators, which deeply affect the marketplace when they see that there's an opportunity through reduced supply or inadequate supply to actually jack up the prices even further. I'm always very concerned about that and the impact that can have, and that's why I believe that that relationship of mutual risk and understanding and, I guess, consideration for certainty in that relationship is one that is well developed, that is well respected from both sides.

I'm hopeful that what you're saying with respect to the current legislation is true. I believe that an opportunity for greater certainty is something that would help us to ensure we have that affordability and supply of housing that we need for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:27 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	MacIntyre	Stier
Gotfried	McIver	van Dijken
Hanson	Schneider	Yao
Hunter	Starke	

11:30

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Phillips
Bilous	Kazim	Piquette
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Ceci	Larivee	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Luff	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Schmidt
Dach	Mason	Shepherd
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Feehan	McLean	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Turner
Ganley	Miller	Westhead

Goehring	Miranda	Woollard
Horne	Nielsen	
Totals:	For – 11	Against – 38

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Mr. Gotfried: Madam Chair, I rise to propose a further amendment to Bill 8, and I have the requisite number of copies here.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A5. If you can please just wait until I have the original.

Mr. Gotfried: Madam Chair, it's a short amendment. Would you like me to read it while it's being distributed?

The Deputy Chair: Yes. If you could read it into the record, please. Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, be amended in section 2 by striking out subsection (19) and substituting the following:

- (19) Section 116 is amended in the new section 664.2
 - (a) in subsection (1)(d) by adding "and area structure plan" after "municipal development plan";
 - (b) in subsection (2) by striking out "received" and substituting "approved".

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment? Please go ahead, and then I'll recognize the minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you. Madam Chair, I will not belabour this. This is in a similar vein to the previous amendment. However, what this one does is to just provide perhaps a smaller level of certainty with respect to transactions involving conservation reserves. In short, this amendment will require municipalities to follow through with the purchase of any lands once they've been designated as conservation reserves in a statutory plan.

Madam Chair, the objective of this one, again, is to provide that certainty for long-term investment by the building and development community so that they can move ahead with those plans, so that they can ensure that there are no surprises as they go through the development process and that there's no change in designation through time that could cost them time, cost them further money, or, in some cases, a complete redesign of a development plan that has already been submitted and approved, with the agreed-upon conservation reserve lands.

This could be a significant parcel of land. It could impact significantly the affordability of that development. It could incur significant cost with respect to redesign and redevelopment of those lands. It deeply concerns me that we don't have that level of certainty, that's going to encourage that risk capital to come forward, to make sure that we have that adequate land supply in a timely manner but, again, to provide affordable housing and housing affordability for Albertans.

Everything we do to layer on costs, everything we do to delay the process puts Albertans at risk, particularly, again, if we're lucky enough in this province to move towards economic growth and to move towards stronger net in-migration. We need to be ready for this, and the only way to be ready for it is through co-operation and collaboration between governments, municipal governments in this

case, and the building and development industry to ensure that strong collaborative relationship.

Madam Chair, I'm going to proceed again here to encourage all members of this House. This is a modest change, a minor change in wording to allow for some certainty in the process, some certainty in the investment, some certainty in that risk capital, that has no guarantees, as, again, we've seen with some of the financial challenges facing the industry now, to provide some certainty in making those long-term investments, both local investments and international investments coming into this province, to make those today to ensure we have the developable land, the land supply, and the building opportunities going forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A5? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to sincerely thank the member for his amendment. I understand what the member is trying to do with this amendment, and I respect the spirit of what he's trying to do. I've had some conversations with my planning department about the amendment, and at this time I'm not prepared to support it.

Let me explain why. Conservation reserve is a new tool we introduced in the MGA with Bill 21 last year. What was in place before was only environmental reserve. Through consultation we had concerns over the different interpretations of the intention of an environmental reserve. The lack of clarity about the purpose and definition of such a reserve led to an inconsistent application of the provisions, which was probably a little unfair to developers, and that's why we created a new type of reserve called a conservation reserve. A conservation reserve allows municipalities to protect lands of environmental value but would also require municipalities to provide appropriate compensation to developers for a conservation reserve since the land will be set aside in reserve instead of developed.

We've carefully constructed this conservation reserve, too, and we think that making this amendment, especially with regard to inserting language around municipal development plans or area structure plans, would severely hamstring municipalities. Municipal development plans and area structure plans are long-range strategic planning instruments that identify broad patterns of development at a higher level than the detail that this amendment proposes.

I can't support this amendment at this time on this basis. We are looking to find the balance with this new tool of conservation reserve, and we're going to need to allow the conservation reserve time to be implemented before entertaining further amendments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. I will keep it short, Madam Chair. I rise today to talk about the proposed changes, of course, to the Municipal Government Act and, more specifically, to the proposed changes that grant broader powers to the minister. While both the

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association have generally been in favour of most of the MGA amendments, in this particular instance they share a few concerns that I want to voice now.

At the very core of this is the belief that municipal autonomy must remain a key foundation of local governance in Alberta. The autonomy must be respected unless the matter is under extreme and unique circumstances. This power should only be used as a last resort. I think, probably, we would all understand this. On this point it's clear that both associations believe exactly that, and both are in complete agreement with that statement.

11:40

According to the proposed changes the government feels that as it exists now, the minister lacks the adequate authority to enforce ministerial orders that implement both decisions of an official administrator or decisions that settle intermunicipal disagreements. Changes would empower the minister with the same authority currently available with respect to the inspection process for situations where, in the minister's opinion, a municipality has not complied with direction provided by an official administrator or by the minister in respect of an intermunicipal disagreement.

The concern shared by both the AAMD and C by and the AUMA is that in regard to an intermunicipal dispute, the minister should not use these provisions to benefit one municipality over another. In fact, where appropriate, the government should apply these provisions equally to all parties involved in whatever dispute happens to arise. Madam Chair, we certainly don't need a situation where the government may find itself picking winners and losers. I don't believe that this is in anybody's best interest.

Additionally, with these changes the minister would have the ability to suspend the authority of a council to make resolutions or bylaws with respect to any matter specified in the order, to exercise resolution- or bylaw-making authority in respect of all or any of the matters for which a resolution- or bylaw-making authority is suspended under the above measure, to remove a suspension of a resolution- or bylaw-making authority with or without conditions. Finally, the minister would have the ability to withhold money otherwise payable by the government to the municipality pending compliance with an order of the minister.

This last point especially could prove overly punitive. The ability of a municipality to continue to operate when these powers are exercised by the minister should always be taken into account. Government needs to consider minimizing disruption to administrative functions and to the public. Further to this point, an additional concern brought up by the AUMA is that withholding money payable to a municipality may cause unforeseen consequences when a municipality has contractual obligations that rely on grants to be funded. This could lead to legal and/or financial repercussions if funds are withheld from the municipality. This situation would benefit no one, I believe, Madam Chair.

Now, I'd also be remiss if I didn't touch on the points brought up about the ability to suspend the council's authority or to make resolutions or bylaws. Somehow it could be problematic if the council becomes unable to pass a bylaw that is necessary for the operation of the municipality. This act, the Municipal Government Act, is an act that's created within these walls, and municipalities live and die by this act. This particular point has the ability to handcuff municipalities' ability to govern, and it infringes on their autonomy and self-determination, which is something that we strive to make sure that municipalities have. The concern is that the minister should not be able to suspend authority to make bylaws or resolutions or withhold money from

an entire council for the actions of an individual or a few councillors.

While it may be understandable that under the current MGA there does not exist a mechanism to provide the minister with much flexibility in enforcing directives derived from an inspection, the current MGA does have the ability to dismiss councillors or the CAO as an enforcement measure. These new powers I would hope would be handled delicately, to put it delicately. These officials are elected officials as well, and that, of course, would be a very important one to be handled delicately.

I do understand that the government has now included a series of tests that must be met to ensure that these additional ministerial powers are only used as a last resort, and I appreciate that. While they weren't included in the 2016 discussion guide, it's good to see that the provision is now included in the proposed amendments to the MGA.

That being said, Madam Chair, these concerns, we feel, must be taken into account as the continuation of governments must always be ensured for the sake of stability. The new MGA needs to make sure that it takes these possibilities into consideration and makes allowances to allow municipalities to carry on with minimum interruption to its citizens. I sincerely hope that these concerns that I've tried to express on behalf of these two municipal organizations are seriously considered.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've listened with interest to all that's gone on with Bill 8 and others. I would like now to rise and report.

Thank you, Chair.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 8. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

All those that concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 7

An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 7 at third reading.

Madam Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada released its decision to guarantee the constitutional right to strike in January of 2015. That was more than two years ago. Our government felt that it was important to talk to our stakeholders, and we engaged in thoughtful and meaningful consultations with them. While the rest of Alberta's public service was given these rights in June of 2016, our government decided to give postsecondary employers and employees more time to transition so that we could listen to them, and that's what we've done. Now it's time to act to ensure that the rights of all Albertans are respected.

Over the past year stakeholders worked with Mr. Andy Sims, a well-known and respected labour lawyer, to develop recommendations, the majority of which we accepted and are represented in this bill. There was no consensus among the stakeholders as the diversity of experience, history, and circumstance varies significantly across the sector, but our government struck a balance, and since its introduction many stakeholders have endorsed this bill. One stakeholder told us that this legislation is long overdue but that the extra time put into consultation and research made it almost exactly right.

I'm proud of the work of the department, stakeholders, and our government. Because of this work, Bill 7 makes changes to both the Post-secondary Learning Act and the Labour Relations Code and gives academic staff, grad students, and postdoctoral fellows the right to strike and become subject to essential services legislation. Furthermore, postsecondary institutions will be required to negotiate essential services agreements with bargaining units and will be covered by the lockout provisions under the Labour Relations Code. This extension of rights to postdoctoral fellows and graduate students is long overdue. A leader in the postdoctoral community told CBC that this legislation is huge news for academics and that postdocs have been looking for recognition as employees in this province for at least 20 years because they've lacked the basic protections required.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has long been out of step with the rest of Canada, and it's time to ensure that postsecondary employees have the same rights as all other Canadians. The changes we are proposing will extend the right to strike, with protection of essential services, to faculty so that labour relations in Alberta's universities and colleges are consistent with the rest of Alberta's public sector and with postsecondary sectors all across Canada. In addition, by modernizing our labour model, we are ensuring that our workplace rules comply with the Supreme Court of Canada's 2015 decision.

Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve a government that makes life better, and that includes ensuring that all workers are respected and that workplace rules are strengthened.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will move third reading of Bill 7.

11:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Third reading of Bill 7, an act that confuses postsecondary bargaining, is just not ready. It's a complete overreach. I'm sure the minister also realizes that it's just not ready. I'm sure that they needed to fill time to make sure that they got some legislation out there, so here we have it, folks. They're unprepared, and then they insert the NDP ideologies into every piece of legislation they put in our hands, even when it doesn't fit. Like I stated yesterday, it's their mistake. Let them work it out.

I do hope that with all the additions to this legislation and the minister not listening to stakeholders that it doesn't end up hurting our institutions, employees, and, in particular, in the event of a strike, the students. Even though we agree that changes are likely necessary to comply with the Supreme Court of Canada decision, this bill far overreaches what was needed and has done so in such a way as to satisfy ideological notions and their NDP world view and for no other reason. That was made evident when the minister didn't support our simple amendment to give faculty associations an additional five years before they get replaced by trade unions.

I have no other option than to oppose this bill in its current form and give the minister a failing grade. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education to close debate.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to close debate. I just want to remind the House that, you know, the Member for Highwood actually proposed an amendment to the bill that would extend the time that faculty associations and grad student associations were forced to be members of unions from five years to 10 years. I'm sure that forcing unionization on faculty association and grad student association members will be something that will endear him greatly to the Wildrose membership. I would be happy to let his members know that and help him campaign, if he chooses to run for re-election, on forced unionization of faculty association members.

Anyway, I have enjoyed the debate, the back and forth. I want to thank all of my colleagues here in this House for engaging in respectful and reasonable debate. With that, I will close debate on Bill 7.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

Mr. Westhead: Madam Speaker, I think we've made some excellent progress this morning. Seeing the time, I say that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:54 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, May 4, 2017

Day 28

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 4, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you an amazing, brilliant group of students from my constituency of Red Deer-South. They're accompanied by their teachers Mr. Jeff Archer, Ms Laurie Shapka, Ms Tracy Knecht, and Ms Bev Higgins. Could you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly your granddaughter Miss Amelia Lewis and your wife, Mrs. Joan Emard-Wanner. Amelia is a grade 3 student from Sunnyside school in Calgary and is visiting the Legislature with her nana today. Amelia loves playing hockey, diving, and is a voracious reader. She is also an accomplished writer, having been published in Scribblitt. Amelia and Joan are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to do today. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you my family. I would like to make sure that everybody understands that I have pride and love for every one of them that is sitting up there. I would like to start with my mother, Arlene Cyr, a strong woman from Slave Lake, and she has been a vision within my life; my sister Melanie Cyr, who has been a wonderful strength in my life as well; my wife, Megan Cyr, who is the love of my life, and I have to say that she has been the reason that I am actually sitting in this House today; my daughter Charlotte Cyr – if she can stand – that is my youngest daughter, and she's obviously a poser; and my oldest daughter, Amelia, who I actually had that conversation for Bill 202 with that gave me the inspiration. If they could all stand.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Cyr: My second introduction. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and to all of the members of the Legislature one of the dedicated staff of the Wildrose caucus. I owe this staff my immense thanks for his hard work in passing Bill 202, the Protecting Victims of Non-consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act. All members of this House know how important it is to have great staff behind you. As I ask him to stand and please take this traditional warm welcome, I would like to enthusiastically encourage him to move forward with his career on something as important as Bill 202. I would like to introduce Cody Johnston.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Okay. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I have a document here that says that my school is here at 2, but maybe they're here now, so that'd be good.

The Speaker: Not a problem, Madam Premier. If they're not here yet, we will go on. We have other guests.

Ms Notley: Okay. Thank you.

The Speaker: That has nothing to do with the fact that she happens to be the Premier.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the House a number of people who are living with cancer or have survived cancer. They joined me in the office this morning as we declared May Bladder Cancer Awareness Month in Alberta. Bladder cancer is the fifth most common cancer in our country. It's my hope that this provincial declaration will help spread awareness and show support for patients and their families. Today I have the honour of introducing a number of bladder cancer survivors, who are appropriately wearing bright yellow T-shirts. They are Dick Southworth, Michele Zielinski, Rob Truscott, and Gerry Maciejko. I ask that they please rise – they're in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 12 staff from the public safety division of Municipal Affairs. I'd like to thank them all for their outstanding work delivering a comprehensive bill and for completing a successful consultation. It's my great pleasure to recognize them on the day that I introduce Bill 12 because they all had a hand in making this happen. This accomplished group of people – not all of them but some of them are here seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they stand as I call their names: Monte Krueger, Colin Robertson, Erin Black, Kristopher Schmaltz, Iain Ilich, Lisa Bell, Jolene Cusack, Cheryl Ryder, Chris Neuman, Kathryn Davidson, Brenda Manweiler, and Alex Morrison. I'd like to now please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Education System

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to rise in this House to acknowledge Education Week in the province of Alberta. This week allows us the opportunity to celebrate the importance of education and to highlight the great work being done in schools across our province. This year's theme, Learning Is a Journey, acknowledges the role education plays in preparing students to pursue their career interests in a diversified economy and highlights the important role education plays in shaping the future of our province.

Our government is working hard to make life better for Albertans by ensuring that every student has a great education and a bright

future. Alberta students deserve the best education that we can deliver. This session our government has introduced Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, which will save Alberta families more than \$54 million this year. Families will no longer have to pay for instructional supplies or materials and will no longer have to pay transportation fees when they're being bused to their designated schools.

We announced 26 new and modernized school projects across the province, and we are providing a school nutrition program to all 61 publicly funded school boards across the province. Our government knows that investing in education is an investment in our future, and that is why we will all continue to build new schools, fund for enrolment, and provide predictable and stable funding for school boards.

I want to thank all of the educators across this province for their tireless effort and commitment to education, and we hope you take a moment to celebrate your accomplishments during Education Week. I encourage Albertans to join in the celebration by visiting their local schools and attending special Education Week events or visiting their child's classroom.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government and Official Opposition Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: In just two years the NDP has destroyed the once great pillars of the Alberta advantage: balanced budgets, low taxes, and accountable government. These pillars of Alberta society have been thrown to the lions under their watch. These two years have been marked by a scorched earth policy of hyperregulation, senseless waste of tax dollars, and blind ideology. But in just two years from today I believe the NDP will be reduced to just a bad memory.

The ancient Romans had a way of dealing with governments that were this far beyond redemption, once deposed. They called it *damnatio memoriae*, meaning literally condemnation from memory. The senate of Rome would declare *damnatio memoriae* as the highest form of dishonour that one could incur, normally reserved for leaders and emperors who brought disgrace on the Roman Empire. They would tear down their monuments and their temples. They would remove their faces even from the coins. They would destroy all traces that that leader or emperor and government had ever existed.

1:40

My friends, Albertans are calling for the *damnatio memoriae* of the NDP. We will tear down their ideological monuments to socialism by cutting taxes, reducing spending, and balancing the budget. We will destroy their temples of ecofundamentalism, replacing carbon taxes and ending the green slush fund. And we will end the NDP era of secrecy, restoring freedom of information and giving people the right to recall bad leaders.

The NDP have done the impossible and united formerly bitter enemies against a threat to Alberta greater than we could ever see in one another. Together we will sow the fields of socialism with salt so that a government like this can never grow again.

For those unlucky enough to remember this government's reign of error, this time will be looked back upon as one we would rather soon forget. Future generations will be lucky enough to never know...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Your time is up. Hon. member, please be seated when I ask... [interjection] Hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mental Health and Addiction Education and Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the privilege of moderating a panel discussion on indigenous youth mental health sponsored by the U of C's Mathison Centre and the Canadian Mental Health Commission. We heard directly from youth at the Kainai board of education and watched a video on the headstrong program encouraging youth to talk about the stigma related to addictions and mental illness. Unfortunately, the stigma is still too common even among some of our health professionals. In fact, there is often a double stigma: first, simply being indigenous and, secondly, with addictions or mental health issues.

Another common theme was the lack of culturally sensitive and more holistic approaches in our mental health system. Several panellists spoke eloquently about how traditional practices and mentoring from elders helped them break free from depression and addictions and regain a sense of identity and self-worth.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has identified a long history of intergenerational trauma and its lasting effect on our First Nations community. Updates to Alberta's curriculum should be aimed at giving all Albertans a deeper understanding of this and encouraging further participation in the reconciliation process. Tragically, we continue to see increasing incidents of mental illness and addictions across Alberta, including opiates and preventable deaths, now approaching two per day. While I commend the government for increasing investment in this area, spending alone is not the answer.

Since 2008 the elimination of the Mental Health Board – there is a lack of consistent leadership and co-ordinated planning for mental health and addictions in this province. System change is difficult without strong, sustained leadership. Once again I must call on the government to reconsider establishing the provincial mental health and addictions officer. We need immediate implementation of the recommendations from the Valuing Mental Health report, including the long-overdue reform of primary care networks and their important role in mental health and addictions. Timely system changes will not only save lives but will substantially reduce costs and boost staff morale.

On Mental Health Week let's reaffirm our commitment to reducing the stigma of addictions and mental health, support our indigenous people, and show...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Your time is up.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mental Health Week

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also speak today about a mental health event: the Canadian Mental Health Association's Mental Health Week. This annual national event takes place during the first week of May to encourage people from all walks of life to learn, talk, reflect, and engage with others on all issues relating to mental health.

CMHA is a national organization that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support their recovery from mental illness.

The theme this year is Turn Up the Volume: "It's the 66th Annual CMHA Mental Health Week and we're getting loud for mental health." During Mental Health Week Canadians are encouraged to take the time to reflect on their mental health and to speak out about mental health. To be truly mentally well, Canadians need the support of psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors,

and other community-based mental health services and programs. As well, they need acknowledgement, respect, and adequate housing.

“Getting loud” means speaking up [to improve access to mental health care and] to stop the discrimination and the stigma that often go hand in hand with mental illness. It means . . . using your voice to raise awareness and build support. For someone at work. For someone at home. For yourself . . .

Positive mental health isn’t about avoiding problems or trying to achieve a “perfect” life. It’s about living well and having the tools to cope with difficult situations . . . during [smooth or challenging times].

I’m proud to be part of a government that is taking mental health seriously and has increased funding for mental health and addictions by over 60 per cent. Each person’s path to mental health is unique.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Edmonton-McClung Meet Your Neighbour Campaign

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise today to update the House on a Canada 150 project that I spoke about earlier this spring. In response to the Quebec shootings in a mosque as well as the desecration of some Jewish cemeteries in Calgary as well as some of the sentiments opposing immigration and refugee immigration in Canada, I designed a Canada 150 project to bring people together.

What I’ve done is invited all community league presidents in Edmonton-McClung to gather together volunteers. They will be joined by volunteers as well within my scope as well as from church groups and schools. Together we’ll meet at individual community league buildings on Saturday and Sunday afternoons in May and June, and from there we’ll go out and knock on 150 doors. As well as that, what we’ll do is invite people to learn about the benefits of community league membership, and particularly we want newcomers to be aware of the infrastructure that’s there in every one of their communities and to belong and become a part of their community league and to join as a member.

Once we finish meeting those 150 neighbours, we’re going to meet back at the community league, have some pizza and pop, and share the stories of new acquaintances we’ve made. Afterwards, later in July at my annual summer barbecue – everybody will be invited to attend – we’re going to be video taping the shared stories of new-found friendships that have been made by this initiative in Edmonton-McClung. I’m glad to say that we have three out of the seven community leagues already signed up, Mr. Speaker, and it’s oversubscribed for most of the Saturday and Sunday afternoons in May and June.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another year, and another fiscally irresponsible budget has been pushed through by this NDP government, but this budget was not backed by me or the Wildrose Party. However, on April 21 of this year I had the exceptional joy of holding my first grandson, Zachary Scott Nichols, for the first time about an hour after his birth. When I consider his birth this year, it strikes me that my grandson and all Albertans will unfortunately be responsible for massive amounts of debt that will be forced upon them due to successive bad budgets created by a

government that doesn’t have a plan to get us back to a balanced budget.

The moment Zach was born, a bill was strapped to his back. I’ve been asked how much that might be. You might be shocked to hear that the moment he was born, his portion of the bill was already more than \$7,000 of provincial government debt. In Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* it says: he will extract a pound of flesh from Antonio for the money he was owed and that was ruthlessly required to be paid back. Thank God no one is required to give a pound of flesh, but every Albertan is being asked to dig deeper and deeper into their pockets. By the time my grandson Zachary is old enough to vote, he will owe around \$50,000 in provincial debt – that is more than the average university graduate owes after completing a degree – yet he will have nothing to show for it.

I made my grandson a promise the day he was born that I would do my best to turn this around. I promised him that I would do everything in my power to make sure that this NDP government would only get two more years of adding debt to his name before they’re voted out of office, and I promised him that I would help fix our spending problem and bring back the Alberta advantage, the advantage the NDP are so intent on destroying.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair

Mr. Barnes: Yesterday Albertans found out how much they are paying the Premier’s top oil sands adviser, ecoradical Tzeporah Berman, while she works tirelessly to shut down pipelines, \$23,000 directly from our taxpayers. To make matters worse, the NDP will not fire Berman. Premier, your inaction demonstrates gross hypocrisy. You publicly avowed that no staff would help the antipipeline B.C. NDP on their campaign. Now we’re seeing exception after exception and no action on your promise. To the Premier: when will you fire Berman?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I’ve outlined in answer to this question before, Ms Berman sits on an advisory committee, a very important advisory committee to the province of Alberta, an advisory committee that is a fundamental part of our climate leadership plan. The plan itself is an absolutely fundamental ingredient to our successful approval of a pipeline to tidewater. In fact, we’re very pleased with the work that everybody on that committee is doing, and we look forward to their reports in the weeks and months to come.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, by adding ecoradicals like Tzeporah Berman and Karen Mahon to the oil sands advisory group, this government legitimizes the views of those that seek to defame and destroy our province’s most important job creator. This is unacceptable. Using taxpayer money to pay the salaries of these ecoradicals is a total betrayal of Alberta families whose livelihoods and re-entry into the job market depend on pipelines and investment. When will this government wake up and realize it is time to fight misinformation about our world-class oil and gas industry and not . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. It's fun hearing the member opposite talk about misinformation when he sincerely put his bank account towards that very cause.

We are proud of the results we are getting because we have taken a different attitude, one different from the members opposite, their predecessors, Conservative governments in both Alberta and in Ottawa, that put their heads in the sand and pretended that there was nothing happening. And what happened, Mr. Speaker? Nothing happened. We took a different approach. We brought people to the table who traditionally have been adversarial, and instead we got good results, which includes two pipelines. I'm not going to apologize for getting good results for Alberta.

Mr. Barnes: When we asked this government about the sale of ConocoPhillips, they were, quote, proud, proud to see a mass exodus of American capital from our oil sands in favour of an NDP-orchestrated consolidation and reorganization. The Premier even accused the opposition of overreacting. Predictably, ConocoPhillips has announced that their sale resulted in 300 more pink slips to Alberta workers. Add that to the hundred thousand jobs already lost under this Premier. Does this Premier want to issue a retraction, or is she still proud to see how ecoradicals cost Albertans their livelihoods?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned, we've gotten two pipeline approvals, which is tens of thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in new investment. But what isn't helpful is that as I talk to leaders every day, they tell me that they are more fearful all the time of the opposition continually talking down Alberta. I can say that on this side of the House we're standing up for Albertans. It would be nice if you would, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Government Policies

Mr. Strankman: We're now at the halfway mark of this government's term, and what an economic disaster that has been. They've spent more time and money trying to impress Leap Manifesto authors than defending Albertans. When they quickly ran out of taxes to hike, they invented the carbon tax. They are destroying coal jobs, including in towns like Hanna and Forestburg. What does the Premier have to say to the tens of thousands of Albertans whose lives are now much worse because of their policies? Where are the Respect Hanna buttons?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that in the last few weeks I visited Hanna, sat down with the community leaders. They recognize that the world is transitioning off coal. They're quite excited at the opportunities within the renewables space. They want to participate, and I can tell you that we've got their backs, unlike the opposition. When the Leader of the Official Opposition was in Ottawa, they passed regs to ensure that those facilities would be closed permanently. We're not doing that. We worked with Ottawa to ensure that they can now transition to cogen.

Mr. Strankman: Albertans haven't seen two worse years of job losses since Trudeau's national energy program. That's how this government will be remembered after they become a footnote in history. While everyday Albertans are losing work, this government

was busy wasting taxpayer money on ads, light bulbs, and clotheslines while abandoning people like Haley Chisholm. It's a shameful record. Albertans are suffering. As of late, in and around Hanna there have been nine adult suicides. How can the Premier justify this record?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you this much. Our government is focusing on making life better for Albertans through two pipeline approvals. We're pleased to see homegrown Alberta companies . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Stop the clock, please. I can't hear the hon. minister speaking. Could you please keep your volume down. [interjection] Pardon me? Did you have something to say?

Finish your 35 seconds, hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is that housing starts are up in our province, exports are up in our province, manufacturing is up, and drilling is up. You know what else? We have a number of banks and economists that have forecast that Alberta will lead the country in growth, by 2.4 per cent, this year and next year, higher than any other province.

Mr. Strankman: Completely out of touch with Albertans: these are the words that Albertans are quickly associating with this government. Bill 6 forced farmers to storm this building demanding respect. This government brought in a carbon tax despite never running on it. They also promised changes to our children in care system. Things got worse under their watch. They called hard-working Albertans sewer rats, embarrassing cousins, and the anger machine. Given this record of destruction how can Albertans trust them?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the reason Albertans can trust us is because in the last election we said that as we head into an economic recession caused by the drop in the international price of oil – just to remind the folks over there – our government would choose to have their backs, that our government would focus on making life better for them, that our government would support those important public services that matter to Albertans: their health care, their education, postsecondary for their kids. Our government would work to create jobs, 20,000 jobs just in the last month. Our government would focus on making life more affordable.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Advanced Education Ministry Travel Expenses

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report released yesterday paints a picture of an NDP government far too comfortable with bending the rules. When it comes to Advanced Education, the ministry padded caucus-related costs to go on out-of-province junkets, with no sign-off on the trips. Life has never been so good if you're an NDP minister, but for everyday Albertans in the real world this reeks of ignorance and lack of respect for taxpayers' dollars. Why does this NDP government think it's okay to treat hard-earned taxpayer dollars as if it were funny money?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this concern of the Auditor General. Of course, we take our responsibility to be prudent with tax dollars

very seriously. We know that the Auditor General identified some errors in processing these expense claims. We're working closely with the Auditor General and officials in our department to correct the errors and make sure that these matters are dealt with appropriately.

Mr. W. Anderson: The NDP government using a ministry to funnel money that should have come from the caucus budget is exactly the type of thing the NDP would have strongly opposed while in opposition. It's time for the NDP to face the facts. They've been in power for two years, and Albertans are sick and tired of them trying to shirk responsibility and accountability. This type of waste management needs to come to an end. What is the minister going to do to ensure and show that junkets on the public dime are over?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'd like to emphasize the fact that we appreciate the Auditor General for his report and his work to ensure the government is running effectively and efficiently. Our department has met with his officials to understand what the requirements are, and we're working very diligently to make sure that all of the proper processes are in place and that all of the documentation is in place so that there are no questions about these expenses going forward. Of course, out-of-province travel is often required as part of our ministerial duties to meet with our counterparts across the provinces. We will make sure that those processes . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. W. Anderson: You know, if a regular Albertan tried to pull off some of the tricks used in Advanced Education, they would have been punished. Submitting caucus expenses to the ministry is irresponsible and shows a complete lack of respect for taxpayers' dollars. But under the NDP's watch Advanced Ed has turned into a free-for-all, with insufficient documentation, a business rationale for submitting expenses, running up extra meal expenses and fuel charges. When is the Minister of Advanced Ed going to put an end to the gravy train in his department?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the minister has answered the question not once but twice, and I think it's also important to understand and to maybe dial back the drama over there a little bit to remember that the Auditor General himself characterized these oversights as insignificant amounts and also acknowledged that there are administrative errors. For instance, what the Auditor General didn't do . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I cannot hear the answer. Would the people who asked the question try to work on listening as well. I had a discussion yesterday with a member who suggested that I needed to stand up and remind them that when I'm standing, you don't speak. I thought that was obvious and that all of you knew about that, but that seems to have escaped some of you.

Hon. Premier, could you finish your answer, please.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The phrase the Auditor General did not use, for instance, was "aura of power." It's interesting that the members opposite are so concerned about these issues, yet they're doing everything they can to join up with their other friends over there who are the architects of the sky palace, of golf club . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier. Thank you. [interjections] Hon. Premier, the principle applies to you as well.

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

The Speaker: Noted.

The leader of the third party.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Flood Risk Management

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Now for something completely different. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the current government for their commitment to complete the southwest portion of Calgary's ring road on the schedule required by the agreement with the Tsuut'ina Nation. There have been concerns expressed by both individuals and groups about the construction form and the environmental care being employed. To the Transportation minister: are you aware of the complaints and challenges to your current construction process, and what can you tell the House about your response?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that the hon. member was involved in getting this project approved in the first place, and I want to assure him that safety is still our top priority when designing infrastructure. The bridge will accommodate flood levels beyond the year 2013 flood level. We've designed the bridge to have a 150-metre bridge span, which provides additional hydraulic capacity, and we've also designed the stormwater ponds so that they can take more water in the event of a flood. The Springbank project will provide additional protection for this area.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister, but there are still concerns that the bridge over the Elbow River has been designed with spans too short to allow the river to pass through during a high-water spring runoff. I heard what the minister said, but I have to ask: have you talked to the people at the Tsuut'ina, the residents of Discovery Ridge, and other people that are concerned about this and are actually filing complaints and injunctions and other things? Have you been able to have contact with them, please, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There has been some ongoing consultation. Certainly, we've received correspondence from some of those communities, and we've responded to it appropriately. We have done a revised design to minimize risk to the Glenmore reservoir. The study was completed in the fall of 2015 and confirmed that the bridge will not present a risk to the Glenmore reservoir, causeway, or dam.

Mr. McIver: Again I thank the minister, but my understanding is that part of the road will be built on an earthen berm, which is to support the road, and there is concern that in high runoff years an earthen dam may not be enough to hold the water back. The folks of Haysboro are concerned about their community as well. In fact, I understand that one of them was told by an official that they are the only ones that are at risk. To the minister: are you aware of this concern, and again can you assure the Legislature and Albertans that you won't let this negative scenario occur as a result of the construction of this important project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since receiving correspondence from some of the communities in southwest Calgary with respect to this, I have had my department officials review the matter again and brief me thoroughly on this. We have submitted an application under the Fisheries Act, the approval of Alberta Environment and Parks has been obtained, and all the work is being completed in accordance with all relevant federal and provincial environmental regulations and acts. I am quite confident that we have provided a safe . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mental Health and Addiction Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this being Mental Health Week, I expected to hear more government announcements on progress implementing the recommendations from the Valuing Mental Health report, including those on first responders, given that this is the anniversary of the Fort McMurray fire; also on extending funding for the central Alberta regional collaborative service delivery model; and on more timely access to opioid treatment clinics. To the Minister of Health. Sixteen months have passed since the report was accepted. Can you give us an update on the progress made on the 26 remaining recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We are continuing to make good progress, and we look forward to being able to give a fulsome response in the coming days. Even without being able to do the full update in short order, I want to assure everyone that we are continuing to move forward with opioid replacement therapies throughout the province. A great deal of the funds that we received from the federal government to help us address the opioid crisis was funnelled directly to that so that increased opportunities for methadone and Suboxone closer to home are available throughout the province. As well, we continue to work on addictions and treatment options in communities, including a number of detox beds.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: The regional collaborative service delivery model has proven to be the most efficient and most effective provider of mental health services to children and families. It's a clear improvement over previous fragmented approaches. A Red Deer mother of a child with special needs is concerned that this funding cut will lead to longer waits for therapy, poorer outcomes, and an increased burden on teachers as they attempt to fill the gap. Again to the minister: will you reinstate the regional collaborative service delivery funding, and if not, why not? This should be expanded, not cut.

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer this question on behalf of the Minister of Education. Of course, we believe that every child in Alberta, including those with special needs, deserves an education that prepares them for success. That's why our government is working to make life better by improving classroom education for all children by hiring new teachers and teaching assistants and investing over \$12 million more this year in inclusive education for students with special needs. It's important

to note that since the RCSD model was introduced in 2014, funding for delivery has actually increased by over \$8 million, to over \$67 million this year. We will continue to do everything we can to support students with special needs in our classrooms.

Dr. Swann: That hardly explains the cuts to the Red Deer program.

Opioid users are seeking help, and often they cannot book during regular business hours. These Albertans require expanded access to treatment clinics, and wait times outside of our two major cities must be shortened. Clinics should meet the needs of people seeking services rather than those providing the services. In other words, services need to be patient centred. To the Minister of Health: will the government commit to reducing wait times and expanding after-hours access to services?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These are the exact kinds of things that the associate minister has been working on, and we appreciate the recommendations and the support from the member opposite. Earlier this week she was in Lethbridge working at meeting with front-line service providers in terms of harm reduction and making sure that increased supports are available there. They also raised a number of other issues that they're hoping to move forward with in collaboration, including supervised consumption services, potentially, as well as increased access to other harm reduction strategies in the community. We look forward to being able to support all Albertans and save lives.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2:10

Capital Planning Process

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over a month ago the government released its \$29.5 billion four-year capital plan. The investment represents one of the most significant investments in roads, schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure like the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin that were neglected for far too long. To the Minister of Infrastructure: what processes does this government follow to ensure that the best projects are approved to the maximum benefit of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just use as an example a project such as the Reynolds Museum. When such a project comes forward, it's reviewed against government criteria and priorities. This highly used museum project was deemed to foster economic development, to improve the health and safety of the existing facility, and to benefit both the local and regional communities as well as visitors. The project was found to be a priority for the local municipality, the MLA as well as the ministry of culture.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you. Given that there are a number of projects in the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency that are not included in the capital plan or unfunded projects list – for example, a new high school for Camrose, new science labs and classrooms for the Augustana campus, and a women's shelter in Wetaskiwin, to name a few – to the Minister of Infrastructure: could you detail the process followed to move such projects onto the capital plan or the unfunded projects list for future consideration?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. Well, projects in the capital plan have all been reviewed very carefully to ensure that they align with government priorities such as the need to enhance access to services, improving the condition of facilities, which includes health and safety concerns, functionality, and use. Our criteria are open and transparent and published on the government of Alberta website.

Mr. Hinkley: Given that many worthwhile projects went unfunded in the government's four-year capital plan, to the same minister: what are the prospects for the funding of projects on the unfunded capital list in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in my time in the ministries of Infrastructure and Transportation I've met with many municipal leaders and many other stakeholders, MLAs and so on, who are bringing forward many very worthwhile projects. I can honestly say that I've not come across a frivolous or unnecessary project. But there are far too many projects to be funded by the government at one time, so we can't say yes to all of them. It's a list of funded capital projects that we've had a chance to evaluate, at least in a preliminary way, and found to be necessary, required, to be a project that is worth while . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Energy Efficiency Program Training Contracts

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, lately the Minister of Labour has been taking us on a stroll through some of the best classic rock of the 1980s. Meanwhile her colleagues are singing to a different tune: a Britney Spears song she might remember from her teenage years called *Oops! . . . I Did It Again*. Earlier this session we learned about the Ecofitt boondoggle, and then, oops, it seems like the NDP has contracted yet another Ontario company to do the training on these retrofits. It seems the government thinks that contractors need training on how to fill out grant applications. To the minister: how do you rationalize the need for this kind of training, and at what cost?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the energy efficiency agency undertook a competitive procurement process in order to administer the programs that the Energy Efficiency agency is now delivering. In this particular case, yes, the contractors will learn how to fill out the forms so that they can ensure that individual homeowners actually get their rebates on time and in good working order. This is how energy efficiency programs are run in other jurisdictions, and we're following best practices in this regard.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that the government thinks it needs to train highly professional and competent Alberta journeymen on how to fill out grant rebate forms and seeing as the government apparently needs Ontario's own ICF company to do this, can the minister explain why no qualified Alberta firms were able to successfully bid and win the same contract that an Ontario company won?

Ms Phillips: For the particular RFP . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Phillips: For the particular RFP that the member is referencing, Mr. Speaker, there were no Alberta companies who bid.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given Alberta's skilled tradespeople need to register to work on these home energy retrofit projects and be trained on how to fill out the forms and then have recurring training from ICF Canada and given that taxpayer dollars are being expended here on an activity that many regard as frivolous and many tradespeople personally consider is an insult to their intelligence and their skills, how many other outsourced contracts is the minister hiding, that create more red tape work for bureaucrats and out-of-province consultants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a variety of programs that are being delivered by Energy Efficiency Alberta in order to make life more affordable for Albertans and ensure that we've got job creation happening in the energy efficiency space, something that we haven't enjoyed in the past given that we're the only jurisdiction in North America without an energy efficiency program. Of course, we do have over 350 contractors registered to deliver the insulation, tankless hot water heaters, and triple-pane windows program. There are also in-store rebates available for consumers as well as an online rebate program. Many people are taking advantage of these programs.

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

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair

(continued)

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having someone as radical as Ms Berman as co-chair of Alberta's oil sands advisory group is like having Saudi Arabia on the Human Rights Commission, but because in the past NDP caucus members, including the Premier, openly protested against pipelines and called our oil dirty oil, Albertans are smart enough to see through this government's hidden intentions for our oil and gas sector. To the Premier: will you do all Albertans a favour and fire this anti-Alberta crusader before they fire you?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say how frustrating it is to hear the members opposite continue to talk down Alberta and our industry. [interjections] Ms Berman has been effective in working with a number of industry leaders. A number of people joined the table and got good results for Alberta, including two pipelines, and we're going to make sure that we continue to get good access to international markets, which helps Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, you're yelling very loud, and you're heckling. I can't hear the speaker, so could you keep the tone down, please?

First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Ms Berman has taken her crusade against the Kinder Morgan pipeline to extreme ends and that that includes calling people names when she disagrees with them and given that a public example of this behaviour is a January 11 tweet, which I will table today, in which she called Premier Clark, of British Columbia, a lapdog for supporting Kinder Morgan's pipeline, Premier, will you fire your lapdog on Alberta's oil sands advisory group? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we talked about respect in this House. Today we have the members opposite name-calling yet again.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah, sewer rats.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, they continue to do this . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, you're just escalating the dysfunction of this place. Please keep those comments to yourself.

Deputy Premier, continue, please.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. We're going to continue to watch for good outcomes, Mr. Speaker, and I have to say that the outcome of getting our product to tidewater is significant. We are proud of that accomplishment.

I hope the members opposite will reflect on the times that they themselves have enabled people to call then members of their own caucus disrespectful names and whether or not that was appropriate as they continue to move forward.

Mr. Gill: Berman is fighting against a good outcome.

Given that Ms Berman considered Premier Clark a lapdog for supporting the Kinder Morgan pipeline and given that Alberta's Premier claims she supports the Kinder Morgan pipeline, too, Premier, do you think that she considers you a lapdog but doesn't tweet it publicly because she's getting paid from your coffer?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

2:20

The Speaker: Another point of order.

The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the oil sands advisory group is a group of oil sands companies, First Nations, communities, and environmental groups who are charged with giving us advice on how to implement the limit on oil sands emissions at 100 megatonnes. The industry folks around that table sit with environmental groups and First Nations and local communities in a solutions-based way. Might I also suggest to the third party that perhaps they take their grievances to Athabasca oil sands, CNRL, Cenovus, Conoco, Suncor, and others who are supporting this process.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Energy Policies

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, while we heard all parties out in B.C. during their election make promises that are outside of their jurisdiction, our Premier is right that a \$70 carbon tax on coal exports is a bad idea, but it's not that much worse than putting a \$50 carbon tax on all of our industries. That's exactly the policy the Premier is putting in place. It doesn't just kill coal jobs but jobs across Alberta. Yesterday the Premier admitted carbon taxes on coal make us less . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Was there a question from the hon. member?

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell the House is that our government is continuing to focus on diversifying

our economy. We've recently put through a budget that not only invests in public services to ensure that we have teachers in classrooms and we have front-line health workers when we need them; we're also investing significantly in capital investment infrastructure projects. When the economists say that Alberta is poised to grow by 2.4 per cent, they attribute that to the two pipelines that we've gotten approved and our huge, largest-ever infrastructure build in Alberta's history.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Panda: Thank you. It's quite rich all of a sudden for the Premier to sound the alarm on coal jobs given she made it a flagship policy to destroy as many as she can over the next decade. Given politicians on the west coast are trying to pretend they can stop pipelines or attack our exports and livelihoods and given the NDP is wasting billions of dollars to kill coal jobs right here in Alberta, how can the Premier look coal workers in the face here in Alberta given her government's record?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We're going to continue to stand up for Alberta's forestry and energy workers as we have done from day one. I can tell you that, you know, our approach is to work with Canada, to work with our provinces in a win-win. Our government is making life better for Albertans by phasing out harmful coal pollution, diversifying our energy economy, and also repairing our international reputation and getting pipelines to tidewater.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given the Premier's top oil sands adviser, Ms Berman, is out campaigning for the B.C. NDP and all the while the government is touting two pipelines every single day in this House and given that this is sending mixed messages, with the government talking out of both sides of their mouth at the same time, the Premier can't have it both ways. Will she fire the ecomilitant, ecoextremist, who is a waste of taxpayers' dollars and is hurting our province's credibility?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what hurts our credibility. It's the opposition that continues to run down our province, our industries and attacks the great work that our government is doing. I'll remind the members opposite that the Prime Minister cited our Premier's climate leadership plan as one of the major reasons that two pipelines were approved. I can tell you that that's what we're focused on. We're going to continue to work collaboratively with our counterparts. We're not going to listen to an opposition as it jumps up and down and tries to poke everyone in the eye.

Surgery Wait Times in Central Alberta

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government always says, "The right care in the right place at the right time." Since the Alberta Health Services centralization we now see hip surgery wait times for Edmonton zone patients at 25.3 weeks, Calgary zone patients at 38.2 weeks, and the central zone at 44.3 weeks. That's right. It takes 19 weeks longer to get hip surgery in the central zone compared to Edmonton. To the minister: why are the surgery wait times so unacceptably long in central . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear. If you're an urgent patient, you will get urgent care. There have

been some good improvements on wait times, things like hip fracture repair, radiation therapy, and our 17 stroke treatment centres. Certainly, I agree that there is more work to be done. That's one of the reasons why on this side of the House we proposed a budget that protects health care instead of pushing for billions of dollars of cuts, which would inevitably impact wait times in all parts of the province, including central Alberta. We're moving forward with a plan that's stable and predictable and works to increase opportunities for speedy recovery.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Taylor: Given that central Alberta makes up approximately 10 per cent of Alberta's population yet only receives 5 per cent of the capital funding and given that a 2015 needs assessment in the central zone showed a shortfall of 96 beds, 18 emergency beds, and three OR rooms and given that surgery needs to happen in ORs and patients need beds to recuperate after surgery, why isn't the minister acting on the information in this report, that shows a severe lack of resources in central Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: Well, thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. I ask the member: why is it that you're advocating for \$9 billion worth of cuts to infrastructure funding, hon. member? [interjections] You want to make sure that we're continuing to provide improvements. That's what we're doing. If you want to make sure we're standing up for health care across Alberta, please vote for the budget. Don't continue to discredit it and put it down. We're proud of the investments that we're making throughout Alberta, and we're going to continue to do those because Albertans have a government that's on their side, that's making their lives better, and that includes investing in health care. [interjections]

The Speaker: Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, just keep your voice down, please.

Mr. Taylor: Given that this government has a priority initiative to "implement a Wait Time Measurement and . . . Management Policy to address long wait times" and given that the Wildrose leader put forward a motion calling for a study on wait times, a motion the NDP voted down, how can the NDP expect Albertans to take their word on wait times seriously when they voted against a motion that would support patients getting timely care?

Ms Hoffman: The motion did no such thing, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. The member said himself that it was a motion to spend a bunch of resources doing more studies, just like they want to do in Justice, when there are serious issues. We are putting our money where our mouth is in Justice. We're putting our money where our mouth is in Health and Education, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite are pushing for deep cuts and to sit around doing studies. That's not good enough. Albertans deserve health care improvements now. That's why we're moving forward to protect their health care instead of pushing for the billions of dollars in cuts, both to capital and to operations, that the members opposite are advocating for. We're putting Albertans first.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Workplace Legislation Review

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday when I asked the Minister of Labour if she would do the right thing and actually

consult with employers and business groups, she replied that she had personally met with Alberta Enterprise group and had met with the chambers. Well, the chambers disagree. The Calgary Chamber has called the process wholly inadequate, and the Alberta chamber had to publicly call on the government to show affected businesses some respect in order to get a meeting, which is still not a replacement for robust consultation. To the Minister of Labour. You say one thing. Others beg to differ. Who is telling the truth?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have been talking to Albertans about making sure we have workplace legislation that works for Alberta, that is fair and balanced, making sure that we've been consulting with employers and workers. We've heard from nearly 5,000 Albertans, and I have met with chamber organizations, and they have been engaged in this process. We are going to make sure that we have family-friendly workplace legislation that works for all Albertans.

2:30

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, the scales appear to be tipped.

Given that this government will not give a straight answer on whether they will get rid of the secret-ballot process for union certification and given that this government's NDP brethren in B.C. have openly stated that they will remove the secret-ballot process if they are elected next week and given that there is nothing more fundamental to Canadian democracy than the secret ballot, again to the minister: will you be proposing the scrapping of the secret-ballot process? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been reviewing the feedback that we've received from various organizations, including workers. This afternoon I'm meeting with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. I need to review what our stakeholders are telling us before making any final decisions, but I will tell you that unlike the party that was formerly in government, we will be making changes. We will be making sure that we have up-to-date, modern workplace legislation that takes care of Albertans.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, given that, in the words of the minister, the "government is getting consultations right" – it sounds like they're in secret as well – and given that every single business and employer group we have spoken with has expressed significant concern with both the length and process of the consultation and given that these groups simply want the government to extend them a basic level of respect by consulting them face to face, again to the minister. Minister, your consultation has failed. Will you do the right thing, reopen consultation and commit to meeting with affected stakeholders across the province face to face?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have had workplace legislation that has not been updated since 1988. We need to make sure that we have legislation that takes care of Albertans. That means that you need to be willing to consult, to have those important meetings, and then make decisions, something the former government failed to do. We will continue our process, and I look forward to bringing forward fair and balanced suggestions for Albertans to review.

Thank you.

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

Economic Development

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore I have investors and small and medium-sized businesses. During tough economic times these businesses take the lead in economic recovery. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: how important are small and medium-sized businesses to Alberta's economy? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please. [interjection] Government House Leader, we had a discussion yesterday.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for asking about the impact that small and medium-sized businesses have on Alberta's economy. I can tell you that Alberta businesses have a bigger economic impact than businesses anywhere in the country. They inject about a hundred billion dollars of GDP per year into our hometowns and neighbourhoods, and together they're responsible for 32 per cent of Alberta's GDP as well as 36 per cent of all private-sector employment in the province. In March Alberta created more than 20,000 new full-time jobs, many of which came from small businesses.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a tough few years for Alberta businesses and families in my constituency and in the province. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what signs are you seeing of economic recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. To quote the Minister of Finance, we definitely are seeing some green shoots in our economy. Drilling starts are up 130 per cent over last year, our exports are up 37 per cent year over year, and last month wholesale trade rose to its highest level in two years. Economists are forecasting that Alberta will lead the country in economic growth, putting us back on top, where we belong. Again, they've cited our historic infrastructure build along with two pipeline approvals.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were proud of the fact that we led the country in private capital investment last year. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are we expecting for this year? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, in 2016 we led the country in private-sector capital investment at \$53.8 billion, setting records in a variety of sectors. In 2016 we had the highest per capita investment in construction, petroleum, chemical manufacturing, retail trade, transportation, and warehousing. In oil and gas extraction Alberta had the highest level of investment in 2016, just shy of \$25 billion, far ahead of the next province, which was B.C., at \$4.5 billion.

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

Calgary Growth Management Board

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Changes to the Municipal Government Act mean that we will now have a mandatory growth board in the Calgary and surrounding areas. Given that voluntary partnerships are always preferable to forced collaboration and given that making the growth boards mandatory will not necessarily overcome underlying issues, especially in some communities that have already worked countless hours on regional priorities, to the minister: why is it necessary to mandate this partnership, and how are you working to address the concerns of all the communities affected by this change?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Collaboration is a no-brainer. The CRP is a voluntary board, and the Calgary Growth Management Board is something that we're bringing in with the communities around Calgary, including Calgary. We are working with them. I was just down there last week, actually. I had a great meeting with them, really positive, fantastic, incredible actually. My commitment to them was to work with them to make sure that as elected officials in that region we are working together in the best interests of all the people of that region.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, some towns, including Black Diamond and Turner Valley, who are currently part of the CRP, will not be part of the new growth board, and given that they've been told by the minister's office that the membership will be limited to towns of over 5,000 and, further, that they are now going to have to work through the rural counties to contribute to the discussions, how will smaller urban areas have an effective voice in this new organization?

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you to the member for the question. What she said is actually untrue. Black Diamond and Turner Valley will have the opportunity to create ICFs with the municipalities around them to work with the growth management board on the things that are important to them. That's what's important, making sure that the locally elected officials can make decisions that affect their residents. I committed to that, and I will do that going forward.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I think you maybe meant to say incorrect rather than untrue.

Mr. S. Anderson: Yes.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, the problem of the voting structure has been a big issue for the municipalities who are involved, and given that the decision-making mechanism is the critical point in these relationships and that the surrounding municipalities are understandably concerned about ending up with a voting structure that will result in the loss of their voices, to the minister: please explain your plan for this voting formula, and please also explain to Albertans what your office is doing to ensure that that structure is fair.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It's a two-thirds majority and two-thirds of the population. What it means is that the people in that area will have to get together, the affected municipalities and the districts there, to work together on the plans for their regions. The growth

management board isn't going to go outside and make some plan for a little town that can do their own things in their own area. They will create ICFs, which is collaboration, which is working together for the benefit of everybody.

School Fees and Education Funding

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, this government's decision to place their priority on taking a stab at fulfilling a campaign promise to reduce school fees is putting a financial stress on individual school budgets. Some administrators are considering drastic measures to absorb a budget shortfall for the coming school year, and at least one school board has increased some parents' busing fees to cover a shortfall that you created. I do not understand how this makes sense. Minister of Education, will you commit today that no teachers will lose their jobs and that class sizes will not increase?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

2:40

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer this question on behalf of the Minister of Education. Of course, we're proud of the work that we're doing to make life better for Albertans, including investing in schools. We're making sure that we're funding for enrolment growth. Of course, if the opposition is so concerned about the welfare of students, they would have voted for our budget instead of advocating for \$4 billion in cuts to government spending, which would mean firing teachers and having larger classrooms.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that schools are already struggling under the weight of the carbon tax and given that this fee reduction hands school administrators another unexpected cost that they have to absorb and given that you have claimed that no teachers will be laid off because of this rushed campaign promise but that schools have to find the money somewhere and are worried that they will have to lay off teachers, which means that class sizes will increase, Minister, is this not another unintended consequence of this rushed election promise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I'm happy to remind the members of the House about how our budget makes life better for Albertans by investing in schools, investing in more teachers to make sure that our students have the best access to education of any students in the country. You know, the members opposite want to cut \$4 billion from government spending, which will necessarily fire teachers, which will necessarily increase class sizes. For some reason they seem to think that that's okay when they propose it but want to criticize us for doing exactly the opposite.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that the minister has admitted that he is fast-tracking the NDP's campaign promise by one year and given that schools are telling me that they cannot absorb the funding shortfall by September because their budgets are already set and given that they are asking for more time just to prepare for the cut in funding, Minister, will you give schools a desperately needed reprieve and delay this purely political policy change to at least the fall of 2018 so that teachers aren't laid off and class sizes are not increased?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only will we continue to invest in classrooms this year and in budgets going forward, but we'll also fight to make sure that those members opposite never have the chance to make the harmful cuts to schools, throwing teachers out of work and making sure that our students have the largest class sizes in the country. We will continue to work for the betterment of the people of Alberta over the next two years and make sure that every student knows what's at stake if those guys have a chance to make a budget again.

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have 10 seconds to exit.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 12

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to table for first reading Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017.

For most Albertans buying a new home is an investment in their future. It's an investment in their family, their kids, and their future home. It is one of the largest purchases we may make as Albertans, and when Albertans make that investment, they deserve the ability to make informed decisions and to feel secure in the knowledge that they are protected. Unfortunately, lack of oversight currently leaves new homebuyers exposed to risks because there are no specific requirements to be a residential builder. Right now in Alberta anyone can call themselves a builder and offer their services in home construction even if they have a documented history of fraud, weak finances, or no credentials.

If passed, Bill 12 will protect prospective homeowners by establishing a licensing system for home builders, providing homebuyers with a single source of information on builders and creating provisions to remove or suspend bad builders in order to protect people from negligent or unscrupulous businesses. Mr. Speaker, this government made a commitment to make Albertans' lives better, and that's what we're doing by ensuring that families can make informed decisions when purchasing a home from a licensed and qualified builder.

I want to again thank my incredible staff in Municipal Affairs for their hard work. They should be proud of themselves because I know I am.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table four letters, one to the Minister of Labour and three to the Premier, all asking for extended and enhanced consultation with respect to the employment standards and labour code. The first one is from Willbros Canada, Jeremy Kinch, president and COO; the second from Krawford Construction, Colleen Kerfoot, VP finance; the third one from McSween Custom Fabricating, operations manager

Nelson Martin; and the last one from Fillmore Construction, Chris Fillmore, president.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies to table of the January 11, 2017, insult tweeted by Tzeporah Berman, which I referenced in my question today, in which she called Premier Clark of B.C. a lapdog for supporting the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to table, in response to the Member for Drumheller-Stettler's concerns about the town of Hanna, an article from the *Hanna Herald* entitled Hanna Mayor Meets with Minister, in which he speaks of his meeting with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, saying, "I felt our meeting was very productive and personally was put at ease with the outlook of the future of our region."

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

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just tabling two sets of documents that were spoken of this morning during Committee of the Whole, that were requested by the Chair, regarding the AUMA and the AAMD and C.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Out of respect for the House last week, I wanted to make sure that I didn't do 41 tablings. I could have. There were 41 different people who wrote in about this last week. There were 23 more today – I'll just do them all at the same time – along the lines of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's, who suggested that these folks are really hoping that the Minister of Labour will take a much longer time to truly consult with people. It's about workers in Alberta deserving the ability to join a union without fear of reprisal, and it's been mentioned many times. I think they know it has. I really trust that they'll take a look at this.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the executive summary from the submission from the postdoctoral associations of Alberta, Post-secondary Labour Relations Consultation Report for Alberta Advanced Education.

Oh, I see that the table officer is stopping me.

The Speaker: Would you like to continue?

Mrs. Littlewood: I am tabling it because I think that it will be relevant for the members to read the support that we have for Bill 7 from the postdocs.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Hon. members – I'd look to the Deputy Premier and Government House Leader – there was earlier a school group. I take it that the group has left by now.

Ms Hoffman: They've left. Thanks, though.

2:50

The Speaker: I believe we have at least two points of order. I'm trying to find one of them as we speak.

The Government House Leader.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under Standing Order 13(2), "The Speaker shall explain the reasons for any decision on the request of a Member." After standing up on the point of order after which you had admonished the Premier that this "applies to you as well," I did consult with the Premier. She indicated that she indeed finished her answer even though you were standing, and she apologizes for that.

But there are a couple of questions remaining around questions that might be interrupted by the Speaker or answers that might be interrupted by the Speaker because of noise from the other side or for some similar reason. The questions really are: does the clock stop automatically in terms of the time, or does the Speaker have to request the table to stop the clock? That's the first question.

Secondly, I just wanted to raise the issue that it's very difficult for someone to give an answer in two parts when it is divided by an admonishment from the Speaker. It might be advisable – and this is a suggestion – to restart the clock if something like that happens. But it does create real difficulty in providing a coherent answer to a question in question period when it is interrupted in that fashion.

I would ask if you could explain the application of this rule with respect to disruptions caused by the opposition.

The Speaker: Well, Government House Leader, with respect to your specific question about the timing, from my facts – I will check it again and report to you – I believe it is stopped at the time and then reactivated at the time that I ask it to happen.

An Hon. Member: Paused.

The Speaker: Paused. Excuse me.

Secondly, thank you to the Premier for the apology.

Related to the other topics you address, I believe, in fact, my office today – if not today, it will be tomorrow – has asked for a meeting with the House leaders to discuss the tone of this place and sharing the responsibility with me on behalf of all of these members so we can be proud of not only what we do in this Chamber but also how we do it. You, Government House Leader, will be invited to that meeting, and we will attempt to share the responsibility for making the tenor better along with the other House leaders.

I think there's a second point of order, Government House Leader, that you raised.

Point of Order Seeking Opinions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Around about 2:15 this afternoon during question period the Member for Calgary-Greenway – I think it was his second supplemental question – demanded to know from the Premier or the Deputy Premier whether or not Tzeporah Berman thought, something to that effect, or what Tzeporah Berman might have thought about the government or something like that.

You know, I'm quoting from chapter 11 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at about page 502. I want to acknowledge, first of all, that the basic principle of freedom of speech is sort of the pre-eminent principle that is applied by the Speaker in this

place. However, some questions go well beyond the scope that is envisaged for them. On page 502:

In summary, when recognized in Question Period, a Member should:

- ask a question;
- be brief;
- seek information; ...
- ask a question ... within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the individual Minister addressed.

Further:

a question should not:

- be a statement, representation, argument, or an expression of opinion;
- be hypothetical;
- seek an opinion ... legal or otherwise.

I'll leave a few here. Yeah. I think those are the relevant ones, Mr. Speaker.

Asking a minister or the Premier for their opinion of what the opinion of a third party might be isn't something that is in within the administrative responsibility of the government. It's hypothetical. It seeks an opinion. It violates a number of the principles that have been established with respect to questions. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's beneath this place to ask such silly questions when there are real issues that the government is dealing with that could be addressed, but they need to be things that the government actually has some control over and not opinions of what someone else might be thinking. That's just silly.

The Speaker: The House leader for the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to what the hon. House leader has just said, this is not silly. This is not hypothetical. In fact, it is the exact opposite. It is very real, and this is a very serious concern.

We need to set the context, and I promise this will take only a short amount of time. He referred to Ms Berman as the co-chair of the Alberta oil sands advisory group. That is indeed what she is, but she's also a B.C. environmental activist who has likened the oil sands to the fictional wasteland of Mordor. We know that. We know that she's been a Greenpeace international campaigner. We know that she's been the cofounder of ForestEthics, and it's well documented that she's anti oil sands. This is all real.

We have the exact question here since the hon. House leader said he wasn't quite sure of the words.

[She's] taken her crusade against the Kinder Morgan pipeline to extreme ends and that includes calling people names when she disagrees with them and given that a public example of this behaviour is a January 11 tweet, which I will table today, in which she called Premier Clark [of B.C.] a lapdog for supporting Kinder Morgan's pipeline.

I will read the exact quote for you ...

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hope you're dealing with the procedure part, not the substance of the discussion.

Mr. Rodney: Absolutely. This deals with the fact that this is not silly or hypothetical; it is very real. From 3:38 p.m., 11th of January, 2017: "Saying yes to every project that the 1% & big polluters want is not leadership it's a lap dog @christyclarkbc #kindermorgan #bcpoli." You know, let's face it. If you look up "lapdog," it's simply a docile companion with no working function other than companionship. Mr. Speaker, the point being ...

The Speaker: Hon. member, which procedure would you be citing in your argument that makes the comment legitimate? The Government House Leader has submitted it under, I believe, 13.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. It's simply the fact that it is completely within the purview of the Premier's jurisdiction to hire and, indeed, fire people. Let's face it. The fact of the matter is that Albertans are absolutely aghast ...

The Speaker: Hon. member, I do now have the Blues.

The point of order that was argued by the Government House Leader was that – I'm trying to look for the correct one. If we look at *Beauchesne* 408 and 409, the Government House Leader, I believe, is correct. The question itself was poorly crafted, and it was not in keeping with the rules governing Oral Question Period in this particular House. Questions should not seek opinions, nor should they be argumentative but should seek information about government policy. The member may wish to brush up on the rules governing Oral Question Period. Please refer to *Beauchesne* 408 and 409.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Royal Assent

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I might, it's been suggested that out of respect for the process and the Lieutenant Governor we would close laptops and related aspects.

Hon. members, I may need a half-ton truck to take the notes that I got today from each and every one of you.

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

[The Mace was draped]

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

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

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

The Speaker: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sittings passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

Her Honour: You can, but I ask, first of all: would you please be seated.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 1 An Act to Reduce School Fees
- 2 An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence
- 6 Northland School Division Act
- 7 An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining

- 9 Marketing of Agricultural Products
Amendment Act, 2017
- 10 Appropriation Act, 2017
- 202 Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual
Distribution of Intimate Images Act

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated her assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

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

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Deputy Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is an excellent end to an eventful, interesting, and challenging at times week for you and all of us, and I would move, then, that we now adjourn until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:06 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, May 4, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 4, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 4, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*May 4, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)
Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*May 4, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)
Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*May 4, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*May 4, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 11 — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 12 — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*May 4, 2017 aft.*)

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 205 — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 8, 2017

Day 29

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
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Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Government Whip
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
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Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
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Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
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Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

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Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 8, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, let us be inspired by the youth of this province, in particular all the youth that are present with us today. Let us work with them to find ways and solutions for a better Alberta. The youth of today will be the decision-makers of tomorrow. Let us also be inspired by those amongst us with special needs and special skills. They are our real heroes.

Thank you, hon. members and ladies and gentlemen. We will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark and a very special guest, Mr. Joey Moss. I would invite all to participate in singing our national anthem.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Please be seated, hon. members.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 students from Muriel Martin school. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Rhonda Surmon, along with their chaperones, Mrs. Heather McDonald and Mrs. Susanne Ambrose. This group is attending School at the Legislature this week, and I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, we'll now get a special introduction to our special guest today. I was hoping that we might get to sing the national anthem seven times.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly Mr. Joey Moss and his family. Mr. Moss is the beating heart of the Edmonton Oilers organization, having been the locker room attendant for both the Oilers and the Edmonton Eskimos for more than 30 years. His unwavering positivity and passion for the game inspires players and fans across the country. He has been awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal, the NHL Alumni Association's seventh man award, and is an honoured member of the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame. Mr. Moss is here today with his family: brother Steve Moss; sister Patty Walker and her husband, Stephen; nieces Jordan and Taylor Walker; niece Brittany Walker and her boyfriend, Steve Besenyei;

nephew Adam Walker and his wife, Kim; and the family photographer, Tom Braid. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

[Mr. Moss made remarks from the gallery]

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 84 students representing 64 constituencies who are here today as participants in the Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. Offered annually since 2003, this program strives to further develop the interest in and understanding of our parliamentary system among Alberta youth. These high school students arrived on Sunday and since then have participated in a variety of activities. In the last day they toured the Legislature, explored the grounds, and were able to network with Legislative Assembly Office staff to learn about the work they do supporting the members of this Assembly.

Today they're observing question period, meeting with a panel of former MLAs. Tomorrow they'll debate a resolution in this very Chamber, which will be presided over by yourself, Mr. Speaker. During this debate the students will be given a unique perspective on the work done by the members of this Assembly. Following the debate students will visit MLA offices and attend the Leg. with their MLAs.

I would ask that all of our MLA for a Day participants, who are seated in both the members' and the public galleries, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, each and every one of you. I would urge you not to hang around too often with the MLAs. I fear that you will get some bad habits.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the board chair of the Alberta Network of Public Housing Agencies, Mrs. Tanni Doblanko. This network is building the capacity of the nonprofit sector in Alberta and is an important advocate for affordable housing. Through connection, education, and advocacy the Alberta Network of Public Housing Agencies is working to create an Alberta where everyone has a safe, affordable, and appropriate place to call home. I would ask that Tanni please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people who are here to see the introduction of Bill 13 later today. Andrew Kriegler is the president and CEO of the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, also known as IIROC. That's a fantastic acronym. With him is Lucy Becker, IIROC's vice-president of public affairs and member education services. I'd ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

1:40

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jeremy Woolward. Jeremy is visiting us from Calgary, and he's been involved in politics since about age 10. He is now a board member for the Member for Calgary-North West. Would like to say a special thank you to the members for Calgary-South East and Vermilion-Lloydminster, but he has crossed the gallery. He has seen the light and has chosen to join a centrist, progressive movement. Please join me in welcoming Jeremy to this House today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents of mine from the outstanding riding of Calgary-Foothills. They decided to drop in and see the question period today. They are Dorothy Allred and Kenneth Allred. The Allreds are struggling small-business owners, who recently lost a major client to bankruptcy, among other knocks of hard luck. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House. They're in the right gallery.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you my roommate and constituent of the Minister of Health and Deputy Premier, who he voted for, Stephen Engstrom. Stephen has his diploma in travel and tourism from Grant MacEwan. He loves to be outdoors fishing and hiking in his free time, and he just wanted to come and watch QP today. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the president and CEO of Alberta Forest Products Association. May 7 to 13 is Alberta Forest Week. Today the Alberta Forest Products Association and its partners have distributed seedlings to each Member of this Legislative Assembly, inviting all of us to be part of the important work of forest stewardship. AFPA is an important partner of our government in keeping our forest industry strong as we continue the work of diversifying our economy and in facing market challenges. I would like to ask Paul Whittaker to now rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests today? The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct honour to introduce an inspirational and intrepid Albertan. Tasha Schindel is a proud but humble wife and mother who embraces an indomitable spirit and a lifetime of volunteerism in children's services, educational institutions, her faith community, and numerous professions to build communities of positive change. She served eight years as provincial director and VP of ASCA, four years on the board of directors for the Calgary Learning Consortium, is the president of the Calgary-Lougheed PC Association, and is the newly minted PCAA regional director for Calgary-South. Tasha spent much of her

childhood in Asia, speaks conversational Mandarin Chinese, and truly believes in a global community. I am absolutely honoured to call Tasha a trusted and dear friend, and I ask her now to stand to receive the warm ovation of this Assembly. Thank you, Tasha. You're awesome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

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

National Hockey League Playoffs in Alberta

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Before I begin, let me just say that I'm paying off part of a bet to our Premier. She was right. I was wrong. I'm wearing the winning team's colours. She and her colleagues will get some Alberta craft beer from Polar Park Brewing on my tab, not my ministerial tab but my personal tab, and I will read this ode to her and the winning team in public. Mr. Speaker, it begins:

I stand today to pay a debt
As often requested by Strathmore-Brooks
And though not the ones of which he dreams,
What I say here will balance books.
Because in April's early days
When Flames and Oilers fans both grinned
I bet the Premier that the Flames
Would be the ones to last and win.
And so we watched with bated breath
As players passed and took their shots
But when the first round was laid to rest
The Oilers prevailed, but we did not.
Our hopes: they sputtered and went out
As our team lost in four straight games.
Now our golf courses call 911
To report they're overrun with Flames.
And so I stand here to confess
Before the Speaker and the Queen
That Alberta's greatest honours belong
To the Oilers in 2017.
And for sports fans aching for a fix
Of top-notch sport and playing sublime,
The Oilers alone can scratch that itch,
The right team in the right place at the right time.
And to my colleagues in this House
I raise my voice and clearly state
As Minister of Finance and the Treasury Board
That beer is good, but the Oilers are great.

The Speaker: You may want to stick with that speech writer, hon. minister.

And won't it be nice, hon. members, when we get two teams in the playoffs.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm glad to see the minister is moving right. A lot of talk about unity here recently in Alberta, and of course all members of this House are united right now, united in a love for the colour orange. I want to make it very clear that, first of all, as you all know, this is the only orange I wear, primarily because it clashes with my hair, as you can tell. No, there hasn't been a sudden defection to the NDP. This orange crush is one we all get behind here in Alberta. It's called the Edmonton Oilers during playoff season. The city of Edmonton and indeed the province have been swept up in the wave of excitement for the team

and are certainly rooting for them as they come into game 7 against the Anaheim Ducks Wednesday night.

I wish I could be there. Whether it's the mutton chops of Zack Kassian, the chorus of Lous for Milan Lucic, the dangles of Leon Draisaitl, or the outstanding aerobics of Cam Talbot in net, this is a team for all Albertans to get behind and to make sure they bring the cup back to Alberta. And let's not forget the outstanding performance of Hart trophy candidate and Oilers captain Connor McDavid, who is certainly worthy of the letter C – Mr. Speaker, you might notice it on my sleeve today – on his jersey at the ripe age of 20, believe it or not. At their last home game of this round the Oilers looked more like the Eskimos than a hockey team, scoring, yes, seven points. Ladies and gentlemen, it's duck-hunting season in Alberta.

We'll be cheering for them all the way regardless, but enough can't be said about the way this team has captured the hearts and minds of all Albertans. Oilers fans are everywhere wearing their favourite player's jersey, as I am today, flying their flags on their cars, and making all Canadians proud indeed of singing the anthems, the Canadian one and the American one. They fight this fight not for Edmonton alone but for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, to bring the cup back to Alberta, because the spirit of this team is infectious. I know all members of this House and all Albertans will join me in saying a resounding: let's go Oilers; let's go.

Members' Statements

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

Member for Calgary-East's World View

Ms Luff: Thank you. In May 2015 the people of Alberta chose a new government because they were tired of the entitled world view of the PCs in power and recognized that the world view of the Wildrose was neither inclusive nor progressive.

Grade 8 students in Alberta know what a world view is, Mr. Speaker. It's in the curriculum. "[A] worldview is a collection of values and beliefs about life and the universe... common to a group of people." The opposition makes a big deal that we're trying to impose our NDP world view on people, so I thought it might be useful to describe exactly what a world view is, what I value, and what I believe.

1:50

I value equality. I believe that every Albertan, regardless of race, religion, gender, gender expression, or socioeconomic status, should have access to equal rights and equal opportunities to succeed. I am proud of legislation that included gender expression in the Human Rights Act.

I value education. I believe in high-quality, publicly delivered education. I believe that education is the future. I am proud of our commitment to fund for enrolment growth and to improve the curriculum for a new generation.

I value the environment. I believe in ensuring that our kids have clean air and water. I know that climate change is real and man-made and that we must act now. I am proud that we protected the Castle and put a cap on oil sands emissions.

I value public services. I believe that there is a necessary role for government in providing important services for our citizens and that health and education must stay public services. Period. I am proud of the 2,000 new long-term care beds that we are building.

I value democracy. I believe that the more people are engaged, the better I can do my job. I believe in identifying barriers to

participation. I believe democracy should work for everyone. I am proud that we have taken big money out of politics.

I value the arts. I believe that they add richness to our society and our lives both as audiences and participants.

Most of all, Mr. Speaker, I value people. I believe in humanity and its capacity to succeed if we work in co-operation rather than in competition.

These are the things that I value and believe, Mr. Speaker, and I know that Albertans value and believe these things, too. I also believe that although your world view might not be exactly the same as mine, we can find common values for the future of Alberta.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Alberta Health Services Survey

Mr. Jean: A new survey conducted by Alberta Health Services paints a bleak picture indeed about the state of our health care system in the province. The results of the internal survey show that over half of the respondents don't think their opinions count and 43 per cent say that they are not satisfied with AHS as a place to work. This comes as no surprise to those who know that the AHS system is a bloated bureaucracy with managers managing managers. Will the Premier commit to fully releasing this survey, as is standard practice within the government of Alberta's bureaucracy? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I believe that the survey has been fully released, and that's why the member is quoting it.

You know, each day more than 100,000 AHS staff and physicians work tirelessly to promote and protect the health of Albertans. We respect them, and we celebrate them for the work that they do every day. We know that we can always do better on that, but one thing that I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that cutting hundreds of millions and, in some cases, billions out of health care would not make it easier for them to do their jobs. We have their backs, and we will continue to have their backs.

Mr. Jean: Albertans want to trust that when they get sick, they will get the health care that they need from AHS, but the results of this survey clearly show that even health care employees and physicians don't trust AHS. An astonishing 36 per cent – that's 36 per cent of respondents, including front-line workers and physicians – stated that if they needed health care, they would not feel safe receiving it from AHS. Premier, if over one-third of those directly involved in delivery in the health care system wouldn't feel safe receiving health care from AHS, how on earth would regular, normal, everyday Albertans feel confident in the delivery of it?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are working every day and our Minister of Health is working every day and the Associate Minister of Health is working every day to improve the quality of care that we deliver to Albertans because we understand that when times are tough, people need to understand and appreciate and know that they have a health care system that is there for them when they and their loved ones need it. So we will continue to do that work. But beating up on public-sector employees, trying to bargain with them in public, rolling back funds, cutting things: that's not the way to stabilize our health care system. [interjections]

Our government is here to protect our health care system, not tear it . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government's watch we have a bloated health care system that physicians and nurses don't trust and that isn't getting results for everyday Albertans. When we propose solutions here on the Wildrose side to fix our health care system like exploring ways to reduce wait times, the NDP laughs, ridicules, and shoots them down. This government seems content with a bloated system that isn't serving Albertans. Will the Premier use the results of this survey as a wake-up call and commit to the Wildrose proposal to study ways to reduce wait times in Alberta? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're actually quite proud that on a lot of different measures our health care system is slowly improving. But one thing that won't make things work better is this continued threat of ideological privatization that the members opposite and their hopeful dance partners have been imposing and threatening Albertans with for years because that is what undercuts the confidence of employees. That's what undercuts the confidence of Albertans. [interjections] We are going to inject stability into our health care system because that's what we know Albertans are looking for.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I was looking for an answer, not a fairy tale.

Oil Sands Advisory Group Co-chair

Mr. Jean: I don't know if it's stubbornness or unwillingness to stand up for Alberta, but Tzepporah Berman's continued position as co-chair of the oil sands advisory group is bad for our province, bad for Albertans. Albertans are frustrated, and justifiably so, that they are handing over any taxpayer dollars to an individual who has equated our oil sands to Mordor and who is actively trying to kill the Trans Mountain expansion project. With friends like Tzepporah Berman, Albertans have no need whatsoever for any enemies. Why won't the Premier do the right thing and fire Berman from this position immediately?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I have said before is that the oil sands advisory group is working together in order to make serious progress on implementing the emissions cap, an emissions cap which is absolutely fundamental to our successful acquisition of not one but two pipelines. Now, I appreciate that the members opposite would like to tear it all down, undo the whole thing, stick their heads in the ground, pretend there's no problem, and then wonder why we have no pipelines, but that is a failed – failed – strategy. [interjections] We will not go down that road again.

The Speaker: Opposition House Leader, I wonder if you can make sure that your caucus behind you keeps the volume of their comments down today because we have a great day ahead of us.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the Premier's appointees that are trying to destroy the pipelines going through B.C. The Premier's unwillingness to do the right thing and fire Berman shows her true colours, and Albertans should recognize that. In case she hadn't

noticed, we need to be proud supporters of Alberta oil, not send mixed messages to investors and the world. Oil continues to hover around \$45 a barrel, and our province is in the worst economic situation since the days of the national energy program. The Premier can't claim to support our oil, having antipipeline activists leading an advisory group on oil sands. It doesn't make any sense. So which is it, Premier? Do you support pipelines and Albertans, or do you support . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear that we support getting tidewater access for our oil and gas, and that is why we have worked on that project since the very beginning, when we were elected. That's why we have succeeded on that project where the members opposite have failed. They took an approach of yelling at people that didn't agree with them. We took an approach of bringing people together, and we are proud that it is getting results.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, her appointee says: no tidewater pipeline.

Since the Premier won't listen to me on this topic, maybe she'll listen to the very valid concerns of an everyday Albertan. David Young wrote to the *Edmonton Journal* and asked this pointed question, that the Premier needs to answer.

These folks can't have it both ways: sitting on OSAG (collecting either salaries or stipends) while trashing one of the key economic engines of our Alberta economy. It's time for the premier to correct this situation. Or has the NDP green plan really been [all along] about killing oil [jobs]?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, our government has done nothing but work on getting a pipeline to tidewater, and thankfully that's exactly what happened. You know what? The members opposite can't even agree with each other on things that they theoretically agree on. Meanwhile, what we've done is we've brought oil executives together with environmentalists to work together on a solution. They can do their thing. We'll do our thing. We'll get a pipeline. Someday they might get shared office space. I'll take our choice.

The Speaker: I think we're at the third main question.

Government Advertising Expenses

Mr. Jean: The NDP have developed a nasty habit of using taxpayer dollars to promote their less popular programs and policies. Albertans know it, and we saw it with the rollout of the carbon tax, that Albertans didn't ask for and couldn't afford, and, again, trying their risky and ideological PPA lawsuit. Ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. The latest example is a rollout of ads related to the energy efficiency program that is paid for through the \$3 billion carbon tax that Albertans pay. How much taxpayer money has this NDP Premier thrown away in her latest energy ad campaign?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, our government is investing in energy efficiency programs to make life more affordable for Albertans by helping them to reduce the costs of their utilities. The funny thing is that it's hard for people to do that if they don't know about it, so what we are doing is that we are investing to ensure Albertans understand the range of

opportunities that they have to engage in energy efficiency strategies and to save money. I will not apologize for that because we are focused on making life better for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this NDP program is going to cost taxpayers more than they will ever save.

That isn't the only new glossy ad campaign that the NDP government is rolling out. Listen to this. A recent CBC report shows that the Public Affairs Bureau is also frantically working on a new video campaign with the company Dynacor that's going to be launched in the coming weeks. It's all part of the propaganda that has seen this NDP government spend over \$10 billion on advertising while in office. [interjections] Ten million. Sorry. I'm used to "b"s with the NDP. Will the Premier disclose why she's hired Dynacor and how on earth she can justify this kind of expenditure?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the previous government left Alberta as the only jurisdiction in North America without an energy efficiency program. It is outrageous. The members opposite and their hopeful new dance partners want to continue down a path of pretending that energy efficiency isn't the most effective way to reduce emissions and help people save money on their regular utility bills. But, like the rest of the continent, we get that that helps Albertans, and we're going to keep working on it because it's an excellent program.

Mr. Jean: The facts are clear, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government has spent almost three times as much as their predecessors on advertising while in office. Shameful. Albertans are disgusted seeing their hard-earned dollars being used for advertisements of government programs that show up in movie theatres or on TV or radio. It's not acceptable. The NDP government continues to waste taxpayer resources on frivolous ad campaigns at a time when they cannot afford it. When will the Premier realize that Albertans don't want to be bought with their own money and stop these expensive ads?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that over 90,000 Albertans have already started to sign up for these energy efficiency programs. Because we know that they work and they save money and they reduce emissions, if we can get another 90,000 people to sign up, that will mean even more money saved and even more emissions reduced. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Notley: The more people who are involved, the more we save and the more we reduce emissions, Mr. Speaker. So you know what? We're just going to keep working on that very, very, goal.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this government claims Alberta has gained 20,000 jobs under their watch, but Statistics Canada's most recent labour force survey tells a different story. Alberta lost 63,200 jobs since May 2015. Meanwhile every part of the goods-producing sector has lost jobs, totalling 71,000, since this government took power. When will this government's failed plan actually produce even one private-sector job beyond the tens and hundreds of thousands that you have driven out of Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, with the drop in the price of oil many, many Albertans lost their

jobs. We are concerned about them, and we understand that it was a very, very serious issue for many, many Alberta families, and that's why we've been focused on trying to combat that which happened as a result of the price of oil. You're right. We're not there yet. For nine of the last 10 months we've seen job growth in Alberta, and that's good. In March we saw 20,000 new jobs, and that's even better, but we'll be the first to admit that our job is not done. We continue to be focused on creating jobs for Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. The Premier never gets tired of being wrong.

Agriculture is among Alberta's most important industries that do not depend directly on global energy prices: 16,700 jobs lost in agriculture, Premier, not because of oil. Twenty-four per cent of the 68,000 jobs gone under your watch. Can the agriculture minister tell us how much of that job loss is due to an actual contraction in agriculture production and exports and how much is due to farmers and ranchers avoiding hiring so they don't have to deal with Bill 6?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I for one and this government can't be more proud of our agriculture sector. The agri-food processing sector in Alberta is now the largest manufacturing sector in the province. Our agriculture continues to be a real bright spot in the province and will continue to be so. I and this government have the best interests of farmers at heart. We will continue to do so. We're making lives better for all farmers. We're making life better for all Albertans.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder neither minister wanted to answer the question about their failed policies: 89,000 jobs from our goods-producing sector lost, including 31,000 in construction, 22,000 in manufacturing, 16,000 in agriculture, thousands more in energy. Given that the jobs in exportable services are also down, including 15,000 in accommodation and food service, they have a lot to be ashamed of. How can this government claim it's diversifying the economy when almost every sector has lost jobs on your watch? They're not all because of oil.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what I'm not going to apologize for? The fact that the number of rigs drilling in our province is up 100 per cent from last year, the fact that Alberta's exports are up 68 per cent over the same time last year. That's including our nonenergy exports, which have reached the highest levels since 2008. Our wholesale trade has risen for the fifth month in a row and has reached the highest levels since June 2015. Last year we led the country in private-sector capital investment, and we're on track to lead it again.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Energy Industry Update

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, while we all know that record-low global oil prices triggered a recession in Alberta in 2015, there are positive signs for the province's economy and for Alberta's oil and gas sector. But the opposition wants Albertans to believe it's a bad thing that our home-grown oil companies are doing well and increasing their investments in the oil sands. Albertans aren't impressed that the opposition is cheering for failure. To the Minister

of Energy: what signals are you seeing to suggest improved prospects for industry and Albertans in 2017? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we know the last couple years have been hard for Albertans and hard on their families. We are seeing a growing sense of optimism. We know that drilling is up, and with drilling come more jobs. Up my way I'm seeing that hotels are fuller, more service rigs are on the roads, and life in general is busier. With two pipeline approvals and our royalty review system, our side of the government is getting results. We need you folks to cheer for us. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

First supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this increased activity coincides with improved resource prices since this time last year, again to the minister: what is it that the government has done to contribute to increased investment and activity in the oil and gas sector? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, critics said that it was the wrong time to review the royalty system, but it proved to be exactly the right time. Our modernized royalty framework supports producers for innovation and supports lowering costs. The new framework is supporting jobs in both conventional oil and gas and in the oil sands, and the outlook for 2017 is very bright. We expect to be having more than 650 rigs, more than our neighbouring provinces. We're not out of the woods yet, but we know that we are seeing a lot of positive signs.

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: given that it's important to see continued investment in Alberta, what is the government doing to counteract the opposition's dangerous climate change denialism and unduly negative characterization of our province's investment climate? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, when I stand, please be quiet. Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I talk daily to energy industry stakeholders. They have heard the same cries about uncertainty, but you know what causes uncertainty? It's an opposition who talks down Alberta consistently and talks about getting rid of the carbon leadership plan, the carbon leadership plan that got us two pipeline approvals. So I would urge the opposition to get out from under the dome themselves and go speak to those stakeholders, who are very worried about the uncertainty that they are causing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry

Mr. Panda: Today I am proud to put forward Motion 505, which will shift Canada away from buying the oil of oppressive dictatorships. Alberta is among the most socially and environmentally minded jurisdictions in the world for petroleum production, yet members of this NDP government have protested oil development, spreading dangerous misinformation. Albertans still doubt the NDP's 180-degree turnaround from anti-oil to pro-development. Does the Premier agree that Alberta's oil is ethical compared to other sources of crude?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we've worked very hard to get two pipelines. Those pipeline approvals came because of a climate leadership plan and the hard work on this side of the House. Our opposition keeps saying that if – if – they are ever elected, they will scrap the climate leadership plan. Do they not understand that that's the very plan that got us two pipeline approvals? [interjections]

The Speaker: Please keep it down.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP want Albertans to celebrate the approval for the repair on line 9 as if it is the same as a new pipeline, spooking Energy East's proponents, and given that Alberta still needs Energy East and given that Energy East is critical for ending Canada's dependence on dictator oil, when will the Premier stand up to her Leap fanatic friends, also known as dance partners, across Canada about the legacy of clean, ethical oil in Alberta and stop stoking the fires against pipeline approvals?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the difference between a dance partner and someone you disagree with is that where you're begging someone to be your dance partner, you're also running around talking about how much you agree on everything even though, apparently, you can't agree on your plan. But what we've been very clear on is that we object to and we reject the position of the Leap Manifesto and everything about it. Quite the opposite. We have gone into places where people are not in favour of pipelines and we have argued for pipelines. We've talked to environmentalists and we've talked to labour unions because you shouldn't yell at your opposition when you don't agree. You should try to bring . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the NDP pay the salary of antipipeline protester Tzeponah Berman while she spreads misinformation. Given that Berman's rhetoric on pipelines proves that the Premier's social licence plan hasn't convinced the eco radicals and given that this misinformation undermines the public confidence in pipelines, is Berman on the OSAG panel because she represents the personal views of the Premier, or will the Premier acknowledge the truth right now, that Alberta oil is clean and ethical?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we disagree with Ms Berman's position on pipelines, but she is on the OSAG committee to help us . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. Please pause the clock. I can't hear. Keep your voices down.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Minister of Energy, please continue.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The OSAG committee is a committee of energy companies, environmental leaders, and community representatives who are helping us work with the 100-megatonne cap. I can tell you that on this side of the House we are taking our orders from Albertans, not from Premiers of other provinces, not from people outside this province. We are listening to Albertans.

Advanced Education Ministry Travel Expenses

Mr. Rodney: Last week I quoted from the government's own numbers in a speech, so it was beyond ironic when a minister stated, "If I were a faculty member, I would give him an F minus." Now, curiously, immediately thereafter the Auditor General released his report on the travel, meal, and hospitality expenses of seven ministries but singled out Advanced Education for insufficient business rationale documentation, no preapproval for out-of-province travel, incorrect quoting on expenses, with an expense not being publicly disclosed. Now, with a failing grade from the Auditor General, when will the Minister of Advanced Education rectify all of these problems?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want to thank the Auditor General for his guidance on this matter. We're working with the Auditor General and the finance department because we recognize that we have some processes that we can improve. We're working diligently to make sure that those processes are better going forward.

Mr. Rodney: Given that during debate last week the minister suggested that a certain member had not done his homework and given that the Ministry of Advanced Education was the only ministry audited which did not have the proper systems or protocols in place, again to the minister. It would appear that perhaps you have been singled out as not having completed your homework, so will you take this opportunity here and now in this Chamber to explain to all Albertans why your office and your department were the only ones not following the rules?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, we take our responsibility for managing tax dollars prudently very seriously. That's why we're working with the Auditor General and our finance departments to make sure that our processes are improved going forward and that we have the proper documentation and controls in place so that all of our expenses are beyond question.

I want to thank the Auditor General for helping us see the error of our ways, and I want to assure everyone in this House that we're making sure that we do a better job in the future.

Mr. Rodney: Albertans are wondering what he'd be saying if he wasn't caught.

Now, given that the Auditor General also reviewed the internal controls of 16 postsecondary institutions from across Alberta and given that his office identified six of them as needing improvement for financial statements as well as the implementation of outstanding Auditor General recommendations from last year, again to the minister: what oversight are you providing to these institutions, and when can we expect them to be in compliance with the Auditor General's recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for the question. Of course, we are very concerned about some of the issues that the Auditor General raised with respect to the financial reporting that took place at a number of the institutions that he identified in the report. We're working with those institutions to make sure that they have all of the information that the Auditor General needs for future reports. We're working diligently to make sure that everything is going to be in better shape for the next Auditor General report.

2:20

Legal Aid

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, legal aid is a vital component of our legal system, providing representation and other services for eligible Albertans who could not have otherwise afforded legal services. The recent Auditor General report highlights several disturbing facts, including that there have been no performance measures to monitor cost-effectiveness or quality until just recently. Even worse, there's a lack of clarity on what services it should provide. The AG also notes that internal studies have been done, yet there remains no action. What is the minister doing to address this problem?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that legal aid is a critical component in our justice system. That's why this government has increased funding to Legal Aid by 26 per cent since we took office. We know that there is still more work that needs to be done to ensure that we are delivering the services needed by vulnerable Albertans. We will continue to work on our processes and systems to make sure that we are doing the absolute best job we can to take care of those people, but what certainly won't help is cutting billions of dollars out of operating.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that another problem facing Legal Aid Alberta is inconsistent budgeting practices, which have led to three supplemental budget votes in just five years, and given that the Auditor General notes the recent budget will be unable to avoid the need for supplemental funding in 2017-2018 and despite that I already raised this exact issue to the minister during the estimates process, when will the minister stop throwing money at the issues and actually fix the problems?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that we need to keep moving forward to ensure that Legal Aid is able to deliver the services necessary to vulnerable Albertans. This has been an issue that has evolved over years. We know that the previous government chose to do absolutely nothing about it and put their head in the sand and ignored the problem. That's why we're taking action, that's why we have moved on increasing funding to Legal Aid, and that's why we've moved on increasing funding to other sectors of the justice system. They want to study the problem forever; we want to fix it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this problem comes down to the oversight and programming responsibilities that rest solely on the shoulders of the Minister of Justice and that, unfortunately, we have really heard radio silence from this minister on the topic of legal aid and given that the Premier in her opposition

days requested this review and chastised the former government's similar inaction as, I quote, a complete abandonment of obligations of the Minister of Justice, unquote, who has abandoned legal aid reform as a priority for this government, the minister or the Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No one has done more to ensure that Legal Aid is delivering the necessary services than this government has done. Previous government stuck its head in the sand and ignored the problem. We started a review. We've been going out and talking to Albertans, we've been working with the Auditor General on this issue, and we've been investing the necessary funds throughout the justice system.

Prescription Drug Coverage for Eye Disease

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, Frankie Leavitt from my riding suffers from macular degeneration and, as a result, is blind in one eye and going blind in the other. A new drug called Eylea has helped. Her injections, needed every 30 to 60 days, resulted in her one eye improving dramatically. Each treatment costs over \$1,600 and is not covered by AHS. The number of compassionate treatments from the drug company has run out. Frankie only makes \$1,600 a month. To the Minister of Health: why isn't Eylea an approved drug as part of the AHS coverage?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I know that macular degeneration is a condition that impacts many Albertans. We're working with the manufacturer and through the common drug review to make sure that we can get it on label and accessible to Albertans as quickly as possible, within reasonable cost limitations, which, of course, as the member points out, right now are not so. We're working to make sure that we bring this about for the benefit of Albertans and at an effective cost. I look forward to being able to update the House and Albertans about this very soon.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that Frankie is still active in the community and able to do physical activities like mow the lawn and shovel snow and given that Frankie faces the very real possibility of having to choose between keeping her sight, which would allow her to stay at home, or losing her sight and moving into seniors' assisted living, does the minister not understand that the best option for Frankie and for the government is for AHS to pick up the cost of the treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in the last response, we are actively engaged in conversations with drug manufacturers through the common drug review to make sure that we have access to drugs that will improve quality of life. We encourage anyone at this time to continue working with their optometrist or their ophthalmologist to make sure that the treatments that are available today are accessible to them. That's one of the reasons why I was so proud to bring in the rapid drug program just a year and a half ago, which, of course, is bringing about better quality, better choice, and better cost savings to all Albertans.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that the side effects of Eylea are manageable and the drug is FDA approved and given Frankie has

almost completely depleted her life savings trying to fund this life-transforming drug, will the minister be willing to meet with Frankie Leavitt this week to discuss how she can get the right care at the right place by the right people?

Ms Hoffman: I'm always happy to meet with Albertans, as I spend a great deal of my time, unlike the members of the opposition, who seem to be spending a lot of time in the backrooms of the Federal building. I'd be very honoured to take that meeting, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we continue to move forward, to make sure that this individual as well as all Albertans have opportunities to have the very best savings, the very best services, and the very best drugs for the benefit of all Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The Member for Calgary-West.

Death Investigation Time Frames

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Performing autopsies for suspected homicides is a crucial responsibility of the office of the Chief Medical Examiner, yet autopsies for murders and suspicious deaths can take more than a year, such as the one for three-month-old Cyrus Nel of Airdrie, whose 2015 death was just recently ruled a homicide, and delays like this can compromise police investigation. To the minister: what are you doing to ensure the ME's office expedites autopsies to allow police to move forward rapidly with criminal investigations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. You know, we think that the work the office of the Chief Medical Examiner does is absolutely critical. It's critical to police; it's critical to victims and families of victims who are waiting to hear the outcome of a case. That's why we've invested in the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. We've provided them with an additional million dollars that will allow them to hire two new medical examiners to ensure that they are able to complete their work in a timely manner in addition to doing the additional work we've asked them to do.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister confirmed in estimates that the purpose of injecting additional money into the medical examiner's office is to decrease turnaround times for death reports and given that this year's \$800,000 to a \$1 million funding increase for the office should come with targets and given that it is the job of the minister to set those expectations, yet there were none in the business plan, Minister, why have you not set any specific timelines for the ME's office to finalize death reports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we think it's important for any of our employees to be meeting necessary targets. Autopsies are very complicated things. They depend on a number of factors in the case. There's a lot of back and forth between investigators and the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. That sometimes takes some time, and sometimes different specialists are required. We work with them to ensure that they are meeting their targets, but in order to ensure that they are able to do this work, it was necessary to make those resource investments, and we're very proud of them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that Ontario has a 90-day target for finalizing its death investigations and given that in Alberta the Chief Medical Examiner is talking about meeting a nine-month turnaround for final death reports and given that this NDP government is not providing the medical examiner's office with new measurables despite this injection of money, Minister, are you not just throwing money at a problem without any expectations of accountability?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member will be aware, it does take awhile to hire these professionals. There are not a lot of pathologists throughout North America, so it does take a while to complete the hiring process and to sometimes work with the immigration folks so that we can bring in the necessary people because we don't have as many as we would like in Canada. We will absolutely be working with the office of the Chief Medical Examiner to ensure that as we go forward, they're able to bring down those timelines in a reasonable and consistent manner.

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

2:30 Legislature Grounds Usage Policy

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a downtown resident and a former employee of the city of Edmonton's LRT design and construction branch I am a big believer in public transit. As a representative of Edmonton's downtown I recognize the important vibrancy that the many festivals that we host here bring to our community. We have reached a phase now in the construction of Edmonton's valley line where several downtown festivals are going to have to temporarily move from Churchill Square in order to allow for the construction of the valley line. One such festival is the Taste of Edmonton. Given that the Taste of Edmonton festival has asked to be able to host their festival here at the Legislature Grounds on the federal plaza, to the Minister of Infrastructure: what is being done . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his question and his advocacy for Edmonton's festival scene. Like many Albertans, I always look forward to the Taste of Edmonton, and I want to inform him that senior officials at Alberta Infrastructure are working with Taste of Edmonton right now to make it possible to host this major festival at the appropriate time. We want to ensure that the Taste of Edmonton continues after 34 successful years.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that public space in the heart of our city is at a premium but is important to community vitality and vibrancy and given that the Legislature and its grounds belong to the people of Alberta and given that the outdated policies about the use of these grounds are restricting their enjoyment by Albertans, to the Minister of Infrastructure: what is being done to bring this policy into the 21st century?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely correct that the Legislature Grounds belong to the people of Alberta. We are working on a new policy that will welcome more Albertans to their Legislature Grounds while recognizing its historical and cultural importance. One of the policies we're looking at is a no-dancing policy, put in place by the previous government. You know, we're not going to let the killjoys over there stop Albertans from enjoying their Legislature Grounds. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that both myself and many of my constituents are known to enjoy the opportunity to cut a rug and given that I have been approached by other festivals such as the Cariwest festival expressing interest in making use of the Legislature Grounds, to the minister: when can we expect to see this new policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We have short summers in Edmonton, and we need to be able to make the most of that time and enjoy the opening up of the Legislature for those kinds of things. We're working to bring forward the policy as soon as possible, and we want to be in a position to welcome new activities to the Legislature precinct. We need to respect the history of this place, but we can open it up to the people, and I think we can have some fun while we're doing it.

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

Seniors' Self-managed Care

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We understand from a former senior executive at AHS and the owner of Community Care Cottages in Red Deer that it is unclear if seniors can use self-managed care funding in a private facility. One couple were told they had six months to move to a public institution or lose their self-managed funds because there supposedly was a duplication of services although the facility does not offer the needed care as part of the rental fee. Can the minister clarify? Can residents of private facilities still access self-managed care for their unmet needs?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I was happy to address this last week and this week and whatever other weeks might be required. It continues to be the case that in this province you have individual assessments, and then care is assigned based on the need of the individual resident. Yes, that care can be done in a variety of settings, including an independent home, a lodge, or another care facility. There continues to be case-by-case assessment. If the member would like to talk to some folks that understand the issue, I'd be happy to arrange so.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the owner of the cottages was told that when an Albertan chooses to leave the public health system and go private, the system washes their hands of that person and given that AHS managers made it clear to her that if anyone anywhere in Alberta living in a private care home is currently receiving SMC funds it is an error that they will correct and they said that they have ways to figure out who the seniors are and where they are living, why are the rules different depending on the type of facility a senior chooses?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, why the member's research department would give him that kind of information, that certainly isn't based on fact, is beyond me, but I'd be very happy to connect the member opposite with people who actually understand the process, understand how it works, and to make sure that he has an opportunity to receive valid information to position future questions on because I certainly want to help him be successful.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've heard that self-managed funds are being denied even when the assessed unmet needs are on the record and given that families report that they've heard that funding does not exist or is frozen and not to apply because they do not qualify for unmet needs or would not qualify if they chose to live in a private facility, to the minister: what are your instructions to home care co-ordinators about self-managed funds in private facilities, and does the 2017 budget for self-managed care funding apply to private facilities?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again with pride. Individual case-by-case assessments are done based on citizens' needs, how they can best be accommodated, and what types of care options they might want to access to be able to do that. My direction to the member opposite is: please, do sit down with me. I'd be happy to walk you through the program and provide those assurances. I think we touched on it at estimates. I'd be happy to do so again. We are continuing to provide a range of supports, including supports in self-managed care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Trade Mission to China and Japan

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and the minister of economic development recently returned from a trip to Asia. Promoting trade between Alberta and the world is a key component of any foreign mission. However, the government should also be focused on attracting foreign investment to Alberta. A recent *Calgary Herald* article referenced comments by China's ambassador to Canada in which he stated when talking about the oil sands: "I do not believe that Chinese enterprises would still be interested in this." To the Minister of EDT: what progress did you make in addressing the negative perception during your trip to China?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for his question. I can tell you that China is very, very interested in our energy. We know that Alberta is the energy and environmental leader that the world needs for the 21st century. While the Premier and I were in Asia, we had numerous conversations about the approval of Trans Mountain, which, I can tell you, was very welcome news. Asia is hungry for our energy, and Alberta is more than willing to provide the world and Asia with our energy resources.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier recently announced that Alberta and the Chinese province of Guangdong had become sister provinces and given that while such announcements are helpful in strengthening bonds with a particular region, those bonds must be nurtured and supported now and into the future in order to achieve full potential, reflecting on our current relationship with Heilongjiang, again to the minister: what

specifically are you doing to build cultural and commercial bridges between Guangdong and Alberta, and what specifically is your ministry doing to promote trade with the people and businesses of Guangdong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. The Premier signed a new twinning relationship with the province of Guangdong. I can tell you that this is the first new twinning since the 1980s with Asia, so this was long overdue. Just to put this into perspective, Guangdong is the economic engine, or one of, in China. They are responsible for one-fifth of China's GDP. They are an economic powerhouse. We recently opened an Alberta office, the 12th Alberta office, in the capital of Guangdong. I've been there three times now, and the Premier . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that Japan has recently chosen to increase the amount of electricity within their grid from coal-fired generation and given that we have heard that there are Japanese companies ready and willing to buy large amounts of Alberta's low-sulphur thermal coal, with a potential for significant direct investment in Alberta to follow, and given that this government has treated the thermal coal industry as just another climate change outcast, again to the minister: did you discuss thermal coal opportunities while you were in Japan, and if so, what specific supports are you offering this industry in facilitating exports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I'll thank the member for the question. First of all, when we were in Japan, the topic of coal actually didn't come up that often, but what I can tell you is that Japan is also very interested in energy security and in continuing to work with Canada. I can tell you that the Premier signed an agreement with Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation. JOGMEC is a significant company that already has invested over a billion dollars in Canada, with the majority of it being here in Alberta. We are continuing to work with them.

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the member opposite and myself are both very interested in the impact that the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade had in their trade mission to China and Japan. I'm really interested in the way that both Chinese and Japanese markets are interested in our agricultural and forestry products, and I was wondering if the Minister of Economic Development and Trade could let us know.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. I'm thrilled to see that there's so much interest in our trade missions, as there should be because these missions are absolutely critical to continuing to open doors for Alberta businesses. I know that the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has been to China and Japan; the Minister of Energy has as well. I myself have been to Japan twice. There is a significant and growing interest in a lot of our agricultural products, from

honey to barley. There is interest in our products in beef and pork. I'd be happy to expand on that in the next response.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Chinese and Japanese economies are growing and given that the demand for Alberta products is increasing along with them, to the same minister: I'm wondering how this government is helping Alberta businesses to take advantage of the opportunities this growth presents.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. Absolutely, we want to support Alberta businesses to diversify their markets. We know that businesses that have a diversity of products and markets build a resilience and are able to weather an economic downturn. This is why last fall in November I was very honoured to lead the largest trade delegation in the history of the province, with over 80 businesses and business associations, including the Alberta Industrial Heartland, which I know is in part of the member's riding. I can tell you that we have a number of programs . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have always been pleased, when I've travelled to Asia, to see our product from Alberta on the supermarket shelf or advertised. I was wondering what other activities the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade undertook to showcase our products and opportunities for businesses.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member. As I was saying, we have a number of supports for Alberta companies that are interested in exporting and getting into new markets. I would encourage them to visit jobsplan.alberta.ca. What's really exciting is that, again, Japan is Alberta's largest market for pork and our third-largest for beef. What's fascinating is that in the last few years Alberta has increased its market share. When you're in Japan, 40 per cent of the pork comes from Canada, and the majority of that is from Alberta. That is very significant. The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and I are going to continue . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will proceed with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, if left unchecked, this NDP government's policies will bankrupt this province. Their debt-fuelled budgets, without any plan on a way back to balance, leave me to wonder if they are in denial and do not recognize that they have a problem or if they know they have a problem but are not willing to solve it. In other words, they are either incompetent or immoral: incompetent if they cannot recognize that we have a structural deficit problem; immoral if they recognize that we have

a structural deficit problem but are willing to saddle our children with a massive debt burden.

This government is projecting an operational deficit this year of \$10.3 billion. They are borrowing almost a quarter of what they are spending. Projections indicate a \$71 billion debt by the time the next election is called. The NDP would like Albertans to believe that the problem is the price of oil and that they are not to blame for this massive debt growth. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Ideological decisions implemented by this government are piling on extra debt and leading our industries down a path of increased costs. It started with increases to corporate and personal taxes. Then came increases in the specified gas emitters levy, resulting in returned PPA contracts at a price of over \$4 billion. Next there was the early shutdown of coal electricity generation, \$1.4 billion, and the list goes on. How about a \$4 billion carbon tax to top it all off?

Mr. Speaker, Albertans know it is the hard-working, ordinary people of Alberta that will pay the price for this NDP government's mismanagement. They will pay for it with increased taxation, reduced job opportunities, and their children's future. Governments running out of money and reaching a point where they are unable to borrow more money is not a fantasy. This government is failing to deal with their structural deficit problem. This government has implemented policies that have increased our debt far more than it ever needed to be, and if left unchecked, this NDP government will bankrupt this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've received a request for unanimous consent for an introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make this introduction to you and through you to the whole House. I'd like to introduce Lennea Oseen, who is my next-door neighbour and also works for the department of agriculture here in the province. She is accompanied today by her father, Chester Oseen, who's a farmer in southern Alberta, and his wife, Hilda Oseen, both of whom now live in Lethbridge-East. If they could please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Ombudsman's Office 50th Anniversary

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1970 Alberta Supreme Court Justice Milvain had this to say regarding the Alberta Ombudsman.

He can bring the lamp of scrutiny to otherwise dark places, even over the resistance of those who would draw the blinds. If his scrutiny and observations are well-founded, corrective measures can be taken in due democratic process, if not, no harm can be done in looking at that which is good.

On September 1, 1967, the province of Alberta became the first jurisdiction in North America to open itself up to this "lamp of scrutiny." On that day, almost 50 years ago, the office of the Alberta Ombudsman opened its doors and George McClellan, the

province's first Ombudsman, arrived at work to find 30 complaints already waiting on his desk.

In the years that followed, Mr. Speaker, the work has never ceased. Individuals in the role of the Alberta Ombudsman have gone on to assist in the development of offices in other jurisdictions and played an instrumental role in the creation of the International Ombudsman Institute in 1978. Our office of the Ombudsman continues to act as a consultant to investigators from around the world.

The Ombudsman's jurisdiction has expanded over time and will soon grow again as the office begins to provide oversight to Alberta's municipalities. But throughout its growth and evolution one thing about the office of the Ombudsman has held firm, that being its steadfast commitment to support Albertans by promoting administrative fairness in an increasingly complex environment.

As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices it is a pleasure to acknowledge the contributions that the office of the Alberta Ombudsman has made and will continue to make to our province and to congratulate everyone involved on the upcoming 50th anniversary of that good work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: My apologies. I missed the Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Construction Concerns

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government continues to display a lack of interest in the consequences of its actions. A case in point is the much-anticipated construction of the southwest Calgary ring road.

Let's be clear. Calgarians in neighbourhoods bordering the ring road support it. They also anticipated some inconvenience during the construction. But they did not expect gravel crushing and asphalt operations virtually in their backyards, that will run continuously, and they certainly did not expect a road dam that leaves them susceptible to flooding. Furthermore, they do not appreciate being ignored.

2:50

They are naturally worried about breathing in carcinogens from the gravel and asphalt operations that will put their health at risk. Additionally, they fear that this road dam will intensify another 2013 flood and will put communities at risk. These are all valid concerns. The people of West Springs, Bridlewood, Discovery Ridge, The Slopes, Lakeview, and Tsuut'ina, among others, are simply asking for a face-to-face meeting with the Transportation minister, but they are repeatedly snubbed.

So PC MLAs are intervening. My colleagues and I are actively working on their behalf. Last month I sent a respectful letter to the Minister of Transportation seeking a meeting. It has been five weeks, and I am still waiting. We are frustrated with the NDP government's attitude of: please stop bothering us because we know best. Today we are putting them on notice. We will not stop bothering you until you address the concerns directly with these residents and work with them to find common-sense solutions. Move the gravel crushing and the asphalt operations. This is not rocket science. People simply want to use their backyards without running the risk of contracting silicosis.

Minister, respectfully, will you please meet with these people?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wind Power and Technology Changes

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me take everyone to New York in the early 1900s. Transportation was by horse: individual riders and horses pulling coaches, carts, and wagons. Imagine all of the workers involved at the stables driving ice carts and milk carts, feeding and caring for horses, cleaning the manure, and building carts, saddles, harnesses, whips, and so on. The economy was built around the horse.

Then along came Henry Ford and his Model T. Not only did this change transportation; it also transformed the economy with the creation of new wealth and new jobs. New York did not disappear because the horse was no longer the main form of transportation; it survived and became an American economic powerhouse.

Today in Alberta another transformation is taking place. The transformation is in our electricity sector, away from coal toward more renewable energy. There are many types of renewable energy, but the one that I want to focus on is wind power.

Canada's first commercial wind farm was installed on Cowley Ridge in southern Alberta in 1993, and in the 24 years since then Alberta's wind energy has grown to rank third in Canada. Alberta now has 38 wind installations and 901 wind turbines producing enough electricity each year to power more than 600,000 homes. Rural municipalities such as Vulcan county, Paintearth county, and the MD of Pincher Creek receive millions of dollars in tax revenue from wind power, and it brings new income and jobs to rural communities. Wind is also a source of significant greenhouse gas reductions, sustainably generating electricity without emitting air pollutants or toxic waste. It is one of the most affordable forms of electricity available today.

While some of the opposition will blow hard about transitioning toward renewable energy, the past has shown that transformation can bring prosperity. Henry Ford drove into the future . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Health Care in Central Alberta

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in central Alberta are desperate for this government to make their health care a priority. Facilities like the Red Deer regional hospital are the primary point for acute-care delivery to the over half a million Albertans living in AHS's central zone, so you can imagine how devastated people were, not only in Red Deer but in the entire region, when year over year AHS's list of top 20 infrastructure priorities went from featuring only two central zone projects in 2015 to a whopping zero projects in 2016.

The per capita funding is also grossly behind every other part of the province, and the imbalance is having serious effects on Albertans' health. This kind of inequity has led to the central zone having the longest emergency room wait times in the province, outraging not only residents but also front-line workers. It's nearing a crisis situation, and it's evidenced by the brave doctors and nurses who are being forced to organize rallies and speak out against a system that is leaving them and their patients behind.

Last summer the Minister of Health told Albertans, quote: always know the buck stops with this minister. But, Mr. Speaker, the problem is with the minister. The NDP talk about the importance of local leadership and empowering communities to prioritize their own needs, but at every step the Minister of Health has centralized power under her control, and this is the result. This is a power-hungry government that does not trust Albertans to get it right, and

it shows in the management and deliverables of our health system. Minister, listen to the residents of central Alberta and start making their health care a priority.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 13

Securities Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017.

The securities regulatory landscape has become more complex, sophisticated, global, and driven by technology than ever before. The government of Alberta is working to make life better for Albertans with practical changes that help make sure that their investments are safe. The proposed amendments are intended to enhance protection of Alberta investors and prompt a fair and effective Alberta capital market. With these amendments we're ensuring that Alberta's securities regulatory system reflects the realities of today's market and evolves with international standards and global regulatory reform initiatives. We are also making changes to Alberta's securities laws to harmonize our system with other jurisdictions in Canada which will help to ensure that our capital markets remain vibrant and efficient.

Thank you to IIROC and to CARP for standing with me earlier today and announcing these at a press conference.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table, on day 15 of excellent Public Affairs Bureau tablings, a letter I wrote to the hon. Government House Leader on 9 March 2017, where he was referring in 2003 to then Premier Stelmach and said:

When the opposition stands up and asks legitimate questions about an increase in communications staff . . . he can actually turn it around into the opposition wanting to take services away from the blind.

That sounds very familiar.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we're at points of order. The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll withdraw the point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Returns

FOIP Request Processing

M1. Mr. Cooper moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents relating to Alberta Justice's role in processing requests made to other government

ministries under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, excluding documents that contain legal advice.

[Debate adjourned May 1: Mr. Cyr speaking]

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

Mr. Cooper: I think I've already spoken. I could close debate if you want.

The Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to this motion?

The hon. member.

3:00

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak, for the benefit of the House, who may not recall where we were last week, on the amended Motion for Return 1 with respect to copies of all documents relating to Alberta Justice's role in processing requests to other government ministries under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and, of course, the amendment, "excluding documents that contain legal advice."

I'd just like to very briefly remind the minister that it's my hope that she doesn't utilize "excluding documents that contain legal advice" too broadly or widely to ensure that the ministry doesn't need to comply with our request. This is important information that should be available to the public. I will support and encourage my colleagues to support the amended motion for a return although reluctantly. Some information is better than no information.

I am assuming that later on this afternoon I will have the opportunity to speak at some length about the government refusing to provide information to the Assembly, which is not just rightfully the Assembly's but also Albertans'.

[Motion for a Return 1 as amended carried]

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Drayton-Valley Devon.

Trinity Christian School Association

M2. Mr. Smith moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence between the government and Trinity Christian School Association sent or received between September 1, 2014, and March 1, 2017.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the Minister of Education and his senior administration mishandled the Trinity Christian and Wisdom schooling file. Instead of working with the administrations of these institutions to deal with the financial concerns and perhaps even appointing a trustee, the minister instead chose to shut down the program, and he left 3,500 students and their families scrambling for some sort of an alternative.

The minister clearly stated that the issues revolved around financial accounting practices and the following of certain regulations. This was not, to be clear, an issue of the quality of the education program but of its financial administration. The minister knew these situations and that in situations like this they'd been handled by appointing a trustee to help school boards come into compliance with all of the pertinent rules and pertinent regulations. It appeared to many Albertans that the actions of this minister in shutting down the programs and leaving 3,500 students in complete educational disarray were disproportionate to the problems that were observed in the administration of the schools and their programs. It's important for Albertans to begin to understand why the minister came to the conclusions that he did, especially in light of the fact that when this issue went to the courts, the courts appeared to believe that the minister indeed did not handle this issue in a proportional fashion.

Wildrose has asked for the correspondence between the minister, Trinity Christian School Association, and the government between September 1, 2014, and March 1, 2017. We'd like to know: just how did the minister get this so wrong? What led him to conclude that his actions to shut down these programs and to deny home educators their choice of program was a reasonable course of action?

That is why I've asked for the correspondence between the ministry and Trinity Christian school. This minister must be held accountable for his uncalled for closing of the Wisdom home-school. I have used the dates from September 2014 because that will give us the correspondence for almost a full school year prior to this government's election to see what previous correspondence was taken into consideration when making this heavy-handed decision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his motion for a return and for his comments. At this point I would like to move that Motion for a Return 2 be amended by striking out "correspondence between the government and Trinity Christian School Association sent or received" and substituting "official signed correspondence from the Minister or Deputy Minister of Alberta Education pertaining to Trinity Christian School Association sent."

Mr. Speaker, the amended motion for a return would read as follows:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all official signed correspondence from the Minister or Deputy Minister of Alberta Education pertaining to Trinity Christian School Association sent between September 1, 2014, and March 1, 2017.

I have the signed copies of that from the Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak against this amendment. Motion for a Return 2 was all about bringing the actions of the government into the light of day. We've seen that something went terribly wrong here when you see 3,500 students placed into a situation where they do not have access to their school of choice, and we've seen that the courts have intervened on this.

This amendment, I believe, is meant to intervene or to obscure actions that would allow us to move the actions of the government into the light of day. We need to take them out of darkness and into the light of day so that we can begin to see if the actions of this government were reasonable or not. Now, this amendment would keep the correspondence that we seek surrounding these events to only those pieces of officially signed correspondence or documents signed by the minister or his senior officials.

Democracy depends on the opposition being able to hold the government accountable for the decisions that they make, for the actions that they take, and in this case the opposition can only do its job properly if it understands the background and the correspondence, the full background and the full correspondence, that has occurred in this situation. You know, the opposition and the courts have already concluded that this government did not act in a reasonable fashion when it closed down the Wisdom Home Schooling program, so therefore it's actually very crucial and important that all of the correspondence, including e-mails, be made available to the opposition and therefore through us to the people of

Alberta so that we can understand how the government could have gotten this just so wrong.

Now, when a government begins making poor decisions that hurt Albertans, in this case hurting 3,500 students and their families, and when a government by its actions exhibits a lack of transparency and when it begins to by its actions hide or impede access to the information that would help us to explain its actions, then I believe that the opposition and the citizens of Alberta through the opposition rightfully should start to become concerned. It's only by opposing this amendment, Mr. Speaker, that the members of this Assembly will begin the process of understanding. When you begin to understand what was going on, then we can begin to rebuild, perhaps, the trust that has been broken between the actions of this government and the people of Alberta.

3:10

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that a full disclosure is important when it comes to the correspondence because it's then that you will see the healing and the trust that is necessary to begin to move forward. The people of Alberta believe that the government needs to be working on their behalf, and when they see that, when they can see that a government is actually working on their behalf, then that trust gets to be reborn and rebuilt. That's only going to happen in this case if the correspondence is forthcoming from this government, if the opposition is able to ensure that this government in this case had the interests of the students at heart, that they were working for these kids.

Now, the court obviously came to a decision that they weren't by their actions actually working in favour of and best interests of these families and these children, but the correspondence could give us some insight as to whether or not that was an accident or whether that was by design.

So I ask all the members of this Assembly to vote down this amendment, to support the original motion for a return so that Albertans will have a clear, open, and transparent understanding of why the government got this decision so badly wrong. It's only when the opposition and thereby Albertans receive this correspondence will the trust in this minister and in this government have a chance of being rebuilt. That is why I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we need to vote this amendment down.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're speaking to amendment A1, as moved by the Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Education?

Mr. Cooper: Correct. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment, which, really, in many respects is outrageous, and perhaps a case could be made that it goes against the original intention of the motion for a return. The challenge is that it fundamentally changes what the member has asked. The member, my colleague, asked for all correspondence.

Mr. Speaker, growing up in the household of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, his father used to say: "all" means all, and that's all "all" means. That is exactly the challenge that we face today. The member has asked for all correspondence or, in this case, all of the facts, and what the minister and the Government House Leader are proposing is something significantly different.

[Mr. Dach in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, you will know that very regularly governments correspond via e-mail and other methods by department heads, by other individuals inside the department about a specific issue prior to any official correspondence being signed by the minister or the

deputy minister and that much of the content is left out from the official correspondence. So the question that everyone in this Chamber should be asking is: what exactly is the minister and the department trying to hide? The information that they would like to release is only the official information or correspondence that these public bodies received. As you can well imagine, much of that correspondence is already available in the public domain, and what is being kept secret by the minister and his department is the very important facts and content around what actually transpired to arrive at the decision. It's very, very troubling.

We've seen this government put together a significant track record. In fact, we have already asked through freedom of information for this very important information to be revealed, but as you can imagine, the government is trying to keep these secret. They have a horrible track record on releasing information and not engaging politically in information that would be potentially damaging to the government, so they have done that in this case as well.

As you'll know, Mr. Speaker, better than anyone, this Assembly has very unique and special abilities to call for documents to be produced. All it takes is the will of the Assembly to say yes. All it takes is members of the NDP backbench to not support cabinet, keeping in mind that we are in private members' business, doing the work of private members, not doing government business. I get that they need to support the government, but this is about supporting private members' ability to get access to information, and the NDP, in all of their wisdom, is choosing to keep things secret and only providing the absolute bare minimum so it looks like they're doing something.

I know that the Government House Leader, when he was in opposition, used to stand just a few feet from me here to the left – now, he was way to the left of me, but it was just a few feet to the left – and almost say these exact same words about the government hiding things. Now, much to the chagrin of Albertans and members on this side of the Assembly and people in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – they're disappointed to see this minister now trying to keep secrets from Albertans.

I encourage all members to vote against this amendment and ensure that private members have access to information that's important for us all to do our work.

Before I sit down, Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent of the House to go to one-minute bells for motions for returns only.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Are there other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:18 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Dach in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	McPherson
Babcock	Jansen	Miller
Carlier	Kazim	Nielsen
Carson	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Connolly	Larivee	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl

Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schreiner
Dang	Malkinson	Shepherd
Drever	Mason	Turner
Eggen	McKittrick	Woollard
Hinkley		

3:20

Against the motion:

Cooper	Loewen	Schneider
Cyr	MacIntyre	Smith
Fildebrandt	Pitt	van Dijken
Gill	Rodney	Yao

Totals:	For – 31	Against – 12
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[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Speaker: Any further speakers on Motion for a Return 2 as amended? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion for a return that's been brought forward is to bring clarity to the communications between the Trinity Christian School Association and the Education minister here. I think that the fact that when you look at some of the circumstances around Trinity school, which resides in my local constituency, it would be nice to hear exactly what the minister, the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister, and all of those that were involved in this process were thinking at the time.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I guess when we start to look at exactly what it is that the government was working towards, it would be better to have an understanding of what it is exactly they were trying to accomplish with this. I know that for myself I ended up with a call from the minister's office, which I'm very appreciative of, on the day that they had shut this school down in my constituency. During that specific call I had asked the minister: was it necessary to shut this school down? The minister said that this was obviously the last resort, shutting it down. Obviously, you know, being in shock from having one of my local schools shut down, I myself was hoping for a little bit more information on it, but I did understand that the minister felt very, very sure that this was the right decision at the time.

Now, for myself I would have loved to have a little bit more information on this because this was a huge step. This was shutting down a school in my constituency during the school year. We're talking about 3,500 people, 3,500 kids across Alberta that were going to be affected by this decision, which is why having the communications with the ministry is something that we needed, to show what the thought process was for such a traumatic move by this government.

Now, I do have to say that in the end, in January we saw a minister that said: maybe we need to take a step back, review exactly how we came to this decision, and then we need to maybe apply an administrator. That is something that I had asked the minister to do when they had first shut this school down in October. So it would be nice to see exactly how the decision that the minister, the ADM, the DM, and anybody that was involved in this situation came up with and how they came to justify this very – I don't like using this word, but I can't come up with a better one – radical move. What we're looking to do here is to see what basis the minister has come up with, what justification.

To see that the minister had accepted this motion but that it needed to be amended does show that the minister is trying to move

forward some clarity. I have to give him some credit for trying to give some clarity on this. But, in the end, I believe that when we start looking at official, signed correspondence from the ministry or deputy minister, what we're looking at is a fact that a lot of this was very formal at that time. What I'm hoping for wasn't just formal letters between the ministry and the school; what I'm hoping for is the thought process behind it. What's important is: how did they get there? What process did they use to go from full-on active school to closed school? What justification is there? I don't believe that the signed letters by the minister address that.

While I'm thankful that the minister is allowing us to be going forward and not rejecting it outright, I am questioning why it is that he needed to amend this. Why couldn't we have more thorough transparency and accountability from this ministry, especially when it comes to so many home-schoolers? This is across Alberta. We had home-schoolers at the front door saying: please support our home-schooling system. This school, this one school, makes up a third of home-schoolers across our constituency. That says that there is a large number of parents, a large number of students that were involved in this.

So I am a little upset that the minister amended it because I do believe that the intent with the way it was is what we needed to see.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against this motion, and I will be wanting to see more clarity coming from the minister. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else who wishes to speak to Motion for a Return 2 as amended?

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just pass.

[Motion for a Return 2 as amended carried]

3:30 Indigenous Relations Review

M3. Mr. Cooper moved on behalf of Mr. Hanson that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents prepared by the government relating to the review mandated by hon. Ms. Notley, Premier, to determine what changes may be needed for the government to better align its policies and initiatives with the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, as referenced on page 11 of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations annual report 2015-16.

The Speaker: Is there anyone who wishes to speak to the motion? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples is something that this government has strongly supported, and it guides our objectives as we move forward. With regard to the request there's a document that fits the description of what has been requested, but it was prepared for cabinet and, as such, is not for public distribution. But in the interests of improved disclosure and public transparency, something this government is deeply committed to, we will provide any document that has been distributed to indigenous communities. Obviously, however, precedent and the very principles of responsible government prohibit us from distributing documents of Executive Council.

As such, I'll move that Motion for a Return 3 be amended by adding "excluding confidential cabinet documents" after "annual report 2015-16."

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? No one?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to speak to the amended motion?

[Motion for a Return 3 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Automated Traffic Enforcement Technology

M4. Mr. Cyr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all data collected by the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General pursuant to section 7 of the September 2014 automated traffic enforcement technology guidelines in each fiscal year from 2014-15 to 2016-17.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're looking to see is exactly what data is actually collected when it comes to our traffic enforcement. The fact is that when we start to see that our government is actually collecting this data, it would be nice if we actually had some transparency and accountability to be able to see what exactly is being done within the province. I would like to hear from the minister if she would be willing to release this information, and if so, then I would thank her for it.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General I'm pleased to respond. Unfortunately, we're recommending that this motion for a return should be rejected. It's not because of anything that we're trying to keep from the opposition, but the request would generate an unmanageably large amount of paper. There would be approximately 81,000 pages per copy that would have to be provided. The minister indicates that she has no concerns about the data itself. It's a question of the volume that is being requested.

Automated traffic enforcement technology guidelines are designed to ensure fairness and consistency in the use of automated traffic enforcement technology across Alberta. Municipalities collect that information, and that is electronically populated in a template that is submitted to Justice and Solicitor General. The data report, reviewed by Justice and Solicitor General staff, is used in determining whether municipalities are following the established guidelines and assisting in audits conducted every two years.

With regret, Mr. Speaker, it's not that we do not wish but that we are unable for practical purposes to supply the information requested in this motion.

The Speaker: Are there any other individuals that would like to speak to the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, I'll let the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake close debate.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very disappointed to hear that this information won't be made public. I do understand the concern and the reluctance that the minister has regarding the size of this. It would be nice to see some sort of maybe open-source document, then, being brought forward so that we can search this information. I would like to see that. While this government has moved towards open data, it is important that when we look at government moving forward and saying that they're open and transparent, some of these larger pieces of data – and I'm trying to remember without the Blues what the minister said – are sent to the

ministry in spreadsheets. Therefore, this should be something easily posted onto the website for us to be able to search. Maybe if the minister has got some concerns regarding the fact that this is too large to be given out in a motion for a return, it would have been nice to hear that maybe a compromise would have been struck, making this available through, again, like I said, open-source data.

While I'm very disappointed and I really wanted to see 81,000 pages, I am looking forward to hearing that the government is moving in this direction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

Ministerial Orders

M15. Mr. Cooper moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all ministerial orders issued by each ministry between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2016.

The Speaker: Anyone wish to speak to the motion as proposed by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to indicate that we very much appreciate and agree with the opposition's desire for more transparency with regard to ministerial orders. Similar requests were made and granted last year. However, it did come to our attention that a small number of orders contained commercially sensitive information that would be excluded under the freedom of information act. For that reason, I will move that Motion for a Return 15 be amended by adding "excluding those items that fall within the exceptions to disclosure provisions in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act" and that that would be inserted after "December 31, 2016." That amendment would allow any commercially sensitive information to be excluded while, I think, still keeping with the spirit of the request.

Mr. Speaker, again, the government is trying to provide the information requested by the opposition wherever that's possible. However, as the opposition knows or should know, I think that when we enter into commercial agreements with third parties, there is some requirement that we protect their commercial information. If we didn't have this, we wouldn't really be able to negotiate and conduct business with other outside parties, whether it's another agency of another order of government, a municipality. It might be a private company. It might be any other number of entities, not-for-profits, and so on.

3:40

Of course, it's really important that the government is able at any time to have negotiations and to enter into agreements with third parties which may have commercially sensitive information or other information that would protect individuals' right to privacy, for example, or protect legal opinions that would be provided in confidence. All of those things are important so that we are seen as a good partner and as an entity that people can have confidence in, that they can enter into negotiations with to conduct various business or other arrangements of a contractual nature and that we're not going to be releasing, either purposefully or inadvertently, information that may compromise their position as an organization or a company. I think that's a very important thing.

That's why we've moved this motion, because it does preserve as much as possible the information that has been requested by the Official Opposition while protecting our reputation as a good partner and someone that people can have some confidence in that their particular information is going to be protected. That's why we

have made this motion, I think, to the degree possible. Notwithstanding the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks' tabling of his wonderful letters, his missives that he is penning to me on a regular basis and tabling here in this House, I have maintained my commitment to openness in government.

We want to make sure and I personally want to make sure that, wherever possible, this government can provide information to the opposition, to the public, to the media in a spirit of openness. Nothing that I have done here, I think, contradicts that basic principle, but obviously from the point of view now of being in government as opposed to being in opposition, one has a slightly different perspective and has to accept the responsibility that comes with being a member of government, something that the opposition doesn't really have to deal with. You know, they can stand up and demand whatever from the government, and it's good posturing. I totally respect the role that the opposition plays, but it's a very different role here, when we are in government. We are responsible and accountable for outcomes as opposed to just simply standing up and saying, "Wouldn't this be nice?" or "Wouldn't that be nice?" and so on.

You know, I appreciate very much Strathmore-Brooks' attention to the comments that I made while I was in opposition. It seems to be that I've set the gold standard for opposition, and I appreciate very much that the Official Opposition is trying to live up to that record. So far I would say, with the greatest respect, that they've fallen a bit short, but I do appreciate their reminders of the work that I did do and that I know the Premier and several other members, now of the government, did in opposition, the stellar work that we did do in opposition, which obviously was appreciated by the public very much, because clearly they decided that they would promote us from the opposition to the government. I think that despite the fondest hopes of members on the opposite side the public is probably going to renew our contract in two years.

As we've seen, coming through a difficult recession and then on our first anniversary in government, we had to deal with the fire in Fort McMurray, which had a very calamitous effect, a calamitous impact. We need to work hard, I think, to win Albertans' trust and to turn the economy around. We knew that eventually oil prices would shift, and they have done so, not nearly as much as we would have liked. Hopefully, they'll continue a gradual upward trend, which will help our economy, because, of course, the economy is still extremely dependent – I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker is not ruling me out of order, but he's sending me facial expressions to indicate that I should really come back to the amendment, which is, as I mentioned, to preserve as much as possible the transparency and the openness and the availability of information collected by the government on behalf of the citizens of Alberta for the citizens of Alberta. I would certainly, really on that basis encourage all members to support this amendment. Then if this amendment is passed, we will vote on the motion as amended, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, and I think we should vote for that as well.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to reluctantly take my seat.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I may have dozed off, but I'm not sure I missed anything.

Are there any members who would wish to speak to the amendment as proposed by the Government House Leader?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to close debate.

Mr. Rodney: Oh. Before you do, sir, earlier today we've had other things unanimously pass. This is a simple request. It's happened on many occasions. As it's warmed up outside, it's warmed up inside. The deliberations of the House are unaffected if folks in a situation like this and on an afternoon like this were to simply take off their jackets. It does require a motion. I would move that for the duration, until 6 o'clock, members would be allowed to remove their jackets if that would pass.

Brian, you're used to this, right?

The Speaker: I believe this motion would require unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: We are now dealing . . . [interjections] Hon. members, I'm standing again. Remember that rule?

Is there anyone else to speak?

[Motion for a Return 15 as amended carried]

NDP Election Platform Documents

M16. Mr. Cooper moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents prepared by the government between April 1, 2015, and March 1, 2017, relating to the New Democratic Party election platform during the 2015 provincial general election campaign.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on Motion for a Return 16. We all know that around election time the government prepares for what could be a number of different outcomes around an election. In this particular case there was a change in government, and what is curious to know is exactly what was happening in the bureaucracy at the time. It's important information for Albertans to have to understand how we transition power in a smooth and reasonable manner.

3:50

It's also important that we on this side of the House can do our job with respect to what exactly is transpiring. That was the genesis of this particular motion for a return, to have a real sense of what was happening at the time, how we transition from one government to another as well as what work the bureaucracy is currently undertaking with respect to the New Democratic Party election platform promises. I hope that the government will be forthcoming with that information.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the Official Opposition House Leader for his motion and for his comments with respect to that matter. You know, it is true – and I think I agree with the hon. member – that there was a change of government in the last election. It's also interesting to note that our party, that won that election, did have a platform and that we have in fact been working very hard to implement the promises that we made during that election campaign.

You know, we've provided greater protection for the consumers. We've put forward a plan to combat climate change. We've made sure that wealthy individuals and corporations that are earning profits pay a little bit more. We did stop the implementation of the proposed health care premium, the reintroduction of the health care premium. That was another thing we did. We took big money out of politics, Mr. Speaker. That was another commitment that we made in that election, and that, in fact, has been done. We've put forward programs to create new jobs in this province, to diversify

our economy because, in fact, the diversification of the economy was a major platform commitment, something that was really strongly supported by the public in the last election. Those are just a few of the more than 20 to 30 campaign commitments that we have met.

It is, in fact, clear that the platform was designed to make life better for Alberta families, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's clear that we're doing that. We make decisions every day in this government – every day – that can be traced back to that platform because that was our commitment to the public. That was what we told the public that we would do if we were elected, and in fact we are doing it.

Now, I want to just point out that the platform itself is public information. It's public information, and everyone has it. Our throne speeches are public as well, so everybody has a chance to see them. They're posted online, on your website, Mr. Speaker. As well, our budgets are public information, and the bills that we introduce in this House and that the House passes in its wisdom are all public information. All of that is out there. It's all transparent. What we ran on and what we're doing: they're both there, and people can check and see that for themselves.

I know that after the election we were encouraged by some of our members opposite to break our promises. "You know, you can't possibly do that. It would be terrible to have people who are making a little bit more money pay a little bit more taxes. It would be completely wrong to get rid of the flat tax," they said. "There are just a lot of things – I know you got elected on all of this stuff, and we didn't get elected, but we think you should keep doing exactly the same thing that we were doing and that we promised to do." It was an odd request, Mr. Speaker. It was a strange situation that the members who had been part of the former government really thought that we should do what they had been doing.

I know why. It was because then we would have been out, too, and they could have replaced us by doing the same things, and nothing ever would have changed. Mr. Speaker, people voted for change in the last election. They voted on a platform that was quite different.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe that you're dealing with the substance rather than the process.

Mr. Mason: Oh. I'm very sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yeah. I know. I thought it my responsibility to remind you.

Mr. Mason: I will deal with it. You know, I was responding to what I thought the reasons were for the motion as it related to the New Democratic Party election platform during the 2015 provincial election. I was merely trying to make the point, Mr. Speaker, that we should defeat this particular motion because all of the things that are relevant to this question are already a matter of public record, whether it's our platform, which was there, or the actions of the government. As I mentioned, budgets and throne speeches, all of these things that this motion would probably ask for are already public, so there's really no need, I think, to pass this particular motion. We're going to continue to be open and transparent, and our budgets and our bills and our throne speeches are all going to remain public. Obviously, that's pretty clear.

I don't think we need to pass this motion, and I would urge all hon. members in the House to defeat this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to Motion for a Return 16 as moved by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills?

[Motion for a Return 16 lost]

Carbon Levy and Climate Leadership Plan Correspondence

M19. Mrs. Pitt moved on behalf of Mr. MacIntyre that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, including e-mails and submissions from stakeholders, related to the carbon levy or the climate leadership plan between May 24, 2015, and March 1, 2017.

The Speaker: All those members wishing to speak to Motion for a Return 19? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, as we stated earlier in relation to the requests laid out in motions for returns 8, 10, 11, 12, and 19, much of the requested information has already been made public through various releases under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and through the full climate leadership panel process, that's been thoroughly documented and posted on our website for public consumption.

Our government does recognize and appreciate the need for open and transparent government, and we will gladly work to accommodate reasonable requests for information on behalf of the Official Opposition or others in the House. However, requests which, taken together, ask for all correspondence related to Alberta's climate leadership plan constitute hundreds of hours of staff time and tens of thousands of dollars' worth of work, the fruits of which would produce thousands of pages of correspondence with no clear informational objective. All of this time and effort would divert valuable resources from our government's work to save Albertans money and to create new jobs.

These unreasonable requests, I think, demonstrate that the opposition needs to sharpen its focus a little bit when it makes requests for information because these giant nets, where they hope to snag something, are going to not only bog us down, but I can't imagine the work that they'd create for their research staff in going through thousands and thousands of documents looking for some smoking gun that doesn't even exist, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's pretty clear that with a little more focus, we can operate to make sure that the opposition gets the information that it needs. But these kinds of – I guess I would call it a fishing trip, but really it's more than that. It's trying to essentially drain the whole ocean with one big net, and I don't think that it will assist the opposition, but I do know that it will take us an inordinate amount of effort and money to fulfill.

4:00

So with the greatest of regret, Mr. Speaker, I have to encourage all members to vote against this request and to encourage the opposition generally, you know, to sharpen its focus when it's asking for information. If we can accommodate their requests without just a massive diversion of resources and time, then we're happy to do so because we are an open and transparent government and we are as committed to those principles as we were in opposition.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to Motion for a Return 19, as moved by the Member for Airdrie on behalf of the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake?

Member for Airdrie, would you like to close debate?

Mrs. Pitt: No.

[Motion for a Return 19 lost]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned April 3: Mr. Hinkley speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How much time do I have remaining?

The Speaker: I think you have five.

Mr. Hinkley: Five minutes? All right.

Well, I guess just quickly to summarize what I had mentioned last time, our party has stood up for landowners in Alberta and will continue to do so. We believe in property rights, including due process, proper notification, and fair compensation. We are working to ensure that the public has access to appropriate protections and avenues for resolution.

There are some concerns, though, that we do have, and there are lots of questions and clarity that we are looking for. For instance, how would we find that the balance between individual property owners' rights and protecting Alberta's public goods such as water and Crown lands be handled in this particular bill?

One of the amendments in Bill 204 proposes to repeal section 74 of the Land Titles Act, including wording that would ensure that "no right or title in or to land registered under this Act may be acquired . . . by adverse possession." Now, we'd like to thank the member for bringing this issue to the House because I do believe it is an issue that requires further investigation and action. I have no doubt that members of this Legislature have been contacted by their constituents urging them to address the doctrine of adverse possession. Issues that will have a positive impact on Albertans are something that this House must consider seriously, but as I read through the bill as currently written, I was left with wanting just a little bit more.

Again, I'd like to stress that this is a good first attempt by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, but it is incomplete. For example, if it is passed, this may not solve the issue the member is seeking to address. I would urge the member to take a more holistic approach given that the bill does not address all the necessary policy considerations. For example, it is unclear how ongoing issues that arise in boundary and occupancy disputes will be addressed and resolved if we eliminate adverse possession. Currently section 69 of the Law of Property Act provides the mechanisms needed to resolve disputes where improvements have been made on the wrong piece of land. However, Bill 204 does not outline whether it plans to keep section 69. If the member does intend through Bill 204 on keeping this section, it does not solve the issue of boundary disputes, and this is just the tip of the iceberg on this issue.

I have no doubt that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod is aware that establishing if something is or isn't a lasting improvement is a difficult process. If it is established, section 69 may not cover situations where the occupier has long-time use but does not actually build a long-lasting improvement, something like a driveway, so I would urge the member to consider that including a method for disputes where lasting improvements are not present is still required.

I would like to shift focus now to the principles of the Limitations Act. As members know, the Limitations Act sets out that claims should be acted on within a 10-year period for an owner to claim return of possession of real property from an adverse possession. But reading through Bill 204, it does not set out a framework that would address existing disputes. As I mentioned earlier, I don't believe that Bill 204 addresses adverse possession in a holistic manner and am interested to hear from other members on these issues.

I've already mentioned section 69 of the Law of Property Act and the Limitations Act and the Land Titles Act, but revisions may be needed to the Municipal Government Act, the Irrigation Districts Act, Public Lands Act, and perhaps others. This is just becoming too much like an omnibus bill, and there's just too much in it, actually. Adverse possession cannot and should not be addressed through a single lens because the elimination of adverse possession is not a straightforward process. It is complex and may open gaps and create unintended consequences for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank the member. As I have said, we respect the intent of this bill; however, property rights and industry responsibility are key concerns for Albertans and for this government. For example, our government is looking at how we can better . . . [Mr. Hinkley's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. I speak in favour of this bill.

Property rights: they're always very tremendously important. If you come into my constituency and you start talking about the property rights of the farmers and the individuals that have acreages, you will find out very, very quickly that property rights are a very important part of the life in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon. Property rights refer to the rights of the landowners, among others, and are a key foundation of the financial security and the prosperity of this province that we call Alberta. When we start talking about financial security and prosperity, obviously it becomes a very important issue that we're addressing.

Landowners, Mr. Speaker, need to know that their investments, that their property, sometimes even their livelihoods that depend on those investments and those properties are not going to be unprotected, that they're protected from the actions of others and from the actions of government, that they can't be simply devalued by the actions of others, including government, without having access to some sort of just compensation. Indeed, many people will argue that the property rights in our society are the foundation of individual liberty. I think of somebody like Calvin Coolidge, that we would have talked about when I was in my social studies class, who said, "Ultimately, property rights and personal rights are the same thing." What he's trying to get at there, for my kids, is the understanding that when you have property, whether it's intellectual or whether it's in the boundaries of physical ownership, the ownership of something as the author or as the owner of land really does come down to your personal right of ownership and therefore your capacity to be able to provide for yourself. So they're absolutely critical.

4:10

Now, we've actually taken in an oblique way the capacity to enshrine these property rights even in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter in section 8 protects individuals

from unreasonable search and seizure of their property. In section 15 we see that we're guaranteed equality before the law, and this can be used, for example, to challenge land-use regulations that may discriminate against someone based on their religion or their mental disability or other protected categories of the Charter. Section 26 affirms the existence of pre-Charter common law and other rights that existed in Canada, especially with regard to ownership of property. And, of course, section 25 of the Charter is crucial for our First Nations for it protects aboriginal rights, including their land rights, against state interference. So when we start talking about this issue of land rights, it's a very important issue.

Now, previous governments have brought forward legislation that severely curtailed the property rights of Albertans. We've been aware – in my constituency I've had many citizens come and talk to me about the problems that were created by bills 19 and 24 and 36 and 50. They looked and they saw that the government and the bureaucracy that works for this government saw property rights as a hindrance, a hindrance to their capacity to be able to plan and to set policy goals, so they saw a deterioration of their property rights, which they have not been happy with.

For instance, Bill 2, in 2012, the Responsible Energy Development Act, lacked the capacity to provide for my constituents adequate notification of hearings and appeals, their ability to appeal for their rights as landowners. It failed to abolish the law of adverse possession, known as squatters' rights.

Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, removed the landowner's right to compensation and to access to the courts for anything short of expropriation when a land-use plan harms their livelihood. There were many people in my constituency that were very concerned about this lack of access to the courts. It gave the cabinet complete decision-making authority over existing rights, including grazing rights, development rights, natural resource rights, et cetera. I live in a rural district. I live in a rural constituency. Every one of those is important to my constituents. Section 17(4) maintains that Bill 36 will trump all other acts. Huge concerns for my constituents.

Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, took authority to approve new electrical transmissions away from the public Alberta Utilities Commission and gave it to the cabinet. Again, after the lines were built, the bill was repealed, but we're still going to be paying for those lines for a long time. The concept of taking it away from a public utilities commission, where people could have access to that commission: huge problems when you're just talking about giving all of that power to the cabinet.

Bill 19 gave cabinet the power to freeze a person's land without compensation. Now, again, it was repealed.

Bill 24, Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, took away the pore spaces. I have heard a lot about that in my constituency, as landowners have had to look at: what were the ramifications of a government that could take away the pore spaces in the land that they owned?

While many of these bills have been repealed over the years, Bill 204 would continue this process. It would continue to rectify some of the still outstanding issues that are of concern for my constituents.

I want to thank the hon. member for bringing forward Bill 210 previously, the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2016. It would have re-established landowners' rights to access to the courts, to a right to fair compensation, to timely information. Now, that bill died on the Order Paper. So I want to thank the hon. member again for bringing forward Bill 204. This bill will continue that move forward, to move that bar in a direction that will allow Albertans to see that their property rights are continuing to be protected.

When we take a look at Bill 36, for instance, Bill 204 will amend Bill 36. It will repeal sections which give cabinet the extraordinary power to make any law or regulation within the authority of the Legislature. It will amend in section 11 the rights of holders of statutory consents, people that are involved in forestry permits, intensive livestock operations, oil and gas leases, grazing leases. They will be allowed to recover their financial losses through the courts if they're negatively impacted by, for instance, regional planning.

As we look at this bill, we can see that it's providing landowners and Albertans with increased capacity to defend their property rights. Every Albertan should have the capacity to go before a court. Every Albertan should have the capacity to be able to fairly place before the courts their concerns rather than simply having cabinet make the decisions for them. Every Albertan should have the capacity to receive fair compensation when their livelihoods are directly and negatively impacted by regional planning, and I believe that this bill will move us forward in that direction, and that's a good thing for Albertans.

We will be amending section 31 of the Responsible Energy Development Act. We're going to incorporate the rights from section 26 of the previous Energy Resources Conservation Act so that the owners of private land will be properly notified of access requests. They will learn and be able to challenge the facts supporting an energy resource application, and they'll be fully involved with the hearings that surround that.

Mr. Speaker, I do not see how allowing Albertans the capacity to learn and to challenge facts is anything but a positive move.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 204, the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. I'm proud to be part of a government and a caucus that has always stood up for landowners in Alberta, and we'll continue to do so. We believe in protecting property rights. It's something that I know as a member of the Resource Stewardship Committee we have discussed numerous times. I've had numerous discussions in my office regarding this topic, and I'm proud of the work that we're doing. It's important to Albertans, and it's important to us, which is why we've made the commitment to address these issues. It's why our government has already begun working with stakeholders to make positive changes to protect Albertans, their property, and their property rights.

The issues raised in Bill 204 are important issues, issues that have been raised by a great many Albertans in my riding, in your riding, and to MLAs on both sides of this House. After my review of the bill, however, I have serious concerns around the specifics of what the member is proposing. Again, many of the issues raised in this bill are important topics worthy of debate in this Legislature, but I believe we need to address issues in a way that does not substitute one set of problems for another or create unintended consequences for the very people I believe we should be trying to help.

Protecting landowners is important to our government, as it should be. It has long been an issue championed by members of our caucus, some of whom, in debates in this House, identified the challenges associated with the legislation Bill 204 would seek to amend. Mr. Speaker, there are other important considerations as well. For far too long previous governments failed to manage the environmental and social outcomes of development on a cumulative-effects basis. We need to do better going forward, and regional planning needs to be a cornerstone of that important work.

4:20

However, one of the key changes that Bill 204 proposes is to provide additional rights to compensation for any statutory consent, like a water licence, that might be affected by a regional plan. In fact, Bill 204 would add a clause to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act that states:

Notwithstanding section 13, if a regional plan affects, amends or rescinds a statutory consent or the terms or conditions of a statutory consent, the holder of the statutory consent may bring a claim against the Crown for any losses the holder may suffer as a result of any effect on or amendment . . . of the statutory consent under a regional plan.

Again, I understand the intent of the member in putting this amendment forward, but I worry that this bill looks at the issue from only the perspective of compensation for consent holders, missing other important perspectives like environmental protection and orderly development. Looking at an issue from all sides is what we do in this government and what we should do in this House.

As drafted, Bill 204 would create private compensation rights for public goods such as water and public lands, and I think we can all agree that property rights are complex. We need to strike the right balance among matters of public good, individual property owners' rights, environmental protection, and responsible development.

Mr. Speaker, there are currently over 86,000 active Crown mineral agreements in Alberta, and many of these may be potentially impacted by regional plans and regulation. If Bill 204 becomes law, regional planning could leave the government, and more importantly Albertans could potentially be liable for compensation for these plus thousands of other statutory consents affecting public lands, water, and any other resources.

Mr. Speaker, regional plans are designed to reflect the unique attributes and public interests of Alberta's different regions. For example, our government has recently begun work on the North Saskatchewan regional plan. The focus of that plan will be on balancing the pressures of a growing population, serving as a significant centre for energy refining and distribution, and acting as a gateway to the north. The lower Athabasca regional plan came into effect in 2012. The focus of that plan was to manage the challenges of a growing population in an area with high bitumen production.

Regional plans such as these are crucial to ensuring that all of the interests in a community are considered when planning for the long-term economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and community well-being in different regions of our province. They were developed after wide-ranging engagement with community stakeholders. Regional planning is an important tool for ensuring Albertans have an ability to shape their communities, and it needs to be preserved.

I'm concerned that Bill 204 could bring in significant financial and legal risk for those regional planning efforts. The bill currently proposes to eliminate section 9(2)(c) and (d) and 14(2) of the Alberta Land Stewardship, which allows the government to make regulations under regional plans. Mr. Speaker, regulations are what allow government to give legal force and meaning to the plans developed in consultation with the people of a region. Without that power regional plans would amount to statements of intent and little more. What the member has proposed could undermine the work of communities and stakeholders across Alberta and potentially gut land-use planning in our province.

Bill 204 also appears to propose a change under section 19 of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act to create additional rights to compensation, not to protect existing rights but to create new ones. The amendment would redefine the term "compensable taking," which refers to situations where a regional plan may take away a

property right and the owner is then compensated under law. The proposed change would potentially overlap and confuse compensation rights under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act that already exist elsewhere in Alberta law. This would broaden the scope of those who would be entitled to compensation even if they would not have been entitled to compensation under common law or any other existing legislation.

Let's think about that. We don't know what the bill would make us liable for because the provision for compensation is potentially so broad that it could require compensation for any loss, including for damages or other financial relief, and the proposed amendments could cause uncertainty. They could harm the ability of government to properly plan for growth and development and to regulate industry. Mr. Speaker, this government is focused on attracting investment at a time when Alberta needs that investment. The uncertainty that this bill could create would have the opposite effect.

To name one example, Bill 204 would reinstate mandatory hearings at the Alberta Energy Regulator, where its decisions may directly and adversely affect the rights of a person and would change other notification requirements by amending the Responsible Energy Development Act. The proposed requirement for mandatory hearings would impose additional costs on industry at a difficult time for our energy sector. Moreover, I'm not certain that formal hearings, where players with deeper pockets and greater capacity may have an advantage, are really the best way to level the playing field, as I believe the member intends.

I also understand that there may be options under the existing Responsible Energy Development Act for changing these processes. Wouldn't this be a simpler way than changing the law? It's also worth noting that this change could also create inconsistencies between regulation of energy resource activities and nonenergy resource activities that would not be subject to the same requirements for mandatory hearings. Again, this strikes me as the wrong time to increase industry uncertainty, particularly when there may be better ways of achieving the same objective.

I'm proud to be part of a government and a caucus who have always stood up for landowners in Alberta. We need a legislative regime that balances the needs of industry for predictable regulation and the needs of all stakeholders, including private property owners. I have serious concerns about how these proposed changes would impact investment in our province. Any changes need to strike an appropriate balance between individual property owner rights, industry's need for process certainty, and protecting Alberta's resources such as water and public lands. As drafted, I'm worried that the choices made in Bill 204 do not meet that test.

One of the amendments that Bill 204 proposes is to repeal section 74 of the Land Titles Act. It includes wording that would ensure that no right or title may be acquired by adverse possession.

If passed, the bill would also delete sections of the Limitations Act. This would remove the limitation period on a registered landowner's right to enforce ownership over his or her land, including the right to possession.

I'd like to thank the member for bringing this issue to the House because it is an issue that requires further investigation and action, and I have no doubt that members of this Legislature have been contacted by their constituents, as I have, urging them to address the doctrine of adverse possession.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to urge that this House vote in favour of Bill 204. My colleague from Livingstone-

Macleod has brought a very good piece of legislation forward. He's looking to address some of the past concerns brought forward by our laws that were, I guess, in an effort to avoid following rules, if you will, or going to the courts and actually allowing people their day in court. Our bureaucrats saw that property rights were a hindrance, and I don't think we should ever see property rights as a hindrance. We should be looking at it as a foundational piece that we should all be trying to bring forward as the one thing that we can depend on.

I know that this adverse possession is something that is a deep concern for rural Alberta. I did find an article that really struck a chord with me, when I thought, you know, it's important that we look at exactly what it is that we're trying to achieve with this bill, at least a part of it anyway.

The article that I'm specifically looking at is from the *Western Producer*. When Squatters Strike is the title of the article. It was done on January 22, 2015. Now, I'd like to read out some of this because it is actually very, very interesting to see the perspective of somebody that is caught within this terrible process that's currently allowed in Alberta. Just to make sure that people understand what squatters' rights are, squatters' rights laws allow people to be legal owners of land if they have been in open possession of it for 10 years or more.

4:30

There's a gentleman named Bob Woodward, who can see the 10-acre parcel of ranchland from his kitchen window.

It is land west of Cardston, Alta., that he bought in 1999, for which he had legal title and on which he paid taxes every year since it was purchased.

So Woodward was flabbergasted when a judge ruled in December that the land belonged to his neighbour.

The decision was based on Alberta law involving adverse possession, more commonly known as squatter's rights.

It allows people to be recognized as legal owners of land if they have been in open possession of it for 10 or more years.

This is something that we need to review. Is this something that we want in Alberta, where you can actually hold the title and somebody can take that title away from you?

Now, it's my understanding here that when we look at these squatters' rights, if you will, we're actually looking at examples where people are becoming very creative on how to take other people's land for free. It is very disappointing that this government appears to be looking in this direction and saying: "This isn't something we're looking at dealing with. This is something that we don't think is important."

I'll go further on here.

Alberta is the only province to retain the legislation, which is based on British common law but has been struck from the books in other provinces.

What's interesting here is that we've got an actual quote from Mr. Woodward, and I think this actually sums it up very, very nicely.

"I think that the rural people need to be made aware that this old act is still in the works and that if you have unscrupulous people looking for an opportunity like that, they can take advantage of that old law . . .

"Even though you've bought a piece of property and paid for it and paid the taxes on it and everything, if they squat on it, even if you know that they're there and more or less acknowledge, or in other words put up with them, if you let them do it for 10 years, they can turn around and claim your property."

You know, in this case it sounded like this gentleman was doing a neighbour a favour. Without knowing all of the facts, I can only speculate at this point. But I can tell you that a lot of this is well intentioned. What happens is that you may have somebody in need,

and you say: “Gee, you know what? I want to help that individual.” So squatters’ rights are something that is a very big concern.

Now, when I was doing some accounting training courses, I remember this topic actually coming up. The one concern that had been brought up was that we’re seeing people even becoming more creative with this. We’re hearing that children living in their parents’ home, down in the basement, could possibly be able to claim squatters’ rights and prevent the sale of that home. Now, I understand about children that are dependent on their parents, but we also need to make sure that we strike a balance. Property rights: it is the most imperative thing that we’ve got, the foundation that we actually formed government on, going forward, for centuries. What we need to be looking at is what, actually, property rights are. That means holding title. That means keeping title.

Now, I do understand that the NDP have brought up a few concerns, some concerns that they feel justify making sure this bill probably isn’t going to be moving forward. But I will remind you that a committee was formed. The committee reviewed that squatters’ rights were probably not in the best interest, and they unanimously passed that something needed to be done. Well, it’s being done with Bill 204. How can you vote against this? Instead of voting against this, why not bring amendments forward that correct your concerns? Why are we looking at a move by the government that will continue to allow this clear, clear injustice when it comes to our property rights?

We need to make sure that when we look at our neighbours and we’re out there to help people, they are not allowed to take advantage of that generosity, that generosity that makes every Albertan that much better, helping their neighbour through hard times. This is the one thing that I can say, that in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, while we are going through this low oil time, there are a lot of people in need. The food banks are so heavily depended on in my constituency right now. The fact that we have such high vacancy rates in my riding is another thing.

I am hoping that, in the end, what we start looking at is that we start to review what has happened in the past when it comes to property rights, that we see that it didn’t work, and then we correct those errors. That is what my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod is doing. He is going forward. He is bringing his constituents’ needs forward. He is saying: “What was done in the past should never have been done. Let’s correct that. Let’s work together.” I went to the committee. We saw it in the committee. We saw that our two caucuses were able to work together and say that something needs to be done specifically around squatters’ rights, yet when the Wildrose puts a bill forward, how is it that this is not being put forward in good faith so that the government will move that forward?

Now, I will say that it is unfair of me to say that they have categorically not wanted to work with the Wildrose because Bill 202 is a good example of our caucuses working together. We did it on that bill. Why can we not move Bill 204 forward? This bill is a strong bill that will strengthen property rights. And you know what? I can’t see any caucus within this House that doesn’t agree that property rights are important to Albertans. I believe that this is something that we can work together to solve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a great privilege to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill 204. It’s actually really gratifying to be part of the Legislature doing its intended job, which is, of course, you know, seriously considering legislation brought

forward by other members. I’d like to commend the spirit that the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod brought this forward in.

[Ms Woollard in the chair]

I also do understand that this is something where, of course, you know, our government and, previous to that, our party have been very clear on making sure that questions of fundamental justice are respected when it comes to surface rights. But I also do understand that members of the opposition might have gone further in this at certain times and also that the very genesis of their party, in some sense, comes from a dispute over that.

Of course, I speak of this in representing a big part of Sturgeon county, where Bill 50, of course, had quite an impact on residents and farmers and where a lot of the concern came from. Now, that being said, of course, Bill 50 has been repealed, so at least we’re not facing that type of very negative approach to property rights.

4:40

I have the utmost sympathy for the perspective that hon. members are taking, but just because we might agree on some outlines of a problem doesn’t necessarily mean that we agree on what the best solution for that problem might be or that it might be always completely clear what that solution is. That’s because, of course, this is a very complex issue. It is not simple, as my other colleagues have brought forward. I mean, it’s not simple even on a basic level.

You know, the hon. members in the opposition have been discussing rights and what property rights are. What does a right consist of? I mean, what does it mean to have a right to something? Who bestows it, and how is it maintained? Now, when it comes to rights in Alberta, my — I don’t know — great-great-grandparents had settled in the St. Albert area before Alberta became a province in 1905, and as such for many decades they retained the subsurface rights or the mineral rights to their property.

Unfortunately, they sold the land. We never did discover any resources under there, and right now that land is under the Costco when you’re going north out of St. Albert. I’m not sure that anyone will be drilling there any time soon either although, with the kind of advances in technology with directional drilling, perhaps.

Now, since 1905, however, all land in the province, whether that was through the homestead act or whether that was purchased through the CPR or whether that was in purchasing school land set aside, the mineral rights have not gone with the property. We have a situation where we do have competing values and competing interests, where you have on the one side, of course, the individual land or property owner that wants to be able to enjoy unencumbered his or her property, but on the other side you have the collective need for the people of Alberta as a whole to develop their own resources in a way that can, you know, bring our province forward. In fact, a lot of the wonderful things we’ve been able to develop in this province over the decades have been through this wise development of our resources.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, that being said, that development has not always been wise either. I mean, there have been excesses. There have been issues with previous administrations where they maybe didn’t get the balance right. Sometimes, you know, the environmental and even economic outcomes have not been properly balanced. There has been sort of a cumulative impact of that, and I think that speaks to maybe a lessening of trust by some property owners in the existing system. Definitely, I think it’s agreed that we do need to do better for individual landowners but also in the public’s interest for the common good. I know that that is a priority of myself and that of our government.

How do we go about this? Well, I mean, a lot of the problems that we've found ourselves in over the years have been maybe a bit of overexuberance and a lack of planning. Regional planning: it's hard to imagine how you can have an orderly development that's going to benefit everybody, including us as individuals, without any sort of plan.

One issue that I have with Bill 204 is that, you know, as my hon. colleagues alluded to earlier, it could have a real impact on some of the existing planning efforts; for example, the North Saskatchewan regional plan and the lower Athabasca regional plan. These plans themselves are critical as they speak to people's other rights.

Now, of course, you can't look at rights in a vacuum. You can't look at property rights in a vacuum. As some members may be aware, I used to actually have the great, well, fun – that would be a good word for it – of teaching ethics for beginning teachers at the U of A. That is something that we go into in great detail, that no right can be unconditional because unconditional rights negate other rights. Maybe a simple way of putting that is that the right for me to swing my arm kind of ends at where your face is. There are kind of limits to what rights are, so there's always a balance built into them.

Now, that balance under our system needs to be in accordance with – now, it's a vague term, but it seems to be the one in Canadian jurisprudence that's becoming more popular because of being in the Charter – the principles of fundamental justice. From that fundamental justice is a concept of basic fairness. That's how these need to be mediated. If we're looking at things for regional planning or things that are serving the collective interest or other rights that we have as individuals – a right to clean water, a right to a rich environment – these types of things might be impacted if we go too far the other way. That's where it might become so prohibitive for the government to make positive changes, because it's unclear just how much of a compensational right Bill 204 would create. It might even be in ways that are unintended.

I guess going on with another hat, speaking as a former insurance agent, having a situation where you can't actually determine the limits of your liability, that isn't a position that I'd like to see our province in. Of course, you know, one of those limits, as my other colleagues had referred to: we have 86,000 Crown mineral agreements enforced at the present time that might be impacted by this.

Like I said, obviously – and I don't want this to be interpreted in any other way – property rights are critically important. They cannot be set aside. However, there's always going to be a balance. If you have a situation where we leave the government liable for potentially – well, who knows how much? That's something that I think anyone, including members of the opposition, are going to have some concerns about.

Now turning to the issue of adverse possession, I think it was the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake that mentioned that this is something that had come out of... [Mr. Piquette's speaking time expired] Oh, I was just getting warmed up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to take a moment here today just to talk about Bill 204, that my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod has put forward. He's put a lot of thought into this bill and has made some very, very good suggestions that this bill will bring forward to the Legislature. It's been interesting to hear the comments so far, especially from the NDP caucus.

I do want to just read a few quotes here, and this is out of a document produced by Alberta's NDP opposition. It's titled *Your Land, Your Rights*. It says:

Alberta's NDP stands for:

- No expropriation except in cases of urgent public need;
- Due process with respect to rights of landowners;
- No "freezing" of land for future projects.

Those are just a couple things there right off the top.

It says down here in another spot that "the NDP Opposition has a petition to repeal Bills 19, 36, and 50." Now, this Bill 204 relates mostly to Bill 36. At one time the NDP opposition fought to totally repeal Bill 36. Now here we are just talking about some amendments just to help soften the blow that Bill 36 has created on landowners' property rights in Alberta, and all we hear now are things like – well, the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose at the beginning of his speech talked about how it doesn't go far enough. That may be. There's probably a lot more we could do with Bill 36 to improve it. But near the end of his speech he talked about how this is way too much; it's like an omnibus bill. Is it too much or too little? I don't understand.

4:50

When I go further into the NDP Official Opposition land property rights brochure, it talks about that Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act,

- Creates seven regional plans that will trump all other legislation and local municipal by-laws, regulations, or plans, have power to make law on any matter within the authority of the Legislature, and be under the exclusive power of cabinet, which can amend or repeal them at any time.

Now, it sounds like they're somewhat distraught by this idea that cabinet would be making all these decisions. Of course, unless it's your cabinet; then I guess it's all okay. It's all fine. It's all fine.

It goes on to say:

- Allows regional plans to extinguish any type of consent requirement under other authorities.

So here we are. We have cabinet taking away opportunity for other authorities to make decisions.

Here's a quote from the Government House Leader.

This is yet another example of the government's own trend toward centralizing power in the political leadership of the province. Specifically I'm talking about the cabinet. There are so many decisions that have previously been made by other organizations in the province that are now being made at the cabinet level.

This government has been in power for two years now. This was one of their campaign brochures. What have they done to change Bill 36, that was so abhorrent back then? Nothing. And what do we do here? The Wildrose Official Opposition MLA for Livingstone-Macleod brings forward Bill 204, and what happens? "We can't talk about this. This, you know, sounds good, but no, no, we just can't look at this."

I think it was the Member for Stony Plain who talked about it taking away government decisions on stuff. Well, in here they're talking about how the problem is that all the decisions are going to be made in cabinet. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we have a situation here where in opposition it was great to oppose, it was great to make all these claims, but once the power was in their hands, things have changed. That's just not right. This is a well-thought-out bill that should be supported by everyone in this House.

I keep hearing discussion on adverse possession. Obviously, that's something that needed to disappear a long time ago. It has across Canada. Different jurisdictions have gotten rid of it or are

getting rid of this adverse possession law. I think it was one of the NDP MLAs who was talking about: “Well, you know, what do we do? How do we tell what’s happening under adverse possession?” Well, I think there’s a thing called a land title that landowners have. There are also people called surveyors that go out and survey land. I think it would be pretty easy to find out who the legal owner is of any property in Alberta based on those two things: a title to the land – who legally owns it? – and if there’s any discussion as far as what property this is and what property that is, then a surveyor could sort that out.

I don’t understand why the government is balking on this other than the fact that maybe they want to make sure that this power is kept in cabinet while they’re in power. Of course, two years from now when they’re gone, we’ll probably see them fighting: “Oh no. Now we’ve got to get rid of this.” They have the opportunity right now, Mr. Speaker, to do the right thing: support Bill 204; take care of some of the most egregious things in Bill 36; protect landowners’ rights, as they have claimed they wanted to do in the past; and take care of adverse possession at the same time. Pretty simple. It’s not complicated. It’s the right thing. All they have to do is support it here, and it’s done.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m very pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, which was brought forward by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. For 30 years I staunchly defended property rights as a member of the Canadian Real Estate Association. Part of the preamble of the code of ethics of the Canadian Real Estate Association speaks to this. I will be tabling this at first opportunity.

Under all is the land. Upon its wise utilization and widely allocated ownership depend the survival and growth of free institutions and of our civilization. Through the realtor, the land resource of the nation reaches its highest [and best] use and private land ownership its widest distribution. The realtor is instrumental in moulding the form of his or her community and the living and working conditions of its people.

Such functions impose grave social responsibilities which realtors can meet only by diligent preparation, and considering it a civic duty to dedicate themselves to the fulfillment of a realtor’s obligations to society.

Mr. Speaker, I dedicated myself to that code of ethics for 30 years, and that dedication didn’t die when I got elected on May 5, 2015. The rest of my caucus is equally committed to that profound dedication to the protection of property rights, and we’ll continue to do so in legislation that we bring forward. Right now, this piece of legislation doesn’t necessarily afford the protections that the opposition is claiming it will.

We’ve always stood up for landowners in Alberta, and we’ll continue to do so. One of the fundamental premises of the code of ethics, “under all is the land,” is that arbitrating competing interests is something that must be carefully done by any piece of legislation that is brought forward. What most real estate law does, in fact a lot of laws, is arbitrate competing interests. However, the legislation before us today really doesn’t reflect that commitment as we would like to see it done. Bill 204 aims to address important concerns, but in fact as it’s currently drafted, the bill creates more questions than it answers.

Our government has already begun working with stakeholders to make positive changes on these important issues, and we’re working to make Albertans’ lives better by ensuring that the public has access to appropriate protections and avenues for resolution

where issues arise, including private property, to make sure that when we are arbitrating competing interests in land, it is done fairly with adequate attention to all the unintended consequences that a piece of legislation might contemplate.

Now, I’m pleased to speak to Bill 204. I’m proud to be part of a government and a caucus that has always stood up for landowners in Alberta and will continue to do so. For anyone to suggest that this government is not interested in the protection of property rights is disingenuous. I think if you look at the histories of the members of the Legislature on our government’s side of the House, there’s a long list of individuals who have been involved in the real estate industry, insurance industry, and other parts of the business community and in their past professional capacity have stood up and been staunch defenders of property rights. That is reflected in our caucus’ attitude towards legislation that will affect property rights and the arbitration of competing interests in land as we move forward in our mandate.

Now, it’s important to Albertans and important to our government, and that’s why we made a commitment to address these issues. Protecting landowners is important to our government, as it should be.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Oil Security of Supply

505. Mr. Panda moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the federal government to develop strategies to facilitate the building of pipelines within Canada to ensure security of supply to the Canadian market, thereby shifting Canada away from buying oil from countries with oppressive dictatorships.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to introduce Motion 505. Our province produces the best oil and gas in the world, and Albertans are tired of the hypocrisy of accepting millions of barrels of foreign dictators’ oil from overseas while putting up barriers for ethically produced Alberta oil. I moved to Canada and especially to Alberta precisely because of the natural resources to be exploited – the economy, the jobs, the opportunity, the lower taxes, the Alberta advantage, the technological innovation, the fairness for workers, the environmental regulatory oversight – so it’s a little baffling to me that Canadian refineries buy 245,000 barrels of oil per day from outside of Canada from countries where basic personal freedoms and democracy are in doubt or absent. This is absurd.

We sit on over 50 per cent of the free oil in the world, yet we are helping finance some of the most oppressive regimes in the world. Alberta has 1.8 billion barrels of proven conventional reserves remaining, but the oil sands contain 166 billion barrels of proven reserves. We are third in the world for reserves, behind Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. The vast majority of the world’s oil is controlled by state-owned enterprises whereas in Canada it’s free oil. We don’t need any military efforts to extract that oil, Mr. Speaker.

This amazing resource provides wealth not only for Albertans in the energy sector but supports industries both here and across the country. Our wealth also funds the rest of the country because of federal taxes and other programs. The most recent average was \$24

billion per year, that goes from Alberta taxpayers to programs like equalization and employment insurance.

In the Trump era, where everything is America first, where stability is going to be very much in question, our oil reserves will provide stability for Canada's economy. We have the ability to achieve something that is only dreamed of in other countries, energy independence. With United States President Donald Trump calling for American energy independence and with Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall going to Washington, DC, last month calling for North American energy independence and with Conservative leadership candidates calling for country of origin labelling at the gas pump, the obvious choice for Alberta is to start promoting Canadian oil for Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Panda: That's right.

That's why it's so important for TransCanada's Energy East project to be built, that 4,500-kilometre pipeline that will transport about 1.1 million barrels per day safely from Alberta and Saskatchewan to the refineries of eastern Canada and a marine terminal in New Brunswick.

In a survey done for the Montreal Economic Institute by Leger in February 2016, 41 per cent of Quebecers consider pipelines to be the safest means to transport oil, and the overwhelming majority of Quebecers, 59 per cent, prefer that the oil imported from outside Quebec come from western Canada.

Valero's refinery at Lévis, south of Quebec City, has already sworn off foreign imports in favour of domestic, North America only crude sources. New Brunswick is welcoming the Energy East pipeline with open arms. Desperate for jobs, there is much hope that Irving Oil will invest in modifying its existing 300,000-barrels-per-day refinery to process Alberta heavy oil.

Getting our oil to the east coast, of course, means that we have all kinds of options because we are at tidewater. India is closer to Saint John, New Brunswick, than Vancouver, British Columbia. My dream is to see the bitumen from Suncor's Firebag or Fort Hills mine operations exported from Saint John, New Brunswick, and sent to the Reliance group's refinery in Jamnagar, India, connecting projects I helped to build in Canada to projects I helped to build in India, too. Mr. Speaker, that's my dream. The infrastructure is all there for energy independence and exports. We just need a pipeline to connect it all. There is a ridiculous tanker ban on the northwest coast of British Columbia, so we have to go to the east, where tankers from tinpot dictators come in every day, Mr. Speaker.

I'm talking about Saudi Arabia and Algeria. Human Rights Watch has this to say about Saudi Arabia:

Saudi authorities in 2017 continued to arbitrarily arrest, try, and convict peaceful dissidents. Dozens of human rights defenders and activists are serving long prison sentences for criticizing authorities or advocating political and [democratic] rights reforms. Authorities systematically discriminate against women and religious minorities. In 2016, Saudi Arabia carried out 154 executions, 23 for non-violent drug crimes.

Women trying to escape forced marriages have their passports seized by authorities and have religion imposed on them. Women are not allowed to drive. How about we go down to the public square and watch someone have their head cut off for committing a crime? It's brutal. It's cruel. Why are we buying oil from these people? Why are we Canadians continuing to patronize this? In Alberta trade unions play a critical role in the development of our oil, and workers' rights here are protected. In Algeria trade union organizers go to jail.

Finally, Alberta's oil is produced with some of the strictest environmental standards in the world. Trust me, Mr. Speaker. I

have seen some of the things that happen in other countries, personally experienced them. Not only are we a country worth supporting for our legal protection of rights but for our environmental regulatory oversight, which has a very personal meaning for me. Upon coming to Canada, a respiratory ailment of mine healed miraculously. Precisely because of Canada's clean air and water I no longer need medication for my sinuses. Have I made my point clear?

I have worked internationally as an engineer in the petroleum sector for 28 years. I came to Canada to see all of these wonderful things, with natural resource development happening, yet six years from first whisper we still do not have a pipeline from Alberta to Saint John, New Brunswick. Six years, Mr. Speaker. In India I worked on a refinery project, and we built a 1.4-million-barrels-per-day refinery in just three years. That's the single largest refinery in the world. Meanwhile we are sending money to foreign countries to buy foreign oil that supports the most heinous of crimes, that would never be tolerated in Canada. It has to stop.

If passed and acted upon, Motion 505 would send a strong message to the rest of Canada that it is time to start truly moving our country in the direction of energy independence and away from our reliance on foreign oil. I challenge all the members in this House to stand up and support our industry, demand those pipelines be built, and promote Canadian oil for Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

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

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Motion 505, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing forward the motion. You know, it's a good motion. It's redundant, but it's a good motion. It's a good motion because it shows that the opposition has been paying attention. In fact, it reads like a motion that could have been written by a government caucus member, but of course we wouldn't have to because we're already working with the industry to modernize the oil and gas sector and achieve what's desired in this motion. Pipelines to tidewater on both Canadian coasts will factor into the success of the industry, so of course we will use our motions for other purposes.

Of course, it makes no sense that Canada still imports oil from countries that don't share a respect for human rights and the environment. My personal position as well as that of many others for many years has been that we should be pursuing energy security in this country, and this, of course, works to eliminate "buying oil from countries with oppressive dictatorships," to quote from Motion 505. But a strong modern oil and gas industry, including pipelines, with a focus on energy security also, somewhat ironically, will help us focus on getting a greater percentage of renewables on the grid.

Mr. Speaker, I know that motions are written to urge governments to take a course of action, but really this motion reads more like a fan letter. I read it as a show of support, telling this government: keep doing what you're doing. As such, I can support this motion in principle because it's really just a show of support for what the government is already doing.

I know the member isn't used to seeing a government take action because the previous government ran the province like it was on autopilot for 30 years, so maybe he missed the fact that his motion is redundant. But I guess it can be said that I'm glad that it is this government receiving this motion and working towards the objectives of this motion because, rest assured, Mr. Speaker, there's

no chance that the opposition has the understanding to navigate the 21st-century relationship between government and industry, not only in this country but around the world. Maybe that's why they're putting forth this motion, because they know that we have an understanding of how the modern world is looking at the oil and gas industry.

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

The Speaker: Point of order. What's your point of order?

Mr. Rodney: You're allowed to sit, sir, through the chair.

Mr. Coolahan: Can I sit?

Mr. Rodney: Yes.

Mr. Coolahan: I don't take orders from you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Rodney: I am simply asking for a little bit of respect. Our third party is not involved in this conversation whatsoever, but I simply don't understand why it is . . .

An Hon. Member: Citation?

Mr. Rodney: The citation is: language that is likely to offend. By continuously insulting the intelligence of the Official Opposition, that's exactly what that's going to do. I'm happy to hear all the arguments; I think we all are. But – let's face it – a little bit of mutual respect would be much appreciated, especially when it comes to a private member's motion that it looks like he might even be supporting.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand, you know, the rules of the House, where people can stand up on points of order, and I think this one certainly is not. We have the opportunity to criticize and be able to make counterarguments. It's all part of the tradition, and that's all the member has been doing. There has been no – I've been listening very carefully to what he has been saying, as I do for everybody in this House, and I don't see in any shape or form that he was being disrespectful, making his points forcefully. I hope he will have the ability to continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on the point of order, and I support my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed in his assertion about language that's likely to create disorder. While I can appreciate that the Deputy Government House Leader quite rightly pointed out that the member hasn't used language that is unparliamentary, that doesn't mean that he hasn't utilized a course of argument that is likely to create disorder, particularly when he makes statements about what the opposition would and wouldn't do, how redundant it is, how they don't know what's going on.

These sorts of statements are likely to create disorder, just like they have for my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed, and I would encourage you to encourage the member to choose the words he uses much more wisely.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I agree. I don't know that there's actually a point of order in this situation. It's one of opinion. But particularly at this late hour and with the weeks that we have to move forward, try and be more considerate of all of the members of the House and adjust your comments accordingly.

In this instance, to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, I don't believe there was an actual point of order.

Please be cautious. Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue. It's just very difficult to adhere to what they're trying to say here, to be honest. But, anyway, I'm going to continue here.

I'm going to say that it's unfortunate and unhelpful to Albertans and the economy, Mr. Speaker, that all I see from the opposition are positions that impede any success of what the opposition is proposing in its own motion. As I said, I support this motion in principle, but I'd almost like to see this motion come with a caveat or a promise from the opposition, something that says that the opposition will not support ideologies and positions that are detrimental to the success of getting pipelines approved and built.

Mr. Speaker, while this government is implementing a made-in-Alberta climate leadership plan that saw the province get two pipelines approved, the opposition rails against the climate leadership plan, preferring that a climate plan be imposed on us. They're completely out of touch with where the modern industry is heading.

On this side of the House we believe that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand, and that is exactly how we secured two new pipelines, pipelines that support Albertan jobs and investment, pipelines that support a strong, diversified economy. The opposition sees this as an either/or proposition, that you can't be environmentally responsible and have a strong oil and gas sector.

While this government continues to work with the federal government and continues to push for more pipelines such as Energy East so that more Albertan oil can be used across the country and around the world, the opposition would rather let their ideology dominate and continue to push for failure. The opposition needs to explain to Albertans why they think it's a good idea to scrap the climate plan that resulted in the approval of two new pipelines.

Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. Collaborating with the federal government is vital to ensuring that pipelines are built. I don't think the opposition understands that, nor have they demonstrated that they have the diplomatic skills to work collaboratively with the federal government or any world government. They need to stop scaring capital away to score political points at the expense of Alberta families and businesses.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I will close by saying thank you to the member for the motion. I will be supporting the motion because it supports the work that's already being done by this government. But I would urge the opposition that should a yes vote come from this side, they recognize what is working in getting pipelines approved and built, which includes a strong climate plan and a modern, incentivized royalty structure, and that they be strong proponents of Alberta's oil and gas sector and recognize what the leaders of the sector are saying. This is part of what it is going to take for success of any kind on what's being proposed in this motion, support for what is working in getting pipeline approval. They need to be strong advocates, like we are on this side, of this oil and gas sector.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I continue to be amazed. Even on issues that you agree upon, there seem to be reasons to disagree with each other.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my thanks to my hon. colleague from Calgary-Foothills for bringing forth this excellent motion. This motion is about market access and about choice, which is why I'm proud today to rise in support of it.

Mr. Speaker, the motion reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the federal government to develop strategies to facilitate the building of pipelines within Canada to ensure security of supply to the Canadian market, thereby shifting Canada away from buying oil from countries with oppressive dictatorships.

From what I just heard, it sounds like both sides of the House can agree that that's a worthy goal.

5:20

As an Albertan and as a conservative this means two things to me. Firstly, Alberta is still facing unfair trade barriers when it comes to transporting our energy products to other provinces. Secondly, eastern Canadians are being robbed of the option of purchasing ethical, clean, Canadian oil.

Mr. Speaker, Canada ranks third in the world for proven reserves, with more than 95 per cent of these reserves being located in the Alberta oil sands and with Alberta having 39 per cent of Canada's remaining conventional oil reserves, more than any other province. Together, this means that Alberta contains nearly all of Canada's oil sands and much of its conventional oil reserves. Of course, we've been happy to be a leader, a leader in growing our economy and a leader in sharing our resources and our wealth with the entire rest of Canada. While Alberta is blessed in its geology, it's landlocked geography has always been a bigger challenge.

In our current political climate, where parties are so eager to spread misinformation regarding the care with which Alberta's oil and gas resources are developed, market access is Alberta's pre-eminent challenge. Alberta needs Energy East, and Canada needs Energy East, not only for the construction jobs and the operation jobs but for access to the resource and the self-sustainability. Perhaps more significantly, by participating in Confederation, under the Constitution Act Alberta is entitled to Energy East. Confederation was intended to be a trade partnership, but today many members of Confederation act to prevent the free movement of our energy products.

Mr. Speaker, right now we can see examples of this with the B.C. NDP and with Alberta NDP appointee Tzepporah Berman. The NDP across Canada and in Alberta, truthfully, and even at the municipal level with mayors like Denis Coderre from Montreal are examples of blocking the free movement of our energy products. Their clear portfolio desire to stop the transportation of our energy products is in clear violation of the spirit of Confederation – 150 years – and section 121 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

Intercolonial free trade was an important motivation for Confederation, yet many players within our Confederation have ignored their obligation to section 121 of the Constitution Act, 1867. Mr. Speaker, section 121 is clear in its intent to provide for the elimination of interprovincial trade barriers, stating: "All Articles of the Growth, Produce, or Manufacture of any one of the Provinces shall, from and after the Union, be admitted free into each of the other Provinces."

It is so interesting to me that political operatives across Canada would be so unkind to their neighbours in Alberta and our communities and people when we're a neighbour that shares our prosperity so willingly, a neighbour that keeps the coffers of other

provinces full through equalization and other transfers. It is interesting because in blocking or protesting oil from Alberta, we're de facto welcoming oil from other countries that do not share their wealth with Canada or our expectations on how ethically our products are developed.

Mr. Speaker, one compliment that I will give to the last government is that it seemed like in almost every throne speech they highlighted the fact that interprovincial trade barriers had to come down and had to be improved upon.

When I talk to Albertans, the ones that I smile about maybe the most are the ones that come up to me and show a map of the United States and all of the miles and miles of pipelines that have been put in to make that country self-sustaining in oil and a lead producer in LNG. At the same time Canadian Confederation is not working like it could and should and was promised in 1867.

Many of the countries that provide oil to Canadian refineries have environmental standards as high as Alberta, and they care deeply for human rights. Mr. Speaker, Norway, for example, contributed 41 MBD to Canada in 2016, and our southern neighbours contributed 411 MBD. This trade is important for controlling costs domestically and ensuring that Canadian consumers and producers are getting the fairest prices.

What is great about this motion is that it does not advocate for trade blocks. No. Where trade makes sense it should occur. Alberta does not need a protectionist national energy program that tries to manage supply, harming Canadians in the process with prices that are higher than the world price. Healthy and free international trade will keep that in check. Furthermore, it should never be the government's place to tell Canadian refineries where they must import their oil from. They should be able to consider all their options.

However, Mr. Speaker, there is again huge hypocrisy at play. Domestically we have mayors like Denis Coderre and other NDP-financed ecoradicals like Tzepporah Berman and Karen Mahon that try to stop the trade of Alberta oil through the building of these needed new pipelines, appointed by our very own Alberta Premier. In working to stop this trade, these so-called advocates are forcing good Canadian refineries to import their raw product from jurisdictions with questionable ethical records. How does this make any sense?

In Alberta we respect workers' rights, we pay high wages, we impose world-class standards, we treat men and women equally in the workforce, and the list goes on. I am not sure that the same can be said for many of the countries we import oil from like Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Nigeria, Angola, or Iraq. I believe that Canadian refineries should be given a fair choice between the oil from Alberta and Saskatchewan and the oil from dictatorships, but without pipelines connecting our country, that choice of supplier is not a meaningful choice. I trust that if refineries in eastern Canada had access to Canadian raw crude, they would choose to use it. If they didn't, well, the country would still be better off because at least Alberta oil would have access to tidewater.

Mr. Speaker, this is why I'm supporting this motion before the House today and why I'm imploring all of my colleagues to do the same, especially critical at a time when we saw last week, unfortunately, another 300 Calgarians receive a pink slip from ConocoPhillips.

You know, I talked to an investment adviser in Medicine Hat this weekend who said to me: "If you look at the multiples of Canadian oil and gas companies compared to the American ones, they're way lower. We're in huge trouble. The confidence is not there."

Mr. Speaker, this is the time – this is the time – that we have to rely on our federal government and our national partners to once

again make the Alberta oil and gas industry strong and restore the Alberta advantage. That is why I'm supporting this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and speak to Motion 505, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing this motion to the House. I will start off by saying that I support the principle of his motion. The fact that Canada still imports oil from countries that don't share a respect for human rights and the environment does not make sense. I agree with him on that point. It also makes no sense that as Canadians we can't sell our oil to our eastern neighbours.

That is why this government has already engaged and continues to work with the federal government to develop strategies to ensure that we get more pipelines out of Alberta, either east or west or any other direction where we can get it to a market. That is why we continue pushing for more pipelines such as Energy East, so that more Albertan oil can be used across the country and around the world. Collaborating with the federal government is vital to ensuring that pipelines are built in Alberta. Let me say that again: collaborating with other provinces. Where the opposition has been asking us to pick fights with other provinces or mayors, their approach would only serve to galvanize opposition to our pipelines and to our interests in this province. I don't subscribe to that strategy, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

On this side of the House we also believe that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand, and that is exactly how we secured two new pipelines, pipelines that support Albertan jobs and investment, pipelines that support a strong, diversified economy, pipelines that – our government is focused and remains committed to making life better for Albertans with new pipelines, good jobs, and a better return on every barrel of oil so this government can continue making investments in things that Albertans care about, things such as strengthening our health care system and investing in Alberta's infrastructure deficit, that has for too long gone unaddressed, and investing in its central public services, that were ignored by the previous government for too long.

The approval of both pipelines simply would not have happened without the made-in-Alberta plan to address climate change. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks – he's heckling me right now – is always very happy about our two pipelines that we got approved, due to our climate leadership, I may add. Our climate leadership plan and new royalty framework both support and incentivize innovation, technical improvements, and emissions reductions in the oil sector and throughout our whole economy.

So while I support the Member for Calgary-Foothills' motion, I do want the opposition to rethink their position on our climate leadership plan. I am proud of our government's policies, policies that have led to strong economic growth in this province. Now, I know the opposition would disagree with me on this point, believing in the disproven theories of austerity, believing in its climate change denying colleagues, and believing that all that is orange is wrong. Ideological indeed, Mr. Speaker.

But the facts show otherwise. Not only are we leading the country in growth, but housing starts are up; that's jobs. Exports are up; that's jobs for Albertans. Manufacturing is up, and drilling activity in this province is up, and that's jobs for Albertans. Each one of those stats is jobs. While the opposition debates climate change, we are focused on jobs. While the member focuses his time on what combination of parties or parties' names will best hide their out-of-

touch, '50s ideals in a quest for power, we have been focusing on the things that make life better for everyday Albertans, those hard-working Albertans on the shop floor, in our hospitals, or out working on our highways or in any other part of the economy, Mr. Speaker, making life better for Albertans.

It has been made clear by stakeholders that the opposition's reckless and extreme approach is opposed by the leaders of the oil and gas industry because it would kill new pipeline . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you are going to stay on the subject matter that we're dealing with?

Mr. Malkinson: Of course, Mr. Speaker. I would be happy to talk about the pipelines and the fact that we need to be able to get our products to market. That is the substance of the motion.

As a part of that, I just was mentioning how it was ironic that what the member opposite was saying is that we need to support pipelines to sell our oil to the rest of Canada. His colleagues and he himself are trying to scare capital away. In fact, they always are talking down the recent investment in the oil industry, in CNRL, in Cenovus. That required a big inflow of capital and finance, billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, in investments. That's jobs here. We should cheer successful Canadian businesses. In fact, those companies are headquartered in Calgary. My riding is in the shadow of those towers that bear the names of those companies. So I cheer that investment, that investment in Canada, and I hope the opposition does as well.

Let me reiterate that scrapping our climate change plan means scrapping the pipelines that the motion speaks to, Mr. Speaker, and I don't agree with that. So as I support this motion, I want to assure the opposition that it is not too late for them to change their minds and support our made-in-Alberta plan to reduce carbon pollution while creating jobs and diversifying our economy and our markets. It's not too late for their Energy critic, Cypress-Medicine Hat, to stop denying climate change and support our pipelines.

The fact is that new pipelines mean a brighter future for our oil and gas industry, with jobs and opportunities for thousands of working families and billions in new investments. [interjections]

The Speaker: Calm it down, folks.

Mr. Malkinson: Our government is committed to improving this province's pipeline capacity because, as the Member for Calgary-Foothills' motion stated, it will "ensure security of supply to the Canadian [energy] market, thereby shifting Canada away from buying oil from [other countries or] countries with oppressive dictatorships."

We all agree that Alberta's oil and gas are the best in the world. We also know that we need to reach more markets beyond Canada and the United States in order to get the best price for our resources. That is why our government continues to push for more pipelines such as Energy East. More oil capacity means that we can sell more of our product to markets right across the country and around the world.

We know that there is much work to do, and we will keep fighting until we get shovels in the ground and oil flowing, employing Albertans around Alberta and getting our men and women to work. We will achieve this because we understand that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand. Again I say to the opposition that this government's made-in-Alberta plan to address climate change secured two new pipelines, Mr. Speaker.

While I support this motion, I want to assure the opposition that it's not too late to change their minds. It's not too late to admit that their old way of doing things wasn't working and that our way of doing things was getting results. I hope the hon. members agree,

and I hope that the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills agrees with me as well.

I'll be voting in support of this motion. Mr. Speaker, I'll leave my comments there. Thank you.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his remarks. I always enjoy the back and forth in this House, and he makes for a very entertaining debate opponent. But I want to really thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing this excellent motion forward in support of Canadian and Albertan clean, ethical oil. This is a common-sense motion that I'm glad to see, at least so far, all members of this Assembly supporting, at least in theory.

It is completely impractical and unreasonable that Canada is still importing large quantities of oil from regimes that can't hold a light to Alberta's human rights record and our environmental record. We are importing oil from places like Venezuela, Nigeria, and much of the Middle East, where human rights are an afterthought, in fact, not just an afterthought but where purchasing oil from these regimes actively props up those states and keeps in place regimes that are both against Canada's commitment to human rights but also our national security interests. Many of the regimes that we are supporting here with oil revenues are either actively hostile to Canadian interests or are allied with interests that are opposed to Canada.

We've got a significant political class, largely to the east and some to the west of Alberta, who would rather see Canada importing oil and other petroleum products from regimes that we should not want to be close to just because of the symbolism of Alberta's oil sands to them. It is cutting off their nose to spite their face.

I am unapologetically proud of Alberta oil. It is ethical. I don't think anyone could say anything negative about the human rights records of Alberta or Canada. [interjections] Somehow they must find some gross human rights violations currently taking place in Alberta. I look forward to their explanation on it.

Alberta oil is clean. It is environmentally responsible. Our carbon emissions per barrel are very reasonable and cleaner in many cases than other North American oil like California heavy. Our emissions are reasonable. It is produced with world-class standards.

5:40

I remember when I travelled along with my Wildrose colleagues to Fort McMurray last summer and saw recovered oil sands sites. They had wood buffalo roaming there, and it was absolutely beautiful. You could hear what sounded like a shotgun going off regularly, about every minute or so, and I asked what it was. It's to keep ducks out of the former tailings ponds. The cost for this is absolutely incredible. Now, if a single duck were to land in the tailings ponds, we'd probably see it on the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, with folks in Toronto declaring Alberta oil to be horrible. You can have birds running into windmills, and you'll never hear about it, period, so we are held to a particularly high standard. It is an unfair standard, but it is a standard nonetheless that our industry has chosen to meet themselves, without the lecturing hand of government. They've decided to do it themselves.

I am proud of Alberta oil, and I'm not an apologist for it. Now, while I'm pleased to see that the government, the NDP, has undergone a kind of conversion on the road to Damascus with their view of Alberta's oil, many members on the government side were well known for protesting against Alberta oil. They called it dirty oil. People who are ministers now stood on the steps of the Legislature just a few years ago, not long ago at all, and chanted: "No new approvals. No new approvals." It was just a few years ago,

and now they are senior cabinet ministers. I genuinely believe that they want pipelines and that they want to see our industry succeed, but there has been a conversion of sorts on the road to Damascus, and I am so glad that they have seen the light of Alberta oil.

My concern, though, is that they are apologists for it. They are only in support of Alberta oil if it's used as an excuse to strangle Albertans with a massive, new, \$5 billion carbon tax, a carbon tax that they are accepting from Ottawa, that they are refusing to fight Justin Trudeau on. Now, they say that this is a made-in-Alberta plan; it is not. It is accepting the diktats of Ottawa when Ottawa declares that you must have a carbon tax, but Ottawa has no constitutional grounds to impose one on a province-by-province level. They are accepting it as a convenient excuse – a convenient excuse – for imposing it here and trying to pass the blame to somebody else. It is an apologetic support of Alberta oil. It is only supporting Alberta oil if – with a big asterisk there – Alberta oil companies and Alberta taxpayers and consumers are paying a massive carbon tax. My support for Alberta oil is not conditional on a carbon tax, Mr. Speaker.

Now, if they were truly in support of Alberta oil, they could prove it by doing something really simple right now. The Premier or the Energy minister could stand up and announce that effective immediately they are firing Tzeporah Berman. They could prove that they truly support Alberta oil by ceasing to fund and pay the salaries of people who are campaigning against Alberta oil. The NDP is taking taxpayers' dollars to support anti-oil activists who are fighting right now in the B.C. election, which will be held tomorrow.

Now, I could tell you that the B.C. NDP is no friend of Alberta oil. The B.C. NDP is a radical, radical branch, a Leap Manifesto branch, of the NDP that is attempting to shut down Alberta's access to tidewater by stopping . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would remind you of the same that I reminded another member of earlier: please stay to the subject matter that you've got.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. I'm speaking about pipelines, Mr. Speaker.

The B.C. NDP is opposing pipelines to tidewater, and the NDP in Alberta is taking taxpayers' money to fund people who are campaigning for the B.C. NDP. If they truly supported Alberta oil, they would stand up right now and announce that they will not put people on the payroll with Alberta tax dollars who are campaigning against pipelines to Alberta. They have implicitly accepted Ottawa's control to impose a carbon tax on Alberta. This side of the House – I think I can speak for the Official Opposition, and I'd presume to speak for the third party, too – categorically rejects that anyone named Trudeau can tell Alberta's oil industry what it can do.

We make no apologies for it, and I'm proud of the Member for Calgary-Foothills for putting forward this motion, which will put front and centre the fact that this Assembly will support Alberta's oil without apology, without conditions as they would impose.

Let's all stand up on the record. Let's stand up for Alberta. Let's stand up for clean oil, for ethical oil, and for Canadian oil. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I rise to request unanimous consent to go to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I admit that after hearing the Member for Strathmore-Brooks today, I'd think he comes from B.C. but that yesterday he came from Saskatchewan. I'd like to remind him that we're debating the motion having to do with pipelines in Alberta and not anything from B.C. or from any other province.

I wanted to thank the member for inviting us once again to talk about pipelines and the work that our government has done to get the federal government to approve the pipelines. The more that we talk about it, maybe the opposition will believe it.

One of the wishes I really have in this House is that I wish the opposition would be consistent. Clean, ethical oil is defined as coming from countries that uphold not only human rights but that have high environmental standards. I'm thinking that if the opposition really believes it about clean, ethical oil, they would indeed support our government's climate change plan and that they would support all the efforts that our government has put in place to really ensure that the environmental standards are obeyed. I think that as a government we've been very vigilant to ensure that there are no pipeline leaks and so on.

I really hope that the opposition would consistently believe in what they're saying through this motion. I want to remind the opposition, as my other colleagues have done, that it is the Premier, through her work with the federal government and the ministers, who has ensured approval for the pipelines.

I'm very proud, Mr. Speaker, that indeed one of those pipelines will be starting from my constituency and that the pipelines are going to provide employment not only to my constituency but also to my friends in this House who come from constituencies nearby. In my riding we have the makers, the manufacturers, of the pipeline components. We have a steelmaker that makes the rebar. So the pipeline is something that's very important to me and to my colleagues.

There are also two refineries in the area. Refining the oil in our province is important for well-paying, long-lasting employment and for creating a long-lasting economy for our province. I would like to remind everyone that it is our government who has provided the petrochemical diversification program so that the oil and gas can be further refined and we can further upgrade the crude in the riding. It is because our government is focused and remains committed to making life better for Albertans, with new pipelines, good jobs, and a better return on every barrel of oil.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss one aspect of the motion that I'm not sure the mover has really thought about, and I'm kind of intrigued by what he thinks about it. I did some research on the words "oppressive" and "dictatorship." The word "oppressive" means burdensome, unjustly harsh, or tyrannical. A dictator is defined as a person exercising absolute power, especially a ruler who has absolute, unrestricted control in a government without hereditary succession.

5:50

I'm intrigued about how the MLA for Calgary-Foothills would define these words. For example, would he define it as a country that holds democratic elections but disenfranchises some from voting or a country where the military has power through a coup and keeps postponing elections or a country that is moving towards democracy but still hasn't appointed legislators or a country where the elections are not held in a fair or open manner? I've had that experience as an elections observer. Or is it like what happened yesterday, a country that holds fair and open elections but is dissed

by its friends in the Rebel media because the person who was elected was not xenophobic and anti-EU?

Really, I have to say that when I heard the words "oppressive dictatorships," I was really upset that your friends in the Rebel media would dis a fairly elected government. I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, where the mover of the motion is on what is an oppressive dictatorship when his friends were pushing for a xenophobic government. I'm also wondering what the mover of the motion thinks about an elected Legislature where legislators are disqualified for made-up reasons or where legislators are put in jail on trumped-up charges or where they lose the popular vote but are still elected.

Mr. Speaker, while I support the motion to urge the federal government to develop strategies to facilitate the building of pipelines, I do have some problems with the second part of the motion because I am not persuaded that the members opposite can define accurately who they mean by an oppressive dictator. I'm also concerned that the people who are maybe the most affected by the member's definition are the most destitute in Africa and the Middle East.

So, Mr. Speaker, while I will be voting for the motion, I would really ask the members of the opposition to pay particular attention to the definition of ethical oil and to support the government around our climate change plan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other individuals who would like to speak to the motion?

I would call upon the Member for Calgary-Foothills to close debate.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my hon. colleagues for their remarks pertaining to motion 505. I have some curious facts here to add to the debate. Whether we are talking about Canadian oil for Canadians or North American energy independence, when it comes to production, in 2016 the United States produced 9 million barrels per day whereas Canada produced half of that, 4 and a half million barrels per day. Whereas Canada has 171 billion barrels of proven reserves, the United States only has 35 billion barrels. What that means is that although our resource is five times bigger than the U.S., the U.S. produces double what we produce here.

Also, there are some interesting facts about the economics of importing foreign oil. We spend every year \$13 billion in foreign exchange paying for imports from other countries. We import about 759,000 barrels per day, and we spend \$13 billion in foreign exchange, which works out to be about \$35 million per day. On the other hand, we are losing \$50 million per day, as per the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, due to the lack of marketing infrastructure in Canada.

Alberta has been selling at a discount to the only customer we have, the south of the border, who is our strongest competitor now. Many believe President Trump will take advantage of the opposition to pipelines within Canada, whether it is Tzeporah Berman or whoever it is, because Mr. Trump has all the intelligence at his disposal. He can figure it out. Some of the NDP colleagues here in the past have opposed pipelines for whatever reason. Suddenly they've taken a 180-degree turn, and now they say that they're pro development. I respect that if they've had a change of heart. But today I asked the Premier at least to confirm that she agrees that Alberta oil is ethical compared to other sources of crude. She didn't give me any answer on that.

Now, every day they take credit for those two pipelines, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk a little bit about that. Out of those two

pipelines, the one, line 9, is a replacement pipeline, which is a repair to line 9, which they make out to be a big deal as a new pipeline, which is okay. But then the other pipeline, which is going west, is Trans Mountain. I'm really worried that if tomorrow, with the help of Ms Berman and other people appointed by NDP here, they succeed in convincing British Columbians to vote for the NDP there, that is saying that they won't allow that Trans Mountain pipeline. So the two pipelines which they're talking about will become suddenly one. I'm really concerned about that. I'm really, really concerned about that. That's why we asked them to fire Ms Berman. But they refused to do that, and she continues to be on the oil sands advisory group, paid by the government.

In the end, anyway, Mr. Speaker, if they change their heart, if they support this motion, I thank them from the bottom of my heart. I want them to be consistent. When they ask us to be consistent, I want them to be consistent. When they say that they support pipelines but when government-paid employees are protesting pipelines and they encourage them to do that, then they can't have it both ways.

In any case, Canada needs to be strong and self-sufficient. By building the Energy East pipeline, we'll get our market access, and we'll lessen our dependence on exports to American markets.

I thank all of the members for agreeing to support this motion. This is a common-sense motion. When it is passed today and if it is acted upon in the future, this would strengthen Alberta's energy industry and create jobs across the country, and we'll be building more pipelines in every single direction across Canada. That way, we'll lessen our dependence on foreign oil. Also, we'll lessen our dependence on exports to the United States. That way, we'll move our country away from foreign oil and move close to energy independence. This is all about economic prosperity, Canadian oil for Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:59 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gill	Panda
Babcock	Hinkley	Piquette
Barnes	Hoffman	Pitt
Bilous	Horne	Renaud
Carlier	Jansen	Rodney
Carson	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schneider
Cooper	Loewen	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Cyr	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Dach	McKitrick	Smith
Dang	McPherson	Turner
Drever	Miller	van Dijken
Feehan	Miranda	Woollard
Fildebrandt	Nielsen	Yao
Ganley		

Totals: For – 49 Against – 0

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Government Motion 18 we stand adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30, hon. members. It is the MLA for a Day. I hope as many of you can be there as possible.

Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:03 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 18]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 9, 2017

Day 30

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 9, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let each of us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us embrace diversity, encourage opinions, and welcome our differences. When we open our minds, solutions often follow. Let us think critically, have patience, and find renewed understanding, not for our individual selves but for the people we serve.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Elan Lynes, the cofounder of Fund It Forward among the many things that she does – she was also recently my real estate agent – and Le-Ann Ewaskiw, co-ordinator of the youth volunteer program for Strathcona information and volunteer centre; and Cody Hanson and Kalea Colman from Youth Rock. I will speak to the great work that they're doing later in my member's statement. I invite them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a fantastic constituent from the riding of Edmonton-Decore, Jim Ragsdale. Jim is a dedicated constituent in the riding of Edmonton-Decore. He's part of the Evansdale Community League, area 17, which Evansdale is a part of, and a huge supporter of the VantagePoint church. He also volunteers in my constituency office. I would now ask Jim to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Volunteerism in Strathcona-Sherwood Park

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize the spirit of co-operation and collaboration that exists amongst volunteers within my constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. My guests here today include representatives from the information and volunteer centre. The IVC promotes volunteerism and supports nonprofits and community organizations. They connect people to the most accurate and relevant community information.

One of the organizations they support is Fund It Forward, which is a local crowdfunding movement. Fund It Forward is made up of local businesspeople and residents that come together quarterly with a commitment to support local nonprofit organizations. The projects they fund impact directly the health and well-being of the county and residents.

Most recently the members voted to provide funding to Youth Rock to put on a number of events this month to engage youth. At Youth Rock events youth lead, plan, and execute events that they are interested in while adults from the community act as mentors and advise youth as needed. Last week they held Locked In the Library and Big Brother, Sherwood Park edition, for senior high students. The junior high students get their chance on Friday. This fun continues later on this month with Pressure Cooker, Dive In Movie, and Smashcona, and the month wraps up with May Music Fest.

I'm proud that our government is able to provide grant funding for initiatives like this, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Emergency Medical Dispatch Services

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, separation of fire and EMS dispatch in southern Alberta is back in the news today. People are dying, lives are at risk, and quality of patient care has degraded because of the current broken system. There are major life-threatening delays, gaps in coverage, and local familiarity and co-ordinated responses are missing when EMS dispatch is moved to another centre. Pages of examples have been delivered to the minister's office. Just to name a few: number 1, a person died after suffering a heart attack and receiving no advanced medical help on scene for 50 minutes due to a poorly co-ordinated EMS call with an air ambulance response.

Number 2, a baby with breathing problems could have died due to a 64-minute delay in EMS sending the call to dispatch fire when an ambulance was unavailable and fire was only 6 and a half kilometres from the scene.

Number 3, a person having an asthma attack did not receive a timely emergency response because it took AHS EMS 34 minutes to forward the call to get fire first on scene because someone left the room and dropped the call.

Number 4, persons involved in a motor vehicle accident did not receive a timely response due to an inaccurate dispatch. Emergency responses were sent to the wrong location in Banff townsites rather than Field, B.C., due to a major EMS dispatch problem.

Number 5, a person suffering a cardiac arrest did not receive advanced life care for 40 minutes because EMS dispatch would not allow the closest ambulance to attend the scene and was unfamiliar with the distances.

Mr. Speaker, we need a single-point 911 call answer, with fire and EMS dispatch together, to solve the multiple problems causing delays and the unacceptable consequences of centralizing, which are experienced by all 26 municipalities served by the Foothills 911. This is something we can fix and has been done for Calgary, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Fort McMurray. We are requesting the immediate return of EMS dispatch to Foothills regional 911 commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Seniors' Supports

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is aging. Today's boomers, only now beginning to access seniors' care, are 53 to 71, with healthier, active lifestyles. By 2031 there will be more than 900,000 Alberta seniors, roughly double current numbers. Key priorities in the future of seniors' care: enabling seniors to remain in their homes, better connecting seniors with services, and delivering services in the community. Choice and innovation in community design, transportation, and housing are required.

The future of seniors' care is important while sustainability and affordability are challenges we must face head-on. But, first, we must take care of today's seniors by working collaboratively with private, nonprofit, and faith-based sectors. In 2015 we had ASLI. Today we are told that the scope and timeline for the next capital grant program has not been determined and that more announcements will follow. We all know that now is the time to partner, plan, and build.

We hear of challenges in providing seniors' care due to the minimum wage increases and the burden of the carbon tax in an environment where exemptions and rebates are either nonexistent or misdirected. In my Motion 509, to be tabled this session, I will ask you to approve a review of the financial impact of the carbon levy on organizations providing front-line care to seniors. We must collectively understand the unintended consequences of legislation on this all-important and growing demographic, the people who literally built this province.

We have called on government to exempt the seniors' housing and continuing care industry from the carbon levy to allow them to continue a high level of care and services for their residents and clients without the burden of crippling cost pressures or the negative consequences of fee increases.

Mr. Speaker, let's listen and work together as legislators with caring and compassionate housing organizations, the private sector, and industry associations to ensure sustainability, innovation, and focused and leveraged investment in the care of those who deserve our respect, compassion, and support to live not only in comfort, safety, and dignity but to thrive as valued and contributing members of society.

Thank you.

Westray Mine Explosion 25th Anniversary

Loyola: Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago today, early in the morning of May 9, 1992, a blast so strong that it shook houses more than a kilometre away lit up the skies of the small town of Plymouth in Nova Scotia. This was the Westray mine explosion. It ended the lives of 26 miners and started both a criminal investigation and a public inquiry into the safety conditions of the mine that led to this disaster.

Nova Scotia Supreme Court Justice K.P. Richard said in his report that the Westray disaster was "a story of incompetence, of mismanagement, of bureaucratic bungling, of deceit, of ruthlessness, of cover-up, of apathy, of expediency, and of cynical indifference." He placed the cause of the disaster and the loss of life squarely on the shoulders of management, who repeatedly violated safety procedures, and on government for failing to enforce their own regulations.

In 1997, after the release of his report, the government of Nova Scotia apologized to the miners' families, finally admitting that the entire system failed the workers of Westray.

Despite wide-ranging evidence of safety violations and wilful refusal by management to act, no one was ever held criminally responsible for the deaths of these 26 men. It is hard to think of any other circumstance where 26 people could be killed and everyone who was responsible could walk away free.

I'm proud to be part of our government today for signing an MOU which will define protocols between occupational health and safety officers and police officers when investigating serious workplace incidents to help determine if criminal charges are warranted. On this anniversary of a deadly disaster, where 26 men died and where dozens of family members' lives were changed forever, we should all do everything we can to make sure that it never happens again.

1:40

Mariano Ezeta

Connolly: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of a young Albertan who grew up in my constituency of Calgary-Hawkwood and tragically passed away early last week. Mariano Ezeta was born on June 7, 1993, and lost his battle with leukemia on April 30, 2017. He grew up in the community of Arbour Lake and later attended the University of Calgary, where he was a member of the U of C Dinos track and field team in 2012-2013 and 2014-2015. He won the Canada West men's track and field championship with the Dinos in 2015 along with other medals for the relay and the 300-metre sprint. After the 2015 season he was diagnosed with leukemia and was forced to miss the next two seasons.

Mr. Speaker, leukemia is a devastating disease that can attack people at any age. It occurs when the bone marrow begins to create abnormal white blood cells. Usually white blood cells help your body to fight infection, but leukemia cells grow faster than normal cells and crowd out the other blood cells in the body.

Experts don't know what causes leukemia, but the toll of the disease is high. It is estimated that in 2017 alone close to 3,000 Canadians will die from the disease. Research into the causes and effects of leukemia are ongoing, and treatments are helping hundreds of Albertans to fight the disease. Sadly, for Mariano Ezeta the treatments did not work.

This gifted athlete is survived by his parents, Guillermo and Marcela Ezeta, and his sister, Alex Ezeta. His teammates with the U of C Dinos remember him for his strength and his team spirit. The University of Calgary lowered its flags to mark his passing and is establishing a track and field scholarship in his name.

I encourage all members to visit the Mariano Ezeta track and field scholarship page at netcommunity.ucalgary.ca/marianoezeta and join me in contributing toward this worthy cause in memory of a strong Calgary athlete.

Thank you.

Arbor Day and Forest Week

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, Arbor Day has come and gone, and with that, we begin the celebration of Forest Week here in Alberta. To get at the roots of these events, you need to go back to Nebraska, where then secretary of the territory of Nebraska, a journalist and nature lover, J. Sterling Morton, advocated the planting of trees whenever he could. On January 4, 1872, Morton first proposed a tree-planting holiday, to be called Arbor Day, at the meeting of the state board of agriculture. The date was set for April 10, 1872. Prizes were offered to counties and individuals for properly planting the largest number of trees on that day. It was estimated that more than 1 million trees were planted in Nebraska on the first Arbor Day.

Closer to home Alberta's Forest Week is celebrated each year during the first full week of May. While not as long a tradition here as in Nebraska, the tradition of Alberta Forest Week and Arbor Day celebrations do date back to 1884. In fact, the lodgepole pine, or *Pinus contorta*, is Alberta's provincial tree. Conservation and stewardship as well as the environmental benefits of trees and our forests are shared with our young generation. Close to 70,000 tree seedlings are distributed by Agriculture and Forestry to grade 1 students throughout the province during Forest Week.

Forest companies also play their part throughout the year as members planted over 65 million seedlings in 2015, more than two trees for every one harvested. This is a renewable industry that employs over 15,000 people and nearly 30,000 others in direct spinoff activities. Alberta has some of the highest forest management standards in the world. Companies are required to not

only regenerate harvested areas and access roads but to also take into consideration wildlife habitat, water quality, and recreational opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this time to acknowledge the contributions to both Alberta school kids and industry to ensure that we have a healthy and long-lasting forest for generations to come.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four sets of documents to table today. One is from Market Surveillance Administrator, a notice to participants. "The MSA has received complaints about the Balancing Pool's conduct regarding ... breaches of the Electric Utilities Act" with regard to power purchase arrangement terminations. They're investigating the conduct of the Balancing Pool.

I have another document from the Balancing Pool acknowledging that they have received a notice of an investigation from the MSA pursuant to complaints about the Balancing Pool's conduct regarding breaches of the Electric Utilities Act in relation to power purchase agreements and terminations.

I'm also tabling a letter from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta. It's investigation file 004383. The commissioner is investigating the issue regarding the government asking the Balancing Pool to delete e-mails. It's regarding PPAs again, the gift that keeps giving here.

Also, an article from jwnenergy.com entitled Canada One of the Most Geopolitically Unstable Places for Oil and Gas. "Arguably the highest-cost basin in the world and it's not because of inefficient operators ... [but because of] the high tax rates and the uncertainty."

Thank you.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on day 16 of Public Affairs Bureau tablings. I would like to table a letter I wrote to the hon. Government House Leader on the 9th of March, 2017, quoting him, where he refers to the Public Affairs Bureau as a "bloated PR bureaucracy [that should] be downsized in order to save the taxpayers money."

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of an article from CBC's website today entitled 'God Only Knows': Serenity's Mother Concerned about Children Living in Former Foster Home.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the requisite number of copies of a story found through the 630 CHED website where the title of the story is Wildrose Party AHS Employee Satisfaction Numbers Found to Be Misleading. That's not my word; that's the word of the media.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Serenity's Former Guardians

Mr. Jean: The NDP government is allowing what happened to Serenity to happen again. The same guardians who allowed Serenity to be physically and sexually abused and starve under their watch continue to have children in their care. The ministry is trying to claim it's nuanced because it's an informal living arrangement, but that's simply not good enough. Why isn't the Premier directing her government to take every single necessary step to ensure that these guardians who abused Serenity can't have children in their care ever again?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that our hearts go out to the mother of Serenity, who is still dealing with this horrible tragedy, and our hearts also go out, of course, to all Albertans who are concerned for vulnerable children across this province.

Let me begin by saying that it is the policy of this government, that we are following, that we never place children in care in a setting where there is a criminal investigation involved. However, we do not take the biological children away from families where there is a criminal investigation involved. Instead, what we do is we monitor the matter very, very closely. That's what's happening in the case here.

Mr. Jean: Well, here's what Serenity's caseworker said about her guardians.

The child is being neglected by the guardian, the child has been or there is substantial risk the child will be physically injured or sexually abused by the guardian of the child and the guardian of the child is unable or unwilling to protect the child from physical injury or sexual abuse.

Your government says that removing children from the home is the last resort. If that doesn't sound like a last resort, Premier, what does?

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to caution the entire House. This is a very sensitive matter. As we move into this topic, I would hope that we all respect that.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, after the tragedy of Serenity's death, ministry officials immediately removed children under the government's care from that particular setting. They then engaged in a process of monitoring the safety and the quality of life of the biological children in that family very, very closely. The matter actually went before the courts. Indeed, in that case the judge indicated that what should happen is that monitoring should continue. So that is what is happening, and we are taking every care to ensure the safety of the children in the house in which they live.

Mr. Jean: Sounds like a lot of excuses, Mr. Speaker.

It is their job to protect these children. If it wasn't for Serenity's mother's bravery in continuing to bring these horrific conditions to light, we would know nothing. It took a CBC reporter to uncover it. From what I see, this government is sitting on its hands while children are in serious danger in Alberta. This scenario isn't something from the past. These children right now are living in these conditions. We keep asking for action and answers. What is the Premier doing to protect the other children in this house and prevent another possible murder?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I would caution the member opposite on using the kind of inflammatory characterizations that have not been proven in any setting, and I would suggest that that is deeply irresponsible to the families, the children, and the community in which this tragedy occurred. What I will say is that the safety of the children who are biologically related to the guardians in question is being monitored on a regular basis. We are absolutely concerned about ensuring their continued safety, and we will continue to do that work.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: This government is totally irresponsible, Mr. Speaker. Two years after her death the RCMP continues to investigate the probable murder of Serenity in the home of her caregivers. And what do they say? Excuses. There are six children still in that home under the guardianship of Serenity's former caregivers. Two of those six children have reportedly not been seen in school since October. That's over six months and no school. While we've been asking for answers on the death of Serenity, we don't know if the other six children in that home are even safe today. Has the minister even bothered to pick up the phone and ask someone to go and check on the welfare of those children?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety of the children of this province is my top priority, and I remain committed to doing everything in my power to ensure the safety of those children. I care very deeply, like all Albertans, about ensuring that every child is safe and protected. My heart continues to go out to the mother of Serenity, who is dealing with this tragedy still. Ministry officials do continue to monitor the situation very closely, and I certainly continue to interact with them to ensure their safety as well.

Mr. Jean: Albertans are disgusted. It's absolutely absurd that six children remain in the care of those responsible for Serenity at the time of her death. It is absolutely beyond comprehension that nobody in this government appears to have bothered to check on the safety of those children. This is pure negligence, and somebody in this government needs to be held responsible for this. I can't even believe that I have to ask this, but will the minister go right now and direct her staff, direct child services, or ask the RCMP to drive over to the home and check on these kids to make sure they're okay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the safety and protection of Alberta's children touches us all, and it makes us all passionate. I just want to clarify that, absolutely, the safety of Alberta's children is a key priority of Children's Services. We are monitoring the situation in the home very closely. When there have been concerns of safety issues, of abuse or neglect, they have been followed up. We take every report of possible abuse and neglect very seriously and follow up with every single one. We continue to monitor this situation and ensure safety.

Mr. Jean: The death of Serenity was more than a tragedy. It looks like outright murder. Now, with six other children still in the care of the same people who were responsible for Serenity when she died, we hear more shocking stories told by Serenity's family. "Every time I saw them, those kids, they had bruises and cuts on them. Every single time." I don't even know what to say. When will

this minister, this government, and this Premier or anybody over there do their job and get these kids out of that house?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the safety of children is a top priority for myself, for Children's Services, and for this government, and we continue to do everything we can to ensure the safety of children in this home and across this province. Every single concern about the safety of a child in this province that's reported to Children's Services is taken seriously and followed up. I would urge all Albertans that if they have concerns about the safety of a child, please let Children's Services know. Please know that we do take it seriously. We will ensure to follow it up and to monitor . . .

The Speaker: The third main question.

Lacombe Hospital and Care Centre

Mr. Jean: Wildrose has obtained confidential documents related to the AHS-run Lacombe hospital and care centre. In April an investigation was launched following serious concerns about care quality and only – only – because Red Deer College practical nurse students completing their practicum sounded the alarm. In total there were 80 issues identified to date that include safety concerns and training deficiencies. What changes are being made to Lacombe hospital to address these serious concerns that jeopardize patient safety?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are grateful that the students who were on-site did raise concerns and that AHS followed up immediately. Some of the steps to date include placing three staff leaders on immediate administrative leave pending the investigation. The investigation is still ongoing, but this certainly is a matter of concern. We are grateful that the students raised it and that AHS is acting in accordance with the legislation, including following up with protection for persons in care to ensure that they can do their preliminary investigation as well, which is, again, under way.

Mr. Jean: Monitoring, investigating: Mr. Speaker, why don't they just do their job and pick up the phone and get some action on this file? We've heard concerning stories from loved ones whose families have been patients at Lacombe hospital. Lois Cookson's 89-year-old father's condition rapidly deteriorated at Lacombe hospital to the point that she said that she was watching him die before her eyes, with an inadequate level of care. Since he's gotten out of the facility, he's improved 40 per cent. I'm appalled at the conditions at this hospital. Would the Premier trust the level of care at Lacombe hospital to her own loved ones?

Ms Hoffman: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would. Again, this is a long-term care facility. It's important that we enable anyone who has concerns to bring those forward. It's my understanding that the students did bring those concerns forward. AHS was notified, and they're in the process of conducting a survey, ensuring that the three staff who were the staff leads at that time were put on administrative leave. They're conducting nursing assessments of the 75 residents, again, of the long-term care facility to ensure that the health care needs are being met. I would be confident to assure that if I needed to be in care, I would feel safe there. That's why we have these checks and

balances in place. Again, thank you to the students for raising the concerns.

Mr. Jean: Another concerned family shared the following about their 72-year-old mom who has dementia. Numerous times Lois was found in her room in her wheelchair with her pants around her knees because it was quicker for staff than pulling her pants all the way up. Her blanket had fallen on the floor beside her, out of her reach. She was cold and very distraught. What steps is the Premier taking to ensure that the people of Lacombe get the care they deserve, and is that the care the Minister of Health said she would leave her family in? Is that appropriate?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Health has already outlined, these concerns that were raised have been taken very, very seriously. The staff leads have been put on leave, and most importantly a very thorough nursing assessment of the quality of care and the state of health of every person in that facility has been undertaken, because we know we are accountable, because we care about providing the quality of care that our seniors and our loved ones deserve. We are working very hard to make sure that all of those concerns are addressed and that the quality of care improves on behalf of the people that are there.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The hon. leader of the third party.

Serenity's Former Guardians (continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CBC article I tabled today said, "Children are still living in the former foster home where Serenity lived before she died emaciated and battered in an Edmonton hospital bed." When I read this, I thought that the minister and the system cannot possibly be that tone deaf and indifferent to children in care, yet it is true. To the children's minister: what could possibly have been more important that you couldn't be bothered to ensure kids in the same place where the brutal end to Serenity's young life took place aren't left to suffer the same fate under your watch?

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I cannot state strongly enough that the safety of the children of this province is absolutely my key priority, and I will continue to do everything in my power to ensure children in this province are safe. I want to be clear that there are no children in the care of this government who have been placed in this home, and again ministry officials continue to monitor the situation in the home very closely. But if there is an allegation of abuse or neglect, Children's Services staff will follow up. They will do a safety assessment in that house and will . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The first supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I was once a minister, so I know that things can go sideways without warning and land on the front page of the paper. I also know that when this happens, the minister in charge must demand the file and take a personal interest in the issue and get on top of the problem or be fired. Serenity's file has been front and centre for months, and now we know that the Premier and the minister have not done their job and left more kids in the same danger as Serenity. To the Premier: before you and your minister decide to resign in disgrace, will you order these kids

removed from the very same house that led to the unspeakable abuse and death that Serenity suffered?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's interesting. Unfortunately, the tragedy that Serenity went through occurred in September 2014, and the ministry engaged in a very comprehensive review and monitoring of the safety of the biological children of the guardians in question, beginning in September 2014 and onward, under the watch of the member opposite's former government. Now, the reason for that is because the policy is that you do not take away the children of somebody who is engaged in a criminal investigation . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier. [interjection] Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: Shame on the Premier smirking about this issue.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Premier and the children's minister have left children under the same roof where a child named Serenity was starved, beaten, raped, and murdered, knowing that her killers are still at large. To any minister that dares to answer: what feeble excuse can you offer that would convince Albertans that the Premier and the minister should not be fired and immediately held responsible for endangering the lives of these and other children? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would ask that responses – I am not able to hear when the noise gets so loud, so please contain your comments both in substance as well as tone.

The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I have to say that, without doubt, I take an interest in the safety and well-being of every child in this province. I can absolutely say that in this particular case ministry officials and Children's Services are monitoring the situation very closely. Since 2014 they did recognize the need for an interest. I care very deeply about ensuring that every child is safe and protected, and I will continue to do every single thing I can to improve the child intervention system and to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Gravel Extraction in Flood Plains

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the minister of environment. The water for life strategy has three main goals: safe, secure water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; a reliable, quality water supply. Gravel extraction in watercourses continues to threaten as flood plains are crucial for long-term protection of our water and flood mitigation efforts, yet this government continues to allow the PC-era policy of continued activity in flood plains. To the minister: why hasn't the law changed since you took office? Why do you still allow gravel extraction in flood plains?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and climate renewal.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. He's quite right that the water for life strategy involves monitoring. It involves clean drinking water. It also involves public education. It also involves compliance and enforcement. We're very committed to all of those elements of the water for life strategy.

As for the particular matter that the hon. member raises, I can assure him that the department is reviewing the matter of gravel extraction and will have more to say about that.

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, the conflict is that the Municipal Government Act allows municipal governments authority over water within their boundaries. The Environmental Law Centre said recently that they have a lack of capacity to assess risk, measure cumulative impacts, and protect habitat, recognizing ecological function of the flood plains. Alberta Environment and Parks does have the necessary expertise and is responsible for protecting all surface water, including flood plains. To the minister: when will the minister make water the priority and enforce the ministry's standards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that years of underfunding the environment department and the operations division in particular under the previous government led to a situation where we have a number of cases in which we simply don't have enough resources to do the job. That is why we have increased our resources by reallocating within the department – we've had this conversation at estimates as well – to ensure safe drinking water, to ensure habitat, and to ensure that Alberta's water resources are there for environmental, social, and economic reasons. That is why the department is looking at its options . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last week I met with members of the watershed planning and advisory committee for the confluence of the Red Deer and Medicine rivers and viewed the 120 acres, productive farmland, in the river flood plain that are going to be turned into another gravel bed. They're dissatisfied with the lack of transparency in the approval process and the inability to appeal decisions, meaning that finances trump environmental concerns. However, the proposal still needs to be ratified by this province. To the minister: will you commit now to protect these communities and the environment and do a proper cumulative impact assessment before this goes ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for his engagement on this topic for the benefit and health of all Albertans. It's not just on this particular topic, but his history of working on environmental issues is to be commended and in this case as well. I am pleased that he has interacted and engaged with the WPAC in question. I am pleased that he has raised this matter for us. We will ensure that all of the appropriate protocols are followed and that we take a conservation and stewardship ethic approach as we consider this matter of that particular extraction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Protected Leaves of Absence from Work

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be part of a government that supports family-friendly workplaces. I have worked for about 50 years, and most of that time my workplaces were not family friendly. Given that today's workplaces are very different from when our employment standards legislation was last reviewed and that this province has not done enough to match protections enjoyed by other Canadians, to the Minister of Labour:

what is the government hearing from Albertans who are struggling to balance work and family responsibilities?

2:10

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, since I've been minister, I've been hearing from Albertans who have concerns that they haven't been able to take time off in urgent situations for personal and family reasons, situations like when a loved one dies or for the care of a child with a critical illness. Albertans want to be treated fairly, and a parent having to worry about losing their job while also trying to care for a critically ill child is not fair. Albertans pay into employment insurance like every other Canadian and deserve the same rights and protections other Canadians enjoy.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that other jurisdictions have made updates to their employment standards legislation and given that many Albertans may not be aware that they don't have the same rights and protections as other Canadians, can the same minister tell us where Alberta is out of step with other provinces and why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans face some of the longest qualification periods in Canada for job-protected leaves, including maternity and parental leave. We are also one of the few provinces that don't guarantee that employees who are sick won't lose their jobs for that. Alberta also has the shortest compassionate care leave in Canada, and we don't have leaves for bereavement or domestic violence. That is why I have engaged with Albertans to ask their thoughts on our leave system.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How do these leaves in other provinces impact women in the workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Between 2005 and 2015 the number of women in Alberta's working-age population grew by 28 per cent, or by 360,000. Mothers and pregnant women are a part of our workforce, and their ability to take leaves impacts their health, their productivity at work, and the health of their children. However, our maternity leave is out of step with what is offered by the EI system. We also have the longest qualification period for maternity leave, meaning that Alberta women can be fired for getting pregnant if they haven't worked somewhere for a full year. Other jurisdictions have lower . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Lacombe Hospital and Care Centre (continued)

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Elder abuse is not something to take lightly. We entrust our loved ones to the care of competent and compassionate care workers in seniors' homes across Alberta. At AHS's Lacombe hospital families spoke up, but issues persisted until nursing students in practicum reported abuses. The teacher had to pull the students from the hospital before an investigation was launched. Such drastic measures should not need to be taken before

reports of abuse are taken seriously. Why were families rebuffed, and why did it take so long for an investigation to be launched?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is right that Albertans of all ages and all health care needs deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Again I want to thank the students at Red Deer College for expressing their concerns and ensuring that those were raised. As soon as AHS found out, the concerns were indeed followed up.

With regard to the specific questions about families notifying the facility, I'd be happy to follow up. I can tell you that when AHS was notified, they immediately followed up, and I'd be happy to co-ordinate sharing additional information. Any Albertan can call 811 to talk to a registered nurse and absolutely be facilitated with the right people if they do have concerns they want to raise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Orr: This is a systemic issue. Given that 80 continuing care service standards have been breached at Lacombe hospital – no medical assessments at admission, no care plans, no record of legal representatives, no fall assessments, no dietary assessments, no wound care interventions, and staff are not trained in infection prevention, emergency preparedness, medical assistance, care with dementia, CPR, on and on – how did this facility deteriorate to the point where 80 care service standards have been breached?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member does articulate concerns that have been raised. As I've mentioned, there is an investigation, and even more deeply – ensuring that the 75 residents in the facility had their health care needs being met was the number one action as well as making sure that the three staff leads who were on at the time and who were responsible were put on leave, the three staff leads at the facility. So I have to say that this is a demonstration of the seriousness with which it's been taken.

With regard to the accusations the review is continuing, and of course any measures will be taken to ensure the safety of all residents.

Mr. Orr: People's parents and grandparents are at stake here. Given that patients have suffered falls, burns, and serious systemic substandard care here, if this is the case at one facility, I can only guess how many other facilities managed by AHS are in the same disastrous state. Given the people of Lacombe are worried that this will be swept under the rug, will the minister make public the results of the current investigation into the hospital to ensure that real corrective action is taken?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, what is always the case is that whatever information can be shared publicly will be done so.

We want to ensure the safety of all residents in this facility and others. That's why there are regular audits, and that's why I really want to say again that if you have any questions, please do raise them with AHS and make sure that they are properly flagged, as was the case by these nursing students. I'm very grateful that they did raise these concerns. I myself had a grandmother that lived in long-term care for five years. There were times when she fell, where I had concerns and where I was able to raise them, and they were

able to be addressed. Of course, the staff who work in this facility deserve our respect, Mr. Speaker.

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

Support for the Energy Industry

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was proud to vote in favour of the Member for Calgary-Foothills' motion favouring Alberta's oil over oil from countries with poor human rights records. Unfortunately, the Member for Edmonton-Decore shouted "no" during the vote. We all acknowledge that he later voted for the motion, perhaps after his whip intervened to avoid embarrassment for this government. The member even acknowledged on Twitter that he shouted "no," saying he was just, "playing around." Playing around with the fate of Alberta jobs: seriously? Premier, will you denounce this member's anti-Alberta views, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was proud to be part of the debate yesterday. We heard many points raised on both sides of the House. At the end of the day, we all came together and had a unanimous vote in support of making sure that we continue to advocate for our product to get not only to tidewater but to all markets within Canada. I think that yesterday was a very good day, a very positive result. [interjections] I have to say that the disrespect that is being demonstrated by members opposite at this very moment is very frustrating, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that they certainly stand by the vote that we had yesterday and the unanimity that we had. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, can I draw your attention to the very blatant disrespect that's being shown to me at this moment?

Mr. Gill: Mr. Speaker, alone I could have shrugged off this member's antics, but this is just part of a bigger pattern for this NDP government. The NDP tries to talk a good game but every once in a while show their true colours. From labelling Alberta the "embarrassing cousins" of Canada to appointing anti-oil radical Ms Berman as the oil sands adviser to bizarrely calling the vast majority of Albertans that oppose carbon tax xenophobes, this is the true Alberta NDP. Premier, again I ask if you'll lead by example and clearly denounce the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

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

The Speaker: Point of order.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the tone, the rhetoric, the disrespect is not becoming of elected officials or of our province. I'm very proud of the fact that we came together yesterday afternoon to consider a motion brought forward by one of the members opposite. We all engaged in that debate in a thoughtful way. [interjections]

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

Ms Hoffman: At the end of the day we voted unanimously, Mr. Speaker. It was a standing vote. The member's vote is on the record. The accusations coming from the member opposite are not becoming of his office or this House.

2:20

Mr. Gill: Mr. Speaker, today is election day in B.C. It's quite possible that Ms Berman, this government's hand-picked oil sands adviser, is busy right now campaigning for the B.C. NDP, the party

that's promising to kill the desperately needed pipeline to our west coast. That's right. If Ms Berman gets her way, the next Premier of B.C. will block the Trans Mountain pipeline. This is who Alberta's government is taking advice from. Wow. This is a bad joke, and it has gone on for far too long now. Premier, regardless of the outcome in B.C., will you finally do the right thing and fire Ms Berman?

Speaker's Ruling Preambles to Questions

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would remind you again as well as the other ones – and I've said this several times, particularly today but also in earlier events – about the use of the preamble. You've taken advantage of it, and I don't appreciate that. If it continues in the manner in which it has, I think we'll have to enforce it much more stringently than we have. So I would ask you, hon. member, not to do that again.

The Deputy Premier.

Support for the Energy Industry (continued)

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say how proud I am of the environment minister and the fact that she did things differently. Guess what? Instead of getting the same results that we did year after year after year, which was a flat-out no, we got a different result. By bringing a variety of perspectives to the table, including the member that was just referred to, we got approval for two pipelines. This is great news for Alberta. We're making sure that we're showing the world and our country that environmental responsibility and good jobs and market access go hand in hand, and I have no apologies to make for that.

Emergency Medical Dispatch Services

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, back in the news today are the issues surrounding the lack of co-ordinated emergency response and the reduced communication between AHS dispatch and the Foothills regional 911 commission. Since AHS took over EMS dispatch and especially since February, people are dying and lives are at risk because the current broken system of separating fire and EMS dispatch is causing life-threatening delays and risks to first responders. Instead of just monitoring this situation, why won't the minister and AHS do the right thing and allow Foothills 911 to become a satellite EMS dispatch centre as has been done in four other major centres in Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that I've had an opportunity to discuss this issue with the member opposite as well as the Member for Banff-Cochrane as well as with the leadership from FRESH themselves. What the member opposite fails to highlight is that this has been the case for over six years. He himself says that he's been working to try to stop this for many years. It is totally different from the issue that he's highlighted. This has been something that's been happening for some time, where folks in Calgary are doing dispatch, and we are working to make sure that any of the questions and concerns are being ironed out. While they spend all this time in the backrooms of the Federal building, why don't they talk about policy? It was their . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given that AHS is falsely suggesting that this is a change issue and the problem is with 911 call handling and given that this is a lack-of-communication issue between EMS and fire, which has been intensifying since AHS began dispatch earlier this year, and given that this can easily be solved by Foothills, who have the facility and the capability to solve this problem, where a single-point 911 call answer with fire and EMS would be dispatched together, again, why do the minister and AHS continue to refuse to consider returning the authority to Foothills?

Ms Hoffman: Again, Mr. Speaker, this has been something that has been ongoing. There's been a great deal of change in the last seven or eight years. We've ensured to make increased opportunities for stability. I hope that the member will lean over to the left or that the next time he's in the backrooms with members of the PC caucus ask them why this policy change happened seven years ago. I believe that they have very insightful intelligence, including people who have been paramedics themselves, to offer the members. While they're having these conversations about where to have their seats, maybe they can talk about policy.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, this is serious. Given that recent poorly co-ordinated EMS calls and delays and errors have led to death, a baby not getting an emerg response for 64 minutes, a person having an asthma attack waiting 34 minutes, and a person suffering a heart attack for 40 minutes and given that only 4 per cent of emergency calls are being sent to Foothills 911 within the industry standard response times, Minister, you can make an immediate decision and save lives. Again, will you do the right thing and allow Foothills 911 to become a satellite EMS dispatch centre?

Ms Hoffman: The points the member raises are valid. Any time anyone calls 911, they want to know that help is on the way, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why those specific occurrences or incidents that have been highlighted have been reviewed, to ensure that the very best opportunities for effective dispatch are in place. We're going to continue working to make life better for Albertans in all parts of the province, including those that the members just referred to.

Again, if you want to talk about policy, this has been policy in place for over five years. Please feel free to talk to the people whose positions are going to have to be defended before you keep criticizing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Health Care Funding for Central Alberta

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The inequity of health care funding to central Alberta is quickly reaching a crisis situation, and the government needs to stop pretending that there isn't a problem. According to AHS's own numbers, planned capital spending on a per capita basis in the central zone is fractional compared to its neighbouring zones. How can the minister rationalize the gross inequity in per capita funding to the central zone?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite talks about gross inequities. How about proposals that would result in cutting \$9 billion from infrastructure projects? How about the Calgary cancer hospital? Do the members opposite think that we shouldn't be building a Calgary cancer hospital because that's an inequity? I don't think so.

We're making sure that we are moving forward with increasing stability in terms of infrastructure. We're increasing infrastructure spending in parts of the province that were neglected for far too long. And we all are happy to continue to work with folks in central Alberta. I was just in Red Deer a week and a half ago meeting with doctors to talk about how their needs can be met as well instead of...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Taylor: Given that this is a critical issue that desperately needs the government's attention, not political posturing, and given that the Red Deer hospital was once a top priority for AHS and now no longer appears on AHS's list of top 20 priorities, my question to the Minister of Health: how can a desperately needed expansion of the Red Deer hospital simply fall off the government's priority list?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The point around priorities changing is a fair point. It's dependent on what some of the other needs are in the area. Let's talk about Lacombe-Ponoka, where we've invested \$2 million in roof repairs and chiller replacement. Let's talk about Strathmore-Brooks. In Brooks we've invested \$500,000 in health care to ensure a new high-pressure sterilization boiler, which ensures that clinical equipment and tools are properly cleaned. Let's talk about Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundry. In Sundry we're working to keep long-term care beds open, ensure that they remain at the site, and develop the lab in the hospital. We will continue to work with folks in Red Deer as well.

Mr. Taylor: Given that the Minister of Health has informed Albertans that, quote, the buck always stops with the minister, unquote, and given that the situation has hit a critical juncture, where doctors and nurses feel it necessary to organize rallies and speak to media about their concerns, about their ability to provide adequate care to patients, to the minister: does the buck still stop with you, and if it does, why are you subjecting central Albertans to this type of unfair treatment and ultimately risking their health?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I respect the fact that individuals in the community had meetings and ensured that they were sharing their perspectives. I actually followed up by having my own meetings both before the gatherings and after with a number of the folks who were there presenting information. I respect the physicians and other health care staff working in the community of Red Deer and in other parts of the province for doing their best to make sure that they have the best supports available to their constituents. And I'll tell you that making sure that they have an NDP government that supports health care and making sure that we aren't pushing deep ideological cuts and privatization is just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Rural Health Facility Capital Planning

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In February the Minister of Health told the good people of Beaverlodge that the money for planning a new health facility had already been allocated and the design for a new health care facility would be moving ahead. Since the Minister of Health has stated, "When I make a commitment, you can count on it," and given that the good people of Beaverlodge are counting on the minister to uphold her commitment to planning this

facility, to the Minister of Health: can you confirm that you are currently planning the Beaverlodge health facility?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his important question. Absolutely, the residents of Beaverlodge have worked hard, and they've long advocated for the community and the health care needs to be met over many years. I had the pleasure of meeting with Doris McFarlane at that exact moment, and she, having formerly been a nurse and also being somebody who wants to ensure that the community has a long-term, positive outlook moving forward, has graciously offered a significant portion of land. We are happy to ensure that we are moving forward with plans to ensure that Beaverlodge does get a new facility at some point.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Minister. Given that \$2.5 million allocated for a rural health facility design template appeared in the Minister of Infrastructure's 2016 budget and given that the 2015 budget allocated those funds to create a model that could be used on health care facilities in rural communities across the province, including Beaverlodge, to the same minister: is the \$2.5 million you referred to in the Ministry of Health's budget, or is it in the Ministry of Infrastructure's budget?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again for the very fair question. The member is right to say that that is what I said. The \$2.5 million is indeed in the Minister of Infrastructure's budget. In the budget previous to that, which was passed only about six months before, I believe, we also had a line item – I believe it was \$10 million – for rural facility and needs assessments to be done throughout the province, Mr. Speaker. Both Health and Infrastructure have been making sure that they have resources available. My staff have a number of projects on their plates, but this continues to be one of them.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Minister, for that clarification. Given that the Ministry of Infrastructure has had money in their budget to design rural health care facilities such as Beaverlodge for three years now and given that in estimates I asked the Minister of Infrastructure if something was actually going to get done this year and given that the minister answered that they were awaiting direction from the Ministry of Health, to the Minister of Infrastructure: are you still waiting for the Minister of Health to direct you to design rural health facilities such as Beaverlodge?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question from the former Infrastructure minister of the previous government. The rural health facility design project is indeed in the Alberta Infrastructure budget. Approximately \$2.4 million has been allocated this year for the work. We're nearing the completion of this initiative. It will standardize documents and processes and provide consistent information for the planning and development of future rural health facilities. Various facilities are included in the project, including...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Calgary-Northern Hills.

Calgary Growth Management Board Transition

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Regional Partnership, or CRP, has been in existence for over a decade now and has been an organization that has helped the Calgary region expand their work together on common interests during that time. With the MGA review and the new growth management board coming to Calgary, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the future of the CRP, and will the CRP be merged with the new growth management board?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I want to say that the Calgary Regional Partnership has done excellent work over the years. I recently had a great meeting with the board and have committed transitional funding to help assist the CRP as we move forward to establish a new board similar to the Capital Region Board here in Edmonton. What elements of the CRP will be taken over by the growth management board will be up to the member municipalities and the elected leaders of those communities, and I will support the decisions that they make for their region.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the CRP covered 12 municipalities such as Turner Valley and Black Diamond and given that the new growth board is expected to include 10 municipalities and three municipal districts, to the same minister: what will happen to communities that are no longer covered by the growth board?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We want to make sure that the right number of municipalities are at the table so that the board is as effective as possible. We are proposing a number of provisions to help ensure that this board operates smoothly and that all perspectives are heard. As for Black Diamond and Turner Valley, I have committed to meeting with the mayors again one-on-one and look forward to discussing the membership issue with them. I will also point out that all communities in the region will have opportunities to collaborate, whether they are mandatory members or not.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that regional transportation projects like On-It transit are in the pilot project stage and involve communities that were covered by the CRP but not the new Calgary growth board, to the same minister: what will be the future of this pilot transit project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As mentioned, I have approved transitional funding for the CRP so that this and other priority programs can continue. Just today I received a letter from the CRP thanking Municipal Affairs for this funding and for the encouragement going forward with the transition. The long-term future of this program and others of the CRP will be determined by the elected leaders of the new growth management board. They will

have the ability to transition this program, and I will support the decisions that they make for their region.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Health Information Privacy Breach Reporting

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rising problems related to information and privacy have never been a problem that this government has addressed. It's bad enough that the NDP withholds information from Albertans under FOIP, and it's just as bad that the privacy of Albertans is being violated. Most recently a former AHS staff member was fined \$3,000 for inappropriately accessing information, yet it appears that there's no obligation for the incident to be publicly reported. To the Minister of Health: is it mandatory for your ministry to report these types of privacy breaches? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. When privacy is breached, obviously, it's a deep concern. A number of factors are taken into consideration, including the risk that it might put to the individual if they were notified. I believe that there is some room for – regularly it is said that the rules need to be questioned sometimes. It is certainly best practice, whenever it's safe to do so, to share that information with the individual who could have been impacted, but there are times when it isn't safe to do so.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in May 2014 the health information amendment act passed third reading and given that this act would have made reporting privacy breaches mandatory but, unfortunately, a section that this act brought forward was never fully brought into force, to the Minister of Health: how can it be mandatory, given that you have not proclaimed the legislation necessary, to publicly report investigated breaches under the law?

Ms Hoffman: Well, in answer to the first question, Mr. Speaker, I clarified that there are times when information needs to be taken into consideration, as the implications of notifying the individual could be damaging both to their safety and the safety of others. So that, I believe, is one of the reasons why that piece has not been proclaimed. Obviously, the intent is to ensure that whenever it's safe to do so, that information is shared. Certainly, there are times when it may not be safe to do so, and people's safety, obviously, needs to be the top priority.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. It appears that you're hiding breaches.

Given that it appears there is no mandatory reporting for health-related breach problems and given that this concern for privacy and security has been raised on all sides of the House and considering that the Member for Edmonton-Calder, the former NDP Health critic, said in May of 2014 that the information on this bill was "very timely and important," will you immediately implement this bill to protect Albertans' sensitive health information, or now that you're in government is privacy and security no longer timely or important?

Ms Hoffman: Of course, privacy and security is timely and important, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why I'm confident that my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and Minister of Education made those remarks. There are times when sharing the information could cause a serious threat to a number of individuals – a threat of safety, a threat of well-being – and that needs to be taken into consideration. But the intent is that whenever it's safe to do so, to share information, and that will continue to be the case.

2:40

The Speaker: We're going to move, hon. members, to points of order. If anybody would like to leave the Chamber, please do so within about 15 to 20 seconds.

Hon. members, I believe a point of order was raised on question 9 by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in question period the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway posed a number of questions with respect to apparently some sort of heckle that may have occurred. I think that the question was clearly out of order.

If you look at *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, page 121, rule 409(6):

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

There are a number of other references as well. In *O'Brien and Bosc*, on page 502, questions should be about items that are "within the administrative responsibility of the government." At page 617 in *O'Brien and Bosc* there's also a reference to referencing previous debates and proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition's interpretation of everything that's said in this House by people who do not have the floor is to become the subject of a point of order, we might see hundreds of points of order based on various heckles and catcalls and so on that we get all the time from the opposition. Each one could be subject to a point of order.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the member has put his own interpretation on whatever it was, and that is not something that one ought to be doing. I think that that's actually a violation of 29 – sorry; 23, 22. I'm counting down. I just want to actually find that section. Standing Order 23(i) says, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." He's clearly doing that in this case with the Member for Edmonton-Decore. He has no idea what that meant, nor is it a matter of something that is rightfully a subject of question period.

He is simply using the opportunity to try and smear the government by creating some sort of sense that the government is not deeply committed to establishing pipelines and to supporting the oil sands in our province. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. This government has shown by its actions where it stands with respect to these matters. This government has got more action in two short years than that government ever did in 20 years.

I just want to say in closing, Mr. Speaker, that those types of questions are absolutely inappropriate in this House. They are nothing but an attempt to smear the member, smear the government, and clearly, in my view, should be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: The House leader for the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To quote the old Bard, methinks thou doth protest too much, my friend.

Mr. Speaker, clearly there's no point of order. We can see how the hon. Government House Leader was struggling for the quotations. I daresay that if this wasn't so serious, it would be laughable. Now, to prove my point, because there were no direct references to what was said, I will quote simply two sentences that were said. "The member even acknowledged on Twitter that he shouted 'no,' saying he was just 'playing around.' Playing around with the fate of Alberta jobs: seriously?" The other quotation: "From labelling Alberta the 'embarrassing cousins' of Canada to appointing anti-oil radical Ms Berman as the oil sands adviser to bizarrely calling the vast majority of Albertans that oppose the carbon tax xenophobes, this is the true Alberta NDP."

So I challenge anyone in this House from any corner of this House to prove that any of these statements are at all false because they're not. Mr. Speaker, with reference to Standing Order 23(h), there were no false allegations, there were no false or unavowed motives, and (i) there was no abusive or insulting language. These are the words of the NDP. If it causes disorder for them, they're the ones causing the disorder in the first place in this room and out in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this is just simply the truth. If the truth hurts them, I'm sorry it hurts their feelings, so I encourage you to simply rule this out of order. If the Government House Leader is concerned about continuing to raise points of order, maybe he should be a little bit more careful about when he calls them because clearly there is nothing here. Nothing to see. Let's move on.

The Speaker: Did I note by your standing that you wish to speak as well, hon. member?

Mr. Cooper: That is correct. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'll stand on a phone book the next time so you know I'm actually standing.

It's a pleasure to stand and speak to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I'll speak specifically just to address some of the concerns from my colleague, the Government House Leader, who has taught me much, and I have studied his words in this House at length. I hope that some day he'll have the same opportunity to repay the favour to me.

I speak specifically, Mr. Speaker – the Government House Leader spoke about what was a heckle. As you know, there are rules in this place around when we vote and when we don't and what should be decorum and what isn't while we vote. What happened last night certainly wasn't a heckle. It was a vote in a recorded vote.

If you are so inclined to spend some time reading this evening, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 12, speaks specifically about voice votes and then recorded votes as well. You'll know, Mr. Speaker, that there is a long-standing tradition, not just in this Chamber but in Chambers all across the Westminster parliamentary system, that as one votes with their voice, there is an obligation or an assumed position that one would then stand and be recognized with what their voice vote was. I know that the member from Lloydminster has spoken about this in the House as well. He has spoken where he perhaps even voted in error and voted with the government when he had intended to vote opposed but still stood in his place and voted as he had in the voice vote.

So what we saw last night by the member was a departure, certainly, from the long-standing traditions of the Assembly, and I might add that the question was clearly in order as the statements were true, as acknowledged on Twitter. But, more importantly, the member was asking about whether or not this position was the position of the government, so not only was it discussing a statement of fact but also of government policy because the member

was asking about not just whether it was the member's position but whether it was the position of the government, as such making it in order. He was discussing whether or not this was the position of the government and would the Premier condemn such a position or not.

Clearly this is not a point of order. I hope that you take some time to read chapter 12 this evening around the procedures, voting and perhaps check the *Hansard* from my colleague from Lloydminster when he spoke about the long-standing traditions of voting as you have voice voted.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. member, I in fact have that book beside my bed. I just want you to know that I read it regularly. I've been known to fall asleep when I've read it, but, as you alluded to earlier, you must have a book beside your bed with quotes by the former Opposition House Leader. I suspect you fall asleep faster than I do.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway, I think earlier today I referenced your infractions, I would say, with respect to the preamble point, so let's put that one aside.

Government House Leader, I was listening carefully to your arguments, but I missed some of the subtleties. Nonetheless, I have looked into the matter, and I in fact ought to have maybe jumped in sooner myself. Nonetheless, the subject matter in the first quotation was offside as it pertained to a decision of the House, and I cite Standing Order 23(f) and page 617, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*: "Members may not speak against or reflect upon any decision of the House." In other words, an allegation or question concerning how a member has voted is offside.

The House has made a decision on the matter. I believe there was a point of order in this situation, and I would caution again all members to – it may be good politics at times to do that, but respect and honour in this House is determined by each of us.

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, point of clarification, please. I'm asking how it is that a point of order can be made on something other than what the point of order was. That's all. You raised . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Mr. Rodney: Happy to.

The Speaker: I'm not sure what part you missed. I cited several citations. I've indicated that I made a ruling with respect to the comments made by the member, and I believe they have good evidence, if you look to *Hansard*, that applies.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah, well, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: What now, hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed? I made a decision.

Mr. Rodney: It's Standing Order 13(2), clarification of a decision of yours. The hon. Government House Leader raised a point of order that was completely different than the ruling that you gave. That's very, very confusing for everyone beyond that side of the House.

Mr. Mason: Three separate things.

Mr. Rodney: Not the one that he . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, please, both of you. The decision is made.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 13(2) I would like to seek a clarification of the ruling.

The Speaker: I'm not sure what you were listening to either, hon. member. I've given my decision, and we're now going on to Orders of the Day. I'd love to have a visit with you this afternoon.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 11

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

[Adjourned debate May 4: Mr. Sucha]

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I spoke about fear of reprisal, and I'm going to underline some of those themes that were there. Last time I spoke, I spoke about the future, the 24th century, with the United Federation of Planets, Commander William Riker facing the challenges in relation to fear of reprisal over an experiment that was done. [interjections] Now, the Member for Edmonton-Decore . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, could we ask you to exit if you're going to have a conversation, please? Thank you.

Keep going.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Decore did a sidebar with me in relation to this and asked me to go back in time a bit further to the 23rd century to ask a reference in relation to a red shirt and fear of reprisal in relation to that. He said: how would red shirts be directly impacted if they had a whistleblower protection act on Kirk's *Enterprise*? I cited that more people would be alive today.

Mr. Speaker, you know, it was May the 4th, and we all referenced many fun popular culture references to whistle-blowing, but it is important to acknowledge that sometimes whistle-blowing really impacts a life-or-death situation. I'd be remiss because we just recently had comic expo in Calgary, and Edmonton-born Nathan Fillion was there. In *Firefly* they had the Reavers. If anyone has read into the Reavers, they were these beasts that no one really understood where they came from. There were these weird creatures, and there was a lot of hearsay and rumour in relation to it. As we dug deeper, it turned out that Nathan Fillion's character in the show *Firefly* discovered that it was actually the Alliance that was doing experiments, and they actually work off a parliamentary system similar to our own here. It made me wonder that if they had whistle-blower protection under the Alliance on *Firefly* if Reavers would have actually existed, you know, if whistle-blowing could be called on members of the parliament in *Firefly*.

It's fortunate that here in our Legislative Assembly we're moving forward with including ministerial staff and the office of the Premier to be included under the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act because, you know, it's important that we make sure that we have the most transparent government possible, that we preserve faith in the public sector and preserve faith within our elected officials here within the government of Alberta.

You know, one of the things that we also looked at was expanding it to contractors or delegated services that are provided to the provincial government, and I think this is very important because sometimes within a workforce it's easy for us to put our blinders on. It's easy for individuals sometimes to be in a culture where they think, "Well, this is how it's done, so it must be right,"

not knowing that a regulation or law has been broken. So sometimes when we have situations occur where we have contractor or delegated services come into one of our government environments or come into our workplaces, they can determine that in reality there is some neglect or there is something that's going wrong or people's lives are being put at risk.

It's interesting to note that there are actually a lot of contractors and delegated services in *Firefly*, and if they had this whistle-blower protection, they could move forward with ensuring that Reavers were never a thing. It's important to notice that, because even within sort of our universities there are a lot of ongoing experiments that occur, and sometimes we do bring in contractors, whether to maintain some services or to help with some of these experiments. It's important to note – and for many of those who have been academics who studied psychology or were doctors, they'll understand that there is a code of ethics that has to be dealt with and maintained when doing any experiments. If we're breaching those codes of conduct or codes of ethics and our government is funding these projects, it's important that we're speaking up and that we're making sure that we expose some of these here as well.

3:00

You know, it's also very important to note that if someone is dealing with punishment within the workplace because they have spoken up about anything that is unethical, they have the freedom to go to the Labour Relations Board, and the Labour Relations Board is enabled to find remedies for the situation. While I have complete faith that the office that receives the reports of whistle-blowing will act in the best interests of the whistle-blower, sometimes they don't have a lot of the labour relations legislation readily available whereas with the Labour Relations Board, this is what they're experts at. This is what they're paid to do. So, ultimately, they can move forward with making sure that the employee is taken care of and that they receive the proper justice here as well.

The other thing that's really neat to see is that currently under our public service and our government offices whistle-blowers have to report to the designated officer to handle whistle-blowing, and this can create a lot of anxiety. You know, I used to see this in the private sector when a front-line employee had concerns in relation to something that was happening within the establishment, and they sometimes didn't really know where to turn. There would be some workplaces, especially within the corporate sector, where they would say: well, go to your direct manager if you know of something unethical happening. Well, what if it is your direct manager who is doing something unethical?

A lot of these workplaces enabled an ethics line or a line for you to contact to go directly to a person who would handle, in essence, whistle-blowing within that private-sector establishment. It worked really well because that would go to the regional manager, and then we could have it dealt with appropriately. We could make sure that we protected the privacy of that individual, and to be honest, within the private sector and from what I saw of it occurring there, it worked very efficiently.

I'm happy that we are now introducing legislation that will allow potential whistle-blowers to report directly to the Public Interest Commissioner whenever there is any concern. Then, when the commissioner receives any of these complaints, they are authorized to go to the employer's workplace and view the records within the site, and it gives them strong powers that are equivalent to our Auditor General's.

I know that the Member for Edmonton-Centre spoke about some of the strengths that we've seen from our Auditor General. You

know, it's a system that works really well to hold us – elected officials, government agencies – accountable. Giving the commissioner powers that are very equivalent to the Auditor General's will allow the commissioner to really maintain that public faith within the public sector. Also, those front-line workers can feel safe to come forward but also feel that we have appropriate remedies to make sure that we're running an ethical workplace and so that they can feel safe simply going to work every single day.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that I probably do not have a lot of speaking time left. I just want to close by thanking all hon. members who participated in this committee for the hard work that they did over the summer. You know, I feel a lot closer to all of you. It felt like we really worked collaboratively and got to know each other and that we could work together to find a balance of how we want our whistle-blower protection to occur.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Shaw? Under 29(2)(a), Edmonton-Centre?

Mr. Shepherd: Under 29(2)(a), yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I greatly appreciated the member's statements. He offered, I think, some excellent analogies, and certainly it warmed my heart, being a fan of science fiction myself. Certainly, hearing him expound on both *Star Trek* and *Firefly* in a single speech: much to be admired there. My one question to the member, specifically in regard to his reference to *Firefly*, is: why, if he knew that he was going to bring that up in the House, did he not at least have the decency to wear a brown shirt?

Mr. Sucha: You know what? I was going to sing about the man they called Jayne, but unfortunately – I could see on this side of the House the people that got the reference. Realistically, going into it, I think it's important to really note and relate to these popular culture references because, for some of us, we haven't found those parallels to when something unethical has happened in the workplace and when something unethical hasn't happened in the workplace.

You know, I made light of the May the 4th reference there, but to be fair, it really outlines the importance of why we need these in place. Ultimately, if you look at these references, you truly do see that having these protections in place will ensure that we can have a government that is transparent, that works, and that makes sure individuals are safe.

The Speaker: Any other comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Shaw?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. [interjections]

Dr. Turner: Is there somebody else that wants to speak?

The Speaker: I'm sorry. My apologies to the House.
Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for ceding the floor.

Bill 11, Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017: progress, real progress. I was part of the committee and applaud the chair and the work that was done on this. A pity that we couldn't get on to do some of the other important work with respect to the Election Act and conflicts of interest, but this is truly a step forward from the earlier version of the whistle-blower protection act. It authorizes the Public Interest Commissioner, for example, to investigate allegations of wrongdoing

submitted anonymously or by people that are not considered employees under the act; private citizens, for example. That's progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Whistle-blowers can report wrongdoings directly to the Public Interest Commissioner, which they couldn't do before, always a weakness of the previous bill under the PC government. Whistle-blowers are protected from reprisals from the moment they tell their supervisor about an issue.

Workers who are fired, have their duties changed, or experience reprisals as a result of whistle-blowing have access to restitution through the Labour Relations Board. The Labour Relations Board decides on restitution for workers who experience reprisals, with an enforceable decision in the same manner as a court order. Prescribed service providers such as care in seniors' homes that have a business relationship with the government are now covered under this act, as are physicians, who have an alternate reimbursement program, which was not the case in the past.

The term "gross mismanagement" now includes a wider variety of wrongdoings, including bullying and abuse in the workplace as well as mismanagement. So progress.

The Public Interest Commissioner's office will be required to report more information each year, telling what types of wrongdoings and summarizing the findings, penalties, and specific recommendations to public entities. Section 19 adds a section, 18.1, which grants the Public Interest Commissioner greater access to information than in the past, much like the powers of the Auditor General. More progress.

The Public Interest Commissioner determines whether a public interest outweighs potential harm to an individual, and the Public Interest Commissioner and his or her staff are not compelled to give evidence during judicial proceedings.

Finally, the Public Interest Commissioner is now allowed 20 days to determine whether to investigate a complaint, giving the Public Interest Commissioner more capacity and time and resources to make appropriate decisions and not short-circuit anything that's needed.

The Liberal caucus position is, of course, that the most glaring deficiency is that the PCs wrote the legislation in such a way that it only applies to wrongdoings that occurred after the act came into force. Clearly, that allowed a get-out-of-jail-free card for any potential wrongdoings that occurred prior to June 2013, when the act was first brought in. Certainly, it went against the spirit of the legislation, and we're pleased to see that this is now going to be much more vigorous and timely.

3:10

Section 19(2) authorizes, again, the Public Interest Commissioner to either not investigate a disclosure or discontinue an investigation if more than two years have passed since the date the wrongdoing was discovered. Again, this is arbitrary and could lead to legitimate investigations of wrongdoing being abandoned or not even getting off the ground. So that's a shortcoming of this particular bill, limiting it to two years.

Pursuant to section 38(1) the Public Interest Commissioner is appointed by "the Lieutenant Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly." As always, there is a risk that government could unduly influence the choice, and that continues to be a concern.

Finally, section 52 is problematic in stating:

No proceeding of the Commissioner is invalid for want of form and, except on the ground of lack of jurisdiction, no proceeding

or decision of the Commissioner [can] be challenged, reviewed, quashed or called into question [by a] court.

In other words, the Public Interest Commissioner has the absolute final word, and that's a concern with respect to accountability of the Public Interest Commissioner.

Having said that, I think the progress made on this bill and the improvements in protecting whistle-blowers are significant, and I'm very much supportive of what we finally came to. In my view, our existing whistle-blower legislation was deficient in not allowing proceedings or decisions of the Public Interest Commissioner to be challenged, reviewed, or quashed and with the commissioner being given the absolute final word, with no accountability. I would reiterate that if there was any amendment, that would be an area that we would be considering.

Bill 11 does address the deficiency in part by very specifically allowing a decision of the commissioner concerning a reprisal to be reviewed by the courts. This is a welcome improvement. But why are we stopping there? If we're going to allow the courts to decide whether addressing a reprisal against a whistle-blower can be reviewed, why wouldn't we allow the courts to review the commissioner's decision? It doesn't seem to be consistent.

Apart from those concerns, caveats, I very much support this important bill. It's bringing us into line with much of the rest of the country, Madam Speaker. I believe we will be supporting it as is.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 11, Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. I'd like to start off by saying that this bill should improve accountability and ethics here in Alberta. When the original whistle-blower protection act was passed in 2013, it was mandated to be reviewed within the first two years of coming into force and thereafter every five years. In accordance with this piece of legislation, it was sent to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. I myself sat on that committee, and I'll commend all of the members on all sides who sat on this committee. It is another example of nonpartisan MLAs moving forward to bring in a good piece of legislation. It is an incredible honour to be a part of that committee, to be able to show that the process of committees works within Alberta.

From the fact that this government usually will push legislation through the House, which is to run over the opposition and all objectors from far and wide like a legislative truck, if you will, this is where I can say that in this case a committee was very aptly used. That is why, when I sat on this committee – and this went through the summer, and I spent many hours of time and debate with my government MLA colleagues – it was surprising that what we had, according to the article by Global News from September 20, 2016, was: Brian Mason Says Alberta Democracy Committee Could Be Scrapped. That's the article title.

To go on, I'm going to quote from this article. The Government House Leader told reporters:

I'm pretty disgusted. (The opposition) have filibustered that committee from start to finish, they've made up phoney points of order and points of privilege (and) they've attacked chairs for just trying to [get the job done].

This is completely false. In the end, what we've got here is a piece of legislation that went through a committee, and to say that this

entire committee had no value from start to finish is completely unfounded.

Now, I'm pleased to say that the bill reflects 20 of the 21 recommendations that came from the committee. Recommendation 9 came from a motion that I put forward to the committee, which read:

The Act [should] be amended to clarify a chief or designated officer's obligation to report illegal conduct to law enforcement or to the Department of Justice and Solicitor General in cases where there is a reasonable belief that an offence has been committed.

The legislation as it was originally worded led to some inconsistencies between sections 5(2)(f) and 22 in regard to the chief or designated officer's obligation to report alleged illegal conduct.

Obviously, Madam Speaker, clear laws reduce the need for court clarification and interpretation of the laws and, hopefully, can prevent long-drawn-out arguments about what the interpretation of that law is. That is why making legislation consistent and clear is important, and I hope that this amendment to the act will do so. I am pleased that the other side agreed with that assessment of this and will be supporting the change.

Another recommendation that this side proposed, Madam Speaker, was defining what gross mismanagement is. The Auditor General, Alberta Health Services, and the Alberta Medical Association all asked for that term to be defined. It is my intention that this Chamber supports open government and works with the Auditor General and makes sure that we see an improved piece of legislation moving forward. The fact that we were able to define this term and have it included as a recommendation is an incredible source of co-operation between both the government and the opposition.

Under this bill gross mismanagement will be defined as an act or an omission that is deliberate and shows reckless or wilful disregard for management of public funds or a public asset or the delivery of public services or employees by a pattern of behaviour or conduct of a systematic nature that indicates a problem in the culture of the organization relating to bullying, harassment, or intimidation. In these times, Madam Speaker, we cannot afford for any government funds to be misused, abused, or to pay for needless, worthless expenses. This will help the Auditor General and others determine where the line lies on gross mismanagement of government resources.

There are some other aspects of the bill which will improve current legislation, Madam Speaker. One area that I think is important to note is that this bill will expand the act to contracted service providers who may be witnessing wrongdoing and gross mismanagement of public assets. This is important because there is complicity in the government of Alberta's office with regard to wrongdoing. There may not be anyone able or willing to come forward from that office. By including contract services providers, this will allow an additional set of eyes on operations of government and may expose waste in areas of the government that may not be on other people's radar.

This is especially important in Alberta. As you know, we have private contractors that do many services such as registries agents, services for disabled people, self-managed care, and so on and so forth. The Auditor General noted that the former department of human services contracted with more than 2,200 small businesses. This is just one area of the government, Madam Speaker. So to extend the act in this way, we are extending oversight of the government to areas where services are contracted out.

3:20

If this legislation were to pass, these contractors would be able to report wrongdoing without having to endure bureaucratic nightmares

working all the way up through the government's chain of command. This bill will allow direct reporting by contractors to the Public Interest Commissioner. This will also shield contractors from negative business repercussions from their program area for reporting wrongdoing.

I just want to conclude, Madam Speaker, by talking about how important it is that this legislation and indeed most legislation is reviewed with a sunset clause. We need to get legislation right for whistle-blowers. It is not easy for whistle-blowers to come forward. They risk their jobs, their livelihoods, and much besides that with their decisions to come forward and expose mismanagement in government. That's why it's disappointing to see that the NDP have chosen not to expand whistle-blower protections to physicians, who are in alternative relationship plans or receive other forms of payment from the government. We in the Wildrose wonder why it is better to exclude these people from the act rather than to include them since even the government seems to agree that it is in the best interests of all Alberta and all Albertans. That being said, on the balance this bill is an improvement over the current law.

I would like to reaffirm – reaffirm – Madam Speaker, that while we were in a committee setting, this committee was not a waste of time from start to finish. Let's be clear. The discussion or the comments that the House leader from the government side made were truly inaccurate. I took offence when he did that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for hearing me out.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Member, for those comments. I did want to actually ask a question about your comment that physicians were not included. I think that's actually a misreading of the bill. It's my understanding that physicians and other contracted service providers – and it's in recommendation 3, actually, that came out of the committee – whether they're fee for service or in an alternate revenue plan, are included. This is also going to apply to other service providers like psychologists, social workers, dentists, et cetera. In fact, this is one of the strengths of this legislation.

Otherwise, I actually am in agreement with much of what you said, except for the criticism of our House leader. I wonder if you would want to modify your remarks in that regard.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member for bringing clarity forward. If I have made an error in my speech, I do have to apologize for that. I will be looking closer at that specific issue, and I will be bringing comments later. Thank you very much for bringing that to my attention.

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

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll beg the indulgence of the Legislature, but I am going to continue on in a similar vein, not to coin a pun, to what we were just discussing. First of all, it's fascinating that we're dealing with things like conflicts of interest and whistle-blower protection and enhancement of democracy. I actually have to bring the attention of the Legislature to the fact that all of us who speak to this bill are in a form of conflict of interest since this whistle-blower legislation, according to recommendation 2, will apply to MLAs and their staff.

Certainly, I am in conflict of interest in the sense that I am a physician of 40 years' standing in this province. I have practised medicine at the University of Alberta hospital and other hospitals in Edmonton as well as in Grande Prairie, Red Deer, and outside the province over those 40 years. Some of that practice has been in the form of fee for service, and other parts of it have been in an alternate revenue plan. Indeed, I've worked at the Cross Cancer Institute for 40 years and have always been in an alternate revenue plan employment status there.

I thought it might be useful for me to bring some clarity of that terminology to the Legislature. I think it's a very important thing that this is being discussed in this bill. Also, alternate revenue plans are a very important part of what the Alberta Medical Association, Alberta Health Services, and the Ministry of Health are doing to try to rein in the escalating costs of physician services. Alternate revenue plans refer to a system of payments for physicians that aren't dependent upon only fee for service. Fee for service is what a physician is allowed to charge for specified medical activities. For instance, if a general physician sees a patient for a physical examination, a yearly checkup, there is a set fee for that. If it's a follow-up from that visit, the fee is about a fifth of what the checkup fee is. That's the way that medicine was practised primarily 40 years ago.

Over the 40 years we have come to the realization that involving alternate providers is important, so we have advanced nurse practitioners and pharmacists and physician assistants, who can act in a more collegial environment. Some of these are developed in primary care networks.

I'm more familiar with the academic alternate revenue plans, and they've been interesting, too. Those plans – and they were alluded to by the Member for Calgary-Elbow a week or so ago – actually permit academic physicians to practise medicine. Actually, we can retain academic physicians because this is a very attractive form of practice. It isn't just looking after patients and billing on a fee-for-service basis. We academic physicians can actually create a practice profile that includes doing research.

I might just allude to the remarks made in the member's statement of Calgary-Hawkwood about leukemia. In the Alberta cancer program there is a hematology tumour group that includes a whole host of various professionals that are basically dedicated to improving the results for patients with acute leukemia. That couldn't be done if we didn't have a way to actually include research, education, community service, and clinical service in our practice profiles.

In an alternate revenue plan we've got multiple components to it and multiple co-workers, all of whom deserve the protection of a whistle-blower protection act. I can attest to the fact that having this protection is going to make it a lot easier for this kind of activity to prosper in this province, not only in the cancer program. I can tell you that for 30 years the department of medicine at the University of Alberta hospital has had an alternate revenue plan so that things like pulmonary medicine, cardiology, kidney disease, the whole gamut of what we would call internal medicine, are covered by the same thing. Combining activities in research, combining teaching of all phases of medical activity and community service as well as the actual seeing of patients and caring for patients can all be taken care of.

3:30

That's been very successful at the University of Alberta hospital in medicine, and it's actually at the University of Calgary. They have a similar thing. It's being expanded to pediatrics and to psychiatry in various areas. Maybe giving you more information than you want to know about alternate revenue plans, but I did want

to make sure that all of us knew that by having whistle-blower protection, we're actually enhancing the environment in which that kind of activity can prosper.

You know, basically, the question was: does the act currently apply to physicians? It applies to physicians who are directly employed in public entities as well as other health practitioners and professional staff with admitting privileges run by those public entities such as Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, and others. However, the act currently does not apply to physicians who receive government funding in other ways such as through the alternate revenue plan or fee for service. If the act is passed, government is going to be consulting with physician stakeholder groups and delegated service providers to determine how best to move forward on this side of the issue. The expansion of the legislation could impact a wide variety of health service providers and medical clinics, and it's only fair that they be consulted before moving ahead.

If you look at Bill 11, where this shows up clearly is part 1.2, prescribed service providers. The prescribed service provider regulations basically talk about:

- (a) respecting the Commissioner's exercise of powers and performance of duties under this Act in relation to prescribed service providers; [and]
- (b) for the purpose of section 1(j.1), determining that any individual or person, any part or all of an organization, body or other person or any class of individuals, persons, organizations or bodies is a prescribed service provider.

I think this is a very strong part of this legislation and worthy of support of all of us.

I want to turn back to the comments about the work of the select special committee. I, too, was a frequent attendee and participant in the meetings of this committee last summer, and I think it was one of the most rewarding activities that I've had the honour to participate in during the two years that I've been an MLA. There was a collegial environment and a recognition that expansion of the whistle-blower protection was essential, and this was recognized by all participants in that committee. It was really gratifying to see how well that committee worked, particularly under the direction of our minister responsible for democratic renewal.

There's no doubt that the public interest is served by having strong whistle-blower protection, and certainly there's nobody on this side of the Legislature or that corner of the Legislature that would deny that. It's certainly been my personal belief for as long as I've known about politics that whistle-blower protection is a key factor in our democratic institutions.

The all-party select special ethics committee did a lot of work on the bill, and I do want to acknowledge that that work was done by all of us. There were a lot of thoughtful comments made. The submissions were superb, I thought, and it was obvious that this was something that was very important.

You know, besides physicians, the other area that I think that this legislation applies to that I'm very interested in – and we actually heard a little bit about this in question period today – is the nursing home operators. If this legislation is passed, I would think that perhaps what we heard about the issues in Lacombe might actually be helped.

Those people, those nursing students, I think, could be called whistle-blowers in a sense, and this is going to basically give them some backup when they want to do this. I'm really anxious to see this legislation pass so that the people working and caring for our most vulnerable people living in those long-term care facilities can feel free to try to help improve the environment in which they are working and do that without fear of retribution, without fear of losing their jobs, without fear of being discriminated against in their

employment. I think this is really, really important, and I don't think you can think of a better example than what was brought up in question period.

You know, the government does support the idea that this act should extend to service providers who provide services paid for with taxpayer money. However, it's also very important that everyone takes the time to review and consider which services should be included and how they should be included. So we're going to consult with government contractors and delegated service providers to see how best to move forward without stepping over the line into the private sector.

I think I'm going to wind up my comments at that point. I think this is vitally important legislation. I'm glad to see that there's a lot of interest on both sides that is generally supportive of the legislation. I would hope that the opposition can see their way to fulsomely supporting this without doing some ad hominem type of criticism that I heard a little bit of today. I don't think that that is helpful at all.

In any event, Madam Speaker, I would implore all of my colleagues in this House to support this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, under 29(2)(a) I'd like to ask the hon. member if in his 40 years of medical experience, without divulging details or circumstances, whether directly or in proximity to his practice, he's actually witnessed the effect of not having whistle-blower protection in place in workplaces that he was witness to and what types of pressures that put on employees that he may have been aware of that would have been otherwise helped by the whistle-blower protection that we're now contemplating with this legislation.

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

Dr. Turner: Yeah. Thank you very much to the member for that important question. I do have a lot of experience in health care in general, and I'm somewhat constrained by confidentiality issues at this point to discuss this. In fact, that comment actually is the basis of why I'm so supportive of this legislation, because heretofore health care providers have been constrained in doing this sort of thing. I can assure the member that there have been situations in which I personally might have wanted to become more vocal and bring forward issues, and this legislation is going to protect that.

To take a more positive view of it, having this protection is going to free up, basically, the creativity of our co-workers and our teams so that they can feel free to make comments about how things are managed without fear of retribution, and I think what will happen in health care facilities of all sorts is that you're going to see more. In fact, that's been happening in Alberta Health Services to a greater degree over the last few years because the management of Alberta Health Services actually is trying to promote this, to try to get people to buy in, to engage, you know, and with the whistle-blower protection we may actually see an improvement in the engagement numbers that Alberta Health Services has been seeing.

Thank you for the question.

3:40

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

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to speak to Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. I was able to participate in the committee, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, to review the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, and I'm pleased to stand today and speak on Bill 11, which would amend that act.

I must say that it was a pleasure to work with all members on the committee, and I believe that the amendments to the act reflect much of the work that was done by the committee. It was a show of how committee work can actually come to good resolution and bring forth good recommendations and how it's a very effective tool within our legislative process to work with all-party committees. We did review several written submissions on the committee, Madam Speaker, and I believe we also had three oral presentations to help us with our work.

One thing that the committee work on the public interest disclosure act allowed me to do was also to reflect on some of the whistle-blower work that I had done in the private sector, working on different boards and audit committees that helped to design whistle-blower functions within private-sector businesses, and how it can lead to very effective ways of bringing a culture change into an organization that helps to improve the culture in the organization and respect all levels, from management right down to beginning workers.

It was interesting, just going through the notes of our committee work, that the Auditor General, I believe, did a very good job of consolidating the written submissions that came before us and talked about five main issues that he found that were throughout many of the written submissions, and I believe that we did a fair bit of work on those main issues: expanding the scope or application of the act, coming to a definition of wrongdoing, investigations, and the ability of the commissioner to compel action.

Effective whistle-blower legislation does contribute to better government for the people that it is mandated to serve, and the successful whistle-blower programs, whether they be in government public service or whether they be in private-sector programs, to be effective really rely on buy-in right from the bottom to the top of the organization. I would suggest that it definitely works the best if the senior members of the workforce recognize the value of whistle-blower protection and the value of a whistle-blower program. It really helps to encourage a culture of transparency in how the whole workforce can work together to improve the operation.

Whistle-blower protection is about giving employees the piece of mind to know that they will be free from reprisal when they come forward and report wrongdoing. It's about enabling government employees to expose gross mismanagement of taxpayer-funded resources and bring unethical behaviour to light. Those who behave unethically should not have the privilege of stewarding tax dollars.

The changes being implemented will encourage early reporting of wrongdoing, which will help also with risk management within our functions. Early reporting of situations can really stem the costs of those misdoings. For risk management in undue loss of public dollars it's important that we have effective whistle-blower legislation.

I think there are a number of positive developments within this bill, which is a result of the co-operation of the multiparty legislative committee. It is my understanding that this bill reflects 20 of the 21 recommendations of the committee's final report. Under the new act those who disclose wrongdoing and face reprisal will be able to seek restitution through the Labour Relations Board. Whistle-blowers, who have been brave enough to report wrongdoing, unfortunately sometimes in the past have had their

career or work life suffer at the hands of the people committing the mismanagement. Hopefully, the likelihood of reprisals will be diminished by the fact that this bill includes a provision for whistle-blowers to report directly and anonymously to the office of the Public Interest Commissioner. A whistle-blower may not feel comfortable filing a disclosure with their boss or even their boss's boss. Furthermore, navigating bureaucracy is often a frustrating and unjust process.

Another thing this bill does is expand the scope of the act to the government's contracted service providers. This is important as the Auditor General did point out that there's a risk of misdoing with public funds through the services of contracted service providers. These contractors provide services for seniors and children, to name a few, and it's critical that there is an adequate avenue for reporting of wrongdoing.

One thing that was brought forward in the oral submissions – and it did concern me – was from the Alberta Federation of Labour, where Mr. Gil McGowan presented on behalf of the Alberta Federation of Labour. I did ask a question after his presentation. We had a discussion on extending the legislation into the private sector. It did concern me that the AFL had not become proactive in its own organization to ensure that its employees had the benefit of having whistle-blower protection for themselves.

Mr. McGowan did say that their organization

believes very strongly that whistle-blower protections are an important component of workers' rights and employment rights . . . with an eye to making it more effective. In general and in principle, we're supporters and fans of whistle-blower legislation . . . We believe that all employees, regardless of where they work in the public or private sectors, should have whistle-blower protection.

Then in further discussion on those points my colleague the MLA from Highwood asked a question, where there are 41 individuals who are listed as vice-presidents for the Alberta Federation of Labour – that's quite a size for a management team. He was wondering if the Alberta Federation of Labour could describe their internal processes and practices for dealing with whistle-blowers within their own organization. It astounded me to hear Mr. McGowan reply, "We do not have internal practices or procedures for whistle-blowing." This from a person that strongly believes that whistle-blower protection is an important component of workers' rights and employment rights yet has not taken the effort to ensure that his employees have that same right.

Mr. McGowan would like to see that we have legislation put forward to cover both public and private, and he talks about protecting the public interest. I would suggest that there's a little bit of confusion in his thought process. The public interest is identified by the Auditor General as protecting the public interest by whistle-blower protection where the recipients of public money are under this legislation. The Auditor General did suggest that he thinks that it broadens the scope, this opportunity to manage the risk of public dollars going to these other contractors.

3:50

Mr. McGowan did also say, "I'd be thrilled to welcome legislation that covers my employees as well." But, Madam Speaker, it is not necessary for legislation to come forward to encourage a private-sector body to do what they believe is right for their employees. Legislation is not necessary for whistle-blower protection to be implemented in the private sector, so when I hear this submission that they, the Alberta Federation of Labour, believe strongly in whistle-blower protection for their employees yet have put no effort into ensuring that that protection is given to their

employees and expect our body, the legislative body, to make them do it, I don't understand. There's a disconnect to me.

It is allowed to be done. I sat on boards where we had whistle-blower protection for all our employees, and it worked very effectively. We had third-party auditors that our employees were able to phone if they had any ideas about or saw any misdoings. So I would encourage the Alberta Federal of Labour to actually do that for their employees, to put forward whistle-blower protection for their employees. When it's identified at the top that it's an important function of a healthy organization, it will trickle down and will help that organization to stay very healthy.

Back to Bill 11. This bill calls for more detail when the office of the public interest conducts its annual reporting. The Public Interest Commissioner will now report on the types of proven wrongdoing in the disclosures received: a summary of findings in cases where wrongdoing or acts of reprisals are found to have been committed, the specific recommendations made to public entities or offices of the Legislature and the entities' responses to these recommendations, and any offences committed or penalties given under the act. I would like to see the reports tell how much money has been given in restitution each year, but I'm not sure if this bill does that.

I do look forward to further discussion on Bill 11. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you. I find it rather interesting that the member is talking about the Alberta Federation of Labour and Mr. Gil McGowan and the employees. I'm wondering if the member is aware that the executive is made up of union presidents that are covered by union contracts, and under the union contracts they have all those protections that are outlined: whistle-blower, antiharassment, bullying. All those things are covered under those union contracts. Of course, the other part of it is that any employees hired by the Alberta Federation of Labour are also unionized, and they are also covered under union contracts. So I'm asking you: are you aware of all those things when you make those kinds of comments?

Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: I find it interesting that the Member for West Yellowhead tries to second-guess what the presenter presented before committee, and to this day I have not received a reply to the recorded question that was given at that time. I asked, "So if you could give me an understanding on why you felt it was more necessary to have another entity establish [whistle-blower protection for your employees at] AFL as opposed to establishing it within your own organization." There was no reply, and I still have not received any reply.

So I find it difficult to take that submission seriously from an individual that has spoken very adamantly that they believe strongly in whistle-blower protection and that they believe that all employees, regardless of where they work, should have that protection. I'm a strong believer in whistle-blower protection. I'm a strong believer in whistle-blower programs being instituted in all organizations because I do believe that it's a fantastic way to create an environment that allows that organization to stay healthy and to stay ahead and to provide risk management for their organization so that there will be no wrongdoing.

When an individual brings submissions forward to our committee, quoting that they're a strong believer in that protection, yet makes the claim that there is no – I'll find it here; lots of papers. Essentially, Madam Speaker, the person doing the submission, Mr. Gil McGowan, reflected on the question from the MLA for

Highwood. The question was: "I'm wondering if you could describe to us . . . your internal processes and practices for dealing with whistle-blowers within your . . . organization." Mr. McGowan replies, "We do not have internal practices or procedures for whistle-blowing."

I find it somewhat disingenuous for an individual to make claims that they "believe that all employees, regardless of where they work in the public or private sectors, should have whistle-blower protection," to make claims that they believe that this is a right for all employees yet to not have that right being extended to their very organization. Mr. McGowan says, "We do not have internal practices or procedures for whistle-blowing."

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that this bill – updating and amending it is a very good move. It's something that has been needed in the public arena for a long time. Having protection for people that need to, want to speak up about concerns that they have, not just concerns but wrongdoings that they're aware of in their workplace, is really important. A good public service and a fair, honest, and transparent public sector are things that Albertans count on and should be able to count on. We want to make sure that serious wrongdoings in the public sector are both reported and addressed, not just reported and put on a piece of paper and filed away but dealt with.

Employees are the ones who see things that are going on, and they see what shouldn't be going on. They should be able to report serious problems without having to fear for their job security, and that fear of reprisal is a terrible obstacle. Anybody who's worked in a large institution or corporation knows that there is often, you know, maybe not an overt climate of fear but an underlying climate of fear: don't say too much, or you stand to jeopardize your job or your chances of promotion. There is an element of that being a deterrent. I like the fact that the way the investigation is to be dealt with or handled is laid out very clearly when problems are reported to encourage more people to be able to speak up when need be.

4:00

I've just gone through here and looked at things. One of the things I noticed in the bill was that wrongdoings aren't just having to do with public funds or assets or service delivery but that wrongdoings are also cases where public trust is being violated through egregious or systemic bullying and harassment. That's a very subtle wrong, but it's one that does involve people and is very demoralizing. I'm sure many of us have known people who did wind up leaving jobs that they were effective in and found enjoyment in and were successful at because of harassment in the workplace. I know there are other means for dealing with harassment, but it's good to have the whistle-blower.

The new legislation defines gross mismanagement, and in regard to bullying and harassment in the workplace the new act would allow the Public Interest Commissioner to become involved in some cases. As said, there are already a range of remedies for this – human rights legislation, employment law, and collective bargaining tools – but this allows the Public Interest Commissioner to step in if the other means have been exhausted and it's still going on.

I like the way it lays out how people can blow the whistle. The designated officer in each government department or public-sector entity is given the directions and means to know how to handle whistle-blower complaints, and a potential whistle-blower has to report to a designated officer before a wrongdoing will be investigated. Under the old law that had to be done, and they were

not protected from reprisal until that time. So they may have thought about it and talked about it, maybe to a supervisor, but until it went to the official designated officer, they were not free from the danger of reprisal. But under the new legislation they are allowed to approach their supervisor or the Public Interest Commissioner directly, and they're protected from reprisal as soon as they approach their supervisor. They don't have to wait until the designated officer is informed.

There are just a few other things that I thought were really worth while looking at. I know I was looking at the part on delegated service providers. As a psychologist I worked as a contracted service provider for school boards. I was being paid out of the public purse, and, you know, I used to wonder sometimes. I never had cause to be a whistle-blower, and I didn't see any wrongdoing that concerned me, but if I had, it would have been really important to know what the avenues were, what the means of reporting wrongdoing were so that it could be addressed. If there's any institution that we need to make sure is free of wrongdoing, then that is a school division, a school board.

The recommendations, I found, were very good, and it seemed like they were very thoroughly done, even the definitions clearly laying out the difference between the different kinds of wrongdoing. The reporting of it I've talked about.

One of the things I did mention just briefly, to back up a little bit: a potential whistle-blower may not know who their designated officer is. If the research and prior work hasn't been done, the person may not know, so they've got a choice to hang around and wait until they find out their designated officer's identity or to move on and talk to somebody who can start the process of dealing with the wrongdoing. That's where going directly to the commissioner would be advisable.

I know there are a lot of things that are dealt with and that everybody can read that, but I like the fact that the information is given, and I hope it's shared with every individual in the public sector, in a government sector of any kind, so that they know what their rights are and what their responsibilities are.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek for her informed comments, and I wonder if she could actually expand on some of the issues related to the psychology of whistle-blowers. In my experience, some of these whistle-blowers have been under a lot of stress, and that stress has actually been elevated to the point where it could be called, basically, posttraumatic stress because of the evocative nature of what they've witnessed or what they've been participating in. There's been bullying that's been going on. I just wondered if the member could further elaborate on how this legislation might actually alleviate some of that.

Ms Woollard: Thank you. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud put it very well. That is something that I didn't talk a lot about, but it's something that we all are aware of to some degree. As a psychologist also you know that people who have their confidence and their picture of themselves undermined on a systematic basis do lose perspective. They have a hard time seeing what they can and should do, so a victim mentality. If a person is convinced that speaking up is not going to be effective or that it's not necessary and that, really, what's happening isn't that bad or whatever, they start questioning their own judgment. They can. That is where having something like this would be really helpful. A lot of it is

saying: if you see or are aware of something that you believe is a wrongdoing, then you have the responsibility and the ability to go and speak about it and speak to somebody who, hopefully, would be able to support the person, the whistle-blower, in their thinking, maybe give them some added clarification. Maybe this is somebody who's a witness to or has been aware of the same concerns as the whistle-blower.

At any rate, that would be really important because it's that cycle of abuse, basically, psychological abuse. If a person is being bullied or harassed for a long period of time, it's very hard for them to step out of that situation that they're in, to be able to step out and look at it and say: that's wrong; that needs to stop. Anything we can do or anything that could be done – and I think this will help by giving more support to the whistle-blower – is good to help them have the ability to find out who to speak to and to start the process going.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yes. As you know, I worked for the federal government for nearly 33 years, and I was a union rep for about two-thirds of that time. I had – I can't tell you the exact number – many cases where harassment and bullying went on in the workplace, and when those members tried to deal with it, first of all in a very proactive manner, they found that they were targeted even more so because they were confronting really bad behaviour. I mean, eventually it reached a point where several members of the executive got suspended. They had to go through a process that took almost two years to get settled.

I'd like to hear from you – I mean, I think this legislation is awesome in that it's coming forward to try to protect from those kinds of things in the workplace – and I'd certainly appreciate knowing, again from a psychological standpoint: along with this whistle-blower legislation, how else can we protect employees when this kind of thing is going on in the workplace?

The Deputy Speaker: We're out of time. Sorry, hon. member.

I will now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

4:10

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 11. In my work history I've just been listing the number of places where I did work through some of my early work career. I started off listing warehouses that I worked in in my early teens, packing plants where I helped put myself through university, oil well service rigs north of Edmonton, seniors' long-term care. I was a master control operator at a community TV station, worked at numerous construction sites and also 30 years at a real estate office. Some might say, by reading all those, that I had trouble keeping a job in my early career, but actually they were mostly shorter term positions that helped me get through university, of course, culminating in 30 years of a real estate career.

However, in all those situations that I found myself working in, there were always instances where people during coffee breaks would rub shoulders with each other and talk about situations that they weren't comfortable with and want to know what they could do and who were fearful that if they did perhaps raise the alarm, their job would be at risk.

I know that in working as an oil well service rig hand, that was the most egregious place to work, that I worked at in 1982 or '83. Notice was given about three days beforehand that we were going to have an inspection of the rig, and you could see the binoculars of the rig inspector standing beside his car glint in the sunlight as he recorded the rig number to make sure it was standing, and that was

the extent of his inspection. I can tell you that that rig needed a serious inspection because when I was catching pipe and threading it in and the other fellow on the platform was greasing the threads, as it got close to the pipe that was already stemmed into the hole, there was an arc, a spark, at an open well, and it would happen every time we brought the two two-inch sleeve pipes together.

We'd been working for pretty much 72 hours straight moving one rig and putting rods down the hole, completing it off, and getting to the other site, and the push wanted to really get going and keep on moving. He said: look, just get this pipe, this sleeve, in the hole, and we'll shut her down for the night, and we'll fix it in the morning. It wasn't more than 10 minutes after that that the residual petroleum in the two-inch sleeve caught fire. I was right there, and luckily it was petroleum, an oil well, not a gas well. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't be talking here today. But people there didn't say anything. They were concerned about perhaps getting fired. And that's not the only safety incident there that people never spoke up about.

But as a result of that incident, we of course jumped right off the platform and ran for our lives until we got to the guy wires, and the fellow up in the crow's nest was screaming that he didn't have a cat line to get down, no safety line. We ran back, grabbed fire extinguishers, and tried to put the fire out, but not one of five fire extinguishers worked. So we ended up putting the fire out, an open flame at a wellhead, with rags. That was something that I don't think ever got reported to any type of authority at all. The rig did get shut down at that point, and, blow me down, they actually hired an electrician, who came out to fix the short in the lighting system that we relied upon to continue working into the night.

So that's one example in my working career where I can see how whistle-blower protection might have saved some lives, and I'm sure that's multiplied many times over in the past work histories of many other members of this Legislature. If they recounted stories from places they were employed at, they would probably come up with multiple stories of situations where they knew that things should be said about work practices or about how an operation was being undertaken, yet nobody said anything for fear of reprisal, for fear of losing their job. That was in the days of shoot, shovel, and shut up, where, in other words, you just kept your mouth shut and kept on working. That brings consequences, and it could have been my death as a result of that and that of many others who were working beside me on the same platform.

I know that after I think probably 10 weeks of working on that job, I would normally come home – and I was staying back at my folks' place for the duration of that summer. I'd finish the day working on that service rig, and I'd be covered in crude oil, so I know the smell of Alberta crude.

Crude oil doesn't wash off well with soap and water, so what you'd do in order to get the crude oil off you is turn to the pail of diesel fuel and some scrub brushes you had there. You'd wash the crude oil off with diesel fuel. To get rid of the diesel fuel, you had a pail of gasoline that you scrubbed off with. Then you went and showered, about a triple shower, and you could actually go home. When you got home, you stood your pants up at the door because they were crusty with crude oil from the day, and you'd hopefully pass muster for supper. You'd go inside and not smell too much like a refinery and have supper and crash in bed.

After about nine weeks of this job I went in to talk to my father – and I'd never actually quit a job before – and I told my dad: I quit that job today. And this is after reporting a few other incidents that included getting knocked off the platform into the sump and so forth. And he, to my relief, said: I'd have quit the darn thing two weeks ago.

So I had my experience on the service rigs and wished that there was somebody I could have spoken to and raised the alarm. Many of those people that I met in that service rig industry were missing digits, missing fingers, had caved-in faces, severe injuries that deformed them for life, that nobody really could say anything about and didn't in those days.

It's changed significantly now. There's no bravado, you know, about weathering through dangerous situations. The safety situation is much better. I think that had we had legislation like this back then, you would have seen those occupational safety issues taken care of much more rapidly because people would feel that they could come forward and report wrongdoings in terms of safety or other improper practices without repercussions hanging over their head that they might lose their job, lose their way of supporting their family as a result of doing the right thing, which is basically protecting their lives and that of their other workers and other workers down the road who might replace them later on.

This type of legislation has been a long, long time coming, and I support it wholeheartedly. I support the changes that the legislation makes in terms of how MLAs, ministers, and the Premier can all be investigated when an accusation of wrongdoing is made to the Public Interest Commissioner. So it applies right across the board, top to bottom, throughout the whole workplace in the province, Madam Speaker. Right now no other jurisdiction in Canada has whistle-blower legislation that applies to MLAs in the way that this legislation would apply. Ontario is the only jurisdiction currently that covers ministers. If this recommendation is accepted, it will make our government one of the most honest, transparent, and accountable governments in Canada.

We also know that not only are there wrongdoings in regard to gross mismanagement of public funds, assets, or service delivery, but there also might be cases where public trust is being violated through egregious or systemic bullying or harassment. One of the things that this new legislation does is to define gross mismanagement. In regard to bullying and harassment in the workplace this new act would allow the Public Interest Commissioner to become involved in some cases.

There are already a range of remedies for this like human rights legislation, employment law, and collective bargaining tools. However, this new legislation would allow the Public Interest Commissioner to step in if any of these other processes have been exhausted. Now, it would have been great during my stint on the service rigs and in other jobs that I had if there was a guideline as to how to go about blowing the whistle if you saw improprieties, how to respond to those people who talked to you in the lunchroom, to give them some advice as to who to approach and what method they could take to perhaps save somebody's skin in the workplace or make sure that a bullying situation was taken care of.

4:20

Currently each government department or public-sector entity has a designated officer to handle whistle-blower complaints. A potential whistle-blower has to report to a designated officer before a wrongdoing will be investigated, and they're not protected from reprisal until that time. This new legislation would improve the reporting process and ensure that whistle-blowers are protected when they need it. This new legislation does help that process by allowing whistle-blowers to approach their supervisor or the Public Interest Commissioner directly. Also, this new legislation means that whistle-blowers will be protected from reprisal as soon as they approach their supervisor, not have to wait until the designated officer is informed.

Now, as far as investigating the whistle-blower complaints, something that would have been unheard of in my oil patch days,

never mind being able to come forward with the complaint in the first place without probably getting sacked the moment you opened your mouth, we know that the whistle-blower coming forward with an allegation is only the first step in the process. We're proud that this new legislation will also strengthen the commissioner's ability to conduct investigations.

For instance, the commissioner will be authorized to go to an employee's workplace, to view records on-site, and the commissioner's power will be made equivalent to the Auditor General's ability to get at pertinent information. Also, the burden of accessing the information will be more equitably shared with the commissioner on-site, to review documentation instead of requiring the affected agency to deliver the information to them.

When you look at how widespread this legislation is, you should note that contractors, delegated service providers, and physicians, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud alluded to, were something under consideration during the select special all-party ethics committee. They did a lot of work on this bill, and I want to acknowledge the hours that were spent by many members thinking about this legislation and in preparing a well-prepared final report. One of the things that the committee talked about was that contractors hired by the government and some delegated service providers such as some physicians and some nursing home operators do not currently fall within the scope of the act.

This government supports the idea that this act should extend to some of the service providers who provide services paid for with taxpayer money. However, it's also very important that everyone takes the time to review and consider which services should be included and how they should be included. Our government supports the part of this new legislation which would consult with government contractors and delegated service providers to see how best to move forward without stepping over the line into the private sector. One of the recommendations of the all-party committee was to ensure that these regulations do not affect the private sector, and our government supports the committee's recommendations on that.

Now, Madam Speaker, in order to make this legislation effective and in order to create an atmosphere where whistle-blowers feel secure coming forward, it is critical that their identity be protected. In the existing legislation it is already clear that FOIP does not apply to records held by the Public Interest Commissioner. However, there is an exception to this, and that is when a designated officer initiates an investigation rather than the commissioner. In that case, it is possible for a third party to submit a FOIP request asking for records connected to the investigation. This is not a secure situation for the whistle-blower, and the new legislation will ensure that the name of the whistle-blower and other identifying information is exempted from FOIP requests. The new legislation will also require that more details be reported annually by the Public Interest Commissioner.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just wondering if the member would care to expand more on what he was about to say, I think, about the expansion of the reporting, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to continue with the conclusion of my remarks. Everybody in the Chamber and everybody in the public knows that

most whistle-blowers merely want to help fix mistakes and make things right. I'm proud of this legislation, that I hope will make legitimate whistle-blowers feel more secure in coming forward with their concerns. Everyone in this Chamber can agree that when it comes to public money and resources, opportunities to identify and correct mistakes should be welcome. I'm confident that this legislation, if passed, will help make that happen and help to protect those who come forward. This is just one way that our government is working to make life better for all Albertans and increasing the transparency and accountability of the public sector. I support this legislation, and I hope that everyone else in this Chamber does as well.

Now, as you know and as we've alluded to previously, on June 25, 2015, the Legislative Assembly passed Government Motion 12, which appointed the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, an all-party committee made up of 17 members, to review the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act along with other bills. This all-party committee put forward a number of recommendations, all of which were seriously considered, and the work of this committee has been commended by others in this House and was really put forward as an example of how members of this Legislature can really complement each other and work together to come up with legislation and recommendations around legislation that benefit a wide cross-section of Albertans when it comes to not only this matter but all types of legislation that we as committee members, as legislators are asked to comment on.

Some of the recommendations are incorporated into the legislation, and some are not. But I think that the general consensus about the work of that committee is that it was a very, very fine example of how positively we can work together and how we can really have some great results coming from a truly nonpartisan effort at seeking solutions to problems that face Albertans that are better tested in arguments that are seeking the truth rather than seeking partisan gain.

Now, the all-party committee recommended that the legislation be expanded to contracting entities. At this time we are accepting the all-party committee's recommendations, but much more work needs to be done to determine how to cover public-sector services carried out by third parties without stepping over the line into the private sector.

There are new penalties under the legislation that are contemplated if it's passed. The current act already establishes strict penalties of up to \$25,000 for the first offence and up to \$100,000 for each subsequent offence. Offences include the following: committing a reprisal; withholding information or making a false or misleading statement or counselling or directing another person to do so; obstructing, counselling, or directing another person to obstruct any individual acting in an official capacity under the act; destroying, mutilating, altering, falsifying, or concealing any document or thing that may be relevant to an investigation or directing or counselling another person to do so. There are no new penalties although whistle-blowers who are subject to retaliation would now be entitled to remediation as determined by the Labour Relations Board.

Now, if whistle-blowers go to the media rather than the commissioner – people have asked whether there's protection if they go to the media rather than the commissioner or their designated officer. Now, the act has a formal disclosure process for this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: That concludes the time under 29(2)(a).

Any other hon. members wishing to speak? I'll call on Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill 11, and I'd like to speak in favour of this bill. I think this is something that is building on existing legislation in a very constructive and positive way and one that's going to provide better – well, I mean, a couple of different things: one, I think it can provide one more tool to ensure that, you know, toxic workplaces aren't tolerated within government; secondly, I think it's critical, as these type of measures are, to improving our democratic practice in this province.

I'll talk first about sort of the expansion to allow the Public Interest Commissioner to investigate a wider variety of wrongdoings, including some forms of mismanagement but also, in particular, bullying or abuse of human resources. Now, of course, there are different pieces of legislation as well as workplace regulation that would address these types of issues. Even within the Legislative Assembly Office – right? – we have our respectful workplace policy and assorted directives.

Now, with these types of chains of reporting, there's always a concern that you might have individuals that, because of the widespread and systemic nature of the abuse that might be occurring, would, you know, feel constrained from reporting to their direct supervisor or even one or two steps up that chain and be fearful of reprisals if they do so, both overt – but, of course, these aren't always overt. There are other sort of covert ways to be able to get back at people who are breaking silence over various abuses of power. I think this is something that is going to be one more tool, that will allow another channel so they can go to the Public Interest Commissioner if it's relevant and at the same time be guaranteed that they'll be protected from reprisal from that very moment. I think this will really help get some respect because with these systems, people do have to feel protected, the vast majority of people that might be willing to step forward.

I mean, this is something, I guess, alluding to prior occupations, but I did do consultation and training on respectful workplaces for the city of Edmonton. There were some times when I would have individuals approach me, and they were a bit cynical about the process. They had multiple channels to go through but said: well, it will get back to the abusers, and it's just not worth it for us. So just one more channel is an important one to be able to get at it, especially where you have a toxic workplace. They don't tend to be issues where you have one or two – you know, if it's one or two people that aren't following proper behaviour with their colleagues, that's one thing, but when you have systemic abuse, it seems to erode. So I think it will be useful that way.

Secondly, I was saying that it's important for democratic practice. I mean, I just looked it up. It's a common quote – I think it's from Justice Brandeis – that sunlight is the best disinfectant, right? This is something that, you know, I mean, I had one of my colleagues – he's not in the House today. Oh, God. I didn't say that. Yeah. You could strike that. One of the hon. members – I didn't mention the name, so it's okay – liked to refer to *Firefly*, *Star Trek*.

I'm thinking of a historical analogy, and that's with Gorbachev and the whole movement of perestroika and glasnost in the then Soviet Union in the 1980s. The reason why you had perestroika and glasnost – now, perestroika, of course, referred to restructuring, and glasnost referred to openness. Looking back, in retrospect within Russia today and within, you know, countries like China, Gorbachev has been roundly criticized. He was criticized, saying: well, this was destructive, and all we needed to do was just economic restructuring, so what was the whole point of this whole glasnost thing?

But if you look back at that time, I mean, you know, for the reformers within the old Soviet Union, glasnost had to come first. Why did glasnost have to come first? For the simple reason that without openness, without having people be able to stand up and let officials know what was really going on, it was impossible to reform, right? How can you make informed decisions as a democratic society if you don't have the actual facts of the matter at hand? When you have an environment where there is abuse of power, where there is abuse of privilege, and where you don't have individuals feeling safe to be able to stand up to it, not only do those continue; they can continue despite the best of intentions by those in power for the simple fact that they're not aware that they're happening because people are afraid to tell.

That speaks, I think, directly to being able to govern well. How can you govern well if you're making decisions based on things that aren't actually true? You have your tools, and you're using your tools to the best of your ability to fulfill your mandate, but those tools are defective, and nobody will tell you because they're afraid to. This is something that faced the old Soviet regime. This is something that might surprise people, but when it collapsed, it came as a huge shock to a lot of people within the politburo, within the Supreme Soviet. They were shocked because they thought that things were going just great. I mean, there's an anecdote about Yuri Andropov where, I think, one of his children was saying that, you know, as far as he was concerned, everything was fine in the Soviet Union, but it's because all he could see was what he could see through the windows of his Chaika limousine when he was going from his home to the Kremlin.

Now, I don't want to necessarily compare our predecessors here to the old Soviet regime, but definitely I think sometimes – and I'm sure members of the opposition would agree – I mean, this is a province where we could have used a little more glasnost at certain points than we had. So I think that this is definitely something that's going to help all of us be able to have a better understanding of what the real situation sometimes is and then be able to make better decisions as a consequence.

I mean, it just sort of speaks to why free speech is so important on a pragmatic level. I want to refer to the philosopher John Stuart Mill, who I know is popular amongst some of my colleagues across the floor here mostly for his economic arguments. But sometimes people lose the moral arguments and even the epistemological arguments that he made around the importance of people being able to speak freely without fear of repercussion. According to Mill, really it's the only tool you have to be able to get at a sense of collective truth. By silencing certain parties for whatever reasons but in particular for fear of repercussions, you're actually preventing the ability to get at what the truth of the matter is, and that has grave pragmatic consequences, right? You know, it's like going back – I mean, you make these decisions based on an understanding of what the situation is, but it's a skewed understanding because you're only getting part of the story, right?

4:40

That's why I think this is something that we shouldn't be afraid of because there might be concerns, you know, from all of us on just how radical this expansion is. It is a radical expansion of whistle-blower protection. I think it's something to be commended. By "radical" I mean something that's a real change, and that's having political staff included within the legislation. That's something that I think would be wrong. But I think we're pretty unique in that in the country if we're going forward – I'd like to commend the committee for bringing that type of suggestion forward.

Not only is that going to make sure that we're – you know, if one of us is acting in a way that's untoward, that's unacceptable, that's an abuse of power, there's a better chance we'll be able to be held to account. It'll also create, I think, a more open environment. Like I say, sunlight is the best disinfectant. If all of us go forward with the understanding that if we act in a way that fits within the definition in the legislation, that is considered abuse, we too can be held to account, we too can face investigation. In that sense there aren't any little corners where you can avoid the sunlight, where you can do things in the darkness, which is where you tend to do things you don't want people to find out about. I think that by extending protections to more employees, including staff in the office of the Premier and ministers and MLAs, that's definitely a positive step.

Now, that being said, of course there are certain, you know, things that are legitimately kept secret. There are some types of discussions and conversations where if it's totally public, the people within it can't feel free to express their true opinion. It's a constraint on information necessary to making decisions as well. I'm speaking, of course, about parliamentary privilege and why that has developed over time. I mean, this is something that's developed over the centuries, and it's to make sure that with all this there is a space where we can speak entirely frankly. Now, that's about talking, about advice, that type of thing. I think we can protect that while at the same time making sure that how we treat people and how we treat our powers are subject to that disinfectant when they come out.

It's for these reasons that I'd like to commend once again the committee for, I think, putting together a good, balanced package, something that's very progressive and, hopefully, maybe an example to other provinces because I know that there are other provinces that weren't actually as far ahead as Alberta was even before this legislation. Hopefully, it'll serve as an example to some of the dawdlers so that, you know, everyone across the country can benefit from more open government, more transparent government, where nobody is considered to be above the law or is above reproach.

Thank you for listening to my points. I welcome any questions if you might have some.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You had mentioned a little bit of Soviet and Russian history in your comments there. It was brought to my attention that when the Holodomor memorial display was out front, some of the presenters there: you actually questioned their accuracy. I was wondering if you might want to comment on that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. It's not germane, but with your indulgence I can reply to the question. The presenter was saying that the gulag prisons had just been closed in the 1980s, and I corrected the presenter to say that they were actually closed under Khrushchev in the 1960s.

The Deputy Speaker: I would urge you, hon. members, to keep your questions relevant to the topic at hand.

Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, other speakers to the bill? Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As always, it's a pleasure to get up in this House and speak to a bill and share my thoughts

although I know that not all appreciate it when I get up to talk. But I'm sure the present members appreciate every word I have to say.

Dr. Turner: We do.

Loyola: Thank you. I appreciate that.

It gives me great honour to speak specifically about Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. As we speak about this bill, I think it's very important to highlight those two first words: public interest. What is in the public interest? And how is the work that public servants do day to day for all Albertans a way that they are part of building the great society that we have here in Alberta, in this province? Their day-to-day contributions do exactly that, protect the public interest of all Albertans. We can't forget that that is the primary objective of this bill, the public interest.

The public interest is served through our democratic system, and it's so important within a democracy that there are opportunities for checks and balances. Being an individual that came from a country which established a military regime, a military dictatorship, you can only guess how important it is for me to support democracy and not only to support the process of every four years electing representatives specifically to this House but also that constituents play an active role in participating in their democracy day to day.

We can't forget that public servants are constituents. They're doing their best to make sure that all Albertans get the services that they require, and they're part of that democracy. The hard work that they do every day is part of making sure that we have a strong democracy, and I think that we forget that. Now, you could call me biased. My wife is a public servant. I know many public servants, and I'm sure many of you in this House know public servants, but I think that we forget to appreciate the hard work they do day in, day out in order to contribute to our democracy and to make sure that Albertans are served well by that democracy.

Before I continue, though, I want to go into a little bit about culture because I remember working on the committee, and I remember how important it was for me to speak directly to the issue that what we're trying to do here is to create a paradigm shift. Up until this point, under the previous legislation and until this passes, that piece of legislation had holes in it. Public servants didn't feel a hundred per cent confident to come forward and disclose if there was gross mismanagement happening within a department or ministry. The reason for that is because in the legislation there isn't specifically the issue of how reprisals were going to be addressed. I'm going to get into that a little bit later on. I don't want to forget that we're talking about culture here.

4:50

Now, as a student of anthropology at the University of Alberta I'm proud to say that culture is something very important. A lot of people when they hear the word "culture" think ethnic diversity. My culture: these are my dances, and this is my food, you know? But culture goes even deeper than that, to the subcultures that we have within our different ethnic groupings, and at the base of that are the values and principles that we so intimately hold. That is the true foundation of our culture, the things that we hold dear: family, hard work, making sure that things are fair, that all are treated fairly in our society and our community, that everybody has the same opportunities that everybody else does, and that when we see barriers for some people when it comes to accessing those opportunities, we're going to do something to change it.

Now, that's what our government is all about, and we've been working so hard over the last two years to address those things. I want to talk about the culture that existed in this province for more

than 44 years, and at the risk of boring some people, I'm going to go all the way back to colonization. Let us not forget that this fine country that we call Canada was established by the Hudson's Bay Company. It was established as a corporation. The English had the Hudson's Bay Company, and of course the French had the North West Company, but the prime objective of both those companies was to extract resources from this land so that they could send them back to Europe. Now, of course, the majority of those were furs, as we well know, those of us who know our history and those who have had a chance to visit Fort Edmonton or Fort Calgary or all those wonderful historical interpretive centres that we have here in the province of Alberta, that tell the Alberta story so well.

But rooted deep in that story is a tendency for authoritarianism, not only authoritarianism but specifically colonization and, within that colonization, also patriarchy. Yes, I said it. Patriarchy. All of that has contributed to a strong foundation that has made Alberta the place it is today. Now, of course, Alberta has many, many wonderful things about it, but if we want to make Alberta better, we need to address those aspects of our culture that aren't good, and colonization is something that we need to focus on, of course, colonization and what happened in terms of marginalizing specifically the indigenous people here in the province of Alberta.

You know, I remember the hon. member across the way in the Indigenous Relations estimates specifically speaking to the fact of: how come we don't have more indigenous people working in the Ministry of Indigenous Relations? Great question. But it's not something that we can simply fix by saying: okay; well, now we're just going to go hire more indigenous people.

Mr. Hanson: Just one would be good.

Loyola: One would be good, yes. And my understanding is that they have hired one.

It goes deeper than that. It's about understanding the historical injustices that occurred in the past and trying to address those issues and not only that but also understanding and sharing in a wider understanding of how indigenous people and settler colonialism can work together in order to make this province a better place.

Of course, the base of that is the treaties. Now, I'll remind people – and, hopefully, there are people watching us at home that I'll be able to help remind – about the treaties. So many people think – and I'll be honest with you; this is even a misconception that I had until I learned otherwise – that the treaties allowed indigenous people to have their reservations. When I was younger, when I was in high school, that's what I thought because that was the history that was being passed down to me. That was the narrative that was being passed down to me as a new Canadian immigrant coming from that particular background. I think that many other people shared that misconception of what the treaties meant. But, of course, as I'm sure many of the members here in this House understand, the treaties aren't that.

The treaties said that, yes, these reservations were going to be set aside so that indigenous people could live and that we would share the rest, that we would have a shared responsibility to make sure that the wealth of this province and this nation would be shared equitably by all who call it home. Already right there you can see that we have this disjointed culture. Settler colonialism understands it from a different perspective. They thought: "No. We're going to come in, and we're going to develop. We're going to create our urban centres, and we're going to benefit from the wealth. The indigenous people can be there on their reserves, and if they want, hopefully, they can adopt the same agricultural methods that we use," not understanding the traditions of indigenous people here and

not only not understanding them but just being reluctant to even fathom how both cultures could get along.

Now, you may be wondering: “Okay. Well, this bill is the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. Why is he talking about colonization?” But I think I’ve made a really good argument to establish how the misunderstanding of our cultures has led to where we are right now and why there aren’t more indigenous people in the public sector. We need to make sure that the public sector mirrors the Alberta population, that we have more people who are ethnically diverse working in the public sector and not just at the bottom rungs but also higher up. I’m proud that our government is addressing that. Slowly we’re getting there with time.

I also talked about patriarchy. We wouldn’t need a ministry for the status of women if patriarchy weren’t a reality. Now, I’m so proud to be part of a government that has established a Ministry of Status of Women, that not only established the Ministry of Status of Women but is already doing the analysis on how many women are in the public sector and in what roles within the public sector. When you look at the data and you analyze the data, you start seeing that there are not many women in the upper rungs of the public sector, in director positions, assistant deputy ministers. There are some but not as many as there could be. Through the Ministry of Status of Women they’ve established a women’s leadership program so that the women who are interested in moving into those leadership positions within our government can do so. This is how we build a strong democracy, by making sure that those who didn’t have access before have access now.

Now, these people, as I stated at the very beginning, are the people who work so hard to make sure that our democracy and the services that we provide Albertans may be the best that we can offer the citizens of this fine province.

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member was, well, just kind of beginning his speech about the patriarchy and how that influences this legislation and at the lower end kind of a whole servant-master type of ideal, so I was wondering if the member could expand on his ideas about patriarchy and women’s rights and how it influences this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my hon. colleague for asking such an important question. Of course, as a man I’m a hundred per cent aware that there are women in this room that don’t need me to explain it to them because they live it every day. I would consider myself a newbie when it comes to understanding patriarchy because I’m not the one that has to live it every day and feel the effects of it, but I’m glad to be part of a caucus where there are incredibly strong women who share their experiences with me so that I may learn about the realities that they have to face.

It’s really interesting that when you look at the public sector, you see that there is a majority of women – right? – but those women are not in positions of power. Add that now to the fact that under previous legislation people felt reluctant to come forward and, quote, blow the whistle. So if you’re a woman in a system plagued by colonialism, plagued by patriarchy, how likely are you going to be to come forward and blow the whistle and not fear that potentially you could be fired for doing so?

Now, I’m not talking about what would really happen. I’m talking about perception here based on historical reality. We all see what’s going on. We all see the structures around us. We all know how gender, sex, and our ethnic makeup are part of the aspects of our society. I’ve heard it many times from people who are ethnically diverse. They come and say to me: “Well, you know what? I’m a little bit afraid to say what’s going on here. I’m a little reluctant to come forward because I’m afraid I’m going to lose my job.” If there’s one aspect of Bill 11 that is so great in terms of what we’re trying to do here in this province, it’s exactly addressing that: protecting whistle-blowers against reprisals.

I remember fighting so hard for it in committee along with many of my colleagues both on this side of the House and that side. We all agreed that there needs to be a way to protect us so that we can build a culture that’s going to strengthen our democracy as we move forward. That’s what it’s about at the end of the day. Let’s not forget. I go back to my opening remarks that this is about strengthening our democracy. This is about making sure that when people that work in the public sector see gross mismanagement, whether it be financial gross mismanagement or human resources gross mismanagement, which is now included within the amendment act before us today, someone can come forward and feel confident that they will not be reprisal against. Even if they should be so unlucky as to have a reprisal against them, we’ve set it up so that we can make sure that they would receive a reward if they’ve had to go through a process like that. We want to make sure that we have a culture... [The time limit for questions and comments expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 11? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for speaking. It was a very insightful speech. I really hope that everyone was able to pay close attention, as I am sure all members do whenever any member of the House rises.

I’m very proud today to stand in the House in support of Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. This legislation will better protect employees already covered by the whistle-blower legislation, and it will increase the number of people who would be protected, like staff in the offices of the Premier and ministers as well as all MLAs no matter where they stand in the Legislature. I’m really proud to be part of a government that is making life better for Albertans by renewing democracy in the province.

This isn’t the first bill that we’ve done to renew democracy and really improve our province. I mean, our first bill was to ban political donations from unions and corporations. After that, I was very proud to support the Fair Elections Financing Act, which helped to make sure that good ideas and everyday Albertans decide elections and not big bankrolls and deep pockets. This whistle-blower legislation amendment act would build on those successes, Madam Speaker, and further the principles of open government in Alberta by increasing accountability, ethics, and transparency.

Whistle-blowing is not something new. It’s been around since, really, the dawn of time whereas always people who are the general workers who believe something wrong is happening, whether that be in a corporation or in a government or basically anywhere – I was just looking up some history online, and I found one from 1777 even, with Samuel Shaw along with a third lieutenant, Richard Marven, who was a midshipman. Shaw was a key figure in the passage of the first whistle-blower law passed in the United States

by the Continental Congress. During the Revolutionary War the two naval officers blew the whistle on the torturing of British POWs by Commodore Esek Hopkins. Of course, as everyone obviously knows, Esek Hopkins was the commander-in-chief of the Continental Navy. The Continental Congress enacted the whistle-blower protection law on July 30, 1778, by unanimous vote. In addition, it declared that the United States would defend the two against the libel suit filed against them by Hopkins.

As everyone knows, it's very difficult, whether you're a lieutenant or a midshipman or even just a general worker in a company, to file something against your superior, especially if it's the commander-in-chief of the entire Continental Navy. So that's really where modern whistle-blower protection came from. It was because the Continental Congress at that time was able to pass legislation unanimously, and that didn't happen very often. There was a lot of piddling and twiddling and resolving in the Continental Congress, if anyone was aware. I don't know if anyone in the opposition was alive back in 1778, but I certainly wasn't. I'm very proud of what we've been able to accomplish thus far and to see how far whistle-blower legislation has come.

5:10

Even in 1984 there was a huge blow-up in the Canadian government when a Canadian civil servant reported to his chief, the top Canadian civil servant at the time, that the minister of defence under Brian Mulroney, Minister Robert Coates, had visited a West German strip club while on an official mission, with NATO documents in his possession, thus creating a security risk. While Coates was asked to resign from cabinet by Prime Minister Mulroney at the time, he also fired Duncan Edmonds and made him a *persona non grata* in government circles.

In reality, making sure that people in government who do come forward are given the rights of protection is incredibly important because we've seen – when was that? – 20, 30, 40 years ago, in the '80s, even as recently as then, that people who did come forward as whistle-blowers were still symbolically crucified by governments and by ministers and even by Prime Ministers. It's very important that we read this legislation and that we support the legislation as one of the biggest fears of employees and one of the reasons they don't come forward is the fear of reprisal by their employers. There is some protection with regard to that once this bill is finally passed. Right now any employer in the public sector can be prosecuted for punishing an employee who exposes a wrongdoing, but there is no mechanism in place to determine what kind of restitution should be made to the whistle-blower if they are the subject of such an unlawful punishment.

I'm really proud to say that the new legislation would enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies when there has been a reprisal and that the board may decide that the whistle-blower deserves to get their job back if they've been fired or that they might be entitled to compensation. In the end, it will be up to the board to decide what is appropriate, and the board's order would be enforceable like a court order.

Our government hopes that these changes will encourage whistle-blowers to feel safe in coming forward because that's really the most important part. People won't come forward unless they know that they're safe in doing so. Some people will. Those people are fabulous, and we really appreciate them. However, many people won't because they're afraid of losing their jobs. They're afraid of their previous employers or even government coming back to them, as happened with Duncan Edmonds in 1984. They're afraid of what could happen. So making sure that that's explicitly in the legislation, that they won't lose their job, that they do have protections: that's really what's important.

I'm really happy that the act now expands to ministers and MLAs because another problem with the old legislation is that it didn't protect political staff who were working in ministers' offices and premiers' offices. As well, Madam Speaker, members of the Legislature weren't covered at all under the previous legislation. This is simply not right. As Members of the Legislative Assembly in this province we should be leaders when it comes to ethics and accountability, not people who are excluded from being held accountable, whether that's our staff or even managers in our offices, so I very much support the changes that this legislation makes in these areas as well.

If passed, this bill will mean that MLAs, ministers, and the Premier can all be investigated when an accusation of wrongdoing is made to the Public Interest Commissioner. Now, we know that this has been the subject of parliamentary privilege, and matters regarding parliamentary privilege would still be ruled on in the Legislative Assembly by the Speaker, of course. This is where Alberta will once again be a leader, Madam Speaker, because right now no other jurisdiction in Canada has whistle-blower legislation that applies to MLAs in this way, and Ontario is the only jurisdiction that covers ministers.

I'm really proud to see Alberta as a leader when it comes to ethics and accountability. It's something that we haven't seen, really, for decades, even centuries, I'd say. If this recommendation is accepted, it will help make our government one of the most honest, transparent, and accountable governments in Canada, and that's not only the front bench, Madam Speaker. That's the back bench. That's the opposition. That's every single last Member of this Legislative Assembly. I'm very proud to see that coming forward.

We also know that not only are there wrongdoings in regard to gross mismanagement of public funds, assets, or service delivery, but there also might be cases where public trust is being violated through egregious or systemic bullying or harassment. I know I've spoken to many public servants who have been bullied and who are always afraid of coming forward as a whistle-blower.

One of the things that this new legislation does is to define gross mismanagement, and in regard to bullying and harassment in the workplace this new act would allow the Public Interest Commissioner to become involved in some cases. There are already a range of remedies for this like human rights legislation, employment law, and collective bargaining tools. However, this new legislation would allow the Public Interest Commissioner to step in if any of these other processes have been exhausted, and that's something that we haven't seen in the previous legislation.

I'm really glad it's coming forward, as it is a very touchy subject for many public servants. There is gross bullying, and really it can be quite widespread. So allowing staff to come forward saying that there is bullying being done in their workplaces is something that I'm really proud that we're finally bringing forward. It's really a shame that it didn't come forward before because it has happened for eons. I'm really glad that this is finally going to be in the legislation.

Finally, this new legislation would also improve the reporting process and ensure that whistle-blowers are protected when they need it. Currently each government department or public-sector entity has a designated officer to handle whistle-blower complaints. A potential whistle-blower has to report to a designated officer before a wrongdoing will be investigated, and they are not protected from reprisal until that time. But this new legislation will help the process by allowing whistle-blowers to approach their supervisor or the Public Interest Commissioner directly, and that's really an important tool that public servants will finally have.

I know when we talked to the Public Interest Commissioner at the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, that was

something that he had directly stated was needed because many people do try to come directly to the Public Interest Commissioner; however, before that was never an option. So I'm really glad we have this in the legislation as well. Also, this new legislation means that whistle-blowers will be protected from reprisal as soon as they approach their supervisor and will not have to wait until the designated officer is informed.

This entire bill is really bringing our whistle-blower legislation into the 21st century, and I'm proud that we will finally be a leader in this respect. I'd like to thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me some time to talk about this bill.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

5:20

Bill 12 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are here today to debate the merits of Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017.

I have to say that over the weekend I had the pleasure to speak with a lot of folks in my area who had heard about the bill and thanked me for introducing it. I'll be honest. Many people were actually shocked that this wasn't already in place to protect Albertans, and I think that shock comes from Albertans wanting and expecting their government to stand up for them and have their backs when they're making one of the largest, if not the largest, investment of their lives.

You know, on this side of the House we believe in a few simple things. We believe that a government should be working to make life better for Albertans every day that we walk through these doors of this Legislature, we believe that we can protect and promote smaller builders who get undercut out of the market by fly-by-night companies, and we believe that Alberta families should be able to make informed decisions and be protected when investing in their future home.

Again, what seemed to surprise a lot of the constituents I spoke to this weekend is that there are no specific requirements for the residential construction industry in Alberta. This leaves the government of Alberta with little recourse to stop a bad builder from building even if they have a documented history of fraud, have weak finances, or no credentials, and this could happen to any Albertan. Many of the folks I have spoken to since introducing this bill either had a personal story to share or had a friend or relative that may have encountered this. Even the most proactive Albertans struggle when trying to find information on the financial standing or build history of a prospective builder. So it is with great pride that I stand here to speak to this bill.

If passed, builder licensing will reduce the risk prospective homeowners face by establishing a licensing system for home builders, providing homebuyers with a single source of information on builders, and creating provisions to remove or suspend bad builders in order to protect people from negligent or unscrupulous businesses. We want to see that Albertans are empowered to go with trustworthy builders to construct their homes and that Albertans are better protected.

There are many excellent builders in Alberta, the vast majority of whom work hard, are professional, and build safe and beautiful homes. Under this new framework good builders will no longer be competing with fly-by-night companies that come in, cut corners, and undercut smaller builders out of the market. With builder licensing all builders will need to disclose their corporate history, build experience, financial claims, and any court proceedings in their licence application.

The new-home buyer protection office in my department will review applications for court proceedings, outstanding bankruptcies, orders and administrative penalties under the New Home Buyer Protection Act and Safety Codes Act, and make a determination on whether or not to issue a licence. Key criteria for rejection or removal of a licence would include instances of fraud, risk exposure due to pending bankruptcy, a builder grossly misrepresenting himself or herself, or licence rejection or removal in other provincial jurisdictions.

A licence will be suspended in instances of noncompliance with New Home Buyer Protection Act orders or administrative penalties, patterns of outstanding Safety Codes Act orders or violations, or patterns of financial court claims. Other criteria that would be considered as potential grounds for suspension would include violations under the Fair Trading Act, occupational health and safety standards, employment standards, workers' compensation orders and violations.

Builders who receive their licence will be added to the new public online registry of licensed builders. The online registry will allow consumers to look up corporate histories, build histories, and financial records and allow them to track these over the years. This will provide consumers with a single source of information, a one-stop shop, to help Albertans make informed decisions. It will also promote the many experienced and trustworthy builders in Alberta.

When we consulted with Albertans about this over the winter, we heard overwhelmingly from the 1,200 Albertans who took the survey that nearly 80 per cent supported the idea of licensing builders. We also held 11 engagement sessions across the province to talk with key stakeholders about builder licensing. Working with the Canadian Home Builders' Association and smaller independent builders along with other industry leaders like the Canadian Condominium Institute, we developed a licensing framework that works to protect consumers while promoting the work of great builders.

Currently 75 per cent of Canadians enjoy the benefits and protections of a licensing system in Ontario, B.C., and Quebec, and Manitoba is currently developing their framework and plans to have theirs online for 2018. Not having one means that Albertans have less consumer protection right now than the majority of Canadians. One of the reasons that I'm proud to work for this government is that we just don't settle for average.

What would make our licensing framework unique in Canada is the integration with our home warranty program. Other jurisdictions have different governing bodies that issue their permits, their licences, and their warranties. If there's a failure of communication, this can result in a building receiving a building permit before they even receive a licence or a warranty.

By amending the New Home Buyer Protection Act and tying our licensing framework to our warranty program, we would create a system of checks and balances that protects consumers from falling through the cracks and promotes the builders with great track records. While builder licensing will offer new-home buyers proactive protection when looking to build a new home, the new home warranty program will continue to protect new-home owners after they've moved in. This integration will require home builders to receive a licence before they're able to apply for warranty

coverage. Both the licence and a warranty will then be required to receive a building permit.

This is another example of a made-in-Alberta solution that other provinces are taking notice of. This bill comes from a coalition of Alberta builders, home sellers, homeowners, tradespeople, and government officials working together collaboratively to ensure that this framework comes together in the best way to protect Albertans and the residential home building industry.

As I said, I'm proud to stand here today to move and speak to this bill.

I look forward to the debate on the bill, and I look forward to answering any questions as they come up. Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve a government that protects consumers while promoting great businesses, and that's what we're doing.

I'm looking forward to some of the discussion involved. I've received a lot of positive feedback over the few days since I introduced the bill. You know, that was on Twitter, that was on Facebook, that was phone calls, and in my constituency. So I'm looking forward to hearing more positive stories from people out there. Like I said, any questions or things that I can clear up, I'd be happy to do so.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Stier: Good afternoon and thank you, Madam Speaker, and good afternoon, everyone. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak a little bit about Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. Thanks to the minister for the information he's supplied today on this new bill. I'm certainly most happy to see this bill.

A little bit of history to start out with, I guess, is what I've got prepared here today. The New Home Buyer Protection Act was passed by the Legislature in 2014. I was here during the time when we had those discussions, and it was of interest to me then. It was initially brought in because there was a growing number of homeowners who were finding that their newly built homes were poorly constructed, and the home builders that they had hired were not required to offer any sort of warranty in those times. This resulted in many Alberta families experiencing a significant financial loss, sometimes having to fix and replace shoddy workmanship.

In fact, I'm sure my colleagues from Fort McMurray, who aren't here today, may recall the issue of the poorly built Penhorwood condominium complex that resulted in over 300 residents being evacuated in the middle of the night. In the end, the entire structure was deemed uninhabitable, actually, and in 2015, four years after the evacuation was ordered, it was demolished.

I'm not going to stand here and claim that had the government of Alberta had a home builder licence requirement in those days, the issue of Penhorwood never would have arisen, but it went much deeper and was partly also the result of Fort McMurray's extreme housing shortage, incredible economic expansion, and problems within industry all converging together, apparently, which culminated in the building being ultimately condemned. In response, though, to Penhorwood and others the province began the process of implementing a number of consumer protections that would eventually result in lessening the number and severity of poorly constructed homes and condo buildings.

If the public, though, does not have faith in the products that are being produced, be it new homes or children's toys, the impact both economically and socially can be severe. There's no question. Albertans work hard for their money, and they deserve to have some certainty that when they decide to spend it, they're getting the

product that is being advertised. I believe that this is what the bill intends to address today, and it's why I will be supporting the bill at second reading.

Madam Speaker, I believe there's a role for government to play in ensuring that Albertans are not being taken advantage of, and I believe Albertans are best positioned to make decisions on what is best for themselves. However, in order for that system to work, the consumer must have the information they require to make an informed decision. More importantly, they must have faith and confidence in the information they do have. If they are either unable to obtain or lack faith in the information they have, they are unlikely to part with their money. We all know that.

5:30

It's not uncommon for professionals in highly technical industries to be required to hold a licence to practise their trade, which is what we're talking about here today. For example, land surveyors are required to be certified by the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association before they can advertise or work as a land surveyor in the province, according to the land surveyors' website, "for the protection of the public and administration of the profession." That just makes simple sense.

Another example within the construction industry of the requirement for a professional to have a licence before they can practise their trade is architecture. The Alberta Association of Architects is a self-governing professional association charged by government with the registration of architects and the licensing of interior designers in Alberta. Before an architect can begin practising in Alberta, they must be registered with the Association of Architects. The mission of the association is "to represent the public interest in the administration of the Alberta Architects Act."

Similarly, real estate brokers in Alberta are required to obtain and maintain a licence in order to practise in Alberta. The Real Estate Council of Alberta is responsible for setting, regulating, and enforcing standards for real estate brokerages in Alberta. This is ultimately done for the protection of Albertans and to ensure that they have confidence in the real estate industry in general.

To keep with the theme of housing-related professional licensing, home inspectors, too, in Alberta must be licensed in order to conduct and approve home inspection reports. Again, this requirement was introduced a few years ago in order to improve the confidence Albertans have in home inspectors, which ultimately improves industry as a whole.

No doubt, the intent of Bill 12 is to reduce the number of unscrupulous builders in Alberta, raise the overall quality of homes, and increase consumer confidence in the home construction industry. So while I will be supporting the intent of the bill and will be supporting it at second reading, I do have, though, a number of questions that I hope to have answered before third reading and perhaps in Committee of the Whole.

One of those questions is, by the way, what impact this will have on small, independent home builders. These are reputable, long-standing companies that employ five, three, four, a dozen employees. They may only have a handful of homes built every year. How will they be impacted by this additional requirement, I wonder. My understanding from reviewing the bill is that the licence doesn't require the home builder to have completed any specific education that I can see so far. My colleagues and I will be reaching out to these builders to ensure that small, reputable builders' concerns are being heard. I hope that the government is doing the same.

Another question I have is: who is responsible for overseeing and issuing these licences? I didn't happen to see that very easily on the site so far, but I understand that the Department of Municipal

Affairs is going to be overseeing this licence. Alberta has a long and successful history of delegating regulatory authorities, as I mentioned earlier, like the Alberta Association of Architects and the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association.

Was there any consideration, therefore, to delegating the authority to an industry association for this purpose, I wonder. Home building may not be rocket science, Madam Speaker, but it still takes a lot of expertise, and I'm not sure that a bureaucrat sitting in an office in Edmonton, who may have never worked in the industry, as an example, is going to have the expertise required to ensure that this licensing legislation is going to do what it intends to do. So I look forward to the answers to the questions as to who might be managing this new department and how it will work.

Furthermore, I wonder: how will this impact the housing market and home prices? I understand that a house is often the single largest purchase an individual or couple can make in their lifetime, and they deserve the protection and assurance that what they're buying is of quality, as we've talked about already today. However, the issue of licence costs cannot be made in a vacuum. For instance, last fall we approved changes to off-site levies that a municipality can charge developers. We are aware that all these additional costs cumulatively may not be large by themselves, but in total they can increase the cost of a new home to the point where regular Albertans are simply unable to afford to have the luxury of owning their own home.

I'm looking forward to hearing from the industry and the ministry as to how we will continue with this extra amount of cost being put onto the homeowners, and I look forward to continuing this debate on this legislation, as I said earlier, perhaps in the next couple of days during Committee of the Whole, to find out some of those answers.

I will close by saying that with positive responses to those questions, I will consider supporting this bill at second reading, and I look forward to hearing the answers to those questions and the discussion in the upcoming debates.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I just want to once again remind all members that we do not refer to the presence or absence of members in the House.

I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to the second reading of Bill 12, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, as one of two cosponsors. I'd also like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for bringing this bill forward and also to reiterate some of the sentiments that he's heard from his constituents and stakeholders since bringing the bill forward.

As I've been talking with my community about this bill, the number one thing that I've heard over and over again is: I cannot believe that this isn't in place already. It's really not hard to understand this disbelief, Madam Speaker. As the minister stated, the majority of Canadians, 75 per cent of them, have the protections and benefits of a builder licensing program. I would say that it's about time Alberta moved forward to protect both consumers and qualified builders from the consequences of bad builders in our communities.

I can tell you that since becoming an MLA and, even before then, in my previous line of work as an electrician, I've heard stories of bad builders costing homeowners upwards of thousands of dollars in extra expenses just because they simply didn't do the job right in the first place. I've listened to and spoken with constituents about how devastating these bad practices can be and the stress it causes

to not only not have a home but to be out potentially thousands of dollars as well.

It's important to note that without a licensing system we have no ability to remove accreditation from a poor builder who has a documented history of fraud, weak finances, or no credentials. By passing Bill 12 and establishing a builder licensing framework, we can protect homebuyers and the many builders here in our province. Let's be clear. We are dealing with a few bad apples in the industry. The builders in this province do recognize that licensing is needed to protect not just consumers but Alberta's home building industry. Currently anyone can be a builder in Alberta. There are no mechanisms to prevent builders from operating even after instances of fraud or violations of statutes such as labour laws, and this, I believe, needs to change, Madam Speaker.

Through consultations carried out by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, we have heard from families and home builders alike that builder licensing will help to ensure transparency for consumers while holding bad builders to account within their industry. Once again, if passed, Bill 12 will reduce the risks prospective homeowners face by establishing a licensing system for home builders, providing homebuyers with a single source of information on builders, and creating provisions to remove or suspend bad builders in order to protect people from negligent or unscrupulous businesses. At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, licensing builders will help to prevent issues in home construction by requiring builders to be accountable for their actions.

The move to license builders is not only supported by consumers but by industry leaders such as the Canadian Home Builders' Association as well as the Insurance Bureau of Canada and the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute.

It's important to note once again that across Canada British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec all have implemented builder licensing systems.

As the minister outlined, Municipal Affairs conducted targeted stakeholder engagement in February and March of 2017 to hear stories from Albertans and to determine an appropriate scope of a builder licensing program here in our province. Of course, specific program details will be outlined in regulations, which will be developed in summer 2017, taking into account stakeholder feedback from initial consultations and any further engagement as required. Legislation and regulations will come into force on November 1, 2017, with phased implementation over six months and full implementation taking effect May 1, 2018.

An implementation plan for builder licensing will outline key requirements such as processes for receiving, assessing, issuing, renewing, suspending, and/or revoking licences; auditing procedures; an appeal process; and required IT infrastructure. This new licensing framework will proactively protect potential homebuyers on the front end of the home-buying process, and the current new-home buyer warranty program will continue to protect homeowners after the purchase of their new property. By integrating it with the New Home Buyer Protection Act along with the warranty program, the ministry is creating a system of checks and balances that requires builders to receive a licence before they can apply for a warranty, which is needed to obtain a building permit.

5:40

Madam Speaker, since the introduction of this bill I've had the opportunity to speak with members of my community, as I mentioned, who are currently in the process of building their own homes, and they do see this as a good move. As construction of new homes and infill projects picks up, it is important that we work to ensure the best possible outcomes for families choosing to build a

new home. That starts with builder accountability, and I'm happy to see steps taken through this bill to ensure just that.

I want to take a moment to read a quote from the president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association, Alberta chapter.

CHBA – Alberta is looking forward to working in partnership with the provincial government on including licensing as part of the New Home Buyer Protection Act. While there is still plenty of work to be done, the ability to remove builders who demonstrate a proven negative track record will be a benefit to every Albertan – including those in the industry. Our members have always been on the leading edge of the industry, including requiring warranty coverage for more than 40 years. We want to make sure that licensing protects affordability and choice for Albertans – while also recognizing the many upstanding builders providing homes and jobs throughout the province.

What this bill will do is to empower consumers by establishing a one-stop shop so they can be informed and confident in their choices. Madam Speaker, this government made a commitment to make Albertans' lives better, and that's exactly what we're doing by ensuring that families can be making better, informed decisions when purchasing a home from a licensed and qualified builder.

I'd like to thank the minister for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. I look forward to the debates that arise, and I encourage all of my colleagues to support this passing.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to speak about Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, and I'm especially proud to be one of the cosponsors as well. Thank you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs for bringing this forward. It's a bill I'm proud to cosponsor, and I think we can all get very excited about it. There has already been quite a bit said about the bill by the minister and other members, the many benefits of this bill, because it is a very needed bill. I'd like to talk about some of the specific aspects of the bill, which is a made-in-Alberta solution.

When the wildfires hit Fort McMurray last year, the government moved quickly on the lessons learned from the Slave Lake wildfire and the 2013 floods in Calgary and area. That was to make sure that the public could stay informed while rebuilding their homes. We instituted a pilot program that required builders working on the rebuild to submit a declaration including key information on their corporate structure and history. That information was made available to homeowners so they could make informed decisions about their builder, and this was launched in June 2016. This bill's builder licensing framework builds on this process from the Wood Buffalo fire, and it strengthens the transparency across Alberta as well as offering proactive protection to Alberta consumers.

Melissa Blake, the mayor of Wood Buffalo, recently commented:

These measures build on the New Home Buyers Public Registry pilot, which empowered Wood Buffalo residents to make informed decisions during the rebuild process. Builder licensing promotes builder accountability and protects homebuyers in the biggest purchase of their lives.

Madam Speaker, that's what's at the heart of this bill. It is a government's responsibility to protect its residents and to ensure that when they are making an investment like purchasing a new home with their family, they can be informed and confident consumers. By licensing builders, we are also ensuring the protection of the many builders and small businesses of integrity in

our province, who sometimes get shut out of the market by fly-by-night, unscrupulous companies that undercut them. It's this collaboration with Alberta builders, home sellers, homebuyers, homeowners, and other industry leaders that led to this bill being here today.

What makes the bill unique in Canada is the integration of the licensing program with the Alberta home warranty program. By reviewing and researching what has worked and what has not worked in other jurisdictions – this bill proposes full integration of our licensing program with our home warranty program. This integration, which would be unique to Alberta, ensures a system of checks and balances that puts consumers first. Builder licensing would proactively protect consumers before they choose a builder, and the New Home Warranty Program will continue to protect new-home owners after the purchase of their home. Both a licence and a warranty would be required before receiving a building permit, making sure the consumer is fully informed and protected before a building permit is even issued.

If this amendment is passed, licensing will also extend to condominium developers. Condo developers will also be required to receive a licence when building residential condos.

I'd like to read a quote from Anand Sharma, president of the Canadian Condominium Institute's north Alberta chapter, who recently said:

CCI North Alberta is very pleased that the Alberta government is proposing legislation that will protect new condominium owners. This type of consumer protection legislation has been desperately needed for decades. It will hold developers accountable for poor building practices and allow condominium boards to prevent large special assessments. It will make a tangible difference in protecting consumers.

When I talk to people in my riding, this is what they want to see from the government, legislation that puts them first and strengthens small business. Implementing builder licensing in Alberta will increase builder accountability, provide increased protection for homeowners, and will support enhanced quality of home construction in Alberta. It will also support strengthening the safety code system, enhance professionalism of the builder industry, and protect great smaller home builders from being priced out of the market.

By putting the people of Alberta at the heart of our legislation, we are ensuring protection of the dream of home ownership for Alberta families so they can be informed when making one of the largest financial decisions of their life, and that's how this government is continuing to make life better for Albertans, by making them the centrepiece of our legislation.

I ask that my hon. colleagues please support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was very interested in hearing the discourse from the hon. member regarding her experiences with respect to homebuyer protection and her interest in the matter. I was wondering if indeed she's had any familiarity with people that she's known who have actually suffered as a result of purchasing a home or a condominium that was built in less than a professional fashion and which ended up having problems.

I know that in Edmonton and Calgary and throughout the province we've typically had, of course, boom-bust cycles in real estate as a result of our resource-based economy, which quite often ended up resulting in a shortage of tradespeople and workers, particularly in the housing industry. As a result of that, you had people who were less than qualified actually building houses, and

there was not enough oversight, and quite commonly you had problems with construction.

Most notably, recently you'll see in Edmonton and Calgary and Red Deer, in major centres anywhere in the province, the sort of leaky condo issue, where balconies were actually built where they leaned in towards the property and ended up drawing water into the walls and down the walls and into the actual buildings, so the building envelope was compromised. You'll see scaffolding around properties in Edmonton even right now that are only 10, 15 years old, and you think: "What in the world is going on? Why does this building need such a major revamp?" Well, it's because there were problems with the workmanship in the beginning.

I was wondering if the hon. member had experienced in Calgary those same issues or personally knew anybody affected by it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, and thank you to my colleague for the question. I am sitting here drawing a complete blank, so I'm going to draw from my own experience. Now, I haven't ever purchased a brand new home, but many years ago I bought a home that was quite a bit older. I remember the first very cold day. This was in Massachusetts. It got to minus 20, which is, surprisingly, much colder in Massachusetts than it is in Alberta.

5:50

The furnace died. It was quite a surprise. I actually had to go and buy some diesel to prime it, which was a new experience for me. I'm sure the hon. member can appreciate buying diesel. It took a lot of work on a very cold day when my kids were little to get the furnace going, and what that experience does for me is that, you know, it really draws a parallel. Imagine buying a brand new home. You have the expectation that everything is going to work, that the weeping tiles will be installed so that your basement doesn't flood the first time it rains, that you have a reliable heating and cooling system so that your family is comfortable when we face extreme temperatures, that the doorbells and the electricity will all work.

With this kind of a program, we're going to be licensing builders to ensure that they are credible and reliable. In conjunction with the home warranty program, they will have recourse if they find themselves at minus 20 with a furnace that does not work.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Like the previous member, I've never bought a new house. However, I've bought five houses during my lifetime and sold a couple, and I had experiences with each one. The second house I bought was here in Edmonton back in 1995. On the surface it looked like a pretty good house. I had my three-page checklist, and I checked everything off. I thought it was pretty good, but I found out there were other things I needed on the checklist.

Now, the house was 10 years old, and both my daughters, my grandson, and my stepson were living with me. In the basement of the house, which had been finished when the house was built – it was finished by the contractor – my daughters, my grandson, and my stepson had bedrooms, so they used the bathroom in the basement and used the shower. One day I heard this crash in the basement, and I ran downstairs. My daughter had been having a shower, and she slipped. She put her hand on the tiles around the bathtub, and her hand went right through. There was, I think, quarter-inch Gyproc behind it. It wasn't the wet rock. It wasn't, you

know, the normal size. It was quite thin. What we realized was that when that contractor had put that bathroom in, they didn't do the bathroom to specifications.

There were many other little things that we found out about that house that, really, went right back to the builder of the house. Of course, after 10 years you certainly couldn't go back and try to find or get somebody to fix things like the weeping tiles. Yes, we had a little rain, and we had a little leak in the basement, again, having to get a contractor in to redo weeping tiles or put weeping tiles in because there weren't any in kind of a low part of the soil next to the foundation. My list is now five pages long when I go to buy a house because I have to check all of these things that I found out through my experience.

But I have to tell you that I am thrilled that we have come forward and done this. Like my seatmate here said, so many people have said: "You're doing this bill? I thought that was already the case." None of them had bought new houses, so obviously they didn't know that. I certainly think that we have some incredibly reputable builders throughout Alberta. I see some of the housing that goes up in Lethbridge, and I'm just amazed at the beautiful work that's done.

I've got friends who've bought new houses. Certainly, there's some really, really lovely construction and building and designs, so I think we're very fortunate. But, again, as my seatmate had said, it's that one bad apple. It's the one family who's been saving for 10 years to buy that first house, and they buy a house and start finding all kinds of problems.

My cousin in Lethbridge a number of years ago bought a house. They were living in the house probably a month and a half, and I went to visit, and there were little sticky notes all over the front hallway. I said, "What are all the sticky notes for?" She said, "They're where the nails or the screws are starting to pop out." I said, "This is a brand new house." She said, "I know." They had saved for that house. Here they have this house, and you walk in their front hallway and screws are popping out of the wall. Absolutely shameful. They went back to the contractor and wanted to get something done about it, and basically he just raised his hands and said: "The house is built. You bought it." I don't want that happening to any Albertan. It shouldn't happen.

When I was growing up, my mom and dad did buy a new house. My dad was somebody who if anything needed to be done, did it. If he didn't know how to do it, he went to the library and got a book so that he could fix something if it needed fixing. My dad supervised the construction company that built that house, that I lived in for 13 years. He supervised everything except the pouring of the foundation. Guess what? The only thing there was a problem with was the foundation, and my dad got a jackhammer and fixed it. With everything else in the house – the electrical, the plumbing, everything – he supervised it to make sure they did it right the first time.

That's the way I was raised, that when you do something, you do it right the first time, and then you don't have to do it again. It's like those lessons you learn in life. You don't want to repeat those bad lessons. That's a good lesson that I learned from my dad. I think this bill is a perfect example of telling the building industry that they need to do it right the first time and that they need to put their word behind it.

I'm thrilled that this legislation is in second reading, and hopefully it's going to be passed. I thank the minister for bringing it forward.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just had a very, very quick question, I hope, for the member. I heard her talking. I was very thankful for everything in her speech. I know that in my riding I had someone come to my office because he had recently bought a house for his daughter, and they realized just over a year afterwards that in the attic the builder hadn't connected the vents from the bathrooms to the vents outside. When I heard about this, it was quite odd. He showed me pictures, and they had just blown insulation over top of where the vents were supposed to

come out. There was no attempt to even connect those vents to the outside, which is completely ridiculous, and it is the home builder's fault. I just wanted to ask the member if . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly now stands adjourned until 9 tomorrow morning.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 10, 2017

Day 31

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
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McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
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Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 10, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let's take a moment to reflect, to recognize and send our thoughts to all those who were and continue to be affected by the recent flooding in Ontario and Quebec. It's times like these when we need to stand with our neighbours and let them know that they're not alone and to send our sincere thanks and appreciation to all those who are working tirelessly to ensure that the communities affected remain safe.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 12 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned May 9]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Imagine, if you will, building your dream home. Husband and wife, three children: you're moving to a new community, so you're building your dream home in a new community. Because it's so far away, you can't do regular checks. The day of excitement comes. You're moving in. You're doing your final walk-through. You open your front door, and in your front entranceway is your gas meter because the person who built the house read the blueprints wrong, and instead of putting it at the front door, they put it inside the front door. To this day that gas meter is still in that front entranceway because they are still fighting with the builder to move it. That happened in Ontario. They don't have these kinds of laws, but there are horror stories all over Alberta.

I was married, and with my first husband we built our first home. We would go in every evening and check for, you know, little things that could be wrong. The builder didn't like it, so they locked us out of the house, and we couldn't check on anything. We go to do our final walk-through, and there were problems everywhere. Could you imagine someone putting the outlet for your in-home vacuum in the middle of a staircase, so you can't use it upstairs or downstairs? Or putting the electrical plug-ins for something – so here's your wall. You've got your electrical plug-in for your in-home vacuum. Twelve feet away you've got your outlet to plug in your in-home vacuum. It doesn't work. The cords are only four feet long.

These are the kinds of things that happen. The day of a housewarming having all four toilets crack in your house, and you've got water everywhere because they used faulty toilets that ended up being recalled. If you have a good builder, a licensed builder, these things get rectified. In the case of the toilets they were fixed within hours, but in the case of other things they don't happen as readily and get fixed as fast.

When you're building your dream home, you don't expect all the pitfalls. The shoddy, fly-by-night contractors that take advantage of people have to be stopped. People put their life savings into their homes so they can build their family. It's just not right. We have to be able to have laws that stop them. It doesn't matter who you are. You're not above ripping someone off, putting it bluntly.

I think that this will level the playing field. You have to be licensed, you have to be insured, and then the homeowner has something to come back on. I wouldn't want any of these types of horror stories to happen to anyone. I know that my friend in Ontario is still fighting with this, and her gas meter in her front entranceway is an atrocity.

I would encourage everyone in this House to support this bill to prevent any of these things happening to others. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, any others wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Stony Plain-Spruce Grove.

Mr. Horne: Spruce Grove-St. Albert. Still a crossboundary road, also a great community, totally different although they do work really well together.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, when I was much, much, much younger – I was about two or three – my dad was working for Safeway at the time in the advertising department, and he had moved up to Edmonton for the position. He met my mother, had two kids, and then the department transferred him back down to Calgary. He was actually from Calgary, so that meant we got to see his side of the family a lot more. But the relevance of this story is that Safeway paid for the moving expenses to move back down to Calgary. We moved into a community, a fairly new community at the time, in what is now Calgary-Shaw. It was, I believe, about two years old when we moved in. Of course, we weren't the original owners, but with two-year-old developments there were plenty of the original owners around.

There was an issue with the builder. For some strange reason they didn't install the windows correctly. I was trying to recall the term, but googling things when you don't have the term you're googling is not always that easy. Effectively, they installed the windows in such a way that if there was any water running down the window, the water would run down the Gyproc and get into the wall. Of course, as you can imagine, you now have not just a waterlogged wall, which poses all kinds of mould issues and everything, but you also now have a rotting support structure in your wall. Some of the windows in some of the houses started to rot out of the wall. This is only a two-year-old development, Madam Speaker.

This was, of course, very concerning for many of the residents, and they were, you know, looking to get this fixed. No homeowner buys a house expecting to have to replace the windows in two years, certainly not a new home. So individually they had to reach out to the developer, and the developer wasn't always responsive. Now, I was trying to do some research. Unfortunately, I couldn't find what happened to the developer. The residents did eventually get the developer to come back and replace the windows, do it properly this time. But that's just one of the issues that potentially could have arisen. Of course, when you have an issue where your windows are rotting out of your wall, you're now very concerned about what the rest of the work was like.

Now, with such a large investment, in the case of my family not just personally but for the company but certainly also for the individual – home ownership is a big investment. You know, in my community there's a lot of growth, a lot of new developments, and a lot of families take a lot of pride in being the first owner of their

home, and for a lot of them it's a huge step forward. In fact, the only time I could imagine a bigger financial decision might be the decision to retire, but that instance will be more personalized. For such a big financial decision to then face such uncertainty and, in some cases, neglect of the product they're buying that is their home, that is very concerning.

9:10

I know many of my constituents are very concerned any time they hear that somebody's property has an issue, you know, three blocks away, whether that's that the sump pump doesn't quite work, especially around where I live in northwest St. Albert – it's a very flat piece of land. It used to be mostly boggy land, so all of the houses have sump pumps that are running at least once a day trying to deal with the water. You know, when a sump pump fails, it's a very big concern.

Of course, I believe that this legislation endeavours to strike a balance between the homeowner and the builder. Certainly, in instances where there is an issue, you know, perhaps if the builder buys some toilets that turn out to be recalled, that might not be an issue of the home developer, the home builder but the supplier. That's certainly possible. Without legislation like this they're now in a situation where they're liable for those. I think that this is a good step toward that balance between consumer protection and business protection. I think it's working towards a good middle ground there.

I think that this is a good bill. I would like to thank the minister for bringing this forward, and I hope to see everybody in this House support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert. You talked about, you know, water running down the insides of the walls, and you said that the builder did come back and replace the windows. Did the builder also come back and replace the structural damage that was done with the rotting two-by-fours and the Gyproc and all of the other little things that would have been affected by that kind of water coming down on the inside?

Mr. Horne: Yeah. Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Of course, I was three, four at the time. I don't quite recall.

The next step to the story of my moving around is that Safeway then tried to transfer my dad to San Francisco. He looked around and said: "Housing prices in San Francisco are insane. To find a house that I could afford would be a three-hour commute into work. I'm not doing it, not moving my kids." So we ended up in Prince George in B.C., and we lived there for about six months. My dad is in the design field. Then Conrad Black bought out the paper he was working at, so we moved back to St. Albert, and I've been there since. I've been in St. Albert since kindergarten plus a couple of years before moving to Calgary.

While I believe that the builders did in fact replace the structural damage, I was too young to quite recall, and I had a hard time finding an article on this instance, on this case, when I was doing some research when I saw the bill come forward.

Thank you for the question. Unfortunately, I can't give a definite answer.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. I'll be honest. The likelihood that I will buy a brand new home during my lifetime is probably relatively low. You see, I was raised fairly frugally. My parents didn't have a lot of money, and I didn't personally either, so I learned to be very careful about how I spent what I had. Certainly, working as a musician for a number of years – it's not known to be an occupation in which one makes a large amount of money – I had to learn how to live on a fairly low number of dollars. For myself personally, I spent many years renting before I finally got the opportunity to actually purchase a property.

In fact, Madam Speaker, I'll admit, you know, that I just recently upgraded my vehicle. I was driving a 1994 Toyota Camry that I bought for \$500 back in September 2014 and continued to drive that after elected. It ran well. It served me well, and it was one of many vehicles that I bought. I haven't spent over \$1,000 on a vehicle since 1993. So I'm not one to spend a large amount of money if I can find something that serves me well in a lower bracket.

Now, of course, housing is a bit of a different thing. You know, I did have the opportunity to buy my first property eventually in 2008, and that was in an apartment building that had been converted to condominiums. I had the opportunity to purchase there, and that was when I first moved into Edmonton-Centre. I had the opportunity to take over there. I lived there for about eight years before I purchased a new property just recently and moved in this past December, that again being a condominium of a sort, a unit in a three-storey fourplex just over in the community of Oliver here in Edmonton-Centre. Being that, Madam Speaker, I do really love living in the centre of our city and sort of that urban living, for those reasons, it's not likely that I'm ever going to buy a brand new home built from scratch.

That said, I certainly appreciate what this bill is bringing forward and the positive aspects that this is going to bring forward for Albertans and indeed many of my constituents because, as I said, Madam Speaker, my first home that I purchased was a unit in a condominium build, a converted apartment building. You know, one of the first things that happened when I moved into that building was that I was immediately asked to pay a special assessment to replace the balconies, which was fair. This was a building that was built in 1967 or so. Yes. Absolutely, it takes some time. You need to start to do some upgrades and that sort of thing.

I eventually went on to serve as the president of the condominium board for that building and certainly got a good appreciation for what goes into maintaining a building, what the costs are, and the things you have to look at over the long term. I certainly followed with interest many stories that I read about newer condominium developments around the province, indeed in many locations where builders were throwing up these condominium buildings very quickly, selling them, and then moving on, closing down the corporation that built the building, opening a new subsidiary to build the next building. Then the previous building that they built: within a year all of a sudden there are a number of things that are found to be wrong with it.

What happens then, Madam Speaker, is that the condominium board and the owners in that building are left holding the bill because the corporation that built the building no longer exists. They have no one that they can go back to for legal recourse, so owners are left with thousands and thousands of dollars in special assessments to bring a building up to the level where it should have been after the developer had actually built the property. This is something that has happened in many jurisdictions. Indeed, I believe there was one notable case in the Minister of Municipal

Affairs' own constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, that we heard about quite a bit.

So I think this bill, Madam Speaker, does some very good work towards ensuring that that will not continue to happen or that indeed, should that sort of shoddy workmanship occur in any future condominium buildings, there will be recourse because, as has been discussed by many members, this bill provides for builder licensing within the province of Alberta. I think this is an excellent step forward because, as many members have discussed, whether it's building a new home or building a new condominium building, we need to have standards. Albertans should be able to trust that when they are buying a property, that property is built as well as it could be built, that they are not going to be hit with hidden costs, hit with costs for damages that should not be there, for issues that should not be occurring and know that when they buy a new home, they can be comfortable, they can feel safe, and they can know that they are making a solid investment.

9:20

Builder licensing, Madam Speaker, will directly address builder accountability. The New Home Buyer Protection Act doesn't address the qualifications for being a builder. Right now anybody in Alberta can be a builder regardless of their experience or skills, and this is unlike many other aspects of actual building construction. Of course, the people that do the work to build the home are expected to be professionals. I can't just hang out a shingle and call myself a plumber. I have to have my certification; I have to have my ticket. I have to be able to – it's all inspected. All these things are checked. For any of the trades where people are involved, one must have training, and there must be certification.

It's incredibly important now that we bring in the opportunity for this licensing program. Under the legislation now, builders will be required to submit an application and pay a fee and then hold an active licence in order to be able to build. That licence will be for a one-year period and will allow the builder to apply for multiple building permits during that time, after which the builder then would have to apply for a renewal. But here's the most important part, Madam Speaker, in my view. The application process will require builders to submit information about their history, their track record, their financial standing, and their corporate structure. All those will then be assessed by the registrar of the new-home buyer protection office to ensure that all licence applications, then, are on the straight and narrow.

As I said, Madam Speaker, there has been this practice where builders will have multiple corporations that they use to build specific buildings, specific homes, specific units, and then they will retire that and move on to another. This now will require that when they submit an application for a licence or when they submit a renewal of their licence, all that information must be provided. It will be reviewed, and now it will be able to be tracked. Now Albertans will be aware of the work that has been done by a corporation or a builder in previous work, and the office will have the opportunity to review that and decide, then, whether this builder should be allowed to continue to build in the province of Alberta. I think that that is an incredibly important protection indeed because home ownership is one of the biggest financial decisions any family may ever make.

Certainly, Madam Speaker, as I said, I am loath to spend large amounts of money. I'm very careful about how I do that. I just bought a new vehicle recently and took my time, thinking very carefully about what I was going to get, how I was going to do it, trying to find the best deal I could. I know that Albertan families, when they're looking for a home, especially when they're making that kind of an investment, an investment in something that needs

to support them, that needs to be there for them and their children for many, many years to come, want to have that kind of reassurance. I think what this bill is proposing is a very fair and balanced measure. It's going to be good for consumers.

But, Madam Speaker, it's also going to be very good for the home building industry. Certainly, I think the majority of builders in our province are very good and reputable people. They do quality work. It's an important part of our economy. It's an important part of how our cities grow and thrive. But having even just a few bad apples can give a bad reputation to the larger group. Indeed, I know that in conversations that I've had with folks at the Canadian Home Builders' Association and some others, I think they are very much in support of ensuring that we have ways to track and identify and weed out those who would abuse the system, those who would take advantage of consumers, and ensuring that we are instead giving the opportunity to those who are going to do quality work, who are going to provide Albertans with good homes, who are going to continue to make sure that the industry can enjoy a good reputation and that people can have trust in the people that are building their homes.

As I said, Madam Speaker, this application process will require builders to submit their information about their history, their track record, their financial standing, and corporate structure. That will go to the new registrar of the new-home buyer protection office. They will assess that information.

It's quite similar to the process that we put in place for the enhanced builder information program in Fort McMurray, which I think was a good template. Madam Speaker, I think that was a great program that was put in place, especially when we have people in situations like we do in Fort McMurray, who indeed have lost so much, you know, and are just working to build back their lives, to provide them that extra layer of protection to help them navigate. That's one less stress that they have to have in a very difficult time of their lives.

Many of these requirements already exist for builders and are just going to be folded in under this legislation, and then the registrar will determine if the applicant meets the licence criteria and whether there are any other conditions that should be placed on that licence.

Now, of course, Madam Speaker, we don't just have builders that just build new homes; we have the area of renovations. Certainly, before I moved out of my first home, I did do some substantial renovations in that suite. I tackled some of those myself. I certainly enjoy the opportunity to do that when I can. I took the opportunity over the Christmas break, when I moved into my new home, to remove some of the carpet and replace it with hardwood. That was admittedly the first time I'd taken on sort of a task of that size, but I found it very personally satisfying to be able to spend part of my Christmas break on a task that was, say, a bit more mundane and a bit less intellectually taxing, perhaps, than some of the work we do here or challenging in a different way, certainly still using my brain but a different part of it, perhaps, than from day to day here in the Legislature.

So I certainly appreciate that in many cases people are looking to do renovations of their home. Certainly, here in the downtown core, within my constituency of Edmonton-Centre that's something that happens fairly often. People will buy older properties, and they will choose to do substantial renovations to them. Builder licensing, then, will be required for substantial renovations where at least 75 per cent of the home's footprint is changed such as if there's a full rebuild or if there's a top-floor redesign. That more or less aligns the home warranty with the home warranty requirements under the New Home Buyer Protection Act, where a renovation, as I said, that alters 75 per cent of a home's footprint is defined as essentially

being a new home and therefore requires a warranty. Applying this only to substantial renovations is going to keep us from overregulating the industry.

Certainly, I recognize that there are many people that do much smaller scale renovations. Indeed, when I had the kitchen in my previous home redone – this would have been last April or May – I thought it could be done quickly and in a matter of a short time. I thought it could be easily accommodated during session. I can assure you, Madam Speaker, that I don't think there was ever a renovation that has been done quickly and in the time that you anticipate. It certainly ended up being a bit more of a disruption than I had intended, but I deeply appreciated being able to hire a good contractor or renovator, indeed some local musicians and venue owners who also do some renovation work on the side. I was very happy to be able to hire them to come in and do that work for me as these days I don't have quite as much time as I used to and an opportunity to do these sorts of things. They did excellent work.

But, Madam Speaker, while it certainly made a big difference to my kitchen, it was not a substantial change to my actual home. It didn't do anything that would affect the safety of the home. It didn't take out any load-bearing walls or any walls at all, really. It was a matter of just replacing the cupboards and the flooring and doing a bit of a repaint. It's not something, I think, that would necessarily require licensing for someone to do that kind of work. I think we have some robust systems in place. You know, before I chose a person to do that renovation, I of course checked their references. I had the opportunity to talk to many people who knew them. I was able to work within my own network to have a good sense of reassurance in the work that they would do.

It's much different when somebody is doing a much more substantial renovation or indeed building a home, where it can be a lot more challenging and daunting to sort of find your way through that marketplace. Indeed, to throw citizens out and just sort of say, "You're on your own; you figure it out; buyer beware" is perhaps not the best approach there.

In the case of renovations, you know, we recognize that it can vary pretty significantly. It can be anything from just simply repainting or, as I said, redoing the kitchen. It could be just redoing a bathroom, or, as I said, it could be a gutting and reworking of an entire home. The builder licensing is focused on ensuring quality construction. The smaller renovations, that are more cosmetic and that sort of thing, are not really falling under that rubric. We only require under this bill, then, builder licensing, again, if it's at least 75 per cent of the home's footprint that is being changed.

9:30

In the case of subcontractors – and of course there are many of those within the province of Alberta, Madam Speaker. For a few years I worked for the Canada Revenue Agency. When I started working there, I was working on their phone lines for their business inquiries call centre here in Edmonton. We would be speaking with individuals, a large number of them who were self-employed, about business tax issues.

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much to my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. I was quite interested in your story about your use of your time over Christmas. I sew, a number of years ago, not since I've been elected, and I had a sewing room. It had carpet on the floor, and I couldn't move my sewing table. So I did pull up the carpet, and I laid a laminate floor in my sewing room. I have to say that I did a pretty good job. Laying the first three boards, I had to

cope around corners. It was a long wall, and I went right to the cupboard, so I was pretty pleased with myself. But it wouldn't lay flat, and I couldn't figure out why it wouldn't lay flat. I sat down on the floor, after doing it over two or three times, and kind of had a conversation in my head with my dad, who was pretty good at doing those things. I realized that I needed to put another row down because the weight of it wasn't heavy enough to lay flat. I did complete it in a day and a half.

I'd appreciate hearing a little more about you laying the floor. I'm impressed that you did that.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you to my colleague from Lethbridge-East. Certainly, as I said, it was a bit of a challenge, but it was one that I embraced quite readily. I found that generally what it comes down to is just being patient, and indeed, Madam Speaker, if you lay a good foundation – this is what I learned. I called over a friend to give me a bit of advice for the first bit of the floor, and what he showed me was that if you carefully, very carefully, lay out your measurements for your first few rows, make sure that they are very tight – make sure, folks, that you lay a good, solid foundation – everything else flows very well from there.

Indeed, I think that's largely what this legislation is looking to do, to set a firm foundation for our home building industry, to ensure that we have at least this minimum standard, this basic licensing, which then gives a lot of reassurance for consumers and also gives a solid foundation that we could continue to build on as a province as we continue to grow. Indeed, Madam Speaker, Alberta remains the youngest province in Canada. We have the largest number of children and babies in the country at the moment. We know that we have many people coming up. There are going to be many families that are going to need new homes, so it's indeed important that we have good protections in place to ensure those homes will be well built and protected.

As I was saying, Madam Speaker, in terms of subcontractors, when I worked at the Canada Revenue Agency, one of the calls we'd get most often would be from young tradespeople, indeed, who were just getting started and having to call in to register a GST number. In the industry, in the construction industry in particular, it has gone to a system where it is largely a fairly dense thicket of subcontractors, so every individual who does each piece of a job in each situation is considered to be their own employee. We recognize that that is a big part of the building industry, and certainly subcontractors will do a lot of work, particularly, I think, in areas where there are a number of homes that are being built by a single building company. In those cases we recognize that the builder is responsible for managing the project, including which subtrades they should hire and how much financial risk they're going to assume.

So we are not including the subtrades under builder licensing because that is indeed the responsibility of the builder. In this case we are saying that it's the responsibility of the builder to oversee their subcontractors, to ensure that the work of each of those individuals is of a quality that is going to continue to support the reputation of the builders themselves and, indeed, to be sure they can continue their licensing. I think that's a reasonable approach, Madam Speaker. I mean, after all, Alberta has a very strong system of qualified tradespeople. We have very competent builders. Licensing is about supporting those who do good work, to help them to set themselves apart from those who don't. So builder licensing will not and should not, I think, in fact, impact trades individually.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I look forward to hearing from some of the other members, and I look forward to seeing this bill, hopefully, pass.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: For questions or comments?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. You've got about 40 seconds. Go ahead.

Ms McLean: Thank you. I would just like to assist the hon. member. He made some comments about renovations. I'd just like to be able to clarify for the House and the record, consumer protection being very important to our government, that prepaid contractors are covered under Service Alberta for renovations. This legislation I think we can all be quite proud of. It covers when there are situations of 75 per cent or more of your house being renovated. When that percentage threshold is met, then this legislation certainly does cover that.

Thank you, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the member for his comments earlier. I thought they were well spoken. I find it interesting that he was starting this job off with a car that was worth about \$500 because I think that I have driven many of those same vehicles in my life. It's just nice to see that sometimes there's a lot that we have in common as we enter into this profession.

I rise today to speak to Bill 12, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. I want to let the House and my constituents know that I have a great deal of empathy for both sides of the groups of Albertans that will be affected, both the producers as well as the consumers in this case. I don't know if this is a good exercise to go through, but you could maybe turn your minds back a few years on my life and picture a much younger version of myself and see a university student before you looking for a job and finally being successful and finding a job in the construction industry. It happened to be a company that was owned by a neighbour down the street. I show up on that first day for this job, and I'm about a 150-pound, skinny kid that's looking for some way to work his way through university. I met this big, gruff bear of a man by the name of David Mitchell. Dave would be my foreman for the next three or four years of my life when I was looking for work in between schooling.

Dave was a man of few words. When I got onto the job, they were building a house, and they had just finished pouring the basement and were working on the subfloor. I came up to the job site, and he grabbed this shovel and said, "Do you know what this is?" I said: "Yeah. It's a shovel." He walked me over to the basement, and he threw it down into these three huge piles of sand, and in very Dave fashion he said: "That's a basement. That's sand. Level it." Those were my instructions for the rest of the morning.

Well, that was my introduction to the world of construction. As I said, for the next three or four summers you could find me variously on the end of a hammer or up on a roof or caulking or subflooring or landscaping. Probably the worst of it was putting a 150-pound kid on the end of a wheelbarrow full of cement as he was frantically trying to go through a front door and then pour some cement floors and do those kinds of things.

So I have some experience at the construction level. I wouldn't suggest that that makes me an expert by any stretch of the imagination, but I do know that the company that I worked for always tried to build a home that a family would be safe in, that

they would feel that they were getting good value for their money, that they would be happy living in and raising a family in. I know that there were times when, as the inspectors would come through or when the family would walk through if they'd prebought the house, they would look and we would make adjustments, and we would deal with any issues that either the inspectors or the family might have. It was always a symbiotic relationship, our job being to produce a house that the people would feel comfortable in and know was well built.

9:40

Well, fast-forward a few years. You've graduated from university, you've got your job teaching, and you now are married with three kids, a mortgage, and a home. You can understand as a consumer how important that home is. I mean, the reality is that it's probably the largest investment that we'll make in our lives, and when we find out that there are issues with this home that we have purchased, when it's brand new especially, there's concern. Sometimes the cash register can run up pretty quickly when you're trying to deal with some of those concerns. You know, I think we've all probably in our lives had to address defects and problems in our homes, and when you're a teacher on a single income, oftentimes you become that subcontractor trying to deal with those problems and those issues.

I think Bill 12 tries to address some of these concerns. While I appreciate the intent of it, and I will probably, at the end of the day, support the bill, there are some concerns that perhaps need to be addressed. On the positive side, let's start with, you know, that currently there is no recourse for families for the impact of a substandard home, a new build, but this bill will remedy that by providing safeguards for homeowners by providing a licensing regime that builders will have to follow. The standards that that licensing regime will set should, I believe, provide an additional level of peace of mind that a homeowner needs when making such a large investment, and I believe that that's a good thing. I think it will increase the level of accountability for a home builder to the purchaser or the homeowner. I believe that that is well intended and is worthy of support.

You know, there are times when we hear the bad-news stories. Maybe we've been a part of those bad-news stories. I know that in the house that we're living in presently, I wish I had been the new homeowner rather than somebody down the line because when we purchased our used home, we found out after three or four years that there were problems with the sewer system. When, at the end of the day, it was finally discovered what the issue was, it was that the original home builder had not built the house to grade. As my plumber put it: crap don't run uphill. Trust me, when we brought the town out and we started talking about, "How did this pass inspection?" and "How did 12 or 13 or 15 years ago . . ."

Ms McLean: Get a good inspector before you buy.

Mr. Smith: Yeah. They don't tend to go through the sewer pipe.

Ms McLean: Mine did. I paid for it.

Mr. Smith: Yeah?

Ms McLean: Yeah.

Mr. Smith: Well, actually, ours did as well, but it was about six or seven inches difference. As long as the kids had a bath two or three times a week and it flushed it out, we were good, but if all of a sudden it didn't work that way, it could get plugged up.

Ms McLean: The moral is bathe your children.

Mr. Smith: Yes. You know what? Trust me, when you've got a seven- or eight-year-old boy, you're having those conversations.

The reality is that there are times when I truly can understand the flip side of this, the purchaser's side of the agreement, and I think that this bill addresses some of those issues. I think that, you know, this bill encompasses warranty programs, so it should mean that there's a capacity for your purchaser to be able to fall back on those kinds of things if need be. I think that generally there's some really good material in this bill that needs to be pursued and supported.

There are some concerns that I think the House should consider as well. You know, there are small builders out there that are not building hundreds of houses every year. As a matter of fact, in some cases I'm aware of companies where they're actually one-at-a-time builders. They're very specific. They find the client. That client wants a very specific kind of house, and they build to meet the needs of that client. They might only build three or four houses in a year, and they'll act as their own general contractors and site managers. It's a family business where the husband will often do, in this case, much of the initial preparation work for the building, looking at the excavations and the finishing grades for the houses that they're building.

When I've talked with some of these companies, they do have some concerns. You know, one of them is that while this bill is supposed to be revenue neutral, they're not so sure. They're unsure of the impact in their specific instance, when they build one house at a time, and what that will mean for increased costs related to the licensing. While they understand that the licensing will be some of the lowest in the country, it's the economies of scale that they're worried about. To assume those additional costs would be burdensome on them, so they have to pass them on to the consumer, and that makes them, again, perhaps less attractive an option for people when they're looking to find a builder for their houses.

We have to remember that this licensing fee has to be added to a series of other costs. I'm not trying to be digging at anything here, but obviously even the carbon tax that we have being placed on society has added additional costs, and to a small-scale builder those are costs that either they have to absorb or they have to pass on to the consumer. So in this particular case they're worried about their profit margins and whether they will be negatively impacted. They're worried a little bit about some of the additional time that's going to be spent on paperwork and administration. When we take a look at section 4.1(2)(a), there's perhaps a concern there. The registrar may "require an applicant to take . . . courses and examinations for the purposes of ensuring that the applicant . . . [meets] the qualifications and conditions" for prescribed qualifications and conditions for licensing. In 4.1(2)(b) the registrar may "set and administer courses and examinations."

In the company that I'm thinking about, Madam Speaker, they're self-taught general contractors. They've been very successfully in business for many years for a variety of individuals. They work very closely with their clients. They make sure that as issues develop in the building, they have dealt with those issues, that the purchaser, the buyer, has acceptable workmanship that's going into these buildings. They've never had an issue with home inspections, and they've just got questions. What will this mean to their business as somebody that is a self-taught general contractor but a very successful one?

Everything considered, the capacity for small-scale builders to continue with current businesses and business plans where they're only producing maybe a few single-family dwellings a year – it's becoming harder and harder to do that. The trend in our economy that I think all of us find troubling is when the smaller businesses, the small mom-and-pop operations, the family businesses, face challenges in continually trying to find ways to be more efficient,

to continue to exist amongst a climate of larger scale businesses. We have to be very careful about the cumulative impacts that continue to pile up on these businesses.

9:50

You know, even though in my own personal case perhaps there were some issues with the inspection system, I think that in general the inspectors that we have that are looking at electrical and gas and all of the inspections you have to go through as a builder do a pretty good job across this province to ensure that our houses are being built safely. They require a body of knowledge that allows them to be an expert, to make sure that the houses are meeting code and meeting standards and that it's followed through at each of the stages of the building of the house. Generally I think that the work that's being done is meeting a high level. I believe that it's holding builders to account.

Just a question, I guess, that I have is that if there is a gap between the inspections and the security of the build for the homebuyer, I'm just wondering if there's maybe not another way of ensuring that the work that is being done addresses the shortcomings in the current system rather than producing another bill.

Having said that, I think we've seen with the rural municipality of Wood Buffalo that they've done a pilot project there, and it's worked. So I do intend to support the intent of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the previous speaker under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've actually been really enjoying the comments from my colleague across the way. I want to ask questions in a couple of different areas. I was interested to hear that you actually have a mortgage on your home, as I do, actually. I've had a mortgage on a home since 1980, and I continue to pay on that mortgage. I think it's been one of the best investments that I've ever made in my family's life. I've used a secured mortgage to get a lower rate, and I've actually used that lower rate to do other infrastructure support and to buy things that are important for the future of my family like my children's education and, you know, improvements to our property.

I'm bringing this up because I often hear from the member that deficit spending is such a bad thing and that that party over there has never heard of a deficit that they like, and they rail against using the government's good credit to basically get a loan at a very low rate so that we can build infrastructure like the schools in the member's riding or the roads in the member's riding or the bridges in the member's riding. So I'm actually interested in hearing his reaction to that comment about the importance of being able to use wise investments and securitization, basically, in the whole province.

The other thing that I would ask him about is his more recent comments about the impact of this bill on the small, if you wish, mom-and-pop type of constructor. I think that this is a situation in which the government can help some of these people meet the requirements that all of us as citizens of this province actually expect of a builder. I think this is an example where regulations brought in by the government actually are going to be helpful to the business to assure confidence of the buyers of those homes, and that may actually help the businesses to acquire more customers.

On both of those questions, I look forward to the comments from the member.

The Deputy Speaker: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question. You know, as a teacher we made good money, not as good

as doctors, but we made reasonable money. As a single-income teacher we made reasonable money to be able to raise a family, but it was always an issue in my family that I could have a mortgage, or I could have a car payment. I couldn't have both.

I can remember the time my brother was told he had two weeks to live, and in his generosity as he was winding up his affairs, he said: I want to send your family down to Disneyland. We had had many conversations, and I can remember saying to him at the time: you know, Mike, not sending my kids to Disneyland is not child abuse, okay?

Ms McLean: Sending them is.

Mr. Smith: That's abuse for this man here because I can't take the crowds there.

But the reality was that as a family on a single-income teacher's wage we had to make choices, and we had to make decisions. Disneyland was out; camping at the Brazeau was in.

So when we start talking about debt and deficits, I've always believed . . .

The Deputy Speaker: As the next speaker to the bill I'll recognize Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 12, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, this morning. It's a topic that has really touched me over my life, starting right at the very beginning. I was raised in a family that was led by a union carpenter who raised six children on that carpentry wage, and his motto was always to measure twice, cut once. He did a lot of home construction earlier in his career. It did eventually morph into more commercial construction as he became a superintendent and built such things as the Bonnie Doon swimming pool, which, to me as an eight-year-old, when I went to visit it on a Saturday while it was under construction and the pool was just a mass of rebar, looked pretty massive, and I was pretty amazed that my dad was the one who was making that pool. He was very proud of what he did and did it right until his retirement and ended up building many schools, which the Minister of Infrastructure is happy to continue doing with investments now.

The evolution of construction is really what I'm trying to get at here in terms of home building. If you look at the history of home construction in this province, starting from the early days of the province, a lot of times people would build their own homes, whether it be the farmhouse or even in town. I know that my great-grandfather built a house close to Commonwealth Stadium in about 1920, which they lived in when he was actually employed building the Alberta grain elevator terminal in 1925, which was located in Athlone, along the railway tracks close to where I grew up. That big grain elevator building, which for a long, long time was one of the biggest if not the biggest building in the city, was built prior to the use of diesel engines. It was built using donkeys and steam jennies to get that massive structure constructed.

The evolution of construction has really changed a lot from where you had barn-raising bees and neighbours would help each other build their own homes. You didn't necessarily have to concern yourself about the quality of construction because it was your neighbour and yourself building each other's homes. The history or the fact is that the construction materials that were used were full-dimension lumber, and everybody helped each other on it. The buildings would stay firm and solid for a long, long time, and warranties weren't something that were necessarily in high demand. But over time, as people moved off the farms and came in to populate the cities in the postwar era, you'll find that the mass construction of homes necessitated that they be built by

construction companies and individuals who would build them on a for-hire basis.

Even in that postwar boom you would find that the philosophies of quality and workmanship that were inherent in the construction of the homes that were built by people building them for each other and for their neighbours was transferred into the building construction trades during that postwar boom era. I know that in my real estate career, where I sold the other side of 800 homes over 30 years, I've seen a lot, and I've seen particular eras where housing construction shifted in terms of the quality and the building materials that were put into the homes.

10:00

If you look at buying a house or if I was looking at listing a house or having a buyer of mine make an offer on a house, if it was built, say, prior to 1975, I had a fair degree of comfort that I knew that house was going to be well constructed. There were not going to be any structural issues, probably not going to be a foundation problem, and I knew that it was going to be pretty square and true because prior to that period of time you ended up with people who were building with dimensional lumber, and there was a self-regulating type of atmosphere. Even though during boom times postwar there were massive numbers of houses built, the guiding principle was, I think, pride of workmanship, and it didn't seem to be an issue as far as quality of construction.

Once we got into sort of our boom-bust cycle during our oil booms here in the '70s, something shifted, and we ended up having diminished dimensional lumber and shortages of trades, lack of oversight on construction sites, and massive numbers of homes being built when quality labour wasn't available. As a result of that, we ended up having problems for the first time on a significant scale. That showed up when you went to sell a property or when I was working with buyers and it was a house that was, you know, built in that era. It was two-by-four construction, and you knew what the windows were.

You really made sure that you had your client get a home inspection that was done by somebody that, prior to the home inspectors being licensed, a home inspector that you knew did good work. That way you protected your buyer from getting into a property that perhaps was going to cause a problem down the road.

The New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, isn't necessarily only to protect the new-home buyer. It's also the secondary buyer that is being protected by this legislation because it's not a problem that necessarily shows up during a home inspection when the buyer is first buying a brand new home. It's two or three years down the road, after that house has been subjected to various weather conditions and spring rains and so forth, that you start seeing problems with leaky windows or leaky balconies or other things that aren't normally apparent until the house has experienced a couple of years aging. The secondary buyer is part of the whole process here in terms of protection for these homes that are initially bought on the market as brand new.

As I said before, measure twice and cut once. Prevention is really the best medicine, and that's what this legislation is doing. It's preventing problems from occurring in the first place by ensuring that the companies that are building brand new homes have qualified people doing that construction, that they are competent to be involved in home construction, and that the product they offer to the market is something that's not going to end up costing either the primary or secondary buyers a whole lot of headaches and a whole lot of money to solve problems that should never have occurred in the first place because the home builder wasn't competent.

It's basically an inherent guarantee of quality if you have a home builder that is fully qualified and there are licensing regulations that

ensure that any home builder knows what they're doing and is competent. That builds in a measure of quality guarantee into the homes that are first built.

Now, I know that back in the era of the earlier days you could really count on quality being put into the home. I talk about dimensional lumber. I remember having to help my grandfather in Thorhild. They built a home in 1947, and it was actually partly leased to the federal government because they operated the post office out of their home. That home, I was surprised to learn, had 10-inch thick basement walls. I learned that because I actually helped my grandfather with hammer and chisel cut a doorway in the basement wall to make a basement suite for the then principal of the Thorhild high school, who was named Mr. Michael Senych. He later became a member of this Legislature for the Social Credit Party in 1964, I believe, and served two terms.

In hammering and chiselling that doorway for the basement suite so that Mr. Senych could rent there, I learned that that basement was 10-inch thick. What they used for the aggregate inside that wall was actually fieldstones. Fieldstones were collected from fields around the village and put into that basement wall. It actually still stands now and was known as the big house in Thorhild. That's the type of solid construction technique that was used back then in terms of foundation, and then, of course, the dimensional lumber was – if you had a two-by-four, you knew it was two inches by four inches. The strength of those properties was guaranteed by the quality of the materials and the individuals helping each other to build their own homes.

My grandparents built that home in 1947 using their own labour and neighbours' manpower, and it still stands straight and true today. That's the type of thing that we want our consumers today to be able to expect from the homes that they have built by contractors today: contractors that are licensed, contractors that are proven to be competent, and contractors that will stand by their product because they have been fully trained and understand the most modern construction techniques and are held to that standard by licensing and regulations.

As I said before, the warranties, which were an earlier component of the New Home Buyer Protection Act, really try to compensate for harm after the damage is done whereas this piece of legislation takes the building trades one step further in consumer protection and tries to prevent the harm from being done in the first place by ensuring that those who are building properties, building houses are competent to do so and therefore protects not only the initial homebuyer but the buyer subsequently down the road by ensuring that the problems that might have been built into a home don't occur and cause harm to subsequent buyers.

So I'm fully in support of this piece of legislation. I know that, of course, home ownership is one of the biggest financial decisions any family will make. I don't recall too many situations where a family actually got burned after I did a home sale to them, but I know that there were situations where discoveries were made during home inspections which caused people to back off, and we were very thankful that they did actually have the home inspection done. In fact, if I had a buyer who perhaps in a hot market would say, "Well, no, this is a multiple-offer situation. I don't want the inspection. Just make it an unconditional offer. Don't do the inspection," I would recuse myself from that buyer and refuse to participate in the offer, knowing that the buyer was putting themselves at risk, and it wasn't something I wanted to condone.

It can be very, very harmful for a buyer to get into a situation where there has been a construction flaw in a house that was not caught by inspection during the construction of the property, and it can be devastating financially because you don't get insurance for that kind of thing. Your insurance comes in at the first stage of home

construction, where it's the people who are building those homes who are responsible for making sure that they don't end up being their own worst enemy down the road. If you've ever been in that situation yourself, where either it's water damage or – it can be any number of things. Any system of the house can be flawed in its construction. It costs a lot of money, and it comes right out of the pocket of the homeowner. It can be a long-standing issue. It doesn't matter whether it's shingling that was done wrong or electrical outlets that were installed improperly or stairs too small or too high a height. Anything that was done not according to code or not according to proper professional construction standards can end up costing people a lot of money.

10:10

Now, I had heard from members opposite the question of whether or not this was necessary, that it was going to add undue cost. I really take issue with that. The fact is that builder licensing programs already protect 75 per cent of Canadians, and we need to be in line with the other provinces so we're not a destination for bad builders from elsewhere. Not only that; even if a person is a small home builder – building one, two, five homes a year – the amount that we are asking that the builders pay for a licence fee is hardly a king's ransom. I mean, you could carpet a bedroom for less than what this fee is going to be on an annual basis.

So I don't accept the argument that it's adding an onerous cost to home builders even if they are very small contractors. I think the need and the public interest, the public interest in knowing that there is a measure of protection in terms of licensing of home builders and standards for construction and knowledge and competence being put in place for home builders, far outweigh the argument that small home builders may find the relatively minor fee onerous.

I'm fully in support of the legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, the member talked to us about his experience as a real estate agent, and I think that's a really valuable perspective to add to the debate this morning, so I really appreciate him sharing that with us. I just wonder if he can talk to us a little bit more about his experience with buyers, especially first-time homebuyers. You know, we hear about different names of builders in Alberta, and prior to this legislation being introduced, sometimes folks would feel more confident buying a home whether or not it came from one of these builders that you hear on the radio or on TV. I wonder if the member could speak to us about, you know, the confidence level of new buyers and his experience dealing with those as a real estate agent.

Also, I'm just curious. He talked about subsequent buyers. This not only protects initial buyers but buyers down the road. So is there an implication for a resale value of a home down the road, too? You know, homes tend to appreciate in value, but if we know that they are built according to certain standards, they may appreciate even further or not depreciate as much. I just wonder if the member could talk to us about those kinds of concepts in his experience.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As most members of this Assembly know, I could talk real estate forever. I'm certainly glad to have been changing the channel in my conversation on May 5, 2015, to actually being employed doing the job that I've always wanted to do even before I was a real estate agent. It's very pleasing to be here today, though, to speak about some elements of my past

career in terms of buyer protection, that the member opposite had asked me to comment on.

The member asked about well-known builders or builders' names that buyers would shy away from or that within the industry were homes to stay away from. Of course, I won't name any names right now, but there definitely were some home builders who had a reputation for lower quality work, and one would stay away from them. Especially representing a buyer, you made the buyer aware, or buyers knew, by virtue of the publicity that these builders would get, that there were homes that they probably might not want to buy because of the reputation of certain builders, that was poor. That's one of the things one would have to guard against as a representative of a buyer. You know, of course, as a representative of a seller if there is an issue within a property that you're concerned with, disclosure of that type of a problem would be incumbent upon the seller, with some qualifications.

I know there was a period of time when, as part of the Alberta Real Estate Association, members who listed properties were required to have their sellers fill out a property disclosure statement as part of the listing agreement. Also, you would end up having buyers ask for that as a part of a condition of their offer, that the seller fill out this property disclosure statement. That ended up being a discontinued practice, but it certainly was a result or a reaction to the fact that many houses have some issues with them and that over time things occur that weren't readily noticeable to the owner of the house when they bought it and now really present an issue that may cause some financial expenses to the subsequent buyers.

That responsibility to disclose did force some stories to the surface about a particular home, and it also made it incumbent upon sellers to perhaps remedy some of the issues they might have had in their home that otherwise would have simply been kept silent, and the subsequent buyer would end up suffering and perhaps end up even suing the seller that they bought the house from for failing to disclose a problem, problems which in many cases really were systemic to the original construction of the house.

One of the things that we always consider when buying a property and when recommending or talking to our buyers is that you don't look necessarily only at how the house is going to serve you; you look at resale right from the beginning.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. I think this is a bill that aligns with the government's qualities, aligns with what this government has committed to this session, and aligns with what this government has committed this budget to be, a bill that will support Alberta families. It's a bill that's going to support Alberta families in probably the single largest financial decision any family will ever have to make. I am so proud we are going to be able to protect these people, these families and that they will have confidence in their homes.

Madam Speaker, my riding, Edmonton-South West, is one of the fastest growing ridings in the entire province. It's definitely the fastest growing riding north of Calgary. What that means is that in my riding there are record numbers of new home starts: people that are going out and starting their families, people that are going out and want to have somewhere with a yard to raise their kids, an apple tree in the back, and they're going to grow too many apples and then have to give them away to all of their friends. That's the type of family that's growing up in my riding.

Now, for those families, I hear a lot about the things they have to go through day to day. The types of stories that I've heard over the last few years include things such as the family who decided: "Now is the time we want to buy a new home. We've got the down payment together. We've been saving for a few years, and we're pretty excited. We have our first child on the way, and we want to have a great opportunity to grow our family as our finances improve." Now, that family... [interjection] Not my family, no. Another family. They then went on and they bought a house. They put a down payment with the builder. They put a deposit with the builder, and the builder started going.

The first month came along, and things were going well. The second month came along, and things were going well. This half is getting into the five-, six-month stage. It's almost half built now. Now, the builder that they had decided to go with decided that — well, the investors for that builder decided that this company was no longer viable. The company that they had chosen to build their home was no longer going to be viable, and their investors pulled out. This company had been building, I think, four or five homes on that block, Madam Speaker, and none of those homes were completed ever. In fact, today those homes are still sitting half constructed, empty on those lots, and those families are either involved in court cases or have given up on their deposits and moved on to other locations to try and start building a home again.

Madam Speaker, it's for stories like that, where I hear about families that put almost their entire life-savings into buying their first house, and then, really, because of bad practices, that make the entire industry look bad, practices that put a bad mark on the entire industry — no builder wants to be in that situation. That's where I think this legislation shines. I think that this legislation protects families from having to go through the stress and the burden of not knowing whether their home is going to be completed, not knowing what's going to happen. When you get a half-finished house, no other builder will finish it for you. You can't just go to the next builder and say: "Hey, I've got a half-finished house. Can you put the rest of the walls and the roof in?" Nobody is going to do that for you. They won't guarantee the original builder's work. They won't guarantee that that home qualifies for new-home warranty, which is mandatory in this province. It's not a good situation for anyone involved.

10:20

Now, I understand, Madam Speaker, that this legislation also covers things like condo builds. As somebody who has a number of condo buildings coming up in my riding as well, it's also something I'm very passionate about. We hear time and time again of condo developments, that sometimes get built, where you have tens of residents, hundreds of residents who have put substantial deposits down or have bought one or two units in those buildings. Now, with those buildings you often hear about there being deficiencies after. When there's a deficiency in a condo unit, the owners usually have to pay a special assessment, and that can mean tens of thousands of dollars to repair that. That might be something as simple as the balcony floorings not being done properly, or there might be a leak in one of the walls.

One of the stories that I heard was that the plumbing wasn't done properly, to code, in one of these condo buildings, so every single unit in that condo was assessed a \$50,000 special assessment. That's quite substantial, Madam Speaker. It's \$50,000. That's the down payment for a new home in my riding. Now, what went on from there was that the condo board got a very good legal opinion, and they said: "You know what? We could try to chase the builder, but we don't know what will happen. It could go to court. We might lose. We might win." You could flip a coin and decide, basically.

Or you could go to court, and if it's a shell company for a larger builder, that shell company will actually just close off and declare bankruptcy, and you won't have anyone to sue anymore. That's the type of situation that I've heard about in my riding.

I've heard about what's going on in the industry, and none of those builders that are doing those sorts of nefarious practices are making a good impression on the industry. We want to support our industry. We want to support our families. We want a situation where our industry is able to provide a good product and a good service to consumers so they're able to make responsible financial decisions, so they're able to have a home that they can be proud of, somewhere they can raise a family, somewhere they can have their kids grow up, walk to the school down the street, and have those types of situations.

Madam Speaker, that's why I'm so proud of this legislation. I'm so proud of our legislation, that's going to allow consumers to be able to look up the history of their builders and see how reputable their builders are so that our excellent builders that we do have in this province, the people who are doing very good work and creating very excellent homes for families, are going to be able to shine because it's going to be obvious who's doing a good job and who might not be doing quite as well.

Now, builder licensing programs, Madam Speaker, are already existent for 75 per cent of other Canadians, so it's not something new. It's not something exceptionally onerous. I think it's something that all members of this Assembly will agree supports the types of families – it's the type of consumer protection that we're looking for for Alberta. It's something that we've already seen in other provinces like British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, and when we look at these, we need to step in and say that we want to be at the forefront. We want to be right there at the front of the path, with the other provinces that provide a safe place to build and a safe place to live. If we ensure that the builders are doing the right type of work with this type of licensing program, we're going to be right there, because our families deserve that, and my families deserve that.

Madam Speaker, if you drive out to the airport here in Edmonton, for example, and you just look right, you just look into my riding, that whole stretch, new growth. That growth wasn't there five years ago, that growth wasn't there 10 years ago, and 15 years ago it was farmland. You're looking at it now, and there are entire subdivisions that have grown out. If you look at the electoral map of my riding and my district, you'll see entire neighbourhoods that don't exist yet on those maps, and those maps are only from 2012. It's not that long ago.

Madam Speaker, we have so many homes starting in my riding. We have so many people that are moving into my riding and are excited about the prospects that they're going to have, excited that they're going to be able to landscape their yard however they want. They're excited that they can start doing all these things. But all of that comes back to and starts with having a home that works, having a home that is up to code, having a home that is built right and isn't going to have significant deficiencies moving forward, a home that isn't going to cause you any troubles. You're not going to be worried about replacing the roof, let's say, significantly before the expected lifespan of that because of shoddy work. You don't want to be worried about: if I plug in my vacuum cleaner and my toaster at the same time, is my circuit box going to explode or something? Those are the things you don't want to be worried about. Now, I might be using a little bit of hyperbole. I don't think a circuit box would explode. It might cause an electrical fire, but I don't think that's preferable either.

Madam Speaker, I think that this is the type of legislation that this House not only can and should do, but I think we're obligated

to do this type of legislation. I think it's something that we can go out there and say to every single person in our ridings – every single person in my community that I know bought a new home will say: I wish you had this when I bought my house. I have so many friends of mine and people who live in my riding who are right now involved in some sort of either a lawsuit or trying to arrange a settlement with their builder. It's not a unique situation. It's something that families that build new homes sort of begrudgingly accept. I think that this legislation puts us in step, where we don't have to accept that. We can say that we deserve a good house from day one.

I'm so proud to be able to support this legislation. Madam Speaker, I really do implore all members to vote in favour of this, and I look forward to moving forward. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy and excited to stand here in support of Bill 12, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. As the Member for Edmonton-McClung alluded to, he was a realtor. He had to be certified under RECA. If you're going to a dealership to buy a car, it has to be certified under AMVIC. If you go to a bar to buy beer, it's certified under the AGLC. The paramedic who picks you up is certified by the college. The bus driver has to have proper licensing through Alberta Transportation to be certified to drive a bus. Even the guy selling hot dogs from the cart, which is amazing, out on the street outside the Federal Building has to be certified with AHS to sell us that hot dog. But right now we have a system in place where if you're building someone a home, the most expensive purchase that they're ever going to make, you don't have to be certified.

You know, at the end of the day, this is not a system in which we're trying to create more bureaucracy or more red tape or anything like this. This is where we're trying to protect consumers because it's their safety that's in jeopardy. The Member for Edmonton-South East . . .

Dr. Turner: South West.

Mr. Sucha: South West. Thank you.

. . . alluded to plugging in a vacuum and the circuit box exploding. While it was an extreme measure, you know, it's to think about how important electrical is and how important it is to make sure that your electrical is properly certified when it's in a house because, you know, a house is the place you keep to protect your stuff, yourself, your family, and your kids. We put a lot of trust in the builders of our homes. To be frank, we have some phenomenal builders in this province who do great work and who I would trust with my life, which we do every single day when we make a new purchase and we move into a home. But if we have a few bad apples out there, we're taking a risk.

It's very similar to many of the other items that I outlined, which was to make sure that we have proper certifications to protect individuals. That's why there is a lot of faith in our food service industry and why people can go and not think twice when they go to a restaurant and order a meal, knowing that if that meal is not cooked or not handled properly, you're putting your life at risk.

At the end of the day, it's important that we're making sure that we move forward with licensing builders in an appropriate fashion, that isn't cumbersome and doesn't create a huge burden on them but makes sure that we help protect the reputation of these builders.

That is one of the things that I think is important for us to really do to create some strong confidence in this market.

Being a born-and-raised Calgarian, I remember that growing up I was always a very engaged young individual. I'd watch the news a lot. There was a weird trend that started happening as we got to the late '90s, early 2000s. It was the odd news story that would come up every three weeks, every month, about some shoddy home that was built. While I acknowledge that is was a very, very minute number of homes, a very small minority, it still was a very big concern to hear about this and to hear about some of this shoddy workmanship.

10:30

When I went to Ottawa to study in university, I noticed something when I watched the news every day. Because I was doing television broadcasting and poli-sci, I had to kind of stay tuned to the current affairs and news to stay up to date. These were stories that we weren't hearing about in Ontario. We weren't hearing about foundation issues or electrical issues or condo boards that had to do huge, huge, huge, expensive works, and a lot of that is because in Ontario they have a certification process that holds these businesses accountable, and there are these protection systems in place.

You know, it's unfortunate. I was speaking, actually, with my real estate agent. Nearby to where he lives is a big condo complex, and he says it breaks his heart every time he drives by there because they have literally had to pull all the siding off the side of the walls. They have had to start tearing out a lot of the insulation in this condo. It's going to cost the residents of that condo a vast amount of money. Either (a) the condo fees are going to go up really heavily and it's going to be hard for them to sell their units or (b) they're all going to have to pay out of pocket, but they're going to have to make a hard choice here. The reason why is because when they did the weather stripping at the top of the roof, they cut corners and missed just a small piece. We're talking about maybe a few hundred dollars of savings that is going to cost, you know, all the members combined potentially a million dollars. It's devastating to see that that is occurring.

You know, one of the things that has started to become a cliché in Calgary – and this has actually turned a lot of the houses that are in my constituency. The bulk of it is well established. There are some that were built after the early '90s, but not a lot. There was a huge appeal to a lot of these properties because for people who have lived in Calgary and have heard these stories in the news for the last 20 years about the odd shoddy build, you realize that, you know, you're taking a little bit of a gamble. It's a small gamble – don't get me wrong – because the majority of our houses were built by outstanding contractors who did a great job, but you're still taking a little bit of a gamble.

So what ends up happening is that houses that are actually appealing to a lot of people are anything that was built in a recession, so your early '80s houses, anything that was built in the '60s, '70s, and it came to the extent that people were trusting a 50-year-old home over something that was built five years ago because they have more faith and more trust, just as the Member for Edmonton-McClung kind of alluded to here in Edmonton. You know, it's not that different down in Calgary. Even when I purchased my first home – I bought an '83 – I got really excited because I went: oh, this is great; it's a recession home. I know that they took their time on this build, that at that time we weren't hearing a lot of challenges in relation to shoddy builds in the area and that this home will be safe and sound.

One of the things that we hear a lot of, too, is with some of the new areas that we started seeing development in. Some of the old industrial buildings in the Midnapore community: they tore them

down, and they built condo complexes. Sometimes it was a shame because some of them were actually historical buildings, part of the actual old townsite in the area there, too. So it's something that we've been working on in that community, trying to preserve the last remaining old buildings in that community because it shows a little bit of the history of that area and because there's not a lot there that we really preserved. The old grain elevator is gone. The train station has been moved to Heritage Park, so fortunately it's safe.

Nonetheless, I digress. A lot of these new condo builds: they're only about five, 10, 15 years old, and it's funny when you see some of the condo fees and the structures that are there. A lot of condo owners have come to me. We've actually reached out to a lot of them just to get some feedback. What's happened is that the newer builds, some of them: their fees are significantly higher than the condos that were built in the '70s and '80s, when Shane Homes was developing the Midnapore community following the annex to Calgary. A lot of it is because within about a 10-year timeline they've run into some issues. There was one particular condo complex – this was before the election, but I remember because it was a pretty big deal when it happened. It had some issues with its HVAC. Its HVAC wasn't working properly, and actually they had a huge carbon monoxide leak in the condo complex, and a lot of people got sick.

I was looking at the condo fees for that complex now, and it looks like, because of some of the work they've had to do, they're paying almost a hundred bucks more a month than a lot of the other individuals who live in surrounding condos in the area. With that being said, if we had protections in place to make sure that people were being certified appropriately, there would be a bit more faith, and there could be a bit more trust in these complexes as well.

There's also been a lot of fear in relation to some, you know, negative contracting companies. I have contractors who come to me who've asked us to really look into matters like this because they want to rebuild their reputation. They build homes, they do everything properly, and they're getting really frustrated because there are some bad seeds out there who will come in the market for five years, do unethical, improper, shoddy jobs, and then go insolvent. So if we have a system in place that allows consumers to see that these businesses are in good financial standing, it'll put them in good protection.

I've also heard concerns in relation to some of these companies not being in good financial standing, not paying their invoices or not paying their staff appropriately. In a recession like this what ends up happening is that if you have companies that are not paying their contractors in appropriate times, that could be the one catalyst that causes a contractor or a business, especially a small business, to go under.

You know, there have been situations where I hear allegations from some contractors that there are some shoddy builders out there that will actually push the invoices to the brink in hopes that these small companies will go insolvent. They'll file for bankruptcy. Then when the creditors come for the unpaid invoices, they will sell them for pennies on the dollar, and they'll actually be able to pay less for those invoices. I've heard allegations and concerns in relation to that. So I think that if we really make sure that these builders are in good financial standing, that they're reputable, it's going to help a lot of the subcontractors that they're hiring and create a bit more faith in the contracting community.

The other things that I've heard a lot of are concerns in relation to – and you know, credit to the Member for Edmonton-McClung, who has a lot of expertise in this from whether it's his family background or his background as a real estate agent – natural disasters and how we can have our homes be able to stand whenever

we deal with very heavy challenges in relation to weather and how weather implications can play a major factor in a home build.

We've had a lot of studies that have been coming out. Actually, in the last PNWER conference we had an individual who spoke to us about this, about how we have to start cracking down on our regulations in relation to home builds, making sure that our contractors are doing good jobs and are reputable. What's going to start happening is that it's going to cost us as a society, us as a government, who has to help with remediation, not to mention that if we're having buildings collapse in natural disasters, overall it's going to cost governments a lot more money and cost individuals a lot more money when we start seeing things like heavy winds that come in.

We have significant windstorms that hit the city of Calgary, sometimes actually causing us to declare a state of emergency. There was one about four or five years ago that was very scary because on some of the newer homes it was actually tearing the siding off the walls. The older homes were unscathed, to be completely honest, and it was remarkable to see the workmanship in comparison to those homes.

I think that having a really strong system in place will also help us protect consumers, protect ordinary Albertans when we face potential natural disasters, whether it be flooding, heavy saturation with rain, especially if you want to have a proper foundation. If you have heavy rainfalls, the water table is going to rise, but if you have a proper foundation in there, if your sump pump was installed properly in that home, you're not going to have any issues, you're not going to have any significant damage, and ultimately it's not going to lead to us having to pay out heavy insurance costs, which are going to raise premiums for all Albertans here. It's going to ensure that, at the end of the day, you're still going to be able to live in your home during these times. Even in '05 in Calgary when we had the heavy rainfalls that caused a lot of flooding, you could kind of see the homes that had the good workmanship in comparison to the ones that didn't. You'd be on a street block: all the houses are graded the same, but not all of them have flooded. It was a matter of how well the foundations were built on those houses in comparison to others and how well those sump pumps were installed in comparison to other homes.

10:40

You know, I think it's important that we make sure we move forward, especially as we move forward with the rebuild of Fort McMurray, making sure that we can give faith to the consumers that their homes will be safe when they move back in. That can give them that sense of peace of mind and give all consumers a sense of peace of mind. At the end of the day, if this is going to accomplish anything for the consumer, the new-home buyer, the people who are buying in the new south communities in Calgary and new south communities in Edmonton, it is that they can go home easy knowing that we put a strong system in place in this Legislature to make sure that they will be protected and that their home will be safe and sound.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill in second reading?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 12 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment.

The Chair: This is amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 12, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 20(a)(ii) in the proposed section 28(1)(h.1) by adding the following after subclause (viii):

- (viii.1) respecting exemptions from fees and fee refunds for licences issued for any of the categories of residential builders established under subclause (viii).

Madam Chair, this amendment seeks to remove new barriers to entry for small builders as well as gives the government the ability to waive any fees charged to purely charitable organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. The small builder would not be disadvantaged compared to incumbents when they acquire training and certification. This amendment does not exempt those builders from obtaining and maintaining the requisite qualifications, and it also does not exempt them from obtaining a builder's licence. This amendment simply provides the government the ability to exempt and/or refund fees associated with the builder licence itself as well as any training required by the registrar as set out by the legislation.

While the licence fee itself is relatively minor, the potential training and certification costs associated with meeting the requirements for the licence itself could run into the thousands of dollars. A large home builder can afford these costs quite easily. However, those same costs have the potential to be overly burdensome for some small builders, which could prevent them from growing despite their skill in home building. The last thing we want to do is prevent individuals from expanding their business because they were treated the same as a company that was much larger than they were.

Further, this amendment, if passed, will give the government the ability to exempt or refund organizations such as Habitat for Humanity for the costs and fees associated with obtaining the builder's licence. Habitat for Humanity along with many other organizations in this province do great work in building great products for those that would not otherwise be able to obtain a home, and it is not fair to lay all these costs on these organizations.

In closing, this amendment simply prevents small builders from being disadvantaged and gives the government the ability to avoid laying undue costs onto charitable organizations in the housing industry. I encourage all members to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-South East for this proposed amendment. We have taken a closer look and understand that it would add a

regulation-making power to exempt fees and fee refunds for licences for different categories of residential builders that may be established. This amendment would provide the option to create different categories of residential builders, that could be addressed differently if needed, and therefore adds an element of flexibility under the builder licensing program.

One of the organizations that was mentioned during the introduction of the amendment was Habitat for Humanity. I have some direct experience with Habitat for Humanity, having served on the board of the Family Selection Committee as well for Habitat for Humanity in Norton, Massachusetts, so that's Old Colony Habitat for Humanity. It was one of the most rewarding and gratifying experiences of my life. Going through the process, which is so efficient and so easy to navigate – you would think that it would be really, really difficult for a group of people to choose a family to qualify to have a Habitat for Humanity home, but because the organization has been at this for so long and they've developed such a great program, it was actually really easy to narrow down which families would qualify and which just weren't ready at that time.

Incidentally, as a matter of interest, it was through my participation with Old Colony Habitat for Humanity that I got to try on a Super Bowl ring. We did a lot of fund raising with the Patriots organization, and, yeah, I had the chance to try on a Super Bowl ring, which is, weirdly, related to this amendment.

There are other organizations in Calgary and across Alberta that do good work, nonprofits that help people get into moderately priced homes, that otherwise might be unattainable for them, especially while we're seeing the gap in affordability widen. One of those organizations is Attainable Homes in Calgary, which I know has done a lot of work in helping families that have been priced out of the market to access a home for their family.

I also have seen Habitat for Humanity in Calgary. Recently they completed a build of accessible housing. These are families that have a family member that isn't able to use a regular home. They need certain modifications in order to provide accessibility for them: ramps, bathrooms that you can get a wheelchair in, showers that are accessible for people in wheelchairs.

I know first-hand how important it is to be able to continue to encourage these kinds of organizations to build homes for people that may not otherwise be able to afford to buy a home, and I would like to thank the member for proposing this amendment and for sharing it with us in advance. I am prepared to support this amendment, and I would encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Calgary-South East.

10:50

Mr. Fraser: I have another amendment, Madam Chair.

The Chair: It will be called amendment A2.

Please go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 8 in the proposed section 4.1(2) by striking out "and" at

the end of clause (a), by adding "and" at the end of clause (b), and by adding the following after clause (b):

- (c) designate one or more service providers to administer courses and examinations for the purpose of clause (a).

Again, thank you, Madam Chair. The intent of this motion is to ensure that builders located outside of Edmonton and Calgary are not unduly burdened by having to travel in order to take courses or examinations that are required by the registrar in order to obtain a builder licence. Most ministries are largely based in Edmonton, some having smaller offices in Calgary. However, homes need to be built in all corners of this province. The companies which build in rural areas or far away from the two largest cities should be able to access, where possible, the required courses and examinations in a location that is more convenient for them.

Organizations such as the Professional Home Builders Institute already offer a wide range of courses and certificates, which are available online. If the government were to utilize these pre-existing institutes to offer the training and allow builders to access training which would be geographically convenient for them, it would help reduce the burden placed on these builders as they seek to comply with this new piece of legislation. It would also allow the government to utilize pre-existing corporate testing providers, who have been doing great work across Alberta for many years.

In closing, this amendment simply asks the government to be cognizant of the fact that travelling to Edmonton and Calgary is not always easy for out-of-town builders, especially small companies from more remote areas. By allowing outside organizations the ability to offer some or all of the training these builders require, this amendment would create more equitable programs for builders based outside the two major cities. I hope all members will support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to again thank the Member for Calgary-South East for his second amendment to the bill. I understand that this would see a clause added to designate service providers to administer any courses and/or examinations.

We've reviewed how this would affect the proposed program and have identified that this could result in procedural issues. For example, a service provider is currently undefined, and it's not clear what the designations would be for. Then there's a practical issue of de-accreditation. What happens when licence holders take courses that cease to be recognized? Without some forward thinking put into this, this could cause administrative issues down the road, and we really want to avoid those. I think the opportunity to be able to introduce a licensing program, especially having it integrated with the home warranty program, is a huge benefit for home buyers, and we want to make sure that we take some time to really understand what all of the implications are.

I know this amendment has good intentions, but it could possibly introduce some issues down the road in terms of what is considered appropriate education and qualifies and what doesn't qualify. It would create a whole structure where you have to make sure that there is a migration path, essentially, for courses that exist and courses that may exist in the future. I could envision that that would include a lot of people making those decisions. It sounds like quite an administrative burden.

Additionally, this is unnecessary. Nothing in this bill would preclude service providers from administering courses, and this is actually something that we are discussing with the Canadian Home Builders' Association.

A service provider is currently undefined, so in terms of deciding who or what would be an appropriate service provider, I think, again, we would be at risk of introducing a lot of administrative burden that isn't necessary in order to get to the end result. The purpose of the program is to make sure that consumers are protected when buying a new home. They have the home warranty already, and in licensing builders, we want to ensure that we're not getting fly-by-night operations, people who want to undercut very good builders in order to turn a profit but aren't necessarily that concerned with the integrity of the structure that they're building.

I'm not able to support the amendment. I certainly appreciate the work that has been put into it, but again I cannot recommend that we go forward with it at this time.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning, everyone. I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-South East for bringing this amendment forward. I think it's a good amendment.

I think that it is extremely important to take a little bit of notice that in this bill, from what I've seen and read, there's not a lot of detail as to how this thing is really going to roll out: where people can go, where they can register, where they can be examined, et cetera, et cetera. I don't think it's come forward as to where people actually go to make the application, and it doesn't appear to me – and I'm happy to be corrected on this – how it's really going to be processed, how applications are going to be conducted, et cetera, et cetera. Is it the municipalities that are going to be doing this? Is it a new office that's going to open? Where are these offices going to be? What is the time frame between making an application and when the application is actually approved or, perhaps, refused, et cetera, et cetera?

This amendment that my colleague here today has brought forward is at least trying to get to the situation where service providers could be in local areas, where it wouldn't be necessary for all of these various contractors and home builders to drive for hours and hours just to put in a little bit of paperwork and meet with someone to discuss their application.

I would encourage people to support this amendment. The amendment itself, aside from the detail I'm looking for, would at least encourage local branch offices or some type of service provider to be able to do this and prevent some of that unfortunate lag in making this happen. Red tape is a problem that everybody deals with from time to time in government situations, and without this kind of improvement to this bill I'm worried that it would be just more red tape and a hard thing to manage.

Perhaps the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill can give some clarity as to how this will be done or how existing contractors that have been in business for 35, 40, 50 years, some of them, can go to a local office someplace. Maybe it is a municipality. I don't know. But without that information this type of amendment makes sense.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Livingstone . . .

Mr. Stier: Macleod.

Ms McPherson: Macleod. I was going to say St. Cloud, but I knew that wasn't it.

Those are really good questions, and I have some information that I want to share with you to hopefully alleviate some of your concerns, which are legitimate. Details of the application process will be worked out over the summer. We want to ensure that we're working with builders to develop a system that doesn't result in unnecessary red tape. The process will be similar to what's currently in place for Fort McMurray. We will use a lot of the information that's already collected in the registry system, so registries will be an appropriate place to go through the process.

11:00

Municipal Affairs staff are currently developing the application process and will incorporate feedback from stakeholders on what things should be considered, also taking into account what has worked and what has not worked in terms of the process that's in place for Fort McMurray right now. So we have some lessons there that we can take information from.

The application process will be online although some paper documentation may be required. So if there are certificates, certifications, existing licences that need to be submitted – I'm not sure; this process is going to be worked out – it could be a matter of scanning them or getting a certified copy and submitting those to the registry in order to complete the application.

The application process will require builders to submit information about their history, their track record, their financial standing, and corporate structure to allow the registrar to access all licence applications and determine whether an applicant presents a risk to the consumer. I imagine that will include a matrix where scoring will be applied to each area, and then an overall algorithm will be applied to understand, on a scale, how much of a risk a particular builder would or would not pose to new-home buyers.

Once an application is reviewed and approved, a builder will be notified that they can register new homes in the new-home buyer protection system, the online registry. This is part of the integration process with the new-home buyer warranty program, so that gives an extra level of security to buyers of new construction homes. So we'll have the warranty and the licensing.

If an application is rejected, the registrar will notify the builder with the reasons why and with contact information should they wish to appeal the decision. There may be some contextual information. With small builders, they don't have a lot of volume. I understand that the average number of new homes built per builder in Alberta is seven. So one unfortunate circumstance out of seven is actually a pretty high percentage, but there may be contextual information that would help the registrar understand those circumstances and thereby form the basis of an appeal.

Builders will be required to submit an application, pay the required fee, and hold an active licence in order to build. Now licences will be issued for a one-year period and will allow the builder to apply for multiple building permits during that time, after which the builder will have to apply for a renewal. Just like we have to renew the registration on our vehicles every year or every two years and just like we have to renew our licence for driving, that gives us the privilege of being able to drive in Alberta, there's a similar sort of process. It's not a one-shot deal: you get a licence, and you're licensed forever. That has to be verified and validated, reviewed on a regular basis, and what's been chosen is annually because of the turnover in companies that build homes.

The registrar will assess all licence applications to determine if the applicant meets the licence criteria and whether any conditions should be placed on a licence. Just like I need to have corrective lenses in order to drive my vehicle legally – and you wouldn't want me on the road without them – builders will also have similar sorts

of conditions applied to them, depending on what their circumstances are.

The application process will incorporate many of the existing requirements for a builder under the New Home Buyer Protection Act. So it's not going to be a matter of having to come up with a lot of information that they haven't had to come up with previously or having to qualify for some sort of special skill or service that would be a surprise. It's based on existing criteria, existing principles, existing practices.

In terms of red tape and the concern about red tape, we're using the information that has already been collected wherever possible. So it's not a matter of duplicating the effort. It's not a matter of pushing a lot of paper or JPEGs around. It's taking advantage of what we already have, which is a smart way to approach any task that you want to accomplish.

Financial vetting currently done by banks and warranty providers will consider liquidity and other financial indicators, so that will help inform the decision as to the reliability of a particular builder. Government will meet with warranty providers to see if their financial review processes could support builder licensing rather than government duplicating that process. They're already very good at vetting companies for financial liquidity and stability, so why not leverage that?

I hope that helps to answer some of the concerns that were raised, and I'm happy to answer any other questions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not sure that a lot of what the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill brought up really applied to what was going on with this amendment as we were talking about courses and examinations. But she did bring up some things that I did find interesting and I'd like clarification on, specifically about restrictions on licences like corrective lenses, if I remember her words. I don't have the Blues, unfortunately, in front of me.

Now, from what I understand – and, again, the member can correct me if I'm wrong – this is a revenue-neutral program that's being put forward, so it's supposed to be covered through the fees that are charged to the contractors to maintain this program. I guess my concern here is that it seems like as soon as we start to restrict our contractors, does that mean that suddenly we're going to need a new department set up within the government to maintain this new licensing feature?

It appears that this is going far beyond what I had thought this bill was, which was to bring forward licensing. Again, you can correct me if I'm wrong. My understanding was that you would apply for a licence, you would be granted a licence, and that is as far as I understood this process would go. There may have been an education component to that licensing part. But now we're hearing that there could potentially be restrictions when it comes to the licence itself, sort of like your vehicle licence. Will we be grading from class 7 all the way to class 1, where you can build certain types of units based on the education requirements? Will the Ministry of Municipal Affairs now get into education components with some of our local colleges and universities, or is this going to be a simplified thing, where you'd go online and do a 20-question survey?

I guess my thoughts here are that this could be onerous. The fact that this education component – going back to what this amendment is, I don't know if the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill had actually brought up the facts that we were trying to be concerned with. Specifically, when it comes to my riding, I can tell you that

we're three and a half hours away from Edmonton. Should we need to do any exams or if we need to do any training that is done at the major centres, this could put a real cost to being able to maintain a licence and build houses. So it goes far beyond what the \$600 fee, going down to \$500, I believe – I don't have the talking points in front of me.

11:10

I guess at this point now it appears that we've gone from licensing to enforcement. Is that the goal of the government, to bring enforcement forward? Who's going to pay for that enforcement if it's not being paid for through the funds that are collected? What are you going to do about the fact that this training sounds like it's going to be more extensive because of the levels that you're going to be putting through on this licensing? Who's going to be doing this?

One other thing that occurred to me during my thoughts on this was that it sounds like you're rolling this out during the summer. Going through this, I'm concerned that if this is implemented poorly, it could affect the rebuilding of Fort McMurray because of a lack of training, if you will. So will there be some kind of grandfather clause to allow that to move forward? Like, I would hate to see a building season lost in Fort McMurray because of a government licensing program that is being brought forward and the people in Fort McMurray being unable to get into their homes as soon as they need to be. Will that be thought of when they're rolling this licensing out? I am concerned that Fort McMurray could get caught up in the backlash on this, and I don't think that's okay when we're looking at the devastation that they've witnessed and what the people of Fort McMurray have gone through.

If the member could answer some of those questions, I'd very much appreciate it. Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for the questions, a multitude of questions. I'll try to answer some of them if I can.

First, I want to address the issue regarding your concerns about rebuilding in Fort McMurray. What's in place right now is what the licensing program is actually going to be modelled on. This has been introduced for people that are rebuilding in Fort McMurray. It's already in place, and it's providing the model for licensing across the province. I would emphasize that this introduction of licensing should in no way impede the rebuilding process that's going on in Fort McMurray. There is certainly no desire to keep people out of their homes any longer than necessary. So I hope that allays any concerns that you have about that.

As far as establishing a new department, the program is leveraging off a number of things that already exist: the registration program that is already in place for Fort McMurray; talking with financial providers, warranty providers in terms of the financial information for potential licensees. We're going to be leveraging off that information, so hopefully there would be no need to create any new department in order to address that.

There was something else, too, that escapes me at the moment. I'm going to come back to that in a minute if I can recall it.

In terms of licensing, I am licensed to drive – I think it's a class 5. I'm licensed to drive most vehicles. I've driven a pickup. I've driven a Beetle, which was a lot of fun. I have an SUV now. But I can't drive a motorcycle because I've never been trained or taken any education regarding that, so it would be a bad idea to let me loose on the streets on anything more than a scooter. I can't drive a

never had any training, and it wouldn't be legal. And, goodness knows, without training, we don't want people behind the wheel of a large eighteen-wheeler going down the highway with a load of cattle or grain or cars because that would pose a danger.

Similarly, we could have a builder who is really excellent at building cottages. They've built a number of cottages across the province, and then they undertake a project, a development of multifamily dwellings. Let's say that it is an 18-storey high-rise. It has to be concrete construction. It can't be wood, which is what they're used to working with. We don't want to just have someone pay \$600 for the privilege of building whatever they want to build. There has to be something that backs that up. That is why there is some examination of people's ability to meet the requirements of the licence. It's not simply a matter of paying some cash so that you have your name on a list. It is actually providing information, providing credentials that prove to the registrar that you are competent, that you have experience being able to build a multifamily dwelling as opposed to a cottage at the lake with no insulation.

Let me just refer to my notes and see if I can grab any more of your questions. No. I think that's about it.

In terms of the amendment itself, which we're speaking to – like, I really am confident that the amendments introduced in Bill 12 will do a good job of ensuring that education is up to date and accessible for builders. This amendment that was introduced is redundant, and that's why I'm not supporting it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other comments on amendment A2? Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to reiterate some of the things that my colleague from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill has said and just repeat that there is a provisional period for this fall and winter while construction season is slower. This bill would not obstruct any of the work that's already being undertaken to rebuild Fort McMurray. The program is in place there already, for the most part, in terms of being able to see the quality of builders out there. Finally, the licensing program, if passed, would be fully implemented before the next building season, which is, hopefully, by next spring.

I'll just repeat the timelines here that we have. Specific program details will be outlined in regulations, which will be developed in the summer of this year, taking into account stakeholder feedback from initial consultations and any future engagements.

Ministerial orders respecting licensing fees, powers of compliance officers, and other administrative matters will come into force on November 1, 2017, with phased implementation over six months. Of course, full implementation will be expected to be in effect by May 2018.

Just on the other matter that the member raised, about extra costs to the department, I have had discussions with the ministry, and they assure me that there is room to have this program implemented without any extra costs to the department.

On the piece about enforcement – I also asked about that – as far as I know, there won't be any extra enforcement needed to undertake this program.

That's all I have. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess one of my questions is on the fees that we're paying for the licensing part of this. If it becomes a registry's responsibility to go through this process, have we decided how much of those fees will be moved to that specific

registry, into that process, for their time? Or is this going to be something that is going to be downloaded and put onto the shoulders of all of our registries within Alberta? I don't know if that is quite fair if that is the intent the government has, but I would like to know exactly how it is that you're going to move that fee through to pay for this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the question. I would just say that I know that some of the fees will, I can imagine, go towards the registry costs.

In terms of continuing consultations, that is a discussion that will be ongoing and is to be worked out with further consultations with stakeholders.

Thank you.

11:20

The Chair: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Have you consulted with the registries association within Alberta regarding this plan and rolling this out on exactly how you're going to be licensing? I would love to hear some of their thoughts if you have consulted with them and whether or not they feel this is something that can be moved forward quickly through their offices.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:21 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Fraser	Smith
Cyr	Pitt	Stier
Drysdale	Schneider	Yao
Fildebrandt		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Payne
Babcock	Kazim	Phillips
Carson	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Connolly	Littlewood	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Rosendahl
Dach	Mason	Schreiner
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Sucha
Goehring	McLean	Turner
Hinkley	McPherson	Westhead
Hoffman	Miller	Woollard
Horne	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back on Bill 12, are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Any other speakers to the bill? Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to stand up to talk about Bill 12 this morning. I'd really like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for his work and his department's work on this very important bill. We've heard that this kind of thing, when people are buying their first home or a brand new home, for that matter, is the biggest investment that they can make. We want to reassure folks that the investment they are making is a sound one and that the people that are building their homes are up to the best standards that we have.

I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs has done a tremendous job on striking the right balance, working with the industry, and getting this right. This is a really good example of the consultation that he's done. When we're getting support from the opposition on these kinds of matters, we know that there is a general consensus, and we can all agree that this is an extremely important piece of legislation that's going to protect Albertans and make sure that their investments are sound into the future.

I'd like to start out just talking about a little bit of my personal experience with construction in my home. I had a window company install some windows – and I know that this doesn't necessarily apply directly to the bill, but I think it speaks to the importance of having people that you can trust when you're having work done on your home. We were doing some renovations to our own home, and in the course of doing those renovations, we had some brand new windows installed. They weren't just replacement windows, but we actually had to increase the size of the opening for the windows quite substantially. I consider myself a handy person, but I also know my limits in terms of what I can do safely and comfortably. I know enough to be potentially dangerous, so I want to keep myself in check when I'm doing things. I know enough to say: okay; I can't handle that particular job.

11:40

In creating these large window openings, the openings started out as just about 16 inches wide, the size of a stud bay, and they were going to be opening to I think about maybe five or six feet wide, so it was a pretty substantial opening. It was two windows side by side, and the type of construction that's required in this instance – I can't recall the technical term, but there are headers and jack studs and king studs and this kind of thing.

You know, it was great. The salesman for the window company showed me the architectural drawings of what the opening should look like and how they should be constructed. I was quite impressed because this person showing me the architectural drawings really reassured me that this company knew what they were talking about. I felt confident in their abilities when the contractors came over to do the work, and we were really looking forward to this.

I live in Bragg Creek, and we have a beautiful backyard. The windows that we had there previously, like I say, were only about a foot wide. We had this great big wall that looked out over our nicely forested backyard, but you could only see it through these one-foot-wide windows. I think it was like that in the past because there was a fireplace in between those two windows, so they're quite spread apart. They let a little bit of light in, but that part of the house was quite dark, so trying to open that up and open up the view and be able to see our nice backyard was something that was pretty important to us.

Now, there are two halves to the house. One half was built in the '70s, and there was an addition put onto it in the late '80s, so the construction between the old side of the house and the new side of the house was a bit different. The Member for Edmonton-McClung earlier talked about two-by-four construction and two-by-six construction, and this was the case here. Like, we actually had two parts of the wall with different-sized studs and different kinds of

insulation, so that's why we had undertaken the renovations in the first place. Like I said, as part of that renovation we wanted to open up the windows and increase the light and have a better view.

The contractors came over. I was really intrigued to watch them because I'm an amateur renovator myself.

Mr. S. Anderson: Do you have a licence?

Mr. Westhead: I don't have a licence, but thankfully in the bill owner-builders don't require a licence, so that's okay.

I was quite eager to watch the carpenters do their work because I wanted to see how these experts did it, you know. I was watching them throughout the course of the day, and I kind of told them that I was interested and asked them to walk me through some of the things that they were doing so that I could learn from them. They seemed quite eager to do that, so again my confidence level in this process was quite high.

I think, if I remember correctly, they kind of showed me and walked me through on one window, how they installed the header and the jack studs and the king studs and all this kind of thing. Then, after learning the first window, for the second window I kind of went about my day and was doing some other things while they carried on with their work. Then the day went on. The windows had been installed successfully, and the builders asked: take a look, and see what you think. You know, I was kind of mesmerized by these brand new windows. It was fantastic. It really opened up our view of the backyard, and it really increased the light in our house, too. Anyway, I signed off on the contract and sent them on their way.

Then a little bit later on – I think it was either later that day or the next day – I took a closer look at the work that they had done. It turned out that on the first window, that they had walked me through and showed me what they had done, everything was fine, but then I looked at the second window. You know, over top of a window opening there are supposed to be, I think, two two-by-10 headers over top of each other. It looked like they must have run out of wood. They still had two headers, but one header was a solid piece of wood, and for the other piece of wood they had just put two pieces of wood side by side, so there's no strength in that. Even if you try to laminate them to one another, if you don't have a continuous piece of wood as the second header, there's a significant reduction in strength there.

I could tell that they – my impression was that they were trying to hide this on me and that they were trying to skimp on the wood. You know, Bragg Creek is a little bit isolated from Calgary. My impression was that they picked up the wood in the morning, what they thought they needed, and I suppose they underestimated that and didn't want to make the trip back to Calgary to pick up another piece of two-by-10, so they kind of fudged it a little bit.

Not only that, Madam Chair, but I saw another inconsistency when I looked back at the architectural drawing that the installer had showed me. Because the two windows were adjacent to one another – and I can't remember the correct terms – there are supposed to be two king studs side by side and then a jack stud on either side of those to hold up the header, but in this instance maybe they measured wrong because there was only one king stud in the middle.

Mr. S. Anderson: Measure twice, cut once.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Measure twice, cut once. I think they cut once and maybe didn't even measure in the first place.

Not only was the header insufficient, but the studs that they put beside the openings were insufficient. The type of construction in our home with the two-by-fours: you know, you're asking a lot of those kinds of framing members in your house when you have the

weight of the roof and all that kind of stuff on top of it, especially with snow like we get in Bragg Creek. Fortunately, the windows were made – we had them installed in the summer so we didn't have to contend with the weight at the time.

But, thinking ahead, we knew that – well, first of all, it didn't match the architectural drawings that the salesman had shown me. You know, I called them up right away and said: I think you might have a situation here that needs to be corrected. To the window manufacturer's credit, they made it right immediately. They apologized for the situation and told me that these installers had made a significant mistake and that they would come over and correct it. They did that. I think they came later that week and fixed the problem.

The attention often goes to the negative stories. You don't hear the stories of: I bought my brand new house, and I never had a problem with it for 20 years. That's what we expect. I think it's human nature to bring up our instances that we have difficulties with or that we might have a complaint about. We hear about these negative stories from time to time, and it's easy to get an impression that these problems are persistent elsewhere, but I don't think that's the case. As has been said previously, we have a lot of excellent builders here in Alberta, and we should be proud of that. These people make their living building our homes and providing shelter.

That kind of brings me to the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in terms of: what are our most basic requirements? This bill ensures that we are looking after the most basic of human needs. People want to feel safe in their house. They want to know that when it rains, it's not going to leak. They want to know that when it gets cold outside, the insulation is going to protect them. I think the minister has done a fantastic job in helping people have reassurance that the shelter they are counting on is going to be there when they need it.

I think it also goes to the concept of being professionally licensed. I myself as a registered nurse – we're a self-regulating profession. We hold ourselves to a certain account and standards, and there are consequences if we don't live up to our professional standards. This bill gives us not quite the same type of certainty. It's not a regulated profession per se, but it is a standard where folks will be able to say to the public whether or not they are a licensed builder. That's a very particular term that would be reserved for folks with a licence. Just to draw a parallel, a protected title for health professions is registered nurse. Only someone with a registered nurse licence can call themselves a registered nurse, and that's what's known as a protected title.

11:50

This bill doesn't contemplate quite the same thing. On the other hand, it has a parallel in terms of only a licensed builder being able to go out to the public and say: I'm a licensed builder. That gives the public certainty that when they hear those words, they know that the builder is adhering to the terms and conditions of the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017.

I think that's really important because, you know, when you're contemplating buying a new house, one of the last things you want to worry about is how much faith you have in the builder. You want to know that you've got some recourse. You want to know that that person has met the requirements of having a licence. You know, it's also nice to be able to look them up in a registry to see what their history is, how long they've been licensed, and this kind of thing. So I think that goes a long way. When you're making that big investment, you've got to meet with your lawyers, you have to meet with the real estate agent, and you have to talk to your mortgage broker. There are so many different things that people are thinking

about when they're buying their first home. Knowing whether your builder is a good one or not is an important part of that, and this helps to take some of that anxiety away. It helps people to know that they've got certainty and that their builder is good.

You know, Madam Chair, I grew up watching TV and people like Bob Vila. Does everybody remember *This Old House*? Yeah. That was a great show, that kind of spurred some other similar types of renovation shows and home building shows, people like *Holmes on Homes*' Mike Holmes. There were a couple of other ones that were on the Discovery channel. It was quite interesting, as a young person watching these videos, because the craftsmen took such great pride in the work that they did. They knew that they were building something that folks were going to rely on for quite some time and knew that their investment was predicated on the work that they did. The skill and detail that these craftspeople would adhere to was quite remarkable.

You know, I learned a lot through watching these kinds of things, how to use tools safely and appropriately. This is part of the licensing requirement for builders, too. They have to demonstrate through their actions and through the licensing procedure that they're competent in the types of things that we're going to be trusting them to do.

It also makes me think of – you know, why I support this bill is that in Canmore during the building boom, which would have occurred most recently, I suppose, in sort of the early 2000s, when after the Olympics the town of Canmore was really in the world spotlight, people were clamouring to buy land and buy condos and houses in this little mountain paradise because at the time the land prices were quite low. Investors saw this as a great opportunity to invest in a town that was growing. It's in the mountains, it's a beautiful area, so they looked at this as an investment.

But the problem, Madam Chair, is that, unfortunately, some of these contractors that were building the condos and homes – not all of them, mind you – a minority of them were kind of fly-by-night contractors. They would build things under numbered companies, build these things, make their money, and get out as fast as possible. They'd declare bankruptcy so that they'd protect themselves from any future liability, and in the housing boom . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 12. I wish to table copies of the amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As we are very shortly approaching the 12 o'clock hour, I will move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 10, 2017

Day 31

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKittrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKittrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
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Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	McKittrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
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Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
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Barnes	Malkinson
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Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
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Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
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Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 10, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. members, this morning there was a lot of attention in the media about hockey and elections. But earlier this morning the Deputy Speaker expressed on our collective behalf thoughts and prayers for those who continue to be affected by the recent flooding in Ontario and Quebec. As we know, it is at times like this when we need to reach out to our neighbours across Canada and let them know that they are not alone and that, firstly, we are all Canadians. During this difficult time, please, each of you, as you reach out, extend those best wishes from our Assembly to the people of those two provinces.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly Chief Ron Kreutzer and Mr. Brad Callihoo, the chief executive officer of the Fort McMurray 468 First Nation. You had the opportunity to meet with the chief on the Fort McMurray First Nation a couple of weeks ago, when you were on the Mace tour across the province, and I know everybody greatly appreciated that. The Fort McMurray 468 First Nation is located 45 minutes southeast of Fort McMurray, near Gregoire Lake, and it consists of approximately 700 members, predominately Woodland Cree. During the wildfire evacuations at this time last year Chief Kreutzer stayed behind to prepare to fight the fire. He and his son helped build large firebreaks all around the houses in the community and, at the risk of their own lives, fire-protected all of the properties in their nation.

Chief Kreutzer and Mr. Callihoo are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would like them to please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Edline Jacobi and Gerda Martin. Edline is the secretary for the Airdrie Wildrose Constituency Association, and she's here visiting her sister and the Legislature. Would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 56 grade 6 and grade 9 students from the Taber Christian school, the best school in Canada. I understand that they have the best corn as well. I understand that they have been able to participate in a mock Legislature as well as attend a 4-D video in the Federal building. Their teachers and parents with them today are Wendy, Joel, Philip, René, Trina, Linda, Pam, Marlene, Abe, Anna, and Jennette. They

have traveled a long way to be here, and they've enjoyed the day. I would ask that they be given the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly as they stand.

The Speaker: Welcome. It's always nice to see schools from the hinterland, the far reaches of our province. [interjections] I have experienced the same feeling. I have one school that's been able to get here. It's nice to see that.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 17 students from Viking school in the town of Viking. As always, they're very interested in the proceedings of the House, both the government and the opposition members, and, of course, the NDP members sitting on this side in the Valhalla section. I'd ask for all members of the Assembly to now join in giving them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 20 administrators working both in Edmonton and in our international offices. Now, I must say that these folks do an incredible job ensuring not only that our trade missions are successful, but these are the ones that are working to identify companies to come invest in Alberta and are setting up very powerful, quality meetings when we travel overseas with our businesses.

I'm going to ask them to rise as I say their names – I'm going to apologize in advance for botching up some of their names and beg your forgiveness, Mr. Speaker – from the Beijing office, Lily Li; from the Shanghai office, Zoe Shi; from the Hong Kong office, Peggy Mou and Karen Cheng; from the Taiwan office, Angie Tsai; from the Japan office, Kazuyo Kumamoto and Chie Shinonaga; from the Korea office, Hye-Ja Yoon; from the Mexico office, Sandra Diaz; from the U.K. office, Karen Todman; from our Singapore office, Kathy Malacaman; from the Washington office, Lolita Zaphiropoulos; from our New Delhi office, Disha Kalia; from our Guangzhou office, Katrina Chen. Of course, there's a group of staff here in Edmonton that supports all of our offices: Shannon Homeniuk, Rosie Sorensen, Jeanette Lee, Kendra Turpin, Madeleine O'Scolai, and Susan Henderson. I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome. Welcome.

Pretty good job on that translation, hon. member.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine, Mrs. Mae Bateman, from the Sundre and Rocky Mountain House area. She is one of the most beautiful souls that we have in a community that is very full of beautiful souls. She has worked in home care for a long time, taking care of many of the people that have built the communities that we enjoy today, of course, in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. She's nearing retirement now but still keeps care of one of our most prominent citizens in the community of Sundre, John Whitesell, who just celebrated his 100th birthday. I'm happy to have her as my

guest today. I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Loewen: Last night should be a wake-up call to our NDP government. The B.C. election left a minority government, with this government's cousins, the Green Party, holding the balance of power. It's no secret that the NDP and Green Party are anti-oil and antipipeline.

What is alarming is the Alberta NDP's absurd claim that the carbon tax that burdens Albertans has bought social licence for pipelines. If so, where is it? This government gloats day after day about the two pipeline approvals the carbon tax bought. How can this claim be proven or even be made with any kind of honesty when we see that the people that have opposed pipelines in the past are still opposing pipelines and are being elected into jurisdictions that we need to get our product to market?

We have a government that has many activists among them that have spent their lives opposing pipelines. They have hired and continue to hire and employ antipipeline activists, and they incredulously claim that they support pipelines. Saying a lie over and over again doesn't make it true.

Last year this NDP government helped me pass my motion to support pipelines and to counter the federal government tanker ban. Since then we have not heard . . .

The Speaker: Hon member, just be cautious of the words you're using, please.

Please continue.

Mr. Loewen: Last year this NDP government helped me pass my motion to support pipelines and to counter the federal government tanker ban. Since then we have not heard anything from this government opposing the tanker ban, nothing supporting the Northern Gateway when Trudeau cancelled the approval of it or any other meaningful support of any pipelines. All we hear is how their social licence got two pipeline approvals, which is just not true. They suggest that since Trudeau said it, then it's gospel. What would you expect Trudeau to say on the eve of his own carbon tax announcement? It's clearly a case of one lying and the other swearing to it.

This government needs a proctologist to do a cranium exam if they think that Albertans are buying that the carbon tax has bought this mythical social licence. The first step in change is admitting that you have a problem. You have an NDP problem called anti-oil activism. Once you admit it, then take the next step and get rid of your taxpayer-paid anti-oil activists, take a leadership role in supporting all pipelines, stand up against these radical activists, and finally admit that there is no such thing as social licence and that it's bought nothing but expensive light bulbs.

1:40

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Nurses Week

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to focus on something really positive for two minutes in this House today. I rise with pride to give recognition to a profession which at one time or another and often at multiple times in our lives touches us, makes

us safer, heals us when we are hurt, and points us toward a healthier future. I'm talking about nurses, Mr. Speaker, and the many roles that nurses play in our health care system. This week is Nurses Week in Alberta and in Canada, and I'd like every member of this House to think for a moment about a time in their lives when they or someone they care about was helped by a nurse.

I am incredibly proud to be a nurse. I have seen nurses cry when new life is brought into this world, and I have seen them cry when we've lost someone before their time. I have seen and been the one to hold the hand of someone as they pass from this life. Nurses wipe tears and blood, comfort and strengthen, care and advocate for every patient they serve. I have seen nurses leave their families on holidays, birthdays, work double shifts, and work on their feet for hours to care for my family and yours. And nurses are honoured to have the privilege of serving every single one of those patients.

Really, nurses are involved in almost every important moment in our lives, both tragic and happy. Nurses are there when we need them, 24 hours a day, whether in emergency rooms, where they are the first people we see, or with services like Health Link, where they are only a phone call away.

The theme for this Nurses Week is #Yes This Is Nursing, and I think the very brief description of everything nurses do that I've given above really shows what kind of impact nurses have on everyone's lives. We are fortunate to live in a country and in a province where health care is valued.

I would ask all members of this Assembly to think about the role nurses have played in their lives and, the next time they are engaged with a member of that profession, to just thank them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Election Second Anniversary

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday the world watched the two most exciting minutes in sports, the Kentucky Derby. Now, obviously, I love the horses, but I have always admired the ability of racetrack announcers to summarize an entire horse race into two minutes, and I asked myself: if a racetrack announcer took two minutes to describe the past two years of NDP government, what would that sound like?

Welcome, fans, to the Legislature Downs and the first-ever running of the NDP Derby, a claiming race for nonwinners in their first 28 outings. They're at the post, and they're off. Breaking quickly from the gate, it's Initial Optimism and Hopeful Expectation, followed closely by Honeymoon Period and Give Them a Chance. Here comes No Budget, Embarrassing Cousin, and Just Blame the Tories.

Initial Optimism and Hopeful Expectation are falling off quickly, and moving up fast is Fake Consultation, followed by Enraged Farmers and Flight of Capital. It's Just Blame the Tories, Fake Consultation, Enraged Farmers, and Flight of Capital surging to the front, with Honeymoon Period and Give Them a Chance looking tired and spent.

Speaking of spent, here comes Massive Deficit and Credit Downgrade. Down the back straight it's Massive Deficit, Credit Downgrade, Fake Consultation, Enraged Farmers, and Flight of Capital. Initial Optimism has pulled up lame, and Hopeful Expectation is nowhere to be seen.

But what's this thundering down the middle of the track? It's Carbon Tax. This must be a late entry. Carbon Tax was not in the racing program. Hot on the heels of Carbon Tax is the twin entry of Pipeline Approvals and Pipeline Construction. Pipeline Approvals is losing ground, but Pipeline Construction has been cut off by B.C. Election, boxed in on the rail by Eco Demonstrators and Endless Conditions.

Surging down the backstretch, it's Carbon Tax challenging Massive Deficit and Credit Downgrade for the lead. Fake Consultation is always there, but Just Blame the Tories is losing traction.

Rounding the final turn, it's Carbon Tax, Massive Deficit, and Credit Downgrade. There's a late charge from NDP Again along with Ballooning Debt and I'll Never Vote. Down the stretch they come. It's Carbon Tax, NDP Again, Massive Deficit, Credit Downgrade, and I'll Never Vote. Carbon Tax and Massive Deficit are neck and neck, and at the finish line it's Carbon Tax by a nose over Massive Deficit, Credit Downgrade, and I'll Never Vote NDP Again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, a new benchmark may have been set today.

Mr. Mason: It's been done, and guess who did it?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Domestic Violence Alternative Sentencing

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Social issues are one of the key challenges we face in the north, including high rates of domestic violence. Domestic violence tends to be a revolving door of arrests, charges, victims deciding not to testify, and the cycle repeats. Alberta has high overall rates, but this January my community of High Level was dismayed to learn that spousal abuse cases had skyrocketed over the previous year.

In light of this, Staff Sergeant Brad Giles of the High Level RCMP took action, implementing a two-phase alternative measures approach. High Level already has the Domestic Violence Response Unit, but there were limitations to its effectiveness. Staff Sergeant Giles expanded on this program by assigning one officer full-time to domestic violence, hiring a full-time therapist, and building relationships with multiple agencies in town, including probation, the Safe Home, North Peace Tribal Council, child and family services, and victims' services.

Phase 1 is preconviction. The offender is charged and released with the condition that they must report to the domestic violence unit within the first week. They are offered a range of voluntary, free programs that address the root causes of trauma, anger management, and addictions through individual and group therapy. Within the first few months of this program 100 new therapy files were opened in High Level, including many walk-ins who heard about the program and wanted help. There was an immediate decrease in new domestic violence cases, and over the past three months the RCMP has already seen an overall 12 per cent reduction.

Phase 2 involves program attendance as an alternative measure. The Crown and the offender agree on probation with no conviction, conditional on successful completion of the prescribed program. Even in serious cases this will have benefits. Once phase 2 is fully implemented, the RCMP is confident we will see even more reductions.

Preventative approaches that address the root causes of family violence in addition to providing supports to victims will not only contribute towards breaking the cycle but will help to reduce crime and violence overall. Thank you to the High Level RCMP and the many wonderful community agencies in my constituency who are leading the way.

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

Homelessness

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about a very important issue that I believe isn't spoken about enough, and that is homelessness. Many people think of homelessness as being an inner-city phenomenon or as a result of someone being unable to work. Many think of the homeless as being exclusively addicts.

Mr. Speaker, all of these conceptions miss the mark. Simply put, homelessness exists because there are people that do not have a home. There are many reasons someone can end up in this situation. One man I met several years ago had come to Edmonton following a job opportunity. He did not have the money for a security deposit or a hotel room. While he waited for a paycheque or two to come in, he was on the street. This man had nothing but the clothes on his back and the promise of a job. I met him at a bus stop just a few blocks from here on a very cold January night. His story is far from unique.

Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons someone becomes homeless. The breakdown of a marriage could leave you without a bed. Work could leave you with no time to search for a new apartment. A youth coming out to their parents could be thrown out.

Further, there are just as many forms that homelessness takes. From couch surfing to sleeping in your car, from building a shelter in the woods to curling up in a quiet corner somewhere, homelessness exists in every community in this province.

Everyone deserves a safe and affordable home. In the past few decades the cost of housing has grown faster than income. Alberta was one of only three provinces that did not have an affordable housing strategy. Mr. Speaker, that's changing. Alberta's government is investing \$1.2 billion in affordable housing, and following last year's consultations, Albertans are expecting the launch of a new housing strategy. This is only one of the many ways that this government is working to make life better and more affordable.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Carbon Levy

Mr. Jean: The NDP government is making Albertans foot an ever-increasing bill for the carbon tax in an attempt to buy so-called social licence. Well, this morning it's clear, more than ever, that their social licence application has been rejected. The balance of power in B.C. now rests with the Green Party, which is adamantly opposed to pipeline expansion, as, of course, is the B.C. NDP. Will the Premier face the facts and do the right thing for Albertans and scrap her carbon tax?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by congratulating Premier Christy Clark as well as John Horgan and Andrew Weaver on the campaigns that they did run in British Columbia.

We're looking forward to continuing to work with British Columbians and with their elected officials on items of mutual interest, Mr. Speaker, and of course that includes ensuring that we continue to have market access to new opportunities, including the Asia Pacific markets. I'm grateful that the federal approvals are through. We are going to continue to move forward, and we're going to cheer for Alberta, not for its failure.

Mr. Jean: Well, tidewater access is important, Mr. Speaker, but the Green Party in B.C. opposes Trans Mountain, they oppose LNG, and they oppose site C. Alberta is quickly becoming the punching bag of North America under this NDP government. We're taken for granted federally, where the Premier is willing to go with Trudeau's every beck and call and has done nothing whatsoever to build relationships with who should be our closest allies, our provincial neighbours. Will the Premier just admit that she's dropping the ball when it comes to standing up for Alberta families?

Ms Hoffman: Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to work to make sure that all Albertans have opportunities for a good, clean environment and for good, long-term, mortgage-paying jobs, and that's why the Premier is in Ontario working to make sure that she's expanding opportunities for market access to the east. That's why she's meeting with working people from across the country, including the staff that work in our hospitals, in our schools. [interjections] I hear the members opposite yelling at me that they're union thugs. They are working people of this province, and they deserve respect. Our Premier shows them that respect. The members opposite could learn something from her.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Jean: It's no secret whatsoever that this NDP government has MLAs in the ranks and on their advisory groups who don't like pipelines. In fact, they've even campaigned actively against them. Social licence is a failed experiment that's only hurting hard-working Alberta families. The Premier is busy trying to impress those in the ivory towers in foreign countries and big labour at conferences in Toronto with their carbon tax, but it's only a tax that costs Albertans when they can least afford it. Will the Premier wake up and scrap the tax?

Ms Hoffman: I am so proud to have a Premier who works every day to make life better for the people of this province, and that's exactly what she is doing at this exact moment, Mr. Speaker. We are proud that we have federal approvals to get our market access on the west coast. We are working to ensure that we are connecting with provinces across the country to make sure that we have access further going to the east. This is good news. The Premier's priorities are straight. The member opposite keeps cheering for failure. We're standing up for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to cheer for anything else but failure when you keep seeing failure from the NDP government.

Serenity's Former Guardians

Mr. Jean: The image of little Serenity laying in hospital in her final days is seared in my mind, Mr. Speaker. When I look at the facts, six children are still in the care and under the same roof as the guardians who allowed Serenity to be physically and sexually abused and malnourished. There were repeated pleas from Serenity's birth mother and her cousin to get Serenity out of that house. Those desperate pleas were ignored. Now, why on earth could we ever trust the Premier that the other six children in that house are safe today?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be speaking further to Albertans on this matter later this afternoon, but I want to remind

members that when people make statements without all the facts, inaccurate information is given to the public. I want to assure all Albertans that we have monitored and continue to monitor the situation closely, and if there was evidence of abuse of a child, we would apprehend that child immediately, as we would in any case.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, there is a muzzle on the facts, and that muzzle is this government not telling Albertans what's happened. Yesterday the Premier said that the safety of the six children in the same house under the care of the same people as Serenity when she died a brutal death is being monitored. Now, clearly, Serenity's caseworker swore an affidavit that despite significant evidence of abuse in that home, nothing has changed. Guess what? Serenity was supposedly being monitored, too, at the time of her death. The system failed her, and it sure looks like it's failing these six kids now. What kind of monitoring is in place for these children now, today, that wasn't in place . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The courts do not let government go in and apprehend children without evidence of abuse of that individual child. Courts require that there is evidence of abuse of that child, and that is the law. We have continued to monitor this situation very closely, and if there was any evidence of abuse of a child, we would apprehend that child immediately.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's this government and this minister's job to protect Alberta's children. If you won't listen to me, listen to Serenity's own mother. She lost her little girl because of an unwillingness – an unwillingness – to listen to her serious concerns, and she's sounding the alarm bells again. She says, "God only knows [what's going] on in there." Now, Serenity was raped, beaten, starved, and murdered most likely, based on the facts, under the same care as those other six children. No child should ever have to face this kind of horror and terror. This should weigh heavily on all of us. Why won't someone just do the right thing and make sure that those six children in the same house are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very difficult matter for all members of this House and, indeed, all Albertans, but I want to urge the members again to be aware of spreading inaccurate information and of the impact that this has on the lives of young Albertans. I will be sharing more information about this matter this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention

Mr. Nixon: I joined the children in care panel in good faith with the hope of stopping what happened to Serenity from ever happening again. Instead, the past few months have been spent studying topics that, presenters point out, have already been researched to death. There is a refusal by this minister to share the details of Serenity's case with the panel or to even let them talk about case-level data. This secrecy indicates that this government and this minister are not serious about preventing more children from falling through the cracks. How can this minister stand here

and promise Albertans that what happened to Serenity won't happen again when she knows she has done nothing to change it and her panel is doing nothing to change it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, as legislators, as parents, and as Albertans we have to do everything we can to improve the lives of children at risk and to stop preventable deaths from happening. That is why we have a Minister of Children's Services, that is why we have the panel, and that is why we continue to prioritize the safety and well-being of Alberta's children. As an RN that was my priority for many years, it will continue to be, and I will ensure that we take action to change the system, that has gone unchanged for far too long.

Mr. Nixon: Inaction resulted in Serenity's death. A private guardianship went forward despite reports that Serenity was malnourished and had unexplained marks and bruises. Now the minister tries to appease us by saying that there are regular checks on the six children in care of the same guardians who watched Serenity starve to death. Warnings continue to be expressed about the children in that home. The minister says that they are closely monitoring the situation. Given this government's abysmal track record on this issue and their blatant dodging of questions by the opposition, why would Albertans believe this government is protecting these kids?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I have to say that the situation has been monitored. Without doubt, we very much prioritize the safety and well-being of all Alberta's children. Again I want to remind the members opposite that making statements with inaccurate information to the public is a challenge when you don't have all the facts. I do want to continue to assure Albertans and all members of this House that if there was evidence of abuse of a child, that child would be apprehended immediately.

2:00

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, making sure that my three children are safe and protected is my number one job. Common sense dictates that no children – period – should be cared for by people who allowed a child to be beaten, starved, and sexually assaulted to the point of death under their watch. The minister may have justified in her own mind that these children are safe, but apparently the younger children have not been seen at school since October. Six months. Clearly, something is not right. Minister, would you let your own children be cared for by these adults? Yes or no? And if not, why are you treating these kids differently than yours or mine?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say once again that the courts, the law we are all bound by as Albertans, does not let government go in and apprehend children without evidence of abuse to that individual child. Again, I want to say that when people make statements without all the facts . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members, I cannot hear the response.

Ten more seconds and then finish, hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we will continue to monitor this situation very closely as we have until now, and if

there is any evidence of abuse, we will apprehend the children. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House, I asked you to keep your voice down. Even after I said so, you continued to speak. Please don't do that in the future.

The leader of the third party.

Out-of-country Health Care Funding

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, last week I rose in this House on behalf of little Greta Marofke and her courageous fight against a rare liver cancer. I asked the Minister of Health to use her discretion to cover the cost to allow Greta to have a life-saving transplant in Cincinnati as the option was not available in Alberta. Greta has now had that surgery in the last few days. Minister, I want to publicly thank you for meeting with the family as you promised you would. Can you share with the House whether you were able to offer any hope of financial support to the family?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, we make sure that the decisions around medical best practices are derived by medical experts. One of the things that I did commit to was to ensure that the contact information for the physician that they're working with in the United States was accessible to the committee that does make these decisions. But, again, it's committees of physicians that make decisions on medical best practices, not elected officials, and that's the way it should be.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the \$1 million U.S. price tag could bankrupt three families, and while we can all agree that no price can be placed on this precious little life, it's unacceptable that the onerous burden of that, without provincial coverage, is put upon Greta's family. To the Minister of Health: have you received a request for funding as of yet, and if not, will you have someone follow up, please, with Greta's doctor?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I did meet with the family, I confirmed that their physician did submit the application to the Out-of-country Health Services Committee, and that's exactly the process that needs to take place. These applications are not directed to the minister; they're directed to the commission, the agency that oversees this work. We trust that they will do so to the benefit of all to make sure that there is a decision that supports everyone.

I have to say that Greta's family is incredibly strong, and if she's half as strong as her family, including that warrior mom of hers, she has a very strong spirit, and I look forward to seeing her when she returns.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, and I thank the minister for the direct answer. Mr. Speaker, the family is trying to work with AHS bureaucracy and with the minister. One AHS official has insisted that a letter from the Cincinnati doctor explaining the procedure and providing justification for the urgency not be sent to the minister but through his hands. To the minister. You've demonstrated compassion by meeting with the family, and I thank you for that. They understand from that meeting that you will accept

communication from them. Can they send the letter to you, or must it go through the other person's hands first?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Again, my contact information and phone numbers of two staff who are in regular contact with individuals who would like some support have been given to the family. They are certainly welcome to contact us and ask for additional support in helping them to facilitate the process. But the application doesn't go to AHS; it doesn't go to me; it goes to the Out-of-country Health Services Committee. That's where the application certainly should be directed, but if they're having a challenge getting the letter to that individual, I'd be happy to help them do so, Mr. Speaker.

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

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. However, I believe it's the Member for Calgary-Mountain View first.

The Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. This is the second day in a row that I've done that. There must be other things that are distracting me.

Dr. Swann: I forgive you. I forgive you, Mr. Speaker.

Child Protective Services on First Nations

Dr. Swann: Yesterday the wounds from Serenity's tragic death were reopened as we learned that six more children remain in the same home where her life was cut short. Our first reaction is to assume that the other children in the home might be in danger as well; however, the government says that there's no evidence of abuse or neglect that would cause them to intervene, and clearly there are difficult jurisdictional issues here involving a federal on-reserve family. That is good to hear, that reassurance from the minister, but Albertans cannot understand why we wouldn't err on the side of caution. To the minister: as a provincial authority what evidence do you base your decision on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Absolutely, the safety of Alberta's children is the key priority of Children's Services, so when there is any evidence or complaint or indication of concern, that is followed up with a thorough assessment as to the safety and well-being of Alberta's children. I will continue to state very clearly that when there is specific evidence of abuse of a child, that child is apprehended and then is supported by the courts. We continue to monitor the situation to ensure the safety and well-being . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Well, let me put it very succinctly, Mr. Speaker. First Nations children on reserve land are under the authority of the delegated First Nations authorities. Who is ultimately responsible for the safety of reserve children, the DFNA's or you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work very closely with the delegated First Nations authorities to ensure the safety and well-being of children on Alberta's First Nations. It's no secret that conditions for children on First Nations in this province are far below what they are for children who live off-reserve. That's very

unacceptable, and there are many issues that need to be resolved, that have been complicated and have existed for a very long time. We're very committed to working with our First Nations to make sure that First Nations children have access to the kind of care and support that all children deserve, but their safety . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the Premier rightly identified Serenity's death as a reason to establish the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention to fix what the Premier called systemic problems. The system supposed to be watching out for Serenity clearly failed; however, we must not allow the jurisdictional issues to fail these children again. Finally, to the minister: if you come to believe that these six children are not safe but are outside your jurisdiction, what is your role to ensure their safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to reassure the member that the safety of those children absolutely is my responsibility through Children's Services. Absolutely, if there is evidence that those children are not safe, that those children are being abused, then we'll utilize the power that the law has granted to us to apprehend those children.

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

School Fees and Education Funding

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from many teachers in my riding concerned that they won't be able to provide an adequate amount of school supplies as a result of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. They're concerned that their ability to provide quality education will be compromised as a result of this bill. I have even heard that school administrators are telling teachers to hoard pencils in preparation for the upcoming school year. To the Minister of Education: should teachers be worried about this?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for this question. Mr. Speaker, it gives us a good chance to provide some clarity. We have just passed, with unanimous support from both sides of the House, An Act to Reduce School Fees, so if any place, in any jurisdiction they're suggesting that they will raise school fees as a result of An Act to Reduce School Fees, this is incorrect. We must make sure that teachers and parents and students know that, in fact, in September we're putting money back into the pockets of those families and we are not raising school fees in An Act to Reduce School Fees.

2:10

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.
First supplemental.

Connolly: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister. To the same minister: if teachers have nothing to worry about but this confusion is out there, can you please clarify where the resources will be coming from to ensure that we can reduce school fees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are looking specifically at instructional supplies and materials to reduce those school fees for all students, for more than 660,000 students. As well, we have a reduction in busing transportation fees for some

categories of busing. Again, this is An Act to Reduce School Fees; it's not an act to eliminate school fees, nor is it in any shape or form to be construed as a way by which they can raise school fees as a result of this.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I see so many families in my constituency struggling due to the tough economic times that our province is facing, to the same minister: how many families will benefit as a result of this reduction in school fees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We expect that almost 600,000 Alberta families will see reductions in their school fees as a result of Bill 1. We are working not just to reduce fees but to equalize the landscape around school fees so that we can make further reductions and make sure that we're making life better for Alberta students, families, and teachers by starting this process.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health Facility Quality Assurance

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague identified serious concerns in the Lacombe health facility. These issues include things like not following dietary, infection control, patient handling, and SHARPS safety guidelines; no continuity in dementia training, fall management, and medical chart documentation; not implementing protocols on safe bath temperatures, nutrition and hydration needs, patient hygiene, and medication management. Infractions were found in almost every area inspected. To the Minister of Health: how often are audits performed in our health facilities, and who is accountable for this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are regular reviews that happen, I believe, semiannually. If that's incorrect, I'll correct the record.

I also want to assure everyone that if they do have any questions about the safety of anyone who is living in a care facility, please contact protection for persons in care or raise the concern with the local site manager if they'd like to do so. Certainly, protection for persons in care is there to do these very types of things, to ensure that there are safety audits done if there are any specific concerns, and that's exactly what happened in this case.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, concerns have been raised at this facility for many years based on countless verbal accounts. Who deals with these complaints, and which department is accountable for the corrective actions? Is it the department of process improvement or infection prevention and control? Maybe it's internal audit and risk management or the department of culture, transformation, and innovation. What about integrated quality management or safe, healthy environments? What about the department of quality and health care improvement? Can the Health minister identify which departments within AHS manage these issues, and will you hold them accountable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The specific oversight for long-term facilities, including those within AHS, of course, rests with the assisted living branch within the government of Alberta as well as within Alberta Health Services, but there are many specific components within. That's one of the reasons why immediate steps were taken to investigate the concerns when they were raised. There was, in turn, an audit to ensure that that quality of care is provided to all residents, including the 75 who are there currently. I'm glad to report that a number of initiatives were taken to make sure that changes were made immediately, including the three staff who've been put on immediate leave.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, we all want to see an improvement in our health care system, and within AHS there are so many departments specifically tasked with patient safety, quality, and process improvement, to name a few, that are focused on ensuring operational integrity. Given that oversight and accountability for infection prevention and control are outstanding items from the 2013 AG's report, if we do not learn from this, we are doomed. Will this government provide a report on the issues pertaining to this facility, and when can you provide that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report today in this House that a thorough cleaning of the site was provided, that there is support and guidance from infection prevention and control professionals that are on-site to ensure that that happens and that there are improved communications between caregivers, residents, and families. There is also work with stakeholders to introduce a resident and family council. As somebody who attended those meetings when my grandmother was in a care facility, I can say that there are very productive ways to resolve issues at immediate sites as quickly as possible. I'd encourage people who have somebody in a facility and who would like to be involved to reach out to the site manager and say that they would like to be a part of the resident care family . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Pipelines to the West Coast

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that members on the government side are happy that their comrades across the Rockies increased their seat count, but I know that most Albertans are uneasy about what this means for our province. If the results stand, the majority of seats in the B.C. Legislature will be controlled by parties opposed to the Trans Mountain pipeline. To the Minister of Energy: how do you intend to stop your political siblings from sabotaging Alberta's interests and our future?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, B.C. voters have made their choices, and we're going to work with the government they have elected. We worked very hard to get two permissions, the Trans Mountain plus the other pipeline, and we're confident those projects will go through. It doesn't mean we stop just because we got permissions. We're going to keep fighting. We've applied for intervenor status, and we're going to keep fighting for Albertans because this is a good project not just for Alberta but for Canada.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the Green Party currently holds the balance of power in B.C. and given that after Trans Mountain approval Dr. Andrew Weaver stated that “heavy oil tankers have no place on our coast” and given that he has stated that investment in any fossil fuel infrastructure is incompatible with meeting the targets set out in the Paris accord, again to the minister: will the B.C. election results delay the construction of the Trans Mountain or either of the two pipelines approved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we’re going to continue to do the work. Our office was in contact this morning with Trans Mountain, who plan to do what they’ve been doing. They’re in B.C. talking to people as we speak. We will do the same. We’re going to keep working very hard to not just get a yes to the pipeline but to see those shovels in the ground.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, given that Tzeporah Berman has repeatedly insulted both Dr. Weaver and Premier Clark and given that the Premier continues to defend Berman’s place on the oil sands advisory group, claiming she brings an environmentalist world view, and given that there are numerous qualified individuals who could better represent this view without insulting multiple party leaders in other provinces, again to the minister: if so many people agree with Ms Berman’s perspective, why can’t you find someone who has the social licence to fulfill this role without insulting Albertans and our hopeful allies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the oil sands advisory group is made up of a number of companies and First Nations communities and environmental groups, and their first order of business was to provide government advice on the implementation of the 100-megatonne limit in the oil sands. That work has now been completed, and I fully anticipate that there will be a change in the membership as a result of that, which is what we have signalled from the very beginning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Electricity Power Purchase Arrangements

Mr. MacIntyre: Another day, another chapter in the PPA saga. The Market Surveillance Administrator will be investigating the Balancing Pool over allegations that the coal-fired assets returned to the government last winter are operating at a loss. Once again the NDP’s only plan is to leave the taxpayer on the hook for billions. To the Energy minister: did you task the same staff with understanding the Electric Utilities Act as you tasked with understanding PPA clause 4.3(j)?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we took action to protect Alberta consumers against backroom deals that were done many years ago, and we continue to do so. We did this by extending a loan to the Balancing Pool to reduce monthly charges to consumers because that’s what we’re doing. But let me be clear. This loan has nothing to do with the Balancing Pool’s mandate to manage those PPAs. It’s up to the management, and it’s up to the board.

Mr. MacIntyre: Well, this government’s interference with operations at the Balancing Pool is already under investigation due to a Wildrose FOIP. Given that this FOIP demonstrated a systemic

cover-up by the department and given that the Balancing Pool’s \$4 billion in losses will be shifted to a hidden tax bill instead of a politically dangerous monthly electricity bill, is the Department of Energy responsible for orchestrating Balancing Pool losses as a means of hiding the rapid cost increases stemming from your electricity overhaul?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, let me be clear. The decisions about the PPAs are the work of the Balancing Pool, the management and their board. The MSA’s job is to investigate any complaints, which is what they’re doing. Both of them are arm’s length from our department.

Mr. MacIntyre: My goodness. Albertans are tired of the gross incompetence the NDP have shown. Given that Balancing Pool losses are now projected to exceed the entire first year of revenue from the carbon tax and given that we haven’t seen the full cost of the PPA debacle, with the NDP still battling Calgarian-owned Enmax, to the Energy minister. Your government’s policies have done nothing but make electricity more expensive. Is this what ministers mean when they claim they’re making life better for Albertans?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: You know, Mr. Speaker, again I will reiterate that the Balancing Pool is the one to manage the PPAs. It’s the MSA’s job to manage complaints, which they are doing. What we’re doing on this side of the House: I’m not going to apologize for standing up for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: We are doing that, Mr. Speaker. The opposition continues to want to support backroom deals that were made many years ago. We’re not going to do that. We’re standing up for Albertans.

Services for Students with Special Needs

Mr. Nixon: School staff and parents are very concerned. They were informed last month that funding is being cut by approximately \$1 million for central Alberta regional collaborative service delivery. For the Wild Rose school division, in my riding, this means losing the support of a social worker, invaluable student access to occupational therapists and to speech and language pathologists. The ability to diagnose disabilities like vision or hearing impairment and to intervene at an early stage of life is very important for long-term student success. Minister, will you please explain your reason for cutting this funding for central Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly thank you for the question. It’s very important that we do provide special-needs funding and services in all parts of the province. The regional service delivery method – the funding for certain boards was transitional funding over three years. Now we’ve moved to a regional model, and I can say that we have actually increased the funding this year by more than \$8 million on the regional model, and we have funding otherwise of \$451 million for inclusive education.

Mr. Nixon: Given that every year the Wild Rose school division subsidizes the inclusive education grant money it receives from the

government and given that despite these dollars they are still having to cut inclusive education staff and support due to inflation and rising costs and given that the number one challenge facing the Wild Rose school division and others is the significant mental health issues faced by students and their families, Minister, why is this government making it so hard for schools to meet the needs of their most vulnerable students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, we want to make sure that we are providing special education needs for all students. In general the regional service delivery method is a good way to pool resources so that you are getting the best possible people to help to intervene when students need it the most. I have individual school boards that do have problems as a result of the end of transitional funding, and I am in discussions with them, the Wild Rose school division amongst them.

Mr. Nixon: Given that schools say that they do not have the tools they need to support students with mental health needs or with other disabilities and given that partners in the central Alberta RCSD are getting together to advocate for restored funding because clearly this government has not yet communicated an adequate alternative arrangement and given that school jurisdictions are publicly calling for meetings with the government to discuss the negative consequences of this government's decision to cut, to the minister: what have you been doing to engage with the schools and the families in central Alberta about a strategy to address their valid concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we are, as I said before, in discussions with school boards to look for ways by which we can provide that care for students who need it at the time that they need it. The best way to do that globally is to make sure you fund for education and you fund for enrollment. We have done so as a government for schools. We're building schools all across the province. You can't do that and have billions of dollars in cuts at the same time.

PDD Needs Assessments and Service Delivery

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, it's been said that the measure of a compassionate society lies in how it supports those that are most vulnerable. Albertans with developmental disabilities face challenges every day, better addressed through a myriad of supports provided by government, support agencies, service organizations, and families. It is a complex network where, unfortunately, both duplication and gaps can and do occur. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: is your department following an overarching, co-ordinated strategy for the delivery of services to Albertans with developmental disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Over the period of the last two years I've worked with persons with developmental disabilities, their advocate, their representative organizations, and service providers. Evidence of that is that we work with them on safety standards, we work with them on the supports intensity scale, and we work with them on

contracting going forward. We will continue to collaborate with them on all issues that matter to them.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that there was only a fleeting mention of persons with developmental disabilities in the government's recent Speech from the Throne and there was no mention in the budget speech and given that this has led to concerns from stakeholder groups that the ongoing need for co-ordinated government support has disappeared from the government's radar screen and given that these stakeholders need assurance that this, in fact, is not the case, to the minister. Your government's silence is causing significant concern. What assurances can you provide to persons with developmental disabilities that they are still a priority for your government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I think what I have heard loud and clear from that community is: nothing about us without us. The past two years demonstrates that whatever steps we took, we took in close consultation and collaboration with the community. We will continue to work with them on all issues that matter to them.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that stakeholders within the PDD community were very pleased when this minister announced the end of the demeaning and degrading supports intensity scale, or SIS, test and given that this minister has indicated that his department would develop a more comprehensive and holistic approach to assessing the needs of those requiring supports and given that there's no indication of what assessment methodologies are being developed nor has there been any consultation with PDD stakeholders regarding alternatives to SIS, to the minister: we applaud your commitment to end SIS, but what are you replacing it with, and when will you be informing Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. As I said earlier, on all issues that matter to them we have worked with them. In the absence of that supports intensity scale there is still a process in place, which is more one-on-one contact with the families to assess their needs on a case-by-case basis to make sure that individuals get the supports they need based on their individual circumstances. We will continue to work with individuals and our community partners to make sure that persons with developmental . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Investment in Alberta

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A strong and sustainable economy is dependent on strategic long-term investment. Given that this investment requires a climate that provides opportunity and a competitive advantage over other jurisdictions, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what strategies has this government developed to remove the barriers that have traditionally impacted this province's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. There are a number of initiatives that our government has undertaken, including two tax credits which are going to provide Albertans an opportunity to invest in companies in their own backyard, something other jurisdictions have enjoyed for decades. We are also actively working to diversify our economy through initiatives in agriculture and forestry, through diversifying our energy sector, investing in partial upgrading but also the petrochemical diversification program. As well, market access is absolutely critical, and that's why we've rolled out programs to help our companies diversify their markets.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has made it clear that a strong economy and clean environment go hand in hand, to the same minister: how is this government supporting our businesses and helping to ensure that Alberta will continue to be the economic and environmental leader Canada needs for the 21st century?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm very proud of a number of things, including the fact that we are showing that the environment and the economy go hand in hand. You don't have to choose one over the other. The number of investments that will be coming into the province, including our own companies in renewables, wanting to get into the renewable space, is going to create thousands of jobs.

2:30

As well, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of announcing a \$10 million investment in Alberta's carbon conversion technology centre, which is very exciting because this is providing support for companies to take carbon and add value or turn it into useful products. I'm quite proud of the work that is going on in Calgary.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how is this government collaborating with private investors to ensure Alberta's economy diversifies and thrives and makes life healthier for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what? This morning I was very excited to stand with Janssen, which is the Canadian company of Johnson & Johnson, when they announced a J Labs pod, which is the first of its kind in the world. It is here in Edmonton. We are working collaboratively with the city of Edmonton. What this is doing is providing supports for our researchers and entrepreneurs so that they can commercialize their technologies, which we know the world needs, and it will also help us drive down our health care costs.

Renewable Energy Land Leases

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, several advisory groups have been cautioning landowners of late on the possible perils and pitfalls of renewable energy agreements. This government has said over and over that these agreements are strictly voluntary. Well, kind of. With the lofty goal of 30 per cent renewables by 2030, Minister, will the Surface Rights Board force right of access in order to tie in above- or underground cabling between tower structures and substations

regardless of whether neighbouring landowners want any part of renewables on their property? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as the hon. member knows, there are a number of existing wind facilities in his own riding. For example, the Blackspring Ridge wind project is the largest in Canada and created a number of jobs, 350 construction jobs and a number of permanent positions. It returns a large amount of revenue to towns and counties in his own riding.

To his question, Mr. Speaker, those are matters that are being dealt with through the permitting process.

Thank you.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, given that my questions are based around landowner rights, I will continue. Given that under Bill 27 these renewable projects are considered activities and given that that side voted down our renewables equivalent to the orphaned well fund and given that there have been no legislative protections written for landowners, will the minister issue a ministerial order that demands that some form of remediation and reclamation bond be put on all renewable projects? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, many of these questions are taken up in the approvals process. Certainly, from Environment and Parks' perspective, obviously the siting and wildlife directives are also important parts of the permitting process. As we phase in more renewable power, we will ensure that our regulatory framework keeps pace. You know, places like the village of Carmangay, for example: I've got a quote here from the mayor, who indicates that there are huge opportunities for that particular village as a result.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, given that I know where all of the renewable projects are in my riding, I will ask a question. Given that these renewables projects will be assessed at a rapidly declining linear tax rate and given that it isn't uncommon for energy project companies of all types to fail and become insolvent and given that this government is providing little protection to landowners beyond buyer beware – Minister, agriculture is the number 2 business in this province – why does this government continue to treat this industry with little respect, certainly with regard to landowners' rights?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I would suggest is that it is not helpful to affix the tinfoil hat a little too tightly with respect to what the Wildrose spreads for misinformation about renewables. [interjections] It is shocking the sorts of things that have come up in this Chamber with respect to what renewables are and what they can deliver to rural landowners.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted. [interjections] Order, please.

Ms Phillips: I'll read from Gary Sproule, who is from Wheatland county.

It's sure nice to have an idea of a pretty good chunk of income that you are going to have available in the next 20 . . . years. You

can make some plans and have a little money [on the side].
You're not always sure of a lot of other things when you farm . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Calgary-West.

Child Safety Reporting and Investigations

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said, "Our hearts also go out . . . to all Albertans who are concerned for vulnerable children across this province." Premier, Albertans' hearts are broken. Their faith in your government is shattered. We cannot comprehend the excuses this government offered for leaving children in a home where a little girl was beaten, starved, and sexually assaulted and from which her siblings were rescued. Premier, will you commit today to calling a public inquiry so Albertans can have answers and Serenity can have justice?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, hon. members.

Ms Larivee: Mr. Speaker, again I will say that I am sharing more information for Albertans later this afternoon. I do want to continue to caution the members of this House about making statements without the facts . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Larivee: . . . which, in fact, leads to inaccurate information being given to the public. I want to continue to assure all Albertans that we monitor the situation, and if there was evidence of abuse of a child, that child would be apprehended immediately because we take the safety of every Alberta child very seriously. [interjections]

The Speaker: You continue to yell at a level where I am unable to hear the minister. Please contain that volume. There are several of you. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, I'm speaking to you as well as to the other members, to all of you. Please keep your volume down here. Please. Thank you.

The hon. member. It's the first supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Minister, we'll just do it in two years' time, then.

Given that the minister said yesterday, "I would urge all Albertans that if they have concerns about the safety of a child, please let Children's Services know" and given that it is good to hear the minister address the public in this way, because according to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act all adults have a legal obligation to report the matter to a director, Minister, can you specifically tell Albertans today who a director is and how you would contact them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly say that if any Albertan has concern about the safety of a child, they can contact any Children's Services office or call the child abuse hotline. You know, once again I want to say that, absolutely, Children's Services and this government take the safety of Alberta's children very seriously. We're thankful for the co-operation of Albertans to assist us with that in reporting all concerns about abuse. We will follow up, we will assess, and we will ensure . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, let me run through this very convoluted process for you, Minister. Given that to seek intervention for a child, Albertans have to go to the Children's Services website and then they need to know to look under Abuse and Intervention, click on Child Intervention, and then scroll down to How to Get Help, eventually finding a phone number to call, and given that my proposal for Serenity's law makes it very simple – adults must call the police if they know a child is in need of intervention, but the government claimed last fall that it ran out of time to make this change – Minister, will you make it very simple and change the legislation now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I would encourage all Albertans, if they are concerned about the safety of a child, to call the child abuse hotline or to contact their local Children's Services. But I have to say that this government has a very strong record of being very concerned about the safety and well-being of Alberta's children. That has not changed. We will take action to ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of Alberta's children, and you have our commitment on that.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Whitemud.

2:40

Electronic Cigarettes

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Control of inhalation of cigarette smoke is a very important preventive health measure. There has been a steady increase in usage of e-cigarettes in Alberta in recent years. Given that Health Canada is currently looking at how best to address and regulate this industry, to the Minister of Health: what plans does this government have to address concerns my constituents and I have regarding vaping?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his important question as well as the expertise that he brings forward as an oncologist and as somebody who's been a cancer prevention advocate for decades. We're very grateful for that. I am proud that our government has a strong working relationship with the federal government. We are working to make sure that provincial regulations would of course flow from the federal legislation and working in partnership with other jurisdictions across Canada. I am working with the ministry to bring forward options that ensure safety and best regulatory approaches as we move forward.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that in recent years municipalities across Alberta, including Red Deer, Cold Lake, and Bonnyville, have introduced bylaws restricting the use of e-cigarettes in public spaces and given that vaping may occur near children, to the Minister of Health: is this government considering similar regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member again for his question. The municipalities that have been named certainly have done important work in this regard. As well, I know a number of school jurisdictions have made efforts as well,

and we want to commend them for their work in that area. We'll continue to review all of the moving pieces. Within Alberta obviously the regulations or guidelines would flow from federal decisions as well, so we want to ensure that we have safety but respect and want to commend local municipalities for making efforts that they think will provide best safety for their communities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that families in my constituency are very concerned about the accessibility of e-cigarettes to children, to the same minister: will this government ensure its policies protect the health of children and youth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to highlight one that I think has very quickly addressed that in the past in a related manner, and that is of course ensuring that we banned flavoured tobacco products, including menthol, which the previous government failed to do. The research was clear. Flavoured products are an attraction to youth. We moved on that. We'll continue to monitor the research in this regard and work with cancer prevention organizations, with the federal government, and with the families that continue to be involved as well as with retailers. We're happy to continue to work in partnership with those parties as we make best decisions moving forward.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we'll recommence.

Members' Statements (continued)

Airdrie Food Bank

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about one of the most recognized not-for-profits that exist in many of our communities across Alberta, Canada, and the world. In particular, I would like to talk about the important work being done in my community at the local Airdrie Food Bank. The Airdrie Food Bank is responsible for providing assistance to their clients within Airdrie, Crossfield, Balzac, Beiseker, Madden, and the surrounding area of Rocky View county. They provide many invaluable services to the community such as the community kitchen, a program designed to help people gain basic cooking skills and the ability to create well-rounded meals with food that's available.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that in my community the Airdrie Food Bank has been nominated for a national award titled Excellence in Food Banking. I know that the executive director, Lori McRitchie, and all of her staff and the volunteers will be successful given that they provide exceptional services with hamper programs, partnerships with schools, and other community-based nutrition.

No child, mother, or family should go without food, not in Airdrie, not in Alberta, not in Canada. It's a sad reality, but more and more Albertans are turning to these resources because of the economy, job losses, and rising costs. Wildrose has rallied hard to have exemptions brought forward for the carbon tax to ensure these amazing not-for-profits are not harmed by this government's risky, ideological carbon tax on absolutely everything. These pressures and other poor NDP policies have forced food banks across our province to do more with less.

I would encourage all NDP members to reach out to their local food banks and hear their stories first-hand. To the Airdrie Food Bank and all of the food banks: thanks for everything you do and

for being leaders in creating healthy, strong communities and families.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table five copies of an article from the CBC news website entitled Calgary Girl with Rare Cancer Gets Liver Transplant in U.S.

The Speaker: Any others, hon. members? Strathmore-Brooks? No.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm all out.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the preamble included in the March 2016 Canadian Real Estate Association's code of ethics, which I quoted during the recent Bill 204 debate. As noted in the preamble, realtors are dedicated and committed to the protection of property rights in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any others, hon. members? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to table the requisite number of copies of an article talking about the order for the Trans Mountain pipeline using recycled Canadian steel from a unionized shop in Regina, and some of the metal is from Alberta.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Acting Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms McLean, Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women, response to a question raised by Mr. Cyr, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, on April 12, 2017, Ministry of Service Alberta 2017-18 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we are at points of order. If I recall, it's the Opposition House Leader with respect to point of order 1.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to withdraw point of order 1.

The Speaker: It's headed in the right direction.

Mr. Cooper: I can speak to point of order 2 if you like.

The Speaker: Point of order 2 would be nice.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of a Member

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today during question period, in response to a question from the opposition, the Deputy Premier referred to the Premier being in Toronto at this moment. We all know that referring to the absence or the presence of a member inside the Chamber is wildly inappropriate, and while she may have been pleased to talk about that, it still would be inappropriate to do so.

The Speaker: I just want to make sure. Can you just tell me that again? I don't know that I have the Blues. Hon. member, the statement that was made, if you might say it again.

Mr. Cooper: The Deputy Premier made reference to the Premier being in Toronto presently, today, at this moment. I also don't have the benefit of the Blues.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Opposition House Leader is correct that it is inappropriate and has been ruled out of order to refer to the absence of a member. I believe in this case it was inadvertent on the part of the Deputy Premier to imply in some way the absence of a member. I do appreciate the Official Opposition House Leader's interest in standing up and protecting the interests of our Premier. I've seen many things over the years, but this is probably the first time I've seen that. So as it was very likely inadvertent, but it did actually happen, you know, I'm sure that the Deputy Premier is very remorseful, and on her behalf I will offer this as an apology.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, it may well have been inadvertent. However, I believe there was an end result which was a point of order, so I'm sure it won't happen again.

The third point of order.

Point of Order Items Previously Decided

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you. I rise to speak to a point of order. During the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood's question – and my point of reference for folks today and for those of you following along at home is 23(f). Mr. Speaker, you, sir, had the opportunity just yesterday to speak to Standing Order 23(f). For those who may not be familiar, 23(f) is: “debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that Member's intention to move that it be rescinded.”

Now, yesterday in this very Chamber my colleague from the third party rose and asked a question about a vote that had happened or, in this case, as you ruled, a matter that had already been determined by the Assembly, and you ruled that it was out of order. Your ruling can be found on page 924 of Alberta *Hansard* from May 9, 2017, when you said these words.

And I in fact ought to have maybe jumped in sooner myself. Nonetheless, the subject matter in the first quotation was offside as it pertained to a decision of the House, and I cite Standing Order 23(f) and page 617, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*: “Members may not speak against or reflect upon any decision of the House.” In other words, an allegation or question concerning how a member has voted is offside.

The House has made a decision on the matter. I believe there was a point of order in this situation, and I would caution again all members to – it may be good politics at times to do that, but respect and honour in this House is [to be] determined by each of us.

Now, it may in fact have been good politics for the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood to speak to Bill 1, but unfortunately you had made a ruling yesterday that spoke specifically to decisions that have been made by the House. While I may not have entirely agreed with the decision yesterday, the challenge is that when we have ruled, then we create a precedent. In this case the member clearly asked a question about Bill 1 from this session, that has been ruled

on in this Chamber. As such, this particular question should today, in fact, be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: The House leader for the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, hon. Speaker. Yesterday the Government House Leader raised a point of order, 23(j), against the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway, as a matter of fact. Mr. Speaker, you did not rule on that but, instead, scolded him on something completely different, that was a reference to a decision of this House, 23(f). Now, as you recall, I asked for clarification, and I got a bit of a lecture, that many found disrespectful.

Today the NDP member referenced a vote in this Chamber, again 23(f). Based on the fact that yesterday our caucus was ruled out of order for exactly that, Mr. Speaker, I guess it comes down to a very simple question. Does the rule apply to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood and other members of the NDP as well or only to this side of the House?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first want to address the points made by the House leader for the third party. It continues to amaze me how little this House leader knows about the rules of the Assembly despite being the person who is the second longest serving member of this Assembly. When you ruled yesterday, the member attempted to argue with you and, moreover, made a very erroneous argument, which he repeated again just now, that the Speaker may only rule on points that are brought up before him. That is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, if we can get to the point of order that was made by the Official Opposition House Leader, I think that he's made a very cogent case. It's clear that the standing order says that you may not debate any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is the member's intention to move that we rescind it. He's quite correct in that, and had the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood done that, he would have had a valid point of order. But I have the questions of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, and it's very clear from that that he does not do anything like what has been suggested by the Official Opposition House Leader.

Here's the first question, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard from many teachers in my [constituency] concerned that they won't be able to provide an adequate amount of school supplies as a result of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees. They're concerned that their ability to provide quality education will be compromised as a result of this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. member, can you get to the substance? I have the copy.

Mr. Mason: You have it? Well, I hope that you will put that also on the record, Mr. Speaker.

It's very clear that he's asking about concerns of constituents about the impact of this bill, and that is . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. [interjection] Hon. member. Who is talking?

Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That does not constitute reflecting on the decision of the House. It simply asks about concerns of his constituents about the impact of a decision that has been made. There is a very, very big difference between the two things, and it is absolutely in order for a member to ask on behalf of his constituents about concerns that are raised by any matter that

may have been passed by the House or actions that are taken by the government.

Should you choose to rule in favour of this, Mr. Speaker, we might also say that the opposition is not entitled to ask questions about the carbon levy because that is a decision of the House and so on and so on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: To the leader of the third party: I would point out that in your comments – and it applies to all. How many times have I said it? Each situation ought to be considered in context. I believe that the situations today, last week, tomorrow each will be different.

In this particular situation there was no point of order because there was no reflection upon the decision. There was no reflection. As the Government House Leader said, it was simply responding to the fact. I think he makes a good case in terms of the fact that you may well limit debate on other questions if you were to raise that point. So in this situation there is no point of order.

The next point of order. I believe there's one more left. Is that correct? Who was that from? Go ahead, hon. member.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Rodney: Actually, it's on behalf of our hon. caucus leader of the PC opposition. Standing order 23(j) reads: "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Now, on this particular occasion, Mr. Speaker, in answer to a question, the minister of environment referred to the opposition as spreading misinformation, and it went on over and over. It's been used many times. I dare say that if any member on this side suggested that the government was spreading misinformation . . .

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. Hon. member, you continue to imply, whether it's intentional or not, to this House that decisions by the chair are somehow being applied because of which side of the House they're sitting on. I would respectfully ask with respect to the process that if you haven't, avoid those kinds of suggestions. I think the record will stand in terms of its fairness of application in this House.

Please proceed. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: I concluded my comments, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: So what is your point of order, then?

3:00

Mr. Rodney: On behalf of the hon. PC caucus leader of the opposition 23(j), which reads, "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," to reference the fact that the minister of environment, during one of her answers, referred to the opposition spreading misinformation. There are many words that have been disallowed in this House that have a denotation or connotation along these lines. I would hope, Mr. Speaker – you can apply this any way you want – that the rules would be the same for everyone in this House, and that indeed should be a violation point of order under 23(j), that language.

Please and thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, clearly, as you've already indicated today, context means everything. It's for you to decide whether this particular use crosses a line or not. The only point that I would make is that we have seen repeatedly from the opposition use of that language and stronger language. Even

today the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky in his member's statement used the term "lie" at least twice, and taking cover under the rule for Members' Statements that does not allow interruption or points of order, he clearly violated the rules. We see this repeatedly on the other side. Then when much milder terms are used, the opposition stands up with this mock indignation and tries to pretend that the government has transgressed the rules of the House, the very rules of which . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Mason: . . . they regularly and flagrantly disregard in a complete lack of respect, Mr. Speaker, for the House and for yourself.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise. I had hoped to sit this one out, but unfortunately the Government House Leader left me no option but to rise and speak to this particular point of order and respond briefly to the comments from the Government House Leader, particularly with respect to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky may have in fact said the word "lie" but did not make an allegation against the government side of the House. He said that there was an either/or, and it could have been the federal government. We all know that that can happen.

Now, more importantly than that is that the Government House Leader makes an allegation that this side of the House will effort to bend the rules while at the same time ministers of the government have made allegations that the opposition members are misleading Albertans, sir. That is clearly an abuse of the rules. It is the exact same thing that took place earlier today in the member's statement from the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

If the government is going to make allegations about the opposition misleading the Chamber, which has happened on numerous occasions, particularly from the minister of environment in the past, the opposition, too, will make statements that reflect the beliefs of the opposition. It is very problematic that the government can make these statements and then rise on a point of order to say that the opposition is the one that is trying to bend the rules. Nothing could be further from the truth, sir. All members of the Chamber should be held to the same standard, and the rules need to be applied the same to all members of the Chamber.

The Speaker: Any other members like to speak?

Then thus it goes, that the applications within the principle of context ought to be applied, and in this particular instance I believe that the minister was somewhat inflammatory with her remarks and would caution her again. I think there was a point of order in this situation, and I need to remind both sides of the House to avoid those kinds of comments.

Hon. members, you continue as a group to create – someone is going to be able to sell a very valuable book: new words that you can say in here that mean something other than what you intend but not get onto the list. I consider that there was a point of order in this situation, and I would caution the minister in the future.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Thank you for the ruling, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Environment and Parks I withdraw the comment and apologize on her behalf.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I have an important meeting to go to, which I'm looking forward to.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 13
Securities Amendment Act, 2017

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

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017.

The Alberta Securities Commission is mandated to protect investors and foster a fair and efficient Alberta capital market. A well-regulated and efficient financial system where investors are protected is essential for investor confidence and can allow for innovation. As I've said in this House many times before, the securities regulatory landscape has become more complex, sophisticated, global, and driven by technology than ever before. Throughout the world regulators and legislators have to be nimble and act vigilantly while also allowing for innovation. Simply put, regulators and legislators must keep abreast of a landscape that is ever changing and constantly evolving while at the same time be prepared to update our laws and regulations at regular intervals.

Before I get into the substance of the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, I think it would also be beneficial for all members of this Chamber to briefly review where we are and where we have come from over the past few years. Roughly a year ago this government announced that it would stand up for Alberta businesses and investors by backing our provincially led securities regulator to continue overseeing our capital markets rather than deferring this responsibility to a single national agency. We took this decision after taking the time to fully understand the implications of regulatory oversight in our capital markets and the excellent leadership role our provincial regulator has taken on the national stage.

As we made this decision, we set out three goals, or three principles, that would guide our approaches to our capital markets on a go-forward basis. Those three principles were investor protection, market integrity, and an efficient system of capital formation. We all know that these goals are best achieved when our capital markets operate transparently, when regulatory standards are harmonized, and when we have effective, authoritative oversight.

All members of this House can appreciate that our capital markets are defined by the resource sector, and it remains our belief that it only makes sense to have a provincially led securities regulator who understands our province's unique need. As I said at the time, when you have highly localized and specialized capital markets, as we do in Alberta, effective oversight is increased by having a regulator just blocks away from the action, not thousands of kilometres away on Bay Street. While I'm certain that this government made the right decision to continue with our provincially led regulator, that decision requires this government and this Legislature to regularly keep our laws up to date. The responsibility falls on us, and we will not defer that responsibility to Bay Street or Ottawa.

3:10

As members of this House know well, this government has been working consistently with our industry partners to ensure that our capital markets remain well regulated, provide effective mechanisms through which companies can raise capital, and to ensure our laws are kept up to date. Alberta and this Legislature must ensure that our securities regulatory system continues to reflect the realities of current markets and aligns with international standards and regulatory reforms.

To achieve this objective, this government has brought on a number of amendments before this House to ensure our capital markets continue to function effectively. Madam Speaker, if I'm not mistaken, all of our previous amendments that this government has introduced received unanimous support in this House. As a reminder members of this Chamber have voted in favour of legislation that I introduced to do a number of things, including amending the definitions of a derivative reporting issuer and security, amending the amount of advance notice a witness must provide to appear at a Securities Commission hearing, making smart changes to halt trade provisions, harmonizing provisions related to civil liability, and the list goes on. The important thing here is that we all acknowledge how critical it is to continue updating legislation as required to keep our capital markets strong, and we do so in a fashion that keeps to our three key operating principles.

Madam Speaker, with that very important context in mind let me say a few words about the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, and steps this government is taking to continue ensuring that we have strong investor protection, that we continue to maintain strong market integrity, and that we continue to build the necessary institutional infrastructure to allow for an efficient system of capital formation. Let me also state that these proposed amendments, that I will discuss and that are part of the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, have been developed in line with our key operating principles and in co-ordination with other industry partners.

First, let me focus on investor protection. Currently the Alberta Securities Commission has statutory powers to compel attendance and the production of evidence during both investigations and adjudication phases. However, self-regulatory organizations, or SROs, such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Funds Dealers Association do not have this authority. It is the view of this government and the ASC that the vast majority of market participants need this change, so we all agree. We need to ensure that self-regulatory organizations, or SROs, have the necessary authority to do their work, like other self-regulatory organizations in our society. Providing SROs with the same authorities as the commission will strengthen their enforcement abilities and improve investor protection.

Let me be clear. The vast majority of market participants are honest, trustworthy, and follow the rules. The issue is that we need to protect against the few bad apples that are out there. As members of this House know well, trust is integral to the integrity of our capital markets. When a few bad apples take action and swindle investors, trust can erode very quickly, and when overall trust erodes in our capital markets, it becomes incredibly difficult if not impossible to raise capital. Therefore, the proposed amendments before you with respect to self-regulatory organizations are important for two reasons. First, these changes will help protect individual investors and, therefore, improve investor protection. Second, and just as importantly, these changes are one step that we can take to improve overall trust in the market and, therefore, help to improve market integrity.

The proposed amendments will also extend immunity to their directors, officers, employees, and agents from civil liability and will also clarify the conditions that immunity is provided to these organizations. Providing immunity from liability for good-faith acts during the exercise of regulatory or delegated duties, functions, or powers makes it possible for these organizations to conduct enforcement more effectively. I think all members of this House can agree that these are common-sense changes and will help to ensure that our capital markets continue to operate fairly and efficiently.

Madam Speaker, while the amendments that I have just discussed form the largest part of this bill, I should add that the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, has a few other very minor components. Most notably, there are some changes that are housekeeping in nature to ensure clarity and better compliance with Alberta securities laws. In particular, amendments to Lieutenant Governor in Council regulations will apply provisions to persons and companies to ensure the act is consistent and allow the application to all parties, as intended by the legislation.

In closing, Madam Speaker, and to summarize, these amendments before this House today will help ensure Alberta's securities regulatory system reflects the realities of today's markets and evolves with international standards and global regulatory reform initiatives.

Let me also add that the common-sense amendments before this House today also have broad support in the financial community. We have worked closely with the ASC and our industry partners like IIROC on developing these changes. These changes or amendments have been widely applauded by groups like the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. For example, Wanda Morris from CARP came out publicly and said the following about the Securities Amendment Act, 2017:

I've heard too many heart-wrenching stories of individuals who have lost their life savings because they trusted the wrong person: an unscrupulous financial advisor. Today's changes will help hold wrongdoers to account.

Wanda went on to say that this legislation is

a critical step in bringing rule-breakers to justice and deterring wrongdoing, thus better protecting investors in this province.

Likewise, Andrew Kriegl, president and CEO of the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, or IIROC, and former deputy superintendent of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, had the following to say about this legislation.

We congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Government of Alberta for their leadership in being at the forefront of investor protection in Canada. With these [legislations] Alberta becomes the first province in Canada to provide [self-regulatory organizations] with a complete toolkit, enabling us to more effectively fulfil our responsibilities as a public interest regulator and bring wrongdoers to justice.

Madam Speaker, I think we can all agree that keeping our securities laws up to date is a good idea and in the best interest of Albertans, and I think we can all agree that improving investor protection is good not only for investors but for the overall long-term health of our capital markets in this province. On that note, I think that the amendments before this House warrant the support of all members. These amendments are reasonable, practical, and in the best interest of Alberta's capital markets. These amendments align with our overall strategy of improving investor protection, strengthening market integrity, and ensuring we have an efficient system to raise capital.

I would ask all members of this House, Madam Speaker, to support this bill as we work to ensure the long-term vibrancy of our unique and innovative capital markets in this province. Thank you.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, which will strengthen our investment regulators and harmonize our regulations with the rest of Canada. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for bringing this forward. I might even give myself a puffball of the day award for the speech I give today.

3:20

Canadian provinces, ours included, have long been opposed to a forced national securities regulator. The Minister of Treasury Board and Finance wrote an article on that subject in April of last year in which he said, "It only makes sense to have a provincially led securities regulator who understands our province's unique needs." I agree with the minister. Don't get used to it, Madam Speaker.

The bill will assist in strengthening our regulatory process and those bodies that best understand Alberta's investment industry. If we are going to control our own securities system, let's make it the best in Canada.

The groups that will be the main benefactors of this bill will be the Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada, MFDA, and the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, IIROC. Alberta's Securities Commission has delegated investigation powers to both of these organizations, the MFDA and IIROC. These two bodies are responsible for those companies and individuals who are registered beneath them. This is an excellent example of a decentralized structure working more efficiently if everyone is looking for examples as to how to make other parts of our government work more effectively.

IIROC and the MFDA have encountered issues following through with their investigations, especially when it comes to the collecting of evidence. One example provided by IIROC was when they attempted to track down evidence against an investor who was accused of misappropriating the funds of a client for their own personal use. The most obvious way to track whether or not this was true would be to follow the money. IIROC has access to its clients' accounts, and they can see what happens to every cent that is invested with clients of the investors who are registered with IIROC. Of course, this information is only accessed with the permission of their clients, which was granted when the investigation was requested by the client. When IIROC had access to the client's side of the equation, they did not have access to the investor's bank accounts. To trace the money, investigators at IIROC would need to gain access to the bank records of the investor.

Banks are mandated to protect their clients' personal information and are not required to give this information to IIROC. The reason the banks are not required to give up this information is because IIROC does not have the authority to compel the bank to provide this information. This is one example of a need for the change in legislation that is provided in this bill.

With the powers granted within this bill, IIROC and the MFDA would have the equivalent powers as an investigator for the Court of Queen's Bench. If Bill 13 passes and a situation arises where bank records are required to investigate a case of using the client's funds for personal use, IIROC would be able to compel the bank to provide this information.

Another example is when investors are trying to determine if a report of insider trading is legitimate or not. There are many ways of communication in this day and age, and almost all of them are traceable in one form or another. Text messages are recoverable, e-mails are located on both the sending and receiving end, and phone

records show who called whom and when. All of this information can be used as evidence if it can be acquired.

To accuse someone of insider trading is a serious accusation and will result in severe consequences when prosecuted and convicted. There has to be some way to prove that someone with insider knowledge misused this information and spread it one way or another. Text messages or phone records would need to be obtained from the phone company as a piece of evidence with building their case upon the receipt of a warrant. Just like banks, phone companies will protect their clients' personal information and are not required under current laws to provide this information to IIROC or the MFDA. Without this bill investigators will face a roadblock they cannot overcome.

These are just two examples of the reasons why the changes within this bill are necessary.

When Albertans invest, they need to be assured that their money is invested with and not beyond the reach of the law. At the moment, without this bill, there are those who believe they can get away with illegal and immoral use of other people's hard-earned money. Strengthening our regulatory bodies will give Albertans peace of mind. Albertans are already struggling in an economy, and they should not be worried that any of their savings would not be protected by the law. Albertans want to be assured that those they are investing with cannot use loopholes in our legislation to get away with stealing or misusing their money.

One very positive thing I'd like to point out in this piece of legislation is the fact that this would not increase the province's debt. It won't cost us a penny. Nowhere in this bill would the government be spending more money or creating debt. It always pleases me when the government finds ways to solve problems without throwing money at it. If this could be a theme for the rest of the government's last two years of record, that would be wonderful.

Stakeholder outreach is very important when creating legislation. I'm sure that the government remembers Bill 6 and other fiascos when outreach was not done properly in advance. It seems for the most part that in this case stakeholder outreach has properly occurred.

I'd like to read an excerpt from IIROC's 2016 Enforcement Report, where they ask for another change being brought forward in this bill.

IIROC is seeking statutory immunity for its good faith performance of all of its regulatory functions undertaken pursuant to its Recognition Orders, including action taken by Enforcement. While there are limited common law protections, statutory immunity would ensure that IIROC and its employees have the same protection as provided to the provincial securities commissions and other regulatory bodies. We strongly believe that this immunity is necessary in order to allow us to take appropriate regulatory action in the public interest without fear of reprisal.

I agree with IIROC, in that if they are being directed to fill the shoes of the Alberta Securities Commission, they should be provided with the same immunity as the Alberta Securities Commission while investigating white-collar crime. IIROC and the MFDA are not requesting to be above the law with this change. They are requesting to be able to enforce the law with the same protections as other Alberta organizations who complete the same work.

This protection is not needed for one or two investigations a year. Investigating white-collar crime is not a minor part of their mandate. Last year IIROC alone had almost 1,500 complaints, and 138 of those were investigated. That is more than one investigation every three days. Without this immunity protection granted within

the bill, investigations on this scale would be hazardous for investigators. White-collar crime is devastating to many families, and it should not be devastating to those investigating wrongdoers.

Unlike the laws that the minister of Treasury Board and Finance writes to govern himself and the actions of this government in their fiscal framework, we need to ensure that the laws have consequences and are enforceable. When we pass laws here, we should be bound by them. If that's not the case, we need to make it the case when we're writing legislation for our regulators at the very least. This piece of legislation is a step in the right direction when it comes to prosecuting white-collar crime. The minister should consider some enforcement legislation for how this government complies with our own fiscal framework legislation. We should be a leader, and we should not be above the law.

I'd like to encourage all members of the Legislature to support this bill. We need to protect Albertans, and we need to protect their hard-earned money. It is encouraging to see this government putting forward a bill that protects their hard-earned money instead of taking it from them in the form of taxation, levies, and other terms they'll invent to take more Albertans' money. It is important to close loopholes that allow white-collar crime to get away with misappropriating other people's money. I know that Albertans don't like it when their money is taken from them in any case, so we need to ensure that we have the best possible legislation in place to protect those who are protecting our investors and to protect investors in Alberta.

With that, I will ask all members of this Legislature to support Bill 13 and ensure that it gets passed in short order. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's always a great day when the Member for Strathmore-Brooks and I agree on something.

The Securities Amendment Act, 2017, if passed, would put Alberta at the forefront of investor protection by providing the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association with the same enforcement powers as the Alberta Securities Commission. This change would empower both organizations to compel attendance and the production of evidence during investigations and hearings, allowing them to better protect Albertans' investments. Thus, enforcing Alberta's securities laws would also be immune from civil liability, allowing them to enforce the law effectively without fear of liability.

Madam Speaker, you know, I have a quote here, actually, from Wanda Morris, the vice-president, advocacy, of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, who goes on to say that she has

heard too many heart-wrenching stories of individuals who lost their life savings because they trusted the wrong person: an unscrupulous financial advisor. Today's changes [would] help hold wrongdoers to account. We welcome today's announcement as a critical step in bringing rule-breakers to justice and deterring wrongdoing, thus better protecting investors in this province. We look forward to additional, practical steps like [these] from the Government of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I think that's an excellent example of how this Securities Amendment Act is working to make life better for Albertans. It's just like how we are doing that on the business front, where we are making life better for Albertans by supporting our businesses through our investor tax credit that was brought forward by our Minister of Economic Development and Trade and is just –

you know what? – a small example of the many things we are doing in this government, big and small, to help Albertans, to make life better for Albertans.

Now, in the bill itself, Madam Speaker, one of the most interesting sections that is in this bill and that I think is perhaps the most important is section 69.1, where they specifically talk about those investigative powers.

A person [who is] appointed to conduct an investigation has the same power as is vested in the Court of Queen's Bench [before a] trial of civil actions.

What that means is that that person will have investigative powers just like Queen's Bench, and that gives them the ability

- (i) to summon and enforce the attendance of witnesses,
- (ii) to compel witnesses to give evidence on oath or otherwise, and
- (iii) to compel witnesses to produce documents, records, securities, derivatives, contracts and [other such] things

that are needed in the course of an investigation.

Madam Speaker, why are we doing this? I mean, as our Minister of Finance mentioned in his opening statements just recently, you know, Alberta has made an ongoing commitment to reform, modernize, and harmonize securities laws in Canada, and since then Alberta has made a practice of reviewing and updating its securities laws annually, along with other provinces and territories, that came about as a part of a 2004 memorandum of understanding. The securities regulatory landscape in Canada has become more complex, sophisticated, and international in scope and is more driven by technology than ever before. Since the 2007 financial crisis it has become more difficult to sustain quality capital markets, and Alberta's challenge is to deliver the right regulation to support investor confidence and to encourage investment, innovation, and economic growth in Alberta and across Canada.

I, of course, note that when it comes to encouraging investment and innovation and economic growth in Alberta, just recently, Madam Speaker, we have seen a whole lot of investment in our oil and gas industry here in Alberta as Canadian companies such as CNRL have been investing heavily in our oil sands, backed by various large investors throughout Canada and Bay Street and around the world. That, I think, speaks to the business climate that we are bringing forward in this province and, frankly, to the confidence that investors have in our province.

The Securities Amendment Act works to make sure that we keep reviewing our securities legislation every single year and bring in those changes to make sure that confidence is sustained so that consumers can invest with confidence in Alberta or wherever they choose to do so. Alberta must ensure that our securities regulatory system reflects the reality of today's markets and stays in step with evolving international standards as well as global regulatory reform.

Madam Speaker, you know, of course, a lot has been said on this already, and with that, it seems that we have support from the Finance critic from the opposition, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. It's always nice when we can find agreement on these sorts of things in the House.

With that, I will encourage all members of the House to vote in support of this important and much-needed bill. I'm sure, as many members of the House will note, that it's probably not the most exciting piece of legislation that we have, but it will make a very big difference to consumers who are investing in this province. I think it's important, and as legislators we need to examine it and debate it. I encourage all members of this House to vote in support of the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect if there are any questions or comments for the previous speaker.

Seeing none, I will call on Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As always, it's a pleasure to get up in the House and speak to the legislation that's before us. Specifically, when it comes to the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, I'd like to paint a picture for all the members that are here.

Before I do, though, I'll mention that at one point I actually used to work for RBC Dominion Securities, as I've pointed out in the past. As I was going through and reviewing this piece of legislation, I was reminded of a lady, Maria. Maria used to work as a maintenance person, and every paycheque she'd simply put \$50 into a Canada savings bond. That was all she could afford, but that's what she did. Every paycheque would come by, and \$50 would go into that Canada savings bond, and she saved and she saved and she saved and she saved. Finally, when it came to retiring, she transferred her money over to RBC Dominion Securities.

Of course, we don't think about it often, but, you know, when you start saving \$50 every paycheque over a lifetime, it adds up to a substantial amount of money. Maria transferred that money over to RBC Dominion Securities, and then she had a stockbroker invest that money for her, as I recommend all Albertans do. Save that piece of money. Save that little bit of money every month, and make sure that you invest it wisely.

That's why the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, is important and also for us here in the province of Alberta to continue updating our regulatory system through the Alberta Securities Commission: for people like Maria. I want you to imagine a situation where a person who has saved their entire life – you know, I really respect all Albertans but specifically those ones like Maria. Every day they go to work, and they do what they need to do. They honestly gain money through the sweat of their brow, their hard-earned money, as the Member for Strathmore-Brooks pointed out. For them to be cheated out of that hard-earned money that they've saved over an entire lifetime is just a catastrophe. It's a catastrophe.

3:40

I want to say that most businesses here in the province of Alberta are honest. They do what they need to do. They're investing. They're trying to build and help our economy grow, and that's excellent. But there are the few bad apples out there. That's what we're trying to do, protect people like Maria from those bad apples. That's why this piece of legislation – you know, it's been mentioned before that people say: oh, it's not the most exciting piece of legislation. But let me tell you that it sure is necessary. It is absolutely necessary. We often don't think about how capital markets impact the everyday lives of Alberta citizens. This is why I'm trying to highlight Maria's experience, right?

I think it's really important that, as the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has stated, we've consciously taken on the responsibility and made a decision that we continue with having the Alberta Securities Commission, our own commission right here, because of the fact that it responds to the specific market that we're trying to develop within here, inside of the province, and why it's so important to continue amending the Securities Act on a regular basis.

As was pointed out, the regulatory landscape is continuing to become more complex and more sophisticated, and I'll give you the example of crowdfunding. It's a great example. You know, especially start-ups, new technologies, new people, new young people in our communities and in our economy: they're starting to get together and they're working out new ways of putting together businesses. Crowdfunding is a major way that they can explore

research and bring a commodity or a service, a business idea of their own, to market. As we continue to grow here in Alberta in terms of implementing new technologies and new ways of doing business, new ways of providing services, crowdfunding is going to become more and more a way of raising finance capital for those ideas, and the Securities Commission is going to have to be able to respond to that in that way.

We don't want to be in a situation where, let's just say, hypothetically speaking, a group of people decide that they're going to go into a business idea. They start crowdfunding, and then all of a sudden instead of using the money for what they stated it was going to be used for, they use it for something else. Then imagine all those people who bought into the idea to provide that service or that product that these people were saying they were going to do who all of a sudden are out that money that they've invested through that crowdfunding avenue.

I'm happy that we continue to have our own provincial regulator here. I think it's really important, as was mentioned by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. We're a unique province here, and the investments that are being made here continue to be ways that we build and grow our economy.

With that, I want to say how proud I am that we've passed legislation on the Alberta investor tax credit. These go hand in hand, right? You have Albertans that have been saving that money, and they have a friend or perhaps someone they know, and they want to be able to help that friend or acquaintance grow their business. Of course, the Alberta investor tax credit is a great idea to help Alberta businesses grow and be able to invest that money. What could be better?

You know what? When I go out into the public and I talk about the Alberta investor tax credit with people in the community in my own constituency and others around Edmonton and in the province, they're like: "Oh, a 30 per cent tax credit? Well, that's great. It totally makes sense." It's a great piece of legislation that's going to help spur on growth in our economy. Like the Alberta investor tax credit, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, is going to help encourage growth and help people like Maria feel that they can trust that we have a good regulatory system here in the province of Alberta.

I want to speak a little bit to the fact that we have unanimous support for this. I think it's great. I think it's wonderful that we can all agree on something that's so important and on how important it is to regulate capital within our markets. You know, there are certain people in this House who I've heard say that they would much prefer a libertarian way of going about capital markets. "No regulations whatsoever" is what they seem to imply, right? I mean, they want no government intervention whatsoever. I think that's kind of strange, right?

At the same time they get up in the House and say that, well, they support this piece of legislation. Great. Wonderful. But I think it's so important to have the intervention from the Alberta government, from the Alberta Securities Commission, people who are investigating and who know capital markets, know how capital formation occurs within the province, that specifically contributes to the growth of industry right here in our own province. Regulation is absolutely essential because at the end of the day, we're helping people like Maria and helping to protect investors.

Now, we're going on and even taking a further step and making sure that other SROs, or self-regulatory organizations, also have the authority to do their own work in making sure that investors are protected. I think this is an incredible move in the right direction. Providing self-regulatory organizations with the same authorities as the commission will strengthen their enforcement abilities and contribute to the protection of people like Maria. As I stated before,

this improves overall trust in the market, which is what the end objective is really all about at the end of the day.

With that being said, the fact that we do have unanimous support, well, what I feel is unanimous support – I want to highly encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of the bill.

With that, I will close, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, it's fascinating listening to the real-life example that you shared with us from your experience, Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I just wonder: in that circumstance – and, you know, I was out for a little bit, so I didn't hear the whole thing about Maria's situation – it sounds like the duty to compel during investigations would have assisted her situation and brought more information, evidence to the table more quickly so that situation could be totally understood in terms of how she was investing with a group who was fraudulent or misusing the funds that she had committed to that investment. I'd like to hear more about that if I could.

I'd just like to better understand, you know, the kind of feedback you're getting with regard to the independence the Alberta Securities Commission has and the steps this government took to reinforce that, hiring a top-notch executive to be the chair of the commission as well as the CEO, Stan Magidson, who spent time with the ICD as their leader in Toronto and had great support in the capital investment community here in Alberta for his hiring. We're incredibly proud of the work he is doing. He's liaising across Canada to ensure that the Canadian community of securities commissions knows the value that the Alberta Securities Commission brings to that collection of commissions. Alberta continues to be a leader, to know its capital markets extremely well.

Perhaps if you could just tell us a little more about Maria and her circumstance and how these actions will protect her and what you've heard about the Alberta Securities Commission and the actions this government has taken.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize Edmonton-Ellerslie, just a reminder to always speak through the chair. Also, for the benefit of *Hansard*, the microphones will not pick you up if you're facing away. Thank you.

Go ahead, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just to clarify, I know that the President of Treasury Board and Finance was on a break, shall we say. I wasn't suggesting that Maria was in any way taken or – actually, I was talking about how Maria had with every paycheque put away \$50 into a Canada savings bond and that this is the experience of many people in our society that work hard every day. You know, they're not people who receive large, large sums of money, as others do in our society, right? I'm talking about your average person. But somewhere along the line they've met someone who has told them: hey, just put that little piece of money away.

You know, having the experience of working in the finance industry at RBC Dominion Securities, I want to urge all Albertans – and I always remind people: you could be making \$30,000 a year, and you're just putting that little bit away, and you're going to save that amount of money for your retirement, or you could be making \$200,000, like some people do, and not save a single penny because you're spending it on toys and a snowmobile and whatever the case may be.

Ms Renaud: A motorcycle. Sorry.

Loyola: I have my money well invested, and I've invested in a motorcycle.

Ms Renaud: Which is awesome.

Loyola: Thank you for that.

Again, getting back to it, I want to urge all Albertans, no matter how much you're making monthly, to just put that little bit away because when it comes to retirement, you want to make sure to have that little nest egg. Our government, through the Alberta Securities Commission, wants to make sure to protect that amount of money that you've saved for your retirement. We want to make sure that ...

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I do agree. Motorcycles are very good investments.

Any other speakers to the bill? Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to disagree with you. I think investment in bikes is much wiser and much better in terms of the carbon levy and the environment, but that's just a minor disagreement.

Madam Speaker, I am so proud today to rise in support of Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. Very often in this house we talk about how small things make a difference. This is one of the things that I'm so proud of our government for, that we're really concerned about how we can change ways of doing things in Alberta to protect people and to ensure that ordinary Albertans do not see their life savings disappear or are not taken for granted.

I'm also reminded that last year we passed a bill around payday loans, which, again, was something that needed to be done for a long time in Alberta, and our government has done something. That has also protected Albertans and their savings and their money. I'm so proud today to support this bill.

You know, things have really changed in Canada and in other parts. In the past people saved for their retirement through a government pension, and the money was invested by professionals through a pension system, either a public pension or a company pension. But things are really, really different at the moment. Many Albertans have to work at saving for their pension right from the beginning, as the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie explained with this lady saving \$50.

So many Albertans have been taken advantage of by persons who have taken their money and have not been wise about how the money has been invested. I've had a number of constituents come to my office and tell me their sad stories about how they had invested money in a fund or a security that they thought was going to be secure, that had been promised to be protected and so on and found all of their hard earnings, all the money that they had put aside and had saved for retirement gone. One of my constituents saw all of her retirement money disappear. Even though there was a trial, she could never get any of it back.

I really, really appreciate the work that the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has done to include a strengthening so that the securities organizations can be more diligent about protecting the consumer. You know, it wasn't something that it was immediately apparent needed to be done, but still the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has done it.

As Wanda Morris from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons says, "I've heard too many heart-wrenching stories of individuals who lost their life savings because they trusted the wrong person: an unscrupulous financial advisor." This is something which not only myself as an MLA but, I would say, many other members of this House have experienced: they have been faced with constituents to whom this has happened. Individual

investors, be it that you have a thousand dollars saved or have a million dollars saved, need to know that the investment industry is being regulated properly.

I am so thankful that in my 20s, when I began earning a little bit of money, I took an investment course because I knew that if I didn't understand the challenge of investment and understand not only how to save properly but who to go to for help and advice and the challenge of knowing how many fees you're paying for and what kind of investment is protected, I might really have started saving and lost all my savings.

Financial markets are getting more and more complicated every day, and more and more people are relying on financial advisers to help guide their decisions. As a government we need to encourage investment, especially because, as I mentioned, fewer and fewer people have pension plans but also because it is critical to the development of our economy. Last year we passed a bill with tax credits for people who invest in our local economy, and this Bill 13 very much links to Bill 30 that we passed last year.

We also have to do everything we can to protect investors against the very few people in the system who would take advantage of them, and I think all of us in this House know of some really sad, terrible, terrible stories that have attracted attention in Canada. We already have strong organizations in Alberta like the Alberta Securities Commission, whose mandate is to protect investors and foster a fair and efficient Alberta capital market. The commission currently has statutory powers to compel attendance and the production of evidence during both the investigation and adjudication phases. With all the legislation dealing with the fast-changing role of securities law, some of these proposed changes are just housekeeping to ensure clarity and better compliance with Alberta's securities laws.

4:00

I'm wondering how many of the members here are day traders. When I started my investment career, when I was in my 20s, a long, long time ago, there weren't that many options about how you were going to invest your money, and really it was less fraught with problems. You either went to your bank or your credit union and invested or you might have gone to a full-service brokerage firm and met somebody and established a relationship. Now the investment vehicles are so varied. It's very hard to know, really, how secure they are, what kind of protections there are.

Also, there are so many different ways for people to be licensed to provide financial advice. This is an issue that I know many of us have discussed. Now we have people who sell life insurance, we have people in the banks, we have people in the credit unions, we have people in full brokerage, we have people on the phone and on the Internet. It's a lot more challenging work.

I wanted once again to really thank the minister for having done some very small amendments with the Securities Amendment Act to provide everyone in Alberta with the opportunity to know that there are remedies and there's a stronger vigilance about how their money is being invested.

Madam Speaker, I'm happy to see that this bill will have support from all sides of the House. I also would like to support the remarks of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie that as we debate this bill and we talk about the need to save for retirement and the need to ensure that we save, we all think carefully and choose wisely how we're going to invest and make sure that we invest through the types of investments that are protected under Alberta laws.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments?

Seeing none, other members to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very proud today to stand here to support Bill 13, Securities Amendment Act, 2017. I agree with almost one hundred per cent of everything that my colleague from Calgary-Currie says except when he described Bill 13 as – and I’m paraphrasing – somewhat boring. I’m sure the Minister of Finance doesn’t agree with that, and indeed I stand here really attesting to the fact that I find this to be one of the most exciting pieces of legislation.

Loyola: I didn’t say that.

Dr. Turner: I said Calgary-Currie, by the way. I’m one hundred per cent in agreement with my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie and always have been, including my support of left-wing causes.

Calgary-Currie made the mistake – I think he might regret it – of saying that this act really wasn’t all that exciting. Tell that to people like Maria, or tell that to people like a constituent of mine who has been in my constituency office on multiple occasions, a senior citizen on a fixed income who has been the unwitting prey of an unscrupulous financial adviser. This financial adviser actually absconded with more than \$300,000 of this constituent’s wealth, and it forced her to sell her home and to move into less than satisfactory accommodations.

This law that we have now would help prevent that sort of thing. This actual action occurred four or five years ago, and despite appeals to the banking regulator, because there was a chartered bank that was involved in this situation, and despite appeals to the Securities Commission, my constituent has been pauperized by the actions of this individual. That individual has actually absconded and left Canada and is out of the reach of justice in this province.

I want to repeat something that’s been said already. This government is working every day to make life better for Albertans, Albertans of all sorts. In this situation as a senior I’m actually going to speak on behalf of my fellow senior citizens in this province. Many of those seniors are small investors. Whether you’re a senior or not, you’re going to be faced with having to make investment decisions, basically, throughout your life. Seniors have to make decisions, for instance, about how they invest their RRIFs or their RRSPs. At the age of 71 the rules of RRSPs dictate that you begin to withdraw a certain portion of your income. That means that you have to actually make investments that will yield that kind of money and that you withdraw it.

It’s not only people that are investing in RRSPs and RRIFs that need to be aware of this sort of thing. Those young people that are investing in RESPs for their children’s education – and I would certainly recommend that every parent make sure that they have an RESP, taking advantage of the federal monies coming in to help augment the size of the RESPs. The holder of an RESP has to make decisions about where that money is going to be invested, and that means that the holder has to have confidence in the purveyor of these investments. With this law, Bill 13, we are going to make that situation a bit safer for these investors.

There’s another situation in which people of all ages have to make decisions about investments, and that’s in the situation where they might have a pension that is called a defined contribution type of pension. There’s a defined benefit pension, which many of us who are public servants have access to and which is, in my opinion, a better form of pension than a defined contribution pension. But if you do have a defined contribution pension, it is actually your

responsibility to invest the pension money into a suitable investment product.

There have been many instances – you can take the American example of Enron. Everybody knows about Enron.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Dr. Turner: We don’t know about Enron? Enron was an American corporation that basically played fast and dirty with electricity contracts and other energy contracts.

I had a brother-in-law who was a captain of a petroleum tanker in Florida which happened to be owned by a company related to Enron. What Enron was doing was making the people that worked for that tanker company invest their pension, which was a defined contribution pension, into Enron shares. Guess what happened to my brother-in-law’s pension when Enron went broke through malfeasance of the people that ran it? I imagine that some of the members across the way actually know more of the details about that than I do. My brother-in-law basically lost all of his pension. He’s still struggling 20 years later to build back something to take care of himself in his older years.

We definitely need to be paying attention to that.

4:10

I’m going to bring up some other names just because they’re important to be recognized in this context. The name Ponzi, the name Madoff, Bre-X: these were all schemes somewhat like Enron that basically preyed upon the gullibility, if you wish, of the general public in regard to investments. Ponzi actually happened a hundred years ago; Bre-X, maybe – what? – 20, 25 years ago; Madoff, 10, 15 years ago. Yet we’re still struggling with this. I really congratulate the minister and his department for bringing forward this legislation that’s going to at least partially help prevent a repetition of a Ponzi scheme or the Madoff story or perhaps even Bre-X, although that situation is somewhat different financially from the other two.

The financial markets are getting really complicated, and more and more people are relying on financial advisers. That’s probably a good idea. I’m sure, like the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, there are probably at least 200 good financial advisers for every one that’s not good, but it is our responsibility as a government to help protect folks in that way.

We need to be encouraging investment because it’s critical to our economy. This is going to help diversify our economy. It’s going to help provide for the security of our senior citizens. It’s going to help provide for the security of getting our children educated through RESPs. I could go on and on. Investors need to be protected in some ways, and this is a good use of, if you wish, red tape or regulation. You know, we already have strong organizations like the Securities Commission and the self-regulatory organizations, but we need to support those.

In sum, because I’m a consumer of these products and I recognize how important investment is to making sure that the whole economy is functioning well, I would urge all of the members of the Legislature to support this fine legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing order 29(2)(a)? Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Member, for sharing your information and talking about the situation you’re aware of in regard to the \$300,000 that a constituent was unfortunately bilked out of. You know, there are thousands and thousands of financial advisers in this province, and the vast, vast, vast majority are upright and follow the laws and have no problem at all with regard

to any sanctions from the ASC or IIROC or the other organizations. But there are some wrongdoers out there, and this amendment, the Securities Amendment Act, Bill 13, will give greater powers for that investigation to go on with regard to the people, the self-regulatory organizations, so that they're more in line with the powers of inspectors from the ASC.

Could you just maybe focus a little bit on how you think this will prevent future wrongdoers from taking the actions that occurred with your constituent? I mean, we're looking at changing things so that people can be properly investigated and prosecuted and monies can be recovered or attempts to recover money can be more successful. What effect do you think these amendments will have on preventing these actions in the future?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I think these are very important questions, and I'm pleased to respond to them. In my experience, I've dealt with probably at least a dozen or more financial advisers over my adult life, and all of them have been credible, honest, of high integrity, and what I hear from my friends who are financial advisers is that, basically, their image needs to be burnished. I think many people look at financial advisers somewhat like used-car salesmen in that there's maybe a taint to even that title. So having these sorts of protections built into the regulations I think is going to be a great help to the investment advisers who are competent and who deal with clients with great integrity.

To answer the question specifically, what impresses me about Bill 13, specifically in reference to the constituent that I was mentioning, is that the legislation will force the respondents to respond. They're actually compelled to respond, and they have a much shorter time to respond than they do now. During that month that they have to respond now – and it's going to be shortened to two weeks, as I understand – many of these folks go to Belize or some other place that they can't be extradited from, and they basically hide their ill-gotten gains and make it difficult to have recovery.

I think that many of the provisions of this bill are going to help in enforcement, if you wish, but I think its greatest benefit is going to be to provide more faith and trust by the general public of our investment organizations.

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

Seeing none, other speakers to the bill? Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Pleased to rise today to speak to this piece of legislation as proposed as a major regular update of the legislation in keeping with Alberta's commitment that was made to ongoing reform and modernization and harmonization of securities laws in Canada. Alberta made that commitment in a 2004 memorandum of understanding with other provinces and territories across the country, and since then we've had a regular practice of reviewing and updating the securities laws annually along with other provinces and territories, and this legislation, these amendments, are in keeping with that commitment.

The securities regulatory landscape in Canada has become more complex, continues to change over time, becomes more sophisticated and international in scope, and is driven by technology more than ever before. Since the 2007 financial crisis, which the world is still recovering from in many quarters, it's become more difficult to sustain quality capital markets. Alberta's challenge is to deliver the right regulation to support investor confidence and encourage investment, innovation, and economic growth in Alberta and across Canada. Once again, these amendments are designed to maintain

our momentum in ensuring that we keep up with the times with respect to securities regulation globally. We must ensure that our securities regulatory system reflects the realities of today's markets and stays in step with evolving international standards and global regulatory reform initiatives.

These powers, as I say, are more than housekeeping changes. These amendments will help ensure Alberta has fair and effective capital markets by extending powers to recognized regulatory organizations so that they can compel testimony and the production of evidence during a disciplinary hearing. This is a significant change, which will give more teeth and more legitimacy to the regulatory organizations which protect the public in securities investment in the province.

4:20

The changes will extend immunity to the directors, officers, employees, and agents of regulatory organizations from civil liability when conducting enforcement activity, something which is absolutely essential in order for those directors to do that task of oversight and enforcement. Not being protected from civil liability would expose them to legal suits that would make it impossible for them to conduct their job. That's why this immunity is being granted to the regulatory officers by this amendment. The people responsible for enforcing securities rules must be able to do their jobs without fear of being held personally liable.

It's something that is very common in self-regulated industries as well, where there are oversight bodies and members and directors who have the responsibility to make decisions and adjudicate over that particular industry. They are commonly granted this immunity from prosecution so that they can freely do their jobs. Protecting them from liability for carrying out their duties in good faith makes it possible to enforce the rules more effectively.

Compared to other jurisdictions, Madam Speaker, the immunity and statutory powers to compel attendance and the production of evidence at securities laws investigations were recommended by the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, and this came as a result of hearings and broad public consultations with industry and investors. These changes are also planned by other jurisdictions across Canada. Quebec is considering similar investigative authority for regulatory organizations. B.C., Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon have committed to adopting immunity provisions. We're not doing something that's out of the ordinary. It's in keeping with the momentum that we have committed to in annually updating our regulations, on a regular basis. The Minister of Finance and head of the Treasury Board will bring forward amendments to ensure that the modernization of the securities regulations in Alberta keeps up with the changing landscape of the global securities field.

The Alberta Securities Commission is an industry-funded provincial corporation responsible for ensuring a fair and efficient capital market in Alberta. The Securities Commission develops and enforces securities regulations, it offers information and resources to Albertans about investing, and it administers Alberta's Securities Act and regulations.

Now, I mentioned that regulatory organizations would be granted having the powers extended to them to compel testimony and the production of evidence, and I wanted to maybe explain a little bit more about the organizations. Firstly, the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada is a national regulatory organization which oversees all investment dealers and trading activity in debt and equity marketplaces in Canada. The Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada was created in 2008 through the consolidation of Investment Dealers Association of Canada and Market Regulation Services Inc. and sets high-quality regulatory

investment industry standards, protects investors, and strengthens market integrity while maintaining efficient and competitive capital markets. It was from there that the recommendations to have these new amendments occur came. The Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada is a national regulatory organization for the distribution side of the Canadian mutual fund industry. The association regulates the operations, standards of practice, and business conduct of its members and their representatives.

Now, the government delegates authority to regulatory organizations for specific reasons. Provincial regulators have delegated certain aspects of their authority to regulatory organizations to provide more effective and efficient regulation of the market and market participants.

Madam Speaker, what we're doing today is going to satisfy the desires of a lot of investors in this province, people who rely upon the provincial government to ensure that rules are in place that govern those involved in the investment and securities industry in a way that makes them know that should they contravene the rules, there will be severe consequences and that the regulators have the tools at their disposal to ensure compliance and investigate any wrongdoings that are brought forward.

Many people in this province over time have suffered as a result of wrongdoing by investment dealers, and of course the stories have been relayed or spoken about in this House by other members previously. What we're doing is continually updating our rules and regulations so that these types of bad-news stories are kept at a minimum. By and large, we know that the investment dealers throughout the province and indeed across the country are very highly respected, but no matter what industry one talks about, there are rules and regulations and government orders in place to protect the public, as there should be. We in Alberta are once again leading the way in bringing forward these types of amendments so that the standard of care for our public is the highest it possibly can be.

Extending powers to recognized regulatory organizations so that we can compel testimony and production of evidence through a disciplinary hearing is a natural progression of the oversight powers that the public demands we have for our Alberta citizens and for protection of their hard-earned money and their investments as they retire and save for their end of life as well as when they save to protect the educational opportunities for their children or perhaps for those in their families who may be looking to having to survive with a disability after their parents have died. There's a mechanism for them to invest as well.

It's important that all of those investments that people rely on are protected and given the highest level of scrutiny so that anyone with malintent is weeded out of the industry and properly sanctioned by rules that are continually upgraded after oversight and recommendations by people in the industry, by citizens who are involved in investing, and by other bodies and members of the industry that have an interest in making sure that the reputation of investment dealers and the investment community is absolutely stellar in this province. That's what this legislation continues to do as we meet our commitments to review this legislation on an annual basis, in step with other provinces and the territories as well as the federal government, in keeping the legislation across the country relatively in line with each jurisdiction, one with respect to the other, so that you don't end up with crossjurisdictional difficulties.

That's the way in which we will continue to operate in this province and ensure that there is a very healthy and transparent and reliable investment regulatory system and framework in place so that when people do receive a request or a recommendation from an investment dealer or securities agent that they are engaging with, they can have confidence that that individual's activities have the scrutiny of oversight and so that they know that if indeed there is

something that they think has gone awry, there's a place that they can report it to and know that it will receive significant scrutiny and oversight and that the body that does actually look at the transgression will have the legal teeth necessary to fully investigate and, if necessary, sanction those individuals who may be contravening the laws.

With that, I will once again commend the Minister of Finance and thank him for bringing this legislation up to date with these amendments, that he's advised us he will continue to do in future years. I agree that this is actually much more than simple house-keeping on an annual basis, because it is a fairly significant step to not only grant immunity to the directors, officers, employees, and agents of these regulatory bodies and also to clarify the conditions under which immunity is granted to these organizations, but in the first place to give them the authority to compel witnesses and to compel documents to be produced is a major step forward to changing how these organizations are viewed by those who might consider bending the rules for their own advantage.

I think that it will go a long way in helping investors in Alberta have confidence that the landscape in Alberta for investors has changed in their favour and they can know that there is an even greater layer of protection laid upon them by the amendment to this legislation for their protection and that of their families as they invest for their future.

Thank you.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. To the Member for Edmonton-McClung, Stan Magidson, the chair and the CEO of Alberta Securities Commission, agrees with you. He said recently, "Strong investor protection is a critical component of our mandate, and we support meaningful and practical regulatory advances such as this that can have a real impact on protecting Albertans from financial misconduct."

I agree with everything that you said just now. I guess I know that you're a lifelong professional in terms of real estate in this province. I just wonder. With seeing so many clients who are saving money for often their first home and, you know, the protections that the real estate industry has in place with regard to monies needing to be deposited and put in trust and all those sorts of things, I wonder if you've heard from any of those clients or know situations where people have perhaps been with unscrupulous financial advisers and lost money that they could not then put into their home or to use for the benefit of their family with regard to making important purchases, the biggest purchase that they often make in their life in terms of housing. Do you know of situations where, you know, with other parts of their investments they were not treated so well?

We heard earlier from another member who knew of a situation where \$300,000 was misappropriated, and that person did not get those monies back. This kind of legislation will, as you said, be able to get to the heart of and investigate these matters more quickly so that people will know what's happened, will be able to see some actions taking place so that those same individuals who are doing wrong with investment advice and taking monies and giving bad advice and not being straight with their clients – we'll be able to get to the heart of the matter more quickly. Have you heard of other situations where that hasn't occurred because this kind of protection wasn't in place?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Finance's questions. Indeed, I did over a 30-year real estate career come across many, many situations where people saved their hard-earned money and made the difficult decision of sacrifice each and every paycheque to put that money away and were very disciplined in doing so. It's not an easy thing to do, particularly when you're – no matter what age you are, saving is a hard thing to do. It takes a lot of effort and, really, a lot of dedication and sacrifice from a family to put together that down payment, whether it's a minimum 5 per cent down payment or you're looking at a 15 per cent down payment to avoid the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It's been two years, so I may have those percentages wrong.

I know that when I had a family come to me, particularly first-time homebuyers, I'd sit down and I'd do a one and a half, two-hour interview before we'd even go looking at houses. That was my standard *modus operandi*. If you wanted to go looking at houses with me and you wanted me to represent you, I wanted to know who you are and where you're at and what exactly your needs were.

I have had situations, Madam Speaker, where the family would talk to me and we'd have an initial interview. Even when I'd meet somebody anywhere – I would talk real estate no matter where I was; in an elevator, grocery store, didn't matter what – people would say: "Oh, well, we've just started out. We're looking next year. I don't know when we're going to buy a house." I'd say: "Well, that's okay. Come talk with me. I'll talk with you for an hour and a half anyways, get you going." Even knowing that those people may be a year and a half, two years away from purchasing a property, I'd sit down and spend that hour and a half, two hours with them and go through that process and find out what their needs were and try to determine a savings plan so they could more effectively save that money and get into that house faster than they otherwise would because they were paying more in rent than they really needed to. If there were solutions that could be made to adjust what they were paying in other output costs, then we'd take a look at that so that that savings would rise quickly.

Some of the times when I looked at the investments that they had those savings in, they weren't very appropriate. It was, in some certain cases, because they chose the wrong investor's help.

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired for 29(2)(a).

The next speaker, Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, as I was considering this bill, at first I didn't think too much of it. I haven't heard too much about securities from my constituents, but then I did a little bit of digging on, you know, demographic trends and such, and in parts of my constituency I've got everything from, like, subsidized trailer parks up to multimillion-dollar homes, so certainly there are a lot of constituents that are seeking the services of a financial adviser. I, actually, just the other year myself did the same thing. There seems to be a theme today. Earlier I was talking about protecting homebuyers with their large financial decisions. Now I'm talking about people as they seek the advice of financial advisers. I think these are both equally important issues.

You know, for a lot of Albertans, not just my constituents, of course, they need to be able to know that whoever they discuss their finances with, they can trust that person. Especially if it's a situation where there are large amounts of investment or indeed if it's your only savings, that can be very sensitive information. I think that the majority of financial advisers, I'm sure, are fine, outstanding people, but there's always that one or two that give the entire industry a bad name. I think it's really great to see some legislation coming forward to show that we are both protecting the person

seeking the services as well as the financial advisers as a collective group. I think that legislation like this really helps to provide some confidence when seeking the advice of a financial adviser.

You know, regulation bodies like what is being discussed here really help to make sure that if there are those oddball people out there who aren't necessarily the most outstanding citizens or perhaps – it's entirely possible that they're just ignorant of the regulations. But it provides some certainty that there's a possibility of recourse there. So I think that having that certainty provides a lot of comfort for Albertans. For many Albertans these are things like their retirement we're talking about here. We're talking about, you know – I myself am definitely a long ways away from retirement, but there are some programs available that I've kept my eye on, and hopefully by the time that I can make use of those, they're still there.

4:40

But, you know, there are RESPs, your children's education and, really, their future and RRSPs as well as TFSAs and everything else as well as direct investments. When Albertans and indeed anybody go to seek advice on these things, they need to know that not only the person that they are talking to knows what they're talking about but also that there's nothing shady going on. When I was going through school, there was a lot of talk about identity theft, especially with the growing digital age, and, you know, that's certainly something that you would be opening yourself up to when you seek some financial advice. So it's really important to see that there are protections there for Albertans.

You know, I am very happy to see the minister bring forward this legislation to help protect the person seeking these services. It also helps protect the people doing the investigations. It helps protect the employees of the regulatory organizations, and I think that's certainly very important. When we have a regulatory organization, they need to have the ability to investigate any allegations that do arise. Certainly, having the ability to compel attendance and produce evidence in cases of alleged wrongdoing: I think that's very important. It helps them be able to do both their jobs but also helps protect the investors themselves. I think that's something that's certainly very important. It also helps ensure that these investigations are carried out in good faith and that regulatory bodies are really able to engage in their duties with that faith in mind.

Now, I know the minister reached out to several of the organizations involved, you know, the Alberta Securities Commission as well as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, and they helped develop this bill along with the minister. I think that that shows that there's some buy-in from the financial adviser community here.

Overall I think that this is a good bill. You know, the world of financial securities changes constantly. It's not the first of these amendment bills that we've seen, and I'm sure it certainly won't be the last, nor indeed do I think it should be the last. New technologies, new practices, new agreements between jurisdictions: these come up all the time. I know there was a federal one just recently, a similar amendment act, that was a result of an agreement with some place like Gibraltar, like, a fairly small country. But it's very important that we keep on top of all of these.

I would like to take a moment to thank the minister for bringing this forward, and I hope to see all members of this House support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Yeah, and I'm just speaking to the bill, not 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: You want to speak to the bill?

Mr. Orr: Yeah, if you're ready for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. In a second.

You had a question under 29(2)(a), hon. minister? Go ahead.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member. It's always great to hear people planning for their future and making investment decisions. I guess a question to him and to others who might be thinking about that: what were some of the criteria that you used in choosing who to work with, and how can others maybe do some of that work to feel confident, especially at such a young age?

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

I want to commend you not only for being very significant in your savings, but you're also very significant, I know, in donations to a variety of organizations. So you are clearly making many efforts to make life better. How do you ensure that the people who are supporting you in that work have those same values?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome to the chair. And thank you to the minister for the question. You know, prior to being elected, I was working part-time as I made my way through university. Then suddenly I had a rather large increase in both the paid hours I was working – of course, I was putting a lot of work into my school time – but also in my income, so I felt that it was prudent to reach out and seek some advice early, before I developed any habits that I would later regret down the road.

I started asking around to people I knew: who did you talk to? And there was one name that seemed to have a fairly good rapport in the community, a local guy in St. Albert. I reached out to him and asked his advice. You know, at that point we were looking at purchasing a home and everything, and he said: okay; well, here are the steps that I myself would take if I were to be looking towards that and was in your financial situation.

So we've been putting some money into RSPs as well as trying to avoid things like credit card debt. I also made the purchase of a vehicle fairly recently, slightly used. Well, I bought a 2016 car used in 2016, but it was a rental. [interjection] The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood is telling me how to park. For those of you that don't know, his parking spot is next to mine.

You know, I bought it slightly used. I did my research, and I picked a car that doesn't depreciate that much. Some of the other cars on the lot I looked at were five years older, but they were selling for only, like, \$1,000 or \$2,000 less. So I thought that that was a fairly prudent investment. In fact, to get any significant savings, I had to go to a car that was 10 years old, and it looked like it had some engine issues and was starting to get some rust around the wheel well and things like that. So I figured that given the two choices, it was more prudent to go with the slightly used car.

So, yeah, back to the minister's question. I reached out to the community and to people that I knew had talked to financial advisers and asked them who they went to. I've made similar inquiries about various other services that I didn't need as much before. You know, I didn't have much need for tailoring in my previous life, so I reached out and discovered who had a good reputation in the community. I think that's a great process, that many constituents can use and many Albertans can use. Well, I would go so far as to say that anybody anywhere can use this approach.

I saw the minister making motions towards haircutting. Actually, I didn't have to ask people about haircutting because . . .

4:50

The Acting Speaker: The time for 29(2)(a) has expired.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. Yes. I'd love to speak to this, bring a little bit of excitement to it, because I think this is actually a fascinating topic. I've always been truly interested in this, and I can support Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017.

I think it's important because of the evolving complexities of the marketplace. There are ever-new financial products out there, ever-new derivative markets being created, and, in fact, ever-new trading platforms that are confusing and difficult. Because of the complexity of the market, we have to keep up to it. I think there's also the reality of the increasing needs of people in our complex society to have financial instruments as a way to not only park but even have assets.

You know, in days gone by people were more focused on land. They would oftentimes have rental or lease revenue. It's a small part of the population that can actually have, for instance, business dividends that can carry them into years of retirement or whatever. Not everybody gets a government gold-plated pension. The reality is that people need some mechanism by which to preserve their assets and their wealth. It's an increasingly complex world; therefore, we need to keep up to date with how we protect people as they try to do those kinds of things.

Because it's an increasingly complex world, I fear a little bit that people somewhat tend to just throw up their hands in frustration and, consequently, trust their broker too much. There are too many people that I've run into who just feel like: I don't know all this stuff; whatever they tell me is what I'll do. Yeah, that's an easy way out. But the truth of the matter is that the crooks will take advantage of that in our society.

I guess what I'd like to say is that it's a great bill as far as it goes, but it's sort of after-the-fact protection. I'd also like to see some sort of before-the-fact protection maybe more, and I think maybe the only way for that to happen is through increased investor education and increased investor knowledge. Never trust a dealer. That is my advice to everybody.

I remember years ago I was quite involved, actually, through some family business with some listings on the Vancouver Stock Exchange, and I read a book that I would recommend to everyone for their financial education. I see on the Internet here that it's still available today. It was written by a journalist and is called, *Fleeing the Lamb: The Inside Story of the Vancouver Stock Exchange*, by David Cruise. I would encourage anybody who hasn't read that book to read it. It will increase your knowledge of how the markets work, why they work, who they're for.

The markets are not for the benefit of consumers, I assure you that. The markets are for the benefit, really, of businesses to raise capital. That's why they create shares, so they can sell little, tiny pieces of the company and create capital with which to function. Now, that's a good thing because it allows for business to grow and develop and our economy to develop, but there are risks in it to the consumer. Too many people just aren't willing to be educated well enough to understand the risks and are frustrated by the complexity and just give up on it.

I also want to say that because the modern economy needs a marketplace, we do need to be careful also of the extreme reaction of too much regulation. Businesses will avoid marketplaces that are so regulated that it becomes impossible for them to function. That, to some degree, has happened in the last 15 to 20 years in our North

American equities markets. In many cases the markets have become nothing but exit strategies for insiders and owners. They just want a way to liquefy their assets and turn shares into cash. Then what happens is that some of these publicly traded companies that become viable are taken over, on the other hand, by private equity, so the good investments for the ordinary people are often pulled out of the marketplace.

There's a real need for balance here in terms of regulation and the freedom and the viability of our economy because the reality is that stable, reliable, healthy marketplaces are key to a healthy economy, key to the generation of jobs in a society, key to a middle-class lifestyle. In fact, healthy marketplaces are one of the key metrics by which countries' viabilities are measured. Third-world countries that struggle economically to provide middle-class income for their citizens in many cases don't have viable equity markets, so it's extremely important. Access to capital is necessary to build businesses, innovation, GDP, raise our standard of living, and protect the wealth that we have.

I think it's a great bill. I think we always need to be paying attention to and finding that balance between protection of consumers, protection of industry and of the economy itself and how we move that forward.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any speakers under 29(2)(a)? The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to get a chance to ask some questions around this. I have to agree. I think it's really important that we ensure that all individuals have opportunities to gain greater understanding in terms of financial literacy, investment prudence, and educational support to be able to support themselves, ask critical questions when necessary. Definitely, I think that's one half of it. I think the other half is ensuring that there's recourse if something does happen that is unbecoming to the individual.

I guess the main question I want to ask is around work we're doing in curriculum redesign to make sure that all students have opportunities to have these types of knowledge to be able to care for themselves. Certainly, there are a number of areas that are related, and I think one is financial literacy. When I was on the Edmonton public school board, I was really proud to bring forward a resolution to the Alberta School Boards Association, along with the rest of my board, that this be incorporated into the upcoming curriculum review. That was a number of years ago.

Obviously, it needs to be done, and I think this is an opportunity. I'd be happy to hear if the member opposite would support that through the curriculum redesign, increased opportunities for financial literacy and financial acumen, and what other areas he thinks might relate as the minister engages in that work in supporting all Albertans to prepare for opportunities not only in the world of work but also in the world of investment.

The Acting Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. That's a great question. I actually was going to make a note about it earlier, but I figured I'd keep it limited. I truly think that incorporating some financial literacy into our education curriculum would be very helpful, considering the kind of society we're in. The Education minister, of course, isn't here at the moment, but I'm sure he'll consider that.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, just to remind you about referring to the presence of members in the House.

Mr. Orr: Because he's not here. Right. Sorry. My apologies. I'll stick to the Health minister.

Yeah, I think that incorporating that, especially at the higher grades, the high school level, would be extremely important.

The other thing that I think would be helpful in that regard might be to somehow look at how we, either through regulation or simply asking the industry's self-regulation itself to do that, include a higher or a more extended level of education with customers when they come in and they're looking for something like that. I know a lot of the businesses are working in that direction. But I do think that an increased level of education would be extremely valuable and would protect customers in many cases from making mistakes, not only just from fraudulent issues but even just from making mistakes in the kinds of investments that don't actually benefit them in the long run because that's not really helpful either.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually rising to congratulate the member opposite on his presentation. I think it has been a valuable contribution. My question would actually relate to something he mentioned about the complexity of modern investment vehicles. I know that in this legislation we are referring, or we did in previous legislation, to how the derivative market is working, but there are other novel things going on these days such as the Bitcoin and alternate currencies.

I read a fascinating book a while back. I've forgotten the title of it, but it was about how investment corporations in the United States had actually created a fibre-optic link between Chicago and New York, and they actually had to make sure that there were no curves in the line. They had to keep it as straight as possible because in millionths of seconds they could actually beat the market. I'm just wondering if the member opposite had comments on how the securities market in this province can be protected, I guess, from that sort of manipulation.

5:00

Mr. Orr: Yeah. That's a really interesting subject. The whole evolution of automated trading – and it's actually evolving at a rapid, rapid pace – does hold serious risk for retail investors and maybe even, quite frankly, for the industry as a whole, as we saw with the package real estate market meltdown in 2008 in the U.S. That was a part of the derivative market. So I think there is an ongoing, serious need to monitor it.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see the Member for Calgary-Shaw in the Speaker's chair. It's my privilege to stand and speak to Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. I'm speaking in support of it.

I just wanted to go back to maybe some basics for those that maybe need a quick rundown on exactly what it is that we're talking about. Securities regulation: what it is is the conduct of securities market participants, including issuers, that raise capital through securities offerings, and their directors and officers and securities firms, the directors and officers and employees registered to advise and trade in securities.

Canada does not have federal securities regulation. Regulation falls under provincial jurisdiction, and the provinces are working together through the Canadian Securities Administrators to co-ordinate securities regulation throughout Canada.

Securities regulation in Alberta is the responsibility of the Alberta Securities Commission. The Alberta Securities Commission is an industry-funded provincial corporation that is responsible for ensuring that a fair and efficient capital market exists in Alberta. It also develops and enforces securities regulations, offers information and resources to Albertans about investing, and administers Alberta's Securities Act and regulations.

Regulatory organizations such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada have authority that is delegated by the Alberta Securities Act to make sure that their member firms meet standards set by the province's securities laws. Regulatory organizations are an important part of the enforcement mosaic in Canada. The three key regulatory organizations, as overseen by members of the Canadian Securities Administrators, are the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, the Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada, and the *Chambre de la sécurité financière*. These three organizations concluded 139 enforcement cases in 2015, and that compared to 112 in 2014. In 2015 the Canadian Securities Administrators' members concluded matters that involved 233 individuals and 117 companies, or 350 total respondents.

There are certain securities violations that proceed to prosecution either through an administrative tribunal or a provincial court, depending on the type of violation and the jurisdiction where it occurred.

For those that don't know what the Canadian Securities Administrators is, it is an umbrella organization of Canada's provincial and territorial securities regulators whose objective is to improve, coordinate, and harmonize regulation of the Canadian capital markets.

For those that don't know what the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada is, it is the national regulatory organization that oversees investment dealers and trading activity in debt and equity in the marketplaces of Canada. It also was created in 2008 to consolidate the Investment Dealers Association of Canada and Market Regulation Services Inc., and it sets high-quality regulatory and investment industry standards, protects investors, and strengthens market integrity while maintaining efficient and competitive capital markets. The government delegates authority to these regulatory organizations so that they can provide effective and efficient regulation of the market and market participants.

What this bill sets out to do, other than just some standard updating to ensure that it's in line with international standards, is that it will provide regulatory organizations the same enforcement authorities as the Alberta Securities Commission. It will give regulatory organizations the ability to compel attendance and production of evidence so that they are better able to do their jobs and to protect Alberta investors. It will also protect the people who investigate these cases from liability while carrying out their duties in good faith. This is one of the ways that our government is working to make life better for Albertans, making practical changes that will make sure that Albertans' investments are safe.

To again quote Wanda Morris from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, she said, "I've heard too many heart-wrenching stories of individuals who lost their life savings because they trusted the wrong person: an unscrupulous financial advisor." Unfortunately, sometimes individuals are taken advantage of with a lack of regulation or a lack of scruples. Unfortunately, sometimes these people also lose their lives because of the stress that it causes themselves and their families, which is always quite tragic.

Individual investors and large investors need to know that the investment industry is being regulated properly. The commission currently has statutory powers to compel evidence and attendance

during both the investigation and adjudication phases. However, self-regulatory organizations such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association do not currently have this authority. Alberta will be the first in Canada.

Andrew J. Krieger, president and CEO of Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, says, "We congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Government of Alberta for their leadership in being at the forefront of investor protection in Canada," and that these legislative changes will mean that "Alberta becomes the first province in Canada to provide IIROC with a complete toolkit" that will enable more effective fulfillment of "responsibilities as a public interest regulator and bring wrongdoers to justice."

This actually was quite meaningful to me when it came forward because I actually have had constituents come into my office that have been victims of money schemes, of Ponzi schemes, as a matter of fact. There was a case that involved a person by the name of Wade Robert Closson, who was able to take \$10.8 million away from 125 investors, and none of these people have ever been paid back. The commission found that Closson lied to investors. Instead of investing the money in mortgages, what he did was that he used \$5.6 million of new investor money to pay returns to other investors and \$3.9 million for other projects outside the scope of the investment's purposes and used \$800,000 of that for his own personal use. As a note, he does owe almost all of that money still to investors. The fine that was waged on him was \$1 million, and he does have a permanent ban placed on him on being able to trade.

However, when you have someone in front of you like I had in my office, telling you that they lost their entire life savings to someone like this, they obviously will never feel like it's enough to actually address what happened to them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There's also the really terrible case of someone named Jeremy, or Jay, Peers. There were 11 counts he committed that breached the Alberta Securities Commission, and he was guilty of taking \$80 million of investors' money and causing it to disappear in the practices that he was engaging in. He was fined \$5 million and was sentenced to five years less one day. That decision was upheld by our Alberta Court of Appeal, and it was also upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada.

5:10

So I think it is incredibly important that we continue to move forward with legislation that will ensure that we're looking after Albertans and their hard-earned money because it's not just money, but it's individuals and their families that are trying to make plans for the future. When there are individuals that lack the scruples to be able to actually manage those funds as someone has entrusted them to do, it can end in incredibly tragic consequences for those that are involved.

With that, I will thank the Minister of Finance and look forward to continued support for these amendments. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill?

Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to commend all of the speakers on both sides of the House for their time and attention here today with regard to Bill 13, the Securities

Amendment Act, 2017, that we have been elucidating in the different discussions and different presentations.

As was rightly pointed out, since 2004 governments in Alberta have been yearly bringing forward securities amendment acts to stay abreast of all the evolving changes in securities legislation across the country and in best practices. I think there was only one year that there was a miss in terms of amendments being brought forward, and it was around 2012, when an election intervened and there was not an opportunity to bring a bill forward with that government.

Since the new government has been elected, May 2015, I have three times brought to this House bills that would improve the securities sector in this province and bring greater clarity to the application of the securities laws in this province and give more enforcement teeth, as we are doing at this time with this bill, this amendment. We have also shortened the length of time necessary for people to produce evidence, when they are now compelled to produce evidence in terms of investigations, and other actions have improved that situation for our investigators.

Madam Speaker, the ASC is the overarching regulator in this province, and they have given self-regulatory permission to two SROs that we're dealing with today, IIROC and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association. Now the investigators for those two organizations will be able to have the same sorts of powers that current ASC investigators do and immunity from malicious suits and so be better able to do their jobs without fear of reprisals from those who are doing wrong and want to stymie the progress of investigations.

We have good partners in IIROC and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association. We have great advocates in people like the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, who are fully onside with the actions we're taking here today, and we'll continue to work with our partner jurisdictions throughout the country. Notably, Quebec is taking similar kinds of actions to what we're taking today in this province so that investors can be better protected in that province. I might note that today Quebec had a summary judgment from the Court of Appeal, a decision on a particular part of the securities regime in that province. What I read from that work that they did in terms of going to their courts is that they're in line with Alberta in terms of the independent securities regulator, and they're getting support from their courts to say that the actions they're taking to be independent make a great deal of sense and are in the best interests of investors in that province.

That's why we took the actions we did, Madam Speaker, to make sure that Alberta's unique investment community had an independent regulator who could be closely in touch with and mere feet away from the investment community here instead of thousands of kilometres away in terms of being on Bay Street or in Ottawa. We believe strongly that continuing to have that independent securities commission in our province and the chair and CEO, Stan Magidson, is in the best interests of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, the work we've done today I think will continue to prove well for this province. Continuing to amend the Securities Act is in the best interests of our investment community and the protection of investors here. We are taking actions that will provide immunity for the regulatory organizations that work with the Alberta Securities Commission, and we are taking actions to

compel the production of evidence during investigations and not just during hearings so that the full tool kit is now available for the people who take on the difficult task of trying to unravel sometimes the fraud that goes on with unscrupulous investment personnel.

I just want to quickly say that the vast, vast majority of people who are involved with investments have the utmost high standards in terms of ethicalness and competency. There are from time to time people who take advantage, though, and those people need to be brought to justice as quickly as possible. The actions we're taking today will assist in making that happen so that we have integrity and confidence that when we go to people, when we put our hard-earned money in the hands of other people, they will treat that with the kind of care that we know needs to be taken. It's just like assurance that our monies are in good hands. When they get into wrongdoers' hands, though, those people need to be brought to justice as quickly as possible, as I say. The situations that members here today elaborated on, situations they know about where these negative actions occurred as a result of wrongdoers: those are tragic. We need to be assured that actions are being taken and that organizations like the Mutual Fund Dealers Association and IIROC are able to use the full tool kit available to them.

I would just say that I look forward to standing in this place again soon to bring additional improvements to the Securities Act so that we continue to stay at the forefront. I am the chair at this point in time of all the ministers of the Crown across the provinces who are responsible for securities in their provinces. I am taking great comfort in knowing that there's a great deal of support and that we can be the leaders in this initiative across Canada and that other provinces, once they see what we're doing and see the benefit of the SROs having these additional tool kit functions, will take similar actions or that there'll be consequential actions in their provinces to make that happen.

5:20

I'm also looking forward to being able to find out from those ministers of the Crown responsible for securities in their provinces what other things can be done to improve the investment communities in this province and bring greater integrity and security to the investment sector as a result of actions they're taking that we can take.

I would like to close debate on second reading of Bill 13. Thank you very much for your attention, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In view of momentous events that are going to be occurring this evening and the fact that we made such great progress and wonderful strides today in our legislative agenda, I move that the Assembly now adjourn until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Some Hon. Members: Let's go, Oilers.

The Deputy Speaker: I feel like I don't even have to call the motion. That was so enthusiastic.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 11, 2017

Day 32

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 11, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. As elected representatives we take the weight of our responsibility to our constituents very seriously, and we live by the motto Service above Self. However, let us never lose sight of the importance of self-care. In order to discharge our duties successfully, we must remain healthy.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's hard to come in to work today after what happened last night with the Oilers, but we're here doing it, so we'll do our best today. They made a good run but fell short, unfortunately.

Madam Speaker, I request leave to give third and final reading to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. This bill is aimed at improving how municipalities are empowered to govern, how they work together, and how they are funded. It's about giving Alberta communities the tools they need to deliver services and improve the lives of Albertans.

Madam Speaker, this bill has been a long time in the making. I'm proud of its contents and the effort that has gone into its development. I would like to thank the many Albertans who took time to provide input and ideas for this very important piece of legislation. I would also like to thank the members of this Assembly for reviewing these amendments to the MGA. Your consideration was thoughtful, and it was great to hear about all the municipalities in all of your constituencies. I would also like to thank the department for its efforts. I know there were countless hours and plenty of thought that went into developing this final piece of legislation.

Well, let me recap. In the summer of 2016 Municipal Affairs toured the province to talk to Albertans about the Modernized Municipal Government Act, or Bill 21. Last session 21 consultations were held in 20 communities across Alberta. Albertans gave us great feedback on Bill 21, and they also shared new ideas for how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities. Municipal Affairs ran with these ideas and released a discussion guide to put them past the rest of the province. The document was posted online during November, December, and January, and Albertans were asked to review it and provide input via an online questionnaire.

Municipal Affairs received more than 1,100 responses to the online survey and more than 35 official submissions. Albertans know better than anybody else how to improve their communities. We heard strong support for nearly every policy proposal, so these ideas from Albertans form the foundation of An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. This bill provides municipalities with more

tools to continue to build strong communities and to make the lives of Albertans better every day.

Madam Speaker, some of the substantive changes we're making include taking steps to live up to Alberta's commitment to the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We heard indigenous communities express interest in building these better partnerships with neighbouring communities. Albertans are neighbourly, and speaking to your neighbours about changes you plan to make in your backyard is the right thing to do. That's why we're making three key changes to strengthen the relationship between municipalities and neighbouring First Nations and Métis settlements.

First, we're clarifying that municipalities may invite neighbouring indigenous communities to participate in regional servicing opportunities. Second, we're clarifying that municipalities are authorized to enter into formal legal agreements with First Nations and Métis settlements. Third, we're requiring municipalities to notify First Nations and Métis settlements of new municipal development plans and area structure plans where there is a shared border. This change will make Alberta a leader in Canada. We believe that it will support stronger relationships between municipalities and First Nations and Métis settlements, and I'm very proud of the work we've done to date.

Our government also vowed to make governance more family friendly and more open to people starting families. This bill would enable municipalities to create parental leave bylaws so that councillors may be allowed to take leave prior to or after the birth or adoption of a child. The decision on whether to adopt a parental leave bylaw and the specific content of the bylaw will be left to each municipality based on its needs.

Our elected officials need to better reflect the communities they serve, including young people, new families, and women. Half of Alberta's population are women, but right now in Alberta women only make up 26 per cent of municipal councillors, and 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on council. As our Premier has said, "We know gender parity is possible. We have done it in our government. It's time to make similar gains at the local and school board levels."

The Minister of Service Alberta, a champion for the Ready for Her campaign and the women of Alberta, also said it well.

Our city halls and school boards should reflect the communities they serve, and that means electing more women. When women run for office in Alberta, they win as often as men. I'm encouraging more women to run because when Albertans are truly represented, that's progress for all of us.

I want to thank the minister for her fine work in that regard.

I also want to repeat the words of Councillor Bev Esslinger, who was instrumental in bringing this idea forward and has already started discussion at the city of Edmonton for what their policy will look like. Councillor Esslinger said of this bill:

It's great to see this change. This is not just about women, this is about families. There are so many bright, talented individuals out there and having a child should not be reason to hold any of them back from becoming a municipal leader.

I was happy to hear all the support for this policy in this House, and I appreciate all the comments and stories that were shared with this Assembly about how parental leave policies would make life better for Alberta families.

Another way we would do this through this bill, Madam Speaker, is the amendments to give local governments more tools to build complete and sustainable communities. An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government will enable municipalities to share intermunicipal off-site levies for libraries, police stations, fire halls, and community recreation centres. This change will also make

Alberta a leader in Canada and is another way that our changes to the MGA are supporting municipal collaboration.

One of the themes of the MGA review has been collaboration between municipalities, their neighbours, and other local authorities, including school boards. This bill would add a section to the MGA that indicates municipalities must enter into joint-use and planning agreements with school boards within their boundaries. These agreements would support effective and efficient use of municipal and school reserves by discussing matters related to planning, development, and use of reserves; transfers of reserve land; disposal of school sites; servicing of school sites; the use of school facilities, municipal facilities, and playing fields, including maintenance, liabilities, and fees; how they will work together; how they will resolve issues; and the establishment of a time frame for regular review of the agreement.

This bill has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from Alberta's school boards. As Mary Martin, president of the Alberta School Boards Association has said:

[This] government has heard our concerns and acted on them – in particular, introducing mandatory joint use and planning agreements. It benefits Alberta families and communities when municipalities and school boards work together on integrated long-term planning for school sites and facilities. Further clarifying exemptions for off-site levies is also good news for school boards, because it means more dollars remain in our classrooms.

We also heard great feedback from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, AUMA, whose words of support highlight the shift to collaboration for the MGA.

Collaboration ensures strong communities and increased quality of life for Albertans. Local governments can advance cost-effective regional approaches for infrastructure and service delivery through new tools such as inter-municipal off-site levies and greater use of joint use agreements with school boards.

I also want to highlight feedback from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, whose president, Al Kemmere, reiterates how robust the consultation and collaboration has been during the MGA review. "Through the MGA review process, AAMDC has been grateful to have been at the table. This journey has been open, inclusionary and fair . . . and we are proud to have been part of it."

Madam Speaker, I'm also proud to have been a part of the immense amount of work to update the MGA in a transparent and collaborative way. As Ken Kobly, president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, said so well, "The MGA review is the gold standard for government consultation." We will continue this approach as we work with the key stakeholder groups to develop draft regulations, all of which will be posted online for 60 days so that everyone can see and give feedback on the specific proposed policies.

I appreciate all the feedback from members on the ongoing work of the MGA review, and I want to thank all the members of this Assembly for their many contributions to this important conversation and for their thoughtful consideration. It has been a collaborative process, a long process.

I want to say, Madam Speaker, that I'm extremely proud of the staff of Municipal Affairs for the amount of work they've done on this. It's been, as I said, years coming. They have put in countless hours to make sure that they've listened to feedback from Albertans all across the province. I've heard overwhelmingly positive comments from many municipal councillors, and I'm looking forward to a lot of these things coming to fruition. I know we have some work to do on our regulations once they come out, and I'm looking forward to hearing more feedback once those are posted online. I think it's been an interesting process.

9:10

I feel that the MGA is one of the most interesting pieces of legislation that we've had out there because it touches the lives of every Albertan. You know, it's something that I think we can all be proud of because we've all worked on it together. I'm looking forward to more information coming in from throughout the province, as I said, and getting around the province this summer to municipal councils out there to hear more from them on the ground, what's going on and what they think could be improved or changed or what they like with the MGA and the regulations.

I really appreciate all the work that's been done and everybody in here for all their comments.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move that this bill be read a third and final time. Third time is the charm.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Any other speakers to the bill in third reading? Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I haven't had an opportunity to get up and speak to this bill yet, so I thought I would mention some things that I thought were important while I had the opportunity. I'm from Calgary, one of the larger municipalities in the province. I think there are three parts of this bill that I really want to touch on, three amendments that I think are really important and are going to make some crucial changes to how municipalities operate in Alberta. The first is the issue of parental leave and allowing parental leave for city councillors. I know it's something that many members of this caucus have spoken to because many members of this caucus have had the experience of having children while in office or having small children or being part of a family.

Now, while I don't get the distinction of having had a baby while elected, I did campaign in 2012 while I was three months pregnant, and I really don't recommend that to anybody. When you're three months pregnant, you're not allowed to tell anyone that you're pregnant. Also, you feel exhausted and are nauseous all the time. So, you know, it's not something that I would necessarily recommend. Then again in 2015 I campaigned while I had a three-year-old and an eight-month-old, and in the ensuing two years my eight-month-old has turned into a nearly three-year-old, so I've really had the opportunity to experience all of what it means to have children while being in office.

Subsequently, I have been super impressed with the Ask Her campaign that's been going on in Calgary to get more women involved in municipal politics because, really, we don't have enough women involved in municipal politics. The numbers have been thrown around several times. There are only 23 per cent of municipal councillors who are women. The Ask Her campaign has been very successful. We have women running, I think, in almost all of the wards in Calgary now – I know in my ward there are at least three women running, which is wonderful – women from indigenous backgrounds, women from African-Caribbean backgrounds, women from Muslim backgrounds, women from, really, all walks of life.

Many of them have come to talk to me, and they've said: "I need to talk to you because I have kids, and I am about to do this. I am worried that it will be really difficult. I don't know how you're doing it." When I speak with these women, I try not to scare them too much, because it is hard. It's challenging. You have to have really supportive partners. You have to have access to good-quality child care. You have to have access to flexible child care. This amendment is going to make it that much easier when I talk to women about running to say: "Hey. It is possible now for you to

push for parental leave for municipal councillors.” So I think it’ll make a really big difference.

Why is it exactly that we want more women in politics? We want more women in politics because all sorts of research has shown that more women in politics leads to more equitable societies. Women have a tendency to focus on issues that matter to them. They focus on issues like child care, reproductive rights, education, women’s health.

When I was on the family-friendly subcommittee, when we were trying to come up with changes to how we could make this House more family friendly, I heard from other members of the committee: you know, we should have gotten around to this, but we didn’t ever really have to. The thing is that when women are involved in the political process, we get around to things. We get around to things that should have been done for hundreds of years, and men didn’t do them for hundreds of years. That’s why it’s important to have women involved in politics.

Women have been shown to govern differently. They have a tendency to be even more collaborative, less aggressive, more likely to emphasize consensus building, which I think we can all agree is a good thing. There are also at least two peer-reviewed studies that have shown a significant correlation between a higher proportion of women in government and lower levels of corruption, so I think that’s probably a good thing, too.

I am really impressed with this amendment, that allows municipalities to create parental leave and to create parental leave that works for them so that we are allowing them to do it but also allowing them to come up with what works for them themselves.

I do also want to talk about the amendments with regard to school boards. I think it’s valuable to note at this point that the Calgary board of education is actually 100 per cent women, which is a wonderful and interesting thing. They’re wonderful women, whom I get to work with on a very regular basis. They come to talk to me about all manners of things. The Calgary Catholic school board also has a majority of women. I know that both of these boards recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the city of Calgary to allow more flexibility for how the city uses school reserve sites. The mayor of Calgary was quoted as saying that he was really excited about the possibility of having a firehouse and a school together on the same site. I’m not sure that that’s something that will necessarily happen, but the fact that we are requiring these joint-use agreements could lead to any manner of very exciting development.

Schools really are community hubs. They’re places in the community that people come to, where people gather. If we can include more services that are required by the community in those schools, we’re all going to benefit. You could have child care centres in schools. You could have libraries in schools. You could have daycares in schools. You could have other varieties of recreation facilities.

For example, not in my riding but in the Member for Calgary-Cross’s riding we have Village Square Leisure Centre, which was built right next to a high school, so the high school is able to use all of the facilities at the Village Square Leisure Centre for their physical education classes. Also, there’s a library in there. There are, you know, cafés and other public-use areas. It’s really become a hub for that community. People from all over the northeast of Calgary go to Village Square Leisure Centre to partake in all of the services that are available there. That’s really an example of what we can do when we plan for communities when we’re planning schools as opposed to just building a school and nothing else associated with it.

The other part that I’m excited about, the other amendment, is to include environmental well-being as a municipal purpose. Again, when I used to talk to my students about water and how we use

water, because that’s part of the grade 8 curriculum, we always talked about: when planning for the future and looking at the water that we have available, who are the groups that need to use that water, and how are we going to plan for using it into the future? The students always, very rightly, brought up that although people and industry are very important and need to use the water, the environment needs that water, too. The environment needs that water to be self-sustaining and to allow a functioning ecosystem.

So including environmental well-being as a municipal purpose, I think, is really important, especially given that many of our cities in Alberta are river cities. Calgary is a river city. Edmonton is a river city. Lethbridge is a river city. There are lots of cities that have rivers running through them. [interjection] Sorry? Lots of them have rivers running through them. Really, the river is the centre of our communities. So including environmental well-being helps to really foster that sense of care that we need to have.

It’s been shown that spending time outside has proven to have, you know, clear mental health benefits. If you spend just 20 minutes or half an hour outside, even in an urban park, every day, it can really clear your head, help you to think more clearly, reduce depression. There’s research that shows this. I think maybe all of us in the House might benefit from getting outside a little bit more often, spending time in nature.

In Calgary we’re very fortunate to have many wonderful parks. Just this last Saturday was really the first truly beautiful day of the year. As Albertans we all really appreciate that first day where you can get outside and sit in the sun. My kids and I went down to Prince’s Island park and threw rocks in the water and looked at the goslings and, you know, got into an argument with some people about religion. It was a good day. We had a really good day. Because Calgary has really prioritized the ability to have those public parks so that even within a large public park you have the opportunity within the city to get outside, and I think that’s really important.

9:20

Those are really the three things I wanted to touch on. I’m obviously also very excited about the work for collaboration with indigenous communities. There are many First Nations communities just outside the city of Calgary who I know will appreciate the amendments in this piece of legislation that are really focusing on our commitment to the rights of indigenous peoples and to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

There are a lot of good things in this bill, Madam Speaker. I thank the minister for bringing it forward, and I look forward to its passage. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Other speakers to the bill? Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. I am in full support of each of the proposed amendments, particularly the parental leave amendment. Fellow members, the most recent Canadian statistical data available regarding women supports that women comprise 48.9 per cent of our Albertan population. Parity in many respects is an endeavour that supports fair representation. The impact of policy and legislation should denote a similar representation.

When the Municipal Government Act review was conducted last year, 21 sessions provided a broad scope of feedback that resonates throughout each community. My community of Red Deer was one of the participants, and what emanated was the immense pride that Albertans have for their community as well as its governance. Speaking to our MGA, the impacts also reflect how our municipal

governance is comprised and how it interacts with the diversity of our communities. Static governance cannot reflect the dynamics of our ever-evolving province, and I am glad that I belong to a government that recognizes that change is inevitable and that policies require flexibility. Madam Speaker, we must be adaptable and resilient in order to sustain the impact of change.

Fellow members, my opening statement supported the specifics of the parental leave amendment. I speak to this because it enables and encourages the empowerment of women to participate, without repercussion, in municipal councils and various other municipal boards, with an impact that supports the demographics of our province. It is my belief that elected councils need to better reflect the communities they serve. It hones in on making political life more accessible for Albertan women and their families. Currently the population of women involved within municipal councils, sadly, encompasses a mere 26 per cent.

It is no surprise to the House that I wish to encompass my great city as a superb example of how the participation of women in the political and policy-making forum can be executed. Currently Her Worship Tara Veer is the mayor of Alberta's third-largest city. Her career has supported three terms as a city councillor, with transition into mayor, and is an excellent example of how women can sustain great momentum in the municipal forum. I wish to speak about our former mayor, Gail Surkan, who held office as mayor for three terms as well. In fact, her participation inspired Tara Veer, and this is specifically one of the changes that our MGA amendments serve to achieve.

My city of Red Deer is rich in contributions from women within the municipal arena. Within the team of city councillors 3 of 7 are women. Lynne Mulder has served four terms as councillor, Dianne Wyntjes is in her second term, and Tanya Handley has her first term almost under her belt. What does this mean to our municipality? Madam Speaker, I'd like to say that considering the needs of our city, our dream teams are bringing projects to fruition and accomplishing what needs to be done.

Recently the announcement of the Red Deer regional justice centre shed light on this momentum. I wish to thank the members for Calgary-Buffalo, Edmonton-Strathcona, Red Deer-South, and myself along with Mayor Veer, who were dubbed the Get 'Er Done Girls. No disrespect to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, but thanks nonetheless.

Women bring a perspective that is prevalent in all facets of our political spectrum. Currently our education boards also support a strong female presence. Why? Because we recognize the importance of their input and invaluable feedback. We cannot be stifled by conventional views if we are going to participate in global matters. Red Deer's public school board also has 3 female members out of 7. It's chaired by Bev Manning, vice-chaired by Cathy Peacocke, with Dianne Macaulay as trustee. We commend the diversity of participation that allows the vision and mission guiding our future Albertans' education.

Similarly, the Red Deer Catholic school board engages 3 women participants of 7: Anne Marie Watson as vice-chair, Diane MacKay as trustee, and Adriana LaGrange as trustee as well as president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association. These women inspire progress and change while balancing priorities because they are passionate about our future and direction.

Bev Hanes, the president of our Red Deer Royal Canadian Legion, is also an outstanding individual who contributes at a municipal level. Having participated as a director and chair, her presence as president is unprecedented. And I'm not going to repeat that.

Broadening the scope of our municipal governance paves the way to sustainability as well as adaptability. While division is historically prevalent in many aspects of our global society, our

ability to implement change must be met with the open-mindedness that allows for growth as well as progress.

Madam Speaker, engaging opportunity for parity provides for well-rounded approaches and solutions and engages the diversity and mental mapping that embraces a stronger model that paves the way to future endeavours. Achievement is measured on cohesion. As a female elected official I fully support the amendments and move to a global progression.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect if there are any questions or comments.

Seeing none, I'll recognize Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to support Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, and I would like to give my utmost respect and appreciation to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and also his staff, that worked tirelessly to make this bill happen. Thank you. I know how much work goes into a bill.

There are many great amendments to this bill to make lives for Albertans easier, but I would like to bring attention to the parental leave amendment and give a shout-out to Lisa Holmes, who is the president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. She was a huge supporter of this amendment, and I would just like to quote her right now.

Collaboration ensures strong communities and increased quality of life for Albertans. Local governments can advance cost-effective regional approaches for infrastructure and service delivery through new tools such as inter-municipal off-site levies and greater use of joint use agreements with school boards. We appreciate that the province adjusted many of its initial approaches for the bill [in order] to ensure the provisions are more practical for municipalities.

Another supporter of adding parental leave to the MGA is Bev Esslinger, Edmonton city councillor. She states:

It's great to see this change. This is not just about women, this is about families. There are so many bright, talented individuals out there and having a child should not be a reason to hold any of them back from becoming a municipal leader.

9:30

Madam Speaker, I am a woman in my child-bearing years – that kind of scares me saying that – and after the next three or more terms I will still be in my child-bearing years, so it's comforting to know that if I decide to run in municipal politics and I could bring my expertise that I learned from this House, I could do it because of this policy. I feel this way because when I look at Calgary's city council, there are only two women sitting on the 14 seats available. That is only 14 per cent, and I find that concerning considering the fact that 50 per cent of Calgary's population is female.

Another concerning fact is that half of Alberta's population is women but that right now in Alberta women only make up 26 per cent of municipal councillors and 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on them. By adding parental leave to the MGA, it will remove this barrier for women trying to enter municipal politics, and I'm happy to see that our government wants to encourage young women to get involved so that their voices can be heard. Something I speak often about when I talk to constituents in my office and at the doors is that I'm proud that our government is taking women's issues as a priority. This is a change as this kind of discourse was not present with the previous government. I applaud this amendment.

Another amendment that I would like to talk about is our government's commitment to building new schools to serve our

young and growing province and to protecting and improving education for Alberta's students. The education of our children is incredibly important to the well-being and prosperity of our communities, and schools are at the heart of our neighbourhoods. We listened to municipalities and school boards that we can do better in how school sites are planned and serviced for communities, so this bill proposes joint-use and planning agreements to work together on integrated long-term planning for school sites and facilities. This will benefit students, families, and all communities, including the riding of Calgary-Bow.

Back in April I was pleased to attend the grand opening of the West Ridge middle school in the community of West Springs. As government one of our top priorities is seeing school constructions like West Ridge middle school completed quickly and efficiently. An incredible amount of hard work and dedication went into the development of this school. Between the parents and community at large, the Calgary board of education, and contractors, everyone involved can take great pride in its completion. By building that school, we ensure that all of our students receive an education that prepares them for success.

More than 60 new schools and modernization projects opened last year while 26 more projects province-wide will be announced for this year. Another investment that our government provided was for the much-needed modernization of Bowness high school. We all know that projects like these are creating good jobs and protecting and improving the things like education that Albertans and my constituents count on.

Speaking of modernization, Madam Speaker, our government is delivering on its promise to modernize the Municipal Government Act. The amendments that were made were from Albertans to serve Albertans to make lives better for Albertans. It's just one more way that our government is improving the lives of Albertan families.

With that, I would like to end my comments and ask everyone here to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, other speakers to the bill? Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Like the others who've spoken before me today, I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for really championing this bill. I want to thank in particular Melinda and Keith on his staff for the work that they have done supporting me and the other cosponsor for this bill.

Now I want to talk about a couple of things within the bill, and the first piece that I'll talk about is collaboration. I want to give kudos to my city of Lethbridge for the effort that they make and they have made since 1959 to collaborate on so many different things, collaboration with our county in the municipal development plans and area structure plans and for reaching out to the Blackfoot Confederacy as they border our city. In terms of any of the new things that are going on in the city, the schools, the whole issue of sharing facilities with schools: just amazing in my city. Absolutely. Kudos to the city, to the council, and to the mayor for doing those things.

The next piece that I'm going to talk about, obviously, is the parental issue, and I want to talk about that totally from my perspective. I was a single parent, as I've said many times in this Legislature. I've certainly met throughout my years with many, many other single parents who couldn't even think about participating in politics even though they had the ability to do so. They certainly had the passion to do so, and they had input that would have been fabulous for their municipal councils; however, they were single parents and they had children, and this didn't allow

for them to do that. I see many men in this Legislature who probably have children and are here because their wives or their partners are at home looking after their children.

Women have a huge impact in our society, an impact that's rarely acknowledged and appreciated for just how important it is. That same perspective of being a mother and looking after your children, balancing the bank book, cooking meals, doing a menu week in and week out, getting the laundry done: all of those things really show the ability for women to multitask and the ability to be organized and provide input. We have a depth of knowledge of families and communities that is rarely tapped.

To have this amendment in this act to me really speaks of a progressive, forward-thinking bill that engages all of our community. So thank you again to the minister and the staff for including that in this amendment. Because I've spoken to this bill before, I'm not going to say much more. I just want to say how pleased I have been to be a part of this.

I guess one thing to go back to is the indigenous communities. Somebody had said to me: well, they're not compelled to engage in that conversation. No, they're not, and neither is your neighbour when you're building a fence or anything else. But the neighbourly thing to do is to tell them what you're doing and to ask if they have any concerns about that, and that's what this bill does. You are required to notify them of what your plans are within your community. To me, that opens the door to a much better collaboration in the future. Certainly, I think that if I'm talking to my neighbour, it increases the level of trust that I have with my neighbours when we collaborate and talk about what we're doing within our own neighbourhood.

With that, I'm going to say please support this bill. Thank you very much.

9:40

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really proud that our government is delivering on its promise to modernize the Municipal Government Act in time for the municipal elections this coming fall. It gives municipalities practical tools and resources to support strong and sustainable communities and a more resilient and diversified economy for all Albertan families. As we know, in our rural constituencies it is incredibly important that we are diversified, that we are resilient, and that we are bringing these investments to our communities. We're making life better for Albertans by listening to their ideas, enhancing community collaboration, and removing barriers to municipal leadership. We will continue to work collaboratively with municipalities.

Our government is committed to open and accessible consultation with Albertans on the Modernized Municipal Government Act, and we took the time to do it right. Last summer we held 21 sessions as government across the province to hear directly from Albertans about what matters for each and every one of their communities. There are so many people across Alberta who care about their communities, and we heard from those people how our government can make practical changes to make their lives and communities better. I attended one of those sessions in Hinton, and I was very encouraged by the conversations I heard and was engaged in with many municipal leaders from many communities. Many of them had travelled a very long way to be there.

There were 40 additional amendments in the Modernized Municipal Government Act last fall before it was passed. What we've heard are things that we're bringing forth in this amendment. They're new ideas on how we can support those sustainable and

collaborative communities. We heard strong support for nearly every policy proposal. One of the key focuses of the MGA's modernization is municipal collaboration because we believe that all Albertans benefit when municipalities are good neighbours and they work together to provide services and strengthen the economy.

Madam Speaker, I'm lucky enough to live in what we call the trimunicipal area. The trimunicipal area is Parkland county, Stony Plain, and the city of Spruce Grove. When we have our communities in silos, everybody can make something good. We can have a small rec centre in each community. We can have decent infrastructure in each community. But when our communities get together, as they do in the trimunicipal area very often, we can provide something great for all of our citizens. Parkland county, in particular, extends collaborative agreements within their borders as well as beyond their borders. For example, they have a number of agreements with the town of Devon for things like fire services.

Over the last year we heard from leaders in many First Nations and Métis settlements that they want to see better relationships with their neighbouring municipalities. These amendments would require that municipalities give First Nations and Métis settlements the same notification and opportunity to comment on statutory plans that is provided to all other adjacent municipalities. It would set a Canadian precedent to build a stronger relationship between municipalities, First Nations, and Métis settlements. We are empowering municipalities to enter into agreements with indigenous communities. It's a small but significant step to strengthen relationships between indigenous communities and municipalities farther.

Our province is committed to implementing the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, and as such it's important to encourage the province's municipalities to continue to take meaningful and reasonable steps to understand and engage with neighbouring indigenous communities and citizens in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner, particularly in respect to land-use planning and service delivery. I know that the indigenous leaders in my region – namely, the Enoch Cree Nation and Paul First Nation – appreciate the collaborative approach we're taking now and ensuring into the future.

Madam Speaker, by making political life more accessible for women and Albertans with young families and by making amendments that would enable councils to make parental leave bylaws for councillors, our elected councils will better reflect the communities they serve, including young people, new families, and women. With the new census numbers released, we know that in the town of Stony Plain there are approximately 500 more females in the community than males, and the average age of a resident in Stony Plain is 39.4 years old. I'm not sure where the .4 comes from. And 19.3 per cent of the population is aged zero to 14, which is higher than in any other region in Alberta, which means that having parents of this large portion of our population be engaged is even more important.

Half of the population in Alberta are women, but right now they only make up 26 per cent of municipal councillors, and 23 per cent of municipalities in this province do not have a single woman on council. Today in our House we have 33 per cent women, and 97 per cent of those sit on the government side. Of course, I'm incredibly proud to see the number of women that surround me. But it's not the case even here in Canada, if we speak on a provincial or national level, because only four out of our 13 jurisdictions have achieved the minimum 30 per cent participation of women as outlined in the 2011 UN resolution on women's political participation.

Madam Speaker, I am a huge believer in using all the tools available to achieve a successful result. There is substantial

evidence that the collective intelligence of a group is significantly increased when there are more women as part of said group. Studies from MIT and Carnegie Mellon, among others, point to some diversity being good, more women being important, and to encourage this is imperative. In this way, supporting women may be a tool in the tool box to encourage participation of all marginalized groups, but it cannot be the only tool. It doesn't accomplish enough. Today less than 19 per cent of legislators world-wide are women, so there's still much to do to involve all voices in our province, in our municipalities, and globally, of course.

Madam Speaker, one of the things I'm most excited about seeing in this Municipal Government Act is the commitment to building schools to serve our young and growing province and protecting and improving education for all Albertan students. Mandatory joint-use and planning agreements will be required between municipalities and school boards through amendments to the MGA and the School Act. That will require all municipalities to have these agreements with the school boards operating within their borders and to consider establishing a process for discussing matters relating to the planning, development, and use of school sites on municipal reserves, school reserves, and municipal and school reserves in the municipality; transfers of municipal reserves, school reserves, and municipal and school reserves in the municipality; disposal of school sites; and the servicing of school sites on municipal reserves.

It's so important that we see the education of our children as being one of those most important things that we can do as a province and as municipalities. It helps with the well-being and the prosperity of everybody in our community to have a good educational system, and our schools are the hearts of those neighbourhoods.

There is a higher percentage of children in the town of Stony Plain, as I mentioned, at 19.3 per cent, than in the region – that is the No. 11 census division, including Edmonton and surrounding areas – which sits at 18.5 per cent of the population. Stony Plain also has a higher percentage of children aged zero to 14 than the population of Alberta, which sits at 19.2 per cent, or even Canada itself. Nationally we sit at 16.6 per cent. So we are a growing community, and we are a young community.

One of the things that I'm really proud that our government has stood up and made a difference on in our municipalities and our school boards is how we can do better on school sites being planned and serviced. In the city of Spruce Grove, in Parkland school division, the Minister of Education has funded a bus transfer station, which is in a planned new school, which will help all of our children from the west end of our region come into these more urban places so that we don't have so many buses on the road. It's working because working regionally is so important to all of us.

You know, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government is designed to make life better for Albertans no matter where they live, whether they live in our cities, whether they live in our towns, or whether they live in rural Alberta. Madam Speaker, I would encourage every member in this House to vote for this bill.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

9:50

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

Seeing none, other speakers to the bill? I will recognize Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my unexpected privilege to rise in the House today to speak at third reading of Bill 8. It's always a pleasure to speak to municipal governance. I guess,

before getting into the meat of my comments, I'd just like to thank, of course – I think I've mentioned this on other occasions before. Municipal Affairs is an amazing ministry, with dedicated and very astute individuals within it. This process wouldn't have had the kind of traction it did without the co-operation and buy-in from our municipal partners from across the entire province.

As the members might be aware, I had the opportunity to attend four of the consultation sessions over the last summer: in Two Hills, in Lac La Biche, in Athabasca, and in Rocky Mountain House. They were all very well attended, and the people that came to them came briefed, came with kind of reasoned opinions on it and with a willingness to discuss them. But it also goes beyond elected officials.

Of course, this is the second bill with amendments to the Municipal Government Act that we passed. The first one actually went over two separate sessions. This has been an ongoing topic of discussion within municipal circles for, you know, quite a bit of time now, I guess, even if you add to that that the beginning of the consultative process, of course, happened before we ever became government. So this is an iterative process that's been going over years, and there's been continued engagement, like I said, not just from elected officials. Some of the most astute commentaries that I'd heard actually came from CAOs, from people doing assessments, and from people generally involved with municipal government in all sorts of different ways. If they hadn't been forward in their comments, I don't think that we would have been able to come up with such an excellent, balanced approach to reform.

It's kind of a real special honour to be involved in this type of legislation because it kind of speaks to the most important technology we actually have. I think that's something that we need to take time to kind of reflect on and to recognize from time to time, just how fortunate we are to be in a place like this and that this is the way that we settle disagreements, that we work out how to share power equitably between people. It's absolutely critical to civilized life, to the point of the very definition. You know, when we say "civilized," we're talking civil, we're talking civic, and we're talking city, right? So we're talking about, you know, municipal affairs.

Now, this has always been a real challenge to be able to get right, the balance between centralized authority and local autonomy. I mean, there have been philosophers in the past that have made the argument that without sufficient centralized authority, you actually can't even have morals. I think one of the hon. members on the other side referred to Thomas Hobbes, and I know that we had one of our members bring up Hobbes as well.

The famous quote by Hobbes about life and nature refers to what happens when you don't have adequate centralized authority. I'll read the quote in its entirety.

During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man . . .

To this war of every man against every man this also is consequent, that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues . . .

No arts, no letters, no society, and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

That's that famous quote within its context.

When we're talking about the balance between centralized authority and local autonomy, we're talking about fundamental tensions that go to the beginning of civilization itself, and in fact

these are the types of arrangements that developed in time when we started living in cities. In fact, the very definition of politics itself, the root of "politics," is the Greek word for city, "polis." That's where these technologies developed over time, how to be able to balance out between the common person and the king, between the Senate and the proletariat, and on we go.

What has been found through trial and error, essentially, over the centuries is that, really, too much on the one side is a bad thing. If you go with too much autonomy, you end up with anarchy and all the miseries that are attendant there. However, if you go too far the other way, to too much of a centralized authority, then you kill any ability to progress. You create huge inefficiencies, and you create, of course, autocracy, tyranny, and oppression. How do you strike that balance?

Now, the very meaning of the word "municipal" comes from earlier attempts at striking that balance. Whereas "polis" is Greek for city, "munia" is Latin. That comes from a Latin origin. "Municipal" is pertaining to citizens of a free city within the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, where they were Roman citizens, but they could govern their own local affairs with their own laws. That's where you had this balance between, you know, the centralized authority and local autonomy. That's kind of the very base of where the concepts of municipal politics, municipal affairs come from.

Like I said, this is something that has been a tension ongoing for, well, as long as we've been around. I guess I could also refer to maybe another earlier philosopher than Hobbes, and that, of course, would be Plato, who wrote, you know, one of the foundational books of western philosophy, *The Republic*. It's about: what does it take to govern a city wisely? What does it mean to be a good person in that type of city? Aristotle, after Plato, talks about how it is impossible to have a good life as a human being without being embedded in a well-functioning society. It's just something that you can't do. We are talking about, as I said, pretty important stuff.

10:00

As I think I've mentioned before, there are a lot of decision points going through this bill, and I think the overarching thing is kind of where they fall on that spectrum between authority and autonomy. I think that we've used a really deft hand with the use of that authority, and I think that the whole ICF process – I guess we'll see how that unfolds as time goes on – is kind of an example of that, where we're saying as the province: "You have to sit down and talk to your neighbours and work things out. However, we are going to leave it up to your discretion how to do that. Now, if in the end your discussion isn't in good faith or you just end up with irreconcilable differences so that after two years you're just not going anywhere, then we'll step in and help bring that agreement. But we respect your autonomy to the point that we'll give you that opportunity to work it out yourself."

With Bill 8 I'm very happy to see that that potential or that option is now extended to working with indigenous communities as well. Now, of course, it would be mandatory for municipalities, you know, if they have developments that can directly impact these communities, to contact them. I'm surprised, quite frankly, that that hasn't been there all along. This option for municipalities to sit down and talk with indigenous communities about that shared interest: I'm very happy to see that in there and hope to see that kind of take fire.

I know that there are some good examples of that happening within our own area. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and I attend what are called joint municipalities meetings in Smoky Lake county. I've been told that this isn't unique, but I'm not sure who else does this. Is it every three or four months? I think

it's three months. Every three months the county of Smoky Lake has a meeting with all the municipalities within the county as well as representatives from the police, representatives from the school board, and you get presentations from community groups, and they invite both of the MLAs that represent the ridings.

It's a very interesting experience, as I know my colleague would probably agree. It's never dull, and sometimes it can get pretty heated. Very tough questions sometimes get asked, and sometimes people aren't very happy with each other during that meeting. The key point here is that they're still talking to each other. As long as people are talking to each other, there are other things that they're not doing to each other. I think that it is just so absolutely important to keep people at the same table.

It's kind of funny. I mean, it's been a couple of years that I've been going to these meetings, and you can start to see some of the patterns of, you know, relationships between people at the table. You can see that there are a few, I guess, sort of frenemy relationships, but you can also see that some people don't reach their rhetorical best without having these frenemies there to help goad them into flights of eloquence, let's just say.

Now, why am I going off on that a little bit? It's because I think it would be really wonderful to have more opportunities where representatives of indigenous communities and the surrounding municipalities would get the opportunity to forge those types of relationships, you know, sort of honest, open, forthright, and happening enough over time so that people come to respect the qualities on each side and then build a way forward for effective, lasting partnerships. That is what the government is really looking for between municipalities and indigenous communities and, of course, between municipalities and the federal government as well. I think that this extension of options for ICF for indigenous communities speaks well to that.

Now, just going on to the next sort of major set of amendments, around parental leave, many of my colleagues I think have made pretty excellent points on why that's so important. I know that I myself have risen before to talk about just the absolute necessity of diversity for good decision-making. I just want to make this small point. Of course, when we're talking about municipalities being empowered to develop parental leave, I know that the focus has been on women, but I do want to, you know, maybe remind our male colleagues that, of course, this can apply to us as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was really interested in the comments of the member from Redwater and surrounding area. He touched a number of times on the theme of collaboration. That's one thing that I think this government can be proud of as the major theme of our government throughout the ministries. Whether it be Economic Development, Health, Treasury Board and Finance, we're all looking for ways to make sure that government departments and agencies aren't siloed.

I know that one of the ways that I saw evidence of this in a beneficial way was even before I was elected, and I wanted to know if it is something that is continuing in the member's riding. One of the last homes I sold was in Ryley, and I, of course, wanted to familiarize myself with what school opportunities there were for families who might be buying that house. I discovered that there was collaboration between neighbouring school boards wherein there were smaller class sizes or smaller populations of certain age groups in one community versus another, so they gathered together the groups of students into classroom sizes and decided where certain grades would best be offered in a community. One

community would offer grades 3 to 6, and another one would be, you know, 6 to 9. It kept people in their communities and with shorter busing distances. I thought it was a great example of a collaborative effort that was not really formalized. I think these amendments go a long way to formalizing that type of collaborative effort.

I'm wondering if in his community the member has been able to identify new areas of collaboration that he thinks this effort will benefit and what relationships, as he alluded to, may be formed as a result of meetings between communities, if the formalization of this collaborative effort in the MGA amendments will lead to new interconnections and opportunities to share services and regionalize the benefits of those spread-out services, and what examples he might see where he would like to apply these new collaborative initiatives under the MGA.

The Deputy Speaker: Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. Just to make sure that I understand it correctly, he's not asking about existing agreements but asking about where I see potential for new agreements. Well, I mean, first is that I think one of the things about this process is that until you get people sitting down and having these discussions, it's kind of difficult to be able to predict just what synergies are going to emerge from those types of discussions.

I guess this sort of goes back to why it's really important that we didn't try to dictate this from the top down. You know, when you're on the ground and when you see these discussions unfold and there are things happening, sometimes you can have these unexpected areas where you can find efficiencies or where you have a new area for potential co-operation that you might not have been aware of. For example, you know, the co-operation and collaboration in discussing water seems to be opening up some new possibilities in Athabasca county. They're looking at bringing water out to communities such as Rochester and also to the summer villages. I know that, you know, in having them sit down at the table and talk, they might be able to find better ways of doing that and also help them to come up with a consensus within their own communities. Of course, these discussions are never isolated in small communities; everybody kind of gets involved. So there's power in having these discussions in and of themselves.

I guess other efficiencies that I hope we could find: well, snow removal might be one. Perhaps you could see municipalities, villages, towns, and counties working more closely together to optimize how they allocate resources for snow removal. Sanitation: of course, there is a lot of co-operation in municipalities as it stands now through various water commissions, those types of organizations, but there might be also partners that they don't yet know they could have. That might come out of these discussions. Garbage collection and bylaw enforcement could be other areas of fruitful collaboration.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the bill? Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It really is my honour to rise today to speak to third reading of An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, presented by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Like my colleagues, I really want to congratulate both the current minister and the previous minister for their excellent leadership on this effort. The various amendments to the Municipal Government Act, in my opinion, are among the most important measures that this Legislature has taken in the two years that we've been sitting.

Indeed, it is my honour to be able to speak to it because when you look at what we do as legislators, I doubt that there's anything much more important than what we are talking about today, collaboration between cities and municipalities.

Loyola: The Securities Amendment Act.

Dr. Turner: Well, maybe the Securities Amendment Act would have some impact, but I don't think it's quite as important as ensuring parental leave for folks that might want to run for municipal office. The Securities Act probably isn't as important as ensuring collaboration among municipalities, and it's not as important as the topic that I really want to cover in this, and that is protecting our environment and ensuring that this province, its municipalities, and its other levels of government collaborate on ensuring that we have environmental protection.

Before I get to that, since I am the first Edmonton MLA to stand up, I really want to take a couple of moments to express my appreciation to the Edmonton Oilers for the fantastic effort that they've shown this year. I'm sure all of my colleagues in the House join in congratulating Captain McDavid as well as Coach McLellan and the rest of the team and the management in really overachieving and making us all proud as Albertans. Thank you.

Back to what I was talking about, another thing that I've really appreciated in the discussion of this act throughout all of its phases has been the collaborative spirit that all sides of the House are showing. I have learned a lot about Municipal Affairs from listening to the comments made not only by our minister but by representatives of the opposition, of all stripes of the opposition. In particular, I'd like to pay tribute to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. He is a wise man, and his interjections have been very positive, and I have personally appreciated his wisdom in his comments. There have been other members. I'm not going to go through the whole list. Actually, each of the interjections, I think, has been very positive. As a government MLA I truly appreciate it, and I think that's how we should be working on a whole bunch of things. I think we worked that way on the securities bill, actually, yesterday. There was a sense of collaboration.

Our government is delivering on its promise to modernize the MGA, and we need to do this expeditiously because there are municipal elections this fall. We're making the MGA a responsive and forward-looking piece of legislation that gives municipalities practical tools and resources to support strong and sustainable communities – and I would underline the word “sustainable” when I come back to talking about the environment – and a more resilient and diversified economy for Alberta families.

I'm going to pause again to quote some of the folks that have worked with the government on these. The first is from Lisa Holmes, who has been mentioned before. She's the president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association.

Collaboration ensures strong communities and increased quality of life for Albertans. Local governments can advance cost-effective regional approaches for infrastructure and service delivery through new tools such as inter-municipal off-site levies and greater use of joint use agreements with school boards. We appreciate that the province adjusted many of its initial approaches ... to ensure the provisions are more practical for municipalities.

That was Lisa Holmes, president of AUMA.

The president of the AAMD and C is Al Kemmere, and his quote is:

Through the MGA review process, AAMDC has been grateful to have been at the table. This journey has been open, inclusionary and fair. Though you never get everything you ask for, in the end

we have current legislation that for the most part reflects municipal challenges and we are proud to have been part of it.

Last summer our government held 21 sessions across the province, and we heard from Albertans directly about what matters to their communities. There are so many people in Alberta who care about their communities, and we heard from these people about how our government can make practical changes to make their lives and communities better. Those changes have been made in the form of 40 additional amendments to the MGA, and this was passed unanimously last December. Today is about the rest of what we heard from municipal leaders, families, young people, school boards, indigenous communities, and businesses. They've included new ideas about how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities.

I'm going to turn now to the discussion about components of these amendments that relate to environmental well-being. I think that before I do that, I just want to discuss a couple of points. Don't municipalities already take environmental issues into consideration when making decisions? Well, many do, but specifically enabling municipalities to consider environmental well-being will encourage them to take a leadership role in addressing this critical issue and will better position the municipalities as key partners with the government of Alberta in addressing environmental matters.

Well, might this policy give municipalities a blank cheque to take land for environmental purposes? No. This wouldn't allow municipalities to adopt any policies or bylaws that are inconsistent with the provincial policy or legislation. It would also not allow municipalities to take environmentally sensitive or valued land without proper compensation, and this would empower municipalities to include environmental well-being in their planning and development of policies. I think this is really vital, and I'm going to give you some examples from my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud where this might apply.

What's changing, actually? We're going to foster environmental well-being by including it in the MGA as a municipal purpose. The MGA currently identifies municipal purposes as providing good governance, providing “services, facilities or other things ... necessary or desirable,” and “to develop and maintain safe and viable communities.” Many municipalities consider environmental elements as part of their decision-making, but the MGA does not include fostering environmental well-being as a municipal purpose.

Some stakeholders express concern that municipalities lack explicit authority to incorporate environmental well-being in their operational land-use decision-making processes. This may prevent municipalities from fully embracing a leadership role in environmental stewardship and more actively taking action towards the goal in Alberta's climate leadership plan. Members of the public are supportive of clarifying municipal responsibilities and consideration in the decision-making process that will lead to better planning and development decisions. Expanding municipal purpose in the MGA to include fostering environmental well-being will give municipalities a clear signal to consider the environment in a multitude of operational and growth decisions, and municipalities will not be able to pass bylaws that conflict with provincial legislation on these environmental measures.

10:20

I'm proud to say that the city of Edmonton and indeed the city of Calgary are extremely supportive of this. The Urban Development Institute and the Canadian Home Builders' Association have not been as supportive as they believe this will confuse the roles of municipalities in the province regarding management and development of the environment, but I think we can still work with those folks to get their involvement. Meanwhile the Canadian

Association of Petroleum Producers will be supportive if the scope of environmental stewardship as a municipal purpose is limited to matters that are municipally related.

As I said before, I'm actually going to give a few examples in my riding where this collaboration has worked very well. The riding of Edmonton-Whitemud is a very urban riding. I'll describe it. If people don't know the geography of it, the riding of Edmonton-Whitemud is bounded by the North Saskatchewan River on the north and west sides, by the Henday on the west and south sides, and the east border is Whitemud Creek, from which the name of the riding comes. It's a beautiful riding with lots of natural areas and ravines. Really, a high-quality life is available to our residents for activities in the parks and in the ravines, on the bike trails. For the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud having a positive approach to our environment is very important. I can tell you that when I go door-knocking – and I'm door-knocking twice a week in my riding now – the climate leadership that our government has done and the approach to these Municipal Government Act amendments are really, truly appreciated.

In the riding of Edmonton-Whitemud we have a monthly meeting which involves all of the community leagues, the municipal councillors, their MLAs as well as representatives of the rec centre and the school boards. We actually discuss these issues on a regular basis. One of the things that has come out of this – and this is called the Terwillegar Riverbend area council – is a fantastic organization called Brander Gardens ROCKS. ROCKS means reaching out to community kids. This is a phenomenal organization. I've spoken about it briefly in a previous presentation.

Brander Gardens ROCKS is a collaboration between the public school, Brander Gardens, in the northern end of Edmonton-Whitemud; Capital Region Housing, which has a large number of units in the vicinity of Brander Gardens school; as well as the Riverbend community league; and several of the churches, including the Riverbend United church. The local library is part of this, and the city of Edmonton also collaborates with this.

The city of Edmonton is interested in collaborating with this not only because of the housing that's involved but because there's a large number of recent immigrants that are living in the housing that I referred to and there's a known need for programming to provide for youth to have things to do, basically. The library is an important part of that. The school opens up its facilities after hours and on the weekends for this. There's phenomenal music, cultural interchange. People exchange, actually, cooking hints between the recent immigrants and the people that have lived in Riverbend for a longer time.

It provides a safer community. It's a collaboration. It's really an example in this very urban setting of how this collaboration could work between various levels of government. I'm really proud to have that in my riding. I can tell you that the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud really appreciate that as well.

A short time ago I spoke about my experience at the opening of the Larch sanctuary in the southeast corner of my riding, where it abuts the riding of Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-South West. This is actually a conservation area of about 50 acres. It's at the confluence of the Whitemud and the Blackmud creeks. It's an oxbow, and in that area there are a lot of different . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll touch on two things that the member said. First, I would also like to extend my congratulations to the Edmonton Oilers for a great season. I'm hoping that the member would be open to cheering for the Ottawa

Senators. There are some great players that are on there with some great names, including Cody Ceci, Mike Hoffman, and Craig Anderson. With that being said, I could really see it as a team that our entire caucus could get behind.

But I would love for the member to continue to elaborate on the conservation areas if he would like to.

Dr. Turner: Well, I truly appreciate the question. Thank you very much. You can be assured that the Ottawa Senators will have my full support, at least the hockey team. I'm not very fond of the actual people that sit in the House of Commons, and if it were up to me, I'd get rid of them, actually.

Anyways, thank you for the opportunity to finish the description of Larch, and I may go on to another example of collaboration between the municipalities, at least at various levels of government. This sanctuary was the result of a donation of land from the Poole family of Poole constructors. Another private company called Maclab has also contributed, as has Melcor. I would actually welcome all members to come down to that area. It's on May Common where it meets May Gate in Magrath.

Melcor has built several sustainable housing developments, and there are actually several blocks in which every building is covered with solar panels. It is a real revelation to go down there and see how this private company, with the assistance of the city in terms of its zoning, has been able to enhance our sustainability. I spoke to Mr. Tim Melton at the opening of this Larch development – he's with Melcor – and he said that this was a good business decision, that this is what people want, and that this is what new families are looking for. You know, the home builders are responding to these needs when we give them the proper support through policy and development. I really think this is a glowing example of how that can work.

The other company that I want to give a shout-out to on a completely different measure – but it's again through our policies that promote collaboration between private industry and municipalities – is Telus. Telus has invested over a billion dollars in a fibre optic build-out throughout the province. They're showing confidence in this province. They're showing that this province has a future. That fibre optic build-out is happening right now in Edmonton-Whitemud, and I'm going to actually share a booth with Telus at the upcoming farmers' market on May 17 I think it is, whatever the Wednesday is next week. I'd welcome you all to come out basically to see me but also to see how Telus is expanding this important service that's going to help students, businesses, and old folks like me that want to download some movies. Maybe I'm going to be able to do trading with the new Securities Act.

In any case, this is a collaboration that's been facilitated by the municipality – and it's changing its policies – and the government or at least private industry, that is seeing its opportunities. It's there because it's going to presumably make some more money and maybe improve its competitive status. But, again, this is a collaboration. It's a very positive thing.

Thank you.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Edmonton-McClung, you have 15 seconds.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to ask quickly the hon. member if he could elaborate a little bit more on a topic he touched on that interested me greatly, and that was the area council that he alluded to that had been in operation in his riding, where the school board, community league, Capital Region Housing, faith groups, library, city of Edmonton, all of them got

together on a monthly meeting basis and formed an area council, out of which this group called Brander Gardens ROCKS came. I'm just wondering: what was the genesis of this organization, how long has it been going on, and is it something that you would recommend other . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The time for 29(2)(a) has expired.
Other speakers to the bill? Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to the amendments to the MGA. I wanted to discuss some of the application that that will have in my constituency.

Over the last two years as MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park there have been a number of school builds and modernizations and commitments that we've made within the constituency that really come back to some of the agreements and amendments that are coming into the MGA. We saw that we committed to École Élémentaire and an expansion, even, for the school there, and Davidson Creek is in the new area.

For those of you that aren't familiar with Sherwood Park and Strathcona county, I mean, it's considered one of the most livable communities in Canada. It's something that – lots of families move there to raise their children.

I know that I've discussed this with many parents and community leagues and parent councils and school boards and the municipality in the last two years, kind of being shocked to find out that there was no mechanism where the school boards and the municipalities were really sitting down and very thoughtfully planning out the long-term development strategies. I mean, there's been lots of growth in Strathcona county. There have been a lot of families moving in, and that causes, you know, increased need on the school board and increased need for more space. Of course, you always have changing demographics. Is it young families that are moving in?

All that's happening requires a planned approach. I am happy to say that even before we did this, the county, the municipality, and the school boards got together and had been discussing how they do joint planning. But to solidify that goal a little bit further, the amendments within the MGA allow for there to be clarity as to what needs to be hashed out and worked in to make sure that when you bring in a new school – I'll give the example of, like, Davidson Creek, which was a new school in an established neighbourhood. Had there been some kind of long-term planning and some expectations as to where the new schools were going to be built, it might have facilitated a simpler conversation, and it hashes out also the roles and responsibilities of both municipalities and the new school board.

Just to expand on some of the things that it means to have something like joint-use planning and agreements for schools that would be seen under this bill, the change requires the municipality to have joint-use and planning agreements with the school boards operating within their borders that consider establishing a process for discussing matters related to the planning, development, and use of school sites on municipal reserves, school reserves, and municipal and school reserves in the municipality; transfers of municipal reserves; disposal of school sites; the servicing of school sites on municipal reserves; the use of the school facilities, municipal facilities, and playing fields, including the maintenance of the facilities and the payment of these fees associated with them. Set out within that is how the municipality and the school board are going to work together collaboratively; also, setting up a process for settling disputes; also, a time frame for a regular review agreement; and any other provisions that the parties may consider to be advisable.

When we talk about how that is applied, there have been many cases within my constituency where that would have helped the process. There was the school closure of Colchester, and the school site had to be disposed of. You know, there was a very complicated process because of the things laid out, because of the history between the public school board and the municipality. Those things were resolved. However, there weren't processes and ways to resolve the kinds of circumstances that were arising, so it was new for everybody. It was complicated, and it took a lot longer than it needed to. At the end of day, that means that maybe the school was sitting there, like, having to deal with some of the vandalism that happens when a school isn't open.

Being able to have a plan in place and a process for those kinds of things really aids the community's understanding of the process as well. I know that a lot of my parent councils and my school boards are very involved together, and they work collaboratively. I know that in talking to parents, they want to know more about the process and how decisions are made in developing the long-term planning and in understanding why a school would be built in one place versus another place. Madam Speaker, I believe that this is actually going to be something that I will be talking about throughout the summer to the parent councils, and I know that this is actually feedback that I've received as the MLA from people that come to me and say: I'm not sure why there hasn't been this joint planning in order to prevent surprises from occurring.

There are also residual effects from not having joint planning. For example, if the municipality decides to build a facility in a space that maybe in the foreseeable future isn't becoming a school site, they might put investment into that green space and make a baseball field or whatever the case may be. They can put those investments in. I know that on a municipal level the council is looking at motions to prevent things like that. But this solidifies that you have to do it in an inclusive approach, understanding the different things that are involved in building that community.

It would prevent something for the community also, just being surprised, when a school site is announced in a certain area, as to why it was picked, as to all of these things. It really helps build that transparency and accountability with the community, and I think that that's something that in my area people are looking for.

I'm really proud to say that the Minister of Municipal Affairs really heard the concerns that people brought forward and appreciated that, you know, they looked at how to find solutions, and he also appreciated that, from the side of the school board trustees in my area and the municipalities, they were also open to doing this. They have been doing this in a more informal setting already. Solidifying that and kind of establishing a paradigm to work from really help altogether as we address all of the needs and concerns.

Again, going back to the number of infrastructure investments that we've made in my community, there's, as I mentioned before, École Élémentaire, which is a replacement school; Davidson Creek, which is a new school in an area that has grown out and has actually seen a lot of the students from the area that was developed be on buses to another side of Sherwood Park.

Of course, when you're talking about reducing bus times, making sure that you're building communities that are accessible, especially with something like Emerald Hills, which is one of the ones that was built – it was built with the mind frame of it being a walkable community, the same as Summerwood, that whole area, of it having all the things that you need in order to really have the capacity to have parks there and do that. Having to attend a school on a different side of Sherwood Park isn't really working within that vision.

Having that kind of mandatory agreement that you have to come to this place and talk to the municipalities as to what they're building out, make sure that the school sites are actually viable options for them to choose when thinking about building a school, which is, I mean, something that was discussed within the school reserve left in Summerwood, whether they could actually build a school there and what the impacts would be – there was a train site, rails nearby. There were perceptions of safety concerns at that point.

10:40

So understanding that it all comes together and that the school boards work within the confines of what areas are provided to them by the municipality and some of the concerns that maybe parents raise: they're limited to being able to address them based on that. Having to work together, making a plan, well, that actually might eliminate some of the frustration that I've heard from community members. Of course, I think everyone has come together to address these concerns, but I think that putting something like this in place really allows people to know that when they come forward to discuss that – they have expectations of accountability and want to be a part of the process – something like this really says to them: we're listening; we want to move forward on things that are meaningful to you, and we want to be accountable for the decisions that we make.

Just as we go forward, I know that this will be a topic of conversation in my community, so I just wanted to discuss that even further.

Having kind of highlighted the number of families and schools being modernized or the infrastructure investment in my community, that also means that there are a lot of families there. When we get to the other part of the amendments here, there's the parental leave. What does that mean when, you know, we want to elect representatives that represent the diverse makeup of our community?

When a community like Strathcona county is made up of families – also, not excluding that there are an increasing number of seniors, as the rest of Alberta is experiencing, that high increase in the number of seniors in the population, there's still a big portion of the people living in Sherwood Park that are family orientated. Making sure that representatives can be elected that are mothers or are fathers or whatever the case may be and aren't being prevented from running for politics because of being worried that if something happened, they wouldn't have an option available to them, that they would have to make a lot of sacrifices to make it work – I think that when we talk about being allies and being supportive to women and diverse voices in leadership, it has to translate into policy.

That's what this looks like – right? – translating that into being able to have parental leave and being able to give the tools available to municipalities and people within the council to figure out what that parental leave can look like within their constraints, because each one is different. I mean, they set out their own salaries. They set out a lot of these other conditions. Being able to set out what this looks like for that municipality is very important, but it also allows the tools to exist.

I know that I was able to go to one of the meetings with AAMDC and talk to Lisa Holmes on behalf of the Minister of Status of Women. We discussed that the leadership on a provincial level allows people on a municipal level to really bring these issues forward. I remember having that conversation because it is really important to lead by example, to provide those spaces in a place like the Legislature because it builds a broader understanding in the general public as to what is actually happening. Not many people would just know off the top of their head what kind of, you know,

parental, compassionate care leaves an MLA or an elected official on a school board has. Those aren't pieces of information that people just know. That's something that you have to look into.

Bringing to light the fact that we had the first two MLAs that had a child while being an MLA brings those issues to light. Those things have never occurred. We've never really resolved these issues because they didn't come to the forefront. We weren't really forced into it, and it didn't seem all that relevant. I mean, it seemed something, you know, like, that we should work on, but it just didn't seem like we had to do it right now.

But I think that as we move forward, we know that supporting women in politics has a very positive effect, supporting diverse voices in that way, especially in a community such as mine, where it's made up of families. It has this commitment to being a livable community for your family, to being able to actually talk to representatives in the community and say: "Listen; you can raise your family, and you can be part of a municipal council or school council. Those things are options available to you. There are supports put in place, and there are tools there for you to make it a better space for you." That is something that people think about: how am I going to manage all of the expectations I have as a mother or a father of a young family and be able to also manage the expectations of living a political life?

I mean, we understand inherently that it's difficult, that there are expectations put in place on the amount of time that you're spending going out into communities. I always say that it's more of a lifestyle than a career because it's part of your life, going out to the community. So it's knowing, for them, that there are at least some options for things. You know, when you're pregnant, you might need some other time off, and being impacted negatively in your position because of that is a natural deterrent. It's a barrier for people to experience.

I think it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we are supportive, that we put the things in place, and we listen to people when they tell us the reasons that they're hesitant to move forward, and if there are not reasons that that needs to be in place that we find a solution for those things.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Yes, under 29(2)(a) to the member. It was very interesting, and it was great to hear about the parent councils that are working together collaboratively. It is a microscopic reflection of what we want to happen with the municipalities. I have two sort of questions that I'd like you to touch on if you could. Have there been examples of shared facilities or events between the various urban and rural municipalities in your constituency already? If not, do you see any potential for any specific joint socioeconomic collaboration within those different municipal governments within your constituency as well that would benefit as a result of the modernization of the MGA?

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you. I think that's a really great question. More of an example of a collaborative approach to it would actually be just, like, a block outside of my riding, in the Member for Sherwood Park's riding. It's a school that is part Holy Trinity and Lakeland, and it also has a part in there that is part of Children's Services. It's all within the same facility, so it's one building. It's one space, a shared field space. But what the school boards have actually done is to be able to stagger the break times, the recess times so that they were both able to use the whole playground for their classes during their break times.

That would be an example of a joint venture between the school board and the municipality because you create a government space in the middle that's kind of in between the two. Again, it's just outside of my riding. I actually went to that school, so I was able to see it in action and see the fact that you don't really see much of the other school there because they stagger this in order to create the maximum use of the space there.

You know, it's a really wonderful thing to be able to talk about because, at the same time, somewhere like Strathcona county and Sherwood Park are going to be experiencing a limitation in the amount of land available for schools. Then you're going to see the number of parents and families that need space, and enrolment capacities are at a maximum right now, so you get into the complication of: where do you build these schools?

Both, you know, the separate school system and the public school system need schools as well. We also have a francophone school division that actually just had a grand opening in that area as well. That's another example of joint planning again in the MLA for Sherwood Park's riding.

At the end of the day, it's a fact that we're going to be facing a limitation of the space available, space that is currently being used as green space in the community. So if we learn to utilize that space in a way that is efficient, that is thoughtful to the community's perspective of that space as well – because, of course, these are established neighbourhoods where they've used these spaces for a very long time; there are habits being built – being able to come up with a plan of how to respect that community's needs and how to make sure that we're enhancing those needs and meeting the needs of our education system, that's incredibly important.

There are some examples, and I know that everyone at the table is willing to work at finding more of them. So I think it's a great question. I think that we can continue to do things like that. It allows us to actually maximize money and look at different mechanisms of doing things like that. I was really happy to be able to share those examples.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

10:50

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

Seeing none, other speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, I just wanted to make a few comments in regard to An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. Of course, one of the main elements of this was to have interaction between school boards as a level of government and municipalities and then the province, too. I must say that this has been quite an illuminating experience for school boards across the province.

Initially they entered into the MGA consultation with some trepidation. I think perhaps they have had less than amicable relationships with previous governments. But, lo and behold, with the new government they found that the process was quite open and was within both the spirit and the letter of the law of responsibilities between these levels of government. So by building the planning and compelling school boards and municipalities to discuss the issues around school sites, I think we've really taken a big step forward. Of course, again, everyone has stories – we've heard them all morning – about school planning and municipal planning that were not in alignment with each other.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that we are in the midst of the largest school build here in the history of the province of Alberta. We have 200 projects on the go now, and it's going very well. I can

tell you – you know, knock on wood – that the projects have been moved into alignment with the timing. I mean, you always have the vagaries of individual circumstances that might cause delays. We know that we had a tragic fire, for example, here in Edmonton just a few days ago. But, again, we're getting better at building schools, and the contractors are getting better at them, too, right? We now have, with all these projects, lots of experience building specifically to school project orders. I'm seeing projects speeding up and timelines shrinking all the time.

One of the main ways by which we can choose a project for its readiness is how the site is serviced and the interaction and the co-operation between the municipal government and the school board. There are many schools, for example, that I know I want to get going – we see the population growing, and we can track the populations of young children moving through, you know, and you need a school for the next phase of their lives – but we've seen roadblocks where the site servicing has not been done in a timely manner or the urban planning has not been sort of put into alignment in a timely manner as well. So by building in these changes from this bill, I fully expect that we will have a much more integrated planning process that will allow municipalities and developers and school boards to get it all working together in a timely and efficient manner.

All of us, again, have had lots of these stories of schools. A picture of a school in a field stays there for 10 years, but no school is ever built, right? Or, you know, some posts in the ground with tape on them but no school. Together with our planning, working in co-operation with Infrastructure, working in co-operation between school boards and sitting down at the table with municipalities, I believe that we've turned a corner in this regard, and we can start to get those schools built and serviced and integrated into the community in a timely way, that we've never been able to do previously.

So, yeah, I know as well that there's a large appetite for school boards to work closely with municipalities in terms of providing public services in close proximity to where school sites might be. We've seen some interesting and imaginative pilots in this regard: school boards and municipalities building, for example, their multiplexes in close proximity to each other; school boards and municipalities looking for libraries and other public buildings in close proximity to each other with the school. I'm encouraging this every step of the way. This is a way by which, again, we can facilitate that at a discussion table between the school boards and the municipalities.

I think the best and wisest good governance from a provincial level is that you open the door for a smooth interaction of communication and let the local authorities on the ground make the decisions that are best for their own neighbourhoods and communities, right? We know that any given town and school board have an intimate knowledge of what they need and how they can achieve that in terms of planning, and I believe that that's the best and wisest way for us to go. This bill does do that in the broadest possible way, and I'm quite proud to see my school boards give it universal acceptance and that enthusiastic agreement to moving forward under this new framework.

We know as well that when we are building schools and we're making decisions about planning over time, we're really shaping how those communities will look not just for a few years but for generations to come. We know that, for example, schools will have a heavy demand on them for certain populations moving through, and then the demographics change over time. Over the course of 50 years or 100 years you have different waves of young families moving through and retired people and so forth, so we can be more flexible using those public buildings and those public spaces over

time. We might consider, for example, having some social services or seniors' services built into a school complex. We might have access to daycare built into those school complexes. We might have, you know, anything that people can creatively and imaginatively consider. I think, again, this bill will help to make that happen.

You know, it's important to note that, of course, with Municipal Affairs, with Education – for example, Education I know. Your budget I know less about. But between about 95 and 97 per cent of all the money through Education goes to the school boards. I think that that's a proud and wise decision. We try to have certain initiatives that we encourage school boards to do, but ultimately they're making those decisions around capital projects and operations and everything else.

What better way to ensure the responsible spending of those considerable funds – in my case it's \$8.1 billion coming through the Education budget – than to make sure that they are discussing and planning with municipalities every step of the way? Because once you pour the foundation and put up the roof, then that's what you've got for probably 50, 60 years of a school's life, or even more sometimes. So we need to make sure that we have an adaptable and clear vision of what the neighbourhood is going to look like with that school as its community hub every step of the way.

So, yeah, it's looking good. I know that there are other provisions I've heard colleagues talking about in regard to elections and the improvements that this bill does have in regard to elections. Of course, we have the school board elections in October, too. Already I'm very proud of how we have much more gender balance in the school boards than in perhaps other levels of governance. You know, I would like to encourage people to be running in those school board elections here in the fall. I know that the provisions to encourage more gender parity in this bill can really help to strengthen the school boards.

11:00

It's interesting. Of course, I know CBE very well. I'm in discussions with them every week. It just was a great reminder to say: hey, that's an all-female board, right? And it's strong. I mean, it's one of the largest school boards anywhere, really. It provides an excellent standard of education, and the leadership is second to none. There you go. Of course, it's an all-female trustee crew, and I am very proud of the work that they do. They lead by example every step of the way.

We all signed off on the Northland School Division Act here just in the last few days. Again, that is signalling a democratically elected trustee board for Northland, the first time in seven years. I think that this municipal government act here will really help to encourage people to make choices about running in the Northland school division. For women to make that decision, we need that, quite frankly. Again, we're just facilitating the movement of democracy in the Northland school division here, but it's the people on the ground in Northland that must step up and run. I think that An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government can really help to encourage people to run in Northland and all school boards here in the province of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, this is an exciting time, to see us moving forward on this bill. I know that it was a long time coming. I know that a lot of people put work into it over many years. It's an example of what can be done when everybody puts their shoulders together to push in the same direction.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 12 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know that saying the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, over and over probably gets a little long. I'll just shorten it up. I'll just call it builder licensing if that makes it easier for people.

I just have some comments today, you know, some kind of clarification on some of the things I've heard from people over the last little while of debating this bill. I'll start with the online registry, some of the messaging and a little bit of information here. An online registry will be kept up to date for consumers with a listing of all the builders who are licensed to build. The licence status – active, probationary, suspended, provisional, as examples – will be listed as well as reasons why the decision was made in the case of a probationary or suspended licence. In addition to providing more information to home builders to help them make informed decisions when selecting a builder, this will provide homeowners with the assurance that builders meet government criteria.

The registry will build on existing infrastructure that is housed and maintained within Municipal Affairs, which is an important thing to know, which lists the number of homes registered in Alberta. The current new-home buyer registry has 6,400 users that utilize the system daily. This infrastructure will be leveraged to ensure a seamless application process.

I've heard the question: will this be a new registry? This is not a new registry, nor is it related to registries under the purview of Service Alberta, which has drivers' licences, birth certificates, et cetera. The new-home buyer registry currently lists all homes in Alberta which have a home warranty insurance contract. This will be expanded to list information about all licensed builders in Alberta, including licence status, to provide consumers with information about builders. This is not associated with the Association of Alberta Registry Agents but is a stand-alone registry that will be maintained and housed within Municipal Affairs.

I've also heard some things about program operations. The builder licensing program will be administered from within government in the new-home buyer protection office. The program will not require additional staffing resources. It will be administered through a reallocation of existing staffing resources. Integrating this program into the new-home buyer protection office will enable integration into the safety codes system, working closely with warranty providers, municipalities, and builders, and it can also leverage an existing public registry.

I also have some more questions and answers here that I'd like to go through just, as I said before, to get some clarification and to get this information on the record so that we have it straight. I heard a question that says: why does Alberta need a builder licensing program when the province already has mandatory home warranty coverage under the New Home Buyer Protection Act? Albertans have shared many stories about poor home construction leading to massive repair costs. The recent consultation on builder licensing indicated that homeowners want builders to be held more accountable for their work.

Builder licensing will directly address builder accountability. The NHBPA does not address the qualifications for being a home builder, and right now anyone in Alberta could be a builder regardless of their experience or skills. This is unlike other aspects of building construction, where plumbers, gas fitters, and master electricians are required trades.

There's also no provision under the NHBPA to prevent a builder from building in Alberta even under extreme circumstances such as fraud or imminent bankruptcy. Licensing builders will help prevent issues in home construction by requiring builders to be accountable for their actions. For example, a builder may set up a numbered company, which can later be dissolved. The builder can walk away from its business without any repercussion while transferring the cost and risk of low-quality builds to the consumer. Builder licensing will enable tracking of these types of practices, and those with poor track records may find their company without a licence.

I've also heard the question: do any other jurisdictions have builder licensing programs? I have stated before that, again, Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec have builder licensing programs in place. That covers 75 per cent of Canadians under those. Manitoba is expected to come online with a program in 2018.

The next question that I've heard is: who did government consult with to develop this proposed bill or licensing framework, and what are some of the results that we heard? We did consult stakeholders in engagements between February and March 2017 to hear stories from Albertans and determine the appropriate scope of what this builder licensing program was going to be in Alberta.

We had approximately 1,270 or so Albertans respond to the online survey, and about 130 participants – homeowners, owner-builders, builders, renovators – that attended the 11 engagement sessions and 78 per cent of survey respondents were in favour of the government exploring options for licensing builders. Several builder survey respondents noted the challenges of competing with home builders and that they would welcome a builder licensing program. Also, 81 per cent of members of the public support government exploring options for licensing builders compared to 69 per cent support from those in the industry.

I said to a gentleman the other day who asked me about builder licensing: "You know what? If you go out right now, I bet that if you polled 100 people on the street, most of them probably would think that they already have builder licensing because we have trades that are licensed and it seems like everybody out there has a licence for what they're doing." I brought that up, and I think it's a good point to make. We need to make sure that we're holding people accountable for the work that they do. That's one of the purposes of this, right? It's to protect our consumers and make sure Albertans have the protections that 75 per cent of other Canadians have.

I've also heard, you know, more general questions like: what difference is builder licensing going to make for Albertans? As I've stated before, home ownership is one of the largest investments, if not the largest investment, that a person can make. You know, we want to make sure that Albertans are informed and that they know that they're going to be protected and their families are going to be safe.

11:10

Previously there were no provisions to remove poor builders to protect consumers. Under our builder licensing framework builders who have demonstrated a pattern of disreputable behaviour or have consistently failed to meet standards may have their licence revoked.

Homeowners have expressed frustration with having limited access to information and not being able to easily or accurately

research their builders. With builder licensing consumers will have access to consistent, reliable online information about the licences and the licence holders to help them make these informed decisions.

Now, how will builder licensing benefit Alberta's residential construction industry? Builder licensing will support the overall integrity and reputation of Alberta's residential construction industry. We have a great many builders out there that are fantastic, Madam Chair, and we want to make sure that those guys are highlighted. We don't want, you know, one bad apple here and there to ruin it for the rest of them. I want to make sure that we get that on record, that there are some amazing builders out there. The vast, vast majority of them are very, very good builders. That's something we can be proud of in this province.

Builder licensing is about supporting, as I said, those who do good work and helping to differentiate them from the rest of the pack. Builder and licence information will be available online, and we will help consumers with that to be able to understand who they have building their houses so that they don't have builders that are going to go out there and cut corners and misrepresent their industry and try to gain an unfair market advantage by deceiving people.

What will be the requirements for builders under a builder licensing program? Builders will be required to submit an application, pay a fee of \$600 for the application and \$500 for renewal, and hold an active licence in order to build. The licence will be for a one-year period and allows a builder to apply for multiple building permits during that time, after which a builder will then have to apply for a renewal.

The application process will require builders to submit information about their history – their track record, financial standing, and corporate structure – and it will allow the registrar of the new-home buyer protection office to assess all licence applications and determine whether an applicant presents a risk to the consumer. To avoid duplication of activities where possible, the application process will incorporate many of the existing requirements for a builder under the NHBPA, and the registrar will then determine if the applicant meets the licence criteria.

Will builders be required to take courses in order to obtain a licence and maintain an active licence? Builders have expressed a need for better training for practices outside of trades such as siding installation and installation of windows. Courses are not being considered at this time. We want to implement builder licensing first and phase in courses over the next few years. By phasing in training or course requirements, we will be able to first assess the program, determine strengths and gaps, and better align any required training to address those gaps. Both British Columbia and Ontario have had builder licensing in place for some time and have just recently introduced some of their course requirements.

What are the proposed licensing fees? How do proposed fees compare to other jurisdictions? Does government collect any other fees from builders? As I said, the proposed fees are \$600 for a new application and \$500 for the annual renewal. Ontario charges \$2,500 for a new application and \$500 for the renewal, and this involves warranty application fees. B.C. charges \$600 for a new application and \$500 for an annual renewal. Quebec charges \$1,048 for a new general applicant and \$1,378 for a specialized licence, with a range of renewal fees depending on licence type.

Will builder licensing apply to the construction of condominiums? Simply, yes, it will. We all know about leaky condos. We've heard about them here and in B.C. in the past. We want to make sure that people who are buying condos are protected as well.

Now, how will builder licensing be applied to renovations? This is a big one that we need to clarify about how this is going forward. Builder licensing will be required for substantial renovations where

at least 75 per cent of the home's footprint is changed such as a full rebuild or top-floor redesign. This aligns home warranty requirements under the NHBP where renovations that alter 75 per cent of a home's footprint are defined as buying a new home and therefore require warranty. Applying builder licensing only to substantial renovations will prevent overregulation of the industry.

Renovations vary significantly and range from painting to deck building to finishing a basement or replacing a furnace to a full rebuild of a home. Builder licensing is focused on ensuring quality construction. Renovations such as painting or tiling are cosmetic and less complex and do not have safety impacts for the most part, unless I'm doing it. As a result, these types of renovations will not be covered under the builder licensing as they are also regulated under Service Alberta's prepaid contracting business licensing regulation. Renovations such as putting in new electrical wiring or finishing a basement are more complex and require journeypersons and permitting. The prepaid contracting business licensing regulation also applies to many of these renovations, and as a result, these types of renovations are regulated.

How will builder licensing impact trades or subcontractors? Trade subcontractors would not be required to be licensed. The builder is responsible for managing the project, including which subtrades to hire and how much financial risk they assume. Subtrades are not covered under the builder licensing because they are the responsibility of the builder. Alberta has a strong system of qualified tradespeople and competent builders. Builder licensing is about supporting those who do good work and helping them to differentiate themselves from those who don't. Builder licensing will not impact the trades.

Builder licensing would apply only to the construction of new homes, as I said, which does include condominiums and major renovations to most or all of an existing home. The majority of renovations requiring tradespeople are less complex and already covered under existing permit systems and, as I said, prepaid contracting regulations.

Will builder licensing pass extra costs on to consumers? Will builder licensing result in increased home prices? Home ownership is, as I stated, probably the largest investment people are going to make in their lives, and Albertans have told us that they want to be protected. The average builder in Alberta builds approximately seven homes per year. Using the proposed \$500 fee for licensing renewal, the yearly cost per home will be roughly \$80.

In general, housing prices are determined by supply and demand and much less directly by underlying costs such as materials like lumber. Ultimately, high demand by consumer confidence and availability of supply will determine housing prices. An underlying cost in the form of a licensing fee is therefore unlikely to be passed on to the consumer anyway. The overall affordability of housing in Alberta is appreciably below the Canadian average and will not be significantly impacted by builder licensing.

Who will be exempted from builder licensing requirements? Owner-builders constructing their own home would not be required to maintain an active builder licence. Charitable organizations such as Habitat for Humanity could also be exempt from builder licensing because they have a different business model. Builder licensing is focused on regulating those in the business of being a builder.

What's the definition of a builder? Under the New Home Buyer Protection Act

"residential builder" means a person who engages in, arranges for or manages all or substantially all of the construction or reconstruction of a new home, or agrees to do any of those things, and includes a general contractor, but does not include an owner builder.

What other questions can I answer for people here? What will be the requirements for a builder to be licensed – for example, education or experience, project track record – and who will evaluate? The bill proposes that the builder submit information about their history, their financial standing, and their corporate structure. The new-home buyer protection office would review this information. They would evaluate the builder's demonstrated experience, knowledge of legal responsibility, ability to undertake and complete home construction, and ability to manage finances. Any formal training and certifications would be considered a benefit. When looking at these elements to evaluate a builder, the key question would be: does the builder's track record demonstrate building competence, and are there any patterns of behaviour that could be deemed risky to consumers? There are many excellent builders in Alberta, and this program would highlight those good track records.

How will a so-called bad builder be determined? Will it be a complaint system, and how will it be evaluated? Will there be an appeal system? If a builder has committed fraud in the past, has had their licence revoked in any other province, or has outstanding bankruptcy proceedings, a builder licence would not be issued. Court proceedings for past bankruptcies or violations under other acts will be considered along with the builder's history of construction when making these licensing decisions.

Is the annual fee a flat rate regardless of company size? Yes. The licence application and renewal fee will be the same for all builders regardless of size.

Will builders be responsible for the trades they subcontract, or will providers such as roofers, finishers, et cetera, also have to be licensed? I did touch on this before, that trades and subcontractors would not be required to be licensed. The builder is responsible for managing that project, including the subtrades that they've hired and the financial risk they would assume. Subtrades are not covered under builder licensing because they are the responsibility of the builder. In addition to protecting Albertans and bolstering the reputation of the residential building industry, better licensing would help protect subcontractors by recognizing builders' strong financial and legal track records.

11:20

How will you avoid processing delays since builders will need to be licensed for the building season? Government will work with the industry to make sure that licensing requirements do not impede a builder's ability to prepare for the building season. Steps will also be taken to ensure continuity throughout the process and that builders and homeowners will not be interrupted by unnecessary bureaucratic delays. Because of the integrated system being proposed and the ability to leverage the current registry system, Municipal Affairs will be able to work with our existing partners to mitigate delays and find agreeable solutions.

How many new staff will you hire for this program? We touched on this before. The program will be administered through reallocation of existing staff resources.

Aren't we just creating a duplicate system when both insurance companies and the banks already vet builders for financial risk? The financial vetting currently done by banks and warranty providers will consider liquidity and other financial indicators. The warranty providers are currently key partners in the NHBP system, and we will continue to work with them to implement builder licensing, utilizing existing information. Government will meet with warranty providers to see if their financial review processes could support builder licensing rather than government duplicating the process.

Will this be a barrier to a new builder? No, this will not be a barrier to a new builder. We will look at a range of factors beyond

experience, including financial and corporate structure, to determine licensing decisions. New builders will be given the opportunity to build a profile with the department over time. The builder licensing program will provide oversight and guidance for the new builder.

As for some of the regulations, many of the specific details of the builder licensing program will be laid out in the regulations. These will include details on appeal processes, fees, classes of licence, application process, renewal process, suspension or cancellation of licence, terms and conditions of licences, requirements for corporate licence holders, and some other things, obviously, that will be coming through. Government will continue to listen to stakeholders and industry to make sure the implementation of builder licensing is smooth and that through the drafting of regulations we are listening to everybody going forward.

I'm sure there's a lot more that I could say, but I know there are a few others that would like to speak. I just want to say that I really appreciate, again, my staff and all the hard work that they're doing on this and all the good, positive feedback we've been hearing from our different ridings and from different people around the province about this.

You know, I was just with a few gentlemen the other night, friends of mine, and one of them works in the oil patch. He had said, "It's about time; up in the oil patch we've got to have licences and permits," and he kind of listed off a bunch of things that they do. He's a tradesman himself, and he had kind of laughed about it and said: "It's about time. You know, people need to be licensed and protected." It was a nice thing to hear from him. I talked to a couple of builders on the weekend that said similar types of things. You know, we continue to get messages, as I had stated before, on social media and through e-mail and things like that. Hopefully, we continue to get more information from people and more feedback like that and make sure that we catch all of that feedback in a positive way. [Mr. S. Anderson's speaking time expired]

There you go. Perfect.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise this morning to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. Clearly, a new-home purchase is one of the biggest financial decisions any family will make, and Albertans should be protected. They need the confidence that the home being built is being built to the highest standards by builders with a good track record.

I was surprised to find out that 75 per cent of other Canadians in other provinces are protected by builder licensing programs, and the provinces of British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario each have a licensing program that has proven to benefit both consumers and the home-building industry.

Buying a new home is one of the biggest investments that a person will ever make in their lifetime, and when Albertans make that investment, they deserve to be able to make an informed decision about their builder. They need to feel secure in the knowledge that the builder they have chosen is qualified and that the builder doesn't have a history of mismanagement and fraud. Currently new-home buyers are vulnerable, and there are no specific requirements for a residential builder.

Madam Chair, like most members of this Legislature, I have bought a new home a few times in my life. The first time was a 1,400-square-foot condo unit. It was one unit in a six-unit building, and I was lucky enough to have bought a unit without any significant problems. However, being in a shared condo space of

townhouses, I heard from neighbours about problems and complications within their units. For example, if plumbing or electrical wiring in a block of units was not completed in a proper way, I could have found myself affected by the failures or the low quality of work even though it may have not been in my unit.

I later joined the condo board of our condo units and served as director and soon found out that my worst fears were realized and that the roofing and shingles were poorly installed, and a few units had leaky roofs. We attempted to fix the work and used our condo reserves to approach the builder to get the job complete. To make a long story short, it took two years to get a proper settlement and the shingles fixed, but it came at a cost to the condo board, and the fee increase affected all residents. In this case, although it was a reputable builder, still we confronted these challenges. Fortunately, we came to a resolution to the matter, but it doesn't make the process any easier.

However, I was happy to see that condominium construction was included in this bill as well. The construction of condominiums is regulated under the New Home Buyer Protection Act, as is any new-home construction, and I'm encouraged to know that the builder licensing will apply to condominium developers as well.

Madam Chair, I'll tell you another anecdotal tale of another home that I purchased in the past. In this case, it was a semidetached unit. When I think about the spot, I often miss it. It had a great view. However, after moving into the neighbourhood in this new home, I was surprised to learn that a lot of other neighbours were still having issues with their homes. The builder managed to resolve most disputes, and the neighbours were satisfied in the end for the most part, but we found it necessary to form a community association to work with the builder to further resolve some of those issues as well.

In the case of my building, my neighbour always asked me in the wintertime about my unit and if the master bedroom was warm enough. I didn't have any problems with my unit, and eventually, after the second winter, my neighbour ended up moving away because of the heating issues in their unit. After the new neighbours moved in, while I was over socializing one night, after a few drinks of milk and juice, of course, I found out that the vent from the furnace to their master bedroom was missing about half a foot of pipe. Yes, Madam Chair. There was literally a half-foot gap between the pipe and the connecting piece to the master bedroom. The basement was toasty warm in the winter while the master bedroom was not.

I went to have a peek at this deficiency, and I was surprised to see this not only because the final inspectors missed it – and not only that; the previous family had missed it as well – but because the consequences of that deficiency were so irritating that the family moved away. They were great neighbours. But to the credit of the new neighbours, I enjoyed their company as well. Once again it just highlights how a small deficiency like that can have such surprising consequences.

Madam Chair, I am certain that this bill and the builder licensing is going to make a big difference for Albertans. In February and March 2017 Municipal Affairs conducted a targeted stakeholder engagement to hear stories from Albertans and to determine the appropriate scope of a builder licensing program in Alberta: 1,269 Albertans responded to the online survey, and 130 participants attended 11 engagement sessions across the province. Seventy-eight per cent of survey respondents were in favour of government exploring options for licensed builders. Eighty-one per cent of members of the public support government exploring options for the licensing of builders compared to 69 per cent supporting those of the building industry. Forty-one per cent of all respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied with the current state of residential construction in Alberta. As well, several builder survey

respondents noted the challenges of competing with poor builders and that they would welcome a builder licensing program.

11:30

Through the consultations we heard frustration from homeowners, who felt they were on their own when it came to the residential construction process, with no assurance that someone was looking out for them. Builder licensing combined with mandatory home warranties will help increase builder accountability, with homeowners feeling confident that mechanisms are in place to protect their interests.

Madam Chair, I'm impressed with the direction of this bill, and I think it's time that we take action to protect Albertans when they're making the biggest investment decisions of their lives. I'll be supporting Bill 12 in Committee of the Whole, and I encourage others to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, I've had a request to revert to Introduction of Guests.

Okay. I've been advised that we can't actually do that in committee as we can't set aside the standing orders. We'd have to actually be in Assembly. So if someone would like to move that we rise and report progress and then go back, then we could.

The hon. Government House Leader to help us out.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I think we need to revisit that rule, but I will move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 12.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would request unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to introduce a school to you and through you to all members of this Assembly. The Spring Glen junior high school has come up from the southern parts of the province. They've travelled a long way, and they were hoping to be able to be introduced in the House, so I'd like to do this at this time. Their principal, Jamie Barfuss, is here, a great guy even though his students say otherwise. We went to school together. I'd like to have all of them please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Do you need a motion to go back into Committee of the Whole?

The Deputy Speaker: No. I think we're fine. You learn something new every day around here.

Thank you, hon. members.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: We're moving back into committee.

Bill 12 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (continued)

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments? Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. I'm really proud to be able to stand today and speak, mostly because home ownership is one of the biggest financial decisions that any family will make. Albertans deserve to be protected and have confidence that their home is being built to a high standard by builders with a good track record. Currently you can never be too sure as to whether or not your home builder is well equipped, is licensed – well, there is no licensing program at the moment. You never know what their credentials are, but soon you will if this bill is to pass.

This is a fair and balanced measure which will help both consumers and the home building industry and has been put forward after consultation with the industry, consumers, municipalities, and, of course, other stakeholders. Currently new-home consumers are vulnerable because they have limited access to information about builders, like I was referring to earlier. There are no mechanisms to prevent a builder from operating even after instances of fraud or poor building practices. Builder licensing programs already protect 75 per cent of Canadians, and we need to be in line with the other provinces so that we're not a destination for bad builders from elsewhere, of course. Now, Madam Chair, this is just one of the more practical ways that we're making life better for Albertans, and I'm proud to be a part of a government that is focused on that.

Now, I just wanted to talk about certain parts of the bill. Of course, under part 1.1 of the act, Licensing:

4.1(1) The Registrar may, on application, issue a licence to a residential builder if

- (a) the Registrar is satisfied that the residential builder meets the prescribed qualifications and conditions for licensing,
- (b) where the residential builder is a corporation, the Registrar is satisfied that no individual about whom disclosure is required under subsection (3) would be refused a licence if the individual were an applicant, and
- (c) the residential builder pays the required licence fee.

Of course, that's just referring to how the licensing program will be set up, Madam Chair, and how we can move forward.

(2) The Registrar may

- (a) require an applicant to take, or where the applicant is a corporation, to require any of its directors, officers or employees to take, courses and examinations for the

purposes of ensuring that the applicant or the applicant's directors, officers and employees meet the qualifications and conditions referred to in subsection (1)(a).

Of course, this just makes sure that everyone who does want a licence is properly informed of all the decisions, is informed of what the requirements to build a house would be.

Of course, Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec already have builder licensing programs in place, so that means that over 75 per cent of Canadians, as I was referring to earlier, have the benefit of protection of builder licensing, and Manitoba is expected to introduce a licensing and warranty program in 2018.

Just to continue on with what I was talking about:

- (b) set and administer courses and examinations for the purposes of clause (a).

That's just referring to the first part I was talking about.

- (3) Where a residential builder applying for a licence or the renewal of a licence is a corporation, the residential builder must file a statement with the Registrar disclosing to the satisfaction of the Registrar the identity of all directors and officers of the corporation.

That's just so that there's a bit more transparency in the corporation.

- (4) If, after a statement is filed under subsection (3), there is any change in the information required to be disclosed, an updated statement must be filed with the Registrar forthwith.

- (5) A licence is not transferable.

Of course, that's just to make sure that if one corporation does close down or licensing does close down, they cannot create a new one and have that licence follow them with the new corporation.

11:40

Under Renewal of Licence:

- 4.2(1) A residential builder who holds a licence under this Part may, within the time prescribed, apply to the Registrar to have the licence renewed.

That's just to make sure that there is continuity.

- (2) The Registrar may renew the licence, with or without conditions and restrictions, if
 - (a) the Registrar is satisfied that the residential builder continues to meet the applicable requirements of section 4.1, and
 - (b) the residential builder pays the required renewal fee.

Again, just to make sure that there is continuity, making sure that they are still paying their dues as well as ensuring that everyone in the corporation or a certain builder is still qualified.

Under Conditions:

- 4.3 Subject to the regulations, the Registrar may at any time impose conditions and restrictions on a licence issued or renewed under this Part.

You never know what may happen, so you have to make sure that the registrar has the right to impose conditions.

Under Expiry of Licence:

- 4.4 Subject to section 4.5, a licence expires one year after the day it was issued or last renewed or, if an earlier expiry date is specified on the licence by the Registrar, on the specified date.

That is just, of course, making sure that people are able to renew the licence.

- 4.5(1) The Registrar may refuse to issue or renew or may at any time suspend or cancel, as the Registrar considers appropriate, the licence of a residential builder

- (a) for any reason that would render the residential builder ineligible for a licence under section 4.1 if the residential builder were applying for a licence under that section,
- (b) if the residential builder has made a false statement about a material matter in the application for the licence or renewal or refuses to provide information

about a material matter when requested to do so by the Registrar.

Of course, that's just keeping everything more transparent.

- (c) if the residential builder is convicted of an offence under this Act or a prescribed offence under another Act,
- (d) if the residential builder has breached a condition of the licence or a restriction on the licence,
- (e) if the Registrar considers that the application for the licence or renewal is not or was not made in good faith,
- (f) if the residential builder has failed to comply with a compliance order or a prescribed order or direction under another Act,
- (g) if the residential builder has failed to pay an administrative penalty under this Act or a prescribed Act,
- (h) if the licence was issued in error.

Of course, that would be if it was issued without compliance with the other parts under 4.5.

- (i) in any other circumstances in which the Registrar considers the refusal, suspension or cancellation appropriate to avoid or reduce a risk to the public or any person.

That's, of course, just keeping with public safety.

- (2) Subject to the regulations, the Registrar may reinstate a licence that has been suspended or cancelled if the Registrar is satisfied that it is appropriate to do so and that the issues that resulted in the suspension or cancellation have been addressed.

Again, making sure there's transparency, making sure the registrar has the rights to do as they need to.

Under Notice of Decision and Surrender of Licence:

- 4.6(1) If the Registrar refuses to issue or renew a licence or suspends, cancels or imposes conditions or restrictions on a licence, the Registrar shall serve the residential builder with notice of the decision.

- (2) The notice must

- (a) include written reasons for the Registrar's decision, and
- (b) advise the residential builder of the right under section 17 to appeal the Registrar's decision to the Board.

So making sure that the home builders still have rights if something does happen to their licences.

- (3) Where the Registrar suspends, cancels or refuses to renew the licence of a residential builder, the residential builder must forthwith surrender the licence to the Registrar.

So making sure that the registrar does have rights to suspend at any time instead of just having to wait until the renewal.

Under Holding Out:

- 4.7 A person who does not hold a valid licence under this Part shall not represent or hold out, expressly or by implication, that the person is licensed under this Part.

Section 5 is amended

- (a) in subsection (1)
 - (i) by striking out "shall issue" and substituting "may, on application, issue";
 - (ii) by striking out "an individual who intends to build a new home for personal use if the individual" and substituting "an owner builder if the owner builder";
- (b) by repealing subsection (3).

The current act says:

- 5(1) Subject to section 6, the Registrar shall issue an authorization, subject to any terms and conditions the Registrar considers appropriate, to an individual who intends to build a new home for personal use if the individual

- (a) registers the new home with the Registrar,
- (b) meets the prescribed criteria, and
- (c) pays the required fees, if any.

Of course, this just makes it so that if someone does own their own home or is an owner-builder, they have their own rights under this act.

Section 6 is repealed, and the following is substituted:

Refusal, suspension or cancellation of authorization

6 The Registrar may refuse to issue an authorization to an owner builder or may at any time suspend or cancel, as the Registrar considers appropriate, an owner builder's authorization

- (a) if the owner builder does not meet the prescribed criteria referred to in section 5(1)(b) or does not pay the required fees, if any, under section 5(1)(c),

Of course, that was the section that I just read and we have amended.

- (b) if the owner builder has made a false statement about a material matter in the application for an authorization or refuses to provide information about a material matter when requested to do so by the Registrar,

This is making sure that they are accountable under the registrar once more.

- (c) if the owner builder is convicted of an offence under this Act,
- (d) if the owner builder has breached a condition of the authorization or a restriction on the authorization,
- (e) if the Registrar considers that the application for the authorization is not or was not made in good faith,
- (f) if the owner builder has failed to comply with a compliance order,
- (g) if the owner builder has failed to pay an administrative penalty, or
- (h) if the authorization was issued in error.

Of course, this just mirrors what's done for other builders.

Section 7(2) is being repealed. It presently says: "If the Registrar suspends or cancels an owner builder's authorization, the Registrar shall notify the permit issuer that issued the building permit to the owner builder." It will be substituted with:

- (2) If the Registrar suspends or cancels an authorization held by an owner builder to whom a building permit has been issued under the Safety Codes Act, the Registrar shall notify the permit issuer.

That's just making sure that the registrar still has the right to permit the issuer.

Section 9(1)(a) will be repealed. It presently reads:

9(1) The Registrar shall establish and maintain a registry that must include information on

- (a) authorizations and exemptions issued or applied for under this Act.

That will be repealed, and the following will be substituted:

- (a) licences applied for, issued, renewed, suspended, cancelled or reinstated under this Act,
- (a.1) authorizations applied for, issued, suspended or cancelled under this Act,
- (a.2) exemptions applied for or issued under this Act.

Of course, that's to make sure that the registrar can maintain his registry and include certain information.

11:50

The current section 11(1)(a) and (b) shall be repealed. It reads:

- 11(1) For the purposes of this Act, a compliance officer may
- (a) require an owner builder to produce
 - (i) the owner builder's authorization, including any declaration in support of the application for that authorization, or
 - (ii) any records relating to the owner builder's exemption from a requirement under this Act.

That will be repealed, and the following shall be substituted:

- (a) require an owner builder to produce any or all of the following:
 - (i) proof of the owner builder's authorization;
 - (ii) any records relating to the application for the authorization;
 - (iii) any records relating to an exemption from a requirement under this Act,
- (b) require a residential builder to produce any or all of the following:
 - (i) proof of the residential builder's licence;
 - (ii) any records relating to the application for the licence;
 - (iii) proof that a new home built or under construction by the residential builder has the required home warranty coverage;
 - (iv) any records relating to an exemption from a requirement under this Act.

Of course, that makes it so that the residential builder shall produce any proof that they are a residential builder to a registrar or those who are taking care of the law in this regard.

Section 12(3)(a) is amended by striking out "an authorization" and substituting "a licence or an authorization," just to make sure that we have full compliance under the law.

Section 15 shall be amended in subsection (2) by striking out "in respect of a new home, including a dwelling unit within a multiple family dwelling that is a new home." That means, in respect to the act, that a penalty may be imposed by the registrar. Currently that subsection reads:

- (2) An administrative penalty may be
 - (a) a single amount, or
 - (b) an amount for each day that the contravention or failure to comply continues.

It will also be amended by adding the following after subsection (2).

- (2.1) Where a contravention or failure to comply referred to in subsection (1) is in respect of a multiple family dwelling, a separate administrative penalty may be imposed for each dwelling unit that is a new home within the multiple family dwelling.

It will also be amended in subsection (4) by striking out "under this section."

It will also be amended by repealing subsection (6) and substituting the following:

- (6) An administrative penalty may be imposed on one or more directors, officers or other persons who authorized, permitted or acquiesced in a contravention or failure to comply by a corporation for which an administrative . . .

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 12. I wish to table copies of any amendments that may be considered by the Committee of the Whole, but seeing none, there won't be any tabled.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Madam Speaker, I move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon. [Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, May 11, 2017

Day 32

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 11, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. It's a beautiful day out there, folks. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you this day the students of Lacombe Christian school from the beautiful and historic city of Lacombe. With them is their teacher, Mr. David Allers. As you will see by the names of the parent chaperones in a minute, most are from the hard-working Dutch community that live in and around Lacombe as well. I'll see how I get through the names: Mrs. Reanne Vanderscheer, Mrs. Judy Hazelhoff, Mrs. Candace Bajema, Mr. Keith Vaandrager, Mrs. Rachel Kraay, Don and Angie Scott, and Sherry TenHove. I'd ask that they all please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 80 students from Westpark middle school in the amazing constituency of Red Deer-South. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Adam Barthel, Mr. David Cozens, Ms Kim Toth, and Mrs. Cindy O'Connor. Would you all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Richard Hanson. Mr. Hanson was a correctional officer at the Edmonton Remand Centre for 33 years, retiring in 2013. This week he was awarded the corrections exemplary service medal for his 30-plus years of service in the corrections system. I think we all know how difficult and challenging this work is and that it keeps the rest of us safe. I'd like Mr. Hanson to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members some very special guests from the Edmonton Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee. These gentlemen have dedicated hundreds of volunteer hours planning and organizing the 19th annual Edmonton Nagar Kirtan parade, which draws upwards of 50,000 Albertans from all faiths. I ask them to stand. They are Gurcharan Singh Sangha, Pal Singh Purewal, Harpreet Singh Gill, Paramjeet Singh Dhindsa, Malkit Singh Panesar, Chanchal Singh Nyota, and Mohinder Singh Sagoo. This year's parade is on May 21 and touches the constituencies of

Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Mill Creek, and Edmonton-Ellerslie. I encourage all members to attend. Thank you for being here, gentlemen. I would now like you to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize National Nursing Week, and I have four guests in our gallery. They are Alberta nursing professionals, who always bring compassion and expertise to their roles, that are continuously evolving and changing: Joy Peacock from the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta as well as Barbara Lowe from the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta, Linda Stanger from the College of Licensed Practical Nurses, and Teddie Tanguay from the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta. They have all risen. Please join me in extending the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you 18 students and their teachers from around the province. They came here today to present to me two papers on reconciliation in our schools. These 18 students represent more than 200 students who are working collaboratively to produce papers on how schools can become institutions of reconciliation and how we can work to ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures are recognized and supported throughout the K to 12 education system. I would ask them, their teachers, their chaperones, and the elders to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and pleasure to introduce to you and through you my parents-in-law, Dave and Donna Johnston. They are joined by my husband, Jeremy Johnston. They are my most lovely parents-in-law and are in Fort Saskatchewan. They have been making their lives there for decades upon decades and have raised four lovely children. My father-in-law was a long-time Unifor union member, so we have a lot to talk about on those files. I would encourage the entire House to please extend the warm welcome to them.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests that are from Saskatchewan. Austin MacNally is a student at the University of Saskatchewan with the hope of one day serving as an NDP MLA in the province of Saskatchewan. He's a proud member and vice-president of the Saskatchewan Young New Democrats. After attending the 2016 Western Canada Youth Parliament, he decided he wanted to see all Legislatures in person and not just on television. He is here today with his grandmother, Dianne Winters, who hails from Borden, Saskatchewan, and currently serves as an office manager at the Royal Canadian Legion branch 63 in Saskatoon. These two have joined us today to see firsthand the great work that our Alberta NDP government is able to

accomplish. Could they please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature representatives of Hypertension Canada, who've been running a blood pressure monitoring clinic in the lower rotunda. In fact, it's still going on until 2:30 if anybody wants to get their blood pressure checked. Hypertension Canada is a volunteer-based, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to advance health through the prevention and control of blood pressure. Several representatives of Hypertension Canada are in the public gallery, including Angelique Berg, CEO; Dr. Nadia Khan, president and chair of the board; Dr. Ross Tsuyuki, professor of medicine and pharmacy at the University of Alberta; and Dr. Raj Padwal, professor of medicine at the University of Alberta. I ask for all to rise and receive the usual welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, I was encouraged by both sides of the House to go to that clinic before I came in here this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions if I may. The first one is on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Airdrie. I would like to welcome the beautiful and determined Abby Marr and her grandfather Gavin Clarke, who are strong conservatives from the wonderful city of Airdrie. If they could please stand and receive the traditional welcome of our House.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce my next two guests. The first one is Lisa Friedt. She is a community creator, connector, and coach, and she shines light on women's strengths and accomplishments. I am so lucky to know her and to work with her.

The second is a very, very dear friend of mine. Her name is Kelly Falardeau. She is a survivor of burns on 75 per cent of her body since the age of two years and constantly struggled with her self-worth and confidence. She found a way, in her own words, to go from near death to success, from the ugly, scar-faced girl to the top 10 most powerful and influential speakers, fierce woman of the year, international best-seller author, four-time recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal, and the YWCA women of distinction award. She has also travelled to Africa twice to help burn survivors recover from their tragic injuries. Plus, she started the blankets for burn kids fund to help burn kids to feel more loved and needed and wanted at times when life is just too rough to move forward.

I would like you both to stand and please receive the absolute warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly someone who is a regular visitor to our Chamber but who comes to us today having just done some quality control on our health care system, and having accomplished that, he is now informing me that he is going to be a very strong advocate on behalf of increased resources for health care infrastructure and operations. Please welcome back once again Rory Koopmans.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Climate Leadership Plan and Pipeline Construction

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard many members of the opposition ring alarm bells and shout insults across the aisle because of one news item or another about oil pipelines in Canada. The latest bit of nonsense came yesterday, when a member opposite used the occasion of the B.C. election to use highly inflammatory language about our government's stance on pipelines. I will not dignify the member's statement by responding to it directly except to say that he is absolutely wrong.

Instead of arguing at the level of insult, let's look at some facts. The first is the Prime Minister of Canada's announcement where he publicly stated that Kinder Morgan and line 3 could not have been approved without the leadership of Alberta's Premier and Alberta's climate leadership plan. If the opposition wants to claim that the Prime Minister is lying, that is their choice.

The second is Cenovus CEO Brian Ferguson, who spoke at a panel organized by the Calgary Chamber of commerce and said that Alberta had struck an appropriate balance with our climate change policy. If the opposition wants to claim the CEO of one of Alberta's largest energy companies is lying, that is their choice.

Support from powerful political and business leaders did not come about because we used childish insults. This support came about because we, working as a conscientious and informed government, recognized some fundamental realities. Albertans know that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand. Opposition to pipelines is real. We must engage with those who oppose pipelines in order to achieve lasting results. The benefits of pipelines, both economically and environmentally, are substantial. We must educate and inform everyone of that reality.

Progress towards a stronger economy and a cleaner environment must not be taken for granted, and I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to working with the energy industry to get results and not part of the opposition whose risky and extreme actions put those results at risk.

Thank you.

Immigration and Economic Development

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, throughout the 1990s the Alberta advantage meant having the lowest taxes to attract entrepreneurs to create jobs. Migrants have long been associated with entrepreneurialism. According to the World Economic Forum 65 per cent of migrants between the ages of 15 and 35 are skilled, and India is the number one migrant-sending country in the world. Among the 15 million Indian immigrants globally, many hold prominent positions in management, technology, and science, bringing with them unique skills and diaspora networks. Some of the examples are the current CEOs of Microsoft, Google, and Pepsi.

President Trump's policy to overhaul the H-1B visa program will provide opportunities for Alberta as Indian computer programmers and coders will no longer be brought to Silicon Valley. This means creative, tech-savvy individuals can set up anywhere in the world equipped only with smart phones, database access, and desktop-publishing capability. They can create, market, and sell internationally. Their company's value will be based on the innovations, not assets. Calgary's fintech and Edmonton's computer gaming sectors

stand to benefit from these computer programmers and entrepreneurs leaving the U.S.A.

In today's society we are defined by our ability to reach every corner of the world in an instant. We can share ideas and move between continents like never before. Fibre optics to every community and direct international flights off-continent are essential. The opportunities abound, and I encourage the government to update the Alberta immigrant nominee program for strategic recruitment of computer programmers and high-tech entrepreneurs who want to move to Alberta and contribute to our communities.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Alberta Party Policies

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This weekend Alberta Party members will gather in Edmonton to bring the centre together. We'll meet to talk about the issues that matter to Albertans, focusing on jobs and the economy. We'll bring together people from around the province to share ideas, debate, and learn from one another. We will host two diverse panels to talk about how to create jobs for underrepresented groups and how government can create an environment where Albertans have stable employment and job growth no matter the price of oil. In other words, exactly the topics we should be focusing on in this Assembly.

Now, I've had the privilege of travelling all over Alberta, and I will let you in on a little secret. Albertans are not left-wing or right-wing. Albertans are humble. Albertans are remarkable. They are proud and smart and resourceful and compassionate. Albertans are thrifty, but we are not cheap. We are strong, but we're not bullies. We get things done, and working together, Albertans make tomorrow happen. Albertans: we admit our mistakes, and we move past them. We don't obsess about who's to blame. We put our energies into what's to come. Albertans time and time again prove that we have big hearts. Albertans believe that to be great, our province must be great for each and every citizen. At the same time, Albertans hate waste.

Our people want a government as smart as they are. They want common sense. Albertans know that we cannot have a discussion about the economy without having a discussion about the environment. Albertans want leaders who are proud of our energy industry as it is today and will fiercely defend our environmental and social track record to the world. Albertans want leaders who ensure our province succeeds in today's economy while also taking a step into tomorrow's economy, by allowing Alberta entrepreneurs to innovate in green technology, agrifood, IT, and so much more.

That is the sort of leadership Albertans are looking for, and in 2019 that's exactly what the Alberta Party will . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Government and Opposition Policies

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's New Democrats have a long history of standing up for the protection of universal, accessible public services like health care and education. We know that cuts in essential services lead to horrible consequences down the road. We also know that for years the previous government neglected necessary repairs in nearly all of our province's infrastructure in the name of a balanced budget. Even when oil prices were at record high, the previous government failed to invest sufficiently in our public systems. They did nothing to curtail the

skyrocketing school fees, they allowed tuition to rise over decades, and the Wildrose opposition called for even further cuts, which they continue to do to this day.

When our government expands on affordable child care and nutrition programs, reduces school fees, and freezes tuition, we hear crickets from that side of the House. When this government invests in new hospitals and needed infrastructure, more crickets.

Mr. Speaker, when the opposition talks about risky economic policies hurting families, perhaps they might look to their best friends to the east, the ones that made massive increases to their PST while cutting almost all of the services their citizens depend on. They removed \$67 million from the K to 12 system. They eliminated their provincially funded busing services, which are utilized by low-income seniors and rural communities. They reduced postsecondary funding by 5 per cent while raising the education tax by nearly 10 per cent. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, the opposition might try to deny that they support these measures, but up until a few weeks ago they were the Saskatchewan government's biggest cheerleaders. If they have a better plan, perhaps they might take a moment from tweeting memes to make a shadow budget longer than 140 characters.

Mr. Speaker, I support finding efficiencies and making smart, targeted investments to optimize outcomes, but what I do not support is pretending that a balanced budget is more important than protecting the services that the people in this province depend on. I will continue to be a tireless advocate for my community, as will the rest of my government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Serenity's Former Guardians

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Children's Services minister said that we had things wrong about Serenity. She said that she would explain everything in a press conference. And then nothing: no details, no explanation, and no answers. What we do know is that there are still children living with adults who allowed Serenity to be abused and starved. She was four years old and only weighed 19 pounds. Will the Premier tell Albertans right now which law allows you to abuse and starve one child but still allows you to keep the other children?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the members opposite should know, our government is committed to ensuring that vulnerable children in our province are kept safe. We are focused on doing that work. Is it perfect? No. Do we all have more work to do to make it better? Absolutely. Are we committed to doing that work in as transparent a process as possible? Absolutely. Is this process being led by an excellent minister who is absolutely focused on this issue, too? Yes. The answer to that is yes. I'm very proud of her work, and I'm happy to have her answer the additional questions around what she can and cannot . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the state put Serenity in the home where she was starved and abused. The state gave the adults in that home

guardianship status over Serenity. The state stopped visiting her and looking out for her. It abandoned her. Now the state has left other children in that very same house. The adults in that house at minimum allowed a four-year-old to be abused and starved. The whole point of the panel was to make sure that what happened to Serenity never happens again. What laws, Premier, are we actually going to see changed to protect our children?

The Speaker: The hon. Children's Services minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been very clear with what I'm able to say at the moment. A criminal investigation is ongoing, so I'm unable to provide additional details at this time because to do so would put young people involved at risk. It would be so much easier for me to have these conversations if I disclosed very personal, intimate details about those youth. I won't apologize for protecting those kids because that's my job: to protect and keep kids safe. That's what I'm doing and I will continue to do, and we will continue to monitor and ensure the safety of those children.

Mr. Jean: Serenity was four years old and weighed only 19 pounds when she died, Mr. Speaker. Her siblings were also drastically underweight. They were beaten for stealing food. This type of abuse did not happen overnight. It took time for Serenity to get to that place. The minister says that the remaining children in that home are safe and that you can't remove a child until you can prove abuse of that specific child. But we cannot let history repeat itself in Alberta in this case. If there's no law in place to protect these children today, when will this NDP government bring forward a law to keep these children safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Children's Services minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I would say that the safety of children in this province is my absolute priority and that if any young person in this province was being abused, then we would apprehend them immediately. Clearly, there are challenges in the child intervention system. That's why we have a Minister of Children's Services. That's why we have the ministerial panel. This government has stood on the record strongly in support of our vulnerable children for a very long time, and we will take action to improve the system going forward.

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

Serenity and the Child Intervention System

Mr. Nixon: When we asked this government what action is being taken for Serenity, the minister brings up the panel. The panel might be doing good work, but it is not doing anything for Serenity; let's be clear. In fact, this government and this minister refuse to allow us to even speak about Serenity. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act has provisions to allow the minister to disclose to any person personal information that comes to the minister's attention. Minister, are you willing to explore a way to legally disclose the details of Serenity's case with the panel members in private so that we can work together on preventing another Serenity – yes or no? – or will your government and you . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I would say that, yes, there are issues with the child intervention system, and, yes, all of us continue to be devastated by the story of Serenity, and

absolutely we need to make changes to do so. There is a process by which the panel members can work with the chair to get access to the information they need to make the decisions to improve the system. So I would continue to encourage the members of the panel to work through all of us to ensure they have access to the information.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Albertans are rightly confused by what the minister is telling us about the children in Serenity's former home. Yesterday she said that there needs to be evidence of actual abuse to an individual before apprehension, but the minister and I both know, Mr. Speaker, that there are many examples of where that is not the case. The minister accuses us of being inaccurate when in actual fact she is being inaccurate. Minister, Albertans are outraged and have had enough of this government's incompetence when it comes to children in care. When will this minister and this government stop hiding behind ridiculous excuses, stop the secrecy, do something, and do your job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that as a mom and as a nurse for almost 18 years taking care of Alberta's vulnerable children goes to the very heart of who I am, and I'm very proud to be in this chair and responsible for that. While I understand that it's frustrating to not have all the details, I can absolutely assure Albertans and all members of this House that the safety of those children is the priority of this government and that we will continue to do everything in our power to ensure their safety and the safety of all children in this province.

Mr. Nixon: Children absolutely need to be put first. A previous round-table with a cross-section of stakeholders resulted in the development of the Children First Act in 2013. Surprisingly, much of that legislation has not actually been put into force. We asked the minister about this, and she replied that it would not be timely to move forward. This law is from four years ago, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the problem is not passing laws; the problem is getting this government to act on laws. Minister, even if new legislation is passed as a result of your panel, what guarantee can you give Albertans that your government will actually implement the laws?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I can say that, absolutely, this government is committed to putting vulnerable children first, and we will continue to do so in this situation and in terms of developing legislation going forward. I'm incredibly excited to see the results coming out of the ministerial panel as we go forward through phase 2. I'll be bringing forward legislation on phase 1 very shortly this spring, and I can't wait to take action on the recommendations going forward because the children of this province have deserved change for a long time, and we will make that change happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Highway Speed Limits and Potoradar Use

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, earlier this week Edmonton's chief of police stated that in his opinion there is no reason why the Anthony Henday ring road does not have a maximum speed limit of 110 kilometres during the summer driving season. The tens of thousands of drivers who have received a stealth potoradar ticket

on the Anthony Henday for going less than 10 kilometres over the limit were very happy to hear this news. Will the Premier commit to reviewing the speed limits on provincial highways, including the Henday, and ensure that they are properly and objectively set?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I admire the hon. member for her commitment to some of the changes that she's talking about: photoradar, for example, and speed on the Henday. Unfortunately, she's a day late and a dollar short because I asked the department to look at speed limits on the Henday a couple of months ago. It's being reviewed. Safety is our top priority. I've also had the opportunity some time ago to discuss it with the chief of police and solicit his opinion. I appreciate her enthusiasm, but we're on it.

2:00

Mrs. Pitt: I love when the opposition makes changes with this government, Mr. Speaker.

Many Albertans are understandably frustrated that photoradar in our province feels like a cash grab. Only four Canadian provinces have photoradar programs in place, and Alberta is the Wild West, with uninhibited use that allows for mobile speed cameras outside of construction and school zones. Does the Premier believe that our current photoradar system is serving Albertans, or is it just a cash cow?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, pretty much the same situation as the last question. We've been working on this for a number of months. I've been meeting with my colleague the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General on this matter. We're reviewing the policy around photoradar, how it's utilized. We're going to be talking to municipalities about how they implement the guidelines that have been in place for some time. We're reviewing the guidelines. We are going to conduct a review of photoradar to make sure that people are safe on our highways and that law enforcement is not used for revenue generation.

Mrs. Pitt: Always a good day when Wildrose member-passed policy is being followed by the government, Mr. Speaker.

We all care about safety on this side of this Assembly. We believe that photoradar can be used to prevent collisions and protect pedestrians, but we also think that a review would be common sense to ensure that photoradar is being used fairly. Will the Premier commit to producing a report on photoradar, due back no later than September 15 of this year, so that Albertans can be informed on photoradar before heading to the municipal elections this fall?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are conducting a review of photoradar. This is something that's been on our radar for a number of months. We are scoping out the terms of reference of the review, and we are not going to be rushed by artificial deadlines. This opposition may want to use it as a club in the municipal elections, but we're more interested in safety and getting the policy right. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'd respectfully request again: keep the volume down.

The leader of the third party.

Serenity's Former Guardians (continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Children's Services accused both the media and the opposition of spreading misinformation about children that are still living in the home where Serenity suffered unspeakable abuse. Apparently, there was so much, quote, information that the minister needed to call a press conference, wherein she informed the media that their facts were wrong, but then she refused to provide the correct facts. To the Minister of Children's Services: since you failed to point out yesterday where the media and opposition were wrong, perhaps you'd like to clear that up now.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there's a lot of emotion around this story. My heart continues to go out to the family of Serenity for the tragic loss that they endured. However, there is information that is quite dated that has been circulated and is being utilized in this House and throughout the media. Again, in the interest of protecting the youth who might be involved in this situation, I was unable to share particular details. I thought the media and the opposition would be interested in knowing that they should not be spreading . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: It just keeps getting worse, Mr. Speaker.

If the minister is going to accuse me, my colleagues, and the men and women of the press gallery of lying to Albertans about something as serious as vulnerable children in need of intervention, then she ought to be prepared to set the record straight. Minister, we're all ears. Strike one was yesterday. Strike two was on the first question. Before you have strike three, what were we incorrect about? Please correct the record.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because I respect my colleagues in this House, I certainly would never have used the word "lying" at all. In fact, what I said is that they should be careful in terms of the sources of information and be cautious about sharing information that they've not confirmed. Again, you know, it's important to protect the young people involved in a very complex situation, and sharing their personal details, in fact, could have quite unintended consequences for their lives. I will not apologize for protecting young people in this province. That's my job, given to me by the Premier, and I will continue to do so.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the minister is putting children in danger because she will not use the authority she has to get them out of danger, and that is unacceptable. Now, the only thing the minister did say yesterday was that the number of kids was not six. She didn't say if it was two; she didn't say if it was 12; just not six. Apparently, that was her reason for calling a media conference. To the minister: your credibility is now at stake. Can you please point to the specific Alberta privacy laws that you are hiding behind in order to not talk? What are you hiding? What are you not telling the public? What you're telling sure isn't the story that Albertans deserve to hear, and it's not the truth.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been very clear about what information I'm able to share at this point in time. Once again, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act: the entire intention and purpose behind that act is to protect Alberta's vulnerable children. I take the protection of those children very seriously. As much as it would be easy for me to be able to answer the questions in terms of that, you know who would pay for that? Not the members of this Legislature but those vulnerable youth, whom the sharing of that very protected information would put at risk. I will continue to protect the children because that is my job, and I take it very seriously.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Serenity and the Child Intervention System (continued)

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to children in care, there is a complex web of legislation, different accountabilities and funding from various levels of government, overlaid with privacy concerns. Now, all of this, I hope, is focused on the well-being of Alberta's children. Unfortunately, as questions about Serenity's former kinship care family have been debated this week, the minister hasn't helped the situation by her lack of disclosure. To the Minister of Children's Services. Now, I'm not asking you to break any privacy laws, but your responses have left too many unanswered questions. There's an unfortunate perception that you're using privacy as an excuse for inaction. What are you going to do to change that perception?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that this is a very complex situation and that there is some frustration at the lack of being able to access that information. Again, while I understand the frustration on behalf of members and other Albertans, I have to be incredibly careful and respectful of the young people who are involved in any complex and delicate and sensitive situation. My primary directive is to protect those youth, so while I understand the frustration of the member, absolutely I can say that I am ensuring the safety of those children.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, the first phase of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention resulted in seven recommendations, including to improve information sharing, which I believe would go a long way towards helping the minister provide timely information to Albertans and restoring public confidence in the system. The panel also recommended changes to streamline and speed up the child death review process and enhance supports for families. The panel chair confirmed on April 19 that there would be legislation brought forward this spring to implement the phase 1 recommendations. Again to the minister: will we see this legislation this spring? If so, will it enact all seven of the panel's recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Absolutely, the panel did fantastic work. I'm very thankful for the recommendations that came forward in terms of improving the child death review process. Absolutely, I took those

recommendations very seriously. I'm working very hard with my legislative team to look at legislation as well as potential changes to policies and procedures and regulations to enact those changes or the intent of those changes as we go forward because, clearly, there was change required. Again, there was excellent work done, and I look forward to making those changes in the very near future.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The panel was created to prevent tragedies like what happened to Serenity from ever happening again. The only way to restore Albertans' trust in the system is for this panel to be given the tools we need to do a comprehensive review. That means we need access to the information about what happened to Serenity. I think I speak for all panel members when I say that we would be willing to sign whatever agreements are necessary for us to see the specific files and to review those files in strictly closed sessions. Again to the minister: will you grant us access to the information we need to do our jobs so we can prevent tragedies like this from ever happening again?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I think it's very important that the panel have all the tools that they require in order to be able to make the recommendations to improve the child intervention system. So I will continue to support working with the panel to ensure they have access to the information that they require in order to do that.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Larivee: Mr. Speaker, clearly, we need to know how to improve the system, and clearly they need access to all the information that they require. Absolutely, I will continue to work with them to give them access to all the information I can to support their ability to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Air Ambulance Service in Northern Alberta

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Peace River have approached me with concerns about the process used by Alberta Health Services to provide air ambulance services. Given that the fixed-wing air ambulance is a vital component of health care in the north and given that my constituents rely on this service to access the health care they need, particularly in emergencies, to the Minister of Health: can you clarify the status of the procurement process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the member for the question and acknowledge that several other members have approached my office with similar questions. The current contract will expire this summer. A competitive RFP process opened last July and closed this March. Two proponents were successful. AHS is in contract negotiations with them, but no contracts have been signed at this point.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents remember that when the previous government brought these

contracts out to a bidding process, the intention was to relocate air ambulance bases out of several communities, including Peace River, and given that this would have a very serious impact on health care in these communities, can the Minister of Health assure this House that the air ambulance will continue to be based in Peace River?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member again for the question. She's right that that would have a detrimental effect. So, yes. What's more, I can assure all members that this procurement process will not lead to any base location changes. I want to be very clear on this point for my colleagues. This procurement process will not lead to any consolidation or relocation of air ambulance bases, period.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that municipal leaders in the Peace River region have also raised concerns about the economic viability of the Peace River Airport if its scheduled passenger service provider is unable to continue that service, to the same minister: was this issue a factor in the Alberta Health Services procurement process?

Ms Hoffman: No, Mr. Speaker, it was not. This process is about getting the best air ambulance service for our health care dollars. I've met with municipal leaders in the area as well as the member. I've heard from the members for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, Lethbridge-East, Lethbridge-West, and yourself, Mr. Speaker, as a local MLA for Medicine Hat. I encouraged them to continue working with their local aviation companies. Certainly, we will recognize that Peace River Airport is an important economic portal for the region.

Oil Prices and the Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Mr. Barnes: Good news today for the market. Oil is up for a second day. Bad news today for Albertans. The rebounded price is nearly \$10 below the NDP's budget projection, contrived to make things look a little less terrible. The NDP has no plan outside of gross hypocrisy. The economic development minister used to criticize the former government, saying that they "intentionally misled Albertans by using . . . overly optimistic projections." Minister, when can Albertans expect more details on your budget adjustment and a deficit update?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, we're about six, maybe five and a half weeks into the fiscal year, so that's not a great deal of time in terms of the whole 52 weeks to base this average on, the average for oil. We're not going to change it, necessarily, right now. It's about \$50. Albertans know that it's a fool's game to go up and down with the price of oil, so we've risk-adjusted our forecast, and that's to the benefit of Albertans.

Mr. Barnes: By now the NDP really should have figured out that the price of oil isn't responsive to the whimsical hopes of a misguided, ideological, socialist government. Given that every \$3 swing in the price of oil has a billion-dollar implication for the treasury and given that The Rapidan Group is predicting that by the middle of next year crude could revisit the low \$30 mark, to the Premier: when can Albertans expect you to stop buying off voters by indenturing our children with an ever-mounting, unsustainable debt level?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, Albertans deserve a government that makes life better for them and their families regardless of the price of oil. Mr. Speaker, we're going to assure Albertans that the size of the classrooms for their children and the care their parents receive in hospitals are not dependent on the price of oil. That's why we've risk-adjusted it. We will get through this. I just wish they would support Alberta and Albertans instead of calling our oil price and everything down.

Mr. Barnes: Obviously, poor budgeting is just one more thing that Albertans can add to the long list of reasons capital investment is skittish or fleeing.

Given that Alberta was referred to as the most – the most – geopolitically unstable jurisdiction in the world due to high royalties, high taxes, and high uncertainty and given that the rapidly increasing deficit and debt only serve to unnerve investors, who fear a pending drastic tax increase, and that we're two years into this, Premier, can Albertans expect you to get your spending in order without bankrupting the next . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

The Speaker: Hon. members, I had a great meeting yesterday with the House leaders. One of the topics that came up, which was really a very engaging discussion, was with respect to the use of preambles in the House. I also had discussions with other members. I urge all of you again to go back to the standing orders and be conscious of the way you may or may not be applying the intent of that standing order.

The Minister of Finance.

Oil Prices and the Provincial Fiscal Deficit

(continued)

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we average our oil price from five private-sector companies. That is the same way we've been doing it in this province for years. We have the same oil forecast as Saskatchewan does. If you take a look at their oil forecast, it's the same as ours. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, full-time employment in this province rose for the third straight month. Rigs, drilling are up in this province. There are good things happening across this province as opposed to what's being said over there.

Serenity's Former Guardians

(continued)

Mr. Fraser: As a paramedic I've attended motor vehicle accidents where one person in the vehicle has died and the other passengers seemed fine. Common sense would dictate that if one person is dead in the vehicle, the mechanism of injury is lethal and others may be hurt. In fact, it's a duty of care to do everything in my power to get those patients to a safe place, to ensure that they're not harmed beyond what I can see. Minister, as a nurse you understand duty of care and mechanism of injury, yet there are still children in the home where Serenity was raped and starved. Doesn't common sense

tell you that the other vulnerable children in that home should be removed based on what happened to Serenity?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely understand the member's frustration. It is a very complex situation. What I can say is that we have been and we continue to monitor the situation, and if there were ever concerns about the safety of any young person, we would apprehend them immediately. The courts don't let us go in and apprehend children without evidence of abuse to that specific child. That is the law. I take the safety of those children very seriously and will absolutely say that we continue to monitor the situation to ensure the safety . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the children at potential risk in this home deserve more than empty promises and key messages from the minister. Minister, given that as a nurse, if you came across a child that was being abused, you would have a duty of care to report it – having worked with nurses, there is no way a nurse would abandon children who lived in the same home where a child was raped. Given the fact that children are regularly removed from these circumstances until a full investigation has been conducted – Minister, you have the authority, the duty of care to get these children to safety today. Why are you choosing to leave them in potential harm?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say, absolutely, without doubt, that the safety of those children and all children in this province is my primary focus and that I'm doing everything in my power to ensure their safety. Again, I understand the frustration with the lack of information in a complex situation. However, I will say that the safety of the children is being monitored. If there were concerns about the safety of any young person, we would apprehend them immediately. Again, everything in our power is being done to ensure the safety . . .

2:20

The Speaker: Hon. member, I urge you with respect to the preamble as well. Please proceed with your second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, given that this government claims to be champions for sexual assault survivors yet they're sitting on their hands while children may be in harm's way as we speak, Minister, respectfully, what are you thinking? Given that these children may have witnessed the sexual abuse, starvation, and murder of Serenity, do you honestly think that they even dare speak out about what's happening to them as they might receive the same fate as Serenity? They will never speak until they know that they will be safe. Minister, will you do your job, begin to advocate for these kids, and put them in a safe place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say to my fellow health care provider in the Legislature that oftentimes there are many details about situations that we cannot disclose which provide understanding of a complex situation. I would say that I understand the member's frustration. However, I absolutely would assure all members of this House and all Albertans that we are doing everything in our power to keep those children safe because keeping

vulnerable children safe is our key priority, and we will continue to ensure that we are doing everything to make that happen.

Supervised Drug Consumption Sites in Edmonton

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, this last weekend there was a large rally downtown protesting three proposed supervised injection sites in their neighbourhood, the Boyle Street-Chinatown area. The city of Edmonton claims they held consultations. However, the Chinese community says that they were never properly consulted, and they point out that the whole process had been rushed. To the Minister of Health: did your ministry ask the city of Edmonton to have this process expedited?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are very proud as a government to be supporting the application for supervised consumption services here in the city of Edmonton. We know that there's tremendous evidence that supervised consumption services save lives, and that's why the Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, and the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary support these services. The community groups that put forward the applications have engaged in a fulsome process of consultation with the communities where they will be located, and we've supported them along the way.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, consultations are critical. This is something that the Wildrose opposition has been trying to teach this NDP government for the last two years now. The Edmonton Chinese community has raised concerns regarding the lack of consultation by the municipal government, and the Senate has proposed . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you get to the question? It seems to me that as I hear you speaking . . . [interjections] The preamble. The preamble.

Mr. Yao: The city of Edmonton says that they were directed by the Ministry of Health to expedite the process. To the Minister of Health: did you ask to have this process expedited? Why?

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The process has undergone a five-year process to get to the point of the application of the supervised consumption services for the exemption under the federal law. I don't know that I would call five years an expedited process. Additionally, I would quote Reverend James Holland of the Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples, located in the neighbourhood where some of those services will be located. He's in support of the supervised consumption services because within the month he's buried five community members. Quote: we've got to recognize that people are human beings no matter what situation they are in in life; if we bring them to a safe place, we have a chance . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. [interjections]

Hon. members. Hon. members. Hon. members.

I do hope, hon. member, that you have a second supplemental. I do ask again that you be conscious of the rule that this House has agreed to with respect to preambles, discussed as lately as yesterday, so I would urge you to do that. Please proceed.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, 2016 saw a 33 per cent increase in overdose deaths compared to 2015.

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

Mr. Yao: The 343 people that died in Alberta due to overdoses last year alone: that's one a day. In the first six weeks of 2017 there were 51 opioid overdoses.

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, I must say. I'm not sure. We might need to have some more discussion on the matter, but as I hear it, you continue to use the preamble. That may not be your intent, but that's what I think I'm hearing. I therefore would say that your question is out of order because of the standing order.

Labour Relations Code Review

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been a peaceful and prosperous province for decades. Our economy needs stability so we can get Albertans back to work. This government engaged in a very short consultation with Albertans on its workplace laws. It hosted a survey online with questions on employment standards but left out questions on labour relations. Albertans are worried that the fix is in. Minister of Labour, can we expect to see a report from Andrew Sims on the labour relations portion of this consultation before your government introduces any changes to the Labour Relations Code? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question about our consultation. We had heard from thousands of stakeholders about both our employment standards and our Labour Relations Code through the online surveys – over 1,000 employers responded – as well as through the round-tables and the discussions that have been taking place. With the guidance of Mr. Andrew Sims, a renowned labour lawyer, we are looking forward to reviewing all the feedback we've received and determining what the next steps may be after we've reviewed that.

Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that the NDP's constitution guarantees the Alberta Federation of Labour two seats on its provincial council and given that the constitution also guarantees seats for other AFL member unions like CUPE, UFCW, and United Steelworkers and given that the minister did not attend all of the by-invitation-only consultation meetings but the AFL president, Gil McGowan, did, Minister, who is making the decisions about card check certification, collective bargaining, and other labour relations issues? Is it you, or is it the AFL and your union bosses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to be Alberta's Minister of Labour, and I'm very proud to be reviewing workplace legislation that had been neglected under the previous government, not updated since 1988. We currently have workplace legislation that allowed a mother to lose her job when her son needed treatment for cancer. We have legislation that allows employees to be fired if they take time off to be sick. I am very proud to be leading an initiative of this NDP government, who believes in fair and family-friendly workplace legislation.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that the AFL opposes secret ballots in favour of a card check system and given that secret ballots were implemented to allow people to express their true conscience without fear of reprisal from either an intimidating union or a

threatening employer and given that a vote to decide who will represent you is a basic principle of democracy, to the minister of democratic renewal: could you ever foresee yourself claiming that it's in the best interest of democracy to get rid of a secret ballot vote?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through our consultation we heard from thousands of Albertans, thousands of businesses, all of which had a variety of opinions on employment standards and labour relations. I am reviewing the submissions that Albertans have put forward. I look forward to making sure that Alberta has fair, family-friendly, and balanced workplace legislation to support a strong economy and to make sure that workers can contribute to that economy and take care of their family responsibilities.

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

Serenity and the Child Intervention System (continued)

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I pointed out the difficulty in finding a phone number for your ministry. I then asked about implementing Serenity's law, and the reaction over there continues to be groaning, eye-rolling, and shaking of heads. My proposal to change legislation is not self-serving. It will save lives if the police are notified when a child is at risk. Again to the minister: since your government is dragging its heels on legislation anyway, will you please bring Serenity's law forward now?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the story of Serenity devastated all of us in this Legislature and moved us all to recognize the importance of making real, meaningful change to our child intervention system. That's why we have the ministerial panel to take a serious look at the system and identify improvements. Phase 2 of the panel's work will focus on the system as a whole and explore ways to achieve the best possible outcomes, and I encourage members who have ideas and suggestions to continue to work with their caucus representative on the panel to ensure that together we make the best changes possible.

Mr. Ellis: Given that the minister has been admonishing the media and opposition members for disseminating inaccurate information and given that whistle-blowers are so desperate to get help for children that they are leaking information to the media, which the minister then criticizes, and given that Serenity's law addresses the need for public awareness and your concerns about whistle-blowing and misinformation, Minister, why, for the love of children, would you not do this right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, this government has taken a strong stand on improving the child intervention system for a tremendously long time. That's why, once again, in this province we have a Children's Services minister, a move that I'm incredibly proud of, so it finally has the focus that it deserves. Through the panel and through the work of the Children's Services ministry we will make changes and we will take action, action that should have been taken a long time ago on behalf of Alberta's vulnerable children.

Mr. Ellis: Not soon enough, Minister.

Given that multiple systems failed Serenity before and after her death and they continue to fail now and given that those failures include the child intervention system that left Serenity to languish and die, a botched autopsy that may have compromised the criminal investigation into determining her killer, and the failure of the minister's office to prioritize this disturbing case, Minister, since the ministerial panel is barred from reviewing Serenity's death, will your government call a public inquiry so that Albertans can get answers, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously stated, there have been changes that have needed to happen for a long time, and I look forward to taking action as soon as possible to make those changes happen. Absolutely, I'm thankful for the partnership of Albertans who have concerns for children. If anyone knows of any child who is at risk of abuse or neglect, please call immediately to report that so we can follow it up and work together to keep Alberta's vulnerable children safe.

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

Government Information Technology Systems

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The May 2017 report of the Auditor General highlights that Service Alberta maintains duplicate computer systems across many different ministries. This is wasteful. Given that Albertans expect governments to spend their money wisely, to the Minister of Service Alberta: what action is your ministry taking to address this problematic duplication?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Speaker and to the member for the important question. First and foremost, I take the stewardship of taxpayer dollars very seriously. Since taking government, we have already taken steps to find efficiencies and have realized significant cost savings by consolidating e-mail systems and helpdesks, and we are now doing the same with data centres. One example of the real action we've taken is implementing our information management and technology strategy to ensure that our systems meet the needs of government in the most efficient way possible.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy that the minister is taking actions to address this wasteful spending, but to the same minister: can you explain to Albertans why such an obviously wasteful system was even set up in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Speaker. A very insightful question as it was, in fact, the Klein government who created these impractical systems of duplicate programs and disjointed data, which are very expensive and time consuming to maintain, at the expense of taxpayers. The recent report indicated that this has been a long-standing issue and has recommended improvements in his last three audits, dating back to almost 10 years ago, since 2008. Now we're left to clean up the PCs' mess, though I'm happy to say that since taking office, we've taken the necessary steps to begin fixing their costly and inefficient mistakes. We've embarked on a multiyear program to replace those applications, renew legacy technology, and deliver . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Auditor General's report also makes two other recommendations in relation to our IT systems and given that Albertans expect our IT systems to be run efficiently, to the same minister: what actions is your ministry taking to address the Auditor General's concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Speaker. The government of Alberta's IMT strategy sets the vision, direction, and foundation for us to do just that. As I mentioned earlier, the actions we are taking to consolidate and standardize government systems demonstrate the action and commitment that I have to addressing the Auditor General's concerns as well as optimizing our government's efficiency while saving tax dollars. Another example of how we are working responsibly and effectively is working with ministry partners to reduce the number of data centres. We have already reduced the number by 54 per cent, and our goal is to further reduce by another 85 per cent by 2020. This is important work, which will further reduce duplication and allow us to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Services for Students with Special Needs

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are confused about the regional collaborative service delivery funding. In response to a question yesterday from the MLA from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre you spoke about a new regional model and an increase of \$8 million for the program, yet the budget shows a decrease, and we continue to hear from boards who say that they will be receiving fewer funds this year. To the minister: what's going on? What is this new regional model? How have you communicated the changes to boards and families who rely on the services, and what is your plan for RCSD funding for the 2018-19 school year?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, we know that the regional service transition money has moved into the next phase. Having a regional model by which you can have physiotherapists and psychologists and speech pathologists and so forth working for more than one area I think is more economical, and it's probably better focused. The three-year transition finished this year. Now we have moved and we have put more money, more than an \$8 million increase in funding, into the regional service model.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, given that this transition is going to cause disruptions in service that are difficult for everyone and most especially for families who need programs for their children to help them succeed and given that some school boards are telling us that they're losing funds that support these students and given that the government states that they will save money by ending the, quote, three-year transition funding, end quote, to the Minister of Education: well, then are you cutting the full \$65.2 million at the end of 2017-18, and what exactly does that mean for public, independent, ECS, alternative, and home-schooling families who need these services?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question. It's important to have clarity. The transition funding that was given to a number of school boards – three years – was about three and some million dollars, but, no, the 60 some million dollars is not being cut at all. In fact, it is being strengthened over time, and I'm working with some of the school boards that might have lost some of their funding this time because of the transition to make sure that we have those services in place for them in coming years because it's important to make sure that we have special-needs services for all students regardless of where they live here in the province of Alberta.

Mrs. Aheer: I'm interested to find out what strengthening funding means.

Since Albertans and schools and authorities are very confused about your plans with this critical program and given that the website still says that in 2016 regions began to plan to engage with First Nations across Alberta as part of the MOU and that this should be functioning by next month, in June of 2017, Mr. Speaker, when the minister ends the RCSD funding, is he planning on transitioning out of funding for First Nations communities as well?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. In fact, the regional service model that we've moved to – that's what we transitioned into – is there. It's strengthened. In fact, it's up by \$8 million. Overall we're spending more than \$451 million this year on inclusive education in general. So we are working hard to fund education. That's the way we have operated since we started in government, and you can't do any of these things if you decide to make billions of dollars worth of cuts, as the opposition would do. You know, talking out of both sides of your mouth does not improve education.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A study on the status of the grizzly bear was last done in 2010. The status report on Alberta's grizzly bear population and habitat was the source for government policy in this area. A grizzly bear recovery plan was designed for 2008 to 2013 implementation. Since the report seven years ago much has changed about the grizzly situation in Alberta. To the minister of environment: what is the status of the grizzly in Alberta?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite right, that at the last time of inventory in bear management area 2, which is the hon. member's riding, there were 388 grizzly bears. What we have found is that human-caused grizzly bear mortality rates in Alberta are low and within the ranges to allow for population growth. I can elaborate a little bit more in the supplementals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the grizzly population in Alberta has recovered significantly since hunting of them was outlawed and given that an overgrown grizzly population can threaten human lives if left unchecked, to the same minister: what are you doing to control the grizzly situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a full inventory of bear management area 2 scheduled for the coming months. Most livestock-related issues happen in the white zone, but according to the figures there have been no increases over time in the 2009 to '13 analysis period. It is true that the province has invested in BearSmart programs, all of the information for which is available on the Environment and Parks website. There are a number of different programs in terms of grain bins and other investments that landowners can make and a number of other pieces of information there for landowners.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the predator kills of livestock due to grizzlies have increased and given that we're seeing increased interactions with humans and grizzlies, to the minister: what can you do to help farmers and ranchers with predation, and are you concerned about the increased interaction with humans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are concerned about increased interactions with grizzlies, and that's why we've ensured that the BearSmart funding continues and that Environment and Parks' overall funding remains stable. Additionally, I have asked for more information around the wildlife predator compensation program. This program was enhanced in 2014, but it remains to be seen if there are more partnerships with the Growing Forward 3 program or other enhancements that we can make to that program. Right now it is jointly funded between the federal government's GF2 and proceeds from hunting licences, and I'm committed as minister to reviewing it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will move to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mother's Day

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday Albertans will celebrate Mother's Day. Mother's Day gives us all the opportunity to appreciate what our mothers or mother figures mean to us and for those lucky enough to be a mother, what being a mother brings to their lives. A quote from the late Princess Diana speaks volumes on what a mother means to many. She said, "A mother's arms are more comforting than anyone else's."

I know that, growing up, my mother would always make me feel better no matter what was happening. She was always there for me and would work to provide everything she could to ensure that I was as happy as could be. And while I know that some may want to debate me on this, she made the best apple pie in the world.

One day a year is just not enough to appreciate everything mothers do for us. They watch over us, as only a mother can, when we sleep for the first time. They are our first nurse, our first teacher, our first confidante, and so much more. They inspire us to be the best we can be, make us laugh, and try their hardest to make sure we survive.

On Sunday mothers will be visited in the morning with a breakfast that only a five-year-old would count as a breakfast. Mothers will be called for just a few minutes by their kids, who are across the country at university. Mothers will be visited by their children, who now have children of their own in tow. Sunday will be different for every mother, but one thing I hope is the same for all is that they all know that they are loved every day of the year. This Mother's Day do not forget to tell your mother how much she means to you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Dr. Brian Sproule and the 1950s Polio Epidemic Childhood Immunization

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, I was absent from QP on Monday, May 8, to attend the celebration of life of Dr. Brian Jessup Sproule. Brian was a constituent who I had the pleasure to talk about at his residence in Lifestyle Options, near my constituency office in Riverbend Square, at the end of March.

Although he was 91 years old, Brian was physically sound and mentally active. He loved to swim, hike, golf, and was an avid concertgoer and continuous learner. To me, perhaps the most endearing part of the eulogy at the celebration was that Brian provided a left-wing voice in the frequent political discussions at Lifestyle Options.

Dr. Sproule received many honours, including an Order of Canada in 2002 for his contribution to pulmonary medicine in Canada and his ongoing commitment to world peace. He was a role model and mentor for hundreds of junior colleagues, including me.

Mr. Speaker, Brian Sproule was a hero of Alberta medicine. In the 1950s Alberta was ravaged by a polio epidemic, which resulted in a large number of young people afflicted by paralysis requiring treatment in an iron lung. He moved into the Aberhart hospital, where he provided 24-hour medical care as part of the Aberhart team. It took many years for technology to develop that allowed these young people to live fulfilling lives outside of that iron lung.

I emphasize this historical event because some parents are choosing not to protect their children from polio, diphtheria, tetanus, measles, and rubella, all of which are preventable and can be devastating to our whole community. I was vaccinated against polio in 1954, and I'm extremely grateful to the scientists who developed the vaccine such as Dr. Julius Youngner, who also recently died, as well as to the nurses and physicians at the Aberhart like Dr. Sproule, who selflessly saved hundreds of lives during the polio epidemic. For their memory, Mr. Speaker, we should all encourage fact-based and science-based policies such as universal vaccination.

Thank you very much.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and present the requisite 95 copies of the letter I sent to you this morning, before 11 o'clock, which states in the first line, "In accordance with Standing Order 15(2), I am raising a question of Privilege regarding the conduct of the Honourable Minister of Children's Services during Oral Question Period on May 10, 2017," and it goes on. I look forward to the debate shortly.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 206

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so honoured today to rise and introduce Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017.

This is a piece of legislation that was inspired by my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. As you know, he has spoken with tremendous passion as a father who has been given the gift of two of his beautiful children through adoption. His story is compelling, and one of the things that he found was that there is a necessity to update the legislation around adoption and accessing information of potential parents.

If this change is passed, it will offer more options for birth parents, who have decided to find forever homes for their children, to find parents that, for a myriad of reasons, will complete their families in this way. The loving and lasting commitment not only comes from the side of those adopting but from those who are looking to find homes to adopt these precious children.

Unlike in other provinces, Albertans who are looking to adopt cannot advertise their profiles online. Bill 206 amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act in section 85(2) and would allow the publication of an advertisement by a licensed adoption agency publicizing the profiles of prospective adoptive parents.

Again, I look so forward to hearing from all of the members of this House and hope to have your support in bringing this important legislation forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a report from Robert McNally, founder and president of The Rapidan Group, which is entitled This Oil Rebound Is Just Another Fake-out: Here's Where Prices Are Really Headed. Unfortunately, Mr. McNally goes on to say that they're headed to \$30 a barrel. Fortunately, though, on this side of the House we're aware of the wildly optimistic prediction of the price of oil by the minister, and the high per capita spending is a recipe for disaster.

The Speaker: The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a letter from Sherry Payne, who is a controller at O'Dell Electric Ltd. This is a copy of a letter sent to the Minister of Labour, wherein she says, "a 5 week window for input is neither fair nor reasonable, given the complexity of the Code."

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a CBC piece that I referenced in my member's statement in which Cenovus CEO Brian Ferguson stated that our climate plan has struck "an appropriate balance."

A point of interest, Mr. Speaker. My former boss Scott Thon, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway Energy Canada, is also noted in this

article, and he said that the carbon tax hasn't diminished his company's bullishness on Alberta.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today in relation to questions that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo raised yesterday. The first is a long-term care accommodation standards document, and the second is a continuing care health service standards document. I want to remind all Albertans that if they have any concerns about the care that they or their loved ones are receiving, please ensure that those concerns are raised either with on-site administration from a facility or with protection for persons in care. We take these very seriously.

The Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the superintendent of the Wild Rose school division clearly outlining the Wild Rose school division's concerns with this government's cuts and the impact on front-line services and front-line jobs, I would add, as well as the consequences to the children that they educate in that jurisdiction as a result of this government's decisions.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document has been deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Bilous, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, responses to written questions WQ9 and WQ10.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we have some points of order, the first being, I believe, from the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: I withdrew.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

The second is from the Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is in connection with Standing Order 23(h) and (i), that is to say, "makes allegations against another Member" and "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member."

It was I believe the hon. PC caucus leader who alleged that the Minister of Children's Services had suggested that the opposition and the media had lied with respect to that information. What the minister clearly said was that there was some misinformation that was being disseminated which she wished to correct. You can find it in yesterday's *Hansard* at page 966. The minister says, "I want to remind members that when people make statements without all the facts, inaccurate information is given to the public."

Mr. Speaker, that's a far cry from suggesting that the opposition or the media had lied to the public. As such, I think it violates the two standing orders that I referenced.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period today the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays asked questions about vulnerable children in need of intervention. He did

not accuse the minister of lying. He simply stated, and I will quote for the record:

If the minister is going to accuse me, my colleagues, and the men and women of the press gallery of lying to Albertans about something as serious as vulnerable children in need of intervention, then she [better] be prepared to set the record straight.

Then he simply asked: "Minister, we're all ears . . . [Will you take this opportunity now to] correct the record?"

The record, of course, Mr. Speaker, is from yesterday's *Hansard*. Also from page 966: "When people make statements without all the facts, inaccurate information is given to the public." It goes on on the same page about: "spreading inaccurate information." And on the next page: "I want to remind the members opposite that making statements with inaccurate information to the public is a challenge when you don't have all the facts." Again on the same page: "Again, I want to say that when people make statements without all the facts." And, finally, on page 973: "I do want to continue to caution the members of this House about making statements without the facts . . . which, in fact, leads to inaccurate information being given to the public."

Now, Mr. Speaker, many would contend that these references equate to lying in the colloquial. But if this is deemed unparliamentary, I will be happy to apologize and retract on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, despite the level of accuracy and common understanding of the statement.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe point of order 3 is withdrawn as well.

Point of order 4 is from the Government House Leader. Is that correct?

Mr. Mason: Sorry; were you going to rule on the other one?

The Speaker: The hon. member withdrew his. It's withdrawn. [interjections] What am I missing here, folks? It's withdrawn. [interjections]

Let me go to point of order 4.

Mr. Mason: I withdraw it.

The Speaker: Okay. I believe that now we would go to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on a point of privilege that he communicated with my office today.

Privilege

Access to Information

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Acknowledging the seriousness of raising a point of privilege, I rise today pursuant to Standing Order 15 on the grounds that the Minister of Children's Services breached the privilege of the members of this House by withholding information from members and intending to share that information with the media before members of this House. Standing Order 15(1) states: "A breach of the rights of the Assembly or of the parliamentary rights of any Member constitutes a question of privilege."

To cite *Erskine May*, 23rd edition, page 75:

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals. Thus privilege, though part of the law of the land, is to a certain extent an exemption from the general law.

Further, from *Erskine May*, 24th edition, page 251:

Any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

3:00

To cite *O'Brien and Bosc*, page 61:

The House has the authority to assert privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions or where Members have been obstructed in the performance of their duties. Members are not outside or above the law which governs all citizens of Canada.

And from *Erskine May*, page 251: "Any disorderly, contumacious or disrespectful conduct in the presence of either House or a committee will constitute a contempt, which may be committed by members of the public, parties, witnesses or by Members of either House." Mr. Speaker, the minister's repeated obstructive responses that answers would be forthcoming later, outside the House were clearly disrespectful to this Assembly.

Another clear reference in this regard, Mr. Speaker, comes from *O'Brien and Bosc*, pages 82 and 83. It reads: "The United Kingdom Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege attempted to provide a list of some types of contempt in its 1999 report," which included "assaulting, threatening, obstructing or intimidating a Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties."

Mr. Speaker, in this House yesterday we witnessed a very vigorous debate regarding vulnerable children residing in the same house where Serenity once lived. The minister repeatedly delayed answering questions until after question period had ended and chose instead to share the information with the media before giving it to members of this House.

Quoting from *Hansard*, page 966, the Minister of Children's Services said in response to questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be speaking further to Albertans on this matter later this afternoon, but I want to remind members that when people make statements without all the facts, inaccurate information is given to the public." Again on page 966, responding to the same member: "I will be sharing more information about this matter this afternoon." Despite the repeated urging of members of this House, the minister refused to share that information with the duly elected representatives of Alberta, instead choosing to accuse the opposition of spreading misinformation.

Now, further, in response to the Member for Calgary-West, on page 973 of *Hansard* the minister stated, "Mr. Speaker, again I will say that I am sharing more information for Albertans later this afternoon." That was the third time during question period yesterday alone that the minister stated her intention to share information with the media before sharing it with the members of this House. Clearly, this is not a slip of the tongue but a deliberate withholding of critical information in contempt of this House.

Now, in this regard *Erskine May*, page 261, clearly states, "The House will proceed against those who obstruct Members in the discharge of their responsibilities to the House or in their participation in its proceedings." Mr. Speaker, the minister refused on numerous occasions to provide adequate information to members of this House, which would have allowed them to better advocate and represent Albertans, including Serenity and other children in question, clearly a breach of member privilege.

Furthermore, the minister impugned the reputation of members of the opposition yesterday by claiming that information provided by opposition in their questions was inaccurate and that they were spreading misinformation. Mr. Speaker, I think we all know that the purpose of questions in this House is to provide Albertans with the

most fulsome information regarding issues of public interest. If the minister was interested in celebrating and combatting – sorry. I'm going to read that again. I want to be very accurate with my words. If the minister was interested in combatting misinformation, she had every opportunity to do so in this House yesterday.

Further, the minister was clearly obstructing the members of this House in the discharge of their duties. Every member of this House has a duty to speak out on issues of importance to Albertans, and for the minister to accuse the members of this House of trying to spread misinformation while deliberately withholding the relevant facts is an affront to the people who elect us to this House and clearly is a breach of privilege.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we ask that you rule this is a *prima facie* breach of privilege. Thank you.

The Speaker: I know I do not need to remind all of the members about the importance of points of privilege.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the matter today, or would they choose it for a later time? The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think, certainly, that there are references we could make right now on this matter, but I think we will reserve till Monday to make sure that we can address all the many and varied allegations.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, all members of the House had appropriate notice at 11 a.m. I think it's only reasonable that if they would like to respond, we ought to be doing that today, which has been a fairly routine practice around the Chamber for responding when appropriate notice is given.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, on that point, I don't think that the Official Opposition House Leader is on the mark. It is actually very common for people who have been accused of a breach of the privileges of the House to reserve in order to research it.

The notice that was given says simply, "I will address how the Minister of Children's Services breached the privilege of this assembly. I will provide relevant citations at that time." That is what the hon. member has now done. I think it's entirely reasonable for us to take some time.

If you rule, however, Mr. Speaker, that we need to proceed with our arguments now, we will comply, but they will be incomplete.

Mr. Cooper: If I may, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Cooper: If the Government House Leader has a concern with respect to the notice that was given, I think that's significantly different than his ability to respond. That is different. But if it's not that he doesn't have a challenge with it other than the challenge with his notice – and I know that we've done this in the past. When the Government House Leader has had some concerns that the points of privilege raised may have been different than the points in the notice, you have rightly allowed time to respond. That is different than just not being aware of the points that would be raised.

The Speaker: So do I understand, Opposition House Leader, that if he had used a different argument, you would have agreed to the principle? Is that correct?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. That's correct.

The Speaker: As a matter of background to the issue, hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, did you, in fact, send a copy of your statement that you sent to my office – did you also provide the minister in question with a copy of the letter as well?

Mr. Rodney: I understand that it was sent not only to the minister but to all the other House leaders.

The Speaker: To the House leaders but not to the member herself?

Mr. Rodney: No. I understand that she received a copy through your office.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I can't hear you. Just through my office?

Mr. Rodney: And it was sent also to her office.

Mr. McIver: To the minister. Say "to the minister," not "to her."

Mr. Rodney: Sorry. To the minister's office.

The Speaker: For the record it was my office that sent the letter to the – it's my understanding that the letter was sent to the House leaders. I'm just trying to determine if, in fact, a copy was sent by you or your caucus to the minister in question. Yes?

Mr. Rodney: We followed protocol. We sent it to your office, and it was in turn sent to all of the House leaders and the minister's office. Sorry. That's my understanding.

3:10

The Speaker: Okay. I think the point being made about, as you read it – the letter that came to my office was:

I am raising a question of Privilege regarding the conduct of the Honourable Minister of Children's Services during Oral Question Period on May 10, 2017.

At the appropriate time in the House today I will address how the Minister of Children's Services breached the privilege of [the] assembly. I will provide relevant citations at that time.

Thank you, hon. member. You did that.

There is under 15(3): "If the Speaker is of the opinion that the matter may not be fairly dealt with at that time, the Speaker may defer debate on the matter to a time when he or she determines it may be fairly dealt with." I think in this instance, as per the Opposition House Leader's agreement as well as the Government House Leader's, that those arguments that the Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader may wish to make in this matter should be deferred to our next sitting day, which is Monday.

Mr. Cooper: Just to be clear, I would like to also provide comment on this then.

The Speaker: Yes. That's the intent.

Orders of the Day

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 2

Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act, in accordance with the recommendation of the committee.

The Speaker: Is there anyone who would like to speak to this bill? Seeing and hearing none, any closing comments on the bill?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill Pr. 2

Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. On behalf of Paula I wish to thank the committee for the work that was done to have this come through. She is very grateful, cannot be with us today. I have nothing more to add.

I thank you, Madam Chair, and I would move that the question be put.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the matter in committee? Any questions, comments?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

Bill 13

Securities Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. With regard to Bill 13, Securities Amendment Act, 2017, our government is working to make life better for Albertans by helping to make sure their investments are safe. Alberta is the second-largest capital market in Canada, and our province's economic growth depends greatly on consumer and investor confidence in that market. Albertans deserve to know that the people to whom they entrust their money are honest, proficient, and represent their financial interests.

To keep pace with industry developments, government is supporting the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system by reviewing and amending the Alberta Securities Act on an annual basis. I think the only time that it was not done was in 2012. Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, will further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's securities laws and assist Canada in meeting its international commitments to securities regulation. As I've mentioned, the Alberta Securities Act has been amended annually since 2003 with the exception, again, of 2012.

Changes in today's global financial markets make it more difficult to design and sustain quality capital markets on a timely basis. This requires regulation that promotes confidence in our capital markets, is responsive to changes in economic and business

environments, and reflects the reality of today's global, competitive capital markets. Alberta's challenge is to deliver the right regulation to support investor confidence and encourage investment, innovation, and economic growth in Alberta and across Canada, and our government is trying to do this in an environment that is more complex, more sophisticated, more international in scope and driven by technology than ever before. It is important to ensure that Alberta's securities framework reflects the realities of today's 21st-century markets and keeps in step with evolving international standards and global regulatory reform initiatives.

In 2004 Alberta made a commitment to an ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. Since that time provincial and territorial governments as well as securities regulators have worked to harmonize, modernize, and reform the Canadian securities regulatory system. Ensuring that we're able to do so has required the continuous review and updating of securities laws across Canada. Alberta continues to focus on making practical, functional, and timely improvements to its securities laws.

The amendments proposed in this bill will support the ongoing reform of the Canadian regulatory system while helping to meet the needs of Alberta and Albertans. Our government is absolutely committed to maintaining a well-regulated and efficient capital market in this province so that investors are protected and innovation is encouraged, and we are doing just that with these amendments.

If passed, these amendments will extend the industry regulatory organization the same enforcement powers as the Alberta Securities Commission when conducting investigations and hearings. Madam Chair, we're enhancing investor protection by providing stronger enforcement powers for regulatory organizations. These changes are also planned by other jurisdictions across Canada. These amendments will help ensure that Alberta has a fair and effective capital market by extending powers to recognized regulatory organizations to compel testimony and the production of evidence during an investigation.

Regulatory organizations like the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association are entrusted with the oversight of large segments of the national investment industry, including Alberta. The Securities Amendment Act, 2017, will provide these organizations with the same powers available to the Alberta Securities Commission during investigations and hearings so that they can better protect investors in our province. These regulatory organizations are key partners in protecting investors and making sure that we have a fair and efficient capital market. When these regulatory organizations suspect wrongdoing, Madam Chair, they will be able to go after the wrongdoers so that people have the confidence to invest in Alberta's vibrant capital markets.

3:20

Madam Chair, we are making sure these organizations have the right tools necessary to do their jobs, which includes making changes to the Securities Act to extend immunity to the directors, officers, employees, and agents of these important regulatory organizations from civil liability when conducting enforcement activities in good faith. This gives the people responsible for enforcing Alberta's securities laws immunity from civil liability so that they can do their jobs without fear of malicious lawsuits. The people responsible for enforcing securities rules must be able to do their jobs without fear of being held personally liable. Protecting them from liability for carrying out their duties in good faith makes it possible to enforce the rules more effectively.

We did not arbitrarily decide that these amendments were needed. Madam Chair, these changes came from broad public consultations with industry participants and investors. These changes are also under consideration by other jurisdictions across Canada. Quebec is committed to extending the same enforcement powers, and several other jurisdictions intend to adopt these enhanced enforcement powers and immunity provisions within the next year. These other provinces and territories include British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and the Yukon.

Madam Chair, these changes reflect our continued commitment to the reform of the securities regulatory framework across Canada. Today's legislative amendments are just the latest example of that commitment. If these amendments are not promptly passed, Alberta could jeopardize its leadership role in securities regulatory reform. Without continued modernization and harmonization of the Alberta Securities Act, it will be difficult to ensure a continued vibrant capital market in Alberta through enhanced market transparency and investor protection along with the detection and mitigation of possible risks and market abuse.

Now, Madam Chair, I'd like to take some time to provide some background on securities regulation and some of the industry players. Please allow me to begin by explaining what securities regulation is as well as its importance. Securities regulation is simply the regulation of the conduct of the securities market participants. These participants include issuers that raise capital through securities offerings as well as their directors and officers and promoters, securities dealers and advisers and their representatives, who are registered to advise and trade in securities.

Canada does not have federal securities regulation. The day-to-day regulation of securities falls within provincial jurisdiction under the Canadian Constitution. This has been confirmed repeatedly by Canada's courts and was reaffirmed again just yesterday by the Quebec Court of Appeal. The Alberta Securities Commission is most familiar with the unique aspects of our province's capital market and is best positioned as a regulator, and I'm pleased the courts continue to recognize this.

As I mentioned earlier, provinces and territories work together through Canadian Securities Administrators to co-ordinate securities regulation throughout the country. Securities regulation in Alberta is the responsibility of the Alberta Securities Commission. The commission is responsible for administering the Alberta Securities Act and its regulations and rules. The commission is an industry-funded provincial corporation responsible for ensuring a fair and efficient capital market exists in Alberta and the protection of Alberta investors.

The Alberta Securities Commission develops and enforces securities regulation and rules. Madam Chair, the Alberta Securities Commission offers information and resources to Albertans about investing and administers the province's Securities Act and regulations. Organizations such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, commonly known as IIROC, and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada have authority delegated by the Alberta Securities Commission to make sure their member firms and their representatives comply with the standards set out in the province's securities laws.

Regulatory organizations are an important part of the enforcement mosaic in Canada. Certain securities violations proceed to prosecution either through an administrative tribunal or Provincial Court, depending on the type of violation and the jurisdiction where it occurred.

The Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, or IIROC, is a national, self-regulatory organization which oversees all investment dealers and trading activity in debt and equity

marketplaces in Canada. IIROC was created in 2008 through the consolidation of the Investment Dealers Association of Canada and Market Regulation Services Inc. and sets high regulatory and investment industry standards, protects investors, and strengthens market integrity while maintaining efficient and competitive capital markets.

Madam Chair, the Mutual Fund Dealers Association is a national regulatory organization for the distribution side of the Canadian mutual fund industry. The association regulates the operations, standards, practices, and business conduct of its members and their representatives.

Finally, Madam Chair, I'd like to point out why it is necessary that these regulatory organizations have these new powers. Provincial regulators like the Alberta Securities Commission have delegated certain aspects of their duties and functions to regulatory organizations in order to provide more effective and efficient regulation of the market and market participants.

In summary, Madam Chair, the Alberta government is working to make life better for Albertans with practical changes that help make sure investments are safe. The proposed amendments were developed to support Alberta's commitment to ongoing reform by protecting investors and promoting a fair and efficient Alberta capital market. The changes will compel persons or companies that are under investigation to provide the necessary assistance to the Alberta Securities Commission as well as ensure that market participants under review are in compliance with Alberta securities laws. These amendments will also ensure that Alberta has a fair and effective capital market by extending powers to recognized regulatory organizations so that they can compel testimony and the production of evidence during an investigation or disciplinary hearing.

The people responsible for enforcing securities laws must be able to do their jobs without fear of being held personally liable. Protecting them from liability for carrying out their duties in good faith makes it possible to enforce the rules more effectively. In addition, these changes will extend immunity to their directors, officers, employees, and agents from civil liability and will also clarify the conditions under which that immunity is provided to such organizations.

Finally, amendments to Lieutenant Governor in Council regulations will ensure the act is consistent and applies to all parties as intended.

In closing, with these amendments we are ensuring that Alberta's securities regulatory system reflects the realities of today's market and evolves with international standards in regulatory reform. Albertans deserve to be confident that someone is looking out for them, and with the changes our government is making, they can have that confidence.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd ask all members of this House to support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill? Any questions, comments? The hon. Member for Calgary- . . .

Mr. Malkinson: Currie. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I notice we're at the time of the day where we always, you know, forget who is in what riding.

I rise today to say a few words about the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. As members of this Chamber well know, this government has made a commitment to ensuring that our capital markets work well and for the benefit of all Albertans. As the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board just mentioned and has made very clear, this government has laid out three key principles when it comes to approaching Alberta's capital markets. The

minister said that the government is focused on, one, investor protection; two, ensuring market integrity; and three, ensuring that we have an efficient system for capital formation. I think we can all agree that these are laudable goals and serve as a useful guidepost when we consider changes to the Securities Act.

3:30

When we consider these amendments, let's ask ourselves: how does this legislation serve to enhance consumer protection? Does this legislation serve to further improve our integrity? I apologize, Madam Chair. There's a very cute baby that is here that's just bringing joy to my heart. Anyway, the final question we should ask ourselves: will these changes ensure that we have an efficient system for capital formation?

Ms Renaud: Just imagine them in bikinis.

Mr. Malkinson: Not helpful, hon. member.

Madam Chair, I think the answer to all three questions is a clear yes. But before I say these additional words about the Securities Amendment Act, I think it's useful to remind this Chamber of the steps we've taken together to further these three goals.

Back in 2015 the Securities Amendment Act – I'll come back to this, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: I just thought that maybe the member needed a few minutes to compose himself.

As we talk to the Securities Amendment Act, I think it's important to discuss, you know, the communities which need to be protected by something put in place like this. Of course, when we put something like this in place, we're really talking about a few bad apples that could cause harm to people that have put away their life savings in investments and making sure that there's appropriate recourse. These situations need to be prevented, and these kinds of amendments really allow for that.

There's something really important in it in that we don't have a big history in financial liabilities in this way, but I know that the Securities Amendment Act provides securities – especially when we have an aging population and we have an increased number of people that are depending on their investments being protected. We need to make sure that these protections are put in place. They are very important.

I am very proud to be supporting this bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I've had a chance to have a glass of water here, so I will continue my comments where I left off.

Back in 2015 the Securities Amendment Act, 2015, came before this Assembly. At that time the Minister of Finance asked this Chamber to approve a number of changes to the Securities Act. In particular, he asked this Chamber to approve changes related to enforcement: for example, to ensure that ASC had the capacity and authority over electronic record statements; point-of-sale changes specifically related to ETFs, one of the most popular financial products on the market today; as well as harmonizing derivatives regulations as part of our continued efforts to harmonize standards across the country.

Madam Chair, I believe these changes received the unanimous support of this House because they were reasonable and in line with the set and reasonable principles that guide decision-making progress when it comes to Alberta capital markets. Back in 2016 the Securities Amendment Act, 2016, came before this House. If I remember correctly, this bill brought forward an important set of amendments that were, once again, in line with the principles that this government set out regarding our capital markets. For example, the SAA, 2016, set out updated definitions of a derivative reporting issuer and a security. The SAA, 2016, went on to amend the wording related to the halt-trade provisions, to make changes that would allow the justice of the peace to issue warrants, and finally, updated provisions related to the regulation of exchanges, trade repositories, and clearing agencies.

Madam Chair, I could go on, but the point here is that on a yearly basis the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and this government have long been doing a very good job of keeping our regulatory system up to date. We know how important well-functioning capital markets are to this economy and to our province, so I am pleased to see the action being taken to date.

That brings me, Madam Chair, to the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, that we're discussing here today, and the changes that are before the Assembly. Once again, just like in 2015 and 2016, we have a set of reasonable amendments before us that will improve investor protection, ensure market integrity, and ensure that we continue to have an efficient system of capital formation. Clearly, the major focus of the SAA, 2017, is investor protection, and with everything we hear about in the newspapers, on TV, and on social media, I am glad we are taking further steps to ensure investor protection.

Before us today in this bill there are proposed changes to the authorities and capacities of self-regulatory organizations, or, since we like to abbreviate things in this House, SROs. SROs like the Mutual Fund Dealers Association or the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, also known as IIROC, play an important role in our capital markets. These SROs have devolved authority from the Alberta Securities Commission, so it's incumbent on us to make sure that they have the best tools at their disposal to do their job. The amendments of the SAA, 2017, will allow SROs to have the same statutory powers as the ASC, which will improve the enforcement capabilities of the SAA.

Madam Chair, ensuring that SROs can compel attendance and ensure the production of evidence is critically important. It is critically important because it empowers these organizations to fulfill their mandate, which is investor protection. When we create laws and rules which empower investors, it's good for our capital markets. When we create a disincentive for wrongdoers to operate in our capital markets, we improve the overall integrity of our capital markets for all, and as all members of this Chamber know well, market integrity is a precondition for firms to be able to go out and raise capital. Without market integrity, firms can't raise capital, and our entire economy is put in jeopardy.

Madam Chair, as we consider the bill before us, I think it's worth reflecting on the questions I first raised as we go about considering this legislation. Does the legislation serve to enhance consumer protection? Does the legislation serve to further improve market integrity? Finally, will these changes continue to ensure that we have an efficient system for capital formation? In my view, the answer to all three of these questions is yes.

This is good, smart, and important legislation, Madam Chair, and I hope, as happened with the securities amendment acts of 2015 and 2016, that all members of this Chamber will vote to support these critical amendments.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

3:40

Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to say a few words about the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. I'd like to begin these brief remarks with a story which helps to underscore why the amendments before this House are so important for investor protection and for our capital markets more generally.

Back in 2016 an individual was working at a Calgary-based investment firm. The person in question failed to ensure that his financial recommendations were suitable for two clients, who lived in Saskatchewan, who were nearing retirement and depended on his advice because they did not know much about the stock market. This individual undertook an investment strategy not designed for clients entering into their retirement years such as engaging in numerous trades and penny stocks, day trading, and short sales, which was not consistent with the personal circumstances of these people from Saskatchewan, including their expressed intentions with respect to retirement. As a result of this individual's aggressive investment strategy, which involved the pursuit of many high-risk, speculative securities, his clients lost over \$125,000.

This individual failed to ensure that his recommendations were suitable for a third client in Calgary, who was seeking secure investments with respect to her eventual retirement. This individual pursued an aggressive investment strategy involving a high degree of risk to her account and which was too aggressive for her. This client nearly lost \$41,000.

This individual also on many occasions executed trades without prior information provided to or informed consent received from all three clients beforehand. This is contrary to the IIROC rules.

Madam Chair, I got this IIROC information, and this is one of the cases that they successfully prosecuted. The IIROC hearing panel ordered that this individual pay a fine of \$120,000 and be suspended from engaging in the securities industry for a period of two years, following which he would have to successfully complete a prescribed course and be subject to supervision if he re-enters the industry. It also ordered that he pay a cost of \$25,000 in payment of IIROC costs incurred in these proceedings.

Madam Chair, as we know, the amendments before this House will further empower organizations like IIROC and the MFDA to protect investors. While the powers currently provided to these organizations have been effective in some circumstances, we can do more to support and protect investors.

It is stories like the one I just told you that make me proud to stand up in the House and support the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. As has been said before in this House, the vast majority of market participants are honest, trustworthy, and play by the rules. What we need to do is protect against the actions of wrongdoers, the individuals who try to take advantage of others and make it harder for everyone else in the market to succeed. We want investors in our marketplace to be successful and get good returns. We want companies in our marketplace to be successful and be able to raise capital to grow and sustain their businesses. The amendments before us today help achieve those objectives.

When we have more good actors operating in our marketplace, when we have market integrity, when investors are protected, then firms can effectively raise capital. When capital markets are working effectively, our entire economy benefits, and that means good jobs for the people of Alberta.

On that note, Madam Chair, I hope that all members of this Assembly support this very important legislation. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, amendments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak on Bill 13, the amendment act here, because I think that it's such an important piece of legislation. It's something that, as we've already heard about from other members in this Assembly, affects so many people in so many aspects of their lives and is something that Albertans deserve to feel comfortable and confident about when they make financial decisions with their investment dealers, their advisers, their representatives.

I'm so proud of the government for being a leader in this aspect. I'm so proud of the government for being a leader in ensuring that as we move forward with the Securities Amendment Act, which, of course, Madam Chair, you know, comes every year – but this one in particular, I believe, is one of the first jurisdictions in the country to provide the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada with the tool kit that they need to bring wrongdoers to justice and to fulfill their responsibilities as a public interest regulator.

The amendments proposed in this bill will provide the regulatory organizations with the same enforcement authorities as the Alberta Securities Commission. Madam Chair, that gives the regulatory organizations the ability to compel people's attendance and the production of evidence so that they are better able to do their jobs and protect Alberta investors. When we talk about work like that, when we talk about the tools that we're providing for these regulatory organizations, we're talking about making a difference for each and every family that trusts an adviser to make decisions with their money.

Madam Chair, in my constituency, for example, which is predominantly, of course, as I've spoken about before, young families, people who are starting their families, as we hear from some families here in the Legislature, are the types of families that are starting to make these types of investment decisions. These are the types of families that are starting to go out and say, "We need to put money away for my child," whether that's to go to college, university, or some sort of postsecondary education, or to make decisions that reflect their own retirement moving forward.

Seeing those types of decisions being made, these Albertans and my constituents expect there to be strong regulatory frameworks and strong enforcement frameworks to ensure that they're not taken advantage of. In fact, Madam Chair, if you go and speak to a lot of my constituents, you may indeed find that they thought that those protections were already in place. This is something that I think is going to be harmonized across Canada moving forward, and I'm very, very excited to see that a number of provinces have already committed to adopting provisions that are very similar to those we're seeing in this act.

When we see that the Canadian Association of Retired Persons and the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Alberta Securities Commission have all come onboard and said, "This is something that we absolutely need; this is something that we absolutely want to see moving forward," I think it's so self-evident that this bill and the amendments that it puts forward will protect Albertans. It's something that – when we talk about

consumer protection, we can bring bills and bill and bills about consumer protection, but at the end of the day, Madam Chair, these are people's lives. We're talking about the money that they're putting forward for their child's life or for their own retirement. Those types of investment decisions don't come lightly, and we do want to make sure that all of it's done in good faith and in the most thorough way possible.

Madam Chair, it's so encouraging to see that these amendments and this bill were consulted on very thoroughly with the investment industry. That's why we did see the quotes and validation from all of those validators that I did mention earlier. I believe that these are very common-sense amendments. I think that they're things that when we go out and we talk to the industry, they say, "Well, yes, we've been asking for this for a while," or "Absolutely, these are things that we want to see," because the industry does not wish to be seen as perhaps trying to swindle persons. The industry does not want to be seen as being malevolent in any way. They want to be working with the government to provide a very strong framework and a very strong industry that will allow Albertans to invest wisely, to be able to move forward wisely so that everybody is able to benefit from our strong Securities Act.

I think it's something that I'm very excited to see moving forward. I'm very encouraged to see the government moving forward to harmonize and modernize our legislation in this aspect. I think it's something that all members of this House are likely to be able to support, and I do encourage all members to support this bill as well.

Thank you.

3:50

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Chair, given that we were reminded earlier today about the upcoming special day this weekend to celebrate Mother's Day, I'd like to move that the committee rise and report Bill Pr. 2 and report progress on Bill 13.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill Pr. 2. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 13.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to move to adjourn the House and come back on Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:52 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, May 11, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11 — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn., adjourned, amendment agreed to*)

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 205 — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 206 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 15, 2017

Day 33

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
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Party standings:

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Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us each reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, let us take a moment to find the strength and guidance in the ongoing support received from our families and close friends in all corners of Alberta. May their understanding and patience inspire us to be compassionate and co-operative in working together for the people of our province.

Hon. members, we have an interesting situation today. You're going to lead us, hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we do owe each other a round of applause for that. [some applause] Let us use that as yet another example of how we can work together.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe my guests are here yet, so with your permission I'll wait and see if they arrive. Thank you.

The Speaker: Agreed.

Are there any school groups, hon. members?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly Mr. Ahmed Kassem, Mr. Mudhir Mohamed, Mr. Osman Aidarus, and Mr. Mourad Trabelsi. Mr. Kassem is with us today from Shaw TV Medicine Hat *Global Village* centre show, which provides resources and integrated assistance to new Canadians. Mr. Mohamed is the president of the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary, Mr. Aidarus is a businessman in Edmonton, and Mr. Trabelsi is president of the Brooks Muslims. Mr. Kassem, Mr. Aidarus, Mr. Mohamed, and Mr. Trabelsi are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Team Investigate Tachyons, eight Bishop Carroll high school students who have entered the CERN beamline contest. Just when you thought that the speed of light was the fastest superhero on the block, imaginary mass blessed with a positive charge and attractive gravity makes it onto the scene through the scientific method,

enhanced by a thousand hours of math and pure resolve. I would like to mention all of them by name, and please stand when I say your name: Koi McArthur, team leader grade 12; Tarek El Naggar, grade 12; Urban Pistek, grade 11; Brynna Clarke-Leene, grade 11; Nicholas Betancourt-Lee, grade 11; Kelly Ma, grade 12; Carter Markic, grade 11; Eyoas Negash, grade 10; and my amazing research assistant, if she's still in here, Maureen Gough. One of their mandates is that the universe is like a beautiful painting, and the paint is math. Would you please join me in giving them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the students of Lycée Louis Pasteur from the beautiful, tremendous, remarkable, and wonderful constituency of Calgary-Elbow. They're here this week attending School at the Legislature. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Nicole Pereversoff and Ryan Taylor. I ask, please, that they rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests for introduction today? The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly Shuai Wang. Shuai is currently visiting Canada on his fifth trip to North America from China. His trip will include Victoria, Vancouver, and Montreal, and he has come to Edmonton to learn more about our great province. I ask my guest to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Sabir: The second set of guests. It's my pleasure to introduce Stan and his son, Mike Szykowski. Stan and Mike are here in honour of Stan's wife and Mike's mother, Tamara. Tamara recently passed away, but today we honour her as an activist for social justice and for equality. Although we mourn her loss, we remember Tamara as a proud Albertan who made life better for so many Albertans. Stan and Mike are related to my press staff Kate Toogood, as her father-in-law and partner respectively. I ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce Daniel Menjivar. He's a guest pastor at the New Hope church of God, which is in Edmonton-Calder. Since becoming a pastor, Daniel has led three missions to Cuba with a small group of dedicated volunteers, building churches and communities and taking bicycles to southeastern Cuba. He does great work both internationally and right back here in Alberta. If you could rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

Environment Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of our government's commitment to the environment, and I'm proud of municipal

governments that are taking action as well. I rise today to talk about a local organization called Environment Lethbridge. It was started in 2014 to inspire Lethbridge residents to take action on sustainability. In April of this year they released the first Lethbridge State of the Environment Report. This report reviewed 32 indicators of environmental sustainability.

Lethbridge and southern Alberta have excellent potential for development of renewable energy sources, and Lethbridge residents use less electricity than both the Alberta and Canadian averages. Lethbridge also has an abundance of green space, with over 38 square kilometres of parks.

1:40

Lethbridge is facing some of the same challenges as the rest of Alberta. Water flow in the Oldman River, a vulnerable watershed, has decreased by 57 per cent since 1912. The local climate is warming, with the growing season in Lethbridge increasing by 23 days since 1950.

The report also contains some key recommendations for the city such as controlling invasive species, supporting native pollinators, reducing the amount of food waste entering the landfill, working with regional partners to improve air quality, encouraging green transportation, and, above all, educating people about water use.

I am very proud of the city of Lethbridge for recognizing the importance of sustainability. As the city approaches 100,000 people, we must be prepared for the impact that climate change and population growth will have on our environment and our lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Serenity

Mr. Nixon: In November of last year journalist Paula Simons put a face and a name to the subject of an investigation by the Child and Youth Advocate. Four-year-old Serenity was the subject of that report. She died more than two years ago, starved, beaten, and sexually abused. Her life was wiped out before it could even begin. She did not have a chance, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP was not in power when Serenity died, so we thought that the NDP wouldn't have reasons to sweep this under the rug. We asked this government what happened and when criminal charges would be laid. Our questions were stonewalled. It turns out that the RCMP weren't able to proceed with their investigation because they were missing key government documents. The NDP, to cover for their mistakes, put its spin doctors to work and set up a child intervention panel to talk about root causes. We also saw a cabinet shuffle that split the human services ministry in two and a new Minister of Children's Services.

The panel isn't allowed to talk about Serenity despite the minister repeatedly telling this House that it can, and we still haven't received answers from this new minister about what the department is doing to fix things. To make matters worse, we recently learned that there are still children living in the house where Serenity had her life stolen from her. The minister responded by saying that the media and the opposition had their facts wrong but refused to correct the record. She said that the situation is being monitored but won't conduct her own ministry with any sort of transparency. The tragic story, the timeline of events both leading up to Serenity's death and after are mind boggling, Mr. Speaker.

If all of us in this House care about kids, why does it feel like a case of government workers covering up for government workers while Serenity and her family continue to come last? This is not a partisan issue. I implore this government to start working with the opposition and the experts to ensure that we learn from Serenity's death and that this never happens again. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are

sick of this government's lip service and want the NDP to stop sweeping this issue under the rug.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coat of arms sitting above your chair includes the motto *Fortis et Liber*, which we all know means strong and free. I want to thank the forefathers of this province for giving Alberta this coat of arms and also the pioneers for making this province strong and free.

I am concerned, however, that Alberta today is less strong and less free. When nearly 100,000 people are sitting at home because they cannot find work, we are less strong. When the multinational companies are bailing out of Alberta, when bankruptcies are spiking, and when small businesses four to five generations old are shutting down, we are less strong.

When the government disrespects our proud farmers with Bill 6 and when the vast majority of Albertans reject a carbon tax but have it imposed on them anyway, we are less free. When this government wants to take freedom away from our small businesses and enslave them with their socialist ideology, we are definitely not free. When the Minister of Finance is asked about burgeoning debt load and he simply smiles and when his comrades heckle and call concerned citizens Chicken Little and sewer rats and when Serenity still cannot get justice, we are definitely not strong or free.

With the NDP's ideological governing style this government is not fighting for Alberta families as they always claim. In reality they are hijacking our future, our children's future, and they are killing the proud culture of this province. When free-enterprise Albertans unite, they will annihilate this NDP socialist ideology. In the next election Albertans will take their province back, and once again it will be *fortis et liber*.

The Speaker: I want to caution all of the House again about the need for certain words like "killing" and words of violence. Please consider that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Calgary-East Constituency Update

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I love spending time in my constituency and not just because we have the best food in Calgary. Talking to my constituents about what matters to them is the most important part of my job. I also like being there because I get to be on the ground to experience real, concrete examples of the work that this government is doing to make life better for people in Calgary-East.

The most obvious example of this is the redesign and addition of bus rapid transit to 17th Avenue S.E. As a result of \$85 million of investment by this government construction has begun to widen the street. This project will make it easier for people to visit the amazing businesses on the avenue, increase access to faster public transit, and will make it possible for people to bike into downtown and Inglewood.

I also had the opportunity to tour the new EvenStart child development centre in Mayland Heights, where \$300,000 of government investment is helping to create 30 new \$25-a-day child care spaces, and the centre will also house EvenStart's existing program for at-risk preschoolers. It's a beautiful facility, complete with indoor play centre, community gardens, and art spaces.

I spent a lunch hour at Holy Family school, one of the first schools to pilot our school nutrition program. Grade 6 students were helping to serve a variety of healthy sandwiches and fruits to

younger students, who were all smiles as they sat on the gym floor enjoying their lunch. The principal noted that parents, teachers, and kids have all noticed benefits from this program already.

I dropped by Common Crown Brewing, the second of three new microbreweries to open in my riding, that makes delicious beer with local ingredients. The owners were pleased with the government support that had been available so far and talked about the camaraderie and collaborative approach that new small brewers in Calgary are taking together.

I was present at the opening of the new NICU at the Peter Lougheed hospital, where folks from east Calgary, including myself, go to have babies. I know this beautiful new space will be appreciated by the 1 in 8 parents who have babies that require some form of intensive care.

These are only some examples, Mr. Speaker, but I think they work to illustrate how our government's choices are focused on tangible actions that make life better for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Blue Hills Community

Ms Jabbour: I recently had the opportunity to get to know a corner of my constituency that no previous MLA has ever visited, the Blue Hills community school. I was invited to the Tompkins Improvement Board AGM and fundraiser and received a warm welcome on arrival. I toured the school, chatted with families from the area, and learned about community plans and goals.

Blue Hills is a Mennonite farming community, a mix of long-time residents and newcomers. What is perhaps most unique about this community is that unlike many small rural communities that are struggling to remain viable, Blue Hills is flourishing and growing quickly. They already have the lovely new Blue Hills Motel and Plaza, a small convenience store, and fuel station. If the rate of development continues, I wouldn't be surprised to see a new town spring up in the area within a few years.

Blue Hills is about 50 kilometres southwest of La Crête and 20 kilometres from the Tompkins Landing ferry, a key route to access services and markets. There are challenges, though. The ferry and ice bridge are closed several months of the year during freeze and spring breakup. Water levels are often too low for the ferry to operate, and limited ferry capacity can mean long waits. The community would love a new bridge, but they were very pleased to learn that a new, larger capacity ferry is on its way, although they joked that they would like a ferry wide enough to touch both sides of the river.

Education is important to this community. Blue Hills school is K to 9, but they want to expand to grade 12 in order to increase high school completion rates and eliminate the two-hour bus ride. A new gymnasium is needed as the current gym is too small to host tournaments and visiting teams. The old gym would become an industrial arts shop. A covered ice rink to allow games to be played during inclement weather is also planned.

Blue Hills has many other project ideas such as a seed-cleaning plant, a ski hill, expanding the P5 road to Peace River, and value-added agriculture processing not only for grains but for dairy and egg operations. We hope to support these projects through our government's investor and small-business programs.

There is incredible potential in this part of my constituency, and with their hard work, enthusiasm, and dedicated community spirit, I'm confident that Blue Hills will achieve their goals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Serenity and the Child Intervention System

Mr. Nixon: In response to public outrage over the horrific death of Serenity, this government established the child intervention panel. The panel was supposed to recommend changes to the system, but how can we when we actually can't learn anything about what happened to Serenity? The minister tells Albertans that they are giving us panel members all the information we require. That is not accurate, Mr. Speaker. We are given intake windows to put forth requests; the documents we ask for, we never get. Any attempt to ask about Serenity by the panel is blocked by the NDP. Minister, will your government at least stop misleading Albertans about what this panel can actually do?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The story of Serenity moved every single person in this House, and all of us continue to be heartbroken about it. That is the reason that the panel was put in place, to create meaningful recommendations to strengthen the child intervention system. We want panel members to have the information they need to make recommendations that will lead to real change. As I stated previously, if members feel they require additional information for their work on the panel, I encourage them to work with their caucus representative, and panel members can reach out to the chair to request information . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: I am the caucus representative.

The public was shocked to learn that children still live in the home where Serenity was likely murdered. Because this defies common sense and we have yet to see evidence of action to prevent a future Serenity, panel members are asking this government to find a way to legally discuss the file with them in private. The government says "trust us" when there is absolutely no reason to trust them. Minister, I ask again – and don't you dare say that this is what is already happening, because it is not – are you willing to explore a way to disclose the details of Serenity's case with panel members in private to assure us that this issue is being handled properly and that steps have been taken to prevent future tragedies, or are you going to continue to mislead the House?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I will state that absolutely the panel needs to have access to the information that they need to make recommendations that will lead to real change. Again, the government, Children's Services, myself as minister: protecting vulnerable children in care is our key priority. That's why the panel is there. We'll ensure they have the information that they need in order to make real change. This case continues to be under criminal investigation. We don't have all the facts, however. We will continue to provide the panel with the information they need, and I encourage them to continue to work through the process to get that information.

Mr. Nixon: Utter nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

On November 22 the Premier said that she would make public the detailed changes made to the system as a result of what is learned from Serenity's death. We're still waiting. She said that the reviews were under way internally and as that information was assembled, it would become public. This hasn't happened either. We're still waiting for a statutory review for any case, let alone Serenity's case. Premier, how much longer do Albertans have to wait until Serenity's internal reviews are finished, and are you still committed to making this information public, or are you going to continue to allow your minister to keep misleading the Assembly?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I am very proud of the work that this minister has done to move forward on the many, many important issues that face vulnerable children in Alberta, that face people who are concerned about vulnerable children in Alberta, and that, of course, arise with the particular tragedy around Serenity. There will be legislation that comes forward this spring to deal with the first set of recommendations that the panel made.

Let me say from my own experience that there has never been an opportunity for an all-party committee to engage as deeply and as meaningfully as that all-party committee has, yet they still complain.

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

Calgary LRT Green Line

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the green line LRT project was supposed to be good news for Calgarians in suburban communities, but this dream is quickly turning into a nightmare for these families, who are now being cut out of green line construction. Many of these families purchased homes on the promise that this project was proceeding as planned. Premier: what do you have to say to these families, who were sold a bogus bill of goods by the city of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government is very committed to supporting the transportation needs of all Albertans. It's part of making life better for everyone. That means also supporting our major cities in their transit systems and their LRT systems, which we're prepared to do. We're awaiting a final decision from the city council in Calgary as to the route and costs of this project, and we're going to do our very best to support the transportation needs of the citizens of Calgary.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, families in suburban Calgary are facing higher property tax rates caused by the NDP PPA debacle with Enmax and by the carbon tax even though they will never see the benefits of the green line. Since Alberta Transportation will fund \$92 million this year for this revised project, does the minister agree with this antisuburban plan, or is he ready to call this what it really is, a bait and switch on suburban Calgary residents?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Wildrose opposition may be quite content to sit here and make decisions for city council in the city of Calgary, but we respect all

orders of government in this country, including the municipal governments, and the democratic right of citizens to elect a mayor and a council to do the kinds of things that they want to. Obviously, the Wildrose doesn't care about democracy.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, this project is going to have real consequences for real people. The south campus hospital will not be connected, and Centre Street will still be chock full of cars. Construction costs should be dropping as per the minister, but the scaled-back project will cost \$4.65 billion for just 20 kilometres, up from \$4.5 billion for 46 kilometres, a whopping \$233 million for each kilometre. Before committing more money, is the minister ready to demand better from the city's management?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, this government is committed to helping all Albertans with their transportation needs, including the residents of the city of Calgary. We are not going to be interfering in the work of the city council of the city of Calgary or of any other municipal council. We will carefully consider whatever proposals they put in front of us, and we will see how we can help because we're committed to making life better for all Alberta families.

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

AIMCo Governance

Mr. Fildebrandt: The Alberta Investment Management Corporation manages \$90 billion in Alberta assets. Troubling signs of political interference first appeared when the NDP ceased requiring that AIMCo directors have relevant financial experience, clearing the way for partisan appointments. The Finance minister said that these changes were welcomed by AIMCo, but the AIMCo CEO said that these changes came "as a surprise to us and, frankly, not a welcome surprise." Will the Premier reverse this decision and reinstitute basic financial qualifications as a requirement for serving on AIMCo?

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say that I've got great confidence in the professionals at AIMCo. They make sound investment decisions for Albertans and in the many pension funds and investments that they take on on our behalf. We took some redundant provisions out of the bylaws that AIMCo had and made for an open and transparent process of appointments for people. That means that any Albertan, anybody, can go online and see what boards and commissions are available and put their names in. We've got good people who have come forward, and we're going to have more good people soon with regard to appointments.

Mr. Fildebrandt: This minister's answers are redundant, Mr. Speaker.

This government is falling all over itself trying to explain away its bungling of an AIMCo investment in Calfrac. The government issued a false news release with information that was directly refuted by Calfrac. People in the Premier's office demanded that AIMCo insert itself into this political embarrassment for the government in an attempt to take the heat off them. Can the Premier look me in the eyes and tell me with a straight face that this government is not interfering in AIMCo?

Ms Notley: This government is not interfering in AIMCo. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please, hon. members.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's not that the Premier is not telling the truth; it's just that what she's saying is just not so. Kevin Libin at the *Financial Post* released documents today, obtained through freedom of information, showing the media talking points that were prepared for AIMCo's CEO after this mess blew up. In it he says that he was personally called with an apology over the snap qualification changes, that he was not consulted on. So who's telling the truth about these changes, the CEO of AIMCo or the Premier?

2:00

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. You know, on March 8 the CEO of AIMCo said, "I do want to reinforce that at present our independence in investment decision-making, as I think I reassure you at every quarterly meeting, has not been encumbered in any way." Mr. Speaker, if they won't take the views of the CEO of AIMCo on this, why are they taking the views of a reporter or writer in the *Financial Post* or anywhere else? Listen to the CEO of AIMCo.

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

Seniors' Prescription Drug Copayments

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along with our very young, our seniors can be the most vulnerable in society. I have a constituent in an assisted living facility. This individual has 10 prescriptions. When she ordered from home once every three months, the average cost was \$83. The facility orders twice a month, with a \$25 per prescription fee. That's \$500 per month. To the minister of seniors: are you and your department aware of this, and what are you doing to protect seniors against these expensive practices?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the question. The drug policy that is in place around prescription refills in terms of seniors' drug benefits does have a \$25 copay piece attached to it. In terms of the timelines those certainly aren't guidelines that are set by the College of Pharmacists or otherwise, so we'll be happy to follow up with regard to this very specific case. Again, under this government we're working to make life more affordable. We're working to make sure we're investing in our seniors, and that includes making sure that we're building long-term care facilities, Mr. Speaker. The last government pushed forward full speed ahead with other facilities where seniors do have to cover things like their own drug coverage. I think we know clearly who's on whose side.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the government is actually making things more expensive, as I pointed out. The senior was ordering every three months at an average cost of \$83 a month, and the government's program is \$500 a month. I don't know how the minister can say that that's making life better for Albertans, so again to the minister: what can you do to make this better? Because, clearly, so far you've made it worse.

Ms Hoffman: Let me clarify that in assisted living facilities you are responsible for your own drug costs, assisted living facilities that moved on en masse under the former government. We are making sure that we have a balance of varieties of places for people to live, including long-term care, where drug coverage is incorporated. But

I have assured the member that I will follow up with regard to this specific case and make sure that we can find out what can be done longer term to prescriptions being filled because you are right that there is a \$25 copay when you fill your prescriptions. If they're filling them once every two weeks, obviously that would be greater than once every three months. I would be happy to look into it for this case, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to hear the minister agree that the one senior was doing a better job of buying her drugs than the whole government was, but I'm also grateful that the minister has acknowledged the problem and has said that she's willing to help. To the minister: if I get you the information on the case, would you take a look at it and get back to the senior to see if you can't help, please?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to reiterate, the assisted living facility is not a government facility. It is another facility that is operated by another operator. But I would be very, very happy to look into it on behalf of this senior and any others who want to raise these kinds of questions. I encourage the member to look even within his own caucus to ask them for some education around how assisted living facilities work because I know there's expertise on that side of the House, and I think that information could be very helpful to the member opposite. Of course, I'd be very happy to work with him on behalf of this constituent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Energy Industry Liability Management

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard regularly from constituents concerned about the issue of abandoned oil and gas wells. Many are landowners who feel that the system isn't working for them. Some are concerned about the environmental impact of abandoned wells. They are folks from the oil and gas sector worried about the damage to their reputation and their industry thanks to a few bad actors. To the Minister of Energy: what is the government doing to address these very real concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to report to the House what we are doing. We absolutely all know that this is a critically important issue for Albertans. I myself and many of us who are rural MLAs hear this all the time when we go home. When the oil and gas industry was booming, there wasn't very much attention paid to this matter, and as it fell, we're seeing an uptick in issues. That's not right, and our government is taking a leadership role in this. We're looking to find solutions that protect Albertans, protect our environment, and keep Alberta a competitive place to invest.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rosendahl: Mr. Speaker, given that a lot of people in this province are very cynical about this issue and given that they've seen previous governments only do one-sided consultations, what is the minister doing to ensure that this does not happen this time?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike members of the opposite side there, who prefer to stay in their echo chamber,

we in fact are out engaging. We believe in thorough engagement and finding common ground for solutions. We're talking to farmers and landowners. We're talking to environmental groups. We're talking to lenders. We're talking to municipalities. They're helping us look at the matter and how we can best manage the situation. We're not just admiring the problem; we're having good conversations and finding solutions.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that previous governments ignored indigenous communities in this province, to the same minister: will First Nations and Métis communities be included in this liability management review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, our government is proud of the work we're doing to renew the relationship with our indigenous peoples. We have a responsibility to have meaningful engagement with First Nations and Métis communities, and I'm pleased to say that we have a parallel engagement going on with these groups that will be beginning very shortly. As well, my department is visiting different parts of the province to ensure that we get a good cross-section of perspectives. This is a critically important matter, not just to rural Albertans but to our indigenous people, and we're getting all perspectives as we continue.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Labour Relations Code Review

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is not being up front with Albertans about its labour law review. We ask legitimate questions about the labour relations portion, and the minister responds with old pop culture references and comments about employment standards, which is a different topic. Issues like union certification and collective bargaining are serious subjects, and this government is avoiding our questions. Minister, leaving the employment standards portion aside for a moment, will you be proposing changes to our Labour Relations Code this session? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud that we've been engaging with Albertans and talking to them about what needs to be updated in our workplace legislation to make sure we have fair and family-friendly workplaces. Albertans have engaged, with nearly 5,000 submissions, multiple round-tables, other submissions, and people working with labour lawyer Andrew Sims. The former government held consultations as well, and what they did with those was that they let them sit on the shelf and gather dust. I'm looking forward to bringing forward workplace legislation reforms that will help build a strong economy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that any review of our labour laws must be transparent and accountable and given that the major cost of the Labour Relations Code review is our contract with Andrew Sims and given that Albertans are giving tens of thousands of tax dollars in exchange for his guidance throughout this review, to the Minister of Labour: can we expect to see a report from

Andrew Sims on the labour relations portion of this consultation before your government introduces any changes to the Labour Relations Code? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta needs legislation that makes sure that our workplaces are fair, family friendly, and support a strong economy as well as making sure that we have our rights protected in Alberta as they are in other areas. This legislation has not changed since 1988. [interjections] The previous government conducted reviews and then took no steps forward. We are making sure that our workplace legislation is fair and family friendly, and I am looking forward to talking to Albertans further about that.

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, your volume is getting pretty loud.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that significant changes to our labour laws will likely discourage investment, making it more difficult to create jobs, and given that this ideological government seems more concerned with appeasing their union bosses than with helping get Albertans back to work and given that this government has shaken investor confidence and is destabilizing our economy by bringing in uncertainty, Minister, tell Albertans why you are rushing through changes to our labour laws rather than helping Albertans get back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Particularly during tough economic times Albertans deserve workplace legislation that protects them, protects their families, and supports a strong economy. We have been engaging with Albertans and talking about important issues like job-protected sick leave, like making sure that we have workplace legislation that allows families to balance their work and family responsibilities. These are important topics that have been neglected under previous governments for too long. Making sure that we have fair and family-friendly workplaces is a priority for me and this government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Now I would ask the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and also the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, under the same rule, to cut it down a little.

Calgary-West.

Investigation into Serenity's Death

Mr. Ellis: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has provided so much conflicting information and lack of information about Serenity that it has lost all credibility. For instance, the *Edmonton Journal* reported on March 22 that the RCMP investigation was concluded and the file was in the Alberta Crown prosecutors' office for review, but in the House last Thursday the minister told us that she could not answer opposition questions because the "investigation is ongoing." Minister, is the investigation finished or not, and do you even know what is happening here?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We were all deeply touched by this particular case. That's why the RCMP is being absolutely very careful to ensure that they do the best job they

can. As is very common in many complex cases, the file has been forwarded to the Crown, and the investigation is still ongoing. Police and Crown often work closely together in this way to see what additional evidence may be necessary in advance of the laying of charges.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Given that last Thursday the minister also said – and this is alarming – that she is unable to provide details about the ongoing criminal investigation because “to do so would put young people involved at risk” and given that the minister and Premier spent last week assuring Albertans that young people are not at risk, Minister, if children are at risk, why are you not acting now to protect them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children’s Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, without doubt, the commitment of myself and my department and this government is to protect the vulnerable children of this province. If there was a child in this province for whom there was evidence of abuse, absolutely they would be apprehended. What I can say is that I will not disclose information in which the disclosure of information would put a child at risk, and I would hope that the member would support me in ensuring the protection of the children of this province.

Mr. Ellis: Given that the minister keeps saying that the media is wrong but she will not correct the information and given that we have heard this before – in November the then minister told the House that a reporter, quote, did not have all the facts, unquote, and he was referring to the date that the RCMP finally received Serenity’s case file, and it was the minister himself who reported the date wrong – and given that the government keeps changing its story and hiding behind privacy laws that they will not identify, Premier, there is only one way to get the facts here. Will you call a public inquiry now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all members on all sides of this House and all Albertans take this case incredibly seriously. The Crown and the RCMP have been working very diligently on this case to make sure that they explore every possible avenue because everybody wants to make sure that they get it right in this particular instance. At this time that investigation is ongoing, so it’s not appropriate to comment on what the other further steps will be. As the Minister of Children’s Services has said many times, I think we really need to be focused on moving forward and making the system better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Data Security in Public Bodies

Mr. Cyr: Over the last year tens of thousands of computers have been affected with a recent wave of cyberattacks which use ransomware to extort individuals and businesses to pay to get their information from these individuals. With 12 international offices the chances of Alberta coming close to contact with cybermalware is high. The risks of infection both at home and abroad are a reality. Just last weekend this attack happened in Saskatchewan. At any point has Alberta become a target of espionage operations for cyberattacks within Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta takes information security very seriously, so we have a number of best practices that are in place to protect our information and our systems. I can tell you that, certainly, we know that world-wide hackers do target governments. That’s why it’s important to be vigilant, so we are very vigilant. I’m very happy to report to this House and to the member opposite that ransomware has never affected the government such that we’ve ever paid a ransom. Our security systems and vaccinations, as it were, from these viruses are very much in place and are very top of the line. We are not exposed in the way that Saskatchewan was, and I’m proud of our systems.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in 2016 the University of Calgary’s computer system was cyberattacked by ransomware and a \$20,000 ransom was paid to cyberterrorists, to the Minister of Service Alberta: within the last year has the government paid any other ransoms for government of Alberta departments, agencies, boards, or commissions since the University of Calgary cyberattack, and are they recorded in the blue book?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again for the question, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta is responsible for the government of Alberta ministries’ devices, so I can certainly speak to that. We do update our antivirus protection software very rigorously. We also have a rigorous and robust backup and restoration process. So I can certainly tell the member opposite that our efforts are definitely working. Of a total of 860 million e-mails which we received last year, 93.4 per cent were blocked due to detected malicious intent. So we certainly have good systems in place. With respect to ABCs it’s a different . . .

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given this government’s callous disregard towards privacy, freedom, and general concern for its citizens’ information and given that ransoms have been paid by public institutions within the riding of the minister responsible for IT security, to the Premier: if your minister is not able to protect institutions in her own riding, how can we expect her to protect Alberta in our own home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I’m sure the member opposite does know that agencies, boards, and commissions are arm’s length. There are many things that they’re responsible for, including their own budgeting, including their own operations. The University of Calgary is no different in that respect. When it comes to the government of Alberta, however, and the ministries, we are certainly responsible for that. I can certainly assure the House that we take the most rigorous of steps. If we did what the opposition proposed, which would include millions of cuts from our budget – I can tell you that one of the vulnerabilities is because governments look to IT applications as the very first place to cut.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:20 Flood Damage Mitigation in High River

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, in just a few short weeks we’ll be recognizing the four-year anniversary of the High River flood. This epic event had a devastating effect on the people and the economy

of High River. Flood mitigation work is still in progress with only one project left to complete. To the Minister of Infrastructure: have the funds for the High River floodgates been allocated to this project?

Mr. Mason: I'll look into that matter and get back to the member, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's interesting. Given that last year I contacted the ministry and suggested that since the floodgate project was a temporary solution and the raising of the Centre Street Bridge was the only permanent solution and whereas I had suggested that instead of spending taxpayers' dollars on a temporary fix the government ought to allocate the funds to a permanent solution, why did the minister turn down this project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, in Environment and Parks we have worked very closely with the town of High River and with the city of Calgary on appropriate flood mitigation in response to the 2013 flood. That is why our government has also committed \$500 million over 10 years to protect homes, businesses, and the economy through the Alberta community resilience program. In 2015 we also committed \$297 million, which will ensure that communities along the Elbow River are protected from a 2013 event. Our work on flood mitigation is ongoing, and we're happy to work with the town of High River to complete the projects that came out of the 2013 disaster.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's really interesting because given that the town of High River council has provided to the minister – which minister, I'm not sure now – a 107-page engineering-approved project, shovel-ready solution along with the offer to fund over half of the project, why is this ministry preventing High River flood mitigation projects from taking place, why are you holding up this vital, potentially life-saving solution, and why is there so much bureaucratic red tape? What's the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our province has dedicated many hundreds of millions of dollars to flood mitigation in response to the 2013 flood and to ensure that our communities are resilient in the future, both in High River and elsewhere. I would be very pleased to hear from the town of High River on further mitigation that is proposed by them and follow up with the hon. member and the town of High River as we complete the projects that came in the immediate aftermath of the 2013 flood.

Coal Strategy

Mr. Fraser: TransAlta recently announced that it would be speeding up the conversion of some of their coal-fired plants to natural gas. Specifically, some of the Sundance and Keephills units will be converted or retired up to two years sooner than previously estimated. While this might seem like a win for the NDP, it's certainly not a win for Alberta's coal communities like Parkland county, which is looking at a nearly \$6 million loss from their tax revenue due to the early shutdown. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are you doing to offset the loss to Parkland county and the similar losses that all communities can expect?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you . . . [interjection] What? Okay. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm short, and sometimes I don't see my colleagues.

Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, his own leader, Mr. Kenney, voted to phase out 12 of the 16 coal plants, as did the Leader of the Official Opposition, with no plan for what might happen to those communities. Our side of the House has taken a different approach. We are engaging with coal communities. We ensured that we got the right regulatory change with respect to natural gas conversion, and we're going to make sure we invest in those communities whereas they were ignored by the PCs and the Wildrose.

Mr. Fraser: Respectfully, Minister, that \$6 million this year is likely the cut to front-line services for that community.

Given that the minister has spoken about the opportunities for the export of thermal coal to other jurisdictions and given the further opportunity to export Alberta's high-grade metallurgical coal and given that much of the impact on the coal communities will be felt through the loss of good, mortgage-paying mining jobs, to the same minister: will you commit to doing everything in your power to ensure that thermal coal mines in these communities remain open, and will you work to reduce the barriers currently stopping new metallurgical coal mines from opening?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the plan that we put forward so that generators could convert their plants to natural gas and keep investing in communities and workers had to do with the plants and not the thermal coal mines. We went to Ottawa – our side of the House did – with a plan, and we were able to negotiate a 15-year exemption for coal plants that convert to natural gas. That means that Alberta natural gas will be burned in Alberta plants that are run by Alberta workers. We have the best interests of those communities in mind. They were ignored by the PCs and the Wildrose.

Mr. Fraser: Given that in my discussions with the mayors of the various coal communities a common concern has been that the well-being of their communities doesn't seem to be a top priority for this government and given the current environment around the uncertainty and the future of the coal industry, including the early forced shutdown and the intent of the B.C. government to levy an additional tax on the export of thermal coal, to the same minister: respectfully, Minister, these communities have expressed that they've heard more about free light bulbs than their successful transition. Will you demonstrate to these communities that their families, their future are more important than free light bulbs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the best interests of the communities were ignored by the PCs and the Wildrose when both the leader of the Wildrose and the leader of the PCs voted to shut down 12 of those 18 plants. Our approach has been a little bit different. Here's what the CEO of TransAlta, for example, had to say about that: "We have been [very] public about the benefits of these conversions. These are low-cost investments that will lengthen the average life of our coal fleet by up to 15 years." This ensures that we keep our workers working, according to the CEO of TransAlta, and keep those communities strong to be able to provide capacity to the system as we go through decades . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Marijuana Legalization

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we fast approach the legalization of marijuana, my office continues to receive calls from constituents concerned about the effect this will have in Red Deer and across the province. Given that the federal government has committed to setting the minimum age of 18 to buy marijuana, to the Minister of Justice: has this government considered the legal age in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. I think all Albertans are concerned about ensuring that we make this transition in a thoughtful way. Some of our main priorities with this process include keeping cannabis out of the hands of children and proceeds out of the hands of criminals. The minimum age is something we'll raise as part of our public consultation, a process we'll be launching in the coming weeks. We want to ensure that the views of Albertans are taken into account in this process.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the need to ensure that our roads remain safe and given the concerns surrounding drug-impaired driving, to the same minister: how will we ensure that Albertans are kept safe on the roads after marijuana is legalized?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this is a concern that is very much on the mind of the government and of all Albertans, I think. Impaired driving, whether by alcohol or drugs, is unacceptable. It is dangerous, and it puts everyone on our roads at risk. The federal government is working to ensure that a reliable roadside saliva test will be available, and we will be watching this process closely. One of the things we're looking to ensure is that law enforcement in Alberta is properly educated so that they're able to proceed on the basis of the impaired charge.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the need to educate Albertans on this topic as we move forward, to the same minister: how will public education play a role in how the province responds to the legalization process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Educating Albertans about safe consumption is absolutely a high priority. We'll be working to ensure that this happens as we move forward in the process. We will be working very closely with our partners in Health, and we'll have more to say about this as we move forward. It's absolutely critical that Albertans understand both the risks and the benefits.

2:30

Highway 61 Repairs

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, last summer residents of the county of Forty Mile were excited to see construction equipment begin to fix

highway 61 near Etzikom. Sadly, the equipment idled, and the highway repairs stopped. It turns out that some regulation changed in the environment department, and the minister of environment halted the Minister of Transportation's project. Now I'm told by Alberta Transportation that nothing will happen until August. Why is the minister of environment holding up the Department of Transportation on road repairs, promised since 2007, that represent a health and safety issue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an unfortunate situation. The project was on the shelf for quite a long time. Our government revitalized it, and as a result there were some changes to the Water Act that require additional permits, and we're in the process of acquiring those permits now.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this isn't the first critical, unsafe project that has been held up waiting for the NDP's approval. Given that NDP bureaucracy and red tape are holding up repairs on this critical lifeline while we risk losing a second construction season and given that this road is in such a state that even school buses refuse to use it, is the minister of environment trying to shut down rural Alberta by allowing the roads to deteriorate to such a condition that the Transportation minister can't fix them anymore?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Our government is strongly committed to meeting the transportation needs of all Albertans, including those in rural Alberta. But I can tell you that if the Wildrose formed government and cut \$9 billion from infrastructure, the roads would be one mass of potholes from one end of the province to the other.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that I have asked about the repairs to highway 61 every year since I was elected – in question period, estimates, and Public Accounts – and given that the government of Alberta continues to botch the repairs of this highway for all the residents of southern Alberta, if the government isn't able to get the basics of road repair right, how can we trust them to diversify our economy, create jobs, and get value for taxpayer dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this government is already producing results in all of those areas. The infrastructure that's being built in this province is going to serve Albertans for generations to come. Jobs are being created. We're getting back on track. It's not going to be highway 61 revisited.

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

Workers' Compensation System

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government has proven that it is a poor financial manager. That's why business owners are concerned that the WCB has not provided them with their 2016 premium rebates. In a year in which businesses are struggling with the economy, the carbon tax, the minimum wage increase, and top-secret regulation changes, these rebates are particularly critical. Minister, will you promise these business owners that you will not use their premium overpayments to help fund your department? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely critical that Albertans know that they have a Workers' Compensation Board and system that provides fair compensation and meaningful rehabilitation. Let me be clear that surpluses are not being folded back into government revenue. The WCB manages its own funds, and there has been an internal decision of the WCB for this current year. We look forward to working with the WCB as we receive the report from the panel that has been reviewing WCB to see how we can improve the system going forward.

Mr. Gill: Given that the accounting practice standard is that if employers contributed more in premiums than was needed in a given year, the money is refunded and given that it's unfair to withhold their money when all of the accounting is finished for 2016 and given that it should not matter what the WCB review recommends for the future because we are talking about the last year, to the same minister: is the decision to withhold the premium surplus coming from you or the WCB?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The WCB manages its own funds, and this was an internal decision of the WCB, who has historically responsibly managed and accounted for all of the funds within the WCB system. There has been an ongoing review of the WCB to make sure that the system is working for injured workers and employers. The last comprehensive review of the WCB had happened more than 15 years ago, so this was long overdue. This review is part of our commitment to make sure agencies, boards, and commissions are operating well here in this province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the WCB review was launched over a year ago and given that the law hinges on this review, including premium overpayments from 2016 that businesses did not expect to have to worry about and potential legislation changes from a government that is a fan of overburdening businesses with regulations, Minister, when will your panel complete its report and provide it publicly for all Albertans, and if you want to say spring, is this the spring of 2017 or 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that we had a three-person panel, consisting of a neutral chair and representatives from workers and employers, engaged in a fulsome review of the workers' compensation system so that we can make sure there is meaningful rehabilitation and fair compensation as well as to make sure that there is a strong system of workers' compensation. The report is due to me spring of this year. We will be receiving that report, reviewing it, and then coming back to talk to Albertans, the WCB, and all affected by the system about the next steps.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Neonatal Health Care

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently this government announced the official opening of the new neonatal intensive care unit at the Peter Lougheed health centre in Calgary. To the Minister of Health: what does this project mean for front-line health teams in the Lougheed NICU and their patients?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, it's important to make sure that we have the very best care environments, which also regularly equate to the very best working environments for the staff who are there to provide this care. Rather than teeny-tiny newborns having to be held in close proximity to each other, they have much better infection control, the space is three times that which it was previously, there are doors that actually close between the different spaces, and it also creates a space for the family to be able to stay and care for their children, which regularly is where you want to be when you have a child who is so ill.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the number of births in the Calgary zone has increased by 8 per cent in the last five years, from almost 18,000 babies in 2011 to nearly 20,000 in 2016, to the same minister: why didn't the new unit increase the number of beds to meet the growing demand?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. I had a chance to meet with some of the families as well as the staff while I was there, and I have to tell you that baby Noah's family was so excited to see the new space. They're more excited to get him home, but if the time continues where they have to be there, they're excited to be able to transition into the new space, where they'll all be welcome. Certainly, that new, dedicated space supports isolation as well for conditions that could be infectious. It's important that we continue to have the right number of beds or, rather, bassinets in this unit, and AHS continues to monitor that and ensure that they're bringing space online when it's most needed.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Calgary isn't the only community facing increasing demands, to the same minister: what else is this government doing to make sure families across Alberta don't experience barriers when a child needs health care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the reasons why I'm so proud to be a part of a government that's putting Alberta families first instead of moving forward with reckless, ideological cuts, as are being proposed by the members opposite. We're investing in parts of the province to ensure that we have the right health care supports. That includes ridings right across this province, from north to south, from east to west. Last year we started covering things outside of acute care, including specialized formula for children who have severe dietary restrictions, and many families have been able to benefit from that. As well, the health care system has had fewer complications because these tiny children aren't getting the kinds of conditions that they could acquire if they...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Legislative Procedures

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, two years ago in June the Wildrose Official Opposition proposed a document to restore trust in

Alberta's democracy, and so far we've heard crickets from this Government House Leader. What I'd like to know is: what has happened in the last two years when he used to believe in openness, transparency, and fairness for the opposition?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to talk about what this government has done to renew democracy over the past two years, starting with Bill 1, banning corporate and union donations, and following that up with changes to our elections financing act to get big money out of politics. We've now introduced whistle-blower legislation that is going to make sure that our public servants are able to come forward and speak about what they're seeing if there is wrongdoing happening within our agencies. We continue to push the boundaries and make sure that Alberta is leading in renewing our democracy. I'm very proud of the work we've done so far and the work we are going to do in the future.

2:40

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the opposition proposed real changes to this Assembly that would make our democracy more open and more transparent, including reforming question period, including opposition days, and all this government can talk about is their union pals, when will they make real changes that reform our democracy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I would note that when this party, the NDP, was in opposition, we had four seats, sometimes even two seats, and we were far more effective under even far more restrictive rules than this huge Wildrose opposition. So don't blame us because you're lame.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that there is no new legislation on the Order Paper and that this government claims to be effective at governing – yet all we saw last week was this government filibustering their own pieces of legislation, with nothing on the horizon – and that the Minister of Labour is always dodging and weaving about whether or not they're going to ram controversial labour legislation through at the end of session, when are we going to hear whether this will be happening or not?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been advised that my last comment was perhaps disrespectful to the disabled community, and I'd like to apologize now for using that. I can think of five or six other words I could have used equally effectively to describe the opposition.

But I do want to tell the Opposition House Leader that we are going to be introducing two new bills – I'm giving notice this afternoon – just so the opposition is happy, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. members, Members' Statements in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Electric Power System

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're now two years into an electricity comedy of errors that started as soon as the NDP began their reign of economic tragedy. It's time for a recap. Weeks into the NDP's electoral mandate, without any consultation with industry, the NDP rashly changed the 2007 SGER's carbon pricing. The result: a mass turn-back of power purchase arrangements, which are decade-old power contracts between Alberta generators and the government's arm's-length Balancing Pool. The NDP had six months to undo their rash change to SGERs. The NDP were warned repeatedly that companies would lawfully terminate their contracts unless the short-sighted order in council was reversed, but ideology came before sense and before Albertans. The NDP didn't back down. Instead, they started a smear campaign, evoking the besmirched name of Enron in a failed attempt to divert attention away from their growing comedy of errors.

The Balancing Pool recognized Enmax's right to terminate, which is the last time they decided anything independent of this meddling government. Then came the costly lawsuits and Bill 34, the blank cheque to the Balancing Pool. A few short months ago, when the blank cheque act was passed, the expected cost was \$600 million, but weeks ago costs skyrocketed to over \$4 billion according to the government's own admission. Now the Balancing Pool is being investigated by the MSA for using the money from the blank cheque act as an open-ended subsidy, undermining our competitive power market. Changing SGERs will cost Albertan taxpayers at least \$4.437 billion.

The taxpayer and the ratepayer are still the same person. You are not the heroes protecting Albertans; you are the villains inflicting harm on them.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I stand here to provide oral notice of two bills to be added to the Order Paper tomorrow. Those bills are Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation, which will be sponsored by the hon. Minister of Energy; and Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, which will be sponsored by the hon. Minister of Finance.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to bring forward five copies of the Edmonton collision statistics as well as some photoradar locations that were provided by FOIP, showing that there's absolutely no correlation between the locations of photoradar and collisions.

The Speaker: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a six-pack of Wild Rose beer that I owe the hon. minister of agriculture. I bet him that the Flames would outlast the Oilers in the playoffs. I was wrong, and a Fildebrandt always pays his debts. Unfortunately for me, though, I didn't put any money on the Bandits against Whitecourt. In any case, it's right here for him.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter that I received today from Paul Baena of Western Electrical Management Ltd. It's with regard to the labour review, and he claims, "I feel that the NDP government is once again attempting to change our province in order to align the province with the values and belief system of a political party, which is no longer in favor by the people."

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table five copies of the summary and indicators from the Lethbridge State of the Environment 2017 report by Environment Lethbridge, which I quoted during my member's statement. As noted in the summary, we must be prepared for the impacts of climate change and population growth on our environment and lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a post from my Facebook page, where the mayor of Carmangay commented on answers that I got as I questioned the minister of environment about property rights and renewables. The mayor was not impressed that the minister took her comments out of context and used them as supporting arguments to give a non answer to an extremely important question.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the Hon. Mr. S. Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs, responses to questions raised by Mr. McIver, hon. leader of the Progressive Conservative opposition; Mr. Clark, hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow; and Mr. Strankman, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, at the April 12, 2017, Ministry of Municipal Affairs 2017-18 main estimates debate.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we have two points of order today. Is that correct?

An Hon. Member: And a point of privilege.

The Speaker: And a point of privilege as well.
The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Would you like to begin with the points of order or the point of privilege? The points of order?

The Speaker: Please.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Ganley: I rise on a point under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), which states that members
will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

At about 1:55 p.m. – and I believe this same argument stands for both points of order because it occurred again at about 1:56 – the

Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre asked: will the minister continue to mislead the House?

Mr. Speaker, in recent months you have cautioned many times on the practice of using words like "mislead" or "misleading." Most recently, on April 20 you said, "I want to caution the member and the members. We've had many hours wasted on discussions about what's true, what's not true, misleading, false, et cetera. I want to caution everyone to be careful."

This, of course, is a very context-specific state of affairs. In this particular case the context is that it was a specific allegation against a specific person. We were not talking about an argument or an idea or a group, Mr. Speaker. We were talking about one specific, individual person. In particular, what we were talking about was a topic that is deserving of sensitivity and respect. In this case I think it is clear that the use of "misleading" in this context was absolutely a violation of this rule. It's very sensitive, it's affected all of us very deeply, and I think that really does denote the need for caution.

Mr. Speaker, you have asked members to stand in this House before for saying that a member was misleading the House and to apologize and withdraw. I would ask that the members opposite do the same by withdrawing and apologizing for the remarks made today.

The Speaker: The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to agree in many respects with my colleague. This is an issue that is emotional. From time to time members of the Chamber can become emotional. I know that my colleague has some strong feelings about some of the things that the minister has said both at the panel and here in the House and how there's some discrepancy with those. But I do agree that in this case the context in which it was used was in fact a point of order, and the member has asked me if I would withdraw and apologize on his behalf as he had to step out.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe we are now at a point of privilege. The case was made by the House leader of the third party on Thursday, I believe.

The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Privilege Access to Information

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the point of privilege raised by the hon. House leader for the third party, I would begin by saying that the test for prima facie breach of privilege is high. The hon. House leader for the PC caucus hasn't even come close to establishing that the privilege of a member has been violated in this instance or that the privileges of the House as a collective have been breached by the Minister of Children's Services in question period. The member is using this matter of privilege and points of order frivolously as a means of extending debate from question period and of relitigating issues that have been closed.

Before refuting his argument, I'd like to briefly outline what it was that occurred. In question period the PC caucus leader asked the Minister of Children's Services questions about child welfare. The minister responded to those questions. The opposition wasn't satisfied with the answers. Mr. Speaker, that happens most days in this place. Following question period the minister provided further information to the public through a media conference, an update she had made reference to earlier that day in question period. Again, there's nothing unusual here. Those are the facts. This doesn't translate to a matter of privilege.

I'd like to now review and refute the accusations of the PC House leader, Mr. Speaker. I'll begin with what I believe to be the substance of the matter, but the argument wandered somewhat, so I will try to touch on as much as possible.

First, he argued that the privileges of a member of this House were breached "by withholding information from members and intending to share that information with the media before members of this House." Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* is very clear on page 13, paragraph 31(10), that there is absolutely no right of members to receive any or all information before the general public does.

The question has often been raised whether parliamentary privilege imposes on ministers an obligation to deliver ministerial statements and to make announcements and communications to the public through the House of Commons or to make these announcements or statements in the House rather than outside the chamber. The question has been asked whether Hon. Members are entitled, as part of their parliamentary privilege, to receive such information ahead of the general public. I can find no precedent to justify this suggestion.

Parliamentary Privilege in Canada, by Maingot, further states on page 224:

A complaint that a minister of the Crown has made a statement outside the House rather than in the House or that the government provides information only to its supporters in the House may well amount to a grievance against the government, but in the absence of an order in the House forbidding such activity, there is no personal or corporate privilege that has been breached in the doing.

As one of my predecessors as Government House Leader, Mr. Hancock, stated on March 6, 2000: government actually gets elected to govern, and then they come into the House to get approval for legislation and approval for spending; but governments are elected to govern, and they are expected to go out and talk to the public about what they are doing.

Similarly, Speaker Zwodzesky stated on November 7, 2013:

We all know that governments across the greater Commonwealth will make announcements. They will make policy statements, they will make program decisions and other announcements like that, and they will also make funding announcements such as the one we heard today, and they are well within their right to do that. That's what governments are elected to do. They can do it any time they wish provided that some of our conventions, rules, and authorities are observed.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that sharing information with the public through the media prior to it being provided to this Chamber is not prohibited, and in fact there are a great many occasions on which it is desirable or appropriate.

At the same time, I do wonder whether the hon. member spoke to his caucus leader prior to making this argument. After all, earlier that day in question period the Member for Calgary-Hays said that the minister had refused to provide correct facts to the media. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition went on even further in his first question to say that the minister provided nothing: no details, no explanations, no answers.

Mr. Speaker, it can only be one of the two. Did the minister breach privilege by providing answers to the media, or did she provide nothing? You can't have it both ways. In either event, it's quite clear that ministers have the right to provide information to the public and, in fact, one might argue, even have the duty to do so in many cases.

The next allegation raised by the hon. third-party House leader quotes at length from *Parliamentary Practice* as well as *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* in defining what privilege is. But he doesn't establish that the minister breached privilege. He

quotes *Erskine May* on page 251 in attempting to argue that the minister's conduct in a response in question period was disrespectful in such a way as to have breached the privileges of the Assembly; however, he ought to have continued reading, Mr. Speaker. He would have found that his own dissatisfaction in terms of the answers to questions in question period is most definitely not grounds for a point of privilege.

O'Brien and Bosc at page 510:

Members may not insist on an answer nor may a Member insist that a specific Minister respond to his or her question. A Minister's refusal to answer a question may not be questioned or treated as the subject of a point of order or question of privilege.

It continues, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the [rule] . . . of privilege.

3:00

There are a couple of other comments, Mr. Speaker. Ministers are not required to provide answers that the members opposite may necessarily like. *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* states at page 223, "The alleged lack or unsatisfactory nature of a reply to an oral or written question is not a question of privilege, because the practice of the House does not compel a reply." I think that the minister has been very clear about the constraints placed on her in this situation, in the context of an ongoing investigation, and I think it is abundantly clear that just because the members opposite don't like the answer, that doesn't mean their privileges have been breached.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the hon. third-party House leader quotes from various books on obstruction. His claim is that he has been impeded in his duty as an MLA seeking information on a matter of importance to himself and the people who elected us to this House. He argues, "The minister was clearly obstructing the members of this House in the discharge of their duties. Every member of this House has a duty to speak out on issues of importance to Albertans." As proof of obstruction he argues that the minister delayed in answering questions or refused to share information. First of all, Mr. Speaker, that's just simply not obstruction. Beginning at page 108 in *O'Brien and Bosc* is a discussion on obstruction and similar matters. To begin with, it's generally a reference to physical obstruction, assault, or molestation, items such as traffic barriers, security cordons, and picket lines that literally impede the ability of a member to access parliament or to discharge their duties.

While members may want particular information related to a policy or program, that does not mean that receiving the information is fundamental to their duties as a member. On that point *O'Brien and Bosc* discuss on page 117 the multiple responsibilities and duties of members, including those related to their constituency work. They point to a ruling from July 15, 1980, when Speaker Sauvé told the Chamber, "Whatever duty a member has to his constituents, before a valid question of privilege arises in respect [to] alleged interference, such interference must relate to the member's parliamentary duties." In other words, just because accessing specific information may be important to the individual, that does not make it a fundamental part of their duties or privileges as a member, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, I don't believe that any of the points raised by the hon. House leader for the third party meet the test of privilege, which, again, is quite high. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just begin by reminding folks exactly why we're here and of some of the statements that were made by the minister which have created some significant concern for many members inside this Chamber. It can be found on page 966 of *Hansard*, when she said in response to the question from the Leader of the Opposition, "I want to urge the members again to be aware of spreading inaccurate information . . . I will be sharing more information about this matter this afternoon." Ultimately, how the opposition is able to do our jobs representing the views of Albertans is in question here. The minister is clearly withholding information from the Chamber. Clearly stating that she "will be sharing more information about this matter this afternoon" gives an indication to every member of the Assembly that she had the information available to her at that point.

Mr. Speaker, question period is one of the only opportunities in the day in which the opposition has the opportunity to ask the government questions and, as such, hold the government to account. The very fact that the minister would withhold information from the Leader of the Official Opposition and others and openly acknowledge that she would be providing that information to members of the media and not to this Chamber directly affects the ability of the member to hold the government to account in the line of questioning that he may or may not have chosen to take during question period.

We in effect are told by that minister that they're not going to provide details to the House, but it's okay for them to go to the press and provide them the details, essentially saying: you can all tune in later when I tell Albertans what I wasn't willing to tell you. This clearly shows contempt for the Assembly. I won't go on at length today, Mr. Speaker, about this point of privilege because I think that it is clear that there is a tradition inside the Chamber that we ought to provide information to the Chamber and not to the media in advance of providing that information to the Assembly, particularly when she acknowledged that she had it.

It's significantly different from a funding announcement that the government may engage in, where the government makes a decision that they will be rolling out a policy announcement or otherwise. We were in the Chamber at the time that the Minister of Children's Services said: "No. I'm not going to tell you; I'm going to tell the media later today." That directly and intentionally affected the Leader of the Opposition's ability to execute his duties on that day.

We heard the Minister of Justice, the Acting Deputy House Leader, speak at length about answering questions and what their ability was to do. I'd just like to point to a reference in *Beauchesne's* for you that she neglected to bring up, mostly because it doesn't support her arguments – all the same, it is there and available to you – when it speaks specifically about the government's responsibilities when it comes to answering questions. Mr. Speaker, if you're following along in *Beauchesne's* this afternoon or tomorrow or later today, it can be found on page 25. The heading is Interfering with Members, notation 97.

The Speaker has stated: "While it is correct to say that the government is not required by our rules to answer written or oral questions, it would be bold to suggest that no circumstances . . . like we may have seen the Minister of Justice recommend today

. . . could ever exist for a prima facie question of privilege to be made where there was a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an Hon. Member . . .

which is exactly what we saw from the Minister of Children's Services when she did not answer the question of my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, but said – and I'm paraphrasing here – "I'm not going to answer your question; I will answer that question later in a media conference." What we saw was a deliberate attempt to deny an answer to my colleague, and while I can appreciate that the government is not required, there are certainly references available to you that provide evidence that that limit is not boundless, as the government has suggested.

It's my recommendation, Mr. Speaker, that you do find a prima facie case of privilege and that this issue be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing so that situations like this, where the government is not providing the answers that are rightly deserved, could be heard there.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, upon assuming this responsibility, I was told that in this House points of privilege happen very infrequently. I must tell you that we've had far more than I would have expected in these last two years.

There were some very strong, cogent arguments made with respect to this matter. I will be taking your points under consideration and in due course will report back to the House.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned May 8: Mr. Dach speaking]

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to stand today and speak about Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. There have been a number of points made by both opposition and my own caucus colleagues, and I just want to kind of start off the conversation pretty broad and then get a little bit more detailed as I go along.

As those that have been aware of work that's gone on in this Legislature for the last 10 years know, we have members that are sitting as ministers now that have been long-time advocates for property rights in Alberta. They have stood up for landowners, and we as members will continue to do so because we do believe in things like property rights, due process, proper notification, and fair compensation. The government has already begun working with stakeholders to try to make these positive changes on important issues, and it's very important that we do this to make Albertans' lives better and ensure the public has access to appropriate protections and avenues for resolution where issues arise involving private property, Madam Speaker.

Last we left off, we were speaking about adverse possession. As was talked about, I'm sure that all of us in this Chamber have had constituents come into our offices to talk about adverse possession,

urging us to make very substantive changes that would protect property rights, and members of this government are very interested in making changes that will satisfy that call. But, of course, any amendments that we see come before this House: they do impact many pieces of legislation often, and it's quite important to the House to consider all of what these necessary policy implications might be.

For example, when I'm looking at the bill, I'm not quite sure how ongoing issues that arise in boundary and occupancy disputes will be addressed and resolved if we were to go ahead and make these changes. Currently section 69 of the Law of Property Act provides the mechanisms needed to resolve disputes where improvements have been made on the wrong piece of land. Sometimes this may have been a result of past survey errors. Sometimes it may have been an unrecorded understanding that happened in early generations between neighbours that can no longer be identified. The fact is, unfortunately, that we know that mistakes can happen.

I do understand that section 69 was originally enacted after a property owner ended up obtaining a house that someone else had actually built, Madam Speaker. There needs to be a way of resolving these situations fairly. The current law might not be the best, but we can't do away with it without a lot of consideration. If we're seeking to protect one landowner who historically owned that land, we shouldn't do it in a way that is entirely unfair to the other landowner who mistakenly could occupy or use it.

I'm concerned that these amendments would potentially hand over one hard-working person's investment to another party without due process that would protect both parties' interests. Many of these situations, after all, aren't about government or industry versus landowners; they can be landowner versus landowner. So we need to make sure that we get this right and be fair to both sides. However, Bill 204 does not seem to outline the impact of section 69, and that's just the tip of the iceberg on this issue. Establishing the necessary facts in such disputes is a difficult process, and even if the facts are established, section 69 may not cover all situations. I would not want to leave these neighbours without a process for addressing these concerns, Madam Speaker.

I would like to shift focus now to the Limitations Act, which sets out claims that would be brought within 10 years for an owner to claim return of possession of land from an adverse possessor, which is someone who occupies land that they do not own and under the doctrine of adverse possession might acquire an interest in that land if certain criteria are not met. The doctrine of adverse possession requires an owner to take timely action to enforce ownership and possession of the land, often through court action if an agreement with the adverse possessor cannot be reached. Bill 204 does not seem to set out a framework that would address disputes that may already be before the courts or claims that existed before the proposed amendments are supposed to take effect. More work absolutely seems to be needed to get this right.

Just as a recap of many of the points that have been made, it doesn't seem that Bill 204 addresses adverse possession in a holistic manner and as drafted would have unintended consequences for the very people that I believe the Legislature is trying to help. I already mentioned section 69 of the Law of Property Act as well as the Limitations Act and also the Land Titles Act, but also the other acts that might be impacted would be the Municipal Government Act, the Irrigation Districts Act, the Public Lands Act, and perhaps other acts. Adverse possession cannot be addressed through a single lens. Eliminating the doctrine of adverse possession is not a straightforward process and needs these careful considerations. It's complex and may open gaps and create unintended consequences for Albertans.

I just want to make a few notes also about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, that the act is important for doing cumulative effects management and for managing the triple bottom line of the public's interest in social, environmental, and economic outcomes. For too long previous governments failed to manage the environmental and social outcomes of development on a cumulative effects basis, and we do need to do better in the public's interest and for the common good. It's a priority for this government, and regional planning is a cornerstone of this effort.

Bill 204 could bring in significant financial and legal risk for these regional planning efforts like the North Saskatchewan regional plan, for which we have just begun consultations, or for the lower Athabasca regional plan, which came into effect in 2012. Regional plans such as these are crucial to ensuring that all of the interests in a community are considered when planning for the long-term economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and community well-being in different regions of the province. Also, what's important is developing these wide-ranging engagement tools for community stakeholders. Regional planning is also an important tool for ensuring Albertans have an ability to shape their communities, and that net needs to be preserved.

Bill 204 would create new rights to compensation in legal contexts where property rights were not intended. In fact, we don't even know what the bill would make the public liable for, and because the provision for compensation is so broad, it would require compensation for any losses, including for damages or other financial relief, so really this bill could leave the government and the public liable for compensation for the 86,000 active Crown mineral agreements that might be affected by a regional plan.

I would like to again thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I understand and respect the intent behind his bill. Our government and caucus believe in protecting property rights, including due process, proper notification, fair compensation, and that is why the government has begun to work with stakeholders to make positive changes that would protect Albertans and respect property rights. The government is right now looking at how to better manage historic, current, and future liabilities associated with upstream oil and gas infrastructure, which is often located on private property, Madam Speaker.

To further support managing these liabilities, the government would be working with federal counterparts in securing \$30 million to help address the rising inventory of orphan assets. We are waiting for the details of how that money will be used to benefit Alberta, and we know that this is just the beginning of the work that we need to do to benefit landowners, workers, and the environment.

3:20

We know that there is room for improvement in how property rights issues are addressed, and I would again like to thank the member for bringing forward this bill. Of course, as I've laid out, it leaves many unanswered questions, which is why I am happy to move an amendment in the House on this bill, Madam Speaker, and I have the requisite copies.

The Acting Speaker: If you can just wait one minute until the originals are at the table, please.

Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as RA1.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. Could I speak to that amendment?

The NDP has always stood up for Alberta landowners, Madam Speaker. We're working to strike the right balance between individual property rights, the public interest, and responsible energy development with industry, which is why we have done so

much to get to two pipeline approvals, because we have been able to get the public on our side. Balancing these very delicate interests is of critical importance, and that's why I'm concerned that the bill does not strike an appropriate balance, which is why I'm tabling this amendment.

As such, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 204, Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill does not strike the right balance between individual property owner rights, industry's need for certainty and the public's need to protect Alberta's water and public lands.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah, I'm pleased to rise today in support of my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod's private member's bill and against the reasoned motion as it was just presented. You know, I struggle with where to start. Three things run through my mind, and the first of all is the hypocrisy of a government that four and five years ago was absolutely, totally against bills 36, 24, 19, and 50 and claimed, like the Wildrose opposition would at the time, that they would repeal them. I guess you're supporters of property rights only when it's convenient, supporters of property rights only when you don't have the opportunity to make government bigger, larger, have more ability to infringe on individual and property rights.

Certainly, we have the opportunity in this House to just vote against a bill. We have opportunities to make amendments to change it. You know, my question in question period today talked about how for five years I've been asking for the improvements on highway 61. Well, Madam Speaker, it's seven or eight years that I've had constituents from Cypress-Medicine Hat and Forty Mile county come to me with great, great concern about the infringement of property rights.

Again, when both the NDP and the Wildrose were in opposition, in an odd kind of way we seemed like we were allies to protect property rights. Obviously, we know the true NDP government position. Thank goodness the Wildrose position hasn't changed at all. We are here to protect property rights.

Why should we do this? You know, everywhere I go talking to people in the oil and gas business, people in industry, people looking for jobs, they are absolutely appalled at how this government has shattered confidence, confidence in not increasing taxes with the biggest per capita deficit in provincial Canadian history since World War II – I'm afraid they have to go even higher before this government decides to get spending in line – the confidence of an industry that might come here. Madam Speaker, as we all know, we've seen several international companies leave our jurisdiction in the last little while, taking their capital and their jobs with them. Stronger property rights would be a signal to these companies that this is the type of jurisdiction . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, sorry to interrupt.

Members, we are not in Committee of the Whole at the moment. Can you please return to your seats.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you. Again, you know, the confidence that we could send to investors, to stockholders, to people to buy shares, to people that want to start small businesses that Alberta is

a jurisdiction where government knows its limits and where government knows that the individuals and companies are happy to pay taxes, are happy to support families and communities, but they need certainty.

So the hypocrisy, the lack of confidence are two of the reasons that I will not be supporting this amendment.

The third reason. What I didn't hear the hon. member who introduced this talk about was what I saw, Madam Speaker, five and six years ago: 300, 400, 500 farmers and ranchers, hundreds of Albertans from the cities come to meetings to express their concern for the fact that these laws could not only take away their covenants that are attached to their titles to land that in some cases great-great-grandfather and great-great-grandmother homesteaded but actually without their full input to courts, to one of the hallmarks of a western democracy. Again, it was, like, 250 to 450 everyday Albertans, hard-working families, men and women who built this province, who felt that the prior government absolutely got the balance wrong. I think the balance was that they were trying to expedite so the government could do what they want quicker without paying the compensation they might need to.

I don't know. Fairness and equity, I think, are hallmarks of every Albertan. Yeah, sometimes things have to be done for the public good, but let's always treat those affected with fairness and equity, and the current status of bills 36 and 24 right now does not do that. My hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod is presenting some great solutions.

I mean, many, many people I talk to, Madam Speaker, would prefer just to repeal the bill still and start over and strengthen property rights. I think the hon. member found a way that might appeal to a party that believes in a bigger, more spending government, but obviously we're seeing clearly that the hypocrisy from the NDP, the lack of desire for individual and property rights, is going to continue. I fully expect it to continue through the next two years into the next election, and I fully expect that rural Albertans will once again see that the Wildrose is continuing to stand up on their behalf and continuing to stand up for stronger property rights, which means a stronger Alberta for all of us.

I will ask all of my hon. colleagues to vote against this amendment and return to supporting these excellent changes to the bill as proposed by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hadn't spoken to Bill 204 previously, and I didn't because I have some questions and I wanted to have a better understanding of what the bill will actually do. Are there any unexpected consequences which may negatively affect my constituents and Albertans?

3:30

Now, I've had a number of people come into my office – some constituents; some from other constituencies – and they've both supported and not supported the bill, so I'm actually very happy with the amendment. The issue of adverse possession was certainly one of the things that came up. The story that was shared with me was that there was a development under way, and the surveyor came and did the survey lines for each of the pieces of property on this development, and there was – I don't know – I guess a snowstorm or something happened, and a contractor came in with a grader to grade the roads and, in fact, went over a couple of the survey poles, unbeknownst to the person operating the grader.

So the one house got built. The sticks were put back in the ground, the house was built, and then the person on the next

property went to build a house and had their own surveyor come in to check because they felt like the property lines didn't quite align the way they had aligned when they bought the property. Sure enough, they were about two and a half to three feet over the line. But the house was built, a fence was built, and now the second property owner was about to build, and there was a problem. It didn't get resolved very civilly, and it cost both parties a fair amount of money in court arguing about it. I don't want that kind of thing happening to my constituents or to other Albertans. I would like to see those things fixed and, if we're going to have a bill, a bill that's going to address all of the issues.

First of all, I want to thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for bringing it up because we're having a discussion and a debate about this issue, and I think that's pretty important. Unfortunately, I'm not able to support your bill – I'm going to support the amendment – but I do think that it gave us the opportunity to discuss it and for us to put something together in future that really addresses all of these fine points in legislation like this. I'm standing up to support the amendment, and I'm sorry that I can't support your bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm just very disappointed. With the opportunity the government had here to simply send this bill to committee if they had concerns, we could have ironed out a lot of these issues that they had at committee before it came back for third reading or sent it to committee for a total rebuild of the legislation.

We've seen concerns over this government's ability to address property rights, you know, specifically to landowners out in the rural parts of the province, farmers' and ranchers' concerns over the green energy legislation. For example, I actually attended a town hall where the Farmers' Advocate and the AUC presented a PowerPoint really, really challenging farmers that before they signed any deals with these unscrupulous landmen – that's pretty much the way they put it – they make sure that they talk to their communities and don't have pitting of neighbour against neighbour or municipalities against landowners. Municipalities, when they're approached with these big green energy or even oil and gas projects, look at the linear assessment that they're going to get, and they can plan ahead for 10 years and bank on all this money coming in, but they don't really look at the rights of the landowners and how it's going to affect them.

Not only that, but when it comes to wind energy as well as oil and gas with the vent tanks, your neighbour may have a gas well or an oil well on his property, and you're living downwind from it, so you're the one that gets the benefit of all the vent gases that come off the tank. It's the same thing when it comes to wind energy. If there are any vibrations or – you know, some people say that they can feel the vibrations from this and it drives them crazy because they're living in close proximity to this. This is what pits neighbours against neighbours and communities against communities when it comes to that linear tax and trying to force this onto the landowners.

The other part that was very concerning about that was that if your neighbour agreed to a wind energy project and he was surrounded by other landowners and there was no access to the grid, they would then – once the agreement was signed, yeah, the property owner has a right to say yes or no to the wind energy program or plan, but the adjacent landowners have no right to block access to infrastructure to tie that wind farm into the grid. We're going to see this pitting neighbour against neighbour, pitting municipalities against their own constituents.

I would really caution members that we have an opportunity here. This amendment basically kills this bill. We've seen it happen before in this House, where a similar amendment was put forward to squash a bill, and the outcry from the province was enough to force them to backtrack and change their minds. We've seen how landowners can get motivated, how farmers can get motivated with Bill 6, and I think this is another one of those where you're going to see a huge backlash from landowners in the province. It extends. You know, this isn't a centralized issue. This is going to cover the entire province, and I think you're going to get a huge backlash over this when it becomes public that you're using this referral amendment to kill this bill rather than take it to committee and fix the issues.

If you have issues with it, that's fine. We can take that and have an open discussion on it and address those issues. You don't just introduce a bill – this puts every bill that's put forward by the opposition at risk of, you know, simply: we throw a referral motion against it, vote against it. Bang. The bill's dead. I think that Albertans are really going to take notice of this, and I think you're making a drastic mistake by voting for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in disappointment at the amendment here to essentially kill this bill. I think the amendment that we should be discussing right now perhaps is a referral to committee, where this bill can be thoroughly debated, discussed, we can bring in experts, whatever type of extra information that you need. I think Albertans are going to be extremely disappointed to hear that after the committee on economic future voted unanimously to put a recommendation forward to this Assembly to reverse the adverse possession, also known as squatter's rights, which this bill would address – and this is yet another example, Madam Speaker, of the government members supporting ideas, recommendations in areas they think are not as public as they actually are and then reversing their opinions in this Assembly, perhaps because they are instructed or told to do so.

I think that's extremely disappointing, Madam Speaker, and I think Albertans will not feel fairly represented when they find out that this government, when now actually asked to make a decision in legislation, is voting against property rights.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Airdrie, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod to close debate on Bill 204.

3:40

Mr. Stier: Madam Speaker, are we talking about the amendment now, or are we closing debate on the bill?

The Acting Speaker: The reasoned amendment is on the floor, but traditional practice has been to allow you to close debate, and then we will vote on the reasoned amendment. The time is up for the private bill.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Thank you for this opportunity. Certainly, I respect the comments today from the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and the time she took to expand on and explain the situation.

I must say, as some of my colleagues have said already this afternoon, that we're pretty disappointed, and I am concerned about the backlash in the public for the decision that's being made today on this very important – very important – set of amendments, that we were hoping to get to Bill 36 and all of these other various acts that we were trying to fix up. It was basically a housekeeping bill, we thought, to try to, you know, kick up some of the main problems and clean those up. Anyway, you know, it only sought to restore some of the basic protections that we were looking for.

We've spent lots of time listening to what the government members have said, yet we hear some of the things and we just can't understand if there are any really good reasons why not to proceed with this as is. We could have, as some have said today, gone to a committee on it. We could have invited in special experts. We could have really made this, jointly, one of the best changes for property rights we've ever seen and really turned this situation around.

You know, it's strange that we think about property rights in such a fashion, where we're putting forward things like what the Member for Stony Plain said: "I worry that this bill looks at the issue from only the perspective of compensation for consent holders, missing other important perspectives like environmental protection and orderly development." In other words, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Stony Plain seems to believe in compensating property owners but not necessarily when property is being taken for environmental protection or development planning purposes. That's a contradictory statement. That's exactly when property rights need to be upheld; namely, the right to fair compensation when the government decides to sacrifice property or livelihood for the sake of everybody else. Every member considering voting against this bill should consider what it is they're telling Albertans.

The same member also expressed concern for private compensation for public good. Clearly, the member is not aware of water licences, as an example. Well, a water licence is basically a document that allows the holder to draw a specified amount of water from a water source. For an individual operating a farm, the ability to draw water is a pretty important aspect to being able to sustain life, and it's fundamental to the business. But currently the government can cancel a water licence and provide whatever compensation the minister wants, including absolutely none. If a farmer can no longer provide water to his herd or irrigate his crops, that's a devastation to his business. Bill 204 does not at all affect the government's ability to take the licence; it just ensures that they will provide fair compensation for sacrificing this person's business. Should the government not have some responsibility to compensate the farmer or businessman for their loss of livelihood, I ask?

I would have hoped that we would have all been able to agree on that fundamental point of ensuring that we can take care of individuals as we pursue some notion of common good, but it doesn't appear that way. A proper referral to a committee motion or amendment would have been something that we would have supported. We could have all met and decided how we could move forward with this and clean this situation up. Instead, what we're faced with today is not the appropriate course of action, in my opinion.

I'm extremely disappointed, Madam Speaker, and I will be voting against the amendment that was presented if that comes up, and I'll be bringing forward some other kind of legislation in the future to correct what has happened today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:44 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Hoffman	McPherson
Carson	Horne	Miranda
Ceci	Jabbour	Nielsen
Connolly	Jansen	Piquette
Coolahan	Kazim	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Dang	Littlewood	Schmidt
Drever	Loyola	Schreiner
Eggen	Luff	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Sucha
Ganley	Mason	Turner
Goehring	McKittrick	Westhead
Gray	McLean	Woollard
Hinkley		

4:00

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Stier
Barnes	Loewen	Strankman
Clark	McIver	Swann
Cooper	Pitt	Taylor
Cyr	Schneider	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Smith	Yao
Gotfried		

Totals: For – 40 Against – 19

[Motion on amendment RA1 carried]

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand and move second reading of Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act.

Establishing an advocate, I believe and many of my caucus members also believe, hopefully all of them, is going to make life better for Albertans and provide much-needed support for people with disabilities and their families in this province.

Madam Speaker, the bill would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta with the power to represent the rights, the interests, and the viewpoints of persons with disabilities. This bill proposes a new advocate position that would report to and advise the Minister of Community and Social Services. The bill will support the ongoing work of the Ministry of Community and Social Services as well.

Now, the final report of the persons with developmental disabilities, PDD, safety standards consultation in 2016 identified and recommended that advocacy is critical within the PDD community to ensure that individuals with disabilities are supported to lead more fulfilling lives. In fact, recommendation 10 of that report asked the government of Alberta to investigate the creation of a

formal advocate for persons with disabilities, and Bill 205 aims to do just that.

I'd like to say that my colleague the MLA for St. Albert has been an advocate in this area for a very long time. She took part in the PDD safety standards consultation. Shortly she is going to be speaking to Bill 205, and I can't wait to hear what she has to say because I don't believe there's anyone in this Chamber who has more knowledge and background than the Member for St. Albert. It was truly wonderful to work with her on this. This bill is the culmination as much of her efforts as anyone else's, and I'm absolutely excited and looking forward to hearing what she has to say.

Now, what does the bill do? That's the question. The advocate would have a mandate, and that mandate is to:

- (a) identify and study issues of concern to persons with disabilities . . .
- (b) review programs and policies affecting persons with disabilities;
- (c) participate in processes in which decisions are made [with respect to] persons with disabilities;
- (d) promote the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education;
- (e) provide information and advice to the Government with respect to any matter relating to the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities; [as well as]
- (f) assist individuals who are having difficulty accessing services and related programs for persons with disabilities, including directing them to an appropriate resource, person or organization [that may be able to help them].

Madam Speaker, I began working on this when I was a member of a different caucus and began my consultations back then, and I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity to have conversations with a lot of people about what exactly this advocate should be doing and where the gaps and the holes are. Certainly, I know that many of them are watching today, and I do want to thank them because so many of them really informed the work that I did. When we talk about consultation, it was the consultation that began the quest to get this bill done in the first place. It was consultation all the way through, and the consultation is ongoing. This is a fine example of that.

I also had a lovely conversation with my colleague across the aisle from Chestermere-Rocky View, who, of course, has a lot of knowledge about this area as well, and I certainly took her comments to heart when we were having these discussions. You know, I'm really hoping that this conversation that we have is a postpartisan conversation about how we move this bill forward so that it does what it needs to do for the constituents of all 87 of us in this Chamber.

We know that with an advocate we can help identify barriers to access to information, and we know that this person will be able to provide advice to government on all sorts of issues where that advice is desperately needed. Just as important, the advocate is going to identify issues of concern that come up over and over again, and our ability to take care of those issues, to find really good common-sense solutions comes when we have the ability to sit down and say: we see a pattern here and an opportunity to create some much-needed change.

By having an advocate, Albertans with disabilities will have a point person; for instance, when a teen transitions into adulthood. I heard from so many of the service providers that there are an awful lot of difficulties in areas of transition. We know that when we see a pattern like that forming, if we have the ability to sit down and come up with some good, workable solutions to those problems, we help people over their lifespan, and that is critically important. For

instance, there are people who need help navigating government programs and services, and I hear this.

I met with a number of people in my constituency who worry. Not all people with disabilities have an advocate in their home or in their community, and even for those who do, a lot of those folks often are parents, and at a certain point they're saying to me: I worry about what happens when I'm not around anymore and my child needs an advocate. All the preplanning in the world cannot prepare you for problems that can come up in the future, so that's why this conversation around advocacy becomes so important.

According to the latest Canadian survey of people with disabilities done by Statistics Canada, there are approximately 436,000 adults with disabilities and 31,000 children with disabilities right here in this province. Now, those stats were done in 2012. It'd be interesting to see them updated because, certainly, five years later we believe that those numbers have gone up. Although government staff and contracted service providers are providing ongoing case management supports, including identifying and responding to the changing needs of individuals and families, we do need to do more. We recognize that, and we want to. That's the importance of a bill like this.

This government is collaborating with partners in Health, Education, and Community and Social Services to ensure that the needs of individuals who require supports from more than one ministry get those supports without having to go to individual ministries and do that work piecemeal. Having an advocate is going to help with that task, and it's also going to be a great addition to the system that is striving to make life better for Albertans with disabilities.

The government is prioritizing access to services for individuals with disabilities. There are a number of programs in the province right now to support individuals, including the family support for children with disabilities, the FSCD. There are 13,400 families in that particular group. The persons with developmental disabilities group, PDD, has 11,300 people. The residential access modification program has 570 people. Of course, if this bill is passed, this will establish an advocate that will help make all of the services tailored to Albertans living with disabilities and access to these services easier to manage. The disability community would have a direct ear to turn to for assistance in this province.

4:10

I'm very pleased to bring this forward and look forward to the conversation about this bill and what folks have to say on both sides of the aisle because I do believe that we all have people in our communities with disabilities. When we have a good, fulsome conversation about this and get to a place where we can move the disability community forward and put an advocate in place, we all benefit, the province benefits, and we are better for it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand and speak in support of this important new role, that's obviously been much needed for many years given the history of some of the complaints and concerns not only with respect to PDD but AISH as well. With PDD, in particular, there's been lots of demand for change, access to supports, recognition of the role of family and community, and this would certainly give greater voice, greater attention, greater influence and understanding of what's working and what's not working in the system by someone so directly

involved with these most vulnerable folks. It obviously gives the advocate the power to represent the interests and rights of people with disabilities and to advocate for change where it's needed, not least in individual cases where people are not getting their needs met, where families are not feeling properly listened to and responded to.

Programs and policies, obviously, in some cases need to be changed, but certainly their basic rights and their well-being have to be at the forefront and need strong advocacy. There's no question that the measure of a civilization, the measure of a society is how well we take care of those folks. We have advocates for health, for seniors, for mental health. We have an advocate for children in care. This is another vulnerable population that clearly needs to have some independent leadership and advocacy.

To be sure, I need to comment on not only the role but the resources given to this person. If it's anything like the resources given to the mental health advocate, it's a shame because the mental health advocate has been able to do almost nothing in the last few years because of receiving the same resources they have for the last 25 years. In name we have a mental health advocate, but the mental health advocate has been hamstrung by a lack of resources and ability to formally investigate complaints about the mental health system and in some cases the abuse of people's rights as persons. Whatever we do, let this not be a token, as I feel the mental health advocate has become in this province.

The Health Advocate: also very limited resources except to refer these people to different bodies, including the college of physicians, the college of nursing, various colleges that are supposed to oversee the quality of care, the quality of response to health issues. The Seniors Advocate: similarly. If we're going to provide these advocates' offices, let them be properly resourced, evaluated, and properly increased as the population increases. It's a travesty that in 25 years we see the mental health advocate, for example, still dealing with two staff when the population has increased phenomenally and the number of mental health issues has increased exponentially in the last 25 years. Let's ensure that we get value for money and ensure that the people who are in this position have the resources to do their job.

I also, I guess, have to wonder how much this is an effort to address the Auditor General's stinging criticism of AISH in the past, and rightly so. It looks like an important initiative that is going to address the criticisms of the Auditor General, and I sincerely hope it will be. Again, it depends on finding the right person and staffing appropriately and finding the resources to do this. I think it's an important initiative. It sends the right message to people with a disability and their families. Let's just make sure that it's done with the generosity and the research and the capacity that is needed for this large population.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. Now, as MLAs we are elected to represent our constituents and to advocate on their behalf, and that's not always easy as you try to interface with government and the bureaucracy that's there. Often it's very difficult for our constituents to work through and to work with government. I know that nothing gives me more pleasure at the constituency level in this job than to help one of my constituents navigate the maze of government regulations and the red tape and try to access the services that they are indeed needing. I believe that Bill 205 is intended to provide Albertans with disabilities with an advocate to help them access government services and that would

ensure that the government is working for them and not against them.

I rise today to speak in favour of this bill. I believe that Bill 205 will advocate for and help to advocate for and represent the rights and the interests and the viewpoints of persons with disabilities, and we know that that's often a very important thing that needs to happen. It's difficult for someone that is not facing a disability in their life to do this. When you have a variety of disabilities that make that more difficult, it's indeed important to have an advocate in your corner. I believe that in this bill the advocate will be able to identify and study various issues of concern to the person with a disability and to help to recommend appropriate action and a course of action for that individual. They can review programs and policies, they can be a participant in the process with this individual, and they can help to promote the rights and the interests and the well-being of that individual.

As I look at this bill, I see that there are many ways that this advocate can indeed step into the gap, perhaps, that this individual would not be able to deal with. I believe that when we take a look at other portfolios within the government, other areas, we see that there's a Farmers' Advocate, a Child and Youth Advocate, a Seniors Advocate, a Health Advocate, so I can see the benefits of creating an advocate for persons with disabilities. I know that government is hard to navigate, and it's magnified when you are suffering from a disability.

I think of one of the constituents that walked into my office about a year and a half ago or two years ago, and if it wasn't for the fact that his parents were involved in his life, he would have had significant difficulties in navigating through the systems of government that were necessary for him to get the help that he needed. I don't believe this is uncommon, and I believe that it speaks to the necessity of having somebody within the government apparatus that can help these individuals work their way through to receive the help that we want to give them and that they deserve.

I believe the advocate will reduce the demands on time that the programs and the services and the regulations and the policies place on families. It will reduce the time and the demands on families. It will help them to be able to seek the help that is needed for the loved ones that they are concerned about.

4:20

For those that do not have family to advocate on behalf of them, the advocate can assume that role to ensure that they have access to the programs and the services that should be appropriately theirs. You know, an example of this as it's come through my office has been those that are looking to apply for AISH. There are over 55,000 Albertans that count on AISH to help them survive. In 2016 there were over 12,000 applications for the AISH program. In October 2016 the Auditor General released a report on how to improve the AISH program, and I believe that the Auditor General's report is a good example of how Albertans find difficulty in negotiating through the complexities of government, especially with this program, and would be helped by an advocate.

The Auditor General identified several concerns. One of them was the need to improve program accessibility in AISH, that there was a problem with receiving the appropriate information that would allow the AISH program to be accessible and to be user friendly. He identified the need to simplify the AISH application process. I believe that in this case an advocate for persons with disabilities would be able to help them proceed through something like the AISH application process.

The Auditor General came out with a second recommendation. It said that there need to be improvements in the eligibility procedures and guidelines, that AISH did not have the adequate standards to

track and monitor application processing times, and that the staff did not receive sufficient training when assessing applications. Because of that, it's made it more difficult for people to be able to apply and to work through the process. I believe an advocate could help an individual work their way through that.

I believe that AISH is just one example of how there can be internal issues within a bureaucracy of the government that can make it more difficult for Albertans to access and to receive the benefits from a government program that they both need and deserve, so I would speak, Madam Speaker, to this bill and its ability to help Albertans.

Of course, AISH is not the only program; it is just one. We have all sorts of programs. For instance, Community and Social Services offers disability services and supports related to employment for families of people with children with disabilities, for fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, for residential modifications. An advocate will help Albertans and their families cut through the red tape that's necessary to be able to provide the accessibility that they need in a much more timely fashion. So I can see some of the real positives of moving forward with this.

Bill 205 will help Albertans who don't know how to access the information and supports. It will help to address some of the inefficiencies and disorganization that have been identified by the Auditor General. It will help persons with disabilities by aligning with other government advocates who are there to help the vulnerable in Alberta. Perhaps as importantly, it will provide for public education to promote the rights and the interests and the well-being of persons with disabilities.

I guess that if there is one concern – and it's one that I would like the House to consider – it would be that in Bill 205 this is not an independent advocate that we're setting up. I'm wondering if maybe we shouldn't be reconsidering having a little more distance and making this person independent. We've maintained as the Wildrose that the role of an advocate should be independent of government, that this would ensure that issues are dealt with fairly and consistently and with transparency, and that the role of the advocate would be strengthened by this independence.

I believe that we should consider that, that we would continue from this side of the House to voice our concerns over that issue. We would believe that any advocate must report, and I think reasonably so, to the Legislature and have the authority and the autonomy to investigate complaints, the ability to perform system-wide audits and to explore better ways for the delivery of care for these individuals. So it's something that I would suggest to the House we should maybe consider as we move forward.

You know, I think all of us probably at some point in time, as we've gone through life, have had people that have disabilities. I can think of one, and it's the reason that I stand up here today to support this bill. This individual came into my life about 30 years ago. He has a brain injury, and for all of the things that are stacked against this individual . . . [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up. I'd just like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for this bill. I couldn't be any happier, and I don't think we spend nearly enough time in this House talking about people with disabilities, so thank you. I also think that history is important, so I'm going to refer back a little bit because I think it's where we come from. We learn a lot about ourselves, and I think we learn a lot about charting the right course forward.

Just a few years ago people with disabilities and their allies by the thousands rallied the government on some very key issues around people with disabilities, and that was that they were telling the government to consult. They needed an advocate. They needed someone to speak on their behalf. They desperately wanted somebody to speak on their behalf. As you know, the disability rights movement really began in the '70s and '80s. Deinstitutionalization was fuelled by the powerful voices of people with disabilities, their allies and families. Let's not forget about the time the government wanted to stifle those voices of people with disabilities following Leilani O'Malley Muir's successful battle.

The reality prior to that was segregation, sterilization, rampant abuse, and isolation. Still, we have much ground to cover in order for Canadians with disabilities to experience the same rights and access that Canadians without disabilities enjoy. The opposition gets annoyed when we refer to the actions of the previous government. The reality is that they own many of the complex issues facing people with disabilities today in Alberta. It is important to remember our history. They talk a lot about the Alberta advantage. When I think about the Alberta advantage, I know it was not advantageous for people with disabilities. I seem to remember the PCs trimming about 70,000 people from welfare rolls.

So why do we need an advocate? There are so many reasons. I participated in the PDD safety standards review. We needed a review because of what the previous government introduced without even five minutes of consultation with Albertans with disabilities. In an attempt to keep people with disabilities safe, they introduced standards that set us on a dangerous path. One of the standards required people with disabilities in the community to have fire suppression on the same level as massive institutions. One man in his condo, owned by his dad, living by himself with staff got an estimate of about \$20,000 to renovate his condo to meet these standards. That year the previous government spent over a million dollars on mixing valves for hot water tanks. That was directly related to the safety standard that was brought in without consultation, and there was no one to advocate.

Examples of the previous government: I just want to remind you a little bit. A few years ago, when we all started rallying out here and all across Alberta, it was because the previous government wanted to cut community access. Their solution to that, one of the solutions to that, was to create an employment focus group. That focus group was made up of people from the business community, some experts in disability, but I didn't see anybody with a disability on that committee. The previous government introduced things like the supports intensity scale assessment, the quality-of-life index, and, my favourite, the PDD transformational plan. None of these things were done in consultation with Albertans with disabilities. We need to learn from that because we need to do a lot better.

4:30

I'm going to give you some examples of the times when we needed an advocate, when we desperately needed an advocate. Yeah, I was in the sector for a very long time, and I had the fortune of meeting a lot of people. I'm going to share the stories of some people that are no longer with us, but I think their lives have a lot of meaning, and we can learn a lot from them.

I met Susan W. about 20 years ago. She was a woman who had acquired a serious brain injury. She was married at the time, and due to her acquired disability she was unable to get the support she needed to navigate the justice system. She wanted to divorce her husband – she did remember that part from before the injury – and she wanted to get some control, retain some control of the business and the assets she shared with her husband. She could not. She did not have a family, and she did not have allies at the time. The justice

system is difficult for all of us to manage when it comes time for us to be there. You can imagine someone with an acquired brain injury, with problems with speech and memory and physical mobility. It was almost impossible, so she relied on a paid service provider, whose role isn't necessarily to do that.

Joanne L. was another woman I met. She's a woman that had Down syndrome, and her family was told when she was born that she wouldn't live very long, but she did. When she got to her 50s, she presented with symptoms of dementia and was eventually diagnosed with Alzheimer's. It was extremely difficult to get an appointment to see a specialist and to get her access to the medication that would slow the disease. Why? Because she had a disability. We were actually told by the doctors that, you know, she really did have enough to worry about given that she had a disability. Needless to say, people around her advocated when there wasn't a systemic advocate or advocacy system in place, and we were able to get the support she needed. The result was that she died at home surrounded by people who knew her and cared for her. I think we learned a lot from that. But service providers are not always the best advocates, and families are not always in the best place to do that.

Patrick H. was another man that I met. He was actually a triplet, and there were two of them left. He moved to the city and to a service provider when his elderly parents could no longer care for him. There wasn't any family left. He was new to the city, so a nephew that he hardly knew and had little contact with was assigned to him to be his informal trustee. He was on AISH, of course, so after expenses he was left with approximately \$200 a month. Over the few years that this nephew was his informal trustee, that \$200 that was left over each month dwindled away. His service provider reported and spoke to the people in power at the time, and nothing could be done. So at his age – he was also in his 50s – he had zero savings. He did not have \$20 in his account, and he should have. Eventually we had to get a lawyer to have the informal trustee removed. Now, thankfully, he had a provider that was able to do that; not everybody does. An advocate would have been ideal in that situation.

Paul was another person I met, originally from the Wabasca-Desmarais area, and he had been in a severe accident and was a quadriplegic, had a significant spinal cord injury. He was moved to a supportive living facility where most of the residents were about 30 years older than him. He had no assistance maintaining contact with his family. There was no cultural awareness or attempts to link him with appropriate supports. There was no advocate for him.

Sonny was another fellow. He died in his 20s, actually. He moved to Alberta from Quebec, and he died after being sent home from the hospital twice. He had gone because he was not feeling well. He couldn't express himself properly – he had cerebral palsy; he was tough to understand – and he went by himself or he went with his staff. He did not get the assistance he needed. I'm certainly not blaming the hospital or the staff at the hospital. I'm certain they did their best. He went home. He was by himself. He was weak from illness. He fell into a piece of furniture and died as a result of an internal injury. He was in his 20s. He needed an advocate. He needed an advocate so badly. He had no family here.

Betty Anne Gagnon: I think that if we don't learn a lot from this woman, we don't deserve to be here.

Young men and women who have public or private guardians being told that they can't have relationships because they have guardians: that's why we need an advocate. People in hospital without advocates around them are taken off life support very quickly. I don't think the same discussions are had as when a person without a disability is facing that decision. People with disabilities are unable to get support for a mental illness because they have a

disability. Birth control is often difficult to get or refused because people have a disability.

My brother, who had a significant mental illness and disability, was released from hospital because he was stable a few days after a suicide attempt, only to successfully die by suicide when he was released. I am certainly not blaming providers for that at all. It is a system, and it's a system without strong advocates.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. In my view, it's an act whose time has come. I would even say that it's overdue by 40 or 50 years, but the second-best time after 40 or 50 years ago is today. I congratulate the member for bringing it forward because this is an act that a lot of Albertans, I believe, if it is put into place correctly, will benefit from, and those are people that in many cases very much need an advocate.

Madam Speaker, just as a small piece of housekeeping and not to panic the author of the bill, if you go on the Assembly website right now to the status of bills, it shows that Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, is defeated on second reading today. Let's make sure that that doesn't come to pass because that's what the website says. I certainly am one who will be in favour of this act.

There are lots of things to like about the act, but one of my favourite things is section 6(1), the review of the act, which says:

Within one year of the Advocate's appointment under section 2(1), the Advocate shall prepare a report evaluating the effectiveness of this Act that includes any amendments and recommendations relating to persons with disabilities that the Advocate considers appropriate.

Of course, that would be submitted to the Speaker of the Legislature, and we'll all get to see it. It's my hope that this will allay some of the fears of my colleague from the Liberal Party, who was concerned about the advocate not having any effect, because when we see that report a year from now, then of course it will all be in front of us. We'll all have the responsibility to take action on it in this place and then out in the world, where, actually, people with disabilities live, who will be needing that help.

I don't want to be misunderstood, so I want to make it very clear that I'm not a fan of reviewing the act in a year because I think it's bad; rather, I'm a fan of reviewing the act within a year because it's important. I'm sure that the act in its current form will cause very much improvement for very many Albertans who have disabilities now and whose voices don't get heard, but I also think that we will learn a lot as we go. I know that we heard in debate today examples of when things have not always been done well in the past, and I think that as we evolve and we learn and we improve, we need to do that.

I am reminded of a time when we were dealing with infrastructure changes at city hall and some of the city-owned buildings when I was on council in Calgary. I and some of my colleagues made some suggestions for improvements. While I felt good about them, a friend of mine who was part of a disabled persons' advocacy group – I think it was disability hall if my memory serves me – invited me to a meeting to talk about that, where, Madam Speaker, they schooled me big time on what I didn't know because nobody can explain what disabled people need better than a group of disabled people that are organized can explain. I can assure you that they did their very best to pry some of that knowledge into my mind, and it made quite an impression upon me.

4:40

I see this bill as an extension of that personal learning experience that I have had, and it will give me an opportunity, along with, I believe, other members of this House, to learn more in the future and to make more changes that will benefit those people in Alberta with disabilities, who very much need and deserve to have those changes put into place.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

A little later on we will have, I believe, Madam Speaker – Mr. Speaker, sorry; we just changed players in the chair there – a couple of minor amendments, ones that I'm hopeful the mover of the bill will agree with. I would assure all members of the House now that those will have the intent of making slight adjustments, we believe, one hundred per cent within the intent of the creator of the bill. We'll bring them forward in the spirit of co-operation. I think somebody from the government side said that this should be a nonpartisan issue, and I believe that they were correct in so saying. For my part, I will be pleased to be supporting this bill because it's one of those opportunities that we get in this House to actually, demonstrably make Alberta better, and because of that, I thank the mover of the bill for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker: The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It really is a pleasure and privilege to speak in favour of Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I want to very much thank the hon. member for bringing this forward and recognize the work that the Member for St. Albert has done and her strong advocacy and action that she has taken on behalf of people with disabilities. That action, I know, predates her time in this Assembly by a lot. It's very much appreciated. The Member for Calgary-North West bringing this forward as well: I know this is something that you're very passionate about, and I thank you very much for bringing this forward.

But for the vagaries of private members' bill draws – and I think that if I'm to see my private member's bill this session come up, it will probably be the spring of 2023 by the time my bill would be up. I didn't do as well. This is, quite interestingly, one of the ideas that we had talked about with my team as well should we get high enough up in the bill draw. Without question, I absolutely, enthusiastically, of course, will support this bill.

It addresses both issues that people who have disabilities deal with on a daily basis. Those are some of the issues that they will deal with today, right now, on a daily basis, but what I like about the advocate role is that it will address challenges that people with disabilities and their families and loved ones and caregivers deal with on an ongoing basis. They're the kind of thing that, unfortunately, will likely always require someone to advocate for people with disabilities.

I can tell you from the work that we do in my constituency office – and I imagine that all members very likely deal with some of these challenges through their constituency offices and in their work as members – that the various programs and services that are available really are confusing for people with disabilities. They're confusing for people who advocate for those people or who are their friends and family. Anything we can do to have an advocate role similar to the Seniors Advocate's, the mental health advocate's, to parts of the role of the Child and Youth Advocate and others I think can only be a positive thing.

There are a couple of examples that I noted as I prepared for this debate today. There have been many challenges raised to my office

about the transition from services that are available when you're under 18 to the services that are available when you turn 18. The person's needs haven't changed, but the funding sources change, the programs that are available change. Sometimes families and people with disabilities find that they have less in the way of services. An advocate can certainly help not only people who are dealing with the transition to navigate the system as it is now, but they can also help advocate for change from government to ensure that that transition is far smoother, that services are provided in a way that's much more consistent, that better meets the needs of the variety of different people with different needs.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The other example is a constituent of mine who has raised with me the issue of building codes. She's in a wheelchair and has troubles with buildings that are officially built to Alberta's building codes. She finds that doors perhaps will open in the wrong direction in certain buildings, and she'll end up in a vestibule in what she calls squish-me doors. She finds that she can't push the button, wheel out of the way, and then wheel back in and get, actually, through the door. Now, the building meets the building code – no one is breaking any rules – but does she actually have access? Is that building, in fact, accessible to her? The answer in many cases is no.

These are just a couple of examples that I thought of as I reflected on what sorts of things a disability advocate could possibly do. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I think rightly, has raised the question of resourcing in ensuring that this is not just a token position, that it's not just there in name only, that in fact they have the tools they need to do the job, the resources they need to do the job, and as has been noted in debate, it's very likely that in giving appropriate resources to a disability advocate, we will actually save money.

It will actually not only improve the lives of people with disabilities, but it will actually save money, and I would hope that as we go through the debate and the discussion here, we can learn a little more about specifically where that can happen and actually what some of that cost-benefit calculation might look like. I think it's likely very compelling. Again, not only will we be helping on a human level, but we're also helping the government save money because we're improving people's quality of life. We're keeping them out of hospital, and we're ensuring that the services that they receive are most efficient and effective.

Enthusiastically, I will support Bill 205. Again I thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing it forward, and I look forward to listening to further comments.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm so happy to rise today to speak to this bill. I, again, would really like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West as well as the Member for St. Albert, especially, for her expertise in this. It's greatly appreciated.

I just want to say that because I'm a parent, I have to thank the Member for Calgary-Hays as well because we fundraised for autism for many years together, long before I was here. I've met many of you in just the last two years at so many functions throughout the city and the province advocating on behalf of special needs and our folks with disabilities. I think the ability to be here, the privilege to be in this House, elevates our understanding of the needs of these folks, the families, and everybody who surrounds them. It's a huge

privilege to be here and to be able to speak to this. Thank you so much for bringing this bill forward.

One of the things I'd like to share is that when I was 28, that's when my son was born. He came into the world with curly hair and monster blue eyes. He was a beautiful child. Of course, we all think that of our children. I remember that as he grew, he was just a normal, functioning, you know, happy little baby, and then all of a sudden he disappeared one day. He completely disappeared. He couldn't remember any of the language that he had learned, the "mama" and all of that kind of language that babies learn. He just disappeared into himself completely. We lost him somewhere.

It was one of those days that I won't forget. All of a sudden it started to become apparent that he just wasn't connecting. His eyes wouldn't make eye contact. The one thing that I remember at that point was thinking: how do I find out about this? I'd been really fortunate in my lifetime that I'd worked with special-needs kids for a long, long, long time, so for me it was a matter of getting to the guts of it and finding out. For my husband, it was a completely different journey. He just didn't know how to deal with that.

4:50

One of the things that I noticed right from the beginning was that it was very hard to find people to learn about what to do with this munchkin. He was nine months old at that time, so we intervened very early on. I remember that when we went to the Dr. Gordon Townsend school in Calgary to learn about disabilities and who this little boy was going to be and who he was, a lot of the information that came out initially was extremely negative. And not because the people were negative. I honestly don't believe, Madam Speaker, that it was anything intentional. It's just that they were trying to put as much information together for you as they can. They told me that he may not speak, that he may not be able to walk or swim or do all of these things that his older brother, by 20 months, was doing at that point in time. As a mom you just draw your line in the sand, and you realize at that point that nobody is going to tell you what your kid can and can't do. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I believe, saw my son perform this weekend in Youth Singers on stage. I think he can probably attest that he's pretty strong. He's pretty awesome up there.

What happened, though, and probably what was most significant at the time were the parent connections that we made, but they were really difficult to find. The importance of having an advocate stretches so far beyond what we think an advocate needs to be. This advocate isn't only going to be a person that connects the dots and fills the gaps. For all of the facilitators that we've had come into our house – the OT, the PT, the speech paths – I mean, they lived at our house when my children were young. In fact, our speech pathologist is still one of my closest friends to this day. She's the reason, I think, my son can sing a song from end to end.

Those people are heroes in my world, and to have an advocate to be able to help parents – also, we are talking about other people with disabilities, with brain injuries, people who come into disabilities later on for all sorts of reasons. Having those gaps filled is imperative. I believe we had a good discussion about this, Madam Speaker, in estimates as well. We were going through the process of what goes on in the ministries of human services and Health and Education, that all of these ministries have a lot of different options, a lot of different availabilities but that nobody really knows how it all works together. This is a really great opportunity, hopefully, for that advocate to be able to bring that all together.

One of the things I wanted to also talk about a little bit – and this was in our stakeholder outreach, too – was sort of an interesting perspective, and I hope that it helps to ask some questions to strengthen the bill as well. When we're looking at disabilities as a

sector, we are lacking a process for appeals. What I mean by that is that we need that process to respond to the concerns of quality of service and safety as well. That's one of those places, I feel, where those gaps really need to be addressed. That needs to have a mandate, and it needs to have a space.

I was excited when the bill was introduced. It's very exciting. There were some other things, too, that I wanted to ask about, and potentially as we go through debate and discussion over this, this will have some opportunity to be discussed. One of the things about the role, in my opinion – and I believe the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon also brought it up – is that I honestly feel this needs to be an independent person. If at all possible, that advocate needs to be independent so that it's not attached to the ministry and has the ability to avoid conflicts of interest and can make judgments based purely on that family, on the situation, on whatever is going on at that time. The persons with disabilities need to be able to interact in a way that is conducive to making sure that things get better for them.

Part of the problem – I mean, you all know this as well from having worked in this field or having talked to your stakeholders – is that there's such a runaround that ends up happening. I've just come through the process of AISH myself with my son, and it's a tricky situation. The paperwork and the number of people that you talk to – and it's the same discussion over and over again. When my child was young, I used to have to go in and advocate with FSCD and a lot of different associations to get funding for him at that time.

The hardest part of that, Madam Speaker, was that I had to advocate on what he couldn't do, not on what he could do. It really, really just tears at your soul. Having an advocate in order to be able to find out what services are needed and what can be provided for your child, family member, friend, whatever that is, for the allies to be able to advocate, is really, really important, because when you're having to point out all of the things that your child can't do, it's hard on you as a person.

If the advocate falls under one particular ministry, Community and Social Services in this case, then does the advocate work for persons with issues in Health or Seniors and Housing, too? That's just one question. I don't know if that would fill a gap, because it could be construed as a disability as well, depending on that person's situation. I think the member also brought that up as well when she was doing her speech.

We've also heard a few concerns about who the advocate will represent or work for. Are we talking just about developmental disabilities, physical handicaps, any particular stage in life, or all of them? That's quite a broad range, so I think there needs to be some clarity around that.

Also, would the advocate also work with the families of persons with disabilities seeing as some with disabilities aren't able to reach out on their own for help? The family members also have needs, so this is an important aspect. Again, you want to make sure that that person, those people, family, all have the supports to make sure that the people that they love are being supported appropriately.

Also, is the advocate going to be representing also the people working within the disability sector? I bring up the tragic death of Valerie Wolski. On the flip side, we also have people working with folks with disabilities where the person who's working with them, the worker, could also be at risk. I'm just curious if that's part of that mandate as well.

The other thing that's just a little bit concerning – and this just may be something that I think is an easy fix if this is the direction that the government wants to go in – is that in the bill it lists what the advocate may do but not what they must do. The advocate may

- (a) identify and study issues of concern ...
- (b) review programs and policies ...

- (c) participate in processes in which decisions are made . . .
- (d) promote the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education;
- (e) provide information and advice . . .
- (f) assist individuals who are having difficulty accessing services and related programs . . .

and, finally,

- (g) perform any other function prescribed in the regulations.

Madam Speaker, the stakeholders have expressed some concern about this. I'm not sure if anybody else has heard this as well.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I recognize we will be coming up against the clock here shortly, but I'll see if I can get a few words in.

Just in regard to what the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View was talking about in terms of making this an independent officer of the Legislature, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I recognize, I guess, everything that's involved in creating a new, independent officer of the Legislature. It's a fairly significant investment of resources. You know, it could be as much as 10 times, in terms of a budget, between somebody having the opportunity to work as an advocate and investing somebody as an officer of the Legislature, so that's certainly something that we need to consider in this.

As well as many of the other things that would be involved in that, I think it could be prudent and reasonable to start with an advocate that works within the ministry, much as the mental health advocate or the Health Advocate. Give them the opportunity to begin to define the role, and from there, then, have the opportunity in the future to consider if it's something that needs to be expanded and could be looked at and moved into a larger presence.

But I can certainly appreciate where folks are coming from because indeed this is an incredibly important bill and, I think, an incredibly valuable position to be creating within the government.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Northern Alberta Development Strategy

506. Ms Jabbour moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm thrilled to stand here in this House to move Motion 506. Why do we need a northern strategy? As MLA for Peace River and chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council, or NADC, I'm very familiar with the unique challenges we face in northern Alberta: rural, remote, and widely dispersed communities, a large geographic area, sparse population, lack of services, difficulties with labour recruitment and retention, social issues, and much more.

First Nations comprise a significant part of our population, including all 24 Treaty 8 nations and eight of the Treaty 6 nations, all with unique cultures and languages. All of Alberta's Métis settlements are in the north, and we have several francophone communities.

Thirteen of us as MLAs are from northern constituencies. Our region represents 60 per cent of Alberta's land base and only 9 per cent of its population. This means that per capita funding models can severely disadvantage us and leave us lacking in core services. We have unique health needs such as high rates of diabetes and FASD. I was very pleased to see the recent agreement with the PCNs that will fund by medical need rather than per capita, and I'm hopeful this new model will help us manage these concerns.

We have major transportation challenges, including limited road networks, remote communities accessed by plane or winter road only, ferry crossings, ice bridges, and mud roads that can be impassable certain times of the year. Access to rail is problematic. The lack of an east-west route hampers growth. A utility and transportation corridor linking Peace River and Fort McMurray could have significant economic opportunities and could be part of a forward-thinking northern strategy.

We are truly, as the NADC website states, "Canada's outback – a vast area of grandiose lakes, mighty rivers, abundant wildlife and untapped wilderness." We are also a land of incredible opportunities, where anyone with an idea can become anything they want to be.

Alberta's north is filled with creative, hard-working, innovative entrepreneurs, and when it comes to resources, we are truly wealthy. Northern Alberta has 100 per cent of the province's minable oil sands, but that's not all. We have the potential for much, much more. We have high concentrations of lithium, a light metal used for medical, environmental, and electrical applications such as electric car batteries. New technologies allow mining of lithium from oil field waste water, and projects are already under way in Fox Creek and Swan Hills. We have great quantities of iron and vanadium. One large deposit near Fairview is expected to produce activity for years into the future. We have diamonds in the Buffalo Head hills and Birch Mountains, and many, many more such resources are just waiting to be developed.

Geothermal is another area with great growth potential for the north, although it requires a long-term vision to properly develop the resource. Hot spots have been identified in various locations in northern Alberta, including Peace River, Rainbow Lake, Zama, Hinton, and Swan Hills. A Hutterite colony near Manning, in my constituency, is completely powered by geothermal. Not only is geothermal one of the cleanest sources of energy and 100 per cent renewable; it could represent a creative solution to the problem of orphan wells.

Given our many hours of sunshine in the north solar power is another growth industry. Many farms in the La Crête area are already operating with solar. Many First Nations such as Tallcree, Beaver Lake, and Fort Chip have major solar projects, and Grande Prairie will soon be using solar to power a fleet of electric buses. People in the north are excited about possibilities, but maximizing these opportunities requires training, planning, and a forward-thinking strategy.

That's not all. We have 21 per cent of provincial crop production, including a significant portion of all organic produce in Alberta. Northern Alberta's climate is conducive to particular types of agriculture, including a very high quality of flax. NADC recently did workshops to highlight possibilities for industrial hemp and flax. Medical marijuana is another untapped resource some communities are exploring. We also have 10 per cent of provincial livestock and 86 per cent of the province's forests. Of course, our

tourism potential is unlimited. From dinosaurs to history to indigenous culture to outdoor activities, we have it all, and we have the aurora borealis.

But we see what can happen when resource activities proceed too rapidly without a comprehensive, structured growth plan. Fort McMurray experienced some incredible growth pressures as a result of unplanned, unstructured growth. Alberta's north is comprised of an estimated 350,000 people in 150 communities, each with diverse economies that are rich in potential. A strategy is needed to properly manage these resources.

Another area of concern highlighting the need for a strategy is our workforce. We face unique challenges in attracting and retaining a workforce in northern Alberta, that are not experienced in other parts of the province. The long distances, the scarcity of big-city resources, and the need to travel for health services and other activities means that potential teachers, nurses, and other professionals tend to choose to work in the larger centres rather than the north. One solution to this is to educate local youth and support their career development at home, but this will require a long-term vision and strategy.

Northern Albertans are also experiencing social and economic barriers to prosperity that include inadequate local infrastructure to attract investment and to develop economic opportunities, a small market size that limits opportunities, high transport costs for goods and services, a lack of affordable housing and services for the homeless. We have limited public transportation options. The larger northern centres such as Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie have excellent public transit, but that's not the case for most of the rest of northern Alberta. If you don't have access to a vehicle, it can be impossible to get to work and move around the community. Of course, lack of child care is a key factor in preventing many northern women in particular from working.

The fact is that these issues are having a bigger impact on northern Alberta's indigenous communities, so a comprehensive strategy must be inclusive, collaborative, and viewed through a northern lens in order to address the concerns and issues experienced by both indigenous and nonindigenous communities and to ensure northern Alberta is prepared to take advantage of current opportunities to meet future challenges. A strategy can help guide our province in renewing its relationship with indigenous people, one that is based on trust, collaboration, and respectful engagement and that follows the principles and objectives of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

There exists a legal framework under the Northern Alberta Development Council Act which permits the government of Alberta through the NADC to develop and implement regional development plans in Alberta's north. A northern development strategy will align with government's current vision and plan for achieving enhanced social prosperity and economic diversification. Not only would the strategy support the government of Alberta's desire to maximize the value of its natural resources; it would establish the province as an environmental leader and enhance the quality of life of all Albertans by becoming a leader in the areas of health care, education, and skills training as part of its overall mandate.

Rapid development in the north has made Alberta a formidable player on the national and international economic stage, but the volatility of world markets substantially impacts Alberta's growth forecasts, and for northern Alberta communities the realities of a resource-based economy must be managed to ensure long-term sustainability. As Alberta moves toward integrating new technologies and diversifying the economy, the northern region would benefit from a plan to firmly guide development and help the region adapt to future challenges. A northern development strategy will

strengthen all of Alberta. It will ensure a northern perspective, helping northerners build resilient, sustainable economies and enhanced quality of life. It would support economic growth, ensure infrastructure enhancements are in place to support that growth, and it will help define how we address social issues in the north and support a resilient, strong, local workforce that has the necessary expertise to build our economy.

NADC is prepared to champion the creation of a northern development strategy as part of its mandate within the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. With 50 years of experience identifying issues of importance to the north, the NADC and its regional staff are well positioned to facilitate the advancement of a northern development strategy for Alberta. The council's strategic plan identifies key priorities for a strong northern region: a robust, diversified economy; strong, vibrant communities; and a skilled, educated, local workforce. NADC is experienced in working with regional partners, elected officials, and ministry colleagues to advance projects and initiatives with a northern focus. We have council members representing areas across the north who can help bring forward a grassroots perspective. These connections, coupled with a political mandate, would provide the NADC with the key elements necessary to begin the process of building a strategy that will align with overarching government priorities such as economic development, human capital, infrastructure, healthy populations, environmental sustainability, and aboriginal engagement.

In 2009 the government of Canada announced the creation of a northern strategy outlining the federal government's overall direction for Canada's north. Four of Canada's seven provinces with defined northern regions have also developed northern strategies identifying long-term policy objectives and short-term outcomes that will improve the social and economic fabric of their respective jurisdictions.

Northern Alberta communities are resilient, continuing to demonstrate a willingness to work together to foster growth as a region. The time has come for the government of Alberta to support a co-ordinated approach to northern development to maximize the growth potential and enhance the quality of life for northerners.

I urge all members of this Assembly to support this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 506. My colleague from Peace River has brought forward a good motion to discuss matters that I observed on my trip across northern Alberta last fall. But I have to ask a rhetorical question. Why do we need the Legislature to tell the government to tell the Northern Alberta Development Council to do something? The NADC has its own board to report to. Why is the NADC not taking direction from its own board? Why is the board chair running to the Legislature to tell the government to tell the board what to do?

5:10

The NADC has a budget of \$2.4 million. The executive director was moved from Peace River to Edmonton, a move that has bred resentment amongst stakeholders. Somehow I think this motion is a veiled ask for more money and that it sounds like another government make-work project for the bureaucrats. The crats will scurry around and develop this plan. Meanwhile some good plans have already been developed like the comprehensive regional infrastructure sustainability plan, or CRISP, for the Athabasca, Cold Lake, and Peace River oil sands regions. Well, the Peace River one was never finished and released publicly. These CRISPs sit

largely on a shelf, gathering dust, because the government does not have the will or money to implement them, but they are excellent pieces of information to draw resources from for this northern strategy.

It is not the first time that a northern development strategy was attempted. In 1980 Cold Lake had a regional plan drawn up because of the rapidly expanding oil industry. Thirty-seven years, and here we are, coming full circle, Madam Speaker.

Peace River and Cold Lake oil sands deposits have a low steam-oil ratio, which makes these projects very economical. The northern Alberta region is blessed with resources, but the development of in situ projects will be limited by the 100-megatonne cap and also the carbon tax.

There is no use having a plan unless the government actually plans to follow through and commit to the plan and commit the resources to fund the plan. Madam Speaker, I'm told that there is a plan on the shelf to build a highway from Fort McMurray all the way to Peerless Lake so that Peace River and Fort McMurray would be connected directly, saving hours upon hours of travel time across the north. Even residents of communities that would see a drop in traffic are cheering for this road, but, just like all good plans, unless the government commits the money, it will never happen.

We had a plan for SuperNet in this province to all corners of rural Alberta. I understand that the last miles are being completed. Meanwhile I'm told that the SuperNet is too slow in High Prairie, so slow that a First Nations software company could not set up shop and diversify the economy away from lumber. I'm also told that the SuperNet is too expensive, so expensive that a registry office in Falher had to close shop. That is not economic development, Madam Speaker; that is economic destruction.

Speaking of destruction, I've heard all about the sorry state of the postsecondary buildings across the north. It is as if the government wants to close them all down through death by a thousand cuts, Madam Speaker. With schools closed due to poor infrastructure, the province will be forced to bring skilled labour in from foreign countries in order to enable natural resource extraction. It will force amendments to the provincial nominee program.

Northern Alberta appreciates small colleges close to home for skills training. These schools help to keep northern Albertans in their communities, schools like Grande Prairie Regional College, Fairview campus, where our hon. Energy minister used to be a top official before becoming an MLA. I happened to visit there, too. One of the student residences has been condemned. It is not safe to live in anymore. Replacement is not in the capital plan nor on the unfunded list. I guess no one on the government benches looked at this Fairview one seriously.

Then there is Athabasca University, a distance learning institution that will have to close in a year if proper funding is not secured by the government and the information technology is not only modernized and replaced but also backed up, as per the report of the Auditor General. What a blow to Athabasca if this distance learning institution is closed.

You know what else northern Alberta is concerned about? Caribou. It seems the caribou management plan will do things like closing the largest employer in High Level, the Tolko mill. The caribou plan will hurt the timber harvest in addition to the struggling oil and gas industry in that area. Who wants High Level to be a ghost town like Coalspur or Whiskey Gap? At this moment if that lumber mill closes over this caribou plan, High Level will be reduced to a tourism town. Yes. Trips from Yellowknife to High Level for just a feed of Kentucky Fried Chicken is northern tourism, Madam Speaker. That's what they told me when I visited there.

Now, if only the federal government had not botched the First Nations consultation, highway 58 could have been extended by

Ottawa through Wood Buffalo national park, from Garden River to Peace Point and onward to Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, and a real northern driving loop would be established to drive tourism. Maybe our federal dance partners will send some equalization money back and build a highway there.

Meanwhile over in La Crête there is a baby boom under way. La Crête now has the same population as High Level but has no hospital. Residents have to drive one and a half hours to High Level for hospital services, Madam Speaker. That is the equivalent of telling everyone in Red Deer to drive to a hospital in Edmonton.

La Crête is a boom town. The people are really industrious, and one of their big concerns is Crown land release, Madam Speaker. We heard this before in Fort McMurray, perhaps, this concern about Crown land release. Farmers in La Crête want more Crown land sold so they can convert it to productive farmland. This farmland is so fertile, and warmed by the long daylight hours, it grows the highest protein oats and wheat and the highest omega 3 canola in the country and yields premium prices. How is that for an economic competitive advantage?

Sadly, northern Alberta is strangled by geography, the long distance to markets, and poor service provided by CN Rail. No strategy created by this government is going to get a faster, more frequent, or competitive railway up there, nor will any strategy created by the government of Alberta force the hand of CN Rail to run trains from Grande Prairie to Dawson Creek and on to the port of Prince Rupert. No. CN will take everything to Edmonton or Swan Landing first and then send it out to Rupert at additional distance, additional time, and additional cost.

With that, Madam Speaker, as shadow minister for Economic Development and Trade I have summarized a number of issues to go into this strategy: roads, SuperNet, colleges, caribou, hospitals, land releases, railways. In short, I'm willing to support this motion, but that is because I believe that if the NADC does its job properly, they'll give the government good advice on how to improve prosperity, and most of that advice will run counter to this government's ideology. If instead this turns into an exercise where the NADC comes up with a report that explains the government's ideological vision to northern Albertans, then I'll be very disappointed. I look forward to reviewing any strategy the NADC brings forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to speak about this motion to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy. Having lived and worked in northern Alberta for a number of years, I'm very interested. I was really interested in reading the notes and thinking about the development that could and should happen up in the northern area of our province.

5:20

One of the things that's so important is that, as with any other kind of development, people need support. The area needs support. They've got some special issues in northern Alberta that we may not be familiar with. One of them is transportation. Transportation, as the member previously stated, can be very tricky in some areas. You get freeze-up. When the ice goes out – things like that will translate into stops in traffic, stops in trucking.

We do need to be committed to supporting this region of Alberta given that all the municipalities bring strengths. There's energy, agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism. One of the things you find

when you spend much time up in northern Alberta is that there is an enormous variety. Sometimes going north from Edmonton, you think it's going to be nothing but bush, you know, lots of rivers and streams. But you get further north, and there's so much farming, and there are so many different people, different cultures in the different communities.

I had a terrific time with a friend one year just hitting all the small museums we could in northern Alberta. Well, we actually went as far as – where did we go up by? – Great Slave Lake. It was so much fun seeing the different museums.

Dr. Turner: There's a new dinosaur museum up there.

Ms Woollard: Yeah. We haven't even got there yet.

Didn't get to Grande Prairie but all the little ones: Manning and High Level and La Crête – we didn't hit the museum in La Crête – Fort Vermilion, and all the little stops along the way. People, as everywhere else, are treasuring their past, their heritage and showing people what is valuable in the area. All those things were wonderful.

In every place people are welcoming and are just so happy to show you what they have, what they're doing, what their natural resources are, what they're being accessed – you know, not saying: our country, our land is for sale; our resources are for sale. But, as with anybody else, they want to make a living. They want to develop their area. They want it to be a good place for their children to grow up in, and they want opportunities for everyone there.

I wholeheartedly agree that the government should direct the NADC to develop the comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy. I like the phrasing of it: "The mandate of the NADC ... to 'investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta and to advise the Government accordingly.'"

With any development anywhere it's really important to make sure that all the local people in the various communities that are part of northern Alberta are consulted, not just consulted but are partners in all the developments. That's so important.

I like the fact that it mentions that we are thinking about – the reality is that being boom-and-bust economies, that we see with our resource development, we need to make sure that the economy is diversified and do long-range planning to ensure that the development is sustainable because it doesn't do anybody any good to have the boom, and then when it goes back, it's like the tide going out. Everybody is left with memories of the good times.

I'm proud to be part of a government that has tried to address the infrastructure deficit through an aggressive capital plan and to be, hopefully, part of a government's vision of having a prosperous province from north to south to north.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We've had a request to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to introduce, I guess, guests actually sitting on both sides of the House here to support this motion. I'd like to introduce Garrett Tomlinson, the reeve of Northern Sunrise county, and Ken Noskey, who is a council member of NADC.

On the other side of the House I'd also like to introduce my daughter Marni and my grandchildren Noah, Reuben, Virgil, and Azula. Please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Welcome.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Northern Alberta Development Strategy (continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to talk about Motion 506, which urges the government to

direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region.

Now, on the NADC website it says:

the Northern Alberta Development Council advances the promise of Alberta's North.

It goes on to say:

NADC's mandate is to help the region's 150 communities and 350,000 people realize their rich potential and strengthen their diverse economies. The Council is made up of a dedicated group of provincial and local leaders and staff tasked with producing quality regional development information, supporting education and skills enhancement programs and building strategic partnerships.

Now, Madam Speaker, I may be confused, but I was under the impression that NADC was intended to act somewhat independently from the provincial government; hence, they were set up independently from the government. It appears that this motion would be setting out direct orders to NADC.

The council was established by the Northern Alberta Development Council Act, which outlines the functions of the council.

To investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta, and to advise the Government accordingly, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the Council may investigate the requirements of the people resident in northern Alberta and make recommendations in that regard in respect of

- (a) social and economic development,
- (b) development of communities and service delivery, and
- (c) development of government services and programs.

Now, it would appear to me that the motion being debated today is somewhat redundant and really unnecessary as the NADC already has the power to go ahead and do these things that this motion is suggesting. But if the member believes it will actually result in the government taking concrete steps to support northern Alberta, then I will happily cast my vote in favour. Now, the mover of the motion, the Member for Peace River, as the chair of NADC really has a great opportunity to get things happening there.

Now, as someone who lives, works, and is raising a family in northern Alberta I understand the power and potential that Alberta's north holds. Northern Alberta represents 60 per cent of Alberta's land mass, contains 100 per cent of the province's oil sands and 86 per cent of the province's forests. Northern Alberta boasts some of the world's greatest fishing and hunting. That's something that I can attest to.

Some of the things that I've heard from my constituents and other people in the north are real, tangible ways this government can help northern Alberta. Some of those things are a common-sense caribou plan that doesn't destroy the industries that so many of the residents

up there rely upon for their livelihood and the counties that rely on that area, too, for a tax base. Another thing is to kill the carbon tax, that exponentially affects residents and businesses in northern Alberta because of the distances we travel and the costs we have to heat our buildings there. Remove the 100-megatonne cap on oil sands emissions, which limits northern Alberta from realizing true benefits from our province's oil sands resource.

Finally, we have the lack of high-speed Internet access, and that's a huge stumbling block to developing the north. Too often I hear stories of local businesses being forced to shutter or move their operations down south because the spotty Internet access or substandard speed simply does not allow these businesses to conduct their business at the speed their clients demand.

There are many more issues unique to the north that need to be dealt with. Transportation is one that just right off the top I think of.

I hope that this government does finally take action to promote and invest in northern Alberta and begins a process by focusing on the areas that I've highlighted. When I travelled up to the northern Peace River region, those were some of the things that the people brought to me when I travelled up there and had meetings.

I hope this isn't just an opportunity for the government to promote itself. There is one phrase in the motion that does cause a little concern. That phrase is: "northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision." This should be about the people of the north's vision. It shouldn't be about this government. This government has its own business to do here. NADC has a different set of business and a different responsibility, and that's to represent the north.

Now, I've been advocating for northern Alberta since long before I was elected in this House, and I will continue to support northern Alberta long after I leave. I will vote in favour of this motion in support of northern Alberta.

Thank you.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms McKittrick: Madam Speaker, I am delighted to rise and speak in support of the motion by the Member for Peace River on the development of a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region. I have not yet had the pleasure to visit the Peace River region but plan on doing so this summer. I have, however, worked with many of the organizations in northern Alberta in supporting community economic development.

The Member for Peace River in her role as chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council has brought leadership to the council in a number of areas. I would like to particularly highlight the work that has been done to promote and educate on the potential of renewable energy. I would also like to support efforts to encourage small-scale agricultural projects such as the development of value-added honey products, market gardens, and products arising out of communities in the north such as the francophone, Hutterite, and Mennonite communities.

The government is currently engaging in consultations to lead to the development of community economic development corporations as announced in Bill 30, Investing in a Diversified Alberta Economy Act. These corporations, which can be incorporated also as co-ops, will help communities access local funds for community economic projects. I think that this will support the development of a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy by providing a tool for local community investment and encouraging

communities to invest in the provision of local employment and local value-added industry.

Madam Speaker, local community economic development is defined as action by people locally to create economic opportunities that improve social conditions, particularly for those who are the most disadvantaged. CED is an approach that recognizes that economic, environmental, and social challenges are interdependent, complex, and ever-changing. To be effective, solutions must be rooted in local knowledge and led by community members. CED promotes holistic approaches addressing individual community and regional levels, recognizing that those levels are interconnected.

Dr. John Loxley, a professor of community economic development in Manitoba, has written extensively about his work in aboriginal northern communities and economic development. His book *Aboriginal, Northern, and Community Economic Development* provides very useful research on how to work with northern aboriginal communities on economic development. I think that book would be very helpful in the development of a strategic plan for northern Alberta.

In the introduction Professor Loxley writes about the Manitoba northern plan:

First, it suggests there are no simplistic solutions to the problems facing northern and Aboriginal poverty and underdevelopment. Rather, multi-faceted, across-the-board approaches are called for, which are demanding both conceptually and politically. Second, the plan demonstrated that there are numerous possibilities for economic and social development in the small communities of the North, possibilities which become greater with co-operation among communities and with targeted state involvement and support, including subsidies justified by social considerations.

Dr. Loxley's book also discusses how challenging comprehensive northern economic development strategies can be in light of distinct thinking. Dr. Loxley discusses at length the need to work with indigenous communities in the development of the north in Manitoba. It's a good reminder for us in Alberta, and I was pleased to see that the member especially mentioned indigenous communities in her speech.

I would like to encourage anyone interested in supporting this motion to explore the existing literature on the promotion of northern community economic development: what has been successful, what are the challenges, and especially how to incorporate indigenous communities within the strategies.

I am pleased to support this motion because our government is committed to getting the most out of our natural resources while at the same time ensuring that our people and environment are looked after as well. That's why I read that definition of community economic development, because one thing that I really appreciate about our government is that it always puts people first. We know that we have to develop industries, but we also know that it's important for these industries to look after people and our environment. As a government we've made a lot of practical changes.

We also know that the residents of northern Alberta face additional challenges. Some of my colleagues have talked about transportation, access to markets, the way that the population is scattered all over vast numbers of kilometres. We know that there are challenges around rural schools and providing education, especially at the high school levels.

We also know that northern Alberta contains the majority of the province's oil, gas, and forestry resources. But the reality is that a lot of these resources create a boom-and-bust economy, so we need to ensure that we diversify the economy and engage in long-term planning to ensure sustainability. This is why I read from Dr. Loxley's book and introduction, because there are other provinces that have faced the same challenges as this motion speaks to and

have studied the need and how we can create very viable northern community planning in terms of both the economy and social sustainability.

I think, as to what this motion calls for, there is a lot of literature in Canada that we can use and that the Northern Alberta Development Council can use in terms of ensuring that the planning that this motion calls for is done in light of the existing research and existing knowledge.

I'm also very proud to be part of a government that has tried to address the infrastructure deficit through an aggressive capital plan, and I'm thinking especially of the roads and the work that's going on on highway 28 and some of our roads in the north. That's going to allow much safer access for both people and industry.

I've heard the Member for Peace River speak about her work with the Northern Alberta Development Council, and I know that the council is made up of a diversity of people and interests, that it has indigenous communities, that it has local residents. I've had the pleasure of meeting, I think, a former school trustee who is proud of the council. I know that the framework for the motion is in place both through the diversity of the people on the council and the work that the hon. member has done as chair.

I wholeheartedly agree that the government should direct the NADC to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region. I actually really like the fact that they're putting the social and the economic together because I think that if we only look towards economic and we don't worry about people and we don't worry about education and access to health, then we can't really have the economic prosperity that we really want. I am confident that the NADC is going to build on the success that it has achieved and that it can play a leading role in achieving a strategic plan for northern Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I will happily support this motion, and I would like to thank the member for her interest in the north, for the way that she has shared her passion for her community not only in her speech this afternoon but also in the interactions that we have with her. I would urge all members of the Assembly to vote in support of this motion.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise on Motion 506, to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region, and I am happy to be supportive of this motion.

Northern Alberta, like all of rural Alberta, is important to the success of our province. Everybody knows that the wealth of Alberta is almost entirely administered in Edmonton and Calgary, but what we don't think about often enough is that it's almost entirely earned and created outside of Edmonton and Calgary, which means that northern Alberta is an important aspect of that.

So I support the motion. In my view, I think NADC has done a good job for a long time. If they've been slow in the last couple of years, in my view it's largely because the current government has been really slow in appointing people to the board and letting them do their job. This is a sign that the government is going to let them do their job and encourage them instead of holding them back. I couldn't be any happier.

With that, I will sit down, making sure that everybody knows I am supportive of this motion as it is written.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak about Motion 506, made by the hon. Member for Peace River. I would like to start off by saying that any motion that addresses some of the needs that northern Alberta has is a good motion, and I myself will be supporting this motion.

I do have a few concerns with this motion, and I will talk about them throughout the speech here, more or less to see where the member is going with this as the chair of the council. Let's start with that the motion seeks to provide guidance to the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a strategy to promote prosperity within northern Alberta. Now, I'd like to start off talking about what its current mandate is, as listed on the website.

The mandate of the Council is to investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta and to advise the Government accordingly, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the Council may investigate the requirements of the people resident in northern Alberta and make recommendations in that regard in respect of

- (a) social and economic development,
- (b) development of communities and service delivery, and
- (c) development of government services and programs.

That's quite the mouthful. There's a lot there.

I will read this motion. The Member for Peace River to propose:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to direct the Northern Alberta Development Council to develop a comprehensive northern Alberta development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan for achieving enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region.

The main difference between these two that I can see is that one is saying that they're going to create a government's vision moving forward, and this one here is saying that the NADC is looking to advise the government on moving forward. Now, I know that's splitting hairs, and I'm looking at this and saying: okay; what's the difference between the government's vision and advice? One of the things that I would say is: is this becoming a tool that the government is using to promote or advertise the north?

I guess that for myself I went through some of the newsletters that were brought forward. Unfortunately, the link for the 2014 newsletters is broken. That happens. You know, I understand that, and I'm not concerned about that. But the 2015 and 2016 newsletters appear to be completely nonpartisan. They appear to be completely nonpartisan. This is important because it looks like this group was actively trying to separate itself from the government, saying, "We are independent, and we're looking to move forward the north's needs," if you will.

But if you look at the 2017 one, that just came out, I see that the Minister of Transportation is in the opening remarks. I see a biography, more or less, of the Minister of Health, and I see the Minister of Education being mentioned there as well. The first page of the newsletter. I see this as us now moving towards a government's vision.

Now, if the member is actively going out and making sure that these ministers are listening to the north, I commend her on that. Absolutely. You know what? Having minister involvement in the north, having the ministers involved with the NADC is absolutely great. This is something that we should be looking forward to, and I want to see that kind of thing. But do we need to be promoting

that through the north? Do we need to have that on the front page? Is this something that we can say: these are the areas that we're working on?

The Member for Calgary-Foothills brought up the highway between Peace River and Fort McMurray. Now, it's important that while we're looking at this newsletter, it's showing that there are clear needs for the north, and it is written in the letter from the Member for Peace River. To focus on those would be something that I would hope to see inside of this motion, something that's substantive that we can move forward. In this one here what we're seeing is "enhanced social and economic prosperity in the region." I would like to have seen something a little bit more precise. Even though I will say that the Fort McMurray to Peace River highway would probably not affect my constituency, I still see it improving all connectivity between all of the north, and that is a good thing. It would have been nice to see something along that line in this motion.

Now, if we look at the formal council, I would like to mention that if you go to the website here – and we're looking at the council itself – it would be nice to see that the council is recognized by being actually put onto the website. I do have the Member for Peace River on there, on the council. I also have the past chair, and I'm very thankful for Mr. Ken Noskey. I hear that he's probably above us here. I'm very thankful for the contributions that he has brought forward to this council. But it would be nice to see the other seven members that are on the council. Right now they don't seem to be on there. Why is this important? Well, it's important that we all kind of understand who exactly is a part of this. Seeing what they do for a living and how they are contributing towards the council would be a great thing.

The fact that we are looking at this motion is – we see that this council is already able to do what this motion provides, so my question is: is the member looking for a clear focus? When I look at what I originally mentioned as the mandate, does this mean that the mandate of the council is going to be focused in a smaller fashion? Are we going to be taking the development of communities and service deliveries and the development of government services and programs out of this? Is that something that no longer is the focus of the council? Because it's not in this specific motion. Are we going to see a mandate change? That means that we're going to possibly see less advocacy because of this.

Now, if that is not the case, then I apologize to the member, because that's not where I'm going here. What I'm trying to do is say that we all need to work together to try to be able to move northern Alberta forward to ensure that prosperity is seen in this province. When the northern part of Alberta prospers, the rest of Alberta seems to feel that impact. Calgary specifically is a city that has felt the fact that we have had low oil prices, and the fact that they've been seeing such high commercial vacancy rates is a real problem there.

If we look at this, I would like to say – and my colleague over there had touched on it – that the emissions cap, the carbon tax, and the caribou plan are all areas that are going to impact northern Alberta. I would have liked to have seen how the council is looking to move beyond this by saying, "How much of an impact is this going to be?" and studying this so that we can know how we can go around this or change it.

5:50

Now, I am concerned that when we look at northern Alberta, we've got significant heavy oil deposits. I know that this isn't shocking. I'm not telling you this to surprise you. What I am saying is that when I discuss these kinds of things about Hanna and other places that use coal, those communities are dying, and we are

actively seeing those communities . . . [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand here today as a proud long-time resident of northern Alberta. I have no memory of any place besides northern Alberta. I moved there when I was three years old, so I certainly can speak to both the strengths of northern Alberta and the contributions it makes as well as the challenges. I want to say thank you to the member for bringing forward this motion, which I support in terms of the role that it plays in highlighting the importance of northern Alberta to the province but also the important role that NADC can play in terms of addressing some of that as well.

Certainly, northern Alberta has many unique strengths and challenges compared to the rest of the province. Some of the strengths are an incredibly strong, resilient people. I mean, if we talk about the west being, you know, the final frontier, the north is certainly the frontier for this province in many ways. There are not nearly as many people there in terms of concentration. They're well dispersed across the north. It's not as well connected as it could be in terms of some challenges, Madam Speaker, but it offers so much in terms of the people and in terms of the resources.

The member talked about the industry that's there. We think of the north a lot in terms of oil, but it is also where our forestry industry lies and where there's a lot of agriculture as well. Certainly, the people of the north understand and take great pride in the contributions that they make to this province in terms of managing and harvesting the resources that this great province has to offer.

Madam Speaker, many of the challenges that are faced in the north relate, in particular, to the fact that despite the riches of the north, there's not a whole lot of people that live there in comparison to the rest of the province. There's a lot of work to be done, a lot of importance to the province, but a very wide, disparate area with not as many people. It's always a challenge to provide the quality of services that encourage people to want to be a part of that.

Certainly, I'm thankful for the role of the Northern Alberta Development Council and for their contributions in the past, but I also think very strongly that they could as community members, as people who are engaged in the north, who live there and think in a different way than perhaps government thinks, come up with some thoughts and creative solutions around what needs to be done in order to keep the north healthy and sustainable for the long term, Madam Speaker.

You know, in the meantime, I'm thankful for the recognition of the value, in particular, of the real north that I see by this government. As a member at the cabinet table I'm always happy to represent the north. I know that there are a number of us who do so, and I'm certainly hearing that. For example, some substantial investment in Northern Lakes College recently happened. A new campus in High Prairie really is going to make a difference.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Children's Services, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I'd like to invite the hon. Member for Peace River to close debate on Motion 506.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members of the House for the debate that we've had here today. In particular, I want to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-

Foothills for highlighting in great detail the many, many challenges we face in the north. I simply didn't have enough time in my 10 minutes to go into that great of detail, but we have many challenges. And he's quite right. The north has been neglected for a very long time.

There was a previous attempt to make a strategy, but the previous government did not get very far with that. This is why this has to change, and this is why I brought forward this motion. It's time. I'm proud to be part of a government that is making life better for all Albertans, including the 350,000 of us who live in Alberta's north. It's absolutely critical that we have a development strategy that will identify the government's vision and plan to achieve enhanced social and economic prosperity in northern Alberta, and we have to look at all of our challenges through a northern lens.

We do want to maximize the value of our natural resources, especially in terms of achieving sustainable prosperity for our northern residents and communities. The volatile world markets do impact Alberta as a whole, but the effects of the roller coaster are felt more profoundly in northern Alberta perhaps because it's not only jobs but it's our communities that are directly affected. So we need to work towards a more sustainable model for northern development because the fate of Alberta as a whole is forever intertwined with the fate of northern Alberta.

A northern development strategy informed and guided by a northern perspective will help to bring about this development in a way that recognizes and values the experience and knowledge of northern residents and organizations and builds on the new relationships that we're developing with our First Nations and Métis communities. It would not only support economic growth and infrastructure enhancements, but it will help to define how we manage health, social structures, education, and workforce in the north.

I see the challenges that we face in the north every day in my constituency of Peace River. Residents in the north are resilient and strong, and we know what it takes to live and thrive in these areas. I appreciate the comments of my fellow MLAs from the north because we all share these kinds of things, and we all know what we're up against.

The Northern Alberta Development Council is uniquely positioned to be the champion for our region. They have 50 years of experience working with distinctively northern issues. Their priorities, as identified already by the council, are a robust,

diversified economy; strong, vibrant communities; and a skilled, educated workforce. The NADC knows that it will be necessary to work with regional partners, elected officials, ministry colleagues, and people of the north to achieve those priorities. They have the experience to bring together government and northern Albertans to develop a plan for all of these shared priorities. But to achieve these goals, they need to know that all the rest of Alberta recognizes the importance of the work that they are doing and are ready to support the objectives.

Other jurisdictions across Canada have recognized the importance of a northern strategy. Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Quebec have developed strategies that will improve the social and economic fabric of their northern jurisdictions, and we can learn from their strategies as they contain elements such as highlighting regional growth opportunities; challenges to growth; information to guide investment from both government and the private sector; ways to improve infrastructure, education, and health; encouraging collaboration and a co-ordinated approach to development; a focus on sustainability; working respectfully with indigenous and nonindigenous communities; and giving equal weight to those communities and to the principle of equality between men and women.

As I mentioned earlier, in 2009 the government of Canada also established a vision for northern development through the creation of a northern strategy. So it's time for Alberta to step up to the plate and provide the Northern Alberta Development Council with the mandate that will allow it to deliver on the potential of northern Alberta in a way that will truly maximize that potential and provide for the needs of Alberta's families in the north.

I always tell my community that there are not very many of us out there, so we have to be twice as loud. That's why I'm bringing this motion forward. It's time for us to be twice as loud, and I know that our government is going to listen.

Thank you again for participating in this debate. I look forward to your support of Motion 506.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

Ms Ganley: Seeing as we are so close to 6 o'clock, I move that we adjourn and resume tomorrow morning at 10.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 16, 2017

Day 34

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
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Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
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Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
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Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
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Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
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Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
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Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 16, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. members, let us pray or reflect, each in our own way. Let us remain humble for the opportunity to work on behalf of the citizens of our great province. Let us find strength and encouragement from them to seek out solutions and opportunities that will create a better tomorrow for our future generations.

Thank you, and please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect of this bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to stand up to speak about the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, this morning. I would just like to start out my comments by briefly noting that not too long ago in this Chamber the Member for Strathmore-Brooks on behalf of the Wildrose caucus pledged to undertake an erasing and revising of history if they were ever to form government. I think it bears noting that that's been said, especially when we're considering a bill like this, that goes to protect investors and, particularly, seniors. It should be deeply troubling to Albertans that the Wildrose would plan to overturn bills like this. I think that deserves to be on the record.

I think also, Madam Chair, that Albertans deserve to feel comfortable and confident when they entrust their money to investment dealers, advisers, and their representatives. Organizations that regulate the investment industry need the capability to regulate effectively. Accordingly, the amendments proposed in this bill will provide regulatory organizations the same enforcement authorities as the Alberta Securities Commission. It will give regulatory organizations the ability to compel attendance and production of evidence so they are better able to do their jobs and protect Alberta investors. It will also protect the people who investigate these cases from liability when carrying out their duties in good faith.

Madam Chair, our government is working to make life better for everyday Albertans by making practical changes that help to make sure their investments are safe. I think the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board deserves a great deal of credit for working with the industry and taking actions to protect Albertans. As Wanda Morris from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons has said, "I've heard too many heart-wrenching stories of individuals who lost their life savings because they trusted the wrong person: an unscrupulous financial advisor." Individual investors and large investors need to know that the investment industry is being regulated properly. Financial markets are getting

more and more complicated every day, and more and more people are relying on financial advisers to help guide their decisions.

As government we need to encourage investment because it is critical to the development of our economy, but we also must do everything we can to protect investors against the very few people in the system who would take advantage of them. We already have strong organizations in Alberta like the Alberta Securities Commission. The ASC is mandated to protect investors and foster a fair and efficient Alberta capital market. The commission currently has statutory powers to compel attendance and the production of evidence during both the investigation and adjudication phases.

However, self-regulatory organizations such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association do not currently have this authority. These proposed changes that we have before us in Bill 13 will give these organizations the same authority as the commission and will strengthen their enforcement abilities and improve investor protection. In most provinces across Canada provincial governments have delegated certain aspects of their authority to these regulatory organizations to provide more efficient and effective regulation.

A well-regulated and efficient financial system where investors are protected is absolutely essential for confidence in the markets. The Canadian and international markets are also changing, and Alberta must ensure that our securities regulatory system aligns with international standards and regulatory reforms.

Another thing these proposed amendments will do is to extend immunity to the directors, officers, employees, and agents of these regulatory bodies. These proposed amendments will also clarify the conditions under which immunity is granted to these organizations, which will make it possible for them to conduct enforcement more effectively.

As with all legislation dealing with the fast-changing world of securities law, some of these proposed changes are merely housekeeping to ensure clarity and better compliance with Alberta's securities laws. Take, for example, amendments to regulations that will make sure these provisions apply to persons and companies, ensure the act is consistent, and allow the application to all parties as intended by the legislation.

Madam Chair, as the government was preparing these amendments, they consulted with the investment industry. The Alberta Securities Commission and the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada were both engaged with developing these changes, and these common-sense amendments that are being proposed have been welcomed by groups like the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. As I mentioned earlier, there are heartbreaking situations where people have lost their life savings, and we are proud to stand up for Albertans and make it safer for them to invest.

I agree with our Minister of Finance, and I think we can all agree that keeping our securities laws up to date is a great idea. It is in the best interests of Albertans, the best interests of our financial markets, and the best interests of our investors. The long-term health of our capital markets, our economy, and our citizens depends on it. That's why I support this bill, Madam Chair, and I'm hoping that all other members in the House will do the same.

I'd like to read into the record several quotes from stakeholders that have been consulted and were a part of the creation of this piece of legislation. I'll start out by reading from Ms Wanda Morris, who is the vice-president of advocacy at the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. She says:

I've heard too many heart-wrenching stories of individuals who lost their life savings because they trusted the wrong person: an

unscrupulous financial advisor. Today's changes will help hold wrongdoers to account. We welcome today's announcement as a critical step in bringing rule-breakers to justice and deterring wrongdoing, thus better protecting investors in this province. We look forward to additional, practical steps like this from the Government of Alberta.

Another quote, from Andrew Kriegler, who is president and CEO of the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada. He says:

We congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Government of Alberta for their leadership in being at the forefront of investor protection in Canada. With these legislative changes, Alberta becomes the first province in Canada to provide IIROC with a complete toolkit, enabling us to more effectively fulfil our responsibilities as a public interest regulator and bring wrongdoers to justice.

The next quote I'll read is from Stan Magidson, who is chair and CEO of the Alberta Securities Commission. Stan says:

Strong investor protection is a critical component of our mandate, and we support meaningful and practical regulatory advances such as this that can have a real impact on protecting Albertans from financial misconduct.

Now, Madam Chair, I'd like to read in a little bit of background to why I support this bill but also why this bill was necessary in the first place. Alberta has made a commitment to ongoing reform and modernization and harmonization of securities laws in Canada, and since that commitment Alberta has had a practice of reviewing and updating its securities laws annually along with other provinces and territories. That was a result of a 2004 memorandum of understanding.

10:10

The securities regulatory landscape in Canada has become more complex, sophisticated, international in scope, and driven by technology than ever before. Since the 2007 financial crisis it has been more difficult to sustain quality capital markets. Alberta's challenge is to deliver the right regulation to support investor confidence and to encourage investment, innovation, and economic growth in Alberta and across Canada. Alberta must ensure that our securities regulatory system reflects the realities of today's markets and stays in step with evolving international standards and global regulatory reform initiatives.

Madam Chair, I've had a number of questions from constituents and stakeholders regarding this legislation, and I'd like to read some of those questions and their respective answers into the record as well. You know, of course, the most obvious question is: why is the government amending the Securities Act? Well, I've touched on this a little bit before, but I think it deserves a fulsome answer. Our government is committed to maintaining a well-regulated, efficient capital market in Alberta that protects investors and encourages innovation. We are enhancing investor protection by providing stronger enforcement authorities for regulatory organizations. These changes are also planned by other jurisdictions across Canada, and these changes mean that Alberta is first out of the gate and continues to be a leader when it comes to securities regulation.

Another question is: how will these changes promote a fair and effective Alberta capital market and protect investors? Well, the answer is that these amendments will help to ensure Alberta has a fair and effective capital market by extending powers to recognized regulatory organizations so that they can compel testimony and the production of evidence during a disciplinary hearing.

The changes will extend immunity from civil liability to the directors, officers, employees, and agents of regulatory organizations when conducting enforcement activity. Another question is: why are you providing immunity to these regulatory

organizations? The answer is that the people responsible for enforcing securities rules must be able to do their jobs without fear of being held personally liable. Protecting them from liability when carrying out their duties in good faith makes it possible to enforce the rules more effectively.

Another question is: how do these legislative changes compare to other jurisdictions'? I mentioned before that Alberta is leading the way, and that's good to know, that our province is at the forefront of these changes. Immunity and the statutory powers to compel attendance and the production of evidence for securities law investigations were some things that were recommended by the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada. This came from broad public consultations with industry and investors. These changes are also planned by other jurisdictions across Canada. For example, Quebec is considering similar investigative authorities for regulatory organizations, and B.C., Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, P.E.I., and the Yukon have also committed to adopting immunity provisions.

Another question that I received. You know, sometimes when you mention the word "securities" to people, it doesn't necessarily resonate with them. It's a bit of a technical term. Sometimes the average Albertan might not understand what it is exactly that we're talking about here, so I think that also deserves to be elaborated upon. So the question is: what is securities regulation? It's the regulation of the conduct of securities market participants, including issuers that raise capital through security offerings, and their directors and officers and securities firms, their directors and officers and their employees registered to advise and trade in securities.

Canada does not have federal securities regulation, but regulation instead falls under provincial jurisdiction. The provinces are working together through the Canadian Securities Administrators to co-ordinate securities regulation throughout Canada.

Securities regulation in Alberta is the responsibility of the Alberta Securities Commission. So that leads to the question: what is the Alberta Securities Commission? Now, the commission is an industry-funded provincial corporation that is responsible for ensuring that a fair and efficient capital market exists in Alberta. The commission develops and enforces securities regulations, offers information and resources to Albertans about investing, and administers Alberta's Securities Act and regulations.

What exactly is a regulatory organization? Organizations such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada have authority that's delegated by the Alberta Securities Act to make sure their members' firms meet standards set by the province's securities laws. These regulatory organizations are an important part of the enforcement mosaic in Canada.

The three key regulatory organizations, as overseen by members of the Canadian Securities Administrators, are the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, the Mutual Fund Dealers Association of Canada, and La Chambre de la Sécurité Financière. These three organizations concluded 139 enforcement cases in the year 2015 compared with 112 in 2014. In 2015 Canadian Securities Administrators members concluded matters involving 233 individuals and 117 companies, or 350 total respondents. Certain securities violations proceed to prosecution either through an administrative tribunal or Provincial Court, depending on the type of violation and the jurisdiction where it occurred.

Canadian Securities Administrators is an umbrella organization of Canada's provincial and territorial securities regulators, whose objective is to improve, co-ordinate, and harmonize regulation of the Canadian capital markets.

The Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada is the national regulatory organization which oversees all investment dealers and trading activity on debt and equity marketplaces in Canada. They were created in 2008 through the consolidation of the Investment Dealers Association of Canada and Market Regulation Services Inc., and they set high-quality regulatory and investment industry standards, protect investors, and strengthen market integrity while maintaining efficient and competitive capital markets.

The Mutual Fund Dealers Association is the national regulatory organization for the distribution side of the Canadian mutual fund industry. The association regulates the operations, standard of practice, and business conduct of its members and their representatives.

A final question that people may be asking is: why does the government delegate authority to these regulatory organizations? The answer is that provincial regulators have delegated certain aspects of their authority to regulatory organizations to provide more effective and efficient regulation of the market to market participants.

Madam Chair, considering all of the information that I've just detailed and the intention of the bill to protect investors and given that seniors are specifically one of the groups that are targeted to be protected through this legislation, you know, it makes me a bit worried when the Wildrose proposes to undo the things that the NDP government has done. We'll be putting seniors at risk if they have their way, and that's dangerous. I think that the Wildrose ought to make it a little bit more clear what their plan is. All they do is propose to undo things. They don't propose to bring things forward.

Mr. Hanson: Carbon tax.

Mr. Westhead: An example that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills just mentioned is the carbon tax. You know, of course, that's something that they have made very clear.

Mr. Hanson: Bill 6.

Mr. Westhead: And Bill 6, protection for paid farm workers: here they want to put workers at risk . . .

Ms Hoffman: Pipelines.

Mr. Westhead: . . . and pipelines at risk. They would prefer for Ottawa to impose their carbon plan on us. You know, Madam Chair, it's pretty worrisome that you have to ask the question: whose interests are they really looking after? It seems as though it's a quest for power, and that's all it is. It's not a quest to have people's backs and make life better for people; it's to make life worse. They want to undo protections for people who work in one of the most dangerous occupations. That's shameful.

Madam Chair, especially when it comes to securities acts, when we're talking about vulnerable populations who put their trust in people to look after their best interests . . .

10:20

Mr. Hanson: We're supporting this.

Mr. Westhead: You know, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills claims that they're supporting this, but at the same time one of his own caucus members has committed to undoing everything and erasing from history and revising history in what we've done here. I mean, they can't have it both ways. They've got to really pick and choose. And how do they pick and choose,

Madam Chair? Is it just with their ideology and no evidence-based practice here?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. That's right. Exactly.

Mr. Westhead: The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View says, "That's right." They just do think blindly with ideology. You know, that's scary, Madam Chair. I think that the opposition ought to get up and explain to Albertans what exactly their plan is because we haven't heard anything from them on their plans other than that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner attended an anti women's reproductive rights rally. That's one of their most clear policy directions that we've heard from them, and that's pretty scary.

The Deputy Chair: Before I call the next speaker, I just want to remind everybody in the House that we are speaking to the clauses of the bill, please.

Would there be any other members that would like to speak to the clauses of the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As much as I enjoy pointing out all of the flaws in the opposition's ideology, I will of course stick to the clauses of the bill.

You know, it's good to rise this morning and speak on this bill. I've actually spoken on this bill previously. To review some of my comments from earlier, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has made clear that this government has laid out three key principles when it comes to approaching Alberta's capital market. The minister said that the government is focused on, number one, investor protection; number two, ensuring market integrity; and number three, ensuring that we have an efficient system for capital formation. From what I've heard thus far in this House, there seems to be some general agreement that these are indeed laudable goals and are useful guideposts when we consider changes to the Securities Act.

As a result, as we consider this bill, you know, I feel like we must consider the following questions. If they sound familiar, they should be. I've talked about this at length previously. Does this legislation serve to enhance consumer protection? Does this legislation serve to further improve market integrity? And will these changes continue to ensure that we have an efficient system for capital formation? Well, Madam Chair, I believe the answer to all three of these questions is yes, and I note nods of agreement from the opposition, so that's great.

Now, one, specifically in the bill's section 69.1, I believe really meets that second test, that being: does this legislation serve to further improve market integrity? If we look at page 2 of the bill that we have in front of us, section 69.1 talks about the powers regarding investigations. It says:

Where a recognized exchange, a recognized self-regulatory organization or a recognized quotation and trade reporting system is empowered under the bylaws or rules of the exchange, self-regulatory organization or quotation and trade reporting system, as the case may be, to conduct investigations, the following applies for the purposes of such an investigation:

- (a) a person appointed to conduct an investigation has the same power as is vested in the Court of Queen's Bench for the trial of civil actions
 - (i) to summon and enforce the attendance of witnesses,
 - (ii) to compel witnesses to give evidence on oath or otherwise, and
 - (iii) to compel witnesses to produce documents, records, securities, derivatives, contracts and things.

I'd be very interested to note – I'm assuming the “and things” part is for all-inclusive documents that might not otherwise be covered under this particular act, but if we want to debate what those things are, I would love to do so.

In section 69.1(b) it goes on to say that

- (b) the failure or refusal of a person summoned as a witness under clause (a) to attend at the required location and time, to answer questions or to produce documents, records, securities, derivatives, contracts and things that are in that person's custody or possession makes that person, on application to the Court of Queen's Bench by the person appointed to conduct the investigation, liable to be committed for contempt by the Court of Queen's Bench in the same manner as if that person were in breach of an order or judgment of that Court.

I think that's a very interesting clause, Madam Chair.

Section 69.1(c) goes on to say that

- (c) a person appointed to conduct an investigation may take evidence under oath.

Part (d) goes on to say:

- (d) a person appointed to conduct an investigation or a person authorized by a person conducting an investigation may administer oaths for the purpose of taking evidence.

Now, section (e) goes on to say:

- (e) notwithstanding the Alberta Evidence Act, another very interesting piece of legislation if you have some time to read it,

a bank or any officer or employee of the bank is not exempt from the operation of this section.

Now, if you're following along at home, continuing on to page 3, section 69.1(f) says:

- (f) a person giving evidence at an investigation may be represented by legal counsel.

Of course, in our justice system being able to have legal counsel or a lawyer at your disposal is a very reasonable and prudent thing to do. I would imagine if you were under investigation by this act, that would probably be a wise choice.

That is section 69.1. Now, I really do believe that it meets that question of: does this legislation further serve to improve market integrity? I think it does. It talks about adding investigation powers just as if they are members of the Queen's Bench and have the full power of our courts to compel the attendance of witnesses and to compel witnesses to give evidence under oath and so on.

One thing that is interesting, though – I mean, this section is fine and good, but if you combine it with the amendments we're making to section 222(1), it lays out additional and I think very necessary protections for those who are going to be investigating wrongdoing that would be covered under this act.

Now, it's actually quite extensive, you know. Section 222(1) is actually repealed and is substituted with a great deal of extra detail, and what it talks about is immunities, in fact, though I know the opposition would like to be immune from fact. But this specifically talks to immunities for those doing the investigations. I think this is a very necessary part of the bill, especially when it goes in combination with the new investigative powers.

Section 222(1) starts off by saying that

No action or other proceeding for damages may be instituted against the Commission, a member of the Commission, the Executive Director, the Secretary, a person employed by the Commission or a person appointed under this Act or [through] regulations to perform a function or duty of or for the Commission, the Executive Director or the Secretary

- (a) for any act done in good faith

- (i) in the performance or intended performance of any function or duty, or
 - (ii) in the exercise or intended exercise of any power,
- or
- (b) for any neglect, omission or default in the performance or exercise in good faith of any function, duty or power.

10:30

Now, as interesting as that is, subsection (2) goes on to say:

(2) No action or other proceeding for damages may be instituted against a recognized auditor oversight organization or its directors, governors, members, officers, employees or agents for

- (a) any act done in good faith
 - (i) in the performance or intended performance of any function or duty, or
 - (ii) in the exercise or intended exercise of any power,
- or
- (b) any neglect, omission or default in the performance or exercise in good faith of any function, duty or power,

Now, those last sections that I just read, subsection 2(a) and its appropriate subclauses, go to further say:

in respect of a function, duty or power that has been assigned to the recognized auditor oversight organization pursuant to its recognition under section 64.1.

From there it goes on to subsection (3) of section 222.

(3) No action or other proceeding for damages may be instituted against a recognized self-regulatory organization or its directors, officers . . . or agents for

- (a) any act done in good faith.

Now, it further goes on to say:

- (i) in the performance or intended performance of any function or duty, or
- (ii) in the exercise or intended exercise of any power.

Then in subsection (b) it goes on to further clarify:

- (b) any neglect, omission or default in the performance or exercise in good faith of any function, duty or power, in respect of a function, duty or power that has been authorized under section 64 or 66.

Now, section 222 goes on to further state – and this is also quite interesting as well – that

(4) No person or company has any rights or remedies and no proceedings lie or may be brought against any person or company for any act or omission of the last mentioned person or company done or omitted in compliance with Alberta securities laws.

Section 222(5) goes on to a further clarification. It reads:

(5) Subsection (1) does not, by reason of section 5(2) and (3) . . .

I will note that subsection (3) was the one that I actually just read previously, which was talking about that no actions or proceeding for damages may be instituted against a self-regulatory organization or its directors, against its agents.

I think we've sort of gone on at length about this, Madam Chair. I'm of course going to be very happy to talk more about this, I'm sure, as we go through Committee of the Whole. For the moment I will leave my comments there, and I'm sure I'll be up again speaking to this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member, for speaking to the clauses.

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. As always, it's a pleasure to get up and speak in the House. I rise today to say a few words about the

Securities Amendment Act, 2017, in particular and a few words more generally about our capital markets.

As members of this Chamber come together to consider this bill, I think it's important that we reflect on the big picture and how we can ensure that our capital markets work well. As all observers of capital markets know well, the decision-making in financial markets is driven by one very important factor, and that's good information, and by trust. When investors have access to good-quality information, when risk is credibly priced, and when trust is high, our capital markets work well. However, we also know what happens when investors have access to poor information and when the trust is low: the health of our capital markets deteriorates rather quickly.

All members of this House can remember the great scandals of the recent past that eroded trust in capital markets around the world. Take, for example, the actions of Bernie Madoff, whose failed Ponzi scheme cost investors an estimated \$65 billion, or Jérôme Kerviel of the Société Générale, whose secretive futures trades cost the bank nearly \$8 billion, or, for that matter, Nick Leeson of Barings Bank, whose risky bets in Singapore on the International Monetary Exchange resulted in the stark collapse of one of Britain's most iconic and historic investment banks.

Madam Chair, I raise these examples as they serve as a cautionary reminder of what can happen in our capital markets when bad apples are allowed to take action, and that's exactly what the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, is to address. As all members of this Chamber know, the direct loss to investors in these scandals was significant. Many people were impacted. Many people's retirement savings were impacted. I'll remind members of the House of when I spoke to the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, during second reading, when I talked about Maria and her savings and how these people depend on that as they move into retirement. We don't want people to have to go through that experience.

Of course, there was a broader cost, a wider cost, and that was borne by all participants in the capital markets. Because of the actions of a few bad apples, trust was eroded: trust in the investment industry, trust in our institutions, and trust in the broader market. When trust in our capital markets erodes, it has an effect on everyone. Liquidity dries up, investment declines, and, as we saw with the financial crisis of 2008, declining levels of confidence and trust coupled with poor information can lead to a world-wide recession.

Madam Chair, as you and all members of this Chamber know well, Alberta has the second-largest capital market in the country. Our capital market is unique and is largely driven by the enormous capital needs of our resource sector. As we consider this bill, I think it's important that we keep in mind how critical our capital markets are to the future economic health of our province.

What should be the principles that guide our decision-making when it comes to keeping the Securities Act and our regulatory framework up to date? In his remarks the other day during second reading the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board laid out those principles. As a reminder to members of the Assembly those principles were: strong investor protection, continued market integrity, and developing an efficient system of capital formation. In my view, these are the right principles to guide our decision-making with respect to this bill because it gets to the core of the issue of trust in our capital markets, and anything we can do to increase trust in our capital markets is good for capital formation, good for Alberta businesses, good for investors, and good for the long-term health of Alberta's economy.

On that note, Madam Chair, it is through this lens and with these thoughts in mind that I'd like to discuss the amendments before us today with the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. As we've all

heard, the amendments before us are largely focused on increasing investor protection. As members know well, the Alberta Securities Commission currently has the statutory powers and authority to compel attendance and the production of evidence during investigations and during the adjudicative phases of their enforcement work. Of course, these powers and authorities are entirely appropriate for the Alberta Securities Commission. In fact, absent these powers and authorities, it is not clear that our capital markets could function properly as market integrity would be put at risk.

10:40

In the amendments before us the government is seeking like powers for self-regulatory organizations that have devolved powers under the Alberta Securities Commission. As members know well, self-regulatory organizations like the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, also known as IIROC, and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association play an important role in ensuring market integrity and in protecting investors. By providing like powers and authorities to organizations like IIROC and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association, we are increasing trust in the marketplace and increasing investor protection. Perhaps more importantly, we are creating an institutional disincentive for bad apples to operate in our marketplace in the first place. Madam Chair, keeping bad apples out of our capital markets is good for investors. It's good for Alberta businesses and good for our overall economy.

I should add, Madam Chair, that extending immunity to directors, officers, employees, and agents is an important step in investor protection. By ensuring that we are only providing immunity for good-faith acts in the exercising of regulatory or deregulated duties, functions, or powers, we are enabling these self-regulatory organizations to conduct their enforcement much more effectively. All these things considered, the amendment before the House takes another important step forward in ensuring trust in the marketplace and therefore enhancing overall market integrity. The rest of the amendments in the bill before us are housekeeping in nature, but they are important nonetheless.

I would like to commend the Finance minister for taking the time to regularly review this act and make sure it is crystal clear whenever possible. Ensuring regulatory and, for that matter, legislative clarity is critical for all market participants. When the rules governing capital formation are clear, when we have smart regulations like we do here in Alberta, we provide the institutional framework that allows our capital markets to flourish. As I said before, having well-functioning capital markets in Alberta is critical for our economy, particularly because our resource sector is so dependent on raising huge sums of capital.

Madam Chair, as I wrap up these brief remarks, I want to emphasize how important this legislation is for Alberta, and I want to encourage all members of this House to support this bill. I think all members appreciate how important it is to develop trust in our capital markets and how important investor protection is to that end.

As all members of this House know, Alberta has a long and proud tradition of innovation in our capital markets. We're often looked at as leaders in the country and rightfully so. Today, with this legislation, Alberta is once again leading in Canada. We'll be the first jurisdiction in Canada to extend these powers to self-regulatory organizations like IIROC and the MFDA. As I read in the paper and as I hear on the street, these types of actions are being demanded by regular Canadians, trade associations, civil society, and, most importantly, investors and firms trying to raise capital. Quite frankly, everyone is onboard precisely because the amendments

before this House are reasonable and, at the end of the day, will make our capital markets stronger while protecting investors.

On that note, Madam Chair, I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 13, which is the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, and I wish to commend my associates on both sides of the House that have spoken already on this. This is a good bill, and I think it fulfills our government's mandate to provide a suite of consumer protection legislation that tells Albertans that their government – and that's this whole government – really has their backs.

I'm very proud of what our government has done so far on consumer protection. Actually, it's not just me; there have been several commentators recently that have said that we're on the right track. We're looking after middle-class problems and making sure that vulnerable folks are protected from predatory financial actions. The payday loan legislation that was passed a year ago I think has been very successful. It has prompted basically the reversal of usurious interest rates that were being charged and has prompted a whole new class of lending institution that is going to provide short-term loans at more reasonable rates. I actually want to thank ATB as well as various credit unions in the province for stepping up on this. This will have a big impact on the welfare of lower income Albertans.

Another act that I'm very proud of is the one that banned door-to-door sales, at least has tightened up the contractual relationships that people enter into. I think that there are some analogies with this particular act, Bill 13, and the banning of door-to-door sales for certain products. Along those lines, the bill that we just passed licensing contractors and making sure that people that are building new homes can trust the contractor to have the appropriate background and education and facilities and as well provide some redress for the buyer of the new homes is very good and actually, again, has analogies to this bill.

The fourth thing that I would mention – it hasn't been mentioned recently, but the seniors' home adaptation and repair program is another example where, through an act that involves both grants and a type of reverse mortgage, seniors are able to get credible renovations done on their facilities. These renovations will help them stay in their home for longer periods of time.

Now, none of this, Madam Chair, is actually in a clause of this bill, but I think it's important as context to why we need to have clauses such as the powers re investigation, which is clause 69.1. I think that this is actually the real meat of this bill. It's what gives investors as well as the investment community and our businesses such as oil and gas and other entities that require strong investment support the trust in our system here in Alberta that will make for improved economic activity as well as the welfare of all Albertans. Clause 69.1 says:

Where a recognized exchange, a recognized self-regulatory organization or a recognized quotation and trade reporting system is empowered under the bylaws or rules of the exchange, self-regulatory organization or quotation and trade reporting system, as the case may be, to conduct investigations, the following applies for the purposes of such an investigation:

- (a) a person appointed to conduct an investigation has the same power as is vested in the Court of Queen's Bench for the trial of civil actions.

That's really powerful language: a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench can summon and enforce the attendance of witnesses.

Somebody can't say that they're away on other business or on vacation or need a sick day off. They actually can be compelled to attend, and they can be compelled to give evidence on oath, which means that if they provide testimony that is later found to be in error, there are consequences for that. Those consequences can be dire. So this ability to compel the witnesses to give evidence as well as to attend is very important.

10:50

Witnesses are also compelled "to produce documents, records, securities, derivatives, contracts and things." I know there has been some discussion about what the definition of "things" is in the context of another piece of legislation, but this means that the witness really needs to bring all the information pertinent to the case.

Under clause 69.1

- (b) The failure or refusal of a person summoned as a witness under clause (a) to attend at the required location and time, to answer questions or to produce documents, records, securities, derivatives, contracts and things that are in that person's custody or possession makes that person, on application to the Court of Queen's Bench by the person appointed to conduct the investigation, liable to be committed for contempt by the Court of Queen's Bench in the same manner as if that person were in breach of an order or judgment of that Court.

Again, very, very powerful language.

- (c) A person appointed to conduct an investigation may take evidence under oath.

I think I mentioned that before.

- (d) A person appointed to conduct an investigation or a person authorized by a person conducting an investigation may administer oaths for the purpose of taking evidence.

So we don't have to actually go to court and bring these people before a Court of Queen's Bench. This can be done under oath in a lawyer's office or other suitable environment.

- (e) Notwithstanding the Alberta Evidence Act, a bank or any officer or employee of the bank is not exempt from the operation of this section.

Again, it's very often that the persons providing investment advice and handling investments actually are employees of a bank, so this part of the legislation is, again, crucial.

In another section there is immunity to civil suit for these investigators. Again, this is very strong language that is going to help make sure that the investigators in these situations get all of the information that's pertinent to the situation.

I've lived in Alberta for 40 years, and I've basically started a career and had a successful career in medicine, started a family, bought a home, got my children educated with the help of RESPs, been a strong supporter of the RRSP systems in this province as well as the tax-free savings account, that is actually a federal responsibility, and I'm also trying to plan for my retirement, which may come sooner than later, I guess, if the opposition has its way. But in all of these segments of my life, in all of these segments of my financial life I've actually had to trust that the financial system is operating correctly. As I said in the second reading of this bill, that trust is very, very important, not only for me as an investor but also for the financial institutions that are providing the investments and by extension, as I mentioned earlier in this speech, the various industries and services that require investment support to flourish and to improve our economy.

Back in the day not so long after, 40 years ago, this province was devastated by the failure of something called the Principal Group. I

don't know if any of those in the Chamber today remember the Principal Group. This was devastating. This was basically kind of a hybrid mutual fund, savings bank operation. They actually charged a 9 per cent upfront sales fee on their products and then purported to give a higher rate of return than comparable mutual funds. But it turned out that it was a form of Ponzi scheme that was going on, and it failed. It caused economic devastation in this province when it failed, not only to the employees of Principal Group, of which there were many that were devastated by the loss of their job, but also to a wide range of investors who had put their life savings into that. There were other groups.

One of the things that I'm pleased with that the previous government did was set up or at least made amendments to the Securities Act, which I think has prevented something like the Principal Group from ever occurring again in this province. But we need to keep being vigilant, and I think that's what this act is doing, to make sure that newer products – we don't even talk about mutual funds much anymore – that are available, derivatives and high-speed trading and all these other things, are being controlled.

Just to come to the current, just to today, there's an issue on the Toronto Stock Exchange with Home Capital. This is a company that provides high-risk mortgages, and they've had to be bailed out by a variety of pension funds and other corporations. The problem that I have with this is that Home Capital has the investment of a large number of Canadians in the mortgages as well as in the stock of this company, and those folks are at risk. It just points out the need to be vigilant, to keep on track of that. It was the failure of those high-risk mortgages in 2007 and 2008 which led to the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the United States and the financial crisis of 10 years ago. I certainly don't want to see a repetition of that either in Toronto or in Alberta.

For all of these reasons and largely, basically for investor protection and to protect the integrity of our capital markets, I think that this bill deserves our fulsome support. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 13? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was trying to find a quote by the president and CEO of IIROC, Andrew Kriegler. So I googled "Bill 13 Alberta," and the first subject I saw was A Little Bit of it is Jealousy: Alberta Town Proud of Nickelback Despite Haters. I doubt that those two apply. With that being said, I did find my quote in relation to this.

I'm going to speak in relation to three pieces that Bill 13 underlines, which are that it provides regulatory organizations the same enforcement authority as the Alberta Securities Commission, gives regulatory organizations the ability to compel attendance and production of evidence so they are better able to do their jobs and protect Alberta investors, and protects people who investigate these cases from liability for carrying out their duties in good faith. As the CEO of IIROC did associate, these are three pieces that we need, the three legs of the stool. With the introduction of this legislation, when it passes, then we will have them, and we will be excited to have them. It really provides that leverage and allows justice for individuals who've been defrauded.

11:00

When I spoke a couple of days ago, I spoke about Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, and I talked about how having regulatory bodies that enforce regulations can be a good thing. I alluded to whenever we entrust someone with our

well-being, whether it is our financial well-being, our physical or emotional or psychological well-being, we put a lot of trust in them. I alluded to the fact that there are regulatory bodies that oversee the guy outside the Federal building who sells hot dogs, that he's monitored by Alberta Health Services. It's important that we ensure that we give the proper powers for these individuals to investigate. If I got sick because of the hot dog I enjoyed yesterday, it's important that Alberta Health Services has the ability to investigate in good faith and doesn't have the liability that they could fall under by doing that investigation.

It's important that as we move forward, the Alberta Securities Commission has those powers as well because we put a lot of trust into securities, and there are many heartbreaking stories of when individuals are defrauded when their life savings have been entrusted with someone. To be frank, it becomes too emotionally overwhelming for those individuals, and those individuals take their own lives. It's heartbreaking, and it's tragic. If they were protected, then they probably would still be around today. At the end of the day, it's important for those individuals who have been defrauded that, first, we find ways for them to recoup their capital, if possible, and that we provide them with closure from the situation as well.

I reflect to when I had my first child at the age of 21. There was a commitment that me and my then partner made, which was that we were going to invest in their education. We were going to put away \$100 every single month to make sure that they had a great education. While it seemed like a little bit at the time, we knew that it would continue to add up for our children. You know, we were living from paycheque to paycheque, but this was an important investment for us, so we continued to make it and continue to make it.

Fortunately, we have a financial adviser we trust, who is a family friend, and we know very well that he's not going to do anything to us. But if we reached out to an investor that we did trust but they defrauded us, I can only envision how heartbreaking it would be for us to lose this nest egg that we are saving up for them, especially at a time when, you know, maybe we didn't go on the nice trip or maybe we bought the chairs from Value Village. These were hard decisions that were made on the merits that we wanted to make sure that we had a better life for our kids. I can only empathize with those who have been defrauded and feel sympathy for the pain that those individuals have had to go through.

It's important that we give these investigative bodies the tools that they need. The Alberta Securities Commission is mandated to protect investors and really foster a fair and efficient capital market here in Alberta. It's not about interfering. It's not about sticking our nose where it doesn't belong.

You know, I often hear the analogy of bureaucratic red tape. Well, you know what? When you don't give investigative bodies the powers that they need to investigate properly and when they have to continuously seek other avenues to get all the information they require and they can't compel people to provide that information in meaningful time, that just creates more red tape for those individuals. I'm happy that this government is moving forward to really cut the red tape when it comes to investigating securities.

At the end of the day, I think a lot has been said by many of the members here in the House. With that being said, I'm happy to support Bill 12 – sorry; Bill 13. I'm also supporting Bill 12, but I support Bill 13 because I think it's going to create some very positive protection for many Albertans, especially those who are first entering the capital market and may not entirely know all the laws and regulations that exist or may be really, really busy and it's hard for them to really do a lot of their homework in relation to that.

I will take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think we've made a lot of good progress and had some good discussion on the bill this morning in Committee of the Whole. I would move that the next time the committee rises and reports, it report Bill 13.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, just to clarify: rise and report? So you would like to call the question on the bill as of now?

Okay. Anybody else looking to speak at this point on Bill 13? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 11 Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered on this bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, better known as the whistle-blower act. In a perfect world whistle-blower legislation would never have to be used, but as we heard during the deliberations of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee and as we heard during the debate on Bill 11, there are those who abuse the system, leading to gross mismanagement of government resources. These people need to be held to account, and whistle-blowers are in the best position to bring these cases forward.

It's not an easy decision for a whistle-blower to come forward and file a complaint. They take on a significant amount of risk. They risk their career advancement and soured relationships with other employees. You know, frankly, it's terrible to think that someone who is trying to make Alberta a better place may actually have to suffer for it. The risk is necessary and important to make sure that taxpayer resources aren't being wasted or the public being put in harm's way. As legislators it's our responsibility to ensure that we are equipping these brave men and women with as many tools as possible to allow for reprisal-free disclosure.

I think that Bill 11 has incorporated a significant change to the act which makes it safer for employees to blow the whistle when they see wrongdoing. When we take a step back and look at Bill 11, we can see that the government actually listened to the recommendations made by the all-party Ethics and Accountability Committee. This is how committees are supposed to work. I know that my colleagues spent a significant amount of time last summer hammering out the details of PIDA, and the results are something that all parties in the Assembly should be proud of.

It's worth noting that the well-functioning committee did take an unfortunate turn for the worse in the late stages of summer and into the fall mainly because the government was more concerned about stacking the deck on electoral finance rules than actually completing the committee's mandate. The committee was also

tasked with reviewing the Conflicts of Interest Act, an act that still has some significant problems. These problems are preventing members of the Assembly from one side to the other from speaking on legislation which has a big impact on our constituents, the people who have hired us to be here. It's unfortunate that the committee couldn't continue to function well and produce legislation that could benefit all Albertans and not just the NDP.

11:10

Like I said before, the opportunity was missed, the opportunity to work with the Conflicts of Interest Act. There was a bill before this House, which was Bill 12, that my constituents would have benefited from if only I were able to comment. The Ethics Commissioner is bound to work with the rules that exist. Those rules still have not changed, yet perhaps they should have changed. However, it seems that the NDP was more concerned with advancing their own interests above the interests of the great people of Alberta and Battle River-Wainwright.

Like I said before, I think that Bill 11 is a great example of what this Assembly can accomplish if we actually work together to help Albertans and not just the governing party, but I also believe that it could have been a better bill. I will be supporting Bill 11 and encourage other members of the Assembly to do so.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. Unlike my friends across the way, I'm actually going to focus on the bill and give you a little tour. I'm going to contrast a little bit so that there's really clear understanding about what was existing and what is proposed.

Just a little background. The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act came into force in 2013. The act provides a process for employees in government or certain public-sector entities to report potential serious wrongdoings related to government and to receive protection from reprisal when they have done so. The Public Interest Commissioner along with the chief officer and designated officer in each government department or public-sector entity is charged with investigating wrongdoings and making recommendations.

This bill proposes to enhance protection for whistle-blowers and expands the scope of the act. I'm going to walk you through a few of the finer points and describe what is existing now and what the new bill or the amendment will provide. Currently the act applies to government departments, offices of the Legislature, and public entities such as Alberta Health Services and school boards. The amendment act references prescribed service providers, which are persons or entities that provide public services as a result of an arrangement or contract with government under an enactment. Specifics regarding which service providers and any exemptions will be dealt with in the regulations.

It's not clear whether the current act applies to ministers as heads of departments. The act does not apply to MLAs. Constituency staff are employed by the Legislative Assembly so are covered as employees. The current act does not apply to the Premier's or ministers' staff. With the amendments that we are proposing, the act will clearly lay that out. Subject to parliamentary privilege, MLAs, ministers, and the Premier can all be investigated when a disclosure is made to the Public Interest Commissioner. Likewise, political staff will be protected from reprisal should they choose to blow the whistle.

Currently Alberta's legislation already applies to physicians who are directly employed in public entities as well as other health practitioners and professional staff with admitting privileges in hospitals run by those public entities such as Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health as well as others. The new bill will have regulation-making authority that could be used in the future to expand the legislation to physicians who are in alternative relationship plans or receive other forms of payment from government.

The current act covers gross mismanagement of public funds or a public asset but not mismanagement of the public service or human resources. Gross mismanagement is not defined in the act, and the commissioner interprets when something constitutes gross mismanagement. The new bill will define gross mismanagement to include acts or omissions that are deliberate and that show reckless or wilful disregard for proper management of public funds, public assets, public service delivery, or the management or performance of a contract, arrangement, or enactment, or funds administered under a contract, arrangement, or enactment. In addition, gross mismanagement also includes egregious and/or systemic cases of bullying and harassment.

Around reporting requirements, currently whistle-blowers are required to report to the designated officer of their department or employer. In limited circumstances they can make a disclosure directly to the commissioner. Otherwise, they are not protected under the act. The new amendments will allow an employee to disclose to the designated officer or the commissioner at the employee's choice. This will apply to employees of departments, offices, and public entities. Employees of any contractors, prescribed service providers added in the regulations will report directly to the commissioner.

A whistle-blower may approach their boss about a wrongdoing, and their protection from reprisal would start at that very moment. The employee must still make the official disclosure to their designated officer or the commissioner before an investigation can begin. This avoids new obligations and procedures for supervisors.

Currently we require that the commissioner report an alleged offence to a law enforcement agency or to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Designated officers are not obliged in the same way. The new bill will have a reporting obligation that applies consistently to the commissioner, chief officers, and designated officers.

Now, around freedom of information currently the commissioner is not subject to freedom of information and protection of privacy. However, if disclosures are made to designated officers, those disclosures may not be protected from a FOIP request and could result in the name of a whistle-blower being released. The new bill ensures that the name of the whistle-blower and other identifying information is exempt from those FOIP requests.

Around timeline to decide, currently the regulation provides that the commissioner has 10 business days to decide whether or not to investigate an alleged wrongdoing. The new bill will have the timeline extended to 20 business days. This balances the need to ensure that the decisions are made promptly and that cases do not fall through the cracks with the commissioner's need to make an informed decision.

Around powers to investigate, currently the act provides that the commissioner may require any person to produce or provide information. The changes would authorize the commissioner to go to an employer's work site to view records on-site, similar to the Auditor General's powers.

Currently there's an authorized designated officer or chief officer or the commissioner to collect personal information, including

individually identifying health information and other information necessary to investigate disclosures. The changes would require a chief officer, designated officer, or the commissioner to use reasonable efforts to inform someone if they have received their individually identifying health information.

Currently when a designated officer or the chief officer is involved in an alleged wrongdoing, the Public Interest Commissioner will investigate. Normally the commissioner would provide a report and recommendations to the chief officer and designated officer, and the commissioner can request that they report back to the commissioner on actions being taken. However, if the chief officer and/or the designated officer is involved in the alleged wrongdoing, a report must be provided to other specified individuals, but the act is missing the requirement for those individuals to report to the commissioner on the steps taken. Changes would include an obligation on the specified individuals to report to the commissioner on the steps taken.

In terms of no remedies being allowed in the old legislation, currently while reprisals are prohibited, there are no remedies available if a reprisal occurs. Changes would see the Labour Relations Board empowered to decide on restitution to the whistle-blower, and the board's order would be enforceable as if it were a court order. The commissioner will investigate and decide whether or not a reprisal has occurred, and if a reprisal is found to have occurred, the commissioner refers the matter to the Labour Relations Board.

11:20

Around annual reporting, currently it requires the commissioner to annually report to the Legislative Assembly. The required contents are mainly statistics related to the number of inquiries, disclosures, and investigations. The changes would require more detailed annual reporting, including the types of proven wrongdoings and the disclosures received by the Public Interest Commissioner, a summary of findings in cases where wrongdoings or acts of reprisal are found to have been committed, the specific recommendations made to the public entities or offices of the Legislature and entities' responses to such recommendations, and also any offences committed or penalties given under the act. The annual report must also contain information about referrals to the Labour Relations Board and dispositions of those cases.

Currently the commissioner does not have the ability to delegate authority. The changes will give the commissioner the ability to delegate authority in the event of normal absence. This would be done at the discretion of the commissioner and would allow investigations to continue if the commissioner is away.

[Mr. Hinkley in the chair]

Currently the commissioner and staff are not exempt from giving evidence or appearing as witnesses in any other proceedings of a judicial nature. The changes would provide that the commissioner and their staff are not compellable in other judicial proceedings but still allow the Labour Relations Board to ask the commissioner for relevant information when determining restitution for the whistle-blower. It will also provide that the Labour Relations Board members and staff are not compellable.

Currently in terms of records management the legislation does not include any records management provision for the office of the commissioner. The changes allow the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to make an order related to records management similar to the records management provision for other legislative offices.

With that, I am going to end my little tour of the changes in this very important bill. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. The discussion on Bill 11 today has been interesting, and I appreciate the comments made by both the Member for Battle River-Wainwright as well as the Member for St. Albert. I have an amendment to the bill if the pages can come pick up a copy. The original is on the top of the stack. I'll wait until everyone has had a chance to take a look at it.

I'll just make a few comments to preface the talk on the amendment, Mr. Chair. I would concur with other members who have spoken both in second reading and also during the committee stage of this bill that it has been an important update to a piece of legislation which was passed in a past Legislature, and I think it made some very important improvements. I think that among the improvements I'm particularly pleased to see is the option for people who are whistle-blowers – if they don't feel comfortable bringing knowledge of a wrongdoing to an immediate supervisor or a designated officer, they can also go to the Public Interest Commissioner and make that information known to them. We had a very compelling presentation on behalf of a whistle-blower who felt that that was something that was very important to include in the act, and it has been adjusted to do so.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to read for the record that I move that Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 27 by striking out the proposed section 26(5) and substituting the following:

(5) The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly must lay the report referred to in subsection (4)(c) before the Legislative Assembly, if it is then sitting, or if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting, for review, referral to a committee of the Legislative Assembly or other action as the Legislative Assembly considers appropriate.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member. We will call that amendment A1. You may now proceed.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now, some may ask: well, what exactly is the purpose of the amendment? The purpose of the amendment – and there's certainly not anything earth-shattering or groundbreaking in this amendment – is to create a sense of urgency and timeliness for the report that is being provided. During debate in second reading I believe it was the Member for St. Albert that talked about how the whistle-blower legislation would create a situation where that legislation would make Alberta a leading jurisdiction in terms of supporting and promoting the activities of whistle-blowers in reporting wrongdoings.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I took a little bit of disagreement with that because I don't know that legislation alone can do that. In my view, what needs to happen is that there needs to be an overall culture whereby, first of all, wrongdoing is discouraged, obviously, but that, secondly, if wrongdoing occurs, anyone in a position to make a report, anyone who is a whistle-blower, you know, feels that they have the opportunity to do this.

One of the important improvements in this proposed act is the fact that reprisal is dealt with and some remedy for reprisal is dealt with, and that's specifically what this specific clause refers to. The reason I'm proposing this amendment is because I don't want a situation whereby there is no specific time limit on when a report can be dealt with and when a report can be recorded and tabled in the Legislature. This particular clause is actually quite common in lots of pieces of legislation, and it is common whenever we have a situation where we want to see something dealt with in a very timely and forthright manner. I can't think of many things that would fall

into that category more than a report on a reprisal or a report on a remedy for a reprisal.

I think that's an extremely important part of creating that overall culture in our province whereby not only is wrongdoing discouraged but also that whistle-blowing, you know, in the public interest – people can come forward and report a wrongdoing, whether that report is done through a traditional channel, through the designated officer within the department of government, or whether that report goes directly to the Public Interest Commissioner.

I would ask my colleagues in the Legislature to seriously give consideration to this amendment. I think that it makes a small but not insignificant improvement to a bill that is important and one that we have, you know, basically stated has broad support across all parties within the Legislature, and I would ask for your support in supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just having a look at this amendment. I'd like to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and actually agree. I think it's important that the Legislative Assembly be informed about what is happening as soon as possible. I'd just like to thank him for making this reasonable amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill as amended. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill as amended? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm hoping to continue speaking to what I consider the riveting points I brought up during second reading in terms of the culture that we have here in the province of Alberta and how we can make it a little bit better when it comes to the PIDA specifically and this act – right? – the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017.

Last time I was speaking about the fact that under the current legislation people feel reluctant to come forward and disclose information regarding potential wrongdoing within the ministry that they're working in. I was speaking about how important it is within the public sector that public servants feel that they can come out and speak directly to issues of wrongdoing or gross mismanagement and even bullying and harassment, which aren't considered under the current legislation, and how that directly impacts the level of democracy that we have here in the province of Alberta.

11:30

If people do not feel secure – I think that is the ideal word we need to make sure that we're addressing here – that they can come forward and not suffer reprisals for what they are disclosing, then that actually makes our democracy poorer, right? I think that we can all agree on that. This amendment act is really important in that sense because it's making sure to address exactly that.

Now I want to go a little bit more into specifics when it comes to the act being proposed before us and speak a little bit about gross mismanagement because under the previous piece of legislation it wasn't very clear what was meant by gross mismanagement, what was included in gross mismanagement. It wasn't broad enough to include mismanagement of public service or human resource issues, which the current act will now encase within it.

With the proposed amendments gross mismanagement will include an act or omission that is deliberate and that shows a reckless or wilful disregard for the proper management of public funds, public assets, public service delivery, or the management or performance of a contract, arrangement, enactment, or funds administered under a contract, arrangement, or enactment. In addition, gross mismanagement will also include egregious and/or systemic cases of bullying and harassment, as I alluded to before. Ultimately, the commissioner, as an independent officer of the Legislature, will interpret when something constitutes gross mismanagement.

I think that this is a step in the right direction, where we're being more clear about what the intent is or, specifically with this definition, of what gross mismanagement is. Not only our government, but I do want to recognize at this time that the all-party committee was very constructive in the support that it gave to the minister responsible for democratic renewal and Minister of Labour when it came to putting this piece of legislation together. I want to applaud the fact that gross mismanagement is now going to include systemic cases of bullying and harassment.

I want to say how important this is because I've heard specifically from public servants who have experienced what they would consider systemic bullying or harassment on behalf of others within departments, specifically when it comes to their day-to-day work within the government. I want to say how important it is that people should feel free from that kind of bullying and harassment in their day-to-day life. Can you think about the level of stress that it would cause an individual to have to consistently put up with that kind of behaviour when they go to work every day, to put up with that kind of bullying day in, day out? You know, I can only imagine how tough that would be. So I'm very glad and I'm very happy that that will now be included if this amendment act were to be approved.

On another note, this legislation would improve the reporting process and ensure that whistle-blowers are protected when they need it. Under the old legislation a potential whistle-blower had to report to a designated officer before a wrongdoing would be investigated, and they were not protected from reprisal until that time. Under the proposed legislation potential whistle-blowers could bypass their designated officer and report directly to the Public Interest Commissioner if they chose to do so. Furthermore, the new act would clarify that a whistle-blower may approach their boss about a wrongdoing and that their protection from reprisal would start from that very moment. That's another move in a positive direction, making sure that they would be protected from the moment that they disclosed.

In some cases employees may not know their designated officer, and as a result they may be more comfortable speaking with their supervisor before going to their designated officer. In other cases a potential whistle-blower may prefer to go directly to the commissioner, which I think is important. If I'm not mistaken, that was requested by the commissioner himself, opening up that possibility. Also if I'm not mistaken, in committee I think that received support from everybody, and I want to acknowledge that.

Another matter that was considered was: what happens if during an investigation the commissioner has reason to believe that an offence has been committed? Under the current act they must report it to law enforcement. When this happens, the commissioner's

investigation is suspended pending the results of the law enforcement investigation. The new legislation would clarify that designated officers and chief officers are also required to report to law enforcement in the same way, which is something that the old legislation overlooked. This change was requested by the Auditor General.

It is also important that the identity of whistle-blowers be protected. To that end, it's already the case that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act does not apply to records held by the Public Interest Commissioner. However, if a designated officer initiates an investigation rather than the commissioner, it is possible for a third party to submit a FOIP request asking for records connected to the investigation.

Our new legislation will ensure that the name of the whistle-blowers and other identifying information is exempt from these FOIP requests, of course, to the all-important objective of protecting the whistle-blower and making sure that they're free of reprisals. Madam Chair, let's not forget that at the end of the day that's the major objective that we're trying to achieve, to make sure that people feel confident when coming forward to disclose a wrongdoing or gross mismanagement that they will be protected.

Another aspect that the all-party committee considered was: how long should the commissioner have to decide whether or not to investigate a complaint? Under the current act the commissioner has 10 business days to conduct initial inquiries and decide whether or not a full investigation is warranted. The act establishes a timeline to ensure that these decisions are made promptly and that cases do not fall through the cracks. However, this should be balanced with the commissioner's need to make an informed decision. Therefore, we have accepted the committee's recommendation and will extend that deadline to 20 days. Since the current deadline of 10 days is in the regulation, the change will be made in the regulation.

A further aspect that the all-party committee considered was: how should identifying health information be treated in whistle-blower investigations? Custodians of health information are obligated by other legislation to limit disclosure of that information to the least amount necessary. When the all-party committee was reviewing the whistle-blower legislation, the Public Interest Commissioner noted that there had never been a situation – I repeat: there had never been a situation – where his office received identifying health information. However, the legislation already provides the authority for the commissioner to collect that information in the course of an investigation. With this in mind, the new legislation will require the Public Interest Commissioner to make reasonable efforts to notify someone if their office receives identifying health information.

Now, another aspect that the all-party committee considered was: what happens if a chief officer or designated officer is involved in an alleged wrongdoing? For example, after conducting an investigation, the commissioner would normally provide a report and recommendations to the chief officer and the designated officer for the department or agency that was the subject of the investigation, and these officers would then report back to the commissioner on actions being taken. I'm sure that all members can see how this would be problematic.

11:40

If a chief officer and/or designated officer is involved in the alleged wrongdoing, the amended act will identify alternates to fill in for them. Under the new legislation it would clarify that these alternates have obligations that are as consistent as possible with the normal obligations of the chief officer or designated officer. If the commissioner found that there had been a reprisal against a

whistle-blower, the Labour Relations Board would hear the matter and determine a remedy, as I will now describe.

I think that this is really important with the new piece of legislation coming forward, this whole issue of reprisals because, of course, I go back to my opening remarks about how important it is that public servants feel that they're being protected and that they are able to bring forward issues. At the end of the day, that makes our democracy all that more rich. It improves our democracy. I honestly believe that all members, regardless of what side of the House they sit on, can agree on that, on strengthening our democracy, and that's what this piece of proposed legislation is doing.

One of the most important goals of this piece of legislation is to protect whistle-blowers from any sort of punishment or retaliation from their employer. Under the existing legislation an employer in the public sector can already be charged for punishing an employee for exposing a wrongdoing – this is true – however, the old legislation does not provide for any sort of restitution to the whistle-blower if they suffer an unlawful reprisal. To solve this problem, the new legislation would enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies when there has been a reprisal.

For example, the board may decide that the whistle-blower should get their job back if they were fired for blowing the whistle, or in other cases they may be entitled to compensation for lost wages. Ultimately, it will be up to the board to decide what is appropriate, and the board's order would be enforceable like a court order.

Now, that being said, I hope that it would never come to that. But it's reassuring to me and I believe to many members of this Assembly and to many of those in the public sector to know that this is written into the proposed amendment act that we have before us. This provides a sense of security to those that would be potentially coming forward if they were to disclose a wrongdoing or gross mismanagement that they may encounter.

While the current act requires the commissioner to issue an annual report, the required contents are mainly statistics relating to the number of inquiries, disclosures, and investigations. The amended act would require more details, including the types of proven wrongdoings in the disclosure received by the Public Interest Commissioner, summary findings in cases where wrongdoings or acts of reprisal are found to have been committed, the specific recommendations made to public entities or offices of the Legislature and the entities' responses to such recommendations, and any offences committed or penalties given under the act. This will make it more clear to Albertans what the commissioner achieves every year.

Additionally, the all-party committee also considered: what should happen if the commissioner is away while there is still work to be done? I'm sure that we've all found ourselves in that kind of a situation, where we've had to leave for whatever reason and need to delegate our responsibility to someone else. Under the new legislation this would give the commissioner the ability to delegate authority in the event of a normal absence, and this would be done at the discretion of the commissioner and would allow investigations to continue if the commissioner is away. The provision we are proposing is effectively the same as the delegation authorities already given to the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Alberta Ombudsman.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, I just want to say how important I feel this piece of legislation is. Not only is this contributing to an improvement in our overall culture and making sure that we are working hard together with public servants here in the province of Alberta to make sure that our ministries are functioning well, but we are making sure that we're doing it at the same time as we're

strengthening our democracy. At the same time, this strengthens our public service here in the province and makes sure that things are functioning in the best way possible.

With that, I'm going to complete my remarks. I'd encourage all members to support this particular bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is a very important bill, in my mind. I have a very strong belief in accountability, honesty, transparency in government as in all dealings.

One of the things in listening to other speakers that's really clear is that it's not just having the ability to report but the fact that individual people are making the choice to basically, in some ways, take a very big chance on their future employment, on their standing in different settings to make these reports. The choice is always there. Every one of us at every stage in our lives every day have choices to make. Do you report something you see that you know to be a wrongdoing, or do you sometimes, you know, ignore it or leave it till later because you haven't got the time? First and foremost, I think I would really admire the people that do come forward when they see or are aware of something that they know to be a wrongdoing.

Wrongdoings can be the very obvious ones like somebody creating a substantial, specific, or undue danger to the public or to the environment. Even there, though, you're taking a chance. You're putting yourself out there, and there is some potential for harm. The one that really spoke to me, though, was the section on gross mismanagement of public funds or a public asset and/or knowingly directing or counselling an individual to commit any of the other wrongdoings already mentioned. It's not that one so much but the gross mismanagement, including egregious and/or systemic cases of bullying and harassment.

Actually, when I thought about it, I realized I know someone in this situation right now, and it's pretty horrendous. This is a person who's working in a very responsible position, has been for 35 years, and another person in the same building, in the same institution but not directly her supervisor, has taken it upon herself to bully the person I'm speaking about. Bullying is a very difficult behaviour to counter because bullying is often subtle, and it can be repeated and subtle, and then it becomes harassment if it's regular and ongoing. Somebody looking in from the outside might say, "Well, it's not causing physical harm," but it's causing harm in so many invisible ways.

One of the things that comes out is that the person starts to experience – or several of the things that come out is that the person upon whom this bullying is inflicted starts feeling unsure of themselves: did I really do something wrong? They begin to doubt their own abilities even, like I said, when working in a position for over 30 years very successfully with no complaints, no problems, never any problem at work, no work complaints. They start doubting themselves. They've got anxiety about what they're doing. They start suffering. In a lot of cases there's some depression because it's very, very hard to go into work every day being pretty certain that you're going to be facing behaviour that is negative to you, negative about you.

If it carries on for long enough, it spreads, behaviour like that. Things can be said to other people. People who are not directly affected in the workplace can start taking sides. You know: am I on the side of the victim, or am I on the side of the bully? The bully has the advantage because they often have the power, and then people who are undecided, uncommitted may go with them because

this is the side most likely to come out on top. As you can see, the person who is being bullied is put increasingly into a very solitary, very lonely, and very anxiety-ridden corner, where they don't know what they should do, what is the best thing to do to not be bullied even more.

11:50

When you put all that together, you know, I'm really, really happy that this description of bullying and harassment is in the new whistle-blower legislation because it does give the person who is being harassed or bullied another way they can get justice for themselves; that is, if their union maybe helps to a certain point but hasn't completely helped, if human rights legislation hasn't helped. When all things are exhausted, then they can go to the Public Interest Commissioner, the Ombudsman, and be free of danger of reprisal. This is so important because we are speaking about people's livelihoods.

By the time it gets to the legislative and the point where they're taking action against the bully or trying to, they're often very worn down in points of confidence, so the more supports they have and the more they feel that society as a whole supports them in fighting for themselves and in stopping something that everybody knows in their heart of hearts is wrong is a good thing.

I am very happy about this legislation and support it completely. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill as amended? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I was very interested to see not just this bill but many related bills that this government has brought forward in the two years that we've been here. I was thinking about this bill earlier this week, this one in particular, when I was taking a document I had gotten from my grandmother to get framed. As I've spoken about in this House a few times, my great-grandfather was a Member of Parliament back in the '50s and '60s. We would not have seen eye to eye on many policies as he was a Diefenbaker Conservative, but this meant that he was present for the passing of the Human Rights Act. As such, being a personal friend of Diefenbaker, he had a hand-signed copy of the Bill of Rights. It had been sitting in a box in my grandmother's basement for a number of years. She felt that

it was appropriate that she hand it on to me, so I brought it in to get framed.

I was thinking about, you know, what that bill intended to do. It ended up not being as effective as it could have been, which is why we now have the Charter of Rights as opposed to the Bill of Rights. But I was reflecting back on all of the developments in Canadian democracy that we've seen over the years. There are things that have always been a part of Canadian democracy, things like freedom of the press, mostly freedom of speech, things like that that are truly part of any Westminster-style parliament, indeed part of any democracy. I was happy to see that all of these are continuing to be brought forward.

You know, the public interest disclosure act, often referred to as whistle-blower protection, was brought forward previously, and it allowed for employees of various public bodies to come forward . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) we will now rise and report.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 13. The committee also reports progress on the following bill: Bill 11. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we've made some great progress and had some vigorous debate this morning, so I would move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 16, 2017

Day 34

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 16, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 74 students from the wonderful school of Eastview in Red Deer-South. They are accompanied by teachers Kim Foster, Isaac Terrenzio, and Tracy Beingessner and chaperones Jodi Quintal, Gail McDonald, Sandi O'Brien, Mike Hudak, Angie Desharnais, and Laurette Woodward. Would you all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you 43 students from the amazing school of St. Timothy. They are accompanied today by Miss Kyra Reilly and Mrs. Kristina Schmidt. I would ask all the students and their teachers to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?
Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly Ms Wilma Shim, chair of Special Olympics Alberta; Mr. Johnny Byrne, CEO of Special Olympics Alberta; Mr. Brian Varga, chair of the provincial games; and the athletes, volunteers, and staff of the Special Olympics. An hour ago we saw the torch run final leg relay kick off on the front steps of the Legislature with the Law Enforcement Torch Run as guardians of the flame. In 52 days the Special Olympics Alberta Summer Games will take place in Medicine Hat, from July 7 to 9. It will be a thrilling weekend for over 1,000 athletes from all over Alberta, full of incredible competition and celebration of the Special Olympics community.

Ms Shim, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Varga, and the participants of the Special Olympics are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask them all now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, it would be amiss – I didn't know until after the event, but one of the torch runners is, in fact, a sister of the hon. Minister of Service Alberta. And I would advise all of you – I'm sure you'll be on a waiting list – that when you come down to Medicine Hat to spend some of your money in July, we'd be more than happy to have you there.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some special guests from the Canadian Franchise Association. With

us today is Mr. Ryan Eickmeier, vice-president of government relations and public policy for CFA, along with 20 representatives from some of Alberta's and Canada's biggest franchises. There are too many for me to name individually today, but I want to thank them all for joining us. I will point out that our guests are here on a special occasion for their organization, Franchise Awareness Day. It also marks the 50th anniversary of the CFA. There are 40,000 franchisees operating coast to coast; 60 per cent of their membership operates in Alberta. I thank them for joining us today, and I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Tim Parnett. Tim is the founder of Mightywheels.ca, an advocacy website for people with physical disabilities. Tim is joined today by his father, Glen Parnett; his mother, Kelly Parnett; as well as my devoted constituency office assistant, Joscelyn Proby; our social work placement student, Adiatu Kuyatah; and another constituent, Jennifer Easaw, who joins us here in the House for the first time today to witness the proceedings. I invite them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you the following incredibly smart and hard-working individuals from the Department of Advanced Education, which is indisputably the best department in the government of Alberta. In the gallery with us today we have Charles Barnard, Cheryl Naundorf, Claire Tunney, David Williams, and Lauren Chomyn. I also want to recognize people who are not here today but have contributed significantly to some work that we have recently accomplished: Debbie Andre, John Muir, Kelly Turner, Natasha McKenzie, Peter Pagano, Roderick Wiltshire, Sandra Wagenseil, and Waqas Yousafzai.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the hard work, dedication, and expertise that these people have so generously contributed in guiding our ministry, stakeholders, and the province through the legislation of Bill 7, An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining. I'm very proud of my department and of the comprehensive rigour that they have applied to the process on everything from gathering data through the many consultation avenues to getting right the fine print of the actual bill. They were instrumental in helping us listen to all Albertans so that we could find the right balance and deliver the long-neglected rights that Bill 7 ensures. I'd ask them to please rise to receive my heartfelt thanks and the recognition of all in this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from the Boys and Girls Club of Strathcona County. I will be speaking about their work later on in my member's statement. Tyler Roed is the executive director, who has worked hard for many, many years to achieve the success of the club, and from the board of directors are Brock Day, Helen Conroy, Leta Shannon, and Sean Jenkinson. I would like them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Service Alberta and of Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like very much to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the House my sister Jessica McLean. Jessica is here today with the Special Olympics torch run. As you mentioned, she was one of the torch runners. She is an athlete and an accomplished swimmer with Special Olympics. She has competed at the national level, winning numerous gold medals. She is a member of their masters' swim club, and she is on the Edmonton and provincial athletes' committee. I am very proud of her and her accomplishments. Seeing her run today brought a tear to my eye. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to introduce her today in the House. I'd ask that she rise and please receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: A special welcome to you.

Members' Statements

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

Sunalta Community in Calgary

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak about a neighbourhood in Calgary-Currie that is working hard to create a welcoming community for all. That neighbourhood is Sunalta. Built in the early 1900s by the CPR, its name is a fusion of sunny plus Alberta, hence Sunalta. Today Sunalta is home to Albertans who live in one-, two-, and three-storey walk-ups, who live in basement suites, condos, side-by-sides, and you name it. Some, unfortunately, do not have a place to call home, but everyone is welcome in Sunalta.

1:40

I am so proud of the work Sunalta does to foster inclusion. This summer the Sunalta Community Association and five other organizations are creating a 10-day camp for immigrant and refugee youth aged 13 to 17, calling this initiative My Summer Journey YYC. Youth will participate in urban art projects, go on field trips to local tourism destinations, and explore Calgary by bike. The goal, Mr. Speaker, is to engage recent immigrant and refugee youth in hands-on art and cultural activities as well as to teach technical and practical skills.

Another example is Jane's walk, part of an international initiative to help communities foster growth. This walk was attended by myself and people of all ages. We visited what was once a vacant lot that has since been transformed by the community members into a wildflower garden with picnic tables, memorial stepping stones, and a crabapple tree.

Sunalta is also home to local businesses like One Way Foods, where you are greeted with the aroma of banana bread, and Mikey's juke joint, a well-known local music venue.

Sunalta is where I met a man using solar panels to heat his garage eager to know more about our energy efficiency programs. It's also where I met a couple who provide services to people with disabilities eager to hear about my Henson trust consultations.

This is Sunalta, Mr. Speaker. Sunalta has been welcoming change, families, and diversity for well over 100 years, and I hope they will continue to welcome everyone for many more years to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Federal and Provincial Government Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government just does not have the backs of Albertans, especially when this NDP government deals with their BFF, Justin Trudeau. There was the closing of the Vegreville immigration centre, killing hundreds of good rural jobs. When Trudeau brought legislation forward solidifying the tanker ban along the B.C. coast, where was the NDP? Missing in action. Does the NDP even understand the significance of the tanker ban and the impact it will have on our oil industry? Either they don't understand, they don't care, or, worse yet, they actually revel in the potential demise of Alberta's number one industry.

Last week the Prime Minister's hand-picked panel recommended moving the National Energy Board from Calgary to Ottawa. Where was the NDP? Out in left field. Is there anyone over there in left field that understands that the heart of Canada's energy industry is right here in Alberta? The federal government continues to kick Alberta when it's down, with things like GST on the carbon tax and billions in unfair equalization, and the NDP remains complacent if not complicit in these actions.

Let's face it. Social licence is a hoax. Those opposed to our oil and gas industry still oppose it today. The tanker ban is a classic example. The highly touted carbon tax, the biggest tax increase in the province, got us nothing. Well, it did get us free light bulbs installed by an out-of-province company. Albertans don't need light bulbs. They need timely health care, quality education, safe communities, well-maintained highways, and jobs.

This government simply does not have Albertans' backs, but they do have their bestie Trudeau's back and the backs of environmental radicals from around the world. This government has brought forward three brutal, debt-laden budgets in a row. These budgets are creating record levels of debt, and Albertans will be paying billions in annual interest payments.

This government has done nothing to create a stable, business-friendly environment. In fact, it has taken every opportunity to destroy the Alberta advantage. Without business investment, there can be no jobs and prosperity.

Wildrose believes Alberta's government agenda should be to put Albertans first. We need to build relationships with the rest of Canada and the world, relationships built on trust and respect, with strength, rather than to cower and appease. If we have just one plea . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Government Accountability

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the constant criticisms of this Legislature is that we as legislators too often put partisan politics before the best interests of our constituents. That's a fair criticism. Members on both sides of the House have been accused of being in the pocket of big business or unions or of lacking compassion or not respecting democracy or deliberately acting against the best interests of Albertans.

Often these complaints are not based on the actions of the specific member being accused. In our system of government members answer to the actions of caucus colleagues past and present because one of the most important aspects of representative democracy is that there is someone answerable to the people. We wear the collective history of our political affiliation because the people who elect us bear the weight of the decisions made in this Chamber.

It's true that the Progressive Conservatives, after 44 years of governing this great province, have more history to account for than any other party in this House. While we wear that history proudly with names like Klein and Lougheed, finding admirers across the province as well as across party lines, we also acknowledge that we've made our fair share of mistakes. We've taken our lumps from the government for some of those mistakes.

That is why I find it so disappointing that the government is taking question period as simply another opportunity to repeat key messages and attack the opposition, when a question about transitions for worried coal communities draws accusations from the minister that these communities were being ignored by the opposition instead of actually taking the opportunity to inform concerned Albertans, when questions about the safety of children in care are brushed off by the Premier because that specific case didn't happen on her watch.

Mr. Speaker, a preference for your own political team is to be expected. But when that preference for your own team or your disdain for the opposition continues to cloud your better judgment and prevents you from answering questions given to us justifiably by concerned Albertans, then your preference has become a prejudice and an obstacle to good governance.

Thank you.

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

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Asian Heritage Month. Here in Edmonton Asian Heritage Month has been around since 1998, and in 2002 May was declared Asian Heritage Month by the government of Canada. This month gives us an opportunity to reflect on the contributions made by individuals of Asian descent to Canada and its culture. Our society is a rich mosaic of diversity and inclusion, and a significant part of that mosaic is due to the many individuals of Asian heritage who make this province home. As the Canadian Heritage Minister reminded us earlier this month, "Whether from East Asia, South Asia, Western Asia, Southeast Asia or the Middle East, Asian Canadians have helped our country prosper and grow."

Asian-Canadians and Asian-Albertans have been here in Alberta for many generations, Mr. Speaker. I myself am proud to be a second-generation Asian-Albertan that has the opportunity to celebrate my heritage right here in this House.

I know that our Asian communities across this province are extraordinarily proud and vibrant. In fact, every single year I attend numerous new year events across the province for weeks on end, Mr. Speaker, to celebrate and share in the prosperity a new year brings to our communities. Here in Edmonton during Asian Heritage Month there are opportunities to experience films, choirs, and even opera. I encourage all members to seek out and attend these and other events in your communities.

Our Asian communities are working people in this province. They're business leaders, they're doctors, they're teachers, they're nurses, they're labourers, and indeed even MLAs, Mr. Speaker. So I'm proud of this province for being inclusive and for the opportunity that it offers to our diverse communities. Our province and indeed our nation are better because of the unique diversity that our Asian heritage and culture bring to the table.

Diversity and inclusion are something that I am proud this government stands for, and I hope all members of this House will strive to uphold those values and be strong ambassadors for the

diversity in this province, whether that's for our Asian culture or any other. Alberta is stronger together.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Boys and Girls Club of Strathcona County

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Boys and Girls Club of Strathcona County has been hard at work in my community since 2001. Starting with one small program, they have expanded to serve more than 750 youth through the support of businesses, community groups, and family and community services.

One of the things that makes the Boys and Girls Club unique is their sole focus on serving young people. No child is ever denied access to the wide range of programs due to their inability to pay.

Programs at the Boys and Girls Club are created to provide opportunities that build leadership and character for every individual through every stage of their lives. This strength-based perspective and capacity-building focus have earned fantastic results and have been adopted by many other groups. My own practice as a community and social planner has benefited from learning about this asset-based philosophy.

The club has grown so quickly in Strathcona county that they have recently opened a third location in Sherwood Park. Executive Director Ty Roed has said that one reason for their growth is that the Boys and Girls Club offers an affordable solution in a tough economy.

They have worked hard to become a part of the community. I particularly like how the two satellite locations are situated in schools to offer before and after school programs. In addition to before and after school care programs, the club runs summer programs and adventure camps, where there are opportunities for kids to go on trips to places like Banff, Calgary, Drumheller, and maybe the Legislative Assembly.

I strongly encourage you all to visit your local Boys and Girls Club to meet the dedicated teams that work to deliver these important services and to learn more about the multitude of ways in which this club strengthens communities by always seeing the best in our youth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

1:50

Property Rights and Bill 204

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express my disbelief that this government, that claims to champion protecting property rights for Albertans, would be so completely out of touch on the matter. Despite their claims to champion this topic while in opposition, when the rubber hit the road, they drove straight into the ditch, throwing one of their few rural MLAs under the bus in the process.

The now Infrastructure minister even had his picture on a glossy brochure titled *Your Land, Your Rights*, which contained all sorts of indignant quotes on how evil some of the sections of bills 19, 24, 36, and 50 were. It's ironic, considering that when this side of the House gave them the opportunity to actually fix some of these egregious parts, they failed landowners completely. The hon. minister even once stated, "I find it ironic in a way that it's the New Democrat opposition that is standing up and has stood up from the beginning for the [property] rights of [Albertans] in this province." Well, Mr. Speaker, we know from yesterday's actions by the

government that they say one thing and do another. I believe that meets the definition of two-faced.

The government made no efforts to work together to address any concerns they had with this bill. They could have proposed meaningful amendments or even suggested sending it to committee so that they could hear from experts on the subject. An all-party committee even recommended unanimously that the government abolish adverse possession. Then the same government members of that committee voted yesterday to destroy this bill in the House, a disgraceful position to take from a party who had released property rights propaganda stating, "Together we can change these laws that trample on important rights of citizens."

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that this government once more failed its citizens, not just rural Albertans but all Albertans, by destroying this bill. Albertans have long memories, and they will remember who voted for property rights and those that failed to do so. The Wildrose Party was formed in large part because of attacks on property rights. This is important to Albertans. Any government would be wise to remember that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I wonder if we could have unanimous consent to introduce guests that were missed in the earlier introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two guests today. Kathleen DeSousa has just completed her social work diploma program at NorQuest College and is completing her practicum in my constituency office this spring. In the fall Kathleen will be entering the bachelor of social work degree program offered here through the University of Calgary. Arike Akomolafe is a first-year social work diploma student from NorQuest College who is doing her practicum with the New Democrat caucus this spring. She also will be continuing her education at NorQuest in the fall and hopes to work with families and children after graduating.

I want to wish both of them the very best in their education and their future. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Jean: Earlier today I sent a letter to the Prime Minister urging him to use common sense when it comes to proposed changes to the National Energy Board and the pipeline approval process in our country. I'm deeply concerned that the idea is being floated right now to have the headquarters of the NEB moved from Calgary to Ottawa. The Prime Minister might think it's okay to alienate the west, but the everyday Albertans I talk to would truly disagree. What pressure is the Premier putting on Ottawa and Trudeau to keep the NEB in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I must say that it is always a pleasure to be able to get up and speak to something where the Leader of the Opposition and I are in fundamental agreement, because we absolutely agree that it is not a wise decision to move the NEB to Ottawa. We made that position very clear to the crew that was reviewing the NEB previously, and just today as well we had a press conference, at which point I made it very clear that our government was absolutely opposed to the NEB moving and that we would continue our work to oppose that because it makes no sense. It makes about as much sense as moving the Atlantic marketing board to Winnipeg, and that doesn't make sense either.

Mr. Jean: The threat to move the NEB is just the latest in a string of decisions that clearly show that Ottawa is ignoring our province and Albertans. While the Premier may be comfortable with her current complacency with Trudeau, Albertans are getting a raw deal during really tough times. The Infrastructure Bank went to Ottawa, not Calgary. Valuable jobs are moving away from Vegreville, and now the NEB could be closing up shop in Calgary. Will the Premier just admit that she is failing to defend Alberta's interests with the Trudeau Liberals?

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, I think what I just outlined is the very opposite of that. We are of course always working to promote and create jobs here in Alberta and to preserve those that we have. Of course, it makes obvious sense for the NEB to stay in Alberta, which is, of course, the centre of the energy industry for all of Canada. In fact, as we move forward in terms of growing the ability of our energy industry to diversify our markets, it makes sense for the NEB to stay here with those people who are leading that growth, and that is the message I will continue to deliver to Ottawa each and every day.

Mr. Jean: The Premier can't say that she's using diplomacy when she spends her time taking potshots at our neighbouring western provinces, who should be our greatest allies. Albertans are rightly frustrated. They're losing out on their hard-earned dollars to the NDP's carbon tax, all in the name of social licence. The federal government is suggesting that the pipeline approval process should take three years now instead of 15 months. This is unacceptable. Will the Premier wake up to the facts and realize that she doesn't have a friend in Trudeau and that Alberta is being hurt in the process?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I will of course remind the members opposite is that after a decade of a Conservative government here in Alberta and a Conservative government in Ottawa we didn't get a pipeline built. But you know what we are doing? We have gotten a pipeline approved – construction is scheduled to start this fall – and that happened because our government is working hard on addressing and accommodating national interests, including those with respect to climate change, because that is the way you lead. I am very proud that that is exactly what our government is doing.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Oil and Gas Transportation to the West Coast

Mr. Jean: Alberta isn't just being overlooked in the federal government's eyes; we're also being ignored when it comes to major policy decisions. Last week Trudeau introduced legislation that will establish a ban on tanker ships along the central and northern coast of British Columbia. Out of this government, not even a peep. The tanker ban is a direct attack on the viability of

Alberta's oil and gas industry. Why did the Premier sit on her hands while the federal government was firing the latest shots in its war on Alberta?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is misinformed. In fact, our government was very clear in our representations to the federal government about how they should move forward with respect to the northern coast port possibilities. We believe that we still need to leave it open for more upgraded product to be able to leave those ports, and we'll continue to engage in conversations with the federal government on exactly that point.

Mr. Jean: This tanker ban will have a real negative impact on our province, but the NDP is only willing to support our energy industry when they're embarrassed into doing so. That's the only reason they supported our Wildrose motion to urge the government to not have a tanker ban. Since then, they've been entirely silent on the issue. Albertans aren't having the wool pulled over their eyes on this. Is the shell game of a Premier that you'll say one thing, then do another to serve your NDP world view?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what our government is going to do is that we are going to look at all the issues that are being considered when it comes to building national energy infrastructure, and we're not going to point fingers and yell at people from inside our echo chamber and pretend that there aren't legitimate issues that other provinces need to consider. It is that approach that got us the approval for Kinder Morgan, and it is that approach that is going to ultimately see that pipeline built.

Mr. Jean: Not that it matters to the NDP, but the tanker ban means Northern Gateway will never, ever happen. The Northern Gateway pipeline project proposed a safe, reliable option for transporting Alberta oil to world market. It was supported by a majority of the First Nations along the proposed route. It would have resulted in thousands upon thousands of jobs for Albertans, and it was approved by the rigorous NEB process. When the province is experiencing hundreds of thousands of lost jobs, why in the world did the Premier fail to advocate for an important project like the Northern Gateway pipeline?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the reason that the Northern Gateway pipeline was rejected by the courts was because of the way in which the members opposite and their government approached decision-making: plug their ears, not listen to anybody, call people names, demonize their opposition, and absolutely destroy the process so that, as a result, the courts reversed the decision. That is not the way you build a nation. That is not the way you get infrastructure built. That's not the way you build an economy. We have a different approach, and it's working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:00

Pure North S'Energy Foundation

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Carl Amrhein, has been accused of personally lobbying for Pure North. What's worse is that he was pushing his private agenda while maintaining his post as the most senior official at Alberta Health Services. This kind of nepotism and insider trading is exactly why Albertans voted out the last government, which is why the Wildrose has written to the Ethics Commissioner asking for an investigation. Albertans want to know: does the Minister of Health think the actions of her deputy minister are appropriate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I want to reiterate that under the previous government \$10 million was awarded in funding. If you have questions about that funding for the wellness program, please ask the Member for Calgary-Lougheed because he was the associate minister at the time. If you have questions about what's happened under this government, I'm proud that this government has worked outside the box to find a nurse practitioner program. That's a program that is very different from the wellness program that's been spoken to in the past. My deputy gave advice twice not to fund the wellness program, but the previous government did.

Mr. Yao: Albertans are tired of hearing the NDP's secrecy, and they're tired of seeing this government work so hard to cover up their own mistakes. On April 10 we asked if the minister knew of this issue, and she said no. We have now seen a brief from September 2016 that says otherwise. The minister and her staff are refusing to comment on this very serious issue and have repeatedly dodged the media. Why has the minister been silent on an issue of this magnitude, and what are you hiding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise in this House and speak to the matter of this case. Specifically, the pilot project that's being referred to I believe today was evaluated by three committees led by the Institute of Health Economics and includes leading national nursing researchers and educators. With regard to the program of the past I absolutely agree. That's why I refused to fund extensions on the program of the past. I don't believe that that was a proper use of funds, and that's why this government stepped up, did things differently, and refused to move forward with what the Member for Calgary-Lougheed clearly endorsed at the time.

Mr. Rodney: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

The second supplemental.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this government is spending Alberta's tax dollars, they better be sure they're getting the best value for the dollar spent. This means picking contracts based on a fair, transparent proposal and bidding process. Sadly, this concept seems to be completely lost on this Health minister. To the Premier: what are you doing to ensure that all contracts and Albertans' hard-earned money are being awarded based on facts and not personal relationships, and will you dismiss this deputy minister?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I have all the confidence in the world that this process was appropriate. As the members opposite have heard, the minister in question was involved in a decision about a completely different issue than that which they are trying to confuse everybody else with. If they're concerned about that other decision, that was made based on personal relationships, I suggest they look to their left and ask their dance partners why they did that, but in the meantime the minister is making contracting decisions in the appropriate way.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The left doesn't look that good.

AIMCo Board of Directors

Mr. McIver: The NDP has proudly proclaimed that now all Albertans can apply to be on all boards appointed by this government. When it comes to handling \$90 billion as an AIMCo board member, I'm not sure I want just any person in charge unless, of course, they're well qualified. To the Premier: why can't you admit that your socialist dogma does not make all people equally able to manage \$90 billion, and will you re-establish minimum requirements that let only qualified people do this important job?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that we have very great confidence in the professionals at AIMCo to make sound investment decisions. Indeed, this is why we're seeing excellent outcomes as a result of their work. But I'd just like to read the following quote:

In making an appointment, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall have regard to the desirability of having a board that is comprised of individuals who, in the aggregate, have the full range of skills, knowledge and experience necessary to ... [run] the Corporation.

That is in the regulation, that is the rule that we are following, and I suggest that the member opposite judge us on our record.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. AIMCo manages \$90 billion, including the heritage trust fund, and about \$70 billion in pension funds belonging to Alberta workers. Here's what the NDP took out in section 5: "proven and demonstrable experience and expertise in investment management, finance, accounting or law or experience as an executive or a director in a senior publicly traded issuer." Much different than what the Premier just said. Premier, where can we look up something comparable to that, not what you just put in but something that actually has teeth and is specific and makes people be qualified?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I think it's important for the members opposite to understand that what I just read actually ensures exactly what he's referring to.

In addition, the board of AIMCo is looking at guidelines that will also include exactly the additional issues that he's talking about. And you know what? The quality and the competence of the people that this government has appointed to that board are absolutely stellar, and nobody could possibly criticize them. So I would suggest that the member opposite look at our record rather than looking for problems that aren't there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McIver: All the qualified people the Premier refers to were appointed before these changes that they made.

Premier, there are four new members coming on. Section 6 required a nominating committee to keep AIMCo at arm's length to stop political interference. Albertans don't trust that that won't happen. To the Premier. I ask you once again: will you assure this House and all Albertans, after admitting that you need to make more changes, that you will not stack this board with your friends simply to propagate the NDP world view?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this. You know, look at the quality of the people who have been appointed recently. Those people were appointed in October. We changed the system, Mr. Speaker, in September. Ken Kroner, who previously managed \$4 trillion in assets, was appointed. Phyllis Clark, formerly the vice-president and CFO of the U of A, also

came on. We've got several more appointments going. Judge us by the people who come onto the board. They're going to be stellar, like these people are. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, you may want to listen sometimes, not keep talking all of the time.

Pure North S'Energy Foundation (continued)

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the former PC government gave a \$10 million grant to Pure North for a vitamin/mineral supplement program against the advice of medical officials who expressed concerns over its effectiveness and potential health risks. The NDP last year gave another \$4.2 million to the same group for a nurse practitioner program led in a primary care clinic. Fourteen million dollars represents a significant investment in a group that third-party reviewers said should not receive funding. The Minister of Health claimed to have no knowledge of her ministry's concerns before approving the grant, but an AHS briefing note suggests otherwise. To the minister: given the concerns...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. On what he does say about the \$10 million for the wellness program, I have to agree. That's one of the reasons why my department gave me advice not to extend the funding that was granted under the former government. Twice they gave me that advice; twice I acted on their very important advice.

When it came to nurse practitioner demonstration projects, I think all members of this House – I hope all members of this House – would agree how valuable nurse practitioners are, particularly in working with vulnerable populations, and there are a number of different nurse practitioner demonstration projects currently under way just to prove that thing, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: CBC news reported that former AHS official Carl Amrhein reportedly has a history of participating in and lobbying for Pure North. This raises serious concerns about a potential conflict of interest in the awarding of both these grants. Albertans deserve to know what role he played and whether or not his involvement biased the approval process. I've asked the Auditor General to investigate, but perhaps the minister could set the record straight. Were you aware of your deputy and his conflict of interest, and if so, when?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. It's my understanding that Dr. Amrhein made his disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner. If the Ethics Commissioner wishes to look into this further, we certainly welcome that, and it's my understanding that there were also questions today brought forward to the Auditor General. Again, if the Auditor General chooses to pursue that, we welcome that. The nurse practitioner project has very rigorous oversight, and we welcome that to any of the other decisions that were made under the former government, of course, as well.

Dr. Swann: It doesn't sound like the minister wants to answer the question.

In Public Accounts today I asked the assistant deputy minister if he was concerned that the latest \$4.2 million grant to Pure North for

a nurse practitioner led clinic program would be used to further the supplements of vitamins and minerals. He denied any connection to Pure North, which clearly views this as an extension of their program. Can the minister assure us that no megavitamins are being handed out by this clinic and table their contract?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Just to clarify, the disclosure was made to the Ethics Commissioner. I don't recall any discussions that spoke to that specific matter with regard to the previous question.

With regard to the nurse practitioner grant agreement, which this question relates to, the agreement very clearly spells out that Pure North must obtain written permission to use any of the information outside of the agreement, which has not been granted. If any organization does not follow the grant agreement, Pure North or any other, their funding could be discontinued. Clinicians are beholden to their colleges as well as to those who are granting this funding. We, of course, work in partnership with the colleges, but these are for nurse practitioners, RNs, LPNs, and health care aides.

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

Support for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans who use wheels to be mobile like my friend Tim Parnett, who joins us today in the Legislature, often report difficulties in navigating parts of everyday life due to barriers many of us take for granted. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: what strategies has this government taken to make sure Albertans with physical disabilities have accessible options?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government is protecting and investing in things that make a difference in the lives of Albertans. We have heard loud and clear from advocates: nothing about us without us. That's why our track record is very clear that we are working with advocates, we are working with service providers, and we are working with individuals with disabilities to make sure that the policies respond to their needs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans with disabilities are reporting long wait times for approval of new AISH applications. To the same minister: tell us what is being done to alleviate the backlog of AISH approvals.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. For 55,000 Albertans who rely on this program, it's more than a cheque, more than a government program. We have increased funding to this program, and we have a comprehensive set of benefits through Health that supports this program. We have put together an AISH action plan which actually sets out the details on how we will address the long-standing issues under the previous government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta building code was recently updated, in the fall. However, Alberta's Barrier-free Design Guide, which is part of the building code, has not been updated since 2008. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: does the government plan to update this guide given new advances in technology and increased awareness of accessibility issues facing people with disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. Alberta has established the Barrier Free Sub-Council, and this group deals specifically with barrier-free access and is in place to review all code changes. This council is responsible for producing a guide to help builders, municipalities, and Albertans transition towards more accessible, barrier-free communities. It is my understanding that the subcouncil completed work on an updated guide in March, and a finalized version should be available in early June.

Coal Workers

Mr. MacIntyre: Float like an indifferent butterfly and sting like a killer bee: that was the Minister of Municipal Affairs' approach to answering the questions from concerned coal workers last night on the telephone town hall. Minister, the Albertans that called in weren't looking for your repetitive talking points. They were really looking for hope. I'm going to give you another shot to answer their questions. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: please answer the mayor of Hanna's question. Will the Advisory Panel on Coal Communities' report be made public?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I did have a telephone town hall, two hours of it last night. I listened to concerned citizens and workers from around the province, and I was glad to take their questions, as I took the mayor's question. I did tell him that once we get the feedback from the coal transition panel, we will be making it available.

Mr. MacIntyre: The Albertans that called in needed compassion, not canned talking points. Given that one caller pointed out, "You talk about the power companies receiving financial benefit, but I haven't heard anything yet about how you're going to help the coal miners," and given that in response the minister spoke about a transition from coal to natural gas plants and that skilled coal miners aren't trained to work in natural gas plants, Minister, what is the compensation planned for coal miners losing their jobs due to government policies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the conversations last night were centred mostly around the power plants, and that's what we were discussing, the three companies that did receive funds to help these workers transition. Those plans are ongoing. We will work with those communities, as we have been, and with those workers and those leaders in those areas on what that transition is going to look like. I'm not going to deal in hypotheticals, even though they want me to, until we have all of the information that comes out. We will wait for that, and we will work with it when we get it.

Thank you.

Mr. MacIntyre: Coal workers know that the companies they work for are in no position to commit to retraining opportunities. That is why they were asking you, Minister. Given that 69 per cent of the callers were looking for retraining opportunities and that we're two years into this plan and these workers and their families are desperate for the NDP to offer specifics, Minister, will there be any training funding for laid-off employees? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for your information, 12 out of the 18 coal plants were going to come offline by the feds with zero help from anybody. Unlike the previous federal government and what these guys would do, we're working with the communities on a transition plan to make sure that we do what's best for all of their unique circumstances.

Thank you.

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

High School Education Funding Formula

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's high school graduation season, and while graduates are excited about finishing grade 12, many principals and teachers I've spoken with are gravely concerned about the reduction in funding from 60 to 45 credit enrolment units in this year's Education budget. It's estimated that this change translates to a \$6.4 million funding cut to 24 of Alberta's rural school boards. To the Minister of Education: why did you make this reduction that disproportionately harms rural school boards and, more importantly, rural students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. In regard to the high school credits, first of all, we were looking for efficiencies, certainly listening to the members opposite to find efficiencies, and we found that the majority of high schools are now using the high school redesign programming. We also found that the average high school student is taking 37 credits, so the cap that we put at 45 credits was, I think, a pretty reasonable way to deal with this because we're looking to make sure that we spend public money in the most efficient way possible.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that statistics show that rural students average a higher number of CEUs than urban students, in fact, 41 versus 37, and given that this funding change could result in some rural boards having to either lay off teachers or restrict educational options for students and given that this is surely not what this minister had intended, to the minister: what are the total savings that you expect to realize from this funding change, and what projected impact will it have on high school completion rates?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are both very good questions. We did look at all of those issues. I just made an announcement, for example, to put \$16 million over the next four years into dual credit programming, which is focused very much on rural high school students. As well, I don't think it's a mystery to anybody that we have been putting money in for enrolment, building and modernizing schools across the province, including in

the hon. member's area. We're looking for ways by which we can make a shift to make sure that we are funding schools and making life better for Alberta families.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the analysis of statistics from one school division showed only 28 students taking more than 60 CEUs but some 249 taking over 45 CEUs, fully one-quarter of the high school enrolment, and given that these additional CEUs are often earned in dual credit, green certificate, and work experience programs that this government, as has just happened, has been eager to promote and given that this means students in rural Alberta will have reduced choices in attempting to finish high school, to the minister: will you consider revisiting this change in your funding model?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's important to make difficult decisions, but it's also important to be modernizing and moving along as we build a proper high school funding formula. The high school redesign program has now moved into the majority of all of the schools here in the province of Alberta. It allows flexibility for students and for teachers and principals to make decisions that are best for their education. We can see discernible improvements in high school completion rates, in attendance and so forth. [interjections] So, yes, we're putting more investment in dual credit, more investment in green certificate as well, and we're making sure that we are funding our . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, please keep your volume down.

Provincial Deficit

Mr. Fildebrandt: The budgets are all in for 2017. All provinces in Canada will run a combined deficit of \$12.8 billion this year. Of that number, 80 per cent is Alberta. Every other province running a deficit, minus Alberta, adds up to \$2.5 billion. This government, though, with a projected deficit of \$10.3 billion, is literally running a deficit the size of the rest of the country combined multiplied by four. The sheer recklessness is breathtaking. Does the Minister of Finance believe that this is responsible?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. What we're doing is making the lives of Albertans better. We will balance by 2023-2024, and in doing that, we're bringing down the operational spending, that in the past was all over the place. Sometimes it was as high as 11 per cent year over year by that side over there. We are going to be reducing our spending under population plus inflation. That will get us back to balance.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Weak sauce, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's role model, Kathleen Wynne of Ontario, has run their province into the ground, spending recklessly, driving energy costs through the roof, and incurring an entire generation to pay for it, and given that, despite this, Ontario, with three times the population of Alberta, will run a smaller deficit by the NDP's accounting standards – if the Premier has national ambitions, she's on track because she's running a national level debt – is the Premier's next goal to exceed the federal deficit?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to point out that the economy is turning around in this province. We have full-time employment that is rising for the third straight month. Rigs are up 100 per cent since last year. Exports are up. Manufacturing is up. We are doing the things in this province that we need to do to get back to balance. We'll continue on that path because that's the path that Albertans require and that we were elected on.

Mr. Fildebrandt: A hundred thousand out-of-work Albertans disagree.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that under a best-case scenario our debt will reach \$71 billion by 2019 – and that best-case scenario requires this minister to keep spending within his budget, something he's never done, and this best-case scenario also requires oil to be 40 per cent higher than it is today – and given that the Minister of Finance has grossly exceeded his deficit projections in all three of his budgets, he clearly can't do his job. If the Minister of Finance exceeds his deficit target for a fourth time, will he just quit?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite enjoying this job, I want to say. Faced with the collapse of the world oil price, we rejected the reckless path that the government over there put us on. Members opposite would make reckless cuts to important public services that would harm Albertans. We're not doing that. We'll get back to balance. We're going to be turning the province around because of the work of this government.

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

Educational Curriculum Review

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are concerned. I received another e-mail just yesterday from someone who understands that specially chosen members of interest groups are invited to participate in community face-to-face engagement sessions to work on the curriculum rewrite. As you can imagine, they're extremely concerned that the new online survey will be another attempt at a nod to stakeholder engagement. Will the minister make the answers to the written submission portion of the first survey available to Albertans, and will he make the written part of the second survey available when it is completed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Yes, we launched the second phase of our curriculum interface with Albertans, and in the first day we already have 2,000 submissions. That's very good. We had 32,000 last time. I'm trying to open it up even more so that we in fact have more public interactions with the working groups and have more participation and presentations to those groups as well. I'm open to any suggestion that continues to make this the most successful process by which we have transparency . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Aheer: I'd really like to see those written submissions, Minister.

Given that agriculture is a critical industry in Alberta and given that our farmers are world leaders in the industry and some are becoming extremely successful in diversifying the industry to include uses for hemp and expanding markets for pulses and other products and given that our agribusiness opportunities are growing and diversifying, how is the government including this industry and

all its complexities, seed to table, in the curriculum rewrite and ensuring that resources and professional development are available to teachers to meet the learning needs of all students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the excellent question. We know that the second-largest industry and probably one of the fastest growing industries continues to be agriculture here in the province. It forms a really important opportunity for us to make that bridge between urban and rural, between food and table and so forth. In our curriculum we will definitely be working to strengthen that across different subject areas and across all grade levels, too, because – you know what? – we want to make sure that we build and continue to build the strongest education system in the country.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, we've heard many times in this House and all over the province that there needs to be changes and that education should focus on literacy and numeracy and also develop 21st-century competencies. This is what's been stated by the government. Given that these guiding statements are of vital importance to those working on the revisions and given that it is important to be clear about the meaning of these terms, to the minister: what exactly does 21st-century competencies mean, and how will it be guiding the new curricula?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a great opportunity for all Albertans to make sure they are engaging in building this new curriculum because the most important investment that we can make in our future is to ensure the highest quality education for our students. So 21st-century competencies are making sure that we have those basic skills in numeracy, in math, basic skills in communication and language, and we're moving them across all subject areas so that students are looking at content, yes, but they're looking at building those basic skills that they can carry with them for the rest of their lives so that we can improve our economy, diversify, and to make sure . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

2:30

Educational Delivery Choices

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's proud history of supporting school choice is an undeniable success which has resulted in better results for our entire education system, including within the public system. Now, unfortunately, a group of NDP-linked front groups have continued their attacks on school choice, demanding that long-standing funding be rescinded. Parents and students are concerned that this government is going to oblige ideological allies and end school choice. To the Minister of Education: will you unequivocally commit today that the funding model for Catholic, charter, private, and home-schooling will indeed remain the same?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I find it interesting that every few months I have to stand up to the same question because we have from the very beginning as a government invested in education. We've invested in enrolment to fund increases in enrolment in all forms of education. We continued to do so in this budget even during very difficult economic times. We made sacrifices in other areas to make

sure that we fund education right across the board. I won't apologize for what we have been doing. You know, when you cast aspersions like this member does, it only causes a bigger problem.

Mr. Rodney: Here's why the question keeps coming up. Given that members of the current government, when in opposition, demanded an end to school choice and given that Public Interest Alberta, the group spearheading the attack on school choice, has well-established links to the governing party and given that the executive director used to work for the Minister of Infrastructure and that their president is a former NDP candidate and that their founder is now the chief of staff within the government, Minister, is your government quietly encouraging PIA in an attempt to build the political conditions to introduce policy that you long advocated for while you were in opposition?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, while the member opposite likes to concoct conspiracy theories like he wants his own TV show or something, we are funding for education, we are making sure that we're building schools, and we're making sure that we're actually strengthening our education system in all of its different manifestations across the province. While other people cast aspersions, as the hon. member is doing here, we're actually getting the job done. We're doing a great job, and I think Albertans think so, too.

Mr. Rodney: No aspersions, just facts.

Given that the minister of seniors is a former vice-president at Public Interest Alberta and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie chaired a special PIA education task force and that this government is clearly very closely aligned with this organization and given that a number of the other NDP MLAs and their partners, including the Premier, have very close ties to a number of the 14 organizations listed on PIA's website, to the minister: have you or your staff had any direct or indirect discussions about changing the current school funding model with any of the 14 organizations lobbying against school choice?

Mr. Eggen: I would like to see after a couple of years that the opposition member, while fitting into his opposition role, would actually ask questions that are meaningful and actually constructive. In fact, we are building to strengthen education, and each time someone like the member opposite is spreading rumours in order to knock public education down. You know what? You've got to rise above it. We certainly do, and we make sure that our students get the very best education here in the province of Alberta. That's why the member opposite got voted out of office, because they didn't do that.

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

School Construction in Edmonton-South West

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents expect and deserve the best quality education in our communities. Given that the new Kim Hung school in my constituency has already been delayed for opening this year, to the Minister of Education: what is the status of this school build after the site caught fire last week?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Our department has been working very closely with Infrastructure and Edmonton public's planning department to get the impact and still have the opening in January 2018. We're hoping that the

damages will be found to be minimal and will have no impact on the time of completion.

I want to take this time as well to commend our hard-working first responders, whose quick response prevented the complete destruction of this facility. Your constituents should know that as soon as the investigation is complete – construction is still ongoing, and the insurance is being finalized – our top priority will be to make sure we . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. As I've asked many times already, the constituents in Edmonton-South West need more schools, specifically high schools. Given that I continue to hear from my constituents about how the previous government failed to open schools, can the minister tell this Assembly how this government is taking the needs of our students seriously?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Our government is committed to making life better for Albertans. Our Budget 2017 has funding for 26 new schools, and we're managing the very largest school build in Alberta's history. It's going very well. I can tell you that as I travel around the province opening new schools, I hear from people how grateful they are that they have a government that's actually getting the job done building those schools and making sure that we are reducing school fees, funding for enrolment. It's a very, very good time for education.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again as I've asked before, given that my constituents deserve a modern and effective high school, can the minister detail to this House if we can expect space in school to provide quality and much-needed education for my constituents?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that we have a growing population. We can see it from the enrolment. We announced five new schools here in Edmonton, one major modernization. Those were K to 9 schools. So guess what? Of course, we're going to need to build high schools to meet those graduates coming from those schools. We will make sure that we have adequate space in all areas, not just in Edmonton but right across the province. You know what? The New Democrats get the job done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Health Care Capital Funding in Central Alberta

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week my colleague asked about the gross inequity of funding to AHS central zone. Instead, the Minister of Health spoke about projects outside of central Alberta. Minister, this isn't good enough. The central zone has the longest wait times in the province, and Albertans deserve a real answer. Is solving the inequity of per capita funding to AHS central zone a priority for this government? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's a priority that we make sure that no matter where you live in Alberta, you get the right care. That's one

of the reasons why we're moving forward with a very long overdue Calgary cancer hospital in the city of Calgary. That's one of the reasons why in Edmonton we're building a new hospital. It hasn't happened in Edmonton since 1989. Of course, there is need in central Alberta, but I'm not going to stop spending money in other parts of the province. I'm going to make sure that we get the projects we need for all of Alberta, including central Alberta.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the central Alberta health zone has increased in geographical size and has a ballooning population and given that the per capita funding received by central Albertans is a small fraction of its neighbouring zones, residents are rightly concerned. Again to the minister: how much longer do central Albertans and front-line workers have to put up with substandard infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure everyone that they are in safe hands. I have to say how proud I am of the work we're doing to invest in communities like Red Deer. Certainly, the families that are benefiting from having those new labour and delivery spaces and recovery spaces at the Red Deer hospital, for example, or the families who are going to be receiving care in Sylvan Lake because this government worked with the community instead of doing things to the community – we've worked in partnership. I'm very proud of the progress that we're making. Is there more to be done? Absolutely. What would undo that? Having the member opposite in government because they're pushing for \$9 billion in infrastructure cuts. Keeping this government here is what's going to make life better.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, given that consulting residents and doctors and nurses and other stakeholders is a positive step towards finding a solution to health care delivery in central Alberta and given that these meetings will mean nothing if the minister does not act on the repeated legitimate outcries of the community, when is the minister going to eliminate this gross inequity and provide front-line workers the infrastructure that they need to deliver the care that central Albertans need?

Ms Hoffman: Speaking of central Alberta, Mr. Speaker, I was really proud during the last constituency break to spend some time with front-line workers in the Red Deer hospital. We had a very productive meeting not only with the physicians in the community but also with registered nurses, people who work in diagnostic imaging, and people who work as porters. Do you know what they told me? They are so glad that they have stable funding. They're glad that they're not seeing billions of dollars in cuts, as proposed by both parties opposite. Yes, they want to work with us on long-term infrastructure plans, and we want to work with them, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:40 Growing Forward 2 Agricultural Policy Framework

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week during the committee meeting on Public Accounts the deputy minister of agriculture mentioned that the minister was meeting with the federal minister of agriculture to discuss specific elements of the new Growing Forward 3 program after Growing Forward 2 expires in 2018. To the minister of agriculture: what specifics came out of

this meeting, and what progress have you made on Growing Forward 3, if that's what we're calling it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would be my bet that it will be called Growing Forward 3. Yeah, we had an opportunity to meet with all the agriculture ministers across Canada, including the federal minister, last week in Ottawa. It gave us a good opportunity to look at our priorities going forward to the larger federal-provincial-territorial meeting on the next national policy framework, which will be happening in St. John's. Discussed at this last meeting in Ottawa was everything from risk management policies to trade and other issues as well. It was a very fruitful meeting. I'm looking forward to the meeting in July.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that current funding from the Growing Forward 2 program is helping our agricultural industry increase innovation, sustainability, and profitability and given that this program is a key part of diversifying Alberta's agricultural industry, to the same minister: how are you ensuring a smooth transition to the new GF 3 program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It is true that the last five years of the current Growing Forward 2 program have put \$400 million into the agricultural industry in Alberta. It's a very successful program, with everything from business risk management for crop insurance, that kind of thing, to grant programs for infrastructure and agrifood processing. It's a great program. I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues across the country to ensure that funding continues in Alberta. There will be different types of discussions. There will be bilateral discussions, Alberta with the federal, and also multilateral with all the provinces. I'm looking forward to it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is a wide array of programs funded by the current GF 2 and given that some programs which are not currently available in GF 2 could help Alberta farmers if added to Growing Forward 3, to the minister: how are you ensuring that the new GF 3 gives Alberta enough flexibility to address specific Alberta priorities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very good question. As I said in my previous answer, there are opportunities to do bilateral discussions as well, you know, on assistant deputy minister, deputy minister, and minister levels. In those bilateral discussions we'll talk about what the member is actually asking: is that flexibility available with the province and the federal government for those funds to help specifically our agriculture industry right here in Alberta? I'm looking forward to those discussions. It's an opportunity to support the industry right across the province.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move that Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, be moved to Government Bills and Orders on the Order Paper.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 14

An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that safety around oil and gas sites that are orphaned is a concern for all Albertans. The proposed bill allows us to take additional and immediate action to close and reclaim infrastructure from upstream oil and gas companies that no longer exist, the results of which will be more jobs and a healthier environment for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the 2015-2016 annual report of the Family Violence Death Review Committee, and I have the requisite number of copies for that.

Thank you.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I received information from Onoway liquor, but it's with regard to highway 777 south. This morning the grader got stuck in the middle of the road, and their concern is with the secondary highway, that it is a disgrace and needs significant repairs, so bringing it to the attention of this House. I have five copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today in my member's statement I referred to Your Land, Your Rights, in which the NDP opposition mentioned they have a petition to repeal bills 19, 36, and 50. They had the opportunity to change that yesterday, and they failed to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter I sent to Canada's Transport minister, Minister Garneau, with copies to the Minister of Natural Resources, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, regarding the oil tanker moratorium. In this letter I make our government's position clear in pressing Ottawa to ensure that Alberta energy products have access to international markets.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few tablings. The first is from Alberta Health Services to the minister relating to applications by Pure North S'Energy Foundation funding requests,

in which a number of medical experts suggest to the ministry that this not be funded and that it, in fact, may risk people's health.

The second set of tablings has to do with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and relevant World Health Organization resolutions, which have been copied to the Minister of Health. First is a request to stop the marketing of infant formula, which decreases the rate of breastfeeding both in our communities and beyond. The second is a copy of the World Health Organization code and how Alberta is violating the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

The third is my letter to the minister advising that we need to address this as a matter of urgency.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: I believe we had a point of order today. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order. I will cite the notations Standing Order 23

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Mr. Speaker, very shortly after 2 p.m. today the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo asked questions related to the current Health minister's deputy minister. The hon. member was not asking questions about me politically, professionally, or personally, yet the Minister of Health made it clear not once but twice that I made an endorsement and/or signed something.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health knows very, very well that neither of those things occurred, yet she said that they did on two occasions today and on a separate occasion on a different day. Clearly, there was an allegation made against another member, false or unavowed motives were referred to, and the language did indeed – we saw it – create disorder. I would simply ask that you would rule that the minister simply apologize and withdraw her remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully to the Minister of Health when she was responding to the question. The question had to do with an allegation of lobbying on the part of one of her officials with respect to a program. That program was a vitamin therapy program approved by the previous government, and the hon. member was the Associate Minister of Health at the time that program was put into place. Previous to that, from January 2012 to May 2012, he was the parliamentary assistant to the Health minister, and the wellness program received its funding on December 23, 2013, from the previous government while the hon. member was the associate minister.

What the Health minister merely said was: if you have questions about the program, you should direct them to the hon. member because he was associate minister. Now, either he didn't know about the program, in which case I think he's not doing his job, or he did have some knowledge of the program. It has to be one or the other, Mr. Speaker.

I would just indicate that I don't believe there's any point of order. Unfortunate as it may seem, it is not against the rules to hurt the feelings of the hon. member.

The Speaker: Hon. members, specifically, section 494 of *Beauchesne's* is relevant here for the point that "statements by Members respecting themselves . . . must be accepted." There are very rare occasions that something is different. This does allow these two versions, opinions about the case at hand.

So in this particular instance I believe that there is no point of order. I would hope, however, that mutual respect continues in the House as we direct comments across the aisle.

Privilege Access to Information

The Speaker: I will at this point in time make a ruling on the point of privilege which was raised by the hon. House leader for the third party on May 11, 2017.

Hon. members, on May 11 the House leader for the third party raised a purported question of privilege with respect to statements made by the Minister of Children's Services in Oral Question Period the previous day. He alleged that the minister repeatedly delayed answering questions in this Assembly so that it could be shared first with the media. I've listened to the arguments with respect to the purported question of privilege, and I am now prepared to rule on the matter.

Dealing first with the procedural requirement under Standing Order 15(2):

A Member wishing to raise a question of privilege [must provide] written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting.

My office did receive a letter from the House leader for the third party on May 11 at 10:55 a.m. indicating that he would be raising a question of privilege with respect to the hon. Minister of Children's Services later that afternoon. The letter does not indicate whether a copy was also provided to the Minister of Children's Services or anyone else, nor is the basis for the purported question of privilege set out, hon. member, as required in Standing Order 15(2). Though my office did forward the notice to the House leaders, the onus as we move forward, hon. members, is on the member raising the question to ensure that the notice is provided to all parties involved.

The purpose of the notice requirement in part is to provide a member implicated in a purported question of privilege with sufficient notice prior to the afternoon sitting to effectively respond to the allegation being raised or to have another member do so on their behalf. In this case all members wishing to speak to this matter have been given the opportunity to prepare and to make arguments. I therefore find that the requirements under Standing Order 15(2) have been met. I would however urge all members to keep in mind the purpose of the notice requirement, and I would hope and expect that they will be observed more carefully going forward.

As members well know, when a purported question of privilege is raised in the Assembly, it's the role of the chair to determine whether there is a prima facie breach; in other words, whether there is a breach of privilege upon first appearance. The House leader of the third party indicated on May 11 that during Oral Question Period for the preceding day the Minister of Children's Services repeatedly refused to answer questions with respect to the child welfare system in Alberta and instead indicated she would share information with the media before giving it to the members. This refusal, he argued, prevented members from discharging their duties as elected representatives, and her actions were disrespectful to this Assembly.

The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General responded yesterday by referring to *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, at page 13,

paragraph 31(10), which states that there is no precedent to justify the suggestion that members are entitled as a part of their parliamentary privilege to receive information ahead of the public. In short, the government is expected to govern, and it is well within its rights to make announcements in public without first providing notice to this Assembly.

The House leader for the Official Opposition, for his part, noted that while the government may not be required to provide answers to the opposition, there may indeed be a situation where a prima facie question of privilege could arise where a deliberate attempt is made to deny answers to an hon. member.

The statements made by the Minister of Children's Services that are at issue can be found starting at page 966 of *Alberta Hansard* for May 10, in which she states in response to the second main question from the Leader of the Official Opposition: "I will be speaking further to Albertans on this matter later this afternoon, but I want to remind members that when people make statements without all the facts, inaccurate information is given to the public." In a following supplemental response, also found on page 966, the minister again states: "I will be sharing more information about this matter this afternoon." Finally, in response to a question from the Member for Calgary-West, found on page 973, she states: "Mr. Speaker, again I will say that I am sharing more information for Albertans later this afternoon. I do want to continue to caution the members of this House about making statements without the facts."

3:00

Well, the arguments made with respect to this matter have touched upon several different points. I find that the central issue being raised by the purported question is whether the dignity of the Assembly was offended as a result of the minister's statements indicating that she would share information about the child welfare system outside of the House before providing it to members.

As I have done previously, I will start by clarifying that the question being raised in this case is properly called a contempt, which is more a form of a question of privilege. Speaker Zwodzesky commented on a somewhat similar question of contempt in connection with the disclosure of information in his ruling on November 7, 2013, which can be found on page 2845 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. In that case, a concern was raised about a government press release that was provided to select reporters, detailing a decision to increase funding to postsecondary educational institutions. The former Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills argued that selectively giving information to journalists but otherwise refusing to make the information public prevented members from discharging their duties both inside and outside of the Assembly.

In his decision Speaker Zwodzesky noted that "governments are at liberty to share . . . information in whatever way they wish . . . provided it's done within the rules and conventions" of this House. The government is not required to inform members prior to a news conference or a policy announcement, despite the fact that it may be difficult for the opposition to respond and to comment. This is not necessarily a form of contempt.

Speaker Levac of the Ontario Legislative Assembly came to a similar conclusion on June 9, 2016, which can be found on page 9998 of the Ontario *Hansard*, in response to a question of privilege raised with respect to the government's proposed climate change action plan. It was argued that the release of the plan to the media before its announcement or tabling in the House amounted to a contempt. Noting that Ontario has no procedural ruling requiring notice be given to the Assembly prior to the government making a policy announcement, Speaker Levac found that a prima facie case of contempt could not be established. In so ruling, he emphasized

the important role of the Legislative Assembly in its claim to be first recipient of major announcements.

Referring to a November 2, 2009, ruling, Speaker Levac stated:

I and my predecessors have repeatedly conveyed our deep concern about how these types of extra-parliamentary announcements erode the stature of Parliament. Speakers have repeatedly implored governments to consider the impact of this erosion and how it damages the reputation of the foundation institution of this province . . . In an ideal world where the legitimate and historic role of the Legislative Assembly, and specifically of the loyal opposition, were given first consideration, I expect that what a previous Speaker referred to as these types of 'administrative discourtesies' would not arise.

Returning to the matter at hand, while I must find there is no prima facie question of contempt with respect to this matter, I'm a bit troubled by the suggestion that a minister would be answering members' questions at a media event instead of in the Assembly. Although there may not be a rule under which the government is obligated to provide important and timely information to members before disclosing it outside of this Assembly, it is a principle of responsible government that the executive branch is accountable to this Assembly.

It is incumbent upon all members to respect our system of parliamentary democracy and to demonstrate respect for this institution. Declining to share significant information in this place diminishes the reasons we come together, and I would encourage the ministers of the government to carefully consider the important role of this Assembly when deciding when to share information. While Oral Question Period may not be the best forum to communicate complex and often sensitive policy decisions, I also want to note that the ministers have other means of providing information to this Assembly such as ministerial statements, and I would encourage them to do so when appropriate.

I hope all members carefully consider my comments today. This matter is now concluded.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a suggested amendment for Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, which I'll circulate.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. My amendment is that Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 39 by striking out the proposed section 52 and substituting the following:

Proceedings of Commissioner subject to review

52(1) Subject to subsection (2), no decision, report or proceeding of the Commissioner is invalid for want of form.

(2) A decision of the Commissioner may be questioned or reviewed by way of an application for judicial review seeking an order in the nature of certiorari or mandamus if the application is filed with the Court of Queen's Bench and served on the Commissioner no later than 30 days after the date of the decision, report, proceeding or reasons, whichever is latest.

(3) The Court may, in respect of an application under subsection (2),

- (a) determine the issues to be resolved on the application,
- (b) limit the contents of the return from the Commissioner to those materials necessary for the disposition of those issues, and
- (c) give directions to protect the confidentiality of the matters referred to in Part 4.1.

The intent of this amendment, Madam Chair, should be clear. Under the current writing of the bill there's no appeals process. This, I think, would give all of us some sense that no one is inviolate. There should be access to some kind of an appeals process based on circumstances, contingencies, specific facts of the concerns, and that any officer of the government should be subject to a second review. Currently there's no ability to appeal in the bill as it's written.

This is simply an attempt to ensure that if an error has been made or there are extenuating circumstances, an individual may be able to have recourse to an appeal.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:10

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I, of course, didn't have advance notice that this was coming, but I have to say that it seems pretty common sense to me, and it seems like a good idea to consider that decisions have an appeals process. All of us being human beings and with the frailties that go along with that are subject to making an error now and again. As such, it seems to me to only make sense that there should be an appeals process to look after those circumstances when an error may occur from time to time.

I'm in support of this, and I would encourage other members of the House to also be in support for those reasons. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for submitting this amendment. As the Member for Calgary-Hays rightly noted, you know, we hadn't received advance notice of the amendment, so I think it's worth taking some time to carefully consider this amendment. I know that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is very passionate about the principles of natural justice, and the appeals process is potentially something that we can look at and consider for the bill. But I think it's going to take us a bit of time to carefully consider that a little bit more.

I know that the members of the all-party committee that looked at the public interest disclosure amendment act took a lot of time going through the clauses of the act to consider the different amendments that they might suggest for improvements going forward. I wasn't personally on the committee myself, but I understand that they've undertaken a great deal of work in looking at the various clauses, perhaps the appeals process as well. I know that there are some other members of the committee here in Chamber

today who might be able to speak a little bit more about the appeals process or how that was considered during the committee hearings.

You know, I think that when we're looking at a piece of legislation of this magnitude, that has such far-reaching implications, it serves us to spend a little bit more time considering amendments like this, asking questions and clarifying intentions because we want to make sure that when we're making these kinds of substantive changes, we're doing what's right for Albertans.

I plan to speak a little bit later this afternoon to the bill itself, perhaps, if the opportunity arises. For myself as a registered nurse whistle-blowing and sort of the aim to do the right thing is very central to nursing practice. Also, you know, the amendment speaks to an appeals process whereby someone doesn't feel that the principles of natural justice have been adhered to or if there are questions arising from that decision of the commissioner. I think it's something that's worth considering.

If there are other members of the committee that might be able to expand a little bit on the concept of an appeals process and how that fits into the legislation, I would certainly welcome hearing from them on that very issue. Perhaps they might want to chime in on that.

The Chair: Any other members on the amendment? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was actually just trying to briefly go back to when we did the PIDA review and we had the summary of submissions. I don't remember having discussed an appeals process within it. I could see some of it. I mean, honestly, we looked at how to make sure that we strengthen it to make sure that there are mechanisms within the PIDA amendments that we're introducing that allow for better capacity to really review the allegations and what is being brought forward early on to make sure that it's kind of set up for success. I was just wondering if the member could clarify if there was a point when that was brought forward that I'm just not remembering that talked to the appeals, who would bring this forward, and what kind of a background there is to it.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't actually remember discussing this at the committee, but I, too, have lost time and memory around the details of the discussions. What I can say is that the appellant could be the individual who has blown the whistle and feels not appropriately addressed by the commissioner, or it could be a lawyer on behalf of that individual, or indeed, I suppose, it could be the employer who for whatever reason decides that the decision was not appropriate. It's trying to create a fair playing field for both sides to resolve where there is still dispute.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, not being a lawyer, I actually had to look up your terms, some of the terms in the amendment, because I wasn't sure what the Latin words were. I think, you know, like the member indicated, it's been a while since we sat as the all-party committee. I was fortunate to be a member for the entire time. I do think that we looked at a lot changes. One of the things that we thought we would do is: let's go with step 1 first, and let's see how that works, then we can come back and look at it.

I think, just having heard from the commissioner and having heard about the recommendations that he made around the processes and also being able to look at restitution, although I understand where the member is coming from with the desire to give people an opportunity to appeal a decision that is made and,

really, that impacts their lives, that it's important to take this a step at a time. I think that we've expanded the scope and the depth and the ability to award restitution in the cases. I think that that indeed covers a lot of the problems that we heard of, and it covers a lot of recommendations that we heard from the experts and some of the submissions.

While I certainly appreciate where this is going, I don't know that it's necessary at this time. Anyway, thank you to the member.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak against the amendment, and I will explain the reason for that. Section 52(1), the way it's drafted now, essentially doesn't violate any principles of natural justice in that it may sound like that it's restricting a review by a higher court; what it does is that it gives the commissioner kind of more authority, more flexibility on its own process so that his decision is not challenged, as you have mentioned in your amendment, just for want of the form, just from some procedural point of view, just for lack of jurisdiction. So he can look at any matter in a more holistic manner to address the issue properly while in subsection (2), if it's the substantive content of that bill, any person will still be able to challenge the commissioner's decision. So I would suggest to all members that 52(1) is more about the procedural matters and extending flexibility to the commissioner – that should stay the same – while on the substantive matters his decision certainly is challengeable, and anybody can challenge that as outlined in this section.

Based on that, I would suggest that members vote against this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:20

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on Bill 11. Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 11 in Committee of the Whole. Our government is committed to having accountability, ethics, and transparency front and centre in Alberta, and this bill will ensure that.

I tried to recount my working life in the 10-year period between the time I graduated from high school and the time I ended up as a new real estate agent at age 27. In those 10 years I did a lot of things, some which I've recounted in this House, but I don't think I ever actually mentioned that I was a public servant working for the housing ministry for a short period one summer during a STEP program position. It was a short position. It was counting calculators and staplers and so forth. It was an inventory job, and I really found that it wasn't my cup of tea after a few weeks, but nonetheless I know that during that period of time as a public servant working within the housing ministry, had I at that point in time come forward with a complaint of wrongdoing, I wouldn't have had the protection under the act that this legislation prescribes.

I tried to think about what my decision-making process would have been at that time as a young employee within the government ministry for the first time and whether or not I'd be inclined to go ahead with a complaint given that there was a fear of potential reprisal or fear of losing a job in that young working life at that point in time that I was at. One of the biggest fears of employees

and one of the reasons they don't come forward is the fear of reprisal by their employer. A younger employee especially, newer to the workforce, would be less likely to come forward than somebody who had a bit more experience. I can think back to those early days of my working life within the housing ministry and know that I would really have a limited amount of confidence in proceeding with a complaint of wrongdoing even if it might have been egregious.

Now, there is some protection in regard to the right of reprisals. Any employer in the public sector can be prosecuted for punishing an employee who exposes a wrongdoing, but there is no mechanism in place to determine what kind of restitution should be made to the whistle-blower if they are subject to such an unlawful punishment, so I'm proud to say that the new legislation would enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies when there has been a reprisal. The board may decide that the whistle-blower deserves to get their job back if they've been fired or that they might be entitled to compensation. In the end, it will be up to the board to decide what is appropriate, and the board's order would be enforceable, much like a court order.

Now, our government hopes that these changes will encourage whistle-blowers to feel safe in coming forward. Thinking back to those early days within the housing ministry as a young employee relatively fresh to the workforce, knowing that legislation protected my ability to come forward with complaints of wrongdoing might have given me some comfort in deciding to bring to light of day a wrongdoing had I been in a position where I felt I had to report something or felt that something should be reported in the workplace while acting as a public servant in the housing ministry in my early days of employment.

Now, another problem with the old legislation is that it doesn't protect political staff working in ministers' offices or the Premier's office, and as well, Madam Chair, Members of the Legislative Assembly aren't covered at all. This just doesn't seem right. As Members of the Legislative Assembly in this province we should be leaders in ethics and accountability, not people who are excluded from being held accountable. I support the changes this legislation makes in these areas as well. If passed, this bill will mean that MLAs, ministers, and the Premier can all be investigated when an accusation of wrongdoing is made to the Public Interest Commissioner.

Now, we know that this has to be subject to parliamentary privilege, and matters regarding parliamentary privilege would still be ruled on in the Legislative Assembly by the Speaker. This is where Alberta will once again be a leader, Madam Chair. Right now no other jurisdiction in Canada has whistle-blower legislation that applies to MLAs in this way, and Ontario is the only jurisdiction that covers ministers. If this recommendation is accepted, it will help make our government one of the most honest, transparent, and accountable governments in Canada.

Now, when I was that young worker in the housing ministry, I may have had cause to raise issues of wrongdoing that I may have witnessed; however, I may not have actually known how to go about it, how to blow the whistle. This new legislation would also improve the reporting process and ensure that whistle-blowers are protected when they need it.

Currently each government department or public-sector entity has a designated officer to handle whistle-blower complaints, and a potential whistle-blower has to report to a designated officer before a wrongdoing will be investigated. They are not protected from reprisal until that time. This can create some problems and concerns and possibly prevent whistle-blowing from occurring because of fear of reprisal, but this new legislation will help the process by

allowing whistle-blowers to approach their supervisor or the Public Interest Commissioner directly. Also, this new legislation means that whistle-blowers will be protected from reprisal as soon as they approach their supervisor and not to have to wait until the designated officer is informed.

Madam Chair, the all-party special ethics committee did a lot of work on this bill, as we have heard, and it has been some time since that committee met and made recommendations. I want to acknowledge the hours that were spent by many members thinking through this legislation and preparing a final report.

One of the things that this committee spoke about was that contractors hired by the government and some designated service providers such as some physicians and some nursing home operators do not currently fall within the scope of the act. This government supports the idea that this act should extend to some of the service providers who provide services paid for with taxpayer money. However, it is also important that everyone takes time to review and consider which services should be included and how they should be included. Therefore, our government supports the part of this new legislation which would consult with government contractors and designated service providers to see how best to move forward without stepping over the line into the private sector. One of the recommendations of the all-party committee was to ensure that these regulations do not affect the private sector, and our government supports the committee's recommendation on that.

3:30

Madam Chair, in order to make this legislation effective and in order to create an atmosphere where whistle-blowers feel secure coming forward regardless of whether they're brand new to the workforce or whether they're closer to their retirement years and considering the pension period that they might be looking at, it is critical that their identity be protected. In the existing legislation it is already clear that FOIP does not apply to records held by the Public Interest Commissioner. However, there is an exception to this, and that is when a designated officer initiates an investigation rather than the commissioner. In that case, it is possible for a third party to submit a FOIP request asking for records connected to the investigation. This is not a secure situation for the whistle-blower. The new legislation will ensure that the names of the whistle-blowers and other identifying information are exempted from such FOIP requests, therefore ensuring that the identity is not exposed and that the safety of and ability for the employee with the concern to move forward are enhanced.

The new legislation will also require that more details be reported annually by the Public Interest Commissioner. This will help everybody, both in the Chamber and in the public, see that these issues are being taken seriously and what the outcomes of the investigations are.

Madam Chair, everybody in this Chamber knows and everybody in the public knows that most whistle-blowers merely want to help fix mistakes and make things right. I know that as a young worker I may have been worried, perhaps even scared, to come forward with wrongdoing that I may have witnessed in my early workplace in the housing ministry. In this position, knowing that there are many young people in their early careers working for various ministries in various areas of our public service throughout the province, I'm proud of legislation that, I hope, will make legitimate whistle-blowers feel more secure in coming forward with their concerns. Everyone in this Chamber can agree that when it comes to public money and resources, opportunities to identify and correct mistakes should be welcomed. I'm confident that this legislation, if passed, will help to make that happen and help to protect those who come forward.

This is just one way that our government is working to make life better for all Albertans and to increase the transparency and accountability of the public sector. I support this legislation, and I hope that everyone in this Chamber does as well so that individuals, no matter what stage of their career they're at within the public service, feel absolutely confident that they can come forward and do the right thing and report wrongdoings without fear of reprisal, know that there's a process that is clear and transparent for them to follow when they do see fit to make such a report, know and understand that in coming forward with their wrongdoing reports, they will be protected by law, surrounded by due process, and, as well, make an effective, positive contribution to their workplace, the public service of Alberta, and also, going forward, to the working environment of those in the provincial sector, transferable by right of example to other workplaces throughout the province.

With that, I conclude my remarks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, I've had a request to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this House some very important people that do very important work in this province. As I mention their names, I'd like them to stand: Lance Sheppard, who is a primary care paramedic and council member with the Alberta College of Paramedics, and Pete Helfrich, who is the president of the Alberta College of Paramedics and an advanced care paramedic. These are two people that do important work in this province along with other council members and the registrar and other administrators. I just thank them for their service and their dedication to Albertans. I would ask the House to give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

Bill 11

Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

(continued)

The Chair: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 11? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm proud to stand in the House today in support of Bill 11, the public interest disclosure act, also known as whistle-blower protection. This legislation will better protect employees already covered by whistle-blower legislation, and it will increase the number of people who would be protected, like staff in the offices of the Premier and the ministers.

I'm a proud union member and proud of the rights that we as members have negotiated in our collective bargaining agreements. We have protection from reprisal. In our last set of negotiations my union was able to include time during training to explain what the new employees' rights are. It was included in the health and safety training I provided to every employee. Our CBA gives my fellow members the ability to report bullying and harassment, unfair labour practices, or serious wrongdoings. They don't have to fear

losing shifts or being given less desirable shifts or losing their jobs for reporting incidents. They know who to turn to.

But not all workers have this type of protection. This bill will make sure that public-sector employees feel safe to report serious wrongdoings and are free from reprisal. This is the right thing to do both for employees and for all Albertans. A good public service and a fair and honest public sector are something that Albertans count on, and we are making it better. Our government wants to ensure that serious wrongdoings in the public sector are reported and addressed. Often employees are the ones who see things going on that shouldn't be, and many are afraid to report these incidents for fear of losing their jobs or of other types of reprisal. These wrongdoings need to be reported and investigated. This legislation is going to strengthen the current law and better protect whistle-blowers from reprisal.

Currently each government department or public-sector entity has a designated officer to handle whistle-blower complaints. A potential whistle-blower has to report to a designated officer before a wrongdoing will be investigated, and they are not protected from reprisal until that time. This new legislation will help the process by allowing whistle-blowers to approach their supervisor or the Public Interest Commissioner directly.

I can give you a real example. An employee – well, let's call him Tom – had his wife call the office and say that he was sick and wouldn't be in that day. The person taking the call – we'll call her Sally – knew that the supposed sick employee was actually facilitating a seminar in another province as a consultant. This bothered Sally as Tom was getting his work pay and a consultant fee, and she thought it was wrong. When it happened a second time, Sally reported it to her supervisor. It ended up that the supervisor wasn't the designated officer, and he was also Tom's good friend. Sally ended up losing her job when the supervisor eliminated her position. Because she had not reported it to the right person, she was not protected.

3:40

One of the biggest fears of employees and one of the reasons they don't come forward is the fear of reprisal from their employer. There is some protection in that regard. Right now any employee in the public sector can be prosecuted for punishing an employee who exposes a wrongdoing, but there is no mechanism in place to determine what kind of restitution should be made to the whistle-blower if they are subject to an unlawful punishment. I am proud to say that the new legislation would enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies where there has been a reprisal. The board may decide that the whistle-blower deserves to get their job back if they have been fired, or they might be entitled to compensation.

Another problem with the old legislation is that it doesn't protect political staff working in ministers' offices or the Premier's office. As well, Madam Chair, Members of the Legislative Assembly aren't covered at all. This doesn't seem right. As Members of the Legislative Assembly in this province we should be leaders in ethics and accountability, not people who are excluded from being held accountable. I support the changes this legislation makes in these areas. If passed, this bill will mean that MLAs, ministers, and the Premier can all be investigated when an accusation of wrongdoing is made to the Public Interest Commissioner. This is where Alberta will once again be a leader. Right now no other jurisdiction in Canada has whistle-blower legislation that applies to MLAs in this way. Ontario is the only jurisdiction that covers ministers.

We have to make it easier for people to report serious wrongdoing or any kind of wrongdoing without the fear of losing their jobs, their livelihoods. I sat on the Ethics and Accountability

Committee, and I believe we came up with a good bill from our consultation. I urge everyone in this House to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to stand and speak in support of Bill 11 this afternoon. I'd like to begin my remarks by referring to part 2.1, regarding disclosure to the commissioner, and I'd just like to preface my remarks by reading briefly from the bill.

15.1(1) An employee referred to in section 9 may make a disclosure directly to the Commissioner . . . and any provision in the procedures established under section 5 . . .

(2) If an employee referred to in section 9 has made a disclosure to the designated officer, the employee may also make a disclosure directly to the Commissioner even if the designated officer has made recommendations or concluded the investigation.

I read that to preface my remarks.

I'd like to bring my perspective as a registered nurse to the table this afternoon. One of the articles that I'll be happy to table tomorrow and that I will refer to this afternoon is by the Canadian Nurses Association. It's an ethics in practice series, and this particular one revolves around whistle-blowing. The title is *I See and Am Silent / I See and Speak Out: The Ethical Dilemma of Whistle-blowing*. This may seem a little elementary, but I think it's worth putting in the context of nursing in terms of the question of: what is whistle-blowing?

Whistleblowers are people who expose negligence, abuses, or dangers, such as professional misconduct or incompetence, which exist in the organization in which they work. The decision to blow the whistle on a colleague, associate, or employer is never an easy one; unless there is a legal obligation to report, it should be considered a step one takes when all else has failed.

In health care institutions, threats to patient safety may come from prescribed treatments, environmental hazards, staffing inadequacies, or illegal, incompetent or unethical conduct of any employee or person such as a family member or volunteer. Employees, especially nurses, may be the first to recognize unsafe practice or to identify actual or potential hazards. However, a nurse may often be caught between the values and standards of the profession and the values and norms of the organization in which he or she works.

In the above cases, nurses face a decision: should they disclose information learned in the course of their work?

Madam Chair, the tension that I mentioned there at the conclusion of that paragraph, that a nurse may be caught between the values and standards of their profession and the values and norms of the organization where they work, is central to the question of whistle-blowing.

In terms of the nursing profession it's interesting to see and study the trajectory of a brand new nurse who has just graduated and entered the profession. Oftentimes you'll hear nurses describe that perhaps the first couple of years of their practice is spent learning how to be a good nurse, just how to get things done, where the supplies are, how to organize yourself and make the best use of your time. You know, new nurses will come across these ethical dilemmas of whistle-blowing when they're new, but they have so much on their plate in trying to learn the profession, sometimes they don't know how to deal with these situations. As a nurse goes through their trajectory, becoming more of an expert, you get much better at the job and much more proficient, and then with these ethical dilemmas that you've encountered, you have a little bit more headspace to tackle these difficult issues.

I think something that was brought up a little bit earlier, about the fear of reprisal, is also central to this question because especially,

you know, as a new nurse you're worried that if you bring things up, you might lose your job. Certainly, nurses go through a great deal of education and spend a lot of time and a great deal of money getting their education, and once they get a job, they aim to keep it. There can sometimes be a perception of: "I don't want to rock the boat. I'm new here. I'm going to take care of patients the best way I possibly can, but I'm afraid that if I speak up, I might lose my job."

This is particularly so in smaller institutions and in rural and remote settings because that nurse might be the only nurse there. You know, it's a very special calling when health care practitioners go to these rural and remote communities because they are often either the only health care provider or one of the very few that are there. If they start to question or ask themselves – you know, in health care we refer to these as ethical dilemmas or moral dilemmas. People in these remote situations might ask themselves: if I rock the boat, I don't want to lose my job. But, at the same time, they have a very deep professional interest in taking care of their patients.

Based on my experience in the operating room – you know, I was fortunate to have entered the operating room after several years of practice on the floor. We call it the floor, working on a unit. By this point I felt like I was a fairly proficient nurse, and I was in the space where I could start asking these difficult questions. It was interesting because I started in the operating room in about 2006, and I quit my job when I was elected in 2015. Working there for about 10 years, even in that short time period I saw a dramatic culture shift with new doctors coming into the operating room.

I'd like to refer a bit to the culture of health care and how that's changing and how that influences whistle-blowing behaviour. There are some parallels that are used between the airline industry and the operating room. Both are very complex and technical environments that require multiple levels of support staff and also tend to have an ingrained or entrenched hierarchy, if you will, of people that may be considered more important or less important than others. Of course, we all know that it's a team that is required to make these things happen, so to say that one person is more important than the other isn't really accurate. We all do different jobs. We all have different levels of experience and training. But, you know, a nurse can't do their job without a housekeeper who cleans up in between and a sterile instrument processor who uses their professional skills to make sure that they have clean instruments to take care of patients.

3:50

In referring to the culture and airlines, that is what I'm getting at here. Quite some time ago the airline industry examined their practices and why they were having accidents, and one of the conclusions that they reached was that oftentimes, you know, those considered lower on the hierarchy may have had concerns about the aircraft or some other maintenance issue, but in the past they were afraid to bring that up for fear of the pilot or a more senior person having some act of reprisal or speaking down about them. So there was a culture of being afraid to speak up and say what was on your mind and sort of, so to speak, challenge those who may be seen as superiors. The airline industry recognized this as a safety concern, so they changed the culture so that it allowed all members of the team to speak in a more equal manner to each other so that they weren't afraid to bring these safety concerns forward.

This was a culture shift that was also adopted by the operating rooms and surgical suites because, you know, there's a very similar, invisible hierarchy in the operating room. Surgeons and anaesthetists might tend to be at the top, and housekeepers or whatnot may be at the bottom, but, like I said, we're all part of a team. Everybody there is focused on patient care. So in the operating room we learned

some lessons from the airline industry about shifting the culture in terms of feeling more free to speak up and identify safety concerns, and that was a paradigm shift. That's what I referred to.

In my brief 10 years or so that I was in the operating room – and I should say that, by and large, in 99.9 per cent of staff interactions in the operating room people feel free to speak up and say what they want. You know, there's a misperception that surgeons are *prima donnas* and that it's their way or the highway. I can tell you that, by and large, that's not the case. The vast majority of surgeons and anaesthetists and other doctors appreciate any level of staff bringing concerns forward, so I want to reassure Albertans that in their health care system they've got absolutely professional staff dedicated to caring for them.

I want to just use a couple of examples of things that I had experienced myself in terms of – you know, maybe “whistle-blowing” in the context that I'm about to describe is a little bit overboard, but it's still with the same intention. I had an instance where in a former job that I'd had I identified some safety concerns where I was working, and I tried to go through the proper processes to have those addressed by talking to the nurse clinician and making my case and saying what I identified as a problem and how I think we could solve that.

I didn't get a satisfactory resolution at that level, so I took my concerns up to the manager, and it was a very troubling situation, even reflecting on it to this day. Like I say, in the majority of cases Albertans are absolutely safe. What I'm about to describe may alarm some people. Guess what the manager that I spoke to about the safety concerns that I had described to him and that I hadn't had a satisfactory resolution to told me, *Madam Chair*? He said: if you don't like it, go work somewhere else. And my jaw must have dropped to the floor. I couldn't believe he had said that. In fact, that person was a registered nurse as well, which made it even more shocking. You know what? After hearing that, I still tried to take measures to correct the situation and went above that manager to the director, and I did see some resolution at that level.

You know, I think what the bill contemplates is escalating levels of whistle-blowing, so to speak, that there are processes in place that should be followed to make sure that we're going through a proper chain of command, and that is to say that the first time we notice something wrong, we don't necessarily go to the commissioner or the media right away. Of course, it all depends on the context of a person's work situation, but we always owe it to our managers and whatnot to bring those things to their attention first and try to seek resolution at that level and then escalate as necessary.

There is a concept called duty of fidelity, and that is whereby an employee owes it to their employer to give the employer every opportunity to fix situations that the employee may see as unsatisfactory and that the employee also has an obligation not to paint the employer in a negative light in public, because the relationship of the employee and the employer hinges on this duty of fidelity. I think that's important, but at the same time we don't want that to limit people to not come forward and blow the whistle.

I think that in the nursing profession nurses and, I think, all health care providers, for that matter, are driven by a strong desire to do the right thing. They're in this for the right reasons. Certainly, nursing is an incredibly rewarding job, but it's not very glamorous, or oftentimes it's not. You know, we're looking after people's bodily functions and whatnot. There's no shame in that, *Madam Chair*. When you go talk to your family and they say, “What do you do at work?” I used to say, “Well, I change diapers for adults.” That's kind of a pejorative way of putting it, but sometimes, in essence, that's what nurses do in different circumstances. I don't

mean to demean that. It's an extremely important job because of skin integrity and personal dignity and whatnot. It's an extremely important job.

I'd like to describe another scenario that I encountered. We were doing an operation where we were going into the chest cavity, and in these circumstances you have to have an experienced surgeon and a resident. At the time the two operators were a fellow and a resident, a first-year resident for that matter, and going into the chest cavity is kind of a big deal. I informed the surgeon that, you know, there is a policy that the surgeon had to be at least in the room and ready to scrub in if necessary. So I called the surgeon and described the situation. I'm paraphrasing, but this is relatively accurate. He told me: if you don't tell me how to do my doctor job, I won't tell you how to do your nurse job. I was gobsmacked. That's the kind of culture that we're aiming to change.

We want it so that new doctors coming into the profession would never say something like that. They'd say, “Thank you for letting me know; here's the reason why I made that decision” or whatnot, but they would certainly never seek to demean another professional. Certainly, in a situation where if a doctor noticed me doing my quote, unquote, nursing job in a fashion that they had a concern about, I would welcome them to bring that to my attention. That's the kind of culture we're seeking to change, and I think that's absolutely important.

There is another section in the bill that I wanted to refer to because I think it also speaks to going about whistle-blowing sort of in the appropriate fashion. I'll just read briefly this one section. This is from section 20 in the bill.

Before beginning an investigation into a disclosure where the disclosure alleges gross mismanagement in relation to employees, the Commissioner must be satisfied that all applicable mechanisms, including any human resource processes or processes under a collective agreement, to address bullying, harassment or intimidation . . . have been used or considered.

I'd like to speak about something that I know relatively intimately, which is the professional responsibility clause in the United Nurses of Alberta's collective agreement. This is a fantastic clause because it speaks to precisely that article in the bill. That is that when nurses encounter a professional responsibility concern in their workplace here in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada – I believe they have similar provisions in collective agreements across the country – there's a defined mechanism in the collective agreement for nurses to bring professional responsibility concerns forward.

4:00

I'd really like to applaud the United Nurses of Alberta because they have taken this matter extraordinarily seriously. They've hired researchers and nurses that do research on professional responsibility to examine this exact matter. Especially under the management of the former government, who would make cuts to health care and put patient care at risk by their gross mismanagement of public resources and political interference, the United Nurses of Alberta really ramped this up. They were afraid that the decisions of the former government were going to put patients at risk.

This is something that I was involved with. Frankly, that's one of the reasons I ran for election. When the PCs were planning to cut a billion dollars out of health care, I knew that the system was already strained and that nurses and staff were doing everything they could to hold it together.

If the PCs had had their way and cut that significant amount of funding, things may have gone a much different way. The United Nurses of Alberta have taken this very seriously. They have committees, and they have a professional responsibility adviser. They've done an admirable job, you know, looking at the essence

of what nursing is and making sure that all health care situations are safe across the province.

With that, Madam Chair, you know, I think this is an excellent bill. I know that the minister has done a fantastic job of putting this together in terms of consultation and captured the various scenarios that we can encounter here in Alberta. I'd also like to thank the members of the Ethics and Accountability Committee, who put so much work into creating the recommendations, working long hours and through difficult circumstances as they contemplated the various aspects of this legislation. I'd like to encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Ms Fitzpatrick: I've said many times in this room that I spent 20 years as an activist in my union. I worked for the federal government and the territorial government for 32 and a half years within corrections, and throughout that time there were certainly a number of incidents that occurred that I felt were incidents that needed to be reported. Anybody who knows me – well, the Member for Banff-Cochrane used a phrase about rocking the boat. One might have been able to use the words "boat rocker" as an indicator for me. When things happened and my instincts said that there was something wrong – guess what? – there was probably something wrong.

I have a number of incidents and a number of issues on reprisals. When I worked at the jail in Yellowknife, I was a recreation supervisor when I started there. The gym was a little short, so we talked among management about what we could do because a couple of the offenders had injured themselves running into the wall when playing floor hockey or basketball. We came up with a solution. We were going to put a wood frame along both end walls, and we were going to use all the exercise mats as padding on those walls, but the only time we could do it was during the night because the gym was in use from 7 o'clock in the morning until 10 at night. So I decided that I would get a crew of offenders who wanted to volunteer to do this, and I brought them into the gym at about 11:30 at night on a Friday night. We took all the wood we were using, sanded it all down, put some varnish on it, and put Velcro on the top so that we could hook the mats up.

The rule in corrections is that there have to be rounds done every hour. All the inmates have to be counted. You want to make sure everybody is there, and you want to make sure everybody is safe. As I said, I went into the gym at 11:30, and I never saw anybody until 2:30. At 2:30 one of the guys on duty came in, and he said: "We're just getting supper for the staff, so the inmates can come and have something to eat." I said okay. I asked them, and they said that, all right, they'd go for something to eat. We went into the dining room. He had frozen fish and chips out for the offenders, and he had steaks and some other goodies out for the staff. He said, "You can have a steak." I said: "Well, no. I'm going to have exactly what the offenders are having." That's the procedure in the jail during the daytime, that whatever is on the meal plan for one group is on the plan for everybody. So we ate fish and chips, and then we went back to the gym.

We finished the job at 4 o'clock, and I didn't see anybody else coming to count the offenders or to check on us. I was in there with 10 guys who were offenders, who were in jail for committing crimes, and nobody came to check on me. Nobody came to check on them.

Anyway, we finished, and they went back to their units. I went to the front door of the jail, and there was smoke coming out of the

front door. What I realized was that they had a barbecue between the front door and the outside door. That's the only exit from the jail. They've got a barbecue in there, and they were barbecuing their steaks. I was a little perturbed, and I spoke to the officer in charge. I said: "What the heck are you doing? You can't have a barbecue between the two doors. You're putting the whole building at risk. You're putting everybody's life at risk." And he said, "What are you going to do about it?" I said: "Well, you've put me at risk, you've put all the staff at risk, and you've put every offender in this jail at risk. This is against the rules." He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to report this incident." And he said, "Just remember that nobody is going to have your back if something happens."

Anyway, as I said, I'm a boat rocker. If you're not going to put the safety of everybody in the jail first, then somebody has to do something about it. So I reported it to my supervisor, and my supervisor reported it to the superintendent. The officer in charge was disciplined, and he was suspended for three days. I can't remember what his position was, but he would be the senior person for the correctional officers in that jail who assigned shifts. They were a little ticked that I made that report and that he was suspended, so they scheduled him for overtime so that he wouldn't actually lose any money. To me, that was such a lack of integrity.

Again I went back, but this time I went to the superintendent, and I said: "This person was disciplined for what they did, which put everybody at risk. They didn't observe the schedule to check on inmates or staff in the institution every hour, yet they had written it in the book that they had done that." You had lots of witnesses because all of the offenders who were in the gym with me remarked that no staff came to check on them. There was no other way to check but to come in the door and come into the gym. Anyway, I went back, and I reported it.

4:10

There were certainly reprisals. I got left in the gym with some remanded offenders. If two of those offenders hadn't stood by my side and backed the other offenders off in a particular situation that happened, I could have been killed. Again I reported the situation. It was the same shift supervisor who had done it on the night shift. You've got to report that. It finally went to the head of corrections in the Territories before any action actually happened.

That was one example. I've had enough experience in my life that I'm not going to put up with any kind of baloney like that that's going on. I stand up, and I say something.

Eventually I get to a parole office. An incident happened when one of my colleagues was being sexually harassed by another one of our colleagues. She went to the district director and said: this is what's happening; I need you to take some action. The person who was doing it was a friend of the director. He did nothing. So she came to me and said: I need to file a grievance against management for not following our own procedure and policy on harassment. The first thing he should have done was to separate the two of them so that she would be safe.

It took two years before that was resolved, and it meant that I had to continue all the time fighting this. Somebody said to me: like, what are you prepared to give up? My career was in the tubes as far as advancing within corrections in that work setting. But I could not let something like that happen without standing up and saying: no, this is not going to continue, and there are going to be consequences for that behaviour.

As I said, my career didn't go anywhere while I was in that office. It wasn't that I didn't apply in competitions that I was more than qualified for and certainly more qualified than those people that they put into those positions. But I wasn't going anywhere. In fact,

the district director told me that I wasn't going anywhere. I couldn't keep my mouth shut, so I wasn't going anywhere.

It wasn't until I went to Ottawa that, in fact, my career did progress. Because I was a union rep, there were people who came to me when things happened. In Ottawa I didn't mess around. If something didn't happen right away, I went to the commissioner. We had a policy in the federal government on harassment, on bullying, on sexual harassment, and the department was going to follow it because if not, I was going public with it. He knew that I'd go public with it. One of the things I learned in those years of being a union rep was to document every little bit of evidence that had occurred in every one of those cases. So you fix it, you do the right thing, but as I said, my career was impacted for a long time because I did that.

This legislation will change that. Hopefully, it will change that culture that I talked about. Certainly, there was a correctional culture when I was there, but that culture, I've found, is in many other places as well. There are always people who want to bully you and don't want their actions to be made public. Except, their actions are causing pain to somebody else. They are causing pain to the institution.

In corrections one of the things that you were expected to do was to be a good example. If we wanted offenders to change their behaviour, we needed to model good behaviour. What went on in Yellowknife when I was there at that jail was not good behaviour, and those offenders that were there saw that it wasn't good behaviour.

If we want things to get better, yes, this legislation needs to go forward. We need to change that culture about respect and to stop bullying and those power games that are going on.

With that, I'll sit down. I have lots of other examples, but I think I'll leave it at that. To be very honest, I expect everybody in this room to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments to Bill 11? West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to try and work my way through this. I've got a real bad cold, so hopefully I can work my way through my speech.

I'm proud to stand in the House in support of Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. I say that it's about time. It's long overdue. The old legislation that was in place: a lot of people thought it was okay, but it was weak. I always said that it was full of holes like a sieve, which is unfortunate, but a lot of people and employers took advantage of it.

One of the biggest fears that employees have is the fear of reprisal from employers. In some cases it even goes beyond that to peer pressure from other workers that you're working with because when you raise an issue, they're afraid that it's going to be a reflection on them as well. I guess I learned early on that you have to stand up. Like Maria, you know, you're not afraid to stand up and say that this isn't right.

Maybe that's why I was very well respected in the union in later years, because I had that opinion. It didn't matter whether it was something that the employer did or whether or not it was about issues of harassment and those kinds of things that went on in different workplaces that I dealt with. Once again, it was the fact that I wasn't afraid to stand up. It took us a while, even where I worked in the union at the plant in Hinton, where I really got my training and those kinds of things, to really understand workers' health and safety, for example, or when you're looking at the

chemicals that we dealt with in the plant, what was going on with it. Of course, a lot of the issues that we dealt with in there were environmental concerns because the chemicals that we dealt with in the plant had a huge repercussion on the environment in one way or another if there were spills or leaks or anything else that occurred.

4:20

I learned early on in my employment career, when I worked for a government agency, for example, that when we found some silly things – and I'll say that it was silly things – that went on and when we raised the issue with our boss, who was our immediate supervisor, we were told to shut up or face reprisals one way or another. You could end up with a shortened career, which isn't right, but that's the way it was then.

In later years I was working for another employer, that was doing some kind of an experiment, and the animals that they were looking after were near starvation. I said: "This isn't right. You can't do that. Even in an experimental situation you do not have a right to treat animals like that." Well, I won't go into the harassment and stuff that I ended up with because I stood up and said: "No, you can't do that. These animals need to be fed. You don't have a right. You're breaking the law." I was subjected to all kinds of things, but I said: "You know, this is important. You don't have a right to do these things."

When I went to work for – and I'm going to be clear about the pulp mill in Hinton. In the early '70s, of course, there weren't a lot of environmental things there. Sure, they had their operating licence and everything else. They did all kinds of I won't say stupid things, but some people made some real bad decisions. It wasn't good for the environment, for sure, but we learned the hard way, in some cases, in standing up to them and saying that you can't be doing these things. Some of us got days off for sticking up for workers and those kinds of things.

Through that we learned that we had to look at our collective agreements. Through our collective agreement we had to make considerable changes and address the issues of environment, for example. We also had to address the issues of harassment in the workplace. Of course, it took us a few years to get that recognized in the collective agreement as being a real problem because the laws in Alberta really didn't help the workers in there if you stood up and said something against the employer or whatever.

That's why this is so important today, because when you're dealing with a workplace that is dealing with all kinds of chemicals like we did and in quite a vast amount – in some cases the large vessels that we had of various material could certainly harm the environment. When we stood up to that employer because they decided to drain the vessel for repairs or wash the stuff out and not deal with it in a proper manner, we had to stand up to them and say: "This isn't right. You can't do that." Because of my steadfast relationship in looking after air and water and those things, we ended up forming an environment committee, for example, in the plant to try and deal with it so that we all had a collective voice. Meanwhile we've had employees get time off, including myself on a few occasions, when I was threatened or even just about fired a few times because I stood up.

What was good in that case, though, was that because it was a union environment, the union workers stood with me. That's the only way that we could stand up to the employer that this isn't right, what you're doing. In some cases it was so bad we had to phone or even report the mill for environmental laws that they were breaking or whatever. We had to do that. It's too bad that we had to go through all those things. Meanwhile the employees, including myself and a few others, had to endure harassment and bullying in

some cases because we were standing up and believing that what we were doing was the right thing to do.

That's why this Bill 11 is so important. It gives a voice to people and the ability to stand up and say: "Look, you can't do that. You can't threaten me with firing or removing my livelihood because I don't think that what you're doing to me is the right thing to do." Being the president of the labour council in West Yellowhead for many years, we ran into that from several other employers, whether it was some people at McDonald's or whether it was some workers at the different hotels or whatever, some of the things that went on dealing with harassment and bullying in the workplace. Of course, I got told on several occasions that I should mind my own business, that I shouldn't interfere, that because it wasn't a unionized workplace, I should butt out or a few other things. What we were thinking was the fact that nobody should have to work under those conditions.

Another case – and I'll say it this way – was that my wife was working for an employer, and she does not see well. She's technically blind, carries a CNIB card. She was working for this employer, and the manager of the hotel cornered her in the hotel room while she was making the bed and made some gross advances to her. She cornered herself in the closet, called me when she had the opportunity, and, needless to say, I went over there. I won't repeat what I said to the guy, but she didn't work there anymore either because we don't need to put up with that. That's harassment. It's not right, especially the fact that when they do this to people with disabilities, it's even more concerning because they can't fight for themselves. They try their best to do the job, and, if anything, they try harder than anyone else to prove themselves, that they can do these things.

4:30

In another case my wife was working for another employer because she was bound and determined that she had a right to work, which she does, and I supported that, but this employer would do nasty things: hide her cleaning supplies and then complain that she took too long to do her job. She would phone me and say: "The stuff is missing. Can you come and help me find the stuff so I can do what I need to do?" So I would go over there and help her out. My wife can't see blue on a piece of paper. If you write a note in blue ink, for example, she can't read that, so what this employer would do is write a note half in blue ink and half in black and then complain to her because she couldn't read the note. What we did for that, once we found out that this was going on: she would send me a picture of the note. I would read it for her so that she knew what it said. This is wrong.

This is why this is so important, to protect people like that from this kind of thing. It's important that we look at that because, like I said, people with disabilities try their hardest. They work harder than some people because they're trying to prove that they can do it. That's why I'm so much in support of this. It's not only for them; it's for other people to stand up and say: this is wrong.

I know I've got issues going on in West Yellowhead right now. I know that there's a case in another situation where another worker is being harassed because of their age. It's wrong. I confronted the employer about it just a little while ago. This individual needs the job because, unfortunately, her husband died and didn't really leave her much of a pension. She's trying to make ends meet, so she needs this bus-driving job so that she can pay her rent and stuff. She's being harassed, which is ridiculous. There are other cases out there where this is going on. It's not right. This is why it's so important that I support this.

Everybody in the Chamber knows and everybody in the public knows that most whistle-blowers merely want to help fix things and make things right. That's the principle that we've got to look at because that's what they're trying to do, whether it's a supervisor that's dumping chemicals when they shouldn't or out in the oil and gas sector, for example.

Of course, I'm always out there when I have the chance, poking around and seeing what's going on, and I find that a whole bunch of chemicals are leaking from a bunch of old barrels that are left on an abandoned oil site. Boy, did that stir up a hornet's nest. I got harassment phone calls and a few other things. I got told to mind my own business and a few other expletives in there. It's important that these kinds of things should be reported. Everybody should have a right to report these things without the fear of bullying and harassment and threats.

That's why I'm in full support of Bill 11. I think that we need to look at this, and I think that we need to pass it a hundred per cent. With that, I'll sit down.

Thank you very much.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's always tough to follow the Member for West Yellowhead, but I will do my best. It is my privilege to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole about the amendments to the public interest disclosure act. One of the things that I wanted to touch on was talking about reprisals. There is some significant work that's been done in terms of reprisal being captured in the legislation, so I'll just go over a bit of what's in the legislation, in the amendments.

We know that one of the most important parts of public disclosure legislation is having employees have faith in the system of being able to come forward with information that would otherwise not come to light. Unfortunately, one of the things that happens in that process is that there can be reprisals against that employee in the workplace. I know that for the many public service employees that I've had the privilege of meeting in this role as MLA, all of them take what they do quite seriously in service of the province, and I thank them absolutely for all the work they do.

Some of the sections where section 24 would be repealed and substituted would be:

- 24(1) This section applies to an employee or a prescribed service provider who has, in good faith,
 - (a) requested advice about making a disclosure as described in section 8 or, in the case of an employee of a prescribed service provider, the regulations made under Part 1.2, whether or not the employee made a disclosure,
 - (b) made a disclosure under this Act,
 - (c) co-operated in an investigation under this Act,
 - (d) declined to participate in a wrongdoing, or
 - (e) done anything in accordance with this Act, [and]
- (2) No person shall take or direct, or counsel or direct a person to take or direct, any of the following measures against an employee of a department, a public entity, an office of the Legislature, the Office of the Premier, an office of a minister or a prescribed service provider for the reason that the employee took an action referred to in subsection (1):
 - (a) a dismissal, layoff, suspension, demotion or transfer, discontinuation or elimination of a job, change of job location, reduction in wages, change in hours of work or reprimand;
 - (b) any measure, other than one mentioned in clause (a), that adversely affects the employee's employment or working conditions;

- (c) a threat to take any of the measures mentioned in clause (a) or (b).

(3) Subject to the regulations, no person shall take or direct, or counsel or direct a person to take or direct, any measure prescribed in the regulations against a prescribed service provider for the reason that the prescribed service provider or an employee of the prescribed service provider took an action referred to in subsection (1).

Of course, with reprisal, unfortunately, for very good reason it's one of the biggest fears that employees do have and one of the reasons that they don't come forward: fear of reprisal by their employer. We know that this has taken place, but there haven't necessarily been the remedies to actually deal with a reprisal that's happened. There wasn't the power of the office to be able to either prescribe or have a body that could prescribe a remedy for that person.

4:40

This is a step towards making sure that there is some protection in regard to that. Right now any employer that is in the public sector can be prosecuted for punishing an employee who exposes a wrongdoing, but there is no mechanism that is currently in place that would determine how that restitution would be made to a person who is the whistle-blower if they are subject to such an unlawful punishment. So one of the recommendations that was made by the committee was that there would be an ability to enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies where there has been a reprisal. That board may decide that the whistle-blower deserves to get their job back if they've been fired or that they might be entitled to compensation.

Of course, in the end, it would be up to the board to decide what would be appropriate, but it's important to note, I should say, that the board's order would be enforceable like a court order. It's with that that this would provide encouragement for whistle-blowers to feel more safe coming forward with information about their workplace. We saw this legislation actually come into real-life experience when we saw that the Public Interest Commissioner was able to rule that there had been a contravention of the rules of Alberta Innovates: technology futures, that they had been found to be directing their staff to change information of parties that were engaging with AITF, and it was likely as a means to expedite the process of finding those – I shouldn't say companies – providers, those contractors that would partner in the office for work, and someone was brave enough to come forward. As I was saying before, you know, someone like this, that works in the public sector, would be doing that because they are wanting to ensure that there is accountability in the body that they're working in and that the resources that are in the office that they are fulfilling the duties of are being appropriately used.

When I was going through the clauses here, I thought that it was also important to note that it will also expand this act to ministers and MLAs. Right now that coverage is not currently in effect with ministers' offices or MLAs' offices. This will increase that scope of accountability so that if somebody has a similar sort of complaint in regard to someone not using public resources in a way that follows the rules and regulations of that office, they can go through the process of making that public disclosure in the interests of the province, really.

It's very important to talk about how those that go through the process of making a disclosure and could be putting their future livelihoods at risk are able to have more faith in the process. You know, it has been said that for people that do this or think about doing this, their concern is that they are really taking their entire practice, their training, their years of school, their years of service

to the public and they're putting it all on the line, not just in regard to their current livelihood but also going forward. They're worried about their future livelihood, earnings all being put at risk because often they do not believe that they will actually be able to return to the public sector to be able to gain employment.

So I want to thank those that have come forward with disclosures and those that will do so in the future because, just as the member previous was saying, it's incredibly important for people to be able to hold public institutions to account. It's important to have faith from the public in those institutions, and that's what I believe is the bedrock of this legislation.

That would be why I am proud to stand and speak in favour of this, because I know that a lot of people have put a lot on the line and also lost a lot in the interest of the public good. I want to again thank those people and thank the minister for democratic reform for tabling these amendments. I want to give them my full support.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on that bill, Bill 11. I wish to table copies of the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

[Adjourned debate May 11: Mr. Eggen]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to once again rise in this Assembly and talk about the Municipal Government Act. It's a pleasure for me because in my past life I actually worked in municipal government, and I knew the importance of the MGA in terms of the activities that it regulated in the municipalities that I worked for. In the Assembly we have spoken at length about the changes to the Municipal Government Act and the way that this act now strengthens municipal governments. When I worked for municipal governments, I would encourage residents to get involved in their local government decision-making, to engage with municipal candidates during elections, and, especially, to exercise their democratic rights by voting.

It has always disturbed me that often the percentage of persons who vote in the municipal election for municipal councillors, mayors, and school trustees is less than 50 per cent because, actually, municipal governments have the most impact on a

family's life. Through zoning regulations municipal governments have an impact on the affordability, style, and type of housing that is available. Through the municipal development plan municipalities decide where roads will be, green spaces, public amenities, schools, and the density of subdivisions. Municipalities set bylaws that can determine if your dog and cat need licences, if you can keep hens, bees, pigs, and so on in your backyard; set speeds on roads; decide on photoradar; fund libraries, affordable housing, seniors' lodges; support families and community services programs.

I want especially to talk about libraries, not only because we have a fantastic library in Strathcona county but because our government actually funds libraries as opposed to what happened in Saskatchewan, where library funding was cut.

4:50

Mr. Carson: They went back on it.

Ms McKittrick: Okay. Well, sorry.

Anyway, I'm always happy to visit my library, and I'm always reminded that it is a part of municipal government.

Municipalities also work to ensure industrial and retail tax bases, encourage economic development, honour volunteers and community leadership. As you can see, Madam Speaker, any revision to the Municipal Government Act has a huge impact on the life of every single Albertan.

I was very pleased to see the addition in Bill 8 of section 63, about the joint-use and planning agreements. During my school trustee days planning for schools and finding the appropriate land were an ongoing challenge. We were fortunate that our board and municipal government had established, at the staff and political level, committees to discuss planning for schools, joint-use agreements for parks, green spaces, and school facilities. The issue of joint-use and planning agreements is one which was advocated for strongly during the original MGA consultations by one of my boards, the Elk Island public board. I'm really grateful for their willingness to speak about this issue. My thanks to the former and current ministers of Municipal Affairs for having listened to Elk Island public board and all the other boards that spoke to the need of adding this section to the MGA.

Land, especially a portion of land big enough for a school, playground, playing fields, parking, and so on, is really hard to set aside in many urban municipalities. There is also the need for appropriate access to and exit from the schools, with provisions for emergency situations. Planning for schools must happen with attention paid to demographics, future growth, suitability, and to the kinds of businesses and developments that can be located close to schools. For example, you have to make sure that you don't build dangerous industries close to school sites. Land is also costly and hard to acquire if careful planning has not happened early on in any area structure planning.

The section that was added to the MGA in Bill 8 reads in part:

670.1(1) Where on the coming into force of this section a school board is operating within the municipal boundaries of a municipality, the municipality must, within 3 years after this section comes into force, enter into an agreement under this section with the school board.

(2) Where after the coming into force of this section a school board commences operating within the municipal boundaries of a municipality, the municipality must, within 3 years after the school board commences operating in the municipality, enter into an agreement under this section with the school board.

I won't bore the Assembly today by reading all of this section, as my colleague the MLA from Calgary did a few days ago, but I think everybody understands the importance of this section in terms of ensuring that municipal government and school boards meet early

on and really spend time thinking about the use of land within the municipal or county boundaries and how this land can best be used to ensure that the children that live in the area can have access to schools.

Bill 8 will make sure that each school board will sit down with their one or in many cases more than one, maybe even up to 10 municipal governments and discuss school site needs, suitability, demographics, and, hopefully, share each other's strategic plan as to programs and land use. I think of my own school boards, that have probably seven or eight municipal governments that they have to work with in terms of planning for schools. They have to work with not only Strathcona county but Fort Saskatchewan, Vegreville, for one of the boards Camrose, Mundare, Tofield, and so on. This section of the act is really going to encourage every partner in municipal governments to really think about the need to use land for schools.

Also, in many municipalities there is more than one board, as there is in my own municipality. In Strathcona county we have public, Catholic, and francophone boards. All three and the municipal governments, hopefully, will work together to figure how best to use land to the benefit of schools and public amenities. I'm really hoping that this part of the act will encourage not only the municipalities that come to agreement with individual boards but that all boards in one municipality will come into agreement jointly with the municipality so we can really use land as well as possible to create the kind of schools that we need.

I should also add, Madam Speaker, that I'm so pleased that the Minister of Education has worked so hard to build new schools not only in my own riding but in all of the other ridings. It's very timely that this section has been added to Bill 8 because it's going to establish the planning for years to come as the government initiates the building of new schools.

Madam Speaker, other members in the Assembly have spoken eloquently about the provisions that allow municipal government to establish parental leave policies and about the need for all municipalities to work and collaborate with their nearby First Nation communities. I myself had the opportunity to see the importance of this collaboration when I worked with a municipality in B.C. to develop their municipal plan. The plan was given in draft to the nearby First Nation communities and their feedback incorporated in the final draft. It was a very respectful process, that led to these communities' engagement with the municipalities on other matters, and I'm really hoping that that experience will be replicated in many, many of the municipalities in Alberta that are adjacent to First Nation communities.

I would like to also remind all members of the extensive consultation processes that led to Bill 8. Al Kemmere, who's the president of AAMD and C, stated:

Through the MGA review process, AAMDC has been grateful to have been at the table. This journey has been open, inclusionary and fair. Though you never get everything you ask for, in the end we have current legislation that for the most part reflects municipal challenges and we are proud to have been part of it.

I again want to commend both ministers, the current Minister of Municipal Affairs and the former minister, for the time, the energy, and the way they carefully consulted with everyone who wanted to be part of revision of the act.

Madam Speaker, it is my hope that all members of this Assembly will support Bill 8 and will also work with their local municipalities, First Nation communities, and school boards to support collaboration and thoughtful planning.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and good afternoon, everyone. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak once again to Bill 8. It is a fact that this bill had a significant number of topics in it, and it's difficult to actually pay proper attention to all the topics that it has, in fact, in the time that's allowed today, but I'd like to go through a few things if I could.

I'd like to start out just by saying that we identified from the briefings 44 different topics that were in Bill 8 that were under review. There were some proposed changes, and they were divided up into three or four major topic areas: governance, how they work together and plan for growth, and funding. These kinds of topics are important and vital to how municipalities work with the ratepayers in their areas.

5:00

I'm pleased to say and be able to say that I'm glad the government did come forward with some of these things. They were, for the most part, fairly welcomed, and I thought they were worth while to discuss. I only wish we had more time to discuss them in greater detail. There are a lot of them I'd like to touch on just a little bit, so I'll just mention a few of them.

The first one is collaboration with indigenous communities. That's certainly something that we do support. In the bill municipalities with adjacent First Nation reserves or Métis settlements are required to notify them of any new municipal development plans and area structure plans. It clarifies that municipalities are able to collaborate with their neighbouring First Nation communities, you know, on matters of regional service delivery, and it empowers municipalities to form collaborative agreements with those communities. While many municipalities are already doing this, during last summer's MGA tour it became clear, however, that there was and probably still is today some confusion. This amendment perhaps will give some clarity that may be needed there. I'm not sure how the indigenous communities feel about this – it will be interesting to hear back from them – but it's certainly a change that I support and that our party supports.

Conservation reserves were another interesting one. From my previous experience in municipal work we had conservation reserves in some manner but not to the extent that this is indicating now. It's the ability for a municipality to establish a reserve. That was actually created in Bill 21. The idea then was to address an issue that municipalities were facing when dealing with development requests. The change was largely welcomed by developers.

It looks like Bill 8 is going to enhance and expand the rules around that new idea. It'll allow for reimbursement, actually, of the purchase cost to be considered during annexation proceedings as well. It further restricts those funds to be used for conservation purposes only. It also clarifies that the conservation reserve land is exempt from municipal taxes, and it encourages municipalities to include conservation goals and objectives in their statutory plans. Finally, it does close a loophole that would have left municipalities unable to reclassify a conservation reserve that had suffered substantive changes that eliminated the land's conservation value; for example, when lands are often destroyed by flooding. Some of these changes are good, and I do support that one.

There was also another topic. It was taxation of provincial agencies. It makes it clear that any property held by a provincial corporation will be considered taxable for the purpose of property taxation. I welcome this acknowledgement on the part of the province, too. It was a responsibility that I think is important. The AUMA had a quote on that, and they thought it was good. They

said that it's "to compensate municipalities for the services the municipality provides." It's a change that I, too, support.

Another big one that was mentioned, I think, just a bit by the previous speaker: joint-use and planning agreements. Bill 8 proposes to establish the requirement for a municipality to establish joint-use and planning agreements, or JUPAs, with the school boards within its boundaries. These JUPAs will include basic things leading to the planning, development, and use of school sites; the transfer of municipal and school reserves in a municipality; the disposal of school sites; the servicing of school sites on municipal reserves in the municipality; and the use and maintenance of school and municipality facilities and playing fields in the municipality, including what the fees, if any, for use will be. The proposed changes should result in improved collaboration, I think, between school boards and municipalities, so it's definitely a change that I can support.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, all the good that this bill offers is overshadowed a little bit, in my opinion, by the government's insistence on maintaining complete secrecy over the phase-in of the 5 to 1 property tax ratio. Now, let me make this clear. I'm not opposed to the principle of linking nonresidential and residential property tax rates, nor am I opposed to the ratio being 5 to 1. But what I am opposed to is the government's complete unwillingness to provide any certainty with a timeline to those municipalities and all of their residents, local business owners, and industries that exceed the 5 to 1 tax ratio currently on when the government expects them to become compliant with the 5 to 1 linkage.

During the Committee of the Whole debate two reasonable amendments were proposed that would have established within the legislation itself the government's expectation in terms of a timeline for municipalities to come into compliance. We thought this was a reasonable request. We didn't think that it was something that could not be fairly considered by the government.

The first proposed amendment would have allowed a municipality until 2029 to bring their property tax rates into compliance. It did this simply by including the date in the body of the proposed bill. This was a timeline suggested by the communities that would be the hardest hit. The response from the government was that they didn't want to establish timelines in the legislation because it was too restrictive and that it didn't allow for flexibility for different municipalities that have different ratios and established a horizon that might be too long.

The second amendment accommodated the comments and concerns of the minister and proposed a different timeline of 2027, or 10 years, by which to become compliant with the 5 to 1 ratio. Again the response from the government members was a concern that the 10 years was too onerous a horizon by which these municipalities had to become compliant.

As my hon. colleague from Calgary-Hays pointed out that day, a compromise of 11 years seemed to be a number that fit nicely between 10 and 12. However, instead, as most people know, the government insisted that they had things well in control, that assurances had been made to the nonconforming municipalities, and that the only thing required was that they have a little trust in them. Well, frankly, Madam Speaker, trust-me clauses in this government are not necessarily appropriate, in my opinion. I'm unwilling to trust them to do what they say, and I think most municipalities that we've talked to have the same feeling.

I'd like to give a little reminder on a couple of key words that I'd given during Committee of the Whole. There was the word "uncertainty." Uncertainty can lead to speculation, and speculation in municipalities and marketplaces and all that kind of thing, whether it's in the stock market or in the municipal world, especially to do with real estate and the value of people's properties,

can lead eventually to economic difficulty if it's not managed correctly.

Instead, however, if you have predictability, you can have prosperity, whether it's the community itself or the businesses that are involved in that community or the ancillary businesses that are providing employment like in the Fort McMurray area with the oil sands operations. The oil and gas business is vital to the Canadian economy. It's vital to the Alberta economy. We support the oil and gas industry heavily on our side of the House, and we would really have appreciated having that predictability and that prosperity as a result of having a proper timeline in place. It didn't look like that was going to happen. We're disappointed with that.

While there are many things in Bill 8 that are improvements – and I'm happy to see them in this bill – since the government has failed to address the critical issue of bringing certainty to the timeline for the phase-in of that 5 to 1 ratio, I'm sorry, but I will be voting against this bill during this reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Like my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod, I'm happy to stand up and speak today to Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, at third reading. I agree with him as well that there are a lot of good proposals contained in Bill 8, including enabling municipalities to create parental leave for councillors, a great idea; clarifying that municipalities may collaborate with First Nations reserves and Métis settlements on regional service delivery – I think, again, that's, you know, a gimme – and establishing a framework for municipalities and school boards within their boundaries to create joint-use and planning agreements, also a good choice, where we try to take advantage of every tax dollar that we can to make sure that it's utilized to its full potential.

5:10

There's also a requirement that a municipality initiating an amalgamation or annexation must notify all local authorities operating or providing services within the affected municipalities; exempting school boards from paying off-site levies on the construction of public school building projects, which is also good; allowing municipalities the freedom to provide receipts for taxes paid at the request of the taxpayer; clarifying that property held by a provincial corporation is taxable – I hear that quite a bit, especially in my community of St. Paul, where there are a lot of provincial buildings – clarifying that assessors may not compel a property owner to provide records during an inspection or respond to a request for information relative to the current assessment year if the property owner has filed a complaint about their assessment.

Unfortunately, all these good proposals are overshadowed by the proposed changes that grant the minister complete and total discretion to set the deadline for compliance to meet the required nonresidential to residential property tax rate of 5 to 1. I would just like to point out that the reason I have an issue with that is that some of the municipalities, especially up in northeastern-northwestern Alberta, are already facing issues with nonpayment of linear tax by companies that have defaulted or have gone bankrupt or insolvent. You know, they already have to sort of tack on some of this stuff as carry-over onto residential taxes, so this is just going to make it a little bit harder for the municipalities, especially the smaller ones, to meet their goals.

Now, while I don't have an issue with the ratio myself, granting the minister absolute authority to set the timeline is completely unacceptable. In some cases the decision of the minister could cause residential property taxes to increase by double or more. I understand that the minister has committed to working closely with municipalities on a case-by-case basis when developing the phase-in timeline for each nonconforming municipality, but without clearly laying it out in the legislation, it remains completely at the discretion of the minister, and it makes a few of the municipalities a little nervous. If they could have some set dates, if you're dealing with them on an individual basis, the sooner that we could get those dates set up with them, the better. Through the chair, of course.

I represent a constituency that includes two municipalities whose nonresidential tax rate exceeds its lowest residential property tax rate by more than five times.

An Hon. Member: Two municipalities?

Mr. Hanson: Two of them, yeah. I believe one has a ratio around 7.3; the other one is a little closer, at 6.25.

Compared to other municipalities who exceed the ratio, 6.25 may not seem that bad, and that may be correct. However, the fact remains that there are provisions within Bill 8 that require all municipalities that exceed the ratio to become fully compliant, with no mention of a specific and clear timeline in which to do so. That's where the issue comes in. I believe that in the previous legislation, that was passed here by this government, there was kind of a set timeline of five or 10 years for people to come into compliance, and this bill doesn't allow for that. It just puts it solely at the discretion of the minister. Like I said, it makes some of the industries and municipalities, actually, nervous because they don't have any real dates that they can set their priorities and their schedules and their funding on.

Instead, it provides for those deadlines to be established through regulation. Unlike legislation, which is required to be debated and voted on by the Legislature, regulations are established behind closed doors at the cabinet table. It's important to note that none of these regulations currently exist. The government is asking us to trust them to set compliance timelines for municipalities. I consider myself a reasonable person, and even for me that's asking a lot. I'm not prepared to bet my constituents' hard-earned money on this government's promise that they won't simply impose a timeline on municipalities unilaterally.

I'll close by reaffirming that there are many positive proposals offered in Bill 8. I agree with many of them. Unfortunately, without addressing the need for certainty around the 5 to 1 ratio, I will be unable to support it at third reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comments and the concerns from the members opposite. I appreciate that they like 99.9 per cent of the second-biggest piece of legislation in Alberta. That's fantastic. What I'm curious about is the fact that they say that they can't support it because the 5 to 1 is under the minister's discretion.

Well, everything is under the minister's discretion when it really comes down to it. The fact of the matter is that I've been in discussions with industry. They say that there are concerns. Fair enough. I've been discussing with them. Municipalities: there are concerns, granted. I've been discussing with them, and I've committed to them since I've been onboard as the minister that we are going to wait for their feedback to understand what their timelines are. They

didn't want me to impose timelines on them when we suggested those things. Now things have changed, apparently. I'm supposed to believe the members opposite. They say that they don't want to trust me. Well, how can I trust that? The conversations that I've had personally with a lot of different people out there: I will go on that, thank you very much.

I do appreciate the comments and the concerns, you know, but to not want to support a bill like this, where you agree with so much of it, almost the whole thing, because I've said that I made a promise and a commitment to the municipalities and industry to work with them in collaboration to set timelines that they can agree with rather than dropping the hammer and using my ministerial power — I would rather not have to do that. I can if I want, but I would rather work with people because that's the way we get things done in a good way, moving forward, to make it sustainable. I will continue to work with these communities, going forward, because I think that when we work together — the whole point of the MGA is collaboration, making sure that what we're doing is better for residents. I don't think my dropping the hammer and just setting a hard timeline that might not work for certain communities is appropriate for a lot of the communities out there, so I don't want to do that unless I have to in the long run.

We've committed for this regulation itself, apart from the rest of the bill and the other regulations, that we'll take the time it needs to make sure we get it right with these communities, working in collaboration going forward. As I said, the MGA is meant for that. It's meant to make sure that we're here working for the residents and our constituents. You know, I'm not here about power or any of these types of things, about taking things back or any of that. It's all about working for the people, and I've committed to that, and I will continue to do that. I want my kids to know that the promises that I make they can count on. When I look a person in the eye and shake their hand and commit to something, then I will commit to that, and I will continue doing that. I'm not going to go back on my word. That's not how I was brought up.

I understand their concerns and what they're saying, but I don't appreciate trying to sit here and pretend that by throwing hard timelines down, I'm going to end all of the uncertainty out there. The uncertainty is coming from over there. I would appreciate it if we go on the facts, which they did for 99.9 per cent of this bill, but to spread things about the 5 to 1 ratio and start talking about this after I've had all these conversations, to try to bring things up that haven't been brought to me, you know, I don't appreciate. I'd appreciate it if maybe you bring them to me next time. I'm here to work in collaboration. I'm here for the people of this province. I'll say it every single time I'm in here. That's how I was brought up.

Going forward, you know, I understand they say: "Oh, you don't want to trust the government. You don't want to trust anybody that's saying things on the opposite side." One of the reasons why I got involved in politics was because I was sick of that. I didn't like it when people would get up and say things that weren't true or purposely mislead or misconstrue things. Then the public would shrug and say, "Well, that's politics." No, it's not. We're elected officials, and we should be accountable to our people and our constituents. That's a promise that I made, and it's a promise I'm going to keep.

Thank you. I appreciate the comments from the other side, but I will continue to work with the people out there that I promised to work with, and we'll make sure that we have positive outcomes in the end.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you have 15 seconds.

Mr. Hanson: Fifteen seconds? Oh. Well, I'll sit. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to respond in the few seconds we have left under 29(2)(a)?

All right. The time has expired on that. I'll recognize Calgary-Glenmore.

5:20

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the House today in support of Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. When I look at this act, the first word that comes to mind is collaboration. What a beautiful word, "collaboration." It's bringing people to the same table for discussions, getting their opinions, getting their views, including people, including Albertans. That's what the province is about. Albertans define Alberta.

We're making the MGA a responsive and forward-looking piece of legislation that gives municipalities practical tools and resources to support strong and sustainable communities and a more resilient and diversified economy for Alberta families. There are so many people across Alberta who care about their communities, and we heard from these people about how our government can make practical changes to make their lives and communities better. The process of engagement was involved, which means that it's collaboration, once again, getting people involved in how they would like to pursue things together, the sense of togetherness.

We made some of the changes in the form of 40 additional amendments to the Modernized Municipal Government Act last fall before it was passed unanimously in December 2016. This bill incorporates feedback received during engagements with municipal leaders, families, young people, school boards, indigenous communities, small businesses, and industry, which included new ideas for how the MGA can support sustainable and collaborative communities. Again I highlight the words "sustainable and collaborative communities."

This bill delivers ideas that were heard from Albertans. A key focus of the MGA's modernization is municipal collaboration because we believe that all Albertans benefit when municipalities are good neighbours, working together to provide services and strengthen the economy. It's a sense of developing synergy when people are all together on the same boat for a common objective, the betterment of the province and Albertans.

I would like to specifically highlight the indigenous communities aspect because I'm very grateful and honoured to be the representative of Calgary-Glenmore, which is adjacent to Tsuut'ina Nation. Working with that particular nation as my neighbour, it is my privilege that I have this opportunity to do so, to have more engagement and develop that sense of understanding with each other and strengthen our relationship with the First Nation.

Indigenous communities intersect with municipalities through regular interactions for a variety of reasons such as utility service delivery. Our government is committed to implementing the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. As such, it is important to encourage the province's municipalities to continue to take meaningful and reasonable steps to understand and engage with neighbouring indigenous communities and citizens in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner, particularly with respect to land-use planning and service delivery.

Municipalities will be required to notify neighbouring indigenous communities of any new municipal development plans or area structure plans. Madam Speaker, I can tell you that these changes are a first step to improving the relationship between indigenous communities and municipalities. As we look at the history, this is

what was missing when it came to strengthening our relationships with indigenous communities, engagement and collaboration.

Requiring municipalities to notify adjacent indigenous communities of any new municipal development plans or area structure plans mirrors current legislation regarding statutory plan preparation, where municipalities must notify adjacent municipalities of the plan preparation. The MGA review has included meetings with Treaty 6, Treaty 8, Siksika, Tsuut'ina, Stoney, Kainai, Metis Settlements General Council, and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association. We talk about and say with pride that we are on treaty lands depending on where we are in the province, but when we acknowledge that, we need to ensure that they have the voice at the table when the decisions are made.

This MGA is actually that bridge, that road that is leading towards strengthening those relationships, thus strengthening our communities. In preparation for this bill Municipal Affairs sent e-mails and letters to all First Nation bands and Métis so that they would know what amendments were coming forward. The MGA doesn't apply on indigenous lands but can be used to help bridge

the gap between indigenous communities and municipalities by creating an avenue for collaboration and conversation. Again, I repeat the words "collaboration" and "conversation." The MGA is bringing in a new era of collaboration for all Alberta communities. This approach should include First Nation and Métis communities. Bridging the gap is important to build a strong Alberta.

Therefore, I'm very proud to say that I'm supporting this bill with pride, and I'm amazed how collaborative it is and how it is conveying or encouraging the message of friendships and relationships through this modernized MGA.

Now I would like to move to adjourn the debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Mason: Good progress today, Madam Speaker. I would therefore move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 17, 2017

Day 35

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 17, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. members, let us pray or reflect, each in our own way. Allow us to embrace a discovery. Let us search for new solutions and new opportunities, reaching beyond what we think is possible. We must not limit ourselves. We must not restrict the possibilities. We must believe that through co-operation and community anything can be accomplished.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 8

An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government

[Adjourned debate May 16: Ms Kazim]

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition. Good morning.

Mr. Jean: Good morning and thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 8 at third reading. I want to begin by offering my thanks to my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for providing my input, my comments for the record at the Committee of the Whole stage. I appreciate that, and I know that with his help we have been able to come up with some amendments and proposed amendments and, actually, to overcome some of the challenges that have been identified to inspire stakeholders, in particular municipalities, in relation to this bill.

I do share his disappointment that the government saw fit to reject both of his amendments, however, because I think that they were reasonable and thoughtful and certainly reflected some of what we've heard in discussions with municipalities and members of municipal governments across Alberta. What they told me was that they wanted predictability and flexibility, not all municipalities because, obviously, some are more mature in their development and also their population growth and some of the demands that they've needed over the years. The provincial government, frankly, in the past has provided some of those areas with more stable, predictable, long-term funding, and they've been able to as a result control some of their tax base and their ratios on taxes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my Wildrose colleagues and I have long been proud advocates for municipal governments, and of course we have proposed many things, including the 10-10 infrastructure plan, which we believe gives stable, long-term funding to municipalities. We've also proposed some other municipal government suggestions that would strengthen municipalities. It's always our purpose in the Wildrose to strengthen municipal governments because they're closer to the people and they make better decisions, in my opinion, with the people's money.

Also, long term they are more accountable to the people and more instantly are able to deal with the needs and demands as well as to reflect at the ballot box what the people of that constituency or municipality want. We understand that when you empower local municipalities and provide them with resources that they need, they

flourish and, in turn, Mr. Speaker, Albertans flourish. That's what it's all about here, to serve the people of Alberta and make sure that they are provided with the opportunity to have greatness in their lives as they see fit for their lives.

When it comes to Bill 8 specifically, I have been clear about my position from the beginning. There are a lot of good things in this legislation, Mr. Speaker, a lot of things that I actually support and have been advocating for for years. I think it's important also to give stability and predictability to industry and to corporations as well and, most importantly, to the citizens of Alberta, the everyday Albertans that pay their taxes, pay their dues, and want their government to simply stick up for them when they ask.

The bill's title, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, is, I think, well deserved. As I said, many of the proposed amendments will indeed strengthen municipal governance in our province. Of course, that is a very good thing because if we strengthen the municipal governments, we will strengthen, ultimately, the accountability to the people of Alberta, and I believe better government will happen as a result.

Unfortunately, however, providing absolutely no details whatsoever and leaving it completely up to ministerial discretion regarding when a municipality that exceeds the 5 to 1 tax ratio will be expected to become compliant are not things I can support. Mr. Speaker, this gives, I believe, the absolute opposite effect than what the Federation of Canadian Municipalities asked for from our government and previous governments, federal governments, regarding predictability, stability, long-term understanding of what the result of this bill will be in regard to the ratio.

You might be asking yourself: why am I so hung up on the 5 to 1 ratio? Why am I prepared to vote against an entire bill full of good ideas – and they are good ideas – that actually strengthen municipal governments and support municipal governments all across Alberta? Well, the answer is simple: because I want every Albertan to experience the amazing life I've had in Fort McMurray. I've lived there 50 years, Mr. Speaker. It's been fantastic. Two blocks away from my home of over 20 years, before it was burned down, I would be able to take my kids and my family out fishing in the morning and actually, in 15 minutes, be able to catch some fish and have them on the banks of the Clearwater. Now, that's not important to everybody, but it is important to me. I do believe that the lifestyle that I've had has been incredible.

I do think Fort McMurray is the greatest place in the world. Certainly, Alberta is. I've had the honour of representing the Wood Buffalo region, including Fort McMurray, for 12 years, both federally and provincially, and I've lived in the community since 1967. I have spent the greatest years of my life in Fort McMurray. Great memories, Mr. Speaker, and I do see that being a challenge today, being able to continue, especially under the uncertainty that this act brings to the stability and the long-term predictability of taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to say it a couple of times in my speech, but this has the possibility and, I believe, the likelihood of the minister being able to bring in ramifications that are, frankly, unaffordable. Right now we pay, in Fort McMurray, municipal taxes. The citizens of Fort McMurray pay municipal taxes that are comparable to Edmonton's and Calgary's for the same home, yet because of this change and because of the neglect of previous governments with Fort McMurray and the huge growth rate, the expansion by over 120 per cent over the last decade or so, we have had challenges that most communities don't have, mature communities. We've grown, as you know, from 1,700 people in 1967 to 100,000 people just two years ago and now a few less than that, about 82,000, I understand. There are a ton of challenges.

Mr. Speaker, I know that although our birthplace does leave a mark on us, the place where we are raised, I believe, makes a permanent mark on your soul, your family, and your future. It creates the foundation which builds who we are.

The opportunity of our municipal taxes, which are currently competitive with the rest of the province, seeing a 300 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker, in just five years I believe is unconscionable. It certainly, from what I've read in the notes from the government, seems to definitely be within the realm of possibility, which means that the people of Fort McMurray, notwithstanding that they have seen devastation there in just the last year, will be subject to a 300 per cent increase in their tax rate. I would suggest that that will encourage people to move out of town.

I don't want to be the doom and gloom person. I do believe that Fort McMurray, as I mentioned, and that area, northern Alberta, northeastern Alberta, is the greatest place in the world, as, I would hope, anybody that was raised there thinks. But it is going to present a lot of challenges, and right now we have more than enough challenges.

That's why I'm asking for predictability and stability and knowing what's going to happen long term. I want to talk about Fort McMurray in 20 years. I'd like to make it 50 years, Mr. Speaker, maybe even 100; that would be so nice. But I'd like to talk about Fort McMurray not in the way it was and how it was the economic engine of Canada, how it was providing so much tax base and so many riches to the people of Canada and Alberta. I don't want to talk about "was." I want to talk about "is," and I can't talk about "is" if nobody lives there, if people fly in and fly out, they stay at the camps, they don't contribute to the community. Everybody here is part of a community, and I want my community to thrive, flourish. I want people to be proud of it.

Mr. Speaker, we've lost over 2,000 homes. Some people put the estimate as high as 2,600 homes. At a time when our tax base is shrinking and people are earning a lot less money, we're seeing an increased cost of 300 per cent, possibly, and that's why I can't in good conscience support this bill. That's why I've asked the government and why our amendments suggested that we do what municipal leaders have suggested we do, and that is, for those municipalities that exceed the 5 to 1 ratio, to put forward an opportunity for them to know how it's going to lay out in the future so they can adjust accordingly before we vote on this bill, not afterwards.

9:10

I'm not going to take up a lot of time, Mr. Speaker. I think everybody knows where I stand on this bill and why I want to vote against it, notwithstanding that there are some incredible parts to it.

I would support the bill if they just moved to a different time frame to implement this and gave the certainty and predictability to the municipalities. It doesn't, Mr. Speaker, just matter to my municipality; it matters to 19 other municipalities across Alberta. They're not just in northern Alberta; they're all over Alberta. I believe that many of these municipalities don't even understand at this stage the large ramifications for their tax base and ultimately the ability of their community and their citizens to thrive.

I simply can't go back to Fort McMurray and look the residents in the eyes – many of them lost everything they had, including, Mr. Speaker, some without any adequate insurance – and tell them not to worry, that they can trust this government to bring forward predictable, balanced, sustainable legislation and regulation, that will support them and not encourage them to move out of Fort McMurray, that won't double, triple, or even do worse over a very short period of time just because they said so. That's why we need governments that bring forward predictable, long-term legislation

based upon proper accountability mechanisms and that make sure they listen to the people and do what the people ask.

That's why the consultation process is so important for any government. Without the legitimacy of consultation with the people, I don't think you have the right to govern and certainly not the right to bring forward legislation that is going to impose dramatic costs and a change of lifestyle on the people that have lived in northern Alberta for so long or on any community, Mr. Speaker, any of the 19 municipalities across Alberta. After the year many of the residents have survived, they certainly need stability, predictability, need to know that this government is on their side and has their backs.

I'm also one that believes that we need to give the same ability to businesses to have long-term projections and know what their costs will be going forward. Mr. Speaker, we know that it's going to be less. Why not just have the ability to move that over a greater period of time so people have more flexibility to get to the point where they have to be, ultimately, with this government?

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against Bill 8 at third reading. I think my community is depending on me, as all municipalities that are going to be affected by this legislation are. They want predictability, they want stability, and they want to know long term what they are facing because they have to make those decisions for their lives. Many people within my community and the 19 others across this province will have their personal lifestyle and quality of life affected by these changes by this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I just had a question for the hon. member relating to his comments about municipalities. I appreciated those comments. He talked about the importance of municipalities being independent, being able to determine their own futures, that they were more accountable to the people. He was supportive of the FCM position with respect to predictability and autonomy of municipalities as well, I assume.

But on Monday afternoon during question period one of his members asked me some questions about the green line issue in Calgary – it was the Member for Calgary-Foothills – in which he demanded that we intervene to tell the city council what to do with respect to the green line. I'm just wondering if he supports the position that was taken by the Member for Calgary-Foothills, that the provincial government should overrule the city of Calgary when it comes to the design and so on of the green line, and whether or not he feels that's consistent with the principles that he's just stated.

Mr. Jean: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. As you know, there are only really three levels of government in Canada. One is the federal government. The others are the provincial government and, of course, aboriginal government. As such, the municipal governments are actually under the purview of the province, and although this government, the NDP government, might try to download as many decisions on them as possible, the truth is that they are ultimately responsible for all of these changes because it's called the Municipal Government Act, and that means the authority rests with this minister and with this government.

I do believe that decisions closer to the people are better decisions, but that doesn't mean consultation does not have to be on the wide breadth of all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, this is being funded, in part, by the people of Alberta, from all across Alberta. Much like the federal model of tripartite involvement – municipality, province, and the federal government – I would

suggest that it would be no different in this particular case. I do believe that we have to have something that this government has been missing, and that is consultation with the people: having the ability to talk to them, having a committee that actually hears them, and that they get to vote on those decisions. [interjections] Now, they may bicker and laugh, but we know what happened with Bill 6. Was there consultation? No. That's why we had thousands of people out on the front steps. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Jean: Was there consultation on any of the bills they brought forward? Thirty-six days for the labour bill, Mr. Speaker: that's not consultation. That's telling people what's going to happen. This government is not a consultative government. They want to download the decisions, ultimately, onto people that they can blame in the future. They should take the responsibility that they have been elected to have and make the decisions in consultation with municipal governments and with the people of Alberta and businesses and citizens, everyday Albertans, because that's who they serve, not themselves.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other questions or comments to the Leader of the Official Opposition under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, are there any other members who would like to speak to the bill?

Seeing and hearing none, I would call upon the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to close debate.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour to stand here to close third reading of Bill 8, An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, but before I do, I'd like to address some of the last member's comments. Time after time I've listened to the members of the Official Opposition fearmonger Albertans with hypothetical scenarios, and frankly I won't let the member of the Official Opposition get away with that today. Listen, these are real families. I've met some of these families, and they deserve better than what the member opposite is offering. They deserve facts, not rumours and conspiracies. Albertans deserve a better opposition, and so do the people of Fort McMurray.

I want to speak to the regulation-making authority proposed in Bill 8 for compliance with the linked tax ratio of 5 to 1. I understand there are some concerns, and I think there's been a lot of misinformation about this. During the MGA review and consultation we heard very clearly that municipalities over the 5 to 1 ratio should have to comply with the ratio. All this bill will do is provide a mechanism to set a compliance schedule. This bill changes nothing for the property tax rates in Wood Buffalo right now. No changes have been put in place in Bill 8, and no changes are imminent.

The Official Opposition has been stating that this is going to raise taxes by 300 per cent, and this is patently false. That is not the case. Let me explain this clearly to the hon. members across the aisle. We are talking about a long-term, phased approach, a phased approach that takes into account the assessment growth and capital planning of each affected municipality so that we can protect residential ratepayers and municipal services. This is a thoughtful and balanced approach. This approach is supported by both RMWB and industry, who are working together in collaboration on a solution that works for families and the economy.

Municipalities will not be asked to do this overnight. We are working with our municipal partners and industry to determine timelines that work best for them and their residents, and I'll remind the House that supporting our municipalities also means supporting the industries that their residents depend on. During this time of low

oil prices we are working to help our oil sands industry remain as competitive as possible. The bottom line is that if the oil sands aren't succeeding, Fort McMurray and other communities aren't succeeding. We're moving forward with a thoughtful and balanced approach.

9:20

Bill 8, if passed, gives the minister regulation-making powers in terms of timelines – just timelines – and this gives us the flexibility to ensure that communities have plenty of time to adapt. Each community is different, and that's why we will develop local solutions with the local municipalities through consultation. We can't just put through arbitrary timelines. We need to respect the diversity and needs of each community and make collaborative decisions from there. I'll say it again: nothing is imminent, and we'll continue to move forward collaboratively with the RMWB, other municipalities, and industry with a balanced approach that improves industrial competitiveness and protects residents.

Now, as I have previously said, I'm very proud to close third reading of this bill. The Municipal Government Act has been the gold standard of government consultation. This has been an ongoing process since 2012, and I want to take a second to truly thank my department staff. None of us would be here without the hard work and long hours put in by our staff, and I am certainly no exception. Without a doubt, I have the best staff in the government, and I really want to thank them for the hard work that they have put into this. It's incredible.

The MGA has been about two things all along, collaboration and consultation. We wanted to make sure that this bill encourages municipalities to work collaboratively with their neighbours to the benefit of their residents. We wanted to make sure that the voices of Albertans were reflected in this legislation, and this bill represents a lot of the ideas and feedback we received directly from Albertans during our town halls last summer in 21 communities. We wanted to make sure that this bill supported families by enabling councils to create parental leave policies for municipal councillors and to ensure that municipalities can work together towards shared services such as libraries and rec centres.

It's easy for members on both sides of the aisle to get caught up in the day-to-day politics of the Legislature, but we should never forget that at the heart of this work must be Albertans. With that, I want to end by thanking all of the Albertans who participated in our consultation and shared valuable feedback and ideas. I want to thank the members in the Assembly for thoughtful and constructive, for the most part, discussion of these amendments. I appreciate all the consideration you've given this bill, and I welcome your support of an Act to Strengthen Municipal Government.

I move that the bill be read a third and final time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:23 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jabbour	Nielsen
Babcock	Kazim	Panda
Carson	Kleinstauber	Phillips
Clark	Littlewood	Piquette
Cooper	Loyola	Renaud
Dach	Luff	Rosendahl

Drysdale	MacIntyre	Schreiner
Eggen	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	Mason	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Smith
Gotfried	McLean	Sucha
Hinkley	McPherson	Sweet
Hoffman	Miller	Turner
Horne	Miranda	Westhead

9:40

Against the motion:

Cyr	Pitt	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Schneider	van Dijken
Hanson	Stier	Yao
Jean		

Totals: For – 42 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 2

Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Private Bills for the expeditious manner in which this bill was brought forward, and I'd like to thank the House for the same thing, for moving it right along. I've been in contact with Mrs. Anderson, and she wishes to extend her thanks to the House.

Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill Pr. 2, Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act.

The Speaker: Any other members who wish to speak to the motion?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017.

It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to support Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that as the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore it is my honour to represent the Calgary Jewish Centre, an exemplary and unique community centre in Calgary that has been serving all the individuals in our city at great length. In 1979 the Jewish community of Calgary opened the Calgary Jewish Centre, a recreational, cultural, and social facility in southwest Calgary. The Calgary Jewish Centre today and as it has been since 1979 is open one hundred per cent of the time to any and all who wish to attend and participate, Jewish or not. All programs are open to all. With this policy the Calgary Jewish Centre is a major recreational, cultural, and daycare facility in its part of the city.

Considerable work and legal planning and a petition to the Alberta Legislative Assembly to amend the Calgary Jewish Centre Act with expanded objects and a name change have brought them to the point

where they're ready, finally, to begin moving forward with fundraising towards execution. Their expansion is amazing. I have gone to this facility multiple times myself, and the amount of work they have put in and the effort to serve our communities is commendable. I have seen how it is serving all the communities, particularly in Calgary-Glenmore, in so many ways. When I talk to seniors, children, parents, whoever, they all talk very highly of the facility, and I've seen with my own eyes that the kind of events, festivals, and programs that are conducted through the facility are exceptional.

So when this bill was brought forward with the amendments for further expansion of this facility – I can't express how delighted I was to see what great work is being forwarded by the Jewish community, that is serving all the communities in our society. It was my pleasure to stand up and speak on their behalf.

In order to explain a little bit more in terms of what this expansion entails – it comes in different phases, and phase 1 consists of renovation of the existing Jewish community building and building a new, enlarged daycare facility. As we could see, the vision about having a daycare facility along with the seniors' care facility is excellent. With the existing building and its amenities as the base, including meeting rooms, recreational facilities, aquatics centre, gymnasium, the upgrades are going to be definitely very helpful to the members.

In phase 2 the focus is mostly to have a new theatre, basically to have seats that will be for up to 400 people as well as 250 people for a banquet and social function. The rest of the phases would consist of a new seniors' care centre and independent housing with a kosher kitchen in it, so that will make the facility a very unique place and very different in comparison to other facilities. Also, the aquatic facility's expansion and the gymnasium along with the Jewish day school or independent housing are something that is part of the scope of this project.

All in all, I would say that it's a very well-researched, very thorough approach with long-term vision in terms of how it is going to serve our communities, understanding the fact of how our demographics are changing over time and having that vision in terms of how our communities are going to look in the next few years. Planning something by anticipating or having foresight is excellent, and I would like to really commend the Calgary Jewish Centre for their excellent work.

I am very happy and honoured to stand up today to support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who wish to speak to Bill Pr. 1?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, any closing comments?

Ms Kazim: I'm good. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill Pr. 1

Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

9:50

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to say that Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017, was reviewed by the Standing Committee on Private Bills and that the committee recommended that the bill proceed.

The Chair: Are there any further speakers to this bill?
Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

Bill 12 New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm always pleased to rise, as the members of this Assembly will know, to speak to matters relating to the real estate industry and particularly where it concerns consumer protection and the protection of the public's interest in the greatest transaction that most Albertans will undertake in their lives. It is one of the biggest financial decisions that most families or individuals will make if they're buying their property for their own principal residence or as a revenue purchase, and they deserve to be protected and have confidence that that home is being built to a high standard by builders with a good track record.

It's common knowledge throughout the province that people have suffered at the hands of builders who were not well trained or lacked the skills required to complete the construction of a particular building. It's a nightmare when that happens to a family that is expecting to have their hard-earned dollars invested in a product that's going to last 50 years, 100 years if indeed it's built to the standards that it was supposed to be built to in the first place. When that doesn't happen, as I said, it's a nightmare for that family and usually a big financial burden if not financial ruin if indeed there's no compensation available because the builder that built that home, that caused the problem, no longer exists.

This bill is a fair and balanced measure which helps both consumers and the home building industry because participants in the home building industry are the last ones who want to see unscrupulous or unworthy contractors building homes for buyers who end up getting stuck with a property that requires all kinds of renovations or ends up being unfit for habitation and costs them financially something that they can't bear.

After great consultation with industry, consumer stakeholders, municipalities, and others this bill is being brought forward today to protect consumers and to maintain the high standard of integrity that we typically see in the home construction industry, notwithstanding the fact that some builders have caused this legislation to be necessary. Now, builder licensing programs already protect about 75 per cent of Canadians. We need to be in line with the other provinces so we're not a destination for bad builders from elsewhere.

This is just one more practical way that we're making life better for Albertans, and I'm proud to be a part of a government that's focused on that, particularly when we're looking at, as I said, the largest financial transaction that a family will undertake. It's a significant undertaking. I know that when I did speak with individuals in my past life as a real estate agent, that was one of the major questions in mind. When you're talking about what you actually want to buy, do you want to look at a resale property, or do you want to look at a brand new property, that's first on the market from a builder? Whether it is a resale property or whether it was one that's now going to be your first home or the home that's first occupied by you as a purchaser, the legislation is out to protect both of those buyers, the resale buyer as well as the initial buyer of a brand new property.

Madam Chair, the signs of difficulties or problems in construction don't always occur right after the purchaser moves in. Sometimes it's a subsequent purchaser who will be the recipient of the flaws in construction in the form of perhaps mould, perhaps leaky windows, perhaps a balcony that's tilted in towards the house and accepting water that goes down the wall. It doesn't really appear till a year or two later in the form of mould or seepage. There can be any number of incidents or problems that may occur even two to three or more years after the house is built, and quite often that house has already been sold to a subsequent buyer, maybe two or three subsequent buyers over the course of those few short years. The people who initially bought that house from the builder weren't probably aware of the problems that were endemic in the flawed construction in the first place.

What we want to make sure is that we try to be proactive and prevent those flaws from occurring in the first place by ensuring that those contractors who are constructing homes for sale in this province are qualified to do so and that there's a registration mechanism to ensure that those individuals who have been found to have a track record of flawed construction are not able to set up under another name in the future and do the same thing to somebody else down the road.

Currently new-home buyers are vulnerable because there are no specific requirements to be a residential builder. This doesn't just put consumers at risk; it also damages the home construction industry because one or two bad builders can tarnish the reputation of the industry as a whole. When I would sit down with homebuyers who would be making that choice as to whether they'd go ahead and buy a brand new home from a builder or perhaps a resale home that was a few years older on the market, that choice was often clouded by fears that they would end up being stuck with a home that was built by one of those so-called bad builders.

Reputations of certain names of builders got around within the industry. Homebuyers would stay away from them if they could, but sometimes those same builders would end up naming themselves something else under a new company and continue to build homes. Quite often a homebuyer would, with that fear in mind, simply opt to buy a resale home so that they knew they were buying something that had a bit of history in it and perhaps would have been showing its flaws already after it's two or three years old. They would have some confidence that anything that was going to surface had actually surfaced.

That's one of the reasons that new-home builders certainly want to make sure that buyers have confidence in the products that the industry is putting on the market, so that the buyer will, when they're considering whether to buy a brand new home or a resale home, opt without fear for the new-home builder's product. That's something that I actually had conversations about with numerous buyers, particularly first-time homebuyers who were fearful of getting into a brand new home because they didn't want to get stuck

with something that would need remediation as a result of a construction flaw. The new legislation is supported by organizations like the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, and the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute.

We've heard from homeowners, home builders, owner-builders, and renovators at targeted engagement sessions across the province. Further than that, this licensing program is partially based on the new-home buyers public registry pilot, which is helping Wood Buffalo residents during the process of rebuilding their homes and their communities in the Wood Buffalo-Fort McMurray area. Mayor Melissa Blake is also a supporter of the licensing program and has publicly stated that it promotes builder accountability and protects homebuyers.

I just want to point out, Madam Chair, that because the opposition always makes this claim that government doesn't do enough consultation, I'd like to head that off right at the start and say that we're not just wasting time listening to people complain; we are listening to engage with them and make sure that we get the legislation right.

The number of homes a company has built or typically builds in a year will have no effect on its ability to be licensed. Builder licensing is not going to have a negative impact on the trades or prevent smaller builders from entering the industry. It's not going to require owner-builders who are building their own home to be licensed. It's not going to cost taxpayers a whole bunch of money. It's going to be a fee-operated system on a cost-recovery basis. It's not going to place an unfair burden on Alberta builders. The proposed license fee is \$600 for a new application and \$500 per year for a renewal. That's the same as in British Columbia and lower than in Ontario and Quebec, where new applications are \$2,500 and \$1,000 respectively.

10:00

So the \$600 initial fee for application and \$500 for a renewal is a pretty small portion or percentage of what it costs to buy a new condo or single-family dwelling. I don't believe that we're going to see a lot of push-back from builders over this cost because when you add that into the price of a home, it's probably not going to be something that buyers would balk about if the builder decided to pass it on. Also, if the builder decided to absorb that cost, it still is something that's within the range of their ability to do given the price of homes and apartment or townhouse condominiums.

It's also considered, I would think, by the home builders as an investment in their own industry standards and reputation. It could be considered an investment in their businesses because it has the result of really making it much more difficult for unscrupulous builders to participate in the industry, and it makes it a lot easier to weed them out and prevent them from continuing to build homes after having been identified and caught out as a builder who should not be in the industry.

Madam Chair, not only has the government held constructive engagement with many builders in order to shape this bill so far; we've actually gotten their support, as I mentioned before in talking about the various stakeholders who expressed themselves positively towards this legislation. To quote the Canadian Home Builders' Association:

Alberta is looking forward to working in partnership with the provincial government on including licensing as part of the New Home Buyer Protection Act. While there is . . . plenty of work to be done, the ability to remove builders who demonstrate a proven, negative track record will be a benefit to every Albertan – including those in the industry. Our members have always been on the leading edge of the industry, including requiring warranty coverage for more than 40 years. We want to make sure that

licensing protects affordability and choice for Albertans – while also recognizing the many upstanding builders providing homes and jobs throughout the province.

That's a quote from Ryan Scott, president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association, Alberta chapter.

Madam Chair, I wish I had had this protection, this legislation in place when I was representing my buyers when they were making choices about building versus buying a resale home. It would have made the choice a lot easier, a lot more comfortable when there wasn't this added fear or cloud of fear over their decisions, when they were wondering if indeed there was a risk of themselves becoming the victims of a home builder who never decided that they would be acting in the interest of the consumer but were looking just to simply flip another home and get another one on the market and darn the consequences down the road with the buyer who would be suffering from their shoddy workmanship.

That element wouldn't now be a part of the equation should this legislation be passed. Buyers would have a much higher degree of confidence when they're deciding to go ahead with the purchase of a brand new home, and ultimately down the road the individuals whom they sell that home to will also know that there's probably a higher level of probability that the property won't have the endemic problems that we see in houses that have been built over the last couple of decades.

That would more likely be in terms of water infiltration. That is the most common issue that I've seen in the industry, particularly more than likely around windows and balconies, where in times of economic booms, when houses are under construction at a rapid rate and labour is in short supply, skilled people have to have the oversight of supervision, which they don't always get, and what results is that the techniques are not properly followed or not known. Windows get installed without proper sealant, and balconies get attached to buildings and constructed in a way that they end up having water trend towards the house instead of away from it. Eventually water infiltrates the borders of the house and the perimeters, gets inside the house, and once that happens, you've got mould issues, and that is a huge, huge problem.

Many of us have seen scaffolding around three- or four-storey walk-up buildings, even taller buildings in Edmonton, Calgary, other cities in the province, and those buildings are only half a dozen years old. It makes one wonder: what in the world is going on? These buildings are being shrouded by scaffolding, and they're undergoing major renovations, and they're only a few years old. This is quite often the result of water infiltration because of poor construction and because builders weren't skilled in what construction methods were required in order to keep water out.

This legislation will go a long way to really highlighting the fact that if you're a builder in this province, you will need to be qualified, you'll need to know what you're doing, and you'll have to make sure that the interests of those people that you are serving, those people that you're building those homes for, are protected. In the home building industry and in the resale industry as well there's a high level of pride of workmanship, but there's a percentage, a small percentage, of individual builders out there who really don't regard the public interest as something that they need to follow. It's those builders that we are targeting with this legislation here to protect the public and consumers at the point of purchase, where they first buy the home from the builder, and resale subsequently down the road.

This legislation will go a long way to protect the consumer as well as the industry and make it a much safer transaction for buyers, whether they are buying a brand new home or a resale home, because of the fact that the builders who are licensed to construct homes in this province have proper oversight and a need to be

licensed, a need to be educated to a required standard, and that indeed is what the home building industry seeks to do. There's no pride in somebody who builds a home that ends up causing problems and hardships for that buyer. It does the industry no good to have those types of players involved in the construction industry, and the Home Builders' Association and other builders and participants in the industry would be the first ones to admit that this legislation is probably a long time overdue. Given that we're going to be joining the other 75 per cent of the Canadian population, the 75 per cent who are covered already by this type of consumer protection legislation, it's high time that we did pass this.

It's not something that's going to be a large cost to consumers. The \$600 initial licensing fee, as I mentioned, or the \$500 subsequent annual fee is a good insurance for the reputation of builders. It's a reassurance to the consumers of these new homes, that they will be putting on the market for buyers to purchase, knowing that the people who constructed them were licensed, were subject to educational standards, and were members of an industry that sought to look to the long term in providing a quality product to the consumer that was going to last beyond the first purchase and go on to subsequently be homes that stand proudly and don't require a huge investment to remediate problems that shouldn't have happened in the first place.

With that, Madam Chair, I'll close my remarks and encourage all members to wholeheartedly support this legislation. Thank you.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to suggest and will circulate that and await your approval.

10:10

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A3.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Madam Chair. This is an excellent bill that I think all Albertans will welcome. My amendment seeks to simply add a little more transparency around the background of specific builders and suggests that the public has a right to know a little more than is currently required of builders and their past history.

The New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, would be amended by striking out section 12 and substituting the following:

12 Section 9 is repealed, and the following is substituted:

Registry

9(1) The Registrar shall establish and maintain a registry that must include information on

- (a) licences applied for, issued, renewed, suspended, cancelled or reinstated under this Act,
- (b) authorizations applied for, issued, suspended or cancelled under this Act,
- (c) exemptions applied for or issued under this Act,
- (d) claims that have been made under a home warranty insurance contract or under Part 1 of this Act,
- (e) legal proceedings against a residential builder for structural defects, defects in materials or labour or any deficiency related to the construction of a new home,
- (f) new homes built or under construction by residential builders, including details of the home warranty insurance contracts covering the new homes,
- (g) new homes built or under construction by owner builders, including details of the home warranty insurance contracts covering the new homes, if applicable,

- (h) persons in respect of whom administrative penalties have been imposed or compliance orders have been issued under this Act,
- (i) persons convicted of an offence under this Act, and
- (j) any other prescribed information.

(2) A warranty provider, residential builder or owner builder must notify the Registrar when a claim is made under a home warranty insurance contract or Part 1 of this Act within 30 days after the claim is made.

(3) The Registrar shall establish and maintain an online registry accessible to the public that consists of the information in the registry, and may publicly disclose that information.

Madam Chair, it is clear that we want more public access to information. This is simply going to add to the access the public has to information about a particular builder, their history, any concerns that have been found to be warranted relating to improper or inadequate building standards, any previous actions to withhold approval to this particular builder. It will simply give public access to the information that now is not included on the current website, to allow the public themselves to make their own judgments about whether the past history of this builder is acceptable or not. I think it will simply add to the confidence that people will have in this important new legislation and give them access to more information that relates to specific builders and their past history.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the member for putting forward a thoughtful amendment. You know, we've just received this, so it might take some time for us to consider this. I would strongly encourage the member that if it's available to him in the future, if we can have a little more notice so that we have a bit of time to understand the ramifications of the proposed amendment. I know that the member certainly brought this forward in good faith and is attempting to improve the bill.

I guess, as we're considering this, I have some questions on whether or not the information that is being requested here could potentially be obtained elsewhere in the bill. I just want to make sure that this information isn't redundant and hasn't been captured elsewhere. You know, I'm just wondering. Reading through the section that is relevant here, it currently reads:

Section 9(1)(a) is repealed and the following is substituted:

- (a) licences applied for, issued, renewed, suspended, cancelled or reinstated under this Act,
- (a.1) authorizations applied for, issued, suspended or cancelled under this Act,
- (a.2) exemptions applied for or issued under this Act.

The amendment contemplates adding quite a bit of additional information. You know, my question to the member is: does he feel that what's currently in there is not accurately captured? What specifically is the reason for these additional items?

Dr. Swann: Well, indeed, this gives more information to the public. This may be knowledge that the ministry might have, but in the current bill legal proceedings that have been raised against a builder in the past aren't necessarily included, past convictions. I think consumers have a right to know what's gone on in the past, not just what's happening in the current state of affairs. This would add more information, more data, more accountability to this particular bill. It's a question, I guess, of just how much transparency is reasonable. For the homebuyer, I think, the more the better, and looking at a builder's past history and previous convictions, to me, should be part and parcel of what is available to the consumer.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you for the additional information. I suppose a question that came up for me in the explanation was: would this information be retroactive, or do you contemplate this being once the bill comes into force, that this would be information that's kept moving forward from that point in time? Or would this be retrospectively looking at future convictions, future exemptions? The information you're seeking: would it be retroactive, or would it be forward looking?

Dr. Swann: I think that, as indicated in the details of the amendment, this should include past convictions and should be part of the record indeed if there has been a violation and a conviction around inadequate building standards or misrepresentation of building quality.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have a couple of quick questions for my colleague from the Liberal caucus with respect to the registry and if he feels that some of the additional requirements in the registry will have any significant impact on costs. We've seen in the past other Liberal organizations with respect to registries and ballooning costs, and I'm just wondering if that is a possibility with the additional requirements in this registry.

Dr. Swann: Well, Madam Chair, reliable information does cost a little more. There's no question that if you want more information and you want more reliable information and you want more disclosure, more accountability of inadequate builders, it's going to cost a little more. It takes more time, more searching, more uploading of information. Presumably, we would better protect consumers.

Mr. Cooper: In all seriousness, though, have you given any consideration to what those costs might be with respect to the additional information? I know I was joking around about the gun registry there, but have you considered what the additional costs might be? Perhaps the government can provide some comment around whether or not they think that the additional associated costs to the builder would be able to cover the additional pieces of information that you are also trying to include in the registration.

10:20

I do agree that having more information available to those that would like to seek it when making such an important decision is, obviously, an important goal to try to achieve. The legislation, hopefully, balances the amount of red tape associated with the bill, allowing industry to also act in a way that is helpful to industry, helpful to the consumer and to finding that balance. I don't know if the government could respond with respect to the total costs and how this may affect that, or perhaps you've considered it. In addition to adding regulations to builders already, does it tilt the balance, or do you think the balance has been struck appropriately?

Dr. Swann: Well, fair question. I guess that what I would say is that this new bill is going to add costs to builders. It's going to require them to upload more information about their past, especially about inadequacies in their past and violations in their past building practices. Once that is done, there would be no additional expense because the foundation has been set and they simply add each year any concerns that have been raised or found inadequate in their building.

I don't see it being a significant increase – some increase but not a significant increase – in the initial requirements based on this new

bill. The bill itself is going to require significant new information, a new website, new reporting practices and standards. Yes, it's going to cost more but not significantly more than is currently being asked for.

The Chair: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to rise as well and make a comment, a couple of questions to the hon. member who's proposing the amendment because it does give me some concern. I'm just wondering if he has given consideration to the consequences of some of the measures that he's proposing, particularly in terms of gathering some of the information that he's proposing be registered. Some of that is readily available and could be verified quite easily. What I believe the hon. member is asking builders to do is self-report certain information that might incriminate them and that they would rather not see reported.

I don't think we can leave it up to the legislation to force builders to self-report. I think there would have to be a means of actually verifying this information; therefore, there would have to be some kind of oversight watchdog that would collect information on legal proceedings that were under way or had taken place. I'm not sure how this information would be gathered. There is certainly a huge cost to that, to raking in all this information about new-home builders. To rely upon them to self-report I think would be naive at best.

I'm concerned that this amendment doesn't really consider the ramifications of how difficult it will be to actually gather the information that the amendment proposes be registered. Therefore, I have these significant concerns about it. Perhaps the hon. member might comment on this aspect of requiring self-reporting to self-incriminate oneself and also the difficulty of gathering the information that would come from disparate sources and would require oversight, which would need a significant amount of staff, in my view, and be quite logistically difficult.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks for those comments. No question that there are going to be additional costs to confirm reporting. That's also the case with the present bill. You're relying on builders to self-report into this registry as it is. The question is: do we have a reasonable and robust oversight body within the ministry to ensure that what's being reported is accurate? That goes without question. Will it involve additional searches through the law courts, perhaps, and the registered convictions? I think that's the price of accountability and transparency, and it's what consumers expect of a government, that they not only provide information to the public but verify that the information that's being put up there from whatever source is reliable and reasonable.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. This proposed amendment refers to section 9. Now, currently this section reads in part:

9(1) The Registrar shall establish and maintain a registry that must include information on

(a) authorizations and exemptions issued or applied for under this Act.

What's proposed in Bill 12 is that section 9(1)(a) be repealed and the following substituted:

(a) licences applied for, issued, renewed, suspended, cancelled or reinstated under this Act,

(a.1) authorizations applied for, issued, suspended or cancelled under this Act,

(a.2) exemptions applied for or issued under this Act.

Now, as I understand the amendment, we have quite a number of changes. This amendment proposes:

9(1) The Registrar shall establish and maintain a registry that must include information on

- (a) licences applied for, issued, renewed, suspended, cancelled or reinstated under this Act,
- (b) authorizations applied for, issued, suspended or cancelled under this Act,
- (c) exemptions applied for or issued under this Act,
- (d) claims that have been made under a home warranty insurance contract or under Part 1 of this Act,
- (e) legal proceedings against a residential builder for structural defects, defects in materials or labour or any deficiency related to the construction of a new home,
- (f) new homes built or under construction by residential builders, including details of the home warranty insurance contracts covering the new homes,
- (g) new homes built or under construction by owner builders, including details of the home warranty insurance contracts covering the new homes, if applicable,
- (h) persons in respect of whom administrative penalties have been imposed or compliance orders have been issued under this Act,
- (i) persons convicted of an offence under this Act, and
- (j) any other prescribed information.

So with that particular part it seems to me that the idea is to create, essentially, a Carfax for houses. I'm wondering if the member who introduced the amendment can explain how much consultation has gone into the development of this list with the stakeholders.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much for the question. I've had no consultation on this. This is based on, I guess, common-sense requirements that seem applicable to all consumers who would want to know, ideally, how much has gone on in the background of a particular builder and as comprehensive a list as is possible to gather so that buyers can be aware, buyers can know as much as possible about the background of a builder and ensure that they're getting what they think they're buying.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the member for the amendment. He's right. It's common sense. That's why we're making sure that this information is online. I just want to get a couple of things on the record of kind of how this is working, and then I'll speak to the registry part of it. Then we'll go from there.

In regard to the licences and suspensions and how this is going to work, the consumer protection measure will create provisions to remove or suspend bad builders from Alberta before they get hired to construct their homes. The intent is to screen for bad behaviour and patterns of behaviour, obviously, that are presenting risks to consumers. Court records will also be used to determine behaviour that represents risks. Licence issuance is for one year. A probationary licence is issued when there is inadequate builder history or when there are red flags to demonstrate a pattern of noncompliance or lack of understanding of the safety code system, and the builders will be required to complete remedial steps.

A suspended licence is based on more serious infractions and offences. Builders would be unable to build until a plan is implemented. Licence rejection is based on situations of fraud, criminal violation, substantive outstanding court actions with homeowners and contractors, which are all things that the registry will be looking at.

10:30

Now the appeals. All registered decisions on the issuance, suspension, or cancellation of licences will be open to appeal. Appeals will be heard by the New Home Buyer Protection Board. If a decision is made to deny, suspend, or cancel a builder's licence, this information will be provided through written notice to the builder along with the reasons why.

Now, if we get to the online registry part, as I said, we want to make sure that – the whole point of this is to make sure the information is online for the consumer. An online registry will be kept up to date for consumers, with a listing of all builders who are licensed to build. Licence status – active, probationary, suspended, provisional, as examples – will be listed as well as reasons why the decision was made in the case of a probationary or suspended licence. In addition to providing more information to homeowners to help them make informed decisions when selecting a builder, this will provide homeowners with the assurance that builders meet government criteria.

This registry will build on existing infrastructure – and that's important – that is housed and maintained within Municipal Affairs and which lists the number of homes registered in Alberta. The current new-home buyer registry has approximately 6,400 users that utilize the system daily. This infrastructure will be leveraged to ensure a seamless application process.

One might ask the question: will this be a new registry? This is not a new registry, nor is it related to registries under the purview of Service Alberta. The new-home buyer registry currently lists all homes in Alberta which have a home warranty insurance contract. This will be expanded to list information about all of the licensed builders in Alberta, including licence status such as probationary or suspended licences, to provide consumers with information about builders. This is not associated with the Association of Alberta Registry Agents but is stand-alone and maintained and housed in Municipal Affairs. So when we're talking about the cost, all of these are already in-house.

There are other examples across the country where people use in-house. Ontario is actually going to go in-house, I believe, because they agree with the way that we are going about our system. In that respect it does make a lot more sense to have that in-house. It's interlaced. It's a system that works well together with our new-home warranty system.

He's right. I mean, we need to make sure this information is out there. And that's the whole point of the – one of the points of the bill, to begin with, is to make sure that we communicate to consumers and customers out there who are building their homes what infractions they've had in the past.

As I'm looking over the amendment, I mean, I'm trying to find what isn't covered in the bill at the moment. In all honesty, my staff is trying to look at that right now, too, so that we can have a little peek at it. I would have liked a little more time. We all would like more time to look at amendments – of course, we would – but when we're looking at something that's a consumer protection bill, we want to make sure that we get the right information out there.

Mr. Cooper: Time is on our side. Yes, it is.

Mr. S. Anderson: I appreciate the singing across the way from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

That's something that's very important: to make sure that we get that information out there. You know, I've heard from builders, from homeowners, from realtors, buyers that that's what they want. We started that pilot in Fort Mac just for that reason, not quite as robust as what we are thinking of implementing with this bill, but it is part of what we're doing.

As I said, I'm just trying to figure out, you know, from what I've read from the amendment in the short time that we've had this, what possibly is not in the bill right now. Hopefully, I'll have an answer pretty quickly for the member, and then I can let him know.

Yeah. I'm just kind of curious as to – I know the member probably read my bill, obviously. It was why I brought this amendment up. If he knew, obviously, that it was under Municipal Affairs already, the registry, so that the costs are going to be there – the licensing fees, the \$600 for the initial and the \$500 going forward to renew, are all going to be simply to cover the cost of the program. That's where those fees will go.

I'm just open. I know the member has read it. He's very good at what he does. Just curious if he sees any other way that there are going to be costs there above and beyond what the price of those licences are, to handle this in-house system.

The Chair: Other speakers to the amendment? Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. I just have some questions for the hon. member as well, specifically to the warranty and insurance reporting provisions. Just looking over the wording here, I see some, you know, potential – I'm sure quite unintentional – vagueness in the wording of the amendment, that could present some challenges for it to be fulfilled. Looking at 9(f) for the registry here: "New homes built or under construction by residential builders, including details of the home warranty insurance contracts covering the new homes." Now, it doesn't specify precisely what details of those contracts would be available to the registrar, and I would have a bit of pause on that because, I mean, there could be valid reasons, commercial reasons, where some details such as premium, that type of thing, might not actually be something that insurance companies want to disclose.

Also, you know, what are the reporting requirements for any changes in wording, and is it meant that they need to be reporting if it's valid at the time? Is there reporting needed to be done when it expires? Before even looking at that, I think you would need to – I think it would be advisable, anyway – discuss that with people in the industry to try and see just what would be reasonable and unreasonable in that circumstance and indeed how helpful that might actually be, in particular.

Also, that's a similar kind of concern I have if we look at a subsection (2): "A warranty provider, residential builder or owner builder must notify the Registrar when a claim is made under a home warranty insurance contract or Part 1 of this Act within 30 days after the claim is made." Does that mean that, you know, both parties or three parties, in a sense, to the warranty contract would have to report this claim? The company providing the warranty, the builder, perhaps the person making the claim – it doesn't specify, but at least two for sure.

Then, of course, the other question would be: when we say "after the claim is made," does that mean when a claim has been opened? Opening a claim just means that the individual has contacted the warranty provider and made a complaint, has brought up a concern. At that point it may not be a valid claim. So then the question becomes: if you have claims that are invalid, should they be recorded?

Also, should it come when a claim has actually been closed? Once a claim is open, you know, once the individual reports it, they have a certain period of time whether to decide they're going to go through with it as well. Standard? I don't know. I can't say particularly to warranty, but it could be up to two years. So the timing is kind of important and whether, you know – because having a claim opened on a warranty does not necessarily speak to

any sort of culpability, irresponsibility on behalf of the homeowner unless the claim is actually deemed to be valid and a payout was made.

It's just a lot of questions, I think, that I have on just how this is meant to work in practice. I think it's well meaning, but I would be concerned, personally, about accepting an amendment like this without having an opportunity to discuss it with the parties who would be responsible for reporting it. I just wonder if the hon. member might have some comments or a rebuttal to my concerns. I'd be very happy to hear them.

10:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to rise to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his amendment. Very well intentioned and with some great opportunities here to clarify and, I guess, highlight some of what the minister has said that is going to be embedded into the intent and the spirit of this bill. There is, I think, an opportunity here for us to take a look at the fact that there are many different opportunities through various channels for accountability for the builders. I think that Bill 12 is a great step in new-home buyer protection, in ensuring that there are at least minimum standards met by the builder community in protection of the consumer. I think that's a good thing.

There are lots of other channels where buyers can access information, which I think is very positive: through the Canadian Home Builders' Association, or Build Calgary, as it's called now in Calgary, and also through organizations such as Better Business Bureau. Anybody who's been in the industry, as I have been, knows that there are many different ratings – Avid Ratings, J.D. Power, and HomeStars – where consumers can also go and get additional information on the builders, whether there are any issues outstanding or whether there's a trend towards not meeting the needs of the consumers and their purchasers.

I think there is some great intent here. Again, as the minister has said, his staff is looking through to ensure that these are items and issues that are covered. But I do thank again the member for his intent in looking at some of these.

Again, having been in the industry, I think one of our greatest protections for the consumer is the fact that we have a highly competitive industry, where we have very good quality builders, not just the large ones but the medium-sized and the smaller ones. But we do have to ensure that there is protection and a level of expertise and a level of accountability to the consumer within those. I'm hopeful that that is what will bear fruit with this bill as we move forward.

I again thank the member for his intent on that. I thank the minister for ensuring that these protections are in there for the consumer and the fact that this is, I think, a great opportunity for us to work with industry and to ensure that the government is there and also to ensure that we find the most efficient ways for us to move forward in terms of providing that homebuyer protection.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Yes. I would also like to thank the member for taking the time to put an amendment forward. Reading through this amendment actually brought up a concern that I hadn't thought of until now, and I'm sure that the minister has probably already dealt with this. Should we put forward all this information on licensing that is being, I guess, detailed by the minister and let's say, for instance, that government isn't efficient in getting all of this

information onto the website or into the type of vehicle that the government is trying to get this information out to the consumer and let's say, for instance, that a consumer uses that outdated information to purchase a house, will there be liability for the Alberta government because of that information not being updated? If it's in there, I apologize; I must have just missed it when I glanced through the bill. In this case here, obviously, our liability would be a lot higher if we had a lot more stuff within the requirement to bring forward information to the consumer.

The next one is one of the concerns that I brought forward already. It seems that there is going to be a lot of work, if you will, to bring this forward in a way that – it maybe seems that there's going to be a lot of work involved with implementing this. Has the minister brought forward a line item that he can reference in his budget that will show this extra work to get this moving forward so that we don't end up in March of next year with a supplementary budget for an extra \$50 million to create a program? As our Opposition House Leader has stated, when these programs start, a lot of times we say that, well, it's going to cost \$500,000 or \$1 million to implement, but it ends up being \$150 million or \$200 million. Has the minister got this as a budget item? There's obviously going to be some upfront work to make this happen.

Also, I heard the minister say when he was talking that Service Alberta will not be involved in this process. I may have misunderstood that, but how can Service Alberta not be involved in this process if it is in charge of all the registration of land titles, if you will? Will we be putting a lot of burden on the Service Alberta department that is unforeseen? Will Service Alberta end up going for supplementary supply, if you will, when it comes time for implementing this because they're going to have to bring forward some sort of mechanism to, I guess, flag or move this transition information from registry services into Municipal Affairs?

I would love to hear some thoughts from the Minister of Municipal Affairs regarding some of my concerns.

Mr. S. Anderson: I will read the registry stuff for you again because the reason why Service Alberta is not involved in this part is because it's not their registry that's being used. It's not a new registry, nor is it related to registries under the purview of Service Alberta like drivers' licences, birth certificates, et cetera. The new-home buyer registry currently lists – so it's existing. There's already a new-home buyer registry under my ministry that lists all homes in Alberta which have a home warranty insurance contract. This will be expanded to list information about all licensed builders in Alberta, including licence status, et cetera. That is not associated with the Association of Alberta Registry Agents. It's a stand-alone registry that will be maintained and housed within Municipal Affairs. That's why I say that it's in-house; it's there.

When you're talking about the line item in the budget, it's staff that have been reallocated from other projects that we used for this already. It's people that are already in our ministry that we're using, so there are no issues there. And the licensing fees would cover any of the additional costs that are involved in that. So all that's there. If there's any, you know, really fine detail that I can get the member if he has any questions, I can certainly get that for him.

On to the amendment. As I said before, you know, a lot of these changes that we're talking about here are already under this bill and in the regulations for the New Home Buyer Protection Act. We are planning and we do have more work to do on the consultation and the rollout with our stakeholders, and all of the stakeholders that have been involved in this are all onside, whether it be CHBA, the Condominium Institute, small builders, consumers, realtors, things like that.

I do appreciate the member's amendment, and I appreciate the thought he's put into it. But, to be honest, without some further consultation going forward, as we've promised these stakeholders, unfortunately I will have to be voting it down. But I do appreciate, as I said, the member's time and effort, and I hope that he comes forward with some more information and is willing, if he has any more ideas, to bring those forward and work with us on this because this is a nonpartisan issue. This is something that helps consumers in Alberta. I think it's a good thing that we can all work on.

So I appreciate it, but unfortunately I will have to be voting that down. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to A3? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Yes. I did ask a question about liability, if that was a part of this as well. That is a concern.

I also heard that you're going to be reallocating staff within Municipal Affairs. How exactly is it that we're going to have this additional staff be moving around, Minister, when you've got the MGA, that has actually been reviewed, and we've made some significant changes to your department? Do you feel that it's reasonable to assume that suddenly you're going to be freeing up staff when it appears that you're actually going to be allocating staff to making sure that the new recommendations for the MGA legislation are going to be instituted?

Specifically, I guess for myself it would be that ICFs would be in play. We have a lot of these big-piece items that I'm sure you're working through as we speak. How exactly is it that you're going to be moving staff to get through to this department without adding extra cost and coming to us for a supplementary increase in the spring?

10:50

Mr. S. Anderson: The liability question: that's a little more detail that I'll have to get for you just to make sure that the nuances are worked out.

The reallocation part is because there are programs that – I mean, my ministry is pretty big. There's a lot of staff in there. Not everybody is working on the MGA just because it's the second-biggest piece of legislation around. There are some programs that are coming to fruition, and we are going to use those staff that would have been moved into other programs and things like that. That's where we're doing that. There are just simply staff that are coming to the end of certain projects or things that they were working on, so then they'll be transitioned into this. That's simply all it is for that.

Mr. Cyr: I'm sorry. I just want to clarify that in the spring we're not going to see a line item that specifically says that it's additional staff for the MGA or for instituting this program or programs that you didn't anticipate to stop, just to be clear on the record.

Mr. S. Anderson: I'll answer the question again and say that we are reallocating staff that have their projects ending. I'm not going to look to the future and make assumptions and do hypotheticals on what's going on. I don't think that would be fair to anybody. What I am saying is that staff are reallocated in my ministry and aren't affecting any of the budget in my ministry.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A3?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to table an amendment to Bill 12, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. I have the requisite number of copies here for the chair.

The Chair: This will be amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 12, New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 8 in the proposed section 4.1(1) by striking out “The Registrar may, on application, issue a licence to a residential builder if” and substituting “On receipt of an application and within 30 days of a residential builder satisfying the requirements under this section, the Registrar shall issue a licence to a residential builder if.”

Madam Chair, this is a relatively simple amendment which I think provides some degree of certainty and additional clarity for builders applying for licences. The current wording of this section allows the registrar latitude to not issue a licence even if all requirements are met. I’m going to assume that this is not the intent of this section, and we are suggesting and seeking support to amend the wording to ensure a greater level of certainty for applicant builders and to ensure we do not create any unintentional barriers to conducting their business, investing in and building communities, and creating jobs.

Further, adding “within 30 days” of all the requirements being met in addition to changing the “may” to “shall” ensures that decisions on licence applications are made in a timely manner and, again, are not impeding much-needed economic activity and job creation. This amendment simply gives clarity with some certainty in timing for builders by allowing them to know within 30 days if they will or will not receive a licence. This also gives the builder the ability to quickly meet any shortcomings of their application or to begin any additional training deemed necessary by the registrar.

I would encourage all members to support this amendment and thank the minister for his kind consideration and, hopefully, his endorsement. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A4? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. Thank you to the member for the amendment. These are the types of things that I’m talking about when we’re working together on a bill that I think is beneficial to all consumers out there. What this bill does, obviously, is that it protects consumers.

I know that the member opposite has experience in the industry. What I’m curious about is that he’s brought amendments to me before, that were pretty good, and unfortunately we had to vote them down. But I’m curious on this one about when he’s talking about substituting in the bill here the “shall” and the “may” and these types of things, and he’s putting in the 30 days. Does he think that it’s going to take away flexibility from the registrar? For example, there is a builder that through no fault of his own can’t get the information in time from, say, a broker or somebody like that. You know, that’s just an example. Does he think that it would bog things down and that, unfortunately, there might be a little bit too much red tape in that sense and a lack of flexibility for that registrar to say, “I understand what your situation is. You need three more days, four more days,” whatever it is? I’m just kind of curious if that’s something that he’s considered while looking at bringing this amendment forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for his request for clarification. Minister, that actually is not going to be one of the challenges of this amendment because it says, “Within 30 days of a residential builder satisfying the requirements under this section.” In fact, my comments earlier about giving them a chance to meet those requirements were actually not entirely correct because what this is saying is that they have met all of the requirements.

All it says is that if the registrar has said that you’ve met all the requirements, you’ve checked all the boxes here, you have met both the paperwork and the financial and also the background checks or funding or financing that may be required within your more detailed regulations – if those are met, that decision then has to be made within 30 days.

It’s really just for someone who has taken the time. They may have gone back and forth already with the registrar’s office to meet those requirements, but once they have satisfied those requirements to the satisfaction of the registrar, that decision has to be made within that 30-day period to give them some certainty in moving ahead with their business.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A4? The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Unfortunately, that’s not the way that I’m reading this right now. I understand where the member is trying to come from here. To be honest, I think this might have unintended consequences, and that’s where my worry has been all along. I think that if there is a situation that could arise, possibly where a builder application is rejected, that because of these delays, the builder would have to reapply and repay the fee, which is something that I don’t want. We want to avoid this.

I think the concern over administrative burdens is plausible. You know, we are aware of this and of those and manage on the principle of not creating unintended bureaucratic roadblocks to homeowners and builders. Nobody wants bureaucratic roadblocks and red tape. That’s something we really want to avoid.

Unfortunately, I think that this might create unintended impact contrary to the principles that we’re going for here. I think that in the event of a processing backlog we will actually be able to work with the permit issuer so that construction isn’t delayed because of processing delays. You know, that would include issuing a provisional licence. So there are those options there. Also, if they meet the requirements, it wouldn’t take 30 days. So I don’t think that this is needed, to be honest, and I think it might actually . . .

11:00

Mr. Cooper: But you’re not sure.

Mr. S. Anderson: I am sure. I am sure.

I don’t think it is needed. I am sure that it isn’t needed, so I will be voting it down, unfortunately. But I do appreciate that this member always brings good amendments forward to me, and he’s always willing to work together on this. It’s great that he does that, and I very much appreciate that. Yeah. Unfortunately, I think it might tie our hands a little bit too much, so I will be voting it down.

Mr. Gotfried: Madam Chair, again, thank you to the minister for his comments. I think what we’re asking for in this amendment, really, is to ensure that there are no undue delays. I mean, in embedding this in the legislation, what we’re doing is ensuring that we don’t get a backlog, that we have no excuses in allowing the

private sector – they’ve met the requirements and have satisfied the requirements under this section, so everything that the minister has put into place is met. I guess, when we look at this: is there a situation here where due to a backlog – a builder is applying. They meet all the requirements. There is nothing outstanding with respect to their application, so we’re not talking about a rejection. We’re not talking about anything like that. We’re talking about a situation where a builder has checked all the boxes, has met all the requirements.

It would be my suggestion that we have a responsibility to the private sector, to the builders, and to their customers as well to ensure that we do not have undue delays, and I think that 30 days is a reasonable amount of time if the system is efficient and the processes are put in place. Again, the builder maybe has gone back and forth several times, but they’ve met all the requirements. They are hoping to build homes either on a speculation basis to sell, or they have a client who is anxious to get building.

The other part of that, of course, is that if we hold it up, we are holding back economic activity, we are holding back the creation of jobs, we are holding back stimulation within the economy, where, again, we’ll assume that there is demand for that housing or need for that housing.

This, Minister, could be some of the not-for-profit groups that we’re dealing with as well. This could be Habitat for Humanity applying for a licence. It could be other nonprofit groups that are trying to step in. It could be people trying to work with those other groups or build affordable housing as well.

I think that that certainty of meeting all the requirements – and we’ve had this, Minister, in some other legislation, where we changed a “may” to a “shall,” and those were graciously accepted, in fact, by the minister of economic development, which then held the ministry and your department accountable to the people that we’re serving to make sure that we do not cause undue delays in the processing and approvals for them to move ahead in conducting their business.

I think therein lies the intent of this, and I hope that not only the spirit but the intent and the wording of this, to ensure accountability from your ministry and your department and your staff, is that if everything is met, there will not be undue delays beyond that 30-day period. What happens if it stretches out to six months? I mean, that person may end up being out of business. The person who has contracted them to build their home has said: “Sorry, I can’t wait. I’m moving on. I’m going to find somebody else.” Again, I think we’re trying to ensure that there are not undue barriers to entry into a marketplace.

I was talking with the Home Builders’ Association. I think that they’ve got about 400 registered members across the province. In fact, I think from information that they got from your department, there are actually about 4,000 builders in Alberta, so many of them are not large builders. They’re not a part of the bigger associations. It’s very important, I think, that we allow that economic activity, that entrepreneurial spirit to occur within Alberta without undue delay.

I would again implore the minister and the members to support this amendment to ensure that we do not cause barriers or undue delays to economic activity during difficult times. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A4?
Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’m pleased to rise to speak against this amendment. I appreciate the intent and motivation of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who is always intent on

making sure that the consumer is protected. On this side of the House we’re certainly all for economic development and making sure that we don’t have impediments in place to economic development, particularly home construction, in this time of economic downturn.

However, there is an inherent assumption in the amendment that I do reject, and that assumption is that the department will sit on applications when there’s no reason to do so. I reject that because I believe strongly that the ministry and the department are certainly wanting to make sure that any applications which meet the requirements, you know, get out the door and get finalized so that those builders who do meet the requirements can begin operating and construct homes. The assumption that the department will sit on these applications for no reason whatsoever is something that I don’t feel comfortable with. I don’t think it was the intent of the mover of the amendment to suggest that the department or ministry would do such a thing.

What I do see this amendment also doing as far as, perhaps, forcing the hand of the ministry or the department when they are considering finalization and getting these applications out the door is that there may be – even if, as the wording of the amendment says, the builder has satisfied the requirements under this section, they may have not got all the documentation that the ministry or the department required them to get in, therefore satisfying the requirements under this section. However, there’s also a time period within which the ministry will have to verify information. To say that the 30-day time window will be the limitation that the department has to meet, I think, as the minister indicated, will unnecessarily tie the hands of the department. Even though they may have met the requirements under this section, as the member states in his amendment, the department still, therefore, may have a time period within which they would have to verify some of the information provided by the builder to meet the requirements. Putting a 30-day time limit on it may not be enough time for those verifications to be made. For that reason as well I see problems with this amendment.

For two reasons. The assumption that the department will not get the applications out the door once all the requirements have been made I reject. I don’t believe that will happen, and I don’t think that the onus should be put upon the department to perform within 30 days. There may be no more time necessary to verify information provided under the application even though all requirements are satisfied. The information needs to be verified, and it may not be done within 30 days. Therefore, I’m more than comfortable entrusting the department to get the applications approved and out the door once they’re comfortable that the information that is provided has been verified, and the builder can go ahead and build the home.

I propose to all members to reject this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A4? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We’re back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? No other speakers to the bill?

Are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

11:10

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Pursuant to the notice provided yesterday . . .

The Chair: Rise and report.

Mr. Mason: Oh, rise and report. Sure. Let's do that. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill Pr. 1. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 12. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. So ordered.

Government Motions

Bill 205

19. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, be moved to Government Bills and Orders on the Order Paper.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Now, Madam Speaker? Thank you very much. I'd like to indicate that Bill 205 is a very positive act that's been brought forward initially as a private member's bill by the Member for Calgary-North West. I know that a great number of members of this Assembly are very supportive of this bill, and moving it to Government Bills and Orders will help it to receive fuller discussion and consideration, which I believe it merits.

I would urge all hon. members to support this motion.

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Government Motion 19, that will move Bill 205, a bill that a number of my colleagues on this side of the House have already spoken in favour of, a bill that many, many individuals on this side of the Chamber as well as that side support. I think that it will be a positive step in the right direction, and I look forward to discussing that a little bit further when we are back in debate. So I encourage members of the Assembly to support the motion.

I also look forward to having some discussions with the Government House Leader around other bills that we might like to try and provide some expedient passage for, including Bill 206, a bill that was introduced last week in the House, that I know has some widespread support. I know that the mover of that bill would

also like to be able to see that bill moved through the House prior to the end of this session. I encourage the Government House Leader to do the same.

I look forward to such discussions, where we can work together, like we will on Bill 205, to see safe passage, if you will, of that piece of legislation and get on to supporting the good people of this province in, hopefully, what will be a number of different areas.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: Just to close, Madam Speaker. Well, this is to give fuller consideration, not to give it quick passage but to allow greater consideration by the Assembly of what is an important bill. With respect to other bills, if the Opposition House Leader is suggesting that a bill put forward by a member of the opposition should be made a government bill – it's an interesting and unique proposal – it might have to entail the member proposing the bill becoming a member of the government, so you may want to consider that.

[Government Motion 19 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

[Debate adjourned May 15: Mr. Shepherd speaking]

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to continue to speak about this, I think, very important, invaluable bill. You know, I have a niece, a niece named Brooklynn. She's on the fetal alcohol spectrum. As a result, since she was a child, she's faced a lot of challenges, both mental and physical, challenges that, I'm happy to say, she's largely been able to meet head-on and that she's been very successful in managing through the support of a lot of family, friends, and some very dedicated support workers. At the end of May she'll be turning 21. Brooklynn is a very talented drummer, she's a skilled painter, and she's about halfway through the early childhood development program at MacEwan University here in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Now, Madam Speaker, it wasn't that long ago that Brooklynn was very reliant on family and friends to be able to navigate through a lot of areas in her life. She faced real challenges in handling money. She wasn't able to travel alone. However, now, thanks to some wonderful support staff, having access to them, and to assistance from organizations like Inclusion Alberta Society, Brooklynn has become quite independent. She's now able to travel alone by bus to school, she spends time with her friends, and she's become a very valued employee working with children at a YMCA in the north end of Edmonton. I can tell you that I'm incredibly proud of how well Brooklynn has done, to see that growth, that success in her life, to see how happy she is now in having gained these skills and these new opportunities and being able to pursue some of her own dreams of working with young children.

You know, earlier this week, this past Sunday, we had Mother's Day. It's fitting to note how hard I saw my mom work to help track down the supports and the resources that made all of this possible for Brooklynn, that helped her to be able to succeed in school and make what's been a very successful transition for her now into her adult life. But the truth is, Madam Speaker, that not all individuals

with disabilities have someone like my mom in their court. Not all of them have someone who's able to look out for them, who's able to help navigate those systems, who's able to dedicate the time and the energy it takes to navigate all of the government programs, systems, resources to get the help and the support they need. Certainly, there are more than a few who actually face some significant barriers and challenges in doing so for themselves.

Now, we know that there are many great community organizations. I mentioned Inclusion Alberta Society and Skills Society, which is here in Edmonton-Centre and which I've had the chance to get to know, and Bev Hills there, who is a fantastic advocate for people with disabilities and people in the disability community. There are many others who are assisting and working to make sure that people are able to access supports now. But even these dedicated people, who go above and beyond in their work to assist people with disabilities, sometimes face some barriers in trying to make progress when they face some of these long-standing, systemic issues and challenges that can cause some people to fall through the cracks.

That's why I'm very happy to stand today to speak in support of Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. This is a proposal that will ensure that all members of the disability community have a voice. If we pass this bill, it will create a disabilities advocate with the power to identify and study issues that are of concern to persons with disabilities, to review the programs and policies that affect persons with disabilities, to participate in processes in which decisions are made about persons with disabilities.

The minister has noted the motto of the disability community, Nothing about Us without Us. This advocate would be there to ensure that that would happen, that that would be the case, to promote the rights, interests, and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education. They would help to provide information and advice to the government with respect to any matter relating to the rights and the interests and the well-being of persons with disabilities. They would be there to assist individuals who are having difficulty accessing services for people with disabilities and related programs, including directing them to appropriate resources, persons, or organizations who may be able to help them.

11:20

You know, Madam Speaker, in the two years that we've been here in government, we've heard it very clearly from the disability community: Nothing about Us without Us. I commend the Minister of Community and Social Services for his dedication and his work to adopt that mantra as he's been moving forward now. He's taking concrete action in revoking the intrusive safety standards and holding substantive consultations on what should instead take their place. We've heard from members of the disability community that they deeply appreciated those consultations and that they felt that their voices were indeed heard.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, I also want to thank the minister for his decision to end the use of the supports intensity scale. That was an incredibly important step, to end what was for people from this community a truly humiliating experience, which I heard about from constituents and from those who worked with them. I know it meant a lot the day that that minister rose in this House and said that that would not be the practice of the government of Alberta anymore.

Indeed, that is one more reason why we need to look at passing this bill and having someone like the disability advocate. Think, Madam Speaker. If someone like that had been present when they first considered putting forward the supports intensity scale, they

could have been here to say that they had spoken with members of the community, that this would be a system that would reduce their dignity, that it would strip it away, that there were better ways, that there were better approaches that could be taken.

To have that voice available inside the ministry, I think, is incredibly valuable and important to making sure that we understand these issues and these concerns from the perspectives of those who are most affected by them. The creation of a disability advocate can help to ensure that we develop much more respectful and effective systems to deliver the supports and services to members of the disability community and that we do so with a full understanding of what the members of that community truly want and need to be able to live with the full dignity and freedom that all of us enjoy here in the province of Alberta.

That is action, Madam Speaker, that will make life better for Albertans, for all Albertans, by helping more individuals with disabilities be able to find and retain employment, like my niece Brooklynn has been able to do, by giving better supports to parents of children with disabilities so that they can spend less time navigating systems and focus instead on providing good care and support for themselves and their families.

I'd like to thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing this bill forward. I know that she's bringing this forward after having done months of consultation, having conversations with many, many people from across the disability community, and based on feedback that we received through our own PDD safety standard consultations last year. Madam Speaker, this is an excellent example of how government can learn and improve and build new and better systems that will truly serve the people of Alberta.

Thank you again to the member for bringing this forward. I look forward to voting in favour of Bill 205.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was wonderful to hear. I'm so happy to be able to rise and even ask questions about Bill 205. Your comments about the supports intensity scale are absolutely accurate. Actually, this particular assessment tool was brought in a number of years ago, and the original writer or creator of this tool actually said that it was not to be used to determine funding. Sadly, at some point, without consultation, there was a determination – this happened a few years ago – that they would use this tool to determine what kinds of funds people with developmental disabilities, adults with developmental disabilities need.

You're right. The process was quite humiliating. It took a few hours to interview a person with a disability and their family, and they would ask the same questions to any person. It didn't matter if you were able to speak or not able to speak. It was a difficult process for people to go through, and I saw more than a few family members have to leave the room or just sit there in tears. I'm wondering if you could just expand for us on some of the feedback that you heard from your community and your constituents regarding how they felt or what they think should replace it or how they think their voices need to be included when creating a new step to determine what people need for funding.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you to the Member for St. Albert for her question and her observations. I know that indeed she has a deep, deep knowledge of this subject, having spent many years working on advocacy with the disability community.

Admittedly, I haven't had a lot of constituents who have come to me and sort of described the process of having gone through SIS.

Certainly, I've had the chance to speak with advocates from various organizations that work out of Edmonton-Centre who have shared with me that they've worked with many people who have found it to be a humiliating and intrusive process. Certainly, from their descriptions I've been able to imagine what it must be like to have to go through something like that just to try to access the kind of support and funding that you need. Certainly, I recognize that, as I said, it was a problematic system at best and deeply, deeply humiliating at worst, and it's something that indeed I'm happy to see taken away.

At this point I don't feel that I could really speak to what should replace it. Again, that's something that I haven't had the opportunity to speak deeply about with those in the community, and I think it's really important that they are the ones who are making those decisions, who are providing that insight. Indeed, Madam Speaker, this is one of the amazing opportunities we have as representatives to learn so much. Certainly, this is an area that I wasn't deeply familiar with.

As I said, I certainly have a niece who has been part of this experience and part of these systems, but for her, while she has had some challenges, they weren't of the overly severe variety. She's been able to get by fairly well and, again, has had a lot of family support.

It's a pretty wide range of experience, I think, even just within the disability community. It's an incredible opportunity, I think, for us to learn more about what others' life experiences are like, how these systems operate for them, what kinds of supports are needed, and how we as a society can go about compassionately and respectfully providing support and services that are needed while also making sure that we do so responsibly and that we're doing so with the best use of tax dollars.

It's an incredible opportunity for us to learn from folks like the Member for St. Albert who have deep experience in this community, to work with folks like the Skills Society, for myself and others in Edmonton-Centre here, who also work closely with many of these people, to learn more and indeed, Madam Speaker, to engage with some of our public servants, who have some deep knowledge of these systems and how these things operate as well, I know, some of whom have been working within our various agencies to provide insight and to help guide and try to develop better policy.

So it's a real opportunity for us all to work together now as the minister is committed to coming up with improvements and replacements for the supports intensity scale. Certainly, having someone in place like a disability advocate can help to ensure that all voices are heard at that table, that we have the best of the expertise there, and that the new systems that we put in place are truly going to be both effective, responsible, and respectful in how they support the members of the disability community in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: A few seconds left under 29(2)(a). Any other comments? Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Yes, Madam . . . [Ms McKittrick's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: I said a few seconds.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 205? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I want to open up by commenting – and some members within the caucus will remember hearing this phrase – that you don't know what you don't know. It's been pretty remarkable taking on this job because over

vast periods of time what I envisioned it to be versus what it's turned out to be was entirely different. I mean that in a most endearing and good way. When I ran for office, I did it with visions of concerns in relation to seniors' care, health care, with a little bit of an undertone of postsecondary and, obviously, education. Little did I know, as we entered this field, that I was going to be learning a lot about indigenous rights, people with developmental disabilities, challenges within our social services as well, and even about the adoption system, that the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills shares with us in this House from time to time.

11:30

First, as I open up, I want to thank the Member for St. Albert, who has really brought this issue to the forefront both within the Legislature but also within our government caucus, too. It has really allowed me to stay informed and to really know a lot about the issue here.

When I reflect back to where we came from with Bill 205, I reflect on the Member for Calgary-North West when she was pushing for a lot of advocacy within this field and within this area. When I saw her sitting over on this side of the House – for those who are at home, I get to sit on the opposition side of the House.

Mr. Cooper: The corner of shame.

Mr. Sucha: The corner of pride.

With that being said, when she would ask very critical questions of what the government was doing moving forward, I used to scratch my head and say, "Why is she not in our caucus?" because a lot of these values were values that we all share. So I was very happy and I welcomed having her join us because I knew that she would help us move forward on challenges for individuals who are suffering from disabilities or dealing with the challenges of disabilities.

One thing that was very remarkable as I entered the management field was one of the programs that we used to do when I worked for the Reb Lobster chain, a program called Cops and Lobsters, and it was to raise lots of funds for the Special Olympics. I remember that the last year I participated in this, we raised over \$10,000 at our restaurant alone towards the Special Olympics. We'd have police officers, sheriffs, transit cops from all over the province who would come to our restaurant, and it was kind of a tip-a-cop program where you'd make donations to the Special Olympics.

We'd also have Olympians that were there, and we had an individual named Rory. My goodness, the intensity that he had was remarkable. He was helping to bus tables, and he was probably working harder than anyone else in that restaurant. So myself and my general manager went aside, and we said: you know, we need a busboy; do you think Rory would want to be a busboy here? We went to his mom, and we asked her if Rory wanted a job. It was remarkable because tears started rolling down her face. Rory was 35, and he had never had a job before. We gave him that offer. It's remarkable because I've gone back to that restaurant since leaving – this was a few years back – and he was still there, and he was succeeding.

It was through a lot of programs that were led that we could move forward. At the time when we brought him in, we were sort of trying to invent the wheel, as it goes. We hadn't reached out to some programs, some of which are now offered through Mount Royal University, to help people with disabilities enter the workforce. But going on to other restaurants, we have had a chance to experience some of these programs.

I had another individual who started at one of my restaurants about six years ago who was a prep cook. This was through programs at Mount Royal where they did placement, and they

worked with us one-on-one for a few months to help develop that relationship and develop that rapport. It's remarkable because she is one of the longest serving cooks in that restaurant now. Not only that, but she was able to build up her skills, and she was able to work on the line with us in the pantry station when we were busy. So not only was she able to break down the barriers to enter the workforce, she was also able to build up her success, she was able to find coping mechanisms for anxiety. I was really excited to hear from one of my colleagues that she's moving out now. She's going to be living independently. And this all started because of these programs that we were able to leverage.

But the one thing that is important to know is that – I was just an employer. I'm not within the community. I had not studied and I had not worked with people with disabilities until I had the opportunity and the privilege for them to come and work with me. It's important that as we move forward, there are systems in place where we can find best practices that we can improve on. Because there could be practices that I'm doing or there could be ways that I'm trying to coach this individual, that may not be accurate and may not drive results. I won't know unless someone comes forward and provides me with feedback and ways that we can move forward and ways that we can improve.

So while I know that sometimes there can be a fear that an advocate, an auditor is only there to sort of be an adversarial role to a government or to a department, I can also reassure you that if it wasn't for outside supports coming to me as an employer and me being able to have that lifeline to seek feedback, we would not have had success. To be frank, my general manager who I worked with in the past, Aaron Haynes, now sits on Mount Royal's board to place individuals with disabilities into the workforce, and it's because of all the success that we had. There was a lot of trial and error and a lot of outside intervention and a lot of patience.

I see this as a phenomenally good thing because, as has been noted in these clauses, the advocate is to "review programs and policies affecting persons with disabilities." It's important that we make sure that we have those thorough outside eyes to hold us to our standards. Realistically, there's lots of research. There is lots of data. Society changes the way we do things and the practices that we have. I'm sure many individuals who have worked with people with disabilities can attest to the fact that what we are doing now is way different than what we were doing 20 or 30 years ago.

But it's not uncommon as we build hundreds, if not thousands, of policies within government departments, that there can be redundancies that we aren't catching or that there can be situations where we need fresh eyes. We need someone from the outside who's re-evaluating what we're doing to find best practices so that we can move forward and we can improve. If we fear to challenge ourselves and to reassess where we're at, we can get very stagnant and not progress at all.

You know, as I entered the realm of politics, within a couple of months after being sworn in, there were a few items that came to my attention right away. There were a lot of individuals who were suffering from disabilities and who had barriers within government supports who really didn't know where to turn. The challenge going into this office was that we're learning as we go. I was only a month into it, and I'm not an expert in this field. It was very hard to really try to direct them as to where they could go, where they could provide their feedback, and where we could really drive tangible change. Having an advocate will allow us to do that, to move forward in those ways. It's also important that we're evaluating the laws and the practices that we have in place.

You know, one of the things that I took a lot of pride in is how accommodating we were to any guests that came into our restaurant. We always ensured that we provided the best hospitality

possible. I had an individual who found out where I worked before he came in and met with me. He was from the blind community.

He shook my hand, and he praised me and my co-workers for how accommodating we'd be whenever he came into our restaurant, making sure that we had Braille menus available, making sure that we were seating him in a booth that was comfortable enough for a service dog to be able to sit down, making sure that our employees were not touching that service dog because it could really interfere with the overall job that he's trying to do. The challenge, he said to me, was: we continue to go to your establishment because there are not enough places that are doing what you are doing, not being accommodating to us or even flat out rejecting us service because we have an animal coming into their establishment.

A lot of these things can be oversights through regulation and policy that come through government and also enforcement. It's important that we have an advocate who can talk about these policies that we have and how we can appropriately enforce them within government to make sure that not only are our government departments being accountable but that those who fall within oversight of government, whether it's service providers or even front-line services or the simple gestures of going to a store or riding the bus, are accountable, too.

I want to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing forth this bill and the Government House Leader for expediting the process so that we can make sure that we review this more thoroughly. I'm happy to support it.

Thank you.

11:40

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for his comments. Certainly, the systems for people with disabilities, their families, their friends are very complex, so thank you for saying that.

I was really interested in your comments about employment – okay; not to mention the fact that the Cops and Lobsters was really awesome – and I wanted to talk a little bit about inclusive employment. Inclusive employment is vital. It's actually a real skill and a science. We're lucky to have service providers all around Alberta that are very skilled at doing this. Sadly, I think it's been an undersupported area. I hope that this will begin to change that because the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is so high. It is so much higher than people without disabilities.

Anyway, I wanted to ask you to describe in a little more detail what the natural supports were for the person with a disability that you ended up hiring and how that worked. I think that's such a great example for people thinking about looking at inclusive employment for their place of work.

Thank you.

Mr. Sucha: You know, I had an individual named Alan who came to work for us. Actually, he came in as a dishwasher. It was very easy for him to get distracted, and we didn't really fully understand why. One of things that we did was we reached out to his support worker to provide us with feedback. One of the challenges was that he didn't know what time it was. He was wanting to work hard, but he didn't know when he could take his break. He wasn't very cognizant of time. So we made sure that we had a clock that was close to the dishwasher so that he could see what time it was. Then we'd go up to him, and say: okay; at 8:30 is when you take your break, and we'll bring someone in to cover for you as well. All of a

sudden it was like night and day. We saw phenomenal work coming from him, and his intensity really improved.

I think the challenges that we see with some of the workforce is obviously trying to break down stigma and people not realizing what supports are available to them with work placements. A lot of times within the first few months you can have a worker who will come with the individual you're employing and provide you with that feedback and provide you with that follow-up as well.

You know, sometimes there are situations, too, where it may not work out. That's the case with any employment. Whether the individual is disabled or not, sometimes you're not a fit for each other. So it's about being very open minded and recognizing that there may be times where it may not work out, but that's the case with any individual who goes to work for any employer.

It's about making sure you maintain patience and also talking about a lot of those success stories. I think some of the challenges that occur are because a lot of employers just aren't aware that there are these supports available for you. It really drives a positive culture within your work environment. We noticed that right away. There was a strong sense of community that established and a strong sense of pride and almost, you know, a siblinghood that existed when we would open our mind to hiring different employees. I feel that I got a lot of value and that I grew as an individual, if not even as an employer, because of individuals like Rory or Alan who came to work for us.

It always made me smile when I would go back to visit and still see them there and see that they were still a successful part of our business. You know, the underlying thing that I would say as an employer is that I'm only as successful as my employees, that it is a team that is driving our success, driving our business, driving our profitability. I can tell you that individuals like Rory and Alan, speaking in a capitalistic way, helped us make a lot of money because of how strong of employees they were and how much they drove the people around them. If there is anything to say, it is that we need to make sure that we share a lot of these success stories and that we really embrace these work placements as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to Bill 205? Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. As some of you may know, I am a social worker by training. I started my career with the government of Alberta, actually, with family support for children with disabilities. My responsibility working with that organization, that part of the ministry, was in doing assessments and working with families that had children between the ages of zero and 18 to determine whether or not they would qualify for financial assistance and specialized services through the ministry.

I actually specialized in working in Lancaster Park with many of our military families. What I found was that there were actually quite a few of our military families that were requesting to be transferred to Edmonton and to the Griesbach area so that they could access the supports that were being provided with FSCD, family support for children with disabilities. It was a program that wasn't available in other provinces, so they were coming with the hope to be able to access the service and to be able to support their families and their children with the different needs that they had.

Part of that as I moved through my career was also looking at out-of-home placements. Out-of-home placements are something that is offered under family support for children with disabilities for children that are no longer able to reside with their parents, not due to any concerns around their ability to parent but due to their high

needs, whether it would be high medical needs or high behavioural needs. My responsibility was to work with the family to try to identify a caregiver that would be able to provide the support and work with the family so that they would still continue to have their relationship and still have a cohesive family but also have the needs of their child met.

That seems a good idea, and it definitely worked for the children that needed the support, that had access to the medical professionals and the people that were able to deal with their complex needs. But the struggle that came with that was also that family support for children with disabilities only supports children from the ages of zero to 18. Families would have to then try to access and apply to the persons with developmental disabilities program, so that created a lot of stress for many of the families.

The reason for that was that under family support for children with disabilities, we may have deemed a child in need of additional supports for a variety of different reasons and we would continue to provide the family with the support that they needed – we would support the specialized services, behavioural management, different things like that – but what we deemed as being qualifiers for the program for zero to 18 may not be the same qualifications that were required for PDD. So we would have families that would be accessing these great supports – we would be, you know, helping a family have their child reside with them in their home because they had respite and they had the medical supports and different things that they needed so that their child could still be there, but the family could have a break when they needed to – all of a sudden finding out that they may not qualify for any type of supports with persons with developmental disabilities.

Of course, people started at the age of 16 to try to apply to PDD because it's a complex process, and as these children were aging and becoming closer and closer to 18, you could see the stress on the family. You could see their frustration with not understanding or not being able to demonstrate to the person that was doing the assessment for PDD that they needed this additional support. I mean, I think it does speak to the importance of this advocate in being able to look at how we as government, in programs, support our families in Alberta, looking at how we can support families transitioning from FSCD to persons with developmental disabilities and ensuring that we're not getting to a point where all of a sudden somebody turns 18 and the family has absolutely nothing in place to support them. So I'm a strong supporter of the advocate helping, you know, to look at that gap and look at the systemic issues and trying to be able to identify if we can do this work better.

In addition to that, when I was doing the out-of-home placements, part of the struggle was also the concern around what happened when these children turned 18. They'd been living in a home where they were supported by staff, where their medical needs were being met or their developmental needs were being met, and all of a sudden they were having to transition funding to persons with developmental disabilities. Of course, the licensing around that is different. The application process is different. They could be getting supports provided by one agency from zero to 18 that may not provide adult supports.

11:50

Then the question became, you know: do we now move this child, that's maybe lived in this home for four years, two years, whatever length of time, to another service provider because now all of a sudden they've become 18? I mean, we were able to work through that process with many of the providers that were providing zero to 18 residential supports. Many of them have transitioned to also be adult support providers. But it still created, again, undue stress and questions for the family around having to move

somebody from a home that they recognized as their home and an agency that they had a great relationship with to now maybe a potentially new relationship, a new agency provider, learning the culture of that agency and that group.

I mean, it's a complex system. Of course, when you're looking at the different age groups, it does create questions and confusion. So I think, again, having the advocate there to be able to help guide some of those questions and some of those concerns is a significant benefit.

The one question that I would have around the advocate, though, is that currently I don't see anything around consent and referral. If we're looking at from zero to an 18-year-old, for example, if we look at the Child and Youth Advocate, if someone refers to the Child and Youth Advocate on behalf of a child, they still have to talk to that child, they still have to accept recommendations and different things like that, and they still have to be able to make sure that the child is wanting to have additional supports.

If we're looking at an advocate for persons with disabilities, my question would be: if they're residing with their family, is the advocate advocating on behalf of the individual with the disability, or are they actually supporting the family? What would that policy and regulation sort of look like? Again, I don't think it's a complication. I think that it's really just a policy question or a regulation question to make sure that we're actually supporting the family as a whole and that it's not that we're, you know, saying that it has to be specific to that individual, especially when it comes to the systemic issues. Because we recognize that, again, if we're looking at a transition from FSCD to PDD, it's not affecting one individual; it's affecting a group and a group of families. How can we make sure that the advocate is able to do that stuff? I do know that, of course, in the bill it does say that they can look at the systemic issues and they can have those conversations.

Again, I think that this is a fantastic bill. I recognize that people with disabilities have a right to have a voice. They are citizens of our community, no different than anybody else.

When I was going to university, I actually worked at the Robin Hood Association in Sherwood Park. The name always kind of makes me giggle. [interjection] I was not Maid Marion. I'm just saying. But the benefit of that was that they had developed really inclusive programming. Some of the great things that the association has done is that they recognized that their group was aging, and because their group was aging, they acknowledged that they were having adults with disabilities who were becoming seniors, who were being impacted by what happens as you age, whether that became dementia or physical needs or just a different sense of community, not being in a home with someone who's 18 when you're, you know, 65. They were great. They acknowledged that that was a need, so they built a retirement apartment.

Now as adults age and become seniors, they have a space where they can then move in, and they still have the medical supports or the physical and mental supports that they need, but they're in an environment that is much more adapted to their age and more relaxed, less busy, whereas in some of the other group homes that they have, you know, we've got young, vibrant adults who are 18, 19, who are going to work or going to their agency during the day and then are out at Special Olympics in the evening. Their lives are far busier than even mine in a social aspect.

I think there's an ability there to really highlight the positive things that are also happening in the community and the great work that agencies are providing for individuals with disabilities and then looking at those great success stories and figuring out how we can expand those and make them even more successful and also outside

of our major urban centres. Again, I think that what has happened is that as people with disabilities age, they end up moving more into urban centres because that's where the service providers are. So it's looking again at the systemic issue around: how do we support individuals with disabilities in their communities as a whole?

Again, I support the bill, and I look forward to hearing more conversations from all of my colleagues in the House. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Ms Renaud: Well, thank you to the member for those comments. I always actually giggle, too, when I say: Robin Hood in Sherwood Park. And then it turns out that, you know, my father's name was Littlejohn. So I laugh a bit more.

I love your comments. I love that you talked about that difficult transition period from the time when children with disabilities and families, in many cases, are looking at making that transition. Often it does take several years to figure out the system but also to find housing if that's something they need to do or just to look at transitions to so many other very complex systems, AISH being one of them, of course. I'm just wondering if you could expand a little more on some of the things you've learned in your work that we could start to talk about, things that this advocate position, if it's approved and passed, could look at.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. I think something that we definitely need to look at is how we are evaluating the qualifications around families that access family support for children with disabilities, our supports for permanency programs, actually, under the family enhancement act and then, as well, how we're supporting individuals with the persons with disabilities program. Again, I think it is an issue around looking at how we make sure that there's consistency. How do we make sure that families are not having expectations around things that are not consistent across all spectrums?

Again I recognize, though, that children in that zero-to-5, zero-to-6 age group need intensive supports as they're developing, especially if we recognize that they have some learning deficits or language deficits. Of course, the expectations and the services that are provided to them when they're little are far more intense than what they may necessarily get as adults. I think part of that is education as well as making sure that people understand those developmental milestones, looking at what is important at different ages and how as people age and grow, those supports may shift and may change over time. But it's ensuring that the family is aware and understands that so that it doesn't feel like they have another loss in their life.

I definitely agree that there are things that we could do to support families to make sure that they are feeling supported through the whole process as their child grows and becomes an adult because it is definitely more complex, and the needs of each individual are different. Definitely, there are areas that I think we can look at for sure.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly now stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 17, 2017

Day 35

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 17, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really honoured to be able to introduce the amazing students from the Hughenden school in my riding. I would like the teacher and the students to rise as I call out the name Shawna Tainsh. Please join me in welcoming them to this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real thrill to be able to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the most amazing students in Edmonton-Decore from the great school of Northmount. They are joined here today by their teachers Diana Coumantarakis and Justin Hume. I would now invite the teachers and all of the students to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a large group of students from Rimbey elementary school. Rimbey, of course, is home to the famous couple Martha and Henry, made famous by Ralph Klein, and one of the greatest places in this province. They have a lot of chaperones with them, so in the interests of time I will not try to name them all and also because I probably would accidentally butcher some of these names. But I would ask if, on both sides of the gallery, the students from Rimbey could stand up with their chaperones and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?
The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some friends of mine visiting from the MS Society. I ask them to rise and remain standing as I call their names. With us today we have Dr. Garry Wheeler, Julie Kelndorfer, Bob Macklon, Patrycia Rzechowka, Kevin O'Neil, and Gayelene Bonenfant. These people are tireless advocates for improving the lives of Albertans affected by MS, and some of them know first-hand what it's like to live with the disease. Whether it's dealing with the disease directly or assisting family, volunteering, leading, educating, spreading awareness, or fund-raising, these people all possess a passion and dedication to helping others that are truly inspiring and a great example for all of us in this House and across the province. I ask them all to please receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Stan Fisher. Stan Fisher has been contributing to the well-being of Albertans as a volunteer and a professional for over 40 years, most recently as president and CEO of the St. Michael's Health Group. Prior to that he served in senior positions with Chrysalis, the Wild Rose Foundation, and in both provincial and municipal government. His staff is with him here today to wish him well on his retirement from St. Michael's. I now welcome him and, of course, all the staff. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House today Troy Taylor and Mike Moze. As you may know, there is an upcoming rally at the Legislature to call on the government to investigate failures in the child welfare system, and both of these gentlemen are involved in that. Troy will be sitting in silence at the Legislature tomorrow morning and is here to watch question period today. He works with high-risk youth. He's founded an organization called Young Diverse Proud, working with youth in Edmonton. I ask him to rise – he has already risen – and ask that he receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you one of my constituents and a family friend of the Boyds, John MacArthur. John is a cattle producer in our region carrying on the tradition from his father, a long-time farmer. He's here today because he can't seed because unfortunately it's raining up our way. He's able to come to the Legislature today and will be representing Alberta Beef Producers and meeting with officials at their event tonight. So I ask members of the Legislature to welcome my constituent John MacArthur.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Crime Prevention

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, this government is completely out of touch. Crime continues to soar, and this government just doesn't seem to care. Recently in Alberta there have been three stabbings, murders, and countless fentanyl overdoses, just to mention a few. My friend's son was a victim of a senseless home invasion where burglars broke in and beat him with a baseball bat, causing loss of vision, a cracked skull, and numerous broken bones. Many Albertans no longer feel safe in their own homes.

We have seen an increase in robberies and drug use due to the economic downturn, and we must make sure that criminals cannot take advantage of the lack of government response. Criminals are preying on potentially underserved communities, which in turn puts added strain on our police forces. When there is less law enforcement, crime increases. The minister should know that.

This government has spent the vast majority of its time in office pushing its radical ideology on Albertans rather than focusing on a serious increase in crime in our province. The minister seems to be reacting rather than governing, and it seems very evident in a recent

news release where they reported increasing enforcement by fish and wildlife officers to patrol public land and fine people for littering. Littering. Really, that's what the NDP government is focusing its efforts on. I can't imagine a more backwards priority in the wake of increased crime in Alberta communities. The unwillingness to take measures to protect the citizens of rural Alberta from criminal activity is shameful.

Wildrose is taking action. Last month we launched our Alberta Crime Task Force, which will listen to Albertans and find solutions to address rural crime. A Wildrose government will promote safe communities, strong families. In 2019 citizens will have their say.

Thank you.

International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia

Connolly: Mr. Speaker, today is International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. As we work to end discrimination today, let us mark important milestones of the past because the fight for equality for LGBTQ-plus people began long before Canada legalized same-sex marriage. On May 20, 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled, in its *M. versus H.* decision, that all couples, gay or straight, are entitled to the same spousal benefits and recognition as common-law couples. The court called on the provinces to fix their laws to recognize same-sex couples once and for all.

Of course, conservative politicians tried to stand in the way of progress. The Progressive Conservative government contemplated using the notwithstanding clause to challenge the court and ended up passing a bill in this Assembly to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. Even as their Justice minister warned that it had no legal effect, they did it anyway.

Another Alberta politician, Jason Kenney, has never apologized for what he said as an MP about the decision. In an article that spring he called the ruling "one of the most outrageous exercises of raw judicial power in the history of modern democracy." In Parliament he denounced the Supreme Court's decision as illegitimate. He said that judges can't change what he called a metaphysical reality and that, quote: marriage is marriage; it is between a man and a woman, and it can be between no others.

Mr. Speaker, that has changed for the better. LGBTQ-plus couples in Alberta now have the same rights as everybody else. As we work to fight homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, and all forms of discrimination against LGBTQ-plus people, we must remember that these struggles, which we have fought and often had to re-fight, always had opponents rooted in the conservative ideology. Jason Kenney and his conservative friends have stood in the way of progress at every opportunity.

Let us celebrate this day in history as a mark of success, let us take action to fight homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia everywhere we encounter it, and let us commit to never going back.

1:40

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

Stan C. Fisher, St. Michael's Health Group

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to honour a very special man that I've had the pleasure of working with since I became the MLA for Edmonton-Decore, Stan Fisher, who will be retiring from his position as president and CEO of St. Michael's Health Group, a position that he has held for over 11 years. I'm very fortunate to have both St. Michael's Health Group Long Term Care Centre and Millennium Pavilion in my riding.

Stan has been a tireless advocate for his organization. As such, during his time with St. Michael's the organization has grown and sought after a location for long-term care and is regularly on the forefront of new approaches to seniors' and dementia care. I'm also proud to say that because of Stan's hard work and advocacy St. Michael's Long Term Care Centre will be getting a brand new kitchen for its residents.

Unfortunately, there isn't enough time in this member's statement to list all of Stan's achievements. I will mention that he has been honoured for his hard work, being the recipient of prestigious awards such as the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal and the Alberta centennial medal.

Stan, you have been absolutely wonderful to work with, and it's an honour for me to represent your organization and your residents in this Legislature. I sincerely wish you the best of luck, and may you have a happy retirement. You will be missed by many.

The Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. The order was confused. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mount Farquhar Summit Climb 2017

Mr. Rodney: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Countless Canadian soldiers have lost their lives fighting for ours. So many others have returned home with life-changing physical injuries, and far too many have experienced mental, emotional, and spiritual tolls that have caused disastrous lifelong or life-ending effects.

That's why the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Foundation and the Calgary Health Trust are pleased to announce the second annual Reaching the Summit for Mental Health and Wellness fundraising initiative, which is aimed at heightening awareness of veterans and their families who are suffering from the devastating consequences of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and other forms of mental illness. On Saturday, June 24, two groups of climbers will reach for the summit of Mount Farquhar while others will hike Cataract Creek trail. The climbing teams will again be led by Canada's first Mount Everest summiteer, Laurie Skreslet, and yours truly.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot tell you what an honour this is. During our climb on Mount Buller last year I was truly humbled to hear the heart-wrenching stories of these true Canadian heroes. During the inaugural event over \$71,000 was raised. I encourage all Albertans to offer what they can as we strive to reach the \$100,000 mark.

The event begins below Mount Farquhar, which was named after the first commanding officer of the PPCLI, who's credited with establishing the regiment's sense of duty, professionalism, and fighting spirit. A dedication will be made to Lieutenant Colonel Farquhar. I look forward to seeing my hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod there.

Now, for more information on how to get involved as a climber, hiker, or sponsor, please visit calgaryhealthtrust.ca, Reaching the Summit for Mental Health and Wellness.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mrs. Schreiner: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in the House to remind all members about the devastating impact of multiple sclerosis. I rise to speak for everybody in the province because this chronic, often disabling disease of the central nervous system affects 1 in 400 Albertans, or almost 14,000 people.

Since its inception, in 1948, the MS Society has provided over \$160 million in research dollars in support of mitigating the impact of the disease on all Canadians. The core support of the MS Society

has been from tens of thousands of dedicated individuals, companies, and foundations within proud communities just like Alberta's across the country.

May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, and the campaign raises awareness of the fact that Canada has the highest rate of MS in the world. Similarly, it also serves to highlight that we have the best MS research in the world. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar introduced the passionate representatives of the MS Society who are here as guests today. They strive to shed light on the disease as well as the accomplishments of research.

Raising awareness is one step in ending the impact that MS has on fellow Albertans and Canadians alike. I know that the Member for Sherwood Park has been a strong advocate in support of MS research through her diligent participation in the MS bike ride. We all need to work harder to support this research because the unpredictable, episodic, and often progressive nature of MS makes it particularly challenging, and the physical, emotional, and financial impacts of MS last a lifetime.

Fellow members, I have heard from many of my Red Deer-North constituents who suffer from this disease. I hope that all members of this House will support the great work of the MS Society and the many people who support MS research.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government and Official Opposition Policies

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it would seem that the NDP skipped the economics 101 class, so if you will indulge me, I want to spend the next couple of minutes going over a crash course in some of the fairly rudimentary principles that they missed.

Lesson 1. There is no such thing as a free lunch. When you get something for free – i.e., freely installed light bulbs – someone else ends up paying for it, and that somebody is hard-working Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the reality is that if too many people get on the gravy train, the gravy runs out. That's exactly what is happening in Alberta right now. Businesses, you know, the ones that create jobs, are leaving this province once and for all. Over \$24 billion of investment has fled since this government took office in 2015.

Lesson 2. Empower individuals to create their own prosperity through the vehicle of liberty and freedom. This path was best documented during the Reagan and Thatcher eras. It featured lower marginal tax rates, deregulation, and restrained government spending. These policies have created more wealth and prosperity than any other vehicle in modern history, full stop.

Lesson 3. Parkinson's law states that work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. Between 2015 and 2016 Alberta's population expanded by 1.7 per cent whereas the public sector expanded by 7.1 per cent. That means that the public sector is expanding over 400 per cent compared to the expansion of population.

Lesson 4. No one spends somebody else's money as carefully as they spend their own. When you or I purchase something, price and quality are paramount. When the government spends, it is neither with their own money nor for their own consumption, and you can guess how efficient and effective that is.

Lesson 5. And I'm pretty sure I read this in an economics book somewhere. If you want a prosperous society, then don't elect an NDP government. Mr. Speaker, the NDP have chosen to increase marginal tax rates, increase regulations, and increase government spending. This has created less prosperity, liberty, and freedom. How is this making life better for Albertans?

Presenting Petitions

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a petition containing 645 signatures calling on the government to

order a proper and complete Heritage Resource Impact Assessment for the site and buildings that constitutes the former Raymond School of Agriculture, also known as the Raymond Care Centre, and to halt plans to demolish these important historic buildings until the public can fully understand the potential heritage impact of their destruction and the scope of what would be involved in preserving them.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Employment and Labour Code Consultations

Mr. Jean: The last two years have seen Alberta in the worst economic downturn since the 1980s, but you wouldn't know it from looking at the NDP's policy record. Instead of trying to do no further harm, as they should do, they have waged war on Albertans' pocketbooks and ruined investor confidence all over the world for this province. The latest misguided idea: to ram through labour legislation after just 36 days of consultation, where on Ontario's part it's been over two years, and they're still going. Does the Premier take pleasure in kicking Albertans when they're down, or is she that out of touch with how harmful her policies are?

1:50

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I have to sort of begin by responding to the preamble there. Jobs were up in Alberta by 20,000 in March. Manufacturing in Alberta is up. Drilling is up. Car sales are up. Housing starts are up. Exports are up. The only thing not up is the Wildrose's strategy for talking this economy down, and Albertans deserve better.

Mr. Jean: From where the NDP has taken our economy over the last 18 months and the first year, Mr. Speaker, it wouldn't be that difficult to be up.

The absolute bare minimum this government could do would be to take some time to allow for consultation on their labour legislation. The way this government acts, consultation may indeed be just a four-letter word. We saw it with Bill 6, and now we are seeing history repeat itself with the labour legislation. When you rush legislation, Premier, you usually get it wrong, especially if you don't listen to Albertans. Will the Premier try to show just an ounce of goodwill and agree to consult on labour legislation over the summer? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, what we know is that Albertans need fair legislation that protects families. Last week, for instance, we heard the story of Amanda Jensen, who was fired when she took time off work to care for her child with leukemia. We are the only province in this country where that kind of injustice could occur under our laws. Albertans have been waiting for decades for that injustice to be fixed, and we're not going to make them wait any longer.

Mr. Jean: If they've been waiting decades, why not wait a few months to get the legislation right? Thirty-six days isn't long enough. It's not long enough to talk to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.
Please proceed.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-six days isn't long enough to talk to all the concerned stakeholders in the province let alone fully consult with them. Let me be clear. It's obvious the fix is in with this review. If the Premier took the time to talk to real Albertans, small-business owners, families concerned about the economy instead of just the union bosses who sit on the NDP board of directors, they'd understand how misguided their policies are. Why does the Premier refuse to listen to everyday Albertans and fully consult with them? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Second main question. Or second supplemental?

An Hon. Member: She didn't get to answer.

The Speaker: Oh yeah. That would be the part that I missed today, the answer. Yes. Thank you.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recall being advised that when you're standing, I shouldn't be, so I was just waiting there.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that, as I said before, it is time for Albertans to finally get fair laws that protect them in their workplace. Do you know another thing? If an Albertan is actually sick at work – perhaps they're sick because they themselves are getting cancer treatment – if they try to collect the EI benefits into which they have paid, their employer can say: "You know what? Go get those benefits, but don't expect your job to be there when you come back." Albertans deserve the right to get the benefits that they pay into. They deserve to be treated with respect.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Now it would be the second main question.

Mr. Jean: Did you hear that, Mr. Speaker? It sounds like a lot of excuses not to consult and listen to Albertans.

Family Violence Death Review Committee Report

Mr. Jean: Yesterday the NDP tabled a report that could save lives. The Family Violence Death Review Committee annual report was tabled almost a full year after it was given to the minister's office. There is absolutely no reason why this information should be delayed, yet the Minister of Community and Social Services did not release the report until he received repeated calls from the media. Ridiculous. This is unacceptable. Why does it take calls from the CBC for your minister to release a report that could save Albertans' lives?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to first begin by saying that all Albertans deserve to feel safe in their homes, their communities, and their workplaces. With respect to the particular report that the member opposite is talking about, yes, it could have been tabled earlier. But it's also important to understand that the recommendations contained in that report were actually released publicly in 2015, Mr. Speaker. In the meantime our government has been working very hard to make progress on preventing family violence, and I look forward to talking about that more in answer to the member's next question.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this minister's negligence is putting lives at risk. Now, this government may have forgotten Serenity, but we are not going to let them. Vulnerable Albertans deserve better. They deserve better from this government, and the NDP is leaving them

behind, full stop. How can the same disgraced minister that failed to turn over documents to the RCMP on the death of Serenity be trusted by the Premier when he failed to produce this vital report on family violence deaths?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I am exceptionally proud of the work that this minister has done on issues related to family violence. This government, under this minister's watch, increased funding to FCSS by \$25 million. They put in a \$15 million increase to women's shelters, an increase that those shelters had been asking for for three decades. They put \$11 million into family and community safety grants. We passed Bill 2. We've protected people fleeing family violence in their residential tenancy situations. We have done more in the last two years to support people than . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Shovelling tons of taxpayers' money towards a problem does not solve the problem.

Mr. Speaker, the last time this minister showed negligence and completely failed in his duties, the Deputy Premier told Albertans that, quote, we have full confidence in him and his abilities. End quote. The Premier just said the same thing. Talk about déjà vu. It sounds like *Groundhog Day* all over again. I have no confidence that there are no other reports gathering dust in the minister's office that could save lives. Does the Premier still believe that the Minister of Community and Social Services is capable of doing anything other than delaying reports and giving half-hearted apologies to Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seemed to miss the point where I indicated that the recommendations included in that report were actually released in late 2015. But I think the member opposite should actually give some thought to whether he really wants to stick by that comment to people that run women's shelters, to say that finally, after 30 years, giving them what they need to help run their programs is shovelling money needlessly at a problem. I would like them to go out to women who are fleeing domestic violence and say that to their faces. [interjections] That is unacceptable.

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Communities like Calgary are nervously watching the weather, our flood season being in full swing, while remembering the devastation of 2013. Numbers from Environment and Parks' own website show that snowpack levels in the Bow River watershed are at or near record levels and far above the levels of 2013, that resulted in massive flooding downstream in Cochrane, Calgary, and High River. What is the Premier doing in collaboration with our communities to be ready for the potential of flooding if these conditions continue to worsen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, recent reports indicate that there may be a risk of flooding in southern Alberta and in Calgary again. It's something this government takes

very seriously. We remember the devastation to people's lives and property during the last flood in 2013. Tens of thousands were forced from their homes, and there was over \$6 billion in damage. We're working hard to protect Albertans through the Springbank project and through a number of other flood mitigation projects to make sure in the event of another flood that people and their homes are protected.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Okay. Thank you. Lessons learned from Slave Lake in 2011, Calgary in 2013, and Fort McMurray in 2016 should be a wake-up call. Disaster can strike communities at any time. Communities like Calgary, Drumheller, High River, Sundre, and more devote significant time and resources to be prepared for these natural disasters, but their citizens should not be expected to act as provincial first responders. What is the Premier doing to improve the response time of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency so regular Albertans are not put in harm's way?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, there's no question that the 2013 floods and last year the wildfire emergency situation in Wood Buffalo brought out the best in Albertans, and now our province, in particular on the flood in question, has redoubled our efforts to ensure that our communities are safe. We have much better river forecasting than we did prior to the 2013 flood. Our government has invested in that co-ordination with municipalities as well. There's a lot more public information, and there's a lot more co-ordination with municipalities on the question of river forecasting.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. The 2012 report from the Slave Lake fire states that the sustainable resource development strategy should be a "high state of readiness" coupled with a multiminsty approach. Albertans are counting on this government to not leave them in the lurch and to be ready when disaster strikes. In 2016 in Fort McMurray, four years after the recommendations, we did not experience a high state of readiness, nor did we see a multiministerial approach. First reaction from the province took days. Can the Premier say specifically what is being done today to make sure that our province is at a high state of readiness for fire, flood, and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do take some issue, again, with the preamble that the member offered. In fact, last year with the tragic situation with the Fort McMurray fire, of course, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency immediately brought everybody together into the Provincial Operations Centre, where we worked across ministries in all ways in order to support the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo in their immediate response to an unprecedented disaster. Now, as the members opposite know, there will be additional reports going out which talk about how we can do better. We can always do better, and we're committed to that.

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

Investigation into Serenity's Death

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can any of us imagine losing a child under the most horrific circumstances and then being ignored when you ask questions about it? Today a brave, resilient family is with us, and they are seeking answers. I am honoured to be their voice. So far all of their information about Serenity's terrible fate has come from the media and the child advocate. They have asked me to ask this question: Premier, why are the ME's office, the Crown, and the department withholding basic information from Serenity's mother regarding the abuse of her children more than two and a half years ago?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This tragedy has been extremely difficult on the family, I have no doubt, and on all Albertans. Everyone is working very hard to ensure we do the best to obtain justice for this little girl. It is true that the process did not occur as quickly as it should have done. We will ensure that in future we do a better job of moving forward in a more timely manner, but at this time we cannot prejudice any potential prosecution going forward until the investigation is complete.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Serenity's mom has not only been kept in the dark about Serenity's death; this government will not even tell her about the investigation into the abuse of her other children, who were in care in the same home. Serenity's brother and sister are safe and back with their mother, and that should have been Serenity's future, too. The family will never be whole again because we all have failed them. Premier, will you look up into the gallery and tell Serenity's family and her mother watching online here today why you will not respect their wishes and call a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like the Minister of Justice, of course, I need to begin by saying that all Albertans are very, very troubled and have been about the horrible circumstances that Serenity suffered up to 2014, including, of course, her tragic death in 2014. It is absolutely important that the police be allowed to proceed so that the matter can be addressed fully in the justice system. It is frustrating for all of us, but we can't compromise that because that would be yet another injustice.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Last fall the former minister assured this House that he met with Serenity's family and offered supports. In reality, no one from the NDP government has ever reached out to Serenity's mother or her mother's immediate family to offer condolences, information, or support. And it gets worse. The former minister's office called Serenity's mother to schedule a phone call, and he never bothered to call. Premier, your government's role in this is shameful. Will you apologize to Serenity's mother and her immediate family today? And what is this man still doing on your front bench?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, when we are asked in the role of government or we are compelled to take on the responsibility of caring for children, we have an incredibly important obligation to those children and to their families, and when we don't get that done right, we absolutely owe

them an apology – all of us do – because there are so many ways in which the work that we do to support these children and their families can and must be better. That's absolutely true. There's no qualification to that. It must be done better. But it's also important that we make sure that the people who were responsible for Serenity's death . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Energy Resource Revenue

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moody's says that Alberta's deficit reduction plan relies almost entirely on higher oil prices, and they also say that this government isn't doing enough to get us off the royalty revenue roller coaster. I couldn't agree more. You know who else agrees? One of the four members of the NDP caucus who were in this House before the last election. Here's a quote. "They've failed to take us off the boom-and-bust revenue roller coaster, and they've failed to save for a rainy day . . . That's not leadership." To the Premier: which one of your four incumbent MLAs said that on March 25, 2015?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that when oil was at \$100 a barrel, it would have been prudent for the people who were in charge at the time to put together a financial and fiscal plan that would have allowed for us to have more money in savings. When we became government, we watched as the international price of oil went to an unprecedented low. Right now, as much as the issues that the member opposite talks about are important, what's important to us is standing with Albertans, having their backs, making life more affordable, creating jobs, and supporting those important programs that matter to their families.

Mr. Clark: Well, of course, it was you who said that, Madam Premier. I'm sure that you remember that well.

Here's another one, Mr. Speaker.

This government has promised for years to get [us] off the [resource revenue] roller coaster, but here we are once again coming over the top of the rickety track, about to plunge down amid screams and white knuckles. We've been on this ride too long, Mr. Speaker, and it's time the government got serious about getting off it.

Now, this is probably an easy one, but again to the Premier: which one of your members said this on November 26, 2014?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to hazard a guess that it was the current Minister of Transportation. That being said, I think the key issue here is that over decades when overall we had very high oil prices, there is no question that there was an obligation on the part of the people who were in charge to save for a rainy day. Right now, two years into the biggest oil price drop in decades, to suggest that now is the time to start, by closing schools, throwing nurses and teachers out of work, by eliminating jobs, that is not the way to build an economy. What we're seeing is green shoots that are looking very healthy, and that's because we did a stimulative budget . . .

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Hon. member, I'm reminded that the questions in the House should really be to government policy and not necessarily a TV program. I'm sure that on your next supplemental you will consider that.

Mr. Clark: Why thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course the Premier is right. It was the Government House Leader who said that.

Third try.

Why didn't you fix this? Why didn't you fix it so that you were protected from changes in oil prices? Lord knows, we all know that the price of oil goes up and [the price of oil goes] down. If the government doesn't know that by now, there's something really, really seriously wrong.

Again to the Premier, I want to know who said that on December 8, 2014, and I want to know if you know that the price of oil goes up, the price of oil goes down, and that it is a tragic mistake to wager Alberta's future on the price of oil.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to remind you again that it's the current government policy that I think this question period is for.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, again thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suppose I can just answer as I have before. The fact of the matter is that we know that Albertans and the Alberta economy and Alberta families are facing an unprecedented challenge to their economic prosperity because of an unprecedented drop in the price of oil. There are different choices that you make when that happens in the short and immediate term. Our choice was to stand with Albertans. Our choice was to invest in jobs. Our choice was to invest in infrastructure. Our choice was to protect health care and education, because that is the path out of this problem.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Postsecondary Education and Health Care in Indigenous Communities

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of mine in Maskwacis are concerned about opportunities to pursue post-secondary education at home. Given that our government is working hard to establish strong, collaborative relationships with indigenous peoples, can the Minister of Advanced Education please outline his plan to increase access to higher education in indigenous communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for his commitment to higher learning opportunities for his constituents in Maskwacis. Of course, affordability is at the heart of our plan for advanced education. That's why we've maintained the tuition freeze for three years, and that's why we've provided predictable and sustainable funding for every university and college in the province, because we know that when Albertans have access to higher education, they can make life better for themselves. That includes indigenous students at Maskwacis and all over the province. What wouldn't help is cutting \$600 million from the budget of Advanced Education like the PCs proposed to do or untold billions that the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we know that education is a key component in building strong communities and lifting people out of poverty, to the same minister: how are you working to ensure indigenous Albertans are well represented at postsecondary institutions across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we know that good jobs begin with a good education, but we know that for some Albertans, including indigenous learners, accessing postsecondary education can be a challenge. We've taken steps to address that, including \$7 million in scholarships for indigenous students in high-demand programs. The indigenous careers award and indigenous graduate award encourage more indigenous Albertans to pursue studies in fields such as business, education, health science, and graduate studies. I just want to remind the House that the big cuts the opposition are proposing would slam the door on opportunities to indigenous students and all other students in this province . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that health care delivery and the quality of health care are important pillars of indigenous well-being, to the Minister of Health: what is the Ministry of Health doing to improve access to health care for residents of Maskwacis?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud that last year Alberta Innovates and AHS announced a partnership with Merck Canada to give Maskwacis moms better prenatal care closer to home. I have to say that in terms of the hospital visit we had in Wetaskiwin very recently, it was an excellent opportunity for us to see all of the good work that's happening to work with community. While members in the opposition are calling for deep, brutal cuts that would definitely undermine health and well-being of Albertans, including those who live in this community, our government has got their back. We're working to make their lives better. We're not going to fire teachers and nurses and make their lives far worse.

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

Addiction and Mental Health Strategy

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard from Ministry of Health officials that implementing the recommendations of the Valuing Mental Health report has consisted of forming committees: an executive committee, an advisory committee, and four integration committees, whatever those would be. Minister, people are dying while your ministry forms committees to form more committees. Albertans need action, not more talk. What are the tangible actions you will take to combat the mental health crisis, and what is your timeline?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. We know that mental health problems and struggles with addictions are serious problems in our communities. Mr. Speaker, 1 in 5 Albertans will grapple with this at some point in their lives, and 1 in 10 Albertans over the age of 15 will struggle with alcohol and drug dependency. That's why we're working to make sure that we increase opportunities for safe consumption services. I'm certain that these are going to save lives, and we're going to keep making sure that we have every opportunity. I hope that the members opposite support us in this because lives are too precious to gamble on whether or not substances are safe, and we need to make sure that we're keeping all Albertans safe.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Auditor General called for an action plan to implement the mental health and addiction strategy, but the department cancelled the last meeting of the advisory committee because they had no meaningful next steps – they apparently sent a newsletter instead – and given that the committee is supposed to develop the next steps and given that 343 people dying from overdoses last year seems to be pretty meaningful, what does this minister have to say to the families of these Albertans, who want action instead of cancelled committee meetings and newsletters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We are expanding services, consistent with the mental health review recommendations, in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Calgary, and in other parts of the province. In Budget 2017-18 we're allocating over \$80 million to help Albertans coping with mental health issues and substance use. I wish the members opposite would step up and actually support these kinds of recommendations, that put money where it needs to be to save lives, because these strategies are proven to work. That's a 64 per cent increase over Budget 2016. Because we know that Albertans dealing with these issues need support, we're there for them, and we are fighting to keep them alive.

Mr. Smith: Spending money without an action plan recommended by the Auditor General: hmmm.

Given that one person a day is dying of a drug overdose in Alberta and given that the department could not identify the top three deliverables of an action plan to address the crisis and given that we urged this government to declare a public health emergency and given that forming endless committees and then cancelling meetings does not get the right people in the right place at the right time with the right action plan to save Albertans' lives, when will the minister follow the example of B.C. and declare a public health emergency?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I have to say to the families who are in the new eight-bed youth detox facility in Red Deer: spending money is a priority; making sure your children have somewhere safe to detox is a priority. And you know what? These types of investments are important. This isn't throwing money; this is saving lives, and I'm not going to apologize for that. We're going to keep making concrete actions, and we'll be happy to update the House in the days to come about additional steps. Our government funds 37 mental health capacity building initiatives, with 64 communities across this province targeting mental health and addictions prevention and promotion programs. These are saving children's lives, and I'm proud to invest in these kids and their communities.

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

Serenity and the Child Intervention System

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that two days ago in question period the Children's Services minister promised that the children in care minister's panel will be able to learn about the circumstances surrounding the abuse and untimely death that Serenity suffered while in care and given that I am on that panel and have not yet received news concerning that promise, to the Premier: when will your minister fulfill that promise she made two days ago, and what actions will she take to make sure the panel members

know what is coming so that we can learn about Serenity and make changes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, there are changes that need to happen within the child intervention system in this province. Everyone in this House is aware of that, and certainly Serenity's story brought that to the forefront. There have been many children over the years who, unfortunately, suffered tragedy within the child intervention system. We need to learn from all their stories. We need to look at what recommendations will lead to real change. We're very committed to taking action in terms of Children's Services, and we'll continue to provide as much information as we can that will certainly not compromise the criminal investigation as we move forward.

2:20

Mr. McIver: Promise broken so far.

Given that in question period this week the Justice minister said that the Crown is in discussion with the RCMP on investigation of Serenity's case and given that no arrests have been made, which leads us to believe that either the arrests are coming or the investigation has failed, and given that children are still residing in the home where Serenity suffered so much, to the Justice minister: since the Children's Services minister will not do her job by removing the children currently in that home, will you do your job and protect those children by removing them or at least by removing the adults responsible?

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, the protection and the belief in the support and protection of children in this province is not a partisan issue. This is a long and complex situation that started before 2014 and obviously covered the leadership of a number of individuals within this House. We both made choices in terms of the well-being of children, and we both are committed to the well-being and safety of children in this province. I stand behind the decisions to protect these children and to keep them safe and will continue to monitor and ensure the safety of all children in this province.

Mr. McIver: The minister said nonpartisan and immediately laid blame.

Mr. Speaker, given that on May 11 in question period the Children's Services minister confirmed a criminal investigation is ongoing, which would give reasonable persons cause to believe that the perpetrators of Serenity's terrible abuse and death would create living conditions unfit for children to endure, and given that charges have not been laid more than two years after Serenity's death, to the Premier: will you promise a public inquiry to get to the bottom? You didn't answer the question the first time. Will you call a public inquiry so that we can find out?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this situation has been challenging for the family, for Albertans in general, for all members of this House. I know that tragedies like this provoke strong reactions, but we absolutely need to let the criminal process play itself out before we make any more decisions. We will await the outcomes of those investigations. I have been in contact with the Crown. They are taking the matter very seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Data Security in Public Bodies

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. News broke out last night that in December 2016 our Energy Regulator was hacked and shut down for two days, but on Monday the Service Alberta minister stated in this Legislature that "we are not exposed" and that she's "proud of our systems." The real shock, though, is that Alberta's Auditor General warned the NDP that our Energy Regulator was at risk of being hacked 10 months prior to the actual attack. Minister, what is there to be proud of? Why wasn't this warning taken seriously?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Our government takes security very seriously and information security very seriously. Our systems are secure and well protected because we are constantly vigilant in protecting government information and systems. As the hon. member from across the aisle knows, we provide a cybersecurity framework and expertise to agencies, boards, and commissions so that they can keep their systems secure. Ultimately, this falls within their individual responsibility. ABCs are invited to a monthly security forum meeting that Service Alberta chairs, where cybersecurity issues are discussed. Service Alberta also has a website that links to cybersecurity standards, templates, program plans, policy advisory guides . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: The Minister of Service Alberta has been shirking her responsibility, claiming that agencies are responsible for their own operations. Given that the Auditor General's report states, "We recommend that the Department of Energy and Alberta Energy Regulator work together to determine whether a further assessment of threats, risks and impacts to industrial control systems used in provincially regulated oil and gas infrastructure would benefit Alberta,"

Minister, why aren't the ministries working with vulnerable agencies and commissions as per the AG's recommendation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: They don't take the AG seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms McLean: Again, I will repeat my answer for the hon. member. Our government takes information security very seriously. That's why we provide our cybersecurity framework and expertise to agencies, boards, and commissions so that they can keep their systems secure. ABCs are invited to a monthly security forum meeting that Service Alberta chairs, where cybersecurity threats and issues are discussed. Service Alberta also has a website that links to cybersecurity standards, templates, program plans, policy advisory guides, and IT disaster recovery tools. We are available to assist all of our ABCs with cybersecurity . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given the Auditor General's damning findings that pipeline operators use industrial control systems to control pumps and valves and to detect leaks or other problems and that if the industrial control systems are not secure, they can be misused to cause damage to critical infrastructure like oil wells, pipelines, and refineries, resulting in harm to Albertans or the environment, to

the Energy minister: why didn't you instruct an Alberta government entity to assess risks to our energy infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. minister previously answered the two questions on what is being done, and those apply to pipelines. Companies maintain their own systems, and we work with them on the systems, but at the end of the day the companies have their own systems, and we have ours.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Electric Power Prices and Transmission Costs

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the Energy file, the NDP just doesn't get it. Day in and day out I have constituents, many already battling unemployment, bringing me outrageous power bills. Regular Albertans are concerned about the astronomical charges for power transmission, not power generation. The NDP is suing generators and capping the lowest component of their bills, which is retail, and doing nothing about the costly transmission line overbuild. To the Minister of Energy: what is this government doing to lower transmission costs for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we're working on all aspects of the bills. We've capped the rate at 6.8 cents, and we're working with my ministry to look at transmission. To be clear, the transmission costs that we're speaking of now were done with the previous government, not with ours, but we are looking into how those costs can be managed going forward.

Mr. Cyr: Blaming the last government: that's shameful.

Transitioning Alberta's grid to 30 per cent renewables by 2030 and stranding our coal assets will only require more transmission lines, which means higher transmission fees for Alberta. Given that the new renewable assets will need to be built in areas of the province where they perform the best and given that our coal generators are located near coal and that winds are strongest near where the sun shines the brightest, why is the government pursuing a course that will make electricity more expensive for the good people in Bonnyville-Cold Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, one of the good things about having an overbuilt transmission line is that we won't need as much transmission when we're doing our renewables. I'm pleased to say that in all of our auctions, we're working with the ISO to look at where placements can be. A number of the coal facilities are already near good transmission lines, so there won't be much more cost for that.

Mr. Cyr: The NDP capping electricity retail rates at double the current price sends a signal to families and industry that they should expect electricity prices to double. Given that the NDP capped electricity prices at double so that they can hide the true costs of their costly renewables strategy with debt and given that this has had no effect but was put forward to stop the rising transmission costs, to the minister. My constituents can't afford their electricity bills now. How can they afford them when the NDP causes their bills to double?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the system we inherited is an energy-only market, which causes price volatility. That's why we're capping the rates. That's why we're developing a capacity market. We want consumers to have stability and predictability in their system, and we also want reliability. That's what they're going to get.

Child Protective Services and Death Reviews

Mr. Rodney: All hon. members agree that Serenity's death was a tragedy. Every one of us needs to do everything possible to prevent a situation like this from ever happening again. The office of the Child and Youth Advocate does amazing work as it offers solutions to the issues that Children's Services faces. To the Premier. You have publicly stated that all of the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendations were accepted by your government. Can you please tell the family and all Albertans: have all of these recommendations actually been implemented yet?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm thankful for the partnership we have with the Child and Youth Advocate in terms of his commitment and passion towards the safety and protection of our vulnerable children in this province. We worked very closely with the Child and Youth Advocate to understand the intent of the recommendations and to move forward. Some of the recommendations, obviously, are incredibly complex and will take years to implement, but we're making progress on them all in order to make this system better. That's why we have a Minister of Children's Services. That's why we had the panel. We're committed to working together to ensure that this system is better off than it has been for far too many years.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Given that criminal record checks must be completed on all adults living in a residence where children in care are to be placed and given that the Child and Youth Advocate's report indicates that these checks were performed on the parents that Serenity was placed with but not on the adult children who also live there, to the Minister of Children's Services: what new directives have you issued to your department to ensure that criminal record checks occur on all adults in all care homes, as your department policy dictates?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I'm thankful for the team within Children's Services, who is very committed to protecting the children within Alberta. There's been much progress made over recent years in terms of ensuring that policy is implemented. We continue to provide the resources that those staff need to ensure that they are able to do the work that they're being asked to do. Absolutely, while money doesn't fix everything, money sure helps the staff to be there and to provide the services and resources that they need. We remain committed to funding the department in order to be able to implement the policy that they need to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Given that one of the major concerns with Serenity's case was the length of time it took to perform the autopsy and given that in 2015 1.75 per cent of autopsies took longer than nine months

to perform and given that Serenity's autopsy took a full two years to complete, which may well have compromised the criminal investigation into her death, to the minister once again: how many autopsies in Alberta take two years or longer to be completed, and what are your plans to deal with this on an urgent basis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We certainly know that the autopsy in this case did not move forward in a particularly timely manner. Obviously, there are some cases in which there are complications, but we will be looking very closely to ensure that we can expedite those processes. It's incredibly challenging, we know, for families who are waiting for the outcomes of these autopsies. We absolutely know. That's why we've made it a priority. That's why we've invested in hiring more medical examiners. We will absolutely be ensuring that those timelines come down.

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

Midwifery Services

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After my sister's experience giving birth to her first son, she pursued the services and care of a midwife for her second and third pregnancies. I meet more and more women in my constituency who are seeking midwifery services that are concerned that the demand exceeds availability. Given the vital care that midwives provide throughout pregnancy, to the Minister of Health: what is this government doing to support access to these primary care practitioners?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her important advocacy in this area. The government values Alberta midwives and their important role in the health of mothers and babies, and that's why this government has brought forward stable funding with year-over-year increases. We've already seen a 30 per cent increase in the number of midwife-attended births since we came into office, which I'm very proud of, and by the end of 2018-19 we'll see an almost 68 per cent increase compared to when we came into government. Ensuring that we have increased options for women who choose these ones is very important to us.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the number of families receiving midwifery care is increasing and midwives are currently involved in about 5 per cent of all pregnancies in Alberta, to the same minister: how is this government working with stakeholders to ensure that midwives have the capacity to handle increasing interest and demand?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again to the member for her question and for her advocacy on this very important matter, Mr. Speaker. Midwives across this province are the ones dealing with the front lines, and they understand our pressures. Even in this tough economy we've put our money where our mouth is. We've worked with our partners to support midwives. Stable and predictable funding has made it possible for AHS and the association to reach an agreement that will increase the number of midwives in our province and improve access to underserved communities. I might add that I'm looking forward to sharing some positive news about this in the hon. member's riding in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural families often have to travel long distances to cities to receive supports and are often forced to join wait-lists, to the same minister: what is this government doing to support rural or remote families in Alberta to address this serious inequity?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for this question. As a rural MLA it's important that we make sure that her advocacy helps not only the residents of her constituency but all residents, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're delivering on a commitment to provide midwifery care to more Alberta families than ever before. The agreement will increase the number of midwives practising in Alberta and includes a joint process that AHS and the association will use to determine where midwives can serve more underserved rural and remote communities. What's also important is that Mount Royal graduates can start their careers here in Alberta, something I'm so proud that our government is investing in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask the question that the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville should be asking. Farmers and ranchers are stewards of their land. They are the ones that have laid out the investment. They are the ones that have done the improvements. They are the ones that have paid the taxes. They feel that they should have a say to any outside corporation accessing their land. To the Minister of Transportation. You used to be an advocate for landowners' rights when you were an opposition member. How do you justify supporting the opposite position now that you are in government? Or are you being overruled by the minister of environment?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the hon. member, that's not a question about government policy, and I don't feel inclined to answer it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's going to look great on Facebook.

The Speaker: No preambles, please. Keep going.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, given that the Farmers' Advocate . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hanson: . . . is cautioning landowners regarding unregistered landmen representing speculators . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Hanson: . . . and given that these companies are not being forthright with information that could affect landowners and their relationships with their neighbours and municipalities, what is this government doing to defend the rights of landowners to protect the interest that they have worked so hard towards?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, these questions are very complex and very interrelated. We absolutely know that it's the case that there have been long-standing issues with respect to the way property rights operate in this province. We will have more to say about it in the future. These are incredibly complicated issues. There are complicated interests on both sides of the case. This is something that needs to be taken seriously and handled in an appropriate manner, not for cheap political points. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that bills 19, 24, 36, and 50 were seen as an attack on the rights of property owners in Alberta and given that our Bill 204 sought to remedy some of the remaining issues but was defeated in this House, to the Minister of Transportation. You have previously campaigned to repeal these bills that trampled the rights of Alberta property owners. When can we expect any of the remaining problems of these bills to be repealed?

2:40

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we have consistently stood to protect the rights of landowners and all Albertans. People have a right to fair compensation of their land. They need a right to appeal. We've always stood for these basic principles. We continue to do that now. I was in this House defending those principles when the Wildrose didn't even exist, and I'm going to continue to do it long after they're gone. [interjections]

The Speaker: What a robust day we are having today. In 20 seconds we will go to the next agenda item.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 15 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 15, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

As you know, Alberta's economy and commodity tax statutes are typically amended every year. This is done in order to implement government policy decisions and make necessary changes that ensure our tax legislation remains aligned with the federal tax legislation. In addition to the technical and administrative amendments being brought forward this year, we are also proposing important changes that will affect the carbon levy rebate. The changes are specifically aimed at reducing the need for rebate amounts to be returned when a household's eligibility changes due to the death of a family member.

We heard from Albertans who were affected by this, and we've been working as quickly as possible to address it. As soon as we heard about this issue in March, we took action and directed the Canada Revenue Agency to halt these notices. Mr. Speaker, families who already received reassessment notices from the Canada Revenue Agency in these cases can disregard those notices. Those who have already returned the rebate will receive a repayment.

Mr. Speaker, this measure is also extended to the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit programs as of January 1 of this year. The related amendments in this bill will

ensure that this issue is resolved across all three programs going forward.

Additional changes included in this bill include implementing a broader political contribution tax credit, as announced a couple of months ago in Budget 2017. Extending the political contribution tax credit to leadership campaigns and nomination races will help encourage more participation in the political process from Albertans.

Other technical amendments included in this bill will ensure that Alberta's tuition and education tax credits are not affected by recent changes in the federal legislation. Mr. Speaker, the federal government also passed several bills this year that amended the federal Income Tax Act that now require . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, are you just about there?

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of the document by Moody's Investors Service that I referenced in my question today entitled Moody's Highlights Continued Credit Concern for Alberta Despite Anticipated Rebound in Revenue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table today an article written by Carmen Wittmeier entitled Playing House: Politicians Cower as the Supreme Court Overrides the Natural Family Order, in which the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party is quoted as saying that the ruling on LGBTQ-plus rights is "one of the most outrageous exercises of raw judicial power in the history of modern democracy."

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter submitted by a pediatrician encouraging the Education minister to establish a provincial policy for the management of type 1 diabetes in Alberta schools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During my speech on Bill 11 yesterday I referenced a document from the Canadian Nurses Association that I promised to table. When I went to print off copies of the document, I had trouble accessing the website, so I don't unfortunately have that with me today. As soon as I can access the website, I'll commit to tabling that.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 13 Securities Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017.

It's been truly touching to hear the stories that were delivered by hon. members during the debate on this bill. The stories of their constituents' experiences are exactly why we brought this legislation forward, Mr. Speaker. I hope that we will start to hear fewer of these types of stories as the bad apples and the wrongdoers are weeded out by the stronger investment protection provided by this bill.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is another example of how this government is working harder to make life better for more Albertans by helping to ensure that their investments are safe through strong and effective enforcement measures. When wrongdoing is suspected, self-regulatory organizations will now have the ability to go after those offenders so that people have more confidence to invest in this great province's vibrant capital market.

We know that the securities regulatory landscape has become more complex, sophisticated, global, and more driven by technology than ever before. The proposed amendments were developed to support Alberta's commitment to ongoing reform by protecting investors and promoting a fair and effective Alberta capital market.

The Alberta Securities Commission is mandated to protect investors and the integrity of our province's capital market. A well-regulated and efficient financial system where investors are protected is essential for investor confidence while allowing for innovation. We must ensure that the securities regulatory system in Alberta not only continues to reflect the realities of current markets but that it is also aligned with international standards and regulatory reform. That's why we have proposed these amendments, to support our ongoing commitment to enhancing investor protection and promoting a fair and effective Alberta capital market.

The Alberta Securities Commission has statutory powers to compel attendance at and the production of evidence during both investigations and hearings. As I've mentioned, self-regulatory organizations such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, or IIROC, and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association currently do not have this authority during investigations. This bill changes that.

2:50

These amendments extend the powers of self-regulatory organizations so that they can compel testimony and the production of evidence during an investigation. Providing these SROs with the same powers as the commission will strengthen their enforcement abilities and improve investor protection in Alberta.

In addition, these changes will extend immunity to the directors, officers, employees, and agencies of SROs from civil liability for the good-faith exercising of regulatory and delegated powers. Mr. Speaker, the people responsible for enforcing securities laws must be able to do their jobs without fear of being held personally liable. Protecting them from liability for carrying out their duties in good faith makes it possible to enforce the rules more effectively.

Finally, amendments to the Lieutenant Governor in Council regulation will ensure that the act is consistent and applies to all parties as intended.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, with these amendments we are ensuring that Alberta's securities regulatory framework reflects the realities of today's market and evolves with international standards and regulatory reforms. Our government is working to make life better for Albertans with practical changes that help strengthen investor protection in this province.

As I have mentioned previously, the amendments before this Chamber in the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, reflect the core principles which guide this government's approach to Alberta's capital market. These core principles are, one, a strong investor protection framework; two, continued market integrity; and finally,

ensuring that we have an efficient system for capital formation. Mr. Speaker, I believe that these are the right principles to guide both the government and this legislation when we consider changes to the Securities Act, and the amendments before this House in the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, are in alignment with those very principles.

If members are concerned about investor protection, if members are concerned with the long-term integrity of our capital markets, and if members want to ensure over the long term that we continue to have an efficient system of capital formation, then I strongly urge them to support this bill. This is good legislation, Mr. Speaker. This legislation has the support of industry participants, this legislation has the support of advocacy groups who support investor protections, and of course this legislation is fully supported by the Alberta Securities Commission.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members of this House to support third reading of this important bill. Thank you very much.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and support third reading of Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. The Alberta Securities Commission is mandated to protect investors and foster a fair and efficient Alberta capital market, as you may have heard me say in the House before when speaking to this bill and previously to a similar bill almost a year ago today.

As you've heard me say in the House – and I've echoed our Finance minister – the securities regulatory landscape has become more complex, sophisticated, global, and more driven by technology than ever before. Throughout the world regulators and legislators have to be nimble and act vigilantly while also allowing for innovation. Regulators and legislators must keep abreast of a landscape that is ever-changing and constantly evolving while at the same time being prepared to update our laws and regulations at regular intervals.

At a previous time when I spoke, I talked about crowd funding, how that's changing the landscape and how it's important for the Alberta Securities Commission to be on top of that and any changes that could potentially happen in terms of how we protect investors as we move forward.

I think it would be beneficial for all members of this Chamber to briefly review where we are and where we've come from over the past few years. Roughly a year ago this government announced that it would stand up for Alberta businesses and investors by backing our provincially led securities regulator to continue overseeing our capital markets rather than deferring this responsibility to a single national agency, and on that we all agree.

We made this decision after taking the time to fully understand the implications of regulatory oversight in our capital markets and the excellent leadership role of our provincial regulator, which has taken on the national stage. I'm proud to say that the Alberta Securities Commission has implemented many different guidelines and policies that have been adopted in other jurisdictions all across the country. For that, we must be proud.

As we made this decision, we set out three goals, the three principles that would guide the approach to our capital markets on a go-forward basis. Those were investor protection, market integrity, and an efficient system of capital formation. We all know that these goals are best achieved when our capital markets operate transparently, when regulatory standards are harmonized, and when we have effective, authoritative oversight.

All members of this House can appreciate that our capital markets are defined by the resource sector. It remains our belief that it only makes sense to have a provincially led securities regulator who

understands our province's unique needs. While I'm certain that this government made the right decision to continue with our provincially led regulator, that decision requires this government and this Legislature to regularly keep our laws up to date. The responsibility falls on us, and we will not defer that responsibility to Bay Street or Ottawa.

As members of this House know well, this government has been working consistently with our industry partners to ensure that our capital markets remain well regulated, to provide effective mechanisms through which companies can raise capital, and to ensure that our laws are up to date. Alberta and this Legislature must ensure that our securities regulatory system continues to reflect the realities of current markets and aligns with international standards and regulatory reforms.

To achieve this objective, the government has brought a number of amendments before this House to ensure that our capital markets continue to function effectively. Mr. Speaker, if I'm not mistaken, all of the previous amendments that this government has introduced received the unanimous support of this House.

As a reminder, members of this Chamber have voted in favour of legislation that our minister introduced to do a number of things. Those are to amend the definitions of a derivative, a reporting issuer, and a security; amending the amount of advance notice that a witness must be provided to appear at a Securities Commission hearing; making smart changes to halt-trade provisions; harmonizing provisions related to civil liability; and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker. The important thing here is that we all acknowledge how critical it is to continue updating legislation as required to keep our capital markets strong and that we do so in a fashion in keeping with our three key operating principles.

Mr. Speaker, with that very important context in mind, let me say a few words about the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, and steps this government is taking to continue ensuring that we have strong investor protection, we continue to maintain strong market integrity, and we continue to build the necessary institutional infrastructure to allow for an efficient system of capital formation. Let me also state that the proposed amendments that we have been discussing and that are part of the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, were developed in line with our key operating principles and in co-ordination with our industry partners.

Currently the Alberta Securities Commission has statutory powers to compel attendance at and the production of evidence during both the investigation and the adjudication phases. However, self-regulatory organizations such as the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, or IIROC, and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association do not have this authority.

It is the view of this government and the Alberta Securities Commission and the vast majority of market participants that this needs to change. We need to ensure that self-regulatory organizations have the necessary authority to do their work like other self-regulatory organizations in our society. Providing self-regulatory organizations with the same authorities as the commission will strengthen their enforcement abilities and improve investor protection.

Let me be clear. The vast majority of market participants are honest and trustworthy, and they follow the rules. As members of this House know well, trust is integral to the integrity of our capital markets. When a few bad apples take action and swindle investors, trust can quickly erode. When overall trust erodes in our capital markets, it becomes incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to raise capital.

3:00

Therefore, the proposed amendments before you with respect to self-regulatory organizations are important for two reasons. First,

these changes will help protect individual investors and therefore improve investor protection. Second, and just as importantly, these changes are one step we can take to improve overall trust in the market and therefore help to improve market integrity.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many more things that I could mention when it comes to the Securities Amendment Act, 2017, but I'm going to provide the opportunity for other members of the government caucus and perhaps even members across the way to speak to it.

With that, I want to encourage all members of this House to stand up and vote in favour of the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up today and speak on this act. You know, as the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board made clear in his opening remark, this government has laid out three key principles when it comes to approaching Alberta's capital market. Throughout this debate I have always said that the government is focused on, one, investor protection; two, ensuring market integrity; and three, ensuring that we have an efficient system for capital formation.

I think we can all agree that these are very worthy and laudable goals and should serve as useful guideposts when we consider this bill. I think through Committee of the Whole we spent a lot of time considering the various amendments and statutes. We discussed them at great length, and I think it was quite enjoyable for all of us here. With all of those amendments I always said that we should ask ourselves three main things. Does the legislation serve to enhance consumer protection? I believe that it does. Does the legislation serve to further improve market integrity? I believe that it does as well. Finally, will the changes in this bill continue to ensure that we have an efficient system for capital formation? I believe the answer to all of these questions is yes.

I'm glad we're talking about investor protection. As we talked about and as we were reading through the various, you know, amendments and new investigative powers that would come forward through this bill, I'd think of my grandparents. I think of parents that are saving for their kids, perhaps saving for a disabled child in a registered retirement disability fund. I think of every working Albertan who could have their savings wiped out by scandalous, surreptitious, fraudulent – all the fun words for no-good – investors in the mutual fund market. I think about those because I think that this bill is actually part of our continuing goal to make life better for Albertans, to protect Albertans from the nogoodniks out there in the finance industry.

You know, I think it's just like how we have our support for small business with lowering the small-business tax and how we've brought in our investor tax credits as another way that we are also helping Albertans by helping small businesses, that hire many Albertans.

The opposition has said on many occasions that they will undo everything we have done. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks has mentioned at length that he would wipe all record of us off the face of the Earth. I wonder. Why would they want to undo the good of this bill? Why would they want to undo the protection for those grandparents who are going to an investor, who is supposed to be a professional, and trusting that person to invest their money wisely and, instead, want to get rid of the investigative powers that would allow justice to take its course and protect Albertans from those unscrupulous dealers? I don't think the opposition should do that, and I think they should explain that in their comments to this bill if they choose to speak to it.

You know, with everything that we hear in the newspapers, on TV, on social media, I'm really glad that we are actually taking concrete action to ensure investor protection, Mr. Speaker. In this bill there are proposed changes to authorities and capacities of self-regulatory organizations. Since we do love abbreviations in this bill, they're also known as SROs, like the Mutual Fund Dealers Association, also known as the MFDA, or the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, also known as IIROC. For those of you who are car enthusiasts, that was also a fairly excellent Camaro made in the late '80s and early '90s.

Mr. S. Anderson: That's the best abbreviation.

Mr. Malkinson: The best abbreviation.

Mr. S. Anderson: Yeah.

Mr. Malkinson: I believe the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs agrees with me on that one.

These organizations play an important role in our capital markets. These SROs have devolved authority from the Alberta Securities Commission, so it's incumbent on us to make sure that they have the best tools at their disposal to do their job.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The amendments, Madam Speaker, in the SAA, 2017, will also allow the SROs to have the same statutory powers as the ASC, which will improve their enforcement capabilities. Ensuring that SROs can compel attendance and ensure the production of evidence is critically important. It's critically important because it empowers these organizations to fulfill their mandate, which is investor protection. It's the protection of investors, which, we must remember, are everyday, hard-working Albertans throughout this province. When we create laws and rules which empower investors, that's good for capital markets. But when we create a disincentive for wrongdoers, scoundrels, as one could say, to operate in our capital markets, we improve the overall integrity of our capital markets.

Now, Madam Speaker, as we do our final consideration of this bill before us, I think it's worth reflecting on the questions I first raised in my opening, that I've talked about throughout this process, in second reading as well as extensively in Committee of the Whole. We must ask ourselves when we think of this legislation: does this legislation serve to enhance consumer protection? Does this legislation serve to further improve market integrity? Finally, will these changes continue to ensure that we have an efficient system for capital formation?

In my view, the answer to all three of these questions is, of course, yes. I believe that speaks to the thoughtfulness that the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and his staff and the government have put into this bill to make sure that we are there protecting consumers.

This is good, smart, and important legislation, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to take a moment before I finish off to thank all members of this House who spoke in support of this piece of legislation in the very fulsome discussion that we had on this very important but perhaps, as some people might think, dry piece of legislation.

Some Hon. Members: No. No.

Mr. Malkinson: I hear cries of no. I mean, it was amazing how great a discussion we had on this particular piece of legislation.

I'd also like to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie, who spoke at length on this bill, as well as all other members of the House.

With that, I would like to encourage all members of this Chamber to support these critical amendments and proudly vote yea when we call the vote for third reading of the Securities Amendment Act, 2017.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and answers. Does anybody wish to avail themselves of the opportunity?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. I believe I have Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: When you invest your life savings, you want to know that your money is being managed with integrity and skill. Albertans deserve this assurance when they're investing, and governments need to do everything they can to protect investors. Investment and the financial industry are critical to our economy and are an integral part of economic diversification.

In reading up on this bill, I was reminded of the Bre-X case in Calgary in the 1990s. In 1989 the company was listed on the Alberta Stock Exchange at 30 cents a share. Bre-X was a mining company, and they focused their exploration on gold in Quebec and diamonds in the Northwest Territories. Now, it was a slow start for the company, and the founder ended up with \$60,000 in credit card debt in an effort to keep the company afloat, and he saw an opportunity in the Busang site in Borneo. Who says this isn't exciting? This is a compelling story.

There were productive gold discoveries on the island, and early exploration showed some evidence of gold in the Busang. Exploration is expensive, and in investigating the case, it appeared that the agents of the company were salting core samples with gold. Busang was billed as the biggest gold deposit in the world.

I remember driving past the Bre-X office on 14th Street in the mid-90s. It was world famous by then and regularly showed up in the news stories. At one point Bre-X was valued at \$6 billion on the TSE and Bre-X stock reached a peak of \$286 a share, which was a long way up from the opening price of 30 cents. Now, who wouldn't want to invest in the largest gold deposit in the world? Who wouldn't want to be part of a fast-growing company that seemed to have no downside?

Bre-X began to encounter a number of stock-pummelling pitfalls, the most damaging of which was a partnership with the mining company Freeport-McMoRan. This was as a result of the Indonesian government compelling them to go into this partnership. Freeport did some of their own drilling tests, and they did not get the same results that Bre-X had been reporting.

Next, the Indonesian government reported that the Busang probably wasn't a gold-producing site, and there were other independent tests that confirmed that what was being reported wasn't right, that there wasn't the world's biggest gold deposit in the Busang, that indeed there wasn't likely any gold in the Busang.

Bre-X stocks fell, the company folded, and investors lost \$3 billion. Many people lost their life savings as a result of this spectacular fraud. Their lives were devastated. About the only good thing about this story is that it was adapted by Hollywood for a screenplay and movie that was loosely based on the story. It was kind of an okay movie.

This story illustrates the need for good regulation to protect investors from fraud. Albertans and industry both benefit when regulators have the tools they need to ferret out the bad actors. Regulation of the financial industry is spread across regulatory organizations much the same as it is in other provinces. This bill

would strengthen the abilities of self-regulatory organizations by granting them the authority to compel attendance and to produce evidence. That means that it puts some teeth into legislation for them to make people show up as well as to produce evidence and to be able to implement consequences if they don't.

I was happy to learn about the level of consultation with stakeholders, including the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, who shared a number of stories of the devastation people have experienced when they've been bilked out of their money.

I support this bill for two reasons, Madam Speaker. First, protection of investors' money is a huge responsibility, and it's addressed well in this bill. Second, a robust, well-regulated capital market is integral to our economy now and into the future, and our citizens and business community depend on it. I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to listen to my fellow Calgary colleague from Mackay-Nose Hill. You know, she spoke, actually, about a very interesting case in our history, the Bre-X scandal. I often remember my father, who was an accountant, talking about the Bre-X scandal. He, of course, became an accountant starting off in the '80s there, and he remembers the excesses of the '80s. I mean, most people think of that as sort of your Gordon Gekko, *Wall Street* type scenario. He spoke of Bre-X. That was a very big scandal in Canadian history, and I think the hon. member brought up a great point. It's a very perfect example of how when people are bilked out of their money, it has a very big impact on their finances. Oftentimes people think in these losses that it's just large investors or very wealthy individuals. But it also is regular, everyday Albertans. The hon. member went on talking about specifically a quote there – I believe it was from the retired people's organization – you know, talking about how this is very important to their members.

My question for the hon. member, if she would like to elaborate a little bit more, is thinking of: what would be the negative effects if somebody was to be bilked out of their investments, perhaps, if there wasn't this strong, investigative power that's in this bill? What effect might that have on those regular, everyday Albertans, and how would this bill perhaps protect them and perhaps make life better for them, Madam Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thanks for the question. I think anyone who's nearing retirement age is looking for ways to maximize their return and minimize the risk, so they rely on investment advisers to advise them as to the smart places to put their money. Without a strong regulatory framework to prevent nefarious activity – there's always going to be risk involved in investing, but you can mitigate that risk to a certain degree by using someone who's experienced, very well qualified.

But if you happen to connect with someone who isn't well qualified, it could be absolutely devastating for someone's retirement. If you're nearing retirement age and you lose your life savings – I can't imagine the psychological damage that would do to somebody, to have a future that was fairly sure all of a sudden become a future that's completely unsure and to not know how they're going to pay for things, where they're going to live and what they're going to eat, at a time in their lives when they may not be able to work as much or for as much money as they worked for

before. Yeah, I can see that that would be an absolutely devastating experience for anyone.

I hope that answers the question.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity today to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Securities Amendment Act, 2017. Admittedly, I would say that I tend to be much more of a words guy than a numbers guy. I did well in math in high school, certainly, but I've always been one to gravitate more towards words, English, that sort of thing, and away from sort of the numbers side of things. I did manage to get by in terms of budgeting and taking care of my own personal finances. For many years I operated as a musician, as a sole proprietor and as a studio engineer, so I had to do some budgeting and that sort of thing, but it wasn't a line of work that left a significant amount of money for investment, admittedly.

It took a little while before I did sort of decide that I was going to move on. I decided that I was going to go back to school. I had the opportunity to work in a number of positions where I began to accumulate a bit of a pension. Once I had that in place and then decided that I was going to move on from my work in a couple of those positions with the federal government and with the provincial government, then I found myself with sort of a large chunk of money that needed to be invested.

3:20

In 2015, actually, shortly after my opportunity to be in this House as the representative for Edmonton-Centre, I hired my first financial adviser. Certainly, it was helpful to be able to go through and sort of talk with friends and sort of get some good recommendations and find out who other people had worked with. I was able to sit down and have a very good meeting with a gentleman who I've now been able to sort of trust with my finances and to set up those investments for me.

It's reassuring, you know, to know that I have somebody who has that expertise, much the same as if I wanted to hire someone to renovate my home or fix my car or any of these other things which, I suppose, I could probably learn how to do myself if I had the time. But as I'm sure you're well aware, Madam Speaker, this is not a job that lends itself to a lot of free time for any of us in this House. Certainly, I appreciate the opportunity to avail myself of expertise to handle some of these aspects of life for which I don't have the time to dedicate myself.

I think that that's true, probably, for many Albertans. Certainly, I have some friends who I know have spent a good deal of time educating themselves about investment and securities and the different options that they have, and they personally enjoy doing some of that in their free time and doing some investment on their own. But I think there are many Albertans who require that sort of advice, require that sort of expertise and, as many have noted in speaking about this bill, who are, in fact, very dependent in a very important aspect of their lives, indeed, their financial future, their ability to retire, placing it in the hands of someone else and trusting that they are going to have their best interests in mind.

Certainly, Madam Speaker, this is in line with the other work that our government has chosen to do in terms of trying to make life better for Albertans. Shortly after our election, of course, we had our bill that we put through to tighten regulations on payday loans. I'll say that it's been incredibly encouraging to hear that that has begun, in fact, to have an impact and that we are seeing people

being able to turn to other financial options, that we are seeing reductions in the number of people that are caught up in the cycle of debt through that. We, of course, banned door-to-door energy sales. We have the bill that is before us now introducing new licensing for home builders.

Madam Speaker, this is all part of work that we are trying to do to ensure that Albertans can rest assured that when they are acting as consumers, they can trust that they are protected. They can trust that they have a mechanism by which they can get redress if they are wronged or indeed they are taken advantage of. So I really appreciate the work that our ministers have been doing on this, and I appreciate that the Minister of Finance has brought forward this bill now to ensure that the same will be true of investment and securities.

Now, of course, the securities regulatory landscape in Canada has been becoming increasingly complex. It's much more sophisticated. It's involved at a much more international and global scale than it has been in the past. Of course, as the complexity grows, so grows the need for more expertise and also so grows the opportunity for people to take advantage of that complexity, to take advantage for themselves and to take advantage of other people. Certainly, since the 2007 financial crisis we recognize that it's become even more difficult to sustain quality capital markets.

The challenge that we faced here in Alberta, then, was how we would deliver the right regulations to support investor confidence and still help to encourage investment, innovation, and economic growth here in Alberta and, of course, across Canada. The important thing is that we ensure that our securities regulatory system reflects the realities of today's markets and stays in step with evolving international standards and global regulatory reform initiatives and indeed the growth of technology because as technology grows and new opportunities make themselves available, then we need to find ways that we can work these things in as well.

This bill, of course, provides, then, that regulatory organizations have the same enforcement authority as the Alberta Securities Commission and gives those regulatory organizations the ability, as some have noted, to compel attendance and production of evidence so that they're better able to do their jobs and protect Alberta investors. It also offers at the same time protection from liability for the people who will investigate these cases when carrying out their duties in good faith.

Now, of course, Madam Speaker, it's incredibly important that we do everything we can to protect investors against the very few – and, of course, as many have noted, it is indeed few. We have many who work in our financial industries here in the province who have nothing but the best interests of the people that they serve in mind. What we are focused on here, as we have been with so many of these other bills which I spoke of which are looking to protect consumers, is identifying and eliminating those few bad apples who would spoil the bunch. So we must do everything we can to protect investors against those few people in the system who would take advantage.

We recognize that we have strong organizations in Alberta. We have the Alberta Securities Commission. They're mandated to protect investors and foster a fair and efficient Alberta capital market. Of course, that commission has some statutory powers already. They can compel attendance, as I mentioned, and the production of evidence during both the investigation and adjudication phases. However, there are also self-regulatory organizations like the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada and the Mutual Fund Dealers Association who don't have that authority. The proposed changes will now give those organizations that same authority as the commission's. That's going to strengthen

their abilities now to enforce and to improve investor protection amongst those that they serve and for those that they represent.

Now, of course, in most provinces across Canada provincial governments have delegated certain aspects of this authority to these sorts of regulatory organizations, providing much more efficient and effective regulation. That's something, of course, that then provides better protection for investors, and that's something that's essential if we want to have confidence in our markets. We recognize that confidence in the market is something that is essential for those markets to do well and to prosper. We recognize also, at the same time, Madam Speaker, that both in Canada and globally speaking, those markets are in fact changing. So here in Alberta we have to ensure that our system is going to align with these new international standards and the types of regulatory reforms that we're seeing in other provinces and, of course, around the world.

Another thing that these proposed amendments will do is to extend immunity to the directors, the officers, the employees, and agents of these regulatory bodies. Those amendments, therefore, will also clarify the conditions under which that immunity is granted to those organizations, which will make it possible, then, for those organizations to be able to conduct their enforcement more effectively, without having to be concerned about being found liable when they are trying to simply do work on behalf of the people of Alberta.

Now, of course, some of these proposed changes are just sort of housekeeping, just to ensure some clarity, better compliance with Alberta securities laws. We certainly heard from members in this House about the need to reduce red tape, to make things more efficient and to help government operate more efficiently, so there are some portions of this bill which are dedicated specifically to that as well. I certainly commend the minister for identifying those challenges and ensuring that those are corrected and modified to better serve Albertans.

Now, as the government was preparing these amendments, of course, there was some good consultation. Again I recognize the minister. He certainly has worked to consult on much of the work that he's done here. He certainly did a fulsome consultation before the last budget, touring across the province to speak with many Albertans about their concerns and thoughts.

Likewise, on this bill he ensured that there was consultation with the Alberta Securities Commission, the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada, good conversations with them to help draft these common-sense amendments, which, due to that consultation and support, have been recognized also by the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, which recognizes the value of having these protections in place for those they represent. Of course, Madam Speaker, that's somewhere that we all shall one day go, finding ourselves in that position of being retired, and certainly we want to be assured that we have the protections that we need in place to ensure that we will be able to retire with comfort and dignity and with good financial standing.

With that, I think that's more or less the end of my remarks. I certainly appreciate having heard from many of my colleagues, the other members, about the concerns, the issues that they've heard from their constituents and how these protections are going to help them. I look forward to hearing from a few others.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd really like to, you know, thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for

bringing forward his comments. I think that right at the beginning, where he was talking about how perhaps words were very much his forte in school and most definitely still are for those of us who, of course, intently listened to the hon. member in this House – but he was fine at math, too. I think that speaks to a good part of this bill. Like, when we think of the people we're protecting, we are not thinking that we are necessarily – people who get duped by these perhaps unscrupulous investors are citizens of Alberta who are, in fact, decently financially literate. Just like the hon. member said, these citizens rely on the expertise of professionals when they are making their investment decisions, whether it be as part of a business or for their own personal savings, and this act goes to creating some very large disincentives for those wrongdoers.

3:30

He went on to talk about, you know, that average citizens rely on those experts in the same way as if you're driving down the street and the battery light comes on in your car. If you've done a little bit of searching on the Internet, you know that it's probably your alternator or battery. Although both of those would be fairly easy to fix in one's driveway with a basic set of tools, perhaps that is not your forte, and you would rely on the expertise of your local mechanic. That local mechanic, of course, would very much appreciate the . . .

An Hon. Member: IROC-Z.

Mr. Malkinson: The IROC-Z, as the member said.

. . . IROC, the acronym as it relates to the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada.

That mechanic would also know another car-related reference, a Gremlin, which would be a great way to describe those bad actors in our investment community that we are trying to disincentivize here.

Trust, you know, is something that we require, that citizens expect from those financial advisers. This consumer perception is something that I think has long been ignored in Alberta. I mean, I remember reading an article – and I don't quite remember the name of it – that I think is quite relevant to the situation. It actually was talking about our hon. Minister of Treasury Board and Finance talking about how we in this government had been going after perceived deficiencies in consumer protection. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre I think talked about some of them being, I believe, payday loans. I'm going to ask him here in a moment to sort of elaborate on some of that.

It mostly reminds me of when we were in the election debate. We got asked the question: what, at the end of the day, is that final message? The thing that I always said, compared to the people I was running against, was: at the end of the day, I view the world through the lens of what is most helpful to everyday Albertans. I believe that this act is supportive of that.

With that, I would just ask the hon. member if he would like to comment a little bit further, perhaps, on how this bill would be helpful to those who are self-employed. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Currie for his comments and thoughts on this as well. I've certainly appreciated what he's had to say on this bill and his support as a cosponsor.

Certainly, as he said, you know, we need to always be thinking about what's going to be best for Albertans. How can we best ensure that they have the protections? Certainly, for myself here in Edmonton-Centre, I represent a respectable number of seniors. There are a number of seniors' residences. During our constituency week I was out on my sort of twice-a-year tour of seniors'

residences here in Edmonton-Centre. I believe that during that week there were about eight or nine that we visited, and that still left at least another half-dozen that we had yet to visit, so certainly quite a few, and then, of course, a number of seniors live independently in their own homes and condominiums, et cetera.

Certainly, we are aware that seniors can be a vulnerable population, particularly for people in the financial industry, as they're looking to, again, ensure their comfort and their security in their retirement years or as they're looking out for their children, ensuring that they're leaving something behind to help them as well. I'm very happy to see that this bill is offering protection in that respect.

That has been noted by Ms Wanda Morris, the vice-president of advocacy with the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. She said:

I've heard too many heart-wrenching stories of individuals who lost their life savings because they trusted the wrong person: an unscrupulous financial advisor. [These] changes will help hold wrongdoers to account. We welcome today's announcement as a critical step in bringing rule-breakers to justice and deterring wrongdoing, thus better protecting investors in this province. We look forward to additional, practical steps like this from the Government of Alberta.

Indeed, I appreciate what the Member for Calgary-Currie was noting about this and the protections it does provide for Albertans, that extra security that we have now in knowing of that expertise that each of us is able to access when we need to avail ourselves of it to plan for our financial future. We have that much more security, that much more protection, and the ability to seek redress when necessary should we encounter one of the few people that abuse this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 13, Securities Amendment Act, 2017. I followed this debate with great interest from the beginning, and I think that we've struck the right balance with this bill. The public needs to have the confidence in our financial system and needs to have the trust in investment dealers, advisers, and their representatives when they invest their money. The organizations that regulate the investment industry need the capability to regulate effectively. The amendments in this bill will give regulatory organizations the ability to compel attendance and production of evidence so that they are able to do their jobs and protect investors; secondly, provide regulatory organizations the same enforcement authorities as the Alberta Securities Commission; and finally, protect the people who investigate these cases from liability when carrying out their duties in good faith.

Madam Speaker, I'm confident that with the proposed legislation investors would be protected. It would recognize the work of many qualified and hard-working financial advisers in this province. This government has made a commitment to ongoing reform by modernizing and harmonizing the securities laws in Canada. This is becoming increasingly necessary because Canadian and international markets are changing fast. In Alberta we must ensure that our securities regulatory systems align with international standards and regulatory reforms. This bill will ensure that the amendments proposed will extend immunity to the officers, directors, employees, and the agents of these regulatory bodies. The proposed amendments will clarify the conditions under which immunity is granted to these organizations, which will make it possible for these organizations to conduct their enforcement more effectively.

Madam Speaker, as the government prepared these amendments, they consulted with the investment industry. The Alberta Securities Commission and the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada were both engaged with the development of these changes. Just to quote Stan Magidson, the chair and CEO of the Alberta Securities Commission, "Strong investor protection is a critical component of our mandate, and we support meaningful and practical regulatory advances such as this that can have a real impact on protecting Albertans from financial misconduct."

Again, Madam Speaker, strengthening the enforcement powers of regulatory organizations is in the best interests of Albertans, the best interests of our investors, and it is in the best interests of our financial markets. I'll be supporting this bill at third reading, and I hope that many members of this Legislature will join me and do the same.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to add a few more remarks to comments that I made earlier about this piece of legislation, this proposed bill to protect Albertans in the investment field in the province. I know that as a government we are very concerned about improving the financial literacy of our province, and that's certainly one education piece that we will be pursuing by other measures. Hopefully, with the review of the education curriculum that's ongoing, that will be considered there.

Even given financial literacy and the sophistication of some investors in our province, investing is a very complex field. Even the most sophisticated investors perhaps will rely upon the evidence or the advice of professionals in the field more so than anybody else. It's important that the rules governing those who give that advice are updated regularly and go a long way to making sure that unscrupulous people don't involve themselves in the field.

3:40

I know that as a real estate agent, for example, I've had individuals who were perhaps helping their kids out, individuals who were professionals in their own right wanting to make sure that they provided a down payment for them for a house, yet when I found out where those funds were invested over a long period of time to help those family members purchase their home, I discovered that they had been told to invest them in unsheltered investments, which might have had a higher rate of return. However, had they been invested in a registered home ownership savings plan, those investments, those funds, could have been withdrawn and stayed within a tax-sheltered investment and repaid over a period of 15 years without losing the tax advantage of having them sheltered in the RHOSP.

Specific examples like that tell me that even sophisticated investors require the confidence that those people who are in the field are guided and governed by legislation which insists that they follow the proper training, legislation which makes sure that individuals who are in the field of providing investment advice know what they're doing and that there is oversight in ensuring that they provide the advice that serves the best interests of their clients.

With that, I'll conclude my comments.

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

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 14

An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation.

The cleanup of orphan oil and gas sites is a matter of concern for many Albertans. It's certainly a concern when I go home, and I'm sure many of my rural colleagues on all sides of the House hear the same thing. This includes people like farmers, rural officials, environmentalists, those involved in the oil and gas industry, indigenous people, and, of course, all of us here in this House. Sometimes the operators of these sites might not exist anymore. They might have gone bankrupt or are no longer in the business. We've always followed a polluter-pay principle here in our province, and that includes operators' responsibilities to deal with this concern. The expectation is that if you as a company go onto the land to get at the oil and gas, you will also clean up the site when you are done. Usually this is what happens but not always.

When the company that took the oil and gas out of the ground no longer exists, these wells are called orphan wells. Albertans have recently seen the worst economic downturn in over a generation, and the orphanage is full of sites without an operator to take care of them. This is why we have the industry-funded Orphan Well Association. This association is delegated the hard work of closing and reclaiming infrastructure from companies that no longer exist. Oil and gas companies that operate in Alberta pay into the orphan fund through a levy. This fiscal year the levy provides \$30 million to the Orphan Well Association to do this work. With this money they are able to close around a couple of hundred wells a year on average, but with the recent economic downturn the number of orphan wells increased faster than at any time in the OWA's history, faster than the system was able to keep up with.

This presented us with the challenge of how to tackle this issue. Our government has made the argument repeatedly to our federal counterparts that Canada's economic health is intrinsically bound to the health of Alberta's energy economy. A few weeks ago the government of Canada responded to our call with a commitment of \$30 million in the federal budget. This money is to be put towards supporting provincial actions that will stimulate economic activity and employment in Alberta's resource sector, and that is exactly what we are doing, Madam Speaker.

The government of Alberta is finalizing plans to assist the Orphan Well Association in the best way possible using that \$30 million. Right now the OWA is unable to use the orphan fund to do anything other than pay for the suspension, abandonment, and reclamation costs for orphan wells and sites. The law is also not clear as to whether the OWA could accept a loan to address the rapid increases in orphan sites that it has to deal with.

As the hon. members can see in the legislation, amendments are required to the Oil and Gas Conservation Act to enable a loan as well as to repay a loan. Our goal is to find a way to accelerate the good work the OWA is already doing while creating more jobs in the oil field and environmental sectors, thereby keeping skilled workers here in the province that we will need as the energy sector rebounds, and we need to do it in a way that protects the polluter-pay principle and in a way that does not disrupt the OWA's current industry-funded annual program.

This legislation, Madam Speaker, will give the Orphan Well Association the tools it needs, tools that make business sense, and enable the OWA to achieve its mandate and reach these goals. We intend to work with the OWA to develop a plan for how additional dollars could be used. Details of how a program might look, things like dollar amounts, benefits to Albertans, and how it will work, will be made available very soon. No matter what, we will ensure that the OWA's annual program will continue to be funded by industry and will continue to use a risk-based approach for determining which orphan sites to prioritize and to protect Albertans. Most importantly, the polluter-pay principle and industry's responsibility for this issue will be maintained.

Madam Speaker, it is also important to point out that these legislative changes are only one small piece of the puzzle. Our government is dealing with the larger issue of old oil and gas infrastructure. For far too long the entire system for how we manage liabilities associated with the old oil and gas sites has not kept up with the challenging realities. Action is needed, so we are examining the entire system from top to bottom. This work is under way. We are talking with stakeholders to get their views on the issue and what can be done about it. That engagement started earlier this month and will continue for a number of weeks. I'm pleased to report that the early sessions have attracted a good turnout from a broad range of stakeholders, and the people's contributions have been thoughtful and they have been constructive.

Once government has collected these views, we will develop options for consideration. In working with industry, landowners, indigenous communities, and other stakeholders, we will develop a responsible plan to make lasting improvements to the system. That is the story for another day, though. Today we are here to discuss the need to take swifter action now to address the growing number of orphan wells.

I'm sure that keeping skilled oil field workers in Alberta and cleaning up more oil and gas sites is something that all members of this House can agree is a good thing for all Albertans, and for that reason, Madam Speaker, I am hopeful we can count on everyone's support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's important in any conversation to be clear about what we mean when we use certain terms, and that is particularly true in any debate over orphan wells. Too often people use terms like "abandoned" and "orphan" interchangeably when they don't really mean the same thing. An abandoned well is a well that is no longer needed to support oil and gas development and is permanently decommissioned, meaning that the well is plugged, cut, and capped and is left in a safe condition. In other words, the term "abandoned well" refers to the stage in the closure process that the well is in.

In contrast, an orphan well is a well, facility, or pipeline where the licensee is unable or unwilling to pay the required closure processes. Usually this happens because the licensee has gone bankrupt, and there is no one else who is able to take on the responsibility for the cleanup.

Remediation and reclamation are the final two stages of the closure process. Remediation refers to cleaning up any contamination that may be present at a site, and reclamation is the process of replacing the soil and vegetation to return the site to an approximation of its original state. The idea is that theoretically the site can be used for farming or whatever activities originally took place on that land before a well was drilled there. Wells that are no

longer used for production but are not properly abandoned pose an environmental concern. These wells can become pathways for salt water and other contaminants that pollute groundwater and soil.

3:50

Madam Speaker, since oil drilling activities began here in Alberta, there have been approximately 558,000 wells drilled. Just over half of those wells, 285,000, are still deemed to be operational today, just over 100,000 of those wells are suspended, meaning that they are not currently active, and 81,000 nonoperational wells have been reclaimed and remediated. That leaves about 87,000 abandoned wells needing reclamation and remediation.

The Orphan Well Association has just a portion of those sites in its inventory. As of March 2017 they held 2,084 orphan wells that still need to go through closure activities, an additional 1,088 sites that require suspension, and 1,766 pipeline segments.

Orphan wells could pose financial and environmental liabilities for the people of Alberta. According to the Orphan Well Association the abandonment of orphan wells can cost anywhere from \$12,000 to \$700,000. The cost depends on the extent of contamination. In addition to removing tubing, zonal abandon, and surface abandon, which are required for every single well, many orphan wells require groundwater protection and casing leak repairs. Many historical orphan well sites require regular monitoring and maintenance. Madam Speaker, that's a lot of work.

But we didn't get here just over the course of this economic downturn. No, it's a problem that's been building up over a good number of years, and it's a problem that was neglected for far too long. Now, Madam Speaker, we have thousands and thousands of sites across the province that require urgent attention.

As I'm sure you know, Madam Speaker, the Peace River well is Alberta's most infamous orphan well. The well was drilled in 1916 by Peace River oils. That company did not find any oil. Instead, it tapped into a high-pressure aquifer flowing through a layer of highly unstable sand and gravel. Since 1916 enough salt water flowed out of the well and into the Peace River each day to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

Though the Peace River oils company attempted to control the well several times, after the flow of water blew out a crater around the old cable tool rig and swallowed the derrick, the company lost interest in the well. In 1954, after the salt water had been flowing into the Peace River for nearly 37 years, the Energy Resources Conservation Board attempted to cap the well by drilling a relief well and closing it off with cement. Their efforts, however, were in vain. The board concluded that it lacked the technology to properly abandon the well, and 3,000 cubic feet of salt water continued to flow into the Peace River each day.

In 1988, after the well had collapsed into a crater, it was discovered that the salt water was contaminated with sour gas and toxic hydrogen sulphide. A burn tray was installed, but only some of the sour gas could be ignited and flared off. Most of the sour gas continued to dissolve in the salt water and flow into the Peace River. Through an assessment of the well it concluded that it had little impact on the Peace River as it was only .003 per cent of the river's flow.

In 2001 Environment Canada ordered the EUB to abandon the well. It was unclear, however, who was to pay for the cleanup as the original operator of the well, the Peace River oils company, was no longer in business. After the well was abandoned by its original operators, it became the property of the federal and then provincial governments. The responsibility fell on the Orphan Well Association. Throughout the years the EUB had spent over \$968,000 monitoring and maintaining that well site. In 2003 the Orphan Well Association spent over \$5 million to abandon the Peace River well. As the

amount was over half of the association's annual budget, the Orphan Well Association requested that the orphan levy be collected twice in 2003 to cover the association's unusually large expenditure for the year.

Madam Speaker, that is just one story of the thousands of wells here in Alberta that are left abandoned and/or orphaned, but, you know, there's another side to this. We also have a huge number of skilled oil field service workers ready and willing to do the important work that's needed here, and it's important that we get as many of them working as possible. We will need their unique skill sets for the upcoming economic recovery, but if we want them to be available to work, we need to keep them occupied in their chosen profession. The estimate is that this will incent about 1,650 jobs, approximately 550 jobs per year, direct and indirect.

The president and CEO of PSAC, Mark Salkeld, says:

While we absolutely agree well decommissioning is the responsibility of the licensee (generally [exploration and production] companies), economic circumstances and steadily increasing costs due to ever-improving regulations are causing this work to be delayed or postponed and regular activity has almost come to a standstill

due to our economic times.

Well decommissioning will help keep the expertise and intellectual capital that we have worked so hard to find and develop in Alberta so we're prepared when the turnaround comes.

He goes on to say, Madam Speaker, that they

believe it is in the interests of all stakeholders to accelerate well decommissioning activity especially during this challenging and possibly prolonged economic downturn and the federal and provincial governments are looking for infrastructure investments that will help stimulate the economy. Helping to address this issue positively impacts the industry, the economy, employment, the environment and the quality of life for all Albertans by:

- Providing much-needed jobs for oilfield services workers and keeping companies afloat;
- Providing infrastructure investment opportunity for federal government to boost the economy;
- Reducing the impact of the program costs through income taxes and fuel taxes as this type of work is labour and fuel intensive;
- Enhancing the oil and gas industry's reputation as a leader in environmental protection: preventing greenhouse gas emissions including methane and remediating environmental impacts from well operations.

Madam Speaker, the Orphan Well Association is an organization funded by the upstream oil and gas companies through the orphan fund levy. It has an independent board of directors with representation from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, or CAPP, and the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada, EPAC, as well as one voting representative from the provincial government. We have to remember that the OWA has done a lot of good work over the years. They have decommissioned over 1,100 orphan wells, and they have reclaimed another 700 orphan wells. They've also taken on projects that would normally be outside their scope. To name another example, there was a well drilled in the 1980s to supply gas to a building in downtown Medicine Hat. It's known as the American Hotel site. The OWA took on the job of reclaiming this site due to the risk to public safety, and indeed public safety underpins everything they do. The OWA uses a risk-based approach to decide which wells will be cleaned up next.

But, Madam Speaker, it's not enough. We need to do more to reduce this huge inventory of sites that need abandonment, reclamation, and remediation. I hear about it all the time from my constituents in Stony Plain, and I'm sure my colleagues in this Assembly hear the same thing.

Madam Speaker, I would urge every member of this Assembly to please support Bill 14 as we move it through the House. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation. I just kind of want to make something clear. There seems to be a perception that orphan wells are the result of a government policy. Today we're seeing many more orphan wells because of the downturn in oil prices, which has caused companies to either go bankrupt or to have to abandon the well site, so that is part of the issue. There does need to be a mechanism to be able to clean this up.

As I understand it, the purpose of this bill is tied up with the \$30 million that the federal government is advancing to the province, money that was intended to help with the additional cleanup of orphan wells, which is a good thing. While I would have preferred to see a more substantial commitment, it's encouraging to see that the federal government is making some attempt to help with the issue of orphan wells. Extra money for orphan wells should also result in increased economic activity. As we know, there are crews out there with the appropriate skills to clean up these well sites, and they're eager to get started.

But I have to admit that I have some questions about the specifics of the bill. Firstly, what was the rationale behind giving the government the ability to loan money to the Orphan Well Association? I'm unsure why that would be a requirement to be able to allow this money to flow through from the federal government. I realize that we need some sort of mechanism to direct that money from the federal government to the OWA, but enabling them to accept and repay loans from this government seems an odd way to do that. Perhaps a cabinet member or a member of the government caucus could provide some explanation as to: why these specific amendments, which would allow for borrowing, and why was this the best way to do this?

4:00

The other question this raises is how it's going to affect the decision process for the OWA. I believe that the OWA has done some very good work on reclaiming wells, and there's no doubt that they have the expertise to address this issue. But I worry that if they're receiving money from the government under the loan model, perhaps the government will have the ability or some control over the process and the association and what wells get cleaned up. We want to see these wells reclaimed safely, with the least damage to the environment. The government might believe that their interference is going to be beneficial for this organization. I believe this is one of those situations where we have to let the experts guide our efforts, get that \$30 million to the Orphan Well Association, and let them do what they're best at. I hope we'll hear some assurances that this loan isn't being used to influence the direction of the OWA.

Other than those concerns and possibly some concerns as we hear more details about the plans for the \$30 million of federal money, I'm cautiously optimistic about this bill. I hope this means that we can move ahead in getting some crews out in the field working on these orphan wells.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thanks. Sounds great. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. S. Anderson: It does sound great.

Mrs. Littlewood: It does sound great. I'm very excited about this piece of legislation because it is going to help support companies, put people back out into the fields to work on well reclamation and remediation.

I'm just going to go back to the start of this, first, and just remind everyone that I'm talking about Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation. It's a great bill that discusses some issues that have been quite paramount in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I know that we've had ongoing issues with wells that have not been remediated and wells that have been left to be taken on by the Orphan Well Association because of a lack of resources to pay leases, with landowners and companies that have also gone bankrupt.

I just want to go back to some terms of what exactly we're talking about when we're using certain phrases. Learning more about this, I realize how important it is to make sure that we're using the right words to refer to the right wells. An abandoned well is a well that is no longer supporting oil and gas development and that has been permanently decommissioned, meaning that the well has been plugged, cut, and capped and has been left in a safe condition.

I know that trying to answer questions about that by going online to the Alberta Energy Regulator has been quite difficult. If anyone has gone online to see how many regulations there are, it is quite hard to find answers for yourself that are clear because there is an amazing amount of information. I try to go to the very wonderful staff to help me in those endeavours because when you are looking for the different ways that they're capped, the different ways that they're remediated, you quickly see that there are far more definitions to talk about a well being reclaimed than only abandoned.

The term "abandoned well" is referring to that stage in the closure process that the well is in. Contrasting that, an orphan well is a well or facility or pipeline where the licensee is unable or unwilling to pay for the required closure processes. Sometimes a licensee has gone bankrupt. They've gone through the process of trying to find out if there is anyone that is ultimately responsible for that well, and after much due process it is found that no one has responsibility for it anymore, and it has become the responsibility of the Orphan Well Association.

Remediation and reclamation are the last two stages of the process. Remediation refers to cleaning up any contamination that may be present at the site, and reclamation is the process of replacing the soil and vegetation to return the site to an approximation of its original state. This is something that is incredibly important to farm owners and landowners. It can get in the way of just trying to do the common work of seeding or spraying or, you know, making sure that they don't have weed infestations that take over their lawn just because they can't come within a certain distance and be able to get their headers over a well. Actually, this weekend I will be visiting a farm where they have this ongoing problem.

Unfortunately, when the company goes bankrupt and they are having to do something like spray and the process has not gotten to the end to find out who was ultimately responsible for it, the landowner doesn't actually have the legal ability, because of liability issues, to be able to spray where the well is. So it can be very dangerous for those farmers sometimes, and they get very frustrated. They're just trying to make a living for themselves and their family, and they have these processes that get in the way of them just trying to take care of their land.

A bit of a recap, also, is that there have been over half a million wells drilled in Alberta in the last almost a century, and just over half of those wells, 285,000, are still operational today. Just over a hundred thousand of those wells are suspended, meaning that they're not currently active, and 81,000 are nonoperational wells that have been reclaimed and remediated. That's why we see these articles in the newspaper about 87,000 abandoned wells that need reclamation and remediation. We know that it has been a growing problem, with a drop in commodity prices world-wide. It has meant that the expenses to be able to draw resources out of the ground have become a losing proposition for some of these companies, so continuing to draw resources at a cost to them has become just that, a losing game.

Right now, as of March 2017, there are 2,084 orphan wells that will need to go through closure activities, including 1,088 sites that require suspension, 1,766 that are pipeline segments. Madam Speaker, it's a lot of work, but I know that with a lot of people that have become unemployed in this downturn in oil and gas, we have the expertise and the manpower and the companies that are looking at this as being a good way to manage responsible development, manage unemployment, and manage the environment. It's a lot of work, but I think that it's a good opportunity to be able to do some of that.

The number has been building up, and unfortunately the legislation that's currently in place was not built to address what would happen in the next downturn, and that's unfortunately where we are. It's time to look at how we fix these things going forward. This is one of the reasons why the government has announced that there will be a legal liability review I think it's referred to as, a liability management review, so that whatever actions the government takes to reduce the current inventory of orphan wells around the province, we will have a better approach that will make sure that we address the liability of these sites going forward.

4:10

In many cases, Madam Speaker, the question of liability for closure costs arises when an operator is getting ready to shut down a well, and by that point in time it may in fact already be too late. The operator in question could be running out of money and may be unable to afford the costs of abandonment, remediation, and reclamation. I know that in talking with people that have been doing this work, there's a wide expanse of costs that can be incurred to do this. It could cost in the tens of thousands of dollars, and for very complex remediations it could cost upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Madam Speaker, too often the burden of that liability is borne by others in the industry, through the Orphan Well Association. In many cases landowners are bearing a lot of this brunt as well, and I know that there are many stakeholders that are being engaged in this process, including the freehold mineral rights holders, that are worried about the potential liability for themselves and their families going forward.

Madam Speaker, the whole system really does need a thorough review, and I'm really glad to see that the provincial government and our Energy minister have moved forward and will be doing that. On May 10 our province announced that they'll be working with industry and experts to find better ways to protect Alberta and the environment by improving policies for managing old oil and gas facilities. I'm very pleased to say that this liability management review will go through a thorough consultation process and review, and I know that people on this side of the House really do believe that the best solutions are found when you engage people that don't necessarily agree around the table.

I know that I was just having lunch, actually, with a couple of friends this afternoon, and my friend Rick said that his mom always said that there were three sides to every story. I said: oh, there must have been three children in the family, then. He laughed because, apparently, I hit the nail on the head.

People are really wanting the government to move forward on this. These pumpjacks and wells create quite a sight on the landscape when you drive through rural Alberta, and we want to make sure that landowners are not being adversely impacted after the point at which they can't get economic benefit from that well anymore. I've had multiple people come into my office and call me because they haven't been paid in three years, and they're starting to deal with people that are coming onto their property to take assets away. I know of a farmer that is on the east end of my constituency where, apparently, the county, actually, engaged with a contractor that went onto his property and took the assets, but in taking those assets, actually took the farmer's own assets as well, mistakenly.

You know, understandably, the counties and municipalities have been very stressed in the downturn because things like linear assessment have gone down and they're looking for ways to recoup costs or revenue for their counties. This is one of those unforeseen circumstances, a knock-on effect, when we actually see what happens when push comes to shove, when something is failing.

So it makes me very, very proud to say that I'm part of the government that is actually going to be taking on this issue in a substantive way and making sure that we find a solution that looks to the future as opposed to just looking at how much money we can make today.

We need to look at this in a generational way. I'm sure that there are many things that we can learn in terms of how we utilize some of these assets for geothermal. Or if we have renewable energy infrastructure coming onto people's properties, how do we make sure that the legislation doesn't leave landowners with this infrastructure that's out on their land that is hampering their abilities to put food on the table and take care of themselves?

It's my pleasure to be part of a fulsome conversation and to have meaningful debate. I'm very glad that there will be representatives from the oil and gas industry, the oil field services sector, agriculture, landowners, freehold mineral owners, environmental organizations, lenders, insolvency professionals, municipal organizations, surety companies, and lawyers who represent landowners.

With that, I will conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Well, Madam Speaker, I was very much riveted by the comments of the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and I wonder if she had any concluding comments she wished to make.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you to the member for the question. I think that what I would like to talk about is the \$30 million that has been secured from the federal government in their recent budget. I think it shows some good diplomacy. It shows the ability of our government to be able to come to the table to look at how responsible development is done. You know, if they see this as a priority, it shows that we are trying to work in a collaborative way to put people's workboots back on and get them out into the field. The government is, I believe, working on options that would allow us to be able to use this money in the best way possible by assisting the Orphan Well Association.

I don't think that when the government leverages money in this way, it is necessarily a decision that would make the government

the one that is making the decision on how that money is spent. The Member for Calgary-South East, I believe, was saying that the government being able to backstop a loan for an arm's-length entity is somehow interfering with the process, which doesn't make any sense to me. The government allowed Alberta Treasury Branches to be able to credit another 1 and a half billion dollars to support small and medium-sized businesses to get business loans. The government wasn't making the decisions on what to do with that money, but it gave ATB the lending capacity to be able to actually support entrepreneurs in creating businesses. I think that is the role of government, to be able to provide that capacity to do things that are in the public interest and for the public good, especially when you're putting people back to work.

I think that there are also some notes here. Specifically, the Oil and Gas Conservation Act needs to be amended in section 70(1). That would set out the uses of the orphan fund and the powers, duties, and functions that are delegated by regulation to the OWA, and this will enable the OWA to pay back that loan. You can see that currently the OWA just is not legally allowed to accept the loan, and this will enable it to do that and to actually do some good work that, I think, most of us support.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

4:20

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak about Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation. In my constituency, of course, of West Yellowhead we have many oil and gas sites that need attention, and they're spread throughout the constituency as you travel through the different areas.

One of the things I really appreciate is the clarity that's been brought to this issue. Too often we talk about abandoned wells or orphan wells as if they are all the same thing, but, I assure you, they are not.

Madam Speaker, I am both shocked and impressed when I hear about the large number of wells that have been drilled since the activity began. Over half of those wells, or close to 285,000, as one of the other speakers has already mentioned, are still deemed to be operational today. That's quite a large number when you think about it. Drilling down further – excuse the pun; it's a term that's used in the oil and gas industry – just over 100,000 of those wells are not currently active, so they're either shut-in or just sitting there until the company decides what they're going to do with them, and 81,000 wells have been reclaimed or remediated. That's a huge number, but when you think about it, 87,000 abandoned wells require reclamation and remediation. That's a large number when you really look at the numbers that are spread out over the province.

Of these wells only a small portion of sites are actually recorded in the inventory of the Orphan Well Association. The thing is that there may be many more out there that they've lost track of over the years. Where is the paperwork and all that kind of thing when you're looking at these things and where they exist? As of March 2017, for example, 2,084 orphan wells still need to go through the closure activities. They're still not even closed.

In addition to that, there are more than 1,700 pipeline segments that need attention. I mean, you talk about the miles of pipelines that are buried out there in the land base and not only that but mention some that are sitting or laying about on the different sites

that I've encountered – when you think about it, Madam Speaker, the problem is huge.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is actually, finally, going to do something about it. It's long overdue when you really think about the scope of the problem and the fact that it hasn't been addressed over the many years. For far too long the problem, like I said, was allowed to grow. This has affected thousands of Alberta residents, people like farmers who have sites on their land or municipalities – it's been already mentioned – that have abandoned wells near different communities. They have to work around them.

This didn't happen overnight or even during the course of the last five years, when the economy was in its downturn. It's been building for many years. Of course, it's gotten worse now with the downturn in the economy, where some companies have gone bankrupt and that kind of thing, so then that's only increased or caused the problem to even grow. When you really look at it, we have thousands of sites across the province that require urgent attention, and that needs to be addressed in one way or another.

This is the thing. When you talk about the sites, the earlier drilling practices were that the camps and the offices in some cases weren't even near where the drilling activities occurred or near where the wellhead was. You had larger areas that were cleared off, so you had areas where the camp was set up and in some cases the offices and stuff because there was always a fear that if something happened at the wellhead, the workers would have some place to be for the camp and that kind of thing. They didn't want to have issues like that, so there was always this great area of infrastructure between where the camp was set up and where the actual drilling occurred, out near the wellhead. Of course, it was always large areas that were cleared off.

Of course, when they did that, in some cases they had sumps near the wellhead. What the sump was used for, of course, was the storage of the used drilling mud and contaminants that occurred, and some of the material was pumped in the sump. Of course, when they abandoned the site, the sumps were left. That creates a safety problem and also the fact that in some cases the sumps were near where the camp was as well.

When you look at all these issues, plus all this infrastructure that's out there, the roads and everything else that were used to connect some of the camps to the drilling sites themselves, not to mention the huge lines of pipelines that were put in to connect the wellhead to different collection points or batteries out on the land base: it's all classed under the definition of sites. So when you're talking about thousands of these, you're talking about a lot of area.

It's important to understand the terms "abandoned" and "orphaned." It's been mentioned already, but "abandoned" is permanently decommissioned. They're plugged, cut, and capped and supposedly left in a safe condition. That's not always the case. Casings can leak over time as they're left sitting there to rust and everything else. I've come across many over the time frame, being out on the land base quadding, hunting, fishing, et cetera. We've come across many that are seeping, or you can come across some that are stinking pretty bad. Of course, if you take the GPS coordinates for them and you can find, in some cases, information about the particular site, you can report it. Quite often, in some cases somebody will show up and deal with it, but consider the fact that it's supposed to be abandoned.

Orphan wells are wells, facilities, pipelines where the original owner or licensee is not capable of paying for the required closure process. In other words, they just left it. In some cases these aren't very good either. You know, like I mentioned about the downturn in the economy: well, that's reason number two why so many of them have gone bankrupt and just left them. They aren't able to

close the facility properly, aren't able to pay for remediation or reclamation.

4:30

This is where the Orphan Well Association comes into play. The Orphan Well Association, or OWA, is a not-for-profit organization funded by the oil and gas industry through the orphan fund levy, that's supposed to be collected and used for the work. It is run by an independent board of directors and has done a lot of good work over the years, which it has, but there's a lot more work that needs to be done out there.

Public safety is one of the key things that they are concerned with, and they examine the risk of every project to help determine which wells will be cleaned up. Of course, like I said, there's always a problem when you look at the infrastructure that's left with the issue of the abandoned roads, the issue of the abandoned sites, the abandoned sumps. In one particular case we encountered a situation where I drove across an abandoned site and sunk my entire truck into a sump. It took us all day to get it out of there, needless to say. The thing was abandoned, it was done, and it was supposed to be deemed safe. Well, it wasn't, and these kinds of situations exist out there.

In another case we saved a white-tailed doe that had sunk in a sump. She was in a pretty bad way by the time we found her, but we got her out of there, cleaned her up, and she was well on her way after that. Nonetheless, it's a hazard to wildlife, a hazard to the public or anybody that is just out there checking things out. That's, even more importantly, why we need to address these things.

Seven hundred orphan wells have been cleaned up to date, but it's not enough. We have another 2,000 or more that need attention. We need to do more to assist in that job, and we need everyone to recognize the seriousness of the situation. I hear all the time from my constituents – and I'm sure my colleagues in this Assembly hear the same thing – about the issues of the abandoned wells out on this land base.

At the same time, Madam Speaker, we also have a huge number of skilled oilfield service workers ready and willing to go to work. I think that we could use the expertise of these people to be out there and working on this project to clear this up or to at least start clearing it up. We need them and their experience and skills to help power the coming economic recovery, which is vital. It gets them back to work, and it helps with the economy. We also want them to be available in the near future, however, once the economy recovers in the oil and gas sector, for example.

There are several things that we can do. We can get them back to work right away and keep their skills and stuff to be used for that, but once the economy recovers, then we can use them to go back to work on new activities. That's why I'm proud to stand and support Bill 14, because it will give the Orphan Well Association the ability to act now, get those people to work, and clean up significant portions of the outstanding orphan wells.

As members of this House know, the federal government allocated \$30 million in its recent budget to support our efforts to reclaim the orphan oil and gas wells. This bill would help the OWA take advantage of that funding. Right now they aren't allowed to do that, nor is the OWA legally allowed to accept the loan. What we need to do as a Legislative Assembly is to change the Oil and Gas Conservation Act and change the allowable uses for the orphan fund and the powers, duties, and functions that are delegated to the OWA. These changes will allow the OWA to acquire a loan and will allow the government to provide support so that the OWA can do their job more effectively. It's important to really think about that as a way that we can move forward.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 14 in its second reading, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation. Something that we see recurrently in the history of Alberta is this ongoing challenge of meeting those environmental concerns that have been left from bankrupt or otherwise dissolved organizations.

The attempt by the previous government to provide through the Orphan Well Association fairly modest annual payments based on the licensing liability association regulations clearly has not met the need. It points again to other major liabilities that we and our children are facing around the oil sands and the tailings ponds, which are many more billions of dollars of potential liability because we haven't required appropriate bonding or set asides in the event of stranded assets or bankruptcies or abandonments by companies of these operations.

Clearly, this is going to take us into a more positive position in relation to these wells, and I'm pleased to see that the polluter pays principle will be front and centre in this. These will be loans. In fact, it appears – and this is my first reading of it, Madam Speaker – that there will be borrowing costs and interest associated with the loans. Very good news. I think we have to be consistent in our approach to the responsibilities of industry to meet their obligations under the act, and it would set a very dangerous precedent if it were anything but a loan.

The double benefit, of course, is that we have servicing companies that are going to be employed, in some cases after some period of time of being unemployed. So this is a win-win for the economy, for sustaining some of the jobs in the province, and for getting some appropriate cleanup. A long way to go; \$30 million isn't going to go very far in the long list of potential abandonments as is needed.

While I fully support it, I guess there are lots of questions still to be considered. One of them would be whether or not the Alberta government is planning to make loans through other sources to this fund or if the federal fund is the sole fund that is going to be provided for these companies to do the reclamation and rehabilitation work. If we are borrowing more money or putting more public liability at risk through loans, I think we would have to have a very serious discussion since there's already quite a lot being put aside in terms of borrowing by this government, and I would be very concerned if it was going beyond that. But there may be some other opportunities for providing loans to companies which I haven't considered but perhaps the government has.

So my only caveat is that we not put any more public dollars in Alberta in jeopardy through further loans and that unless we have some other means of – and I hope perhaps at some time in this next year we'll see some real amendments to the orphan well fund, that we'll look at issues around reclamation of the oil sands and the tailings ponds because we'll be dealing with the same issues over the next 10 years at a much higher level with respect to abandonment or reclamation and remediation in the oil sands and the tailings ponds.

4:40

But this is a good start. I mean, to give the government credit, we are moving forward on some of the most thorny issues that this province has faced for the last 20 or 25 years. I can congratulate both the federal government and the provincial government on taking what are quite necessary steps in particular at this time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I just want to stand and thank the member opposite for those kind words with regard to this government's action on orphan wells. He's right to recognize the federal government also on this issue because they have provided the \$30 million which will be used to take out on behalf of the Orphan Well Association a loan that they'll then use to address the situation with as many orphan wells as they are able to, with the \$30 million being able to service that loan.

The government of Alberta is not adding to that. The polluter-pay principle still remains fully intact, but the monies that we are making available are the extent, at this time, of the monies that are being contributed to address this problem. There are no provincial monies going into this. We are in a sense being the banker to assure that the Orphan Well Association can take down a loan and be able to address as many orphan wells as they can, paying that loan back with this money, the \$30 million.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know this will come as a surprise to some inside the Chamber, but I will keep my remarks brief today.

Mr. Orr: It's not possible.

Mr. Cooper: Some would believe that that isn't possible, but I also know that he believes that all things are possible, so we will see if we can deliver on my promise today.

As an MLA that represents a large rural riding, orphan wells are certainly a very serious concern for a number of farmers and ranchers and a number of constituents all across the constituency. It's good that we are seeing some positive steps forward with respect to dealing with orphan wells.

As an Albertan I understand that there is an importance of maintaining our land, our air, and our water for future generations. As you know, Madam Speaker, you've heard me say in this Chamber before that I am a conservative, and that means we need to conserve things, which includes our land, our air, and our water. It is very, very important that we sustain our province's legacy because long after the oil and gas is gone, our land and our agriculture and other industries will remain. As an advocate, though, for our energy industry I know and understand that the industry also recognizes some of their obligations to Albertans to develop our oil and gas assets responsibly. While they don't have a perfect track record, certainly many, many of our producers and developers of our oil and gas do so in a very responsible manner.

I also know about significant amounts of work that the players throughout our oil and gas industry put into reclaiming sites, even sites that they're not necessarily responsible for. Alberta excels at energy site reclamation, and I'm extremely proud of our industry for adopting a polluter-pay mentality and taking responsibility and accountability for ensuring sites are left better than when the energy activity started.

Now, that's not to say that there isn't a very real challenge and concern around orphan wells, and that's not to say that our industry and others can't do more and shouldn't do more. That is one of the reasons why I will be supporting this legislation, Bill 14, at second reading.

That's not to say that we don't have some additional concerns. We have some questions that would be much more appropriate to answer at the committee stage. We certainly support the purpose and the intent of this bill. As such, I will be encouraging my colleagues to support Bill 14 at second reading.

It seems that the purpose of the bill would be to allow the OWF and the oil and gas industry, which funds the OWF, some flexibility, and of course this is very important. We do want to understand what the government's full intent is to do with the bill. We have some questions around why the OWF needs to be able to take out loans and exactly how those things are going to be applied. I know that we've heard from the Minister of Finance this afternoon a little about that, but we will be seeking some further clarification.

I know that my colleagues from Cypress-Medicine Hat and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake will also be providing some additional comments around some of their concerns and some potential amendments that may or may not be needed. But at this point I do look forward to supporting Bill 14 at second reading and continuing the debate through the process.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise and speak to Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation, particularly because as a professional geologist I have spent 13 years working in both the private sector and in the public sector on the issue of abandoned well reclamation. So it's a particular privilege for me to speak to this matter here in the Legislature of the province of Alberta. I think it's an issue that doesn't get enough attention at this level, and I'm pleased to be able to speak to it today.

First of all, I want to congratulate the Minister of Energy on creating such a short bill. Madam Speaker, I think this may be the only bill in this Legislature that gets read completely from front to end by all of the members of the Legislature. I appreciate her brevity, but that doesn't mean that what's presented in this bill isn't a good thing for the people of Alberta. Good things come in small packages, and that's certainly what we see here with Bill 14.

I also want to thank our partners in the federal government for providing us with \$30 million to address the issue of orphan wells in the province of Alberta. I'm proud of the track record that this provincial government has on working with the federal government to support the energy industry in the province of Alberta. Not only have we gotten two pipelines approved, Madam Speaker, but we're also taking concrete action on addressing energy liabilities and environmental liabilities in this province, certainly something that we didn't see the Conservative government in Ottawa take any action on at all in 10 years and certainly something that we didn't see the previous Progressive Conservative government take a lot of action on over 44 years.

I'm proud of the incredible progress that we're making in such a very short time. I look forward to continuing to work on behalf of the people of Alberta to support our energy industry and also to protect and preserve the environment and make sure that our energy industry is developed and works in an environmentally responsible manner.

On this issue of environmental responsibility, certainly, any sound environmental policy is built on the polluter-pay principle, Madam Speaker, basically, the idea that people should clean up after themselves. Any child believes in the polluter-pay principle. I often have to arbitrate disputes between my own two children, Opal and Gus. I often walk into the living room and find a mess, and I

ask one of them to clean it up, and they are quick to tell me that it was the other's responsibility, that they didn't make the mess, so they shouldn't be responsible for cleaning it up.

4:50

That's certainly what underpins the polluter-pay principle, Madam Speaker, the fact that the people who made the mess are the ones responsible for cleaning it up. Certainly, the way that this bill is constructed, we have preserved that principle, that's fair, that those who have made the messes are cleaning them up and that the messes aren't left for the individual landowners, who in many cases couldn't afford the incredible costs that are associated with the cleanup of these liabilities.

My colleagues on this side of the House were very detailed in discussing how much these orphan wells can cost to clean up, certainly well beyond the capacity of any individual landowner to clean up. I don't know too many Alberta families who have an extra million dollars in between the couch cushions, who can afford to look after an orphan well once an oil and gas company has pulled up stakes and blown out of town and abandoned their environmental responsibilities.

It certainly shouldn't fall on the taxpayers of Alberta, Madam Speaker. We shouldn't be left on the hook for the bad practices of the energy industry. It's the responsibility of the government of Alberta to make sure that the energy industry cleans up its messes and doesn't make the people of Alberta foot the bill. They have certainly profited from these oil and gas sites. Let's not forget that. They have made good money on most of these sites in most cases, and it's only fair that they share the cost of cleaning up the sites. That shouldn't be funded by the taxpayers of Alberta.

You know, it's important to remember that the polluter-pay principle also preserves the reputation of the industry, Madam Speaker, and this brings us back to the concept of social licence, that we're fond of talking about here on this side of the House. Certainly, the energy industry recognizes that it has to generate social licence to continue operating on the landscape in Alberta, and that's why they've created the Orphan Well Association, that collects levies from all of the industry players so that there's money in the bank to clean up the messes that are left behind by the operators that go out of business or the bad actors in the energy industry.

Most of the actors in the energy industry see themselves as sound environmental stewards. I certainly know from my own personal and professional practice that many oil companies do want to do a good job when it comes to protecting the environment, but that's not the case in all cases. That's why they've recognized as an industry that they need to collectively look after the messes that they've created, and they've created the Orphan Well Association to look after those messes that are left behind. That gives the energy industry the social licence to continue operating on the landscape, because the people of Alberta and individual landowners can be confident that the energy industry will clean up its mess when it's done.

You know, I think it's troubling to see Conservative governments in Saskatchewan and past Conservative governments in this province willing to dilute the polluter-pay principle by just putting tax dollars directly into the remediation of these orphan well sites rather than the strategy that we've adopted here on this side of the House, where we have crafted a government program that preserves the polluter-pay principle but enhances the ability of the energy industry to clean up its messes.

The Conservative option is to just shovel taxpayers' money into the energy industry with no strings attached, let the bad actors off the hook, and send the bill to the people of Alberta. We certainly

don't believe that that's fair, but the Conservatives do seem to think that that's fair. That's consistent with their world view, Madam Speaker, of making sure that profits go to the private owners and that the losses go to the people. That's not something that we support as a New Democratic government, and I'm proud that we are not passing the bill for environmental remediation on to the people of Alberta.

You know, my colleagues have spoken to the importance of protecting the environment as a result of cleaning up these problem wells, and certainly the scale of the problem is growing. I know we've thrown some numbers around about the number of orphan wells that currently exist in the province of Alberta. The fact is that we don't know how many orphan wells are out there, Madam Speaker. The list continues to grow as operators continue to go out of business and we do the work of investigating whether or not there are any energy industry partners who are on the hook for the remediation.

Certainly, there are, you know, issues related to methane emissions, H₂S emissions that have been discussed, salt and hydrocarbons that can contaminate groundwater. I don't think I need to remind people about the important resource that groundwater is to the people of Alberta. There are approximately 150,000 people in the province of Alberta who rely on water from their own wells, and it's particularly important that we take concrete and immediate action to protect the groundwater resources of those people because in many cases nobody else is looking out for the protection of that groundwater resource. There is no comprehensive groundwater monitoring program on private landowners' wells. It's up to each landowner to monitor the quality of their wells, and in many cases, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that most landowners don't know what the quality of their well is from time to time, and they certainly don't know whether or not the well next door has contaminated their land, probably because they haven't even thought to look at it. That's why it's important for the Orphan Well Association to get started on this work because we certainly don't want private landowners' wells to be put at risk.

It certainly has been the case in the past. There have been some high-profile cases. I think of Rosevear, Alberta. The landowners there around an old gas plant had their wells contaminated by sulfolane because the gas plant operators let contamination flow unchecked for many, many years, and those people are still suffering the consequences of that irresponsibility to this day. I also think of the town of Fox Creek, where the municipality relies on groundwater primarily for its wells, and they're certainly very close to the energy industry. I think everybody wants to know that the energy industry is acting responsibly to protect the quality of the groundwater in that community as well.

My colleagues also touched on the importance of proper reclamation of these sites so that they're returned to equivalent land capability so that agricultural sites can be used again for agriculture and forested sites can be used for forestry. Certainly, that's something that we don't see enough of these days.

One of the final issues that I want to raise – it's been touched on a little bit – is the issue of jobs. Certainly, we're going to see people with oil field experience go back to work as a result of these investments by the Orphan Well Association. I'm quite proud as Minister of Advanced Education of the quality of the trades training that many of these people have received from our institutions. But

I also want to remind everybody in the House that it's not just the oil field workers who are working on the rigs and pulling tools who are benefiting from this work. It's also very highly trained professionals who are working in the area of reclamation and remediation. You know, agrologists, geologists, biologists, toxicologists, and engineers are all employed in the area of oil field reclamation, and certainly this kind of work allows people to have good, family-supporting, mortgage-paying jobs. It's important now more than ever to be able to support those kinds of jobs here in the province of Alberta in these tough economic times.

There's also a significant amount of innovation that happens in this sector in those fields, and certainly the U of A is at the head of groundwater studies in the province and, arguably, in the country. We also have institutions like Lakeland College and Olds College that do excellent jobs of training people in the areas of site reclamation. I'm quite proud as Minister of Advanced Education, of course, of the work that our postsecondary system does to support both the job training in this area but also the innovation in the area.

5:00

One thing that I do want to highlight, of course, is NAIT. Reclaiming sites, particularly in the north, is a particularly troublesome issue. There isn't a whole lot of research on reclaiming northern sites, peatlands and forest lands, and NAIT is certainly one of the world leaders in looking at issues of reclamation in those kinds of environments, Madam Speaker. I'm quite proud of the work that the postsecondary system does in this space. I'm looking forward to the opportunities of perhaps exporting the technologies and techniques and practices that come out of this research to other northern countries that are looking to reclaim their energy industries and their other industries that have impacted landscapes in northern locations around the world.

With that, I think I will conclude my remarks by saying that I'm quite proud of our government's ability to make sure that we're putting people back to work, to make sure that the energy industry is a responsible steward of the environment, all the while protecting the pockets of taxpayers, Madam Speaker, and making sure that those responsible for cleaning up their messes are, in fact, the ones who are actually doing it.

We talk about making life better for Albertans. This short but effective bill is clear evidence of how our government is working hard every day to make life better for Albertans. I'm quite proud to stand in support of Bill 14.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
Seeing none, are there any further speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe we've made good progress today, and I would move to adjourn until 9 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:02 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 18, 2017

Day 36

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Wildrose: 22

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Alberta Liberal: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 18, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. At the conclusion of our work for the week here in the Assembly, may we all travel safely back to our constituencies. Let us be leaders for our communities by working collaboratively and with kindness, always striving for patience and understanding as we work to make life better for the families of communities that we represent.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

[Debate adjourned May 17]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Good morning, Madam Speaker, and thank you. I rise in support of Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing the bill forward, and a huge thank you to the Member for St. Albert for her many, many years of work in this area. I would also like to acknowledge an activist for members with disabilities from my union involvement days – she taught me a lot about how to advocate like a dog with a bone – Pat McGrath.

Everyone has abilities, and some of us have challenges. I have challenges. Let's see. About 20 years ago there was a bit of an argument in my house about the remote control. Now, when the TV was on and there was music playing, it was really loud, but when somebody was talking, I couldn't hear what they were saying. Of course, I thought that other people in the house were messing with the remote control. My daughter said to me: mom, you need to go get your hearing checked. So I did. When I got my first set of hearing aids, I got in the car, and *A Horse with No Name* was playing. Now, if any of you remember back that far, that was 1971 or '72. I loved that song, and I started to sing.

An Hon. Member: By America?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yes.

I realized I was singing the wrong words. For almost 20 years I'd actually been losing my hearing, maybe even longer than that. I was missing some nuances when anybody was speaking to me, and I often asked people to repeat what they were saying. Anyway, I thought: okay, I've got two hearing aids.

The first time I went to the hearing doctor, he said, "Well, you need to just listen more carefully, and you need to watch people's mouths when they speak." I looked at him, like: are you nuts? I need to hear what people are saying, and I don't always get to look at their mouths when they're speaking. Anyway, something happened. It might have been that somebody had come to work, and they were doing hearing testing on everybody. They said: yes, you really need to get some hearing aids because you're losing high-

frequency sound. The kind of hearing loss I have is gradually going through the spectrum, so I'm hearing less and less.

I had those hearing aids for a number of years. They're pretty expensive, so I was certainly trying to make them last as long as they could. Anyway, my mother and father had passed away, and I received a small inheritance, and I thought: this is the time for me to go and get a new set of hearing aids that properly addresses my hearing needs. So \$6,900 later I had a pair of hearing aids that were guaranteed for three years. They expected them to last for five. I managed to stretch it out to eight. Then the last pair of hearing aids I got was about \$2,000, and the difference between the two is incredible.

I need to get a new pair. I saw one of the hearing specialists in Lethbridge, and the new hearing aids that they've recommended to address my hearing needs are \$8,600. Now, I don't know. I mean, I make a reasonable wage. For me to pay \$8,600 is a huge chunk of money, and I can't get them right away. I've got to save for those, but I'm in a position where I can do that.

I don't even know what the percentage of people in Alberta is that require hearing aids. Certainly, I'm a senior, and many seniors that I know have challenges with their hearing. I have a challenge here in the House. I have a challenge when I go to committees. If any of you have been in a committee meeting with me, I introduce myself, and I say: please speak into the microphone because if not, I can't hear you. Some people do; some people don't.

The other challenge I have here in this House is when people are yelling or when people, after somebody has spoken, hit the top of the desk where the speaker is. If I have the earbud in my ear – in fact, my one eardrum has been damaged because of that banging right next to the microphone. I ask people in this House: please don't do that. If you bang on your desk, that's one thing, but if you bang right next to the microphone, the intensity of the sound on my eardrum not only hurts, but it's damaging my eardrum. So I'm asking you to please not do that.

I got up to speak today, first of all, because if I'd had an advocate who could have done the work that I needed to get to that point where I had a pair of hearing aids that worked for me – it took me months and months to get two hearing aids that were appropriate for my hearing loss, and I'm pretty skilled at advocating for other people. But I've certainly met a number of seniors at Nord-Bridge, when I go there every couple of weeks, who have similar issues with their hearing, and they have absolutely no idea how to access any supports that they're entitled to so they can get to a place where they've got some quality of life in that they can hear a conversation with somebody else.

In my years as a union activist I have worked with many members that I represented with all kinds of disabilities, and I'm going to give you one example. A woman who worked with me when I was in Ottawa had a very serious disability with regard to chemical sensitivity. We went to the employer and said: you know, she's a good employee, she's got 30 years of work experience, and every single appraisal she's had done on her work was excellent. But she had this chemical sensitivity problem because there had been a spill at work. It had affected her, and it will affect her the rest of her life. Anyway, we went to the employer, and the employer agreed that they needed to provide some accommodation. We worked on the fourth floor, and there was a sign on the door to the fourth floor, there was a sign when you got off the elevator that you were not to wear scented perfumes, scented deodorant, scented hair products. It had a list.

9:10

Now, the reality is that she had to get from the front door to the fourth floor, so it would mean getting on the elevator, walking up

the stairs. There were no signs as you came into the building that you should recognize that you shouldn't do these things because it would affect somebody else's life. So we pushed and we pushed, and they wouldn't put a notice up. But what I did as the union president was that I made sure everybody in the building knew about it, and I asked people not to wear perfumes or any scented products. I also asked the cleaning staff, when they were using specific products, if they would identify what chemicals were in those and check with this member or with me so that we could make sure that in fact she wasn't going to be affected.

One morning I get to work, and she gets off the bus when I get off the bus, and we walk in the building. We're not 10 feet into the building, and I turned around and looked at her, and her face and her neck were starting to swell. We were in the building maybe five, maybe eight minutes, and she could hardly breathe. I dragged her outside, and I got somebody else who worked with us to stay with her momentarily. I went back in, and I saw the management health and safety rep. I told her what happened, and I said: I'm taking her to the hospital. She could have smothered that day because her throat was closing off from whatever chemicals. I couldn't smell anything, so whatever it was didn't have a scent, but it was a chemical that affected her. I took her to the hospital. They had to give her a shot. They observed her for a number of hours until the swelling went down and then released her back to her home. She was terrified to come back in to work in case that would happen again.

The next step for me as her representative was to go to management: how can we accommodate this? They were not prepared to put up signs in the building to make sure that nobody wore anything in there that was going to affect her. I said: "Fine. The job that she does is on a computer. She has access to all the information she needs on the computer. Let's set up a workstation for her at home so that she can continue to work. She's being productive." I couldn't believe the amount of push-back from my department. The job she did didn't mean that she needed to be sitting at a desk in that building. They finally agreed to do it. They set it up. In the department where she was working, in human resources, every time there was a new manager, we had to go through the same thing. She was at her wits' end.

Anyway, in the last meeting that we had, which was the final meeting we were ever going to have about it, the new manager wanted her to come into the office to meet with him. I said: "Absolutely not. I'm not putting her life at risk by bringing her in. You can come out and meet her at the house." So he and one of the other managers from HR met me and met her at her house. She sent a list the day before that said: please do not wear blah, blah, blah, everything that would cause a reaction. You couldn't bring it into her house. I'm in her office with her, and one manager arrived and came into the office. The other manager arrived, and immediately she started to react. I said: what's going on? The manager had worn her coat. She didn't wear any perfume that day, but she wears perfume all the other times, and it's all on her coat. We had that meeting outside, in front of the garage, and it was minus 26 degrees. It was the last time we had to meet about it because the manager wasn't going to put himself in that position again.

But the reality is that we should not have had to go through that. This was time that I could have been sitting at my desk, doing my job, but because I was the union rep, I was doing this for her. She was in a unionized environment, and I was an advocate. I was able to do this for her. How many Albertans are in a position where they cannot get anybody to be an advocate for them and they need assistance? They don't even know that they could go to somebody to get some assistance. They may need assistance in three or four different areas.

I know that if they come to my office, my two staff are going to be able to help them, but the reality is that that's not the case for everybody or every office. The importance of having somebody who is going to be the go-to person – and in fact, I'm thinking, you know, that you may have one person, but you may wind up with 20 staff all having to address the number, 20 lives, maybe.

So many people in Alberta have challenges, and I'm not calling them disabilities. It is a challenge. It is a challenge every single day of their lives. We're in a position where we can do something about it, to make their lives better.

On that note, I'll say thank you, and I'll sit down.

The Deputy Speaker: Any question or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just have a quick question for the member. Thank you for your comments. They're outstanding, as always. I know that there are members of the Self Advocacy Federation in Lethbridge that are very active. I think you had them here as guests one time, Ben Rowley and his brother. I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the Self Advocacy Federation in Lethbridge and what they're up to.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much, Member, for the question. The group in Lethbridge, in fact, on Friday had their big fundraising event, and they've changed their name to inclusion Lethbridge. Both Ben and Chris are members. There is Dave Lawson, who is kind of the person in charge there, but there are parents, and there are people who have challenges who, once they've learned how to deal with their challenges, are actually helping others.

We're very fortunate in Lethbridge. I've said over and over again what a fantastic city I live in, and we're fantastic because we have a community that looks after our community. That's not the case everywhere.

The blanket doesn't cover everybody because not everybody knows about it. I certainly try to advertise, talk about it. It's on Facebook. It's on Twitter. And when I talk to people who come into our office who have concerns, I certainly direct them to inclusion Lethbridge. Ben and Chris are fantastic. The two of them are kind of Twitter – how can I put this? They're alive on Twitter. They certainly put information out there on a very regular basis about things that are going on. Their mom is absolutely incredible.

Again, if we had somebody within the government who is able to be that advocate and provide the direction where people need to go to get the support that they need and the kinds of supports that they are entitled to, we will certainly make life better for Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her stories about receiving her hearing aids. It actually made me smile a little bit because it reflected when my grandmother received some implants. She had measles as a child, so she lost all hearing in one ear and had only 15 per cent capacity in the other. It was the same sort of situation. You had to look at her when you were speaking to her because she would read lips.

But there was a pilot that came out in Alberta here for cochlear implants. It's a very common thing now, but at the time it was very new, and she was one of the first 50 Albertans to get a cochlear implant. It was remarkable to see this new technology that was coming out because as soon as they put them in and turned them on, it was night and day. My uncle took her to get some breakfast after,

and on the way she was looking out the window, and it was because she could hear cars going by. It was the first time she'd ever heard a car going by.

9:20

Your story in relation to hearing that song and how the lyrics were different was really funny because music had entirely changed. When she passed away and we were going through her CD collection, it was remarkable because songs and music that would be unbecoming of an elderly woman to listen to were the stuff that she was listening to because it was new to her and she enjoyed it. You know, when my uncle turned on the radio, there was an R & B song that was playing. She was bobbing her head to it because she had never heard music like that before, and she was really excited to hear it.

I was wondering if in probably about 20 seconds the member could share how new technology has impacted individuals with disabilities.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much for the question. I will tell you that I did music my whole life in school. I sang in the glee club. I sang in the church choir. I didn't think I had perfect pitch. [Ms Fitzpatrick's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wasn't going to speak on this bill. I spoke on it the other day, and I complimented the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Pardon me?

The Deputy Speaker: You have already spoken to the bill.

Mr. McIver: In this reading?

The Deputy Speaker: In the second reading.

Mr. McIver: I thought it was in the previous reading.

The Deputy Speaker: You'll be able to speak in committee again.

Mr. McIver: Fair enough.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really interested in this bill, really interested in hearing what people have to say about it.

Just a quick anecdote about hearing losses. My mother was the same way, progressive hearing loss through her life. It wasn't until I was, well, an adult and she was older that I realized how much she was lip-reading. Nobody knew it. I'm not even sure she was aware of it, but I realized that if you made eye contact with her, her understanding of what was said was increased dramatically.

What I mainly wanted to speak about here today, when we're looking at the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, is that I worked for many years in schools with children and youth who had disabilities that were of the definitely less visible kind – you could call them invisible disabilities – but that affected their lives, nonetheless, to a great degree. Sometimes it's really hard to imagine how an advocate can help people like this because what we're talking about, the things that we would see in schools, are not things

that just go away as the child grows older. They may lessen. Obviously, we see everybody in their lives trying to, you know, make it less obvious what their shortcomings are. That's natural human behaviour. But some of these things, if there is someone who could advocate on their behalf, would be really helpful.

Some of the specific things I was thinking about are people who have learning disabilities. Learning disabilities are when you have got the ability to learn but for some reason the processing, say, of language, reading or writing, or math is definitely – there's a gap. There's a delay. You're not as strong in an area as you should be. In the old days, before it was recognized, before there was a term for it, people would often either quit school quite young because they just got tired of repeating grades, or else they would hide it.

I had a friend who used to rehearse, you know, all his reading in school. He learned that if he could jump ahead in the book, in the reader, practise ahead of time before the teacher called his name, he could look as competent as anyone else. It was good practice, but that's thinking ahead. The actual reading was a challenge.

I remember talking to a parent of a child with a learning disability. They do tend to run in families. I asked the parent, who's hard working, worked at an industry near Wabamun, raised a family, a very good family man. I said, "How do you cope with your reading challenges?" He had identified as having the same challenges as his child, and he said: "Don't do much. Make sure that I've got a job where somebody else can read memos and pass it on verbally to me. In reading to my children, I'm always looking back at what I've read to see how many mistakes I've made and to try to fix them." I said, "So it never changes?" "No," he said, "You just become more aware of it, and you learn little strategies to cope." So there's an invisible disability.

Obviously, it's not going to hamper everybody in their life, but it's something to be aware of, and it's something that gets in the way of people when they have to do a lot of reading and writing like filling out forms.

Another invisible disability is intellectual disability. I met several youth in high school, when I was an educational psychologist, who looked competent and had friends and had good social skills, but when it came down to remembering information that they were reading, it was a struggle for them.

Sometimes it's not if you have somebody who can do the tasks for you. But if you could have an advocate, if a person like this, I'm thinking, going into their adult years could have somebody who could help them understand what strategies they might be able to use to overcome their weaknesses, it might be really helpful, even sometimes somebody saying: "It's not from lack of effort. You are not just not paying attention. You have a struggle here."

There are a number of other disabilities, like fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, and that's one that, unfortunately, affects a number of people. There is no cure, but they do need advocates who can be encouraging, be supportive, and can show them ways to manage things that are difficult. I used to say to children, sometimes, with memory issues: "We have our computers and our smart phones, our external memories. Use them. You can write it down, you can put it in another device, whatever. You don't have to feel yourself being put behind the eight ball because you can't remember everything you hear. You find another way of keeping track of information." That was really helpful, saying that there's more than one way to get the information to do what you need to do.

One of the most difficult ones, especially for young people, is anything that is in the mental health area – anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorders – because that really interferes with people's ability to interact effectively with other people. You can see sometimes, as they go into their later years, that they will

compensate by isolating themselves or sometimes just getting all their information and all their social contact online, which is not as obviously productive and helpful for them as face-to-face and meeting other people.

I'm very hopeful that the advocate for persons with disabilities will make a difference for people with disabilities. I would really hope that people will be made aware, and probably the younger the better. If we can help – I'm not saying that the elementary school-aged children will be able to benefit, but if people from age 12 on are aware that there are supports out there, beyond just the school-based ones, who can help them get information and get the help that they need, that would be very good.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, any others wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to get up today and speak to this bill. This bill is important. When I first got elected, I came from a shop floor, mechanical, kind of sales environment. Even before I had staff, the first group that was through my door was the local PDD community. There are a lot of PDD support organizations and nonprofits headquartered in my riding, and they came to my door because they wanted to talk to me about PDD standard 8. We've heard in this House about the safety standards. I have to admit that with my background, issues of those with disabilities were not exactly at the top of things I knew.

9:30

You know, I'm no PDD specialist, but unfairness still looks the same whether you're in it or not. When talking about standard 8 and talking about where they would require things like sprinklers in regular rental homes, even to me, freshly elected, with my mechanic's brain, sitting there looking across the table from them, I'm going: yup, that doesn't make sense. I didn't know the whole history of lack of consultations or how perhaps well-meaning people came up with a solution first and consulted after the fact. I took the lessons from that, from how that came about. I'm, of course, very proud of our government and the minister for doing proper consultations and addressing those concerns that were there when I first got elected as they related to the PDD safety standards.

I really took that to heart, and when I had the opportunity to recently bring forward a private member's bill, you know, I took a lot of those lessons to heart. When I found out that I did have the opportunity to do that, I thought about: where in my community can I do the most good? I wanted with my private member's bill, just like the hon. member who proposed this bill, to do something real. As much as I enjoy a bill on Blue Sky Appreciation Day or something to that effect, I wanted to do something real and put my efforts to something that actually affects people and is helpful. So I took that to heart.

The Henson trust came across as something that was a problem. Although, of course, we are very much working to improve the AISH system, for example, and PDD – and I know the minister is taking very positive steps towards doing that – a private member's bill needs to be a little more restrained in scope than what perhaps a whole ministry could do, and the Henson trust came up. I went out to the community and said: hey, is this a problem that you would like me to try and solve? The answer to that was yes, and as a result I have gone through, and taking the lessons learned from PDD standard 8, I have thus far been going through and consulting every step of the way.

My first round of consultations had 120 people at them, fire code capacity in both Edmonton and Calgary. I have an amazingly long list of people who came to these consultations. The thing I said was: "This is what I see is the problem. The reason why I'm here is that I want to hear from you about this problem and what your feedback is on perhaps how to solve it." You know, some people in that consultation asked me, "Well, what are you going to propose for the bill?" I told them, "Well, I'm not there yet." I saw what happened with PDD standard 8 and took those lessons to heart. When I did my consultation, I said: "I have just identified what I've seen as the problem from what I've heard in my community, and I'm trying to ask two things through this consultation. One, is it actually a problem? Two, give me some feedback on what you would like to see as a solution to that."

I've gone through those consultations. I've, of course, had the what-we-heard document go back. One of the previous speakers to this bill, my colleague from Lethbridge-East, has actually been very kind and will be hosting me for the first in my second round of consultations, where I'll bring back to the community, you know, my draft ideas for the actual bill itself to again get feedback from the community before I go forward with the regular process of having Parliamentary Counsel draft it. Now, some of the people who came out have been very helpful on this bill. They are some of the same ones that have been helpful and supportive of the bill for the disability advocate.

I was so glad to have in Calgary people come up to provide me a lot of assistance: Erin Waite from Connections Counselling; Gordon VanderLeek, a lawyer for disabled children; even in Calgary my hon. opposition colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View came out as well to the consultations, and that was much appreciated; Bev Hills from the Skills Society; Jamie Post from ACDS; Amy Park from the Self Advocacy Foundation; Kary Hargreaves, a lawyer from Edmonton who also specializes in disability and trust-related law; Steven Siu from AdaptAbilities; Bruce Uditsky from Inclusion Alberta. I mean, Madam Speaker, I could go on and on. These are people with disabilities and from the disability advocacy community who also, through the course of Henson trust, did mention that what's in this bill would be helpful to them.

You know, I do believe that the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, who actually does sit in my former seat in this particular House – I think there's something about consultation on PDD advocacy that comes from that particular seat – took those same lessons to heart and has consulted on this bill. I believe that the bill responds directly to the concerns of members of the disability community, concerns that the advocates have called for as it would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities. I'm really proud of the level of consultation that the Member for Calgary-North West undertook.

I believe that creating this advocate will make Albertans' lives better, will provide much-needed support to persons with disabilities as well as their families. If we as a House feel that creating an advocate is important, if we feel that it's important for those with disabilities and it's important for making sure all citizens can participate fully, then I would suggest that in this House we lead by voting in favour of Bill 205, which would make Alberta one of only three jurisdictions in the country to have an advocate specifically dedicated to those with disabilities.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments? The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think there are probably a lot of people in this House that don't quite understand what the Henson trust is. I'm wondering if you could give us more information or share some information about what that is and how that makes lives better for people with disabilities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much for the question. In essence, the Henson trust is a way for a parent of a disabled child to be able to leave that child an inheritance, once the parents pass away, in such a way that that inheritance doesn't suddenly increase the assets of the disabled child so much that they suddenly have their government supports clawed back. In essence, it would allow a way for the support that, you know, parents always would give the disabled child, whether it be a little bit of help with clothing, a little bit of help perhaps with a trip, to be able to have those supports continue that are outside of the support they may be receiving from AISH or PDD or perhaps other mental health supports, to be able to have that continue after the parents pass away in the form of money, however much that may be, to provide those extras. I mean, it could be things as simple as an appliance if an appliance fails. It could be things such as that at some point perhaps that person may need a new vehicle, that may be more expensive than perhaps one of us would be able to buy because it would need modifications.

9:40

The idea is to have those supports continue for as long as possible after the parents pass away, because anyone with children wants to be able to leave something for their kids after they pass away. I think that currently, from what I've been hearing from, of course, the feedback, the system perhaps is a bit unfair for those who are on disabilities because an inheritance, even a very modest one, may, like I said, knock somebody over the asset or income limits for receiving supports, whether it's through AISH or PDD.

That is something that was brought to me as a problem. When my private member's bill is introduced in this House – I'm private member's Bill 211 – I hope we do get a chance to debate it. I believe that would be something, just like this bill here that we're discussing today, Bill 205, that I think would be very helpful to those with disabilities. It would go to improving their lives and making life better for Albertans, which definitely seems to be a theme of this bill and our discussion thus far this morning.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I want to thank the member for bringing this forward and starting an important conversation and for the hard work that she's done to consult with Albertans.

Madam Speaker, this bill would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta with the power to represent – and this is what's so important – the rights, the interests, and the viewpoints of persons with disabilities. My wife has always said: "Why don't they listen to us? We know what's good for us, but they never ask, so how do they get to listen to what we have to say?" It's important that this point of view be looked at very carefully. Just as important, the advocate will identify concerns within the disability community, which is a huge part of it to understand.

I'm proud of the level of consultation that the hon. Member for Calgary-North West undertook. It's great that she's done this and taken on this important job.

When we look at this issue, the advocate would have a mandate to

- (a) identify and study issues of concern to persons with disabilities.

Well, how can you decide what's good for them if you don't look and listen and understand what the concerns of the people with disabilities are? That is vital.

- (b) review programs and policies affecting persons with disabilities.

Here's another good point, and it's important to understand that when you're dealing with people with disabilities.

- (c) participate in processes in which decisions are made about persons with disabilities;
- (d) promote the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education.

It's very important that we look at those things and say how it's important to understand. Through understanding you can develop these things, and through that you

- (e) provide information and advice to the Government with respect to any matter relating to the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities.

Then when you look at it further, you say: what is the scope and the result? It's to assist those who are having difficulty accessing services, which is a common, everyday thing for them. Directing them to the appropriate resources or person or organization that may be able to help assist them: try that in rural Alberta. It's an altogether different thing.

As you know, my wife is handicapped. She doesn't see well, and from her point of view, everything is a fight. It was a fight to get her schoolwork marked. Teachers didn't want to do it for some reason. It's a fight to go to work. To get there, in the city of Edmonton you can just go get your CNIB card and show it to the bus driver, and you don't have to pay anything. Try that in rural Alberta. She had to go to town council to try and get to use the handibus because they wouldn't recognize a CNIB card. An advocate would fix that. That's why it's so important. In one case they told her that, well, she could ride the bus, but her kids could not. It was silly. She said: "What am I supposed to do? Leave my kids by the curbside?" They were okay, but they didn't know how to address that. Ridiculous. These are the kinds of things that people with disabilities face.

A lot of people don't know that I was a bus driver in the town of Hinton. I drove the Hinton handibus, and we transported handicapped kids all over the community, through different programs, to school, and those kinds of things. You'd hear the complaints from many of the parents about the issues and the concerns that that community was having and the supports that weren't there when they needed them whereas you take supports like that and everything else in the cities or urban Alberta: these programs and stuff are in place for them. But in rural Alberta those programs don't exist. That's why it's so important to have an advocate that can speak on behalf of these people. It's very important. By establishing an advocate, this government is committed to ensuring that the voices of this community and their loved ones are heard. That is vital. In other words, the advocate will be committed to making Albertans' lives better. That's important for these people.

In one case I know that the problem here is that – by having an advocate, for example, Albertans with disabilities will have a person that will look into systemic issues such as teens transitioning into adulthood. In rural Alberta there are no programs. None. By

establishing an advocate, there would be somebody there who can speak up for these people and help them transition and find programs, maybe, that they can do. I know one family personally where their marriage failed because there was no such program. The mother took her child and moved to the city of Edmonton, and they ended up getting a divorce because the long-distance relationship didn't work. Well, it affected the family quite strongly in the fact that the father had a good working relationship with the daughter. It was unfortunate, but this is reality. This is why it's so important, Madam Speaker, that we establish the advocate.

I'm seeing that we're committed to establishing that. That way the advocate can listen and develop programs that are good for the people with disabilities. When it comes to making life better for Albertans with disabilities, the previous government failed in the long run. Our government's record is clear. We're committed to supporting Alberta's disability community, and that's why it's so important that we support Bill 205. It'll give the people with disabilities a voice that'll be heard, provide programs, and help these people to make their lives better, and that's what's very important here.

With that, I'll thank you very much.

9:50

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments for the previous speaker?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park – sorry – Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: That's okay. It's a great municipality anyway.

Madam Speaker, it's really my pleasure to speak about this bill, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I wanted to start off with a quote from Gandhi. Gandhi is one of my heroes for his work around nonviolence and resistance. One of the things that he said was, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." I remember from my time overseas the difference between how we treat people who are vulnerable members of our society in Canada and how they are treated in other parts of the world.

In particular, I remember in 1981 being with the person who was the president of the international year of disabilities. He was going around with me at that time in the country of Thailand. He was amazed how little had been done in that country for people with disabilities. It was challenging for him to navigate with his wheelchair, but most disturbing was that there was very little inclusion of people with disabilities. People with disabilities were hidden and not part of society. There was no provision in the workplace for people who were in wheelchairs or who had some cognitive challenges. He was really amazed at how far we had come in North America as to our inclusion of people with disabilities.

I don't think that we have fully included people with disabilities in our society. I think that the words of Gandhi still stand for us here in Alberta and in Canada and North America generally. The way that we treat our most vulnerable members is really a reflection of who we are as a society and how we are willing to provide accommodation and equality to people who have some form of disability.

First of all, I've never really liked the word "disabilities." My children happen to be hearing impaired. As many in the House know, I adopted them from an orphanage in Thailand, where their lack of hearing would have made them very marginalized in their society. There would have been no provision to help them either acquire their needed hearing aids or to provide adaptive facilities within their workplace.

Madam Speaker, one of the reasons that I am so happy that this bill has come forward from the MLA for Calgary-North West, assisted by the MLA for St. Albert, is that what this bill is really doing is ensuring that people who have challenges in our society, be it mobility issues or their ability to hear or their ability to see or cognitive challenges or any kind of challenge that they face – we're really talking about ensuring that they have full inclusion in our community.

I really want to talk about the meaning of the word "inclusion." This is what we're really talking about around this. We're talking about persons who have faced barriers through the systems that we have created in our government, and we're talking about an advocate who's going to help those people and their families to navigate those barriers and provide full inclusion for them, whatever full inclusion means in their particular circumstances.

As an MLA – and I'm sure that my colleagues in this House will testify to it – we do spend a lot of time helping people who have challenges in navigating systems and whose parents are desperate to ensure that they can access the needed support, be it help in obtaining rent for the houses or access to programs or government support through PDD or AISH. Those take up a fair amount of my constituency office time, but also they really take up a lot of my emotional time. I know as a parent the challenges that everyone faces in making sure that their children or their loved ones have access to the services.

I think I've told this House before about my issues around hearing aids. When my son was diagnosed, he needed hearing aids, and as the Member for Lethbridge-East alluded to, hearing aids are very expensive. Who would have thought that a hearing aid for a child, especially one that has very small channels in their ears, would have set me back over \$2,000 per hearing aid? If I hadn't been an advocate already in my own community and I knew where I could go and I could advocate for my child, I would never have been able to afford the hearing aids for my children. This is, you know, a very small thing, but when I talk to people in my constituency office and I see the challenges that they have to access information – not because the information is not there, but very often people are very emotional. They're at the end of their rope. So what I look forward to for the advocate position is somebody who can take their problems and their questions and help them to navigate through the various systems in the community.

I think this is going to be a really, really good bill. One of the things that I'm hoping the advocate will be able to do is work with groups, including municipalities, possibly, to look at barriers. I'm very thankful for the Minister of Environment and Parks, who has created accessible areas in the parks system. I think this is something that shows this government's commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities have full inclusion. I think this is a really good example that the government is committed and has done a lot of work. I could go on and on about examples of what the government has already done to ensure inclusion in our society, but I think we have to do a lot more to really break down the barriers for people who have any kind of disability or inability to access the system or inability to be fully integrated in society.

My own particular area of real interest in this is the area of inclusion within the workplace. I have worked with a couple of young people who are visually impaired, and it's such a challenge for them to access employment and to access the aid that already exists in terms of employers having access to programs to support their employment in the workplace. I'm really also very interested in some of the work that has been going on around inclusion for people in the workplace through groups like Chrysalis, Inclusion Alberta, and a group that I just heard about this morning on CBC

that is helping people to access employment by breaking down mattresses.

Madam Speaker, I think this bill directly responds to the concerns that I have heard from the disability community and from the advocates. I think that this bill will make Albertans' lives better, especially those that have been more marginalized or more vulnerable, as Gandhi said, in our community. I also think that it will really help across the government to see what barriers exist, how information may not have been communicated to people, and the kind of programs there need to be.

When I look at the lives of my own children and the fact that they were able to access the needed help at the time, I look at their success. One of my sons is a teacher, and the other son is a finance manager at a big car dealership. Their success has directly resulted because early on they were able to access the help and support that they needed.

I also would like to support the fact that while the advocate will be located within one ministry, the mandate will be broad enough to make sure that people who have any kind of disability will have access to and understand the programs across the government. I think that's really, really important because when we're talking about disability and inclusion, we're talking about access throughout the government, be it in terms of employment – we just talked about parks – also justice, you know, housing, municipal government, and the way that municipal government is creating accessibility.

10:00

Madam Speaker, I am so delighted that this private member's bill is now going to become a government bill. I look forward as an MLA to be able to refer my constituents to the office of the advocate as it is appropriate, and I especially look forward to supporting the Minister of Community and Social Services in his work with this office and to ensuring that people with disabilities in Alberta become full members of our community and indeed that they find full inclusion in terms of their work, their play, and education and that they feel that as a government we continue to support them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments?

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to this bill in second reading? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to Bill 205. I have a lot of experience with working with people with disabilities, visible and otherwise, and I really understand the complications of it. My mother is a speech pathologist and an audiologist. She kind of raised me by going out and really working with groups with disabilities.

I think that even further than that, being part of a multicultural community and having that be embedded in the practices really taught me to understand how complicated the system is to work. I know other members have really discussed this complication, and I know that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek discussed the actual specifics of learning disabilities and what that can look like. I think it's important to get that context because that is the experience.

Like, people don't get diagnosed or learn that they have a learning disability and have a particular background in it a lot of the time. A lot of the time it can be families. Families experience different difficulties, and that's just an additional one, and that's something that is new to them. I really learned about this as an educational assistant having to work with parents and having to talk

about their child just recently being diagnosed. Of course, there's a whole process that happens. When it's discussed, the parents might go through a denial process. The parents might go through this process of understanding. There's a lot of jargon involved as well like understanding cognitive delays. You know, all of these things are not things that we normally talk about in routine practices, yet a lot of the things that help assist these children aren't necessarily difficult; it's just new, and it is not something that we talk about.

The reason I think it's important to have a bill that would have an advocate for persons with disabilities is because I think there are many layers to the process, and it's extremely complicated. The reason why I think it's a good place to start versus going through an independent office is because by having an advocate for disabilities, we can look for some of the low-hanging fruit. Some of the things are even, like, just the forms that you're filling out that can take a long period of time and that can be rather complicated, and if you add language barriers to that, if you add just difficulties at home, it adds to the process.

So if there is an advocate that is understanding of how the system in its whole is working and that can look at these recommendations and that can bring to attention ideas to the different ministries that are involved – because it's not just Children's Services, it's not just Community and Social Services, it's not just Education. It's Health. It's all of them, and all of them have different pieces, from FSCD to early learning funding to PDD funding. Then you have the postsecondary schools as well, which have their own system.

All of that, when you put it together, becomes complex, so having someone that is viewing these and hearing these stories and being able to just advocate for those particular circumstances and being able to add that into recommendations that they can bring forward to the different departments adds the capacity for it to be accountable to the people that they're serving. I think that's extremely important, especially given that that's a conversation that people with learning disabilities have.

We allocate a certain amount of money depending on the disability, the severity, the way it's impacting functionality in the classroom in the case of a classroom setting. And it's hard for people, if they don't know what that funding model looks like, to know if they're actually getting the right level of care according to the child's severity. If you're just learning that your child has autism, you might be learning about how best to support your child, but it would be a whole other thing to figure out, you know, whether the supports that they're receiving are appropriate or consistent in those cases because you might not have a background in that.

I think it is important that we build mechanisms of accountability to the families because that's the reason that these things were put in place in the first place, to provide the services that they require in order to build the skills that can really put them in the best situation so they continue to support our society. I think, you know, it's something that I'm extremely passionate about, finding organizations that look at more than just supporting a child but finding a way for them to have contributions and give back.

I have been incredibly privileged to be able to work with many, many people with disabilities, and because of that I have been able to see those various different perspectives. I know the Member for St. Albert actually spoke about this once, the incredible learnings that you have from a different perspective. It's quite interesting because if you work with a kid with autism, they don't take those social norms and work their world out from the social norms. They'll tell you how they see it, unfiltered, and there's something absolutely beautiful in understanding society through that lens. There's something that we can learn as a society from children and then adults as well that bring that perspective. When we have organizations that really empower those students and those people

in building the skills so that they can contribute what they feel they have to offer, we build a better society, we build more equality into it, and I think that's incumbent upon us.

I think the complication of doing that is that there are so many systems at play, there are so many different levels, and we have to pick a place to start. I think that's what this is. This is a good place to start. There's a lot of commitment across the board from parents, from advocacy groups, and even within departments of government that want to improve the system, but it's extremely complicated, so you have to find and build a foundation. I think our government has been incredibly good at doing just that, of looking at a problem and saying that this is extremely complex.

I think the best way to have built it in the first place was to really look at these evidence-based practices from the beginning and build it that way. But that's not what happened, so we're at a point where systems are in place, and if you change something, that might mean that someone would lose funding. There are all of these complications, so it's making sure that as you transition, as you improve the system, you're also aware of how it impacts the people that are currently using the system. I believe that we have to find a starting point for this, and I think that's what this bill brings us to, that starting point.

Before I do that, I want to talk about some of the barriers that are experienced within other marginalized groups in addition to having a disability. In this particular example, like, I think of recently landed immigrants or refugees that come, and maybe they have – and I'll speak to children because that's more of my background. I have a background in early education and as an educational assistant, so I'll speak to that example. An immigrant coming in that has a family and they're just getting settled and they're rebuilding everything and they might not have family here to support them: what they want to do is be able to get jobs to support their family and have their child, you know, have the education that they want them to get. You know, this has happened. This has happened in many situations that I've come up to.

10:10

The family learning when the child has either a learning disability or a cognitive delay, whatever level that they have, or FCD or any other complication, I think is amplified. It's amplified by the fact that they're just getting settled. It's amplified by the fact that the experts that are going to be explaining to them what's happening, what the new processes in school are might not have the cultural background that they do. They might not have the language that they do. They're speaking on issues that are hard to understand even for native English speakers. When you add the fact that – and it's not as simple as adding a translator to it because even for a translator they might be able to say, "Your child has a cognitive delay," but they might not know what that means.

For that mother that wants to explore the issue with them, it's hard because not only are you hearing, you know, that there might be something wrong and you want to protect that child, but they're also hearing things that they don't quite understand, or even if they do, they're not quite sure what to do about it. You add a translator that might not know the cultural context, the background, maybe the history of stigmatization in the country that they're coming from or the history or whatever it is: it adds a complexity to it.

I mention this because I know that there are groups within Edmonton that work on this. The example that I'll give is Multicultural Health Brokers, which have brokers from different communities, so leaders within that community can be trained on the specific area of interest. Sometimes it's prenatal care. Sometimes it's children with disabilities. Sometimes it's managing all of those different systems. But when it comes to having these

conversations with the multidisciplinary teams, which usually happens because we're moving towards this multidisciplinary team so we're all working to support that child, that can be really overwhelming. You can have a teacher at a table, you can have an educational assistant at the table, a speech pathologist, an occupational therapist, and all of them have all of these perspectives and have been working with the child, and you're not even really understanding exactly what it is that they're telling you, or you're getting it through a second channel of a translation from maybe someone that knows the words but doesn't understand the context of it.

I say that it's amplified because there are systems of support that you don't have naturally as an immigrant or as a person that is speaking a different language. I think that when we talk about building a framework of supporting persons with disabilities, we have to acknowledge the immense complexity of the issue because it's not something that will be addressed in one year or two years. I think that it would be something, you know, within my lifespan. I'm one of the younger members, but I think that even within my lifespan we'll still be working on it.

But I'm very optimistic that we are learning from our mistakes. I think that the more we address the fact that just having an advocate is a building block, but that person wouldn't have the sole responsibility of advocating for people with disabilities – I think that's important because there are a multitude of views of people that experience difficulties within the system, and we have to share that responsibility because it's so complicated.

I give the example, specifically, of an immigrant that's landed as an example of how amplified it is and how complicated it is because they will always say, like, that you'll never know a better advocate than someone that has a child with a disability because they have been advocating for that child since the start. [some applause] Thank you.

I'll just add something in there. Even in the Spanish community a landed immigrant: they're coming from a community where rocking the boat is fundamentally unacceptable. Just the fact that they're receiving some attention is good enough. Even though they want to help the student, it's overwhelming and it's really difficult, so I think there are added levels. This expectation that the parent should be the number one advocate: it's difficult for parents that are coming from a different place to take on given the cultural circumstances, given that if you were to do that in a different country, that might mean that your child isn't going to get that education in that school. It's just simply going to be kicked out if you rock the boat. It's not understanding that it's different here and having no one to really discuss that with and to talk about those differences with. It's difficult for families to take on. They take on as much as they can.

On top of that, the way that government is run in Canada is significantly different than in a lot of other countries. Knowing that there are options available is actually not something that many other countries have. Where do you go for these things?

I think that's why it's important, when we discuss this, to look at the broad spectrum of people that are affected and how we can make sure that everyone has a place to go and that we're actually doing it in a culturally sensitive approach, an approach that is really equalling the playing field because at the end of the day the better we are at supporting the diverse population that we have, the stronger the economy we'll have, the stronger the workforce, and the stronger we are as a society as well. I believe that it's really a fundamental purpose that the government has, to make sure that those supports are in place and to make sure that we're thinking about that. I'm not naive enough to think that that's not a complicated process.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: Before I call on 29(2)(a), I just wanted to mention this morning, hon. members, that there have been a number of side conversations happening throughout the House, particularly, I'm noticing, in this corner. They start to escalate in volume. Not only does it become difficult to hear as the Speaker, but it is somewhat disrespectful to other members who might be trying to pay attention to the speaker who has the floor. I'd encourage you, if you want to have a lengthy conversation with a colleague, to please take it outside.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Go ahead, hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to compliment the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for bringing an incredibly important perspective to the debate in terms of marginalized communities. I just wonder if she might have some more remarks that she would wish to share with us.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do. I have a few more, but I'm not going to try to get through it all today. It's something that is really important. I've talked about this before, but I actually have a learning disability myself. It's something that I learned to overcome with technology. I had the luxury of having a speech pathologist for a mother, so I was able to turn to somebody and know what those practices are. My little brother as well had a speech delay, and all through my high school I spent a lot of it actually doing play therapies with him at home. Me and my mom would take turns until you wouldn't actually be able to tell that he had a speech delay.

I think that the reason I'm so passionate about it is because I've seen so many success stories when it's done right. There's an incredible amount of potential to actually support and build skills in children that could change the way that they experience life, that could build those skills so they don't have to feel that everything in life is a barrier. I think that's what drove my passion.

When I was able to see the severity of the speech delay that my little brother had – you know, I had been helping my mom from pretty young. When he was born, I was actually 15, so he's quite younger. We call him the next generation of our family. He was 18 months old – we knew the points that you have to reach, like how much vocabulary you have to have at very specific points – and we would look at each other, and we were, like: he's not quite there. But you kind of check yourself because you might know too much and you might be reading into it. You don't know, so you always get a different perspective. In fact, it was true. He did have a speech delay. It took him three years to learn how to say my first name. As a person that was a main person in his life, that kind of speaks to the difficulty that he had.

10:20

But we didn't approach it as: he had an issue to deal with. We just approached it as: this is something that he had to practise. We were able to identify the speech delay that he had, we identified the play therapies that would be most beneficial to him, and we would take turns. My mom always worked in the afternoons after I got home from school, and then I would stay with my little brother. I would do play therapies, but it was always fun. He actually became very aware of the difficulties he had when he finally learned how to

say a word, and then he would forget it. I know that through the commitment that we had of continuously doing this, because we knew that there could be success on the other side.

I think the comparison is that another child that was diagnosed with a very similar severity to what he had at 7 years old was still stuttering and was still very much not able to say the words and having issues vocalizing. Yet because of the intensive approach that we took – and I say "play therapy" because it very much was playing. We were playing with him, and it was just knowing how to reinforce words, knowing how to practise with him and how to not let go of certain things. Those are the things that we were focusing on. It allowed him to practise enough times that he was able to really develop the skills he didn't naturally come into. That's when people say, you know: he'll grow out of it. Sometimes you can; sometimes you can't. Sometimes it's a reality, and sometimes it's something you have to figure out. There are ways to assist that happening.

That's why, like, I'm a big advocate for early education. It's an incredible investment we can make as a society, and I have seen the differences that it makes in children's lives. I've seen the differences that it's made in my own family's life, but I've seen the differences in the countless numbers of classrooms that I've been in when people actually focus on those very skills that allow children to overcome those barriers. I think that when we talk about the systems and we talk about building mechanisms of accountability like having an advocate that looks at the systems and makes recommendations, it allows us to really focus on what the goal is, which is supporting our communities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to rise and support this bill at second reading this morning. I'd really like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for putting this forward. I think it's fitting that we're debating this today, recalling that the Member for Calgary-North West previously sat across the floor in a PC caucus that ostracized her and pushed her out. We're hearing rumours of a merge between these two parties happening today.

Mr. Gill: Come on. Stick to the bill.

Mr. Westhead: So I think it's fitting that they're, you know, pushing out progressives from that side that are bringing...

Mr. Gill: Alberta is going to push you all if we get down to the matter of it. Just stick to the bill.

Mr. Westhead: The Member for Calgary-Greenway is getting pretty upset about me speaking about how they pushed progressives out. You know, he's trying to tell me what I should say here in the House. If that's the way he wants to run the province, I think that's pretty unfortunate. [interjections] Interesting, Madam Speaker, this morning. They've got a bee in their bonnet over there. I guess they don't want to step on their news release.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, are you speaking to Bill 205?

Mr. Westhead: Yes, absolutely, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Westhead: I'm mentioning the fact that the bill came from a caucus member that used to belong to that caucus.

More importantly, I think what I'd like to talk about is Alberta parks and their inclusivity plan. I was fortunate a couple of weeks ago to visit the Member for Calgary-Shaw in Fish Creek park, where we were on Earth Day. I had the honour of speaking on behalf of the Minister of Environment and Parks. I was speaking about the everyone belongs outside campaign. I think that this is an incredibly important aspect of making sure that Alberta parks are inclusive for all Albertans.

I think that appreciation of our natural outdoor spaces is something that Albertans have as part of their identity, that we identify with our wilderness spaces, our trees, and our wildlife habitat. That means a lot of different things to different people. Some people like to just know that that's out there, and they may never anticipate participating in that. There's a continuum of people who just like to know that it's there. Then on the other side of the continuum there are people that want to live as much as they can in the outdoors. For people with a disability that can be a barrier, so I'm really proud that the Minister of Environment and Parks is making the everyone belongs outside campaign a priority.

I'd like to talk a little bit about that in terms of my constituency because we have a lot of provincial parks in Banff-Cochrane, and one of the crown jewels of that space in Kananaskis Country is William Watson Lodge. For those who aren't familiar with William Watson Lodge, it's an accessible facility that's designed for persons with disabilities. You know, they have made renovations – I suppose, actually, it was built this way in the first place to accommodate people who may be confined to a wheelchair and need assistance with bathing and this kind of thing. There are units that are created specifically with room for lifts in the washrooms, larger bedrooms and that kind of thing to accommodate a wheelchair.

This was a vision of Premier Lougheed back in the day, that when he created Kananaskis Country, he wanted to make sure that there was an opportunity for all Albertans to get outside, and I think that kind of visionary leadership is something that we can really be proud of here in Alberta. You know, the former government lost touch with that vision, and that's unfortunate.

I think that what we're doing here today in creating an advocate for people with disabilities can go a long way, you know, to the day-to-day things that those folks find challenging but also in terms of getting people to enjoy the outdoors, too, because we don't want them to be constrained in that respect.

I had a really fortunate opportunity. I think it was in the summer of 2015 that I attended William Watson Lodge in Kananaskis Country, and they had their grand opening of what they call comfort camping. It's a unit that's kind of bare bones in terms of – like, I don't think there's a TV or that kind of thing. It's meant to be kind of an equivalent to tent camping for people with disabilities, but it has a good wheelchair ramp and good accessibility within, so it's a little bit more rustic type of facility than what you find in the rest of William Watson Lodge. That was the first of many units that they were contemplating constructing, and I understand that they've built a few more since then. I think that it's incredibly important to give everybody the ability to access parks.

I want to just go over a few of the details of the everybody belongs outside initiative that Alberta Environment and Parks has undertaken. I'd like to read a little bit from the document and the strategy in terms of planning how we want to go about making sure our parks are inclusive. There's a document that I would be happy to table. It's quite lengthy, but I think it's important in terms of the discussion that we're having today to bring that to the table and share that strategy. The document has a section entitled *The Importance of Inclusion in Parks*, and it begins like this.

The Alberta Human Rights Act recognizes the “inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all persons [...] without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation.” The inclusion plan builds on the Alberta Human Rights Act through a commitment in Alberta's Plan for Parks to “increase opportunities for, and invite full participation of, all Albertans.” This inclusion plan is about more than [just] human rights. It is about building public support for the landscapes and experiences that make up Alberta's network of parks.

I've specifically singled out William Watson Lodge because that's what I'm most familiar with, but I do understand that in parks across the province there are plans to create pathways, paved pathways, that make it easier for folks to access those. It's a holistic strategy in terms of making our parks more accessible and allowing people to enjoy the outdoors.

10:30

Park agencies [around the world] are struggling for relevance in a changing and complex world. Alberta is no exception. Our province has experienced tremendous population growth in the past decade. Immigration and migration, more people living with disabilities, and a rise in active senior citizens make Albertans more socially diverse than ever. In addition, the growth of cities and gateway communities, the emergence of non-traditional outdoor activities, competition for the attention of youth, and the rise of nature-deficit disorder make it more challenging than ever for parks to effectively engage people.

A priority action in Alberta's Plan for Parks is to implement a province-wide inclusion strategy to remove barriers and create opportunities for all Albertans to be involved and inspired by Alberta's parks. For nature and outdoor recreation to be relevant in Alberta's changing society, park programs must engage people as diverse as the wild ecosystems protected within park boundaries.

There's a question here. How does the plan fit in the greater plan for Alberta's parks?

Alberta's Plan for Parks ensures that the management of parks aligns with the Government of Alberta's strategic direction. The Plan presents an exciting vision that Alberta Parks inspire people to discover, value, protect and enjoy the natural world, and all its benefits for current and future generations. Through inclusion, more people can be involved in making this vision a reality.

Alberta's Plan for Parks also outlines key planning elements that complement Alberta's Land-use Framework, and identifies Four Priority Actions based on feedback from Albertans. The inclusion plan supports three of these Priority Actions:

Strategy #1: Involve Albertans. Albertans want more involvement in decisions about parks and in the delivery of parks programs. The inclusion plan will ensure that Albertans from all backgrounds are invited and welcome to participate in dialogue about how parks operate.

Strategy #2: Offer Modern Facilities, Policies and Programs. Albertans want modern amenities, more inclusive facilities and well-maintained trails. The inclusion plan will create a foundation to understand and address the changing needs of visitors.

Strategy #3, Providing Recreation Opportunities, directly commits to the development and implementation of an inclusion plan. Albertans want more access to recreation opportunities and the inclusion plan will increase opportunities for, and invite full participation of, all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, whenever we engage in a strategy, we also need to look at outcomes to measure how well the plan we've put in place

is working, so there are some outcomes that have been identified in this plan that I'd like to share with members this morning.

This inclusion plan supports the positive contributions that people can make in daily operations and long-term planning throughout Alberta's network of parks. A successful inclusion plan will ensure the full participation of diverse Albertans as visitors, participants, volunteers and employees, or partners. This will be measured over time by how well the Parks Division has achieved the following key outcomes:

- Decrease in physical and other barriers to accessing parks.
- Increase in knowledge of park recreation and stewardship opportunities among diverse communities.
- Increase in participation by diverse communities and new users in aspects of park programming such as experiences, consultation, volunteerism and employment and partnerships.

And, finally,

- Improved attitudes toward social diversity among visitors, partners and staff.

The second-last point I mentioned there regarding volunteers is something I'd like to expand a little bit on. I think that one of the greatest things that I've found in my role as an MLA is seeing the amount of volunteerism that our communities support. You know, I always knew this existed in Alberta and elsewhere throughout Canada. We're a very helping society, and we want to look after one another, and I think the amount of volunteerism that we see is a testament to how strong that community feeling is amongst Albertans. Volunteers make the world go around, and if it weren't for people who step up to the plate and help their neighbours and roll up their sleeves in good times and in bad times and help one another – it's a value that's held very dear by people.

One good example that I can think of specifically is from Canmore and the Nordic Centre, which was born out of the 1988 Olympics. One of the proponents of sport there told me a really telling thing about volunteers. He said that a lot of people think of the Olympic legacy as the structures that we have like the ski jump at Canada Olympic Park, the biathlon range, and the Nordic Centre in Canmore. Sometimes people point to those facilities as our Olympic legacy, but this gentleman put it another way. He said that the actual legacy is the volunteers because it takes a huge network and community of volunteers to put on events like the Special Olympics.

I understand that in cross-country skiing the athletes will have up to about eight different pairs of skis that they bring with them. It all depends on the snow conditions. Especially thinking of persons with disabilities and the Special Olympics, the snow conditions and the terrain that they're travelling on makes a big difference. It's incredible.

I enjoy skiing at the Nordic Centre myself, and I see people skiing there who have only one arm. You know, they're flying like a bird. It's incredible to see how those facilities that we have and the volunteers that help make that happen help people of all different ability levels, and it's quite heartwarming to see that. When we think about volunteers that help one another and help people in their community, I think that volunteers deserve recognition for the work that they do. It's incredibly important.

You know, I think I've touched on some fairly significant points within my constituency, and I know that we've had an interesting debate this morning. I'd like to thank everyone for the conversation that they've added to, and I certainly encourage everyone to support the bill.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 205. I would like to begin by thanking the Member for Calgary-North West and the cosponsor, the Member for St. Albert, for bringing forward this bill and for their advocacy when it comes to persons with varying abilities.

Madam Speaker, we live in a society, if we look around, that consists of people with varying abilities. Everybody has some abilities. They may not be the same. Even in this House we all bring different skill sets, different abilities. As government I want to say that we want a society that is inclusive of people with all abilities. To that end, it's important that people have their voices heard, and this bill certainly will bring forward the voices of those who have not been included as much as they could have been. Certainly, there are many organizations out in communities, but this role of advocate will help co-ordinate those efforts and bring forward the voices of persons with disabilities.

I will have more to say about it at a later stage. I just wanted to thank the Member for Calgary-North West and the Member for St. Albert for bringing forward this bill and for their advocacy.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a second time]

10:40 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 205 Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. As Minister of Community and Social Services I have a very active interest in Bill 205, introduced by the Member for Calgary-North West and sponsored by my colleague the Member for St. Albert. In discussion around this bill we had a great discussion, so I want to take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues from all sides of the House who have shared their experiences in this area. Certainly, it takes all of us working together to ensure that all Albertans can reach their full potential and can be included meaningfully in society. This legislation certainly is an example of how we as elected members can come together and make life better for all Albertans. I offer my support for this legislation. I'm of the view that this legislation will benefit and include people with disabilities. I will offer some remarks, and then I have some amendments for consideration.

The proposed role of the advocate will be to respond to concerns from the disability community and will also bring forward their voices to the table where decisions are made with respect to disabilities. What I heard very loud and clear over the period of the last two years was: Nothing about Us without Us. That means that they want to be included in those decision-making processes. They

are certainly better judges of their issues, and they must be part of those discussions. This office of the advocate can serve to identify those issues of concern, review programs and policies, provide an arm's-length perspective from the work of the ministry and staff. The advocate will provide advice to government to help avoid situations where people get off track and fall through the cracks.

The legislation will also enable the advocate to promote rights and trust and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education. Education and awareness are important roles for any individual in the position of an advocate, and it works both ways. I envision that this role will also help people looking for information as not all of us are proficient at navigating through the systems. Having a person who can ensure that connections are made to information which, in turn, lead to accessing services will make a significant difference to people who can be overwhelmed in our busy and often complex world. Helping Albertans understand the experiences and challenges of individuals living with disabilities can go a long way to breaking down barriers and making our community more inclusive on many levels. By learning about the range of challenges, we can remove the obstacles that currently prevent individuals from accessing information and resources.

I see this as information sharing that works both ways. The advocate will provide information to government about where, when, what, and why people are having difficulty accessing services and programs. In turn, the government will have another direct line to hear about these challenges and work with the advocate and community members to identify a solution and make sure that information and programs are accessible.

I'm proposing a few amendments to the legislation, which I would like to outline and explain for the members. Here are the requisite number of copies. Do you want me to wait, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Please. Just give me a moment.

This will be known as amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. The bill is amended as follows:

- A Section 2 is amended
 - (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "duties and functions set out in this Act" and substituting "role, duties and functions and exercise the powers set out in this Act and the regulations";
 - (b) by striking out subsection (3);
 - (c) in subsection (4) by striking out "duties" and substituting "role, duties and functions and exercising the Advocate's powers".
- B Section 3(2) is amended
 - (a) in clause (c) by striking out "processes in which decisions" and substituting "consultations in which systemic decisions";
 - (b) by striking out clause (f) and substituting the following:
 - (f) provide education as needed to ensure individuals having difficulty accessing services and related programs for persons with disabilities are aware of appropriate resources, persons and organizations;
 - (c) by adding the following after clause (g):
 - (h) exercise any other power prescribed in the regulations.
- C Section 5 is amended by adding the following after clause (a):
 - (a.1) prescribing other powers of the Advocate;
- D Section 6 is amended
 - (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "one year" and substituting "2 years";

- (b) in subsection (5) by striking out "report is tabled" and substituting "report is referred".

I will try to explain the rationale behind these amendments.

The amendments with respect to section 2 are mostly administrative changes. They eliminate section 3 and combine the role, duties, and functions of the advocate under subsection (1). Subsection (4) is amended just to ensure consistent language with subsection (1), which is the role, duties, and functions.

In Section 3(2) I propose a clarifying change by amending clause (c) to clarify that the advocate will not be involved in the everyday decision-making process regarding individuals, but he will participate in more broad systemic level decision-making in any consultation with respect to disability programs. I also propose that clause (f) be amended to clarify that the advocate provides education as needed so that individuals having difficulties accessing services and related programs are aware of appropriate resources, persons, or organizations.

10:50

Certainly, there are other advisory committees as well such as the Premier's council on persons with disabilities, PDD Provincial Advisory Committee, PDD Provincial Self-advocates' Advisory Committee, FSCD Provincial Parent Advisory Committee, and FASD advisory council. Similarly, there are community organizations as well such as the Alberta Disabilities Forum, Disability Action Hall, Inclusion Alberta, Voice of Albertans with Disabilities. And there are service provider organizations: Alberta Council of Disability Services, Alberta Disability Workers Association, Align, Alberta brain injury network. Our hope is that the advocate will help us to put together information and resources for individuals who are facing any challenges accessing our programs.

The addition of clause (h) highlights the advocate's powers in the regulations, while clause (g) was only focused on functions. So this will give us room for expanding the powers of the advocate as needed.

Section 5 supports the addition of clause (a.1).

Lastly, in section 6 I propose amending the required time from one year to two years for the advocate to provide a report evaluating its effectiveness. That will give the advocate sufficient time to set up and establish normal operations and be able to meaningfully evaluate its own procedures and make suggestions to the committee for improvements.

These are all the amendments. Thank you very much. I look forward to further discussion on this issue.

The Chair: On amendment A1, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the chance to rise on amendment A1. It's timely, and I will consider carefully the amendment. It's particularly timely because all members of the Legislature received an e-mail from Inclusion Alberta this morning, who the mover of the amendment mentioned in his remarks.

I think it's worth reading out loud what this says.

It is the considered opinion of Inclusion Alberta that for 'Bill 205: Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act' to be effective and meaningful it must be amended and its inherent limitations understood. We appreciate having had the opportunity to discuss some of our suggestions . . . [with the MLA for Calgary-North West] who introduced the Bill and her willingness to thoughtfully consider a number of our points. In addition, we appreciate the interest of other MLAs, their respective Parties and their consideration of possible Amendments to strengthen the Act.

I understand that our Liberal Party member may have some of those amendments. Then it says to please look at the PDF attached.

I spoke in second reading in favour of this bill, Madam Chair, and my opinion hasn't changed. I still think it's a good bill. I still think the hon. member that brought it forward deserves to be thanked for that. I haven't changed my opinion on that. But I think even the hon. member that brought it forward and members of the government would say that Inclusion Alberta is one of the voices that we ought to listen to when we are considering this and other amendments to this bill.

In that vein, here are some of the things, and I will compare these things to the amendment before us because, again, I believe Inclusion Alberta is an important voice to hear. It says:

We believe, to be effective BILL 205, should be amended to ensure:

1. there is sufficient independence and power for the Advocate to make a valued and positive difference, which would require the Advocate to be situated within the Legislative Assembly and not a ministry,
2. the Advocate's actions ensure equality and equity for persons with disabilities relative to Albertans without disabilities,
3. the Act identifies which activities the Advocate must engage in and which activities are optional,
4. the Advocate is guided by the principles of community inclusion as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and
5. the Advocate, as in keeping with the title of the proposed Act, represents all individuals with disabilities, including their families, regardless of age or disability or where their interest lies with respect to government ministries, programs or funding.

It goes on to say:

In our view individuals with disabilities as Albertans and citizens are entitled and due the proper consideration of its government and Legislature and as such an Act as important as that of an Advocate for Persons with Disabilities, ought to have been brought forward by the Government and only after extensive consultation with the disability community. This approach would more likely have ensured the development of an Advocate's office for Persons with Disabilities had the authority and independence to be an effective voice.

So they seem to be complaining a little bit about the lack of consultation.

They put in red, interestingly enough:

... Private Member's Bill to become a government Bill. While we support this decision, we wish to reiterate our desire to see the government fully consult with the disability community ...

Again, a bit of a complaint by the sounds of it.

... on how an Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act can be best structured to ensure the office is both independent, supportive of inclusion as a means to equality and equity of life outcomes to Albertans without disabilities.

Now, in fairness, Madam Chair, Inclusion Alberta goes on to compliment the Member for Calgary-North West for the work she has done, and I echo that as well.

I think this is something where we should consider both the good and the bad parts, I suppose you could say, of the letter from Inclusion Alberta because I think we can all agree that they are one of those voices that has earned the right to be heard, not least of all because to a large degree they are the voice of disabled people in Alberta organized in such a fashion to make life better for disabled people in Alberta. I think all hon. members in this House ought to respect that, ought to listen to that, and ought to do our best to understand and, where possible, act on that.

Looking at the amendments – and, of course, we just got them from our Liberal member. I hope that when he gets on his feet again, he will expand a little bit about what he's got here. I'm looking particularly at part B, subsection (c), under (h), where it says: "exercise any other power prescribed in the regulations." Now, this ...

The Chair: Hon. member, are you speaking to – a government amendment is what's on the floor right now.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, respectfully, I was just reading right out of it so I can comment on it. So, yes, ma'am.

The Chair: I'm just making sure that you're on the correct amendment.

Mr. McIver: Yes, ma'am. What you're asking is exactly what I'm doing.

An Hon. Member: You said the Liberal member.

The Chair: Yeah. You said the member from the Liberal Party.

Mr. McIver: The Liberal member also suggested he was going to put some amendments, so thank you.

The minister's motion, again, which we just got, will take a few minutes to absorb. I may have more to say on it after we get a little more time to look at it. But, hopefully, the minister will explain part B, subsection (c), under (h): "exercise any other power prescribed in the regulations." Now, on the surface this seems a little bit at odds with what Inclusion Alberta is asking for, and I would like to explain why.

While it sounds like a good thing, it seems to be limiting the advocate's ability to advocate to what the legislation specifically allows the advocate to advocate for. I believe that Inclusion Alberta is looking for more of an open-ended ability for advocacy – because in the section that I just read it said all persons with disability without exception and their family members, without regard for their age – in other words, a more empowering scope of authority rather than a limiting scope of authority. I'm certainly not saying that the minister's amendment is not well meaning, but I think the minister might even agree with me that if you put any limits on the advocate's ability to advocate, that is at odds with what Inclusion Alberta is suggesting in the section that I read out ever so recently in this House.

11:00

Mr. Sabir: That's subsection (h)?

Mr. McIver: Subsection (h).

I would say that, again, like other members of the House other than the minister, I have only had this in my hands for a very few minutes and have not had time to do research on it, but that's the one thing that struck me immediately that requires some further explanation before we vote on it. I think, again, without being able to compare it directly, in the time allowed, with the act – and when I look at the sections by contrast, I look at the amendment in part B, under subsection (b), where it says:

- (f) provide education as needed to ensure individuals having difficulty accessing services and related programs for persons with disabilities are aware of appropriate resources, persons and organizations.

I'll have to read the rest of that section in the original legislation.

That sounds like a good thing. It sounds like people advocating for persons with disabilities and those persons that might be employed by the advocate will be given the education they need in

order to do an effective job. That's where I'm hoping to get an explanation from the minister because I looked at two sections right before each other where one looks like it needs to be fixed and the other one looks like it is actually strengthening the legislation and making it better.

I probably wouldn't be surprised if I'm on my feet again later on talking about this, again, because of the short time I've had to look at it. Hopefully, at some point, Madam Chair, we will have the minister on his feet, and perhaps the minister would do me the courtesy of expanding upon and putting an explanation on those two sections that I have asked about just now.

Thank you for this opportunity.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 205 and the amendments. I just wanted to say a couple of things that I do appreciate about the amendment. It's extending the time to two years, which I think is important, that the folks entrusted with doing the advocacy work not be solely focused when they're getting started on preparing a report. It does take time, and as we all know, advocacy takes time.

To the member across the way, I certainly am aware of Inclusion Alberta and the work that they do, but they are one voice. It is one organization, one provincial organization, but they are one voice, and they do not speak for all people with disabilities. You know, I want to couch that with saying that they are an incredibly valuable organization. The current CEO of Inclusion Alberta and I were both able to sit on the PDD safety standards consultation, and that took many months. It took us all across Alberta. One of the recommendations that we came up with together was the creation of an advocate, and that's what this is.

I understand that they're setting the bar here. Who wouldn't want a Cadillac immediately? I would. In a real world that's just not possible. The fiscal reality that we're in right now is tough, so I would rather begin with something as good as an advocate and then work towards the Cadillac. I think that particularly when times are tight like they are, I don't want to remove any more front-line dollars than absolutely necessary, so that's why this is so important.

I wanted to speak about some of the systems that an advocate like this would use to help people with disabilities, their families, and allies. It would absolutely help them navigate and sort through these very complex and, in many cases, very, very old systems.

The first one I want to talk about is assured income for the severely handicapped. Let's just put it right out there: you know, maybe it's time for a name change. Assured income for the severely handicapped isn't exactly respectful and doesn't really address the sort of reality of the folks who are receiving that benefit. Obviously, the Auditor General made some very good recommendations, which I wasn't surprised to see, which I was actually very happy to see, and I'm also very happy to hear from the minister that they are seriously looking at making systemic changes. This has been long overdue. I think the community has been asking for changes for many, many years.

I think what's really important is about consultation. As we're making changes to AISH, every piece of AISH, it's important to bring in people with disabilities, their families, and allies and get them to tell us what would work.

The other thing I wanted to say about AISH is that we already know it's tough to get on. It's also tough sometimes for people who are working. It's very easy for them to get kicked off. For example, if they forget to send in pay stubs for a month or two, very quickly

they find themselves in a really serious situation. So there are a lot of examples of where advocates are needed.

You know, another question that an advocate may in fact be faced with and help someone navigate is that – I don't know if AISH is still doing this – at one point people were encouraged to apply for early CPP, and what that meant was a reduction in their overall benefit as well as a reduction overall because of the early application. It would reduce the monthly amount they'd be eligible for. Those are really important things to look at and to talk about.

The other issue that an advocate might look at is that people with disabilities, just like all of us, sometimes end up in trouble and sometimes end up in the justice system. It is the practice right now that for people who are incarcerated or hospitalized long term, for more than three months, they lose their benefits. What that translates to is sometimes a loss of housing, so it is contributing to a homelessness problem. Those are just some examples of some of the systemic problems in AISH that I know an advocate would help with.

Another system that I don't know if all members are aware of is called aids to daily living. It's also a support that people with disabilities and chronic illnesses are able to apply for, and it helps them with the cost of supplies and equipment to manage a long-term disability or illness. It's about \$500 a month. You know, sometimes that is difficult to navigate, and I think an advocate would also help here. One of the suggestions that I know we've talked about and that we will be, I'm sure, looking at in the near future is that there are other things that are not listed on ADL, or aids to daily living, that I know would be of help to people with disabilities, things like the cost, care, and maintenance of a service dog.

I'm going to spend a little bit of time on persons with developmental disabilities because this is a system that I do know quite well. Obviously, it's a massive system. It supports over 11,000 people across Alberta. It's an old system, that was created a long time ago, and I think it's trying its very best to meet the very real and new needs of people with disabilities, but it's struggling. I'm glad that we are open and ready to look at what needs to be changed, what needs to be enhanced, and where an advocate is needed.

For those of you that don't know, persons with developmental disabilities provides support to people with disabilities and their families in a couple of different ways. Sometimes a person with a disability will receive support, and they pay for staffing hours. They don't pay for rent; they pay for staffing hours. It'll pay through a service provider – we've heard lots of them named here today – or they'll go through a contract that's called family-managed care. Family-managed care is really just what it says, that a person with a disability is able to either receive the funding themselves or have a family member or a friend manage that contract so that they can hire staff and get the training they need and can have the assistance they need to live in their community, to work in their community, to access their community. Through a service provider it is a little different. The service provider will receive the funds to be able to hire the staff for the person with a disability.

11:10

I want to tell you a little bit of a story that I think will illustrate some of the systemic issues that are facing people with disabilities and their supporters in Alberta. They're very real examples, and I think they illustrate why these changes are so important. Inclusion Alberta, as we've heard from a lot of people, is an organization that advocates for people with disabilities in Alberta. They've been really outside of the box and forward thinking, and they certainly

deserve a lot of credit. One of the programs they operate is around postsecondary education. It actually started at the U of A – it was called on campus – and what they do is that they work with the university and they work with a student with a disability so that they're able to attend that postsecondary institution as a noncredit student. They're able to attend different classes. They get involved in all the social activities. When they finish in four years, just like any other student, it enhances their resume. It helps to promote employment. It's just part of a normal continuum. So they've come from elementary, junior high, high school, where they've been included, and they go on to postsecondary education and then, hopefully, employment if that's something that they're able to do.

The problem is that there are limited spaces, and Inclusion Alberta or programs like on campus are unable to meet everybody's needs. I have a story about a woman – and this is why Inclusion Alberta does not speak for everybody. They have a wonderful voice, but they don't speak for everybody. I'm sure you've heard me speak about Leah McRorie before. She is an advocate. She's just a tiny little thing, but she's an advocate that is a force to be reckoned with. I think somebody said earlier today that the most powerful advocates are parents of children with disabilities, and they are. She is one of those people.

When her daughter Taisa was a young student, Leah noticed that she was a musician. She had the spirit of a musician. She may have had some mobility challenges, she was unable to communicate verbally, but she was still a musician. She wanted to go to Vic high school – well, comprehensive school now, I suppose – so she showed up there. She didn't have any assistance from an organization. She showed up there, and she paved the way for her daughter to be able to attend Vic. She even, from what I hear, got her daughter to band camp at Vic. She tells me a little bit about what it did for her daughter but also what it did for the students and the staff of Vic.

Anyway, of course, her daughter Taisa wanted to go on to postsecondary education, and they were unable to get support through Inclusion Alberta. By the way, I just want to say that there are 18 postsecondary institutions across Alberta that now include students with a disability. So she showed up at MacEwan, their arts program, and she talked to them about Taisa. Of course, you know, the normal reaction is: "What? You can't do this. She's not able to communicate verbally. This is an audition-based program. She doesn't have the academic ability." But Leah doesn't stop ever, so she continued to advocate, and she connected with a man who is actually with fine arts and communications, I believe. His name is Allan Gilliland. I'm mispronouncing his name, I'm sure. So she started to advocate and speak to this man. As it turns out, this man was also involved in the band camp that her daughter had gone to, so he knew exactly who Taisa was.

So her daughter attended. Through family-managed supports her daughter attended, and she went to MacEwan for four years. She's finished now, and she's a musician. She had family-managed supports. Her mom, Leah, helped her with staffing and transportation. The staff provided all of that support while she was on campus, and four years later this young woman has graduated in her own way, in a way that meets her needs. I know that is life changing for people. But she wouldn't have been able to do that had she not had the advocate mom that she has.

Now, sadly, far too many people with disabilities do not have those kinds of advocates. Often they don't have family members. Often they've grown up in care. They may have a public guardian whose caseloads are massive, or they have a private guardian who just doesn't have the ability to advocate for the things that their person needs. So an advocate like the one we're proposing is so incredibly vital.

I want to tell you a little bit about another sort of systemic problem that will also highlight the importance of an advocate. A few years ago, when I was the director of an organization, a service provider that provides people with disabilities, we were approached by government to take on some people that were going to be moved from the Michener Centre in Red Deer to Edmonton. It was three men, three of which who had spent the majority of their lives in Michener Centre, and they were going to be transitioned out.

Now, the previous government did undertake sort of a movement to close Michener Centre and to move people out to the community. I'm not going to speak to that necessarily. What I will say is that I will always support community living over segregation in any way, shape, or form. However, there are always mitigating factors.

There were problems with the plan although there were a number of people from different ministries involved in the transition planning. When the rubber hit the road, the transition plan truly fell apart. I think you probably heard in the news about six people, seniors, who had spent their lives there that had been transitioned out, put into long-term care, and died very soon after that. It's not really surprising, you know, if they were taken out of an environment that's the only environment they've really known.

The three people that we took on and brought were also very challenging as they had spent the majority of their lives there. Now, you have to understand what that means. They don't have the connections to their communities. They don't have connections to their families. They don't have the natural supports that we all enjoy. They don't have the supports that people who grow up and live in the community have. It's just not there. When you pluck them out of their home, the only home they've known, and you put them in a community for their well-being – and it was well intentioned; I know this – you're going to cause a lot of problems.

For us it was reintegrating these folks into a community or into relationships that they had not had since they were young children with siblings. Their parents had passed on. It was incredibly stressful and tough, and it was incredibly stressful and tough for the family members, who were now dealing with these adult siblings that they really didn't know and they didn't understand. I won't even get into all of the other things that present if you institutionalize someone, but they are truly, truly significant.

The other thing I want to talk a little bit about with persons with developmental disabilities, which is really a department of the ministry, is that it was established and built a long time ago, and the criteria for those supports were also built a very long time ago.

There are three things that they talk about that you need to meet in order to be eligible for support, one of which is IQ. Your IQ has to be at 70 or lower. The other thing is that I believe you need to meet 6 out of the 24 skill sets or domains that they identify. Those would be things like: do you need assistance with grooming or personal care; do you need assistance with transportation; do you need assistance with, you know, managing daily living things like preparing food or eating, those kinds of things? The other piece is that, obviously, you have to be an adult and you have to be an Albertan or you have to have lived here, I think, for a certain amount of time. The other piece, if I'm not mistaken, is that the disability has to have been acquired before the age of 18. Obviously, this is a problem.

11:20

I'm sure many of you have had constituents come into your office and say: "You know, listen. I'm not sure what to do. I don't meet

the criteria established by PDD, but I can't function in the community. I can't get a job. I can't learn a job. I can't learn a bus route. I can't prepare my own food. I can't manage my money. I can't apply for AISH. I can't do all of these things because I don't have the assistance that I need." This is another example of why an advocate is so essential.

I'll tell you about a person that I know. I won't say his real name because he's still around. He was diagnosed as a young person with Asperger's, which is on the autism spectrum. He could probably recite every word that is written in all of the Harry Potter books, but he couldn't really do a grocery shopping list, buy his groceries, and prepare his food without assistance. You can see how things get a little tough for people.

The other issue that I wanted to talk a little bit about around advocacy is that when service providers or larger organizations – sometimes they're small – provide supports to people with disabilities and they're full or they don't have the capacity to take on new people or the waiting list gets too large, people are sometimes forced or encouraged, because there isn't a whole lot else around, to seek out family-managed care. That can be really tough.

For any of you that have run a business or managed an organization, you know what's involved with human resources, with recruiting staff, with doing background checks, with doing police clearance, with signing them up, with the ongoing training, even with remittances, with payroll. All of those things are very, very tough. Now, imagine having to do that yourself. You're a parent, you might have a job, maybe you're a senior, and you're trying to do this for your adult child because there is nothing else. It's like a full-time job when you're trying to manage probably a job of your own to support yourself. This is tough.

I know that there are only a few centres in Alberta that actually are set up, hubs, to support people on family-managed care. I know that Gateway provides some assistance. I'm quite certain Inclusion Alberta does. I think there's one in Calgary. I know there's a group . . . [Ms Renaud's speaking time expired]

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will speak briefly to the comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. The first thing changed was that the bill as it's drafted now only refers to duties and functions, so we expanded that to include role, duties, functions, and exercise of power. That change made section 2(3) redundant with this section. That's why we took out that section. Since we are giving that power in section 2, in the role and functions of the advocate section, we needed to include to perform any functions and exercise the powers. That was flowing from that change that we made in section 2.

With respect to education as needed, as the Member for St. Albert pointed out, there are many organizations out there who have information available, so we don't want the advocate to duplicate all those resources. Wherever the advocate sees a gap, they can provide that information as needed. That was, I guess, the purpose behind it. I guess that will also allow the advocate to choose where he thinks that education is necessary.

In section 5 the change with respect to prescribing power was just to correspond with what his roles and functions are, which are about the exercise of power, so they needed authority to create those powers. That was the change.

In the last section I don't think you commented with respect to two years. That's what we thought would be a reasonable time for

an advocate to get set up, established, and be able to provide a meaningful report about the role and what needed to be improved.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Sabir: I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Sweet: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 205. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole (continued)

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 11 Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak in support of Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, a little bit in the area of reprisals because that's one thing that concerns a lot of people. When they think about speaking up about a concern or of evidence of wrongdoing in their workplace, it's very worrying because they don't know what the consequences will be. Obviously, we do want a good public service. We want a fair, honest, and transparent public sector. So it's very important that people be given the protection to be able to speak up when they decide it's appropriate.

Of course, one of the fears is that they will have reprisals brought by their employers. There is some protection in regard to that right now. Right now any employer in the public sector can be prosecuted for punishing an employee who exposes a wrongdoing, but there's no mechanism in place at the present time to determine what kind of restitution should be made to the whistle-blower if they are the subject of an unlawful punishment. I'm delighted to say that the new regulation would enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies when there has been a reprisal.

There are certain cases where having their job back might just not work. If there's been a very poisonous atmosphere created through the wrongdoing, through the whistle-blowing, or whatever conflict there was, that may be very difficult, so a worker might be entitled to compensation. In that case the board can decide what is appropriate, and the board's order would be enforceable like a court order, which is really good to hear. Of course, one difficulty is that a lot of times these things take their

own sweet time to work their way through, but hopefully there will be some more protection maybe written into the bill for situations like that.

11:30

It's very important that employees feel safe and free from reprisal. We talked about government-contracted entities, too, people not directly employed by the government but contracted. If there's alleged wrongdoing in those situations, the legislation is being proposed to cover the government-contracted people and that they have some protections given, too. There will be some consultation with government contractors and delegated service providers to look at details of how to move on there.

One of the questions that came up was about when the person is not able to lay a complaint of wrongdoing with their official agent. That is a little bit tricky because that means they are applying to or will go straight to the Public Interest Commissioner. That's really important. The commissioner would investigate situations like that, that come directly before them, and the person is protected from reprisal.

There are a number of things here. The commissioner investigates incidents of workplace bullying and harassment. We've talked about that a lot. In the event of wrongdoing in relation to that, any collective agreement or employer policy would have to be accessed first, and then the commissioner has jurisdiction after other options have been exhausted.

Government department and public-sector entities covered by the act are required to have procedures related to how their designated officer will investigate and address complaints, but that's the thing that I was mentioning. If the officer fails to investigate or if the whistle-blower is not satisfied with the decision of the designated officer, then the Public Interest Commissioner can begin their own investigation. In that case, the whistle-blower could approach their boss or direct supervisor about a wrongdoing, and at that moment their protection from reprisal would start. Then they would go directly to the commissioner. The official report would still have to be made to the designated officer or directly to the commissioner.

The whistle-blower and their supervisor could discuss the issue beforehand if the whistle-blower chooses. If the supervisor is supportive, then they could help the whistle-blower take the matter to the designated officer or the commissioner. That way, designated officers would still be responsible for investigating all complaints. There's no obligation for the supervisor to take that job on.

Since the act applies to a very large assortment of public-sector entities, maintaining a formal disclosure process helps to ensure consistency in the application of the act. It makes the process more comfortable and accessible for potential whistle-blowers, but it still makes sure that everybody is on the same page as far as reporting information.

That's about it. The process. The Public Interest Commissioner also investigates reprisal claims. And I mentioned the Labour Relations Board. The board would appoint one of its senior members, either the chair or one of the vice-chairs, to hear the matter and order the remedy. Hearings would be conducted as determined by the board. They could summon witnesses, and their decision would be final. Remedies could include reinstatement, compensation for lost wages, or other such things. Then the board would be required to provide a copy of all their reasons and restitution orders to the commissioner for inclusion in the commissioner's annual report.

Thank you, Madam Chair. That's about all I wish to add at this time.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 11?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Carlier: I would like the committee to now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with amendments: Bill 11.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report, does the Assembly concur?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 12

New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move third reading on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Since the introduction of this bill I've had many conversations with the people in my community, and they are very thankful for us moving forward with this important piece of legislation. I can tell you that I've heard many similar stories throughout the years. A family works hard to save up for their dream home. They do as much research as they can to find a reputable builder who seems experienced, only to later find out that the deal has fallen through and to have to deal with the ramifications of such. These stories are not unique. They have been shared with many of us in the room, and we've heard many stories from the members here as well as in our constituencies and throughout the community.

It is our duty as elected representatives of the people of Alberta to ensure that we are protecting the best interests of those we represent. That's why I am proud to be a part of this government. We have an opportunity today to pass legislation that would protect consumers and empower them to make informed decisions.

Bill 12 will create a builder licensing framework that will put consumers first while supporting Alberta's many reputable builders. As we've debated builder licensing, members on both sides of the aisle have shared their stories of working in residential construction, and they have experienced first-hand the

professionalism and knowledge of many of Alberta's builders. Under this new framework these good builders will no longer be competing with fly-by-night companies that cut corners and undercut good builders out of the market. We've worked hand in hand with builders along with other key industry stakeholders and Alberta homeowners in the development of this licensing framework.

This licensing framework includes requirements for residential builders to hold an active licence in order to obtain a building permit; requirements for licence applicants to submit information about their history, business practices, finances, and corporate structure to determine whether they pose a risk to consumers; the authority to suspend, revoke, or deny licences or to issue licences with conditions; and the creation of a public online registry of licensed builders to help consumers make informed decisions.

By working collaboratively with all stakeholders, this made-in-Alberta framework is unique because it creates a system of checks and balances through full integration with the New Home Warranty Program. Unlike other jurisdictions, both the licensing and warranty program will be run in-house, requiring the builder to receive a licence in order to apply for a warranty and a warranty in order to apply for a building permit. This framework is designed to put consumers first so that they don't fall through the cracks and to promote the builders with great track records.

11:40

Part of protecting Albertans is also empowering them with the tools to become informed consumers. An issue we heard frequently throughout our consultation was the lack of publicly accessible information about the residential construction industry. Consumers felt it was difficult to research potential builders. This is why we are creating a new public online registry of licensed builders. The online registry will allow consumers to look up corporate histories, build histories, and financial records of licensed builders and allow them to track these over the years. This will provide consumers with a single source of information, a one-stop shop to help Albertans make informed decisions. It will also promote the many experienced and trustworthy builders here in our province.

We have an opportunity today to give Albertans the protection of builder licensing currently enjoyed by 75 per cent of Canadians. Not having one means that Albertans currently have less consumer protection than the majority of Canadians. While builder licensing will offer new-home buyers proactive protection when looking to build a home, the New Home Warranty Program will continue to protect new homeowners after they've moved in. I want to remind the House that nearly 80 per cent of consulted Albertans agreed with the government exploring builder licensing and reiterate that most Albertans who have approached me since its introduction were more shocked than anything that it's not already in place.

Our government will continue to engage with stakeholders and industry on the implementation of builder licensing to ensure that this program comes together in the best way to protect Albertans and support and strengthen Alberta's home building industry. Our government made a commitment to make Albertans' lives better. Homeownership is one of the largest purchases we make as Albertans, and when Albertans make that investment, they deserve the ability to make informed decisions and feel secure in the knowledge that they are protected.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning, all. It's great to be with you all here again this morning. I rise once again today to speak to Bill 12, the New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017. The stated intent of Bill 12 is to reduce the number of dishonest and fraudulent builders in Alberta, which in turn will improve the quality of homes being built in our province and ultimately build up the public's trust and confidence in that industry overall. I think I'm safe in saying that those are things that all of us support. The purchase of a home represents the biggest investment most Albertans will make in their entire lifetime. They deserve to have confidence that it was built to code and that if faulty workmanship is found, they have the protection of a warranty.

As Bill 12 has proceeded through the debate process, many of the questions I had have been answered, not just by the government, although the debate has been quite informative, but also by different stakeholders and stakeholder groups that are supportive of the bill, which weighed heavily in my decision to support this bill here today at third reading.

For example, when the licensing framework was first announced in February, Canadian Home Builders' Association CEO Donna Moore said, "CHBA – Alberta welcomes the opportunity to work in collaboration with Government and other stakeholders to develop a Builder Licensing program." Another example. During the announcement of Bill 12 earlier this month CHBA – Alberta President Ryan Scott said, "The ability to remove builders who demonstrate a proven, negative track record will be a benefit to every Albertan – including those in the industry." So that seems quite positive, Madam Speaker.

In my comments to the House during debate at second reading I had a number of questions about the bill. For the most part I'm somewhat satisfied with what I heard from the minister during debate and, too, feedback from those stakeholders. For example, a concern I had was the impact that this licensing regime would have on small, independent home builders, those that only build a few houses in a year. I wondered and I still somewhat wonder today: how will they be impacted by this licensing requirement? I turn again, in reflection to that, to the Canadian Home Builders' Association, whose membership roll boasts around 500 home builders, of which around half build less than 10 homes per year, and many of them do support Bill 12.

Another question I had was: who is going to be ultimately responsible for overseeing and issuing the licences, for doing the background work, reviewing the applications, and approving the licences? On May 11 during Committee of the Whole debate the Minister of Municipal Affairs said:

The builder licensing program will be administered from within government in the new-home buyer protection office. The program will not require any additional staffing resources. It will be administered through a reallocation of existing staffing resources.

Well, while that sounded okay, there sure would have been a lot more detail that I could have heard there, and I'm still wondering just exactly where people in the small towns go to get these permits, how it's going to be rolled out. It would have been nice to hear that.

Anyway, he went on to say – and I'm paraphrasing – that this integration would allow for better flow-through with the province's safety code system, warranty providers, and municipal partners. As a proponent of smaller, seamless government I believe it's critical to ensure that the government can and, more importantly, does communicate with itself effectively. Therefore, I will be connecting with home builders in the months and years ahead to ensure that this synergy is indeed taking place and there are not unnecessary delays in approving licences for home builders because of the typical government red tape situation that can happen.

That being said, every member of this Assembly, I think, has a responsibility also to ensure that the government does what it says it's going to do, so you can rest assured that while I will be keeping a watchful eye to ensure that this program does indeed serve the people of Alberta and that it doesn't become just another layer of expensive red tape, I think that other members, in doing their jobs as they usually do, will do the same. You see, too often as elected members I think we can get focused on our duty to debate and review proposed legislation, and there can be no doubt that it is vitally important as part of our jobs to also monitor how these things do roll out and occur. I believe we have the responsibility as elected officials representing the people of Alberta to ensure that the legislation that was passed is functioning in the best interests of all Albertans.

As I mentioned earlier, buying a home is an expensive investment. Housing prices are already high. We cannot afford for this program to become a hindrance to industry to do what they do best: build high-quality, reliable, and affordable homes in Alberta.

So far I believe that Bill 12 strikes an appropriate balance, and primarily due to its overwhelming support amongst the stakeholders that we've been in touch with, I will be supporting this bill at third reading. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really enjoyed the debate this morning. I think we did some good work. We're close to 12 o'clock, so I move that we adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:49 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, May 18, 2017

Day 36

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 18, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the House students from Langevin science school in the fabulous constituency of Calgary-Mountain View. The students are accompanied by their teachers Elaine McCrady, Kate Logan, and Tim Bowles along with chaperones Milica Legault, Grant Lewis, Patty Ross-O'Donnell, and Carlos Ferreira. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 70 amazing students from Eastview middle school in the amazing riding of Red Deer-South. With them are teachers Mr. Bob Rutz, Miss Victory Shewchuk, and Mrs. Bev Wilibnisky. I'd like them all to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other school groups?

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature the Alberta Donates Life Coalition, which was formed in 2012 to address the urgent need for increased numbers of organ and tissue donors in Alberta. I would ask Barbara Esdale to rise. She's from the great constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud and is the co-chair of the coalition. Her husband received the gift of life with a double lung transplant in 2009. Neil Folkins is the national membership director for the Canadian Transplant Association. He received a liver transplant first in 1996, and he received a second one in 2004. Lionel Jensen is a PhD student at the University of Alberta. A long-time blood donor, he established the Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness club at the U of A in 2015. The club's charter and materials can provide a model for other postsecondary institutions in Alberta. I would ask the other folks with the life coalition to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce Barry Morishita. Barry Morishita is the mayor of Brooks and also the chairman of the Newell Foundation in the Brooks region, which is heading up the Bassano project for seniors' care. He is here today advocating on behalf of the project to ensure that people in the Brooks-Newell region get the seniors' care that they need. I ask that he stand and receive the warm welcome of every member of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you councillors from the town of Vegreville: Councillor Marielle Brodziak, Councillor David Berry, and Councillor Tim MacPhee. They are here as I will be giving a member's statement about the CPC centre in Vegreville. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Myrna Wisdom. Myrna is a third-generation descendant of the original Amber Valley settlers, where she grew up. She has been a tireless advocate for the community and is responsible for Amber Valley having recently been designated as a national historic site. Myrna, I see you've already risen. Please receive the customary warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine, Audrey Martyn. Audrey represents the Canadian National Institute for the Blind as a CNIB champion. CNIB advocates at various levels of government and community to extend services to the blind and low visioned to improve their quality of life. In addition to this, Audrey also organizes with the Alberta Donates Life Coalition, that has been recognized already today, a group that helped to bring in Bill 207, from which the donor registry for human tissue and organ donation was born. Please welcome Audrey, an advocate for community members in my constituency in Alberta and across Canada, and extend the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you three guests visiting us today from the town of Jasper. I ask that they please rise as I call their names: Jasper's mayor, Richard Ireland; Councillor Gilbert Wall; and Kathleen Waxer, a director of Community and Family Services for the town. They are here advocating for the family and community support services program. That incredible preventive social services program is jointly funded by municipalities and the province. I ask that the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly be given to them.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Donations to Political Parties

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In June 2015 I was very proud to vote for Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. Nearly two years ago that bill banned corporate and union donations in this province. I was very pleased to see this whole Assembly, including the Wildrose and PC caucuses, vote to ban those donations to political parties.

But I was really dismayed to read in the news this morning that these two dance partner parties still don't think the rules apply to

them. The Unite the Right folks on the opposition benches don't seem to find any rule too big or too small to break when it comes to fundraising and party operations.

Madam Speaker, last night the Member for Strathmore-Brooks and his buddies the Member for Calgary-Greenway and the Member for Calgary-West held a meeting about uniting their parties. They were able to get about 50 people into a theatre that holds about 460 people. Their own party advertising originally listed the event as sponsored by a business.

Even as the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that corporate donations to his party are wrong, he's still listed online as holding a fundraiser next week where a corporation is bidding on tickets. As of this morning that event is still on the Facebook page.

Mr. Kenney is no better. Remember that his own party fined him \$5,000 because he fought the definition of what near a ballot box means.

Albertans expect politicians to be honest, to be committed to upholding the law in this province, and to be graceful when they make a mistake. But these parties don't seem to think there's anything wrong with accepting corporate donations. Jason Kenney still hasn't said who he got funds from for his leadership campaign, that began last July. He has yet to reveal who his for-profit corporation solicited for donations even though they apparently stopped accepting money last October.

Albertans want a government that respects the rules, respects the laws. The Unite the Right dance-off needs to stop making excuses.

1:40 Conservative Party Merger Agreement

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, did you hear the good news? The path to unite the right has been paved. Last night a unity framework was reached between the Wildrose and the PC leadership, and as always, the power is in the hands of our membership, who will make the final decision. However, I believe I can safely say that my children will not have to live under an NDP regime ever again, nor will my grandchildren. We put our differences aside and came together for hard-working Albertans who have been waiting for this day for a very long time. To them I say: wait no more; the NDP will soon be political history. Alberta small "c" conservatives will not let Alberta become another casualty of the NDP world view on the scrap heap of history. The countdown is on. The dark days of the NDP will soon be over.

This government has fundamentally changed our province for the worst in two short years, imposing crushing tax increases that they never campaigned on, filling the hallowed halls of this building with anti-Alberta activists who have the audacity to collect a cheque from taxpayers while they conspire to sabotage our pipelines. The NDP has turned our province into a pariah, a province once a lighthouse of fiscal hope to the world, but this is nothing that cannot be undone.

Alberta's former prosperity was built on hard work, self-determination, and it will be restored on such things. Our members will now pave the path forward, and the next steps in unity take shape. Unlike the NDP, who serve special interests, we serve our members, honest Albertans who want their province back. Every member of our two parties believes there is no one person bigger than doing what is right for the families of this great province, so what we are doing is to honour the legacy of our two great parties, the wishes of Albertans today, and the hopes of all our future generations. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I know today is Thursday.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Vegreville Immigration Centre

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I was first elected as the MLA to represent Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, people would often ask me about the big Ukrainian egg. Now the first thing I hear is: how goes the fight for the CPC centre?

Madam Speaker, Albertans are frustrated by the federal government's decision to close the Canadian immigration case processing centre in Vegreville, but no one is more frustrated than the town. Global News is now reporting that internal federal government documents show that it will cost an extra \$10.8 million to move it.

Council members joining us here today were informed by frantic texts from workers, who were told unceremoniously at a staff meeting that the centre was closing. Council got to work immediately, contacting their federal and provincial representatives, and the Respect Vegreville campaign was started. Two town halls have been held. We've knocked on hundreds of doors with petitions. Many of us have written letters, only to receive canned responses. Our Minister of Labour held a face-to-face meeting on April 27 with federal minister Ahmed Hussen and fought for these workers.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, we go unheard. Recently I was forwarded a letter written by Minister Hussen in which he continues to refuse the responsibility for this decision. He says, "The decision to relocate the CPC in Vegreville to downtown Edmonton was a difficult one for the management of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada."

Madam Speaker, the difficult decisions won't be made in Ottawa. The difficult decisions will be made by town council, by families around the kitchen table, by schools trying to figure out how to make up a million dollars if they lose 130 students.

Prime Minister Trudeau stood in the train station in Vegreville and promised to support rural Canada. When he won, he said the words, "Sunny ways my friends, sunny ways." Madam Speaker, the sun is shining on parts of Canada, but the sunlight has not yet reached Vegreville.

Conservative Opposition Policies

Mr. Westhead: As the conservative parties merge, it's important to know where they stand on issues that matter to Albertans, but their memes and buzzwords only serve to obscure a serious problem with their intellectual balance sheet. It's obvious there's a deficit of ideas and facts from the conservative opposition members, no matter what they choose to call themselves. Albertans deserve better than the UCP.

Just how low is the opposition on intellectual capital? So low that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks proposes borrowing a Soviet-era idea to erase history. They'll have a lot of explaining to do when they wipe out school nutrition programs, slash the minimum wage, and cancel Black History Month. Just like their shadow budget, opposition policies have yet to see the light of day. If the opposition has a better way to do things and truly cares about Alberta, they owe it to all of us to share those ideas. But the cupboard is bare. Either they don't care about Alberta, don't have any ideas, or are scared that Albertans will reject their intolerant, slash-and-burn approach. To avoid making tough decisions, they've proposed a *Dragons' Den* style reality TV scenario that pits teachers against nurses and special-needs children against seniors in a no-holds-barred battle royal to avoid their damaging cuts.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner attended a rally opposing women's reproductive rights. I guess that counts as an idea, but it's a deeply troubling one. It seems the conservatives don't care who gets hurt as long as they win the next election.

We must acknowledge the absence of solutions being offered by the members opposite. Madam Speaker, Alberta's opposition has a profound deficit of ideas, and their credit rating has been downgraded to an F minus. The next step for them is to declare intellectual bankruptcy. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, just a reminder. We are on Members' Statements, and if we could be respectful to the speaker, please. You'll have time later.

Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to recognize the organizers of the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan, a procession held annually in southeast Edmonton in the constituencies of Edmonton-Mill Woods and Edmonton-Ellerslie. I'd also like to thank the broader Sikh community of Alberta who host the Nagar Kirtan in Calgary as well.

The Nagar Kirtan is an important Sikh tradition for commemorating special occasions in the Sikh calendar. Traditionally the procession is led by the saffron-robed Panj Pyare, who are the spiritual and temporal embodiment of the collective Sikh community, who are followed by the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture, which is placed on a float. Commonly, members of the procession are unshod in a deference to the displayed scripture. As bystanders bow their heads to the holy scripture as it passes, they may receive food provided to them from floats. The procession concludes at the gurdwara with prayers.

I am always encouraged when hearing about the three pillars of the Sikh faith: to constantly remember the oneness that unites us all, to work with integrity while earning an honest living, and to share that wealth with all those in the broader community.

Madam Speaker, it is the sharing of our cultures that makes Alberta a great place to call home. As a Canadian not born in Canada, I give thanks that we have a culture of respect and understanding. As people who have come from a foreign land to now call Alberta home, we are not expected to fit the mold of a Eurocentric definition of what it means to be Canadian. It is exactly that multicultural nature of Canada that enriches Alberta society.

I'm proud to be part of a government that declared April 2017 as Sikh Heritage Month in Alberta and recognizes that cultural diversity can still embrace common values, values such as dedication to one's family, profession, and community while at the same time being compassionate to those in need.

Again, I thank all the organizers of the Nagar Kirtan for sharing their values with us, values that we share and respect as we continue to build Alberta into a stronger place to call home for everyone.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Amber Valley National Historic Site

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In February of this year, thanks in great part to the work of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, Alberta celebrated its very first Black History Month, and Amber Valley has always been a big part of that history.

This past weekend I had the good fortune to bring greetings on behalf of our Premier to Amber Valley and share in the celebration of their official designation as a national historic site. This designation is in recognition of the arrival of over a thousand African-American settlers to Canada between 1908 and 1911, seeking to escape discrimination and in hope of a better future.

Amber Valley itself was home to over 150 of these individuals and is unique in having some of their descendants still living on their original homesteads. Growing up, my grandfather used to tell me stories about Amber Valley. Their baseball team was legendary across northeastern Alberta, as were their annual three-day picnics. These courageous settlers established their own institutions, created a rich social life, and forged vibrant farming communities. The arrival of these black pioneers to our province has been and will forever be an integral part of our western heritage.

1:50

Sadly, the initial rush of black settlers caused a racist backlash by our governments of the time, and the door was then shut to black immigrants until the early '60s, to our collective shame and also our collective loss. Those who did come have enriched our diversity and our society well out of proportion to their numbers, playing a vital role in battling discrimination and advocating for equality, tolerance, and justice for all.

Today the Amber Valley community centre, museum, and historic pioneer cabin is largely maintained by the Amber Valley historical society, dedicated volunteers who rely on their own hard work and by raising funds through hosting music jams and, of course, their famous chicken dinners. I wish to commend their community spirit and their dedication to preserving this truly unique piece of Alberta's heritage.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Cooper: Alberta's energy industry is the engine of Canada's economy and the reason why people across our country enjoy such a high quality of life, yet important pipelines that could bring our product to tidewater face significant opposition, including from the Premier's NDP friends in British Columbia. How could this be? The Premier promised that the carbon tax would buy social licence from the very same people that oppose these vital projects. Premier, your plan is failing. It's hurting Albertans. When will you admit that this carbon tax isn't working and that social licence is a hoax?

Ms. Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, I appreciate that members opposite love to dine out on the words of the opponents of the pipeline for their own political gain. That's, unfortunately, not good for Alberta. What is good for Alberta is the fact that the decision around the pipeline is within the authority of the federal government. The federal government considered a number of issues, including our government's commitment to reducing and combating climate change, and as a result, they approved the pipeline, something that would not have happened under their watch.

Mr. Cooper: Albertans can't stand the carbon tax, and opponents of pipelines are indifferent to it. Insolvencies and bankruptcies are on the rise, and while Albertans are scrimping and saving to make ends meet, this NDP government is running a deficit that is four times the size of all other provinces combined. Still, this ideological government is charging ahead with increases to the carbon tax that are only making things worse. Is this what the Premier meant when she said that the carbon tax would buy social licence?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. What our government meant when we said that we were going to stand up for Albertans and have their backs was that we were going to focus on building our economy and supporting Albertans as we come through this recovery. What's going on now is that we have the third consecutive month where new jobs have been created, and in the last nine out of 10 months we've seen jobs created. Manufacturing is up. Exports are up. Car sales are up. Housing prices are up. That's because we have Albertans' backs. We're not pretending that problems don't exist, and we are not going after cuts as a means . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Cooper: Albertans are beyond tired of hearing from this government trying to take credit for pipeline approvals that had nothing to do with their terrible climate leadership plan. Albertans aren't buying it. What this government should do is take some responsibility for a damaging tax that has done nothing to gain social licence and get new pipelines built. Can the Premier tell Albertans why she insists on keeping this carbon tax, that has done nothing but drive investment and people from our province?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. In fact, since the minister of environment and I first announced our climate leadership plan, here's what has happened. We've got not one but two pipelines approved by the people who have the authority to approve them. This year our province will lead the country in growth. This year our province will lead the country in investment. This year our province will lead the country in manufacturing growth. These are the kinds of things that happen when you invest in your province rather than cutting it down and slashing and burning to help your . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Surgery Wait Times

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, the Wildrose has repeatedly called for solutions to address unreasonably long wait times. Sadly, not only is Alberta behind other provinces despite our big spending; some Albertans are even further behind, depending on where they live. For example, the average wait time for a knee replacement in south zone is 60 weeks, yet the wait time for the same surgery in Calgary zone is 36 weeks. That's almost a six-month difference. To the Minister of Health: why are there such major discrepancies for wait times in regions and centres?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Health to answer this question. Let me be clear that if you are an urgent patient, you will get urgent care. There have been some good improvements on wait times for things like hip fracture repair, radiation therapy, and our 17 stroke treatment centres are now among the fastest in the world. But we recognize that there is more to do, and as our population grows and ages, we're seeing a significant increase in demand for health procedures, and that's why we're working with physicians to increase efficiencies and capacity while we're reducing inappropriate testing. I'll be pleased to address more comments.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, we already spend more per capita than both Saskatchewan and B.C. on health care, yet we are not seeing better results. You can only throw so much money at a problem before you run out of money. We can speculate as to why. Is it the number of operating rooms, is it perhaps the recovering surgery bed availability, is it staffing levels of front-line workers, or is it just simply bureaucratic red tape? To the Minister of Health: do you know why Albertans aren't receiving equal and effective health care?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, you know, we've seen some significant improvements in wait times. We have a 25 per cent decrease in wait times for neurosurgery. We've seen a 20 per cent wait time decrease in general surgery, 21 per cent decrease in internal medicine, and a 14 per cent wait time decrease for specialists focusing on ears, necks, and throats. The member opposite is obviously very concerned about how much money we're spending on health care because he wants to cut \$2 billion out of the budget and make sure that every patient has to wait forever to get health care in this province.

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education doesn't know health care.

Excessively long wait times compound an already bad situation, resulting in increased costs and strains on our health care system. In this last budget we learned that the Health Quality Council of Alberta received an increase of almost 10 per cent and that they have capacity. Under the previous government they were tasked with measuring ER wait times and providing real-time reports on the website. Under this government they have been tasked with creating a report on the separation of lab services. To the Premier: will you give direction to the Health Quality Council of Alberta to conduct a study on surgical wait times so that we can understand why?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Of course, the Minister of Advanced Education on behalf of the Minister of Health has already outlined what the members opposite don't want to acknowledge, which is that we've actually made improvements on wait times on a number of different levels and that, in fact, we are going to continue to do that work. What we're not going to do is lay off nurses, we're not going to privatize health care, and we're not going to do the kinds of things that the members opposite have said publicly that they want to do in order to finance their tax breaks for the wealthiest Albertans. That is not what we will do because we care about growing the health of Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Marijuana Legalization in Canada

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With the recent announcements made by the federal government to legalize marijuana, it appears that the bulk of the decisions will be downloaded to the provincial government. With a deadline of a little over a year away, many things will have to be decided, including distribution and point-of-sale law. When it comes to the sale of liquor, Alberta is leading in providing free-market choice through the regulator AGLC. To the minister: will your government implement a free-market style system for the distribution and sale of marijuana?

2:00

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Of course, this is an issue that is of great interest to all Canadians and all Albertans. Before we make any final decisions, we are absolutely going to be going out to speak to Albertans, to consult with them because we feel that it is absolutely critical for the voices of those Albertans to be heard in the policy.

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, the federal government has decided to legalize marijuana and has provided no oversight to provincial governments on the implementation. Strict guidelines must be in place to protect our youth and ensure that they do not have access to these drugs. Another area that Albertans need answers on is around the age of consumption. The minister has promised just now to consult with Albertans, but we haven't heard anything about this plan. To the minister: where is this review; when is it happening?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We've been quite clear that we think it's absolutely important to hear from Albertans on this issue. We'll be going out to consult on a number of issues to ensure that those views are taken into account not only in areas of provincial jurisdiction but potentially in areas of federal jurisdiction as well. It is certainly an aggressive time frame, but at the end of the day, it is the safety of Albertans that is at stake. So I think it's really important that we go out and talk to them about those decisions.

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, all too often Albertans lose loved ones in avoidable workplace accidents. There are fatal consequences of on-the-job drug use, which is why Alberta's construction industry has implemented strict drug-testing policies. However, employers are concerned that they may not be able to detect levels of marijuana impairment. The government needs to consider restrictions on marijuana use in high-impact workplaces. Will the legalization of marijuana make it impossible for employers to enforce drug policies?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is absolutely the case that we will be able to impose those sorts of safety restrictions. Alcohol is currently legal. It is nonetheless permissible to impose restrictions on the use of alcohol while one is at work. We will be working very closely with employer groups and with unions to make sure that we are doing those rules in a way that's reasonable for all Albertans. We have no intention of bogarting this decision. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Members. Thank you.
The hon. leader of the third party.

Teachers' Working Time

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, the Premier and her Education minister have stood in this House and lauded the new ATA deal as something almost revolutionary in that it buys two years of labour peace at a zero wage increase. The revolution is that they've given away management rights to the union by eliminating how teachers

allocate their time and created a \$75 million fund to be administered by the union. To the Premier. This is a very simple question: who is in charge of education in Alberta today, you and your government or your union pals?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question because it is a tremendous opportunity for me to talk about the \$75 million investment that our government ran on in the last election about investing into our classrooms to improve the quality of classroom experience for kids. At the end of the day, that's where our money should be going. It should be going into the classrooms to ensure a better learning experience. We ran on that in the election, and I'm very pleased that that \$75 million will be going into classrooms to provide even better educational supports to our kids. We all care about getting exactly the best outcomes for our kids.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. The Premier herself should be directing that money to the classroom.

Madam Speaker, this agreement will handcuff all boards but mostly rural boards. The cap on instructional hours will take away flexibility from rural boards. Teachers, who will not want to run afoul, will be forced to refuse duties like supervision, administrative duties assigned outside of instructional time, not to mention possibly shortening the school year, with impacts to high school programs like RAP. Again to the Premier: in your haste to shore up your union base, why did you bargain away these basic rights, that will drive up the cost of education and throw rural Alberta under the bus?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think it's important for the member opposite to understand that the cap on instructional hours was agreed to after thorough consideration was given to how many boards have teachers that actually ever come close to that cap or exceed it. In fact, the number is infinitesimal, so it should have no impact on the quality of education and the time dedicated to education by our hard-working teachers. What will however have an impact is \$75 million going to support our classrooms.

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, rural boards have already complained that they'll have to lay off teachers because of this. The narrow-sighted rush to a deal has put in jeopardy the great work done by parents and teachers and school boards across this province, and they've tried to find a balance of delivery between quality education in a fiscally challenging environment. Unlike this government, they know there is a finite source of funding. This bungled agreement, if ratified, will require a complete revamp of the funding framework. To the Premier: will you stop the madness, send your Education minister back to do the job properly, and find an agreement that's actually good for Alberta kids?

Ms Notley: Well, once again, Madam Speaker, I'm very pleased that teachers in Alberta have understood that the province of Alberta is under fiscal restraints and so have accepted a deal with zero per cent increases, and I think that sets a very good example. On the flip side, I'm very proud that our government is putting more money into our classrooms because, in fact, we do have kids in our classrooms – special-needs kids, ESL, or English language learning

children – that need extra supports. We've heard from rural school boards and urban school boards that they need more support to be able to deal with those kids and give them the education they deserve, and I'm proud our government is delivering that.

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

Logging in Kananaskis Country

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Kananaskis Country includes vital headwaters, prime outdoor recreation for Calgarians, an attraction for tourists from all over the world. That's why a plan for large-scale clear-cut logging in the Highwood region is very concerning to residents from Black Diamond, Turner Valley, and High River. The allocation of trees was supposed to be over a five-year period, yet they're planning to take it all this year, before the NDP government can amend logging plans or put in additional conservation measures. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: are you aware this is happening, and what are you doing about it?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government remains committed to protecting and improving the things that make a difference in Albertans' lives. That includes protection of land and water. We have good partnerships with our lumber industry right across the province to ensure that sustainable practices are maintained across the province and continue to be so. The partnership is working well. We'll continue working with those lumbering partners in the province, including in the area that the member is talking about, to ensure that those sustainable practices are maintained.

Dr. Swann: Madam Speaker, this clear-cut is part of the quota operated by Balcaen Consolidated Contracting, a company from B.C., and the timber will be processed in B.C. This means there are very few jobs for Albertans in this plan to clear-cut a significant part of Kananaskis Country. To make matters worse, it will reduce tourism and recreational economic opportunities, having a negative impact on livelihoods that are based on the region's intact forest. What is the minister doing to protect jobs and support the economic diversification this provides to Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.
2:10

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. Up to 70 communities in the province and over 19,000 workers are in the lumber industry, so it's a very important industry. We continue to support that industry both nationally and internationally. We're continually monitoring the harvest operation, whoever is doing that harvest operation, to ensure that sustainable practices are maintained and to meet those standards. Governments, communities, and industries must continue to work together to maintain those standards and ensure the sustainable management of Alberta's important forestry resources.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Madam Speaker, the creeks in the forested slopes feeding the upper Highwood River also contain pure strain cutthroat trout, an endangered species in Alberta, and this activity threatens their further recovery. High River also depends on the forest for flood mitigation. Nonetheless, this operation is slated to start in

August even as many concerned citizens are speaking up to protect the local economy, the watershed, and the wildlife. Again to the minister: will you put this logging on hold and order a proper impact assessment before proceeding with this plan?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. All harvesting operations are done in accordance with operating ground rules in the area. Companies have to work with the department to ensure that their harvesting plans meet those standards. The department then periodically goes out, making sure those standards are maintained. I have confidence that those are maintained. For example, the logging companies must maintain a tree buffer zone around creeks, et cetera, to ensure that we do protect all species, endangered or otherwise, in those harvested areas.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Just a reminder that there will be no preambles, please.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

AISH and PDD Programs

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Both the PDD and AISH systems have been around for a long time and continue to face enormous challenges given the complexity of the system and the difficult economic reality and depth of need. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: what is this government doing to modernize and integrate both of these systems?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the question. PDD and AISH are more than government programs; they are a comprehensive set of supports. We have increased funding to both of the programs. We have stopped restrictive PDD safety standards and the SIS, supports intensity scale, and we have released a comprehensive plan, the AISH action plan, to overhaul the system. We will continue to work with the community to make sure we get it right.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Alberta's population is growing and the demand for supports is also growing, to the same minister: what steps are being taken to ensure the PDD program manages the growing list of people waiting for services?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member. When it comes to making life better for Albertans with disabilities, we know that PDD service providers are facing pressure due to growing demand for PDD services. That is why we increased funding to PDD and are prioritizing access to PDD funding services for those who have health and safety risks to ensure that their needs are quickly assessed, as opposed to cutting and burning these services and cutting operational dollars from these programs.

The Acting Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: I know who cut it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very thankful that our government understands the importance of addressing recommendations about the AISH program that have been repeated for many years. To the minister: what progress have you made with the AISH action plan?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In my previous answer I didn't mention who will cut it because the member knows that very well.

Just to the question, at this point we have made improvements to the application process and how we collect the information about the program. We are making progress by developing a more accessible and streamlined application process, improving staff training, and finding better ways to monitor and report progress on the program. All these things are set out in our AISH plan, and we will continue to monitor the progress of this plan.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Job Creation

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker, the NDP government likes to paint a rosy picture of the Alberta economy and jobs, but according to Stats Canada almost net 11,000 people have left Alberta for other parts of Canada since October 2015. That is the equivalent of the towns of Hinton or Morinville or Strathmore packing up and leaving. To the Premier: how can you say that your programs to create jobs are working if more people are leaving Alberta for other provinces than coming in?

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I can talk about the jobs that are growing in this province because it is happening. The Alberta investment tax credit is bringing investment to this province and capital investment tax credits are bringing capital to this province from all over the place. AIMCo is investing in this province, which is creating more jobs. Jobs are coming back. Investment is happening because of this government. They would cut all of that. They've done it before. We're not better off with that side.

Mr. Panda: Given that the minister didn't have a clue about how many jobs were created by all the programs like AITC and CITC and given that Stats Canada also shows that the number of people drawing EI in Alberta is still almost double and that when the benefits run out, people give up and drop off EI and unemployment stats even though still unemployed, is the minister of social services prepared for the onslaught of people demanding income supports once their benefits and personal savings run out?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. During these tough economic times job creation is a priority for our government, and we are investing in that area. At the same time, we have invested in the programs that provide support to Albertans who are looking for those supports. They would have cut \$2.6 billion. That means more than half of the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Panda: Madam Speaker, in order to weather the downturn, some engineering firms in Alberta have turned to work sharing overseas to get jobs done competitively. Given that much of this work sharing is being done by offshore offices in low-cost places like India and South Korea and given that hard-working Albertans are sick and tired of hearing talking points from all these ministers, what is the NDP government doing to get unemployed Albertans back to work, and after two years where are the measurable results?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to talk about an announcement we made this morning about jobs that will be created in the next three years to recover orphan wells. The government today announced \$235 million in a loan that'll be repaid by industry over 10 years. That's 1,650 jobs. Many of those are engineering jobs. I talked to an engineer this morning who was excited about this plan. It's going to rehabilitate one-third of the existing orphan wells we have.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Serenity and the Child Intervention System

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When it became public that children continue to reside in the home where Serenity had lived, the Premier was questioned directly about how this was allowed to happen. The Premier responded: "The matter actually went before the courts. Indeed, in that case the judge indicated that what should happen is that monitoring should continue." To the Minister of Children's Services. Please confirm for Serenity's family and for all Albertans: did your department seek to remove the other children from the home where Serenity had lived, or did you choose not to?

2:20

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, the safety and well-being of all vulnerable children in this province are our core responsibilities. Absolutely, we looked at the best interests of the child. The courts looked at the best interests of the child and decided that monitoring was the best way to proceed. We continue to monitor the safety and well-being of those children. Absolutely, I'm proud of the work that's been done to support Alberta's children, to protect their safety.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Rodney: The non answer makes the answer clear.

Now, given that just yesterday Serenity's family was present in this gallery here in this Assembly hoping for answers, hoping they could be reassured that what happened to Serenity would never happen again to any child in Alberta and given that they were wholly disappointed with the answers they received and stated unequivocally their demand for a public inquiry into Serenity's death, again to the minister: will you listen to Serenity's family? Will you launch a public inquiry into her death, or will you choose not to?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Albertans and Serenity's family are right to want to know that we are doing everything we can to improve the way that we support vulnerable children, but what the member is asking me to do would interfere with an ongoing criminal investigation, and that is not something I will do.

Every Albertan wants justice for Serenity, and I will not do anything to jeopardize that. The member knows it would be completely inappropriate to hold any kind of inquiry when a criminal investigation into this case is ongoing. I want justice for Serenity. Everyone in this House, every Albertan wants the same, and we will do everything to make sure that happens.

Mr. Rodney: If that's true, I'm sure she'll agree to this.

Given that bringing forward Serenity's law as the next bill to be discussed in this Legislature would save the lives of vulnerable children across Alberta and given that Serenity's family is very supportive of this bill and articulated that fact to the Minister of Children's Services after the minister was pressured into meeting with them yesterday afternoon, Minister, will you bring forward and support Serenity's law during this spring session of this Legislature, or will you choose not to?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to say that when we learned about the tragic loss of Serenity and the heartbreak that her mother was going through, we reached out to Serenity's mom, just as we reached out to the family yesterday. Certainly, the work that the panel is doing to create good work for protecting children is incredibly important, and certainly they can consider Serenity's law. We need to do consultation with parties such as the police, who would be highly impacted by that. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of the panel's consideration of that so that we can continue to improve the child intervention system. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members, please.

Schoolchildren's Transportation

Mrs. Aheer: Changes to transportation costs and busing routes as a result of Bill 1 are causing some very real concerns for Albertans. For example, a group of young children in Calgary will have to walk to a transit station, take the bus, walk to a train, take the train, walk to another bus, and then, finally, get out and walk to school, which will take over an hour each way and is completely unsafe and an unreal expectation for young children. How will the minister work with families to address the unintended consequences of Bill 1?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, as we work through Bill 1, which is An Act to Reduce School Fees, we're working closely with school boards to make sure we're getting the money into families' pockets that they deserve. We're taking the instructional supply and materials fees and some bus fees as well. The Calgary board of education is working through other issues around their routes and so forth, and we're happy to work closely with them to ensure that we have good service for everyone in Calgary.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, let's talk about Rocky View schools, then. Given that Rocky View schools is one of the fastest growing school districts in the province, with 50 schools and 21,000 students, and given that some families will see an increase in transportation costs by as much as 47 per cent downloaded onto them next school year and given that reduced school fees will be undermined by the increasing costs for transportation and given that new busing routes will include unsafe conditions, crossing major

highways, and unacceptable long walks on country roads, how is this making life better for Albertans?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Again, we're working very closely with Rocky View schools. You know, what is important to note, because we had the bill here not long ago, is that it's An Act to Reduce School Fees, but it's also an act to monitor to make sure that school fees are not going up in an inordinate way. So the Rocky View school board must submit those fees to . . . [interjections] Excuse me. You know, if this was my classroom, someone would get a detention right now for interrupting while we're trying to put important information forward for parents to hear.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, after detention – he's talking about detention here.

Given that all of us in good faith voted for Bill 1 and given now that school boards are scrambling to accommodate the needs of families as they implement Bill 1 and given that one unintended consequence will be that families are now going to drive their children instead of using school buses and since, I would think, that contradicts the government's supposed commitment around sound environmental stewardship and punishes parents through increased taxes on fuel at a time when thousands of Albertans are unemployed, again, how is this making life better for Albertans?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's very important to remember that we are building on An Act to Reduce School Fees. We're going to be putting many millions of dollars, for example, into Rocky View schools. They'll see more than \$3.6 million going into the pockets of families. For so long the school fee situation was way out of control. The former government just let it go wild, and we are bringing it in. The school boards cannot increase their fees by 40-some per cent because it has to come by my desk first to see that they're not increasing other fees when we're reducing in other places. Rocky View is doing a good job to talk to us.

Seniors' Housing Construction in Bassano

Mr. Fildebrandt: For years volunteers at the Newell Foundation have been working towards a vision of seniors' care in the Brooks region that would see the Bassano hospital integrated with an assisted living complex. We would leverage private-sector resources to ensure that seniors living there can get the care they need. It's an innovative model for seniors' care that could serve as an example for rural communities across Alberta. The only thing that is needed now is for the Minister of Health to sign off on the integration with the Bassano hospital. Last week she said no without explanation. Why?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm quite delighted to hear that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks actually made the trip to Bassano from his home in Calgary.

On the issue of the ASLI grants and the seniors' lodge, of course, we're pleased that our government has pledged \$3.4 million for the ASLI grants and \$9.6 million for the seniors' lodge. We continue to provide predictable and sustainable funding for health care all

across the province so that patients in Alberta can get the right care at the right place at the right time.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The disdain of the minister for the people of Bassano and Strathmore-Brooks is incredible.

Given, Madam Speaker, that Infrastructure Alberta did a cost analysis of the different options available to the Bassano hospital and they found that integration with the proposed seniors' facility was the most cost-effective option – it's good value for money, and seniors in the region have been depending on the project going forward for years – and given that this is a classic case of a government unable to smartly prioritize spending, instead of spending \$21 million on free light bulbs and \$9 million on carbon tax propaganda ads, why doesn't the minister think that those are better uses of . . .

2:30

The Acting Speaker: I'm trying to give you some cues, Member. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm quite proud of our government's investments of \$3.4 million into the ASLI grant for the Newell Foundation and a \$9.6 million seniors' lodge grant for the new seniors' lodge in Bassano. If the member opposite is so concerned about health care for the people of Bassano, then he shouldn't be running on a platform of cutting \$2 billion from the budget and \$9 billion from capital, that would probably close down the existing hospital in Bassano.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Minister Magoo doesn't even know what the Bassano project is.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Madam Speaker, that the Newell Foundation volunteers have been working on this project for years, it's critical for seniors in my constituency, and it's the most cost-effective option by the government's own studies. In her rejection letter the Minister of Health refused to give any explanation for her decision. Given that she has refused to meet with the chairman of the Newell Foundation, who is right here today, will she give a clear answer as to why she will not sign off on the integration of the hospital, and will she commit to meet with the chairman of the Newell Foundation, who is here right now?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, both Associate Minister Payne and the Health minister have met with the Newell Foundation over the last year. . . .

Some Hon. Members: Names.

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry. The Associate Minister of Health – I beg your forgiveness, Madam Speaker – and the Minister of Health have met with the Newell Foundation over the last year. We're committed to working with them as we roll out the ASLI grant and the support for the new seniors' lodge. Of course, we're proud of our investments in health care not only in Bassano but for patients all across the province.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As B.C.'s election results remain murky, what is clear is that Alberta may end up the loser no matter the outcome. With the Green Party potentially

holding the balance of power, Doctor Weaver has reaffirmed the Greens' election campaign promise to oppose Trans Mountain, stating that he and his members believe it is their responsibility to stop the project. To the Minister of Energy: your public confidence is admirable, but can you confidently say today that the Trans Mountain pipeline is any closer to being built than the Northern Gateway ever was?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, we continue to do the work we've done, and so does Kinder Morgan with Trans Mountain. As we speak, they are in B.C. talking. We continue with our relationships, as we've done. These relationships and this adult way of dealing with pipelines has gotten us not just one but two approvals. It's also been our climate leadership plan that got us those approvals as well, and we're going to continue that good work.

Mr. Gotfried: So the answer is no.

Madam Speaker, given that the Trans Mountain pipeline was approved after a rigorous assessment by the National Energy Board and given that B.C. had negotiated \$1.5 billion with their environmental protection and services with the federal government and a 20-year revenue-sharing agreement worth \$1 billion with Kinder Morgan and given that these factors coupled with carbon taxes in both B.C. and Alberta have resulted in absolutely zero compromise from those who oppose pipelines, again to the minister: will you admit today that your attempts to obtain social licence have been an abysmal failure?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I will admit is that our plan is working. We got permission for two pipelines. We'll continue that work until shovels are in the ground. None of that has changed. We've formed good relationships with B.C. and across Canada. The only ones who don't seem to want these pipelines are across the way. These pipelines are not just good for Alberta. They're good for Canada, for Saskatchewan pipeline-makers, for our workers in Alberta. I don't know why you oppose it. On this side of the House we're standing up for those pipelines.

The Acting Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The current flow measurement is zero.

Given that throughout the B.C. elections Albertans got to see their favourite ecoradical stand with a leader and a party that are wholly opposed to Alberta's best interests and given that the minister of environment seemed to indicate during question period last week that the composition of the oil sands advisory group would be changing, to the Minister of Energy: as we have called for repeatedly, will Tzeponah Berman be removed from the oil sands advisory group by the time we return for the fall session, thereby making life better for Albertans?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, what makes life better for Albertans is getting those pipelines approved and getting shovels in the ground as soon as possible. The other thing that makes life better is working with oil sands companies in order to invest in innovation, which is the second phase of the work that will be undertaken by the oil sands advisory group. We're working

in consultation with industry and with community groups and with First Nations in a respectful way in the oil sands region to ensure that we are moving forward with developing our economy and our resources in a way that's responsible for future generations.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Invasive Mussel Species

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The waterways of the northwest region are the only ones in North America still free of invasive zebra and quagga mussels. If these invasive species got into Alberta's waterways, they could destroy irrigation infrastructure and cause up to \$75 million of damage annually. Given that last November these mussels were detected just south of the border in Montana, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: what measures are you taking to ensure Alberta's waterways are protected?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. What we have done this year is that we've expanded our number of watercraft inspectors. We have inspection stations along all of Alberta's major highways. We also have 24-hour inspections happening in addition to our K-9 sniffer dog units, which we also have moving again this year. We are leaders recognized in western Canada and throughout the western United States on this matter of ensuring that zebra and quagga mussels stay out of our waterways.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that recreational boats are the main vector for transporting these invasive mussels and given that boating season is upon us, what do you recommend Alberta boaters do to help prevent the spread of these mussels? [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, while the opposition laughs at this, it's actually a very serious matter. If we get aquatic invasive species in our waterways, it's about a \$75 million cost to our irrigation districts and our farmers. That's really important to the government on this side of the House. That's why we have new legislation that it's mandatory to stop at watercraft inspection stations. It's not just motorized boats; it's also if you are carrying a canoe or a kayak.

The Acting Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you. To the same minister: given the massive impact that these mussels can have, what work is being done to ensure that Alberta could respond quickly in the event that invasive mussels are detected?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, it's well established that our programs have established leadership throughout western Canada. Indeed, when Montana had a detection of invasive mussels, we were there with them on the ground in response. That's the kind of collaboration that we've undertaken as a program, and that's why we're recognized as leaders. What wouldn't help is firing all of those watercraft inspectors, conservation officers, fish

and wildlife officers, commercial vehicle inspectors, all of the front-line workers that deliver this program, through massive and drastic cuts to the Environment budget, which, of course, the Wildrose is proposing.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

2:40 Queen Elizabeth II Highway Interchange at Balzac

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For two years I have been advocating for this government to fix the Balzac interchange. I'm extremely frustrated that the government will not take action to alleviate the safety concerns and traffic congestion. Both the MLA for Chestermere-Rocky View and myself have submitted this as a priority for the last two years on the capital submissions list. This is currently Rocky View county's number one priority as well. When will the minister listen to the community and fix this problem?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, this government is committed to the transportation needs of all Albertans. I have met extensively with municipalities, both urban and rural, during my tenure as Minister of Transportation and of Infrastructure, and we have been moving ahead with a significant increase in the capital plan for Transportation. We've had announcements of interchanges, of improvements to our highway system as well as funding for transit.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Alberta Transportation has cut the budget to build interchanges and given that Alberta Transportation placed this on the three-year priority list but under this government it's since been removed and given that this poses a serious safety risk to constituents in Airdrie, Chestermere, and the surrounding area in Calgary, to the minister: how did this fall off the priority list?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have removed some projects on the 2016 unfunded list. Others have remained unfunded, and there are new projects in the capital plan that were not on the unfunded list in 2016. Our historic \$29.5 billion capital plan means that these funds have been flowing to projects that make life better across Alberta, and we are planning to increase our spending on Transportation.

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, dollars ain't flowing in the Balzac area.

Given that Alberta Transportation knew the overpass could not handle existing or future traffic and given that the minister's department has completed a review – the study is done; the only thing missing is action from this government – to the minister: does someone have to die before you fix this interchange?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Obviously, with this Wildrose opposition if it bleeds, it leads. Quite frankly, safety is our top priority, and it's going to be maintained as our top priority. We look at every interchange in this province and

every request that we get through the lens of safety, and that's because we want to make life safer for everyday Albertans.

Notices of Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Energy I would like to give oral notice of a bill for the Order Paper, this being Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, another part of our plan to make life more affordable for Albertans.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite five copies of a letter that I submitted to the *Jewish Free Press* about how honoured I was to participate in a Yom ha-Shoah service in my riding, standing alongside the Jewish community to memorialize the 6 million Jews who were targeted and killed in the Holocaust.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of Dr. Swann, hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, map image indicating 2016-2021 timber harvest quota for Balcaen Consolidated Contracting Ltd.; second, report updated, entitled Bill 205: Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, Proposed Amendments and Review of Limitations, prepared by Inclusion Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: I believe there's a . . .

Mr. Hanson: Madam Speaker, I'm sorry, but they missed the tablings.

The Acting Speaker: You'll have to do it next week. You'll have to table them on Tuesday.

Mr. Mason: I request unanimous consent from the House to revert to tablings, Madam Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Acting Speaker: We'll wait till next week. [interjections] Members. Members.

My understanding is that there is a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. During question period today the Member for Strathmore-Brooks referred to the Minister of Advanced Education as Minister Magoo. Of course, Mr. Magoo was a cartoon character, a bumbling and nearly blind character. As such, I would suggest that 23(j), a member who "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," has been breached. Moreover, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 613 it says, "Members do not refer to one another by their names but rather by title, position or constituency name in order to guard against the tendency to personalize debate. A Minister is referred to by the portfolio he or she holds."

Clearly, Madam Speaker, the hon. member used a personalized and insulting reference to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education. It's unacceptable. It's clearly in violation of the rules and the traditions of the House. I would ask that you rule that there's a valid point of order and ask the hon. member to appear in this Chamber personally to stand up and apologize to the House and to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

The Acting Speaker: The deputy Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think the leader is getting a little desperate to find points of order, especially when it comes to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. A couple of weeks back he actually called a point of order on the Member for Strathmore-Brooks for using an acronym, where he referred to the climate leadership plan as "the CLAP." You know, that's how simple it was. Then he quickly followed up. If you missed it, it was CLP. The argument was used . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members.

Hon. member, if you could just speak to this point of order, please.

Mr. Hanson: I'm getting to it. Thank you very much. It's relevant, believe me.

The argument he used against that was that there was no "A" in climate leadership plan. He then called a point of order on the point of order. [interjections] Okay. I'll get right to it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

2:50

Mr. Hanson: On this point of order for calling the Advanced Education minister Minister Magoo, I find it rich, coming from a government that uses name-calling as its first line of defence in question period, that they would be offended by a reference to a famous cartoon character like Mr. Magoo. That being said, if the Advanced Education minister found offence, on behalf of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks I will withdraw and apologize.

The Acting Speaker: All right, hon. members. I do have a copy of the Blues. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks did refer to the minister as Minister Magoo. In saying that, this was clearly a comment that was meant to be disrespectful. The language's intent was to create disorder in the House, so I do find this a point of order, and he should withdraw the comment and apologize.

I would also like to just caution all members in the House, though, that the exchange between the minister and the hon. member was also creating disorder, so if we could just remember the kind of comments that we make when we're responding to questions, too. Thank you.

Hon. member, could you please apologize to the House on behalf of the member?

Mr. Hanson: I just actually did. I said . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members.

The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do believe I ended my comments with: on behalf of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks I withdraw and apologize.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 15
Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

As I mentioned during the introduction of this legislation, Alberta's income and commodity tax statutes are typically amended every year. This is necessary to ensure that government policy decisions are implemented and our tax legislation continues to be aligned with federal tax legislation.

Allow me to briefly present the proposed changes being brought forward this year, starting with the most significant one. Madam Speaker, when I introduced this bill, I mentioned that we've heard from Albertans whose carbon levy rebates were affected by the death of a family member. We are taking measures to ensure that their rebates do not have to be returned. Repayments will be issued later this year for households that have already returned those amounts. Households that have not yet repaid will not be required to do so.

The same will apply to benefits received under the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit going back to January 1 of this year. We heard and listened to Albertans and are making some changes and extending those changes to the Alberta child benefit and the family employment tax credit programs. We're taking action to protect these benefits and make this right for those families.

In addition to forgiving amounts owing to these situations, we are also proposing an amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act that will address the issue with the carbon levy rebates program so that it does not recur in the future. As most of you know, the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, administers a carbon levy rebate program on behalf of this province. Currently the program has a \$100 minimum payment rule in place. This means that total annual rebate entitlements of \$100 are paid in a single amount, a single allowable payment at the beginning of the benefit year. Essentially, in these cases we are prepaying the rebate in advance for the entire year.

However, the eligibility for the rebate may be affected later due to changes in residency or a death in the family, so if a household is no longer eligible for the prepaid rebate they received, CRA will seek repayment of any excess amount. We heard from a number of Albertans who received a reassessment notice after the death of a family member. This was an unintended consequence of the \$100 minimum payment rule that affected a very small number of the overall 1.2 million payments that were issued. But we recognized that families coping with the death of a loved one should not face the indignity of a notice requesting that they pay back a benefit that was meant to make their lives better.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

What we are proposing is an amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act that will allow for rebate entitlements to be delivered in quarterly payments as low as \$25. This will prevent the prepayment of benefits and eliminate the need to recover those payments when a family member dies. I want to point out that the minimum annual rebate entitlement still continues to be \$100 per year, so rebates for less than that amount over the year will still not

be paid. We are just changing the legislation to allow for quarterly payments as low as \$25.

Mr. Speaker, we're also continuing to work with the CRA to ensure recovery notices use language that is more sensitive to grieving families, and we expect to see meaningful changes on that front by next year.

As I mentioned, this is the most significant amendment being brought forward in this bill, but there are additional changes that I'll briefly outline now, starting with other amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

One change relates to the government's decision to extend the political contributions tax credit to leadership campaigns and nomination races. As you know, our government has made important changes to provincial election financing to get big money out of politics, including banning corporate and union contributions and putting a cap on individual donations. These measures will remain in place. The amendment we've brought forward here implements a broader political contribution tax credit, as announced in Budget 2017. The aim with this change is to encourage provincial participation in the political process while fostering a healthy and competitive political environment.

Mr. Speaker, other technical amendments to this act are also needed to ensure that Alberta's policies with regard to provincial dividend tax credits along with our tuition and education tax credits are not affected by recent changes to federal legislation.

I'll move on now to changes related to the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. The Canadian Parliament recently passed legislation last year that amended the federal Income Tax Act. Federal changes to the Income Tax Act generally result in technical changes to our legislation to ensure that there is alignment.

For instance, our Corporate Tax Act needs to be amended to parallel the 2016 federal changes that aim to reduce misuse of the preferential 2 per cent small-business tax rate. These amendments will protect provincial revenue and the integrity of our tax system by preventing a few small businesses from using certain structures to multiply their access to the small-business tax rate. The intent of the existing legislation is for the preferential rate to only apply to a small business's first \$500,000 of income. These amendments are consistent with the intent and ensure that small businesses do not take advantage of a loophole.

Although Alberta administers its own corporate tax system, we rely on the federal government for the calculations and verifications of income that is eligible for the small-business rate. As a result, Alberta must adopt these federal changes to ensure the province can continue to rely on the federal calculations of income eligibility for the small-business tax rate. It was an automatic change for all other provinces, except for Alberta and Quebec, as we administer our own corporate tax system, so it makes sense to ensure that our corporate tax system stays aligned with theirs.

3:00

In addition, the act will also be amended to require tax preparers who fill out 10 or more provincial tax returns to file those returns electronically. It will also implement a penalty if they fail to comply with this requirement. A separate penalty will be implemented for corporations that fail to file tax returns electronically if required to do so. These penalty provisions are consistent with federal tax legislation and are necessary to promote compliance with Alberta's tax laws.

Finally, we've included an amendment that will apply to the Tourism Levy Act. It will allow levy collectors, more specifically accommodations operators, to file a waiver to extend the assessment period when an assessment is issued against them. This provides operators additional time to resolve issues if there is a

dispute over the amount of tax owing and also aligns administrative processes among Alberta's tax statutes.

Mr. Speaker, to recap, this bill will address issues with the carbon levy rebate to prevent rebates from being recovered when a family member dies. It will adopt federal changes that will protect tax revenue and ensure consistency between our tax system and the federal tax system. It will help to protect the integrity and fairness of Alberta's tax system and ensure that government policies are implemented.

I'm pleased with the practical changes we've brought forward here, Mr. Speaker, and I have no doubt they will make a meaningful difference for all Albertans. I look forward to the debate on this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister of Finance. I just want to confirm that you're moving second reading of this bill.

Mr. Ceci: I am.

The Acting Speaker: Okay.

The Chair will recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the majority of this bill deals with changes brought about due to changes on the federal side, I'll keep my remarks rather brief. Most of the content of this bill is rather technocratic changes to refer to federal taxation changes brought about by the federal government. These are necessary changes in order to keep government running relatively smoothly. Some loopholes are closed, and some old legislation has been updated to align with the digital age. The major changes revolve around the carbon tax partial rebates, which I'll need some more information on before I can make a more informed decision on that front. I hope the Minister of Finance will be able to provide us with those details before this bill is passed.

First, I want to touch on a few of the changes in the bill. The closure of the small-business loophole, which allowed organizations to avoid paying higher taxes, gets my seal of approval. The more tax-avoidance loopholes that are closed: that is directly related to the amount of sleep I get at night. For those listening at home, there are instances where a group could create a separate, smaller business in order to not pay the larger corporate tax. Instead, their separate, smaller business would pay a small-business tax in an attempt to avoid paying the correct level of corporate tax. The initial intent of this portion of legislation will now be written as it was intended if the bill is passed.

Another change revolves around the fact that the federal government removed two tax credits for university students, the textbook tax credits and the education tax credit referred to in this legislation. Since they no longer exist, references to them are being edited out of our provincial legislation. This change is pretty much just housekeeping.

Another housekeeping aspect was brought about by this Legislature. Donation limits to political parties, nomination races, and leadership races were recently changed. With that change came a change to the fact that Albertans now receive a taxable credit for donating to nomination races and leadership races. This bill edits our legislation to allow those tax credits to be issued. As you saw from our announcement today, there will be many tax credits probably being issued in the near future.

Three pieces of legislation are being edited in order to bring them up to our digital-age standards. The tobacco, tourism, and fuel tax acts have been updated within them to allow individuals to file notice via digital means.

Now, the changes I would like to spend most of the time on are the changes being made around the carbon tax rebates. As was first

pointed out by someone in my constituency, right in Strathmore, this government in their relative ineptitude clawed back the carbon tax rebate from the recently deceased spouse of one of my constituents. This was completely unacceptable and, frankly, disgusting of this government. While I'm glad that this government is finally doing something about this to prevent it from happening again, I'm disappointed that incompetence within the ranks of the government could allow this to happen in the first place. I'm not surprised by this incompetence, but at least it is being rectified now.

I have concerns about this change, though. I believe that clawing back deceased people's money is just not right, but I'm not necessarily sure yet that this is the most correct way to go about making this happen. As it is set out in this legislation, rebate cheques will go out more often instead of in one lump sum. Now, this might be how the NDP have determined to go about avoiding the desire to claw back people's carbon tax money, but I'm interested to know if the cost of administering thousands and thousands of additional cheques outweighs the cost of letting people just keep the extra \$50 or \$100. How many people have had to deal with the CRA and the NDP clawing back their money?

If the minister could provide a figure on how many Albertans are actually affected by this along with how much it will cost to administer the additional issuing of cheques per year, that would allow us to determine which is more cost-effective. Should we be issuing more cheques every year, or should we just allow the spouse of a deceased individual to just keep the carbon tax money, which shouldn't have been collected in the first place?

I'm quite sure Albertans would like to spend a lesser amount of their money on a carbon tax, until we repeal it in 2019, but I have a feeling that the amount that it will cost to administer the cheques could very well be higher than just letting deceased people keep the cheques issued to their spouses. And technically it was their money to begin with since it was their tax dollars that were being mailed back to them.

I'll be supporting this bill at second reading, but for me and my caucus to support this bill at further readings, we will need to see an estimate of the costs for the administration issuing more cheques and the estimated cost of letting people just keep cheques when their spouse passes away. I hope that the Minister of Finance will be able to provide the opposition parties with that information so that we can hopefully come to a consensus on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always seem to stand right after the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. I'm happy that today he actually spoke about things about Alberta and not Saskatchewan or B.C. It's a really welcome change in the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really happy to support Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, that was earlier introduced for second reading by the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance. As he mentioned in his introduction to second reading of this bill, this is something that is done regularly in Alberta because the commodity tax statutes and income tax laws change, and, as was referred to earlier, things happen in Ottawa that necessitate changes in Alberta.

This bill is necessary to ensure government policy decisions are implemented and that our tax legislation continues to be aligned with the federal tax legislation. These are some of the changes that are in this bill. I think the first change that is important is the fact that the government has heard from Albertans where carbon levy rebates were affected by the death of a family member. We all know

how challenging those situations were, and I'm really pleased to be part of a government that is acting quickly to put a remedy to the situation. We are taking measures to ensure that the rebates do not have to be returned if somebody dies in the family. Repayments will be issued later this year for households that may have already returned these amounts, and households that have not yet repaid the amount will not be required to do so.

3:10

The same will apply to benefits received under the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit going back to January 1 of this year. I would really like to thank the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance for ensuring that in situations where somebody is facing a very tough time due to the death of a loved one, they are not faced with letters from CRA or the Alberta government asking for repayment. We have heard and listened to Albertans and are making those changes.

We're also taking action to protect these benefits and make this right for them. In addition to forgiving amounts owing in these situations, we are also proposing an amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act that will address the issues with a carbon levy rebate program so that this does not reoccur in the future. As most of you know, the Canada Revenue Agency, or the CRA, administers the carbon levy rebate program on behalf of the province. Currently the program has a \$100 minimum payment rule in place. This means that the total annual rebate entitlements of \$100 are paid in a single-amount payment at the beginning of the benefit year, as happened this year in January for those who qualified.

Essentially, in these cases we are prepaying the rebate in advance for the entire year. However, eligibility for the rebate may be affected later due to changes in residency or a death in the family. So if a household is no longer eligible for the prepaid rebate they received, CRA will seek repayment of any excess amount.

We've heard from a number of Albertans who received their reassessment notice after the death of a family member. This was an unintended consequence of the \$100 minimum payment rule that affected a very small number of the overall 1.2 million payments that were issued, and I want to emphasize that this was an unintended consequence. We recognize that families coping with the death of a loved one should not face the indignity of a notice requesting that they pay back a benefit that was meant to make their lives better. I think I can speak on behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly that we've all faced helping someone who experienced a death in their family and the number of letters and information that has to be communicated to CRA and various government levels, and just receiving a letter from the CRA asking for repayment added to the grief and the burden.

What we are proposing is an amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Act that will allow for rebate entitlements to be delivered in quarterly payments of as low as \$25. This will prevent the prepayment of benefits and eliminate the need to recover those payments when a family member dies. I want to point out that the minimum annual rebate entitlement still continues to be \$100 per year, so rebates of less than this amount over the year will still not be paid. We are just changing the legislation to allow quarterly payments of as low as \$25.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to work with the CRA to ensure recovery notices use language that is more sensitive to grieving families, and we expect to see meaningful changes on that front by next year. As I mentioned, this is the most significant amendment being brought forward in this bill, but there are some other changes.

Some of the other changes are other amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. I think one change that is probably

important to my colleagues across the way, who have just formed another entity, which I cannot say the name of without laughing, so I will not . . . [interjection] One change relates to the government's decision to extend the political contributions tax credit to leadership campaigns and nomination races. [interjection] I'm sorry if I'm laughing. I just have a really, really hard time with acronyms.

As I mentioned and has been mentioned by the hon. minister, in one of the first bills that the government put forth, there was a decision to extend the political contributions tax credit to leadership campaigns and nomination races. As you know, we made important changes to election financing to get big money out of politics, including banning corporate and union contributions and putting the cap on individual donations.

I just find myself really frustrated by the way that our government has worked so hard to get the corporate contributions out of politics and how we just found out yesterday that the opposition may be contravening these.

These measures will remain in place. The amendment we brought forward here implements a broader political contribution tax credit, as announced in Budget 2017. The aim of this change is to encourage participation in the political process while fostering a healthy and competitive political environment. I want to really emphasize that the purpose of these changes is to encourage participation in the political process while fostering a healthy and competitive political environment, and this applies to all parties in the Legislative Assembly and for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, other technical amendments to this act are also needed to ensure Alberta's policies with regard to provincial dividend tax credits along with our tuition and education tax credits are not affected by recent changes to federal legislation. The Alberta Corporate Tax Act also needed to be amended because of what was passed by the federal government. Changes to the federal Income Tax Act generally result in technical changes to our legislation to ensure there is alignment.

For instance, our Corporate Tax Act needs to be amended to parallel the 2016 federal changes that aimed to reduce misuse of the preferential 2 per cent small-business tax rate. These amendments will protect provincial revenue and the integrity of our tax system by preventing a few small businesses from using certain structures to multiply their access to the small-business rate. The intent of the existing legislation is for the preferential rate to only apply to a small business's first \$500,000 of income. These amendments are consistent with this intent and ensure small businesses do not take advantage of a loophole.

Although Alberta administers its own corporate tax system, we rely on the federal government for the calculation and verification of income that is eligible for the small-business rate. As a result, Alberta must adopt these federal changes to ensure the province can continue to rely on the federal calculation of income eligibility for the small-business rate. Maybe it's really good to remind everyone in the House that this government lowered the small-business rate from 3 per cent to 2 per cent in the last budget. It was an automatic change for all other provinces except for Alberta and Quebec as we administer our own corporate tax system, so it makes sense to ensure our corporate tax systems stay aligned.

In addition, the act will also be amended to require tax preparers who file 10 or more provincial tax returns to file the returns electronically. It will also implement a penalty if they fail to comply with this requirement. A separate penalty will be implemented for corporations that fail to file their tax return electronically if required to do so. These penalty provisions are consistent with federal tax legislation and are necessary to promote compliance with Alberta tax laws.

Mr. Speaker, we will be amending the Tourism Levy Act through Bill 15. It will allow levy collectors – more specifically, accommodation operators – to file a waiver to extend the assessment period when an assessment is issued against them. This provides operators additional time to resolve issues if there is a dispute over the amount of tax owing and also aligns administrative processes among Alberta tax statutes.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, in closing, this bill will do a lot of things. I know a lot of people think that tax bills are really, really boring, but tax bills are really enabling bills to allow the government to do what it set out to do in its budget, and they are some very important bills. This bill will address issues with the carbon levy rebate, to prevent rebates from being recovered when a family member dies. It will adopt federal changes that will protect tax revenue and ensure consistency between our tax system and the federal tax system, and it will help to protect the integrity and fairness of Alberta's tax system and ensure government policies are implemented.

I am pleased with the practical changes that are brought in by this bill. I would like to thank once again the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance for the careful preparation of this bill. I look forward to the debate and for all Members of this Legislative Assembly to support second reading of this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was interesting to watch, that's for sure. I do have a question. You know, it's sort of an ironic situation, more or less. I'm pretty sure that during the carbon tax debate the opposition members raised several questions and amendments that spoke to the unintended consequences of the implementation of the carbon tax, and, sure enough, we're here – what? – one year later dealing with the unintended consequences of the NDP carbon tax here in Alberta. We now have to bring in legislation so that we are no longer taking money back from those that have passed away. This is crazy.

I can't even imagine how many more times this government is going to come back to the House, their tail between their legs, with a piece of legislation and go: "Oops. We've got to fix this stupid, crappy thing we did earlier." I just want to point out that this is actually absolutely ridiculous. Maybe next time do your homework and work through all the unintended consequences of a tax that is very harmful to everyone in Alberta. Most people don't like it, and I'm sure they're going to be really kind of annoyed that this government is wasting time with legislation here in this House to fix their mistakes.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: I think the member opposite is not understanding the quick action that the government took as soon as the government realized that there were some challenges with prepaying the rebate. The minister alerted CRA, and things were set in motion quickly. This bill is to make sure that there are no unforeseen consequences to the payment of the carbon levy rebate, so it's changing the way that the payment will happen. It's going to be in quarterly payments so that nobody is faced with a situation where they've been paid for something and they have to give it back.

Actually, rather than putting the government down, I am really pleased to be part of a government that acted right away when the problem was brought up publicly and worked with the CRA to

rectify the problem. Now, through this bill, the problem will no longer exist because people are being paid in quarterly payments. On top of that, the people have been prepaid, and if they lost someone in their family, they will not have to repay the prepayment of \$100. That will be forgiven by the government. So rather than knocking the government down all the time, please pay some attention to how quickly the government has moved and how sensitive the minister and the Premier have been to this issue.

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to comment on the intended consequences of the carbon levy because I think the members opposite forget that their approach and their continuous resistance to being able to talk to people that have different opinions than them created a polarized conversation that resulted in zero pipelines to tidewater. The fact is that the carbon levy and the ability to actually talk to people that are different than their world view has built a capacity for our government to build social licence and be able to talk to the members opposite.

I think they reflected on the election across our boundaries, Mr. Speaker. I think they need to remember that one of the top issues within that province is actually electoral reform. One of the reasons that that is happening is because the democratic process that we have has been affected by the fact that people haven't been listened to. The members opposite will soon find out that compromises are difficult, because they're about to create and are creating a merger between the two parties, and they can barely agree on who's going to finish the press conference. The fact of the matter is that the member opposite has failed to talk to what has been created by the carbon levy, and it's something incredibly important in our economy, and it's something that this government will not stop fighting for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: With only five seconds left, I'll remind members that 29(2)(a) is for questions or comments relevant to the prior speaker.

The chair will recognize the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to get up and talk about the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. I think this is actually the first time I've gotten up to speak with this particular Mr. Speaker in the chair.

You know, I want to start off with some comments. I mean, this is a very important bill, and it does talk about that we are making some changes as they relate to the implementation of the carbon levy rebate as well as various other tax changes.

I want to start off by talking about this bill through some of the comments that had just come up under the previous 29(2)(a). You know, the opposition Member for Airdrie is correct that they did talk at length about what they perceived to be unintended consequences of the carbon levy, but unfortunately for them the unintended consequences that they were talking about are that they felt that there was going to be some version of economic doom that would come from it, and that is, in fact, not what happened, I will reiterate.

In fact, I believe that the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance actually mentioned in question period just today that housing starts are up, Mr. Speaker, that jobs are up, that rig activity and working rigs are up. I would submit to the hon. Member for Airdrie that it sounds like what they thought would be unintended consequences have not at all come true and that our plan for making life better for Albertans through taking action on climate

change is, in fact, working and that the hon. member's assertion is wrong.

You know, in their plan that they propose – I mean, we're now at the two-year mark of this mandate, and all the opposition has been giving us is anecdotes, if you will. They are purely opposing, and at this point in their mandate I would suggest it would be useful for them to ante up an actual plan so that Albertans can see what they think.

An Hon. Member: Table the napkin.

Mr. Malkinson: They can table the napkin, because so far the only thing that they've presented when we've gone to debate things over and over in this House, whether it's on the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, whether it was on the budget – that's all I hear over and over and over again from the opposition.

The only part I've heard that's a concrete plan from them is that they want to undo everything we've done, and unfortunately for them I think they need to explain to Albertans why they would undo the good that is in this bill. The hon. Minister of Treasury Board and Finance has gone on at length about why he's brought this forward. I think we've heard an excellent summary from my colleague.

You know, we've got to think about this. What do we want to do? Do we want to do good, or do we want to have an opposition that continually just opposes even when it's administrative changes to fix a problem that we identified and that the Premier committed to taking quick action on? I will point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier committed to take quick action on this, and here we are. We are here with the solution to that. I think it speaks to our continuing commitment to do what's best for Albertans, no matter what it is, whether it's providing daycare spaces or whether it's updating our tax statutes in order to make them run more efficiently and to keep them in line with the federal government.

3:30

I think we've already gone on somewhat at length about why these changes needed to be in there. I think I'll take a moment just to quickly mention about what happens with people who move out of Alberta and then receive a rebate. I think a question that most people would reasonably ask, which is, in all honesty, the only question I've actually gotten on this particular bill, is: what would happen in that case? Well, Mr. Speaker, people who leave the province and are no longer paying into Alberta's carbon levy should not be entitled to the rebate.

By switching to this quarterly payment system for the rebate, it will also help address this situation as well as the situation of what happens when a loved one or family member passes away. That's a traumatic time for anyone, and it's important that we do our best to make sure that we are not being petty by going after a couple of dollars from the carbon levy rebate. I don't think that's something that's good policy and that we need to do, and it's not in the interests of making life better for Albertans.

I'd also like to bring the House's attention to one other thing we're doing in here. In particular, as a result of the small-business tax we are closing a bit of a loophole, actually, in the small-business tax system because our government has the backs of small-business owners. Those are small-business owners that are in every single one of our ridings.

I know the hon. member from Fort McMurray, of course, laughs at that because he does want to cut everything we've done. He wants to put the small-business tax back up to its old rate. I'm very curious to see how he's going to explain and justify that to his constituents. Like was mentioned earlier, we've seen no plan from

that hon. member. I think it's high time that the opposition starts anteing up specifics to what they would do differently, especially as they merge into a new party.

We made this change. It was also to mirror changes that happened to the federal tax system to close a loophole that gave some small businesses an unfair advantage. But I'll also point out that it was our government that lowered small-business taxes, Mr. Speaker – our government, an NDP government – because we are there supporting small businesses, because we are always there.

We are making changes to make life better for Albertans. As part of our budgets we're also building new roads and new schools, which support various trades and contractors throughout the province, and that's jobs for other small businesses that happen to be in the infrastructure sector.

We've also had the hon. minister of economic development introduce various tax credits and incentives for investors to invest in Albertan businesses, whether they be in my home riding of Calgary-Currie, whether they be in the Finance minister's riding of Calgary-Fort, or whether they be in Fort McMurray, in the riding of the previous member who was, you know, laughing about these changes earlier.

I think it's important that we talk about these and that we pass this bill because it is one small part of how we're working to make life better for Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much for the debate that's gone on with regard to the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, Mr. Speaker. We on this side, of course, believe very strongly that the carbon levy rebates that are being issued to Albertans at \$410 million in 2017-2018 will make life better for those families. It will assist them in being able to address either costs to their households, to help ameliorate those costs, to improve their households, or lower their emissions.

It will also be something that helps this province, Mr. Speaker. As many have said around this side of the House, the climate leadership plan that has been brought forward is having a positive effect on this province. It is improving the ability of the province to achieve a connection to the west coast through access to tidewater, and that will help our economy so much.

We've been at the behest of one customer. The major competitor to Canadian oil sands is in the United States, and that situation has left us without a great deal of leverage power when it comes to getting world prices. We get a discounted price, and that discounted price directly affects the bottom line of this province. It directly affects the amount of resource revenues that come into this province, and as a result it has challenged this province financially.

We are taking action to change that, Mr. Speaker. The Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, while not directly changing that, does improve the situation that we have discovered and quickly acted on. The quarterly payments to Albertans who are eligible to receive these carbon rebates will make it so that the unfortunate circumstance of CRA asking to recover a portion of those funds from families will not occur going forward. We have taken the view that this is the best way to address this so that we're not in this situation as a government, as Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, though, changes to the small-business taxation loophole that was there are a good thing. I mean, it means that there won't be leakage from inappropriate use of that

rate. We need to appreciate that the federal government moved on that quickly, and that has helped as well.

Just back to the benefit, of course, of the carbon levy and the rebates that are going back to Albertans. You know, Mr. Speaker, that helped us understand that we can do similar improvements with regard to the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit. While we don't see the same number of situations occurring in those benefits to Albertans, which are very, very helpful, again, we have taken action to make sure that the same sort of thing doesn't happen there. Though there were far fewer numbers of circumstances in those other two benefit programs to Albertans, there were still impacts.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues again who have stood up and talked about these important changes. Typically, you know, they're not the kinds of things that would attract a lot of attention. They're more mundane and regularized. But because we have

brought in an important program in terms of the Alberta climate leadership plan, important rebates going out to families, it is worth noting and it is worth bringing forward that we have quickly addressed this. We have worked with our partner in CRA to make sure that they provide more sensitive information to individuals who receive these notices going forward. We are going to make sure that that happens as quickly as possible.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to close debate on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Cortes-Vargas: Seeing the great progress that we've made this afternoon, I would move to adjourn the House and come back on Tuesday at 10 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:40 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, May 18, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division*)

Bill 205 — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn., adjourned on amendment*)

Bill 206 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

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Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 23, 2017

Day 37

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 23, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. members, let us please take a moment to send our thoughts and prayers to all those who were killed and injured by the bombing in Manchester, England. We are thinking of the victims, family, friends, first responders, and so many others who will forever be affected by this intolerable act. Please know that we are here with you.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

The Chair: We are currently debating amendment A1. Are there any further speakers to this amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to propose an amendment, and I have spoken to both the minister and the Member for Calgary-North West about the concerns with the current proposed amendment from the government.

The Chair: Hon. member, can I just clarify? Are you proposing a subamendment to amendment A1?

Dr. Swann: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Swann: My understanding is that unless the government withdraws its amendment, this would not be . . .

The Chair: Just clarifying that it's a subamendment, to get the terminology right.

Dr. Swann: Okay.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Well, I have the appropriate number of copies, Madam Chair. My understanding is that – yeah. Well, I'll propose it as is. It seeks to establish the advocate for persons with disabilities as an officer of the Legislature instead of an advocate within the ministry.

The Chair: Hon. member, if you could give me a second until we have the original here at the table so we can make sure we've got . . .

Dr. Swann: Sure.

The Chair: Hon. member, I've been advised that this is not in a subamendment format. It's an actual amendment, so we have to

deal with amendment A1 first before we can get to your proposed amendment. It's not in order to move it right at the moment. We have to finish up with amendment A1.

Dr. Swann: Could I speak, then, to the amendment and why I think . . .

The Chair: You could speak to amendment A1 if you wish, but you can't move another amendment while we've got A1 on the floor.

Dr. Swann: Well, I guess my argument, then, would be that I would request that the minister withdraw his amendment to allow the debate to happen on this amendment because otherwise there won't be a debate on the independence of the advocate. That would be my argument, Madam Chair. Could I proceed?

The Chair: Go ahead if you want to speak to the amendment, and you can, you know, make your case, as it may be. Absolutely.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. I understand that the establishment of an advocate for persons with disabilities under the ministry is being proposed. I am suggesting that the advocate be independent of the ministry and that the advocate be an independent officer of the Legislature.

The amendment obviously cannot be introduced at this time because there is an amendment on the floor which would preclude the opportunity to have this debate. It raises the whole question of informing the government of amendments when they have the ability to stop that amendment by anticipating the proposal of an amendment.

Let me first say that I fully support the establishment of an advocate for persons with disabilities. It's laudable. It's essential. Unfortunately, in this case it is not going to be as effective or create the accountability that I think we all want in an advocate. Having been an MLA for over a decade, I can tell you that there have always been constituents seeking navigation and system change within the AISH and the PDD systems. Bill 205 proposes the creation of an advocate's office similar to the Health, Seniors, and Mental Health Patient advocates, all of whom report to the minister and whose funding is determined by the minister. In the past this has led to advocates being unable to fulfill their mandates due to lack of resources or impingement on their freedom to express concerns because they are employed by the ministry.

That's why after almost a decade the Child and Youth Advocate became independent, because it was clear that the advocate was not able to say the tough things that the minister didn't want to hear. It took a tremendous amount of leadership and political will from the public and child advocates to get that advocate independent. Indeed, in the 2014-15 annual report of the mental health advocate, it was stated explicitly:

The past year posed challenges to fulfill our . . . mandate in a timely manner . . . largely due to the loss of a position and the subsequent reassignment of duties, along with the Government of Alberta's restraint measures. It had a direct impact on the number of Albertans we served

and the inability to perform formal investigations.

Bill 205 is silent on anything related to an independent advocate because it's not the model the government has opted for. The bill merely states that the government or Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint an advocate and that the minister may make funds available for an advocate and his or her staff.

There's nothing saying that an advocate who is an officer of the Legislature necessarily has to have a larger budget than one who is not, but that tends to be the case. The question, I guess, would be: will a larger budget allocated to an advocate reduce the funding for

that ministry? And, as some have said in the PDD community, would that affect their own income as caregivers of people with disabilities? That seems to be a fear out there. In fact, the reverse would be true. If the advocate was independent, there would be no impact of budgetary decisions in the ministry because the budget for the advocate would be created by the Legislature generally. The fear that has been expressed by front-line workers, that their salaries might be impacted by establishing a budget for the advocate, is unfounded in this context.

In a lot of ways this discounts our advocates, who are only as effective as the government allows within the ministry. The government appears to want the advocate to fulfill a very specific role, mostly assisting and advising AISH and PDD clients, but one that does not include challenging government to improve the management culture and the management system of PDD and AISH. I envision the advocate as having an expanded role similar to that of the Child and Youth Advocate, not necessarily with a big budget but at least starting off with the independence and accountability that I think everyone wants, including those with disabilities. My current move with this amendment would have the support of groups like the Disability Action Hall and Inclusion Alberta, who are also proposing the creation of an independent advocate.

10:10

I think it's disingenuous to attach independence to a high, big budget. It doesn't have to be. What it needs is accountability and transparency, which I think can be as much as the government and the legislative committee decide is appropriate based on the budget of the day. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right. Putting our money where our mouth is, whether it's a million-dollar budget or a \$14 million budget, I think, is really what this question is about. Besides, an independent officer will have a budget then set by the all-party committee, based on, again, the current need and the financial realities that the government is facing, in an open and transparent manner.

The argument over money misses the point, and that is that to be truly effective, the advocate needs to be independent of the ministry. The question, then, is whether this is the appearance of more accountability for the PDD community or if it's a real commitment to listening and advocating for some of the concerns of this long-beleaguered community. It needs a different reporting structure and greater accountability, which is what we will get with an independent advocate. The advocate will also have the ability to exercise judgment on what areas need investigation and improvement. I view both of these aspects as desirable, and I expect the government of today to do so as well.

I certainly hope the government will do the right thing and consider establishing the advocate for persons with disabilities as an independent officer of the Legislature. After all, that is what Albertans, the PDD community, families, and caregivers expect.

I think, in passing, that there still is a strong need for consultation with the community. I know the member has done some consultation through her office. This is now a significant bill affecting thousands and thousands of Albertans, and it's clear to me that if the government is serious, they should withdraw the amendment currently on the table and allow this whole question of independence to be debated. I leave that to the government.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms Jansen: I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his comments because I have a great deal of respect for his years of service in this House and for his comments on, clearly, a community that he has had some valuable input on. I think that's

fantastic, and I appreciated the conversation that you took pains to have with me on this particular issue.

We're going to agree to disagree on a couple of points here, and one of them is the role of the advocate. When I first started talking about this bill, when I was, certainly, on the other side of the House, one of the things the initial conversation was about was an independent advocate. Now, with a price tag like the Child and Youth Advocate's of about \$14 million – that's a pretty big price tag for an advocate, so I thought to myself: well, in this current economic climate how do we move these issues forward when the resources don't seem to be there to put an independent office into place?

Now, one of the things you mentioned to me was that you believed that on a budget of less than a million dollars this advocate could do the same thing as an independent advocate. I would say that one of my concerns when amendments come forward is that we're not putting suggestions forward that would essentially set the advocate up to fail. When we talk about what this advocate would do, when I talked about what I wanted the advocate to do, it was to identify issues and concerns for people with disabilities. It was to review programs and policies that we have in place in our government. It was about promoting the rights and interests of people with disabilities. It was about providing advice to government with respect to matters relating to programs that we have.

Now, if you are to give – and you know that comparisons are made. Comparisons are always made between programs. Comparisons are being made right now between the advocate programs we have in place, the different advocates. You made them yourself. So the idea that you would give all the expectations of the Child and Youth Advocate, with its budget of \$15 million, and give those expectations now to an advocate for people with disabilities, with a budget of \$800,000 or \$900,000, strikes me as setting that person up for an onerous task.

Now, between adults and children with disabilities in this province they number almost 500,000 people, half a million people. If you're saying that with our budget of \$800,000 this advocate is then going to be an individual advocate or representative for more than 500,000 people, that is a huge task. I worry that in the first year or two that the advocate is up and running and if all those people's needs aren't met individually, what then do they say about the advocate?

When I envisioned this advocate, considering the resources that we had available to us – and then the question is: if we did put the additional resources in, where would they come from? That's another area which now would come up short, and that's concerning to me.

In a perfect world I would love to see an independent advocate. The struggle right now is to be able to provide as much in the way of services as possible within the constraints we have in the current economic climate. So with all due respect, you know, I don't think I'm arguing against a subamendment because you haven't put it forward, but I would say to the main amendment that in order to accomplish what is a pretty onerous task in the first year or two of forming this advocate, they have a lot on their plate already.

What I hope in the longer term is that we grow this position with constant feedback, with consultation with a broad number of groups – you're right that we haven't consulted all the people we need to consult with; that's ongoing, and that's something that the advocate is going to be able to do – and that by the time we get to the review period, we know exactly where we want to go in the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move a subamendment to Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act.

The Chair: It will be known as SA1.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would move that amendment A1 to Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, be amended as follows. Part B is struck out, and the following is substituted. In part B section 3 is amended (a) in subsection (1) by adding "and persons who are employed to provide services to persons with disabilities" after "viewpoints of persons with disabilities"; (b) in subsection (2) by (i) striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:

- (b) review programs and policies to ensure the rights and safety of persons with disabilities and persons who are employed to provide services to persons with disabilities are protected;

(ii) in clause (c) by striking out "processes in which decisions" and substituting "consultations in which systemic decisions"; (iii) in clause (e) by adding "and persons who are employed to provide services to persons with disabilities" after "and well-being of persons with disabilities"; (iv) by striking out clause (f) and substituting the following:

- (f) provide education as needed to ensure individuals having difficulty accessing services and related programs for persons with disabilities are aware of appropriate resources, persons and organizations;

and (v) by adding the following after clause (g):

- (h) exercise any other power prescribed in the regulations.

Part D is struck out, and the following is substituted. In part D section 6 is amended (a) in subsection (1) by (i) striking out "one year" and substituting "2 years"; (ii) by adding "and persons who are employed to provide services to persons with disabilities" after "relating to persons with disabilities"; and (b) by striking out subsection (5) and substituting the following:

- (5) The committee to which a report is referred must, within 90 days of the report being referred to the committee,
 - (a) consult with the public about the report, in a form and manner satisfactory to the committee, and
 - (b) report back to the Legislative Assembly with any recommendations, if it is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

10:20

Madam Chair, I would like to speak briefly to the government's amendment and propose a subamendment. In this bill as it is currently written, the advocate must submit a review after one year has passed. The government is now amending this to be two years, and I think it would be fair to give the advocate this time to actually get settled into the role, to have some experience and see how things are working before it's expected to review what is working and what isn't. So we would support two years as being reasonable, and we would move forward and support that change.

Now, our subamendment also speaks to this review. This review should involve, we believe, consultation with stakeholders. As the advocate is moving forward, they might take a look at and meet with front-line workers that may have a different viewpoint that needs to be addressed so that we can determine what is working and what isn't. Obviously, we would like the advocate to be able to meet with those front-line workers and to be able to get their take on how things are working.

You know, the advocate may be aware of some of the gaps that occur in service or where there are some issues with the service that is being provided to Albertans. I believe that the legislators and the

advocate alike would benefit from hearing that point of view in the review by the advocate. We're just really encouraging some more fulsome consultation with stakeholders on the advocate's review to ensure that their input is considered and that as the Legislative Assembly moves forward and considers changes to the act, they would have included in the advocate's review considerations from front-line workers.

Similarly, right now we see that this is working in things like the Legislative Offices Committee, that is doing a review of the Child and Youth Advocate Act. We've heard from colleagues on that committee that it's been very helpful to hear from stakeholders, from front-line workers on what is working and what could be improved. For instance, the Child and Youth Advocate was not aware that many Albertans thought that an adult could not call their office on behalf of a young person. This misunderstanding highlights – and it only came to light when the advocate heard testimony from stakeholders, so during the committee meetings, and the advocate was able to quickly resolve this issue. So we would like to see something similar happen with the review, and this is one portion of my subamendment, that we would like to include consultation with front-line workers.

I'd like to see something similar happen with the review, and this part of our amendment simply adds that the committee to which the advocate's report is referred must within 90 days of the report being referred consult with the public about the report in a form and in a manner that is satisfactory to the committee. I don't think we're doing anything too prescriptive here. We'd be saying that the committee should consider what others have to say about the effectiveness of the act as well.

Another aspect of our subamendment would bring workers within the disability sector into the advocate's purview. I think it's safe to say that it's in the best interests of persons with disabilities to have a staff worker or the staff working with them well trained and to have a good work environment. More importantly, we all know that good staff morale is critical to effective service.

Stories like the tragic death of Valerie Wolski come to mind. You know, if a support worker is placed in a risky situation yet they are responsible for a high-risk individual that they care about, well, whom do they turn to? We believe that since this advocate is to be involved in a broad, systemic level of decision-making, I think it should have a mandate to consider those employed within the sector as well and to include that information in any review being sent forward.

In summary, we would support the government amendment to clarify the role of the advocate and to increase the time frame to two years before a review is undertaken. We would hope that the members of this House will also see the subamendment that we're proposing, of adding workers within the disabilities sector to the act and adding public input to the review of the act, as a way of strengthening this bill even further.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms Jansen: I want to thank the member for his subamendment, and I want to say that I'm a little disappointed right now because when I first stood to talk about this bill, I talked about how I wanted us to be postpartisan about this and all work together. When I get two pages put in front of me that we never – you know, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View phoned me and talked to me about his amendment beforehand. We had a chance to have a good discussion about it, and I knew it was coming and had a chance to talk with some folks about what it meant. This is presented to us with no discussion, no idea that it was coming forward. There's a part of me that says: why would you do that? Why would you not – if you were really serious about amendments that you thought would make this

better, why did you not pick up the phone and call me like other folks have done? Even the Member for Calgary-Greenway did that.

An Hon. Member: Even him?

Ms Jansen: Even him.

You know, I would say that there are actually things in here I like but put together in a basket of stuff that, meh, I'm not so fond of. I guess I'm a little bit frustrated right now because I think you were going some good places here. If we had a chance to sit down and talk about it, I think – that's what I wanted this bill to be was an opportunity to sit down and amongst 87 members of the Legislature come up with something that fits every single constituency in the province.

As a whole, unfortunately, I can't support the subamendment. There are parts of it I like, and if we continue to have this conversation, I would be delighted to sit down and have a conversation when we actually have a little time to sort of talk about the individual implications.

So I thank you because there is a lot here. I just really wish, for myself and for quite a few of the members on this side of the House, that we had a chance to kind of noodle it over, and that hasn't been given to us.

The Chair: Any other speakers to SA1?

Seeing none, are you ready for the vote?

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: We're back on amendment A1. Are there any further speakers to this amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Back on Bill 205, are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my honour to rise to speak to Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. First, I would like to take a moment to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing the bill forward. It's important we have opportunities to discuss and understand the barriers that those with disabilities face. Some of the conversations that have taken place since the introduction of this bill have given me a better understanding of the challenges, but of course I still have so much to learn. I'd also like to thank the MLA for St. Albert for her many years of work advocating for and working with the disabled community.

Edmonton-Meadowlark is lucky to be home to many incredible organizations that work within this community: the Gateway Association, Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities, Children's Ability Fund, AdaptAbilities, just to name a few. Each of these organizations serves different purposes, but they are all equally important not only in their ability to advocate for and support those they serve but also to teach us as representatives of our community how to be better and how to do better by this community.

Madam Chair, of course, that starts by us being able to listen to the issues that affect them. There are varying levels of abilities within our communities, some more visible than others, but we must do our best to address the issues that keep them from living the best lives possible.

10:30

It wasn't long ago that I was at a local fast-food chain, and a man stopped me, after recognizing me as the MLA for the community,

to explain that the automatic door openers were not working and hadn't been for weeks. He was on crutches and was able to navigate this barrier, but he was concerned about others who might not have the ability to do so. Madam Chair, this is something that most of us take for granted, being able to make it through doorways of establishments, let alone the other barriers that arise after making it through those doors. The issue of having working automatic doors seems so simple, yet I can admit that previously I seldom checked to make sure that they worked.

But that is why these conversations are so important for those in the disability community to show us our own privilege and the negative effect it can have on them when we don't address it and create legislation to break these barriers down. Now, the moment the man stopped me in the fast-food store to explain the obstacles, it was easy for me to understand the situation – he had a visible disability, and there was a somewhat clear solution moving forward, at least in this specific instance – but then I think about my friend who has MS, a debilitating condition which has taken away her ability to drive to work and do many other activities that we take for granted. But you wouldn't know this by looking at her. The challenges that she faces are completely different, but the importance of an advocate to her is the same.

Now, I want to give my colleagues more time to speak, so I'll keep this as short as possible. I know that there are a few more, I believe, wanting to speak to this. But I also want to recognize the community of advocates for people with developmental disabilities, that work day in and day out to teach us more about their issues. Members in this House have already recognized many of them by name. Your tireless work to bring understanding to us is greatly appreciated, and it truly is making a difference. An advocate will help us better understand each of these unique situations and bring accountability to the government when it comes to supporting this community, especially as it relates to government services, which is why I'm so proud to stand here in the Chamber to support this bill.

Now, I just want to comment on something that happened this weekend, something that I am unbelievably saddened to see, the advocate for persons with disabilities from the PC caucus, the Member for Calgary-Greenway, validating some of the most hateful language that can be used within this community, a word that our caucus has pledged to stand against whenever we hear it. Though he did apologize, with, I would say, a somewhat canned apology, Madam Chair, he hurt that community deeply, and I hope that he will stand in this House to apologize on the record.

But I do digress. Once again I would just like to say thank you to the many tireless advocates in our province who spend countless hours reaching out to us as representatives to help us better understand the challenges within the community. You have taught me a lot, but I recognize that I have so, so much more to learn. The most important piece I can take away from this is that we must not make decisions without fully consulting with the community, and I pledge to do that as much as possible.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for introducing Bill 205 and recognizing the need for the advocate for persons with disabilities. In an effort to make life better for all Albertans, Bill 205 is a strong response to the call for advocacy regarding vulnerable Albertans.

Madam Chair, I support this bill for many reasons. I have seen many instances within my riding of the particular need. Our vulnerable require a voice that appropriately addresses the rights, interests, and viewpoints of those who may be unable to represent themselves. Without this voice advocating, we are seeing those who are unable to represent themselves fall victim to a system that is not representing the true essence of their concerns. We cannot identify appropriate resources and recommendations without the input and dialogue of those who are entangled in a system they find difficult to navigate.

By establishing an advocacy body for susceptible Albertans, our Ministry of Community and Social Services will have front-line information regarding viable recommendations to enhance the lives of Albertans. With a mandate to identify and study issues of concern, review programs and policies affecting persons with disabilities, support direct participation in processes, promote rights and well-being, we can strive towards a more systematic understanding of the issues faced and identify potential solutions to these barriers.

Madam Chair, it is no secret that my constituency has seen how misrepresenting the vulnerable can traumatically impact them. The Michener Centre has made headlines continuously as a result of less than favourable decisions made by the previous government. Members of the House, the Keep Michener Open campaign has provided insight into the true need for advocacy for persons with disabilities. When the previous government announced their plans for closure, the impact was felt throughout Alberta. Michener represented a community for persons with disabilities. Community is the true fabric of our great province, and when it is systematically dismantled, it presents a great loss to its clients. It removed the peace of mind encompassed by their family members, who recognize the importance of maintaining the community.

I am proud to be part of a government that sees the need to provide assistance to vulnerable Albertans, who can essentially become victims of the very protocol that is meant to serve them and their needs.

To the House, let me detail how advocacy imparts a strong response. Michener was a hub that provided the opportunity for persons with disabilities to come together within their own special dynamics and to experience the world together. This hub provided the care and attention that was specific to them. They hosted weekly dances and provided the socialization that is necessary for inclusion. This is where they found their sense of belonging. Residents took part in planning activities and events. They were their own micro-society, with protocols that catered to their diverse needs. Residents lived in, participated in, contributed to, and nurtured their community so that it resonated the true wants of the residents. They gathered socially and made a home into a community where disabilities did not hinder their lives.

Albertans responded to this decision with the help of AUPE and the parents' society, who sought 80,000-plus signatures in a campaign to keep Michener open. Two thousand lawn signs, rallies, door-knocking blitzes, and media announced the importance of allowing residents to reside where they were comfortable and had a choice. If an advocate had been established, this situation may have presented differently. Madam Chair, Bill 205 gives a voice to those who cannot speak for themselves, to the concerns that impact their lives.

Recently the Member for Calgary-McCall responded to concerns within the PDD system, and I thank him for that.

The Auditor General engaged recommendations in support of creating a more streamlined system to access resources for our disabled Albertans. These are the direct measures that support

viable recommendations that dive deep into the concerns impacting our vulnerable Albertans.

10:40

We must recognize that disabled Albertans deserve to live safely and inclusively in our communities and, as a result, strive to make life better for them. We can no longer enable the mindset that disabilities are merely physical.

The 2012 Canadian survey of disabilities identified that 436,000 adults and 31,000 children lived with disabilities in Alberta. This makes a strong case for advocacy as outlined in Bill 205. Numerous consultations with service providers in various regions alluded to gaps in the present systems that are difficult to navigate and negotiate without strong advocacy. These consultations are pinnacles of providing the necessary input to improve and streamline the services provided currently and recognize how change elicits a more dynamic model of service provision. The needs of our vulnerable are changing, and we need to recognize the importance of programs and services that are adaptable and resilient to their needs.

Thank you to the Member for Calgary-North West for shedding light on a situation that enables progress in a time of difficulty, for realizing the importance of a system that needs to align with the specific needs of those impacted by them.

Madam Chair, I am grateful to a government that realizes that we cannot tuck our vulnerable under the rug and ignore their needs. Bill 205 speaks to progress in an antiquated arena. Our ability to impart positive change is a strong initiation of momentum and speaks to our recognition that we need to alleviate barriers for those who cannot negotiate them for themselves. Inclusion is extremely important to everyone, and this is a sound step in harnessing resources through advocacy.

I am proud to speak to Bill 205 and the progress it represents. I encourage all in the House to support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the bill? Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my privilege and, I believe, actually my obligation to rise to speak in support of this bill. I've had a great opportunity to hear, you know, the excellent points made by my colleagues.

For myself, I've had a bit more of a personal view than some of what it's like to work through the system. I have two sons, and my youngest son is on the autism spectrum. As well, he has other challenges, so he's presently receiving services through FSCD and looking to go on to PDD. He's going to be turning 18. Now, I guess the first thing I'd like to say about our present system is how grateful I am as a parent and as an Albertan for the level of services that we actually do get in this province. I mean, this is something that you do not find in many other jurisdictions.

My youngest son was actually born in South Korea, where I was living and working, you know, with my wife. Well, it was complicated, back and forth, but he was diagnosed when he was in Korea. At that time – and it's surprising, I mean, how it wasn't that long ago – the whole refrigerator mother theory of autism still held sway there, and there was really no recognition that this was something that could be really treated. We had to cobble together treatment. I happened to teach at a college where there was a professor of occupational therapy that agreed to help me, and we set this up. I paid out of my pocket, it was ad hoc, it was confusing, and there was no support. In coming back to Alberta, it was, you know, a lot better. I know that previous members have mentioned

how you've had people from across Canada move to Alberta to access their services.

Now, that being said, I think there's definitely, you know, a role for an advocate to review the services as they stand now. I'm a relatively well-resourced individual, but I found it quite overwhelming trying to figure out how to navigate my way through the system, how to get my son qualified for supports and services. Once qualified, the real challenge has been to actually access services. My son had some challenges. It was very, very difficult to get any sort of respite care. It was very difficult to be able to get after-school care. It was difficult to get consistent therapy and supports. That's for a host of reasons. I mean, it can be a real challenge for the families of children with disabilities, and this is something, of course, I'd heard previous to becoming an MLA but after becoming an MLA as well.

I do have families that will reach out to me, and they have concerns, you know: how am I going to find a therapist? Nobody wants to come out to rural Alberta for some of these services, or it's difficult to find people. It's very difficult to find care sometimes. If you place too much of a burden on families to be able to assist with their loved ones, you can break families. Statistics for divorces and family breakdowns for families with children with disabilities is over 50 per cent is my understanding. It's a pretty high statistic. Then the consequences. When you do have families break down and these children and youth lose their supports, their needs don't go away, but they're either not met or, when they are met, it's at a greater cost to the rest of society.

If our social systems, you know, if our aids to disabled individuals don't respond, maybe other aspects of our governmental system respond instead and not in a positive way. Everybody has, I think, a strong, vested interest in having these systems work as they're intended to and to make sure that people do not fall through the cracks, through sometimes the patchwork of services they have to cobble together, the lack of information, lack of social or cultural capital to be able to stand up and demand the services that they're eligible for. These definitely have impacts and costs that can be very long term.

It's not just the cost. I think also the big thing is the loss of the potential benefits that you could get from these individuals themselves. I've been quite fortunate with my own son. We've had some pretty rough times, you know, when things might have turned out a little bit for the worse, but thankfully with the supports we were able to put together, he's an amazing young man, an incredible artist, a beautiful singer. He's a real asset to his school community. He has friends at school and teachers that really appreciate being around him, and I know that he is going to contribute to society in a positive way. He'll be giving back. On the other hand, had these supports and services not been available, had things gone differently, who knows what would be lost?

I just wanted to put that forward. Sometimes these things are viewed as a type of charity or as something, you know: well, we kind of have to give this. This is actually, I think, something that not only saves us money to make sure these services are working properly; it also can provide all sorts of benefits that we wouldn't have otherwise. If having this advocate in place is going to help to improve the system in any way, I think that's an excellent thing. Of course, we have lots of challenges. Resources are always a problem. Accessing resources in rural areas is a continuing challenge, but I think this is a good step in the right direction.

I'd like to congratulate the member for bringing this forward, and I'd like to urge all my colleagues to support this bill. Thank you very much.

10:50

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to stand and speak again to Bill 205, obviously, I think, a piece of legislation which has captured the interest of many of us here in the House and certainly those in the community, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I just wanted to make a few comments just from my perspective as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices regarding some of the discussion that's been had on interest, I guess, in seeing the position of advocate being made an independent officer of the Legislature.

Madam Chair, I've had the opportunity to be involved, I guess, in various aspects of the work that the committee does in terms of working with the officers of the Legislature, one of those most recently being the process to form a search committee to look for a new Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner for the province of Alberta. It's just my observation from having been involved in that process that, as some have discussed, there needn't be a lot of additional costs for the disability advocate to operate as an independent officer of the Legislature. I think the Member for Calgary-North West put it quite well and explained some of the concerns around that, the additional pressures it could put on this sort of office if they were given a very small budget to work with but asked to take on such an enormous task. Indeed, that's a kind of pressure that might be unreasonable.

I also just wanted to observe that there are other costs that also come with appointing an independent officer of the Legislature. For example, in appointing a new independent officer of the Legislature, we've had to go through a significant search process, which has involved a number of meetings with committee members, which has involved having to take time and go off-site and book rooms off-site. It involves extra time where the legislative office's staff has to be involved as part of that process, hiring an external HR firm to help as part of that search. So there are number of other ancillary costs which come with appointing and in creating a new officer of the Legislature.

I would observe, Madam Chair, that at present Alberta has seven independent officers of the Legislature. That's about on par with the average for most Canadian jurisdictions. I note that B.C. has eight. Saskatchewan has seven. Manitoba, interestingly, has only four. Ontario also has seven. Quebec has, I believe, five; New Brunswick, interestingly enough, eight; Nova Scotia, four; Newfoundland, five; Prince Edward Island, about four. I think it's something that we want to think about very seriously. It's not something that one wants to just do idly. It's a very significant thing to invest in somebody as an independent officer of the Legislature.

I think the opportunity for us to begin with the advocate working within the ministry, having the opportunity to work with a modest budget to begin but to be able to first set up and determine the scope of their work – they have the opportunity to investigate the different opportunities that are available, to begin to liaise with some of the other contacts that they have. Certainly, Madam Chair, we saw that the office of the Auditor General conducted an excellent audit into the AISH system here in the province of Alberta, provided some excellent advice, which the Ministry of Community and Social Services has taken under advisement and has indeed already begun to make many improvements to that system based on that report.

I think, Madam Chair, we have many resources that are already available and in existence within the Legislature, within the mechanisms of government. Indeed, some of those are independent

officers of the Legislature. A disability advocate will have the opportunity to establish their office, to draw on the resources that are available, and to collaborate with some of the other individuals that serve the people of Alberta to begin to lay the foundation and the groundwork to truly be able to support those who are in need in our province. Indeed, we recognize that there is definitely a need for this advocate.

You know, when I rose earlier, I had the opportunity to speak about my niece and the great growth and great strides she's been able to make because of the many supports that she's been able to access and how that was because of the advocacy of my mom in being able to work and look out for her and being able to help find the resources that were available and help ensure that she was able to access what she needed, that the teachers were there, the speech therapists, the other people that she needed to be able to help her learn and develop and truly develop her own real personal potential, a significant potential, I'll tell you. I'm very excited to see where her life is going to go. But it's because my mom was able to do that work that she was able to do as well as she has. Of course, we recognize that there are many who don't have that, who may not have family who are able to advocate for them, whose family may not have the time or the resources to be able to do that kind of advocacy.

Certainly, having the disability advocate, somebody who is able to provide better information, who is able to better study these systems to determine what work needs to be done, what things need to be changed, and how we can better support individuals in the disability community: that is indeed an incredibly important position, I think, to have and to fill here within the province of Alberta.

So I appreciate what all the members have had to say so far. There's been some very good discussion. I've appreciated the amendments that have been brought forward and the opportunities we've had to discuss those as well, and I look forward to further opportunities to discuss this as we continue on this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've been reflecting a lot on the conversations we've had over the last week around this act, and for me the best part of it is not only what's going to happen when this bill is passed and people with disabilities have an advocate, but also, for me, the really greatest benefit of this act is the fact that we have spent so much time in this Legislative Assembly talking about people with disabilities, their needs, and the need for inclusion.

I appreciate the fact that so many people have shared personal stories, that they've talked about their own personal experience with the systems and also how things have really changed over the years. I wanted to really commend my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly for their willingness, as we all should, to learn from people with disabilities, to listen to their voice, to ensure that we include them in the decision-making, and that we really work hard towards inclusion.

My own personal interest around inclusion is around employment. I know there are so many barriers to people with disabilities to be employed. I'm really hoping that when the bill is passed and the advocate is in place, we can really work collectively with the communities, with the organizations that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark mentioned, Chrysalis, the organizations that already provide a voice for people with disability. I really think

that inclusion in the workplace is something that's very much needed.

Once again, I'm so happy that we're talking about this issue in the Legislative Assembly, that we all agree that this is something that needs to be done, and I really look forward to the work that is going to happen with the advocate once the bill is passed.

I also really wanted to thank the members for sharing their personal stories about their families, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre did, or personal stories of their children. I'm hoping that as we pass the bill the way that it is, I'm sure that over the next few years we're going to be seeing the results of having an advocate and that we will continue to work collaboratively with the people that are most affected by this office to ensure that their voices are heard, that we have the programs in place to offer them full inclusion.

Madam Chair, I'm so glad that we're spending the time to talk about this bill. I'm looking forward to every member of this Assembly voting in favour. Thank you.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm very happy to rise today and speak to Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I just wanted to let it be known that I am currently in my capacity as MLA for Edmonton-McClung exploring work opportunities with Inclusion Alberta for a member referred by them to my office to work in my office. We are trying to match work opportunities to available individuals to see if indeed we can come up with a program that will allow somebody referred to me by Inclusion Alberta to be an active participant and actually work in my office. I'm very pleased to say that that's now under way, and hopefully soon we'll be able to indeed have a good match, with an individual coming from Inclusion Alberta working in my office and enriching our workspace.

11:00

I know from my former experience driving a DATS bus, disabled adult transportation service bus, that many individuals with various disabilities often had complaints or concerns that really went unattended to. I would hear these complaints or concerns as I would transport individuals from one place to another in my DATS bus, and I'm very, very pleased to know that Bill 205 will now give an opportunity, give a place for individuals with disabilities to register their complaints and know that they're going to be followed up in a respectful and an official capacity.

While it's not an official legislative officer position that we're bringing forward with this bill, what it will do, as the Member for Calgary-North West indicated, is to give us an opportunity over time to determine exactly the development of the role. We will look forward to perhaps making further changes to the legislation as time shows us what direction we should be going with the legislation.

Now, I know that many individuals come forward to offices of the MLAs in all parts of the province who are involved with the advocacy for PDD or individuals who are suffering a disability themselves. My office is no different. I did introduce to this Legislature Mr. Tim Parnett a while ago, who had started a website, called mightywheels.ca, whereby he seeks to improve the infrastructure that people with disabilities use in rolling along, let's say, the people who use wheels to get by. He's not only looking to improve the lives of those who may be in wheelchairs but also of anybody who uses wheels: mothers with strollers, children with roller skates and other means of wheeled devices. His advocacy is quite broad.

I know that Mr. Parnett was looking for an outlet to ensure that his voice was heard, so we are doing our best to have him work with the city committee but know also that in the background there is an opportunity for individuals like Mr. Parnett to raise his voice, if he feels he's not being heard, to the advocate for individuals with disabilities proposed under this legislation, that there is a guarantee that his advocacy will not be falling on deaf ears.

I'm very pleased to rise, and I want to thank the member for bringing forward this bill, starting an important conversation, and for the hard work she has done to consult with Albertans. As we said before, this bill would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta with the power to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of persons with disabilities. Just as importantly, the advocate will identify concerns within the disability community.

I'm very proud of the level of consultation that also has taken place with respect to developing this legislation by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, who undertook to make sure that she did consult with the community. It responds to the calls within the disability advocate community, and more importantly it responds to the concerns of members of the PDD community such as Mr. Parnett.

By creating an advocate, our government is working towards making the lives of Albertans better, and it will provide much-needed support to persons with disabilities and their families in the province. The bill will support the ongoing work of the Ministry of Community and Social Services. The final report of the PDD safety standard consultations of 2016 identified and recommended that advocacy is critical within the PDD community to ensuring that individuals with disabilities are supported to lead more fulfilling lives. The bill proposes a new advocate position that will report to and advise the Minister of Community and Social Services.

The advocate would have a mandate to identify and study issues of concern to persons with disabilities; review programs and policies affecting persons with disabilities; participate in processes in which decisions are made about persons with disabilities; promote the rights, interests, and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education; provide information and advice to the government with respect to any matter relating to the rights, interests, and well-being of persons with disabilities; and assist individuals who are having difficulty accessing services for persons with disabilities and related programs, including directing them to an appropriate resource, person, or organization that may be able to assist them.

I know that when Mr. Parnett visited my office, he wanted me to accompany him on a small trip of about three blocks between my office and his residential high-rise tower where he lives just to show how difficult it was for him as an individual using a wheelchair to actually roll along. In that little three-block trip his wheelchair upended, and luckily I happened to be in a spot that I was able to stop it from completely turning right over. It showed me just how easily an individual who's using a chair can reinjure themselves or suffer worse injuries because the surfaces that they travel on are quite often dangerous, and it's not just simply a curb cut that's not there; it's broken pavement and concrete. That's something that individuals with disabilities who use wheelchairs face every day.

I actually captured that whole walk on video, and it was very, very revealing as to the difficulties that individuals face in going short distances within their own communities, who end up, perhaps, injuring themselves because they can't get it through to the city and in some cases perhaps the province, when we're talking about building codes, that real attention has to be paid to the smooth surfaces that are required by individuals who roll on wheels to transport themselves.

The provision of this legislation, Bill 205, to provide an advocate, that individuals who want to get their message across can now turn to, is very welcome news. If Bill 205 is passed, as I said, it would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta, which will allow for a more systematic understanding of the issues faced by persons with disabilities and identify potential solutions to these barriers.

I'm very pleased to be part of a government caucus that is moving forward on an issue that has been ignored for too long in this province. By having an advocate, Albertans with disabilities will have a person that will look into systemic issues such as teens transitioning into adulthood or create resources to navigate government programs and services by looking into systemic ways to address these issues such as ensuring that our streets and roadways don't provide hazards to those individuals who are forced to walk with canes or use wheelchairs.

Madam Chair, by establishing an advocate, this government is committed to ensuring the voices of this community and their loved ones are heard. In other words, the advocate will be committed to making Albertans' lives better. The advocate would be able to help identify barriers and provide information and advice to the government with respect to any matter relating to the rights, interests, and well-being of persons with disabilities.

When it comes to making life better for Albertans with disabilities, the previous government was a lot of talk and not a lot of action. The Official Opposition has a plan to cut services like health and education that Albertans rely on. Our government's record is clear. We're committed to supporting Alberta's disability community. We stopped the PDD safety standards, and we stopped SIS. We recognize that PDD service providers are facing pressures due to a growing demand for PDD services. That is why we increased funding for PDD. Our government is protecting and improving things that matter to Albertans, and that's why we continue to listen to the disability community about their ideas to fix issues the previous government created.

The final report of the PDD safety standards consultations found that advocacy is critical within the PDD community to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes. In fact, recommendation 10 of that report asked the government of Alberta to investigate the creation of a formal advocate for persons with disabilities, and Bill 205 aims to do just that.

11:10

In conclusion, Madam Chair, I rise very happily to support the provisions of Bill 205, and I know that the people with disabilities in this province will be taking a large step forward in terms of having their voice heard through official government channels and making sure that they don't fall through the cracks, as they say, as Mr. Parnett literally did while he was wheeling alongside me between my office and his residence.

That concludes my remarks.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 205?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 205 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Sweet: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 205. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this day for the official record of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 11 Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 11, Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, on behalf of the Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

With this bill our government is taking the next step in our commitment to renew democracy in Alberta. Bill 11 is a direct result of the hard work done by all members of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, and it is our hope that this legislation will stand as a shining example of what can be accomplished when all parties work together. I think it is clear that we all agree on the importance of ensuring that serious wrongdoings in the public sector are both reported and addressed, and it has been heartening to see the support of this bill from both sides of the House. By strengthening existing legislation and by better protecting whistle-blowers from reprisal, we hope to encourage more people to come forward when a matter needs to be investigated.

One of the most important goals of this legislation is to protect whistle-blowers from any sort of punishment or retaliation from their employer. In order to help achieve this goal, the all-party committee recommended that the act be amended to ensure that whistle-blowers are entitled to some sort of remedy if they suffer a reprisal.

We have accepted the all-party committee's recommendation, and this bill will enable the Labour Relations Board to order remedies. The board would appoint one of its senior members, either the chair or one of the vice-chairs, to hear the matter and order a remedy. Hearings would be conducted as determined by the board. They would be able to summon witnesses, and their decision would be final. For example, the board may decide that the whistle-blower should get their job back if they were fired for blowing the whistle. In other cases they may be entitled to compensation for lost wages. The board would also be required to provide a copy of all their restitution orders to the commissioner for inclusion in the commissioner's annual report. Madam Speaker, when someone reports a serious wrongdoing, that person is acting in the public interest, and these changes will help ensure that they are protected.

The all-party committee also recommended that acts be amended so that it more clearly applies to ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly. This bill clearly lays out that, subject to parliamentary privilege, MLAs, ministers, and the Premier can all be investigated when a disclosure is made to the Public Interest Commissioner. Likewise, political staff will be protected from reprisal should they choose to blow the whistle. Currently no other jurisdiction in Canada has whistle-blower legislation that applies to MLAs in this way, and Ontario is the only jurisdiction that covers ministers.

The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster also proposed an amendment that would ensure the timely reporting of information concerning reprisals in relation to the office of a Member of the Legislative Assembly. If the commissioner finds that such a reprisal has occurred, the bill states that the commissioner must submit a report to the Speaker that sets out the commissioner's finding, reasoning, and recommendations. The Speaker would then be required to table the report in the Legislative Assembly. With the amendment, if the Legislative Assembly is not in session, the Speaker would be required to table the report within 15 days of the beginning of the next sitting. It's important for the Legislative Assembly to be informed of these matters in a timely way, and I am pleased to say that this amendment was passed.

The new legislation would also allow the Public Interest Commissioner to investigate a wider variety of wrongdoings, including some forms of mismanagement or abuse of human resources in the public sector. Under certain circumstances this may include bullying and harassment in the workplace. Of course, other options already exist to address human resource issues and breaches of code of conduct. We already have human rights legislation, ordinary employment law, and collective bargaining mechanisms to help ensure healthy work environments in the public sector. To be clear, in the event of a wrongdoing related to workplace bullying or harassment in the public sector, any collective agreement or employer policies would be accessed first, but if these processes are not adequate to resolve the problem, this bill would allow the Public Interest Commissioner to investigate egregious and systemic cases of bullying and harassment.

In addition, this bill would help improve the process whistle-blowers must go through to report a wrongdoing and ensure that they are protected when they need it. Under the old legislation a potential whistle-blower is required to report the details of the alleged wrongdoing to a designated officer. Our new legislation would allow potential whistle-blowers to bypass their designated officer and report directly to the Public Interest Commissioner if they so choose.

Furthermore, the new act would clarify that a whistle-blower may approach their boss about a wrongdoing, and their protection from reprisal would start at that very moment. In some cases a potential whistle-blower may not know their designated officer, and as a result they may be more comfortable speaking with their supervisor before going to the designated officer. In other cases a potential whistle-blower may prefer to go directly to the commissioner.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View also proposed amending the act to ensure that the commissioner's decision or proceedings can be called into question in court. Currently the act provides that no proceeding or decision of the commissioner may be challenged in court except on jurisdictional grounds. The bill maintains this premise with one important exception. The bill states that the commissioner's decision regarding a reprisal may be questioned through a judicial review. As laid out in the bill, the commissioner will investigate and decide whether or not a reprisal has occurred. If the commissioner finds there has been a reprisal,

the matter is then referred to the Labour Relations Board to decide on restitution. Ultimately, the employer may be required to offer some kind of remedy to the whistle-blower. Therefore, as decisions on reprisal can be legally binding, the commissioner's decision-making process is subject to a judicial review.

11:20

However, investigations into wrongdoing are different than investigations into reprisal. If the commissioner concludes that there has been a wrongdoing as defined by the act, they will make recommendations to the government department or public entity responsible. The department or public entity must work with the commissioner and report on the steps taken to fix the problem. The commissioner does not issue orders or set out requirements, so it is unclear what purpose would be served by questioning the commissioner's decision or proceedings in court.

Lastly, the bill is based on recommendations from the all-party committee, and there were no recommendations on judicial review. Thus, the existing protection for the commissioner is preserved except as mentioned in relation to reprisals.

As members of the all-party committee will know, there were many recommendations, and our government considered each and every one very carefully. The committee's work on this legislation and the broad support this bill has received here in the Legislative Assembly are proof of what can be accomplished by working together. If passed, I'm confident that our proposed legislation would be among the most comprehensive of its kind in Canada. Madam Speaker, it is clear that the Members of this Legislative Assembly recognize that wrongdoings need to be reported and addressed and that when someone blows the whistle, they should be celebrated and encouraged rather than punished.

I'd like to thank all members for their comments and support up to this point and to encourage everyone to continue to back the bill at this stage. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak once more to Bill 11, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, which has been tabled by the Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Just to remind everyone, on June 25, 2015, the Legislative Assembly passed Government Motion 12, which appointed the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, an all-party committee made up of 17 members, to review the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act along with other bills. I was very proud to sit on that committee for, while not the entire tenure, a large portion of the mandate. This all-party committee put forward a number of recommendations, all of which were seriously considered in the making of this bill. Some of them are incorporated into the legislation, and some are not. I'll read out details about each recommendation and how they're handled by the bill as we go along.

Albertans deserve a government that is committed to the highest standards of responsibility, accountability, ethics, and transparency. It's important that public-sector employees feel safe and are free from reprisal when they report serious wrongdoings. This legislation will help increase the chances of wrongdoings being both reported and addressed, and that is the right thing to do, both for employees and Albertans in general. By strengthening this act, we hope that it will encourage more people to come forward when a matter needs to be investigated, and it will also help protect these

whistle-blowers from reprisal by their employers. That's the main part of this bill. Why it's so important is because we need people to come forward when something does arise, whether that be someone from an MLA's office, whether that be someone from a ministry's office, whether that be anyone in the public sector. We do need those people to come forward because sometimes there are wrongdoings, and we need to address those.

It's important that employees feel safe and free from reprisal when they report serious wrongdoings, and that includes employees contracted to fill government services. At the same time, these government-contracted entities should also be investigated if there is an alleged wrongdoing related to their work in the public sector. The all-party committee recommended that the legislation be expanded to these entities, and it is only fair that they be consulted before moving ahead. That's why we need to make sure that we look at that before we put that in the regulations.

At this time we are accepting the all-party committee's recommendations, but much more work needs to be done to determine how to cover public-sector services carried out by third parties without stepping over the line into the private sector. If the act is passed – and I certainly hope all members will vote for this bill – we will consult with government contractors and delegated service providers to determine how best to move forward on the details of this recommendation.

The all-party committee that reviewed the legislation, which, of course, many members sat on, agreed that there was significant room for improvement. By strengthening the act, we hope it will encourage more people to come forward when a matter needs to be investigated. It will also help protect these whistle-blowers from reprisal by their employers. For example, the existing legislation needs to be changed to ensure that a whistle-blower who has suffered punishment or retaliation from their employer is entitled to a remedy. Our proposed legislation also clarifies that staff in the offices of the Premier and ministers, like I was saying, are protected as well and that members of cabinet could be investigated when a disclosure is made. The bill also addresses some administrative issues experienced by the commissioner, including access to records, records management and retention, and the authority to delegate.

Does this legislation capture agencies, boards, and commissions such as AHS? That is very important. ABCs are already covered as provincial corporations as defined in the Financial Administration Act. School boards, AHS, Covenant Health, and other health entities are also covered already. While this legislation does not expand the purview over agencies, boards, and commissions, it does strengthen those people's rights to come forward and makes sure that there are no reprisals if they do end up coming forward.

In the 2015-16 fiscal year the commissioner received 17 disclosures of wrongdoing and seven complaints of reprisal. Two investigations identified instances of wrongdoing. The year before 21 disclosures of wrongdoing were received along with eight complaints of reprisal. The year before that was the first year of the commissioner's existence, and there were five disclosures of wrongdoing but no complaints of reprisal. There is certainly a problem, and we're hoping that this legislation, if it is passed here in the Legislature, will aid more people and encourage more people to come forward to disclose wrongdoings within government agencies and government in general.

The current act establishes strict penalties, up to \$25,000 for the first offence and up to \$100,000 for each subsequent offence. Offences include the following: committing a reprisal; withholding information; making a false or misleading statement or counselling or directing another person to do so; obstructing or counselling or

directing another person to obstruct any individual acting in an official capacity under the act; destroying, mutilating, altering, falsifying, or concealing any documents or a thing that may be relevant to an investigation or directing or counselling another person to do so. There are no new penalties under the new legislation being put forward though whistle-blowers who are subjected to retaliation would now be entitled to remediation as determined by the Labour Relations Board.

The act has a formal disclosure process, which does not include disclosures to the media to help ensure that investigators are able to conduct their work without undue influence from outside parties. Whistle-blowers are protected as long as they make a disclosure in accordance with the act, and with our amendments whistle-blowers will have more options and greater protection. Since the act applies to a very large assortment of public-sector entities, maintaining a formal disclosure process will also help ensure consistency in the application of the act. The office of the commissioner publishes investigative reports on their website, of course. This commissioner is also required to publish annual reports, and the proposed legislation would require these reports to be much more detailed than they are now. Of course, it adds to transparency within governments and adds to what can be shown in the media.

11:30

The current act states that it “applies only in respect of wrongdoings that occur after the coming into force of this Act,” which was in 2013. The current act also states:

- (2) The Commissioner is not required to investigate a disclosure . . .
 - (a) if more than 2 years has passed since the date that the wrongdoing was discovered.

Our amendments are based on recommendations from the all-party committee, of course, and none of their recommendations involve changing these provisions. When an employee has reason to believe there has been wrongdoing, we would encourage them to bring it to their designated officer as soon as possible so that it can be investigated and addressed in a timely manner.

Of course, the all-party committee noted that there are many outsourced government functions or governmentlike functions that do not fall within the scope of the act but for which government spends a lot of time and money to provide a service to the public. In other words, those who carry out activities on behalf of the government should feel safe and free from reprisal when they report serious wrongdoings rather than just those who are directly employed by government. At the same time, these entities should also be investigated if there is an alleged wrongdoing related to their work in the public sector.

However, the all-party committee also recommended that the act not be expanded to include the private sector. At this time we are accepting the all-party committee recommendations, but much more work needs to be done to determine how to cover public-sector services carried out by a third party without stepping over the line into the private sector. So if this act is passed, we will consult with government contractors and delegated service providers to determine how best to move forward on these details with recommendations. Of course, it will be in the regulations, which is currently stated in the act, as to what we’ll do.

Who, exactly, will be covered under this expansion of the act? More work needs to be done to determine how to cover public-sector services carried out by third parties without stepping over the line of the private sector, like I said before. If this act is passed, we’ll certainly be consulting with contractors and delegated service providers to determine how best to move forward on the details of the recommendation. After a complete analysis of who should be

added and any consequences of doing so, we will draft regulations to fully and properly implement the all-party committee’s recommendations.

To be clear, no contractors or delegated service providers will be subject to this act until consultations have occurred and regulations have been drafted. That’s, of course, to make sure that we are not stepping on anyone’s toes, not stepping over the line when looking into the private sector but also ensuring that we are safe, that government agencies, that ministries are being transparent and that people who are being contracted have the right to come forward as whistle-blowers. It is incredibly important because they do work that, well, people in government ministries cannot do. That’s why we outsource to private enterprises. Having those people under the regulations is something that we certainly need, and I’m quite glad that we are waiting for the regulations to make sure that we’re doing it right.

Like I was saying, very soon after our government was elected, we reached out to all political parties to come together and review the legislation. The all-party committee concluded that “no changes [should] be made to the Act to expand its scope to the private sector.” The legislation is meant to improve ethics and transparency in the public sector and to help ensure accountability to taxpayers, so, really, to all Albertans. That’s certainly why we’re not expanding into the private sector and why we’re waiting to review the regulations before we look at our private-sector contractors. As of right now Manitoba is the only place that prevents reprisals against a contractor if the contractor or an employee of the contractor makes a disclosure.

With that, I will just ask all my colleagues in the Legislature to support this piece of legislation. I look forward to working with all of you again.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s my honour to stand and speak in favour of Bill 11, Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017, in third reading.

Similar to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, I had an opportunity in the last segment of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee to sit in during deliberations on the recommendations we were going to make for the whistle-blower disclosure act. I think it was quite a constructive experience. We worked diligently into the summer to make sure that we could hold a bit more transparency towards our public service.

When I reflect on how we want our public service to operate – and I don’t necessarily disagree with the bulk of this – we want to make sure that we have good governance. We took a lot of cues off what we already see within the private sector and some of the leadership that we see there. At the end of the day, when it’s private-sector businesses and their operation, they’re utilizing other people’s money to operate. Many of them are publicly trusted and held companies, and they’re accountable to their shareholders. Similar to that, our public service here in Alberta is accountable to its shareholders, which are the millions of people who pay taxes, are users of these services, and live in this province. It’s great to see that, you know, we’ve expanded the scope of what this is. At the end of the day, we as MLAs, whether it’s the MLA, the Premier, or any of our ministers, are employees of the people within Alberta.

With that being said, I’ll quickly sort of reflect back on one popular culture reference for those watching at home to kind of understand what I’m getting at with the fear of reprisal. In the film *Alien* the *Nostramo* was responding to a distress call, and it was a

very adverse situation. They went onto the ship, and they noticed some weird eggs, and someone was attacked. Science Officer Ash ignored Warrant Officer Ripley's wanting to abide by quarantine regulations because she was really worried that they were going to infect the other people on the ship. As it turned out, these aliens came to life and murdered a lot of people. If she had had a system in place in which she could have blown the whistle on the leaders within that scenario, I think the outcome of that story would have been a lot different.

I say these popular culture references in a positive light as it's very hard for some of us who may not have been involved in a situation where we had to blow the whistle on an employer or have been in an unethical workforce to understand the challenges that happen when someone is not following proper conduct or regulations or rules within a system.

I think it's important, as we move forward, that we don't have any adverse disasters happen within our province, that we have safe, secure workforces, that we're using the public purse appropriately. That's why I'm going to support Bill 11 in its third reading, and I encourage all members to do the same.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect if there are any questions or comments for the previous speaker.

Seeing none, I will recognize Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and just share a few words on third reading of Bill 11, Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017. I just wanted to say that it was an incredible honour to be involved with the committee last year, to go through all of the

public submissions and all of the different stakeholder submissions and especially the submission that came from the Public Interest Commissioner, Mr. Peter Hourihan, and his office. I want to thank them all for their work and wish Mr. Peter Hourihan all the best and just say that we learned a lot from him and that he's been an incredible asset to the province in that role and that I look forward to seeing a new Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner come into the office that will bring the same level of scrutiny and investigation and trustworthiness.

11:40

I just wanted to quote from Chief Justice Milvain from 1970, who wrote that the Ombudsman "can bring the lamp of scrutiny to otherwise dark places, even over the resistance of those who would draw the blinds," just to remind us all of what we're talking about when we make sure that legislation like this is working to the best of its ability for the public and for the province.

With that, I will conclude my remarks and just again thank Mr. Peter Hourihan for all of his service.

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

Seeing none, any further members wishing to speak to the bill in third reading?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, seeing the great progress that we've made this Tuesday morning, I say that we call it 12 o'clock and come back at 1:30 p.m. I move to adjourn.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:41 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 23, 2017

Day 37

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 23, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. I know the prayer referenced it this morning when the session started, but let us all remember the disasters of violence when it is used throughout the world.

We will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. Please join us in the language of your choice if you would like.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of my friends who are visiting from Saskatchewan today. Carla Beck is the NDP MLA for Regina Lakeview and is seated in your gallery today. Carla serves as the deputy opposition whip and is the critic for Education, early learning, and child care, the Crown Investments Corporation, Saskatchewan Government Insurance, and SaskEnergy, a lot of files, something that our caucus is very familiar with. Carla was also a school trustee with the Regina public school board prior to being elected as an MLA. Before entering politics, Carla was a registered social worker with over 20 years of experience in that field. Seated with her in the gallery today is Carla's daughter Hannah Marsden-Beck, who is currently a grade 11 student in Regina, visiting Edmonton today because she's considering attending the University of Alberta to pursue a degree in engineering. Carla and Hannah both know the importance of a strong, progressive government and have come to see how an NDP government makes lives better for all Albertans. Now I'd ask them to please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members from Saskatchewan, there may be a counteropinion on that particular matter.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a delight for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a delegation representing the Council of State Governments Midwest, or CSG Midwest, of which Alberta has been an affiliate member since 2010, and I'm honoured to represent Alberta on behalf of the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. They are Indiana state Senator Ed Charbonneau, co-chair of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee; Mike McCabe, director of the CSG Midwest; and Ilene Grossman, assistant director of the CSG Midwest. The CSG Midwest is a regional forum made up of 11 Midwestern states that include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, and

the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. Alberta's participation in the CSG Midwest gives us the opportunity to engage with U.S. state legislators like Senator Charbonneau to share information, build consensus, and promote common interests on a number of regional issues.

Mr. Speaker, the member states of CSG Midwest are some of the most important trading partners for Alberta. To put this in perspective, in 2016 Alberta exports to the 11 CSG Midwest region were valued at \$30.4 billion, and imports from the CSG Midwest region to Alberta totalled more than \$5.9 billion. For example, to the state of Indiana, where Senator Charbonneau serves his constituents, Alberta exports were valued at \$284 million, and imports from Indiana to Alberta totalled more than \$223 million.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hope you get to the introduction soon.

Mr. Westhead: Yes.

In regard to oil, our single biggest trading partnership with the U.S., we supplied approximately 34 per cent of U.S. oil imports.

We appreciate this visit by CSG Midwest representatives and this opportunity to build on our relationships with the member states. Mr. Speaker, the delegation has risen, and I'd ask the members to extend the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For several years the Legislative Assembly has supported the Edmonton Regional Heritage Fair, which provides an opportunity for students in Edmonton and the surrounding area to research and present projects celebrating Canada's heritage. The Legislative Assembly Office recognizes one outstanding presentation that specifically relates to Alberta's history, politics, or governance. It is my pleasure to introduce this year's award winners, Medina Assiff and Madeena Jallal Tarrabain, grade 7 students at the Edmonton Islamic Academy. Their presentation, entitled *The Trudeaus: Past and Present*, was well researched and engaging. Accompanying Medina and Madeena today are their mothers, Hoda Assaf and Mahassen Assiff, and their teacher, Kirstie Elsa Jensch. They are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask them all to rise, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a fantastic group of kids, who I had the pleasure of having a fun picture with and doing the dab with downstairs, from Father Leduc Catholic school in Leduc and their teacher, Mrs. Janelle Kowerchuk. Hopefully, I said that right. I'm glad that they got to come here today and have a great visit. It was a pleasure meeting them, and I'd like to get to their school to see them again sometime. I'd invite them to rise and have us give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 73 students from the amazing constituency of Red Deer-South. They attend Eastview middle school. The students

are accompanied by their teachers, Jennifer Neis and Greg Boulay, and 11 chaperones. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you on behalf of my colleague from Battle River-Wainwright people from the Holden school. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Amanda Hewlett, Karen Arychuk, and Nicole Suchy, along with their chaperones, Annette Hrabec, Marilyn Koch, and Michelle Albrecht. If the students, staff, and chaperones could please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the students from Erle Rivers high school in Milk River in my riding. I'd like to ask Courtney and Barb and the students to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups? The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a group of students visiting from a local school in my riding of Edmonton-Rutherford. L'école Greenfield is one of several bilingual schools in my district and takes pride in furthering French education here in this province and especially in Edmonton. I would like to thank them for taking the time to come visit us today, and I'd ask the entire House to join me in saying hello and bonjour to the guests. If they'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent from the wonderful riding of Edmonton-Riverview. Marie Walker is a retired nurse and a dedicated volunteer in the community. She volunteers with the Autism Society, the Edmonton Native Plant Group, and the United Church of Canada. Marie is also a long-term volunteer in my constituency association, and I'm grateful for her significant contributions. She is joined today by her grandchildren Taiyo and Tsukino Walker; Dylan, Mason, and Cora Ramirez; and their friend Ismael Booq. I would like them all to please rise – there they are – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests today?

Members' Statements

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not a member's statement; it's an introduction. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you need unanimous consent if you'd like to introduce a guest. Have you a visitor here today?

Dr. Turner: Yes.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jake Bainbridge and Ryan Dick from Terrapin Geothermics, the topic of my member's statement to come. Jake is Terrapin's senior engineer. After studying aerospace engineering in the U.K., Jake moved to Alberta to work in Canada's oil and gas industry. Jake oversees technology development and industrial projects. Ryan has an extensive background in project development, financing, and PPA negotiations for renewable energy projects. He returns to Alberta to work with Terrapin after stints in Ecuador as well as Silicon Valley. I invite them to rise, as they have, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Now, hon. member, your member's statement.

Terrapin Geothermics Investor Tax Credit

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious I'm still learning in here.

This government's energy efficiency programs are helping Albertans save up to \$112 each year by switching their light bulbs alone. This isn't trivial and is one of the reasons that over 100,000 Alberta families have signed up with efficiencyalberta.ca. This sort of information resonates with constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud, who are excited to hear of the many other energy savings through efficiencyalberta.ca. Indeed, homeowners in Edmonton-Whitemud have registered in really large numbers. They're also signing up for the installation of solar panels, and developers such as Landmark Homes and Melcor have successfully marketed net-zero homes and solar-panelled townhouses in Edmonton-Whitemud. Our community cares about climate change and energy efficiency.

In this vein, I would like to tell the Assembly about an Alberta-based renewable energy company which is among the first companies to offer investors the Alberta investor tax credit. With this approval for its proprietary waste heat generator Alberta-based investors and Terrapin Geothermics can receive a 30 per cent Alberta tax credit. Terrapin is an example of the AITC program creating a strong incentive to support high-growth, innovative opportunities in Alberta.

The Terrapin engine produces clean baseload power from sources of waste heat such as oil and gas wells as well as SAGD sites. A single SAGD can lose over 17 terajoules of waste energy daily. Harnessing this could provide power for 60,000 homes. The Terrapin engine is a technology coming from the University of Alberta, and the technology is particularly suited to a climate with low average ambient temperatures.

Terrapin Geothermics is also expert in geothermal mapping. It has created 3-D models of geothermal reservoirs in Alberta which have tremendous potential for both investment and job creation.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is building on local expertise and using the AITC to develop our economy while protecting the environment.

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

Violence against Women and Girls

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with an extremely heavy heart that I rise to pay homage to the numerous young people who died at the Ariana Grande concert last night in Manchester. As the details of this horrific terrorist event emerge, we are learning more about the victims. As expected, a disproportionate number of young girls are expected to have died.

Some of Ariana Grande's top songs: *Into You*, *Break Free*, and a modern-version theme from *Beauty and the Beast*.

When I saw the news, I instantly felt sick, keenly aware that youth, young girls, were targeted because they were young and happy and free, the embodiment of the ideals that those who inflict terror hate so much. When I was made the shadow minister of Status of Women, I pledged to work towards the advancement of women's causes in Alberta and around the world. Women are pillars in our communities, leaders in business, trailblazers in science and technology, and so much more, but women, girls especially, are still a primary target for sexual, psychological, and extreme religious violence around the globe.

Many of these young girls were likely going to their first pop concert, a rite of passage that should be a part of growing up. They were there to laugh and dance and sing along to one of their favourite songs. These are the activities that terrorists want to take away. They feel that the oppression of women is their right. They want to replace the uninhibited joy of a young girl going to a concert with fear instead.

Above all else, in the coming days and weeks and months as the stories of the precious young men and women who lost their lives in these attacks come out, we must always remember: we cannot let fear win. I feel fortunate every day to live in this beautiful country, one of the freest and most tolerant nations of the world, but Canada is not immune to the ideologies that treat women as subhuman or expendable. Last night's attack served as a reminder that all decent people must be on guard, even in a free nation, against the ideologies that seek to repress girls into cycles of violence and abuse. Society is counting on us.

Thank you.

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, as time goes on, it becomes more obvious that this NDP government must be replaced. A government typically uses Bill 1 to set a positive tone. This government used it to break their election promise of eliminating all school fees. They took over \$50 million away from school boards, leaving the parents, who now won't be paying those fees, to wonder what else will be taken away from their school to make up for the money.

Bill 3 does nothing to make the blood supply in Alberta safer. It does, however, give a monopoly in providing blood services to the union employing the Premier's husband.

The Children's Services minister has left kids in the same home where Serenity was abused and eventually killed, hiding behind legislation that the minister will not specify.

The Education minister has signed an agreement which limits hard-working and caring teachers' hours and actually prevents them from being the best they can be.

The postsecondary minister has ignored warnings from the Auditor General, forcing him to single out the minister.

The Environment minister has carbon taxed Albertans and spent the money in Ontario for light bulbs and to buy advertisements which have failed to convince Albertans.

The Service Alberta minister has stopped telling drivers when their vehicle registrations will expire.

The Labour minister is so disrespectful to Alberta workers that she answers serious questions about the hundreds and thousands of lost jobs with pop culture references, ignoring the real and current plight of families.

The Justice minister has insulted virtually every judge in Alberta by denigrating their appointments, which should be a fireable offence, all the while dithering on fentanyl and Serenity's file.

The Finance minister is unable to put forward a credible plan to run the province today, to protect the future of our grandchildren, or to even begin paying back \$75 billion in debt that he will accumulate before the next election.

The Premier should fire all these ministers and resign as leader of this out-of-tune band. I have no faith, Mr. Speaker, that will happen.

The answer is a new, united conservative government in 2019. Albertans are actively shopping for a new government. Our job is to be the best choice to fix the mess created by the current group of ministers, who are completely out of touch with Alberta.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Carbon Levy and Energy Industry Image

Mr. Jean: Social licence is fast becoming a snake oil of the 21st century. The concept that social licence is needed to get pipelines built is not only wrong, but it's dangerous. The NDP government just doesn't get how important getting our energy products to market is. They are consumed with a misguided feeling that they somehow must apologize for our energy sector with a carbon tax and are taking away from the world-class NEB process we already have. Will the Premier face the facts, realize she is hurting our economy and Albertans, and give up her career as a snake oil salesperson?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms. Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must say that the people in this House who are selling snake oil are those who want us to pretend that climate change isn't an issue and that the government has no responsibility to deal with it. Thankfully, those snake oil salespeople aren't in government; we are. We are moving very carefully, very forcefully on this issue while at the same time working with the progressive members of our oil and gas industry to grow our industry sustainably and prosperously for years to come.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the SS *Climate Change Fearmongering* has sailed. The Premier just doesn't get it. You can't earn social licence, because it doesn't exist. Albertans are paying the price for the Premier's misguided belief in the form of a carbon tax that is only hurting hard-working Albertans, they're paying the price in opportunities lost and fleeing investment because of the economic

conditions created by this NDP government, and they're paying the price when this government puts all of its eggs in the social licence basket. Will the Premier wake up to the facts and cancel the carbon tax, that is only hurting our province when Albertans can least afford it?

Ms Notley: Well, as the member opposite knows but hates to admit, the fact that we have not one but two pipelines approved is absolutely, completely connected to our climate leadership plan. So not only are we diversifying the economy, creating jobs, and taking action to reduce emissions; we're also getting our product to tide-water, Mr. Speaker, overall a good record that I'm happy to speak to Albertans about.

Mr. Jean: I think, Mr. Speaker, we heard it best. If you're so justified, call an election.

Rex Murphy has it right on social licence. The Premier missed the central point of social licence: its preconditions can never be met, and are not meant to be. It is an obstructionist tactic, designed to forestall and delay, till whatever its target has been become so worn down by process and protest and delay that it is simply taken off the policy table.

Will the Premier please stop making Albertans pay for her misguided ideas and stop chasing after this figment of imagination called a social licence? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that the member opposite and his soon-to-be dance partners could school this whole House on how to break an election law and call an election early. However, the lesson from that particular schooling is not one that I think they'd like, and certainly it didn't help them out very much.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our record on this. The federal government has the authority to make the decision. They have made the decision. The pipelines are approved, and this is because of our work on climate leadership. That is a record I will be proud to run on when it's a legal time to call an election. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.
Second main question.

Opioid Overdoses

Mr. Jean: Late Friday Alberta Health posted the first-quarter report on opioid and substance misuse: 113 Albertans overdosed and died in the first three months of 2017. That's a 61 per cent increase. Every day someone in Alberta lost their life as a result of this crisis. You wouldn't know it, though, from the NDP quietly posting these numbers without any comment before a long weekend: no news conference, no news release, no statement even from the minister. Why is the Premier treating overdose deaths in our province as something to hide on a Friday afternoon instead of a full-blown crisis as it should be and recognize it with Albertans . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, each and every member of this government is incredibly concerned and focused on dealing with the tragedies that occur every day as a result of this opioid crisis. One of the things that we've done is we've improved transparency and reporting to Albertans, and that's exactly why the information that was released on Friday was released at the request of the chief medical health officer: because it was ready to go. That's how we do things.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? We are also working very, very hard through a number of different measures to address this crisis. It's not an easy one, but we will not stop until we get it right.

Mr. Jean: The federal Health minister has called this the biggest overdose epidemic in our country's history and an unprecedented public health crisis. Premier, the NDP government has tasked a junior minister with the file, who can only be bothered to take cheap, partisan shots instead of trying to address this serious problem. Every day of inaction from this government results in more Albertans losing their lives to this crisis. It's essential. Why on earth won't the Premier do the right thing, step up, and call this what it is, an unprecedented crisis that deserves the full attention of her government?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the federal minister is absolutely right. This is an unprecedented crisis. This is an unprecedented problem with opioid deaths. That's why our government has put \$56 million so far into prevention. That's why we are working very, very hard to get safe injection sites in more and more places in order to prevent those deaths. That's why we've put more money into detox beds. We're going to continue to work on this, and there will be more work going forward because this is a very complex and difficult challenge. We can't take our eye off the ball, and neither of the ministers who are dealing with it have done that.

Mr. Jean: The opioid crisis has multiple root causes and deserves multiple solutions, not just greater access to naloxone. The right way to co-ordinate a response and better share information across ministries is through calling a public health emergency. Time and time again the Premier has rejected the call from the opposition for a public health emergency, but I'll try again. Premier, since you agree that it's important given the unprecedented magnitude of this crisis, will you do the right thing and call for a public health emergency? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that even the member opposite has to have taken the time to read the legislation. Calling this in our province a public health emergency would give the province the ability to take property from people, to go into their homes, and to conscript them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Notley: That is what our legislation says, Mr. Speaker. The work that's going on in other provinces – co-ordinating services, investing money, sharing information, working with doctors, ensuring that there are more resources for people suffering from addictions – is going on in Alberta already. It is not necessary to put in the War Measures Act.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Student Assessment and Curriculum Review

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, today I also want to ask some questions about accountability in education. Just four years ago mandatory grade 3 provincial achievement tests, PATs, were replaced with student learning assessments, SLAs. Now we hear that the SLAs will become optional. Believe this or not, teachers will decide if they want to administer them. No one is asking parents, the actual people that should be in charge. How will this lead to accountability, and what will the minister say to Alberta parents, who need to know how their child is doing in grade 3, if testing is actually up to the teachers to do?

Ms Notley: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? If the members opposite were to actually go out and talk to parents and talk to Albertans, what they would hear from parents of kids who are in grade 3 is that those grade 3 exams cause nothing but stress and anxiety for those kids and that experts from all across the board think that they are a bad idea. Indeed, that's why their dance partner actually supported a private member's bill several years ago to get rid of the grade 3 test. The minister is working on this issue. You know what? We have to have balance, and subjecting grade 3 kids to these tests just so that they can measure things is not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Optional testing, Mr. Speaker? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Jean: There are also accountability issues in the NDP's massive curriculum development project. Albertans worry about this government's NDP world view becoming ingrained in our curriculum. This government doesn't want to disclose which outside groups are even being consulted on the curriculum, and they won't release the actual comments that Albertans provided on the government's flawed consultation process. Why is the minister ducking accountability? If he is confident that what he is doing is what Alberta parents want, why won't he release the actual comments submitted by parents on the surveys?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Alberta is engaged in the very largest curriculum rewrite in the history of the province and the most transparent rewrite of curriculum in the history of the province as well. We have literally hundreds and hundreds of interactions with the public, with different groups coming in. We even have different territories. Our curriculum is so good that Nunavut and the NWT also use our curriculum. So I defend the position that we have to build curriculum. We're doing it in a very transparent way, and we're doing it with the expertise that we have on the ground.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Wow, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government is so out of touch with parents in Alberta. This week we are starting to see the NDP world view creeping into the proposed social studies curriculum. As one columnist noted, there seems to be precious little history in the draft curriculum. Instead, there is a focus on – wait for this – prejudicial policies and perspectives on activism. When you look at the new list of things being taught, you might think that Alberta is a horrible place and not one of the safest, freest, and most tolerant places in the entire world. Can the minister please explain why the draft social studies curriculum takes such a negative view . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the program that we are building for curriculum is transparent in the broadest possible way. We have literally hundreds of different individuals and groups presenting. I would advise the hon. member opposite to actually read what we're putting forward instead of just reading second-hand Twitter quotes. What we have, in substance, is not only setting a new standard for curriculum, but it is also, I think, going to be something that will help us all in the future for all of our children. I think that it's something we will be very, very proud of.

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

Teachers' Working Time

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Premier and her Education minister have thrown rural Alberta under the bus. The ATA agreement, just ratified, caps both instructional and assignable time for every teacher in the province. To the Premier: how will teachers who want to help kids be able to do their jobs when they are told that they have used up their assignable hours, so no more help after class, no more phone calls from parents, no more field trips, no more coaching of sports?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, as we've outlined before, the doomsday scenario that the member opposite is describing is actually not what's happening. In fact, we were fully aware of what the implications of that policy would be. I would say, however, that what families would wonder is how their kids are going to learn if all the teachers that those guys had planned to lay off were in fact laid off, how their kids are going to learn if that extra \$70 million that our government committed as a result of that agreement isn't actually injected into the classrooms, how well students will learn as a result of getting school lunch programs if the members opposite can't even decide they support . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has thrown teachers under the bus. The agreement will handcuff all boards but more so rural boards. The cap on instructional hours will take away the flexibility from these boards and also from the teachers, who care deeply about kids. Again to the Premier. You have knowingly allowed instructional hours to be capped, which means you've taken away the ability of teachers to be the best they can be. How will Albertans' kids get the help they need after class when their teacher is told they've run out of instructional hours?

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite doesn't seem to understand how this policy would actually work or the degree to which the scenario he outlined would ever happen, because the reality is that it wouldn't. To be clear, what this does ensure is that teachers are still spending time preparing for their work in the classroom, because that's something else that teachers also do right now, so this will assist in greater quality within the classrooms. But we are absolutely sure that the quality of education received by Alberta children, something that we care very deeply about, will absolutely continue to improve under the watch of this government, and we are very proud of that.

Mr. McIver: Sending teachers home before they're finished will not help.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier has thrown Alberta kids under the bus. Teachers are amongst the most respected of all professions, in part because of their dedication to working with kids and parents, sometimes for long hours, to give each kid what he needs to succeed. This agreement caps instructional hours, limiting those amazing teachers from doing their best. Premier, since you are clearly ignoring the best interests of teachers, parents, and kids with this latest agreement, whose interests were you protecting?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, just to re-emphasize, the scenario that the member opposite describes is not going to happen, but what I can say is that we increased funding. The members opposite

introduced a budget that wouldn't fund school boards for enrolment increases. That would have undermined. That would have thrown teachers under the bus. They were planning on not hiring teachers for new kids coming in. That would have thrown kids under the bus. They were planning on laying off about 800 educational assistants. That would have thrown kids under the bus. They have no interest at all in our school lunch program. That throws kids under the bus. I could go on forever. The fact is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many lower income seniors and families are struggling to make ends meet due to the high cost of housing in our province. We know that to keep rental housing affordable, the stock of rental housing must keep up with population growth. My question is for the Minister of Seniors and Housing. What is the government doing to reduce the strain of housing costs on low-income renters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans deserve a safe and affordable place to call home, and that's why our 2016 capital plan will build over 6,000 units of affordable housing. This will mean thousands of families will soon have a safe and affordable place to call home. Additionally, we're supporting housing management bodies to do the repairs that they need to do, projects like replacing hot water tanks and furnaces. We know that the opposition would make very drastic cuts to the investment in affordable housing in this province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the previous government failed to make sufficient investments in the Capital Region Housing Corporation and other housing bodies across the province and, in fact, made drastic cuts to these programs even during the most recent economic boom, to the same minister: what is this government doing to correct the affordable housing deficit left behind by that government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is taking action to make life better for Albertans. Our government is following through on our \$1.2 billion commitment to build more affordable housing. We have over 40 projects on the go: Deer Lane in Banff, London Road in Lethbridge. Because our government stepped in with our investments, these projects are now moving forward.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that access to safe, affordable housing is one of the most essential needs of a healthy community, can the minister please provide the House with more details on the government's commitment to an affordable housing strategy in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We expect to launch the strategy later in the spring. One thing I've heard is how the current

housing system essentially penalizes tenants for improving their financial situation. Currently if a tenant gets a better job and their income level increases to just over the income cut-off for eligibility, they risk losing their home. This type of instability is detrimental to their long-term success. Our government wants to support tenants to improve their financial situation, and that's why I'm looking at this issue, to make life better for Albertans.

Employment and Labour Legislation

Mr. Fildebrandt: When the NDP were in opposition, they had a tradition of filibustering bills to delay them when they didn't have the votes to outright stop them. But even though they now sit on the government side of the House, the NDP are working hard to be Alberta's opposition-in-waiting. For the last two weeks they have been filibustering their own legislation because they don't have their union boss empowerment bill ready yet. It now appears the NDP will attempt to force that union boss bill through the House with rushed late-night sittings. Will the opposition-in-waiting commit that they won't force the bill through late at night?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's well known that you can't ask questions of the opposition, so he can't have it both ways.

We're committed, Mr. Speaker, to getting our legislative agenda through with full debate and to allow as much time as it takes to debate and improve the legislation as we go.

The Speaker: Your first supplemental.

Mr. Fildebrandt: If the question was to us, we'd actually answer.

The Speaker: No preamble.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the CFIB has released a survey today showing that just 13 per cent of their small-business members agree with the NDP about taking away the right of workers to a secret ballot . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I know I don't need to tell you again. Forget the preamble.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker . . .

2:10

The Speaker: Sit down, please. Too many times you continue to put in inserts as preambles. You know the rules of this House.

Please proceed with your first supplemental again.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the CFIB released a survey, given that workers have a right to join a union but that they also have a fundamental right to a secret ballot, given that everyone in this place was elected using a secret ballot, which is good because it's getting hard to find anyone who will admit that they actually voted for the NDP anymore, why do the NDP believe in the right to a secret ballot for elections but not for unions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve fair workplace legislation that protects them, their families, and supports a strong economy. When we introduce legislation, I will be pleased to discuss individual items with the member, but I can assure you that the legislation we bring forward will be fair and family friendly. It will reflect a consultation that engaged thousands of Albertans, including me sitting down personally to meet with the CFIB, Merit Contractors, and chambers of commerce. I look forward to introducing that legislation and moving Alberta forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP chose to name their union boss empowerment bill the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, which is funny because taking away the secret ballot is not fair and intimidation and bullying from union bosses is not friendly, and given that without the protection of a secret ballot...

The Speaker: Get to your question.

Mr. Fildebrandt: ... workplaces will be significantly more prone to workplace bullying and intimidation as paid union bosses cajole their way, why would this government force through...

The Speaker: Hon. member, when I stand, you sit. Understand that part? Hon. member, look at me, please. Do you understand that part? Tell me yes or no.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Sure.

The Speaker: Great. Next time put a question in there.

Who would like to respond to the question? The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, making sure that Alberta does have fair and family-friendly legislation is important, and I can tell you that right now Alberta does not have fair legislation because we have stories like Amanda Jensen's, who lost her job because her son got leukemia, and she asked for an unpaid leave to take care of a son that needed chemotherapy, that needed treatments. That is not fair. Through my consultation with thousands of Albertans we found agreement on that. Making sure that we have workplace laws that serve our province, serve our economy, and help workers to take care of their families is important.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Care Worker Safety

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than four months ago a 60-year-old staff member was attacked and almost killed at the Elk Island youth ranch near Lamont. The vicious assault prompted questions about the safety of staff working for the government-contracted service providers throughout Alberta. To the Minister of Labour: since occupational health and safety's investigation could take up to two years, what changes have you introduced for the interim to protect all contracted care workers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to speak about the fact that we take the workers that work in our contracted facilities very seriously. From the moment that we heard about it, we took action not only in that facility but to start conversations about what we can do right across this province. Certainly, the workers who take care of vulnerable youth across this province make tremendous sacrifices in order to do so, but one of those sacrifices should not be their safety. So, absolutely, we took it very seriously, stepped in very quickly in that facility, and we'll continue to work to move right across this province to ensure the safety...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that on March 7 the minister said in this House that

Children's Services is reviewing policy and licensing requirements and accreditation. We will certainly be acting quickly on any findings because ... our government believes that no one's life and safety should be put unnecessarily at risk when they go to work,

let me try it again. To the Minister of Labour: what specific action has your ministry taken to ensure the safety of all care workers in Alberta since the February attack?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as the government of Alberta we're very committed to worker safety in every area of this province, but certainly when it comes to our contract providers, we need to make sure that we continue to work with the actual service providers to ensure that workers are safe, that the staffing is at a safe level, because no one's life and safety should unnecessarily be put at risk when they go to work. We are taking a closer look at how we support safety for contract staff. I'm proud of the work Children's Services is doing to make some changes in this area in order to make sure that workers can feel safe when...

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that physical harm to the government-contracted care worker does occur, including harm of the most serious nature, and given that the victim of the Elk Island attack suffered debilitating physical and emotional injuries and given that Albertans expect contracted employees to have access to a full scope of health benefits should they suffer on-the-job injuries, Minister, can you personally assure this House that the victim of the Elk Island incident has access to comprehensive health support to assist her recovery from this dreadful attack?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All Alberta workers are covered through our workers' compensation system, which we have been reviewing over the past year to make sure that we have fair compensation for all workers, to make sure that the system is sustainable. In this case, for this specific worker, making sure that there is that appropriate coverage and that we have a system that is sustainable is a priority for our government because this is a tragic situation. No Alberta worker should go to work and not be able to come home safely. We want to do everything we can to protect...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Vegreville Immigration Centre

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the federal government is shutting down the immigration case processing centre in Vegreville. Albertans have heard very little from the NDP and absolutely nothing, zero – zero – from the Premier. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Cooper: Clearly, the Premier would rather leave this community behind instead of rocking the boat with her best friend in Ottawa. Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Premier do more than just wear a button and actually stand up for the people of Vegreville?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so proud of this government, standing with the people of Vegreville from day one. The MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has been a champion for this. Through her activism I have had the opportunity to not only sit down with the minister responsible and look him in the eye and talk to him about the importance of Vegreville, but we have sent numerous corresponding letters to the federal government to make sure that they understand the impact that closing this facility will have on Vegreville. This government has Vegreville's back, and I'm very proud of the actions we've taken.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier has not said one word publicly and given that Albertans have received word that Ottawa is planning on moving the National Energy Board out of Alberta and given that the feds appear unwilling to stop the move of the immigration case processing centre out of Vegreville and since these are the kinds of results that Albertans have come to expect from this Premier's experiment, that has failed, in quiet diplomacy, to the Premier: when are you actually going to stand up and fight for the people of Vegreville?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud that our Premier and this government fight every day for Albertans, including making public statements about the National Energy Board moving, making sure that I as the minister responsible am engaging directly with the minister responsible for this decision in the federal government. I had an opportunity to sit down with him. The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has done member's statements in this House and has helped to organize the petitions that have been circulated throughout the community of Vegreville. We continue to fight for that community. We have been publicly fighting for that community, and I am proud of that work.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that Vegreville was first given notice that it would be losing this major employer last October and since this move could result in the relocation of almost 10 per cent of the town's population, the results of which would be devastating, how has the Premier been silent for seven months, turning her back on rural Alberta, while this community loses a major employer? How can she care so little about Vegreville? Will she commit today to calling the Prime Minister himself and defending Vegreville?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has been anything but silent. We have been fighting for Vegreville. We have been talking to the federal government about the impact of their decision. Making sure that we can support our rural communities and understand the impact that closing this centre would have on schools, on businesses, on this thriving community has been a priority for us. We have done so in numerous ways, including in-person discussions. I'm proud of this government's efforts to fight for Vegreville. We will continue to support Vegreville through services and through investments in that community however we can. We are fighting for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Capital Project Tendering Process

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently it was brought to my attention that the government was restricting who could and

could not submit tenders for government capital builds. This they called prequalification. In my riding a reputable local builder of provincial public facilities known for excellent quality and on-time project completion was told that they would not even be able to bid on the government tender. Can the Minister of Infrastructure confirm for this House if this is happening or not?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's not my practice to talk about individual contract bids in the Assembly. I can assure the hon. member, however, that the process was fair and that all the bids were evaluated properly. I've asked the department to confirm that for me, and I believe it to be true.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, when the tender process is not open to all bidders, the government runs the risk of allowing price-fixing. Given that this is the practice where a small group of contractors who were permitted to bid on a job adds an amount to each of their bids and then the company who gets the bid distributes and adds the amount to each of the other unsuccessful bidders, to the minister: how can you be sure that by restricting the companies who can bid on a job, you are not opening up the Alberta taxpayer to price-fixing?

Mr. Mason: I want to thank the hon. member for explaining the basics of this to me, Mr. Speaker, but I can assure him that the process is fair and that qualified bidders are allowed to bid and that their bids are evaluated fairly and that the best choice, in the opinion of nonpolitical, nonpartisan, skilled public servants, is made in the interests of the people and in the interests of the taxes that they pay.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, he forgot to say Scout's honour on that one.

Given that the Alberta purchasing connection inconsistently displays who bid what dollar amount and who won the bid for government procurement of goods and services and given that the purchasing connection also removes access to the tender documents once the competition closes, will the minister increase transparency and accountability and make these necessary changes to the purchasing connection in order to help the private sector offer goods and services at a lower rate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can tell the hon. member and I can tell the House that we are in the process of revising and updating the procurement process across government. It's a multidepartmental initiative, and we're looking at finding ways to encourage innovation, to encourage local economic investment, to increase green practices. Transparency is part of that process, I want to assure the hon. member.

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

Fentanyl- and Carfentanil-related Deaths

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first-quarter stats for this year's fentanyl-related deaths are definitive. The crisis is not abating. Of tremendous concern is that, of the 113 fatalities in the first three months of this year, almost 20 per cent were due to carfentanil. When asked last month what this government is doing to address public awareness about carfentanil, the minister said it had, quote, released a report, unquote. We now have another report, and fentanyl has taken even more lives. Minister, clearly, reports are not enough. Why are you not declaring a public health emergency?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. This crisis is devastating for all Albertans, for families, communities, and, of course, for victims, and that's why this year alone our government is investing \$56 million in support of treatment and prevention. With that money we're going to be expanding the access to life-saving naloxone kits as well as expanding access to supervised consumption services and other wraparound services, plus expanding access to opioid dependency treatment, which is considered best practice when helping people deal with an addiction.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, this is an emergency.

Given that there have been incidents around North America that have seen first responders fall ill at overdose scenes involving carfentanyl and given that with 50 carfentanyl deaths in Alberta over the past 15 months the danger to our front-line emergency workers is extreme and given that Alberta created the first known test to detect carfentanyl in blood, which allows this government to act nimbly upon learning that it's present in specific areas, to the same minister: why have you not raised the urgent alarm about the grave public health emergency of carfentanyl?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government is committed to working in close partnership with members in law enforcement as well as other first responders. We're working really hard to make sure that they've got the tools that they need to do their jobs and to keep themselves safe in any situation where there might be carfentanyl present. That is why we've worked to expand access to naloxone kits for first responders, which was, you know, leadership taken by this government in order to address this crisis.

Mr. Ellis: The opposition has been calling upon the province to declare a public health emergency to create a co-ordinated response to this epidemic. Given that we have been assured that there is no need to make that declaration because co-ordination is occurring and given that the Justice minister said in estimates that police services are not required to share information with the province – so co-ordination is not happening, then, but what is happening is that Albertans are dying. Premier, will you show leadership here and order your minister to launch a co-ordinated attack on this crisis?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to further highlight some of the work that our government has been doing as part of our co-ordinated response to this. The chief medical officer of health in Alberta has been leading our response and is best suited to do so as a leading epidemiologist in our province. Further, we've been working with partners in the community as well as in partnership with law enforcement and other first responders, increasing access to naloxone, which has saved lives. There were 1,130 reports of life-saving reversals last quarter alone, and we are going to continue to do that work in partnership, continue to share that, and move . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Indigenous Workforce Participation

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you well know, indigenous people in Alberta face many barriers when finding employment. In fact, the percentage of unemployed off-reserve indigenous population compared to the nonindigenous population in 2015 was almost 6 per cent higher. This is unacceptable. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what is the government doing to help indigenous peoples find employment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. I was very happy last week to announce, along with the Minister of Advanced Education and the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark, a grant to Trade Winds to Success, an organization that supports academic upgrading and skills training to help indigenous people make a successful entry into the trades, leading to good jobs and careers. Trade Winds to Success has graduated more than 1,000 indigenous students from its preapprenticeship program since the program began in 2009. As a former student stated at the event, "My life would not be what it is today without Trade Winds." Through programs such as this our government is providing funding that helps indigenous people get the skills they need.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the unemployment rate for young people is almost always higher when compared to other age groups, to the same minister: are there any programs designed to help young indigenous people enter the workforce?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to highlight a program that Indigenous Relations offers called the Alberta indigenous internship program. This is a two-year program open to postsecondary graduates who have an interest in working with the Alberta government and possess a good knowledge of aboriginal initiatives, people, communities, and culture. The program offers graduates work experience, professional development, and the opportunity to work with an aboriginal community partner. Interns spend the first year working in one of the participating ministries, followed by nine months of working with a community nongovernment partner before returning to the ministry for the last three months. Currently we have six interns in year 1 and 11 in year 2.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, are there any other programs that your ministry funds to boost employment in indigenous communities?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is also the employment partnership program, which supports employment and training initiatives for indigenous people to enter the workforce. Specifically, it supports indigenous people in overcoming barriers, learning new skills, and adapting to changing labour market demands. Last year the employment partnership program provided funding worth \$5.9 million to over 35 employment and training projects. All these

programs invest in employment opportunities for indigenous people to help make life better for these individuals and support Alberta's economy now and into the future.

Thank you.

Provincial Spending

Mr. Loewen: Recently the Premier said that Alberta needed the Trans Mountain pipeline because the revenues that it will produce, quote, will give us more money for health care, more money for education, for renewables, and the technologies to reduce emissions. End quote. Premier, can you tell us here today: if Alberta receives more money because of pipelines, will your plans be to spend it on light bulbs, or will you at least put some towards the astronomical deficit that causes debt and enormous interest payments?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our Premier has been steadfast in her commitment to making sure that we gain new market access, and that's because Albertans deserve the very best price for their resources. We are going to move forward with the plan that we've brought forward, which includes a plan to get us back to balance within six years, instead of moving forward with rash cuts, as the members opposite are proposing, and getting us there possibly one year earlier. We're not going to fire teachers and nurses. We're going to keep moving forward with a reasonable, balanced approach that stands up for Alberta families and gets us better market access.

Mr. Loewen: Since the NDP government has an apparent spending addiction on things like light bulbs from an Ontario company, a government laundry service, and millions on carbon tax advertisements, will you tell us how much money the NDP government will spend before it decides that enough is enough, or will the Minister of Finance at least tell us here today how high the price of oil needs to be in order for him to balance the budget?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, both parties, the future whatever party they call themselves – one party, two parties, three parties – are pushing for rash, ideological cuts. They don't want to stand up for Alberta families. On this side of the House we're capping electricity rates. They'd jack them up. We're capping school fees, and we're making them affordable. They'd jack them up. We're making sure that if you go to university in this province, you can afford to pay your tuition. They want to jack it up. The choice is clear. You guys are wrong. We're moving forward with the right plan.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the minister cannot and will not tell us how much money the NDP government has to collect in order to balance the budget and since the NDP government's debt problem is something that credit-rating agency DBRS says "demonstrates a lack of willingness to contain debt growth" and since it's clear that this government has a spending addiction and that the first step to recovery is admitting that you have a problem, for the sake of the province when is the Minister of Finance going to admit that he has a spending problem and seek credit counselling?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud of our Minister of Finance for bringing forward a plan that protects

Alberta families. It does that within reason. In the past under Conservative governments we've seen increases to health care expenditure in excess of 6 per cent. Under our government it's about 3 and a half per cent. That's reasonable. We've also seen deep ideological cuts on the other side. That's the problem. The problem is that the folks on the other side are spending all of their time trying to beat up health care, trying to beat up education. And you know what? Albertans deserve better. They've got better. They've got an NDP government.

North West Refinery

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the North West refinery is getting closer to completion, and we're eager to begin seeing the benefits to the economy that refining bitumen in Alberta will bring. However, the downside is that as the refinery comes online, the hard-working Albertans who built it will be losing their jobs. With no confidence that the second phase of the refinery will be built, many of these workers are concerned for their future. To the Minister of Energy: when can we expect this government to make a decision on the second phase of the North West refinery to give these workers some certainty for their future?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we are in constant contact with the North West refinery to see how the first phase goes. They're wrapping it up at this point. They need to meet some targets as we go along. But we are in constant talks, and we know that this refinery will be opening in the fall.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of the workers who are part of this project have amassed a wealth of expertise and first-hand knowledge building the first phase and given that the longer the government delays making a decision, the more workers will leave the area and possibly Alberta and given that continued loss of these workers may harm the economics to continuing phase 2, to the same minister. Albertans are concerned that you may be dragging your feet on this decision, hoping that your delay will force the abandonment of the second phase without you actually having to make the decision.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've got a lot of – Alberta is very proud of all the skilled tradespeople we have. While we're waiting to see how the North West refinery starts up and works, we also are proud to say that we have two PDP projects that are going to be needing workers – one will be making final decisions in the next while – and workers will have plenty of opportunity to work on either of those two projects.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that phase 1 of the North West refinery was part of the PC government's diversification plan, with upgraded products helping to mitigate the impact of the low price for bitumen, and given that phase 2 of the upgrader would provide both long-term employment for Albertans and allow for more value-added production, to the same minister: will you acknowledge that the North West refinery is an important piece of Alberta's petrochemical diversification and assure Albertans that this decision isn't being held up for political reasons?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, the North West refinery is important. It's the first refinery in a number of years that is being built in Alberta. We're looking forward to it opening up in the fall. It has to finish the last bits of its last phase. We have to see how it works. Again, we are in contact with the owners regarding the next phase.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mental Health Services for Children

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek is a vibrant part of Alberta due in no small part to the large number of children being raised in the area. Over 25 per cent of the residents are under the age of 18, well above the average even for our young province. As a teacher and psychologist I'm very concerned with children's mental health. Given that mental health has been emphasized as a top priority, to the Associate Minister of Health: what is this government doing to support the mental health of children in Edmonton-Mill Creek?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this very important question as well as for her strong advocacy on this issue. You know, members on the other side of the House like to dismiss social issues, but we're working on building a healthier and stronger province when we take care of one another. Our government has increased the addictions and mental health budget by \$45 million this year alone, with children and youth as one of the target populations for investment under the valuing mental health plan. This government is keeping its commitments to make life better for Albertans of all ages.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many programs and professionals are embedded within the school system and given that the school year is now winding down, to the same minister: what mental health supports are available for children in the community during the summer months?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we all know that mental health issues don't fall neatly into business hours or into the school calendar, which is why we're working to make sure that children have access to help whenever they need it, wherever they are. We've already launched help4me.ca, an Internet portal that provides 24/7 support to children struggling with addiction or mental illness or looking to help their friends.

I'd like to again thank the member for her ongoing advocacy. We'll have more to say on our work to increase the number of treatment beds and counselling supports available for children in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some children require more intensive supports as well as familial supports, to the Associate Minister of Health: how is this government expanding access to more specialized mental health for children?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When families and children are in crisis, they need access to the wraparound services that are ready to support them. These include organizations such as CASA, the centre for Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health, which this government has committed more than \$14 million in funding for through 2018. While the members opposite would promise deep cuts and widespread cuts, I would ask them which families they would abandon. These are investments that we think are vital to making life better for all Albertans, and this is work that we will continue to support.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will proceed with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

London Road Gateway Housing Project in Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to rise and speak about the London Road gateway project in my community of Lethbridge. In 2011 this affordable housing project was approved by the Lethbridge city council through the Lethbridge Housing Authority and presented to the previous provincial government, who had yet again failed to invest in Albertans.

Following the election of 2015 I moved into my constituency office in the London Road neighbourhood. I was very quickly visited by neighbours, the architect, the Lethbridge Housing Authority, and the mayor. They all shared the importance and urgency of this project. They shared the design and identified why this is such a good project to address affordable housing in our community. This project is shovel ready and is so good that I was stunned by the fact that it had not received approval by the previous government.

The London Road gateway project will provide eight semi-detached units with two bedrooms, three barrier-free studio units, and three detached homes with two bedrooms each. Units will share a common courtyard. The housing authority will scale its rental fees to the tenant's income.

Mr. Speaker, initiatives such as these are needed to reduce homelessness, and I am proud to be part of a government that takes the needs of all Albertans seriously. On behalf of my constituents, some of whom asked the questions that my colleague asked today, I thank our government from the bottom of my heart for its decision to provide \$3.5 million to fund the construction of the London Road gateway affordable housing project.

Thank you.

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

Tsuut'ina First Nation

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak of a great people and a great neighbour to my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore, the Tsuut'ina Nation. The Tsuut'ina First Nation is part of the Athapaskan-speaking language group, which is spread across North America and has a history of 3,000 years.

Recently I had the opportunity to greet Hal Eagletail of the Tsuut'ina Nation when he came to the Lakeview community and offer him the traditional gift of tobacco from the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. There were many people who came to see Mr. Eagletail and to listen to his presentation.

He told the story of how the Tsuut'ina came to be and how their people had ranged across much of the continent. He also explained the devastating effect that European settlement had on his nation. When their chief signed Treaty 7 in 1877, their population was only 150 people; before European settlement their nation had numbered over 1,000. I want to mention this sad fact because it relates directly to the subject of his visit to Calgary-Glenmore. He came to build relationships with us as good neighbours.

We are neighbours in many ways, and one of them is the southwest ring road project in Calgary. This project would not have been able to go ahead without the Tsuut'ina Nation. This road connects people around the city and strengthens relationships between us and our partners everywhere. Mr. Speaker, a popular definition of "neighbour" is someone who provides kindness or helpfulness toward their fellow humans. I would argue that for generations the Tsuut'ina people were not treated that way.

I'm incredibly proud to be part of a government that is working hard to correct that historic wrong and develop a new relationship based on the principles and objectives of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. Mr. Speaker, our success lies in the strength of our relationships, and building a good relationship with our neighbours will build success for everyone.

Thank you.

Vegreville Immigration Centre

Mr. Cooper: Today across our province a new generation of conservative leaders is stepping forward to defend our communities from an anti-Alberta establishment in Ottawa. These next generation conservatives are strong, smart, confident people who are capable and ready to lead. One of them, the Member of Parliament for Lakeland, is fighting a heated battle to protect the town of Vegreville. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau plans to relocate the community's immigration case processing centre, at a devastating cost to workers, to the community, and to taxpayers.

Here are the facts. Over a five-year period it will cost taxpayers \$22 million to relocate the processing centre but just \$7 million to keep it in Vegreville. The move strips a minimum of 236 direct jobs from the community as well as dozens and dozens of secondary and tertiary jobs. This decision will be devastating for the people of Vegreville, but the Premier has been absolutely silent. The quiet diplomacy being pursued by this administration has done nothing to make the lives better for Albertans. One needs to look no further than to the Premier sitting on her hands with this situation in Vegreville. You would think that the Premier's best friend in Ottawa wouldn't be treating her like this, especially with all the so-called social licence she's been building up.

The next generation of conservative leaders, folks like MP Shannon Stubbs, know that standing up for Alberta isn't just about looking at the past, but it's about implementing a vision for Alberta's future. Thirty years from now we'll be able to look back and say: "Yes, we fought for the community of Vegreville. Yes, we stood up to the Prime Minister when he said that the oil sands should be phased out. Yes, we fought to keep the National Energy Board here in Alberta, where it belongs. And, yes, Mr. Speaker, we fought for an Alberta where hard work and dedication bring new hope and new prosperity." And that's what it means to be a conservative in the 21st century.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my delight today to rise and table two petitions sponsored by one of my constituents. The first petition urges the government of Alberta to

- (1) encourage the use of materials in industrial projects in Alberta that are fabricated in Canada;
- (2) facilitate the transition of unionized workers from major construction projects by ensuring that new major construction projects only commence once active major construction projects near completion; and
- (3) ensure that trade unions bring any new construction project agreements to their membership for approval prior to the expiry of current construction project agreements.

The second one, Mr. Speaker, urges the government of Alberta to

- (1) increase the basic entitlement of annual holidays for all workers to four weeks with pay;
- (2) prohibit employers from hiring replacement workers once a bargaining unit is on strike; and
- (3) implement a standard 40-hour work week for all workers.

I'm delighted, Mr. Speaker, to encourage constituents to be active. Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 16

An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. This being a money bill, the Administrator, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

In the fall we announced a cap on electricity prices to protect Alberta consumers. The proposed bill would cap electricity rates for a four-year period, protecting Albertans from the electricity rate spikes that it has been seeing under the existing market structure. If passed, this act would build a bridge of stability as we transition to a cleaner and more stable electricity system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a rather hefty tabling to make today. I have the requisite five copies of a petition. In my constituency I mailed everybody a cheque for \$5 billion. The other side says: "This is not a cheque to buy you off with your own money. [It's] a petition to cancel & repeal the job-killing carbon tax." I have well over a thousand responses. You may want a few pages here.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite five copies of the socioeconomic impact assessment of the CPC closure. Hopefully, the Wildrose opposition won't prevent me from tabling it today. [interjection] No? That's fine? You'll let me table it today? Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also, I have five copies of a letter from NDP MP Jenny Kwan, MP for Vancouver East, and Sheri Benson,

MP for Saskatoon West, a letter to the hon. Ahmed Hussen asking for a reversal of the decision about the CPC centre.

Also, I have a response to that, that I quoted from in my member's statement on Thursday, from the same minister, where he goes through the trouble of reiterating that this was a difficult decision for management of immigration case processing.

I also have five copies of the Global News article that references an extra \$10.8 million that it'll cost to move it to Edmonton as opposed to staying in Vegreville.

While I would have loved to table five copies of a letter in support from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, unfortunately, that doesn't exist.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections]

Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. I have five copies of an article from the *Financial Post* from May 15 in reference to AIMCo. It says: Tension Keeps Rising over Alberta's Heritage Fund After Another Ambush of Political Tampering from [Premier's] NDP.

I have five copies of the front page of the *ATA News*, talking about teachers having their assignable as well as their instructional time capped.

Five copies, Mr. Speaker, of a PDF sent to all members from Inclusion Alberta entitled Bill 205: Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act, Proposed Amendments and Review of Limitations.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today at the Public Accounts Committee meeting there were questions about protecting the independence of government-appointed tribunal chairs like OHS, which is supposed to be arm's length. That chair actually last year went public, and CBC interviewed him about a fundraising e-mail he got from the NDP, which the NDP acknowledged was wrong. I agreed to table this document wherein the OHS chair felt the pressure of donating to the NDP. If not, he may not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three documents to table today. The first one is dated Sunday, May 21, from the Allstate Arena in Chicago, Illinois, by the WWE Network: Jinder Mahal Def. Randy Orton to Become the New WWE Champion.

The second document is from *Times of India*, entitled I Want to Represent India and Make Them Proud: WWE Champion Jinder Mahal, in reference to his WWE *Backlash* win.

This document is from the *Calgary Herald*. Don't Hinder Jinder Mahal: He's the First Calgarian Professional Wrestler to Win WWE Championship in 20 Years, with the subtext, "It's been 20 years since Calgary last saw a WWE Champion when wrestling legend Bret 'The Hitman' Hart claimed his fourth [title] in 1997."

I think I speak for all Albertans that I would like to congratulate this talented wrestler from Calgary on his championship win.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good afternoon. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 15

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to offer in regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm happy to hear the support we've had in second reading for this important Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, that we've put forward here. As discussed during second reading, Alberta's income and commodity tax statutes are typically amended every year. This is necessary to ensure government policy decisions are implemented and our tax legislation continues to align with federal tax legislation.

I'd like to highlight two aspects of this particular bill. Our intent is to continue to work to make life better for Albertans and for Albertan businesses. The amendments in Bill 15 do just that not only by keeping our tax system aligned with the federal system but also by ensuring that small businesses in this province are operating on a level playing field and by ensuring that rebates and benefit programs delivered through the tax system are administered consistently and, most importantly, efficiently.

In regard to the small-business tax rate I was really pleased to hear agreement from other members of this House for the small-business-rate component of this bill. I want to emphasize once again that the changes we're making simply parallel changes made at the federal level last year. Those changes were necessary to address the misuse of the preferential 2 per cent small-business rate and to maintain the integrity of the tax system. Although this is not a prevalent issue, it is one that deserves our attention.

We pride ourselves on a tax system that is attractive not only to families wanting to build a better life but also to businesses wanting to invest and to grow. In order for this to continue being the case, we have to ensure Alberta's taxes are applied fairly and consistently. The preferential business tax rate is meant to apply only once, to a small business's first \$500,000 of income. These changes we're making are consistent with this intent and ensure small businesses don't take advantage of a loophole to multiply their access to this preferential rate.

This doesn't change the benefits enjoyed by Albertans' small businesses, which represent 96 per cent of all Alberta businesses in this province. Let's not forget that we are leaders among Canadian provinces, consistently generating a GDP per capita that exceeds the national average, Madam Chair. There is no question of the importance to our province's economic health.

That is why our government has been working to support small businesses by cutting the small-business tax rate to 2 per cent at the start of the year, which was previously 3 per cent; by introducing a capital tax investment credit and the Alberta investor tax credit, which is expected to support at least 9,000 jobs and add \$1.2 billion to Alberta's GDP – I know many businesses in my riding and many constituents of mine were very supportive of this particular investor tax credit – by capping electricity rates, protecting Albertans and Alberta businesses from sudden price spikes; by increasing capital available to ATB by \$1.5 billion to support small and medium-sized business loans; and lastly, by introducing energy efficiency programming that will help businesses save money.

3:00

We've made a commitment to have the backs of Alberta businesses, and we will continue to honour that commitment, Madam

Chair. Amending our Corporate Tax Act to remain consistent with the federal Income Tax Act will affect a very small fraction of the overall number of small businesses in the province, but it will serve the important purpose of protecting the integrity of the tax system by closing a loophole and ensuring small businesses are operating on a level playing field. We're not introducing anything new here. We're just clarifying the intent of the small-business rate so that it applies fairly and consistently, something that I think everyone can agree makes good sense.

Now, Madam Chair, I'd also like to highlight an amendment to the payment rules for the carbon levy rebate. As this House has heard, families who had recently lost a loved one were receiving notices from the Canada Revenue Agency requiring the repayment of all or part of that deceased person's rebate. I was disappointed that those letters compounded the distress of the loved ones of that person, and our Premier was clear, and this House as well, that that was not the right way to do things. The intent of the rebate is to help lower and middle-income families adjust to the additional costs of the carbon levy. We set a \$100 minimum payment rule to ensure these families would receive meaningful payments that would make a difference as they balance their chequebooks at home, and we allowed for the prepayment of rebates so that these families would have the support they needed in a timely fashion.

The recovery of these rebates when a death changed a household's eligibility was an unintended consequence of that threshold, and it certainly wasn't something we wanted to happen. That is why we immediately notified the Canada Revenue Agency when we became aware of this issue, and we asked them to stop sending these letters while we worked out a permanent solution. A permanent solution is contained in this bill, Madam Chair, and we are letting Albertans know that these notices can be disregarded and that any rebates received by family members who have passed away do not have to be returned.

The Canada Revenue Agency is working as we speak to update their systems so that rebates can be repaid to any families that had already returned their payment. This, Madam Chair, is a labour-intensive process, so it will take some time, and we ask those who have done that to be patient with us. We expect these repayments to be completed in the fall, and we appreciate the continued patience of those affected families.

The recovery of benefits will also be waived under the Alberta child benefit and Alberta family employment tax credit programs. No parent should ever have to deal with the loss of a child, and they shouldn't have the added grief of a collection notice for a benefit that's supposed to make their life better. Madam Chair, we recognize that, and similar to the carbon levy rebate, processes could be improved. So we're working with the Canada Revenue Agency to implement changes that will allow the parents of deceased children to keep any benefit amounts they received for that deceased child. This will apply to all benefit payments from January 1, 2017, onwards.

Also, Madam Chair, families in this situation who receive a notice of reassessment after that date can disregard the notice. They do not have to return the money. I want to be clear about that. They do not have to return the money of any overpayments from 2017 onwards. All families who have already repaid any amounts will of course be reimbursed.

These are practical changes to benefits provided through the tax system, and I know they will make a meaningful difference to the, thankfully, few families in these particular circumstances. We, of course, should not lose sight of the fact that more than 1 million payments were delivered to Albertans with no problems at all. This

rebate was deposited in their bank account or mailed to their home, and they were able to use that money to help pay their gas bill, make their home more energy efficient, or put it to other priorities that they deemed worthy.

Unexpected issues sometimes arise in new programs of this magnitude, but I'm proud of the work we've done to resolve this as quickly and efficiently as possible. Great credit, Madam Chair, I think, goes to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and his staff in the ministry for working to fix this problem quickly; hence, the bill we have in front of us.

Going forward, Madam Chair, we're confident that the legislative amendments included in this bill will prevent these situations from occurring again. Pro-rating the annual \$100 minimum threshold to a \$25 quarterly minimum threshold means the rebates will be paid more frequently and in a way that is more responsive to a particular household's current situation. Rebate entitlements below \$200 will no longer have to be prepaid up front. For example, a household entitled to a \$150 rebate will receive four payments of \$37.50 rather than the full amount in one payment at the beginning of the benefit year.

During debate we heard from the Member for Strathmore-Brooks about his concern that making this legislative amendment might be more costly than simply continuing to waive the recovery of amounts in these particular aforementioned situations. I think it's important to understand the amount of work that went into identifying these cases and updating the systems to reflect the forgiveness of these amounts. This was not an automatic process for the Canada Revenue Agency. They had to manually go back to determine which of the recovery notices were sent out as the result of a death. Those 4,400 cases had to be individually identified from a total of 1.2 million payments that went out. I think we can all agree that this would not be a practical or efficient approach to dealing with this into the future, and the Canada Revenue Agency certainly wouldn't be doing it for free.

3:10

Now, of course, administrative costs will be higher with more payments being issued, but we in the ministry don't expect the increase to be significant, Madam Chair, and even with the change we estimate the cost of administering the rebate to remain below \$10 million annually. That's about 2 per cent of the total amount that's going out in rebates to the households, at \$410 million, in 2017-2018. The administrative costs and the costs of the benefits provided are all funded from carbon levy revenue.

The new payment rules will not only resolve issues with recovery of payments but will also make the programs more responsive. For example, as eligible families grow or move into the province, they can start receiving the rebate at the next payment cycle. Without this amendment, they might have to wait until the next benefit year to start receiving these valuable payments. This ensures that as families bear the additional cost of the carbon levy, they will have the support they need to adjust.

I should note that for the next benefit year, which starts just over a month from now, in July, eligibility will be based on the 2016 tax returns. We know that many Albertan families were affected by unexpected layoffs in 2016. Because the current rebate benefit year is based on 2015 tax returns, some of these families were not eligible to receive it because their 2015 income did not meet the eligibility parameters, but I'm pleased, Madam Chair, that they will start benefiting from the rebate program soon, and I know they will welcome that support.

Now, Madam Chair, I thought it would be very interesting, since we talked about this at length, just to briefly mention the section –

I know that in Committee of the Whole we didn't go over this – that actually allows this to happen. It is:

(7) Section 35.3(5) is repealed and the following is substituted.
What it's saying there is:

(5) The amount deemed to have been paid by an eligible individual for a taxation year is nil where the amount in relation to a month specified for the taxation year that would otherwise be deemed by subsection (3) to have been paid on account of the eligible individual's tax payable under this Act is less than \$25.

That, in effect, Madam Chair, is the section, which is referring to many other parts of the tax code, that allows this to happen, and I think it's important that that gets read into the record because that is the piece that is actually fixing what we want to fix. It's the intent of this bill, and it's a small part of how we're making life better for everyday Albertans.

Now, I want to just talk briefly about why families, even in the first place, were being asked by Revenue Canada to pay back these rebates after a loved one dies. Well, in short, it's because the Canada Revenue Agency administers the rebate program, and their system, when it discovered that somebody was perhaps ineligible for a rebate because of a death, saw that there would be an overpayment and then autogenerated letters to go out to claim the overpayment back. The system, of course, was automated and administered by the Canada Revenue Agency but was not what we intended with the carbon levy payment rebates, and although I don't personally blame Revenue Canada for that, I could see how that could happen. This bill makes it clear that the Canada Revenue Agency could set up their systems to appropriately address this issue through the amendments in Bill 15, Tax Statutes Amendment Act.

Now, Madam Chair, I think I'm going to head into my closing here so that I can hear from other members of the House about the Tax Statutes Amendment Act. As I said earlier, Bill 15 is about making life better for Albertans and for Alberta businesses. We're continuing our good work to support entrepreneurs and job creators in this province by clarifying the policy intent of the small-business rate so that it is accessed fairly and consistently. We're protecting the integrity of our tax system by ensuring that it remains aligned with the federal tax system. Of course, we're making practical, meaningful changes that help keep more money in families' pockets by improving the administration of the carbon levy rebate and the child benefit programs.

Now, Madam Chair, I'd request that all members of this House, if they haven't done so already, read through the important amendments in this bill and listen to the remainder of the debate here. Finally, of course, I'd ask that all members of this House support this important bill, that is making life better for everyday Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. That is a tough act to follow. Boy, I will try to ramp it up just a little so that I can kind of go over and above my constituency neighbour from Calgary-Currie there, and I will do that by proposing an amendment. I will hand the requisite number of copies to you and wait for you to receive it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I have the original. Please go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. The amendment itself is simple. It reads that I will move that Bill 15, Tax Statutes Amendment Act,

2017, be amended in section 2 by striking out subsections (6) and (10). Those sections are the two sections that deal with political tax credits applying to both leadership and nomination contests.

I have a number of reasons why I believe this should be removed from the bill. As members will recall, I was a member of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which reviewed all aspects of our province's campaign finance rules, and at no time, in my recollection, did that committee ever recommend or even discuss whether political contribution tax credits ought to be extended to leadership contests or nomination contests. We did have a long and robust debate about whether or not leadership contests or, more fittingly, nomination contests should in fact be included in the contribution limit. Certainly, in the global \$4,000 contribution limit there was considerable disagreement as to whether or not both leadership but especially nomination contests should be included in that.

So I'm curious why this shows up in this particular bill. And then I thought: well, did we think about the level of the limit for political contributions? The answer is that, yes, we did. We had a long debate and discussion about the political contribution tax credit and whether, in fact, it's fair when you compare that tax credit to charitable tax credits. There was a strong belief, led particularly by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, that charitable tax credits, in fact, should be increased or political tax credits should be decreased or both. I happen to agree with that.

Now, this amendment won't specifically do that. We can't do that. I couldn't bring that specific amendment to this bill because this bill does not contemplate any changes to the charitable tax credit provisions. So, unfortunately, I was unable to bring that particular amendment as much as I would have liked to.

We actually talked about lowering political contribution tax credits, not increasing that. Then I thought: well, perhaps this is just the government aligning the province of Alberta with other jurisdictions in this country. Perhaps the federal government, at the very least, that has a reasonably similar donation restriction to what Alberta currently has or is in the process of putting into place, or other provinces, surely, would at least have this in place. The answer, Madam Chair, is that no other province in this country has a tax receipt for any donation to a leadership contest. No other province in this country has donation tax receipts to nomination contests, and neither does the federal government. Alberta will stand alone on this particular provision.

3:20

So I asked myself: "Why would that be? What is this government trying to achieve by extending political contribution tax credits to leadership contests in particular but also to nomination contests?" I think: what could be to this government's advantage in doing that? Well, very few NDP MLAs faced a nomination contest. I don't know how many on this side faced a nomination contest in the last election, but other parties tend to have more nomination contests. Now, perhaps this next go-round we'll see a flurry of nomination contests on the NDP side of things. Entirely possible. Entirely possible. So far as we know, I suppose anything is possible in Alberta politics these days. Things seem to be weirder and weirder by the day.

Madam Chair, I suppose it's possible that the government will face a leadership contest before the next election, but let's just assume that's unlikely. That leaves one – it's currently two, but I suppose eventually one – party in this House that will be facing a leadership contest before the next election. Then we think: why would it matter if political contributions could be tax receipted for that particular campaign, especially because there's the \$4,000 aggregate limit? If people are donating to a leadership contest, even

if there's no tax receipt, that still counts against their global donation limit.

But then I think, you know, that if the dollars are going to go into leadership campaigns and there's an incentive for doing that, more money goes into a leadership campaign and less money goes into the core party itself, so less money ends up in the coffers of that party to contest and fight the next election. I think there's very clearly something that this government is trying to sneak in there.

Now, I don't know, frankly, if my friends in the united conservative movement here, the two parties – I actually haven't talked with them about their . . . [interjections] You would like me to say the UCP acronym? [interjections] You're welcome. You're welcome. Maybe I stand as the first person to read that into *Hansard* in this province, and if so, I feel like I really have left my mark. [laughter] Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm here all week. Back on task, my friends. It's only Tuesday. Imagine how this week is going to go.

But, you know, the point is – and I think this is an important point – that Albertans in the process of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee and absolutely zero of my constituents or any Albertans I've talked with have said: "You know, Member, what is really important is that we make sure that more of my political contribution gets tax receipted at 75 per cent for the first \$250, and 50 per cent of the next amount, and a third for the rest of that up to a fairly high limit. That's the most important issue facing Alberta today. By the way, I'd also like you to sneak that in to an omnibus tax statutes amendment bill which is as boring as the day is long and most people aren't going to really pay any attention to. We would really like for that to happen."

Well, of course, Madam Chair, no one says that. But that's what this government has done. They've snuck these changes in. Again, I haven't talked to my hon. opposition colleagues. I don't know what their perspective on this is. It doesn't feel right to me.

So this amendment seeks to simply remove that provision from the bill. I think it improves the bill. I think it returns Alberta into alignment with every other province in this country and with the federal government. If we allow this to stay in, Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada to have this provision. It feels wrong because it is wrong, Madam Chair, and I would encourage both sides of the House to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to thank the member for his interest in this bill and especially for anything that encourages Albertans to participate in democracy. I want the member to go back to page 97 of the fiscal plan, and I'm going to speak to it in answer to his suggestion. If you look at page 97 of the fiscal plan, that was tabled earlier on this year, it talks about personal income tax.

Political Contributions Tax Credit

Albertans who contribute funds to registered candidates, constituency associations and political parties can claim the political contributions tax credit. The credit is worth 75% on the first \$200 in donations, 50% on the next \$900 and 33.33% on the next \$1,200, for a maximum credit of \$1,000 on total contributions of \$2,300.

The government has implemented a number of reforms to election financing. Changes in 2015 prohibited corporate and union contributions. More recently, the Fair Elections Financing Act of 2016 extended the prohibition on corporate and union contributions to leadership contests, set limits on individual contributions and established overall campaign spending limits.

In connection with these reforms, and to help encourage a healthy democracy, the existing political contributions tax credit will be extended to contributions to party leadership elections and candidate nomination races that meet the criteria established under the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. This change is effective for contributions made on or after January 1, 2017. The existing structure for calculating the credit remains in place, including the maximum of \$2,300 in total contributions eligible for the credit.

Madam Chair, when I read the government's plan – and although I wasn't part of the committee, I understand that this issue was discussed at length in the committee that discussed the Election Act and the whistle-blower act and so on. The idea is to keep a leadership and a nomination contest on the same footing as other political activity so that the same limits would apply that have been discussed previously.

While I understand the member's interest in the election process, I would like to say that this amendment is not in keeping with what the government had in mind with its fiscal plan and the discussion that happened at the committee, that it's really important for nomination and especially leadership contests to be under the same kind of regulations and laws and limits that exist for all kinds of involvement in the political process. I'd like to remind the House, because it was stated a number of times by my colleagues, that this bill would only apply to new leadership contests and does not apply to any prior leadership contests as we have seen for the PC Party, although I understand we're still waiting for the gentleman who did win this nomination to disclose who his donors were and so on.

This amendment, suggested by the Member for Calgary-Elbow, is not one that I'm going to be supporting. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just ever so briefly to speak on this, I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow knows I'm a tough act to follow, and I can always return the favour and follow him. So just to quickly comment, my colleague here did an excellent job of sort of, I think, explaining the technical reasons why this amendment is out of order. I just want to comment on some of his comments around this amendment and about where he was saying that, you know, perhaps this was a backdoor way for us to get the PC Party to spend all their money as opposed – to have the PC membership base spend all their money on leadership campaigns as opposed to the party. I would suggest to the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow that that's perhaps a little tinfoil hattish.

The Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, is not a conspiracy, nor is any part of it trying to sneak in things that are part of some security. I can assure the member that that is not the case. I want to put on the record that that is indeed what is going on and that there is no nefariousness in the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. I very briefly just want to respond to that. You know, given everything that's gone on with election financing in this province, with tremendous respect to my colleague from Calgary-Currie, I just don't believe them. I really don't. I see a government that has tried to do everything they can to stack the deck in their favour for this upcoming election, whenever it may be.

I don't know specifically what the motivation is. It feels wrong. It really, genuinely does. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

To the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, you know: the conversation that happened at the committee was very different from what we see here in this bill. At no time did it come up that tax receipts ought to be expanded. If anything, in fact, there was a discussion about tax receipts being contracted, about the donation limit, the amount of money you get in a tax receipt being reduced, not increased. Unfortunately, that was ruled to be out of order for that particular committee, so no motion was brought, although I do know for sure that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster had tried to bring exactly that amendment.

Again, absolutely no one that I know of has asked for this. When a government comes up with something out of the blue that absolutely no one asked for even if it was in their fiscal plan from the budget, I get very suspicious. I absolutely would not put it past the government to have thought through how this somehow may benefit them. Regardless, I don't feel that it's inappropriate, especially in this challenging fiscal time. Whether the numbers that we're talking about here are large or not, this is money that ought not to be routed from Alberta taxpayer coffers into political party hands. That's ultimately what this does, so that's what my amendment seeks to change, to fix what is a flaw in what otherwise appears to be a housekeeping bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Panda: Madam Chair, I would like to request unanimous consent to introduce guests. They're a school group from my riding.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to introduce to you and through you grade 6 students from the outstanding Renert School in the riding of Calgary-Foothills. Today we have grade 6 teachers Mr. Eriksen, Ms Banakar, Mr. Wilcox, and Ms Molloy with the grade 6 students visiting and learning how we work here. I had the opportunity to tour the school last year, and I was quite impressed with the way they learn. I witnessed myself how well the students were educated practically with projects. This school used to be – I mean, when they started, it was tutoring services, and now they have become a fully accredited school. It's a private school. It's a great success story of Calgary. Actually, my son took the tutoring a long time ago, and I'm sure it worked well for him. That's why today he's in med school. I wish all the students all the best in their careers. I ask them to rise along with their teachers and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Welcome.

Bill 15

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to the amendment to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do rise to speak to the amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Elbow. I rise to speak against this. You know, this amendment would actually really disturb the equilibrium that has been developed with the Fair Elections Financing Act. There is a total of \$4,000 per year that is allowed for political contributions, whether it's to a constituency, to the party, in a nomination battle for an upcoming election or a leadership.

I think, too, that one of the main reasons that I'm suggesting that this Legislature not adopt this amendment is that we would return to the era of big money in politics. If we gave this loophole that the Member for Calgary-Elbow is suggesting, what will stop the purchase of a nomination, as was seen over the last 40 years in multiple constituency associations of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta? What would stop a leadership candidate basically buying delegates?

I think that what has been suggested by the Fair Elections Financing Act or what has been passed in that makes a lot of sense, levels the playing field so that every Albertan has an equal opportunity to participate in the democratic process. Just because you have more financial resources than your neighbour doesn't give you the right to influence a nomination battle or a leadership battle, in my opinion. I think that what the Member for Calgary-Elbow is suggesting would actually promote that nefarious activity. We do need to get big money out of politics in this province. We do need to make it a community effort rather than the effort of a few very wealthy individuals.

I only look to the experience that our American cousins are going through at the present time. They have the opposite situation in terms of election financing, and I would call it unfair election financing. Corporations are considered to be the equivalent of an individual in the United States. That was a Supreme Court ruling in the United States that I disagree with vehemently.

I think that the single mother that wants to volunteer and go door-knocking with a candidate or the single mother that wants to run for a nomination or even for the leadership of a party should be on relatively equal footing with a professional, let's say, a physician like myself, that has considerable financial resources. I think that the Fair Elections Financing Act has done that.

I think that if we were to subvert that by passing this amendment, it would be a shame, so I am suggesting that we turn down this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to start by thanking my hon. colleague from Calgary-Elbow for bringing this excellent amendment forward. I'm going to be supporting it.

First reason, as was clearly stated – to me, it's amazing that the donation to a political party or a political leadership race is higher than what it would be to a charity, what it would be to a much-needed health or family or community organization in our communities all throughout Alberta. Again, I think it's crucial that this Legislature, this government be focused on communities and families and making them stronger so everyday Albertans have a better opportunity and philanthropy can grow in our province. You know, in my five years of doing this and my many, many years of living in Alberta – my goodness, we've got so many good people that are willing to share their wealth and willing to share what they have.

3:40

Again, we're looking at a bill, as it is currently written, that promotes more money into political leadership and political activity

than it does into everyday charity, so I think my hon. colleague got it exactly right when he wants to exclude that part.

I'm sitting here listening to the pros and cons of this and to: let's take the big money out of politics. Well, I think I'm seeing big money in politics now, with all of these changes. I think Alberta has got several PACs that are raising tens of thousands, maybe millions of dollars. Where is this money going to come into effect? I think the transparency, you know, where it's risen from and how it's spent: it may be less open than we want but a result of what this government has done in their two years, created several PACs, created the potential for more of an American-style political landscape. Hey, let's see where that goes.

You know, I think back to the Ontario election of two or three years ago and how the talk, I think, was that political parties spent \$2 million each – there was some kind of cap like that – but unions in Ontario spent \$9 million. We have the opposite, the government telling us that we're going to take the big money out of politics. Uh-huh. You're leaving big union money in politics, guys. It sounds like a heck of a double standard to me.

Again, you're doing it at the expense of the taxpayer. Currently we have a situation where a leadership contest is not tax receiptable. Now it's going to be. You're going to be dragging in the taxpayer at a different level.

You know, there were many, many reasons for the 2015 result. I congratulate every single one of the 87 of us that are sitting here, but a lot of us got here without spending a lot of money. So let's talk about how important big money is in politics compared to a broken election promise, compared to not being able to listen to Albertans, compared to where we were at.

Again, it's always hard to know the consequences of a bill; it's impossible to know the unintended consequences. But I think my hon. colleague from Calgary-Elbow got this right. Let's not put the taxpayer involved in leadership races – let's not have their money, taxpayers' money, go there rather than into their families and communities, and let's ensure that we do all we can to increase our charitable sector and make sure that, at the very least, charity is recognized as much as political leadership battles are.

I will be supporting this amendment, and I thank my hon. colleague.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the Member for Calgary-Klein. Go ahead.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it. First of all, I want to say that – well, number one, I'm getting up to speak against this amendment. I want to echo the words of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud in that when we were in committee, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, and we were talking about these issues, members of the opposition were completely against regulating leadership races and nomination races. We all understand that if we did that, we would be creating a loophole, so I find it very disingenuous that members from the other side would get up and say: oh, you want to leave big money in politics. No, no, no. Let me be absolutely clear, hon. member. This is a way to create more transparency so that we see exactly who is giving money at all stages of the political process. If you don't regulate nomination and leadership races, then you can have a whole bunch of money coming into the process, and we wouldn't know where that money was coming from. No one is accountable for it, and there would be no transparency.

Hon. members, this amendment wouldn't allow us to do that. You want to talk about getting big money out of politics? This is

not the way we do it. This amendment would not be the way that we would contribute to that. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Members, we could let the member finish.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. I want to say how important it is to regulate all levels of the election process.

Now, hon. members on the other side of the House get up and say: oh, well, you guys want to keep big money or corporate or union donations inside the process. Our very first bill – our very first bill – that we introduced in this House when we became government was to ban union and corporate donations.

Cortes-Vargas: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Cortes-Vargas: Sorry, Madam Chair. I just need to get up to make sure – to just bring to your attention that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky is insinuating that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is getting his money from people in South America, which I find extremely offensive on multiple levels. Further to it being a racist statement, it also insinuates that he's breaking the law. I want him to retract the statement and apologize and know that this Chamber needs to be a respectful place for everyone, regardless of where you're from.

Madam Chair, I didn't state the citation, which is 23(j): "uses abusive or insulting language . . . likely to create disorder." I believe that the member is using language that is inherently hurtful, and it perpetuates a racist culture that we experience as immigrants. I think he should apologize, and I hope that he will just withdraw his statements.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's been quite a robust discussion below the scenes. A lot of it probably didn't make it to *Hansard*, chatter back and forth, but we've been listening to chatter back and forth here all afternoon. I don't believe that this is a point of order. You know, the member was bantering back and forth with other members.

An Hon. Member: He made a racist comment.

The Deputy Chair: Members.

Mr. Hanson: Pardon me? Can you control yourself a minute, just for a minute?

The Deputy Chair: Members . . .

Mr. Hanson: I believe I have the floor.

The Deputy Chair: . . . on both sides, please.

Mr. Hanson: This is exactly what I mean, Madam Chair. This is not a point of order. It's been going on all afternoon, and it will probably continue well into the 6 o'clock hour, when we leave this place.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, there have been a lot of cross-paths of conversation happening outside of the actual debate of the bill. At this point I will not see it as a point of order. However, I would ask that both sides try to not maintain the side chatter. Focus on the bill, please.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair, for recognizing me once again because I wasn't finished, and I was speaking to the amendment. I was very much focused on the amendment itself and how this amendment, instead of contributing to transparency, which I personally know that the Member for Calgary-Elbow is very much in favour of because he's gotten up not only in this House, but he's also gotten up in committee – he's spoken to the importance of transparency in our democratic system, especially when it comes to money and the contributions that are given to political parties. [interjections] I know.

3:50

However, the amendment that he has presented today in this House would go against that, and I think that we've worked really hard over the past two years to bring more transparency to the political process and the financing of elections in this province. We've come a long way. I'll remind every member in this House that under the previous legislation that existed, an individual, a wealthy individual, could give up to \$105,000 to a political party within an election cycle. A hundred and five thousand dollars. Now, when I was out door-knocking on people's doors in my constituency, I'd ask people: do you have \$105,000 to give to a political party? You can imagine what the response was. Not one person that I asked had \$105,000 to give to a political party, never mind \$50,000 or \$20,000 or \$10,000. Under the previous legislation that's what was happening. That's what was being permitted in this province.

I'm glad that this government has stood up, presented new legislation where now the maximum that an individual can give every year is \$4,000. That's how we clean up, that's how we make our system more democratic, that's how we make elections about ideas and not about who has the deepest pockets. That's how we do it, and I'm really proud of what we've done. While members of the opposition hurl insults, I'm proud of the work that we've done in this House.

I want to echo again my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who was talking about how this levels the playing field because – again I'm going to go back to speaking about how under nominations and leadership races we can't control how much money is coming in from those same wealthy individuals that under the previous legislation were being allowed to contribute up to a maximum of \$105,000 in an election cycle: preposterous, that we would continue to do that, to permit that. By accepting this amendment, we would be providing that loophole for these individuals to do exactly that. Madam Chair, under my watch that's not going to happen. Under our watch that's not going to happen.

That's why I want to say to all the members of this House that I strongly encourage you to vote against this amendment because this is about accountability, this is about Elections Alberta having the ability to look and see who is contributing to leadership races, who is contributing to nomination races, and providing that opportunity so that we can make our electoral system more democratic, more accountable. At the end of the day, that's what our objective in this

House should be always, to strengthen our democracy. Again, I'll remind members: elections should be about ideas, not about who has the deepest pocketbook, okay?

With that, again I urge all members to strongly vote against this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to speak as well against the amendment, and I'd like to just clarify a point, I think, made by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat where he was talking about political contributions. I think he was mentioning that they were more valuable than the charitable donations credit, but it's not, in fact, true, and I've got a few statistics here. The cost of the political contributions tax credit is around \$3.6 million, and that's pretty minimal relative to that of the charitable contributions credit, which is \$302.3 million. Now, the political credit is capped at the maximum of \$1,000 for any one individual. In contrast, individuals can make charitable donations and receive a tax credit on the donations equalling up to 75 per cent of their income.

Madam Chair, I believe that the political contributions credit helps to encourage a healthy and competitive political environment, a cornerstone of our democratic system, in fact, just as a charitable donation credit helps to encourage donations to charitable organizations, organizations that provide significant benefits to our province.

I'd like to add those statistics to the record and just mention that I will not be supporting the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Well, this is fun. No one suggested that we should raise the \$4,000 donation limit. No one suggested that we should change the current rules that require leadership campaigns to fully disclose all of their donors. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie should know that as a member of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. That was a recommendation of that committee, and it also was in the legislation that this House passed last fall or it might even have been last spring. Nothing in this amendment would hide who donates to political campaigns or leadership campaigns. Nothing in this amendment would raise the \$4,000 limit or put big money back into politics.

You know, it's interesting. In year 1 of this government their theme was, "We're taking big money out of politics," every single thing. What day of the week is it? "We're taking big money out of politics." Today, well, what's the temperature outside? "We're making life better for Albertans."

Dr. Turner: Two pipelines.

Mr. Clark: Oh, "Two pipelines." I'm sorry. Thank you very much, Edmonton-Whitemud. I'd forgotten about two pipelines. There was one in the middle there.

I think year 3, speaking of pipelines – I imagine the theme for next year is going to be "Hoping to goodness the price of oil goes up," and the theme in year 4 is just "I'm sorry about that." I think that this government's theme next year is going to be "Sorry about that."

Look, let's just be very clear on what the purpose of this is. Nobody asked for political parties' leadership contests to be eligible for tax receipts. No one. It didn't come in any of the written submissions to Select Special Ethics and Accountability. Absolutely no one anywhere in my constituency has asked me for that. I

strongly suspect, if we're all honest with ourselves, that not a single Albertan has asked us for that particular change, but here it is.

Let's talk about money in politics. The changes this government made allow just three people donating the maximum \$4,000 to a constituency association over four years to fund an entire campaign. If we want to have less influence in politics, I think we would all agree that having one MLA's seat beholden to just three people is not a good thing. But that's effectively what this government has done.

The other thing that this government has done, perhaps inadvertently, perhaps deliberately, is to enable or compel or even require the rise of super PACs, or political action committees, because so many restrictions have been placed on political contributions and political parties that the only possible way anyone can express their views is through a political action committee. So what do PACs do? Well, PACs attack. We see that all the time. It's already happening in this province, and, heaven forbid, it's going to happen in the next election. I don't like it. I wish it wasn't that way. It's one of those unintended or possibly intended consequences of the electoral changes that this government has made.

I just want to speak to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills. He talked about the total amount of money that was refunded for political contributions versus charitable contributions. That may very well be the case, that political contributions and charitable contributions are similar in terms of gross dollars, but I'd love to know: how many actual contributions? How many actual Albertans contributed to charity at the lower, I believe it's 20 per cent rate versus the higher, 75 per cent rate of political contributions? The numbers, I'm sure, are wildly different. Albertans are incredibly charitable and generous people, and I know that they will donate, tens and hundreds of thousands of Albertans. I know it. Millions of Albertans, I suspect, will donate to charity every year, and far fewer will donate to political parties, yet the numbers are similar. That exactly proves my point that what we need to be doing is lowering the political contribution tax limits, raising the charitable contribution tax limits, and not sneaking in and, through an omnibus bill, expanding political contribution tax credits to places no one wants them. That's what this amendment seeks to fix.

4:00

Let's be very clear that this has nothing to do with reducing transparency, that this has nothing to do with putting big money back into politics. This only has to do with this government trying to sneak in changes that nobody wants for no good purpose that I can see except for some possible way of sticking it to the opposition for the process it looks like they're about to go through.

With that, I would return to my seat and encourage all members of the House to please support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:01 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes Gotfried Loewen

Clark	Hanson	Panda
Ellis		
Against the motion:		
Babcock	Kazim	Miranda
Carlier	Kleinsteinuber	Nielsen
Carson	Larivee	Piquette
Connolly	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schreiner
Dach	Malkinson	Shepherd
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Goehring	McKittrick	Westhead
Horne	McLean	Woollard
Jansen	Miller	
Totals:	For – 7	Against – 35

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 15. Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteinuber: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to take a moment to speak to Bill 15, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, in Committee of the Whole here. As we move forward as a government, making lives better for Albertans, there are aspects to our democratic system that constantly need adjustments and some tweaks to keep our legislation up to date and relevant. This is why, as the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board stated earlier in the debate, it is necessary to update tax statutes on a yearly basis. Not only is this necessary to implement government policy decisions in a fair and equitable way, but it's also to make sure that our legislation is in alignment with federal tax legislation.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

To be specific, within this legislation there are three programs that will be primarily affected by this act. Number one, the Alberta child benefit; number two, the Alberta family employment tax credit; and number three, the carbon levy rebate. I might add, Mr. Chair, that I've heard from residents at the doors in my riding that these are very helpful for many families. Many of us know that these programs were introduced to make life more affordable for Albertans, and we are seeing that these policies are having a positive effect on the finances of Albertans with families and for those with lower incomes.

A few months ago, Mr. Chair, I thought it was extremely unfortunate to hear that some families when facing the loss of a loved one were also affected when the Canada Revenue Agency requested that some of those carbon levy rebates had to be returned. That's why I'm glad that this bill will take immediate action and request that the CRA stop that practice. I've heard the opposition parties criticize this irregularity with the carbon levy as well, and now it's being corrected with this legislation. I'm hopeful that we will have their support to ensure the passage of this bill as soon as possible and to ensure that this practice does not continue further. After all, these programs were put in place to help people, not cause them added stress.

4:20

Another reason I support this proposed amendment is because it ensures that big money is out of politics. More specifically, this act extends the political contribution tax credit to leadership campaigns and nomination races, which will encourage participation in the

political process and help guide a healthy and competitive political environment. I heard a little bit about this previously with the previous amendment there, and I think we can move forward with that point of view at this point.

Mr. Chair, further changes from the bill, Bill 15, will be to the Personal Income Tax Act. The Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, will also make changes to the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. As many are aware, Alberta continues to collect our own corporate taxes, and each year we have to amend our tax legislation so that it aligns with the federal government's Income Tax Act. When federal changes to the Income Tax Act are applied, this results in technical changes to our legislation to ensure that there is an alignment. In 2016 the federal act was changed to reduce misuse of the preferential small-business tax rate. In Alberta we intend that our 2 per cent small-business tax rate applies to small businesses on their first \$500,000 worth of income.

Mr. Chair, there was a loophole in the system, and a very small number of companies were designing certain business structures that allowed them to apply that rate to more of their income. I think many of us here believe that this was unfair to the other small businesses that were applying the rules properly and to the Albertan taxpayer, so I think many of us can agree that this irregularity should be corrected. Again, this bill will accomplish that.

Finally, Mr. Chair, there are proposed changes that include an amendment that will apply to the Tourism Levy Act. For those following at home, this can be found on page 21 of the bill.

5(1) The Tourism Levy Act is amended by this section.

(2) Section 5 is amended by adding the following after subsection (1.2):

(1.3) If an operator has filed a waiver in a form established by the Minister within 4 years from the end of the calendar year in which a tourism levy became payable and

- (a) the operator has not revoked the waiver, the Minister may, in accordance with the terms of the waiver, assess the amount of the tourism levy payable under this section at any time, or
- (b) the operator has revoked the waiver, the Minister may, in accordance with the terms of the waiver, assess the amount of the tourism levy payable under this section within 6 months after the Minister receives notice of the revocation.

These changes will allow levy collectors – and by levy collectors I'm referring to the accommodation operators – to file a waiver to extend the assessment period when an assessment is issued against them. This will provide operators additional time to resolve issues if there is a dispute over the amount of tax owing and also aligns administrative processes along Alberta's tax statutes.

So just to wrap up, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to compliment the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance on their ability to keep up with these changes with an excellent level of dedication and detail and to make sure that Alberta is up to date with both the federal government and other provinces. I'd also like to thank the Minister of Finance for his diligent work on this file.

I'll be supporting this bill at Committee of the Whole, and I hope many other colleagues in this Legislature do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. The legislation before us is not necessarily simply housekeeping or enabling legislation; it is the mechanism through which the legislation actually lives. It's been fascinating to see this process move forward as we move forward to make life better for Albertans. There are aspects in our democratic

system that constantly need adjustment and renewal, and income taxes and commodity taxes are some of them.

Now, where this particular piece of legislation touches me most pointedly is around the political contributions component that the bill seeks to implement. I do recall during debates, particularly in committee, when members of the opposition were quite vehement in that they felt that, and almost to quote them, political parties were not subject or should not be subject to the light of day. They called them private clubs and that political parties, as such, as private clubs shouldn't be scrutinized by the government or the state or be subject to the types of political contribution limitations that the legislation encompasses.

That was a very telling statement to me, when members of the opposition would get up and very, very clearly articulate how they thought that political parties were private clubs and that the very entry point at which an individual would become first eligible to either run for a party or enter into a leadership race was a bit of private information that the public, the government, people of this province had no right to scrutinize. I disagree with that absolutely wholeheartedly. When a person does put their name forward for nomination, when you decide you're going to enter into a leadership contest, your private club stops right there, and that's when public scrutiny should definitely be part of the process.

This legislation, by bringing the political financing act in to encompass those two levels of political engagement, is well past time. I'm very pleased particularly to see these two elements encompassed into legislation and enter into the realm of public scrutiny. That, for me, is one of the largest highlights of this legislation and one of the reasons I'm most pleased to support it.

With that, I'll conclude my brief remarks on this portion of the legislation as it affects me most pointedly and invite other members to join the debate, add their remarks and comments. I look forward to passage of the legislation.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, rise to speak in support in the Committee of the Whole of this bill. You know, these amendments are going to ensure that our government's policy decisions are implemented and our tax legislation continues to be aligned with the federal situation.

The sort of headline part of this bill is, really, compassion. What is happening here is that, due to an unfortunate situation where a relatively unthinking and uncomprehending federal tax system was utilized in order to save administrative costs and other expenses in getting this rebate out to Albertans – and it had some unintended consequences of us trying to save Albertan taxpayers some money. It's a relatively small number, but that number did have – when the situation occurred to families who had lost a loved one, it was devastating, I'm sure. This legislation is well designed on a going-forward basis to prevent that unfortunate situation.

We do care about Albertans. We care about all Albertans. We want to make sure that the benefits of the rebate of the carbon levy are not a concern to Albertans. You know, one of the things that I'm particularly pleased with and what the Minister of Finance has done is that he's announced that the government will be forgiving the amounts currently owed in the situations that I've described. I think this is very compassionate, and I'm proud to be associated with a government like that.

4:30

You know, there are two other programs that are a part of this system, too, the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit, and we're going to be able to regularize the situation if some unfortunate event occurs related to those.

You know, the part of the bill that I wanted to speak to, actually, is one of its more arcane parts, I think. It's something that I actually have a fair bit of experience with, being the parent of two children who, I can proudly say, were very successful at their university education. For about 10 years or so I was able to avail myself of the education tax credit that could be transferred from a child to the parent, and this was an important part of my tax planning. I'm not sure that my children appreciate the fact that I took those tax credits, but I did try to explain to them that they were actually not making very much money and that I could use that benefit better.

Basically, section 16 is being amended, and, you know, we're going to make it easier for parents or grandparents of persons taking education, whether it's in a college or an institution like NAIT or SAIT or at a university, to improve their financial situation. This relates to the unused tuition and education credits and how they're calculated.

As I said, it sounds kind of arcane, but in fact, having just come through filing my income tax on April 30, I do have, actually, very good memories of seeing that positive credit that I used to get after I had transferred that. I think many of you will know that you actually have to get your child to file their income tax and claim the amount that's going to be transferred.

Again, this is an example where the Minister of Finance and minister responsible for the Treasury Board is making sure that all Albertans are going to be able to get that credit, and that will actually improve the situation for those of us that are lucky enough to have children that are pursuing their education.

I'm also pleased with the changes that are being made to the corporate tax situation. I have to declare some conflict of interest in that I do have a professional corporation, as, I would assume, some other members of this House do. The way that the corporate tax is being reorganized is a good thing, and I'm pleased to support this bill in this regard.

You know, what's the government doing for families who had to return benefits they received under the Alberta child benefit or the other situations? Basically, what is being suggested in this act is that we would deal with those things similar to the way the carbon levy rebate is being dealt with. The processes are going to be improved. The Canada Revenue Agency is going to implement change that's going to allow parents of deceased children to keep rebate amounts. This is going to apply in cases of children who passed away on or after January 1, 2017. Families who receive a notice of reassessment in this situation after the specified date don't have to return the money. Again, it's a very compassionate approach and one which, I'm sure, all members of this Legislature will support.

In summary, this might be called a housekeeping bill, but the housekeeping that's being done I think is vitally important, not only on the carbon levy situation but on several other taxation measures, and I would encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments in relation to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Chair. I think the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud and, I believe, a number of us spoke to the fact that a tax statutes bill appears to be a very boring bill, but when you start to

look at it, you realize that the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board spent quite a bit of time putting a bill together to benefit families.

I think I might have said earlier in this Assembly that I really very much respect how quickly the government realized that there was some problem with the way the rebate for the carbon levy was handled and that they immediately worked with CRA and then ensured that there would be a bill introduced in the House to ensure that any challenges that had been created by the collection of the carbon levy would be finished. I think that that not only shows that the government is always trying to make things better for Albertans but also that we understand the importance of the rebate to families.

But this bill doesn't just do this. This bill doesn't just allow families to receive their carbon levies in four equal payments and ensure that no rebate has to be returned for the carbon levy and for the other two provincial programs that families benefit from, including the child tax credit. This is only one part of the bill. In this House this afternoon we discussed some other parts of the bill. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talked about the tuition tax credit, and I also have used that tuition tax credit in the past when my young children went to university.

But what I really wanted to talk about today, again, was the issue that we just discussed a little bit around an amendment. I don't know about other members, but it seems to me that when leadership contests do happen – and we are seeing this currently federally with the leadership contests in both the Conservative Party and the NDP Party – the stakes are very, very, very high. I haven't had a chance to look at the discrepancy, for example, in money raised by the two leadership contestants in the PC Party, Mr. Kenney and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. I know from experience that leadership contests tend to draw a lot of money, and as has been pointed out in this House a number of times this afternoon, what the government did from the first bill that it introduced in this place was that we wanted to remove big money from the election process.

I'm really thankful that we did because the idea is to ensure that everyone feels that they can contribute to a process and that no election process, including leadership contests, is influenced by so-called big money. I think the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie spoke about the fact that in the past people donated over \$105,000 for a leadership contest and how crazy that was.

4:40

I wanted to just reinforce the fact that the political contributions tax credit makes life better by encouraging a healthy democracy and by providing financial support to individuals participating in the provincial election process. The Alberta government has worked to make important changes to election financing to get big money out of politics, including banning corporate and union contributions. The political contributions tax credit will encourage Albertans to participate in the political process. I understand that there might be a leadership contest happening for a party that is proposing to be formed, and I think we're all going to be really happy to know that big money has been removed from that leadership contest.

The cost of the political contributions tax credit is estimated to be \$3.6 million, which is minimal relative to that of the charitable contribution credit, which is \$302.3 million. I know that the Member for Calgary-Elbow spoke to that earlier on and was wondering why the political contributions tax credit was higher than the charitable contributions tax credit. The thing is that there are a lot more tax credits given for charitable contributions than political contributions. The political credit is capped at a maximum of \$1,000 for any one individual. In contrast, individuals can make charitable donations and receive a credit on donations equalling up to 75 per cent of their income.

As we're talking about charitable donations, I'm really hoping that each member of this House is as supportive of the charitable sector as Albertans are and that we are all taking the opportunity to earn tax credits by making a lot of charitable donations because I know that the charitable sector really relies on donations.

The political contributions credit helps to encourage a healthy and competitive political environment, a cornerstone of our democratic system. I wanted to speak a little about that because I think some members of this House, like myself, have lived in places where the political environment is not as healthy as ours, where the processes are not as open, not as democratic, and don't give everybody the opportunity for a chance. One of the things that I've always appreciated in Canada is that everybody has the opportunity to present themselves for election, to be part of the democratic system, to vote, to debate, to be engaged, and I think we really treasure this. That's why the proposed changes that are made through Bill 15 are really part of this government's support for a healthy and competitive political environment, the cornerstone of our democratic system, where everybody can participate and everybody can contribute to their ability.

Consistent with the Fair Elections Financing Act, any leadership race that was ongoing at the time of that act's passage is exempt, so I wanted to reassure the people who were involved in the leadership races before this bill has passed – I believe that there are two political parties who have been involved in the leadership race – that this bill exempts them at this point. Future leadership and nomination contests will be subject to that act and this one if passed.

We have about two years to get used to working under this act if it's passed in the House. I'm hoping that everyone in this House considers this bill and that they fully understand the way that the bill is going to benefit families by ensuring that no one is asked to return their carbon levy rebate or the child tax credit if there is an unforeseen death in the family. This bill also supports the government's agenda to ensure that the democratic process is fair and allows everybody to contribute.

Mr. Chair, I really urge everyone to support this bill. I once again want to thank the minister for quickly reacting to the problem that was identified around rebates and ensuring that each family that does receive a rebate where there is a death in the family does not have to return the rebate.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 15?

Seeing none, are we ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 14

An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, are there any questions, comments, or amendments on Bill 14? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation, is amending the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, and it should be starting to move our economy

before the end of the year. As you know, the federal government allocated \$30 million in its recent budget to support our efforts to reclaim orphan oil and gas wells. The government of Alberta is working on options to leverage that money to assist the Orphan Well Association in the best way possible using that \$30 million. Right now the OWA is unable to use the orphan fund to do anything other than pay for the suspension, abandonment, and reclamation costs in respect to orphan wells and sites, nor is the OWA legally allowed to accept a loan.

As you can see, legislation amendments are required to the Oil and Gas Conservation Act to enable a loan as well as to repay a loan. Specifically, the Oil and Gas Conservation Act needs to be amended in section 70(1), which sets out the uses for the orphan fund and the powers, duties, and functions that are delegated by regulation to the OWA. This will enable the OWA to pay back a loan. Amendments are also needed to add a new provision in section 76 to allow Alberta to provide a loan to the OWA as required by section 42(2) of the Financial Administration Act. Mr. Chair, these changes will give the government of Alberta the legal authority to provide the OWA with the support it needs to support further orphan well rehabilitation.

I'm confident that the plan that the government of Alberta will bring forward will adhere to the key principle of polluter pays. Simply put, Mr. Chair, Albertans should not be on the hook to clean up oil and gas sites – the previous government failed to ensure that companies were held properly accountable for their actions – and whatever actions we take as a government and a Legislature to support orphan well rehabilitation should not change that.

Mr. Chair, with whatever actions we take to reduce the current inventory of orphan wells around the province, the fact is that we need a better approach to the question of liability for these sites going forward. In too many cases the question of liability for closure costs arises only when an operator is getting ready to shut down a well, and by that time it may be too late. The operator in question may be running out of money and may be unable to afford the cost of abandonment, remediation, and reclamation. Too often the burden of that liability is borne by others in the industry through the Orphan Well Association. In many cases landowners are bearing the brunt of this as well, and some, like freehold mineral rights holders, are worried about the potential liability for themselves and their families going forward.

Mr. Chair, the whole system needs a thorough review, and I'm pleased to see that the government is doing just that. On May 10 the province announced that they would be working with industry and experts to find better ways to protect Albertans and the environment by improving policies for managing old oil and gas facilities.

4:50

This was quoted in the *Calgary Herald* on May 9.

Alberta Launches Review of Aging Oil and Gas Wells

The Alberta government says it's moving to tackle the growing problem of orphaned and aging oil and gas wells by drafting a new strategy to manage liabilities.

Starting Wednesday, the government and Alberta Energy Regulator will meet with industry, landowners and other interested groups to begin work on a policy to address the costs associated with the cleanup of aging energy infrastructure across the province.

Energy Minister Marg McCuaig-Boyd said changes are needed to protect Albertans from the financial and environmental costs associated with well remediation.

"Landowners are worried, the industry itself is worried, so it's time to take some action," she said in an interview.

The province currently works under a polluter-pay principle, where industry is responsible for the abandonment and

remediation of old wells. However, as low oil prices and the recession have forced more companies into bankruptcy, more inactive wells are left without an owner.

"I'm a bit disappointed that when oil and gas was booming nobody took this seriously, and now that we're in a downturn there's not the mechanisms in place," said McCuaig-Boyd, who expects the review to be completed by the end of 2017.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, remember that referring to a member . . .

Ms Babcock: I'm quoting.

The Acting Chair: You still can't refer to members by name.

Ms Babcock: Okay. I apologize.

Responsibility for the remediation of orphaned wells – those without an active owner – has fallen to the Alberta Orphan Well Association. The industry-funded organization has more than 2,000 orphan wells on its books, more than double from a year ago. Last year, it managed to close 185 wells.

"We think it's critical to open the dialogue with Albertans and jointly develop a framework that improves the management of unproductive upstream oil and natural gas assets," Brad Herald, chairman of the Orphan Well Association, said in a statement.

Mr. Chair, this is why I'm pleased to say that this liability management review isn't a one-sided consultation, the way reviews have often been in the past. We believe that the best solutions are found when you engage individuals who don't normally agree on an issue and encourage them to work together to find that common ground. That, of course, is an approach that is new since 2015 in this House. Before 2015, their approach was to fix on one solution, no matter how ill considered, and then put together a group of people who agreed with them.

Mr. Chair, I'm very proud of the work the government is doing to ensure that we hear a range of opinions and perspectives on this very important issue, an issue that we see too often in rural Alberta. The government has engaged representatives of the oil and gas industry, the oil field services sector, agriculture, landowners, freehold mineral rights owners, environmental organizations, lenders, insolvency professionals, principal organizations, surety companies, and lawyers who represent landowners. In the coming weeks those stakeholders will be delving more deeply into the technical issues around fiscal policies and programs, inventory management and legacy sites, and postregulatory closure.

There is one other part of this liability management review process that is worth highlighting, sir. I'm proud of the work that our government is doing to renew our relationship with Alberta's indigenous peoples. Too often in the past governments ignored their responsibilities to meaningfully engage with First Nations and Métis communities, so I'm pleased to note that there will indeed be a parallel engagement with the First Nations and Métis communities on this very important topic, starting in June. These engagement sessions will be taking place in different parts of the province to ensure we hear from a good cross-section of people. It's critically important that indigenous perspectives be included in this debate, and, Mr. Chair, they will be.

Mr. Chair, I'm excited to see that the funding in question will address about a third of the OWA's current and projected inventory in just three years. That's the kind of meaningful progress that my constituents and Albertans have been calling for.

It's also important to note the number of jobs that this program will create, 1,650 jobs over three years. That's approximately 550 jobs per year. The increase in annual jobs is equal to about 10 per

cent of the number of current jobs in the waste management and remediation services industry.

It's important to remember here that the economic benefits of this bill go beyond the sheer number of jobs created. This initiative will help keep skilled workers in a dynamic sector employed here in Alberta, workers whose particular skill set will be in great demand as the recovery in the energy sector takes hold.

There's every reason to be confident that the polluter-pay principle will be respected no matter what happens in the years to come in the industry. The OWA is funded from an industry levy imposed on oil and gas companies. Moreover, the government of Alberta has regulatory tools and other legal remedies to require individual companies to pay their industry levy. The Alberta Energy Regulator can issue penalties on the outstanding levy owed and ultimately issue closure or abandonment orders or cancel approvals of licences if levy payments are not received. The Minister of Energy can also refuse to issue an agreement or register a transfer if debts are owed to the Crown in right of Alberta or the AER. Those are extraordinary tools, Mr. Chair, and frankly, given the size of the industry and the small percentage of industry revenues that this represents, it is difficult to imagine a scenario where such actions would be necessary.

Bill 14 enables the government to take long-overdue action to reduce the inventory of orphan wells in our province. It ensures that hundreds of sites that pose a risk to the health and safety of Albertans and our environment will be cleaned up in a short period of time.

Again, to quote Brad Herald, chairman of the Orphan Well Association, he says:

Environmental protection and safety of communities is paramount to our industry. We think it's critical to open the dialogue with Albertans and jointly develop a framework that improves the management of unproductive upstream oil and natural gas assets. As part of our commitment, we will take part in that conversation and support solutions to improve policy and manage these [unproductive assets.]

They want to take part in the conversation with us.

This puts hundreds of Albertans back to work. It keeps skilled workers in our province, that we will need as the energy sector recovers, and it does so while maintaining the principle of polluter pay. This is the kind of work that Albertans sent us here to do.

I'm pleased to support Bill 14, and I urge all of my colleagues in this Assembly to do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 14? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the chance to rise as well. I, too, would like to co-operate and support Bill 14. Three principal reasons come to mind. I remember about a year and a half ago when Premier Brad Wall first announced this idea in Saskatchewan and the great support it had throughout Alberta. It was maybe at the start or the front of the downturn, and we were concerned about Alberta families. We were concerned about Alberta communities and Alberta individuals. It was absolutely clear that Albertans were in favour of some support for our good oil and gas workers and of what the Conservative Premier to the east of us had suggested.

So I'm grateful that, you know, the federal government has come to the plate to clean up some of their legacy stuff from prior to the '50s, and I hope that as this bill goes through, the NDP government will get it right to ensure that the maximum employment happens, the maximum cleanup happens, and Albertans are honoured constituents.

Cypress-Medicine Hat – my goodness – was a leading part of the gas and the oil and gas industries in Alberta. We're blessed with the Suffield Block just to the west of Medicine Hat, which is now maybe mostly famous for the fact that some side of approximately 10,000 British soldiers annually come and train there. But initially it was where Alberta Energy got its start. It's where so many southeastern Albertans learned the trade, built wealth, and made things happen for the province of Alberta.

When I talked to constituents about orphan wells and about where we are at, many of them pointed out that in spite of some years of oil and gas companies having huge revenues, they were paying huge royalties. They were paying huge lease payments to the citizens of Alberta. My goodness. They were providing prosperity and wealth and opportunity for their employees, for employees' families and communities. Of course, you know, the oil and gas business is an expensive business to be in a lot of times, and a lot of times capital was a problem. What they were telling me was that a necessity or an opportunity to have more capital could go a long, long way in their desire to speed up the cleaning, to get their liability risk rating in order, to ensure that they could continue to employ Albertans, that they could continue to hire subtrades. So this appears to be a shot in the arm, you know, for a lot of our industry to get the capital that they need to do the job that they want to do.

5:00

We can't forget what the oil and gas industry has done for Alberta, and we also can't forget that they, too, are responsible for the cleanup of these wells. They want to be responsible for the cleanup of these wells, and of course they are, through their payment into the fund. Again, you don't have to go far in Cypress-Medicine Hat to talk to somebody that hasn't had a good quality of life, hasn't had part of rural Alberta developed, whether it's roads or electricity, because of what the oil and gas industry has brought to Alberta. Again, they absolutely want to be responsible for their own cleanup. They absolutely want to ensure that they are the best corporate player possible.

I'm looking to co-operate on and support this bill and hope that that will continue, but I do have some questions of the government that I hope they can answer. Parts of this bill just haven't been fully explained and expanded upon yet, and as this moves through the stage, you know, of Committee of the Whole onto the next stage of reading, I'd like to know some things like: of course, industry will be responsible for this loan, as it should be, but what mechanism and consultation have occurred to ensure that industry is in favour of taking this loan?

You know, has the government only met with industry advocacy groups? Will the government be meeting with individual players as well? Mr. Chair, as we have seen in the past, we all know that industry groups at times have ignored the voice of smaller players in favour of larger players. Possibly, probably the number one thing that I've heard in my two years since the government changed and in my three or four months as energy critic is about the four or five companies that were on the stage with the Premier and the socialism entrepreneurship that that is and the fairness and the unfairness that that may lead to. I would just hope that this government doesn't create a situation where small players are disadvantaged, where all companies aren't treated as fair as possible. We're going to have to get some answers on that.

One of the questions that's hanging out there for me is the repayment timeline. When the liability risk rating was changed, it especially affected smaller oil and gas companies, I think, three or four years ago, when that happened. Yes, it's important – it's important – to ensure that industry cleans up their residual, absolutely, for future generations and the environment, but it's also

important to make sure that there's a mechanism for appeal, there's a mechanism for employment, there's a mechanism for growth. So unless we know the repayment timeline, Mr. Chair, for some smaller companies, maybe even some bigger companies, you know, who run into some bad luck drilling wells or whatever – maybe a longer timeline is important. So I'd like to hear what the industry has to say on that.

Thirty million dollars, I believe, we got from the feds. Will that cover the full cost of the interest on this, or will there be interest that will potentially have to be picked up by industry? Do we know what the mechanism will be for that?

What will be the level of increased activity due to the administration size of the Orphan Well Association? As we start to clean up more and more wells, will the size of the association increase? You know, how much will it increase by? Who will bear the cost of that? I would hope that this government has fully, fully consulted with our industry to make sure that the level is set with their agreement – this is their association; this is their cleanup – and is not going to be a hardship. Then, of course, I hope this government has a plan for decreasing the administrative body once the work is complete.

One of the main criticisms I hear about this government, of course, is how the size of government has grown and grown and grown while the private sector has had hardship and difficulty in the oil and gas business. I was talking to one of my friends the other day who's gone from over \$30 an hour to \$15 an hour and less pay when he's out of town and stuff like that. Mr. Chair, I would just ask: don't put too big a tax burden on these young families as they start to recover.

I'm also hoping and wondering: will the minister be tabling a timeline detailing the remediation schedule? Are we going to see, you know, exactly how this is going to be done?

I've also met with industry people, Mr. Chair, that talk about some situations where productive wells are in the middle of some orphan wells or some abandoned wells or some low-producing wells. Are we going to have a mechanism to possibly, you know, return some of these productive wells to the pool and an opportunity for creditors, for subtrades, for people like that to have an opportunity to participate in the Alberta advantage again?

It's also interesting: I understand that the skills for well reclamation on oil and gas works are not directly transferable from drilling or fracking or servicing a well, so maybe we have to ensure that we can meet the labour demand and the labour skills with what needs to be done to make sure that we can meet this timetable.

Mr. Chair, in summary, I'm glad that the feds stepped up to the plate to help us. I'm glad that they've taken some ownership on the legacy well problem, that is their responsibility. I'm hopeful that the government will get it as right as possible when it comes to ensuring that the environment gets maximum cleanup but that we give Albertans, employees and companies, the maximum opportunity to take advantage of this. I hope that I can get some of these questions answered during the Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: The chair will recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to speak in committee on Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation, clearly a win-win, with the federal government offering to front the interest, at least, on a significant loan to industry. At the same time we're going to create jobs and clean up some important liabilities for all Albertans, particularly our children and grandchildren, with the Orphan Well Association. Presently the orphan

well fund can only be used to pay for suspension, abandonment, and related reclamation costs in respect to orphan well facilities and sites.

The bill also proposes to authorize the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to make loans. In its current form the Oil and Gas Conservation Act does not specifically allow that. This is obviously enabling legislation that will potentially be a win-win for employment, our economy, and these important delayed and deferred cleanup costs, that hold a potentially fairly large liability for future generations. The government is making the changes to allow a \$235 million loan to the Orphan Well Association, to allow the fund to repay the loan.

As has been stated, there are 83,000 inactive wells and 69,000 abandoned. In March of this year the Orphan Well Association had an inventory of 2,000 orphan wells to go through closure activities. It managed only 185 wells last year with an annual budget of \$30 million. It's scheduled to increase to \$60 million in the 2019-20 fiscal year. This will entirely be covered by industry levies.

I have only a few questions that don't appear to be clear in the current bill. It authorizes the loan money to the Orphan Well Association but doesn't specify a loan ceiling or a repayment schedule apart from the 10-year, full repayment. It's not clear how that's to be shared, especially with companies that are perhaps struggling financially, and whether, in fact, at the end of the day, we will see the big companies stepping up with their share and the smaller companies again deferring and declining. Those are some specific details, but it seems to me that Albertans deserve to know how and in what manner the loans will be repaid, and we have a right to know at the start just what those terms of repayment are in the interest of protecting taxpayers from undue risk. They should be written into the bill.

5:10

This loan should also be a one-time deal, and it should reflect that, that this is not a pattern for future decades. While Premier Notley insisted that the \$235 million loan doesn't replace the orphan levy or the polluter-pay principle . . .

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, refrain from using names.

Dr. Swann: Sorry?

The Acting Chair: Refrain from using names. You used the Premier's name.

Dr. Swann: Oh, thank you. Yes.

Bill 14 is worded in such a way that the door is being left wide open for government to make future loans. That needs to be addressed, too, I think. In terms of honouring the polluter-pay principle, we need to ensure that that is clear, that this is not setting a pattern for future defaults, I guess, by the industry.

Bill 14 is also not prescriptive about what any loans to the orphan wells can be used for. I guess, if the price of oil happened to jump by double, I would wonder whether some of this money already given could then be used for other purposes besides the purposes of abandonment and reclamation. Without it being more specific, I wonder if we are again not quite holding them sufficiently to account.

Finally, I think there is a reason to call for this bill to have a review process, to within one to two years report back to Albertans to let us know how this fund is being used and how effectively it is accomplishing the goals it set out to do. It's part of due diligence, accountability. It also, in my view, should be written into the bill, certainly, before any future lending is given. It seems to me that

within the next one to two years it would be good to know what's working and how well it's working.

Those are some of the concerns in an otherwise laudable bill, that, as I say, is a win-win for Albertans, for our environment, and for our workplace. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to stand to speak to this piece of legislation, which is going to be, as noted by previous speakers, a win-win situation for many people in this province, people in the oil and gas sector, people in the environmental sector. Economically, for the province it's a means of addressing a problem that only gets worse over time if it doesn't get attention paid to it.

Now, in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung I have no oil and gas sites that need remediation. There are, in fact, no oil or gas wells that I know of unless somebody drilled one in the last half an hour. We do however have a pipeline. The existing Kinder Morgan pipeline goes smack dab through the constituency, crosses the river from Edmonton-Whitemud and comes in through the Edmonton-McClung riding. They had been very, very attentive to the community's needs when they were addressing how indeed they would ensure that that pipeline right-of-way was kept safe and clear of vegetation and trees that needed to be removed. There's been an ongoing, long-term process. Kinder Morgan has been involved deeply with the community in discussing how that gets done.

However, with respect to the situation regarding oil and gas wells, abandoned versus orphaned, I learned early on, when I had an opportunity for one summer to work in the oil patch, about the difference between these two terms. I often wondered even as a rig hand, when I worked for one summer on service rigs, how indeed — when I was doing service work around Redwater and St. Paul or Fort Saskatchewan, mostly northeast of Edmonton, you'd hear that some of these wells, even back then in the 1980s, in a field that you thought was a productive oil field, the Redwater oilfield in particular, were only producing one or two barrels a day. They were still operational, but you'd think: oh, how can this be economical? Even as a rig hand you wondered how that was possible. In fact, of course, it wasn't.

Back then they would do certain things to try to increase the productivity of the wells. There would be a process called a cement squeeze, which was basically a process where high-pressure fluids were pumped down a well in order to raise the fluid level of the whole underground resource. The water and oil, in particular, would all be raised up so that oil could be pumped once again. That was an afternoon of heavy, intense activity and quite a lot of excitement, actually, when the trucks from companies like Schlumberger would come in and pump those fluid levels down under such high pressure and get that oil to come up. And not always did it work. Now we may end up seeing other procedures used like hydraulic fracking, which may be more successful.

But even with today's technology not all wells can be remediated. A lot of them are owned by small oil companies, which end up not being able to sustain the well. Rather than being abandoned, as has happened with some of the larger companies, smaller companies simply orphan the well. That ends up in the lap of the Alberta taxpayer. This is what's happened with a lot of these wells that we're going to be employing people to remediate over the next number of years with this program under Bill 14.

I was actually shocked and impressed by the large number of wells that have been drilled in our province. Over half a million wells have been drilled since drilling activities began. Over half of

those wells, or close to 285,000, are still deemed to be operational. However, a hundred thousand of those wells are not currently active. Eighty-one thousand wells have been reclaimed and remediated, leaving somewhere around 87,000 abandoned wells that require reclamation and remediation. Only a small portion of these sites are actually recorded in the inventory of the Orphan Well Association. As of March 2017 they held 2,084 orphan wells that still need to go through closure activities. In addition to that, there are some 1,700 pipeline segments that need attention.

The problem, Mr. Chair, is large. It's something that we've been aware of for a long, long time in this province, and the can has just been kicked down the road. Even back when I worked in the oil patch, there were lots and lots of wells where you'd see that the pumpjack wasn't working. Parts of it were not even there, or sometimes it would just be a hunk of steel sticking out of the ground, and you wondered: gee, that used to be a well site; what's happened to that? Well, they are nonfunctional orphan well sites. Some of them have been sitting there for decades, and now we're finally addressing the issue.

I'm proud to be part of a government that has Alberta's back on this and is finally doing something significant about it. For too long the problem was allowed to grow. This has affected thousands of Alberta residents, people like farmers who have these sites on their land, many of which can be seen. Just drive northeast of Edmonton through Thorhild county or up in Fort Saskatchewan, and you'll see them. Many of these farmers have sites on their land or municipalities have these unclaimed sites in their areas and can't work around them. It didn't happen overnight or even during the course of the last five years, when the economy was in a downturn. It's been building up for many years.

As I mentioned, in the '80s, when I worked in the oil patch, it was a known difficulty, a known problem that hasn't really been addressed over the years. Now we're finally doing something about it. In doing so, we're putting Albertans back to work, keeping the skill set in this province that is necessary and, as other people have alluded to, perhaps even creating a resource of individuals with specialized skills for addressing this problem in Alberta over the long term as we continue to pay attention to the issue of orphaned wells and not let it get to the point where there's a backlog of wells over time that ends up facing us as an overwhelmingly difficult problem but one that we have no choice but to dig into and solve now.

5:20

These orphan wells are wells, facilities, or pipelines where the original owner or the licensee is not capable of paying for the required closure processes. It can happen for any number of reasons, but quite often it means that the licensee has gone bankrupt, as I alluded to before, quite often a smaller company who ends up not being able to afford or have any funds left to remediate the well site. If they aren't going to close the facility properly, they're not going to be able to pay for remediation or reclamation either, and that's where the Orphan Well Association comes into play.

The OWA, the Orphan Well Association, is a not-for-profit organization funded by the oil and gas industry through the orphan levy fund. It's run by an independent board of directors and has done a lot of good work over the years. They have decommissioned over 1,100 orphan wells, and they have reclaimed another 700 orphan wells. Public safety is one of the key things they are concerned with. They examine the risk of every project to help to determine which wells will be cleaned up. But the 700 orphan wells they've cleaned up to date is not enough when we have another 2,000 or more that need attention.

We need to do more to assist them in their job, and we need everyone to recognize the seriousness of the situation. We can't continue to put off the problem. I think that's a question that I asked myself even working in the oil patch in the '80s: why are these just allowed to sit there? Now we're finally doing something about them. But they never should have been allowed to sit and have the problem fester for decades. I hear it all the time from my constituents, and I'm sure my colleagues in the Assembly hear the same thing: why was this problem allowed to fester, and why did it grow so large?

However, at the same time, Mr. Chair, we have a huge number of skilled oil field service workers ready and willing to go, many of whom will be employed in this project over the next three years, 1,650 of them who will be developing a significant and unique set of skills to address the problem of orphan wells. It's a set of skills that we hope to maintain in this province as we solve the backlog. Hopefully, we don't end up having a large backlog. We maintain this skill set and these individual crews so that as wells do become orphaned and the OWA seeks to address the problem, they'll have their valuable skills available to us on an ongoing basis, a team of skilled people to protect Albertans from the harm of possible abandoned and orphaned wells. So we want to keep them available for the near future. We need to keep them working now.

I know when talking with constituents at a recent school function, who were involved in the oil patch, they were really quite pleased to hear about this program. Some of them weren't aware of it. Those that I know who are also involved in the oil field supply service are quite excited about it as well. Those that are making hoses and pumps and all the other pieces of equipment that are necessary in the servicing industry and the specialized equipment that will be needed for the remediation of well sites and the orphan wells are only going to add to the level of economic activity that we already see beginning to happen in the oil patch. We look forward to as many individuals as possible of the 1,650 being employed in this rather specialized field of remediation of the orphan wells.

With that, I conclude my remarks and encourage all members to support this win-win-win legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The chair will recognize the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to rise in the House today to support Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation. You know, specifically, as opposed to those who spoke earlier, we can talk about the decision of our government to provide a loan for the Orphan Well Association, as other members have discussed. I'm very happy to support this bill because I think it strikes a very good balance between some competing interests. As well, it speaks to a real need for employment for rig hands in our province. I think it's one of these win-win situations.

Now, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung alluded to, there are indeed a lot of old well casings, rusting pumpjacks. It's hard to tell when you look at a well whether it is an orphan well, whether it's an abandoned well, or whether it's a well that, you know, in theory is still in production.

I do know that you do see a lot of these in and around Redwater, one of the oldest oil fields in the province, in fact the second oldest, and also up into Thorhild county, I think, with several, actually, around Boyle and around Athabasca. I know there are some within Lac La Biche county in my neighbouring riding. As well, Lamont county has quite a number of them.

Of course, these wells are a hazard while they remain in place if they are indeed orphan and the proper steps haven't been taken. It's kind of ironic in a way, you know, a lot of the concerns that some

groups have around hydraulic fracturing, when the main risk for water contamination from that is surface water spills. Meanwhile you have these old well casings in place, where the older they get and the less they're being maintained and looked after, the greater the chance you are going to have cracks in the casing and, actually, indeed, potentially contaminated groundwater as well as contaminated soil, and of course there's the ongoing nuisance for farmers where it makes parts of their land unusable, sometimes for decades. Obviously, it's not an acceptable situation.

This has been a debt that we've been accruing over decades. It's, unfortunately, part of the pattern of our previous administrations. They almost sort of worked counter to common sense. A common-sense approach to problems like this is that when you've got the labour available, when you have the workers looking for work, when you don't have a lot of competition for them, you can get them fairly reasonably, so willing and able to work at a reasonable cost. In the past, because that happened during a downturn, that tended to be precisely the time when, you know, previous administrations would actually cut back, and then during the boom time, when wages would be skyrocketing and you'd actually be competing with private industry for production for these types of things, that's where they'd start to ramp up. I'm very happy that I'm part of a government that understands that that's when people want these types of things, when they're unemployed, and with the fact that we can do this in a way that's going to address the unfortunate backlog of the past, I mean, it's really nice. To have in three years one-third retirement is actually pretty significant, but we can also do that while maintaining intact the principle of polluter pay.

In talking about striking the right balance, I'm really impressed by that because definitely we're in a dilemma. I'd have people approaching me, as I know many members would as well. I mean, you had people from PSAC coming, and not only that, but you would have individual companies and just individuals, farmers, concerned residents. They were pushing: "Well, now is the time to do that. I mean, it just needs to be done. We have workers here." But at the same time, you have others who could say, "But it's unfair that we should have to pay for industry, you know, perhaps not setting aside enough money or just basically for problems in liability management from the industry." I think this strikes a good balance.

We're not actually spending taxpayers' money directly. What we're doing is that we're using money from the federal government to leverage loans over time – they will be paid back – in order to get these things accelerated, so I think this is a win-win-win. It's the best bang for the buck we could get, I think, for that money if we wanted to shut in as many abandoned wells as possible. It keeps principles intact and puts people back to work when they need it.

With that, I guess that's good. I hope everybody votes for it and that we get unanimous consent on this.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 14? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

5:30

Mr. Gotfried: I'll keep it brief, Mr. Chair. I'd also like to speak in support of this bill. I think that the opportunity is there. In my conversations with many different organizations – the Petroleum Services Association of Canada, the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors, CAPP, and, of course, the Orphan Well Association – there was universal support of the principle that industry must pay for the cost of well reclamation. However, I think

we're in an opportunity right now where we would like to see this accelerated during a time period where we actually have excess capacity in the industry, and actually we can accelerate this process through the loan process, again respecting the principle that industry will pay it back. So this is an opportunity for us to invest in reclaiming these and doing the right thing in terms of the environmental impact of these wells, the fact that they are orphan wells. Otherwise, it will take much longer for us to address that concern. But, again, that financial commitment is there from the industry to do so.

The other thing is that we still have a lot of unemployed oil field workers out there who can be retrained to do this reclamation work. We also have a lot of idle equipment as well. There's going to be a great opportunity to ensure that this land not only is reclaimed but that it's put back to productive use within our economy. If some of that land can be utilized again in terms of the agricultural impact that it can have, it can reduce the land that is taken out of production for those purposes.

As I said, I will keep this short and sweet. It looks like everybody is very much in support of this bill. I'd like to add my support and encourage everybody to support this bill and move forward to allow the industry to take care of an issue which will help many, many people, I think, in terms of employment and reclamation.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 14?

Seeing none, are we ready for the question on Bill 14?

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 15, Bill 14. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I move that as we've made some good progress, we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:34 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 24, 2017

Day 38

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 24, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us just take a moment to remember that as elected officials and leaders we must not remain silent when events such as those that have just happened in Manchester occur. It is our responsibility to make known that we condemn these acts and that we will stand with our brothers and sisters during this very difficult time.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 205

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act

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

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 205.

As I begin, I think one of the points that I want to make is that we've had some good discussion here in the House, and we've also seen what happens when folks don't have the respect and the understanding about the language that we use around disability rights. One of our colleagues in the Legislature, the MLA for Calgary-Greenway, retweeted or validated some extremely negative language around people with disabilities, and it gave us an opportunity to have a discussion about what is unacceptable. That is unacceptable, and I think people know that now. But something else struck me as interesting in looking at this member's Twitter account. The description under his name said, "With a focus on the most vulnerable Albertans." I thought: why is that bothering me? The term "vulnerable Albertans" as applied to people with disabilities seems to me to be words we use when we have failed people with disabilities. What makes you vulnerable?

Well, in the case of people with disabilities in Alberta it is bad policy, indifferent policy, and the fact that we have not put the measures in place for people with disabilities to easily access the services and supports they need. That's one of the reasons why a disability advocate is so important. There are folks out there who have family members who will advocate for them, and that's wonderful. I've heard amazing stories of families doing that work, but I've also heard stories about families at the end of an exhausting day having to spend hours trying to get paperwork done, trying to help their children and family members transition at age 18 and age 65 to go from one level of support to another. That is why we need an advocate. There are lots of people with disabilities out there who don't have family members to do that work for them. There are parents that I spoke to who said: we're getting older, and as we do, we are worried sick about what happens to our adult child.

I am so proud, Madam Speaker, to be part of a government that has said: "You know what? We're not going to use the term 'most vulnerable Albertans.' We're going to use the term 'Albertans who deserve our respect and good policy to match it.'"

When we talk about what the advocate does, one of the things that we felt was most important is to set out an agenda for that first year or two years and identify and study the issues of concern for

people with disabilities, to review our programs and policies because, clearly, from the feedback we heard, there's a lot that isn't working right right now, and there are no better people to tell us what's not working than people with disabilities who are accessing the system and their advocates currently who are helping them do that. When we say participating in processes in which decisions are made about people with disabilities, that's an important piece because as we move forward and talk about what supports and services we need to have in Alberta, what we need to make easier, all of those things, that is a really important point. To give advice to the government on how to make things better: that is the whole process of consultation.

You know, when I first started talking about this bill, Madam Speaker, I was a member of the opposition and began to have these conversations about it. When I came over and joined this government, I was really delighted at the level of enthusiasm and excitement for this bill. I want to make a special point of recognizing the MLA for St. Albert, who really was doing this work across the aisle from me for quite some time but always – always – in a really postpartisan way took the time to explain to me some of the things that were most important about where we needed to head in terms of disability rights in Alberta. She has so many years of experience, and really I would not have been able to do the work I did without her advice and without the work she had done initially in order to get us to this point in the conversation.

With the input of the disability community, of people with disabilities, we can get to a place where their safety, their inclusion, their well-being becomes something that we don't strive for but something that we fully expect every day and maintain at a level that is important in this province. I know we're not there yet, but I'm so happy that we're having this discussion because in this caucus we believe social issues are important issues.

We know that when we develop good, strong legislation that helps people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, when we help any number of people who need our help, people fleeing domestic violence, we not only create life-changing opportunities for them, but at the end of the day we save money. We save money when Albertans are happy and they're comfortable and they're not going to emergency rooms to access care, when they feel safe, when we understand that their mental health and their personal safety and everything else is a part of their quality of living, but it's also something that is a responsibility that we hold as lawmakers in this province. I think that it's important to remember that as lawmakers in this province we are responsible for making sure that everybody has a level playing field, and that, I think, ultimately is what the disability advocate does. It is an attempt to create a level playing field where there isn't one now.

I want to thank everyone on both sides of the aisle for their input. I think that we've had an excellent discussion. I look forward to more of it today. I just want to say, Madam Speaker, that when we consider policy like this, what we are saying to people in this province is: we've got your back.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 205, Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. Let me just start off by saying first of all that this bill is a good step forward, a good step forward to finding ways for the system to be improved and better serve people with disabilities in our province. Dealing with bureaucracy can be very painful at times. It can be a very painful process, and I sincerely hope that this advocate

will be able to resolve some of the issues with the present system. I personally will be monitoring the implementation of this act, and I know that stakeholders that I'm speaking to will be watching it very closely as well.

9:10

On that note, I would also like to take a moment, Madam Speaker, to express my extreme disappointment that the government did not give any thought to our subamendment, which would have seen the public and stakeholders give input during the review of this act, give input on the act's effectiveness after two years of being in place. Our understanding is that the Member for Calgary-North West dismissed our reasonable amendment because she was offended because apparently she didn't receive a personal phone call ahead of time. Now, I don't know about you, but my personal offence would not stand in my way of making sure that legislation was right for the people that I was advocating for, and it's extremely disappointing that something as small and petty as not receiving a personal phone call would stand in the way of the member supporting a good amendment – a good amendment – that was being asked for by many stakeholders, including some stakeholders that I'm leaving here shortly to meet with, that are extremely disappointed in this government's behaviour when it comes to that.

It becomes even more appalling, in my mind, Madam Speaker, when you realize that this government on short notice changed this private member's bill to be a government bill and then didn't notify us in advance about their own amendment, so there's definitely a double standard right there when it comes to time constraints. But, again, despite the fact that we didn't receive a personal phone call, we are still rising to support this bill in general because it's the right thing for Albertans. Hopefully, in the future the hon. member can put some of that pettiness aside.

Now, in addition to that, Madam Speaker, her caucus voted down our amendment very quickly and without almost any thought. There could not have been any thought. I don't think it's just my caucus that's disappointed. As I said earlier, I know for sure that there are many stakeholder groups that are offended and very disappointed in that behaviour.

One other thing I wanted to note on it is that there is no preamble in this bill. Now, preambles give an indication as to the spirit of the law and can guide the crafting of regulations and other details later on. The Child and Youth Advocate Act has a preamble pointing out a couple of things: one, that

children and youth are our greatest resource;

secondly, that

the Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that the rights, interests and viewpoints of [our] most vulnerable children and youth . . . are considered in matters affecting those children and youth;

and that the government

recognizes the importance of continual improvement in the provision of services to vulnerable children and youth.

Now, those are good things to have in the preamble.

It's also interesting to note that the other night in Legislative Offices this caucus across from us inside there voted to stop debate on including children with disabilities under the Child and Youth Advocate. It was shocking.

But not having a preamble is problematic, so I'd like to be on the record stating a possible preamble of sorts for this bill. One, the government of Alberta supports persons with disabilities to be fully included in their communities; two, the government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that the rights, interests, and viewpoints of persons with disabilities are considered in matters affecting them;

and the government of Alberta recognizes the importance of continual improvement in the provision of services to persons with disabilities. Again, you could have a solid preamble like that, Madam Speaker, if the government wasn't rushing through the bill and spending their time being offended because they didn't get personal phone calls about amendments.

On this issue, the bill becoming a government bill: I support this move. Now, I've heard from several stakeholders that more consultation with the disability community was needed and is needed. In an analysis on their website Inclusion Alberta writes:

Since this analysis was completed it is our understanding that as of today May 17, 2017 Bill 205 will be moved from a Private Member's Bill to become a government Bill. While we support this decision, we wish to reiterate our desire to see the government fully consult with the disability community on how an Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act can be best structured to ensure the office is both independent, supportive of inclusion as a means to equality and equity of life outcomes to Albertans without disabilities and effective.

Now, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the work that's been done here, and I do believe that it's a good start. I believe it is the beginning of a very important conversation. I applaud the member for her hard work on this bill while I also encourage the government to continue to listen to those directly impacted by this new office as it works to implement this advocate.

In summary, I again would like to commend the government on this bill and to further encourage all members of this House to consider more broadly how we can continually support Albertans who use these services. Let's not stop with this bill, and let's certainly not let our petty feelings get in the way of moving forward with good legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm getting up to give just quick, brief words that I support this bill. This is a group of people that for too long has heard just talk from previous governments.

Here on this side of the House we aim to make life better for Albertans, all Albertans. What I have heard from my consultation with constituents – as some of you know, I'm working on a private member's bill on Henson trust, which means I'm consulting with a lot of the same groups of people that the hon. member consulted with for this bill. What they tell me is that they are supportive of this bill, Madam Speaker.

Now, of course, the work continues when it comes to issues facing these groups of constituents that are on AISH or receive various PDD supports. We have gotten rid of SIS, our minister is working diligently to make recommended changes to the AISH system, and of course in my own office we have done continuing work in consulting with the PDD and AISH communities every step of the way as I work to form and bring forward my private member's bill on Henson trust, which will most likely happen in the fall.

Now, these groups of constituents that I am talking with – and they're constituents, the same as any other – support having this advocate. They support this bill, and as a representative of those constituents and a supporter of this bill being the right thing to do, the right thing to make life better for Albertans, I will be voting in support of this bill.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his supporting words. I know that the member himself has been a champion for persons with disabilities, and he's got a private member's bill on the Order Paper regarding Henson trust. I just wonder if he can tell us a little bit more about the work that he's been doing on that particular issue to support persons with disabilities and how the consultations that he's undertaken have gone.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much. I have private member's Bill 211. When I first got elected, one of the first groups of constituents to visit me in my office was members from the PDD community who were upset about the previous government and safety standard 8, which meant that those of the PDD community who were renting independent residences would basically force their landlords to start putting in full sprinkler systems, bringing private residences up to the full code standards of a full-living facility. As you can imagine, putting full sprinkler systems into a private residence is a bit of a massive and perhaps unreasonable undertaking.

Now, I'm sure that the people that brought this in had the best of intentions, but unfortunately they talked to the community after the fact. I heard loud and clear from that so that when I brought forward this bill, I consulted every step of the way. I saw that there was a problem that I had heard. Henson trusts, in short, are a way for parents of disabled children to leave an inheritance for their children in such a way that when they pass away, that particular child's assets don't suddenly become so large that they have their AISH benefits clawed back, which I think is very reasonable. That's something that pretty much all other provinces in this country do.

My first step was not to draft an idea of what the solution would be. My first step in that consultation was to go out to the community and say: "This is what I see as a problem for my private member's bill. You tell me what you want to see as a solution for that. You tell me." So I consulted in both Edmonton and Calgary. I had above the fire code capacity in attendance at both consultations, which was quite the experience. From there, I took all the feedback that I heard from all the various constituents who were affected by this as well as from their advocates, and since this also deals with what happens when a parent passes away, I heard as well from accountants and lawyers who specialize in this particular area of law, on how you set up inheritances and trusts for those with disabilities.

9:20

From that, Madam Speaker, I sent out to all the stakeholders a what-I-heard document, a summary of everything I heard from those consultations. Currently, for about the next three weeks, I am finishing off my first draft of what I would give to our table officers and Parliamentary Counsel to draft the bill. I'm going to bring that draft of what I think the solution would be to the community again for another round of consultation and go to the community and say: "This is what I heard. This is what I am proposing would be the content and the specifics of the bill." Assuming that that consultation goes well, that's what I'll give to Parliamentary Counsel, and that's what we'll see before the House, hopefully sometime in the fall.

That's the meaning of consultation: every step of the way making sure that the community is involved and that what I'm interpreting from them to be their optimal solution, of course within the restrictions of what I can do in a private member's bill, is there. We've listened to the community.

For the second round of consultations I'm happy to say that, due to the great amount of support from members of my caucus, I will be going down to Lethbridge, actually, to open up those consultations. I will of course be back in Calgary to do another round of consultations. We're working with my colleagues in Edmonton to host bigger consultations. We're also working with some other colleagues to perhaps go a little bit further afield into rural Alberta as well to sort of get a little bit more of the rural members of the PDD community, to make sure that this private member's bill meets their needs, and to make sure I have, as much as possible, the full diversity of viewpoints. Should that come out as positive, that's what I'll bring forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? I'll recognize Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-North West for her efforts on this bill.

You know, I don't think it's a news flash to anybody that for Albertans sometimes trying to navigate through the labyrinth of government is often very difficult. If you think of the government as the largest business, perhaps, in the province, it's often very difficult to get through the layers of bureaucracy and to actually make the provincial government work for you. My constituents are often in my office to ask me and my office to try to help them work their way through government. The bureaucracy, the regulations, the timelines, the forms, the technicalities: all of these things combine at times to make it almost impossible for the people of my constituency to work through the government and to make the government work for them. Of course, it's even harder when you're an Albertan that has a disability that you suffer from. So it's a good idea to bring forward Bill 205 to create an advocate for persons with disabilities, and I would applaud the member for bringing this forward.

It's clear that an advocate in this bill has been empowered with the ability to identify and to study issues. Each one of the people that walks into our offices has a unique life and unique challenges. People with disabilities are no different. As they come into our lives and come into our offices and ask government to be a part of their lives, it's important for this advocate to be able to study and to be able to identify the unique situations that people with disabilities face, whether that's a physical disability or a mental disability, whatever that disability may be. Having an advocate that can study and identify those issues is a good thing. To review the programs and the policies that we create as a government to try to help the people of Alberta with disabilities: that's an important thing for an advocate to be able to do, to see if those programs and those policies are actually fulfilling the purpose for which they were designed.

Allowing that advocate to have consultations and to help make and to advise the government on systemic decisions that could help people with disabilities is an important role for this advocate to play, so I'm glad to see that it's built into this bill, to a degree at least. That they can promote the rights and the interests and the well-being of the person that is seeking access to government service is a good idea; it's a good thing. That this advocate would be able to provide information and advice to the government is actually really crucial.

We must as a government be self-reflective. We must be looking at how we can do things better for the people of Alberta, how we can make our systems more efficient and more effective, and an advocate allows us to be able to do that, to help those people that

perhaps cannot speak on their own behalf or cannot help themselves.

An advocate can help provide people with disabilities or their families with an educational component. They can help educate these families to see how they can work through the system. This is accessing the services and the related programs for that individual. They can help make them aware of the appropriate resources and the people in the organizations that the government has available, and they can, like we've done with other advocates, reach out to Albertans, whether it's the Child and Youth Advocate or whether it's the Seniors Advocate. These advocates can help the government work for the people, and if nothing else, that's what a democracy should be about. It should be about helping the government work for the people.

For those that do not have the resources or the capacity to advocate on their own, I believe that an advocate will assume, to a certain degree, that role, that capacity of advocacy. These are all positive things that I wanted to bring to the attention of the House. It's the reason that we will and I will be supporting this bill.

That doesn't mean that this bill couldn't have been better. This bill provides for the advocate for persons with disabilities to improve the government capacity by identifying and studying issues, by reviewing programs, by providing information, and while I support these objectives – and they are worthy objectives – I believe we could have made this bill even better. I really wish the government had been willing to support the subamendment that I put forward in the House. The subamendment would have encouraged the advocate when they review policies and programs, when they identify issues, and when they provide advice to the government. This subamendment would have helped strengthen the mandate of the advocate in order to be able to help Albertans. I believe that it would have made a better bill.

When you ask to allow and encourage the advocate to consult with stakeholders and when the advocate puts forward a report to a committee, upon 90 days of receiving that report, the committee would then consult with the public about that report and maybe ask for some of those stakeholders to come before the committee. That's how committees work. We take a problem, we take an issue, and we study it. We bring in the consultation.

9:30

I'm very happy to hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, I believe, say that in his private member's bill he's done all of this consultation leading up. Why would we not encourage our advocate to do the same thing? The amendment asks for front-line workers, that maybe have a different viewpoint, to be involved, that there would be fulsome consultation with those stakeholders. We're simply asking for the advocate to have the capacity to do what the member across is doing for his private member's bill, and that's a good thing.

We asked for the committee to have more consultation with stakeholders coming out of that report. We've asked in that subamendment for the advocate to have the capacity to speak on behalf of those that are being employed, that are looking after many of the people that have disabilities, that they would be able to advocate on their behalf as well. If you're advocating on behalf of the people that are working with people with disabilities, you are advocating for that person with a disability.

I wish that the government had been willing to consider and to vote in favour of that subamendment because I believe that it would have made this a better bill. I guess we can only take the government and the hon. member and the reasons that she gave for why she wouldn't consider this subamendment. I guess that was, from my perspective, quite disappointing.

At any rate, to sum it up, I believe that there is much in this bill that's worthy of support. It will receive my support. I thank the government and the hon. member for bringing it forward. I just wish that we had been able to make it a little bit better.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was very interested in the words that the hon. member had to share. I recall that earlier on in this session the member was talking about opposition that he and other people had to a group home in his own cul-de-sac. It seems so interesting that here he is advocating for persons with disabilities, you know, a group of people that, quote, unquote, people say are vulnerable, yet in another instance he was completely opposing a group that could be considered part of that category. So I'd like the hon. member to get on the record as to what the difference is and why there's a difference in advocating for some as opposed to others who desperately need our help and should all be treated with dignity.

The Deputy Speaker: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is now several times that I've come up and spoken to this issue. I believe that the root of it comes back down to that important word that we've talked about, consultation. We saw just how much difficulty this government worked itself into when it did not do a proper job of consulting with farmers over Bill 6. You see, when governments make decisions, they impact individual people's lives. Before they go about doing that, whether it's with zoning laws or whether it's with a Bill 6, they better make sure that they've done the job of consulting because, at the end of the day, government is supposed to be about serving the people regardless of the issue.

What happened in both Bill 6 and with the issue that he's referring to in my life is that there was not proper consultation. This government learned the hard way how Bill 6 came back to bite them because the people of Alberta realized that this government was not working in their favour but, rather, was trying to impose an ideological point of view on free Alberta citizens. Now, in this case of mine we saw again a government making a decision without appropriate consultation. At the end of the day, the appeals panel came out in favour of our position, that there had not been appropriate consultation and that the issue was in our favour.

While we all want to help people – and I even believe that the government wants to try to help the people of Alberta at times – we see that when you do not do the appropriate consultation, that consultation or lack thereof can create a whole series of problems that government creates for itself. So I would encourage this government to continue to learn. We realize that many of us in this Legislature are first-time MLAs. There is a learning curve. I believe that this government has started to learn at least a little bit about the idea of consultation. I think we saw the Member for Calgary-Currie stand up and give a speech here just a few minutes ago all about the role of consultation that he's taking, and I believe that that's probably as a result of the problems that were created at least in part by Bill 6.

So when we start to think about how government works in people's lives and when we start looking at this bill, let's remember that consultation is always a good thing. Asking the advocate to be able to consult, to talk with front-line workers, to advocate on behalf of the people that are, in turn, working with people with disabilities, that consultation and having the committees that will review the reports of the advocate, have an opportunity to take that information and to be able to go back and to consult with the people,

is actually a really, really important part of the process of government. At the end of the day, when you do that, it's a part of getting the government to be able to actually work for the people. And in the case of people with disabilities that's a very important thing that government can do for them, advocate for them, not be a part of the problem.

So while again I would speak to this bill and say that there are major portions of it that are worthy of our support, I believe that it could have been tweaked. It's, again, disappointing that the government is unwilling or unable . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak to third reading of Bill 205. I'd like to start by just talking a little bit about some statements that were made earlier today. The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre seemed quite disappointed that the subamendment, which was just spoken about by the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, was voted down in the Assembly.

Now, Madam Speaker, this was a two-page subamendment incorporating a number of changes for which, frankly, I heard very little explanation or clarification offered in this House. I know that after I listened to the member present the subamendment, I had very little understanding of precisely what it was he was asking for. He gave a much more eloquent explanation of it here this morning. I, frankly, wish he would have made so eloquent an explanation on that day. However, you know, as was said by the Member for Calgary-North West, there had been no previous consultation or indication that that subamendment would be brought forward, no opportunity to correctly understand how it would fit within the bill, and, as I said, little explanation offered in the House.

I will note, Madam Speaker, that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre himself did not speak to this subamendment that he apparently felt so passionately about, much as he had almost nothing to say in our last meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, where I was pleased to serve as chair, in which he somewhat misleadingly suggested that government members at that committee chose to stop debate on aspects of the Child and Youth Advocate Act, when in fact they simply chose to adjourn discussion of further expanding the scope of the advocate to a future date and another committee meeting.

Now, I suppose there are many reasons why a member may choose not to speak to a particular debate. Perhaps they've chosen not to be present for a particular discussion, in which case it's a bit disingenuous to cast aspersions on those who are there. Perhaps they didn't feel strongly enough about something to be there to take part in that debate – I suppose that's a possibility – or I suppose they just might not feel passionately enough or be concerned enough about that issue to rise and make their opinion known at the time. I suppose that's for the member in question to determine or to know for themselves. At any rate, I'll say for my own part that I did not find that that amendment was very clearly explained or presented on the record, so I did not find that I could support it.

9:40

Now if we can go back then, Madam Speaker, to the actual substance of the bill, as I hope all members will be able to today. I'm very happy to have seen this bill brought forward by the Member for Calgary-North West. You know, when I first was elected, I admit I did not have much, if any, knowledge about the realities for the disability community in Alberta.

Shortly after I was elected I did meet with Ms Bev Hills of the Skills Society, who came to my office, and we had a very good

discussion. That was my first opportunity to learn about some of the difficulties and indeed many challenges that that community had faced in trying to communicate with the previous government. There were a number of issues that they had encountered, a number of challenges on which they had tried to be heard but on which they found that they were not able to gain any purchase. They were not able to gain any ground. They were not able to get their concerns recognized, indeed, or things changed.

As I continued to serve and I had the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to have the honour of chairing our caucus committee on social policy, I began to have the opportunity to learn from the Member for St. Albert, who many of us have spoken of in regard to this bill given her deep knowledge of this area, given her many, many years of work with this community and advocacy on behalf of this community. From her and through her I began to learn about the concerns around standard 8, the safety standards that were brought in under the previous government, and the implications that those held for the disability community and indeed very dire implications that could have cost many people from the disability community their very homes.

I was very pleased, Madam Speaker, to see that the minister for human services at the time, now the Minister of Community and Social Services, undertook a consultation to sit down with that community, to hear directly from them their concerns. Indeed, again, the Member for St. Albert was a leader in part of that consultation and in ensuring that the voices of the people in our disability community here in Alberta were heard. I'm very happy to say that as a result of that fulsome consultation, those standards were repealed.

Madam Speaker, I've had the opportunity to continue to learn. I've been able to continue to learn because there have been people within our government caucus who have that knowledge. The Member for Calgary-North West, whichever side of this aisle she has been on, has indeed endeavoured to become that advocate as well. She spent much time with people in that community, learning from them, understanding the issues, and she repeatedly rose in this House – repeatedly rose in this House – unlike some other members, to advocate for this community not just when it was politically convenient but out of true concern, to make sure that their voices were heard at this table.

That is an excellent example of why a disability advocate in this province is so badly needed and of the great value that it can provide to the disability community in our province. Madam Speaker, when we have someone who is dedicated to examining the systems of support, to examining the things that are in place to help those who are in need, as was so eloquently put earlier this morning, not those who are just vulnerable, not those whom we want to look at as victims but simply those who need help from their government, as so many of us do in so many different areas, those people would have someone who can help them to navigate the systems because, as has been observed, these systems can be complex. They can be somewhat labyrinthine.

As I noted yesterday, the Auditor General had identified how bad things had gotten with the AISH system in our province. I'm very happy that the Minister of Community and Social Services has made many improvements. I know that my office, in terms of our casework, had many people come to us who were struggling with trying to get through the AISH system, having to make repeated applications before they were finally able to access the services and the supports that they needed and indeed deserved.

Having a disability advocate who could report to and advise the Minister of Community and Social Services, to identify and study issues of concern to people with disabilities, to review those programs and policies that are there to support them, to participate

in the processes through which decisions are made, indeed to consult with and promote the rights and interests and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education: Madam Speaker, this is an incredibly valuable thing. This is a good step forward. We have much work left to do with the disability community. There are many things left to address.

We had an excellent report, which was released last fall, again which the Member for St. Albert was a key part in bringing together as a member of the committee that looked at this. I look forward to working with the Minister of Community and Social Services to see how that report can be implemented and how we can begin to take further steps forward to ensure that all Albertans receive the support and services from their government that they deserve. Madam Speaker, to be clear, we are here to make life better for Albertans. We make life better for Albertans by standing together and supporting each other, not by pitting Albertans against each other, not by suggesting who is and who is not truly Albertan but by supporting all Albertans regardless of their political bent or stripe.

I appreciate this opportunity to stand today and again express my support for Bill 205, to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing this bill forward, to recognize the Member for St. Albert for her continued and ongoing advocacy for this community. I look forward to seeing this bill pass and to working with the new disability advocate in the province of Alberta to make sure, again, that we are making life better for all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any further speakers to the bill? Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to rise in support of Bill 205 and thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing it forward and, of course, thank the Member for St. Albert for her lifetime of advocacy on this matter. You know, this is one of those bills where I think to myself: why wasn't this done years ago? That's been happening a lot over here, actually. I've been really enjoying the dialogue on this bill as well – well, until the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre got up to speak. But it's been very positive, and it's what we really need.

An advocate is going to be very important for this community. An advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta will allow for a more systemic understanding of the issues faced by persons with disabilities and will identify potential solutions to these barriers. That's exactly what an advocate does. They will recognize items in the community that aren't being addressed. I have an example from Calgary's greatest riding, Calgary-Klein.

Ms McPherson: The second greatest.

Mr. Coolahan: The second greatest, yeah.

It's funny that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie addressed the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon on keeping the youth house in his cul-de-sac. In my community of Capitol Hill, my own community, construction is under way right now on accessible housing that was originally there. It had 14 rooms, and now it's being expanded to 42 rooms for people with disabilities. It's really fantastic.

This was a combination of private donors, the government of Alberta, and many advocacy groups. What happened there was that with the members from the Capitol Hill Community Association, who I thank very much for this, there was no objection to this accessible housing development being expanded. You have to understand that. They advocated for this, absolutely. This is what an advocate who is in place would do on a continual basis, not just

sort of an ad hoc advocacy when something is recognized. I'm very proud of the Capitol Hill community and the association.

9:50

You have to understand where this is being built, Madam Speaker. I mean, it would leave developers salivating. It overlooks beautiful Confederation park. They developed it so that people with disabilities, who are in chairs or scooters or these kinds of things, can actually go right into the park. It's very beautiful land. Again, I'm just so proud of my community for helping make that happen.

You know another thing an advocate can do? I just wanted to bring this up because it's kind of interesting. When I was in high school many, many years ago . . .

Ms McPherson: Not that long ago.

Mr. Coolahan: It's quite a while ago.

. . . I actually earned a credit for being what they called a buddy to people with developmental disabilities and physical disabilities. What a great program. This is something an advocate in Alberta might actually advocate for in the education system here. It really gave me an understanding as a young person, a teenager, of the challenges that are faced by people with disabilities but also of their abilities, what they are able to accomplish, and how much they contribute to communities.

I don't want to take up too much time on this, Madam Speaker, because a lot has been said, and I really do want to see this bill passed, as I'm sure it will be. Again, thank you so much to the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing this forward. I'm sure we are going to see this bill passed, and we're going to see an improvement in the lives of people with disabilities in this province.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Before I begin, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for her work in putting this forward and for all the consultation that she's done for this bill, and I also want to thank the Member for St. Albert, who has worked her entire adult life advocating for people with disabilities. The work that she has done has helped our government and has helped all Albertans move forward when it comes to helping persons with disabilities. I am very proud to be in a caucus that has people from all pasts, from all walks of life, who can bring their expertise to our government, and if we don't have that expertise, we can go out and seek that expertise. We are nowhere near as blind as previous governments have been when it comes to talking to other people, so I'm so proud to be part of this government and our caucus.

Now, I have never been anywhere near an expert on persons with disabilities, but I knew that about myself before I was elected. As a brand new candidate I sought out an expert. When I was getting signatures for my nomination, I sat down with a friend, my grades 11 and 12 social studies teacher, actually, Jean-Pascal Morin. While he hasn't always been an expert either, a few years ago he and his wife were blessed with their first child, Isaac, who was born with Down syndrome. I knew about this because he always talked about Isaac in class, and he even brought him a few times. Isaac was the happiest kid I have ever met. He loved everyone, and quite frankly everybody loved him. He was just a barrel of joy and always brought a smile to everyone's face when he was able to come to school with his father.

Now, I don't know if you've recently visited a high school, Madam Speaker, or if anyone here has recently visited a high school, but high school has never been, really, a bastion of proper language. Quite frankly, the number of times I heard the R word is astounding, but in M. Morin's class I learned quite quickly why that word is inappropriate and how to shut it down when I see it or hear it. As high school students we learn that this word is inappropriate and that it can be hurtful to so many people across our province and even in the microcosm that was our school, and we did learn. It was like night and day from when we entered M. Morin's class at the beginning of the year to when we exited after two years. No one used the R word because we all loved M. Morin, and we knew that it upset him and for good reasons. It's insulting, it's degrading, and I wish the Member for Calgary-Greenway would have talked to the family of a person with disabilities before he supported the use of such a degrading word.

That is why this bill is so important, because we have people who believe that using the R word is worth their validation, because we have people even in this Chamber who don't understand the harm that can be done when you stand aside and let people use degrading language to Albertans and to people whom we love.

When I was getting my nomination paper signed, I went to see M. Morin and his family to talk about politics and what I needed to know about persons with disabilities. I wanted to know what I could do to help. I needed a crash course because, like I said, I knew very little about the subject. I wish members of the opposition would have done the same because I learned a lot in our short meeting. When I asked what needed to be done, he pretty much said: everything. It's incredibly difficult to raise a child with a developmental disability. They lack support, they lack information about what supports do exist for them, and they lack someone to speak on their behalf.

The previous government failed persons with disabilities. I vowed that I would do better not just for Isaac but for all Albertans. There's a lot that needs to be better. There's a lot that needs to be done. Because of the lack of will and because of the lack of caring from people on the other side of the House, we have inherited a deficit of empathy from the previous government. We will not leave people with disabilities behind, because we care about Albertans, we care about people with developmental disabilities, and we will make sure that this and what happened in the past 10 years never happens again.

This bill responds to calls within the disability community for an advocate, and more importantly it responds to concerns of members of the PDD community. I couldn't be happier to support this bill, and I couldn't be happier to be with a government that puts legislation like this forward, and I am so proud of the Member for Calgary-North West and the Member for St. Albert for all their hard work in helping people with disabilities.

While people on the other side have their headphones in, while people on the other side decide not to talk, that is why we're here. We're here to make sure that we bring their stories forward, because the people in the opposition are so blind to what's happening with social issues. It may not be in their top 100 things of why they ran, but it's important to people in this province. Those 100 issues, those social issues: that is why people ran. That is why people need a government. They need government to speak on their behalf to help them with social issues because they have never had a voice in this Legislature or very rarely get a voice in this Legislature.

Once again, I am so proud of people who have gone out into the communities to talk to people in these communities, who took the time to actually ask them what they needed. That's why I am proud to be part of this government, and I am proud to support this bill.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 205. I also want to add my congratulations to the Member for Calgary-North West and to her colleague and my colleague as well the Member for St. Albert, who together are a force to be reckoned with when it comes to advocacy for individuals who need support in this province and deserve the support of this government.

This legislation will bring forward a long-desired advocate for persons with disabilities. I do want to thank the member for bringing forward this bill, starting an important conversation, and for the work she's done to consult with Albertans. Madam Speaker, this bill would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta with the power to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of persons with disabilities. Just as important, the advocate will identify concerns within the disability community.

Some of these concerns I've mentioned before in the House and I've had the opportunity to witness and learn about earlier in other capacities, while driving a DATS bus or working with geriatric patients as a nursing orderly trainee. Those early impressions never left me, and I'm very, very proud to know that we recognize the need and the wisdom of bringing forward legislation which creates an office whereby individuals with disabilities can turn to an advocate and have their voices heard.

10:00

Many were the times when passengers on my bus or individuals who now are my constituents sought to gain access to government programs or services that they really shouldn't have to ask twice for, yet they didn't seem to be able to obtain them as easily as one would expect. To have this office available for them to turn to is something they've been calling for a long time, and I'm proud that this government is finally responding and turning to that community of Albertans and saying: "Yes, you belong. Yes, we value you. Yes, you're important. Yes, we understand."

When it comes to making life better for Albertans with disabilities, the previous government was a lot of talk and not a lot of action. The Official Opposition has a plan to cut services like health and education, that Albertans rely on. Our government's record is clear. We are committed to supporting Alberta's disability community. We stopped the PDD safety standards, and we stopped SIS. We recognize that PDD service providers are facing pressures due to a growing demand for PDD services. That's why we increased funding for PDD. Our government is protecting and improving the things that matter to Albertans, and that's why we continue to listen to the disability community about their ideas to fix the issues that the previous government created.

Now, many Albertans who don't have a relative or a close friend or maybe don't run across in their own workplace individuals who face the challenges of having a disability may not be aware of some of the statistics about the individuals and the size of the community who live with disabilities in Alberta. Overall, we know that individuals with disabilities face unique challenges. A few examples include an employment rate of 47 per cent compared with individuals without disabilities at 74 per cent.

One of the things that an advocate will be able to do is raise awareness amongst employers about the value of employing individuals with disabilities. There are many benefits to having someone in your employ, as an employer, who otherwise wouldn't be working, if one takes the opportunity to realize the value of employing somebody with a disability, realizing that in many cases those employees have lower absentee rates, better job dedication,

longer term employment in one place, and genuinely add an element to your workplace that basically improves the camaraderie and self-respect of everybody in the workplace because they know that they're reaching out and valuing somebody else in our society.

Right now I'm in the process of working with Inclusion Alberta to match the work that I have available to the skills of somebody that they will refer. Hopefully, very soon there'll be somebody in my office who is living with a disability, gainfully employed in some capacity, that we can enrich our workplace with. I look forward very much to doing so and, hopefully, by example, will encourage others in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung to really consider looking at how they could employ an individual with a disability as well.

Now, a bit more background as far as the quality of life for adult Albertans with developmental disabilities goes, as measured by a personal outcomes index. It demonstrates that the ability to get around within one's community, i.e. transportation, is positively related to all domains of quality of life. The greatest gap between quality of life for adults with developmental disabilities and other adult Albertans was in the domains of rights and self-determination.

Research shows that in comparison to parents of typically developing children, parents of children with disabilities are more likely to turn down a promotion, work reduced hours, or not work, and have a lower income. Many of us have seen this first-hand, where you'll have a dedicated set of parents or a single parent looking after an individual who has a disability in their home, quite often with other children as well. They will do everything, as one would expect, to ensure that that child has the best outcomes as they grow towards adulthood within that family but at great sacrifice.

Those are some of the things that I expect the advocate will address when the office is in place should we pass this legislation, as I expect we will. The advocate will, I believe, become a very worthy advocate for parents raising children with disabilities in ensuring that the access to government services or development of new programs and services is something that reaches the attention of the government sooner rather than later so that individuals don't end up suffering unnecessarily as they do their very best to raise children with disabilities within families and, hopefully, minimize the sacrifices that they have to make compared to families who are not suffering the same challenges.

According to the 2012 Canadian survey of disabilities by Statistics Canada – get this – there are approximately 436,000 adults with disabilities and 31,000 children with disabilities in Alberta, a huge number. Many of us don't realize just how large that number is: 436,000 adults and 31,000 children with disabilities. What an absolutely wonderful resource of individuals that we can welcome into the workplace and into our schools to ensure that they know they're valued. This legislation, which brings forward an advocate for those with disabilities, will go a long way to signify that the government values individuals who have disabilities as they would any other Albertan. The Canadian survey on people with disabilities conducted by Statistics Canada is collecting data between March and June 2017. Updated results will be available in the winter of 2018 and '19, but even as the numbers stand now, from 2012, 436,000 adults with disabilities and 31,000 children with disabilities in Alberta are significant numbers which, I'm sure, come as a shock to many Albertans to know.

There are a number of programs in the province designed to provide supports to individuals with disabilities, but those support programs will always need to be reviewed, updated, reconsidered. An advocate for persons with disabilities will be a very significant and useful instrument, officially, for individuals and families who wish to address government and make sure that changes are made to programs as they develop over time and as needs change.

Thirty-seven hundred children, youth, and adults are either affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder or are caregivers of those affected, accessing support. That's a significant number, and it's a very, very difficult situation to be in as a caregiver for somebody suffering from FASD. I know an individual in my constituency who was a foster mom to one individual with FASD, and it's total dedication, and it's nonstop. It's heartwarming to see that child, that young boy, grow into a young adult under the care of this mother who has taken that responsibility on, but the supports that need to be there for individuals in that situation are not always what they should be.

I know from having conversations with her that the power, the resource, the office of an advocate for those with disabilities would be an asset to her. As an individual MLA one can make representations, but for, officially, that office to be available to mothers in her situation looking after a child with FASD would be a real recognition of the value of the role that they play in extending themselves to really take on a very, very difficult and challenging task. Raising somebody with FASD: well, it's really heartwarming to see that effort and that dedication. People who are in that situation deserve nothing but our absolute support and deserve to be elevated to a status of the highest order in our society. Giving them the recognition they deserve by implementing an advocate for people with disabilities in this province is one way of honouring that dedication that caregivers for those with FASD exhibit every day.

10:10

The family support for children with disabilities program supports more than 13,400 families and their children with disabilities. Other programs: the persons with developmental disabilities program supports over 11,300 individuals; 570 Albertans accessed the residential access modification program; approximately 150 Albertans have a qualified service dog under the Service Dogs Act and service dogs qualifications regulation. Supports and services cover a broad range and can include community-based assessment and diagnosis, targeted and indicated prevention, support services for people affected by FASD and their caregivers, a range of respite options, targeted behavioural and developmental strategies, work-related and/or developmental child care, assistance with some extraordinary costs related to health and medical needs, and out-of-home care for the child when necessary through FSCD.

A number of programs exist, and they do need to be revisited over time. The needs of families change. Situations change within the workplace. The individuals who suffer the disability and live with the challenges of disability themselves will often, as they grow older, have their needs change, go from school to the workplace. It's the transition quite often from school to workplace that these individuals have difficulty manipulating. The advocate will look at transitional problems that individuals suffer when they try to go through even a change of academic institution. From high school to university is quite often a challenge, and there are barriers there that need to be addressed on an ongoing basis. This is one area where I'm really quite hopeful we'll see some progress made with the assistance of the advocate, in having more people go from high school into postsecondary institutions and be accommodated.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm proud to rise to speak to Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act. I would

like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for putting forward this bill and also the Member for St. Albert for cosponsoring. I know that these two members have been huge advocates on this issue, and I and many other Albertans certainly commend them for that.

I would like to begin by saying that it is our government's first priority to ensure that Albertans with disabilities continue to receive the supports they need, not just to continue to support them but to add to that support in a meaningful way to smooth over the problem areas and find solutions to the frustrations that people of the disability community have experienced for years.

We saw one important example of frustration in the disability community in the form of incredibly damaging language validated by a member of the Legislature, the Member for Calgary-Greenway. He responded to a blistering criticism of the government that included an offensive term to the disability community. In responding both positively and excitedly to the person who made the insult, he validated a term that the disability community and its allies have worked so incredibly hard to make unacceptable. When he was finally pushed into apologizing, he used the opportunity to take yet another swipe at the government, and he didn't even use the word "disability." This is the same member who offered up a substantial bill-changing amendment, which actually he never even bothered to bring to the House. That was about two weeks ago, and it just left us wondering and left me wondering whether he had the best interest of this bill at heart.

You see, Madam Speaker, prejudice is everywhere and even in this House, but I am confident in saying that prejudice of any kind does not exist on this side of the House. Our government has always valued the input of the disability community into how we can best support their safety and inclusion. That's why we continue to make thoughtful, measured changes to improve the way the PDD programs meet the needs of Albertans with developmental disabilities. Our government recognizes that both individual and family advocacy is important for addressing issues and creating meaningful changes to systems and supports.

The ministry has existing relationships with the disability community, providing avenues for both engagement and advocacy. Just to list off the advocacy committees, that includes the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, PDD provincial advocacy committee, PDD Provincial Self-Advocates' Advisory Committee, PDD contacts advisory committee, family support for children with disabilities, provincial parent advisory committee, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder family advisory council. Community advocacy organizations also include the Alberta Disabilities Forum, Disability Action Hall, Inclusion Alberta, voices of Albertans, Voice of Albertans with Disabilities. Service provider organizations also include Alberta Council of Disability Services, Alberta Disability Workers Association, Align Association of Community Services, Alberta brain injury network, PDD regional service provider council.

Madam Speaker, our government is listening to Albertans. As you can see with the long list of organizations that I just listed, we are engaging with Albertans. The message Albertans are sending is loud and clear. Establishing an advocate will make the lives of Albertans better.

I'd like to get into the role and the mandate of the advocate:

- (a) identify and study issues of concern to persons with disabilities . . .
- (c) participate in processes in which decisions are made about persons with disabilities;
- (d) promote the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities through public education;

- (e) provide information and advice to the Government with respect to any matter relating to the rights, interests and well-being of persons with disabilities;
- (f) assist individuals who are having difficulty accessing services and related programs for persons with disabilities, including directing them to an appropriate resource, person or organization [that may be able to assist them].

Madam Speaker, simply put, this bill gives the disability community a voice. By having an advocate, Albertans with disabilities will have a point person when, for example, teens transition into adulthood or need assistance navigating government programs and services by providing advice, information, and assistance with resolution concerns through third-party support.

Madam Speaker, in my fundamental role as the elected representative of the fabulous riding of Calgary-Bow, I must reflect on how this bill will affect my constituents. I have reached out to many stakeholders in my riding. In the community of Bowness I have met with the Resicare Society, which is a wonderful organization. The Resicare Society was formed by a group of concerned parents and individuals who believe that persons with disabilities have the right to a stable home environment offering supports for growth and development.

10:20

I had the opportunity to tour their facility and attend their AGM, which I spoke at on behalf of the government. I was greeted by their CEO, Maline Jenkinson, and we discussed her organization's experience in serving people with developmental disabilities and the barriers that they face in working with the PDD legislation because the previous government just failed them for far too long, Madam Speaker. I was happy to add their voice to the PDD safety standards consultation in 2016, which I know the Member for St. Albert was deeply involved in. This is just another example of how our government is listening to Albertans. By having an advocate, it will help the people who live at the Resicare Society by reducing barriers and giving them a voice, and this is one example of why I support this legislation.

Another organization that will benefit from this bill is Accessible Housing. I know that the Member for Calgary-Klein also spoke about this earlier, and it is in his riding as well. The CEO, Jeff Dyer – well, he was the CEO; now he's the CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs – at the time invited me because he is a constituent of mine. He lives in Bowness, and he wanted me to tour their facility. For people who don't know what Accessible Housing is, it's a not-for-profit organization and registered charity with a mandate to open doors to homes that are accessible and affordable for people with limited mobility. Through their outreach and residential programs they provide housing and personal supports so that everyone can have a home, belong, and participate in their community. I thank him for having me as it was an enriching experience which led to conversations on how they can help accessibility in Calgary-Bow. Actually, something that he mentioned was that a former MLA, Kent Hehr, used Accessible Housing. I found that interesting.

Mr. Dyer mentioned that they had a project called ramp it up. This is a project that helps remove physical barriers by providing single-step storefront custom-made ramps, at no cost, to businesses who need them. In collaboration with the Bowness improvement area and this program we were able to put up ramps all over Bowness to help people with accessibility. I highly recommend to anyone in this House to use that program as well because, you know, a single step can definitely be a huge barrier for someone who has accessibility issues.

This is just a great example of community engagement. When there is community engagement, it protects and improves the lives

of Albertans, and I feel like Bill 205 does just that. If passed, it would establish an advocate for persons with disabilities in Alberta, which will allow for a systematic understanding of the issues faced by persons with disabilities and identify solutions to those barriers.

With that, I support this bill, and I urge my fellow colleagues to support this bill as well and to give to the disability community what they've been asking for for far too long. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to express my appreciation to the Member for Calgary-Bow for those remarks, and I wonder if she would expand on the experience of the previous MLA in that great riding and how his experience with affordable housing informed yours.

Drever: Well, thank you for that question. Mr. Dyer and I had a really good conversation around how accessible housing really has benefited Calgarians. He did mention that former MLA Kent Hehr did use their facility and that it really was life changing for that individual. I mean, like many other members of this House, I didn't have a lot of knowledge about people with disabilities, and listening to other people's stories is really eye opening for me. I didn't talk to Mr. Hehr myself, but I did hear his story through Jeff Dyer. He said that, you know, it made him feel like he had a family. It made him feel like he had a home. Those are just the fundamental basics that I feel everyone deserves and has the right to. Just because you have a disability, it doesn't mean that you don't get that right. He did express that Mr. Hehr was very happy that he was able to use that, and I think that that helped him be an advocate for other people with disabilities because he knows where they're coming from.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rose in support of this bill during second reading, and I did so because it was and is the right thing to do. As I mentioned before, I'm a person living with the challenge of hearing loss. I have worked within the disability community for about 20 to 25 years in Edmonton, Ottawa, and Lethbridge. I consider myself to be a vehicle for change within this and many other communities.

As I've said previously, Lethbridge is an incredible community, and it is so because it exemplifies what I believe a community should be. Perhaps a definition which encompasses it: a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common, a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. I believe the attitude, interests, and goals in Lethbridge are of inclusion and sharing our diversity. There are a number of groups which have taken a lead role in this area in Lethbridge. One of those groups is inclusion Lethbridge. It was formerly known as Lethbridge Association for Community Living. I believe that I have a good working and personal relationship with inclusion Lethbridge.

Last Friday I had a very positive and, I think, productive discussion with Dani. Dani is a mom who works tirelessly as an advocate for her daughter, who is amazing, and also for others in our community with developmental disabilities. I prefer to say developmental challenges. Dani provided me with a great deal of feedback on the issue, which I've shared with my colleagues. She recognizes that this bill and the appointment of an advocate is a first step. Dani wants her daughter to have a rich and meaningful life. She recognizes the depth and breadth of the needs of her daughter.

It is this knowledge and the leadership and advocacy by herself and other parents which provides the information we need to make positive and productive steps forward. Information like this will be shared with the advocate.

I'm a member of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, and as such I'm learning much more about the role of an advocate. I am also learning about the actual costs to have such a role as an independent entity or within a branch of the government. I know that our budget is limited. In fact, I hear from the opposition every day where they are directing us to cut everywhere. I also know we cannot do that.

It has been recommended that an independent office of the Legislature similar to that of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate be formed. As much as I would like this to happen, I would point out, as my colleague from Edmonton-Centre did, that the cost of such an entity in this framework would be in the area of \$14 million. This bill is proposing an advocate that sits within the Ministry of Community and Social Services, which is similar to the successful B.C. model. In this model the advocate is appointed and reports to the government. This allows the advocate to provide direct advice and recommendations to the government. On that note, groups such as Inclusion Alberta and inclusion Lethbridge provide to the government information on the challenges, the barriers, et cetera, that impact the service sector and family capacity of those who provide service to Albertans experiencing such challenges.

10:30

One of my concerns with respect to a separate entity is that the money would have to be redirected from elsewhere within the overall government budget. Where could one possibly make those cuts to do this? In having the advocate within a ministry which would have the supports available through that ministry and being able to listen, assess, and provide both advice and recommendations to the government directly, this position would look at systemic issues brought forward. It will provide the government the ability to address the gaps within the system much more quickly, and in fact this is one of the things that has been requested through the PDD consultation.

I am convinced that the advocate as being proposed by this bill will begin to make the lives of Albertans better. I'm very pleased to be part of a government that is taking action to do just that. As a person with a disability, my challenge of hearing loss, I thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing this bill forward and the Member for St. Albert for the advocacy work she has done over many, many years within this community.

I know how important it is to have somebody there that listens, that understands and actually makes a movement forward so that our government can make those changes. I absolutely support this bill, and I just won't be able to believe it if anybody voted against it.

Thank you very much.

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

Any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 205. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing it forward and for all the work that she's done in consulting with members from the persons with disabilities community and how she's been out there listening. I also want to thank the Member for St. Albert, who, as we all know and as has been commented on several times in the House, spent

not only her time as an MLA but previously, before she became an MLA, working so closely with this community.

I wanted to speak to the issue of that when it comes to persons with disabilities and the reality that they experience day in and day out. Now, of course, I am not a person with a disability. I don't experience life as they do, and that's why it's so important to take time out of our busy schedules to actually sit down and talk to people who experience the kind of marginalization that they experience on a daily basis no matter what the issue is: if it's persons with disabilities or if it's people from the LGBTQ-plus community, people from different ethnic communities. Let me tell you, discrimination exists in so many different forms. I wanted to speak specifically about that.

At the end of the day, the objective behind this bill, as was pointed out very clearly by the Member for Calgary-North West, is that all people should be treated with dignity and that government policy should be focused on treating everybody with dignity. Yet we live in a culture that discriminates all the time against people who are different. I want to ask not only the members of this House but all Albertans and not just those who are watching us right now: why does this culture of indifference and discrimination exist in the first place?

I remember being in grade 1. There was a little girl that was in my class. She came in about halfway through the year, and she had to wear a respirator on her back. I remember that when she came into the class, her mother and the teacher made a special point of pulling us all and getting us to focus and understand difference and stating to us how important it was that we shouldn't be discriminating against her because she has this respirator on her back. I don't know why, regardless of that, we were still having students in the school that would bully this young girl because of her disability, because she looked different. I've got to ask us again: where does that culture come from? Why are we so scared of what's different?

We have a long way to go in order to curb the discrimination experienced by people with disabilities in this province. I know for a fact that sometimes it's out of ignorance, yet we can't blame it on ignorance. Each and every one of us has the responsibility to go out there and learn. It's not necessarily someone from the disabilities community that has to come and teach us. We just need to take the time to go out there and speak to people. There's that wonderful thing called Google. We can go on the Internet, and we can learn, educate ourselves about the reality that people with disabilities have to go through day in and day out.

That's one of the main reasons why I'm standing up to speak in favour of this bill, and I strongly recommend that all members of this House vote in favour of this bill.

The other thing I want to say is that consultation is so important. Now, before becoming an MLA, I remember being a little boy and being a human rights advocate and activist and being out on the streets demonstrating for human rights issues because, of course, the reality that I came from was a dictatorship. When my family came here to Canada, we were trying to create awareness around the dictatorship in Chile, and I remember being on the streets of this fine city talking about those kinds of things. As I grew and became older, I remember not being consulted. I remember whole communities not being consulted about issues that were being discussed in this House. Policy was being created that was continuing to marginalize people here in our own province.

Let me say, Madam Speaker, that I find it absolutely rich that we have members on the other side of this House that get up and criticize this government about consultation. When did they ever provide the opportunity for consultation when we were in opposition?

I remember being with our now Premier on the steps of this Legislature, with those steps being absolutely full when it came to

issues of PDD. I remember that many people here who are sitting amongst us were part of that crowd when the previous government wasn't listening to members of the persons with disabilities community.

I remember that when we came into power, I had the opportunity to sit down and specifically speak to parents of children with disabilities and parents of children with learning challenges. They said: look, we're tired of stating again and again and again that we're not being listened to, or at best we get a lot of words but no action.

10:40

I'm so happy that now we have before this House a bill that is going to give that opportunity to people in our community that they can have dignity by having an advocate that will work hard on their behalf to make sure that our government programs are going to be there and be able to provide what they need. I know it's not going to be all roses. It's going to take time, but the important thing is that they will have an advocate.

The other thing that I wanted to stress very quickly is that especially when it comes to parents of children with disabilities and, specifically, learning challenges in schools, when the parents themselves advocate on behalf of their own children, there are some people who look at them and say: "Oh, they're squeaky wheels. They're challenging the system." Of course, I understand that there's frustration and that there are issues with resources and money and that you can have to apply to this and that. A parent standing up for their child should not be seen as something negative, yet those are the conditions that we're in, and it has to do with the fact that for so long there was a government that wasn't listening to this community and wasn't creating policy to address the issues.

Now, one of the things that I want to say specifically to those parents is that, yeah, not every parent has the energy to be that kind of advocate. First of all, you shouldn't be stigmatized for standing up for your child. You shouldn't be stigmatized for it. Keep doing it. But I also understand that there are some parents out there and maybe even some single parents out there who are working two jobs, three jobs, and they just don't have the energy to advocate for their child, or they don't know where to go. They don't understand well how the system works. That's why it's so important that we have an advocate for them, so that they can advocate for their child or loved one with a disability.

This government is focused on creating good policy as we move forward, and this is a beginning for that. I want to say that it was this party that was on the steps of the Legislature in the past together with that community, and we were fighting for the same things. We always have been listening. We always have been listening to marginalized people in this province. We've been with them, whether it comes to issues with racism or any other kind of discrimination, LGBTQ-plus, and specifically in this case with people with disabilities.

To the community I want to say that this is a first step. We're moving in the right direction. We need to continue working together, listening, and understanding how we can create better policy, but now you have a government that's going to listen, and we're going to create that great policy together.

With that, I'll encourage every member of this House to vote in favour of this bill. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments? Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for his passionate speech on Bill 205. He did

mention parents who have children with learning disabilities and some of the challenges that they face. As someone who was diagnosed with a learning disability, I absolutely understand the challenges that come with that. Having an advocate for myself during that time would have been really helpful. Unfortunately, I didn't have a government that supported me in that. I wanted to ask the member what challenges he's heard from constituents in this area.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member and my colleague for such an important question. You know, over the past summer – it's almost been a year now – I was approached by a constituent of mine who's a parent of children with learning disabilities, and she was so passionate about this issue. To be quite honest, I remember the way that I met her, when I was door-knocking back in 2012 for that election campaign. At that time I said: "You know what? This is a really important issue. I think that it would be really great if we could find more parents that are concerned about this issue and sit down and have a conversation."

And soon after she did. She went out and she organized a meeting of more parents in the constituency and specialists across the city that were willing to come in and talk about this issue. Let me tell you, the challenges are immense. There are a lot, and they intersect with issues of the Ministry of Health, with issues of the Ministry of Advanced Education. What I'm very happy to say is that the group that this lady was able to put together identified all these things, and they put together an action plan about how they are engaging with our government on this particular issue. There are many things that we can do, and I'm so happy that we're working together with her group, which is now specifically focused on several children throughout the province with learning challenges.

I could go on for days about all the problems that there are, and you know them well. Most importantly, specifically, these people need an advocate, so I'm happy that we're working on such an important bill.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any further speakers to the bill? Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak on Bill 205, introduced by the Member for Calgary-North West. It has actually been really incredible to see all of the stories and all of the people that have come together to try to tackle and put things in place so we can address the really broad issues faced by the communities that have disabilities. I've already spoken to this bill once before, talking about the difficulties if you add socioeconomic status into the mix or if you add the fact that maybe you're a recent immigrant and the struggles that you can experience with those things.

But I think that today it's also just important to know that even within organizations that we have that advocate for different groups, it's important to make sure that we make spaces for all those voices, that one doesn't trump the others. I think the member that spoke before me, Edmonton-Ellerslie, was speaking about a group of parents that got together, and the reason that they formed their own organization versus just joining one that already existed – I mean, there's Autism Alberta, there's the advocate for communities with disabilities, there's a whole group of people. I think the diversity in organizations is because the experiences differ and the points of view differ as to how best to address the issues. I think

that these are legitimate conversations to have because there are a multitude of approaches to address any given situation, and I think that having that diversity and discourse and having the diversity in organizations are completely important to finding solutions that serve as many people as possible.

I think that what we have by introducing an advocate within the ministry is that what we're really focusing on is actually just listening to the ways that we can make those initial changes and be able to not have to – like, we're still working within the parameters of a limited budget. We've supported very small increases within Community and Social Services, and that means that there's a limit to the amount of funds that would be able to address any issues that come up.

10:50

When we're putting an initial process in place, it's important to make sure that we don't go to what was referred to by the Member for St. Albert as a Cadillac – don't start off with a Cadillac, like, when a Honda Civic will do – in the sense that if we just get in and we start driving and start addressing some of the initial speed bumps and barriers, we start building something, and we are able to direct the money where it's most effective and where it impacts people the most.

You know, I think it's actually wonderful to have reports that point us in the direction, but I believe a lot of work has already been done on this matter. I believe that there's a fundamental understanding that there are some processes within how you have to apply for funding, within how you get services in schools, that there are discrepancies and some things that can be easily fixed and some things that are much more complex. That's where the reports are really helpful.

But there's some kind of lower hanging fruit that really changes people's everyday experiences in accessing those services that we can address, and we can direct the funds to where people feel it the most. I think it is important within a government to evaluate where you can do those things and how you can improve those systems.

Some of them don't even take money. It just takes rewriting a form. I mean, that might be simple to one person, but being able to submit a form that actually gets you the result that you were looking for is actually something that has been documented as a system of oppression, just a systemized way to reduce the number of applications that get approved by making a form complicated. It's something that is largely experienced by people that are searching for supports and services. Instead of actually getting the services, they spend more time figuring out how to access them. Reducing that and being able to look at those issues and being able to find solutions are some things I believe the advocate can really provide advice to the minister on and provide advice to the departments as well to be able to implement them successfully.

I know that it is an absolutely difficult undertaking to be an advocate because there's an incredibly complex intersection of needs that comes. When I say "intersection," I mean that there are different experiences based on socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and on the level of severity of the disability, and based on that, you might be more or less successful. I think that when an advocate has to listen to all of the different stories, they have to try to find the places where people are really experiencing the higher number of difficulties.

I'm very proud that this bill was brought forward and that what we're doing is really looking for a way to fix what hasn't been addressed for many decades. I think there have been attempts to fix some of those things, and I think those things should be acknowledged. But acknowledge as well that in order to truly be able to move forward, the voices of the very people that are affected need to be there, need to be a part of the conversation.

I know that the members opposite were saying that not enough people are talked to, but I really believe that having an advocate will actually allow those conversations to exist. By not having an advocate, there are all of these different avenues and ministries that could be affected. It could be the ministries of Health, Education, Children's Services, or Community and Social Services. They're all getting dispersed, and because of the complex nature of each of those ministries maybe the discussion between them hasn't been as frequent as it may need to be. Having one person where it could be directed to means that all of those issues are being – the bigger picture is being seen by one person, at least. I think there's something incredibly powerful about putting something in place like that.

I appreciate the comments that are made and all of the organizations that continue to advocate, and I think they should continue to advocate even more. I don't think that the government should ever stop working for people. I think that as we grow as a society, as an aging population, the needs change, and I think that part of government is actually progressing with your society and making sure that things that are supporting the community are still current.

I think that actually part of the issue of what happened with the former government was that they didn't change the policies. Year after year we saw labour laws that weren't introduced for a long period of time, and those things end up affecting people. They end up affecting even people within the disability community. When you think about employment standards and you think about the laws that were put in place there, not being able to take compassionate care leave or a stress leave, because maybe you just found out that your world has been turned around and you have to figure out all of these different things, creates a lot of stress in your life. Having to meet with doctors all the time and being uncertain create a lot of stress. Not being able to have job protection when you have stress leave contributes to the issues that are faced within the community. It might not be directed to the person with a disability, but it might be to someone that is supporting them.

I think what happens when we don't evaluate how laws affect other people is that the laws become wrong. They are wrong, and they're not serving people. It is incumbent upon governments to make sure that they are looking at these, reviewing them, and not just to have a review. I think there have been lots of situations where the former government actually did a review. They've done reviews of the labour code and the employment standards, and they did a five-week review, and all of a sudden nothing happened. The reviews happened, and nothing happened. Nothing was changed. It was just too complicated, too complex. They just didn't want to maybe anger some people: we're just not going to touch it.

The thing is that the lack of integrity in being able to address issues and being able to come to compromises and to look for solutions is part of the problem and is part of what contributes to these laws remaining inadequate for the people that they're meant to serve. Laws are put in place to protect people. I think that that's something we need to continuously work on.

I'm incredibly proud to support and to be supporting this bill, and I'm incredibly proud of the work that has been done across the board on this. I know that there's going to be so much more work ahead of us, and I know that we will be committed to coming to the table and having those conversations again and again and disagreeing some days and then coming to the table and finding other solutions and then finding a way for us to move forward.

I think, Madam Speaker, that with that, I will conclude my statements and put my wholehearted support in supporting this bill.

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

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to the bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West to close debate.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank everyone who took the time over the last number of days to talk about Bill 205 and to talk about the idea of what an advocate for people with disabilities can do. I want to thank this government for taking a private member's bill and turning it into a government bill. For those folks who are watching via the Internet – and I know that a lot of folks are – what that enabled us to do was to take a bill that we would normally have discussed one day a week and to discuss it on multiple days. At the end of the day, what that also did was to enable us to take a private member's bill that might not have gone through all its stages before the Legislature broke for the summer and to stand up day after day and to give members from all sides the opportunity to talk about it and what it means to them.

I want to address something I think it was the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said earlier. His criticism was that we had moved it to a government bill without talking about it, and I thought – it struck me as odd because the very act of moving it from a private member's bill to a government bill enabled everyone to have the opportunity to speak to it. I would have liked to have seen more people in opposition speak to it, but, you know, I mean, it's not up to me to determine their priorities.

11:00

What I can say is that lots of people spoke to this bill. The support was wonderful. I am very hopeful that we continue this discussion because getting the position of an advocate is one step; moving a person into that job and having them do the work is another mountain to climb. Really, I think what we've seen here is a lot of great discussion about a very important subject, and I thank everyone who contributed to it.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:01 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Hinkley	Piquette
Carlier	Hoffman	Pitt
Carson	Horne	Rodney
Ceci	Jansen	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kazim	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cooper	Loyola	Schneider
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schreiner
Cyr	Malkinson	Shepherd
Dach	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Dang	McIver	Smith
Drever	McPherson	Starke
Ellis	Miller	Sucha
Feehan	Miranda	Turner
Fildebrandt	Nielsen	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Payne	Yao
Gotfried	Phillips	

Totals: For – 50 Against – 0

[Motion carried; Bill 205 unanimously read a third time]

Bill 14

An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation.

I'm proud of this bill, Madam Speaker. It is the product of months of work on this side of the House and within the Ministry of Energy to bring forward a plan that will significantly reduce the inventory of orphan wells in this province, and I'm gratified to see that it appears to have received support on all sides of this House and that members are prepared to move quickly to pass this bill and enable important work to begin.

As members know, Bill 14 will amend the Oil and Gas Conservation Act to enable the government to provide the Orphan Well Association with a loan and to allow the Orphan Well Association to use funds from the orphan well fund levy imposed on industry to pay it back. I think it's worth while spending a few moments to clarify some of the details of just how that will work, particularly in light of important questions that have been raised during the debate on this bill. Many of them are the same questions that our government considered as we deliberated the best way to take advantage of the \$30 million allocated in the federal budget.

First, this government takes the principle of polluter pay very seriously, as do the vast majority of Albertans. I'm sure that members on all sides of the House have heard this from constituents who want to ensure that industry lives up to its obligations to pay the costs of cleaning up orphan wells and not the provincial taxpayers. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to confirm that Bill 14 will respect this principle. The \$30 million allocated by the federal government in its recent budget will be used to pay any interest incurred by the provincial government in providing this loan. No provincial government funds will be required to pay the interest on this loan. The \$235 million loan figure was chosen with that consideration foremost in our mind, and the loan will be repaid by industry through the orphan fund levy imposed on industry.

11:20

Second, this government believes very strongly that decisions about which wells should be rehabilitated first should be made on the basis of greatest need. Resources should not be allocated based on political considerations. They should be allocated based on which wells pose the greatest immediate risk to communities, to public health, to safety, and to our environment.

Madam Speaker, the Orphan Well Association, or OWA, was established precisely for this purpose. The OWA is a delegated administrative authority, meaning that it operates at arm's length from government. More than 80 per cent of its board members are chosen by industry: three members from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, or CAPP; two members from the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada, or EPAC. The vice-president of the Alberta Energy Regulator's closure and liability branch is the only voting member of this board who is chosen by a public body.

Similarly, the OWA is funded by industry through an annual orphan fund levy charged to industry by the Alberta Energy Regulator. The orphan fund levy is distributed amongst industry licensees according to their proportionate share of the total liability of the industry. In other words, the bigger your share of the active licences in Alberta, the more you pay. Bill 14 will allow the OWA to use some of the annual proceeds from that industry levy to repay the loan, thereby preserving the principle of polluter pay.

If we receive the support of this House and pass this bill, we will work quickly to finalize the terms of the loan agreement. The government is planning to have the loan fully repaid within 10 years, and the first repayment is planned for 2019-2020. Again, Madam Speaker, I want to underscore this point. The loan will be repaid by industry through the orphan fund levy. This government is ensuring that industry lives up to its responsibilities.

The OWA selects for rehabilitation based on its professional, risk-based assessment. I expect that if there are a number of orphan wells in a given area, some projects may be grouped together because it makes more economical sense to do that, but overall risk is the main factor in determining which wells will be cleaned up first. The OWA does have procurement principles that apply to the selection of contractors to undertake this work. The contractors are selected by the OWA, not by government.

If I might add, Madam Speaker, that I got calls in my constituency office immediately after this bill was announced, and I expect others would have. I would direct you to orphanwell.ca. There's a link there for people who wish to register for contract work.

The OWA will also be responsible for determining what additional staff resources they may need internally in order to manage this accelerated program. The government is planning to issue the loan in stages over a three-year period to allow the OWA to ramp up and maximize the benefits of these additional funds. The OWA publishes an annual report detailing its work over the previous year, including which wells were rehabilitated and at what cost. If you look at page 17 of the 2015-16 OWA annual report, for example, you will see that abandonment work was completed on 80 wells formerly licensed to Fairwest Energy Corporation in southeast central Alberta at an average cost of just under \$37,000 each.

Madam Speaker, I believe Albertans will receive a full and detailed accounting of just how these funds are being spent by the OWA, and for greater certainty my department is working on performance measures to help government evaluate the effectiveness of this program.

Third, the OWA will continue to have the option of selling productive orphan wells to interested buyers. Those decisions should of course be made in consultation with the affected landowners, who may have strong views on whether they wish production to continue on their property. I'm sure members on all sides of this House would agree that it is important for landowners to have a vote in this process.

Fourth, I want to underscore the benefits to our energy economy in ramping up this work at this time. There are many skilled workers in the oil field services sector, Madam Speaker. Those workers possess valuable skills, expertise that we will need as our energy economy recovers. Moreover, as long as there is drilling activity in our province, we will need workers with the necessary skills to one day shut in those wells, to undertake the necessary work to decommission those wells and remediate and ultimately reclaim those sites. If we want those workers to be here in the years to come, we need them now. We need to keep them here through the downturn, and I'm very pleased that this bill will allow us to do precisely that.

In conclusion, I'm gratified by the support this bill has already received. It is an important initiative for our province. It will accelerate the cleanup of orphan and gas well sites; it will protect communities, public health, safety, and our environment; it will create good jobs at a time when our energy economy is still emerging from the downturn caused by an unprecedented drop in the price of oil; it will keep skilled workers in our province; and it will ensure that industry lives up to its responsibilities to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to move third reading of this bill, and I look forward to its passage so we can get on with the important work it enables. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will be keeping my closing remarks brief. We are not thrilled that the \$30 million coming from Ottawa is taxpayer funded, taxpayer money. Our industry knows that they have the obligation to clean up. They believe in and they follow the polluter-pay model, and taking taxpayer money for regular orphan wells is, of course, a violation of that model.

However, I am supporting this bill in spite of this flaw because the reality is that the federal government does have an obligation to help with reclamation costs from a time when responsibility for wells was federal. The federal money that was given in the 2017 budget should be focused on reclaiming these legacy infrastructure wells from the period before industry and the province shifted to the industry reclamation model. Because the federal government does owe money to Alberta's oil and gas reclamation system from a time when the federal government failed to take reclamation seriously, Alberta's industry can reasonably accept this contribution. We as Official Opposition will support them in that request.

Industry, however, should not come to expect Albertans to take on the responsibility of cleaning up the mess that industry makes, and with that in mind, I was glad to hear the minister talk about a 10-year time limit on the fact that this has to be restored and the taxpayers' liability reduced. I have no reason to think our world-class energy sector will expect the taxpayer to clean up after them. Industry needs to fulfill its obligation to repay this loan, not the Alberta taxpayer.

Madam Speaker, I will be voting in support of this bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak in support of Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation. I thought it might be a good time to just revisit what an orphan well is. I know it's been spoken about before, but it certainly bears repeating. From the Orphan Well Association website:

In the upstream oil and gas industry, an orphan is a well, pipeline, facility or associated site which has been investigated and confirmed as not having any legally responsible and/or financially able party to deal with its abandonment and reclamation responsibilities.

We may see an abandoned well, but what we don't see is the farmer who isn't farming the land, the small businesses that aren't spending their money, the children that aren't getting to do as many activities as they could if that land was being farmed. Here's what else we aren't seeing. We aren't seeing the risk posed by unremediated or unrehabilitated wells, the risks to the environment, to safety, and to public health.

I worked in oil and gas for over 20 years, and I was fortunate to work for companies that took their responsibility seriously and developed their assets with rehabilitation and remediation in mind. It's something that's built into the business case for any well by a responsible exploration company. Currently the orphan well levy collected by the Alberta Energy Regulator goes into a fund that's

administered by the Orphan Well Association. This was a fair-weather structure that wasn't designed for the more challenging times we're facing now.

What happens if we don't do anything? Well, the number of orphan wells will continue to increase. There are currently over 2,000 orphan wells on the books with the Orphan Well Association. This is more than double the number of wells that they were dealing with last year. The rate of orphan wells has definitely accelerated.

11:30

As Brad Herald, chair of the OWA, was recently quoted: "We think it's critical to open the dialogue with Albertans and jointly develop a framework that improves the management of unproductive upstream oil and natural gas assets." This bill is an integral part of the process of remediation, reclamation, and rehabilitation of orphan wells.

We have a couple of options to address the issue of orphan wells. We can do nothing. We can stick our heads in the sand and be immobilized by how large the problem is. We would be letting down the people who own these lands, and we'd be letting down future generations. It's their environment that's being compromised. Or we can leverage the \$30 million federal funding to address the backlog while also creating good jobs for Albertans, the many skilled Albertans who have a great deal of experience in oil and gas operations and who can help address this very large problem.

The Energy ministry and this government recognize the scope and the seriousness of the issue. They've worked closely with industry, who raised the issue, and our government listened. Some of the best parts of Bill 14 include the liability management review. It's obvious the process that's been in place isn't robust enough to address this growing problem. The review will include industry experts to find better ways to protect Albertans and the environment. The review won't be one-sided because it's important that it's not. It's also important to engage people who normally don't agree on an issue and encourage them to work together to find common ground. This is certainly an improvement over simply engaging people who agree, as the government has been urged to do with other files. Without this legislation, without taking advantage of this funding, we will continue to see the problem grow.

The president of the AAMDC, Al Kemmere, recently stated: "Rural landowners and municipal districts have many concerns surrounding this issue. We're pleased to see [the] government is beginning its review and look forward to learning more about how we can address it."

This is timely and important legislation. Alberta has long relied on energy and agriculture to drive the economy of our province. This bill will ensure a brighter future for both industries, and for that reason, Madam Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to third reading? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to talk to Bill 14, An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation. We know that Albertans are concerned about the growing problem of orphan and aging oil and gas wells in many constituencies throughout the province. Many landowners, municipalities, other stakeholders, indigenous groups are

concerned about the impact that these have, and they deserve a government that has their backs. That's why we're leveraging the \$30 million federal assistance into a significant loan so that the Orphan Well Association can address the significant backlog of facilities needing attention while maintaining the polluter-pay principle. It's important that we maintain that.

When we look at the definition, as I explained before, it goes beyond, that orphan wells are wells, facilities, or pipelines where the original owner or licensee is not capable of paying for the required closure processes. This includes the many miles of pipe that we know exist out there: infrastructure, roads, well sites, office sites, and old camps that exist everywhere out there on the land base. These are the things that certainly need to be addressed when we're talking about the issue of orphan wells and those kinds of things.

The Orphan Well Association, or the OWA – let's be clear – is a not-for-profit organization funded by the oil and gas industry through the orphan fund levy. It's important to remember that concept. It is run by an independent board of directors and has done a lot of good work over the years. It was stated by the minister about the reports that you can access. It is not connected to the government. They decide which contractors get the work, not the government. It's important to remember that basic fact.

The government of Alberta has regulatory tools, for example, and other legal remedies to require the individual companies to pay the industry levy, so it's important to understand that.

My constituents tell me all the time that the industry is not living up to its responsibility to clean up the abandoned oil and well sites all throughout the constituency, and it's important that that needs to be addressed. We agree that it's important to escalate the important work of cleaning these up to minimize the environmental risks that exist out there. The other part of it is to keep skilled oil field workers working in this economic downturn. It's important to understand that this process is important to do that. But if you look at why we got ourselves into the mess in the first place, it was that fact that the previous government failed to address it over the years.

Albertans won't pay the cost of providing this loan. Instead, they'll enjoy the benefit it brings. The loan would mean employment benefits of 1,650 jobs over three years that will be created in the oil field and environmental service sectors, keeping those industry jobs in Alberta, which is so important. This will allow important work to happen quickly. The opportunity has knocked, and we're opening that door. In quoting the Premier of Alberta:

This is about creating jobs and fixing a long-standing problem. Albertans are concerned about the growing number of orphaned oil and gas wells, and the landowners directly impacted deserve a government that takes this issue seriously. We're proud to work with industry to get orphaned wells cleaned up – it's good for our environment, good for landowners and the jobs created will help make life better for [all] Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to close by thanking all the members for the very good debate, the very good questions that we got.

I did want to acknowledge – and I failed to do that in my comments – that this was an idea that we worked on with industry, and they take this problem as seriously as we do in government. I wanted to also acknowledge that the vast majority of industry does

their job in reclaiming sites, but this bill is about working with those who have failed in their responsibilities.

I'm very excited for the support that we are getting on this bill, and I look forward to getting on this with important work.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Bill 15

11:40 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to move third reading of Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

I appreciate the fruitful discussions on this bill and the general understanding of its importance. This bill makes necessary changes that not only ensure our tax legislation remains aligned with federal tax legislation but also ensure support programs delivered through the tax system are administered as consistently and efficiently as possible.

Madam Speaker, I'll quickly recap the amendments. The Alberta Corporate Tax Act. We're updating this act to reflect changes that were made to the federal Income Tax Act. This will protect provincial revenue and the integrity of our tax system by preventing a few small businesses from using certain structures to multiply their access to the small-business tax rate. The intent of the existing legislation is for the preferential rate to only apply to a small business's first \$500,000 of income. These amendments are consistent with the intent and ensure small businesses do not take advantage of a loophole.

The act will also be amended to require tax preparers who fill out 10 or more provincial tax returns to file the returns electronically. It will also implement a penalty if they fail to comply with this requirement. A separate penalty will be implemented for corporations that fail to file tax returns electronically if required to do so. These penalty provisions are consistent with federal tax legislation and are necessary to promote compliance with Alberta's tax laws. Electronic filing also reduces administration and compliance costs for both government and businesses, Madam Speaker.

With regard to the Tourism Levy Act an amendment to the Tourism Levy Act will allow levy collectors, more specifically accommodation operators, to file a waiver to extend the assessment period when an assessment is issued against them. This means operators will have more time to resolve issues if there is a dispute over the amount of tax owing.

With regard to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act on the personal income tax side we are making several changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The most significant change relates to the carbon levy rebate payments. We're making an amendment that will allow for rebate entitlements to be delivered in quarterly payments as low as \$25 rather than the current \$100 minimum payment. With this change, the program will no longer have to prepay rebates. Prepaying rebates for up to six months resulted in recoveries when household compositions changed or people moved away from this province. This will ensure that going forward, carbon levy rebate payments do not have to be recovered when changes in household status affect eligibility for that rebate.

Madam Speaker, this directly addresses the concern we heard from Albertans who received a reassessment notice from the Canada Revenue Agency seeking to recover rebate amounts

received by a family member who had died. In order to rectify the situation for those who received these notices, we are also taking measures to forgive these amounts. Families in these circumstances do not have to return rebate payments, and those who already have will be reimbursed later this year. The same will apply to benefits received under the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit going back to January 1 of this year.

We're also amending the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to implement a broader political contributions tax credit, as announced in Budget 2017. The objective of that is to encourage greater participation in the political process while fostering a healthy and competitive political environment. Additional technical amendments to this act will ensure Alberta's policies with regard to provincial dividend tax credits as well as our tuition and education tax credits are not affected by recent changes to federal legislation.

In closing, Madam Speaker, this legislation is just another example of how this government is working to make life better for all Albertans by protecting the integrity of our tax system and by helping families keep more money in their pockets.

I request that all members of this House support this bill so that we can move forward with implementing these important changes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, with the government filibustering their own bills lately, you'd think that, at the very least, they could provide a bit more information about some of the effects that this bill will have. When I first spoke to this bill, at second reading, I asked the minister for information that would assist this side of the House in making an informed decision. I wanted to know the costs that would be incurred by Alberta taxpayers to issue more carbon tax rebate cheques on a quarterly basis.

I will repeat that question now in the hope that at least someone on that side of the House can provide an answer before we vote. We want to know: how many people are estimated to be affected by this change in the legislation? How many people would the Canada Revenue Agency try and claw back the rebates from in the instance of a death in the family? If the number is low, it may be cheaper for the government to simply eat the cost of a \$25 or \$50 cheque instead. This bill will instead pay for almost 30 per cent more cheques to be issued every year. If the government would be willing to provide the administrative costs of this expanded endeavour, that would at least allow us to make a more informed decision before we vote.

But so far, at least, instead of providing us with this information, the government has decided to rag the puck on bills that have the unanimous support of all parties in this House. If the cost of administering and mailing out almost 30 per cent more cheques a year is a larger cost than forgiving the \$25 or \$50 rebates of those who have passed away, then we need to determine if this portion of the bill should be changed or not. We as stewards of the province's finances should choose the most prudent and cost-effective way to operate. That's what this government does not yet seem to understand. They're not watching their pennies or, for that matter, their nickels, their dimes, their quarters, their loonies, their millions or billions.

A few extra envelopes, a few extra postage stamps, a few extra hours spent administering the carbon tax rebate will add up as a real cost to taxpayers. Let's say that the cost of this expanded carbon tax rebate costs only 1 per cent of the total rebate program. That would

be over \$100,000 in additional costs to taxpayers. I'm quite sure that we would not have to cover that much money if we were to cover the costs of just a few \$25 or \$50 rebate cheques when someone passes away.

Yet the government does not view finances this way. The Minister of Finance said that he would keep spending in the budget to inflation plus population, yet he's increased – he's increased – the budget of his own ministry by three times that amount. They've excluded the entire cost of the CLAP from the budget as a way of trying to fool Albertans into believing that they've kept spending below the rates of inflation and population, yet this is a spending increase that will add up to \$5 billion a year, and they won't even address it as a part of the main set of books in the budget. It's just one more example of how this government is overlooking smaller costs, allowing them to pile on yet more debt.

When we proposed savings of \$293 million by reducing regulations, it was no shock that the NDP refused to even consider the idea. By streamlining our government, we can save hundreds of millions of dollars. It means reducing the work when it is not needed. Are the administrative hours needed for almost 30 per cent more rebate cheques to be sent out, or is there a cheaper way to solve the problem? Is it cheaper to let a widow or a grandchild or a child just keep the \$25 or \$50 cheque when it's sent in error? This is a textbook example of regulatory overreach increasing the cost of government. We need to be watching our pennies. It's necessary to pay for almost 30 per cent more stamps and envelopes to send these rebate cheques.

Perhaps it's not, but the government has thus far refused to provide these numbers to make a more informed decision. Frankly, the private members on the government side of the House should be asking this information of their cabinet. Their job is not just to sit there and vote for whatever is put in front of them. Their job is to also ask questions of their own ministers, to get more information, to make an informed choice themselves, not to be mere voting machines for a government. Perhaps that is a too optimistic view to take of how this government would work, however. This government refuses to provide these numbers and allow members of this House, at least on this side, to make an informed decision. We know that this government has these numbers, or at least we hope that they would have these numbers.

11:50

This all began because a constituent of mine from Strathmore brought this issue forward. She works in an office right near the A&W, actually, beside my office. I know her quite well, Darlene. She brought this forward, and we would probably not be debating it right now if she had not.

Darlene's grandmother had passed away, and she was the first person to vocalize her opposition to this government's incompetence in the carbon tax rebate system. She was asked by this government to return her deceased grandmother's carbon tax rebate cheque, an absolutely disgusting act on the part of a government that couldn't have the foresight to think: what would happen if cheques were issued to deceased people? Now, those deceased people will have actually been paying the carbon tax, but apparently the estate of that family is not entitled to the rebate for that. So this government, without thinking ahead, asked for the money back from her. She came to my office, and she came to some of our local papers like the *Strathmore Standard* and the *Strathmore Times*, and soon enough it became a big issue.

You know, yesterday I had a school group visiting from the Brentwood elementary school in Strathmore. You know, we were doing some questions and answers, and one of the students asked me, "How many people have to complain before the government

changes something?" I said: "Oh, that's actually a very interesting question. It really depends."

The examples I gave him were two contrasting examples. Yesterday, members might recall, I had a rather large box of petitions on my desk. They were not a prop, Madam Speaker; they were petitions. They were petitions from people in Strathmore-Brooks against the carbon tax, thousands of petitions from constituents of mine who do not want the carbon tax. Albertans are overwhelmingly against the carbon tax, but the government refuses to listen. I told the student: "Sometimes that's just the way it is. You can beat the government with facts. You can have overwhelming public sentiment on your side. Sometimes they just won't listen. The only way to deal with that is to defeat them, and that's what we're going to do."

But, on the other side, sometimes one person makes a difference, just one person. In this case Darlene made a difference. Darlene spoke up, and she just had one case. It wasn't a petition; it was just her case. She spoke up, and she caught the attention of Albertans across the province and, frankly, a lot of people across the country because people saw how unjust and ridiculous it was for the NDP to be demanding carbon tax rebates back from deceased family members. So I told the student who was here, who actually will be joining us for question period later today: "You know, sometimes you can have thousands of people on your side, and it won't make a difference. The government won't listen. But sometimes one voice can make a difference, and Darlene made a difference here."

Her case, I think, became the impetus for this change. While it certainly shouldn't have happened to begin with, we'll give credit where credit is due. Governments make mistakes, and if governments recognize those mistakes, take responsibility, and change them, we should commend that. So I commend the Minister of Finance for listening on this issue and fixing what needed to be changed.

Now, my constituents voted for me because they wanted to get back to balanced budgets. They didn't want more debt, they didn't want more spending, and they didn't want more regulations. When Darlene came to me about the Canada Revenue Agency clawing back her deceased grandmother's carbon tax rebate money, she wanted action. She wanted to protect her finances. She was watching every penny, and she expects her government to do the same. I know that she would not want us to spend a thousand times more than her rebate cheque to solve a problem that could potentially be fixed by this government simply allowing folks to keep the money. Again, we need more information to make an informed decision here.

The entire carbon tax, though, has been a mess from the very start. Albertans are overwhelmingly opposed to it. Even the majority of people who voted for the NDP are now against it. The NDP did not run on a carbon tax. They have no democratic mandate for it. They are making the carbon tax potentially even more expensive to administer now. The NDP refuses to disclose the information that we've requested. It's very simple information, and if the government would simply put it on the table and if it matches up to show that it is the most cost-effective way forward, we would be very happy to support that.

Now, the only instance of a member being close to giving us the information was my very good friend from Calgary-Currie. He hates it when I do this, but my very good friend from Calgary-Currie said:

Now, of course, administrative costs will be higher with more payments being issued, but we in the ministry don't expect the increase to be significant, Madam Chair, and even with the change we estimate the cost of administering the rebate to remain below \$10 million annually.

We'll take him at his word that the cost of issuing 30 per cent more cheques will remain under \$10 million.

That is almost the same cost as the request by the Newell Foundation in my constituency to integrate the Bassano hospital with the Bassano seniors' care project. Instead of important projects in this province, the government would rather spend it on a failed attempt at some elusive social licence, which, as the great Canadian prophet Rex Murphy said, is never meant to be given when granted. He's a sort of John the Baptist of pipelines, if you will.

This government has decided that it will tax Albertans for the privilege of driving their cars and heating their homes. Then the NDP will spend another \$10 million a year to mail back cheques to those they have just taxed for that privilege. The government is taking money away from Albertans and charging them just to mail it back to them, and now they want to charge Albertans potentially even more to administer it because they couldn't figure out how not to rip off families who have deceased ones.

If this is the most cost-effective way to stop the Canada Revenue Agency from clawing back dead family members' money, then I'll support the bill, but I hope that they have learned an important lesson from this and that they do not repeat this kind of bureaucratic bungling moving forward in the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I just wish to say that I appreciate my cosponsors, who were here in the House when I couldn't be here. It seems clear that the bill is needed at this time to redress some important things that we found out as a result of bringing in an important rebate for families, which will be a total of \$410 million in 2017-18. Madam Speaker, that is good news.

It's clear that our friend across the floor has no intention of supporting this bill, so I don't really think we need to wait too much longer before we vote. I hope that all members of this House can support it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The Assembly will stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 24, 2017

Day 38

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel	Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer		Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
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Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKittrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Drysdale	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKittrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
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Drever	Nixon
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Horne	van Dijken
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Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinstauber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinstauber
Babcock	McKittrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
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Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
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Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinstauber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 24, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise to introduce to you and to this Assembly a distinguished visitor, the consul of Mexico for Alberta, Mrs. Cecilia Villanueva Bracho. The consul has served in this post since 2014 and will soon be assuming new duties for the government of Mexico.

Mexico is an important trading partner for Alberta and is the fourth-largest customer for Alberta exports, at nearly \$1 billion in 2016. We support this important relationship through the Alberta Mexico office. Mexico is also one of our most popular holiday destinations for Albertans, where they enjoy the warm hospitality of the Mexican people and enriching cultural experiences. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that our relationship with Mexico is growing. For example, our province and the Mexican state of Jalisco share a collaborative agreement on commercializing technology, an agreement that is creating opportunities in both jurisdictions. We also share ties between our postsecondary institutions, including a collaborative sustainable energy project at the University of Calgary funded with \$46 million from the Mexican Ministry of Energy.

I'd also like to mention that during the wildfires in the Wood Buffalo region Mexican firefighters joined with our first responders, putting themselves in harm's way to protect Albertans. I join with all Albertans to thank them for their service.

It is my honour to say on behalf of our government thank you to Consul Villanueva for her work to build our relationship with Mexico. We appreciate the global experience you brought to your posting in Alberta and the stronger connections you helped to create between Alberta and Mexico. I now ask the consul to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly students, teachers, and chaperones from Brentwood elementary in Strathmore. They won a contest on CTV to be special guests here today. They've been here for several days, learning about our parliamentary and democratic institutions, and they've been having a great time. They submitted a bunch of written questions to me in advance. Most of them were very technical and parliamentary questions, but one question in particular stood out. A student asked me if it was possible to outlaw homework. While I explained that it is theoretically possible to outlaw homework, it would also be a great lesson in the law of unintended consequences. I want to ask that they rise as I call their names: their teacher, Mrs. Amy White; parents Krista, Jay, Donalda, and Ben; and all the students from Brentwood elementary, who it's been my real pleasure to have here today. I believe there's probably a future Prime Minister up there. Let's give them a hand.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Thank you, hon. member. I hope they listen carefully to you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise in the House today to introduce to you and through you the students of grade 6, accompanied by their teachers, Jill Morgan and Michael Steinberg, from Calgary Jewish Academy in the great constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. They're highly engaged students, and I've enjoyed my conversations with them about politics. I wish them all the very best, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 32 students from Woodhaven middle school, a school that recently hosted both the Premier and the Minister of Education. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Sarah Cresswell and Ms Helen Kinnee, and their chaperones, Bethany Adair, Trina Merkel, Darlene Taylor, Heather Kleckner, and Colleen Oshak. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce a guest that is seated in your gallery. You might not know it, but there is a political legend amongst us. If you're a political watcher of the Maritimes, in particular P.E.I., you know this man. He is Ronnie MacKinley. He has enjoyed a long political career. He was first elected in the riding he represented in 1985, long before some members of this Assembly were even born, and he served continuously in that role until 2015, over 30 years.

In the year 2000 in the provincial election the Liberals in P.E.I. had a little bit of a setback. In fact, he was the only member of the opposition that was elected as a member of the Liberal Party at the time. As a result, he served as the Leader of the Opposition, the de facto leader of the Liberal Party until 2003, when he was then replaced by Robert Ghiz, who would become the Premier. MacKinley served, as you can imagine, as the opposition critic for Transportation and Public Works, Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture, and he was the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Perhaps our colleague from Calgary-Mountain View knows a little bit about what it is to be all of those things. On June 12, 2007, MacKinley assumed the office of the Minister of Transportation and Public Works, where he served in the Robert Ghiz cabinet. More importantly than all of those things, he is one heck of a good guy, and he is joined by perhaps the person responsible for all of his success, his wife, Ann. I invite them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. It's not often that we get an opportunity to have visitors from the east coast, and it's even less often that we would have the hon. Opposition House Leader be so kind to a Liberal.

The Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Amanda

Jensen as well as her son Jake, who's seven, and Ben, who's 14. When Jake was diagnosed with cancer, Amanda requested leave from work to care for him like any mother would. However, Amanda did not meet the qualification period for job-protected compassionate care leave, and Alberta does not have job protection for leave to care for a critically ill child. As a result, she was terminated from her workplace. Our laws are wrong in this, and they failed this family. No parent should have to face the stress of losing their job on top of dealing with an urgent family situation. That's why I'm very pleased to introduce them today, the day that I'll be introducing legislation that will amend our laws and ensure that parents like Amanda are protected. I thank her and her family for joining us, and I ask them to rise. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

1:40

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me immense pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Luanne Whitmarsh. Luanne is the CEO of the Kerby Centre, which is located in the beautiful riding of Calgary-Buffalo. She's dedicated to enhancing the lives of seniors in her community through active living programs and social supports. Luanne has been an advocate and an activist for many years. She speaks for those who need assistance speaking for themselves and has been a tireless advocate on behalf of seniors since taking on the Kerby Centre. I have had the great pleasure of working very closely with Luanne since I was elected, and I would like her to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly a group of brilliant students from the Nebula Academy, which is housed in the Elmwood Park neighbourhood, located within the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The academy offers kindergarten through grade 5, with a focus on Turkish culture. This spring two grade 4 students from the school won a silver medal at the Edmonton Regional Science Fair. The students are accompanied by the school's director, Mr. Nedim Istemil, Acting Principal Robin Murphy, Guidance Counsellor Selda Benli, and volunteers Serif Aydin and Taryn Putinta. I would ask them to now please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Schreiner: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House my guests from The Lending Cupboard. Dawna Morey joined The Lending Cupboard as executive director in 2015. She brings much experience and expertise to the table as well as a strong motivation to support individuals and families in our community. Chris Hume participates in The Lending Cupboard board of directors as secretary. Chris is committed to seeing people live with independence and dignity. I ask my guests to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly

Andrea Myers. Andrea grew up in the Edmonton area and is a graduate of NAIT. For the last five years she's been working as business manager for RiverWatch. She's here to hear a member's statement on that same subject today. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three people attending today: my legislative assistant, Andrew Koning; his wife, Sarah Patricia Koning; and their seven-year-old daughter, Adriana, who is spending the day not at school but here at work with her father. It's always a pleasure to have families in the Legislature, of course. Of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't say how much I appreciate the good work that the staff does for the Wildrose caucus, in particular Andrew. I also have to point out how much the spouses and the families of the people that work with us sacrifice to have their spouses here working with us all these crazy hours. If we could give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly, that'd be great, and if they can stand.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Minister of Labour, I believe you had another introduction.

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ken Kobly, the president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. As an advocate for Alberta business the Alberta Chambers of Commerce is a local resource, bringing together chambers and business owners from across the province to champion new ideas and solutions. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce is also very supportive of the proposed Energy East project, which will boost our economy and help Alberta reach new markets. I'd like to thank Mr. Kobly for all his contributions to this government's consultations, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. member, you may not know it, but the guest today is from the best city in the province of Alberta, Medicine Hat.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Employment and Labour Code Legislation

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government has said precious little about its plan to uproot years of labour peace and impose sweeping labour changes on Alberta. Now, no one disagrees with the spirit of ideas like allowing workers to take time off to attend to sick or dying loved ones, but the opposition has asked many meaningful questions about union certification, collective bargaining, and specific rumours that this government plans on scrapping secret ballots, a move that could expose workers to bullying and intimidation in the workplace. The minister has only fuelled these concerns by discussing off-topic employment standards and making silly references to '80s pop songs in response to direct questions on these topics. These issues are serious, and this government failed in its duty by avoiding them.

The NDP also failed to properly consult, which is par for the course from the government that walked blindly into the Bill 6

disaster with its government-knows-best ideology. Only four in-person, invitation-only consultations were held. Not surprisingly, certain big union bosses were always present while certain business advocates were barely involved. Even more worrisome is the thought that this government could be taking its cues from its union boss friends, who have been wanting to scrap secret ballots for years and who have very close relationships with members of this government.

Not only could these changes negatively affect workers, but they could destabilize our economy even further by discouraging even more investment in our province. It's ironic that the NDP claim to be on the side of workers when its policies have led to a record number of Albertans collecting unemployment insurance and more than 84,000 good, full-time jobs being lost.

Today we will find out exactly what this insular NDP government has in store for Albertans, but right now all signs point to the fix being in on this legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Wild Mountain Music Festival

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about an exciting music festival taking place in my constituency this summer. The Wild Mountain Music Festival runs July 14 to 16 at the historic Entrance Ranch just off highway 40. This year's lineup includes an impressive array of Juno award winners and nominees as well as local up-and-coming groups and artists from Alberta and across Canada: 54-40, David Wilcox, the Sadies, Big Sugar, the Jerry Cans, Matt Andersen, and crowd favourite Digging Roots will join many other exciting entertainers.

Rustic camping is included with every weekend pass, so bring everything you need. There's plenty of room. This family-friendly event includes performers, activities for children, and for adults the impressive beer tent has a great view of both performance stages. Shuttles operate from three pickup and drop-off spots in Hinton to the festival site starting prior to the music and running well after so that you don't miss out on any of the fun.

Started in 2007, this 100 per cent community-owned and volunteer-run music festival has relied on sponsors to grow into one of this province's most important artistic events. This year it's expected to attract 9,000 people to our region and make a major contribution to the local economy while bringing a unique arts event to West Yellowhead.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the individuals and organizations who make this event possible. There are too many sponsors to mention, but I encourage everyone to check out the website for their names, to get more information. Please attend the Wild Mountain Music Festival in Hinton this July.

Thank you very much.

Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Loewen: It seems the NDP cannot resist taking credit for just about everything. This was brought to a whole new level of lunacy when the members for Calgary-Currie and Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville pronounced in the Legislature that the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline was due to — you guessed it — this government's climate leadership plan.

Now, we know the NDP have a propensity to ship supporters and their MLAs all across Canada to campaign for their anti-oil friends, but in a first for this government they appear to have sent a

delegation of supporters to the United States to campaign for Donald Trump since he had promised to and did sign the Keystone XL deal.

1:50

Let's just talk about the Trans Mountain and line 3 pipelines. These are both existing lines, not new lines. One is an expansion; the other is a replacement with more volume. Now, they may have been approved under the NDP time and power, but to say that these pipelines were approved because of the NDP government is just not true. They were approved in spite of the Alberta NDP, in spite of the antipipeline activists within the NDP. If the NDP wants to take credit for them, they also have to take the blame for the cancellation of the Northern Gateway pipeline and the west coast tanker ban. Those also happened under their watch, and their mythical social licence was no help there.

This government's quiet diplomacy equals silent insolence. When the leader of the Wildrose opposition was in Ottawa, they got four approved pipelines, four major pipelines, in spite of the NDP protesting them.

Now, since the NDP has been elected, Alberta has lost over 100,000 jobs, but the NDP continue taking credit and bragging about creating new jobs. Fact: this government promised to create 100,000 jobs but can only muster 20,000 and caused 100,000 jobs to be lost. I'd say that it's a loss of 80,000 and 180,000 fewer than they promised, not something to brag about.

This government likes to take credit for every possible positive thing that happens, but the facts are that investor confidence has been crushed since they took office and that Albertans are suffering due to the poor choices this government continues to make.

There's only one question left. Will anyone over there take responsibility for the 100,000 jobs lost, the tanker ban, the cancellation of Northern Gateway, and running the economy into the ground? Take responsibility and apologize.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Employment and Labour Code Legislation

Mr. Jean: Today the NDP will introduce changes to the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code. Now, Amanda Jensen was fired from her job for seeking time off to care for her child suffering from leukemia. I spoke to Amanda yesterday and told her that I'd support changes to protect people in her situation from losing their job, but unfortunately this NDP bill is rumoured to go far beyond that. Why would the Premier want to possibly remove a worker's right to a secret ballot for union certification in this bill if all this is really about is protecting the livelihoods of people like Amanda Jensen?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms. Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, without getting into the details of the bill, which, of course, is going to be introduced today, generally speaking, it is the policy of this government to promote at long last a balanced playing field for all workers in Alberta after decades of that being in complete opposition to the work of this government. You know what? That will not only make life better for middle-class Albertans; it will also help employers, those responsible employers who do the right thing by their workers each and every day. They need to know that everybody has to play by the rules, and under our watch they will.

Mr. Jean: I know the importance of being with loved ones when they're sick. The Wildrose campaigned to extend support for those caring for loved ones, but this omnibus legislation isn't just about protecting those who need to care for loved ones. It makes sweeping changes to the labour code, and that has 90 per cent of businesses surveyed worried about their ability to keep Albertans working. That should worry this government. Why won't the government pass the protections for people seeking compassionate care and then table the rest of the changes for greater consultation with Albertans over the summer?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member opposite is, as far as I can tell, still in consultations over whether he can actually support school lunches. However, we are not going to approach dealing with long-overdue problems being fixed that way. We are going to ensure that we promote fairness across the board in Alberta, and we are going to do it without fearmongering. We're going to do it by simply engaging in a balanced, down-the-middle kind of approach, and I'm proud of our government for doing that. It is about time.

Mr. Jean: Thirty-six days is not consultation. Four come-and-be-told meetings is not consultation, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP are trying to use compassionate care leave, which the Wildrose also supports, as cover for drastic measures to tilt the playing field in favour of the NDP's big labour friends. Eliminating a worker's right to a secret ballot for union certification has nothing whatsoever to do with protecting people like Amanda Jensen. It only puts the jobs of other Albertans at risk. Why does the Premier insist on ramming through a union-friendly omnibus bill instead of splitting the bill in half, making sense, and seeking further consultation on labour code changes with Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it really does demonstrate quite a bit that the member opposite automatically equates unions with job killing. You know what? The fact of the matter is that unions include nurses, they include teachers, they include restaurant workers, they include police, they include middle-class Albertans across the province. In fact, those other Albertans who would like the opportunity to engage in their constitutionally protected rights in this province should be able to have those rights, and that is what our government is going to ensure happens. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, caution. It's windy outside. We don't need to be windy in here.

The second main question.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Jean: This NDP government just doesn't get how important and how significant the impact of their policy decisions are. Yesterday we saw the NDP formalize their cap on electricity prices. One problem with their scheme, Mr. Speaker: for every cent the rate goes above 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, the taxpayers, Albertans, will be on the hook for an extra – you got it – \$10 million a month. Where is this cash coming from? Well, it's coming from the funny money bank account funded by the NDP's carbon tax. Why does the Premier think it's okay to throw Albertans' hard-earned money away to compensate for her government's mistakes?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, when it comes to dealing with the challenges with our electricity

system, caused, in fact, by the fact that it was on the verge of breaking as a result of the wacky system that the previous government had put in place, there's a choice. Their plan would ensure higher bills, more market volatility for Alberta families. It would ensure burning coal even though everyone knows that it's not healthy, and it would ensure ignoring expert advice about how to best transition to a stable energy market. That's not the plan that we will follow. We will protect Alberta families, we will protect stability in their bills, and we will make sure that we get off coal.

Mr. Jean: Wacky system, Mr. Speaker? Consistently the lowest energy prices in North America.

Whether the Premier likes it or not, ratepayers and taxpayers are one and the same. A subsidy on an electricity bill is going to show up on the bottom line at tax time to all Albertans. I can't decide what's worse, the NDP trying to pull the wool over Albertans' eyes or that they just don't care and are doing this move for ideology's sake no matter what Albertans think or believe. Why does the Premier respect Albertans so little that she's willing to make them pay a lot more for electricity in the name of ideology?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to making short-sighted, ideological decisions, I have to tell you that the members opposite can school us all. They are so committed to a free-market, full-market system that they would move to the Texas model of putting the electricity cap from \$1,000 to \$10,000 just to keep that free-market system going, and they'd just let families deal with that volatility day in and day out because that's the way the market works. That's not what Albertans voted for. That doesn't give stability to Albertans. That doesn't make their life better, but we will.

Mr. Jean: Speaking of the NDP copying other jurisdictions that fail taxpayers and citizens, Mr. Speaker, just today Ontario's budget watchdog released a report that the Liberal government's plan to lower electricity bills artificially will ultimately cost Ontarians over \$21 billion. Their scheme to subsidize electricity rates is opposed by the Tories and, believe it or not, even the NDP in Ontario. Why? Well, they've seen how damaging the Liberal's electricity plan is, the same plan, by the way, that Alberta's NDP are now copying. Why won't the Premier face the facts, look out for Albertans, and cancel this NDP risky electricity plan? [interjections]

The Speaker: Stay calm, please.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you that there's one thing that the members opposite are very good at. I guess it's two, fearmongering and alternative facts. The reality is that our electricity system is nothing like the Ontario electricity system. What we've done is that we've moved to a capacity market as a result of the advice of independent experts who are leaders in their field in North America, and we are moving into a bidding process that will not create the kinds of cost overruns that you've seen in Ontario. The members opposite, one or two of them, might even understand that, but the member instead insists on making claims that people know aren't true. Albertans deserve better.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Educational Curriculum Review

Mr. Jean: Albertans don't trust the NDP government's mismanagement of the economy, and they certainly don't trust them when

it comes to the current curriculum review either. Parents are sick and tired of their children being treated like guinea pigs in the classroom, and the latest survey doesn't show anything is going to change under this government. Let me be clear. This is not what parents want or asked their government to do. Will the Premier please listen to the parents of Alberta and not impose her NDP world view on our school system and our children?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that a modern, 21st-century curriculum is the key to preparing our kids for success in a fast-changing world, and that's exactly the reasons why we're engaging in this curriculum review. We are consulting across the board – with kids, with parents, with teachers, with Albertans who don't fit any of those descriptions – and we are going to as a result move forward in a way that reflects the fact that we are now in the 21st century. I appreciate that the members opposite are a little uncomfortable with that fact, but you know what? We know that what's good for Albertans is to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Experts on the subject of curriculum review share my concerns about the current overhaul. The former director of curriculum review in Edmonton public schools has said what they believe of the Premier's modern interpretation, quote: knowledge outcomes don't figure very prominently in this curriculum. This is all about teaching opinions. It's teaching the opinion of the extreme left, an opinion of radical socialism. End quote. The Premier would be out organizing protests if extreme right or social conservative views were being pushed right now, so how on earth is the Premier letting this kind of thing happen in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the document to which the member appears to be referring actually includes the goal, this notion of encouraging the development of "engaged citizens." Somehow they've taken that phrase and converted it to some kind of socialist plot. Now, the reality, I believe, is that all Alberta parents want their kids to grow up to be engaged citizens: to engage in critical analysis, to question alternative facts wherever they might arise, and, in fact, to engage in their province. I am very hopeful that our kids will continue to do just that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: I know the Premier doesn't talk to everyday, normal Albertans, but I do, and I hear very valid concerns right across Alberta when I talk to parents that they want to go back to the basics in our education system. They want their kids to be grounded in math, reading, and writing and to have an understanding of the world, not learning how to become social activists like some people. Will the Premier agree that she's setting up Alberta students to fail and that, in the words of the former EPSB curriculum director, this curriculum will end up with very opinionated but poorly educated students?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, if the member opposite had engaged in this issue to any level of detail, he would know that our government has been very focused on improving those core learning outcomes and, in particular, that we asked for and received a review of our math curriculum that is actually going to be very much focused on improving the way we teach math and ensuring that the focus on math actually gets better in our schools. Indeed, at

the time a lot of people that you wouldn't expect to agree actually did agree on the direction that we're moving forward in. Being an engaged citizen doesn't negate understanding math and doesn't negate knowing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's see if we can get a better answer from the Education minister.

The proposed rewrite of the social studies curriculum is a travesty that could be foisted upon Alberta students. The NDP world view guidelines are pushing social change and not the usual focus on history. It seeks to turn students into agents of change. If students are not grounded in the fundamentals of where we came from, how can they be equipped to steer us where we're going to go in the future? To the Minister of Education: why are you downplaying the value of history and feel the need to re-engineer such a vital part of the curriculum with a narrow focus . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I appreciate that. You know, questions like that make me realize that we need to redouble our efforts to teach these basic skills because, clearly, this member is lacking in many of those critical analysis skills that actually allow people to understand what we're doing. We're building a new curriculum, and we're doing a very good job of it. They left the curriculum for 30 years. We're getting the job done. Albertans will benefit as a result.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, indeed, it is the Education minister that needs to take a lesson. The fact is that Stuart Wachowicz, a former director of curriculum for Edmonton public schools, said that students under this system will graduate with opinions of the extreme left, of radical socialism. The government is trying to train children to fight their battles for them rather than get them ready for being successful in society. Minister, will you stop this madness? Will you actually care for children and help to prepare them through the curriculum to be successful in the world in which they must survive? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as a former history teacher myself and as an English teacher, no, we're not going to stop teaching history. In fact, we will redouble our efforts to ensure that students have the critical thinking skills, the rational skills, the communication skills, the math skills to make sure that they can interpret history as it moves through the past, the present, and the future. We know that it's important to learn from history so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. We do that right here right now. We've voted a new government in because, certainly, the past was way past due.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, it's even more pathetic that the minister, a teacher, is going down this road. You know what? They're cherry-picking things on the flavour of the day, and they shouldn't do that, whether it's on the left or the right side of the political spectrum. They should be preparing kids for the future they choose and not choosing it for them. To the minister: will you stop this madness and send your officials back to change the planning documents and

widen the focus instead of narrowing it on the NDP world view, which seems to be the only dogma that you will pay attention to?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we have been working with literally thousands of Albertans building curriculum. We had 32,000 responses last time. We only started the new response this week, and we've already had 9,000 submissions. You know, it's very important to make informed decisions and to make sure that we're including what we need as 21st-century learners here in the province of Alberta. We're including such things as computer literacy, entrepreneurship, working with the oil industry, working with the forestry industry, with agriculture as well. So, you know, this sort of inflamed rhetoric, this sort of hyperbole, which is deliberate exaggeration, for anyone that needs to know . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

2:10 Domestic Violence in Airdrie

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has among the highest rates of domestic violence in the country, and 4 out of 5 victims are women. A very troubling report, released yesterday, shows that Airdrie's rate of intimate partner violence is four times higher than in the rest of the province. To the Premier: are you aware of this report, and what is your government doing to address this issue in Airdrie specifically?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much to the member for this very important question. It is, without question, a very, very important issue. No one should live in fear for their life, for their safety, or in fear for the life and safety of their children. Our government has been working on this issue. The minister has met with a group called Airdrie POWER, a nonprofit group committed to improving supports for survivors, and they'll continue to work with them. They are also providing funding to a number of programs to address family violence in the Airdrie area, and they also now have an outreach worker through the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter Association. But I agree that we need to do more.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, perhaps even more troubling is the fact that Airdrie numbers are based on police-reported incidents, and we know that many instances of domestic violence go unreported. One of the challenges Airdrie faces is a lack of shelter beds. While similar-sized cities like Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat have dedicated shelters, Airdrie has no shelter at all, which means they rely entirely on overstretched services in Calgary. Again to the Premier. I know your government has made additional investments in women's shelters. Will any of this money flow to Airdrie?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite has indicated, our government has in fact been taking long-overdue action on this issue. As he knows, we've passed legislation to make it easier for victims of domestic violence to get out of these dangerous situations, we've increased funding to FCSS by \$25 million – some of that money, obviously, would have gone to Airdrie – and of course we've increased funding for women's shelters. I'm not able to answer the specific question

about women's shelters in Airdrie, but I do believe he's identified a very, very important area that needs to be in focus. We actually know that these numbers have been the case for Airdrie for a very, very long time, and we need to move on it more effectively.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even better than shelters is preventing domestic violence in the first place. HomeFront is a unique collaboration between Calgary police and CFS that pairs an officer with a domestic violence caseworker. They provide early intervention for at-risk families, including counselling, risk assessment, and safety planning. HomeFront has been remarkably successful. Eighty-three per cent of families they work with report the reduction or cessation of domestic conflict, and domestic violence calls to police have been reduced by 70 per cent. To the Minister of Justice. All Albertans should have access to this service. What are you doing to ensure that they do?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I certainly agree that prevention needs to be focused on, and that's the reason we have increased funding to the FCSS organizations by \$25 million so that prevention-focused services can be provided. I certainly appreciate the work HomeFront and many organizations like HomeFront do across this province. We are continuing to have stable funding for these organizations so that we can deliver our services in the best way possible. Thank you again.

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

Environmental Programs for Municipalities

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities provide leadership to Albertans on many issues, and when I meet with municipal leaders across Alberta, they have made it clear that they are eager to make use of alternative energy to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and their operating costs. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: what has this government done to assist municipalities wanting to use alternative energy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that municipalities are leaders when it comes to renewable energy and energy efficiency. We have towns like Camrose, who installed the second-largest solar installation in Canada on the roof of the recreation centre last year. We are supporting those efforts. We've invested \$5 million in the Alberta municipal solar program. There will be more to come as we work with municipalities to ensure that they can lower their operating costs and make life better for all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that municipalities such as the city of Edmonton have committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from their operations, what programs can municipalities look forward to on this important issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we're committed to working with municipalities to reinvest the \$1.3 billion in green infrastructure that we have set aside for those

municipal leadership activities, whether it's transit, whether it's retrofits, whether it's smaller transit systems in smaller centres. We're open to all of those initiatives, and we'll be moving forward on them in the coming weeks and months. You know, it's really important that we reinvest in creating those jobs in energy efficiency, that we know those investments create, and in making life better as we invest in transit. [interjections]

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very troubled to hear that the opposition doesn't think this is an important issue.

Given that municipal leaders are not always clear on the programs available to them, to the same minister: how is the government working with municipalities to ensure they have the necessary information?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, efficiencyalberta.ca is always a good source of information on new energy efficiency programs and new programs that we're moving forward with. Now, there's no question that the UCP would flush all of those programs and that they would reject all of that municipal leadership in solar, energy efficiency, transit, all of those things that make our daily lives better, but on this side of the House we are supporting that leadership.

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

Opioid Use

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quote: this is not the time for key messages. End quote. Those words come from an expert in the field tired of hearing NDP talking points about the opioid crisis. Two years ago the Auditor General recommended that this government display leadership and develop an action plan. This government has no co-ordination of services, no action plan, and ministry officials can't even identify three priorities. How many Albertans have to die before you'll stop being part of the problem, declare a public health emergency, and table a comprehensive action plan to address it?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to talk some more about the work that our government is doing to address the overdose deaths crisis in our province. Albertans want to know that their government is responding to the overdose crisis as a top priority. We are. We've expanded access to the take-home naloxone kit program, we're expanding access to treatment such as opioid replacement therapies, and we are doing everything that we can to support the opening of supervised consumption services in our province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in 2014 Michael Trew, the former chief addiction and mental health officer, asked the government for a bigger role in fighting the opioid crisis or epidemic and given that Mr. Trew maintains that had he been given that role, quote, we would have been at least two years ahead of where we are today, end quote, and given that Mr. Trew was on the front lines of the opioid epidemic but that in 2015 this NDP government disbanded his office, Premier, why did you ignore

Michael Trew's advice and then act so short sighted in disbanding his office?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The addiction and mental health officer position was specifically tasked with dealing with the aftermath of the 2013 floods, and that position wrapped up in 2015. Since then, the top-ranking medical officer in our province, the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Karen Grimsrud, has been leading this fight as she is the one with the appropriate expertise to support this work leading what is indeed a public health crisis. The previous government failed to recognize that addiction and substance use are medical issues. Our government knows that they are, and we're providing the medical supports that are needed.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government's mishandling of the opioid crisis is having deadly results and given that the government announced that a total of \$62 million in federal and provincial funding was going to help Albertans get the treatment that they need and given that Suboxone provides enough stability to allow clients to address issues that impact their mental and physical health but given that Suboxone may be too expensive for many who do not have health benefits, how much money has this government put aside for this critical first-line medication?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to talk about opioid replacement therapy in this House. Our government has done much work to expand opioid replacement therapy programs existing through Alberta Health Services. Currently Albertans who are on any of the low-income drug plans or the seniors' drug plan are covered for their Suboxone prescription, and our government is looking at ways that we can expand that access because we don't believe that the ability to afford your medication should be a barrier for treatment.

2:20

Government Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, this government has become masters of unintended consequences, and I'm concerned this trend will continue. From the minimum wage increase to the carbon tax and the Bill 6 fiasco, this government has demonstrated a lack of understanding of how their policies are burdening many of the small to medium-sized employers in Alberta. To the Minister of Labour: do you perform analyses which indicate the cost of any policy changes to small-business owners prior to implementing new policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the relationship that we've developed with our small businesses, the consultations that we undertake through organizations like the Chambers of Commerce, CFIB so that when we're looking at making life better for Albertans, we can make sure that we are updating legislation like our labour legislation and employment standards so that it takes care of a strong economy, so that it makes sure that it's supporting families, so that we can have modern and up-to-date legislation in this province, which we are sorely lacking.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, nothing beats face-to-face consultation.

Given the government's track record of hiding poor policy within bills which contain justifiable changes, I'm concerned the government will once again use positive change as cover for their true intentions and given that a number of small and medium-sized businesses have reached out to our caucus to express their deep concern with the government's intentions, again to the minister: when drafting legislation, do you analyze and consider the effect your changes will have on the viability and sustainability of Alberta's private sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to hear the member opposite say that he's happy to support positive change because the bill that I will be tabling later today deals with a lack of action from the previous government, that has gone on for decades. I am so proud to be able to look at our work legislation, to talk to all stakeholders, to approach this with a fair and balanced legislation that will support a strong economy and will support families in this province.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, nothing beats face-to-face meetings with businesses.

Given that this government is very fond of singing the praises of a particular policy only for that policy to end up harming Albertans and given that the increase to the corporate income tax is a prime example given that a recent study from the U of C demonstrated that the 2 per cent increase in the CIT resulted in \$830 less in earnings for the average dual-income Alberta family, again to the minister: how can Albertans trust you to understand their reality when drafting policy given your government's track record of introducing changes which negatively impact their earnings and employment opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have personally met with the CFIB, with the Chambers of Commerce, with businesses across this province, and I have also personally met with individual Albertans who are benefiting from our policies like an increase to minimum wage so that they can put food on the table for their families. Making sure that we have Albertans' backs, that we are implementing policies that take care of individual families is a priority for our government, and I'm very proud to be part of that.

Air Ambulance Service Contract

Mr. Barnes: This week rural Albertans learned that the successful bid for operating the fixed-wing air ambulance was awarded. The winning bid, CanWest, does not have a local hangar at Medicine Hat airport or Peace River. Without a fixed-wing ambulance aircraft base timely medical care could be compromised. Rural Albertans need answers. Minister, why wasn't there more oversight? How did CanWest win the request for proposal without a hangar in Medicine Hat or Peace River?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, there was significant foresight in this process. One of the reasons why there was was because a number of years ago – it had been over 13 years since there had been an open RFP process, and when there was one under the former government, the RFP didn't require there to be local housing of that air ambulance. AHS learned from what happened under the

former government, and they moved forward in a way that would ensure that a contract would be assigned only if the successful component could secure local hangar space and be able to house those air ambulances locally. So please, as the Premier said earlier, stop the fearmongering on the other side.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, if an aircraft has to first travel through a major hub to pick up a patient and then return to that hub, the critical window for patient safety is missed. Given that this means an unacceptable delay for the patient and will impact patient care and given the losses to the local economies of both Peace River and Medicine Hat, to the Minister of Health: will you commit to finally – finally – providing oversight by retendering the bid if CanWest cannot fulfill the obligations set out in the request for proposal?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that the members opposite tout the free market, and then they light their hair on fire every opportunity they get. What's happening right now is that the concerns that were received are being reviewed. No contracts have been signed. They are moving forward and making sure that the terms of the RFP can be achieved, and if they can't, then we'll examine next steps. The members opposite should take it a little bit easy and rest assured that the terms of the RFP that went out ensure that we are going to have local air ambulance in those same communities where they are today.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the minister should light her hair on fire because this will greatly affect the economy and quality of care for rural Alberta.

Given that Medicine Hat's council has demanded answers from this Minister of Health and given that the request to meet with the minister has now been ignored for weeks, to the Minister of Health: will you commit here and now to meeting the Medicine Hat council and the mayor to solve this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said in my previous answer, the RFP is being awarded, but no contracts have been signed. It would be premature to assume that the RFP terms can't be met. I think that it's important for us to trust the companies that are involved to be able to work on the details, and if they aren't successful, I will happily be part of the discussion. At this point I think it's important to respect the parties that are at the table, that are in negotiations. Obviously, safety for all Albertans is my number one concern, and making sure that we spend health care dollars is also very important. The members opposite are asking for cuts. Then they're asking me to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Central Alberta Concerns

Mr. MacIntyre: Central Alberta has been hit hard by this economic recession and this government's policies. Our big resource-servicing companies are at a standstill, many of our farmers face damaged 2016 crops, and local manufacturing is suffering under the onerous carbon tax. Central Alberta needs some hope. When will this government provide central Alberta with the tools they need for some serious economic development?

Mr. Ceci: Well, there is hope. There is hope. There's hope in the sense that Alberta is going to grow further than any province this

year. GDP growth will be 2.7 per cent. That will affect the people in central Alberta just as it'll affect people throughout Alberta.

Mr. MacIntyre: Well, Red Deer College services a community of 350,000 people, and given that this community is particularly affected by the accelerated coal phase-out and given the immense demand for retraining that is already bubbling to the surface in the outcries of desperate coal workers, when will this government be providing Red Deer College with the polytechnic degree-granting status that they need to service my community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we're quite proud of the work that Red Deer College does to support students in central Alberta, and we're quite pleased to have a new board chair at Red Deer College, Mr. Morris Flewelling, who is serving the people of central Alberta admirably in that role. If the members opposite were so concerned about providing education for the people of central Alberta, they would at least tell them how much their cuts would affect Red Deer College in their ability to deliver education to the people of central Alberta.

Mr. MacIntyre: The economic impact assessment of granting Red Deer College polytechnic status shows an addition of tens of millions of dollars to our local economy. Given that it is beyond the right time for this government to prioritize central Alberta as the right place, to the Minister of Advanced Education: are you sticking it to central Alberta by delaying the granting of polytechnic status so you can keep it in your back pocket as an election plum for a pair of floundering central Alberta MLAs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are working with all of our universities and colleges in reviewing the roles and mandates, and we will make decisions about the future of Red Deer College later this year. The members opposite are campaigning on cuts that would close down Red Deer College and not just Red Deer College but colleges and universities all over this province. They should be ashamed of themselves for promoting those kinds of policies.

2:30 Registry Service Personal Information Collection

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, last week I received a call from an 86-year-old constituent who had recently lost her husband of 66 years. Now, they both owned vehicles registered in both names, and when she went to renew the registration on her car, she informed the registry agent that her husband had passed away and that his name should be removed from the registration. The agent asked her to provide a copy of her husband's will. Afterwards she was very upset at what she feels is an invasion of her privacy. To the Minister of Service Alberta. Even the staff that we spoke with in your department feel that this policy is wrong. Why are registry agents being required to do this?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I want to thank the hon. member for raising this question, and I'm pleased to, of course, represent the Minister of Service Alberta on this issue. I'm not familiar with the issue, and I will communicate this to the Service Alberta department, who will take this issue under advisement and get back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that registry offices are where Albertans receive key services from their government and given that high levels of courtesy, compassion, and customer service should be goals in all of these offices' interactions and given that asking a grieving widow to produce her late husband's will to be copied and read by strangers is a cruel and heartless invasion of privacy, to the minister: why isn't simply producing a copy of the death certificate sufficient in this sensitive situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we expect all of our service agents to deal with everybody with kindness and empathy . . .

Mr. Cooper: You should deal with us with kindness.

Mr. Schmidt: . . . and we will continue to communicate that expectation to the service agents who are delivering this. On this particular issue, of course, we will contact the department and get back to the hon. member with some more information. Hopefully, we can rectify this situation.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't hear all of the answer owing to the jocularity going on on this serious matter. Given that there are growing concerns about the security of personal data that is stored on computers by government and other institutions and given that just last week a major malware threat caused significant disruption world-wide in a number of jurisdictions and given that these threats are growing in their scope and sophistication, to the minister. No one can absolutely guarantee the security of these personal and private documents. Why are you requiring registry agents to collect, copy, scan, and store all of this information?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as I mentioned in my previous answers on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta, we will look into this matter further and reply to the hon. member with some advice on how we can rectify this situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government's National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has been under way for some time. Given that my constituents in Red Deer-South have expressed frustration over the delays with the federal inquiry, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what actions has the government of Alberta undertaken to support this inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. As the member may remember, in September of last year we had an order in council that allowed us to bring the commission here into Alberta and for them to have full access to all Alberta records. In May of this year we also applied for standing to

allow ourselves to have records for the national inquiry. We met with many of the family members together to talk to them about their experiences of all of this process and to ask them about what it is they would like going forward. We are happy to announce this week that the family information liaison units will be open. I'll speak a little bit more about that in further answers.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some of my constituents are involved in the federal inquiry, to the same minister: how will the family information liaison unit help these individuals and families during the inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. As you can well imagine, the circumstances for family members who have lost a member, murdered or missing, are quite difficult. As a result, trying to navigate the very many systems involved can be problematic. The family information liaison unit members will help them to gather specific case information from police investigations, court records, coroners' investigations, and inquests. They'll also have access to counselling elders and spiritual support to help them through this very difficult time, which this government is very concerned about, for the family members.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans across the province will want to access the services provided by the family information liaison units, to the same minister: how will the families access these services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very concerned that the family liaison information workers actually have direct, face-to-face contact with family members. As a result, they'll be travelling throughout the province of Alberta and meeting people face to face, and we encourage family members to register with the system. They can call 780.427.3460 or 310.0000 and identify themselves so that they can have the individualized support they muchly deserve.

Child Protective Services and Death Reviews

Mr. Nixon: Today the Child and Youth Advocate released a report about the death of 15-year-old Levi. This is the story of another child who did not have to die. His mother stated many times that she could not take care of him. Levi himself asked to move to a safe home. In his home there was drinking, domestic violence, and unexplained gaps in his child intervention file. To the Minister of Children's Services: you say we need to do better, but how are we supposed to believe your ministry is taking this seriously when we keep hearing tragic stories like this one day after day?

Ms Hoffman: I want to thank the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for sharing these stories. I think it's important for us to hear them and have an opportunity to learn and be able to move forward. I know all members of this House feel for this young man and for his family. He faced unspeakable hardship and pain in his life, and it's tragic and in need of support. It's clear that the former ministry of human services did not do everything possible to support this young man. That is unacceptable. We accept the

recommendations, and we will move forward to make sure that we do better, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nixon: Given the minister has the gall to say that the government created the child intervention panel to help kids but knows full well the panel does not look at case-level data and given that I have no confidence that any meaningful change is going to happen for kids like Levi and given that Levi's story isn't new either – in the advocate's report into his death there are similar recommendations that have been made in three previous reviews. Minister, the panel isn't helping kids like Levi. When are you going to take some accountability and actually do your job, make some changes that the advocate is asking for?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, we fully accept these recommendations. We believe that they are important, and we look forward to working closely with the advocate around implementation and further improvements. All young people should have their voices listened to and have access to the help that they need. When a young person asks for help, we need to do whatever we can to support them; however, it's clear that that did not happen for Levi. We expect that the committee is going to bring forward very good recommendations. We'll be able to act on them, and life will get better for young people. It needs to.

Mr. Nixon: Given that there were so many times in Levi's short life where he and others cried for help and he never received it, given that in the past police had found several intoxicated adults in Levi's home and him missing for large periods of time, given that it was documented that he missed a significant amount of school and that at age 12 he was found living in a tent because of his mother's drinking, and given that this is yet another case where there were clear cries for help from a child and those associated with the child that were ignored, to the minister: how will you make changes in the system so that when a young person asks for help out of a dangerous situation, they actually get it? Stop making excuses, stop saying it's the panel, because it's not, and tell us what you're going to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's why I'm asking Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, and the college of physicians to examine this heartbreaking situation, ensure protocols are in place to care for vulnerable youth. When children ask for help, they need it, and Levi deserved better. That's why we created a ministerial panel, to take a very serious look at child intervention systems and make recommendations for improvement. It's clear that significant changes must be made, and we await the panel's recommendations. We hope that they are supportive, and we look forward to moving quickly to make changes for Alberta's children and youth.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.
The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

2:40

Economic Indicators

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to Statistics Canada monthly manufacturing in Alberta is down by over half a billion dollars since the NDP became the government, a nearly 10

per cent drop, but only \$30 million of that was in petroleum- and coal-related manufacturing. The rest came from industries such as food, fabricated metal, machinery, computers, furniture, and transportation equipment manufacturing. To the Premier: when will you stop using low oil prices as a false excuse for the negative impact that the NDP's misguided policies are having on Albertans?

Mr. Ceci: Well, it gives me an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to talk again about how those oil forecasts are generated for the province of Alberta. We look at five private-sector averages, and we usually take the average of those five entities, but this year we took the lowest number, which was \$55 for '17 and '18. That same number is what Saskatchewan has brought forward for their budget, the same number or higher.

Mr. Rodney: Given that nondurable goods manufacturing, which includes oil and gas, was down \$139 million per month but durable goods manufacturing was down \$395 million and given that some Alberta industries have shrunk to the point of no longer even being reported by Statistics Canada, including primary metal manufacturing, down 40 per cent, and electrical equipment, appliances, and components, down 45 per cent, to the minister: how can the NDP claim that its economic diversification and export development plan is working when manufacturing even beyond oil and gas has been decimated?

Mr. Ceci: You know, I think that today is an example of the questions where the glass is half empty with that person over there. We know, Mr. Speaker, that, for instance, a Ford distribution warehouse is opening in Leduc. Champion Petfoods is building a 37,000-square-metre pet food facility in Parkland county. Tourism is up across this province. The GDP is going to be leading this province. The glass is half full, not empty.

Mr. Rodney: Perhaps the minister doesn't know that you don't even measure tourism anymore. We're asking about Albertans, not us.

Given that the value-added manufacturing exports that should be driving the economy outside our big cities are also down, with industries from animal food manufacturing to pulp and paper suffering millions of dollars in lower project activity, and given that agriculture, construction, and manufacturing are also down by tens of millions of dollars and given the impending devastation to the coal industry workers' families, who are often coemployed in the agricultural sector, how can the agriculture minister claim to be protecting and growing Alberta's ag industry when the numbers clearly show the exact opposite?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the opportunity to talk about the good work that agriculture and agrifood processing are doing in Alberta. Currently agrifood processing is the largest manufacturing sector in Alberta, contributing about \$12 billion to the economy. It's a sector that continues to grow with the policies of this government. The Minister of Finance has highlighted some of the great work that has been going on: Champion Petfoods, Cavendish foods down in southern Alberta. There are a lot of great things happening in this province around the agriculture industry because of the policies of this government, because this government has Alberta's back.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

In 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

RiverWatch Science Program

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 1994 a group of three teachers envisioned taking lessons on aquatic ecosystems from the classroom to the outdoors so that students could experience their neighbourhood rivers up close. In the spring of 1995 Cal Kullman's grade 9 students from Louis Riel school piloted lessons, science experiments, and a raft route along the Bow River through Calgary. In this way RiverWatch was born, and by the fall of that year 22 teachers and nearly 600 students adventured out for the first season. Two decades later RiverWatch is now a nonprofit organization, an award-winning river monitoring program, and host to the 10,000 students which participate in the program annually from across Alberta.

Last Friday, May 19, I joined the Member for Calgary-Fort, the Member for Calgary-East, and many other Albertans on a RiverWatch expedition. We embarked from Pearce Estate Park in Inglewood and set off down the Bow. As we passed the Inglewood bird sanctuary, our guide surveyed the group regarding the health of the river, and the group assumed that it was about a 3 out of 5. Further down the river we beached the rafts to do a few science experiments. My partner and I checked the pH of the river and discovered that it was about 8.3, within the norms of a healthy river.

Relaunching the boats, we reached the Bonnybrook waste-water treatment plant, where students get to tour this state-of-the-art water treatment facility. Our group continued to the area where the treatment plant's effluent discharges into the Bow and where the students get a chance to consider the ways of how our water usage impacts the river's health. A full-day tour also includes a final science checkpoint across from the Beaverdam Flats park, where students repeat the same science experiment as earlier, and groups often decide that the river quality is, in fact, a 4 out of 5.

On behalf of myself and my MLA colleagues I'd like to thank Cal Kullman, Andrea Myers, and the RiverWatch team for an educational morning float down the Bow. RiverWatch helps students see that water connects us all and that whatever we do to the river, we do to ourselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Red Deer's Lending Cupboard Society

Mrs. Schreiner: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I am sure everyone in the House knows that I am immensely proud of the great city which I call home. Red Deer has earned the title of volunteer capital. That speaks to our strong sense of loyalty and community, and I never run out of reasons to sing its praises.

I would like to shed light on The Lending Cupboard Society, which embodies this strong sense of community. Established in July 2006, with services provided to 456 clients, the mission was to provide medical equipment to those in need. Today their tremendous growth supports a diverse model incorporating a more holistic approach, including wellness, mobility, independence, and dignity.

The Lending Cupboard Society helps make Albertans' lives better. As the only established nonprofit organization of its kind in central Alberta their mission has touched the lives of many family, friends, and constituents of many of our members in the House today. It is not only the services and equipment that make The Lending Cupboard such a success. The service it provides supplements Alberta Health Services by ensuring that Albertans

have access to the medical devices they need to maintain their independence and dignity.

On January 30 I had the pleasure of introducing the hon. Minister of Health to the gem that The Lending Cupboard is and to showcase the caring community that is Red Deer and its impact on central Alberta. With the dedication of many volunteers and phenomenal staff The Lending Cupboard Society meets a strong community need by supporting individuals when illness or tragedy strikes.

Mr. Speaker, today I applaud the great strides that have been made in supporting Albertans who are vulnerable, and I compliment The Lending Cupboard Society for the leadership and compassion that motivates the great work they do in the community I call home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Energy Policies

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to read a quote from the very first Alberta NDP election platform. "Alberta has among its many power sources: coal, water-power and petroleum. This is a substantial basis upon which to establish profitable industries within the province." It continues: "The development of coal-burning thermal units for electric power in coal mining areas of the province will be encouraged as economic aids to . . . depressed areas and as an added source of power for industry and domestic use." They actually advocated for an east coast pipeline, the same one that the Alberta Wildrose has urged them to advocate for.

But sadly, Mr. Speaker, these values have been replaced by this radical manifesto that the NDP has moved forward on, which is aimed at killing jobs and completely shutting down the petroleum sector. Instead of concern for hard-working families and the economy, the NDP are now more concerned with a 21st-century version of snake oil, also known as a social licence.

2:50

They have lost touch with regular, everyday Albertans and instead have decided to cozy up with their Trudeau Liberal BFFs from Ontario. That's shameful. We have seen the NDP demonize our energy industry and state that Albertans are the embarrassing cousins of Canada. We have seen the NDP shutting down the coal plants. We have seen the NDP hire antipipeline activists to key positions within their government. That also is shameful.

The real threat to Alberta right now is this NDP government. The NDP have departed from the principles that Albertans hold dear and that they once believed in, too. This is why Albertans are demanding a conservative government to move forward, to start working together to prevent this from ever happening again. But this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

With this bill our government is supporting family-friendly workplaces and giving Alberta workers and employers rights and protections similar to other Canadians. If passed, this bill will make changes to the Employment Standards Code and the Labour

Relations Code. The proposed changes to these labour codes are based on consultations with Albertans. With this input, Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 strikes the right balance between the needs of workers and employers and brings Alberta's workplace legislation into the 21st century.

I'd like to thank those in the gallery for being here to witness this today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:52 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Horne	Nielsen
Carlier	Jabbour	Payne
Carson	Jansen	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Clark	Kleinstein	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Schreiner
Dang	Malkinson	Shepherd
Drever	Mason	Swann
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woollard
Hinkley	Miranda	

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Orr
Cooper	Hanson	Pitt
Cyr	Jean	Rodney
Ellis	MacIntyre	Schneider
Fraser	McIver	van Dijken
Gill	Nixon	

Totals: For – 44 Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

The Speaker: Government House Leader, is there unanimous consent with respect to the Routine today?

3:10

Mr. Mason: We can try it, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: In addition, there's a request for unanimous consent for an introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to the House. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a member of the legal services team who was instrumental in helping to draft the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I'd like to introduce Ms Chelsea Evans-Rymes, who's come with some family, perhaps, and some friends. Ms Evans-Rymes and I actually

were camp counsellors together, so it's been interesting to get reacquainted many, many years later. I'd like her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 5(3) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the chair is pleased to table in the Assembly five copies of the 2016 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office.

The Clerk: Tablings to the Clerk.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table five copies of an article titled India Cancels Plans for Huge Coal Power Stations as Solar Energy Prices Hit Record Low, the article noting that India has cancelled plans to build nearly 14 gigawatts of coal-fired power stations. That's about the same as the total amount in the entire United Kingdom.

The Speaker: On a go-forward basis, hon. members – it's a procedural matter that I should have been more aware of – it's the Clerk that tables at that particular section. The document is accepted, but in the future we should avoid, as members, using that to table documents.

I believe we are at points of order. The hon. member for Olds – excuse me. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Nixon: That's okay. I spend a lot of time with the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, but you might have noticed, Mr. Speaker, that there is a slight height difference. Just slight.

I rise on 23(j), use of “abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.” During my questions to the Children's Services minister, which the Deputy Premier answered, the Deputy Premier during that time made some statements that do not accurately represent the facts. Several ministers have in the past, but particularly during those questions the minister continued to again make statements that do not accurately represent the facts, which creates disorder when the minister knows that her statements are not accurately representing the facts.

It is clear, without a doubt, and the minister is aware that the child intervention panel, that the minister continues to refer to in her answers to our questions, is not allowed – and the reason it's not allowed, Mr. Speaker, is because the NDP has blocked it – to deal with any case-level data, compare it to the Serenity or the Levi cases, which we were speaking about in particular today. When the minister keeps rising and telling Albertans and the opposition that we are allowed to refer to that and that that panel is actually dealing with that issue when in fact it is not, that is language that will cause disorder in the House. I would appreciate it if the minister would stop that.

The Speaker: The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the member opposite is upset. There is a dispute as to what the facts are. I don't believe this is anything resembling a point of order. You know, saying that as we move forward, the entire child intervention

system is something that we should look at, saying that we should move forward and look at systemic issues that affect all children and that we should work as a House, all together, to make those systemic issues better: I don't know how that could possibly create disorder.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the way this panel has moved forward and the speed with which they are doing their work and the speed with which they are moving to create a better system for all children in Alberta, which is obviously desperately needed – and I think all sides of the House are going to agree on that – is pretty phenomenal. To say, you know, that the minister standing up and saying, “Of course we care about this issue; that's why we continue to invest money and that's why we have a panel that's going to deal with these systemic issues” is not, I think, likely to create any disorder amongst any reasonable individuals. Obviously, this is just a dispute as to the facts and whether or not there are systemic issues.

The Speaker: The House leader of the third party.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is one reason there is a panel, and that's because the hon. leader of the PC caucus asked repeatedly for it, and I really appreciate that the government agreed that it was indeed a good idea. I appreciate the input of all the caucuses on that panel, but as has been demonstrated by the hon. Official Opposition deputy House leader, this is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. We've asked on many occasions for the same rule to apply, so I'll thank you for your ruling.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think that in this instance there is no point of order. It is a difference of opinion. However, let me remind all of the House that sensitive issues like this are very visceral to all of us. They impact considerably on this province, that we represent in this House. I ask all of you to be conscious of that when comments are being made in the House.

Orders of the Day

Private Bills

Third Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017.

This bill has been recommended by the Standing Committee on Private Bills, and I encourage all the members of the House to support it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, would anyone like to speak to third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Pr. 1, the Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017. As a member of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I was able to attend the presentation by Mr. Bruce Libin, the president of the Calgary Jewish Federation, on May 1 to understand the requests of the organization. The overall proposal of the request is to, one, change the name of the Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act to the Calgary Jewish Community Campus Corporation Act to better reflect the objects of the corporation.

The second part is to change the objects so that this organization can expand on their campus plans. I'll highlight some of the details here now.

- (a) To promote health by encouraging and facilitating general physical fitness by operating and maintaining recreational facilities . . . for the general public,
- (b) to advance education by operating and maintaining a daycare facility . . . [for] both Jewish and non-Jewish communities of Calgary,
- (c) to advance education and culture by providing educational programs . . . ,
- (d) to relieve poverty by providing free or subsidized educational, cultural and recreational programs to individuals in need,
- (e) . . . by providing specially adapted residential accommodation . . . and other support services to Jewish and non-Jewish seniors.

3:20

In the committee we were told that there had been talk for a long time about the opportunities and vision of expanding facilities on that land adjacent to the existing Calgary Jewish Community Centre, and the bill would allow for the development of that space. As a first step we were told that there are plans to expand and renovate the existing building and to expand the daycare at that facility.

Mr. Speaker, having listened to the presentation, witnessed the expansion diagrams, and seen the future potential of this campus, I will be supporting Bill Pr. 1 at third reading. I encourage all others to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to speak to Bill Pr. 1?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore to close debate.

Ms Kazim: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise to support the bill. I would like to elaborate a little bit more on the contributions this particular bill will have in the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore as well as the entire city of Calgary.

The expansion is basically including more facilities, and it will be more inclusive for our communities. It serves not only Jewish people but others as well, as mentioned earlier. It's a very multi-faceted organization, and it has facilities that are catering to the needs of seniors, children, adults, young adults, and to all families and friends. People can utilize it for multiple purposes. It's a great venue. Whenever I visit the facility, I can see that it's a great venue to bring people together, and whenever people are together, that means that we are strengthening our communities. It is a hub for our communities, particularly when I look at Calgary-Glenmore.

I can't explain how happy I am to have this opportunity today to support this expansion because it is basically looking, with foresight, at how our communities are going to look in the next 20 years. Expanding this campus and having more senior care facilities offering kosher food and also having daycare facilities on-site, where we are basically bridging the generation gap that we face and bringing people together: it's a beautiful vision, and when I imagine it, it makes me happy. I'm looking forward to seeing this imagination become a reality soon. I'm more than happy to support this bill, and I would like to congratulate the Calgary Jewish Centre for such a great initiative.

Now I would like to close debate. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 16

An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates.

This proposed act marks another step our government is taking to protect the pocketbooks of Albertans and to make life more affordable for all. Last fall we committed to fixing Alberta's broken electricity system, the volatile system we inherited, that exposes consumers to vicious price swings and no longer attracts investors. At that time we promised to cap electricity rates while we do the necessary and long-overdue work to modernize our system. This bill follows through on that promise.

If passed, Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, would protect Albertans from volatile electricity prices by capping prices at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour on the regulated rate option, or the RRO, rate. The RRO rate is the default retail electricity option for most Alberta consumers.

Just to put that rate into perspective, since the start of 2017 the average rate charged by the major providers has been in the range of 4.2 cents to 2.9 cents per kilowatt hour, but prices have spiked more than double the 6.8-cent price cap in recent years. In the past five years we've seen the RRO spike as high as 15.3 cents per kilowatt hour, and it has regularly risen to over 8 cents, 10 cents, and even breaking 12 cents more than once in the years past.

This is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. How can we expect families to afford those sorts of energy prices? How can we ask families to live from month to month afraid that their energy prices will spike suddenly and without warning? How can families plan and budget with this sort of uncertainty? How could any responsible government blithely stand by through months of price spikes like that and not have enough sense or enough compassion to address the problem? Well, this government won't give this dysfunctional electricity system the chance to wreak its havoc on Albertans under our watch.

With this bill Albertans on the RRO would have electricity price protection for a four-year period from June 1 of this year to May 21, 2021. This bill would provide those families and those small businesses with the assurance that they will never have to pay more than 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour for their electric energy. When they open their energy bill, they won't have to worry and fret about what part of the roller-coaster ride they're on. They'll have the certainty of knowing that their electricity rate will not be higher than 6.8 cents. That rate can be lower than the cap, just as it is today, but it will not rise above the cap.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 16 clearly sets the term and level of the price cap. Full details as to how providers will be paid should rates exceed the 6.8-cent price cap will be provided in associated regulations. When we announced our intention to cap electricity rates last November, we said that we would do so over a four-year period, beginning June 1 of this year. Our proposed legislation sets out this term. The cap would be in place, providing Albertans with stable rates while we make the necessary reforms to transition the province's electricity system.

This bill also outlines the operation of the price cap for the different RRO providers. For providers regulated by the Alberta Utilities Commission, the bill simply outlines the four-year term and the requirement that these providers charge their customers

either 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour or their approved RRO rate if it is lower than the 6.8 cents. For those providers not regulated by the Alberta Utilities Commission, specifically rural electrification associations and municipalities, the legislation is more detailed to address the unique nature of these entities. While it outlines the four-year term and the 6.8-cent level of the price cap, it also provides for some flexibility as to how the price cap is applied in the regulations. This is to ensure that government is not removing the independence of some municipalities and the rural electrification associations to set their own rates and to ensure that government will not be responsible for compensating providers for unreasonable rates.

Bill 16 also includes provisions for the city of Medicine Hat, which does not offer a regulated rate option, to be included in the price cap program once the appropriate arrangements are in place. Medicine Hat, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is in a unique situation in managing their own electricity system, and we are committed to working toward appropriate arrangements that maintain their independence. Our government committed to providing this price protection to all eligible Albertans, and with these provisions to include municipalities and REAs, we are doing just that.

Bill 16 would include amendments to two other pieces of legislation, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act and the Climate Leadership Act. The change to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act would give authority to the Market Surveillance Administrator to enforce the provisions of Bill 16. We believe strongly in the important oversight functions of the MSA, and this bill would expand them to enforce its effective implementation. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member. [interjection] Hon. member.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: May I continue, please, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: The change to the Climate Leadership Act would enable funding for this program to come from the carbon levy if the funding is needed. Funding will only be required if the rates exceed the cap. The use of carbon funds is appropriate. It's a natural fit to use the carbon levy to protect consumers from any potential spikes in our current carbon-intensive system while we transition to a new electricity market system, a system that is not only more stable but is focused on using greener, healthier power sources.

3:30

Now, the regulations to define all the details of how this legislation would be implemented still need to be finalized. There are a number of complexities, and it is important to get them right. These regulations will establish the approach to account for any payments should rates exceed the price cap and the appropriate regulatory oversight from Alberta's regulatory authorities. In the case of providers whose rates aren't overseen by the Alberta Utilities Commission such as municipalities and rural electrification associations, the regulations will outline a mechanism that will ensure government does not reimburse providers for unreasonable rates.

Mr. Speaker, this proposed act would provide consumers with more predictable electricity bills as we work to reform Alberta's electricity system. For too long Albertans have been paying the price for a broken electricity system, and we are changing that. Many of us in our caucus have seen families struggle with energy bills and worry about how they'll make ends meet if the price spikes again next month. Some of us have even experienced these hardships ourselves. I remember back to when we ran a cattle operation, and from month to month the bills were quite steep.

Not to act in the face of these real challenges that we've seen in the past years was both senseless and heartless. It leaves one to wonder if previous decision-makers even noticed the problem. Well, we certainly did. In our respective places, in our communities we couldn't help but notice. That's why we're doing the necessary work, the work that was left undone, to get the electricity retail system and the broader generation system right to benefit both consumers and investors.

This proposed act would protect RRO consumers from sudden price spike increases while we do this work. Consumers would not be subjected to the wild price swings that have defined this province's electricity system, rates that have climbed to over 15 cents per kilowatt hour and rates that have increased by as much as 65 per cent in one month. The cap outlined in this act would make life more affordable for Alberta families and small businesses and farms by ensuring Albertans don't have to worry about price volatility as we transition to a cleaner electricity grid and a more stable electricity market.

I urge all members to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, those wishing to speak to Bill 16? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's always important for all of us in this Chamber, whenever we're looking at any new piece of legislation, to ask ourselves: why is this bill necessary? What is the backstory? Why does this government think that this bill needs to be here?

Just to give us a little understanding of how we got to this point where this government thinks this bill is so very necessary, the tangled web this government has woven throughout the electricity file all began with an order in council just weeks after coming to power after the May 2015 election. Without any guidance from experts whatsoever, without any consultation with industry, the newly elected NDP launched their first missile at Alberta's job creators and rashly changed the old carbon tax under the specified gas emitters regulation. It was at \$15. It rose to \$20, then \$30. The percentage of emissions it applied to rose from 12 per cent of emissions, then to 15 per cent of emissions, and now to 20 per cent. Essentially, the tax on our generators rose 70 per cent in just one year. Starting next year, it'll continue at \$30, but it's going to apply to 60 per cent of emissions.

In hindsight, in real dollars that initial increase under SGER brought in revenue for this government that was something less than only a couple hundred million dollars, but, oh, the cost. The government's own estimates recently put the consequential damages of just that first ill-conceived move at something north of \$4 billion.

Mr. Rodney: Sorry. What?

Mr. MacIntyre: Four billion dollars. With a B. Yeah.

If you did a real simple return on investment calculation here, it doesn't wash too well. The result of just that initial move weeks after coming into power was the famous "or more unprofitable" clause, section 4.3(j) in the power purchase agreements. It was triggered, and a mass cancellation of power purchase arrangements flooded the Balancing Pool. Up until this point Albertans didn't even know what a balancing pool was. Today almost everybody understands what it is.

Initially the government claimed they had no idea this clause existed. Initially they even blamed their own officials for not telling them about it. It wasn't in the binder. Then they blamed, collectively, the government's own Balancing Pool, dozens of industry players and consumer groups who had a hand in designing the power purchase arrangements, and even PricewaterhouseCoopers

was blamed. I mean, they're an esteemed company. They were tasked with overseeing the appropriateness of the PPA design.

Mr. Rodney: You're making this up.

Mr. MacIntyre: Nah. This is a true story.

The government claimed this was all a secret deal, and they even raised the spectre of Enron, calling the clause the Enron clause in a vain attempt to convince Albertans they'd been swindled by a bunch of greedy crooks in a secret backroom somewhere.

The truth of the matter is that the only people who didn't know about this so-called secret clause was the new government. They didn't do their homework. To their credit the Alberta press did some research and discovered there were so many people involved in the design of these PPAs, and there were so many e-mails obtained through FOIP proving they knew full well about it. The NDP's attempt at pushing an Enron narrative failed miserably. Undaunted, the government went even further. They filed a lawsuit, a lawsuit to prove they didn't know about the clause 4.3(j), and absurdly asked the court to undo the PPA contracts, now 16 years old.

Mr. Rodney: Now you're making that up.

Mr. MacIntyre: Nah. It's a true story.

That one action – that one action – made by an order in council just weeks after coming into power without doing their homework sent shivers through the investment community. They were already fleeing this province with their capital because of this government's antibusiness attitude, a royalty review that ended up we didn't really need it. The court action named Enmax, wholly owned by Calgarians, TransCanada, and Capital Power, but it went further. Their court action also named the electricity generator ATCO and their own Balancing Pool, which is a public body and its own power regulator. They were all named as defendants in this action. They were suing anybody and everybody.

In effect, the government was suing Albertans and even its own departments because a small group of ill-informed politicians at the top, who did not and in many respects still do not understand the nature of our electricity system or the value of a free-market approach to an economy – they simply did not do their homework, and they did not listen to the warnings that were repeatedly given to them from within the department and within the industry.

Now, I would be remiss if I did not point out that from the moment this government attacked our power industry, these job creators tried and tried desperately to warn this government of the consequences of their ill-conceived moves. Industry stepped up with a variety of proposals in the fall of 2015 to address the issue, even to reduce capacity voluntarily, to reduce emissions without job loss, without asking for subsidy or compensation, but still this government strangely refused to listen. These consequences were even noted in submissions to the climate leadership panel in the fall of 2015, and there were countless meetings between companies and departments. We have documents and e-mails showing interdepartmental communications and more from the chairman of the Balancing Pool warning the ministers and Premier's office about the consequences, but, no, the politicians ignored every warning and rejected every solution presented to them.

Even after realizing their error, the NDP still had six months to undo the rash changes to the specified gas emitters regulation, but in spite – and I say in spite – of the consequences, this government, knowing full well that companies would have the right to terminate their contracts if the NDP didn't undo their decision to force the generators into the margins of more unprofitability, forged on anyway. Ideology once again came before common sense, and it came before Albertans. We've seen this repeatedly throughout their

dealings with our economy and our job creators. Remember Bill 6? Remember the cap on development of our oil sands? Remember Bill 27, which prohibits the MSA from investigating wrongdoing when it comes to renewable developments? Over and over again, Mr. Speaker, ideology trumps common sense in the world of economics, with the NDP world view, anyway.

3:40

Well, the NDP didn't back down on their tax hike to our generators, and, as warned, the generators exercised their right to turn back the PPAs to the Balancing Pool. Enmax, owned by Calgarians, was the first to receive a ruling from the Balancing Pool that indeed the government's actions had triggered section 4.3(j), and Enmax had the right, not privilege but right, under that contract to turn back their PPA. But the government instead started a smear campaign, of course, evoking the name of long-discredited Enron in a pathetic, desperate attempt to divert attention away from the previous disregard for the economic well-being of Albertans.

But the Balancing Pool recognized Enmax's right to terminate, and I should point out to this House and to Albertans that that was the last time the Balancing Pool exercised their independence. That was the last independent act that we can see from them. This government has been meddling ever since. In fact, their meddling in the independence of the Balancing Pool was caught by the pool's own banker, the Toronto-Dominion Bank. They chopped the Balancing Pool's line of credit down from, I believe, \$70 million to just \$4 million, and they cited in their letter that the reason is the fact that the Balancing Pool could no longer, quote, demonstrate independence. They could no longer demonstrate independence, Mr. Speaker, from the political meddling of the Department of Energy.

Even the Auditor General is looking into the meddling by the government in the Balancing Pool's independence and financial decision-making. Specifically, he is assessing whether or not the Department of Energy, through its recent actions, controls the Balancing Pool for financial reporting purposes. Control for financial reporting purposes means the ability to govern the financial and operating policies of another organization with expected benefits or the risk of loss to the government from the other organization's activities. Let's take a look at that last line from the AG: with expected benefits or the risk of loss to the government from the other organization's activities.

We had a bill come before this House called Bill 34. I called it the blank cheque act. It is a bill extending an open-ended line of credit to the Balancing Pool to cover its losses, losses which would never have been incurred had it not been for this government's meddling in PPAs in the first place, hence the AG's statement that they're looking into the meddling of this government into the financial and operating policies of the other organization, the Balancing Pool, with expected benefits or risk of loss to the government from the other organization's activities.

The Balancing Pool was originally mandated to be at arm's length from the government, free from political interference. Its mandate was to operate independently and in the best interests of Albertans and, furthermore, specifically to operate its assets in a commercial manner. It has not been permitted to do that. There is communication from the chair of the Balancing Pool to the minister asking for permission. Should never have had to ask for permission.

There is another document, a letter from the pool to the minister citing that because the minister had delayed responding to the pool, the pool was now subject to a \$29 million penalty, a penalty that they had to pay because of delays in waiting for the minister to make a decision. That is not acting independently, nor is it acting in the best interests of Albertans, nor is it acting in a commercial

manner. Well, the meddling in the financial affairs of the pool was so acute that e-mails obtained through FOIP indicate the pool's officers actually communicating with accountants and lawyers to explore ramifications from the pool declaring bankruptcy. This minister stood in this House and talked about how broken the electricity system was before she showed up on the job. Frankly, that is being extremely economical with the truth. It was not broken until this government started meddling with it. We had reasonable prices for electricity and no utility debt. We're never going to be in that position again under this government.

Then along came Bill 34, essentially writing a blank cheque to the Balancing Pool to prevent it from going bankrupt. A few short months ago, when the blank cheque act, Bill 34, passed, the expected cost was a mere \$600 million, but weeks ago costs skyrocketed to over \$4 billion. Now we have the Balancing Pool being investigated by the MSA for using money from the blank cheque act as an open-ended, taxpayer-funded subsidy to undermine the competitive power market.

It's just one catastrophe after another after another, and this minister runs from crisis to crisis to crisis with Band-Aids. The fact of the matter is that the entire fiasco began by an order in council just weeks after this government came to power, making an order in council to amend SGER without considering the ramifications of it, without listening to industry's concerns, without even listening to their own departmental memos coming to them warning them: don't do that. Well, the fateful decision to change SGER, by the government's own estimates, is going to be \$4.437 billion. Making life more affordable for Albertans, indeed.

The taxpayer and the ratepayer – I have said it many times – are the same person. They really are. The government says: well, we're going to pay for some things out of the carbon tax for some of the problems we're experiencing in the electricity sector. Well, who in the world pays the carbon tax? It's the electricity ratepayers and the taxpayers that pay that, too. They're going to be taking money out of our pockets over here, running it through the government, and saying: "Oh, well, your electricity bill is too high. Here. We'll give you some of your own money back. Don't you feel better about that?" I'll tell you what. I'm not going to feel better about that.

Moving charges to a tax bill instead of to the more politically dangerous monthly electricity bill doesn't help struggling families, doesn't make life more affordable for Albertans at all. This government does not get to play hero for protecting Albertans from the very harm this government inflicts on us. It doesn't work that way. They should be ashamed to support this misguided action.

They've got this bill here, Bill 16, that's going to cap the regulated electricity rate at 6.8 cents as though there is nothing else in the whole wide electricity system to protect consumers. Well, news flash: we've been able to get fixed-rate contracts for years. There have been dozens of energy retailers in this province offering all kinds of deals. You can lock down your electricity price right now. The current 13-month average for fixed-rate contracts is 6.8 cents – 6.8 cents – per kilowatt hour. That is cheaper than the cap on RRO. Retailers within the free market of our electricity market have had offers like that for years, where people could lock down their price of electricity to prevent volatility. If you listen to this government's narrative, it's like: oh, my God, we could be seeing spikes tomorrow.

I wonder why. Why would we be seeing spikes in the first place? Our electricity market is already some 30 per cent oversupplied. When you're in an oversupply situation in a free-market enterprise, prices stay low. If you look at your electricity today and you're on an RRO, you're probably paying something around 3 cents. The reason for that is because we have an oversupply of electricity in a free-market economy right now.

3:50

Those prices will go up as the available electricity supply goes down. The only way those prices will go up is by that reduction in supply, and the only way we're going to see a reduction in supply is for this government to artificially start shutting down generation. This government is purposely forcing shortfall to increase the price of electricity, putting a cap on the RRO so that their actions don't show up on people's monthly electricity bills and they start getting 1.6 million phone calls. That's about how many people are at least eligible to be on the RRO.

But this cap does nothing to protect our job creators. Users of greater than 250,000 kilowatts don't get any protection under this at all. Furthermore, should the price of electricity exceed 6.8 cents, for every cent it is above 6.8, the government is going to have to shell out about \$10 million a month. But where does that come from? It comes from the very people they say that they are trying to protect.

An Hon. Member: No. They borrow it from fairyland.

Mr. MacIntyre: No. They take it out of the carbon tax, they said. In fact, they're having to amend the Climate Leadership Act so that they can do it.

An Hon. Member: Hey, you read it.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yes, I've read it. I shall not tell you where it went.

Really, this bill is an admission. It's an admission that sometime over the next four years because of this government's actions retail electricity prices are going to go up. As I've said, we're sitting at about 3 cents right now on the RRO, and this cap is at 6.8, so we're going to see power prices going up at least to 6.8.

They keep saying: "No, we're not following Ontario. No, no, no, we're not following Ontario." Yet every little footie print in the sand sure looks like an Ontario footie print from this government.

They really need to turn back the clock. They need to turn back the clock on their reckless and expensive transition to renewables. They need to start standing up for Albertans. They claim that they're solving issues with power price volatility, but as I've said, we have had options for a long time to bring stability to our electricity prices.

Furthermore, if you look at your electricity bill, the actual power price, that amount of money we pay for the electricity that we consume, is just a small piece on your electricity bill. There are multiple line items there that are not directly connected to consumption. There is nothing here in this bill for that, and there won't be. In reality, what's the need for this bill? Well, in my opinion . . . [Mr. MacIntyre's speaking time expired] I have an opinion.

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

Mr. Coolahan: Oh, sorry. I want to speak to the main bill.

The Speaker: There is no 29(2)(a) in this situation.

Mr. Coolahan: Oh, well, then I'm up. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. Our government is working to make life better for Albertans, and this does include capping electricity prices. This bill is one part of our plan to ensure a reliable, sustainable, and affordable electricity system. It protects Alberta's families, farms, and small businesses from sudden spikes in electricity prices and sustained high electricity prices. [interjections] This part is key. Listen. It helps the province transition to a more stable and greener electricity system.

Beginning June 1, consumers will be protected through a four-year, 6.8 cent per kilowatt hour regulated rate option, the default electricity contract available to most Alberta households, farms, and small businesses. With this cap, should the market price rise above 6.8 cents, consumers will not see an increase on their bills. This protection gives Alberta households peace of mind that there is no shock on their electricity bill – pardon the pun – and it gives entrepreneurs and small businesses the stability they need to move their businesses forward without having to worry about electricity price spikes.

Let's be clear. Albertans have seen price spikes over the years, Mr. Speaker. In the past six years alone consumers on the regulated rate option, RRO, have paid as much as 15.3 cents per kilowatt hour.

Mr. MacIntyre: They didn't have to.

Mr. Coolahan: They really have. Well, it was long before us.

Should the RRO go above 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, funds from the carbon levy will be used to support this program, and I suggest that it is an appropriate use of the funds given that it supports Albertans as we transition to a more stable and greener electricity system.

Mr. Speaker, many seniors call the amazing communities in Calgary-Klein home, and when I speak with them, explain to them the climate leadership plan and the carbon levy and they see what they've received in rebates and now that there's a cap on the RRO, well, they're extremely happy. They're extremely happy with the certainty about what they will be paying. Of course, in many cases these are people living on fixed incomes.

In addition to protecting Albertans from high electricity prices, the other cornerstone of this bill is helping the province transition to a more stable and greener electricity system. Now, Mr. Speaker, I worked in the utility industry for a decade before being elected, and I can tell you that the system that we inherited as a government was broken. Changes are needed, and the changes are needed for several reasons. They're needed not only to protect consumers and to create investment but also to transition to a greener future. Our current electricity system does not benefit consumers or investors. It is a volatile system that relies on price spikes, which we actually heard the member from the opposition say, and, you know, that's not good news for Albertans.

You know, we need a reliable system with stable, predictable rates, and our move to a capacity market will get us there. Moving to a capacity market has been done in jurisdictions all over North America, and we're slow in getting there. This moving to a capacity market was actually a recommendation by the AESO, the Alberta Electric System Operator, several years ago. Several years ago they said that we should consider moving to that market as a result of the volatility in the generation market. There have been indications for several years that the current generation market was not only volatile in terms of price but that it was not reliable and wasn't serving the needs of Albertans, and it won't work for the future.

In the summer of 2012 there was quite a heat wave, and there was a huge demand for electricity. For various reasons, including unscheduled shutdowns, the system could not keep up, and there were rolling blackouts, and prices spiked. In the wake of this, the then Premier appointed a committee of PC MLAs to implement changes to the retail electricity market to reduce the volatility. Now, clearly, they recognized that something was up, that something was wrong, that something needed to change. I have no idea if a report ever came out of that. I don't know. Perhaps some of the members of the third party who are still here would know that. I'm not sure.

But released or not, I sense that nothing would have been done anyway, Mr. Speaker. Let's face it. You know, the previous government demonstrated that it was in a state of sort of legislative paralysis for many years, so I doubt anything would have happened. And when they do consult with people on what we should do with things as important as the electricity system, it's a very limited audience – very limited – so I doubt that they would have had the wherewithal to actually move forward with anything that might have impacted Albertans positively.

But on the other side of that, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that in this government we make hard decisions like this that positively impact the majority of Albertans and have the prescience and the understanding and courage to implement a move towards a capacity market and greener generation and to decrease emissions and position Alberta for a greener future.

4:00

But this isn't just an Alberta movement, Mr. Speaker. It's the way the world is moving, to both cleaner technology and to capacity generation. By taking action now, we're staying ahead of the curve to ensure that we remain competitive now and in the future.

Mr. MacIntyre: It ain't working.

Mr. Coolahan: This is a very difficult concept for those over there. It's very difficult. Doing this is going to help ensure prosperity for our children and generations to come. This bill is one example of how we do take action, how we are taking action on this file.

Through the climate leadership plan we outlined the blueprint to develop more renewable energy. The unpredictability in electricity rates is one illustration of how the system isn't working. Consumers are paying the price every time they open their monthly electricity bill, not knowing what to expect or what household decisions to make. Mr. Speaker, we've seen the RRO for electricity as high, as I said, as 15.3 cents per kilowatt hour and as low as 2.7 in just the last six years. If that's not volatile, I'm not sure what is. We've heard time and time again how this uncertainty takes a toll on the average Albertan household and the small-business owner, but this unpredictability isn't just impacting the average homeowner in Calgary or Lethbridge or the restaurant owner in Cold Lake or Red Deer. It has a wider economic impact.

What we're doing is we're changing the system so that we will have a system that can attract new investment. This investment is crucial because it's what drives innovation in the entire system. It also transitions the system for the future to support economic growth and an increasing population. This is why last fall we made a commitment to fix Alberta's broken electricity system, starting with a cap on electricity rates, while we do the necessary and long-overdue work to modernize our system.

This bill shows how we're acting on our promise by implementing a price cap of 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour on the RRO. This cap will take effect on June 1 and ensure that Albertans on the RRO have electricity price protection for four years. Funding will only be required if the provider rates exceed the cap and does not reimburse – I'm sorry. Hold on a sec. If it goes well over, we will only reimburse for reasonable rates. This bill also outlines the operation of the price cap for the different RRO providers. With the cap in place we're doing the work necessary to get the electricity retail system and broader generation system right.

One key component of this work is developing more renewable energy, as we know. The renewable energy program will add 5,000 megawatts of new electricity capacity by 2030.

Another key component of developing greener electricity is empowering Albertans to generate their own power. To encourage

more owners and small businesses to generate electricity, our government amended the rules for microgeneration last December. That's going to increase capacity size and allow for more flexibility in the system. We're currently exploring ways to develop small-scale community generation as well, which is really the big next step in renewable energy. Underpinning this transition is the movement to a capacity market, that will attract new investment and provide the foundation needed to increase renewable energy.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will say that I am proud to support this bill and proud to be able to speak on behalf of hard-working Albertans, who deserve affordable electricity rates and deserve an electricity system that works for them and all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Calgary-Klein? Edmonton-Whitemud, under 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, under 29(2)(a). I did really appreciate the Member for Calgary-Klein's exposition of the actual facts behind this bill. I mean, we were exposed to a litany of very biased observations by the previous speaker, and I really appreciated the balanced and thoughtful approach of the Member for Calgary-Klein.

My question actually relates to terminology used in describing the rolling blackouts of 2012. I actually feel sorry for my Calgary colleagues. Edmonton, actually, wasn't affected by those blackouts to any degree, and one of the reasons that we weren't affected by them was that one of the major power suppliers to the Calgary market had unscheduled maintenance. It just happened to be, I think, at midnight on a Sunday or something like that, the unscheduled maintenance.

You know, as I understand it – and I liked the comments from the MLA for Calgary-Klein – in this great system that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake espoused, there was a term called “economic withholding,” which basically meant that a company could do this at exactly the right time to maximize their profits and at exactly the right time to cause discomfiture to the citizens of Alberta. Am I correct in that analysis, MLA?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. My recollection of that time period was this. I believe there was one generator that did go offline like that. It is well known that price-spiking volatility is what makes these companies money, right? I don't necessarily want to get into that. It's a bit of a legal grey area. Certainly, it's been done. That's for sure.

However, my recollection of that blackout was that, I believe, there was one generator that went down like that as a result, but I believe three went down as a result of malfunctions. So, yes, they were unscheduled blackouts, but they were malfunctions. That just goes to show you, as I've been saying, that this system is not supporting Albertans the way that it needs to. We need to have a better system, a more green system, and have better equipment, that isn't subject to these unscheduled shutdowns because, you know, living through a blackout is tough on everybody. It's tough on the economy, as we know.

Yeah. I think moving towards the system that we're going towards, the capacity market, is going to mean that we will always have electricity in the hopper ready to go, and we shouldn't have these blackout issues when it comes to unscheduled maintenance.

Thank you for the question.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments for the Member for Calgary-Klein under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think I can speak with certainty and with truth. If I recall, the wind farms in southern Alberta have been there for quite a long time. In fact, I can also speak with truth that Alberta was the first jurisdiction to put a price on carbon on heavy emitters, before this government. For anybody who's actually tuning in, they know that if they are paying an electricity bill right now, they are also the taxpayer. They're likely paying taxes.

An Hon. Member: Are you sure?

Mr. Fraser: I'm pretty sure.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, let's be honest. The member talked quite a bit about a capacity market. Well, if he goes back in the books, he will see that under Premier Redford and Premier Prentice there was a move to move to that capacity market to, yeah, support more renewable energy, which is – come on – abundant in this province.

4:10

Now, the member also talks about a broken electricity system. Let's remember that those investors who built those coal-fired generation plants took losses many times but still provided reliable electricity to Albertans. Even when you have the green electricity grid, Mr. Speaker, you still have to have a baseload. You still have to have something there, whether it's natural gas, which this government is moving to, and I say that with certainty.

When we're talking about this today, the other part, too – you know what? We in the former government, without a doubt, made mistakes, and without a doubt we look back and we see where we could have done better. Now, my heart goes out to every senior citizen, every single person on a fixed income, a low income that struggled with spike volatilities. But, Mr. Speaker, let's also be honest. The companies that provided this electricity for generations in this province also came up with a plan to help those folks.

This is nothing new. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this is the government saying that they're fixing a problem that is not a problem. There is already something out there provided to consumers to get on that. It is no different with your city taxes. What's next? You know, it is important for our children to drink milk, to have balanced food, so are we going to put a price stop on the cost of milk and some of those necessities?

My problem with this, Mr. Speaker – and I understand the intent. It's a good intent. But, at the end of the day, it's almost like we're telling the companies: charge 6.8 cents. It's almost like insider trading. We've set the market when right now prices are so low and have been so low for a long time.

I understand the intent, but let's be honest. The electricity system – and let's be really clear. For a long time this province has been and I still believe is, even though I disagree with this government on a lot of their economical policies, number one in Canada over and over and over again, generating wealth for Albertans and Canadians over and over again to support social programs right across this country. When that government says that we don't champion Alberta – Mr. Speaker, this government talks like Alberta was in the Stone Age and didn't contribute anything, that the former government didn't contribute anything, which is a falsehood. A lot of the good things that these members grew up under they can attribute to people like Peter Lougheed, Ralph Klein, and former MLAs.

The system wasn't broken. You don't get that kind of investment, you don't get that kind of growth in oil sands, in fact, you don't get the green energy companies wanting to come here if the system is broken. You don't actually become the hub. Long before this government ever came into power, we already were the hub in western Canada for distribution when you look at the Walmarts, when you look at the Home Hardwares, when you look at all those distribution plants, the Canadian Tires. We are the gateway to the west, Mr. Speaker, and those companies don't come here if there is a grid that's not reliable and affordable. You don't have constituencies like mine, that grow twice in size, with young families, progressive families.

These members should be careful when they speak in this House, when they speak to me with disrespect, saying that I don't know anything. Mr. Speaker, I'm the conduit to my constituents. It's their voice that I champion in this House. When I speak right now, it's their voice. It is not my own. My goal, unlike maybe this government, because they are scratching the bottom of the barrel right now trying to get re-elected – it's not my job to get re-elected. It is never my job to step in this House to try to get Rick Fraser re-elected. It is my job to do my job for the constituents in Calgary-South East.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to end with that. The system wasn't broken. We have many things in this province to champion, things that went very well. This province, many of the systems, many of the institutions were not broken. As representatives in this House we should always be looking to try to improve, to take steps forward, to work collaboratively, to not laugh every time a member steps up and speaks in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I will say this. At one point I sat on those benches, I sat in cabinet, and I said to myself, with the same arrogance that I'm getting from this government – and I failed. I failed myself with that arrogance. Now I proudly sit in the third party, representing my constituents with conviction. This government, these MLAs: may they be so fortunate in the next election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-South East?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. I think it's important to call it what it is. A cap suggests that there's a limit. Indeed, the government is putting a limit on what people will pay in the short term, but clearly they're hiding the real price of electricity from consumers when it goes over 6.8 cents.

When it goes over 6.8 cents to produce, somebody's going to have to pay it. So why not be honest with people? Why not send them the true price of electricity so that we will all change behaviour if we need to? We will start to look at more efficient appliances. We will start to look at different ways of using our electricity and, potentially, make the changes they say that we're needing to make instead of hiding it and passing it on through taxes and through, I guess, whatever's left of the carbon levy, although it's been relegated to so many different areas, I'm not sure how that will go.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Frankly, Madam Speaker, it's disingenuous to pretend that we're actually going to protect people. If we really are trying to protect vulnerable people from high electricity prices, help them financially, those who need the help, but don't fail to give Albertans the true cost of our electricity. That, I think, troubles me as much as anything because we're already racking up other debts, but here

we're hiding a debt instead of being honest with people about where we're going with this.

Since 2001 Albertans have been able to choose to receive their electricity either from a retailer that's regulated by the AUC or from a competitive retailer. The regulated rate option was established to provide a default option for consumers who decide not to choose a competitive retail product. To be clear, the regulated rate option does not ensure a single low rate; rather, rates change from month to month depending on the real price of power.

In 2006 the regulated rate regulation was changed to encourage customers to switch to competitive retail products and foster development of the competitive retail market. But retail statistics from the Alberta Market Surveillance Administrator indicated that as of last year about half of residential customers had switched to competitive contracts and half remained on the regulated rate option. That means that despite the availability of the product from competitive retailers, consumers did not choose that option. Fair enough. However, the problem with the current regulated rate option is that it actually leads to higher electricity costs for consumers.

When the electricity market was deregulated, the promise that was made was one of low energy costs and reduced price volatility. However, the deregulated market clearly did not deliver that in all cases. Something definitely needs to be done. In fact, over the many years that I've served here as MLA, one of the most frequent concerns of constituents was the high cost and volatility of energy bills. Clearly, the default option for electricity needs to be affordable and protect consumers, but it also has to send an honest price to people so that they can change their ways.

4:20

I support the government's efforts to create a market for renewables and diversify our electricity generation. However, simply putting a cap on the regulated rate option is not the answer. It could potentially, I believe it will, cause serious problems down the line, as prices inevitably increase with all of our expensive new infrastructure. Consumers should always have a price reference based on the actual costs in order to make efficient and effective consumption and investment choices. If energy costs are deemed to be too high, vulnerable folks can be reimbursed with rebates and subsidies, but we should never mask the true price signal. Otherwise, we could end up moving much closer to Ontario's reality.

A price cap will not reduce the cost of electricity. It merely defers payment to another pocket, to our children, to our grandchildren. It will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the viability of the competitive market. It basically sends the wrong message to real competition and incentives for people to build new stuff and to try and get into the game of producing electricity and getting some income in a business. As I said, it won't change behaviour and it won't change purchasing if we stifle the real price.

Funding the RRO from carbon revenue is the worst possible policy that the NDP government could have picked. The RRO retailers will continue to get what they always got, which is quite high revenue, but rather than reforming the RRO, which is what I suggested in Motion 502, the government took the political way out, hiding the real price from Albertans. The four-year time frame of the regulated rate option cap appears to be more about political expediency than fixing the system. The only change that happens is that the NDP government removes the risk of a price spike during the next election. I think that's disingenuous.

The important question is: what is the NDP's real motivation? It must be contemplating other changes such as turning back the PPAs to the owners, converting the coal plants to gas, which would significantly increase prices in the next four years. It has to because

making these changes will be expensive. Fair enough. But let's start paying it now and not pass it on to our children and our grandchildren and take it out of a new tax. We're going to have to start paying some of these extra expenses.

Specific recommendations that I think I've made before in relation to the regulated rate option. Number one, preserve and enhance the integrity and operation of some competitive retail. Most economists believe that competition rather than regulation has the best chance of achieving economic efficiency. I'm one of those. A competitive market will force down prices and encourage innovation and change behaviour.

Alberta has embarked on a program to restructure the electricity market by setting an objective of 30 per cent of renewable energy by 2030 and implementing a capacity market. I applaud that. A highly competitive retail market will help ensure that the benefits of changes in the wholesale market will be transferred to retail customers.

The second recommendation: preserve the ability of consumers to choose the retail service that best meets their needs. Don't treat Albertans like ignoramuses. It's very unlikely that a single product or service can meet the needs of all consumers, so let people choose what is best for them. It's because of their interests, needs, and preferences that we have new businesses in Alberta who can meet some of the unique needs of every person.

Funding the RRO from the carbon revenue: I've said that already.

Electricity is no different from any other product. For example, some consumers prefer fixed prices and are willing to pay a premium to eliminate volatility, some prefer variable prices to obtain the lowest costs, and some consumers simply don't care and are price takers. That's their choice. Consumer choice is a key feature of Alberta since it was regulated in 2001, albeit not as well as it could have been managed. I've made some suggestions about how the regulated rate option, in particular, could save people \$12 a month if we did a flow-through option instead of the current approach.

It's worth noting that consumers already have the ability to protect themselves from volatility and can choose a retail product that best serves their needs. The implications of the government's strategy is that it eliminates the incentive for consumers to make any decision or to make any changes. That's not really what we want. It makes consumers who don't choose a competitive retail product for whatever reason into free riders. In other words, the regulated rate option people will get subsidized by the carbon tax if the price goes over 6.8 cents. The rest of us will be paying for those on the regulated rate option. Guess what people are going to choose? It unfairly penalizes consumers who have made the effort to educate themselves and try for more efficient, competitive retail options.

The third recommendation: drop the requirement that consumers should know the price of energy in advance of consumption. The RRO is based on the presumption that consumers should know in advance the price of energy before it's consumed. While this is an important principle for virtually all other consumer products, it is not for the purposes of electricity prices. Electricity is an essential good that consumers cannot function without. I know of no consumers who can monitor the RRO price prior to consumption. As a result, consumers tend to be price inelastic and consume electricity regardless of price. Consumers tend to respond more to price trends and price spikes when making decisions about the purchase, management, and consumption of their energy.

The fourth recommendation: the RRO should be renamed the default rate option. The name of the RRO is a misnomer. RRO is

not a regulated price in the traditional sense. Default rate is a more appropriate description and reflects exactly what it is, a rate that applies when consumers decide not to choose a competitive option.

The fifth recommendation: the default rate should be based on the pool price. As I spoke about in Motion 502, the pool price is the actual cost of power and ultimately is the price paid by consumers. All other prices are derivatives of the pool price. Because the pool price is the cost of power, it will tend to be the lowest price over time.

While other prices may be lower from time to time, particularly the forward price, the long-term tendency is for the pool price to be the lowest price because it represents the actual cost of power. The price differential between the pool price and the forward price fluctuates and is based on the time value of money and other factors related to varying perspectives amongst buyers and sellers concerning the future price. The spot power floating rate likely includes adjustments for its consumer load profile and other costs related to the risk of supplying the floating rate, and the RRO rate includes the risk and return premium that increases the cost of power.

There are many reasons supporting the use of the pool price as the default rate, but three reasons stand out. Number one, the pool price will tend to be the lowest cost over time. Number two, the pool price will serve as a benchmark. It will allow consumers to accurately compare the cost of energy products among different retailers. Number three, the pool price is the closest thing we have to a price signal that will guide consumers in terms of making effective energy efficiency decisions and policy-makers in terms of resource allocation in the Alberta energy economy.

The number one issue related to the use of the pool price as the default rate is the fact that it is the most volatile price. As I said, if it's too volatile and vulnerable people need to be supported, then let's support the vulnerable people. Let's not compromise the whole system on the basis that volatility might compromise our most vulnerable.

Government has implemented two structural changes in the electricity market that will have a profound impact on reducing future pool price volatility. This will happen because the transition to renewable energy will likely be financed by capacity payments to cover the fixed cost of generation. As the reliance on capacity payments grows, it will change the composition of the pool price into a weighting of capacity payment plus energy costs. In effect, the pool price will be self-stabilizing and will substantially contribute to the realization of the government's pricing objective.

One possibility that could accelerate the transition to a capacity market is the recent proposal by ATCO and TransAlta to convert coal-fired generating plants to natural gas. If adopted, this proposal would accelerate the phase-out of coal plants, thus achieving our transition to a low-carbon economy sooner than anticipated, but the method of financing this transition is still unknown. Using capacity payments for this has the benefit of providing a way to facilitate project financing that is acceptable to financial lenders. In addition, this will benefit consumers in terms of helping to stabilize the pool price.

The proposal is not without its challenges, however. For example, how will the capacity payment be determined in an environment where a fair competitive price might not be available in this particular instance? The capacity market will take time to develop. In the short term there are, fortunately, several very effective and low-cost ways of mitigating the volatility inherent in a pool price. Two of these methods are price caps and fixed prices.

A final comment on the use of the pool price flow through as the default rate is the significant reduction in regulation burden. The regulatory process surrounding the review and approval of the RRO

is complicated and time consuming. It requires significant commitment by stakeholders, consumers, retailers, and regulators in terms of money and staff. Adoption of the pool price as the default rate will eliminate all of that requirement.

4:30

Madam Speaker, I am once again appealing to this government to reconsider eliminating all price signals to our people. It may not be a perfect system that we have, but let's retain some element of the price signals so that people actually get real, honest feedback on how their use of energy is costing them and costing the environment in that sense. You don't have to eliminate the deregulation completely. You have the best of both worlds right now. By putting a price cap and not taking advantage of a different way of calculating the regulated rate option, I don't think you're getting what you want. I haven't been able to get that through, but I hope the government is listening and will consider those options further.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Great timing, Member. Thank you so much.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This bill is definitely an interesting bill. This is a bill that the government has been promising to bring forward, and we've been awaiting it to see exactly how they were going to implement it.

Now, for me, what I like to do is that I like to go through the bill – and you can see that I've got notes and stuff – and get my thoughts down, and then I like to see what the government has to say about the bill, because, really, what's important is saying: do the government releases match what actually is within the bill?

I'd like to just go through a release that was done on May 23, 2017. The title of it is Taking Action to Protect Electricity Consumers. What I'd like to go off is a quote that our hon. Minister of Energy put in this release. I'd like to actually break down the parts of the quote and give my thoughts on exactly what it is that she said and how, in this case, they may not be achieving what their intentions are. I'm going to read through the entire quote and then break it down by sentence from there.

With this bill, we're following through on the promise we made last fall to protect Albertans from electricity price spikes. Volatility and uncertainty have been hallmarks of our electricity system for years. Electricity is a basic necessity and Albertans shouldn't have to worry about their power bills spiking from one month to the next. This cap would help make life more affordable by ensuring Albertans aren't burdened with price volatility as we transition to a cleaner electricity grid and a more stable electricity market.

All right. The first one. "With this bill, we're following through on the promise we made last fall to protect Albertans from electricity price spikes." Now, what's important – and I'll go to another document that is on the government website. For *Hansard's* sake I will read out the address. It's <https://www.alberta.ca/electricity-price-protection.aspx>. The title of it is Electricity Price Protection.

On that one website there what we've got is a wonderful little graph. For illustration purposes you can see that it's got lots of peaks, but what's important here is that it's got a line going through the graph at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. When we look at this, if you look at from about, I would say, the middle of 2014 all the way back to about 2006, there are significant spikes that go through that 6.8-cent average. And what happens here is that – and we've heard this from the government – as things come forward like a shutdown to maintain a plant, suddenly we have less supply for the market,

and that means that in the end what happens is that the price spikes. What happens here is that we see significant spikes.

Now, at the very bottom here in a little box below the graph we've got:

Historically, regulated electricity rates have been extremely volatile – increasing by as much as 65% ... in a single month ...

It actually says in brackets "April 2011."

... and crashing by as much as 42% ... in a single month.

And it goes with "June 2014."

Now, I would like to move, and then I'll go back to the graph. What I've got is an article by the *Globe and Mail*. It's written by Kelly Cryderman, and the title of the article is TransAlta Reaches Tentative Deal to Settle Power Price-fixing Charges. All right. This is a quote from the article.

In 2014, the province's Market Surveillance Administrator alleged that TransAlta engaged in "anti-competitive conduct" in 2010 and 2011 by taking three coal-fired power plants off line on four cold days, during high-demand hours and in periods when other players in Alberta's competitive power market were the least likely to be able to pick up the slack. This, the administrator said, drove up electricity prices and allowed TransAlta to reap millions in additional profits.

Now, using the example here from the graph again, that that is a typical power spike, I think, is a little misleading, especially when we had an intentional act to make profit. In the end there was, I believe, a \$56 million settlement. They got caught doing it. We had our watchdogs. They did their job. They got the profit out of there. It went back to the consumers. This is terrible stuff, right? But using that one example to justify that these spikes are the norm in Alberta, again, is definitely misleading.

If we look at this graph again and we look at just after 2014, actually closer to the beginning of 2015, we're going to see that the power rates stabilized, didn't actually go beyond the 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. It's not a coincidence because, from what I understand, we had Enmax Calgary bring on a plant, a generating plant, and what happened is that they added more supply to the market. Now, this is what a healthy market looks like. As there is profit-taking, people build plants, and then what happens is that the profits go down, and in the end we end up with lower charges for our electricity.

So to go back to where the Minister of Energy says, "With this bill, we're following through on the promise we made last fall to protect Albertans from electricity price spikes," I question whether there was actually a crisis here because in the end it appears that the market sorted itself out. The market sorted itself out, and we actually haven't seen a price spike over 6.8 cents.

Now, it makes sense that the government will look at this and say: wow, that looks terrible over the last few years. You know what? Giving the ability for more power to get into the market was definitely the goal the government should have been on. They should have been saying: there is the ability to be able to make money at this; let's make this happen. And maybe diversification through dams or other, different ways of going about it would have been a great way of going about it. Again, the market was taking care of itself. This first sentence: it seems like we're correcting something that had already corrected itself.

4:40

"Volatility and uncertainty have been hallmarks of our electricity system for years." Well, again, if you look at this graph – and it doesn't go beyond 2002, so maybe it was more volatile back then – what I'm looking at is only a couple of years here and a few months there that it was actually volatile. Again, when we're looking at the free-market system, what we end up seeing is that the market will

correct itself, and that's what you see here. You see the markets correcting themselves. I'm going to speculate that you are going to be able to say that there were coal plants brought on or gas plants to help fix these spikes in power costs.

Now, what we're looking at here is a government that is saying: we are going to regulate something because we believe that we need to prevent something from happening. Okay. That makes sense. You know what? I don't want to see a vulnerable Albertan be hurt anymore by volatile power prices. I don't think anybody in this Chamber does. Everybody wants to make sure that our seniors and our disabled are able to go through their lives able to pay for their power bills and able to have a life that we would all want them to have. So when we look at this and we look at the government saying, "We are trying to bring uncertainty out of the market" – I don't believe you can ever do that because in the end what we're looking at here is a government that is relying on actual machinery. That machinery breaks down. That machinery needs to be fixed, maintained. So in the end what we need to say is that there's always going to be some volatility there.

Now, we look at the coal plants in this province, and from what I understand, anywhere from 50 to 55 per cent of our power is generated by coal right now. What happens is that as we phase out coal for Alberta, we're going to see more volatility in the system, and the reason that we're going to see that is that – guess what? – when the sun doesn't shine, we don't make power; when the wind doesn't blow, we don't make power. So what ends up happening is that we're going to see spikes, and we're going to see lots of spikes, which is why I believe the NDP are bringing this in. They already know that this is coming. They already know that we're going to see massive spikes that are going to have to be addressed someday. So what do they do? Well, they hide it. They cap it.

You know, I will say that it appears that they have taken on a lot of the Ontario approach, if you will, on how to deal with the power markets. Now what we are seeing is volatility in their markets, seeing price spikes. And guess what? People are angry there. People can't afford their power bills. Energy poverty is a real thing over there – a real thing – and that is something that we were going down the road to, but our fix is to hide it, to hide it by making sure that somebody else pays it, to hide it from the taxpayer. Again, my colleague who's the shadow minister for renewables has repeatedly said that the ratepayer and the taxpayer are the same person – the same person – so if we take away from one, we're putting it on the other.

Now, the third sentence in this is: "Electricity is a basic necessity and Albertans shouldn't have to worry about their power bills spiking from one month to the next." I agree with the fact that electricity is a basic necessity. Cheap power brings prosperity. We all heard today that the first platform that the NDP brought forward in this province was very clear: power brings prosperity, brings business. Yet somehow this government has decided to deviate from that.

Now, when we start looking at this and we start treating this like a pet project, then we end up with the blackouts or the brownouts, that the government was talking about before, because we don't have a stable system. We have nothing to back this system up. So we end up having more brownouts, we have volatility, and we have incredibly high power spikes. And guess what? We end up with extreme profits going to our generators.

An Hon. Member: It's a free market.

Mr. Cyr: Well, that isn't a free market because you're limiting coal.

The government said: well, that's a free market. Well, when you go after something that is actually creating more than 50 per cent of our power right now, how exactly is free market involved in that? There is no such thing as free market when you restrict players from getting into the market at the point – now, we hear all these things about justification and why we need to move in this direction. But we have heard consistently over and over that, actually, this decision has nothing to do with coal. It has to do with an ideology, a radical ideology at that.

Now, to go on with the fourth point here: "This cap [will] help make life more affordable by ensuring Albertans aren't burdened with price volatility . . ."

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. Well, I've enjoyed very much listening to my esteemed hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. He is a bean-counter by trade, just to be clear, and of course graphs are exciting to him. I'm glad that they are. There were some things in his speech here that did catch my attention, and I wanted him, if he wouldn't mind, just to expand a little bit. Please correct me if I'm wrong, hon. member, but is it true that what you saw in that graph was price spikes that led to more generation without a government insisting it happen, that the investment community saw that as something worth while to invest in, and that no government law had to be passed to create that generation? Please correct me there if I got that wrong.

The other thing. It's amazing – is it not? – that these price spikes actually attracted investment, yet this government claims that the current energy-only market was not attracting investment. According to the graph that you have, was there not some investment happening? Could you please expand on that a little bit?

Also, I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on these fixed-price contracts that have already been available to vulnerable Albertans for a long time. I don't know. You have an REA in your area. I'm aware that most REAs also have programs – do they not, hon. member? – protecting vulnerable co-op members from electricity pricing and helping them to pay their electricity bills, again with no law coming from a government forcing them to do so. They just do it out of the goodness of their hearts. Could you expand on that?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to thank my colleague for his really great questions when it comes to reviewing these graphs. I will tell you that when you start looking at this, if we look at the logic that the NDP has used, saying that this system is broken and it's not working and they need to fix it, this graph would be going up, would be going all the way up. It wouldn't be going up and down. It wouldn't be consistent. There wouldn't be a 6.8-cent average, if you will, that they would be able to put on here. What we're looking at here is a system that was correcting itself. It was working very well.

We have a system that always can improve. There's no doubting that. But the industry itself was the partners and the ones that were wanting to make this happen. I don't believe that any Albertan wants pollution. I don't believe any Albertan wants to see anything that's leading to health problems. So you were seeing the industry itself start to move in these directions, bringing safety onto work sites. We're hearing that that is a big thing today, with the labour bill. We're hearing all these different things, but what we aren't hearing is that the system itself was working. We're fixing it.

4:50

Now, when it comes to the fixed prices that the hon. member was bringing up, I believe it is at 6.8 cents where we can get a contract right now. It's ironic that what we're seeing as a market right now is 6.8 cents as a fixed one. That actually brought out the volatility altogether. If you are on a fixed income and you were saying, "You know what? This volatile price environment is something that I need to deal with," it already had the mechanism. Guess what? The industry did that. The industry saw that they could actually bring volatility out and still be able to make profits with it.

Now, myself, I like the variable market. In the end I was willing to take the risk that I would pay less over time because I believed in the market. In the end what happens here is that – in these last two years I've won. Now, I might not have been very good in, say, 2009. There was a spike there. But I believe that when we look at it, that is the consumer's choice, to go on a variable plan or a fixed plan. That's the beauty of the system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, this has been an interesting discussion. It's really, really nice to be speaking on the Energy portfolio again. It's very nice.

Well, the supposed green shoots of the government are starting to turn into a bit more of a tangled web of onerous and deceptive weeds. This unwieldy garden is growing faster and taking over the seeds of a once prosperous and high-functioning energy-only market.

What is a little bit more than concerning is the smoke and mirrors that this capacity-market model falls underneath. What continues to amaze me is the perspective that somehow it's going to protect consumers from price volatility. That truly is misrepresentative of the market and the way that Albertans use electricity, but that would require that the government would understand how the market was working before in order to understand the difficulties that this capacity market is going to bring forward. The fact that the government continues to perpetuate the myth that the capacity market reduces wholesale price volatility, including the spike in prices, which we've heard about over and over again – to his credit, my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake has explained very, very well why those spikes occurred and the mechanism that actually creates them in the first place. As we've said a couple of times, there are mechanisms in the system that actually help to mitigate those spikes.

I feel that when we're speaking about this particular situation, especially when we're talking about the capacity market and the myth that is coming from the government, it's extremely disrespectful of the government to Albertans and to their needs when it comes to electricity and the cost of electricity in this province right now. As has been said by many of my colleagues on this side of the House, electricity is at low prices right now, and the cap that is being put on is artificial and does nothing to protect Albertans. In fact, if anything, it's going to cost Albertans a whole lot more money.

One thing I want to ask this government is: do you really think that you can hide the cost of what you're trying to do with this cap? That's actually the question I want to know. You really, really believe that Albertans are not savvy enough to understand what you're trying to do here. Believe me, it's not a possibility. They know. This bill actually tells all and is exactly the missing piece of the puzzle to all of the other bills that came before: 34, 27, all of those other bills together. This is the descriptor.

This cap in itself is exactly – we knew it was coming, and Albertans knew it was coming. It's extremely disrespectful to Albertans. The reason is because the government is actually going to more than double the costs to the ratepayer/taxpayer. To reiterate what my colleagues have said, they are the same person, the consumer. These people are going to see more than double the costs within the next four years. Maybe somebody can answer for me how that's going to make life better for Albertans. I'd like to know.

Some of our colleagues on the government side were saying that they had spoken to people and that they had heard from people that this cap is good. I would love to understand how it was that that was explained to them given the fact that right now electricity is as low as it is and given the fact that in the next little while we're going to see massive jumps. The worst part is that once this cap is done, Albertans are going to get slammed by the capacity market. That's the most interesting part of all of this, but I'll get to that.

If the government was willing to look historically at the deregulated market – and, again, we've heard this before. The free market actually provides signals, and those signals are to invest or not to invest. That is the question. Those are the signals. We had places like the Shepard facility, to name one. It's one of the largest gas-powered facilities of its kind in Alberta, 800 megawatts. This happened as a result of the industry understanding the signals that are put out by the free market.

Right now this is a market that benefits the consumer. Investors are going to look at the models at any given time and say: this is a time to invest. When prices are low, it completely benefits the consumer. An investor is going to look at those signals and find out what is the best decision for them at that time, and it actually draws in investment, which is contradictory to what is on the government website, saying that "investors like the stability, predictability and familiarity of capacity markets" and that this capacity market is going to have "Albertans have reliable, affordable electricity in the future" and help "facilitate the transition away from coal-fired." Well, actually, investors need to understand how the market is working, Madam Speaker, in order to understand when it is a good time to invest. The Shepard facility is a good example of that because they made one of those investment decisions, and Calgarians benefit from understanding those signals.

We've continually said to this government: stand up for Alberta. We were already on track to phase out coal and bring natural gas online. That would have reduced, actually reduced, emissions by 50 per cent per megawatt hour generated. This was already in the works. The accelerated phase-outs – and I won't go into everything that my colleagues have already spoken about and the events, this domino effect, but it's quite amazing to watch the whole puzzle get put together. Even when we were debating bills 34, 27, and 25, it was disconcerting to see how much damage was being done by government all at one time, and then to see this little piece get put on is the icing on the cake.

Just to be clear, before this government started on its warpath against our energy industry, people – the taxpayer, the ratepayer – had the ability to manage the way that their electricity bills came to them. Again, I know I'm reiterating a few of the things that we've talked about already. Just to give an example, a fixed-rate option, that actually protects the consumer from volatility, was one of those ways. It was a choice that the ratepayer/taxpayer/consumer could make, a decision as to how they would have their electricity delivered to them. This is choice. This is what Albertans want.

5:00

Now, that volatility, the one that the government keeps talking about: guess who that falls on now, Madam Speaker? That falls on the shoulders of the consumer because – guess what? – the providers

no longer bear the risk. They don't bear the risk anymore. In the past they bore the risk, which is why we were able to have the low-cost electricity that we've had in the past.

We have zero utility debt right now. Zero. That is amazing. Do you even understand what that means? That is unique across Canada, zero utility debt. Now the government, Madam Speaker, is creating debt where there was none. I mean, that speaks oodles about what's been going on in all sorts of things.

Again, I just can't understand why the government would feel in any way that they can pull the wool over Albertans' eyes. Albertans are way too intelligent. They're way too savvy. Believe me, since we started down this path with this government, they know way more about the electricity models and the capacity models and deregulation and their bills and everything else than, I'm sure, any of us ever probably thought we would know. I am impressed and absolutely humbled every single time I talk to a person because they know. They know. They know what this cap is, let me tell you. They know a lot more than I know. I am constantly educated and amazed by the people that I have the privilege of meeting. I guarantee you, Madam Speaker, they're not going to fall for it.

You want to hide your intentions. The government wants to hide their intentions from the people who elected them to be here. Does the government intend to take advantage of what the government feels and believes to be a lack of knowledge regarding how people understand their bills? I don't know how else to ask the question because, to me, that's what it feels like.

Well, understand this. When that cap is removed and that capacity market hits with a full swing to the pocketbooks of Albertans, they will be slammed, Madam Speaker. Slammed. We here in the opposition will have made sure that every Albertan that we come in contact with is fully informed and educated, every single one of them, and that they understand that the Balancing Pool is a blank cheque that this government gave to them, that the government under Bill 27 decided to take away the ability for the electricity police to be able to do their job, to actually make sure that Albertans cannot be overcharged for electricity.

These are the kinds of things. We brought amendments forward. We brought all sorts of ideas on how to change that and to strengthen some of that legislation. But, no, now the minister is able to make changes on renewable electricity in those bills, with this one being the cream of the crop, without ever asking a single Albertan how they feel about that or what's going to happen to their bill. Every single Albertan will understand that.

We will not hide behind smoke and mirrors, Madam Speaker. The government keeps saying that the industry is aligned with you. Well, maybe you should explain to Albertans why some of the major industry giants are onside. Because they no longer bear the responsibility of the volatility of the market. In other words, they bear no risk. Alberta families do, along with the burden of the carbon tax, a tax on the energy industry; environmental activists running amok and being paid and defended by this government to lobby against our natural resources; the cap on the oil sands; one thing after another.

Again I bring up Bill 34, a blank cheque, which, I might add, shortly after it was brought forward was used, and dollars were disbursed into the Balancing Pool already. I mean, again, look at the domino effect. The government cannot hide from this. This cap is simply smoke and mirrors until this capacity market comes in, and, whammo, every single Albertan will be impacted. That is the unintended consequence of what happened to this market when we were first elected.

The government, by the very nature of this bill and the other bills, is mandating the end of the competitive and fair pricing that happens in an energy market, straight up. When you put the cap where

there did not need to be one, this tells us, tells every Albertan, in fact, that the prices are going to be crazy high, through the roof. Somebody has to pay the piper, folks, and now that is burdened on every single Albertan. Every single one. Again, I need to have it explained to me as to how this is making life better for Albertans.

Let's talk about volatility for a moment. This is the word that, you know, probably best describes the way that this market is at times, and I understand that. But it's also the government's favourite word to use when describing the industry, and it adds a few more puffs of smoke to bring this illusion full circle. That's what this is. If you're wanting to harm investment, Madam Speaker, this is the way to go about it because volatility – and I'll say this again – provides signals to the industry for them to understand how to invest, when to invest, what to invest.

On top of that, we also have the fact that under Bill 27 the minister now has the purview to be able to bring renewables online, and we will have absolutely no idea how much it's going to cost. None. There is zero accountability. Accountability was taken out. The actual word "accountability" was taken out of the bill. It was amended in Bill 27 in order for the minister to be able to make changes without having to ever – ever – let Albertans know the impact.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an absolute pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. This bill does little more than scare the industry about high costs of electricity coming because of bad NDP policy and showcases that instead of fixing the problem of high electricity prices, this government wants to shove it under the rug, hiding the high cost of electricity in the tax bill of Albertans.

The good news, Madam Speaker, is that this government has an opportunity to correct its path. I know that you will be familiar with an amendment that I like to move from time to time about referring pieces of legislation to committee. I think this afternoon we've heard from my colleagues, who have done a very, very good job of discussing some of the very significant challenges that you'll find inside this particular piece of legislation. I will pass the amendment to the pages. I'll speak broadly until you have a copy and they're distributed, and then I'll be happy to read the amendment into the record.

We've heard from my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View, however brief it was. I know that she's looking forward to being able to speak to this particular amendment. We've heard from my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and others in the House about a lot of the challenges, a lot of the self-inflicted pain that this government is experiencing. Whether it's through the cancellation of the PPAs, whether it's suing Enmax, whether it's shaking investor confidence, the NDP has just done so, so much damage on the electricity file that it's impossible to list it all here today, but I know that it's important that we still talk about that. There are some very specific reasons why this particular piece of legislation should go to committee, and I'll speak about those briefly in just a moment.

5:10

But why don't I start by just reading into the record that I move a motion that second reading of Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be

referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, it is very, very, very critical, not just because referring legislation to committee makes good sense and not just because virtually every other jurisdiction in this fair land of ours refers legislation to committee. I know that you've been paying such close attention and know that this is, I believe, my first referral motion of this session. I know that you've been waiting for this to happen because you'll know that it's an important part of this process. We could send this piece of legislation to committee, have experts come and provide expert testimony and witness and discuss a lot of the things that we've heard here today from our colleague the independent Member for Calgary-Mountain View and leader of the Liberal Party.

We have a wide range of opinions on this particular piece of legislation, and committee would allow not just the opinions of members to be heard but the opinions of experts. I'm certain that the government would roll out some of the folks that they have consulted, and it would provide the opposition and members of the Assembly and, perhaps more importantly than those folks, Albertans with a much clearer picture of the consequences of this legislation.

I'm certain that the government will rise and talk about how the opposition just wants to delay this, but nothing could be further from the truth. We have been waiting for a period of time for this legislation, and I'm certain that if we were to do a thorough review over the summer and come back in the fall – and I'm just speculating on what might happen in the House over the next couple of days with respect to other referral motions, particularly around some labour legislation – my guess is that it would be a really, really good idea for us to send this to committee and then consult more thoroughly instead of the 36 days that the government has offered up as their consultation on a 124-page bill. But I digress for the time being.

This isn't about just delaying this piece of legislation; it's about making sure that we get it right. One of the things that is very, very, very problematic that is included in Bill 16 and a very, very good reason why we ought to be sending it to committee is some of the powers that it changes around the ability of the minister. In section 6(1) it states:

The Minister may make regulations . . .

- (f) adding to, clarifying, limiting or restricting any powers, duties or functions of the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the Minister considers necessary or advisable to enable the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator to exercise powers, duties or functions for the purposes of this Act.

Madam Speaker, we have a situation where Bill 16 is providing the minister additional abilities to change regulation that could restrict any powers or duties or functions of the MSA, the Market Surveillance Administrator. The big challenge with this is that less than two weeks after the MSA launched their investigation into the Balancing Pool, the government with this legislation has the potential to intervene to restrict the MSA's very power and duties and functions in ensuring the electricity market is fair. So we have the MSA currently investigating the Balancing Pool, and then you lay on top of that a piece of legislation that could potentially restrict the MSA's ability to get to the bottom of exactly what was happening at the Balancing Pool.

It's not just the MSA who has expressed some concerns. We heard from my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake about the Auditor General's concerns with respect to what's happening at the Balancing Pool. We have an incredible amount of FOIPed information that clearly lays out political meddling from this government. The optics, if nothing else, for the government on this

should be concerning. One of the great ways to clear that up is to refer this to committee. We can have members of the MSA come. We can have members of the Balancing Pool come. We can have a discussion around what potential risks there are to the MSA's ability to do their job if by the very clause in section 6(1)(f) the minister now has the ability to say, "Uh-uh; the MSA can't do any of these sorts of investigations any longer," or they can limit the scope of the MSA or otherwise.

It is critically important for the government's reputation, for the MSA's ability to provide light and shine light on this particular situation that we do take time and not rush another piece of legislation through this House in the dying days of a session, just like we saw in the last session, with the power bills, just like we saw two sessions ago, with Bill 6. The government is putting together a really concerning track record of rushing legislation through this Assembly.

Now, I wouldn't want to guess what's going to happen with Bill 17, but it seems to me that the government introduced a piece of legislation that's 142 pages long with a mere 36 days of consultation with less than eight days left in the legislative session. It sure appears to me that they're not only going to do that to Bill 16 but also to Bill 17. The only thing that stands between bad legislation getting passed is the opposition, so we have this duty to ensure that good legislation is passed.

Right now there are a ton of things in Bill 16 that present a challenge. Instead of doing a rush job, we ought to send it to committee and take the time to make sure we get this right over the summer, hear from the Balancing Pool, hear from the MSA, hear from the Auditor General, and ensure that the government actually isn't interfering with the process, that we're not seeing a consolidation of power into the minister's office and into the regulations, and that we can move forward in a way that is open and transparent because one thing that this bill doesn't do is provide the same sort of openness and transparency to the consumer. Even my colleague from the Liberal Party – we don't necessarily see eye to eye on all things. We do on this, that the government is trying to hide the true costs of electricity to the consumer.

Committee is a great spot for folks to be able to hear about that, for Albertans to be aware of exactly what's taking place. So I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this amendment and send this bill to committee so that we, too, can get to the bottom of the very important details, particularly the one that I highlighted in this speech but also the ones that have been highlighted by members of the opposition, from all parties in the opposition. Any time that that happens, the government ought to touch the brakes, heed the advice of the opposition, and move forward in a much more cautious manner. Now, I'm not very optimistic that that's going to happen, but I would encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate the member's enthusiasm for committee work. That's great. But this bill has been drafted with input from industry experts, and it's being done in the best interests of Albertans and the actual electricity system. And let's not forget that we will be going to Committee of the Whole with this, so there'll be an opportunity for a lot more fulsome discussion on this bill.

With that said, I'll say that I cannot support this amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank my hon. colleague from the outstanding riding of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for giving us some wise words on the benefit of referring this bill to committee. This government has a bad habit of not doing that, not taking full advantage of the processes within this Legislature that are there, intended to do two things: improve legislation but also to allow everyday Albertans to come and address those pieces of legislation that are going to impact their lives, for Albertans to have a say. I think that it behooves any government in power to take every opportunity to hear directly from Albertans regarding legislation that is before this Assembly. This government, as I said, doesn't have a real good track record in that regard.

There are some organizations, I believe, that would want to come and address this Legislature in a committee setting to talk about this legislation and the impact that it may have on them. It's interesting to note that over time our electricity system, which this government claims is so broken, that this government claims needed help directly from this government in order to make the transition to renewables – it's interesting that if you look at the historical record, the truth comes out. If you go back through the history of our electricity system, you have a number of players that are currently in our market, and I believe that every single one of those players would have something to say about this legislation before us and others as well.

[Mr. Hinkley in the chair]

But I want to just bring to the House's attention who some of these players are. I know that for a lot of people if you were to take a poll right here in this room or even amongst Albertans and ask, "Who are the people in the electricity system; who are the players?" they would probably list off TransAlta, ATCO, Enmax, Capital, EPCOR. They might struggle getting beyond the big five into any of the other players that are out there. Frankly, we have many, many companies involved in our electricity system, and they all have opinions, and they all have a lot of skin in this game. The majority of their investors are everyday Albertans, people with pension funds, people with RRSPs, mutual funds. I believe that every piece of legislation and the policies from this government that we have seen come through this House that have impacted our electricity system – I believe that every single one of those players has an opinion that should be heard, should be heeded, should be taken under advisement in all that is being done by this government to completely overhaul what was an electricity system that was actually working quite well. Was it perfect? No. Did it need to be completely destroyed? No.

I want to just let everyone here know who some of these players are that I think would want to see this bill go to committee and come and talk to us about what they've done. I'm not sure if people are aware that we have a power station in Balzac. It's natural gas, and – guess what? – no government had to force them to build it. The signals that my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake talked about indicated to them that there was an opportunity for them, and they built it. It came online in 2001.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

We have the Bellshill power centre at Galahad. It, too, is natural gas. Came on stream in 2015. Again, no government had to force

them to do this. No government had to force them to do it. I believe they would have something to say about this.

I believe that our rural electricity associations would have a great deal to say about, well, practically every bill regarding electricity that's come through here.

There are pages and pages of natural gas systems coming online. Anyone ever heard of the MacKay River power plant in Fort McMurray? It's natural gas. Came online in 2003. No government had to tell them to do it. They made a business decision to do that. Imagine that.

Then this government is saying: well, you know, we have to do this in order to get renewables to come online. Oh, really? In 1993 Alberta-Pacific Forest created a biomass plant in Athabasca, 131 megawatts of capacity, way back in '93. No NDP government in power at that time. No government had to force them to come online, and there was no debt thrown on the backs of Alberta taxpayers on account of it.

Another biomass plant: 2002, Bear Creek steam turbine in Grande Prairie. TransCanada owns that. They built that. Again, no debt on the backs of taxpayers. I would reckon that they might have something to say to this government, especially in relation to an electricity bill like this.

How about waste heat recovery in Medicine Hat? Waste heat recovery came on stream in 2000 right in Medicine Hat. TransCanada owns that. A great alternative energy plant. Again, no taxpayer debt on there. Imagine that.

An Hon. Member: Waste heat recovery in Joffre.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yes, as my hon. colleague is pointing out, waste heat recovery in Joffre.

Another waste heat recovery in Caroline, the Caroline gas complex, 20 megawatts of capacity. No government had to tell them to do that. They did that because it was a good business model to do that. If you allow the free market to be free, people will innovate. We've had tons of innovation.

Another biomass, 25 megawatts in Grande Prairie.

Another 50 megawatts – oh my goodness – came online in 1985. Hinton. No NDP government in power at that time. Nobody had to tell them to do that, and no debt on the backs of taxpayers.

Another waste heat came online in Swan Hills.

Another biomass in Peace River. Fifty two megawatts at the Peace River pulp mill. My goodness.

To listen to the minister and the members opposite, you would think that there was never a renewables plant that came online until this government, this NDP government, came to power in May 2015, yet nothing could be further from the truth. They claim that it was broken and there's no way they could attract investment for renewables. That is an untrue statement that has come from this government repeatedly. I'm reading you renewable projects, alternative energy projects that came online without the government having to force it, without taxpayers having to bear the burden.

Now this government is running through this Legislature Bill 16, and let's get 'er through. Let's get it done lickety-split. Let's not look at it, and, for goodness' sake, let's not invite Albertans to come talk to us about it.

5:30

The hon. member is claiming: no, I don't think I can support this going to committee. This government has repeatedly indicated their fear of having Albertans talk to them about their legislation. We saw that with Bill 6. We saw it with bills 27, 25, 34. We're seeing it again with Bill 16. It's shameful.

Another biomass project, 48 megawatts, came online in 2011, the Grande Prairie pulp mill. Weyerhaeuser, again, made a business decision because it was sound business economics to do so. If you allow the free market to do its job, it will always correct itself.

We also had some hydro happen. TransAlta has got a number of hydro assets at Barrier, Bearspaw, going all the way back to 1991. In 1972 it was Big Horn. At Brazeau it's 355. Again, no government had to order them to do that. TransAlta did it because it was a great business decision to do so. They approached their shareholders, and the shareholders said: yep; sounds like a good plan; let's do it. No government came. There was no NDP government then. Look at all the hydro in Raymond and Cochrane and Seebe and Kananaskis, page after page. ATCO owns some. TransAlta owns most.

And then wind power. Oh, my goodness. We actually had wind power in this province before this NDP government came along. Can you imagine?

An Hon. Member: No way.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yeah. It's true. It's actually true.

We had 66 megawatts come on at the Ardenville wind farm, owned by TransAlta, down by Fort Macleod. No government had to order them to do that. They did it because it was a good business case. Then they built 66 more megawatts, Blue Trail, down by Fort Macleod again. At Pincher Creek 44 megawatts came online in 2000; at Drumheller more wind power, 77 megawatts; the Castle Rock wind farm, owned by Enel. No government had to order them or tell them or try to coax them to do it. They did it because it was a good, sound business decision. The government didn't have to artificially create an environment that attracted investment. It happened naturally in a free-market enterprise.

But this government doesn't understand basic economics. They think that they have to force things, they have to create a false environment, they have to forcibly shut down perfectly good coal generation to create a shortfall, to make some kind of business case for renewables to come in when we're already over capacity, to build generation we do not actually need right now, to try to protect consumers from some sort of price spike, that they know full well is coming when they short the power system.

Look at all the wind power. We've got 150 megawatts installed in Halkirk. It came online in 2012 from Capital Power. In 2012 it came online. This government claims that the system was broken, that we couldn't get any renewables investment. There are at least 40 renewables projects in my hand that somehow or other these investors thought were a great idea, without the NDP government trying to entice them with a false market that they're creating. No. They did it because it was a sound business decision. And it was all kinds of companies: Enmax, TransAlta, Capital Power, Nextera. These companies all have something to say.

This government needs to put this bill to committee so that everyday Albertans can come and talk to them. Consumer groups are going to have a lot to say about this. Rural electrification associations are going to have a lot to say about this. Alberta's retailers of energy are going to have a lot to say about this. This government has not fairly consulted with the people of this province and the energy providers in this province. They cannot sit there or even stand there with a straight face and say: yeah; we've talked to everybody, and they're all good to go. No.

The purpose of having a committee is so that we can talk to Albertans. They can come and talk to us, and we can hear what they've got to say about this piece of legislation and others. I'm a firm believer in having bills go to committee so that Albertans and business owners in our province can come talk to us. There are other segments of our economy that are going to have words of wisdom,

and this government is not availing themselves of it. It's shameful. I would hope that every member of this Legislature would look forward to hearing from Albertans on every piece of legislation so that we get it right.

Either this is a democracy or it isn't. If we're going to claim to be a democracy, then that means we need to listen to the people. We need to listen to them more than once every four years during an election cycle. They need to have a continual conversation with their representatives in this House, informing us of what they think about particular pieces of legislation, especially legislation like this, that directly impacts their pocketbook, that has the potential of doing harm.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members with questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thanks. Yes, I would like to speak to the referral motion. I really do think that we need to take the time to hear the people who are going to have to pay for the consequences of this. The opportunity to refer it to committee really gives a little bit of time to give some sober second thought and allow people to express their fears and their concerns.

I'd like to focus a little bit on the human side of this, why it's urgent. We've heard all of the technical stuff. We've heard lots of detail. But the reality is that there is a human price to misguided policy on electrical legislation. There's a human price to the overpricing of power. For that reason, I think the people that have to pay for it and live with it need an opportunity to speak, an opportunity to express their fears and their concerns.

I'd like to share a bit of a story of where this misguided power and policy leads to from a current article, actually today, an opportunity just to look at what's actually happening in other jurisdictions as a warning to us about the human cost of all of this. This isn't some imaginary dystopian future. It's what's actually happening, reported today in a paper, of what happens when government introduces policy after policy with harmful and predictable consequences of increasing electricity prices.

The article comes from the *Recorder & Times* in Brockville, Ontario.

Nearly 500 local jobs will be lost within three years after Proctor and Gamble announced Wednesday it will close its Brockville operations [in] 2020.

Employees of the Brockville site were informed at a meeting early Wednesday of the decision.

And they've attributed it to a review of their North American supply network design.

So they are going to relocate to West Virginia, out of Ontario and actually out of Canada, which will impact their business immensely. Mostly what I want to focus on is that it will impact the 480 or so people who actually work in this plant. The transitions are announced. They've been feared for some time. But the result will be the permanent closure of this Brockville plant by 2020, and these people will be out of work.

5:40

I think in order to bring that a little bit closer to home, we need to very carefully relate this to exactly what the federal government has done in closing down their office in Vegreville. The families there have suffered their future loss of income, the fear of the loss of real estate values in that town, the emotional trauma. The anxiety that that has caused in Vegreville is no different than what happens in Brockville when a plant closes down and 480 people, who all represent families, are thrown out of work. That's the human

consequence of what happens with endlessly escalating power increases.

These people, Procter & Gamble, had been doing a study of their North American supply network for several years, and the reality is that the supply of electricity is part of that equation. For them, they just realized that there were much better opportunities elsewhere, so they decided to close down the plant and move.

Jeff LeRoy, a Procter & Gamble company communications spokesperson, said exactly what you would expect him to say. He said that the decision to close production in Brockville was difficult. But the reality is that excessive costs always trump the difficult emotional realities of these kinds of decisions. While it's difficult, they do it anyway, and people are put out of jobs. Their lives are thrown against the rock, so to speak. They have no ability to pay their mortgage. Maybe their real estate prices drop. Their whole lives are seriously impacted. We need to think about the human costs of this, which is why we need to take the time to send this to committee and give it some sober second thought.

Brockville Mayor David Henderson said that the news is a blow that was not entirely unexpected. Why not entirely unexpected? They knew that the price of power was forcing these kinds of reviews. Other companies in Ontario have done exactly the same thing. He said that everybody has been on the edge of their seats for some time, waiting for this whole thing to happen. Then he said that when it actually happens, it's brutal. That's the human pain of driving up electricity costs by bad regulation and by misguided policy. That's the reality of lives that need to be considered.

The news of the pending plant closure was devastating to all of these people, and I think it's something that we really need to take into consideration when we think about a bill like this because the facts are quite simple. We are following essentially in the same direction as Ontario, and Ontario, ahead of us, has actively driven away manufacturers and businesses with overpriced electricity and in the same way has driven away jobs, prosperity, family security, and all that goes with it. The results are heartbreaking for the families that depend on these things for their livelihoods.

Ontario has gone from at one point in time having some of the most affordable electricity in North America to now having some of the most expensive, and there is a true human cost to this. From 2013-15 alone, just a couple of years, industrial electricity rates rose 16 per cent in Ontario. Now here in Alberta we're probably going to see a policy that's going to drive electricity rates to more than double.

The high cost of electricity is unavoidably harmful because – I mean, it's something that can be managed differently. Electricity is not one of those things that you can not use. It's an essential item in our lifestyle. The reality of the cap that we're here debating today and the need to send it to committee is that the businesses that provide jobs for people and a lifestyle and an income, these industries, especially the bigger industries, are not protected from this cap. They are going to get hit with the price of this, and when they re-evaluate the realities of their economic survival in a particular jurisdiction over time, if it becomes unbearable, they do exactly what's been happening in Ontario. They pack up and move somewhere else and leave the people behind with no hope. There is no hope in this when your job walks away from you.

Our heavy industry in Alberta provides the employment that families need to pay their bills. These are our job creators, and this bill is an admission that retail prices will probably more than double in the next four years due to this crazy kind of policy and legislation that we're pushing forward here. So we need to take a step back. We need to take a breath. We need to allow the people to come

before us and share their heartbreaking stories and fears of what's going to happen in their lives.

This is just one, this story that I've shared with you, of many more warning signs to our industry that prices will drive out business, will leave families suffering, will leave families without income, without the ability to provide for their living, and businesses will consider other jurisdictions. The high cost of electricity puts Ontario businesses at a severe disadvantage, and now we're importing exactly the same thing into Alberta with all of these policies.

The reality is that I have to support the motion because I cannot support the bill. The truth is that by pushing this forward without going to committee, this government doesn't have Albertans' backs. You're hiding the real price of power behind their backs. You haven't got their backs. You're hiding it behind their backs. You're not making life better for Albertans; you're going to be making life a whole lot more bitter for Albertans. You're going to be driving them into power poverty. They're going to be losing their life-giving jobs like Ontario's thousands of people with no power supply because they can't afford to pay their bill and they can't afford to live with a permanently spiked power price. When you follow these kinds of policies, what happens is that the power price spikes and it stays spiked. People can't afford to pay for that, so then there are thousands of people in Alberta who have no power at all. Then the government has to come along – well, we won't even go there.

Like Ontario, businesses are going to be going away. Economic diversity is destroyed by high power prices. Economic opportunity is denied. The economy shrinks. Prosperity vanishes. When you double and quadruple the price from the current 3 cents – this is complete doublespeak. You are not protecting people. You are exposing them in extremely serious ways.

We need to send this to committee. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Anybody wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to speak to what my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka was speaking about and specifically to Ontario.

But before I get to that, I just want to also mention that my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was bringing up a whole bunch of different companies that were already investing. If you actually look at TransAlta's history of what they've invested, I mean, they own wind, solar, natural gas, and 27 hydro facilities that have a total capacity of 936 megawatts. That was long before this government ever came into being. Again, it's imperative that that free market is there so that renewables, when they do come online, are economically viable and we can actually afford to pay for them and give people the choice and the opportunity to choose how they want their electricity brought to them.

But of note in Ontario – and this is from the financial accountability office – Ontario will spend \$45 billion to save ratepayers \$24 billion on their electricity bills. This is from their watchdog, which, I might add, on renewables on our side of things has kind of been undercut here. What it says here is that Ontario's budget watchdog says that the Liberal government will spend \$45 billion over the life of its hydro plan, Madam Speaker, to save people \$24 billion on their electricity bills. This report from the financial accountability office says that this means there will be a net cost of \$21 billion to Ontarians over the approximately 30 years of the plan. This is

because of the rebates. Through the debt the cost to the province could balloon up to as much as \$93 billion. Take note. Here we go.

An Hon. Member: It sounds like Bill 34.

5:50

Mrs. Aheer: It does sound an awful lot like Bill 34, doesn't it? There is your Balancing Pool, and there is your blank cheque. It's identical, just to be clear.

The Premier of that province is spending again in the same way that Ontario got into trouble the last time. Maybe we could learn a thing or two from that mistake. The legislation to cut electricity bills by 17 per cent on average on top of the 8 per cent rebate is before the House, and if this passes, this is what they're going to be looking at.

I don't understand. The whole point of referring this to committee is to try and avoid these kinds of boondoggles. If you actually talked to the industry that's been involved up until now, that, I would have to say, has a whole lot more expertise than I do in this House – I would certainly like to be able to hear from them so that as legislation comes forward, we actually can make good legislation, that is not going to hurt the families that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka was speaking about.

Is it the government's intent to erase all competition so that it can control supply and demand? Well, again, it didn't work, did it? No, it didn't. Again, just in case you didn't get this message, the shift of the burden goes to the taxpayer and the ratepayer, from the investor to my shoulders, to our constituents' shoulders, to the taxpayers' shoulders. That's where this goes. I personally am going to spend every single day making sure that Albertans understand this, especially if we don't even have a chance to go to committee and talk about this reasonably in a place where we can actually hash out some of the details. I will personally make sure that everybody I come in contact with knows what they're doing and help them understand how this is going to negatively impact them because – let me tell you, Albertans better get ready for this onslaught. It will be huge once it hits.

The NDP wants a centrally planned system, with no consumer input, obviously, if we're not going to even refer it to committee. We're not asking for the moon here. We're asking for a little bit of time to actually discuss this legitimately, to find out the direction that this needs to go. The government has purposely created this mess. The government and the industry have zero risk. You know why? Because it's not their money. The government keeps forgetting. This is a privilege that you have, spending hard-earned tax dollars. This government is going to be responsible for future generations of debt, destroying industry, and our children and grandchildren will inherit this mess. So send this bill to committee. Here's an opportunity to fix this before it gets off the ground.

The transition from coal-fired has already happened. We already know that. Investors were onboard with that transition. We knew that, too.

But on top of the billions lost on the PPA debacle – the fact that accountability has been removed from the minister's purview as to Bill 27 gave her all the ammunition she needs to build new infrastructure without ever having to speak to Albertans, whether there's a need for it or not. That demands a motion to go to committee. The MSA can no longer take complaints about renewables

unless the minister decides she wants to do that. She can go whichever direction she wants to go. The MSA has also been demoted and can no longer take investigative action against the minister with respect to bringing renewables online. Another reason to go to committee. But the bill goes even further. Now the minister can actually direct the MSA to go against filling its own mandate, which is policing the industry. Yet another reason to go to committee. I think Albertans will be very interested in understanding that the government has zero – zero – accountability to them when it comes to bringing renewables online.

This cap is a deliberate deception, and the consumer takes all of the risk, Madam Speaker. The energy-only model was competitive. The auction goes to the lowest bidder winning, thereby protecting the customer.

The renewables target of 30 per cent: why that number? Again, maybe we should go to committee.

The carbon tax is not a bottomless pit. It comes from our taxpayers. The carbon tax comes from Albertans. Then the government is going to subsidize the generators with our money.

You claim to ride in on a white horse to save us from the evil of price volatility and the evil twin of the deregulated market, but the Balancing Pool has no accountability because of Bill 34, and then the taxpayers are going to pay for that. Twenty billion dollars is actually the price tag for that. You might want to go to committee.

Plus, there's the \$600,000, that Terry Boston wrote the four-page letter about confirming this boondoggle. You might want to go to committee.

Now the government will determine the price, and we will pay for it. That's how the government intends to make life better for Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the referral amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 16 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Minister of Energy to close debate.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: No. I'm good.

The Acting Speaker: Okay.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think we've made some excellent progress here today, with some vigorous debate. Seeing the time, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 25, 2017

Day 39

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 25, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. As we conclude our work here this week, let us take extra time to show appreciation for our families. They stand by us, support us, and make it possible for us to do our jobs. Let us seek opportunities this weekend to rest, rejuvenate, and energize alongside our families and loved ones so that we can return energized and strengthened, able to continue our work on behalf of our communities and of all Albertans.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16

An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates: at a quick look at this you would think, "That's great. It's going to reduce electricity for Albertans. What could go wrong?" Well, unfortunately, a lot could go wrong. We've sat here with this government over the past two years and looked at the multiple bills that they've brought forward, and a lot has gone wrong. We look at the carbon tax and the widespread effects of the carbon tax on the economy in Alberta, on jobs, on business. We look at the accelerated coal phase-out and the cost on communities, on jobs, on the cost of electricity. All of these things have a ripple effect in our economy and our society.

Each time this government brings up these bills, we sit here on this side of the House and warn them of the things that could go wrong, and they shrug their shoulders. Then they bring forward something else. It seems like half the bills that they bring forward now are damage control for the bills that they've already passed, that we warned them were going to be a problem. Nobody likes an I told you so, but what else are we to do when we're representing the people of Alberta and their best interests? Now, the members on the other side, I guess, think that's funny, all these damaging effects of the bills that they've passed, but it's really not that funny.

Now, obviously, when you put a cap on electricity that's twice the current rate, that would indicate that there's some concern that the electricity rates are going to double. Why would you put a cap at double the existing rate if you weren't concerned that it was going to raise to that point or beyond?

Now, obviously, there seem to be some problems understanding, I guess, the difference between a ratepayer and a taxpayer. A ratepayer is somebody that purchases electricity or relies on any

form of electricity in their lives. I would challenge anybody in this House to find me some person in Alberta that doesn't rely on electricity for something in their life. If this cap actually comes into effect, where that actually stops the rate of climb of electricity in Alberta, who's going to pay for that? If that company cannot operate with the electricity rate at 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour, then what options does that company have? There are really only two options. It can shut down its business because, obviously, if we can't make money, it's going to have to do something. Or, of course, the government is going to have to pay for it. Now, the government doesn't have any money that it doesn't take from the taxpayer, so therein lies the problem, the difference between a ratepayer and a taxpayer.

If this cap comes into place and the company cannot keep operating at 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour or less, then the government comes in and uses taxpayer money to fund electricity. Now, I don't understand where there's an actual benefit to Albertans because either way they're paying for it. But what I can see is the government being able to say, "Well, lookit, our electricity rates are only 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour," but that's not the full cost of it when we're using taxpayer money to subsidize it. So, Madam Chair, ratepayer, taxpayer: they're both Albertans. Every Albertan relies on electricity at some point in their life, probably at some point in their day, and I would suggest that almost all Albertans rely on electricity at some point every single day if not every single hour or minute of their lives.

Mr. Coolahan: Not me.

Mr. Loewen: Actually, one of the members opposite in the NDP suggested that they don't, but I presume they must not exist in this building right now that has lights on. I guess they think they're pretty funny over there, but I don't think Albertans are laughing, Madam Chair. [interjections] I don't think Albertans are laughing.

Now, this bill is an admission that the retail rates . . .

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Chair: We have a point of order. Go ahead, hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, you know what? There's a lot of banter going back and forth, which is understandable, but I think that the comment of calling the member a racist is completely out of line. I would say that definitely an apology is in order.

The Chair: Do you wish to respond to this, Acting Deputy Government House Leader?

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Chair, as was brought forward a few days ago, heckles are happening in the Chamber, and I think that that's exactly what's happened.

The Chair: Hon. members, I was focused on the member who had the floor, Grande Prairie-Smoky. I didn't hear those kinds of comments. I'd be concerned if those were the types of things that were being said. There are certainly appropriate heckles, and there are things that are inappropriate to ever be said in this House. So I would encourage all hon. members to please be aware of that and conduct themselves appropriately.

Let's move on. Grande Prairie-Smoky has the floor.

9:10

Debate Continued

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, this bill is an admission that the government expects retail rates to more than double within the next four years, and this is due to reckless NDP policy on this electricity file.

Now, not everybody in Alberta is protected by this cap. Some of our largest job creators in the province aren't covered by this. So if electricity rates balloon past this and these job creators in Alberta are subject to astronomical electricity rates, that makes them less competitive in the global economy, even the Canada-wide economy. If they're not competitive, what are they going to do? Lose money? Move their corporations elsewhere? Not expand in Alberta? Those are the unintended consequences that some of these bills that this government has brought forward cause. What we need to do is that we need to stop these damaging bills, these bills that are hurting our economy. They're hurting our jobs. They're making Alberta less competitive. They are not helpful to Albertans. This government talks about having Albertans' backs, but there's nothing in these bills that has Albertans' backs. This one right here: regardless of what the cost of electricity is, Albertans will be paying for it. Either they'll be paying for it in taxes, or they'll be paying for it in electricity rates. It's very simple.

Now, we have to have at least learned something from the Ontario experience with electricity and what it's done to them. There's another government that's constantly trying to undo the damage that they created themselves. This bill is really all about hiding the true cost of electricity from Albertans. Because Albertans won't see the exact cost on their bill, the government is taking cover with that. Since the full price won't be on the bill and it actually comes from the taxpayers' money unseen – but because it's unseen, it doesn't mean it's not happening. There are other options available to accomplish some of the same things that this government wants to do, but they always seem to take the worst path, and that's not necessary.

Again, I mean, we have an opportunity to see this same thing in action in Ontario, and for some reason we ignore that here in this House. I shouldn't say that we ignore it. On this side of the House we bring it up all the time. Look at Ontario. Look what it cost the people of Ontario. This government, I guess, doesn't hear that or doesn't want to listen to that, but I think we can learn a lot by looking at what others have done and have failed at.

Now, I guess if there's anything they did learn from Ontario, that's how to hide the high cost of this irresponsible transition to renewables. I guess that's one thing they did learn: "Okay. We can hide this. We can hide this by having it subsidized by taxpayer money, unseen on a bill." But I don't think taxpayers are so excited to have what they pay be for something hidden, and I don't think they want to pay for this government's poor policies. I think Albertans are frustrated by the carbon tax. That's shown in every poll that's ever been done on the carbon tax. What's interesting is that the more the government spends advertising the carbon tax, the more Albertans hate it. That's a fact. This doesn't protect Albertans. All it does is show that this government admits that their electricity policies are going to drive up the cost of electricity. That's plain and simple.

Now, when we talk about the regulated rate option, that's offered to residential and small-business customers who consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours per year. There are 1.6 million users eligible for an RRO, but most of our larger, job-creating industries are not eligible for the RRO and will not be protected from this government's costly and misguided overhaul of our electricity system.

Now, we understand that this government has a certain ideology that they want to put into Alberta, this NDP world view that we hear about, but I don't think Albertans want to pay for that world view. The RRO is the rate that customers who have not chosen to enter into a contract with an electricity retail supplier receive automatically, and most consumers continue with this default rate. Again, it's roughly half of what this cap is.

Now, most Albertans have the option of choosing between three rates: the floating rate, the fixed rate, and the regulated retail rate. The floating rate is highly variable, changing with ups and downs of the market, but it is currently the lowest, at 3.14 cents per kilowatt hour.

The fixed rate varies by company. It is generally a three- to five-year, fixed-rate, locked-in price per kilowatt hour that is guaranteed throughout the term of the contract. The fixed rate offers a maximum insulation against price shocks and currently averages 6.08 cents. That's using a 13-month average.

These just show how unnecessary this bill is. There are already options, and in fact all the options are less than the electricity cap that this government wants to put forward. The only reason to have this bill is if this government expects electricity rates to double. That's clear, and I think Albertans are finding that alarming. I find it alarming. This is basically foreshadowing the future that this government sees for Albertans, more than doubled electricity rates.

Now, this is on top of the government's last two budgets, which added over \$10 billion a year to the government's debt. There's no shortage of money being spent by this government. There's no shortage of taxes being collected. We look at the carbon tax that this government implemented, the largest tax increase in Alberta's history. I always get a kick out of listening to the government talk about the levy. It's a tax. In their own government budget it's listed under taxes. When the money is being clawed back from widows, who's clawing it back? Revenue Canada. What's Revenue Canada's job? Taxes. It is interesting to hear this government talk about things like that.

9:20

Again, they seem to think it's funny. The carbon tax is funny to them. I don't think it's funny to the Albertans that have to pay this, the people that looked at their gas bill at the end of January and realized how much it cost, and then to realize that the carbon tax is going up 50 per cent at the beginning of the year, so even more.

Now, we've talked about how unfair the carbon tax is to all Albertans but especially to Albertans who live in northern Alberta, where we travel greater distances for services. We travel greater distances to go to work. It tends to be a little colder, so it costs a little more to heat our buildings. The cost of transportation of goods up there is more. All these different things that the carbon tax has increased the cost of and burdened Albertans with: what do we get for it? We get free light bulbs installed by an Ontario company, and we get bills like this.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. This bill was introduced by this government, who voiced the reason that Alberta ratepayers needed protection from something. This government felt like they needed to step in and protect the good people of Alberta from what they called spiking, volatile, and uncertain electricity prices, that it was necessary for this government to come along and be the saviour, so to speak, of Albertans from what this government claimed could be extraordinarily high electricity prices, and that this government was going to cap those retail prices at 6.8 cents as

a means of ensuring that Albertans would never feel the pinch of electricity price spikes.

One of the things that the government pointed out was that prices for electricity under the RRO had spiked to as high as 15 cents, and as my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake pointed out yesterday, that was actually an illegal activity that was done by TransAlta, for which they got themselves in a good deal of trouble and got a \$56 million fine. The Market Surveillance Administrator caught them red-handed and did what the MSA does. They're our electricity police, as I like to call them. So to use that as some kind of an example of an extreme price spike that we need protection from is really kind of smoke and mirrors in that the MSA did their job, caught TransAlta at it. They were fined. The problem was solved.

It's interesting to note that this government, that is claiming they need to do this today to protect Albertans from a potential price spike, is the same government that is denying the MSA the liberty to investigate renewable projects under Bill 27 if you recall. I find it kind of laughable that the government is claiming to be the saviour, the great protector of Albertans on the one hand and on the other hand is denying the MSA the right to do their job as the electricity police but only with regard to renewable projects, that somehow we don't need that kind of protection.

When I look at the reasons this government is putting forward for this bill, that it is to protect Albertans from price spikes, the only way anyone would actually believe that is if they didn't realize that there is already protection and has been protection for a long time. As of right now, today, this day, you could sign up with a number of providers for a two-year contract at 5.49 cents, fixed for a whole two years. If you didn't want to stay on a fixed-rate option, some of these providers will allow you to cancel your contract and go back on the RRO if you can do better on the RRO. We have some members right in this House who chose to do things like that, who chose to leave their fixed contract because they felt they could do better on the floating rate. So they did that, and they saved money. I believe that the floating rate right now is somewhere around 3 cents.

The market had provided protection from price spikes all the way along, right from the beginning of our deregulated market. There was that option available to Albertans, and significant numbers of Albertans took advantage of locking in their power prices for long periods of time. I should also say that lots of Albertans also take advantage of locking in their natural gas prices for long periods of time. I say locking in, but I'm not aware of any of these retail contracts that you can't jump out of, giving sometimes one month's, sometimes two months' notice. For some of them it's just a few days' notice, and you can leave your fixed rate and go to a floating rate.

The point is that Albertans have had choice, and when you have a free market like that, with many, many choices, it is in that that there is protection. We are protected from all kinds of inordinately high prices by choices, competitive choices that we can look for as consumers in buying just about everything. In buying a cup of coffee, we don't need the government to protect us from price spikes in the world of coffee. We can choose to pay \$7 to a certain trendy little place, or we could make it ourselves for pennies, and there's everything in the middle there that we can pick from. That's where consumers have the greatest protection, in the choice given to us, offered to us in a free-market economy.

I understand, you know, that for people with a really strong socialist bent a free-market economy is scary. I don't understand why, because if you look at places around the world where socialism has gone to the nth degree, their economies break down. Take a look at Venezuela today. It's all falling down. I'm sure that

that government thought at the time that they were doing a lot of things to protect their people.

In many regards the best protection consumers can ever have is a competitive market, where companies have to compete for our business and I am free to make a choice between company A or B or C based on what I think is best for me. It's my money. I'm the best decider as to how to spend it.

Now, when you look at the backstory behind this bill – and I did mention some things about this last night – some of the history as to how we got to this place legislatively has been one disastrous decision after another made by this government, to the point now where this government obviously has done some calculating and this government is absolutely certain that prices are going to go up. Otherwise, there would be no need whatsoever to cap the RRO. There would be no need. But, obviously, prices are going to go up so much because of this government's mismanagement of the electricity file that this government is terrified of seeing their mismanagement printed out on electricity bills that will be in the hands of every Albertan every month, reminding them month after month after month of the calamity this government has caused in what was actually a very stable electricity market. But somehow this government figures people need protecting from that, from spikes.

9:30

But let's be really clear as to who is the culprit causing these spikes. It is this NDP government and this government's mismanagement of this file beginning in July of 2015, just days after they came to power. They decided they had a hate on for coal and they were going to attack our coal industry, and that has not abated one bit. So here we are today, one misstep after another after another, and now the government is so terrified of having their mismanagement shown on an electricity bill. They want to protect Albertans? No. They are out to protect themselves. This cap on the RRO is nothing more than a cap on the public relations disaster that would occur if Albertans actually saw the real cost of this government's mismanagement on the electricity file.

This government is also terrified of seeing anything of the like that Ontarians are going through right now, where they are suffering from severe energy poverty over there and it's only growing day by day. As we heard last night, the Ontario government is going to spend \$48 billion to save \$24 billion. I have hon. members over here that are businessmen. How's that for an ROI? Buy high, sell low: how does that work? It's just phenomenal mismanagement on a horrific scale. This government has tried repeatedly to distance themselves from their friends in Ontario. That debacle, nevertheless, step after step after step, is definitely following in their footsteps, forcibly retiring coal plants that still had lots of life left in them, that had been deploying all kinds of antipollution devices and cleanup within their systems, making them the best they possibly can, and then punishing them for it.

It's just one thing after another, forcibly taking offline all of that generation to force up prices to make it more attractive for renewables to come here and invest, so they claim. Yet last night before this House I went through some of the many renewable and alternative energy generators that have done things in this province without having to throw utility debt on the back of our taxpayers, without having to cap an RRO, without having the government come in like some pretend white knight to save the day. They made sound business discussions and installed things like biomass, like wind generation, hydro, and so on. We've had businesses in this province do exploratory work on run of the river.

There's been work done here to explore even using our flowing gas and oil wells that we have and using the heat energy from those

wells to generate electricity. It's being done just south of the border. Resource companies have been taking marginal wells that still have some pressure in them – they're marginal, but the fluids coming out are still hot enough – and taking that heat and converting it to electricity, and now that well that was only marginal has become very profitable. They didn't need the government to tell them to do that. It was a sound business decision. They're selling electricity into the grid, improving their cash flow on that well. That kind of work has been looked at here, too, without having a government to tell them that we need to do this. In the business world there are choices in a free market economy, and for us consumers we need choices, too. That is always the very best protection for us.

Now, we have a government that thinks that unless the government does it, it isn't going to get done. That, too, is not actually true. Governments have an incredible ability for getting things wrong. As my hon. colleague has already said, this bill really is an admission that prices are going to be pressured upwards, and this government is terrified of seeing that happen.

Now, we have some issues, of course, because we've got a situation where this government has so meddled in our electricity system that the business environment in this province has now been turned on its head. I remember speaking to some of the executives within the industry in the fall of 2015. They had communicated to me that they'd been speaking with the government, trying to get the government to understand that the industry had some answers for the government's direction towards lessening our carbon footprint. They attempted repeatedly to communicate those plans to the government, and the government continually turned them down.

Those plans that they put forward would have spared us getting to this point today where we are looking at some serious price hikes in the cost of electricity. The industry's plans, if the government had accepted them, I can tell you, would have saved us at least \$4.437 billion because the proposals put forward by those companies would not have resulted in the power purchase arrangements being thrown back into the Balancing Pool. We would have been spared that. In addition, those proposals from industry would have resulted in an immediate reduction in our carbon footprint. Immediate. By I guess it was November of 2015 we would have seen a reduction in emissions from coal-fired generation immediately. But, no, the government turned them down.

That proposal was put forward voluntarily by industry with a solution that would have worked, that would have actually preserved jobs. It wouldn't have cost any jobs. I specifically spoke to those executives about that: are you telling me that the proposal that you put forward to this government to reduce capacity would not have cost any jobs? They guaranteed me that, no, not one job would have been lost. "But what about compensation?" I asked. "How much compensation were you asking for to go forward with this?" "Zero dollars. No compensation costs whatsoever." So I can say with surety in this House that if this government had listened to the experts in the industry in the fall of 2015, it would have spared Albertan taxpayers this looming debt in the pool of \$4.437 billion. That's a significant misstep on the part of this government, and now here we are today.

Now, this government introduced a Bill 34 to also protect them in the same way that this bill is an attempt to protect them, to protect them from the reality of an angry Alberta voter base because under the problems this government had created in the Balancing Pool, the Balancing Pool was facing insolvency. We received through FOIP the actual communications of executives in the pool wanting to meet with lawyers and accountants to discuss insolvency. This government broke the electricity system. It was not broken until they started meddling with it. That narrative that they've been

trying to push, that this Bill 16 is part and parcel of a great big plan they have to fix a broken electricity system, is actually not true. I wish we could use the L-word in here because that's exactly what they have been doing to Albertans on this narrative.

There is no way our electricity system was broken. Did it need tweaking? Absolutely it did. But the manner in which this government has gone about doing it is entirely wrong. They have been hurting our electricity system from the get-go. They are not protecting Albertans with this bill, nor were they protecting Albertans with Bill 34. The reason for Bill 34 was simply because the Balancing Pool was going broke because of this government's inaction and some policies that they had in place. The pool needed money. The government wasn't going to allow the pool to put their losses on our electric bill under the consumer allocation line item.

9:40

As a result of this Minister of Energy's constant delay in communicating with the chair of the Balancing Pool, the Balancing Pool suffered a \$29 million penalty, that they had to pay out while they waited and waited and waited for the minister to make up her mind about the consumer allocation. What's interesting is that the initial request from the pool to the minister regarding the consumer allocation was 10 bucks. Ten bucks. That's all they were asking for, a consumer allocation of \$10, but this government was so terrified of seeing any – any – increase whatsoever in people's electricity bill that the minister delayed responding and delayed responding.

Another letter went from the pool to the minister saying, well, more or less – I'm paraphrasing – I'm still waiting for your answer, but oh, by the way, we'll need a little more now in the consumer allocation, \$13. I think we even have one letter later on: still waiting. The consumer allocation went up to 16 bucks. Over and over again the pool was trying to do the pool's job, and they'd been doing a very, very excellent job as an independent, arm's-length agency in looking after Albertans and our electricity system until this government started meddling in that independence.

At one point the pool simply was at a point where: we're going broke; we'd better do something about it. They let the government know. Their banker knew. Everyone knew. This government was so terrified ...

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a few comments here. You know, this bill was put forward because we genuinely are concerned about Alberta citizens and their families and Alberta businesses, about price spikes in the electricity market. The other part of this bill is to transition into a more reliable, greener electricity system.

Mr. MacIntyre: It was already reliable.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, let's talk about if it was reliable or not and if price spikes were going to happen. What we are seeing: it was particularly acute and a bad system from about 2010 to 2014. Lots of headlines. I guess the opposition didn't read the newspaper back then. Let's just read some of the headlines. November 2010: Frigid Weather Sees Power Price Spike. July 2011: August Brings 30% Spike in Local Power Bills. December 2011: Anger over Electricity Prices Puts Producers on Edge. We are being genuine in our move to protect Albertans. Unfortunately, I believe, the opposition is being genuine in their defence of a system that they created, that isn't working for anybody.

Ms McPherson: The status quo.

Mr. Coolahan: The status quo. I talked about the legislative paralysis yesterday as well.

Here's another interesting tidbit from 2012, in which a steel producer outside of Edmonton says that every single day on their board – they have a board on their shop floor – that's the first thing they look at: what is the price of electricity? They pay by the hour, and if it gets too high, they just shut operations down. Is that the type of system we want? Absolutely not. We want protection for these businesses to keep people working and to keep production going. I'm not sure why they are defending this system at all.

Let's look at a couple more headlines before I sit down because I think we need to understand this. July 2012: now in a free market system, where private companies assume all risk, there's no incentive to build anything that isn't practically profitable; that makes the system less elastic and could lead us into occasional darkness. Now, we talked about the rolling blackouts in 2012 yesterday. April 2014: Albertans Warned of Power "Price Spike."

You know, this system is all based on volatility. That's how these companies make money. I'm not sure why the opposition continues to defend this practice and to defend this system. We are trying to make it better. We're trying to make it better for Albertans with this bill. We're trying to make it better for consumers. We're trying to make it better for businesses. We're trying to make it better for farms. Over there they just continue to defend an outdated system, and they continue to defend the decisions that they made back then. I think it's a shame that they don't allow Alberta to move forward. I mean, for many years they haven't allowed Alberta to move forward. I'm very proud that this government actually takes a stance and does the right thing for Albertans.

I'd like to hear more from the opposition, so I'm going to sit down for now, Madam Chair, but I look forward to it.

The Chair: Hon. member, just a reminder. You had a number of quotes. You will be tabling those documents later, please.

Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it very much. Again, as always, I'm honoured to stand and speak to any bill that's in the House, especially when it comes to defending a sector that creates prosperity for all of us in this province and across Canada. Any time you look at putting caps on things, you have to remember that you could be capping prosperity. We saw that with Bill 25, with the cap on the oil sands. We brought a lot of things forward about those caps and about how that was going to impact the economy of Canada and the province. With respect to this cap, what's happening here is that it's a phony mechanism to use smoke and mirrors, to in some ways mislead Albertans into thinking that they're actually going to be saving money based on this cap on residential electricity. The truth is that right now we are at low prices.

The way that the electricity market works right now works and benefits the people of this province, including all of the industries that are in this province. We're just talking about residential specifically, but it's interesting because when you look at the dollar figure and how it works and the way that the pool works and the competitive market, that's actually what works for people, that market, if you let the market decide. When we're talking about renewables specifically, renewables are something that Alberta has been great at for a long time, as we described yesterday, Madam Chair. I mean, we have a tremendous amount of renewables already online. Bringing those online isn't the issue; it's about how it gets brought online.

A couple of the things. There was actually a really interesting article that I read. I won't quote from it because I don't have it front me, but there are two really fantastic environmental women that are

working out in Ontario, and they were actually speaking about how to bring environmental pieces online.

Mr. Coolahan: Friends of Science?

Mrs. Aheer: No, no. They work with environmental sciences at the university. One of them actually has a doctorate, so she's actually sort of more towards the side about bringing renewables online.

The way that they talk about it is about how you engage the public to get the buy-in from the public. So you're looking at the environmental piece, but you're also looking at the economic piece and making sure that it's actually economically viable when you bring it online, whether that is upkeep of the particular infrastructure that's coming in, building new infrastructure, the costs of that really being transparent. There are a lot of issues when you're building new infrastructure with property rights and dealing with disturbance and all of those kinds of things, so there are a lot of discussions that need to happen with stakeholders, which is why we wanted to have this brought to committee, so that we could bring in a lot more people to have the discussion to find out what would be the appropriate way to move forward.

The concern here with Bill 27 is that it gave the minister the right to bring renewables online without actually letting the public know how that was going to work and how it's actually going to impact their pocketbook and the bill at the end of the day. So it's not even about whether or not to bring on renewables; it's how you do it – right? – when you bring them online. If they're economically viable, you're going to have buy-in from the public because they're going to understand. They're brought into the discussion, Madam Chair. They understand what's going on, and most people are going to want – if they have the choice to make that choice, they're going to make choices based on what's best for them and their families, the environment, all of the things that are important to people. But if it is rammed down their throat and into their taxes – like, right now, that 6.8 cap, the thing that I keep trying to say is that after four years, when the capacity market actually hits full swing, that's when we're going to see massive changes to people's bills. What are you going to do then? I mean, everybody in here keeps saying: well, we're not like Ontario. Well, I'm sorry. That's how they ended up like this, because of the situations of smoke and mirrors and not explaining how those dollars were coming forward.

9:50

Right now, like, the government keeps saying that the system is broken. Well, there are things that certainly could have been fixed, but to take a system like this that has no debt attached to it right now – we have no utility debt, Madam Chair, none. To take a system that has come to this mechanism and cap it in a way where with 6.8 cents, the minute that we go 1 cent over that, it's \$10 million. Where is that coming from? Who's paying that? What about the money that goes to the Balancing Pool? Who's paying for that? What about the \$600,000 that was spent by this government on the Boston report that basically explained how this was – where is that coming from?

I mean, let me bring this up, too. We have a 30 per cent target – right? – that requires the government to build in order to reach the targets. Well, does the government realize that that requires 100 per cent backup for wind and solar? One hundred per cent. That's a double build on absolutely everything in case the wind doesn't blow or the sun doesn't shine, one hundred per cent backup because, obviously, these pieces of infrastructure and these types of energy are not reliable.

So you look at that, and you're going to increase costs to bring on this infrastructure that, I think, given the market – and if the

market was working and if the market flows and that is the right infrastructure to come online, the market will allow for that to happen. If they came online and are not subsidized, which they are everywhere else in the world, they come online and they have economic viability and the province buys into it and has the choice to have that infrastructure, well, then, you're not going to increase costs to people. But as it stands right now, by building that infrastructure plus having to double-build to make sure that you have 100 per cent backup because you have to have a baseload all the time – in order to have the lights go on, you have to have a baseload. That double build actually makes it that – why would you cap residential rates, then? It doesn't make any sense. The reason you have to cap it is because of the double build, because you have to be able to pay for it.

Madam Chair, that's the smoke and mirrors. That is absolutely the vision that is going on here. Behind the smoke and mirrors the capacity model has to be there in order to cover up all of the things that have to be done to build the infrastructure to get us to be able to have this stuff come online more than it already does. I mean, of course, the government has to realize that we already have wind online; we already have solar online. We have these things. I mean, there are a gazillion examples that the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake gave yesterday and today.

Mr. MacIntyre: It was a gazillion?

Mrs. Aheer: Well, I'm exaggerating, but you know what I mean. Maybe not a gazillion but at least 80. We know there are 80, my point being: imagine, they did that all on their own without subsidy, without any input from the government. Imagine that.

If you're actually wanting to incite and bring people online, let's open up the market to allow for that to happen so that the market determines how that goes forward. We all have to be able to turn on our lights. We all have to be able to heat our houses. I mean, if we're looking at any of the other situations like vulnerable people, if we're talking about seniors' homes or any of the group homes like Wood's Homes or any of those, they're actually being negatively impacted by this carbon tax. Well, how is this going to impact groups like that, especially once that cap is done in four years and the capacity market hits full on?

Have we thought about that? Have we looked ahead to what that's actually going to cost these groups? Have we looked ahead to understand how that's going to impact young families who are buying houses, who are trying to come on and buy? I mean, they might not necessarily be buying new infrastructure. A lot of new families that are buying new homes are buying old homes. They're getting into homes. You know, they're getting mortgages for the first time. Like, we have to think about those things. By the time my son, for example, is old enough to purchase a house – well, he could probably purchase a house now. When he's able to actually settle down and buy a house, four years from now – guess what? – he's going to be getting hit with that capacity market full on, full stop. What is he going to do? He's 20 now, so when he's 24. My other son: same thing.

Do you know what I find really interesting, too? It's kind of off topic, but it's interesting. My younger son, who's 18, who lives at home with me, who does not drive a car and does not pay for electricity, got a carbon tax cheque. Yeah. I find it interesting that my son, who lives at home, who lives with me, does not own a car, does not pay for gas, does not pay for electricity, does not in any way get impacted right now by any payments into that, got a carbon tax cheque. It's interesting because the government keeps saying: oh, we're going to help people. Well, no, you're not. Those dollars, when my son lives in my house, certainly could have gone to

somebody who needed it. I can guarantee you that. He doesn't need it. Anyway, he donated it to a charity of his choice.

The point is that \$100 and the amount of money that actually went into creating that cheque and carving that cheque and the bureaucracy that was – we all know that that's not just \$100. There's an entire piece of bureaucracy that was attached to creating that cheque to go out to my son. We know that it's worth well over \$100 by the time it leaves my pocket, goes to the government, and comes back to my son. Let's just be clear there.

The other thing, too, is that the carbon tax cheque, for example – and we were talking about this yesterday. The carbon tax is what the government keeps saying that they're going to use in order to make sure that this capacity model and the cap works. Well, again, guess what? Those are taxpayer dollars. Holy double-dipping. You have the carbon tax, which you're ding people for, and then you're going to cap electricity, whereby all of the other pieces of infrastructure coming along are going to come through their property taxes and their personal taxes on top of that. And then by the time four years goes by, you're going to hit them with a capacity market. Wow. Thank you. I'm sure Albertans are thanking you. I'm sure that when you go out and speak to the people in your constituencies, they're going to be thanking you for this. Like I said yesterday, I'll make sure that every single person I come in contact with has the facts. Every single person.

Honestly, like, Albertans are savvy. If I'm wrong, they'll tell me that I'm wrong. There are a lot of people who are way more intelligent on this file than I am – that's for sure – and most of them are the people that I just get to talk to every day. People know their bills. By the way, people are going to be looking at their bills. The minute that they see a movement, a shift, or anything, believe me, you're going to know about it. I already hear about those things, just in case you haven't. It sounds to me like the government is getting lots of pats on the back for their choices. Well, I have a feeling that's going to change very soon.

The other thing is that the backup energy that I was speaking about with regard to this infrastructure is wasteful. I mean, first of all, it shows no significant changes in GHGs, and it has to run a baseload in order to make sure that renewables can work. How does that work? I don't understand how in any way that's more efficient, how you're going to save money. You're double-building infrastructure absolutely everywhere. Oh, and on top of that, solar and wind is not necessarily near the infrastructure it needs to be in order to get it to people's homes. Isn't that interesting how that works? There's an entire chunk of infrastructure in there that's going to need to be built in order to get that to people's homes.

The market has to decide what the best mix of renewables and nonrenewables are, otherwise the government is subsidizing, and they're subsidizing unreliable renewables. You have to manipulate the ratepayer in order to be able to do that. I just don't understand how that's sound policy.

Again, I think what's really disconcerting for me, having had the privilege of having the energy portfolio when I was first elected – I mean, I came into that portfolio with, you know, a teeny-weeny bit of knowledge, a bit of savvy and understanding. My dad was a chemical engineer, so I had a little bit of understanding. The energy industry just opened its arms just wonderfully, just took me in and educated me on all sorts of things. I still feel like I only have, like, a 30,000-foot view. It's a very humble view. But it's about listening to people – right? – and understanding that in this province we have the best of the best when it comes to this industry. The best of the best. That's everything from electricity markets to geologists and everybody in between.

These people love this province desperately, and they also know what it means to create prosperity. When you have people that

create prosperity, that know that it's not just for them but that it's for the entire country, you're dealing with a completely different group of people. Their reach is so much more beyond just their company or what they're doing. They know that they're job creators. They know that their families will be successful because their neighbour is successful. They know how that works. That's a fabric of the communities. For those of us who live in, you know, communities that surround the cities and stuff, we know what that's like. It wouldn't matter what your political stripe is. It wouldn't matter if you're a competitor. It doesn't matter. People come together. It's beautiful, actually.

10:00

Really, again, it's so frustrating when you see divisive politics come in that actually look at an industry that – sure, it needed help. There are lots of things that I don't disagree with, but the manner in which you bring those policies online is a testament to who's governing and how you do that. I have to tell you that the message is not resonating right now, especially with this. This is particularly nasty because it manipulates the taxpayer, ratepayer, consumer. However you want to look, they're all the same person. It manipulates them because you make them think that you're actually saving them money.

But after the light bulb fiasco, the carbon tax ads, the PPA fiasco, Bill 6, and a whole bunch of other things, I can tell you that the trust is not there. They're going to be asking you questions, and I really hope that you can answer them because, for me, my answer is going to be what I'm saying to you right now, clear as day, transparent. You know how I feel. That's how my message will transfer out to the public. Like I said, if I am proven wrong, I'll happily stand here and admit that. But right now the way that I look at it and my understanding of this model: not impressed.

I honestly believe – like, the other bills that came through, 34, 27, and 25 before Christmas: I mean, we brought amendments and processes, we talked about renewables, we talked about companies, we talked about what they do. What I'd love to see is that the government actually stand up and say how proud they are of these companies and the groups and the people and the Albertans that they represent.

Do you understand that the taxpayer dollars that are coming in are not your money? They're not yours. I was at one of the CRCAG meetings. That's the residents of Elbow Park that are on the flood mitigation teams, and I went to that meeting downtown. As you know, there are a lot of sides to the flood mitigation piece, but what was interesting to me wasn't so much the discussion around flood mitigation, which was also very interesting. I learned a lot from that. It was that when the minister stood up to speak about the dollars that would be coming in for the dam itself, for the Springbank dam, the language that was used was that the Minister of Finance was there and that he was going to bankroll that project. That was the exact language used: bankroll that project.

Do you know what that means to Albertans? That means that you think that that's your money. Oh, my goodness. That language is so inappropriate. I can't even believe it. I couldn't believe it. I was standing there listening to that, that the minister is going to bankroll that. No, he's not. Taxpayers are paying for that, and you have the privilege to disburse those funds. Absolutely appalling. I couldn't believe it, and I was standing there going: well, that's the mentality – that's the mentality – of a government that doesn't understand the privilege of the dollars that they receive. You're getting money through a carbon tax. You're getting money through taxation. The job of government is to collect that and then bring projects forward, not to take advantage of the people that pay our wages to be here.

Taking advantage of the people who put you here is what that cap does, and the minute that that capacity model comes forward: bam. My goodness. Like, have a look at your own policies, please, and look at the dollar figures and understand that this is not whether to not bring renewables online or not. That's not what this discussion is about. This is about how you do it. This is about policy. This is about the dollars that you're spending and actually allowing the market to decide. I do not understand what's so scary about that concept. Electricity is inelastic. We all need it, so you can either choose to do what's best for Albertans, or you can use an ideology to push an agenda forward and not even think for one minute about what the consequences are.

As the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has laid out time and time and time again, this domino effect, the impact that the policies of this government have had on our energy sector, is far, far, far reaching. You know, last night a lot of you were at the meeting at the Matrix with a lot of our energy producers here, and they did a beautiful video of young children talking about what their priorities are. A lot of them spoke about environment. They spoke about petrochemicals. They spoke about prosperity. I mean, these young kids are brilliant, right? If you want to learn something, it's out of the mouths of babes, right? They're just superintelligent kids.

One thing I realized being there and what they showed in their video is that \$225 billion of investment is going to the United States and only \$1 billion here. Holy moly. Like, something is wrong. We've got the best of the best in this province, and they are looking for business elsewhere, not because they want to. That group of people that was there last night – those of you who were there know this – are Alberta-based companies. They have a vested interest in this province. They want to work here. They want to produce here. They want to diversify here. That whole group is based on petrochemical diversification. That whole group.

Please, folks, like, let's listen to these people. These are the experts in the field. They're the experts in understanding that if you attack the residents of this province over and over and over again, whether it's a cap on electricity or bills that make their lives more difficult, we're going to not only lose population; we're losing people in the industry. That means that ultimately we don't – we actually are short on labour right now in the field, not because everybody is working but because everybody has left.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just another couple of quick comments. I'm enjoying the diatribe over there on defending high electricity rates for Alberta's families. We've always said that the rate cap is a transitional measure as we move to a capacity market. You know, we're taking time to design that market with affordability for consumers in mind. Other capacity markets are seeing reasonable prices and healthy competition, and we will as well.

Over time prices will of course rise, as they do in any market – and we've never said otherwise, which is why we're bringing in the cap – but we are working to ensure that those prices will be reasonable and stable and predictable for families, small businesses, and farms, who depend on the electricity system. The 6.8 cent cap: I hope the opposition understands this, that if the prices don't rise above that, then the government doesn't have to make the businesses whole.

Mrs. Aheer: Why are you doing it, then?

Mr. Coolahan: It's being done because it's an insurance policy as we transition. That's what it is. It's ensuring that small businesses are protected, that Alberta's families are protected.

The members opposite, again, you know, believe that utility rates were reasonable under the old system. When you hear statements like that, you can't help but wonder if they actually pay their bills in their own households, or perhaps they just lack basic human empathy. I don't know. Try telling that to a single parent who had to pay 11.82 cents per kilowatt hour in April of 2011. Try telling a small-business owner that these rates were reasonable at 12.34 cents or the senior on a fixed income who had to pay 13.32 cents in December of 2011 and 15.06 cents in January of 2012. That's not reasonable, Madam Chair. If the opposition believes that this does sound reasonable and that those are signs of a system that's working well, then they are woefully out of touch.

My last point I'm going to make in response is that, you know, the capacity market works well in other jurisdictions because the generators are paid to generate, and that's what keeps the stability in the market, because we always have reserves of electricity. I'm looking forward to the transition to this market and when we're going to reach 30 per cent renewables on our grid and eventually even more. I think that in the future we're going to be praised for this move and for having the courage to do so.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

10:10

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, it's becoming very obvious why we have this bill, and that is a gross misunderstanding on the part of this government and members opposite of just how our electricity system functions and the beauty of it.

I was privileged to be in a meeting with a number of American counterparts. These were state-level legislators from across the United States, and we were talking about electricity. What was really fascinating is that they all had capacity markets, every one of them. My turn came. They wanted to know what our market looked like, and I said, "Well, we have an energy-only market, and we have no utility debt." They couldn't believe it. They said, "Well, what's the price of power right now?" I looked it up, and it was low.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

They just couldn't understand how you could possibly have an energy-only market with no utility debt and low prices, so I explained briefly what our electricity market looked like, who the players were, the size of population we were serving, and the industries that we had here. Those legislators wanted to know – the discussion then became: "How can we do what you're doing in Alberta? How can we switch our system over to what you've got, where you don't have your taxpayers with any utility debt?" They were very intrigued by that.

Now, this government and members opposite in the backbenches have been pointing to our energy-only market as some kind of an outlier, and the whole rest of North America is in a capacity-market system, and that's better. Well, the legislators I spoke to looked upon our energy-only market with envy. They would love to have something like what we have, where there's no utility debt, there is affordable power, and there are all kinds of choices.

Let's just talk about some choices here. I don't know if the members opposite understand how the RRO works, but it's averaged over 45 to 120 days, depending on the provider you're buying from, based on the wholesale price of power. If you don't want to have the RRO, you are free to choose something to protect yourself from price spikes. This government continues to state, the Member for Calgary-Klein in particular, how we have to have this to protect Albertans from price spikes.

Well, guess what? The market already has that. It's called a fixed rate. Perhaps no one over there has ever bought one, but you can get a fixed rate right now for five years, longer than this bill, by the way, and cheaper. This bill is pegged at 6.8 cents as a cap. Well, for fixed-rate contracts right now you can get 6.29 for five whole years from an Alberta company. You can get another one here – I'm looking at it – for 6.59 cents, again a five-year guaranteed rate. There's no fee, and there's only a 15-day notice required if you want to jump off and go back to the RRO.

Freedom to choose: that is the best protection consumers can ever have, a competitive market where people are competing for my energy dollars. People that want my business are going to have to compete for it. I want choices in the marketplace, and I am quite able to protect myself from price spikes by either choosing a fixed contract or, when it's in my best interests, jumping over to the RRO. I have the freedom to do that. I didn't need this government to come along and protect me from something that didn't actually exist.

What they claim never existed was protection for consumers. Well, that is patently not true. Consumers have had the opportunity to protect themselves all along. Currently they can still protect themselves for longer than the life of this bill, cheaper than the 6.8 cents that this bill is putting forward. The affordability has always been there. It's just patently untrue, what this government is claiming, that we need protection and that this government is going to be our saviour. The reality is that the marketplace provided us the protection that we needed through choice. Through choice. Over and over again we're seeing this government not understanding the marketplace, not understanding basic economics. You can even get better rates if you go to things like three-year fixed-rate contracts, and again you can jump into and out of these contracts if you so choose. Choice is still the best protection for any one of us.

The reason for this bill – I'll repeat it again – is not to protect Albertans from price spikes. It is to protect this government from a bad PR problem. That's what this bill is really about.

I will stop for the moment, but I'll be back.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to go over some history as to why we are where we are today on this. I want to make sure that some of these tidbits are on record. Let's start by saying that Alberta's foray into deregulated power began in April 1998 – I mean, you can find these tidbits, and as you dig through, you can find different things – when Ralph Klein's Progressive Conservative government passed the utilities amendment act. [interjections] Interesting. You won't be cheering here when I get through this.

The act paved the way for an open electricity market on January 1, 2001 – okay? – where power companies could compete for customers and government would step away from setting prices. This is where the problem started. Competition and the introduction of contracts were supposed to keep the prices low. Did it happen? No. The reality wasn't that straightforward, and consumers were in for a wild ride. Boy, were they ever. Before deregulation took effect, power generators were barely keeping up with the demand, right? They were making about 1 per cent more power than what they needed. They said that they needed about a 20 per cent increase in there so that they could maintain the system's stability.

On June 12, 1998, when two major power generators were down for maintenance, utilities were forced to cut power to thousands of people – Edmonton, Calgary – to prevent a province-wide blackout. They just didn't have the power. In October 15,000 Calgary homes

lost electricity, and companies told Edmonton industries to cut consumption when turbines broke down. It led to allegations and an investigation that companies purposely withheld power to inflate prices during high demand. That's all in history. And we don't need Bill 16 to protect consumers, do we? Okay.

Let's get back into this. As the first day of deregulation approached in late 2000, power prices soared. That's a fact. The Klein government had already promised a \$20-a-month rebate to consumers to protect consumers in 2000, and you're talking about what we're doing under Bill 16? Very interesting. Klein also promised – get this – \$300 to every Albertan from the proceeds of the first power auction, which netted the government \$1.1 billion on the backs of all Albertans. That's who paid the price for this. That's who paid the price, not the carbon tax or anything else. But the political blowback was growing over this, right? Surcharges to power bills pushed the government to halt fee hike requests so that they could be evaluated for fairness. Obviously, they knew it was unfair at that time, did they not?

10:20

An Hon. Member: I don't know.

Mr. Rosendahl: Yeah. Obviously.

A month before the market was supposed to operate unhindered, the government suddenly imposed an 8-cent-per-kilowatt-hour cap on the price of power to prevent prices from skyrocketing in 2001. Interesting, isn't it? Twenty-one days later the government changed its plan again, raising the cap to 11 cents per kilowatt hour . . .

Ms Renaud: It's almost like they didn't know what they were doing.

Mr. Rosendahl: Go figure. And we don't need Bill 16, do we? Right?

. . . and doubling the consumer power rebate to \$40 a month. By early 2001 researchers who had studied the deregulation move said that it had already cost Alberta consumers billions of dollars. Billions of dollars it cost Alberta consumers.

Here's another interesting tidbit that's out there, okay? Small towns were particularly hard hit by the new regime. By 2003 village community halls, ice arenas, and curling rinks were facing shutdown over power bills that had tripled or quadrupled. In some cases counties had to step in to keep the recreational facilities open. It's all there. [interjections] You can't deny that. The utilities are the biggest single factor. A Grande Prairie city councillor said at the time: there's no question in my mind that it's killing the small communities little by little, and it's killing the clubs. That is what they said at the time. By then Klein acknowledged that deregulation had not gone well. Go figure.

Here's another interesting tidbit, okay? That same year the government also changed the way the cost of electrical infrastructure was covered, shifting the entire cost of transmission onto consumer bills. One-half of the costs were covered by the generators before. Consumers are still on the hook today for that. We get complaints every day into my office about that very thing and about how unfair that was, how totally unfair. But, then, we don't need Bill 16, do we? Well, I disagree. I was paying this price, and I still am. And that's fair? Well, it isn't.

Three years later power prices rose to among the highest in the country. The Liberals, who had opposed the rapid pace of deregulation more than a decade earlier, said that it was time to admit deregulation had not attracted more competition or better service. Well, that is a fact. And we don't need Bill 16? Really? You know, you hear all the tidbits over there. I mean, these are the facts that are out there. This is why we need it, to protect consumers.

Supply problems caused two more major blackouts in cities, one in 2006, another in 2012. Suspicion persisted that companies purposely cut their supply load to keep prices high. And we don't need to protect consumers? Really? In 2011 TransAlta was fined, which they should have been, after admitting it turned away power from B.C. to artificially inflate prices.

Mr. Taylor: That's called the rule of law.

Mr. Rosendahl: Yeah. Right. The rule of law. They got fined for doing that, didn't they?

Mr. Taylor: And it worked.

Mr. Rosendahl: So this is why we need Bill 16. That's why it's important that we support it, and I support it wholeheartedly.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm rising here today to speak to Bill 16, which really should be called An Act to Hide Regulated Electricity Rates, and also to call out some real reasons why this ideological government is bringing forward this bill. You know, what we should be talking about – the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View said that it was smoke and mirrors, but really I think this is more a shell game. That is what's been happening with regard to things.

Let's go back to the Member for West Yellowhead. He wants to talk about history. I'm going to talk about a brief history. I'm going to do a couple of things. We know what a shell game is, I think. I'll explain it briefly. You've got the three shells. You put a ball underneath there, and you move the ball around. Eventually you lift it up, and it's not there. And it's not there. Oh, it's underneath this one. Well, this is what this government has been trying to do.

I'll give my part of the history on the shell game that this government has been trying to put forward here. We go back to Bill 10, the Fiscal Statutes Amendment Act, 2016. We all remember that one. We sat here and we talked about it. It really gives this government the ability to have unlimited debt. Where is the debt ceiling? We don't know. That bill did not put a ceiling on the debt. The government, then, can borrow as much as they want. That's a problem. It's a problem, and it's a fact. We go back to history. It's a fact that you brought forward that bill that allows you to borrow whatever you need to.

Then let's go forward in time a little bit more. I've got the bill here in front of me, Bill 34, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 2016. I mean, this is it. We're looking at it. It has, really, just this one page and a couple of lines on the other one. It says here under Loans to the Balancing Pool and Guarantee:

82.1 The President of Treasury Board, Minister of Finance may, on the recommendation of the Minister of Energy, make loans to the Balancing Pool and guarantee the obligations of the Balancing Pool.

They're guaranteeing the obligations of the Balancing Pool.

Where does Bill 10 come and fit into this? They get to guarantee when all of a sudden you've spent too much on electricity as a result of these actions that you're bringing forward. You've capped it at 6.8 cents, yes, but who has to pay for that? All of a sudden, with how much we're borrowing and how much we're in debt, we look like we're going to be \$71 billion in debt by 2019, and it could be greater than that. If you're looking at that, the \$71 billion in debt, you know, you still have one ratepayer, one taxpayer, so that taxpayer and that ratepayer are still on the hook. They still have to

pay for that electricity. Even though you've capped it at 6.8 cents, they've still got to pay back that much money. It's going to come out of their pocket one way or the other. Let's be clear about that.

This government is not clear. They're not up front. They're using a shell game to hide what's really happening here. They don't know what they're doing with this. They are over their head with this file, and unfortunately that's been the problem the whole time with this file. They really don't know what they're doing.

10:30

They're bringing forward this particular bill at this time because they know that retail rates will more than double within the next four years as a result of them moving towards 30 per cent renewables by 2030. It's not going to keep the rates low when you start to do that. It's going to make those rates climb. When those rates climb and they go beyond that 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour, then, unfortunately, you have to borrow more money. In borrowing more money, you're not protecting the taxpayers. You're not protecting Albertans. You're in fact making Albertans have to pay it from a different part of their pockets. There is, like I say, one ratepayer, the same taxpayer, and they're footing that bill.

They're trying to cover up. This bill is them admitting that this will happen. They know it's going to happen, and it's an admission on their part that this will happen, that the rates will climb and they will go beyond 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour. They know it. What their actions are doing is going to be detrimental for this province. They're trying to cover up the mistakes they made by transitioning to renewables too quickly. I agree that renewables are a great thing, but forcing it to be done that fast, that much: it's not going to work.

The Member for Calgary-Klein – I have to now go back, and we have to talk about that. There was a steel company that you were referring to. The steel company needed to be protected at that 6.8 cents. Well, they are not on the RRO. They are a high user. They use more than 250,000 kilowatt hours a year. That's a fact, too. You don't produce things like that and stay at that level. So I don't know why you were going down that angle and saying that you want to protect those people. Well, frankly, it's not going to work that way, Madam Chair.

What they do is that they're on a managed system with places like the steel company. They are not on the RRO, as suggested, so they work with the floating rate. Unfortunately, the floating rate will likely be increasing and increasing and increasing in this province, and they won't be protected, and we will lose jobs as a result of them not being protected. The system, I think, is going to crater here in the future as a result of what they're doing, and we'll see jobs being lost in this province as a result of high electricity rates.

These large manufacturers, Madam Chair, are not going to be able to stay. They'll find that their ability to produce is not going to be here and cheap, like we need to have it. We will be losing jobs to the United States. We already are. People are looking at the writing on the wall, and they're saying: this is not going to work. Unfortunately, people are moving. There are a lot of jobs already being moved out to the States. I know of several companies in my riding that have chosen that option just in the past couple of weeks, and it's shameful.

They don't care less about the cost, the real cost to Albertans. The cost of this cap will either be covered by the carbon slush fund that we as Albertans already pay for, or the cost will be coming out of the general revenue. Let's be real. If it's coming out of the general revenue, it's going to be borrowed money. All that money I talked about that we have on Bill 10 that allows you to have that keep going up, once Bill 34 – well, if Bill 34 is enacted and once we have the rates go higher, we'll be borrowing money, and it'll be coming

through the general revenue, and that will be, say, \$71 billion by 2019, but maybe it's going to be \$75 billion. I don't know. Then if you go forward in time, it's going to be greater. So the potential cost to this cap is \$4.437 billion in losses that taxpayers will now be on the hook for over the Balancing Pool's mismanagement.

We already know that they won't devise a bill that will actually be in Albertans' best interests. You're trying to say that it's in Alberta's best interest, but this is not in Alberta's best interest. This bill, folks, has been devised to hide the truth of what is really happening.

Let me explain. Electricity rates will increase due to the NDP government's reckless, ideological policy on the electricity file. If this bill is passed, this bill will cap the regulated rate at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. Currently the RRO is 3.8 cents a kilowatt hour. It's fluctuating around that 3 cents, 4 cents. That's reasonable. That is cheap. That's cheap electricity. We should be thankful that we have this rate in Alberta.

But the cap isn't for everyone. The first ones who will be affected – and I mentioned it before – will be the large industries, as we talked about with the steel industry, who Albertans rely on for jobs. These producers that create jobs: well, they're going to go to wherever they can make the most money for the shareholders. The shareholders demand that they make a profit.

And profit is not a dirty word. Profit is a good thing. Profit is what creates jobs and makes Alberta move. It has given us the Alberta advantage. The more people that we have working, the more tax that is being paid by the average person, and the more Alberta advantage that we can have. That's why we have such low taxes. That's why we were the envy of the world.

Our job creators will not be protected from the drastic increase to electricity rates, and this increase will go directly to them. What they may try to do is to pass it on to the consumer if it's just here in Alberta, but if they pass it on to the consumer, how did that protect the taxpayers or the ratepayers in Alberta? If the amount they have to charge goes up and then they have to pass it on to the consumer and the consumer then has to pay more money, you have not protected the consumer. What you're doing is not working, and it will not work, Madam Chair.

Once again, this government refuses to acknowledge that this, like so many of their policies, will have a harmful trickle-down effect on the Alberta economy. You know, I have businesses telling me all the time that it's affecting jobs in my riding. These things always have consequences. All the policies that you're putting forward have consequences. The electricity rates being capped the way they are and then some other consumers not being affected by it: it's affecting them. The minimum wage: it's affecting them.

Take grocery stores, for example. Well, you like having your food fresh. You don't want it spoiled. They have to have freezers, and they have to have coolers. As a result, they use a huge amount of electricity to make those compressors run. Those compressors don't run just while the doors are open. They run 24/7. People like to have their places air conditioned when they go in there, and that, in fact, actually keeps the fruits and vegetables better when you keep it cooler in there. That is more electricity. All these things that use electricity make them a higher user of electricity, and now they're not protected if they go beyond the 250,000 kilowatt hours per year. So the cost of food, you'll see, is going to be affected as a result of it as well.

One thing this government is good at is repelling and destroying businesses in this province. That's what's happening. People are leaving. That's what's happened in Ontario and now here. People don't want to invest. I listened to the people that came over, and they spoke to us. They came over and said: "Frankly, we don't want to" – these were many businesses that have come and talked

to me and to a variety of other people here in the Wildrose Party. They said: "We're waiting. We want to see what's going to happen, but right now the climate isn't such that we want to invest. We don't want to pour a ton of money into this province." As they've mentioned, there have been jobs that have been created, but we've lost 100,000 jobs to get 20,000 jobs. That's a net 80,000 jobs lost.

10:40

If I'm correct in this, this is them trying to correct their radical policies. This is the NDP trying to correct their radical policies, so let me tell you all that – news flash – the NDP policies are not working, and they're meddling in a file that they don't understand. This will be another hit to our already devastated economy, and on top of all the personal businesses and carbon tax hikes and the minimum wage hikes, the emission cap. When will they learn? We keep speaking about it. We have the opportunity. We're in here, and we discuss it, and we still see that there are negative effects to it.

When I brought forward Motion 505 with the minimum wage, I asked for us to pause to see what the economic impact would be to the stakeholders, to the industry. You know, there are other ways that we could have – I heard from across the aisle that there were single mothers and that we need to protect them and get the minimum wage up for that. There are other methods to be able to do that, and that's what was happening. They were identified as needing to have extra support. This is what the government should have been doing, trying to look at supporting those people.

But what about the other people that are looking at trying to get jobs in Alberta for the first time? They're a young student, they want a job, but it's a \$15 minimum wage, and unfortunately the employers would rather hire somebody that's got three, four, five years experience, that they don't have to train. It costs a lot to train a person. We could have worked with this properly. My point is that we're not looking at all the ramifications and all the implications of the bill, and this Bill 16 is just another one that you're not stopping and pausing and looking at all the unintended consequences and added expenses that are going to cost Albertans as a result of what you're doing.

If this isn't so, then please find a way to explain to the House why you would need to cap regulated electricity rates. Why do you need to do it if it's not going to go up because of what you're doing, if it won't go up past 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour? Again, the taxpayers will have to pay for it. For only residential consumers, small farms, or smaller businesses – why only those who consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours per year? Why on earth do large businesses and industry in this province of Alberta get the brunt of the repercussions of this bill and other ideological, damaging changes that this government has inflicted on them? These businesses, doggone it, you know, they create the jobs, but the actions that you've got going are driving businesses out, and I find that shameful.

What we're asking you to do is to pause and to look at what's going to happen. Really, I think you should be saying that this is all wrong, and we should actually kill this bill. This bill is a harmful bill for Alberta, and let's start making some corrections right along the way. Otherwise, I guess, you know, another government is going to have to come along and be the adult and make the necessary changes to do what the hard choices are.

Madam Chair, the target of 30 per cent by 2030, the renewables target, that this government has legislated is a complete mistake. Scientific estimates indicate that our grid will experience instability once we get to 25 per cent of renewables. That's 25 per cent; that's

not 30 per cent. I don't know how you got to that number because it caps out somewhere around that 25 per cent.

This is going to cost our province dearly. Does the government not see that these practices will be further hurting our job creators? When businesses are starving, they will move to where they can make a living and create work, make a profit, pay their employees – make sure that they can pay their employees – and pay their shareholders. Shareholders, if they're going to invest money . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I've been listening with intent to what I'm hearing from the opposition and from my fellow members and colleagues. I think there's some confusion here because I don't think you really understand the electricity bill. This electricity file is being orchestrated just to fix a problem that was caused by this government. The only reason we need this bill is because I think you're really worried that the retail rates are going to quadruple over the next four years. It's another warning sign to Albertans and especially to our industries that prices are going to get out of control, because they're not covered. Big business is not covered by this, and I know how much you love big business. Our job creators are not protected by this scheme, and Alberta is going to suffer. You're just going to push them out of this province.

A carbon tax, corporate tax, and now exorbitant electricity costs are going to drive the business investors out of our province, and that's my big concern. I really think you should look at this and do a complete one-eighty on this bill and double back on this reckless, expensive ideological transition to renewables and also fight the federal Liberal Party on their costly accelerated coal phase-out program. Do it in proper phases. Do it over a period of time so that businesses and corporations and individuals can actually afford to absorb it. Thoughtless and careless decisions can make a government impose and create mistake after mistake, especially, I think, on this electricity file.

From raising the SGER levy in June of 2015 to introducing a capacity model that shifts the risk of electricity investment away from private companies and puts it back on Alberta taxpayers, I think this government is attempting to profess that they're actually solving a problem or solving a matter and a question of power price volatility. This is not the case. Fixed-price contracts are already available to Alberta consumers, and they're recommended to consumers on all fixed incomes. As a matter of fact, most Albertans have a fixed-rate option already available to them, and this offers the utmost protection from unpredictability in electricity prices through long-term fixed contracts. In other words, they're already covered. The consumers are covered, so why are we going through this bill and going through this exercise, yet leaving businesses alone unprotected?

Madam Chair, it comes as a surprise that the current 13-month average for fixed-rate contracts is approximately 6 cents per kilowatt hour. That already exists in the marketplace. As my hon. colleague mentioned earlier, their rates are even better. So it's already covered. But now with your regulated cap it's going to be 6.8 cents. I can't believe that that's an effective way of managing taxpayers' money or managing what you call covering and protecting the consumer market.

You're introducing a bill that kind of misguides Albertans into believing their rates are protected when, in fact, retailers within our free electrical market already offer more protection than this government and this bill are offering. So why do it? The fact is that

for every 1 cent of capital above the cap, it's going to cost \$10 million to the taxpayers of Alberta. Think about that: an additional \$10 million. You've got a \$49 billion corporation, you need \$59 billion now to run it, and now you're going to add more debt and more debt and more debt. These things are not good for Alberta consumers.

Again, I'm going to repeat myself. Businesses are not protected by this, and if businesses don't have that kind of offer of protection or the ability under that to manage this, they're going to leave our province. The estimation right now from the oil and gas sector is that we've lost anywhere between \$8 billion and \$10 billion to the U.S. market, and it's not coming back. People are not investing in our province anymore. To pay for the cap, funds will have to be disbursed from the carbon tax, from the carbon tax slush fund, or from government revenues, which is already borrowed capital. That means that children, grandchildren, and future taxpayers, if there are going to be any left, are going to be burdened with this debt load, the same ratepayers, the same taxpayers that this government is trying to hide the truth from. Juggling money, moving money around from one ministry to another is not the proper way to run a business. Accelerating massive debt for taxpayers does not protect Albertans. This is a taxpayer burden. NDP policies are hurting Albertans. You're hurting families, but really what you're doing here is hurting job creators.

10:50

Now, my biggest fear is that we're going to end up like Ontario. Right now in Ontario they're losing \$5 billion to \$8 billion worth of industry every year because their electricity rates are out of control. And there's no guarantee; there's no protection. Think about that. If that happens here, it's not just the oil and gas sector that's been deflated with investment; you're going to get more manufacturers. Even the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein stated that he knows of a business that shut down. In his own words, it shuts itself down. Think about that. When you shut a business down, nothing is going on. Nothing is being produced. People lose their jobs. I don't know. The Ontario debacle is something you should learn from. Read what's been going on there. This bill is about giving Albertans a false sense of security so that when they see their monthly electricity bill, they won't see how badly the policies are hurting this province.

Electrical transition is moving way too fast. The provincial and federal governments are working together to arbitrarily accelerate the transition from coal to natural gas, wind farms by a whopping 20 to 30 per cent. This is just too fast. Bringing in renewables by 2030 is moving too quickly. You're putting a burden on the taxpayer. You're putting a burden on industry. Is 30 per cent by 2030 necessary? Is it evidence based? I think it's just an arbitrary target. I haven't seen much consultation, no business sense, no economic development strategies, nothing.

The potential cost of the cap is significant. It will drive out job creators and add approximately \$4.4 billion in losses, that taxpayers are now on the hook for in the Balancing Pool's mismanagement. Twenty billion dollars will be needed, according to Terry Boston, your own consultant, to get this province to the 30 per cent by 2030. That's a lot of money. That's your consultant telling you that. All of this combined does not make life more affordable for Albertans. You're not protecting anybody.

What's more, scientific estimates state that our grid will experience instability once we get to 25 per cent renewables. So are you going to build another grid? You put that already on the taxpayers' back, and now you have to build another one? Think about that. You can't run solely on the sun and wind to power the entire province of Alberta without some sort of expensive backup

to keep the power load evened out. This policy to accelerate by 2030 will require either costly systems integrated with other jurisdictions or a peak plant overbuild over the reliability of the current network. No wonder the province's economy is going down. This is not a way to treat investors. You can't treat investors this way. People will not invest in an environment where it is not business friendly. It's basic economics.

You know, just a sidebar. I think of the hon. member for Tim Hortons with his tidbits. Quoting Ralph Klein – I mean, I owned a business in the private sector, and I worked with the Alberta advantage. It was a good time to be in Alberta. It wasn't perfect, but it was a good time. Investors were coming into Alberta. People were bringing billions of dollars into Alberta, and you cannot argue against that. It worked. It worked really well, and we kept investing in Alberta.

Now owning a business no longer, I'm here listening to the backbench talk as if they ran a business, as if they signed a paycheque, as if they actually did something like that. They didn't. You haven't had the privilege yet. Listen, let me tell you something. The private sector was glad to deal with the Alberta advantage when it was available.

Loyola: I used to run a business.

Mr. W. Anderson: In Venezuela?

Mr. Westhead: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: Member.

Mr. W. Anderson: This government . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. W. Anderson: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Sit down, please.

The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to rise on a point of order under Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I'm pretty sure we all heard what the member said, which was a racist statement against us on this side, and I think the member should apologize and retract.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again, as to the point of order that was raised yesterday, this is kind of the same thing. The banter goes back and forth. Earlier this morning the member in question, that just took this shot about Venezuela, who has spoken favourably in speeches in the House, actually called one of our members a racist today. You know, if he's willing to stand up and apologize for that comment, then I would apologize for and withdraw this one.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this has been an ongoing issue for the last few days around the language that's been used in this House. I did hear it today. I would recommend – actually, I will rule that it is a point of order and that you need to stand up and apologize, please, and that the language in this House needs to be

more respectful around people's diversity and their cultures and that we need to make sure that we are not using language in this House to try to create disorder.

Mr. W. Anderson: Madam Chair, thank you for that ruling. Much appreciated. I will apologize for mentioning the country Venezuela, which this hon. member has spoken favourably of in the past, but I will apologize to the hon. member.

May I continue?

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead.

Debate Continued

Mr. W. Anderson: Just to close on my points, again, my biggest concern is that this government is forcing businesses out of our province, and you're going to continue to do so with Bill 16. You're going to continue putting the tax burden on the citizens of Alberta, another onerous tax, a tax that will drive and force . . . [interjection]

The Deputy Chair: Member.

Mr. W. Anderson: . . . hard-working citizens of Alberta into a situation where they will no longer have a job or an opportunity to be employed. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members and the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, if we could please refrain from trying to engage in the conversation after I've ruled. Please let the Member for Highwood continue.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just in closing, again, as I said earlier, my concern is that if we continue to create a business vacuum in this province, a vacuum that is going to be so difficult for us to overcome with additional taxes and taxations like Bill 16 and like so many others and like the onerous debt that is now on this province, that my grandchildren are now going to have to pay back because of this government's policies – fast and loose and reckless with the economy is no way to run a business, no way to run a government.

Madam Chair, thank you for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like now to move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Motions

Evening Sittings

20. **Mr. Carlier** moved on behalf of **Mr. Mason**:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing May 29, 2017, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the Third Session of the 29th Legislature 2017 spring sitting unless the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

11:00 Adjournment of Spring Session

21. **Mr. Carlier** moved on behalf of **Mr. Mason**:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the Third Session of the 29th Legislature 2017 spring sitting of the Assembly be extended beyond the first Thursday in June until such time as or when the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly stands adjourned.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 16

An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have many comments, many questions, so far no amendments, but that may change over time. I can't support this bill because this is part of a continuing trend of the NDP's haphazard dismantling of Alberta's electricity system.

Let's just go back in history and recall how it is that we've managed to get to this point, coming up on almost two years exactly, maybe two years less a month, to where this all started. This all started with the government's very first ever bill, Bill 1. The government's first-ever Bill 1, as those of you, I'm sure, remember and recall vividly and fondly, increased Alberta's original carbon tax, the specified gas emitters regulation on large emitters. At the time I'm sure the government thought: well, that seems like a good idea. You know what? In general terms and broadly speaking, I actually am in favour of these sorts of things, of a properly structured carbon tax, with the money going into innovation, allowing Alberta companies to innovate and to help solve the carbon problem not just for our province, not just for our country, but for the world. This is the contribution that, done properly, Alberta can make to the world.

But as with many things this government didn't fully think it through, didn't fully understand market forces, didn't especially understand the implications on power purchase arrangements. They

were warned repeatedly following the passage of the bill, leading to the end of 2015, that their actions were going to trigger the “or more unprofitable” clause of power purchase arrangements. They were warned. And if they weren’t warned – well, I happen to know for absolute certainty that they were warned and that they knew. The minister knew or ought to have known. Senior administration, political staff, deputy ministers, associate deputy ministers either knew or ought to have known that that was going to trigger the “or more unprofitable” clause.

That’s part of the deal when you’re in government, is understanding the contractual obligations that government has agreed to, whether it was your government at the time or not. You inherit everything that government in Alberta has ever done over the course of time. You may like some of it. You probably don’t like most of it because that’s what happens when we change government. It doesn’t change the fact that there are contractual obligations that the government of Alberta, which you now are – although, being nerdy and technical, there are only two members on the front bench here, which is technically government. [interjections] I’m just giving everyone a civics lesson on what government is.

Mr. Westhead: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Madam Chair, it’s against good parliamentary practice to refer to the presence or absence of members, and I would ask the member to refrain from doing so.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, although you are correct on the standing order, the member did not actually refer to any particular member being absent, so it’s not a point of order.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. My point being that when you become government of the province of Alberta, you inherit all of the obligations and contractual arrangements that have been entered into by government. That’s what you do. As a result of not understanding that, of either not doing your homework or, worse, perhaps simply ignoring the advice that you were given and feeling that somehow you could legislate your way out of it, you find yourself in a position where you’re chasing your tail. So Bill 16 is the logical next step in a who-knows-how-many-steps process this government is going to have to go through to dismantle what was a very effective deregulated electricity market.

Now, I’ve heard some of the debate and commentary this morning about some of the challenges and price spikes and ups and downs and whether Albertans need to be market traders to lock in an electricity price. While I have some sympathy for that, there is no question that the market forces that were in play in Alberta’s electricity system were working. How do we know that? Well, here we are with historically low electricity prices. The bill that Albertans actually pay is far higher than that because there are administrative fees, there are transmission fees, there are all sorts of fees on top of fees that end up on your electricity bill, but the energy portion itself is historically low. That is because market signals were sent, generation was built, and it was working. But now, as the NDP have discovered, once you start to pull the thread, the thing starts to unravel pretty quickly and in unpredictable ways.

Here we are in this strange situation, which is not the same as Ontario. It has shades of Ontario, but Ontarians are paying enormous electricity bills. As the government there faces an election, coming relatively soon, they undertake extreme measures

to reduce end-user consumer electricity prices that had already spiked. They’re doing so in a cynical political move. I note with interest that the electricity bill that they passed is called the fair hydro plan. Any time government puts the word “fair” into a bill title, I get very worried. That makes me feel like perhaps they’re trying to pull the wool over our eyes. That’s what we see here as well.

The situation here is different because Albertans’ electricity prices haven’t spiked yet, which makes me wonder. My goodness, what’s going on behind the scenes here in the Energy department that’s telling this government: “Guess what, folks? At some point in the next four years, maybe in a very inconvenient time relative to the next election, electricity bills are going to go shooting through the roof, you know, just FYI.” Then the political wheels start to move, and the folks, the secret squirrels who run around behind the scenes making these sorts of political decisions will decide: “All right. You know what we’ll do? We’ll cap consumer electricity prices, that are actually paid by Albertans. Let’s not worry about how exactly we’re going to pay for that. That’s an issue to be dealt with later. But on the political side, you know, we’d better identify who our voters are going to be and make sure that they don’t feel any pain at an inconvenient time, say, fall of ’18 or spring of ’19. So let’s come forward with a bill.” And that’s what they’ve done here.

The billions of dollars of losses. What I can’t fully grasp, and perhaps this is a failing on my part in opposition, is how it is that \$2.2 billion has gone into the Balancing Pool, backstopped by Alberta taxpayers, and it isn’t the single greatest scandal that Albertans have seen. It is a scandal. It is absolutely a scandal. The amount of money is stunning to me. That it went from a \$600 million or \$700 million surplus now to \$2.2 billion backstopped by Alberta taxpayers is unbelievable to me.

Now we have a bill that seeks to use Alberta’s carbon tax revenue, this slush fund . . .

Mr. Gill: Levy.

Mr. Clark: I don’t mean levy, hon. member. I mean tax. It is a tax.

11:10

Mr. Gill: Okay. I just wanted clarification.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Absolutely. There’s no question there.

The carbon tax revenue is now going to be used. First, that money comes from the carbon tax, which the government likes to just go back to this well. It seems like it’s this unlimited mythical source of funding that they can just dip into for everything from light bulbs to multibillion-dollar backstops to our electricity market. But guess what? At some point that money is gone. And given what is likely to happen in our electricity sector with this bill, that money is going to go pretty darn quickly, and when that money is gone, well, it’s more backstop from general revenues. And guess what? Our general revenues, topline revenues this year, I have a feeling are not going to meet the government’s projections this year.

Already the price of oil has trended downward below what the government’s estimates were. Just today the price of oil, WTI, is off another 4 per cent. Now, I’ll never cheer against Alberta. That’s not a good thing. I want that price of oil to go up. There’s nothing I want more: \$60, \$70, \$80 oil. That’s good for Albertans; it’s good for our province. Unfortunately, this government has relied on crossing their fingers, just like every government before them, on the price of oil going up. Well, guess what? It hasn’t. And if it doesn’t, our deficit goes higher. That means that we need to borrow even more money.

Now we have a bill before us that’s going to see perhaps another raid on the treasury just to support electricity prices at the consumer

level just because of all of the changes this government has brought in without thinking them through. So I'm asking: what problem are we trying to solve? We're trying to solve a problem created by the government. Either you're simply cutting a blind cheque here because you have a sense of what this is actually going to cost or, worst yet, you have no idea what this is actually going to cost, and you refuse to share that information with us. Right now today, well, prices are low. Where are prices going to be in six months or a year or a year and a half or three years or by the end of this? The only reason that you would bring this bill forward is that you have pretty good information that consumer electricity prices are going to be a heck of a lot higher than 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour. That's going to hit Albertans in the pocketbook. Well, guess what? It's going to hit Albertans in the pocketbook no matter what. The money has got to come from somewhere. All these changes mean that the money has got to come from somewhere.

Now, don't think for a moment that any of this means that I don't think we should phase out coal-fired power, because I do. The Alberta Party ran on a platform of phasing out coal-fired electricity. I'm in favour of doing that. I'm in favour of taking action on climate change. I think climate change is real. I think climate change is human caused. I think it's a problem. I think it's something we ought to deal with. But I also think that, done properly, Alberta's response to climate change could be the single greatest market opportunity of our lifetimes. If we put Albertan entrepreneurs to work, if we create a true frame for innovation, if we use carbon tax revenues for appropriate things like cutting personal and corporate income taxes so that people can keep more of their hard-earned money, that we create an attractive investment climate, that we make real and substantial investments in Alberta innovation, in our postsecondary institutions, in our research institutions: these are the kinds of things we should be doing with carbon tax money, not light bulb programs, not backstopping your changes to electricity, that you didn't think through.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

By the way, did it have to be this bad? Did we have to find ourselves in a position where we already have backstopped a \$2.2 billion loan to the Balancing Pool, which probably gets worse over time? Well, the answer is no, actually. It didn't need to be this bad, no less than the economist Trevor Tombe and a fellow by the name of Dr. Andrew Leach – now, you might have heard his name. He's someone that this government ought to be familiar with. He did the climate plan, didn't he? He worked with Trevor Tombe, and they discovered that had the government simply accepted back the PPAs, for which their policy change triggered the “or more unprofitable” clause, that, at most, the losses would have been \$600 million. At most. How did it get to \$2.2 billion? I support phasing out coal. My point is that there's a much better way of doing it.

The other challenge with this particular bill and the entire approach the government has taken to electricity goes far beyond the electricity market. It goes to confidence in Alberta as a place to invest. Why would someone invest money, why would a company invest money, why would an individual buy or start a business in Alberta when they don't know what the rules are going to be a year or two or three or four or five down the road, when things are constantly changing, when they don't know what their electricity prices are going to be? That instability and unpredictability in the market make Alberta an unattractive place to invest.

It's unnecessary. It's hurtful to the people of Alberta. If you truly do want to make life better for Albertans – TM, trademark, copyright, quote, whatever – you will not pursue policies that drive capital out of the province of Alberta, that drive companies to invest

somewhere else. That hurts our province. It breaks my heart to see it happen because you are hurting the province of Alberta. You are hurting Albertans. You are not incenting and rewarding people for taking an entrepreneurial risk, which, by the way, doesn't guarantee success. Investing in a company, investing in a business, starting a business: there's no guarantee that it's going to work. In fact, the numbers will tell you that it fails far more often than it succeeds. But Albertans are diligent, responsible, hard-working people, and they're going to take those risks if you give them the chance to do that, if you give them the chance for a reasonable return on investment should that investment work out for them.

When you have unpredictable government and unpredictable legislation, you never quite know what's going to happen. With a government that relies far too heavily on the price of oil, there's a chance that our deficit could be \$11 billion or \$12 billion or \$13 billion this year. I don't want to see that happen – I genuinely don't – but there's a huge risk that it does. When it is that high, now what? Do we see more tax increases? What do we see? How are you going to find your way out of that particular problem that you've put yourself in?

Instead of using the carbon tax money to backstop electricity like you're doing, you could use it for substantial, real innovation. We could invest in Alberta research. We could invest in Alberta companies. We could invest in targeted tax credits, not the \$30-million-a-year innovation tax credit you've already done. A good idea – I like it – but it's far too complicated. It's too small. It's too narrow. That innovation tax credit is the right vehicle. You've just got an 80 CC Honda motorcycle when what you really need is a big Ford F-150 truck.

I looked at this bill, and I asked my team: what do you see when you see Bill 16? One of my staff said that this bill seems designed to waste the most amount of money possible.

Mr. Hanson: Sorry. I missed that.

Mr. Clark: I said that this bill seems designed to waste the most amount of money possible. Now, that's interesting. I'm not sure this is the only bill that seems designed to waste the most amount of money possible, but it's right up there. It really is. You have an unlimited backstop on the price of electricity. Once that carbon tax money is gone, we'll dip into general revenues, and with general revenues already in the red, it means we borrow more money in this province.

Our credit rating is under threat. Interest rates are going up, not just globally but in Canada. If you saw it, Canada's central bankers yesterday indicated that it looks like our interest rates are likely headed higher. That means the money Alberta has already borrowed is going to cost more, that the money we're going to borrow in the future is going to cost more, and we create this debt spiral. It's a huge challenge.

I also want to make an important point, also, actually, borrowed from an insightful tweet from Andrew Leach. This bill doesn't prevent price spikes. Prices will still spike. Consumers won't see the impact of that. Money has got to come from somewhere. Wholesale prices have still spiked. This does not prevent price spikes. It prevents people seeing the impact of that on their electricity bill, but it doesn't mean that Albertans don't pay for it. The money has got to come from somewhere. It's not magic. The money has got to come from somewhere.

Dr. Starke: It's a transparency thing.

Mr. Clark: It is a transparency thing. That's exactly right.

The government is using the complexity of the electricity system. Trust me, having done a little bit of work in trying to unravel some

of this stuff, it is complex. There's no way of truly simplifying it. But when you have a bill that just simply seeks to backstop it, it shows that this government hasn't done their homework. They haven't actually sought to truly understand the implications, so we see this piecemeal, step-by-step, put out one foot and then see where you end up. There's no road map here beyond, really, an ideological route in saying: we don't like the idea of deregulation. Okay. But why don't you put together a fully baked, thoughtful plan that thinks about all of the different implications? You haven't done that.

11:20

No matter what, one way or the other Albertans are going to have to pay for this. This isn't magical. Money has to come from somewhere. My greatest concern is that you're doing this at a time when electricity prices are at historic lows. Back in the depths of the Energy department and back in the depths of government I am truly worried about what those forecasts look like. I've asked my team to look into some of that. It's obviously a little more difficult when we don't have the resources of government, but I'm very concerned that the numbers are going to get very big very quickly and that they will start to get out of control, certainly over the course of the four years that this bill is in force.

For all of those reasons and many, many, many more, I certainly cannot support this bill and would seriously and sincerely hope that the government would rethink their approach to electricity deregulation. This bill is troubling, to say the least.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The chair will recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate being able to stand and speak on Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. I want to start off first of all by saying that there's a quote by JFK. He once said that an error does not become a blunder unless you refuse to own up to it. Unfortunately, what I'm seeing here is that when the NDP government decided they were going to transition into renewable energy – and it was done, I think, probably in the best interests of Albertans and in the best interests of what they felt was best for their children. The problem is that the unintended consequences are something that I think Bill 16 is trying to address, and that is a spike in the cost of electricity.

I want to really quickly discuss some of the things that were stated by the Member for West Yellowhead. He gave some one-off examples that I think were interesting but didn't really give a full picture of what's been happening in Alberta. I think it hasn't been, Mr. Chair. The reason why it hasn't is because when you take a look at our electrical system in Alberta, there are three parts to it. You've got the retail, you've got the distribution, and you've got the transmission. Now, if you take a look at all three of those things together as the cost that Albertans bear, the problem is that what the Member for West Yellowhead has not established and stated is that the costs in transmission and distribution have skyrocketed and that the costs in retail have gone down. Everybody in the House knows this.

The question is: why? Why did this happen? What the Member for West Yellowhead did not explain is that the only part that was actually deregulated was the retail side. The parts that were not deregulated, the transmission and distribution sides, have increased substantially. The cost of retail has gone down. The only component, the only part of those three parts that has actually gone down is the deregulated part. History always gives us 20/20 vision of how things really happened versus what we speculate can happen.

I get that there are members opposite that have given examples of where businesses have taken advantage of our system, but remember that our system works best when we allow competition to drive down price so that the supply of the producers increases. It drives the equilibrium price down. That's, again, simple economics. But the other part to this whole thing is that it cannot work unless you have the rule of law. The Member for West Yellowhead has explained this. I thought he explained it very well, but the outcome that he got from it was different than mine. The outcome is that that rule of law worked, and the system is working. Why do we need to change it?

Now, I agree that we do need to start looking at the transmission and distribution parts of this electrical system because they are going up, but again you're allowing a small group of suppliers of that distribution and transmission to be able to provide that service to Albertans. Because you have restricted the supply in those sectors, you have driven the price of those things up. So I don't understand the argument that he gave.

The other part that I wanted to point out is that I've heard over and over again from the members opposite that they did this to protect Albertans. Two points I want to make. One, if you really did want to protect Albertans, then why are you setting the price at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour versus setting it at 3.6 cents per kilowatt hour? If you truly believe that you need to protect Albertans, why do you have to wait for it to double in order for you to all of a sudden start kicking in to protect Albertans? If you do not believe that that is the reason why you're doing this, then obviously you'd go to 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

You have capped tuition rates for students at the present rate, yet you didn't say in that situation: let's cap it at a future rate, increasing it by a hundred per cent. You didn't do that. What you said is that we need to cap it now in order to protect our students. You did that. But in this situation what you're saying is that we need to protect Albertans but only after the cost or price of this goes up a hundred per cent. How does that protect Albertans?

Now, one thing that I love is history. I will admit that I was 10 years old when this happened, but I'm going to tell you about a situation, a story about Jimmy Carter back in 1977, '78, I believe. That would put me at about 10 years old. But, listen, this situation is very similar, so I wanted to give this kind of a scenario to explain how I would say that Liberal thinking or NDP thinking would take a look at this situation. What he did was – and you could always tell when Jimmy Carter was concerned, because he always put on his green jacket. That meant that big problems were coming and that he needed to save Americans. As you can see, I've got a green shirt on here, so I'm concerned.

Anyway, he had a real concerned look on his face, and he got up and said to the people: listen, we're running out of natural gas; this is a five-alarm fire; we need to save the little old lady in the house who is really struggling, who's not going to have enough gas to be able to heat her house in the winter. And he created a huge storm over this situation, to the point where the States passed legislation that restricted any use of natural gas except for residents.

What was the outcome? What was the effect of this? The fallout was that greenhouses the next day went out of business. The employees of those greenhouses were out on the street. They lost their jobs. The people who owned these greenhouses, the ma's and pa's that owned these – these were not big operations or organizations – went out of business because of this concept of, you know, "The sky is falling; we need to save the world," which I hear constantly from the other side. You continue to say that we are the

ones who are fearmongering, yet your policies constantly are: hey, listen, we've got a big problem here, and we need to fix it.

11:30

Again, I said, Madam Chair, that hindsight is 20/20 vision – '78, '88, '98, 2007, 2008, 2017 – as 39 years later we now know that we have over a hundred years' worth of natural gas. Hindsight has shown us that that was a bad policy, that was a bad mistake. The President of the United States was fearmongering. Whether he had bad information, bad intel, or whatever happened, the information that he gave to Americans created a terrible, terrible fallout. This is what I see when I look at this bill. I take a look at it, and I see that there is a reaction to a bad strategy at the beginning, and instead of doing like JFK says – an error does not become a blunder unless you refuse to own up to it – the government is refusing to own up to the problem of their greening of the economy.

I actually thought that my colleague next to me explained it very well when he said that this is, you know, a shell game, but I'm going to call it something different. I'm going to say that this is actually more like a wag-the-dog scenario. What happens in this situation is that while you're watching the tail wag, the head is coming around and biting you, so it's just a way of being able to keep people and distract people from, really, what's going on.

In reality, this is exactly what this bill does. Bill 16 says: we are not protecting you – we are not protecting Albertans – because if we really were, we would protect them at 3.6 cents per kilowatt hour; we would not be waiting till it doubles to a hundred per cent increase before we protect you. In reality, the argument is flawed. What it is saying is: we are creating a bill that will try to hide what we're really doing to Albertans, and that is that we are going to increase the cost of electricity. We've seen this in Europe, we've seen this in Ontario, and we've seen this in many jurisdictions throughout the world. In Ontario: look at the situation there. Businesses are leaving Ontario because they cannot afford the electricity bills. The utility bills are out of control.

Bill 16, in my opinion, is a way to be able to distract Albertans from the real cost or real fallout of their failed approach to green our economy. I can tell you straight out that I'm a champion of and I believe in green energy, but I do not believe in green energy at the expense of Albertans. The cost of this bill, the cost of this strategy, this broad strategy, of greening the economy of Alberta, in my opinion, is going to be staggering for Albertans, and I don't think that the single mom with three young children is going to appreciate that. They're not going to appreciate losing their job. They're not going to appreciate the increased cost to their electricity bills. They're not going to appreciate it.

Whenever we take a look at the bills that are presented by the government, we do go through a cost-benefit approach, where we talk about the pros and we talk about the cons, and we do actually look at what the pros are. We really try to look at it. We have certain groups that are saying: okay, well, you be the good cop, and you be the bad cop. We really try to look at these things in an objective way. The potential benefit of this bill is that electricity bills will be lower, but again the caveat here is: the electricity bills will be lower for how long? Is it a sustainable system, where if you drive up the cost of the electricity, then at some point it's going to have to boomerang back to the real price of the electricity?

Unless your goal is to completely take all competition out of the electrical system – if your final goal is to be able to do that, then just come out and tell Albertans that. If that is your goal, come out and tell them, "You know, we're going to restrict supply of how many people can actually create electricity in Alberta, and we're going to pick winners and losers, and we'll just guarantee that your price is going to be at this level, but it's going to be subsidized

somewhere else." Come out and say that. Let Albertans make the decision. Let them be able to vote yes or no on that strategy, but at least be honest with Albertans and let them know that's what's happening.

When we took a look at what the cons or the cost of this bill would be, obviously we saw that the idea of doubling electricity rates is really going to cause a lot of problems for Albertans that are already being kicked in this low economy right now. We felt that, in all good conscience, we cannot vote for this bill. We cannot support it because, again, it's just covering up the failed policies and strategies of the past.

Now, I think that a lot of information has been presented by my other colleagues, Madam Chair, that have talked about those costs, and I think they've done a great job on it. So I will finish by again asking the government to follow the advice of JFK. If you make an error, don't make it into a blunder by not owning up to it. Own up to it. Say: "You know what? We planned, we did, we checked, and now we've got to adjust." If you do that, I think that Albertans will appreciate it. They'll certainly appreciate it in their pocketbooks.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd like to finish my remarks. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. Bill 16 is being presented by this government as kind of a consumer protection bill, but in this case what consumers really need protection against is the government. The government is touting this bill as a way to protect consumers against spikes in the price of electricity, but those spikes in electricity prices are going to be as a result of government's changes to the electricity system, the bungling of the PPA deals, the early shutdown of coal, the carbon tax. Decisions like these are likely to drive up the price of electricity. Even though the government claims that we won't go the way of Ontario, that all of these changes are not going to push the price of electricity through the roof, they are all clearly concerned that it will.

The price of electricity has come nowhere near 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour in the past few years. If prices are going to remain at the same low mark that the competitive market has given us, there would be no need for a cap on the rates. The government will be hoping that average Albertans don't dig too deep into their electricity bills because once the changes the government is envisioning come into effect, those bills are going to start going up. The government will probably start spending more tax dollars trying to convince the public that the rising prices are a result of anything but their own policy. It's not what they created, but actually it will be the result of this bill.

They'll blame greedy power companies, the previous government – notorious; the 44-year regime of PCs – what they'll call the reasons why the electricity rates are going up now all of a sudden. They'll probably even try to blame the price of oil because this government seems absolutely incapable of admitting the negative consequences to their actions. I don't think they have admitted so far that they have made any mistakes, which puts this electricity rate cap into even better context, because the government thinks that they have found the perfect answer to their driving up electricity prices.

11:40

They said to themselves: "What if we just say that the prices won't go up? Let's assume we're just going to say that, and life is

going to be good.” That’s what they want Albertans to believe. You know, what a revelation that must have seemed like to them. They can just make another law so that Albertans won’t get mad at the consequences of the other laws that they have already made; let’s throw another bad legislation at them. Of course, most members on the other side of the House won’t see the problem with that solution.

If your law drives up the cost of producing electricity but you won’t let the companies charge enough to cover their costs, suddenly there won’t be any companies. As the Member for Calgary-Elbow said earlier, there won’t be any companies willing to invest, and I think that most Albertans would probably choose paying a little more for electricity as opposed to not being able to buy electricity at all.

The government got their brain trust back together, and they came up with another of their now famous consequence-free decisions: if the consumers aren’t going to pay the true cost of electricity, then we’ll just make it so we can give tax dollars directly to the electricity companies to cover their difference. And this is where the government settled. Most NDP policies find their way into the pockets of the taxpayers because when you’re borrowing billions of dollars that you won’t be responsible for paying back, when you have no problem saddling unwilling or unaware Albertans with debt, tax money always seems like a great solution. After two years the majority of the members on this side are not going to be here, but Albertans are going to still be on the hook for over \$75 billion of debt. Our generation, no matter whether they’re NDP, PC, conservatives, Liberals, will be on the hook for this massive, massive debt.

One of the left’s favourite accusations about fiscally conservative politics is that we want to privatize profits and socialize losses. That’s what they claim, yet here the government is enacting law to do exactly that. Members on the opposition side of the House likely see what I mean, but I’ll walk through it in case the government benches haven’t gone through it. Electricity companies make a not insignificant portion of their profits from high points or spikes in the price of electricity. The government is driving up the price of electricity with their policies, leading to higher and more frequent spikes in the price of electricity. The cap on electricity and the payments to the electricity companies to make up the difference mean that the government and all taxpayers will foot the bill for these large spikes in the rates. The companies have their profits protected, backstopped by every tax-paying Albertan.

That sounds to me like a policy that the NDP would make up during an election to fearmonger about conservative politics, yet here they are happily jumping in with both feet. That is what can happen when you start making policies and laws without considering the real consequences for the people of Alberta, when you assume that because you have good intentions, only good can come from your actions, nothing negative. Every time your actions result in something negative, you just slap another poorly considered decision over top and cross your fingers that this thing is going to be better than the last decision we had, and on and on and on until, in the end, all this ends up being the problem of the taxpayer. It always ends up being the taxpayer footing the bill. This bill, like all the other pieces of legislation, is another example of that process, which I don’t think anybody on this side of House is supporting and that definitely I can’t support.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak against Bill 16 for all the reasons explained by the previous speakers. This bill is, to my knowledge, a make-work bill. This government lost their thought process when they brought in this bill.

Let’s look into why this bill is required first. I think that the origin of this bill is their big climate change plan, which is the NDP’s ideological, risky policy that has driven them to bring in this bill. They wanted to phase out coal. Once in a while they quote the former Harper federal government. They say that even Harper wanted to phase out coal, but the difference is that the Harper government didn’t want to replace 30 per cent of cheap, coal-fired electric generation with renewables by 2030.

Because they’re doing it so fast and because instead of having natural gas, which is cheap and readily available and which could have employed thousands of Albertans, which would not have necessitated any backup, unlike wind and solar, this government chose not to ramp up natural gas. Rather, they want to employ renewable energy to replace 30 per cent by 2030. That will spike the prices of electricity here.

This government speaks about making life better and making life affordable. This bill does neither of those. We have cheap electricity prices here, which this government is trying to jack up by replacing cheap, coal-fired electricity. And now, to hide their incompetence and inefficiency, to mask their ideological policies, they bring in these kinds of bills to show the little guy that they’re doing something to keep the prices lower artificially. But like the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake said many times, there is only one ratepayer, who is the taxpayer. In the end, it’s not making life more affordable. It is actually making life more expensive, and it’s not making life better because people are losing jobs.

Talking about jobs, Madam Chair, last year the Minister of Economic Development and Trade brought in their flagship, signature bill, Bill 1, which was supposed to create 100,000 jobs. In reality, we lost almost 100,000 jobs. We asked those questions every day to the minister, and he couldn’t give any convincing answer on how he was going to replace those well-paid jobs that were lost. He just goes off the talking points and says: oh, we’re creating this many jobs and this many jobs. But there is no measurable outcome of his policies.

11:50

They bring in bills like this, and the direction they get is from their role models and idols in Ontario. Yesterday we got the news that the Ontario government spent \$45 billion to save the ratepayers of Ontario \$24 billion. So let’s get this math correct. To save \$24 billion, our Alberta NDP’s role model in Ontario, the Liberal government, spent \$45 billion. That means there will be a net cost of \$21 billion to Ontarians. That’s the path this NDP government is taking Albertans down.

Now, I know the NDP are drooling at the prospect of such a large taxpayer liability in Alberta, but the taxpayer and the ratepayer are actually the same person. We keep saying that, but it seems that the other side is not getting that point. There is only one taxpayer, and that is the ratepayer. When the taxpayer subsidizes the ratepayer, families still suffer the consequences of bad government policy, which we have seen in Ontario.

We heard some fascinatingly untrue things from my good friend the Member for Calgary-Klein yesterday. We were told earlier that the system failures won’t happen in a model with more renewables. Let me quote:

Yeah. I think moving towards the system that we’re going towards, the capacity market, is going to mean that we will always have electricity in the hopper ready to go, and we

shouldn't have these blackout issues when it comes to unscheduled maintenance.

I want to assure the member that I'll have his delusional quote archived for the next time a power generator has to go offline due to a safety issue. It is strange to me that in the member's time as a technical writer for a Calgary-based utility company, the member managed to completely miss the fact that planned maintenance is necessary, but I won't pretend that this is the first time you have missed something completely obvious directly under your nose, Member for Calgary-Klein.

Unplanned system failures occur in any system, whether it is renewable or nonrenewable, especially in a system with a high variability of renewables. In a system heavily reliant on renewables there are days when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine. That causes rolling blackouts. System maintenance blackouts are a risk in any system. The irony of the NDP citing this as a failure of the former system while they transition us to a system with more variability, more cost, a system that will require more maintenance days due to the forced renewables, is not lost on anyone here, Madam Chair.

Now, I think we also need to talk about economic withholding. Since the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was so eager to tell a story he clearly didn't understand yesterday, I think it is extremely important that I spend some time telling my colleagues from across the aisle about the time TransAlta was fined \$56 million for market manipulation. Madam Chair, \$56 million. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud sarcastically declared:

In this great system that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake espoused, there was a term called "economic withholding," which basically meant that a company could [withhold] at exactly

the right time to maximize their profits and at exactly the right time to cause discomfiture to the citizens of Alberta.

To put the reality of Alberta's market into context, most residential consumers do not face the hourly price volatility of the spot market because they either pay a contracted price or they pay the regulated rate option or the default rate, which averages prices from the previous 45 to 120 days, depending on the provider.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) we shall now rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 16.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn for the morning, after such great work this morning, and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, May 25, 2017

Day 39

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 25, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. M. le Président, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs a group of 75 brilliant grade 6 students from l'école Coloniale Estates in the beautiful town of Beaumont. L'école Coloniale Estates offers programming in both French immersion and English. The students are accompanied by their teacher, M. Mario Lemay, and five parent assistants and chaperones. I'll just go through them: Mrs. Kimberly Epp, Mrs. Barb Parolin, Mrs. Linda Bouyea, Miss Addie Hobbins, and Mrs. Kim Tremblay. I would ask them to now rise across both sides of the House and accept the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the outstanding grade 6 students, teachers, and parents of the Forestburg school in my beautiful riding of Battle River-Wainwright. Forestburg, as you may know or may not know, is a coal mining community that produces electricity, that Albertans depend upon, through the Battle River power generating station, the Westmoreland coal mine, and ATCO Power. Among many other things, this is a community of farmers. The people here are hard working, and they have awesome students and teachers. Would you please rise as I call out your name: the teacher, Mrs. Laura Pfeffer; chaperones Brock Bartlett and Dion Burlock; and the students. Please help me give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?
Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and to the Assembly the members of the 2016-17 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, who are sitting in your gallery. This commission was established in October 2016 with the task of reviewing Alberta's 87 constituencies using a whole number of factors to make sure that they are fair and equitable. The commission had a series of hearings across the province, and now they are issuing their interim report. I had the honour of meeting them when they visited Peace River, and I saw first-hand the integrity and dedication that they all bring to this role. I'm very, very pleased to introduce the members of the commission. We have Hon. Justice Myra Bielby, chair, and members Laurie Livingstone, Gwen Day, Bruce McLeod, and Jean Munn. I would ask that our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise in the House today to introduce to you and through you my mother, Shaheen Asad, who lives in Toronto with my father, Asad Kazim. She's visiting me from Toronto to celebrate the two-year anniversary of our government after she and my father attended my swearing-in ceremony. I appreciate her indulgence in politics and would like to thank her for her blessings and support in my political journey. I would like to request her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, Mom.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to introduce to you and through you Theresa Jenkins, the executive director at Servants Anonymous, and Victoria Bailey, the research, communications, and development manager at Servants Anonymous. The goal of Servants Anonymous is for all women who are at risk of or who have experienced sexual exploitation to know faith, hope, and love and to be empowered to rebuild their lives. These incredible women have completely inspired me, and I've spoken about them nonstop since I've met them. They are passionately committed to the women and children that they work for and to providing women a lifeline to exit sexual exploitation and trafficking. I'm honoured to introduce them in the House. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Samantha Christie. Samantha is a communications practicum student working in Seniors and Housing. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in political science and is completing her public relations certificate at MacEwan University. Samantha, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you two amazing community leaders from the Al-Rashid mosque. Mr. Khalid Tarabain is the president, and Mr. Omar Najmeddine is the executive director for Al-Rashid and the chair of the board of directors of the Edmonton Islamic Academy, which is located in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. I want to thank you for your years of dedication and support in the community and all across Alberta. I will speak more about this in my member's statement this afternoon. I would ask my guests to now please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of introductions today. It's a privilege to rise and recognize this week, when the House voted on Bill 205 to create an advocate for people with disabilities, and to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Teresa Pinkoski, who I believe is sitting right there. Teresa has demonstrated remarkable leadership through her impressive areas of volunteer work in the community, including Fort Edmonton, a child care centre, and the Strathcona county library. Last year she earned her early learning and child care

diploma at MacEwan. This year Teresa is one of two recipients of the inspiration award, presented by the Canadian Down Syndrome Society, for her accomplishments. She is here with her mother and with her friends Cosima Vicente; Amanda Riley, who's her support worker; May Carter; and Joe Carter. It's really a great pleasure for her to be recognized today. I would like to ask everyone to stand and receive the customary welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it's also a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Nathan Ip. Nathan Ip is a trustee with the Edmonton public school board, but he's also a campus connections worker who provided support to Teresa during her time at MacEwan University and was part of her success. I would like to ask Nathan to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and to all the members of this Assembly 37 members of Global Pravasi Seniors Society visiting from Calgary, many of whom are living in the most beautiful, diverse, and outstanding riding of Calgary-McCall. This society is dedicated to providing resources to seniors, identifying opportunities for them to be engaged and involved in society, and protecting seniors from financial or age-related abuse. I will not name all of them, but I would like to name the executive. I would like them to rise as I call their names: Sat Paul Kaushal, the president; Subash Kalia, vice-president of Global Pravasi and also the president of the Hindu Society of Calgary; Prem Bhandari, secretary; Pritam Singh, treasurer; Sarabjit Randhawa; Baldev Singh Kang; Raj Kumar Handa; Balwant Sharma. I thank them for their important work as advocates for seniors and ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly staff from the Property Rights Advocate's office in Edmonton: Ms Karen Johnson, Alberta's Acting Property Rights Advocate, and Ms Angela Balec, the public engagement officer. The office has been around for about four and a half years, providing an evidence-based, unbiased voice to government about current and future property rights and laws and policies. The staff of the office listen to and document stories of Albertans as they share their concerns about property rights. I'd ask Karen and Angela to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Violence against Women and Girls

Ms McPherson: Women in Alberta continue to face discrimination, sexism in the workplace and in public, lower pay than men, violence in their homes, harassment on the street, and the low opinion of traditionalists, and it's time for it to stop. Earlier this week we were all reminded of the urgent need to address this, not only in Alberta but throughout the world, when a suicide bomber

targeted young people, specifically young women, at a concert, killing 22.

The United Nations has designated the 25th of every month Orange Day as part of the Unite campaign to end violence against women. Goal 5 from the 2030 agenda for sustainable development identifies gender equality and the empowerment of women as key priorities and a key to ending violence against women and girls in our world. Mr. Speaker, on this Orange Day I am so proud to be part of a government that is taking action to promote the equality and empowerment of women. Ours is the first gender-balanced cabinet in Canada, and our province has the first Status of Women ministry, unlike the opposition, who have consistently acted against equality by voting against increased funding for women's shelters; voting against Status of Women grants for achieving women's equality; opposing minimum wage increases, which primarily affect women; making public statements encouraging violence against women; and heckling sexual abuse survivors in this House.

We have lifted thousands of children out of poverty with the Alberta child benefit and the family employment tax credit. We've taken action on violence against women by funding women's shelters and passing a law to help women get out of leases trapping them in dangerous situations.

How can you support equality for the women and girls in your life? Tell your daughters how smart they are. If someone discloses they've been sexually assaulted, believe them. Support capable women in your life running for office. Donate time and money to organizations that support women fleeing violence. Question the subtle ways that women are discriminated against every day. And if you want to continue to see the advancement of women, vote NDP in the next election.

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

Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is horrifying when you know that young teen girls are being sexually exploited or that little girls are being raped, abused, and held in bondage by pimps. The mortality rates are staggering. Women and girls are dying. However, over 800 women and children owe a new life to an organization called Servants Anonymous Society, started as a true grassroots initiative in 2017, and this marks their 29th year of providing life-saving services. SAS provides immediate, safe, rapid exit programming and 24/7 long-term support to women and girls from across Canada fleeing sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.

SAS programs stabilize, heal, reconnect, help women and girls exit sexual exploitation and then positively, completely help them rebuild their lives. They run many programs, including a cuddle and care child care system in which there are activities and resources that promote healthy child development and allow exit participants to work in a program of recovery while knowing that their children are safe while on-site. The social return on this investment: analysis conducted in 2009 to 2012 shows that the SAS rapid-exit safe program was effective and cost efficient, creating nearly \$9 in social value for every dollar invested. This social value results in decreases of emergency services use, police involvement, incarceration, violent victimization, addictions and substance abuse, and increased employment in the mainstream economy.

Mr. Speaker, the safe program was closed in February of 2016 due to lack of dedicated funding from this government. Alberta can be a leader in helping women and girls to not only exit sexual exploitation but also as a unique service provider that does not typically fit into existing provincial funding models for vulnerable women. Supporting SAS to provide a safe haven for women fleeing

sexual exploiters can literally mean the difference between life and death for them and their children.

I'd like to thank the ministries of Finance, Status of Women, and human services for finding the time to meet with these advocates today.

Opioid Use

Dr. Swann: The opioid death crisis is unprecedented, ripping apart families of all socioeconomic groups, including First Nations. The continual and dramatic increases in opioid deaths since 2013 are extremely saddening given that they are all preventable. While we see increased investment, it's not clear that mental health experts are leading, what the overall strategy is, or how current efforts are being evaluated since there has been no public analysis and reporting. Last year we had 363 deaths due to fentanyl. In the first three months of this year 113 Albertans lost their lives, a 61 per cent increase in deaths over the same period of 2016.

We're starting to see the same disturbing trends here as in B.C., without basic analysis of why we continue to lose ground even after four years, nor have we chosen to call this a public health emergency to mobilize all related resources. This is a mistake. B.C.'s declaration of a public health emergency led to resources being mobilized through the Health ministry across all government departments and between all stakeholders in a co-ordinated plan, with monthly reporting on what is working and what is not. Alberta struggles to report quarterly on fentanyl and other opioid deaths. B.C. embraced an early harm-reduction measure, including safe injection sites. We have yet to see a safe injection site in Alberta.

Naloxone kits are undoubtedly saving lives. The associate minister yesterday admitted there were 1,130 life-saving doses of naloxone given in the first three months of this year. That's 13 near deaths every day in Alberta. Clearly, we are not getting ahead of this devastation.

Wait times have improved for opioid replacement therapy, but outside of Edmonton and Calgary people seeking help continue to wait too long.

Numbers are not enough. There is a troubling lack of analysis of what changes are needed and where for an accurate picture of this epidemic. Strong new leadership from a mental health and addictions expert is needed, who can focus and oversee an evidence-based, co-ordinated plan and overcome the silos. This terribly stigmatized illness needs a new approach, and now is the time for the government to admit that its approach is not working.

This is the most important preventable public health crisis of our time. The lives of our children depend on it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Government Caucus

Cortes-Vargas: Two years ago Albertans elected a new government, and this new government for the first time in 40 years reflected a province that is diverse, inclusive, and full of fresh ideas. I was one of those new faces, a proud member of the LGBTQ community, a Canadian-Columbian immigrant looking for a better life. My experiences and those of my amazingly diverse caucus members are setting the foundation for the kind of legislation that is making this province better.

I am proud to serve as part of a caucus of people that come from all walks of life. We are a group of people who know what it is like to work in all parts of the Alberta economy. On topics like fair and balanced workplace legislation in this House this diversity of views helps us get things right.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House our members have signed both the front and the back of paycheques. We are nurses. We are teachers. We have run our own businesses, worked for other businesses. We have bus drivers, electricians, and realtors. We have come from pulp mills, autobody shops, farms, and we are from the resource sector, nonprofits, and schools. We have helped people with disability take their place in the community and have fought for their dignity and quality of life. We are social workers. We are psychologists, doctors and lawyers. We are writers. We are ship-pers, activists, school trustees, and, yes, some of us even became union representatives.

Mr. Speaker, our diversity is the strength of our province. While the two right-wing parties believe that working people don't belong in government or in decision-making, it is pretty clear from the last election that that is exactly what Albertans wanted.

I am proud of our fair and balanced plan for family-friendly workplaces, and I am proud that with this diverse team we will make life better for Albertans.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

Mr. Jean: The NDP introduced their omnibus labour legislation just yesterday. I want to state once again very clearly that Wildrose is in favour of the compassionate care changes made in this bill. If the government splits the bill into two, we would happily pass those changes through every single stage right now, today. If the Premier was sincere in wanting to help Albertans like Amanda Jensen and was not using her story as a PR exercise, she would agree. To the Premier: will you commit to splitting this bill in two right now and passing it at all stages this afternoon and fast-tracking all the compassionate components of the bill? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's really quite interesting. I recall the member opposite being part of a government that stuffed unrelated issues into bills that were thousands of pages long, and that was the way they did business each and every day. This bill that we're talking about is about modernizing workplace rules and bringing them up to date across the scope to support working families across Alberta. Now, if there are specific parts of it that he'd like to change, I welcome the debate in Committee of the Whole. That's where the debate should occur. Our government's focus is on making life better for working Albertans.

Mr. Jean: No, Mr. Speaker. The debate should happen in front of Albertans. That's called consultation, and you can do that this summer. It would be a great thing to hear from them.

It's sad to hear the Premier using Albertans as props to score political points. The NDP are being incredibly callous with this legislation. They're using common-sense employment standards changes as cover for significant changes to the labour code. These changes will hurt Alberta's economy when we can least afford it. Listen, please, to Albertans. The Calgary Chamber of commerce says that Bill 17 will make it harder to run a business in Alberta. I agree. Why won't the Premier use common sense and split this bill in two and take the time to actually consult with Albertans?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, with each passing day the member's rhetoric gets more extreme. I guess it's because he's fighting Jason Kenney for his job. Let's review this session. The Wildrose leader didn't support providing school lunches, he flip-flopped on GSAs, he called regular Albertans who belonged to unions thugs, and now he's shouting about a bill that even Lorne Gunter thinks is noncontroversial. I honestly didn't believe it was possible to run right of Lorne Gunter.

Mr. Jean: News flash, Mr. Speaker. I don't work for Lorne Gunter; I work for Albertans. They should try to do the same thing.

No consultation, no economic impact study, no problem: that's the NDP way of doing things and the examples of how their ideological fly by the seat of their pants policy methods are piling up. Bill 6, the carbon tax, now sweeping labour changes to change Alberta: all done without consultation and without a sound economic plan. No surprise. It's the NDP. Since the Premier won't hit the pause button in the name of consultation, would she at least recognize that an economic impact study is necessary before forging ahead with this bill?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't need an economic impact study to know that fairness for working Albertans finally coming into line with the rest of the country is good for business. It's good for people. It's good for the economy. Here's what the president of the Progressive Contractors Association, not normally a big-union-friendly group, said. "The government appears to have genuinely sought a 'middle-ground'." People understand that that's what we're doing. I think the member opposite should just get onboard and vote to support working Albertans.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Removing secret ballots for Alberta workers is not middle of the ground.

Educational Curriculum Review

Mr. Jean: The Premier ought to spend more time with parents so that she can actually understand why Albertans have serious concerns about her government's curriculum overhaul. In the real world parents are seeing scores slipping, and they don't want their kids being used as guinea pigs for yet another educational fad by this government. In the real world parents have a strong desire to be involved in their child's education, and they have the right to. Why isn't the Premier taking the time to listen to parents in this curriculum review and not just her bureaucratic buddies in Edmonton?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the curriculum review is part of one of the biggest engagements with Albertans of any curriculum review ever. Students have been invited to participate. Parents have been invited to participate. Teachers have been invited to participate. The member opposite is actually quite welcome to participate. We are moving forward to make sure that we have a curriculum that serves Albertan students and kids going forward to help them get ready for the new economy, and it's really about time.

Mr. Jean: Come-and-be-told meetings are not consultation.

You'll forgive me if I'm a little bit skeptical about where this review is taking us. You see, buzzwords might work for bureaucrats,

but parents want to actually see a strong foundation in reading, writing, and understanding of history. You see, the Premier talks all the time about being future ready, but you can't be future ready if you haven't learned from the past. When will the Premier realize that getting back to basics in education is exactly what parents are asking for and what our students need to compete in an evermore competitive world?

Ms Notley: Well, as I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, it was our government that actually did a math review that very much focused on improving the kind of work that's going on in math and raising accountability levels throughout the education system to improve the math education received by Alberta students. Many people who often align with the members opposite actually thought that it was a good thing, so I'm pleased that some people were able to acknowledge that. Generally speaking, there is a lot more consultation to go forward. The draft document is just out there, and we look forward to hearing more from people across the province, including, as I said before, the member opposite, because I think at the end of the day we're going to produce . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: If the NDP are going to fundamentally change our curriculum system, as all signs seem to suggest they're going to do, then the very least they can do is publicly post the results of their reviews. That includes going back to the fall review and posting written suggestions, and that means doing the same thing for the online survey that's under way now. Will the Premier agree to publicly posting all results of these surveys, including written responses from all Albertans, for all Albertans to see? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we commit to doing is carrying on with this consultation, carrying on with the very open dialogue about the matters that are in front of us. In fact, it absolutely boggles the mind that the kinds of things that are in the draft document now the member opposite sees as bad. The notion of engaged citizens is somehow seen as a socialist plot to the members opposite. I said before that they are moving to the extreme, but even this seems too much for them. Engaged citizenship is good for all Alberta, and we are proud to support that.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Child and Youth Advocate Death Review

Mr. Jean: Yesterday the Child and Youth Advocate released another heartbreaking report that highlights again ongoing problems in our child welfare system. Levi was 15 when he took his own life. In one four-year stretch he was moved 12 times between the homes of his mother, relatives, and his foster families. He had nightmares that he would have to move again. This was a child who was bounced around by a system that ultimately failed him. Premier, why don't you have a policy to limit the number of times a child can be bounced around until action is taken?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. I want to begin, of course, by thanking the advocate for sharing Levi's story. It's absolutely heartbreaking that Levi did not get the support that he needed, and our thoughts go out to not only Levi's family as they grieve for the

loss of their son and their brother and their grandson but to all people who find themselves in those situations.

We accept these important recommendations, and we will work closely with the advocate to move forward on them. We know that we need to do better, and we look forward to hearing productive and effective recommendations from the all-party committee that we've set up to focus on exactly these kinds of issues, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Sounds like no policy, Mr. Speaker.

Levi repeatedly told adults that he did not like being around his mother when she drank. When he was eight, he wrote to his mother asking to stay with his foster family, but Levi was returned to her care. When he was 12, Levi was found living in a tent because of his mother's drinking. No action was taken. Levi's voice was ignored. Now, the advocate recommends that children be actively engaged in decisions that affect them. It makes a lot of sense. What is the Premier going to make sure and do so that kids are being heard in our system in the future?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that the facts that the member describes and that the advocate describes demonstrate that it's clear that the former human services ministry was not able to do everything possible that should have happened for this young man. You know, when the people decide that we need to focus on keeping families together in order to correct the mistakes of the past, when people felt that families were split too often, sometimes what happens is that families are kept together when they shouldn't be. The advocate is absolutely correct that what we need to do is listen to these kids. That work has already started within the ministry. I know it has. And we'll keep . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: A shocking response, Mr. Speaker. In fact, a shocking nonresponse.

The Child and Youth Advocate shouldn't have to scream and shout to be taken seriously. It's nice to hear the Premier saying that she's listening, but his report into Levi's death is the fourth time that he's made recommendations about the effects that exposure to parental violence or addictions has on a child. We hear the ministry accept the recommendation, but there seems no will to actually implement these changes. A new system is needed, and it's needed now. Will the Premier agree to bring in the advocate's recommendations to a committee of the Legislature immediately so we can hold the minister and her staff fully accountable?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we've gone one step further. We've set up an all-party committee which is reviewing all of these issues. This is exactly the opportunity for us to do what the member has asked us to do. So I hope that when they go to the committee, they focus on these difficult challenges, these large problems, these issues of how we care for kids and care for families, all of whom are struggling, to ensure the best outcomes for kids and keeping people together. That's what we'll continue to work on, and I invite the members opposite to participate fully in that committee.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is hiding bad policy behind good policy. Yesterday they introduced Ashley Jensen to highlight employment standards changes, that we on this side support, to protect the job of a mother who takes time off to care for her child with cancer. Of course, we support that. Sadly, the NDP is using Ashley as a human shield for bad policy in the same bill. Shame. To the Premier. It's obvious you're using this Albertan for political cover. Why wouldn't you separate two different bills, the positive changes for job protection from the many negative changes that you are pushing?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's all fine for the member opposite to say that it's an automatic thing that we should move forward with the kinds of leaves that – the many stories that Albertans have been telling about the struggles they've had under the leadership of the former government come to the forefront. I'm glad that he's finally seen the light. For 44 years that government failed to bring in the kinds of changes that every other worker in this country had and deserved, and for him to come here now and complain about us moving forward on it is the most hypocritical thing I've seen in this House in some time. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. McIver: Wrong again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. McIver: The Premier sat here last term when we introduced compassionate care changes . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. McIver: . . . brought in by MLA Jeneroux.

The Labour minister was asked repeatedly if she'd take the private ballot away for union certification. She said no, but it turns out that it does happen. By the time a vote can happen, after six months of card signing, everyone will know who signed a card and who has not, leaving workers open to intimidation from both sides, union and management. To the Premier: why are you leaving Alberta workers vulnerable to intimidation from all sides by removing the secret ballot provision?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, under the rules that were put in place by the Conservative government back in the '80s, a system was created that left Alberta workers vulnerable in a way that no other worker in the country had experienced. Quite frankly, the Supreme Court of Canada has issued so many decisions about matters related to labour relations that if you applied those decisions to our labour laws, there are so many ways in which we were in breach of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms under the leadership of the former government. We are righting the balance. We are about creating a fair and modern workplace, and it is about time.

Mr. McIver: The Premier is making it worse.

Mr. Speaker, many nonprofits and charities manage their budgets by working long hours near key times of the year and then letting employees take banked hours off during slower times. Bill 17 now means that they have to pay 1.5 times the hourly pay. Now nonprofits will need to raise more money to provide the same service or provide less mission-based work per year. Congratulations. You fixed what wasn't broken. To the Premier. Your government is constantly hurting the people you claim to help. Are

you that beholden to your union masters that charities are just collateral damage?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Whether the hard-working people of Alberta are earning a living as workers working for oil companies, working for banks, working for accountants, or working for charities, each and every one of them deserves to have certain basic rights in the employment sector. Quite frankly, people who work for charities deserve to be treated fairly. The don't deserve to be told to work volunteer hours because somehow what they do is less valuable. It is not less valuable; it is as valuable. That's what our rules will make sure happens. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order, please. [interjection] Hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Some Hon. Members: Calgary-Mountain View.

The Speaker: It must have been that introduction by the Opposition House Leader yesterday that caused me to overlook it.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: That's twice, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Twice.

Health Information Reporting

Dr. Swann: This afternoon the Auditor General is set to release a report called Better Healthcare for Albertans, which analyzes the root causes of the government's lack of progress in specific parts of the health care system. One way to gauge the system is to look at the AHS quarterly performance reports. However, the last quarter of 2016 came out in April 2017, and this quarter's performance is still not on the AHS website. The PCs often delayed, changed, or stopped reporting altogether when it failed to meet targets. I had hoped that the NDP would do better. To the Minister of Health: where is the report, and why the delays?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. I haven't seen the report yet, but I will certainly follow up with AHS immediately and follow up with the House and with the public as soon as possible.

Dr. Swann: Well, last week, Mr. Speaker, the Métis Nation of Alberta released three new health reports detailing higher rates of injury, tobacco-related disease, and problems with Métis people accessing the health system. However, as Keith Gerein's article points out, these studies are based on outdated information, including one report that doesn't have data more recent than 2009-10. Again to the Minister: given the importance of these issues what are you doing to improve the quality and availability of Métis health information to address specific concerns raised in the report?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has committed to rebuilding the relationship with the indigenous peoples of this land. In February of 2017 our government signed a 10-year framework agreement with the Métis Nation of Alberta, and we are very proud of that. This commitment includes working with indigenous communities, including the \$300,000 that

we used to develop these reports, and also providing analytical support to the community. We're proud to work with them and not do things to them.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, late Friday afternoon, just ahead of a long weekend, Alberta Health posted the first-quarter opioid death reports, showing a 61 per cent increase over the same quarter in 2016, without so much as a comment from the minister, much less a thoughtful analysis of what's working and what's not working in our approach. Surely we deserve a higher degree of reporting and transparency. Will the minister commit today to establishing a predictable, monthly reporting to the public and some analysis of how the program is working? If not, why not?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, we had a choice. As soon as the data was available, we chose to release it rather than holding on to that data and waiting through the whole weekend. We thought it was important to be open and public with that data, so we made it available as soon as we possibly could. In terms of availability I was actually at a press conference that afternoon where we were talking about work that we're doing to help with truth and reconciliation as well as with missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. I'm very happy to answer questions, and if the member has some that he'd like to pose, I would be happy to continue to enter into this dialogue. We've been doing extensive work, and we want to be open with our data. That's why we made it available as soon as possible.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

2:10

Supportive Living Accommodations for Rural Seniors

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After much anticipation the greatly needed Boyle supportive living facility has now been built, but it is not fully operational because sections of the building were not built to code. Given the relatively small number of residents in the facility and given that the Greater North Foundation believes the facility can safely function at a level 3 to 4 care, as it was intended, in its current state, to the Minister of Seniors and Housing: can the government confirm whether this will happen?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seniors built this province, and they deserve to retire in dignity. Our government is proud to invest over \$13 million in the Boyle supportive living facility to make life better for seniors in this area. The facility is designed and constructed to the B3 building code. I understand that many housing management bodies want to ensure that these facilities serve seniors as their required level of care increases. We have been working with Municipal Affairs on this to create clarity over the building codes needed for seniors' facilities, and I will have more to say on this in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that seniors living in partnerships are far too often split up by the requirements for differing levels of care and given that the Boyle supportive living facility will offer both enhanced lodge accommodations and levels 3 to 4 care, which supports the needs of smaller rural communities, to the same minister: will the government use the approach taken in this case for other rural facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors tell me that they want to age in the community where they have lived most of their lives, close to family and friends. My ministry has been working with Health to create these campuses of care. This is a priority for our government, and that's why we're investing \$1.2 billion in seniors' lodges and affordable housing. For example, in Canmore the Bow River seniors' lodge project will house both lodge and supportive care units to allow seniors to stay in the facility while accessing additional services. I'm looking forward to the completion of the Boyle supportive living facility such as this.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the demand for services for seniors will only keep increasing across rural Alberta, to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that seniors, especially those living in rural Alberta, will have access to the services they require?

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, having grown up in a small town in northern Alberta, Valleyview, I understand the importance of providing services to seniors in rural communities. That's why we've introduced the seniors' home adaptation repair program, which supports seniors to access up to \$40,000 to make necessary home adaptations. We've also enhanced the special-needs assistance for seniors who have to travel long distances for medical appointments. Through Health our government has invested an additional \$200 million for home-care services. These are a few of the things our government is doing to make life better for seniors in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Energy Industry Opposition

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the 2015 federal election foreign money and third parties were very active. One of the worst offenders was the Tides Foundation. Tides has been funding antipipeline activism for years. Between 2009 and 2015 Tides made over 400 payments to anti oil sands and antipipeline groups. My question is simple. If this NDP government doesn't have a soft spot for Tides, why don't you file a case against them for interference in the 2015 election?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has made sure that our elections financing rules are some of the strongest in the country, including strong protections against third-party advertising. Any third-party advertiser needs to register with Elections Alberta and needs to disclose their donors, increasing the transparency so that we know where big money is in play in our political system and all Albertans can be aware of that. This is groundbreaking. It was passed last session. I'm quite proud that we now have these rules in place.

Mr. Panda: Given that the Tides Foundation gave \$615,000 to Stand, the Pembina Institute, Environmental Defence, and Équiterre, four groups who helped develop the NDP's climate plan, and given that the national director for Stand, Karen Mahon, is serving as an oil sands adviser to this Premier while at the same time she's working to destroy the Kinder Morgan pipeline, why is the NDP

government denying their involvement with the Tides Foundation when the proof is in the pudding?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we are incredibly proud of the fact that with our very first bill we took corporate and union money out of campaigns. It was very important and long overdue. It's time to make sure that we ensure that the people of Alberta have as strong a voice as possible, and fortunately we have a majority government and the ability to do that, no matter what the members opposite try to do.

There are, as the member said, very clear guidelines around third-party advertising. We take them very seriously, and we hope that the members opposite abide by the legislation and ensure that corporations don't buy tickets to fundraisers.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the New Venture Fund started a website called Dirty Oil Sands, which, according to the *Financial Post*, was registered to Tzporah Berman, the Premier's other top oil sands adviser, and given that the Dirty Oil Sands campaign conceivably received funds from foreign governments, why is the NDP government working with the anti-Alberta organizations like Tides and radical activists like Karen Mahon and Tzporah Berman, who are clearly on the take from people who would ruin Alberta?

The Speaker: All hon. members, but specifically, hon. member, be cautious about the use of names in the House and any allegations about their character because, remember, they cannot be represented in this House.

The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this side of the government has taken a different approach because, we know, for far too long the other side wanted to go full John Wayne and pull everybody against each other. Our side is not doing that. We've gathered oil companies together, we've gathered environmental groups and everyday Albertans, and you know what the results were? Two pipelines. We've got the permissions, we're going to keep going, and we're going to get those pipeline shovels in the ground soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Calgary Cancer Centre

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's budget allocated \$370 million to a number of health facilities in Alberta. This included the Calgary cancer centre. The Minister of Infrastructure stated that the increased amount of capital investment of \$110 million this year was mainly the result of moving cash flows to reflect the progress of facilities, including the Calgary cancer centre. To the Minister of Infrastructure: with the money allocated in this budget, can you tell us what tangible results we can expect to see this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, our capital plan has been expanded significantly in order to take advantage of lower prices and to keep Albertans working and to catch up on the terrible infrastructure deficit which was left to us by the previous government. By reprofiling money forward into the current year, we can ensure that the construction continues to increase and take place so that we're able to finish and get in the ground new projects that will benefit all Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in estimates you stated that the Calgary cancer centre is a design/bid/build and given that the design will be done when the tender is awarded, to the minister: can you tell us if the Calgary cancer centre has been tendered?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I will get that information as to when the project will be tendered and provide it to him directly.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in estimates the Minister of Infrastructure expressed his concerns that the previous government was designing the Grande Prairie hospital to a political announcement and didn't take into account the actual needs, to the minister: as you have announced that the Calgary cancer centre is to be built but don't yet have a design, wouldn't you say that you are now designing the Calgary cancer centre to your political announcement?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the Minister of Infrastructure for giving me the opportunity to answer this question. For more than 10 years the people of Calgary waited, announcement after announcement after announcement, on that Conservative government. Guess what? Lots of evidence was gathered. The design/build will be completed by the end of the summer, and we expect construction to start later this year as well. It's about time. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

2:20 Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sexual exploitation and trafficking is growing, and it is full of complexities. The city of Calgary estimates that there are 3,000 women and girls experiencing sexual exploitation in Calgary alone. Barriers to leaving include a lack of money or food, addictions and mental health issues, or concerns about children and family members. One of the main policy areas of Status of Women is preventing and addressing gender-based violence. To the Minister of Status of Women: what are you doing for supports to eliminate sexual exploitation?

Ms McLean: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we must stop trafficking before it starts and provide needed supports so that the victims can heal and rebuild their lives. That's why we're working in partnership with Community and Social Services as well as the Department of Justice to combat human trafficking, sexual violence, and family violence. Our government provides funding to community agencies directly addressing the needs of human trafficking victims, including the Strathcona Shelter Society, the Centre to End all Sexual Exploitation, and the Action Coalition on Human Trafficking, which is a partnership of government, community partners, and survivors.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, hopefully, that funding will fund SAS as well.

Given that courageous victims are taking early steps to exit sexual exploitation and sex trafficking – they need wraparound supports like those provided by Servants Anonymous Society – and given that these supports like housing, mental health, addictions care, child care, and employment training cross many different government ministries and given that Community and Social Services was just separated from the Ministry of Children's Services, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what is your government doing to make sure that all of these separate services are available specifically to those exiting sexual exploitation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the important question. I met with the Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary this morning and had an opportunity to learn about the important work they do. We have family and community support program grants, and we will work with an organization like Servants Anonymous and other organizations across the province to make sure that survivors have the supports they need. In addition to that, we have also increased FCSS funding, that goes to prevention programs, and also added ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Given that the problem isn't going away and more and more women and girls are at risk every day and given that most women become involved in sexual exploitation at the average age of 12 and given that youth are at risk and are much more likely to be sexually exploited, to the Minister of Children's Services: how is your ministry responding to this increasing problem, and what are you going to do to ensure that Alberta's at-risk youth are not falling into the hands of predators?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Member, for the question. As she stated, the new research suggests that it starts fairly early on, and I guess it's incumbent on us as government that we must stop trafficking before it begins. My colleague from Status of Women has outlined certain programs that we fund. In addition to that, Justice is also participating in the implementation of a federal action plan on human trafficking through work on the federal-provincial-territorial working group on human trafficking. As I said earlier, we will be there for ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Whirling Disease in Alberta Fish

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The outbreak of whirling disease on Alberta fish farms has led to them being quarantined since the fall of 2016. Very little communication has been provided to some in the industry. One quarantined fish farm has received no written confirmation of test results or any other documents. At the time of inspection he asked for copies of the documents and was told: no, you don't get a copy. Is this normal practice, that affected farms do not get copies of documents or written confirmation of test results?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that our government is taking swift action to protect our fish population from whirling disease. The day after whirling disease was detected in Banff national park, we signed a ministerial order outlining the three-point action plan to educate Albertans, detect and contain the disease. In order to expedite the communication with stakeholders, we formed a whirling disease committee. A representative from the aquaculture industry sits on that committee. This allows us to communicate quickly with stakeholders and get their input on how to contain this disease.

Mr. Orr: The fish farm industry is struggling to manage this outbreak. I would hope that the government would consult and work with them. Instead, operators are saying that they are being ignored and that the government is only focused on public fish farms instead of private commercial fish farms. It appears that the government is going into competition with the commercial fish industry. Will the government save the future of fish farms, both public and private, by working with them, or will your competition just be forced out of business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have sent information packages to registered fish farm operators, and staff have met with those operators. We will continue working for fish farm operators as we continue to combat whirling disease.

Mr. Orr: The ministry has written a letter to some quarantined trout farms offering them a paltry \$25,000, and no explanation of how this figure was arrived at has been provided. Given that in the livestock industries quarantined and slaughtered animals are compensated at fair market value and since these are the livelihoods of families and communities – if they're not compensated at fair market value, a family may not have food on their table – how was this figure calculated, is it negotiable, and is it meant to be fair market value or just a silencer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you. We did offer ex gratia payments to certain operators who were placed under quarantine. Staff are working with operators to help them apply for those payments. I would encourage the hon. member, if there's a specific constituent, to contact the Minister of Environment and Parks' office. There may be more questions we can help them with. But I need to reiterate that whirling disease is seriously impacting Alberta's world-famous fishery. The CFIA now requires a permit when transferring fish and fish farm equipment from an infected area. For more information I would suggest you contact the Environment and Parks website.

Tax Policies

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, recently the Finance minister trumpeted how the indexed exemption amounts on Alberta's income taxes were yet another example of how this government is making life better for Albertans. You know, it sounds wonderful, but the minister is taking credit for something he had nothing to do with. It kind of reminds me of the ranchers I used to do work for who said how great their calves looked until I pointed out that the calves all looked like the neighbour's bull. But I digress. To the minister: are you claiming that indexing the exemption amount to inflation is something you came up with, or are you simply taking credit for something that was done by the previous government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We carried on something that was done by the previous government, but we carried it on because we know that we don't want to see incomes further eroded. It's important. We expanded it. We had the choice not to expand it to the lower income people, but we did, and we'll continue to do that.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that a two-income family with two children and a household income of \$105,000 will pay \$100 less in income tax thanks to this measure that the minister had nothing to do with and given that the same family will pay roughly \$400 more in carbon taxes, that this minister had everything to do with, and given that the minister is only telling Albertans half the story, the \$100 part and not the \$400 part, to the minister: when can we expect your department to issue a press release to correct the error you've made?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I won't be issuing a press release on Friday afternoon or any other time, I can tell you, because there is no need to introduce a press release. You know, we are making life more affordable for Alberta families. We are cutting school fees. We are freezing tuition. We are doing things like capping electricity rates. That side made life more expensive. We're making it cheaper for Albertans.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government brags about a \$7.5 billion tax advantage over the next lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada and that this advantage will grow to \$8.7 billion this year – but, of course, they had nothing to do with that either – and given that this advantage was \$11 billion when this government took office, to the Finance minister: is this taxation advantage that you inherited and have already eroded by one-third something that you try to maintain, or is this just the room that you have to play with before Alberta is no longer the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country?

2:30

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I know we've all been here for a while, two years, but you know, there's been a recession in this province for two years. Has that side not been aware that it's been the toughest recession? We've contracted 3.5 per cent of our GDP in 2015-16. We didn't cause it. We're fixing it. We're bringing diversification into this province. We've got the backs of Albertans, and we're investing across this province. That'll get us back.

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

Digital Media and Postproduction Grant Programs

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Currie has hundreds of people whose livelihood is in the cultural sector, and I know that culture is an economic driver in our province. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is this government doing to help Albertans looking for work in the post-production, digital animation, visual effects, and interactive digital media sectors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of culture.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm very happy to share with you that two new pilot grant programs, worth \$3 million, will be put in to make it easier for Albertans looking to work in these sectors. A \$1.5 million interactive digital media grant will cover up to 35 per cent of labour

costs for new hires, and a \$1.5 million postproduction, digital animation, and visual effects grant will cover up to 18 per cent of eligible labour expenses. These grants were designed with input from industry stakeholders, who are very excited to see our government's involvement and support of the industry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is great news. Can the Minister of Culture and Tourism inform the House who will ultimately benefit from these grants?

The Speaker: Point of order is noted.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These grants will help Alberta's postproduction and digital media companies grow and create jobs, diversify our economy, and make life better for Albertans, and they are expected to benefit Albertans looking to get into the cultural industry, many of them being recent graduates. The grants will benefit any small to medium-sized businesses by helping to offset the costs of hiring new labour in the postproduction, visual effects, digital animation, and interactive media sectors. Eligible companies can apply for grant funding using albertamediafund.ca.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the conservatives across the way have no plans for this sector and given that their reckless cuts across this government would only make the lives of Albertans worse in this tough economy, can the Minister of Culture and Tourism explain how this will protect and diversify our economy, create more jobs, and make life better for Albertans?

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Miranda: The interactive digital media and postproduction grants offer much-needed stimulus and support for the cultural industry, Mr. Speaker. We're going to help attract more film and television, digital media products, games, and animation production here to our province. It will also help individuals and companies develop technical expertise that is very much needed. Overall, these grants will help Alberta's postproduction and digital media companies grow, create jobs, and make life better for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Midwifery Services

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Wildrose called on the NDP government to remove the cap on midwife funding. We explained the importance of giving women choice instead of instituting artificial funding caps. Small midwifery clinics in locations across our province are still worried that this health service is not being properly funded. To the Minister of Health: will you remove the cap for midwife funding?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'd like to remind everyone that this government values

Alberta midwives and their important role in the health and well-being of mothers and their babies, and even in this tough economy we've supported midwives with a large commitment to expand funding for access to midwifery services. By working with the Alberta Association of Midwives, I'm pleased to report that the funding we've put in place means almost 600 more midwife-attended births this fiscal year alone, and that number is going to continue to go up over the next two years.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that this government likes to brag about their 68 per cent increase to midwife funding and while this stat may sound all great and good, it only increases the number of midwife births by 3 per cent, which doesn't even address the waiting list, and considering that this is only a fraction of the 50,000 to 55,000 births each year, when is the Minister of Status of Women going to stop the smoke and mirrors and stand up for women's choice? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, our government absolutely supports women's choice in all aspects of their reproduction. Frankly, the member opposite might do well to compare the midwives' agreement here in Alberta with some of the other jurisdictions across this country. We have some of the most generous policies available for midwives and are continuing to work in partnership with the Alberta Association of Midwives to expand access to this very important service for Alberta women. Meanwhile the opposition rattles on about removing the midwifery budget while at the same time talking about cutting billions from our health care system.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that a midwife birth can offer substantial cost savings to the entire health care system and given that this government is currently running a \$10.3 billion deficit, will the minister take the advice of the Wildrose Official Opposition, save taxpayers' money, improve choice for women, and immediately remove the cap on midwifery services?

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, we absolutely value the work of midwives and the benefit that they provide for mothers and their babies. In fact, I was lucky enough to have midwives attend both of my births. You know, frankly, we do know that midwifery has the possibility of helping to save dollars in the system, often with reduced medical intervention through the course of both pregnancy as well as during the birth itself. That said, our government is pleased to be working in co-operation with the Alberta Association of Midwives to expand further access to midwifery care for Alberta women, unlike the opposition.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

(continued)

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 includes some positive change for Albertans. We can all support job-protected leave for victims of domestic violence or for parents who need to care for critically ill or injured children. However, this government exploits the emotional elements of the bill to shield themselves from valid criticism while refusing to admit that many . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Gottfried: . . . of the sections clearly pander the bill to special-interest groups. To the Minister of Labour: were you afraid that if you

introduced the labour code provisions separately from employment standards, you wouldn't be able to conveniently hide behind vulnerable Albertans when debating this bill? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjection] Order. Calgary-Hays.
The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a disgrace to hear the Member for Calgary-Hays misname Amanda Jensen. For over 30 years that party didn't do anything, and she fell through the cracks because although they held consultations, they did not make any changes that would help everyday Albertans. They had consultations. They knew there were problems. Amanda Jensen was let go because of laws that that government allowed to stand. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet down, folks.

Mr. Gotfried: So you are hiding behind vulnerable Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, given this government has once caved to union pressure and introduced an antidemocratic hybrid card check system for union certification and given that the government's own press release states that Bill 17 will "simplify union certification" and given that the Alberta Federation of Labour was in full force on social media yesterday singing the praises of this bill and attacking its critics, again to the minister. You stated publicly that protecting the secret ballot process for union certification was of paramount concern for employers. Why did you ignore them in favour of your union comrades? [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Sorry.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have kept the secret ballot vote as part of our labour relations system. It's ironic to see the member opposite stand up and talk about intimidation when his party's leader was accused of intimidating voters during the leadership race. His own leader was forced to return thousands of dollars of donations because the supporters gave more than the law allowed when he was an MP. On this side of the House we are going to keep standing up for Alberta families. We're going to stand up for Albertans like Amanda Jensen. The opposition wants to sit on their hands and let these Albertans slip through the cracks. We will not let that happen. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Government House Leader, remind the caucus again of that earlier rule I've advised. When I stand, you be quiet, okay?

Mr. Mason: Yes. I'll do that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

2:40

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No consultation and hiding behind Albertans: that's the way it's going to be.

Given how obvious it is that the government was afraid of losing the narrative on Bill 17 before it was even introduced given the ad campaign they rolled out yesterday and given that this government has a long history of wasting taxpayer dollars on propaganda in support of pending legislation to make themselves feel good or convince themselves that Albertans support their misguided policies, again to the minister: what is the total cost of the ad campaign

launched in support of Bill 17? Please share this information with Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that Alberta has fair and family-friendly workplace legislation is a priority of this government. Making sure that people can take time off to care for themselves or their loved ones when someone is sick is a priority as is making sure that Albertans know about these important changes so that they will be able to be more protected when they are sick. Today I spoke with two doctors who every day in their practice talk to people who are afraid to call in sick because they might lose their jobs. Making sure that Albertans know about this through a small ad campaign is a priority for us.

The Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent to introduce some guests who have arrived?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House some friends of the Speaker's and mine from Medicine Hat. Now, everybody knows that Medicine Hat has the best weather. They know we have great people. But more people need to know that we have one of the best chambers of commerce in all of Canada. I would like to take a few minutes and introduce five of the people, volunteers and staff, that make this happen. As I call your name, if you could please rise. I'd like to introduce the president of the Medicine Hat chamber of commerce, Aaron Fleming. Next, I'd like to introduce our second vice-president, Sarah MacKenzie. Then I'd like to introduce the treasurer, Tracy Noullet; our executive director, Lisa Kowalchuk; and her executive assistant, Katalin Lang. If everyone would please share in the normal warm reception for our guests. Thank you for coming.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ramadan

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to have the opportunity to rise and wish Ramadan Mubarak to all and especially those of my constituents and those Albertans of the Muslim faith. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this month adult Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset and are also expected to abstain from other activities which keep their hearts and minds tied to earthly things. It is a time of renewed devotion to the spiritual practice of Islam and is meant to not only cleanse the body and spirit but also increase empathy for others who may be suffering from hunger. I would especially like to recognize the devotion and discipline of those members of the Muslim faith who observe Ramadan in a northern climate like ours. With long hours of daylight may come long hours of fasting, and those of us who are not Muslim should recognize and support our friends and neighbours.

One of the reasons that Ramadan is held to be sacred is that the Quran, Islam's holy book, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, during this month. Observing Ramadan is one of the core tenets of Islam and is observed widely amongst all Muslims. Muslims believe in the oneness of God, the importance of regular prayer, the giving of charity to the poor, and the importance of pilgrimage.

The Muslim community has been a part of Alberta for many years. The oldest mosque in Canada, the Al-Rashid mosque, was built in Edmonton and officially opened in 1938. Over the years Muslim Albertans have made many contributions to this province, not least during the fire in Fort McMurray last year, when Muslim charitable organizations contributed generously. It is a reminder that all of us share a responsibility for our neighbours of all faiths, cultures, and ethnicities.

As Muslims take this time to renew their faith and devotion, may we all take this time to consider our own faith and renew our pledge to build a strong, inclusive, and caring society.

Once again Ramadan Mubarak to all. Assalamu Alaikum. Peace be with you.

Thank you.

Municipal Minimum Property Tax

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, in *Hamlet* Polonius offers this advice to Laertes.

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Now, this NDP government appears to be following Polonius's advice. Higher taxes, runaway spending, massive deficits, ballooning debts: these are all, certainly, them being true to their NDP selves.

But on one issue the NDP supports transferring wealth from the poor to the rich. Over 70 Alberta municipalities apply minimum tax, which allows municipalities to levy a property tax bill that in some cases is higher than the assessed value of the property. Poor people pay more, and rich people get a tax break. Now, the first two NDP Municipal Affairs ministers could have changed this reverse Robin Hood policy, but they didn't. What do NDP stalwarts have to say about this? Well, the late Jack Layton in his book *Homelessness: How to End the National Crisis* describes how shifting property taxes from higher to lower income Canadians, as minimum tax does, makes homelessness worse. A recent survey by the Broadbent Institute showed that 82 per cent of respondents believe that the gap between the rich and the poor in Canada is growing. Minimum tax widens that gap.

Now, recently the Premier's former chief of staff advised the NDP to challenge what he ironically called reverse Robin Hood policies that transfer wealth from ordinary people to the rich. It's strange, Mr. Speaker, because when it comes to things this government is eager to change, minimum tax meets all the criteria. It was brought in by the previous government – yes, those evil PCs they love to blame for everything – and Alberta is the only province that allows minimum tax. Normally this government rushes to bring us in line with the other provinces, but on minimum tax this government has ignored its own party sages as well as Polonius's counsel.

But perhaps we shouldn't be surprised because earlier in the same speech Polonius recommends, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," and we all know how well the NDP has followed that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee it is my honour to table our report, which recommends the appointment of Marianne Ryan as the next Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner for the province of Alberta. This will be for a five-year term commencing July 1, 2017.

Now that our committee's mandate is complete, I'd like to quickly thank all of my committee colleagues for their co-operation and dedication throughout the search process and to acknowledge the valuable and important support provided to the committee by the staff from executive search and the Legislative Assembly Office.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 207

Regulatory Burden Reduction Act

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I rise and beg leave to introduce Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is very short and was deliberately made so in order to illustrate brevity and simplicity in creating regulations. I will get right to the point of the bill. It is simple. For every regulation created or amended that adds a burden to business, one or more regulations need to be eliminated.

In this depressed economic environment business owners want to spend their time and money working to create jobs, not filling out red tape and forms. Red tape manifested throughout government regulations takes business owners away from doing what they do best. Instead, they have to spend time on government administration and reporting.

In Canada regulatory compliance costs business owners over \$30 billion a year. Outdated, redundant, or excessive regulations hobble businesses and are silent eliminators of jobs. Regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by small businesses. Small and medium-sized firms constitute the largest segment of the Canadian economy and consistently account for the lion's share of new job creation.

I look forward to a productive debate on Bill 207 and urge the Assembly to help eliminate barriers.

2:50

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 20(2) of the Auditor General Act I'm pleased to table five copies of the following report: Better Healthcare for Albertans, A Report by the Office of the Auditor General of Alberta, May 2017. Copies of this report will be provided to all members.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and table this article from February 15, 2005, the same year, actually, that

the PCs announced the Calgary cancer centre, where the title is Gays Can Marry – But Not Each Other. Calgary MP Jason Kenney says discrimination is okay. Then it goes on to cite that Libby Davies and Svend Robinson, the first two openly gay MPs, are reasons why gays shouldn't be able to marry.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table three reports. I have the requisite number of copies for that. The first one is the '15-16 annual report for Alberta's Promise.

The second is the Social Care Facilities Review Committee reports for '14-15 and '15-16.

I have the requisite number of copies for all three of them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you have a tabling today?

Dr. Swann: Oh, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. The first is an article by Chris Nelson from the *Calgary Herald* called: politicians may run, but they can't hide. It's about the opioid crisis.

The second is based on my questions around the recent Métis health burdens and the delays and late reporting on statistics for their health concerns.

The final is from former MLA Harry Chase, who comments on the clear-cut logging in the Kananaskis area and his concerns as a former watchdog and campground manager and the devastation he's witnessed in the past.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two items for tabling today. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a couple of items that I quoted from in my member's statement. The first, an op-ed opinion piece by Mr. Tom Parkin, Postmedia Network, entitled The Next NDP Leader Needs Western Support – Here's How to Earn It.

The second item, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of a summary entitled Progress Summit 2017: Progress in the Age of Trump, a Polling Presentation for the Broadbent Institute.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a tabling as well. This is the Alberta NDP Party platform for 1963. This is one that I believe that they should actually read, especially when it comes to the fact that they're phasing out coal.

Thank you very much. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order, please.

Hon. members, pursuant to section 6 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly and, by doing so, make public the interim report of the 2016-17 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I would ask that the pages provide each member with a copy of the report.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mason, Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation, responses to questions raised by Mr. Taylor, the

hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright; Mr. Drysdale, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti; and Mr. Orr, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, the April 12, 2017, Ministry of Infrastructure 2017-18 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: I believe we have two points of order.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, as much as I dislike puffballs and feel they're a monumental waste of the House's time, I will withdraw that point of order for today. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Anticipation

Questions on Large Policy Matters

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During question period today the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek asked a number of questions with respect to a bill that is currently on the Order Paper. I let the first one go by, but the first supplemental clearly had to do with policy and items that were contained within the bill itself and such. I believe that those questions were out of order.

The Speaker: The member that would like to speak to this point of order?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek we will remind him to be more careful in the future and to not be offside with this particular rule. We thank the Government House Leader for this valuable reminder.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to kick off debate about the merits of Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

Workplaces legislation touches the lives of every Albertan. Nearly everyone in this province works to make a living or depends on someone who does. Unfortunately for Albertans, the rules that govern our workplaces haven't been updated since 1988. That's nearly three decades with no major changes, just some minor tweaking every now and then. Think about how much our workplaces and our world have changed over the past 30 years, Madam Speaker. Not only have Alberta's workplace laws lagged behind the times; they've lagged behind the rest of Canada as well, and Albertans deserve better than this. Albertans deserve fair and family-friendly workplace laws that support a strong economy and ensure they can take care of themselves and their families. Albertans need modern, balanced workplace legislation that protects the rights of hard-working Albertans and helps businesses to stay competitive.

Madam Speaker, Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, is the legislation that Albertans deserve and need. If passed, this bill would make a number of important updates to our

workplace legislation that would make life better for Albertans and protect those who rely on the basic rights and protections enshrined in law. The bill does this by addressing issues that are keys to how Albertans work today, including family-friendly leaves, youth employment, modernized workplace standards, administrative penalties, labour relations, and application to farms and ranches. I'd like to touch on each of these sections of the bill in turn.

The first is family-friendly leaves. Bill 17 enhances existing job-protected leaves and introduces new categories of leave so that Albertans can take care of their family responsibilities without fear of losing their jobs. Madam Speaker, in consulting with Albertans, we posted comparisons between Alberta's leaves that we currently have and other jurisdictions'. Alberta had four job-protected leaves: maternity, paternity, reservist, and an eight-week compassionate care. Most of our other provinces had somewhere between 10 and 14 job-protected leaves, so there was a gap identified. In the survey results that we received from Albertans, a majority of Albertans, including employers, supported matching our federally supported employment insurance leaves, that Canadians pay into and Albertans pay into. That is a key part of what I have brought forward and introduced with this package. To match the federal employment insurance system, we are reducing the eligibility requirements for maternity leave and, again, making sure that the lengths of our leaves in all cases line up with employment insurance.

3:00

We are introducing new leaves as well, Madam Speaker, including a leave that supports victims of domestic violence so that they can seek help without worrying about losing their job. Bill 17 also provides leaves for those struggling with short-term illness, mourning the loss of a loved one, or for someone who might need to care for their critically ill child, and it gives new Canadians attending a citizenship ceremony an unpaid half day off to recognize this important milestone in their life. We can all empathize with someone who is in each of these positions, and that's why we must enshrine these protections and allow Albertans to tend to their personal responsibilities without being worried about losing their jobs.

The second area of updates has to do with our youth employment. Madam Speaker, as it stands, Alberta's workplace rules do not align with our international labour obligations such as the International Labour Organization's convention 138 on youth employment, which Canada has agreed to ratify and which comes into effect in just a short while.

To line up with the ILO obligations and, more importantly, to protect young Albertans, Bill 17 makes several changes. First, the minimum age for light work would be set at 13, with 12-year-olds only able to work in artistic endeavours through a permit process. Youth aged 15 and under will be required to choose work from an allowable light work list. The hours youth work and the duties they're permitted to perform will be restricted. My department will consult with stakeholders to develop these lists of light work and hazardous work, and these sections to do with youth work will be proclaimed once that work is completed. All of these changes will help ensure that young Albertans have the proper protections from exploitation and for their safety.

I would like to note, Madam Speaker, that the changes I'm describing speak specifically to true employment relationships and not to children helping with chores, doing casual babysitting, or participating in 4-H. The government has no interest in disrupting these traditional and beneficial roles for young Albertans, but we do think it's important that Alberta follow the conventions that the ILO has recommended and that we make sure we are putting in laws that protect our young people.

The next area I'll discuss is simplifying and modernizing workplace standards. This is a broad subject that covers many aspects of Albertans' daily experiences on the job, and it makes up a large part of Bill 17. In keeping with other Canadian jurisdictions, we are proposing that rates of banked overtime and pay be no less than time and a half, something that other Canadians have had for quite some time. The bill would update the rules around hours of work, including rest periods and compressed work weeks. In the case of Alberta, Madam Speaker, we had a rule that allowed a 30-minute rest break if you worked more than five hours, and we're adjusting that to match other jurisdictions where you receive a 30-minute rest break for every five hours so that someone who works that 12-hour shift would have an adequate rest break.

Likewise, vacation rules and holiday pay would be updated and better clarified under the bill. We're also proposing that employers no longer be allowed to pay an employee with a disability less than minimum wage and that wage deduction rules be clarified so that employees are not held responsible in dine-and-dash or gas-and-dash situations.

We are also introducing minimum notice periods for termination by an employer, making sure that the employees would be better protected and that there is some sense and clarity in how those termination notices operate. Under Bill 17 employees would be provided with a minimum notice for their termination based on how long they have held their position, and if an employee provides less notice than required, employers would have the option to pay wages only for the notice that has been given.

I look forward to discussing the merits of these changes and all of the changes that Alberta employees and employers have asked for as we work through the bill in detail.

The fourth area that Bill 17 deals with is administrative penalties. After all, delinquent employers have no motivation to follow the proposed new rules if they don't have any teeth to them. While most Alberta employers treat employees with fairness and respect, during consultations we heard too many stories of others who skirted the rules and neglected their duties.

To ensure that employers follow the proposed guidelines, one of the critical provisions of this legislation calls for the creation of an administrative penalty system. Employers who contravene the law would face reasonable and enforceable penalties, and those who do so repeatedly would face further disciplinary action. In this way, Bill 17 would set up a much stronger system to ensure that Alberta workers enjoy the protections and rights they deserve. Madam Speaker, I have to tell you that when I was at the round-table sessions and when we looked at the survey submissions from our stakeholders, having an administrative penalty system that held employers to account and made sure we were enforcing our legislation was something that everyone seemed to agree on. This was a point of common ground between our stakeholders.

Bill 17 also ensures that Alberta has a fair and balanced labour relations system that respects the collective bargaining rights of both employees and employers. For example, if this legislation passes, it would implement first contract arbitration when an agreement between parties has not been reached after 90 days. This helps limit the number of strikes, that can harm long-term relationships between parties. Within our first contract solution, Madam Speaker, we have tried to make sure that it is the responsibility of the two parties to come to an agreement, giving the Labour Relations Board tools to help them reach that agreement by having them go back to mediation or adjust in other ways. Those tools will be very important because we believe the best settlements are those that are reached between the two parties, so our legislation is designed to help facilitate just that.

We've also introduced a hybrid system for certification, where based on verified membership cards from more than 65 per cent of employees, a union can be certified. If 40 to 65 per cent of eligible employees sign cards, a supervised vote would be conducted, and the Labour Relations Board still retains the ability to hold a vote where it believes appropriate, such as when there might be conflicting evidence of support. Our proposed system will help avoid the intimidation that can occur on both sides of a negotiation between that first and second vote. These changes balance the interests of employers and employees and ensure businesses are on a level and competitive playing field and that they will contribute to a strong economy.

Finally, the last aspect of Bill 17 I'll discuss is how the changes I've described apply to Alberta's agricultural community. The technical working groups gathered extensive input from Albertans. With that feedback we have been able to strike the right balance in ensuring that waged, nonfamily workers on farms and ranches have the same rights as their peers in other sectors while also respecting the unique qualities of farms and ranches in Alberta. Exemptions for family members for both new and existing employment standards remain in place. New protections include tools to end strikes during critical times like harvest and adjustments to balance work and rest requirements. All of these are to ensure that Alberta's proud agricultural traditions can continue and thrive.

Madam Speaker, we took with great seriousness the suggestions made by our technical working groups, and I would once again like to thank those who participated and submitted their thoughts both through the technical working group process and through the consultation that we hosted afterwards.

Madam Speaker, as you can see, this government has been working hard to make life better for Albertans. Through this badly needed update to our province's workplace legislation, Albertans would have family-friendly workplaces that empower them to take care of their personal responsibilities. We heard from employers and employees alike that these proposed changes would help protect vulnerable Albertans and support a strong, competitive economy. These sensible, balanced changes have been a long time coming. After nearly three decades of inaction, Albertans deserve safe, up-to-date workplace legislation, and that's why I'm very proud to be moving forward with Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I look forward to debating it further with my colleagues.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

3:10

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 17. First of all, I'd like to say that there are some great parts to this bill, and we all acknowledge that and have asked to actually have those parts separated out of the bill so that they could be passed through the House before, you know, the end of this week even. We could have had it done today or first thing Monday as well. There are some great things about it.

But, again, it's 124 pages long. We've heard that people are looking for consultation. The business community, chambers of commerce, and just regular, concerned Albertans would like to have their say in something so fundamental as this 124-page bill. Therefore, I will be presenting an amendment. If I can get the pages to pass it out, I'll wait until you have a copy of it.

The Acting Speaker: Please go ahead.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Now, the reason for this amendment, Madam Speaker, is that this will provide time for proper consultation with affected parties, concerned businesses, chambers of commerce, and concerned Albertans. It will also give the government time to consider splitting this bill into two parts, as we suggested, as was suggested by the Leader of the Official Opposition as well as the House leader of the third party. As well, it would give members of the government time to reflect on whether or not they should actually be speaking to this bill and voting on the stages of this bill or on amendments to it based on recent rulings on the Member for Calgary-Hays and also the fact that during the debates on Bill 12 17 per cent of the Official Opposition had to recuse itself from discussion or voting on Bill 12 because they had interests, although indirect, in the housing industry.

Now, I'd just like to point out a few things for the members opposite to reflect on. Affiliated union members contribute \$16.04 per year to the Alberta Federation of Labour. The Alberta Federation of Labour was fined \$50,000 for robodialing during the 2012 election, and I can guarantee you it wasn't for the Wildrose Party. Major contributions to the NDP leadership campaign were from union organizations: our Premier, \$42,050 from union donations; the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, over 50 per cent from union support, a total of \$5,443; the Member for Edmonton-Calder, 60 per cent of the donations came from unions, to a total of \$21,250.

Madam Speaker, I would just like the members opposite to take this into consideration, reflect on what's happened in this House in the very recent past, in this spring session, and really, really consider whether they should actually speak to this bill, vote on it, or recuse themselves, which would be the proper thing to do.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to REF1? The hon. Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I stand to say that I will not be supporting this amendment. Making sure that we have fair and family-friendly workplaces in this province is of high priority. Albertans have been done a disservice by being left with workplace legislation that had not been kept up to date, that did not give them the rights that other Canadians have enjoyed. We have Albertans who are paying into the employment insurance system and then are not able to access the leaves that they pay into, that all Canadians agree are an important safety net. We want to care for our neighbours. We want to make sure people can care for their family's responsibilities. We have legislation that is not in line with Supreme Court rulings. Making sure that we have legislation that is not at risk of being challenged should be a priority for any government. Keeping legislation up to date is a priority.

For these reasons I will not be supporting the member's motion, and I must say that I'm very proud that on this side of the House I work with a caucus filled with teachers and electricians, people who worked in grocery stores, people who worked in hospitals, people who worked in good, hard-working jobs. It's because we have caucus members with such a wide variety of experience that we represent Alberta, and it's because of caucus members like that that

we've been able to bring forward groundbreaking legislation that better reflects Alberta.

I'm quite proud of my caucus, Madam Speaker, and I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral REF1? Oh, sorry; 29(2)(a) first.

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I definitely agree that the amendment to send this to committee is the right thing to do. I was hoping that the government across the aisle here would have realized how important consultation is by now. With the fiasco that was created by Bill 6 due to lack of consultations, I was hoping they wouldn't make the same mistake twice, but it doesn't appear that that's the case. Thirty days is just simply not enough time to consult on such an extensive bill as this, and even now, since yesterday, companies of all stripes are issuing releases saying that there needs to be some consultation on this. The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada just recently said: we also note our deep concerns with the very compressed consultation period that was undertaken prior to the introduction of this bill. They are among the many who are concerned that not enough consultation has been done.

I have a feeling that even the NDP themselves were not ready with this bill as they wanted to put a constituency week into the schedule that wasn't in the schedule. They needed a break in order to get this ready. They filibustered their own bills all last week in order to create time to dream this thing up in a hurry. They weren't ready then, they're not ready for debate now, and I can assure you that if they weren't ready, Albertans aren't ready because they haven't even had time to look at it.

Not only that, but it seems now that they want to get rid of the family-friendly Legislature idea by invoking night sittings all of a sudden. They want to introduce a week off, then they want night-friendly sittings so that they can ram this bill through in the night as fast as possible, and then also they're going to extend the House, so here we are at the very end of session sticking this thing through in a hurry. I find it interesting, actually, that the House staff, NDP caucus staff, opposition staff will actually have to work contrary to the contents of this bill in order to pass this very legislation. It makes no sense. We'll be working late into the night, more than 12-hour days, overtime questionable. I guess that doesn't even count for MLAs.

This bill needs to be sent to committee. That's the reality of it. There are parts of this bill that we actually would like to pass very quickly if the NDP would be willing to separate it into two different parts, which is another reason that it should go to committee, but it doesn't seem they want to pass it that way. They would rather sneak labour in on top of something else, and it's negatively going to affect the businesses of Alberta. It's 124 pages long. They've sent bills that are only three or four pages long to committee for further study, but here we have 124 pages. It has to be rushed through, not willing to let committee look at it.

3:20

It's interesting that, in fact, the government approached us for our support to send their time zone bill to committee for further study, yet this bill, that would affect all aspects of all working people and as well employers, needs to be passed in a matter of a couple of weeks with virtually no consultation. We're willing to pass parts of it now, but that would require the NDP to actually play nice and split the bill apart as it should have been presented.

Not only are they trying to rush this bill through without consultations, but they give opposition parties just a matter of days to consult with their constituents and stakeholders. Actually, it isn't even days. We've had 24 hours to consult with stakeholders and constituents . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members. Sorry, Member. I recognize you're all interested in the material in front of you. If you could all please be respectful to the members as they're speaking and stop moving around the House and/or hanging over each other's desks, that would be much appreciated, please.

Member, please continue.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the NDP were back in the opposition role, where they used to be and might soon be, they would be screaming mad at this kind of a procedural process. They seem to have taken on the mantle of being an oppressive, unfair government who doesn't care for anything except their own agenda, and it is disappointing. Any single MLA across the aisle who ever once said that they wanted to make this House a better place: well, we have all failed in that, apparently.

Make this House a better place. Allow us to send this to committee, properly consult with stakeholders. Allow us to talk to our constituents and find out how they actually want us to vote. That's our job, and if this bill is rushed through in the night, we are prevented from doing our jobs, and it's not how we should function in this House or in our province. They are not allowing our elected officials to be good elected officials when we have this kind of process.

I just say that to do this properly, we need more than a few hours, more than a week. We need time to consult on this massive document that drastically alters the landscape of our labour in Alberta. If the members opposite believe that a week is long enough, then they really don't know what it means to consult with constituents or stakeholders. Again, the bill needs to be sent to committee. It needs more consultation. Please vote to send it to committee. Give me something to believe in, that there is good in this House still. If we don't learn from our mistakes, I don't know where we're going to end up because we will be creating the same kind of public outcry that we had on Bill 6.

There has been no real consultation in this, just a sham approach to it. The bill has been written in a rush, without due deliberation or stakeholder review at all except for some union bosses. To present it at the very end of session, to extend this session, to squeeze it in so that it runs through the night to minimize news coverage, to hope it's over before Albertans can speak up: you haven't got Albertans' backs. You're trying to do it behind their backs. Send it to committee and support democracy.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to – oh, 29(2)(a). My apologies.

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment to Bill 17, the so-called Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. This is a thoughtful amendment, particularly in light of the history that we've seen carry on in this House. As I begin, I can't help but comment on the Labour minister's remarks when she took the floor talking about electricians in her caucus. I know she's got at least one caucus member

that's on the record for not being fond of electricians. I'm sure that the minister will deal with that.

It is important that the labour bill is respectful to people in every line of work because all work is valuable, all people that do work need to be valued, and they all need to have a chance to comment and, hopefully, have some influence on legislation that will affect their working lives from now until the legislation changes.

What we have here is a government in a rush to do some good things, surely, in the leaves for vulnerable people. Despite the fact that the government has brought in a person, Ms Jensen, that was really badly treated under the previous legislation – unfortunately, they're using her for cover for a lot of other things that are in this legislation that are not nearly as family friendly or nearly as good for the workplace or the workforce as the leave provisions that the government has chosen to add. As we've made clear on this side of the House, we'll be happy to support those leave provisions that are in this legislation.

However, Madam Speaker, those are not the only things in this legislation. We probably could have gone a little bit further down the road if a few things had happened better; first of all, if there had been a legitimate consultation process. We've heard in question period over the last few weeks, knowing this legislation was cooking somewhere in the back halls and the backrooms of NDP land, the Labour minister talk about how there had been consultation. What we heard at the briefing for the bill was that essentially Mr. Sims was hired to do consultation, but we're not sure how little the minister actually attended the consultations.

I know I heard from at least one business group that had a, quote, consultation, where the minister sat there playing on her cellphone the whole time and not listening to a thing, looked at her watch when the time was up, and said: I guess we've consulted; it's time to go. They don't know for sure what the minister listened to, but they told me that they were pretty sure the minister didn't listen to a syllable that they said when they were there. She was just checking a box so that she could come into this House and say: I consulted with this group of businesses. You know what? That is exactly the problem when you have invitation-only consultation, which is what this ministry and this government and this Premier have decided to go with on this piece of important legislation. They've tried to break the province up into groups of people that were outnumbered by their friends. A lot of Albertans that will be affected by this legislation would have liked to have had their voices truly heard and considered. They were really left out, and you just cannot argue with that if you're honest as the government, but of course they will argue with it.

The fact is that this bill was brought in at the end of a legislative session. You know how they say, "The end is near"? Well, in this case the end was near because – you know what? There's no excuse for this government not to have been prepared. They started this legislative session about a month later than legislative sessions usually start. The government with their majority is in complete control of the timing of the legislative session. They're in complete control of the government's legislative agenda. They're in control of what gets to move and how fast it gets to move. In fact, they were so disorganized – some would say that they couldn't organize a two-car parade – that they actually spent the last 10 days filibustering their own bills because they were so unorganized, Madam Speaker. I know you know that, and I know you can't comment on that, and I won't ask you to because you're in the chair, but you know.

The government was completely disorganized and not ready to go on time with their legislation to the point where there are several pieces of legislation that members of all the opposition said, "Yeah, we'll support this," and the government stood up and filibustered

them for days on end because they were completely unorganized and could not get ready. Well, if they weren't ready for this legislation up until two days ago, how can they possibly expect that Albertans across this province were consulted and were ready for this legislation? To make that argument by the government would be completely less than credible, completely inconsistent, completely wrong, completely beyond the ability of most Albertans to believe because, frankly, the government just doesn't have their act together. This is just one more example.

As was said by my colleague, in the name of family-friendly workplaces the government has decided to stay up all night and pass it in the middle of the night if necessary, as they put a motion in the House today to do. It's not what a government that's proud of a piece of legislation would do. It's what a government would do when they're trying to sneak something through when no one is looking and make it as close as possible to summer vacation. Let's face it. I love Alberta. I will say that I believe all members of this House love Alberta, but even those of us that love Alberta know the summer is short, and we Albertans love to spend as much time outside running and jumping and playing and such when the summer is short. And this government, in their attempt to hide this very negative bill, has decided to sneak it through as close to summer as possible, when people are paying the least attention possible, having done the poorest and least amount of consultation possible on something that will affect everybody's life that works in this province and, in some cases, in a very negative way.

3:30

When you look at the amendment suggesting that it be referred to a standing committee, where, actually, Albertans would have a chance to talk to members of the Legislature after having seen the bill, to give us advice on what they like about the bill – there are things to like, Madam Speaker. There are, but there are also things to strongly and vehemently dislike in this bill. Either way, Albertans deserve to have the opportunity to make their feelings and their thoughts and their intentions known about it rather than having this government try to ram it through right before summer, at the last minute, with night sittings, when most people intended to be home with their families. It's completely reasonable that all members of this House would support this amendment to make sure that this bill gets to actually be heard, discussed, considered by the 4 million plus people in Alberta, that will be affected by the bill.

Madam Speaker, there are so many things in the bill. To be clear, I don't pretend that I understand it all yet because, again, we just had it dropped on our desks yesterday. It's as thick as a phone book. Although those that are less than 25 years old may not know what a phone book is, I don't blame them for that because they just haven't been around for the last few years. That's only a function of some of them having never needed to use a phone book. We older people at some point in our lives had no other choice but to use a phone book. I'm not blaming you who are younger and probably, by extension, better looking than me. But the fact is that it's as thick as a phone book, and to try to drop it on the table and have night sittings and run it through this House when nobody has the time to absorb it, to understand it, to get advice on it, to talk about it with their friends and their neighbours is completely unfair, completely out of step with how a democracy should run, certainly one that cares about her citizens.

This amendment actually is going to help the government do a better job. If the government was to be wise enough to vote for this, they actually might look, for one of the rare times since they've been elected, like they care about the citizens of Alberta, like they actually might want to listen a little bit to the citizens of Alberta, because, Madam Speaker, there's been precious, precious, precious

little evidence that this government has had a lick of patience to listen to Albertans and what matters to them before they ram through this huge piece of legislation.

Again, fair and family-friendly and even the small parts that I have been able to see from reading the bill in the short period of time we've had: the minister was asked in the House several times – she could have had us doing some research on this before – whether she was going to get rid of the secret ballot provision in the legislation. The fact is that, for all intents and purposes, she has.

Now, I expect to hear the government-side people howling and saying: sure, there are private votes there. But they know, because they were able to consider it in the government caucus before we got to see it yesterday, that under the current legislation, with the way it's structured, after a card check has been going on now for up to six months, there might be a ballot that's secret, but it won't really be a secret because everybody will pretty much know who's signed the card and who hasn't, leaving those employees at risk of being intimidated by their company and intimidated by the union that wants to start. Both sides, they could be intimidated by. Again, I know that members of the House will say that only one side or the other is guilty of doing this. But, I think, if we're honest with ourselves, at different times both sides, over the history of time, have been guilty of intimidating employees in situations like this.

Employees need to be protected from intimidation from whatever source, from the company or from the union that wants to establish itself. There's no excuse ever for employees to be intimidated. That is just one of the many things that this government and the opposition need to hear about from Albertans, to know what they think, to know whether they like this, to know whether they don't like this. I'll call it a fake secret ballot because you can't call it a real secret ballot after you've been outside getting cards signed up for six months. Perhaps there are improvements that can be made.

For the government to carry on now night and day – again, even by the fact that the government has now put itself in a position to add night sittings, Madam Speaker, they've put themselves in a position to have a great deal of the debate take place late at night, when most Albertans are home in bed, home spending time with their spouses, home spending time with their kids. Of course, that just makes it harder than ever for people to keep track of this legislation, which just makes it absolutely more logical that you would send this to committee – that you would send this to committee – where all members of this House are privy to those committee deliberations as opposed to just the government side being privy to the caucus deliberations, where all members of this House could reach out to employees and workers across each of our ridings and across Alberta and find out what they like and dislike about this legislation.

The government needs to acknowledge that if they're as proud of it as they claim they are, although I'm a little stretched to believe that – but let's just take their word for it just for a second, for argument's sake. If they're as proud of it and Albertans are as proud of it as the government claims they are, then the message that we opposition members are going to hear is: you better vote for this legislation because we love every paragraph, we love every syllable, we love every sentence, we love every word. But, Madam Speaker, the government doesn't believe we're going to hear that because they know they've got nasty stuff in this bill, things that will actually make it harder on workers in Alberta, make it harder on small businesses in Alberta, and things that actually appear to be tipping the level playing field that's largely existed in Alberta for a long time.

I can tell you that I spent some time as labour minister. When I talked to people largely from all stripes of the labour movement when I was there, what I heard when we looked at making some

changes here was that – and we decided that the changes being presented weren't good enough. One of the few things that I'll agree with the minister on is that we didn't move on that. But I can tell you that having talked to everybody from Merit Contractors, who, I think it would be reasonable to say, are not the most pro-union people in the province – I also talked to the people in the unionized construction contractors. They all said to me at the time and in between, the progressive contractors in CLAC and other members: you know, as long as you don't make any bad changes, there are some things that could probably be tweaked and made better in the legislation, but things are largely in balance right now. They all said to me: there are a few little changes we would have liked, but as long as you don't upset the balance that largely exists, then things are okay.

So I acknowledge that there are some tweaks and improvements that can be made to the legislation, but there's no reason we can't talk about it. There's no reason that all Albertans, no matter what their beliefs are, no matter what stripe they are, no matter how they make their living, whether they're a professional or a tradesperson or a labourer or somebody just learning on the job to do something, shouldn't have their voices heard, because all work is honest. All work is important, and all Albertans doing that work must be respected. We can't really know whether this legislation does that until those workers get a chance to peek at it and communicate to the government through their MLAs, whether the MLA is on the opposition side or the government side. Albertans need a chance to communicate that, which is all the more reason why this legislation should be fleshed out in a committee.

Again, the other thing about it, too, is that committees are usually, not always, I think all members of this House would agree, but usually less adversarial than this House is.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral?

Some Hon. Members: It's 29(2)(a).

The Acting Speaker: Oh, 29(2)(a). I will get there.

Mr. Gotfried: Under 29(2)(a), I'd actually like to hear a little bit more of the member's comments on his thoughts on some of the reasons for referral of this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek asking me that question because there is a lot more to be said on this bill. What's most important is that members of this House – their voices are important but not as important as the voices from across Alberta, and those voices have not yet been heard. They haven't been heard because the government hasn't given them a chance to be heard.

3:40

This actually gives the government a chance to have a better track record of listening. This amendment actually gives the government a chance to say: "You know, having thought about it, we realize that what's obvious is right and that Albertans haven't had a chance. Alberta businesses, large, haven't had a chance. Alberta businesses, small, haven't had a chance. Alberta workers have not had a chance. Whether they're higher earning professionals or starting out and not making so much money or whether they're labourers or tradespeople or whatever type of work they're in, they haven't had a chance to look at this and say: 'How will this affect my work life?'"

What would I like to tell my MLA about what I would like to see changed in this bill?"

You know what? There are bound to be things where those workers will come to me and other MLAs and say: don't you dare change this section because I love it. But we won't know until they actually get a chance to see it, to understand it, to talk about it with people they trust, to have those conversations back and forth, to relay that information to members of this House, whose job it is to serve Albertans and to make sure that the bill can be protected where it's right and can be improved where it's wrong.

Madam Speaker, actually, when it comes to labour legislation – and I can assure you, though I was a labour minister for a little bit of time, that there are some experts around here, and I am not one of them. I am not one of them.

Ms Hoffman: Yep.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Health minister, for agreeing with me on that. I appreciate that.

Madam Speaker, most other members of this House are not experts on it either, and if they're honest with themselves, a little more time for them to look at this thing and talk to their constituents – I know what it's like when you're in government. Even the government members, private members and ministers alike, can't talk openly and publicly about a piece of legislation that hasn't been released yet because, of course, there are rules about talking out in the public about the final text of a bill before it's presented in the House.

I'm sure that the government members all have obeyed that rule, which, by extension, means that they actually haven't had the opportunity to go out and fully discuss it with their constituents because that would be wrong – and I know they wouldn't do that – which makes this amendment to refer this bill to committee all the more important, all the more valuable, all the more necessary, all the more in the government's favour, putting them in a position to look Albertans in the eye and say, "We actually did try to listen to you this time," because, Madam Speaker, as you know, they failed so miserably so many times. They failed miserably on Bill 6. They failed miserably on their budget. They failed miserably on the amount of debt that they are putting Albertans under. They failed miserably so many times.

This amendment actually offers the government some redemption, one shining example – and they need redemption, believe me – where they can actually go out to Albertans and say, "I know we haven't listened to you for two years," because they haven't, and Albertans will say, "We know you haven't listened to us for two years." But if the government-side members were to support this amendment, it would put them in a position, for the first time, probably, in the two years that they've had the privilege of being government, to go out to their constituents and say, "I know we've got it wrong almost all of the last two years, but this time we're actually going to make the effort to get it right."

For that reason and so many more reasons, the government ought to support this amendment. They ought to actually walk the walk instead of just talking the talk and vote yes.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really appreciate this opportunity to ask that our members consider this referral motion. Now, I know that there are a lot of people here that know that I like to really dig into the past, so after hearing our Labour minister go on and on about all of the movies in 1988 – *Beetlejuice* and *Die*

Hard and all those movies – I thought: "You know what? I'd love to read *Hansard* and see what they had to say at the time regarding this legislation that they put through in 1988. What process did they use that was able to get that piece of legislation through?"

Now, I'm going to be reading a large portion from *Hansard* here. It's going to show that there is a significant difference between what was done in 1988 and what is being done today: 36 days of consultation and then a bill that they had to filibuster their own legislation to be able to get to. If you look at it, they couldn't even staple it because it's so thick. It's quite the bill that we've got, 124 pages. I have to say that it's quite a weighty bill.

But to get back to this, I'd like to read from June 6, 1988. This is regarding Bill 21, the Employment Standards Code, and this is at second reading. Actually, it's pretty similar if you look at it. We're right around that same time frame, right? Now, the start of the quote says:

Before going into some of the provisions of Bill 21, I would like to briefly review the process by which we reached the stage we are now at with the second reading of a new Employment Standards Code. In the Speech from the Throne in the second week of June 1986,

Two full years in advance, by the way. Two full years.

there was a specific commitment to a thorough review of labour legislation in the province. There was some discussion about how that commitment should be met, and there was an unprecedented process initiated. The process, first of all, was that of appointing a multisector-based committee of Albertans:

Now, I didn't see any appointments or any discussions or any committees, which is why this referral is so important. This is why we actually need to engage Albertans, because we've already seen with Bill 6 what has happened when we don't engage Albertans.

It says:

three from organized labour,

Three.

three representing employers, and three from the general public. Those members were chosen not as specific representatives for their own narrow group – be it city management or be it the operating engineers – but they were chosen to represent in a reasonably sized committee as much as possible of the economic activity in the province and, as much as possible, all of the different employee/employer relations that exist in the province: manufacturing, construction, public sector, private sector, male, female, the teaching profession, and others. The result was a committee that, although numbering nine, covered a very broad spectrum of Alberta society, Alberta economic activity, and Alberta employment.

What we've got here is that they struck a group. They took that group, and they said: "Let's start the process of talking about what this is going to look like. Let's involve different people and get the process started." Now, this is important because if they would have started with a 50-person committee, this may not have been moving forward anywhere. What they needed to do was start the process. This is what they did back then. They started the process through a committee.

Then to continue on:

The committee looked at legislation and at the systems in several other jurisdictions, and in November of 1986 published an interim report which included information from those jurisdictions and asked certain questions of Albertans prior to a very thorough process of public meetings.

Public meetings. Did you hear? They didn't say: hidden meetings or special invitation committees. They said: public meetings to bring Albertans together to discuss this. That's what's important here. They brought Albertans together to discuss this. They brought the nine people together. Then they said: let's come out with an interim report, and then let's go out and talk to Albertans. Inside of

that report we actually had comparisons done to other provinces to see where we were at.

3:50

At those public hearings, interest groups, individuals, organized labour, individual employees, employer associations, and individual employers came and spoke to the committee. In addition to that, there was a large number of briefs submitted in written form. Some of those were supplementary to the verbal statements made to the committee at those public meetings, and some of them had no verbal statement attached to them. There was, as I say, an extremely large public input into the process.

Again, we're going into the fact that this was a public process, not something that was rushed, like we saw with this. It was something that was actually thought out and moved forward.

Now, let's start with:

Subsequent to the tabling for first reading in this Legislature of Bill 60, the government received over 300 written submissions from all types of Albertans, employers and employees: individual employers, associations of employers; individual employees, unions, associations of unions – in other words, a very broad input again. I myself held over 200 meetings with various groups of Albertans –

Now, I think I heard – and the government can correct me if I am wrong – that the minister held four. That seems quite a bit lower than 200.

Then it goes on:

– public meetings, private meetings – and again that input was considered in the process over the winter of 1987-88, subsequent to which again the government caucus considered the input. The result was two separate Bills, one of which I am currently addressing, Bill 21, the Employment Standards Code, the other being Bill 22, the Labour Relations Code.

So now we're hearing that they saw the wisdom of splitting this into two bills, which is exactly what the Wildrose is asking right at this point. Why are we rushing through this? We understand that there are things that vulnerable Albertans need addressed. We agree that those needed to be addressed, so moving those forward in two bills – yet we had foresight in the past government. Am I the only one reading *Hansard*? Apparently. [interjections] Apparently this is funny as well.

It is now, Mr. Speaker, some seven weeks since the introduction of Bills 21 and 22 on April 15 of this year. During that time, again we have received input, but the input has changed very much. The input now is, in general, an acceptance of the provisions in the Employment Standards Code and is also, quite naturally, specific requests for individual items to be reconsidered or for individual items to be deleted or to be added. But I might say, Mr. Speaker, that in general the responses have been remarkably favourable to the concepts that are in Bill 21, the Employment Standards Code.

That's how you do consultation.

Now, it's remarkable that we couldn't even do like we did with the MGA. This was tabled in the spring, and then we went through the summer and saw consultation done by this government, and then what happened in the fall, once we actually had feedback from the AUMA, the AAMD and C, and municipalities and stakeholders, is that we were able to tailor that. Then we came up with another bill and said: okay; we got some more feedback that we need to work on. That is the correct way. That way, unfortunately, wasn't started by the NDP government. That was by the past government. There were two years, I believe, for that MGA to be reviewed.

When you're looking at large-scale reviews of legislation like these, you need more than 36 days. You need more. You need to talk to more than the two or three people that are on the NDP board of directors.

What we need to go with here is: how exactly is this consultation done? You knew how it was done before, yet you decided just to fall off the rails and do it on your own, do it quickly, get through this as fast as you possibly could. You put some really good stuff in here, and then you put a poison pill in. Then what happens is that you said: let's launch this out to the press, and we will condemn anybody that says that there's something wrong with this legislation. That is the wrong way of doing this. What we need to do is make sure Albertans are heard. The process that we've got here is that we're going to see labour legislation that is 124 pages thick going through this House within two weeks, possibly three weeks. That is an incredible, incredible insult to Albertans.

That is why we need to consider this referral. The referral itself is saying: let's step back; let's put this to a committee. The committee can at least go out to Albertans, maybe bring some stakeholders out here. Let's hear what Albertans have to say, which is why this motion for a referral makes so much sense. Let's slow this process down.

If at the end we still hear that Albertans really want to make sure that they get rid of the secret ballot system for unions, then possibly – I can't see how that's democratic, but at least you've done your due diligence. But by rushing this through, it only reinforces that this government is only for unions right now, and that is a shame. I will tell you that I have a deep respect when it comes to our unions and hard-working men and women on the front lines, and from the fact that they're not able to even be consulted on this as well, because they're seeing this and going through it in three weeks as well, we need to be making sure that all Albertans are included in this process.

Now, the fact that we've had 12 weeks during the spring session and that they gave five weeks in total consultation is something that needs to be changed. I can't tell you enough that when we see a government moving this rapidly, all we're looking for is trouble. We're looking at a point where we're going to be correcting this bill six months from now because we rushed through it too fast. We're going to find that things aren't working quite right or quite the way we anticipated it. That's because excluding the groups that are involved or are going to be impacted by this is fundamentally wrong. This is something that we as Albertans rejected with Bill 6 and that we are going to continue to reject as this government pushes through legislation that radically changes the direction of Alberta without consultation with Albertans.

Now, what we need to do is bring this back to a healthy piece. It appears that this government isn't interested in the two-year consultation period that we've done in the past, but at least give us through the summer. At least give us some time with a committee so that we're able to move forward with this. But you know what? So far this government has had its blinders on. When it gets something like this moving forward, all it does is that it wants to get it through as fast as it possibly can, and then we have to live with the consequences.

Now, I sat on the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. We sat as a group, and we debated as a committee. Well, we had the wonderful witness . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak? Comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I wanted to thank the Member for Lac

La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for proposing this amendment and the referral of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

Madam Speaker, there are a few things I want to talk about here. I mean, I think that in this House we all want what's best for Albertans, and I like to believe that that's true of all members of this House.

4:00

An Hon. Member: All members of this House.

Mr. Gottfried: All members.

It was mentioned by the Minister of Labour that this bill was about everyday Albertans, that it was about working Albertans, that it was about their futures, about their livelihoods. Madam Speaker, I think that therein lie some of our concerns with this. This isn't about us in this House. This is for us to do what's best for Albertans. They deserve the attention, they deserve the consultation, and they deserve the opportunity to understand what we're doing in here, in the 124 pages here, that's supposed to benefit them, not just benefit them but protect them, give them the opportunity to live the life, and have the opportunities that they feel are most important to them.

Madam Speaker, it's been mentioned by some of the other members here about the opportunity to split this bill, that there are some things in the employment standards, some good things in there. But we're also hearing – I'm already getting feedback – that there are some things in that particular bill that deserve attention as well, some unintended consequences. I think we've heard that statement before in this House. However, the big concerns we have are on the labour code side. Again, I agree that, really, these should be split, but the opportunity for us to refer this to a committee maybe will allow us to find a way to address them separately but equally with Albertans and with the key stakeholders.

When we're talking about things like secret ballots, Madam Speaker, I worry about the removal of the secret balloting process, which, to me, is a fundamental expectation within a democratic society. I think we owe it to Albertans to let a committee have a look at those principles that our forefathers fought for, democratic principles of being able to vote freely, that we shouldn't take for granted. I think that in elections in Alberta, all kinds of elections, every eligible Canadian should have the right to vote freely, without fear of intimidation or reprisal. Really, nobody should have the right to know whom we voted for. I talk to people all the time who say: "Well, I might be supporting you, I might not be supporting you, but that's my business. That's my choice. That's my privacy. It's my freedom to do so." I think those are principles that everybody in this House can agree with.

It would be kind of like us going out to our constituencies and saying: "Well, whichever party can sell the most memberships wins the election. We don't need to have an election. If you sell more, if you sell 65 per cent or more, you just win. We don't need to have a vote. We'll just card check in our communities for the next election. How about that?" Maybe we need to push this to committee, where they can take a look at those principles and decide whether those need to be defended.

Madam Speaker, we've also talked here about some of the concerns about conflict of interest. The government may want to consider that maybe they should refer this bill before half of their caucus has to recuse themselves on a vote. Wouldn't that be interesting? Numbers could be changed drastically here so that maybe the balance of power isn't on that side when they have to recuse half of their members there. I guess we'll hear from the Ethics Commissioner on that in the future. To maybe change a little bit of a phrase from Abraham Lincoln, I don't think this government wants to be seen as the government of the unions, by the unions,

and for the unions. I don't have the beard to do that one. I don't think this government wants to be the one that takes that time-honoured phrase and is accused of having conflicts of interest in that regard.

We've also talked about the lack of consultation. One of our members has talked about 36 days of consultation. It's actually not 36 days; it was 27 working days. Twenty-seven working days for a very detailed, very robust, 124-page piece of legislation, which, by the way, we hear has had some extractions from what was rumoured to be a 1,200-page submission from the AFL. So at just 10 per cent of that, we've thrown that in the legislation, and, you know, that should be good enough for Albertans; we don't need to consult anymore because we consulted with the AFL: government of the unions, by the unions, and for the unions.

Talking about timing and about consultation and lack of robust consultation, we also got unbound copies of this bill again. We've had that happen a few times in this House. That means it probably didn't make it to the printer's in time to get done in the proper way. Maybe the ink is not dry. Boy, we're going to have to look at that final copy to see if there were some final changes that didn't make it there in time so that we had to use quick copy or someone to do that. It should be a very interesting thing as we get those final copies out, that phone book that the Member for Calgary-Hays referred to, which we all will of course have plenty of time over this weekend to look through and find out along with our fellow Albertans what's in there, what lurks in there.

There are some good things, admittedly. We've discussed that in this House. There are some things that are protective of Albertans during difficult times, during vulnerable times, during crises in their lives, and we have no problem with and, in fact, fully support those types of things. But we're also hearing from some of our private-sector partners out there that hidden sometimes even in the employment standards are some things that are going to be very costly for Alberta businesses and Alberta employers and that could affect the sustainability, viability, and economics of our private-sector employers. Admittedly, I think everyone in this House can agree that most of the jobs in this province are created not only by private-sector employers but by small and medium-sized enterprises out there. That's where the bulk of our employment is created.

Everything we do has unintended consequences, and we need to know that, and we need to consult on that. I believe that in a committee setting, an all-party committee setting, where we can consult Albertans in a more robust way, we have an opportunity to ensure, as, again, I believe all members of this House want, that we have the best legislation for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, there are many other things that we could talk about around this bill in terms of employees' rights, not about what's best for employers or businesses, not about what's best for unions but about what's best for Albertans, for those employees in all of those sectors we talked about – the electricians and the teachers and the construction workers and the airline workers and all of these different categories of workers in our society – who, again, deserve the opportunity to do what's best for themselves, what's best for their families, to earn a living.

Some will agree that unionization is the way to go, and some will disagree, but I think we need to afford that protection to them so that they can make that decision freely, so that they're not influenced by peer pressure – I think we've all felt that, whether that's in a school or a workplace – so that they're not concerned about the potential of being outcast or of having repercussions or of being ostracized in the workplace or about intimidation or, God forbid, the B word, the "bullying" word.

Again, we should do all we can in this Legislature to ensure that there is no opportunity for things like workplace bullying, whether

that's intentional or unintentional or driven by an employer or an employee group or a union group. We need to protect Albertans as best we can with this legislation to achieve that, Madam Speaker.

I would like to support doing the right thing today, doing what's best for Albertans, putting aside our ideologies, and putting this legislation in front of a committee. I've had the pleasure of working on some committees, and when they are working well, they work very well. When the people come to the table with the right intentions, which is to be nonpartisan, to park their ideologies at the door as much as they possibly can and to do what's best for Albertans, it can and does work well. I think we've collaborated with many of the members, on all sides of this House, on achieving positive results from those committee settings.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I'd just again like to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for his very thoughtful amendment to this, and I would encourage all members of the House to put their ideologies and partisanship aside and support this opportunity for us to ensure that this is the best legislation it can possibly be.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I'd like the hon. member to comment on how he feels about taking this over the summer – it'll be a little more work when a lot of people want to have time off – and about whether he believes this is an important enough issue that it actually should go over whatever period of time it needs to to make sure that we can deal with something as important as labour legislation, that affects all Albertans.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Hays for his very thoughtful question. To the member, I'd like to say that I think all of us in this House are here to do a job. We're here, we're elected, and we're hired by Albertans – they're our bosses – to come here and do the work that will ensure that we work for and protect Albertans as best as we can.

Madam Speaker, one of my committees will be meeting over the summer to talk about daylight saving time. I respect the opportunity to provide some committee work on that particular bill, but I can tell you that this labour legislation is much more important to Albertans' everyday lives, to their livelihoods, to their futures than whether they change a clock in the spring and the fall, with all due respect. I know that we'll get to the right result on that particular piece of legislation as well.

I think it's incumbent upon us to do what's right for Albertans here, and if referring it to a committee and doing some work over the summer is what needs to be done, I know that I'm prepared to do it, I know that my colleagues are prepared to do it, and I would expect that all members of this House are prepared to do it to ensure that we do come out of this with the best legislation, that we do listen in a robust manner, in an open and transparent manner, not by invitation but by invitation for all to give us their opinions: employers, employees, small businesses, medium-sized businesses, large businesses, union groups, employee associations, all the groups that will matter, and, Madam Speaker, even some individual Albertans. What a unique and refreshing thought, that maybe some individual Albertans might want to step forward and give us their opinions. I hope that we'll have the opportunity, and I hope that if

we have the opportunity to put this to committee, those Albertans will come to our constituency offices, which are a place for them to connect with this House, with this Legislature, and share with us.

I know I have my MLA cafés, and I know that there are many members that have many opportunities to engage their constituents. This is a great opportunity for us to do that, to ensure that we are not doing it only as a regular course of business but that we have a very specific piece of business that we're seeking their input on.

Again, I thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for his question. I know that I'm prepared to do the work that is required to ensure that we have the best legislation, and I challenge the rest of this House to step up to the plate and be ready to sacrifice some of their summer. We all know that we like to spend some time with our families and friends and our constituents as much as we can, but this is too important for us not to do, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. McIver: Yeah.

The Acting Speaker: Please go ahead.

Mr. McIver: I just wanted to know whether the hon. member has heard from workers in his riding, not employers but workers. Have any of them told you that they know what's in this legislation and what their opinion is? What's their depth of knowledge so far on this after it's been out in the public for one day?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you again to the Member for Calgary-Hays. He's got some very insightful questions about how we engage with our constituents.

To honestly answer that question, I have to tell you that this all came so quickly for most Albertans. We only started to hear from our constituents with only a couple of weeks left in the consultation, which tells me that the consultation was not robust enough.

I've been putting into my newsletters that we're addressing this labour bill, but Albertans are busy. They're trying to stay employed. They're trying to get gainful employment. They're trying to provide for their families. Let's be honest; they're struggling. Many Albertans are struggling, and this is not top of mind for them. But it is coming up. They're seeing that there are some things here that will impact them, that will impact their futures and their livelihoods and their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

Madam Speaker, I think that this is a great question . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. You know, we have been given a rare opportunity in this House as Members of the Legislative Assembly to represent the people of Alberta; more specifically, to represent our constituents on the issues of the day that come before this House. I can't think of too many things that are more important in the lives of Albertans than their jobs and their capacity to be able to meet the needs of their families, their financial needs. So when we start talking about the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code, Madam Speaker, this is a very important piece of legislation that we need to deal with.

As I said, I'm glad they built this into the title. We do need a fair and family-friendly workplace. That's why we work. That's why we spend the long hours and we give our best efforts in our jobs, so that we can take care of our families. Any legislation that deals with that is important, and it's why we need to make sure, Madam Speaker, that we get this right. It's why we need to make sure and why I will support this referral amendment, because it speaks to the very heart of our capacity as families and as men and women to be able to take care of those families and to earn a living and to do so in a way that provides us with not only job satisfaction but with the capacity to make sure that we take care of the most important people in our lives.

As I said, we have a rare privilege in this House in that we get the opportunity to speak to these kinds of issues, and we must always remember that in a democracy it's about providing and crafting legislation that will actually meet the needs of the people of Alberta. I see some problems with the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, which I believe a referral to committee would help us with. We know that there are times – and I think this government has shown a trend, a pattern, that they are indeed struggling with this whole idea of consultation. We've had many members of the Legislature here today mention the fact that for a 124-page document – some are calling it an omnibus bill – this document has had very little consultation, that prior legislation in this area, in the 1980s, had years of consultation whereas this has had anywhere between 27 business days or 36 days total.

Madam Speaker, we would argue and we would suggest that this is part of the pattern that we see in this government of a lack of consultation. We know that starting in the very first session, we brought this to the government's attention. There are times, when you don't consult with the people of Alberta, when you find yourself out of step with those people. In a democracy that's a very serious thing, to be out of step with the people that you're called to represent.

We know that right out of the gate, when they were first elected, they voted for a 7.25 per cent raise for senior government officials. They were out of step because they did not do the appropriate amount of consultation. My colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said at that time:

This sends the completely wrong message to Albertans struggling and looking for leadership from their government during difficult economic times . . . The economy is hurting, the NDP are threatening new and higher taxes, and now they are voting for massive pay increases for senior government officials.

That was not done on our part just to try and bring the government down. Rather, it was there as a sincere attempt to help them reconnect as a young government with the people of Alberta, to make sure that they were indeed listening to the people and not out of step with Albertans. That's one of the things that a referral to committee will do. It will help this government to reconnect, to make sure that they are indeed voicing the opinions and the desires of the people of Alberta.

4:20

You know we've seen a pattern of lack of consultation on things like Bill 6, the carbon tax, the Climate Leadership Implementation Act, and the Renewable Electricity Act. To simply ignore this amendment is to ignore the fact that they are being given a chance to again go back to the public to consult before they table most of their legislation, before they bring it back into the House. This is a wise thing to do because at the end of the day this legislation has to be able to have the support of the people of Alberta. Right now we're hearing from many stakeholders that they are very concerned about this legislation. When you don't consult, you run the risk of

having a bill die a death by a thousand cuts as one stakeholder after the other after the other after the other begins to voice their disagreement with that bill. So we would suggest that this government would be wise, rather than eroding public confidence in this bill and in this government, to go back to the table and do more consultation.

Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. We and I on this side of the House see that there is a value to some portions and parts of this bill. We can see that in the portions that deal with the Employment Standards Codes, there's much to be supported in that. There is no question that the compassionate care issues that are enshrined in this legislation can be addressed immediately and can be addressed with the support of this House. There are some very good pieces here. When we take a look at maternity leave and the parental leave clauses and the compassionate care leave, the death or disappearance of a child leave or critical illness of a child leave; long-term illness, domestic violence, bereavement leave; leave for citizenship ceremonies, these are all good things that need to be incorporated into the fabric of Alberta working society. These can and should and will be supported, I believe, not only by members of this House but by the general public, Albertans in general.

But there are significant portions of this bill, especially in the Labour Relations Code, that we need to take another look at. That's why I will support this referral to a committee. We need to understand and we need to realize that there are problems when you place an omnibus bill before a House. We've seen government after government all across this country – federally, provincially – get into trouble when they try to package large numbers of ideas into one bill. They run the risk, because they haven't done the consultation and because they've packaged it into such a large document, that one or two pieces of that omnibus bill can actually bring down some potentially good legislation.

As the opposition, who is charged with providing accountability to the government and trying to offer suggestions as to how the government could pass better legislation, we are as the opposition, as the Wildrose, suggesting to the government that they would be further ahead and that they would be wise to separate and split this omnibus bill into two parts, one that would pass through very quickly with the support of the House, the compassionate leave portions of this omnibus bill, but that it would then take more time at committee. Through this referral amendment they could then take the time to listen to Albertans and to listen to the stakeholders that need to deal with those portions of this bill that have some significant issues with them.

You know, that's the problem with an omnibus bill. The portions that Albertans would support can be held up and maybe even be lost when you do not separate those portions of the bill that do not have the support of Albertans and, as far as we're concerned, will not have the support of the opposition. A wise government would listen to this, would not dig in their heels, but instead would listen to the wise counsel of the opposition.

A referral to committee allows for that extra consultation. We've heard that already. You know, this is not consultation just for one segment of Albertans. This is not a consultation on this bill that should be just for unions. We've heard that in many cases the small amount of consultation that occurred over that 36 days was attended on a regular basis, all of them, by unions but that very few major stakeholders from the other side of the equation were allowed or capable of attending. We believe as the opposition that there needs to be more consultation and stakeholders from the business community allowed and brought before the committee, or the committee could go out to the business community and receive their feedback on the Labour Relations Code portion of this bill, we believe, from

stakeholders like the Chambers of Commerce. We need expert testimony. We need the testimony of those people that are involved in business, that understand how the business community works.

You know, we just spent time last night at the Resource Diversification Council. In my conversations with some of the businesses at the Resource Diversification Council they were saying: "You know, we're now in an economic climate where even the pennies have to be counted. Any increase to our input costs are going to seriously influence and impact our capacity to hire people and to do business." If that's what they're saying – and I know the hon. members from the NDP were there. Many of them were there. I saw them there last night. They must have been having those conversations. They must have had those kinds of conversations. I know that's what I was hearing last night. Because of that, we need to make sure that we've included those business perspectives in this consultation. This is just simply good governance. This is simply a model of good government, and it allows us the capacity to make good legislation.

When I was in my social studies class, I made sure that my kids had the ability to look at both sides of the issue, look at case study examples from one point of view and from another point of view. My response to them was always: "I don't care what your position is on the paper that I'm assigning you. I don't care which way you go on this. What I care about is that you have the capacity to be able to explain your position and to be able to defend your position using relevant case study examples." That's a good educational tool. That's what good education looks like. I would argue that in the Legislature making sure that we've listened to all of the stakeholders and that we have a balanced perspective so that we have good legislation is always a good thing, and referring this to committee will allow us to do that, Madam Speaker.

A referral amendment like we're looking at right here recognizes that we live in unique times, that these are difficult economic times, and that anything that we choose to do in this House will have ramifications to Albertans and to their capacity to have jobs, to the capital that needs to be spent in this province. We cannot be passing legislation that's going to hurt the economy of Alberta. This is a very serious issue. We have to make sure that we are making the wise choices based on information, and the only way that we're going to be able to get that is if we refer this to committee. You know, I believe that this government does need to take time to reflect, and this committee would allow it to be able to do that.

You know, it's been brought up that there may be a conflict of interest, that we may have the Ethics Commissioner ruling on whether some of us can speak to this bill or not speak to this bill. I believe that it would be wise and it would be a good thing for this government if this is referred to committee, for them to take the time and to reflect and have that second sober thought as to whether or not this is the opportunity that they're going to take to realize or to think about whether they should indeed be addressing this issue right now. [interjection] You know what? As a social studies teacher that means very little.

We're looking at a situation here for referral to committee that I believe has really got an opportunity for us to be able to pass better legislation. Let's use the summer to receive the meaningful feedback that we need so that we can bring all the changes that are needed.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The House now stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, May 25, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 11991202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 17 — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft., adjourned on referral amendment*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)
Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 206 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 29, 2017

Day 40

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 8 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 29, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us each reflect or pray, each in our own way. Friday, May 26, marked the month of Ramadan. During this time Albertans who are Muslims, our fellow Muslims world-wide fast to remind themselves of the suffering of those less fortunate. This month also focuses on spiritual discipline, deep contemplation, and increased generosity towards others. Regardless of our own faith and beliefs, this key message of Ramadan is something we should all reflect upon.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly students from Landing Trail intermediate school. I had the pleasure of visiting with them not too long ago. Excellent questions: I have to say that they'd give us a run for our money although they were a bit more polite than we tend to be. They are joined by their teacher, Mrs. Laura Pope, and their chaperone, Mrs. Barbara Nicholl. If the class, teacher, and chaperone could please rise and receive the customary – oh, I'm looking at the wrong group. All right. Okay. Well, I guess you guys know what to do.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, you're correct. I know that each one of you has much to learn from these children about how to be nice to each other.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. M. le Président, c'est avec fierté que je me lève à ce Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire les étudiants qui viennent de l'école Father Jan. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Natalie Jurick, and their chaperones, Sarah Macsymic, Heidi Pisani, and David Fisher. I would ask that – oh, they've risen already. Please join me in welcoming this group to the Chamber.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups today, hon. members?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly 10 recipients of the sovereign's medal for volunteers. This Canadian honour recognizes the exceptional achievement of volunteers from across the country in a wide range of fields. This inspirational group of Albertans demonstrates selfless dedication of time, passion, and energy to a variety of causes and communities across the province. The recipients and their guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I call their names: Mr. James Bourgoin, Ms Christine McCourt-Reid, Captain Barbara Sand, Ms Barbara Furuness, Captain Sidney Furuness, Cadet Sergeant Avery Nham, Mr. Harold Lefebvre, Warrant Officer Kristopher Porlier, Mr. George Lucki, and the hon. Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Steinke. If we can all please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're joined here today by recipients of the Ernest Manning innovation award. Since 1982 the Ernest Manning innovation awards have recognized Canadians whose pioneering technologies have helped grow their local economies, protect the environment, and save lives. The awards honour scientists, businesspeople, and community activists who aspire to do good for the common good. Leaders do not only develop creative products but also improve the standard of living for all Canadians. Today I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly seven distinguished Albertans nominated by the northern Alberta chapter of the 2017 Ernest Manning awards. I'll ask that they rise as I call their names: Sophia Fairweather, James Keirstead, Jim Qualie, Gordon Molnar, Dr. Jianhua Zhu, Tim Battle, Des Quinn. I'd also like to welcome Sol Rolingher, chair of the northern Alberta chapter, who is accompanying the nominees. I want to thank them for their hard work and wish them the best of luck in the innovation awards this fall. Please join me in giving them the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents of Edmonton-Centre and former pages in this Assembly, Mr. Myles Chykerda and Mr. Edward Davies. Myles joined the House as a page from his home constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka in early 2000 and then moved to Edmonton-Centre to begin studies at the University of Alberta. He went on to become a government documents page in the Legislature Library and a historical researcher before leaving the Assembly to pursue graduate studies at the U of A. In 2011 he moved to Los Angeles, where he has been pursuing a doctorate in archeology, University of California in Los Angeles, where he remains proud of his Alberta heritage and education and is happy to return here this summer to focus on his dissertation.

Edward joined the House as a page in 2008 and has continued that work during his undergraduate studies at the University of Alberta until the conclusion of the spring session in 2010. He received his bachelor of arts with distinction from the University of Alberta in 2013, where he studied political science and music, and went on to earn his juris doctor from the University of Ottawa in 2016. He recently returned home to Alberta to accept a position with the Edmonton law firm McAllister LLP, where he is currently rounding out his articles and will be continuing as an associate.

I would ask both Edward and Myles to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Minister of Education, I understand you have two groups.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature some pretty amazing people from the city of Red Deer. First, here are two incredibly brave students from Lindsay Thurber high school, Ursella Khan and Thomas Gower. These two students stood up to racism last week, when a group of people gathered outside Lindsay Thurber high school in Red Deer to hold an anti-immigration protest. Ursella and Thomas sent a clear message to the protestors and to all Albertans about the importance of making our schools welcome and safe and treating people with respect. I would also like to introduce Dan Lower, the principal of Lindsay Thurber high school; superintendent Stu Henry; and board chair Bev Manning. I want to thank all of you for the role that you played in standing up against hatred and standing up for love and understanding. Please, let's rise and give them a very traditional warm welcome. [Standing ovation]

1:40

Not to be outdone by that by any means, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce the members of my family that are here today, though you don't have to give them a standing ovation. I have my mom here, Marion Eggen. I have my daughter Ava Eggen, my son Jonathan Wales, and my niece Madeleine Elkins. If they could stand and get a warm, you know, subdued greeting.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health. The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was so taken by the last two sets of introductions. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you five Alberta paramedics, who are seated in our members' gallery today. This week is dedicated to paramedic services to celebrate the vital services performed by our front-line professionals to ensure that Albertans are provided with the very best care. I ask that they rise as I call their names: Andrew Scobbie, advanced care paramedic from Calgary, with 28 years of service; Holly Howard, primary care paramedic from Edmonton, with three years of service; Stu Snowdon, advanced care paramedic from Edmonton, with 12 years of service; Melanie Howard, advanced care paramedic from Calgary, with seven years of service; and Alex Campbell, public education officer from Edmonton, with 15 years of service. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly to our guests.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 10 employees from various areas within Alberta Justice and Solicitor General. I'd like to thank them for the hard work they do every day on behalf of all Albertans. I would now ask that they rise, and I would ask that the members join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other introductions today, hon. members?

Members' Statements

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

Decorum and Civility in the Assembly

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms citizens of this country are provided the right of freedom to believe in whatever they wish to believe. Under section 2 it specifically states, "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms." Subsection (b) specifically states that everyone has "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression." This is absolutely necessary in a democracy.

However, the opposition in this House consistently ridicules those who do not share their point of view. Just last week I was the subject of racially focused, discriminatory remarks in this very House during Committee of the Whole. How can we expect better for our society and our children if in this House members are the subject of such personal attacks?

Our children deserve better. Albertans want a governing body that will focus on the issues, that will develop policy in their best interests, and a government and an opposition that are willing to debate and, at the end of the day, work together towards that end. However, Mr. Speaker, what they get instead is an opposition that bullies its way through sitting after sitting, hurling insults and racist remarks at members of this House for their beliefs rather than focusing on policy.

A few months ago, after a visit from Meyokumin school, an elementary school in my riding, a student reached out to me and asked a couple of questions, and I quote:

When the assembly is in their meeting and someone is talking, why do members of other parties start to be rude to them? I noticed . . . today when someone from the NDP was talking, members from the opposition were laughing. Why do they do that?

Mr. Speaker, I have also heard from other constituents that are tired of the fact that we act worse than schoolchildren in this House. You have mentioned it repeatedly yourself.

Albertans are tired, and this behaviour must end, if not for our sake then at least for the sake of our children and future generations. As we all know, children learn by example. Let us do our best to be the good example they aspire us to be and, once and for all, put an end to personal attacks in this House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

PDD Service Eligibility

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I sent the minister of human services a letter back in March of this year outlining a particular problem Bruce Bolton, one of my constituents, is having receiving PDD benefits for his autistic son. In the letter I outlined how Mr. Bolton has applied twice, appealed once, and has been denied based on a current blanket ban on services for any person having an IQ higher than 70.

Travis Bolton, Mr. Bolton's son, has autism, which impairs his executive functioning. It means he has very poor problem-solving skills, lacks impulse control, does not read social cues appropriately, and has significant other issues. If something were to happen to Travis's parents today, Travis would not be able to take care of himself. Period. As outlined in my letter, Travis is an individual that needs the support that only PDD funding can provide.

On May 26, 2016, we brought forward certain individuals who were experiencing problems with eligibility requirements and were unable to receive PDD benefits. Over a year has passed since the minister at the time made a promise to this House and to Albertans that he would "work with the sector, work with the individuals, and work with the advocates to make sure that Albertans get the supports they need." He also stated that same day that "usually a

detailed response and follow-up is provided by the staff, and that will be the case in this particular instance as well.” However, no one has contacted either Mr. Bolton or my office regarding this matter.

I need the minister to carry out his promise and have his staff contact my staff to formulate a plan that involves making sure Travis Bolton has the necessary PDD funding in place.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Grande Prairie Diversity Award

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Grande Prairie recently received the peace and friendship diversity award. This award is given out annually by the indigenous community to Albertans who promote diversity and inclusion through community work, volunteerism, relationship development, shared programs, and consistent efforts to support, build, and maintain good relations with indigenous communities.

The city of Grande Prairie received the 2017 peace and friendship diversity award for their ceremonial smudging policy, which has been created to honour sacred smudging and the burning of sacred medicines as a traditional practice of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. Smudging rituals are an important part of FNMI culture. The smoke is used to heal, bless, and cleanse. The city’s policy permits smudging rituals in certain city facilities such as the Grande Prairie museum and Revolution Place. The city of Grande Prairie is the first western Canadian municipality to develop a policy of this nature.

There are many other examples of Grande Prairie pulling together to build community relationships. In January 2017 the Grande Prairie Regional College signed its indigenous education protocol with the Circle of Indigenous Students. The Rotary clubs in Grande Prairie work closely with the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre to build community relationships and to serve community members in need. They are continually working to better relationships with FNMI communities and recognize them for their historic and continuing role in the development of the Grande Prairie area.

As Albertans we have work to do to further develop collaborative relationships with our FNMI communities, and I’m proud to see policies such as this being developed in my great constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Thank you.

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

NDP and Conservative Policies

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 18 the Leader of the Opposition and Jason Kenney announced the formation of the united conservative party. As usual, Jason Kenney made sure he repeated the same old tired lines he’s always used about the NDP.

We hear the same from the Kenney foot soldiers in the Chamber. It’s like they’re auditioning. Remember when the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek compared the NDP to the Chinese Communists? Remember when the Member for Strathmore-Brooks tried to slap us with a bizarre Thatcher quote on International Women’s Day? The Wildrose and PCs are good at throwing names across the aisle and making speeches about why they’re entitled to run Alberta, they’re entitled to power.

NDP governments have initiated a lot of what makes Canada the place we know and love today. Universal access to health care, employment insurance, workers’ compensation, old age pension: all things that are NDP initiatives. Publicly funded education for all

students, even those who want GSAs: definitely NDP. Working with Alberta’s private energy sector to increase market access: NDP.

1:50

Back to Mr. Kenney for a moment. When he was in cabinet, the Conservative government set the record for the highest per capita spending in Canadian history. Don’t believe me? Ask the Fraser Institute.

Wildrose and PCs will both tell you they want a balanced budget, but they will not tell you what their plan is. They have no plan. It’s just an excuse for attacking public health, education, and social services. The members opposite will theatrically complain about the deficit spending that will put our children into indentured servitude and then, in the next breath, demand more capital spending in their constituencies for hospitals, schools, and seniors. The science of economics tells us that deficit spending pulls economies out of recession faster, and that’s why we’re recovering, but they reject the science just like they reject the science of climate change.

With the UCP we can expect more of the same. Repeal everything: repeal all the growth, repeal a disability services advocate, repeal minimum wages, repeal reduced school fees. Mr. Speaker, to quote Jason Kenney, that’s catastrophic.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Statement by the Speaker

Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: On April 12, 2017, I shared the following reminder with this House.

Hon. members . . . I just want to, as a courtesy to all, remind members of the memo that was distributed to everyone . . . on February 13. Just to refresh your memory, “Members may use their mobile devices during Oral Question Period but must only use them as reading devices and not for streaming, sending or receiving messages.”

I want to remind each and every member of this. As hon. members I’m sure you will not incur this practice, that I’ve outlined on several occasions to you.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Credit Rating

Mr. Jean: Last election the Premier promised balanced budgets. What did Albertans get instead? Well, they got record levels of debt, endless multibillion-dollar deficits, a massive expansion in the size of government, the biggest tax hike in our history, and now our fifth credit downgrade. That’s more than just an accounting error; it’s gross negligence. It shows a pattern of waste and excess across government while ordinary, everyday Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. How many more hits to our province’s credit rating will this Premier tolerate until she realizes her plan is failing and changes Alberta’s course?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, just this morning the Conference Board of Canada upgraded Alberta’s economic growth forecast to 3.3 per cent, the fastest growth in the country. Now, the Wildrose would like to kill that recovery with brutal cuts, putting people out of work and hurting the middle class, all to satisfy one rating agency. You know what? We’re not going to do that. We’re going to continue on the path. We’ve got Albertans’ backs. The

economy is going to continue growing, and we are going to make life better for all Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Albertans' backs, Mr. Speaker? Well, Standard & Poor's says this about your attempt to get Albertans' backs. It has the provincial debt set to skyrocket to \$94 billion by 2020. What does that mean for 1.5 million or so households in Alberta? Well, it means about \$63,000 in extra debt that ultimately they'll be responsible to pay for and pay interest payments on. That doesn't even touch the billions and billions of dollars the government will pay on interest payments every year rather than on hospitals, schools, nurses, teachers, all those things that are so important to Albertans. It's time the NDP stopped living in a fantasy world. When will they admit that five credit downgrades in less than two years . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, this particular rating agency is using a brand new criterion that decides to discount a whole bunch of revenue, so whatever. But this particular agency would have us earn their support by cutting \$3.5 billion out of our operating or raising taxes by that much. That is almost half the Education budget, \$3.5 billion. To the member opposite: what will he do? Will he cut \$3.5 billion or raise that much in taxes? Tell Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schmidt: You guys love transparency. Be open to Albertans.

The Speaker: Please don't speak, hon. minister, while I'm standing. Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Finance minister's response to the downgrade has been to pretend that billions in new spending are actually helping Albertans. Let's look at the NDP record so far: 60,000 full-time jobs have vanished under their watch, they've brought in a \$5 billion carbon tax, they put a cap on our oil sands, and they've spent billions to kill off our industries just because they don't like them. All we get in return is – you know it – free light bulbs. It's an absolutely appalling record of incompetence. Not a single dollar of NDP spending has created one net new job, not even close. How can the NDP or the Premier possibly justify their record?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when our government came into office, we inherited the biggest recession that this province has seen in over 50 years. But since then jobs are up, drilling is up, manufacturing is up, housing starts are up, exports are up, and all the Wildrose wants to do is cut. I appreciate that good economic news is bad political news for them, but it is time they start putting Albertans' economic interests before their political ones.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Yes, it's up, Mr. Speaker. Debt is up, deficit is up, and unemployment is up.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: Alberta now shares a credit rating with Ontario, a jurisdiction with the highest level of subnational debt in the world, Mr. Speaker – it's disgraceful – and the Premier's only plan is to

cross her fingers and hope that oil will soon be roaring back at \$100 a barrel. The Finance minister can't just fly to Toronto and New York and hope that smiling at credit agencies will work. They expect to see a real plan. We haven't seen one from this NDP government, not even close. When can Albertans ever hope to see a plan that isn't just borrowing billions of dollars off the backs of future generations of Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm still waiting for the member opposite to answer: is he going to cut \$3.5 billion or raise taxes by \$3.5 billion? In the meantime Albertans do have an answer from us. They have a plan that is focused on making life better for Albertans. Increasing jobs, increasing investment, important public sector, and making life more affordable: these things together are the foundation of a growing and renewing economy, exactly what we are seeing now.

Mr. Jean: Ideas, Mr. Speaker? Suggestions? Well, the NDP wouldn't know how to hit low-hanging fruit if it was staring them in the face. Here are a few ideas that maybe would help them: end the tens of millions spent on budget and carbon tax ads, stop the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on shoring up government-run linen services, and save more by thinning out layers of managers that are currently managing managers that manage managers. Just some of these things would be a good idea. Stop the billions of dollars wasted on free light bulb programs and stop killing coal jobs. There are some ideas. Maybe they should think about those. Why not just implement one of those ideas to start saving some money?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that hitting low-hanging fruit is actually a way to save money, so I'm not going to go with that.

What I am going to do, however, is to not stop the very plan that got us a pipeline, a pipeline where on Friday a final investment decision was made that is worth \$7 billion dollars for Albertans. Just on Friday. No celebrating: I hear no celebrating from the members opposite. To be clear, that decision was made by the federal government because of our climate leadership plan. Mr. Speaker, we are not going to back down on that.

Mr. Jean: Here's the big picture, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is more interested in serving their own world view, an antipipeline view, I might add, than doing what is right by the people of Alberta. They are driving our province nearly \$100 billion in debt, without one net new job to show for it, and an endless series of credit downgrades. In the meantime they've ripped billions of dollars out of the economy through higher taxes, and they've sent billions more away with their reckless policies. How does the Premier ever expect anyone, especially Albertans, to trust her again with this disastrous record?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the alt-facts machine is blowing quite a lot of smoke over there in the Official Opposition office. That was quite a list.

Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that we will continue on the plan that we've put into place. We made a choice. We will have Albertans' backs. We will support those important public services. We will support our schools and our hospitals. We will finally invest in infrastructure. We will create jobs, and we will not apologize for making life more affordable for Albertans, because that is the way you rebuild an economy, that's the way you support Albertans when things are down, and that's why we got elected.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Economic Conditions in Calgary

Mr. Jean: More affordable for Albertans? Well, on Friday new StatsCan data was released that shows that the median income in Calgary plunged more than 15 per cent, the second-worst decline on record for this city. Couple that with the current unemployment rate, and it's no surprise that Calgarians are having a tough time right now with this NDP government. Instead of doing no further harm, the NDP government continues to plunge ahead with policies damaging to our economy. Will the Premier just admit the truth, that her government doesn't have the backs of the people of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know, of course, that people across Alberta are suffering as a result of the drop in the price of oil, and of course we know that that is the case in Calgary even though we still have the lowest overall taxes in the country. That's why we will not jack up their tuition rates. We will cut their school fees. We will protect them from skyrocketing electricity rates. Those are the things you do when people are already struggling. You don't pile on \$3.5 billion worth of cuts.

Mr. Jean: Fearmongering will not make what this NDP government says true, Mr. Speaker. The accusations are ridiculous. Here's how the NDP is actually helping Calgary: a carbon tax that is raising the price of groceries, gas, and too many other items to count; an increase in business taxes that is causing investments to flee downtown and all over Calgary and southern Alberta; and a lawsuit, of course, against Enmax over the NDP's lack of understanding about PPAs. And you guessed it, Mr. Speaker. It's against the people of Calgary. No wonder Calgarians feel ignored by this Premier and this NDP government. Why won't the Premier back down from her reckless policies, that are only hurting Calgarians when they can least afford it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what our government is doing is working with Calgary to help their economy renew. As we've said, the Conference Board of Canada is projecting that Calgary's economy will grow by 2.3 per cent this year, adding 9,000 jobs this year and 10,000 new jobs next year. We've been working with Calgary Economic Development to attract even more jobs to Calgary. Seventeen of the world's 20 largest investment banks have offices in Calgary. Calgary is home to the highest concentration of international headquarters in Canada. We are investing in infrastructure in Calgary each and every day, including a cancer hospital that those fellows over there couldn't make . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, thank you. [interjections] Order, please.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, could the Premier please walk downtown in Calgary and see the people, see the devastation, see the 30 per cent vacancy? The NDP just doesn't get it. So many of their actions send direct signals to investors that Alberta is simply not open for business. Maybe if the Premier spent a bit of time in Calgary, she'd hear the same stories that I do of businesses that are barely getting by or that have had to close up shop because of the downturn. When

will the Premier realize that her government's policies are the straw that broke the camel's back when oil prices are low?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when will the member opposite quit cheering for Albertans to fail? That's what he's doing right now. Over and over and over again we are seeing indications that things are slowly getting better. Is it better? No, Mr. Speaker. Do we have more to do? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Do we have the lowest overall tax rate in the country still? Yes, Mr. Speaker. Have we brought in tax credits, both investment tax credits and capital tax credits, that will help business? Yes, Mr. Speaker. Is our member working every day with Calgary Economic Development to grow the economy in Calgary? Yes, Mr. Speaker, and we'll keep doing it. So stop with the exaggeration and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Provincial Credit Rating

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. NDP government policy hasn't satisfied any credit-rating agency. They've taken us from a surplus and a triple-A credit rating down to a single-A plus as ranked by Standard & Poor's. We're now halfway from double-A, which is the highest investment grade, to speculative grade, which is sometimes referred to as junk bond status. This government's direction is clearly wrong and headed for worse. To the Premier: how can you and your Finance minister claim to have the backs of Albertans when you are on the path to a third-world credit rating?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can the member opposite care about the backs of Albertans while walking around throwing around statements like "third-world credit rating"? That's the kind of thing that scares away investment, not the good policies that this government is bringing into place, with 3.3 per cent growth this year. Now, I appreciate that that member opposite also doesn't want to engage in any kind of celebration of the green shoots that are going forward, but could he please refrain from the rhetorical name-calling of business leaders and the business climate here in Alberta?

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is the problem; businesspeople are the solution. She should learn that.

Alberta will run deficits of 26 per cent after capital expenditures according to Standard & Poor's. That's like a family with a \$60,000 income raising their credit card debt by over \$15,000. By 2020 the debt in the province will be \$94 billion, 180 per cent of operating. When I was on city council, the province made us stop our debt at 150 per cent of revenue. Is it possible the Premier could take the government's own advice and control the amount of debt which the government acknowledges through legislation . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, our government has taken a very clear approach to how we will help Albertans and Alberta businesses and Alberta citizens through these difficult economic times. Again, the same question that I gave to the member opposite also applies to his kissing cousins or whatever they are in the third party. What would they do? Would they cut \$3.5 billion in services – that's \$3.5 billion,

about 40 per cent of the Education budget – or would they raise taxes by \$3.5 billion? That's how we get out of the so-called junk bond rating that the member so callously threw out there. Which would he do? Come clean.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. News flash for the Premier: people with jobs pay more taxes and require less social services. That's how you do it, Premier. It's not that difficult. I just said that I'd help people get jobs. Standard & Poor's said that this has not happened. Standard & Poor's says that there's still a downside risk. We have to stop maxing out the credit card. Premier, will you direct your Finance minister to take a remedial course in budgeting so that you can get off this roller coaster, which is leading to third-world status, and will you do it now? Albertans need those jobs. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A clear little economics lesson here. When you raise taxes by \$3.5 billion and pull it out of the economy or when you cut services by \$3.5 billion, you know what doesn't happen? Jobs. That's what doesn't happen when you make those kinds of cuts. You know what does create jobs? Investing in infrastructure long overdue for many, many years, supporting important public services, and making life more affordable so people have more money in their pocket. This is what creates jobs. That is what is creating jobs, and that's why we're leading...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier. [interjection]
Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, keep your volume down, please.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Auditor General Recommendations on Health Care

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Auditor General released a groundbreaking report on Alberta's health care system, including a recommendation that funding should be linked to outcomes. He argues for the use of market mechanisms within a public health care system, and I couldn't agree more. Let me be very clear. I believe passionately in public health care, and this report says nothing about privatization, but we know we need to set aspirational goals to deliver better care to more people for the same amount of money. To the Minister of Health: do you accept this recommendation, and if so, when are you going to link funding to outcomes?

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Auditor General for his report. His ideas support our push to make life better for Albertans by improving access to team-based care, integrated care in their communities. That's why we're better integrating doctors and supporting better care for patients through our new AMA agreement. This work is well under way. I'm very proud of it. Instead of pushing for rash, ideological cuts, as both conservative parties, three conservative parties, one conservative party want to push for on the other side, we're making life better and working with front-line workers to do that. I'm so proud of our progress.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I'm over here, and I'm not part of any of those parties, and I never will be, so I'd appreciate an answer to my question.

The Auditor General called for bold action, for taking a quantum leap rather than incremental changes, but I've seen no evidence that this government is up to the task. Albertans pay more for health care here than anywhere else in Canada, and we need leadership to ensure that we get what we pay for. Again to the Minister of Health. Your changes to date are just nibbling around the edges. Will you commit to making the fundamental transformational changes that the Auditor General called for?

Ms Hoffman: If the member opposite wants to pretend he's not united with the other folks, maybe he should look at his own voting record, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say that we deserve better integration, and we're proud to move forward on that, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're investing \$400 million to better integrate and share information across the health care system, improving access to accountability within primary care networks. We have been working and making very significant progress in partnership. We're working with health professionals, not doing things to them. I'm so proud of the paramedics who are in our audience, who are doing work around the Health Professions Act. They're expanding their scope of practice as well, making health care better for every Albertan.

Mr. Clark: I'll put my voting record up against theirs and yours because Albertans know there's a middle way and a better way, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General also found significant overlap between Alberta Health and AHS. This is something we've known for a long time, and it's certainly a legacy of the previous government. But they're not in charge anymore, Mr. Speaker. This government is, so it's time to stop making excuses. Again to the Minister of Health: what specifically are you doing to eliminate duplication between Alberta Health and AHS, and what metrics are you using to track your progress?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am so proud of the work we're doing, the fact that we are working together as many different parts to make health care better instead of having infighting between two different organizations. We've been very effective in moving things forward. There isn't a parallel management function between the two organizations but, rather, a close working relationship that determines how policies will be reflected and the services delivered for Albertans. Alberta Health sets the policies. AHS carries them out on the front lines through front-line health care providers, including the paramedics who are here today. For example, AHS sets continuing care standards. AH sets them; AHS implements them. That's the right division of power.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Economic Recovery

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the low price of oil, the last two years have been hard on Alberta families and Alberta businesses. In Calgary-Currie we are now seeing signs that Alberta is emerging from one of the worst recessions in a generation. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are the latest economic indicators saying about the provincial economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for being a very strong advocate for the business community. I'm happy to share that full-time employment rose for the third straight month, reaching the highest level in the past year. Last year we led the country in private-sector investment and are on track to lead the country again this year. Rig drilling is up a hundred per cent. Our exports are up 68 per cent over the same time last year. Manufacturing was up in March and reached \$5.8 billion. Housing starts are up. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that small-business confidence is up, at its highest level since 2014.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents and Albertans across the province are anxious about the recovery of the economy and the creation of jobs, to the same minister: what are you hearing from economic forecasters about the provincial economy going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy will be the fastest growing this year. The Conference Board of Canada increased its projection of GDP growth to 3.3 per cent, the highest in the country. I can tell you that they said that nonconventional oil production in the province will see a big increase this year thanks to new capacity. Energy investment is expected to make a comeback this year and next year. Outside of the energy sector Alberta is benefiting from improvements in labour markets, consumer demand, and the housing sector, and I can tell you that the manufacturing sector has also been bolstered significantly by the new ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans have been on a resource roller coaster due to the previous government's inability to diversify the economy, to the same minister: what industries outside of the energy sector are facilitating Alberta's economic recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm proud of the work our government is doing to diversify the economy. We've got the Official Opposition, who doesn't believe in diversification, and the third party, that failed to diversify the economy. I can tell you that in manufacturing, Ford is opening a new parts and distribution warehouse in Leduc. Champion Petfoods is building a 37,000-square-foot facility in Parkland county. In tourism our market monitor shows the province's national parks are experiencing record visitation, and Edmonton will host the first-ever international Cities and Climate Change Science Conference, that will welcome up to a thousand representatives. I encourage the opposition ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister

Auditor General Recommendations on Health Care (continued)

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, last week the Auditor General released a report about how the health care system is still failing patients. The

AG was clear when he said that putting more money into the system is not the answer. This government thinks that spending millions on government-run linen services is a priority. For two years the NDP has shown no will to get costs under control, and they've attacked the opposition for proposing good ideas that would not affect the front lines. Does this NDP government finally understand that they can't simply keep throwing money at the problem?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You mean, like, not firing teachers? He says that that's throwing money at the problem. You mean not firing nurses, protecting front-line services? I'm proud to do that. While his dance partners saw increases in health expenditure in excess of 6 per cent regularly, we've gotten them down to 3 and a half per cent. So if you want to talk about who's got better control of making sure we're making life better for Albertans and spending on important services that Albertans care about, it's the NDP government.

Mr. Yao: It's easy to spend somebody else's money, Mr. Speaker. Here's another quote from the AG. "Albertans [deserve] the best. Why would they not [expect] the best?" Given that Health is one of the biggest line items in our budget and given that the AG has said that our weakness has many organizational weaknesses in areas as far-reaching as from information management to the integration of allied health services, is the minister planning on implementing the AG's recommendations which seek to empower patients and front-line workers? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons why we're proud to be investing in the very skills and services that the OAG recommends. That's why we're spending \$400 million to ensure that Albertans can have access to better integration of their own patient information through the clinical information system. We're so proud of that. Members opposite want to push for deep, ideological cuts. We're actually moving forward with reasonable investments to make sure that patients can be partners in their care and have better care tomorrow than they did yesterday. I'll tell you that the members opposite say that they are doing nothing that would compromise front-line care, for the rich. They want to move forward with two-tiered, privatized health care, and we won't stand for that.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, this government does promote and support private health care. Let's be clear.

The AG makes it crystal clear that these recommendations are necessary and long overdue. Given that the NDP said that they were going to implement changes in the health care system but quickly adopted the status quo of inefficient centralized health care and given that the Auditor said that change will not be possible until health care shifts its weight from the bureaucracy, how is the minister going to fix our health care system when she barely admits that there's a problem, and what's her timeline?

Ms Hoffman: Every day, Mr. Speaker, I talk to Albertans, and when I see them, I say: how do you feel about the health care services you're getting? The vast, vast majority are very proud. They're proud to have a public health care system. Is there room for improvement? Yes. Do they want us to cut billions of dollars from health care? No way. They want to see strategic, smart investment that will enable them to get better public health care tomorrow than they had

yesterday, and that's exactly what they're getting from this government instead of deep, ideological cuts from the opposition.

2:20 Provincial Credit Rating
(continued)

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, last week I quoted Polonius' advice to Laertes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Now, among other things Polonius advised his son:

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.

To the Finance minister. I understand you played Laertes in school. Now, you've borrowed a lot, and Standard & Poor's clearly stated that all that borrowing has dulled the edge of your husbandry. Minister, when are you going to sharpen up?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my high school years. I also played Tybalt in I think it was *Romeo and Juliet*.

With regard to the debt and the deficit I have said many times in this House that we will thoughtfully and prudently bring down our deficit. It's going to be a third reduced from where it is today at the end of our fiscal plan. That's the fiscal plan we have before us right now. We know that Albertans want us to control that. We are controlling our spending. We're looking to the future. The economy is coming back, and the Conference Board of Canada said that it's going to grow 3.3 per cent . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister is now playing that role.

Given that the Fraser Forum has shown that the increase in this government's spending over the last two years is the highest of any Canadian province, at 10.99 per cent, and given this government's refusal to even attempt to rein in its spending, which is cited by Standard & Poor's as a major consideration in its credit downgrade, to the minister. You've brushed off this two-step downgrade and the messages it is sending you. When do you intend to give up the position you've earned as the most profligate of Canada's finance ministers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great opportunity to talk about some of the things we have done that will get us back to balance. We are finding savings by cutting CEOs' salaries, something that side left in place for far too long. We are cutting salaries and services by 2 per cent. We saved \$121 million by doing that. We froze management's salaries, cabinet ministers', MLAs', political staff's. We have amalgamated or dissolved public agencies, something that side left in place for far too long. We're making lives better for Albertans. They would make it worse.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, given that this credit rating has real consequences as Alberta sinks ever deeper into this government's pit of debt and given that each credit downgrade makes it harder and more expensive for our government to debt finance both capital and, thanks to this government, operational spending, to the minister. Here's your chance to show the world how firm a handle you have on things. You must know this, so tell Albertans: what is the estimated increase in the cost of borrowing caused by this latest credit downgrade?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, I've said it before. I'll say it in this House: \$3.4 million is a cost that we will have to bear, but I think that is far better than cutting billions of dollars out of the budget, billions of dollars that would make life more difficult for

Albertans, billions of dollars that would probably come from raising taxes or cutting services. That's not what Albertans want. We've got the lowest tax structure. We're going to keep it there. We're growing faster than any other province.

2014 Commercial Fishery Closures

Mr. Loewen: Commercial fishing across Alberta was shut down in 2014. At that time the minister committed to fair compensation. Now this government has changed from compensation to goodwill payments, which are only about a third of the previous compensation discussed. This government is giving billions of dollars to coal generators to shut down. Do you feel what you're doing is fair to commercial fishers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government took swift action to protect our fish population from whirling disease. The day after whirling disease was detected in Banff national park by the federal government, we signed a ministerial order outlining our three-point action plan to educate Albertans. In order to expedite communication with key stakeholders, including commercial fishery operations, we formed a whirling disease committee. That had been disbanded by the Wildrose's new dance partner. We are investing, and we will have more to say about commercial fisheries in the supplementals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I'm talking about the 2014 commercial fisheries shutdown, not the 2017 . . .

The Speaker: No preamble on this question.

Mr. Loewen: . . . whirling disease issue, and given that much of the commercial fishing is conducted by indigenous and Métis individuals and companies and since these communities need jobs and it is an important employment income source for many indigenous families, not to mention that it helps to diversify the economy, something this government talks about all the time, and given that government is at least giving lip service to communities that are affected by the coal phase-out, what has this government done to help these families and communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, with the commercial fisheries we have discussed the ex gratia payments, and I'm advised by the Minister of Indigenous Relations that indigenous communities support these ex gratia payments. Those arrangements are now concluded. We have worked hard with those communities to ensure that that structure is relevant and fair to all parties involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Given that to this day the Minister of Environment and Parks has not met with the commercial fishers and since this is not surprising based on this government's record with consultation, will the minister extend the deadline for commercial fishers to accept payouts beyond the June 15 deadline and commit today to meet with an industry that is clearly under her mandate and deeply affected by government policy? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the decision to close the commercial fishery came as a result of decisions made by the PC environment minister, so the member may want to bring

this matter up at the next Unite the Right meeting. However, we will take the matter under advisement, and we will ensure that all parties are treated fairly through the ex gratia payment process and through subsequent processes for rural economic development in our province.

Thank you.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, it was in November of 2015 when this government first introduced their flawed Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. This labour bill under the guise of a farm safety bill was rolled out with notoriously little consultation, sadly, a theme that Albertans would become all too familiar with. The uproar and resentment that this bill created still resonates today. What I would like to know from the Minister of Labour is: if this bill was about safety, then why were the safety aspects of the bill not the priority yet the labour portions of the bill were?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This government, as do most Albertans, realizes that basic workers' rights are important for all Albertans. As far as farm and ranch workers, they now, finally, enjoy rights that most Albertans enjoy, that all farmers across Canada enjoy, and for that we are extremely proud. We're glad of the work that we're doing, making all Albertans' lives better, including farm and ranch workers.

Mr. Schneider: Congratulations to the minister on his promotion to Labour.

Given that a year and a half after the outrageous way that Bill 6 was dumped on farmers and ranchers the only safety aspect provided to us currently consists of OH and S being responsible for accident investigations and workers being allowed to refuse unsafe work and given that it appears that an OH and S bureaucrat could show up in a farmer's yard one morning and start writing tickets, Minister, do you have an update on the OH and S round-tables? Will the forthcoming regulations consist of purely punitive penalties, or will there actually be an educational component for these farmers and ranchers?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There are aspects of the occupational health and safety that are continuing to be worked on. It's not a stagnant thing. We do not all of a sudden reach a point where things don't change. Agriculture, as any industry, changes continuously. Those conversations with the agriculture community will continue; for instance, making sure that we define more clearly what constitutes dangerous work for youth workers. We're going to ensure that this legislation and other legislation will ensure that all of our workers, especially our youth workers, are protected while they learn and experience agriculture.

Mr. Schneider: Given that the Supreme Court ruled on the right of collective bargaining and the right to strike and given that there is still a great deal of rural distrust with this government and getting to be more by the day, actually, will the same minister please clarify who determines what constitutes a public emergency sufficient enough to stop the compassionate care of livestock or irreversible damage to crops? Do farmers and ranchers get to do that, I wonder,

or will it be some bureaucrat that's charged with that responsibility, you know, to make lives better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

2:30

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Yes, we do make life better for Albertans, and we'll continue to do so. It's the belief of this government and most Albertans, most Canadians that workers should have basic human rights, and that includes labour legislation. I would encourage the member opposite to look perhaps even to our cousins to the east, where they've had labour legislation that allows workers to unionize for decades – decades – and now we have something that exists here in Alberta. If you looked again to our friends to the east, you'd realize that very little unionization goes on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

School Fees

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the government introduced Bill 1, they stood in this House and claimed that they were going to make life better for Albertans. Well, Albertans, apparently, didn't get the memo. I attended a meeting last Thursday where concerned parents of school-aged children talked about how the school boards' reaction to Bill 1, including changing bell times and a move to more city transit for alternative programs, would actually cost them more money and force their children to take longer, more dangerous commutes. To the Minister of Education: why are you making life harder for these families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, you know, it's a good reminder that Bill 1 is An Act to Reduce School Fees. Almost 600,000 families across the province will see a reduction in their school fees in Alberta, particularly in the city of Calgary, too. We're working closely with boards to maintain and to make sure that we look for other ways by which we can reduce school fees. With the co-operation of parents and schools and boards I know that we can achieve that goal.

Mr. Fraser: Given the number of families that elect to have their children educated in alternative programs that emphasize cultural or second-language learning and given that this diversity in education both reflects and strengthens the cultural diversity of this province and given that Bill 1 is causing costs associated with these programs such as transportation to rise, to the same minister: was the decision to exclude certain programs from fee reductions designed to discourage participation in alternative programs, or is it the result of insufficient consultation with school boards and parents?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we hear the members opposite talking about credit ratings and cuts and so forth, the main reason that we were working with Bill 1 as An Act to Reduce School Fees and not eliminate them is because we have fiscal realities to deal with. So, yes, we are reducing school fees in different areas, and we will expand that as we get an opportunity to do so. You can't talk out of both sides of your mouth. You know, you talk about making massive cuts and then wanting more programming to reduce school fees. We at least have a coherent plan to reduce school fees here in the province.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the minister should focus on children, education, and families, not the other things.

Given that this government has increased spending by billions of dollars on your priorities, including subsidized light bulb installation, and given the relatively minuscule cost of extending fee reductions to important alternative education programs and given that this government has consistently claimed that education and making life more affordable for Albertans are some of their top priorities, to the same minister: if you're willing to spend billions on your priorities and unwilling to spend a few million to make alternative programs affordable, are you saying that these families simply aren't a priority?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, when building Bill 1, part of it was to make sure that the landscape that was created by the previous government, where it was the Wild West of school fees all over the place – we're bringing them in, we're lassoing them in, and making sure that we make life affordable for Alberta families, particularly in September. We will see literally 600,000 people with a reduced school fee bill in September as opposed to the many years when the member opposite and his government were in office.

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

Adult Literacy

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that roughly 1 in 5 Albertans has a low literacy rate and this impedes their progress and chances of getting good jobs. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that adult learning is a crucial tool for improving literacy and other essential skills, what is our government doing to support adult learning programs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that important question. We know that literacy is absolutely fundamental to making Albertans' lives better, and that's why it's a key priority for our government. Through the community adult learning program more than 125 organizations deliver adult learning to over 600 communities in Alberta. Earlier this month in Calgary I was proud to announce our government's Budget 2017 commitment of \$18 million to these programs, an increase of \$900,000 from the previous year. This increase means that our partner organizations will have more tools to reach more Albertans who struggle with literacy, and this will help ensure that Albertans have the literacy and skills they need to succeed and get a good job.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the rest of the province, Calgarians deserve to have the best chance at success, and this includes helping those in our cities struggling with literacy. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education: how is your ministry specifically supporting Calgary in this area?

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for advocating for foundational learning needs in Calgary. Recently I had the pleasure of helping recognize outstanding Albertans at the life of learning awards in Calgary, organized by one of our partners, called Calgary Learns. My ministry recently provided an additional \$500,000 to Calgary Learns so that they can meet higher demands for literacy and other essential skills in the Calgary region. In the

previous year Calgary Learns served over 2,000 people looking to improve their literacy. We're also proud to support other providers like Bow Valley College, Immigrant Services Calgary in the important work they do, important work that they wouldn't be able to do with the \$600 million . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how does our government's support for community and adult learning make life better for Albertans in my city and across the province?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, community adult learning programs open doors for Albertans that the opposition wants to shut. These programs ensure that Albertans have not only the skills to make their lives better but also the encouragement and support to persevere because it can be overwhelming to take the first step to overcoming literacy barriers on your own. At the life of learning awards I had the honour of meeting several outstanding Calgarians with stories of bravery in the face of learning deficiencies. One young woman, who had a serious brain injury, came forward and got the help that she needed from Calgary Learns and is now enrolled in a program at college which will help her find meaningful work and success. These programs are crucial to making Albertans' lives better.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

British Columbia Provincial Election

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, in just a few minutes from now the NDP in British Columbia and the Green Party are set to announce that they are about to cut a deal to form government. It's clear that this will not be good for the interests of Alberta. Both parties said that they oppose Kinder Morgan. Both oppose LNG exports. To the Premier: what is your government going to do to ensure that your friends out west don't hurt Albertans here at home?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, we extend our congratulations to all three parties on their electoral success in the last election. We are proud to work with whoever is in the Premier's office and their cabinet. But do you know who we're going to be working for? We're going to be working for Albertans. We've done that every day. That's why we brought in a leadership plan that got us two pipeline approvals. We've been continuing to speak with the federal government and with others, and those pipelines: we're committed to seeing them forward. That's why we got intervenor status, because we are standing up for Alberta jobs and Alberta pipelines.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that we just heard the Alberta NDP has sought intervenor status and so has the British Columbia NDP and Green Party, my question to the Deputy Premier is: where exactly are her oil sands advisors going to come down in the courtroom, with Albertans or with the British Columbia NDP?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, I am proud of our energy industry. Our government on this side of the House was proud when Kinder Morgan stood up on Friday, with not a peep from the other side of the House, when they made their final investment decision. That's \$7 billion of new investment that's going to move our energy industry forward. Instead of getting out their

pompoms and cheerleading for Alberta's demise, stand up for this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. We're standing up for Albertans right here, right now because the British Columbia NDP and British Columbia Greens are anti-oil and antipipeline approval, and the folks on that side of the House have all been there at one point in time. My question to the Deputy Premier is: what exactly is she going to do to ensure that Alberta interests are heard while her friends and colleagues are working every day against Alberta?

2:40

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so proud to have a government and a Premier that has been respectful and has engaged in real, meaningful action, and as a result we got two federal approvals. That's significant. The proof is in the pipelines. We're going to keep moving forward, standing up for Alberta jobs, Alberta pipelines, and making sure we get the very best opportunities for not just Alberta's economy but Canada's economy to succeed. This can be done while protecting the environment, and we've proven just that.

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

Child and Youth Advocate Death Review

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Advocate plays a vitally important role in our province because he's the voice for children who either cannot speak or whose voices are not heard. Last week the advocate released a report on Levi, whose voice was muted at best, ignored at worst. In response to the advocate's report the minister says that her government, quote, accepts these important recommendations, unquote. Minister: what is the exact procedure in your office when the Child and Youth Advocate releases a report?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to say that it is absolutely heartbreaking that Levi did not get the support that he needed, and our thoughts continue to be with his family and with his community. Again, these recommendations are important and need to be acted on closely. Certainly, my staff within Children's Services will work closely with the Child and Youth Advocate to talk about what the best way is to move forward to implement those recommendations. It is completely unacceptable what happened to Levi, and that should never happen again. We're committed to moving forward and making the system better for the vulnerable children in this province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in his report on Levi's lonely suicide, which was the end result of lifelong neglect, the advocate recommends that the department pay serious attention to a child's needs and given that these recommendations have been made numerous times and this government has had two years and two ministers to address them, Minister: what have you done, personally, since becoming a minister to ensure that the system never again loses track of neglected children like Levi or Serenity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of the record that this government has in advocating for vulnerable children in this province before we became government and, certainly, as government. We've invested in the child intervention system. We've invested in families in the province with the Alberta child benefit. We have moved forward with the most open review of the child intervention system with the ministerial panel to talk about moving forward. We moved from recommendations on the child death review, just a month ago received, to introducing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gill: Given that the advocate is critical of a system that pays more heed to the needs and the wants of parents than that of children and given that the United Nations convention on the rights of the child states that every child has the right to participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their opinion seriously considered and given that this convention should inform every decision made by every staff member, minister: since your business plan makes no mention of this powerful international convention, does this mean it is of no consequence to your ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, the best interests of the vulnerable youth and children in this province are the primary focus of this ministry. It is very clear that when it comes to Levi, the ministry did not do everything possible to support that young man. Again, that is completely unacceptable. When a young person asks for help, as Levi did, we must do whatever we can to support them. Yes, we will work with the Child and Youth Advocate to make sure that the vulnerable youth and children of this province have the voice that they have deserved for so long in a system that was neglected for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, we will proceed with Members' Statements in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Tourism Week

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the start of Tourism Week in Canada, and we couldn't be more proud of our dynamic and resilient tourism industry. That's because Alberta's reputation as a world-class tourist destination continues to grow. Publications like *National Geographic*, *Lonely Planet*, the *New York Times*, *TripAdvisor*, and many more have put Alberta on the top of their list of best places to visit in 2017.

And why not? Because whether it's digging for dinosaurs in the Canadian badlands or canoeing in paradise in our provincial parks, going ice fishing with bannock in the bag, following the northern lights like a few nights ago in Elk Island, driving the scenic highways in the breathtaking Rockies, attending the Stampede in Calgary, walking through our mixed-woods forests, gazing at the wind farms of Pincher Creek, or exploring the centuries-old heritage of indigenous peoples right here in Alberta, our province has it all, Mr. Speaker. Some of my personal favourites include the pysanka in Vegreville, the perogy in Glendon, and, of course, our *Star Trek* landing pad in Vulcan along with their themed hotel and museum.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the fact that the government of Alberta is investing in indigenous tourism and providing the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada with a \$100,000 grant to help establish a provincial indigenous tourism organization to grow tourism-related businesses across this province. The economic impact of tourism is huge. Tourism in Alberta is an \$8 billion industry, supporting more than 19,000 businesses and 127,000 jobs. That's why growing Alberta's tourism industry is a key priority for our government. It creates jobs, it diversifies our economy, and it makes lives better for Albertans.

I encourage everyone this week to participate in Tourism Week. This week provides an opportunity for organizations, regions, cities, towns, and everyday Albertans to collaborate and to promote Alberta as a tourism destination for the world and as a fantastic place to live. Mr. Speaker, when tourism works, we all work.

Dave Kirschner

Fort McMurray Continuing Care Facility

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Dave Kirschner was a tireless advocate for my community, and he dedicated his life to making Fort McMurray a better place. In 1978 he moved to Fort McMurray with his loving wife, Iris, to start a trucking company. They made Fort McMurray home and started a family. They helped found the food bank in Fort McMurray as well as our first homeless shelter. Throughout the years Dave devoted so much of his time, talent, and treasure to charitable organizations throughout our community. He even served a term on council.

He spent years advocating for a continuing care facility in town, many years before it was even known that he himself would need this. Sadly, when Dave was diagnosed in 2011 with multiple systems atrophy, a rare neurological disorder, they had to leave their home, their family, and their friends in Fort McMurray in order to get the care that Dave needed. The Kirschners were keen to return to Fort McMurray upon the completion of the continuing care facility.

Arguments have been made that Fort McMurray doesn't need a facility as seniors don't want to retire in Fort McMurray; however, this is not the case. They don't stay because there is no place for them, from the indigenous community that have lived here for generations to those that followed their children, that live and work in Fort McMurray, to be closer to their grandkids or those that simply call Fort McMurray home. Willow Square, our continuing care facility, still has not been built. In fact, there aren't even shovels in the ground, and this is despite countless announcements by almost as many governments and Premiers. This lack of a continuing care facility hurts our community and forces many to leave town to get the care they need.

Sadly, Dave passed away yesterday before getting a chance to see Willow Square completed, as is, sadly, the case for far too many of our seniors. Rest in peace, Dave, and God bless.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table three petitions, all with the appropriate number of copies, sponsored by some of my constituents in Edmonton-Decore. The first petition urges the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation to amend the Labour Relations Code to prohibit the practice" of what's known in some industries as "double-breasting."

The second petition that I would also like to table is sponsored again by some of my constituents. This petition urges the government of Alberta to

- (1) construct a memorial on public land adjacent to Highway 63 near Fort McMurray to honour the skilled trade workers who have been injured or killed ... on oil sands projects and to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the production of the first barrel of oil from Alberta's oil sands on September 30, 2017; and
- (2) introduce legislation to recognize May 1st in Alberta as an annual statutory holiday known as "International Workers' Day".

Third, a petition to urge the government of Alberta to

- (1) repeal sections 34(1)(e) and 38(2) of the Labour Relations Code, to remove the prohibition on certifying a trade union as a bargaining agent when engaged in certain types of picketing;
- (2) end the practice of grouping trade unions by repealing section 172 of the Labour Relations Code, and making any necessary consequential amendments to the legislation; and
- (3) repeal amendments to the Labour Relations Code contained in the Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2008.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. One is the legal definition of a junk bond. The other one is the definition of a junk bond.

The next one, which I shared with the Finance minister today, is Standard & Poor's Ratings Services Guide to Credit Rating Essentials: What Are Credit Ratings and How Do They Work?

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a report from the Fraser Forum entitled Alberta Leads the Country in Spending Growth.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 206

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, good afternoon. It is my absolute pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 206.

This bill amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to change the restriction on advertising for prospective adoptive parents here in Alberta. Up until now in Alberta parents hoping to adopt a child have not been able to advertise a profile online. In Ontario, Yukon, and British Columbia prospective adoptive parents create profiles for expectant parents to look at.

We know that how we communicate has changed, dramatically actually. Most people are now more comfortable learning, researching, and interacting online, and because of this, both adoption agencies and government provide in-depth information about the adoption process on websites. Many agencies provide text lines so

that expectant parents can reach out to them by text as well as by phone or e-mail.

It's really important that it's as easy and as accessible as possible for people who need the support and information to be able to access it. Hopefully, they're able to use whatever means necessary, that they're most comfortable with, so that when considering adoption, it can be a process that – right now I think for anybody who's been through this process, it's an extremely stressful and overwhelming time, so if there's some way that we can help to reduce some of that stress and have the ability to bring families together. We know that it would be easier also for the expecting parents to look at profiles online and do this at their own pace and participate even more so in the process.

Many of those who work to make adoptions possible have said that the restrictions need to change. There is even concern that birth parents, expectant moms, and parents in Alberta are finding parents from other provinces because prospective parents in Alberta just simply are not able to post their profiles online and connect with them as easily. For example, the website Canada Adopts, which posts the profiles of parents, has been in operation since 2001. I really hope that Alberta families can soon be eligible to use that service.

There is also an inconsistency that needs to be corrected. For a long time now – and I found this very interesting – it's been possible for Alberta children who are waiting for adoption to be profiled online. You may have seen certain things like *Wednesday's Child* on the website or on TV, but adoptive parents have not been able to post their profiles. This is part of the law in Alberta that doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense, and I believe that that needs to change.

This bill, if passed, doesn't allow prospective parents to post a profile without some guidelines. Obviously, we need to make sure that we're protecting these precious children and make sure that all of the necessary guidelines are there to make sure we protect all of the families and children that are involved, especially the expectant families. But it's important to make sure that prospective parents have the ability and are able to take the required steps by the province to be eligible for adoption and that they have worked with the adoption agencies before they publicly share their profile.

I would especially like to thank the NDP MLA for Calgary-East for introducing the private member's motion addressing the issue of prospective adoptive families being able to post information online. Thank you so much for doing that. Advocates for open adoptions have been saying this for some time in Alberta, and the government needs to update this little-known publication ban.

They say that it's putting local adoptive parents at a disadvantage when it comes to matching new babies with parents. Under the current legislation, Mr. Speaker, Alberta couples are not allowed to create public profiles of themselves on websites such as canadaadopts.com. This site helps match prospective adopters with birth parents and expectant moms and families from across the country. Many, many families are extremely frustrated. They're stressed and trying desperately to complete their families, and they've waited for many years to do this. To bring these families together, expecting moms and families looking to place these precious babies for adoption deserve to have access to a system that helps them advocate on behalf of their unborn child and helps to reduce the stigma around adoption.

There are so many reasons why expecting moms and parents may create an adoption plan, and it's imperative that we look at making the system as fluid and as open as possible. These expecting moms are heroes to many families who are looking to adopt, and this gives the expecting moms a chance to take a look as well. Being able to look at the profiles really, really engages them in being part of the

process. We want to give everyone who is part of this process acknowledgement and to acknowledge the struggles and the sacrifice it takes to entrust a child with new parents. I can't even imagine all that I've been able to experience from my perspective of seeing friends and family that I just adore who have gone through this process and have been able to complete their families through adoption. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's just a miracle when you see these families come together.

This is really about embracing the future and providing different options, offering chances to adopting parents. This legislation will bring us one step closer to the goal of an expecting mom finding a forever home for her baby. The decision to adopt, the decision to place a child up for adoption is a journey that is emotional, and it tests a family to its very core. Many families looking to adopt have gone through many, many unsuccessful cycles of fertility, drugs, testing, and years and years of waiting. This process to adopt is stressful, and the process takes a long time. We need to open the doors so that these families can begin their lives together, and this legislation certainly helps that.

It's time to bring this legislation into the 21st century and allow parents to advertise their profiles online. This is about providing all the information to prospective expecting moms and to the adoptive families. This normalizes the process and, again, removes stigmas and is a beautiful option for an expecting family willing to consider putting their child up for adoption. This lack of access is heart-breaking for so many families who are looking to adopt and for those expecting families looking to place their child into the system for adoption. Expecting parents are giving the greatest, most precious gift possible to these waiting families. Adoption is an expression of complete love on both sides.

3:00

Bill 206 allows “the publication of an advertisement by a licensed adoption agency publicizing the profiles of prospective adoptive parents that meets the requirements prescribed in the regulations.” This bill is meant to change the act and begin the conversation with the government, with Alberta's adoption agencies, and with prospective adoptive parents so that we can develop the best possible guidelines and rules. It is time to update the law, Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta to keep up with the times, and we need to be sure, we need to be absolutely certain that we do it right. I am looking extremely forward to the debate and to the feedback from all parties and stakeholders, who I know will have an immense number of suggestions and thoughtful common sense for how to make these changes.

I ask that all members of this House support this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have risen in the House before to discuss this very important topic, to discuss issues that are addressing potential adoptive families. Adoption is really a wonderful thing, and we should be as supportive as we can of both birth families and adoptive families who choose this option here in Alberta. I would like to thank the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing forward this bill, for continuing some of the work that I started last session, and for bringing it forward in bill form. I appreciate that this is an issue that I think we agree on. We share a common interest in modernizing a regulation that's out of date, and through doing this we can help to give a little bit more hope to families who are looking to adopt here in Alberta.

I do have some questions surrounding this bill, and I think the member explained it a little bit more to me in the course of her

speech, about looking to flesh this out, perhaps, a little bit more in the regulations and talking to adoption agencies. As it reads right now, to me, anyway, it says that it would allow “the publication of an advertisement by a licensed adoption agency publicizing the profiles of prospective adoptive parents that meets the requirements prescribed in the regulations.”

My question, I suppose, is: does this mean that the only people who can publish a profile are private adoption agencies? If so, would they be using a website such as Canada Adopts? Most of the folks who came to me who had concerns were upset about not being able to publish a profile on Canada Adopts. These were people who were often registered with, you know, the government of Alberta who were looking to adopt potential children out of care in Alberta. They were people who had looked at private agencies and had found them to be very expensive. They saw Canada Adopts as an option to help them be able to connect with somebody outside of using a fully private agency.

I do know it's very important that we get this right. It's very important that we protect potential adoptive children. It's very important that, you know, the regulations are in place to make sure that no one is offering money in exchange for potential adoptive children, so it is something that we have to look at very closely. Those were just some questions that I had, and potentially we will be able to look at them going forward in Committee of the Whole.

It was disappointing that, you know, when you start talking about this, you start hearing stories from parents all over the province who have had issues with this. I've heard from parents who have been actively discouraged in seeking another child for their family because they're told that they're too old – right? – or I've had parents who have been actively discouraged because agencies thought that they didn't have a high enough income to support an adoptive child, and that can be just really crushing to families who are really looking to open their hearts and open their homes to love another child. So looking at those issues, what can we do to work at reducing stigma, reducing discrimination based on certain factors for people who could really provide wonderful, loving homes for children in Alberta?

I do just want to take this opportunity to speak a little bit more about my story because I think it's really indicative of how adoption can come together and be a fantastic example of how a family can work. It occurred to me when I was speaking to my motion that I talked about myself being adopted, but I hadn't mentioned my brother at all. A typical first child, I just, you know, forgot that he existed. I think it really is an additional bit of the story that is worth telling.

My family adopted me locally, obviously, out of British Columbia through the public adoption system in British Columbia in the '80s, but my brother is an international adoption, so he's actually from Bolivia. The way that that happened was – so when I was about three years old, my family had a Rotary exchange student from Bolivia. My dad was a lawyer at the time. She had come and spent a year with us and was lovely. We're friends on Facebook now.

When she went back to Bolivia – her dad was a doctor who worked at a hospital in Bolivia. It just so happened that he was present at the delivery of a baby boy whose parents couldn't care for him and left him at the hospital. We got a call in Canada, my mom and dad did, that said: “Hey, we have a baby. Are you interested in potentially coming to get him?” You know, it was the '80s. Regulations were maybe a little lax back then, but my parents, you know, talked about it and thought about it and were, like: “Yeah, we can do this.” They flew down to Bolivia to pick up my little brother.

It did take a while, so they had to spend – and I don't remember because I was four, but it was a longish period of time. It was maybe four or five months that I was staying with my grandparents while my parents were going through the legal work and paperwork and everything that had to be done in Bolivia to bring home this baby.

Anyway, they finally did. They managed to, you know, get all the paperwork done, and they brought home this baby. I remember being very excited, and, you know, I saw my mom come through the doors at the airport in Vancouver, and I ran to greet her. They let me in behind the little partition because she had to wait because she had this baby who was from out of the country. I got my first look at him, and he was just skinny and covered in this rash. He had this really awful rash, and I was, like, “Uh, Mom, can we, like, send him back?” and she was, like: “No, we can't. We have to keep him.”

That was my little brother, Pete. Over the course of growing up together we were siblings like any other siblings are, but we look quite different. I could easily pass. If my family had only ever adopted me, we could have easily passed as any other regular family. In fact, quite often when I was a child and we were in grocery stores, people would go, “Oh, you look so much like your mom,” and I, being a child, would go, “No, I don't; I'm adopted,” because my parents did a really excellent job of making me feel special and letting me know that being adopted was a result of being loved so much by so many people. I was proud and happy to tell people that.

My brother, on the other hand – growing up, we would play with each other, and it really opened my eyes to the challenges of adoption because he did look different from us. Unfortunately, there was a lot of racism in my small town growing up. I remember just playing in the school yard with him and having boys pick on him and say, like, “You don't look like us; where are you from?” and having to stand up for him and being, like, “That's my brother. You leave him alone. He's from Bolivia,” and just having to deal with bullies.

He once, while he was in school, had a teacher straight up tell him that he was lying when he said that he was from Bolivia. He was, like, “I'm from Bolivia; I'm adopted,” and a teacher told him “No, you're not,” – right? – because he looks a lot like many of the First Nations people who live in my town. They thought that he was making up a story. There are issues of racism and feeling different when you do go through international adoptions. That's always something that's important to consider when that's something the families are looking at.

The other things were just the challenges like: he didn't get a Canadian passport until he was six years old, I think. It took six years to get him his Canadian passport, and when that happened, my grandparents took us all on a trip to Disneyland because he could finally leave the country. It was wonderful for all of us that we got to celebrate my brother finally fully being Canadian, but that was another challenge that existed with adoption as well.

3:10

The third thing is that it's expensive. Adoption can be very expensive. It can be very taxing on a family's finances. When my parents went through this in the '80s, it was during, you know, the early 1980s, which was when interest rates were skyrocketing. There were a bunch of compounding factors, but shortly after we adopted my brother, we lost our house, and we had to move in with my grandparents.

There were a lot of things happening at the time, but, you know, we've come through it. We are absolutely a family like any other family, and it's really opened my eyes at the same time to experiences of what it's like to be different. I thought it was a story that was worth telling. Adoptive families really can face so many

challenges, so really whatever we can do in this House through legislation to make that process easier for people, to give them a little bit more hope, if it is just a simple change, something like allowing the posting of a profile, that's something that can give families a little bit of extra hope, a little bit of extra encouragement, and they can see the stories of other families who've had success. I know right now a lot of people tell me: I like to go on Canada Adopts and look at the profiles, but I also don't like to look at the profiles because it's something that I am not able to do as a prospective adoptive parent here in Alberta.

You know, I think I've mentioned that there are some questions that I have, and we have to be very careful moving forward in terms of making sure that everyone is safe and that we're not unduly publishing any information anyone wouldn't want published, but I look forward to more discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you would allow me. The challenges in this House are many, but a sincere privilege it is to hear the stories that each of you tell. We can learn so much more from each other when we listen to the stories.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this to the House. You know, this bill amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, and it's going to change some of the restrictions on advertising for prospective and adoptive parents.

I don't think that there are too many people in this House that would disagree that whatever we can do in our society to create strong families and strong communities, we should take those steps. Indeed, the future of Alberta and of our society, I believe, is integrally connected to strong families and to strong communities, and I believe that this Bill 206 will help us do that.

You know, the adoption system, I think we all would agree, needs to adapt and to change in order to meet the challenges of our modern society. Obviously, the current advertising legislation is well over 30 years old, and it's out of sync with the modern technologies. I only have to think back to when I was starting my teaching career and to the Gestetner machine that was there and how we used to stand there and crank that Gestetner to try to get – yeah. I'm that old. I am that old. If we were trying to run our school system on that same kind of technology today, people would give their heads a shake and wonder why we were still trapped in that era, in that time. I think that it's about time that we had the opportunity to take a look at the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and to update it, especially on an issue that's as important as adoption, to make the system of adoption more responsive to the modern needs of, I think, all of the parties that are involved here, whether it's the kids or whether it's the families that are looking to adopt, so I would speak in favour wholeheartedly of this bill.

You know, I don't think that it takes any of us very long to reflect on the people that are in our lives that are important to see that adoption intersects all of our lives at some point in time. As I was growing up, my Uncle Dale and Auntie Sandy adopted three kids. They were just our cousins. One of them was born full-blooded Hawaiian. Two were First Nations. It never even crossed our mind; they were just family. Didn't matter that they were adopted. Didn't matter how they came into the family. They were just family. Perhaps my best friend – I had the pleasure of introducing him to the House here one day: adopted, he and his sister. Three families in our church that I can think of off the top of my head have children

that they've brought into their lives. I can't think of a single instance where this has been negative, where adoption has been nothing but a positive for not only the children involved but for the parents that were involved, and anything that we can do that would allow children to be placed into loving families is something that we should pursue. So I speak in favour. I believe that this is truly a good thing that we can do in this Legislature when we support Bill 206.

I was kind of surprised when this came forward. I guess I had just always believed that parents could advertise, that they could help to increase that communication between prospective parents who are looking to give their children up for adoption and those that are choosing to find children that they can love, that we communicate in a whole wide range of ways in our society today.

I know that as a teacher I sometimes wondered what was the big deal about having a cellphone until I realized once I got one that it was the best way of opening up communication with my kids. They could listen to announcements and ignore announcements forever, but when I texted them, they had to answer, it seems. It was almost physically impossible for them not to answer that text. My kids, when I started off as a teacher, going to the library and getting out, yes, something called an encyclopedia or having to go through the card catalogue and trying to research: how limited they were to the resources that they had in that square room we call the library. Today our children in our schools literally have the world at their fingertips, and I wonder why we can't have that as a part of the adoption process.

You know, most people are comfortable today learning and researching and interacting online, and I believe that it's time in the 21st century that we have that possibility for people that are looking to increase their understanding and in-depth knowledge and pursue the process of adoption. I believe it's important for expectant parents to be able to reach out, for parents that are looking for how to get involved in that adoption process to be able to use all of the means of communication that we have available to us today, whatever that method may be. For expectant parents to be able to look at profiles online, to be able to do it at their own pace, to be able to consider, to think, perhaps to pray as they move forward in that whole process is a very important thing.

The goal here is to make sure that the families that have pursued adoption all are in favour and feel comfortable and agree and will pursue and be able to put the love that they need to into these children. Birth parents in Alberta need to be able to find the people and the families that they feel comfortable with, that they know will provide the firm foundation, the love, the guidance that these children will need. I believe that Bill 206 will help to do that.

3:20

I'd never heard of Canada Adopts before I started looking at this bill. So I went on it, and I started to look and to read through some of the profiles. I don't think that it takes a person very long to see how valuable that exercise could be. The profiles of these prospective families are varied, but in all of them, in every single one that I read through – and I must have read through dozens of them – I think that it would help a parent feel more comfortable with the decisions that they were making. At the end of the day, this is about the children. Potential parents looking to invest their lives in raising one or more children through adoption need to be able to have that infrastructure that allows them to communicate. I don't know if there could be anything more important than allowing prospective parents to be able to connect and begin to process their feelings and their emotions so that they can find that perfect adoption, that perfect family.

You know, children who are waiting to be adopted sometimes will have their own profiles placed on . . . [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I didn't know there was anyone else in the House old enough to remember a Gestetner. I remember because it was at the time that the pen replaced the quill. That's why it sticks in my mind.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I want to thank the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this forward and also members from all sides of the House for their thoughtful comments and questions today. I think this bill is one of those things that probably will bring us together, unlike a lot of other things in this House. I think this is important because when someone is considering adoption or when someone is making a decision on whether they can keep a child that's on the way, in my view in all cases it's a very emotional, a very tough time and a time when people are under a great deal of stress.

The ability for those people to express their desire to adopt or their need to give up a child or their need to express that they are considering giving up a child for adoption: all of those situations really require the birth parents or the adoptive parents to have more information, to have communication, to know that they're not alone, to know other people have gone through this before, and to know that other people will go through this again. Limitations on advertising amount to a limitation on communication, communication which can not only help people to find a child to adopt but birth parents to find a couple to look after their child. Also, it's the lack of ability to maybe understand some of the feelings that they may have, some of the stresses, some of the societal pressures that they may feel and to be able to find other people in the same circumstance, to be able to talk to them, to be able to express how important it is to be either a receiving or a giving partner in the adoption process. I can only imagine how helpful that could be.

Obviously, one of the most wonderful expressions of love is when a couple can have a child, and I'm sure one of the most stressful, troubling, and worrying situations occurs when a couple wants to have a child and they cannot. Of course, there are many, many avenues previous to adoption that can be explored: in vitro fertilization, different medical procedures, different tests, and one thing and another. But the fact is that when a couple comes to the place in their life where they realize that adoption is perhaps the only path left to them for them to be parents, I cannot imagine just how lonely that could be if they can't actually talk about it with people that have the experience, and I can't imagine how wonderful it would be for people that want to adopt to be able to talk to other parents that have adopted, to be in touch with other parents that are in the same situation as them, and even to talk to potential birth parents that are trying to make a very difficult decision.

So I'm in support of this. I'm grateful that this is forward. It's one of these things that as society evolves some of these things can't be done – well, I guess they can all be done sooner, but if it should have been done sooner, like all things that should have been done sooner, the second-best day is today. On that basis I'm happy to express my support for Bill 206. I'm grateful for the commentary, again, from all sides of the House, and I look forward to the remaining part of the debate, and I look forward to voting in favour of Bill 206.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adoption often starts with the pain of infertility, and the pain of infertility is terrible. People marry and, as the Member for Calgary-Hays just mentioned, the most wonderful thing about getting married is having a child. Even though marriage has really changed over many years and birthing a child may look different for different couples, the pain of infertility is terrible. Month after month you think that this time, this month, you may be pregnant, and you are not pregnant. I think we have to remember that it's a very emotional, just a terrible time for couples when they are trying to have children.

It's also painful for birth parents, for the mother, the decisions that they consider through the months of pregnancy, after the birth of the child. I've worked with single mothers, and I admire their ability to always think of their child first. I want to acknowledge, as we're talking about this bill, the pain of both infertile couples, as my husband and I went through, and the pain of birth mothers and birth fathers as they seek to make the best decision for the child.

I also want to talk about the language of adoption. I never thought that the birth mothers of my children gave up something. They actually gave something to their child, and when I talk to my children about their adoption story, I always talk about their birth parents as people who knew that they wanted to give the child an opportunity. I would like to encourage us in the House to really think carefully about the language that we use when talking about adoption. On this matter I personally get so angry every year at Christmas when we talk about adopting a family at Christmastime, because for my children, for our families, and for many, many families adoption is a permanent, committed relationship with a child. It is not a one-time thing that one does at Christmastime, so I would like to encourage all of us to carefully think about how we use the word "adoption" and how we refer to children whose parents lovingly gave them an opportunity for life.

I think we also have to be reminded that adoption is increasingly open, with birth parents involved, so the birth parents may stay in the life of their children and depending on the arrangements may actually be part of the extended family. I know many families who have chosen this, and it's been wonderful to see. Unfortunately, it is not the opportunity for my children as we cannot find their birth parents.

3:30

What happens to a family when, after many months or very often many years of trying to have a child, they find out that they are infertile and cannot conceive naturally? Very often the first step is medical procedures. These medical procedures, as many of us know, can be very costly, very invasive, and the pain continues month after month because the procedures haven't worked for you.

In the case of myself and my husband, we decided not to go through the medical procedures for a number of reasons. Part of the reason was that I had worked overseas for many, many years, and I realized that in some countries some people did not have access to basic health care. We decided not to burden our health care system and not to spend a lot of money on medical procedures.

The other thing that happens when you're considering adoption is the reality – and I think this is one of the issues that we should really be straight up about in the House as we're talking about this bill – that there are very few babies available. We have done a wonderful job in Canada in terms of accepting the fact that babies are born to single mothers, to couples, be it same-sex couples, that having a child, in whatever way you have a child, is acceptable. We provide amazing support in our communities for these moms who raise their children even if they don't have the support of their

partner. I think we need to acknowledge this. I wanted to thank the government of Alberta for the work that it's doing in ensuring that children are provided with a safe environment to grow and for empowering mothers who give birth to have those supports.

I think that's part of the challenge around the adoption story when parents consider adoption after they've gone through the pain of infertility, that we all want to have a baby in our hands. We all want to have a baby because this is something that we are kind of raised with, that having a child is having a baby. Parents want to have a baby, but there aren't that many babies available.

In my own life, through the adoption and fertility journey that we took on, we became convinced that our adoption story should really be of adopting children where adoption was the only option. We also felt that children were not a commodity. One of the issues that I have with the bill a little bit is that by parents advertising, mostly linked to a private agency, it really seems like what we're talking about is a market-driven approach to finding the right family for a child, and I just have some concern around that.

In our own story we went through the government, then we went through a private agency, and then we were actually even approached by a lawyer on behalf of a birth mother. You know how it is. When you start telling people that you're considering adoption, people approach you. But because we had decided to move overseas and I was going to work overseas, we decided that what we would do was that we would adopt through the Thai government because we were living there. Even though we were offered babies by a local hospital as we lived in a small rural town – people said, “Oh, these foreigners are going to be adopting through the government, but maybe they might like to have a baby” – we always said, “No, we don't want a baby because we know there are children in Thailand that are in an orphanage and whose families have decided that they cannot take care of the child, and we will be going through the government.”

We adopted two boys. They were about two years of age. In Thailand, before a child is adopted, the government wants to make sure that the birth parents cannot take care of the child and are not looking for the child again. We really, really appreciated it. We let the government choose our boys. It was kind of really interesting because they told us that they chose boys that looked like us. Well, of course, my boys don't look like me. But, you know, from the first time that I saw my first son, Sam – he was just about two years of age – it was love at first sight. I can still remember that time. Our second son, Isaac, was about 18 months when we got to take him home. It's a wonderful story.

I feel that I have to tell you a story about each of my boys because I want to emphasize that it doesn't really matter at what age you have a child, that it doesn't really matter if they look like you or not. Adoption is not about all that stuff. Adoption is really about a permanent relationship between a child and parents who are going to take care of them, and in some cases it might involve their birth parents.

A few weeks ago we were in the market for buying a car. My son loves cars. He's very good; he actually works in the business. So we took him car shopping with us, and we told the car salesman that he was my boy, that he was our son, right? Of course, you can well imagine that the car salesperson did not believe that he was our boy. He thought that we had hired someone to help us buy a car. It strikes me all the time because I keep forgetting that my boys are adopted.

Then I want to tell a story about Isaac. Isaac was teaching in Egypt. This son, Isaac, is a fantastic teacher. He spent two years teaching in Egypt and is just finishing three years teaching in China. Actually, Isaac looks very much Chinese because his birth father was Chinese, and his birth mother was Thai.

So we were in Egypt. We had just arrived in Egypt, and we went to see Isaac in his school. He was teaching in an international school...

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm very disappointed that we aren't able to hear the last part of that story, but I hope that maybe it might happen in the future.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. We're here today to update this legislation.

Shortly after I was elected, I was invited to attend a meeting in Okotoks, with my hon. colleague from that area, to meet with a couple who were advocating at that time to have these adoption rules updated in the legislation. They had adopted one child, and they were looking to adopt another. They were frustrated, and they wanted to help other couples who were going through the adoption process, to help make it easier for them. They also shared a really unique view of birth moms, and this was in an effort to reduce any barriers that a birth mom might face when choosing adoption.

When families like this family that I met with are sitting and waiting on an adoption list, there's not much they can do. They came with this beautiful book. It was their family book. It had pictures of the child that they had adopted previously and the wonderful things that they did together as a family. It was a family book, just like any of us here would have of our families. It was wonderful, and they were able to share it. It catered towards a potential adoptive family, but the only way that they could get this book into a birth mother's hands was if that mother contacted the adoption agency and went through that process and was able to find families that way.

Nowadays everybody just goes on the Internet for everything. Certainly, I think that for anybody looking to adopt, this might help them to make a choice by finding a family online and saying: hey, look, I choose adoption. I mean, it's because I have been inspired by the families looking to adopt children online. That family really, really touched me that day, and I'm glad to see that we're here today talking about the very thing that they were advocating for. That's really special, I think, for any of us in this role as an MLA, to be able to make a difference in someone's life because they've been advocating for it.

3:40

I personally don't have a lot of instances where I've been touched by adoption or in that realm of life, and it's not a hot-button issue in the constituency of Airdrie, but I can guarantee you there are families that are impacted by this, and I'd certainly support this amendment to the act.

I'm very grateful to hear the stories here today in this Legislature. I agree with you, Mr. Speaker. It's quite a good day to be on House duty, a Monday afternoon for private members' business, because of some of the great things that we're able to do here in this Legislature.

I'm really excited to be able to support this bill in updating this act and also in taking that further step, along with the MLA for Calgary-East, on the motion that we debated here not too long ago. I'm in support of that, absolutely.

Just one more thing I wanted to mention before I do sit down. I think it's commendable at this time to recognize birth mothers and the choice that they are faced with in being able to give to another family. I agree that it's not something that someone always gives up. In some cases I think it is, absolutely, but I think that when

you're able to give, especially something so precious as a child to another family, we should do whatever we can to be able to support those people in those roles. These are all emotional times for everyone, with a range of emotions that, you know, we see from birth mom to new mom. It's a wonderful, beautiful, special time.

I know my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has two children that he's been through the adoption process with, and it's just been such a special time for him and his family to be able to bring those children into his home and welcome them as his own. You know, we see them all the time in this Legislature. They're going to be very well-adapted children to the political world thanks to their upbringing. I mean, they're just wonderful, happy, beautiful children that belong so much in my hon. colleague's family. We're so touched that we as his colleagues in the office get to see this family operate just as any other family. They've been given the gift of children, and that's exactly where they're supposed to be.

There are children who have yet to be born that this legislation would affect, but there are also, you know, children in care that may also find forever homes because of the updating of this legislation. I think that's the goal here, to find children forever homes, where mom and dad are forever, just like for any of us.

I'm so honoured to be able to speak to this amendment to the legislation and to vote in favour of it, and I support all of my hon. colleagues in this House to do the same.

That is all I have to say, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you can just give me a moment here.

As other MLAs have said in this discussion, I really want to express my appreciation to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this forward. I also want to commend my colleague from Calgary-East for leading the way in discussing this in the last session. I also want to express my appreciation, as the Speaker has, for the profound effect of these speeches on me.

It isn't only that I've learned a lot about a very important subject, but it's also shown a humanity in this place that we don't often get to see, unfortunately. I mean, like, bills have been brought forward before, many of them as private members' bills, but when good ideas come forward like the daylight saving time legislation or the disability advocate legislation or the cyberbullying act – these are all good ideas – we can work together on these and really improve the lives of Albertans.

I don't have a lot of personal experience with adoption – I feel in some ways very fortunate about that – but I do have constituents that have brought to me this very issue, and it's been one that I have sort of struggled with in terms of responding to my constituents because it doesn't really make sense to me that a prospective parent couple couldn't let it be known that they are available.

Along with that, though, I would also mention that I really hope that this sort of legislation can be expanded to the prospective adoptee, the *Wednesday's Child*, the single mother, the woman who's single and perhaps still in high school or in university that wants to be able to ensure an appropriate placement for her offspring. There's a lot in terms of this advertising that we still need to work on.

I did make inquiries with the ministry of child and social services. Is it children? It's CSS – right? – or CCS? Anyways, you know, the Minister of Children's Services did respond to me and actually commended me on my advocacy for adoptive families and expectant parents in Alberta and agreed with me that there should be more options available for families and parents participating in the adoption process.

Each province and territory in Canada has its own legislation regarding adoption advertising and disclosure of personal information. British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon are the only jurisdictions that allow the posting of adoptive family profiles online, and there are families in those jurisdictions that do use that facility. There will be an opportunity to consider the publication of information related to the adoption of a child, including the posting of prospective parents' profiles online, when Alberta's Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the legislation governing adoption in this province, is reviewed. The ministry does plan on having a fulsome review of this. I'm going to be encouraging my constituents to participate in that review so that Alberta's laws can be brought up to at least a similar level as in those four other provinces.

You know, our government and, I'm sure, the opposition do share a deep concern for this issue, and we're always looking for ways to improve core supports and programs for all sorts of social activities, including adoption. I think that this is one of the main points that I want to get across today, that while this is a significant issue for Albertans who are infertile or who want to go through the adoption process, there is a whole panoply of other, related issues that we need to consider. This government is committed to providing a loving, nurturing home to all children who need care because every child does deserve to grow up in a healthy, loving environment that supports healthy development and prepares them for a bright future. So we need a good education system, we need a good health care system, and we need a system that protects the identity of the adoptee as well as the prospective adoption family. There are many other things that we need to work at comprehensively, and I'm hoping to discuss this more when we get into Committee of the Whole.

3:50

As a physician one of the times that I've gotten into consideration of this part of our legislation is when persons who may have been adopted actually are concerned about their genetic background. This is a significant concern for persons who might have cancer because there are identifiable genetic risk factors for particular kinds of cancers. I think the one that my colleagues might be most aware of is a genetic condition called BRCA 1 and 2. This is a very important contributor to the genetic cause of breast cancer as well as other cancers such as ovarian cancer and even gastrointestinal cancer. Similarly, prostate cancer patients often are concerned that they may have inherited a predisposition to this condition.

The current situation in Alberta in particular but in Canada in general and, I think, even in the United States is that it's often very difficult for the adoption records to be accessed in a credible way that allows persons to get that information. Now, this does have a double edge to the sword in that that same information can be misused by insurance companies, for instance, if it's found out, so we have to have protections in place. But this idea of being able to have a registry where information about the families can be accessed under the appropriate safeguards, I think, is a really important adjunct to what's being talked about in this bill.

You know, some of the other provinces in this country have legislation in this regard. My native province of Manitoba is one that has excellent legislation in this regard, and I think that if I were to make some suggestions to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, it would be to take a look at the Manitoba legislation as to how this might transpire.

You know, in the previous session we did support a motion by the Member for Calgary-East on this issue, and I think that – again, I mentioned this before – this is an issue that all of us can stand behind. The work that the Member for Calgary-East did on this was

really exemplary, and I think we should be trying to combine those two.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this bill forward. There are few acts more generous and compassionate than the adoption of a child. Adoptive parents are taking on an incredible responsibility to care for that child that would otherwise not benefit by being raised by loving parents.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I believe that given all the good that is derived from the adoption of children, we should do what we can, within reason and with the safety of the child foremost, to make that process easier. I believe that the amendment proposed in this private member's bill will make it that much easier for prospective adoptive parents to move forward in the adoption process. I hope the discussion of adoption in this House encourages more Albertans to consider adopting a child. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I will be supporting this bill, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the pleasure of speaking on Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. This is something that I actually spoke on before, not this specific bill but the motion that was brought forward by Calgary-East. At that time I had some encouraging words for the motion that the member had brought forward because, in the end, I think that we all want to see children inside happy families. A happy family unit will be better for everybody. That includes Albertans, the children.

I'd like to just say that when you look at the motion that was brought forward by the Member for Calgary-East, this is the next step. The first step is to draft a motion that says: let's make sure the government moves in a certain direction. This motion said:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review section 85(1) of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and section 25(2)(d)(iii) of adoption regulation AR 187/2004 with a view to removing the prohibition on prospective adoptive parents that currently prevents them from advertising and publishing a profile.

So we're urging the government to move this forward.

Now, this was done, I believe, in December, so we've had a little bit of time to have this moved forward by the government. Actually, if you look at it, we're near the end of the session. Usually what happens is that the government would look at this, and they move it forward. What happens is that they would come out with a government bill. Having not seen that, I have to say that the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View saw this as a good piece of legislation to bring forward. The government didn't do it; the Wildrose Party did.

I have to commend the member because she is actually moving forward legislation that is going to help people within my constituency. That is actually very important because when I had talked on that motion about this adoption being a real problem and hampered by the fact that we can't advertise – this is an actual, real-life concern for somebody within my constituency. Actually, it was my local bank manager for the commercial lending arm. It's people in everyday life that you don't realize are going through this

struggle right now. That's the thing. It's really a problem that seems to be hidden because what happens is that in order to get a child, you want to be going through the process.

I'm going to start reading, and I did read some of this into *Hansard* on December 5, 2016.

My wife and I are . . . going through the process of adopting a child in Alberta. We are working with Adoption Options and we are now on the waiting list for a child. The wait for a child is approximately 2 – 3 years and the wait is completely out of . . . control as we have to await a birth parent [or parents] to select us.

He's saying that the process right now takes two to three years to be able to move through it. You know what? That is something that could have been really moved forward, and I again have to commend my colleague because, really, what she's trying to do is to reduce this waiting time on these lists. We need to make sure that parents that are wanting to give a safe place to a child are able to get that child in a reasonable, timely manner and, again, safely.

But what happens here is that we aren't competitive here in Alberta, where there are different, competing avenues for other provinces. If we were competing at the same level as other provinces for these children, we would be sitting here going: well, how can we reduce it? But right now what it is is that we need to be addressing the fact that social media is an important part of this process whether we like it or not.

4:00

Now, to go into this:

Something that surprised my wife and I when we were going through the approval process is that we found out that waiting adoptive parents are not allowed to make it known on social media that we are looking to adopt a child nor are we allowed to announce that we are on the "approved list." This to us seemed archaic, and runs counter to other provinces/territories (namely BC, Ontario and Yukon) in Canada where these provinces/territories allow adoptive parents to make such announcements on social media. This puts potential adoptive parents in Alberta at a disadvantage to other prospective adoptive parents in other parts of the country. Often birth parents in Alberta will end up connecting with prospective adoptive parents in other provinces simply because they have online profiles.

It seems that we have an imbalance, if you will. We have different parts of the country – all reside in Canada, and if we've got parents here in Alberta wanting to raise children in Alberta, why would we not put the priority on those children to stay here? We need to make sure that we give every opportunity to parents that are able to do that, especially when it comes to being local.

It's clear that online profiles in this case – this letter that my constituent had sent to me is clearly laying out that we need to address this promptly. Now we are into May, and we haven't seen any legislation put forward by the government. Again, it's nice to see that our member of the Wildrose is saying that this is important. It's something that we are going to take to the next step, and we need the government to move this piece of legislation along with us because it's important. It was important because it was passed unanimously by this entire House through a government motion, so it was important to the government. It's important to us. How could this not flow through the House unanimously?

Now, I do understand that when we have pieces of legislation, we always need to be looking at how to make it better. So I encourage the government that if there are concerns when it comes to this piece of legislation, this bill, they reach out to our member here, the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, and bring those amendments forward so that we can make this the best and then fix this clear imbalance within the system. What happens here is that we are hearing that this is not a problem that has just been identified in

my local constituency. So what we've got here is that we've had adoptive parents reaching out to a lot of our constituency offices saying that this needs to be fixed.

I believe that when it came to this government motion, we moved the motion. Then the next step would have been a government act coming forward. I would love to hear, when it comes to Committee of the Whole, where the government was in the process of moving this forward because of their own motion and, if they are going to be moving this forward, what kind of amendments they would consider. I think this is a great piece of legislation. I think the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View has done a great job on it. But, again, it all comes down to co-ordinating and co-operating with each other to make the best legislation going forward.

Now, with Bill 202 we did that. We went out and said that distribution of nonconsensual images is something that is important to this entire House. I think we can find a middle ground on Bill 206 that says the exact same thing. We can say that we need to put children first. Let's do that as a group. I think this is something that we can actually move forward unanimously because I think every person in this House believes that children should be put first.

When looking at this, we see that we've got parents reaching out to MLAs. The next part is that we've got MLAs creating motions saying that this is important to us. The next step is to create a bill that corrects this. The last step... [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I feel compelled to speak to Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I'll start by thanking the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this important issue to the House and also my colleague from Calgary-East for her motion when she brought that forward.

When I first heard that this bill was coming forward, I had a little knot in my stomach. I am a mom. I'm a stepmom, and I am also a birth mom to my son, who I reluctantly relinquished to social services for adoption. I knew that I was not in a position to care for him in the way that I wished. A number of people who knew that I was pregnant and would be in a position where I would have to surrender my child for adoption offered to become parents. They cited that they could provide everything that my son could possibly need if they were to become parents. The decision to relinquish my son was probably the most difficult decision I made in my life, and it's certainly impacted the rest of my life ever since.

I have to respond to two comments that were made by members opposite with respect to loving families. They talked about a child being adopted so that they would have a loving family. I relinquished my son. I loved him, and I would have provided a loving family for my son had that option been available to Matthew and myself. So I was not happy with those two comments that were made.

When I found out that I was pregnant, I was in my early years at university, and I did not have support to keep my son. But I had time to think about what I wanted to do and how I would do it so that he would have the best possible home that he could have. I spoke with social services on a number of occasions. I did all the things that you have to do, all the blood work, all the physical stuff that you have to do. I signed the papers.

The social worker came to see me the day I was to leave the hospital. Now, initially when I had him, I thought: I can't even see him because I don't know if I can go through with this decision if I

see him. But after he was born, I had no choice but to see him. I held him. I changed his diapers. I counted his fingers and his toes. I checked the medical reports on him to make sure that he was all right. The day I left the hospital, I went to the nursery and looked at him for the last time. I didn't think that I'd even be able to walk out of the hospital.

The social worker came, and she said: in six months you have to sign the final paperwork. Well, I couldn't because I was in Montreal when I gave birth to him, and I was going back to Newfoundland, so I had to sign those papers then. For the next six months I don't think there was a night that I didn't go to bed and cry because I didn't want that to be finalized. I didn't know how I would be able to change it, but I begged for some option to be able to take back that final signature that I gave. Needless to say, I wasn't able to change that decision, and sometimes those decisions are the best decisions one can make.

4:10

When my son turned 18, I started to search for him because up to that point I didn't think that I had a moral or ethical right to disturb his life or to disturb the lives of the parents who chose to bring him into their family. I searched for him from the time he was 18 until he was 24, when I was able to reunite with him. I was able to meet his family. I was able to share many of the experiences that he had growing up because his family had kept an album for me, had kept report cards, had kept all kinds of things to share with me.

I know that this is a difficult decision. My son was not chattel. My son was not a commodity to barter. He was my son. He is a human being, and he's a wonderful, wonderful man. I've now had the opportunity to have a relationship with him for almost 24 years. I don't get to see him as often as I'd like, but I do get to see him, and I do get to talk to him on the phone and through e-mails.

I don't know that I'm going to be able to support this bill as it is. I think there are some things that need to be done differently. The concern, the gnaw that I have in my stomach, is that he was not a commodity. Social services found incredible parents for him, and I thank them every day that they provided him with a home that was a loving home. They didn't have any other children when they adopted him. Joan told me that they were trying for about 10 years to have a child. When they adopted Matthew, she then became pregnant, and they had three sons of their own. So he had three brothers, and he had two sisters because I had two other children.

Certainly, if I was advocating for anything, it would be for open adoptions. I'm going to have to think about this some more in terms of some kind of an amendment. But I don't know that anybody else in here was a birth mother that gave a child up for adoption, so I really felt compelled that I had to stand and tell you about my experience. Even though I have contact with Matthew, I still go to bed at night and when I say a few prayers and ask God to protect my kids, he's certainly there and I ask for protection for him, too. I ask that all of my kids have a decent life and that good things come to them. But I know that life has ups and downs, and all of my kids have had ups and downs. So whether he was with me or with his family, he had ups and downs, and I know that everybody did what they could to make life for him the best that it could be.

Even though I think that this is certainly a good issue to bring forward and to have that discussion on – and I certainly understand how many people who have not been able to have children of their own want to be able to adopt – my instincts tell me that if we're going to do anything, then maybe we need a stronger, more robust social services entity that is able to look after that.

I'm going to sit down, and I'd like everybody to think about what kind of options will make a bill like this the best bill that can go forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 206. I'd like to first begin by thanking my colleague from Lethbridge-East for her comments and all those who've spoken in the House this afternoon on this very important issue of adoption. I, too, have an adoption story to tell, which is much different than some others as each adoption story is different and each adoption story is unique. I would like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her story and her bravery in that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think it's important that the purpose in many respects – and I had the privilege and honour of working very closely with my colleague from Chestermere on this piece of legislation. This legislation was never intended to be all-encompassing. This piece of legislation was never intended to fix every challenge within the context of the adoption system or in the child and family services system. Mr. Speaker, you'll know that you've heard me say in this House on numerous occasions, even within the context of having two adopted children myself, that I wished we lived in a world where there was no need for adoption at all, where every situation was perfect. Unfortunately, we don't live in that scenario, so there is a need for this adoption story amongst many folks.

I think I'd just like to point out that in Bill 206 – I'll come back around to that – much of the purpose was to provide the opportunity to speak about this important issue and to speak about the important issue not just around advertising, which Bill 206 does, but around the very, very important issue of ensuring that we talk about adoption and some of the challenges around that and that we have the opportunity to speak about some of the stigmas that are associated with adoption, that we have the opportunity to speak and champion both birth parents and adoptive parents, that adoption is not possible without both of those folks.

Sometimes we see situations where a prospective birth parent wilfully makes that decision, and then we also see adoptions take place where those children, for whatever reason – something very traumatic has happened in their lives – have become a ward or a permanent guardianship of the government and the government is then making decisions on behalf of those children when it comes to adoption. Adoption covers such a broad, wide spectrum.

Bill 206 allowed us this afternoon and my colleague from across the way, when we had the opportunity to speak about a motion around a very similar topic, to really speak about this very, very important issue. It's not always in the House that we have the opportunity to speak about these sorts of issues, but today is one of those days. Equally as important as the piece of legislation is our opportunity to speak about the impact of adoption because adoption has such – such – an impact on the lives of everyone that's involved, whether it's the biological parents, who've made that conscious decision to put their child up for adoption, whether it's the biological mom, who has gone through a decision-making process to arrive at that case.

4:20

It's my sense that Bill 206 will actually promote more open adoptions, which is one of the challenges or concerns that we heard from our colleague from Lethbridge-East, because this reduces barriers to connecting prospective birth parents to adoptive parents. So there is a very likely opportunity that more open adoptions will take place because of it, because when the birth parent is involved in the decision-making process of the prospective adoptive parent, almost exclusively those result in open adoptions.

Now, in my situation, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of working through the department of child and family services, and our adoptions weren't open. The government, at the time of permanent guardianship, had made a decision that that would be the best case moving forward, and there is no communication between our children and their biological parents. Now, that may change at some point in time in the future, but currently it is not an option. Not exclusively but often when a child has been placed in care and subsequently a permanent guardianship order granted and then into permanent adoption, often inside the context of child and family services, those adoptions wind up remaining closed for significant periods of time and perhaps never opened. Now, that's not to say that we aren't open with our children about adoption, but it is that there's no ongoing context.

There is this wide swath of adoption stories, and each one of them is so critically important. In our case we, Mr. Speaker, as you know, had the opportunity, the fortune, the blessing to have our first child. His name is Porter. We were fortunate to have him biologically through a fairly tumultuous time of a pregnancy and wound up with just a tiny, tiny, tiny, little wee one – “No bigger than a ham sandwich, really,” we used to joke about him – a tiny shade over four pounds and six weeks early. Lots of excitement in our home, as you can imagine. Then we went on to suffer significant losses in our lives and multiple, multiple pregnancies that were not carried to term.

We had always felt like we would have a family with lots of short people in our lives and weren't always sure how that was going to happen but had always assumed that it would be a traditional way. But that didn't prove to be the case for our family, so we started to walk down this path of adoption and have known many folks who have also walked down that path. At the end of the day, we had an opportunity to bring a child into our home, and what an incredible miracle that is. In many ways adoption, just like childbirth, I think, really is a miracle because it takes so many complex factors to come together.

In this case, you know, in an open adoption situation like we're primarily speaking about today, with removing the barriers to advertising, the biological parents or birth mother will make the choice of where that child goes. But in our case it is the government that makes the best available decision, based on that child, to choose – so it's not like you have input into any of those scenarios.

But I remember so clearly the day that our social worker called. I was at my office in northeast Calgary, and the actual question that the social worker asked was: what is your definition of complex medical needs? In the situation of our second child, Paxton had some significant medical needs, so the social worker was reaching out to us . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, let me say again how unfortunate it is that we can't finish many of these stories. They are so interesting.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. An important bill to be sure, Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I appreciate all of the comments of those in the House who have had personal experience with it. While I have not had personal experience in that sense, I certainly, through my two daughters, have had two international adoptions, one from east Africa, Uganda, which I participated in very actively, and the other through my other daughter, who adopted two from Haiti: certainly, lengthy processes and challenging to deal with the other governments on these issues.

I think, like others who have spoken, that there's a tremendous need for more openness and access not only for the birth parents to

feel like they can connect with the adoptive parents but also for the adoptive parents to be able to be more public about their desire to connect with the birth parents. This bill proposes to amend the act to allow licensed adoption agencies in Alberta to publicize the profiles of prospective adoptive parents, bringing Alberta in line with B.C., Ontario, and the Yukon.

Presently Alberta couples seeking open adoptions are not allowed to create public profiles of themselves on websites such as *canadaadopts.com*. Conversely, profiles of children that are up for adoption are featured on television and Alberta human services' website, leading critics to charge that there is an inconsistency in the law. I think that's part of what this worthy bill is trying to amend. I won't take a long time to comment on it, but under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act there is an inconsistency that needs to be addressed. There's really no reason why prospective adoptive parents should not be permitted to advertise online as long as proper safeguards are in place.

In this context, I guess, my daughter has advised me – and she's head of Christian Adoption in Canada – that without going through an agency, there is a risk of misrepresentation of adoptive parents, a need to ensure that they not have access directly to the birth parents. A lot of birth parents considering putting a child up for adoption are doing their research and communications online today – and that's fine; it makes sense – but without a home visit and without proper counselling for the birth parent, it's really open to abuse. Those are the concerns, I'm sure, that we are all wanting to see addressed. There's a reason why there are so many regulations and oversights, and there's a reason why birth parents get counselling to be clear on the full implications of what they're doing, the emotional as well as the legal implications of what they're doing. It behooves us to do this carefully, to make sure that we are protecting the interests, particularly, of the child and the birth parents.

I mentioned counselling for the birth parent or parents to make sure they're clear and have some ability to go through a grieving process in a mature and responsible way, ensuring that there's no money or other incentives being exchanged for the placement of a child, ensuring that a proper home study is done so that the adoptive parents are found to be legitimate, capable, that the setting is appropriate and healthy, and that, by all means, information is shared through a reputable agency. The birth parent then can work through the agency to get the full contact information. I guess the concern is that there need to be appropriate checks and balances, and I think we'll be dealing with those perhaps and some suggested amendments, then, as we get through to other stages of the bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View as well as the Member for Calgary-East for her motion. I think that talking about adoption and ways that we can reduce barriers to both birth families and adoptive families is so important. I know that as a young mom having an unplanned pregnancy, having to consider my options was something that I dealt with, and in looking at my peer group at the time, I was surrounded by other young moms who were also facing similar circumstances.

One of my very best friends chose to place her son for adoption. Being with her – the late nights, the crying, the indecisiveness, being unsure of what was going to be the future for her son – was something that was so incredibly powerful and so emotional, to be on that side of it, to hear the birth mother's perspective. At that time

there weren't a lot of options for her as a birth mom. She didn't have a lot of access to information about who these potential other family members were going to be, who would raise her son when she wasn't able to. What she did at the time was that she explored other young moms who perhaps had placed their children in other homes and got to know their stories and talked to social services and talked to some of the adoption agencies at the time just to determine what her options were as a mom who wasn't able to raise her son at that time in her life.

In just thinking about reducing some of these barriers, allowing the birth parents to access information online would open so many more doors to give them a little bit more of a connection to what their options are when they're choosing this incredibly difficult option for their child.

As a social worker I've worked with families on both sides. I've worked with parents who were at the point where they were looking at adoption as an option as well as with young families and all different types of families about wanting to add to their family for whatever reasons, whether it was infertility or just a time in their life where they were not wanting to perhaps carry a pregnancy but wanting to add to their family, just the different available things that were open to them at the time. I think that having the ability to advertise approved adoptive families would be in the best interests of birth families and adoptive families.

I know that we've had people reach out to my office, families that are seeking adoption, grandparents whose children are looking at adoption, and they've identified some of the barriers. They talked about, you know, being on a wait-list for over a year and being told by the agency that perhaps it could be another three years before there's a potential match for their home, the incredible cost of the infertility medicine, sometimes upwards of \$20,000, in their attempts to try and have a family. I think that eliminating some of these barriers that are faced by our adoptive parents is a huge step in the right direction. I think that having Alberta come forward to this like some of our other provinces have done is an incredible first step.

Being a worker with Children's Services, knowing the importance of having the parents able to identify online as wanting to adopt a child – they need to be approved, and I think that that's such an important part of this so that it's not just anybody that can come forward and say that they're interested in adopting a child. It needs to be families that have gone through the process of vetting and making sure that their home would be appropriate and suitable for a potential child to be placed with them.

I think that this is just an incredible opportunity for Alberta, to be able to move this legislation forward. Just in hearing the stories in the House about how many people are impacted, I'm sure every one of us has had constituents reach out to us advocating for better laws in Alberta to allow those opportunities for birth families to be able to look online and for adoptive families to be able to advertise that way should they choose.

I would also like to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her incredible story and just acknowledging the strength that it takes to be able to stand up and talk about such a personal moment and to be able to advocate for this legislation to be the absolute best that it can be. Yeah, I just wanted to say that it's such an honour to be able to stand up here and advocate for something that I think is well overdue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members who would like to speak to Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017?

Seeing none, I will allow the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to close debate.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to reiterate how amazing it's been hearing some of the other stories in the House. It's incredible when you have the opportunity to speak about something like this and when you hear the contributions of people, what they've been through. You learn a little bit more about all of the people that are in this House and about the diversity of people that we have in here and how they've been impacted from all sides of this.

One of the things that inspired me at the very beginning of this was the story of my friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Many of you have probably seen his beautiful children around in this area and coming in to see their dad debate and speak and do introductions and his beautiful wife and their incredible family. Quite often when they've been up in my office, my shoes are usually distributed across the floor because they go and try on all my shoes in there. They're just a beautiful family. Seeing how this family came together and what they've been through and the struggles, on both sides, again, I can't imagine what it must be like to be in that position, where you are even considering an option of putting your child forward into adoption.

Like I said in my earlier speeches, for the families who have found that this is the way for them to complete their families, these expectant moms and families are heroes to these families who've been through cycles of fertility and have tried so many options and have looked for various ways. I mean, it's just an absolute miracle for them. Again, from the bottom of my heart, there is just nothing more miraculous than seeing a birth mom, an expectant mom, an expectant family make the decision to take this precious human being and place it into the hands of a family with complete trust, also, as the Member for Lethbridge-East said, putting your faith in a system that is going to raise your child, and then potentially even at some point in time having a relationship with that child.

There are so many things. It's extremely complex. This legislation starts off with the most simple pieces, giving these expectant families an opportunity to actually look at the families that are available. It will get rid of certain stigmas, like the Member for Calgary-East was speaking about, with regard to socioeconomic or race, religion, all of these kinds of things. When a family is able to put themselves into and be able to publicly show that they're interested in participating in an adoption, the expectant moms and families will have the opportunity to really look at that and imagine that this gift that they have will be raised in a family that they can relate to or understand.

If it is an open adoption or whatever version of adoption it is, like the member had said, there are some regulations and things that we need to look at to make sure that all pieces are protected, because the last thing we want to see happen is predators also being able to participate and get involved in this. So there are things that we need to look at very closely. I think we can do some cross-jurisdictional checks to see what's working and what's not. Also, the stakeholder outreach has to continue on. I'm not sure about the government, but I know that, for myself, we've had a ton of feedback from families.

4:40

I can say, without a shadow of a doubt, that this is definitely positive legislation, that it will lead to seeing more adoptions happen. At the end of the day, that's what we're looking for – isn't it? – to complete these families and to give options to expectant moms and families that are in situations where they are going to be part of the adoption process.

I'd also like to say that the amount of courage it takes on both sides of this is just massive, isn't it? When you hear about the situations of unplanned pregnancies – of course, when we're looking at adoption, there are all different age groups and reasons and all sorts of things that determine why an expectant family would be putting their child into adoption. I think what goes without saying – but it's worth reiterating – is the courage that it takes for a family to make the decision to adopt and, especially from the expectant family side, to go through that process, like the member was saying, to cry and just go through that over and over again.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Goehring	Pitt
Babcock	Hinkley	Renaud
Barnes	Horne	Rosendahl
Bilous	Hunter	Sabir
Carlier	Jansen	Schneider
Carson	Kazim	Schreiner
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Shepherd
Connolly	Larivee	Smith
Coolahan	Littlewood	Stier
Cooper	Luff	Strankman
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Sucha
Cyr	McKittrick	Swann
Dang	Miller	Sweet
Drever	Miranda	Turner
Feehan	Nielsen	Westhead
Fildebrandt	Payne	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Piquette	Yao
Fraser		

Totals: For – 52 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 206 read a second time]

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, seeing that we are one minute away from 5 o'clock, I'd ask for unanimous consent of the House to call it 5 o'clock and move to Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Accessibility Legislation Review Committee

507. Mr. Fraser moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation and consider potential amendments to legislation, including but not limited to the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes regulation, Alta. reg. 192/2015, with the intent to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code 2014.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to move a motion that calls for the creation of a special select committee, a

committee that will look at possible amendments to several pieces of legislation that impact accessibility to public buildings. I know that people who are in charge of updating these codes do great work, and I don't mean this motion to be a criticism to them as they do great work on a day-to-day basis. My motion is in response to Albertans that I've met in my work as an MLA who have expressed to me a desire not just to increase access to public buildings but also that they be more involved in the process.

5:00

Accessibility is an important issue for many Albertans, and we are a stronger province when we make a deliberate effort to make our public spaces more available. My hope is that by establishing this committee to examine the issue, we can solicit feedback from affected members of the province and all stakeholders. A greater understanding of what barriers are being faced with respect to accessibility will help us as legislators to ensure that future changes to building codes are done with the best possible information.

No member of this House can be an expert in every area, so we must take advantage of opportunities to further educate ourselves on important issues to our constituents. I believe that this motion and this committee will give us a chance to do that. It's my hope that this motion will receive broad support in this House and that we can move forward with examining this very important issue.

It's very difficult if we do not put ourselves in a position to try to understand somebody with a disability, perhaps a physical disability, a mental disability, how hard it is for them on a day-to-day basis to access just very simple, basic things, Mr. Speaker, but this motion also goes beyond that. Consider folks that are suffering from a broken leg or a back injury or some other form of injury, somebody who is in the early stages or late stages of multiple sclerosis. What this does is it allows this government, allows the opposition, allows the members, and allows the people that do the day-to-day work in this Legislature to show what's best about what we do. It's to create a committee to come together to talk about issues that are facing Albertans today, issues that faced Albertans yesterday, and issues that will face Albertans in the future.

Mr. Speaker, my hope is that collectively we can show Albertans that we all care about this issue and that we want to do what's right and what's in the very best interest of these folks. It is truly about making the best decisions as legislators to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. So I would urge all members to support this motion, and I look forward to listening to the feedback.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone wishing to speak to Motion 507? The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member bringing forth this private motion to address accessibility and, essentially, the rights of persons with varying abilities.

I'll begin by saying that our government is committed to working with the community and with people with varying abilities to support their safety and inclusion in whatever way possible. In addition to our work already taking place to address these problems around elevator accessibility and supports and promoting barrier-free access, it is worth mentioning that we have taken a number of steps to promote accessibility not just in terms of removing barriers to physical structures but bureaucratic or organizational as well. We have acted to repeal PDD safety standards regulations, stopped using the supports intensity scale, and have changed service dog regulations.

Albertans told us that safety is important but that the PDD safety standards regulation was not the right solution. That's why we acted

to repeal the regulation after phase 1 of the consultation last year. In June of 2016 I announced that our government stopped using the supports intensity scale and committed to using policies that are respectful in engaging the supports that people with developmental disabilities need. Finally, the service dog regulation changes will increase the capacity to train and test qualified service dogs in Alberta, maintain high training standards, align them with ADI, and ensure public safety. Increased capacity to train and test qualified service dogs supports inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities in their communities.

We do all of this because we believe that everyone deserves to live safely, with dignity and with the supports they need to reach their full potential. Our government is protecting and improving the things that matter and ensuring that Albertans with all abilities are supported to be included in their communities.

On that note, I will ask all of my colleagues to support the motion brought forward by the member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Good afternoon and thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to the hon. member's private member's motion, Motion 507, today. I think it's a very important suggestion. I will be supporting the motion, and I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to support the motion as well.

Mr. Speaker, the building code is an incredibly complex, technical, and exhaustive regulation that establishes how buildings in Alberta are to be built. During Municipal Affairs estimates this spring, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Elbow asked the minister a number of questions relating to the building code. Through answers to his questions, we learned that the building code is developed on a five-year cycle. Basically, as soon as they issue the latest version, the process of developing the next version begins.

According to what we learned in estimates, it starts with consultations at the national level first. While the consultation starts at the federal level, it ends up back at the province, and consideration is always brought back to the Safety Codes Council here in Alberta. According to the Safety Codes Council website:

Established by the Government of Alberta in 1993, the Safety Codes Council is responsible to the Minister of Municipal Affairs to administer portions of the safety system, including accrediting the municipalities, corporations, and agencies that sell permits and inspect the work carried out under these permits, certifying and training safety codes officers who do the inspections, administering the Alberta Master Electrician Program, and working with industry through our sub-councils to recommend codes and standards.

The elevating devices code regulation is another one. It covers elevating devices such as elevators, industrial lifts, dumb waiters, et cetera, and established the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, which – I am summarizing from the website – is a delegated regulatory authority that oversees the installation and ongoing safety compliance of elevating devices, amusement rides, and passenger ropeways in the province.

I think we can all agree that the Safety Codes Council, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, and the current building codes approval processes have been working pretty well for most Albertans. But that doesn't seem to be the case for every Albertan, specifically those with physical limitations. We did some research, and according to government data 15.8 per cent of the population are persons with disabilities. In 2006, when this was reported, that equalled 410,600 people in Alberta, actually. If the rate stayed the same, in 2017 that would mean that there are possibly over 650,000 people with disabilities in the province right now. Just imagine. That's a substantial figure.

Many of you may have heard the saying: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. It's an important thing to remember that concept and, in fact, something this government would be well placed to remember. However, there is also another equally important saying: if better is possible, is good just good enough? Now, the only way to really determine which of these is true is that you've got to consult and research and investigate. It's entirely possible that the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes act are perfect, but that's not necessarily the case. We don't think that really is the case. I don't think that they are perfect, but the only way to really determine that would be to bring in the experts and persons with disabilities who have a much better understanding.

I like the committee idea proposed by my hon. colleague, Mr. Speaker. I think it hits the right balance. That is why I'll be supporting this motion. Again, I encourage all members of the Assembly to do so as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

5:10

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 507. I'd like to thank the member for proposing this motion. As I've said before, I think that any time we stand up in this House and talk about issues that are related to people with disabilities, people with mobility challenges, it's a great discussion. For a very long time it hasn't been a topic always on the top of our minds or front and centre. We're starting to speak about this community more, and I'm eternally grateful for that.

Before I begin, because we're considering this motion – it's actually a very complex system, as I'm sure you know – I think it's worth while to discuss some of the existing systems for reviewing and developing building codes for accessibility. Currently our provincial code review and update system to support barrier-free access is well established and highly consulted. The Alberta code changes for accessibility in buildings are reviewed by Municipal Affairs and the Safety Codes Council. The review is undertaken by expert safety officials, construction design stakeholders, and representatives from disability and seniors' organizations among many other stakeholders.

Alberta currently has a committee to review and make recommendations on the accessibility of buildings, and it's called the Barrier Free Sub-Council of the Safety Codes Council. The Barrier Free Sub-Council is comprised of a range of stakeholders, including a ministerial representative that makes recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs on barrier-free standards. The subcouncil is also comprised of representatives, some of which are people with disabilities, municipal officials who enforce the building code, and members of industry who must comply with the code's requirements. Several disability organizations are also represented. Industry includes the rental industry, hotels, building managers, commercial construction, home builders, and architects. The council ensures that a wide range of experiences of persons with mobility and sensory disabilities are considered. Our provincial code review system is well established, and as you can imagine, there are many layers to it.

Originally, when I read the motion, I did have some concerns about, you know, maybe just the wording, and I'll explain a little bit why that is. Many of you will remember the PDD safety standards. These standards were introduced under the previous government. As I've said before in this House, they were done – they were certainly well meaning; they were not meant to harm anybody – in an effort to keep people safe, but the steps that were missed were the important consultation pieces. Because this

legislation is so complex and has so many moving pieces, what was missed is that by just including all people with disabilities or all people with mobility needs under these standards, they were inadvertently triggering some activity that was not necessarily conducive to community living.

For example, you would have maybe a person or two with a label of developmental disability; whether or not they had a mobility challenge was up in the air. These folks living in the community would be subject to these standards that would require inspections under the safety codes, under Health, and that would trigger fire inspection. What was happening is that people just trying to live in their community, live a normal life, were faced with a number of inspections, and then the resulting recommendations were very expensive. In many cases people had to leave their homes or find other places to rent with things like fire suppression, that they didn't necessarily need. You had people with developmental disabilities or mobility issues living in the community, and standards were being applied to them, standards similar to detention centres or hospitals or sort of long-term care facilities.

That being said, I know the member and I had a chance to chat earlier today. Of course, the intent of this motion is absolutely to do the best thing for Albertans and to make barrier-free access in Alberta, you know, the most important goal, and that's what I believe this motion does.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if I might, I'd like to intervene. Respectfully, I've been advised that there has been an error made between what's on the Order Paper and the signed motion. I respectfully suggest that the House consider an adjournment at this juncture.

The motion that is on the Order Paper references "urge the government," whereas the motion that was signed does not make reference to the government. Therefore, you are debating an issue which has not had the correct processes followed leading up to this. I'm advised that it would be in the best interests of the motion as well as the House that the House adjourn at this juncture. It would then, I think, come back with the necessary corrections.

I'll just read this. The motion that was signed is as follows.

Mr. Cooper: Are we talking about the amendment, not the motion?

The Speaker: I haven't accepted an amendment here yet. We're talking about the original motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation and consider potential amendments to legislation, including but not limited to the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes regulation, Alta. reg. 192/2015, with the intent to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code 2014.

The motion as presented on the Order Paper – I think you have copies of this – reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation and consider potential amendments to legislation, including but not limited to the Safety Codes Act and the elevating devices codes regulation, Alta. reg. 192/2015, with the intent to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code 2014.

The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am just curious to know – and perhaps it may not be possible – if this could be addressed through unanimous consent of the House for us to be able to continue, that we might be able to ask for a motion for unanimous

consent of the House to have the document read as such, making a correction to the document through a motion. The table officers would then have the ability to correct the document on a go-forward basis. That would allow us to continue debate this evening and, by the sounds of things, see a successful conclusion to the motion.

The Speaker: For clarification, would it be the one that's signed?

Mr. Cooper: Correct.

Cortes-Vargas: Just to verify, we would be debating the motion that he read earlier on – correct? – not the one on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I'll effort to provide some clarification. The original document, the motion that was initially signed by the hon. member and then turned in to the bills and Journals clerk, failed to have the word "government" in that motion. As such, there was an error because in most motions that are debated in this Chamber, it says "urge the government." There was a discrepancy between the original document, that was signed by the member, and the motion that we have on the Order Paper before us.

It would be my recommendation that through unanimous consent of the House we provide a correction to that document through a motion. Then they will be the same, we will be debating it appropriately, and we can all proceed with the debate.

The Speaker: To be clear, hon. member, I'm confused as to which motion we would be following. Would it be the intent of the House that it would be the wording which is on the Order Paper, which uses the phrase "urge the government"? It's the other one, I'm being advised, that would be debated. Is there agreement that we would urge the government? Is that your proposal, hon. member?

Mr. Cooper: Yes.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-South East, it's your motion. I'll give you the opportunity to speak to the matter.

Mr. Fraser: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; I apologize to this House if there is this mix-up. However, this is what we were presented with, exactly what I've read from the Order Paper. If the House would agree, I'd love to continue.

The Speaker: Hon. member, might I clarify, then, again? Your intent would be that the motion that you would task the House with is the one that's on the Order Paper, not the one which you signed. Is that correct?

Let me read it again. This would be with the assumption that this is what would be moved. The motion would now read: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a special committee to review accessibility legislation," et cetera, et cetera. Is that the mover's intent?

Mr. Fraser: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask for unanimous consent for us to continue.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've been advised – and it certainly was my understanding as well and I think shared by the House – that the time that we have just used with respect to this correction has not been counted and that you will get the adequate time for the motion as agreed to under standing orders.

Hon. Member for St. Albert, accordingly, you would have approximately five minutes left to speak. Please proceed.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you. I'd like to propose this amendment to Motion 507, (a) striking out "consider" and substituting "conduct a thorough consultation regarding" and (b) striking out all of the words that follow "Albertans."

The member and I had a chance to chat briefly earlier today. The reason that I'm asking for this amendment is that it's been the experience of the community of people with disabilities and their allies that, I think, well-meaning legislation and well-meaning activities don't always turn out that way.

I think the original wording was "to ensure accessibility for Albertans that exceeds the base requirements of the Alberta Building Code," when, in fact, this community of people, people with disabilities, doesn't necessarily want to be excluded or doesn't want any more. So while barrier-free is certainly the goal for all Canadians, all Albertans, people with disabilities don't necessarily want to be singled out. For example, labour legislation: I think there was a suggestion the other day about the issue that people with disabilities be pulled out and dealt with separately. That's a really good example of that. People with disabilities want to be included in schools, in work, in legislation.

So this amendment proposes to slightly change the wording. I think, though, that the intent of the motion is still there. I think the member is talking about aligning some legislation, working together, strengthening things so that barrier-free and access are the focus, not just people with disabilities going over and above what is there in legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, an amendment has been proposed, which you will have a copy of, which will be identified as A1.

The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'd just like to thank the member for her comments. Absolutely, one of the things that I think we can learn as Albertans, certainly – at least, what I've learned is that when you talk to people with disability or different challenges from our challenges, what I find is that more often than not, some of us that have everything at our fingertips get stuck in a fixed mindset where we're always considering our failures and we're always considering our barriers. However, what we see with people with disabilities is that they have a different mindset. It's a growth mindset. They don't always see a barrier; what they see is an opportunity. They see things completely differently, and we can learn so much from them.

That's why I would urge the House to support this amendment, that shows that when we speak about Albertans, there should be no classification. It should all be equal, and we should be considering accessibility for all Albertans, not one specific person. I would support this amendment. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this amendment. Any time that we can make our communities and our province more accessible is a time that we should all take advantage of. I sense a willingness in this room to support this amendment and therefore to support this motion, so I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to A1? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise briefly in support of the amendment. If it keeps us all on the same page in looking at making Alberta more accessible for all of its citizens, then that can only end up being a good thing. If we're going to work on it together in consultation with those people that we need to help have access, then that can't be anything but a good thing, too. So I'm happy to support both the amendment and the main motion.

The Speaker: The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to speak on my support of this amendment, something that I have learned, that stays with me, from the Member for St. Albert as well as from those that have the disabilities is: Nothing about Us without Us. I remember that every time I talk about issues that affect them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would speak to amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

5:30

The Speaker: Now we're back to the amended motion. Hon. members, anyone wishing to speak to the amended motion?

Do you wish the opportunity for closure?

Mr. Fraser: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'd like to thank this House and this Chamber. I mean, I really do believe that when we put before us the important things that we can agree on, there is a symbiotic relationship here. It's encouraging. I just want to thank everybody for their comments. Certainly, hopefully, we can move forward with this committee to truly make Alberta more accessible for all people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for an interesting afternoon. I believe I learn something every time I sit in this chair. Today was no exception.

I would move that we adjourn this afternoon and reconvene at 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:32 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, May 29, 2017

Day 40

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
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Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
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Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
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Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
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Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Fiona Vance, Sessional Parliamentary Counsel

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms

Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House
Services

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Committee Services

Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and
Legal Research Officer

Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
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Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
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Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

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Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Orr
Coolahan	Piquette
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Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
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Aheer	Miller
Drever	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
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McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
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Drever	Nixon
Ellis	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
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Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
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Fraser	Panda
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Littlewood	Westhead
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 29, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16 An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. I have not been impressed by this bill that tries to help the poor, only to end up taking the money out of their pockets through higher taxes. I'm also not impressed with the sign that this bill will send to our industry, that they should expect a significant increase in rates in the near future. The NDP has set us up on a path that will force rates to soar, hurt businesses, hurt our job creators, and truly upset Alberta's economy.

Madam Chair, we talked about the different policies of this government in the past, too. We gave them honest feedback on most of their policies in the past, and here we are again trying to make their unreasonable bills better in the interests of Albertans. We are here again at that work.

That's why I actually wanted to introduce an amendment to this bill. I'll read the amendment, and I have the requisite copies. I'll give them to the page here.

Madam Chair, my amendment reads as follows. I move that Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, be amended as follows. The following is added after section 2:

Economic impact assessment

2.1(1) One month after the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent, the Minister shall prepare a projection of the economic impact of the imposition of maximum rates established in section 2 on electricity consumers who are not regulated rate customers.

(2) The Minister shall lay a copy of the projection prepared under subsection (1) as soon as practicable before the Assembly if it is then sitting or, if it is not sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

In part B section 8 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

Coming into force

8 Sections 2(2), 3 and 6(1)(c) and (d)(iii) come into force on the later of the following:

(a) January 1, 2018;

(b) 30 days after the date on which the Minister lays the projection prepared under section 2.1(2) before the Assembly.

Madam Chair, that's my amendment, which is very reasonable. Now every member has a copy of this. They have the opportunity to read this.

Madam Chair, we gave lots of feedback on NDP policies in the past, and we talked about the economic impacts of their policies. I don't know how many antibusiness policies have been promoted by

this government without looking at the big picture. Just look at the big picture: that's what you used to say when you sat on this side, but now you've lost sight. You've stopped looking at the big picture.

The corporate tax hike: you never thought it through; you never did the economic impact analysis. The minimum wage 50 per cent hike: you didn't think it through; you didn't do the economic impact analysis. We asked for it. If you have done that, you didn't share it with us. It takes the *Calgary Herald* or someone else to leak that after the session is over. That's what happened last time. [interjection] Yeah, we'll stay tuned to what else you leak after this session.

Now, the labour bill, which is just your ideology, with no analysis of how many jobs it will kill... [interjections] Yeah, you've already killed 100,000, so you should have the joy of the killjoy by now. [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members.

Mr. Panda: You should be on the high. Minister of technical education, you should be on the high of that killjoy.

The Chair: Hon. member, we are on Bill 16, amendment A1.

Mr. Panda: I'm speaking to that, Madam Chair. If I'm engaged, I have to answer them.

The Chair: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Panda: Sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Panda: As long as they direct to you, I'll direct through you.

Madam Chair, we talked about some of those risky ideological policies like a 100-megatonne cap. We asked when they introduced that and when they brought in Bill 25, Bill 27, Bill 30, at every stage of those bills, for a simple economic impact analysis, and we never got it. That's why I made one more attempt here to get the message across the aisle. If they consider the big picture and consider this reasonable amendment to this important bill, that will help all Albertans. It is clear that the Department of Energy believes that electricity rates are going up significantly over the next four years. You're only there for two years, but it's going to go up for four years.

Those rate increases are going to happen over the lifespan of this bill, Madam Chair, yet we have not seen the economic impact assessment for the job creators that will not qualify for the RRO, the regulated rate option. As all of the MLAs in this House should know, the regulated rate option is only offered to residential and small-business customers who consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours per year, leaving our job creators to face market rates.

An Hon. Member: You believe in the market, don't you?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. If it is truly the market, we do believe in that, but you're trying to tinker with the free-market system here.

If I know the public servants – and I'm starting to now, Madam Chair; after two years in this job I'm getting to know the public servants – they would have figured this out and identified this problem and have likely done some kind of economic impact assessment on the business community to find out what doubling electricity rates, as this cap projects, will mean to those businesses. But in case the public servants have not done their homework for the minister, I'm giving them a month to produce a report. As per this amendment that is just 20 working days.

Madam Chair, 250,000 kilowatt hours per year is a lot of electricity. [interjections] This is not a laughing matter for the job creators. You know, it's not a laughing matter, Madam Premier. There are employers in Alberta who will use even more than 250,000 kilowatt hours per year. There are lots of them, and they will not be protected by this bill. No. Will those employers pack up and leave and go elsewhere because of rising electricity prices? Possibly. You were very successful in driving out those businesses so far.

So that's why this amendment. Please check out the amendment. It's very reasonable. Electricity costs are a key input for industry and often a determining factor in whether a company stays in a jurisdiction or not. I'll give you an example. The aluminum smelter in Kitimat, B.C., was set up there because of the cheap electricity available at that location. That's why they have a smelter for aluminum there and not in Alberta.

7:40

Ontario has seen a mass exodus of industry overseas and to the U.S.A. because of the outrageous power prices. Ontario gets the double whammy of Kathleen Wynne's green jobs, a coal phase-out, a natural gas phase-out but also aging facilities like Pickering and Darlington nuclear generation, that need to be replaced, refurbished, or phased out. We don't want to follow Ontario's route here.

When an Albertan loses their job, Madam Chair, it doesn't matter what the price of electricity is. They just aren't going to be able to pay their bills because they don't have a job. This cap is fundamentally wrong. If you use power, you pay for it. It's a simple principle. When you use power, you pay for it. It's that simple. No gimmicks that saddle the taxpayers with the burden and then rob the ratepayer through their income tax or other taxes. My colleague here from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake: he educated us so many times that there is only one ratepayer and one taxpayer. Somehow we miss that point every time.

That's why, Madam Chair, we have to look at this amendment. Don't get me wrong here. I like the renewables, but this is not the way to do it. The NDP need to turn back the clock on the reckless, expensive, and ideological transition to plan the renewables. That's why I have brought this amendment forward. Albertans deserve to know what the economic impact of this policy is. If the NDP truly isn't worried that electricity rates will double in the next four years, then you would table an economic impact study showing that that isn't the motivation for the bill.

I see some of the backbenchers over there nodding in agreement. They know I'm right. They know their government is wrong on this, but for some reason, whatever it is, they'll support team orange and green – we'll see some news across the neighbouring province tomorrow – their brothers and sisters in their misguided do-goodism, Madam Chair.

That's why I encourage everyone to look at this amendment and do what is right for Albertans. In this industry, which uses more than 250,000 kilowatt hours per year, they can't afford such high electricity prices. As a result, they close the shop and move to other jurisdictions. That's why I challenge the members to recognize the economic impact that this bill will have and to work to amend the bill to table an economic impact assessment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Foothills for the amendment. He's talking

about us missing the big picture. Well, it seems like he's watching the feature-length film with his eyes closed, but that's okay.

You know, to have the economic impact assessment for those who aren't RRO customers, it doesn't make any sense at this point because if they aren't, they're locked into a different contract anyhow. We won't know what that result is for four years down the road, anyway.

Also, we have to understand that with this bill there's no intention to put retailers out of business whatsoever. I mean, the rate cap is not designed to hurt competitive retailers in this space. Its intent is to protect Albertans from high electricity prices. There's no intent to phase out the electricity market either. You know, this actually provides opportunities for retailers to come up with innovative products that work for consumers and help keep the costs low as well.

In terms of customers that use over 250,000 kilowatts, I mean, again, with the big picture, the big film here that we're talking about, actually, the design of this program is to move into a greener, more stable electricity environment for these customers as well.

Mrs. Littlewood: That's going to be a blockbuster.

Mr. Coolahan: It's going to be a blockbuster, Madam Chair. A blockbuster.

Anyhow, with that said, I'm going to say thank you for the amendment, but I will not be supporting it at this time. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I as well will not be supporting this particular amendment because part of it is asking that we provide an impact study showing what the cap's impact will be on Albertans. I would like to see their impact study showing that the cap is indeed wrong. Since they do not have an impact study showing it's wrong, it's just pure speculation. Therefore, I will not be supporting it.

What we can be sure of is that it will protect Alberta families, it will protect farms, and it will protect businesses because they will know exactly what their rate will be, 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, so they will have certainty and stability. That's the impact, that they will know for sure for the next four years, and that is the impact that they are looking for. That protection is exactly what this government is offering to families, small businesses, and farms.

Again, I will not be supporting that amendment. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good evening, everyone. As always, I'm happy to stand to speak to this bill and bills on energy. To speak to a couple of the comments from the government side here, I just wanted to make sure I understood this correctly, that the economic assessment is not necessary because we don't have an economic assessment to show that it wouldn't work. I just wanted to make sure that I was clear about that. I'm going to give lots of opportunity to actually speak about that in just a minute. Just to be clear, when we're talking about protecting people, that's one thing, but if you're killing the business and the job creators in this province, you are in no way protecting people. Just to be clear.

Let's talk about the RRO for a minute. I just wanted to throw out some numbers here. The current rate, just to be clear, is right now, I think, 3.5 to 3.8 cents per kilowatt hour. I just don't understand how that cap of 6.8 cents is in any way possibly protecting Albertans right now, especially when we're talking about small business. In fact, at 250,000 kilowatt hours we're actually

disincentivizing business. We're actually disincentivizing. As far as I can tell, the current rate of the RRO is actually beneficial to consumers right now. Any Albertan could have ended their long-term contracts and levelled out their price of electricity from any of the many, many independent companies that we have here, just to be clear. I just wanted to make sure. I mean, if we're looking at independent retailers or Enmax, you can sit down and sign a contract that would eliminate price volatility. We have several different versions to actually eliminate volatility. It's actually choice, which is huge for Albertans. Just in case you haven't had a chance to talk to people in your constituencies, that's a big deal for people.

I also wanted to say that an RRO is actually a temporary window design. It's smoke and mirrors to stop them from showing what the market is actually going to be doing. Let me tell you that in four years, when that cap is gone, whammo. There you go. The truth will be clear as day, and all of a sudden what we're going to be seeing is a doubling of that cost. So I'm not quite sure how it is that you intend to protect people with this, especially if you're killing job creators.

If the Department of Energy believes that a significant increase in electricity is going to happen within the next four years, which, it's my understanding, is the reason for this cap, if I understand correctly, it is because the government saw that there would be a large increase over the next four years, during the duration of this bill. That is why we need an economic assessment, because that is actually for the job creators that don't qualify. So is the next step, then, to cap industry? Yikes. I really hope that that's not next on the list because that's certainly not what we're asking for.

In fact, not having a cap is allowing the market to send signals to investors, and those signals actually tell those investors when it's a good time to invest and when it's not. It's actually imperative to the market, and it's actually part of the advantage that we had here in this province. Understand that those market changes are warning signs. When you are looking at the disincentive, those are warning signs to an industry. You are removing signals that help point industry towards investment.

7:50

To talk about the amendment for a moment, the reason why we're asking for one month on the day – we're asking for a projection. That's actually a very reasonable request because the government would not have come up with a random number on a cap if they hadn't already projected what that outcome was going to be for the people of Alberta, Madam Chair. It's actually a very reasonable request. In fact, I would have assumed that in order to come up with the idea of a cap or any aspect that is going to change the industry, that is ultimately going to change the way job creators can come in, that is going to limit them to a 250,000 kilowatt hours capacity, you would have already as a government had the capacity explained to anybody who is going to be involved, anybody who is going to be impacted, about what that imposition is going to mean.

I don't really think we're asking for anything that's unusual. Any business plan would require some understanding of the projection of an economic impact analysis. What I find really interesting is that this isn't the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth time that we have asked for an economic impact analysis. In fact, I would have to say that with any bills that regularly impact money, business, any aspect that impacts Albertans in their pocketbook, we have asked. I have to point to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. He has consistently asked over and over again for an economic impact analysis pretty much on every bill. The reason for that is because we owe it to Albertans. We're using their money. It's not your money. It is not the government's money. You are not bankrolling

this. This is Albertans' hard-earned cash. They need to understand from you, the government, what it is that you're doing with their dollars.

You keep saying that you're going to use the carbon tax, this very overpromised carbon tax, to somehow compensate for the decisions that you're making. I'm a small-business owner. I own three businesses, in fact. And I'm not alone. There are a lot of people on this side. I can honestly tell you as a person who's in business that if I put forward a business plan like this and went to the bank, went to ask for money, they would laugh at me. You have to have some sort of understanding of the imposition of the change that you're making on the businesses that are the fabric of this province. Small business, agriculture, and oil and gas are the fabric of this province. They're what built this province. Please don't forget that when you're making these decisions. Every decision, every policy that has led to this moment right here is an absolutely horrible domino effect of impact to an industry that provides for the entire country.

Let's talk about Ontario for just a moment. We're looking at potentially a mass exodus of businesses from here. [interjection] And from there, too, actually. You're correct, yeah, from there and from here.

I just wanted to bring up something that was posted about the Liberals, and I'll table this, Madam Chair. This is from an article by Allison Jones of the Canadian Press on financial accountability. In here it says:

The Liberals have said after the initial cut to bills this year, rate increases will be held to inflation for the next four years . . .

Sounds very similar to what's going on here.

. . . and in 10 years ratepayers will have to start paying back debt that will be accumulated in order to finance lower rates for the next decade.

Do you know what that means, Madam Chair? That means that from 2017 to 2027 electricity costs will be lower than they would have otherwise been, saving . . .

Initially it sounds good.

. . . \$33 billion, but after that, electricity costs will be higher than under the status quo, with ratepayers spending \$9 billion more through to 2045.

So you spend \$45 billion to save the ratepayer, taxpayer, consumer – they're all the same person – \$24 billion. I don't understand it. We are on the same path here. Within four years to pay back all of the decisions that are going to be made: \$10 million a month is what's going to happen. If we look at that, I mean, this is a possibility with this legislation because the problem is that at 6.8 cents somebody has to pay the difference. Somebody has to pay that difference. Who's going to do that? That's all going to come from the carbon tax? I don't think so. It will not come from the carbon tax.

Then the cost of paying back that debt with interest – this is in Ontario again – which the government has said will be up to \$28 billion, will go back onto ratepayers' bills for the next 20 years as a clean-energy adjustment. I'm just curious if that's going to be one of the bills up in the next session here. Just keep that in mind, guys, a clean-energy adjustment. That's what we might be looking at here in the future.

The rates are going to double, and I just can't understand how that's competitive. Let's use the greatest claim to fame of this government as an example. I mean, we've got the credit downgrade – right? – from a double-A to an A-plus rating. That is because this government actively attacks its citizens and its industry and its job creators, and they do not table economic plans. The downgrade happened because there was no economic plan tabled. That's why we were downgraded. The government isn't going to raise taxes except for the ones that it decided to raise: personal taxes, business

taxes, beer taxes, carbon taxes. It's a lot of taxes for a government that said that they weren't going to raise taxes, isn't it? Then the overpromised slush fund is going to supposedly and magically pay for all of this increase, right? The government needs to go back in time and undo policies that have led us here. There are some simple, simple facts here. Right now, Madam Chair, the government is in serious damage control. The rates are going to double, and then we'll all have to pay that rate.

The RRO doesn't even apply to the industry. Does this government not understand that oversupply in the energy industry actually benefits industry? Yes, we are intense users of energy because we produce energy that is used by every single Canadian, used all over the world, in fact.

We are in direct competition with our neighbours, and our industry is being welcomed with open arms in Houston. I talked to five men, actually, just a few days ago, all of whom have transferred their industry to Houston. All of them. They're actually travelling every other week. They're 10 days out, two days back, 10 days out. It's absolutely amazing the amount of work that they're actually getting in the United States. It's not just them. These are oil and gas guys. I'm not talking about the geophysicists, the geotechnicians, any of the geologists, all of these people that are underutilized right now, some of the best minds in the industry. We are chasing them away.

Our grid is used by the industry. I don't know if you have any idea, Madam Chair, how unique it is that we're actually able to supply all of the energy necessary in order to do such energy-intensive work in this province. It's very unusual. That creates jobs. In fact, the industry learns to be – I think this is in response, actually, to the member across the way talking about learning about efficiencies. That's actually how it happens, right? The industry learns to be more efficient because they want to help the environment. They want to do better. They care about the earth, air, and water, all of them do, so they want to be more efficient. It's actually good for business because if they save money with their energy – in fact, so many of them are able to create their own energy onsite. It's absolutely incredible the number of changes that have happened in the industry in order for them to be able to support themselves, to be able to move forward, to find ways to cut down on all sorts of NOx and SOx going into the air. Incredible. In fact, if the government actually supported industry, the possibilities of actually increasing the ability to reduce harmful toxins going into our air would be massively increased.

Jobs in Alberta are power intensive. Just to talk about out east again, 7 million light vehicles and over 70,000 medium trucks can be used in Ontario, 33 million vehicles in all of Canada. I would sure like it to be that we are the ones who are supplying energy to these folks. We do it better than anywhere else in the world. On one hand, the government says that they love pipelines and that they're supporting the industry, yet everywhere else we see caps, we see restrictions, and we see stops in everything that's important to the energy industry. Consistently we're seeing these job creators, especially the small-industry people that have actually created a lot of the big changes in terms of efficiencies – because they're smaller, they have to save money. We're attacking these people. We're attacking these industries. Thirty-three million vehicles, cars and trucks, on the roads in all of Canada: I'm sure that all of us would like to be the ones that get to participate in providing them energy, and we are energy intensive.

If you want to talk about how that's working, we can talk about carbon leakage again. We talked about this a great deal in Bill 25 and the cap on the oil sands. If we're talking about carbon leakage, the biggest piece of that is that every single time we put a cap on

industry here, Madam Chair, somebody else is going to do it. It's not going to stop.

8:00

Wouldn't you rather have the rules and regulations here in our province, the way that we do things, and do more here and have control over how we produce in this province? We are the best. We are the greenest. We are the cleanest. We are third in Canada – actually, third in the world for renewables in terms of renewables online for the size of country that we have. We have so much to be proud of. Yet this government keeps capping and putting behind smoke and mirrors that somehow that's going to help out the people of this province. There's a huge differential in there that is going to be paid. It doesn't make any sense.

I wanted to also bring this up, that the second piece of the impact study says that "the Minister shall lay a copy of the projection prepared under subsection (1) as soon as practicable before the Assembly if it is then sitting or, if it is not sitting, within 15 days." I don't understand why there's a problem in laying out a plan of what this is going to look like. If you are correct about this, if you truly feel that this cap on industry is the way to go for the RRO, wouldn't you like to be able to show how your numbers are working? Show us the metrics, that this is actually going to work.

It's not possible because right now people are paying less for energy. You're going to be actually charging more. Right now there is a competitive market. Right now we are competitive with everywhere else, and it's a jurisdiction that people would like to invest in. But you removed the markers, you removed the signals, and you removed accountability from the electricity. That happened in Bill 34, where you removed accountability from electricity by removing the ability for anybody to see how renewables were being brought online. It is a blank cheque to the industry, without any accountability to Albertans about how renewables will be brought online.

Guess what? That's going to be hidden in that 6.8 cents. That's where it's hidden. Honestly, if you were able to make it viable and economical, you don't think people would choose these things? Let them choose. Give them the opportunity. Let's make it economically viable. Let's let these companies come in and have the market decide. Let's get a competition going for solar panels and competition for wind and competition for all of the construction industry that would be involved in building the massive concrete windmills that are located in southern Alberta. Let's get that going. I mean, I thought they were already doing that. Am I wrong? It seems to me there were an awful lot of windmills before the NDP was in government, right?

I certainly did not need government to tell me to put solar panels on my house. I love my solar panels, but I'll also tell you that in 25 years I'm going to have 40 solar panels, that are as wide and as tall as the length of me, that I'm going to have to replace or recycle or put somewhere. I don't know where those are going to go, not to mention that it's like a hundred thousand dollars of infrastructure that had to be built in order to support those. There are a lot of things that are involved here that would require and, I think, demand the ability to make sure that there's accountability from the government for what this cap is actually trying to accomplish.

I mean, I've got so many notes here that I don't even know where to go. Like, let's look at how we got to this point. The reason we're asking for accountability is because the puzzle pieces that are lining up to show what this government is trying to do with respect to our energy industry are scary. I mean, we began with the order in council just after you came to power, and then without any guidance from experts and no consultation with industry we all of a sudden have the carbon tax under the specified emitters. It went from \$15

and then rose to \$20 and then \$30, and the percentage of emissions applied rose from 12 per cent of emissions to 15 per cent of emissions and now to 20 per cent. Basically, you're taxing our generators 70 per cent in one year. I'm sorry. How is that good for Albertans? How is that making life better for Albertans? I really don't understand that. I would love for somebody to explain that to me.

In hindsight, that initial increase under the SGERs, that was going to bring revenue for this government, was only a couple of hundred million dollars. Like, it doesn't make any sense. And now the PPA debacle is going to cost Albertans 4 billion plus dollars. Four billion plus dollars. How is it that the government is going to justify that? Oh, right. The green slush fund. I forgot. That's that oversell on the slush fund, that's actually going to pay for all of the difficulties that one single act created. Four billion dollars. So your return-on-investment calculation doesn't really add up.

Then if we look at the power purchase agreements, again, it triggered a mass cancellation – a mass cancellation – of purchase arrangements and flooded the Balancing Pool. Honestly, that was the one thing that kept everybody accountable. You buy in at the lowest value. That is the best thing for Albertans. You purchase at the lowest purchase price possible. That is why we have such good prices for electricity right now, because it's a competitive market, and the competition starts every single day, and you buy in. On top of that, we have a baseline of power that keeps our lights on at all times and, on top of that, makes us able to run industries that are energy intensive off our own grid. That is spectacular. It's spectacular that we can do that. I wish the government could see how spectacular that is.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A1? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. We're here tonight talking about an economic impact assessment. We're sitting here, and presently the rate is about 3.8 cents a kilowatt hour. The government is proposing to put a cap at 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour, which is almost double. Now, I would presume it only makes sense that if you want to put a cap that's almost double the existing rate, you must be expecting the rate to go up more than double or else you wouldn't be interested in putting a cap on that. The suggestion of an economic impact assessment, I would suggest, only makes sense.

Now, we did hear from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who suggested that because we would like an economic impact assessment, we should do it in order to prove that we need an economic impact assessment. I think that's how I understood that. The silliness continues. It's bizarre.

But I would have to suggest, Madam Chair, that the government came up with a number, 6.8 cents. Now, where did that number come from? That's not a random number, I would guess. I mean, I guess there are two choices. Either it's a random number that somebody just picked out of the air – that's scary – or maybe, what's scarier, they actually worked this all out somehow and won't provide that information to Albertans. I don't know which is worse, actually. They're probably equally scary, to think that either the number was picked out of the air or that they'd done some work and some calculations to figure it out and won't show it to anybody. Honestly, I don't know which is worse. There has to be some sort of way to get these numbers, I'm guessing. I don't know. Maybe they've got a little wheel with numbers, and they spin it around, and whatever it ends up at, that's what it's going to be. I don't know.

Madam Chair, we're sitting here at a time when this government has just had its fifth credit downgrade, something that this side of the House warned them about every single time. Every single budget we warned them, they laughed it off, and now they're laughing off an economic impact assessment, an assessment that would show Albertans what the effects of this could be. I don't understand. I think Albertans deserve to understand the economic impact of this policy. If they're not worried about electricity rates doubling in the next four years, then why not do the economic impact study? Why not?

8:10

When you put a cap at almost double the present rate, then obviously there's some sort of expectation it's going to get there and beyond, because a cap is no good unless it goes beyond. That's the only time the cap will actually be implemented, if the price goes beyond that cap. That's the only time it'll actually make a difference.

Now, why would the electricity go up that high? I would suggest that it would probably have to do with all the other bills that this government has passed dealing with electricity. Again, we warned them about the effects they were going to cause. This government needs to turn back the clock. They need to stop this ideological transition to renewables, this thought process that they can manipulate the market, that they can influence the market with taxpayer money and not get bad results.

Again, we seem to be in this House all the time debating bills that are damage control for the previous bills that they've passed. Over and over again we're in here doing this, and had they listened the first time, with the carbon tax, for instance, then we wouldn't be in this situation. Their early phase-out of coal and the billions of dollars that cost, the PPA issues and the billions that cost: that's all taxpayer money.

Now, when Albertans lose their jobs due to bad government policy, it doesn't matter what their electricity rates are; they can't pay their bills. All these different things that this government is doing to drive investment out of this province cost jobs, and that hurts Albertans. If we look at Ontario, it's already seen industry leave because of its bad policies, policies that this government just seems to want to follow. I guess this government just can't see past this narrow, ideological trail that they're on. They can't seem to see beyond that in any way to see what could happen when they do this. Every time we show you: what could go wrong with a carbon tax? Lots of things could go wrong. They are going wrong.

The worst part is that the larger industrial consumers are not going to be protected by this, and we don't need this. That's the problem. We don't need this cap if this government would quit messing with every other part of the system. That's the problem. They're trying to protect themselves. What they're trying to do here is that they're trying to hide the true cost of electricity because if the cap is reached and the cap is implemented, then we know that the cost of electricity is actually, realistically, beyond that. We know that either the companies are going to have to declare bankruptcy because they can't make money or the government is going to have to shovel taxpayer money to them. Those are the only two ways it can work. This solves nothing. In fact, what it is is a way to hide their bad policies.

Now, when industry is trying to decide where they want to set up or if they want to expand their existing business, electricity is a factor. It's a big factor for some industries. They look at Alberta and say: "Okay; look at this. They've messed around with the electricity market here. They've messed it around there. Now they're putting a cap at double the price." What is that company going to think? They're going to think: "Wow. Obviously, the price

of electricity is going to double. Can we afford to do business in an area like that, in a jurisdiction like that? Probably not." They'll go somewhere else. That's the problem, Madam Chair. As this government goes through and passes these bills one by one by one, they have a cumulative effect on industry, on business, on the job creators. They have to decide: am I going to set up business here or not?

Some are forced to because the only place they can do business is in Alberta because that's where their leases are or whatever. But other companies have a choice. They can take their capital. They can go anywhere and invest it, but they want a decent return on it. By looking at this government's policies and the bills that they've passed and the instability that they've created in the environment, they're going to have to make a decision: do we set up business here or not? And they're not, Madam Chair. We're losing billions of dollars of investment because of this government's policies. That's the truth. Again, this is a warning sign to our industry that prices in Alberta will accelerate rapidly, and that will push them to decide on other jurisdictions to do business in.

Madam Chair, it only makes sense to do an economic impact assessment. I don't know how many amendments we've brought forward to this Legislature asking for an economic impact assessment, and this government has done none. None. Not one have they passed. Not one have they passed. So it's either one of two things. They're either scared of the results, or they already know the results and don't want to make them public. An economic impact assessment: any \$40 billion to \$50 billion a year business would do an economic impact assessment. This province spends \$40 billion to \$50 billion a year, and they don't want to do an economic impact assessment on something that could affect virtually every Albertan economically? It doesn't make sense. It just doesn't make sense.

We've seen what's happened in Ontario. They've gone down this road before. What did it get them? Billions and billions of dollars in boondoggles. Who's paying for those? Well, the people of Ontario are paying for their boondoggles. Who's going to be paying for ours here? Albertans, whether it's with higher electricity rates or higher taxes, debt, interest payments. Now, we heard earlier about Ontario spending \$45 billion to save the ratepayers \$24 billion on their electricity bills. That's the kind of road we're on here, Madam Chair, spending billions and billions of dollars with nothing to show for it. Nothing.

Again, I just don't understand what the problem would be with having an economic impact assessment. If this is so great, then it will stand up to an economic impact assessment. Why wouldn't it? The time frames on this amendment are plenty generous enough to make sure it can be done. Where's the fear? Why would somebody be scared of doing an economic impact assessment on something like this if it's so good? It should stand up to the scrutiny of an economic impact assessment. That should be straightforward.

8:20

Now, it seems like this government, when it comes to what fits into their ideology, the NDP world view, bulls ahead, with no economic impact assessments, no looking at any other options. They just bull straight ahead. If it doesn't fit into it: "Well, we'll send it to committee. We'll take a look at it here. We'll look at this. We'll look at that. We'll shuffle it around, kick it around a little bit, watch it die on the Order Paper, like property rights." Madam Chair, if there's nothing to be scared of here, do the economic impact assessment. Prove to Albertans that this is a great idea. It's really simple.

It's clear that they believe there's going to be a significant rise in electricity rates. That's clear. Why would they do it if they didn't

think it was possible? It would be senseless to even bring it forward. Obviously, they believe that electricity rates are going to double. They believe they are. Why won't they do an economic impact assessment? Or maybe just show us what you've already done. There must be something that produced the 6.8 cents. There are probably some notes around somewhere on that. Why not show it to Albertans? What's there to hide? If this is going to work out great for Albertans, show us. If not, do an economic impact assessment. Prove it that way. It's very simple.

Madam Chair, I'll leave it at that. I'm going to support this amendment. It makes sense. It's what Albertans expect when we're dealing with their money. That's what they expect, and they deserve that. It's all about accountability. Those are the people that we're responsible to when we sit here in this Legislature, the people of Alberta. That's who we're here representing. Those are the people that will be affected by this, the people of Alberta, so they deserve to have this opportunity to see what this is going to do.

It's not too much to ask. It's common sense. Any business that was going to do something like this would have done some sort of assessment. Whether the government did or not, we don't know. I would like to think that they did, but I would hate to think that they're hiding it from Albertans.

Mrs. Pitt: It sounds like they are.

Mr. Loewen: It sounds like they are, but I don't know.

Madam Chair, I'm going to support this amendment. We need to have economic impact assessments on things like this that are going to affect every single Albertan.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein on amendment A1.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just briefly, because, goodness knows, somebody should be, on just how we got to the 6.8 cents. I'm pretty sure it was in the briefing notes for the bill. I think I'm reading the same ones. Anyhow, the 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour price cap was taken as an average equal to the five-year, fixed-price competitive retail contracts when the price was announced to be capped in November 2016. We also understand that a lot of consumers felt the pinch when the price went above 6.8 cents.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, another day, another request from the opposition asking to see how exactly it is that we are going to see an impact on our economy with a decision based on ideology from the NDP. At this point here I've got a colleague from Calgary-Foothills who has brought forward a sensible amendment that says: "Well, you know what? Before we go down this path too far and before we shut down the businesses that this bill is going to be impacting, maybe we should consider doing an impact study."

What we're hearing is that there is a mass exodus out of Ontario right now based on the fact that their energy prices have gotten out of control for them. I know that we're sitting here again talking about out of control, so I'd like to talk about some of the specifics, about how we were sold a bill of goods by this government that, I would argue, is taking us down a very misleading road. What I've got here is an article by the Pembina Institute. This is a group that is normally very government friendly, NDP friendly. Very NDP friendly. If I brought something up from, say, the Fraser Institute,

we would hear groans from the other side. But this one here is actually from the Pembina Institute.

I'm going to, for *Hansard's* sake, make sure that I read this into the record so that they are able to find this article for me. It's <https://www.pembina.org/reports/faq1-clp-effect-on-electricity-costs.pdf>. It is a long one, and I apologize for that. For those who are looking for the article by Google, the name of the article is *The Impact of Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan on Electricity Costs*. This is dated June 15, 2016, and it was done by Benjamin Thibault. He has an article that says that, clearly, this is the way to go. I'm going to walk through this because this was before we actually saw this bill being brought into place.

What we've got here is a question that it starts off with:

Will electricity bills triple as a result of the Climate Leadership Plan?

The answer to this was:

There is no analysis that backs up any such assertion. These claims have been made without any analytical support. The tripling assertion has been cited widely, including by several media outlets, with absolutely no reference to a particular study or other analysis.

Well, you know what? That is exactly what we've been asking for. We've been asking this NDP government for an analysis to bring forward what the impacts of this climate change bill are going to be. When we look at this amendment, that is asking for another impact study to make sure that we're not shutting down our largest businesses, well, again, it looks like the government isn't going to move in this direction. The government has already been saying: "You know what? This isn't going to impact anything."

Here is where we go:

Will the carbon levy increase electricity rates by 2-3 ¢/kWh?

The answer here is:

No. Erroneous claims like this have been made that much more expensive electricity will result from the carbon levy.

An Hon. Member: Tax.

Mr. Cyr: My colleague is correcting me with "tax." Unfortunately, I do need to read the article's quote here.

But they are based on misunderstandings of how the price of electricity is set and how the carbon levy is applied to power generators. In fact, the carbon levy could eventually lower electricity [prices].

What we're hearing from this report by Pembina is that not only is this going to not increase our electricity rates but potentially decrease – decrease – the energy rates.

8:30

Now, why is this important? Well, according to this article it shows that we are putting forward a cap that we shouldn't need. We're putting a cap on electricity that Albertans shouldn't need. Now, if you look at the graph that I referred to in my last speech, we actually hadn't seen a spike above 6.8 cents for the last two years. So we're already seeing that with this projection that he's got, he's saying that we should see stability because of this climate action plan. What we're looking at here is a government that says: we don't have faith in the plan that we're bringing forward; we're going to see an extensive increase in the price of electricity.

This article goes on, and it says, "How the market works to set the wholesale price." This is important. This is exactly what the Wildrose has been maintaining, that the market that we had was working, and it was working just fine. But what happens here is that when you change something like, say, adding a carbon tax and suddenly all of your generators are handing their PPAs in, then suddenly what ends up happening is that you create a market

imbalance that you need to correct, and then you need to recorrect and then recorrect again and then recorrect again.

Had we done an impact study or a review of the initial decision to put a carbon tax on Albertans, we would have known that the PPAs would have been at risk. But now, because we're too far down that road, we're suing companies in Alberta. We're suing the very companies that have provided us with power for the last – what? – 18 years under this system. They can correct me if I'm wrong on that number of years.

Now to go back to this.

The wholesale [electricity] price is set by only one generation bid in any hour. The energy price that consumers pay depends on the type of retail contract or regulated rate they have chosen – but one way or another, these are ultimately determined as something of an average of the hourly prices or expected future prices, with retail markup.

Supply and demand sets the wholesale energy price.

This is the important part here, supply and demand.

Now, this climate action plan that the government is bringing forward is going to be taking off our coal plants, which make up more than 50 per cent of our energy being provided to Alberta right now. Again, we've got imbalance happening. So what happens is that we are needing to replace this energy very quickly, and the question is: how are we going to be able to bring this energy online by the time we take off this coal?

Now, we hear the government saying that they've got everything under control, but if that was the case, we wouldn't need a 6.8-cent cap put on this. That is the very important point here, the fact that if we were going towards your plan and we were taking this report that was written clearly to justify the government's move to bring in the carbon tax – how is it that it's clear that now we've lost faith in the direction that we're going and we're putting caps on? And then not only are we putting caps on; we're changing directions and putting it on the taxpayer. As my colleague the shadow minister for renewable energy continues to point out, the ratepayer is the same person as the taxpayer. This is important because what happens is that you might not be paying this in the utility bill for your home, but you are paying it in additional taxes the NDP bring forward.

Now, when we're looking at this, we're seeing that we have a government that is expecting big spikes in the cost of power. If they weren't expecting a big spike in this cost, they would never have excluded our biggest businesses. They are anticipating that the decisions that they've made are going to lead to spikes. This is tragic when you look at the fact that this was supposed to make all our lives better by actually bringing on this carbon tax. I still can't get from point A to point Z on that one, where taking money out of the economy and putting it into a green slush fund will eventually somehow make jobs, because, in the end, we're attacking our biggest businesses.

When we start looking at this, we need to be asking ourselves: what is the impact to our big businesses? My colleague from Calgary-Foothills has done a very good job of explaining that this needs to happen. We can wait until it's too late, but then what ends up happening is that we end up with businesses going out of Alberta, and by that time it's too late. I would argue that Ontario is already starting to see a lot of their big businesses saying: we just can't afford to be here anymore. Had they done an impact study, they would have been able to forecast the fact that this is a result of raising the cost and creating those spikes. This is, in the end, a decision and a policy direction that this government has made to go to renewables.

Now, let's talk about renewables here because it's important. When the sun doesn't shine, we don't get power. When the wind doesn't blow, we don't get power. What's important here is that we are going

to have a lot of spikes. We're hearing that a lot of countries that went with a very large percentage of their energy production in renewable energy are now moving back to coal. How is it that we are moving away from coal? How is it that we're looking at moving away from the one thing that brings constant power?

For those that are wondering, I will say that when we look at the fact that we're seeing a cap here, we are already under the understanding that what we're looking for is more instability within the markets. You know what that leads to? The fact is that what we're going to see is a move towards more blackouts or brownouts, if you will, and this is distressing because what we need is consistent power. We need cheap power. We also need environmentally responsible power, which, I would argue, our clean coal can do. Our clean coal is cheap, it makes everybody's life better, and it brings business to Alberta. What it does is make sure that we have the jobs.

Going back to this economic impact study, I am going to say that if we did the study, we would probably see that coal is a necessity to be able to maintain the businesses that we've got in our area in Alberta. When we start looking at the fact that we're phasing out of this so quickly, without any justification of exactly how we got here – we have repeatedly asked for impact studies when it comes to our climate action plan. How is it that we haven't seen one yet?

This government has had two years – two years – to be able to bring forward an impact study that we can follow, but I don't believe that they want to release one. We do know that one was leaked. We ended up with it. It didn't have the answers they wanted, so they said: we changed our minds on how to do it; that one there is irrelevant. Well, now we're looking at it, and we're still seeing that the government is trying to fix the problems it's created.

Now, next I want to go to the Speech from the Throne. This is interesting. What we've got, I believe, is a government that really, genuinely wants to make jobs. I don't believe you're out to destroy jobs. I truly don't believe that. I think that the radical decisions you're making are doing that.

8:40

I believe that the Bill 1 that the minister of economic development put out was a clear indication – when I stood up in the House and told him, “This isn't going to work,” he should have listened. He could have listened. He had the opportunity to listen. You know what? Even though it had his job description there, in the end, consultations were important here, and if he had requested an impact study, it would have been a better solution. But, no. Again, what we end up with is a government that just chooses to say: we're going in that direction, and – guess what? – we'll fix it as we go along. Well, that's a very poor way of going.

Let's go to the throne speech. This is where I was saying that we were going to go. Creating and Supporting Jobs: this is the heading. It's on page 5.

Mr. Panda: How many jobs will be created in Bonnyville-Cold Lake?

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you. I'll get to that.

What we've got here is that “Alberta's energy industry creates good jobs, and good jobs are the bedrock of a strong province.” I believe that everybody in this room would agree with that. I truly believe that. I think that some of the decisions you make end up setting us back, but in the end I believe that all of our goals are moving in that direction.

Since the beginning of its mandate, your government has zeroed in on the task of supporting Alberta's energy industry. Now, I think that this is a little misleading because when we end up with a

government where we couldn't get them to answer whether or not they believed in pipelines – they would not answer the question. It was only after they were pressured into it that we actually saw them starting to answer these questions, and now they're bragging about not one but two pipelines. [interjections] Yes, two pipelines. Two pipelines that our opposition has been pressing for from the very beginning. That was our mandate. I will tell you that when it came to Wildrose, we were looking at, for sure, the economy, jobs, and – guess what? – pipelines. We've been consistent with our messaging: consistent, consistent, consistent. What we've heard from this government has been that profits are not good for Alberta. And that is always distressing.

To wrap up – I will get to some more of this later, and I know that depresses everybody – what we're looking at here is an impact study that we are hoping to move forward with. We are asking for a reasonable expectation. What impact is it to jobs? You've got it in your throne speech, so please do an impact study. Vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:43 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Smith
Cyr	Panda	Strankman
Fildebrandt	Pitt	Yao
Gill	Schneider	

9:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Nielsen
Bilous	Horne	Notley
Carlier	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Ceci	Larivee	Sabir
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	Mason	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Hinkley		

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 37
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

Mr. Hanson moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment May 25]

Mr. Fildebrandt: This bill is an attack on the rights of workers, and that is why it must be sent to a committee. This bill is an attack on the rights of workers. In this piece of legislation the NDP are selling out workers to union bosses who are more focused on maintaining and increasing their own wealth and their own power than the interests of the workers that they claim to represent. This bill strips Alberta workers of the right to a secret ballot.

Canadian voters have had the right to a secret ballot since 1880. We have a secret ballot in our general elections because before this, without it, politicians and governments would regularly bribe, cajole, threaten, or even punish people who didn't toe the party line. The secret ballot is considered an uncompromisable pillar of democracy, something so basic that even most banana republics, pseudodemocracies, have at least the pretense of it. Taking away a worker's right to a secret ballot is taking away their democratic rights. Taking away the secret ballot is taking away a worker's right to a free and fair election without fear of bullying, intimidation, trickery, or manipulation.

Alberta has the lowest rate of unionization in the country while having the lowest threshold yet to trigger a union ratification vote. Alberta has a 40 per cent threshold for card check to start the unionization process. Yet even with this threshold, which is in some instances 25 per cent less than in other provinces for card check, unions are still not as common here. The reason for this: the secret ballot. An attack on the secret ballot is an attack on the rights of workers.

But, in a way, I want to thank the NDP for putting this topic on the agenda, for making Alberta workers think about the proper role of legislated union power in a free society. Workers have a right to act and organize collectively. They have a right to come together and bargain for their working conditions, for their benefits, and for their compensation. But every worker is also an individual, sovereign in his or her individual choices so long as they do not hurt anyone else, a free man or a free woman with a right to self-determination, independent of what anyone else tells them they need to do. If union leaders are representatives and not bosses, then they can only ever provide advice and leadership, never orders. The moment that a union representative can tell any worker what they can or cannot do, they are no longer the leader

of a democratic and free organization of consenting individuals but the boss of a cartel.

Freedom of assembly means the right to form and join voluntary organizations without obstruction from the state, but equally freedom of assembly means the right to not join unions and organizations compelled by the power of the state. Workers have a right to form and join unions, but they also have a God-given right not to be members of a union. They have a God-given right to exercise their own liberty in deciding what organization they will or will not give their money to. Members of any organization, especially one whose membership is compelled by the power of the state, have a right to demand accountability from that organization. They have a right to hold their leaders' feet to the fire, and they have a right to know how their money is being spent.

This bill strips workers of those basic rights. This bill is written by and for undemocratic union bosses, with the acquiescence of the NDP. Theirs is a symbiotic relationship designed for one purpose: to use the power of the state to force workers, against their will, to pay dues into organizations that are hell bent on keeping this party in power.

Instead of a bill stripping workers of the right to a secret ballot to certify a union, we should instead legislate mandatory votes on recertification every four years. If workers are satisfied with the union representing them, then surely they will vote to recertify that union. But if they are dissatisfied with that union, they will have the right that voters have with their government every four years and throw them out.

Right now the overwhelming majority of Albertans are dissatisfied with their representatives in power. They have demanded that the conservative movement in Alberta unite itself, energize itself, and prepare itself to throw this government to the ash heap of history at the first opportunity. I believe that this will be their first and last four years in power. At that time Alberta workers will begin to see their rights restored.

Alberta workers deserve more than just a secret ballot to certify and decertify their union if they choose to do so. If they want a union, they should have the right to hold those unions accountable. That means opening the books to see how unions spend their dues. Unions funnelling dues to partisan propaganda arms of the NDP should be strictly prohibited. When the vast majority of workers pay their dues, they expect that their hard-earned dollars will go exclusively to the purpose of collective bargaining. They expect that every dollar that they pay in union dues will go to improving working conditions and compensation and not towards anti-Israel boycotts, socialist international congresses, Press Progress, Progress Alberta, or re-electing the NDP.

Now, any voluntary and democratic organization should also be responsible for collecting their own membership dues. When the Canadian Federation of Independent Business collects the dues of their small-business members, they have to sing for their supper. They have to go to their members every year and explain to them how they have spent their money wisely and why they should continue their voluntary membership in that organization. By contrast, this government wants to force workers to continue to pay mandatory dues, collected automatically off their paycheques, even if that union is engaged in an illegal strike. An illegal strike. Surely, if there was ever a circumstance under which a worker should be allowed to withhold their dues from a union, it would be when that union is breaking the laws of our country.

When the Wildrose Party seeks to renew our members every year, we have to go to them cap in hand and explain to them how we have spent their money and why they should continue to support us. We have to ask them for their voluntary and consensual contribution to the membership of our party. Could we for just one

moment imagine a scenario where, after winning a slim majority in a constituency, the victorious party could use the power of government to compel everyone in that constituency to be a member of that party and collect money off their paycheque without the consent of each and every individual man and woman? Unions, like business organizations, like the world wildlife foundation, like Ducks Unlimited, like every other organization, should be required to collect the dues of their members themselves.

9:10

Alberta deserves a bill not for the rights of union bosses but for the rights of workers. Unions began in the 19th century because workers needed the right to band together to demand safe working conditions, to demand reasonable benefits, to demand time off like a five-day work week, and to demand fair and reasonable wages. My great-great-grandfather used to be the president of a coal miners' union in Scotland. I may not share his politics, but I share his belief in the right of workers to form and join a union. Those are workers' rights. The right of workers to join a union should never be misconstrued with the government-granted right of a union boss to force any individual worker to submit to his will.

The NDP have filibustered their own legislation for two weeks now because they were busy rushing to slap together this bill so that it could be forced down the throats of this Legislature in late-night sittings. We know that even if the legal text of this bill was not written in time, the substantive content of the bill was written years ago by the bosses at the Federation of Labour and the special-interest groups that permeate the NDP and this government.

Instead of getting what they want in return for helping to elect the NDP, they have awoken thousands of Alberta workers to the reality of the NDP, and very soon that reality is going to come crashing down on the NDP and the special-interest groups that they represent. In two years from now Alberta will be rid of the NDP, and we will begin to repeal their socialist programs piece by piece. Taxpayers will not have to pay the carbon tax anymore, farmers will not be subject to Bill 6 anymore, our children will not have to pay today's debts anymore, and workers will not be taken for granted and used as political pawns by this government anymore. We will repeal any attempt to destroy the secret ballot in Alberta and restore real workers' rights in Alberta, not union boss rights.

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

Seeing none, before I recognize the next speaker to the bill, I've had a request to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you – and I believe he's still in the public gallery, but my position and stature make it hard to tell – a good friend of mine, Brendon Legault, who is the constituency manager for the Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre and the former executive assistant of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. He joins us here tonight to learn how a progressive government actually passes legislation to make life better for Albertans. If he'd please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Back on Bill 17. Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, after listening to that, jeez, I'm ready to submit you for the next Razzie award. That was quite a display. I think that for somebody that, you know, claims to know so much about unions, maybe we need to find you a union so you can learn how they operate.

Madam Speaker, it's very, very clear in the bill, assuming that folks actually read it, that the secret ballot is still there. It's not being taken away. You know, this rhetoric that we're hearing about how it's being denied and that we're taking democracy and trying to ship it off to the moon or something like that: I would suggest that maybe the member go back and take a little time to read the bill.

You know, in regard to this referral motion, Madam Speaker, let's be honest. We have not seen any significant updates to our labour legislation since 1988. I don't know about anybody else here, but 1988 was quite a while ago, just about 30 years ago. Not being from Calgary, I'm pretty sure that's when Calgary was hosting the Olympics. It was hosting the Olympics back in 1988, yet we have not been able to find the time in that time to update some of our legislation. As a result, we've very, very clearly fallen behind the rest of Canada because they're enjoying all of these great things that Bill 17 is going to be offering to them in terms of leaves and whatnot.

You know, let's be very clear here. I think the opposition really is not behind trying to make life better for Albertans, but certainly on this side of the House we are. It's our top priority to make sure that that happens, Madam Speaker. On this side of the House we want to make sure – when a mother needs to take time off because they have a sick child, the last thing they need to be worrying about is whether they're going to be keeping their job. That's something that I can relate to very, very personally because I've been in that position where I've had a sick child, but thankfully – maybe the member might have known this – there were rules in place that protected my job. Yet we're talking about repealing those kinds of things. If a worker happens to lose a family member, needs a day or two off to attend a funeral, we're going to repeal that kind of thing? That is absolutely shameful.

But that's not going to happen on this side of the House because on this side of the House we have Albertans' backs. We're going to make sure that their lives are better, and we're going to make sure that their rights are protected because that's what every other Canadian enjoys in this country. We're going to make sure that Albertans get the chance to finally enjoy those same benefits as well. We're talking about making modest changes here: fair, family workplaces. The other side is talking about getting rid of them and taking us back to – what was it? – the 1920s. Unbelievable.

So I will not be supporting this referral motion, Madam Speaker, and I would certainly urge all my other colleagues to not support this motion either.

With that, I would move to adjourn debate, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:18 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Nielsen
Bilous	Horne	Notley
Carlier	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Ceci	Larivee	Sabir
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	Mason	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Hinkley		

Against the motion:

Cooper	Gill	Strankman
Cyr	McIver	Yao
Fildebrandt	Smith	

Totals:	For – 37	Against – 8
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[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. With that useful 15 minutes of time well spent, I would move that we adjourn until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:35 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 30, 2017

Day 41

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

It's a beautiful day in which we can just reflect and pray, each in our own way. As we enjoy this privilege to start yet another day in such a beautiful province, in such a wonderful country, let us remind each other of our responsibility to find a democratic solution to the issues that our province faces.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

Mr. Hanson moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 29: Mr. Nielsen]

The Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak to the referral amendment? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support my hon. colleague in this referral amendment. The government should separate the job leave components of Bill 17 for immediate passage and send the bulk of the bill to committee. We have a system of democracy in place, and this government continues to disregard the importance of that process in crafting workable legislation for the benefit of all Albertans. The result is that all too often things are gotten wrong and we have to come back here in a two-year period to get them right, wasting the time and energy of Albertans.

This government is rushing through major changes. A 124-page bill was introduced yesterday afternoon, and we're already expected to be educated on it and to debate it intelligently. Come on. This is far too quick. We are all hon. colleagues working on behalf of Albertans. The least we can do is to get this right the first time, and it takes a little longer than the short period they've given us.

A 36-day consultation is not enough. Send it to a legislative standing committee to examine and to call witnesses. Then we can be sure to get a fair and balanced consultation. Maybe the government intended for very little discussion to happen. That's what happens when you have 124 pages go through so quickly. I'll be anxious to see if the House leader invokes closure, or time allocation, on this.

This legislation from the NDP government is omnibus in nature and would be best served if split into two distinct components to allow for faster passage of compassionate care leaves. This government is being disingenuous by lumping together changes to both the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code into one big omnibus bill.

This bill is far reaching and has the potential to change the economic landscape of this province. Alberta has been a prosperous, peaceful province for decades. We've had labour peace for decades, and the government's move could have incalculable consequences, consequences that could lower wages. I have even seen things in this bill already about allowing a union onto private property. Private property, Mr. Speaker. Those are property rights that we're dealing with. I don't allow anyone into my house that I don't want. Why should a private business allow someone unwelcome onto their property? It is a show of government having an unhealthy view of private property rights despite whatever the Government House Leader says as he rises to defend property rights. By their deeds you shall know them. Now the NDP will force employers to allow office space for unions on business property and allow access to their private property. This is scary stuff. This is why this bill needs to be split and sent to committee.

Should the government decide to split the current omnibus legislation into two components, it would allow for quick passage of compassionate care while allowing the summer to be used to consult on Labour Relations Code changes and other changes to employment standards, as was done last year with the Municipal Government Act. We have a session in October. That is plenty of time to get the consultation right. People that need to be consulted include Merit and the Progressive Contractors Association. I'm sure they have plenty to say about allowing salting and MERFing into Alberta. I'm also sure the Christian Labour Association of Canada would have much to say about these practices.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, this is why I need to see this bill sent to committee. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner?

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in full support of the referral motion. Now, that motion revolves around the government separating the job leave components of Bill 17 for immediate passage and sending the bulk of the bill to committee. If the NDP were true, if they were sincere in their often-expressed desire to work with all parties of the House, then it is only logical that they would separate this bill and, like I just said, send most of this bill to committee for real and extensive consultation with all interested parties, not just those that the government chose to consult with privately.

You know, before I move on, I just want to address that last statement on consultation. I'm not sure that the other side of the House is hearing what I hear when I run into people, but consulting with those that the government chooses rather than everyone in the province that may have an opinion or wish to make a submission on whatever the subject may be is not going unnoticed.

Anyway, it was a few short days ago that the Member for Calgary-North West was lamenting the lack of co-operation in this House. She commented how disappointed she was that an opposition member didn't give her a chance to sit down and discuss an amendment he had proposed. She was frustrated that there wasn't the opportunity for back and forth, and rightly so, on some of the good ideas of the amendment, and she didn't feel there was time to discuss the subamendment on her private member's bill.

Well, you know, folks, this side of the House knows only too well that feeling as the government side had every opportunity to do just that with Bill 204, the Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. Instead, they chose to use their majority to outright kill that bill, not propose reasonable amendments or send

it to committee for submissions from Albertans. They just plain and simple completely destroyed it instead with a majority.

On reflection, this is the perfect time for the government to put their words into action. Let's truly consult on this bill. Let's take the time to truly work together and have some back and forth here. Opposition members are sincere in updating employment standards for the province to protect those on compassionate leave and are more than prepared to work with the government to have those portions of the bill pass as quickly as possible. Splitting up this 124-page monstrosity would help us do just that.

Rushing through this giant omnibus bill is a great disservice to Albertans. How can we as legislators be expected to properly do our job when we have this enormous bill to go through and be expected to educate ourselves and those we are entrusted to represent in this House? How do we speak for them? Or does this government have such short memories concerning how their hubris got them in trouble with the farming and ranching communities? But they still believe they know best.

The government needs to stop pretending that it's a reasonable idea to lump the Employment Standards Code changes in with the Labour Relations Code changes. Government wasn't even that disingenuous to do that for the farm and safety round-tables. You knew that these two issues were so completely complex and far reaching that you realized it was best served to separate them into two different tables. I wonder why it is okay to do that for the round-tables and not for Bill 17. What is the government afraid of? Is it possible that the government rightly believes that the best case is for the government to jam through the more contentious aspects of this omnibus bill by hiding them under the reasonable aspects of the employment standards parts? That's just a notion, but I'm just going to talk about that notion for a moment.

Government set up two distinct tables under the enhanced safety for farm and ranch workers round-tables, obviously because they are two separate and distinct issues. Interestingly enough, in discussions with members of those tables as well as in review of the reports from the same, it came as no surprise and was easy and reasonable to see how those tables came about to almost complete consensus on the employment standards. There were good discussions back and forth and a respectful give-and-take. As a result, there was only one minor issue that wasn't agreed upon. I think it was light work for teenagers. The term "light work" has yet to be defined by regulation after consultation with the public as a matter of fact. Also, 16- and 17-year-olds cannot be employed in any hazardous activity without a permit. Hazardous activity is defined in future regulations after consultation with the public, something that's already been going on.

You know, it was a pretty good discussion if the final report came out with only those minor points that couldn't be agreed upon, obviously some give-and-take. As a result, it came as no surprise to me or anyone else, actually, that had seen Bill 17 that when the aspects of the farm and ranch employment standards portion of the bill were put forth, it was clear that they were being rolled out almost exactly as the recommendations from the round-table report.

10:10

Now, as far as the labour relations round-table discussions went, good discussions and respectful back and forth and give-and-take were not the case. As one member put it to me, quote: we strongly disagreed going into the discussions at the table, and we strongly disagreed coming out of those discussions. Unquote. I don't think it will surprise anyone here that the comment that I just quoted came from a rural resident, obviously, a farmer, actually, one of the few that was allowed on those farm and ranch safety round-tables, a

farmer that over and above the busy life of just being a farmer is involved with many of the aspects of the ag coalition. But I digress.

I doubt it is much of a leap to figure out that the government knew there would be backlash, and that is why they brought forth Bill 17 as a giant omnibus bill rather than bringing it out as separate entities. Once again it bears repeating that the Wildrose would support those employment standards changes that make life better for everyone. Heck; we could move forward immediately, straight through to Royal Assent if there was the political will from the government. But it appears that the government is going to be taking the spoonful of honey with the bitter medicine approach here in trying to make a bitter labour-friendly bill more publicly palatable by including the feel-good employment standards changes that they knew opposition parties would all agree on.

This is an obvious ploy that the government publicity machine is churning out on the social media feeds of the NDP members, tweets of feigned outrage that the opposition is voting against domestic violence leave, compassionate leave, et cetera, et cetera. All that is just a red herring. For a year and a half we've heard this stuff. I scrape it off my boots every weekend when I go home to work with cattle.

You know, the government pulled this on Bill 6. They do their best to change the channel every single time they know they are in the wrong. Mr. Speaker, the stick from the government side of the House is getting tiring. If the government is truly sincere about this, then take the time to get this legislation right. After all, doing what is right for all Albertans is our responsibility. That is a phrase that the government side uses every time someone from the front bench stands up to speak. It would be best for all of us to use the summer to receive meaningful feedback on all the proposed changes and come back in the fall with recommendations to committee and also to suggest stakeholders who may wish to appear or submit. Rushing through such important legislation at the end of session under the guise of a 124-page bill is a ploy that Albertans will see right through. If the government continues to move forward in the direction it appears it's going to take, their credibility will fall faster than Alberta's credit rating from Standard & Poor's.

Everyone in this House has a responsibility to all Albertans to respect the process and the role of democracy and make sure that the government puts forth workable legislation that benefits us all. Separate this bill into usable pieces. Identify all of the best of the employment standards legislation that will protect the vulnerable and the marginalized, get these solid pieces passed quickly, and take the time to properly consult with Albertans on the rest. It's imperative that we work together and send the unwieldy parts to committee, where it can get its proper due diligence, not a rushed, 30-day cursory consultation with private, hand-picked groups. We need to throw light on the process. Make it public, make it engaged, and make it fair for all people.

Once again, the members of the Official Opposition are willing to provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers from being fired for taking a sick day, protecting workers from being fired for caring for a baby, protecting workers from being fired for attending a citizenship ceremony, for looking after a sick relative, or for taking time off as a victim of domestic violence. I'm sure that the other members in opposition would agree. The fact is that there are good, solid pieces of legislation here, but the government needs to show Albertans they are serious about working for all of them. They need to show that they aren't just about ideology and protecting their labour friends, because, folks, that's what it looks like.

Mr. Speaker, there's no need for the haste in which this bill is being pushed through. There is no public emergency like with our current fentanyl crisis. It's simply the government being lazy in

their approach and lazy in their preparation. We've already acknowledged the good that many aspects of this bill can achieve, but it's the education of it that is suspect.

We've seen weeks of the NDP backbench tossing up speeches on their own legislation in order to string out the session. It speaks volumes about the preparedness of the government. If the session needed to be extended because you thought you had so much important work to do, then why did we not start session a month earlier? Remember how you wanted to make the Legislature more family friendly? I'm sure running night sittings is the exact opposite of family friendly, Mr. Speaker.

It's time to show this province what kind of government you want to be known for, a reasonable one that can work with opposition or the type of government that bullies its legislation through simply because it can, the same type that several members of the government used to decry when they sat on opposition benches.

There is no way – no way – that you can sell the urgency of the labour aspect of this bill. Even the most uninformed Albertan knows that anything as hefty as a labour bill such as the one before us now cannot have received proper consultation in a mere 36 days. If anything, you will gain support by taking the time to send this bill to committee and using the summer to consult with all affected parties, not just those chosen and hand-picked. Do the right thing, separate this bill, and let's pass the good pieces quickly and start consultation on the labour process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions for the Member for Little Bow?

Seeing and hearing none, speaking to the amendment, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. I enjoyed your comments at the opening of our morning session, talking about using democracy to achieve an end here. That's what I'm hoping we're going to do here today. It's a fine day in Alberta, and democracy is well achieved on days like this, sir. I appreciate that.

Some of the early commentary and the banter in the Chamber reminded me of early days in my farming background when I was asked to go out and gather the eggs and I heard a lot of cackling and chortling in the farmyard. It was interesting to watch the chickens scratching around in the dirt, and then you'd hear the cackling and chortling. And as members came to the Chamber, there seemed to be a lot of that going on in here, but now everybody has settled down and seems to be occupied with some form of reading and modern material.

I'm going to continue on with my opinion in support of this amendment. An option could be to refer it to a standing committee. That, too, Mr. Speaker, is some of the important work that we do here. To reiterate, this bill does have important aspects that, I believe, all members should be able to agree on. For example, parental leave extension, compassionate leave, and time for citizenship ceremonies are easy to get behind. Coming from a rural background – and many people know of this era – we take our days of compassion and respect for death and/or other humanistic functions at our own choice. In many ways they don't have to be legislated. They are done out of complete and absolute respect for the people that have earned that relationship with those who attend either at a wedding or a church service or a funeral service to exhibit their personal and open respect. They don't need legislation to force them there.

I'm going to be reiterating in some cases what my opposition colleagues have said over and over again, that we sincerely have no issue with updating these employment standards components of the bill. We are here willing to work with the government to get these passed as quickly as possible. What we won't do is allow the government to use these compassionate changes to bulldoze through labour changes without proper consultation. That's a good part, Mr. Speaker, of the frustration coming from the opposition side of the Chamber through all this. This legislation from the government is, for all purposes, a bulky 124-page bill and would be best served if split into two distinct components to allow for quick passage of the compassionate care components.

10:20

It is no secret that this government has an atrocious record when it comes to proper consultation on legislation. They failed miserably on Bill 6, to the point of mass protests outside this Chamber, historical sized protests. Over 1,800 people were hoping to have their representation heard outside the Chamber.

They failed on consulting on the carbon tax, opting for a weighted, highly biased, and leading questionnaire instead of public consultation. They're failing to do a proper public consultation with the education curriculum, and they're once again failing to adequately consult on this labour legislation.

Webster's defines consultation as "the act of consulting or conferring," a meeting for deliberation, discussion, or decision. Public consultation is defined as a process by which the public's input on matters affecting them is sought. That can be done in many different ways, whether it be by referendum or broad white paper consultations, for example.

Mr. Speaker, inviting select groups who are primarily favourable to this government's world view isn't exactly the definition of proper, fair, or equitable consultation. It doesn't take a Leap Manifesto of logic to predict that those types of consultations will come down heavily on the government's side. What needs to happen is to separate the components of this bill into employment standards and labour elements, much like the government recognized was needed on the farm safety round-tables. This precedent has already been established by the government. They recognized that the issues were too complex to simply lump together into one round-table.

In this case, the case of this legislation, 124 pages of eloquent reading: what has changed? This government has rushed through major changes introduced late last week, and we're already expected to be fully educated on it and debate it in a robust, educated way. Could it be that the government intended for little discussion to happen and simply wanted to move it on through or jam it on through? Why can't we ensure that this is done properly? Why not take this summer to consult with Albertans and amend it if necessary? We can fast-track the important employment aspects without opposition. Why the artificially set urgency in this legislation? Some would even say that there is contempt to including the public in the consultation process. That does not lead, Mr. Speaker, to the democracy you talked about in the opening of this morning's session.

Alberta's current union certification system has resulted in 30-plus years of stable labour peace and the highest wages in the nation. How would taking the summer to gather more public and business opinions hurt that process? What harm would sending it off to a standing committee that's dominated by government backbenchers possibly have in the passing of the legislation? Is there a question of solidarity in the government ranks?

We need to take the time to do this right, and that means more than barely a month of consultation and a week of debate or less.

Ontario has taken years of consultation for their labour rewrite. Why not take a minimum of five or six months for Alberta's legislation?

Mr. Speaker, there are several troubling aspects of these labour changes that I can highlight here. Let's use this example. The restriction requiring employees in the construction industry to have worked for an employer for 30 days in order to participate in a union certification vote would be removed. In addition, employees would not have up to 90 days to reconsider their decision. So you can literally have people join your workforce today with the full intention of unionizing the workplace. They get hired to work a job and get to work on unionizing the workforce immediately before even knowing anything about the actual job participation or anything about you or your co-workers or anyone involved in the workplace. This is known as salting, by the way, and it's a tactic that unions commonly use. Bill 17 removes the protection that the Labour Relations Amendment Act of 2008 provided against such a tactic. I note, in particular, a hyperbole from the other side claiming no changes to the labour act for decades. Perhaps they meant no changes favourable to big labour.

Another problematic notion is the fact that under the current provisions of the code it suspends the collection and remittance of union dues during an illegal strike, which would be removed under Bill 17. If the strike is illegal, why should the union be entitled to have the employer continue to collect and send those union dues in?

Lastly, this new legislation gives the Labour Relations Board new powers, including the ability to "decide how and whether to publish any of its decisions." Only under the NDP world view would anyone think that this constitutes an open and transparent process. It's just not clear what the impact would be to Alberta businesses should these labour provisions be rushed through. Again, you need to broadly consult with Alberta's businesses.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a few examples of some of the more contentious issues that need to be addressed. That's why it is so important that we take the time to get this right, and that means more than 30-odd days of consultation and a brief week of debate.

Should the government decide to split the current 124-page chunk of legislation into two components, it would allow quicker passage of compassionate care while allowing for the summer to be used to consult on Labour Relations Code changes and other changes to employment standards. This was successfully done last year with the Municipal Government Act, so why couldn't the same be done with this legislation?

This bill has far-reaching, possibly unintended consequences and has the potential to change the economic landscape of this province. Again I reiterate that it can possibly create a myriad of unintended consequences. Why not take the time to ensure that we get it right? I simply don't see the harm in doing that despite the purely hysterical attempt by the government to paint the opposition as villains. I quite enjoy the charades that that creates, and I'm enjoying hearing some of the comments from, again, across the aisle.

I'd like to reiterate what the Leader of the Opposition said from day one. We are more than willing to provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers from being fired for taking sick days, looking after a sick relative, attending a citizenship ceremony, for example, or taking time off as a victim of domestic violence. These are all examples, Mr. Speaker, and in my upbringing and history or background we didn't need legislation to do that. They were done out of earned compassion and respect for the citizenry that we lived and worked with every day. We could get those most important aspects done within a very few days. We just need this government

to show a willingness to get this done in an amicable fashion. This can be done.

Again, Mr. Speaker, let's work together. Let's split this bill up and pass the solid pieces that we can agree on and potentially move the rest to committee. Let's take the summer to consult with all the groups affected by this proposed legislation and get them in front of a committee to publicly share their thoughts, take a broad reading on the perceptions and the perspectives of a greater portion of Albertans. It boggles the mind that this government would be content to have its legacy defined by their inability to get a simple thing like a public consultation done correctly.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask and plead: do the right thing, government, for the right reasons. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: Of course, Mr. Speaker, and of course I don't want you to forget about the great community of Rimbey. I can't forget about the good people of Rimbey.

Under 29(2)(a) to the member for Strathmore-Drumheller. No. That'll be soon, from what I understand. But for Drumheller-Stettler I do have a question.

The Speaker: I need to remember Rimbey, and then you can remember Stettler.

Mr. Nixon: I'll try, Mr. Speaker, for sure. We might be able to practise together later on.

Anyway, I would like to ask a question to the hon. member under 29(2)(a). I was very interested in hearing his remarks, particularly around the need for consultation and how some of the actions of this government, not yours, of course, Mr. Speaker, but how this government's behaviour in their time in power has impacted his constituents and their inability to consult, to talk to the people that they're attempting to govern, and how they're often changing the way that they've done things for long periods of time. He referred to lots of good issues, including Bill 6. I know, Mr. Speaker, you saw that debacle first-hand, and I know that you, without a doubt, were disappointed in that, as I was.

10:30

One of the areas I like to talk about is the democracy portion of this. It is interesting that the only time this government seems to want to consult with the people that they're attempting to write legislation for is on things like time change bills or the hon. member's private member's bill that would stop taxpayer money from being used to advertise for the benefit of the governing party during by-elections or elections, something I think most Albertans would be behind right away. Those bills were sent off to committee, and we've never seen them again since. When it comes to a bill of this magnitude, the largest bill that I have seen in my elected life, this government wants to try to force it through this House in one week. One week. In one week they want to try to bring it through the House. I know they think it's funny that they want to do that to Albertans, but I certainly don't, Mr. Speaker. They want to bring it through in one week, but they'll go and consult on other stuff.

I mean, there was also another situation, of course, over the last year where this government, as you know, Mr. Speaker, spent all their time trying to get their campaign finances paid for instead of consulting Albertans on that, where this side of the House had to fight on behalf of Albertans to finally get that silly behaviour to stop. In regard to this government now, with this bill, trying to take away secret ballots, it's so appalling, just appalling behaviour.

Ms Jansen: Super PACs and you guys.

Mr. Nixon: I know the Member for Calgary-North West seems to be trying to defend that behaviour. It would very interesting for me to hear . . . [interjection] Oh, then the Minister for Education really wants to defend that behaviour, too. That doesn't surprise me as much as the Member for Calgary-North West.

Mr. Speaker, I would be interested in hearing the member's comments on how his constituents feel about this great attack on democracy by the current NDP government, which, in some ways, maybe we shouldn't be surprised at because they've been attacking democracy since they were elected, over and over and over, trying to stack the deck to their advantage. Maybe I would be interested in hearing what the Member for Drumheller-Stettler thinks of this continued behaviour by this government to attack democracy in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'd just caution on using the words "attack democracy." It's a pretty sensitive issue.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. It still is Drumheller-Stettler, the diverse constituency of which I'm proud to be the representative only. And, yes, I do take great umbrage at the democracy that Bill 6 did or did not represent for the constituency.

To that end, I'd like to relate a situation that occurred on the last day of passing that legislation. Some members may remember the emotion expressed by government members in the House that day. Some people may not know that during that debate, when there were some 1,800 people out in front of the Legislature here, I personally received a note from the Sergeant-at-Arms requesting my presence at the front door. There were great concerns that those gentlemen had that day at the front door regarding the security that would be exhibited by the demonstrators, who were right on the steps. They were right at the door. They were right up at the steps. The gentlemen down there asked me to go out and speak to those people while we were having our QP session here, Mr. Speaker. Not a lot of people know this, but I actually went down there and was asked by the security of this building to go and speak to the demonstrators down there. I said, "Why do you want some humble farmer from Drumheller-Stettler?" "Because," they said, "they know you, and they know what you're going to do."

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. We're speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Barnes: Yes, please. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this morning to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. This amendment seeks to ensure that all Albertans have an opportunity to provide input and advice to the government on this critical bill. This is what this amendment seeks to ensure.

This is a massive omnibus labour bill – a massive omnibus labour bill – that brings forward sweeping changes to both our Employment Standards Code and our Labour Relations Code. While many of the changes proposed in this bill on their own might be defensible, we need to stop and ask ourselves: what is the big picture? Although several of the changes that have been proposed in this ominous bill were more or less expected and not terribly controversial – in fact, some of them are supported by the Wildrose – this bill has dozens of small and large sections that chip away at employers, that chip away at employers while we are already facing tremendously challenging economic times. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we are sincere in wanting to update our employment standards in the

province to protect those on compassionate leave, and we want to work with this government to have them pass it as quickly as possible.

But this NDP government needs to realize that more consultations and analysis are needed before making these sweeping changes, again, Mr. Speaker, especially because of these challenging economic times. Alberta's job creators have already taken so many blows from this NDP government's insistence on putting ideology over reason. The best protection for employees is a strong and stable economy. Sadly, this government continually puts ideology and imposing their NDP world view above keeping our economy strong.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about that strong and stable economy for a couple of seconds. I think back to my high school and university years, where for fellow students and fellow Medicine Hatters there wasn't a need to look for a job before the last day of school because the economy was so strong, jobs were everywhere and plentiful, pay was good. Employees had tremendous, tremendous options.

Up until three or four years ago, up until two years ago especially, that same type of labour market existed for employees, where lots of employers went above and beyond, knew that being fair, providing good options and good pay for their employees were ways to everyone's success: employers, employees, Albertans. I think John F. Kennedy said, "a rising tide lifts all boats." Well, when the tide used to rise in this province – Mr. Speaker, when the tide used to rise – many, many Albertans benefited, including our employees.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, this government continually puts ideology and imposing the NDP world view above, before keeping our economy strong, and this government doesn't understand what it costs Alberta families, what it costs Albertans, what it costs Alberta communities. And I'm not talking about debt ratings plummeting; I'm talking about families not being able to afford the basics. Alberta's economy simply cannot afford to absorb it. This NDP government is sacrificing jobs, our jobs, purely to please their base.

I would implore this government to do the right thing, split this bill in two so that we can pass the compassionate leave portions of this bill as quickly as possible and send other components of the bill for further review to experts, to Albertans, to employees and employers, to those Albertans that spend most every day out there making our province, our communities, and our families strong. If they are sincere in taking the time to get this right, the NDP government will use the summer to receive meaningful feedback on all of the changes and the combined ramifications, including a closer look at their unintended consequences.

As has already been stated by some of my hon. colleagues, we will even provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers. We will provide unanimous consent for protecting workers from being fired for taking a sick day or looking after a sick relative, caring for a baby, attending a citizenship ceremony, or taking time off as a victim of domestic violence, those changes in life where we all can support each other and will. Again, I'm just asking the NDP government to do the right thing and make this part go unanimously and quickly.

10:40

Mr. Speaker, the changes being proposed in this bill are not subtle and minor changes. They will have drastic intended and unintended consequences for our labour market. It's supply and demand. It will affect everyone both ways. They are not aspects that Albertans want to see rushed through. For example, the changes to the Labour Relations Code include card check certification – goodbye, secret

ballot – salting and MERFing, farm and ranch workers, first contract arbitration, essential services, dependent contractors, the Rand formula, suspension of dues, reverse onus, secondary picketing, enhancement of powers of Labour Relations Board arbitrators, duty of fair representation, greater transparency, and international loopholes. Sadly, those are only the changes to the labour relations portion of this bill, an omnibus bill at its worst.

There are also substantial changes to the employment standards, with underage workers, leaves, overtime pay, holiday pay, farm and ranch – back to that Bill 6 nightmare – temporary layoff periods, persons with disabilities, termination, and administrative penalties taking away more control of Albertans' lives.

Changes to workplace-related legislation are important, and, Mr. Speaker, they will have a direct impact on businesses, employees, supply and demand of labour, and the province's overall economic future. Due to the large impacts workplace-related legislation has on the province as a whole, some other governments that have endeavoured to make significant changes to their workplace legislation have embarked on formal reviews and lengthy consultative processes. For example, in Ontario – even in Ontario – there was the changing workplaces review, which took place over a two-year span. It focused on reviewing their employment standards code and their labour relations code. Over this two-year span there were over 200 public presentations, over 500 written submissions, which resulted in 173 recommendations being put forward. My goodness, it's nice to see an Alberta NDP government learn something from a left Ontario government.

This is in stark contrast to this government's consultations, a mere 36 days of consultations and a week of debate in the Legislature: instead of two years, a week of debate and 36 days. Changes of this magnitude, that carry this much weight on the overall economic well-being of our province, deserve and need to have more consultation. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure there's a happy medium between the two-year process in Ontario and a five-week process that this government thinks is good enough.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that I've noticed an alarming trend, whether it's a carbon tax, changes to our electricity market that soon will have the taxpayers subsidizing the ratepayer at perhaps \$10 million a week, tax hikes, or the minimum wage. This NDP government either refuses – refuses – to do an impact assessment, or they just completely ignore the evidence in favour of advancing the NDP world view and ideology.

Mr. Speaker, another alarming trend is their lack of consultation, something they campaigned on doing the opposite, but whether it's budget, farm safety, emissions caps, and the carbon tax – totally silent on the carbon tax – once again one could only assume that they either don't want to hear what Albertans have to say, or they don't care and once again push their NDP world view.

Mr. Speaker, we both know that Albertans deserve better. I would encourage all of my hon. colleagues to support this excellent referral amendment and allow the sweeping changes being proposed in this omnibus bill to have more thorough consultation with stakeholders and Albertans. We cannot go wrong if we allow Albertans a bigger voice. This would allow government to split apart the bill and bring forward a bill that would protect those on compassionate leave – a good thing – and let us pass this portion as quickly as possible.

As I said earlier, we will even provide unanimous consent for all three stages of reading for the components of the bill that relate to protecting workers from being fired after taking a sick day or looking after a sick relative, caring for a baby, attending a citizenship ceremony, or taking time off as a victim of domestic violence. Mr. Speaker, this also allows the government to bring other aspects of the bill forward for further consultation and study.

Mr. Speaker, this is why this is so clearly a win-win and something that Albertans deserve. I ask all of my hon. colleagues to support this referral amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for an excellent speech. I found it very informative and educating.

An Hon. Member: Riveting.

Mr. Nixon: Riveting. Speaking towards the amendment, I can see, of course, Mr. Speaker, that it seems the government agrees with me on that assessment, which is excellent. I'm always happy when the NDP is following the opposition's example. That's usually when they're doing good work. In this case I would strongly suggest that they take the member's words seriously to heart and have a look at this amendment and the importance of consultation.

One of the questions that I have for the member, after listening to his presentation, is around this whole concept of consultation. Some of the concerns that I know I hear from my constituents and, I suspect, that he hears from his constituents are about this government's tendency not to consult on bills, particularly on bills where I think they're probably nervous about the reaction of the public.

As I was talking about earlier in the day, Mr. Speaker, we see stuff like a time change bill go to committee for lots of consultation. Stuff like the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler's private member's bill, stopping taxpayer money from being used by the governing party of the day during elections to be able to finance campaign-funded advertisement stuff, went off to committee. We never saw it again inside this Chamber. But a bill of this magnitude is all of a sudden being pushed through within a week, with no consultation. Certainly, the constituents that I represent don't feel that they've been consulted with. The government says that they consulted with them, with these come-and-be-told meetings. It's quite shocking.

Now, some of the other examples I could think of since this government has come into power is stuff like Bill 6, which, of course, has been talked about many times in this House. You know, the government's behaviour on Bill 6 has made it so that generations of people inside of rural Alberta and farming and ranching communities will never look to the NDP again. I was at a 4-H sale last night in Sundre, Mr. Speaker, and little kids showing me their projects, their steers and their sheep and stuff that are going into their sales, are still talking about the government's blatant – blatant – disregard for their way of life and complete inability to consult with them. That's just one example.

The hon. member brought up carbon tax. Carbon tax: that's another one. I see, Mr. Speaker, that the minister of agriculture is really, really concerned about it. I don't blame him. Based on the reaction there and the fact that he represents a rural riding, I would be very, very concerned, too, about how they're feeling, which is the point of this referral. Instead of making the same mistakes that the hon. minister made with Bill 6, with the complete disregard for all of rural Alberta and our second-largest industry, maybe they should not make the same mistake that his department made during that debacle, and they should consult with the people of Alberta. That is the core of this amendment that we're debating right now, whether or not this should be referred to committee.

Now, the carbon tax is another good example. The hon. member talked about the carbon tax, again something – I know, Mr. Speaker,

as you travel around your constituency, you're hearing from just as many constituents as I would hear from in regard to their concern over the carbon tax and the fact that this government never campaigned on it. They brought forward a tax that's buying people light bulbs but not doing much else. They didn't consult with the people of Alberta. If they did, they would have heard that our schools are having trouble staying open now as a result of the decisions associated with the carbon tax. Our municipalities are struggling, are going to have to raise property taxes. How do we know with this bill right now, that the government is trying to ram through this House in a week, that there aren't going to be similar consequences?

Mr. Bilous: Hey, we can stay for three weeks.

10:50

Mr. Nixon: Now, I know that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wants to stay for three weeks. Well, certainly, we should stay for three weeks if that's what it takes to get the work done. What would be nice, though, Mr. Speaker, is if the hon. Deputy Government House Leader would take the time to consult with the people of Alberta rather than just coming here.

That is what's most disappointing. This government continues over and over and over not to want to talk to the people of Alberta, not to want to talk . . . [interjections] This is 29(2)(a), questions and comments, of course, for the hon. member. The government continues to not want to consult with the people of Alberta, and there are serious consequences of that decision. There are serious consequences to the future of this government.

Now, I don't care about the reputation of this government – it's shot with the people of Alberta, again, for generations – but I do care about the people of Alberta, who can have consequences. We've seen it with Bill 6, the carbon tax, election changes, all these things that are coming from this government as a result of their complete and utter refusal to communicate with the people of Alberta.

So I would like to hear, under my 29(2)(a) questions and comments, what the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat feels about . . . [interjections] Well, you know, I've got five minutes to talk on comments. That's what the standing orders say, and I'm quite happy to do that, Mr. Speaker. It appears that the government really wants to hear from me by their reaction, so I'm quite enjoying that.

With that said, though, I would like to hear from the hon. member . . . [interjections] Of course they want to. Agreed. They want to hear from me. So enjoyable, Mr. Speaker, the time and the behaviour of the government.

Now I would really like to hear from the hon. member on what he thinks about the consultation question. [Mr. Nixon's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to the amendment on Bill 17? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to rise and speak to this bill, and it's with concern, of course, that I'm rising to speak about this. There are a couple of things that I wanted to speak about today. In my mind, I'm extremely confused, I guess, for lack of a better word, and my confusion is based on the language that is used in the title of this piece of legislation and what is actually being accomplished.

To reiterate what some of the members on this side have said, there is a very good reason to be looking at the compassionate care. As a private-sector worker I probably – we've got a roomful of experts here who work in the public sector, who have worked under

the auspices of unions and have a great deal of knowledge. So I certainly do look towards that knowledge in order to understand a little bit more about this legislation.

But coming from an area of the private sector, Mr. Speaker, you know, when I look at things that are in the compassionate care, these are things that, when you're in the private sector, you also have to follow through with as well. It never occurred to me that we wouldn't do these things for people that work for us. I think one of the things that was devastating to read was the fact that there has to be legislation for the death or disappearance of a child, that it actually has to be written into legislation to make sure that people can have leave for something so absolutely horrible. I just can't imagine that an employer would not allow that to happen.

If that is the case, obviously, this legislation needs to be changed in order to make sure that the people that are working in these unions are able to actually access the ability to leave if they need to. I didn't realize until after reading this that the jobs in a labour union would not allow for a person to leave if their child had disappeared, and with the fact that it has to be put into legislation, well, I'm grateful. I'm grateful that it's in there. Obviously, if it has to be listed, it's something that somebody has suffered within the labour legislation. So thank you for making those much-needed changes in order to make sure that people who work for labour unions are actually protected and are able to leave if a child disappears or dies or for miscarriages or any of those other things.

Like I said, in the private sector, for the folks that work for us, anyway, these are things that you would take care of within the business that you work in. I've never actually had a contract that I've had to have one of the people that work for me sign where I had to lay out the number of days for a particular issue such as domestic violence or bereavement leave or any of those kinds of things. Those are usually negotiated upon. I mean, especially when somebody is bereaved or if your child went missing, I can't even imagine having to go negotiate with your adviser to see if you could actually leave to go and take care of your family.

Anyway, I'm very grateful that the legislation is being changed. So thank you to the government for putting in these changes, where people within the industry have been obviously hurt by not having this in the legislation. I think that's why it's so important to make sure and why we've said on a couple of occasions to actually split the legislation. The name of the legislation refers, I think, to this piece, and I think there's a lot of work that could be done on this piece to make sure that these numbers are correct. Potentially, the government has consulted on these particular things through hearing from people who work for labour unions that they're not being taken care of by the people they work for in order to have to lay these kinds of things out. So thank you for doing that, and thank you for making sure that the folks that work for labour unions have these things.

Aside from that, we're talking about two different chunks of this bill. We're talking about compassionate care – that's this piece – so things like maternity leave, parental leave, compassionate care, death or disappearance of a child, critical illness, long-term illness, domestic violence, personal and family responsibility leave, bereavement leave, citizenship ceremonies, overtime pay, a lot of these things that I've seen that are listed in the legislation. So thank you for making sure that the workers are protected from the people that they work for.

One of the things that I wanted to bring up, too, is that we've got the family-friendly piece – that's that – but then we also have the piece on the Labour Relations Code changes. When we're talking about that, that's where I'm particularly confused. Why we're asking to keep this legislation going a little bit longer is because we really believe that 36 days is not long enough. I have a document

that I'm going to table a little bit later. It talks about the need to actually take a look more deeply at the legislation, especially because we're looking at federal changes for this legislation as well as provincial changes for the legislation. [interjection]

One of the members across the way said: 30 years. You might be correct that 30 years have passed since the legislation has changed, but please don't mince words in that there has not been 30 years of consultation. If you have that, please present it. If you have 30 years of consultation, please present that. That would be wonderful. There are some things that you can say, you know, that in 30 years haven't been changed – that's fair; nobody is saying that the legislation doesn't need to be looked at – but to assume that for 30 years you've consulted and that you have the data that you need in order to make sure that these changes are actually appropriate, that's a completely different argument.

Like I said, if we're talking about the compassionate care pieces, I couldn't agree more. If it has to be detailed and written out like that to protect the workers that work for unions, yes, I agree one hundred per cent. Aside from that, if we're looking at the other parts of this legislation, I think we have some discussion that we need to have, and why not take the summer? It's really only a couple of months. I mean, we're back here at the end of October. Some of our legislation that we've had the privilege of putting forward here in this session will actually be put to the next session. It actually gives all of us a little bit more time to consult. I'm certainly grateful for time to consult on my bill, and I'm very, very grateful that that stakeholder outreach will continue to go on.

Like many members have said and upon speaking to some of the people in my constituency, I'm pretty sure that union workers would appreciate an opportunity to chime in on this a little bit more. There's no harm. What is the difference of four months at this point in time, Mr. Speaker? To take the time, which is why we want to refer it to committee – right? – it would be absolutely within the auspices of serving Albertans. That's what we're put here to do, to serve Albertans. So why not take a few more months, four to six months, and put it into committee? We can have a chance to talk about it, and then when that legislation comes forward, you are absolutely certain that all of the folks that are going to be impacted by this have had a chance to speak up, to speak their minds.

Again, I think that the title is wrong, but that's just my opinion.

Mr. Nixon: It's a good opinion.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

I think that any time you're bringing in a large piece of legislation like this, any time you do something like that, you have to ask a couple of questions. One of those things is: what does this bill mean to the people that it's impacting, right? The second piece is: has there been enough time or ability? There are a lot of reasons why consultation may or may not happen, right? So have you had the time and the ability to consult to minimize any of the unintended consequences? It's just another piece that needs to be looked at.

11:00

Then, the third piece is: have you actually drawn on the wisdom and the strengths of Albertans in crafting the legislation? As you look at other pieces of legislation, as the hon. members on this side have mentioned very eloquently, there has been lack of consultation on many, many pieces. I could go through and list them again, but, believe me, people know.

Again, it just goes to show that here's a government that really has a good chunk of experts on this particular piece of legislation, a lot of experts in the room, that could use that expertise and that knowledge and that ability to really reach out and take the time to

make sure that this legislation is really solid. There are some really good things in here as well. I'm only looking at the critical parts of it because that's my job. My job is to hopefully give you some interpretation of my eyes on it. Whether you choose to agree or disagree, you're completely entitled to your opinion, and that's fair, but I also believe that my eyes on it, coming from my perspective, will do nothing but help to enhance and strengthen this legislation. So it would be very, very appropriate for the government just to listen and actually to listen to Albertans and take that opportunity.

I don't even know how many pieces of legislation we've put to committee. I'd have to go through everything that I've actually spoken on to see.

Mr. Bilous: Almost everything. Almost every piece.

Mrs. Aheer: I think the minister is correct. I think that it could be close to almost every large piece of legislation.

Part of the reason that happens is because we're concerned about the consultation, but we're also concerned that a lot of the legislation packs in a ton of things into one piece of legislation that doesn't actually represent everything at one time, because if you vote against one thing, you end up negating an entire bill. There are good pieces of this bill. What does that say about the government that they would put pieces of this in a piece of legislation that you look at and you're going, "Yup, that's good; that's good," but there's no way without consultation that we can take a look at this bill in good faith and say we can vote for this?

So why not split it? Why not split it? I just don't understand why we can't put compassionate care through and protect the people that are working for labour unions and then take a look at the other pieces of this legislation a little bit more closely.

I mean, our job in being here is to try and work through the confusion. A lot of the confusion that I'm laying out for the government right now is confusion that is coming from people that I've spoken to. I don't think that that's a bad thing. I think it is fair to bring forward that and ask for clarity. So I'd like to have some clarity as to why we can't split this piece of legislation. Why? Why wouldn't you do that? It's a really, really easy request. Why?

Ms Fitzpatrick: You're going to chop everything up.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, why not chop everything up? There are a lot of good reasons, actually, to do that. It's actually a really fair, fair question.

The Speaker: Folks, I'd like to remind you to stay on the amendment.

Mrs. Aheer: Then, in terms of putting it to committee, that's exactly why I'm asking about that, Mr. Speaker, because there are so many pieces of this. With 36 days of consultation under their belt and the inability to actually talk to people succinctly about how this is – and the reason I bring this up is that I'd like to move forward on a couple of things here.

One of those is the secret ballot. Yesterday we brought that up in a couple of other speeches. I think that the government thinks that by what they're doing right now, Albertans don't understand the difference between having a secret ballot and not having a secret ballot.

I know this is going to bring some giggles, but I just have to do it. I'm going to table a policy brief from the Manning centre. [interjections] The reason why I'm tabling this brief...

The Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. member, if you're tabling it, table it this afternoon.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh, sorry. I apologize. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I will table this later.

The Speaker: Thank you. Stay on the amendment, the issue.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, sir. This is towards the amendment.

The reason why I'm tabling this particular brief isn't so much about the opinions, which I think are interesting, which I'd like to bring up, but more than that is that this actually has data in it, like, actual data. That's why I want to make sure that the government gets this document, so that we can have a chance to maybe talk about it . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please. Keep it down. Keep it down.

Mrs. Aheer: . . . and maybe have an opportunity to look at it from a different perspective, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that I wanted to bring up is that Manitoba right now is trying to change it so that there is a mandatory secret ballot. Up until now, Mr. Speaker, in a lot of jurisdictions 40 per cent would trigger that vote.

I have to say after reading this that quite often the secret ballot, just for the information of people like myself who are just actually in the process of learning about this legislation – what I found was interesting. The secret ballot actually doesn't take away from a union being able to unionize. In fact, the secret ballot is one of those pieces of democracy that strengthens a union's ability to bring forward and unionize. However, right now with the legislation that's being presented – and we're assuming that people have their own free will to sign these cards, so let's assume that that's true – at 65 per cent there's no more secret ballot. There's no more. The members were telling me: no; the secret ballot is in there. It's actually not. It's been negated completely by that piece of legislation.

Now, my question is: why did the secret ballot come to be in the first place? Why was it even necessary? Why did we need it? Well, the secret ballot was invoked for the very reason that under the auspices of democracy in a group of people, people could make that decision because you have the right to change your mind, I would assume. You sign a card saying: yes, this union looks good. Then you have a chance to look at the information, and you're like: maybe not.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to speak against this amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you can't rise to speak to the amendment. You can make a comment or a question to the member, but it's, really, the statements now.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yeah. What I'd like to know is that basically – there are a number of things. You've talked about how much you support different kinds of leaves, so I'm going to first talk about family-friendly leaves, in particular about the leave with respect to domestic violence.

I've shared my experience about domestic violence previously. When I finally charged my ex with domestic violence, I called the police 16 times in 14 days. One of those calls was when he showed up at my place of employment and was waving a gun. I worked at a brace shop, a private business. There were patients in the waiting room waiting to be measured or fitted for different kinds of orthopaedic or prosthetic devices. There were a number of men who worked in my

place of employment with me, and they came out to support and protect me. The police were called, and he left before the police arrived. My boss called me into the office and told me that he would have to let me go because our clients and other staff were put at risk.

I left and went home and felt absolutely devastated. I was at my wits' end. What was I going to do? Later that evening . . .

The Speaker: I need to remind you again that it's to the amendment that we're speaking.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yeah. I'm going to get to it.

Later he called me. He apologized. He asked me to come back to work. He said that I was a great employee, and he was not going to put me at further risk; they would figure out what to do. I told him that I also worried about those things because I cared about the people I worked with. He apologized again and said that I could come back to work when I was ready, and they would figure out how to deal with the work situation to keep us all safe.

Situations similar to this happen over and over again. It happened when I was in corrections. I heard it from parolees, colleagues. I heard telephone conversations from open cubicles. As a union representative I heard those things. Within the public we don't hear about those incidents unless there is a death and the police become involved. The reality is that we all need to recognize those signs, and we need to take action. This bill takes action.

Certainly, one of the first things that we can do is having that time so that the person can go see a lawyer and not lose their job because things have to be done . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, don't dialogue.

Ms Fitzpatrick: . . . and she or he is out of the workplace. [interjections]

11:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, don't dialogue directly. Comment through the chair.

Please get to the amendment motion. That's what we're talking about.

Thank you.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Again, in terms of different kinds of leave we heard from Amanda Jensen last week. We know that those things are important. Keeping your job when you're going through this kind of stressful situation is really important.

Now, you've spoken a number of times about these leave items and said that you're committed to them. If you're really committed to them, then support the legislation rather than putting forward this amendment.

I'm going to give you another example. I worked with the federal government for 33 years. There were problems in the workplace just as I had experience with in private industry, problems which restricted the productivity in the workplace, things like harassment, unsafe workplace conditions. As an example, during my years as a parole officer I attended both the home and workplace of parolees I supervised. A day of community supervision meant that I was out of the office, meeting with parolees in the community from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. I had no cellphone. I asked and didn't get one, but my supervisor had one. He was sitting at a desk with a cellphone. It wasn't until Louise Pargeter was killed – she was a parole officer in Yellowknife – that finally things changed, but it took my union fighting for this.

The importance of having a union in the workplace is what makes this, so I don't understand why you are opposed to this.

Speaker's Ruling Question-and-comment Period

The Speaker: Hon. members [interjections] Hon. members, let me remind the House again.

Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East and hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, I want to remind each of you to continue to focus your questions on the amendment that's at hand and direct your questions or comments to the member who made the initial presentation. It's important to the debate that takes place. There may well be points that were made that can be made in your actual 15 minutes, but under 29(2)(a) please be more conscious of directing the comments to the member who made the initial comments.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I rise to speak to the referral amendment today. I do appreciate the hon. member bringing forward the referral amendment. I'd like to open up where the last speaker left off, and that was in regard to the compassionate portion of this legislation. Now, every member of the opposition that has risen to speak on this bill has made it clear that they support that, all of those portions of the bill. In fact, what we have proposed to this House – and this is why it's important for the referral amendment – is to separate those from the larger issues in the labour code, get those compassionate issues dealt with immediately. As the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View did a great job of articulating, if there is that much detail that needs to go in, we are with it to support being able to get union workers what they need.

We have said that we would provide unanimous consent immediately, Mr. Speaker, to pass all stages of that legislation right now, right here, today. So if the hon. members across the way in the government truly believe that – and I believe that they do; I know that I do as well – they would support that, and they would immediately take steps to move to pass all of those compassionate issues through this Assembly today and get them to Royal Assent as fast as possible. But that's not what's happening, and that's why you're seeing this referral amendment come forward. Instead, what we're seeing is these compassionate issues being mixed up with extremely complicated labour issues, and the two issues are happening at once.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. I know that the hon. members across the way don't like to be called out, but they're being called out right now. We will pass that all today. They should do their job and pass that all through this House today, but they won't. Instead, they will continue to make this a significant bill, well over 100-some pages, 124 pages to be exact, and they will try to combine it all into one, without consulting – and this is important for the referral amendment because that's what this is about; it's about consultation – the people of Alberta adequately. They have no clue. They've been asked questions in question period for months leading up to this. They've been asked questions during this debate. They've had lots of time for them to communicate. It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that this government has no clue what the true impacts of this legislation will be on my constituents and my colleagues' constituents and on the good people of Alberta.

I want to reiterate, though, to be very, very clear, that the compassionate portion of this bill is something that all parties support, as far I'm aware, inside this Legislature right now and that we will pass today. We will provide unanimous consent. Let's move it through the House. Let's get it done. It's important.

The question we have to ask ourselves now, Mr. Speaker, is on why this government doesn't want to do that. Why this government would want to delay the passage of such an important issue goes to the core of the question that we are facing here today. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Nixon: Instead, they want to keep it attached to other issues that clearly need more consultation. Mr. Speaker, we have talked about this many times in this Legislature, you and I, and that is the concern. I know I've been to Medicine Hat, your constituency. Great place. And I know I hear from the constituents of Medicine Hat the concerns that they have with this government's lack of consultation on many – many – bills. Instead, we have to continue to rise in this Assembly to try to get this government to do their jobs and consult with the people of Alberta; to use the committee process, that you would see in other provinces and with our federal government, to make sure that we get this legislation right; to be able to come forward to this House with clear assessments of what the consequences, both pro and con, will be for the legislation that they're bringing forward in this Assembly.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they don't do that. It's extremely disappointing that they don't do that. It's had tremendous impacts on the people of Alberta because of the behaviour of this government when they don't consult with the people of Alberta. It's sad. My family, my friends, my neighbours, my constituents that sent me here to represent them in this Chamber have been severely – severely – hurt because of this government's actions when it comes to consultation, and it is no different with this bill that is before us right now, which is why we see a referral amendment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have to ask myself why there's so much concern from the NDP about talking to the people of Alberta. They are Alberta's government. It is their job to speak to the people of Alberta. But, in fact, I'll go further than that. It is their job to talk to the people of Alberta and hear from them. Instead, what we continue to see with this government is that they think they know better than the people of Alberta. They think they know better than the people of Alberta, and they keep telling the people of Alberta what they should think. Well, I reject that. I can tell you that the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre don't want to hear from the government what they should think; they want to tell the government what the government should think.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Well, you're not listening to them.

Mr. Nixon: Now, the hon. member is telling me that I am not listening to my constituents in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I assure you that I am listening to my constituents in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and the number one issue that you hear from them if you go anywhere within my constituency – I'd invite you any time, Mr. Speaker. I have before. Come and visit the Sundre A&W in the middle of the day, a great place to come and talk to many constituents around the Sundre community to hear how they're feeling. The number one thing that they'll bring up is this government's lack of consultation. At Tim Hortons in Rocky Mountain House the number one thing that they'll bring up is the lack of consultation. In Rimbey, at the old motel, another great place to meet constituents, they'll say that the number one thing is lack of consultation.

The problem this government has is that they live in a bubble, and that's why they keep turning down motions like this. They live with their ideological friends and their people that have the NDP world view, and that's all they hear from. They don't leave this place and talk to the people of Alberta.

Ms Jansen: They listen to me.

Mr. Nixon: The MLA for Calgary-North West is heckling to me that they listen to her. No. If she was listening to her constituents, she wouldn't have crossed the floor, but I digress. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the core of this amendment is the fact that this government won't do its job and consult with the people of Alberta. I'm hearing it from the minister of agriculture. One of the worst examples of lack of consultation in this Legislature is Bill 6. He oversaw that, didn't consult with the farmers and ranchers of this great province, and brought forward legislation that still, to this day, is not operating properly: a great example of why you need to take something like this to committee. Take time to make sure that you get it right for the people of Alberta. It is a great responsibility to be a member of the Legislature. It is a great responsibility, even greater, to be a member of the government.

Drever: Shame on you.

11:20

Mr. Nixon: The Member for Calgary-Bow is yelling shame on me. No. Shame on her for not listening to her constituents, Mr. Speaker. Shame on her. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. Again, direct your comments to the chair and not directly to the party. Please continue.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The core, though, of the discussion today is how much this could or could not impact the people of Alberta and whether or not the government has truly shown to this Assembly that they have figured out all the consequences and that they have consulted the people of Alberta. That's the point of the referral amendment. If the government has not adequately done its job in consulting with Albertans, then the amendment is correct and this should go to committee to make sure the government can do its job, to make sure they hear from the people of Alberta.

I don't think anybody in this Assembly can argue that it is our responsibility to listen to our constituents and to the people of Alberta. Nobody in this Assembly should argue that. I don't think they would. I don't think the government members would. I think they would agree that that is their responsibility.

When we look at this amendment, Mr. Speaker, that's the question that we need to be asking ourselves as members before we vote on it: did the government adequately do its job and consult with Albertans? If not, we should be voting for this amendment, sending it to committee, determining the consequences, making sure that Albertans get a chance to participate in the legislative process. That, at its core, is what this is about. The concern I continue to have – and I rise in this House many times to talk about it – is the complete disdain of this governing party for democracy and for communication with the people of Alberta.

We have seen them over and over send legislation to committee. This is very relevant to this amendment. We need to ask: what bills does the government send to committee? When you're asking why they would or would not send . . .

Ms Jansen: That your constituents didn't vote for?

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-North West.

Mr. Nixon: I hear the Member for Calgary-North West still heckling me. I don't understand what the issue is because the core

of the issue here is this: whether or not this amendment should be passed and this bill should be sent to committee. That's the question we are asking. When we ask that question, we should ask ourselves . . .

Drever: Talk to Amanda Jensen. Tell them to wait a little longer because of your ideology.

The Speaker: Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Nixon: . . . what bills does this government send to committee, and why would they or why would they not send this to this committee? That would be a valid comparison.

We've seen recently that they sent a private member's bill on time change to committee to receive more consultation: consultation is good; we better get that right. That makes sense. You don't have to look too far back to see that the hon. member for Drumheller-Strathmore brought forward a bill to make sure that this government and all future governing parties could not use taxpayer dollars . . .

Drever: You mean Drumheller-Stettler? You don't even know your own area?

Mr. Nixon: I hear the Member for Calgary-Bow heckling again. She likes to use taxpayer dollars for expenses. We know. She worked in a committee this summer to try to get money for her political expenses.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler had a private member's bill that would stop this government from using taxpayer dollars to advertise during political campaigns. Do you know where that bill went, Mr. Speaker? It went to committee, and this House has never seen it again. A pretty simple bill. It was a couple of pages long. It went to committee because the government didn't want to pass it. We have to ask ourselves: why? Well, I would assume it's because they want to continue to use the good people of Alberta's hard-earned dollars to pay for their political campaigns, which we, then, again saw them this summer spending their main focus on. Disappointing. The Member for Calgary-North West agreed with me on that at the time. I do commend her for that.

Second, we have now a bill with 124 pages that only was put before us last week, that has only been consulted on with limited people in this province, limited by the NDP, at come-and-be-told meetings. They have not talked to Albertans at large, they have not talked to a large scope of Albertans to make sure that they understand, they have not adequately talked to employers, they do not know the consequences that are associated with the bill, but that bill doesn't go to committee to make sure we get it right when the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler's bill goes to committee and never comes back to this Assembly? It was just a little, tiny bill to make sure the government couldn't use taxpayer dollars to pay for political expenses during campaigns.

Now, the core of this is consultation. If you went to Sundre with me on Friday and toured around and talked to everybody across Sundre and you explained that, saying that a bill of this size won't go to committee but that a private member's bill that stops their money from being used for their political expenses goes to committee and never comes back, Mr. Speaker, what do you think the average person in Sundre will think when you explain that to them? They would say: "I don't think so. This is wrong. This is the NDP's continued behaviour to not consult with the people of Alberta. This is the NDP's continued behaviour to move forward their ideological agenda no matter what the people of this province think."

In the end, Mr. Speaker, it's not the members across the way that will be negatively impacted by it; it's possibly the people of Alberta,

the employers of Alberta. Without taking the time to properly consult – that’s why we continue to stand in this House and have to rise to speak to an important amendment like this to try to get the good people of Alberta an opportunity to be able to speak about legislation that will impact them, to be able to tell the government what they think, to be able to give the government advice.

Mr. Speaker, where the NDP has gone wrong on this and so much is that they think it’s their job to tell Albertans what they should think. The people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre outright reject that idea, and I think the people of Alberta outright reject that idea. We work for Albertans, and if this government wants to bring this big a legislation forward with no consultation with the people that I represent or my colleagues on this side of the House represent and, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, with no consultation with the people you represent or they represent, then it is our job to rise in this House and to try to get this bill to a committee process so we can make sure we get it right for the people of Alberta.

It’s unfortunate that the government continues over and over not to think about the consequences to Albertans. They certainly don’t think about the consequences to them, but that’s really in some ways irrelevant. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I don’t care about this government’s reputation. It’s tarnished because of their behaviour. But because they continue it, they’re hurting the people that I care about. They’re hurting Albertans. They’re hurting business owners and employees by rushing things through. Instead, if we did the process appropriately through committee, we could come out with a bill – as has been said, there are many things in this we agree with, in fact, I would suggest, probably the majority of it. The government is essentially putting poison pills in certain areas of this to try to push forward their ideological, union-based agenda.

Mr. Bilous: Radical.

Mr. Nixon: It is a radical agenda. I mean, the Deputy Government House Leader just said “radical,” and I think that’s right. I think that is a good assessment of the agenda that he is putting forward. It’s radical.

How do you get around that, Mr. Speaker? The core of this amendment, that has been brought forward by the hon. member, is to get this to a body that could take the time to study it, take the time to communicate with the people that are impacted by it, and be able to come back to this Assembly and say: “Here are the consequences, both good and bad, of this legislation. Here are things that we heard from Albertans that could make this legislation better. Here are things we heard from the opposition that could make this legislation better.”

Now, the big argument right now – and it’s in some ways reasonable at face value – is that there are a lot of compassionate issues within this legislation. That is why this side of the House offered, again, to pass it in one day and get those compassionate issues immediately dealt with for the people of Alberta.

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

Mr. Sucha: Under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I have a question here, but I want to make sure that I provide context for those who are watching the debate or watching this at home. There’s a long-acting tradition that we have whenever we vote on first reading of a bill in which we pass it so we can actually read the bill and we can debate the bill. You don’t have to look any further for legislation that we and, actually, the PC caucus at the time didn’t like, which was recall legislation, because it had been debated in the House many times. We recognized it was likely going to be unconstitutional, that there were going to be challenges with it costing taxpayers lots of money, but we still passed it at first reading so we could debate it in this House, and ultimately it did not pass.

Now, I want to throw this ironic sort of context onto it – and I want to first apologize to my constituents. I was unable to vote for first reading of Bill 1 because I was actually at home sick. I had pink eye, and I had to go to the doctor. You know what’s crazy? I didn’t lose my job for it, and some people could.

With that being said, I’ve heard from members of the opposition that they would like to amend the bill. I’ve heard from members of the opposition that they would like to see this bill split up. I have to ask the question: why did they vote against it in first reading before they read it? Further to it, when the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is talking to the average person in Sundre on Friday, would they be okay with him voting a bill down without reading it or voting down compassionate care amendments in that bill without reading it?

I would love to hear from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who is the opposition whip and can speak about why his caucus voted against this bill before they even had an opportunity to read it, about why it was reasonable to do so. Ultimately, this is an important bill. We’ve heard very important facts around compassionate care. I’ve heard from many members in this House who have heard from individuals who have lost their jobs over compassionate care. We’ve heard many of the members of the opposition talking about the importance of compassionate care and talking about how we need to protect the rights of workers who are either sick or their kids are sick.

11:30

Mr. Hanson: Apparently, that’s a union problem.

Mr. Sucha: Well, I hear some heckling from the hon. member that apparently compassionate care is a union problem. No. It’s an everyone problem, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it’s remarkable when I hear some of these comments that are coming on this. Many of them talk about how they’re business leaders, and they’re right now heckling me over compassionate care. I ran a business as well, and at the end of the day, if someone was sick, we made sure that we took care of that individual. So I’m a bit disappointed that I’m hearing those comments coming from that side of the bench here.

I further want to ask this: what are the member’s true motives in relation to compassionate care? What is the member hearing from the constituents in Sundre in relation to this? As he’s talked about consulting with individuals in his constituency, I can ultimately tell you that within the constituency of Calgary-Shaw we have spent many times . . . [interjections] I hear a lot of heckling about this, and I’m still talking about compassionate care. I’m a bit disappointed that I’m hearing this heckling while I’m trying to speak about compassionate care.

Even within the constituency of Calgary-Shaw we’ve made a huge point to reach out to third-party groups, to make sure that we reach out to many individuals throughout the riding. We’ve sent letters to every registered small business in the constituency to get their feedback, to have open houses, to discuss with them . . . [interjections] I’m still hearing a bit of heckling, and I’m still trying to tie it in with compassionate care.

I think it’s important, if we want to try to break up this bill, if we want to try to look at it in two different formats, that I ultimately hear what the constituents from that area are feeling about compassionate care, and if they feel all right . . . [interjections] I’m still hearing heckling over compassionate care, and I’m a bit disappointed over this. At the end of the day, I’m sure the constituents in Sundre think that if someone is sick, if someone has had a baby or happened to have had a miscarriage, they don’t want to lose their job. They would think that this is very important.

I'm extraordinarily disappointed that I'm hearing this while I'm trying to dig deep into the fact that they voted against this bill in first reading despite the fact that they're now talking about how they support elements around compassionate care. So I would be happy to hear from the member in relation to if he thinks that his constituents think this is appropriate.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're short on time because of how long the hon. member took, which is fine, so let me be very clear. We say that we'll bring it through in one day. They did not bring it till the last week of session because they don't care. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this referral amendment to Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. You know, we're talking about taking this and bringing this to committee, to refer this to a committee, and that is super important because this is a huge bill. It's not one piece of a bill. We go back to the part we were talking about, the compassionate care portion. We would have passed that a month ago had this government brought this forward with that portion. This would have been done, and we could have dealt with the labour portion as a separate issue. But that's not what happened.

This is an omnibus bill, that puts everything in there together. That creates problems. It creates problems for us. We want to say, "Yeah, this is a bill I would support," but, you know, they didn't separate those two, and that's the unfortunate part.

You know, when you look at this bill and you look at how they've gone about the consultation part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, it's like when you were in school. We used to have show and tell. [interjections] I can hear from people that, yes, they remember show and tell. What we're seeing from this government is the opposite. We're seeing tell and show. They tell us, "This is the bill," and then they're going to show us through regulation what's going to happen afterwards. That's completely backwards. When we were in school, we had to show and we had to give reasons for what we were talking about, and then we'd tell them about it. Then people would be able to have feedback. Instead, this is just being told, and it is being rammed down the throats of the people.

So we need to separate these portions of the bill. If we take this and put it into a committee that can fully vet it, understand it, we'll be able to make some progress, I believe. Unfortunately, what we've got here is something that I won't be able to support as a whole because you've taken labour and then you've taken parts of compassionate care. That's the unfortunate part. I cannot support the bill because of all the different aspects that are, frankly, wrong with the bill.

You know, you're allowing salting, and I would like to know more about why you're allowing salting. For the people that aren't aware, who are listening or who may be seeing this in *Hansard* or who might be watching this, salting is when a union employee or a union sympathizer gets a job at a non-union workplace solely in order to organize the workers or the workplace and disrupt the company's operations. You know, with this, the person only has to be employed for one day. Hey, if they've only been employed one day – they've just gotten into the job – and in the first hour they're saying, "Let's unionize this thing," how do they even know what that workplace is like? As it stands, there are 30 days, but right now this could be changed over to one day, and that's not fair for the people that are working in that job and who actually like that job. This person wants to jump in there because they're a union supporter, a union sympathizer. They want to make it a union, and all of a sudden they can actually disrupt or change what's actually happening in that business.

The business of salting is, you know, something that is part of this bill. We need to go back, and we need to be able to take this to a committee and talk about that. Frankly, if I take that to my constituents – and I've been talking to my constituents. They've had portions of this. They've said that they cannot support anything that goes with this bill. I've talked to the people in Wainwright. I've talked to the people in Killam and Bruce and Holden and throughout my riding of Battle River-Wainwright, and they're looking at this. I was in Provost the other day, and one of the people in the businesses there was looking at that, and they're, frankly, upset with this bill.

You know, the government, I think, did a reasonably good job of trying to talk about the compassionate care part of the bill. They went forward and they made sure that people understood that this bill is all about the compassionate care part. They put in the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, but that's only a portion of this bill. When you're looking at, again, as I talked about, salting, does that sound like that's a fair and family-friendly workplace part of it? No. It's an omnibus-type bill, and this amendment will stop that. The name is misleading. I just would have trouble supporting the bill as it is, Bill 17. That's why we need to make this referral to a committee.

Major changes need to be made, and there's just, frankly, not enough time. When we're looking at just days, mere days, to be able to do this bill and they've taken – what? – two years in Ontario to look at the same kind of legislation, that's not fair to Albertans. That's not fair to my constituents. It's not fair to the people that own businesses. It's just, frankly, wrong.

Major changes need to be made, and there's not been consultation. I understand from my colleague over here that he was doing consultation, going out into his riding, but the people in my riding weren't given that same opportunity. They weren't able to see – perhaps you were highlighting some of the parts of the bill that we weren't able to see. You were given that part of the consultation or the compassionate care part. It's not fair that that information that you were giving was not spread out to all Albertans.

11:40

The member said that he gave it to his constituents, but it didn't go to all the constituents across all of Alberta so that all of Alberta could actually have a chance to see what was going to be contained in this bill, and never once did I hear anything about salting. I don't know if the member shared that with them. These are things where substantive amendments would need to be made to this bill to make it family friendly because the vast majority is not family friendly.

The constituents I've talked to agree. They were not advised. They never heard about most of these things. Now they're learning it for the first time, and they cannot support it. If the government were truly sincere in getting this bill right and took the necessary amount of time, like Ontario – they've taken two years. We're even asking just to take this until the fall session. We can talk about it over the summer. But we're not getting this whole summer to be able to talk about this. That, I think, would be a minimum, necessary amount of time to be able to make this bill workable, something that we can talk about to our constituents, to Albertans, and take this out and meet our constituents.

The government needs to put aside pursuing their ideological beliefs. Then they would be able to perhaps – perhaps – create something that we here in this House and all Albertans could stand behind. That's when you're taking the proper amount of consultation. We saw on Bill 6 that they rammed that legislation through and enacted it as of January 1 of that year, and frankly my constituents said that they wanted to be able to be heard on that bill. They wanted to be consulted. Time after time we're seeing bills coming through where the consultation is just not happening. Instead, they rush it through without thought or consideration.

Job creators – and we’re talking about job creators, Mr. Speaker – have taken hit after hit due to this NDP government’s legislative decisions. As the opposition we must stand for the people of Alberta and for the economy. I’m certainly standing up for the people in my constituency. The people in my constituency are clearly asking me to ask you these kinds of questions and ask you to pause and to consider what you’re doing and allow them to have input through sending us e-mails, writing us letters, making phone calls. There’s, frankly, not enough time for me to be able to get all that information. I first have to give them the information that’s contained in this bill and then wait for them to respond. That does not just happen overnight.

After all, they really would have to be serious about getting it right. They would have to have taken the summer. Let’s talk about it. They would have to have taken the summer to work things out and get it right. Instead, they have decided to rush through this legislation so that they could tick off another legislative, political item on their wish list. This is wrong, and I implore this government to consider taking more time. If we take it to the committee and do the referral – and I would support this referral. I would truly support the referral. The referral would allow this to go to committee.

Mr. Speaker, with that, thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General under 29(2)(a)?

Ms Ganley: Under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I think that I just feel compelled at this point to rise and make a couple of comments on this speech. This legislation and the things that are being said about it in this House are near and dear to my heart. As many members of this House will know, labour and employment was, in fact, my area of practice before I came to this job, so this is, of course, something that I’m quite familiar with. I’m certainly familiar with hearing from Albertans about it, taking calls day in and day out from people who had experienced a termination because of a maternity leave, who had experienced a termination because, you know, they had a child who was ill or because that child passed away and they needed to take counselling as a result of that. I heard from these individuals all the time, Mr. Speaker, so I’ve certainly had a lot of experience with this. I think, you know, it’s...

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you will speak to the amendment.

Ms Ganley: Absolutely.

I think that it is absolutely about time, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way rises to say that we should refer this bill to committee, but it has been years – years and years – in the making. Those are people’s lives. Actual individuals who are experiencing these unfair labour practices are people; they’re Albertans who deserve to have their rights protected.

Just to comment on a few things that the member said, I’d like to begin by talking about the definition of what an omnibus bill is. An omnibus bill is something that combines disparate things that have nothing to do with each other. Fair workplace legislation, protecting the rights of workers, whether they are in a unionized environment or a non-unionized environment, regardless of who they work for in this province, Mr. Speaker, is one issue. It’s quite clearly tied together. In fact, it was not only my area but many people’s area of practice. So to say that this is an omnibus bill because it combines related pieces of legislation that impact the same thing – i.e., the rights of workers and employers vis-à-vis one another – is just a little absurd. I think that that’s the first thing that I’d like to comment on.

The second thing I’d like to comment on, Mr. Speaker, is the title of the bill. The title of the bill is Fair and Family-friendly Workplace Act. The member seemed to be objecting to the fact that

some of the fairness pieces affect people who have families and some affect people who don’t necessarily have children, so not everybody is in the same circumstances. Well, that’s the case with almost every bill that we pass. They affect different people across different circumstances at the same time. In this case we’re protecting workers’ rights, all workers’ rights: workers with children, workers with sick parents, all different workers, workers who don’t have those things. So I think it’s perfectly reasonable that these things would come together.

The primary objection, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member seems to have to this bill is its length. I mean, we’ve certainly had a reasonable amount of time to debate this bill. I think it’s been before the House for about a week now, and, you know, I think asking to read 120 pages in a week isn’t actually that extraordinary a request. It’s totally reasonable that people would be able to do that and to debate it, and I absolutely think that that is what the public expects of us.

You know, I think that this has been an extremely long time coming. The members opposite say that we need more time, that we’re moving too quickly, but workers have been waiting for these rights for years, Mr. Speaker, and workers are being affected right now, each day, even as we speak. When I was in my practice and even now in my MLA office I have people coming to me all the time who have had these sorts of issues with their employer, who have experienced an unfair workplace practice. Those workers are across the spectrum. Some of them may be in unionized workplaces. Some of them may be in non-unionized workplaces. I think that, you know, to say that all workers ought to have rights, that all workers ought to have access to fair workplaces is a totally reasonable thing to do.

11:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to speak to amendment REF1?

Seeing and hearing none, on the amendment to second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, as proposed for the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:50 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Taylor
Ellis	Starke	

Against the motion:

Babcock	Goehring	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carlier	Horne	Payne
Carson	Jansen	Phillips
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Luff	Renaud
Coolahan	Malkinson	Rosendahl
Dach	McCuaig-Boyd	Sabir
Drever	McKitrick	Schreiner
Eggen	McLean	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Turner
Ganley	Miller	Westhead

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:08 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 30, 2017

Day 41

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

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Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. A beautiful day out there, folks. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of 26 students from the combined grade 5/6 class of Hazeldean elementary school in my constituency who are here with educational assistant Jennifer Soon and parent volunteers Rita Djukich, Amanda Serbu, and Nikki Mauer. These bright young Albertans are in the public gallery, and question period comes at the end of a very busy day. They learned about a number of things today, including participating in the mock Legislature and touring this venerable building. Now they are here to watch the Legislature in action and, I'm sure, to go home thinking they could do this job better than all of us. I ask that these students rise and that all members give these young Albertans our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, I believe you have two.

Mr. Piquette: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two grade 6 classes from Landing Trail intermediate. This is the same school that I had the pleasure of having visitors from yesterday, and I had a chance to speak to these young people, and they're just as sharp and nice as the group yesterday. They're accompanied by their teachers Jeff Semenchuk and Jennifer Jones as well as their chaperones Stacey Taylor, Alice Tieulie, and Lorelei O'Brien. Could students and teachers and chaperones please rise and receive the customary warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Another introduction, hon. member? Not a second one?

Mr. Piquette: Oh, I put them together.

The Speaker: Good. Efficiency.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of Paramedic Services Week it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a number of veteran front-line paramedics who are seated today in your gallery. I ask that each of them rise as I introduce them: Mark Carson, peer support team lead and paramedic addressing PTSD among first responders; Delanie Spangler, an advanced care paramedic I first met in my constituency on a tour of Edmonton Glenora station; Lisa Swanson, an advanced care paramedic and supervisor of the critical care transport team; Amy Benson, a community paramedic who works with vulnerable populations in Edmonton. Thank you for your combined 80 years of service to Edmonton residents and those who are in crisis, and as one of our Edmonton students wrote recently: you are superheroes. Indeed, you are. Please join me in extending the warm welcome to our guests.

The Speaker: Welcome and thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Tim Dixon and Karen Munkedal. These two Calgary-West constituents have worked hard on behalf of their fellow residents to advocate for the government to address health and safety concerns related to the southwest Calgary ring road. Tim even spearheaded a 724-name petition, which I will table later on today. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature members of the Josephburg Agricultural Society, who I will be talking about later in my member's statement. We have – and if you don't mind rising as I speak your names – Joanne Heckbert, who is a member of Josephburg Presents, who has been a key member, doing the work for her community there. Also, we have Billie Borys, who is a director and has taken numbers in T-ball and softball from 20 to 95, from what I understand; and Sharon Loughheed, who is a director and has been doing that for a number of years; as well as her husband, former MLA Rob Loughheed, who served three terms from 1997 to 2008, representing first Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and later Strathcona. It's my absolute privilege to be able to have them here with us in the House, and I ask everyone to extend the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group from the Millennium Pavilion Seniors' Lodge, one of the buildings in my riding that is part of St. Michael's Health Group. Since 1990 the Millennium Pavilion Seniors' Lodge has provided a 75-unit supportive housing facility for the elderly who wish to live in an independent, apartment-style setting with full services. I have the honour of attending numerous events at Millennium Pavilion, and I can truly tell you that Edmonton-Decore has the best seniors in the province. I would now welcome all of my guests, and if they are able to stand, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly over a hundred members of the group of unemployed energy workers. The NDP government is not making their lives better, and many of these new Canadians now find themselves out of work. The engineering design of new projects is not happening. My colleagues here on this side will help me to introduce some of those guests. I have some names here. If we pronounce any of their names with a little bit of difficulty, please excuse us, because there are so many of them from different countries. I'll take a first stab here. I ask that as I read these names, they stand up and receive a warm welcome here.

The Speaker: Hon. member, is it your intention to introduce all 100?

Mr. Panda: No.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Some of them can't make it because school groups are there. As they come in, we'll catch them all at the end of QP. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Isaac Bernard, Anilkumar Madhava, Ravi Selvarajan, Santhanam Swaminathan, Muhammad Asim Farooqi, Muhammad Yasin, Naresh Pasalkar, Roopendra Singh, Rajan Pallipat, Kuldeep Sodhi, Sri Valsan. Please stand up and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome. Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members Tom Genore, a constituent and also the president of my constituency association. He served for six years, two tours, with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and is currently employed as a heavy-duty mechanic and heavy equipment technician. Please join me in welcoming him to this House.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly another group of unemployed energy workers. I have engineers who have made the trip from Calgary, engineers who for eight months have been trying to get a meeting with this government, and their requests have been totally ignored. I would like to introduce eight of them. As I say your names, please rise: Arun Mukherjee, Narayanan Marath, Vikas Sood, Jinju Antony, Bhavik Trivedi, Naresh Kumar, Ravi Injal, Sivarkamani Karatholuvu, and Kulandaivelal Manickavasakam. Please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some unemployed energy workers. I was wondering if anyone here can give them a job. I ask that as I say your name, you rise and stay standing. Their names are Kumaragurubaran Palanisubramaniam, Balamurali Babykrishnan, Velappa Reddy Bala, Srivalsan Kochugovindan, Norm Ferguson, Irfan Chughtai, Usman Choudhry, Deepu Chandran, and Hoshiyar Singh Panghal. Thank you very much. Everyone, give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly more highly skilled technical energy workers from Calgary who are looking for work. Their names are Vikaskumar Bhatt, Rajan Pendharkar, Rizwan Khan, Xuequin Zhu, Xuejun Zhu, Tamar Bourne, Sureshbabu. If they'd all please rise. These are the faces of real people. These are the faces of Alberta. Please join me in welcoming them with the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Hunter: Close. Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the next group of unemployed energy workers. Their names are Kuljeet Dhillon, Swaminathan Jayaraman, Akshat Agrawal, Jaison James, Alex Lechadores, Sanjay Chaudhari, Sanjoy Das, and Chandrasekhar Ramalingam. I'd like to have them please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: My apologies to the member. Your electorate is Cardston-Taber-Warner.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some unemployed energy workers from the wonderful city of Calgary and area who have travelled up here today to put a real face to the NDP's disastrous policies that have led them to be unemployed here. Would you please stand as I call your name: Mr. Rajesh Somaya, Mrs. Maheswari Atchudda Reddy, Diwakar Selva Ravi, Mrs. Harjeet Sodhi, and Mrs. Beena Jaison. Please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly more highly skilled technical energy workers that feel that they are getting a raw deal from the NDP government. They travelled from Calgary today to sit up in the gallery and watch question period for a while. Their names – and I ask you to rise as I say your name – are Ashok Kumar, Krishan Kathuria, Alex Villamayor, Shrikant Kalyankar, Harish Kulkarni, Prabhu Mishra, and Harshad Baraiya. Sorry if I butchered them, folks. Please join me in welcoming these folks.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly more highly skilled technical energy workers who are, unfortunately, out of work and are looking for work. Their names are Prabir Adhikari, Paramjit Bhatia, Oonnikrishnan KR, Sudhakar Vallala, Kaushik Gupta, and Shagufta Tasneem. Please join me in welcoming them with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some more of these incredibly highly skilled technical energy workers from Calgary who have gathered here to let the NDP know what is going on and so that we can honour them here today. If you could please stand as I say your names: Maheep Pamma, Amitava Mukherjee, Narayana Swamy, Mohan Palanisamy, Khalid Hussain Khan, Rakesh Kumar, Vipul Panchal, and Noel Ranido. Thank you so much.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to my fellow members in the House several members of Alberta's union of public employees, that represents nearly 100,000 employees. Present today is Karen

Weiers, AUPE vice-president, Rose Read, Nancy Woods, Brian Cook, José Osmel Reyes, Thelma Ogden, and Bill Erickson. These individuals work hard every day ensuring the flawless execution of services our Albertans rely on from health and long-term care to utilities, building maintenance, and more. I ask that my guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly what I believe is the final group of unemployed energy workers that are here today. If they could rise as I read their names and stay standing until we give you the appropriate response: Mrs. Radha Narayanaswamy, Mrs. Supriya Pendharkar, Serena Pendharkar, and Mrs. Nalini Vallala. If you could join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Josephburg Agricultural Society

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For more than 100 years agricultural societies, including the Josephburg Agricultural Society, have been working to make life in rural Alberta better. Yoga, T-ball, softball, minor hockey, Christmas in the heartland, scholarships, Josephburg Presents: this group puts true sweat equity into our community.

May 28 and 29 marked the UFA Country Classic, a broad-based event welcoming families from across western Canada and giving young people a chance to compete in Josephburg. The annual north country classic horse show held at Birch Bay Ranch was attended by over 50 participants, with exhibitors showing in halter, English, and western riding classes and competing for high points awards in five age divisions. It was the first circuit show of the season, where judges foster the love and enthusiasm of these young equestrian riders.

The UFA Country Classic is also a major stop on the junior show circuit, where participants come to cut their teeth before going on to the summer cattle shows. They learn research, genetics, biology, and how to make mistakes and learn from them. Each youth receives an award or prize to encourage them to stay engaged and feel successful. This year marked the first Elaine Hiller memorial herdsman award, handed out to Bailey Deitrich, a youth who embodies that same love and passion for agriculture as Elaine did in her own life and who puts his efforts into the cattle industry both inside the rink and out.

Mr. Speaker, shows like this are a major cultural component of how we achieve sustainable agriculture in Alberta and encourage the next generation of farmers, teaching the ropes of business and agricultural science. These youth learn how to be entrepreneurs and create the best beef for our own plate here and across the world.

I'd like to thank Kelsey Knott for chairing this year's event and the entire executive of the Josephburg Agricultural Society.

I invite all members of the Legislature to venture out east and check out everything that Josephburg has to offer and to mark their 2018 calendar with the UFA Country Classic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Energy-sector Unemployment

Mr. Barnes: Today we are joined by 94 energy workers and engineers, many of whom are struggling with unemployment due to NDP government policies that have not put Albertans first. There are many more outside. I urge the members of this House, especially those in government, to look their way and to really see them. These men and women are the backbone of our nation's economy, and they have been for decades. They possess good Canadian values, a tireless work ethic, and specialized technical skills. The work they do is so important. But still they find themselves the targets of unfair attacks from radical environmental groups, groups who are funded by foreign interests like the Tides Foundation and who want to see our province fail.

Today I rise to tell these workers and engineers thank you. You have not been forgotten. Thank you for making Alberta a lighthouse of economic opportunity for families in search of a better life no matter where they're from. Thank you for creating good jobs that allow countless Albertans to buy homes, vehicles, and hockey equipment, all those ties that bind our communities. Thank you for supporting the essential services we hold dear like health care and education. Thank you for providing job training to our aboriginal youth, which for many is a gift that will keep on giving. Thank you for being a leader in land reclamation and never compromising on human rights in the name of higher profits.

1:50

I want the NDP to stop treating this Legislature like a safe space. Face the Albertans hurt by your policies such as the oil sands caps, the carbon tax, the doubling of the LMR, the royalty review, and higher business taxes. These are some of our finest citizens.

This NDP government needs to understand that actions have consequences. This war on energy, the deliberate weakening of our own economic position just to satisfy NDP cohorts in B.C. and elsewhere is irrational and needs to end. Stand with the engineers of our province and stop apologizing for our industry. The hard-working men and women who joined us are the lifeblood of Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline

Mr. Jean: Since forming government, the NDP have tried to have their cake and eat it too when it comes to pipelines. From day one they have failed to realize that pipelines in every single direction would be good news for Albertans. They protested Keystone XL, they were complicit in the tanker ban that absolutely killed Northern Gateway, and now their brothers and sisters in the B.C. NDP are determined to block the Trans Mountain pipeline. Does the Premier realize just how much pain her waffling on pipelines is causing our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, there they go again: sound and fury signifying nothing, hoping against hope that Alberta will fail, making the Green Party's case for them for their own political gain, folding at the first hint of opposition. Pipeline opponents don't need friends; they've got the Wildrose. This pipeline will be built. Albertans fought for it,

Albertans won approval for it, and they won't let the Wildrose Party or anyone else stand in the way. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Jean: Pipelines are happening in Alberta despite the NDP and the Premier, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and Prime Minister are setting themselves up for failure when it comes to pipelines. They've tried to sell Albertans the snake oil of the 21st century, social licence, with the myth that it will get pipelines built. News flash: social licence doesn't get pipelines built; our world-class NEB approval process does. But the Premier has given an inch in the name of social licence, and now the B.C. NDP, the B.C. Greens, and ecoradicals are taking a mile. Will the Premier please wake up to the facts and realize her social licence . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to pipelines, the Leader of the Opposition is a sheep in sheep's clothing. Every time he stands in this House, pipeline opponents cheer. Here's the bottom line. The twinning of the Trans Mountain pipeline was approved by the federal government, and guess what? Those are the people that get to approve it. The pipeline will get built. Albertans will benefit. So I ask the member opposite to stop taking this sky-is-falling routine, to stop talking down Alberta, and to instead stand with Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Baloney, Mr. Speaker. It's not just the B.C. NDP and Green parties that are showing their true colours on pipelines. There's also the antipipeline celebration of the Premier's closest oil sands advisers, Tzaporah Berman and Karen Mahon. You can't make this stuff up. Berman is actively celebrating the likely demise of Trans Mountain under the NDP's and the Greens' watch all while collecting a healthy paycheque from – you've got it – Alberta taxpayers. They are an insult to our province and to everyday Albertans. An insult. Will the Premier do the right thing today and fire Berman and Mahon? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? What our government will do is continue working on the climate leadership plan and the emissions cap, which is fundamental to the approval that this government received from the federal government for the Trans Mountain pipeline. That is exactly what we will do. I know the Wildrose panics easily, but Albertans don't. We are getting this done, our economy is growing, and this pipeline will get built.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we could make a huge sandwich with all the baloney coming from the Premier today.

Auditor General Recommendations on Health Care

Mr. Jean: Alberta's health care system should never be about dollars spent but should be about people cured. When you put money over people, it means patients get left behind. It's the story of my family and thousands of families right across Alberta. The Auditor General made it very clear in his report released last week that, quote, pumping more money into the most expensive health care system isn't the answer; change is needed. End quote. I agree. When will the Premier show Albertans that we'll get to see real reforms instead of billions of dollars just being poured into a system that, obviously, is very . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, when we ran in the last election, we said to Albertans that it is time for people to stop experimenting with ideology in our health care system, that instead what they need is stable, predictable funding and supportive planning, and that's exactly what we've got. Two per cent a year is not shovelling money into the system. Moreover, you know what we won't do? We will not privatize our health care system. We will not create a two-tiered health care system. We will not create opportunities for the rich to buy better services while others get sicker. That is absolutely what this government will never do.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this Premier and this government are failing Albertans when it comes to health care. The fact is that despite the NDP boasting about record levels of spending across our health care system, they have absolutely nothing to show for it. No improvements. Nothing. Wait times for key procedures in Alberta remain embarrassingly long. If you need a cataract surgery or a knee replacement, you're waiting almost – get it? – 240 days, far too long, almost a year. Two hundred and forty days is too long. The Auditor General has a novel idea. How about linking funding to outcomes, not just volume? Will the NDP stand on the side of patients and make this reform, or will they continue to put the quality of life of Albertans at risk?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what our government will continue to do is the work that we have been doing, which is making slow, progressive improvement on a number of different wait times in a lot of different areas.

You know what else our government is doing? Just today we announced that we will be opening up a new hospital in southern Edmonton, the first hospital built in over a generation. I wonder if the member opposite plans to tell Edmontonians that they are not going to get that hospital.

Mr. Jean: It's the management, Mr. Speaker. The waste across our health care system is excessive, with duplication and layers of managers managing managers that manage managers. It is, as the AG put it, "an orchestra without a conductor." You can imagine the sound. It would be nothing but disaster. Here's an example. If it was run like a bank, our health care system would have 1,300 separate IT systems totally incapable of communicating with the other 1,299. Today we are spending over \$600 million on IT, with no plan to get it working properly or to keep it up to date. This is incompetence.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that the Auditor General pointed out is that the administrative costs at AHS are the lowest per capita in the country. It's not the doom and gloom that the members opposite keep talking about.

2:00

But you know what would be doom and gloom, Mr. Speaker? The election platform of the members opposite, creating new systems for the wealthy and shutting other people out, taking billions of dollars out of the health care budget, which is what those folks over there thought they could do with no plan put in place. They would have laid off nurses, they would have laid off care workers, they would have closed beds, and they would have hurt Albertans all across the province. We won't do that.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Jean: A record today, Mr. Speaker: I have enough baloney for a couple of sandwiches.

Energy-sector Unemployment

Mr. Jean: Today we are joined at the Legislature – and today we're enjoyed by them as well, Mr. Speaker – by unemployed oil and gas workers and engineers. They are the faces of women and men that are too often forgotten by all levels of government. When oil was crashing, they got a carbon tax. Then they got caps on the oil sands. Then they got Ottawa piling higher taxes on oil and gas exploration. These folks aren't feeling any sort of recovery. They're hurting right now. What does the Premier have to say to them about the damage her economy and policies have had on their livelihoods?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by welcoming our guests to the House today. We understand that the collapse in energy prices is hurting workers, families, and communities across the country. That's why our government has chosen to stand with workers and families. For instance, a year ago we introduced the PDP program. As a result of that, just a few days ago they announced that they would be tendering a hundred million dollars' worth of engineering design work in weeks to come. That is the kind of thing that will put folks like this back to work, and it's a direct result of the PDP program that our government brought in.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: One of the people in the gallery today is a recent engineering graduate. His is the story of many young Albertans. He worked and studied hard but now, after leaving university, can't find a job. Times are tough. Alberta isn't the same place it was even when he started his education. Young Albertans deserve better than seeing antipipeline activists like Tzeporah Berman, the Premier's good friend, serving as an oil sands adviser. They want to see the government fight harder for our oil and gas sector than they do for new carbon taxes, as they're doing. When will the Premier start to give Albertans and unemployed Albertans a break?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've been saying repeatedly, our government is absolutely focused on the need to promote job growth and to promote economic recovery in this province. That's why we have been a very big advocate for the Kinder Morgan project instead of predicting its demise, as the members opposite want to gleefully do, and that's why we've been working on a number of projects like the one I just announced, the PDP program, which will create jobs for exactly the folks who are here today.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, our plan is working. Drilling is up. Capital investment is up. Jobs are coming back. Is there more work to do? Yes. But the members opposite have no plan and would only have made things worse.

Mr. Jean: Making things worse, Mr. Speaker? I don't think anybody could make the economy worse than what this NDP government has done. The NDP will pretend that all is good and that the economy is just fine, but these are real people who are hurting, real people, real Albertans that are hurting. Sixty thousand full-time jobs have vanished, and these people laugh about it. Carbon taxes, tax hikes, credit downgrades, new regulations and red tape, all from this government: none of these things are helping. They are making a bad situation much worse. When things start to stabilize, they've strangled our full potential to grow. This government's policies

have made it harder for Albertans and the people who came here today . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Leader of the Opposition and their new friends' plan would have made a tough situation much worse for working families. Those folks over there drove the economy into the ditch and did nothing to prepare for a potential oil price collapse. We've taken a different approach. We're investing in apprenticeship and training, we're working with the industry to connect workers to opportunities, and we're keeping postsecondary education affordable because we believe that in a tough economy the government needs to stand with people, not fire them, not fire their family members, not pull back services, not shut the doors on them. We'll be there for them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Hon. members, I've seen a note. I did not hear this myself, but I'm sure that no hon. member would say this, that nobody in the House would say, "Not telling the truth," and I just want to make sure. I don't know who that would be. I didn't hear it.

The leader of the third party.

Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline (continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has paid lip service to supporting the Kinder Morgan pipeline. The problem is that the B.C. NDP Party, which is the Premier's party, will be in a position to interfere with the construction. The federal NDP, which is the Premier's party, are opposed to Trans Mountain. The Premier is outnumbered in the family. No wonder her minister is running away from unemployed engineers today. To the Premier. It is time for you to stand up for Alberta. Will you ask your party, the Alberta NDP Party, to divorce themselves from the national and B.C. parties so that you can actually support Albertans? Right now most of your family doesn't.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin, of course, by correcting the record. The Minister of Energy did meet in March with a number of the people who are here today, and the minister of economic development will be meeting with more of them.

To the member's question, let me just say this. I don't believe that there is a government in the country that has done more work to get the Kinder Morgan project approved, Mr. Speaker, than ours. Moreover, the people that we have lobbied are the people who actually have the authority to make the decision, the federal government. When the federal government approved the Kinder Morgan project, they did so on the basis of the work that this government had done, not on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier finally admitted that the Prime Minister, who treats Alberta like a doormat, in this case approved the pipelines. She tries to take credit when the news is good and runs like a rabbit when trouble rears its head, like her minister running from hundreds of unemployed engineers today – yes, minister of postsecondary – who are looking for work. The

Premier continues to employ Tzeporah Berman to attack Alberta's interest with the B.C. wing of her party. Premier, when will you match your actions with some support by firing Berman and have your ministers talk to unemployed engineers?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the members opposite believe that question period is all about theatre, but I really wish that they would just listen to the answers a little bit, because, as I've said already, the Minister of Energy has already met with some of these workers, and the Minister of Labour and the minister of economic development will be doing so again. I think that part of the question has been answered twice now.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, as I've already indicated, what our government did to get the approval of the pipeline from the federal government was develop a climate leadership plan which included an emissions cap. The work on that must be done, and it must be finished, and we will make sure that happens.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier continues to appease Alberta's enemies. She's invited activists onto the oil sands advisory panel, she's burned Alberta with a job-killing carbon tax, she's sacrificed whole towns where coal jobs are to make her fancy friends in France happy, and now she refuses to divorce herself from the national and British Columbia NDP parties, who cheerlead against Alberta every single day. She's breaking the backs of Alberta families. To the Premier: will you finally admit that your policy of appeasing Alberta's enemies is not working and actually stand up for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of our government's record with respect to standing up for Albertans on a whole range of issues, also including this pipeline. We worked to get a plan in place that would ensure that the federal government could move forward with approving this pipeline, and that decision stands. I know the members opposite want to join together with their little friends over there and hope, gleefully, for the potential failure of the pipeline for their own political interests. Quite frankly, it is utterly shameful, and unemployed Albertans should be watching the politics that these folks are playing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:10 Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having grown up in an oil and gas family, I understand the concerns of boom-and-bust cycles. Many of my constituents in Stony Plain have built their livelihood around coal plants, and it is understandable that they are very worried about transitioning off coal-powered electricity. To the minister of economic development: how is the government creating stability for families such as my constituents to support them through this transition?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by thanking the member for being a tireless advocate for her constituency. First of all, coal communities have helped make our province a prosperous and industrious place, where many people

have come to build good lives for themselves and their families. Canada is one of the many countries that are moving away from coal-fired electricity. During my visits to these communities and in a town hall the Minister of Municipal Affairs hosted earlier this month on my behalf, we had an opportunity to talk to a lot of the community members, workers, and municipal leaders about what this is doing and looking at opportunities for economic growth and development in the future.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

It seems that today there are small, little details that I just need to reinforce. I want to remind the members of a reminder that I gave them – and today will be the third time – that the use of electronic equipment, putting earplugs in, except for communicating, is not acceptable.

The first supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this issue crosses jurisdictions and that the federal, provincial, and local governments all need to sit at the table as partners to build an end result that works for all, to the same minister: what is this government doing to make sure we have a plan and a process that work for Albertans?

The Speaker: I want to just clarify the point I made. I'm not referring to the earplugs that are provided with the Chamber. It's other electronic material. [interjections] Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members, are we ready to continue?

The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to clarify that back in 2012 the opposition leader along with his Ottawa BFF, Jason Kenney, were part of a federal government that passed regulations to close Alberta coal plants and prevent them from converting to natural gas. They were turning out the lights and their backs on Albertans and Alberta communities. Our government has been working respectfully and collaboratively with the federal government to allow coal plants to convert to natural gas producing facilities here in Alberta. The Minister of Environment and Parks has been working diligently to get this done, and we did. We are working with the communities to ensure that they can . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to ensure that the impacted companies aren't leaving the Alberta energy market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. Our government has reached agreements with TransAlta, Capital Power, and ATCO in order to ensure that they're going to fulfill their obligations, first and foremost to workers, including severance pay and pensions. They're going to keep their head offices here in Alberta, and they're going to continue to generate power for Alberta's electricity grid. At the same time, we are moving toward a capacity market that will help maintain reliability in our electricity system as we transition off coal and at the same time ensure that electricity remains reasonable as far as pricing and that we'll continue to be competitive in our province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Calgary-Foothills.

Energy-sector Unemployment (continued)

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems this government wants to enact a brain drain to foreign countries. The Calgary engineers and design forum has asked for a meeting with the ministers of Energy and Economic Development and Trade. They were redirected to the Minister of Labour, who would not meet and directed them to the Labour workforce strategies team, who cannot answer the questions and redirected them back to the ministers. To the Premier: will you stop this merry-go-round and make yourself available to meet with the unemployed engineers, who are here at your convenience, in Calgary or in Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by welcoming our guests and acknowledging that they've travelled up here. The Minister of Energy, including representatives from my Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and representatives from Labour, did sit down with them in March and talked to them about a number of programs. I'm sure the Minister of Labour will tell the House of the work that she's been doing to ensure that jobs go to Albertans and Alberta engineers first and foremost. We met with them. Today after question period the Minister of Labour and I will be sitting down with them again. I can tell you that Alberta is the best place in Canada to be an engineer.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the unholy alliance next door in British Columbia does not shed crocodile tears over pipelines not achieving social licence and given that the carbon tax and 100-megatonne cap on oil sands production is creating an oligopoly in the oil sands, as predicted by Wildrose, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what message are you sending to the new engineering graduates from the universities if you can't stop to speak to your former colleagues protesting at lunch?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, because of our government we are having a historic infrastructure build that will create 10,000 jobs per year, and – guess what? – we need engineers to do detailed design work for those projects. We have two pipeline approvals that will create 22,000 jobs. We need engineers to do the detailed design work. As the Premier mentioned, we have two successful petrochemicals diversification program applicants. One will have shovels in the ground this fall. The other just announced that they will be putting out a tender for \$100 million worth of contracts for engineers to do detailed design work here in Alberta. The Conference Board of Canada is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that when the Premier was in China over a month ago, the Chinese ambassador to Canada was saying that Chinese enterprises are not interested in the oil sands anymore and given that last session when Bill 1 was introduced, the minister of economic development was all smiles about going to spend us \$100 billion into debt and create 100,000 jobs, how about the minister stop paying Albertans lip service and tell everyone and those in the gallery today where the 100,000 jobs are that you boasted about a year ago? These engineers want to meet their Premier. They want to meet . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: You know, Mr. Speaker, I wish that members opposite would stop running down our province, our employers, our workers and actually stand up for them the way this side of the House is. Last year we led the country in private-sector investment. We're on track to lead the country again this year. Drilling in the province is up 100 per cent over last year. Our exports are up 68 per cent over the same time last year. Wholesale trade rose for the sixth month in a row and reached its highest level since June 2015. Manufacturing is up. Housing starts are up. I wish that the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Construction Concerns

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My caucus colleagues and I have been assisting residents living along the route of the southwest ring road as they attempt to convince this NDP government to address their health and safety concerns. Once again let me remind this government that they are all in support of this project. They just don't want gravel-crushing and asphalt operations over their back fence for the next four years, and they need noise and safety issues addressed. These are all reasonable concerns. Minister, time is ticking. Do you believe the residents' concerns are valid or not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, building the ring road is very important to Alberta, and it's something that the government takes very seriously. But we also want to make sure that neighbouring communities are protected, as much as that is possible, and we are working to mitigate any impacts of gravel crushing. I've been meeting regularly with the department on this matter. We're looking at new locations for the asphalt plants so that the nuisance odours will be minimized, and in certain cases we're going to be working to reduce the amount of dust and so on through various mitigation . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Ellis: Given that the minister has been invited to attend a meeting organized by numerous communities along the construction route and given that they are offering the minister a broad timeline to confirm his attendance and then they will set the date to take care of all the other meeting logistics and given that they are only asking the minister to attend, Minister, will you meet with the communities in the June 12 to 23 window that they have provided? Yes or no?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we're very concerned about minimizing the impact and making sure that we have good communication. We have been working through the MLAs in the area. Officials from our department have been available as well to interact with the communities, and that's going to continue.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Those same residents have been contacting me, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my request to meet with the minister to discuss the residents' concerns was ignored and given that the residents have also written directly to the minister to invite him to attend a public meeting to hear their common-sense solutions and given that I am now asking the minister to just let the residents know if he intends to meet with them or not, Minister, will you or will you not attend a meeting on one of the many days the residents are offering to you to hear them?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's not true that I've refused to meet with the hon. member. In fact, I have met with him. I went down to Calgary to meet with him, as a matter of fact, on the ring road and the construction, so it's simply not true. With respect to residents we are having good communication with them through the MLAs and through department officials, who are available to talk to the community on the issues that are of concern to them.

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline (continued)

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake is the home to many unemployed energy workers, who can't believe what they're seeing. The Premier's top oil adviser, Tzeporah Berman, is actually cheering a new agreement between the B.C. NDP and the Greens, which is built on their election promise to kill the Kinder Morgan. On Twitter she called for the deal to be a turning point for our climate. It is time for the Premier to pick a side. Is she with Tzeporah Berman, or is she with Alberta jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, making life better means a strong oil and gas industry. That is why we are committed to ensuring that Albertans get full value for their resources through pipeline approvals, of which we have secured two. That is also why we're committed to working with industry on a strong clean-tech component to our climate leadership plan, and that is why we are moving forward with innovation investments. It's also why we are working with industry with respect to oil sands emissions. When we conclude that work with industry, we'll be moving on. In terms of the detail around our innovation investments I'm happy to speak about those in the sup.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is subsidizing Ms Berman's activities with Albertans' money. Hundreds of engineers are here today to say that this is disgraceful. Given that the Premier is refusing to stand up for Albertans and fire Ms Berman, is she willing to bear the responsibility if some of her oil sands advisers are successful in killing our pipeline?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the oil sands advisory group is made up of companies like Cenovus, Athabasca, CNRL, MEG Energy, Suncor. They've endured endless reputational attacks from the Wildrose. They've endured endless conspiracies, having their names dragged through the mud, all for the alleged crime, for the Wildrose, of daring to say that, yes, we can grow our investment in the oil sands, but we can also reduce our emissions. For that, the Wildrose talks them down. For that, the Wildrose says

that, you know, we need to drag their names through the mud. It's simply not acceptable.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are companies that I respect in my constituency.

Given that this government has a long history of environmental activism from the environment minister, who helped edit a book called *An Action a Day: Keeps Global Capitalism Away*, and the Education minister, who stood on the steps of this very Legislature and chanted, "No new approvals," why should energy workers in Bonnyville-Cold Lake trust this government when it's so painfully obvious that this government wants to shut down our oil sands?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of oil sands companies that have told us and have told the public that they would like to reduce their emissions while continuing to produce oil sands, and when they say those things, we believe them. That is what we have done on this side of the House. When those companies come to us and say, "Yes, we can be a global leader," we don't shout them out of the room. We believe them. When they say to us, "We want to work with environmental groups, with communities, with First Nations, with the government in order to move this province forward," we don't shout Cenovus or Athabasca or Suncor or CNRL out of the room. We don't drag their names through the mud. The Wildrose does that.

Provincial Credit Rating and Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: On Friday I was in Toronto to meet with the DBRS credit-rating agency. It was illuminating. These agencies are not conservatives nor liberals nor socialists. They are sober-minded analysts who take a dispassionate view of the hard numbers. On the same day that I was meeting with DBRS, Standard & Poor's handed Alberta its fifth credit downgrade under the watch of this Finance minister. His response was to blame the creditors and anyone else with even an elementary understanding of finances as having a conservative agenda. Does the minister take his latest credit downgrade seriously?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, we take everything on this side seriously, and we work for Albertans. We are making life better in this province as a result of our investments for capital, our investments for infrastructure across the province, including a new hospital announcement today in Edmonton. That particular credit-rating agency wanted us to cut \$3.5 billion out of our budget or raise taxes. We won't do either because we have Albertans' backs. We're going to get through this into recovery, and we're doing that now.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that when the Premier appointed this Finance minister, she knew that he had virtually no background in economics, in finance, or in any serious understanding of government budgets and given that the minister's shortcomings could have been somehow overcome with the advice of people who know better but so far he has shown an unwillingness to listen to economists, to fiscal experts, to credit-rating agencies, or even most Albertans, this leads me to wonder: is he taking his advice from Kathleen Wynne?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, before I got elected to the government of Alberta, I was on city council for 15 years – 15 years – with that member over there. I served together with that member.

The hon. member asking me the question was an outreach worker for an agency that looked at small businesses. He was an outreach worker. That's his background.

An Hon. Member: This is your second job.

The Speaker: Hon. minister. [interjections] Hon. minister.

Hon. members, I just want to caution about making personal references.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that nothing seems capable of making this minister listen to sound advice or take the finances of this province seriously and that if he is going to start acting competently, then clearly he's going to need a little motivation and given that the number one job of the Minister of Finance is to responsibly manage the finances of Alberta – and if he can't do that, then he's not doing his job right – my question is: if Alberta receives yet another credit downgrade, will this minister take a pay cut?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On to more germane things, you know, the finances of the province. The people of this province are struggling right now. We're coming into recovery. This government is supporting Albertans, and we are going to grow fastest in the nation, 3.3 per cent. That's an upgrade of half a per cent, from 2.8 per cent, from the Conference Board of Canada. We're on the right track. They would put everything at risk.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

2:30

Carbon Levy Revenue

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the inception of this government's climate leadership plan we've seen a steady stream of spending announcements and subsidies. The majority of these announcements were to be funded through the collection of the carbon tax on all Albertans. Now that we've had a year living under this government's climate plan and some time for the government to evaluate and estimate the yearly revenue of the carbon tax, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: how much of that money is expected to be collected by the carbon tax, how much of it has been spent or committed so far, and does your government anticipate needing to dip into general revenue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer to the second question is no. The answer to the first question is that we will have a quarterly update, which is fast upon us, and the information will be contained therein.

Thank you.

Mr. Fraser: Given the government's confidence that the carbon tax will be sufficient to pay for all of the spending that they have announced under the climate leadership plan and given that if they are correct in the assumption, there will likely be money collected from the carbon tax left over from year to year and given this government's enthusiasm for spending found money, to the same minister: if the amount of the carbon tax collected exceeds the amount needed for you to pay for announcements and subsidies, will you make the right choice and return that money to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to the question is: it won't.

Mr. Fraser: Given that the B.C. NDP has campaigned against the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline and given that the NDP blocking the Trans Mountain pipeline will impact growth in the oil sands, affecting money raised from the royalties and from SGER as well as the provincial economy at large, and given that the government's climate plan relied on increasing carbon tax revenue, to the same minister: will a reduction in the carbon tax collected force the government to raise taxes further to meet their commitments, or will long-term green infrastructure plans suffer because of the unpredictable funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the commitments that we have made are through stable and predictable funding to a number of different initiatives, including our indigenous investments, including our investments in on-farm solar PV and efficiency, including a number of green infrastructure investments that we are examining right now. We will be making sure that those fit within the projected revenues so that communities can have what they need in order to build transit systems, in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and in order to diversify the economy while creating jobs, which, of course, is the outcome of the climate leadership plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Social Studies Curriculum Review

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the second-youngest person in the Legislature I have actually been through the current social studies curriculum. Now, given that the current grades 7 to 9 social studies curriculum includes perspectives on Canada, international world views, and issues for Canadians and that the grades 10 to 12 social studies curriculum consists of globalization, nationalism, and ideologies, there seem to be some gross misconceptions about what's in the draft curriculum documents, which include many of the same themes. To the Minister of Education: why did you feel the need to revise Alberta's education curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for that question. Of course, we know that our current curriculum has enabled our students to achieve a very great deal, but we also know that it's always important to upgrade. Some of the curriculum is more than 30 years old. Our kids deserve a modern curriculum that builds on strengths, including literacy, mathematics, and history. They deserve an education that prepares them for success. That's why we're making life better by not only building new curriculum but building new schools, ensuring our classrooms are well resourced, and making sure that Albertans can see themselves in the curriculum when they take it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some of the misconceptions are centred around the draft social studies scope and sequencing, which includes questions such as how events, groups, and individuals can shape views on freedom, responsibilities, rights, and reconciliation, and given that the new PC leader says that there's no mention of history in the documents, to the same minister: is this odd statement true?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for asking that. Certainly, the leader of the third party's statements are absolutely one hundred per cent not true. The words "history" or "historical" appear more than a dozen times in the scope and sequence. I know as well as a history teacher myself that I can assure any member or any Albertan that the social studies curriculum that I sign off on will have a very strong focus on history.

We also are working with people such as junior achievement, universities, the energy industry, agriculture and the like to make sure that we have a reflection of who we are as Albertans in the curriculum. The curriculum, some of it, hasn't been updated . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new leader of the third party has accused the government of politicizing social studies, a subject that is to ensure students develop critical thinking skills, in the draft curriculum documents, to the same minister: how does the government respond to these accusations?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. I mean, we are certainly not the ones playing politics on curriculum. Let's review the Conservative record on education. They proposed deep cuts, which would close schools and lay off teachers. They did not do any curriculum updates, so we're left in the position that we are in today. Now they're attacking very common-sense curriculum changes coming from the teachers and postsecondary institutions, from parents and students. The president of the PC Party even said that this curriculum review would turn our kids into Nazis somehow. That sort of talk is abhorrent. I find it disgusting. Sir, we are focusing on regular folks and regular curriculum.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Agricultural Concerns

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon has declared an agricultural disaster twice in the last two years. Drought one year and saturation the next are devastating our farmers. Farmers are telling me that the AFSC managers appear to be hamstrung at times, having to wait on people up the chain of command before they can take action that will get farmers into their fields. To the minister of agriculture. Preharvest inspections were carried out by AFSC in February and March. Have all the farmers eligible for the 25 per cent advance been issued cheques?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I couldn't be happier with the inspectors that have been going out there and doing the work. All 120 inspectors in the province have been in the hardest hit areas. They've been doing very good work. As of last week only 20 per cent of unharvestable crops are still left over there. We've had some really good progress. We've had some good weather this week. We're looking forward to good weather and to farmers doing what they do best, and that's to get the seed in the ground and growing food for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many farmers are struggling to get a crop in this year – they've had to fight the

elements and the red tape and the inefficiencies of AFSC – and given that many farmers tell me that they've been very disappointed in the payment process for crop insurance through AFSC, what is this government doing to improve the process of paying out crop insurance in a timely fashion so that farmers in my constituency can face the next potential agricultural disaster and continue farming with more confidence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. As I said in the answer to the previous question, the inspectors have been out there doing their work. All the unharvested claims have been paid out. Now they're looking forward to getting the seed in the ground. There are, no doubt, still some wet areas in the province. We'll have to wait for Mother Nature to make it a little bit dryer. For instance, in the northwest region, where just last week they had only 5 per cent seeded, they're actually up to 35 per cent seeded now. Mother Nature is co-operating as we are making lives better for farmers.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many farmers in my constituency have had to subsidize their income by working off farm and given that your climate leadership plan has eliminated well-paying oil and gas jobs that many farmers depended on and given that you sped up the dates for the elimination of the coal-powered electricity generating plans such as the Genesee power plant in my constituency, which, once again, will eliminate an important source of additional income for some farmers, will this government and this minister please explain how they are possibly making life better for the Albertans in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? The world is moving away from coal, and no one knows this better than the Leader of the Official Opposition, who in 2012 was part of a government that would not only have killed these coal-fired plants but also stopped them from converting to natural gas. I've met with miners, municipal and community leaders, and power companies, and together we're building a plan that will diversify the local economy and allow these plants to convert to natural gas. What I'd like to know is: when will the Leader of the Official Opposition apologize for turning his back on these communities and leaving them in the dark?

2:40 Crime Prevention in Rural Communities.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, one of the most common calls we receive in our constituency offices comes from rural residents who have been victims of criminal activity. Brazen, broad-daylight thefts of property as well as threats to personal security have become an all-too-frequent occurrence. Now, the Justice minister has been repeatedly questioned on this, and she brushes off these concerns with talk about more money for legal aid and more money for judges, but most of these cases never get to court. The RCMP have done their best, but the situation is overwhelming their resources, and rural Albertans are outraged. Minister, specifically what are you doing about solving the problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we take the concerns of all Albertans seriously. This is a genuine and serious concern, and we do take it seriously. That's why we have continued to invest in policing. We spend over half a billion dollars on policing in this province. That's why this government stepped in and increased the funding to ALERT, that helps rural communities all over this province. That's why we've taken so many measures to ensure that officers can be back on the street instead of back at the office doing paperwork. I'll be happy to talk about that in my supplemental answers.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, the funding to ALERT is certainly appreciated, but it's not getting the job done. Given that the perpetrators of these crimes know full well that the RCMP can't get to the crime scene quickly enough to apprehend them and given that anger and frustration among victims is growing along with the desire to do what it takes to protect their property and given that this increases the risk of people taking the law into their own hands, to the minister: what measures have you been taking or will you be taking to defuse this potentially volatile situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said in the first answer, we will continue to advance that police funding, which is a more generous flow to municipalities than in any other western province.

In addition to that, I think it's important that we look at efficiencies and that we look at ensuring those officers are out on the street protecting Albertans rather than back at the office. That's why we brought in Bill 9, which allows e-ticketing as well as ensuring that they're not executing warrants for minor offences so that they can be on the street doing more important work. We'll be taking a number of measures to ensure that we are focusing justice system resources in the right places.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that local law enforcement officials have also expressed frustration at the rising rate of crime in rural communities and given that they have recommended increased surveillance among neighbours to gather evidence, monitor, and report suspicious activity and given that there's been considerably new technology developed to deal with surveillance and with evidence gathering, to the minister: instead of giving away free light bulbs, clotheslines, and shower heads, would you consider a program to encourage the purchase of trail cams and other security monitoring equipment for rural Albertans?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, we're in close contact all the time with the RCMP and with law enforcement professionals, who are, in fact, the experts in this area, and we take their advice very seriously. We certainly haven't heard about that particular advice, but moving forward, we will listen to what they have to say.

Mr. Speaker, what we have been hearing from law enforcement professionals is that they spend a lot of their time on things that they don't need to be spending their time on. That's why it is so important to invest in mental health, to invest in affordable housing, to invest in education, so that those police officers can focus on serious crime. You know what definitely wouldn't help? The proposals of the folks over there to cut 10 per cent out of my budget.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Construction Concerns

Mr. Ellis: Great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, another three weeks have gone by, and we still wait for the government to deal with this valid concern of residents living along the construction route of the southwest ring road. Representatives were sitting in the gallery today as I asked the minister to meet with them. It seems clear now that he won't do so, but I'm going to take another opportunity to urge him to change his mind.

Mr. Speaker, all Calgarians want this project, but those who will be directly affected by years of construction are simply asking for this government to lessen the impact on their lives and protect their health and their safety. Let me run down a few specific concerns. West Springs in Calgary-Bow and Bridlewood in Calgary-Lougheed are asking this government to relocate gravel-crushing operations away from their homes and their schools; residents of The Slopes in Calgary-West are greatly concerned about the plans to locate an asphalt plant near them, especially when there are other options; Discovery Ridge has concerns about safety, environmental impact, and noise attenuation; and Lakeview and Discovery Ridge are fearful that a road dam will put them at risk of flooding. More than 700 residents of Discovery Ridge have signed a petition, which I will table later today, laying out their concerns.

The communities are inviting the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, who is responsible for all aspects of this project, to listen to their common-sense solutions and have a respectful dialogue with them. To date, unfortunately, including today, they have been ignored, so our PC caucus has been acting as their voice because we know, through experience in government, that this consultation should and can occur.

But construction season is upon us. There is still time to meet with the residents in the coming weeks and quell their concerns, but the minister seems to have no interest in doing so. Minister, please do not dismiss the reasonable health and safety concerns of these communities in Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Culture Days Grant Program

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with pleasure to talk about an opportunity for local organizations all over the province to apply for funding that is being made available by Alberta Culture and Tourism.

Alberta Culture Days, September 29 to October 1, is an annual celebration that promotes the benefits of diversity and encourages participation in cultural experiences across the province. Last year 315 events took place in 87 Alberta communities, and I was personally honoured to represent Minister Miranda in Lac La Biche for one of the site announcements. As an aside, if you haven't had an opportunity to visit northeast Alberta, you're definitely missing out. This year, especially since it is the 150th birthday of Canada, we are hoping that even more communities take the opportunity to become involved.

This funding isn't just for sites that are named official celebration sites; it is for any community or organization that wants to share their ideas and their culture. Communities can participate in any number of ways, Mr. Speaker. They can create events and celebrate

their local culture, their heritage and history, their artistic diversity, and their pride in being Albertan. Alberta Culture Days is intended to help build community partnerships, boost the impact and reach of local programming, and increase Albertans' access to cultural experiences. We live in a wonderful province, and we want everyone to know about the people, cultures, and communities who live in it. We want everyone to share their creativity and their pride.

Cultural organizations, nonprofit groups, libraries, venues and facilities, schools, and community groups are all encouraged to apply. Consideration will be given to those who partner with others in their community. The deadline for applying for this grant funding is June 16 this year. I encourage every member of this House to spread the word in their constituencies and show off their communities and their cultures to the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Edmonton Islamic Academy Model UN Participation

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and honour the students, staff, and family of Edmonton Islamic Academy who join us in the House this afternoon. The academy has been operating since 1987 and now serves over 1,000 students.

Fifteen high school students join us here today. This group was invited to New York from March 9 to 13 to participate in the 43rd annual National High School Model United Nations Conference. This program offers the chance for schools to register and attend. Each school then provides their top three choices for the countries they wish to represent. The model UN then selects which schools represent which country. Edmonton Islamic Academy was chosen to represent the country they chose as number one, Canada.

This model UN conference is known for its diverse, prestigious attendees, its world-class staff, and its engaging committee simulations. EIA students were provided with opportunities to interact with high-profile, relevant United Nations figures and were joined by hundreds of schools and thousands of delegates from around the world. The students participated in academically rigorous material, thought-provoking debate, and an immersive experience in the world of international affairs, problem solving, and diplomacy.

I would especially like to recognize the devotion and dedication of Dr. Mona Nashman-Smith. I want to sincerely thank you for providing and organizing experiences like this trip for our future leaders of tomorrow. Dr. Nashman-Smith has spent countless hours supporting and creating an incredible curriculum for the students and families who attend EIA. Her work and that of countless others has made the school a pillar in the community of Edmonton-Castle Downs. It was an honour to have the EIA represent Canada this year at the high school model UN conference.

Thank you, and Ramadan Mubarak.

2:50

Engineering Profession

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I cannot think of a better mascot for an engineer than the beaver. This Canadian animal is capable of building homes, dams, and altering waterways to suit their needs. Beavers build for their families, just like our engineers.

The downturn in the economy is in its third year and has hit our engineers and technologists hard. They have a petition, with over 4,000 signatures, calling for help. Local engineering work is now being exported, through outsourcing and work sharing, to far-off countries for completion. While this might be a cost savings for the business, it's not without risks of not meeting Alberta's rigorous safety, integrity, quality, and cold-weather standards.

There are perceived biases that just because an engineer worked in the energy sector, it means that they do not have the transferable skills to work in other sectors or are overqualified and a flight risk when the energy sector comes back.

Some engineers and technologists have watched and waited patiently for new training and skills upgrade programs, to qualify for the new growth sectors of renewables and petrochemicals. Those programs are not to be found. The government has failed to meet with the representatives and get their side of the story. Even the Minister of Advanced Education refused to stop and speak to this group on the Legislature steps at noon.

Everything that was built in Alberta was done by engineers. Engineers and scientists unlocked the secret of separating oil from sand. They will be the ones to solve our environmental challenges, not politicians.

But with the current government's policies of capping oil sands production, carbon taxing, and scaring investment away with our out-of-control deficit and debt, the government has commenced a brain drain. Like the beaver who needs to turn a river into a pond to make a home for his family . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 724 residents of Discovery Ridge neighbourhood in my constituency of Calgary-West. They petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to mitigate the health, safety, environmental, and quality-of-life impacts resulting from the construction of the southwest Calgary ring road.

Thank you again for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Bill 18

Child Protection and Accountability Act

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to request leave to introduce Bill 18, the Child Protection and Accountability Act.

If passed, this new act will transform how the deaths of children who've received intervention services are reviewed in Alberta. When these heartbreaking tragedies happen, Albertans expect their government to take a hard, honest look at the system and what may have gone wrong, to rapidly adapt and improve its services, and, ultimately, to do everything it can to learn from these tragedies and prevent similar tragedies from happening.

With this legislation we would empower the Child and Youth Advocate, creating for the first time in Alberta a primary authority for reviewing the deaths of children and young people in care. We would eliminate gaps and roadblocks that prevent important information from being shared across the system. We would improve accountability so that Albertans know we are doing everything we can to protect children in care, and we would help to ensure that every review from the Child and Youth Advocate is as transparent, timely, and culturally competent as possible.

This legislation is founded on the recommendations of the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, all of which our government is taking action to implement. I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of this panel and extend my heartfelt

gratitude to all its members for putting Alberta's vulnerable children first. I look forward to discussion and deliberations with my colleagues on this important legislation to ensure that the Child and Youth Advocate reviews every death of a child in care and strengthens the way we support children and families.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Foothills – he had to step out – and just table five copies of the document that shows that there are over 4,000 signatures by the unemployed oil field workers in Calgary.

The Speaker: Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a policy brief that I used this morning during the debate on Bill 17, and I have five copies.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 16

An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to rise and table an amendment to Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, be amended as follows. Section 2(2) is amended by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:

- (b) the rate of 6.8 cents per kWh if that rate is lower than the rate referred to in clause (a).

And section 6(1) is amended by striking out clause (b).

Section 2(2) will be amended by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following: the rate of 6.8 cents – for clarity, clause 2(2)(b) currently reads:

- (b) whichever of the following rates applies, if that rate is lower than the rate referred to in clause (a):
 - (i) the applicable rate per kWh, if any, provided for by regulations under section 6(1)(b);
 - (ii) if no applicable rate is provided for by regulations under section 6(1)(b), the rate of 6.8 cents per kWh.

Section 6(1) is amended by striking out clause (b). Just for a bit of clarity, clause (b) currently reads:

- (b) determining or providing for mechanisms for determining one or more rates per kWh for purposes of section 2(2)(b)(i)

and determining the rate, if any, that applies to a particular owner or rate class of a particular owner.

3:00

The intention of this amendment is to prevent the Minister of Energy from changing the regulated rate option cap in regulations. The cap stated in the bill and in all of the government publications on the bill states that the cap will be set at 6.8 cents, which is double the current RRO. That has been the number that has been put out in public; that is the number that we understand. The way that it's presently written, the Minister of Energy has the ability to alter that without coming before the Legislature. In spite of the fact that the government never consulted with Albertans about a rate cap other than the 6.8 cents, and even that is questionable, the consultation there, the bill is crafted in a way that allows the minister to arbitrarily change the cap without consultation – without consultation – so without debate or consent of this Legislature on something beyond 6.8 cents.

This is an important and needed check. At this point presently we've been trying to explain what the RRO looks like and what it is going to mean for Albertans and residential payers – taxpayers, ratepayers, consumers, all the same person – the impact of 6.8 cents presently. We need to have that check and balance to make sure, if anything changes, that this minister is responsible to the people of Alberta and that that comes before this Legislature and is thoughtfully brought forward so we have an opportunity to discuss what that's going to mean for Albertans.

The draft of the bill provides the minister with two options. The minister actually at this point in time, unamended, can raise the cap so it's higher than 6.8 cents and can lower the cap so it is lower than the set 6.8 cents. These are massive changes that will, again, hamper the industry's ability to look at what's going on. We've already removed their signals from the market. This is another way that this government can undermine their own bill and actually come in and alter those changes without bringing it before the Legislature. If the minister needs to raise the cap for some reason, because the cost of electricity rises and the government needs to increase cost-sharing between the ratepayer and the taxpayer, who is the same person, then she should bring this request to the Legislature. That amendment needs to happen. That is a check and balance. That is about accountability. She should bring that request to the Legislature, where we can debate and discuss the increase in the cap.

If the minister wants to lower the cap, then the minister is exposing the taxpayer to more risk. What does that mean? Well, it's clear from the bill that the minister is allowed to pay that debt incurred under the cap through general revenue, which, as we know, under 6.8 cents right now doesn't describe anything about what's going on. It's complete smoke and mirrors. There's no accountability under that cap. On top of that, now with the legislation reading as it is, this minister has zero accountability for any changes that may happen. That means that through general revenue and using carbon tax revenue, that's just simply an option, an option available to the minister, who willy-nilly, at will, can change those numbers without even consulting Albertans, us, the Legislature, anybody. At \$10 million per month per cent – \$10 million per month per cent above that cap – which can happen, again, without consultation in this House, that that RRO rises as a consequence of this government's bad policy, the risk to the taxpayer: to say that that's significant is an understatement.

What's worse about this is that there's zero accountability to the average Albertan about how that's going to impact them. Right now we have zero utility debt. Why? Because right now, as much as it may be frustrating and as much as there are issues, everybody

knows what they're paying. It is listed; it is there; it is clear as day. Under the 6.8 cap there are all sorts of things that can be hidden. On top of that, now the minister has the right and the ability to change that without actually coming before the Legislature.

Everybody in this room knows that the NDP is just trying to hide those costs of their poor electricity policy instead of facing the demands from Albertans who receive a monthly bill to actually improve their policy, to monitor rising costs, and to deal with the transmission line overbuild. These are things that are going to be hidden in that 6.8-cent cap. If the minister finds that all of a sudden we don't have the infrastructure for the renewables coming online, she has the ability not only under this bill but also under Bill 34 and Bill 27 to just absolutely without consultation make changes to that legislation and not be accountable to Albertans.

This is piece three, major piece three of the accountability issues. All of a sudden the minister has all of the power in the world to make these changes without bringing it before Albertans, smoke and mirrors, hiding the changes and the bringing in of new technologies under the 6.8-cent cap without actually talking to Albertans, subsidizing industries without talking to Albertans, bringing on all sorts of projects without talking to Albertans, building new infrastructure without talking to Albertans. I think that it would be a very good idea to look at this amendment and to apply some much-needed accountability so that at least within the Legislature, if we're talking about changing that cap, that has to be brought here and have that discussion with those of us who are also representing Albertans, who are, quite frankly, very frustrated right now.

If the minister wanted, she could set that cap to zero and hide the entire cost of the RRO – the entire cost – which means that those dollars could come from a bunch of other places: property taxes, business taxes, carbon taxes. There are so many little nooks and crannies where these taxes can be pulled out of from the taxpayer, ratepayer, consumer in order for the minister to be able to cover up the decisions that she is making with her ministry with respect to Albertans' money.

As we know, Bill 27 did just exactly what we expected. Bill 27 already gave her the power to bring renewables online without actually discussing it with Albertans and, on top of that, got rid of the MSA so that the electricity police cannot have any issues. They cannot bring anything before this Legislature if they have an issue with how renewables are being brought online. They are actually completely cut out of that discussion.

Now we don't have electricity police. Now we have a Balancing Pool, that is a blank cheque. And the third beautiful piece of this legislation is that now the minister has the complete capability to raise or lower this cap as she sees fit, without bringing it in front of this Legislature. The bill is deliberately designed to reduce awareness about the NDP meddling – meddling – in the energy sector, in the electricity sector. That meddling misrepresents Albertans and is absolutely manipulative of this situation because there is zero accountability for any of the numbers that people will get on their regular bill. It's a complete manipulation of the people that are being represented in this Legislature.

I think the most frustrating part of this is that if this is the right idea, if this is the right bill, the minister has absolutely zero reason to have to hide this. She would be proud about the decisions that she's making because she's talked to the sector and she's got accountability to the sector and to Albertans to let them know that this is the best thing for them. But no. Not only is the 6.8 hiding all of those things, but now, on top of that, she is able to manipulate those numbers as she sees fit for anything that is coming online without letting Albertans know.

So far every bill this government has passed on electricity will cause costs to rise, at the minimum. We're not only talking about costs rising but also about the industry's ability to buy in and find a competitive market in which to bring industry here and create jobs, which is what I thought this government was interested in doing. Let's talk about this for a second. Let's talk about the various bills that have been passed with respect to electricity. The biggest one: guess what it is. The carbon tax. This carbon tax was not campaigned on by this government. This carbon tax is a slush fund and, let me tell you, super-duper overpromised. Every time we hear about where money is going to come from, it's going to come from the carbon tax.

3:10

The coal phase-out. It was interesting today because the Minister of Economic Development and Trade was talking about how the Leader of the Opposition had talked in 2012 about phasing out coal. Yes, he did. This was an agreed-upon phase-out by industry, by government, a phase-out in six years that the industry actually agreed to, which meant, Madam Chair, that there were no stranded assets. In fact, many of the places that were built in order to do coal fire were built with the phase-out in mind. We're now talking about a boulder rolling downhill at warp speed, that was already going that way, that is going to cost this province and everybody else billions of dollars. We were already headed in that direction. It was already set up. It was already there. The industry understood it. We understood it.

This accelerated phase-out was an absolute debacle. We were already set. Yes. You're right. The Leader of the Opposition in 2012 was absolutely part of that phase-out, something that everybody could get behind, including the industry, which did not put the taxpayer, ratepayer, consumer at risk. In fact, it gave the industry the opportunity to have the right signals to know what to buy into, what to invest into, and to understand what that transition was going to look like. Right now none of us even understands that transition.

As renewables come online, Madam Chair, does everybody here understand that those are double-billed on almost anything because when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine, we have to have capacity. There has to be baseline capacity there. That is extremely expensive. It's not just for one piece of infrastructure, not just one windmill. No. There has to be some sort of natural gas electricity provided for when that wind doesn't blow. I might also add that if it's blowing too fast, then the mechanism has to be working so it can slow it down. If it's not blowing at all, then the mechanism has to work so that it can get them moving again.

We have all sorts of issues there. We've got the coal phase-out, the 30 per cent renewables by 2030 strategy, which is a random number, picked out of thin air. Then I think that probably one of the most frustrating things is that when we were in here discussing the caps on the oil sands and the megatonne cap bill and the cogeneration, we came up with – I don't know – it must have been at least 14 amendments to bring cogeneration into the discussion. All the industry provided us, including the government, with tons of information on cogeneration. What did the NDP do? They are penalizing cogeneration at oil sands facilities. These are efficient and excellent uses of energy for an energy-intensive group of people. Yes, we are energy intensive. We provide energy for all of Canada and a good chunk of the world. We're also competing with our neighbours right now. It's something you might want to think about when they're looking at the economies here. When they're creating policy that's an absolute attack on the industry, they're at war with the industry.

They're penalizing cogeneration of the oil sands facilities under the 100-megatonne cap, and I still to this day do not have a

description or an understanding as to why that 100-megatonne cap was picked on cogeneration. Cogeneration could be a lot of different things. We brought forward a lot of amendments about different kinds of cogeneration.

In addition to the bills, we have seen gross incompetence in the way that the NDP managed the PPA file. What I'm interested in finding out is: under this government, with all the smoke and mirrors and with the ability of the minister to make random decisions without bringing them in front of the Legislature, what is it that we are signing up for now? I am so curious. In 20 years what are my grandchildren going to be on the hook for outside of the debt that this government is incurring? What kinds of deals are being made with renewable companies that none of us are participating in, that we don't understand, that my kids and my grandkids are going to pay for? I'd like to know about the overbuilds, bringing renewables online without bringing it before the Legislature. What kind of deals?

This government uses the Enron clause, saying that all of this was done in the background somewhere, with nobody knowing what was going on. Well, I'd like to know what's going on behind these closed doors right now because under that 6.8 cap it could be anything. Absolutely anything.

Just a few weeks into introducing an increase to the SGER levy, that has now resulted in – let's say it again – a \$4 billion loss for the Balancing Pool. Four billion dollars. I'm sure, absolutely sure that that's covered by that carbon levy – that's what you call the carbon tax, right? – \$4 billion plus everything else that is going to somehow be given back to Albertans as a result of this smoke-and-mirrors deal that hides everything under the mat, that is completely manipulative of the Albertans that all of us represent in this House. There are losses that the taxpayer is on the hook for, the taxpayer, ratepayer, consumer. That is why this transparency matters so much, Madam Chair. That is why it is imperative that this minister ask and participate fully in making sure that this Legislature understands what her role is, what her responsibilities are, what she is going to do, and how that comes online so that Albertans understand.

Believe me, renewables are something that everybody wants, but you have to have economic viability and you have to have buy-in. Allow the people to make choices. The government is assuming that people are going to make bad choices, but if you reward people for good choices, they're going to make good choices. Most of the people who have made these decisions made them without government intervention. I know I sure did. I didn't need a government to tell me to put solar panels on my house. That was a decision I made, but I would not expect my neighbour to spend the number of dollars and everything that I did on mine. That would be completely unfair. You have to look at the economy, and you have to look at the viability of these things. As people are more interested, the costs will come down, and more and more people will be able to put solar panels, should they desire, on their houses. They're going to be able to put all sorts of other different kinds of energy to use.

On top of that, even if that was the direction we're going, we don't have the infrastructure. These solar panels and wind farms are not necessarily on site to where we can connect to the grid. How much is that going to cost? On top of that, it's in the bill somewhere under regulations, where we have no say, no debate, no ability to chime in on how that's going to impact Albertans. You're going to hide the cost of your plan instead of fixing the plan to cost less, which does not benefit Albertans at all. How does this government justify this? How?

Again, the major issue here and why the amendment is being brought forward is because the minister has the ability to do this

without consulting Albertans. That impacts the market. The beautiful thing about our deregulated market is that it's a free market. Millions upon millions of price signals and indicators from consumers are what dictate to the industry what the market should build and how much the consumers are demanding and what price the consumer is willing to pay. That is a good thing. That is being erased by these bills, completely erased.

The competitive nature of our market has resulted in a sustained period of lower prices. This cap more than doubles the RRO. We are already paying less. We are already there. I think, again, one of the most disconcerting things is that the government thinks that Albertans don't know that. Oh, they know, and they're not buying it.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Sylvan Lake . . .

Mr. MacIntyre: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

The Chair: Innisfail.

Mr. MacIntyre: Innisfail would not be happy if we forgot it.

The Chair: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I got it.

Mr. MacIntyre: I'd be hearing about it.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I am very pleased to stand today and speak in support of the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's amendment to this bill, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. Whenever we're looking at legislation, of course, it's important to understand why the legislation is even in this House. When it comes to amendments, it's important to understand the need for this amendment. Well, of course, we understand the story behind Bill 16 in general. It's a story of mismanagement that has been consistent almost from the first day this government came to power. With specific regard to this minister and the minister's conduct in handling the electricity file, we have seen mismanagement after mismanagement, misstep after misstep, which brings us to this day where we have Bill 16 before this House, capping the RRO.

3:20

As I read through Bill 16 and I see the conditions within it, it seems to me that what we're looking at here is a bait and switch, a classic bait and switch. This government and this minister in particular spent a considerable amount of time and resources justifying a 6.8 cent cap on the regulated rate option; not 6.7, not 6.9, not some other number but 6.8 cents. I asked the minister and the government to justify the choice of 6.8. I got no answers. I asked the government for the analysis that led to the determination of 6.8. I've seen nothing. All this time the government has been out there with their flags and banners waving this 6.8 cent cap on the RRO, which, I should point out, is somewhere around 3 cents right now, so a cap at more than double where we're currently at with no justification, no analysis presented to this House, repeatedly asked for, repeatedly denied.

It makes me wonder: why, then, do we have 6.8 written into this piece of legislation when the minister is now being given substantial overreach to change that rate to whatever her little heart desires without having to come back in this Legislature and answer for it? Not only is this a bait and switch – classic bait and switch – there is zero accountability for what the switch will look like. This is what we're faced with right now. This government has been declaring to the good people of Alberta, "We're here to protect you; here's a 6.8 cent cap on the RRO," but the Minister of Energy also has the authority, unchallenged by this Legislature, to change that

rate after the fact. No accountability. Madam Chair, that really is false pretense here. There's no justification, no analysis, nothing.

This is classic flying by the seat of your pants. We have seen that from the Minister of Energy from the get-go, from this government from the get-go. They changed the carbon tax under the specified gas emitters rate without reading the contract, without understanding the implications. They were warned from within their department and from within industry that doing so was going to result in substantial consequences. They ignored the warnings both from inside the government and from industry and pressed on ahead. That is gross mismanagement, and now here we have a bill before this House giving that same minister and this same government absolute arbitrary authority to change this cap to whatever they want. No. Not acceptable. Absolutely not acceptable.

If we had a minister and a government that had demonstrated some really good common-sense management on the electricity file from the get-go, that would be a different situation, but that's not the case. We have gone from a Balancing Pool with a surplus in their account of \$705 million, and this government vaporized that in less than 12 months and so harmed the financial viability of the pool that they actually were going out for advice on what to do in case of insolvency due to the mismanagement of this government and the constant delays in giving direction to the Balancing Pool by this Minister of Energy specifically. Letter after letter from the chair of the pool to the minister asking for direction on the consumer allocation. No answer, no answer, no answer repeatedly. That is mismanagement, and now we're supposed to just: oh, yes; yes, we'll give the minister absolute, unquestioned authority to change this cap to whatever she wants now. Having gone before the people of Alberta in the press and here saying, "Oh, 6.8 is the number; 6.8 is what people need" but then giving her absolute authority to go change that willy-nilly whenever she wants either up or down – I'm sure part of the reason is because the minister is well aware that for every cent over that 6.8 it's going to cost Alberta taxpayers another \$10 million a month.

But, then, what this government has been up to with the electricity file is shifting the burden onto the taxpayer because of their constant mismanagement of this file. As I started to say, the Balancing Pool started out with a surplus of \$705 million. This government's inaction vaporized that in less than a year, putting the pool in an insolvent situation. The government came and introduced Bill 34 to bail the pool out. It never ever in its history needed that in the past till that Minister of Energy mismanaged this file. By the government's own projections under Bill 34 this government is going to have to extend some \$4.437 billion to the pool to bail it out for no other reason than this government's mishandling of the file. That is not only unfair to Albertans; it's just plain unfair every way you want to look at it. It's unfair that the people of Alberta are going to be burdened with billions of dollars of debt through the ineptness of this government. And now we're supposed to just sit back and say: oh, well, yeah; they are talking about 6.8 cents, but we'll just let the minister change that if she wants to. No coming back to this House to face any kind of questioning about it. No, she just can do it on the fly.

So there are some questions. What are the anticipated financial and economic impacts, then, of Bill 16? Is this minister going to table these sorts of things? Good managers do things like that. They do economic impact assessments. They do a financial impact assessment. They do consultation broadly. Where's the consultation? There are well over 80 players in the Balancing Pool. I'm sure there are 80 companies with opinions. We have dozens and dozens of retail energy suppliers and providers out there. I'm sure there are dozens and dozens of opinions that they have. These are the people who are being impacted by this. There are consumer groups. There

are REAs. We should have the city of Medicine Hat here. There are all kinds of consultations that need to take place over this, especially in view of this minister asking for arbitrary power to change that cap to whatever it is that she wants.

There's a significant backstory behind Bill 16, Bill 34, Bill 27. There's a huge backstory, and that backstory is fraught with mismanagement, with mishandling, misstep after misstep. I wholeheartedly support the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's amendment because what it does is cause at least a modicum of accountability so that the minister will have to come back here to change that 6.8 cent cap to something else, and she will have to answer to the Legislature and the people of Alberta and the businesses that are involved and justify that change. There has been no justification for choosing 6.8 cents thus far, none whatsoever. There has been no presentation, tabling, or anything to support that number being chosen. We've gotten vague non answers every time we've asked about it. Now here we have the minister putting forward a bill that says 6.8, but – but – she can change it any day she wants to. Frankly, this is a bait and switch, and it's a very poorly executed one.

3:30

I think it's very important to this Legislature and to the people of Alberta that the Minister of Energy take time – and today would be a fine day – to stand in this Legislature and explain to the people of Alberta how she came up with 6.8 cents to begin with. Who were the stakeholders that were consulted on this? Let's have a list of them. I'm familiar with a significant number of the players in the electricity market. As I said, I think there are well over 80 of them in the pool alone and dozens and dozens of retailers. Then there are the generators, too. Everybody has skin in this game, and a significant amount. Every time this government touches the electricity file, someone is being harmed, whether it be the taxpayer, the ratepayer, or the players themselves and the stakeholders themselves.

In a democracy it behooves the government in power to take the time and take care. Be gentle on people. That's not been a hallmark of this government's legislative history, to be gentle on Albertans, to be gentle on our industry, to be gentle on our job creators. No. This government just runs roughshod over everybody because they've got an ideology and they've got a plan and they've got everything figured out and they push on ahead. Well, all right. I think it would behoove the Minister of Energy to come before this House with a list of who was consulted. What was said in those discussions? What was actually said? It's one thing to say: yes, we consulted a dozen companies or two dozen stakeholders. But what did they say?

You know, just on a note that is perhaps a side note, but it is relevant to this, Madam Chair: that's why putting bills in committee is so important. It's so that the entire Legislature here and the members of the committee and the public have an open discussion about a piece of legislation coming before this Legislature. In a healthy democracy it seems to me only sensible that things would go to committee on a consistent basis so that people could discuss these things with us before we get to third reading, before it is proclaimed as law, before it's going to impact them, not after the fact.

If we recall, back in the Bill 6 debacle this government assured us on the day that the bill was dropped in this House that it was fine the way it was. Well, farmers disagreed, and eventually the government even listened, at least partly, and put forward in this House six pages of amendments to their perfectly fine five-page bill. Here we have another bill, Bill 16, coming before this Legislature, and it is fine like it is. Well, no it's not.

I think it makes sense that there be some further consultation on this, but I understand the minister will say that she has consulted. I would like to know who. I think the people of Alberta deserve to know who. What did they say? What kind of analysis led to choosing 6.8 cents? Why is there a clause within this in section 2(2) giving the minister arbitrary power to change that rate? Why would that rate have to change given that the current RRO is less than half of where the 6.8 cent cap is now? What is about to transpire? What forward projections has the government made that determined 6.8 to be the magic number that we need to cap the RRO at? Why wasn't it some other number? None of these questions have been answered. The procedures that have even been used to develop this entire bill: those need to be spelled out to Albertans. Why is this government doing what they're doing?

We're putting forward an amendment here, Madam Chair, in an attempt to do our job as the Official Opposition to hold this government accountable for its actions, and I realize this government has an aversion to that. Nevertheless, this amendment is extremely important in that it will require the minister to come and answer the big question: why? Why do you need to change that cap, if you need to change it? And it will require of the minister the analysis that led to the decision, just like I'm asking for the analysis that led to this decision in the first place.

This is not an unreasonable request – in the business world these kinds of analyses are done all the time – and especially so when you consider that every time this government does something on the electricity file, it's not just a buck or two impact. It seems like every time they turn around and do something on the electricity file, it costs us another billion. Well, that's a ton of money at a time when we don't have it. It's important that this government be much more responsible with other people's money than they have been. So I think it's quite sensible to insist on the analysis. Let's see. How did you arrive at these numbers? How is it that you believe you need to have this kind of overreaching authority to change it on the fly? Those are very serious questions that, I believe, this government needs to answer.

Further to that, I would hope that as we go forward, all members in this House will support this amendment, want to ensure that we do the very best for the people of Alberta that we possibly can and ensure that everything that goes through this Legislature has a very valid reason for being here. Passing a law for the sake of passing a law is simply not acceptable to the people of Alberta. We need to have legislation that actually improves life here, and if this government believes that Bill 16 is going to improve life here, then I think it behooves them to present their rationale and justification for it. Let's see the numbers. The numbers always tell a story. Let's hear what the people that the government consulted with said about this. If the government isn't prepared to do that, then I guess the next question that needs to be asked is: why? What are you hiding? This is a democracy. It's supposed to be open and transparent governance. I think it's only fair and reasonable that the government comes clean on some of the rationale behind not only Bill 16, but that's where we are right now.

I mean, I have given and my hon. colleague for Chestermere-Rocky View has given substantial reason and rationale for this amendment. We're concerned that this Bill 16 is giving the government and the Minister of Energy in particular much too much unaccountable authority to do something that has a very far-reaching impact on the electricity sector in our province.

I will remind the House that for every cent over the 6.8 cent cap, that costs us another \$10 million a month. Ten million dollars a month. I realize that this government will do what they can to make sure that doesn't appear on our electricity bills because, as I've said

before, this government is terrified of seeing increases in electricity costs on a monthly electricity bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the amendment. You know, there is a pragmatic reason for having section 6(1)(b) in the legislation, and it has absolutely nothing to do with the fearmongering that's being spouted right now.

Some Albertans get their electricity from sources other than major providers that are overseen by the AUC, the Alberta Utilities Commission, specifically many rural Albertans and the residents of Medicine Hat. So, you know, the government does expect rural electrification associations, the REAs, and municipalities to charge reasonable rates that are in line with other providers, and that will include being in line with the 6.8 cent cap. Government does not intend to remove the powers of the REA boards of directors or city councils that independently set their own rates. However, to help ensure that rates are reasonable, the government will put a mechanism in place that will provide reimbursement for reasonable rates, and here we have our mechanism that we're discussing in this section.

3:40

Should these providers choose to put in place unreasonable rates, the government will work with them and the relevant regulatory authorities to ensure that rates are consistent with other providers and in line with the regulatory requirements. You know, the reality is that the opposition wants to obstruct the introduction of these protection measures for consumers, and I find that a bit shameful.

With that said, Madam Chair, I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. Poppcock. I find it absolutely amazing that that hon. member would suggest for one moment that REAs, which are a co-operative, which are owned by their members, managed by their members, directed by their members, are going to charge, quote, unreasonable rates. It is absolute insanity that this hon. member would charge rural electrification association members and member-driven boards with the potential for being unreasonable to their own people. They are not the NDP government. They are local people.

The last thing they need is big, heavy-handed government stepping in where they are not wanted. I know so many people in those REA boards and members of those REAs, and I will stand in this House and defend their integrity to this member and any other that should dare to charge them with the potential for being unreasonable to their own families. REAs are member-driven organizations. These are farmers and acreage owners and small-business owners. They know one another. They're related many times. They've been farming in the same community for generations.

Those REAs are the lifeblood of rural economic development. They got there in spite of being neglected by successive generations of government who focused on putting electricity supply in larger communities and left rural communities to fend for themselves. Those farmers – God bless them – stood up together. They created REAs, they put poles in the ground, they strung wire themselves in those old days, and they powered up rural Alberta. We would not have a rural Alberta today like it is if it hadn't been for REAs. It is shameful for that member or any other member in this House to suggest for one moment that those dear souls are unreasonable or

could possibly be unreasonable and need this socialist government to come in heavy handed and knock them down. Shame on that hon. member. He owes an apology to the REAs in Alberta.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak against the amendment proposed by the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View. Let me begin by saying that the member in no way, shape, or manner was saying that any REA is charging unreasonable rates. What he was alluding to is that there are 32 different REAs... [interjections] If the member for Chestermere would let me speak, I would be grateful. It's my right to speak freely in this House.

There are 32 different REAs across Alberta. They are facing different realities than in Calgary and Edmonton. What this provision, section 2, does is that it provides in section 2(1) for those providers who are governed by or where AUC, the Alberta Utilities Commission, has oversight. Those will be dealt with under 2(1). Under section 2 there are those REAs, 32 of them, and then there are five municipalities, which are not governed under the previous section. They will be going under section 2. Unless the minister makes regulation, the 6.8-cent cap applies. But rural realities can be different, and that provision gives the minister an ability to look into the specific circumstances affecting those REAs and to set the rates and deal with them in a manner that is appropriate and that is best suited to the needs of those REAs. That's all these two provisions do.

On that note, I will urge all members to vote against this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You know, the reality facing REAs, the biggest issue that REAs have, is that they're profitable. Nobody wanted anything to do with rural Alberta because it was an expense and a liability. When the REAs stepped in, they built the infrastructure. Everybody that belongs to the REA is a part of that corporation. They profit from it. But now that they're profitable, of course, the big corporations want to step in and take them over, and that's the biggest reality and the biggest problem facing REAs today.

Now, the idea that this government can arbitrarily step in and set the rates for the REAs and make them noncompetitive with...

An Hon. Member: That's not going to happen.

Mr. Hanson: Well, we would sure like some clarification on that because, you know, if I look back in *Hansard* to what you just said, it sure appears that way. Now, I'm sure that the REAs are going to be very nervous when they hear that, that they may be treated differently from larger distributors in the province, that are going to make them less profitable, less competitive, and make it more attractive for their members to sell out to a large corporation. It is absolutely ludicrous that the government would expect that people are going to sit back and allow that to happen after all their hard work.

One of the greatest things about the REAs that I've seen – and I've talked to them on many occasions at their meetings, and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville was with me at one, I believe out in Willingdon. When we spoke to them, I assured them that their fight is our fight, that their fight is Alberta's fight. They're the last man standing in this fight for control and to not have a monopoly in this province. We commend them. Also, this government, rather than hindering them and making it harder for them to operate and be competitive, should be standing in and protecting

that small guy so that we can eliminate the chance of a monopoly in this province.

Now, if that's what this bill is projecting – and we'll be looking into that a little bit more, and we'll be looking into *Hansard* to see exactly what was said there – and if there is an explanation, it would be great if the minister would stand up and say it in the House, in *Hansard*, so that we could have it, have the explanation. Tell us what it's all about. I give you that opportunity right now.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like now to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 16 by the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View regarding regulated rates. I think this amendment notes that section 2(2) is amended by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:

- (b) the rate of 6.8 cents per kWh if that rate is lower than the rate referred to in clause (a).

Clause 2(2)(b) currently reads:

- (b) whichever of the following rates applies, if that rate is lower than the rate referred to in clause (a):
 - (i) the applicable rate per kWh, if any, provided for by regulations under section 6(1)(b);
 - (ii) if no applicable rate is provided for by regulations under section 6(1)(b), the rate of 6.8 cents per kWh

applies.

Also, section 6(1) is amended by striking out clause (b), which currently reads:

- (b) determining or providing for mechanisms for determining one or more rates per kWh for the purposes of section 2(2)(b)(i) and determining that rate, if any, that applies to a particular owner or rate class of [that] particular owner.

If the true intent of this government was to build in an expiry date of 2021, why on earth would this government need to build in legislation that permits the minister at any time the flexibility to increase that rate? This once again proves a gross overreach of power for the minister to pass a bill under the pretense that the RRO cap must be 6.8 cents and then have clauses to insert that give the minister the power to change it at will.

3:50

Are Albertans supposed to trust that the cap on regulated rates will not be changed at any given minute like they trusted the cap that the government put on the borrowing line? They then came back into this House and rejected it only a couple of months later. Why should Albertans trust this government?

If the minister wants to raise the rate after imposing such legislation, then she should be required to seek consent of this Legislature. It seems pretty pretentious that this government would write this bill, tell Albertans what they are doing to protect them, and then also drop in any way out through the clauses that perhaps the general public would not see or catch onto. How can this government be trusted?

What happened to their nice little cap gesture when it came to the province's debt load? They said one thing, and then just as fast as making that decision, they came back to destroy that debt load cap. Now they want to write in a clause that they wouldn't even have to come back to the House if they wanted to get rid of the cap. This is truly preposterous.

Every time we are called to this House to debate a bill this government has put through, they never cease to amaze me how they can create such crafty legislation, saying one thing to the public and then building in duck-outs in the very same legislation. This is

backward and hypocritical and just proves why this government cannot be trusted.

Madam Chair, this bill has a built-in expiry date for 2021, which is four years from now. This minister does not need the option given to her to arbitrarily determine a rate after she has made the promise to Albertans to cap their electricity cost rates at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. The cap that the minister is setting with this legislation is already double the current RRO, and after this bill is passed, she is going to be permitted to change the agreed-upon rate to any rate of her choosing.

Just for a reference, the cost is driven up by \$10 million for every 1 cent above the cap that the RRO price reaches. Ten million dollars. This exponentially increases the risk to taxpayers if the minister were to arbitrarily decide to lower the cap. Like I mentioned last week, the ratepayer and the taxpayer are the same person. If the consumer is not paying the price, the taxpayer is. Someone has to pay for this power, whether it comes out directly from their pocket or in the form of a bill or if it comes directly out of your pocket through the carbon tax, that each and every Albertan is forced to pay.

The other way the taxpayer is directly paying for anything above the cap is through general revenue. That will not only come directly out of the taxpayer's pocket but will be coming out of their children's and grandchildren's pockets for decades – decades – to come. This government doesn't care about that. They only care about now and about anything they think might get them re-elected.

The minister needs to come out and tell Albertans what her true intention really is with this bill. The 6.8-cent cap should not be changeable in regulation, and the minister needs to come clean on why she has added this clause into this legislation. If the minister wants to change up the legislated cap, she should have to come back to this House and explain to Albertans and everyone in this House why she would like to do so instead of just arbitrarily being able to do so within regulations.

I would ask those in this House to please support this amendment. Those sitting on the other side: just talk to your constituents, get some feedback from them, consult with them, see what they think, and tell them what this bill is really all about, if not for yourselves, then for your constituents and for your children and for your grandchildren. Ask everybody who voted for you and put you in a position of power. Your constituents need answers.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. A couple of things I just wanted to address here. When the member was talking about the REAs and all of this, I just wanted to – the REAs are our families, okay? Just to reiterate what the hon. members from the opposition side said, these folks are already competitive. They already function. And, just so you know, they are not governed by the AUC. They are not governed. The minister was trying to explain about the number of REAs and who is involved – thank you for that description – but the concern that we have right now, after the other member's comments, is very, very simple and, actually, glaring because of the fact that the two would have been brought together in the same conversation.

Let's talk about this for a minute. I don't have the Blues in front of me, but I'd like to understand what the member meant by reimbursement. First of all, to whom? By whom? Through the AUC to consumers that are already being taken care of by the REAs, which are more competitive in some aspects than a lot of other places? I mean, a lot of the larger companies are trying to buy these guys out. They're highly profitable. So that's the first thing.

The second piece is that I'd like to understand what he meant by unreasonable rates and to whom he's speaking. That needs to be clarified. Then the real concern is that because the AUC does not govern the REAs, now are the REAs the next thing to be removed in some piece of this legislation? Is that the next piece that we have to look forward to? I hope that this government can stand up, without a shadow of a doubt, and say that that's not going to happen, because that is a concern. Now, is the agriculture minister under that going to remove the REAs and put them under the governance of the AUC? Is that what's next on the docket here? I would like to have some clarity about that. I can tell you that with those 32 groups that the minister was talking about and all of those, you're going to have an uprising here if that's what's on the docket. If this minister, the Minister of Energy, is allowed to do that in the regulations without bringing it forward to Albertans and to change the way that the REAs function with their electricity within rural Alberta, that is not the way to do this.

I'm extremely concerned, based on what this member said, that all of a sudden the folks of the REAs, because they're competitive, might be at risk now of losing their ability to run their electricity the way that they do. They stay competitive because they understand the market. Now, the government has already removed the market signals in order for anybody to be competitive, so now is the plan that the government is going to go after REAs? I would like a very clear answer to this: yes or no? The other part is that the REAs can only compete within their service areas, so they can only compete with Fortis and ATCO, with those people, in those service areas. Outside of those service areas they can't compete.

It makes no sense that this member would bring up the AUC along with the REAs and then give the impression that somehow they would charge unreasonable rates to the families that they serve who are also members of that REA. Is this a concern? Should we be concerned on this side that the government's next piece of legislation is going to remove REAs? Literally, I want to know because we need to understand that now, and we'd better start doing some consultation. I can guarantee you that you're going to have a gallery full of angry members coming in to fight to make sure that their competitive model is not run by a socialist government.

Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Madam Chair, I've been listening for the last few minutes to the opposition really misconstruing words that may have been said by the hon. member, and I'm standing here today to be very clear that the government is actually protecting the REAs through this bill, that we are not disadvantaging the REAs, and that we have spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to keep the REAs functioning while they have faced no support from the opposition for so many years. The reason the REAs have been perishing and have been taken over by Fortis and by others is because they had no support from the opposition, but here on this side we are working very hard with the REAs.

We understand the word "co-operatives." I hate to tell the opposition, but the REAs were formed because there were no electricity providers in the rural areas, so they went to the roots, through the chair, of what we believe as New Democrats, and they actually formed a co-operative. A co-operative is where people pool their resources to be able to provide services that they really need.

Madam Chair, I just want to really emphasize again and again that the government has been working with the REAs. There's been a lot of consultation with both the minister of agriculture and the Minister of Energy to make sure that the REAs maintain their strength in our rural communities and can be really functioning. I personally have really appreciated the work that has happened with both ministries. Through this bill and other acts we're really working

hard to make sure that the REAs can survive even though they have been totally not supported by the former government.

What this section reflects is the significant effort of the government to accommodate the REAs' unique circumstances and contribution to Alberta's economy, especially the rural economies, whereby they are not regulated, as with the other RRO providers. The other side is undermining this work, which is the result of significant consultation with the REAs. I know that I myself and the members for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater and all of the other rural MLAs, the Member for Stony Plain have spent a lot of time with our REAs because we understand the power of the REAs in the economy of rural Alberta. This provision, as was discussed, is the result of that, and we are proud to have done the hard work to include them in the collaboration.

4:00

Now, my understanding is that there are a number of consultations at the moment, and I know that all of the REAs have been involved because I've been in touch with many of the REAs. Actually, I'm working very closely with the REAs to make sure that they are involved. So what I would really appreciate, Madam Chair, from the opposition is that they would acknowledge the work that our government has done to recognize the work of the REAs in rural Alberta and the contribution they are making to energy rates, especially the work that's happening.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I do appreciate the last member's passionate comments in defence of REAs, and I do agree with her on the need to defend REAs and the importance of them in the history of our province, our whole province but particularly rural Alberta.

But the issue that we have – and we were watching the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein speaking on this bill, speaking specifically on the amendment. The reason that he would not support the amendment, he made very, very clear, was that there were concerns that REAs would take advantage of their members. Now, the hon. member who just spoke was very passionate about her concern for the way REAs are treated, and I want to be clear, Madam Chair, that I agree with her on that. She should be upset that one of her hon. colleagues has either shown a complete ignorance of what an REA is or that this is actually something that the government is trying to bring forward with this bill. This is an issue, so the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, who rose immediately after hearing those comments, asked some very clear questions of the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein on whether or not this was the intent of this bill.

If the point is to protect REAs, then they should be supporting the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's amendment because that's the point of that amendment as well, as has been pointed out by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

An Hon. Member: I think we need a standing vote on that.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. I mean, the standing vote on this will be interesting.

The Member for Calgary-Klein clearly rose in this House and said that, basically, the government's policy and the reason that they were bringing forward this legislation was because they were concerned that REAs would take advantage of their members.

Now, does the government know what an REA is? Does the hon. member know what an REA is? REAs are run by their members. Their boards are run by their members. They're made up of their

members. They have a long history in this province of making sure that rural Albertans could have electricity. In fact, we would not have electricity in rural Alberta if it wasn't for REAs.

Why would it be implied, when we're talking about an amendment designed to protect REAs' autonomy and their ability to be able to do what they do – why the member would rise and say that is confusing. Certainly, I think it's the government's responsibility to rise and acknowledge that statement and explain it. If the member misspoke or misunderstood what an REA is, that's fine, but there needs to be some clarification now, for those of us who represent REAs like myself, of what exactly the government's intention is for REAs because it's very, very concerning.

Now, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, I believe, also rose, talking about Fortis and making disparaging comments about Fortis. Why are we specifically talking about companies or specific REAs in the middle of this debate? If that is the intention of this bill, then that needs to be explained. If that is why this government is voting against this very, very reasonable amendment, because they have some sort of hidden agenda when it comes to the REAs or Fortis, that needs to be explained.

There's a direct contradiction between the MLA for Sherwood Park and the MLA for Calgary-Klein that is significant and needs to be answered. What are this government's plans for REAs now? Is it the Member for Sherwood Park's version, or is it the Member for Calgary-Klein's version? Is the government concerned that REAs are going to take advantage of their members, or is the government concerned with protecting REAs' ability to be able to do their role inside rural communities? Which one is it? I'm confused. I'm sure you're confused, Madam Chair, after hearing both of those speeches. So I would love it if the government would acknowledge that.

We'd like to hear from the minister now on what her plan is for REAs and whether she agrees with the Member for Calgary-Klein that there is significant risk of REAs taking advantage of their members and that that's why they're doing this legislation. Is this legislation being brought in in an attempt to limit REAs' abilities? Or, as the Member for Sherwood Park brought up, is this legislation being brought in to stop Fortis from doing their job? It's very confusing now, what the intention of this government is with this bill. I don't know what the government wants to do. They clearly need to get their story straight because we're hearing two very, very different versions in relation to REAs, in particular in the last few minutes, from members across the way. It's disappointing.

What is most disappointing is that there's a clear amount of ignorance from the members on what an REA is, what their implications are for rural Alberta. I think the Member for Calgary-Klein, if he misspoke, should make that clear, should rise and explain it. If not, the government needs to explain what their intention is for REAs. Is this going to be a continued attack on rural Alberta, that we have seen from the NDP? Are they continuing with their attraction to attacking rural Alberta or not?

The Chair: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my absolute pleasure to stand up and talk about rural electrification associations. In the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville I have the privilege to represent the Lakeland Rural Electrification Association, the Zawale Rural Electrification Association, and the Battle River Cooperative REA. Over the last couple of years it's been a really interesting journey in getting to know how these different REAs work on a really local level as co-operative models. I know that, actually, after I was elected, the Lakeland REA was one that reached out to me immediately because they were very excited that

the new New Democrat government shared the same ideological underpinnings as co-operatives. They were hoping that a new government with those ideologies would come forward in a way that would collaborate with them to figure out how to make those local drivers of economic development in rural Alberta sustainable, viable engines out in their communities. They want to know that there is someone that is actually fighting for them.

I know that the Wildrose members have come together on this issue because they represent mostly rural ridings. I know that these REAs that have come forward to talk to us were hoping to see new MLAs from these parties do something to better protect their futures, that had not been taken into consideration by the previous government at all. These groups out in rural Alberta, exactly like members have pointed out, came together to provide themselves with electricity when government would not help and when companies did not see the ability to make money. So they came together . . .

An Hon. Member: So why don't you trust them?

Mrs. Littlewood: I don't really know why there are members yelling at me. Maybe you could control your members. We're in agreement. We're talking about the same thing. [interjections] We all agree that these groups are incredibly important out in rural areas, out in small communities, for economic development.

An Hon. Member: But you don't trust them.

Mrs. Littlewood: I'm sorry. I don't know why the members from the Wildrose continue to yell at me. I'm sorry. I'm at a bit of a loss. I'm sorry.

Chair, is there a reason . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, please continue.

4:10

Mrs. Littlewood: I would like to, but it's a little bit difficult.

At any rate, it's my absolute pleasure to be able to represent these groups and work with them knowing that we can come together and look at how the legislation works, see how it is that we can work with other models of how it works in other jurisdictions such as the United States and how it has been a model unto itself. Because it is an agreement between someone like ATCO and the REA itself, so there is not the space in between for the Alberta Utilities Commission. It's a direct relationship that they have.

I think that we need to make sure that we find out how it is that these models can continue to be good for their members to continue to invest in. Because they look at how they buy their energy in markets, and there is, of course, instability inherent in that. I know that I've heard that from some of the smaller REAs just outside of the capital region of Edmonton, that when they buy at a rate higher for the future, you know, that they could have offered something that was more competitive if they didn't do that. But they're looking at how to make sure that they can actually provide the best value for their members, so they make those business decisions with the experience that they have.

We need to look to the future and see how we can better partner with them and their expertise. [interjections] I don't really know why the members continue to shout down REAs. It's a little bit confusing why the members opposite don't want to just work together on helping REAs into the future. You know, I think that we've been working very well on this for a couple of years, and I don't know why they're so angry that the government supports the work that the REAs are doing. Madam Chair, it's astonishing that we could be working towards helping rural Alberta and the Wildrose

would instead try to score some sort of political points off people that are really just trying to make life better for their local communities.

I really do hope that we actually have some genuine support from across the way, but I'm not hearing that. I wish that we could work together on something that would actually help people as opposed to creating these strange sort of divides against people and against communities. I am very much hoping that we can maybe strike a more collaborative tone on trying to help these REAs into the future. I very much hope that the members can get onboard with the government's plan to make these groups more viable in the future.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I just wanted to say that I think that when the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville stands up and says that we're shouting her down, she needs to remember that we are actually giving good advice to this government to be able to make it better. Then what happens is that she gets us on *Hansard* so that it makes it look like we're shouting her down. In reality, the members opposite shout us down constantly. What I'd like to say to the member is that she might want to make sure that when she's pointing one finger, three are not pointing back at her.

Let me just talk to this really quickly. I think the issue here, that I see as a big problem – let me just read to you really quickly what the regulations say. I think it's really important, Madam Chair, to remember that this bill – I have no doubt that they believe in what they're doing and that they believe that this is in the best interest of Albertans. The problem is that there could be problems with it, so if we come up with a reasonable amendment, I think the members opposite should take a look at it.

So here's the question that I have. Under regulations it says:

- 6(1) The Minister may make regulations . . .
 - (b) determining or providing for mechanisms for determining one or more rates per kWh for the purposes of section 2(2)(b)(i) and determining the rate, if any, that applies to a particular owner or rate class of a particular owner.

First of all, members need to remember how these rates are set. The government thinks that the rates should be set by the minister, that they could go in at any time and pick and choose the companies – and we've heard a lot about the REAs in this situation – and that they need to protect Albertans against REAs that are actually member driven. It's absolutely ludicrous that they would say such a thing. Really, the devil's in the details, Madam Chair. In reality, if the minister has this right and the power to be able to change the regulations at any time, to take away the right of an REA to set the rate, then they could create a multi-tiered scenario at any given time, a multi-tiered scenario where they pick who's going to have what rate and could drive them out.

Now, one thing that I have seen over the last two years that is extremely concerning to me is that this government continues to restrict supply. When they restrict supply, they drive up the price. Simple economics. Supply and demand create the equilibrium price. This is why for a couple of hundred years we have had very successful societies, because we've allowed the market to decide those prices. The problem is that when the minister has the right to decide what those prices are, she drives up the price.

I have said this before in this House, Madam Chair. The concern I have is that if this government, if this bill was all about protecting Albertans, would you not protect them at the 3 cents per kilowatt hour that it's at presently? Why would you wait to when it has to

get over a hundred per cent increase in the cost of this electricity before you decide to then protect them? That's what they're saying. They're saying: we're going to protect them when it hits 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour.

If that's the case, when they decided they were going to cap tuition rates, why didn't they wait for it to go up over a hundred per cent before they decided to cap tuition rates? Because they know that they would never get that vote again. They know that students would say: you guys have been completely destroying our economy, destroying our ability to get to school. So they capped the rate at the present rate. They didn't wait for it to go up a hundred per cent.

In this situation this whole idea of capping the rate at 6.8 cents when we're sitting at 3 cents per kilowatt hour is saying: "You know what? We're actually not going to protect Albertans. We're going to wait for it to go up to 6.8 cents. Then we're going to cap it, and you guys can go ahead and eat the over hundred per cent increase in the cost of electricity." How is that making life better for Albertans?

Now, the problem with this is that – I think that the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View has said: look, let's try to make this less bad. In order to do that, we want to make sure that there's an equal playing field in this market, an equal playing field where REAs and everyone else can have the same rate set. But under this regulation the way that it reads right now, the minister would be able to pick and choose who gets what, and I believe that that is a complete disaster waiting to happen.

If the members opposite believe that REAs would be okay with that, I have no idea where they'd get that kind of thinking because REAs don't need their help. REAs are member driven. They are fully capable and have been capable for quite some time now to have a strong, vibrant business model. This is the reason why we have so many REAs in Alberta. They are very capable of doing what they do because they're member driven and because they have a good business model. They don't need the government telling them how to do it.

4:20

This is the problem with this whole bill. The problem with this whole bill is that these guys are creating a scenario where they're going to dictate what the price is for each of these different entities in this market. I just think they are playing with fire on this one.

Albertans don't deserve it. They don't deserve to have them, first of all, drive up the price of electricity. I have talked to people in my riding who are absolutely irate. People who are on fixed incomes do not know how they're going to be able to deal with this. They're already struggling. They're already in pain because of the continual problems that this government keeps piling on them, and then this government is going to be complicit in driving the price up to 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. They drive it up because they're trying hard, desperately to be able to bring in green energy.

Now, listen, Madam Chair, I believe in green energy. I want to see green energy come, but the technology has to be there. You can't drive this to happen. I gave an example the other day where I talked about a U.S. president back in the '70s, and he decided that he was going to restrict how much natural gas people could use. He drove greenhouse businesses out of business. It's interesting, as I read a little bit more about that, that he actually put solar panels on the White House. It didn't last because the technology wasn't there. It wasn't ready for it.

What we need to do is make sure that the technology is there before we start bringing in some kind of an ideological push so that it won't cost Albertans billions of dollars. This is what this boondoggle

has created. It just seems like one problem after another has been created because they wanted to push. They wanted to push their green energy strategy. We've got lots of examples – Ontario, Germany, California, lots of examples – where this boondoggle has been simmering for a long time and has cost the people, the taxpayers of those jurisdictions a lot of money. For some strange reason this NDP government believes that they've got it right this time. No wonder Albertans are concerned. No wonder we're concerned. No wonder we don't believe that they do have it right, because they haven't shown a model that does work.

Anyway, Madam Chair, again, I think this is a reasonable amendment. I think that this is making this bill less bad. It takes the power out of the minister's hand so that she cannot just arbitrarily decide a rate for each of the different entities within this playing field. I think it's an extremely important amendment, and I will be supporting it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:23 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	MacIntyre
Anderson, W.	Hanson	Panda
Cyr	Hunter	Stier
Drysdale	Loewen	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	McLean
Babcock	Goehring	McPherson
Bilous	Gray	Miller
Carlier	Hoffman	Miranda
Ceci	Kazim	Nielsen
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Payne
Coolahan	Larivee	Piquette
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Sabir
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Eggen	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Woollard

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 39
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

4:40

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I'd like to make a few comments on this bill we're discussing here today. In particular, I would like to quote some parts of a letter from Spot Power. This is a letter to the Energy minister and CCed to all MLAs in Alberta. It starts off with:

On Tuesday, you tabled Bill 16: An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. The new bill will allow the government to place a cap on the Regulated Rate Option (RRO) for electricity. The retail price cap of 6.8 cents per kilowatt-hour will apply to those consumers on the RRO until May 31, 2021.

So they've outlined here what this bill is doing.

The subsidy, funded wholly from the Carbon Levy, will be paid to the RRO Utilities, Rural Electrification Associations (REAs) and the city of Medicine Hat to cover the difference between the calculated monthly RRO price and the government set cap of 6.8 cents per kWh.

Now, of course, they've described here where this is going to be funded from. It's from the carbon tax. Of course, the carbon tax is something that Albertans did not want and that the government did not campaign on.

It goes on to say:

All consumers in Alberta pay into the Carbon Levy Fund, but not all consumers will benefit from this subsidy. A policy that subsidizes only part of the population while requiring everyone to fund it, is simply wrong. We are all Albertans and should be treated fairly.

Since the carbon levy is just on fuel and heating and this money goes to electrical consumers, then the people that burn lots of gas, for instance, tend to pay more carbon tax, of course, and if they burn lots of gas and, say, have solar panels, then they get no return on that investment. That's what he's describing here in this letter, why it's not fair.

The subsidy payment will go to the RRO providers who are guaranteed a marginal profit based on their individual Energy Price Setting Plans. We ask you to realize that some of the utilities you are subsidizing have shipped Alberta jobs out of the province (Enmax to Tata; ATCO to Wipro; and Direct Energy to HCL). These jobs were once provided by Albertans in fields such as Information Technology, Customer Care, and Billing Services. Subsidizing RRO providers that shipped jobs to India, Guatemala or Ontario out of Carbon Levy dollars is not right.

So this isn't having Albertans' backs. These are some of the consequences of some of this government's actions that they don't realize.

The letter goes on to say:

The main message touted by the government for this new bill is "protection of the consumer from price fluctuations". Dear Minister, it is wrong to base your decisions on what RRO prices looked like in 2012 and 2013. Market conditions have changed. The market over the last three years has been stable and today, consumers are paying 3 cents for energy, not the 15.3 cents that was seen in the past.

By using averages going back to 2012-2013, it has somewhat distorted what's happening today. It's just not necessarily using the best data.

The letter goes on to say:

Are you expecting wholesale power prices to spike again given the various energy policies that you are planning on undertaking? If the wholesale market collapses and we see a return to 15.3 cent retail prices this will cost the government almost \$120 million a month. Is this what you are anticipating?

I think that's a great question because if the prices do go back up because of this government's electricity policies, then the taxpayer is going to be on the hook for almost \$120 million a month. That's a lot of money.

It goes on:

The Cost of Energy is Not the Problem

What does the average consumer bill look like today?

They've actually got a graph, and I'll be bringing this forward tomorrow into the Legislature. But it's got a graph here, and basically what the graph is saying is:

The charges on an electricity bill can be split into two categories, regulated and de-regulated. De-regulated charges vary depending on which provider you choose to supply you with electricity. Regulated charges are set by the Wires company which services your area and remain the same, no matter who you choose to provide you with energy.

De-regulated charges include:

- The cost of electricity consumed . . .
- Administration fees

Regulated charges include:

- Balancing Pool Allocation
- Delivery Charges
- Local Access Fees

The delivery charges make up over 74% of the total costs for the consumer . . . The actual energy consumption charges make up only 14% of the total costs.

Clearly the cost of energy is not the problem.

It goes on to say:

Over the last four years, energy prices have declined every month – year after year. It was the private sector that invested \$17 Billion in building generation facilities, and consumers have benefited. Today, retail prices indexed to the cost of energy have never been lower. If the cost of energy isn't the problem, possibly the cap should be applied to the cost of distribution and transmission. Consumers can buy electricity today for between 3 to 4 cents per kWh but pay two times and as much as five times more for the cost of delivery.

He's kind of outlining some of the problems with the situation that we have here with this cap.

Now, having a cap to begin with I think is worrisome to Albertans because, obviously, what they're doing is setting the tone for where the electricity prices are going. That's worrisome, especially when you put the cap at double the rates existing today.

The letter goes on to say:

New Policies Will Cause Energy Costs to Rise

Closing coal plants, a conversion to natural gas, subsidies for solar PV, bailing out the Balancing Pool, and capacity payments being made to new generators will all contribute to pushing up the cost of generation.

Let me just kind of reiterate that. It says here that closing coal plants, a conversion to natural gas, subsidies for solar PV, bailing out the Balancing Pool, and capacity payments being made to new generators will all contribute to pushing up the cost of generation. That's a lot of things that will affect the cost of electricity in Alberta that are all as a result of this government's actions.

Now, it goes on to say:

The total annual load that is eligible for the RRO is about 19 terawatt hours . . . translated on average to [1.6 billion] kWh per month. This accounts for about 40% of the load settled through the Alberta Load Settlement System. If the wholesale market increases, thus causing the RRO to go above 6.8 cents per kWh, it is going to cost \$10 million to \$16 million in subsidies per month for every cent per kWh increase in the wholesale price. Wouldn't we be wiser to spend this money on subsidizing programs that would increase the quality of our life or help reduce the carbon footprint, rather than manipulating the market?

I think that's another good question, Madam Chair, how we're spending this money to benefit Albertans. We're spending billions of dollars here manipulating a system that was working fine, and to what end? Costing Albertans billions of dollars. That's who's paying for all this. Any time a company invests money in electricity in Alberta, that money will be recovered from Albertans.

What if the RRO spikes to 15.3 cents per kilowatt hour again? Under the cap that has been imposed, this would cost the government (consumers) \$119 million during that particular month. This program could bankrupt the Carbon Levy fund and will do nothing to reduce our carbon footprint. Does the Carbon

Levy have enough money in the budget to fund the additional expense?

These expenses could be huge, Madam Chair: \$119 million a month just on bailing out electricity companies if the price of electricity goes beyond the cap. That's a huge amount of money.

It goes on to say:

A question to consumers: where do you think the money is coming from that will be used to fund the cap? Where?

- Out of one pocket and into the other.
- Industry who is consuming 60% of the load in Alberta will be required to step up to subsidize the subsidy.

How will industry recover their losses? You know, they'll be charging Albertans, or Albertans will be paying for it through their taxes.

A higher cost of electricity will hurt consumers as well as our manufacturing and industrial sectors. When this happens, we start to lose the Alberta competitive advantage.

4:50

What this letter is stating, which is obvious, is that as you increase the costs of doing business in Alberta, that makes it less likely for companies to come here and set up businesses. It's all about having a competitive advantage over other jurisdictions. This is what we see over and over again. By driving away investment, we lose jobs, we lose tax base, and it's just a spiralling effect.

The letter goes on to say:

Does the Government Want to Kill a Competitive Electricity Market?

It is the competitive retailers in the market that drive innovation and are constantly introducing new products and services. The RRO cap will artificially tilt the playing field towards the RRO providers and away from competitive market participants. Those who will profit from the end of the competitive market are the same players who exported jobs out of the province. With unemployment still far too high, why are we going to subsidize RRO providers who shipped jobs out of the province?

That's a fair question.

The Carbon Levy is being used to subsidize 40% of the load in the province, yet the other 60% are not eligible for the subsidy but are required to pay. This taxation program will hurt the private sector, and in the long run, consumers.

Somebody has to pay for all this in the end. Who's there to pay? Of course, the consumers. Who are the consumers? Those are Albertans.

Dear Minister, we are asking you to avoid harming private sector businesses, the likes of Spot Power, and scores of others that have invested in this province.

So there's a letter from Spot Power to the Energy minister. Obviously, they're concerned. They've brought out a lot of great points as far as what this bill will do to make Alberta less competitive and to force the cost onto the taxpayer.

We all know that this bill is a way for the government to hide the true cost of electricity, to take it off the bill of Albertans and have it funded through the back door from tax money, which is also Albertans' money. That's the only reason this could have been brought forward, Madam Chair. It has nothing to do with protecting Albertans. It has nothing to do with lowering the cost of electricity. It's an admission that the electricity rates are going up, and it's an admission that this government wants to hide those costs from showing up on your electricity bill. There's no need for this bill. This is, again, another situation where the government has to bring forward bills as damage control for bills that they've already passed, bills that they passed that we warned had consequences.

Madam Chair, I'll be voting against this bill, and I'd encourage others that are concerned about Albertans and concerned about transparency to do the same. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, there is a great deal to talk about in this bill, Bill 16. I would like to draw our attention to section 6 in particular. Regulations is the heading, and I'm going to go to subsection (g).

6(1) The Minister may make regulations . . .

- (g) respecting any matter or thing that the Minister considers necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.

An absolute, wide open, carte blanche power given to the minister to make regulations respecting any matter or thing that the minister considers necessary to carry out the purposes of this act.

Let's have a look at the purposes of this act. Well, there are two very distinctly different narratives about the real purposes of this act. The government would have us believe that the purpose of this act is to protect Alberta consumers from price spikes on the retail side of our electricity market, up till now our competitive, free-market electricity sector, deregulated but not for long, apparently. The government claims that Albertans need protection from price spikes.

I believe it's been mentioned before. I'm going to mention it again. The RRO, the regulated rate option, is the fallback, the default rate for Alberta residential customers, small businesses, and small farms should they choose not to use a fixed-rate contract. We have available to us from multiple retail providers in this province fixed-rate contracts ranging from, I've seen, two years, three years, five years, that are already well below 6.8 cents, I should point out. I believe the current five-year contract from at least four providers is 5.59 cents. So the government's claim that the purpose of this bill is to protect Albertans from price spikes really falls to the ground when you consider that the protection has been there all along. Any of these fixed-rate contract providers also have mechanisms within those contracts for Albertans to opt out of a fixed-rate contract and go back to their regulated rate option if the customer chooses to. Some of these providers want 30 days' notice; some want 15 days' notice. In either case it's not a lot of notice. For some of them there's no penalty; you simply go back on the RRO if it's in your best interest to do so.

Right now with the rate being 3 cents, 3.1, 3.2 on the RRO, depending on your providers, it makes perfect sense to jump over there, take advantage of those low rates for a while, and if in your opinion as the consumer you want to lock things down at any point in time, then fine, phone up any of these providers. Get yourself a long-term contract or a short-term contract and protect yourself from price spikes. The deregulated electricity market that we had already had so many choices for consumers. It was in that very choice that the consumer was finding protection. They did not need Big Brother government coming along and putting in place an artificial cap over twice as high as the current RRO, strangely, and then claiming to be protecting Albertans from price spikes. They were already protected, fully protected. They could at any moment pick up the phone, call a provider, and lock down their electricity rate if they saw that rates were going to go up. It's a very simple process. That's the nature of a competitive market in a free-market economy.

Competition has always been the number one protector for consumers. We have competition in the purchasing of cars, the brand of food, the kinds of clothes we buy. You name it. There is competition out there for our business. That's where we find our protection, both in the quality of the product we buy and in the price for the product we buy. If you go around the world and you study

economic history and you look at government models throughout the world that have employed supply management regimes, those economies consistently collapse. They fail because government then becomes the determiner of what is going to be the price for commodity A or B.

It wasn't all that long ago that we saw a total collapse in Eastern bloc nations under the old socialist regime. They had shoe factories producing shoes nobody wanted. They couldn't get bread produced because the flour was being sold somewhere else. This was all managed by a central government and managed wrong. Here in this country we had supply management under the Canadian Wheat Board, and thankfully it's gone. Thankfully, it's gone. You know, there was another monopolistic, centralized, planned regime in place.

5:00

Here we have a government that, for whatever reason, seems to think that they know best and that the competitive nature of a market doesn't ensure either quality or reliability or stability or competitive pricing. They have throughout the debate on Bill 16 and others used those words, that they need to do this for the sake of reliability in our electricity system, they need to do this for the sake of stability in our electricity system, and they need to do this for the sake of volatility and for the sake of ensuring that Albertans don't experience price spikes. Well, news flash: our deregulated energy market did a really good job. It did a really good job in providing all of that to Albertans.

The system wasn't broken. This government has come along and broken it terribly. They broke it to the tune already of well over \$4 billion in unnecessary costs to Alberta taxpayers. So when we see something like this particular clause under section 6(1)(g), that "the Minister may make regulations . . . respecting any matter or thing that the Minister considers necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act," I would suggest to this House and to Albertans who are watching this debate that the real purpose of this act is not at all to protect Alberta consumers. It is to eliminate the deregulated electricity system. It is to eliminate the free market and choice. It is to eliminate consumers' only real protection, which has been competition. Its real purpose is actually to protect this government from the embarrassing reality of a series of horrific missteps in the management of this file. That is the real purpose of this bill that we have before us.

I reject the notion that this minister can be given carte blanche authority to make regulations respecting any matter or thing that the minister considers necessary to carry out the purposes of this act. I have no faith whatsoever in this minister or this government in getting it right. I do not want this minister or this government to be able to do whatever they want in regulation without having to come into this Chamber right here and answer for it. They saw fit to bring Bill 16 in with a 6.8 cent price tag on the cap, and as we have seen already, they want to give the minister permission to change it any way she wants. So does this section.

So I would like to introduce an amendment. I'll wait, Madam Chair.

The Chair: This is amendment A3. Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, be amended in section 6(1) by striking out clause (g) entirely. That is the amendment, to get rid of it entirely out of this bill for the reasons that I have stated. There is no way – no way – that this minister and this government should be given this kind of carte blanche authority to do whatever they want to, and that's what this section (g) does: "respecting any matter

or thing that the Minister considers necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act."

As I've already discussed, there is a big difference between the purposes expressed by this government and the realities of the real reasons for this Bill 16 coming before this Legislature, and I do not believe for one moment that this Minister of Energy or this government should be given permission through a piece of legislation like this to do whatever they want to a free-market system that has been working quite well, thank you very much.

They even went so far as to use as some of their justification a price spike in the RRO that went slightly more than 15 cents, failing to understand that that price spike was actually caught by the MSA and the company responsible for it fined \$56 million. Fifty-six million. In other words, our free-market economy with the built-in protection mechanisms that were put in place some time ago worked just fine. The contravening participant was caught. It went before the authorities. The authorities said: "No. What you did was wrong. You purposely went and withheld generation to force the price up. You took advantage of that, and you charged Albertans a lot of money for it. You've been caught red-handed, and now you need to pay this fine." Our system worked. The very competitive nature of the system with the built-in safeguards, specifically the MSA, worked just fine.

The government is claiming: oh, Albertans need protection because the price went up that time to 15 cents. I agree that we need protection there. We have it. It's called the Market Surveillance Administrator. They're the electricity police. They were notified of what had happened. The whistle was blown on TransAlta. TransAlta was fined. The system worked flawlessly.

Mr. Panda: How much was the fine?

Mr. MacIntyre: Fifty-six million dollars.

It's significant to realize that the system, in a completely deregulated environment, was not only working but even policing itself. The mechanisms existed. I should also note that – well, we'll talk about the MSA a little later, one of my favourite organizations within our electricity system.

As it stands right now, respecting this particular amendment that I'm putting forward before this House, I would hope that all members would consider the kind of carte blanche authority that is being given to this minister that has failed to demonstrate a solid understanding of the electricity file from the beginning, claiming from the beginning that she had not any knowledge of section 4.3(j), which led to this whole mess that we're experiencing right now.

Bill 34 had to come into being. The government had to bail out the Balancing Pool. Because of this minister's mismanagement well over \$700 million in the pool vaporized. The pool was fined \$29 million because of this minister's mismanagement, and we're going to give this minister carte blanche like this? I don't think so. I don't think so. And no accountability to do things in regulation without having to come to this House and answer for those actions? No. That is unreasonable.

You cannot come to Albertans anymore and say: trust me. That trust has been broken time and time and time again on this electricity file. Not only does the average Albertan not trust this government; the industry doesn't trust this government either. There's nothing to trust anymore. This government hit industry with a 70 per cent increase in the specified gas emitters rate. That doesn't engender trust, when you slap them like that within six weeks of coming into office. That doesn't make people trust you. Quite the opposite. Then you're shutting down coal – it's just crazy – and saying: "Trust me. We've got your back. We're making life more affordable for Albertans." Well, tell that to people in

Keephills. Tell that to the people in Halkirk, Hanna, Forestburg. Go ahead. Stand on the corner with a big sign that says, "I'm making life more affordable for you," and see what the response is.

5:10

Mr. Panda: It's an insult to Albertans.

Mr. MacIntyre: It's an insult. They're not making life more affordable for Albertans. They're hurting Albertans left, right, and centre, especially in the electricity industry. And now here we have Bill 16. It's ridiculous.

I would hope that every member will consider this amendment to make the minister come back to this House whenever the minister wants to make a change to this bill. I think it's important. I think it's important because Albertans have no reason to trust that the minister will get it right. We haven't seen any analysis. We haven't seen any assessment. We have not seen any of the deliberations through consultation, none of it. Over and over again it's the same story: "Trust me; I've got your back. Trust me; I've got your back." No. No. Not happening. We do not trust this minister.

I would hope every member will support this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:12 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Hanson	MacIntyre
Drysdale	Hunter	Panda
Gotfried	Loewen	Stier

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	McLean
Babcock	Goehring	McPherson
Bilous	Gray	Miller
Carlier	Hoffman	Miranda
Ceci	Kazim	Nielsen
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Payne
Coolahan	Larivee	Piquette
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Sabir
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Eggen	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Woollard

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 39
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 16? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to take this time to speak to Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates. My understanding is that if this bill is passed, the regulated rate option, which is currently around 3 cents per kilowatt hour, will be capped

at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour. Is this not an admission from this government that the rate will more than double over the next little while? The RRO will be capped for the next four years, from June 1, 2017, to May 31, 2021. Regardless, even with their cap, we're in for a huge increase on our power bills.

This was completely shocking to me until I read further information about the file. Madam Chair, I have to tell you that after reading up on this file, I realized that this government is not in a position to govern the people of Alberta properly. This file is being completely torn to pieces, and Albertans will have to suffer the consequences of this NDP's action and inaction for decades to come.

I've been listening to a few of the speeches from the other side of the House, and it makes me wonder if any of those MLAs did any homework on this file or if they just were handed talking points and then went blindly into this foray. I have to admit that it angers me that this government is promoting this bill like they are actually sticking up for Albertan families. This is purely nonsensical. I talk to Albertans on a regular basis, and people on a fixed income especially are not happy about this bill.

You're telling us that you have to cap the regulated rate option at 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, when currently it's 3.8 cents per kilowatt hour. Natural gas is cheap, readily available, and is capable of employing hundreds of thousands of people. What is more ridiculous is that this cap is only available for those who consume fewer than 250,000 kilowatt hours per year. So what about companies and industry, who supply Albertans with thousands upon thousands of jobs? Are you just going to cut and slash them so that they have no other option but to finally pick up and move to another jurisdiction, out of the province? Or maybe that is your plan altogether.

First, the job creators were hit by this government's massive corporate tax, then came the carbon tax, and now you're not going to protect our job makers and everyday Albertans from an increase to electricity that has been set in motion due to your radical and ideological policy decisions.

Will the government just admit to Albertans that due to their reckless NDP policy world views, they have completely turned this file upside down? They're meddling with a file they know absolutely nothing about. Albertans realize that the bill is just a cover-up due to their irresponsible rapid transition to renewables. We kept warning them over and over again: "Too fast. The economy can't handle this. Slow down. Do an economic impact study. Listen to Albertans." But they don't listen to reason, calling us climate change deniers whenever they get the chance, for political reasons, just so that they can press forward with their ideological nonsense.

5:20

Albertans are going to pay one way or the other, from job losses when industry has once and for all been decimated and forced to move, to massive debt that will occur due to the amount of money it will take to fund this cap. It's been estimated at over \$20 billion to get us to the 30 per cent by 2030. Can you believe it? Where is this money going to come from, Madam Chair? Being completely out of touch with everyday Albertans and radical ideology are going to be the financial ruin of this province, this once-great province: a massive and costly lawsuit with Enmax, funded by taxpayers, phasing out coal at an accelerated rate, and the cost to fund this cap.

I urge the government to turn back the clock on this senseless and expensive transition to renewables and help restore Alberta to a place where businesses are thriving and Albertans are earning a good living. As I look over to the other side, I plead with those sitting on the backbench to do their own research. Don't just read off your talking points without giving what you are saying a second

thought. Do the right thing and educate yourselves, if not for yourself, for your constituents, at least for the constituents, who will ultimately be paying the price.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am very happy to rise again and speak to this bill. I would like to draw the members' attention to, again, section 6 under regulations. I'll just read it for everyone's edification here.

6(1) The Minister may make regulations . . .

- (f) adding to, clarifying, limiting or restricting any powers, duties or functions of the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the Minister considers necessary or advisable to enable the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator to exercise powers, duties or functions for the purposes of this Act.

I find it not surprising, frankly, that we would see this kind of wording in another act with respect to our electricity system from this government. In particular, I find it interesting and noteworthy that this government wants to give the minister the arbitrary power to limit or restrict any powers or duties or functions of the commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the minister considers necessary. Again, here we have another blank cheque given to the Minister of Energy to completely hamstring the Market Surveillance Administrator's ability to do its job, which is policing, making sure everybody is following the rules.

We saw this under Bill 27 as well. I put forward an amendment to this Legislature to try to protect the integrity of the Market Surveillance Administrator's ability to do their job, to police our electricity system. In that particular instance, under Bill 27, this government completely restricted the MSA's ability to investigate renewables developments. For some reason the MSA can investigate everything else but not renewables. I guess renewables developments never contravene the law, according to this government. And we did debate that vigorously. I put forward an amendment. In fact, I believe I put forward a total of 11 amendments in the Bill 27 debate. They were all to do with accountability, preventing sweetheart insider details, respect for landowners, et cetera. This government voted them all down.

It was particularly telling when it came to issues of accountability. This government just hates accountability. They want to give their ministers these sweeping, broad powers and limit the accountability and restrict and, in fact, eliminate accountability, in particular for the Market Surveillance Administrator when it comes to renewables projects. It completely eliminated the MSA's ability to investigate complaints regarding renewables developments. What does that say about accountability? It says that this government hates accountability.

So here we come with Bill 16, the regulations, section 6(1) and clause (f). I'm not surprised at all. Here we have the same kind of thing again. The power of the Market Surveillance Administrator to do its job is at the whim of the Minister of Energy. The minister can add to – that's okay – and can clarify. That's understandable. But then limiting or restricting any powers, any duties, any functions of the committee or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the minister considers necessary?

What we have, Madam Chair, is a government that wants to have its fingers so deeply down into our system of doing things that it is impossible for the motions and the mechanics and the mechanisms of a free-market economy to function properly. This government is getting its fingers down into our electricity system and not just in

regulating it but in even determining what can and cannot be held accountable by limiting the powers of the Market Surveillance Administrator and the commission itself.

Clause (f), in my opinion, is one of the most potentially dangerous pieces within this legislation. In that regard, Madam Chair, I would like to introduce an amendment. I know you're surprised.

The Chair: That's amendment A4.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. Amendment A4. I move that Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, be amended in section 6(1) by striking out clause (f). Period. Strike the whole thing out.

To allow this minister the arbitrary authority to limit or restrict in any way the Market Surveillance Administrator results in the direct political interference of the minister with a body that ought not ever have political interference. Not ever. The Market Surveillance Administrator by their very mandate is there to protect Albertans, to protect the integrity of our electricity system, the stability of our system and so on, and to make sure that all of the players within our electricity system are playing by the rules, rules that lead to stable power supply, reliable power supply, and a competitive marketplace, with "competitive" defined as getting the best price for Albertans.

5:30

As I pointed out earlier, this very body, the Market Surveillance Administrator, was the body responsible for taking TransAlta to task for economic withholding that caused a substantial price spike. The MSA did their job, did it superbly. They caught TransAlta doing what they did. They had a full investigation. Everything was made transparent, public. We all knew. Everyone in the industry knew what had transpired, and TransAlta paid the \$59 million fine for what they had done. That is the blessing of having an organization like the MSA operating at arm's length, outside of the world of political meddling.

Now, I should point out, on that note of political meddling, that the Balancing Pool was supposed to operate this way, too. Yeah, they were. The Balancing Pool's mandate was that they be arm's length. Arm's length means just that, outside of the political meddling of the Ministry of Energy. But as this House knows and Albertans know, that very independence of the Balancing Pool is now under investigation because all evidence that we have seen thus far points to some very serious meddling, meddling that is costing Albertans billions. By the government's own estimate it's \$4.437 billion – \$4.437 billion – because the Minister of Energy chose to meddle where the minister wasn't supposed to meddle, in the Balancing Pool.

All right. Fast-forward to Bill 16. The very same problem is being set up here. The very same problem is being set up, where the Minister of Energy has the arbitrary power under this legislation to limit or restrict any powers. It doesn't say which ones; it's any. It's wide open here: "any powers, duties or functions of the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the Minister considers necessary." This is extremely dangerous.

Mr. Panda: They haven't learned their lesson.

Mr. MacIntyre: They have not learned their lesson from the \$4 billion mistake that they made in meddling in the Balancing Pool.

Now here we go meddling in the RRO, meddling in the Electric Utilities Act, meddling in the affairs of REAs, meddling in the affairs of the city of Medicine Hat, meddling in what is supposed to be a free-market deregulated energy market, that has done a very

good job of providing Albertans with reliable, stable, affordable electricity and that has fuelled one of the greatest economic engines in this country and that is now at risk because of this government's irresponsible and inappropriate level of meddling in that free-market economy. It's just crazy. It's a real head-scratcher.

Why would the Market Surveillance Administrator not be trusted to do their job? It's the very same thing, Madam Chair, as this government passing a piece of legislation saying: "Well, we're going to give the Solicitor General the absolute, unconditional authority to limit the powers of police to investigate crime. That minister can change, limit, or restrict any powers, duties, or functions of all police departments in this province." Does that sound like a good idea? Certainly not. But that's precisely what clause (f) is doing. It's taking the electricity police and giving the minister, who has already demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the electricity system, that same minister who so sunk our Balancing Pool to the point of insolvency and then had to introduce Bill 34 to bail them out, an absolute, open-ended line of credit. That same minister is now being given the authority to limit or restrict any powers, duties, or functions of the commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator.

That is preposterous, Madam Chair. There is no way that this should be allowed in this bill. The Market Surveillance Administrator has a moral duty to act free of political interference. This completely reverses that. The MSA will no longer be at arm's length from political interference just like the Balancing Pool is no longer at arm's length from political interference. That political interference in the pool cost us \$4.437 billion. How much is this going to cost? How much is this political interference going to cost? And I should point out: political interference with no accountability for it, no accountability whatsoever.

It's these kinds of things, Madam Chair, that anger Albertans. It's this kind of refusal to be held accountable that angers the voters. It is these kinds of things and a long list of others like them: lack of consultation, roughshod legislation, just bulldozing legislation along, never putting anything in committee to be opened up to the public so that they can speak to things. It's that lack of accountability that is going to result in this government being brought down because the people of Alberta ultimately have the last word, and thank God for that. In 2019 Albertans are going to get to express their opinion, and they're going to get to express their hope. If the polls are any suggestion whatsoever, this government is coming down to a very resounding defeat, and it will be because of things like this, because of meddling, political meddling in a free-market economy.

I would hope that every member in this House will give serious consideration to giving a minister the power like this to meddle in what ought to be an arm's-length policing body like the Market Surveillance Administrator. This is, in my opinion, the worst part of Bill 16. It's the reason why I cannot support Bill 16. It's the reason for this amendment. It's an attempt to make it better. It's an attempt to protect Albertans, contrary to the stated intent of this government that Bill 16 protects Albertans. How is this protecting Albertans by removing the power of the MSA to actually investigate and do its job, by giving the minister the authority to say one day, "No, you cannot investigate this," or, "I'm going to limit your scope of investigation into that"? That's what this does. That's exactly what clause (f) does. How is that protecting Albertans? How is that having Albertans' backs? Well, it isn't.

I'll tell you who it does protect. It protects this government from scrutiny. That is the intent of this. It's protecting this government from the scrutiny of an organization like the MSA, who has a very good track record of scrutinizing, of catching people doing what

they should not be doing. The MSA has done a stellar job for this province over the years and will continue to do so only as long as they are free from political interference.

I would hope that every member on both sides of this House will give serious consideration to this amendment. It is an attempt to protect Albertans by giving the commission and the MSA the power that they need to do their job without interference from the Ministry of Energy.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, I've got a request for unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a former colleague of mine from my time in Calgary, Adrian Boudreau. He currently resides in Edmonton. I'm not too sure why he's made that choice. Nonetheless, we'll do some catching up. I would ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

5:40

Bill 16

An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates

(continued)

The Chair: I'll recognize Calgary-Klein on amendment A4.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. In 2019 I think we are actually going to put to rest the politics of fear in this province.

I understand that sometimes legislation is open to interpretation, but I'm going to help the hon. member over there with the actual intent here. The purpose of this section of the proposed act is to actually enable the MSA and the AUC to administer the act and the associated regulations. In particular, the regulations will require the MSA and the AUC to carry out certain functions to administer and enforce our price cap policy. In that sense, it actually expands their role. This includes ensuring that the government is paying the correct amount to the RRO providers if the 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour cap is exceeded. You know, this is also not unique. Similar provisions related to the AUC and MSA exist in the Electric Utilities Act and the Alberta Utilities Commission Act.

Moreover, under this section of the bill the AUC's and the MSA's powers could only be restricted or limited for the purposes of this act. They cannot be limited for other purposes. So, in fact, this bill adds to the role that the AUC and the MSA play in overseeing the electricity system operations and the behaviours.

It's for all of those reasons, Madam Chair, that I will not be supporting this amendment. Actually, it would probably be a better idea if they withdrew it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, everyone. Interesting debate this afternoon on a very controversial subject, no question. I'd like to take the time today to speak to the amendment that we're dealing with at the present time. For those of you who are not sure just how this government is changing the law

so that the Minister of Energy can interfere with the Market Surveillance Administrator's duties, section 6(1)(f) states that the minister may make these changes through regulations:

- (1) The Minister may make regulations . . .
- (f) adding to, clarifying, limiting or restricting any powers, duties or functions of the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the Minister considers necessary or advisable to enable the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator to exercise powers, duties or functions for the purposes of this Act.

Sounds like usurped authority.

Taking this all into account and taking it into context, the fact is that less than two weeks ago the Market Surveillance Administrator launched an investigation into the Balancing Pool. The Balancing Pool was established by the government of Alberta in '99 to help manage the transition to competition in Alberta's electric industry. Wildrose has obtained FOIP documents that indicate NDP government interference with the Balancing Pool. Currently the Privacy Commissioner is also investigating this matter.

The Market Surveillance Administrator also launched an investigation, like I previously stated, less than two weeks ago. This investigation could potentially unveil growing concerns that the Balancing Pool is operating coal-fired assets at a loss to undermine the competitive balance in our electricity market. Just imagine.

Now we have the Minister of Energy trying to add oversight, and we are very concerned that this bill will legally give the government the right to shut down this investigation. There's already been evidence of potential government interference, and now in order to hide their potential interference, they will use their legislative powers to override and add government oversight. If the Balancing Pool is found to be not acting in a commercial manner, they would effectively and knowingly purposely be putting the taxpayers of this province at increased risk.

If we put all the dots together, Madam Chair, we can finally see that there's an explanation for the enormous 4 and a half billion dollars in projected losses that were disclosed in the government of Alberta's fiscal plan, which you can find on page 119 of their 2017 plan. Unforgivable is the money that taxpayers will have to shell out for the lawsuit with Enmax. I would also like to include for the benefit of those listening that all of this loss will be superimposed by this government's propaganda. If it wasn't for the investigative rights the MSA now holds, this government would be allowed to cover up their interference and the true cost to the taxpayer. This right will be taken away once this bill is enacted in June of '17.

I encourage the backbenchers on the other side of the House to investigate this for themselves. All of you should be encouraged to be leaders and not just blindly follow. You can do this by educating yourselves. Don't just read the propaganda you were given.

Madam Chair, this additional section added to Bill 16 that gives the minister these powers is in essence the minister's way to control the outcome of the MSA investigation. That is clear. This should not be allowed, and it should be remembered by Alberta voters come the next election. The truth is, though, that when a government is so ideological and works in a silo and force-feeds its members and membership with repeated propaganda and ideological banter, if one doesn't think for himself or herself, they could very easily be charmed by the political rhetoric.

News flash for those of you over on the other side of the House working in silos, though: Albertans have been shaking their heads at how foolishly the NDP government has been handling their money. They will not forget that their increased debt burden, job loss, huge tax and power bills down the line are all a direct result of the NDP government's bad decisions. Albertans not only want

stability, but they want prosperity. This government is systematically destroying all hopes of the Alberta advantage.

I ask all members of the House to think for themselves and vote today to include this needed amendment. The minister does not need to politically interfere and add, clarify, limit, or restrict the powers, duties, and functions of the commission nor of the MSA. I ask everyone to think about this seriously and to please vote in favour of this amendment to end these political games. Please.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be brief, looking at the clock. Yeah, initially I was not planning to speak. I see some backbenchers there very excited, so I'll try and get to the point here. Initially I didn't plan to speak today, but after hearing a very passionate argument here from my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake – he actually did some work on this file. You have to give him due credit for doing his homework, coming to this House, and eloquently debating on this matter. First, he's an expert. He's a subject matter expert. Second, all of us, when we are elected and sent to this House, are not expected to blindly rubber-stamp whatever the minister or the Premier wants the private members to do. That's not what we are here for. [interjection] It's not why we are here.

I'm talking to that member who is making noise there. He should first read before he speaks, before he makes any sense to people. The Member for Calgary-Klein said that this particular section, 6(f), on page 5 of this bill – this is your bill, not our bill. This is your bill. You guys drafted it. You should read that. He said that this section 6(f) enhances the powers of the MSA. On the contrary, if you read this before laughing and making stupid noises, if you read that, it reads:

- (f) adding to, clarifying, limiting or restricting any powers, duties or functions of the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the Minister considers necessary.

Where does it say that it enhances the powers of the MSA? Before you vote blindly, I want you to just explain.

You know, Madam Chair, people send us here to do our job. We end up paying \$4.4 billion because of the incompetence or ideological reasons of this government.

5:50

Ms McKittrick: How about your ideology?

Mr. Panda: Taxpayers. It is reality. It is \$4.4 billion.

You explain to me why you want me to support this bill first. You couldn't give me any valid reasons, and then this member, who did his homework, is giving us a compelling reason to vote in favour of this amendment, which will actually make Albertans' lives better. We have an empowered, arm's-length agency which will do the work on behalf of Albertans, which we are also supposed to do but we are failing to do here because we take the direction from the minister and the Premier and do what they want because you're the government members. I don't have that obligation. I'm elected as an Official Opposition MLA to hold the government to account and to support them if they make any reasonable acts or laws or arguments here, but they didn't.

I'm challenging them before they vote down this amendment, if you heard. I'm sure you all have good intentions because when I was hearing the member, there was pin-drop silence there. I'm sure some of the members definitely heard him making that compelling

argument. They really want to do their job, but they're forced, because of the party whip or for whatever reasons – they're not doing their job. Either they convince me not to support that amendment, or they actually support the amendment. That's the common-sense thing to do, Madam Chair, and I urge all the members there to actually read it one more time and support the amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 16?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like now for the committee to rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like now to call for adjournment for this afternoon and to reconvene at 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 30, 2017

Day 41

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening, everyone. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

[Debate adjourned May 30]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I'm struck by the sheer volume of the bill. This is huge. There's a lot of stuff in here. In fact, a phone book comes to mind when I think about the size of this. Where to begin? We have card check certification, salting and MERFing, labour changes for farm and ranch workers, first contract arbitration, essential services, the Rand formula, enhancement of powers to the Labour Relations Board, arbitrations, duty of fair representation, international loopholes, and those are just the labour relations changes. There's no way that a perfectly reasonable government would create this legislation in 36 days of consultation.

I met with stakeholders. I met with the Canadian Franchise Association. When we explained to them what was going on and what was happening and how fast the rules for running their business were about to change, the looks of horror that crossed the faces of the small-business owners were ones of shock that they had been skipped over as a worthy body for stakeholder consultation. The NDP missed these small-business owners. The consultation was incomplete. Sadly, the line of scrimmage will not move. The NDP will not get a second or third down for a touchdown; they get unlimited downs until the clock runs out.

As such, I would like to move an amendment. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, just wait till I see the copy of the amendment, please.

While we're waiting, just a reminder, everyone. Hon. members, just a reminder that we are in second reading, so if we could please be respectful to all the speakers in the House when they're speaking. Please go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not provided Albertans enough time to be consulted on the specific changes being proposed and, further, has not provided assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impact on the economic well-being of Albertans.

Now, Madam Speaker, let's take these two issues and deal with them one at a time. I contend that Bill 17 has not provided Albertans with enough time to be consulted on the specific changes. I know that not enough time was spent, and I know that not enough of the right people were spoken to. Thirty-six days in Alberta to change a stack of laws like this; Ontario is spending two years to do the same.

Given that the NDP refused the prior amendment to send this bill to a legislative standing committee, which would have fixed this lack of consultation problem, that tells me something.

That tells me that the NDP are trying to hide something from Albertans. In that way, they can say, "Oops," "Surprise," or "Gotcha" on the unsuspecting business community. It has nothing to do with the clock of the Legislature. I know that many in the business community are watching. They are reaching out and talking to people they haven't talked to in a long time, and they are saying things like: "I have a chain of retail stores, and I'm going to have to lay off staff and close stores because the labour changes are the last straw. We swallowed the minimum wage increase. We took the tax increase, and then we took more increases with the carbon tax. There's no profit anymore. Now these changes will force me into bankruptcy unless I lay off staff and close stores." There you have it, Madam Speaker: one business owner. The NDP tried to help the employees with a higher minimum wage and changes to the Labour Relations Code. Now they're going to be put out of a job. The NDP hurt the people that they try to help. Those people end up remaining dependent on the state for welfare and benefits, and the cycle perpetuates and repeats itself, all because the NDP failed to consult long enough or with the right people.

Now, the other part of this amendment is that the NDP did not provide assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impacts on the economic well-being of Albertans. There has to have been some measure of economic impact analysis done to measure these proposed changes on the Alberta economy before they were proposed. To do so blindly is irresponsible, Madam Speaker. The government has an army of public servants to measure and evaluate the economy. It is quantifiable. Changes to the economy can be quantified.

As I mentioned in the tale of the retailers, whether it's the carbon tax, the electricity changes, the tax hikes, the minimum wage, the government either refuses to do impact assessments or ignores the evidence in favour of ideology. Continually this NDP government tries to settle ideological scores at a time when Alberta's economy cannot absorb it. They are sacrificing jobs to purchase votes. But you know what, Madam Speaker? Albertans are not buying it.

Clearly, the government intended for very little discussion to happen because they know this bill aims to please their big labour pals and not the rest of Albertans. We have a system of democracy in this place, and this government continues to disregard the importance of that process in crafting workable legislation for the benefit of all Albertans. It is contemptuous, Madam Speaker.

Alberta's current union certification system has resulted in 30-plus years of relative labour peace and the highest wages in the nation. I want to reiterate what I just said there: we have the highest wages in the nation. Something must have been done right. Throwing out that system without consultation is, pure and simple, wrong.

How wrong? Let's talk about salting. Bill 17 removes the uniquely Alberta protections against salting in the first 30 days after finding employment with an employer. Under the NDP you can hire an employee, and the next day that employee can start on a unionization drive. Thank you, NDP, for disturbing employer-employee peace with salting.

When unions use funds to unfairly help unionized contractors gain an advantage over non-unionized contractors when they bid for jobs, they use market enhancement recovery funds. The acronym is MERFs. Bill 17 removes the ban on MERFs. The NDP's experts insist that the ban never really worked. Then why change it?

Under current Alberta law the employer can suspend the remission of union dues to the union in cases of an illegal strike.

The NDP are taking this off the books. Bill 17 will now allow union organizers access to remote work sites upon permission from the labour board.

There you have it. The very same people the NDP think they are helping with a higher minimum wage and a better Labour Relations Code are now going to be out of a job. The NDP hurt the people they are trying to help, and those people end up remaining dependent upon the state for welfare. The cycle perpetuates and repeats itself, and Alberta no longer stands out as a beacon with the Alberta advantage, all because the NDP have failed in their duty.

For these reasons and many others, I move the amendment to not read Bill 17 a second time. More consultation with stakeholders is needed and an economic impact analysis is essential to make sure that we get this right.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment? You would like to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

7:40

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a couple of things. You know, we've been basically preached to here for a couple of days about: how can you possibly be against a bill that supports workers' rights and people's rights to take leave if they have a death in the family or a sick child or a missing child? Then I look at the coming into force of the codes. Interestingly enough, the employment standards won't come into effect until January 1, 2018, yet the sections that deal with labour organizations and unions are coming into effect in September. So if the labour standards were the most important part of this bill – there are sections on underage workers that come into force on proclamation. The section on union certification comes into effect September 1. Yet the all-important labour relations portion, that supposedly protects people's rights and is supposed to be the big improvement and why this bill had to be brought in in such a hurry, doesn't come into effect until January 2018. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me when we've listened to all the rhetoric coming across from the other side.

When I put forward my original amendment to put this forth, I had mentioned the fact that this kind of smacks of pandering to unions and organized labour. I talked about how \$42,000 was donated from union donations to our Premier for her run for leadership, that for the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie over 50 per cent coming from union donations, for the Member for Edmonton-Calder, our Minister of Education, 60 per cent for his leadership. Sixty per cent. So much for taking big dollars and unions out of politics. Come on, folks. If you think Albertans are stupid, you're making a mistake.

Mr. Nixon: Albertans aren't stupid. Yeah, he's giving a thumbs-up.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah, thumbs-up. That's all stuff that's wonderful. We can put that on bulletin boards during the next election. All that stuff: it's going to be great.

You know, getting further down to it, Madam Speaker, we've talked about this before. The Member for I believe Calgary-Hays was chastised for actually just asking a question that could have possibly affected his wife's company and her involvement in it. We had 13 per cent of our caucus recuse themselves during the debates on new-home buyers' protection because they happen to be partners or have a wife that's in a company that builds a couple of houses a year. Now, we have all these members sitting here that are union active. Some of them have been business agents; some of them have

been presidents. They're getting heavy, heavy donations from unions to run their campaigns, yet they can stand here in this House in front of Albertans and claim: oh, we're just doing this for the poor folks that have a sick child at home so they can take time off.

Well, I worked a long time in the construction industry, and I did work for a time for a union for about nine years. Then, when we moved up north, I had to leave that, and I worked for the private sector up there. I'll tell you that with a lot of those companies up there, I mean, everybody knows everybody. Their kids go to school together; they play ball together. Whether you're the owner of the company or an employee, whenever there was a serious incident where somebody was sick, those companies banded together. They helped out. They did fundraisers.

I remember one incident where a worker was at work and his kids were at home with his mother because both parents worked. They were both heavily involved in the oil and gas industry. Grandma was babysitting the kids. She was out for a walk and the little three-year-old girl fell through a hole into a well. When the call went out to that company, they not only sent that man to where the accident had occurred, but half the company went there with their equipment, too, to help out. When the little girl was saved that day and brought out, she had some trauma, of course, and the dad and mom were both sent to Edmonton to be with their kid at the Stollery. There was no question about whether their job was going to be saved. The topic never even came up.

Now, if you're having issues like this in some of your union organizations and you need legislation to force people to have recognition, to protect people's rights, well, then, I'll buy it. But why not proclaim it? Right? We could do this today. But you won't. You're going to pass it off. It's not going to come into effect until January of 2018, but all of your union-protecting stuff is going to come into effect in September. What does that say about you folks? It says a lot about your priorities.

Most of this legislation is a joke. It's hiding behind protecting sick kids and people's right to go home and be with their sick kids. I think it's disgusting. It definitely shows, just in the way you've picked your proclamation dates, where your real priorities are as a government, and that is shameful.

I will end my arguments on that. I think that we need to push this bill to committee, where we can expose more of what this is actually all about.

An Hon. Member: Please do.

Mr. Hanson: Absolutely. Would love to.

Aren't you the one that was hollering at someone who was hollering at you while you were speaking? Funny how the shoe doesn't fit on the other foot, right?

Madam Speaker, this bill needs to be pushed to committee, where Albertans can come and have their say, where businesses can come and have their say. Like I say, if you're having these kinds of issues in your union organizations, then, by all means, put legislation in to force them into complying. But I can speak for the majority of the private sector that I've worked for. In a case like this, where one of their employees has an issue, whether it's a family member that's passed away or is critically ill, those companies get behind their employees. They not only give them the time off that they need to deal with it, but they support them financially. For this government to stand up and poke at the entire industry and the entire private sector because of incidents that have happened and, you know – I don't know all the details of those incidents, but I can tell you that that is not a fact in the industry. It is not a fact here in Alberta. It's shameful that we actually need legislation to make it so.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member for his speech on this important amendment. I found it very interesting. One of the core areas I wouldn't mind if the hon. member would take a little bit more time to explore is around three concepts associated with the steps that this government has taken with this bill and the reasons for why this should go to committee and there should be more consultation.

The first is that the government indicates that because of some very serious compassion issues that are in this legislation, that are good, as the hon. member who was just presenting made very clear, it's very important that we get this through before the end of spring session. Now, Madam Speaker, as you know, we agree and have made that very, very clear. In fact, we will pass all of those issues tonight if they would like or tomorrow, immediately get them through the House and go on. But the government still has not taken us up on that offer and continues to keep it tied to other issues that they have not consulted Albertans on, which is troubling.

The second issue is the need for this large hurry that the government is putting forward because of the compassion issues that are involved with this legislation. The member touched on this, Madam Speaker. Maybe you don't realize it, but the government is not intending to bring this in till January of next year. Why you couldn't take time to consult over the summer if you weren't going to bring the bill into effect in January seems a little – you know, I think that needs to be . . .

An Hon. Member: Disingenuous.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. Disingenuous, for sure.

. . . explained in more detail by the government. They haven't answered that. I'd be curious to see what the hon. member thinks of that, what he thinks his constituents would think of that.

Also, Madam Speaker, when you bring up the fact that the government brought this in what is expected to be the last week or week and a half of this sitting in the spring, if this was so important – and there are things within this bill that are definitely important. I guess the question is why the government waited till the last minute to try to ram things through.

7:50

Now, Madam Speaker, I don't have to tell you. You know. You've been here as long as I have, and you've seen some of the other behaviour, like Bill 6 for example, trying to ram it through before Christmas and the consequences that came from that to our communities. So I'd just like to hear from the hon. member a little bit more on how he thinks his constituents feel about the fact that the NDP is talking out of both sides of their mouth on this issue.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Hanson: Lac La Biche-St. Paul . . .

The Acting Speaker: . . . St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: For the time being. You have to joke about it.

Well, thank you, Member, for the question. You know, I was a little confused about the whole issue when we first started talking about this bill because we all agreed on all sides – I think every party in the House here agrees – on the importance of the compassionate leave portion and the standards, making it fair and equitable and putting it into legislation. Again, like I say, I don't

know which companies are involved, but having to have legislation like that to protect a family when they're going through a really tough time is a little bit shocking to me. I'm surprised that we don't actually already have that legislation on the books.

With that being said, I do now understand the rush. If it was just the compassionate portion of this bill that this government was so concerned about, being that they're not putting it in force until January of 2018, there would be plenty of time to consult over the summer. Unfortunately, a portion of this bill that deals with their labour negotiations, union certification, all the stuff that they're trying to hide behind compassionate leave, it comes into effect on September 1. So, of course, Madam Speaker, there is no time to go out and consult with Albertans because we don't sit until the end of October or early November, which would fail them completely on their real mission, which is to push through the union certification portion of this bill. I find it really unfortunate and disgusting that they will hide that behind compassionate care when the dates clearly show what is really going on here. You guys should all be ashamed of that, and I'm going to make sure that Albertans know about it. That'll be my job as opposition.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, just a reminder to all the members in the House that we're speaking to the reasoned amendment, which is to not be read a second time. The referral to committee has already been debated.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good evening. I rise today to speak to the reasoned amendment to Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. The main point I want to touch on is that this government needs to realize that more consultation analysis is needed on their labour and employment changes. The economy is still in a precarious position, and these changes need to have proper consultation. If they are sincere in taking time to get this right, they will use the summer to receive meaningful feedback on all the changes and their combined ramifications.

This government is being disingenuous by lumping together all these changes to both the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code into one big omnibus bill. Clearly, the government intended for very little discussion to happen because they knew that this bill aims to please their big-labour pals and not the rest of Alberta. The contempt that this government has for the legislative process is unhealthy and, frankly, unacceptable.

There are a number of good ideas in this bill, and I want to begin by discussing a few of them before digging a bit deeper into the more nefarious aspects of this bill.

Maternity leave. While having a child is usually something to be celebrated, it is not all roses, and giving birth can and does take some time to recover. More important is how important those first months are for a baby and a mother to bond. Changes to maternity leave provide for 16 weeks of maternity leave versus the previous limit of 15 weeks. This is a step in the right direction and something that I support, and I suspect that most in this Chamber do as well. One additional thing that I am really happy to see with regard to maternity leave is the inclusion of leave for employees that experience a stillbirth or a miscarriage. This can be and often is a devastating experience, and this new leave is something, as I said, I am happy to support.

Parental leave. Changes proposed to parental leave will result in parents receiving up to 37 weeks of parental leave following the last

day of maternity leave. Coupled with the changes to maternity leave, this is a real, positive change for Alberta families.

Compassionate care leave. Strong, compassionate families are the bedrock of society, and approving compassionate care leave from eight weeks to 27 weeks is a positive step.

Death or disappearance of child leave. I cannot begin to fathom what it must be like to experience the disappearance of a child, and I am happy to see that this government is proposing changes to support parents through what can only be described as devastating. The proposal in Bill 17 would allow parents up to 52 weeks' leave if their child disappeared due to crime and up to 104 weeks if their child died as a result of crime.

Critical illness of child leave. Bill 17 will provide parents with up to 36 weeks of leave to care for their sick or ill child. One question I have on this particular topic – and it is possible that it's been addressed already, but, if not, I hope that during the course of debate it might be addressed by the government – is: does critical illness leave apply for a child who suffered a critical injury but not necessarily an illness? I hope that is the case as I can think of many examples of parents whose child has been injured in a car accident or a sports injury or that sort of thing.

Long-term illness and injury leave. Changes to long-term illness and injury leave will result in employees receiving up to 16 weeks of leave in a calendar year due to illness, injury, or quarantine.

Domestic violence leave. Domestic violence is a scourge on society, and one of the ways that we as society can combat this problem is by supporting those individuals when they experience domestic violence. Overwhelmingly victims of domestic violence are women and children, and far too often they get caught in a cycle of violence that is incredibly difficult to get out of. Changes in Bill 17 will result in Albertans receiving up to 10 days' leave in a calendar year. This leave can be used to relocate, obtain services such as psychological and professional counselling, or to seek medical attention. We aren't the first province to implement this change, but frankly that doesn't matter. The right thing is being done, and I support it.

Personal and family responsibility leave. Raising a family or, even if you aren't raising children, being part of a family often means attending appointments and doctors' visits, et cetera. Bill 17 will result in employees receiving up to five days leave in a calendar year for their health or to meet their family responsibilities in relation to a family member.

Bereavement leave. The last two proposals I want to touch on today are bereavement leave and citizenship ceremonies. I'm not sure of two things that could be less related than the sadness and grief that accompanies bereavement and the joy and elation that is felt by each and every new Canadian as they participate in the ceremony to formally become citizens of this great dominion. Allowing for up to three days of leave in order to attend a funeral is certainly welcomed, and I support the change. Likewise, I support the recognition that this government is giving to the gaining of citizenship. All we need to do to understand the importance of the ceremony is to watch the emotions displayed on the faces of new Canadians when they officially receive their citizenship. It quickly becomes clear why it is important to ensure employees can attend those citizenship ceremonies.

What the government needs to do is spend the summer consulting on the bill, and I think they will find that Albertans aren't supportive of many of these changes. That is why I'll be supporting the amendment. Instead of protecting working Albertans, this government is using them as shields to protect their big, powerful union bosses. It's disgusting, and Albertans deserve much better than what they get from this government.

We have secret ballot voting. Many of the proposed changes to the Labour Relations Code in Bill 17 aren't just bad ideas; they are downright undemocratic. Canada marks its 150th birthday this year, and this government apparently wants to celebrate by taking Alberta's democracy back to the 1800s. Secret votes are going to be a thing of the past. All this government is requiring is a simple card check, a process that is fraught with intimidation and thuggery. For decades the NDP proclaimed themselves as the party of the people. Well, with Bill 17 and the ending of secret ballots for certifying a union, the Alberta NDP have made it clear that the people they proclaim to represent are actually just big, fat cat union bosses.

But don't take my word on the importance of secret ballots; here's what the experts have to say. Elections Canada states: "The secret ballot – which safeguards the right of all citizens to vote freely and in private, without fear of intimidation." Adam Steedman states in his article *The History of the Secret Ballot*, "No one ever speaks of an open voting system any more, the secret ballot paper is seen as an essential hallmark of a free election system." No one speaks of an open voting system anymore. Well, no one but the Alberta NDP, that is.

Steedman goes on to say that the secret ballot was first introduced as "a means of managing elections that had proved, or might prove, unduly fractious and where the hostility of competing factions was such as to render open voting neither practical nor decisive."

8:00

In his research on legislative rules in European parliamentary democracies Thomas Saalfeld found that secret ballots date back to ancient Greece.

Upon my election to this illustrious Chamber I never would have guessed that I would be forced to make a speech defending the right of Albertans to a secret ballot. This government never fails to disappoint. While I support aspects of this bill, the changes to certification votes and the removal of secret ballots are not something I can or will ever support. I will be voting for the amendment, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same.

Just to summarize, when it comes to Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, there are some things I like: maternity leave, parental leave, death or disappearance of a child leave, critical illness of a child leave, long-term illness and injury leave, domestic violence leave, bereavement leave, and citizenship leave. But if this government is sincere in taking the time to get this right, they will use the summer to receive meaningful feedback on all the changes and their combined ramifications.

This government is being disingenuous by lumping together all these changes to both the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code into one big omnibus bill. Clearly, the government intended for very little discussion to happen because they know that this bill aims to please their big labour pals and not the rest of Alberta. The contempt that this government has for the legislative process is unhealthy and unacceptable. Many of the proposed changes to the Labour Relations Code in Bill 17 aren't just bad ideas; they're downright antidemocratic.

As I mentioned before, Canada marks its 150th birthday this year, and this government wants to take us back into the past, to the 1800s. Secret ballots are going to be a thing of the past. All this government is requiring is a simple card check, a process that increases the chance of intimidation in the voting process. This government used to proclaim themselves as the party of the people, but that just isn't right anymore.

I can't believe that I'm sitting here in this Legislature talking about free speech, secret ballots, and having this government give

more than 36 days' discussion on something that hasn't been changed in 30 years. They sit here and talk about how many years it's been since this legislation has been looked at, and what do they do? Thirty-six days, ram it through at the end of a legislative session, and then stifle the opportunity for Albertans to have their say. It's just not right. We need to support this amendment and have this properly consulted on with Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you again to the hon. member for his comments on this important amendment, this referral amendment, and the need for the government to slow this process down, take a time out and go back to the boss, the people of Alberta, and have a conversation and make sure that we're getting this right, particularly around some of the consequences that will go on with businesses and that type of stuff in our province.

My question to the hon. member, based on his presentation, has to do with the last portion that he was talking about and his concerns around democracy. I'd like to ask him a question about trust. One of the things I noticed back home in my constituency, Madam Speaker – you may have noticed it in yours; I don't know, but I would certainly like to hear from the hon. member on this issue – is the complete lack of trust that most Albertans have in the NDP now and in this government.

You know, I was at a 4-H event in Sundre last night. I do a lot of work with 4-H clubs in my community. As you know, Madam Speaker, it's something I enjoy. What really struck me as I was talking to a bunch of the kids from the Sundre and Bergen multiclub last night – Sundre had their sale – was how much the youth in my communities are scared of the NDP government and don't trust them and how much of a tremendous impact some of the outrageous decisions had, that the caucus across from me made during, in their case particularly, Bill 6, which they saw as an attack on their families' livelihoods and something that they cared about so much.

Of course, it comes back to not consulting and not heeding the opposition's advice at that time and working with the people of Alberta. I can't help but think that if at the time the government wasn't so blindly and selfishly trying to move forward legislation that would, you know, attack children on their farms, they would not have lost trust of a whole generation of Albertans who will never, certainly, vote NDP. It will have long-term consequences.

I think of the implications of democracy in regard to some of the secret ballot decisions that we now see the caucus across from us doing, you know, and continuing the pattern that we saw in the last sitting, where they attacked democracy by manipulating election rules to their advantage or spending their time attempting to get taxpayers to pay for their political campaigns, one of the most outrageous things that anybody has seen in this building, I would suggest.

So I'm interested to see what the hon. member would think his constituents would feel in regard to trust and how much damage this government has done to the relationship with Albertans, you know, Madam Speaker, people that I know you know that they don't talk to. They stay with the people that believe in their world view, and they're not interested in talking to the majority of Albertans who don't buy into their ideological agenda. But in continuing to do all these things that lose Albertans' trust, what type of long-term consequences does he think this will have on his constituents?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Well, thank you very much for the question. It's interesting because I'm seeing the exact same thing in my constituency, a lack of trust in this government because of the bills that they've passed and the lack of consultation that they've done. Just about every organization in Alberta has a story to tell about not being able to get a meeting with the minister or not being able to get a hold of their MLA.

I've had a chance to travel to other constituencies around mine that have NDP MLAs, and they are more than happy to see me. They welcome me into their community. They ask me to come and speak to them because they can't talk to their own MLA. They won't return the calls. They won't come out and speak. They won't go out in public. This is an issue that this government has, and it continues to happen to this day.

This government continues to attack democracy. We've seen that with the bills that they've passed. In fact, the member talked during the discussions on democracy and the changing of the fundraising act for campaigns about stacking the deck and how the government is always stacking the deck in their favour. It was sad to see. They had a chance to do legislation right, but they continued to try to stack the deck in their favour, and we see it all the time in this Legislature.

Now, getting back to this particular bill, we've said over and over again: split the bill. Split apart the labour relations and the employment standards. Split it. We will help pass it, and the other one can be consulted on over the summer. We'll support that. Then we can bring this into effect immediately. But this government wants to pass this all in one omnibus bill. They want to be able to sneak in the worst...

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment. I speak in favour of the amendment because there's no question, in my mind, that not enough consultation has happened, that we need some more time. I'm going to go into specifically why I think we need more time and what we need more time to consider. My hon. friends from the other side seem to have a different view of that. I'm going to talk about specifically why I think we need to spend some more time on this bill.

First off, let me say that any time there's the word "fair" in a bill title, I'm a little concerned. I worry a little bit about what spin the government is trying to put on it. I'm more of a fan of functional bill titles than the politicized bill titles, but here we are.

Look, there's no question that there are aspects of this bill I'm enthusiastically in favour of. The job-protected leave provisions are long overdue for change. When we look at compassionate care leave, I'm fascinated. It's certainly about time Alberta came up to speed with the rest of the country, with the exception of B.C., interestingly enough, who only allows eight weeks within a 26-week period. It's good to know that Alberta will be on par or similar, at least, to Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, other parts of the country.

8:10

Maternity and parental leave. I was very fortunate to take three months with our first daughter 13 and a half years ago. It was the greatest experience of my life, without question. We were in a position, fortunately, where my wife and I were able to split our

leave. It's a time of my life I absolutely treasure. I think that all Albertans should have that opportunity, and aligning it with the EI program makes all the sense in the world.

The long-term illness and critical injury leave, the 16 weeks, again, makes a lot of sense, as does the personal and family responsibility leave, five days' job protection for personal sickness, short-term care of an immediate family member. Again, on just human and compassionate grounds these make all the sense in the world, and I enthusiastically support those changes, as I do the changes on bereavement leave.

I am pleased to see that domestic violence leave is being added to Alberta legislation. As I hope the House knows, I've volunteered with HomeFront in the past in Calgary. It's an area that I feel all of us have an obligation to set our minds to, addressing domestic violence in our society. I certainly very much support the government in their efforts to add this in.

Citizenship ceremony leave is not one I expected to see in there, but I'm pleased it's there. It's one of the things I get a chance to do here coming up in the next couple of weeks, attend a citizenship ceremony, and those are always remarkable days.

Critical illness of a child, death or disappearance of a child: again, these are areas that we absolutely should have in legislation in this province, and I'm very supportive of that.

If the bill was carved into these two component pieces, it would be very easy, I think, for us to pass this through the Assembly very quickly. I think you would have perhaps some support for unanimous consent. I know that's not going to happen, but it should. It should.

It's pretty obvious, I think, where the government is coming from on this. You wrap up things that are positive with things that are controversial, and then if any opposition member votes against the things that are controversial, they get called out for not supporting the things that are positive. There's a term for that, which is most certainly unparliamentary, and I won't even come close to going there, to what that is. I suppose I could say it and then apologize and withdraw, but that would be cheeky. I won't do that. That would be counter to the spirit of what we're trying to achieve in this Assembly. I'm glad to see that I have the enthusiastic agreement of Madam Speaker on that.

You know, what I see in this bill, I mean, when you look at the size of it – I have the original bill that was dropped on first reading, the fateful first reading as we'll all recall that remarkable day – is that very clearly there was a lot of work going on in this bill right to the very last minute, which is why it's printed on eight and a half by 11 paper and not in its booklet form. I suspect the government went through several iterations right up to the last minute, eventually running out of time, and said: "All right; this is what we're going with," which is one of those clues that we really need to consider on whether or not enough consultation, enough consideration has gone in.

Again, I'm going to go into some very specific clauses of the bill that I have concerns with, but let me just say this. What I see in particular in the labour code aspect of this bill – but I suppose to some degree it's in, potentially, some areas of employment standards as well – is a particular philosophy which is going away from what has served Alberta very well for a long time. That philosophy that I see in Bill 17 is a philosophy that says that employers are out to try to get their employees and that we have to have all the protections in the world from these big, bad employers and that the employees are at such a disadvantage that we need to make sure that we have overwhelming protection around these employees.

The reality in Alberta – and this has served us very well for a couple of decades as you see from the labour peace that we've had

in this province. The reality in the vast, vast, vast majority of cases is that employees and employers are partners in creating shared prosperity in their businesses. That is tremendously beneficial to this province. Do you know what that does? That creates tax revenue. That tax revenue funds very important social programs that Albertans rely on. That's how it works. So on the question of where the money comes from, why is it that someone would put their hard-earned dollars at risk investing in a business if there's no likelihood of a return?

What this bill does: look, this bill in and of itself is not going to cause capital to flee the province. It may. It may have some impact on that, but it's another brick in the wall, it's another bump in the road for anyone who may want to invest in Alberta, for anyone who may want to consider expanding their business in Alberta. It's that cumulative impact of all of the changes this government has brought in in its two years so far that I'm most concerned about.

I have a lot of questions about this bill and a lot of questions about what impact this is going to have on Alberta's economy, an economy that I hope is ramping up and I hope is creating jobs and I hope is creating prosperity. What I worry about is that this bill may in fact stifle that prosperity, stifle the growth in this province and that it won't be as great or as big as it could be.

Let's just step through some of the concerns I have and the questions that I have. Let me be very clear. It's obviously a very long bill. My team and I are still going through it. There are aspects of the labour code, without question, that I'm sure I'll end up supporting.

First off, the hybrid certification, the card check 65 per cent: it solves a problem we don't have. How someone can think that anything other than a secret ballot is a legitimate way of making something happen – you know what I'd love? I'd like to spend the next two years door-knocking and getting my constituents in Calgary-Elbow to sign a piece of paper that says: we would like you to continue being MLA for Calgary-Elbow. If I get 65 per cent of my constituents to sign that piece of paper, no election. Does that sound pretty good? I imagine that would be pretty good. We could save some money, right? You know, that sounds good. Now, the 35 per cent of people who don't sign my paper: now I know who they are, and we can have some different conversations at some other time.

That just feels wrong. Can you imagine if that's how we were selected to sit in this Chamber? You just go around, and if you get 65 per cent of people to sign a piece of paper, no problem. It's fundamentally wrong, fundamentally counterdemocratic.

An Hon. Member: It's not as easy as you think.

Mr. Clark: It doesn't matter how easy it is. It doesn't matter how easy it is. The principle of a secret ballot is absolutely fundamental to democracy – fundamental – so to go away from that is certainly, clearly something I can't support.

The timelines for certification have become shorter, more regulated. Again, I'm not convinced that this is helpful. I have questions about that.

The farm and ranch changes: I have some concerns and questions about this, frankly, from a property rights perspective. If union organizers must be given access to farm property if there are nonfamily farm workers working on that property, what are the implications for property rights for farmers and ranchers who have workers living on-site? Again, I don't know the answer to that question.

I don't have an answer to that question right now, but those are the kinds of things that we're going to find out if we either split the bill in two – it sounds like it's not going to happen – or, speaking to

this amendment, we have an opportunity to take some time to do the job right, take some time to do the consultation to answer those sorts of questions, answer questions about dependent contractors. If we have people who are independent contractors or incorporated all of a sudden getting caught up in a unionization drive, who had no intention of being part of it because they're incorporated and because they are contractors: I've got some questions about that. As someone who worked in that mode, certainly I wouldn't have expected to be unionized. That was part of the deal. I was able to work between different companies, different job sites.

The labour board procedures. There seems to be a lot of power heading towards the labour board. That may streamline the process. I'm a big fan of streamlining, and I certainly like a one-window approach to anything from a regulatory perspective.

I like the idea that there's priority for disagreements regarding job loss. I actually have a constituent who's really struggling with this right now, so I certainly would likely support something like that.

Again, I'm not convinced that we've heard enough from employers and union reps and employees on the implications of all of the things that are going to land on the desk of the labour board. Is this going to create a substantially increased workload? What does that mean in terms of resources required by the labour board? Who pays the freight? All these are questions that I have that, again, I think, can be answered if we take some time to thoughtfully go through a consultation process and a study process. Once we get to committee, I can only imagine that we're going to have some recommendations that we move this into committee.

8:20

The reverse onus clause seems like an interesting one. Again, I don't know if this is comparable with the rest of the country. Based on my initial reading of it, it feels like what we're seeing in Bill 17 is narrower than what we see in the rest of the country. That deserves, I think, some serious consideration and thought and input from Albertans.

The unfair practices pieces, the authority to certify or decertify where holding a vote has become impractical due to unfair labour practices, making a vote difficult, directed certification: I'd like to know how that compares to the rest of the country. I'd like to know what the implications of that are.

I've talked about the remote site access as it relates specifically to farming and ranching, but there are other areas.

What other points? Secondary picketing: do the provisions of Bill 17, in fact, align with the Supreme Court of Canada's Pepsi-Cola ruling? I don't know if they do or not. We're still in the process of looking at that. Perhaps that's something that we can answer here through the process of debate, but again I'd like to hear from a broad range of stakeholders, labour lawyers, others who may have some more expertise in that than I do.

You know, the MERFing and salting: that's an interesting one. We had a long discussion about this this afternoon in my office, about MERFing in particular. It may very well be one of those things that is not actually, frankly, a big concern in our country. I know Alberta is the only province, to the best of my knowledge, that outlaws this. It may be one of those problems that we, frankly, don't have. There could be no concerns in getting rid of that. I don't know. Again, we're looking into that.

But I do have concerns on eliminating and repealing the salting provisions. There are some examples that have been brought to me where you have a small number of seasonal workers who will come in for a period of time. Perhaps they've been there for 90, 91 days. A large number of them come, and then they move on, and then there's a relatively small number. Just to pick numbers off the top

of my head, we have 10 permanent workers, and we have 100 people who come in on a temporary basis. One person said to me: "Well, I like the situation that we have. I'm one of those 10 permanent workers. I'm not particularly interested in being unionized, but if all of a sudden we only need 90 days before unionization can happen and we have this huge number of temporary workers who come in for 92 days, all of a sudden we're unionized. Those folks go away, but now we're in this position we don't want to be in." That's an important, I think, and interesting question for us to both debate in this House but also hear from Albertans on. So I have questions about that, and many, many, many more.

Madam Speaker, I think there's absolutely no question in my mind that more consultation is required, that the 36 days of consultation this government did are not enough. [Mr. Clark's speaking time expired] And there's my time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was interested to listen to the thoughts from the Member for Calgary-Elbow as he carefully read through, peered through the legislation, sort of identifying pieces about which he had questions. It seemed perhaps a bit improvised on the fly, but perhaps that's just the nature of what was happening at this time. We'll take it as it lies.

Anyway, I appreciated the thoughts that he had, though the member did repeat an argument that I've heard from some other members here this evening, Madam Speaker, that I found a bit odd, that being the argument that the majority of employers already provide good, stable, work environments and that since the majority of employers – and I don't dispute that at all. I certainly do believe in Alberta employers, and I certainly believe that the majority of them are looking out for their employees and seeking to provide safe workplaces, seeking to provide protection for their employees and seeking to be reasonable with their employees. Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

But the argument that because the majority of employers do so, there is no need to bring forward legislation to enforce that for all employers strikes me as a bit disingenuous. Indeed, the majority of employers may provide good working conditions. The majority of employers may not need to be additionally goaded into providing appropriate treatment or wages or working conditions or other things, but the fact remains that there is a minority of employers for whom it may be necessary.

The truth is, Madam Speaker, that we do not legislate anything else on that basis. We don't say: "The majority of restaurants are looking out for the people that eat there. Therefore, it's not necessary to provide regulations to ensure food safety, because the majority of restaurants don't want to poison their customers. That's bad for business, so there's no need for legislation for that to take place." [interjections] Now, admittedly, that was not fully the argument of the Member for Calgary-Elbow. It's an argument that's been put forward by some other members this evening, who seem to be quite vocal about that at this time, and that's fine. If they want to chirp about it, that's fine. They can go ahead and do so. I'd be more than happy to speak to them about that later.

But the fact is, Madam Speaker, that the Member for Calgary-Elbow also then went on to say that because there are exceptions in particular areas regarding labour legislation, the labour legislation may in fact have some possibly – he's not sure: possibly, maybe – negative effects on a minority of employers, that therefore we should not be passing certain parts of this legislation, that it needs

much more discussion. It seems to me that that's kind of going both ways. In some cases, a majority of it being okay, it's fine for employees, then, perhaps to not have particular protections. But on the other hand, if it might possibly – possibly, again – affect a minority of employees, then we have to be very, very concerned.

Now, Madam Speaker, he also was noting his concerns about, you know, how this might affect the labour board. I will note that this whole process was overseen by Mr. Andy Sims, a former chair of the Alberta labour board, appointed by the previous, Progressive Conservative government, a man who has deep experience – deep experience . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members.

Mr. Shepherd: . . . in the area of labour law, in the area of knowing these things. He provided the recommendations on which this bill is based. In fact, Madam Speaker, he spoke very positively about this legislation. I have a quote here from Mr. Sims. [interjection] I do hear the member from the PC caucus there trying to disparage the possible intentions of Mr. Sims, suggesting that he might be making certain statements on the basis of contracts with our particular government. What Mr. Sims had to say was:

I listened carefully to the ideas and perspectives of both employers and employee groups during the course of this review. Drawing on my years of professional experience in this area, I was pleased to present the government with advice and workable options to modernize Alberta's labour relations system and bring it into alignment with the Canadian mainstream.

Mr. Sims was happy to stand with the minister when this legislation was announced and indeed has not spoken critically about this legislation, legislation which, I'll note, many people have spoken in favour of, including the hybrid card check system, Madam Speaker, which Mr. Ken Kobly, the CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, considered to be a compromise.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment?

Mr. Nixon: I think it's a reasoned amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Oh. Sorry. Reasoned amendment.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I do rise to speak to the reasoned amendment. I think it's interesting as we've watched this process throughout the day and we continue to watch the government dodge consulting in any way or communicating in any way with Albertans on this legislation. I think there are a couple of things we should talk about which really illustrate the need for the government to stop this process, to spend the summer consulting with Albertans. That's why I think the hon. member brought forward this reasoned amendment.

One of the great examples, I think, Madam Speaker, that illustrates this is the way we received this bill last week. We received a bill like this when you normally receive a bill like this. Now, the reason that that happened is because the government couldn't get the bill to the printer in time because they were still tinkering with a bill this thick just before they tabled it.

8:30

You're telling me that this government actually consulted with Albertans, everyday Albertans, not the Albertans that stick with the world view that they usually talk to across the way here but Albertans across the province, employers from a wide spectrum, but they couldn't get the bill printed in time because they were rushing

to get it through before we left for the summer. Now, why, Madam Speaker? I think that's an important question to ask when you look at that.

It's interesting – it's interesting – because the hon. members across the way, the government members across the way, say that they're rushing this without consultation because of the compassionate portions of the bill. Now, the opposition side of the House has offered to pass those in one day, provide immediate unanimous consent and move those through and get them done, but the government refuses to do that.

Well, let's look at the dates. This is very telling, Madam Speaker. Let's look at the dates. [interjections] When . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Nixon: When do the compassionate portions of this bill come into effect? I know, Madam Speaker. In January of next year. When do the controversial portions of the bill, that the NDP are attempting to attach to the compassionate portions to force it through this summer, take effect? When do the portions that their union bosses want in effect immediately take effect? In September of this year. The compassionate portions, that the opposition has offered to pass immediately – immediately, done deal, done today, tonight if they want – don't take effect till January, but the controversial portions of this legislation, that they won't consult with Albertans on, that they'll only talk to their union bosses about, people focused on their ideological agenda, take effect in September.

Madam Speaker, I don't know about you, but I'm appalled by that. This side of the House will deal with the serious compassionate issues immediately, get it done, get it to Royal Assent, and get it finished. That side of the House keeps rising and saying that this is why they're trying to rush it through, but they're not even going to let it take effect until next year. On the controversial portions of it, the portions that they didn't bother to talk to employers adequately about, that they only spoke about with Albertans for over 30 days – they have not been public about those consultations or making it clear what they've determined – those will be rushed through and take effect by September.

If this government was serious about the compassionate portion, they would take the opposition up on their offer, and they would get it through immediately so that it could take effect. Instead, what we will probably see throughout the rest of the evening is the opposite side continuing to rise and trying to convince Albertans that their focus is on compassion. But the reality is that when you look at the dates, that is not a reasonable argument.

Now, I would ask myself – I put things within the scope or the view of how my constituents would react to it. I believe that is our job, Madam Speaker, that we should be thinking about the people that sent us here and how they would react to the scenarios that we encounter. Our job is to vote on behalf of our constituents and to make decisions on behalf of our constituents based on what we think the majority of our constituents would want.

It's not always easy, but I can tell you that if you went to my constituency with me – and I would hope that one day you will come and visit my beautiful constituency, Madam Speaker. It's a great place. If you walked into, let's say, the Sundre A&W – I love the Sundre A&W – every day at 2:30 the great Myron Thompson, former Member of Parliament for Sundre, still a town councillor, with 50 years of public service to the community of Sundre and Mountain View county, holds court. Every day at 2:30 inside the A&W. You could come and you could visit with all sorts of people from all across the county.

Now, Madam Speaker, if you and I were there tomorrow, at one of Myron Thompson's great courts inside the Sundre A&W having

a coffee, we could say: “Hey, they want us, Myron, to vote on this bill, but they couldn’t even get it printed in time. They want us to trust that that’s going to be okay for our constituents. They want us to vote on a bill, but they won’t put the compassionate portions through immediately. Instead, Myron, they want to make all the compassionate portions wait until next year, and the only portions they want to rush through, Myron, are the controversial portions, that we would get through in September.”

Now, Madam Speaker, do you think the people in the Sundre A&W would think that that was reasonable? In all honesty, do you think they would think that that was reasonable? I mean, I can tell from your reaction that you realize they would not think that that was very reasonable, and they would be right. The constituents of the members across the way wouldn’t think that that would be reasonable either. There is no reasonable argument that the other side can stand up and give that shows that that’s true. They can’t. They haven’t. All they do is continue to rise and try to put forward this vision that this is about getting compassionate issues associated with this bill through, but they don’t have the courage to get them through tonight or tomorrow.

They keep continuing to push those off to next year while they push through an ideological agenda on behalf of their union friends to get it through in September. Think about that, Madam Speaker. The compassionate issues that we would pass today: this government won’t allow them to happen until January 2018, just a little over a year from when they’ll be removed from office. But they’ll put through the controversial issues, that they have not consulted Albertans on, by September. Albertans aren’t buying it. They don’t buy it.

We have stood in this House many times for many reasoned amendments talking about the need for this government to consult, talking about the need for the government to take their time to answer some questions. Many hon. members have risen and asked serious questions about economic impacts, how this is going to impact employers, what the consequences are for remote work sites, what the consequences are for ranches and farms, lots of legitimate questions that we should be asking on behalf of the people of Alberta. This government, though, Madam Speaker, continues their pattern of behaviour that they have had from their very first day in office, and that is to ignore Albertans and to do whatever the heck they want, and it has serious consequences.

When I was speaking under 29(2)(a) earlier to another hon. member, I talked about my trip to Sundre for their 4-H show and sale on Monday night and the fact that as I was walking with the young kids in the club, the Keiver children, who are usually doing lambs and calves, smaller calves – they’re not putting steers in the sale – they were talking to me about what takes place up here. These are kids, nine, 10 years old. They are scared of the members opposite. They are petrified of this government. [interjections]

They laugh, but that’s a fact. They don’t trust them. Because they went forward with legislation so fast at the time that was associated with something that was so near and dear to them, young children don’t trust them. [interjections] They laugh, but it’s not funny. For generations in the community I represent there is no way those kids will ever accept any of these members across the way in any form because they attacked their very way of life.

Now, if they had slowed down, Madam Speaker, if they had slowed down and actually talked – you know, the Member for Calgary-Bow is heckling away. I don’t even know if she’s ever been to a 4-H sale. Maybe if she slowed down and actually went and talked to some of my constituents, she would have understood before she stood in this House and disregarded everything that they thought, everything about their livelihood, and voted for a piece of legislation that they will never forgive her for.

It’s the same example here. Now, it may not be as extreme in this case, but the point is that if you don’t take the time to talk to the people that the legislation will impact and you continue to hide behind a vision or an argument that is just ridiculous when you look at the dates – because it’s not about compassion. If it was about compassion, the hon. members would stand up and vote and get it through tonight, but they won’t because it’s not about compassion. It’s about forcing through their ideological agenda by September. The dates don’t lie. The dates are clear, Madam Speaker. If this was about the compassionate portion of it, then that would go through in September at the very earliest, at the same time as the rest of the portions of the bill, but it’s not.

An Hon. Member: This is the amendment, right?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. It is the reasoned amendment, absolutely. Thanks to the hon. member for pointing that out. I’m glad that he’s keeping up that we’re on a reasoned amendment. A reasoned amendment is to point out why this needs to be consulted on and that this should stop. That’s what a reasoned amendment is for. This bill needs to stop, and this government needs to consult with the people that it will impact.

Now, Madam Speaker, why doesn’t this government ever want to do that? Over and over and over we ask why this government won’t do it. In this case why does this government not want to talk to the employers that will be impacted? Under this government’s watch over a hundred thousand people have lost jobs. Our economy has been destroyed. We will be \$70 billion to \$100 billion in debt by the time their time in office comes to an end, and it’s coming to an end. I mean, they are in the second half, and there’s not a reasonable person in this entire province that thinks this government will continue a second term in office. But the damage that they will do during this time is why this reasoned amendment is appropriate. We need to send this back for consultation. We need to take the time.

This government has a pattern, and this is very relevant to that. This government has a pattern of putting bills like this into the House just before the end of a session. They have a pattern of not talking to people. I mean, Bill 6 was one of the great examples where bureaucrats were going out and they had no clue. They were coming out from the government, and they had no clue about the reality of the legislation they were going to make, talking about sending bulls out with cows only in the daytime to make sure that they didn’t calve at night. Those stories happened. With the people that were there, that happened. That’s a lack of consultation. If you’re going to make legislation, you should talk to the people that it impacts. That’s not unreasonable.

8:40

Now, there are many good things inside this legislation, as has been pointed out by many members, and we should focus on that. In the end, if the members opposite took the time to talk to Albertans, they might get the legislation better that actually impacts everybody.

What would be very interesting to me, though, Madam Speaker – and many hon. members have spoken about this today – is an explanation for the dates, an explanation from this government on why they brought this forward during the last week if they truly cared. If they truly cared, they wouldn’t have waited until the last minute. They couldn’t even get it to the printer. These are not people that cared. They couldn’t even get the bill done in time and print it. How serious is that? Not very serious. They couldn’t even get the bill done and printed, and they think that they’re ready to debate it in the Legislature. They’re not.

Now they stand up, and again the core of their argument – over and over, Madam Speaker, you’ve heard it – is: well, you guys don’t want to get the compassionate portion through. Let’s bring it through today. Let’s do it. Right now. Move a motion, and we can move all that compassionate portion through. It’s very important. We agree. We’ll get it done.

Mr. Hanson: We’ll even change the enforcement date.

Mr. Nixon: Absolutely. We’ll change the enforcement date. Let’s get it up to the same as where they’re trying to get their big union boss portions through. That’s the point of this amendment, why any reasonable member across the way would not do that.

Now, earlier today we were, of course, debating a referral amendment to send it back to committee, and that was voted down. Again, more consultation was voted down, over and over and over. The only things this government will consult on are things they don’t want to pass. Have you ever noticed that, Madam Speaker? I’m sure that you’ve found that shocking in your time here, that the only bills that this government will take the time to talk to the very people of Alberta about, that are their boss, that pay the bills around this place, are legislation that they don’t want to pass.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler tried to pass legislation to prevent this government from using taxpayer dollars to pay for advertisement for political purposes, and it’s off to committee. We’ve never seen it again. It’s been about two years.

The time change legislation, coming from an hon. member across the way, is off to committee. Who knows if that’s coming back? They’re going to consult with Albertans on it.

Mr. Hanson: Property rights.

Mr. Nixon: Property rights. That’s another great one, something that this party said that they stood for. They’ve turned their back on farmers and rural people yet again and on Albertans as a whole. They care about property rights but turned their back on them. It’s off to committee to be discussed because it’s legislation that does not fit with their ideological agenda.

Now, as soon as we see legislation that fits with their ideological agenda, they push it through even faster than they push through the compassionate portions for the people of Alberta. That is shocking. And they will have the nerve to stand in this House and say: “This is about the compassionate portions. Oh, wait. No. We don’t want to pass that for another six months, until after our ideological agenda portion is through.”

How do they think that we, who are responsible to our constituents, can trust them, based on their pattern of behaviour, that they consulted on this legislation, when they won’t tell us whom they consulted with and what they found out? They won’t show us any financial studies, any details of the impact. And they can’t even print the bill on time, Madam Speaker. They can’t even print the bill. They were still messing with this bill just before they put it in the Legislature because they were rushing it through.

In fact, the reason that proves we need the reasoned amendment to go through was that we saw the government, for the very first time in their time, filibustering their own legislation in an attempt to slow things down because they were trying to rush through this legislation before they left. Now, Madam Speaker, the reason that was noticeable is because they weren’t any good at it. They weren’t. It was very obvious to the press, to everybody that the government was now filibustering legislation because they were trying to slow down the process so that they could try to get the bill through. Well, they will delay the compassionate portions of the bill, but they’ll force through the ideological portion before the compassionate portion, before the next sitting of this House.

So, Madam Speaker, I don’t know about you, but I would like to hear and hopefully we will hear in Committee of the Whole some more information on why this government sees fit to delay the compassionate portions of this bill and to force through the ideological portions of this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul . . .

Mr. Hanson: Two Hills. Don’t forget Two Hills. It’s a very important little community.

I’d just like to ask the member – I know that I was pretty surprised when I realized that there were some significant differences in the dates of coming into force. One of the things I’d like to point out is that the big reason for this bill is compassionate care, and everybody agrees on that. We think it’s wonderful legislation. We’d like to put it through tonight. But it won’t happen because they won’t separate it out from the legislation. They’re going to put that off until January 1, but all of their really important union certification, card check, all of that stuff that just simply cannot wait will be coming through September 1.

Now, another little interesting fact. I know that they’ve thought about these dates because there’s another section in there with regard to underage workers, and that section comes into force upon proclamation. If the compassionate care portion was so important, so vitally important that this bill cannot wait, cannot go through the summer for debate – it’s got to get done here; this is extremely important stuff – why didn’t they put that as coming into force upon proclamation? I think it’s obvious what’s going on here. This group, who depend on union donations to fund their party right from every level, federally, provincially . . . [interjection] Member, did you know that every affiliated union pays \$16.04 per capita per year into the Alberta Federation of Labour? Did you know that? That’s a little interesting fact, isn’t it? One of their huge supporters, Alberta Federation of Labour.

If the member would like to comment on and just, like, you know, take into consideration that last date I said. If they were really, really serious about this legislation, about compassionate care, if they really cared about people – you know, there are people right now that have sick kids at home that could benefit from this legislation. Right now there are people working in Alberta that could benefit from this legislation, and you’re going to drag this out until January 1, 2018. But your all-important union certification stuff: oh, man, that’s got to come through September 1. Underage workers: immediately upon proclamation. Right now there are sick kids at home where the mom and dad are at work and could benefit from this legislation. Absolutely shameful. I’m just wondering if the member would like to stand up and comment on that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. I think that goes to the core of the main point, and that is just the complete lack of trust and the fact that, you know, nobody in Alberta trusts this government anymore. I certainly don’t, and it’s because this behaviour continues. This amendment is relevant to that because the question we have to ask is whether this was truly consulted on with Albertans, and we hear from Albertans: not.

As the hon. member knows, I mean, in my case, I hear constantly from the Red Deer ridings and the Wetaskiwin ridings, from their people who are needing our help because they’re not being able to communicate with their MLAs. We hear that constantly. Clearly,

you know, we hear those stories all the time, of people calling for help from the constituencies of the members opposite. Their constituents aren't being spoken to. They expect us to believe that they actually have taken the time to consult on this. That's troubling.

But, in addition to that – and I think the hon. member's point is that the two dates are extremely troubling – it's extremely troubling that this government continues to rise and say that this is about the compassionate portions of this when we've offered to get this through immediately. In one day we could have that passed and off to help the people that are impacted by it. When you look at that bill and you actually find out, Madam Speaker, that the government's intention is not to do anything with the compassionate portion until at least next year but that it is to force through the ideological portion, where they stack the deck on democracy with ballots, that they push forward their ideological agenda, that's troubling.

It goes to what we keep saying, and that is that there's just no trust left in this government. They've lost all the trust of Albertans, and they know it. They know it, at least the ones across the way that actually take the time to talk to Albertans. You have to know it. You go anywhere in this province, and they don't trust them, but that's because of this behaviour, over and over and over, staying inside the bubble, not talking to the people of Alberta they're trying to impact, and forcing through ideological agendas. It's extremely troubling, I think, at its core, and the reason that we needed the amendment, the reasoned amendment, and, before that, to at least refer this to committee was because of that troubling behaviour.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to support the amendment brought forward by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. I believe it's a very good amendment, and I'll tell you why. Because this bill has been rushed. If members opposite do not believe me, they can actually go ahead and read the bill. The previous speakers talked about the spelling mistakes and the technical mistakes in the bill. Those could be verified by the NDP members here if they read the bill. Members opposite have been told to filibuster their own bills because Bill 17 was not ready. That was also mentioned by the previous speaker.

8:50

Now they rise and say this, that this is what is good for Albertans, without ever having taken the time to speak with Albertans, Madam Speaker. They didn't speak to any Albertans. If they spoke, they haven't informed us whom they spoke to, what they told them.

They spent less time talking to Albertans about these changes than they did speaking to Albertans about daylight saving time, Madam Speaker. If you remember, they brought in the daylight saving bill, and then they referred it to the committee. We saw more advertising and more consultation periods for time change than we are seeing for labour changes. Even after all the consultation on daylight saving time, the NDP still wanted more time to consult, so they asked us, the opposition, to back their motion to send it to the committee.

Now, we want to do the same with this bill, and, Madam Speaker, I didn't see any agreement from the other side. We are more than reasonable in separating the most important parts of it, where we both agree. We said that we have no issue in supporting that and getting that approved and getting royal assent and making that effective, but they don't want to take that. That is very unreasonable. All we are asking is: take the summer to consult with

Albertans. What's wrong with that? They didn't give us any justification for it. We want to spend, at the very least, the same amount of time on this bill as was spent on daylight saving time.

The only reason members opposite would be afraid to send this to the committee for more consultation is that they're afraid Albertans would be opposed to this, which they are, so your reasons are justified. I know that you know that Albertans are not happy with you for rushing this bill, but that is all the more reason to get input from Albertans. At least, then you have the satisfaction that you consulted Albertans and they gave you input. That gives you more confidence. I don't know why you don't do that.

Do the members opposite want to run a government that does not create legislation for all Albertans but only for a few? Do the members opposite really want to create legislation that only appeals to 1 per cent of Albertans? Do they want to create legislation that only union bosses are happy with?

Do they want to create legislation that allows unions to undercut businesses and drive out competition? That is literally what MERFing means, which they have included in this bill, Madam Speaker. Apply MERFing to any large corporation and see if they would be happy with that. Nowadays you've made friends with many corporations, which is good, so just check with them and apply MERFing and see what they've got to say.

Have the members opposite done local consultation to find out what they are introducing and how it will affect their communities? That's our job, Madam Speaker, to find out how it affects the communities. There has been less than one week for us to consult, and there is no way that any single person on that side of the House could possibly say that that is enough time to consult on a bill of this size, this large. If you did, tell us. It's not possible in just one week to consult.

MERFing alone could bankrupt businesses. If you understand business, if you understand the meaning of MERFing, that could actually bankrupt many businesses. Then, instead of introducing hundreds of unemployed engineers, we'll be introducing hundreds of unemployed construction workers, tradesmen, and oil field workers as a result of this bill, all of whom lost their jobs due to policies the members opposite signed into law. This is just one – one – of the many reasons why this bill needs more consultation. The Minister of Labour loves to quote movies and songs from the '80s to reference the last time there were any upset labour workers.

Let's keep this labour peace for one more summer and consult for one more summer. Just one more summer: that is all we are asking, Madam Speaker. Prove to us that Albertans want this bill. Prove to us that we are wrong. Just heckling us doesn't prove you right. You have to use reasonable debate and convince us to prove us wrong. I think that next the Justice minister will get up and speak and prove me wrong. I'm hoping. I know that members opposite would love to prove that we are wrong, which is good, but they have to use a reasonable argument.

Right now they have no proof because everyone is coming out against this bill. Right now we have the proof on this side of the House because lawyers are upset with this bill due to the wrong wording, construction companies are upset due to how it will destroy their businesses, business owners are upset at how they are being treated by this government as criminals, and workers are upset that their right to a secret ballot is being taken away. The only people who are happy, Madam Speaker – the only people who are happy – are the union bosses. That is the 1 per cent of workers that I was referring to. I do not know why this government is appealing to the 1 per cent. I do not know why this government does not care about everyone else.

Yes, many members across the aisle have been heckling me and my colleagues, including the member who had a member's

statement about heckling, who sits right beside his colleague as they heckle, without trying to stop them. Those two make, you know, the Statler and Waldorf of the Assembly.

There are parts of this bill we all agree upon, and we said right from the start that if those pieces were in their own separate bill, we would pass them in a heartbeat. Everyone on this side, including the Member for Calgary-Elbow, said that, but since they will not show any compassion, we have to deal with the difficult portion of this bill in hopes that they listen before it is too late.

Fellow MLAs, my colleagues, if you do not understand what these phrases are, these phrases that are included in this bill, it means that you do not understand what you are passing. I implore you to consult more on this bill. MERFing, salting, Rand, card check, and right to work: if you do not completely understand what all those mean, then that shows that you are uninformed as to the contents of this bill. Please work with us to ensure that everyone in this House is informed, please work with us on this amendment, and work with us to have more consultation on this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise under 29(2)(a) to make a comment about the speech by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Foothills. Now, he was asking quite a lot about consultation and what we've done for consultation and kind of what I've done for consultation, so I'd love to tell him what I've done to consult about Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

9:00

Even before this act was tabled, I was able to speak to my constituents directly. I, unlike some members on the opposite side, go door to door and talk to my constituents because they're the ones whom I'm here to represent. I go door to door, and I talk to them. I've heard over and over again from people like Karen from Hawkwood, who is happy that in Bill 17 we're going to make sure that if somebody is sick or their child is sick, they're going to have the time to go home. I have been able to go door to door, not just this weekend. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, if we could respect both sides of the House, please.

Thank you.

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I find it very disheartening that while I'm trying to speak up for my constituents, I have members from the opposite side trying to yell over top of me. I'd really appreciate it if those members could just calm down and maybe listen to some debate instead of just trying to talk over one another. That's how we have constructive debate, and I'm sure you know that.

I would really hope that my colleague and neighbour from Calgary-Foothills maybe gets out of his office and goes door to door and talks to his constituents about what this legislation means for him and how the I think it was almost 29-year-old labour legislation, this decades-old labour legislation, was so hurtful to our constituents and to all Albertans.

When I go door to door and I talk to my constituents, they tell me that – well, since I went this weekend, they were telling me how happy they were to see what's in this bill. They were happy that we are making sure that Albertans are well represented in this Legislature. They are happy that we are making sure that if

something does happen to them, if something does happen to one of their . . . [interjections]

I'm tired of hearing from the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills constantly over top of me, so I'd ask him to please quiet down while I'm trying to speak through the chair.

Mr. Hanson: Did you tell them about the secret ballot?

Connolly: Excuse me?

The Acting Speaker: We were doing so well. Hon. members, we've actually been very quiet this evening, and we'd appreciate it if we could please, when both sides are speaking, be respectful.

Thank you.

Connolly: Thank you once again, Madam Speaker.

I also heard from Heather down in Silver Springs. Like the hon. member was saying, yeah, I did speak about what we're doing to make sure that people can either join a union or leave a union and making sure that if 65 per cent of people have a card, that union is then created. They are happy with that. They're really happy that between 40 and 65 per cent we still have a secret vote. Sometimes unions can't always reach that 65 per cent because many members of that workforce maybe don't want to be members of a union, so they might not sign a union card. That means we still have the secret ballot. That is why in Bill 17 we decided not to get rid of the secret ballot, unlike what the opposition keeps saying. They are completely making falsehoods out of Bill 17. I am sick and tired of it, and my constituents are sick and tired of it.

Mr. Hanson: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Hanson: With pleasure. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I make reference to the usual suspects: 23(h), (i), and (j). The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood clearly referred to members opposite here as basically lying by using the word "falsehood." [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Let the member finish, please.

Mr. Hanson: It's unparliamentary. It's been called unparliamentary. "Falsehood" and "not telling the truth" have been called unparliamentary in this Chamber many times in the past, and I would like the member to apologize and withdraw.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Would the government side like to respond? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Yes. I'll retract the word that I used, and I do apologize for using that specific word. However, they are not necessarily always construing what our legislation is in the correct manner.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Please continue.

Debate Continued

Connolly: Now, as I mentioned, Madam Speaker, some of the – sorry. I'm not done with my 29(2)(a).

As I mentioned, Madam Speaker, some of this legislation hasn't been updated since 1988, and the previous government's failure to keep up to date with the rest of Canada is completely shameful. The

current opposition is coming up with all sorts of reasons to keep delaying those updates, and I think that's shameful, too. That was directly what the member opposite was trying to do and what they're trying to do with this reasoned amendment.

Albertans need a government that's got their backs and makes sure they have the same rights as people in other jurisdictions. These are things like overtime. In order to protect Albertans and keep up with other Canadian jurisdictions, Bill 17 proposes that rates of banked overtime and pay must be no less than time and a half.

Now, I know several people that are in the same position. My brother, as a matter of fact, is in that position. I am so happy that he is going to get his fair shake. He deserves it for the work that he does as an electrician. I know that for several people who work in the trades and people who even work elsewhere – like, when I worked even in retail, that was the case. We only got one hour for our banked hours in overtime.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good evening, everyone. Well, interesting conversations in the past few minutes, for sure, this evening, folks.

I'd like to rise this evening and speak highly in favour of this amendment. Actually, though, I'd like to start – I'm kind of getting tired of always getting up and speaking about how this government isn't listening to Albertans and about the lack of consultation this government holds on so many of their legislative policies. Frankly, if I didn't know any better, I'd say that they're outright allergic to the thought of listening to Albertans, Madam Speaker.

The NDP government needs to realize that more consultation/analysis is needed under labour and employment changes as Alberta's job creators have taken hit after hit from the NDP blindly pursuing their ideology since they were elected. If they are sincere in taking the time to get this right, they will use the summer to receive meaningful feedback on all the changes and their combined ramifications. That's what our amendment is asking you to do, to take the summer to go out and get feedback.

Economic impact assessments. Whether it's the carbon tax, electricity changes, the tax hikes, or the minimum wage, the government either refuses to do impact assessments or ignores the evidence in favour of ideology. This legislation from the NDP government is omnibus in nature and, in my opinion, would best be served if split into two distinct components to allow for faster passage of compassionate care leaves.

Actually, I'm supportive of many of the updates to the employment standards to protect those on compassionate leave, ladies and gentlemen. I really hoped to work with this government on passing those measures as quickly as possible. But I'm steadily losing hope that the NDP will recognize that these compassionate care components be separate and distinct from the broader employment and labour code changes that require consultation, which is really too bad. Albertans deserve so much better.

The NDP government is being completely insincere in their attempt to wrap up their really bad bill with really good proposals on improving compassionate leaves. Again, if they would take the time to actually listen to Albertans over the course of the summer, they would hear that. Again, that is what our amendment is set to do.

Make no mistake: the larger part of this province's Alberta advantage was the decades of labour peace. That didn't happen by accident. The NDP seem hell-bent on settling ideological scores at

a time when Alberta's economy simply cannot absorb the continued blows. This government is sacrificing jobs to please their big, fat-cat union bosses. That's what it would seem. This legislation should require the government to take their time to get it right. Instead, the NDP is setting a course for destruction and taking us there at lightspeed.

Bill 17 has 124 pages. That is one page longer than Bill 21, the Modernized Municipal Government Act, that this government introduced last spring and that I was heavily involved in debating throughout the fall. The minister then went on the road all summer listening to Albertans, and when we returned in the fall, she – bless her heart – introduced amendments based on the feedback she received from Albertans and stakeholders. Bill 21 has been lauded as the gold standard for consultation and something this government should perhaps be emulating with Bill 17. Instead, Bill 17 is quickly becoming the lowest possible standard for how a government should pass a bill.

9:10

Debate on Bill 21 was measured in months. Bill 17 debate will be measured on a stopwatch, it would seem, and that is disappointing. This government should be ashamed of themselves in this respect. Consultation is something that's so important to all Albertans now since Bill 6, since Bill 21, since all of these things. That's been shown. Why they're not proceeding along that same path, I do not know.

The government clearly intended for no discussion to happen, I think, because they know that this bill aims to please the big, fat cat union bosses I mentioned a moment ago and not the rest of Albertans, who are already hurting from this government's disastrous economic policies. Alberta has a strong, stable system of democracy that has been in place for over 100 years, and this government continues to disregard the importance of that process in crafting workable legislation for the benefit of all Albertans. The contempt that the government has for the legislative process is unhealthy, and frankly it is unacceptable. Albertans deserve better, Madam Speaker.

Why the concerns with the other pieces? It's not clear what the impact would be to Alberta's businesses should the union certification provisions be rushed through. We need to take the time to do this right, and that means more than 36 little days of consultation and just a week of debate. Alberta's current union certification system has resulted in over three decades of relative labour peace, with the highest wages in the nation, and the fact that this government is willing to throw that successful system out without holding any consultation over the summer is simply wrong.

The government has essentially drawn a line in the sand that 65 per cent of employees signing union cards means 50 per cent are in favour of unionizing, and that's not right and it's not accurate, in my opinion. The secret ballot dates back to ancient Greece and has been the backbone of transparent democracy for over a thousand years, and somehow this NDP government seems to think that they know better than anyone else does. If this government is going to get rid of the secret ballot, they should have the intestinal fortitude to consult with Albertans. Again, that is what our amendment is about, consulting with Albertans throughout the summer.

I know why they refuse to speak to anyone or consult with anyone at this stage, because they simply don't have the justification to make those changes, and Albertans know it, and this government knows that Albertans know it.

I'm supporting this amendment because this bill proposes so many changes, 125 pages worth of changes, and this government has not even attempted in the least to do a proper job of consultation. I believe in consultation with Albertans. I believe in

consulting thoroughly with Albertans about these kinds of major changes and any kind of change to legislation. So, Madam Speaker, I encourage all members of this Assembly to do the same. Support this amendment. Let's see some consultation this summer.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate my colleague speaking to this amendment. You know, one of the questions that I had was that I really just wanted to understand: why the rush to get this very controversial part of the bill passed by September 1? So I looked up how many union members are in Alberta. A little over 23 per cent of Albertans are union members according to one of the sources that I looked at, yet the latest polls show that the NDP have dropped to around 19 per cent. So one of the things that I was thinking was that it looks like they're actually losing even some of their union members, so they need to shore up that support, that is generally something that they've been able to count on in the past. I'd like to actually ask the hon. member if he could comment on what he thinks is the reason why they're pushing this forward and whether or not there's anything to the idea that they're polling even less than what the union members are in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure if I can answer the member's questions that he has provided. There are a few things that I could add, though, certainly, and that is that the NDP government needs to realize that more consultation is needed, both about the Labour Relations Code changes and the changes to union certification in the province. If they were actually sincere in taking the time to get this right, they would use the summer to receive that feedback that I spoke of and all the combined ramifications that are involved. This legislation from the government is omnibus in nature, and we would really, really suggest that it should be split into two distinct components to allow for faster passage of many of the important pieces of the legislation, but it's certainly something that needs further consultation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral?

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to note the amount of progress that we have made today and to begin by adjourning debate on the reasoned amendment and then adjourn for the evening until tomorrow morning.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:17 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 31, 2017

Day 42

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Kazim	

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Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning, everyone.

If we could just contemplate and pray, each in our own way. I believe that today marks the 100 years ago that U.S. President John F. Kennedy was born. Let us be reminded of his famous line, where he challenged all citizens of the world by saying, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Let us also remember that he suffered as a result of violence and terrorism. Let us work together to never let that dominate our country and province.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

Mr. Hunter moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not provided Albertans enough time to be consulted on the specific changes being proposed and, further, has not provided assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impact on the economic well-being of Albertans.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 30: Ms Ganley]

The Speaker: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m speaking to the amendment today. This is an extraordinarily large piece of legislation that we have before us today. It is, in fact, two bills brought together. It is trying to do, on the one hand, some positive things for Alberta families and Alberta workers, but on the other hand, it has some much more controversial items in it that go beyond basic working conditions and get into the basic structure of labour and employer relations in Alberta. These are two very, very separate things.

The first part of the bill I refer to deals with employment standards: underage workers, leave, overtime pay, holiday pay, employment standards for farm and ranch workers, temporary layoff periods, persons with disabilities, probationary periods for termination of employment, and administrative penalties. In some of these areas I think we’d find rather broad agreement on both sides of the House between the government, the Official Opposition, and the third party. There will be differences within there. There certainly are some problems on that side, but broadly it is trying to move in the right direction, and I think we could find a large degree of agreement on both sides.

But even where we do agree, at least on some of the broad strokes, we need to take time to properly consult with workers, with employers, with regulators, and with nonprofits and for-profit businesses. So far the only group that has been significantly

consulted on any of this is the Alberta Federation of Labour and its affiliated major unions in the public and private sectors. That is not adequate consultation. A quick phone call to small-business groups is not adequate consultation. Even on the part of the bill where we have a rather broad degree of consensus at least on the direction we should be moving, if perhaps not on some of the details, we need to be able to speak with people in the field on these things. There’s not been anywhere near an adequate period of consultation. That is why this bill should be put on ice until we return in the fall. We should take the summer to go out and consult with people.

I remember that before I was elected, I was with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and there were four members of the current government here who served as the fourth party at the time. There were some bills brought forward by the previous government that dealt largely with pension reform, both the public and private sectors, but the more controversial side of it was on the public sector. It was actually one of the rare cases where I found myself in agreement with the former government and opposed to the Wildrose at the time. I actually felt that the Wildrose had taken the wrong position at the time, that it had been actually a matter of political expediency, and it was the wrong position to take. I was not a Wildrose member at the time, but I was certainly, generally speaking, a supporter.

This bill turned out to be pretty controversial. Members of the then fourth party, who are now in government, demanded that these controversial pieces of legislation dealing with pension reform go to a committee and that that committee spend the summer going out and meeting with stakeholders. I appeared before that committee. I remember the now Minister of Education was there. I was one of only two people to present in favour of the bill, and there were many, let’s just say, vocal public-sector workers who were there demanding that the bill be shelved. I saw the now Minister of Education in the hallway before I went in, and he told me that for my own safety I should probably be careful with my presentation. Needless to say, I was not careful with my presentation and had a few public-sector union members violently shove me on my way out. Nonetheless, it was the right thing to do to have that bill go to a committee.

That was a bill that eventually the Premier who succeeded at that time, Jim Prentice, ended up shelving. I disagreed with that decision. I thought that that was a good piece of legislation, broadly speaking, although it had flaws in it, and that those flaws could have been addressed when they toured that summer to try and consult with people. They actually went out and consulted with many of the people that the bill actually affected. It affected workers, particularly in the public sector. I was there to represent many taxpayers, primarily in the private sector, who also needed to be heard. So the committee was able to go out and listen to what Albertans thought about this.

Now, federally – I generally don’t look to our federal Parliament as a great example of a functioning democracy, but they do actually take much more public input at the committee level. Committees are not a shocking one-off thing. They have more than just the Public Accounts Committee. They have more than just committees that meet a few times a year to consider the estimates. They have regularly meeting committees, where they can receive testimony from members of the public.

The NDP used to stand for that when they were in opposition. You would think – you would hope, at least – that that zeal for listening to the public would carry over into government, but when you get to government, apparently you don’t need to listen anymore. You can just listen to each other in the Chamber. You can listen to each other in a caucus meeting. You can listen to your party members in your meetings. But you don’t have to go out and listen to the general public anymore. That is a very negative reflection on

the transition from opposition to government for many of the members opposite, that I don't think they're proud of but they may overlook for purposes of political expediency.

So that committee went out and listened to many Albertans. In the end the government of the day made the decision to shelve that bill. Again, I don't believe they should have shelved that bill. I think that was generally a positive piece of legislation that should have been passed in an amended form. There were problems with the bill, and they should have passed an amended form of that bill, but instead it was scrapped outright.

It was a good experience for me to see that, look, here are MLAs going out to tour the province. They held public hearings in Edmonton, in Calgary, and, I think, in other medium-sized cities like Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie and listened to people there. And the NDP very actively organized to bring out their supporters. They brought out many members of the NDP. They brought out AFL members. They brought them out in large numbers to try and testify at this committee, to make their voices heard as they had every right to do, although, as I found out in my experience there, they certainly didn't respect the right of other people to testify there, as in both volume and even minor forms of violence.

In any case, it was a positive experience, and I was encouraged when I saw the Minister of Education and, I think, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, that sat on that committee as well. It was positive to see members of all the different opposition parties there with members of the government doing this. I genuinely thought that when those members formed government, that was something that they would carry with them into government, and it's not something we've seen.

9:10

This would be important to do even for the half of this bill where we have a relatively broad level of consensus on the high level of it if not on some of the details. But all the more so is it important for us to take the summer to consult on this bill on the areas where we have virtually no level of agreement right now. The other half of this bill, the Labour Relations Code changes, is a radical overhaul of labour relations and union legislation in this province. They deserve more than a cursory glance by the public before they become the law of the land. They deserve a careful and thoughtful examination from all sides. They deserve a full public hearing, with the ability for expert witnesses to testify, before we are voting on legislation to become the law of the land.

We can talk about card check certification. I think it's, without a doubt, the single most controversial piece of this piece of legislation. Card check certification would strip workers of the right to a secret ballot, would take away a democratic right from workers that Canadians have had since 1880. Eighteen eighty.

I was briefly chatting with I think it was the Member for Calgary-Currie. I know we had a big powwow in his constituency last night. I was chatting with the Member for Calgary-Currie about, you know, how we got the secret ballot. Canada's first federal election was conducted without a secret ballot. Everyone could see how you voted. The upside to that was that, you know, if you were in a Conservative area, the Conservatives would have essentially what amounted to a party or a barbecue next to the polling station, and if you voted for the right guys – they would know how you voted – you'd get invited over, and they would feed you, they would give you something to drink, and you would have had a good time with the other guys who voted Conservative. But if you didn't, well, you'd better hold on to your kneecaps.

The same thing would go on in Liberal polls. I suppose we didn't have the same party configurations at the time. We still had, you

know, what we called Reformers and Clear Grits and things like that, too. But broadly we didn't have a secret ballot. So the upside to it was that you might get some free barbecue and beer out of it if you voted the right way, but the downside was that people were intimidated if they voted the wrong way. They only conducted one federal election after Confederation like that, but our elections pre-Confederation were broadly conducted like that.

In the united provinces of Upper and Lower Canada and the colonial provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland they did not have the secret ballot until 1880 and Alexander Mackenzie, Canada's first Liberal Prime Minister, introduced the secret ballot. From that time on, Canadians have enjoyed the basic democratic right to keep their vote secret.

Now, as politicians we're constantly asking people how they vote. We love to know how people vote. We want to identify voters, to get them out. We want to figure out how people are intending to vote in polls. We're obsessed with these things. But that is a consensual handing over of information from a voter to a politician or to a pollster or to a campaigner.

That is very different – that is very different – than where you vote by signing a card. And if you don't sign the card, which is effectively a yes vote, then you are by default on the no side, meaning that a union organizer could come into your place of work, where you're just trying to do your job, and say: vote yes or no; I will know how you voted. They then have the ability to intimidate, to cajole, to trick, to bully workers into voting their way. I know that members on the other side are concerned about these issues. They talk about bullying and these things all the time, and those things are wrong. So it is beyond me to understand why they would do something which is sure to increase bullying and, potentially, cases of violence in the workplace. I don't know why they would do that.

This is a very significant change in our laws, and it deserves more than just a cursory look here and a couple of late-night sittings and debate between us. We should hear from the public. There's no need to rush this. We should take the summer, listen to Albertans, listen to constituents, listen to experts in their fields on both sides – listen to labour, listen to unions, listen to workers, listen to employers – listen to them, consult over the summer, and come back in the fall so that we can properly debate this bill with a bit more knowledge than we have right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions, comments directed to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks concerning this amendment?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this morning to speak to the amendment. I'm probably just going to keep my comments very, very brief.

One of the things that I've seen as a concern that's been noted from our friends across the way is in regard to the consultation process and what has taken place. Just to point out a couple of little facts here, there were two previous reviews done of the codes, both in 2007 and then again in 2014. Now, unfortunately, there was no action that was taken on those reviews by the previous government, and that has left us out of step with the rest of Canada for quite some time. You know, when you think about those reviews that were done and then nothing having been done there and take into consideration that a lot of our labour language is as much as almost 30 years old, I could see how maybe it's possible to confuse some of the things we're trying to bring into step now with everybody

else in the rest of the country. That would seem a little radical to you, so I can certainly empathize on that.

With regard, again, to the consultation process that took place, you know, there was a lot that was done. We have spoken to organizations like the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the University of Lethbridge, the city of Medicine Hat, the Alberta Caregivers Association, and organizations like Unifor. These are just a few examples of some of the consultation that has gone on, Mr. Speaker, including the nearly 5,000 online submissions that were added to try to guide the process here for this updated labour language legislation. Another 400 written submissions were also brought in.

Were small-business groups included in those consultations? Absolutely. But then again we can see that places like the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, very large organizations with a large business membership, have also been consulted on that.

We also engaged the services of Andrew Sims, a gentleman that has a very, very, very extensive background when it comes to labour law. His guidance was certainly fundamental in helping us navigate to ensure that our laws here in Alberta are now coming into step with the rest of Canada, with our friends in other provinces as well as even on some of our obligations on the international scale with regard to youth employment.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy with the level of consultation that has taken place. I know for sure that, you know, the folks in Edmonton-Decore and I have been talking about this for quite some time. Given my background that's certainly a question that always comes up along with a lot of other things.

9:20

I want to thank the member that brought the motion forward. Hopefully, some of my comments have managed to address the consultation process and how, I think, after 30 years Albertans have waited long enough so that they can enjoy some of the legislation that the rest of the country is already enjoying. I'm not able to support this amendment, and I would ask that my colleagues in the House also not support this at this time.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members who wish to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to a reasoned amendment with regard to Bill 17, that

Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not provided Albertans enough time to be consulted on the specific changes being proposed and, further, has not provided assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impact on the economic well-being of Albertans.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, we came to a point in time where the Minister of Labour decided that it's time to put forward Bill 17, the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code amendment act. What we see here is a minister that has thrown together a document that got plunked on our desks stapled together, not completely, properly finished, I would suggest rushed at the end of a session, and where this government is now proposing that we push this through before the end of session.

I would suggest that the Minister of Labour needs to probably focus more on creating jobs, creating an environment of stability, and creating an environment for many of the unemployed workers that we've seen in our province over the last couple of years, where we've seen many people not being able to find work. We have a Minister of Labour that has been so focused on creating a bill that

is not necessarily going to help create any new jobs and that, I would suggest, possibly is creating more instability within the workplace, within the investment community, and more uncertainty on whether or not we will be able to create the good-paying jobs in the future that we have been able to enjoy over the past few decades.

When I look at this bill, Mr. Speaker, I consider that this bill is not fair to workers, who are having their rights taken away, the rights to a secret ballot, and it's not fair to entrepreneurs trying to create jobs and prosperity. We have had relative labour peace for decades now. I would suggest that employers and employees have been working together collaboratively in the best interests of everyone and, at the end of the day, have been able to move forward in a collaborative manner, enjoying the mutual benefits of success, where employers and employees have been able to reap the benefits of a workplace that rewards each according to their needs.

Now we have a Minister of Labour who claims, after 30 years of relative work peace, that something is wrong. When we look at a situation that has been going quite well and working quite well, you've got to ask the question: why? If it's not broken, why? Why are we trying to fix something that is not necessarily broken?

Now, granted, Mr. Speaker, we have portions of this bill that are speaking to the Employment Standards Code. You know, we in the opposition have advocated for splitting the bill into two portions. The compassionate care components of this bill are separate from the labour code changes and should be treated as such. They should be two separate bills. How union certification operates, for instance, is an entirely different subject than whether or not workers should be able to take protected leave for compassionate care, for caring for sick or dying loved ones; for being able to take time off when they're caught in a domestic violence situation; and those types of things. Having their workplace or their job protected during those times of crisis is an important part of this legislation.

But to lump it all together, the employment standards and Labour Relations Code amendments, is saying to me that the government is trying to hide something, that they're trying to cover up what would be typically viewed as concerning legislation that is playing to their union bosses and the people that are part of the NDP governance structure in their party and playing to those individuals and those organizations that are expecting this government to make union certification easier, to simplify it. The minister has called it simplifying union certification.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there has not been enough consultation with everyday Albertans, stakeholders, our job creators, and our investors in this province to get a good understanding of what the impact is going to be on our economy, on our job situation. I would suggest that if the NDP sincerely wanted to get this right, they would take the time to do it right. With 36 days of consultation, primarily on employment standards, and the four come-and-be-told meetings we heard about, where if you were invited, you were allowed to attend, I don't necessarily believe that that was fulsome consultation that is helpful to improving the investment climate and the job-creation climate within this province. It appears to me to be somewhat underhanded and disingenuous to the proper steps needing to be taken to ensure that all Albertans recognize that this government is working on their behalf and not on behalf of their union bosses.

The amendment would essentially say: take the time to do proper consultation over the summer. You know, we need to know the economic impact assessments on the investment climate and have proper evidence to get an understanding of whether the moves that are being taken at this time to essentially change our Labour Relations Code are going to actually help create jobs within this province.

We have for the last couple of months been asking many questions of the Minister of Labour, when she announced the labour

review, and trying to get an understanding of what process she would be taking to ensure that proper consultation is being done and to ensure that all stakeholders were able to be at the table and discuss the changes that were being proposed. Many of the stakeholders had been writing letters to myself and to the Premier and to the Minister of Labour and to others, and we tabled many of those letters here in the House, Mr. Speaker, based on the fact that stakeholders felt that they were not being adequately consulted with. They were asking this government to slow down, take the time, extend the consultation period, and enhance the consultation period to make sure that all people that were interested in being part of that consultation had the opportunity to actually be a part of it and to learn and understand what this government was proposing.

9:30

But this government decided that they knew better and that they know better. Apparently, they think they know better than the people that actually do create the jobs in this province. It's quite concerning to me that we have a government that is plowing ahead with ideological legislation at a time when many Albertans are looking to the Minister of Labour to come forward with some type of hope, some sign of hope, some indication, some signal that she is actually concerned about the people that are out of work, that she is actually concerned that we need to create a stable investment climate that will create jobs and help these people to be able to provide for their families, to be able to provide for their communities, and to have a healthy lifestyle that we can all enjoy.

The Minister of Labour, who is also, apparently, by coincidence, the minister responsible for democratic reform, is introducing a bill here with regard to Labour Relations Code amendments. I would suggest that the minister responsible for democratic reform or renewal or whatever the title is should be appalled that this government, that the Minister of Labour is introducing a bill that essentially takes away the secret ballot right of the employee, however you spin it. Some have decided that, no, the secret ballot is still there. But when we get to the levels of 65 per cent, the minister decided: "Well, that's good enough. Enough union members here, enough members signing cards. Whether they're signing cards with full information being given to them or not, 65 per cent seems like a good number, so let's go ahead and certify that union."

I believe that that is going against the very pillars of democracy that we've been able to enjoy in this country for many years. We need to protect those democratic rights, and we need to be sure that individuals, employees in this case, are protected from other individuals that would use force or use other types or means of encouragement that possibly are not completely accurate or are possibly somewhat misleading, that would take these individuals down a path when they were not fully informed of what path they were taking.

It's interesting, and I've been thinking about this for the last few days, since the bill was introduced. I wonder if this government would be okay if 65 per cent of voters decided that it's time to decertify this government. You know, if you had a petition and 65 per cent of voters signed the petition and said, "We want this government out," would this government decide: "Yeah. That's good representation. Let's honour that. Let's shut it down, and let's go to the voters for a new election." I would suggest that possibly the government would say: "No, no. That's not going to work." We do need to protect the democratic rights of all individuals and in this case of employees that are being approached with regard to union membership and being approached with regard to unionizing a workplace.

I find it somewhat disingenuous. You know, Mr. Speaker, unions are big business. They're big business, just like any other business, and the union executives are in it for the dollars. At the end of the day, that's what drives unions, dollars. For anybody to think that unions are necessarily all for the worker and for the employee and for the rights of the people, that would essentially be looking through rose-coloured glasses, to think that, yeah, it's not about the dollars.

Unions are big business, and at the end of the day union executives are arguably bosses of this government. We look at the NDP government, the New Democratic Party, their governance structure, and we have union executives sitting on their board. They have a right to a position on the board. I would suggest that these big businesses, these unions, these executives are using this government. They're using this government for their business development strategy.

I would suggest that the unions in Alberta have essentially – they want to do things. They want the Minister of Labour to simplify things in their favour just so that they can take on more business, have more business, create more income. They would like us to believe that they're just in it . . .

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock? Any members under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, are there any other members who wish to speak to the amendment?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:37 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Gill	Starke
Cyr	Pitt	Strankman
Fildebrandt	Schneider	van Dijken
Fraser	Smith	Yao

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Miller
Bilous	Horne	Miranda
Ceci	Jansen	Nielsen
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Sigurdson
Feehan	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Ganley	McKittrick	Turner
Gray	McLean	Westhead
Hinkley	McPherson	

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we're back to discussion on the main motion, Bill 17.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. This

bill aims to hide amendments to the Alberta Labour Relations Code that tip the scales heavily in favour of organized labour by wrapping them in smart, common-sense, compassionate updates to the Employment Standards Code. I'm sure the government hopes that one of two things comes out of this political sleight of hand: either they shame Albertans into supporting the labour relations amendments, which in no way reflect the modern realities of employee-employer relationships in Alberta; or they equate the opposition to labour relations amendments with opposition to the employment standards updates and brand us all as villains. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

For the record, my colleagues and I wholeheartedly support the job-protected leave provisions that would prevent employees from losing their jobs for things like taking time off to care for critically ill children or flee a domestic violence situation. Of course we do. To suggest otherwise is plainly untrue and a wilful attempt to mislead Albertans. But then again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised that this is the level that this government would stoop to. It's behaviour that we've come to expect from the NDP. If they can't win on the strength of their own arguments, they spear their opponents with flat-out lies. If this government was confident that its proposed changes to the Labour Relations Code were anything other than a quid pro quo to NDP union friends, then they would let those amendments stand on their own.

But by combining these amendments with common-sense updates to the Employment Standards Code in the same bill, the NDP is actually admitting it has no confidence that Albertans would accept the pro-union, anti-employer provisions in this bill on their own. Why won't Albertans accept these provisions on their own, Mr. Speaker? Well, could it be the pitiful 36-day consultation, which in reality is an insult to every employer in this province? Thirty-six days is not nearly enough time to adequately consult with job creators on legislation that will have a major impact on how they run their businesses and how much it will cost them to keep their doors open.

The Minister of Labour likes to brag that a thousand employers took part in the consultation. Well, considering there are more than 169,000 businesses in Alberta, the reality is that she consulted with less than 1 per cent of Alberta's employers, yet the minister insists that this was enough to get an accurate read on the business community and their concerns. What we heard from stakeholders is that it was not.

On April 11 the president and CEO of Alberta Chambers of Commerce sent a letter to the Labour minister to outline his members' concerns with the consultation process. He said:

No matter how modest the scope for the review, [the government's] methods and timelines for engaging employers does not constitute as widespread consultation.

He goes on to recommend that the minister extend the consultation period and make a greater effort to meaningfully engage employers across the province.

The Alberta chambers went on to say that the government's approach to consultation left his organization

deeply concerned the outcomes for this and related labour legislative reviews have been predetermined, and are little more than "windshield wiper" legislation where changes in labour legislation [are] the rewards of regime change.

Mr. Speaker, that is a scathing indictment of this government's consultation process if I ever heard one. Given that the minister refused to extend the consultation and engage in a meaningful way with the employers and job creators across the province, I would say that the Alberta chambers' concerns about predetermined outcomes are well founded.

Then there's the removal of the secret ballot for union certification. The government cites the potential for employer

intimidation as the rationale behind a 65 per cent threshold and a six-month card-signing period. But surely they can acknowledge that there's just as much potential for unions to intimidate employees into signing. If at the end of that period they have between 40 and 65 per cent of support but have failed to reach the magic threshold, then the employees get their secret ballot vote. But realistically by the time the secret ballot rolls around, everyone will know who the holdouts are, which defeats the purpose entirely.

I've listened to some of the government members that insist the secret ballot for union certification remains in the Alberta Labour Relations Code. That may be true, Mr. Speaker, but it will continue to exist in name only. After this bill is rammed down Albertans' throats in the middle of the night sometime in the next few weeks, it certainly won't exist in practice.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the proposed changes to both the labour code and the Employment Standards Code are completely unrelated. The only reason they appear together in the same bill is to provide the government with political cover, the same political cover that Amanda Jensen provided when they brought her into this Chamber last week and used her as a shield to defend against any criticism of this proposed legislation. It was a shameful exploitation of an Albertan's hardship, and the Minister of Labour should be embarrassed for using this woman to serve her political agenda.

We've heard many of my colleagues on the opposition benches agree that there are a great many proposed changes to the Employment Standards Code that we could wholeheartedly agree with, but to package them with major changes to the Labour Relations Code and make it even harder to own and operate a business in this province, Mr. Speaker, is dirty pool. Considering the fact that the majority of the businesses in Alberta are small and medium-sized enterprises and these small companies employ more than 80 per cent of the entire workforce in our province, the government's proposed labour relations amendments have potential to put a great many Albertans out of work, and we simply can't support them.

The lie that the government consistently tells Albertans, that big business is the target of the majority of their changes . . .

10:00

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'd just caution you. You know the sensitivity to the word "lie."

Mr. Fraser: Fair enough. I retract that.

But saying that big business is the target of their changes, Mr. Speaker – well, big businesses can afford it. Big business can live with a nominal amount being shaved off their massive profits. But let me repeat the statistic that I cited for the benefit of the members on the government side: 80 per cent of the entire workforce is employed by small and medium-sized enterprises, not big business. These companies just can't afford it, full stop.

When the government took office in 2015, Alberta's signature entrepreneurial spirit was strong. People from across the country and the world knew that if you had a dream of owning your own business, the best place to do it was in Alberta. But with hikes to personal and corporate income taxes, massive increases to the minimum wage, and, of course, the carbon tax, it's getting harder and harder for these Albertans to keep their dreams alive. When these businesses fail as the costs imposed on them by governments eat up their razor-thin profit margins, they have to lay off their employees. This government ought to think about that the next time they congratulate themselves for sticking it to big business.

Again, Mr. Speaker, while I support the common-sense, compassionate, job-protected leave provisions in this bill, I can't

support legislation that will put more small and medium-sized enterprises out of business, resulting in even more job losses for hard-working Albertans. I strongly urge the government to separate the Employment Standards Code amendments from the Labour Relations Code amendments and allow the Assembly to debate them separately.

I want to speak on a personal note. First of all, when I say this, I'm not saying that I don't support unions. That's false. I'm not saying that I don't support that the employment standards need to be strengthened to support Alberta families. But I come from a unique place: I was the president of CUPE 3421 and I was also the son of a father who owned a small business in this province for over 40 years. I can tell you that my father conducted his business in a way that if I am half the man he is by the time I am dead, then I have achieved something because I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when he could give, he gave; where he could train, he trained. Many of those people that worked for my father now own their businesses because of what he taught them. At the height of the business he had 25 employees. That's 25 families. He had good benefits, good vacation time. He was a caring and compassionate employer.

But, Mr. Speaker, at the same time, with that, with being an employer and being responsible, there are times where you have adversity with your employees, especially as you start to grow those small and medium-sized businesses. All I'm saying, when it comes to the Labour Relations Code, is that there is a far more fulsome debate that we can have about the code that would strengthen unions, that would benefit the members of the unions, not the executive of the unions but the members of the unions, because that's really who we're talking about when we want to strengthen those. I can tell you that, yes, there are bad employees, but there are also bad unions. And the ability to open up the Labour Relations Code and have a fulsome debate separately from the workplace standards would serve all members of this House better and all people in this province better and the members of those unions. That's all I'm saying by this.

To wrap this up and to vilify people one way or the other is just not right. Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that this caucus does support those compassionate, common-sense goals and changes to the Alberta labour relations standards. I can tell you that this caucus would also welcome a fulsome debate, a fair debate around the changes in the Labour Relations Code.

Mrs. Littlewood: Before you vote it in.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. I'm speaking of experience. I'm speaking with passion and care for this province. To be labelled something different is unparliamentary. It is immature. I respect this government. They're going to do what they're going to do. At the end of the day, Albertans will be the judge, not me, but I think it's fair that everybody in this Chamber have the opportunity to speak without being vilified, without being predetermined. We have talked about this before. We have talked about human rights and not labelling somebody by a title or a party or a gender. It needs to stop. We all need to grow more wise in this Chamber, more mature in this Chamber, to respect the difference of opinion and figure out how those different opinions can come together to serve Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, once again I ask and urge the government to separate these two pieces of legislation so Albertans can be respected in their points of view. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Calgary-South East under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to rise and comment because as the member was making his marvellous delivery, I noticed that there was heckling coming from the other side, particularly at the most passionate moment of the member's delivery, and I was wondering how he felt about that.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I can say, with a degree of experience in this House, that we're all passionate. We all take a position. I do believe that everybody in this Chamber is trying their best to represent the constituents that elected them. I think, again, that not only do we do a disservice to this Chamber, these buildings where so many great decisions have been made on behalf of Albertans of all governments at some point – the member asked me how I feel about those things. Again, I can only speak for myself. I know I'm not perfect. In fact, just the other day – you know, I too get wrapped up emotionally, but I do make a point that when I feel that I maybe have offended another member, I take the time outside of this Chamber to apologize, to explain myself, to get to know that member's point of view.

Mr. Speaker, we need to remind ourselves that in this Chamber it is not politics; it is service. It is service to Albertans in the most sincere way. I don't have to come to this Chamber. When I wake up, I don't say: I have to come to work today. I get to come to this Chamber, and I feel deeply privileged. I feel honoured, and I'll continue to serve in the best manner, regardless of heckles, regardless of point of view. All I can do is to be sincere. I think all we can ask of all members is to be sincere, be passionate, and try to be respectful.

The Speaker: Any other comments under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other individuals who – the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. To the motion, hon. member, the main motion?

Mr. van Dijken: Yes, for second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is this. The compassionate care components of this bill are separate from the labour code changes and, I believe, should be treated as such. How union certification operates, for instance, is an entirely different subject than whether or not workers are able to take protected leave. The Official Opposition along with the other opposition parties have made this point very clear. We believe that this bill should have been split into two separate bills in that we would be able to move forward in a unanimous manner with regard to many of the Employment Standards Code changes that are happening or that have been presented in this bill, and we would be able to move forward in a way that we could get these types of changes to Albertans.

I've got to reflect, Mr. Speaker, on how this government has been fairly disingenuous right from the start of the labour review and how the Minister of Labour continued to answer questions with regard to the Labour Relations Code report that Mr. Sims was going to present. We asked questions, whether or not we'd be able to see that report. We asked questions about the labour relations act, and the minister would continually deflect and deflect towards the employment standards, trying to make it look like they actually care about Albertans.

10:10

I must say that it's quite concerning that I see that the minister and the government and the members of the governing party are buying into this mantra, that is being essentially proposed to us by their big union bosses, on how they claim to be all about protecting Albertans and that the employment standards of Albertans are top of mind for them. Yet we see implementation dates with regard to the compassionate care components of this bill – not till January

will we see these parts of the bill implemented, yet the other parts with regard to the Labour Relations Code and so on will be implemented by September 1. This is concerning, Mr. Speaker.

The intent of this bill by the title – it's talking about fair and family-friendly workplaces, yet I'm not sure that that's the true intent of this minister. It appears to me that this minister is hiding behind the employment standards portion of the bill to try and cloak a certain amount of secrecy behind the labour relations part of the bill. This should concern all Albertans. This should be top of mind for all Albertans, that big business, big unions are essentially utilizing this government and the members of this governing party as tools in their hands.

Many people think that unions are only there for the sole purpose of representing their members, but I would suggest, after many years of watching and seeing how unions operate, that they have become more about themselves than about their employees and the people that they are supposed to represent. It's more about the money that they take in than about making sure that they're doing proper representation of their people. It's quite often that we see that it's more about their political activism as opposed to working on collective bargaining for their employees.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of concerns on how this minister has decided to move forward with regard to the changes in the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code. I have grave concerns on how the process of consulting with Albertans and the labour review, that was done in March – a 36-day labour review, I would suggest, is not nearly fulsome enough in order to ensure that we are hearing from all stakeholders in Alberta.

The Minister of Labour has a job to do, and that is to ensure that workplaces are safe and that the employees there are being taken care of but also to provide an environment that allows job creators to come to this province and invest in this province and show that they are providing good, well-paying jobs so that all Albertans can move forward with a standard of living that we have been able to enjoy for many decades now.

But this government is rushing through major changes, Mr. Speaker, a 124-page bill, that was introduced just last week, I believe, on Wednesday. Here we are, we're a week later, and we're all expected and Albertans are expected to be able to discuss it intelligently and debate it and reflect on it. The government introducing this right at the end of session, I would suggest, is also providing a certain amount of cover for the fact that they are not prepared to properly go out and consult and defend the direction of this bill.

My concerns primarily, Mr. Speaker, are on how the labour review was done. We had many times where we were trying to encourage the minister to enhance and get more input, extend the consultation period, yet, no, the government has decided that they're just going to move ahead based on their ideology and based on what they believe is the right way forward, not necessarily consulting with Albertans to get an understanding of what Albertans believe is the right way forward.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that in Alberta we've had relative labour peace for over 30 years, and over those 30 years employers and employees have both been able to be quite successful in maintaining a standard of living in this province that most people in the world would be very envious of. I believe that it's our role as government, as Members of this Legislative Assembly to continue to provide an environment for opportunity to succeed and for investment to actually come to this province and see an opportunity for success.

When we have over 30 years of relative labour peace, it would signal to me that the system is not broken. Yet this government has decided that: "Oh, the system is broken. We have to change the

system. The Labour Relations Code is broken." Who decided that the Labour Relations Code was broken? Did Albertans come to them and say: "We need this change. This is not working"? Employees didn't come to them saying that this is not working. It was their big union bosses that came to them and said: this isn't working; this isn't right. Now Albertans are going to be sitting holding the bag.

I think it's quite concerning that this government, that's supposed to be here to serve the people of Alberta, is more about serving their big union bosses and moving forward with an agenda, I would suggest, that is trying to simplify – and these are words from the minister's mouth, to simplify – the union certification process. Why? Why is that necessary? Because the big union bosses have decided that it's necessary. It makes their life easier, Mr. Speaker. Why are they using this government just to make their lives easier? They have a failed business plan, I would suggest, that they have not been able to implement properly for what they would like to see. Their business development strategy is not growing at the rate that they would like to see, and now they're using the government to put in rules that will simplify their work. Is it the role of government to simplify the work for these big union executives so that they can get more members, so that they can grow their membership? I don't believe so.

I believe it's the role of government to ensure that we have the ability to protect the job opportunities and create jobs for everyday Albertans to the best of our ability. Yet this government is bending over backwards for their big union bosses. It's quite concerning that they come forward under the guise of compassionate care leave and under the shell of employment standards improvements to try and hide from Albertans what their true intent with this Labour Relations Code and this bill is. I think all Albertans can see through this. I think all Albertans will recognize that this government is not acting on behalf of Albertans or serving everyday Albertans.

The Member for Calgary-South East had mentioned small businesses creating 80 per cent of the jobs within this province. What is this government doing to help small business to create more jobs? Well, let's talk about unionization. That should create more jobs.

I would suggest that this bill is creating more uncertainty, more instability within the province, possibly on a road to creating an environment where we cannot enjoy the labour peace that we've had for many decades, where employers and employees came together and saw that there's opportunity for everybody to succeed and that they were able to move forward in a collaborative manner and enjoy the ability to create wealth in this province and to share that.

10:20

For government members to believe that the small-business employers of this province have been taking advantage of employees, I would suggest, is few and far between. Having been a small-business operator and having had employees, the reality is that if you're not providing the necessary programs and compensation and benefits that would be competitive within the job market – and that's what it is; it's a job market. Our labour, the work that we do, is a market. It is a commodity just like anything else. We have to recognize that the ability for us to actually have work and have compensation for that work comes from a marketplace. We can think that we can take more out of the marketplace and it won't affect the market, but it does.

If we get into a situation where we have now put in place guidelines that are legislated down to businesses and those businesses are not able to change their business plans and work within those guidelines with regard to the competitive marketplace

in which they exist, those small businesses close. That's the reality. Those small businesses decide that this cannot continue. They close, and those jobs are gone.

So, Mr. Speaker, we need a government that recognizes where we have significant breaks in our system, where we need to do better within our system of employment standards and labour relations. But for this government to come forward with this bill and try to hide behind the employment standards improvements that are in this bill while implementing their agenda from their union bosses, that should concern all Albertans, and I think Albertans will judge them for that accordingly. They will be judged accordingly for the way they're moving forward with their ideology.

It is concerning that a government would serve the interests of big union, of their big union executives over and above the interests of all Albertans. We've received many letters – I've received many letters, and the minister has received many of those same letters, and the Premier has received many of those same letters – from individuals, from stakeholders, from businesses, from companies essentially saying: "Whoa. Slow down. We were not properly consulted."

The Speaker: Hon. members, under 29(2)(a), any questions or comments to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak on Bill 17 today. I want to preface my comments by stating that one of the beauties of a legislative Chamber and the design of a legislative Chamber is such that many people from a range of backgrounds and from a range of experiences and from a range of, you know, let us say, preconceived biases come together to exchange ideas and to exchange arguments in a hope to be able to hammer out the best legislation possible for the province. That's the idea. At times, unfortunately too often, I think that we fall short of that ideal.

I'm going to try to forge ahead today, relating some of my personal experiences and how they relate specifically to clauses within Bill 17 and where I support several areas of Bill 17 but where I also have grave reservations about Bill 17. I will say that one of the concerns that I do have – and it's been mentioned before. You can use a number of different metaphors to describe this, you know, whether you call it a Trojan Horse, whereby something that looks attractive is accepted in order to hide something much more nefarious inside. I use a much more simple metaphor. It's what we used to do when we had difficulty giving medication to patients. Some medications just don't taste good to dogs and cats, but if you wrap it up with something that they really like, they'll swallow it, and they won't even know that they got it. That's exactly what this government is doing with this piece of legislation. It's wrapping up something that's distasteful to the vast majority of Albertans into something that we can all agree with.

We're asking this government to unwrap that bitter pill. We're asking this government to separate the bitter pill and make sure that that bitter pill is something that the majority of Albertans want and not just a small group of union leaders. But no. That's not what they want. In fact, they very definitely want to take out the balling gun – and you can look that up if you're not sure what that is – and they want to ramrod this bitter pill, coated with whatever it is that will make it more palatable to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back and talk a little bit about biases. I grew up in a union household. [interjections] Wait a second. You might not like this all. My father was a reluctant dues-paying member of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America local P243 for the majority of his working career,

until that union was amalgamated into the United Food and Commercial Workers. I, too, was a member of that union for two summers. I will tell you that the issue that my father ran into repeatedly as a worker, as someone trained in Europe as a skilled tradesperson – being a butcher in Europe is something that actually takes several years of apprenticeship, and you eventually become a journeyman butcher – was that he faced intimidation and bullying throughout his career because of his level of work ethic.

My dad showed up early for work. He typically showed up half an hour early so that he could keep his knives sharp prior to going to work. He stayed late. He accepted overtime whenever it was offered. He would not go on the unauthorized – and I won't use the term because it's unparliamentary. But in addition to coffee breaks and lunch breaks, the union encouraged all workers to take additional breaks. I guess we'll call them smoke breaks because a lot of the workers did smoke. They were additional 20-minute breaks that were not part of the working schedule, two of them during an eight-hour shift. Mr. Speaker, my father refused to take those. My father was called all manner of names and insults because he believed that it was his duty to the employer to work for the wage he was being paid.

Many times – because, like I say, he became quite senior working at the plant – the union asked him to become a steward or to become a leader within the union leadership, and he consistently refused. There were a number of work stoppages over my childhood where my father was either locked out or there was strike action taken. I can tell you that those were the most nerve-wracking days of my childhood. I can remember my mother turning on the television each and every single day to see if the strike at Canada Packers was over.

So I understand that the members opposite see the good side of unions and that they have a very pro-union outlook on this and they see the positives of unions. I get that. I say that, absolutely, there is an important place for unions to play within the basic protection of workers' rights. I would not want to be in a society where we did not have an organized labour union movement because I think it provides a very important balance within our society and within our economy. But that being said, to suggest that everything about unions is positive and everything about unions is universally good has not been my experience, and it's not been the experience of a lot of other Albertans, too. That's something that I think you need to recognize. We understand that you are positive on unions. That's fine. You absolutely have the right to hold that opinion, but not all Albertans do.

10:30

Now, moving forward, after my experience for the two summers that I worked at Canada Packers, where I was a union member from 1985 to 1991, I sat on Lloydminster city council, and during that period of time I was twice involved as the city's representative on the negotiating committee on the renegotiation of the out-of-scope contract with our union. It happened to be a local of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I will tell you – and many of the people that sat at the table opposite me will tell you the same thing – that at times those negotiations are the biggest waste of time and effort I have ever seen because so much of it is chewed up and wasted in posturing on both sides. These negotiations happen. They each have their hired gun. We had our hired gun. CUPE had their hired gun, and they came to the table with a whole bunch of provisions and a whole bunch of demands and requests and all the rest of it.

You know, we would go out for a break in the negotiation, and I would talk to the employees that were on the committee because I knew these people. You know, they were folks that came to my business. I knew them from the work that they did, and I'd ask

them: are you really wanting this provision or that provision? They'd say: well, not really, but they told us to put it in there because we needed some bargaining chips. I said to myself: you know, I bet we could wrap this thing up in about two hours if we kicked our hired guns out of the room and just sat down face to face, employer to employee, and worked this out, and I think we could come out to an agreement that was amicable. But, no. Instead, we had this very adversarial and drawn-out relationship where, in my mind, the only people that benefited were the hired guns for our side and for their side.

Now, during my time on city council, Mr. Speaker, I was also the chair of our local seniors' lodge. During that period of time the employees at the seniors' lodge made the decision that they wished to become unionized, or they made the decision that they wanted to go through a certification process. Of course, it is their right to do so, and they had a secret ballot to do so, which, in my opinion, is something that is so fundamental and so clearly obvious, that a secret ballot should be the way this should be done, so that there cannot be intimidation, so that there cannot be any public knowledge of how an employee wants to vote, whether yea or nay, and there can be intimidation on either side.

Now, I knew the vast majority of the employees that were working at the lodge, and, you know, some of them asked me, "What do you think?" I said: "You know what? It is your decision. This is your decision. You decide what you feel is best for you and your family." In fact, we were quite specifically told that we were not to speak to the employees, nor were we to indicate to the employees a preference one way or another on the certification vote. That's, to me, as it should be. This carding provision, this 65 per cent provision that's provided for: that's one of a number of bitter pills to swallow. So I've been through a certification process. I get that.

Now, the majority of my adult life, Mr. Speaker, I was a senior partner of our veterinary hospital. We started with two employees. When I retired, in 2011, we had 25 employees. We were not a union shop, but I can tell you that when I read through the provisions that are going to be proposed and many of the provisions that are in here, we've dealt with just about all of those situations in the close to 30 years that I operated our practice. We dealt with many situations of, certainly, bereavement. We dealt with critical illness of a child. We dealt with domestic violence, sadly, for one of our staff members. I guess the only one that we didn't have to deal with was the incidence of death or disappearance of a child.

We provided in most cases, actually, in excess of what was required by the proposed legislation to our employees. Why did we do that? Mr. Speaker, labour – and not just labour in general but your employees – in a small business are your most valuable asset. They're the most valuable thing that you have. They're well trained, they are dedicated, they are passionate, and they are loyal if you create a culture within your business that causes them to want to be loyal. That's what we tried to do in our business.

I think and I have reasonably good evidence that we treated our employees extremely well. We had a number of employees that would leave for one reason or another and then would come back. I think the record on that was one employee who came back five times. She was a great employee. We loved it every time she came back, and we were sad to see her go every time she did, but we said: "You know what? She'll be back." We had employees who came to us after they had left us and said that that was the worst decision they had made, that they loved the job that they did with us, and we had other employees that went on to other things but yearned for the days that they worked for us in our clinic. It's because we treated our employees with respect. We paid them a fair and living wage. We gave them the time off that they needed.

We were ahead of the curve considerably amongst other employers in our category in terms of providing benefits and providing a pension and providing employer contributions to that pension, in terms of giving a number of other benefits to our employees. I think that that package and that respect to our employees were part of the reason that our practice was named business of the year in Lloydminster in 2011 and why we were at one point nominated for small business of the year by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce a number of years ago. It's about respect.

As far as some of the provisions here, you know, I will tell you that the provision for increasing maternity leave from 15 to 16 weeks I'm absolutely in favour of. In terms of compassionate care leave – I want to be very specific here – I'm in favour of increasing it from eight to 27 weeks. Compassionate care leave is in place in Alberta because of a private member's bill that was introduced by a former colleague of mine, who's now an MP, Matt Jeneroux. Matt was the Member for Edmonton-South West. In a private member's bill he introduced compassionate care leave, and it was supported by the members of this House. I'm quite happy to see the proposal to expand it to 27 weeks. I think that's a very positive thing. Before members opposite suggest that nothing was ever done for employees, that's simply wrong, so I think that is something that you have to recognize.

You know, moving on, there are other concerns that I have. I guess one of the concerns that I have with this bill is that just about universally the notice required for the return from these various leaves is only 48 hours. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, to be fair to the employer, who has provided leave and in some cases will have had to hire somebody to replace that person on leave, I think 48 hours is a little too short. Now, in some sections that are being amended, that notice is two weeks. If two weeks is too long, okay. But 48 hours, in my view, is really short. There's a lot of adjustment that has to be made when an employee returns, and I would suggest – and I'll be making an amendment to this effect – that something around a week would be more reasonable for both employer and employee.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come back and just conclude my comments by saying that this legislation could be passed, and some of the sweet outer coating that you put on the outside of this bitter pill could be swallowed very easily by all members of this Legislature. I urge the members of the government to consider doing that. As far as the bitter pill goes, if that's something that they want to do as well, well, I'd encourage longer consultation, but if they want to have the debate on that, let's have the debate on that. There is broad agreement on a lot of areas of this bill. Certainly, I agree with a lot of areas of this bill, and I would urge this government to reconsider having this go through all as one large, unpalatable package.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Nielsen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for sharing his story about his father's experience. I guess I just wanted to offer a bit of a comment on that. You know, when I hear things about people taking additional breaks, I had to deal with some of my own members in my own workplace at Lucerne who tended to take those extra things, and I always had to caution them: that's not a very good idea because the company could come back to you and call it time theft, okay? When I heard the story about your father getting pressured to take additional breaks, that was definitely very concerning. It's too bad that he had to experience those types of

things. I know, certainly, that I myself would never ever coach a member to do that kind of thing because it puts them considerably at risk.

10:40

With regard to starting early and staying late, I saw members that did the same thing in my workplace, too. You can't help but commend them for their loyalty, for their drive to want to do the absolute best that they could possibly do for their employer. But just a little bit of caution that I always used to give members with that type of enthusiasm: should something happen and they are hurt during that period when they've started early and they're not actually on the clock or they've stayed late and they're not actually on the clock, there's a risk that they could not be covered with regard to an injury. Again, I certainly would never coach members to do that, but kudos to your dad for wanting to be that level of employee, that example for everybody to follow.

The other comment I just wanted to make was with regard to how you used to run your business, that culture that you were building to create that loyalty, and I have to commend you on that. You know, that is the type of thing that we like to try to promote companies to do, to set that example, to lead the way for everybody else to try to match those same standards. So, first, thank you for doing that.

The one thing that I've learned from my time with the labour movement is that when employers are doing that kind of work to create that culture, you know, where the loyalty is there and you're willing to put in absolutely everything for that business, that is to be commended. But I've also noticed that those workplaces very, very, very rarely will ever become union shops because of that desire to create that atmosphere for their employees. They don't need it. I just wanted to share those comments with the member.

Again, I'm hoping that we can move forward with this as a package because, you know, when we're talking about compassionate leaves and all the different labour regulations, that's all encompassed. That's called labour language; that's called labour rules.

Again, thanks to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for sharing those stories and for being an example employer for everybody else to follow.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for his comments, and I have only a very brief few seconds to reply. I will tell you that with regard to what he mentioned, you know, about being early and staying late and not being covered, Dad clocked in, Dad clocked out, and Dad checked to make sure that he was covered. There was, actually, a doctor on-site at the plant. He was also our family doctor. He was also, sadly, the doctor that diagnosed my father with leukemia when he turned 60. But he worked an additional five years at the plant because he loved it. He loved his work.

I do want to say that I'm glad to hear that in your relations with your union members you discouraged what I'll call the abuse of the employer. You know, there has to be a balance here. There has to be a give-and-take here.

Finally, with regard to the way we ran our own clinic, you know, there's no legislation that required me to do those things. I mean, now there is and now there will be, and that's fine, but . . . [The time limit for questions and comments expired] Anyway, thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 17 today, and I just want to touch on three main points: some of the

things that I and we support in this piece of legislation, some of my concerns with this sort of all-encompassing belief from the government that unions act without any sort of bullying or intimidation and that they all act purely, and then just highlight some of my concerns with what may in fact be some ethical breaches on behalf of this government when it comes to their connections to big labour and exactly how that may affect this particular piece of legislation.

First and foremost, like many, I support significant aspects of this piece of legislation, and those sections have been clearly identified by a number of my colleagues and by the member who just spoke. It is very clear that this piece of legislation does many good things. It's also clear, as the previous member rose to speak about, that those good and important things that are taking place in this piece of legislation are being used as political cover for systematically changing the way that unionization happens to place an unfair advantage in the direction of the union as well as against the employer. There must be a better balance struck.

From the get-go this piece of legislation has been a concern, particularly around the consultation. I know that my colleagues have spoken at length with respect to the consultation on this piece of legislation, the 36 days, the fact that we never actually saw the report from Mr. Sims, the fact that the minister dodged questions day in and day out about whether or not they would be ramming this piece of legislation through at the end of session, would they be consulting over the summer, all of which was: dodge, dodge, dodge.

Now we've seen exactly what their plan was the whole way along, to rush this piece of legislation, these 124 pages of legislation, through in the dying days of a session while we spent significant periods of time debating things that there was widespread agreement on. Lots of times that can be a good thing. But when we are talking about tax statutes amendment acts or securities amendment acts, which in many respects are tidying up legislation, unifying pieces of legislation, it's disappointing.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I think that happened for two reasons. One, the government hadn't yet sent their bill to the printers. I think that's very evident in how the initial bill was presented to the House on photocopied paper, rushed – rushed – through the night, I can only imagine, until yesterday or the day before, when we actually got a copy back from the printers that looks much more like this piece of legislation, not like the one that was introduced, that was merely photocopied in the back of the Minister of Labour's office while they were efforting to try and get it here before session.

One of the reasons why I think they did that was to try to put some appropriate amount of space between the consultations that took place and when the bill was introduced. We have these conflicting sorts of pressures: one, to get it introduced, so we're rushing it into the House; and, two, needing to put space between when we actually closed the consultation and having it not look like it was already written. But at every turn this is not a good way to legislate.

While the government has done a horrible job of legislating on lots of different issues and a horrible job of consulting on a number of different pieces of legislation, there are a couple of bright points for the government – I'm more than happy to point those out – particularly around the MGA and the way that the piece of legislation was introduced. They took some time, consulted widely with municipalities, left it on the Order Paper, spent an entire break between sessions to ensure that they got it right. In many, many respects this is a great way to legislate.

So far we've tried to send this bill to committee so that we could have some further discussion about it. We've provided a reason why it shouldn't proceed, around the need for more consultation. It wasn't just us that said it. Many business owners, many nonlabour groups that have significant concern, who have felt like they haven't been consulted, are raising those same concerns.

10:50

The government clearly understands how to do this process, but what they pick and choose to do the process on is what's very concerning. Pieces of legislation like this, that potentially the government will feel some pain on, they don't consult on, they rush through the House in the dying days of a legislative session. Pieces of legislation that they don't particularly like or that they're unsure what to do with they send to committee, like Bill 203 from the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, that was specifically to do with funding announcements during elections, that would have had a negative impact on the government. First it got killed, then revived, then sent to committee to die again. On another Bill 203 the government is a little unsure of what to do, so they want to have more consultation around changing the clocks. Listen, I support that consultation.

This piece of legislation is critically important to the future of our province, yet they don't want to spend the summer consulting on it. They don't want to do that, and they're doing it under the guise of needing to get compassionate care and the other important issues in this bill passed. Well, Madam Speaker, if that was the case, when do you think the coming-into-force date for such an important clause would be? Would you say before the summer, when the bill passes; after the summer; or in January next year? I would have thought that if that was the primary purpose, it would have been when the bill passes. On all of the issues that they are saying are the most important pieces of this bill, they're waiting till January of next year to put them into place, but on all of the things that aren't as important according to them, doing away with secret ballots, no, they come into force in September, just after the summer.

So they're sending some very, very, very conflicting messages about what the purpose of Bill 17 actually is. Now, I believe that they are genuine in their desire to have these important changes, but they're certainly talking out of both sides of their mouth when it comes to the process, when it comes to the coming-into-force dates. Albertans should be concerned about exactly what the motivations are behind a piece of legislation like this.

Now, I've also heard the members on that side speak significantly about how this doesn't have to do with their big union bosses and friends in labour, but the connections to those groups are so deep that it's very difficult to not draw the conclusion that that's what Bill 17 is really about.

For example, Madam Speaker, you'll know that two members of the executive of the AFL are also automatically guaranteed as two members of the executive council of the NDP. Interestingly enough, who were the individuals that were invited to every single one of the consultation meetings?

Mrs. Aheer: Who was it?

Mr. Cooper: It was members of the AFL. I know that it's hard to believe. But you have these very, very close connections of big union bosses in the province to the political party of the NDP, and now we see the NDP acting on the things that those union bosses wanted.

I do find it interesting. If you look in the NDP platform from the last provincial election – I won't use her name, but she currently

sits in the Premier's chair – it was her commitment to you and your family that:

- (2.3) We will strengthen the Conflict of Interest Act . . .

Listen, I also would support such a thing.

. . . to prevent MLAs from using their position to benefit their own financial interests or that of political friends.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that you don't put two of your enemies on your political party's executive council. You don't do that.

Now, I understand that the NDP is claiming that they've put two of their enemies on the oil sands advisory council, but you certainly wouldn't do that to a political party. I wouldn't describe the AFL as enemies of the NDP. I would describe them as their friends. There is significant benefit to the AFL when Bill 17 comes into force. I would never presuppose a decision of the Assembly, Madam Speaker, but I've got a good feeling on this one that the government is going to be supporting Bill 17 and that there's going to be a significant net benefit to the AFL, who is the political friend of the NDP.

There certainly seems to be a pretty significant conflict, with the government saying one thing and doing another. Now, you know, Madam Speaker, that I've spoken a significant amount in this House about the government's track record when it comes to saying one thing and doing another.

Cortes-Vargas: You're not the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Cooper: And this afternoon we're going to have another example of the government saying one thing and doing another, and I look forward to speaking about that in question period.

I heard the member say, "You're not the Ethics Commissioner," but it will be interesting to see what the Ethics Commissioner has to say about this very issue. I happen to know that my hon. colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is literally meeting with the Ethics Commissioner in four minutes to have a discussion about this issue because we have some concerns.

The other thing that's equally as important as what the Ethics Commissioner may or may not say is that just like the Premier, when she was in opposition, recognized that the legislation needed to be strengthened, the Ethics Commissioner has said on numerous occasions that the legislation needs to be strengthened. It's possible that she'll say that there is no personal or financial interest. That doesn't mean that what's happening wouldn't be found to be a conflict of interest otherwise, but because the language in the legislation is such, she may in fact not be able to rule.

A perfect example of that was just this week when I had the opportunity to meet with the Ethics Commissioner on another very, very concerning process that the government is currently engaged in. Even if the Ethics Commissioner wants to rule, she can't tell anybody about it because the legislation prevents her from doing that. The report will go to a minister of the Crown, who may or may not want to tell anyone about it.

So the legislation may in fact prevent the Ethics Commissioner from ruling, but that doesn't mean that there is not a very, very, very clear conflict of interest with the political friends of the NDP. I think that Albertans should be concerned. The best ways to make sure that this doesn't happen are two things: split this bill in two so that we can really, really address the issue; and secondly, consult over the summer so that we can get to the bottom of this and do the right thing.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading?

Seeing none, I'll now call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	McLean
Babcock	Horne	McPherson
Clark	Jansen	Miller
Connolly	Kazim	Miranda
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Sigurdson
Feehan	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Hinkley	McKittrick	Westhead

Against the motion:

Aheer	Pitt	Strankman
Cyr	Schneider	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Smith	Yao
Gill	Starke	

Totals: For – 33 Against – 11

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Chair, thank you so much. Before we get started here on the debate for Bill 17, I'd like to make a request that in dealing with Bill 17, the votes be separated so that we can vote on part 1 and part 2 separately: on part 1, the Employment Standards Code, sections 1 to 100, and then on part 2, the Labour Relations Code, sections 101 to 146.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. It's not debatable, so we will continue on with comments, questions, or amendments.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, it is with some concern that I rise to address Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. We've had a lot of discussions around this piece of legislation and the largeness of it. The Member for Airdrie again is trying to put forward an opportunity . . .

Mr. Westhead: Could I just make a point of order?

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Westhead: Just a procedural question under order 13(2), that the Speaker explains a decision. With the motion that the Member for Airdrie made, I'm just looking for clarification on if there's a vote required on that motion or how that works.

The Deputy Chair: Basically, it's a request to have the bill be able to be voted on in two parts. It is not debatable; it does not require a vote. It's a request that can be honoured, as the member requests.

Hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, please continue.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. As I was saying, we've had some time to discuss some of the parts of this bill. To my mind, I think there are a lot of giant assumptions that this legislation is either family friendly or fair, and I'm going to go into a little bit about why I'm suggesting that. The title, for me anyway – and I think that I can speak, quite frankly, on behalf of our caucus as well – is inappropriate given some of the contents of this bill.

I'm going to start with the not-fair piece of it. The bill – and I was speaking about this yesterday – opens the door to some extreme strong-arm tactics. If you look at the jurisdictions that have used the ability to have 65 per cent sign their cards, we don't know how they get to that number. Is it through intimidation? Is it through doing what's in the best interest of the person that's sitting beside you in how those cards are signed? Nevertheless, to get to 65 per cent signage on those cards and then to assume that that leads to an automatic doing away with the secret ballot is not fair. In fact, there should be a much lower threshold for triggering that discussion and to trigger an election that is democratic in order to make sure that you're representing workers.

11:20

As has been shown in some of the data, there are a lot of people who vote differently after they've signed their cards than they do if they have the secret ballot. But it's also been shown that having a secret ballot in no way takes away from a union's ability to unionize. In fact, if anything, that democratic process strengthens that union's ability to do that union under that because they've given that ability for people without having any intimidation or influence from anybody else to actually make the decision to unionize. Having a secret ballot actually strengthens a union's ability to defend the decision to unionize. That's one piece that I find is very unfair.

The other piece is salting. The fact that a person can be hired to start working to form a union right away and then leave without considering the impacts of their actions on the company or the employees: that is why a secret ballot is so important. If the decision to unionize is the right one, after that discussion happens, then that group of people should have the right with a secret ballot, without the influence of other people around them, to make the decision as to whether or not they unionize. Like with anything, a democratic process takes time to research. You need to be able to talk to the people around you. You need to make sure that that's actually the right decision for the company. The impacts of that could be huge, and I'll go into that a little bit more.

The Rand formula. This is really interesting. A company now has to collect union dues at the direction of the union – at the direction of the union – instead of the company and the union negotiating that collective agreement. The union doesn't have to ask for that, but if they do, the company cannot say no. So all of a sudden this government has in essence taken away the ability for a company to

negotiate their terms. All of a sudden that piece of democracy is gone as well.

So, first of all, we have the ability for intimidation to happen, up to 65 per cent of the cards that are being signed. Now we also have the fact that the union dues are collected at the direction of the union instead of the company. And guess what? It only applies to the private sector. It only applies to the private sector. So you have that piece.

Then the second one – this one is very interesting – is that . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members.

Mrs. Aheer: . . . there is suspension of dues during an illegal strike. Potentially, Madam Chair, this removes the penalty to the trade union for holding an illegal strike by cutting off the union from their funding. The business now is not collecting the union dues – the union is – and the question that I think we should be asking is: does the union want to strike? Is that the ultimate goal here, that we're actually wanting unions to strike? That is the question, because we have taken away any autonomy from the business to be able to work with the union and have some negotiating powers with those groups in order to make sure that it is in the best interests of all of those workers there.

Another piece I find very interesting is that that does not change for the public sector. Nurses and teachers can still carry on the way that they should, the way that it's been all the time, but the penalty only goes toward trade unions and illegal strikes. That's it. So we're penalizing one particular group of people, cutting them off by allowing them to hold an illegal strike. Explain to me how that's good for business.

Why is this government continuing to attack businesses? Why? You know, they keep saying over and over again that they are pro business. Well, I'm sorry; that is not pro business. How is it that we have one version for one group of people and a different version for the others? How is that working? I mean – wow – the government is showing its true colours. Unbelievable. Potentially, this removes the penalty to the trade union. They are taking away the rights of the business. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, government members, we are in Committee of the Whole. There is lots of time for everyone to respond to comments and questions. If you could please keep the tone down to allow respect in the House for all members who are speaking.

Please continue.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. The interesting thing is that potentially this removes the penalty to the trade union for holding an illegal strike. I'd like to understand how that works. I mean, obviously, there is lots of emotion and passion from the other side. Please explain it to us. I would love an explanation. That would be excellent. If I'm wrong, please explain it to me. I would love it. On top of that, I think it would be great for Albertans to understand and to actually hear from the government how this is going to work and benefit business. I would love to understand that. [interjections] You know, you'll get your opportunity to counteract anything that I'm saying, and I look forward to that discussion.

Okay. Now we're getting to the piece that I think is – this took me a little while. I had to read it over a couple of times. Under the present laws, the way that they look, we have something called division 25. This is something that's already in the legislation, and what happens with that is that presently, if there is an illegal strike, the union is held accountable, potentially by being fined \$1,000 a day. This is good, and that's still in the legislation. But, on balance, now with the changes to division 19 – and division 19 was this piece

of legislation that made sure that unions would have consequences for an illegal strike.

We were talking about the Ethics Commissioner a little bit earlier. I'd like to just take a moment to describe my impression and my understanding of this. For me, for example – and I can only use myself as a personal example – when we had the legislation on the home builders, I actually removed myself from those discussions because I am a home builder. I own a company, and I do those kinds of things. I removed myself from that. The reason I did that wasn't even because I might be held accountable. When I actually asked the Ethics Commissioner about it, he advised me that, based on my history and the things that I've been involved in, it would be better for me to not participate in those discussions, so I actually removed myself from those discussions.

I can use another example. We have things like the Stampede, that is coming up. Everybody has gotten that e-mail recently – right? – about what you're allowed to go to, how much money can be given to you in terms of tickets, and the limitations on those. We all got those e-mails, and there's a good reason for that. They're trying to make sure that we have those rules and that we also understand, in the back of our heads, that there are really big consequences for stepping outside of the premise of what the Ethics Commissioner is doing on that.

A lot of the groups that ask us to come to things are lobbying for our ability to be able to bring their ideas forward. There's nothing wrong with that, but if it's being incentivized by a gift, it could look bad. I personally appreciate those reminders from the Ethics Commissioner. I know that people look at my expenses every day. I get comments about my expenses all the time. Again, I'm extremely grateful for that. It's a level of accountability, I think, that all of us appreciate in this House. So that's one piece of it.

We look at division 19 and what is possible here. Again, please correct me if I'm wrong. If there is an illegal strike – and this is just within the private sector, so trade unions and that kind of thing. Right now division 19 has the ability to decertify a union if a union has an illegal strike. That is a great consequence for any group, especially if you consider a business. A business depends on its workers, and if the workers have an illegal strike, there are massive consequences for that business and everybody else that's involved in this because the business cannot function without its workers. In the consequences of division 19 there was an ability for that union to be decertified as the result of an illegal strike. I would like somebody to explain to me why that has been removed.

11:30

Division 19 has been struck from the legislation, and that is a massive level of accountability to that union and to the business that supports that trade union. The workers now have the ability to strike illegally and not be held accountable for that strike because this government has taken that piece and removed it from the legislation. Am I wrong about this? Please tell me if I'm wrong about this. How does that make life better for Albertans?

I mean, we were just talking about the political friends, about the AFL, about all of that influence, and now, not only that, the government has taken away division 19. We have the balance on one side where a union can be charged a thousand dollars a day, but then all of a sudden they can fund raise to keep that going. They are able to intimidate the business that they work for. With any business, depending on how large or small that is, they have families, and they have commitments to the things that they're doing. That's not to say that there may not be a good reason that maybe this employer needs to have consequences. There are consequences already. But all of a sudden the union has no consequences. How is that possible?

We look at the ultimate certification laws. They can stop sending these to the union. How long can a business actually hold out without workers? On top of that, the union has no consequences. This is the kind of legislation we're passing? That has been removed. That was accountability. How can you even call this bill to have accountability, to be family friendly or fair? How is that fair? How is that fair? And it only applies to the private sector. How is that fair? We're encouraging illegal activity. How is that fair? How is the government going to explain that to Albertans?

How is it that the government can take something that was already in there that was able to have a consequence for a union, a good one? Do you know what? In my understanding, it's never even had to be invoked because, most likely, you're thinking: "Oh, my goodness, if we do that, this could happen. We could lose our certification." But now this government has struck that from the record. It is removed from the legislation. How is that fair? How is that fair? I don't understand.

Like I said, when you're talking about the Ethics Commissioner and all of the things that all of us are responsible for in this House – and we have a ton of watchdogs. We have lots of people who look at our expenses, what we say on Twitter, who we like on Facebook, who we interact with, who we have meetings with. All of us have done that across this way and held each other accountable for all manner of things. Can you imagine if we were no longer allowed to do that? Then all of a sudden the government has no accountability because we're not allowed to bring that up. How does that work?

All of a sudden unions are being given this special pedestal, that they no longer have consequences to the business that they represent. The businesses have consequences. The whole legislation is around how to make sure that this legislation protects the workers, but the workers aren't going to have a business if that business goes under because of the ability all of a sudden of the union to hold them at bay at a thousand dollars a day. They can be funded, they can fund raise, they can put this business out of a business or try to intimidate. This government has given permission to the unions to do that. That is absolutely appalling and shameful. "Fair" should be struck from this title altogether.

I think back to Bill 25, with the cap on the oil sands, and Bill 27, where the government removed the Minister of Energy's accountability from the legislation. In fact, it was struck from the legislation, the ability to bring forward information and be accountable. Those words were actually struck from the legislation. Did you think that we weren't going to find this? Madam Chair, there's nothing fair about this. There's nothing fair about giving one group more power than the other. There's nothing fair about taking a business and then having a union able to hold them at bay because of an illegal strike. It's an illegal strike. Are we actually encouraging illegal activity? Is that where we're headed with this? Madam Chair, somebody needs to be accountable for this and explain to those of us on this side how that's possible.

Division 19 is being struck from the legislation, folks. It was there as an accountability measure for the unions. Please explain to me why that is being struck from this legislation. Somebody in here needs to explain that. I'm absolutely appalled. I look at the amount of scrutiny that an MLA, a person who is in public office undergoes, and I am grateful every single day for that. The Ethics Commissioner probably gets sick of hearing from me because I write them about everything. I mean, I don't know what everybody else does, but I do that personally because I just don't think there's any way I can understand every piece of it, and I'm terrified of making a mistake. I'm absolutely grateful for the amount of time that these folks spend talking to me, going: "No. That's okay. That's not okay. Do this. Do that."

Actually, it's one of those things that I've got in my head. I understand some of it, but still they're the experts, so I would always err on the side of caution and ask for permission. That's their job. They do an excellent job of it, and I'm grateful every single day. So is my assistant Peter, who has more conversations with the Ethics Commissioner than anybody I know. I love that. I love that accountability. It makes me very, very happy to know that I'm working within the premise of what I'm supposed to do under this government. If I ever made a mistake, it would truly be my own fault, because I didn't ask. I know that I have the ability to ask. I know that.

I can only transfer my personal desire to understand and to make sure that I'm within the rules, and then I look at this legislation and see that this government is promoting illegal activity. It's saying that you can strike illegally, and there's no consequence to you. Division 19 is struck. I would highly recommend that you take a look at it. If that's not the case, then please explain it to me. That is not fair. It is not fair.

Let's go into another piece here. We've already decided that illegal strikes and lockouts, division 19, is removed, the fact that a union can lose their certification. Very interesting. I'm not sure how the government is going to justify that that makes life better for Albertans. I'm not a hundred per cent sure how that's going to happen.

I also want to talk about the family-friendly piece. That's interesting, too, because the thing that probably shocked me the most today was finding out that that legislation won't go through till 2018, the pieces of that legislation that are about compassionate care. Everybody in here yesterday was very passionate about the fact that we voted against first reading. Well, you know what's interesting about first reading? For the last three months we've been talking in this Legislature every day asking: when is the legislation coming, and are you getting rid of secret ballots? Three months. Then all of a sudden the legislation is put down in front of us with nothing from the Minister of Labour, I might add, suggesting to us that she would protect the workers' rights with that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members that have comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. Labour is a complex issue. It's something that can't be rushed in a couple of weeks. These things need to be developed with true consultation and understanding. Based on your previous careers I would say that you all understand one aspect of this, but do you truly understand how market forces and private business work?

Well, let us talk about unions. Why were they created in the first place? Because workers needed basic rights. Let us be clear. Unions fought to make sure that people would have a safe and amicable environment in which to work, that they would have the right tools and equipment for the right job, that these machines that they worked on were properly maintained so that the workers could do their job safely, that they would have fair benefits like salaries that are agreed to with their employers, that things like holidays and vacations are respected, that workers would be treated fairly and respectfully, including in terminations, and that employers must ensure that their employees are not harassed or discriminated against.

11:40

Our society, though, for the most part has reached a pinnacle in regard to work standards. Every workplace should follow

occupational health and safety guidelines. Every employer needs some insurance like workers' compensation. We have hazardous incident assessments to ensure that dangerous things are identified, and safe storage rules for inflammable and toxic chemicals. We have guidelines and standards that permeate workplace processes to ensure consistency and safety.

AEDs are common now in workplaces alongside mandatory first aid kits. We need to have safety people in our workplaces. Employers demand that they hire reasonably educated people and that they can supplement that education with additional training to ensure efficiency in the workplace.

These are things that in other countries they fight for. We take them for granted. This peak that we've reached is also reflected in the payroll. Unionized public environments have surpassed the private sector for wages, with numbers reflecting approximately a 10 per cent difference in the pay scales. Unions have done their job very, very well.

What do we mean by bullying? You hear our side talk about this bullying that comes from union leaders. What does that mean? What are the hazards of having a simple signed card as a voucher for instituting a union? It doesn't just result in a deduction on your paycheque, which some might interpret as simply another form of tax on an individual's paycheque. Can anyone from across the way actually identify what it means to be set apart as different, to be targeted as different, to be intimidated, to be called rude names, to see how people's prejudicial values come out? People might look at you differently. You see that little furrow in their brow become a little bit more aggressive. Maybe their tone with you isn't that pleasant. Perhaps the words used when they talk to you are quite harsh.

The open-card system is used to draw a line in the sand. It helps identify people who don't think the way that you do. I wonder if anyone on the other side understands in any aspect, way, shape, or form the feeling of being different and discriminated against. Anyone? Perhaps you don't get that promotion or that sweet desk next to the window. Maybe you are just treated differently. It might not be a lot of people, but key people. Maybe it's your supervisor. Maybe it's your steward. Maybe it's your union president. Who knows?

I've had this experience. I was a member of local 2494, International Association of Fire Fighters up in Fort McMurray. It's a good union. Good members. Excellent people. I did get harassment. I use this term loosely. I crossed the floor to management's side. I took over running EMS in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. For four years I had the honour of running EMS in Fort McMurray, and I also had to deal with the trials and tribulations of being taken over by Alberta Health Services during that time. It's very, very difficult to have two bosses.

That said, where does bullying come from? Well, the minute I crossed that floor the union president started attacking me through e-mails, through his lectures with the membership. It was a very, very difficult time. He had the municipal nurse fight me on hand cleanser. You guys understand all those cleansers, those lotions that you put on your hands, disinfectants? At that time it was a new thing, and I was getting it in our ambulances and in our municipal facilities right across the municipality. I was using a product that was far better than alcohol. Alberta Health Services said: oh, you should use alcohol-based products. It was just a general blanket statement, but I'd done my due diligence and found this product to be much better and less harmful on the hands. I got attacked for bringing in a product that, even though it wasn't recommended by AHS, the information I had was that it surpassed the use of alcohol in a hand sanitizer. So I have had this experience of being bullied. The irony is that I was still technically part of the union at that time.

There are some groups that represent workers at sites all over this province, and perhaps if someone is petty, they don't give that worker those so-called sweet jobs. They have to accept whatever comes their way. I have had stories of that, too, from my friends. They can't help but notice that they only get jobs in the less appealing locations. Maybe they have to go very far away and travel for weeks on end, away from their families, to go to a job in a distant location. Or other things: jeez, maybe they swore that they should have been called for a job by now, and why did Joe and William get their second jobs already when I swear my name was in front of theirs on the list? I mean, these are the things that can be done.

Does the NDP understand the feelings of being discriminated against, of being separated, of being identified as different? I wonder. Based on this bill, I guess not. They don't understand the discrimination that happens because maybe you have different thoughts and different subject matter.

After this election where all 87 of us were elected, people would tell me that they supported me and that they voted Wildrose. I have patrons of the PC Party that have told me that they supported the PCs. Other than the five openly NDP members in Fort McMurray, no one else would openly say that they voted NDP. What were they worried about? As I travel across this province and visit with Albertans, it is the same story.

I wonder: why doesn't anyone admit to voting NDP? What do they fear? What do they have concerns about? Do they have some sort of concern that if they say who they supported in the election, they'll be ostracized? At worst, people would laugh at you, but you shouldn't fear some sort of physical retribution or verbal belittling or being shunned somehow. Albertans recognize that everyone has a right to an opinion, and though someone might identify you as a grasshopper in a province full of conservative ants, varied opinions are accepted.

The only people that shame others for not sharing their beliefs seem to be NDP supporters. I base that on the Twitter and Facebook comments that I receive from the trolls. People that this government has introduced into this House continually belittle me. They try to shame me for my opinions. Shame.

The Deputy Chair: Are you speaking to the bill?

Mr. Yao: Absolutely.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Just checking.

Mr. Yao: But I accept it, and I realize that it's an aspect of our jobs that we must deal with. I won't plead and cry and say: oh, you triggered some negative emotions in me that are impacting me in an unvirtuous way.

In closing, I guess we just need to recognize that there are aspects of this bill that need more consultation, more understanding by Albertans. We thought we had taught you how to consult, but this bill demonstrates that you have not learned that. You do this, and you might save yourself a lot of grief when it comes to Albertans not being consulted. It is difficult when people are going to be put under laws by this government without being asked about their opinions. It is so vitally important.

You put forward a Fair Trading Act recently. It was on automotive repair, and even your own government realized that this should go to committee because they recognized that there are parallels in an existing system. They recognized that there was a redundancy. It was a pure demonstration in proper consulting. When it was in committee, groups were invited in to discuss and express their opinions. They provided real numbers that demonstrated how they would be impacted. They demonstrated existing legislation that already addressed the issue. In the end, the

clock ran out on that bill, and it was pushed aside because it was recognized even by the government side that it was redundant. You only did that through consultation. Without that consultation, you would have been in your blissful state of ignorance, where you usually are.

11:50

It's important to know that you are reaching out and trying to become more understanding. What you need to do with this bill as well is to reach out and understand the aspects of it more because the only people that you've listened to are your friends, and that's not necessarily consultation, is it? That only demonstrates one aspect of this. It is so, so important that we consult. That's our job as MLAs. It is our job to reach out to all the people, even the ones that may not share your opinion, to understand and to come out with a balanced effort when you're creating a bill.

Again, with this bill, so much of it is good. There's some housekeeping in there. The leave for difficult family issues is one hundred per cent commendable. That is good, and there's not a person in this House that will disagree with a lot of that. But, again, did you consult? Did you see how much of an added expense a lot of this will be?

Probably not, because you think that all business owners are greedy mercenaries that just rule the world. The truth of the matter is that so many of these are small businesses that just struggle to survive. Their markup isn't what you think. They're not making millions and millions of dollars. They're struggling just to pay their bills as well, and, at that, they have increased bills now because of carbon taxes.

I get what this government is trying to do. You're trying to discourage the purchasing of goods and services because anything that people do impacts the environment. Anything that we do adds to the carbon issue. From the moment that man made that first fire, he was contributing to the carbon pollution. It's something that we just have to recognize because we're carbon-based life forms.

It is important that if we're going to move forward here, you need to consult. You need to take this bill, and you do need to split it in half. You can't put in all the compassionate stuff and use it to blind everyone while you slip some other things inside it that are going to impair businesses and possibly hurt them.

Again, workers' rights: I think everyone agrees with that. Everyone understands the basis of the unions. But, that said, the unions and our work culture, with all of our standards, have changed. It's become more about the money sometimes, and that is unfortunate.

Again I ask anyone from across the way to talk about this card system that you so openly promote. I wonder if you understand if the people that don't sign that card will be exposed to any

discrimination, to any prejudice, to any bullying. It's very possible.

You laugh when you say: oh, union executives would never do that. Well, I know. I've experienced it. It was from one person, but he was the key person. He was the president. Maybe he was just attacking me simply because I was on the management side, and he felt that that was his job. But he attacked me on things that were really quite helpful and ahead of the time. Now you see hand sanitizers everywhere. You carry it in your pocket, and you wonder: jeez, can you imagine the day when they didn't have that? Yeah. A nurse fought me on that. A nurse. Can you imagine that? An occupational health and safety nurse with the municipality fought me on that. That is a shame.

I also got fought on AEDs in my community. I got fought so much on AEDs that I finally gave that to our union charities and said: can you guys carry this forward because I'm literally up against the wall with the bureaucracy blocking me from putting AEDs in our facilities? That's the good stuff that unions do. They get AEDs into the community. I had the route there to take, and it was wonderful.

In that sense, I respect unions. I respect them for ensuring the rights of employees. But I don't respect them when they're trying to bulldoze things through. That's what this bill is doing. You're trying to push something through so that they can bulldoze workplaces all over this province. Now, maybe your idea is to shutter a lot of businesses because they're all making carbon . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but due to Standing Order 4(3) we shall now rise and report.

Mr. Yao: I'm sad. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 17.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing the time, I move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn till 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 31, 2017

Day 42

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
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Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
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Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you have a number of introductions today.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Timberlea school from Fort McMurray along with their teachers Andrea Organ and Alexa Thorne and their chaperones Jennifer Collins and Owen Collins. These amazing kids are not only ridiculously good looking, but they're ridiculously intelligent as well. I ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, I did meet these students, and you're correct. They are very, very intelligent.

Your second introduction.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much. We have another school from Fort McMurray, Christina Gordon school. It's another group of grade 6 students who really re-emphasize the fact that they are ridiculously good looking and smart. They are escorted by their teachers Mr. Gavin Rutledge and Ms Erin Gates. I ask you all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Welcome to you as well.

Mrs. Schreiner: Well, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you from the constituency of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater the Landing Trail intermediate school. The students are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Hope Bradfield and Wanda Bury. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today and introduce to you and through you Rick Kirschner from Fort McMurray. He's a very active community member, and his charity, King's Kids, just recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. Rick is the brother of Dave, who I mentioned on Monday, and I'd like to invite him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly someone who is now a familiar face to us, Ursella Khan. As we heard in the House on Monday, Ursella recently took a stand against racism at her high school in Red Deer. Her ability to remain respectful, cool-headed, and eloquent in the face of adversity is certainly inspirational to all Albertans. Today Ursella is here with her family – Aroosha Khan, Sadia Khan, Shanzay Khan, Harris Khan – and Tessa Murphy. They

are all seated in your gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Heroes almost always have strong family behind them.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two visitors in the members' gallery – I ask that they rise as I introduce them – Sofia Calderon and her mother, Joanna Calderon. They are constituents of Edmonton-Glenora, and Sofia has been selected to be on the Dragon Boat Canada U16 national team. She is the only athlete to qualify from Alberta. She has maintained an honours standing despite her very rigorous training schedule. Sofia, we are so pumped that you will be representing Canada on this team, and we will all be cheering you on. Colleagues, please join me in welcoming Sofia and her mother today.

My second of three introductions, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with past days, as part of Paramedic Services Week it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you three veteran front-line paramedics seated in the members' gallery. I ask that they rise as I say their names: Genevieve Marshall, a second-generation paramedic with 12 years of service; Jason Visscher, a paramedic with 25 years of service; Michael Plumbtree, a paramedic with 30 years of service. Again, thank you to you and your colleagues for all you do to keep us safe. Colleagues, please extend the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

My final introduction, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a constituent, again, of Edmonton-Glenora who's seated in the members' gallery. This is Trustee Patricia Grell, who is a member of the Edmonton Catholic school board, a trustee for ward 71. She's a tireless advocate for LGBTQ students. I ask that Ms Grell rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Josue Eurico Nsiamfumu, a constituent in the wonderfully diverse riding of Calgary-Cross. He's an artist, a musician, a community leader, the regional director for Alberta of black Canadians, and the international Francophonie director of black Canadians. I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Nsiamfumu through his work, especially with the Nigerian community in northeast Calgary. He is visiting us today from Calgary, and I wish to commend him for his work in community development and for helping to strengthen the diversity of Calgary-Cross. I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of employees from Telus, an Alberta union employer, who hosted Kits for Kidz outside the Legislature this morning as part of Telus Days of Giving. Kits for Kidz partners with elected officials across Canada to ensure that nearly 12,000 children in need are able to start the school year with pencils, pens, paper, notebooks, and other needed supplies. I and several colleagues here on both sides of this aisle today had a chance to participate in the event, and it's always a pleasure to work alongside partners in the business community to make life better for Albertans. With us today from

Telus are Claudia Roszell, Zainul Mawji, Shane Sabatino, Dan Campbell, Japman Bajaj, and Shadi Sakr.

Also here are some great members of the community who were out helping us stuff backpacks today: formerly of the Edmonton Oilers, Mr. Paul Coffey; formerly of the Calgary Flames, Mr. Theo Fleury; formerly of the Calgary Stampeders, Mr. Randy Chevrier; and formerly of the Edmonton Eskimos, Mr. Jed Roberts and Mr. Randy Spencer. I would like to ask all of these guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, I think I saw a red and a purple standing beside each other. I'm not sure that that's possible. Who would have thought?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you the Babyroni family. Rakshit, who is visiting us from India, is newly wed to Divneet Babyroni. They are accompanied by Divneet's daughter Notica and, as well, by Divneet's father, Jarnail Basota, who is a notable figure in the Sikh community. He is a great friend of mine and a host of Radio South Asia as well as of *Parwaaz* on TV here in the city of Edmonton. I ask them to rise, as they have, and accept the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Nadja Lalor. Nadja is a social work student from NorQuest College. She is completing her field placement practicum in my constituency office over the course of the summer, and we're delighted to have her around. I'd ask that she rise, as she already has, and that everyone give her the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

1:40

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of my friends who are visiting from the Professional Young Insurance Brokers of Alberta, or PYIB. The PYIB is a standing committee of the Insurance Brokers Association of Alberta, who represent almost 90 per cent of the insurance brokerages across the province. The standing committee's mission is to build a strong, professional young-broker network through continuing education, industry involvement, and political action. I invite the young brokers to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually didn't know that my colleague was going to introduce this individual, but if you'll indulge me, I'll just do it quickly to make him stand out, as he always has. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Theo Fleury, the former NHL star, Olympic gold medallist, and two-time bestselling author. He is a Calgary Flames legend and helped the league's best team to the franchise's first Stanley Cup victory in 1989. He was here today

helping with the Telus Days of Giving, and I ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome again.

Members' Statements

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

Energy Policies and Social Licence

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's face it. The NDP's social licence scheme is a complete failure. For two years this government has been imposing ideological tax hikes and caps on our oil sands, all in the name of social licence. The Premier conned Albertans, undermined the authority and integrity of our national energy regulators to excuse her long-held radical environmental agenda. She turned her back on Albertans when they needed her most, all because she wants to cozy up to the unrealistic Leap Manifesto fundamentalists in Ottawa, B.C., and Paris. She hustled Albertans.

Not only do we not have the social licence, but these radicals are more emboldened than ever before. Yesterday the new NDP-Green alliance in B.C. had a stark warning for this Premier. They are determined to, quote, immediately employ every tool available to the new government and stop the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline. End quote. Members of the Alberta oil sands advisory group could barely contain their excitement. The Premier's top oil sands adviser, Tzeporah Berman, celebrated on Twitter, saying that this is "a turning point for BC." Alberta's pain has certainly been Ottawa's gain. They're collecting millions in GST on carbon taxes, they're turning northern B.C. into an antidevelopment Great Bear park with the tanker ban, and they're considering yanking the NEB out of Calgary.

So what was the point, Premier? Why did this NDP take money out of Albertans' pockets when they can least afford it? Why did you scare away job investment at a time of record job losses? This was never a scheme; this was a scam. Let's cut the nonsense and call the social licence sales job what it really is, snake oil. Stop working against us.

They talk down to Albertans by calling them rodents. The top new radical of the B.C. Greens, Andrew Weaver, had a message for this Premier. He said that she needs to get with the program. I have a different message: stop working for the radicals, and get with Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a request for unanimous consent for an introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute honour to rise today in this House and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my close friends, Mr. Harinder Pal Singh Sethi, who is from Amritsar, my hometown in India, and visiting Canada with his wife, Harleen Kaur Sethi, and son Dilrajpreet Singh Sethi. They are in the gallery with a family friend, Mr. Armander Batra, his wife, Ranjeeta Batra, and their daughter Sharmeen Batra from Spruce Grove. Mr. Sethi has a very successful, affluent business, and I'm honoured to call him a great

friend. I do cherish your friendship, sir. I do ask for them to rise, which they have already done, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Immigration Policies

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a restaurant manager I had the fortune to employ people from many countries like Australia, Great Britain, Germany, Chile, the Philippines, and Slovakia, to just name a few. These workers built rapport with my diverse clientele, contributed to the financial success of my business, and helped with the annual growth of my establishment. However, there were challenges these workers faced. As they started to get settled in and applied for PR or citizenship, they got caught up in bureaucratic red tape and understaffing at Immigration Canada.

For whatever reason, Mr. Speaker, the problems with the immigration department caused delays in some cases by many months. Then these employees' visas and work permits would expire, and they would be forced to go back to their country of origin. I have too many stories to share: from the Central American dishwasher who'd fled gang violence, who had to go back home; the American who had been married to a Canadian for years, who couldn't pay back her student loans because she couldn't legally work; to my having to hold a crying, pregnant server's hand because her husband of U.K. descent had to go back home to work to save money for their baby.

As an MLA my office handled many inquiries because the former Member of Parliament for Calgary Midnapore would not answer constituents who were caught up in the backlog. I will never forget telling a family of five from Mexico that they had to pull their kids out of school mid-year because they had to go back home.

The former MP for Calgary Midnapore, Jason Kenney, was in charge of Immigration Canada for five years. As an MLA I know that decisions made by government have real impacts on people and can ruin their lives. The decisions that Jason Kenney made as a minister of immigration caused untold hardship for people who contributed to the growth of my business. When he laid off front-line workers and added red tape to immigration, it caused direct negative impacts to my business, my workers, forcing me to spend tens of thousands of dollars in retraining and recruitment. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Sucha: This is the new leader of the Conservatives in Alberta, the person they want to trust with our economy and our social welfare? Is this the kind of person we want running our province? I say no.

The Speaker: I want to remind all members that this House has a long-standing practice of no comments during Members' Statements.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Paramedics

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in Alberta a man will have a heart attack, and by tomorrow that man will be alive, recovering at home, surrounded by family. Today in Alberta an expectant

mother at home will go into labour, and by tomorrow she'll be holding a happy, healthy baby. Today in Alberta a child, sibling, parent, or a friend will be overdosing from fentanyl abuse, and by tomorrow that person will be returned from the brink of death, given a second chance.

Between these times of crisis and healthy, long lives that follow are a few critical moments, moments on which a course of a life turns. It's in those moments that the services of a paramedic can make all the difference. For most Albertans it is just a moment, but for paramedics and other emergency medical personnel those moments make up a lifetime. What might be the most traumatic moment in one of our patients' life could be one of many such moments that week for a first responder. Speaking from experience, you never really get used to those moments.

While there were many moments in my career when I managed to be just on time in the right place to save a life, there were also times when despite my best efforts, there was simply nothing more I could do. Those moments stay with you. There are members in this House and in this gallery who know exactly what I mean. When you see a paramedic or other emergency medical workers, remember that they carry these moments with them: the panic moments, the triumphant moments, the awe-inspiring moments, and especially the tragic moments.

My plea to this House and all Albertans is to acknowledge the heavy burden that these people carry on our behalf. As an advanced care paramedic I'd like to take this opportunity to express on behalf of myself and the entire PC caucus our profound gratitude for the work that they do. I encourage all Albertans: if you know a paramedic or if you run into one off duty, take a second and express your gratitude because we could all use a few more good moments like that.

Happy paramedics day.

Educational Curriculum Review

Ms Luff: The province of Alberta has begun the process of updating the K to 12 curriculum so that it better prepares students for success in a rapidly changing world. The rewrite process is being led by teachers and provides opportunities for feedback at multiple stages.

When you read the documents, you see that many of the things that parents have been calling for are directly incorporated: mental math, financial literacy, and First Nations history and culture. These are also only scope and sequence documents. The individual learning outcomes have not yet been written.

When the opposition stands up and asks questions about how we are social engineering the curriculum, I wonder whether they know what scope and sequence means, if they've actually read the documents, or if they only read opinion pieces about the documents.

Jason Kenney believes that our current education system hardwires youth with collectivist ideas. The president of the PCAA compared it to Nazi indoctrination, and the Leader of the Opposition seems to just want education to be the same as it was when he was in school, when teachers wrote things in chalk and students sat in rows and memorized things that the teachers wrote. This is a factory model of education that teaches students what to think but not how to think. To look at the world that we live in today and think that this is an appropriate way to teach our children is beyond ridiculous. In a modern economy, where all of the world's knowledge is literally at your fingertips, we need critical thinkers, problem solvers, co-operators, and entrepreneurs. The basics are important, but basics alone won't prepare students for the world that we live in.

1:50

Every teacher I know works incredibly hard to teach all sides of issues, to teach how to tell if sources are credible, to present a logical argument. This draft curriculum aims to do these things, too. The math curriculum “supports students in developing resiliency through productive struggle, becoming critical thinkers and problem solvers.” The science curriculum ensures that students “have the capacity to critically evaluate information, make informed decisions and solve problems.” And in the social studies curriculum “students learn to address issues in society by respectfully considering multiple perspectives and engaging in dialogue with others.”

I would seriously question any politician who claims that this is a bad thing.

Oral Question Period

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

Energy Policies and Social Licence

Mr. Jean: The NDP imposed a carbon tax on Albertans that they didn't ask for and can't afford all in the name of social licence. According to the NDP world view this carbon tax buys social licence to have our opponents get out of the way of new pipelines. Well, they couldn't be more wrong. Their NDP friends in B.C. are openly waging war on Kinder Morgan. So here's the Premier's chance. Will she stop punishing Albertans for her misguided ways and axe the carbon tax? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Leader of the Opposition couldn't get a pipeline built to a gas station, and the reason we know this is because he was in a government that got Alberta nowhere. There's a reason for that, and we saw it on display yesterday. While the leader was outside telling the press that he was totally able to have a good working relationship with the B.C. government, his front bench was tweeting, calling them lunatics in an asylum. You know what? These guys couldn't get their act together, don't have their act together. Thank God that Albertans are not relying on them for a pipeline.

Mr. Jean: With this government in charge of legislation regulation, no one is going to get a pipeline built anywhere.

Social licence is an ever-moving goalpost. It ignores our world-class NEB process, hurts Albertans, and ruins investor confidence throughout the world. The B.C. NDP and Greens could not have been more clear yesterday that they are going to, and I quote, immediately employ every tool available to stop the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline. End of quote. Social licence is a scam. Will the Premier wake up to the facts and quit her endless pursuit of snake oil social licence? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we have a strategy to build a pipeline. We brought together industry, environmentalists, First Nations, and workers. We brought them together. We delinked pipelines from the issue of climate change emissions. We then secured approval from the NEB. Then we secured approval from the federal government. It wasn't easy, but we got it done. What have the members opposite done? Sent lots of angry tweets, and that's it. You know what? We're getting the job done. They never will. Thank goodness, once again, that it's us who are in charge.

Mr. Jean: When Trudeau announced the tanker ban, this NDP government was silent. When Trudeau cancelled Northern Gateway,

this NDP government was silent. Now this government has the gall to claim that we are cheering for Alberta's failure when it was their minister who literally co-wrote a how-to book on pipeline obstruction with her friend from Greenpeace. If the Premier wants Trans Mountain built, she should shelve her social licence fantasy that she created and is now being used as a barrier to stop this pipeline. Will she do so and cancel the carbon tax while she's at it? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? When the Prime Minister announced Kinder Morgan, the opposition was silent, and it was a shameful day – a shameful day – because we all know they'd been cheering for Alberta's failure. However, we are moving forward much better than the opposition is. We put together a plan. We are moving forward with it. The federal government, who are exactly the ones who should be approving this pipeline, did exactly that. The pipeline will get built, and it's because of the work of the members on this side.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Electric Power System

Mr. Jean: B.C.'s anti-jobs coalition will cost Albertans billions of dollars, and the Premier only has herself to blame. Under the NDP-Green agreement the site C hydro dam may now sit on the chopping block. The Premier and the Energy minister were recklessly banking on this project to bail them out after they spent billions of Albertans' hard-earned dollars killing Alberta's coal-fired electricity and all the jobs that came with it. Can the Premier explain how many more billions of dollars the NDP's reckless electricity plan will now cost them?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when we were elected government, we inherited an electricity system that was on the verge of breaking. Industry and investors told us that the only way they could invest in new electricity infrastructure was if we took the cap from \$1,000 per megawatt hour to \$10,000 per megawatt hour. That would be a 10-fold increase in the spikes of electricity. Alberta families could not possibly tolerate a 10-fold increase in unpredictability in their electricity prices. The system was broken, and we're on the way to fixing it.

Mr. Jean: What that NDP government inherited, Mr. Speaker, was the consistently lowest power prices in North America.

The Premier's entire economic vision for our province was built on nothing but a house of cards, and it's starting to collapse. She promised Albertans that we could kill coal and transfer to renewables pain free. Boy, was she ever wrong. The fact is that the Premier rolled the dice, hoping to import electricity from the site C hydro dam after she spent billions to wipe Alberta's coal generation off the map. If site C is now off the grid, what's the Premier's plan B?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To be perfectly clear, site C was never part of our plan ever. We're still working on plan A because plan A is a good plan. What that plan involves is creating stability in our electricity sector and also creating affordability in our electricity sector. I know that the members opposite are upset that people can't bang on their grandmother's door anymore and sell them direct contracts where they're banking on and selling stability as a product because those guys over there think instability is something that everyone should see. We are making the kinds of changes that end that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The Premier owns this, Mr. Speaker. She's worked for the B.C. NDP, and her chief of staff was most recently the chief of staff for B.C.'s NDP leader. Her backbench and staff spent years campaigning against pipelines and campaigned for the NDP out of province. She endorsed the federal NDP, who now want to implement the economy-destroying Leap Manifesto. It would destroy Alberta's economy. She's lost authority over her antidevelopment coalition, and they're feeling stronger and stronger every day. Will the Premier admit that her plan has failed and start to change Alberta's course?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a little hard to follow. Nonetheless, we are very proud of our plan. We are moving forward to create a more stable electricity system to make life more affordable for Albertans and also moving forward with respect to climate leadership. You know, a famous hockey player – I believe it was Wayne Gretzky – once said that the key to winning is that you go to where the puck will be, not where it just was. These guys have governed for decades on the basis of where it once was. We are governing on the basis of where it will be, and Albertans are so glad to finally have a government that's looking forward.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Jean: Unfortunately, when this NDP government does that, they leave the people of Alberta behind.

Opium Use

Mr. Jean: Alberta is right now in the midst of a full-blown opioid crisis. You wouldn't know it, though, from the NDP government's mishandling since the start of this file. We've had a dramatically increasing number of deaths, a toxic illicit drug market that is getting rapidly worse, and massive resources spent on preventable effects of this crisis in hospitals, jails, social services, and law enforcement. The NDP would rather fearmonger than change legislation to address the crisis. How does the Premier think her plan serves Albertans who desperately today need their help?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, as the member opposite knows, we were very pleased today to be able to announce our emergency opioid response regulation, that we'll be moving forward on co-ordinating people across the government to make sure that the work that's already been under way is more seamlessly co-ordinated and that the additional ideas that are required to move forward can be delivered to cabinet quickly, quickly, quickly, because we understand that this is an emergency. We need to do more because we understand how this hurts families and it hurts the people who suffer from these . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Over one death a day in Alberta, and it took two years to set up this commission, Mr. Speaker. Shameful.

We won't solve the crisis without evidence-based clinical services in the community. The Q1 report shows that in three years access to treatment increased for, at the most, 2,300 people. The NDP wants to take credit even though the vast majority of people right now are not receiving any support from Alberta Health

Services or the ministry. Experts suggest that there are tens of thousands struggling right now with opioid use disorder in our province. How is the Premier going to bridge the gap between the trickle of available services currently through her government and reality?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, this commission will be looking at those issues and making recommendations on exactly that issue on a very urgent basis. What I can say is that we have already significantly increased resources with respect to addictions treatment and addictions prevention. Quite frankly, for the member opposite to be complaining to us that we don't put enough resources in when they are at the same time demanding that we cut \$3 billion out of our operating budget in one year is just untenable. You've got to decide what your plan is and then stick to one plan for more than a day.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Two years to set up this commission, Mr. Speaker. Ridiculous and unacceptable.

An overprescription of drugs is creating a new group of addicts. The Q1 report shows that almost half of people who die from an OD were prescribed an opioid in the year before their death. The College of Physicians & Surgeons says, "We prescribe opioid painkillers . . . too freely, which fuels the supply of – and demand for – opioids and other drugs, both legal and illegal." The overprescription of opioids is hurting Albertans and killing them and getting them hooked. What's the Premier's plan to address this issue?

Ms Notley: Well, the member opposite actually identifies a very, very important issue. That's why the minister and the associate minister have been working on this issue with the college, because we know that their prescription strategies do need to be changed and that they do need to find ways to reduce the degree to which they prescribe those particular substances. That's not the only issue, of course – there are many – but it's absolutely an important one, that we are asking them and that they have agreed to work on very quickly to change the pattern that the member opposite describes, Mr. Speaker.

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

Child Intervention Panel Recommendations

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is about to waste a golden opportunity to improve the lives of children in care. The opposition demanded an all-party committee so the minister could not hide until the next child death hits the headlines. Government instead chose a ministerial panel, which does allow the toughest issues to be buried out of public view. Now our fears have foundation. Many of the panel's recommendations go into what the government calls, and I quote: no legislative change required. To the Premier. You told Albertans in this House that the panel would make meaningful recommendations for real change and they would be listened to. Why did you not keep that promise?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member opposite read the legislation as well as the recommendations a little bit more carefully because there is almost no recommendation that the government hasn't committed to moving forward on. Where the legislation reflects the recommendations – indeed, the legislative

drafting process began by looking at the recommendations. I can take every recommendation and attach it to an action or a legislative change, so I'm not sure what the member opposite is actually talking about. [interjection] I'm very pleased with the work that has moved forward on this so quickly . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Notley: . . . after decades of being ignored, through an all-party process. Quite frankly . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier. Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I will table today a government document showing many of the recommendations, and beside it says: no legislative change required. Premier, you're not telling us the facts.

The legislation labels many of the panel's recommendations as not needing legislation. I don't agree, but since your minister has decided not to commit to legislation for these changes – she now has had six weeks to take internal action on these key changes to be made. The answer won't fit in 35 seconds, so, please, Premier, can you tell this House and all of Alberta where we can find a written account of the specific nonlegislated changes made, or have you done nothing?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it is super rich for the member opposite to suggest that a six-week turnaround, from a group of recommendations to this House to a form of legislation, is doing nothing after the decades of inaction by those people over there. Outrageous.

That means that what we did – just so that the member opposite is clear, when it says, "No legislation required," it means that we can follow the recommendation without changing the law. That's what it means. It doesn't mean that we're not going to do it. We have every intention of doing it. The member opposite should read the legislation and read the recommendations.

Mr. McIver: I helped write the recommendations, Mr. Speaker, and the Premier hasn't acted on a single thing she had a chance to say. She notes that she can publish the name of a child. Paula Simons had to wake this Premier and all of us up. She said that the child Serenity's name could be named by the *Journal* but not by the advocate. As a result, we're at risk of ignoring the plight of children in care until there's public outrage. We have to do better if justice is to be achieved. Is that the best we can do? Premier, will you commit to additional legislation to include more of the panel's recommendations in the next session of the Legislature? You haven't acted on the ones that are in legislation now.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I would suggest that the member opposite read the recommendations because nowhere in the recommendations do they suggest that we start publishing the name of every child whose fatality is investigated by the advocate. That's not in the recommendations, and for him to imply that it is is exceptionally disingenuous. That being said, we are moving forward on the recommendations. We've brought in legislation within six weeks. They have never acted that fast to get their parking space allocated, let alone to work on an important piece of legislation that matters to Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Just checking with members. It seems to be getting a little warmer in here.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Opioid Emergency Response Commission

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government announced what they call their aggressive opioid plan, which can be summed up as more piecemeal action, including the creation of a new advisory opioid commission. Not only is this an admission that the government's response has not been sufficient, but after four years of increasing opiate deaths, instead of giving us a clear evidence-based plan – to the minister: now that you've got the advisers, how long before we see a public strategic plan with specific targets and timelines?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly proud of the group that's been brought together to form the opioid emergency response commission, which includes harm reduction program advocates, parent advocates, law enforcement, and representation from indigenous communities. The commission has scheduled two meetings for the upcoming month, and I look forward to their recommendations in the very near future. I'm going to allow the experts that we've assembled to bring together their recommendations rather than try and presuppose their outcomes.

Dr. Swann: All good people, Mr. Speaker. A little late to the table.

The minister has repeatedly told us that it was not necessary to declare a public health emergency because the government already had enough power and resources to deal with the crisis. We disagreed. Now she's claiming that the new plan will expand her powers but can't say what the new powers are or what will change. To the minister: specifically, what new powers does the minister have to stem the tide?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. You know, instead of trying to use powers that were meant for an infectious disease outbreak, our government has crafted new, aggressive emergency tools that will move forward and address the actual crisis in front of us, which is a public health crisis. It's a question of how we react and respond to people who are living with a chronic health condition. This is an important issue, and as a government we think it's very important that every single Albertan who is struggling with substance use is treated with respect and dignity and has access to the treatment and the supports they need as quickly as possible.

2:10

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the people on the front lines are looking for answers, not rhetoric.

Whether or not these additional powers are sufficient remains to be seen, but what is clear is that these powers are for the minister, and the commission itself reports to the minister instead of to a public health expert, a mental health and addictions expert. To the minister: how can Albertans have confidence that you will do what's necessary, especially since it's taken a year and a half just to get the advisory panel in place?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thanks, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The commission will be directing aggressive action focused on six

key areas, including harm reduction, treatment, prevention, enforcement, collaboration as well as data collection and monitoring. The commission will be providing recommendations directly to my office around how we can best use the tools and the \$30 million in new budget dollars for 2017 to have the best impacts quickly within our communities, and then the commission is going to be responsible for implementing those actions. I fully trust the members of this commission to do an excellent job. We have a very talented group assembled.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans are concerned about the opioid overdose crisis and are pleased to hear that this government is taking action. As a health care professional I know first-hand of the importance of prevention and harm reduction strategies such as supervised consumption services and ready access to naloxone. While the opposition spends their time criticizing these measures, we're saving lives. To the Associate Minister of Health: please update this House on actions that were taken today to magnify the government of Alberta's response to the fentanyl crisis that is affecting my constituency and all of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I was joined at the Legislature by a strong and diverse group of Albertans who will sit on the Minister's Opioid Emergency Response Commission. This group brings together leading experts on substance use treatment, public health, and law enforcement alongside Albertans working at the front lines in our community agencies. This group will guide our next aggressive actions to fight this crisis, backed by \$30 million in new spending identified in Budget 2017. They'll be providing recommendations on how to expand access to treatment and eliminate treatment barriers, increase harm reduction supports, and increase data collection and analytics so we have the fullest sense possible of what is...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the opioid crisis has hit all of our communities and we know that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed, how has the minister ensured that the commission will be able to reach all the Albertans that need help?

Ms Payne: It was really important for us, Mr. Speaker, that we were able to bring together a diversity of voices to the table and formalize that role for those individuals. We've included Dr. Tailfeathers, a family physician from the Kainai First Nation, who has been at the forefront in her community's response to the opioid crisis. We also have Atiya Ashna, a cultural outreach worker within the city of Calgary, who has a tremendous record of outreach, particularly among ethnic and religious groups, where the topic of substance use is a difficult one to broach. We also included Karen Turner, president of The Alberta Addicts Who Educate and Advocate Responsibly. Ms Turner has a powerful message...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that there have been calls for the government to declare a public health emergency, to the same minister: why is the creation of this emergency

commission a more effective way to address the crisis and support Albertans affected by opioid overdose?

Ms Payne: Well, while a public health emergency is attractive on the surface, it is the wrong set of tools for this unprecedented crisis. Instead of trying to use powers that are meant for an infectious disease outbreak, we have crafted new, aggressive emergency tools designed specifically to help Albertans get the help that they need for access to treatment, harm reduction services, and public awareness. These are the tools that will help us address this unprecedented crisis. I certainly hope that all members of this House will support the work of this strong and diverse team of Albertans.

Minister of Finance

Mr. Fildebrandt: The Minister of Finance got a bit defensive yesterday when we noted that he had no background in economics, finance, or budgeting. That's understandable because the truth hurts. While some people can learn on the job, the Minister of Finance has shown that he's incapable of this. He's shown that he's incapable of listening to economists, budgeting experts, or even sober-minded credit-rating agencies. Will the minister finally admit that he's over his head?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ceci: ... my focus all the time is on Alberta. The focus needs to be on helping people recover in this province. It's been a tough couple of years, Mr. Speaker, but every step of the way this government has had people's backs. Of course, there's more work to be done. Forty thousand jobs have returned to this province. That's because of the work of this government, not those people over there. We have Albertans' backs. Why don't they get onboard and support Alberta, too?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that it's impossible to do your job if you don't take it seriously – like, when an electrician doesn't take his job seriously, someone could get shocked, and he will lose his licence, or if a lawyer doesn't do her job seriously, she will lose cases and then clients – and given that if the Minister of Finance doesn't take his job seriously, taxpayers will have their money wasted and children will be saddled with another generation's debt, does the minister believe that there should be consequences for not taking his job seriously?

Mr. Ceci: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I think the focus always has to be on Alberta, so I'll say again that economic growth is returning to this province because of the work of this government. This Minister of Finance, that Premier, this Health minister are all doing their jobs, and recovery is happening. The Conference Board of Canada has said that our GDP will grow 3.3 per cent. They've upgraded us half a per cent since the last time they reported. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that after two years most people are expected to be able to do their jobs competently, surely by now the Premier realizes that her Minister of Finance is just not up to the job. Given that the training wheels are off and the minister keeps crashing, with new credit downgrades at a rate of two every time he introduces a new budget – he's had his chance, and he's not

getting any better – does the Minister of Finance believe that he is fit to do his job?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the opportunity to ask the opposition, maybe this Finance critic: where is your shadow budget? Anybody see one? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, B.C.'s antipipeline NDP voted to ratify a governing agreement with the Green Party. This agreement states that they will immediately employ every available tool to stop the expansion of Kinder Morgan. Your government has spent two years telling Albertans that we need the carbon tax to build pipelines. Well, we've got the job-killing carbon tax but still no pipelines in sight. To the minister of environment: can you provide the name of just one pipeline protest group or individual who opposed Kinder Morgan in 2015 that has been convinced of its merits because of your hollow mantra of social licence?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Premier said it very eloquently yesterday, and I'll repeat: make no mistake; Kinder Morgan will be built. We've had naysayers from the beginning who said that you can't do environmental responsibility and extract resources. We proved them wrong. We got two pipeline approvals. We proved you wrong, and we're going to prove you wrong again.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, please show us the flow.

Given that when asked about the future of Kinder Morgan, the Deputy Premier stated that the federal government was in a position to grant approvals, that they have granted those approvals, and that we are committed to moving forward with the pipeline and given that the Northern Gateway was also approved by the federal government of the day and supported by more than half of the affected aboriginal bands, to the Minister of Energy: can you please explain how today's Kinder Morgan is any different from Northern Gateway, which another well-known NDP Premier – yours, by the way – personally opposed when she took office?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:20

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the differences is, as our Prime Minister said, that our climate leadership plan was one of the deciding factors for the pipeline. Again, instead of joining your B.C. pals and cheering against Alberta, it's time that you stood up for Alberta like this side of the House.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, we always cheer for Alberta on this side.

Given that yesterday the Premier stated that she is open to going to B.C. in order to change people's minds about Kinder Morgan and given that after the NDP and Greens announced their intent to govern, the ever-fireable Tzeporah Berman called it "a turning point for BC, our coast, Reconciliation & our climate," to the Premier. Berman, Mahon, Weaver, Horgan: just how do you intend to convince an entire government to support two pipelines when these economic bouncers continue to cut up your social licence and just take it as fake ID?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: You know, Mr. Speaker, this is a critical project not just for Alberta. It's for Canada. Alberta has never

backed down from a fight, and we're not going to do that now. We're going to stand up for Alberta jobs. We're going to stand up for Alberta energy because that's the right thing to do. When are you guys going to join us? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Following the election in 2015 Wildrose said that the improper destruction of records goes against the heart of an open and accountable government, and we stand by that today. The government, however, seems content to move further and further beneath the cloak of secrecy. To the Minister of Justice. Your staff regularly deleted and shredded records. What is your office covering up, and why does the NDP continue to hide information from Albertans?

The Speaker: The Justice minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we did have one incident in which an individual was misinformed about the policy and made an error in judgment. That incident was immediately investigated and was reported proactively to the FOIP commissioner. Turning that one incident into "regularly destroys" is just a little bit absurd.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the Privacy Commissioner has given many, many examples, including the deleting of e-mails for the PPAs returned, and given that this Justice minister has a horrible track record of dealing with the access to information, what exactly are you hiding, and how many FOIP requests have been tampered with under your leadership?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, this incident was of concern to us. As soon as the department was made aware of the direction within the sheriffs branch, they immediately and proactively called in an investigator to investigate this. They proactively went to the FOIP commissioner to disclose that this had happened. We are working with the relevant authorities. We have brought into place a FOIP policy to ensure that this never happens again because it was determined that the lack of policy was a problem in this case. We take this very seriously, and that's why we've moved to address it.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question. If your department was so proactive, why did it take the opposition to release the report today?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by pointing out that, in fact, the report was disclosed to the applicant by my department, so it was a report that was asked for by my department. It was a report that was prepared by my department. It was proactive disclosure on our part to the office of the Privacy Commissioner. We're not trying to hide anything here. [interjections] I think that the noise coming from the other side is just a little over the top.

The Speaker: Just to remind everyone, it's your time. If we can't hear, more time is going to get used, so keep the tone down, please.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Municipal Government Act Regulations

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the MGA review has been concluded for some time now, and apparently regulations are being developed. The former Minister of Municipal Affairs in November of '16 promised that all legislation and corresponding regulations would be enacted before the fall municipal election. Subsequently the new minister in January of '17 stated that before being proclaimed, all regulations would be posted for public feedback for 60 days. To the minister. That deadline has passed, and municipalities are wondering: has the feedback process been completed, and have the regulations now all been set?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the member is right. We will have everything posted and done and ready to go for the fall, before the municipal election. That's our plan, and I did state that. I didn't set a hard deadline. I'm not sure which date he's talking about – we did say the spring and into the early summer – so if you'd like to inform me of that, that would be great. We are working on the final regulations to post them. There's a lot of work to be done. It is the second-biggest piece of legislation in Alberta's history, so we want to make sure we take the time to consult and get it right.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, a little clarity would be appreciated by municipalities.

Given that the municipal elections are only 140 days away and given that the government has committed to proclaiming all legislation and corresponding regulations before then and given that to date only 10 regulations have been posted publicly, back to the minister: when will you actually be posting the next phase of regulations, then, and when will all of these be made public so that municipalities can plan accordingly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there are a lot more than 10 regulations in this legislation – I know that – and there have been a lot more than 10 that have been posted over the past little while. There are more to come. When I get that exact information, everybody will see it because it will be posted publicly online for everybody to look at and everybody to provide feedback on.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that key components of the regulations yet to be released – and I'm sure you would agree, Minister – are certain charters for Edmonton and Calgary, the city charters, and given that this government has committed to posting the city charters for public comment in the spring and given that the spring is nearly over and the election in the fall is soon to occur, 140 days from now, to the minister: what is the holdup with this subject? Precisely when will you release the city charters to the cities and the public?

Mr. S. Anderson: Listen, Mr. Speaker, and to the opposite member, I appreciate his question. As I said before, when we're working with regulations such as the city charters, we're going to take the time to get it right. We've been meeting with the mayors from Edmonton and from Calgary. [interjections] If you listen, I'll tell you what's going on. We've been meeting with them constantly, with their administration. On a constant basis our administrations are speaking to and discussing the finer details of

what's going on, and once we get it ready and once the big-city mayors and we decide that we are ready to bring this forward to the public, we will do so.

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

Charter Schools and Alternative Education Programs

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government has a track record of not coming clean with Albertans about its intentions. It sprung Bill 6 on farmers, it played coy about the secret ballot, and all Albertans know that it never mentioned the carbon tax while campaigning. It claims to be a champion of choice in education, yet the Premier has called charter schools "havens of elitism," leaving parents with a lack of confidence in the government's supposed support for alternative education. Minister, are you going to suddenly stop funding alternative education? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems as though we have this sort of question every few weeks or so. We can reassure everyone once again that from the beginning we have been funding enrolment for education in all forms, including charter schools, and in fact I've been working very closely with charter schools to improve and to build their extensions. I gave a 15-year extension to Westmount Elementary School. We have approved a loan for another charter school over a 25-year amortization period. So, you know, people can rest assured. The only time people are not assured is when the opposition likes to throw gasoline on the fire and pretend that there's a problem.

2:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gill: Given that government is no longer respecting local autonomy with the policies that allowed a child to attend the same charter school as their siblings and given that spreading children around multiple schools creates such inconvenience that parents may have to enroll all their children in the public system for the sake of simplicity and given that the minister talks about funding charter schools today but never commits to doing so in the future, Minister, are you not dealing with the sibling issue because you want to push all students into the public system? Is this your government's hidden agenda?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, again, Mr. Speaker, it's convenient for the opposition to try to cast aspersions on the solidity of charter schools. We know that we have been working very closely with them, and we will continue to do so in the future. We sent some very strong messaging to their charter school associations, and we always have a very good relationship, and we will continue to do so. It's not easy when you have to clean up the mess of 40 years of education instability. But you know what? I'm getting the job done.

Mr. Gill: They have been top five in the world, just for your information there, Minister.

Given that this government's school fee reduction system is designed for parents in the public system, which displays this government's lack of concern for the parents of children in the alternative education programs, and given that an example is an increasing transportation problem for alternative programs to the point of pricing them out of parents' ability to pay, Minister, is your plan to financially overburden parents so they're forced to enrol their children in the public system?

Mr. Eggen: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I mean, this was sort of a salad or a montage of so many different issues that don't necessarily go together. What I can tell you is that we are putting more money into schools, we're putting more money in to reduce the burden of school fees, we're building 200 schools around the province, and we are funding for enrolment. You know, all of those things are a sharp departure from the previous government, and Albertans do notice that this government actually invests in education and has a long-term plan to commit to investment for our children in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Refugee Resettlement

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Council for Refugees, an organization recognized for their immense contributions to the lives and success of newcomers, is commencing their national spring consultation here in Edmonton, starting tomorrow. Thank you to the sponsoring groups, immigrant settlement agencies, community members and businesses, and labour unions who have done so much to support these newcomers in our communities. To the Minister of Labour: how is the government helping refugees settle within our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Settlement agencies are the first point of contact for newcomers, including refugees. I'm very proud of the government's productive working relationship with our settlement agencies. Settlement staff help with orientation, assessments for language levels, education and skills training, housing needs, translation, finding doctors, schools for children, and many, many more services. The government has provided the Alberta refugee resettlement grant initiative, designating \$1 million to local agencies to help refugees integrate. We've also provided \$1.1 million to AUMA to help build welcoming and inclusive communities. These are just a few measures...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Shaw reminded us of the disastrous policies of the former minister of immigration, Jason Kenney. To the Minister of Labour: has the number of refugees coming to Alberta increased when compared to previous years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Between November 2015 and December 2016 Alberta welcomed roughly 7,000 refugees. Of the 49,000 permanent resident admissions to Alberta for 2016, refugee admissions accounted for 15 per cent compared to 7 per cent in 2015. Though 2016 was an unprecedented year, planned admissions for refugees in 2017 are double those in 2015. There will be more privately sponsored refugees in particular as more Canadians are applying to sponsor refugees.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister of Labour. Given that we are anticipating a significant growth in the number of refugees settling in Alberta, how are we going to support this increase as a government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Moving forward, Alberta Labour is looking at new ways to deliver settlement services to better support all newcomers, including refugees. We are supporting refugees by funding projects that support their needs; for example, collaborating with one of our community partners to provide language and on-the-job training to help refugee women learn language and secure employment. The integration for refugee women project is a communications and job skills workplace training program that builds work readiness for 24 refugee women and leads to employment in banquet or concession services. We continue to enhance our...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Suffield Elk Herd

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently this government's own agency known as the Special Areas Board corporation sent a letter outlining their concerns with the growing Suffield elk herd. This herd has an estimated size of anywhere from 4,000 to 7,500 head. As it continues to grow and expand its range well outside the base, this has possible ramifications with biosecurity risks to the cattle industry. To the minister of environment: when was the last time an official count of this herd was completed within the Suffield base and the surrounding area to which the herd has expanded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those who don't know what the Special Areas Board is – I know the hon. member across the way does, which is why we discuss it quite frequently – it was established in 1938 during a severe drought and economic hardship, and it's quite an interesting area. Actually, it's under my purview, and I've had great meetings with the boards on each side. [interjections] I'd like to inform them more if they'd actually listen at some point.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, given that the bovine TB outbreak in 2016 impacted producers and cattle which used community pastures in and around the Suffield Block and given that the department knew that the elk herd contained avian TB when they were transplanted from Elk Island in '97 and given that avian TB can present a false positive for bovine TB, resulting in unnecessary quarantine of cattle stock, Minister, will you commit to testing the Suffield elk herd for bovine TB, as requested by the Special Areas Board, this government's own agency?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The elk stock in question on the Suffield base had been checked for bovine tuberculosis before they were in there. Subsequently, this last hunting season, close to a thousand head had been tested also for bovine tuberculosis and received no positive hit on those animals that were tested. So I'm not a hundred per cent sure what the member is talking about. That testing continues as those elk are in that area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: The second supplemental will help.

Given that the news reports out of Elk Island national park have stated that those elk and moose populations have grown to levels where a hunt or cull may be necessary and given that the Suffield elk herd has also grown to unmanageable levels and given that biosecurity risks can no longer be ignored, with chronic wasting disease now confirmed in the Suffield herd, will you release an updated wildlife management plan to concerned area landowners and the public should one exist?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's also a fact that that herd has been reduced to about half of what it had been even several years ago, so there is a reduction in that herd. The member is absolutely correct. There was a positive test for chronic wasting disease in one bull elk in that area. It's a situation that as minister of agriculture I take seriously. We'll continue to monitor, working with the Minister of Environment and Parks, to ensure that our domestic herds around those elk stay safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Auditor General's Recommendations on Health Care

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, last week the Auditor General released his report on health care in Alberta. Now, in it he describes a fragmented system, lacking integration of professionals, and a lack of sharing and use of clinical information. The Health minister will tell us that all of this was the fault of the previous government. Fine. You've been Health minister for over two years. What evidence can you provide that you are making the quantum leap to take the system to the next level?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for taking some responsibility for the system we inherited. We are certainly pleased to move forward with a number of recommendations to make Alberta's health care system better. One of the very first things we did to enable an environment where we could stop and do that was stop drastic and rash ideological cuts. That's one of the reasons why we are keen to have a system that has stability, so that we can actually work with our front-line providers, including the physicians, to be able to come up with a new amending agreement that will save up to half a billion dollars in just two years as well as bring forward a blended capitation model that will provide better health outcomes to Albertans.

2:40

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, the initiatives that the minister has described fall clearly into the category of incremental change, reorganization, and moving in circles. There's no quantum leap in sight here.

Given that the Health minister also has 41 outstanding recommendations from the Auditor General and given that there has been painfully little progress on these recommendations during her tenure, to the minister: you haven't acted on the 41 outstanding recommendations from the Auditor General, so why should Albertans have any faith that you will act on the outstanding report that he filed last week?

Ms Hoffman: Again, I want to thank the Auditor General for his report and his recommendations in the past. Many of them have been in place since the 1990s. While, absolutely, we are keen to

move forward with improvements to the health care system, what we aren't going to do is move forward with what those folks in the opposition campaigned for in the last election, which was a billion dollars' worth of health care cuts. Instead, we're working with front-line providers, including physicians, to find ways to return half a billion dollars to the system so that we can invest that in improvements, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased that the Auditor General sees a great deal of opportunities for us to continue to move forward, protecting and enhancing public health care, because that's exactly what this government is going to do.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister just did it again. She constantly equates health spending reductions that are proposed by the opposition members to cuts in front-line services.

Given that the Auditor General has clearly stated that more money is not the solution and given that both this minister and her predecessors of the previous government failed in keeping expenditure increases under the combined inflation and population growth, to the minister. The Auditor General has clearly indicated that expenditures and performance are not correlated. When will you stop equating spending cuts or increases to deterioration or improvement of health care performance?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, that is so rich coming from the members of the opposition who regularly saw increases in excess of 6 per cent. What do we have to show for it? A blooming wait-list. We had deferred maintenance throughout the province, and what we're doing instead is that working as a province, we've gotten our increases down to about 3 and a half per cent as opposed to the 6 from the members opposite. And we're doing it with Albertans while protecting public health care instead of pushing for a billion dollars' worth of cuts, as they had in their last election platform. Now they're asking us to make even more. I think the last number was \$3 billion from operations. Give me a break. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue. [interjections]
Hon. members, continue discussions outside.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Red Deer Regional Airport Expansion

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I dedicate my statement to recognizing a major transportation and infrastructure improvement to the central Alberta region. On May 12 I had the opportunity to attend the official grand opening of the expanded portion of the Red Deer regional airport. This expansion, in the form of a major runway extension, is a necessary economic boost to a region that is quickly growing. Providing the capacity to serve larger aircraft and longer haul flights will make Red Deer an attractive destination to more airlines.

Along with connecting Red Deer to new regions around the country and continent, the economic impact cannot be stressed enough. The direct impact of Red Deer regional airport is 225 jobs, equalling over \$13 million in wages and salaries, with a further \$13 million in wages and salaries when indirect impact is considered. With Red Deer regional airport's operations contributing an estimated \$52 million in total GDP and \$99 million in total economic output to the provincial economy, this is an essential addition to the province and the communities in central Alberta. Red Deer can be a new gateway for tourism and investment in the region.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that is investing in projects that contribute to diversifying the economy and create long-term economic growth. The federal government backed out financially, but with strong advocacy from myself and my counterpart from Red Deer-North the government of Alberta funded the \$6 million shortfall.

Also, thank you to all the major stakeholders who worked with us to get this done and are continuing to work on making RDRA even more competitive. A special thanks goes out to Red Deer regional airport CEO, Graham Ingham, and former CEO, R.J. Steenstra, for their co-operation and leadership on this project.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Parliamentary Democracy

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have the privilege of living in a democracy. Democracy: demos, the people; kratia, to rule; rule by and for the people. In a country as large and diverse as Canada we have chosen to have a federal representative parliamentary democracy.

It is easy to focus on its flaws. It's not a perfect system. It is not immune from ego or personal and ideological political conflict. In many ways our system of democracy, like all human institutions, is no better or worse than the people that participate in it. Our democracy can ignore the people's will. The Legislature can be dominated by political hubris and political ego. Party politics can visibly reign supreme when question period degenerates into rude, hyperpartisan politics.

Yet our democracy works. We do not make decisions in Alberta at the point of a gun, and the people do have political choice. The checks and balances built into our democracy do ensure that all legislators maintain the rule of law. When it works, no other process of decision-making is better anywhere in the world. We must not let its flaws overshadow the amazing good that is done in this Legislature by its MLAs.

The MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake sponsored a private member's bill to address the problem with the distribution of nonconsensual pictures on the Internet. It was supported by all parties in the House and was passed unanimously during this legislative session. The MLA for Chestermere-Rocky View introduced private member's Bill 206 to enhance the communication that will help to connect prospective adoptive parents with expectant families and parents. This is another good example of legislation that appears to have broad support in this House.

It is easy to point out the flaws in our parliamentary democracy, but today let us focus on the good that we do and have done over this past session.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I will move the following motion under Standing Order 42.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly provide an instruction to the Committee of the Whole that, during its consideration of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, the committee be granted the power to divide the bill into two bills: the first consisting of the amendments to the Employment Standards Code; and the second consisting of the amendments to the Labour Relations Code.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of Paula Simons's column in the *Edmonton Journal* entitled Child Death Review Legislation a Betrayal of Public Trust.

The second one, Mr. Speaker, is the Alberta government's Child Protection and Accountability Act: Impact on Recommendations from the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, referenced today in question period, which says the opposite of the Premier's answer.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table an article today in reference to some of the comments I made in my member's statement in relation to bureaucratic red tape and challenges in immigration. It's entitled Jason Kenney's 10 Biggest Blunders as Immigration Minister. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:50

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that we may be now at the time to deal with the matter raised by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I want to now recognize the member to give his arguments with respect to his application under Standing Order 42.

Division of Bill 17

Mr. Cooper:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly provide an instruction to the Committee of the Whole that, during its consideration of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, the committee be granted the power to divide the bill into two bills: the first consisting of the amendments to the Employment Standards Code; and the second consisting of the amendments to the Labour Relations Code.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Standing Order 42, the waiving of notice. For reasons of brevity I'll just speak to Standing Order 42(2).

If the Assembly grants unanimous consent to proceed with the motion, each Member who wishes to speak in the debate shall be limited to 20 minutes, and the debate shall conclude

- (a) when all Members who wish to [have taken] part . . . and the question is put.

I might just add Standing Order 42(1).

A motion may, in case of urgent and pressing necessity previously explained by the mover, be made by unanimous consent . . . without notice . . . under Standing Order 39.

There are a couple of reasons why one would do this. Today we have a situation before us that is pressing, and that is that the government is currently on a path to move a piece of legislation through the House that hasn't had appropriate consultation.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard at length from the government about how this piece of legislation is about making significant changes to the Employment Standards Code, and a lot of that discussion has been around the need for compassionate care, the need to update our legislation with respect to employment standards. While there are many, many good things in there, all of those things are being used as political cover to pass other sections of this legislation. We as an Assembly have the ability to make some necessary changes

to provide the committee the opportunity to divide these pieces of legislation.

Now, I'll be the first to admit that it is not all that common that this sort of procedural activity would happen, but there is broad support, widespread support inside this Chamber for sections of the bill: in fact, part 1, sections 1 to 100. While there may be some smaller areas of disagreement between the government and the opposition, I'm certain that we could get widespread support to in fact have that piece of legislation passed today.

Now, one small amendment that I would probably still recommend would be to move the coming-into-force date. The coming-into-force date on this section of the bill actually doesn't take place until January 2018. You would think, Mr. Speaker, that if it was the most important piece of the legislation, you would want to do it, say, in September, at the same time the labour piece would come into force. We could have a small debate around that later should the Assembly grant the powers to the committee to divide the bill.

This is a very pressing issue, Mr. Speaker. The reason why it's pressing is because members of the opposition have heard at length from stakeholders that are concerned about this particular piece, the labour portion of the bill. We've heard from business, we've heard from chambers, and we've heard from individuals concerned about some of the ramifications around the second part of this bill. All that this motion here before us is asking for is the ability to proceed to the motion, the ability for us to have a full and robust debate this afternoon around the need for this bill to be separated into two separate pieces.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that you would find that there are a number of times in the past when the Government House Leader has spoken about the risks of large pieces of ominous legislation. The motion before us would allow us to debate that so that we can come to the best-case scenario for Albertans, and that is clearly to divide this bill in two.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to support the motion so that we can do what's right not just for this piece of legislation but for all Albertans.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I had an opportunity to speak to this earlier today, and I would just like to continue a little bit with some of the questions and concerns that I have with respect to aspects of this legislation.

One of the things that I was talking about earlier, Madam Chair, was the impact that some of the changes in the legislation will have not only on workers but also on the ability of businesses to run their businesses if some of this legislation is passed. Again I'd like to point out that there are some giant assumptions that are being made in this legislation that, for me anyway, are neither family friendly nor fair. The title seems a bit whimsical in that aspect, especially

given the fact that we just brought forward a motion to actually split the bill into two so that the compassionate care piece could be taken care of right away and potentially even have the legislation brought forward and have the regulations done and get it going right away.

Right now as it stands, if this legislation does pass, folks that are in need of that compassionate care will not be able to participate, use, or otherwise invoke that legislation until 2018. I'm not really sure how we're helping out anybody who is requiring that compassionate care right now without actually having it go forward right away. For something that has been thrown back in our faces, that we're not agreeing with this legislation, the government sure does not seem to be in any hurry to make sure that that compassionate care piece is brought forward. I don't understand how you can call it family friendly when the most important piece of this legislation, at least as far as what the government has made clear, is actually the last piece that will be invoked for the public's benefit.

3:00

We're looking at some of the legislation, in fact, with regard to compassionate care. We're looking at being able to protect workers to leave for the care of a sick or dying loved one. What does that mean for folks that that's happening to right now other than some of the legislation that's already there? Obviously, the legislation needed to be changed. Somebody who is caring for a loved one right now, has a child go missing, is requiring a specific amount of bereavement that's actually outlined in the new legislation will have to wait till 2018, Madam Chair. Does that not matter to this government?

Does it not matter that sexual violence and domestic violence don't have a time limit on them? It's not going to only happen after 2018. These are the things that are happening right now. That's why this legislation was brought forward, to help out these families. Why would you not want to pass it immediately, right now, with everybody here, get it through the gate? No, no, no. We're going to actually wait till 2018 now. Is that my understanding? Anybody who is having troubles in their home or could be subject to domestic violence: well, the government thinks that that can wait till 2018 to come forward. Is that my understanding?

I want to understand why, when we've given the opportunity to work on one part of the legislation that all of us can unanimously agree on – split the legislation, get it through the gate, make sure that the compassionate care is there, set the precedent, set it right now for everybody – that didn't happen. There's nothing family friendly about that, and it's certainly not fair to somebody who is right now suffering at the hand of somebody who may be violating them or being subjected to abuse. I just don't understand. It is such a contradiction. It's just manipulative. Instead of looking at this piece of legislation in the two pieces in which it needed to be handled – and it's a very reasonable request.

All of the other legislation, had the government chosen to leave it for a little while, given us the summer and some months to do a bit more consultation, to strengthen legislation that obviously needed to be changed – then I look at some of the other changes, which I was mentioning this morning. Division 19 will now be removed from the legislation, should it be passed. Division 19 basically says that if the union decides to have an illegal strike with a trade union and in the private sector, there are absolutely no consequences for that group. There are no consequences for that union now. That union can have an illegal strike. They can also continue to take dues, and they can put a business out of business. They can intimidate the business owners.

Like I said earlier, this is about protections. Well, the workers certainly need to be there for the business to succeed, but if the business is no longer there because of intimidation and the impact

of this legislation on the workers towards the business – it's two parts of a puzzle that actually need to work together, and now you've chosen to elevate one cause over the other, inherently throwing a business, potentially, under the bus. Now, if there is a legitimate reason for striking, that's different, but we're talking about illegal strikes here, and that section, division 19, has been removed.

Now, in all fairness the government kept in division 25, which allows for penalties to be put against a union should they throw an illegal strike, which are about \$1,000 a day. But unions can fund raise. The AFL can come in and participate, and they can hold a business at mercy until that union gets what they want illegally. I don't know what else to call that other than: the government is okay with encouraging illegal activity. I don't think that's fair at all. In fact, it's so completely wrong that once Albertans understand what this government is doing, it's another notch in the belt of a government that does not care about this province, that does not make life better for Albertans.

We have that piece, and then when we go into the family-friendly pieces or not so family-friendly pieces, I want to speak a little bit about the resolutions that will be addressed through Bill 6. Bill 6, as you know, has been widely criticized across the province, and if you didn't see the rallies and the demonstrations and the active media sites and everything that are still criticizing the government for not consulting with farmers and Albertans – now, a large part of this bill will be left up to the supposed consultations around Bill 6. Well, we haven't seen those consultations, and we certainly haven't seen any regulations brought forward so that the public can look at the regulations and see how it's going to impact family farms and those aspects. I mean, this isn't even about safety per se or any of the other things that are obviously important to making sure that farmers and farm workers and families are protected.

If you look at things like the inconsistencies around compassionate leave time, well, that's another thing that I would think, after seeing what happened with Bill 6, you'd want to have some consultation on. Like, there are so many pieces of this that don't show any consistencies and seem to just be random numbers that are thrown out in order to rush this legislation through in the last days of the Legislature. If we're talking about compassionate leave time, we completely support that. We want all families to have the opportunity to meet their needs through leave, but we want it to be consistent – actually, people need that to be consistent – and within that consistency a good boss or owner of a business or anything like that is going to talk to the people that are in that state at that time to find out what is necessary for that person.

There are going to be unique differences between any person that is looking for compassionate leave time. It's not always going to be easy, but to be so prescriptive is also not necessarily going to be conducive to making sure that people are taken care of. Albertans shouldn't have to be concerned about determining the time allotment they need depending on their family crisis that they're facing. Those are individual situations, and I would assume, whether that's union or private sector, that most people are going to care about the well-being of the people that work for them because they want them to continue on. Maybe that's a grand assumption.

I can only do it based on my own personal, being a job creator and having several businesses, and on the way that we take care of the folks that work for us because ultimately they take care of us. I don't have a business without workers. I don't have a business without having people who are interested in working for me and having relationships with them and knowing their families and going to their kids' birthday parties. That's the way that we roll. I'm nothing without my workers. There's just no point. I can't do it by myself. These people are inherently important to my ability to be

successful and to their own as well, so there's got to be an ebb and flow there.

I just wanted to go over some of the crossjurisdictional analysis on card check as well because this is one big issue for me where I believe the fairness is really being called into question. If we are moving card check certification in this bill and getting rid of the secret ballot vote to unionize in a workplace, then let's take a look at some of the crossjurisdictional perspectives here just to give you an idea. In Alberta right now if at least 40 per cent of the employees have signed union cards within 90 days, the Labour Relations Board can arrange for a vote to be held, usually within 15 days, but there's actually no time limit. The vote is to be done by secret ballot if a majority of employees want to join the union. That's going to change. All of a sudden we're going to be jumping to a threshold of 65 per cent, and then if 65 per cent is reached through whatever means possible, all of a sudden the vote is revoked.

In British Columbia a vote is required if at least 45 per cent of the employees have signed union cards, and a labour board can arrange a vote to be held within 10 days. In Saskatchewan a vote is required. In Saskatchewan if at least 45 per cent of the employees have signed union cards, the labour board can arrange a vote to be held.

In Manitoba a vote is required. Now, this is interesting because in 2016 the Conservative government in Manitoba brought back the secret ballot vote through Bill 7, the Labour Relations Amendment Act. Before this if more than 65 per cent – does this sound reminiscent of what's going on here? – signed the cards, the labour board could certify the union. If 45 to 65 per cent of the employees have signed cards, the labour board can arrange a vote to take place within seven days. A public opinion poll by NRG Research Group on behalf of the CFIB found that 71 per cent of Manitobans believe that all workers should have the right to a secret vote. Where are this government's numbers? Madam Chair, where are this government's numbers showing us that this is what the workers want? In Manitoba there was clearly a vote, and it was clear that Manitobans wanted the secret ballot.

3:10

I must say again and reiterate that a secret ballot in no way takes away from the strength or the organization of unionization at all. In fact, the metrics prove that secret ballots actually strengthen a union's ability to unionize because that person can vote freely, with their own will. This government is actually taking away that from these people. I guarantee you that the reason this is being rushed through is because this government knows that. They know that, and they are doing this based on the larger administrative pieces and not for the workers at all. If you cared about the workers at all, you would make sure that they had a secret vote. End stop. That is democracy. Can you imagine if your vote was taken away from you and you had to tell the person standing beside you or the person you worked for who you voted for? Can you imagine? Every single one of us in this House would stand up and make sure that that never happened. Or if your vote was taken away from you.

All of us are reaching out to the youth right now, asking them to vote in their municipal elections, in their provincial elections, in their federal elections, begging the youth to come out and show that they want to participate in democracy. But this government is willing to take it away from the very workers that want to make sure that they have that vote and have democracy. That's shameful, especially, on top of that, then to have the intimidation factor of being able to have an illegal strike and not have any consequences for that. How is this government going to justify that? It's not possible.

To continue on, the card count in New Brunswick: if more than 60 per cent of employees have signed cards, the labour board can

certify the union. When 40 to 60 per cent of the employees have signed cards, the labour board will hold a vote.

The other thing, too, is that in this province now if division 19 is removed, guess what? Not only is there not a consequence; they won't decertify the union. They don't have to do that because you have removed division 19 from the legislation. That is the biggest piece of accountability. Explain to Albertans how it is that you're going to justify that. It's not possible.

The Newfoundland and Labrador card count. In 2012 the PC government in Newfoundland got rid of the secret ballot vote if more than 65 per cent of employees signed cards. The Labour Relations Board would certify the union without holding a vote. With 40 to 65 per cent of employees signing cards, the board would hold a certification vote generally within five days. In June of 2014 the PC government brought back the mandatory secret ballot, which is to take place within five days.

Nova Scotia requires at least 40 per cent of signed union cards in order to trigger a vote. Ontario has 40 per cent to trigger a vote. Prince Edward Island has over 55 per cent to trigger a vote. Quebec has 50 per cent.

Then federally, which is really interesting, they got rid of the card check certification altogether. For federally regulated workers a secret ballot will be required in all cases after evidence of support is demonstrated by at least 40 per cent of the membership. At the federal level, for federal employees, they actually have to have a vote. Maybe you should look at some of these other jurisdictions and amend this legislation quickly.

Based on the fact that I with all my heart do not believe in any capacity that this legislation is either fair or family friendly, I would like to propose an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Member, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended as follows. The title is amended by striking out "Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act" and substituting "Employment Standards and Labour Relations Statutes Amendment Act, 2017". In the following provisions "Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act" is struck out wherever it occurs and "Employment Standards and Labour Relations Statutes Amendment Act, 2017" is substituted.

Again, I don't think I could be more clear on how I feel about this. It is glaring, the lack of consultation. It is glaring, the lack of crossjurisdictional representation. It is glaring that the government did not take the time to talk to other jurisdictions to see how this would impact the very people they represent.

There is so much evidence, data-based evidence, on how imperative it is that you do these consultations to see what the people actually want. The simple fact is that you have removed the 40 per cent target and put it ahead to 65 per cent and, on top of that, give adequate ability for people to be intimidated and pushed. What I find particularly interesting is that the government keeps talking about the compassionate side of this legislation, yet some mother or family member or somebody in a union could be bullied by the person sitting beside them to sign a card to get to 65 per cent so that a union could happen. How do you justify that? How do you justify that? If you trigger this vote at 40 per cent, chances are that if it's a good decision, people will vote for the union. What are you afraid of?

So change the legislation. There's nothing family friendly about that. That is bullying in the most obvious, obvious capacity. There's absolutely no way for anybody to be able to say without a shadow of a doubt that they had their say democratically when at 65 per cent

all of the sudden the vote is gone. At 65 per cent you should be thankful for and welcoming a vote because, obviously, people are interested. Why not? You're at 65 per cent. So have the vote. What have you got to lose? Nobody has anything to lose by having a democratic vote. It strengthens the union. It strengthens the ability for people to justify the need to unionize under those circumstances. But then again you've also taken out division 19, which clearly, clearly takes away accountability from the unions, that if they strike illegally could be decertified. That decertification was always in the backs of those unions' heads, knowing that if they were going to strike illegally, they could be decertified. But now that's gone, and that's because of this government. That is not fair.

So, yeah. You've taken away their right to vote. My goodness. I mean, if this is any indication of governance at all – you've taken away their right to vote. You have taken away their ability to hold the union accountable. You're basically throwing business under the bus. Surprise, surprise. On top of that, the entire mechanism is a big, big bullying mechanism to be able to take advantage of the people that work for these unions. How are you going to justify that to these folks? I am interested in people coming forward and saying: yes, 65 per cent is great, and I don't need a vote after that. I just doubt that people are going to be willing to give up the vote.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Ms Gray: I just wanted to address some of the remarks from my colleague on division 19, removing the ability to suspend dues. The member in her remarks was talking about how important crossjurisdictional scans are, how important it is to look to our neighbours as to what they're doing. Division 19 was unique to Alberta and, in fact, double penalized unions because, of course, we already have the ability for the fines, that we have left in, which are standard for other jurisdictions as well. But what typically happens more often is for there to be court proceedings. That's usually where these things start to get discussed.

So being able to remove the ability to suspend dues to unions – I'll clarify that union dues do not get paid during a strike because the members are out on the line, and they're striking. There are no union dues to suspend at that point. What would happen is that after the strike ended, when everyone comes back to work, then union dues would start to be suspended.

3:20

Again, it's something that only Alberta did, and it double penalized. Not necessary. There are other measures. This was not something that was considered controversial during our discussions with both employers and labour going forward. And being aware of what's happening in other jurisdictions is really important.

Speaking of that, the member, who was speaking about other jurisdictions and card check certification, may not be aware that the federal government is currently bringing back card check certification. It will become the new standard for federal government, and that's in progress. As well, Ontario is expanding card check. They currently use it in the construction industry, and Ontario is expanding it to other areas as well. So there are other jurisdictions that are moving towards that card check system.

The final remark that I'd like to make is that the member opposite talked about as an employer wanting to treat employees respectfully and to work with them, and her experience is absolutely the experience of most employers in our province. It's been my experience as an employee, in many cases, that we have wonderful employers in this province, but that's not the universal story. Every

time I talk about the protections that are a part of Bill 17, whether it's on a radio call-in show or at a round-table, the stories that I hear, Madam Chair. Just yesterday while I was in Calgary, I heard the story of a woman whose son experienced over a hundred seizures on a weekend. When that person needed to take time to make sure that their son got to the hospital, they lost their job because we don't have the job-protected leave. I absolutely respect that most employers most of the time provide these, but there are strong reasons why we need to have these, and there are strong reasons why other jurisdictions already have them.

These types of measures, the process that went into talking to all stakeholders have brought forward Bill 17, which is fair and family friendly. I believe strongly in the title that we have. We have found a balance between the two parties when it comes to the labour relations system, when it comes to employment standards, making sure we're balancing the relationship and the power dynamic between those two so that we can have a fair collective bargaining system in our province.

I very much wanted to address just briefly a couple of the member's comments because a crossjurisdictional comparison and deep discussions with all stakeholders were important to us. I will not be supporting the member's amendment to the title of the bill because this bill is fair; it is family friendly. It will make a significant difference for workers in our province, and I'm quite proud of the work that we've done to bring this forward today.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I wanted to take a moment to thank the hon. minister for the changes to compassionate care. We completely agree with you a hundred per cent. In fact, that's why we want to split the bill so that that can get put through right away. The concern I have, Madam Chair, is that for all of those beautiful words that were just said – and I completely agree with you – it doesn't get enacted until 2018. Like, that's not helping anybody right now. We were wanting to put it through right now, pass it in one day, and get it through the gate so that compassionate care can be put forward as legislation right now. I completely agree with you.

My issue here is that if we're looking at card check, the federal level is going to be at 40 per cent, and it still triggers – it still triggers – a vote. We're not talking about that. We're talking about the vote itself. Sixty-five per cent enables unions to be able to manipulate and intimidate and work over the system so that they are not able to have their vote. The minute that they reach the 65 per cent threshold, that's it. It's done. Why remove the vote at all? That's where the change needs to be made. Do whatever threshold you want to trigger the vote, but have the vote. That secret ballot is the most important piece.

The other piece that I also wanted to address is the fines. Like I said, there is a balance. Division 25 is the fines. That's the thousand dollars a day that a union will be charged if they do an illegal strike. But there are ways that a union can fund raise. They can use the AFL. There are a gazillion ways that a union can raise that money and hold that company at bay. That is not good for the workers, and that's not good for the business.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. Earlier today there was, I thought, a really good way to solve this problem – and it was

brought up by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – to be able to make this a family-friendly bill. What he wanted to do was to essentially split the bill into two components so that we can demonstrate to everybody what the family-friendly components are and what the labour relations parts of the bill are. You know, when the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills brought up notice of Standing Order 42, he proposed the following motion. He said:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly provide an instruction to the Committee of the Whole that, during its consideration of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act . . .

So he's going back and making sure that he's looking at this.

. . . the committee be granted the power to divide the bill into two bills:

Two bills so that we don't have the problem that the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View was talking about, the part that talks about illegal strikes or strikes that, really, there's no notification. Like, if it's 65 per cent, you just become a union. What's that got to do with a fair and family-friendly workplace?

It also goes on to say:

the first consisting of the amendments to the Employment Standards Code;

That's what we were talking about there.

and the second consisting of the amendments to the Labour Relations Code.

Now, you can make that family friendly if we divide it in two. I thought that was a very fair motion that he had proposed earlier today.

This name is, frankly, just not what it says it is. I agree with this amendment. We need to have this name changed because it's just not what we're looking for in a bill. "Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act" should be amended, substituted with the "Employment Standards and Labour Relations Statutes Amendment Act" to reflect what this is because that's what we're talking about for the most part. I would love to see – there are so many parts to this bill that I think need to be brought forward and that I would be able to support. If we were able to divide those two, I would be able to support them. But separately we need to be able to go back and talk. We need to be able to go to our constituents and have that time to be able to show them what's in this bill.

Whenever you make a bill, it's very complex, and each word can have a nuance all of its own. We have to respect all the employers that are in this province that will be impacted by this bill. Each word can mean something else, and we frankly don't want to see any unintended consequences happen as a result of having words that perhaps were not the best intentioned.

Much of this bill deals with unions. There again, I don't see where this becomes a family-friendly workplaces act when you're talking about unions and the unions' ability to salt. Yesterday I had talked about salting, and I will remind the House again that salting is when a union employee or sympathizer gets a job at a non-union workplace solely in order to organize workers or disrupt company operations. So if they're hired and on that same day that they're hired they want to be able to form a union, but they have not actually worked there to see if there are actually any problems in that workplace, they can just go ahead and try to create a union. That causes disruption, frankly, in the workplace. It does not make it family friendly but disruptive, Madam Chair. The title is misleading. It, frankly, needs to be changed.

3:30

You know, these are reasons why I would be definitely supporting this amendment, because it's a well-planned-out, well-thought-out amendment. We need to be accountable as a government, and we don't want to be misleading to the public. If you're giving names that just aren't true or not completely true – there are

parts that are absolutely correct when you're talking with regard to being able to support people in the workplace, but when you're talking about unions, I don't get how those two should be coming together.

For those reasons, Madam Chair, I will be supporting this amendment, but I can't support this bill the way it's been put together. If we can change the name, that's a step forward, but I really think that we should have done what the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills said and divided the bill into two parts. That would have saved us, frankly, a lot of time because we could have now moved on with that one part and been able to vote on it and then from now until October, November be able to talk to our constituents and talk to the workplaces and talk to all the people that are stakeholders that will be impacted by this bill.

In Ontario they've taken two years, Madam Chair – two years – to be able to go to this, to get to this point, and we're trying to do this in weeks. We're talking about fairness. Right in there it says "fair" as the first word of the title. Well, how is that fair to Albertans? I would like the government to be able to explain the fairness of that, when you take weeks to do something that Ontarians are given years to do. This does not demonstrate transparency to the public. It doesn't give them any chance to be able to really look at it and look at the nuances that will impact them.

Again, I will be supporting this amendment, and I hope the rest of the House here will do so as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. A pleasure to rise here in Committee of the Whole to speak a little bit about Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I guess I just wanted to start a little bit with regard to what we're talking about here in terms of splitting up the bill, and I'm drawing on my experience from my previous work with regard to speaking to this. I'm not aware of any union contracts anywhere where they take a certain section of the language and divide it up and then the rest of the language is all over here, essentially having two contracts in a workplace. I'm not aware of that occurring anywhere. All of the language is together. That's why they call it labour language, okay? It's to help direct how relations between employees and employers are supposed to work.

When we're talking about this, let me quickly touch on a couple of other things that we're looking at in terms of the labour language with regard to the minimum wage, repealing the ability for employers to pay employees with disabilities less than the minimum wage. Now, granted, there have been no permits issued on this in the last 10 years, but, you know, again, this is labour language. When we're looking at that as a package, that is part of the stuff that we have to deal with. Trying to separate these things out is not really practical because we're talking about the language as a whole.

All right. Some of the other things that are being discussed within the language are youth employment and how we need to start complying with our obligations to the International Labour Organization with regard to youth employment, rest periods, compressed work weeks, temporary layoffs or terminations, deductions in terms of employers that penalize employees for a dine-and-dash or a gas-and-dash. Okay. Again, it's all labour language. To try to divvy up the two, we're not dealing with it as a whole.

To get a little bit further with regard to the amendment that has been proposed about "Fair and Family-friendly," let's focus on the "fair." Part of the consultations that were done with businesses was a bit of a concern with regard to the implementation time with some

of the leaves and how that would impact their businesses. There was a bit of, I guess, an ask by these businesses that they be allowed to have a little bit of time in order to implement and adjust to these changes that will be coming through. When we're seeing some of these different timelines in terms of implementation, those were part of the reasons why we're seeing the fluctuations.

I think, very clearly, that when we're talking about the language as a whole, we are talking about fair language. We are talking about family-friendly workplaces. It's all put together. I think the bill is very appropriately titled. I appreciate the member across the way bringing the amendment forward. Unfortunately, I will not be able to support it at this time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. Speaking to amendment A1, essentially to strike out the current title, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, and replace it with "Employment Standards and Labour Relations Statutes Amendment Act, 2017." I think this is a completely reasonable amendment to make. When we look at our Labour Relations Code and our Employment Standards Code, they are two codes that are separate, and we know exactly what we're speaking to if the title reflects the two codes that we're speaking to.

You know, the minister, if she wanted to, could have easily said, "Fair and Union-friendly" because I would suggest that many of the changes within here are pandering to her union affiliates and the New Democratic Party affiliates and the wishes of those businesses to be able to grow their business and utilize government legislation, government regulations to help them grow their business. I would suggest that when we look at this bill being union friendly as opposed to family friendly, you know, we could look at the fact that the bill is friendly to unions but not necessarily friendly to the employers, and there is an unfair balance, I believe, in what is being proposed here.

Card check certification. Sure, the minister will talk about how the federal government and the Ontario government are expanding their card check systems, but part of the problem is that if the need is so critical for unionization certification, it would be obvious, and the workforce would have no problem meeting the current criteria. But what the union bosses are encouraging this government to do now is to pave the way for them to grow their business in a way that's not necessarily looking out for the best interests of the workers. I suggest that this is more looking out for the best interests of big-business unions and the union executives rather than looking out for everyday Alberta workers. If the government is doing what they're called to do – and that's to serve the people of Alberta, not just to serve their union bosses – then they would look for family-friendly language here as opposed to union-friendly.

3:40

The minister also talked about double penalizing. So here we are; we're union friendly. Again, we're talking about being union friendly. She did not consider it to be fair that they were being double penalized, but she also mentioned that she did not consider increasing the penalties either. I don't know how old the penalties are, but possibly that should be looked into. The penalties should be considered to increase. If the union is involved in illegal activities, the penalties are what the penalties are, but now we're looking at a very union-friendly act here, and we're saying: oh, well, they shouldn't be double penalized for their illegal activity. I

fail to see how this Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act title actually applies in this situation.

I think what we recognize also is that this bill is not fair to the workers that have their rights taken away. The secret ballot is very much a democratic right within our country, and to move in this direction, where all of a sudden we open ourselves up to union intimidation without possibly all the facts being put in front of each of the individuals that are being asked to sign a membership card or to join the union, then I would suggest that that is unfair practice. It's not fair to the employees if they're not able to actually have all of the information put before them and they're being fed very one-sided information.

You know, this legislation is more about pandering to the wills of big unions as opposed to pandering to the needs of Albertans – Alberta workers, Alberta employees – the people that the Labour minister is called to represent and to try and present legislation and an environment for that will encourage investment in our province, which will then create jobs. This piece of legislation addressing the Employment Standards Code is acceptable, but when we move into the Labour Relations Code and we're doing it just for the will of the big union bosses – I didn't have anybody coming to me when talking to my constituents and saying: "Yeah, our union rules are out of sync, and this is not fair to the unions. They're working in an environment that makes it impossible for them to be able to actually exist." I believe what's currently in place has been very acceptable and very fair, so we need to recognize the relative labour peace that we've had over the last three decades and recognize that a labour marketplace can work very effectively without having to pander to the union bosses.

I believe the amendment makes a lot of sense. It speaks to what the actual bill is addressing, and that's the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code. The title Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act is so subjective. Everybody has a different interpretation of what's fair, what's family friendly, and I believe that that title is completely irrelevant to the legislation that's been put before us.

With that, I would encourage everyone to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to briefly speak about some of the reasons why I believe it's important that we accept this amendment and make the necessary change. Since the government was elected in 2015, we've seen this continual decision by the NDP to politicize legislation, and at every turn we see the government using the opportunity to say one thing and do another.

Any time a piece of legislation with a fancy name comes across, it should provide folks the opportunity to just put a pause on and dig a little bit deeper into what's exactly happening. You know, traditionally speaking – and maybe that's often in this Chamber – at least previous to this government, we saw pieces of legislation being called what they actually were. A good example of that in this particular session would be Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. It's fairly clear what that piece of legislation does. It is a statutes amendment act on the tax statutes. The Securities Amendment Act, 2017, is an act that amends the Securities Act.

This one is borderline, but I'll give it to them: An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government. Now, probably a more appropriate title would be the municipal government amendment act, but it's close. Then we see pieces of legislation like this one, the Fair

and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. There could be lots and lots and lots of things that that piece of legislation does.

Every time the government chooses to say one thing and do another, they use a fancy name. A perfect example would be Bill 1 from last session, the Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act. We all know how well that particular piece of legislation created a job. Another good example of this from last session: An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services. Well, it certainly did that. There was much in that piece of legislation that was way beyond the scope of the title. The Seniors' Home Adaptation and Repair Act: that was Bill 5 from last session. Again, a piece of legislation that didn't adequately reflect what was happening.

Now, here in this session: the Voluntary Blood Donations Act. We all know that that was around banning paid plasma, not really about encouraging blood donation. An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining: don't know why they didn't say, "implement the Supreme Court ruling," because that's the same excuse they used. An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation: also a very friendly name to describe what's happening but not accurately reflecting what is actually in the legislation.

My colleague, very rightly, is efforting to call the legislation exactly what it is. We could have gone much further and in itself made it political by saying something like, you know, an act to remove card check, an act to strengthen unions, an act to give the AFL a leg up, whatever. We could have. But, no, my colleague is efforting to change the name to exactly what they're proposing in the bill. It says nothing in this amendment about splitting the bills, although it's well established that that's a good idea. It says nothing about splitting the bills; it only speaks about what it is. Employment standards and labour relations statutes amendment act: that is what Bill 17 does. It amends all sorts of different statutes in two separate areas, and that's what we're doing.

We should stop overpoliticizing the names of bills, start calling them what they are. That's exactly why members in this Chamber should vote to support this amendment.

3:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that, and I will try to be brief on this. This bill, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act: there have been some questions that have been asked about why the name was picked.

I was thinking about a convention that I went to last year, that I was invited to. That convention was a union convention. It was the first one I've actually gone to in my life. I actually gained some understanding about why it's called the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. The reason why is because when you go to a union convention, they call each other brothers and sisters, so I now understand what this meant. The actual reality is that family friendly means union family friendly. I'm trying to help my colleagues to understand, to be able to read into the nuance of this question. The question that I'm asking is: how does the fair part fit it? I'm still really questioning and scratching my head on that one.

You know, the other part that I really wanted to say is that every time I hear someone say "fair" in any title, it reminds me of a used-car salesman when they say: "I promise you that this car is shipshape. It'll be fantastic. You won't have any problems with it." Immediately my spidey sense was tingling on this one, and I started to think: well, we really need to read into the details of this act.

Anyway, I just wanted to be able to bring some clarity to my colleagues to help them understand that, yes, this makes sense, that we should be striking it out and calling it what it is, but my colleagues need to understand that this isn't regular families that we're talking about. It's actually union families that we're talking about. That might help my colleagues understand this a little bit better.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to amend the title of Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, and replace it with the "Employment Standards and Labour Relations Statutes Amendment Act, 2017."

Names are important. After my third child was born, I thought that my wife and I were on the same page with regard to the name that this child would have. I got it explained to me quite clearly afterwards that somehow we hadn't agreed on the name. I thought that we had agreed on the name Sarah, and I thought that we had agreed that her middle name would be Elizabeth. Well, I got the Sarah part wrong. When she was about two years old or so, because she couldn't say Elizabeth, she would go running around saying: I'm Sarah a little bit Smith. I wondered if that had something to do with the postman. That's a family joke. I can say that. I don't know if we got Sarah's first name right or not because "Sarah" in the Jewish culture means princess. She is definitely the daughter that I love more than anything else in the world, but I am not sure that we would ever call her a princess.

Now, language is important. I know that as a teacher I would sometimes have to explain to my kids that using appropriate language in an essay was important, that there's a difference between, say, a social studies essay and an English essay. They're written, sometimes, very differently. The kind of language that you might use, the descriptive language that you might use, in an English essay is not necessarily the language that you would use in a social studies formal essay. As a teacher there's professional language that we use. We have formative and summative evaluations. We use that language to try to make clear the purpose of the action that we're going through, of the assessment that we're using.

So language is important, and titles are important. Names are important, and the name and the title in this amendment is actually important. I thank the hon. member previous to me who read through all of the different titles that have been given to legislation by this government. They were accurate, formal, reasonable names. I think that this amendment speaks to the need to pursue that, to pursue a language and a title that actually describes what the amendment is going to be all about. The title Employment Standards and Labour Relations Statutes Amendment Act is a very descriptive, formal, and accurate title. This piece of legislation is better off having that kind of title and language than the one that the government has provided for it, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

We've heard a lot about what is fair. You know, when we go through the labour code portion of this act, we can see that there is going to be a great deal of debate, I have a belief, as we go through and ask ourselves what is fair. Is it fair that first contract negotiations can be arbitrated after 90 days? Is that fair to the workers? Is it fair to the employers? There's going to be some reasonable, I would believe, disagreement on that.

We have a formula that we're probably going to be talking about called the Rand formula, that looks at how workers are covered by the collective agreement and that if they are, they have to pay union dues. But this is a balancing, this Rand formula, between the worker and the employer and the union. A worker should have the right to decide whether or not they are going to join any organization, including a union, but if they're going to be covered by that collective agreement, the courts have ruled that they have to at least pay the union dues. There's an attempt to find a balance there in the idea that you have the right to have a union, but you don't have the obligation to join it.

What we're looking at here is trying to find balance. Whether or not this act finds that balance and whether it finds a fair balance in some of the pieces of the Labour Relations Code that they're looking to change is, again, up for debate. You know, we face a situation where Bill 17 makes mandatory the collection of union dues by the employer should the union request it. Automatic dues collection by the employer: is that fair to the employer? Is it fair that they should have to outside of the bargaining process? I mean, if they agreed to do that through the bargaining process, that's one thing, but when they're forced to do that and to have the costs and the time and the paperwork that go along with that, is that fair? Many people will argue that it's not.

4:00

When we start to look at this piece of legislation, I believe that this changing of the title of this bill will actually make it better. It's about making it clearer, because there are going to be arguments about whether this is fair and whether it's family friendly. Is it fair that as a worker I could have my right to a secret ballot restricted, that if it reaches 65 per cent, that now is a threshold that will take away my right to a secret ballot? I don't believe that's fair to a worker. I believe that opens the worker to a wide range of perhaps bullying and discrimination. I believe that they should always have the right to a secret ballot. That's what's fair, I would argue, for the workers of this province.

I guess that when we take a look, I would speak in favour of this amendment. I speak in favour of it because I believe that the title is a more accurate description of what this bill is all about. I believe that it sets aside that misleading title, and it allows us to actually debate the merits of the bill. So I would speak in favour of this and ask for the House to support the amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:02 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Smith
Clark	Panda	Taylor
Drysdale	Rodney	van Dijken
Fildebrandt		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	McLean
Babcock	Gray	McPherson

Bilous	Hinkley	Miller
Carlier	Hoffman	Miranda
Carson	Horne	Nielsen
Ceci	Jansen	Payne
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Sigurdson
Dang	Luff	Turner
Eggen	Malkinson	Westhead
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Woollard
Fitzpatrick		
Totals:	For – 10	Against – 37

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now on the original bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As we dug into Bill 17, my staff identified areas that they felt could use some improvement within the bill, and with that I will rise and would like to please propose an amendment.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A2. Please go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in the following provisions by striking out “48 hours” and substituting “1 week’s”: section 34 in the proposed section 53.92(1), section 35 in the proposed sections 53.952(1), 53.962(1), and 53.972(1).

What this amendment will do is to change the notice requirement for return to work from 48 hours to one week, and this is for the longer job-protected leave provisions within the bill. The current period, for example, for compassionate care leave, which I believe is currently eight weeks: the bill seeks to increase that to 27, if I’m not mistaken. That notice period of two weeks seems a bit long, but a notice period of only 48 hours does not seem like quite long enough.

When we have a longer term leave that could be up to half a year or perhaps even longer than that, the employer is very likely to put in a temporary backfill employee in that place. If that person is there for more than 90 days but less than a year, they would be entitled to either one week’s notice or one week’s severance pay. This amendment seeks to align the notice period for the employee returning to work after a leave with that severance pay to ensure that it is something that is, again, fair to the employer and, I also feel, doesn’t put an undue burden on the returning employee.

This is based both on our own analysis and reading of the bill but also on stakeholders, particularly chambers of commerce speaking on behalf of employers, who have indicated that this would be something they would like to see changed. I have had the opportunity to speak with the minister on this. I imagine that perhaps she will make some of her own comments. I also wanted to thank my team for their hard work in pulling together this amendment in short order.

My sincere hope is that through this amendment we can improve the bill without unduly burdening employees and, certainly, without unduly burdening employers, allowing people to take their leave. I think the reality in practice is that the vast, vast majority of employees and employers would be in contact with one another anyway, but this ensures that employers will not be surprised by a relatively small notice window of an employee returning to work to

rightly claim their position even if they have been away for a long period of time.

It’s my hope that the entire House can support this amendment. I do think it makes the bill much stronger. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’d like to thank the hon. member for not only bringing forward this amendment but bringing it to my attention in advance so that I would have a chance to review it. I think it is absolutely understandable, making sure that employers have adequate time to adjust, particularly in the case of one of these longer term leaves that we were talking about. My office as well had heard from chambers about this. Making sure that we have that flexibility so that employers can prepare, understanding that in so many circumstances employers and employees will negotiate these arrangements – and often there might even be frequent updates while someone is away so that the employer knows what’s happening – make those arrangements together, hopefully, most of the time, and providing this minimum one week of notice is more than reasonable.

I think that the member opposite’s amendment does make sense. I’m happy to support this amendment going forward. Thank you again for reaching out to me on this.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I’ll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to bring forward an amendment to Bill 17, the so-called Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A3. Please go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment we’re proposing here is quite simple. Building on Bill 1 of the very first session of this Legislature, it is to ensure that union dues are not spent on political or partisan campaigning of any kind. The first bill that the government brought forward after the last election was one that enjoyed all-party support. It was something that the Wildrose Party campaigned on in the last election, to ban corporate and union donations from politics. It was a common-sense move. It was a big step in the right direction, at least a step towards getting big money out of politics.

But the job is not done. Currently unions are able to use union dues to finance campaigns of a partisan or, at the very least, political or ideological nature. Unions are able to take the dues from members, dues that members have no right whatsoever currently to not pay – they take mandatory dues from members – and they can spend them on political advertising. You know, we see in Ontario that unions – I think they call themselves the Working Families coalition – spend more money than even the Conservative Party of Ontario on advertising. They are, for all intents and purposes, the largest or the second-largest spender of dollars on advertising during elections in Ontario. We have witnessed in recent years a sharp increase in political union activity.

Now, the role of a union is to bargain collectively for the rights and compensation of workers. It's their job to deal with their employer, to get the best possible working conditions for workers, to get a fair level of compensation. That is the legitimate role of unions.

What is not the legitimate role of unions is to take union members' dues, dues that they're forced to pay even if they don't want to be a member of that union or regardless of the political party that they might support or not support, and to put them towards a political campaign. While it is currently illegal for a union to donate to the NDP or to the Wildrose or to the Progressive Conservatives, it would be quite within the bounds for a union to spend money promoting the ideas of the NDP or, heaven forbid, the Wildrose or the Progressive Conservatives. They could also use it on attack ads, probably not against the NDP but more likely against the Wildrose and Progressive Conservatives.

4:30

This is something that is very commonplace in Ontario. In return for benefits the Ontario Liberals help the unions, and the unions turn around and spend massive sums of cash attacking their Conservative opponents. This gives the Ontario Liberals, which are, for all intents and purposes, more or less New Democrats, a massive unfair advantage in elections. It largely spikes elections in favour of the incumbent government because they're able to do that.

Now, that's not just unfair in terms of elections, in terms of giving one party who favours union boss power an unfair advantage. It's not just unfair from that perspective. It's also unfair from the perspective of union members. In my constituency we don't have a very high rate of unionization, but of the private-sector union members in my constituency very, very, very few, it would be fair to say, support the NDP. It would not be fair to those people that they would be forced against their will as individuals with their own political preferences for whom they support and whom they don't support, to force them to support political campaigns, to force them to support attack ads or promotional ads in favour or against any political party.

Imagine that we had a community association somewhere and the dues were mandatory, but that community association was allowed to take mandatory dues and spend it on ads attacking the NDP for whatever kind of policy. Say there was a policy that they didn't like. It would not be fair to the members of that community association who support the NDP that their dues would be used against the party of their choice. It is a fundamental violation of their basic, individual, democratic rights and their rights to free expression and assembly.

No one should ever have to have their money go towards supporting a political party or a political campaign that they do not support. They should also never have to have their dues used against a political party that they do support. This is basic fairness and equity, and I would hope that the members on the government side would recognize the fairness of this, that passing this amendment would go at least some way in making clear to the public that this bill is not, in fact, what we suspect it's about: trying to increase the political clout of union bosses in Alberta society for the political benefit of the NDP. This is a chance for the NDP to actually do something substantive on this bill to improve the lives of workers. This would improve the lives of workers: to not take the dues of union members against their own will for spending on political campaigns.

You know that it happens. They know that it happens. They know that unions right now have people on their payroll who are nothing but propaganda chiefs. Their job is to sit there and do opposition research and to write blog posts and write propaganda. That's all they do. They do nothing but that. They don't actually do anything

for the collective bargaining of workers. Some of these people on union payrolls do nothing but propaganda all day long.

If those people want to write propaganda all day long, they have the right to do that, but they should not have the right to do that with the dues of union members, the dues of people who have no legal recourse currently to opt out of their union dues, people who must pay dues to a union even if they don't want to be a part of that union. Then those dues can get turned around and used for promoting the partisan propaganda of the NDP.

We know it happens right now. We know exactly who it is and how it happens, and we know that this comes to the direct benefit of the NDP. The NDP benefit from the status quo, where they are able to wash their hands of it and not get their own hands dirty because their union boss friends, who control the NDP – they're embedded in the constitutional structure of the NDP, where union bosses effectively run and own the NDP. They're able to stand back and say that their hands are clean, that they have not gotten their hands dirty, while unions are paying for propagandists with the dues of union members, hard-earned dollars.

People working want to know that their dollars are being spent effectively when they have no choice but to hand them over. When they hand them over to government, they want to know that their tax dollars are being spent smartly and fairly. They don't like it when they see that the NDP spent \$10 million a year on carbon tax propaganda ads. Those ads are an abject and complete waste of money, and most taxpayers cringe when they see them on TV. The good news about when they put those carbon tax ads on is that we're pretty sure that every time people see those ads on TV, the NDP get less popular because it reminds them of what they're doing.

But that is beside the point of it, that it is unfair. It is unfair that taxpayers have to pay for partisan propaganda from the NDP. It is equally true that union members who are paying dues often have no choice because that money comes straight off their paycheque, and they get no choice whatsoever on if they're paying those dues or not, and there is no accountability for how those dues are spent. They have no rights to ensure that those union dues are not going towards partisan propaganda. Even if a majority of the members of that union wanted the money to go to propaganda, if 51 per cent of the members of a union wanted to see their union spend money on attacking one political party or supporting another political party, the rights of the 49 per cent are being violated. We do not have a legitimate right to vote ourselves other people's money for our benefit even if we have the majority. This kind of democracy is like two foxes and a hen voting on what to have for dinner.

Even if a majority of the union vote to support a union boss on supporting a political party or attacking another political party with their dues, the 49 per cent have rights, minority rights. These are real minority rights, the right of the minority in any democratic situation to have their voices heard, to have their own say. In the Legislature the minority have rights. They are entrenched in the rules. The NDP are going to enjoy minority rights in the Legislature very soon, so I hope that they respect them. The minority in any situation needs to have the right to not be forced to have their own money spent on some cause that they would vehemently disagree with.

This amendment is an opportunity for the NDP to do that, to show that this bill is not a transparent partisan effort to help themselves with their own dwindling chances at re-election. I hope that all members of this Legislature will stand up and support it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very pleased to speak to this amendment, specifically because it gives me a chance to talk about so many of the important things that our government has done to make sure that our democracy is strong. In this case Bill 1 of our government was banning corporate and union donations. Taking that big money out of politics has been a huge priority for our government, and I'm very pleased with the work that we've been able to do so far, making sure that voters have their voice back and making sure that voters are able to contribute to the conversations that way, making sure that corporate and union dollars are not influencing our political system in that way.

We followed up Bill 1 with changes to our elections financing legislation. I was very proud to bring that forward. It did a number of important things, spending caps and whatnot, but the other thing that it did was put some real boundaries on third-party advertising, making sure that if third-party advertising was taking place in our province, the advertisers would need to register with Elections Alberta that all of those pieces are in play so that we know who is advertising when there are ads on TV either outside of an election period or within an election period. Taking our province several leaps and bounds forward to get big money out of politics and to make sure that we have some of the strongest third-party advertising rules in the country was a priority for our government.

I will not be supporting this amendment. I'm very proud of the work that we've done. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this, but I will not be supporting the member opposite's amendment to our Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister of Labour didn't say why she's not supporting it. She talked about a bill that every single member of this Legislature voted for, Bill 1, of the First Session of this Legislature. That's something we all supported. That's what she talked about, that that was a good bill. We were behind it. So we agree with what she just said. We passed the bill about this time two years ago, and it was a good bill. We agree on that. But she didn't say one word, not one word, about why she will not support this amendment, why she does believe that unions should be allowed to take the dues of their members and spend them on partisan campaigns.

Perhaps it's because the minister has a conflict of interest. Perhaps the minister has a conflict of interest here in her re-election. Perhaps her re-election depends on the ability of unions to take the dues of workers against the will of those workers, against the individual consent of each and every worker, and spend that on partisan advertisements at the next election. Perhaps they're counting on big union bosses bailing them out on partisan advertising using union dues. That sounds like a conflict of interest to me.

The minister should at least give a reason why she won't vote for this amendment. She didn't give a single reason. She stood up and said: we passed a bill two years ago; that bill was nice. Thank you very much. That bill is not here before us. This amendment and this bill are here before us right now. She has a conflict of interest on this. In fact, I'm not sure how she can sit here and say that she doesn't because her own re-election is going to hinge very much on the ability of the AFL and big union bosses to force people against their will into unions – because they've taken away the secret ballot – and the ability to use the dues of workers against their own will to fund the NDP's re-election.

I'm glad that the minister supports a bill that we all voted for two years ago, but I want to know why she will not support the amendment here right now. I'd like to hear the minister speak to this amendment, not Bill 1 of the First Session of this Legislature. Let's hear the minister.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have a question for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. Not in the speech he just gave but when he was moving the amendment, he mentioned that union members currently don't have the option to opt out of paying union dues, and he said "yet." I just wonder if the member can clarify his position on the Rand formula for the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: First, I'll say that I'd like the government to answer the questions that the opposition is asking. This is their bill, and they need to be accountable for it and answer questions for it. It's a sad day when the opposition is more likely to answer questions from the government than the government is willing to answer from the opposition.

But I'll amuse him with what I think about that. I don't believe that any worker should be forced against their own individual decision to pay into an organization with a political agenda. The minority of voters in Strathmore-Brooks should not be forced to be members of the Wildrose Party because a majority of constituents in Strathmore-Brooks voted for the Wildrose and for me. The minority in Strathmore-Brooks have the right to not fund my campaign. The minority of workers also have the right to not fund the NDP's re-election. The same thing goes. Every single worker should have the right to make their own decisions, independent of what union bosses tell them, of what the NDP tells them.

Now that the opposition has answered the government's questions, I want to hear the government answer the opposition's questions. Let's hear them.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. A pleasure to rise to speak to this amendment here to the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I certainly want to echo some of the sentiments that the minister had brought up about Bill 1 and taking union and corporate donations out of politics. Maybe I'll say it a slightly different way. That means that unions cannot put money into the political process.

Perhaps maybe if the member was a little bit more familiar with the workings of a union and how it's structured – you probably know that the membership has the ability to ask about the financial workings of the union, what they do with this money, and they also have the ability to vote within their union. If they think those monies are not going in the proper places, they can certainly direct how that is supposed to happen because, as everybody knows, a union isn't, you know, the president and the secretary. The union is the membership – okay? – so they are the ones that direct that.

The minister had also made some remarks around Bill 35 with the advertising boundaries that were put in, so I don't think the member needs to worry about how advertising is going to be done. There's disclosure around that, and Albertans, of course, will be able to make their decisions on their own.

I would certainly encourage the member to maybe reach out, learn a little bit more about the structures of how unions work

internally, how their finances work, and I'm sure some of his concerns could be addressed in those fashions.

With that said, Madam Chair, I'm not able to support this amendment at this time, and I would encourage others in the House to not support it as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I think this is a really good amendment. You know, it just, frankly, gives clarity and clarity that would be needed. If you're truly wanting to not have these political donations going from the union, then there's absolutely no harm. It says, "No deductions made by an employer and remitted to a union pursuant to this section may be used for political advertising." What's wrong with that? If you're clearly saying that there's no money that's going to be going towards this – that's what I've heard – then why would you be afraid of having this amendment? I think it's a great amendment.

You know, you had talked about it. The government had put forward Bill 35, the Fair Elections Financing Act. There again they're using that word "fair." The government likes to use the word "fair." We're using "fair" with this bill, and we were using "fair" back then. I don't see why we keep saying "fair." In this case fair to whom? Fair to the union? Fair to these union employees? Not the union employees because they don't have a chance to say. So I don't think that part is fair, but it is for the unions themselves.

This is a good amendment that I can support because it does give clarity and it would help out the bill itself, Madam Chair. So I will support this amendment. Thank you. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. Just a reminder to all members if you could please speak through the chair, not to each other.

Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A3? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to rise to speak to the amendment because I'm opposed to it for a variety of reasons. I think that the members opposite, you know, are dripping with hypocrisy when they come up and bring something like this in, especially when we talked about third-party advertising, when we made sure that the playing field that we're working in is fair for all parties. Like, they would never introduce something that would allow the Rebel media to have limited freedom of speech. They just wouldn't do that. When you look at third-party advertising, when you look at being able to make sure that there's an equal playing field, we've already done that. That's why it was a reference to the election financing act. That's why we looked at those things.

4:50

The thing is that this is a pattern of the Conservative Party, a pattern that we saw when you look at whether charities could participate in any form of political discussion. And what happened there, Madam Chair? They're currently revisiting it because what happens when you limit the capacity of an organization to be able to talk to political conversations is that it reduces their capacity to advocate for the needs of that community. So for charities this has an incredible impact. When it's a group that wants to end poverty and they can't talk to any political parties, it reduces their capacity to be effective. It reduces their capacity to meet the needs of the members that they're supposed to talk about. For unions, they represent the needs of labour interests, so in certain cases, if there

were prevalent issues for union members in a specific sector, they could advocate. Those are political decisions that need to be looked at.

Yes, they are part of the third-party advertising thing, and doing this would be unfair because it's not applied across the board. They are not saying that they are committing to making sure that the super PACs or all of these other ways of making sure that political advertising that favours them in other ways are reduced, but they are willing to make sure that a specific group of people, specifically, workers, Madam Chair – workers. They don't want workers to have a voice. That is incredibly, incredibly shameful for the opposition to say that they have their backs but then come in and say: but as long as they don't have a voice.

At the end of the day, we have to make sure that we lay the groundwork for the democratic process to proceed. You're going to have voices from various spectrums, and that's the point of democracy, to have a political discussion. They just want to preclude it from happening altogether. That is actually not invoking a democratic process; that's invoking a one-sided system, Madam Chair, so, no, we will not be supporting this amendment proposed by the opposition.

I think they need to do better. I think they've seen the willingness of the government to consider the various amendments as they bring them through. We saw one amendment go through today, but when they come up with amendments like this, they're specifically doing it to clarify their position that they do not want to have workers with voices. So, no, I will not be supporting this amendment, and I hope the rest of the Chamber does not as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Once again, Madam Chair, the NDP confuse the rights of workers with the rights of union bosses. They conflate the two. They are not the same. Union bosses are the heads of organizations that people have no choice but to belong to regardless of what they as individuals have decided. Workers are people who are actually paying into those organizations.

This would not hurt the rights of workers to be heard. Workers will always, every individual will always have the right to make a donation with their own money voluntarily towards whatever message they want to get out. If they want to donate their money voluntarily towards an NDP union-friendly organization, they all have the right to do that. As a free man, as a free woman they can hand over that money as an individual. That's the way political advertising should take place, outside of the party structure.

The same thing goes on our side except we don't have organizations engaging in any kind of propaganda based on the dues, the mandatory dues, of people. Nobody is forced to put a single dollar – not a single dollar – against their will towards communications or advertising of any kind on the right in Alberta. No one is. The only advertising in Alberta that people are forced to pay for, the only politics that people are forced to pay for against their will are on the left. So when you have private-sector workers in my constituency who are in unions who overwhelmingly do not support the NDP, why should they be forced to take their hard-earned dollars and hand them to them for their floundering efforts at re-election? It's not fair, and it's not right. They are the only party that is benefiting right now from the mandatory dues of workers. Workers have no right not to hand over money to organizations which are effectively propaganda arms of the NDP.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

We've seen here right now that the NDP have made their intentions known. They're going to do what the Kathleen Wynne Liberals in Ontario do. They're going to use unions. They're going to use union bosses. They're going to scratch their backs, and the union bosses are going to come and scratch their backs back. That's what they're going to do. That's their best hope at re-election, and we're seeing it here because if they had any interest in actually getting big money out of politics from big businesses or big unions, they would vote for this. That's why they're voting against it, because they know it's their only shot at getting re-elected. I know you agree with me, Mr. Chair, nodding your head.

Anyway, we now have seen the way the government is going to vote. It's transparent what they're going to do, but they're going to be on the record, and I'm going to be able to go back to Strathmore-Brooks and tell people. I'm going to be able to tell private-sector and public-sector union members in my constituency that the NDP have voted right here and right now to take their money against their will to try and get the NDP re-elected, and we're going to see how they react to that.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to hope that as the member is going back to talk to his constituents, he also, you know, mentions what I have been talking about earlier, about this reference to big union bosses. They are accountable to their membership, okay? The union is the membership, okay? Those folks are voted in on a regular basis. If they were not doing things that the membership liked, I'm sure they would be voted out. So I'm hoping that the member there will be mentioning that to his constituents and how the accountability – both what they do and the money that is spent are accountable to the membership. I'll hope he'll mention that when he's heading back.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Hunter	Taylor
Drysdale	Rodney	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Smith	

5:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Fitzpatrick	McLean
Babcock	Ganley	McPherson
Bilous	Gray	Miller
Carlier	Hinkley	Miranda
Carson	Hoffman	Nielsen
Ceci	Horne	Payne
Connolly	Jansen	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kazim	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Sigurdson
Dach	Loyola	Turner
Dang	Luff	Westhead

Eggen	Malkinson	Woollard
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	
Totals:	For – 8	Against – 38

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on Bill 17. The chair will recognize the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise, and I have an amendment if you'd like to pass it around.

The Acting Chair: I'll just wait for the original. That will be amendment A4.

Please go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 33 in the proposed section 53.9(9)(a) by adding “seven days after” before “the last day”. This amendment addresses what I believe to be, in a way, a streamlining of this bill a bit so that some services are easier for Albertans to access. In this case our amendment is aimed at making the transition from compassionate care leave to bereavement leave simpler.

Now, none of us want to be in a situation where a loved one that we're caring for dies, and cases where that person dies after an extended period of illness can be very difficult. We should do our best not to add any more hardships to people in this difficult time, so my amendment today is an attempt to build the bereavement leave into the compassionate care leave. Normally compassionate care leave would end at the last day of work of the week in which the person being cared for died, and bereavement leave could be applied upon the death of that person, for additional leave of one week after. What this amendment would do is change the end of the compassionate care leave from the last workday of the week in which they died to seven days after the last workday of that week. This way people would be able to take that extra week of time that would normally be allowed for a bereavement leave without having to apply for another leave. This would remove any additional concern during a period when people already have so much on their minds.

With that, I would ask that all members of the Legislature support this amendment, which I believe is a good, common-sense improvement to the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Any members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Chair, it's nice to see you in the chair. I'm just getting the bound copy of my Bill 17 out. I was listening to the member opposite talk about adding “seven days after” the last day when looking at “compassionate care leave ends on the earliest of the following occurrences.”

Mr. Rodney: Sounds like a yes.

Cortes-Vargas: Well, I'm going to read it, and let's find out.

For an employee to be eligible for a leave, the physician must first certify that. It's editing section 33, section 53.9(9)(a), “the last day of the work week in which the family member named in the medical certificate referred to in subsection (4) dies” and adding “seven days after” before “the last day”. Sorry. I'm just a little confused here. I need some time.

Mr. Rodney: Do you want to just say yes?

Cortes-Vargas: No. I'm going to understand what the amendment is before I vote for it.

Mr. Rodney: You don't understand the amendment?

Cortes-Vargas: Yeah. It just wasn't a clear explanation.

So, Mr. Chair, I'm just going to go through this. I'm going to take my time to understand what the amendment does before voting on it.

Mr. Cooper: Here, I'll trade you spots.

Cortes-Vargas: Yeah? Okay. Go ahead.

The Acting Chair: All right. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this very, very reasonable amendment. I think that my hon. colleague from the northern portion of Alberta laid out the facts of this amendment very clearly. You know, all of us have had the misfortune of losing a loved one, and there is a lot happening around that period of time. Particularly, I think of someone who might have the death of a parent. They're working and have children, and they're dealing with the death of a parent as well as figuring out what needs to happen at home as well as taking care of kids and planning funerals and dealing with wills. Perhaps they're even the executor of the estate.

5:10

All that my colleague efforts to do is to remove one little headache, one extra step that would require that individual to go back to their employer and ask for another type of leave or an extension of that leave. What the amendment clearly does – and I appreciate that the government might need a couple of minutes to put this together. Listen, I think it's important that we legislate appropriately and thoroughly. That's just one of the reasons why you should have sent this bill to committee because then you would have had the opportunity to have a larger discussion on this. Perhaps we could have called in expert testimony for amendments just like this. In fact, we could have adjourned the amendment. I know that the government members are experts on adjourning amendments at committee so that they can come back to them, which is reasonable. Unfortunately, in the ebbs and flows of Committee of the Whole it does present a bit more of a challenge when trying to make decisions in a much quicker fashion.

We have before us an amendment that takes one small item off the plate of a grieving individual, provides them with the opportunity to make – it changes the way that they have the leave so that we can allow them to focus in on the things that are actually important instead of going through the paperwork with their employer. I don't see any significant challenges here. I think it's more than reasonable that this is the kind of thing that we would like to do as a Chamber.

We've heard the government speak at length about the importance of compassionate care, at length about these types of leave situations that are important to individuals, that their employment shouldn't be put at risk for situations just like this. And if you believe all of the doom and gloom that the government talks about when they speak about an employer and how horrible they are, this is the type of thing – not getting the leave right is what an employer might use to reprimand an individual. We certainly wouldn't want that. Now, I don't believe that that's the case in the vast majority of employment-employer relationships.

I think that my colleague is providing a reasonable solution. He's not asking for a massive, significant change. I see no reason why we shouldn't be able to move on this amendment and move on it quickly, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to do so.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to the member for bringing forward this amendment. Essentially, what this amendment would do in the case of the death of the family member named on the medical certificate is give an additional seven days in a form of bereavement leave, is my understanding. What we have tried to do very much and one of the founding principles of what I've brought forward was to mirror the federal employment insurance leaves and to mirror the system that exists federally, giving Albertans job protection so that they could access those existing federal EI leaves. For that reason, we've worked to not deviate from the federal leaves.

What we did do, though, was bring in a bereavement leave. Your amendment, I think, could potentially cause confusion because someone may take those additional seven days and then also request a bereavement leave. Is that your intention? Should someone be able to do both of those things? We heard through the consultations and the round-tables with stakeholders a desire for clear leaves, clarity between the leaves. We did consider doing some sort of combined leaves, and it was employers who specifically said: "We would like to have distinct leaves. We'd like to know what our employees are entitled to. We'd like to go through that."

Certainly, the member opposite just recently spoke to that, that many employers and employees will come to their own arrangements. What we're talking about in this legislation, in employment standards, is minimum standards. What is the bare minimum that every Albertan has the right to expect? In many cases, particularly when dealing with tragic circumstances, three days of bereavement leave is not adequate for many people, and alternate accommodations may need to be made. What is in our employment standards is the minimum.

While I appreciate the intent behind this amendment and I see the good intention that is driving it, for clarity, to make sure that we're mirroring the federal EI leaves and to be responsive to employers, who asked us to make sure that we had some of those clear basics defined going forward, I will not be supporting the amendment. But I do, certainly, in drafting employment standards, encourage all employers and employees to continue to work together productively to make the arrangements necessary that they need.

I'm very proud that we have legislation that mirrors the federal employment insurance leaves and will provide job protection for Albertans who have not had that. It's certainly a big step forward. I'm glad that we were able to bring forward the improvements to compassionate care leave and the addition of a bereavement leave, that previously wasn't there, as well as many of the other leaves that we've introduced to the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you to the member.

The Acting Chair: The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Yes. Thank you, Minister. It was my belief that the information was shared with your department before, and if it wasn't, that's too bad. You know, I'm a little confused that this is called the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. Maybe it should be the federal-friendly act if you're more worried about mirroring the federal act than you are about families.

Unfortunately, I lost a son – he was killed at 21 – so I know what bereavement is in these situations. You know, it's difficult if you

haven't been there, and I hope that none of you have or ever will. When you're in that situation, you're not thinking clearly. You can't be filling out forms and asking for bereavement. So this would just make that simpler and more family friendly.

I'm not worried about the federal government. But I don't want to criticize. Good for this. I mean, when I lost my son, I was a farmer. We don't worry about unions and agreements, and I'll tell you that the whole community came together, did my farm work, did the work, and I could take all the time I wanted. So you don't need all these laws.

I get it that people in the city are union people, and you need the laws. You don't have the common sense or employers and employees that respect each other and work together.

To make it family friendly, I think this is probably a pretty good addition, but if you're more worried about mirroring the federal act, I get it. You know, I know that you guys have the power to vote against it, so I'm just making my case.

Ms Gray: I do want to say thank you because your office did send it earlier this afternoon, so I appreciate that. I do see the positive intent here, but given the large number of changes for Alberta employers, those who have been just providing the minimum, certainly not all employers, making sure that we have clear communication about each leave, its length, and how that works is one of my priorities as well as responding to the feedback that we received from employers during the round-tables and then having that mirroring so that when someone qualifies for the federal leave, they know that they have job protection that matches that.

Thank you very much for thinking about ways that we can make Alberta families and their lives better.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:19 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Rodney	Taylor
Drysdale	Swann	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd
Babcock	Ganley	McLean
Bilous	Gray	Miller
Carlier	Hinkley	Miranda
Carson	Hoffman	Nielsen
Ceci	Horne	Payne
Connolly	Jansen	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kazim	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Sigurdson
Dach	Loyola	Turner
Dang	Luff	Westhead
Eggen	Malkinson	Woollard
Feehan		

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 37
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[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on Bill 17. The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Today I'm extremely proud to be speaking to the importance of Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. This government is bringing positive change by recognizing the changing face of Alberta and the conditions that workers face. This government recognized a need for change.

With this bill we are taking huge steps in modernizing the workplace to help protect workers and their families from losing their jobs from everyday challenges and seeking to reinforce the notion that workers are the backbone of this province. These fair and modern and balanced workplace laws protect the rights of hard-working Albertans, support Albertan families, and help our businesses stay competitive without sacrificing the health of our citizens.

This legislation is long overdue. Alberta hasn't made any serious changes to workplace laws for nearly 30 years despite the changing demographics and makeup of this province. As someone who has worked closely with organized labour, I know how important this legislation is to working people of Alberta. As a former active union member I worked hard to protect the rights of my fellow workers and local union members. Now as an MLA I have the opportunity to enhance the protection of workers all across this province.

Many people are asking: why now, or why should we make big changes on the back of a recession? Let us be clear. We recognize your concerns but know that enhancing workplace protection and ensuring the rights of people who are working hard to provide for their families can't wait and simply shouldn't wait. This has been put off too long, and this party is proud to stand with the working-class people of Alberta and let them know that we are putting their interests first despite calls for delay.

We have consulted with many stakeholders, those who represent small and large businesses as well as those who represent workers all across the province. We have listened to Albertans, and we know that protecting the working people of this province is what this government was elected to do. We conducted a focused review over the period of five weeks, and it became clear that the time to act was now. We worked with groups such as the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the city of Medicine Hat, and Unifor while also receiving close to 7,000 submissions through e-mail, letters, and online surveys regarding the labour code. All of this feedback has been taken into consideration.

We have heard from countless Albertans with many heart-breaking stories. While I won't delve into these stories again, we know that there are problems with our labour system, and they need fixing. Whether it be caring for your sick child, burying a loved one and having time to grieve, being able to recover from illness without the fear of termination, or being able to escape domestic violence without the pressure to return to work after a traumatic experience, these things matter.

Groups from across the country and across the province are seeing what this government is doing and recognizing that we are taking this province into the 21st century. Let me be clear. The rights of workers should not be a partisan issue, not in 2017 nor ever again.

Some key changes that we are making include making sure that overtime is recognized and paid out properly, something that has long been in place in other jurisdictions across the country. We are making sure that youth are safe while still providing them the opportunity to gain important life skills by enforcing the minimum age of work of 13. This is an international standard, and we are happy to make sure that we can protect children from pressure to work at such a young age. Education shouldn't be sacrificed for spending money or work experience.

To those who question the results these changes will have on business, I implore you to do research on how satisfaction and job

security play out in the morale and efficiency of workers. Workers who aren't sick or stressed perform better, and businesses reap the results. If someone comes in sick, not only is their productivity down, but they become a health concern. Whether it be doing a job dangerously or spreading illness, the ultimate costs of these things vastly outweigh the cost of letting someone recover. Businesses suffer the costs of illness, and so do taxpayers. Getting someone healthy as quickly as possible should be the preferred *modus operandi* as opposed to having someone prolong their illness and burden a workplace or emergency room. These same points are pertinent when it comes to grieving, caring for sick children, or escaping domestic violence. If your mind is elsewhere, your productivity suffers, and so does your mental health.

People in the fields of organized labour are giving this government a pat on the back. We want to make sure that those who want to organize have the opportunity to do so without intimidation from employers, who often create a narrative through guilt and scare tactics, acting as if workers uniting to secure their rights makes the company a victim. Our proposed system for certification is simpler, quicker, and it avoids undue influence that can occur between votes.

In response to the media and the public's concern about eliminating the secret ballot, we are not doing that. We have decided to shift to a hybrid system, where the secret ballot votes will take place if unionization approval is not overwhelming. For situations in which the Labour Relations Board finds 40 to 65 per cent of workers seek to join a union, a secret ballot will occur. In a situation where that number is over 65 per cent, a considerable majority, a vote would not be required as it would be unnecessary.

We have protected Albertans through making sure that continuing care facilities are included in essential services.

5:30

Before I close, I want to thank all the Albertans, stakeholders, and the groups that reached out to this government to let us know your concerns with the current employment and labour landscape in this province. This government takes pride in its consultation practices with stakeholders and the public, and this legislation comes as a result of that. Taking Alberta forward requires us to protect and ensure the rights of families, workers, and unions just as much as those of large and small businesses. We have titled this bill the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act because fairness and Alberta families are two of the core interests of this government and the priorities of this bill.

Thank you to my fellow MLAs and colleagues who helped craft this important piece of legislation. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for having the courage to enact these necessary changes. Advocating for working-class Albertans is one of the major reasons I sought election as an MLA, and this legislation, that I'm sure will help countless Alberta families, is a point of pride for this government and me.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to stand and speak to an amendment to the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, Bill 17, and will circulate the amendment.

The Acting Chair: This will be referred to as amendment A5. Please proceed.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. Well, I'm pleased with almost all aspects of this act, but this is one of the issues that I think either the minister has overlooked or has been subject to strong

lobbying by the agriculture coalition, by some of the large landowners and industrial agriculture operations.

I would hope that we might consider paying overtime to people who work overtime. It's a basic principle of employment. It operates in all other industries. Indeed, we made significant progress with Bill 6 in getting some basic health and safety rights and workers' compensation and recognized farm workers as equal to all other workers in this country. I applaud the government for finally bringing that good legislation in. I therefore was a bit shocked to see exemptions for overtime for farm workers, when exploitation has been the history of farm workers for a hundred years, and clearly it's going to continue in some, not all, workplaces where there is unethical or exploitive leadership. By exempting farm workers from this overtime pay, it's a clear indication that the agriculture coalition has had a lot of influence in the working groups. In fact, I know they've dominated some of the working groups and softened the right to equal treatment in the workplace for paid farm workers.

The opportunity here is to recognize that these rights under both our Constitution in Canada and as part of the charter of human rights, which gives all workers the right to a safe workplace, to compensation for injury ... [interjection] Who's whistling?

Mr. Cooper: Sorry.

Dr. Swann: I don't need that. Thanks. I'm having enough of a time concentrating.

... the opportunity to recognize these rights and not treat them as second-class employees. It's disappointing, and it's certainly unjust. It's saying that some workers are more equal than others.

Now, I recognize that farm work is different, that ranch work is different, and that it indeed may be reasonable to expect farm workers to work a 10-hour day and not expect overtime, but when we get beyond 10 hours in a day or over 60 hours in a week, surely we could recognize overtime as we do in other workplaces. I doubt that there's a single person in this Legislature that would not expect to be paid a fair overtime wage when it got to over 10 hours in a day or 60 hours in a week. I really doubt that any of us would feel fairly treated if the boss said: sorry, you're going to just have to work overtime and accept regular pay. That opens the door to exploitation. It opens the door to increased injuries and accidents when people are fatigued. When they feel unjustly treated, they're going to be rankling and stressed and not feeling good about themselves or their workplace, and that is not good for anybody.

It's understandable that change is challenging in the ag sector. Paid farm workers are already exempt from time-off provisions under this bill. They don't get the same time-off provisions in a week or in a month. They're exempt from that. Surely, then, we could recognize significant overtime, beyond 10 hours a day and beyond 60 hours a week. That seems pretty fundamental, especially to a government that talks about equal pay for equal work and human rights in the workplace. They certainly have championed that for unionized workers, and I know they believe that all citizens should have the right to form unions. These are some fundamental rights that we fought and died for over generations here, and we're now finally dragging the agriculture sector into the 21st century on these issues. Giving them second-class status as far as hours of work and overtime is disappointing, and I hope that the minister can find a way to acknowledge in this bill that something has to be addressed in terms of overtime, even if not the usual over eight hours of work in a day or 44 hours in a week. Let's at least compromise a bit and extend the right of agriculture operations to only start paying overtime after 10 hours in a day and 60 hours in a week. That's not a big sacrifice to the industry.

I've made my pitch, Mr. Chair, and I think that all fair-minded people will see the wisdom of this not only in terms of health and safety but in fairness and just treatment of paid farm workers. I'm not talking about family members. I'm not talking about extended family members. I'm only talking about those who are hired to do a job as they would be hired to do a job in any other sector of society and have a reasonable expectation that if they're pushed beyond 10, 12, 14 hours a day, which I know many farms require at certain times of the year, they should be paid reasonably and, if not equitably with other jurisdictions, at least get some recognition that overtime requires extra recognition.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the member for the amendment and for the advocacy that you've done on this issue. Part of Bill 17 is the continuation of our dialogue with the farm and ranch community that really continued with our technical working groups, so bringing together farm and ranch community members, owners, labour organizations, and stakeholders to work together as a group to create recommendations for the government. The technical working groups spent significant time talking about the Employment Standards Code and brought to government a series of recommendations. We took those recommendations and posted them online and invited all Albertans to provide their input and their feedback as to those recommendations and where the technical working group had landed. Based on the feedback from all Albertans and looking at the recommendations with Bill 17, we've tried very much to respect the farming and ranching way of life and to accept some of that good advice from the technical working groups and to find that right balance between worker needs and employer responsibilities.

5:40

In the case of overtime the technical working group had recommended to us that employees be exempt from overtime provisions. They provided as their rationale that in most jurisdictions in Canada the agriculture sector is exempt from overtime, pointing to kind of other jurisdictions and that standard, that the hours in the agriculture sector are unpredictable because of the nature of the work, that overtime rates would only lower the base pay rate, which would not increase total earnings of employees and, furthermore, cause complications in calculating pay. After this technical working group, which was intended to be a mix of voices from all sides of the table, came together, the recommendation that they came to was the exemption. I think a large part of that was having to do with just the seasonality of the work and the difficulty in enforcing fixed-hour provisions.

The technical working group's recommendations were something that we took very seriously as we were moving forward with Bill 17. There are areas where we did end up disagreeing with the technical working group because we wanted to find that right balance. One of those areas was making sure that vacation pay was calculated on total wages, not just a maximum of 44 hours per week, so when someone does do that extra work during a time when increased hours are needed in a day, making sure that vacation pay is calculated on top of that.

Generally speaking, looking at what the technical working group recommended – and that consensus recommendation was very important to our government. Moving forward with that overtime exemption, with a series of changes that are, you know, a big change for the farm and ranch community, I think, and wanting to make sure that we are finding that right balance between workers'

needs and employer responsibilities, making sure that we're respecting the process that we engaged with the community on through the technical working groups: for those reasons, I'm afraid I'm not going to support the amendment. I absolutely do understand the intention of it and understand some of that reasoning, but making sure that we do respect the farm and ranch way of life and the work that the technical working group did as we move forward are the main reasons for my decision to not support this amendment.

I look forward to hearing any other colleagues within this Chamber, their thoughts. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A5 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 17? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am rising and wish to move an amendment to Bill 17.

The Acting Chair: That will be amendment A6, hon. member. Please proceed.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 111.

Mr. Chair, in Canada we are fortunate enough to have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the descendant of the Bill of Rights, and contained in the Charter, in section 2(c) and (d), are the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of association. This essentially means that people also have the freedom to not associate. In other words, people have a right to determine if they want to be in a union or not.

If people choose not to be members of unions, they should also have the right to determine if they pay dues to a union they are not part of. Why would I pay dues to an organization that I am not a member of? It is fundamentally wrong to be paying good, hard-earned money to something you don't want to belong to and never had a decision in joining. Forced union membership is like the Borg from *Star Trek*: you will be assimilated, and resistance is futile. But resistance is not futile. Resistance is what makes us human beings with the right to choose whom we wish to associate with.

A 2002 poll found that 76 per cent of Canadians supported the statement that employees should not be legally required to pay dues to a union that they don't want to join. Over three-quarters of Canadians believe in this, yet we are stuck here holding to a Supreme Court decision from 1946 that says otherwise. The princes of reason, as John Ralston Saul called them, the Supreme Court justices of the day, imposed collective rights overtop the individual rights.

I wonder if the Rand formula would survive a Charter challenge today. It is reasonable to think so. It's currently not automatic that an employer will collect union dues from its employees and remit them back to the union. This is one more way that the government is removing choice and flexibility from Albertans. It shouldn't be automatic. Employees should have a choice, and if union dues must be deducted and the payroll system can't be amended to change the deduction for all, those employees should be able to have their deductions directed to a charity.

When you see unions spending millions supporting left-wing political ideologies or parties and being formally and constitutionally part of the NDP, it's no wonder employers and employees want no part of providing them funds. You end up with a situation where the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour takes a leave of absence, goes and runs for the NDP, and then, after he loses, he takes his job back. That campaign and leave were funded by union dues and donations.

Mr. Chair, this is why I have brought forward this amendment, and I challenge the Members of the Legislative Assembly to support individual rights over collective rights. People have a right to determine if they want to be in a union or not. This is the freedom of association. Consequently, people should not be required to pay dues to a union they are not part of as a condition of employment. I encourage the members of this House to support this amendment and respect choice.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Section 111, that the member is suggesting we remove, is referred to colloquially as the Rand formula. The reason that it's called the Rand formula is because it's essentially named after Justice Ivan Rand, who made a Supreme Court ruling essentially making sure that in the labour relations field there is a compulsory check-off of union dues to be deducted when a trade union is bargaining for employees in a bargaining unit.

That Rand formula is, in practice, used in nearly all jurisdictions, so it is considered the standard. It's currently not required in our legislation, but most unions would bargain it as part of their collective bargaining when they're creating their first contract. Here in Alberta not including that Rand formula can be considered an unfair labour practice, so by practice our Labour Relations Board historically makes sure that the Rand formula is accommodated and included in every collective agreement. We are codifying what is the standard practice not only here in Alberta but in other jurisdictions.

5:50

Making sure that we have updated our legislation to account for Supreme Court rulings is an important part of the updates that we are bringing to Alberta through Bill 17. Making sure, again, that we put into our legislation something that is already happening through the Labour Relations Board, through the collective bargaining practices in Alberta is what's happening with our section 111. I will not be supporting the amendment brought forward by the opposite member because, again, it does not acknowledge that there has been a Supreme Court ruling on this, that this is standard practice in Alberta, and that it is included in the legislation in other jurisdictions.

I would, as a final note, mention that there is an exemption for religious reasons to the paying of union dues, and that is standard in the legislation across Canada and, I believe, in other areas. I think what we've put forward in section 111 is reasonable, is mainstream, and is standard practice here in Alberta today.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment. I think one of the things that I found the most

frustrating when I was a member of a union was this pressure or bullying tactic that other members used to have people be a part of the union. In fact, if there was anyone that spoke out against the union in this particular place of employment, the workplace relationship became very strained. I think that we need to do more things that provide the options for employees of unionized workplaces to opt in, opt out of this mandatory membership. Even if there are situations where membership isn't technically mandatory, functionally it can be mandatory by the way that other members treat those who would choose or try to choose not to be part of the union.

Amendments like this provide more flexibility when it comes to joining or not joining, and I think that it is critically important that we do all that we can to minimize situations in workplaces where abuse takes place. The union has an equal responsibility for that, but certainly in my case the union was the propagator of the challenge. I specifically remember a time when I was concerned with our contract. I was working in a large hotel chain at the time that had about 30 different properties, so I was calling all of the other properties – the unionized ones, the non-unionized ones – to find out what sort of contract they were receiving in pay for the exact same job and years of experience and all this stuff and then expressing some significant concern because many of the non-unionized properties actually had better wages.

Certainly, we were in the lowest of the wage category, so I started asking questions about this. I remember clearly the shop steward sitting me down and talking about how we do things as a group and that, "You know, this is going to create a challenge not just for us but for you," this real pressure from the union. If I had had the opportunity, I would have certainly opted out of that particular union.

Anything at all that we can do to prevent these sorts of situations and allow more flexibility in the workplace – listen, if the union is going to exist inside a workplace, I certainly believe that people should be able to opt in or opt out. If this amendment provides any sort of flexibility when it comes to the freedom of association – the freedom to be part of a union, the freedom to choose not to be part of a union – to have more sense of what happens with your union dues, to make a path that's easier for your union dues to not be collected in the first place, all of these sorts of scenarios I think are a positive.

I think it's disappointing that the government is choosing not to pass the amendment. It continually reflects exactly what this piece of legislation is about; that is, doing everything that's possible to appease the large unions, to make it easier for unions. You know, the government always claims that they're on the side of the worker. Well, what about when the worker doesn't want to be part of the union? What about that? Are they on the side of that worker, or are they only on the side of the union in this case? It's certainly disappointing as the government continues to reveal exactly what this piece of legislation is about. It's very clear that it's about making things better for the unions. I hear often the government saying that they're making things better for Albertans, but in actual fact this legislation is clear evidence that they're making things better for the unions.

I encourage members of the House to support the amendment. I encourage all members to reflect upon and consider the fact that not all unions behave in a manner that reflects well on the union, that not all unions behave in a manner that reflects well on this government, and that the government makes claims that they are only here for the worker when, in fact, they are here for the union.

I know that, in my experience, it was very clear that the union's number one job was to take care of the union. I'm not saying that

that's the case everywhere, but that was certainly my personal experience. This particular union didn't reward initiative. It didn't reward ingenuity. It didn't reward people wanting to go above and beyond. In fact, other members did the exact opposite. I would have loved to have been able to not be a part of it. I would have loved to have been able to not have my union dues going to an organization that I certainly didn't support.

If there are things that we can do that can allow that to happen, that make it easier, and also where the union would be respectful of that, of an individual that may or may not want to be involved in

the union, I think that that would be a net positive and, hopefully, a net positive for the union as well. It makes the union more accountable to the members when it's significantly easier for them to associate with the union or not.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. The time is now 6 o'clock. The committee stands adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 31, 2017

Day 42

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Just before we begin this evening, I would like to make an introduction. We have a new face at the table. We're very fortunate to welcome back Ms Fiona Vance, who will be serving as sessional Parliamentary Counsel for the balance of this sitting. This is a role she also filled during the First and Second Sessions of the 28th Legislature. Fiona is a partner with the firm of Shores Jardine in Edmonton, received her law degree from the University of Alberta, and was called to the bar in 2007. Fiona did part of her articling rotation with the office of Parliamentary Counsel. Please join me in welcoming Ms Vance.

Bill 17 Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Chair: We are currently on amendment A6 to Bill 17. Are there any members wishing to speak to this amendment?

Seeing none, are we ready for the vote?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:32 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, just to clarify, we don't do this very often, but we recessed in committee. That's why we started in committee, and we don't do the whole formal kind of process. Because we recessed in committee, we're a continuation of this afternoon's session, meaning that the bells are already reduced to one minute on the same bill. So that's where we're at.

For the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Rodney
Ellis		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	McKittrick
Babcock	Goehring	McPherson
Carson	Gray	Miller
Ceci	Hinkley	Nielsen
Connolly	Horne	Phillips
Cortes-Vargas	Jansen	Renaud
Dach	Kazim	Rosendahl
Dang	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Drever	Larivee	Schreiner
Eggen	Littlewood	Turner
Feehan	Loyola	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Woollard

Totals:	For – 4	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I stand this evening again to speak on Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. Now, it's pretty easy on this one. We could just start with the title, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. This is misleading all in itself. I don't think it's fair to workers in Alberta to take away a proper opportunity for them to have a secret ballot. I mean, this bill definitely reduces that. It's not fair. Right off the bat, that is just not right.

There are parts of this bill that we support, and we went through those multiple times already. These are the parts of this bill that deal with compassion, the employment standards part. We've offered to break this bill up so that we could just go ahead and get this part that deals with compassion passed. But, of course, this government has no interest in that because they have to have this big bill so that they can hide their controversial labour legislation for their union buddies.

Obviously, there's no real concern about compassion here from this government, and that's made even more clear by the dates when this bill comes into effect. The compassion portions of this bill won't come into place until January 1, 2018. But the labour parts of this bill, the controversial parts, the union parts: September 1, 2017. Madam Chair, compassion is not foremost on this government's mind. Otherwise, they could bring the compassion portions into effect immediately or on September 1 also. Why would they have compassion as the last part of this bill to come into play? Because they're hiding their labour legislation in this omnibus bill. It's shameful, it's misleading to Albertans, and it's just not right.

7:40

Now, we know that leading into this bill, the government wasn't ready. We've seen this government filibustering their own bills in the last couple of weeks, bills that clearly had support across the House, that could have been passed immediately. But, no, they decided that they were going to put speaker after speaker up to talk about these bills so that they could waste enough time so that they could get themselves prepared to bring this bill forward.

This was proven again by how this bill was presented to this House. It was presented in a format that I've never seen a bill presented in before, in a full-page document instead of a folded document like it normally is. They had to rush this thing through. They spent the last two weeks wasting the Legislature's time trying to prepare for this bill.

All along our suggestion has been: leave this bill, consult over the summer, and you can bring it forward in the fall. But that's not what they had in mind. They felt that they had to rush this thing through. Now I guess we see why. Because they want to get this labour stuff going on September 1. They don't want to wait until the end of October to bring this forward.

Mrs. Aheer: Except for compassionate care.

Mr. Loewen: Except for compassionate care, of course. We'll leave that until January 1, 2018.

So there's nothing fair about this bill. This government isn't concerned about compassion for workers. There are some good parts of this bill that deal with compassion, but that isn't the government's foremost thought. Otherwise, why would they not have it come into effect until January 1, 2018, instead of September 1 like the labour part of the bill? It's very simple.

Now, this bill should represent exactly which legislation is being changed. The Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act doesn't tell the people of Alberta what's in this bill. It's all fluff, no substance. It doesn't represent what the bill is doing. It's not fair to workers, who are having their rights taken away, or to our businesses, who are trying to create jobs and prosperity in the province. This bill is friendly to unions, though, and not so friendly to businesses. It's a very unfair balance.

This government passed a bill that wanted to get big money out of politics. We brought a motion forward on this particular bill to do exactly that. But, of course, this government didn't support that. They're not interested in getting big money and union money out of politics. It was just so interesting to hear this government talk about this bill and talk about how great it's going to be for the people of Alberta when, really, it's going to be great for the unions in Alberta but not so great for the people of Alberta.

I think that probably another reason why this government wants to make sure that this bill is passed in this session rather than waiting for fall is that they want Albertans to forget about all the poor legislation that they've done. We're over the halfway point in between elections, so now this government has to start worrying about the upcoming election. They want Albertans to forget about things like Bill 6 and the carbon tax. The carbon tax will be hard to forget about because, of course, the carbon tax increases by 50 per cent on January 1, 2018. That will be hard for Albertans to forget about.

They want Albertans to forget about Bill 17. They don't want to bring it up in the fall, six months, eight months closer to the next election. They're counting on Albertans to have poor memories on what this government has done, but I don't think Albertans are going to forget that easy, Madam Chair.

Bill 6, for instance. What's it been? A year and a half? The farmers haven't forgotten about Bill 6, Madam Chair. They haven't forgotten about it at all. The people of Alberta won't be forgetting about Bill 17. They know that this government doesn't care about them. They know this government doesn't have their backs. Otherwise, this government would be talking about the compassion portions of this bill coming forward earlier than the labour portion. [interjections]

You know, it's interesting to hear the other side, when they're speaking, accuse us of yelling at them. They're yelling at me right now. But carry on. Feel free. Yell all you want at me. I'm fine with it. Pot, kettle, black: that's all I've got to say. That's just typical of this government. They say one thing – they said lots of things before they were elected, and of course once they were elected, a complete flip-flop. A complete flip-flop. They sit here and talk about this side being loud and chattering and this sort of thing, but of course they're carrying on here right now, Madam Chair. It's priceless. It really is. You can't make this stuff up. This is too good. [interjections]

Unfortunately, as much as they want to laugh over there, this isn't funny. This affects people's lives. This affects businesses in Alberta. This affects our economy. This affects whether somebody is going to invest in Alberta and bring jobs to Alberta. That's what this stuff affects.

Again, we've offered to separate the compassion parts and get them passed immediately. We can do that any time this government chooses to. All they have to do is make that decision, but they won't do it, Madam Chair. They won't do it because they can't hide their labour legislation in it then. They'd have to separate it, and then they might have to go talk to Albertans.

You know, they sit here and talk about how in 29 years this labour legislation hasn't been touched – 29 years – and then all of a sudden they think: "Okay. This has got to be done with 35 days of consultation." Twenty-nine years are going to be solved in 35 days,

and they're going to have all the consultation that they need. Madam Chair, it's actually despicable. It is. It truly is despicable that this government would suggest to Albertans that with something they feel is so important, that hasn't been touched in 29 years, we've got to do this as fast as possible and that we need to take care of this because it's been so unjust for so long that we desperately have to do this. And they feel that 35 days is justice to Albertans to have consultation on this? It's not right. It's not right.

The Municipal Government Act, that they changed: they had months of consultation – months of consultation – for that. Had it been 29 years since it had been adjusted? Probably not, Madam Chair. They're going to spend way, way more time – months – talking about the time change. They sent it to committee. For months they're going to talk about the time change, but labour legislation hasn't been touched for 29 years. They feel that it is so unjust and not up to Canadian standards and that every other province has all these things that Alberta doesn't have in their labour legislation.

7:50

They're going to sit here and tell us that 35 days is justice to Albertans, that it's fair to Albertans, to businesses that rely on this legislation to create jobs in Alberta. I don't buy it. Albertans don't buy it. There's no way they can justify the minimal consultation that they've done on this bill and bringing it forward haphazardly, filibustering their own bill so that they can finally rush it together and throw it out on the table at the last minute, at the end of the session. Why didn't they bring it out at the first of the session? Why not, Madam Chair? Why didn't they bring it forward at the beginning of the session? Well, it wasn't ready, for one thing. But, of course, it's way better to wait till the end of the session and ram it through, when Albertans don't have a chance to see exactly what's going on.

Madam Chair, this just continues on with this government. Every time we come into this Legislature, we see the same things over and over again: no consultation, rushing things through that fit their ideology, pushing off to committee, and killing property rights legislation. They just killed it. They claim to be the beacon of property rights in Alberta, and what did they do? They killed the bill. They just absolutely dropped it. Again, like I said, hypocrisy: say one thing; do another. That's the definition, right? We see it all the time with this government.

Again, we should just split this bill, take care of the compassionate care parts, get them passed – they've got the support they need; they'll have the support from this side of the House – and take at least the summer to consult. For 29 years this hasn't been touched, and they feel that they can just in 35 days pound it through and that that does it justice? I don't think so, Madam Chair. I don't think so.

But it isn't about compassion. It's about taking care of their unions. It's about taking care of their political agenda, to make sure that they take care of as much of this nasty legislation as possible early in their mandate so that it doesn't get too close to an election in hopes that Albertans will forget. Albertans won't forget. Albertans haven't forgotten Bill 6. The communities that are being affected by the caribou plans: they're not going to forget. They're not going to forget.

Madam Chair, again, split the bill. Let's take care of the compassionate care parts and consult over the summer on labour. Rushing this through at the end of the legislative session is not fair to Albertans. It's not fair at all. It isn't the proper way to do business. "Fair" definitely should be removed from the title. There's nothing fair about that. This government can't seem to help itself, I guess.

Madam Chair, I guess I'll leave it at that. I wish they would listen to Albertans. I wish they would consult with Albertans. I wish they would take some of the good suggestions from this side of the House that have been brought forward, but they just unilaterally turn every single one down.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? Go ahead, Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good evening, everyone. Folks, guess what? I have an amendment. [interjections] I do. I know, right? It wouldn't have been an evening session without an amendment. I am so excited. I am positive you're going to go for this one.

The Chair: This will be amendment A7.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've brought forward a couple of amendments today, and to my huge chagrin many of our amendments, as thoughtful as I thought they were, have not been looked at or, I think, brought forward in a way that strengthens this legislation.

One of the things that I wanted to talk about for just a minute – we keep hearing this, and I'm going to repeat this again just for the sake of going over it because I think it's worth saying again – is that the government keeps saying that they have maintained the ability for workers and unions to have their say through secret ballot. But what they keep forgetting to say along with that is that the target has moved to 65 per cent. What that means is that once that target is hit, that secret ballot is gone, absolutely gone.

It's interesting that they followed along with one of the provinces that's actually changing back, which was Manitoba. In Manitoba, when a union presents cards signed by employees that claim to support the union and it forces automatic certification of a union, for example, then if more than 40 per cent of the employees are signing the cards, it triggers a vote. But if it goes to 65 per cent – and we don't know how that 65 per cent comes to be – then all of a sudden union certification happens without having a vote.

I'd like to say again, for at least the 10th time today, that in a majority of the cases – and this is coming from the brief that I quoted from yesterday. This actually talks about how it strengthens unions.

In a majority of cases the percentage of employees supporting a union increased from the time cards were signed until the certification vote was held. This suggests [that] a secret ballot vote would support those who feel intimidated to sign certification cards, but at the same time, such a process would not negatively impact those who wish to vote in favour of a union.

That's just a comment to everybody who keeps saying that the secret ballot is there. It is not. It is not there. There is not a trigger for it now. It's been moved to 65 per cent.

Having said that, in terms of the amendment I would like to move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in a section in the proposed section 27 by adding the following after subsection (5):

(6) A trade union must disclose on a semi-annual basis to the employees it represents the details of any expenditure of union dues remitted pursuant to this section.

We know that with union dues the money is going to be collected whether a person wants them to be collected or not. A person may not opt out of those dues unless for religious purposes.

The Chair: Hon. member, can you clarify which section you're amending to make sure that we're reading from the same information?

8:00

Mrs. Aheer: You betcha. "Be amended in section 111."

The Chair: Section 111. That's what I've got. All right. And then "in the proposed section 27"?

Mrs. Aheer: Section 27. Yes.

The Chair: Perfect. All right. Go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: I apologize. Sorry for the confusion. It's late.

Anyway, as I was saying, the money from these dues goes to the union no matter what. People do not have the option to opt out. They cannot change the way that those dues are collected unless it's for religious reasons. In those situations, then, a person who is paying their dues can donate them to a charity of their choice. I think that's just fine. But if the money is going to be collected no matter what – the person has absolutely no say on where their dollars are going – don't you think that in order to be transparent to the folks that you are collecting dollars from, on their behalf, supposedly, you should at the very least be transparent?

You already shot down an amendment to make sure that dollars are not going towards partisan events. That's already been shot down. This government said no to that, and I don't understand why. There's absolutely no legitimate reason for doing that. Obviously, it would be prudent for this government to at least show where the dollars that you are collecting are going. Where are the dollars going? You're already taking away the secret ballot from people. Within the working people of this union, who are forced to pay these dues, would it not be appropriate, then, for the trade union, for example, to disclose to the employees where the dollars are being spent? I think that's a very, very reasonable amendment. In fact, it strengthens the union because the union is able to tell the folks where their money is going.

If I was to make a comparison, it would be to look at the government. The government is responsible for being transparent. All of us are responsible to be transparent about how our dollars are spent. Most certainly, all of our expenses are listed. We have to make sure that we take into account our gas, our mileage, what we spend on in our offices. Everything is disclosed so that the public is able to look at all of our expenses and make sure that as MLAs we are spending our dollars appropriately. In the past people have been caught not spending that money appropriately, and that's a good thing. That's part of the accountability.

Now, I brought up an amendment earlier about accountability as well with respect to division 19, that has been taken out of this legislation, which automatically makes it impossible during an illegal strike – that the union cannot be decertified even if they have an illegal strike, which was a good consequence. In fact, I don't even know how many times that actually happened. I don't think it did because the unions would automatically know that if they overstepped that line, they would be held accountable and could be decertified. That section has been removed by the government. Division 19 has been struck from the legislation. Great job on accountability, folks. I'm sure that Albertans are going to love that.

Here's another opportunity for the government to remain transparent. Simply, all it says is: "disclose on a semi-annual basis . . . [the] expenditure of union dues." I don't understand why that would be a big deal. I would think that on behalf of the unions that would strengthen the legislation.

We've already seen in this legislation – we tried to give the government the option to do the compassionate care separately, and this would have put that legislation through right away. We've said I don't know how many times that it's separate from the labour code changes and should be treated as such. It's a very reasonable request. Then what ends up happening is that you end up being able to put those into action right away.

If there is bereavement, if somebody is losing someone, if they've lost a child, if a child goes missing, or any of the other things that are listed in the legislation to protect workers from unions, then we have to make sure that that is invoked right away. Why would you wait till January 2018 to make sure that if somebody is suffering from domestic violence – at this point in time it's not in the legislation. Wouldn't you want that to happen tomorrow? We could have passed that last week. We could have passed it when the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills brought it forward this afternoon and said: let's divide the bill; let's take care of compassionate care because it's obviously important – it's a good idea – and have unanimous consent of the House and have compassionate care taken care of. But, no, the government is putting that piece of legislation, that was supposedly the most important, to January 2018.

You can imagine why we're asking this government to show transparency, and we're asking them to ask the same thing of the unions, to show transparency. All of us campaigned on this. The government campaigned on this, we campaigned on this, and now you're removing the ability of unions to be transparent on several different levels. I would like to understand, again, if somebody can explain it to me, why it is that the government wouldn't want to make sure that that is disclosed. We ask that of ourselves. We ask that of ourselves. As a business owner I have to declare how I spend my money, where it goes. I mean, I have to pay my taxes. I have to do all those things. It is a requirement.

I really believe with all my heart that this is one of those things that the government can do to lead by example and make it transparent so that the unions are responsible for disclosing this to Albertans. It is imperative so that it shows transparency on behalf of the unions. For the unions themselves, it strengthens their ability for their legislation.

Already, like I said, the fact is that the trigger for having a secret ballot has been removed, so if you've changed that and you've taken away a person's right to democratically vote for their decision to be part of a union – like I said earlier, if somebody came in here tomorrow, to the Legislature, and told us that we were not allowed to vote or that a certain number of things triggered a vote only under certain circumstances, and somebody was trying to intimidate me to sign a card to say that I should vote for this person, I think all of us would stand up together unanimously and say: that's not going to happen in a province or a country, for that matter, that believes in democracy.

So why would you allow that to happen to workers in unions? Why would you change the legislation so profoundly that you're in essence taking away the secret ballot? How is that possible? You're following behind a province that is actually right now making changes to go back from that target. If you look crossjurisdictionally at all of the other provinces, they're at about 40 or 55 per cent, but the vote is required. The vote is required because if everybody agrees or if you get the majority of the vote, you strengthen the union. It's just common sense. So I don't understand. [interjection] It is laughable. I'm glad you're laughing because I think it's quite interesting, too, and I think it's really interesting that any time we bring around legislation for transparency, the government laughs.

Again, I can bring up Bill 34, the electricity bill for the Balancing Pool. This government removed the words "accountable" and "transparent" from the legislation verbatim. They removed those words from the legislation so that the Minister of Energy can bring in all sorts of infrastructure and renewables under the wire without letting Albertans know what's going to happen. They therefore had to pay out the Balancing Pool, after spending \$705 million of the Balancing Pool money, because they completely and intentionally removed that language from the legislation.

So we've got that over there, not to mention the fact that the carbon tax was never campaigned on by this government, and neither was Springbank dam, I might add. There are so many things that have happened that bring questions.

Why not lead by example and ask of the unions the same things that you would ask of any of us who are in this House? When I was elected, I had to disclose everything about my businesses, everything about everything I owned, the whole package. Quite frankly, and like I said earlier today, I'm so grateful that the Ethics Commissioner's office is as patient with me as they are because we call them all the time. But as I've said before, I would much, much rather err on the side of asking too much than taking for granted that I can just do whatever it is that I want to do. Like I said, they've been extremely patient with me, and they are gracious enough to answer every single e-mail that we send to them, specifically around things with regard to the Ethics Commissioner.

8:10

Basically, that's what we're asking here. Within the legislation this is an ethical piece that asks the unions to disclose to all Albertans how it is that they're spending the dues. I think we are being responsible by asking them to do that. The question, I guess, should be: why wouldn't you ask them to do that? Why wouldn't you? [interjections] Where is it disclosed? Where can I go see that? Where are the union dues disclosed? I don't know where I can go and see that. I don't believe that it is. What I'm asking is that the trade unions have to disclose on a semiannual basis to the employees so that the employees can see where their union dues are going, because they have to pay them. They're forced to pay them. There is no opt-out. So give them the benefit of understanding where the dollars are going. I think it's a reasonable request.

In fact, I would be surprised if any worker in a union would say, "Oh, no; that's okay; just take my money and do whatever you want with it," although that's what the government seems to do all the time anyway. They forget that taxpayer dollars aren't theirs, that they actually belong to the taxpayer. Maybe it's the same thing with the unions because they are leading by example.

Instead of actually calling for transparency – and I'm surprised that this wouldn't have been in your own legislation. Why didn't you add this into your own legislation? Why wouldn't you call for transparency? This government is the one saying that in 30 years the legislation hasn't been changed. Well, don't you think transparency and accountability should be a major part of that change in the legislation? Then all of the people that vote for this legislation can stand on that pillar knowing that they've looked at absolutely every aspect to make sure that the workers that they're trying to protect in this legislation are truly protected.

Any other company – if a company ever charged for things outside of the scope of what goes on in that business, they would have to disclose that. You would have to disclose anything that's outside of the scope of the fees or the benefits or anything else. So unless you have a very good reason for not wanting to disclose or not making sure that the unions are disclosing, it just doesn't make any sense. It's a very common-sense amendment.

You know, if the government was sincere about the legislation, again, why not split the bill? Why pull out division 19? You have division 25, and as the Minister of Labour said – and she said it very eloquently – there is a penalty, but that penalty can easily be fund raised for. That penalty: the AFL can step in, the union people can step in, or anybody can step in and fund raise and keep that fight going on and on and on while a business goes under. So how does a worker go back to work when the business is destroyed, and how does the business function without its workers? That's not possible.

Division 25 takes care of the penalty, but is it severe enough? Is it the right penalty? I believe the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock said that earlier. There is no balance there. You have this one way to penalize unions for misbehaving, yet you've taken away the accountability piece whereby they could lose their certification if they illegally strike against the company that they're working with. Why would you remove that? There's another piece of accountability that is completely wiped from the slate. I don't understand. It's not fair. It's not family friendly. It does not take into account the workers. How is it that you can justify standing up for the workers when you're allowing unions to be able to illegally strike and potentially have those folks lose any opportunity to get back to work again, especially if that business goes under?

Did you know that a small percentage of unions have had 100 per cent of their certified cards go through, and then when it came to the vote at that time, they had 100 per cent go against the union? It's actually a really small per cent. It's not that big. Quite often when the cards go through, the vote goes through, and it's very aligned, but there are 32 that have been put in the data that, for sure, when they voted, voted against unionizing. Thirty-two accounts. Four of them had 100 per cent that signed their cards and 100 per cent voted against the union.

An Hon. Member: Table it.

Mrs. Aheer: I did yesterday. It's this one. Maybe you should read it.

I was going to say that one of the things that would be really, really impressive is to see the government bring forward pieces of legislation that actually invoke transparency. [Mrs. Aheer's speaking time expired]

Thank you. [interjections] I know; you're so sad.

The Chair: Hon. members, we've had a request for unanimous consent to revert to introductions briefly.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Brett Barden. He has joined us today to visit the Legislature. He is the executive assistant to the national president of the Telecommunications Workers Union, United Steelworkers Union local 1944. He is very proud of the work that unions do on behalf of their members and the representation that they provide, and I'm sure he's finding the conversation extremely interesting. If I could ask all members to provide him the warm greeting.

The Chair: Just for the information of members, I did get some questions yesterday regarding whether we are allowed to revert to Introduction of Guests when in committee. Technically, by the rules, we're not to do that. We can't actually waive the standing

orders when in committee. However, the past practice of this Assembly has been to allow the introduction of guests when in committee, so that's why we're proceeding this way, just so everybody is aware. You don't have to send me notes anymore.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

(continued)

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Wow. Where to start picking through this tossed salad of factlike statements?

Mr. Rosendahl: Word salad.

Ms Jansen: Word salad.

It's almost as if they had watched the movie *Sharknado* and now they're experts on weather systems. I'm going to give away the ending for you: the sharks don't actually travel in tornadoes. So there's that. [interjections] Spoiler alert.

Now, I was interested to hear the words of the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and, of course, before her the words from the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. Fittingly, both of these members spoke about the need to not waste the time of the folks here in the Legislature. I say "fittingly" because both of them are responsible for 99 per cent of the heckling that happens when questions get asked in this House.

An Hon. Member: Ninety-nine per cent?

Ms Jansen: That's what I said. [interjections] Oh, wait. This is the part, Madam Chair, where I say: "Those people across the aisle are yelling at me. I'd like it on the record. Blah, blah, blah." [interjections] And the guy in the Panama hat is over there, too. [interjections] Oh, you can't make this stuff up.

I did want to address some things that are not just concerning to me. I think that they're concerning to a lot of people as they listen to this. I've heard words like "nasty" and, you know, a lot of really negative wording around unions. I look at this amendment and I look at some of the other amendments that the members have brought forward, and I don't believe that they are presented with the idea of making legislation better. I don't believe for a minute that if we'd split this bill to begin with, they would have liked anything in either part because they haven't liked anything we've done. The public has; they haven't.

8:20

I will say this. It's all about, from my perspective, the vilification of union members. Now, you can say "union bosses," and you can use that term as many times as you like – and you do over and over again – but what you are really talking about are the thousands and thousands of Albertans who belong to unions in this province. And let me tell you that I talked to some of them at the Building Trades function I went to tonight. I'll tell you what. You create all the narrative you want about unions being in the back pocket of the NDP. These guys were my sign guys in 2012 and 2015, and they are still with me today, not because of the party I belong to but because they're loyal and because they want to support good people with good ideas.

And I'll tell you what some of these guys said to me. They were talking to me tonight. They were hurt, and I'll tell you why they were hurt. They were hurt because there were a whole bunch of these guys who, in the wake of the Fort Mac fire, opened up their

homes to people with nothing, who were fleeing from Fort McMurray with not even a wallet in their pockets. As they left, their fellow union members reached out and offered them food and lodging and sympathy and a shoulder to cry on and a lot of other supports. When you blather on across the aisle about union bosses, you're really talking about all of these Albertans who help each other out through thick and thin. What you're saying is: "If you've got any association with a union, there is something wrong with you. You're doing something wrong." I've heard the term "crooked." I've heard the term "nasty."

The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky is quite fond in question period of yelling the most egregious stuff across the aisle, rarely gets called on it, and now stands up in the House holier than thou and explains to all of us what it means to be dignified in this House. We're not buying what you're selling.

An Hon. Member: Snake oil.

Ms Jansen: That is snake oil.

They talk about all fluff, no substance. It's funny when they talk about that because every amendment I have seen put forward this session by the folks across the aisle is designed to divide. It's not designed to make anything better that we have worked on so far. It is simply an effort to poke away at this government, using the kind of language that is divisive, and then when someone has the nerve to even make a sound across the aisle and sometimes even when we don't, you want it on the record that you were heckled. In all my years in here I have never seen that kind of behaviour.

You know, they talk about how outrageous it is that the NDP government wanted to take big money out of politics, and from what I've seen of their unite the far right social conservative parties, there's a lot of big money floating around there. In fact, we never really had a conversation in this province about super PACs until they started doing that stuff across the aisle. So there's a lot of hypocrisy floating around in here.

I will just say that when Albertans are watching this, they're not looking to you as saviours from a union. They are looking to you and wondering why you are insulting their fathers, their mothers, their husbands, their wives, and their kids. When the dust settles on all of this, you will not come away looking good. You will come away looking like what you are, which is bullies, because when you talk...

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Chair: Hon. member, we have a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to 23(h), (i), and (j), making allegations against another member. I think you'll find that making an allegation – unfortunately, I don't have the Blues handy, but what the member said is: what you are is bullies. That is a very clear allegation against members on this side of the House. It certainly is not going to add to the debate and very clearly was directed at members of this side of the Chamber and is not likely to create order inside this Chamber. The member is very aware of the words that she chose. She's very aware of how that is going to affect the Chamber. It is mildly ironic that she would choose to make an allegation like that in the middle of the comments that she is making. I ask that she withdraw and apologize.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Obviously, things are getting a little heated in here, but I think that this probably falls under the category of dispute as to the facts. The hon. member was obviously not making an allegation against any one specific member but talking generally about a group of people and about the behaviour of that group of people. You know, there's a big difference between taking a personal attack on one individual person and talking about the behaviour of a group of people, which can be in some instances, I think on both sides, a little bit over the top.

Madam Chair, I mean, in this case, certainly, as I'm sure you're no doubt familiar with, we've seen a lot of this behaviour today. I think, you know, at the end of the day, there is that distinction – and it exists – between talking about one specific person and talking about a group of different people. I think that in this case the hon. member is simply trying to point out the absurdity of the behaviour of complaining about the behaviour of one side while simultaneously doing pretty much the same thing.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to the point of order?

You know, there are some concerns about the way words are used, and in my mind there is a difference between saying, "You are something" or "You are engaging in a certain behaviour," so I would suggest to the hon. member that it would be better to rephrase that particular statement.

Debate Continued

Ms Jansen: All right. On that theme, when you look at a group of people who make about \$50,000 a year and they're working hard and they're paying their taxes and they're doing their job, and a group of people set upon them who make \$150,000 a year and that group has power, influence, money, organization, and a voice across the province, that is the essence of bullying behaviour. Is it not?

I would just say, in closing, Madam Chair, that there are a lot of folks in this province watching this discussion unfold right now. I realize your frustration. You thought you'd get a lot of steam out of this issue, and it's falling flat. You're frustrated, and you probably want to go home early because you're kind of getting trounced a little bit on this.

I will say this. We will cut you some slack, and you do your amendments. You do you – and you'll continue to do that – and we will go back to all the union members in this province and say: that's okay because you actually know who really has your back.

8:30

The Chair: I'll recognize Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, what we're talking about here right now is the amendment, the amendment that says:

- (6) A trade union must disclose on a semi-annual basis to the employees it represents the details of any expenditure of union dues remitted pursuant to this section.

Now, if you were listening to the previous speaker, Calgary-North West, speak, I would probably presume that you have no idea that that's what she was speaking to. What was most priceless about her speech was that it related to decorum in this House. Of course, a point of order was called on the words she used. She had to change her words. Obviously, when she used the word "hypocrisy," it was very well meant. I'll leave it at that.

But there is one thing I'd have to take particular exception to. There were lots of things to take exception to in that speech, lots – lots – that were not true, inaccurate, and meant to be inflammatory. One thing I have to say, Madam Chair, is that when the government

suggests that we don't care about union members, that is false. That is not right. That is incorrect. The suggestion was made that I obviously don't care about my son, who is a union member. My son is a union member. You don't think I care about my son? How about my two sisters-in-law, that I love so much, too? Do you think that I don't care about my sisters-in-law that are members of unions, that actually are union representatives?

An Hon. Member: Then do a better job of representing them.

Mr. Loewen: That's not true, and I take personal exception to any suggestion of that sort.

We are talking about a bill here. In fact, we're talking about an amendment here to bring transparency, to protect union workers so they can see where their money goes. We're talking about this amendment here, Madam Chair. As we've said before, separate the compassionate parts of this bill. We'll pass them immediately. There was a suggestion that we wouldn't do it. Try us. Just try us. Put it to the test. Split the bill. Bring it forward. Prove that we won't do it. We will. We said that we will. It'll happen. But this government won't do it because they don't care about the compassionate parts. They care about the labour parts and their big union friends. They don't care about the workers. They don't care about the union members. They care about their union bosses. That's clear. And to suggest that I don't care about my son and my two sisters-in-law is absolutely false. I take deep exception to it. It's not true. Let's get back to the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Edmonton-Ellerslie on amendment A7.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As always, it's a pleasure to get up in this House and speak to bills that we have before us. In this particular case, I'll be speaking to the amendment brought forward by the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

As has been pointed out by members from the other side of the House, I was a union member. They've said it very clearly: the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie used to be in a union. From that side of the House, not this side of the House. Well, on this side of the House everyone knows, too. And I'm proud of that. I'm proud to have been a union member.

I'll be honest with you. In the union that I was in, I felt that it needed better leadership. Now, don't get me wrong. The leadership that it had: they were good people. But one of the things that I wanted to do was to get involved in my union, and I decided that I was going to work on the bylaws committee. So I put my name forward, and I was selected, voted to be on the bylaws committee. Eventually I then decided to put my name forward as the vice-president of the union. I campaigned, and the members elected me to become their vice-president.

An Hon. Member: Did you say "elected"?

Loyola: I was elected. Not only was I elected, but I was elected with about 71 per cent of the vote.

See, this is the amazing thing about democracy. When you campaign, you talk about your ideas. I used to spend every lunch hour. The lunch hour was what I had free because I had to work during business hours. I wasn't doing anything wrong. During my free time I was going out there, and I was talking to other members of the union, and I was saying: hey, this is what I would like our union to be as we move forward. I got elected.

Then, at the suggestion of many members – they were, like, "Rod, you should run for president of the union." And I said, "Okay; I can do that." I decided to put my name forward. At the

next election I put my name forward and ran, campaigned about the ideas, where I wanted to see our union go, where many people had suggested to me they wanted to see the union go. Gladly I put my name forward, and – guess what? – I was elected. I say this because, to me, unions are probably one of the best examples of democratic institutions that we have in our society. This is what's really important here, right? Members have an opportunity to vote for their elected representatives.

So when the members from across the way start talking about union bosses – and I even heard a couple of times the derogatory name-calling, calling them "union thugs." That's shameful. I mean, we want to maintain a certain level of decorum in this House. We're talking about people. We're talking about colleagues of mine. So it's very important that I just share with the members across the way: please, let's be respectful, right? If you want to call them – and it's really strange, this whole thing of "union boss," because as far as I know, a boss isn't elected to run a business. Am I right? They run a business, and it's their right. They're job creators. They're doing their part for this society, but they're the boss, and nobody questions them. What they say goes, right? They're not elected.

Then I'm wondering: "Okay. Here we've got an institution that's democratic, and people elect their leadership. They have a president and a vice-president and a treasurer and a secretary and perhaps many other positions in the union leadership, the directors of the union, and they're all elected." So I think that the whole concept from the members from across the way, the wording "union boss," is perhaps a little bit – it's a misconception. And "union thugs" is derogatory. I would suggest to the members across the way – many of them I respect a great deal; I would never say something bad about any member – to please refrain from using that kind of language so that we can maintain a certain level of decorum in this House.

8:40

Now, the other point that I wanted to make about unions – and I already mentioned that unions have a treasurer, right? Guess what? The amendment that we have before us from the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View is suggesting that a union "must disclose on a semi-annual basis to the employees it represents the details of any expenditure of union dues remitted pursuant to this section." From my experience – now, I've already mentioned that I've been the president and vice-president and on the board of the Non-Academic Staff Association. I was also part of the chemical, energy, and paperworkers union for a time, another union that I'm very proud to be associated with, which over time has now become Unifor.

But what's really important is that the treasurer – and again I'm speaking to my experience and the unions that I've been in, and I know that this happens in many unions – does a financial report at every monthly meeting. So the amendment that the hon. member is proposing would actually mean less disclosure than what's actually currently happening in most unions, right? You know, I would almost dub this the go-to-a-union-meeting amendment.

I think it's really important that people understand – and by no means am I trying to man-explain; I'm just sharing information with the hon. member – that disclosure is part of the democratic institution of the union, and they communicate what they are spending and how they are spending it at every possible opportunity. I'll never forget that the treasurer in our union – and I've heard this about other unions as well, that the treasurer will always say: "The books are open. If any one of you members wants to come and see what we are spending our money on, what the union dues are that are coming in, what we're spending on, the

books are open for you, membership. Come on in. You're a member of this union, and you have the democratic right within our union structure to know what we are spending our money on because it's your money."

Again I go back to the fact that unions are democratic institutions, and the other important part that I want to suggest is that unlike a corporation, where you have to be a stockholder and you can vote based on the amount of stock that you have in that corporation, a union is quite different: one member, one vote. You know what? I've always been a supporter of that concept: one union, one vote. The reason why I say that is because I've been part of other governing structures – you know, nonprofit organizations or people that are trying to get a nonprofit off the ground or this or that – and people sway away from that idea of one person, one vote. They're, like: oh, well, I'm part of another organization that's going to be part of this group, and I represent 100 people, so I want to have 100 votes to my name. But in a union: one person, one vote. Very democratic.

Disclosing how much money the union is spending and what it's spending on is always connected to the vision of the union. This is another point, that I'm just going to finish up on, this whole concept that, you know, very eloquently members from the other side were talking about, individual rights over the collective rights and the whole concept of opting out from paying your union dues. But then I would ask: well, then, would you opt out of the benefits that the union is getting you because you're a part of that union? I want people to think about this. What are all the rights, the workers' rights, that we've managed to establish?

Sorry. I've got my union hat on, and like I said, I'm not ashamed of it. I'm not ashamed of it. I'm proud to have been a union member, right? What are all the benefits that workers have now and will have when we pass this piece of legislation? I'm so proud of everything that unions have been able to accomplish, you know, since the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Think about it.

And by no means am I suggesting that the members across the way would support this, but think about it. Back in the day children that were eight years old were having to work in factories. This still happens in some places in the world. Children. I have an eight-year-old, and I think to myself: oh, my God, if my son, who is eight years old right now, were subjected to the kinds of things that people in the past were subjected to. Now, I'm not saying that the owners of the factories and the businesses were bad people because of it. They were just following the existing laws of the land, much like now.

The owners, the bosses, the people who run – and don't get me wrong. I understand that these are our job creators. They need to be respected, but we also need to have balance. We need to have balance between the job creators and what they're doing in order to benefit our society and help our economy grow and the rights of the average individual who works for those businesses. When we establish the right balance between those two things, we're going to have a healthy democracy, sustainable communities that thrive, where individuals that live in neighbourhoods have children that go to school, and people are living at a good standard. A good standard of living: that's what we're after, that balance.

Now, when the laws of the land don't reflect the balance that should exist, then that's where the problem lies, and employers, a majority of employers – don't get me wrong. Members from across the way have made the point that there are lots of employers out there that do more than what they should under the current legislation. I get that. That's wonderful. That's beautiful. But not all of them do. Some of them just try to meet the bare minimum.

This is our opportunity. By passing this piece of legislation in this session, we are going to bring the standard up and just have us

match other jurisdictions across our great country. To quote my good friend from West Yellowhead, what's wrong with that?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: West Yellowhead, go ahead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Yeah. Well, boy, I could have fun with this. I've been involved in the union for probably 35 years, and I'm proud of it, very proud of it. I've had many positions in the union, many, whether it was president of the labour council or the vice-president of the union at the mill. I had many positions: shop steward, general shop steward, presenting grievances to arbitration, all these things. I've done that, representing our union brothers and sisters throughout West Yellowhead, throughout Alberta and Canada, when I represented members at the Canadian Labour Congress, and I was proud of it.

8:50

But I'll tell you what is really disappointing. When I hear about the way in which we look after our money, I'm really concerned about some of the I call it silliness, because people don't understand. And echoing my brother – because in the union movement he is my brother. They're brothers and sisters, and they're treated as such. Okay? That's the way it is in the union movement. But when we look at the money side of it, the member mentioned about the treasurer and the treasurer's reports done monthly. I'll tell you what. My last job was a trustee. What does a trustee do? There were three of us. We oversaw the books of the union. We oversaw every nickel and dime that was spent. Every nickel and dime that came into the union we also recorded and made sure that it was correct.

This amendment here flies in the face of what we did. You don't obviously understand. When we filled out our reports, who did we answer to? Our membership. Any time any of our members had a concern or a question about some spending or something like that, they could come and see us, and we would open the books for their perusal. That is good union stewardship, looking after the money, and that's important.

When you look at amendments like this, this is silly, because we do all those things already in accounting to our members on what the money is used for, where it's going at any time. We did that whether it was at the local level with the union. We did that at the labour council. We did that at the federation. We did that at the Canadian Labour Congress. Every nickel and dime is accounted for and where it goes. And you know what? Every member has a right to vote on it. You can't spend any money until the union members okay it. That's the way it works.

So for anybody to say anything else or put out amendments like this is silly, and I can't support it. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I stand to speak to the amendment, which would propose:

- (6) A trade union must disclose on a semi-annual basis to the employees it represents the details of any expenditure of union dues remitted pursuant to this section.

Judging from what I'm hearing from across the way, these members would support that. They are claiming that all unions are doing this. So, then, why would it not be included in this legislation?

We have other items where we've identified that most employers are participating in many of the different aspects of the employment standards. I've heard from members across the way that most are, but maybe some aren't, and it's important that we close that loop.

Now, I believe that this amendment is helping to close that loop to ensure that trade unions are being accountable and transparent to their membership.

I believe that the amendment is actually solidifying what the members across the way from the governing party are identifying as already happening. So I don't understand. You know, I believe it would be wise, then, to include it in the legislation. If you see that there's value in making sure that that accountability and that transparency are there, then why would you not include that in the legislation?

We've heard from members who believe that what's being proposed is not being proposed to improve the legislation but that it's just picking and picking and picking. In reality, this amendment is just ensuring that there's accountability, just to be sure that that will continue to happen. To hear members say, "Well, this is already happening, so it would be silly to include it" would be the same thing, essentially, as saying, "Well, we don't have to do all the good work that's going on with regard to the Employment Standards Code in this legislation because most employers are doing that."

In conclusion, I would just love to see this be part of the legislation that's being proposed at this time to ensure that everybody is held to a standard of transparency, especially when we're dealing with employees' money where it is mandated that they have to give it to the union. It's part of making sure that that accountability and that transparency will continue to go on. That's part of why legislation occurs, to ensure that good practice continues.

I've heard from many with regard to: well, this is already being done. I would encourage everyone, then, to support the amendment as it is written.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A7?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A7 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:57 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Smith
Cooper	Panda	van Dijken
Ellis	Rodney	

9:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	McPherson
Babcock	Gray	Miller
Carson	Hoffman	Nielsen
Ceci	Horne	Phillips
Connolly	Jansen	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Rosendahl
Dach	Kleinsteinuber	Schmidt
Dang	Larivee	Schreiner
Drever	Littlewood	Turner
Eggen	Loyola	Westhead
Feehan	Malkinson	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: We've had a request to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Madam Chair and to my colleagues, for this opportunity to introduce on her birthday my mom, Sylvia Hoffman, who's in the gallery.

Some Hon. Members:

Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday, dear Mom,
Happy birthday to you.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, everyone. Aw. Isn't that nice.

My mom is Sylvia Hoffman, and with her this evening are her husband, David Gordon, as well as – and feel free to stand when I say your names, please – my uncle Larry Tebbutt, my cousin Kyler Tebbutt, my very good friend Jeannette Gysbers as well as her husband, Ed Boraas, who's also a good friend, and their children Tyko Boraas and Anika Boraas as well as my auntie Jenny Yakimik and my uncle Mel Yakimik. Thank you all for being here tonight. Thank you, guys.

Bill 17 Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (continued)

The Chair: All right. Back on Bill 17, are there any further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. May I say: happy birthday, Mom. God bless you.

Madam Chair, I rise for an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies here, and I will begin by passing it off to the page. If it pleases the chair, I could simply read it as it is while it's being distributed or take my seat until you give me further permission.

The Chair: I'd prefer having a chance to look at the original first.

Mr. Rodney: Okay.

The Chair: This will be amendment A8.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. Does it please the chair for me to read this?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 81 in the proposed section 125 as follows: (a) in clause (c) by adding "receives" after "requests" and (b) by striking out "or" at the end of clause (c), by adding "or" at the end of the clause (d), and by adding the following after clause (d):

(e) refuses a leave to which that individual is entitled under Divisions 7, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5 or 7.6.

Now, that's the legalese, Madam Chair. We will put this away and speak a little bit of English now if I may.

I first of all want to thank the minister for a couple of conversations that we've had on this, just in this evening session

and going back to this afternoon. Truly, this amendment is very much in line with the spirit in which the bill is actually written. What we're simply trying to do with this amendment is fill in what we see as possible gaps in the protection of people who are seeking leaves. I trust that we could actually get all-party support on something like that because – let's face it – there's a whole lot in this bill that we do agree with and are happy to support.

Those of us in our PC Party know that the overwhelming majority of business owners are forthright, honest, and decent people. I appreciate the comments of the previous speaker who said that most often, indeed, that is the case. Their hard work is what makes Alberta great. It makes it one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the world to live in and created that Alberta advantage that we've enjoyed. We expect that for most of our business owners we don't actually need these rules because they would respect their employees' requests for leaves.

But, of course, Madam Chair, there are exceptions. That's what this is about. The government acknowledges this in the proposed section 125, which restricts punitive action being taken against workers who request leaves. Again, in commonspeak, what is this amendment really about? It's intended to simply reinforce some of those protections by adding that these punitive actions may not be taken against people that have received some measure under the act and not just requested it. We believe that we're closing the door on adverse effects that may be felt after leave has been granted. Further, by adding that adverse effect on their employment is also prohibited in cases where they've refused the leave, we are making sure that leaves are used for what they're intended for.

We're hoping that this clause will actually stop employers from pressuring employees to go on leave if that employee does not wish to leave. Perhaps we all have had experiences or at least known people who have been pushed into that situation against their will. It might sound like a little bit of an unusual concern, but there have been instances in which this has happened in the past, and we just want to avoid it in the future. So if someone is in a situation where they don't want to take a leave because they do want to keep working and they're completely able to keep working and they want to support themselves and it's medically okay and all the rest, we don't want them feeling pressured into taking a leave that they don't want.

In conversation with the minister a question was asked: does this happen elsewhere? I'll give two examples. From the Ontario Ministry of Labour: can a person be fired for taking leave? I'll just quote this section.

No. If you are eligible, you have the right to take a leave.

You are entitled to be reinstated to the same position you held before your leave if it still exists, or to a comparable position if it does not.

Your employer cannot intimidate you, fire you, suspend you, reduce your pay, punish you in any other way or threaten any of these actions because you take or plan to take any of these leaves.

If this happens, contact the Ministry of Labour.

That is from Ontario.

Now, this is from the Canadian Labour Code, RSC, 1985, c. L-2. It's section 209.3(1).

No employer shall dismiss, suspend, lay off, demote or discipline an employee because the employee is pregnant or has applied for leave of absence in accordance with this Division or take into account the pregnancy of an employee or the intention of an employee to take leave of absence from employment under this Division in any decision to promote or train the employee.

These are just a few of the examples to which this would apply. I understand that some would say that this is already covered. But – let's face it – for people in positions like this, we truly want to

make sure that there's no uncertainty whatsoever. I believe this amendment will close some gaps in protecting employees from adverse effects on their employment because they seek to take a job-protected leave.

I hope, Madam Chair – and I'll end with this – that I can count on the support of all sides of this House because, truly, this is beyond politics. It's beyond anything partisan. It's about protecting our employees in the spirit in which the bill is being given.

Thank you for the opportunity.

9:10

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and thank you very much to the member opposite for bringing forward a genuinely well-intentioned amendment looking to potentially close a gap that may exist in this bill. Because he was able to chat with me about it earlier, I've been able to really consider it and determine that it is, in fact, redundant. Under the current Bill 17, the way it's been written now, someone would not be able to be forced to take a leave. I've been able to confirm that with the help of some of the people who helped to draft this legislation.

So with this amendment being redundant, I will not be supporting it, but I do appreciate the intention, and I certainly encourage continued collaborative efforts going forward. Thank you very much to the member.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A8?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A8 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:11 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Smith
Cooper	Rodney	van Dijken
Ellis		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	McPherson
Babcock	Gray	Miller
Carson	Hoffman	Nielsen
Ceci	Horne	Phillips
Connolly	Jansen	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Rosendahl
Dach	Kleinsteuber	Schmidt
Dang	Larivee	Schreiner
Drever	Littlewood	Turner
Eggen	Loyola	Westhead
Feehan	Malkinson	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, it's always interesting. We all come to this House with different backgrounds. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 17 tonight and to the amendment that I'm about to propose to the House. It's always interesting to take and to listen to the backgrounds and the stories and the diverse perspectives that we have on the bills that are before us, in this case the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

I was interested – I won't say riveted, but I was fairly interested – in the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on his background as a union member. Of course, Madam Chair, I've never been a part of a union, but as a member of a professional association that bargained for me collectively and that often acted in part of its capacity as a union, although we would never call ourselves that, it was interesting to be able to listen to his perspective on how things work in his life when it comes to his union experience and to Bill 17.

I rise today to bring forth a notice of amendment on Bill 17. I will provide you with the original and keep a copy here. I'll wait until you let me know that I can go on.

The Chair: This is amendment A9.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. With this amendment I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 112 and substituting the following:

112 Section 33(a)(ii) is amended by adding "provided none of the applications for membership were obtained by unsolicited visits to employees' residences," after "certification was made."

Madam Chair, I alluded to this in my comments just a little bit earlier, but for 30 years I was a member of a professional association and proudly a part of it. At times it drove me crazy; at times I was very proud of the organization. That's probably life. I appreciated the fact that that organization bargained collectively on my behalf and that it could represent us as teachers when we were working and trying to decide how to fairly represent us before our employers. So I believe that as an MLA I'm not against unions. I see the value of a union. I believe that the people that are part of unions, the men and women in my constituency, are hard working, that they deserve the ability to exercise their right to freedom of assembly and, therefore, their right to bargain collectively, and as their MLA I will represent that position to the best of my ability.

9:20

I believe that portions of Bill 17 are worthy of our support, especially those that govern and talk about maternity leave and parental leave and compassionate leave, et cetera. This amendment that I bring before the House this evening I believe talks about the balance that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie referred to in his comments earlier. Workers have the right to bargain collectively and to be paid fairly. That's important. We do not live in a society that is in the 1750s or the early 1800s, where workers' rights were sorely neglected and abused. Workers have the right to expect to be treated fairly regarding their hours and their wages, their working conditions, et cetera.

Unions are one way that workers can protect themselves from a business that is more concerned with their bottom line than with respecting the rights and the safety of their workers. This, I believe, everyone in the House can agree on. But workers also have rights to be individuals and to be protected from any organization that would impinge on their individual rights, including when that organization is a union. When unions go astray, just as business goes astray at times, when unions impinge on the rights of workers, then we must find, in the words of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, that appropriate balance, for just as we expect an

appropriate balance between the rights of the worker and the business, we would also expect an appropriate balance between the rights of the worker and their relationship with the union.

Bill 17 is called the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, and this amendment, Madam Chair, is asking to fulfill the spirit of this piece of legislation by ensuring that the unions, when trying to introduce a union into a workplace, will respect the privacy rights of any potential member or worker, that when an individual chooses to consider the joining of or the creation of a union within their workplace, they do not give up their privacy rights. This amendment is an attempt to draw some boundaries around the process of certification of workers.

When and where is it appropriate for a union representative to try and get a worker to sign a union certification card indicating their desire to be part of a union? Where would it be appropriate for those conversations to be held, to occur? We know we need to have that balance. We want to ensure that the workers have an opportunity to clearly and without pressure and coercion consider whether they choose to have a union enter into their workplace, but where and when would that be appropriate? There are times and there are places when it is absolutely appropriate and where they should be free to be able to consider and to have those conversations and to be able to sign, but there are also times and there are also places when it is inappropriate, and this amendment deals with that issue. This amendment would place restrictions on union representatives when it comes to the residence of the worker. I believe this to be completely reasonable.

The family home is sacrosanct. As the old saying goes, a man's home is his castle. Home is the one place that a person can call their personal refuge. It's that harbour in the storm of life. It's the safe place, where the rest of the world has to ask permission to enter. It doesn't matter whether you're the government or you're a church or whether it's your neighbour or whether it's the workplace or whether it's the union or whether it's any other organization; they must in normal circumstances take second place to the privacy that you have within your home. This is the safe place for the family, where the rest of society needs the permission of the family in order to be part of that family life.

If the state believes that it must intrude into that family life and enter that family home, then it must have just cause. Madam Chair, only in rare circumstances, for most people, if it chooses to try and enter into that family privacy – they must have sometimes even a warrant. Your neighbour and any person in the general society must either be invited onto your property or they must ask permission. Now, in the rough-and-tumble world of union politics sometimes this is forgotten.

We are all individuals, and we all have the right to privacy. We all understand that while we are part of the larger society and we must work within the confines of the law within that society, we are also individuals. We do have the right to determine when our privacy will be invaded. Governments and society sometimes have to have restrictions placed on them in order to maintain that. But let us be clear. It is a right that we have, a right to privacy.

This is not granted by the state. It's not at the whim of any government. Our right to privacy is enshrined in our laws and our Constitution because we are people, because we are humans. Our Constitution says: "whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law." As we were developing our Constitution, there was a great deal of debate as to whether that sentence should be in our Constitution. While some placed that into the Constitution because they believed that it was important to have the traditional concept of God within the concept of our rule of law, others understood it to mean this, that our rights can be restricted by the state but that we do not derive them from

the state. They come from, in some people's minds, God or, as others interpret it, simply outside of the state or the government.

If the state can give you your rights, then the state can take them away. We are trying with this sentence in our Constitution to understand that our rights are not at the whim of any one particular government or state. We allow the state great power over us, but even it has restrictions, as outlined by our Charter and as they apply to our natural rights. This amendment simply tries to uphold the natural rights that we have as given by God, if you believe, or as simply a part of what we have because we are humans, we are Albertans.

9:30

Now, this amendment places some restrictions that we place on any group, whether it be the state or a union or any other organization, when it's trying to sign up members. When you're trying to sign up a member, this should be a voluntary process, and it should respect the right of any individual to the freedom and the privacy to be able to say yes or no for the reasons that they choose to have and not to be harassed or coerced unnecessarily in order to have that signature on that card or that agreement to join that organization.

There is a place and there is a time for this activity of signing someone up in order to see if they would like to be a union member, but it should only occur at the residence of the worker if it is by the choice of that worker. Yet we know that in the rough-and-tumble world of union politics sometimes this right to privacy is forgotten. Sometimes the pressure to sign and the tactics used to try and ensure that that occurs cross the line. We know that you cannot solicit a worker while you are at work. You cannot do that. It would make sense to this MLA that you cannot and should not be able to solicit unless you have been invited into that home or onto that property in order to do that.

This amendment, I believe, finds balance. This amendment places the power in the right hands at the right time and in the right place. The decision, I believe, must be in the hands of the worker and only the worker, and they must be the ones that request a visit to their house. That is why I fully anticipate that the members across the House will support this amendment. They understand, I'm sure, that while we may all support the right of workers to belong to a union, we also support the right of Albertans to the sanctity and the privacy of their home, that unions, in their sometimes overzealous desire to sign up members, should respect the right to the privacy and the sanctity of their homes, and that they would not abuse, in their desire to see a union in a workplace, the sanctity of that home.

Just as we have drawn a boundary around the workplace, so we draw a boundary around the home. I believe that the support of this amendment, Madam Chair, will allow for that appropriate balance. It keeps the workplace out of the home, yet it still allows, in a reasonable fashion, for the union workers or for the workers that desire to be a part of a union to have those conversations. There is nothing in this amendment that stops the union from calling meetings to encourage people to come and hear why they should be a part of a union, to sign a card that certifies a union, the desire of that worker to be a part of a union. There is much that allows and supports the concept of a union. It just draws a boundary and says that the home, that place where everyone has the right to live and to be private and to take care of their family and to not be bothered by any organization, union or otherwise . . .

Loyola: Can we ban Wildrose's campaigns from coming to our door?

Mr. Smith: You know what? I bet you that if I add that to this amendment, there would be a lot of Albertans that would support it.

But you know what? I think this is a reasonable amendment, and I think that if you think through this, you can see that it strikes the appropriate balance, Madam Chair, that it still allows for the certification process to move forward, but it allows for the worker to continue to work on the job site and to be able to come home and not have to think about the politics of unions or the job. It allows them to focus on their families and the things that are important in life that lie outside of the job and probably the more important things in this life, as far as I am concerned.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Before I recognize Edmonton-Decore, we've had another request to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through to all members assembled Mike Rezanoff and Jeff Sloychuk. They are both from Building Trades, Mike from Building Trades accounts and Jeff from the carpenters' union. Jeff has been a long-time contributor to the New Democratic Party and to the labour movement in Alberta and then the labour movement in the Yukon and now the labour movement in Alberta again and personifies the spirit of the organizer. Both of these men stand up for working people each and every day of their working lives, and we're all better off for it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

(continued)

The Chair: On amendment A9, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to say that it's a pleasure to rise to speak to this amendment, but unfortunately it's not actually, really, a pleasure. We've heard some comments throughout the debate on Bill 17 that have been quite disparaging towards people that, you know, come from the labour movement. My good friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie, as he stated, is very proud of his background roots, and I, too, am very proud of my background roots and do not make apologies for them.

I've had the opportunity to be involved in some organizing drives, and to be painted, quite honestly, as somebody who's invading the privacy of somebody's home – I can certainly attest to the fact that I very respectfully come up to the door, ring the doorbell, find out if it's a good time to speak and if by chance we could schedule a time to sit down, whether that be in the individual's home, whether that be in a coffee shop or wherever else they would kind of like to meet.

Madam Chair, you know, I find some of these comments like "the rough-and-tumble world of union politics" to be very, very stereotypical comments and quite offensive. I think anybody who happens to be a union member in this province would also find this quite offensive. I'm very, very disappointed in the member for bringing these types of comments forward. Again, you know, the

Member for Calgary-North West had pointed out about this repetition of comments that we seem to continue to get because you happen to be associated with a union membership and maybe involved in going out and educating individuals about the benefits of joining a union. As I said, I've always been very, very respectful of people's time and where they would like to meet to have those discussions.

Madam Chair, I am certainly not going to support this amendment that was presented, and I very strongly urge members of this House to not support this amendment.

9:40

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A9?

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, I would like to take a chance on a motion to rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Cooper: Seeing the wonderful progress that we've made this evening, in the spirit of co-operation I move that we adjourn the House till tomorrow morning at 9.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:43 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, June 1, 2017

Day 43

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
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Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, June 1, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let each of us pray or reflect, each in our own way. Let us grant upon ourselves and others the courage to continue the work that needs to be done. Let us remain uplifted and find strength when tempted to give up. Allow us to find guidance from our communities, our families, from one another, and from a superior being if one believes.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18

Child Protection and Accountability Act

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

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Children's Services it's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 18, the Child Protection and Accountability Act.

The proposed legislation would improve the way child death reviews are conducted in Alberta, make child protection more transparent and accountable, and help build a stronger, better child intervention system. When a child dies receiving services, Albertans expect our system to take a hard look at what may have gone wrong, implement changes where needed, and prevent similar deaths from happening in the future.

Our government is introducing this legislation because for way too long Alberta's death review system has failed to meet this standard. This was heartbreakingly demonstrated last fall when Albertans learned of the tragic case of a little girl named Serenity. For all of us here in this Assembly that was a clear call to action that we needed to do better for Alberta's vulnerable children. This legislation is about the thousands of children receiving services in every town, city, and village in this province. We owe them a stronger, better system.

That's why earlier this year our government formed an all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, which I am proud to be a member of. That all-party panel consulted with stakeholders and experts across the province and came together to issue a series of recommendations for improving child death reviews. Those recommendations form the foundation of the legislation being debated here today. As a former social worker before I was elected, I take my responsibility to improve the child intervention system and improve the way we support vulnerable children extremely seriously. I thank all my fellow panel members and all members of the Assembly for the shared commitment to this life-changing work.

Currently the Child and Youth Advocate conducts systemic reviews of death where it believes there is a public interest in doing so. These investigations are discretionary. Under Bill 18 the advocate would be required to review every death of a child up to 18 years old who is receiving services at the time of their death or up to the age of 20 if they received services within two years prior to their death. This goes beyond the panel's recommendation to ensure no child dies in the system without the advocate critically

examining the tragedy to see what can be learned and how we can improve.

Mandatory child death reviews would be a first for Alberta and an important step toward creating a system that learns from its mistakes, but mandatory reviews alone are not enough. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Goehring: We know that a review is only as effective as the quality of information that informs it. In the past barriers to sharing information delayed death reviews, impacted police investigations, and failed Albertans. That's why this legislation proposes breaking down those barriers by requiring any and all bodies with information relevant to a death review to proactively share the material with the advocate. For the first time it would no longer be acceptable to wait until asked because the advocate cannot request information that it does not know exists.

Nowhere is the need for timely, open information sharing more important than between the advocate and law enforcement. Without it, death reviews can be delayed and police investigations could be jeopardized. That's why under the proposed legislation the advocate would be required to communicate with law enforcement and the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General to see if a review will compromise any ongoing investigations or prosecutions. If police then request a review be delayed, the advocate must check in on the status every six months to see if its work can now proceed. To support this, we'll soon be signing a new information-sharing protocol between law enforcement agencies, the government of Alberta, and the OCYA. This will spell out what information will be shared, when, and by whom.

Albertans expect a death review system that is not only transparent but also holds government accountable. That's why Bill 18 would require the advocate to publicly report to the Legislature every six months, informing the public of those reviews that have been completed and the status of all those that have been delayed or are incomplete.

Timelines have also been lacking in our current system, with reviews occurring years after the death itself. Under Bill 18 the advocate would also be required to complete its death reviews within one year whenever possible, and when this is not possible, it would be required to report this delay so that the public would know why.

The public must also know how government responds to recommendations from the advocate. This legislation would require departments to respond to every recommendation, to share this response publicly, and to do so within 75 days. Albertans need to be confident that their government is not only listening but taking action.

Alberta is a diverse, growing province, and reviews must reflect the cultures of the children involved. At the same time, it's a sad reality that indigenous children are vastly overrepresented in the system. Increasing cultural expertise and ensuring strong indigenous input in death reviews is essential to creating meaningful change. Under Bill 18 every review would include an appropriate expert from the culture of the child who died, and a permanent roster of indigenous advisers would be established to provide advice on both a case-by-case basis and on the advocate's overall approach. For the first time the advocate would also be required to notify the families and community of the child when a review starts and finishes and involve them in the review itself, as appropriate, to give them a voice.

This bill would also propose additional legal protections to help family, front-line staff, and others who participate in an open and honest way. This includes a provision to ensure that individuals who report to authorities will retain their anonymity and afford the same privacy protections included in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and a provision that would protect a staffperson or family member's identity and ensure that any information they provide the advocate can't be disclosed by the advocate to be used in court. These protections are also used in the fatality inquiry process and other proceedings. This would ensure that individuals have the legal protections they need to provide honest, open reflections that can help drive real change in our system.

The proposed legislation would not alter the current mandate of the advocate. It has played a vital and trusted role in helping support children and youth across Alberta. Under Bill 18 the advocate will retain its current ability to conduct systemic reviews as it sees fit and to review cases of serious injury or sexually exploited youth in need. Protecting and supporting children is one of the most important roles any government or Legislature can undertake.

This bill is an important step towards creating an intervention system that Albertans can believe in. Bill 18 would create and empower an accountable Child and Youth Advocate to head timely death reviews that hold individuals and governments accountable, that operate transparently, and that share information, and, most importantly, to learn from its mistakes. Ultimately, this is not about enhancing processes or strengthening a system; it's about the more than 10,000 children receiving services across our province today and making sure that we do everything possible to ensure that they have a safe, healthy, and happy life.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all colleagues across all parties to support this bill, and I look forward to participating in the debate. Thank you.

9:10

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, of course, to talk on Bill 18. Since Bill 18 was introduced yesterday, I've been studying it more closely, having a look at that bill in great detail. I have to say that at first I was optimistic about this bill but that, unfortunately, I'm developing serious concerns. The more that I look at this bill and the more that experts across the province look at this bill, the more those concerns are piling up.

My concerns were compounded and increased even more when Paula Simons' article in response to the introduction of this bill came out. Now, Paula Simons is very invested and very informed in the child intervention system and child death review. [interjections] I know the members across the way are heckling about me referring to Paula Simons, and that's disappointing because her work on this issue has been particularly effective and has done an excellent job in raising some serious concerns with the child intervention system in our province. Now, she quotes concerns from Mr. Del Graff, who, of course, Mr. Speaker, is the Child and Youth Advocate, whose office is the one who will be expected now to have extensive new responsibilities and higher caseloads. The fact that he has concerns with this legislation should be a second red flag.

Now, I also personally have substantial concerns that this bill does not accurately reflect the spirit of the panel's recommendations, and I will explain why shortly. But let me be clear on this, Mr. Speaker. I am a member of the panel, and this bill does not respect the spirit of those recommendations. There are

panel members that will be disappointed in the direction that the government has taken.

Now, the number one issue that was identified by the panel was accountability and transparency when you're looking into the death review process. It was pretty clear that there are serious issues with transparency and accountability within the system, and this bill does not deal with that. In fact, I would contend that in some ways it makes the secrecy problem worse.

Let's start with having some discussions about that. Mr. Speaker, what is the part of Bill 18 about a government department having 75 days to publicly respond to recommendations? Now, I can tell you that I don't see it anywhere in the panel recommendations. Recommendation 1 from the panel included:

The Advocate, as an independent officer of the Legislature, will report to a Standing Legislative Committee with the appropriate mandate to ensure accountability, as per the Auditor General's recommendation. The committee can also compel department members to respond to questions and present information.

As a panel member the idea was – I want to be clear on this, Mr. Speaker – that the advocate would have a committee backing it up. The Auditor General has a Public Accounts Committee, as you know. The core of this recommendation was the same. The PAC committee is chaired by the opposition, and it can call department members in order to follow up on their implementation of recommendations issued by the Auditor General after a review.

The Auditor General had given two options to consider. One was what the panel recommended, Mr. Speaker, which was that a standing legislative committee similar to PAC – we must be very clear on that – be built into the Child and Youth Advocate, which is the act that we are dealing with here today. The other suggestion from the Auditor General was an audit committee, which reviews the Auditor General's reports prior to its release. This is a good idea. But this isn't about accountability. PAC is about accountability, the number one issue identified by the panel, accountability and transparency.

The committee proposed in Bill 18 is not a legislative committee. Let me be very clear on that, Mr. Speaker. The committee that is being proposed by this government in Bill 18 is not a legislative committee and is a complete contradiction of the recommendation that the panel brought forward. It's an audit advisory committee, extremely similar to the audit committee that the AG is part of. Bill 18 simply says that this audit advisory committee can make its own rules for its meetings. The only teeth here seem to be that the advocate can require a meeting with the committee to bring a matter to its attention.

Now, I recognize that this bill also refers the advocate's annual report to the legislative committee, which will contain its reviews for the year, but that is not timely nor sufficient. The panel wanted a committee like PAC, with established processes to boost accountability – accountability – Mr. Speaker. The advocate himself is quoted as saying: "The only vehicle I have to compel the government to act is public pressure . . . saying they have to 'respond' in 75 days is just not sufficient." That is the person that this government is proposing to put in charge outright saying that, without a doubt, after reviewing the bill, the bill is inadequate. Or as Paula Simons has said, it is actually "a betrayal of public trust."

So for the government to stand here today and in any way express pride in their behaviour is extremely disappointing, particularly when we think of what the subject is that we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, which is children who are dying or being killed in our care. A betrayal of public trust. The minister and the members across the way should hang their heads in shame when they think about that. It is very disappointing.

Now, the publication ban, which has received much talk within the panel, or an attempt to talk – and we'll talk about that in a minute – has received a lot of press and concerns around it. The one thing that was discussed briefly in phase 1 of the panel was rules around privacy and information sharing. Paula Simons was right to point out that the advocate's reports do not share the real names of children. Serenity's real name, the young girl that brings us here today, was discovered through investigative journalism. The advocate's report, which was extremely useful and important, Mr. Speaker, had her name down as Marie.

Paula's concern is that the body now responsible for doing all the reviews – and, by the way, I think it's very important that we have someone ultimately responsible for doing those reviews because, prior to this, do you know how many internal reviews this government and that department had completed? Zero. Zero internal reviews, which is why somebody has to be accountable. This body is not allowed to publish any such information, as other review processes can and as public inquiries can. By the stunt that this government has pulled, they can essentially make it more private, less accountable, less transparent, and be able to limit information to the public.

On the note of public inquiries, I'd like to read a concern raised by the media: I am concerned that the ability to pursue cases through a public inquiry will be hampered because the advocate is now doing these reviews. Again, the number one goal of the panel, stated very, very clearly, was to get accountability and transparency back into the process. This government has taken steps to make it less transparent.

Will the minister please explain the interactions between the Public Inquiries Act and this bill and what the changes will mean? Most of the panel members wanted to revisit the issue of the publication ban and how we balance privacy with transparency, but unfortunately a select few NDP members of the panel keep trying to punt that responsibility back to the department, and the majority of us can't do anything about this because it's a consensus-based model.

Now, Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, it's only a consensus-based model when it works for the NDP. The only time that we have seen anything resembling votes during the panel process was when the NDP were attempting to shut down the opposition or the external experts. The reason that the publication ban portion is still alive in panel discussions is because the external experts, who have done a great job on this panel – they are excellent experts, very, very professional with lots of wisdom – have sided with the opposition on that panel to make sure that that issue can stay alive. They have worked hard, to their credit, to make sure that the NDP government members on the panel could not stifle the discussion and stop the issue of the publication ban being reviewed and handled appropriately. Instead, if they had not stood with us to do that, the NDP would have swept that under the rug and continued to force through a tremendous amount of secrecy. Very disappointing.

Some panel members are still trying to get this issue on the agenda, and I hope this government will finally let the panel address this issue as a valid concern because it is. The media is saying that it is, the experts are saying that it is, and the opposition is saying that it is. The only people who are not saying that are the NDP in their ongoing work to continue to stifle accountability and transparency within the department.

Now, the staying of investigations is another concern I have. Bill 18 adds new provisions to the Child and Youth Advocate Act that allow the government to pause the advocate's investigations. Maybe all these provisions and expectations in this bill are legitimate, but I'm worried that this is actually just the bureaucrats

giving themselves loopholes in order to cover for other bureaucrats, which is another situation that we have seen during panel deliberations. If it wasn't in the act before, why is it in there now? Will the minister please offer us a hypothetical scenario where the assistant deputy minister would ask for the advocate to stay an investigation pending prosecution?

We obviously know that the advocate was able to investigate Serenity's death while a criminal investigation was ongoing. For peace of mind, please tell us a legitimate example where it would make sense to stay the investigation until actual prosecution. If this power is abused, the only recourse would be through the courts, which is a lengthy process and expensive, too, for both parties, which are funded by taxpayers. The court process also is not clear. Does the application to the court have to be accepted and heard? On what basis will the court make its decisions?

I'm also worried about the burdens and expectations placed on the advocate. Apparently, it's going to be the advocate's job every six months to check in with the people staying the investigation to see if he can keep going. If he doesn't hear back within 21 days, he can continue. How about this alternative? The person can only stay the investigation for, say, two months, and unless they renew it, the advocate is automatically allowed to continue, which was the intent of the panel.

9:20

Designated services. There are also questions about whose death the advocate must review. The government says that with this bill it is going above and beyond the intent of the panel's recommendation, which was: "review all preventable deaths of children and young adults who have received a designated service within two years of [their] death." The current review of the legislation, which is before the Legislative Offices Committee, has discussed the definition of designated services at length. A designated service includes a service other than adoption under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, and the youth criminal justice system. Something interesting here is that the phrase used in this bill is something different: "receiving intervention services as a child in need of intervention." I would like to have the minister explain why the choice was made to go with this language and what the difference is between this and the group of children that the advocate can currently help.

Under this bill the advocate will be reviewing the deaths of children under 20. Legislative Offices just agreed to increase the age of the person the advocate can service to 24.

I acknowledge that this government had a difficult time defining preventable deaths. However, my concern with them going above and beyond the intent of the panel's recommendation is the burden we are placing on the advocate. Does this bill mean that the advocate has to notify the involved family members, law enforcement, DFNAs, and government ministries about a review it has to do of a child that died of cancer but who happened to have contact with intervention workers within two years prior? The government ministries would have to hand over all records of that child if that's the case. Wouldn't this notification of a review add stress to grieving families? Perhaps the advocate should be given some discretion on who is notified based on the cause of death.

At this point I'm willing to keep working with the government because the issue is too important, but I think I've made it clear that I have significant concerns. I've also made it clear that I am not the only one with significant concerns. Many people have raised concerns in the last few days, since this bill was tabled, many people who are not partisan in nature, which should give this government pause, including people like Paula Simons, who has done, nobody

can argue, incredible work bringing the stories of some of the great tragedies that have happened in our system to light to make sure that people can be held accountable and responsible. The Child and Youth Advocate, the individual that this government has chosen to make responsible for all of this, has raised concerns that this legislation will not work for what the government is trying to do and, in addition to that, will actually make it worse, particularly when it comes to transparency and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. The number one issue the panel has seen is issues around transparency and accountability, issues around the government and the department using privacy not to protect the privacy of individuals that are involved but to protect people from being held accountable for mistakes where children have died. We are talking about an extreme consequence: little children, who I know you care about, Mr. Speaker, and I care about and, of course, all the members across the way care about, who have lost their lives in our care, sometimes in brutally violent circumstances, sometimes where they've asked for help, sometimes where people around them have asked for help, sometimes where it's been reported that they've been physically abused, starving, sexually abused, and nobody has come to help them.

On the case of Serenity, which has been talked about so much in this Chamber, that brought us to this process, let's be clear. There is evidence that somebody reported to authorities that that little girl was being sexually abused, starved, and beaten, and ultimately it would cost her her life. Nobody came to help her. This is what we are trying to solve. By the government in any way attempting to go towards making less transparency, less accountability, to slowing the process down, they are, as Paula Simons said, betraying the public trust. It is so disappointing.

I want to close with this, Mr. Speaker. This government has continued to rise in this House, particularly ministers associated with child services and the Premier, and say that the way they have dealt with Serenity and other cases, to get to the bottom of it, was to make the panel. Yes, the opposition agreed to do the panel in order to deal with those situations, but I want to be clear. This government continues to misrepresent the facts when it comes to that. This panel has not been allowed to deal with the Serenity case. It has been stopped by the NDP. This panel has not been allowed to deal with case-level data. It has been stopped by the NDP. In fact, any time on this panel when I've come close to being able to ask questions and find out answers on some of the mistakes that have been made in the death of that poor little girl, the government members on that panel have moved away from consensus based automatically, all of a sudden, and used their majority on that panel to block that transparency from coming to the public.

The public will not accept anymore any government, anybody in the department stopping accountability and transparency when it comes to kids that are being killed in the care of our province, so if the government wants to continue to go down this road and betray the public trust, there will be consequences because there have to be consequences. The children of Alberta are depending on us. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that all opposition parties will not go away. We will not let the NDP sweep these issues under the rug. We will continue to stand in this House over and over and over on behalf of the children of Alberta until the situation is finally fixed.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. If ever there is an issue that will be before this House that should not be politicized, this is it. I know that it's an issue that inflames passions and emotions and that that all comes from a very good place, but when we're talking about

children in the care of our province, where the province has become the parent on behalf of all of us in our community, that is the most serious thing, I think, any of us will ever deal with, and it is something, I know, that for everyone in this House, on both sides, is a responsibility that we take very seriously. I also understand and get where the emotion, passion comes from. At the same time, when we're talking about these issues, I would hope we wouldn't heckle one another and talk over one another.

When we're talking specifically about what Bill 18 is and is not, I think it's equally important that we don't make this bill out to be more than what it is. It is a start. It is a small step on a very long road, and I would like in my comments here this morning to frame it in that way, that it is not going to solve every problem. It shouldn't. It would be inappropriate for us at this stage of where the ministerial panel stands to suggest that it would. It would also be, I think, naive to think that we could do such a thing in this Assembly, as much as I know that each of us would really like to.

What we see in child intervention is the result of a very long line of intergenerational trauma, of poverty, of addiction, much of that as a result of residential schools. We need to understand how it is that we got to the place that we are at now and why it is that we are grappling and struggling and not succeeding, flat out not succeeding, and failing children in our society.

I want to be clear. That's not intended as a shot at this particular government or, certainly, at the people who work in child intervention services or child and family services or Community and Social Services or Health or Education or Justice or any of the departments. The vast majority of people I know who work in those departments are tremendously dedicated people, working in conditions and situations that I know I'm not brave enough to work in. I couldn't do it, yet we have people who do step up every single day and do that.

Is this bill perfect? It certainly isn't. Does it reflect the phase 1 recommendations of the child intervention panel? I'd say that mostly it does. One of the things I've grappled with as a member of that child intervention panel and as I learn more about this issue – and I also think about my role on this side of the House as an opposition member – is the comments that we make in this House, the impact that that has on people working in the system, and the contribution that we may make inadvertently, I hope inadvertently, that I hope comes from a good place but which can contribute to a closed culture, a culture of fear, a reactive culture. When we're dealing with situations that are desperately critical, desperately sad, and just outright tragic, there are things where no matter how good the practice may have been, no matter how many safe landings there may have been – there may have been 500 safe landings in a row – the thing that we talk about is the 501st, that didn't go well. Now, that 501st shouldn't have happened.

I will talk about some concerns that I have with the bill and some of the things I hope to continue to see out of the panel because certainly things are not perfect, not as good as they could or should be. I want to be careful and very clear that I'm not excusing certain ways of working, but, you know, I'm grappling with the need to hold people accountable for mistakes and for bad practice. Of course, we do. I don't think anyone would suggest that we don't. But how do we do that in a way that doesn't create or contribute to a culture of fear within child intervention services, child and family services, within Alberta's public service generally?

9:30

I always have questions about the balance, then, between privacy and transparency. Transparency is an important thing. It's what I think, obviously, this Chamber is about. But I think it's important that we're clear on why it is that we as a panel have not been able

to find consensus on the question of the publication ban. Some of the experts on our panel have argued quite forcefully that, in fact, we actually need to change or extend the publication ban based on the changes that were made, I believe, in 2014, coming out of the fatal care series.

The changes that were made to the publication ban to allow for publication within four days of a death of a child in care were well intentioned and solved a problem we very clearly had. There was a frightening lack of transparency, and a lot of things got swept under the carpet that should not have. That transparency, I believe, is absolutely important, but the discussion around the table has been: "Well, have we gone too far? What is the impact on communities? What is the impact on families? These are families dealing with the tragic loss of a child, who need to decide within four days to make a court application. Is that fair or right? Is that appropriate? Are there better ways of doing that?" That's the conversation that we're having around the table. So to see that that has not been able to be resolved by the panel is, frankly, not a surprise to me. Now, I think that we have perhaps kicked the can down the road further than we might like, but it is still an issue. I can assure you that I'm not going to drop that issue, and I know the other panel members won't either. So I'm not surprised to not see that in the bill.

The question about fatality inquiries. Part of the challenge with fatality inquiries is how far in the future they occur relative to the incident. That, unfortunately, can do a couple of things. It can retraumatize people who have gone through a very difficult situation. The recommendations that we find – in fact, there was a fatality inquiry conducted recently for an incident that happened 10 years ago. Well, without question, the practice that occurred 10 years in the past is no longer the practice today. The learning that happened happened very shortly after whatever it was that caused that particular incident. That isn't to say that we should never have a fatality inquiry. Of course, we should. It's not to say that we should never see a name published. We absolutely should. But it doesn't act in a timely way.

What I see in this bill are some initial steps to address some of those challenges. The one-year time frame, I think, absolutely is an appropriate one. The resources required to meet that, I think, are an open question, a very good question. I recognize that procedurally we can't address it in this bill. It is a process that we'll need to go through. I think the OCYA has some very legitimate questions that need answers. There are only seven investigators in his office. He is certainly going to need more than that if we're going to achieve the timelines that we strive for.

Information sharing is obviously a very, very important part of this bill and something that this bill does not fully address, but it takes some steps to do that.

You know, another question I have is on having culturally relevant experts. I think that's a very important part of the bill, and I'm very pleased to see it there.

Then there's designated funding, which is substantially underfunded. The funding gap between the services provided by delegated First Nation agencies, DFNAs, on-reserve and what children off-reserve receive is not right. Some of those challenges fall into that jurisdictional morass of provincial and federal funding, but children find they fall between the cracks of the different bureaucracies, different jurisdictions on-reserve, off-reserve. You know, that's one of those things I think all of us have a moral obligation to address. This bill won't address that, nor would I expect it to.

You know, in hearing from indigenous peoples and DFNAs in particular, some of the stories of band councils having to supplement their budgets – they're very meagre budgets. I'm just astounded at how small those budgets actually are. Some of that is

provincial responsibility, but primarily it's federal. That doesn't excuse inaction. Are there opportunities for us to invoke Jordan's principle and say: "You know what? We're going to fund that. We're going to make sure that children are taken care of, that DFNAs have the resources they need. Then we'll go fight with the feds in the background." That's the complexity we're going to manage on behalf of children to ensure that they get the services they need so that we can start to move towards some better outcomes. That's what we should be doing.

Certainly, I will be supporting Bill 18. It's a small step, and I would suggest, if I can offer some advice to the government, not trumpeting this as some massive move forward. It's a small step in response to what we saw coming out of phase 1 of the panel. It's an incremental step. There is much, much, much more work to do. I'm certainly committed to doing that, and I hope that all members of both the child intervention panel and of the Assembly are as well.

One of the areas where I think we really do need to do some work, again reflecting on my role in opposition and all of our roles here as elected officials: what are we doing to contribute to a positive culture within child intervention, recognizing that there are going to be times when things don't work out and that when that happens, we should take that as a learning experience? There may be times where we do need to hold people accountable, where something truly has been missed in a way that is negligent, but I believe that those changes that need to occur are not so much on the front lines of the child intervention workers and the social workers and the remarkable people who work there. Perhaps there may be a case or two where that's not true, but I think that in the vast, vast, vast majority of cases, those are the folks that are really doing what they need to do.

As we saw in our meeting last week, a lot of those people will push the envelope, will colour outside the lines where necessary, will not just find themselves in a bureaucratic box because the situations they're dealing with don't lend themselves very well to bureaucratic boxes. There are some remarkable, remarkable people who do tremendous work and who are willing to go: "Well, I know this isn't the rule, but right now this is what's needed. So if I get in trouble, I guess I get in trouble, but I've helped someone today." How do we in the opposition react when someone has done that, but it doesn't go well? What probably happens is that a question gets asked in question period, a news release is issued, and then there's a great hue and cry: well, they broke the rules, and something bad happened. Well, what about all the other times when they went outside the rules or interpreted things in a way that allowed them to help someone that did go well? That's the kind of culture I think we need to be creating.

I think we've also seen in the panel, earlier on, some evidence of a blocking culture, where people came before the panel, relatively senior, and were asked: "Well, what would you do?" "Well, I don't feel that's my place to say," was the response. "What are you afraid of?" That, to me, was evidence of a very closed culture, a culture of fear. When you have people in an organization, especially higher up, who perpetuate a culture of fear, that's not good. That's not the kind of responsive system that I think we want to try to build.

So Bill 18 is a start. It's a small step. It's a step in the right direction. It's not everything, nor should it be everything at this stage. What it tells us is that we have so much more work to do. You certainly have, Mr. Speaker, my commitment to do that work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Elbow?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in support of Bill 18, and I'm really pleased to do so. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow for his very thoughtful and helpful comments.

I'll begin by saying how privileged I felt to be asked to participate on the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. There are some experienced and thoughtful people on the panel who have brought their expertise to thoroughly review our recent and past history of child intervention and to provide recommendations to address the problems and deficiencies within the process.

9:40

Although I was not in the country when the panel was initially established, I have not missed a meeting since the very first meeting, when they began the process, and I was certainly engaged in every single presentation that was given. The information presented kept me even more alert to the issues which have caused all of this legitimate concern. Since February we have been meeting and have heard from a very diverse group of presenters. Their presentations have been informative, challenging, and sad, sometimes all at the same time. The perspectives which have been shared have really provided a very fulsome picture of what is going on, what went on, and what should go on.

There are a number of items which were brought forward and considered very carefully, a number of things that stood out in every presentation, issues such as having all the relevant voices at the table, transparency in the system. It should be effective, culturally appropriate, and improve information sharing. There should be a single entity responsible for the child death review.

Now I will speak to a few of the recommendations from the panel to the minister. The first recommendation was to identify the primary authority for the child death review, and that is the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the OCYA. Within the proposed legislation this would actually, as has been said before, exceed the intent of the recommendation made by the committee in that it is "requiring reviews of all deaths of children under 20 years old who were receiving services or had within two years prior to their death." This bill will empower the OCYA, require that all relevant recommendations from past death reviews be referenced in child death reviews, and enable the advocate to direct recommendations and observations as it sees fit. As proposed in this legislation, the advocate would report to the Speaker of the Legislature for referral to an appropriate standing committee.

The issue of accountability and transparency is also included and is certainly foremost in this bill. Section 9.1 directs:

- (3) The Advocate must
 - (a) complete the review under subsection (2) and make the report of the review . . . within one year from the earlier of
 - (i) the date that [the office of] the Chief Medical Examiner provides notification of the death under section 32.1 of the Fatality Inquiries Act, and
 - (ii) the date that the Advocate first collects information from the Registrar of Vital Statistics under subsection (7) about the death of the deceased person . . .
 - (4) The Advocate must report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly every 6 months in accordance with the regulations
 - (a) as to the number of completed reviews.

Now, I think those are good things, and I'm certainly going to have further comments in different parts of either the Committee of the Whole or third reading.

I want to say that I'm not God, but I can do the best that I can do as part of this panel. We as a government can do the best that we can do. Every single front-line worker who works with children at

risk is not God, and you do not know what may happen that may change circumstances. You can't predict the future. I will not take vigilante action against front-line workers. I believe that our job is to look at how the system works, how the process works, and do legislation that will support the work that needs to be done. I believe that that was what we were trying to do on the panel, and that's what we are trying to do with the bills that we are moving forward.

As the Member for Calgary-Elbow said, this is a first step, and I think it's a pretty good first step. Some people may not agree with that. That's their opinion, and I respect that, but I have been focused, just like most of the members of the committee, to do the best job that we can. I certainly want to see that continue. I know that we've got meetings scheduled until the end of July, so we're continuing to work on this.

As I said, there's lots in the bill, and I'm going to have more to say later, but I just wanted to begin by saying how much I support this bill. I recognize, as did the Member for Calgary-Elbow, that it isn't perfect, but it is a really good first step. So I encourage all to support this bill and move it forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Lethbridge-East?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and talk about Bill 18. I think it's important to acknowledge at least at some length how we got here. I think it's important to acknowledge that kids in care haven't had the government's best for a long time. They didn't have the government's best under the previous government, and they haven't had the government's best under this government. I think it's important to say that out loud because this is a shared responsibility.

You know, Mr. Speaker, very often this issue of children in care gets ignored and has for years until it hits the headlines in the media. I heard the Member for Lethbridge-East, who sits on the children in care committee with me, talking about how this is a good first step. Well, maybe it is. Maybe it's a first step, but this is the 20th or 30th first step we've taken, and I think that as Members of this Legislative Assembly we have to commit to sticking with it this time to get from the first step to the second step and the third step and actually make things better for kids in care rather than waiting another six months or another two years or until the next headline with another child terribly treated and then have another first step. At some point we have to get past the first step.

I would half agree with the Member for Lethbridge-East because I think this is half of a first step. There is some good stuff in this legislation, but it's not as good as it could have been, based on what the committee actually recommended to the minister. Let me just say that the last wake-up call we got was from Paula Simons from the *Edmonton Journal*. Isn't it sad that we have to wait until we get a message from the media in print on the front page of the paper with ugly and very, very disturbing details about the death of a four-year-old child? When I think about that, I think about the responsibility we have to make this better.

Mr. Speaker, we in the opposition have been doing our best to co-operate and push this thing forward, but I have to say that it has been an uphill battle since day one. You know, we started and demanded in this House a committee to make the treatment of children in care better. We pushed the minister, we pushed the Premier – we pushed the Premier, we pushed the minister over and over and over again – and you know what? Sadly, the biggest achievement we've had so far is getting one incompetent minister fired on this file, so we've moved on to another minister. I suppose

that's a small accomplishment. But it won't be felt or seen or heard by children in care, so that isn't really a step forward for children in care. It only is a step forward for the Legislature, we hope, in giving ourselves a better chance to come to a better conclusion on this file, this very important file.

9:50

Mr. Speaker, after we got the first minister fired, who was sitting on his hands, the second minister and the Premier finally agreed to not the right answer but a sort of right answer. The right answer would have been an all-party committee where we could have called in witnesses and had more of an even playing field while we discussed this. We could have actually as a group done this, and we could have done it in such a way that the report at the end of the all-party committee's activity would have been one where no one, including the government, could hide the most uncomfortable details in a minister's office. But the government instead opted for a ministerial panel.

Even then, Mr. Speaker, it was an uphill battle with the opposition members. The government didn't want to have any official records of the meetings. We had to actually take to videoing the meetings and streaming them ourselves until, unfortunately, sad to say, we browbeat the minister and the government into doing half the right thing. They still don't video stream the meetings, but they do audiostream the meetings. It's very sad that it took the sustained, long-term effort on behalf of the opposition parties to get the government to even begin to be transparent, to even begin to be accountable to Albertans for how we treat children in care. We did that, and it wasn't pleasant. We did it because it's important, because children in care matter.

We've moved along the path. Mr. Speaker, let me say that this whole thing started this time around – again, this isn't the first start. This is the 20th or 30th half of a first step, but this half of a first step started because of the case of Serenity. To date in the committee we haven't been allowed to talk about Serenity. Why do we want to talk about Serenity? So that we can talk about how she came to meet her brutal fate. We want to talk about Serenity so that we can make sure that no other child lives in the same place. So far we have not been allowed to do that. I can hardly tell you how disturbing that is.

The Speaker: Take your time, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Furthermore, we don't get to talk about the changes with the staff on the ground that experienced what led up to what happened with Serenity. Yes, I know there will be government-side members that will say that we did have people that work in administration looking after kids that spoke to us, but when we asked them questions that actually would have helped, that would have been useful, questions like, "What would you do differently, and what needs to change in the system?" we universally got pretty much the same answer: well, I don't really want to say. So they've been silenced. They've been silenced.

An Hon. Member: Maybe it's because you were recording them.

Mr. McIver: I'm sorry. I know this is uncomfortable for government-side members. It's uncomfortable for us, too, because I acknowledged right off the start that these kids weren't looked after as well as they should have been under our government either. But whether it's uncomfortable or not, now's the time to talk about it.

Mr. Speaker, when we asked those staffers, those hard-working administrators, what should change with the system, they pretty much universally said: well, I don't really want to say. They've

been muzzled. They've been silenced. I don't know how overtly or how subtly, but they all had the message: don't rock the boat.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Well, if we aren't going to rock the boat, we should all go home. This process needs to be about rocking the boat because the boat is on the wrong path. The boat needs rocking. Kids in care are not being looked after as well as they should be, yet the government is hanging on to the don't-rock-the-boat mantra. It's not a good mantra. It didn't work for our government, and I can assure you that it won't work for yours. It won't solve the problem.

Madam Speaker, it's important that we do rock the boat. It's important that we rock the boat because that's the only way we're going to get to the bottom of this. It's the only way we're actually going to, in the light of day, point at who and what went wrong, how it went wrong, and make it better. There's plenty of blame to go around, but the blame isn't nearly as important as talking about the problem so that we can make it better.

I think I heard somebody use an expression that we don't want vigilante action against the staff. Of course not. No one is calling for that. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East used that expression. No one on the committee has called for that. Nobody in the opposition is calling for that. What we are calling for is to exercise the expression that the best disinfectant is sunlight. Unless we shine light on what has gone wrong, we are not putting ourselves in a position to make it go better.

Children are depending upon us, folks. Bill 18, unfortunately, doesn't get there. There are some good things in Bill 18 that surely we're supporting. Unfortunately, it's probably only half as good as it could be. I asked the Premier about it yesterday. I expressed to her that we're still not allowed to talk about Serenity.

I also heard the Member for Lethbridge-East say that she hasn't missed a meeting. Well, I missed one, and the opposition missed one because, Madam Speaker, we weren't invited. I'm getting a dirty look here, but I'm telling you that the fact is that we were not invited to one of the meetings. That's a fact. You know what? Whether it was an honest mistake or not, we weren't invited to one of the meetings, and that is a concern.

The fact is that until we can actually talk to people that are on the ground – and you know what? Again, the Member for Lethbridge-East talked about vigilante action, but I can tell you that the opposition hasn't talked about that. We've talked about making it better. We've talked about asking people on the ground: what's wrong, why can't you do better, and how would you change the system?

You know what? I really sense that they want to help. The people that work in Children's Services: I really sense that their hearts are in the right place. I really feel that they care about the kids that are under their charge. I really believe that they want those kids to do well and that they want to be part of the solution. Again, Madam Speaker, when given the chance to address the committee, they went silent. I don't blame them for that. Somewhere along the way they got a message that to rock the boat will be detrimental to their employment health. That's the only thing that makes sense to me.

Ms McLean: It happened under your government and the culture of it.

Mr. McIver: Again, I know I'm making the government-side people uncomfortable. They should be uncomfortable, and we should be uncomfortable on this side, too, because we all own this. Those kids in care belong to all of us.

Ms McLean: Your disingenuousness is making me uncomfortable.

Mr. McIver: We all have a responsibility, Minister of Service Alberta, all of us do, including you. [interjection] The minister can chirp if she wants, or she can wait her turn and get on her feet and talk about solutions, as I am doing.

Ms McLean: We're actually acting.

Mr. McIver: No, you're not.

Madam Speaker, I know that the Minister of Service Alberta hasn't got on her feet, and she wants to chirp from where she is, but I'm telling you that I think it's important. If she wants to talk about this, she should stand up instead of running away from the issue. It's not a pretty issue, and we all know that.

I asked the Premier yesterday about the issues that under the ministerial panel are not being addressed and are under the notation of no legislative change required. I would have more comfort with that if the minister said: here are some of the changes we're going to make under regulations instead of legislation. But they haven't revealed that.

You know what? This is the problem with regulations. I understand that regulations are an important part of the legislative process, but regulations can be changed at the stroke of a pen in a cabinet meeting. I think the people of Alberta want to know after this process – and the government should remember that they were browbeaten into this ministerial panel. They should actually take note of that and know that the people of Alberta want to know what we're going to do to make how we look after children in care better.

When a good part of the recommendations of the panel are buried under the heading no legislative change required and there are no details about what regulations are going to be put in place, then of course it takes us back full circle to where we could be back to another half first step again two years after Paula Simons or some other journalist puts something in the headlines of the media. And that's not something that any of us should want, on any side of the House, because, at the end of the day, we're all responsible.

10:00

So I would implore the government, as we go forward, to be a little more open, a little more transparent, a little more accepting of the facts. Again, the facts aren't pretty, but we're not going to get past the facts that aren't pretty until we talk about them out loud.

Again I asked the Premier in the House yesterday what changes, you know, were made on the nonlegislative agreements, and she couldn't name a single one, stating that six weeks was too short. Apparently, it was plenty long for a consultation on a labour bill that affects everybody in Alberta, but it's not long enough to make a single change for children in care. I don't accept that.

You know what? The Premier said to me yesterday in question period, "Your government dragged their feet on this, too," and she's right – she's right – which is part of the reason why we're here. Again, the fault of this, if there is fault, isn't on one side of the House; it's on both or certainly on all of us that have been in government. We need as a team to admit it, we need as a team to talk about it out loud, and we need as a team to get past it.

Now . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for his comments and also for his service on the panel. It is appreciated. He touched on one issue, which is what I keep hearing from this government – and I think it's greatly

unfortunate – and that is the issue around the accusation that the opposition wants to have a witch hunt. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Let me be clear on what we're talking about when we say responsibility and accountability. Madam Speaker, as you know, I'm a dad of three children, a very proud dad of three children. I take that responsibility seriously. In fact, I have said many times in this Chamber and elsewhere that that job is my number one job, to be a dad. I love that job. I'm the dad of a little girl, who, certainly, I want different things for than what happened to Serenity.

When we talk about responsibility and accountability, it's because our system is so broken that right now we're judging whether a child has success in our system based on whether they're murdered or not. That's a problem. I don't think about my children and their success being based on whether or not they've been killed in my care. I have very different dreams for my children, and I expect us as a government and as a society to have very different dreams for the children that have been put into our care.

When we are talking about responsibility and accountability, Madam Speaker, I think it's important to be clear that we're not talking about going after an individual worker who may or may not have made a mistake. We're talking about years of recommendations – years of recommendations – as the hon. member has said, under different governments, multiple governments now, that have come forward to make the system better so that we no longer evaluate it on whether a child has been raped or killed in our care.

The people that need to be responsible or accountable for that are us. It's this government right now because they have the privilege of being the government, and the responsibility and the accountability mechanisms that we are trying to put in here are to hold government accountable, to hold the authorities accountable for why they're not fixing the mistakes that over and over and over are seeing some children die tragic and violent and terrible deaths in our care. We're trying to get responsibility and accountability not just for this government but for this side of the House when it's government in 22 months if Albertans give us that privilege. It's about making us responsible. Somebody has to be responsible for these children.

Right now in my household, for my three children, my partner and I are one hundred per cent responsible for our children, and if something terrible happens like with Serenity inside my household, I sure hope that somebody is going to hold me responsible and accountable as their parent. We are responsible for these children in our care. It is not our responsibility to accept responsibility or punishment for the terrible crime that may have taken place with that child but to accept the responsibility that we have to fix the system to make sure that it doesn't happen to another child.

What you learn – and this is why I want to hear some comments, if I could, from the hon. member – when you participate in a panel like this and you start to do all the reading, what really strikes you are the stacks and stacks and stacks of recommendations that have happened for years and that nothing has happened with them. For me, that is what we're talking about, being responsible and accountable. Albertans expect us to be responsible and accountable for what's happened to these children and to make sure that it's not happening again. And the actions by this government, by not going all the way with the recommendations of the panel, are in my view dodging that responsibility and accountability.

I'd like to hear a little more from the hon. member, if he would, on that topic.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who's been a valuable member of the panel, as have the government-side members – as have the government-side members – and the other opposition parties.

I agree with what he said as a parent and a grandparent myself. If we don't get this right, we can point at each other all day long, but at the end of the day we all ought to point at ourselves, which is why I'm doing my best to make this as uncomfortable as I can so that there's nowhere to hide for any of us, so that we get to solutions on these things because children are still in care. Children are still – you know what? Many get good outcomes, which is fantastic. But this is about reducing and, hopefully, eliminating the bad outcomes. We're not going to get there unless we face up to it. So we continue. We continue.

Here are some things, you know, in the legislation, according to the Alberta government report, where no legislative change is required.

OCYA will advise all families engaged in the child death review process that they have access to supports throughout the review and support connection to the same. Families may access culturally relevant supports as needed. Ensure the family has a designated individual . . . to support the family to navigate the system . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 18, the Child Protection and Accountability Act. I've been around for a few years and have been involved in both the 2014 child death review panel as well as, obviously, hearing and reading reports over the last decade on children in care who have died and have been reviewed by the Child and Youth Advocate. It was roughly, I think, seven or eight years ago, after considerable pressure from the public and from the opposition parties, that the PC government finally agreed to make the Child and Youth Advocate independent, not simply reporting to the minister and telling the minister what the minister wanted to hear and having the unfortunate perception, if not the reality, that reports were sanitized to not offend or embarrass the minister of the day. So I give credit that the PCs, after so many years of not being willing to face the music, created an independent office called the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. That was progress.

I think it's fair to say that we all recognize that there is a particular population of people who are most vulnerable in this society, that are most disadvantaged, that come out of homes that are most broken and vulnerable. Violence, drugs, poverty, a host of issues create the conditions in which parents cannot cope or cannot deal responsibly with their responsibilities. Given that roughly 10,000 children are reviewed annually by child services, they somehow have to make assessments in each case on whether these children would be better in or out of their homes and, if out of their homes, where out of their homes, in kinship care, in foster families, guardians of the government initially. In some cases all of these alternatives prove to be unsatisfactory for various reasons. Either the child can't cope with the particular situation, or the family can't cope with the child, or some combination of social and environmental circumstances requires the child to be again disrupted and moved to different situations.

10:10

With that having been said and the dominance of First Nations folks in this population and our long history of betrayal and abuse

in terms of services for First Nations and the intergenerational trauma that we've heard so much about, in part thanks to more and more awareness and a government today who has been courageous enough to highlight this important, long-standing trauma and the long-standing impacts of this trauma on the kids and the families, what we've come to today is the review panel, that I think has to acknowledge that critically important work, very sensitive work, traumatic work for those of us who hear stories either at the panel or in our everyday lives, in our offices about things that aren't what they should be.

I guess that with the view that we are, in fact, just three months into this review and the government has already come forward with significant changes to the process and the focus of the child death review, I am mightily encouraged by having a bill before us already. I did not expect this until the fall. It's not perfect, but it's a big step forward in terms of clarifying a unified approach instead of three different organizations reviewing deaths, overlapping, creating some perception of gaps, conflicting in some ways, redundant in resource use.

All of this is to say that this is progress. We're now going to have the office of the Child and Youth Advocate review all deaths, whether in care or within two years of leaving care. That's progress. We're going to see, for example, more timely reporting. He or she, whoever the advocate is, has to report within six months on the progress of every death that they're reviewing. They are going to have to complete a report within one year instead of in some cases seeing these dragged out for years and years, with tremendous ongoing suffering within the family, who can't resolve issues completely without closure and the help of the office and its report. We're going to see cultural advisers for the first time required in every case of a death review. These are signs, to me, of a government that's listening.

I think it's important in the context of this whole complicated business of dealing with children to think about the various impacts on these children and families, whether it's their biological family, their family of guardianship, the influences of their community, their school culture, Alberta Health Services and their involvement with that child and family, the social services system and its involvement, the police and their involvement with that family, not to mention the fact that these families grow in a cultural context, a social and economic context that is creating the conditions for significant risk, significant disadvantage. So to blame one system, I think, is really to miss the point, and to focus all of our attention on one system is to miss the point. Every aspect of government and community, not to mention the federal government, which has a huge role here, has to be working together to focus and hone their supports on families and individuals that are at risk.

It may be the case, as our hon. colleagues in the Wildrose and Conservative parties have said, that there isn't enough transparency in these reportings either from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate or in terms of the panel work that we're doing. It may be that there is a need for more recording of statements, perhaps, and more access to the panel discussions by the whole population of Alberta. But, frankly, Madam Speaker, we are a very effective panel, from my point of view. We're hearing from everybody we can think of. We've had in camera sessions that enable people to speak their minds with confidence and confidentiality. Whether they're past employees of child and family services, whether they're DFNAs, designated First Nation agencies, whether they are police, whether they are adoptive families, guardians, we've had a wide range of people tell us the good, the bad, and the ugly about what they've experienced. Some of them are very ugly stories, and they have not minced words about what they see and what they try to do.

I think, all things considered, that in my 12 years here I see significant progress. I don't see a perfect bill. I see a tremendous amount to be grateful for in terms of a ministry that is putting tremendous resources into and a willingness to be open and transparent with anything that we request. I guess I would argue that we're in a process. It's a complex process. It's focused on one tiny aspect of what we've considered to be important in terms of child and family services, and we're making that better, and we will continue to hone that. There may be some good amendments that we will put forward in the next stage of the bill in terms of greater transparency, more accountability for people at the top of the ministry, but this to me is significant progress. Based on second reading and the principles of what we're trying to do here, I have significant satisfaction.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very interested in what the member has been speaking about. He made reference to the fact that there had been difficulties over the years with the reports from the children's advocate. They haven't always been listened to. At least this is a step forward and progress in the future. I'd be interested in hearing a little bit more about his experience with why it didn't work with the previous children's advocates. I know that reports came out from John Mould and John Lafrance indicating significant difficulties in the past. Many of the things that are being moved forward right now are reflections of things that have been asked for for many years, and I know that the member has experience with those previous children's advocates and has some depth of knowledge. We'd like to hear a little bit more about that.

Before I sit down, I also want to add that he has made reference to some of the structural issues, noting that this one ministry cannot solve the problem and that there is a much larger and greater demand out there to change real circumstances in the lives particularly of indigenous people, as I'm concerned about, in order to reduce the number of children coming into care. So I'd be interested as well about some of the other larger structural changes that the member might like to see as we move forward in trying to build on the work of this particular act and to do so much more than what we're doing in this one instance.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for those insightful comments and questions. I have been working in prevention services for 25 years, and it's very clear to me that we as a society have not embraced prevention. We have not looked deeply at the origins of illness, disability, premature death, injury in a serious way that tries to get at root causes. We deal with symptoms. We deal with crisis very well. I guess it's been frustrating for me and for many in this culture to say, "Yes, prevention is where we should be going," and then seeing the budgets go 95 per cent towards crisis and intervention after the fact. The opioid crisis affecting First Nations in a big way is a symptom, another symptom that we're going after in a big way well after the problem has shown itself.

I want to say with respect to the previous child and youth advocates that they did their best under the circumstances that they were given, given the political realities of reporting to a minister, of being paid for by the minister's budget, being overseen by the minister's staff,

being subject to the political whims and sensitivities that were there. Was the Child and Youth Advocate doing their full scope and role? No. They couldn't. I would argue the same thing is happening with other advocates in our province: the Health Advocate, the mental health advocate, the Seniors Advocate, and now the disability advocate. If we're serious about wanting to advocate for special groups and vulnerable groups, they have to be independent.

10:20

I've seen tremendous progress since this Child and Youth Advocate became independent in terms of the depth and the clarity and the hard-hitting nature of the reports that force government, like this particular panel has been forced, to review things and look for change and find out why changes aren't being made when the Auditor General himself has made recommendation after recommendation after recommendation. All this to say that the process of I guess I would call it administrative change, political change has to come about through a progressive increase in pressures and the political will that comes not only out of the office of the minister but comes out of the public and all the bodies that are adding to the pressure to do the right thing.

With respect to some of the many challenges that we're now moving into, phase 2 on the panel, looking at the more systemic issues that relate to child and family services in the province and how we could improve those and reduce the failure rate of those taken into care, prevent those in some cases from getting into care, supporting families in their own locations, supporting First Nations people in kinship care and following up with these families after the death of a child, I mean, that's another area where we are simply ignoring . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading?

Seeing none, I will call on the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to close debate.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to close debate on Bill 18.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has moved second reading of Bill 18, Child Protection and Accountability Act, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Children's Services.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Deputy Chair: We are currently on amendment A9 as moved by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to amendment A9?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now on the original bill, Bill 17. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 17 and I would like to propose an amendment at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A10.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by adding the following after section 98:

Review by committee of the Legislative Assembly
98.1 Within 5 years of the coming into force of Part 1 of the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, a committee of the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of the amendments made by that Act to the Employment Standards Code and its impact on Alberta's economy, and must submit to the Assembly, within one year after beginning the review, a report that includes any amendments recommended by the committee.

Now, Madam Chair, by opening up the Employment Standards Code, the NDP have afforded an opportunity for socioeconomic policy research unlike ever before. We have a baseline measure, the current employment standards. If the NDP are not willing to review this before we implement these changes, then we absolutely need to review them after they have been in place for five years. By making changes to the employment standards, we have an opportunity to have the bureaucrats and the university professors and think tanks step up, monitor changes, study the changes, and quantify their effects on Alberta's economy. Such studies would then be able to be rolled up in a major study by the Legislative Assembly by 2022, a full five years from now. The NDP should be happy for such an amendment because the academics will get jobs measuring the changes.

Knowing that a review and a report will be coming in five years will give some peace of mind to employers and employees that in five years if there are negative, unintended consequences to this act, they will be examined and hopefully fixed. Some union members may find errors or omissions and changes that will need to be made within the next five years. This will provide them with this opportunity. By having this report, those changes can be captured and implemented at that time.

This amendment changes nothing about the bill. It just encourages the next government to review what effects this bill brought upon Alberta. Like the Minister of Labour said – and she often used references to some fairly awesome '80s songs, I must add – it might have been over 30 years since this legislation was reviewed. This amendment ensures that it won't be 30 years for the next review, and the review of those effects will be recorded for all government to see and study. Good decisions can be made on public policy for themselves.

This is a good amendment, Madam Chair. There is nothing scary or dangerous that upsets the main piece of the NDP legislation agenda here. There is good governance. If the Legislative Assembly is confident that Bill 17 is good for Albertans, the Assembly will pass this amendment. If Bill 17 is not good for Alberta and the NDP fail to pass this amendment, they acknowledge they will be embarrassed by the economic impact data that would populate this five-year report. I challenge the NDP to support this amendment, that brings about good governance and does not affect the NDP legislation agenda contained in this bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A10?
Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A10 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:29 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gill	Loewen
Cyr	Hanson	Stier
Drysdale	Hunter	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Phillips
Bilous	Kazim	Piquette
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Carson	Larivee	Rosendahl
Clark	Littlewood	Sabir
Connolly	Loyola	Schmidt
Coolahan	Malkinson	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	McLean	Shepherd
Dach	McPherson	Sigurdson
Drever	Miller	Sucha
Eggen	Miranda	Swann
Feehan	Nielsen	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Payne	Woollard
Goehring		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 40
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[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on Bill 17. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. Yesterday in this House – well, the last few days, actually, it's been really disturbing to hear some of the things coming from across the way talking about folks who belong to unions. They've been referred to as union thugs, all kinds of names, and they seem to believe that we are responsible to union bosses. I'm not sure what exactly that means, but, you know, given their propensity for conspiracy theories, like, climate change related, I'm not too surprised.

I'd like to share a little bit about one of my union bosses. I was the executive director of the Lo-Se-Ca Foundation for many years and managed a staff of about 150 people. We had a number of folks with disabilities that had located and secured inclusive employment. Two of those fellows – one had Down's syndrome; the other one had cerebral palsy – were employed by Superstore in St. Albert. Guess what? They were in a union. [interjections] I know. They were really bossy, too.

But the really great thing about the union, chatting with them over the years, is that they learned a lot about democracy, and they learned a lot about what their rights were. So not only was it a great experience for them, working there, being employed there, but they were also protected. While many people with disabilities in inclusive employment set-ups will often lose hours or lose positions when there are problems in the economy or things shift, these two folks did not. They were included. They were supported by the union. I just wanted to give you an example of a union boss.

The other thing that I was a little bit disturbed about was the constant reference to cherry-picking. You know, they want to say: "Well, if you just pull this part out, we'll vote for it. Totally in

favour of it. Pull this part out. We like it.” Here’s the thing. It’s inclusive legislation. It’s about employment, and there are many, many pieces that go along with that for people that belong to unions and people that don’t belong to unions. I’ll tell you that for many years I managed a staff of about 150 people, so I got to know the labour standards fairly closely, and I’ll tell you that they were shamefully outdated, shamefully. Now, most employers in this province understood that and went over and above, but there are certainly some that do not. It is incumbent on us to update that.

But I get why the previous government steered away from this. They did so because it takes some political capital to do that, and they were not willing to do that. Clearly, this group is not willing to do that either, so it makes sense that they’re going to join.

The piece that I was really happy to see is – and I’ll tell you that the community of people with disabilities and their allies have been lobbying and advocating for many, many, many years to have section 45 repealed altogether. Finally – finally – section 45 is going to be gone if we approve this legislation. Section 45 was a minimum wage exemption for people with disabilities, so employers were able to apply for this permit to pay people less money. Although in the last few years it hasn’t been used very often, historically it has been, and it has been used to support things like enclaves of people that do contract work for businesses. It’s been used in place of a training allowance for people with disabilities. What it did was keep people down. I’m incredibly thankful that this is in this legislation.

10:50

Last week I heard somebody say: well, why not just pull that piece out? Why would you pull it out and deal with it separately? We need employment legislation and labour legislation that is inclusive of all people. Whether you have a disability or not, whether you work with a union or not, it has to be inclusive. Constantly wanting to pick out pieces that you’re okay with or that your base is okay with is not only disingenuous; I think it just doesn’t do service to the people that work in those situations. I for one am extremely happy that we are going to support, I am going to support this legislation.

I wanted to say one other thing. It’s been tough listening to some of the things that come out of this place from the other side. I don’t think they realize sometimes that when they’re assigning these really nasty labels to people who work in unions, these are men and women that were present when your children were born. These are men and women that were there when you took your last breath. These are people that work in the community supporting folks with disabilities. These are home-care workers. They’re firefighters. These are emergency workers. These are first... [interjections] Keep yammering away. That’s A-okay with me.

An Hon. Member: He’s calling them sewer rats.

Ms Renaud: You’re calling us sewer rats?

Mr. Hanson: Nice try.

Ms Renaud: You know, it’s unfortunate...

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members.

Ms Renaud: These guys like to stand up and call names.

The Deputy Chair: If we can speak through the chair, please.

Ms Renaud: Let’s focus on the point here, and the point is that this is inclusive legislation, and I’m incredibly proud to support it. You should be embarrassed about the things that you’re saying about men and women, Albertans who work hard every single day to raise

their families, to make this a better province, to make this a stronger province. You know, you’re just painting them with a brush. You’re stereotyping them. You’re generalizing.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Ms Renaud: Oh, sorry. Sorry, Madam Chair.

Mr. Nixon: She had a lot of trouble with the rules. It’s disappointing.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. I like the rules. I do stick to the rules, so I will go through the chair.

You know, I wanted to say that they like to tell us that they want to work together, they want to make things better, but early this morning I saw two panel members stand up and speak. They both say that they are working towards the same goal, the same legislation, the same end product, yet one of them will call the other disgusting and then expect to have a healthy working relationship when they go back to the panel table. That is disingenuous, Madam Chair.

Those are my comments about it, and I’m happy to support this legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Status of Women and Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: I was just wondering, Chair. Questions or comments: is that...

The Deputy Chair: We’re in Committee of the Whole, so you have 20 minutes to speak.

Ms McLean: Oh, okay. No. That’s fine. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Hays I would like to move an amendment, that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 9, in the proposed section 12(2)(b), by adding “, unless the deduction would reduce the wage of the employee below the minimum wage to which the employee is entitled” after “authorized to be deducted by a collective agreement that is binding on the employee.”

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as amendment A11. Please go ahead.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment, if passed, will ensure that any working individual cannot have their pay reduced below minimum wage because of union dues.

Now, I know that as soon as our caucus introduces an amendment which pertains to unionized employees, many members from the government will assume that this is an attack on unions, but it’s not, actually. The individual at or near minimum wage can least afford any form of wage reduction from union dues or any other reasons, right? I’m sure a number of members from the government side will rise and speak to all the benefits these individuals receive from being part of a union; however, that conversation is for another day.

Minimum wage earners are among the most vulnerable working people in this province, and anything we can do together as elected officials to ensure that the take-home portion of their wage is as high as possible is something, I think, everyone would support, and

we all should support that. At the end of the day, this amendment generally seeks to ensure that no individuals in Alberta will be paid below minimum wage, no matter where they work. I know my staff had sent this across to the minister's office ahead of time because we feel that this is a positive amendment and are hoping for the minister's support. I think that ensuring that all working Albertans get to legitimately make the minimum wage is a rather straightforward action.

I hope all members of this Assembly support it because, at the end of the day, this government's intention is to, you know, fight for everyday Albertans. So let's show them that we're protecting you. I'm hoping that I can get the support of all the members of this Assembly.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Just to clarify, you are moving the amendment on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays?

Mr. Gill: That's right.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gill: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A11? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the member for bringing the amendment forward and, I guess, you know, maybe some kudos, trying to protect workers on the lower end of the scale. Of course, I would love to see more enthusiasm with regard to bringing up that minimum wage to begin with. But on first look at this, as far as I know, this is not occurring in any other jurisdiction anywhere in Canada and would also violate the legislation around the Rand formula. So at this time I am not able to support this amendment and would encourage folks in the House to not support that as well. We can't be allowing these types of changes.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A11?

Mr. Coolahan: Just briefly, Madam Chair. Thank you for the amendment, but it's not an altruistic amendment. Let's face it. It's meant to sort of display that people have to pay union dues even if they are making minimum wage. What the members need to understand is that a lot of union dues go into defence funds so that members can access a lawyer if they require one. Someone on minimum wage is not going to be able to pay their own lawyer. That's what a lot of union dues are used for, defence.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A11?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A11 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:59 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gill	Loewen
Cyr	Hanson	Stier
Drysdale	Hunter	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Payne
Bilous	Kazim	Phillips
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Carson	Larivee	Renaud
Connolly	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Loyola	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Schmidt
Dach	McLean	Schreiner
Drever	McPherson	Shepherd
Eggen	Miller	Sigurdson
Feehan	Miranda	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Goehring		

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 37
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[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on Bill 17. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I do want to move an amendment. I would like to discuss it.

The Acting Chair: That will be referred to as amendment A12.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Okay. I unfortunately gave my only copy to you. If I could get that, please, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to move that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 112.

Now, in that section what we've got is a government that is moving the threshold for the carding process from three months, which is 90 days, to six months, which is 180 days. Now, at this point I haven't heard from the government a good reason to be moving the process by 100 per cent to a higher threshold.

If for some reason we were to hear that we had a higher threshold than other provinces to make this vote happen, then that would be a justification that we could probably see. Let's say, for instance, that we had an 80 per cent threshold that we needed to meet where, let's say, Nova Scotia has 40 per cent. Then what happens is that we can say: well, because we've got such a high threshold, the unions should be given an opportunity to be able to make that 80 per cent threshold. Now, what we've got, though, is a very low threshold when you look at all of the provinces across Canada. Actually, from the reading I can see – and the government can correct me, but I would say that from what I can see here, we're tied with the lowest several of the provinces, reaching the threshold at 40 per cent. This amendment deals with that, saying that we've got a very acceptable range, which is 40 per cent.

My question is: why do we need to increase it from 90 days to six months? I think it's reasonable to say that it looks like what we're trying to do is to more or less allow the unions an unfair time frame to be able to influence the workers that may not want a union to go into their facility. That's where possibly we could see badgering or intimidation being brought forward, and this, obviously, is not what I would hope the intent of the government is, to bring an undue influence.

Ninety days seems to be a very reasonable time frame that a union can use. What their goal here is to go in and make sure that the employees are educated on the benefits of a union. Then what we've got is the employer saying that this is what we believe that we've got without the union here. Then within that 90-day period we end up with a vote that's held, and we're able to see whether or not that entity is able to bring forward a vote for a union.

Now, what we end up seeing here, as many of you know, is that the longer we create this process, the more strife we've got inside of the process. If you look at some of the – well, let's go with the last federal election. I would argue that because of the length of time of that federal election, there were just a lot of people that stopped even caring about it after a while – that's a shame – which is why focusing this to 90 days gets everybody on task. It gives everybody the ability to be able to get to those employees. It gives everybody the ability to say: this is the right direction for us.

What happens here is that by the government saying that we want to unilaterally double this time frame, we are actually creating strife in the workplace. I don't believe that's what the government's intent is. I believe that their intent is to say: let's give a fair representation of being able to get this information to the employees. But in the end, I have not heard from the government as to why 90 days isn't sufficient.

So I encourage the government to strike section 112 from the bill. I encourage the government to go back to the 90 days so that we can actually have a fair time frame that has worked for, as the government continues to state, 30 years.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair recognizes the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the member for bringing the amendment forward. I know you pointed out that there are some jurisdictions, of course, that don't have these numbers in place, but there are also jurisdictions that do have them in place.

The reasoning behind the six-month period that was brought in, Mr. Chair, was with regard to employees that work for companies that are very, very large, vast in the number of employees that are there, as well, possibly, in multiple locations around a jurisdiction. This allows a reasonable amount of time for folks to consider whether they want to unionize or not because of geographical location, the numbers of employees. Essentially, I guess what I'm saying is that this is not a new practice by any means. It's pretty much almost Canadian mainstream now.

At this time again I'll thank the member for bringing it forward, but I won't be able to support this and will urge folks in this House to not support it as well.

11:10

Mr. Cyr: Well, I'm sad to hear that they're not looking to support this amendment. What we've seen here is a unilateral approach to dealing with everybody within Alberta. So what you've done is that you've said that because there are exceptions to this, because they may take time, let's treat all of the businesses in Alberta the same way. Let's say, for instance, there is a business out there with 10 employees. Suddenly what we've got here is that six months is just way too long.

What we need to be looking at here is: if you wanted to bring forward something that said, "Because of the length of time it takes for some of these larger companies to be able to get to the employees, possibly anybody over 300 employees," and I am picking a number out of the sky, "is a company that would be allowed to apply to the minister for an additional three months,"

that, I think, people would be able to accept, but by unilaterally deciding that six months for everybody – a one-fits-all, if you will, approach is not okay. That's why I'm saying that the government should put this amendment forward and then deal with it later on.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments from the member. By extending the timeline from 90 days to six months, this in no way inhibits any kind of activities, meaning that, you know, if you have a smaller employer, it's going to have to drag out to six months. The process still goes as it does now, just as at 90 days. It just allows for that room for the larger groups of employees. Again, there's nothing inhibiting anything smaller. This is just simply something that's already being done in other jurisdictions to allow for the larger and more diverse geographical locations of employers.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A12?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A12 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:13 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Drysdale	Hunter
Cyr	Gill	Loewen

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Payne
Bilous	Kazim	Phillips
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Carson	Larivee	Renaud
Connolly	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Loyola	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Schmidt
Dach	McLean	Schreiner
Drever	McPherson	Shepherd
Eggen	Miller	Sigurdson
Feehan	Miranda	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Goehring		

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 37
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[Motion on amendment A12 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on Bill 17. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to the bill. You know, if you'd asked me, say, just over a week ago how much I thought I had in common in my beliefs with Mr. Lorne Gunter, a columnist with the *Edmonton Sun*, I would have guessed that number to be very, very low. In fact, if you'd asked me to draw a Venn diagram of our relative positions on social and political issues, I'm not sure those two circles would have touched, let alone been on the same page.

However, Mr. Chair, as of last week it appears that I was, in fact, mistaken. There is indeed a small sliver of agreement that exists between us, a sliver that contains perhaps agreement that puppies

are adorable, that “with his do-nothing budget and early election call, Jim Prentice merely confirmed Tory arrogance and cynicism” – we agreed there – and lastly, that the bill that we have before us today, Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, is, in fact, “pretty bland” and “merely brings Alberta . . . into alignment with federal law and – more importantly – with recent Supreme Court decisions on leaves and job security.” Indeed, as Mr. Gunter noted, the changes that this bill is proposing “are already standard practice at many (most?) Alberta businesses.”

Mr. Chair, there is nothing extreme about this bill. Of course, no one would know that from watching the members across the aisle, who have apparently dedicated themselves to lighting their hair on fire in order to decry some aspects of this bill as the continuing advance of some kind of socialist apocalypse. Frankly, I’ve lost track of the number of times we’ve heard the words “radical” and “ideological.” Now, this isn’t unusual. It’s actually been a pretty common tactic of some on the right of the political spectrum to try to shift the goalposts that define the political centre. For decades there have been various organizations on that right end of the spectrum who have worked to try to paint common-sense and compassionate policies as being extreme, as being part of some sort of scary socialist plot, in order to portray their own extreme ideologies in a much more moderate light.

11:20

Now, Mr. Chair, Bill 17 is not extreme. It simply brings Alberta in line with standard policy across Canada. Bill 17, unlike the views of many of the members opposite, is moderate and mainstream. It is not in any way radical or extreme. What’s extreme is the view of the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner that there should be no minimum wage.* What’s radical are the views of the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake on the realities and effects of man-made climate change. What’s truly ideological is the apparent belief of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks that government should never, regardless of economic circumstances, take on debt and his apparent belief that employees who benefit from the work of a union on their behalf should be able to leave it to others to pay for it. Now, of course, the view that you should be able to enjoy all the benefits of systems that are built through collective effort without contributing yourself isn’t that uncommon for those who hold a libertarian view of the world.

But, that said, indeed what was well outside the mainstream and indeed outside any reasonable interpretation of rights in our country was the previous government’s attempt to threaten prosecution and financial penalties for anyone other than a union official or a government employee to suggest that unionized government employees participate in or consider what they deemed an illegal strike.

Mr. Hanson: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Hon. member, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hanson: Yeah, just a point of order, Mr. Chair, under 23(h): “makes allegations against another Member.” The member very clearly said that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner made a statement in the House that he believed that there should not be a minimum wage, and I would like to challenge him to, you know, produce the *Hansard* remarks that show that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner actually said those statements. Otherwise, I would ask him to apologize and withdraw that statement.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. government whip.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Chair, I mean, if what we need is the *Hansard*, then we can provide the *Hansard* if we can come back to this.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, at this time I do not have the benefit of the Blues to refer to or the citations which have been referred to, so at this moment I’ll view it as not a point of order. But I do caution members about any disagreements on statements of the facts here as well.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Certainly, Mr. Chair. I will take that under advisement. Thank you for your caution.

Debate Continued

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Chair, I will return to my remarks. Now, indeed, as I was saying, previous legislation brought forward by the previous government which looked to restrict the free speech of individuals regarding unionized government employees participating in or considering what they deemed an illegal strike: that was extreme, ideological, and radical.

This bill, Mr. Chair, is none of those things. It’s simply a long overdue alignment of Alberta’s employment and labour standards with the rest of Canada, and the fact that it’s taken this long for these changes to be introduced speaks to the cowardice and the skewed priorities of previous governments, who apparently had time to pass constitutionally fraught legislation that threatened the pensions and freedoms of government employees but none to ensure the protection of tens of thousands of workers across our province.

That said, Mr. Chair, now that our government is taking action to bring our employment standards into the 21st century, I’ve been glad to hear members across the aisle state that they’re one hundred per cent in support of these changes, or at least they are in principle.

You know, I’ve heard more than one member of the Official Opposition opining that all employers they know already look after their employees and treat them well and wondering if it’s therefore necessary to enshrine these requirements in legislation, which, frankly, leads me to question whether if, knock on wood, they had formed government in the last election, they would have had the will to provide Alberta workers with the same protections enjoyed by workers everywhere else in Canada. Mr. Chair, it’s not enough to say that most workers are protected, that most employers are reasonable and compassionate. All employees in Canada deserve to be protected no matter where or by whom they are employed.

Now, Mr. Chair, last night I had the opportunity to visit Action for Healthy Communities. That’s an organization in my constituency that supports new Canadians as they are settling in our city and helps to ensure that they are able to thrive here. Last night I had the opportunity to go to Action and to speak to a group of new Canadians about my work as an MLA and how I and all of us can be of help to them. After I spoke, there was a second presentation, from the executive director of the Alberta Workers’ Health Centre, an organization dedicated to educating workers, both unionized and non-unionized, about their rights, particularly in the areas of health and safety.

Now, I mention this presentation for a few reasons. First of all, the presenter, when I spoke with him, noted that they’ve been running a program specifically targeted to new Canadians, a program that’s been funded through a penalty that was paid by an employer after the workplace death of two Chinese temporary foreign workers in 2013. Now, I recognize that we’re not here discussing health and safety regulations, but I think it’s important

*See page 1519, left column, paragraph 16

to recognize that new Canadians and temporary foreign workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by employers. And this is true across the board, not just in terms of health and safety but also in terms of having access to sick leave, being able to take time off when needed to look after their children or other family, being paid the full value of their overtime, or being held responsible for a dine and dash or a gas and go.

Now, new Canadians are more likely to find themselves in somewhat precarious employment, and due to the challenges of learning a new language and culture, they are also more prone to exploitation. Sadly, there are some employers, admittedly nowhere close to a majority but some, who will attempt to exploit these workers and offer less to them than perhaps most Albertans enjoy. This bill ensures, first, that it is legally required for these employees to be granted the same rights enjoyed by employees in every other jurisdiction in Canada and, secondly, that if employers fail to meet these standards, there are administrative penalties that can be applied. Information about these employers, any employer who contravenes the code, will now be able to be published, and there is an enhanced ability to recover earnings that are owed to an employee. That's something that is going to make life better for many Albertans.

Now, the second reason that I mention the presentation that I saw last night from the Alberta Workers' Health Centre is to address the issue of consultation. Members across the aisle have repeatedly risen to claim that our government failed to conduct adequate consultation before bringing this legislation forward. They've complained about the number of consultations and who was able to take part. To be clear, Mr. Chair, this is not an issue that has never been seen before. Previous governments, in both 2007 and 2014, conducted reviews of the codes, but, as with their studies on health and safety protections for farm and ranch workers and so many other issues, those studies were simply shelved, with no action taken, because they lacked the simple courage to provide Alberta workers with the same rights that are enjoyed by all Canadians. Those governments did not have the courage or the will.

Again, Mr. Chair, these are rights that every other jurisdiction brought into place, some in response to rulings of the Supreme Court over the course of nearly 30 years, that were simply overlooked, ignored, and not addressed by previous governments in Alberta. Well, our government went through the information from those previous reviews. We looked at the court rulings. We looked at the norms and practices from every other jurisdiction in Canada. We then held face-to-face round-tables to hear from all stakeholders who might be affected, including employers, business associations, labour groups, and advocacy organizations on both sides of the political spectrum. We ensured we had all perspectives at those tables. We reviewed 400 written submissions and 5,000 responses to an online survey.

11:30

Now, Mr. Chair, to return to the presentation that I was speaking of from the Alberta Workers' Health Centre, after it was completed, the executive director of that organization came to speak to me and expressed his thanks and his appreciation for how our government conducts consultations. He talked about how much they appreciated being included and heard at the round-tables to shape the regulations being developed under the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. He spoke of how happy they've been to see government valuing and including the voice of workers on par with all other stakeholders in considering labour legislation, something previous governments repeatedly failed to do. He noted that in the past it was generally not the case, that previous governments had a tendency to listen to the same voices, those who

were loudest in the room, and not take the opportunity to ensure that all voices were included at the table.

So, Mr. Chair, I am proud of this piece of legislation. I am proud of all aspects of this piece of legislation.

We've heard from the members across the way considerably about their opinions on unions within the province of Alberta. Indeed, they seem to have a very well-developed and not terribly positive ideology developed about unions in the province of Alberta. They've had much negative to say.

They've been very adamant that we not besmirch employers in the province of Alberta, Mr. Chair, and indeed I agree with them on that. We have many, many, indeed a majority of wonderful employers in this province that are truly concerned for the welfare of their employees and truly want to do their best by them and provide them with good, healthy working conditions and fair and accessible alliance.

I would say the same for our unions in this province. I have been a union employee. I have been a private employee. I have seen good employers. I have seen good unions. I've seen poor employers, and I have seen some poor unions. It does not serve us well in this House, Mr. Chair, to paint either with a broad brush, to indulge in ideology, indeed to some extent I would say tinfoil hattery, about either group. Some of the opinions that have been expressed in this House on this particular issue I have found, to borrow a word from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, disgusting.

That said, Mr. Chair, the changes that are brought forward in this legislation, I believe, are reasonable and balanced, and, as I noted early, Mr. Gunter seems to agree with me. Indeed, in the opportunities I have had to discuss this with constituents, with Albertans, indeed at my niece's barbecue birthday dinner the other week with some members of my family, in explaining how this legislation works and the intent and the realities of other jurisdictions across Canada, I have not encountered anyone who does not find that these changes are reasonable and fair.

We are not here, Mr. Chair, to tilt the balance in one direction or another. We are here to restore a fair floor on which all Albertans have the opportunity to be treated equally, to access the rights that all other Canadians enjoy, to be able to have the time off to look after their family when they're ill, to indeed take time off when they themselves are ill. Indeed, we are here talking about the rights of mothers to be able to look after their children, to take the full maternity leave that is available to them under EI, all things which, again I will state, I have serious doubts would have been priorities should any of the other members across the aisle had formed government, looking at the history of how Conservative governments in this province have chosen to operate.

Mr. Chair, I also truly believe it is fair and it is balanced in our approach to the rights that are available for union certification, keeping the secret ballot, and allowing a vote to take place should there be less than 65 per cent of workers who have signed a card. In the case that after hard work and discussion more than 65 per cent have signed a card, I think it is reasonable that we grant that union.

Indeed, as has been discussed in this House, there can be intimidation in that process, and it happens on both sides of the table. We on this side of the House are not singling out one group over the other, unlike members across the aisle, who seem to consistently disparage unions, which work hard to represent the people of this province, to serve their interests. I'm very proud to say that we are indeed keeping the private and secret vote just as it was unless they're able to get a supermajority, which I don't think is unreasonable. Mr. Ken Kobly of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce agreed that it was a reasonable compromise. These are steps which are going to provide, I think, a more fair and balanced

workplace for all Albertans despite the protestations of those across the aisle.

We are not hiding anything in this bill, Mr. Chair. I am standing proudly in this House for all aspects of this bill, aspects which are all connected, all related, all to do with labour and employment standards, all to do with the kind of workplaces and opportunities that employees have, unlike other governments in Canada, which would bring forward large omnibus bills on unrelated subjects, covering a ridiculous range of topics. In this circumstance this is not an omnibus bill. It's a large bill, absolutely. It would not be so large had not previous governments taken 30 years to look at making badly needed updated changes.

Frankly, Mr. Chair, this could have been a much, much less painful process if, as these rights were introduced in other parts of Canada, as the Supreme Court had brought in rulings, previous governments would have taken those changes in stride, if they'd had the courage to face those who would stand against them or those who they were concerned about, who were perhaps making donations or other things, which kept them from making motions or moving forward on these changes. These changes could have been implemented over time.

But that is no argument, Mr. Chair, for why these rights, that are enjoyed by other Canadians all across our country, should be withheld a moment longer from the people of Alberta. It is high time these changes were made. It is high time this legislation was brought forward and passed in this House.

I will be proud to stand as a member and vote in favour of this legislation as it stands. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The member opposite from Edmonton-Centre used the word "courage" quite a few times. You know, I was just thinking about it, as he said that word multiple times – I think that the reality is that an act of courage on the part of many of the members over there would have been to recuse themselves from this conflict of interest because they talk about these things that they're in complete conflict of interest on. That would've been courageous. The kind of stuff that was coming out of the member's mouth there, I just thought – you talk about courageous out of one side of your mouth, but you're not willing to be courageous and actually recuse yourself from the things that you are doing.

The other thing that I wanted to say as I was listening to him – you know, the reality is that I talk to a lot of members . . .

The Acting Chair: My apologies for interrupting. I've just been advised that in relation to policy anything that's been referred to the Ethics Commissioner should not be referenced in the House until deliberations have been concluded.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Thanks very much for saying that. I appreciate your giving me that information.

You know, Mr. Chair, I was thinking about this issue and about the problems that we're facing with this . . . [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor.

Please proceed, hon. member.

11:40

Mr. Hunter: Now, I was thinking about the problems with this bill, and I talked to lots of businesses out there. I keep on hearing on that side that "everybody we talked to" – the Member for Edmonton-Centre said: everybody I've talked to is in favour of this. You know

what? I would have to say that that member needs to get out a lot more because the people I talk to are very upset about this bill. In fact, many of the people that I talk to say that this is the absolute worst bill that this government has brought in. [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members. I hesitate to interrupt, but I want to . . . [interjections] Hon. members, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor. Please allow him to have his opportunity.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Anyways, what I was trying to say was that in talking with the job creators, there is a symbiotic relationship between the job creators and those who have jobs. That symbiotic relationship is defined by our labour laws. It is not unreasonable for us to take their considerations as well as those of the employees into account.

As I listen to this, to the arguments that I've heard over the last few days about this, I remember a story that was told to me many years ago. I thought that it would be applicable here. It's the story of a young boy that went to his mom and wanted to have some fish pets. His mom decided to go and get him a bowl and water and fish, and said: "You need to feed these fish. You need to take care of them." The young boy for a long time kept on feeding the fish, and mom was happy with the situation, and then the fish started to . . .

An Hon. Member: Unionize.

Mr. Hunter: That was funny.

The boy decided that he wanted to start feeding the fish arsenic, and he would feed little bits of arsenic to the fish, and his mom came to him one day and saw what he was feeding to the fish and said: "You can't do that. If you feed that to the fish, they're going to die." He said: "No, mom. I've been feeding this to the fish for a while now, and you know what? They haven't died." She said, "Listen, if you keep on feeding this to the fish, they're going to die." Now, the mom had some information here that the young boy didn't.

The problem with this government is that, as I've watched this government for the last two years, I do not think they realize that if you continue to feed this economy the arsenic that you are, the job creators are going to leave, and they have been leaving. In fact, for the last two years we've dropped \$24 billion of investment. The Conference Board of Canada: you can't argue with those numbers. You keep on talking about how the Conference Board of Canada says: 3.3 per cent increase in the economy. They say that we've dropped \$24 billion in the economy. A death by a thousand cuts is still a death. What happens is that they keep on piling onto Albertans.

They keep on telling Albertans: "They didn't do it right in the past. They don't know what they're doing. We'll do it better now." How many times have we heard that from a government of an NDP or a Liberal ilk? It is amazing how many times we've seen it.

We've seen what has happened in Ontario, and continually this government goes down that road. It's almost like they think: "You know what? No. Mom, we can keep on giving them the arsenic. The fish won't die." But they did die in Ontario. They're leaving. High energy prices over there. The cost of business has skyrocketed, and they're leaving. They just can't do it anymore. These are the job creators. You are supposed to be the champions of the employee. Do you not realize that there is an actual symbiotic relationship between the employer and the employee?

The issues that we are dealing with here have real consequences, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, I do not believe that this government is taking those consequences into account. They refuse to do economic impact studies, which would actually tell them in

advance, based upon other jurisdictions that have done these sorts of things, what the consequences to the economy would be. They refuse to do it. I've asked them numerous times: will you please do an economic impact study? And they say: "No, no. We know what we're doing. Trust us. Scout's honour."

In the end, we continue to lose jobs, a hundred thousand jobs lost, two years. You're absolutely right. We have been in a low oil price economy. This has caused us a lot of problems, but you're not helping. You're not helping when you bring forward this kind of omnibus, sweeping legislation to this kind of . . . [interjections] You know what? If I could just pull out the legislation now and show you the size of the book, you'd realize that it is actually an omnibus.

An Hon. Member: Size doesn't always matter.

Mr. Hunter: That was actually funny, too.

Mr. Chair, I rise and I want to speak to this Bill 17. In an employee-employer relationship there is straight time for wages, but there is also overtime. The employer can ask an employee to work longer hours for compensation. On the other side, the employee might be so motivated and in need of extra work that they might wish to work the overtime and offer to work the overtime to the employer. One is employer driven; the other is employee driven. Provisions need to be made for both of these scenarios. Employers need to have the flexibility to reward that overtime.

I heard the government side of the House say just the other day that one size does not fit all. Well, one size does not fit all in overtime legislation as well. Having all overtime, no matter what the circumstances are, rewarded by 1.5 times the wages lacks that flexibility. So I wish to move an amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: That'll be amendment A13, hon. member. Please proceed.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 15(c), in the proposed section 23, by adding the following after subsection (4):

- (5) Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this Division, an employee and employer may agree that the employee may work overtime hours in order to have time off with pay and the employer shall provide time off with pay instead of overtime pay, which shall be paid at the employee's wage rate at a time that the employee could have worked and received wages from the employer.

Now, Mr. Chair, there are many employees who request to work an hour or two extra a day in cases where they want to have a longer weekend or a certain day off without using their holidays. Albertans are known for their hard-work ethic, and we shouldn't discourage it. This would no longer be able to happen under this bill. The NDP wanted a fair and family-friendly workplace, and this amendment helps make Bill 17 more fair and family friendly for the Albertans that have a get 'er done attitude.

Not being able to bank hours instead of getting time and a half in pay can inhibit families who want that time together. If an employee wishes to work now instead of later and it is agreeable with their boss, who are we to say that we cannot do this? The agreement is consensual. Why would someone cap and restrict and demotivate the employer by forcing the one-fit pay option at 1.5 times the hours? An employer is less likely to let an employee work now instead of later if they have to grant the employee 1.5 times the hours in lieu. Governments want their income taxes, right? Well, an employer just might try to bypass income tax and just do it under the table instead. Is that what the government wants? With the income taxes falling because of fewer people working, the

government needs those tax dollars flowing to pay for their spending. We all know how much governments, especially NDP governments, love to spend, but this amendment would still protect workers in that if their boss asked them to work longer now instead of later, they are protected and receive 1.5 hours in return. This protects workers while also allowing workers to have the choice of when they want to do overtime work.

11:50

We do not know the situation of every person in every job. We should not legislate as though we are all-knowing and that everyone is the same. With changes to the global economy happening and the growing high-tech and technical skills markets in Alberta, employees want the flexibility and the increasing need to be able to work at the same time as people in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Mumbai, or London. These provisions of this amendment allow that international collaboration and teamwork on projects. This keeps the spirit of the NDP bill while improving it to protect workers' choice.

I look forward to receiving the support of my hon. colleagues from the government bench on this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A13?

Mr. Cyr: I would like to thank my hon. colleague for bringing this forward. This actually is a bill that is – the part that has been brought forward by the government on this is overtime. I understand why they're wanting to go in that direction, but I will tell you that this is something that will change the field that I used to be in, which is accounting. What happens is that we compress our time from about January till May. We spend a lot of our hours in that time doing a lot of overtime. What happens in the accounting industry is that it slows down remarkably when you hit June, July, and August, and then the corporate part takes up some time in September, October, November, and December. So what happens for the accountants is that you work a lot of hours, but you can take a lot of the summer off. It actually is a system that has worked for years very, very well. The time-in-lieu system is what makes it work so well.

When we have the government tinkering in this area, my concern is that we're going to start seeing accountants move away from full-time employees. They're going to bulk up during that tax season time frame. So instead of having the normal, say, 15 or 20 employees that we used to sit at, we'd end up with 30 or 40 employees for January, February, March, and April. And then what would happen is that you would lay everybody off because, in the end, your business can't support them through those other months. I can only imagine that there are other professions out there that are going to be dramatically impacted by this change in the way that we deal with time in lieu of.

So I encourage you to support my fellow member. This is actually a thoughtful amendment that is going to solve problems before the government has to go in and fix it. This needs to be fixed.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other speakers to amendment A13? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just a little bit delayed coming in here.

I appreciate the member across the way bringing in the amendment here. This pretty much circumvents what we're trying to create, which is already pretty much a standard in most, if not all,

of the jurisdictions in Canada. Overtime is overtime. An employer controls that overtime, okay? I know in the past with my members I've always counselled them: never build your life around overtime because it's always here today, potentially gone tomorrow. That's the right of the employer to give overtime when it becomes necessary for the business, as they should.

The other little concern I have is that if we did accept this amendment, potentially workers that are in precarious positions could now be, shall we say, compelled to take a lower option rather than being paid rightfully for the overtime work that they have been asked to work. I don't think anybody on this side of the House is prepared to put those folks in that position.

Again, I will thank the member for the amendment here. I won't be able to accept this and support it at this time. You know, this is about making sure that everybody has a level standard right across the board, and this certainly would not create that level standard.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Those opposed, say no. That report is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had very interesting work this morning, but I wish now to adjourn and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, June 1, 2017

Day 43

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk

Fiona Vance, Sessional Parliamentary Counsel

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms

Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of House
Services

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services

Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel

Nancy Robert, Research Officer

Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and
Legal Research Officer

Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, June 1, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly former MLAs from Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba along with their spouses, who are here attending the Alberta Association of Former MLAs annual general meeting today and tomorrow. All of us here on this floor recognize your passion, and we truly understand the commitment all of you demonstrated either in this House or in your respective Legislatures across the country. We hope that your time after serving as elected officials has been equally fulfilling. Please know that your individual imprints on democratic history will never be forgotten.

Sitting in your gallery today, Mr. Speaker, are former Manitoba MLAs Mr. Clif Evans and Dr. Linda Asper; former Ontario MPP Mr. John Hastings; former Quebec MNA Ms France Dionne; former Alberta MLAs Mr. Bill Wyse, Mr. Blake Pedersen, Mr. Rob Renner, Mr. George Rogers, Mrs. Mary Anne Jablonski, Mr. Shiraz Shariff, Mr. Don Tannas, Mr. Bill Purdy, Dr. Raj Sherman, Mr. Gene Zwozdesky, Dr. David Carter, and Mr. Ray Martin. I ask all of these former members, who have risen, along with all of the other former Alberta MLAs that are sitting in the members' gallery to please accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Let me just say, if there was ever a test for working without a net, today is the day.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a remarkable group of grade 11 students from the Calvin Christian School in my riding. Now, Calvin Christian is located just off of highway 3, a couple of miles north of the town of Coalhurst. I had the privilege of meeting this impressive group of young students on the steps as we took a picture and met a couple of the teachers and some of the chaperone parents as well. As I say your name – and please forgive me if I butcher this – please rise and stay risen: Mr. Jeremy Fluit, Mr. Marinus Vande Merwe, Mr. Ben Middelkoop, Mrs. Glenda Middelkoop, Mr. Evert Van Ee, Mrs. Kim Van Ee, Mr. Frans VandeStroet, Mrs. Jolanda Vandenhoek. Now I would ask the students to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all my fellow members in the House the grade 6 class from Glendale elementary school in my constituency of Red Deer-North accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Adam Leonhardt and Ms Katie Bruinsma, along with

their chaperones, Sheri Smith, Aerielle Buchholz, Maria Lee, Meghan Elgert, and Dianne Rumhor. These bright and eager students are here to experience the wealth of history that is encompassed in our Legislature. I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly your grandson Xavier Wanner-Lewis; your wife, Ms Joan Emard-Wanner; and your mother, Ms Mary McNeil Wanner. Xavier is a grade 6 student from Sunnyside school in Calgary and is visiting the Legislature with his nana and his great-grandma today. Xavier loves playing all sports but especially as a goalie for hockey. Mary McNeil Wanner was born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, 98 and a half years ago, and Mary has called Medicine Hat home for over 30 years. Ms Wanner, Xavier, and Joan are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: So if there's any doubt about my anxiety, with all of those other people in addition to my mother – there is a high expectation.

Mr. Hanson: You'd better do a good job today, sir.

The Speaker: Yeah. I'm counting on you guys to make sure that I look good, okay?

Mr. Cooper: That's a problem.

The Speaker: I know I have a problem; I have about 86 problems.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure today to rise in the House to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two very special constituents of mine, Mark and Sandi Sandercock. Mark has worked for the RCMP as a forensic scientist in Edmonton for almost 30 years. After being an occupational therapist for 10 years, Sandi's priorities changed with the arrival of two children, whom Mark and Sandi chose to educate at home. They are both looking forward to Mark's retirement and are thinking of starting a business. They are in the members' gallery today watching their daughter Claire in her last session in her position as a page, which she has held since January 2016. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. And you can be proud.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of my acknowledgement of paramedics this week, as it is Paramedic Services Week, it's my pleasure to introduce two front-line paramedics with Beaver EMS. They are in Tofield and Viking. They're seated in our public gallery today. I'd ask that they rise as I say their names: Jason Geller, an advanced care paramedic, with experience in both ground ambulance and critical care air transport; as well as Adrienne Renton, who is a primary care paramedic and who also volunteers with the CNIB and emergency social services. I want to thank them both for their life-saving care. Colleagues, please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my wife, Dr. Jessica Simon. Jess had me promise that I wasn't going to embarrass her, but when I'm your husband, that's a tall order. We all know what it takes to be in this Assembly, and what that takes is an incredibly strong family behind us. Jess is a remarkable mother who works full-time plus as a physician. More than anything, though, she's a remarkable person, and I'm incredibly lucky to have her as my wife. Jess, if I can ask you to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. [interjections]

It's going to be a great day. Mr. Fildebrandt and I are laughing together. That's an outstanding happening. And I just made a mistake; my apologies to the House. I told you I was going to be nervous today.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

1:40

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my Fort Saskatchewan neighbours, Kelly Thompson. Kelly is a statesman, artist, and active community leader who is heavily involved in Fort Saskatchewan and surrounding areas. He has served on various government and community boards at municipal and provincial levels, including the Minister's Student Advisory Council and the Curriculum Policy Advisory Committee, and was named a national ambassador for bilingualism in 2011. I would like Kelly Thompson to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an energetic youth leader and her family. This young woman from Lacombe has been an active member and a leader of 4-H clubs in Lacombe and Lethbridge. She has been chosen as the recipient of the 4-H 2016 Premier's award. She has held executive positions in her clubs, has attended numerous programs, and has represented 4-H Alberta in various competitions. She is currently a third-year student at the University of Lethbridge, where she is taking a bachelor of science in agricultural biotechnology. I would like to ask Christine Suominen, her parents, Cameron and Annette, and brothers, David and Peter, to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature Kichul Nam. He is the general secretary of the Edmonton Korean Canadian Cultural Foundation, and he is also a tae kwon do master. He wanted to know more about provincial politics, to which I indulged him. Please enjoy the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You might say the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, as I have four outstanding constituents here joining us today. They are from

the lovely Torrington part of the constituency, home of the world-famous gopher museum.

An Hon. Member: I could go for that.

Mr. Cooper: I like what you did there with "go for that."

They are George and Betty Hiebert and their two lovely daughters, Melissa and Emily. They are in Edmonton because Melissa received a provincial recommendation for her piano-playing abilities and is competing at a competition later today.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests today, hon. members?

Members' Statements

Unionized Workers

Mr. Westhead: Once upon a time the Wildrose stood alongside unionized workers while the PCs tried to dismantle public-sector pensions. At that time the Wildrose position was "not [to] balance the budget on the backs of front line public sector workers and services." My, how times have changed. Nowadays about the only thing the Wildrose does promise is to balance the budget on the backs of public-sector workers and services.

It's clear that the Wildrose and their PC frenemies have shifted even further to the political right. Not long ago the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner labelled Alberta's 300,000 unionized workers as thugs. Then last night the Member for Strathmore-Brooks pledged to throw out the Rand formula in an ideologically driven attempt to undermine unions. The members opposite are so blinded by their extreme ideology that they see paramedics and jail guards as enemies. Conservatives just don't understand working people. They would rather give tax breaks to their wealthy friends than allow people with disabilities to earn at least minimum wage.

But just who are these so-called thugs that the opposition vilifies? They are our neighbours, sisters, brothers, fathers, and mothers. They are our children's teachers. They are the nurses who care for us at urgent care clinics. They are not thugs, Mr. Speaker. Far from it. Unionized workers are kind and generous, and they make meaningful contributions in their communities. They fight for equal rights, safe workplaces, and against discrimination. On this side of the House we support the fundamental constitutional rights guaranteed to all Canadians. Our proposed changes to Alberta's Employment Standards and Labour Relations codes demonstrate our commitment to those values.

The opposition thinks the Alberta advantage is predicated on exploiting workers by denying them basic rights most other Canadians enjoy. Rather than a race to the bottom, as the conservatives would have it, I'm proud to stand with a government that is taking tangible steps to make life better for working people.

Conservative Party Unity Agreement

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, as a long-time member of the Wildrose and as one of the five members of the previous Wildrose caucus team that remained strong in their principles, I was so glad to be selected by my leader and caucus to participate this year in work on a historic unity agreement between the two conservative parties in Alberta. Many good people have worked long and hard on the new conservative unity agreement, and there is much more work ahead. It has been an honour and privilege to work on this process as I can say wholeheartedly that everyone involved is there for the right reasons.

As a grassroots, member-driven party, Wildrose's constitution requires 75 per cent support from members for this deal to go ahead. Therefore, I look forward to seeing a record level of democratic participation in the upcoming weeks and months. I joined Wildrose many years ago because it was a party that respected its members. This is as true today as it was then. The members of our party will be the ultimate decider on conservative unity, and I trust in whatever decision they make. This will be one of the greatest exercises in grassroots democracy Alberta has ever seen. Every single vote will matter.

In every corner of the province Albertans are asking for unity. They know the future of Alberta hangs in the balance. Our conservative unity team is working around the clock to ensure their voices are heard. We need good, everyday Albertans, regardless of occupation or location, to buy a membership and answer the call for democracy. I'm calling on these folks to take their future into their own hands and help write the next chapter of the Alberta story. To all Alberta conservatives: we have a unique opportunity to set a new standard for conservatism in Alberta. The spirit of the conservative movement in Alberta is stronger than any one name and any one party. Let's all come together and take back Alberta.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, self-attribution bias is the tendency for people to attribute successes or good outcomes to their own abilities while blaming failures on circumstances beyond their control. That sounds very familiar. When the NDP came to power, Alberta's economy was already on its way down. Oil prices were tumbling, and Alberta jobs and government revenues fell along with them, but anything bad that happened was only a result of circumstances beyond the NDP's control.

But did they do everything they could to cushion the blow? Absolutely not. Their biggest mistake was creating uncertainty in Alberta's investment climate, unnecessarily driving capital from our province. They didn't make any effort to find reasonable efficiencies in government, just like households and businesses all over our province were forced to do. They didn't pursue transformational change in health care, and they raised Alberta's corporate tax rate 20 per cent, which actually drove down tax revenues further than they would have gone from a slowing economy alone.

And now that Alberta's economy is recovering, who is there to take the credit? Why, it's the NDP, Mr. Speaker. They don't think it was their fault when things went wrong; it is certainly not their doing when the economy rebounds. I can assure you that Alberta's economy would come back much stronger if the NDP had exercised even a modicum of fiscal restraint and taken steps to create investor certainty. Sadly, the NDP haven't done enough to attract new industries to Alberta and instead continue to rely on the price of oil. I sincerely hope oil prices do recover and our economy with them, but the NDP needs to take real, concrete steps to support Alberta's entrepreneurial spirit.

The Alberta Party would pursue an "and" economy where we continue to produce reliable, responsible oil and gas, and we would create the conditions where Alberta entrepreneurs can create the jobs of tomorrow in green tech, agribusiness, renewables, IT, and so much more. It is possible, Mr. Speaker, but only if we have a government that understands innovation and is willing to create the conditions to allow it to happen here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Stony Plain Community Organization Grants

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Community organizations in Stony Plain recently received \$271,000 through CFEP and CIP grant programs. It's impossible to talk about all the good work these organizations do, but I want to give it a try.

The Forest Green Parent Council Association received \$125,000 for the playground at Forest Green school. They fund raised for years and raised over \$55,000 themselves. With this grant and additional community and volunteer commitments they can now move ahead with their rebuild.

The Smithfield Community Hall Society received \$9,000 for upgrades to the septic tank and monitoring systems.

The Blueberry Community League received \$31,000 for renovations to the Blueberry Community Hall, which is home to the Blueberry Playschool and a venue for many other community events.

1:50

The Alberta Parenting for the Future Association received \$51,000 for renovations in the Family Connection Centre, where about 40 nonprofit organizations serve our community. The funds will be used to upgrade the aging kitchen so it can be used for things like healthy food classes, meal programs, and more.

The Graminia Community School Foundation received \$11,000 for communication equipment.

The Parkland Potters Guild received \$2,000 towards engaging the community in arts and learning.

Moms Canada received \$8,000 to help provide mentorship programs, learning opportunities, and resource connections for single mothers.

The Stony Plain Cowboy Gathering Society received \$9,000 for the music and art gathering 2017, which allows residents and visitors to experience top-notch talent in our own community.

The Carvel Ukrainian Cultural Society received \$23,000 for upgrades to the Carvel Hall facility, creating a new, barrier-free space for community use.

All of these organizations rely on the commitment of dedicated volunteers and staff and the support of our surrounding communities, and I'm so proud to be part of a community like Stony Plain, that pulls together and works together to make life better for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Jean: Albertans are footing the bill for a social licence plan that is getting Albertans absolutely nowhere. If the Premier truly believed that pipelines in every direction were good for our province, she would respect the National Energy Board process, that has served us so well, but she just couldn't help herself. She decided that imposing a carbon tax on Albertans was better for her NDP world view. Now that it's clear her social licence is getting us nowhere, will the Premier do the right thing and axe the carbon tax? Yes or no?

Some Hon. Members: *Groundhog Day.*

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, it is a little *Groundhog-y* in here today, I must say, but again I will say that the opposition would have us sacrifice jobs, investment in new pipelines by scrapping the

very program that got us the approval for the pipeline, that they never got. I don't know how much clearer I can be. The people who have the ability to make that decision are the federal government. The federal government made it very clear that they made that decision because of our climate leadership plan and the fact that the pipelines were delinked from carbon emissions. I know the member opposite is absolutely keen to cheer for Alberta's failure. We are not.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The Premier should do the right thing and listen to the overwhelming majority of Albertans, who didn't ask for social licence and don't want this carbon tax, and scrap the tax. The Premier should know that there's no making eco radicals happy. She has some in her own caucus, so she should be aware of that. The sooner the Premier decides to stand up for our province and stop kowtowing to those who want Alberta to fail, the better off all Albertans will be. Will the Premier send a strong signal that she's finally looking out for Alberta's interests and rip up her fairy-tale social licence contract?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the member opposite is actually getting his questions written by the Trump administration. Interestingly, a number of business leaders and investment leaders and leaders around the world are talking about how that's actually the wrong decision, the one that's being taken down south, for the world economy. The fact of the matter is that we need to understand that we need to work with our energy industry to reposition it as a progressive, sustainable, nonrenewable energy industry that can play on the international market. That's exactly what we've done together with industry, and that's how we're going to diversify the economy and grow the economy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The Premier created the hurdle to getting pipelines built in Canada. It's called social licence, and now the Premier finds herself constantly tripping over it. The rest of the world has rejected it, but it's no surprise, of course, that her brothers and sisters in the NDP have latched onto the social licence concept that the Premier created. They are the same people who wrote the Leap Manifesto. The Premier created the problem, and now she needs to fix it. When will the Premier send a clear signal to her NDP buddies, both west and east, that the only approvals needed for the pipelines in Canada are those coming from the NEB?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's actually the federal cabinet that makes the decision, not the NEB, and thankfully they did make the decision. As a result of that, we have a pipeline. We have a pipeline that's going to create tens of thousands of jobs. We have an additional pipeline. That pipeline is going to ensure that we can diversify our markets and get the best price for our resources, and that's something that's happened under our watch because we have never stopped advocating for it. Even as the members opposite prayed against its success because they saw it as a, quote, doomsday scenario, we had Albertans' backs.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Wildfire Response Reviews

Mr. Jean: Today, Mr. Speaker, marks the one-year anniversary since the people of Fort McMurray were allowed to return to their community after the worst natural disaster in our province's history. Promised reports into the government's performance in the fire are either gathering dust on the minister's desk or are still not complete. There are too many unanswered questions from Albertans. People are tired of waiting, and they want transparency and full accountability from this government. When will these reports be released, and why the ongoing delays in the release of the reports by this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, our government is absolutely committed to standing with the people of Fort McMurray as they work to recover from that awful disaster, and that's exactly what we've been doing from the first day and moving forward. I'm very proud of the work that the government has done, and I'm even more proud of the work that our public servants and our emergency responders have done, and of course I'm most proud of the way in which the people of Fort McMurray responded to this horrible, horrible challenge. We, as a result, are looking forward to receiving the two independent reports that we've commissioned, and I can tell the member opposite that they are imminent.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The fact is that we've had two major fires that have devastated two northern communities since 2011. The Slave Lake fire Flat Top Complex report in 2011 warned that Alberta was at risk of "large and potentially . . . catastrophic wildfires." It appears that it happened. But even with that warning, several of the report's recommendations went unanswered, unimplemented, or not addressed with any sense whatsoever of urgency. It's become clear that reports commissioned by the government are not enough. Albertans deserve real answers, real accountability, and real action from this government. Will the Premier call an independent inquiry into our wildfire response, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, the member opposite is mistaken because every single recommendation in the Flat Top report has been implemented. More to the point, however, it is really quite ridiculous that the member opposite would be calling for a public inquiry before he has reviewed one single fact from either one of the two independent reports that have been commissioned by the government of Alberta. It really makes one question whether this is really about good policy or whether it's about politics. I would urge the member opposite to read the two reports when they become available and then make a decision about what kind of inquiry is required.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, they have not been fully implemented by this or the previous government.

Here are, actually, the independent inquiries that the NDP called for in opposition: the mad cow crisis, the state of the foster care system, queue-jumping, the murder of a Camrose group home worker, the state of mental health services, the state of our child welfare system, and government spending under the Redford government. If it was good enough for these types of incidents, why

is it not good enough for the wildfires that happened in Fort McMurray? We're calling for an inquiry where 2,500 homes were burned to the ground and an entire city of 80,000 people was evacuated for more than a month. It's reasonable, and it's something the Premier would have called for if in opposition. What has changed?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what we have done is that we have commissioned two independent reviews of what happened with respect to the fire. As the member opposite knows, he was actually invited to participate in those reviews. In addition, the regional municipality will also be doing their own review. I think that it would be wise and not inflammatory for us to receive those reviews, to share them with the public, to review their conclusions, and then have a conversation about next steps.

The Speaker: Third main question.

2:00 Auditor General Recommendations on Health Care

Mr. Jean: Our health care system is bloated, wasteful, and inefficient, but the NDP is happy, as usual, with the status quo, a status quo where patients languish for 240 days for a knee replacement or 230 days for cataract surgery, a system where couples are divorced by nursing home as they age in a system where seniors are stuck waiting for long-term beds right across the province. The Auditor General has made it clear that it's time to measure performance by outcomes, not by dollars spent. Why doesn't the Premier agree?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, as I've said repeatedly, there are actually a number of outcomes in our health care system that we're very proud of. We've managed to reduce a number of wait times in a number of different sectors. At the same time we've increased services in a number of different parts of the province with respect to addictions treatment and mental health services, and of course we've moved forward on significant infrastructure investments, that members opposite and their friends ignored for decades, like, for instance, the cancer centre in Calgary. In fact, we are absolutely focused on getting the best health care outcomes for Albertans, and we'll continue to do that.

Mr. Jean: The AG's report shows that the system is a mess right now from the very top. We have multiple systems that don't talk to each other and are muddled in duplication and waste. We have managers managing managers that manage managers and a health bureaucracy that remains very removed from local health care needs, which are so important. His report says that duplication has been ingrained for decades, but as time goes on, the need to make major structural changes gets more and more important and needs to be done right now. Is the Premier happy funnelling billions into this waste, or will she actually find the courage to stand up and fix it for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think one of the things that challenges our health care system in Alberta is the fact that it has been the victim of major structural change after major structural change after major structural change. Every time that happened, services went down, costs went up, and chaos ensued. The member opposite thinks that that's what we need

to do, more structural change. I say no. That's exactly what we said to Albertans in the last election, that's exactly what they voted for, and that's exactly what we're delivering.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this is not my opinion; this is the Auditor General's opinion. They've clearly stated and highlighted the need for integration in the health care system. Other countries have integrated their systems, and now we are seeing Alberta fall down the rankings as other countries figure out how to deliver more and better health care for less money. Unnecessary prescriptions, repeat scans, and repeat tests, and the overall cost of long wait times are dragging our system way down. This is hurting patients, hurting Albertans and Alberta families. When can they expect to see fundamental change take place as recommended by the AG?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before and I will happily said again – first of all, let me just point out that once again the members opposite just can't get their plan straight. One day they want us to cut \$3 billion out of our operating expense, and the next day they're complaining that we're not doing enough in the health care system and that somehow we can magically make it all better through some weird sort of restructuring. We all know what that actually means. They want to privatize. They want to bring in a two-tiered system. They want one health care system for the wealthy and another health care system for everyone else. That will never happen on our watch.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Premier arrogantly proclaimed the federal cabinet's approval combined with the National Energy Board's guarantees that shovels will be in the ground on Kinder Morgan. That would be nice, but her B.C. siblings promised to block the project. The Northern Gateway pipeline also had cabinet and NEB approvals, and where is that project today? Nowhere. To the Premier: with your B.C. NDP and Greens prepared to go to war against this project, what makes you think these two approvals from the feds add up to a guarantee when this has not been the case till now?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the failure of other pipelines that had approvals ultimately came down to the courts, and the courts said: "You know what? When you ram stuff through without accommodating indigenous interests, without considering environmental issues, without talking to the communities, then the thing ain't gonna fly." That's what happened under their cousin's federal system that was in place before. That is not, in my view, what happened this time. I think that those issues have been properly addressed both by the NEB process as well as by the subsequent process and by the cabinet's review. I suspect that we'll find that the courts support that view, and we'll get a . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, here's what did happen. The Premier did not campaign on a carbon tax, but she did campaign on killing Northern Gateway, which died despite NEB and federal approvals. After she blindsided Albertans with that carbon tax, she justified it with the promise of mythical social licence to convince B.C. eco warriors to support the project. The B.C. wing of the Premier's

party made it clear that nothing will buy social licence. To the Premier: will you now admit that you have no social licence even with your family and that you sold Albertans a bill of goods when you rammed the carbon tax down their throats?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will proclaim with great pride is that we have a climate leadership plan that enjoys the support of industry, that enjoys the support of indigenous people, that enjoys the support of the environmental community. This is a climate change leadership plan that will create jobs, will support diversification of the economy, and it will also – wait for it – reduce emissions, something which the previous government failed to take into account at all. We did that, and in addition we delinked emissions from pipeline construction. That is a fundamental argument that we have made and we will continue to make . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier. Thank you.

Mr. McIver: The Premier's plan doesn't even have NDP support outside of Alberta. It's now proven that Albertans can't bank on federal and NEB approvals alone to be enough. For this government to suggest otherwise is wilful ignorance. On this side of the House we want this project to succeed. We want to see shovels in the ground, but there is no reasoning with the eco warriors who now call the shots in B.C. To the Premier: do you now regret opposing Northern Gateway, and do you have any real plan to get Kinder Morgan's shovels in the ground?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I don't plan to do is to talk down the chances for Alberta's growth, talk down the fact that Alberta is actually a great place to invest, try to discourage people from coming here by telling them the sky is falling when it's really not, all the kinds of politically motivated things that we see from those guys over there and those guys over there. They are so interested in their own political success that all they want to do is to see economic failure for Albertans. Thank God Albertans have a government that's actually standing up for them, that wants to see them prosper, that wants to create more jobs and – you know what? – is succeeding in that.

The Speaker: Calgary-Elbow.

Dementia Care

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last month Dementia Network Calgary met, and the room was full to capacity. One of my constituents said that the stories she heard that day, quote, highlighted the magnitude of the gaps for care for people with dementia and their families and the lack of knowledge and understanding about dementia in our province. Now, after hearing this and other stories, I looked into whether there is a provincial dementia strategy, and it turns out that there was a thorough process that resulted in a draft report and recommendations in 2015. To the Premier: will you implement the recommendations of this report, and if not, will you commit to creating a comprehensive provincial dementia strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question on the very important topic. The numbers of

Albertans continuing to be diagnosed with dementia are continuing to increase, and of course those individuals are impacted as well as their friends and their family members, who care about them. This is one of the reasons why we're investing in building 2,000 new long-term care and dementia care spaces throughout our province, and it's one of the reasons why we are pleased to have the report. The department is working on next steps, and we will continue to make sure that we move forward supporting Albertans, who clearly deserve to be supported.

Mr. Clark: But no commitment to creating an actual strategy.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister referenced, there are approximately 13,000 people in Calgary and area living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias, and it won't be long before 1 in 10 Albertans over the age of 65 and nearly half of Albertans over the age of 90 will be living with dementia. But the word "dementia" is mentioned exactly once in the Ministry of Health business plan. I'm concerned about this government's commitment to dementia care. Again to the Premier: is dementia care a priority for your government, and if so, why have you done so little about it?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, health care and dementia care supports are a priority for this government. That's one of the reasons why, immediately upon taking government, we reversed the billion dollars' worth of cuts that were proposed by the outgoing government. That's one of the reasons why we're moving forward on building 2,000 long-term care and dementia care spaces throughout our province. That's one of the reasons why we're investing in and ensuring that front-line services can be grown and supported in terms of helping people live in the communities that they helped to build, and that's one of the reasons I'm so proud that physicians stepped up and renegotiated a contract enabling us to have half a billion dollars reinvested into the system to make sure that we can improve it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Clark: With respect, Mr. Speaker, without a strategy, how do you know what you're doing and why you're doing it and if the resources are in place that you need?

The federal government is debating a national Alzheimer's and dementia strategy, and Ontario has been proactive, recently announcing a \$100 million spend over the next three years to implement their dementia strategy. This government has the opportunity to do some good and enact a made-in-Alberta plan so that we're ready for any available funding the federal government may provide. I'll ask one more time: why are you not being proactive and bringing forward an Alberta-based dementia strategy?

Ms Hoffman: I'll answer the question one more time, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what's happening. We are actually putting our investment where we say we will. We're making sure that we're supporting seniors in living in their communities, supporting their families, enhancing long-term care, home care, dementia care, and making sure that Albertans can have the supports they need rather than pushing for ideological cuts that all three conservative parties on the opposite side are pushing for. We're pushing to make Alberta stronger, we're supporting Alberta health care, and we're supporting the people who live here.

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

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Construction Concerns

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a recent town hall and in my office I have heard many concerns from my constituents about the impacts of the southwest Calgary ring road project. Given that there have been discussions on putting an asphalt plant in this area and no decisions have been communicated to the residents of Calgary-Bow, to the Minister of Transportation: can this government give a clear answer to my constituents on whether or not an asphalt plant will be operating in their neighbourhood?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for her question. I want to thank her for her advocacy on this issue and for bringing the concerns of the residents to my attention. This is not the first time that she's done so. The Calgary ring road is an important and a complex project, but the safety of the residents is an important priority. It's my top priority. Due to the feedback we've received from the member's constituents and the member herself, we've selected a location for the asphalt plant west of Sarcee Trail and south of Glenmore Trail. The location is more than one kilometre away from the nearest residents, and it is the farthest of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that residents of West Springs have expressed concerns about the gravel operations planned near Old Banff Coach Road and 101 Street S.W., what action is this government taking to protect the health and safety of Albertans from the effects of this operation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said, the government takes the health and safety concerns related to infrastructure projects very seriously indeed, and that's why we ordered a health impact assessment of the gravel operations. The report was reviewed by the acting medical officer of health, who found that our plans to monitor and mitigate dust levels will protect the health of community members. These measures include berms, processing gravel below the natural ground level, and monitoring noise and dust levels to ensure that appropriate thresholds are followed.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that residents have shared concerns about these operations with my office and your ministry for months, again to the Minister of Transportation: how has your ministry responded to this feedback, and was this feedback taken into account when making decisions about this project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for her question. Quite simply, we've listened to the concerns of local residents and found the right balance between the work and the safety of the community and the people working on the project. We've held multiple information sessions about the project, and we're attending more this spring. My office has responded to over a hundred pieces of correspondence and dozens of phone calls on the issue. That's why we have moved asphalt operations as far as possible from homes and are putting in robust mitigation for gravel operations. Our government is committed to minimizing the impact of this work on the community.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Energy-sector Unemployment

Mr. Panda: When the big three oil sands companies announce thousands of layoffs, one number that doesn't show up is the thousands of contract workers – electricians, welders, pipefitters, work camp cooks, cleaners, and other unionized trades – that also get laid off as a ripple effect spreads across the province. Does the minister of economic development know how many contract jobs have been eliminated with the NDP-initiated downsizing of the oil sands?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. First and foremost, you know, the number of layoffs that have occurred are attributed to the fact that there was a dramatic and sustained drop in the world price of oil, something which the government of Alberta, despite what the opposition says, does not control. We are a price taker, not a price maker. We acknowledge that it has been a rough couple of years for a lot of Alberta families and communities and workers. That's exactly why we announced our Alberta jobs plan, which has a historic investment in infrastructure and new projects with a number of other initiatives to help get Albertans back to work.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister has responsibilities for growing the economy – yet so many like the engineers and unionized trades protesting here on Tuesday prove that the minister is killing jobs rather than creating jobs – and given that my friends and former colleagues cannot find jobs because the oil companies are leaving Alberta due to this government, with more pink slips still being handed to employees, outweighing new jobs, will the minister admit that his job-creation plan is a complete and utter failure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish the member opposite and his party would actually look at the statistics and facts that are coming out. Number one, the Conference Board of Canada is projecting that Alberta's economy will grow by 3.3 per cent this year, the highest and fastest growth out of any province in the country. Full-time employment rose for the third straight month. Alberta led the country in private-sector investment last year and is on track this year. The number of cars sold in Alberta, for example, is up 15 per cent. Alberta operators drilled just shy of 2,000 wells during the first three months of 2017.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister said that he would create a hundred thousand jobs, yet we are negative 60,000 jobs, which is 160,000 jobs away from his promise, and given that on Tuesday faces behind the jobs he destroyed came here and the minister was too busy to meet with them until he was shamed into it by the protest, can the minister explain why he disrespects the unemployed by refusing to meet with relevant stakeholders until they come in hundreds knocking on his door?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only kernel of truth in that preamble was the fact that there were dozens of workers that

came up to the Alberta Legislature. Not only did the Minister of Energy along with staff from Economic Development and Trade and from Labour meet with this group; after they came here both the Minister of Labour and I met with them. There are a number of announcements that have been made that are going to be putting engineers back to work in this province, including the fact that Pembina-PIC, one of the successful PDP applicants, will be tendering a \$100 million contract for detailed design work that will be going to engineers. As far as . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:20 New Edmonton Hospital

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the government announced a new hospital in south Edmonton. This is great news for Edmonton and area residents, but I can provide many quotes from different ministers who have said that they won't make any capital announcements without first having a business case, functional plan, design, and cost estimates. So to the Minister of Infrastructure: do you have the business case, functional plan, design, and cost estimates for the new Edmonton hospital as per your announcement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. The issue really is this: do you announce a budget for a project without doing the work to decide what are the necessary services you're going to provide, what the need is going to be in the future, and what the approximate costs are? All of those things should be done before you develop a budget for the process and announce prices. We haven't done that. We've said that there's going to be a new hospital. We've said that we're doing the analysis, working with Alberta Health Services on what the needs are, what the mix of services is going to be. We've picked a site. We have not set a budget. Unlike the previous government that announced prices before they . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has not produced these documents or doesn't have them and given that the Beaverlodge hospital has been the number one capital project in AHS's north zone for several years and they have done the business case and the functional plan and the Infrastructure minister said a few weeks ago that the design was almost done, to the same Minister of Infrastructure: does this urban-centric government have two different standards, one for big cities and one for rural Alberta, when it comes to capital announcements?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question, which highlights the fact that his government, even while he was Minister of Infrastructure, failed to build a hospital in a community that – he's right – had been identified for many years as in need of one. I think it's pretty rich of you to say that we don't need one in Edmonton. We haven't had one in Edmonton since the 1980s. Premier Getty was in office. That is a long time. The people of Alberta deserve better, and all parts of Alberta deserve to have the very best care, and that's what they've got from this NDP government.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in April 2016 the Minister of Infrastructure also criticized the former government for announcing the Grande Prairie hospital and then designing it and said, "Now we scope out our projects before we make a political announcement," and given that this government has not designed the Edmonton hospital before announcing it, to the minister: wouldn't you say that you are now designing the Edmonton hospital to fit your political announcement? How is this different from the previous government?

Mr. Mason: Well, it is very much different than the previous government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Mason: If you take the Grande Prairie hospital as an example, it was announced including a price, including a budget. That's what the former Premier announced in Grande Prairie. It turns out that the price was way more than was necessary, but the bureaucracy decided that they had to design the hospital to fit the political announcement that had been made by that government's Premier. As a result, the shell of this hospital is quite a bit larger than it needs to be, and the costs are quite a bit higher than they needed to have been if that government had done its homework first, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Rural Education Funding

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many rural schools are struggling to stay open given the compounding costs of the carbon tax, the cap on high school credit funding, the impact of Bill 1, and declining enrolment. A school board in my riding is facing some very difficult choices in trying to meet the needs of their students in their rural schools. To the Minister of Education: how many rural school boards have you met with to examine the funding model to find solutions to keep small rural schools open to avoid loss of front-line workers and lengthy bus rides for young students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. It's very important that we retain a high quality of education in all corners of the province, so that's why globally we have made sure that we have increased the funding to meet the needs of Alberta's schools. I have been meeting with school boards around the province. In fact, I will be meeting with the balance of them here on Saturday and then on Monday as well to talk about these very issues.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that the Wildrose policy recognizes the social and economic importance of keeping schools open in small urban and rural school environments and given that we advocate to better fund the associated costs and given that the recent rural school symposium focused on partnerships that can support a healthy, vibrant, rural community and given that many rural schools are facing closure or already have been closed, what is the minister doing specifically to ensure that the beating heart of rural Alberta is protected and that schools stay open?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. This is a very important question that we need to address because, of course, if we do lose schools, they're very unlikely to open again, Mr. Speaker. We are working with some programs and looking to strengthen them. The small schools by necessity program looks to augment funds and looks for special geographic circumstances. We just announced the building of a school in Irma, Alberta, in partnership with the community raising money to use it as a community centre. I want to be creative because I want to make sure that we have the very highest quality education for all of our students.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that last Friday I attended a meeting with the Aspen View school board in Athabasca along with the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater and given that they would like a meeting with you to request a review of the funding model for rural schools and given that the other member has not publicly brought the issue forward on behalf of the school board this week, how is the imminent closure of any Alberta school making life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I totally agree that it's very important that we seek to find creative ways to keep schools open and to build new schools in rural Alberta, to rightsize these schools so that we have something we can work with in the future. Certainly, we will be meeting with the specific school board. I'll be seeing them here on the weekend and on Monday, and I'd be glad to talk to them and the rest of the rural school boards about ways by which we can improve the funding model for rural education in the province of Alberta.

Minister of Finance

Mr. Fildebrandt: Today the NDP are in court again, being sued for their latest attempt at a beer tax tariff on out-of-province brews. The minister's first tariff failed, and he refused to listen. We warned him about his second tariff, and he refused to listen, and now they're in court again. If the minister loses in court again, it will throw Alberta's brewers into chaos and uncertainty and open up Alberta taxpayers to millions of dollars in back taxes. If the minister loses in court again, will he finally admit that he lacks the competence to do his job?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what our government did. Our government is standing up for Alberta brewers. We are standing up for Alberta businesses. For far too long other provinces' companies have enjoyed Alberta's open borders and open trade markets. Finally, it took a New Democrat government to negotiate a fair trade agreement for all of Canada where now our brewers have equal access to other markets.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that it's clear that beer is impairing the judgment of the minister and he's not seeing straight as he swerves from left to left and that he has not only violated the Constitution on free trade but his very own laws that he himself introduced and given that he broke the law by illegally spending \$1.1 billion on the coal phase-out and that he had to repeal his own

debt ceiling law just months after he introduced it – the first step towards recovery is admitting that you have a problem. Will the Minister of Finance admit that he's got a spending problem?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

2:30

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I want to commend, first of all, the Minister of Finance for his work to help support small brewers in this province. In less than three years the growth of craft breweries and brew pubs has exploded from 14 to over 60 by the end of this year. What I'd love to ask the member opposite and the opposition: why are they working against Alberta brewers and cheering for them to fail and defending brewers in other provinces? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They should let the Finance minister stand up and stop benching him.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Finance has left behind a mess, with a projected \$100 billion debt, historically low credit ratings, record high spending, and a long trail of legal and constitutional violations that were easily avoidable, and given that the minister is starting to look like a renter who's left such a mess of the place that he plans to move out and forfeit the deposit, does the minister have any plans to clean up his mess, or does he intend to leave it to his successors?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, you know, I want to start off by quoting the *National Post*. "Alberta's non-discriminatory uniform tax rate with targeted grants to craft brewers is the most trade and constitutionally compliant in Canada." We came up with a fair system, where we charge the same markup, whether it's a brewer from Alberta, Saskatchewan, or somewhere else, at \$1.25 a litre. We are standing up for Alberta brewers and Alberta crafters. The opposition is cheering for Saskatchewan. I want to know if the member opposite is planning to run in their next election. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. [interjections] Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

School Transportation in Calgary

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over half of all Calgary board of education bus students have enjoyed great success in attending schools of their own choosing, but parents are now being told that the board will no longer fund any portion of their transportation costs and that they'll no longer run school buses in these areas. That means that in many cases very young students will have to negotiate multiple transfers on public transit, which can be both terrifying and dangerous for children of that age. How can the minister possibly claim that Bill 1 is making life better for the 13,000 families who are simply trying to get their young people to their school of choice and back safely?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, An Act to Reduce School Fees, in fact, does do that for 600,000 families. They will be seeing a reduction in their school fees, including bus fees as well. It's not an act to eliminate school fees because, of course, there are a myriad of fees that are out there after decades of this previous government allowing fees to go wild. We're bringing them

in. Certainly, I'm working with the Calgary board of education and many others to make sure that they understand both the letter of the law and the spirit of the law to keep school fees in moderation and to provide the services that they need.

Mr. Rodney: That's not what all these parents are saying, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the parents tell me that they are more than willing to pay increased transportation fees but that the CBE will not work with these families on a transportation solution because they feel that they're being held hostage by the minister's lack of understanding of the impact of his bill on parents and students, Minister, will you commit to working with school boards and actually consult with parents to ensure that funding has been provided, and will you commit to meeting with representatives from these families to find manageable, affordable, safe transportation solutions for these children so that these successful programs, that families have chosen, will not die?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'm more than happy to and do work with parents and school boards around school fees in general and then bus routes specifically. You know, the effort to reduce school fees for Alberta families in general is very, very well received. Yes, there are some things to work out along the way, but at the end of the day for us to reduce school fees for more than 600,000 families in the fall – I think that we will see a considerable advantage and make life better for Alberta families.

Mr. Rodney: Given that the system was working extremely well before the NDP started manipulating it and given that a survey of parents in two schools in our area indicates that transportation costs will increase over \$850 each year and that costs for before and after school care will increase over \$530 to accommodate all the school time changes in an effort to reduce their transportation budget as a direct result of Bill 1, how can the minister claim that the NDP has the backs of these families, who are now faced with more than \$1,000 per child in additional costs with a significantly worse level of service than they enjoy right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very important for us to work together with school boards to make sure they understand that they're not meant to increase school fees because of An Act to Reduce School Fees. You know, the hon. member should have looked at the bill to see that one part of it is to reduce school fees and another one is to regulate to make sure that if school fees are excessive, they will not pass. These school fees will come to my attention, and we will review to see if, in fact, they are legitimate or not.

Tourism and Canada 150

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, 2017 marks Canada's 150th birthday. Tourists from across Canada and around the world have their sights set on visiting Banff, the birthplace of our national parks system. This is great news for the tourism and hospitality industry but will put a lot of pressure on the park's infrastructure. Over the May long weekend 31,000 vehicles entering Banff set a new record. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is the government doing to help towns like Banff and Lake Louise deal with the influx of tourists and to help ensure a positive visitor experience?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Staff in my department are working very closely with the town of Banff, Parks Canada, Banff/Lake Louise Tourism, and other stakeholders to effectively manage the increase in visitors to the province's national parks and to help ensure that visitors are aware of free shuttle services and other transit options within the Banff and Lake Louise area as well as to ensure accurate and timely information is available at entry gates and online before they arrive.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the government's latest stats show that the province's national parks and resorts experienced record visitation and occupancy rates last year – and this is great news for businesses in my riding and the region – to the minister: what strategic investments are you making to maximize these opportunities and expand the tourism industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that tourism spurs economic growth, creates jobs, and makes life better for Albertans. That's why we're partnering with the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada to help grow indigenous tourism in our province. We're enabling communities to reach and engage more people with improved tourism technologies through the visitor services innovation fund, and the government is investing \$54.2 million this year for improvements to campgrounds throughout Alberta through the Alberta parks capital plan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the popularity of destinations like Banff and Lake Louise has a spillover effect on neighbouring communities like Cochrane, Canmore, and Kananaskis, again to the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is being done to help these towns capitalize on the influx of visitors we are expecting this year and into the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We're working with Travel Alberta and the tourism industry to encourage visitors to travel beyond the mountain park resorts, to discover all the hidden gems that our province has to offer. Alberta's visitor information centres in places like Canmore, Hinton, West Glacier, and Crowsnest Pass are monitoring local conditions such as high traffic volumes to help redirect visitors to alternative sites and hidden gems in our province. We're also highlighting destinations like Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a drive along Cowboy Trail, and a visit to Fort Macleod national historic site.

Thank you.

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

Air Ambulance Service Contract

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has come to my attention that AHS has actively taken a role in assisting CanWest Air as they

attempt to comply in the multibase medevac RFP. We are being told that this includes contacting airport authorities and employing coercive tactics. AHS issued the RFP, and now the contractor selected is failing to meet that RFP, all while the losing contractors are left wondering how fair the process was to begin with. How can the Minister of Health be complicit by allowing this to happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I wish it was about government policy, but instead it's slandering front-line workers, so that's unfortunate. I'd have to say that I respect the fact that there is a contract negotiation under way. That is taking place right now. Should it be successful or not, then we'll be in a position to discuss next steps, but I respect both parties, that are in the process of trying to negotiate a contract, doing that in a way that's fair, respectful, and appropriate.

2:40

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that AHS has issued a number of inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading statements to the media to counter legitimate concerns from local community leaders, including saying that the successful vendor will meet all requirements of the RFP by the time the existing contract expires in late August, and given that no lease arrangements or construction permits have been issued for new medevac bases in Medicine Hat or Peace River, Minister, how is it a fair and transparent process when AHS is rigging the RFP in favour of the operator without bases in these areas?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Certainly, it's our constant expectation that things are done in a fair and upright manner, and that's going to continue to be my position. We expect that when there is an RFP, when there is a contract that's to be negotiated, it's done in a way that's fair. There hasn't been a contract signed yet. I think that the member opposite is trying to fan some flames when the truth is that there are negotiations happening right now. My commitment is to ensuring that we have local air ambulance at the communities where it's currently housed, and that will continue to be my commitment, ensuring that everybody is safe.

Mr. Hunter: In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, given that there is ample evidence that CanWest cannot comply with the RFP and given that we have been told that the contract for Medicine Hat and Peace River will be signed today, why would the minister sign any contract with any potential service provider that cannot meet an RFP?

Ms Hoffman: Again, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of accusations and hyperbole in place. AHS is in a position where they're the ones who are negotiating the specifics of the contract. My policy direction, which was very clear and in accordance with the Auditor General's recommendations, is to set the box and ensure that the service providers are operating within that. My box is ensuring that we have the very best care throughout the province, that no matter where you live, you have access to adequate air ambulance. Of course, we want to do that at a rate that's fair for taxpayers.

AHS, I believe, is having a conference call tomorrow with the municipalities of both Peace River and Medicine Hat, and I look forward to hearing how those conversations unfold, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds, folks.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

National Aboriginal History Month

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mark the beginning of National Aboriginal History Month and acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 land. When we walk to this House and throughout the city, we do so in the footsteps of the indigenous peoples who lived here for thousands and thousands of years. Since 2009 June has been recognized each year as National Aboriginal History Month in Canada.

This year also marks the 21st anniversary of National Aboriginal Day, celebrated on June 21 of each year. The purpose of this national day of recognition is to encourage solidarity amongst all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people and for all Canadians to celebrate the many contributions and successes of indigenous peoples across the country. National Aboriginal Day also celebrates and recognizes the many diverse indigenous languages, cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and communities. It is important to share these stories and this history because for too long they have been missing from Canada's official history.

Even more important is the work together, government to government, with First Nations to make life better for indigenous families. I'm very proud to be part of a government that is taking action to do just that by investing in clean water, education, jobs, and economic development to create opportunities and support strong First Nations communities.

I'm looking forward to participating in the upcoming activities this year and hope you all will as well. With little effort you can find amazing events in communities throughout Alberta. I invite you to Maskwacis to share the rich historical heritage of our central Alberta Cree nations. I will have the privilege to attend the inauguration of the Samson Cree Nation Chief and Council this June.

As we move forward together in reconciliation, let us acknowledge and embrace the long history of traditional teachings, medicines, spiritualism, and the many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Albertans. [Remarks in Cree]

Thank you.

Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Strankman: With the recent Court of Appeal's decision upholding the Redwater Energy bankruptcy decision, it seems that once again the little guy is left in limbo while the local MLA is completely mute on the subject. Now landowners face issues such as the Lexin receivership, and unless they already had a judgment approved under a section 36 application to the Surface Rights Board, they are out of luck as their application will be put on indefinite hold.

Why does this matter? It matters because this government has been extremely vague in answering questions about how they are going to protect landowners in regard to renewable energy projects. Despite attempts by the opposition to ensure some level of accountability and protection measures, this government simply bullied its legislation through.

NDP ministers routinely ignore constituents' questions and, instead, attack the messenger. It's a typical response from a government that all too often rushes through incomplete or ill-thought-out legislation. Ministers routinely accuse their critics of being anti-industry or antijob. Recently one minister even took a

mayor's comments out of context to give a typical non answer to the Member for Little Bow's question. The mayor publicly expressed her disapproval, but I doubt that will stop the government from continuing the practice.

Given recent events and the lack of will exhibited by this government to stand up for landowners, it should really come as no surprise to Albertans. This government constantly puts its ideological agenda ahead of common sense and won't allow a basic thing such as property rights to stand in its way. A government whose approval ratings fall far behind the opposition parties' simply has nothing to lose.

Mr. Speaker, they may have the majority now, but that won't stop members of the opposition from shining a public light on silly ideological ways. We will continue to hold them accountable and to stand up for the average Albertan.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Bill 208

Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 208, Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to practical changes that make life more affordable for Albertans. Electricity and energy for homes, businesses, and public institutions are essential, and consumers need to know that the companies they're purchasing from are well regulated and fair. Bill 208 will support greater consumer protection, and I look forward to discussion and deliberation with my colleagues in the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document which I referred to in my member's statement that proves that the Wildrose has moved to the ideologically extreme right and that they've broken their promise to working people.

The Speaker: Do we in fact have that point of order today? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to be brief. I rise today on Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). I can just briefly run over them for you:

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member; [and]
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to [cause] disorder.

At approximately 2:20 this afternoon, during question period, the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade used the term "the only kernel of truth," which, to me, would be a very clear implication that the minister called the Member for Calgary-Foothills a liar on all other statements that he made in his question.

Many references and roundabout ways of calling a member a liar have been attempted in this House and have been ruled out of order in the past, and I would ask . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Hanson: . . . that this be treated the same way and that the hon. member simply apologize and withdraw his comment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't believe that there is a point of order here. You know, I've watched with some interest as this sort of line of thinking has developed with the opposition. Because they have used very clear language that is unparliamentary such as "liar" – and they use that in their members' statements – and "deliberately misleading," which are clearly unparliamentary and have been ruled so not just by you but by previous Speakers here and Speakers throughout the Legislatures and Parliament of this country, that does not mean that any particular phrase that could be interpreted to suggest that someone has not told the full truth is, in fact, out of order.

Now, in this particular case the hon. minister said, "the only kernel of truth," so he was acknowledging, in fact, that there was some truth contained in the thing, but obviously he was disagreeing with some of the parts of the statement that had been made by the hon. member.

I think the opposition has been making a serious error here in their attempt to extrapolate clear rulings about clear violations such as saying "lie" or "deliberately mislead" and making that apply to a member in almost any situation that is actually part of the norm of parliamentary discourse in this place. Mr. Speaker, it's quite acceptable in this place to make statements like that. I often say, when I disagree with statements or facts in question period, that nothing could be further from the truth. There are other cases where Speakers have ruled on things like "the member is a stranger to the truth," different ways of expressing that point of view that are not considered unparliamentary.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade was very far from any sort of line with respect to his comment. He was talking about his view of the question that was being put to him, and he acknowledged that there was a kernel of truth. That may imply that there are some things that were not true in the statement. That's a far cry from calling a member a liar, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's time we settled this question without ambiguity because, clearly, the opposition doesn't understand the distinction, and I hope that we can get this cleared up.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this matter?

Well, I agree. This particular discussion has gone on on so many, numerous, occasions that there seems to be a desire on this side of the House to see some kind of black-and-white rule with respect to the use of such words and phrases. There have been rulings in the past, some of which have been made by myself, with respect to this item. Most often, if not always, the point that I've made is to the context in which the comments are made, and even that particular application of principle is one of maybe an art form but certainly not a science.

The member wasn't accused of lying or of a deliberate falsehood, so it doesn't really qualify as an allegation. With respect to the "language of a nature likely to create disorder," Government House Leader, it is getting awfully close to that. You do make very

compelling arguments when you say statements like referring further from the truth, et cetera.

I contemplated this considerably when I heard the comment by the minister. I think soon we're going to be having a long summer respite, which might well help all of us, and I would ask each of you as we go forward to consider ways in which the points you want to protect personal freedom with are used in such a manner that we do not even risk causing a disorder in this House.

In this particular instance, hon. member, I don't believe there is a point of order. However, Government House Leader, let me remind everybody and your caucus to be more conscious, please, of the utilization of these phrases, and let us come back to this House in the fall with a better, shared understanding of what is acceptable in this House.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Appointment

22. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee tabled in the Assembly on May 25, 2017, and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Marianne Ryan be appointed as Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a five year term, effective July 1, 2017.

The Speaker: Any members who wish to speak to Motion 22?

Seeing and hearing none, no need for a closure statement. Having heard the motion as proposed by the Government House Leader, does the Assembly agree with the motion? All in favour, say yea.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Aye? Okay. Fine. Nay? Motion is carried. It's been one of those days.

[Government Motion 22 carried]

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly say yea to that decision.

Auditor General Search Committee

23. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that:
1. A Select Special Auditor General Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed consisting of the following members, namely: Mr. Shepherd, chair; Mr. Malkinson, deputy chair; Mr. Cyr; Mr. Gill; Mr. Horne; Mr. Kleinsteuber; Mrs. Littlewood; Mr. van Dijken; and Ms Woollard, for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Auditor General and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.
 2. Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
 3. In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service

employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.

4. The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued.
5. When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members who would wish to speak to Motion 23?

[Government Motion 23 carried]

3:00 Committee Membership Changes

24. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that the following committee membership changes be made.
- A. on the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future: that Mr. Panda replace Mr. Orr and that Mr. Gill replace Mr. Drysdale;
 - B. on the Standing Committee on Families and Communities: that Mr. Orr replace Mrs. Pitt;
 - C. on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: that Mr. Gill replace Mr. Ellis.

The Speaker: Are there any members that wish to speak to Motion 24?

[Government Motion 24 carried]

Alberta Property Rights Advocate

25. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that:
1. The 2016 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship for the purpose of conducting a review of the recommendations outlined in the report;
 2. The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 3. In accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Assembly within 60 days of the report being referred to it if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to Motion 25?

[Government Motion 25 carried]

Missing Persons Act

26. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that:
1. The Missing Persons Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities and the committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a

- comprehensive review pursuant to section 13 of that act;
2. The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 3. In accordance with section 13 of the Missing Persons Act the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within one year after beginning its review, and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to Motion 26?

[Government Motion 26 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 16

An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 16, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, on behalf of the Minister of Energy.

I am proud to stand with my caucus colleagues to vote for putting the cap on electricity prices to make life more affordable for Albertans. I look forward to easing Albertans' minds by letting them know that we are keeping their electricity rates in check.

My caucus colleagues and I know how hard the energy-only electricity market has been on Alberta families. Unfortunately, that is not true of everyone in this House. Some have suggested that the broken system that we inherited is actually working. They've called it healthy, high functioning, and once prosperous. If you've never struggled to make ends meet or never felt sympathy for a family that worries about next month's prices, then maybe it seems to work just fine, but the people in our caucus remember far too well the hardship that volatile electricity prices have caused for Alberta families. Some of us have even experienced this first-hand.

One thing that I know for sure: once you've lived through these challenges, once you've struggled alongside other families who have worried that their next bill might break their budget, you can't forget how broken our system has been, so I cannot understand how anyone could forget the years of wild price swings, the many months of sudden spikes that we have lived through alongside our neighbours and constituents. On our side we can't forget the hardships caused by these spikes, but given that some in this House have called these spikes reasonable and part of a healthy, high-functioning market that was working well, apparently it bears repeating.

From 2010 to 2014 the one thing you could bank on with your power bill was that you could never bank on it. The only thing that was consistent with the bill was its inconsistency. In those five years rates were over the cap of 6.8 cents as often as they were under. So if anyone is still struggling to understand why we are doing this, you need only to look back a few years.

What made it even harder for families and small businesses was the volatility. From month to month you didn't know what rates might do. Spikes regularly sent prices over 8 cents per kilowatt hour and often over 10 cents. In 2011 and 2012 alone rates flirted with or surpassed 12 cents in six separate months and once jumped over 15 cents. That meant typical residential electricity bills with energy

charges well over \$90 per month, two to three times what they were only a season earlier. How does a family plan for that? How do you make your family budget work with that kind of uncertainty, and how could you ever forget the anxiety that comes with it?

While some have said that this was part of a working system, that this was fair and reasonable treatment of Albertans, we have decided to take action. We are bringing the reforms Alberta needs to make our power system cleaner and more stable. Our capacity market will bring stability to the broken, volatile system that we inherited, a system that clearly hasn't been working for Albertans and a system that the top experts said was struggling to attract new investments.

Designing the right fix for such a broken system is going to take some time. It was left too long in disrepair. While we're stuck with a system we all inherited, that spikes our power rates unpredictably, Albertans deserve to feel secure that they can at least guess at next month's rates. They deserve to have more security for their finances than has been allowed under our current market.

With this bill Albertans would know that they wouldn't need to pay more than the cap, and that applies straight across the province to all consumers on the RRO, including those who receive their RRO from an REA or a municipality. As we know, these providers are in a different situation. The Alberta Utilities Commission does not regulate their rates. That meant that it was more complex to include them in the cap in a fiscally prudent manner. But we committed to working with the REAs and municipalities to include them in the cap, and through this collaboration we found a good solution. Promise made, promise kept. We're thrilled to be able to make the cap work for the REAs and for all Albertans. That's why we are setting this cap, so that regulated rates can't spike to unreasonable levels the way they have in years past.

Mr. MacIntyre: Oh, what are you drinking over there?

Mr. S. Anderson: You should cool your jets, Member.

That's our plan in a nutshell.

The electricity system is complex, but making life more affordable for Alberta families is a simple idea. We are setting the stage for a more reliable electricity system that is more attractive to investors and more stable and predictable for consumers. While we take the necessary time to get that right, we won't let the broken system we inherited continue to subject consumers to its scary roller coaster. We are making life better for Albertans by moving forward with our bill to cap electricity rates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: You guessed it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, that was an interesting fairy tale. Just to maybe illuminate something for the hon. member, Albertans have had available to them all the way along fixed-rate contracts, which brings stability to their electricity prices. We know that. Most Albertans are aware of that. In fact, I would say that all Albertans except maybe the hon. member have been aware of that.

Let's get down to what this particular piece of legislation is really about. It is not about protecting Albertans from price spikes in electricity. This act is a bill to protect this government from enraged Albertans, enraged as they watch this government mismanage the electricity file consistently, from the get-go; enraged as they watch this government bankrupt the Balancing Pool, vaporizing a \$705 million surplus in literally months, forcing the Balancing Pool to the verge of bankruptcy, having to introduce Bill 34, a rushed piece of legislation to try to get something in place to bail out the Balancing Pool because this government mismanaged the electricity file

so bad that now we're staring at \$4.437 billion of debt. That's certainly making life more affordable for Albertans, isn't it?

3:10

This bill is actually to protect this government from enraged Albertans as they see this government destroy the once competitive power market and replace it with a \$20 billion electricity market, \$20 billion in utility debt that we have not had. That's now going to be on the backs of the taxpayers.

During debate this government rallied their backbenches to speak in support of this bill with a blistering defence, and I just want to repeat some of the excellent oratory that we were receiving from other side there. We had the hon. Member for Sherwood Park telling us that the REAs would be very supportive of this because they're co-ops and they're socialists, after all. Well, frankly, the responses I'm getting from the REAs are not repeatable in this House.

Then we had the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein talking to us about how the government

does not intend to remove the powers of REA boards of directors or city councils that independently set their own rates. However, to help ensure that rates are reasonable, the government will put a mechanism in place that will provide reimbursement for reasonable rates, and here we have our mechanism that we're discussing in this section.

Should these providers choose to put in place unreasonable rates, the government will . . .

On and on he went. Basically, charging the REAs, that are member owned, member driven – their members are on the board – and suggesting that these REAs are somehow going to be unreasonable to their own people. It was just incredible. I tell you, what a blistering defence of this bill.

This bill has nothing to do whatsoever with protecting Albertans. It has everything to do with ensuring that this government has as minimal and as controlled a PR problem as possible as they move our electricity forward into the most expensive model possible, with the greatest amount of debt possible, and it's mounting by the day. By their own estimates we're looking at over \$4 billion just to bail out the Balancing Pool, thanks to their excellent management of that, what was supposed to be an arm's-length body.

Then, of course, we come to the section in this bill regarding the MSA, the Market Surveillance Administrator, or, as I like to call them, the electricity police. Of course, again we had the Member for Calgary-Klein illuminating us on the purpose of that section, the section regarding the MSA. According to his own words, the section of the proposed act is to actually enable the MSA to add to their capabilities. I think he might have used the word "enhance." Well, I believe the hon. member needs a new thesaurus because in the act itself it says, "limiting or restricting any powers, duties or functions of the Commission or the Market Surveillance Administrator as the Minister considers necessary." News flash: limiting and restricting are not synonymous with enhancing. Those aren't synonyms for the words "enhance" or "add" or "enable." Limiting and restricting is exactly what it says, to rein in.

We saw this very same thing with Bill 27 as this government is terrified of having the Market Surveillance Administrator actually investigate and look into the situations regarding renewables deployment in this province. They're terrified of it, so much so that they absolutely stopped the MSA, through Bill 27, from being able to do its job. Here we have now the minister, an elected politician, meddling in the affairs of a surveillance administrator whose mandate is to be free of political interference, whose mandate is to protect us, the people of Alberta, in a manner that is unfettered by politics. Yet here we have the very minister being given extraordinary powers to determine what the MSA is and is not able to

do. That is reprehensible. They are completely gutting the powers of the MSA here.

This, as I said, is not an act to protect consumers. This is an act to protect this government from enraged Albertans experiencing the full onslaught from this government's reckless disembowelment of our deregulated electricity market. It's crazy.

So on we go. We have a situation where this government has so mismanaged the electricity file that we now have a broken system. A competitive system is the very best mechanism to protect consumers. It always has been. The protection comes from various players vying for our dollars, providing better services than the competition, better prices than the competition, better anything and everything than the competition. It's good. It's healthy for an economy to have strong competition. It's interesting to note that the very portions of our electricity bill that have actually riled Albertans the most over the years are all those sections of our electricity bill that have remained fully regulated by the government. The deregulated side of our electricity bill, the actual consumption charges for the usage of electricity, is the line item that has been coming down. We're down now around 3 cents and a bit. That's a great rate. The current RRO is great, yet this government seems to think they need to protect Albertans from that, really, pegging it at 6.8 cents for some reason. It's wild.

This government seems to think that they know better, and they are going to completely gut the deregulated system that we have in place and put that whole thing as a regulated system. We are going to have capacity contracts. And on that note, it should be pointed out that this particular bill before us right now expires once the capacity contracts come in. That raises the question: don't we need protection after that? Aren't we going to need protection from these unreasonable people jacking up our electricity rates that the government seems to think are out there lurking in the wings? Somehow at the end of four years, when the capacity market comes along, well, we're not going to need that kind of protection?

There are things going on here. The stage is being set for Albertans to experience an Ontario-style jump in the cost of electricity, not just the consumption cost. There are many more costs other than the per kilowatt charge that Albertans are paying or are going to be paying for electricity. This government is going to need, if they carry out their 30 per cent renewables by 2030, something in the order of 2,400 megawatts of new transmission just to connect all of the renewables to the grid. Somebody is going to have to pay for that. Guess who? The good old taxpayers again, on and on.

We're going to have \$20 billion to \$25 billion in cost in capacity contracts. That's going to be on the taxpayer's back. Then there are transition costs yet that we do not know about for how this government plans to help our coal mining communities. On and on and on these costs keep mounting. On and on and on this government keeps shifting those burdens onto the taxpayer. On and on this government is hiding. They're hiding the true cost of their mismanagement of this electricity file. It is atrocious. They continually say, "No, we're not following in Ontario's footsteps," yet the tracks are unmistakable, shifting the burden onto the taxpayers when we had no utility debt before, putting in place all kinds of mechanisms that weren't necessary in an open-competition market like we had, hindering the ability of the Market Surveillance Administrator to do their job.

It's one thing after another, Mr. Speaker. This government is definitely taking us down the Ontario path. There is no mistake about it. Just take a look at who's working in the wings behind for this government. It's all there. The earmarks are there. It's unmistakable.

An Hon. Member: There's a conspiracy.

3:20

Mr. MacIntyre: Here we go with \$20 billion. Twenty billion dollars is not a conspiracy; \$4.437 billion in Balancing Pool debt is not a conspiracy.

These are bills Albertans didn't see before. This government is actually encumbering future generations through their own mismanagement. All of that utility debt is going to be added to the provincial debt, and it's just going to balloon that \$70 billion number up to who knows what? That's going to be on our children and our children's children because of this government, and it is completely unnecessary.

The electricity system wasn't broken. What is broken is a government that doesn't know how to manage its affairs. What is broken is a Minister of Finance that has at least been consistent, consistently bad but consistent. Five credit downgrades: that is not sound management. Bankrupting the Balancing Pool is not sound management.

The Minister of Energy wouldn't even respond to the pleadings from the chairman of the Balancing Pool when he was in desperate need of direction from her department, and there was silence. They ended up having to pay a \$29 million penalty because of that minister's mismanagement, on and on again.

The electricity system wasn't broken. What was broken is this government, and this government is breaking the people of Alberta, financially encumbering future generations with an irresponsible and reprehensible amount of debt. It is shameful. They should be apologizing to Albertans for their mismanagement of Albertans' economy, Albertans' electricity system.

As you can tell, Mr. Speaker, I'm not in favour of this bill. I knew you knew that.

An Hon. Member: Say it ain't so.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yeah, it's true. I'm not in favour of this bill.

Being faithful to our job as the Official Opposition, we put forward some amendments that would make this bill better. The government made it really clear that they don't want the MSA to be able to exercise its powers, so the amendment was voted down.

If I had the time, I would have loved to have carried on with this, but frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that this government thinks this bill is just dandy the way it is, that it's fine to give away the arm's-length nature of our Market Surveillance Administrator and the other agencies within our electricity system and allow for the Minister of Energy to meddle as deeply as the minister wants to within those functions and, I will say, to the detriment of Albertans.

I will not be supporting this bill. I would urge all my hon. colleagues not to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years before the NDP won government, we saw harmful electricity price spikes making life for Albertans very difficult. That is why we are taking action. The problem was especially acute in the first half of the decade, from 2010 to 2014. Electricity prices were over the government's 6.8-cent price cap half of the time. They were regularly over 8 cents, often 10 cents, and Alberta families had to deal with spikes near and over 12 cents in six separate months from 2011 to 2012. In fact, the price spiked one month, one time, to 15 cents. The energy charge on the average residential bill could move between \$20 and \$90, depending on the month.

People certainly noticed, and we heard this when we were campaigning. For the government the problem was always clear: the energy-only market that the PCs adopted in the early 2000s requires price volatility to work.

The archives are replete with examples of news coverage of this problem, particularly in the first half of the decade, when families endured the hardship of budgeting with spikes up to 60 per cent from one month to the next. From November 2010: *Frigid Weather Sees Power Price Spike*. From July 2011: *August Brings 30% Spike in Local Power Bills and EPCOR Hikes Power Bills to Spike 43%*. From December 2011: *Anger over Electricity Prices Puts Producers on Edge*. From January 2012: *Power Price Spike Shuts Plants; Alstom, Alberta Newsprint Halt Production as Electricity Cost Hits Threshold Level*. From a July 2012 *Edmonton Journal* article: now in a free market system, where private companies assume all risk, there's no incentive to build anything that isn't practically profitable; that makes the system less elastic and could lead us into occasional darkness. From 2014: *Albertans Warned of Power "Price Spike"*. From the *Calgary Herald* July 2015: consumers will see jump in power bills. In August 2015 the *Calgary Herald* said: province's electricity policy under review after complaints; aggressive behaviour by utilities and price spikes cited as reasons.

This is not a two-year problem. This has been going on for more than a decade.

The cause of these recurring spikes was not a mystery. In an October 2012 *Calgary Herald* article called *Alberta Power Rates among Highest in Country; Deregulated Market Blamed for Price Spikes*, with the opening line, "Residents of Calgary and Edmonton still pay among the highest prices for electricity in the country," you can read this clear passage: "Electricity consultant Sheldon Fulton said electricity costs for residential consumers are high in Alberta because of market volatility that can rocket the megawatt-hour price of electricity." It's not something that's happened just since we became the government.

As the volatility and uncertainty for consumers continued, even the PCs had to take notice, and they renewed their well-worn messages about considering changes. In October 2014 the late Premier Prentice said:

I'm open to a look-see at why we have the consumer price spikes that we have had and what can be done about them and what steps we need to take to ensure that we don't experience these going forward.

And:

The kind of price spikes we've had for consumer pricing of electricity in a province where energy is abundant is something that people want a closer look at.

Through these years the Wildrose knew that the system was unfair to consumers. The Wildrose opposition used to see the problem. In December 2013 Wildrose critic Joe Anglin told the *Herald* that Albertans keep getting gouged each month by their power bills. He also said that we've got to change how the wholesale market operates so there aren't those wild swings in electricity prices and that the cost spike hurts families and businesses and demonstrates that Energy minister Ken Hughes is obviously oblivious to the deficiencies of the power market.

This is from an *Edmonton Sun* article from October 2014:

Wildrose energy critic Jason Hale said the market is volatile and unaffordable for businesses and families on fixed incomes. The Wildrose is pledging to reduce price volatility for consumers and businesses who have not signed a fixed price contract for their electricity – if Wildrose is elected government.

That is exactly what our bill, An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates, does, and I support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move to 29(2)(a), I wonder if we could get unanimous consent to make an introduction to the House.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Johnson family who have travelled long and far for five and a half hours from the community of Barnwell to be here. I would like to ask them to rise and remain standing as I call their names: Angela Johnson, Dylan Johnson, Brandon Johnson, Jennifer Johnson, and Justin Johnson. Please join with me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 16 An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions for the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, is there anyone else that wishes to speak to Bill 16?

Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, do you wish to close debate?

3:30

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a moment to express how proud the Minister of Energy is of this legislation – we all are – and my gratitude to everyone who contributed to its development and enactment.

I want to begin by thanking the bill's cosponsors, the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose and the Member for Calgary-Klein. Each of these members has contributed to this important legislation with their hard work, their feedback, and their input.

I also want to thank my caucus colleagues for their support, motivated for some by their first-hand experience with the hardships caused by our volatile electricity system, and for all their compassion for the Alberta families that each and every one of us knows have struggled.

I also want to thank the Energy ministry staff for all of the hard work they have contributed to developing this careful, measured, and precisely tailored piece of legislation. In direct contrast to the worry and anxiety that Albertans have felt in the past, Albertans will benefit from the security and certainty of this policy.

Thank you to all who have made this possible.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:31 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Phillips
Babcock	Hoffman	Piquette

Bilous	Horne	Renaud
Carlier	Larivee	Rosendahl
Carson	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Mason	Shepherd
Eggen	McLean	Sigurdson
Feehan	Miller	Sweet
Goehring	Nielsen	Turner
Gray	Payne	Woollard

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Loewen	Starke
Hanson	MacIntyre	Stier
Hunter		

Totals:	For – 33	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Deputy Chair: We are currently on amendment A13. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to finish up with talking about this issue. The amendment that we brought forward, I think, is misunderstood by the members opposite.

Mrs. Littlewood: The government.

3:50

Mr. Hunter: For now.

I just wanted to be able to clarify really quickly what this amendment is trying to accomplish, and that is that with overtime – there are two scenarios. Number one is that an employee wants to be able to work overtime, yet there's really no incentive for the employer to have that happen. But it would just work better if the employee can work. Maybe he or she needs to be able to earn some extra money that month. The other scenario is that the employer needs to have the employee work overtime. This happens all the time in the workforce. Those situations are completely different.

What this amendment was specifically trying to accomplish was to delineate between those two. When the employer wants the employee to work, then they should have to pay time and a half. We agree with that. That makes sense. And we would agree with the government if that's the case. The government has stated, though, that if you work overtime, you should always be paid at time and a half. The problem is that there are times where the employee just wants to be able to earn a little extra money, so they're initiating the process. They're initiating the process in order to be able to work. Now, in the event that the employer doesn't really care if they work or don't work – it can happen tomorrow, whatever – this allows the employee to be able to work hard, be able to earn a little extra money without actually penalizing the employer. This amendment is specific in terms of being able to try to help the employee.

Now, I've heard many times the government opposite say that this is about trying to help the employee. This amendment, I thought, out of all the amendments that we've presented, would be

the amendment that you would pass because it specifically speaks to this issue. Let's not penalize an employee that has a lot of energy and excitement and wants to work hard. Let's give them the opportunity to be able to do that. If you pass the bill the way it stands now, it will incentivize the employer not to allow that person to work extra time because they will have to say: "You know what? I don't know if I really want to give them the extra half time."

I really wanted to be able to present that to the members opposite because I see this. I've seen this many times in the workforce. I don't think that we should be telling employees or shackling employees from actually being able to – if they want to work hard, let them work hard. If they want to work longer, let them work longer. Don't penalize them for that desire to be able to work longer. But if you do pass it the way it is, the employer will be disincented to stop an employee from actually working the extra time, and we don't want that in Alberta. Albertans are hard workers. You know that. We know that. We shouldn't penalize them for wanting to work hard.

You know, I recognize that – I had some communication with the Labour minister through texting. We talked a little bit about this. She said: you know, it would have been better if you guys had sent this over to us so that we could have taken a look at it. I agree. I apologize for not doing that. I just thought that when you heard this, it would make a lot of sense, that we could pass this thing, and then we'd be able to move forward on it.

I hope that you will take a sober second look at this amendment, take a look at it as a way of being able to help incentivize employers to allow for that work if the employee so chooses and not to stop that employee from being able to either bank time or work longer if they want to.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A13? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate the member's comments. As we had mentioned earlier, one of the things that we are looking to do with regard to our labour regulations and whatnot is to bring the standard up to, you know, the level that a lot of really good employers out there are setting, okay? We don't want to be looking at this race to the bottom. It's the race to the top here. Again, there are a lot of really, really good employers out there that are well and beyond above this. When they start offering overtime, you know, they don't even think about it. They're paying time and a half because that's how much they value their employees, and their employees are more than willing to go out of their way in order to work with their employer.

One of the concerns, of course, that I had mentioned was that the language as presented here will put precarious workers in a position where if we have an employer that maybe isn't as upstanding as a lot of the employers here in Alberta are, they will start to compel these employees to work overtime but at straight time pay, and they really do want to get time and a half.

With that said, I mean, I don't want to belabour this any longer. I won't be able to support this amendment, and I will encourage other members of the House to not support it as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A13? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I do want to just take a moment to talk about this amendment. I guess what I see this as is that by not passing this amendment, it actually stifles

opportunities for employees, for workers. What I see is, I guess, that a couple different situations could come about. Let's say that a particular employee had a particular hobby that would have him partake in this hobby during regular work hours, and the employer doesn't care when he or she puts their hours in as long as the hours get put in. Now, when this employee goes to the employer and says: "Okay. I would like to work an evening and a Saturday so that I could have Monday morning off because that's the only opportunity I have to partake in this hobby of mine." And the employer says: "I would love to do that because it doesn't matter to me when you put the hours in as long as you put them in, but I honestly can't afford to give you time and a half for that for something that's for your enjoyment." Turning down this amendment cuts away that opportunity.

Let's say, for instance, that the employee – maybe their cousin had a doctor's appointment, and this employee was very close to their cousin. It wouldn't apply under anything else as far as a close family member to attend with this cousin to go to a doctor's appointment, so the employee says to the employer: "Could I work extra hours here so that I can take this time off to go with my cousin?" And the employer would say: "Well, I would love to, except I would have to pay or give you time and a half off, and that's just not in the budget to do that."

This is a very simple, straightforward amendment. This would help employees in their dealings with their employer, and it would help that kind of interaction between the two. This actually interferes with that opportunity for employees and employers to work collaboratively to help each other with their schedules. So I do want to speak in favour of this amendment. I think it's pretty straightforward to be able to give this opportunity to employees.

I would hope that it wasn't the intention of this portion of the bill to take away this opportunity for employees and employers to work together to accommodate each other and create a win-win situation. These situations I just described are win-win for both. The employer doesn't lose anything, they get a happier employee, and the employee gets to partake in activities that they want to partake in that they otherwise wouldn't. Both win in this situation, so I'm really not quite certain why the government won't support this amendment. I think it makes perfect sense. Win-win to both. I can't see a problem with it. Honestly, you know, if a worker is working overtime, time and a half, that's the standard. That's fine. But in a situation like this where the employee could ask the employer for time off and want to work time in lieu, that's not an infringement on their rights. It's actually something they were requesting, and I think that's only fair.

Thank you for the opportunity to leave these comments. Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A13? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the member across the way might be confusing overtime with things like averaging agreements, which are currently accessible by employees when, you know, schedules don't sort of work into the normal 9-to-5 workday. They have the ability to talk to their employer and say: can we move things around a little bit, which could give me a potential day off over here? Employees already have the access and the ability to do that.

When we're talking about overtime, overtime is overtime. Like I've always told my membership before, don't ever bank on overtime – okay? – because the employer has the right to hand out

that overtime if they see fit and if it works into their business plan and whatnot.

Special arrangements within their normal schedules are already accessible. This amendment does not address that, but for folks that are in the position of vicarious work, they could be compelled to work for straight time when, rightfully, they should be getting overtime.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A13?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that motion on amendment A13 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:02 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Loewen	Stier
Hanson	Starke	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Payne
Babcock	Hinkley	Phillips
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carlier	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Larivee	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Mason	Shepherd
Eggen	McLean	Sigurdson
Feehan	Miller	Turner
Goehring	Nielsen	Woollard

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 33
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[Motion on amendment A13 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now on the original bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise. I just wanted to address a statement that I made earlier this morning.* I had the opportunity to return to *Hansard* and read a bit more closely a comment that I had remembered from the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Now, when I had recalled that remark, I had made some comments on it this morning, and after having referred to *Hansard* and having reread his original comments, I would like to correct some statements that I made on the record.

To begin, Madam Chair, I'd like to just reference what the member actually did say here in the House. I believe it was in May of last year when we were debating a motion on the minimum wage. The member stated:

But remember this: the difference between a tax and charity is that the tax is mandated; charity is freely given.

So when I hear the argument saying, "You know what? We should do more," guess what? In reality, when they came to this great country, people came here not for a guarantee. They came for an opportunity. They did not ask for a guarantee. In communist countries they got a guarantee. That is not what we offer in Canada. What we offer here is an opportunity. If you

come here and you work hard, you study, you develop your skills, you have the ability to grow and prosper and provide for your family, whatever the sky offers. This is what we offer here in Alberta. This is what we offer here in Canada.

Now, Madam Chair, in recalling this, when the member was saying, "They did not ask for a guarantee. In communist countries they got a guarantee," I had interpreted him as referring to minimum wage in general and that it was his belief that minimum wage in general was a guarantee that should not be provided.

4:20

I recognize, Madam Chair, having read this more closely in context, that the member was simply disagreeing with the idea that we should be guaranteeing that people are able to earn a decent living from minimum wage, that they should be able to earn a living wage.

Indeed, the member on other occasions commented that the then minister of jobs, skills, training, and labour had remarked that that was the reason why we were raising the minimum wage, so that all Albertans would be able to have or take home a decent living wage. His remark at that time was:

Well, I hate to tell you, but no one started this minimum wage as a living wage. That is not something that we ever promised anybody. We promised people that if you go get educated and you get more skills, then you can rise up in your jobs.

And again he referenced that:

We're not a communist country. This is not something that we do here.

While I fundamentally disagree with the member, and I think that historically it's quite clear that minimum wage was always intended to be a wage on which people could afford to live, I misconstrued the member's statement this morning, and I did want to clarify that for the record.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to stand again and address this bill once more. I guess one of the things we've been talking about a lot is the secret ballot and what it does and what it doesn't do and the effects of coercion by not having a secret ballot. I just want to read a few comments here.

A secret ballot prevents most ills, since no one knows how an employee will vote or voted, irrespective of signing a card. Conversely, a serious flaw in the public card check process is that it is inherently rife with the potential for intimidation by union officials.

In 1996, an employer presented evidence to the NLRB that "on the day before the election, a bargaining unit employee approached another employee and solicited her to sign a union authorization card. The card solicitor allegedly stated that the employee had better sign a card because if she did not, the Union would come and get her children and it would also slash her car tires."

I'm going to go through and read a few more of these comments here.

The modern record is full of cases of intimidation. Former United Steelworkers organizer Richard Torres wrote in a February 2007 letter to the House Education and Labor Committee that he quit his job when a union official "asked me to threaten migrant workers by telling them they would be reported to federal immigration officials if they refused to sign check-off cards."

I'll just keep reading some of these. They are numerous.

An affidavit given to the NLRB described a New Jersey food service staff member's ordeal, where a union organizer visited her home,

*See page 1495, left column, paragraph 3

and we talked about the visiting of homes by union members, and told her “I wouldn’t have a job in Sept. if I didn’t sign the card and that the Union would make sure that I was fired.”

Now, this is an affidavit, Madam Chair.

I’ll go on to another one.

Mike Ivey, a Freightliner employee, gained attention when he fought organizing attempts by the United Auto Workers. According to a March 2007 story, Ivey said, “Some employees have had five or more harassing visits from these (United Auto Worker) organizers . . . The only way, it seems, to stop the badgering and pressure is to sign the card.”

I’ll just continue.

A local of the United Food and Commercial Workers, for example, went so far as to institute a bounty system that offered a three-tier “incentive plan” to pay employees per signature they collected from their colleagues.

So here they had a bounty system where they had a three-tier system to encourage people to go and badger their colleagues to get signatures.

In the famous Gissel Packing case the Supreme Court stated:

We would be closing our eyes to obvious difficulties, of course, if we did not recognize that there have been (card solicitation) abuses, primarily arising out of misrepresentations by union organizers as to whether the effect of signing a card was to designate the union to represent the employee for collective bargaining purposes or merely to authorize it to seek an election to determine that issue.

Madam Chair, just another example here, and that was actually from a court case.

Why would someone sign a card if they didn’t support joining a union? Consider this letter to the editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* from April 2016. That’s pretty recent. Dave Deighton described

how two large union organizers came by his house late at night to encourage him to sign a card in favour of joining a union. The letter writer went on to describe how the process was intimidating and that the secret ballot . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) we will now rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Madam Speaker, given that’s it’s almost 4:30 and we automatically adjourn at 4:30 but we don’t want to spend the next two minutes sitting here, I will move that we call it 4:30 and adjourn until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:27 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, June 1, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 18 — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)
Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 206 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 5, 2017

Day 44

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker

Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
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Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
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Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)
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Kleinsteuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)

Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
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MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 5, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. members, our world has once again been inflicted with violence in various locations. One of those situations included the loss of a Canadian. I'd like each of you to reflect or pray, each in your own way.

Today I'd like to read a prayer from the Ute First Nation entitled *Earth, Teach Me*.

Earth teach me quiet as the grasses are still with new light.
 Earth teach me suffering as old stones suffer with memory.
 Earth teach me humility as blossoms are humble with beginning.
 Earth teach me caring as mothers nurture their young.
 Earth teach me courage as the tree that stands alone . . .
 Earth teach me freedom as the eagle that soars in the sky.
 Earth teach me acceptance as the leaves that die each fall.
 Earth teach me renewal as the seed that rises in the spring.
 Earth teach me to forget myself as melted snow forgets its life.
 Earth teach me to remember kindness as dry fields weep with rain.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by a special guest, Akesh Aheer. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great joy and honour today to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature two special people in my life for the last number of years. First of all, David Khan, the newly elected leader of the Alberta Liberal Party: born and raised in Calgary, a background in sciences and chemistry at the University of British Columbia, a law degree from the University of Toronto, fully bilingual, which exceeds my capacity, an indigenous rights lawyer and activist operating on the well-known Liberal values of opportunity, freedom of the individual, and fairness for future generations. Welcome him as the next Premier of Alberta.

With him is Gwyneth Midgley, our executive director of the party for the last two years. She has been in Calgary for 25 years, working for the last two years as the executive director of the Alberta Liberal Party, past president of Calgary-Buffalo and Calgary-Elbow, was the Calgary-Buffalo president for Kent Hehr for five years. Please stand, Gwyneth, and we'll give you the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you today and through you to the whole Assembly Westbrook elementary school, which is nestled away in the north-west part of my riding. The school strives to celebrate diversity in learning, encourage students to think critically, and develop life-long thinkers. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Arlene Walker and Mrs. Elizabeth Branco, their teachers. I would like to ask them all to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of grade 11 and 12 students visiting from Livingstone school in the bustling hamlet of Lundbreck, right down near the Crowsnest Pass, in my constituency: their teacher Kathy Rast; chaperones Diana Bramer and Dale Bueckert; and students Skylar Bueckert, Jonathan Erickson, Ty Ancil, Justyn Connelly-Engel, Quinlan Connelly-Engel, Contessa Penner, and Logan Desjardins. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Vera Saunders and her family, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I ask that they please rise as I read this introduction. Vera is an honoured constituent of Edmonton-Glenora, where she raised her family and had a long teaching career. She was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and this summer she will be turning 105. Vera still lives quite independently. She's at McQueen Place Lodge in Edmonton-Glenora, where she enjoys the distinction of being the eldest resident. She is joined by her daughter Lorraine, her son-in-law Andy, and another Edmonton-Glenora constituent, my good friend, her granddaughter Lyndsey. Please, colleagues, join me in extending the warm welcome to Vera and her family.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I do have a second if it would be permissible.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This second introduction is to introduce to you and through you Dr. Gerry Falk, who's seated in the members' gallery. Again, I ask that she rise as I introduce her and her guests. Gerry is retiring this June from Edmonton public schools after a very rewarding career, where she has been employed for more than 50 years as a principal and a practising psychologist. Gerry is joined by her husband, also a doctor, Michael Falk, and another doctor, her friend Larry Payne. I ask that they all rise and receive our appreciation and welcome to this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four if that's okay. I'll do them in little chunks here.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you some amazing women. First is Gerda Krebs. Gerda started teaching yoga in the early 1970s to junior high students in a school cafeteria that used towels as yoga mats on a cement floor. She also taught adults in her basement for 25 years and had her own television show, called *Yoga Fits In*. Gerda has empowered and strengthened many people for almost 50 years with her very simple message: in order to be healthy in mind, spirit, and body, you have to act as though you are healthy, and you need to live a well-rounded, balanced life. Gerda is turning 86 this month and is still teaching yoga three times a week. You can still find her TV show, which is very inspiring, on TV.

Along with Gerda is Chris Erdmann. Under Gerda's skilled, passionate mentorship a long-time student has also become a yoga instructor. It was this community of committed and dedicated instructors and practising students that became the backbone of the support for Chris to open Yoga for Today in 2001.

Following that is Tina Chavda, who is also with Gerda. Tina is one of those long-time members of the yoga community in Sherwood Park. Her strength shines through her quiet joy in sharing health and strength with her students.

Also, I'd like to say that with this group is our very own Maureen Gough. Many of you already know her, and what you probably don't know is that she has practised yoga since she was a young teenager and started with Gerda in 1974.

If I could have this lovely group of women stand and please receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also with pleasure that I am going to introduce to you Theresa and Daniel Ng. Theresa is the parent who brought our attention to the inappropriate links on the provincial GSA co-ordinator website. Her vigilance and advocacy resulted in the links being removed from the website. I would like to congratulate Theresa for her efforts on behalf of all Albertans. We owe her a debt of gratitude for her careful attention. Later today I will be tabling the names of 2,700 of those Albertans who stand for the protection of all children. With Theresa today is her son Daniel. I thank Theresa for bringing Daniel to remind us all in this Assembly that it is the children like him who are impacted by many of our decisions and the actions of our government. I would hope that, potentially, the minister will have a chance to meet with Theresa regarding her concerns. I would ask Daniel and Theresa to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh, no. I have two more, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Two more.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I would also like to introduce to you and through you a very good friend of mine, Cassandra Montour. We have a mutual passion for public service. Cassandra has a keen interest in community advocacy and in the areas of education, arts, culture, and affordable housing. Cassandra, if you could please stand so you can get the warm welcome of the House.

Finally, Mr. Speaker – thank you so much – it would be completely horrible of me to not also mention my beautiful husband, who is sitting in your gallery along with my son, who had the privilege of

singing *O Canada* in this House today. I would like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you all 20 government staff members who are here from Service Alberta, Economic Development and Trade, and Treasury Board and Finance. This group includes management, technical, and administrative staff as well as summer students, who have recently joined us. I would like to welcome them to the Legislature and the Chamber and ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members some folks in the gallery whose roots are up in Fort McMurray. I ask, as I say your name, that you please rise and stay standing. Iris Kirschner is from Fort McMurray. Iris is the wife of Dave, who I mentioned last week, and her father, Peter Chaba, was a Social Credit MLA for Redwater. She is accompanied by her son David Jr., his wife, Tina, and their children Eliana, Nadya, David, Jonathan, and Benjamin. I would ask that the Assembly give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my mom, Pam Bush, who is visiting from Vancouver. She has been a lifelong NDP supporter, is a proud feminist, a union worker, and one of the strongest women I know. If everyone could please give her the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Rimbeey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests today, that I have here. The first is Brianna Morris. Brianna works with me on the child intervention file and has been working hard on the panel as well. In addition to that, she works with the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock on the labour file, two big pieces of legislation that this Legislature is dealing with right now. Her work has been invaluable, and I want to be able to recognize her for that. In fact, some people would say that she is a factotum of the Federal Building, getting everything done for us, and it's much appreciated. I'd ask if she would stand. Along with her today is her sister Carla Heinrichs, who is Brianna's older sister. She teaches English as a second language and is getting ready for a trip to China. She is a big supporter of the Wildrose and is looking forward to a sane government in the next election. Before she left, she wanted to be able to see the Legislature this way because it won't be that way when she comes back. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly

Brodie Parker from my constituency office in Calgary. Brodie is a student in political science at the University of Calgary. He is seated in the public gallery. I would now ask Brodie to stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 16 of our 2017 government interns. I ask Miss Megan Perram, Andre Tinio, Blaire Christensen, Juan Vargas, Max Harrington, Genna DiPinto, Shae Doyle, Pariyanka Chandan, Lauren Hanon, Margaux Robertson, Ayesha Herian, Bruce Cinnamon, Frank Finley, Aldrick Dugarte, Sumaira Islam, and Rowan Ley to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you two of my esteemed constituents from Lake Bonavista in Calgary, Amy and Brian Salisbury. I would ask them to rise and remain standing as I introduce them as my honoured guests. Amy, a recent addition to my Calgary-Fish Creek PC Association board, is a lifelong resident of Calgary and graduated with a bachelor's degree in history from St. Mary's University, located on the bluffs above beautiful Fish Creek provincial park. Amy's current career is in financial services, but she has previous experience in the hospitality and creative industries. Brian, originally from Wisconsin, has called Alberta home for the past six years and has a successful career in the oil and gas services sector. Amy and Brian are proud to be raising three bright young Albertans, and, with our congratulations in advance, they have a fourth on the way this August. I would ask all members to extend the traditional warm welcome of this House to Amy and Brian in recognition of their first visit to the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several proud and hard-working Albertans who represent electricians, paramedics, front-line health care professionals, and employees from all lines of work in Alberta. Today with us from the HSAA Trudy Thomson, Mike Parker, Donna Farquharson, Kris Moskal, Amanda Freistadt; from the IBEW 424 Scott Crichton, Delaine Coleman, Kyle Hamilton; and from the AFL Gil McGowan. They're here today because they're very keen to watch the debate unfold in the House. I'd now like all members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

A further introduction, Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so sorry; I missed a very important person in my original introduction. Chris's daughter Kerra Boyko is also here. She is a high school student who wants to study veterinary medicine. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to add her in. Would she please rise.

Members' Statements

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

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day on June 27. Last year I was honoured to bring forward a private member's bill that would acknowledge PTSD Awareness Day annually. This passed with unanimous consent in this Legislature. To all of you, thank you for recognizing the importance of this day. I feel truly honoured to have heard and continue to hear the personal experiences of so many Albertans who in some way have been impacted by this devastating anxiety disorder.

1:50

PTSD is a strong and lasting emotional reaction to a very disturbing event such as war, violent crime, or natural disaster. It can make it very hard for those affected to deal with the stressors of life or work and can even affect their ability to interact with family and friends. This year on June 27 I'm hosting a panel and resource fair at the Federal Building from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. and a second resource fair in my own constituency at the Castle Downs Family YMCA from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Both events will have resources available for those who have experienced trauma. Each case is different, and there are a variety of treatment options available to fit the needs of the individual. Raising awareness is key because an early and accurate diagnosis is vital. We are also co-ordinating with municipalities and organizations to encourage Albertans to light up Alberta for PTSD. Many of you may see notable buildings lit in teal. This will be to acknowledge PTSD Awareness Day.

I invite my colleagues in the House to join me along with Albertans from all across this province to help those suffering in silence. Let's all help them find the support that they need, help them to build strong, happy memories to replace the ones that still cause them pain, and help to raise awareness of this destructive disorder.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Victims of Sexual Assault

Mr. Jean: Angela Cardinal was a survivor of kidnapping and aggravated sexual assault, yet when it came time to testify against her attacker in court here in Alberta, Angela was sent to jail shackled and then transported to court in the same van as the person who was ultimately convicted of kidnapping and sexually assaulting her. Angela was the victim of a horrific crime, and the system treated her like a criminal. Can the Premier please explain why it took a media report to inform the public of how badly our justice system failed Angela Cardinal?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is correct. It was a tragedy and, actually, quite an appalling set of circumstances that Angela was faced with. Let me begin by joining with our Minister of Justice to personally offer my apologies to Angela's family for what she was compelled to face. It's not acceptable, absolutely not acceptable. No victim should ever be treated that way. All victims should be treated with respect and with support and, ultimately, justice. That's why I'm very pleased that our Minister of Justice is working as quickly as she can to ensure that this does not happen again.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: The request to place Angela into custody came from the Crown prosecutor and was agreed to by the judge presiding over the preliminary inquiry. That judge was previously a Deputy Minister of Justice. I practised criminal law for 10 years, and I've never heard of a victim of sexual assault being shackled and jailed by the system meant to protect them when she was willing to testify and had committed no crime. An independent review is a good first step, but Albertans want to know, Premier: who will ultimately be held accountable for this shocking failure of the system?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the member rightly points out, there was a decision taken by the Crown to request that form of relief from the judge, and as a result of that, the Minister of Justice has put in place a new policy to ensure that should that kind of request ever be made again, it is reviewed by much more senior officials within the Justice ministry, because it is not, quite frankly, a provision of the Criminal Code that should, I think, almost ever be used. That being said, the minister has also appointed an independent investigator, and that investigator will prepare a report that will in large part answer the member's questions.

Mr. Jean: Our justice system is supposed to protect all Albertans, not just those who have the resources to protect themselves. Angela was an aboriginal woman who was homeless. Her pleas to be released from jail after committing no crime were ignored. This is an absolute failing that shatters the credibility of our justice system, and it happened under this government's watch, and it took two years for the story to finally come to light. Albertans want to know: how many other victims of crime have been shackled and jailed alongside the perpetrators of the very crimes?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm very pleased that upon the Minister of Justice being advised of this outrageous situation, one of the things that she immediately did was to task a special committee to recommend aggressive policies and policy review with respect to victims' services. That committee will in fact include indigenous representation as well as representation from people involved with supporting victims of sexual and domestic assault because, as the member opposite rightly points out, no victim should ever be treated the way Angela was.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Support for Junior Oil and Gas Companies

Mr. Jean: The majority of Canada's junior oil and gas companies have disappeared. It's just another day and another headline under the NDP government. There's no doubt about it: while our junior oil and gas companies have been suffering, the NDP government has just been making things much worse with carbon taxes, oil sands caps, and damaging new regulations. Seventeen publicly traded junior companies have disappeared over the last 30 months. That's under your watch, Premier. When will the Premier and her government finally give our juniors in oil and gas here in Alberta a break?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, the province of Alberta and all economic

players within the province of Alberta have been struggling as a result of the drop in the price of oil. One of the things that our government did soon after being elected was that we implemented a royalty review. Having done that, we brought in place a modernized royalty regime that was designed to support efficiencies within the oil and gas sector and, in fact, to give them opportunities to improve their performance and, ultimately, to improve their success. We are pleased that rig numbers are now on their way back up.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: If we want our oil and gas sector to thrive, our junior oil and gas companies have a critical role to play, but now industry experts don't see a recovery for them any time soon. The NDP is making recovery nearly impossible. Their new oil sands cap will only drown these companies out of the market as control consolidates behind a few major players. This cap is hurting investment in our economy and Alberta businesses. When will the Premier finally realize that it is a mistake and remove it?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member is absolutely wrong with respect to his characterization of the importance of that oil sands cap not only to the environment but ultimately to the long-term sustainability of our oil and gas industry. Fundamentally, that cap was a cap that was put in place as a result of the joint request of environmentalists and senior oil and gas leaders. That is how you develop a long-term, sustainable industry, that is the way we make sure that our economy recovers, and that, of course, is the way we make sure we get that pipeline built.

Mr. Jean: Now, we know, Mr. Speaker, that government can't fix everything, but it can stop getting in the way. The Premier can scrap a carbon tax that is punishing Alberta with absolutely zero benefit. They could for instance get rid of their arbitrary cap on oil sands, they can reverse many of their damaging regulations or just the number of them, and they can stop apologizing for an industry that puts bread on the table for hundreds of thousands of Canadians. Will the Premier implement just one of these ideas to get our junior oil and gas companies back on their feet?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What our government has done, actually, is that we have worked closely with the oil and gas industry to promote their interests and to advocate for their rights in the international markets, because we actually do understand that good jobs are absolutely what Albertans need and that that is tied to a healthy, sustainable oil and gas industry. We are very proud of our record. We also know that, going forward, it is important to pair economic growth with environmental responsibility. That is the path to a long-term, sustainable industry, something that the folks over there have long since forgotten.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The third main question.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the NDP plan is simply not working. It's time to change course. Just look at the numbers. Since May 2015 60,000 full-time jobs have vanished in Alberta under this NDP government's watch. At a time when our economy is supposed to be stabilizing, Alberta has lost nearly 7,000 jobs just since December. Our budget sheet is melting down, and all that Albertans can

expect is more of the same – more debt, more deficit, and higher taxes – from this NDP government. What other damaging policies can Albertans expect the Premier to announce this summer?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what we won't do is continuously talk down the economic prospects of this province and Albertans just so we can make political gains. It is absolutely ridiculous, making political hay at the expense of Albertans. Employment is up. Housing sales are up. Rig numbers are up. Exports are up. Capital investment is up, and once again we will lead the country in economic growth. I know that the members opposite hate to hear good news, but thank goodness Albertans don't.

Mr. Jean: Of course, unemployment is up. Debt is up, record debt. The deficit is up. Seven thousand more jobs lost in 2017. There's no recovery for real people outside the halls of this Legislature. For anyone who pays taxes in Alberta, these past few months of the NDP have been nothing but bad news. Taxpayers are being forced to cough up billions and billions of dollars because of the NDP mistakes and tinkering in our electricity grid. The carbon tax is set to go up another 50 per cent in January. And for what, Mr. Speaker? More light bulbs. How many more taxes, fees, and nickel and diming will Albertans have to pay for this Premier's mistakes and incompetence?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that facts are an inconvenient concept for the members opposite and that, you know, it must be a struggle for them. In fact, we have had several straight months of employment growth. We had 20,000 jobs created just in March. Our plan is working. Their plan was to take \$3.5 billion out of our economy in one year. Their plan was to not build schools. Their plan was to not build a hospital. Their plan was to make Albertans pay for their failure to plan for the need for a diversified economy. Our plan is working.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The NDP plan is a fairy tale, and it's not working. We've seen a growing sense of arrogance from a government that just doesn't understand the plight of struggling everyday Albertans. Albertans concerned about this government were called rodents. They insulted job creators and workers by trying to drive through omnibus legislation after holding embarrassingly short consultations. They are under investigation by the Privacy Commissioner for deleting e-mails and have been condemned for hiding information from Albertans. How can any Albertan trust this Premier or her government with this type of record of secrecy and incompetence?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what our government has done is that we've fought hard for pipelines, we've secured intervenor status, and we've moved forward to get a pipeline approved. What those folks have done is cheered for pipeline opponents and promised to scrap the very plan that got us here. What we did was that we built the Calgary cancer centre. Those folks would never have moved forward on it. What we did was decide that we would feed hungry kids at school. Those people are still waiting to figure out if that's a good idea. What we did was announce that we'd build new schools. Those guys would never have moved forward with that, and they would never have created the jobs. I will put our record up against theirs any day.

Victims of Sexual Assault (continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, like all Albertans, I was shocked to hear of the horrific treatment that Angela Cardinal received from our justice system after she was brutally assaulted. Forcing a victim to ride in a transport vehicle with her attacker can never be justified. While I appreciate the Justice minister's call to action on an independent investigation, I'm concerned that the case has exposed larger issues of how our justice system treats victims of sexual assault. To the Minister of Justice: will you issue a ministerial order today prohibiting putting victims in close proximity to their accused attackers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think, like all Albertans, all members of this House have been shocked by the details of this case. The treatment of the victim in this case was absolutely appalling. We have absolutely indicated and the sheriffs branch is absolutely aware that transport of accused people and victims should never occur in the same transport. In fact, the member opposite is absolutely right. This has unveiled some systemic problems, which is why we're having an internal review as well as an external review.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I hope the minister will do that order today.

As I struggle to comprehend how something like this could possibly happen to a victim of violent crime, I can't help but wonder if racial prejudices and stereotyping might have played a role in the Crown's request to have Ms Cardinal remanded under section 545(1) of the Criminal Code and the judge's decision to grant that application. Again to the Justice minister: does Alberta's justice system have a systemic problem with racism, particularly towards indigenous people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's, of course, very difficult for me to speak to the motivations of the individual people involved in this particular case, but I do struggle with and I am kept up at night by the question: had this victim been Caucasian and had she been housed, would this have happened to her in this particular case? I think this has unveiled a number of systemic problems with the justice system, and we will absolutely be moving forward to address them.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, we thank the minister for her actions so far to conduct an investigation and for striking a special committee to make policy changes to ensure that there are no more victims that get treated this way. Thank you. To the minister: when did you know, what are the anticipated timelines for both the independent investigation and the committee to complete its work, and if you don't mind, will you make both of those fully public when they're finished?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this case has unveiled a number of systemic problems, and one of those systemic problems was certainly the fact that this was brought to my attention in late April by the reporter at CBC. Certainly, that is

one of the challenges we absolutely look to address. The review in terms of policies from the internal committee should be reporting back within three months with those policy changes. In terms of the other review, we're still finalizing the terms of reference, and I should have more to say about that shortly.

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

Health Care System

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For years Alberta Liberals have been pointing to the Alberta Health Services quarterly performance reports as an excellent way for Albertans to assess how the system is working. Unfortunately, those reports are rarely up to date. When I asked the Health minister last week – two weeks ago, actually – she said that she hadn't seen the report yet, which is troubling.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Dr. Swann: She did promise to follow up immediately with Alberta Health Services and inform the House. Two weeks have passed. The minister needs to respond. When will the reports be released so that Albertans can finally decide what's going on?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the member on his second attempt at retirement as leader of his party. Certainly, your service to your party and to Albertans is appreciated, hon. member.

I have followed up with Alberta Health Services, and the report is making its way to their board. Once it is finished going through the board process, it will come to my office, and then I will release it as quickly as possible. This is a process that happens typically. As it's part of the annual report, it goes to the full board. When it is available, I will certainly reach out to the member and ensure that he's aware of it.

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the data have consistently shown is that we're failing to deliver humane, comprehensive seniors' care in this province. The Health Quality Council reports hundreds of seniors not receiving the right level of care in the right place at the right time: 787 people most recently reported being warehoused in hospitals and 973 waiting for placement in the community. With numbers like these how can the minister say that she is providing seniors with dignity at the time when they need it most?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Absolutely, there has been a long need for additional seniors' care, including long-term care, dementia spaces, and increased investment in home care. Certainly, that was the case under the previous government for many years. I'm glad that we're making important investments in those areas. We're on track to be able to open 2,000 new long-term care and dementia care spaces within two years, and we've increased home-care supports significantly. For those who are living in hospital, we certainly think that the staff there are doing a better job than warehousing, but living in a hospital is not ideal.

2:10

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report on better health care for Albertans highlighted the opportunity for better integration of clinical information systems. Unfortunately, the government has not yet required physicians to provide their clinical data to other caregivers. Clinicians are looking for leadership. When will the minister require reporting standards for physicians to share important information with other caregivers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We're working with the Alberta Medical Association to implement the amendments that were done to the agreement that we have with the physicians. These amendments will see improvements in primary care such as information sharing and data sharing as well. I'm pleased that the physicians came back to the table two years before what was required under the previous agreement under the former government and that we were able to make these important changes as well as committing investment to a clinical information system to ensure that patients can have integrated, seamless access to their data and that the health professionals who are making decisions have the best up-to-date information for those patients as well.

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

Rural Health Care Service Interruptions

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just this morning Alberta Health Services informed my constituents in Tofield that the emergency department at the Tofield Health Centre would be closed until Wednesday. As anyone in a rural community can imagine, this is incredibly alarming. Can the Minister of Health please update residents of Tofield and area on why this was necessary and what is being done to ensure that their safety is kept this week?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question and for her ongoing advocacy with her office and with AHS to ensure that we have the very best information and ability to serve her constituents. A full-time physician chose to leave Tofield earlier this year. AHS has been covering with locums, including physicians from other parts of the member's own riding, including Fort Saskatchewan. Sometimes there are gaps, however, in coverage. To ensure safety, acute-care beds have been prioritized. That will require a short-term closure of the emergency department, but EMS is on standby to transport anyone in need of urgent care.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given the impact that this may have on the surrounding area, to the same minister: what's being done currently to address this staffing issue at the Tofield Health Centre?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again for the question. AHS is working very closely with the community, with the local health advisory council, the local foundation, as well as with the Alberta Medical Association. They're actively seeking to recruit new physicians and also are offering flexible options to provide coverage with locums. As several members will recall, we've been through this process a number of times in rural communities. We will make every effort

to avoid any service interruptions, but patient safety will always be the number one priority, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister mentioned that many rural communities have experienced temporary closures or service interruptions due to staffing problems, what is the government's plan going forward to address what could become a worsening inequity in health care in rural Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again to the member for the question. This is very important, something that previous Conservative governments failed to address for decades. I grew up in a rural community in the north, and I'm very proud of the work that we are doing with the AMA to help match our physician workforce with the communities that need them the most. This is part of our commitment to work with communities and with health care professionals instead of against them, Mr. Speaker, as the members opposite continue to call for time after time.

Minister of Finance

Mr. Fildebrandt: The Minister of Finance has taken the annual deficit from \$5.3 billion to \$10.3 billion in a matter of 24 months. We have gone from \$11.9 billion of debt when the minister came to office to a projected debt of \$94 billion. We have gone from the best credit rating in the country to five downgrades and counting, putting us on par with basket cases like Ontario. No more excuses. This minister is incompetent and incapable of doing his job. Will he step aside and resign?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to stand on my record any day. While the member opposite performed his little stunt to launch his bid for the UCP leadership, I and my government colleagues are working hard as we emerge from this recession. We have Albertans' backs. We're feeding hungry kids at school; they call that irresponsible. We're freezing tuition so that the cost of an education doesn't stand in the way of an Albertan's dreams; they call that a mess. I'm standing up for everyday Albertans, and I'm not apologizing.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, the minister has demonstrated gross negligence and irresponsibility in carrying out his duties – he blames everybody but himself when something goes wrong – and the minister blamed the first four credit downgrades on mysterious forces beyond his control and given that when our credit rating was downgraded a fifth time, he blamed S&P for having a conservative agenda and that the minister has demonstrated beyond a doubt that he is incapable of competently doing his job, will he step aside and resign?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me read to the House what the TD Bank said about our budget. They said that "the recently tabled . . . 2017-18 Budget was stimulative in nature, with the government continuing its commitment to investing in health care, education and social services." We're putting Albertans back to work, building badly needed infrastructure like the new Edmonton hospital and the Calgary cancer centre, that the opposition dragged their feet on for decades. I think it's time the hon. member came clean with his plan. You know, what would he cut? How much in taxes . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, the Premier knew that her Finance minister had no qualifications whatsoever for the job when she appointed him and she has refused to listen to expert advice that could help him compensate for this and given that he has shown time and time again that he can't competently do his job and he doesn't care that the fiscal house is burning down around him – he needs to go – Premier, will you fire your Finance minister?

Ms Notley: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? Because of this Finance minister, our kids aren't stuffed into overcrowded classes. Because of this Finance minister, Calgary is getting a new cancer centre. Because of this Finance minister, tens of thousands of Albertans have jobs building new schools. Because of this Finance minister, this province will lead the country in economic growth. I wish I could give him a promotion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's stay focused on policy rather than on personalities.

The Member for Calgary-West.

Child Safety Reporting and Investigations

Mr. Ellis: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another session, another missed opportunity to pass Serenity's law. Near the end of the fall session, when everyone agreed more action was needed to protect children, I suggested a minor legislative change that would require adults to contact police if they know a child is in need of intervention. In December, just before the session ended, this NDP government said: that's a great idea, but we've run out of time. Minister, what is your excuse this time? And don't say that you're waiting for the panel to bring it forward because you have already ignored most of their recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually very thankful for the work that the panel did prioritizing vulnerable children and working together to come up with consensus recommendations. I'm very proud to have accepted them, and I'm moving forward with implementing every single one of them because this issue is so important that we all need to come together and rise above politics and figure out what is in the best interests of our children. From that perspective, I'm very excited to hear what the panel comes forward with after the second phase, and I look forward to working with them on implementing those recommendations as well.

2:20

Mr. Ellis: Given that this bill was called Serenity's law because there were adults who knew that little Serenity was in danger and did not call the, quote, director, unquote, and given that it could easily be called Ezekiel's law, Ryan's law, Alex's law because each of these children suffered long, neglectful deaths and adults other than those found responsible for their deaths knew about their suffering, Minister, you have not introduced legislation that will take immediate action to save children's lives as you promised that you would do, but there is still time. Will you bring forward Serenity's law before this session ends?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, for the first time ever all parties in the Assembly are considering real, meaningful changes to the way that we protect children. Again, this is one idea that the panel can consider. As previously stated, we do need to

engage with police and others who would be involved in this. In the meantime I would absolutely encourage every single Albertan to just know that you're legally required to report child abuse, and if you do know of an imminent threat to a child, please call 911.

Mr. Ellis: Given that I have consulted with experts in health and safety law, police, legal counsel, people who work with the intervention system, parents who've lost their children and given that Serenity's family came to the Legislature to provide powerful personal support for the immediate passing of this law and given that if I could, I would introduce Serenity's law today, Minister, unfortunately I'm not in a position to take this action, but you are. Why are you choosing not to do this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, we are all committed to moving forward in terms of supporting vulnerable children in this province. Absolutely, I'm looking forward, you know, with tremendous excitement to hearing the outcome of the work of the panel as they move through phase 2 to talk about how we can improve the child intervention system in this province. Again I would state: Albertans, it is your obligation to call and report child abuse should you know of it. If you know of a child who's at risk of abuse or is being abused, please report that. If there's an imminent threat, please call 911.

Air Ambulance Service Contract

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the handling of the fixed-wing air ambulance RFP has become a scandal in rural Alberta. First, we learned CanWest, a company with no aircraft bases in major rural stations like Medicine Hat and Peace River, won the RFP. Now we know this government hired Toronto lawyers to handle the tendering of this RFP. To the Minister of Health. Air ambulance is critical to patients in rural Alberta. Why are you making crony deals with Ontario companies who don't understand our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address the irresponsibility that has come from the opposite side both on Thursday and today. They are continuing to inflame things where none exist. First, let's dispense with the rumours and irresponsible statements offered by the members opposite. We have an excellent air ambulance system in Alberta. We are improving on that system, and we have a competitive procurement process under way, but we will not change services, and there will be no change in base locations.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given the NDP has developed a bad habit of awarding government contracts to companies with NDP connections from Ontario, including a contract to screw in taxpayer-funded light bulbs, and given that this contract would have been welcomed by our out-of-work local contractors in these tough times, can the minister explain to Alberta contractors who were passed over for the taxpayer-funded light bulb contract and now the Alberta law firms who were passed over for the air ambulance: why does the NDP hate Alberta businesses?

Ms Hoffman: Unsuccessful proponents have the right to challenge the RFP, Mr. Speaker. That's a process that's laid out in the New West Partnership. There was a time when the members opposite believed in competitive procurement and believed in the New West Partnership. I have to say that I wish it was surprising to see them

abandon their principles, but they do it day after day. Enough is enough. Things are moving forward fairly, respectfully, and we will ensure the very best outcomes for Albertans and that their safety continues to be the top priority.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this isn't just about cronyism or waste; it's a lack of oversight. Given that AHS is now the fourth-largest employer in Canada, boasting a small army of lawyers and bureaucrats, which this minister refuses to trim, and given the minister thought it was a good idea to spend even more taxpayer dollars by handing this RFP issue to a bunch of lawyers from Toronto, Albertans are wondering: does this minister or anyone on that side understand the value of a dollar?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see the member have an opportunity to ask a question. I think he's been here more than one day, but let me explain the way it works. Alberta Health Services are the ones that are in the contract negotiations. Alberta Health Services are the ones who are determining what supports they will need. Alberta Health Services are negotiating in a fair and open and transparent process to make sure that the policies of this government, which are that health will be the number one priority and public safety – that we will find the very best way to have service and protect the current base plans and that we will make sure that we do that while respecting taxpayers. I wish the members opposite would do the same.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Centralized Ambulance Dispatch Wainwright Health Centre

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Too often the Wainwright hospital has been left without ambulance service because they are too busy transporting patients two and a half hours away to Edmonton. This requires a full five-hour trip. In Edmonton this situation is called a code red, which can become a critical situation when there is no help to send. Why does this minister insist on centralizing services to Edmonton and endangering the lives of rural Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Again, the irresponsible and inflammatory language from the members opposite needs to be addressed, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our government is committed to making life better for every Albertan by protecting and strengthening patient care. The members opposite are calling for deep ideological cuts. We're not doing that. We're standing with Albertans. There's a new ambulance bay under construction, an expanded ER project, in the very community as one of the examples. Construction for this important project will begin early in 2018. We are very proud to be investing in Wainwright instead of making cuts like the members opposite are calling for.

Mr. Taylor: They take one ambulance bay out to put another one in but one doctor for these rooms.

Given that rural Alberta at such great distance has not the affordability to provide the big-city services and given that AHS could reverse the flow of ambulance traffic to rural Alberta with specialized services, that would also attract doctors to rural Alberta, why does the minister insist on everything being done in Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the investment that we're making in communities, including Wainwright. That's by this NDP government. I'm very proud of the fact that we have the very best technology, and we're bringing it out to communities as well, whether that's through electronic health records, whether that's through a patient portal that enables them to interface with the data, or whether it's a stroke ambulance that actually brings the very best in stroke treatment to the patient rather than waiting for them to get to the health facility. These are the kinds of investments that this NDP government is making in health care in communities, including Wainwright. The members opposite continue to call for cuts. We're not going to do that.

Mr. Taylor: Given that rural Alberta does not have a major tier 1 or even a tier 2 facility in east central Alberta, causing patients and ambulances to travel hours on end, and given that opening operating rooms without staffing additional doctors doesn't improve the quality of health care, when Alberta Health Services builds a new Wainwright hospital, will they be building a higher tiered facility to attract doctors and nurses to east central?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of our government's investments, including the \$5 million important for upgrades in the health centre in Wainwright. I am so proud of that. The members opposite have one plan – cut, cut, cut – and on this side of the House we're standing with Albertans. We're working to make their lives better. We're working with physicians to ensure that we have the right attraction and recruitment strategies, instead of laying off nurses and doctors throughout Alberta, which certainly would be the inevitable outcome of their deep \$3.5 billion worth of cuts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

2:30 School Transportation Fees

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since last week when I asked in this House about the changes in school transportation brought about by Bill 1, my constituency has been flooded with e-mails and letters confirming the same story. School boards are facing budget shortfalls because they can't collect fees for transportation, and those shortfalls are resulting in changes to bell times and more students being pushed onto public transportation and congregated stops, often at increased cost to parents, both financially and emotionally. To the Minister of Education: are you willing to admit that Bill 1 has led to increased costs for certain families, or are you going to hide behind the name of this bill and pretend that those families don't exist?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, Bill 1 is to reduce school fees. It will put money into the pockets of more than 600,000 families across the province. We know very well that we are covering those bus fees, so if a school board is not paying for that thing – in fact, the government is paying for it. We need to make sure that we are working with clean communication on this, but the bottom line is this: parents and families will pay fewer school fees in the fall as a result of Bill 1.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister still won't meet with school board trustees and given that this sort of meeting should have occurred prior to the introduction of Bill 1 – this needs to

happen now more than ever – and given that the minister has so far refused to admit the negative consequences of Bill 1, to the same minister: will you meet with the school board trustees who are having to face the tough questions over Bill 1, and will you actually listen to those trustees and make decisions based on the feedback that they give you?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Certainly, we have been working with school boards very closely. In fact, I will be meeting with every single school board this evening, so we will be talking about this very subject. You know, it's important to remember that Bill 1 is to reduce school fees. The other part of it is to regulate the out-of-control school fees that this previous government let go hog-wild over the last 10 years. That's part of what we're doing here now, and I'm very proud of how far we've made it so far.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Giving a speech at a dinner is not a meeting, and it's not consultation.

Given that alternative and second-language programs have been disproportionately affected by the changes in bell times and transportation and given that these changes have resulted in families looking at possibly a \$1,000 cost increase and given that the increased costs and difficulty in co-ordinating pickups for different bell times are pushing families away from alternative and second-language programs, to the same minister: can these families expect any support from you in choosing the education that best suits their children, or have you given up on diversity in our education system?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. You know, Mr. Speaker, that sort of inflammatory language and misleading paths of describing things only serve to make things worse. We're putting in billions of dollars to meet enrolment here for education in the province of Alberta, and we are making sure that the students get the education that they need. We've made significant investment in education. You know what? This is a regulation to regulate school fees. We're not going to let school fees go up in an Act to Reduce School Fees; we're going to make sure that they are affordable, and we will communicate that information very, very soon.

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

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People with disabilities and their allies have been asking for a disability advocate to assist them in navigating very complex systems like AISH and PDD. To the minister: how specifically will your ministry consult with that same community to ensure that the advocate's role accurately reflects the intent of the bill?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin by thanking the Member for St. Albert for her advocacy on this file and also thanking the Member for Calgary-North West for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. What we have learned over the period of the last two years is: Nothing about Us without Us. As we move forward to create this position, we will work with

the community to make sure that the legislation is followed in letter and spirit.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will the Ministry of CSS, Community and Social Services, ensure that the advocate's role remains focused on the principles identified in the bill, which is focused on the needs of the community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, again. The bill brought forward by the Member for Calgary-North West is an extremely strong bill. She had consulted – I personally know that – extensively on this bill with the community. As we move forward with implementation of the bill, we will make sure that the advocate's role is focused on what the legislation says, and we will do so in consultation with the community.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplementary.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will the ministry work with the community to identify desired outcomes in order to ensure meaningful oversight?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I think our record is pretty clear. We have worked with the community over the period of the last two years. In terms of the safety standard regulation brought by the previous government, we worked with the community and repealed it. Instead of the supports intensity scale brought by the previous government, we worked with the community, and we repealed it. Going forward, we'll work with the community on all issues that matter to them, and I think that when we work with them, we have a good relationship and their lives are better off.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

School Transportation Fees

(continued)

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A parent from Robert Warren school said that she felt like she'd been kicked in the gut when she heard what the Calgary board of education is forced to do to implement Bill 1. The CBE alternative program will not be provided with school buses because it is not the designated school for people in many communities around Calgary. This government promised to maintain educational choice for parents, and access is a critical part of that. What regulations will the minister consider around Bill 1 to ensure that parents can transport their children to their school of choice?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been working very closely with the Calgary board of education to ensure that we have adequate transportation needs for all students in Calgary, and, you know, we are working to reduce school fees as well. But let's remember that it's not an act to eliminate school fees; it's an act to reduce school fees. We are going to work very hard to make sure that we have an equitable way by which to do so across

the city and across the province, and certainly you'll see, when we are building and finishing the regulation, that we will moderate the fees to ensure that they are affordable.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, there's an extreme deficiency in clarity here. Given that we warned the government about the potential negative impacts of this bill and given that parents across the province are asking for clarity about how this bill is going to be implemented and given that the regulations are still being developed and that no one seems to be able to address the transportation issues and given that school authorities are doing the best they can to accommodate transportation needs – you said that you'd be meeting with the school boards. How many, Minister? How many school authorities has the minister met with to figure out this mess called Bill 1?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would hardly categorize a bill that would put money into the pockets of more than 600,000 families across the province to be anything but a success and a way by which we can make life better for Alberta families. Quite frankly, we have been working very closely with school boards. I have been meeting with them for many, many, many months. We will be with them again this evening. We're working out a way by which to make sure that school is affordable here in the province of Alberta, which would certainly never happen if you made billions of dollars of cuts, as the opposition would like.

Mrs. Aheer: You know what would never happen, Mr. Speaker? We would not be doubling school bus transportation fees.

Given that the Calgary board of education's alternative programs are based on student needs and offer critical choice for parents and given that they need at least 25 students to make these programs viable and given that the fallout from Bill 1 will force families to move from their designated schools, undermining their choice, Mr. Speaker, and given that school boards are not allowed to make changes in transportation fees without permission from the minister, when is the minister going to start supporting school boards to ensure that the unintended consequences of this bill do not remove authentic choice in education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. It's very important that we recognize the hard work of school boards, of parents, of school councils, and so forth to ensure that we build a system that is not just educating kids but is strengthening it for the future as well. So that's exactly what we're doing. You know that the regulation is forthcoming, and you must ... [interjection]

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

Mr. Eggen: You've got to make sure you listen to the answer because otherwise you don't get any of the information. I'm sorry. [interjection] No, keep going. Keep going. That's fine. Finished?

We're working to build a better education system for Alberta families, Mr. Speaker, and I welcome everybody to help in that enterprise.

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

2:40 Opioid Use Prevention and Mitigation

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opioid emergency response commission is an important weapon in the war against

opioids in Alberta, and I have no doubt that the excellent panel members will work tirelessly in tackling the ongoing fentanyl crisis; however, Albertans may never be able to appreciate the contributions of this committee because the recommendations are to go directly to the minister and cabinet, where they can select suggestions with no public accountability. To the minister: for the sake of transparency and to save more lives faster, will you direct the commission to report on a quarterly basis to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to address a question raised with regard to the devastating opioid crisis, which is impacting Albertan families, communities, and, of course, those who have been victims themselves. That's why we must move rapidly and why we announced the opioid emergency response commission, which includes, again, harm reduction program experts, parent advocates, law enforcement, and others. We're keen to implement their recommendations, we're very proud of the stakeholders that have been coming together to do this work, and we'll be proud to update the House in a timely fashion on the very important outcomes.

Mr. Rodney: Given that the Kainai, out of grave necessity, became a leader in Canada in addressing the fentanyl crisis at a local level and given that this model included distributing naloxone, proactive on-reserve enforcement to prevent trafficking, and establishing a successful opioid replacement to treat addiction and given that the fentanyl crisis is a life-and-death issue in a number of First Nations communities across Alberta, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what are you doing to monitor the crisis on other reserves, and what specific actions have you taken to implement the Kainai's successful framework on other reserves clear across Alberta?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We're proud to be able to move forward in partnership with a number of indigenous leaders, including Dr. Esther Tailfeathers, who's actually part of the specific opioid crisis response commission. It's important that we work with leaders throughout our communities and acknowledge the very important role they play in standing up for their communities and their members as well. On Monday we opened a clinic in Grande Prairie, which, of course, has many First Nations in close proximity, and it has a capacity to treat up to 200 people. That was last Monday. We're very proud of that work.

Mr. Rodney: Given that in their efforts to address the fentanyl crisis within their community, the Kainai have also taken a very proactive and preventative approach to addiction and given that this includes recognizing the underlying issues which lead to addiction, including poverty, poor educational opportunities, unemployment, and a lack of housing supports, amongst others, to the Minister of Health this time: what specific initiatives have you undertaken with the Minister of Indigenous Relations to expand this approach to other reserves, and what are you doing to implement this approach in all affected communities right across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. As the Deputy Premier and as the minister responsible for this file it's my pleasure to address this answer, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, again, we addressed a number

of those communities in Grande Prairie. We're also opening additional space in Wetaskiwin, Rocky Mountain House, Stettler, Ponoka, and surrounding areas, and I am very proud of the work we've done with Treaty 8. For example, we have working groups that sit down face to face and talk about the challenges they're facing with regard to a number of different ministries. I think this is bringing about great outcomes for a community. It will take time. We have a significant deficit that we're making up for, that was created over many years, but we certainly have the right people at the table to make significant improvements as we move forward, including the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Farmer's Day

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, for over 50 years the second Friday in June was a provincial holiday in Alberta. This day was recognized as Farmer's Day. Schools were closed, and communities big and small all over Alberta would celebrate the importance and impact that agriculture has had.

Although no longer formally recognized as a holiday, some rural boards do recognize the importance of the day and celebrate the spirit of the occasion. As such, the United Farmers of Alberta cooperative has chosen to continue to celebrate this day by acknowledging the hard work and contribution of Alberta's farmers. On June 9 UFA locations will thank their local farmers and communities by hosting several farm store events.

As we know, this past season has been difficult for some Alberta farmers. The weather can be both a blessing and a curse, and as we've seen, some Alberta farmers can't catch a break. Late-season rains last fall, an early winter, and a damp spring left almost a million acres unharvested in central Alberta. It's still a toss-up if these farmers will get a decent crop seeded this year.

While Mother Nature is as unpredictable as ever, what hasn't been is how this government has been treating rural landowners and farmers. The vague, ill-conceived patchwork of legislation that is Bill 6 has done nothing but create animosity and distrust as this government stumbled through botched consultation and ignored the very people it purported to be helping. To compound matters, a carbon tax was dropped upon farm and ranch operations, and the government seemed genuinely shocked that anyone would question its impact. The fact is that the brunt of calls I get are from agribusiness operations that cannot be competitive on the world stage because of this punitive tax.

Just as a reminder, earlier this month this government voted against private member's Bill 204, which proposed to give property rights back to landowners and end the squatters' rights issue. Maybe on the 9th of June government members should visit a UFA farm outlet and actually listen to the people who are being harmed by their policies.

Rural communities and those of us involved in agriculture understand its importance to Alberta. My sincerest wishes for a happy Farmer's Day for all.

Government Policies

Mr. Rodney: It's time to review the spring 2017 legislative session, and I'm not even going to start with the NDP's record-setting deficit, debt, and downgrades. The government opened with Bill 1,

which will increase transportation and other costs by over \$1,000 per student for many families in my riding, the opposite of making lives better for Albertans.

Next, while Ontario took two years to review their labour legislation, the Alberta NDP spent a mere month on a 252-page document to learn that business and employer groups are gravely concerned that they are not being heard. It sounds like the NDP are on the backs of Albertans. The NDP claimed that they needed to get it done right now, yet they had two years and two ministers to get this process rolling but chose not to. Apparently, stories about *Star Trek*, pink eye, the WWE, and expanding a window frame are more important to the NDP.

The NDP also had two ministers in two years to introduce a viable bill which could have ensured real change to the child intervention system, but Paula Simons' scathing assessment of Bill 18 demonstrates just how much is missing from this legislation.

Then the NDP missed yet another opportunity to declare Serenity's law. Her family even came to the capital to encourage the government to take action and call a public inquiry. Our caucus asked questions on their behalf yet again, and still the NDP refused to budge.

And there's more. Hundreds of Albertans have died as a result of the fentanyl crisis, yet despite constant calls from this side, the NDP refused to ever call a public health emergency.

Finally, the NDP have been telling Albertans that the burden and harm caused by the carbon tax would all be worth it in the end because it would give Alberta the social licence required to build pipelines to tidewater, except that the NDP's comrades from the other side of the mountains unequivocally reject the notion of social licence.

The NDP try to talk a good game, but Albertans can't wait for 2019. There's so much more, but I've only got two minutes. We can only revive the Alberta advantage for future generations once we unite Albertans once again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Glenbrook Community in Calgary

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak about a community in my riding of Calgary-Currie that not only is doing fantastic work but also inspiring other communities across Calgary. I'm speaking, of course, of the Glenbrook Community Association and specifically to the work they've done to upgrade their community spaces.

Glenbrook has been a vibrant and growing community since the 1950s. The community association board is made up of dedicated, long-time residents whose own kids have grown up and who recognize that young families are now moving into the community. They wanted to be ahead of the curve, Mr. Speaker, by developing their community space into a lively recreational hub.

Murray Ost, a city of Calgary firefighter, has been president of the Glenbrook Community Association for over 20 years. He is the sort of person who gives out his personal cellphone number to all residents who live in the community so that they can call him first if there's a problem. He is just one example of the many great volunteers who make Glenbrook a fantastic community.

2:50

Just last spring Glenbrook received a CFEP grant of \$109,000. They used it to renovate their outdoor multisportsplex rink and to create the only rink in Calgary to have a summer surface that gets

covered with ice in the winter. Their new rink is an inspiration to other community associations across the city.

On Canada Day the community plans to have a grand opening barbecue. They're going to have plenty of things for everybody to participate in – paddle sports, basketball, ball hockey, and more – and a number of sports organizations are going to be there holding their camps as well. You really have to come see it for yourself, Mr. Speaker.

The Glenbrook Community Association is truly thankful for grants like CFEP from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. I am proud of the Glenbrook Community Association for their spirit of helping and for being a leader in the city.

I am also honoured to be hosting my Stampede breakfast at the Glenbrook Community Association this year. I look forward to running my wiener dog races on that new rink, and I look forward to the entire community coming out. I invite all members of the Legislature to see this wonderful event as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose and District Support Services

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2017 the Camrose and District Support Services will have provided wanted and needed social programs for 50 years. I congratulate them. Also, congratulations to Margaret Holliston, the current executive director, and all her staff. They have worked hard to achieve the goals of family and community support services and enhance individual, family, and community assets by enhancing the strengths, skills, and abilities of clients to be more resilient and better able to deal with the challenges of life; building individual and environmental safeguards that enhance the ability to deal with stressful life events, risks, and hazards; and by addressing protective and risk factors that affect clients.

The Camrose and District Support Services and I would like to thank this government for its continued support. We appreciate this government's understanding that programs to assist vulnerable Albertans should not be lost in attempts to raise a credit rating while sacrificing human value and dignity.

CDSS includes the collaboration of eight municipal partners, both urban and rural. CDSS often launches projects and services with seed money and a lot of in-kind organizational support. Successful projects include Camrose Children's Centre, Open Door, which is a youth shelter doing youth outreach, and Service Options for Seniors, to name only a few. CDSS is particularly proud of the growth of Camrose Pride, which promotes inclusion, respect, and human rights. CDSS has annually updated their community help book with its vast information and referral services, which has been extremely valuable to my constituency staff in aiding the many constituents who seek help through our office.

Our government's continued funding of the Camrose and District Support Services is just one more example of how we are supporting organizations which, in turn, make life better for individuals, families, and Alberta communities.

Thank you.

29th Legislature Spring Sitting and Summer Break

Mr. Taylor: As we go into the summer recess, I'd like to take time to salute the hard-working Albertans that depend on us as legislators to debate bills and bring in laws that help them. Unfortunately, the NDP have used their majority to pass bills that many Albertans don't agree with such as the carbon tax and the

labour bill. Both will have a lasting impact on this province. In particular, though, I'd like to acknowledge the farmers and the oil field workers. These men and women have been hit hard by the recession and oil prices and poor conditions in the fields. They are the backbone of our economy and make up a large part of my riding of Battle River-Wainwright.

Over the coming summer months it will be my honour to meet with them both in their homes and at events like the Wainwright Stampede, to consult with them, and to discuss how we can make their lives better. Discussions and debates will continue throughout the summer around the legalization of marijuana, eliminating Alberta daylight saving time, and the protection of Alberta's youth, especially under the watch and care of the government.

Possible conservative political restructuring in Alberta this summer will indeed lead us to interesting times. The Wildrose and the PC Party will, through their membership, see if we can set aside our differences and work together in unity so that all Alberta can reap the benefits. Our Wildrose grassroots will be making decisions this summer on whether or not we unite. Albertans will have the final say on July 22.

The message that I'm getting from Albertans is that we cannot afford not to. Albertans will not be able to afford a higher budget that sinks us deeper and deeper into debt, an anticipated \$94 billion in debt by the next election. That's 94 billion reasons why we need a strong and united conservative voice to end the financial disaster. So please come out, sign up, and vote to make a difference.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of a new report from the Public Health Law Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, titled *Leading from up North: How Canada Is Solving the Menthol Tobacco Problem*. This report documents Canada's and Alberta's global leadership in banning flavoured tobacco products and profiles the efforts of several provinces which have approved and implemented legislation to remove flavours from tobacco products, including Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Theresa Ng and with respect to the inappropriate content available for K to 12 kids in schools are 2,700 names on a petition from concerned parents. I have the five requisite copies of that. I would also like to table received correspondence on this subject as well, please, with the five copies.

Cortes-Vargas: I'd just like to briefly stand and table a document from an incredible constituent who is actually in the gallery today. He has been an oil and gas worker for many years. He's been working as a trade worker, I think. It's in response to some of the comments that have been made by the opposition about union thugs, and it talks about the great contribution that the unions played during the Fort McMurray wildfire, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Feehan, Minister of Indigenous Relations, responses

to questions raised by Mr. Rodney, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, at the April 13, 2017, Ministry of Indigenous Relations 2016-17 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we have a point of order that was raised.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sickens me to have to rise on a point of order today. I make reference to Standing Order 23:

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Mr. Speaker, I have two examples that happened around the same time. At approximately 2:07 today, during the Minister of Justice's response to questions from the Member for Calgary-Hays, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo said, directed at the Minister of Justice: is it because you're a racist? Around the same time the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, referring to the Minister of Justice, said: you're only a dime-store lawyer.

I want to start off by saying that that kind of language is offensive. It's offensive not only to members of this House; it's offensive to Albertans. In fact, I think we are better than that and need to hold ourselves to a higher account, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the term "racist" is unparliamentary. I can give you a number of examples. I would argue that it is very unbecoming of a member of this House to use that type of language. I want to point out that just because a microphone is not on, it doesn't mean that a member can say anything, you know, or can utter remarks like that, to basically make accusations against another member.

Frankly, the question exchange between the Member for Calgary-Hays and the Minister of Justice is about a very, very serious matter that has been revealed to us and to Albertans. To have an accusation made against the Minister of Justice, a very serious accusation, on a day such as today makes it even harder to stomach, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

Again, comments like one member accusing another of being a racist undermine the dignity and respect of this House. It is beneath this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to quote from *Hansard* on April 30, 2003. Speaker Kowalski in a ruling said:

There are few allegations that could be made against a member that could be more damaging than that he or she was promoting or condoning discrimination. As the chair has said over and over again, freedom of speech carries with it great responsibility. The events on Monday bring no honour to this Assembly, which is extremely regrettable not just for the chair but for each and every member of the Assembly.

At that point the former Speaker went on to demand an apology from the member for uttering such comments.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's quite disappointing, not only for this side of the House, but again, I mean, we have members of the public that are in our galleries, and we have folks at home that watch. We should hold ourselves to the highest standards because of the public office that we hold. I was extremely disappointed to hear both of those comments made, and I would ask that the member withdraw and apologize not only to the Minister of Justice but to this House and to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that these are serious allegations that are being made by my colleague the Deputy Government House Leader. At that time it was a very serious question that the Member for Calgary-Hays was raising about whether or not the Department of Justice was treating certain groups or individuals differently and if there was a bias directed towards certain groups or individuals.

While I don't have the benefit of the Blues and I can say with all certainty that I am not a hundred per cent sure of what the member sitting behind me said, he most certainly did not make the allegation that the minister is a racist. Now, he may have asked – in fact, I literally did not hear the words that he did not say. However, I did ask him if he had said those things, and he spoke about if the department was functioning that way, which was the very heart of the question that was being asked. At no point in time did the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo make an allegation that the minister was prejudiced.

I might go as far as to say that at that very moment the minister was giving a very thoughtful response about how this very issue, that the department is functioning with a bias, keeps her up at night. I know that my colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo shares those same concerns and challenges and frustrations about how certain groups of people are affected by the way that the department treats them. I would find it highly unlikely that he, in fact, uttered the words “It's because you're a racist,” as in the allegations that are made. Now, I will agree that he was frustrated at the time that the question was asked because of the absolutely unbelievable conditions to which Miss Cardinal had been treated by the Department of Justice, a question specifically about whether or not she would have been treated that way if she was from a different ethnic group.

While no one in this House has the benefit of knowing exactly what the member said, to make the allegation that he said that about the minister without being a hundred per cent certain is also concerning because this is an issue that one ought not tread lightly into. I'm not suggesting that the minister isn't, but I don't believe that the member made that sort of allegation as it would not be consistent with his character, particularly around this particular issue.

While I think that you may find it very difficult to rule because it's unlikely, if I didn't hear, that you heard, I do take this very seriously. I know that the member does as well, so I will leave it in your capable hands and at your discretion. Now, if – if – the House believes that that is what took place, I'm certain he would be happy to withdraw and apologize, and I would do that on his behalf, but I am also convinced that that was not what happened today because that would have been highly and wildly inappropriate.

The Speaker: Hon. Opposition House Leader, I believe there was a second allegation, about a second comment. Could you speak to that matter?

Mr. Cooper: I can speak to that very briefly, Mr. Speaker. I also did not hear what may or may not have been said in the heckling, the back and forth. Certainly, one of these allegations, if that took place, is well beyond the scope of what is reasonable to say inside the Chamber. The other, I think you'll find, is the ebb and flow of this place.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. One of the benefits of sitting in this part of the House is that I don't tend to hear all of the things that go back and forth. That is actually quite a

benefit, I have to say, because a lot of what goes back and forth: “unhelpful” would be, probably, a gentle term.

I think that when we're dealing with issues this serious and emotions are running high, it's incumbent on all members to check ourselves and really ask what purpose it serves. Alleged comments like this are deeply troubling, and it's a pattern. It's a trend that, I think, unfortunately is perhaps not unique to our Assembly, but I think that we in this House, all of us – and I'll include myself in this – can be better. I don't think that it serves democracy. It does not, I think, live up to Albertans' expectations of how we all ought to behave. These sorts of comments, whether you find they did in fact occur or not, are truly unhelpful.

So I think this, as we wrap up session or get close to it, anyway, perhaps serves as an opportunity for us, as we go back to our constituencies and back to our families, to reflect on how we behave in this Assembly, and I would hope that we can all be better, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I too did not hear the two comments that are alleged, nor as I look at the Blues, do I see an account of the statements being made.

It seems to me, though, hon. members, that this is yet another opportunity for this House. Collectively, as we move into this summer break, each of you needs to ask yourselves, when you're raising points in heated discussions or not heated discussions, whether you're actually contributing to the good and healthy democratic debate that takes place in this House. Sometimes it appears to me that comments are made as to how close one can get before being called on a point of order by the Speaker or being called by another member. Let this serve as an example and another opportunity, that when we all return to this place, we will be more cognizant of the comments that we make and of whether they, in fact, contribute to the success of this institution.

I'm going to say, hon. member, that I see no point of order at this time. I just would leave it as a reminder. Unless I hear and see the point, I cannot make a ruling, as per page 618 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

The Opposition House Leader seems to want to say something else. I've made a decision. I'm not sure how he will contribute to this matter.

3:10

Mr. Cooper: Not speaking to the point of order, sir, just rising to request unanimous consent to do away with Standing Order 8(1), that allows private members' business on Monday afternoons, that we would move immediately to Government Bills and Orders.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect of this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, please wait till I see the original, and then we can continue.

Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A14. Please go ahead.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 118(1), in the proposed section 53, as follows: (a) by adding the following after subsection (7):

(7.1) A revocation vote is not required if, on the basis of the evidence submitted in support of the application and the Board's investigation in respect of that evidence, the Board is satisfied that at the time of the application for revocation the applicants had the support, in the form set out in section 51(2), of more than 65% of the employees in the bargaining unit.

(7.2) At any time after the Board begins assessing an application referred to in subsection (7.1), the applicants may elect to waive the right to revocation under subsection (7.1) and to proceed with the revocation based on the results of a revocation vote.

(7.3) If the Board determines under subsection (7.1) that the applicants lack the necessary 65% support of the employees in the bargaining unit, but have the 40% support required by subsection (5), or if there is a waiver under subsection (7.2), the Board shall within 3 working days of that determination or waiver, give notice of a revocation vote.

And (b) in subsection (8) by adding "or (7.3)," after "vote referred to in subsection (6)".

Thank you, Madam Chair. That was definitely a mouthful.

When I speak to this, Madam Chair, I want to put some context around it. You know, certainly, my time in the union – I have to get this set out in the beginning, when I started my career in Calgary paramedics a number of years ago. I have to give credit to my friends in the union at the time that went before me, that made that job incredibly enticing. They did such tremendous work not only to promote labour issues but the profession. In fact, what I can say is that both in Calgary and Edmonton under those respective CUPE bargaining units they did amazing work. I will always lift up the amazing work that they have done, so this is not in any way a reflection that this is anti-union. In fact, this is actually an opportunity to speak about the bill and the title of the bill, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

Madam Chair, when we talk about, you know, certifying a union, the government has spoken about that 65 per cent threshold, where everybody signs a card and then, essentially, it becomes automatic and that for anything below that, between 40 per cent and 65 per cent, it will go to a vote. Well, we all know, at the end of the day, that it is extremely important that we as Albertans get our fair chance to speak about the things we're passionate about and, more importantly, to have the opportunity, the ability to vote. So when we talk about being fair in this legislation, I guess you could say that what is good for the goose is good for the gander. What this does is that it allows employers and it allows those folks – and I'm not going to mention any particular union, but we know there are times when the union doesn't uphold its end of the deal with its members, and I've heard that.

What we want to do is make sure that there is an equal opportunity. Madam Chair, you know, in my time in the union, in fact, I've been on the steps with some of the people in this gallery against the government that I came to serve because I felt that at that time they weren't listening. But it was our opportunity to exercise that. When we talk about this, at the end of the day, to certify, you need that 65 per cent threshold. To decertify or for a revocation vote, you need that 65 per cent. It's fair right across the

board. It creates equality, and I can't imagine that the government and their members and private members would want to take that opportunity away from Albertans. To me, it's a friendly amendment.

Madam Chair, the other part of this that I'd like to speak about is that we as a caucus and I myself, I can tell you, given the opportunity, would support the workplace safety changes to better things for Albertans. I think you've heard that from almost all opposition members: given the opportunity to do that. But when I talk about this specific piece and why I put this amendment forward, I think there is a real opportunity here for us to take a look at the Labour Relations Code and speak about a number of things that I know folks inside the labour movement aren't happy with, that I know folks even perhaps in government may not be fully supportive of. It is an opportunity to open up that entire act and have a fulsome debate about what it means for Albertans, what it means for employers, what it means for the members of unions, and I'm speaking from experience on that.

I think there are opportunities, again, to create that part of this legislation, to have it be more fair, more transparent. In fact, we all know that when we call it evergreening legislation, it is bringing it up to date, to a current standard, not just a portion of it. I would recommend to the government my thought process. In fact, in speaking to the Minister of Labour and, in fact, speaking to anybody in cabinet, it is important that we have the ability to be heard. I hope that there's somebody on the government side that might be able to speak to this, because I think it's important. It talks about equality, it talks about fairness across the board, and it talks about our ability to actually get things done properly, in a more fulsome debate, by separating those two pieces.

I won't speak much longer on this. Again, I think this is fair right across the board for everybody.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A14? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for bringing forward this amendment. I certainly appreciate the thought and consideration that he's put into this, and I'm certainly aware that this member has indeed worked in a union environment, indeed has been part of the folks that have been in leadership in that, and he's certainly been vocal about looking out for those that he worked with and his brothers and sisters in that employment. So we appreciate the thought that he's put into this amendment and the consideration in general that he's put into these aspects of the bill.

3:20

Now, certainly, Madam Chair, the intent of this bill is to ensure that Albertans have a fair and family-friendly workplace, that laws that we put in place in our labour codes, in our labour acts are supporting a strong economy and ensuring that people are able to look after themselves and their families.

Certainly, Madam Chair, I am well aware, having myself worked in a number of union environments, of the importance of ensuring that the rules we have in place that govern the means by which unions are put in place or indeed by which unions are revoked are fair and reasonable. Indeed, a union can be a very powerful force for good for employees. I know that, for myself, in the past at some of the places I've worked, particularly when I worked for the Canada Revenue Agency and had the opportunity to be represented by PSAC there in the call centre that I worked at, I was greatly

appreciative of the work that they had done there, of the ability that I had there to earn a very good wage for the work that I was doing and of having the opportunity to benefit from the work that they were doing there.

At the same time, Madam Chair, I recognize that a union, in the work that it does, needs to be held accountable. There may be times when members find that the union that they have representing them has ceased to represent them to the extent that they feel is important or adequate. We need to have fair means in place which allow that union to be revoked so that members have the opportunity to seek another union to bring into that place or to consider going without representation, because indeed that also is about having a fair and family-friendly workplace.

Those are just my general thoughts. I'm interested in hearing more on this. I know, certainly, I have some colleagues who have even deeper experience in the labour movement, and I look forward to perhaps some of the insight they can bring to this particular amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A14? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. A pleasure to rise again this week in Committee of the Whole and be able to speak about Bill 17 and this amendment that was just brought forward by the hon. member. I do thank him for bringing it forward, and I understand the intentions of what it is he is trying to accomplish.

Of course, what we have right now in our system is, you know, the protected vote when employees are looking to form a union. What we've suggested is that now, when you're able to sign cards at 65 per cent and once that has been verified through application and petition to the labour board, they will automatically certify. One of the things that we've been trying to do now, of course, is to line up right across the board with other jurisdictions that are doing the same thing. Currently, right now, there are no other jurisdictions that have this type of language within their legislation.

I think that at this time, again, I'll thank the member for bringing the amendment forward, but I'm not willing to support it at this time, making sure that we're staying standard with the rest of the jurisdictions across the country, and I'll ask other members to not support it at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A14? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for introducing this amendment. It appears to be an amendment that seems very in line with what this government is proposing with regard to fair treatment moving forward.

From what I've heard from the other side, on the basis to not go in the direction where a revocation vote can be triggered by 65 per cent of the employees in the bargaining unit, they're utilizing the argument that it's not used in any other jurisdiction. If I'm wrong in the way I interpreted what was presented here, then I stand to be corrected, but I do believe that this would completely fall in line with the guidelines that are being proposed by this government, that if it's good for one, it's good for the other.

I do believe that I would support this amendment, and I look forward to all other members supporting a very reasonable amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A14? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to rise in support of the hon. Member for Calgary-South East's amendment. We speak a lot about fairness and transparency, and I think that all members of this House would say that the will of the employee should be the strongest voice in any decisions around unionization or revocation of that unionization. We all want what's best for the employees. We want to ensure that their decisions are made in a transparent manner, without undue influence from either employers or unions.

This amendment allows that process to take place in a fair manner, the same fair manner in terms of – and I'm not a big fan of the straight card check on the way in, but if that's going to be the rule, then we need to make sure that those same principles are employed on the way out of a union. I think that that's only fair to the employees, that we're trying to protect here with legislation. I think it's an opportunity for this House to actually do what's right on this occasion, to again look at fair, equitable, transparent behaviour. You can't speak out of this side of your mouth about fairness and transparency and equitable behaviour and the will of the employees and not have it spoken out of the other side. I think there's an opportunity here for this House to do the right thing, to pass this amendment, and to ensure that this legislation, with all of its flaws, at least has some balance in some of these opportunities for some amendment on some of the minutiae of the bill.

I'd like to encourage everybody in this House to support this amendment. It's well thought out. I think that it's very clear what the intentions are here and that it's something where, if somebody looks, certainly, into their own principles on this, they'll understand that this is a balanced and fair approach to the legislation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the proposed amendment. Now, this is not apples and apples. When you're signing up, why the 65 per cent for card check is a good thing is simply this. You have to think about who is actually in charge of making the decisions about who is employed and who isn't. Now, can you imagine the potential for intimidation in going around and asking people: do you want to get out of the union? It's absurd. This is not a fair comparison. Just think. I just want the members opposite to think about what that would look like in their own situation at any workplace. A union representative does not make the decision on who is employed there and who is not; management does.

That's all I have to say, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Fraser: Madam Chair, I respect the comments, and I can totally understand that, but I think the problem is that we're making the assumption that every employer is nefarious.

Mr. Coolahan: Absolutely not.

Mr. Fraser: Well, that's the assumption when we say that we can't balance it by staying the other way.

Now, certainly, depending on how a labour organization is organized, it can be done with force, it can be done with care, it can be done with good intent, or it can be done with bad intent. I think we all recognize that. And the same for the employer. That's why we have the Labour Relations Board, Madam Chair. The Labour Relations Board is there to hammer all these things out and penalize

those people who don't follow the law. All this does is enshrine this in law, that whatever the process is to organize a union, to move out of a union the same way would be done in a fair way.

I will tell you that I will be the first one to champion any organization and any employee who's bullied by their employer. I guarantee you that. But what I'm saying is that every time we take a look and it tips the scales one way or the other – all I'm saying is about trying to balance the scales here. This is a fair amendment to take a look at that.

This is why, again, I go back to the idea of why these two pieces of the legislation need to be separated. The member brings up a fair point. The labour board itself and the labour code can be bolstered by this. It can be brought out in committee so that everybody has a fair understanding of how it works, including employers. Not every employer is afraid of being unionized, and not everybody who works for an employer wants to be unionized. When we talk about it just being fair and being equal across the board, that's what this amendment provides. I think we should be careful about making assumptions one way or the other. I just think it's important. We could balance the scales with this.

Again, I would support it if the government would separate these pieces of legislation so that we can actually get down to the nuts and bolts of what's going on with the Labour Relations Code versus what's happening to employment standards.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A14?

Mr. Nielsen: Just a couple of things to clarify. You know, I was speaking to this last week during the discussion about separating out the language. Again, drawing on my experience from my time in the labour movement, I'm not aware of any contract anywhere between any union and any employee where they separate out their language – okay? – so that you might have a book that holds compassionate care language over here, and over here you'd have the book that deals with every other language. It's all in one, one contract, and all the language is called labour language. So when we talk about splitting it up, we're talking about trying to tear apart labour language and making two different discussions here. I just thought I'd remind the House of that.

With regard to the amendment, Madam Chair, right now the system that is working here in Alberta and the process around decertification really has never had any problems. We've been looking at trying to standardize our labour language with what other employees across the rest of the country already enjoy, and they haven't attempted to change this in any way.

Again I'll ask members to not support this amendment at this time, and I'll probably have more to say about some of the other comments later.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to A14? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. Not to belabour the point, but it's interesting that the argument used to speak against this very reasonable amendment is that the system has not had any problems. Now we're moving into a system that's being introduced by this government into the certification of unions, which, I would argue, has not had any problems previously. So if we're going to move to a system of this type of democracy, so-called democracy – I would suggest that it's not necessarily what I would believe to be

fully democratic – and opening the door to abuse from employers or employees or from unions, then we have to do it on equal scales, whether we're certifying a new union or whether we're revoking that.

I do believe that this is a critical understanding, that if it's good going in, it should be good going out so that we are comparing apples to apples. On the argument that it wasn't broken and it didn't have any problems, I would suggest that we also didn't have any problems previously with the secret ballot process of certifying a union to begin with. So I don't understand why it can be used to argue one way and then to argue the other way when we're talking about a very reasonable amendment here.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Gotfried: Madam Chair, you know, this is, I think, a very fair amendment, but in some respects it doesn't go far enough. Maybe we should be asking for unions to have to recertify every year or two years or three years, which would mean that they would have to hit that 65 per cent threshold once again. All we're asking for is that to reverse that decision, to actually be able to back out of it, the onus is then back on the employees to prove that they want to decertify as a union. We're not asking for something that is actually skewed in favour of decertifying a union. We're actually asking for the same fairness to decertify as to certify in the first place, which, quite frankly, I don't think is fair. I think that the card check system is flawed. I think that it should be held to a secret vote. I mean, there's huge precedent and huge outcry that we're hearing not just from employers but employees around the fact that they want a secret ballot, that a secret ballot is the only way to ensure absolute transparency for themselves from fear of any kind of reprisal or undue influence or retribution or anything of that sort from a decision that they can make with their own clear conscience with the best interests of themselves and their families and their future at stake. This, I think, is a very watered-down way. Again, with all respect to the Member for Calgary-South East, he's actually being extremely fair and equitable and transparent in proposing this amendment, which is actually just asking for the same treatment as the government is asking for in this bill to certify.

Really, I think we should say that maybe you have to hit that 65 per cent mark again and again and again to prove that you actually hold that same power among your employees, that same decision-making power, that they continue to want that certification of that union. We're not asking for that at this juncture here today. What we're saying is that there needs to be balance on the fairness of certification or decertification of a union. I think that that's a simple principle to grasp, that we're asking for that.

Again, I don't think it goes far enough. I think that the card check system is flawed, and I think, talking about apples, that there are bad apples out there. There could be bad apples on the employer side and bad apples on the union side. I think that every employee deserves the opportunity to make that decision through their own conscience alone without having to open their kimono on that and say: "You know what? Here, I'm going to tell everybody what I'm going to do so that you can possibly harass me, intimidate me, or continually advocate or use peer pressure on me to make that decision." We're only asking here for this amendment, to be flawed in its own right, to allow people to say: we want out.

For that reason, if this is the farthest we can go – and I don't believe, again, that it's far enough – it's better than what we are sitting with today in this legislation. We should be supporting this. All members of this House should be supporting this amendment

because it is fair and equitable and transparent to both sides, using the same rules, which, again, I do not believe are fair, but it's better than what we have today.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A14? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to say a few things about this. First of all, I'll start by saying that I'm incredibly proud that we have a section in the amendments titled Inquiry into Certification Application because we have one of the most outdated and regressive labour codes in the country, which is why we have the lowest number of Albertans that belong to a union.

I just wanted to say that I want to thank the groups that have come and had input into it to make sure that it was coming closer into line with the rest of the country. I know that employers have said that they want time to be able to synthesize a lot of this into their practices at work with employment. I wanted to speak just a little bit to our members in the gallery that are here to join us. I'm not going to list off their names because I'll forget most of them, but I'm thankful to know their faces and count them as friends.

I know that they are disparagingly referred to as union thugs and union bosses, but I want to say that people like Scott Crichton, who was able to mobilize . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you could just speak through me, through the chair, please, and not to the gallery, I would appreciate it.

Mrs. Littlewood: I'm speaking about the gallery, not speaking to the gallery.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, they've already been introduced, and you can't speak to the gallery. You have to speak through me, please.

Mrs. Littlewood: Madam Chair, it is my pleasure to know that there are members in the gallery that I count as friends that have been incredibly helpful with putting together this legislation and, I should say, people from groups like IBEW, that were able to mobilize 150 letters to come from Mundare and Andrew and St. Michael and Tofield and Lamont and Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona county to say that they want to see change that makes their lives better, their work lives better, that they know that the people that fight on their behalf do so with research, they do so with commitment, and they do so with incredible heart.

I want to just make it very clear that I support our legislation in Alberta, with the labour code coming into the 21st century, and that is why I'm going to vote down this amendment.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster first, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the amendment proposed by my colleague the Member for Calgary-South East. It is clear to me and it should come as no surprise to any members here – I spoke to this when I spoke to this bill on second reading – that there are certain biases within the Assembly. I don't think it should come as any surprise to anyone that most of the members of the government caucus have a pro-union bias. That's not a surprise. In fact, most of them are

quite readily willing to accept and wear that as a badge of honour, and they're allowed to do that. That's fine.

It could also be said that many members on this side of the House have – I'm not sure what you'd call it. I wouldn't call it an anti-union bias. As I said, I was once a member of a labour union myself, and I recognize the role that organized labour has within society. It is important that there be a balance between organized labour and management in all situations.

But here's the problem. It's a little bit like pulling for two different sports teams. Because we're in Alberta, I'll use Edmonton and Calgary as an example. The members over on the government side, a lot of them, may well be fans of the Edmonton sports teams, while the folks on this side may well be fans of the Calgary sports teams. Now, this is hypothetical, of course, because I would never cheer for Calgary sports teams. Let's just say for the purposes of this particular illustration, Madam Chair, that that's the situation, that we have one side that is pulling for Edmonton and one side that's pulling for Calgary. But here's the thing. We're setting the rules in this match. We're setting up how the rules will govern how this interaction is to play out.

What we have here is a situation where the folks that are pulling for one team are in the majority, and the folks that are pulling for the other team are in a minority. The folks that are pulling for the one team and that are in the majority are specifically setting the rules in favour of the team that they're pulling for. That's exactly what is going on here with this particular section of Bill 17, and my hon. colleague is simply trying to set the rules evenly.

You know, like I say, it's a little bit like a situation whereby if the route into a certain situation is relatively simple whereas the route out is relatively complex, it stands to reason that over time more and more situations will happen where organizations move into that situation but then have a hard time moving out simply because the rules to move back out again are not the same.

That's the situation that we find ourselves in here. We find ourselves in a situation where the government side, which is specifically more pro-union, is setting up the rules in such a way that certification of unions is done under one set of rules, is done by one procedure. But the exact mirror image of that, to allow for a group of employees, should they desire, to revoke their certification: all of a sudden those rules are more difficult. All of a sudden those rules are more complex. Very clearly, even if you don't have, you know, a specific bias one way or the other, if you look objectively at that situation, that is very clearly an unfair and unbalanced set of rules.

Now, our role here as legislators is to set our biases aside and to actually consider what makes for the best legislation. The best legislation is legislation that is balanced. It is legislation that would allow for, if you will, a two-way street; in other words, a situation where for those who wish to become certified, if there's a certain set of rules – and it's been mentioned before, and I'm not enamoured with the rules that are being proposed in Bill 17, but if those are the rules that are going to be set up for certification of labour unions, then in order to be fair and in order to be balanced, it would seem to me that revocation of certification should follow the exact same rules. That is what this amendment proposes. That's what my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has proposed.

An Hon. Member: For 40 years you've been talking about it.

Dr. Starke: You can talk all you like about past history and all that other stuff. We are in the here and now. We are setting rules for

going forward. You don't start talking about, you know: we're going to even the playing field by flipping the scale over to the other side. That's not our role here. Our role here is to provide even and balanced legislation.

What we have here again, Madam Chair, like I say, is a team that has been on a 44-year losing streak over there. So now in order to try to get on their own little winning streak, they're going to try to set the rules in their favour so that they can go on a 44-year winning streak. That's not right. That's simply not right, and it's not what should be done by the legislators in this Chamber. Our job is to set good legislation, not prebiased legislation but good legislation. This member has proposed an amendment that would put that forward, that would correct a bias in this legislation as it exists currently.

Now, the members on the other side don't want to correct that bias. That's fine. That's fine, but you will have to answer to the people of Alberta when they look at the legislation and they say: "This legislation is biased in favour of labour unions. This is unfair legislation. This legislation has been poorly crafted." If you're comfortable with answering to Albertans and those charges on that legislation, then defeat this amendment.

Personally, being part of an Assembly wherein we should be passing legislation that is even and balanced and is fair to all parties, it seems to me very clear that the rules going in and the rules going out should basically be mirror images of each other. If they are not, then there's a basic unfairness. For that reason, I'm in favour and will vote in favour of my colleague's amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to A14? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hey, I must admit that I was rather interested in some of the comments that were made across the way here a little bit. You know, last week I had encouraged members from the other side to maybe reach out to maybe even some of the fine members that we have sitting in our gallery here today to learn a little bit about how a union actually works, okay?

There were comments about how, well, every four years a union should try to see if they could get their certification back. Maybe if you were a little bit more familiar with the rules, you'd understand that the end of every contract, 90 days before, is when people have the time to go and decertify if they so choose, and it happens at the end of every single contract. Sometimes those contracts are one year long, two years long, three years long, four years long. Again I would certainly encourage the members across the way to maybe go seek some of the help of our fine folks in the gallery here.

You know, another bit of biased positioning here. I heard a lot of table-banging last week when there was talk about possibly removing the Rand formula – yeah, that's not tipping the scales in the other direction – talk about poorly crafted legislation, repealing the ability for employers to pay less than minimum wage to a person with disabilities. I didn't realize that removing that would be considered crafting poor legislation. [interjections]

Again, getting back to the amendment, Madam Chair – and I know folks across the way are chattering away, but we're going to keep plowing along here – this is about standardizing our language across the board where it's already been working in other jurisdictions in Canada. What they're suggesting in the amendment has not been suggested in other jurisdictions. I guess they don't feel that that has tipped it in one way or the other. Again, all the members of the House I would encourage to not support this.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Just a reminder. I know we just came out of question period, but if we could please try to refrain the rhetoric going back and forth across the floor and be respectful to the speakers, I would appreciate it.

Anybody else wishing to speak to amendment A14?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A14 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:50 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Hanson	Stier
Cooper	Loewen	Swann
Drysdale	Orr	Taylor
Fraser	Rodney	van Dijken
Gotfried	Starke	

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hinkley	Miller
Bilous	Horne	Miranda
Carlier	Jansen	Nielsen
Carson	Kazim	Payne
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Phillips
Connolly	Larivee	Piquette
Coolahan	Littlewood	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Rosendahl
Dach	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	Mason	Shepherd
Drever	McKitrick	Sigurdson
Feehan	McLean	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Woollard
Gray		

Totals:	For – 14	Against – 40
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[Motion on amendment A14 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 17. Are there any amendments, questions, comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to submit.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. If you could please just wait until I have the original.

Your amendment will be referred to as A15. Please go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very pleased to stand and speak to Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, with an amendment I think that everyone here will find reasonable. It has to do with break times. I mean, to expect workers to work unlimited hours without a break – and I'm speaking here of paid farm workers – seems eminently unfair, non family friendly, and it flies in the face of all of the values that this government has said that they believe in. We're suggesting here that we amend section 4 in the proposed section 2.1(1) by striking out clause (a) and substituting

(a) section 16 of Part 2, Division 3, Hours of Work;

Madam Chair, under the workplace standards everywhere else in Alberta after five hours of work it's expected that a worker would get 30 minutes of rest, but unfortunately paid farm workers are exempt from any kind of provision for rest. I'm particularly concerned with young people, foreign workers, people who are vulnerable, people who may not want to ask for a rest because it's not written into their contract. I don't see how we could avoid at least putting in some concrete terms the recognition of the need for a rest break.

Under the current rest period for every other worker an employer must provide each employee who works five hours or more with at least 30 minutes of rest, whether paid or unpaid, unless there's an accident or different rest provisions are provided or it's not reasonable for the employee to take a rest period during that time. Well, that to me says that we have a double standard again.

4:10

I raised this issue about overtime pay, and now I'm raising the issue in relation to fair and safe work practices where people can have a break. We're putting this provision in not only for an unfair expectation of, especially, naive workers and foreign workers; we're also putting them at risk of injury if they push on and push on. In some farm operations it's true that you just have to work overtime. But if we're not putting into legislation some legislated protection for some kind of rest period, we are setting people up for injuries, accidents, and problems.

Further to that, I don't think I need to add that this is a government that wants to be fair. They want to be family friendly. There is just absolutely no reason why you wouldn't include in these important changes for employee standards and labour standards, some provision for rest. I rest my case, Madam Chair. I can't imagine any refutation of that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A15? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the member bringing forward this amendment. Certainly, the spirit of the intention of this amendment is definitely a good one. One of the things that we heard within the working groups that have been working very, very diligently with our farm and ranch owners and the workers that they pointed out is that this type of amendment might kind of push things a little bit too far, that they're unable to adapt to this. You know, that was one of the recommendations that was brought forward to us. The government looked very, very seriously at this. You know, as the title says, the fair part – what we have so far is a very big gain. As the system begins to grow and we see where things are maybe not working as well, we can certainly start to adjust for those.

It's very, very reluctantly that I would not be able to support this amendment at this time. Again, I do want to thank the member for bringing this forward. I certainly understand the intentions of it. I would have to ask members of the House to not support it at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Dr. Swann: Well, that's very unfortunate, Madam Chair. It strikes me that this government has been cowed by industrial agriculture. They got such push-back on Bill 6 that they're now backing away from the most fundamental worker right of all, a chance to rest when folks are tired. On one hand, they seem to have said that it's

time for a change in Alberta, but somehow it's a step too far to ensure that young people and new Canadians especially are treated fairly in the workplace. Folks could work 28 days straight under the current legislation with only one day off and no rest periods. They could work 18 hours and have no break under the current legislation.

It's really disappointing to me that they would take the big step, certainly, to bring in Bill 6 and ensure some kind of safety, some kind of standards, and then exempt farm workers just because of the aggressive ag coalition and their throwing their weight around in the rural areas and, presumably, intimidating this government in terms of its election and political future in the rural areas.

Again, I think that any reasonable person looking at it would say that rather than err on the side of putting no constraints on employers, especially industrial agriculture, we should at least put something in there that suggests that there is a recourse for an employee who feels vulnerable to losing their job and at the same time feels vulnerable if they carry on under the conditions that they're being asked to continue under. It flies in the face of what this government says is fair and family friendly and all because they're afraid of push-back from big ag, which has continued to dominate the scene since these working groups were established.

Again, it's not only disingenuous to say that we have reluctance to address these needs; some of the accidents, injuries, and even deaths will be on your watch if you are unwilling to even look at a modicum of required rest for, especially, young people. We're now allowing 14- to 16-year-olds to do certain duties on farms. Quite frankly, even an 18-year-old who is new to industrial agriculture will be very reluctant to push against the employer and say: "This is unreasonable, to expect me and others to work in hour 18 when I haven't had a break and when I feel like I'm numbed out. I can't even think straight, and I'm not going to expect anything from you." Ninety-five per cent of employers would never do this, obviously, but the reason we make legislation is to cover the 5 per cent of people that are not reasonable, that are not responsible, that are not thinking of their workers. They're thinking of themselves and their own bottom line.

So I encourage the government to rethink this. Even enshrining something for the protection, the rest protection of paid farm workers would send a message: "We recognize that people are human beings, and they have a right to a break, whether they are a paid farm worker or any other worker. We value your health. We value you as a person. We recognize that you have the rights of every other worker in this province to be safe and take the rest breaks as you need them." I would encourage the government to rethink this as it smacks of political opportunism, and I don't think it will escape most paid farm workers that this is not a fair or family-friendly decision.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A15? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Sorry. I cede the floor to my colleague.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry for that small confusion there.

You know, I guess I just wanted to point out for other folks here some of the folks that were part of the working group that brought forward these recommendations. We had members such as Blaine Staples, a Red Deer county producer, U-pick and agritourism operator; Stuart Theissen from Strathmore, a producer, a cow-calf

and grain feedlot operator; Susan Schafers, a Stony Plain egg farmer; Laurie Fries, a Wainwright mixed livestock producer. The list is a lot longer as well. I certainly don't want to belabour the point here, but this was just some of the folks that were part of that working group other than sort of the big agribusiness as well.

They were also onboard with trying to – you know, with the new rules coming in, we didn't want to make things too hard going forward and wanted to ensure that our farm and ranch sector thrives going forward. Certainly, as that happens, we'll be able to probably have more discussions with these groups and businesses in order to go forward and again try to build consensus, like we did this last time, about any changes that they might want to look at in the future.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Madam Chair, thank you. Again, we're talking about a thriving agriculture sector on the backs of exploited people. I don't get that. It flies in the face of your values and your stated goals in Bill 6. Yes, we want it to thrive. In fact, it will thrive better if they don't have lawsuits and accidents and deaths because a few bad apples are forcing people to work significant hours and overstrain themselves and take on things in poor judgment. It doesn't wash. It just doesn't wash. I think these folks will be wearing egg on their faces if they continue to argue that it's not right for 95 per cent of the workers in the province but that it's okay for the 5 per cent or 10 per cent that are described as paid farm workers. It doesn't make sense.

The fact that quite a few owners and operators said, "Yes, this is okay with us": where are the farm workers? What is their voice in this? In fact, it's been barely heard on some of these panels because farm workers are still too intimidated to speak out, demand their rights, and ask for equal consideration in all this. It's disappointing.

There it is, Madam Chair.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A15 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 17. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have another amendment here that I'd like to hand out.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A16. Please go ahead.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 33, in the proposed section 53.9, as follows: (a) in subsection (1) by adding the following after clause (b):

(b.1) "nurse practitioner" means a registered nurse who is entitled to use the title of nurse practitioner in accordance with the Health Professions Act and the regulations under that Act and provides care to a family member.

And (b) in subsection (4) by adding "or a nurse practitioner" after "medical certificate issued by a physician."

Madam Chair, this is a pretty straightforward, common-sense amendment. This amendment would give not just a physician but

also a nurse practitioner the ability to sign off on compassionate care leave, critical illness of a family member, et cetera. You know, this government has always said that they support nurse practitioners, so I'm sure they're going to want to support this amendment by supporting nurse practitioners.

You know, this is a prime example of what happens when you rush a bill and don't consult. This amendment didn't come from me. My office and I got e-mails on Friday and this morning asking me: how can we change this legislation? It was from a nurse practitioner in Grande Prairie, in my constituency. It said, "Is it too late to make any changes?" I said: "Well, we've probably got Monday. That's all." So we're trying to rush this amendment in.

You know, this amendment would make it a lot easier for Albertans in a stressful situation, and it should fit with the family-friendly workplace legislation. It'll make it a lot less stressful for families in a bad situation. Also, Madam Chair, this will save Albertans money and save our health care system money because if you're dealing with a nurse practitioner and she gives permission, now you've got to go try and find a doctor and take his time to sign off on it after a practitioner already has. It costs the government money when you're paying a physician to fill out forms.

I think that's pretty well all I need to say. It's pretty straightforward and simple. It's just the simple change of adding practitioners to give them the ability to sign off.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A16? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the amendment coming forward here. Essentially, they're suggesting that nurse practitioners be allowed to issue doctors' notes. Well, you know, it's not necessarily a bad idea, because it is done in Ontario. However, Ontario nurse practitioners are more widely involved in primary care delivery than in Alberta. This would require us to go out and get a lot more consultation within Health, the UNA, and the college. I certainly appreciate the intent of this amendment, but we would need a little bit more time in order to understand what others within the field are thinking about that. So at this time I won't be able to support this amendment, but again I do want to thank the member for bringing this forward. We will certainly look at maybe further consultation on this in the future.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A16?

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, my only comment to the last comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Decore is: unbelievable. Unbelievable. This government, that talks a great game about bringing in team-based medicine, about bringing in additional health professionals to share the load, to move things out of constantly having to be only done through physicians' offices, when given a concrete opportunity to do that through this amendment, an amendment that was suggested by nurse practitioners – I know my colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti received e-mails this past Thursday and Friday. I received e-mails from nurse practitioners in my constituency. They want to be involved. They want to help their patients.

In some parts of Alberta the nurse practitioners have in fact become the primary source of medical care for many families. Many families don't see a family physician on a regular basis because they simply find that they're not available. In some communities, in fact, the nurse practitioner has had a longer tenure

in the community than any of the family physicians that are practising in those communities. Those nurse practitioners have come to be people of great trust. These are professionals with a great deal of skill, and contrary to the Member for Edmonton-Decore, in many rural communities these professionals have in fact become a critical element of primary care, maybe not in Edmonton-Decore, but I can tell you that in Vermilion that is true. That is true in many, many other communities.

I will also point out that when we conducted the rural health review, I had a nurse practitioner on our committee, and she outlined in many instances all of the different things that she is able to do as a nurse practitioner and that the biggest thing holding back a broader application of nurse practitioners in our province is lack of a proper funding model and funding formula to allow a greater usage of nurse practitioners. What is unfortunate is that most of the nurse practitioners that are currently practising in the province of Alberta are not practising independently but, in fact, are practising in conjunction with some other thing where they are still directly involved with the physician.

In this instance, where we have sections of this bill that specifically require signing off by a physician, nurse practitioners have come to us and have said: this needs to be expanded to allow nurse practitioners to be able to provide this same service for their patients, the same service that is provided by primary care physicians. In some communities it is difficult to get in to see a primary care physician, and when you ask for an additional document that is not covered under the Alberta health care insurance plan, the doctor may in some cases charge an additional fee for drafting that document.

So in a situation where, generally speaking – and I know the case, certainly, in Vermilion is that the ability to see the nurse practitioner on a more rapid basis is in place. In order to make the provisions work – and I think these are good provisions, and we’ve said that repeatedly, that these are provisions that we support – for things like a critical illness of a child or injury leave and those sorts of things in those sections of this bill that require a physician, to have that definition expanded, as my colleague’s amendment would do, to include nurse practitioners absolutely makes sense.

It is absolutely consistent with what this government has told Albertans, that it believes in nurse practitioners, that it acknowledges and recognizes the skills and the abilities of nurse practitioners. I mean, I certainly do, and especially after working on the rural health review, I can tell you that not only myself but many, many communities that we went and spoke to talked to us about their desire to have nurse practitioners form a greater role or play a greater role in the delivery of primary care in their communities because of the skill and the professionalism of these individuals. For the government to now say, “We would need more time,” well, you know, without putting too fine a point on it, that’s kind of what we’ve been urging you to do for weeks. We’ve been urging you to slow down the passage of this bill so that things just like this would have the time to be properly implemented.

4:30

Now, if there is the urgency that you suggest there is, that this has to be passed here in the waning days of this spring session, then fine. If that urgency is there, then that urgency also means that this amendment should pass. This amendment improves this piece of legislation. This amendment makes it easier for Albertans. This amendment makes life better for Albertans. Isn’t that your daily mantra in question period, how your government wants to make life better for Albertans? Well, this amendment would do that. This amendment would allow those Albertans who rely on the services of a nurse practitioner to be able to obtain the documentation

necessary in order to access very desirable and absolutely favourable sections of this bill that we support.

When nurse practitioners come to us and say, “You know what? This bill is good, but this bill should be expanded to allow nurse practitioners to sign off on this because in many cases we are the primary health care provider for many families in Alberta,” it behooves us as legislators to listen to what they have to tell us and to respond and react appropriately, to respond and react in a way that is helpful to Albertans.

If you vote down this amendment, basically, first of all, you’re telling Albertans that rely on a nurse practitioner that the choice they’ve made in terms of their primary health care provider isn’t quite good enough for this government. That’s the first message you’re giving. The second message you’re giving is to nurse practitioners, those folks that you are trying to curry favour with. And not just curry favour with, but you acknowledge their professionalism. You acknowledge their abilities, and I think we all acknowledge their abilities.

If we’re to do the kinds of things that the Auditor General called for in the report that was released a week and a half ago, which includes more team-based, co-ordinated health care, including the involvement of other professionals like nurse practitioners, licensed practical nurses, pharmacists, dietitians, physiotherapists, chiropractors, and a whole long list of other health care providers, then we have to acknowledge, when we’re drafting new legislation, that they have those skills and abilities and not leave them out.

This is a glaring omission in this bill. It can be corrected relatively easily. This is an amendment that would improve this piece of legislation, and I am, frankly, dumbfounded, Madam Chair, that this government would consider voting against this amendment. All I’m saying is: explain that to the nurse practitioners the next time they have a meeting. Explain why you wouldn’t include them or you wouldn’t acknowledge their professionalism when you drafted your flagship labour bill. I think you have some explaining to do, and I think that with the explanation that’s been offered so far, that we just need a little bit more time, well, you know, quite frankly, we’ve been telling you that for weeks. But since you’ve said that, no, we don’t need more time and that this is urgent, well, if it is urgent, then it’s urgent to pass this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to thank the member for his passionate words. You know, we certainly don’t want to sound like we’re not respectful of what nurse practitioners can do and how they’re looking to expand their role. The consultation process in that particular area just was not as robust as in all the other areas.

We’re not calling it a bad amendment. You know, I need to be very, very clear about that, Madam Chair. This is not a bad amendment. We just have to make sure. I mean, we hear all the time from the other side that we don’t go and consult. Here we are. We’re going to try and go and consult, take a look at this, and move forward from that point. But to delay everything else at this moment I think wouldn’t be fair. Again, using an example of somebody getting paid below minimum wage because they have a disability, we need to move forward on those things.

Again, I want to thank the members across the way for bringing this amendment forward. It’s a very fair amendment. We’re just not able to support it at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I speak in favour of the amendment as proposed by the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. This is exactly why we do consultation. It was brought to his attention by nurse practitioners about the weakness in the bill and about how we move forward in a way that allows the employment standards to be implemented in a way that is, I would suggest, transparent, fair, and accountable to all. Nurse practitioners are held in high regard in that they carry the professionalism that would be required to meet the guidelines under the compassionate care leave.

You know, we work hard and the government works hard to try and streamline the health care system, and here we have an opportunity where we're not going to tie up the limited amount of resources with the doctors, who are maybe in some cases not even the primary caregiver to the patient involved. Yet we are moving in a direction that would require some more red tape in the system and tying up professionals, doctors in this case, to do a job that I believe would be very well taken care of by nurse practitioners, especially nurse practitioners that are right at the front line, working with the individuals that are needing this extra care from family members or those that are closest to them.

I would really encourage all members to support this amendment and recognize the value that it has in not only improving this bill but in helping us to be sure that we don't burden more of our health care system to a point where red tape starts to slow down even more of the care that we're trying to give to the patients within the province of Alberta. I would really encourage all members to recognize the value and to recognize that we are putting it in the hands of professionals, these nurse practitioners' very capable hands, to make this available to all family members.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. Twenty-seven working days of consultation; four face-to-face, by-invitation-only meetings, in which the minister could not confirm to us anything more than giving a speech at one and no full involvement with the engagement there; 124 pages of legislation; and we're told that there's not enough time here to consider this amendment. Maybe if the consultation had been done in a more robust way, we wouldn't have to propose the amendment from the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to actually not only improve this but to actually just plug one of the holes in this legislation and actually make it practical for Albertans who may have a nurse practitioner in a smaller jurisdiction, a smaller village or town or hamlet, to consult and make it easy for them to access some of the positive aspects of this legislation, some of the compassionate- and illness-related legislation that has been put forward here. On both sides of the House many of us have said that we're in agreement with many of those clauses, but now we're being told that they didn't have adequate time to get it right. Not enough time?

4:40

I guess one of my questions would be: where were the nurse practitioners on the invitation list for those four sessions, those limited four sessions, that were by invitation only and that we know were skewed heavily towards people from unions and not from businesses themselves, not from, obviously, medical practitioners from a broad spectrum as well? They will have to actually administer much of the legislation that's put forth here to make sure

that it's accessible and easy for Albertans to take advantage of some of these improvements in the legislation. It just doesn't make any sense. It just flies in the face of reason and common sense and good judgment with respect to the legislation.

Madam Chair, we're giving this House a chance. You know, maybe the decision-makers aren't here. Maybe the decision-makers need to come back to the table here so that they can hear what these amendments are and that this is reasonable and fair. This is an amendment that, actually, we should probably just quit talking about and vote on and vote in favour of because it's – I hate to use the term here – a bit of a no-brainer. It doesn't affect anything negatively. It doesn't create any burden or barrier. It doesn't even have any touch of any kind of ideology in it, for gosh sake.

This isn't an ideological amendment; this is a practical amendment, a common-sense amendment. Maybe we need a bit more common sense in this House so that we can move ahead with this and get on to some of the other amendments, which, I think, are well reasoned and balanced and speak in many respects to what my colleague for Vermilion-Lloydminster said earlier, which is: let's take some of the ideological bent out of this. Let's do what's best for Albertans. Let's look at fair, open, and transparent and actually adjudicate that from within our own principles and values of what this actually means, to do something better for Albertans, to create better legislation, with all of its flaws. Let's try and at least make it the best we possibly can.

That's what I believe the members on this side of the House are trying to do here, desperately, to improve flawed legislation. Again, granted, some of it is good – we support some of the compassionate leave and some of the illness leave there, no question about that – but there are some concerns even with that part of the legislation, with the employment standards. No question that there are huge flaws in the Labour Relations Code, and we're trying to improve that as well.

But this one is a simple one. This one is – again I'll use the term – a no-brainer. It's a common-sense amendment. I'm looking across the floor here, and I wish somebody could give me a good reason other than that we don't have enough time. Well, we could give you a lot more time if you want to send this bill to committee or delay it so that you and your government can actually do some proper consultation.

I think we've been talking about that for months, forever, since you launched this with a short, short time window of consultation, 27 working days. People have said that it was 36, but it wasn't. It was 27 working days because – don't forget – some of the people that you may have needed to consult there are governed by union rules. It wouldn't have allowed them to work the overtime or the extra hours to get it done, to put in the extra time during those 27 days to actually make it 36. Twenty-seven days for a 124-page piece of legislation that, we heard from the other side of the floor here, needed to be changed because it hadn't been touched since *Beetlejuice*.

You know, I learned a lot about pop culture during some of the debate. Let's get out of pop culture. Let's talk about Albertans. Let's talk about what's good for Albertans here, and let's talk about the practicalities of this.

My sister-in-law is a nurse practitioner, and I can tell you that she's been a medical professional for over 30 years. She has dealt with the brain injured and people with strokes and so many different things, and people trust her. She is in charge of life-and-death decisions every day – every day – at the Foothills medical centre. Families count on her to make decisions. And we're going to deny them the opportunity to actually sign a document that allows

someone to take advantage of a compassionate leave or an illness-related leave? That makes no sense.

Madam Chair, this is an opportunity for the members on the opposite side to actually look within themselves at principles and values of common sense, of fairness, and of actually doing what's right for Albertans. I would encourage them to go back into their lounge, talk to some of their leaders, and get permission, if you need to, to vote for this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, please go ahead.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm really excited to be able to stand here today and introduce the staff, parents, and students of Huntington Hills elementary school. I believe it's grade 6. It might be grades 5 and 6. I'm going to read out your names, and after that, if you could please stand. I apologize if I don't pronounce them correctly. Derek Dedemus, Christopher Dewsbury, Kenedy Hart, Karen Ehrmantraut, and Heather Kunimoto, if you could all rise, please, and the students, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A16? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't want to drag this out any longer. I thank the member across for responding. Some good points have been made by my colleagues, probably articulated better than I can. But just to answer a couple of questions, you know, he said that they need more time. Well, as soon as we found out and prepared the amendment this morning, we sent it over to the department, or the ministry, to review it, so he should have had some comments from them.

Speaking of more time, we get a phone book here, and in a week you want it passed. I think we could have used a lot more time, but I guess I know how it works in here. It works one way, I guess. I don't know why we couldn't – with just this little notice we found these amendments, you know, not from us, from Albertans, from people that see that we could make this better. Why wouldn't we do like we did with the MGA last year? You introduce it, it's in committee, you let it sit over summer, and then you come back and pass it in the fall with the amendments. That would make more sense. Anyway, I won't belabour the point. I think we've made it.

The other thing is that this is the second amendment that I've made. The other one the minister agreed was a good amendment, but she said that it didn't match up with the federal legislation. And I heard that this morning, that this wasn't in the federal legislation,

so maybe this fancy name, calling it family friendly, you should just change to federal friendly instead of family friendly. But this amendment does make it family friendly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A16?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A16 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:48 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Drysdale	Orr	Stier
Gotfried	Rodney	Taylor
Loewen	Starke	van Dijken

4:50

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Miller
Babcock	Hoffman	Miranda
Bilous	Horne	Nielsen
Carlier	Jansen	Payne
Carson	Kazim	Phillips
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Connolly	Larivee	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schmidt
Dach	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	Mason	Shepherd
Drever	McKitrick	Sigurdson
Feehan	McLean	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Woollard
Gray		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 43
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[Motion on amendment A16 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on Bill 17. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to propose an amendment. I can start whenever you're ready.

The Deputy Chair: Just give me one minute, please. Thank you.

Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as amendment A17. Please go ahead.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. What I'd like to do is propose an amendment that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 131. Section 131 repeals division 19, measures during illegal strike or illegal lockout. With the amendment that has just been handed out to everyone, I move to strike out that section, where the NDP would remove division 19. I would like the measures during illegal strike or illegal lockout to be in the Labour Relations Code, but I would like to discuss today why this would be just condoning illegal behaviour for either case, be it the employer or employee.

The first section that would be repealed by the government would be the suspension of dues check-off. Currently if an illegal strike is prohibited by divisions 15.1 or 18, this part commences. The labour board may direct the employer to suspend the deduction and remittance of union dues, assessments, and other fees that are otherwise payable to the union. The suspension could continue for one to six months depending on how the labour board directed, and they would then direct the employer to serve the union with a copy of the directive. The union can then apply to the labour board within 72 hours after service of the directive to determine if the strike actually occurred. If the union doesn't apply to the labour board, the employer can then suspend deduction and would not have to submit the union dues to the union as per directive from the labour board. If the union does apply, the employer will not suspend the deduction until the labour board determines that an illegal strike has occurred.

Built into the Labour Relations Code, it states that if they determine an illegal strike occurred, "an employee does not become ineligible for employment" just because union dues were not submitted to the union and that "at the end of the suspension period the employer shall resume the deduction and remittance of union dues, assessments and other fees in accordance with the collective agreement." Under this code no other provision can be made for substitution.

The second section that would be repealed would be payment of union dues during an illegal lockout. Currently under this section if a lockout commences that is prohibited by certain divisions, the labour board may direct the employer who locked out the employee to pay the union dues, assessments, and other fees that would otherwise be payable by the employees through the employer to the union. The payment will continue for a period directed by the labour board of one to six months after the lockout commences. The employer may apply to the board within 72 hours after receiving the directive until it's determined that a lockout indeed occurred. If the employer does not make the application, then the employer will have to make the payments. If it is determined the payment is to be made, the payments will be deemed as debt owing to the union and may be collected from the employer through civil action if required.

The last section that the NDP would like to repeal would be the direction by Lieutenant Governor in Council. This section specifically spells out the Lieutenant Governor in Council's power to either revoke certification of a union that causes members to illegally strike or to prohibit an employer's organization from representing employers for the purposes of collective bargaining if they cause or participate in an illegal lockout. These powers would be stripped away.

Madam Chair, if the strike is illegal, why should the employer be required to continue to collect and remit dues to the union engaged in an illegal activity that is harming the employer? This seems unreasonable, that they would choose to repeal the only recourse that employers would have to any rights themselves, especially when it comes to divisions 15.1, 16, or 18, which deal with essential services, compulsory interest arbitration, and emergencies. Essential services as part of the Labour Relations Code are defined as

- (a) the interruption of which would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the public, or
- (b) that are necessary to the maintenance and administration of the rule of law or public security.

Any work that would be deemed as an essential service or emergency would be deemed as illegal in the case of a strike, so division 19 is still relevant and should be included.

Favouritism seems to be a recipe of the day with this government. Repealing division 19 of the Labour Relations Code is showing this

government's hypocrisy, especially when these changes would not affect the Public Service Employee Relations Act, where the government is the employer. For some reason only private-sector employers are singled out and stripped of these rights according to the new legislation. Even though the Supreme Court of Canada declared the right to strike to be fundamental and protected by the Constitution, there are still certain instances where a strike could be illegal. If a strike isn't illegal, none of this would apply and would therefore be nullified anyway. What is this government's decision for repealing this division? I would like a more fulsome explanation because I'm pretty sure that some services that trade unions are involved in could be deemed as essential.

Nonfamily employees on farms and ranches can choose to organize according to the new legislation, yet what happens if crops and animals are affected due to a strike? The government themselves have stated that this would be deemed essential. All of these unions would fall under the Labour Relations Code, yet there would now be no penalties for these types of illegal strikes due to the section's repeal. Why should the employer have to continue to pay dues, assessments, and fees if the union decides to strike illegally? This seems to be just another avenue for this NDP government to show the private sector that they don't care what happens to them. If I am completely wrong and there is another reason other than that no Canadian jurisdiction provides for dues suspension, then please educate me.

5:00

These are some of the very reasons why some private companies felt safe setting up shop here in Alberta and to have unions come in to do the work. Yes, there has to be protection for the worker, but there also needs to be some sort of protection for the private-sector employer. The rationale seems to be too one-sided. This is just another piece of legislation that will be another reason for private companies in Alberta to relocate. Alberta used to have their backs. Why would they want to financially contribute to a government who shows no need for their business, Madam Chair?

Another question I would have for this government would be: why on earth would you promote or take away any law to empower an organization who is engaging in illegal behaviour? This government has stated that it seems like there are already too many penalties inflicted upon them. Is this correct? When someone is doing something illegal, they should be penalized. Why would you choose to empower an organization when illegal activity is going on?

It seems like this government is condoning illegal activity with a clause and repealing the only safeguards that private employers have for any recourse. Likewise, there is now going to be no penalty for a company to lock out, not be penalized and made responsible to the workers. That doesn't make sense. By repealing division 19 from the Labour Relations Code, you are essentially supporting illegal activity, and that is something that should never be done in this House. It's a complete insult to everything we all stand for.

I ask the minister to please show us today what reason there would be to support any illegal activity. My hope would be that you'll support a simple amendment by striking out section 131 in Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A17?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A17 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. [interjections] They didn't get up fast enough. I didn't see three get up fast enough, so we're going to move on to the bill, Bill 17.

Are there any other amendments to the bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise with an amendment on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Foothills. I'll just wait until you're ready.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, this is now amendment A18. Please go ahead.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. Like I said, I rise on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Foothills to move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 127.

Madam Chair, I believe that it is hypocritical for unions to argue that the right to strike is a fundamental right but then advocate to remove that right in favour of first contract arbitration.

An Hon. Member: You almost said that with a straight face.

Mr. van Dijken: I did.

Madam Chair, such a move goes against everything the labour movement, in my estimation, has ever stood for. Removing the right to strike in order to arbitrate a first contract goes against everything that I thought the NDP and labour stood for. Requiring arbitration interferes with an employer's right to lockout, which is the flip side of the right to strike and arguably a fundamental right also. If an employer cannot close his doors and close his business because they are being held up by union arbitration, then we are fundamentally going against the grain of everything workers have bargained for in the past.

Arbitration compels one or both parties to enter into an agreement they might not otherwise make. If it is binding arbitration, both sides can almost certainly go away completely unhappy with the arrangement. It breeds resentment and poor morale in the workplace. This affects productivity, so the business will suffer. Then layoffs will occur to save money, and the cycle repeats. Rather than bargaining to get a deal, parties often bargain to best position themselves for arbitration, with no intention of an actual deal skewing the collective bargaining process. As we have seen with public-sector negotiations, compulsory arbitration might protect and prevent labour disruption, but it does come at a cost to the employers.

Madam Chair, we want open and honest negotiations. We want open and honest negotiations if a union comes into a workplace. We don't want bargaining for position, to stake ground, only to have an arbitrator move the goalpost, skewed out of balance, potentially damaging the employer. For an employer arbitration is a risky proposition. An outsider with no knowledge of its business is given a mandate to decide what the employer will pay, what the employer should pay or could pay, and what the terms and conditions of employment will be.

A union focused on eventual [first contract arbitration] has little incentive to compromise before arbitration, thinking that the arbitrator will likely split the difference between its demands and the employer's position. For the employer, arbitration is a risky proposition, as I've said before.

An outsider with no knowledge of its business is given a mandate to decide what the employer will pay and what the terms and conditions of employment will be.

That is from lawyer Rick Dunlop.

Some other feedback we received from stakeholders was:

- Requiring arbitration interferes with an employer's right to lockout, which is the flip-side of the right to strike and arguably a fundamental right also.
- First contract arbitration is really an accommodation of the union only, and its interests, not workers. The sole purpose [of first contract arbitration] is to protect the union,

not the workers but the union.

The union is worried that employees may change their minds about representation or lose interest. It wants to have a collective agreement imposed before that happens.

That's feedback we received from the Progressive Contractors Association.

With that, Madam Chair, I urge the members in this House to support amendment A18 and recognize the fact that we want to protect the right to strike for employees. First contract arbitration essentially in this bill allows the unions to request arbitration solely and would not give the right to the employees to strike.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A18? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the member bringing forward this amendment. Right now what we have in terms of language going across Canada is the 90-day period for employers and employees to try to reach an agreement when it comes to first contract language and then, of course, the ability to seek other measures should that become a problem and they can't reach the contract language. I mean, we even have similar language in places like Manitoba and B.C. as well, so we're not doing anything new. We're not reinventing the wheel here.

5:10

Unfortunately, though, what this amendment will end up doing is that it will end up denying workers the right to a first contract. You know, certainly, what we've seen with some strikes over the past is that some employers will just simply try to wait them out, to hopefully either walk away or accept something lower, which is not what they're hoping to do when we're talking about fair bargaining.

So I will not be able to support this amendment at this time. I urge other members of the House to not support this because we certainly don't want to deny people who have decided to unionize and are looking for a first contract the right to try to get that even if it means going through arbitration and having it settled in as fair a fashion as possible.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A18? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to again refer to the fact that with this type of legislation in place, we get into situations where possibly the union does not negotiate with any intention of coming to a first contract. When we move in that direction, we are essentially, I would suggest, stacking the deck in favour of the union and with little regard for the employees or the employer.

The government decided that they were going to use Mr. Andy Sims to essentially facilitate their movement in the direction of changing the Labour Relations Code. Mr. Andy Sims has one opinion. They held a few by-invite-only consultation periods, with limited input from others within industry and within Alberta to be able to give feedback. It was brought to our attention that this is a

pitfall within some of the other provinces and that we need to focus on: how do we get to a fair contract in first contracts?

By putting forward legislation such as this, in my opinion and also in the opinion of people that we have been consulting with, with first contract arbitration there's little incentive for the union to actually negotiate in good faith and good will. We have concerns with the fact that, again, we are putting in place what I would describe as not a level playing field here and that we are stacking the deck to try and protect the union from disgruntled people, who are possibly being brought into a union for the first time and finding out that maybe it's not all it was cracked up to be, so in order to get past that first contract, this is what unions are going to try and implement.

We're concerned with the right to strike, with the employers' rights to lock out, and the employees' rights in this situation. I would encourage everyone to vote in favour of amendment A18.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to A18? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't think the member across the way is familiar with the fact that in a situation where you might have unfair bargaining going on, unfair labour practices, the labour board is still there. Either party can make application if they think one or the other side is not bargaining in good faith. Of course, the very last fallback position is Court of Queen's Bench as well. Those are still there. They're available for either side to utilize, you know, should one side or the other be accused of unfair bargaining.

Again I will urge others to not support this at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am perfectly aware of the fact that the Labour Relations Board can be asked to take a look at possible unfair labour practices. What I am concerned with here is that we are essentially asking a body to make an interpretation on what would be considered unfair negotiations or possibly skewed negotiations with no intention of coming to any kind of agreement. So with that, by forcing arbitration, then, again, we're putting into the hands of the Labour Relations Board a contract with no understanding of the business implications of the employer. To me it's putting that business at risk and all those employees' jobs at risk.

So I would encourage you again to take a look at this as being fair to employers, employees in the ability to come to a first contract.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just briefly, you know, I think this is a good provision in this bill, and it's something that's been missing in Alberta's labour law for a long time. I think what the hon. member who proposed this amendment needs to understand is that one or both parties of the dispute can apply for first contract arbitration, and I suggest that a lot of employers will apply for this because it will speed up the process, that can go on for several years and can lead to labour slowdowns. Nobody wants that. Then, you know, these first contracts that usually are arbitrated are not – how would we say? – great for anybody a lot of the time. They're very vanilla, and they just establish a working contract that

can be negotiated later, whatever the provisions are, in one or two years.

Anyhow, with that said, I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to A18?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A18, as proposed by the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A18 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:17 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Gotfried	Rodney
Loewen	van Dijken	Drysdale
Orr	Stier	

5:20

Against the motion:

Bilous	Jansen	Nielsen
Carlier	Kazim	Payne
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Phillips
Coolahan	Larivee	Piquette
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Renaud
Dach	Luff	Rosendahl
Dang	Malkinson	Schmidt
Drever	McKittrick	Schreiner
Feehan	McLean	Shepherd
Gray	McPherson	Sigurdson
Hinkley	Miller	Turner
Horne	Miranda	Woollard

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment A18 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the original bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to move an amendment on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Hays, and I have the requisite number of copies. I'll begin reading once the table gives me permission to do so.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the amendment will be referred to as A19. Please go ahead.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. Notice of amendment to Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. Mr. McIver to move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 113 in the proposed section 34 by adding the following after subsection (11):

(11.1) In accordance with any rules made by the Board, the Board shall prohibit the applicant and the employer from causing, incentivizing or preventing any employee to attend or be absent from a place of work or place of voting during the time period for a representation vote.

Madam Chair, there's been much discussion in the House on this bill, and much of that centred on the concerns of intimidation, peer

pressure influence, and other forms of intervention of employees in their decision-making. There have been fingers pointed at both unions and employers, accusations of intimidation leading up to a union vote, which, of course, is not acceptable to any member of this House. Clearly, the government landed on the side of protecting the union. No surprise there. We've heard a little bit about some of the perceptions and perspectives and biases which may be brought into this legislation.

Since they're allowing unions to avoid the complications of having to actually hold a vote in many circumstances when a 65 per cent card check is achieved, there are some concerns and some problems with the process as we move forward, particularly if a ballot is required. Since they were so concerned that a secret ballot could somehow lead to intimidation of workers, despite that being the entire point of a secret ballot, that there's actually secrecy and nobody knows how anybody voted, which is, of course, our argument around using secret ballots versus card checks for the process – the point being is that it's hard to intimidate someone when you can't actually confirm who they voted for, kind of like what we have in our election period, Madam Chair, that we're actually allowed to vote our conscience and allowed to vote without actually having to tell anybody how we voted but have that in our clear conscience whereas it seems much easier to check if someone has signed a union card or not and then possibly lean on them to put their name down. I use the term "lean on them" in a way which I think really implies what we're worried about here, which is intimidation, peer pressure, any kind of being called out or being disenfranchised or being rejected by their peers.

But that's beside the point, I suppose, since the government has already made their decision that the card check seems to be a preferred method, which, unfortunately, allows for that potential, that peer pressure, or, God forbid, bullying to occur.

The amendment I'm bringing forward today concerns what happens in the small window where the government saw fit to allow democracy to happen, when the card check process ends up between 40 and 65 per cent. Then members actually get a chance to vote, to voice their opinions freely and without fear of repercussion. This amendment aims to make sure that when employees actually get a chance to exercise what had previously been a democratic vote, they don't have to worry about influence from either side, from the employers or from the unions. Sounds reasonable. Sounds fair.

Once they actually get a chance to vote, this amendment ensures that neither the unions nor the employers will cause or persuade employees through any manner or any methods to be present or absent from the vote. No influence about their attendance. No calling up and saying, "You know, I'd rather you not be there," or "You better be there." That should be the employee's choice. That means that when it does come down to a vote, in this narrow circumstance the government still allows, between the 40 and 65 per cent, there won't be any promises or enticements to convince employees to stay home or show up that day. They can actually do it of their free will.

This amendment would make sure that when it comes to a vote, it will be up to the honest and sincere belief and the best interest of the employee whether or not a union would be good not only for the workplace but for them, for their families, for their future, for their career, something that I think we should all take seriously here, Madam Chair. It will protect employees and maintain their ability to choose, not somebody else's, not through undue influence, which is what we should be trying to do as legislators instead of trying to restrict the options for voting or to allow undue influence or to allow peer pressure or to allow those phone calls in the middle of the night or to allow someone to knock on their door and suggest that they

should do one thing or another. I think it's incumbent upon us to make sure that that type of influence is not allowed in this process.

While I wish the government would come to their common senses and restore the ability of employees to vote in a secret ballot at all times, ensuring that transparency and that freedom and that freedom of conscience, which, again, I would hope that we would all defend in this House as part of a democratic right and democratic expectation within our society – I think it was mentioned before by someone else that maybe instead of going to the ballots every year, we should just go out, and whichever party sells the most memberships wins the election in that constituency. Wouldn't that be a unique opportunity to do so? Maybe we can do it through a card check system so that, you know, we know exactly, everybody knows who's done it, so you can knock on doors and twist more arms and tell people that they need to vote for you. Then we don't have to have elections, Madam Chair. I think that that's an expectation in our society that, unfortunately, this bill has taken away, that reasonable expectation of democratic freedom without fear of repercussion.

I think that if the government were actually concerned about protecting employees from that potential for intimidation – and that's all we need, Madam Chair, that potential. As I think, as was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Klein before – he was talking about apples – there are some bad apples on both sides of the tree sometimes. I think it's our job to ensure that we protect Albertans from those bad apples, from those worms that might get into those and turn that tree and that fruit into something rotten. [interjection] We've heard that about you.

[Mr. Dach in the chair]

I think if we were actually concerned about protecting employees from intimidation, they'd pass this amendment and abandon the 65 per cent short-circuit of democracy, but since they don't seem inclined to do that, I hope that all members of this House will consider ensuring that what is good for the goose, the unions in this case, is also good for the gander, the employees and employers in this case, and that all members of this House, Mr. Chair, will support this amendment.

Thank you.

5:30

The Acting Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to A19? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the member for bringing the amendment forward here. I'm not sure if the member was aware, but right now in the labour regulations the labour board already has these powers. What we're talking about is potential coercion at the voting site during a certification vote, and in section 151(f), which gets into the specifics of that, the labour board already has the powers to deal with any kind of coercion during the voting process. Certainly, this has nothing to do with card certification or how union members will very respectfully come up to a door, knock on it, ask if it's a good time to talk, and if it isn't, when a good time would be, where they could talk, things like that. But, again, that's not really to this amendment.

So I'm going to urge all members in the House not to support this. The labour board already has the ability to do this, and this is basically redundant.

Thanks very much.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Any other members wishing to speak on A19? The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in support of the amendment. I just speak for a couple of reasons. If it's already there, there's no reason to not make sure that these sorts of protections are in place as well so that there can be no doubt.

While I hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore talking about just how respectful unions are, I myself have been subject to not respectful interactions. In this case it was the Teamster union that was efforting to unionize a workplace where I was employed. [interjections] I received a number of what I would consider threatening letters, harassing phone calls, and I know that they efforted to knock on my door, all of which was unwanted.

I hear the members say: well, of course, that's just them. Perhaps I was paraphrasing, but I heard members say: of course. Well, all the more reason for more protections, then. If there are clearly organizations that don't behave in a manner that reflects well upon unions, clearly we need balances, safeguards in place to ensure that this sort of bullying tactic, these sorts of intimidation tactics don't take place in the workplace. I find it interesting that it's acknowledged that these sorts of things happen yet not the same level of desire to put in protections from these bad apples, I guess, if that's all that they are.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I can appreciate that, just like there are some employers who aren't perfect, there are definitely also, on the other side of that coin, unions that aren't perfect, so we should be ensuring that we take every reasonable and necessary step to have protections in place, that we treat the unions' ability fairly, the employees' ability fairly, and vote in favour of these sorts of measures so that we can deliver exactly that.

This is about creating a fair, level playing field for both sides of this ledger, and I would encourage all members of the Assembly to support this.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A19? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to reiterate the powers that the Labour Relations Board already has, I'll help out the members here a little bit.

Prohibited practices by trade union, etc.

151 No trade union and no person acting on behalf of a trade union shall ...

- (f) use coercion, intimidation, threats, promises or undue influence of any kind with respect to any employee with a view to encouraging or discouraging membership or activity in or for a trade union.

So there we have it. There it is. It's already there.

We don't need this amendment, Madam Chair, and I will urge everybody to vote against it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to the Member for Edmonton-Decore, this specifically talks about the activity around the vote, and it also includes not just the unions, but it also includes the employers. So this is meant to be a more robust approach to it, to ensure that it's embedded in the legislation. It is very specifically not around all of the activities prior to but about the vote, which can be a very slippery slope, a very difficult period because really, at the end of the day, it's only that vote that counts.

This one will ensure that both sides, the employers and the unions, are held to a very high standard with respect to any influence, intimidation, access to enticement of any sort to attend or not to attend a vote.

Madam Chair, I would say that this is very specific. It clarifies something that sounds a little vague to me and does protect the employees. Again, I would like to think that all members of this House are here to protect Albertans from influence from either side of this equation, so I would encourage everybody in this House to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A19?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A19 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:37 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Orr	Stier
Gotfried	Rodney	van Dijken
Loewen		

5:40

Against the motion:

Babcock	Horne	Nielsen
Bilous	Jansen	Payne
Carlier	Kazim	Phillips
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Piquette
Connolly	Larivee	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schmidt
Dach	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	McKittrick	Shepherd
Drever	McLean	Sigurdson
Feehan	McPherson	Turner
Gray	Miller	Woollard
Hinkley	Miranda	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment A19 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment I would like to propose at this time to Bill 17.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, this will be amendment A20. Please go ahead.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by adding the following after section 145:

Review by committee of Legislative Assembly

145.1 Within 5 years of the coming into force of Part 2 of the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, a committee of the

Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of the amendments made by that Act to the Labour Relations Code and its impact on Alberta's economy, and must submit to the Assembly, within one year after beginning the review, a report that includes any amendments recommended by the committee.

Madam Chair, the intent of this amendment is essentially to provide a mechanism that would recognize the need to continually review the work that is being done here and to recognize that changes that are implemented through legislation have impacts – they have consequences – and as we recognize that, we also have to recognize that we need to measure that as time goes along.

It's been identified by the Minister of Labour many times in the lead-up to the introduction of this bill that there was no review or no significant changes to the Labour Relations Code in the past 30 years, and that was the reason for bringing forward the labour code review and then what led up to Bill 17 as we see it here. I would suggest that the labour code review that was implemented by this minister had a very limited amount of consultation, a very limited amount of engagement with stakeholders within Alberta and that there are likely to be significant implications both economically and also on our labour peace within this province, so we need to have an understanding going forward as to: what are the consequences of Bill 17 on the Labour Relations Code?

We currently have a baseline measure that can be utilized to have an understanding of where we've been, the current Labour Relations Code. As we move forward, based off of the baseline, we can get an understanding of the economic impact and any other consequences that come forward through the passage of Bill 17.

You know, we take a look at full engagement of stakeholders to do proper consultation and to come upon what the minister has identified in her business plan as that we need a fair and balanced labour code, and we on this side of the House believe that also. We need to continually review the Labour Relations Code as we move forward to understand the full impact of any changes that we do.

We have encouraged the government to do a fulsome analysis of the economic impacts that this bill may bring forward, through feedback from industry stakeholders, from employers, employees, unions, the investment community, to try and get a good understanding of what these changes, good or bad, have on the Alberta economy, have on the Alberta labour environment, and to be able to monitor that going forward. This can be put in the hands of the experts to be able to get an understanding. The committee would call on experts to do those measures, to be able to come back to committee and identify any consequences – unintended consequences, intended consequences, good consequences, bad consequences – and how we can actually improve on a continual basis moving forward and how we can serve Albertans in a way that allows them to be reassured that the members in this House are looking out for the best interests of all Albertans.

Knowing that a review is coming in five years will help to give some peace of mind to Albertans that the Legislature, the Members of this Legislative Assembly, are going to proceed in a manner that is fair and equitable, fair and balanced on an ongoing basis, and that employers and employees can have peace of mind that we will be examining these things going forward.

I do believe that every member in this House is looking out for the best interest of Alberta. We have different ideas on how that plays itself out, but I do believe that every member comes here with good intentions to try and serve Albertans in the best way they can. Albertans have sent us here to be accountable to them and transparent to them, and by passing this amendment, we have the opportunity to say to Albertans, you know: "We're passing a bill here. There is a bill that's going to be passed, and we look forward to ensuring that in five years we do an analysis on the full impacts

of this bill." That should give peace of mind to employees, employers, unions, all the stakeholders involved here.

This amendment changes nothing in the bill. It changes nothing in the bill. All it does is it adds a level of accountability that, again, I believe brings some peace of mind to all the stakeholders that we have come here to serve. It brings a level of accountability that we will not go 30 years without a review of how this bill is affecting Albertans and how we can possibly improve it in five, six years' time again. You know, we call on this Assembly. Some of us may still be here, some of us may not be here, but at least then we have the peace of mind going forward that this Assembly is going to continually review these codes in this act as we move forward.

5:50

I believe there's nothing scary here. It's a very reasonable amendment that helps us to do good governance in this place and helps us to ensure that good governance continues on going forward. As members of this Assembly move on and as new members come in, then they have the opportunity through committee work to review these acts and review the Labour Relations Code as we are implementing it at this time, and in five years' time we can have a good understanding as experts identify possibly the good implications of this bill, possibly some bad implications, consequences that we didn't identify at this time and that need to be tweaked down the road.

So nothing scary about this amendment. I believe it adds a level of accountability, and I believe that the governing party should not be scared of this amendment. It provides a level of good governance that we should all be trying to fulfill within Alberta, and it helps us to ensure that good governance continues on even after we are no longer in this place. I would submit that this amendment is just adding a level of accountability to the work that we are doing here, trying to serve Albertans.

With that, I will conclude my comments. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A20? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the proposed amendment here. I will not be supporting this amendment.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Coolahan: I know. It's shocking.

I'll tell you why. For many years, you know, myself, members of the caucus, and hundreds of thousands of hard-working Albertans have spent decades trying to convince PC government after PC government to move our labour standards in line with other provinces, okay? And then we're finally getting here so that Albertans can share in the same rights and protections provided to people in other provinces, by their governments.

Madam Chair, you know, should this bill pass, this is something to celebrate. I and hundreds of thousands of Albertans will celebrate, and we will celebrate the fact that Albertans finally have a government that sees the benefits of fair workplace legislation. Let me try and put the joy that me and hundreds of thousands of Albertans will feel upon the passing of Bill 17, should it pass, into context for the opposition, okay? Our joy will be the equivalent of the joy that the opposition would feel if they got to pass a bill that, say, outlawed unions or lowered the minimum wage or dismantled public pension plans. That's how much joy I will feel.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I'm just wanting to clarify that you're actually speaking to the amendment in regard to an economic study.

Mr. Coolahan: I am. I certainly am, because what I'm getting at, Madam Chair, is to say that this bill is very good and has been a long time coming, and we've known what has been needed in this bill for many years, and we have addressed that. That is what I'm speaking to.

Madam Chair, here's the thing. Governments have choices to make, and different governments have different priorities that direct these choices. This government chooses to see the individual and societal advantages to ensuring that people can earn a living and meet the demands of family life at the same time. This government will not sit by and watch Albertans have fewer protections in the workplace than other Canadians. This government will not stand idle while another parent loses their job because they have to take some time off work to care for a loved one. We will not continue to come up with reasons not to support fair work legislation. This bill, Bill 17, is a testament to this government's position that Alberta's workers deserve equal protection to those in other provinces.

Now, Madam Chair, what I read in this amendment is really what we hear a lot from the opposition, which is restoring the Alberta advantage. That's what they're saying here. They want to be able to review it and pare down the bill. But what does the Alberta advantage really mean when they talk about it? The Alberta advantage to them means a tax system that favours the wealthy and large corporations, lacks labour laws, and the ability to pay a low minimum wage.

Madam Chair, we must have a level of corporate tax that allows Alberta to attract and retain large and small businesses, and this government has ensured this: 12 per cent for corporations, 2 per cent for small businesses. We are well in line with the other western Canadian provinces. But I'll tell you that this government will not view substandard employment and labour laws or having one of the country's lowest minimum wages as a benefit to attracting these businesses. That is certainly not a benefit to Albertans. We think the Alberta advantage is its people. In order to keep this advantage, we have to ensure that Albertans are healthy and educated through sustained, predictable funding for hospitals and schools and that

they're safe at work and able to earn a living and take care of their families at the same time.

Madam Chair, the opposition is again finding excuses to avoid bringing Alberta's labour laws into the 21st century, and it is sad. They treat these protections with disdain. It's evident in the fact that most of them voted no on the first reading – it's absolutely disgraceful – before reading the bill. Well, you know, they talk a lot about – I mean, this is more about consultation that they've talked about for this amendment. Let's face it. They are not concerned about consultation. It's a red herring, disguising the fact that they don't want fair legislation for Alberta's workers. The pendulum has swung too far over the last 30 years, and we're just bringing it back to a place that's fair for everyone. Consultation should not supersede or negate basic rights. Not only has it been 30 years since the labour code has changed or the employment standards, but this government did consult, which is why we don't need this amendment.

The government held four face-to-face round-table meetings to hear directly from those who would be affected by the changes, including a broad cross-section of employers, business associations, labour groups, and advocacy organizations. In addition, there were 5,000 online surveys completed plus 400 written submissions received, covering a broad range of topics. You know, the opposition talks about the leave components for this legislation not coming into effect until January of 2018, but that was done in consultation. We listened. The fact of the matter is, they would never do it.

Madam Chair, I will put this legislation onto my long and growing list of legislation that this government is introducing in which I wonder: why wasn't this done decades ago? It's funny, you know. I have spoken about the past government's legislative paralysis I like to call it, especially when it came to the labour file. They did review the code. They reviewed it in 2007. They reviewed it in 2014 but changed nothing.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing 4(4) we will now recess until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, June 5, 2017

Day 44

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature**

Third Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 55

Wildrose: 22

Progressive Conservative: 8

Alberta Liberal: 1

Alberta Party: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, June 5, 2017

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Prior to starting tonight, I just wanted to make a statement regarding the time between division bells. Hon. members, there was some confusion flowing from Wednesday evening last week, when the Committee of the Whole continued from the afternoon. As members may recall, the bells rang with a one-minute interval rather than there being a 15-minute division. As I explained at the time, the reason for the shorter interval between bells, even though it was the first division of the evening, was that the committee had recessed at 6 p.m. rather than rising and reporting. My explanation can be found at page 1467 of *Alberta Hansard* for the evening sitting on May 31, 2017.

However, given the confusion that has occurred and to lend some certainty to the proceedings, the first division in the evening on a bill will be 15 minutes long, as prescribed in Standing Order 32(3.01), whether or not the committee has recessed or risen and reported in the afternoon. Of course, the first division in the morning and in the afternoon on a bill will be 15 minutes, and subsequent divisions in the morning, afternoon, or evening on the same bill will be one minute.

I hope that will clarify the issue.

Bill 17 Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Chair: We are currently on amendment A20. Any questions or comments regarding amendment A20? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment put forward by my colleague from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, sometimes known as BMW.

Mr. Coolahan: Madam Chair, I thought I was still speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Cooper: It's committee. There's no adjournment.

The Chair: We continue on, hon. member, so you can speak again after. I'll recognize you.

Mr. Coolahan: That's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair, and apologies to my colleague. I didn't mean to interrupt what before the dinner break were stirring and wonderful remarks that we will never get back.

One of the things that was so interesting about the remarks from my colleague from the NDP Party was some discussion around how nothing had changed for well over 30 years. We heard the Minister of Labour numerous times – numerous times – in question period speaking about how this legislation hadn't changed since the late '80s. You'll know, Madam Chair, that I have a real passion for song. She provided the opportunity for many cheerful renditions of '80s numbers from the chair of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-

Three Hills, including things like *If I Could Turn Back Time*, wonderful, wonderful hits from Rick Astley. Let's just say that I'm never going to give up on you or this particular remark.

My point is that there had been this narrative created by the government that nothing had changed in 30 years, and somehow that was a challenge for the government. Perhaps the case could be made that now is a good time to update this particular piece of legislation. As they say, time waits for no one. What we have before us is a real opportunity to prevent this 30-year gap in reviewing what's a very important piece of legislation. So I was surprised to hear my colleague from the NDP speak so negatively towards an amendment that would prevent some of the very things that they were the most concerned about in this piece of legislation, this lengthy time between when the legislation came into law and any significant reform.

What my colleague has provided is a five-year window for this legislation to be reviewed, and we do this on all sorts of pieces of legislation. Some people call it an evergreening clause. I know that the Member for Calgary-Varsity has moved and passed numerous amendments with this same sort of idea, in this vein. She didn't pass the amendments in vain; she moved this sort of vein of amendment to make sure that we are staying up to date, that we are not getting too far behind. All that this does is provide that opportunity for a legislative committee to review part 2 of this particular piece of legislation, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, so that we don't wind up in the same situation.

Now, sometimes reviewing legislation can be politically challenging, but this takes a lot of that out of the way. You would think that if there was going to be a significant change in government over a long period of time, which may be very possible starting in 2019, this is the kind of amendment that the NDP would want to put in place to provide themselves some protections and some safeguards to ensure that on a go-forward basis we won't be going anywhere past five years prior to this legislation being reviewed.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to go ahead and support this amendment and pass this amendment. I know that we've heard from the member that he won't be, but I encourage his colleagues to rethink what is a very, very reasonable amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks for the comments on that from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. He hasn't done anything to change my mind about not supporting this amendment because, really, there are rights in this bill that should never ever – ever – be considered for revocation.

As I said earlier, you know, we did listen to Albertans in crafting this bill. It's a good bill. It includes protection from losing one's job for caring for a loved one, protection from losing one's job for being sick, protection for young people that work, protection from losing one's job when fleeing domestic violence, protection to ensure fair pay and breaks. One piece that I'm particularly happy with in this bill is that employees will not be held responsible and docked pay for dine-and-dash or gas-and-dash incidents. [interjections] Hear, hear.

Madam Chair, the gas-and-dash death of Maryam Rashidi occurred in my constituency of Calgary-Klein, only blocks from my house. In fact, that morning I was taking my daughter with me to the local hardware store, and we were just moments away from seeing the incident happen. You know, the reasons why Ms Rashidi did what she did are unclear. However, I believe the new legislation prohibiting employees from being held responsible for missing money and items will prevent this from happening in the future. I

spoke at Ms Rashidi's funeral, and I never want to have to do that again, and I don't want another family to suffer in this way.

You know, we've been hearing a lot of misunderstanding about unions from across the way, particularly around the Rand formula, and sadly some of you even disparaged the work ethic of unionized employees. It's shameful. They talk of union thugs using intimidation to get union cards signed. Well, Madam Chair, during my time as a business representative for the United Utility Workers' Association I didn't participate in recruiting or union drives because the UUA is not a union that actively recruits. My job saw me focusing on collective bargaining, grievances, and representing people in front of arbitration. But we hear the opposition speaking of people being forced into a union. Well, yes, some people aren't happy that being part of a union is a term of employment at a place of work. But these same individuals who are unhappy with being in a union always change their mind when they see the professional representation that they receive should there be an incident of discipline in the workplace and that they have access to legal representation if necessary and that they have an entire union in their corner.

7:40

Madam Chair, you know, the noise coming from the opposition in regard to the bill hiding changes to the labour code behind changes to employment standards is utter nonsense. They simply don't want a card check system because, yes, this could potentially make it easier for unions to organize in a workplace. But let's be clear: this is not guaranteed. There's still a lot of work to do to procure a union and get certified.

You know, the opposition is using an argument about unions intimidating employees to sign a card, but an associate professor of labour relations at Athabasca University, Dr. Bob Barnettson, recently wrote that during his time on the labour board he heard one complaint – this was two years – of union intimidation and hundreds regarding employers intimidating employees during a vote. Now, he also said that, on balance, card check appears to result in workers being better able to choose whether or not they want to unionize free from intimidation than certification votes do.

In contrast to the opposition equating a secret ballot vote as the most democratic way, like a general election for members of government, he makes the salient point that government doesn't typically threaten to take away your job if you vote against them. That's the difference. This legislation is in no way meant to vilify employers. The vast majority of employers are good employers, just as the vast majority of unions and union leaders provide excellent representation.

To Dr. Barnettson's point, an acquaintance of mine recently told me a story about how he and some colleagues attempted to form a union at the company he was working at. They started by signing cards, and they got 75 per cent. On the subsequent secret ballot the vote went down to 55 per cent. Now, trying to get a first contract proved impossible. We were talking earlier about how important first contract arbitration is. There was even a union buster brought out from Toronto, Madam Chair, a professional union buster. Now, perhaps there's a line of work for some of our opposition members who don't fit in with the UCP.

Anyhow, this union buster was successful in getting meetings with employees behind closed doors before and after the vote, and he employed many devious tactics and intimidation, bringing the vote down and ultimately crushing the hopes of forming a union in that place of employment. What really stuck with me from this story was what this union buster actually said after he had accomplished what he had set out to accomplish, and it was this: "I love Alberta. I can do whatever I want and get away with it." Shameful. Is this what the opposition calls the Alberta advantage?

This is why they oppose the card check system. They even oppose the very reasonable middle ground being presented in Bill 17. Nothing is perfect, Madam Chair – we understand that – but Bill 17 makes life better for all working Albertans.

Madam Chair, I'm also very pleased about the changes to employment standards around layoffs and provisions around enforcement. You know, of course, as I said, the majority of companies comply with the code even when it comes to layoffs. Again, in my previous role one of the biggest issues I had with employment standards was that employers sometimes did not take employment standards seriously. One example was when I was dealing with several layoffs. In the act the employer has to pay out all monies owed within a few days or a week, depending on the circumstances. Well, this was a global company, a major company that wasn't paying all the monies owed to these laid-off employees for up to eight weeks. When I phoned the employment standards, basically what they said was: by the time we resolve this, investigate it, they will have been paid, and therefore your complaint would be moot. What this does is strengthen that, give the administrative penalties, and then it makes employers take seriously their obligation to pay employees in layoffs.

I will just close on this amendment by saying that, you know, Madam Chair, I urge the opposition to put aside its partisanship, its ideology that continually champions keeping Alberta's workers at a disadvantage to other workers in this country. I urge the opposition to understand that this legislation is for all workers, not just unionized workers. I urge the opposition to support Alberta families and ensure that one does not lose their job because they must care for a loved one. I urge the opposition to support those who seek a union in their place of work in a fair and democratic way, and I urge the opposition to support fair wages and breaks for all Albertans. Ultimately, I urge the opposition to take a break from being themselves and support Alberta's workers in having the same protection under the law as workers in other provinces.

As such, Madam Chair, I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers to amendment A20? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated the motion on amendment A20 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Clark	Gill	Loewen
Cooper	Gotfried	McIver
Cyr	Hanson	Orr
Ellis	Hunter	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Phillips
Babcock	Hinkley	Piquette
Bilous	Hoffman	Renaud
Carlier	Jansen	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Ceci	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	McPherson	Shepherd
Dach	Miller	Sigurdson

Feehan	Miranda	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Turner
Ganley	Notley	Woollard
Goehring		
Totals:	For – 12	Against – 37

[Motion on amendment A20 lost]

The Chair: Before we continue on Bill 17, I've had a request to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you, colleagues. It is my honour to introduce to you and through the chair to everyone three people who are very important to me. First, Don Macfarlane, who currently works at the U of A for the information services and technology team. Don is a member of NASA and was the Alberta NDP candidate in Strathmore-Brooks in the 2001 and 2004 elections. With Don is Katrina Foster, a strong supporter of and treasurer for the Edmonton-Mill Woods NDP, who has been known to the current Minister of Children's Services since they were teenagers. Katrina has lived in the Cayman Islands for almost a decade, and since returning she's been working for the labour movement, AFL, CUPE 30 and is a proud member of COPE 458. Both Don and Trina are alumni of the TUXIS Parliament of Alberta.

Finally, the last person is Neal Gray, my husband, who has come to watch us many times but has never wanted to be introduced until now. I would like to highlight that Neal has himself been a political candidate. He works with me on all things NDP and has run federally in the past. He is an information technology guru who works for the RCMP, and I could not do what I do every day, in and out, without his support. I'm so proud to be able to introduce him and have him stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Bill 17 Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (continued)

The Chair: Back on Bill 17. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have an amendment here for Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I'll wait until you receive it before I continue on.

The Chair: This will be amendment A21.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 100 as follows. In subsection (1) by striking out "except section 44," and substituting "except sections 9 and 44," and by adding the following after subsection (2):

- (3) Section 9 is deemed to have come into force on the day the Bill to enact the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act received first reading.

Madam Chair, this is a very important amendment, I think, not only to me but, I believe, to the members of this House as well as the people of Alberta. I'd like to certainly commend the government. As I was reading this, you know, of course, this refers

to deductions from earnings: "an employer must not deduct [or] set off against or claim from the earnings of an employee," and, of course, there are some subsections that were not there before, and I think that is very important.

You know, in my former career as a police officer, sadly, I've been to many dine and dashes, many gas drive-offs, and I can tell you that it is completely unfair to the employee who is a server or possibly a bartender or somebody in that sort of capacity when a criminal offence occurs and they are the victim of that criminal offence although, technically, under law the establishment itself is the victim. But to have an employer or, sadly, a manager essentially force that employee to pay when they themselves become the victim of that crime I think is completely unfair. So it's great to see that this stuff has been rectified in this particular act. You know, of course, according to my amendment we just want to make sure that this comes into effect right away because this will have a very positive impact on the people of Alberta and, certainly, people within that industry.

As we go on to the section regarding gas drive-offs, this is a section that really can save lives. What people don't realize in regard to this is that sometimes – of course, I don't want to put everybody in this boat, but there are some employees and gas station attendants where, whether it be the owners or the management, again, they make them pay for that gas drive-off, another practice that is completely unfair. You find that, you know, that person who is working as an attendant, they're the ones that sometimes are chasing after that vehicle and many of whom, sadly, have either been seriously injured or in some cases have died. Sometimes in certain situations it's because that person is going: "I'm going to be out that \$60. I'm going to be out that \$100. Maybe that's all I made during the day." And that's completely unfair, that the employer has put that person, essentially, on the hook for that.

8:10

With this amendment, again, it's consistent, of course, with the law itself. All we're asking in this is that it be enacted right away because it's going to have a positive impact on the people in, of course, the customer service industry when it comes to restaurants, but it's also going to have a very positive impact in the world of the gas stations and where fuel is being pumped. I think employees need to know that if somebody commits a criminal offence, they're not the ones that need to be responsible for the monetary loss that the owner of that gas station is going to incur.

I certainly encourage all of my colleagues in this House to support this amendment. I believe that is something that should be enacted immediately, as per what is stated here in this amendment. I certainly encourage all members of the House to support this.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to the member for working with the government in reviewing Bill 17 and thinking about the impacts that the various sections will have on the very real lives of the Albertans that this bill is going to protect and improve their quality of life and their work-life balance and a number of other things. The section that the member is highlighting is very, very important to me.

Since becoming Minister of Labour, there have been deaths due to gas and dash. That's something I take very seriously because every employee should be able to go to work, to do their job, and to come home safely at the end of the day. Incidents like those are preventable, and they should not be happening.

Some of the actions that I've taken, that we've taken as a government include doing some very specific inspections of convenience and gas stations where our occupational health and safety officers went and did proactive inspections across Alberta, urban and rural, talking to the employees about their health and safety, how things are set up, if they understand current employment standards rules and were issuing tickets when they found that there might be a deficiency or misunderstanding. They made a point of talking to the employers, the owner-operators, and they followed up at every single station to make sure that any improvements that were needed for safety and security were followed through on. Those proactive inspections continue through the OH and S team, and I'm very proud of the work that they're doing.

In this amendment to Bill 17 we are clarifying that an employer cannot deduct from pay gas and dash or dine and dash, but I do want to stress that that clarification and talking about that today are very important, making sure that that's clear. Gas and dash and dine and dash are currently – through our current employment standards you cannot deduct that from an employee's pay. This clarification is going to help with understanding. It makes it more readable. But we want to assure everyone that that has always been the case, so when our occupational health and safety officers have gone to visit and explained these things, making sure that employees understood. That's part of the training.

The change that has been brought forward adjusts the coming-into-force date, so upon first reading, essentially making this one item out of Bill 17, which is a fairly large series of changes given how overdue a lot of this work was and how important it is to the protection of Albertans to the fairness for workplaces for Albertans. One of my concerns is making sure that we're communicating clearly with our stakeholders, including employers, particularly employers who are going to need to be responsible to update their systems, to update their processes, and to enforce and start following Bill 17 once it comes into force.

Through the consultations, which were fulsome, over 5,000 Albertans provided surveys. We had round-tables. I personally met with stakeholder groups like the Alberta Enterprise Group, Merit Contractors, different business leaders, chambers of commerce, and so on. One of the things that I heard was that we as a government need to support the employers as we're making these changes, so my ministry is going to be preparing materials, brochures, pamphlets, online materials, in-person sessions to really help make sure that the changes that are laid out in Bill 17 are understood so that as we move towards the coming-into-force date of January 1, people know what to expect and can update their systems as needed. I don't want to confuse these issues by changing the coming-into-force date to different times. I think that January 1 for our employment standards section is what needs to happen to make sure that we give our employers time on Bill 17, that we listen to the feedback we have. I've worked very hard to try and put forward a moderate, balanced series of changes, listening to feedback from employers.

For that reason, I will not support the amendment, but I appreciate very much the member opposite for submitting it. I thank him for his contributions, but I will not be supporting this amendment. I think having a single coming-into-force date for these changes and allowing my ministry time to prepare the materials so that they can be understood and the enforcement can be turned on is the best way to move forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A21?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for amendment A21 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:17 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Clark	Gotfried	McIver
Cooper	Hanson	Nixon
Cyr	Hunter	Orr
Ellis	Loewen	van Dijken
Gill		

8:20

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Phillips
Babcock	Jansen	Piquette
Bilous	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Carlier	Larivee	Rosendahl
Carson	Littlewood	Sabir
Ceci	Loyola	Schmidt
Coolahan	McCuaig-Boyd	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	McKittrick	Shepherd
Dach	McPherson	Sigurdson
Feehan	Miller	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Turner
Ganley	Nielsen	Westhead
Gray	Notley	Woollard
Hinkley		

Totals:	For – 13	Against – 40
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[Motion on amendment A21 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to stand to introduce another amendment.

The Chair: This will be amendment A22.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, ma'am. I'll read the amendment and then just give a brief explanation.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Hanson: I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended as follows: Under section A, section 100(1) is amended by striking out "January 1, 2018" and substituting "September 1, 2017". Under B, section 146 is struck out and the following is substituted:

Coming into force of Part 2

146(1) This Part, except sections 103(b)(iii) and (c), 104, 128 and 145, comes into force on January 1, 2018.

(2) Sections 103(b)(iii) and (c), 104 and 145 come into force on September 1, 2017

(3) Section 128 with respect to the enactment of section 95.2(2) of the Labour Relations Code is deemed to have come into force on the day the Bill to enact the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act received first reading.

Basically, what this tries to do is – you know, I looked at the coming-into-force dates, and I've listened to many of the arguments

from the government when we tried to put this bill off and get it into committee so that there could be further consultation with business owners in Alberta and just regular Albertans on this very important labour bill. The government's argument was: "This bill is far too important. We must get these employment standard changes into effect as soon as possible, so there's no time to go out and consult. We've done enough consultation, and we're going to put this bill forward." Then when you look at the coming-into-force dates, you see that the all-important labour standards don't come into effect until January 1, 2018, while all of the sections that deal with union certification and all that stuff, that's supposed to be less important, come into force on September 1, 2017.

What this amendment serves to do is to give the government an opportunity to put their money where their mouth is. If this is really the all-important section of the legislation, the employment standards, let's switch the dates. Put the union stuff on January 1, and put the employment standards stuff, that's so important, on September 1. Now, I would personally like to see that section come into effect immediately, but, you know, we're going to give them a little bit of space here and allow employers to prepare and all that.

I think that switching these dates and, you know, showing Albertans what you really mean by this legislation – and if you really mean that this is the important part of the legislation, then you'll have no issue with switching those dates. I'd appreciate to hear some comments on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A22? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the member for bringing the amendment forward. As the minister had pointed out a little bit earlier in the last amendment, we had talked about how, you know, the employers need some time to implement some of the items. There are cost factors that are involved for the employers in order to update these kinds of things. This is pretty much the exact same thing that we're talking about here. Employers do need to have enough time to be able to adapt and react to these things as well as with some of the regulations in terms of penalties. We need to have the time to bring those forward as well.

Again, I'll thank the member for bringing this forward. I won't be able to support this at this time, and I would encourage other members of the House to not support this as well.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's my privilege to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. I think it's well thought out. When the government introduced this bill, they were tripping over themselves talking about how important the employee safety elements of this bill were, and they didn't want to talk nearly as much about the doing a favour for their friends sections. It was all about the safety, all about the extended leaves. It was all about that.

Well, here is a chance for the government to be honest and say: "Yeah, you know, we meant what we said. We want to put the personal safety things first." In fact, in the bill they put it last, so here's a chance for the government's actions to match their words, and I will be supporting this amendment. If the government indeed takes the opportunity for their actions to match their words the least bit seriously, I know that they also will support this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess my question to the Member for Edmonton-Decore is – the argument that he just made

there was that the businesses that they had consulted with said that they needed more time to be able to implement this, and this is the reason why they would not be supporting this. I agree a hundred per cent with you, Member, and I believe that the businesses, from what I've talked to, agreed that they need more time to be able to consult and to talk to the government about these issues. We've brought forward reasonable amendments that would help the government give them the time, but the government has refused that.

What we're seeing here today, Madam Chair, is a government that is being disingenuous to those people who they have said that they have consulted with. They refuse to do the proper consultation. We have given them ample time through proper amendments that we've brought forward, but each time they have said: no, we've given the right amount of time. Yet I've just heard, from what I remember, the Member for Edmonton-Decore saying that the businesses need more time in order to be able to implement and that this is the reason why they can't do that switch.

Now, you cannot have it both ways, because this is exactly what I heard. So if this is about the compassion part of it, which – we've already said many times, Madam Chair, that we are willing to pass it immediately if it is about the compassionate part. The part that we have problems with is the labour part, that we need to be able to actually have that consultation time and that we have not had that opportunity with Albertans to be able to give us that feedback so that we can get this right.

The other point that I wanted to make is that when the members opposite talk about that there hasn't been the labour peace, you know – I would have to say that I think we have had labour peace here, but let's just go with their argument that we haven't had labour peace. The reality is that if we haven't had the labour peace, what they're saying is: "Let the pendulum swing to the complete opposite side, and let's go against what's happened and create no peace. Let's create the war and strife between the employee and the employer."

8:30

Now, I have to say, Madam Chair, that it doesn't surprise me. History is replete with examples of socialist governments that do the same thing every single time. There are lots of historical examples where a socialist government has said: we're going to create that strife between the employee and the employer. That's the only way that they can get the votes. It's called the politics of envy. So when they actually go down this road – I have no problem with them going down this road. Just call it that. Just say that they're going to do that. This is exactly what they've been doing in the past. It's exactly what they're going to do now. Tell Albertans all about it. Tell them that this is why they're doing it. This is a political move. This is a strategy that they've been using for years and years and years throughout history. I just think: come clean; let Albertans know this.

I think this is a very reasonable, well-thought-out amendment that I have no problem supporting, and I will be in support of this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm not going to address all of what the member opposite just said. I'm going to stick to the parts dealing with the amendment here, and I really just want to make clear to the members opposite why they should be voting against this amendment.

It appears that the members opposite think that the employment standards section only provides for some leaves. That is all they seem to be referencing. They seem to have missed the significant

amount of work that we have done on our basic standards around calculations for overtime, vacations, holidays, breaks, key things that impact employers, reasonable changes that make sure that all Alberta employees are treated similarly to other jurisdictions, that update our regulations. For example, someone who works over five hours: for every five hours they get a 30-minute break. Right now if someone works over five hours, they get a 30-minute break, and that's it. Someone who works 12 hours just gets a 30-minute break. This is very different from other jurisdictions. For those types of changes, Madam Chair, employers, who often have human resources systems that run their operations, need time to adjust. These employment standards could impact large employers and small employers.

The other major change that the opposition seems to be ignoring is the fact that Alberta has been the only jurisdiction that did not have an enforcement and administration system in their employment standards. Now, what does that mean, Madam Chair? That means the ability, for example, to fine an employer who is taking advantage of their employees or perhaps an increase in the fine when an employer is repeatedly violating employment standards. That enforcement administration system is not something that my ministry can just turn on tomorrow. That is something where we are going to need to update IT systems. We are going to need to train people. We need to train our employment standards officers on all of these changes.

When the members opposite talk about how they want to pass the leaves today, I appreciate that, Madam Chair, but they are ignoring a huge portion of our employment standards changes that are dramatically important to Alberta employers and workers. We need time both for the employers to update their systems and to understand the rules so we can send this information out and teach people what's changing and also for our ministry, our government departments to update our processes so that we have an enforcement system that we can be proud of and so that we make sure that bad actors in our province have a fine system that holds them to account. We've said it before, and I'll say it again. The majority of employers in Alberta are great employers, but we need to have a system that makes sure that everyone is playing fairly, that we have a level playing field for all employers.

I hope that clarifies for the members opposite why it's a bad idea to start rushing things when it comes to the implementation. I hope that clarifies it. I'm very proud of the work we did bringing forward Bill 17 and of the consultations we did. We've got a measured bill in front of us with fair and balanced changes, and we're going to work with our partners, with businesses, on that implementation in a reasonable time frame. The members opposite trying to rush us is just not going to make sense.

I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in response to the minister's comments. It's disingenuous and it's almost embarrassing, what we just watched here. The fact is that this minister wants to stand up and claim again that it's about the humanitarian issues associated with this bill, and we've given this government every opportunity to get those through immediately.

What are they doing, Madam Chair? They're putting it off until next year and rushing this bill through so that they can get their ideological portions of this bill through, that they didn't consult with Albertans on, while the humanitarian portions of this bill they've pushed off till next year. Albertans can see right through that. The fact is that this is a government that already stood in this

Chamber in their time in government and accused farmers of trying to kill people. This is how disappointed they are, and that is the most disingenuous thing I've ever seen from a minister.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A22? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: I just have to say that I agree with the previous member, with what he said. It was like the minister is actually talking through her hat. That's hat with an "h".

Madam Chair, she says she hasn't got time, yet she claims she got a ton of consultation done in six weeks, a ton of consultation, talked to a whole bunch of people, got a whole bunch of work done, lots of preparation. When it suits the minister's purposes, she seems to magically be able to at least claim she got a lot of work done. When it suits Alberta workers, when it actually does something good for them in the good parts of the bill, well, it takes way too long, helping people. She never has time to do the good stuff, but the bad stuff just slides through her ministry like it was no effort at all, Madam Chair. It slides through her ministry. [interjections] I'm glad to hear the Premier trying to shout me down though I have the floor because it was the Premier that two days ago in this House said that she didn't have time to do something in six weeks.

Well, apparently, if it's good for Albertans, the Premier and her minister don't have time to do it. If it's bad for Albertans, it seems like no effort at all; it doesn't take any time at all. Bad stuff flies through the ministry. Bad stuff flies through the Premier's hands. Good stuff that protects Albertans: they just can't quite find the time to get that stuff done. [interjection] They just can't find the time. It's really telling. It's really an indictment of this government's true nature that what they say and what they do are two entirely different things. [interjection] The fact that the Premier is trying to outshout me while I've got the floor tells me how guilty she feels about this, and it makes me happy to hear her reveal how she really feels, unless she's willing to get up on her feet, and I'd love to hear that.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A22? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, I have got to speak about this because the minister has just accused us of trying to force this timeline. She has said many, many times in this Chamber that they did extensive consultation in six weeks. In six weeks they got all of the consultation done that they needed to do. I will remind you that what we are asking them to do is to implement this in double the time, 12 weeks. That's what we're talking about. So they would have 12 weeks to be able to get it all taken care of, yet six weeks is all it took for this government to be able to get all of the consultation done right.

This is complete hypocrisy, Madam Chair, for her to say that six weeks is fine to be able to consult all businesses in the province, yet we're going to give her 12 weeks, double the time, in order to be able to make this happen. Completely disingenuous.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A22? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A22 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:39 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Fraser	Loewen
Clark	Gill	McIver
Cooper	Gotfried	Orr
Cyr	Hanson	Starke
Ellis	Hunter	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Notley
Babcock	Hoffman	Piquette
Bilous	Jansen	Renaud
Carlier	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schreiner
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Drever	McKitrick	Sucha
Feehan	McPherson	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Gray	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 41
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[Motion on amendment A22 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to propose on Bill 17.

The Chair: This is amendment A23.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 113(1), in the proposed section 34, (a) in subsection (2)(d) by striking out “subject to subsection (8),”; (b) in subsection (6) by striking out “subject to subsection (8),”; (c) by striking out subsections (8), (9), and (10); (d) in subsection (11) by striking out “or (10).”

Essentially, what I'm trying to propose here, Madam Chair, is a recognition of the current system of union certification through a secret ballot and the recognition of that being an integral part of a democratic society, that we are able to enjoy the freedom of a secret ballot, to vote our conscience in the privacy of a booth or a secret vote.

You know, when we look at the proposed legislation here, where the government is proposing that if a union is able to present cards representing over 65 per cent of the workforce, then they would be eligible to be certified with the labour board – secret ballots have been put in place to ensure that all individuals in a democratic process are able to vote their conscience without undue pressure from others around them. With regard to unionization certification we are looking to ensure that employees are protected from the intimidation processes and intimidation from both employers and union organizers. It's a critical part of being able to stem the tide of abuse and reducing the pressure that employees feel when they're asked to sign union cards. They also have the ability to vote their conscience if they're receiving undue pressure from their employer.

The secret ballot is essentially a major release valve for that pressuring and harassing of workers to get card checked. They can get you back in the secret ballot. Can you imagine, Madam Chair,

where you have to decide to vote for or against a union while union organizers or friends or colleagues are sitting right there with you or behind you, looking on? There is a significant amount of peer pressure that is understood or can be recognized in that situation, where individuals, employees in a workforce are feeling the pressure from their co-workers. They're feeling pressure from union organizers, especially if they're superior in their position in the workforce, to actually sign the union card. At the end of the day, no longer is a union vote a secret vote when you go to this card check system.

Madam Chair, even the government admits that the secret ballot gets an average of 10 to 15 per cent less support than the card check shows – and we know there are cases where it is much more than 10 to 15 per cent – so how can we justify that this is a system that is protecting employees and protecting the rights of employees to their democratic rights within a democratic society?

Having an aggressive organizer or someone in a foreman or a senior position pressuring you to sign a card, I would suggest, is not fair. Under this type of legislation I believe that it would actually get worse, that there's no ability for the employee that is being pressured to sign a union card to be able to decide that they're not in favour of unionization in that workforce, whereas when they have that secret ballot – you know, that's why there's typically less support in a secret ballot vote than what shows up when members sign a card. Those are typically employees that just want to have the union organizers or their fellow co-workers leave them alone: “Okay. Let's sign the card. We'll put it to a vote in the workplace.” I think that's fair, and that's proper, and that's a very legitimate way to understand what the true feelings of your workforce are.

8:50

You know, like, what we're currently under in the province of Alberta is where the secret ballot would be a counterbalance to keep the way from tactics or ruthless endeavours by either employers or union organizers. I think we would be kidding ourselves if we sit here – and we even heard members earlier talking about the situation with my fellow colleague, where that particular union was known for their abusive ways of trying to get members to follow their guidelines. I believe that there are some unscrupulous union organizers out there, and there are businesses that need to be held in check also. I believe that the secret ballot gives the employee the freedom to be able to vote their conscience without the pressure and without the knowledge, necessarily, of their co-workers, their employer, their union organizers as to what their vote was. That's why we utilize it, so that we can come to a true understanding of the will of the workplace.

You know, it's interesting, Madam Chair, that the government is proposing a system, and they claim that it's a system that's been adopted in most other jurisdictions in the country, yet as I look across the country, in British Columbia a secret ballot vote is always required for certification for a union. Saskatchewan: a vote is always required. Manitoba: a vote is always required. We have Newfoundland and Labrador: a vote is always required. Nova Scotia: a vote is required. In Ontario a vote is always required.

We're looking at even individual cases where they have gone to a card check system and found out some of the difficulties that are faced, with abuse of employees. That type of activity starts to increase, and then they go back to a secret ballot system to ensure that the employees can get the negative pressures off their back. They'll sign the union card and bring it to a secret ballot vote, and they can move on with their lives without feeling the pressure from the union organizers.

You know, I think it's critical that we recognize the democratic right of all individuals and employees, especially at this time, that

we recognize that we need to protect the rights of the employees from the abuses of other people within the workforce that will be very adamantly trying to ensure that they get their way with these employees. I don't believe that it's fair to the employee to be under that kind of extra pressure. The fact that we had a secret ballot in place allowed that employee to vote their true conscience without the pressure from others around them because they were able to do that in secret.

With that, I'd like to encourage all members to vote in favour of this amendment to ensure that employees are protected from abuse and that we ensure that the interests of all Albertans are recognized and that the right of a democratic vote continues to be established in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Wow. You know, I don't know exactly where to start on this one. Continually through this entire debate we have seen members of the opposition vilify people from the labour union. I can tell you from first-hand experience that nothing could be farther from the truth. I'm getting a little tired of these folks telling everyday Albertans: because you're a union member, you're going to pressure, bust into somebody's house to make them vote. Come on, guys. Like, let's start giving Albertans here a little bit of credit, okay? I don't know if any of you have done any organizing, but I've done some organizing. I've been very, very respectful of people's time. I've been very, very respectful of how they want to place their vote. [interjections] I'd appreciate it if I could have the floor because I've given you the floor.

Madam Chair, maybe the folks across the floor didn't realize this, but votes that are supervised by the Labour Relations Board don't allow for people to look over somebody's shoulder while they're taking a vote. We're talking about 65 per cent of the workplace, a very, very clear majority, that is looking to unionize. That is their right, so quite honestly I cannot support this amendment here.

You know, when we hear about all these jurisdictions that don't have it: there are a lot that do, and it's working just fine.

Madam Chair, I'm going to urge all members across this House to not support this legislation. It's time that we stop this rhetoric that we're hearing about unions because if you knew anything about unions, you'd know that's not the case.

The Chair: Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. Interesting to hear from the Member for Edmonton-Decore and look through his rose-coloured glasses and believe that there are no individuals that would put undue pressure on employees to sign union cards. He talks about how he's getting tired of hearing from the opposition concerns that we have with regard to union tactics to try and grow their business.

At the same time I hear from the other side that they're vilifying businesses that are not living up to the employment standards that are being put before us. On the majority of the employment standards I would suggest that most employers within Alberta have been very fair with their employees. The excuse that the government is giving is: well, we've got to cover off for a few.

That's exactly what we're trying to do here with the secret ballot. We're able to ensure that we do not have individuals within the union movement or even employers that would use undue pressure to influence their employees from being able to have their right exercised through a secret ballot. We have the ability to have that relief valve of a secret ballot, that protects the rights of the individuals, the employees that are deciding on whether or not they want to move forward with this in their workforce. I believe that

that's a fair decision, to protect that decision, and that that employee has that freedom to do that in the secret ballot vote.

The member opposite wants to label us as being against unions. Nothing is further from the truth. I just want it to be a fair process that allows the employee to feel like they are being protected from the thuggery of . . .

An Hon. Member: Both sides.

Mr. van Dijken: . . . both sides, the employers and the unions. I see it on both sides. I give you that. I see it on both sides. I can see where the potential is on both sides.

At the same time, we have to recognize that and we need to put legislation forward that will stand the test of time and be fair to all because otherwise we're going to be back here in a few years recognizing that this didn't quite get covered off and that we're going to have cases where, like in other provinces, they've had to return to the secret ballot. What we're trying to do here is to ensure that we don't go down a road that we're just going to have to decide to change in time.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be brief. I like a secret ballot. I think a secret ballot is one of those cornerstones of democracy. I mean, that's kind of a remarkably obvious statement. And some of the things I've heard tonight are around: well, 65 per cent; gosh, that's a high bar. I have two points to make. One, I would love the opportunity and I encourage the government in the next election to please campaign on this promise. Campaign on this promise. Go door-knocking in your constituency, and if you can get 65 per cent of your constituents to sign a piece of paper saying that you ought to still be the MLA, you get to be the MLA without a vote. That's it. That's number one.

9:00

The second point, being the point of the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, in talking about how difficult it is to get 65 per cent, Madam Chair, is that if the threshold were 100 per cent, I would still be against it because what's wrong with a secret ballot? I don't understand the problem we're trying to solve. If we set the threshold at 100 per cent – that's maybe not a bad idea for an amendment. I don't know how late we want to be here. Maybe I'll try that. But if we set the threshold at 100 per cent, it's still out in the open who signed and who didn't sign, and that just makes the process open to threats and intimidation or to the potential for that. Getting rid of the secret ballot solves a problem we don't have, and it's really unfortunate because, you know, the members may be right that 65 per cent may very well be a difficult threshold to hit, and it may in fact not be used all that often.

So as an attempt to provide an olive branch to their base, they have managed to make a lot of right-thinking Albertans – and by right I mean fair-thinking Albertans that just believe fundamentally in democracy and, yes, right-thinking Albertans in the other sense as well, of course. But fair-thinking Albertans who believe in democracy can't possibly support this. It's a concept foreign to all of us in the province of Alberta.

I will absolutely support this amendment and look forward to bringing an amendment of my own which will attempt to address some of these challenges as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A23? Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I think it's critical – and the Member for Calgary-Elbow highlighted it – that we recognize this as a basic democratic right. We also have to recognize that – I don't see that the system is broken. I don't understand why this government believes that the system is broken. It has everything to do, in my opinion, with that they believe there should be more union workplaces in Alberta. But I actually believe that Alberta has been able to enjoy the creation of wealth and that employers and employees have been able to come to a good position of being able to share that amongst themselves. That has created a system that all sides benefit from, and we've been able to live in relative labour peace for several decades now.

You know, it appears to me that removing the secret ballot is more about trying to make it a simplification. The minister has said this, that it's a simplification for unionization within the province of Alberta. I don't understand the simplification as being necessary. It looks to me like the government is playing into the hands of the unions here to put in rules that will help the unions in their business development strategies more than protecting Albertans and ensuring that Albertans are able to enjoy living in a free and democratic society that protects those rights.

So I think we highlight here that the secret ballot has been able to protect the rights of all individuals, the Albertans that we are here to serve.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A23?

Are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A23 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:04 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gotfried	McIver
Clark	Hanson	Nixon
Cooper	Hunter	Orr
Cyr	Loewen	Starke
Ellis	MacIntyre	van Dijken
Gill		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Nielsen
Bilous	Kazim	Piquette
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Carson	Larivee	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Dach	Loyola	Schmidt
Dang	Mason	Schreiner
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Feehan	McKittrick	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Sucha
Gray	Miller	Turner
Hinkley	Miranda	Westhead
Hoffman		

Totals:	For – 16	Against – 37
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[Motion on amendment A23 lost]

The Chair: Further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Yes, Madam Chair. I do have an amendment, which I will hand over right now and await your receipt of that, and then I will start speaking.

The Chair: This is amendment A24.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. In light of that last amendment to restore the secret ballot process failing and other amendments in efforts to eliminate the card check process – oh, I apologize. I have to read out the amendment. My apologies. I will do that now.

I move that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 113(1) in the proposed section 34(2) by striking out “and” at the end of clause (d) and by adding “and” at the end of clause (e) and by adding the following after clause (e):

- (f) the trade union or a person acting on behalf of a trade union did not engage in a prohibited practice under section 151(f) against any of the employees in the unit the Board considers an appropriate unit for collective bargaining.

I will just talk about why I've come up with this amendment and then dive into the details of specifically what it does. I don't like the card check process, Madam Chair. I don't think that's any secret, but given that we've seen repeated attempts to restore the fundamental principle of a secret ballot fail in this House, I thought I would do whatever I can to try to improve the card check process.

9:10

One of the biggest challenges to the card check process is the perception if not the reality – one would hope not the reality. But at the very, very least it's the perception of intimidation as part of the certification process. What I hope this amendment does is that it strikes a reasonable balance, which I think actually could be a win if the card check process is to move forward. It looks like it is, whether we like it or not. So if it's going to be there, what can we do to make it as good as it can possibly be? Make a bad idea as good as it can be, I guess, is sometimes all we can try to do in opposition. Hopefully, Madam Chair, this could be seen as a win for unions because it strengthens the process. In the case where the 65 per cent threshold is met, it removes the perception that intimidation happened.

As the bill is currently written and as I interpret it, the Labour Relations Board does not have the power to investigate or could perhaps be interpreted not to have the power to investigate. Let's just look to section 113(1) of Bill 17, that repeals section 34 and replaces it with a new section 34, which outlines what the Labour Relations Board can do when certifying an application for unionization. The heading is Inquiry into Certification Application, and 34(2) reads:

- (2) Before granting an application for certification, the Board shall satisfy itself, after any investigation that it considers necessary, that

- (a) the applicant is a trade union,
- (b) the application is timely,
- (c) the union applied for, or a unit reasonably similar to it, is an appropriate unit for collective bargaining,
- (d) subject to subsection (8), the employees in the unit the Board considers an appropriate unit for collective bargaining have voted, at a representation vote conducted by the Board, to select the trade union as their bargaining agent, and
- (e) the application is not prohibited by section 38.

What we're doing is adding a section (f) to that to ensure that the Labour Relations Board can also consider whether or not the trade union or a person acting on behalf of a trade union did not engage in a prohibited practice under section 151(f), which I'll get to in a

minute, against any of the employees in the bargaining unit. What this says is that the Labour Relations Board will be able to review and include coercion and intimidation as one of the areas that they consider when inquiring into the certification of an application. If this test is met, we can be satisfied, and as long as the Labour Relations Board is satisfied, I think Albertans can be satisfied that no coercion or intimidation happened. That's obviously a concern we've heard repeated again and again.

Any process that's open, that involves a vote that is not a secret ballot process is open to this risk. I'm not suggesting that it happens every single time. I'm sure it doesn't happen every single time, but it's certainly open to the risk. What evidence do we have of that? The evidence that was presented by the government and by Mr. Sims is that when there's a card check process that takes place that is followed by a secret ballot, as Bill 17 will enable for those card checks that achieve 40 to 65 per cent – when there's a secret ballot vote that follows a card check process, that vote tends to be 15 per cent lower than the card check process.

Now, why would that be? Well, I wonder why that is. That might be that people feel pressured into signing a card in open, plain view of their colleagues – they actually don't want the unionization drive to happen – and then in the secret ballot process mark an X for no as opposed to yes. The reason that 65 per cent was chosen was because of that 15 per cent difference. Given that, it's very difficult for me to hear from the other side that no intimidation ever happens, that no one is ever leaned on, that no kind of quiet conversations happen in the hallway. When 15 per cent of people are changing their vote, very clearly something has happened. Something is different between what people do in the privacy of a voting box and what happens when it's all in plain view.

To ensure that the system is as sound as it can be, this amendment seeks to enable and ensure that the Labour Relations Board has the power to consider whether or not there was intimidation, a prohibited practice under section 151(f). By the way, the wording that we got for my amendment comes from the current labour code. Section 151(f) is not repealed or amended by Bill 17. It is already today in the labour code, will continue to be in the labour code, and is not changed by Bill 17. It uses almost exactly the same language, which is why we have adopted it here for this amendment.

Again, I'm not a believer that a card check process is appropriate. I don't believe it's necessary. I think it's a step backwards. This amendment attempts to address the greatest shortcoming of a card check process, and I sincerely and genuinely would encourage and hope that the government would consider this amendment and include it in Bill 17 to make what is not a great provision of the bill at least just a little bit better.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A24?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Let me introduce myself. Apart from being the MLA for Lethbridge-East, I was for 32 and a half years with the Public Service Alliance of Canada. I was the person that the opposition referred to as a UT or a UB, a union thug and a union boss. You know what? I'll wear that, and I'll wear it proudly because if a union thug means that I represented my members, I did. I never lost a grievance. I might have gone to mediation to get it finalized, but I never lost one. The one thing that I'm most proud of is that, in fact, I met with management on every issue that came up and tried to resolve it at the lowest possible level, and in most cases I did.

Now I'm going to speak to this amendment. I am opposed to the amendment because in my 32 and a half years of being part of a union that did organize other groups to become part of our union,

first of all, we didn't have a 15 per cent difference between the card check and the vote. We always had a higher number who voted to be unionized than signed on the card check. I'm also going to tell you that I was spoken to by management during my 32 and a half years on many occasions and told that my career was at risk if I continued to support the union and do the things that I was obligated to do under the duty of fair representation.

I joined the union because I became a public service worker, and right from the very beginning it was suggested to me that I not sign off on the fight for pay equity for women by not just one boss but probably half a dozen. I told you that I'm a boat rocker, but more importantly I am somebody who fights for equality and fights for what is right. Now, that clause (f), that's already, as you said, in the current legislation, doesn't say anything about those bosses who try to intimidate you to not sign a card. It isn't the union organizers, at least certainly not a good union organizer, who would ever try to intimidate anybody. We talk about what the union does. We talk about the weekend that you enjoy, that's brought to you by the union. We talk about fair, decent wages that are negotiated, not legislated.

9:20

You know what? I'm here as a legislator, and I believe that every time we sit down with any union that represents GOA employees, we do it on a fair and respectful basis. And you know what? One of the biggest things that the union members I represented asked for was respect. The reason many of them joined unions was that they were not respected in their workplaces. They were not valued for the work that they did. And you know what? When there's a union in place, many times that changes because the employer doesn't want unrest in the workplace.

I absolutely support Bill 17 – absolutely – but I can't support this amendment because it's going after the wrong group. Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I want to agree with the Member for Lethbridge-East. Intimidation of all kinds is absolutely wrong. So for your employer to come and try to lean on you to not sign off on pay equity, it's absolutely wrong, fundamentally, absolutely, one hundred per cent wrong. It shouldn't have happened under any circumstance. And that's what this amendment seeks to address. There are times when intimidation is going to happen.

Let's also not forget that Bill 17 extends the window for a unionization drive from 90 days to six months – it doubles the time – so that gives more opportunity for people to be influenced one way or the other. That doubling of the time is another big challenge.

Also, I just want to address the question of whether employers are allowed to interfere in the process or intimidate. Of course they aren't. That is already in the legislation, as it should be. Employers should also not be allowed to intimidate, and that is already clearly covered in the labour code. It's already covered in section 149(c) in the current labour code, so it's already there.

Again, I would encourage the government to rethink this, vote in favour, and include this because I do think that although the card check process itself is flawed, this would at least perhaps strengthen it and bring more of a perception of legitimacy.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this amendment? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to speak in favour of the amendment that's being proposed by the Member for Calgary-Elbow. As he's alluded to, it's not ideal. We

both very much support the principle of secret ballot, and under this system – the minister calls it a hybrid system – the principle of secret ballot is actually lost and is essentially done away with. We have a situation now where there's potential for individuals to use coercion, intimidation, threats, promises, or any undue influence to move forward.

He also brings up a very valid point that it's now extended into pretty much six months' worth of time where these employees can be intimidated and coerced and can continue to be harassed, so even more time for the employee to finally say: okay; just get off my back. We need to ensure that we recognize that there is a potential for disruption and a potential for employees to feel very much uneasy in their workplace. I don't believe that there's any need for that. If we look at the fact that the secret ballot allowed them to vote their conscience, that's a relief valve there.

I will support this amendment, trying to ensure that we continue to work in this province in a way that protects the employees on the front lines from any undue influence, coercion, intimidation, any of those types of activities that go on and that could possibly be going on. You know, we can all sit here and think that it's not going to happen, but history has shown us that it can happen. In any situation where you are not protecting the democratic principles within a society, these types of situations tend to arise over time. I believe that this amendment helps us to try to stem the tide on those types of situations and those uncomfortable positions that employees might find themselves in.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A24?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A24 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:26 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Schneider
Clark	Hanson	Starke
Cooper	Hunter	Strankman
Cyr	Loewen	Taylor
Drysdale	MacIntyre	van Dijken
Ellis	McIver	Yao
Gill	Pitt	

9:30

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Renaud
Bilous	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Mason	Shepherd
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Feehan	McKittrick	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Turner
Gray	Miranda	Westhead
Hinkley	Nielsen	Woollard
Hoffman	Piquette	

Totals:	For – 20	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment A24 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. At this time it's a pleasure to introduce an amendment that I believe addresses a concern that was raised a little bit earlier. I'll just hand it to the pages. I'll wait until everyone has had a chance to look at it, but I'll preface the comments without going past the bounds of what is within the standing orders with regard to making reference to a past vote because I don't suggest to do that.

What I do think that I recognize – and I believe that it is a recognition on the part of members on both sides of the Assembly – is that over a period of time Albertans have accessed medical services from an ever-expanding group of medical practitioners. Where perhaps at one time a family physician was the only source of medical assistance or information, we do know that that is changing. One of the key sources of information is nurse practitioners. We had a debate on that on a motion that was brought forward by my colleague the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. That debate was held just earlier today.

I do want to give credit where credit is due, and that is certainly to our colleagues on the government side, specifically to the minister in this case, and that is recognizing that there was an opportunity that we shouldn't pass up to improve this piece of legislation.

With that, with those remarks to preface this introduction of this amendment, I would like to move that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended as follows. In part A section 2 is amended by adding the following after clause (g): (g.1) by repealing clause (p) and substituting the following:

(p) "medical certificate" means a statement signed by a physician who is entitled to practise medicine under the laws of the jurisdiction in which the physician practises or by a member of another health profession authorized by the regulations for the purpose of this clause.

In part B section 33 is amended in the proposed section 53.9 by striking out subsection 1(c) and in subsection (4) by striking out "issued by a physician."

In part C section 35 is amended in the proposed section 53.96 by striking out subsection 1(d), in subsection (5) by striking out "issued by a physician," and in the proposed section 53.97(3) by striking out "issued by a physician."

Finally, in part D section 93(a)(viii) is amended by adding the following before the proposed section 138(1)(m): "(1.1) for the purposes of section 1(1)(p), authorizing members of other health professions to sign a medical certificate in respect of one or more provisions of this Act."

A very simple and straight-forward amendment, Madam Chair. The net effect of this – in fact, it serves to combine a couple of other amendments that we had prepared but that we actually had withdrawn after the defeat of the amendment introduced by Grande Prairie-Wapiti – is recognizing that other health professionals are providing services to Albertans, critical services, and in some areas of the province nurse practitioners and other health professionals as well. I think this amendment is good. It is very robust in that it allows for adding additional health professionals to the overall definition whereby people couldn't get the certificate that they required to qualify for the leaves that are specified under the various sections that are specified here.

What this allows for is people who use nurse practitioners, especially in communities, you know, like the one that my colleague represents or like the one I represent in Vermilion, where

many, many people have come to rely on nurse practitioners as their number one source of medical assistance and information for them and their families. I think it acknowledges the contributions of nurse practitioners to the overall health care system in Alberta, and I think it also acknowledges that we are moving toward a system of more team-based medical care, especially in the primary care areas, that are so critical to the overall health of Albertans.

I do want to thank the minister for the work that she and her staff did with members of our caucus staff in drafting and sort of reworking this amendment. I can tell you that this amendment had about three or four different drafts before we landed on this. But we have landed on this, and while it may be unusual to see this sort of rapid co-operation between the sides of the House, as we often said or was often said when I hit one of my very rare straight and long golf shots: even a blind pig finds the occasional truffle.

Madam Chair, it's with a great deal of pleasure that I move this amendment, and I hope that it garners the support of members of all sides of the Assembly. I think that it's a positive change to what is otherwise a flawed piece of legislation. It is a change that will provide assistance and provide increased and more ready access to some of the more palatable parts of this particular bill, and therefore I'm entirely in favour of it, and I hope that members on both sides of the House agree with this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to the member for this amendment. I think it's very good. I think the member does himself a disservice referring to himself as a pig, but I do think that he has found a good amendment with this change.

An Hon. Member: Pigs are very clever.

Ms Gray: Pigs are indeed very clever. You're exactly right.

I appreciate what this amendment is doing, which is providing more flexibility and giving us the opportunity to continue to work to make this legislation the best it can be, and by deferring to regulations, we'll have the opportunity to make sure that we're engaging in consultation with the people we need to be talking to.

Madam Chair, I would like to improve upon this good idea by introducing a subamendment.

The Chair: This will be known as SA1.

Go ahead, hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, what we're doing with this subamendment is essentially accepting what is a really solid amendment and then improving upon it by touching on something that impacts group terminations. We want to make sure that for the purposes of group terminations we allow for circumstances where someone might be excluded from group terminations.

To read my subamendment out loud, amendment A25 is amended by striking out part D and substituting the following: section 93(a) is amended in subclause (ii) in the proposed clause (d.3) by adding "respecting the circumstances under which a notice under section 137 is not required," before "respecting the information," and in subclause (viii) by adding the following before the proposed section 138(1)(m): "(1.1) for the purposes of section 1(1)(p), authorizing members of other health professions to sign a medical certificate in respect of one or more provisions of this Act."

9:40

With the introduction of that subamendment I thank the member opposite for bringing forward this change and speaking to how it

will impact his community. I hope all members will support both the subamendment and the original amendment. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to subamendment SA1?

Seeing none, are you ready for the vote?

[Motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

The Chair: We're back on amendment A25. Are there any further speakers to this amendment?

Mr. Yao: Sure. Why not? Let's do this. Madam Chair, how are you tonight? You know what? This is a good amendment. I'm going to raise his blind pig and a truffle and go with: a blind squirrel finds a nut every now and again.

Recognizing other health professionals: you know, this is a good amendment because it is time to start recognizing the other health professionals. Currently if you look at the way the health system has evolved, we really have evolved to a point where even amongst doctors they're too specialized. Now, my father, back in the day before we had access to a lot of those specialities, would do all the stuff himself. If someone had a foot issue, maybe it was a foot elevation; one leg was shorter than the other. He had to figure those things out himself. He had to read books. He had to consult by calling people. It was a little bit difficult sometimes for people to travel, so he'd have to do the work of a podiatrist, an orthopaedic surgeon. Well, as a doctor he had to learn how to translate those X-rays and to try to figure out about those fractures and all that sort of fun stuff. And it goes on and on.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

In this day and age we now refer to internists and psychologists, anything and everything, Mr. Chair, and that just demonstrates how specialized medicine has gotten. But as our health system gets more expensive, I think we realize that we need to maybe reconsider how we do things and re-evaluate and recognize that perhaps we might not want to consider physicians as gatekeepers to our health care system, that perhaps we should consider allowing other professions to provide the support. One of those, as identified by the good Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, is nurse practitioners. That is one step. There are also physicians' assistants and other professionals that are slowly evolving over time to the point where we feel strongly about the education levels that they have and their capabilities because they have experience in analyzing and evaluating a lot of this stuff. It is important that we do recognize a lot of these other groups.

Again, I think this amendment really is a step forward in helping with that. In this bill, of all things, we might actually get that foot in the door for the rest of our health system to continue to evolve so that even the Member for Banff-Cochrane could possibly be one of those gatekeepers one day if he furthers his education and his experience.

This is a good amendment. I hope that everyone agrees and everyone concurs and votes in favour of it. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other speakers to amendment A25?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A25 carried]

The Acting Chair: We are back on Bill 17.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chair, I think that's a very commendable act of co-operation across the aisle tonight. Carry on.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to rise today to make an amendment on behalf of the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, who is tired after having his successful amendment there. I have the requisite number of copies here with me. I'll begin reading once the table gives me the permission to proceed.

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: This is amendment A26.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. One of the themes of this government's labour legislation is that businesses are not to be trusted. I heard reference on the other side to union thugs. I don't think anybody's used that term, and we'd like to think that there's...

The Chair: Hon. member, I've just noticed, on the amendment that you've presented, that you've done it on behalf of the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. However, he's in the House, so you can't do it on his behalf.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. In danger of tempting fate and trying to go for two in a row, I'll now read the amendment into the record.

I move that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 141 and substituting the following: section 151 is amended (a) by renumbering it as section 151(1); (b) in subsection (1), (i) in clause (d) by adding "subject to section 151.1" before "except" and (ii) by repealing clause (h.1); (c) by adding the following after (1):

(2) If a complaint is made in writing to the Board in respect of an alleged failure by a trade union or person acting on behalf of a trade union to comply with (1)(a) to (g), the written complaint is itself evidence that the failure occurred and the trade union or the person acting on behalf of the trade union has the burden of proving that it did not.

Now, Madam Chair, again I want to point out that I think one of the key things in this piece of legislation is the concept of balance and that having balance between both employers and employees, whether those employees are represented by an organized labour union or not and regardless of what form the employer takes, whether that's an individual proprietorship, a partnership, a small, medium-, or large-sized business, or indeed a large corporation – you know, in general I think that we can all agree that that co-operative relationship between employees and employers has benefited Alberta over the years. We have had a strong economy, notwithstanding the fact that that economy at times does suffer from various challenges that we are very familiar with.

9:50

Now, I think that in general Albertans have the sense that the people that run businesses, that own businesses and have businesses are, for the most part and in the main, decent people who treat their employees with respect. Certainly, my experience over the period of time that I was involved in our business and in other businesses that I was involved in, some of which were operating in a union environment, was always one where I recognized that our employees were, in fact, one of our greatest assets, if not our greatest asset, especially serving in a service industry, as we did.

We were only able to provide the service and the care that we provided through our practice through the expertise, the skill, the knowledge, the compassion, and the commitment of our employees. I can tell you that when we had a team of employees that worked together and, you know, were all on the same page with regard to the importance of providing those services, we always felt that that was the ideal circumstance. To have a great deal of turnover or to have a situation where we had employees coming and going was never a preferable thing.

Because of this, though, I think that one of the things that we have to guard against is that there's bias – and I mentioned this in a previous debate, that there's bias – either bias against a trade union, a labour union, or bias against an employer. Now, I guess our concern in moving this legislation or this particular amendment is that I believe that there are aspects of this piece of legislation that are, in fact, negative towards business, and they make assumptions about business that I think are not necessarily borne out in fact.

The section in the new, proposed legislation that places the burden of proof on a business to show that they did not commit an offence that they've been accused of seems to me to be an overreaction. You know, I can understand the desire of the government to target businesses, which I would suggest are in the vast minority, that are trying to take advantage of employees. But if that's the standard that they're going to be held to, then I believe that it's only fair, once again, that unions be held to the same standard. We discussed this mirror image in this fairness proposal whereby the provisions are a mirror image. Now, in that situation it was the certification versus decertification of a union, but in this situation it's the proof to determine that there's a breach of section 151 of the Labour Relations Code.

In the same way that I think it is fair to state that most businesses, the vast majority of businesses, I would suggest, treat their employees with respect and recognize the importance of a positive and harmonious labour and management relationship, I think it's also true to say that the vast majority of unions work in the best interests of their membership. They provide those benefits and look out for grievances that can arise from time to time in the workplace. Unions provide advocacy on behalf of their workers that is valuable. I think that they have moved the cause of social justice forward, and I think it's important that we recognize the fact that the organized labour movement has done these things.

You know, it's interesting. I'm reading a book right now, called *The Winter Years*, that talks about the situation in post World War I Winnipeg leading up to the Winnipeg General Strike, and it talks a lot about the emergence of the labour union movement in western Canada and the importance of the labour union movement in terms of addressing some of the imbalances that occurred at that time.

In terms of the overall fairness that we need to talk about in section 151, section 151 talks about placing an onus on businesses to prove that coercion or unfair influence, shall we say, has not occurred. You know, to suggest, though, that only employers, that only management can be guilty of that and that somehow the other side of the equation, labour unions, never has that happen, I think, is disingenuous. I think most people would agree and understand that that's simply not a reasonable thing to expect. So if we are going to put safeguards in this piece of legislation guarding against employers abusing employees in a situation like that, I think we should have similar or mirror-image safeguards in place with regard to labour unions.

I think that there should be balance and fairness in legislation, and that is exactly what this amendment is trying to address. I would therefore ask members on both sides of the Chamber to support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A26? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to rise in support of this amendment, which, again, I think is about fairness and balance. I think the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster stated that the majority of employers are good, hard-working, honest, and decent people, and the same is true of the unions, but this balance to protect against those few that may not be, I think, is a valid argument to be made and protects employees, which is the intention of this.

Madam Chair, I was involved in the past with a company and had a lot of work with a group called the Great Place to Work Institute. That institute is the purveyor of the best workplaces in Canada, and they work with employers not just to win awards but actually to improve their performance as employers to ensure that they meet the highest standards and expectations of their employees. The company I worked for was a member of that, the best workplaces in Canada, for over 10 years, and we see other organizations doing these: best employer recognition in Canada, in Alberta, in various provinces.

The key factor in that is actually something called the trust index, and it's, surprisingly, a secret ballot, a secret questionnaire of all the employees, which actually determines, after all of the metrics are put in place, whether that company actually measures up to the expectations of their employees. I can tell you, Madam Chair, that that trust index is transparent. There's no way to identify how people answer, but it is the true measure of whether an employer is a good employer and a fair employer and a decent employer who really looks out for their people.

I can tell you that the outcome of that – and I think it was mentioned by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster as well, the pride and the hard work and the customer satisfaction that come from creating a positive work environment like that – does deliver things like employee pride, employer pride, which comes from that, customer satisfaction, and, actually, a strong performance of the bottom line. Those are measurable from the satisfaction and hard work of the employees.

The other thing is that – it might be a little different right now – during busy times in Alberta one of the biggest goals of most employers is to attract the best talent, and one of the best ways to attract that best talent is by actually being recognized as a best employer.

Madam Chair, I just want to implore all the members of this House to support this amendment, which, again, creates balance between the unions and the employers to the benefit of Alberta employees.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the member bringing forward this amendment. Right now what we have in the regulations is that the Labour Relations Board is able to conduct hearings with regard to any kinds of actions that are taken that are against the rules. That already exists. We're not aware of this type of legislation being present anywhere else in other jurisdictions. You know, it kind of plays a little bit, again, to that narrative that unions out there are these big, bad, bogey organizations that are constantly looking to do things in the wrong way, to do things unfairly, to pressure people.

With that being said, Madam Chair, I'm not able to accept this amendment at this time. As I said, the board can conduct hearings with regard to any problems that are happening. Either the union or

the employer is able to apply for those types of things, and the labour board has the expertise to figure this out. I would urge all members in the House to not support this.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A26? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

10:00

Mr. McIver: Ever so briefly, after hearing about the pigs and the truffles and the nuts and the squirrels, I only had to say that I support this because this legislation really speaks to the axiom of what is good for the goose is also good for the gander.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A26?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A26 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to read a bit from *Hansard* here from way back. This is from the MLA for West Yellowhead.

Subsequent to all of that input, the final report of the committee was put out, a document that was received with interest by Albertans. I forget the exact number, but something like 8,000 or 10,000 of them were distributed around the province. Again, considerable input was received, Mr. Speaker, and that input was considered in the development of draft legislation termed Bill 60. That draft legislation was tabled in the Legislature on June 17, 1987, and the government invited input from everyone who felt they had an interest in it. The Bill was intentionally left over the winter for input. We received some 300 briefs in response to Bill 60, and I myself had over 200 meetings with individual Albertans, groups of Albertans of all types. In other words, the process that I described which led up to the introduction of Bills 21 and 22, which is under consideration this evening, was probably unprecedented in Alberta for the consideration of new legislation.

Now, Madam Chair, that is from June 7, 1988. The previous year the government of the time and the MLA for West Yellowhead at the time introduced Bill 60, which was the Labour Code. Now, what's interesting is that they introduced it on June 17 for consultation with the public, and what they did subsequently was that they were in consultation with the public for 10 months. Of course, this government consulted with the public for 27 working days. I would say that that makes the previous government about 10 times better at consultation than this government. That's just some simple math for you.

What they did do, which was interesting, is split that bill up into two bills, bills 21 and 22, employment standards and labour relations. Now, where have we heard that before? Here we have a government that the present government complains about all the time, and they actually split the bill into two pieces so that they could separate two different issues altogether.

Now, another thing that's really interesting in here is that they introduced Bill 21.

But let's talk about Bill 22. They introduced Bill 22 on April 15, 1988, and it gets past third reading on June 30, 1988. That's 10 weeks that it was before the Legislature. What did we have? Well, I think we've had about seven days of discussion on this bill here. Ten weeks is 70 days. Seven days that we had with this government:

that, again, makes the previous government about 10 times better than this government.

Bill 21, introduced on April 15, 1988, was passed on July 5, 1988: 11 weeks of legislative discussion on that bill.

Madam Chair, I'll leave it at that, just a little bit of history as far as that we keep hearing about 29 years ago since the last labour legislation hit the province here, any changes, and obviously how it was done then is substantially different than how it was done now with this government. I would suggest that it was previously done about 10 times better than this time.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Well, we've carried on successfully for a little while, so I would like to move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official record of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, say no. So ordered.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Statement by the Speaker

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. If I could just have your indulgence for a very special event that I know all of you look forward to, and I know I speak for all members when I say that one of the most enjoyable experiences that we have in this House is seeing the efforts, the courtesy, the professionalism, and dare I say the patience of the pages who serve this institution on a regular and very disciplined basis.

I would now ask that all of the pages who are here if they might, please, come to the dais in front. Many of them are not with us tonight, but I would like to read to you on their behalf a letter which has been written by the pages to the House. I know that the hon. Government House Leader may begin to cry when I read this, but I'm going to try not to, okay?

Dear Mr. Speaker,

Although the end of the Spring Sitting marks the halfway point of this Assembly's Third Session, for some of us the conclusion of today's sitting represents the end of our time on the Chamber floor. We have created everlasting memories while delivering bills, amendments, notes and even sharpening pencils for some of the Members.

10:10

I'm looking. I'm sure there is ample evidence of who that might be.

For this, we would like to express our sincerest gratitude, and for the incredible opportunity we have had to serve the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who have supported us throughout this memorable experience: the Sergeant-at-Arms for imparting on us his pearls

of wisdom and exceptional leadership; the Table Officers for their constant guidance and a breadth of knowledge; the office staff in 315, 412, and the Speaker's Office for demonstrating to us the true meaning of dedication to one's work; and, the Legislative Assembly Security Service members for their round-the-clock sense of humour. We would also like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Speaker, and all Members of the Legislative Assembly, without whom our role in the Chamber [simply] would not exist. It has been a great honour to facilitate each and every Member's service to the people of Alberta.

When we began serving the Members and Officers of Alberta's Assembly, none of us could have possibly imagined the impact that the Page Program would have on our lives. We are especially thankful for the amazing depth of knowledge we gained through our time here. Nevertheless, it is not just the broad understanding of the functions of Parliament that will stay with us; nay, it is the appreciation of the human side of our parliamentarians and their support staff. The Members and Officers of the Assembly stand as a source of inspiration to never cease striving for more than we thought previously possible.

As our time in the Chamber comes to an end, we look forward to giving up our "Best seat in the House" to the next generation of Pages, knowing that incredible experiences lie ahead for them. From our four chairs in the Chamber, we feel extremely privileged to have witnessed the making of decisions that will determine the future of our province. As we turn a new page and a new chapter in our lives, we will use the experiences and knowledge gained here, under this dome, to guide us in our future endeavours.

Farewell and don't forget us,

Kylie Kwok, Alyssa Bucyk, 28th and 29th Legislatures

Andriy Krugliak, Avery Roberge-Eadie, Caitlyn Brown,

Chelsea Parker, Christian Fotang, Claire Sandercock, Lauren

Barter, Lucille Bergmann, Moses Ndekezi . . .

He gave me a hard time about this last week.

. . . Olivia Adams, Rowan Ley, 29th Legislature.

I know that I speak for all of you. I would ask the Deputy Speaker if she might come forward and present to our head page a small token of our appreciation.

What she's really telling her: because the best people that are in the House today – we didn't have the official gift packaged and available because you're such an unpredictable group of people. But I told the head page that the new car would be delivered to her house in the morning.

Hon. members, I wonder if we might . . . [Standing ovation]

I think the demonstration of emotion by all of the members expresses nearly not enough of their appreciation of all the work that you have done. Thank you very, very much, and the very best. I suspect that many of you will be sitting in these rows very, very quickly.

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

(continued)

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 18

Child Protection and Accountability Act

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today, of course, to discuss in Committee of the Whole Bill 18, which is before the

House this evening. I think as we start to discuss Bill 18 tonight and begin to go through all the amendments that will come forward in an attempt to try to make this legislation better for the children of Alberta, it's important that we take a few moments to discuss the process that we have had to follow to get here, the process that has been started in order for us to get this legislation here because that is really what we should be comparing the legislation to, the lens that we should be looking at this bill through as we begin to discuss amendments.

I think it's important for all members of this House today to remember that the reason that we are debating this bill today, the reason that we have gone down this path over the last several months on the panel, that I sit on and that you sit on, Madam Chair, is because of a little girl, a four-year-old girl by the name of Serenity, who died. She died in the care of our province. She was sexually assaulted, she was beaten, and she was starved. When that came to light, people began to express concerns about Serenity's well-being, about the fact that the government had let her down, that the people around Serenity had let her down.

The Child and Youth Advocate carried out a review of Serenity's death. At the time we did not know Serenity's name, but the advocate did a review. An investigative journalist, Paula Simons, put a face and a name to the little girl that was identified in that report, Serenity. The public was outraged. Madam Chair, you were outraged. All of us in this Chamber were outraged, and we demanded answers.

Public outrage was renewed when it was discovered that the RCMP were missing key documents from this government that were needed for the criminal investigation into the death of Serenity. This government then responded to that outrage. After tremendous pressure from the public and tremendous pressure from the opposition the government responded finally and established the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. Now, I will say, Madam Chair, that the government was right. We needed to examine the child death review process and also take a second look at the system that let little Serenity down in the first place.

Phase 1 of the panel and Bill 18 are about the child death review process. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, as you know, this panel did not discuss Serenity's case specifically. In fact, it was stopped at all times by the NDP majority on that panel from being able to discuss the case of Serenity in any detail. Despite the fact that we witnessed in this Chamber repeatedly the minister and the Premier and the Deputy Premier rising and saying that the panel was discussing Serenity and was able to discuss Serenity, the fact of the matter is that that was not the case. That has been prevented. It's disappointing to the people that are on the panel. It is most definitely disappointing to Albertans, who trusted this government to bring forward the panel to actually deal with the case of Serenity. When most Albertans find out, when I tell them and when other people discuss with them that in no way have the panel members been allowed to talk about the case of Serenity and that, in fact, they have been stopped by the NDP majority on that panel, they are extremely disappointed.

In addition to that, I am very disappointed in how this government has twisted one of the panel's recommendations in particular. The panel brought forward several recommendations on the death review process, but one that's very important is that the panel recommended that a legislative committee be given the mandate to ensure accountability. Madam Chair, you know, because you sit on that panel with me, that one of the main issues that came to light often in the discussions of the panel and the people that presented to the panel was concern around transparency and accountability when it came to children in care.

The Auditor General, recognizing the concern, recommended that the Child and Youth Advocate have a committee for itself similar to how the Auditor General has the Public Accounts Committee. That recommendation was very clear from the Auditor General, and the recommendation to do that was very clear from the panel. However, this government instead decided to do an audit advisory committee for the advocate, which is not at all about accountability. Its job is not to follow up and ensure that the advocate's recommendations are being followed. Instead, the advisory committee gives the advocate feedback on its report before it is made public.

The number one concern, again, was accountability and transparency. The Auditor General identified it. The panel identified it. The experts on the panel identified it. This government, instead of taking the path of the recommendations that the panel came forward with, lowered the level of transparency, lowered the level of accountability, and decided to go with the status quo. For those who are concerned about what happened to Serenity and other children like her, that is extremely disappointing. It is extremely disappointing and shocking.

Now, here we are in Committee of the Whole, and I have to say that I'm not super optimistic about this bill because, quite frankly, Madam Chair, I don't think it goes far enough. It goes nowhere near what the recommendations of the panel were. It doesn't even touch nearly to the level of what the panel recommended. It goes nowhere near where the experts have suggested that we go. It goes nowhere near the recommendations that have come out of other panels in the past. In fact, Paula Simons, the lady who worked so hard doing investigative journalism to bring this to light to the people of Alberta, goes so far as to call it "a betrayal of public trust." This bill that is before us is a betrayal of public trust.

10:20

We need to ask ourselves: if this legislation had been in place five years ago, would it have prevented what happened in Serenity's case? Madam Chair, that is the question that we should be asking ourselves. That is what we set out to do six months ago. The fact that the NDP have chosen to block any attempt to be able to deal with the details of Serenity's case is troubling, and that is the lens through which we should look at this to decide if this government and the panel were able to accomplish what they started.

Madam Chair, the most appalling thing that I have learned through this process is this. Not one internal death review has been completed. Not one. Zero. It's shocking. This bill does not even deal with internal reviews. Recommendations dealing with internal reviews have been deferred again, something completely against the panel that you and I were a part of and a completely different direction by this government. Another betrayal of public trust.

Now, I hope that the government has given some serious consideration to our amendment, Madam Chair, that we will bring forward in Committee of the Whole. In fact, we sent those amendments to them well in advance in an effort to be able to work with them to attempt to make this legislation better for the people of Alberta. With that said, though, I do think that it is important that we remember, as we go through this debate, the lens of that poor little girl that brought us here, that little four-year-old girl who despite people calling for help for her, despite reports of sexual and physical abuse to her ended up starving to death under our watch, who is still not allowed to have been talked about despite the claims by the Premier, the Deputy Premier, and the Minister of Children's Services, who continue to rise in this House and say that. It's extremely troubling.

While I do hope that during Committee of the Whole, as we start here, we will be able to make that legislation better, I think it's

important that we also recognize from the start that this legislation does not go far enough, that it is a betrayal of public trust. It is incumbent on this government across from us to take steps now – we are going to give them an opportunity – to make this legislation at least a little better for the people of Alberta and that going forward they will actually use the panel and their ability as a government to finally fix the child intervention system and not continue to just provide lip service and try to sweep it under the rug.

With that, Madam Chair, I look forward to more discussion during Committee of the Whole on the bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise on Bill 18, the Child Protection and Accountability Act. It's one that's received some discussion. There are some good things in this bill, but I think there's also room where, if we worked together as a group and as a team, we can improve this bill. It's in that spirit that I would like to move an amendment with your permission. I'll wait for your word before I...

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, Child Protection and Accountability Act, be amended in section 1(14)(a) in the proposed section 21 by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) The Advocate must report in the Advocate's annual report under subsection (1) on the progress of the implementation of the Advocate's recommendations.

Now, Madam Chair, this amendment, I believe, is important. It doesn't really change the substance of the government's bill, with one exception. It requires an annual report on the progress of the advocate's recommendations. In other words, it's a way for the government to show faith, that they are taking the children in care issue seriously. It's an opportunity for the government to improve the accountability and the transparency of the efforts that all of us on all sides of this House want to make. As my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said ever so recently, when we serve these children well, we serve them well on all sides of the House, and when we fail these children, we fail these children on all sides of the House.

I'm hopeful that all members of the House will support this amendment. Again, it's an effort to strengthen the bill. It's an effort in a way to say to Albertans that children in care are that important, and we think that we want to report to Albertans on a regular basis and let them know how we are doing at improving the conditions of those children in care.

With that, I will listen to the debate, and I will respectfully ask all members of the House to support this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to speak to how wonderful it is to be here today with all of my colleagues in this House to talk about the bill that came from recommendations that were arrived at via consensus in an all-party panel that engaged in a way that, quite honestly, is historic, to really work together to address this long-standing, complex problem and to have a very open and transparent conversation in a way that had not happened previously.

Madam Chair, I'm thankful to the panel for all of the work that they did to come to these recommendations because, clearly, the child intervention system has been in need of change for a very long

time. We're proud of the work that we've done as a government and the work that we did prior to government in terms of advocating for this. It's certainly a wonderful day to work together with my colleagues to make this bill even better.

With that, in terms of the current amendment being presented, it is the current practice of the Child and Youth Advocate that he reports on recommendations in the annual report. However, I certainly support that he continue to do so and have no problems with mandating or requiring that to happen via legislation. I would be pleased to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good evening, everyone. It's always with sadness and regret that I rise to speak on this particular situation and to Bill 18, the Child Protection and Accountability Act. Why am I full of regret? Well, simply because of the road that we travelled to be here today and that every time that I think about my own children, these precious young men that I've had the privilege of raising, she crosses my mind. When I go into my pantry, that is chockfull of food, late at night to grab a snack or I let the dog out at 3 a.m., I think about that little sweetie pie, Serenity, padding across the floor in the middle of the night to get food because she was starving. Her picture and her story are discussed in our home all the time, and we try to honour her and the others' memories and the children that we as government are responsible for.

We're compelled to see and hear and experience this tragedy over and over again. Why? Because we must never forget the rape, abuse, terror, and starvation and the story of Serenity. We must never ever stop asking the question: who did this to her? Who is responsible?

Alberta's Child and Youth Advocate called for better safeguards after we lost Serenity in 2014. Madam Chair, I think that what is equally sad, for me anyway, is that we not only lost her in this tragic and painful and horrific death, but we lost her under mountains of paperwork. We lost her to incompetence and gaps in a broken system and finger pointing. When this case emerged publicly, none of us slept, I'm certain, knowing that we had shirked our responsibilities to this family and this child. We demanded information and clarification to try and understand how this case could have been so poorly handled. We kept on at the government day after day, question after question. Nothing.

10:30

Finally, in response to the appalling and horrible handling of Serenity's file, the government agreed to an all-party panel. Here we are at the end of phase 1, Bill 18 in hand, and we're here to debate the child death review process. Just let that roll around in your mind for a minute. The child death review process. Where are we with this? That's the billion dollar question. How is this little girl honoured? How is accountability honoured in this process when the panel members themselves, who've spent weeks and weeks and weeks at the table discussing how to protect our children, are not privy to all the information to legitimately help make decisions and are literally blocked by the government from asking questions?

Madam Chair, how does one attempt to find solutions when there are limitations to discussions of the very members tasked to finding

those solutions? I don't know about anybody else, but the vision of this little girl just doesn't leave. How does that work, exactly? I mean, the bill is a start, but constantly you look at these kinds of things, and you have to ask: what has the bill set out to accomplish? Where is the clarity? Within that clarity, how do we accomplish that? How do we make sure that Albertans understand that children in our care are going to be competently taken care of?

For example – and I'm repeating, and I apologize for that, but I think it's important – not one child death internal review has been finished to date, Madam Chair. Why? Why can nobody give us an answer about that? Why is there no clarity on the children who've passed under our watch and how that happened? How are we supposed to create legislation when we don't know from where the mistakes came? Who's being held accountable for that? I mean, legitimately we look at a lot of legislation in this House, but if we can't protect our children, then what is this for?

With respect to Serenity I want to know where the ball was dropped and who or what minister's or organization's mess-up led to this little girl's death. This isn't a finger pointing. We've been called "going on witch hunts," all sorts of things like that. Well, you can call it whatever you want. Call it whatever you want. That will in no way stop this side from every day digging in to find out what happened to her. When she was starving in the middle of the night, she would go across from where she lived and then be beaten for taking food. Don't you want to know who did this to her? I certainly do. There's no amount of blocking that can happen that will ever stop us from asking those questions over and over again. How did this happen?

Another important question, like with any piece of legislation: does the bill actually do what it's intended to do? Does it bring accountability, and is it going to protect the children? That is the name of the bill, isn't it?

I have to say that when the bill was brought forward, I was extremely grateful to see a piece of legislation that, obviously, had a lot of panel members in a nonpartisan way working together, but then to see that the legislation doesn't adequately reflect the title yet again? This is entirely different. This isn't an electricity bill. This is a bill about human beings. This isn't about fair and family-friendly environments. This is about children. Don't you think, Madam Chair, that the title should adequately reflect accountability and protecting children? I don't understand how that's being reflected in this bill.

So many of the panel recommendations have been deferred to the next phase, but if the panel members themselves are not privy to the information to inform them on how to envision this legislation, Madam Chair, how is the panel effective? The panel members are literally trying to help create legislation, basically feeling around in the dark, trying to figure out through nuance what the government is trying to achieve. What's the endgame, folks? The government succumbs to pressure from the opposition to have a panel to find out what happened and then goes forward to withhold information that could – and I think that this is the most frustrating part for me. What happens in this panel right now could actually determine a go-forward with respect to laws that could actually save children, potentially save children. It could go from being a death review to a review about potential things that could actually stop those deaths from occurring.

So what is being hidden? Why are there no consequences for the ministries that do not respond to the advocate's request? Why? How are you going to explain that to Albertans? Why is the panel being blocked from digging into a case so that the appalling mistakes that led to Serenity's death never happen again? What meaningful changes will come from this? There is nothing in this bill to show

that the work that was done here by many members in this House actually has followed through.

Now, I understand that there's another phase to this, and I respect the fact that legislation like this can't only happen in one chunk. In fact, I appreciate the fact that it's been broken up. I do. We've asked for that on other legislation. That's a very reasonable thing. But if this is the beginning to legislation that lacks clarity, how do you go forward? We're asking people on this side of the House and everywhere else to help make legislation while uninformed.

The point of the panel, in my understanding and based on the title, was to create accountability, to protect children, to create legislation that will inherently change the way we look at how a child is taken care of in government care, to create best practices – right? – I would assume. Now the advocate will rely on public pressure to force the government ministries to respond to the advocate or to take and implement the recommendations. What is mind boggling is that public inquiries, investigative reporting, or sheer luck may be the only way to reveal the truth.

There are fears that fewer fatality inquiries will be held because of this bill. How is that possible? How do we balance privacy and still be transparent? Well, here's an idea: let the panel discuss it with all of the relevant information so that together you can come up with solutions on how to proceed. From my understanding, solutions were put forward. Ideas were put forward. Questions were asked and not answered. How do we actually protect the children? That is the intended outcome of this panel, isn't it? Am I correct in understanding that?

Let's talk about some interesting gaps in Bill 18, Madam Chair, that seem to be built to help cover up some of the mistakes that have already been made. This is very disconcerting. It sounds a bit deceptive, doesn't it? Well, let's unpack that a little. The government, in its infinite wisdom, has given itself the ability to pause the investigation. Just in case you didn't know that, that's actually being done by the government, to pause the investigation. I'm telling you that if I had the privilege of being in government right now, I would be looking at the ministerial bench and saying: are you kidding me? This is when it's imperative for government to hold government accountable for their actions. Or do the members opposite just prefer to be guilty by association? Ask the questions, people. This is important.

To the members opposite: did you know that this little piece was added in? On top of that, what's worse is that that was not in the previous act. Why would you add in a loophole to cover up mistakes? This is actually a delay. This isn't even about actual time. This is about the effect that a delay can have on the ability of an advocate to do their job. A delay like this is actually an artificial limitation that has nothing to do with what's going on and certainly does not enhance this legislation. We are supposed to protect these children, Madam Chair. We're supposed to protect them, not be looking for loopholes to protect ourselves.

10:40

The panel's job was to come up with solutions and legislation to understand how we ended up here. If it hadn't been for the media release, where would this even be? Still buried somewhere. So we are given this absolutely amazing opportunity, really, if you think about it, that this horrible, tragic death could lead to legislation that may save another child from a similar situation, yet we give every opportunity to stop this legislation from being all that it could be. I don't understand. I'm a mother. I have a gazillion friends who are parents and people who are in all sorts of situations, and, without judgment, their children end up in all sorts of different situations for various things. If all of us in this House cannot honestly stand here and say that we can be responsible and make sure that that

legislation is there to protect those children, why are we here, Madam Chair? Why? What was the point?

The panel's job was to come up with solutions and legislation to understand how we ended up at the point with the deaths of these children in our care, not to cover them up. I can honestly say: how do you participate in something like that and walk away from this building knowing, ultimately, that you've created a loophole in your own legislation to stop the ability to reveal the truth? When a child is in government care and they are returned to their family, we must still make sure that those children are safe, and we have failed. So I ask the question again, Madam Chair. You were a part of this panel. Many people in this House were part of this panel. How do you look at these things; how does the government look at this information and honestly stand up and say, "We've done everything possible at this point to make sure that no other child will endure what Serenity went through"? We haven't done anything to make sure that that won't happen again because we haven't held anybody responsible.

This isn't about finger pointing or witch-hunting. Again, I really don't care what you want to call it, but until somebody is held responsible for this act, the perpetrators will continue to be able to get away with these things without consequences. Do you know who's going to take the responsibility for that? All of us.

I must say again that I would love to be able to understand how this legislation is actually going to enable us to do our jobs to make sure that this little girl, Serenity, is not only honoured but that the horrible things that she endured will not ever happen to another child in our care ever again.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to speak briefly on this. As a member of the child intervention panel I want to bring a little perspective. I just want to be very clear that I agree absolutely with the sentiment of the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and where she's coming from. I share her emotions and her, I know, legitimate desire to ensure that what happened to Serenity never happens again, that what we in this House do and what we do in that committee spurs real action and real change, and that we never allow that to happen ever again.

That is how we honour Serenity, and that's absolutely what I certainly intend to do. I hope that we get the facts about Serenity's case from the minister. I've written to her, as I know other members in the opposition have, and I hope at some point we will see those. I'm optimistic that we may in fact yet get a chance to see that information confidentially so we have the full information we need to do our job.

We do need to spur action, but I think we also need to be very careful about knee-jerk reactions. You know, we've been debating Bill 17, and one of our criticisms, I think, legitimately, of Bill 17 is that not enough consultation went into what the government did. One of the challenges and risks we take here by acting too quickly on Bill 18 and adding too much in is that we may in fact make changes without proper consultation. There's some risk there.

While I think that the government certainly should not be given a free pass and there are gaps and additional changes I'd like to see in the bill – and hopefully this evening we'll see some more amendments coming forward – I think we need to be careful to ensure that what we do does not jump ahead of the process. There is other legislation. The Child and Youth Advocate Act is under review by the Legislative Offices Committee. That's going to make some recommendations which I know will touch on some of the

things that – we want to be careful about anticipating that committee as well.

Of course, there needs to be accountability – of course, there does – in Serenity's case specifically and in other cases as well. But let's not fool ourselves into thinking anything other than – the horrible situation that Serenity found herself in and that other children in our province find themselves in is the end of a very long and tragic road that has its roots in colonialization, has its roots in residential schools, has its roots in poverty. Those are things that we as a society, as a community need to grapple with, but no single bill of this Legislature, unfortunately, as much as we'd like it to, can solve those problems overnight. We can take steps to make it better every day.

While I think that Bill 18 certainly has its shortcomings, again I will hope that some of the amendments that we see coming tonight will address the shortcomings, as the one amendment that has passed already this evening has done. I hope we have that opportunity, but let's be careful that we don't jump to conclusions. Let's allow the process to play itself out. I think that, Madam Chair, is how we will honour Serenity and ensure that this never happens again.

Thank you.

The Chair: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move an amendment. I have the appropriate number of copies. I'll just wait till you tell me I can start.

The Chair: This is amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment states that the legislative committee which receives the advocate's annual report will review it and report back to the Assembly within 90 days.

As you know, Madam Chair, one of the concerns that we continually saw on the panel was the fact that often stuff was not taking place for long periods of time. There were no clear timeline or accountability mechanisms. You know, one of the great examples is, of course, the fact that zero internal investigations have ever been done by the department.

Now, what the panel wanted was a committee like PAC, like the Public Accounts Committee. They wanted to have a PAC-like committee, the same thing the Auditor General wanted, that would follow up on the advocate's recommendations to improve the lives of children in the intervention system. Now, sadly, this bill does not give us that. This bill does not give us what the recommendations of the panel were. I know that the minister earlier this evening rose in this Chamber and said that it does, but – let's be clear – it does not. The fact is that this does not give us a PAC-like committee to work with the advocate. It does not do what the Auditor General's recommendation was. However, this measure is at least to encourage clarity and some more accountability by giving the committee a deadline to review the reports it receives from the advocate. A similar section, interestingly enough, is found in the Property Rights Advocate Act but only allows the committee 60 days.

A reminder that I would say to the government members of this House is that the advocate is concerned that nothing in this act before us right now requires the government to act. The advocate, the person the government is putting in charge of these reviews with this bill, is concerned that this act, that the government has brought here, does not compel it to act. In fact, Madam Chair, the bill simply just states that the government department must respond to his

recommendations. This amendment attempts to provide some clarity on that timeline, at least a little bit of accountability, and responsibility.

I encourage all members of the House to vote for it.

10:50

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to say once again that what happened with Serenity absolutely was a tragedy, but there have been many, many, many tragedies over the years. She's not the only one. There have been many children who have died while in care, over many decades, in this province. Certainly, there has been an indication for a very long time that we needed to make change.

Again, I'm very proud of our government for creating a Children's Services ministry, for investing in families, and I'm certainly proud of this legislation and proud to go forward. Certainly, the job of this House, unlike the justice system, is to protect children going forward, to craft legislation so that as we go forward, we can do a much better job of protecting Alberta's vulnerable children. Madam Chair, I think this legislation is an important step moving in that direction.

In regard to this current amendment, certainly I do feel that this provides some clarity in the legislation, and I would be happy to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 18? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on Bill 8.

Some Hon. Members: Bill 18.

Mr. McIver: Pardon me?

An Hon. Member: Eighteen.

Mr. McIver: Eighteen, yes. I left the "teen" off. Thank you for that correction, everybody. Gee, it's starting to be so helpful here, Madam Chair. I can hardly believe it. I would like, with your permission, to move an amendment, please.

The Chair: This is amendment A3.

Mr. McIver: May I proceed?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. Here's what the amendment says, that the Child Protection and Accountability Act be amended in section 1(8), in the proposed section 14.1, by adding the following after subsection (5):

(5.1) A person must not take any adverse employment action against another person because that other person, acting in good faith, provided information or records to the Advocate for the purposes of carrying out the Advocate's powers, duties and functions under this Act.

Madam Chair, what this amendment suggests that we do is that we protect people who protect children. That's what this says. This says that if somebody provides the office of the Child and Youth Advocate with information or documents in good faith that they believe will protect a child in care, they are protected. I think that's completely within the spirit of the act. I believe it's within the spirit of what the government's intentions are in the act. I believe that it should be viewed positively by every member of the House.

Without this, Madam Chair, I think – you know, if we can't get support for this, I think the rest of the act will be in some trouble because, of course, the act is intended to increase and improve the protection for children that are under the care of the government, which by extension is under the care of us in this Legislative Assembly. I think it's only logical. It's only right. To me it's an obvious thing to do to protect a worker or a citizen that helps the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to protect those very children.

With that, I don't think it takes a lot more explanation of this. I believe it's fairly straightforward. I hope that this meets with the approval and the support of the House, and I shall sit down and listen to the debate and comments that come forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. We'd like to thank the member for his thoughtful amendment, that clarifies and strengthens the legislation as it responds to the panel's recommendations, and on that note, we will be voting in favour.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Chair, I'd like to move an amendment. I have the appropriate number of copies.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment is simply to clarify what we hope is already the expectation of Bill 18. Bill 18 states, "The Advocate must report annually to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly." This amendment states that the Speaker must then table this report so that all members may review it. This measure encourages accountability and encourages follow-up on the recommendations contained within the advocate's report. I hope all members of the Assembly support it.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, having looked at the amendment, I'd like to thank the member opposite for the amendment. Once again, we would be happy to accept it in the spirit of the fact that this is very much legislation resulting from the panel's recommendations.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and to move another amendment to Bill 18. I'll try to get that number right the first time without all the help that I required last time around. Madam Chair, again, as I believe is the custom, we'll wait till you give me the go-ahead on this.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A5.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment that is being distributed is that the Child Protection and Accountability Act, Bill 18, be amended in section 1(3)(a), in the proposed section 9(0.1), by adding the following after clause (b):

(b.1) is the child of a child referred to in section 2(d).

Madam Chair, section 1(3) of the bill amends section 9 of the Child and Youth Advocate Act explicitly to include several types of people as a member of the family of the deceased child, but those sections of the CYA Act and the Family Law Act do not robustly address young mothers. This amendment proposes to add children of young mothers to the list of people that make up members of a child's family, essentially the children of children. Changes would need to be made in section 1(3)(a) of Bill 18. Calgary's child intervention system provides services for persons up to the age of 24. The intent of the panel with their recommendation was to investigate deaths of individuals who had received services within two years of death.

11:00

Now, Madam Chair, there are many young mothers in this province that, unfortunately, need the services of the child intervention system, and children of those young mothers are obviously family members. So if a young mother passes, that young mother's children should be eligible for the emotional and community supports like the rest of their family and to participate in their mother's death review process. Obviously, if they're of that age, by participate it would mean get the support due and eligible to family members as articulated in the government's bill, as I believe is intended in the government's drafting of the bill.

Making it explicit that the children of children, which is, of course, in the case of young mothers, ought to get the support due to other family members, to me at least, seems self-evident, that this is an extension of what's in the legislation. I don't know whether it's something the government overlooked or didn't think of. I certainly don't believe that the government left this out on purpose, and I'm sincerely hopeful that the government will consider this an improvement to the text that's in the bill now and an improvement to the care that will happen for the families of children in care when those unfortunate incidents crop up when a death occurs.

I recommend that members of the House support this, and I will sit down and listen to that debate and comments and hear what members of this Legislature have to say.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. We appreciate the spirit of this amendment. However, involving very young children in the child death review process is a very complex issue. The advocate already has a lot of discretion in terms of who to involve as well as

a very broad definition of family in the legislation, so at this point we're unable to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A5? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I'll just say to the minister that that's disappointing. I think Albertans listening to this debate either now or in the future will indeed be set back just a little bit by the government's refusal to provide services to the children of children in care; in other words, the children of very young mothers having the courtesies, the support, and the means of looking after those kids that are available to other family members under the act. I have to say that I'm disappointed heartily that the government, the minister, has just said that they will not extend that courtesy to the most vulnerable of Albertans, the most vulnerable of Albertans being, in many cases, newborn children who are, in the case of this amendment, the children of children that are in care.

I'm heartily disappointed and hopeful that in the next few minutes the government will see their way clear to supporting the most vulnerable of all Albertans.

The Chair: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Yeah. Thanks, Madam Chair. I rise in support of my colleague from Calgary-Hays' amendment. I am disappointed to hear the comments from the minister that, you know, she and her government will not take the steps to make sure that the children of children in care are also covered and put within this legislation. The minister indicated to the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays that it was complicated. Madam Chair, I would submit to you that most of the issues that we have been dealing with on this issue for the last several months are about as complicated as it gets. However, I don't think that we should shy away from something that's complicated when we are dealing with consequences that involve the loss of life sometimes of children that are in care.

The argument that it is complicated or that it's hard to do is something that I reject, you know, and I would encourage the minister to reconsider that argument and certainly everybody in this House to support the Member for Calgary-Hays' excellent amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. Quite often in my personal experience and in my professional experience as an MLA I've come across children of children in care in the system who absolutely need to have the protection that should be provided to them. I think this is a generational problem, and I'm very saddened to hear that the government will not be supporting an amendment like this. I think it's very short sighted. I absolutely believe that this will be a mistake, and I have a feeling that this will be something that will need to be brought back to the Legislature and amended at a different time and brought forward in another separate piece of legislation because I absolutely believe that this is an oversight.

This is a shame, and I urge all members of this House to reconsider and to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A5?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:06 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Pitt
Cooper	Hanson	Schneider
Cyr	Jean	Starke
Drysdale	Loewen	Strankman
Ellis	MacIntyre	Taylor
Fildebrandt	McIver	van Dijken
Gill	Nixon	Yao

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Hoffman	Notley
Carlier	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Jansen	Rosendahl
Ceci	Kazim	Sabir
Clark	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Coolahan	Larivee	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sigurdson
Dach	Loyola	Sucha
Dang	Luff	Sweet
Drever	Mason	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Woollard

Totals:	For – 21	Against – 42
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[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 18?

Mr. Nixon: Madam Chair, I'd like to move an amendment. I have the appropriate number of copies for the pages, and I will wait till you tell me I can proceed.

The Chair: This is amendment A6.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment clarifies that the court's role in dispute resolution when it comes to Bill 18 is to determine whether there is a reasonable basis for a stay of an investigation.

Now, Madam Chair, I hope and I think you hope that this is already the intent of the legislation. We think, though, that it's not clear and that clarification is worth while. Now under Bill 18 the only requirement for a stay of the advocate's investigation is that, in the opinion of a senior official or ADM, it "could reasonably be expected to interfere with... an ongoing law enforcement investigation" or prosecution. I would contend and argue that the court should be determining whether that opinion is reasonable or not.

We presume that the dispute resolution process is not there only to rule on procedural issues; for example, whether a written request was done properly or not. The default should be that these reviews are happening. The panel and, I think, Albertans expect that these reviews are happening. It should not be super easy to interfere with the advocate's important work. If there is to be a stay of an investigation, there had better be a good excuse as to why. Not only is it burdensome and unnecessary for the advocate to notify and involve all these people for reviews of this nature and for agencies – oh, I actually think the core point, given the time, is that it should not be the advocate's responsibility to prove that investigations

should not happen; it should be the people that are looking for the stay. And a judge should not only determine whether or not the appropriate procedures have been followed to apply for a stay but that there's a reasonable reason why that investigation is being delayed.

With that in mind, I would ask all members to vote for this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing forth this important amendment. I think it's important that we provide as much transparency for the advocate as possible, and this amendment is quite valuable just to clarify certain clauses within the legislation. I'd encourage all members of the House to support this important amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A6 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate this. I have an amendment prepared, and with your permission I shall put it forward.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A7.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, this amendment, I believe, is an important one. It's somewhat of a technical one, but I hope members will agree that it's an important one.

It reads like this, that the Child Protection and Accountability Act, Bill 18, be amended as follows. In the following provisions "or their designate" is added after "Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service": section 1(3)(b), in the proposed sections 9(6)(b) and 7(b); section 1(4), in the proposed sections 9.1(5)(b) and 6(b); and section 1(4), in the proposed section 9.2(1)(b).

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

In the following provisions "or their designate" is added after "Assistant Deputy Minister": section 1(3)(b), in the proposed sections 9(6)(b) and 7(b); in section 1(4), in the proposed section 9.1(5)(b) and (6)(b); and finally, in section 1(4), in the proposed sections 9.2(1)(b)(i) and (ii).

Now, Madam Chair, section 1(3)(b) of this bill enables the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Alberta Crown prosecution service...

11:30

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, good evening. It's getting awfully loud in here, and I'm having a hard time hearing the member read his amendment. If you could please just keep the volume down.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Chair. The amendment enables the assistant deputy minister responsible for the Alberta Crown prosecution service to tell the OCYA that reviewing a child death would or would not interfere with an ongoing prosecution. This

amendment to the proposed 9(6)(b) and the parallel sections would allow other designated individuals in that office to also provide information to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate about pausing and resuming investigations in the case where the assistant deputy minister is incapacitated or otherwise unavailable. I would hope members of the House would not want these important decisions on an investigation to be held up because the designated officer is unavailable and the authority is not there to designate someone else to do that in their absence.

For the same reason that we didn't want a single point where matters would be held up with the Labour Relations Board on Bill 17, we don't want to create a single point where the office of the Child and Youth Advocate review could be procedurally stalled if the assistant deputy minister becomes unavailable to update the OCYA on the status of cases. This enables the Crown prosecution service to designate other individuals to contact the OCYA other than the ADM. This, I believe, will strengthen the bill in that, again, it won't allow a couple of single points of failure to occur should two of the valuable members of the administration with the authority to provide this information be unavailable, for example, for things beyond their control: illness, family emergency, whatever it happens to be.

I hope the members of the government and other members of this House will see the value of not putting ourselves at risk of holding up the office of the Child and Youth Advocate from having important information and at risk of holding up important decisions about stopping or starting investigations. Of course, we want the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to go ahead, and for the people that have the knowledge and the authority to know when they might have to, in some cases, hold up a decision in order to not compromise an investigation, we don't want to be in a position where the person with the knowledge and the skill and the ability to do that is unavailable and no one else is designated to do that in their absence.

In that event, I don't believe that it changes the intention of the government's legislation at all, but I think it would be an important stopgap and fail-safe, and for that reason I would ask the members of this Legislature to support the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. The intention of this bill is to support reviews to proceed during police investigations whenever possible. That is why the bill requires a senior official from both police and the Department of Justice to contact the advocate when a stay is requested. Allowing only the assistant deputy minister to request a stay ensures that the responsibility is taken seriously and that stays are only requested when absolutely necessary. For that reason, this authority should not be delegated to a designate. This will ensure accountability for when these stays are requested. I know that accountability was important to the panel, and it is important to me.

Certainly, Madam Chair, should the assistant deputy minister be unavailable, there is always an acting assistant deputy minister who would be responsible in that particular case, and they would have all the authority to do so. For that reason, I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wish to move an amendment. I have the appropriate number of copies for the Sergeant-at-Arms' staff.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A8. Please go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. The panel, of which you, of course, are a member, wished to require the advocate to review all preventable deaths. You know, we recognize that it's difficult to define preventable, but by expanding the advocate's mandate to review all deaths of children receiving intervention service, this raises, quite frankly, some new concerns.

Remember, Madam Chair, that the advocate must notify the following during its reviews: any relevant government ministry, the members of the family, any relevant band, any relevant DFNA, any relevant community or culture group, any relevant law enforcement agency, the office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and Alberta Health Services. It also must involve many of these parties, and many of these are also required to hand over information and records for the investigation.

Madam Chair, what if, for example, a child who came into contact with the intervention system died tragically in a car accident or from leukemia? Not only would it be burdensome and unnecessary for the advocate to notify and involve all these people for reviews of this nature and for the agencies to subsequently turn over records, but it also might add stress to the grieving family members, worried about what that review means for them. This bill should be focused on holding our government accountable. Our concern is not with the advocate doing his or her job properly. This amendment does not prevent the advocate from doing anything or notifying people if the death is a medical death. It simply allows the advocate to use some discretion, and we would ask that the government support our amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A8? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, there's full recognition of the fact that this legislation does go beyond just preventable deaths. We were somewhat concerned that trying to define preventable deaths would be a challenge and, in fact, might exclude some cases in which there should be a review because there would be an opportunity to learn from that.

I'm so proud of the work we've done in expanding the scope to ensure that the deaths of all children in care certainly are investigated. We certainly agree that there are times when the advocate needs discretion. We'd like to thank the member for raising this important issue, and we would be happy to vote in favour of this amendment this evening.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A8?

[Motion on amendment A8 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other amendments, comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to move an amendment to Bill 18, and I have it ready.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be now referred to as A9. Please go ahead.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Chair. Now, A9 is an amendment that the Child Protection and Accountability Act be amended by adding “, Métis Settlement, indigenous community or organization” after “any relevant Band” in the following provisions: section 1(3)(b) in the proposed sections 9(8) and (9) and section 1(4) in the proposed sections 9.1(8) and (9).

Métis settlements should be included in the list of people and groups to be contacted when a child dies during an investigation. Madam Chair – you know this as part of the committee – we heard a lot from Métis groups, and in many cases they feel left out by the system as it is now. They feel disrespected, and they have legitimate reasons for needing to be in the loop when their children are negatively affected in the system.

11:40

Section 1(3)(b) of this bill lists several types of persons or entities that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate should contact during an investigation or review, including “any relevant Band.” Our amendment proposes to add relevant Métis settlements and other indigenous communities or organizations that are not self-described as bands to the list of indigenous resources to be consulted by the OCYA. This is to recognize that not all indigenous children in care are members of an Alberta band or members of an indigenous community defined in federal or provincial law.

This also addresses indigenous children who are supported in urban settings by indigenous organizations that are not bands. Indigenous children from other provinces in Alberta's child intervention system or living in urban communities without band affiliation or membership should not be disadvantaged by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate due to geography.

This improves the legislation by making it more inclusive, and of course it makes it stronger by making sure that we don't leave out different indigenous groups. Madam Chair, you and I know and several other people on all sides of this House know that indigenous children, depending on how you add the numbers, make up between 50 and 70 per cent of all the children in care, and this is making sure that we include them and their settlement or their originating group that may not be described as a band in communication so that they don't feel left out, so that they get the respect and the privileges of citizenship that other citizens of Alberta get.

For that reason, I believe that this amendment strengthens the bill, and I sincerely hope for the support of all sides of the House for that reason. I will now sit and listen to the debate and comment that shall come forth.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Before I respond to the amendment, I just want to take this moment to officially, in this Legislature, congratulate you on your engagement.

Now, Madam Chair, after that incredibly happy note, I just want to speak for a moment about the fact that, being the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, I actually have 12 First Nations and three Métis settlements in my riding, so I'm very familiar, having been a nurse there for almost 18 years, with the challenges faced by the indigenous people in both northern Alberta and right across this province. Certainly, there are tremendous barriers and issues for all indigenous people in this province, and we need to very seriously

move forward with strategies that improve the outcome for indigenous children in care.

Madam Chair, I have made a promise to the indigenous people of my riding and indigenous people right across this province that I will do so, and I am committed to moving forward on that promise because those children deserve better. I expect to move forward and make changes that will make that happen.

In regard to this amendment, given the uniqueness of First Nation service delivery the inclusion of DFNAs and bands was absolutely required. Indigenous advisers, based on the legislation, will provide advice on how to engage the appropriate communities as the advocate has been required to do so in the legislation. We have intentionally included Métis representation on that list to ensure that proper consideration is given to inclusion of Métis people, including the Métis settlements, but adding the blanket term “indigenous groups” is simply too broad.

Madam Chair, absolutely, the people of the Métis settlements, the children on Métis settlements deserve all the investigative review, but this is not just about geography. It's about service delivery and the uniqueness of service delivery with the First Nations. Given that the blanket term “indigenous groups” is too broad, we simply cannot support this amendment.

Once again, Madam Chair, congratulations.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I must express my disappointment, particularly after I heard that the minister promised the Métis settlements and the groups in her riding that they would be looked after. What we've heard in the committee is that there are a wider variety of indigenous groups than most people recognize and certainly a wider variety than has been traditionally recognized in the legislation. I think this is an opportunity where we could actually correct that shortfall. I'm disappointed that the government has chosen not to do that when we've heard over and over and over again that different indigenous groups feel disrespected, that they feel underserved, and that they feel ignored even though their children represent well over half of the kids in care and receiving services.

It would be a great disappointment if we don't receive support from the government on this amendment that, in my view, would seem completely in line with what the government has promised that they wanted to do and what we heard on the committee needed to be done.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A9?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A9 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:46 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Jean	Schneider
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Taylor
Gill	McIver	van Dijken
Gotfried	Nixon	Yao
Hunter		

11:50

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Nielsen
Babcock	Horne	Notley
Bilous	Jansen	Piquette
Carlier	Kazim	Renaud
Carson	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Ceci	Larivee	Sabir
Clark	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sigurdson
Dach	Mason	Sucha
Dang	McPherson	Turner
Gray	Miranda	Woollard

Totals: For – 16 Against – 36

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now on the original bill. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Your amendment will be referred to as A10. Please go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. It was made very, very clear by panel members and to panel members that more cultural sensitivity is necessary after a child in the intervention system dies. Our amendment is to ensure that we also have other nonindigenous culture experts available to advise the advocate.

The bill does have indigenous cultural experts to be able to advise the advocate. That was something that was important to the panel, and I'm happy to report, Madam Chair, that it's part of Bill 18, but the panel made it clear that they wanted to make sure that other cultural experts would be available for nonindigenous children that may have unfortunately passed away in the system. Indigenous families are disproportionately represented in the intervention system, but they do not account for all the children that are killed in care and do not account for all the families that are associated with children in care. The advocate should be prepared to consider the unique cultures of all child deaths it reviews, whether the child be indigenous, Somalian, Filipino, or Ukrainian.

I think it was clear that that's what the panel expected, and I would be disappointed to see the government vote against such a reasonable amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A10? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Absolutely, the panel wanted to ensure that reviews are conducted in a culturally appropriate way and paid special attention to the issues involving indigenous young people in care, so we've implemented the panel's recommendation by requiring the advocate to involve any relevant community or cultural group in his review, recognizing the diversity of cultures, religious identities, countries of origin, et cetera. This ensures that reviews are conducted in a culturally appropriate way while giving the advocate the flexibility to determine who best to engage on a case-by-case basis.

Madam Chair, we feel quite confident that we've met the intent of the panel in this measure and in the best way that respects the

flexibility required by the advocate. For that reason, I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A10?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment here, which I will furnish the copies for.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the amendment will be referred to as A11.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair, and congratulations on your engagement.

Madam Chair, this amendment moves that Bill 18, the Child Protection and Accountability Act, be amended in section 1(3)(b) in the proposed section 9 by adding the following after subsection (6). It would read:

(6.1) Notwithstanding subsection (6), the Advocate may, with the consent of a party providing a written request under subsection (6)(a) or (b), continue or resume any part of an investigation that does not interfere with or harm an ongoing law enforcement investigation or prosecution.

Of course, the intent here, Madam Chair, is that while we need to be – and I think we all support this on all sides of the House – sensitive when something untoward either happens or is being investigated to not interfere with the investigation, what's equally important is to not hold up the work of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate in those cases where there is no risk to the investigation. That's why it says "with the consent of a party providing a written request" under those sections. This is a matter of not having unnecessary delays.

As we all know, one of the reasons, one of the events, the tragic life and death of young Serenity, one of the big issues that is still before us now is that the investigation is either not complete or at least not made public. I think we should all be feeling the urgency of this amendment to make sure that not only in Serenity's case but in the case of all other children the investigations of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate don't hold up any police or other investigations. But, on the other hand, we need to take care that at every opportunity the investigation of the Child and Youth Advocate can go forward without unnecessary or undue delay. I think we should all support those investigations going forward without unnecessary or undue delay. Certainly, we've seen the tragic evidence and the painful evidence experienced by the families and loved ones of children that pass in care when delays similar to Serenity's and other ones happen.

For that reason, I sincerely hope all members of this House will see the value in this amendment and will choose to support it for the betterment of Alberta's children in care and those that love them.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A11? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, this legislation provides the opportunity and the requirement for the Child and

Youth Advocate and law enforcement to move forward with a renewed relationship in terms of communicating with one another and relating to one another. We certainly feel that in the vast majority of cases the advocate's work will be able to continue. The legislation already provides for cases that are too complicated for concurrent investigations in a number of ways. So we will be voting against this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members?

Mr. McIver: Well, Madam Chair, I'm disappointed in what I heard, in the minister's own words, that it'll be okay in "the vast majority of cases," when passing a simple amendment would get us past the vast majority of cases and perhaps get all cases done on time. Surely, that's worth adding a few words into the legislation. As a result, I sincerely hope that the minister, who promised only the vast majority of cases, will actually reach for that higher bar of all the cases and support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wish to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

This will be referred to as A12. Please proceed.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, Bill 18 is supposed to be a bill that was about accountability. [interjections] I know the Government House Leader wants to participate in the debate right now, but I do hope he'll wait his turn. I'd be interested to hear from him today.

12:00

This bill is supposed to be about accountability and strengthening the child death review process. In fact, the Premier and the minister have risen in this Assembly often and, you know, tried to say that that's what their process was with the panel, when the fact is that that's not what's taken place. Sadly, that's not what's taken place. The panel, despite this government's best efforts during this panel to derail and stop accountability and transparency, was able to get some solid recommendations out mainly because the external experts, who are excellent, Madam Chair, sided with the opposition and against the government members of the panel to be able to force those types of things forward. Sadly, despite solid recommendations around accountability and transparency this minister and this government disregarded the recommendations from the panel and from the external experts and chose to go with that.

The problem with the timelines of the death review process have been highlighted again and again during debate. This government, Madam Chair, has not yet completed one internal death review to date. The Premier, who is laughing right now, has not finished one internal death review debate, not one internal death review debate.

This amendment reverses the onus so that the person staying an investigation – the minister, Madam Chair, maybe should listen so

that she will be able to understand what the panel recommendations were because she continues to rise in this Assembly and say that she knows what they were and misrepresent the facts. That's not what the recommendations were. The recommendations were to have a transparent process. This amendment that I am bringing forward right now will reverse the onus so that the person staying an investigation into a child's death is required to renew the stay. Right now the bill requires the advocate to follow up with the person staying their investigation to ask permission to continue. If there is an important reason for an investigation to be stayed, the person will take the steps to renew the stay. It's that simple. We are already burdening the advocate – and the advocate is concerned about it – with new responsibilities, and this would alleviate a tremendous load.

The default should be that reviews happen. The default should be that reviews happen and that the behaviour of this NDP government cannot continue with zero investigations, the whitewash that they continue to do, putting things underneath the rug. Hiding it from the public cannot continue, and with this legislation they continue to do it. They continue to hide from their responsibility for the people of Alberta at a time where we're talking about the issue that kids were killed in our care. It's shameful, and if the government truly, truly wants to do it, they will at least take the small step despite the fact that they completely ignored all the recommendations from the panel and went ahead with their own process to hide it.

I see the minister laughing about it, but I can tell you that the external members and the other members of the panel are extremely disappointed in her behaviour. They are extremely disappointed in watching the minister and the Premier rise in this House and say that they followed the panel recommendations. They are extremely disappointed to watch them completely disregard the Auditor General's recommendations. They are extremely disappointed to see what Paula Simons calls a breach of public trust by this Premier and this government when it comes to kids in care. It is disappointing. They have had an opportunity to stand up, and they could do what is right once and for all. But, sadly, Madam Chair, I suspect they will continue to whitewash it, continue to sweep it under the rug. I can tell you that this side of the House won't put up with it.

Let's see if they will truly put their money where their mouth is and stand up for accountability and transparency. Instead, what they will continue to do is whitewash children being killed in care, stand up and misrepresent the facts to the people of Alberta, say that they're supporting the panel's recommendations when they clearly are not.

Mr. Clark: Madam Chair, as a member of the child intervention panel, as a member who sits on this side of the House, I profoundly and fundamentally disagree with my hon. colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. This is an incredibly challenging topic. It's getting very late at night here. I know emotions are running high, and I will imagine that the member's intentions only come from a good place.

As I talked about earlier, we've heard over and over and over again that consultation has not been adequate on Bill 17 and many other things this government has done, and I agree with that. The process that we're going through on the child intervention panel is a thorough, methodical consultative process. If we jump ahead by putting things into a bill now, we do exactly the opposite of what the Official Opposition constantly asks the government to do, and that's consult. Especially in an area that is this complex and this challenging, if we don't think very hard about ensuring we get things right, then it's going to make things worse, so I will certainly be voting against this amendment.

You know, look, I don't think this bill is perfect. I don't think the government has done a perfect job of this, but it is an incredibly challenging file that has many and various complexities. I'm also very sensitive and in tune to the role that we play in this Assembly in creating and contributing to a culture of fear, in particular for front-line service providers in areas that are incredibly challenging, that go far beyond anything I have the bravery to do. I could never do that job. I don't have the guts to do that. There's no way I do, so I have tremendous respect for the people who do that job.

That isn't to say that there isn't work to do, because there clearly is. What happened to Serenity happened, and it shouldn't have. I know this government doesn't want that to ever happen again. None of us do. I know they don't, but I believe the process we're going through here on the child intervention panel is a good process. I would ask and hope that the Official Opposition commits to allowing the process to play itself out and to trying not to let politics get in the way of that process.

There'll be plenty of times to have these loud and long debates. This is not the time for that. Let's let the process play itself out. Let's pass Bill 18. Let's make the system a little bit better today than it was yesterday, continue to make it a little bit better tomorrow than it is today, and that's what we can do. That's how we're going to help address and solve this issue. As much as it may make for sexy politics to be very up in arms about this, I don't think it's helpful at this stage. I really, genuinely don't.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you. I will disagree with the last member to speak. You know what? There's nothing sexy about kids dying in care. To hear any part of the debate described that way, frankly, is very disappointing.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has made a good point. You know what? Unfortunately, what he said is true. The minister and the Premier have stood up many times in this House and said that we were allowed on the committee, for example, to discuss the case of Serenity. That is, in fact, not true. [interjections]

Premier, if you disagree, stand up and disagree with me, but I've got the floor now. I'd love to hear your side, love to have you get to your feet, Premier. You're the highest-ranking person here. All of Alberta would love to hear your side of this, but the fact is that this committee has not been allowed to talk about Serenity. This committee has not been allowed to talk about the little girl that actually caused us to push the government to have this minister's panel. In fact, we pushed the government to have an all-party committee, which would have been better.

That's part of the reason why we've got so many amendments here, somewhere between 10 and 20, because the government chose to have a ministerial panel, which gave them the authority in this legislation to put many, many of the panel's recommendations into regulation in the Trust Me; We'll Get It Right Later section. Trust Me; We'll Get It Right Later is exactly the attitude that has gotten the past government in trouble, the attitude that's got this government in trouble, and the attitude that will get future governments in trouble until they get past that and they start discussing the most difficult issues publicly.

I'm sorry. I would say that there are good things in this bill, but there are also things that the minister will be allowed to and has given herself the authority, through this legislation, to sweep under the carpet. It's very much a shame. The children in care in

Alberta deserve better. They haven't gotten better, and that is truly sad.

To hear the Member for Calgary-Elbow stand up and really defend the half-hearted effort to be as transparent as possible by the government – I'm frankly disappointed. The member is, in my view, pandering to some group that I don't understand. It's surely not children in care that he's pandering to when he stands up in here. I'm very disappointed and sad because – you know what? – as much as there are good things in this legislation, enough good things to vote for it, as a friend of mine would say to the government: keep up the mediocre work.

12:10

The problem, Madam Chair, is that the government could have been great on this one. They could have been great, and they haven't reached that standard because they decided that that was too high a standard for them to meet.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A12?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A12 as proposed by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

[Motion on amendment A12 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will now be on the original bill, Bill 18. Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 18 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (continued)

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on Bill 17. All right. On Bill 17 there currently are no amendments. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to the bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I actually have an amendment to move, and with your permission I will put it forward and speak to it.

The Deputy Chair: Please go ahead, hon. member. This will now be referred to as A27.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment reads as such: that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended in section 31 in the proposed section 50, (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "consecutive" wherever it occurs and (b) by adding the following after subsection (1):

- (1.1) An employee and employer may agree that the employee may take any period of parental leave entitled under subsection (1) consecutively or in non-consecutive periods of at least 1 week.

Madam Chair, there are a number of ways in which the workplace is changing, but one of the most pronounced ways is that employees are looking for more flexibility in balancing their home lives and

their professional lives. This amendment that I'm bringing forward today is in recognition of that desire. Parental leave is an important recognition of the adjustment that parents of a new child need to make. Making sure that new parents have the ability to take some time and adjust to their new situation is crucial for the healthy development of the child and for the health of the new parent. But it's not always possible or desirable for a new parent to take one long, uninterrupted leave. For example, maybe two weeks after the baby is born, the grandparents are there to babysit, and that allows the parent on leave to come back to work for a week and check up on things, which is why I believe this amendment is important. The ability to take parental leave in nonconsecutive chunks would allow someone on a parental leave to balance new responsibilities with both their partner and their employer.

The other part of this amendment that I believe is important to highlight is that nonconsecutive leave would be dependent upon reaching an agreement between the employee and the employer. Most businesses are very understanding about the need of a new parent to spend time with their child or partner, but one concern we hear constantly from the business community is the need for stability and certainty. I believe that by making this nonconsecutive leave contingent on an agreement between employee and employer, we are doing a good job of eliminating surprises. You can never do that perfectly, but it would eliminate some of the surprises.

Therefore, I believe the amendment strikes a good balance between the ability of new parents to spend time with their newborn child and the concerns of the business community. I would therefore encourage all members of this House to support this amendment, which I believe improves the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you to the member for thinking about ways that we can make important life events like having children easier for Albertans. The flexibility that is often needed, especially at such a challenging time in new parents' lives: I appreciate the thought behind this.

But I've had the opportunity to stand and talk about one of the core philosophies when we were drafting Bill 17, which was alignment with the federal employment insurance leaves and making sure that we're providing to Albertans job protection when they're accessing that employment insurance system. By introducing this amendment, I think that, obviously, it would not be aligned. It leads to an interesting scenario where someone would be potentially collecting EI and then also working at the same time but only for a short period of time and then going back. This is not to say that nonconsecutive parental leave isn't potentially a good discussion, but I think we would need to make sure that what we were doing was in alignment with the federal employment insurance system. So for that core reason I will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A27 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 17, and I would like to propose an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A28. Please go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended as follows: section 138 is struck out, and section 141(b) is struck out.

Madam Chair, the ban on MERFs, or market enhancement recovery funds, found in section 138 in Bill 17: I propose that it get repealed. This amendment ensures that the ban on MERFs remains. MERFing is when unions use funds to unfairly help unionized contractors gain an advantage over non-unionized contractors when they bid for jobs.

If a business were to do this with a product, it's called dumping. Dumping causes trade disputes on a global scale. All we have to do is look at the softwood lumber case brought forward by the U.S. against Canada. The United States thinks that Canada is dumping wood into their market. We can't help being more efficient than the Americans with the softwood products, but we are. The Americans think our stumpage fees on Crown land are too low compared to their own private woodlot owners. We have won this case many, many, many times, and we'll win it again.

We have another case of tariffs being raised by Ottawa because they thought the Americans were dumping drywall into the Canadian market. Watch all those new homes get more expensive because of that tariff. But when the coal stops being burned and the fly ash is no longer produced, what is going to go into the cement and gypsum to make the drywall and the concrete?

Tariffs and barriers can have unintended consequences for fighting dumping. MERFing is the organized dumping of labour to get the contract. Now, it is beyond me why someone would want to bid on a job at a loss in order to keep another good Alberta company from getting the work only because that Alberta company that loses is not unionized, but I guess if their long game is to drive out the competition so that they can drive up their price in the future, then that's what they'll have to own. Now, some learned individuals insist that MERFing never worked as intended and that unions found alternative means to ensure that their unions got the job.

12:20

Nonetheless, we have rules of trade, and MERFing is a distortion of the economy, the marketplace, and has people playing by different rules. We need people to be playing by the same rules. This is why MERFing must remain banned. You know, it would be very similar to having a baseball game where you had an umpire that was not going to be a fair umpire. If the one team was looking to be able to play with a fair and open field and the umpire was – it didn't matter whether or not that team was able to play better than the other team. If the umpire wanted to rig the game, then that umpire would have the ability to do that. Obviously, if this was the case, people would call foul.

This is what's going on with this MERFing. We cannot allow international unions to come in with big pools of capital and MERFs to undercut the existing contractors just so they can decrease competition and drive up price. Even then, international unions might upset local, homegrown unions. It happened in Toronto when the international union came and shoved out the duly elected local union president at the Toronto Transit Commission. It went to court, and in short order the international union was told to move along. They had no jurisdiction, and the local president was re-established.

We have good labour laws. Let's allow this amendment to be adopted so we can keep it that way. Support the amendment. Support the ban on MERFs.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A28? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Alberta is the only jurisdiction with restrictions on market enhancement recovery funds. It harkens back to a past era that we have this ban at all. In fact, no MERFs have been formed since 2008, and it is time that we come into alignment with the rest of the country on this. So for these reasons, I will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A28?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A28 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:23 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Schneider
Clark	Jean	Starke
Cooper	Loewen	Strankman
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Taylor
Fildebrandt	McIver	van Dijken
Fraser	Nixon	Yao
Gill		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Nielsen
Babcock	Jansen	Notley
Bilous	Kazim	Piquette
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Carson	Larivee	Rosendahl
Ceci	Littlewood	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dach	Mason	Shepherd
Dang	McKittrick	Sigurdson
Drever	McPherson	Sucha
Feehan	Miller	Turner
Gray	Miranda	Woollard

Totals:	For – 22	Against – 39
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[Motion on amendment A28 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any other amendments? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to read an article here, found on unionfacts.com, and it's called Card Check Intimidation, Coercion, and Confusion.

An Hon. Member: Here we go again.

Mrs. Pitt: This is important. There are some good words that need to be heard in this room. I will proceed.

The claim of moral superiority is a favourite technique of union organizers when discussing coercion.

American Rights at Work . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I know it's late, and we're trying to stay awake, but I'm having an extremely hard time hearing everybody, so if we could please keep the volume down in the House and listen. Thank you.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair.

. . . a union-funded organization, makes this case: "While we polled workers on union and employer coercion, it's important to note that they aren't equivalent. Pro-union workers and union organizers attempt to make their case persuasively. But when the person who signs your paycheck calls you into his office and tells you he's against the union, that's an entirely different kind of influence."

The evidence tells a different story. A secret ballot prevents most ills, since no one knows how an employee will vote or voted, irrespective of signing a card. Conversely, a serious flaw in the public card check process is that it is inherently rife with the potential for intimidation by union officials.

In 1996, an employer presented evidence to the NLRB that "on the day before the election, a bargaining unit employee approached another employee and solicited her to sign a union authorization card. The card solicitor allegedly stated that the employee had better sign a card because if she did not, the Union would come and get her children and it would also slash her car tires."

"The modern record . . ." [interjections] Madam Chair, it's disheartening to hear that the government thinks it's funny that the union members – and the Member for Calgary-North West is laughing, thinks it's funny – would come and get her children and also slash her car tires. This threat being made by the union worker is in an article I'm reading.

12:30

I will continue.

The modern record is full of cases of intimidation. Former United Steelworkers organizer Richard Torres wrote in a February 2007 letter to the House Education and Labour Committee that he quit his job when a union official "asked me to threaten migrant workers by telling them they would be reported to federal immigration officials if they refused to sign check-off cards."

There's actually a similar tactic used by those who want to enter persons into human trafficking, labour trafficking.

An affidavit given to the NLRB described a New Jersey food service staff member's ordeal, where a union organizer visited her home and told her "I wouldn't have a job in Sept. if I didn't sign the card and that the Union would make sure that I was fired."

Mike Ivey, a Freightliner employee, gained attention when he fought organizing attempts by the United Auto Workers. According to a March 2007 story, Ivey said, "Some employees have had five or more harassing visits from these (United Auto Worker) organizers . . . The only way, it seems, to stop the badgering and pressure is to sign the card."

Peer pressure is a significant concern among employees who happen to be in the minority opinion, whether they support a union or not. Whereas a secret ballot protects these minorities, paid union staff and peers who support the union can pressure employees if their decision is public. A local of the United Food and Commercial Workers, for example, went so far as to institute

a bounty system that offered a three-tier “incentive plan” to pay employees per signature they collected from their colleagues.

Coercion is not the only problem inherent in card check campaigns. Equally troubling are stories of union organizers gaining signatures from employees who didn’t understand the documents they were signing.

In the famous *Gissel Packing* case in 1969, the Supreme Court stated:

We would be closing our eyes to obvious difficulties, of course, if we did not recognize that there have been [card solicitation] abuses, primarily arising out of misrepresentations by union organizers as to whether the effect of signing a card was to designate the union to represent the employee for collective bargaining purposes or merely to authorize it to seek an election to determine that issue.

A host of recent stories verify this time-tested theory.

In April 2007 the Service Employees International Union in Oregon was forced to reach a settlement with the NLRB in which the union agreed to discontinue card check organizing for six months. Their offense? SEIU Local 49 officials allegedly tricked employees into signing “information flyers” that they later counted as votes favouring unionization.

Interesting. Sounds familiar.

Perhaps not surprisingly, an NLRB regional official noted that the board had earlier reached a similar settlement with the same local.

The article, which I will table and I urge you to read, goes on in similar fashion.

There are many challenges here, to which I would like to move an amendment on behalf of my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I will pass this around, and I will read it. Mr. Cyr moves that Bill 17, Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 112 and substituting the following: section 33 is amended (a) by renumbering it as 33(1); (b) in subsection 1(a)(ii) by adding “, without undue influence,” after “certification was made”; and (c) by adding the following after subsection (1):

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), undue influence includes any practice intended to induce, mislead or compel a person to become a member of a trade union or to impede, prevent or otherwise interfere with the free exercise of that person’s decision to become a member of a trade union.

Thank you. I urge members to vote for this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment is referred to as A29.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment?

[Motion on amendment A29 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment here to move, if you will allow it, to Bill 17. It’s a good one. You’ll like it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be A30. Please go ahead.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I move that Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, be amended by striking out section 114 and substituting the following: 114 Section 34.1 is repealed and the following is substituted:

Certification representation vote

34.1 A person is not eligible to vote in a representation vote referred to in section 34(2)(d) in respect of the certification of a trade union as a bargaining agent unless all of the following apply:

- (a) the person was an employee of that employer for at least the 30-day period immediately preceding the date of the application for certification;
- (b) the person has not quit or abandoned the person’s employment between the date of the application for certification and the date of the vote;
- (c) the person meets any requirements with respect to eligibility to vote established in rules made by the Board pursuant to section 15(4)(a).

Madam Chair, this government made it known they would bring forward labour legislation, and I think everybody on this side of the House knew that their pals would receive a few concessions. Bringing back salting is one of the most obvious examples of this exact thing happening. For those who are not aware, salting is a tactic which involves sending someone to work for a particular company with the specific intent of organizing a union once they are hired but not intending to stay. The person has no intention of staying in the company long term and is simply there to advocate for the interests of a particular union.

Why should that person be allowed to have a say in whether or not that particular company decides to unionize? The employees of the company, of course, should be able to make that decision, the employees that have worked there and intend to work there. Someone that shows up just to organize and then leave probably shouldn’t have the same authority over this particular long-term decision as those people that want to stick around and work and support and make that company successful through their labour. If they want to vote to join a union, that’s their right. I support that right. It should be a secret ballot, but I support that right. But somebody there just clearly for the purpose to organize and leave is not part of the company and truly is not able to represent the will of the employees that are going to stick around. The only people that want these are those that want to organize.

Reimplementing salting by this NDP government does nothing to improve workers’ safety in Alberta. It does nothing to modernize workplace laws. It, in fact, takes them backwards. For a minister that wants to modernize the law, this takes it backwards, and it does nothing to help businesses stay competitive and keep paying employees. These are the stated goals of Bill 17, to help businesses stay competitive, and salting should not be part of this legislation. It doesn’t belong. This type of change is exactly what the government is trying to hide behind a number of positive changes being made to employment standards.

12:40

Allowing this process of salting to once again become the practice in Alberta is simply an act by this government to pay their friends. The only intent of salting is to make it easier and less fair to unionize in Alberta, plain and simple. Forming a union within a particular company changes the company, and employers that want to make that decision in the way that they bargain with their employer have the right to do so. Allowing people to roll in and have the same authority to make that decision as the employees that have been there working, the employees that intend to stay there working, is just plain wrong.

By voting for this amendment, you will ensure that the monumental decision to form a union or to not form a union is made by the actual employees of the company that intend to stick around, support the company, hopefully make a good living, and be part of that which they create, not by somebody that wants to create it and leave and not be any part of it. I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support this amendment. It truly is in the spirit of a fair and democratic process to unionize or not unionize businesses. This amendment would prevent people from coming in to make a change without showing responsibility for the change

before they make it and while not sticking around to be responsible for the change they want to make after it's made. I hope all members of this House will support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A30? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Alberta is the only jurisdiction that currently restricts this practice. Removing this . . .

An Hon. Member: Salting.

Ms Gray: Salting.

. . . restriction simply brings us in alignment with the rest of the country. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A30 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:42 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gill	Schneider
Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Starke
Clark	Hunter	Strankman
Cooper	Jean	Taylor
Drysdale	Loewen	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	McIver	Yao
Fraser	Nixon	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Notley
Babcock	Jansen	Piquette
Bilous	Kazim	Renaud
Carlier	Larivee	Rosendahl
Ceci	Littlewood	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dach	Mason	Shepherd
Dang	McKitrick	Sigurdson
Drever	McPherson	Sucha
Feehan	Miller	Turner
Gray	Miranda	Woollard
Hinkley	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 20	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment A30 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to introduce an amendment, and it is already at your table.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Just to notify everyone in the House that part C of this amendment has already been addressed and agreed to earlier this

evening on the subamendment to amendment A25. The official copy of the amendment will be corrected here at the table, but the rest of the amendment can be debated.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. With your permission may I read each section and just briefly describe it?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Ms Gray: These amendments are minor refinements that do not substantially change the proposals put forward in Bill 17. They're meant to add clarity and context to some sections of the bill based on review and feedback that we've received. When dealing with important provisions like overtime and essential services, we do want to be absolutely clear.

Part A. Section 62 is amended in the proposed section 95(2) by adding the following after clause (c):

(c.1) a notification of a cancellation referred to in section 23.1(7).

This relates to the new provisions regarding hours of work averaging agreements. The amendment clarifies that an appeal may be filed within 21 days if the employment standards director makes a decision to cancel an hours of work averaging agreement. This ensures affected parties have the proper path to appeal a decision in this area if they so choose, essentially just wanting to make sure that access to an appeal is available.

Part B. Section 92 is amended in the proposed section 137(1) by striking out "If" and substituting "Subject to the regulations, if." This as well as consequential amendments which were covered in part C, which has already been addressed, ensure that we have the flexibility around requirements for group termination notices. It's important that the government receives group termination notices within an appropriate time frame. They also deal with areas where group termination notices maybe should not apply. For example, there are often large construction projects where subcontractors are hired for a specific task for a specific amount of time. The expectation is generally agreed that the subcontractors' work concludes when the task for which they were hired is finished; therefore, no termination notice is required. This amendment will give us the ability to have those regulations granting those amendments.

12:50

Part D. Section 103 is amended by striking out clause (b)(iii) and substituting the following: (iii) in clause (l) (a) by adding "and includes a dependent contractor" after "wages" and (b) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (ii), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (iii), and by adding the following after subclause (iii).

(iv) a person employed on a farm or ranch who is a family member of the farm or ranch employer as determined under subsections (2) and (3).

Part D clarifies the definition of dependent contractors as it relates to the Labour Relations Code. As you've heard, we want to protect dependent contractors in this legislation and ensure that they have same rights as an employee. This amendment also ensures that we are not capturing family members on farms and ranches in our Employment Standards Code.

Part E. Section 129(a) is amended by striking out the proposed section 96(1)(j) and substituting the following:

(j) employers whose primary operations are the provision of medical laboratory diagnostic services under a contract with a regional health authority, other than employers that are professional corporations within the meaning of the Health Professions Act, all the employees of those employers.

Part E just ensures that physicians are excluded from the Labour Relations Code provisions as they are now. Physicians are currently

afforded protections through their professional body, and we're not looking to change that in Bill 17. That is why we refer to professional corporations within the meaning of the Health Professions Act.

Finally, Part F. Section 133 is struck out. Part F would alter a section of the bill that repealed appointment provisions for the Labour Relations Board dealing with bias. After further discussions with the board, we're satisfied that this section should be kept and not repealed.

These amendments are going to ensure understanding and proper interpretation of what we're trying to accomplish, and that is making sure that Albertans have fair and family-friendly workplaces. I hope all members will support these straightforward amendments.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, I think, Madam Chair. I'd like to seek some clarification from you if I might with respect to the amendment if presented in this form, with part C still included in the amendment, actually – and I appreciate your comments prior where you said that the rest of the amendment could be debated. But given that part C seems to have already been addressed and may or may not make this amendment in order or out of order as it's presented to us at – oh, I don't know – five to 1, which makes six relatively significant, some more significant than others, amendments to the legislation, perhaps you can provide some additional comment. Because I have an amendment that includes part C, which, if I understood your previous comments, is not in order. Is the amendment, in fact, in order or not?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you for asking the question, hon. member. The balance of the amendment is in order.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. I appreciate the fact that the balance of the amendment is in order. Can you provide clarification? Is part C out of order?

The Deputy Chair: Part C is not part of the amendment. It was already provided to Parliamentary Counsel for adjustment.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. I'm a little confused, then. If part C is not part of the amendment except that I'm holding a piece of paper that appears to be signed by Parliamentary Counsel that includes part C, I'm a little unclear as to exactly how this works.

The Deputy Chair: The official copy has been reflected to remove part C, that was already debated earlier, so I announced that prior to the debate. There is precedent in this House where we have been able to support members with their amendments and change them as requested.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to government amendments to Bill 17. We have before us a document that outlines a number of changes that the government is discovering after the fact need to be cleaned up.

I guess I would like to bring our attention to the fact that we are faced with an omnibus bill right at the end of session that the government has decided to try and rush through with limited consultation and put before us, where we have had, I believe, 30 amendments come forward with regard to shortfalls and with regard to other issues that have been identified within the bill that we feel

could have been addressed in a much more fulsome way through enhanced consultation over the summer.

We put a reasoned amendment forward for it to not be read a second time based on the lack of consultation that occurred, a period of 36 days, where only 27 working days were included in the actual consultation period. Then we see before us less than a month after that consultation is completed a document that's some 120 pages long, 124 pages of adjustments to the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code.

You know, as opposition members we play a critical role in being able to try and help this government identify shortfalls that stakeholders and Albertans bring to our attention with legislation that is brought forward. This is an important role that we have to be very cognizant of, and it's to be there as a sober second thought for the government, to ensure that they are looking at all different aspects of this bill.

Now we've got a government amendment that comes before us, you know, and we see in this amendment that many of these things could have been addressed in a very fulsome manner through work by committee or by consultation over the summer to come back with a bill that has been fine-tuned. Instead, when the bill was first introduced to us, we got a document that was very evident that it was at the last minute stapled together and thrown on our desks. I would suggest that this is a sign that the minister and the government have put forward a bill that was not complete in the first place.

I would like to highlight part F of the amendment, where all of a sudden one portion of this bill, section 133, is struck out. Now, the minister and the government saw fit to present section 133, where they propose that section 139 is repealed, so I guess section 139 stays. Not sure why or the reasoning behind that, but I would suggest that fulsome consultation and full discussion and understanding of why there was possibly a need to remove section 139 – and now we're finding out that, "Oh, no. That's maybe not what we want to do, so we'll leave section 139 in." Section 139:

Except in the case of a chair, no person shall be disqualified from acting as a member of an arbitration board or other body unless that member is directly affected by the difference or has been involved in an attempt to negotiate or settle the difference.

Now, there is maybe some explanation as to why we are returning to this, and possibly it's where we are getting into situations where you're going to continually be needing new chairs. I'm not exactly sure what that's regarding, but it would be good to have more clarification on that.

1:00

There are many times when we can have good legislation brought forward, and that's usually when it's done in proper time and with proper consultation. You know, the fact that we have these before us now is identifying that proper consultation did not take place with regard to Bill 17, and we could have been able to alleviate this difficulty if the time would have been taken to do it right in the first place.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A31? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. At 12:48 a.m. the government introduces two pages of amendments to a 124-page bill and expects those of us in the opposition to have researched and analyzed all of the implications of what could be far-reaching changes. We don't know; we have to take the minister at her word that these are minor refinements. How in the world do we know

that, when they've added words like "subject to the regulations"? Ah, we're just subject to the regulations. What regulations? Regulations are as wide ranging as it could possibly get, including changing the dependent contractor in certain aspects of the bill, with absolutely no idea what the implications of those are. That is remarkably disrespectful to the House.

I would challenge the hon. Premier on what she would have done, sitting in this spot in the Assembly, if the government of the day, the PC government, did the same thing to her. I can assure you that she wouldn't sit back quietly and say: well, I'm sure it's probably nothing; I'm sure it's just fine. This is not, I think, acceptable practice. It's not what Albertans would expect out of their government, but what it shows is the slipshod manner in which this bill was put together, slapped together at the last minute.

It is a massive change to incredibly complex legislation. Look at the size of this thing. Look at the size of this bill. You can't possibly expect anyone on the opposition side, let alone those of us standing here with precisely one researcher in the backroom, to have any concept of what this actually means.

So if anyone was thinking, prior to my comments on Bill 17, that I'm somehow in the pocket of government, hopefully after this you realize that there's not a chance that I am.

When you bring in these kinds of changes here at the last minute, should I just take you at your word? I mean, when you talk about regulation changes, the breadth of that is monumental. Section D: do I think it's a good idea for "a person employed on a farm or ranch who is a family member of the farm or ranch employer" to be excluded as a definition-dependent contractor? Probably. I don't know. I imagine I do, just on the surface of it. But I've just seen this. I've seen this document here for a few scant moments, and here we are at 1 o'clock in the morning trying to blast through a bill and get out of the House. Perhaps the government should have brought the amendment done exactly – here the Minister of Municipal Affairs has some things to say.

Perhaps this bill should have been treated like the Municipal Government Act was treated, where you introduce the bill, you spend some thoughtful time throughout the summer travelling the province and listening to people. That's what you do when you actually want people's input, when you actually want to hear what Albertans have to say. Then you come back in the fall, and you introduce a series of thoughtful amendments based on the feedback you received from the good people of the province of Alberta. Given the implications of Bill 17 on the economy of this province, on the people of this province I would expect no less from this government.

But what they do at 12:48 a.m. is drop two pages of amendments on our desks, confusing whether or not they're actually in order. I can only assume – given the expertise of our Parliamentary Counsel I will take their word that, in fact, these are in order. I'll take the chair at her word as well that they are in order.

But how in the world can we evaluate the implications of what these changes mean? The whole idea of these sorts of amendments, the whole reason why we have this Assembly is to thoughtfully debate amendments and changes to bills and hopefully make them better. But how in the world we can possibly do that when they're dropped in the wee hours of the morning is absolutely beyond me. It's shameful that the government would take this tack.

You know, I hope that all members recognize that I do strive for balance and reasonability in most things that I do in this House. This is unreasonable. It is absolutely unreasonable that the government has done this at the last moment. We'll try to get through it and try to figure out what the implications of it are, but it's one of the many reasons you'll find that I'm not going to be supporting this bill at third reading.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. What's before us really raises a whole raft of questions. Now, I understand that the little letters PP at the top corner are the same as a parliamentary stamp. I accept that. But the fact is that somehow what's good for the goose doesn't seem to be good for the gander here. I know that when opposition puts together an amendment, if something has to be changed, if Parliamentary Counsel wants us to change it, we have to go back, type it all again, and then get it stamped the way Parliamentary Counsel wants it. We don't get to scratch out this and assume it's scratched out there.

An Hon. Member: Welcome to the opposition.

Mr. McIver: Yes. Welcome to the opposition. Well said.

Really, I think the more pertinent point for those in TV land that are still up, both of those Albertans that can't sleep and found themselves by accident on this channel or on this Internet page, will now realize, if they've been watching, that the question that we've asked the minister for weeks, "Have you consulted with Albertans?" – and the minister said yes – was actually proven not to be true. The minister said in her opening comments and since the bill has been in the public for the last week – these are changes that members of the public gave to the minister because they wanted change when the public finally got to see the bill a week ago, not six or eight weeks ago like the minister said. A week ago. The minister claiming that this was out for weeks, that everybody saw it is absolutely not true, and she's proven it. She's admitted it. She's made it obvious right here. It's absolutely not true. There's no way it can be true, and she's essentially said it.

When the public finally could see it, they come up with a bunch of changes. She would have the House believe from her questions in question period week after week from all the opposition that everybody's had weeks to see this.

Now, I was pretty suspicious of this all the way along, but I can tell you what: I was more suspicious when we got to the embargoed preview of the bill a couple of weeks ago, when Andy Sims, who is a fantastic person, one of the greatest labour experts in Alberta if not the greatest one, which the government trotted out as being proud of having Mr. Sims involved – and you know what? I would be proud to have Mr. Sims involved, too. When I was labour minister, he used to work with me, and he's a fine man, one of the best people in Alberta on labour legislation. But you know what he did when we were getting our advancer on the bill, Madam Chair? He distanced himself from this legislation in a serious way. He made it very clear that he never wrote this legislation. He made it very clear that in every section he laid out to the government what all the choices were in a menu form, and the government picked from the menu. Mr. Sims, the man that I trust, the man the government was bragging about having in their corner, distanced himself from this piece of legislation in a very big way.

We can see why now: because the government didn't share it with the public, because the government didn't take the best advice that they had. They got the best advice in Alberta, and all they did was have him lay out a menu which they picked from, and now we don't know which sections Mr. Sims would agree with and which ones he didn't. But I can tell you what: Mr. Sims said to us that he is taking no responsibility for this other than laying out the menu and the government picked. So we don't know whether the government picked the good, the bad, or the ugly in each section for the choices. I'm sure there are a couple of cases where the government might have picked the good, but it's pretty obvious

now that they picked some bad and some ugly also. That's pretty obvious from the legislation.

Madam Chair, what we have here is a government that couldn't organize a two-car parade. They are the gang that cannot shoot straight under any circumstances, and now they're caught red-handed with their pants down, talking in the corner, trying to sort out the deep, deep hole they've dug for themselves in front of the TV cameras. No one's watching tonight, but it's in *Hansard*, and you'll be able to see the replay of it to see what a mess they made of this legislation, that's going to affect every worker in Alberta. This gang couldn't get anything right if their lives depended upon it. The sad thing is that Albertans' lives depend upon it, and this government is screwing it up big time.

1:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

I will call the question on amendment A31, as proposed by the Minister of Labour.

[Motion on amendment A31 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to provide the government one more opportunity to move an amendment at the last minute before this bill moves out of committee.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Well, Madam Chair, the government pushed this thing forward after basically admitting that everything that they said was true wasn't, the fact that they had consulted with Albertans. They did that.

You know what? There was another clue, too, when the government brought a poor woman here whose son had cancer and she'd taken time off work and lost her job. That's not fair, and fixing that is a good thing in this legislation. But the fact that the government hid behind this poor woman all this other stuff that's in this bill that's bad is shameful. It's shameful to hide behind this poor person, that actually needs your support – to hide a bunch of negative legislation is despicable. The whole world knows it now. It's just a shame that they have done that.

You know what? [interjections] I love that the Health minister – I'd like to see her get on her feet and take the microphone if she has something to say. You know, you've got lots to say, but you don't have the microphone. I'd love to yield the floor and let you speak because your government has made a mess, Minister . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'm speaking. Member for Calgary-Hays, please. Through the chair when it's your turn to speak, both sides. Enough, please.

If we could please move forward on the amendments and/or on the debate in question. Does anybody have anything they would like to speak on in regard to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question. All members, as you will remember, there was a request to be able to divide the bill into two separate votes. I will call the question on part 1, and then I will call the question on part 2.

[The remaining clauses of part 1 of Bill 17 agreed to]

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of part 2 of Bill 17 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:14 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Nielsen
Babcock	Jansen	Notley
Bilous	Kazim	Piquette
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Ceci	Larivee	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	Mason	Shepherd
Drever	McKittrick	Sigurdson
Feehan	McPherson	Sucha
Gray	Miller	Turner
Hinkley	Miranda	Woollard

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Schneider
Clark	Jean	Starke
Cooper	Loewen	Strankman
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Taylor
Fildebrandt	McIver	van Dijken
Fraser	Nixon	Yao
Gill		

Totals: For – 39 Against – 22

[The remaining clauses of part 2 of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

1:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 17, Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 18

Child Protection and Accountability Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I would request the unanimous consent of the House for one-minute bells for the rest of the evening.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 18, the Child Protection and Accountability Act.

This legislation would improve the way that child death reviews are conducted in Alberta, make child protection more transparent and accountable, and help build a stronger, better child intervention system. When a child receiving services dies, Albertans expect our system to take a hard look at what may have gone wrong, implement changes where needed, and prevent similar deaths from happening in the future.

This legislation is about Serenity, but it is also about children across this province who receive services from the province. We owe those children and their families a stronger, better system. We owe them a system that responds quickly to tragedies when they happen and learns from what went wrong to ensure that we don't make the same mistake twice.

We all came together in this Legislature, realizing that we needed to move forward on this quickly. I want to thank the all-party panel for their work and thank the opposition for working with me to strengthen this bill in the House today. We're not finished. There is more to be done on critical issues in phase 2, issues like historical trauma, poverty, and resourcing of the system. But this is a start that I'm proud to make, a step in the right direction, one that I hope my colleagues across the aisle can support.

It makes the Child and Youth Advocate the single authority for reviewing these deaths and ensures that government responds to those recommendations and that Albertans can hold us to those changes. It ensures that agencies that have information about a case are required to share that information with the advocate to help inform his review. All of these issues were highlighted in the tragic case of Serenity last year, and I'm proud of the steps this bill takes to address the issues we saw in that heartbreaking case.

I'm committed to making the change that needs to happen going forward, and I look forward to continuing to work to make things better for children in our province. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to third reading?
The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today on third reading to say that the opposition will support this bill, with the caveat, though, that this bill is not the end but the start.

It was very disappointing to watch the minister rise just now and again present that this bill in any way deals with the facts around Serenity's case or that her panel deals with the facts around Serenity's case when, in fact, those are just not the facts of the situation, Madam Speaker. It's disappointing that the minister continues to do that and that the Premier continues to misrepresent the facts of this panel to the people of Alberta.

Specifically, this bill that we are talking about in regard to third reading does not go far enough, nor does it have enough teeth to deal with the serious issues that we've been talking about. I have clearly stated my main concerns with this bill. I am not the only one who has stated concerns with this bill. External experts that the government brought into the situation have stated their concerns with the bill. The Child and Youth Advocate, who will now be in charge of the issues associated with this bill, has stated serious concerns with the bill. The media, including Paula Simons, whose great work brought forward the issue of Serenity to the public, has stated concerns with the bill, going so far as to call it a betrayal of the public trust.

For the minister to rise in this House with that kind of a review from people who have worked extremely hard on this file going so far as to say that the legislation she has brought forward is a betrayal of public trust, does not acknowledge the serious holes that this minister has left behind – for her to rise in this House and try to take a victory lap, particularly around the issue of Serenity, an issue she has not dealt with at all with this bill, is absolutely shameful. Not one little piece of that issue has been dealt with in this bill, and to attempt to take a victory lap on that is shameful, Madam Speaker.

That being said, I do want to thank the government and the minister for working with us on some of our amendments. They did not work with us on several important amendments, including protection of cultural issues inside the death review process, something that was very important to many people that presented to the panel and to panel members. It is extremely disappointing for myself and, I know, for many people to see the minister and this government go out of their way to prevent the opposition from doing what people wanted in regard to cultural issues, to protect people's culture when dealing with a horrendous situation, the death of a child in the care of the government. I implore members of this House, Madam Speaker, to not pat themselves on the back, as we just watched this minister do, and to not think for a minute that this issue has been dealt with.

You know, Madam Speaker, I keep a picture of my 10-year-old daughter on all my desks: in my constituency, in the Chamber, and in Edmonton. When I look at her, I feel very grateful that she's been able to grow up in a place where she's safe and with a mom and dad who love her. I love her very much.

Then I think about poor little Serenity, who was raped, murdered, starved to death. People reported concerns with what was happening with Serenity. Nothing happened. Nobody came to help her, and in the end she suffered some extreme consequences. As a result of that, the public, the opposition, and many people raised concerns. In the end, we had to push the government to do the right thing, and we got a panel. Since then we've watched this minister right there stand in this Assembly over and over and claim that the panel is dealing with the Serenity issue when she knows without a doubt that that is not true. It's shameful that that continues to happen. It's totally unacceptable.

In addition to that, the fact that the advocate cannot publish the real names of children is one issue that definitely needs to be discussed again. The issue around the publication ban has been blocked by this minister at the panel and by her NDP colleagues on the panel. In fact, they went so far, Madam Speaker, as you know because you were in the room, to attempt to make the panel vote and deal with that issue with 45 minutes' warning and said that it had to be done. The only reason that we were able to stop that is because the external experts that the minister put on the panel sided with the opposition against the government's attempt to whitewash that issue. That's got to be dealt with.

One of the recommendations that was deferred is that the department's internal investigations must be completed within one

year. What we found when we went through this process, and you were on the panel, Madam Speaker, so you know, is that zero – zero – internal investigations have been done, including for Serenity. Think about that. Despite this government repeatedly standing up and trying to assure Albertans that they're doing something, they have completed zero investigations.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The panel did put in a recommendation to make sure that internal investigations would be complete. This government has deferred that. Under this Premier this NDP government and this minister have deferred that and, again, went out of their way to prevent accountability and transparency when it comes to children that have been killed while in the care of the government. To date not one internal review has been completed. That is outrageous, and it's completely unacceptable.

Furthermore, the government has acknowledged that many of the panel's recommendations are not changes that happen through legislation. For example, the panel highlighted a need for the ministry to make sure that it has articulated a mechanism to share recommendations with front-line service delivery staff. The government says that Children's Services is addressing that through policy and practice changes. The opposition wants to be told what these changes are so we know that indeed these recommendations have been addressed.

1:30

The child intervention panel, Mr. Speaker, is doing some good work. The panel finishes its meetings in July. Similar panels and round-tables have come and gone, and despite it being the desire of the panel, we still do not have a legislative committee with a mandate focused on fixing the cracks in our child intervention system. This minister with her bill and this government disregarded the panel's recommendations, disregarded the Auditor General's recommendations, continued with their status quo of hiding things from the people of Alberta, of hiding things when it comes to children that have been killed in their care, and of not taking proper or adequate steps to make sure it doesn't happen again, a complete and utter whitewash. It is not a PAC-like committee. It is not what the Auditor General recommended. Let us be very clear on that.

The opposition will do what it can to see improvements in the system and hold the government departments accountable, but the actual government is in a much better position to do this, and if it had listened to the recommendations from the panel, it would have been able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, this legislation came as a result of Serenity. It came as a result of a young girl that was killed in the care of the government. It came as a result of a young girl, where the abuse to that girl, who lost her life, was reported, and nobody came to help that little girl. When that came to light, this government, who was in power when it came to light, did nothing to hold the people accountable for it. In fact, they messed up, and they didn't even get the proper documentation to the RCMP to make sure that the criminal investigation could happen properly. It took the work of this opposition, and it took the work of the media to make them do the right thing and call a panel, and it will continue to take the work of the opposition and the media to make them actually finally do the right thing with this panel instead of standing up and saying that they're doing the right thing when they're not.

We will continue to hold them to account. Mr. Speaker, I will continue to rise in this House. I will continue to rise in this House and speak about this very important issue on behalf of my daughter, on behalf of the children in care in Alberta, on behalf of Albertans. But, most importantly, I will continue to rise in the House and bring

it up on behalf of Serenity, who cannot speak for herself, on behalf of Serenity's mom, on behalf of Serenity's family, who cannot speak for themselves.

I will continue to stand up through you, Mr. Speaker, and call the minister out for not doing her job all the way, for bringing halfway legislation to this Assembly at a time when she could have brought full-way legislation to this Assembly, for not completing the Auditor General's recommendations, and for continuing to stand up and support her government in misleading the good people of Alberta about their behaviour, in misleading the good people of Alberta by saying that they're actually addressing an issue, saying it repeatedly in question period and repeatedly during this bill debate. They have taken us through a panel process where this minister and this government have continued to block the Serenity issue from finally being dealt with.

So while we will support this legislation because there is some good stuff in it, let us be very, very clear. It does not go far enough. The minister knows it does not go far enough, and until the minister will stand up and actually do her job on behalf of the children of Alberta, we will have to continue to push forward this agenda to make sure that there will finally be a change in our system, to make sure that another little girl like Serenity cannot be starved, beaten, and raped until she is killed. That is her responsibility, and if she will not do it, we will do it for her, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 18? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to Bill 18. As my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said, this bill is worth supporting. But this bill should be an A plus, and it's about a C or a C minus, and that is a shame. The minister, the government, the Premier settled for mediocre when they could have had great. The difference wouldn't have cost them any more money. It wouldn't have been any more effort. They just didn't have the courage to be held accountable, and that is a shame.

I guess we shouldn't be surprised because that's how this started. Let's be clear. This started because of Serenity. Let's be clear. Serenity died on the previous government's watch, which I was a part of. We didn't get that right, and this government hasn't got that right. The only thing I will say different is that this government has not yet admitted that they haven't gotten it right. That truly is a shame, and that has stopped them from doing the best job they could do because – you know what? – the first step is admitting that you've got a problem, and they haven't admitted that they have a problem.

But they did succumb to some pressure finally, starting with Paula Simons with the *Edmonton Journal* and with other media and with the opposition pressuring them day after day and not getting honest answers here on the questions that we asked. Nonetheless, the pressure was there.

You know what? If the government had taken our advice, they could have been heroes. They really wasted an opportunity here. Had they listened to the opposition and called an all-party committee, we could've been more in control of it instead of just on the minister's schedule, could've had open conversations about what happened to Serenity, and could've had open conversations about why the other children are still in the house where Serenity used to be. We could've had open conversations about why charges haven't been pressed and what was done wrong and what needs to be done right in the future. We haven't even been allowed to address the issue that brought us to this point because the minister made a choice, with the Premier's permission presumably, to put this in a place where she could sweep the details under the carpet instead of talking about it publicly.

Yes, government members, you should hang your heads because your minister has let you down. She has let us down. She has let children in care down. She's done some good. She just hasn't done half of what she could have done, and that, Mr. Speaker, is truly, truly a shame.

Again, the history of it is the fact that the government was badgered, taunted, pressured into finally firing the one minister, thank goodness, and hiring another minister that was supposed to do better. Probably, what that minister is doing is still better than the one that got fired, but the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the job is not up to what it should have been.

The fact is that some of the issues that brought us here – the issue of Serenity hasn't been talked about. The issue of freedom of information and protection of privacy hasn't been fully dealt with. Again, as has been said, currently the media can publish the name of a child that dies in care but the office of the Child and Youth Advocate cannot in some cases. You know what? We got advice. We got advice from an Edmonton police chief that said that there are changes that he would like to see made to the FOIP legislation. Those changes sadly went missing, so for the minister to stand up and say, "We did everything" or for the Premier to say, "We did everything that this committee recommended" is patently not true. Absolutely, flat not true. It's a terrible shame. It's a terrible shame.

Even some of the amendments: it's kind of unbelievable to me that some of them got turned down tonight. Here are the themes that we heard. Mr. Speaker, you're on the committee with me, so you know this. You heard the same things at the same time in the same place that I heard them. We heard from First Nations people, Métis people, and other indigenous people that they are being treated like second-class citizens. They don't get the information they need, they don't have the same resources, and the system is full of indigenous kids, about 2 out of 3. Some of the amendments that were put forward tonight to make sure that indigenous children and their families get better treatment, more like what everybody else gets, the government turned down.

To be clear, I am grateful that the government did pass some of our amendments. I am very grateful for that. That actually improved the legislation. The fact is that had they listened to us in the beginning, had they had an all-party committee, had they taken our advice, had they allowed the ministerial panel to talk about Serenity, had they dealt with the FOIP issue, had they made the changes to bring aboriginal, Métis, and other indigenous people up to the same standards that other people have, this legislation could have been great. You know what? I suppose there are places – we've got members sleeping over there – where the government can settle for average or mediocre. Children in care is one of those places where they ought not to have settled for mediocre, yet they did.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're not done. The committee will go on. All members of the committee, I'm sure, the ones on the government side will continue to do their best. I sincerely hope we get better support from this Premier and this minister in the future than we've gotten so far. I can tell you, as my colleague just said, that the government can feel like they made an improvement, and I will agree with that, which is why I and we will support this legislation, because it has made things better. The fact is that they only went half as far as they easily could have, and that is a crying shame.

1:40

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 18?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Children's Services to close debate.

Ms Larivee: Okay. Well, once again thank you very much to the panel for the work in creating the recommendations that allowed us to bring forward this legislation. I'm looking forward to moving forward with this legislation, should it pass, and improving life for children right across this province.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

Bill 17

Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act.

This bill contains a number of measures that are going to improve the lives of Albertans and align our legislation with other jurisdictions because over the course of 30 years it has gotten greatly out of line with other Canadian jurisdictions. I'm proud to move third reading. I think that this bill will move Alberta forward significantly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 17? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening, in the early hours of the morning maybe, to speak to third reading of Bill 17, the so-called fair and family-friendly workplace amendment act. At a time when our province is experiencing significant uncertainty and many Albertans find themselves without a job, this government has decided to add even another level of uncertainty. By adding significant changes to the Labour Relations Code, we have opened up, possibly, another signal to send to the marketplace that Alberta is moving down a road of uncertainty.

Alberta has suffered a severe recession. Tens of thousands of Albertans have lost their jobs. These people need a government to do no more harm, yet at a time when Albertans need their government to focus on creating an environment conducive to investment and job creation, this government's priority is to pander to their union friends. This is quite concerning, Mr. Speaker. This government is sending signals to the marketplace that are not helping. Bill 17 is not helping to encourage investment needed to bring back well-paying jobs.

This government should be ashamed of itself for ramming through an omnibus bill at the very end of session. Look how late we are in the day. We're discussing this bill because this government was scrambling. This government was scrambling to put together a huge bill after so little consultation. Even at the end of our work in Committee of the Whole this government had to bring forward last-minute amendments to change the bill because they recognize that they haven't got it right, yet we could have taken the time. We moved many amendments to take the time to do it right.

This government knows that many elements of this bill are specifically designed to serve its union bosses and are not in the best interests of everyday Albertans. The government's strategy was to take away public attention from the changes to the Labour Relations Code. Continually the minister would highlight and focus on employment standards parts of the legislation but never highlight what was being done in our Labour Relations Code, hoping that Albertans would not notice. Mr. Speaker, Albertans have noticed,

and I do believe that they will recognize that this government has been working more for their union friends than for the everyday Albertans that are just – all they want is an environment where they can go and find a job. This government's main priority appears to not be to look after vulnerable workers at all; it is to enable their union bosses to expand their reach and increase the market share of the province that is unionized.

One way to do this is to get rid of the secret ballot vote to certify a union, a democratic right, a pillar of a democratic society to protect the rights of all individuals to a secret ballot to be able to not be put into a situation of coercion. Union activists will now be able to coerce 65 per cent of a workplace's employees into signing union cards, and then their job is done. It doesn't even matter how many employees are in that business.

Opposition members brought forward some 30 amendments. As I said previously, even the government had to bring forward amendments to try and improve this bill.

We put forth an amendment so that the government can rethink its removal of the secret ballot. The government had an opportunity to acknowledge that secret ballots are a fundamental aspect of democracy that serves an important purpose, but this government voted down our amendment. This is not compassionate and is inconsiderate to the vulnerable workers who would sign cards knowing that they could say in a secret ballot how they really feel when they cast their secret ballot in a subsequent vote.

Mr. Speaker, it is disgraceful that the NDP even defeated our amendment to prevent unsolicited visits to employees' private residences. The NDP recently banned door-to-door sales for other sectors because they say that some residents are very vulnerable to some of the tactics used. Now they're endorsing it if it could mean more unionization. This government's main priority was not to protect Albertans or to protect employees from coercion, intimidation, threats, promises, undue influence, and the like; this government's main priority was to simplify union certification.

In addition, this government would not reverse its unjustifiable decision to double the amount of time that union organizers have to get people to sign these cards. It used to be that workers had to sign the union cards within 90 days of the application for union certification. Now the cards are valid for up to 180 days, even more pressure on employees in the workforce and even more time to be intimidated.

In fact, this government voted down many reasonable amendments proposed in this House. One that immediately comes to mind is when it comes to banking overtime. With this bill employers must give workers one and a half hours off for every one hour of banked overtime. One of our concerns with this is that overtime is often banked at the initiative of the employee. For example, an employee might come in an hour early and leave an hour late from Monday to Thursday so that they can take an extended weekend with their family, maybe go camping at the lake or spend other time with their family. Now under Bill 17 an employer is less likely to allow their workers to do that if it costs the employer time and a half. We tried to pass an amendment to return the ratio to one hour for one hour generally but only if banked overtime was at the initiative of the employee. It's a very common-sense amendment, but this NDP government voted down that motion.

When this affects Albertan families, who now have much less flexibility in the workplace, we will make it clear and remind them that this is because of the NDP. The NDP's world view is one that the government should tell people how to live and that the government knows what's best for the people. The NDP's world view is one that business owners, whether large or small, are on a mission to extract as much as possible out of their employees and

exploit them at every opportunity. Mr. Speaker, there are many, many hard-working Albertans that are good people who create jobs and bring value to society through their businesses.

1:50

With this bill especially the NDP shows serious disregard for the plight of business owners and job creators at this time. This NDP government keeps piling on and on, making it difficult for businesses to adjust. Businesses can adjust, but they need time to adjust. It becomes very difficult in troubled times to adjust your business to be able to survive and produce the jobs that Albertans are looking for. Businesses are already having to deal with the highest minimum wage of all provinces. Now, while our economy is slumping, they will have to pay more for overtime, be unable to have compressed work weeks, have to grant indefinite secure leaves, provide more notice for group terminations. The list goes on.

This government should be focused on getting Albertans back to work. It should be focused on making sure we have a stable economy that is attracting investment. As we attract investment, we create the jobs that Albertans so badly need. But, no. Instead, this government is focused on, it appears, their priority of helping its union friends and its union bosses with their interests. This government voted down reasonable amendments that are fair to union members; for example, a requirement for unions to disclose their financials. We also moved an amendment that would prevent mandatory union dues from being used for political advertising. This would have helped the NDP meet its own touted objective of getting big money out of politics.

Mr. Speaker, we even put forward an amendment that would not change the bill at all but that would allow and encourage and make subsequent governments review this act in five years so that we would not be stuck in a position where governments down the road would take their time. This minister was concerned that it was just about 30 years since it was last updated, yet this government voted that amendment down also.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Madam Speaker, I will not be voting in favour of Bill 17 at this time, and I would ask this government to do better, to look out for Alberta families, to look out for Alberta employees, and be sure that they're sending the right signals to the investment market to help bring the jobs back to Alberta, that our families so desperately need.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that if you seek it, you will find it, that unanimous consent for one-minute bells may be granted.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I rise to speak to third reading of Bill 17, I truly wish that it was two bills because I am absolutely enthusiastically in support of the changes to employment standards, especially as it relates to job-protected leave. I'd probably vote in favour of the employment standards portion of this bill. If that was a stand-alone bill, I absolutely would have easily voted for it, and I suspect this entire House would have as well. I'd proudly vote in favour of job-protected leaves like

bereavement leave, compassionate care leave, parental leave, leave for victims of domestic violence, long-term illness and injury leave, leave for attending a citizenship ceremony. These are very good changes. They're good for Albertans, and they are welcome.

But, unfortunately, the changes to the labour code did not provide the same benefits that were found in the changes to employment standards, and I couldn't support the changes to the labour code. So here at third reading, Madam Speaker, I will be voting against Bill 17 based on the changes that are contained for the labour code and to the labour code alone.

While the government calls this a modernization, what they really are repealing are modern policy measures. Innovative ideas like the secret ballot seem to have gone away. This bill and this government aim to increase the ease and frequency of unionization and union density in Alberta while directly increasing costs for business. Now, like I say, I strongly support job-protected leave, but now is not the time to put in additional barriers and cumulative impacts for industry and small business in this province. Albertans who want to join a union can do that today. They don't need the help of a union-friendly government to help expand the footprints of unions in this province.

One of my biggest concerns is how rushed this bill was. The NDP introduced two pages of amendments here after midnight and pushed them through the Legislature with virtually no time for the opposition to review them. Before the bill was introduced, there were very few actual consultations that directly involved employers and employees. Now, talking to just employer and union advocacy organizations absolutely must be supplemented with public consultation and meaningful dialogue with employers and employees and all Albertans, and on this the NDP badly missed the mark. The government should have consulted on the draft legislation throughout the summer, like they did with the MGA, to give all Albertans an opportunity for input on the dramatic changes proposed to Alberta's labour code. I sincerely fear, Madam Speaker, that there will be serious unintended consequences.

The process on Bill 17 was an absolute failure. From start to finish it failed and showed how little the NDP care, really, about what Albertans need, especially those in the business sector. I specifically don't like getting rid of the secret ballot provision, Madam Speaker. They refused our amendment to increase accountability of the card check process. They continually reminded the House and Albertans how long it's been since the legislation was reviewed and then rejected multiple attempts to establish a mandatory review period. The last-minute amendments with very little time for us to review that and consider the implications of that were very disrespectful, I think, to the House and to members. The changes to overtime pay, without allowing employers time to adjust, is yet another brick in the wall that business owners in this province have to face as a result of this government.

The specific changes in this bill are troubling enough on their own, but when added up with all the other changes this government has brought in, it makes it increasingly difficult to start a business in Alberta, it makes it increasingly difficult to expand a business in Alberta, it causes companies to want to look at other jurisdictions, and for the companies that are looking to be located in Alberta, it causes them to think twice. These sorts of changes cause a flight of capital out of our province, Madam Speaker, and that impacts the prosperity of all Albertans. When Albertans are not as prosperous, they pay less tax, which means we have less money to fund important social programs, which I know this government believes in. The money has to come from somewhere.

What we have in this province is a strong track record of very good relationships between employers and employees, a true

partnership, and that is what I don't think this government understands. Hearing the debate here in this House on Bill 17 lays bare the bias this government has and the true belief they have about business and how the terrible business owners are only out to take advantage of the poor workers. Well, you know what, Madam Speaker? It's very important that we protect people who need protection. There's absolutely no question. There are changes in this bill, especially to employment standards, which achieve that goal, and I'm enthusiastically in favour of and supportive of them. But there are other changes which do nothing more than constrain business in a way that's unhelpful, which causes capital to flee our province, and that is not good for Alberta.

For those reasons, I will be voting against Bill 17. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm going to stand today to speak against this bill, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. Fair? Well, that's questionable. Family friendly? Well, I think we'll find out more about whether that's actually true. Improving the lives of Albertans? The jury is out on that one. It's kind of doubtful in certain areas, but I'd welcome this government to prove it to us, that this is going to be fair, family friendly, and improving the lives of Albertans.

2:00

Madam Speaker, let's make no mistake. We all believe that this should have been split into two bills right from the very beginning. It was voted down on first reading. It should have been sent to committee. There was a lack of consultation here, very clearly – 27 days of consultation by invitation only and in only four locations across the province and online – 27 days of consultation for an inadequate piece of legislation. Again, some good elements to it, but unintended consequences, I believe, are going to be key to this.

Much of what's been said by my colleague the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock is going to be repeated here, but I think it deserves repeating. We've been speaking out on behalf of Albertans together, many of us here.

An Hon. Member: Which Albertans? The firefighters?

Mr. Gotfried: Many Albertans, actually.

And we're hearing from Albertans that they believe in self-reliance, they believe in free enterprise, they believe in hard work. They also believe that the best social program is a job.

Madam Speaker, I'm very proud of some organizations we've been working with as well. They've been speaking out on behalf of their members, the Albertans that they represent, businesses that they represent, employees that they represent, groups like Keep Alberta Working, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association, the Calgary Chamber, the Alberta Enterprise Group, Merit Contractors, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. These organizations represent people and businesses and investors and risk capital that create jobs. They should be commended. Many of these organizations have said to us: we're apolitical; we don't want to take on any ideology; we want to speak out on behalf of Albertans and businesses. Those are the people that matter to them, not just the owners and operators but the employees that make their living, that have that job, which is the best social program we can deliver.

We hear from dozens of private businesses. We tabled many letters from owners and managers and HR professionals from organizations across this province, across all sectors, telling us how frightened they were about certain elements of this legislation.

Small to medium-sized businesses are already struggling because of a carbon tax that has driven their bottom line into the ground; increasing minimum wages, which have forced them to lay off employees so that they can at least eke out a meagre existence and pay themselves as owners, investors, entrepreneurs a modest wage without having to work 20 hours a day themselves; struggling through an environment of unemployment, where people don't have disposable income; trying to make ends meet.

We hear about the criticism of the existing labour legislation that we have in this province. Madam Speaker, I remember that when I was with Calgary Economic Development – I think it was in 2012, 2013 – 87 per cent of the new jobs in Canada were created right here in this province. Eighty-seven per cent. That doesn't sound like a flawed labour market to me. We were recruiting across this country and around the world, telling people to come to this great province to find work, to fill the jobs that we had here, for the skilled labour jobs, the labour that they needed, the highly skilled individuals, the engineers, to come to Alberta. That doesn't sound like a flawed labour market to me except that we had a shortage in finding skilled people to come here, who wanted to come to this great province. Now we're suffering with a low disposable income, high unemployment. And here we're going to layer legislation on top of that that is going to burden the recovery that we all hope to see.

Yes, there are some good parts to the employment standards here. No question. We all agree with that. We voted for those. But those costs are borne by someone, Madam Speaker, even for the changes in the legislation that are compassionate, that we believe in, and that are socially responsible. Those costs are not borne by us in this House, the 87 of us. They're borne by businesses and investors. If we don't understand that those costs are going to be there, with the fact that somebody can come back – thankfully now not 48 hours later. They'd have to give us seven days' notice, but maybe the employee that you've got in there you need to give two weeks' notice to. Well, somebody has to bear the cost of that extra week of labour costs.

For a small employer that might be significant. For somebody with hundreds of employees that could be significant. We cannot be cavalier about the costs we layer on Albertans and Alberta businesses that are creating jobs in this province. They're on the brink of survival. Some of these small businesses are being wiped out, and with that are the jobs, the tax base, and a modest living for owners, who only expect a modest return on investment. Make no mistake. When they fail, they take with them landlords and cleaners and building managers and their suppliers and trades that they work with. Madam Speaker, we've made a lot of sacrifices here – and for what? – for big labour, for a perspective and an ideology which have skewed this legislation in favour of big labour with unintended consequences.

The big piece of this, Madam Speaker, is the rescinding of the secret ballot, which we've talked about ad nauseam here. The secret ballots have been an expectation within a responsible and responsive democratic society for as long as any of us here have been around and many years before, a right fought for by our forefathers so that we could have that kind of freedom, that kind of privacy, an expectation of anonymity and freedom from pressure, persecution, intimidation, scorn, ostracization, shunning, or – God forbid – bullying from somebody in your workplace. We're worried about that, not just from the employer side but from the union side.

We tried to introduce some balance for that in our amendments. Twenty-eight of those amendments were voted down by this government. Many of those could have been used to improve this legislation. Make no mistake. Albertans are watching you in this endeavour. The economy may respond positively, or it might deliver unintended consequences, that we've spoken about. Again, 28 rejected amendments here will bear witness to whether you actually took enough time and consulted adequately. You didn't

even consult well with us in this House. Thirty amendments and only two were accepted; 28 of those were rejected. Don't forget that we are here as the voice of Albertans, and you didn't listen to that voice either.

You rushed to pass this legislation after only 27 days of consultation: a botched, late presentation of this legislation, some late amendments brought to us looking like they were printed off, a quick print just minutes ago, on the back of a napkin, hardly signed, looking a little bit amateurish, I would say. It looks like the whole bill, stapled when we first got it, was rushed here. Why? Because we had 27 days of consultation, and that's plenty to listen to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, this government pushed, this side of the House pushed back in protection of the rights of Albertans – employees and employers, hard-working people, families – and now we're stuck with their flawed vision of the good, the bad, and the downright ugly in terms of labour legislation. The government over there, as they're looking at the amendments, looking at that rushed legislation, they need to wear it, and they need to bear responsibility for the flaws and for this last stake in the heart of the Alberta advantage. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to third reading?

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. Minister of Labour and the minister responsible for democratic renewal to close debate.

2:10

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, is going to make sure that no more will someone in Alberta get fired for being sick or lose their job because they have a child that needs chemotherapy treatments, will make sure that reasonable breaks are given to all employees, will make sure that we have an enforcement system that gives us a chance at collecting the over \$18 million in unpaid fines that currently exist in our employment standards system, will make sure that we are holding people to account, improving our system, and aligning it with other jurisdictions. I'm very proud of the changes in Bill 17, and I'd like to thank all members for contributing to the discussion.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:11 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Nielsen
Babcock	Hoffman	Notley
Bilous	Kazim	Piquette
Carlier	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Carson	Larivee	Sabir
Ceci	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Shepherd
Dach	McKittrick	Sigurdson
Dang	McPherson	Sucha
Drever	Miller	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Woollard
Gray		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Schneider
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Starke
Clark	Loewen	Strankman
Cooper	MacIntyre	Taylor
Drysdale	McIver	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Yao
Gill	Pitt	
Totals:	For – 37	Against – 20

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Some Hon. Members:

Solidarity forever, solidarity forever
Solidarity forever . . .

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I didn't know that the Wildrose members knew the words to that song. Apparently, they have been studying.

I just want to thank all members for their contribution to a very, I think, full legislative session. The debate has been vigorous, and by and large it's been positive. We've got a lot of business done.

I'd like to thank the opposition House leaders for their co-operation in helping us navigate this. I think we managed to make it work a little more efficiently than might otherwise have been the case.

Pursuant to Government Motion 21 I wish to advise the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded and that the Assembly stands adjourned.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you are adjourning the House until October 30, 2017, as agreed to?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Whenever is in the rules.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 21, agreed to on May 25, 2017, the Assembly stands adjourned until Monday, October 30, 2017, unless otherwise ordered.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:18 a.m. on Tuesday pursuant to Government Motion 21]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Wednesday, June 7, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c13]

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2017 c11]

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c10]

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c12]

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c14]

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c15]

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017, with exceptions; SA 2017 cC-2.3]

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft.*), 1534-51 (*Jun. 5, 2017 aft.*), 1553-67 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1589-93 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c9]

Bill 18* — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1567-79 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1587-89 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017; c8]

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft., referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 cA-5.5]

Bill 206 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, October 30, 2017

Day 45

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (UCP)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (NDP)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (NDP)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (NDP)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (UCP)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)

Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),
Official Opposition Whip
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (NDP)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP),
Leader of the Official Opposition,
Official Opposition House Leader
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (UCP)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 27 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk
Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
House Services
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services
Nancy Robert, Research Officer
Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Sandra Jansen	Minister of Infrastructure
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Rodney
Horne	Shepherd
Jansen	Swann
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 30, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back, members.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. As we once again come together and continue proceedings in this Assembly, let us reflect on the time we were blessed to be able to spend with our constituents, our families, and loved ones over the past months. May we strive to be respectful, constructive, and principled in the manner in which we represent our constituencies throughout this incredible province. May we draw strength from those who support us and find inspiration from them to have the humility and fortitude to work together. Peace be with each of us.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met.

Mr. Edwin LeRoy Fjordbotten
November 4, 1938, to June 8, 2017

The Speaker: Mr. LeRoy Fjordbotten served four terms as the Progressive Conservative Member for Macleod. He was first elected to this Assembly on March 14, 1979, and served until June 14, 1993. He was a lifetime farmer and rancher. He was a member of the Flying Farmers of Alberta, which combined his love for the land and his skills as a pilot. Mr. Fjordbotten was keen to represent rural Albertans and wanted to contribute to the development of the public policies that impacted agricultural marketing and small business. One of his enduring contributions was in 1981, when he introduced a bill to regulate the dairy industry in Alberta. During his 14 years of service Mr. Fjordbotten held the portfolios of minister of agriculture from 1982 until 1986, minister of tourism from 1986 to 1987, and minister of forestry, lands, and wildlife from 1987 to 1992. Mr. Fjordbotten passed away on June 8, 2017.

Mr. Leonard Clarence Bracko
December 2, 1943, to August 19, 2017

The Speaker: Mr. Len Bracko served one term in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta as the Liberal Member for St. Albert from 1993 to 1997. During that time he served as critic for Municipal Affairs and critic for economic development. Mr. Bracko was a teacher by profession, teaching in junior and senior high schools beginning in 1967. He served on the St. Albert city council from 1989 to 1992 and from 2001 to 2013. Mr. Bracko passed away on August 19, 2017.

Mr. Bruce John Collingwood
May 16, 1953, to August 28, 2017

The Speaker: Mr. Bruce Collingwood served as the Liberal Member for Sherwood Park from 1993 to 1997. Mr. Collingwood began his career with a bachelor of science degree in zoology before becoming a teacher. After a decade of teaching he obtained his law degree and specialized in corporate finance and commercial law. After his election in 1993 he served as the critic for environmental protection and then became whip from 1996 to 1997. Mr. Collingwood passed away on August 28, 2017.

In a moment of silent reflection I ask you to remember those who have gone before us and their families.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Jinting Zhao, and I will invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Leader of the Official Opposition

The Speaker: Hon. members, today I received correspondence from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills advising that he would be resigning his position as the Leader of the Official Opposition and requesting that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre now be recognized as the Leader of the Official Opposition. My best to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Excuse me. The wonderful community of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

An Hon. Member: Outstanding.

The Speaker: Fantastic.

I will therefore today recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre as the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Welcome to your new role.

Well, the climate may have changed, but I still get notes on a continuous basis, so that seems to be the constant that we have.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration and respect there is gratitude to the members of families who shared the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome members of the Fjordbotten, Bracko, and Collingwood families who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your name and remain standing, if you would, until all have been introduced.

First of all, from the Fjordbotten family: Kelly Fjordbotten; Larry and Karen Fjordbotten; Kim Fjordbotten and Phil Bentson; Chelsea Fjordbotten; Janet and Glen Jeske; and Renee, Tim, and Presley Elford.

1:40

From the Bracko family: Barb Bracko, spouse of Mr. Bracko; Robert Bracko, brother of Mr. Bracko; Theresa Bracko, sister-in-law of Mr. Bracko; Marlene Bracko Herbert and Colleen McDougall, sisters of Mr. Bracko; Gordon Beatty, brother-in-law of Mr. Bracko; Katrina Beatty, niece of Mr. Bracko; Colleen Soetaert, good friend and legislative colleague of Mr. Bracko. My apologies for the dropping of the names.

From the Collingwood family: Janis Collingwood; and Evan Collingwood, Taylor Collingwood, Josh McGregor, and Matt McGregor, Mr. Collingwood's four sons.

Would we all extend a warm welcome and appreciation.
[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: I would like to acknowledge the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hope is on the horizon. As the former head of the Alberta and Canadian taxpayers federations and the former federal minister of immigration, employment, National Defence, and multiculturalism Jason Kenney brings a wealth of experience to bringing common sense back to Alberta. He will stand up for Alberta jobs, Alberta families, and the Alberta economy. He will restore the Alberta advantage and get our province back on track. Sixteen months ago he set out to unite the conservative family here in Alberta, and he accomplished what many thought was impossible. He has united our party; he will unite our province. I am humbled and honoured to introduce our dear friend the newly elected leader of the United Conservative Party, the Hon. Jason Kenney. Would he please stand to receive the warm ovation of this House?

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you some amazing students from McLeod elementary school. Along with them today are their chaperones, Ms Fataba Mboma and Curtis Thompson, as well as their teacher, Mrs. Kercelyn Pasternak. If I could ask them all to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a couple of guests from the Alberta Council on Aging, which is a nonprofit in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, which I'm very proud to represent. It's my pleasure to introduce their executive director, Donna Durand, and treasurer Gail Hiller. They work every day to create an Alberta free of ageism and promote inclusion for older persons in Alberta communities. I ask that that Donna and Gail please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Greg Jeffrey. Greg was elected as the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association on March 20, 2017. I would like to congratulate Greg on his win and his position. Teachers play a vital role in building positive futures for students and families across Alberta. Thank you for your strong commitment to education. I would ask him to rise and please accept the warm reception of the Assembly.

I'd also like, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Mary Martin. Mary has been with the Alberta School Boards Association since 2015 and was elected president in February 2017. She was recently re-elected as well for a fourth term in the Calgary Catholic school district, representing wards 13 and 14. I would like to thank Mary for her dedication to education, for the work that she does to help make young Albertans have a bright and optimistic future, and for all of the great advice she gives to me all of the time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Rabbi Shaul Osadchey and his wife, Roberta Osadchey. Rabbi Osadchey is a senior rabbi at the Beth Tzedec congregation of Calgary. He is also the co-chair of the Calgary Interfaith Council, which is the voice and advocate of the interfaith community in Calgary and southern Alberta. The council builds bridges of respect and understanding amongst various faith communities. I will speak more about the good work of the council and Rabbi Osadchey later today when I introduce my motion on United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. I invite the Osadcheyes to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the family of Ki Yun Jo from Thorsby. I'm pleased to introduce Meyoung Hee Han, Jo's wife; Sung Hyun Jo, his son; Ka Yung Jo, his daughter. Ki Yun Jo, or Jo as he was called by his friends and neighbours, was a loving father and husband and a beloved member of his community. He bought a gas station in Thorsby shortly after moving to Canada from Korea in order to provide for his family. Earlier this month Jo was taken away from his family and away from his community in a brazen gas-and-dash incident. As Albertans were heartbroken when we heard what happened to Jo, we cannot let this happen to another worker. I'm very pleased that his family is able to join us today for the introduction of Bill 19. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly. [Standing ovation]

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from Husky Energy Inc. who have joined us for the introduction of Bill 19 today. I'm pleased to welcome Lawrence Richler, VP, Canadian products marketing; Joel Skulsky, director, programs and retail fuel; Adam Sparkes, director, government relations; district managers Ken Kyle, Hugh Armstrong, and Allan Blair; and Edmonton Husky retailer Mian Ahmad.

We are honoured also to be joined today by the family of Surinder Pal Singh, who died after trying to prevent a theft at an Edmonton Husky station in 2015. I want to welcome Sandhya Singh, Surinder's wife; Mandeep Singh, his eldest son; and Jasbeer Singh, his brother. Surinder was a cheerful man and a tireless worker, loved by everyone who knew him. Mr. Speaker, Husky Energy has moved to mandatory prepayment of fuel across Canada, in part due to what happened to Surinder. I thank them all for being here, and I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: With the number of guests and visitors, Government House Leader, did I see you prepared to move unanimous consent to go past the time for Oral Question Period?

Mr. Mason: I so move, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. An honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House the leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, an indigenous rights lawyer, and the next Premier of Alberta. David Khan is here today to get dark money out of politics. He and I both will be trying to improve our democracy in this province, and I will be bringing forth a bill during this session to regulate political action committees. He is seated in the public gallery. Let's give him the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several dedicated employees from the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. These 16 individuals work hard in various areas, and I'd like to thank them for their commitment and professionalism. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jennele Giong. I had the pleasure of meeting and working with Jennele in Calgary, where she resides. Jennele has a bachelor of arts in law and business and presently works as a research assistant at the U of C. She is also Miss Asia Canada 2017. Jennele, please accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other guests for introductions today? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a friend of the House and a friend of mine, David Dorward. David, a chartered accountant, was first elected in 2012 representing Edmonton-Gold Bar. Amongst his other accomplishments he served as the associate minister of aboriginal affairs under Mr. Prentice's cabinet. I see he has risen, and I would ask the House to give him the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of . . . [interjections] Is this notices of . . .

An Hon. Member: Ministerial Statements.

Mr. Mason: My ministerial statement. Okay.

Member for Calgary-Lougheed

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, today I'm rising to speak to the news that my esteemed colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed will be leaving the Chamber and resigning his seat in the next few days. I must say that I was surprised when I heard the news, being one of just three of us in this

Chamber who were elected prior to or during the provincial election in 2004. It is fitting that some tributes are paid today to the hon. member.

Many will know of this hon. member's ability to scale great heights, and there's no greater height to be scaled than Mount Everest, Mr. Speaker. Most people don't know this, but the hon. member accomplished that feat not just once but twice. It was, therefore, not surprising that upon his arrival at the Legislature after being elected, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed was one of the first government MLAs to call for a province-wide ban on smoking in public places. The member was years ahead of many colleagues at the time, and it took a few more years and plenty of political wrangling across the province before the member's ideas to protect children and nonsmokers from the effects of second-hand smoke were adopted, passed, and proclaimed as law in Alberta.

The member has regularly advocated for all of us in this province to lead healthier lives, be it through nutrition or exercise. I know the member is very proud of his work as associate minister of wellness as well as parliamentary assistant for health and wellness and parliamentary assistant for sustainable resource development. Most recently he served as House leader, and I certainly enjoyed debating points of order and matters of privilege with him. The member is also well known as a motivational speaker, and he often brought those skills to this Chamber during debates.

The member has made an honourable decision to step aside at this time and is doing what he feels right for the party that he represents.

I hesitate to add too much more about the member's list of accomplishments during his time as MLA. The reason for this is that I noted with interest that he indicated he may at some point in the future seek a return to this House in a future election. So at the risk of saying something that might end up in his campaign brochure, allow me to simply wish him well on behalf of all members of this House and to wish him the very best in his future endeavours.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for your kind, kind words. I am truly humbled.

I'd like to begin by expressing my deepest appreciation for my mom and dad, who in the beginning hoped I might become a doctor or a lawyer or a minister of the cloth, but in the end they were not disappointed with my work as a lawmaker instead and as associate minister of wellness instead. I thank my wonderful wife, Jennifer, who has been my inspiration since the day that I met her. I thank our beautiful boys, Dawson and Evan, who are the most amazing teachers I will ever meet. Our family has made countless sacrifices over the years just so that I could attempt to help to make Alberta just a little bit better, and I love them more than words can say.

I thank the Lougheed family for the rare and distinct honour of serving the constituency that bears their name. I will never forget their guidance and their friendship. I thank the constituents of Calgary-Lougheed for entrusting me to be their representative during four elections, nine leaders, over 13 years. It's true. Together we built no fewer than four schools and the Calgary South Health Campus. We achieved the historic agreement with our friends the Tsuut'ina – [Remarks in Sarcee] to them – in building the southwest Calgary ring road. It's under construction now, and we happened to pass more private members' business than any other member in our time.

I want to thank all of the legislative assistants that I've been pleased to work with, and I really want to thank Darlynn Linn. She's the most amazing constituency manager I could have ever hoped

for. You know, we've survived and thrived on all sorts of peaks and valleys, and I will forever hold dear our time working together.

Thank you to all who have ever assisted with the Calgary-Lougheed board. That's a very long list, Mr. Speaker, but I'd like to make special mention just of Keith, Janice, Bob, Debbie, Joey, Barb, Brian, and Tasha, whose straightforward advice, unconditional friendship, and boundless diligence for serving Albertans is nothing short of awe inspiring.

Thank you to all Premiers and MLAs I've worked with. I have learned so much while I was honoured to serve on what happened to be dozens of committees from local to international – I guess that happens over time – and, yes, as House leader and deputy caucus chair and also as chair of Calgary caucus and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and certainly as associate minister of wellness. I'm especially proud of our wellness team, Mr. Speaker, as together we initiated healthy eating and active living programs and policies for all Albertans that were positive and proactive and preventative, that helped keep people happy, healthy, and out of the hospital as much as possible, and that have been emulated in many regions around the world.

I would like to thank MLAs from all parties who supported dozens of wellness projects in the past, including the Smoke-free Places Act and the tobacco reduction act, my first private member's bill and my last government bill; the provincial wellness strategy, health for all, wellness for life; and the Alberta Get Outdoors Weekend Act, or GO Weekend Act. And there's a lot more.

Fellow Albertans, after all of this and with so much more to do, part of me finds it very difficult to step aside for now, but I'm confident that now, well, starting November 1, is exactly the time to do that because Alberta did change in a big, wonderful way yesterday. [A timer sounded] I thank you for another 30 seconds, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

Our province gained the most amazing leader it could hope for during these trying times, and he deserves a shot at a place in this Legislature to share his vision with Albertans. You know, before my time as an MLA I enjoyed careers in national and international business and education and humanitarian work. I can tell you unequivocally that I've never met a harder working person than Jason Kenney.

Mr. Speaker, I will dearly miss working in Calgary-Lougheed and in this Chamber for all Albertans, and I truly wish every single one of you nothing but the best as together we strive to build the strongest and most compassionate province possible.

Thank you, all, and God bless Alberta. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, I know you're having difficulty shifting gears in this new routine again, but would you desire to make a motion?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent of the House to permit an additional member from the UCP caucus and the Alberta Party caucus to participate in a response.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, members of the Assembly, for providing this opportunity to wish the best to my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed.

Born and raised in Saskatchewan, as so many people that have responsible roles in Alberta were, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed is one of the most upbeat, positive, professional, friendly

people that I have ever met. I've even heard him described as a stone cold fox. I'm sure he doesn't want to hear that today, but it's too late, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has been a teacher. He has a bachelor of arts, a bachelor of education, a master's degree in religious education. He is a keynote speaker. For those listening, get your bookings in now; I think he'll be busy.

I have to say that he's done a lot of things, but I remember him being the most proud of the things that he did here as associate minister of wellness and his general efforts towards wellness, to keep Albertans healthy before they get in the health care system, to keep them out of the health care system. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed hasn't just talked the talk; he has walked the walk. You'll probably never see in this House a more active person who lives out wellness along with his wife, Jennifer, and his two sons, Dawson and Evan, who, I might say, Mr. Speaker, are two of the most polite young people that I've ever seen, which I think speaks highly of the hon. member and his wife, Jennifer, and the way they've raised those two fine children.

He served here in a number of roles, as a House leader not very long ago. He was very supportive, as was mentioned, during the negotiations for the Tsuut'ina Trail part of the ring road. As was mentioned – and I just learned this today – he has climbed Mount Everest twice. He hasn't yet, Mr. Speaker, revealed to me whether he went the second time because he left his wallet up there the first time or because he forgot his camera the first time. Nonetheless, the hon. member is a person that when he puts his mind to do what almost no one else in the world can do, can do it twice. He was the first Canadian to perform that feat twice in one lifetime.

Many members of our caucus have expressed sadness at the prospect of the member leaving and not sitting among us anymore. I share that sentiment. For those that need to stay awake during the long nights here, Mr. Speaker, slip into the back room where there is a survival kit named after the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, full of coffee and sugar and hot chocolate and a whole bunch of other things to horse you up when we're here till 2 in the morning. I don't know whether he's leaving that recipe behind or not, but if he is, I'm sure it will be well used.

Hon. member, it's been an honour to serve with you. I wish you all the best. I know that everyone in this House will miss the smiling face that I'm looking at right now.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess the cat is out of the bag that the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has summited Everest two times. [interjections] You know, we know this is all in good fun because he has been known to strike a lighthearted tone here in this House. He's succumbed to my goading to read interesting and possibly unparliamentary things into *Hansard*. I have always very much admired that great sense of humour and his ability to make us smile and to keep things light here in the House.

At the same time, over his long tenure in the House he has shown his ability to tackle important issues and debate them seriously and with great insight. Most recently he's championed issues related to postsecondary education and indigenous relations, and he leads by example through tireless volunteer efforts here in Canada and beyond.

Of course, his lifelong commitment to wellness has made a tremendous difference in the lives of Albertans. Among his many successes here in the House include passing the Smoke-free Places Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act in 2008, and of course his service as associate minister of wellness. Whether he's leading debate in the Assembly

or planning fun events like hockey games and team-building events for his party and community, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed has shown leadership through his high spirits and never faltering energy.

On behalf of the newly expanded Alberta Party caucus thank you for your many years of service to the people of Alberta. Good luck in the future. I hope you finally get the chance to spend more time with your family, and keep climbing those mountains.

Thank you.

The Speaker: My personal wishes to you, Member for Calgary-Lougheed, on the new chapter in your new life.

Statements by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to the next item of business in the daily Routine, I would like to make some remarks on the rotation of oral questions and members' statements.

As noted in the memorandum that I sent to all members last Friday, the Speaker's office received two documents signed by the House leaders on October 25, 2017, confirming their agreement on the Oral Question Period and Members' Statements rotations. I will be tabling my memorandum at the appropriate time later today. Copies of both rotations were attached to the memorandum, but members can find copies on their desks of the rotations along with the projected sitting days calendar, which outlines the Members' Statements rotation.

After sending my memorandum to members, I received notification from the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill that she will now be recognized as a member of the Alberta Party caucus alongside the Member for Calgary-Elbow. The Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill and the Member for Calgary-Elbow will be seated together, as you see, in the Assembly as the two-member Alberta Party caucus.

I would note that the number of independent members in the Assembly at present is unprecedented. Therefore, it is my request that the House leaders consult with the Alberta Party as well as those who are identifying as Progressive Conservative, Liberal, and independent members to review the question period rotation given the events which took place over the weekend. I would appreciate receiving a House leaders' report on the review by Wednesday if possible. We will follow the rotations in the October 25 House leaders' agreement until further notice.

2:10

The Oral Question Period rotation is based on an eight-day, 16 questions per day format. As noted in my memorandum, the Assembly will begin on day 4 of the Oral Question Period rotation. I'd also like to take this opportunity to remind members that questions and responses should be up to 35 seconds in length and that preambles to the supplementary questions are only allowed for the first four sets of questions each day, excluding question 4 on days 4 and 8.

With respect to the Members' Statements rotation the House leaders' agreement provides for a three-week rotation. As with the Oral Question Period rotation, changes may be required as a result of the new caucus affiliation of the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. I encourage the House leaders to look at the Members' Statements rotation at the same time as they review the Oral Question Period rotation.

Parliamentary Secretaries

The Speaker: Before I conclude, I would like to comment on the new positions that the government recently created. The members fulfilling these roles, which have been called parliamentary secretaries, continue to function as private members for the purposes of the Assembly.

This has a number of implications. First, the two parliamentary secretaries, the Member for Sherwood Park and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, as private members may ask questions, but they may not respond to questions.

Second, in posing questions it would be inappropriate for the questions to be directed to the minister with whom the parliamentary secretary is affiliated. As Speaker Kowalski, in dealing with a very similar situation, stated on April 16, 2008, "If a parliamentary assistant were to ask questions of the minister with whom he or she works, there might be an expression of discomfort by the chair and undoubtedly from members throughout." Those remarks can be found on page 13 of the *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

Last, parliamentary secretaries, as with other private members, are not able to sponsor what are commonly called money bills. As Standing Order 83 sets out, a minister only, not a private member, may introduce a vote, resolution, address, or bill to which the royal recommendation is attached.

Reusable Cups in the Chamber

The Speaker: On a final note, you will notice some reusable cups on each of your desks. The purpose of these containers is to reduce the waste and the costs associated with purchasing disposable cups. To be able to meet that purpose, these reusable containers are to remain within the Legislature precinct, and I would ask that they not be removed.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Pipeline Approval

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, on August 23 the NDP announced that they would for the first time assess upstream and downstream emissions in a pipeline review. A short while later, Energy East was dead. The inclusion of emissions in a pipeline assessment clearly violates Alberta's jurisdiction regarding oil and gas developments, rights that Premier Lougheed fought hard for. This Premier was in Ottawa at an October 3 meeting with the Prime Minister of Canada. Common sense would be to raise this critical matter at that time. To the Premier: did you personally raise this violation of Alberta's jurisdiction when you met with the Prime Minister? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, both our Minister of Energy and I have spoken with our federal colleagues about the concerns we have with respect to assessing downstream emissions, and we will continue to do that. But I need to say that it's a bit rich for the UCP to play politics with pipelines. I guess we shouldn't be entirely surprised. It's all they've ever done, played politics with pipelines, and we know what's happened as a result of that, no pipelines approved. We've gotten two pipelines approved. That's what's going to help Alberta's energy industry, and we're not going to stop until we get the job done.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has had more pipelines cancelled than approved so far. She's one to talk.

Following the scuttling of Energy East, the government merely issued a bland written statement and then went dark on the matter. The Premier was nowhere to be found. The \$16 billion Energy East pipeline was a critical project for this country and for this province, expanding market access for Alberta while securing energy independence for Canada. Can the Premier tell us if she has since raised the matter with her close ally Prime Minister Justin Trudeau?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe I've in fact just answered that question. But here's another question. Where was the UCP's brand new leader when Albertans needed him? Fun fact: 20 years in the House of Commons allegedly representing the people of Alberta, and not once did he get up to speak in favour of Energy East. Yet somehow the folks over there try to put this on us. Our government is making progress. We are getting very close to breaking the deadlock, and it's because of the work that we've done. We're proud of it, and we are going to help Alberta's energy industry move forward. [interjections]

The Speaker: Keep the noise down, folks.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government has been missing in action on this critical file. The Trudeau Liberals are attacking Alberta, and this NDP government is doing little to nothing to defend our province. We know that the Alberta NDP are Trudeau's close allies. Will the Premier commit today to immediately demand that the government of Canada implement clear legislation prohibiting the National Energy Board from considering upstream and downstream emissions in pipeline approvals?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the members over there, we are not actually in the business of denying climate change. As a result, we believe it is important for all Canadians to consider the matter of upstream emissions, and that's why our government has taken action in partnership with Alberta's energy industry to do just that. It's because of that that we got the pipeline to the B.C. coast approved, because that's the right thing to do. We are not going to turn the clock backwards; we're going to continue making progress on behalf of all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the NDP claim that forcing Albertans to pay a carbon tax would win so-called social licence for pipelines. How has that worked out? Quebec politicians worked tirelessly to sink Energy East, and they succeeded. The NDP government in B.C. has sworn to stop the approved Trans Mountain pipeline. Yet despite all this, the NDP is going to hike its carbon tax by 50 per cent in just two months. We'd obviously welcome a full repeal of that carbon tax, and that day will come, but since this government is unlikely to oblige, will they commit to an immediate freeze to the carbon tax until Albertans start to be treated with respect?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that our friends over there love to make predictions. They love to make predictions against Alberta's interest. They love to hope desperately for bad news. But the fact of the matter is that this government – this government – has gotten two pipelines approved. None by the

former Conservative government, two by this government, and the reason for that is because we are acting responsibly on the matters of climate change, and as a result of that, we are going to succeed on this file. We are going to address climate change issues, and we are also going to grow our energy industry sustainably, responsibly as we move Alberta forward, not backwards.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government did not campaign on a carbon tax. They didn't even mention it, actually, but one day they just told us that we'd have a \$30-per-tonne carbon tax. Then Justin Trudeau demanded that Alberta hike that tax to \$50 per tonne, and the Premier happily obliged. All this was done before a single pipeline was physically completed, let alone started. Common sense would make payment dependent on delivery. We're being taken for suckers. When will this government start standing up to the Ottawa Liberals instead of acting like a doormat to their Trudeau allies?

Ms Notley: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, one of the pipelines started in August. I know: facts, very inconvenient. Nonetheless, the other thing is that if we were to go ahead with what those folks want to do and move away from our carbon levy, we would then give all the authority over to the federal government, who would then make their own rules about how to impose a carbon levy. In fact, because we took action, we've developed a made-in-Alberta plan that was put together in concert with industry in order to ensure that our economy can continue to grow. We are not handing responsibility for that back to the federal government like those folks over there want to do.

2:20

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's quite clear that the carbon tax was nothing more than the largest tax grab in Alberta's history. Market access was used for a cover story by this NDP government. Can the Premier tell us: if the Trans Mountain pipeline is blocked, would she support a repeal of her carbon tax given the failure of social licence?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the members opposite is that (a) they really, really should stop cheering against Alberta and that (b) – you know what? – when the construction on that pipeline begins, not only will Albertans celebrate, but we're going to even invite the naysayers over there on the other side of this building to the party. I hope they celebrate with Albertans because the rest of us will be doing it.

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

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP has touted the paper approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline as a historic victory, and we all want to see the pipeline built, but plenty are working to stop it, as I understand it, some within the Premier's own party. The Premier talks a good game on pipelines at home but then seems to go noticeably silent when outside our borders. Can the Premier please tell us: what communication have you had with fellow NDP Premier John Horgan since he was sworn in as Premier of B.C.?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite would probably know, I did have an opportunity to meet with Premier Horgan and to continue to make the case not only for the energy industry but, frankly, for all Albertans and for all Canadians because we know that getting that pipeline to

tidewater is not only in the best interests of Alberta workers; it's in the best interests of about 40,000 B.C. workers. It's in the best interests of workers throughout this country, and that's why we won't stop pushing for it until that pipeline is complete. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Premier.

The city of Burnaby, B.C., is currently dragging its feet on issuing municipal permits for the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline, clearly overstepping their jurisdiction. Kinder Morgan has asked that the National Energy Board intervene. Will the Premier join this chorus and demand that the federal regulator intervene to ensure the construction of the pipeline?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work closely with Kinder Morgan to determine what it is that we can do and what we have the authority and the jurisdiction to do legally, but we will also continue to make the point to B.C.-ers why it is that this pipeline is good for them. Our minister of environment was out there just very recently making that case to a number of different British Columbians, and I'll be doing more of that this fall. At the end of the day, the key thing to remember is that the decision has been made. I know it makes the guys over there really unhappy, but the reality is that it has been approved. It's been approved because we've struck the right balance, and we are very proud of that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: As a follow-up to the Premier's promise in her last answer, fighting for Alberta's market access does not stop with paper regulatory approval. Words need to be backed up with action. Will the Premier visit British Columbia to make the case for the Trans Mountain pipeline before the new year?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I've been to B.C. throughout this process a number of times to make the case, but it's coincidental that the member raises that because, in fact, I do also have another trip planned for B.C.. So indeed I'll have an opportunity to continue to make the same case that this government has been making since we first got elected, and that case is that when we strike the right balance, we build not only Alberta's economy but B.C.'s economy and Ontario's economy and the Atlantic provinces' economy because it's good for all Canadians, and we will not stop making that case, not ever.

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

Official Opposition Health Care Finance Policies

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to offer my congratulations to the UCP on the election of their new leader. In the interests of promoting a more multipartisan atmosphere in this House, I thought I would help Mr. Kenney get some straight answers and hard numbers for the platform that he tried so hard to keep secret. To the Minister of Health. Mr. Kenney stated a desire to cut 20 per cent from each department and each budget. What would the impacts of 20 per cent cuts to health care be on Albertans that rely on it most?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Jason Kenney's 20 per cent proposed cut to my ministry would mean cutting \$4.3 billion from the health care system. It could mean shutting down 53 acute-care hospitals like the one in Sundre. It could mean closing 88 operating rooms and cancelling 144,000 surgeries while Albertans wait in pain, closing 600 emergency rooms, and that is not even enough to hit \$4.3 billion. [interjections]

The Speaker: Keep it down.
First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health: can the minister tell the House whether having 20 per cent cut out of our health care system would have a positive or negative impact on our front-line services that save lives every single day?

Ms Hoffman: Jason Kenney's 20 per cent cut to health care is reckless, extremist, and would put lives at risk. In addition to closing hospitals, \$4.3 billion could also mean taking 412 ambulances and the paramedics that staff those ambulances off the streets, 23,000 cancer patients being denied public funding for their life-saving drugs, and 13 million essential prescriptions for seniors would be defunded, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health: given the enormity of the cuts proposed by Mr. Kenney and given that he clearly has no issues terminating employees, can you share with the House in human terms how many nurses, doctors will have to be fired as a result of 20 per cent, or \$4.3 billion, in cuts to the Health ministry alone?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. A \$4.3 billion cut would mean no nurses at the bedside of Albertans when they need them most. If Jason Kenney's proposed cuts were to move forward, 28,400 nurses and nearly 5,000 doctors in this province could be fired. Jason Kenney's proposed cuts are super reckless, super extremist, and super cruel. While we're working to make life better for Albertans, Jason Kenney would make life far worse.

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

Federal Small-business Tax

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP's federal Liberal allies launched an unprecedented attack on the beating heart of Canada's economy, our small-business men and women. We should not be surprised. The Prime Minister previously accused our entrepreneurs of being tax cheats. To the minister: now, I know these decisions are being made in Ottawa, but could this government please tell us if it used its relationships with the Trudeau Liberals to lobby against these disastrous changes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me first say that, of course, small businesses are the engine of Alberta's economy. They are working directly with Albertans all across the province. They create jobs all across the province. The federal government has a responsibility for tax fairness in this at their level, and they

are bringing forward changes. I understand that the federal Minister of Finance has listened to Canadians from across the country, including Albertans, and he is bringing forward changes.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm one of those small-business owners and a job creator. Since the current NDP government has a very close working relationship with the Ottawa Liberals, will the minister immediately and vocally speak out against these changes, given the major negative effects on Alberta's economy, and actually stand up for Albertans and small-business owners?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the federal Finance minister would have to make sure that no unintended consequences occur that negatively affect small-business people in this country. [interjections] This government has cut small-business taxes by 33 per cent. That side would threaten small business by rolling back the climate leadership plan, which was a source of the tax cut for small business on this side. We have invested \$10 million to expand small-business incubators here in Alberta. That side cheers on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Now, hon. members, I know that over the summer you were saving up all that energy and were just waiting to get into this place, but remember the energy you're going to need in the long term as well.

Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So you're defending the Trudeau Liberals and their decisions about the tax grabs that they're doing here.

Given that Albertans have been waiting for this government to stand up for them and given the government's de facto silence on these very important matters, can we assume that the government of Alberta supports the Trudeau Liberals' tax changes for small business? To the minister: please answer with a simple yes or no.

Thank you.

Mr. Ceci: It's simply not true, Mr. Speaker. What we are doing is standing up for Alberta small businesses by cutting their taxes 33 per cent. The owner of Transcend Coffee said that the small-business tax cut will "help small businesses move forward and put them in a position to grow" and create jobs in this province. That's what we're doing. We're helping small businesses. The climate leadership plan is doing that. They would put all that at risk.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Federal Small-business Tax on Farm Operations

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's family farms are deeply worried about the pending tax changes coming from Ottawa. Farmers spending countless hours harvesting in the past months have not taken too kindly to the smear of their farms being called tax shelters. Has this government raised Alberta's farmers' concerns with their federal counterpart?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I think I've made it clear that Alberta supports small businesses, whether they're family farms or Transcend Coffee or any other kind of business. We are supporting them with a tax cut in this province. The federal government's responsibility is to ensure there is fairness. They are looking at the unintended consequences and changing their plan as a result.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is not a time for the government to sit on its hands and given that farms that have been in families for generations are now at risk across Alberta, will the government today vocally denounce the proposed changes coming from Ottawa?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, what I denounce is the recklessness coming from that side. They would put it all at risk by cancelling the climate leadership plan. We have brought \$185 million to the table for small businesses in this province. We brought another \$10 million to the table so that incubators could get up and running. That is helping small businesses, whether they're farms or other sorts of things, because of the actions of this side, not that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I cannot understand why the government is so unwilling to speak up on this issue and given that the NDP has such a strong relationship with the current federal government, will they not speak up given what's at stake, or is the friendly relationship with the Trudeau Liberals more important than fighting for Alberta farmers? [interjections]

The Speaker: Keep it down, folks.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about speaking up, let's talk about pipelines. That side couldn't get anywhere with pipelines. We spoke up for pipelines. Jobs are up in this province, wages are up in this province, and growth is up in this province because of this side, not that side. [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks, we're not getting very far down this list today.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are gravely concerned about the NDP's pending changes to the education curriculum. One individual involved has said that the goal is to turn students, our children, into, I quote, effective agents of change. At the same time the government refuses to provide any details on who is actually writing the curriculum. Will this government cease the obstruction and let Albertans know who is writing our children's curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we are engaged in probably the biggest curriculum rewrite in the history of the province of Alberta and the most transparent as well. We have more than 35,000 people who are participating in the curriculum, including energy companies. We have 4-H clubs. We have banks and so forth. You know, it's part of a process by which we are building actual evidence-based curriculum and not just using it for political propaganda like Jason Kenney and the UCP do.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that our children shouldn't be used as tools to push the NDP world view and given that a draft document for the social studies curriculum shows a noticeable

absence in the teaching of important history, I ask again: will the NDP tell us who specifically is writing our curriculum?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, I guess, Mr. Speaker, if you're going to spread around mistruths, then you might as well tell whoppers, and that is clearly the case. We literally have thousands of people working on the curriculum in the most transparent way possible. What the UCP and Jason Kenney are doing is trying to demean the work that is being done on that curriculum. Albertans don't believe it; the only people who do are the conspiracy theorists over there. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, I just don't understand why this government is so against transparency. If there is nothing to fear, then surely they should have no issue with letting us know who is writing the curriculum. Why is this government so insistent on obstructing, on keeping their plans secret, very secret, from Albertans?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, part of my job is to make sure that I protect teachers and professors from attacks by Jason Kenney's attack dogs on Twitter and so forth, demeaning the character of those people. I mean, I will follow the law in terms of privacy and so forth, you know, but I certainly will make sure that I protect children first, I protect teachers first and not give in to conspiracy theorists such as this. They want to out kids who are gay, and they want to out the teachers who are writing the curriculum. [interjections]

The Speaker: Come on, folks. Calm it down.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Cannabis Distribution

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past weeks Albertans have heard some stakeholders say that only a government-regulated agency can ensure the appropriate controls for the imminent distribution of cannabis. Done properly, the legalization of cannabis presents a remarkable opportunity to create jobs without sacrificing safety. To the Minister of Justice: given that the AGLC reports 98 per cent compliance for private liquor retailers, what evidence is there that private distribution of regulated substances such as cannabis is better managed by government?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I'm happy to take the first one. I'm sure the Minister of Justice can reply in detail to the remainder. Albertans have a very clear choice. We are giving them an opportunity to provide that feedback, Mr. Speaker, and we welcome the voices of all. I'd love to know where all members in this House stand on these issues, and they certainly have an opportunity to give that feedback clearly to the public. We are taking the information that all Albertans are providing to us as the Minister of Justice prepares to unroll the plan just prior, we hope, to delivering her new baby.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the strong history of entrepreneurship and small-business growth in Alberta, opportunities for the development of small and medium enterprises have been few and far between during the most recent slump in the

economy. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: have you consulted with entrepreneurs in Alberta who are willing, able, and anxious to tap into the economic opportunity of legally distributing cannabis as mandated by the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've had the opportunity to speak to a wide variety of people, small businesses amongst them, entrepreneurs amongst them, security experts as well. We just had the most successful consultation in Alberta history to hear from Albertans. We've recently published our framework, going back to Albertans to make sure that we heard what they said, and we've had a very successful second round of consultations. We hope to have more to say about that in the very near future.

Thanks very much.

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, given that the Alberta Party caucus estimates show that the start-up costs alone for government-run cannabis distribution would be at least \$168 million and given that the government of Alberta reaps hundreds of millions of dollars from the private distribution of controlled substances such as tobacco and alcohol, does the Minister of Finance have an estimate of the economic impact both in the cost to government of the setting up of brand new infrastructure for retail sale of cannabis and the anticipated revenue? If not, when can the members in this House expect an update?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We spent a lot of time doing an enormous amount of modelling. Of course, this is a brand new market, so it's impossible for anyone to predict with absolute accuracy what the outcome is going to be. Certainly, it is the case that those estimates were creative. As we move forward, we will be assessing that, but we're not in a position to predict with certainty because at this point they are just predictions. But we will absolutely be guided by Albertans on this matter.

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

Catholic School Sex Education Curriculum

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier of this great province has outrageously maligned an entire faith community by alleging that Catholics condone marital rape. It is possible the Premier was misinformed when she made her damaging comments. To the Premier: will you immediately and unreservedly apologize to Alberta's Catholic community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the document in question that was submitted as possible parallel wellness here in the province of Alberta was entirely unacceptable. Reflective of the feedback that we had received from tens of thousands of Albertans on this important curriculum work, I can assure Albertans that under our government any curriculum changes will be inclusive of all students, no matter what their sexual orientation is or their gender identity as well. Certainly, our job one, two, three, and four is to protect the mental and physical well-being of our children in schools.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's outrageous. Given that the document in question is abundantly clear in stating, quote, consent

is always necessary and given that I can't understand how the government could possibly let this smear of hundreds of thousands of good Albertans stand – the Premier clearly made a mistake in her statements – I again ask: will the Premier apologize to Alberta's Catholics, whom you have accused of condoning marital rape? Are there any other groups that the Premier wishes to accuse, or will this be it?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's very important that we build coherent curriculum that is in keeping with best practices, with science, and to ensure the safety and the security of children and the general public as well. So I would suggest that if the UCP and Jason Kenney are interested in doing so, they help us to constructively build curriculum that actually is evidence based, not just using side shots to somehow make some political points.

Mr. McIver: The minister is dodging the question, Mr. Speaker.

Given that, I would like to know: are there any other groups of Albertans that the Premier would like smear by accusing them of condoning marital rape? The Premier accused not only Alberta Catholic teachers, parents, essentially those people that voted for them, and all the school board people that sent in the curriculum that makes it clear that consent is needed. To the Premier: will you apologize for accusing Alberta's Catholic community of condoning rape?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that consent is the law here in the province of Alberta and in Canada, and we teach the law in public schools. You know, the same thing in regard to practicing safe sex. I mean, clearly this is a health and safety issue, and clearly we need to build an Alberta health and wellness curriculum that's in keeping with best practices and with science and the law to ensure that we are protecting our children.

Thank you very much.

Oil Sands Advisory Group Membership

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's carbon tax has done nothing to gain this so-called social licence. Just this past weekend protesters in kayaks staged a protest against the Trans Mountain expansion in Vancouver, kayaks made of petroleum products, of course. Who was one of the organizers of that protest? Karen Mahon, who was part of the government's oil sands advisory group. Does the government regret appointing Karen Mahon to such an important body?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Jason Kenney's conservatives: I'm surprised they weren't in kayaks behind those protesters cheering them on because they have been cheering on Alberta's demise since the very beginning on this matter of pipeline approvals. They have proven time and again that they want to see Alberta fail on this matter of market access. We, on the other hand, have put forward a careful plan in conjunction with industry to ensure that our industry remains competitive while we get that pipeline to tidewater.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, since the government won't answer on Ms Mahon, let's try another one. Given that the Energy East pipeline was cancelled and former NDP oil sands advisory group co-chair Ms Tzeporah Berman posted, "I am glad Energy East was

cancelled and I will stand in front of the bulldozers [if I have to] and take a stand against Kinder Morgan," given this and other statements, will the NDP admit that appointing Ms Berman to the oil sands advisory panel was a mistake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to update the House that the oil sands advisory group has in fact delivered their deliberations on that matter of implementing the regulations governing the 100-megatonne cap. We'll have more to say about that in the coming weeks.

You know, it's no surprise that folks on the other side of the House would prefer a plan imposed on us by Ottawa given the size of Jason Kenney's pension coming from Ottawa, Mr. Speaker. It's no surprise that they like things from that end of the country.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why this is so hard. Governments do make mistakes.

Given the actions of two of their favourite former appointees, why won't the government simply admit their error of judgment and denounce the outrageous statements and actions of Ms Berman and Ms Mahon? Will you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Jason Kenney's conservatives like to ignore the contributions of indigenous peoples to the oil sands advisory group, which have been many. There have been representatives from Mikisew Cree, from various Métis organizations, from Treaty 8, and from Treaty 6. The results of the oil sands advisory group were described, in one industry leader's estimation, as unprecedented collaboration. That's how you get pipelines approved. That's how you move this province forward. That's how you engage in unprecedented new levels of drilling and activity and so on as we get this province back on its feet while we . . .

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

2:50

Official Opposition Postsecondary Educational Finance Policies

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unity was on full display this weekend as the United Conservative Party elected their first leader, and what a joyous occasion it was. They now have an opportunity to come clean about what exactly they will slash and burn to achieve the \$11 billion in cuts that Kenney has promised. But in the event that the UCP will seek to deny the impact and pain that the reckless cuts will have on Albertans, I ask the Minister of Advanced Education: what would Jason Kenney's plan for an \$11 billion cut in postsecondary institutions mean?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, you can always rely on me to tell the truth when others may not be so reliable, because Mr. Kenney's proposed cuts would make life worse for Alberta students and their families, plain and simple. His cuts would mean that mental health supports for students wouldn't be available when students are suffering from anxiety or depression. His cuts would mean that the foundational learning for English for new language learners wouldn't be available. Education would be much more expensive for those who would be able to go given the closures of the programs as a result of his cuts. Our government is

investing in postsecondary education, making sure that every Albertan has an opportunity . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks promised that if the UCP was elected, there will be pain and given that he has also told Albertans that conservatives are not to be trusted when they say that their cuts will not impact services, I ask again to the Minister of Advanced Education: can the minister tell us exactly what programs, projects, grants, bursaries, or courses would be scrapped by the UCP's gleeful desire to make our students in postsecondary feel the pain?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, of course, everybody in this House can rely on me to give it to them straight when talking about the UCP's plans for higher education. While our government is focused on making life better, Jason Kenney's proposed cuts would mean that 81,000 students wouldn't be able to get student loans to go to university or college. That still wouldn't be enough for him. He also wants to cut 21,000 Alberta students' foundational educational supports. Our government's investments mean that students will be able to get an education that they can afford at institutions that will keep their doors open.

Speaker's Ruling Restrictions on Oral Questions Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: I'd just like to caution the House that question period is supposed to be related to the policy area, and there seems to be some suggestion . . . [interjections] Hon. minister, please.

To this side of the House, particularly the Member for Calgary-Hays: Calgary-Hays, your voice is too loud. Please keep your volume down when you're answering the questions. Your volume is in excess, so please take that under advisement.

Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-West.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Speaker: No? Okay. I'm sure it'll be related to policy, right?

Mr. Malkinson: Absolutely.

The Speaker: Yeah? Good.

Official Opposition Postsecondary Educational Finance Policies (continued)

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given Mr. Kenney's belief that students who make up postsecondary institutions lack an understanding of economics, money, politics, and history, I was hoping we could clear up something for him and the UCP opposition, so I ask the Minister of Advanced Education: can the minister advise the House and the opposition what happened last time conservatives took an axe to postsecondary funding?

The Speaker: We're going to have to look at this matter – I will, anyway – in terms of what is really related to provincial policy. But I'll turn it over.

The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to talk about our government's policy of reversing the time-honoured tradition of conservative cuts to higher education. Our government has increased investments in students, increased investments in our universities and colleges so that every Alberta student has the opportunity to receive an affordable education right here at home, and we will continue to do that on behalf of the people of Alberta.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.
Calgary-West.

Pipeline Approval and Construction

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is under unprecedented attack from multiple directions. The Trudeau Liberals are now using the National Energy Board to kill off important energy projects. It is quite clear what is happening here. To the Premier: why won't this government denounce the changes to the NEB and demand that their federal allies cease this behaviour?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, in reference to the Energy East decision, we were extremely disappointed by that, but we had spent a lot of time before that talking to the NEB and the minister about the forward thinking of the modernization. As recently as October 2 I wrote a letter talking about the historic overreach that the NEB was planning for Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given recent events the double standards are shocking. Given that Quebec politicians worked to block the Energy East pipeline and succeeded and given that they were also subsidizing a massive new cement factory, a factory with massive carbon emissions, and given that the Trudeau Liberals wouldn't dare slap punitive regulations on that factory, Premier, when will this government demand fair treatment for Alberta's industries?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it was our climate leadership plan that got the securement of two pipelines, and it was cited for those pipelines. In our talks to the minister about the NEB modernization we have acknowledged that that climate leadership plan is addressing upstream emissions. We disagree with the downstream because it is taking care of the upstream. We worked very hard this summer to work on those pipelines while you folks over there were politicking and taking care of making Alberta better for your friends.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it appears that we may go past 3 o'clock. Is there a motion for unanimous consent to work past 3?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. I would move that we request unanimous consent to continue until the completion of Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given this government's unwillingness to denounce the changes from Ottawa that killed

Energy East, Premier, what assurance do we Albertans have that your government will stand up and fight against the B.C. NDP and their allies, your allies, in the upcoming battles over Kinder Morgan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we have fought very hard for pipelines and in particular Trans Mountain. But, you know, other things that we're fighting for: in our royalty framework and in our climate leadership plan we fought for our energy industry. I'm pleased to say that drilling activity is up, wages are up for oil fields, production is up, jobs are up. We have confidence in the Alberta energy industry, and we're fighting every day to make that energy industry better, unlike these folks, who cheer constantly against our energy industry. They work for their friends, not for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

First Nations Development Fund Grant Oversight

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's report from October included a review of the government's financial statements. I was very surprised to note that the Auditor General was compelled to repeat two specific recommendations for a third time. It is shocking to know that complex grant applications are being accepted without sufficient information to support a funding decision and that there is no consistent oversight to ensure compliance with the grant agreements. Does the Minister of Indigenous Relations share the Auditor General's concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

3:00

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are very concerned about this and have worked very closely with the Auditor General to resolve this. In fact, this particular process has been put in place during this year and has been completed, so we're very much looking forward to the new report from the Auditor General in future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the development fund grant guideline specifically restricts the use of funds to approved projects and prohibits any spending for certain purposes such as operating a casino or providing a security interest in the grant monies and given that the Auditor General's recommendations have been collecting dust on the minister's desk since 2015, can the minister identify exactly how much money has been improperly granted or spent outside the terms of grant agreements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to say that there is nothing that I need to report to the House that is of concern. I can see that the opposition is trying to find something to complain about, and since they haven't found something to complain about, they're trying to fabricate that someone else is complaining.

Thank you.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, that was a wonderful answer.

Given that the significant funds are provided through the ministry's grant process and that Albertans expect their government

to be accountable and responsible in determining funding recipients and providing ongoing compliance with funding agreements, can the minister comment right now on implementing the Auditor General's recommendations immediately, or is he working on an excuse for delaying implementation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have been enjoying a very good relationship with the Auditor General and have complied with all of the requests that he has made of us and made important changes. And I'm very happy to know that the opposition has finally found indigenous people in this province and are likely to begin, hopefully, to look at some of the programs we have put forward, such as the many solar panels that have been put up all across this province, which they want to take away from indigenous people. I'm just told, for example, that in Maskwacis they're saving \$10,000 a month because of the solar panels. That's money you want to take from them. I'm very disappointed that you want to do that not only for that community but all the indigenous communities.

Electricity Power Purchase Arrangement Lawsuit

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, this government launched a frivolous and unnecessary lawsuit against Calgary's own Enmax. A recent decision from the courts has made it clear that this government has failed to make their case because, frankly, they have no case. Will the Minister of Energy tell Albertans just how much money has been wasted on this very unnecessary litigation?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would look for some advice. There's a matter in the courts, as I understand it, as we speak, and the Minister of Justice may wish to comment as to whether this is sub judice.

The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Okay. As you mentioned, Mr. Speaker, that matter is before the courts, but I'm pleased to update on what we have been doing. As you know, we inherited a system that . . .

The Speaker: Is it your view that this question is sub judice?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: No, sir, because it's a matter of the courts right now for that specific question.

The Speaker: Then I think you need to reframe your question so that it does not make reference to the matters currently before the courts.

Mr. MacIntyre: What I'm asking for is no details on that but, rather, the cost. I'm asking about legal costs, sir. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mr. MacIntyre: I'm not talking about the outcome of the case, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'd like to seek counsel.

Hon. minister, are you prepared to answer the question as it was first asked?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: I'm happy to respond about the situation, Mr. Speaker, but I do not have the amounts at this time. It's in the courts.

The Speaker: Then first supplemental.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. Given that until this lawsuit is settled, the Balancing Pool is unable to wrap up all remaining PPA terminations, to the minister again: just how much more money is this delay costing Albertans each month that the Balancing Pool is held up?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I make no apologies for standing up for Albertans against unfair electricity prices. Those prices were the result of bad deals made many years ago, and we are looking at fixing that problem. The Balancing Pool's job is to look out for the market and make decisions on PPAs. Our job is to stand up for Albertans.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, given that this government went so far as to bring in a lawyer from outside Alberta to do its dirty work rather than use government lawyers already on the payroll... [interjection]

The Speaker: This is his second supplemental. Second supplemental.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, given that this government went so far as to bring in a lawyer from outside Alberta to do its dirty work rather than use government lawyers already on a payroll, will the minister tell Albertans how much of their money this government has wasted paying that lawyer to go after one of Alberta's best-managed job creators, Enmax?

An Hon. Member: How much, Minister?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I spoke to a peer of yours about the volume. The way you pounded that desk today in my view is not acceptable, and I'd ask that you no longer do it.

Hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I make no apologies for standing up for Albertans, and if that means bringing in the best lawyer for our case, that's what we do. We took action to protect Albertans while these folks would recklessly keep the same system that takes care of their friends. We negotiated with companies giving the Balancing Pool a loan, and they continue to defend the backroom deals. We stood up for Albertans. We're fighting for families. They're fighting for a system that was broken and doesn't stand up for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling

Sub Judice Rule

Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: Hon. members, we all knew that this was going to be a new phase in the life of this Assembly. First, to the sub judice – and my comments will make this clear – I certainly will but also the member and possibly the House leader of the Official Opposition might want to take a reread of the sub judice principle 23(g)(ii), on civil matters, whether or not the question you were asked was inappropriate or not.

In addition, I would like to suggest that I'd like to have a meeting with the House leaders sometime at my request so that maybe the issue of the roster will be in place, but I'd also like to discuss a couple of other matters. Those are largely with respect to the volume of noise that comes when a question is answered. I would hope that that tones down as we move forward. I think in the past I've been fairly fair in the application of this, but we're on the first day, and this is going to be five, six weeks of difficult times. I think we need to move the benchmark a little differently than we have today.

3:10

Members' Statements

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

High School in Edmonton-South West

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Schools are bursting at the seams in Edmonton-South West. Years of neglect and lack of funding by the former government led to what some parents in my constituency called a crisis. I'm glad our government recognized this and took action. Our government took action, Mr. Speaker, by fully funding hundreds of schools across this province, and eight of those schools have now been opened in my constituency. I sincerely want to thank the government for that.

Those schools, Mr. Speaker, are now full of students. They're full of students between kindergarten and grade 9. Those students need somewhere to go, and those students need somewhere to go that's a high school. Over the last two years I have been asking this government, including in this very House and in question period, to build a high school in Edmonton-South West because our students deserve the best facilities that they can have. Our students deserve a world-class education.

To achieve that, to ensure that they aren't forced to travel across town and lumped into crowded classrooms around the city, my constituency needs infrastructure, and it needs that high school, Mr. Speaker. The government and minister need to commit to supporting the students in my community. They need to commit to supporting our families. High schools prepare our students for the future and ensure that we have a well-educated workforce right here in Alberta.

I know that our government believes in a caring and inclusive education system. I know that our government believes in a steady, predictable future for our children and our educators. Mr. Speaker, I urge the government to build a high school right in my constituency, right here in Edmonton, to prove it.

Thank you.

United Conservative Party

Mr. Cooper: Today is a great day for small "c" conservatives across our great province. For the first time in this Legislature let me proudly say: the United Conservative Party caucus is here to serve. After a very long road to Saturday night we have a new leader ready to offer Albertans a positive vision and alternative to this high-taxing, high-spending NDP government.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

To my friend Doug Schweitzer and the member for Fort McMurray-Conklin: I want to thank you for your efforts in the leadership race. Each of you brought great ideas and great energy to our party. We thank you. We thank your families for all the time and hard work that you've given in helping to build a strong foundation for our party.

To our new leader, Jason Kenney, let me say how proud I am to work with you as we offer a fresh and positive approach for Albertans.

To moms and dads who have felt the pinch of this government, content to raise your taxes, let me tell you: you have a place in our party. To small-business owners let me say: you have a place in our party. To the rig worker who has seen this NDP government turn a blind eye as our province is beaten up by the B.C. NDP, the Trudeau Liberals, and the mayor of Montreal as they oppose pipeline projects, let me say: you have a place in our party. To the farmers and ranchers who are sick and tired of a government that legislates

without understanding the rural way of life, let me tell you: you have a place in our party.

To the hundreds and thousands of Albertans from every corner of our province we say thank you. You have helped us create a single, unified, compassionate conservative party, and we will continue to work tirelessly to earn your trust as we form government.

Madam Speaker, we all know that the NDP will resort to divisive politics and name calling because that's the only tool that they have against us, but Albertans are resilient. They are strong. They're looking for common-sense leadership, and that's exactly what the United Conservative Party caucus will offer them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon Member for Calgary-Klein.

Supervised Opioid Consumption Sites

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I am proud to rise today as a member of this government and as a Calgarian. Many of us, I know, have met with constituents who have lost a loved one to an accidental opioid overdose. In almost every one of their stories their loved one was alone when they died.

On Friday the Associate Minister of Health was joined by a member of our city council, our deputy chief of police, and many others to announce federal approval for supervised consumption services at the Sheldon Chumir health centre.

The evidence is clear, Madam Speaker. Supervised consumption saves lives. Calgarians who use substances will have a safe space, clean equipment, and professional medical supervision. This will reduce the spread of disease. It will mean less public substance use and fewer needles discarded in our parks, our alleys, and our public washrooms. Supervised consumption also provides an accessible on-ramp for Albertans to seek treatment when they are ready and to be in contact with health care professionals they have grown to trust. Above all, it will save lives.

I'm very pleased that supervised consumption will also be available soon here in Edmonton and Lethbridge. In fact, the Royal Alexandra hospital will be the first in North America to offer this service to its patients. This sends a clear message to Albertans who use substances and to their families that their lives are important to us and that they are not alone. Whether or not they are ready to stop using substances, our public health care system is ready to help them, without judgment and without stigma.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The opposition remains utterly silent on this issue. Mr. Kenney was part of the federal government that spent years in court trying to prevent Canadians from accessing these life-saving services. On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we are proud to support evidence-based policies that save lives.

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

United Conservative Party

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today as a member of the new United Conservative Party of Alberta. Over the weekend tens of thousands of Albertans exercised their franchise as UCP party members and elected Jason Kenney as our new leader. This leadership election was a culmination of a 16-month process that saw the legacy Wildrose and PC parties put aside their differences and agree to move forward together as a single, principled conservative party.

It's been a long road, but as we take our seats in this Assembly for the first time as a team, I can tell you that we are stronger and

more united than ever. For the first time in more than two years Albertans can see hope on the horizon, hope that they now have a credible, common-sense alternative to this NDP government, an alternative that puts people ahead of ideology, an alternative that will stand up for them against the disastrous economic policies of the NDP here at home and the Trudeau Liberals in Ottawa. Together these two governments have conspired to drain opportunity and prosperity from our once great province, leaving tens of thousands of hard-working Albertans without a job, billions in lost investment, and destruction of the Alberta advantage.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are sick and tired of these attacks on their quality of life and their ability to support their families. That's why they signed up by the thousands to participate in the United Conservative first-ever leadership process. It was inspiring to see so many people come together to support our movement, and that was only the beginning. Today we begin a new chapter in Alberta, one that finally puts Albertans first. I'm incredibly proud to be part of this team and ready to get to work holding this NDP government to account for choices that are hurting Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Diversity and Inclusivity in Alberta

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today and speak about a subject that is close to my heart. Diversity and inclusivity are two terms with simple meanings. Diversity, according to the Collins dictionary online, means "the state or quality of being different or varied." Inclusivity, according to the Oxford dictionary online, means "an intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who are handicapped or learning-disabled, or racial or sexual minorities."

We know that Alberta is a diverse society. Since the election of our government in 2015 this Chamber reflects that diversity more than it ever did. Inclusivity is a powerful tool for change. When we accept and support members of minorities and marginalized groups, we all grow. Society as a whole benefits from diverse viewpoints, religions, and outlooks. We also know, Mr. Speaker, what happens when inclusivity is not practised. We know how easily hatred and violence can spread. We see it on the news every day.

This summer I have been to many events which celebrate inclusivity: the Calgary Pride Parade, where we celebrated the LGBTQ-plus community; a Tsuut'ina Nation powwow marking the rich heritage of our indigenous community; and many others besides. I attended the Filipino Fiesta; a sugar shack at Heritage Park, where the francophone community shared their culture; Rosh Hashanah, a Jewish New Year celebration; a Japanese tea-tasting event; a Chinese dragon boat race; and Muslim Iftar events during Ramadan. I also took part in a round-table on housing and homelessness issues for vulnerable Albertans, including those with disabilities.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, our government has made a strong commitment to inclusivity. I trust and hope that every member of this Assembly will do the same and make Alberta a great place to live for everyone. I look forward to attending upcoming Hanukkah and Christmas celebrations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

United Conservative Party

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year and a bit ago two great conservative Albertans started on a journey. Our recent leader and our new leader began a dance. They invited Alberta conservatives to look to the future, to believe in the greatness of Alberta, to put aside their differences and come together. On July 22 conservatives voted overwhelmingly in support of unity, renewing the Alberta advantage, supporting the creative spirit of business, jobs, prosperity for Albertans, and hope for families. We have made history. We have forever altered the course of Alberta's future for the better. We chose unity over division and common cause over conflict.

Unity is not a milestone but a process of nurturing relationships. This is just the beginning. We will continue to practise unity because Albertans want a stable, mainstream, courteous, and compassionate government. While many Albertans are thankful for the quality of our health care, we can and will make it better, and we will carefully trim unnecessary costs without reducing front-line services so that Albertans have the best health care possible for the dollar we spend.

Albertans used to have the best educational system in the world, and we will help our students and parents achieve that once again.

Alberta has the highest petroleum industry standards and the cleanest oil in the world. We have vast reserves of oil and gas that can put our province back to work again, improve our quality of life, and pay for the services that a civil society depends on. We will support high-tech innovation, the agriculture and forestry sectors, business and financial services, culture and tourism, manufacturing and construction industries so that people can get back to work and look after themselves with dignity.

Today is the beginning of a brighter future for the people of Alberta. The United Conservative Party is a party where all people of common sense and optimistic spirit will find a welcome for their ideas and their concerns for a smaller and nonobtrusive government. Alberta's best days are yet to come.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act it is my honour as the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship to table five copies of the committee's report on the 2016 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate Act.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future I'm pleased to inform the Assembly that the committee report on Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, was deposited intersessionally on October 2, 2017, as sessional paper 445/2017. This bill was referred to the committee on April 3, 2017, and the committee was required to report back to the Assembly by October 4, 2017.

I would like to acknowledge the support provided by staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. Sincere appreciation is also extended to the thousands of organizations and individuals who contributed with written submissions and made oral presentations as part of our review. I would also like to thank my fellow committee members, who worked thoroughly together to ensure this review was completed on time.

Mr. Speaker, the committee report recommends that Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act, not proceed. The report also includes and makes recommendations to the government. I request concurrence of the Assembly with respect to the report on Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b) I wish to speak to concurrence on the motion regarding Bill 203.

Speaker's Ruling Debate on Committee Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Assembly has a rare circumstance before us on which I'd like to elaborate. As members have just heard, the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future has presented the committee's final report on Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act. He also moved a motion that the Assembly concur in the report. Typically motions for concurrence in committee reports are not debated. However, such motions are debatable as provided by Standing Order 18(1)(b). Today Edmonton-South West, who is also the sponsor of Bill 203, rose to debate the concurrence motion, as you did. At this point the Assembly is still in daily Routine, which is not the usual time to debate such a motion.

When this situation arose on October 28, 2013, Speaker Zwodzesky determined that a more appropriate time to debate a motion for concurrence in a private member's bill was during Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders, which will be called this afternoon after Orders of the Day.

In keeping with the time limits for private members' business, as set out in Standing Order 29(3), members with the exception of the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition will "be limited to 10 minutes' speaking time," and the mover of the motion is entitled to "5 minutes to close debate." You are going to get an opportunity to do that. It's the sequence of events.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, do you have a petition?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from 821 residents representing 28 communities in Alberta who have petitioned for highway 845 to be paved through the town of Raymond, from highway 52 north 1.3 kilometres to where it is already paved. There are over 2,000 vehicles a day on that highway, and the threshold is 200 to 400 vehicles a day. I'd like to present these petitions, please.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give oral notice of a bill for tomorrow's Order Paper, that bill being Bill 22, Resident and Family Councils Act, which will be sponsored by the hon. Minister of Health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

National Energy Board Act

Mr. Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately demand that the government of Canada introduce amendments to the National Energy Board Act that would prohibit the board from considering upstream and downstream emissions in pipeline approval assessments.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I intend to move the motion pursuant to Standing Order 42.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Bill 19

An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers for first reading.

As Albertans our hearts break every time someone is injured or killed in a gas-and-dash or convenience store robbery. Our hearts go out to all Alberta families impacted by violence in these workplaces, and I'd like to say thank you to the families and stakeholders who have joined us here today.

Bill 19 is thoughtful legislation built on discussions with businesses, workers, law enforcement agencies, and families. Bill 19 would make prepayment for fuel mandatory in Alberta, and it also makes violence prevention plans mandatory in retail, fuel, and convenience stores and outlines requirements for those programs.

Mr. Speaker, we said that we would take action to protect gas and convenience store workers. Bill 19 is that action.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

3:30

Bill 20

Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is a special act of the Legislature to improve two interbasin transfers to address drinking water challenges in both Mallaig in the county of St. Paul and the Whitefish Lake First Nation. This bill will allow an interbasin transfer to make good on our commitments to indigenous peoples under the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and bring drinking water to that reserve. We are tremendously proud to be undertaking this work, and that's what this bill represents.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings for you today. The first is an article titled Can We Fix Daylight-Saving Time for Good?, which shows 24 states are moving to abolish daylight saving time; the second being 'End It': Finland Urges EU to Stop Daylight Savings Time Because Change Makes People Sick; and the final one saying If You Want to Get Rid of Daylight Saving Time in BC, Premier Says Email Him.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two documents. The first document is a press release from the BNP Paribas bank, stating that it will no longer invest in companies involved in the oil sands or shale gas industry.

The second is a joint study by numerous universities in Canada, including the U of A, entitled Fusion 2030: Roadmap for Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rodney: It's actually a tabling to the Clerk if I may, sir. It's a document from all resident owners of Sierras of Evergreen condominium. They hereby ask the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to consider allowing an exemption for age restrictions on condominiums and specifically an exemption for 15 Everstone Drive SW, Calgary. It's a designated 40-plus residence as this was a lifestyle choice those of us living at Sierras of Evergreen have specifically made. I trust the minister will take the time to read it. It is signed by every single one of them. It's a very important issue, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: I have another tabling.

The Speaker: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, all on behalf of the Minister of Energy. The first one is a letter that she sent to the Hon. James Carr, Minister of Natural Resources of the government of Canada, on June 15, outlining our concerns with the National Energy Board's modernization expert panel's report in which she indicates to him that

it is Alberta's view that Canada's regulatory framework should facilitate, not frustrate projects. Decisions on projects should be made on their own economic and environmental merits through a credible, public, balanced process designed to hear, test, and assess the facts.

That's that one.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from the Minister of Environment and Parks to the Hon. Catherine McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada, in which she states that "we believe public confidence in the regulatory review . . . is crucial to ensuring projects move forward in a timely manner."

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

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

I was about to comment, hon. House leader. Pick up the pace insofar as what you've got.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Mr. Speaker, it is normal that a few lines from these can be read. I'm keeping it to one or two lines in each case.

The third letter is dated October 2 from the office of the Minister of Energy to the Minister of Natural Resources Canada in which

she states that “the inclusion of downstream uses in the scope of the Energy East review is an historic over-reach. In our view, this is simply not an appropriate issue to include in the review.”

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any other tablings that you have?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I think this puts to rest whether this government has been active in lobbying for . . .

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

The Speaker: Any other tablings?

Hon. members, I have two tablings. The first is that I'd like to table five copies of the 2016-17 Electoral Boundaries Commission final report, titled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta, which was received in my office on October 19, 2017.

The second is five copies of my October 27, 2017, memo and attachments to all members regarding Oral Question Period and Members' Statements rotations.

The Speaker: I believe we now have at least three, maybe four points of order, noting the last comment that was made. I believe the first one was made by the Leader of the Official Opposition. Is that correct? Please proceed.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate to actually rise on the first day to talk about it, but it was just so obvious that I think we have to set the appropriate tone as we go through this session. So I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly (j). At the time that I rose on that point of order, the hon. Member for Airdrie was asking a question of the Minister of Education. In response to the hon. member, the Minister of Education – I don't have the advantage of the Blues, of course, but the gist of it was that the Minister of Education told the hon. Member for Airdrie that the member was telling an untruth. In fact, a “whopper” I believe was another word that was used at that time.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, we have a long-standing tradition in this Assembly of not calling members liars or using language that in any way would imply that a member was not telling the truth. Certainly, saying they weren't telling the truth does that. I would also argue that the word “whopper” implies that, saying that the member was saying a whopper. But even before that, very, very clearly saying, “You're not telling truth,” is telling the member that they're not telling the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I think the fastest way to deal with this would be to have the member withdraw those comments and let us move on with the day.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The rules around this are fairly clear and well canvassed. It's one of the most often argued points of order in this Assembly and, I have no doubt, in others as well. Of course, it's very clear that one of the things you simply cannot do in this House is call another member a liar or suggest that they have told a lie. However, there has been a great deal of latitude afforded to members for making statements that may indicate that the statement itself may not be true but it was not with intent or a deliberate attempt to mislead the House.

I just have some interesting things here. *Hansard*, May 2, 2017, the then leader of the Wildrose opposition in the House started out talking about the provincial credit rating with the words: “Speaking of whoppers, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister delivered a few more whoppers yesterday on the state of Alberta's finances.” There was no point of order with respect to that one, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, *Hansard* has names, and I forget. What's your constituency?

Mr. Loewen: Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Back on March 7, 2017, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky said, “Well, I'll tell you that somebody better call Burger King because I just found their Whopper.”

Moving on, Mr. Speaker. There are several cases where the hon. member for Calgary – it used to be your . . .

3:40

Mr. McIver: I can't help you anymore today. That's all the help you get.

Mr. Mason: Okay. That's it, eh? They're not going to help me.

That guy that sits there now, Mr. Speaker, talked about, “I do want to address quite a few things that I have heard, some mistruths,” and so on. There was no point of order in that respect as well.

The Speaker: Excuse me. Hon. member, could you just say that last part again, please? You referenced somebody.

Mr. Mason: It was Calgary-West.

The Speaker: What was said?

Mr. Mason: “Mistruths.” Let me see. Yes. “I . . . want to address quite a few things that I have heard, some mistruths.” He was referring to debate on the government side with respect to Bill 9 at that time, Mr. Speaker.

In none of these cases was a point of order made or upheld, Mr. Speaker, so I would submit that the use of “whopper” has been well established and used often by members on the other side. It's hardly reasonable, then, for them to now stand in their places and to make a point of order with respect to the government's use of the very same word in the very same fashion. I would submit that there is, in fact, no point of order.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Yes. Thank you. The hon. Government House Leader just gave a few examples of when a point of order wasn't called, which, unfortunately, makes his arguments irrelevant because his arguments weren't whether it's in order or not. He just gave examples of when an order wasn't called.

Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Government House Leader might even agree that we would never get any business done here if somebody called a point of order every single time that someone said something offside. What is at issue here is what actually was said today, and I would ask you to rule it out of order.

The Speaker: Any other members?

Well, in this particular situation, again, context. I read the Blues, which say, “I guess, Mr. Speaker, if you're going to spread around mistruths, then you might as well tell whoppers.” That's what was said today. For the record I'm not sure about the word “whopper,” but I can tell you, though, that on a go-forward basis I urge all the

members – and I would be asking that your minister withdraw the comments about mistruths.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In that case, on behalf of the Minister of Education I withdraw the comment about mistruths but apparently not the whopper.

The Speaker: I think we have another point of order.
Calgary-Elbow.

Point of Order

Oral Questions

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So long as the Whopper is Alberta beef, I guess it's probably okay, right?

I rise, Mr. Speaker, in my ongoing and continued battle against the puffball question. You yourself, when the Member for Calgary-Currie was on his trajectory earlier today, quite rightly raised a note of caution with the hon. member for the line of questioning. I will make several citations here today.

From *Beauchesne's*, when referencing the role of Oral Question Period, section 408(1) reads:

Such questions should:

- (a) be asked only in respect of matters of sufficient urgency and importance as to require an immediate answer.

Subsection (1)(b) is no longer in use, inquiring whether statements made in a newspaper are correct.

But 408(2), I think, is very instructive here. It says:

Answers to questions should be as brief as possible [and] should deal with the matter raised, and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, should not provoke debate.

I think if we were to unpack the questions asked by the hon. member and previous questions by the government private members today, I think it's very clear that those questions were argumentative, were designed to do nothing more than to provoke debate.

I also want to reference, Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne's* 410, which notes, most importantly:

- (3) Time is scarce.

I think we would all agree.

- (5) The primary purpose of the Question Period is the seeking of information and calling the Government to account.

Not the opposition but calling the government to account. That, I think, is an important one.

Finally, and my last:

- (12) Questions should not be hypothetical.

Now, I would suggest that from the very little we have heard from the new UCP leader, given that he's not in this House and not running in an election campaign, one could argue that any statements there are hypothetical.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just reference a ruling by Speaker Zwozdesky which I have referenced previously. It references Oral Question Period on December 6, 2012. Now, what's most relevant about this time period is that it was immediately after a provincial election, and there were many new members of the House. We've now been at this for about two and a half years, and I would suggest that none of us can count ourselves as new members of the House. At the time Speaker Zwozdesky was referring to the then Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, who asked a question. In response, before the minister answered her question, Speaker Zwozdesky on page 1344 of *Hansard* from December 6, 2012, said, "Hon. members, as you all know, the purpose of question period is to seek information and to hold the government to account." That, again, I think speaks specifically to what we're talking about here.

I won't go on in much greater detail, respecting that time is scarce here, Mr. Speaker, but again I would agree with your caution that we, all members of this House, in particular government private members, need to use question period for the legitimate purpose of holding the government to account, standing up for the interests and best wishes of their constituents and all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate the perseverance of the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. By my count this is at least the third time and maybe the fourth time that he's made a similar point of order. You have ruled in each case, and I'll read your ruling on December 8.

I note to all members that the ability for private members of the government caucus to ask questions of the government is a long-standing practice and tradition in this House, and it certainly has been in the period of time that I have been in this chair. In other words, all private members have the opportunity to hold the government to account. All private members have the opportunity to seek information. I would conclude by saying that all private members should continue to do exactly that. I find that there was no point of order.

Mr. Speaker, the questions raised at that time specifically had to do with the funding of postsecondary education. The questions today had to do with what would be the case if the government made significant reductions in their funding for several areas. In this particular case it was directed to the Minister of Advanced Education.

I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that in fact there is no point of order here.

The Speaker: Any other members? The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't belabour this too much because I think that we have a lot of important work to do this afternoon and this evening, and we already are behind schedule. With that said, I think the leader of the third party – I don't know what he is. I think I'll just stick with the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow. He did a good job, though, of discussing the responsibility of the opposition with questions to hold the government to account. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that you already raised during question period, and I thought rightly, some concerns about whether or not the questions that were going through had anything to do with government policy – I heard you bring that up a couple of times; I would be interested to hear more of your input on that – and I was alarmed about that as well.

3:50

Now, I do appreciate the excitement of the government caucus on the election of Jason Kenney as the leader of the United Conservative Party. I do appreciate that they want to continue to raise his name in every sentence of their question. I'm excited about it, too. I'm happy to say the name "Jason Kenney" over and over and over. But the fact is that the now leader of the United Conservative Party, Jason Kenney, is not the Premier of Alberta yet, Mr. Speaker. When he is, then the NDP, who will be presumably – presumably – in opposition, can ask the member, Jason Kenney, the Premier of Alberta, questions about his government policy, but in the meantime I think we should stick with the rules of the House.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to this matter?

Mr. Cooper: Just the soon-to-be Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

The Speaker: You've just a little less volume than when you were in the front row, hon. member, but I still can hear you.

This is what I think the point of order was raised on. In fact, I have some other notes here that it may have been suggested that the subject matter was referenced at other times in the last Oral Question Period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given Mr. Kenney's belief that students who make up postsecondary institutions lack an understanding of economics, money, politics, and history, I was hoping we could clear up something for him and the UCP opposition, so I ask the Minister of Advanced Education: can the minister advise the House and the opposition what happened last time conservatives took an axe to postsecondary funding?

I struggle to find the part of that question which addresses government policy, and I think that in this instance, Mr. House Leader, I ask that you refine your questions during Oral Question Period to focus on government policy.

Please note that there is one more, that I think was made, again, by the Opposition House Leader at the end of Oral Question Period. Is that correct?

Mr. Nixon: I think, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would be happy to withdraw it. I believe he actually dealt with that point of order as he was raising it if I recall. We'll withdraw it.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Leader of the Official Opposition, I think I neglected your Standing Order 42.

Pipeline Approval Assessments

Mr. Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately demand that the government of Canada introduce amendments to the National Energy Board Act that would prohibit the board from considering upstream and downstream emissions in pipeline approval assessments.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 42 I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to move the motion.

Mr. Speaker, like many Albertans, I was devastated and I know many of my constituents were devastated to see what happened with Energy East, to see the cancellation of a pipeline project that would have brought thousands of jobs and billions of dollars to our economy, not only in this province but across this great country.

I was also, I would say, shocked, just like the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre as they were looking on, at the silence of this government and particularly the Premier of Alberta, who went completely silent after that, missing in action, and who gave a very simple and bland statement that really did not speak to the issue at all and certainly did not do an adequate job of standing up for Alberta, standing up for our largest industry, and recognizing that what the National Energy Board was doing was wrong, Mr. Speaker. It was disappointing to see that. I know many people that I have talked to across the province have brought that up with me and agree with that.

But what's interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, is that despite that muted response, despite the fact that, as I pointed out in question period today, the Premier has inadequately brought this up with her friend Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, despite the fact that she has met with him since this has happened and has not raised that issue in any adequate way for the people of Alberta, it

interests me that the NDP still claim that they are opposed to the National Energy Board changes.

My intent today with this motion is to give the NDP an opportunity to be able to vote to show that they are in agreement with the majority of Albertans and with the opposition about the concerns with what has taken place on this issue.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this is important. It's important because the changes that the National Energy Board have put in place are now responsible for scuttling a \$16 billion project that would have brought energy independence to Canada and market access for Alberta. One of the most important issues that we have talked about in this Chamber over the last couple of years is getting market access. The NDP repeatedly rise in this Chamber and say that that's important to them, but when the time comes to be able to stand up for Alberta on that very issue, they remain silent. It's extremely troubling.

It becomes even more troubling when you recognize that counting upstream and downstream emissions makes no sense. Pipelines don't make emissions. They don't make emissions. They deliver the product. So counting them is just unreasonable, particularly when you consider the fact that the federal government does not account for emissions when giving cheques to Bombardier for planes that burn the oil that is in the pipeline nor for money to the auto manufacturing plants in Ontario. Why, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I want to urge you to get to the rationale for the urgency.

Mr. Nixon: I'm getting there. The urgency, Mr. Speaker, in my mind, is: why is this government not standing up to the hypocrisy that is coming from the National Energy Board when it comes to Alberta and our largest industry, when it comes to pipelines trying to get to the market?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is what?

Point of Order Standing Order 42 Motion

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is merely attempting to debate the item, to make his attacks on government policy. If he wants to know what the government has done, I tabled three letters today that will help enlighten him. But in the meantime the question here is on the urgency, and he has not made a case for the urgency of this matter at all.

The Speaker: Hon. member, as you've heard, I said: get to the urgency question.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Government House Leader may not think that the loss of thousands of jobs in this province and the loss of billions of dollars for this province is urgent, but I can tell you that I think it's urgent, and my constituents think it's urgent.

I will get to the point, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yeah. Please do.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nixon: Surely, if the NDP oppose the changes, as they say, they'll have no problem supporting this motion and making a request to their friends in Ottawa. I will call . . .

The Speaker: So what's the urgency, hon. member?

Mr. Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker: loss of jobs, loss of billions of dollars to our economy. This government says that this is something that's important to them, and they're not standing up for it . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

There's been a motion under Standing Order 42 for debate, an urgent debate on a matter. There is no debate on this matter, so is there unanimous support for the motion as proposed by the Leader of the Official Opposition to proceed with debate?

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Motion to Concur in the Report from the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Bill 203

Alberta Standard Time Act

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Calgary-South West.

4:00

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's Edmonton-South West.

An Hon. Member: It's a promotion.

Mr. Dang: I think my colleagues on this side might disagree.

It's my pleasure today to rise and speak to the concurrence motion on the Alberta's Economic Future recommendation on Bill 203. I do want to begin by thanking the committee members for all the incredible work that they did, the nearly 14,000 Albertans that they connected with and the report that they were able to generate to give to this Assembly for us to be able to be here today.

I believe that the work and the recommendation that they made were hard work, for sure, Madam Speaker, and it was also the right recommendation at the time. However, I believe that new information since that report was compiled and deposited fundamentally changes the context in which we must view that recommendation.

The committee recognized that 75 per cent of Albertans supported having one unified time year-round. This was because of the various health effects, physical effects, and mental well-being effects that it has on people across the province, and it also was because of how it adversely affects productivity and safety across the province.

Madam Speaker, the committee also recommended that the government not proceed with this bill pending engagement with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States. Now, I believe that Canada should take a lead and be torchbearers in that conversation because just weeks ago mayors from the Union of British Columbia Municipalities voted 62 per cent in favour of abolishing daylight saving time in British Columbia. Premier Horgan has indicated that he would be open to discussing and consulting British Columbians on how B.C. abolishes daylight saving time.

The time to act and be a part of how Canada moves away from the time change is now. We know that at the state level in the United States of America two dozen states currently have bills pending to

abolish daylight saving time. That's nearly half of all American jurisdictions. The government of Finland has just received a 70,000-person petition to abolish daylight saving time, and a parliamentary committee in their Parliament, Madam Speaker, is advising the government to raise the issue with the European Union's Parliament.

I understand, Madam Speaker, the very legitimate concerns that businesses in our committee brought forward in dealing with other jurisdictions and how this could bring us out of step with other provinces here in Alberta, but I believe that these recent developments fundamentally change that information. These recent developments change how we must view that recommendation. They change the context in which that recommendation was made, and I think that's information that the committee would have found valuable during their work.

The committee heard loud and clear, as did I during my consultation, from many Albertans, for many reasons, that one time year-round was the way to go, but we did stop and consider some of the larger effects around what the interjurisdictional play and issues may be. Now, I believe that if we were to reject the committee's recommendation, if we were to vote no here today in this House, we could solve those problems that were raised. Other jurisdictions have already passed and are moving forward with this type of legislation. Let us be leaders in the nation. Let us be somebody who says, "We will not wait and follow, but we will drive that horse forward," Madam Speaker.

If this House were to reject the recommendation of the committee and allow the bill to continue through second reading and into Committee of the Whole, I believe strongly that the issues that were identified, specifically those issues with how our businesses interact with other jurisdictions, could be remedied during Committee of the Whole. In fact, I would say so far that I would be willing to move amendments myself that would address the concerns about us being out of step with other jurisdictions.

The debate should not end here today, Madam Speaker. Today we should decide to be leaders in the conversation and be prepared to guide the rest of the country based on Alberta's framework and Alberta's leadership. I believe that I could move amendments that would satisfy the concern that Alberta would be out of step with other provinces and states, but those amendments could only be considered in Committee of the Whole. That's why today I think it's so important that we reject this recommendation and that we allow ourselves the opportunity to continue debate. I believe we should give ourselves the opportunity to have conversation and see what we can do to fix our legislation.

What I'm asking here today, Madam Speaker, is very simple. I'm asking all hon. members in this House to continue having that conversation with me in this House because over 70 per cent of Albertans want one time year-round. We saw that time and time again, not just in my survey but in the one that the committee did as well. We have the opportunity to continue that conversation for them. We have the opportunity to listen to those constituents and those Albertans while addressing the very real business concerns and implications across the province, across the country, and across North America.

I believe we can fulfill in spirit the recommendations that the committee brought forward. We can fulfill those things in spirit and principle, but I believe that in order to continue to be national and international leaders in the conversation, we must vote to allow debate to continue in this House. We must be permitted to continue talking about this issue in this very Legislature, Madam Speaker, and I would commit to making the amendments that would ensure that Alberta would move forward with a co-ordinated approach with the other jurisdictions so Alberta would not fall out of step

with the rest of the country or the rest of North America. I do want to urge all my colleagues to consider today that our constituents and Albertans have told us that they want one time year-round. I believe we can do that for them. I believe that we can find a fair middle ground acknowledging the concerns of our business partners and our interests.

I believe that if we vote together today, if we vote to reject the committee's recommendation, we can bring a common-sense bill forward that will make Alberta a strong national leader in that conversation. I do urge all of my colleagues to vote against the concurrence motion here today. We can make a good bill together. We can tell Albertans that we heard them. We can tell Albertans that we know how to work together to make common-sense change that reflects their wishes. So let's continue that conversation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. I apologize for temporarily moving you to Calgary.

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 203. It was a pleasure to be working with the Economic Future Committee on this consultation process through the summer and talking to Albertans on what their wishes are and seeing what Albertans had to say about how we could best move forward. I believe the committee did some great work on the discovery of trying to understand the best way to move forward. I do believe that the recommendation that came forward from the committee is to consider one time year-round going forward but then to also do that not as if we're on an island unto ourselves but to consider that in consultation with other jurisdictions that we are intertwined with not only in our trading practices, but also socially we're intertwined with them.

We sought feedback from stakeholders and held public meetings in several cities. I was able to participate in public meetings in Grande Prairie and Edmonton, and other members were able to participate in other jurisdictions in the province. I want to thank all of the people that came forward to participate in those meetings. It was helpful for myself and I believe it was helpful for other members on the committee to understand the wishes of Albertans from one end of the province to the other. I did find it very interesting that we were able to see that depending on where you are at in the province, the choice to go with Central Time or the choice to go with Mountain Standard Time was probably the biggest consideration for those that wanted to stop changing the clocks.

What we did learn in Grande Prairie: the Chamber of Commerce in Grande Prairie, Madam Speaker, did a survey amongst their members. I found it very interesting that it was a survey that was split pretty much three ways. A third of their members were saying, "Let's just continue on the way we are," and then another third of the members of the chamber were interested in, "Let's stop changing the clocks, but let's have Mountain Standard Time," and then another third were in favour of Central Time. One thing we did learn also is that when you're that far west in our province, to go to Central Time through the winter would mean that they would be dark until very late in the morning.

That was a big concern for Grande Prairie relative to the concerns in, say, a place farther to the east. Lloydminster would have fewer concerns about being on Central Time because they are right next to Saskatchewan, which is on Central Time. So it was less of a concern as we travelled east that way.

4:10

Before we make a decision as Albertans to stop changing clocks and, not only that, to switch time zones, to go from Mountain Standard Time, which we are currently in, and to essentially become part of the central time zone, which would put us in the same time as places such as Chicago and Nashville, Mexico City, you know, places that are quite a bit further east of us – it became quite evident that we needed to have a conversation with other jurisdictions, our trading partners, and other parts of the world that would also be affected by the decision that is made here.

In my opinion, the committee's consultation ended up with the committee making the right decision, which is that Bill 203 should not proceed and that the motion that came forward would essentially put us where we would then, in consultation with other jurisdictions, decide on the best path forward.

I would like to read from the report the motion that came forward. I'm just trying to find it here, Madam Speaker. I thought I had it. The motion that came forward essentially is recommending that we do not proceed at this time with Bill 203.

The one thing that did concern us in the final report of the committee was the motion that was put forward at committee. The NDP majority passed the motion. My colleagues and I from the UCP Official Opposition that were a part of the committee effort felt it important that we point out that the majority, the NDP majority, passed a motion that we were not able to concur with and that we actually voted against being put forward in the report. The motion was to this effect, that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future direct research services to include in its report regarding the committee's review of Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act, that approximately 75 per cent of the submissions en masse to the committee were in support of abolishing the observance of daylight saving time and identified that it has a negative effect on [but not limited to] their physical and mental well-being, their children, families, productivity at home, at work, at school, and safety on roads.

Madam Speaker, I was not in favour of that motion because, in my opinion, it was not an accurate reflection of the information that we had received as a committee. I believe that we need to be clear with Albertans on the information that came forward. You know, while the committee received approximately 13,562 written submissions, it doesn't necessarily accurately represent a province of over 4 million people, especially considering that these submissions were on a voluntary basis. Voluntary surveys, although helpful, can be very often skewed and have a response bias that would not necessarily be the opinion of the population as opposed to conducting scientific polling, that would be probably more accurate on what the general population's opinion is with regard to the issue at hand.

Furthermore, the motion exaggerated the findings of these supportive submissions by saying that in them people identified that daylight saving time "has a negative effect on . . . their physical and mental well-being." Not all supportive submissions listed any of these things. In fact, the greatest proportion of submissions in favour of abolishing daylight saving had no rationale attached to them at all. They just simply said that there is no benefit to the time change and they would prefer to stick with one time.

Because of these things, we expressed our opposition to this particular motion being included in the final report. It's important that the final report represent clearly and accurately the submissions that came forward.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for doing the work on the bill. I would like to thank the committee for also doing the work on the bill. I believe

that the committee has come to a conclusion that the Members of this Legislative Assembly should respect and understand that the committee, I believe, has heard from Albertans in a way that we can move forward on this item with other jurisdictions and be ready to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand up and talk about the concurrence motion. I am in agreement with my colleague from Edmonton-South West that indeed the time is now – I'm sure there's a pun in there somewhere – and disagree with the results of the report from the committee. Just sort of great notes from our friend in Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock about the work of the committee. I think that the circumstances have changed since that report came forward. I respectfully disagree with that report and say that we be bold when it comes to daylight saving time.

The report at its core recommends that we engage with other jurisdictions to make sure that we do not have any problems when it comes to interjurisdictional business with other provinces and other parts of the United States. However, I have heard loudly from my constituents that they are overwhelmingly in favour of stopping the switch twice yearly and that we stay on daylight saving time year-round. I have had more responses to my office on this particular topic than on any other topic that people have written in to me about.

In particular, I have had several individuals come into my office and sit down with me to give specific examples of why this twice-yearly switch is bad for them. I believe our colleague from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock talked about how some of the submissions didn't have a specific reason. Well, as many people in this House know, I do a lot of work with persons with disabilities. I had several of them come and sit down with me in my office and talk to me about this bill. For many who have disabilities, the importance of routine in their daily lives is very important to helping them manage their disability, whether it be physical or, in particular, mental. Having even that one-hour time-difference switch: for some of us who are, you know, perhaps a bit younger, getting used to the change perhaps only takes a day or two. Well, for these individuals it could take weeks. That dramatically affects their quality of life, their ability to go out and interact and be meaningful members of society as much as they can.

Recently, on Friday, I had a constituency open house, the one I have at the beginning of every session. I had about 30 people come out. I asked the question to them. I have to admit that I prefaced it with the best arguments I've heard both for and against daylight saving time, and they were, in fact, in the report. In that open house people were, again, overwhelmingly in support of stopping the twice-yearly change. Overwhelmingly in support.

4:20

In fact, even from the survey that the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West did, there were 166 individuals from my riding of Calgary-Currie who responded to his survey who strongly agree with his bill. There were another 22 that agreed with his bill. However, there were only 39 who either responded that they didn't know or that they disagreed with the bill. That is an overwhelming majority of my constituents who want this bill to continue moving forward in the Legislature. In listening to them, again, I'm going to have to respectfully disagree with the committee's report. To that, I say to all members of this House that we should be bold. We should lead on this particular topic because that is what my constituents are telling me, that we should lead on that. Be bold.

In the report there seem to be two particular points. Many businesses presented to the committee, and I had a chance to talk to some of my colleagues to get their feedback on how, if this bill was to go forward, it might hurt small businesses. We heard from various hockey teams, businesses, and, of course, from our local airports. I think the airports, you know, made a very interesting case on why this might be a problem, particularly as it relates to connecting flights. That was actually the example I used when I talked to my constituents in my office and said, "Hey; this is by far the strongest case I've heard for why we shouldn't go forward." The response I got from my constituents is: "You know, yeah. That makes sense. However, it seems like something that could, after a bit of a transition, be managed." That was what my constituents were telling me in my office. I tend to agree with them on that particular point.

The other part was related to, you know, the importance of matching up with other jurisdictions. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West mentioned, there are several other constituencies who are working on this. In fact, in B.C., as he mentioned, there is a 62 per cent vote in favour of B.C. moving off the twice-yearly switch, which means that that conversation in B.C. is already starting, and it seems like perhaps they're about a year behind us.

If we vote with the report of the committee, then we will end this conversation. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West made some very great points about how he would be able to address some of the concerns in the report. On the topic of, you know, other jurisdictions this is a little bit of a chicken-and-egg problem. If we wait for other jurisdictions and then other jurisdictions wait for those other jurisdictions – I think that we should be bold. We should take the first step and vote no to concurrence so that we can continue this debate.

With that, I ask you, all my colleagues: let us be bold and lead into the future and continue the debate in this House. Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, I have some real concerns with the arguments coming from the other side. There's a committee that very thoughtfully debated and discussed this bill that was referred to it. Just some of the dismissiveness, I think, of the work that had gone on in the committee is really troubling to me and some of the very, very thin rationale that's being used to perhaps suggest that we reject the recommendations of this committee: that the B.C. Premier, quote, is discussing the idea that perhaps we would do this, that B.C.'s equivalent to the AUMA has passed a resolution suggesting that perhaps the government of British Columbia should consider this. These are very preliminary steps that the government is taking, and it's nowhere near enough, in my opinion, to override a unanimous motion of a committee of the Legislative Assembly.

I will say, Madam Speaker, that I find it curious that when that committee, an all-party committee, unanimously voted to not proceed with this bill and once that news came out, the Premier herself was then scrummed shortly thereafter and expressed her personal opinion that actually maybe this issue isn't dead.

Well, there are a couple of things that really concern me with that. One, it's a committee of the Legislative Assembly that's passed a unanimous motion, including, of course, members of her own party. But this, Madam Speaker, is a private member's bill. Now, again, we have the government very clearly cracking the whip on their backbench on an issue that perhaps the Premier herself has a strong opinion on, so it makes me wonder what the purpose of this entire process is if, really, the Premier just will do whatever it is she wants.

I will say this. I am perfectly fine with the idea of ending daylight saving time. However, if we're going to do that, we need to ensure that we are co-ordinating with not just our neighbours to the east and west in Alberta and in Canada but with our largest trading partner south of the border. Now, I understand that perhaps as many as half the states in the U.S. are thinking about eliminating daylight saving time, and that's a great idea. Let's do that. If we're going to do that, let's do it as a co-ordinated North America wide effort. I think it would be very damaging to Alberta's fragile economy for us to be out of step with our largest trading partner. Frankly, it makes no sense at all.

Now, I was very encouraged and curious – and I know there's no 29(2)(a) in private members' business – when the Member for Edmonton-South West said that he also would want us to make sure we don't fall out of step with our neighbours and the rest of North America. That's important. It'd be very, very damaging, I think, for Alberta to move forward unilaterally.

I look forward to seeing the amendments that he will propose, but again what I don't understand, Madam Speaker, is what isn't addressed by accepting this motion. Why do we need to not accept the motion? I'll read the motion, and that is that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future recommend that Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act, not proceed and that the government of Alberta engage other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States to develop a co-ordinated approach to eliminating the practice of observing daylight saving time.

That's a good idea. That's what we should be doing.

I agree. I agree with the majority of Albertans that daylight saving time is an antiquated practice that probably does more harm than good. However, we've lived with it for decades, and if we get out of step with our trading partners, we're in trouble. My question is: why would we reinvigorate this debate? Is there going to be a scenario where we're out of step with our largest trading partner? I certainly hope not.

I believe that the motion as passed unanimously by the committee addresses the concerns that have been raised by the Member for Edmonton-South West.

One final and, I think, perhaps the most important point of all: continuing the debate on daylight saving time sends exactly the wrong message to all of those stakeholders who came to that committee. They provided their thoughtful input.

What this does is it adds more uncertainty to an already very uncertain business climate. And if there is one thing this government could do to help entrepreneurs, to help the economy of this province, it is to end the uncertainty. By passing that motion unanimously, there was a collective sigh of relief from airlines, from companies that do business all over North America, who export throughout the world. But now, all of a sudden, these companies go: "Wait a minute; I thought we'd settled this thing, and now we're back on it. We have to debate this thing again?" The uncertainty that this bill brings – I recognize it's a private member's bill, but it's a private member's bill of the government side – the uncertainty created in Alberta's economy by this government, is just killing jobs. It's killing investment. This is the reason that companies are unwilling right now to invest in Alberta. It's this incredible uncertainty.

I would strongly encourage the Assembly, all of my colleagues in the government, to accept this recommendation because it achieves what I have heard the other side wants to achieve, and that is to continue to co-ordinate with other jurisdictions as they move forward. That's what we should be doing. But we should allow this bill to die and make sure that we bring at least a modicum of certainty to Alberta's business climate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Calgary-Greenway.

4:30

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise on this first day of the session to speak to Bill 203, and I rise to concur with the motion and recommendation put forward by the committee that Bill 203 not proceed. I believe that this committee sat in many, many meetings, listened to submissions, that were probably one of the largest numbers of submissions ever received by a committee of this Legislature, and they came up with the correct conclusion, that it's not really a question of if but when we stop changing our clocks and decide upon which time zone to adopt year-round.

I speak in support of the recommendation, and I encourage all members to do the same thing because I think that in its wisdom the committee, in adding a further recommendation that the government of Alberta engage other jurisdictions, as mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Elbow just recently, sought to address any concerns that individuals might have that we weren't going to move in lockstep with other jurisdictions, which the committee heard was very, very important to do if and when we decide to go ahead and not change our clocks any longer and would decide upon a time zone to adopt year-round. I think the committee rightfully makes this recommendation knowing that the large majority of Albertans wish to stop changing their clocks and that they wish to do so in conjunction with neighbouring jurisdictions, in particular British Columbia, and perhaps other jurisdictions in the United States.

I'd urge all members of the House to follow my lead and choose to accept the recommendation of the Alberta's Economic Future Committee that Bill 203 not proceed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to support the motion not to proceed with Bill 203, Alberta Standard Time Act. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, and the proposal of this bill to eliminate daylight saving time did involve potential impact on Alberta's economic future. We heard from various stakeholders. We heard from our business community that any move to eliminate daylight saving time at this juncture would put us out of sync with the rest of North America. That could be damaging to our businesses.

Particularly compelling was the feedback from Calgary and Edmonton airport authorities. Bill 203's proposal to move Alberta two time zones from B.C. during winter was particularly concerning. Should that have come to pass, WestJet indicated that its connecting flight system would have meant that customers in British Columbia would have had to catch their flights at 5 a.m., which means they have to be at the airport for international flights, like, as early as the middle of the night. The concern from the airline was that the B.C. travellers might simply choose alternate routes that bypass Alberta rather than face those departure times. As the Calgary Airport Authority noted, Calgary's economic engine generates more than \$8 billion in GDP through a carefully balanced system that depends on negotiated schedules with various partners around the world. That is basically, of course, the crux of the issue.

Yes, jurisdictions in Canada and the United States are reconsidering the value of daylight saving time right now, but the movement is just beginning. Just last week states in the New England region began pondering the advisability of eliminating daylight saving time. A bill was even brought forward in Maine. Its experience was interesting because even though the bill passed both

chambers in the state Legislature, the Senate added a provision that Maine voters must approve it through a referendum and that a vote could only be triggered by neighbouring Massachusetts and New Hampshire also changing their time zones. That speaks to two important issues, that it is important not to move out of sync with your region when it comes to time zones and that referendums are the tools for these kinds of decisions.

Time after time in the consultation period with Albertans on Bill 203 they requested the same allowance. Since daylight saving time was brought in by a referendum decades ago, should Alberta's Legislature be considering a similar move, they should send it to a province-wide vote. That has been the consistent position of our UCP caucus on the matter. Yes, I understand there is a cost to this referendum. However, if it is partnered with the provincial election, then the cost is manageable and justifiable when Albertans are the ones asking for it. We can manage effectively if we're willing to do so.

Albertans were also asking for another thing when they provided submissions to the committee or attended to address us in person. They asked us to deal with the very real problem that Alberta is facing today, and that is, as we all know, the economy. The economy is top of mind for them, Madam Speaker. When so many Albertans are out of work, when our economy has taken a dive from which it has yet to recover, when we're posting \$10 billion deficits over and over again with no plan to pay it back, when Alberta's debt load is escalating to the point that Canada's parliamentary budget office, our AG, and respected economists are warning us to get our fiscal house in order, why would we spend so much time on this issue? That's just my question.

Alberta is desperate for common sense from their government these days, and time and money spent deliberating over this bill when other challenging issues were just pushed through the House with almost no consultation – labour legislation comes to mind. Bill 6 comes to mind. Carbon tax comes to mind. They wanted us to get down to work on the issues that will set our province on an economic course that will allow them and their family members and their friends and their neighbours to get back to work. I for one and all my colleagues in the Official Opposition are more than willing to do this. We don't need distractions like these bills the NDP keeps bringing forward. We're here to better the lives of Albertans, and we intend to do that, so let's focus on the issues that matter the most to Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to begin by saying that I believe that the idea of getting rid of daylight savings time is a good idea, and I believe it's widely supported by Albertans. I also want to say that I understand the concern as it relates to being out of sync with other jurisdictions. I appreciate the good work of the committee and particularly of the sponsor of the bill that we are here to discuss today. It definitely reflects the hundreds of families that reached out to me in particular and others. I had about 300 people from Edmonton-Glenora contact me with feedback, and I believe it was nine that said that they wanted to keep daylight savings. I think that this is more complex, though, obviously, than the information that most individuals have at their hands. I respect what's being said about being out of sync with other jurisdictions, and obviously we don't want to do anything that could jeopardize our economic recovery.

We are set – by the way, Madam Speaker, I plan on saying this a lot in this Chamber, so this is my first shot – to see the strongest growth of any jurisdiction in Canada this year under this NDP

government. I'm very, very proud of that. It is absolutely the right place and the right time for people to be investing in Alberta.

I agree that we shouldn't be moving forward without other jurisdictions being ready to follow suit with us because of that fragile position of our economy. Therefore, I'm of the opinion that the committee should find a way to give this another shot. The committee should find another way to engage with the New West Partnership. The committee should find another way to engage with the Western Governors' Association. We are part of so many different organizations that are engaged with other governors across this country as well as across North America, and I really am hopeful that Alberta will be in a position to lead those conversations.

4:40

Of course, I want to stay in step. Of course, I want to support those investments in continuing to come to Alberta, and I'm a little disappointed that the only recommendation is that we just don't do this work. I think it's important that we be leaders on this file, and I want to again thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for being a leader on this file. I understand what some of the precarity is, but I really do wish that the committee give it another shot and find a way to move forward with Albertans, who are definitely making a lot of their opinions very clear, as well as protect the economy and the investments. Doing that in a way that's in partnership with engaging, as I mentioned, the New West Partnership as well as the Western Governors' Association would be a reasonable way to do that, in my opinion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member that brought forward this bill says that we need to be in step and that there are a bunch of states that are actually looking at this bill. I've got a sheet here in front of me that shows a lot of that that is going on. Colorado Bill 1226, to make daylight saving time year-round standard time, failed.

Mr. Gill: What?

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. Bill 1226 failed.

There's a whole raft of them here: Illinois, referred to committee; Iowa, referred to committee; Maine, died in the House; Mississippi, failed in committee; Mississippi, again failed in committee. It's been tried. Numerous attempts have been made, and some of these fall in the same time zone as us. Again, New Hampshire failed to adopt standard time. You know, it goes on and on and on. I really think that if we're going to take this step, we have to be – if we're going to be out of step with the rest of the jurisdictions south of us, east of us, and west of us, especially British Columbia, I think it's just a bit insane.

The time spent on committee – you know, there are a lot of us that don't live in Edmonton that do a lot of travelling when it comes to committee. People from Calgary drive up, or, you know, we phone in and sit on the line for hours and try to take part in these important discussions.

I think this is an important discussion. It was given a fair bit of time in the committee. A lot of people came and submitted. I mean, if we ignore the submission by the Calgary Airport Authority, where they say, "The YYC economic engine generates \$8.28 billion in GDP" – this just seems like another attack on another industry in Alberta, and I think that in the last two years we've seen enough damage done.

The frustrating part is that while a lot of this was taking place – and I look at the money that was spent on consultation. I'm all for consultation, but the important issues of the day that were ignored while this was going on – the \$10 billion debt, the projected \$90 billion in deficit and debt coming forward – are the things that we should have been spending our time on.

While the money was being spent on this, a little program in the town of St. Paul – you know, we talk about not affecting front-line workers and front-line patients – called the STRIDES program was cancelled this summer. A lady came into my office crying with a letter saying that basically they were being thrown out in the street, and this program was dropped. When I started looking into it, it's like: man, this must be some huge money-saving program for this government. This affected people with brain injuries, gave them something to do every day, gave them something to get up for in the morning. You know what this thing was worth? Twenty-four thousand dollars. Cancelled by Alberta Health Services.

Ms Hoffman: You know how many of those you're going to have to cancel to find 20 per cent?

Mr. Hanson: Shameful. Shameful that you would even say that.

You know what? Dealing with some of this stuff in committees where we would get into a robust discussion and when the other committee members – I'll remind you that this committee decision was made by a majority of government committee members that voted unanimously for this. But I find it very frustrating a lot of times. It's like peeling balloons, right? It's just poof, and it's gone.

Where did I get that from? Well, when I was in high school, I read a book by Kurt Vonnegut called *Cat's Cradle*. In this book they talk about an island in the south Pacific where they had their own society called volcanism, and they had their own language. One of the words in that language was the word "granfalloon," and I think it describes this government in the way they handle committees perfectly. Basically, if you want to look it up on Wikipedia, it could help you out there. It says that one of the definitions is that it's a proud and meaningless collection of human beings. It is a group of people who effect a shared identity of purpose but whose mutual association is totally meaningless.

If we go and make decisions in committees and have unanimous decisions and somebody does a flip-flop and changes their mind on it, it basically is a waste of taxpayers' time and money. It's a waste of committee time. How are people supposed to be engaged? Who is going to come and present to our next committee when we open it up for the public to come in and submit? People take a lot of time. They put these proposals together. They take time out of their own businesses to come and present and to basically be – oh, well; we've changed our minds again – you know, left out in the cold.

We find it very frustrating that we would take this committee decision, again, that was voted on by a majority of the government committee members, all-party committee members that were there – the people that came and submitted really good submissions, talking about how \$8.2 billion is nothing to sneeze at. That's down in Calgary. What are the people down in Calgary going to say when they see that, or even the Edmonton airport authority, that basically submitted the same type of proposal, that this is going to cost a lot of money? You know, those airports are constantly fighting to bring international flights into our area, and something like this just makes all their efforts look like a joke.

I would submit that we need to support the committee's recommendation on this, vote for this motion, and kill this bill. Until we can get a collaboration of all of the jurisdictions that we work with on a daily basis in this province, we don't need to put another nail in the coffin of Alberta and the economy of Alberta. We need

to support the Alberta economy, airports, tourism, everything that goes with it.

That's about all I've got to say. I just hope everybody realizes that this decision was made, and we have to support our committees. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm privileged and honoured, of course, to be a member of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, which was charged with addressing this Bill 203. You know, in my committee and subsequent public consultation roles in the subcommittee, which I was honoured to serve on as well, I was able to review and consider the various written and verbal submissions received from engaged and, in many cases, concerned Albertans and stakeholder groups.

One thing that struck me throughout the entire process was the lack of a clear mandate for change, in fact, the contrary, with much confusion, dissension, reasoned economic and logistical concerns being raised, and, yes, yes, a good number who also suggested that our clocks should never be changed again. In fact, it became clear and we must recognize that there are many factors at play in this issue, in fact too many for us to lead blindly into the unknown, possibly at great costs with respect to jobs and the economy, which must be first and foremost in our minds during these difficult times.

Yes, again, many of the written submissions received by the committee indicated a desire to abolish daylight saving time. However, even these submissions were split on what permanent time we should adopt. Do we make a permanent leap forward, do we take a risky step back or just maintain the status quo, or do we want to be bold and act as a global outlier with great risks attached to it?

During the live in-person consultation process, where we invited key stakeholders to present to the committee, the majority, in fact, were opposed to Bill 203. I kept my own record of that in Calgary and Edmonton specifically. As someone who has spent almost two decades in the airline industry myself with Hong Kong based Cathay Pacific Airways, it was no surprise to me to see such important transportation stakeholders as WestJet, Edmonton International Airport, Calgary airport, and Fort McMurray all opposing Bill 203 for strategic reasons, good reasons that could ultimately affect investment, employment, our global connectivity, and the building of strong passenger and cargo hubs that support Alberta trade, commerce, tourism, cultural exchanges, and prosperity.

4:50

Bill 203 would put Alberta two time zones away from B.C. during the winter months. WestJet specifically cited this as a serious, in fact a potentially critical concern in their plans for a regionally, continentally, and globally connected Alberta. Their representatives indicated that guests departing B.C. on a given morning through a Calgary or Edmonton hub that they worked so hard to establish would now have to depart at a highly inconvenient, perhaps traffic-killing 5 a.m. instead of 6 a.m. They expressed concern that this change would be unappealing enough to many of their customers, who may then choose alternate routings that bypass Alberta, possibly sending business to competitors south of the border, weakening our ability to focus on strategic growth in what I can assure you after 20 years is a highly competitive industry.

They went on to state:

This connecting traffic is [foundational] to the growth of WestJet's...

Yes, that proud Alberta company.

... hub in Calgary and continued expansion in Edmonton.

It also has a positive downstream impact on the strength of our services in Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie.

Bill 203 puts this growth at risk. Members, is that a risk that this Assembly is willing to take? I don't think so.

As you can see, one of Alberta's major employers and a global leader in civil aviation has a very real concern with this bill. I do not think it is wise to cast aside such concerns when the potential for negative impact is clear but the depth of that impact is absolutely unknown and perhaps unpredictable were we to take such an unjustifiable leap of faith. Or should I call it a flight of fancy?

All of the input from the thousands of written submissions, in-person stakeholder presentations, and public consultations were transparently available to all members of this committee and, in fact, all members of this Legislature, with attendant rationale, arguments, and emotional pleas when we as a committee made a unanimous recommendation not to proceed with Bill 203, which brings me to my next point. The Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future was tasked by this Legislature with reviewing Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act, and returning to the Assembly with a clear recommendation. We have done this work, and, again, we unanimously passed a motion which indicated that Bill 203 should not proceed.

All parties and members were of course welcome and able to attend any of the committee meetings and offer their insights and input. We have now heard from many Albertans, Madam Speaker, and the only logical decision is clearly not to proceed given the uncertainty of costs versus benefits in any leap forward on this bill.

I think we all need to say our final piece, Madam Speaker, as Albertans. We need to respect the committee. We need to respect the members of that committee, the majority being from that side, and all of the people that worked hard on this and support the recommendation to now put aside Bill 203.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I'm going to say that I'm on the Economic Future Committee. I was on the subcommittee for this bill, and I listened to every single presenter at the meetings.

Now, I listened. I was part of the unanimous decision that this bill not proceed further, but there was a second recommendation from that committee, and that recommendation was that the government of Alberta engage other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States to discuss a co-ordinated approach to eliminating the practice of observing daylight saving time. I put that forward, and I put it forward because I listened to Susan Schneider when she came to the mike and she said that she hadn't even planned on coming to the mike to speak but she had to. She was somebody who had MS. She said that every time the clock changes, her body reacts both physically and psychologically because she has to adjust her medication. She said that it is a month of hell after she has to change that clock. Because of her I put that motion forward; this bill may die right now, but the issue cannot. It has to move forward because we represent Albertans, the Albertans like Susan. We have to consider every single part of this argument, and, let me tell you, I listened to every single submission.

I also listened to the people that came to my office. I did a little survey with my church choir. Of the 39 people in that choir 38 said to stop changing the clock. Of course the issue is: are we going to mountain or central? That is an issue that has to be discussed. It has to engage conversation with our neighbours, and it has to because we need to do it simultaneously. So I support the motion that the

committee put forward for this bill not to proceed, but I also support the second recommendation, which is to engage our neighbours.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw to close debate.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be very brief on this. I do want to thank all the committee members. This was a very thorough review that commenced. As we move forward, it is important, as it was recommended, that we engage the jurisdictions moving forward with this process. I specifically can commit to the Legislative Assembly that I will be bringing this forth, amongst other items, including fighting for pipelines, when we are in PNWER this weekend. It will be one of the many focuses and dialogues that are happening. So the conversation will continue.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 203. Does the Assembly concur in this report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. That motion is carried.

[The voice vote indicated that the committee report was concurred in]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For:

Aheer	Gottfried	Nielsen
Anderson, S.	Hanson	Orr
Anderson, W.	Horne	Phillips
Babcock	Hunter	Piquette
Carson	Jansen	Rosendahl
Ceci	Kazim	Sabir
Clark	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Coolahan	Larivee	Shepherd
Cooper	Littlewood	Starke
Cortes-Vargas	McCuaig-Boyd	Stier
Dach	McIver	Sucha
Drever	McKittrick	Sweet
Drysdale	McPherson	van Dijken
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Gill		

Against:

Dang	Hoffman	Malkinson
Eggen	Loyola	Turner
Totals:	For – 46	Against – 6

[The committee report was concurred in]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

World Interfaith Harmony Week

508. Ms Kazim moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the

government to recognize the first week of February as World Interfaith Harmony Week in support of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 65/5.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This motion has the objective of declaring the first week of February beginning in 2018 to be the annual United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. World Interfaith Harmony Week was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on October 20, 2010. The resolution highlights that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace and establishes World Interfaith Harmony Week as a way to promote harmony between all people regardless of their faith. World Interfaith Harmony Week aims to enhance mutual understanding, harmony, and co-operation among people, and the United Nations encourages all countries to support this valuable work.

I find it most appropriate in a time where misconceptions and misunderstanding lead to fear and hate crimes that we encourage harmony and understanding in Alberta when it comes to diversity, especially diversity in faith. Alberta, as the rest of Canada, has a diverse community. Here in Alberta we celebrate and share our diversity throughout the year. Here in Alberta we are proud of our diversity. In fact, here in Alberta our diversity is our strength. I'm very proud to be part of a government that supports communities and initiatives that promote interfaith and cultural harmony. We on this side of the House and, I hope, across the aisle, too, value diversity in our communities and in our province. That is why our government supports and encourages the mutual understanding, harmony, and co-operation among people through multiple initiatives.

In July the Premier tasked the Minister of Education with gathering input on ways the government can fight racism, foster acceptance, and promote an inclusive society. The minister, the Premier, and government MLAs have met with over a hundred community organizations to hear directly from them on what they are seeing and experiencing. After hearing their concerns about the challenges faced in their communities, the Minister of Education will report back on his findings and possible recommendations this fall.

Another way that we celebrate diversity in this province is through Alberta Culture Days, a three-day provincial celebration that raises awareness, accessibility, participation, and engagement of all Albertans in the arts and cultural life of their communities. The 10th anniversary of Alberta Culture Days happened last month, and our government provided grants to assist nonprofit organizations in becoming celebration sites to provide cultural programming.

The declaration of April 2017 as Sikh Heritage Month celebrates the contributions of Alberta's Sikh community to Alberta's cultural diversity and the richness of thoughts and ideas that Sikh Albertans contribute to our province.

This year Alberta became the fourth province in Canada to proclaim February as Black History Month. This month-long celebration recognizes the contributions of people of African and Caribbean descent and gives all Albertans the opportunity to learn more about the black experience in Alberta and hear amazing stories of struggle, of hope, and of triumph.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism also provided \$2 million in funding to commemorate the 150th year of the Confederation of Canada, Canada 150. This supported projects by nonprofit organizations that tied into the Canada 150 themes. Two of the four themes are: diversity, inclusion, and the building of common interests and relationships; and supporting efforts toward reconciliation of indigenous and nonindigenous Canadians. Adding

such opportunities for Albertans from different faiths and backgrounds to come together strengthens the cohesion that exists in this province, but we know that there is still work to do. That is why we have been reaching out to communities across Alberta to gather their input on racism in Alberta and on the practical steps our government can take to fight racism, foster acceptance, and promote inclusion and diversity today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

5:20

Our government is committed to listening to Albertans who are experiencing racism and hearing from them on how we can best work together on ways to fight it. I'm proud that our government is taking steps to combat racism, and I feel that interfaith harmony week will contribute towards the education and relationship building needed in combatting racism and intolerance.

This motion will keep building on the many supports that this government has shown and given to Albertans. It will provide the time and space to celebrate and help to create understanding of the many faiths that are practised in Alberta. It will celebrate Alberta's diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious communities. It will encourage dialogue and respect the equal rights and privileges of all.

This motion will celebrate diversity in our communities, enhance mutual understanding, promote harmony and co-operation, and inspire Albertans to practise one's religion, convictions, or beliefs without fear. Albertans will have a designated time to celebrate their faith and come together in a sharing and communing spirit.

I know how important this need is, having heard directly from the Calgary Interfaith Council on how participation in the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week builds bridges of respect and understanding amongst faith communities. In fact, the Calgary Interfaith Council launched its newly amalgamated organization in February 2017 with its participation in the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. Earlier this year the Calgary Interfaith Council program was even awarded a prestigious gold medal interfaith harmony prize in Amman, Jordan, because of their work encouraging interfaith co-operation.

By declaring the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, Alberta will join various communities across the globe and right here in Canada such as Nova Scotia and the cities of Halifax and Calgary, that already celebrate interfaith week. The province of Alberta will join millions across the world to celebrate what unites people in faith, love, and good actions.

I ask the members of this House to support my motion that urges the government to declare the first week of February, beginning in 2018, to be the annual United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. Let's build an opportunity for Albertans to come together and celebrate their faith. Together we will continue to build a successful province and make life better for Albertans regardless of their skin colour, immigration status, or faith.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to thank the member opposite for bringing this motion before us and also to speak in support of recognizing World Interfaith Harmony Week in our great province.

Albertans in many respects have been collaborating across faiths for decades in things like food banks and disaster relief, community building, elder care, things like that. But there are still challenges, and it's important for us to think about this and talk about it and recognize the intent of this motion. Having a formal day of

recognition may bring more people to the table and inspire future collaborations, which would be a good thing.

I think it's important to say that Alberta has seen very little, relatively speaking to other places in the world, interfaith conflict, which really is the concern of an interfaith harmony week. In Alberta we've had relative interfaith peace, respect, and collaboration, but, tragically, it isn't always the case, and it hasn't been in the past, nor, I suspect, will it be in the future. I think we do need to emphasize the importance of always reminding ourselves about these things. The reality is that sometimes faith has been the point of conflict. Sometimes faith just gets blamed for economic and social conflict. Sometimes faith is twisted and used corruptly to create conflict. That's tragic because all faiths, in their true forms, seek peace, goodness, and kindness toward family and foreigner. Hence, support for World Interfaith Harmony Week to remind all people of faith to stay true to the virtues and the graces of their teaching is a worthwhile effort.

Just last week, Wednesday, I was at the Red Deer College 12th annual interfaith conference. The theme of this year's conference is particularly relevant to this motion today. It was Global Conflicts and the Need for Justice. Speakers were a visiting Jewish Israeli, a Roman Catholic from Edmonton, an imam from Ahmadiya Muslim Jama'at from Calgary, and two native elders from Maskwacis, all presenting very informative and positive ideas.

Alberta is actually, as has been referred to already, blessed with adherents of approximately 100 different religions or denominations or spiritual traditions, all of which, I believe, strengthen our province and continue to bring people to our province. Stats Canada data released in October shows that Alberta is becoming increasingly attractive as a place for newcomers to exercise both their personal and their religious freedoms. To quote Stats Canada:

Over the past 15 years, the share of recent immigrants in the Prairie provinces has more than doubled. The percentage of new immigrants living in Alberta rose from 6.9% in 2001 to 17.1% in 2016, a higher share [even] than in British Columbia.

Stats Canada goes on to say that

moreover, many new immigrants chose to settle in areas with an established community from their [own] home country.

What Stats Canada may be overlooking there is that there are often forerunner folks who settle in communities alone where there may not be a large community of people from their home countries. For some of them it is actually often shared-faith communities that provide the support and the friendship and the connection from which to start out in the middle of a prairie province even when the common bonds of language and home country are not there.

For instance, in my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka our community is enriched by the diversity of faiths represented in approximately 50 different cultural and faith communities: again, Stats Canada data. That includes various First Nations and Métis, Inuit, Acadian, various European origins, which I humbly share. We've welcomed Hindus from south Asia and the Caribbean; Muslims from Europe and the Middle East; Catholics from Asia, the Pacific islands, Central America and South America; Buddhists from the Far East; and of course the list goes on, far beyond that.

Lacombe has also been the home for over 100 years to a faith-based educational institution now called Burman University. I recently had the good fortune to join the Minister of Advanced Education there for the installation of a new president of this great institution. This faith academy community has greatly enriched the community of Lacombe and does so with deliberate intent to engage. As an ordained minister one of the greatest joys I've experienced is in seeing folks explore and express their faith, and in return I've received insights and affirmations from Albertans who may pray or believe differently or even not at all, quite frankly.

It's been my goal and, I believe, the goal of many community leaders to consider new ways to showcase the innovative ways in which working across faith brings people together in our communities. Community leaders, for instance, in Calgary, whose World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrations this year took first place among 79 entries world-wide, should be an inspiration to all of us as we work together toward goals of larger faith.

Encouraging and understanding and collaboration is where I believe that we as legislators can have a positive impact. As people with skills in legislation and policy we have opportunities to help nonprofit organizations such as places of worship to identify, reduce, and remove barriers that hinder or prevent them from understanding one another and/or working together in ways that are helpful. Whether those barriers are policies and governments that discourage different groups or governments around the world that in some way try to restrict them or limit them or whatever kinds of ways that hinder people and faith groups from trying to work together, whether it's uninformed stereotypes about other groups held by an unrepresentative few in a community, we need to speak out and help to reduce those kinds of barriers and misunderstandings.

5:30

A good example of collaboration here in the city of Edmonton is the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action Society. They hold an annual interfaith exhibition to celebrate faith, again representing many aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Quaker, Sikh, Unitarian, Zoroastrian, and other faiths.

But there remains much work to do, and we need to recognize that. We need to recognize and reconcile and heal historic rifts of faith around the world as well as here at home. As European colonists, including many of our ancestors, expanded westward in Canada, religious and government leaders sought to eradicate faiths of people indigenous to this land through residential schools and laws prohibiting practices of faith such as the potlatch and the sun dance. In so doing, government and religious officials left behind a legacy of broken communities, families, and individuals who were forced to abandon their culture and their faith.

Those actions taken in the name of religion continue to harm indigenous peoples today through intergenerational trauma; disproportionately high representation in the justice and child intervention systems; reduced opportunity; loss of culture, language, and faith; and diminished quality of life. While I don't think that we can go back and rewrite history or make different choices back then, working to improve understanding across faiths will help to prevent such tragedies and injustices from ever occurring again in the name of faith here or in other countries.

In light of an unfortunate and persistent and possibly growing climate of intolerance, prejudice, and even violence against people who express their faith around the world, the reasons why the UN General Assembly actually initiated the resolution for World Interfaith Harmony Week back in 2010, all of that remains especially relevant even today. As world leaders have said – I think of just a few: David Cameron, Angela Merkel, the Pope – and others have pointed out, the age of religious persecutions and martyrs is not over. Most data points out that Christians are the group most persecuted and killed for their faith in the world today. Muslims are the second most persecuted. But there are others also.

Some have called this the premier human rights challenge of our era, and I think it is a challenge for all of us even here in Alberta. For my caucus colleagues and myself, who are ourselves of diverse faiths and represent constituents of even more faiths, it is right to promote a culture of peace and goodwill with religious and cultural

understanding, harmony, and co-operation of one another's religions and beliefs.

Mr. Stier: Madam Speaker, is there a 29(2)(a) opportunity?

The Deputy Speaker: No, not on this. This is a private member's motion.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Motion 508. I am so pleased to see the Member for Calgary-Glenmore introduce this motion. I know that the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore has introduced this motion because it is something that she not only believes in but models through her work as an MLA. I want to take the opportunity to thank her for her leadership in this area, as I've witnessed in her work, in the things that she has said in this Assembly, and just how she has modeled the true meaning of intercultural harmony. So thank you.

I share with the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore and with many of my constituents the importance of having one's faith and beliefs respected and recognized. I have been to too many places in the world right after wars that have been caused due to religious intolerance. Knowing that there are so many different faith groups that are active in Alberta really underscores the importance of recognizing the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week here in Alberta. I understand that next year in Edmonton we're going to see an international congress around interfaith work, and I'm so pleased that this organization has chosen to come here to Alberta.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed World Interfaith Harmony Week seven years ago, and it has proven to be an effective way to recognize different faiths and promote harmony between all people regardless of their faith. It would be very fitting to see this week declared and recognized in Alberta, where we are so proud of our diversity.

I'm very proud of the diversity within our own caucus, where we come from many different ethnic backgrounds, faiths, sexual identities, marriages, young and old. We are really lucky to reflect the diversity of Albertans within our caucus. Like the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, I feel a great sense of pride to be part of a government that supports Alberta's faith and cultural communities and promotes interfaith and cultural harmony. In our efforts to stand up and reject intolerance and racism, it is vitally important that we do everything that we can to encourage harmony and understanding in Alberta when it comes to diversity.

Last week the Baha'i community celebrated the birth of their founder, Baha'ullah. Baha'is may not be well known in Alberta. Many have fled Persia and other countries due to persecution, and others became Baha'is through learning about the tenets of the faith. Baha'is believe in community service and in educating youth on the virtues of volunteerism, peacemaking, and not speaking ill of each other. Baha'ullah calls his followers to good deeds, kind words, upright conduct, service to others, and collaborative action. I can attest to how the Baha'is in my own constituency model these teachings and the legacy this has in our community.

Another example of how Albertans are involved in interfaith harmony is the recently held Christian-Muslim dialogue initiated by A Common World Alberta. On Saturday table discussions took place between Christians and Muslims following some very thought-provoking remarks by leading Muslim and Christian clergy. This event was funded by a diversity of groups with deep roots in interfaith dialogue, including the Mennonite Central Committee, the Intercultural Dialogue Institute of Edmonton, the city of Edmonton, and a number of mosques and churches. The

vision of A Common World Alberta is: "As Christians and Muslims, we strive to create spaces for gatherings where our faith communities can engage each other in order to overcome stereotypes and embrace our differences."

This event was part of a week of meetings in various churches, university campuses, and mosques to promote dialogue and understanding. I know that through this event my colleagues from Edmonton-McClung and Edmonton-Mill Creek, like me, were provided with the opportunity to dialogue with Albertans who have deep faith and who, like this motion calls for, really believe in intercultural harmony.

Like my colleague, I am extremely proud of our government's antiracism initiative, led by the Minister of Education, and I think this initiative is going to have some very far-reaching things not only in our schools but through our community. I really would like to again thank the Premier for initiating this initiative.

Many Albertans, including some of my constituents, have taken the time to visit the government's website and share their perspective on how our government can support efforts to combat racism, foster acceptance, and promote an inclusive society. In Sherwood Park the Strathcona County Diversity Committee, which is a grassroots initiative, has provided leadership in promoting intercultural harmony, including ensuring that a new mosque in our community is welcomed. I look forward to the official opening of the masjid in the park and the welcoming place that this mosque will be in our community.

Creating opportunities for Albertans from different faiths to join together is an important way that we can strengthen the bonds that already exist in our community. Faith communities add vibrancy to our province, and the members of these communities contribute so much to Alberta. I believe that interfaith harmony week will remind us as Albertans that despite our differences, we have a shared proud history of coming together on our common values of the importance of family and devoting ourselves to our communities.

I would urge every MLA to buy the multifaith calendar. If you don't know where you can buy the multifaith calendar, please come and see me, and I'll be happy to give you the information on where you can buy it. This calendar is really key in doing what this week calls for, which is the promotion of intercultural harmony and, especially, learning more about other faiths.

Once again I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for making this motion and for providing a valuable opportunity for all of us to recognize people of different faiths, to learn more about each other's faith, and to see what we have in common.

Thank you very much.

5:40

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I first of all want to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. It's a real pleasure to rise and speak to this motion, and I would like to thank the member for bringing it forward. I love this motion.

World Interfaith Harmony Week: I mean, if you think about what that means, it encompasses so many things that are important to so many Albertans. It seems these days that we just can't get through a week without hearing about some horrific attack, some attack destroying the lives of hundreds of people around the world, and our hearts go out to everyone who is impacted. Unfortunately, these situations tend to hide behind the banners of faith and create fear and confusion around the world about what religion actually is, what it means to us, and what it stands for. I really believe that this

motion goes a long, long way to fostering understanding between religions and really creating community and embracing faith and also the teachings of that faith.

I actually feel extremely blessed to have been born to a Hindu father and an Anglican mother. From my very first breath I've had the good fortune of a wealth of spiritual and cultural traditions that surround me. I've had the privilege of growing up with an array of religious beliefs and traditions. My family actually found some really magnificent ways to combine all of those different traditions.

For example, when my dad first arrived in Canada, this lovely woman whose name is Pansy and her husband, George, who became my Grandma Pansy and my Grandpa George, went to the airport – they didn't have children of their own – and took all of these young East Indian men that were just getting off the airplane and embraced them and brought them into Canadian culture and taught them about, you know, their life and Christmas and all of these other things. These young men were away from their family and their comfort and the food that they knew. They were vegetarians. They were coming to a cold country. All of a sudden this cute little woman from the IODE shows up at the airport and embraces 15 of them.

To this day – my dad is close to 80 – they're still friends. That's what community, that's what that interfaith, that exchange of ideas, is: sitting down and having a meal with somebody in a nonjudgmental way. That's what this motion really encapsulates for me, that feeling.

On the flip side, my mother, when she married my father in Edmonton here – she was part of the Centennial Singers; both my mother and father were – embraced the Indian culture and the Hindu traditions, having come from an Anglican background. Everything that I appreciate about my culture actually came from my mother. She taught me how to wear a sari. She cooked the south Indian food. She eats way spicier food than anybody. For being a little Irish woman, she's got a real good flair for spicy food. Those are all things that were a complete blessing, just having the natural coming together of my parents and having the blessing of growing up in that situation.

When I was 15 and a half, the Aryan Guard was really, really taking hold in Caroline, Alberta, and I remember receiving information that I was considered an abomination by the very nature of having been born from a mixed marriage. So it sort of started me down my path to having a political mind and being involved in politics at that time. It just goes to show you how things can be interpreted if we don't have the communities and the understandings of faith around us to be able to appreciate where all of us come from and that background. So I really, really appreciate this motion.

My Indian-Irish family background provided me with these amazing opportunities to explore and understand many faiths and traditions and the practice of those faiths, something that I take very seriously because I personally am a very spiritual person. I don't practise any particular faith, but I'm very respectful and understanding and honour other people's choices and their faith and how they practise. It gives life vibrancy, and for a lot of people it is their reason that they wake up every morning.

Because of my musical career as well, I've had the humungous privilege of singing in pretty much every kind of church you can imagine: at celebrations in my own culture; at Durga Pujas, which is a celebration of women in the Hindu culture; at midnight Masses celebrating the birth of Jesus. You know, with our careers and where we are here, we're also blessed and very, very fortunate to be invited to so many things that many of us would never be able to participate in if we didn't have the blessing of having this job.

I was really happy to be invited to the installation of Calgary's Bishop McGrattan. I've been invited to sweetgrass ceremonies with First Nations and to some of the more serious things: the Holodomor memorials, prayers at the Ismaili khane, pride Shabbat, Hindu temples. I mean, the list goes on and on. Again, I'm just so gratified that we're in a position where we actually get invited to these things and people want to share their faith and their culture with us, which I really think, again, embraces the idea of this particular motion.

I'm thankful to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. I'm very grateful that you've tabled this motion. If it's passed, like you had said, Alberta will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to recognize the United Nations resolution for a world-wide week of interfaith harmony, that other jurisdictions have honoured since 2011.

There are a lot more reasons also why I'm very, very glad to see this motion coming from government. I have to say that this is very forward thinking on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. She's obviously been listening to people and understands the importance of faith in our communities, especially when it feels at every turn that the government wants to undermine the very diverse faith traditions that we have and celebrate here in Alberta. On one hand, we hear the desire for diversity and the desire to incorporate people, and then, abysmally, the track has been that there's been this complete undermining of faith consistently in our society. I'm grateful that this member understood this in order to bring this motion to the floor, so thank you. Thank you so much for that.

It's very difficult coming into a situation like this, where in my lifetime – maybe I was just lucky that way. I didn't see a lot of things that made me question who I was other than the things that I've spoken about, and it's very important to speak up about those. When a government seems to actively be working in a divisive way to separate faith, to take that out and to critique it but, on the same hand, is going to bring a motion forward to honour that, you can understand why I might be a little bit confused. The government chooses to divide Albertans on the basis of religion instead of creating community. How is that possible? A motion is coming forward right now to speak about interfaith unity and harmony, but it seems that every single step of the way, no matter what happens, that divisive nature is the underlying feeling.

I have to say – this is really disappointing, and we brought this up in question period today – that the Premier and the Minister of Education have come out with unacceptable rhetoric, threats against the Catholics, but in the same breath we're having a motion put in front of us to honour faith and to honour harmony. The contradiction is absolutely appalling.

Mr. Gill: It's the height of hypocrisy.

Mrs. Aheer: It is. It's hypocritical.

Most notably, the Premier, you know, accused Catholics of supporting marital rape. The words coming out of my mouth – it's absolutely mind-boggling. I'm very grateful to the member for bringing this forward because, potentially, maybe the government will take this wonderful motion from this member and actually apply it to legislation. What a thought process. It's an excellent motion, but we would really like to see the application of that being brought forward.

The refusal to apologize. I'm not Catholic, but I cannot imagine that language being used in conjunction with a faith. There are bad people everywhere, in every faith, in every background, in everything, and to accuse a religion of having that mentality – I'm very, very glad that the member has brought this motion forward because maybe the Premier can learn a thing or two from the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

5:50

I would like to know: when having a motion like this, that actually brings forward exactly how we all feel, exactly how we should move forward, how is it that the undermining process of this government is supporting communities and faith? That is actually a part of what was just said in the opening comments from the member. How can, on one hand, the government say that they support faith and then at the same . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this to the floor of the Assembly for discussion today, and I stand in support of her desire to declare the first week of every February as United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, we look at this Assembly and see members of many faiths. We look around our constituencies and see churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship that bring people together.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to be an Albertan. I came to this country as a refugee in 1988 with my family. After arriving, we made our home in the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Cross, where we still live, a riding that is as diverse as they come, a riding that consists of Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Christians, atheists, indigenous traditions, and many, many more. All these great traditions and religions have this in common: they inspire us to meet need with compassion and charity, to give of ourselves in service to others, and to achieve the highest level of personal integrity and conduct. Those shared principles should lead all faiths to live together and in harmony.

In my Ministry of Culture and Tourism Alberta Culture Days is one of our largest celebrations of the arts, heritage, culture, and community. Through Culture Days for the past 10 years more than 800 communities from all over the province have come together to increase awareness, accessibility, participation, and engagement of Canadians to talk about their communities.

Mosques, temples, synagogues, and churches have all played a huge role in shaping this as well, be it the Baitun Nur mosque in Calgary or the community dining kitchens, the langars, in Calgary Sikh temples – I learned about their many charitable activities and their members' commitment to building caring communities of hope and faith – be it the festivals of Diwali by lighting the diyas, the candles, and the fireworks, lighting the candles of the hanukkah, or sharing a meal with friends on Eid and taking time for prayer and renewing our commitment to help each other. Acknowledging and celebrating these moments reaffirms the good done by people of all faiths to build a more equal, welcoming, and inclusive community and province.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, we have seen in recent actions around the world and, in fact, in our province and even in my own constituency of Calgary-Cross that hatred, bigotry, and intolerant behaviour still exist. Albertans continue to face anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and, in fact, many other forms of discrimination. There are still victims of hate crimes and vandalism simply because of their religion and ethnicity. I'm sad to say that twice in the last year we have seen hate crimes in my own constituency. The last instance saw a swastika etched into a car that was set on fire. This is extremely heartbreaking but does not represent my community at all, and I'm proud to say that.

Madam Speaker, there are people out there who want to divide Albertans, people who want to demonize Albertans from different cultures and faiths, people who fearmonger, pander to the extremes, and try to put Albertans down for being who they are. Well, I will

say that this is not who we are as Albertans or what we believe in. Albertans believe that our diversity makes us stronger. We believe in a caring, inclusive, safe, and equal province for all. Albertans believe in moving forwards, not backwards. Albertans believe that it does not matter if you're Jewish, Christian, Sikh, or Muslim. We are in a province where all faiths and cultures are welcome and can live and work together to promote acceptance, raise our families, and contribute meaningfully to our great province.

I am proud to be part of a government that actively supports and encourages religious and cultural diversity by, for example, declaring Sikh Heritage Month, recognizing Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day. Our government encourages understanding and acceptance by reaching out to thousands of Albertans about antiracism strategies to help foster acceptance and promote diversity, showcasing Alberta heritage all the way, providing funding to support Canada 150 projects with themes that include diversity, inclusion, and building common interests and relationships.

Madam Speaker, religious acceptance must continue to be a fundamental feature of our multicultural society, and our government is working to make life better for Albertans by supporting a culture of acceptance, inclusion, and harmony. In the spirit of that, I ask the members of this Assembly to support the motion to declare the first week of February 2018 and the very first week of February each year after to be recognized in Alberta as United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week in treaties 6, 7, and 8.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know I don't have long. I'll just say a few things about it. I'm really pleased, as are so many others, to see the Member for Calgary-Glenmore introduce this motion. I've heard from many constituents in my constituency especially. I find that, on consideration, one of the biggest privileges of being elected has been to get to know some of the many diverse religions and cultural groups in my constituency.

As a previous colleague was talking about, there are so many groups coming along to try to encourage connections between the different groups. Their function is to establish what common grounds we have between our various groups, and they're wonderful. This event on Saturday was, I think, the second I've gone to, and I walked in the door and immediately knew so many people from previous years and from so many great groups. It isn't that you walk in and stay with your own particular cultural group. People don't do that. They are actively looking at ways to establish common ground.

Another event I went to recently that made a huge impact was called the Tea Connection. In my constituency it is a very grassroots endeavour to get people from all different organizations and, basically, newcomer groups to come together to support each other. They can practise English, and they can get information on how to use local transportation, so many different things that aren't kind of covered in any of the more formal programs that they get together to do.

What made an impact is that one of the older members of this group was having a birthday, and to celebrate it, her son had come with a cake. The group of people there decided to sing *Happy Birthday*, so *Happy Birthday* was sung in English. Then it was suggested that we sing it in French, and that was done. A third member volunteered to sing it in Hindi, which was beautiful. Finally, our member from the local Edmonton public library sang it in Ukrainian.

It was just a wonderful event, and it really illustrated that there are things happening all the time. This is an endeavour to keep it going, to reinforce it, to encourage that we keep the voice going, that we keep the connections being made.

That's about it. I'm really proud of the antiracism initiative being led by the Minister of Education. Every time there is an antiracism event, I love to hang around because I meet members of my constituency going in or going out, and they talk about how pleased they are, sometimes for the first time since they've been in Canada,

to be involved in an organization, in a group that's talking about some of the challenges that people have in interacting with the kind of broader community and how they can help make . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until 10 tomorrow morning.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, October 31, 2017

Day 46

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 27 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, October 31, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

As we begin another day's work here, help us to proceed with the respect and honour this House deserves, filling our hearts and minds with wisdom and determination to always do what is right for our constituents in this province and always remembering that for a society to be truly healthy, democratic, and prosperous, we must first care for the weakest and most vulnerable amongst us.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Constituency Week

27. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding the calendar filed with the Clerk pursuant to Standing Order 3(5), the constituency week for the 2017 fall sitting shall be held the week of November 20, 2017, with the Assembly reconvening on Monday, November 27, 2017.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. By way of background I can indicate that the motion proposed is moving the constituency week, originally set for the week of November 13, to the following week. This change would allow for greater participation of MLAs in AAMD and C and AUMA conventions in the coming weeks. I should indicate here for the information of all members that in a few minutes I intend to move Motion 29, which addresses the fact that moving the constituency week would result in a loss of Monday business.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to this motion?

[Government Motion 27 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Adjournment

28. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that on Thursday, November 9, 2017, the morning sitting of the Assembly stand adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This change is being made to accommodate Remembrance Day ceremonies scheduled to take place in the rotunda at 11 a.m.

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 28 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Items of Business

29. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 8(2), during the morning sitting on Tuesday, November 14, 2017, the only item of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As the members know, the Assembly does not sit on November 13 due to Remembrance Day. When the opposition were consulted about moving the constituency week as per Motion 27, it was pointed out that this would result in the loss of Monday to deal with private members' business. Motion 29 is aimed to address that fact by ensuring that private members' bills are dealt with on Tuesday morning, November 14.

The Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this motion?

[Government Motion 29 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Adjournment

30. Ms Ganley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that on Thursday, November 16, 2017, the morning sitting of the Assembly stand adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This time change is being made to accommodate Louis Riel Day ceremonies, which take place in the rotunda at 11 a.m.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 30 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 20

Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead on behalf of the hon. minister of environment.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I move second reading of Bill 20, Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act, on behalf of the minister.

This bill will allow for the approval of two interbasin transfers from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin, and this bill is a plan to make life better for all Albertans.

These interbasin transfers will allow Whitefish Lake First Nation and the hamlet of Mallaig in St. Paul county to connect to regional waterlines in order to address long-running issues with drinking water in their communities. Clean drinking water should be seen as a basic human right, and the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act is an important step towards solving drinking water issues in these communities.

Interbasin transfers are not to be taken lightly. The Water Act requires that any licence which transfers water between major river basins in Alberta be authorized by a special act of the Legislature. All western provinces have legislation that prohibits transfers between major river basins with some exceptions allowed. Since 2003 five interbasin transfers have been authorized in Alberta by a special act of the Legislature. All five were potable waterline

extensions to rural communities. This is why our government introduced Bill 20.

Both St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation explored multiple options, and connecting to the regional waterline was determined to be the best solution to address their drinking water challenges. To ensure a safe, reliable supply of drinking water for their residents, both communities have requested that the province approve an interbasin transfer, allowing them to extend existing regional waterlines.

Whitefish Lake First Nation looked at five options prior to pursuing an extension of an existing potable water pipeline from the highway 28/63 regional water commission in the North Saskatchewan River basin. The highway 28/63 regional water commission received \$20.66 million from our government's United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples/First Nations regional tie-in project fund. That was quite a mouthful; anyway, I got through it. An additional \$1.98 million was committed by the federal government to complete the waterline connection to the reservoir on the reserve.

Of course, environmental impacts were considered prior to introducing this bill. Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation are small communities, and the North Saskatchewan River is a reliable source of water, with an average annual volume of approximately 7.5 billion cubic metres flowing through Edmonton.

The existing municipal allocation held by EPCOR to provide drinking water throughout the capital region totals close to 200 million cubic metres. The proposed transfer for St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation would total 600,000 cubic metres. Environment and Parks confirms that the additional transfer of drinking water will have no measurable effects on the North Saskatchewan River. Consultation has been conducted, and both proposed interbasin transfers are widely supported among the stakeholders.

St. Paul county also specifically engaged a water rate policy on the upcoming water rate increase for Mallaig residents prior to engaging in the regional waterline connection project. Mallaig residents will receive three months' notice that the water rate will be raised to match the two other hamlets in St. Paul county that already receive EPCOR-treated water via the regional waterline. This is in addition to written notice from the county in January 2017 regarding the county's move to full-cost recovery water rates that come into effect as of March 2017.

10:10

Provincial and federal grant funding for the project will help ensure that St. Paul county's water rate is the same as other users on the highway 28/63 regional waterline. There is no water rate increase anticipated for the residents of Whitefish Lake First Nation.

Alberta's water for life strategy sets the stage for a new way of working with Albertans to ensure safe, reliable, and quality water supplies for a sustainable environment and a growing economy. Water for life is centred on the achievement of three goals: safe, secure drinking water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy.

Approving the interbasin transfers would support the water for life strategy and is a key priority to providing safe and reliable drinking water on-reserve as part of the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

I hope the House will support Bill 20, thereby providing the necessary approval for the interbasin transfers for both communities. It's important to note that both river basins are open for allocation, so there is no impact to the other licence holders.

Following the approval of the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act, two water licences will be issued under the Water Act, one licence to the county of St. Paul and the other to the highway 28/63 regional water commission to provide water to the Whitefish Lake First Nation. The Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act includes the maximum amount of water allocated to each community on an annual basis.

I hope all members of the House will see the value of allowing these interbasin transfers to secure a reliable source of drinking water for residents of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation. This solution has widespread stakeholder support. The environmental impact study identified no concerns regarding the long-term health of the North Saskatchewan River. Both projects leverage federal funding.

If approved, the county of St. Paul and the highway 28/63 regional water commission will be responsible for construction, operation, and maintenance following completion of the pipelines.

I'm very proud to move second reading of Bill 20. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good morning. I rise this morning to speak in favour of Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. This act, if passed, would allow for the transfer of water from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin through two water pipelines. One pipeline will connect the Ashmont water treatment plant to Mallaig, and the other will tie into the existing Highway 28/63 Regional Water Services Commission waterline between the village of Vilna and the hamlet of Spedden and run north to Whitefish Lake First Nation.

The Water Act states in section 47: "A licence shall not be issued that authorizes the transfer of water between major river basins in the Province unless the licence is specifically authorized by a special Act of the Legislature." Bill 20 fulfills this requirement.

Mallaig is a hamlet in the county of St. Paul which currently obtains its drinking water from nearby groundwater sources. While there are no immediate concerns with Mallaig's water source in terms of quality, the water source that Mallaig draws from has seen its levels decrease in recent years to the point where it is quickly becoming critical that they find a long-term replacement. The groundwater source that the community is currently using is simply not able to sustain the expected population in years and decades to come. Mallaig's current water treatment process meets health requirements, but the North Saskatchewan River basin water that they will be receiving through the pipeline is of higher quality.

The Whitefish Lake First Nation, on the other hand, is facing a slightly more critical issue. They currently draw their water from a nearby lake which has recently seen a measurable and escalating decrease in its water level. This is due to the lake's inability to naturally recover the water that the community draws from it. This drop in water level is concerning not only from an environmental standpoint, but more importantly it has resulted in increased parts per million of carcinogenic contaminants that exceed recommended levels.

While it doesn't present a short-term health problem, it is critical that the Whitefish Lake First Nation switch to the much higher quality North Saskatchewan River basin water without delay. I think that in our society, in a first-world country, it's expected that we would have good water for the people of Alberta. The sooner the community switches, the sooner the lake they draw from will begin its water level recovery, which will undoubtedly bring ecological benefits to the lake and the surrounding community.

The UCP caucus supports Bill 20 and looks forward to passing it as quickly as possible so as to not delay the construction of these two important water pipelines. Clean, reliable drinking water is vital to maintaining a healthy and successful community, and Bill 20 ensures that the Whitefish Lake First Nation and the hamlet of Mallaig have access to a high-quality and sustainable potable water source for many, many years to come. Section 47 of the Water Act mandates that any transfer of water from one river basin to another must be approved through a special act of the Legislature. Again, Bill 20 fulfills that requirement.

Another reason why this should be passed without delay is that Bill 20 has the support of the municipalities in the area. Since the proposed pipelines are being built on existing rights-of-way, the project minimizes the negative impact on area property owners. When it comes to the cost of the pipelines, the money has already been approved at all necessary levels of government. This is a shovel-ready project.

The pipeline that will service Mallaig is budgeted to cost \$10.2 million, with \$4.75 million to come from the federal government, \$4.75 million from the provincial government, and the remaining \$700,000 to come from the local municipality. The pipeline that will service the Whitefish Lake First Nation is budgeted to cost \$22.6 million, with \$20.66 million being paid for by the provincial government and the remaining \$1.8 million being paid for by the federal government. The federal government's portion covers the cost of the pipeline being built on federal and reserve land.

Lastly, I'd like to address the issue of availability of water in the North Saskatchewan River basin. I know that some of my colleagues from southern Alberta have been dealing with a shortage of available water and that in some places the shortage of water has even started to impact their community's ability to grow and expand. According to Alberta WaterPortal the annual discharge of the North Saskatchewan River is 7.3 million cubic decametres. The total amount of water being transferred between the North Saskatchewan River and the Beaver River basins in Bill 20 is 601.1 cubic decametres, which represents just eight one-thousandths of 1 per cent of the annual North Saskatchewan River discharge, not much at all, obviously. Now, the Beaver River basin flows into Hudson Bay, and the North Saskatchewan River also flows into Hudson Bay via Lake Winnipeg.

I'd like to thank you and urge all of my colleagues on both sides of this House to support Bill 20.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 20, on the face of it a logical and sensible and, obviously, critical thing to do for health and for sustainability of communities, including a First Nations community. I want to add my caution, though, to that of the mover of this bill. The reason these bills come to the Legislature is because it's a big decision. Transferring water from one basin to another has costs, and it has benefits.

10:20

I don't think we in the Legislature necessarily appreciate the costs of continuing to transfer water from one basin to another. We've had five in the past. I was part of those decisions. They were in southern Alberta and related to some groundwater quality issues and quantity issues.

I think it behooves us to think about why we are continuing to have to provide interbasin transfers, which have some ecological

risks. Those are contamination of certain species going into another ecosystem and potentially becoming invasive species, overriding certain species of fish, dominating the fish mix, and certain potential toxins, obviously, whether plant toxins or industrial toxins.

So there's that dimension, and there's the other dimension, which has to do with whether we're conserving appropriately the water that we're currently using in a particular basin.

The third aspect is: do we understand what's happening to our groundwater? Why is the groundwater declining in that area? What are the factors that are contributing to its decline? Is it population demand, agricultural demand? Is it industrial demand? Is it a failure to conserve in places where we could be conserving?

Are we seeing the kinds of issues related to the Rosebud area, where fracking and coal-bed methane actually contaminated quite a significant number of people's groundwater wells and therefore required trucked-in water and eventual new sources of water for these folks? What do we know about our groundwater? What do we know about what's happening, especially in the new shale gas developments? We seem to have learned nothing from the 2006 fiasco in Rosebud, where after all this volume and this gas was coming up in people's water wells, we suddenly realized that we didn't know what the baseline gas was in those wells because we hadn't been doing baseline groundwater monitoring.

We did 12,000 samples in that area, and 10 years later we don't have meaningful results from those groundwater tests because the sampling techniques were different, the laboratories were different, the standards were different, and we can draw almost no conclusions from that whole Rosebud fiasco. Are we doing baseline groundwater monitoring now in relation to the shale gas developments? No. We're leaving it up to the industry to decide whether groundwater is being protected or not, and only on complaints do we actually get in there and sample the water.

So I have serious concerns about our groundwater. I'm not saying that this particular transfer is wrong. I'm saying that we haven't yet taken seriously the growing threat to both surface and groundwater in terms of our demands: agricultural, industrial, residential, municipal. We haven't taken seriously the fact that, especially in the southern and eastern parts of this province, we're headed for real trouble with climate change. We don't know what we should know about our groundwater, we don't know what the industrial impacts are, and I don't think any of us believe that we're conserving our water and using it to the best available opportunities.

Again, a note of caution that these issues come to the Legislature because we have the final say, and I don't know how much information we have to make these decisions. We continue to pass them. This will be the sixth interbasin transfer. I don't know if we're asking the right questions of our ministry, and that includes the Energy ministry because the industrial activity in this province is second to none under the surface. Over 450,000 wells puncture through our water tables, and we don't know what we need to know.

I met with a groundwater expert last week at the University of Calgary. He's still trying to sift through and get some semblance of conclusions, some reliable conclusions from those 12,000 samplings that were done in 2006 and '07 in the Rosebud area. He's having a great deal of difficulty because of the problems I mentioned.

We don't know the volumes of water available in our groundwater, which is the ultimate source of our surface water. We need to start asking some hard questions of our Energy and Environment ministries and ensure that we know what we're leaving for the next seven generations.

I will be supporting this transfer but with great concern that we don't know what we need to know to make these decisions. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very proud to stand up today and speak to Bill 20. It's been something that's been on my mind and on the mind of our council out in St. Paul for quite some time. The project has been something that has been talked about and planned for quite a few years, so it's really good to see it come through in this fall session so that they can get to work on this project and finish the final leg of it.

It's very important that we do respect the Water Act and these clauses that try to protect the interbasin transfers. I know from my previous life in the industry that when major pipelines are being built all the way across the province, north and south and east and west, whenever they come to transfer water across, they're not allowed to do that. They have to do their hydro testing and keep that water on that side. So I do respect the reasons for having this part of the legislation and part of the Water Act.

However, the fact that our northern communities are isolated doesn't mean that they should be living in substandard conditions, and I speak specifically to the Whitefish Lake First Nation. They're a very viable, vital community up there. You know, they're doing great things. They've got some great education programs, trying to get their youth trained up for industry work in scaffolding and other areas.

I know that one of the other issues that they have is busing. A lot of the students from Whitefish Lake are bused to Ashmont. This waterline is a step in the right direction, and the next one that we're going to have to work on is – and I see the minister shaking his head. You know, there are times when the kids miss a whole week of school because of muddy roads or snowy roads. That's another one that we're going to have to deal with, but this waterline is a step in the right direction.

As well, I'm sure that people have heard me speak about Mallaig quite often. They host Haying in the 30s every long weekend in August, where they raise money for cancer support groups. They do a wonderful job there. It's a very, very unique community, one of the few that's actually growing out in that area of the county. There are some beautiful homes in there. This is just another thing that's going to help make them a more attractive place for young families to move to.

I really support Bill 20, and I hope everybody else does as well.

One thing I'd like to add is that the waterline currently ends at Ashmont, and it's completely legal to pull up to the water station at Ashmont and fill a truck with 4,000 litres of water and drive to Mallaig and put it into a cistern. You know, the pipeline is just going to serve to make it easier to do those water transfers.

I don't see a real issue from an environmental standpoint. The amount of water that we're dealing with here is not that substantial that it's going to cause any real grief to the Beaver River watershed.

I would hope that everybody, you know, recognizes the importance of fresh, clean drinking water at Whitefish Lake and Mallaig. I think that they deserve and have a right to it, just like any other Albertan does. So whatever we can do to push this bill through as quickly as possible so that we can carry on with this project would be much appreciated by the county of St. Paul. I know that for sure.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the opposition for standing up and supporting this bill. It's obviously a very important bill, and I, too, will speak to it in a few moments.

I just want to note that this is \$20 million out of the \$100 million coming from the budget this year to enhance water to communities, and I know that you support all of that. I'm just wondering if the member can speak to the fact that they voted against the budget and here we are in this place, where the actual fruits of the budget are being discussed, and they're voting in favour of it. I just wonder if you might somehow articulate how it is that you're working with the communities to enhance the things that we absolutely, obviously agree on in terms of the benefits to the community, agree on in terms of the need to have communities live in the modern time, you know, with fair and just services, as every other community in Alberta would rightly expect, as you do as well, and then at the same time vote against the very budget that allowed the money for this to happen. I'd just like to hear how you would justify that.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. Thank you for the question. Yeah. Indeed, we did vote against the budget. We voted against a \$10 billion deficit and ever-growing debt in the province that our children and grandchildren are going to have to pay for. This project is very much needed, and it's a very small piece of the pie. I really appreciate that the government has put this money in because I think Whitefish Lake absolutely deserves this and the hamlet of Mallaig absolutely deserves this, like I said.

The road construction project that I talked about as well: I mean, it's going to take a lot of money, and it's going to take collaboration between the federal government and the provincial government. This is what we're here for, to push forward these projects and make sure our communities are viable and that they have the rights and the drinking water that they need. So, yes, you know, we can vote against a deficit budget and still support community programs that are needed.

An Hon. Member: No. You can't.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. We can. We just did.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I appreciate that comment. I'm just wondering if I can ask the hon. member whether we can anticipate that in the next budget coming forward, you will speak favourably in terms of our increasing the provincial budget in order to provide roads for indigenous people in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Hanson: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the question. I will not be voting in favour of any budget that increases the debt load on future generations of Albertans, period. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to stand in this Chamber and support Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. Many of you in this House will have heard me speak about my roots from small-town Alberta, from the village of Thorhild. I'm quite familiar with what living with groundwater supply is like. Thorhild for many, many decades, even when I was a child until I probably was in my teen years, relied upon well water, and the whole community had a reservoir from which they drew their water. I know that home movies will testify as to the quality of that water. When siblings and I were bathing, we had home movies taken, and there were comments when people see them because the water is yellow. It was yellow coming right out of the tap because of the organics that were in it. People are shocked now to see that that water quality was acceptable back then.

Ultimately what happened was that the city of Edmonton water supply eventually was brought to Thorhild and some other surrounding villages and communities, and it really improved the quality of life for that village. The water was less and less desirable, and it ultimately got to the point where they demanded something be done, and finally it happened. It was actually an extension of a city of Edmonton waterline that went out to Thorhild and other communities which were relying on well water that wasn't up to the standard that most of us in Alberta in more urban situations expect.

Many people had their own wells, of course, in town, but in my grandmother's case that well in Thorhild was one that was only for vegetable washing. That was all you could use that water for. The rest of it was well water from a reservoir that everybody used. But the quality of life of the whole community changed when they could turn on a tap and have a reliable source of water that didn't smell like peat moss, as their source of water in Thorhild did. So I'm sure the communities of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake will benefit in a similar way from this water transfer.

But I agree with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View that we definitely must take seriously the concerns about water transfer between basins. Water is life, but also there are things to be concerned about when you are transferring between basins. That was taken into account prior to this legislation being brought forward.

It's not every day that a water basin transfer happens or takes place. It was noted by other speakers before me that there have only been five such transfers since 2003, which indicates that it's very seriously considered before a decision is made to go ahead and do an interbasin transfer. These transfers are done to really raise the quality of life of the communities that they're proposed to serve. There is a good reason why the transfer has to come before us in the Legislature for approval; it is a serious thing to do, to have an interbasin transfer.

I know that the government consulted with other stakeholder groups, and this was determined to be the best way to move forward. I can only imagine what the people of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation are thinking about in anticipation of having a higher level of water quality available to them in the near future.

The fact that we're going ahead with this is a moment to celebrate, but it's something that we also have to take a look at in respect of the whole picture of water quality in Alberta. I do agree with other speakers. Knowing that water is life and conservation is important and groundwater quality is important, this government is taking those thoughts into their consideration in a longer term picture. We certainly are aware in this province of the value of our water resources and the need to look at a long-term measure to protect them. I think that in the shorter term we must also act in the

interests of the communities we are serving in other more rural areas of the province so that they are not denied the health and quality of the water supply that most Albertans take for granted in their more urban settings.

St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation have already been looking at options for years and applying for funds to make these waterlines a reality. I know that it was years ago that Thorhild was looking to do the same thing. I think that in the future when we do see these types of situations occurring, we should probably see what we can do to expedite the new supply of water for communities where we can within budgetary limitations. It's such an important consideration for the quality of life of the communities and the people in them that we serve. It behooves us to see if we can speed up the process where there is a demonstrated need for a higher quality of water when the current supply of water is dwindling over time.

Now, it's a testament to the work and vision of this government and the federal government that funding is already in place for both projects. We've heard that St. Paul county has \$9.5 million in funding from the province and the federal government. They must spend the federal funding by March 2018, or it will expire. The highway 28/63 regional water commission received \$20.66 million from our government's United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples/First Nations regional tie-in project fund. An additional \$1.98 million was committed by the federal government to complete the waterline connection to the reservoir on-reserve. It's truly the case, Madam Speaker, of citizens, municipalities, regional organizations, the provincial government, and the federal government all working together.

I know, Madam Speaker, that our government also thinks of a clean and sustainable environment for all Albertans as they consider these kinds of transfers. After all, the impacts that our actions have today will have a great impact on our children and grandchildren far into the future. We on this side of the House know that and try to enact legislation that takes environmental sustainability very seriously. I'm proud to note that environmental impacts were considered prior to introducing this bill.

Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation are small communities, just as the village of Thorhild when I lived there was quite tiny. They deserve our consideration and respect when it comes to making sure that their water supply is up to the standards that all the rest of us in Alberta take for granted.

10:40

The North Saskatchewan River is a reliable source of water. The amount of water that this transfer will take from the flow of source of the North Saskatchewan River is really quite small. EPCOR already holds an allocation close to 200 million cubic metres to provide treated drinking water throughout the region. The proposed transfer for St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation would total 600,000 cubic metres. Extensive bottling has been done to confirm that this additional transfer of drinking water will have no measurable effects on the North Saskatchewan River. I also further know that the government has consulted with NGO stakeholders who study and monitor water use and that no concerns were raised. As with everything this government does, we also considered the criteria of making life more affordable for Albertans.

We know that St. Paul county consulted with Mallaig residents before deciding to pursue this option. The water rates in Mallaig are set by the county, and after this extension is completed, the water rates in Mallaig will be the same as in the two other hamlets in St. Paul county that already receive EPCOR-treated water via the regional waterline. Funding from the provincial and federal governments for this important project will help ensure St. Paul

county's water rate is the same as others on the highway 28/63 waterline. There is no water rate increase anticipated for residents of Whitefish Lake First Nation.

I'm also very happy that this project falls within the parameters of two of our government's strategic policies moving forward. One is Alberta's water for life strategy, that is centred on the achievement of three goals: safe, secure drinking water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy. Another key priority for our government, as it should be for all Albertans, is the absolute necessity to provide safe and reliable drinking water for First Nations as part of the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. This is one of the initiatives that I'm most proud of that this government has put into place since its inception after the 2015 election. It is a long time overdue, we're actually doing it, and it's the right thing to do, Madam Speaker. I hope that everyone in this Legislature agrees.

For these reasons I'm going to support this bill, and I hope that everyone in this Legislature does so as well. I remember seeing yellow water coming out of the tap in Thorhild and knowing that I thought it was odd, even as a kid. The people of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation deserve to have clean, clear, fresh, well-treated drinking water coming out of their taps, just as everybody else in the province does.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, thank you to the member for his thoughtful comments. I assume, given his research on the issue, that he has been given some explanation for why the groundwater is diminishing and the lake water is diminishing. Could he share with the House his research on the explanation for why the water is diminishing?

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. While we certainly are aware that the groundwater is diminishing and there are concerns around that, I don't profess to be a hydrologist or a complete expert on the matter, but I'm certainly aware that it's a concern that we have in this jurisdiction, as it is throughout the world. Water resources are something that we have to pay more attention to, and it's the responsibility of every government, every jurisdiction to do so. We take that seriously here.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to discuss this very important bill. I'm also very pleased to hear the tenor of the debate this morning. From all sides the debate has been productive and has contributed to, I think, improving the lives of Albertans, as is the main priority of this government.

I do want to make some comments on the interchange between the Minister of Indigenous Relations and the member representing Lac La Biche-Two Hills-Cold Lake, if I have that in the correct order.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Dr. Turner: I'll get *Hansard* corrected later.

I think this interchange actually strikes at one of the fundamental differences between this side of the House and the other side of the House. I mean, everybody in this House agrees that the millions of dollars should be spent on getting a safe, reliable, healthy supply of water to the residents of Mallaig as well as to other parts of St. Paul county, including Whitefish Lake. Also, everybody agrees here that UNDRIP is a very important issue and that we need to do everything in this House to make sure that the principles of the TRC report as well as the advice that's been given to us by the United Nations is fulfilled. So we have to spend money now to achieve this.

That money, actually, is going to help prime the economy of this province, the economy of St. Paul county, the economy of the residents of Whitefish First Nation, and, basically, the economy of the city of Edmonton because EPCOR is actually going to be the contractor that does this work. That money is going to be spent now, and it means that the children and the grandchildren that were referred to by the member opposite are actually going to be able to benefit from a healthy, safe water supply. They're going to have a much higher quality of life. They are going to do better in school. There's good evidence that with a safe water supply the attendance at school is better and the achievements at school are better. There will be the ability to participate in various sporting activities that come along with having an adequate water supply, and there will be less time spent dealing with the sort of adverse effects of poor water supplies, that really do have a major effect on health.

I'm actually pleased that we're adding to the deficit to get this accomplished, and I'm pleased that that's going to mean that those children and those grandchildren are going to be able to benefit now rather than having to wait for some unknown future to benefit. They may actually not survive to that future if we don't spend that money now. So I think that's one of the most important issues here, that there are things that we need to spend money on now, irrespective of the fact that that may add to our deficit, because they are needed and they are essential.

I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, and it's bounded by the North Saskatchewan River. The quality of life of those that live along the North Saskatchewan, all the way from the headwaters above Brazeau, all the way down, actually, into Saskatchewan and Prince Albert, and then all the way into Manitoba and eventually into the Nelson River: that's a key thing to me. I'm reassured that this bill, as has been stated before, with a water transfer, is not going to have any effect on that, but it does represent, I think, a recognition that we have to husband our water supply very, very carefully.

I was born and raised in southwestern Manitoba, and the Assiniboine and the Souris River are very important water sources there. About 20 years ago or maybe longer the government of the United States acceded to some demands from the state of North Dakota to change the way that Devils Lake was drained. That's a lake in North Dakota. Now, the Devils Lake was previously in the drainage of the Missouri River, and with the changes that came about, the Devils Lake ended up draining into the Red River. Well, guess what's connected to the Red River? The Assiniboine at the Forks in Winnipeg and then the Souris River in southwestern Manitoba. What happened with that change in the drainage was that there were invasive species that did come up the drainage from Devils Lake. You know, there are going to be some long-term consequences, so I'm very familiar with the need to make sure that we're doing things very safely.

10:50

I know the member across may disagree with this, but the Beaver River is really underappreciated, both historically and currently, in

the economy of Alberta. The Beaver River does connect to the Churchill River in Manitoba through Lac Île-à-la-Crosse in Saskatchewan, and it was a very important river in the exploration of western Canada. Indeed, my hero, David Thompson, came to the Beaver River in 1798 and actually made it all the way to Lac La Biche. There was a fort – I think it was called Cold Lake house – that was established on the Beaver River, and it was one of the first fur trading posts in Alberta.

As has been said, the Beaver River now probably has a smaller discharge and needs some assistance in maintaining its activity, and I think the work that the environment department has done to make sure that this is being done safely is going to protect us in that.

Another thing that I do want to speak to – and I've spoken to this previously – is the wonderful work that's done in the village of Mallaig. That Haying in the 30s organization that was alluded to earlier is a phenomenal organization. In my experience as a cancer physician at the Cross that group has been instrumental in improving the quality of life of a large number of people from northeastern Alberta, and whatever can be done to help that community and that group I'm definitely in favour of.

I basically want to summarize that, you know, no matter where people live in this province, they deserve to have clean and safe drinking water, and providing that water, especially to First Nations and to small communities, is an obligation that this government takes very, very seriously. Those who live in Alberta's urban areas like me rarely think about water, but it's certainly in the minds of those that live in rural areas and in First Nations. We don't take these transfers lightly, but this one is a good one. It's a fundamental need and I believe should be a human right. As a physician I'm very cognizant of the need for any community to have a safe and reliable water supply. I think that should be a human right, and I'm pleased to see that our government in collaboration with the federal government is moving in the right direction to achieve those ends.

With that, I will encourage all of my colleagues on both sides of the House to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for the great statement that he made. When he mentioned that he was happy to spend the money on this exact thing, there were a couple of snickers over there from the Member for Airdrie, who apparently believes that we need to be prosperous before we can be caring and compassionate. So can you please explain why it's important to spend this money and to help these individuals have clean drinking water?

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood for that very insightful question. It comes down to that fundamental difference between the party across and the party on this side of the House. We recognize that there are certain inviolable needs of the citizens of Alberta: education, health care, safe and caring institutional environments, good roads, safe bridges, maintenance of all of those things, making sure that our environment is taken care of, making sure that we have the resources to encourage the diversification of our economy, making sure that we have resources to make sure that our colleges and our universities and our institutes of technology are able to get our citizens ready for the future, whatever that brings, making sure that we can attract businesses like Amazon. That's going to create 750 great jobs close to Airdrie, isn't it? It's Balzac, actually, where that's going to be.

I mean, if we didn't spend some money on encouraging Amazon to think about actually having its headquarters here in Alberta – and, by the way, that probably is adding to our deficit, but I'm happy to see that money being spent. You know, again, who could be against providing a safe, potable water supply to our First Nations people? For 150 years the government of Canada has not stepped up to the plate on that. I'm proud of what our minister is doing to make sure that the pipelines – the Minister of Infrastructure is helping out. The minister of environment is helping out. They're stepping up and making sure that this fundamental human right is supplied.

Thank you very much for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to pick up on the member's comments about the truth and reconciliation process. In my constituency I have the Stoney Nakoda First Nation. Often when I have meetings with them and talk about the things that we're doing to help indigenous communities, they say: "You know what? We've heard all that before. We sat with the former government. They sat and told us they were going to do all this and do that, and they never did." When I meet with the First Nations, they tend to be skeptical about the things that we're promising to them.

I think this bill right here is a good example of making good on our promise to the truth and reconciliation process. It's putting it into action. They say: talk is cheap; let's see your action. This is action. This is giving clean drinking water to First Nations communities and honouring the truth and reconciliation process.

We heard the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills earlier say that he wouldn't vote for a deficit budget. Now, these people can't wait for oil to be \$100 a barrel again to have clean, safe drinking water. They need it now. That's why we're doing this now. They can't wait. This is their human right. It's on the provincial government to give these people their human rights. You know, the folks over there want to slash public services and balance the budget, pray for oil to come back up, and only then would they consider giving people their fundamental human rights. They did it for the last 40 years, total inaction from the conservatives, so I'm proud of our government that we're doing this and would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for his comments, too.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very delighted to stand up in support of this bill today because it truly is a moment where we get to reflect on a much larger issue and place ourselves in the context of history and place ourselves in the context of doing what's right.

When this government entered into the responsibility of taking care of all of the people in this province and making life better for everyone, we said from the very first day that that included indigenous people and that we were going to ensure that that happened in a way that had not happened previously across the country and, essentially, for the 150 years of the existence of Canada. It's now time for us to step up and do something different. As part of that, we adopted the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and made the commitment that we would do everything we could to change our laws, our policies, and our practices to align ourselves with that wonderful document, which was largely written here in Alberta, by the way.

11:00

As a part of that process, we distributed the United Nations declaration to all of our ministries within the provincial government and as well to many community organizations such as treaties 6, 7, and 8, to the Metis Settlements General Council, to the Métis Nation of Alberta, to the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, and to the friendship centres. The question that we asked all of them in giving them this declaration was: what do we need to do to bring Alberta into the modern times, to align Alberta with the international declaration that indigenous people are indeed people that need to be respected for who they are and provided with the services that we would expect to have in any other place in this city or in this province?

From that came a list of about 20 first-step items. We understand there'll be many more as time moves on, but we derived a list. One of the top items on that list coming from the indigenous communities was the fact that so many indigenous communities were living with inadequate water supplies, something, of course, that was very concerning to those communities. They had lived for thousands of years, tens of thousands of years on this land being able to drink the water, being able to provide for the health and well-being of their communities just by being part of nature and taking care of nature in a way that we all should be doing, a lesson we need to learn from the First Nations communities and the Métis communities in this province.

Now they find themselves in a place where, because of our water use, because of our industrial use, because of our municipal use, and because of changing environmental circumstances, the undeniable truth of climate change, they're not able to drink the water in the way that they used to be able to drink the water. They used to be able to go out onto the land and dip their hand into any puddle and drink that water feeling safe and secure that that was going to enhance their well-being, not harm them. Now we find ourselves in a very different place. Part of our commitment through that United Nations declaration is understanding that we have been part of that change, that very unfortunate change that doesn't allow them to drink the water in the way they used to.

So we made this decision, made a decision that we have a commitment not only to the individuals who are living in those communities right now but to all the generations coming forward, many generations ahead, to provide them with what we all expect, and that is clean, drinkable water accessible to them at all times for their health and their well-being.

As a government we also faced a second problem. The second problem was that the previous governments have always taken the position that First Nations issues are a federal jurisdictional issue and have always essentially dismissed the First Nations people in this province and the Métis people in this province by virtue of saying: "I'm sorry. There's nothing we can do about that. That is a federal government issue." For the very first time in this province we made a decision that that kind of jurisdictional divide was not acceptable to us. We had committed ourselves to the United Nations declaration, and as a result of that commitment, we had to fulfill it by actually living in practice the commitments that we had made.

So we made a decision that has not been widely done across this country. In fact, we may be the very first provincial jurisdiction to have said: we are going to put money in our provincial budget to provide water to First Nations communities in spite of the fact that First Nations communities are supposed to be taken care of by the federal government but, clearly, for over 150 years have not. As a result, in the spring we put \$100 million in our budget in order to ensure that there is clean drinking water in various communities throughout this province. I'm very happy to be here today to help

us spend \$20 million of that \$100 million to ensure that clean drinking water is coming to the Whitefish (Goodfish) Lake First Nation and, of course, to the community of Mallaig close by.

This is really important for a number of reasons. One of them is that we're fulfilling our commitments. It's the right thing to do, and we are a government that puts our money where our mouth is, so we know we have to put dollars into it. You can't make commitments with your heart and then run away with your wallet. It just doesn't work that way, and that's how it's always worked in the past.

Having fulfilled that commitment, we also realize that there are some other benefits, that I want to make sure that we point out here. One of them is that we have made sure that we have provided leadership to the federal government. As a result of our decision to put \$100 million into water for reserves, the federal government has stepped up. In all of the communities that we have designated for bringing water to the community, the federal government has agreed that they will work with us to ensure that once the pipe arrives at that community, that water will be dispersed throughout the community appropriately. That means that we, through our leadership, are actually getting the federal government to take action on something that they have neglected for 150 years. That's an incredible stance for us to take.

As well, that means we're also leveraging federal dollars. We're getting them to invest dollars in our province, which is something that we're very proud to do as a province, and to ensure that we are getting our just due in this larger entity of Canada, that we are very proudly a member of.

The benefits of taking this kind of important leadership position are numerous. We have a commitment filled, we have an increase of dollars brought into the province, and we have helped a federal government which is dragging its heels to take steps forward on commitments that they have made but they have not followed up on with their wallet, unfortunately a problem with many governments. Thank goodness; finally, an NDP government got elected, so we could actually do these kinds of things.

One of the other things that I also think is very important about this type of movement forward is the fact that we sometimes hear complaints about resources going to First Nations communities. Of course, I could take hours talking about why it's appropriate for that to happen, but one of the things I want to remind people of is that whenever one part of our community experiences a better life, we all experience a better life. This is an absolute, great example of that. We have a First Nations community that is asking for water, we have provided the dollars for that water to arrive there, and, lo and behold, at the same time we have another community close by the First Nations community which benefits from the work we have done for the First Nations community. As a result, Mallaig is now finding itself able to get clean drinking water, that they were not able to get before.

This summer a very similar process happened when we brought the water pipe from Stony Plain to the Alexis reserve, just west of Edmonton. While we brought that water to the Alexis reserve as part of our commitment, we also made sure that it was available to all of the summer homes around Lac Ste. Anne and to the town of Alberta Beach and other towns along the way.

It's something for us all to remember. If we want to uplift the province of Alberta, if you want to uplift your community, you need to uplift other communities. Alberta is uplifted when the First Nations communities are uplifted, and when the First Nations communities are uplifted, so are the rest of the cities and towns in the province of Alberta. That is the nature of good governance, and that is the commitment that we made to ensure that all people live a better life in the province of Alberta.

I think that having made these steps along the way, we have taken some very important first steps, but we also need to do a number of other things, and I'd like to mention a few of those things. One of them is that we now need to ensure that First Nations have full participation in terms of the water regulation boards across this province. So if Whitefish (Goodfish) is on the waterline, they should also be on the board that regulates that waterline. That's a commitment we're making to try to work with all the municipalities to ensure that First Nations truly have representation, that they can speak to their needs, that they can fully participate, because we believe that that is good. That is good for First Nations, but it is good for all of Alberta. We all lift up together, and I think that's something that's very important for us to remember.

I also want to comment on the very important comments that were given by the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View about our concern for: why is it that we're having difficulties with water in various parts of this province? Another commitment we have made to First Nations in this province is to talk to them about water just as an issue, not connected necessarily to a pipeline of water to their community or to other specific projects but, rather, to look at: how do we ensure that water is well protected in this community, in this province and that we can make sure that that water will be a benefit to all generations coming forward? As a result, we have established a committee working with First Nations communities to discuss water, to discuss water movement, and to discuss how we can improve the health and well-being of all the community through ensuring clean and safe and protected water.

11:10

I take the comments from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View very seriously when he reminds us that there is scientific work to be done to ensure that we have an understanding of the water needs that we have in this province, that we have an understanding of the present circumstance of water in this province and how any actions that we take moving forward will affect the present circumstances and the circumstances that should have been in place and that were in place long before the nonindigenous people arrived in this province.

From this one small action I've already mentioned four different ways in which this has serious implications for us in the province, with the United Nations declaration, through leveraging federal action and dollars, and through benefiting everybody in this province.

I stand here proudly with my colleagues saying that this is what you get when you have an NDP government. You get people who are committed. You get people who turn that commitment into action, and we get results today.

I want to thank those members of the opposition who have stood up in support of this piece of legislation for recognizing the important work that is going on today and supporting us in doing this. I look forward, as I mentioned earlier, to their support for actually putting their money where their mouth is and not simply standing up and making a commitment to support individual projects in their community, whether it be an emergency room or an ambulance service or a bridge or a road being built, but actually

standing up when it's time to pay for all those things, when it's time to commit yourself to saying: if I say that this is worth doing, then I will actually do something to make it happen. That's what you get when you have this government.

I look forward to our other initiatives moving forward. I look forward to all the work coming out in this particular round of the Legislature and all of the work that we as an NDP government are committed to providing on behalf of our constituents, the people of Alberta, including the First Nation and Métis people in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to take a short moment to praise the Minister of Indigenous Relations for the work that he and his team in the ministry have done. I've had an opportunity to witness the minister and his team in action when we've been in meetings with the Stoney Nakoda First Nation in my constituency. The ministry has bent over backwards to meet with the nation there, and the ministry has worked extraordinarily hard to move things forward. I know that the ministry is struggling under the enormity of what work was left for them by the former government due to their inaction, but I know that the minister, the Indigenous Relations ministry have taken up the task to tackle those difficult issues. I just want to thank him for the work that he and his team have done, and I want to put it on the record that it hasn't gone unnoticed. Thank you, Minister.

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

Any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead on behalf of the minister of environment to close debate.

Mr. Rosendahl: I would like to move that we close debate on Bill 20.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader, I just would like to have an announcement on behalf of the Speaker that he would like to proceed with the group photo of Members of the Legislative Assembly on the front steps, which is scheduled to take place at 12:10 p.m. today. The Speaker would ask that members be prompt to ensure that the photo will be taken as quickly as possible. Thank you.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing as we have made some good progress already this morning, I move that the House adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:15 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 31, 2017

Day 46

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 27 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 31, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

First of all, we will be taking a photo in the gallery of this Legislature. We attempted to arrange a picture. I'm seeing a message that we're not taking a photo? [interjections] Now please be seated.

Hon. members, first of all, I'll explain. We're taking a risk on the picture outside. We wanted to aim for the "150" banners that were out there, but because of the weather and circumstances we have decided to attempt to do that at a later date. That may not be successful, but we will do our best.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature His Excellency Mr. John Lanyasunya, high commissioner for the Republic of Kenya, and his staff, who are sitting in the Speaker's gallery. Mr. Lanyasunya will be meeting with the Lieutenant Governor; yourself, Mr. Speaker; as well as a number of cabinet ministers, including myself; and with senior government officials. The high commissioner's visit will focus on fostering economic co-operation between Alberta and Kenya. I would like to ask everyone in the Assembly to provide a warm reception to our guests.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some wonderful students from my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The students of Millwoods Christian school are here accompanied by their teachers Ashley Merta, Thomas Hughes, and Sarah Inman. We have three classes of grade 9 students. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups for introduction today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Assembly Tara Martin. Tara and I had the honour of working together in Calgary back in the days before I got into politics. She still thinks it's probably a good idea that I got involved in politics. We're not sure. I really enjoyed working with her and welcome her to the Legislature. I would ask that she rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you one of Alberta's occupational

therapists. I'd ask that Abid Valji please rise as I do this introduction. October is dedicated to occupational therapists as they dedicate their careers to the well-being of others. Occupational therapists work to help Albertans in need of care to care for themselves and to live inclusive, fulfilling lives. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome to our guest.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House some additional members of the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists. Occupational therapists empower and enable patients to reach their goals and are valued members of patient-centred, team-based care. I'd ask that Gayla Grinde, clinical lead at CASA, Elizabeth Taylor, associate professor in occupational therapy at the U of A, Shaniff Esmail, associate chair and professor of the department of OT at the U of A, Sharon Brintnell, a global leader in occupational therapy and service development, and Maggie Fulford, registrar for the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly some familiar faces: Amanda Porter, Kylie Kwok, and Andriy Krugliak. These three incredibly hard-working and dedicated young Albertans are not strangers here because they are former or current members of the Legislature page program. Former head page Kylie recently started her second year at the University of Alberta studying biological sciences, current head page Amanda is in her final year at Paul Kane high school in St. Albert, and former Speaker's page Andriy is enjoying his second year of honours in economics at the University of Alberta. Andriy, however, wasn't quite ready to leave legislative life after his term as a page, so he's now balancing a full course load while working as a dynamic member of the Speaker's office team.

Kylie, Amanda, and Andriy are here today to sit back and relax for a change while observing this afternoon's proceedings. They are standing in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask all of the House to please give them the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House two of the forces behind the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta, Louise Daviduck, provincial director of development, and Rubyann Rice, provincial executive director. The Schizophrenia Society works to improve the quality of life for those affected by schizophrenia and psychosis through education, support programs, public policy, and research. With their efforts to support those affected by schizophrenia, Louise and Rubyann embody the motto of the Schizophrenia Society: caring, empowering, educating. I'd invite Louise and Rubyann to now rise so that we may welcome them with the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you a group from the MS Society:

Nicole Gasior, Garry Wheeler, Julie Kelndorfer, Michael MacFynn, and Bonnie MacFynn. I will speak more about the MS Society later today, but I want to now thank the MS Society for the great work they do to provide invaluable supports to those living with MS. I'd ask my guests to now rise, which they already have, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you Telus employees Matt Mosby and Rob Wright and their supervisor, Theresa Stevens. You may have heard about Matt and Rob in the news a few months ago when they rescued a family of four from a terrible apartment fire in a neighbourhood in my constituency of Lethbridge-East. They truly embody what it is to be Albertan, Lethbridgian, and make us all proud. I'd invite Matt, Rob, and Theresa to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

1:40

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of over 120,000 Lutherans in Alberta and over 80 million world-wide who are today marking the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation. I might add that to the best of our knowledge this is the largest gathering of Lutherans that didn't first involve a potluck supper. I would ask my guests to rise and remain standing as I introduce them.

Reverend Dr. Edwin Lehman is past president emeritus of Lutheran Church – Canada. Reverend Dr. Larry Kochendorfer is bishop of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories of the Evangelical Lutheran church of Canada. Reverend Dr. Glenn Schaeffer is district president of the Alberta-British Columbia District of Lutheran Church – Canada. Reverend Dr. Harold Ruf is the past president of the ABC District of Lutheran Church – Canada, and Mrs. Ruth Ruf. Reverend Dr. Stephen Chambers is academic dean and professor of exegetical theology at Concordia Lutheran Seminary.

Pastor Keith Hoveland is pastor at Zion Lutheran church in Golden Spike, Alberta, and his wife Carole. Pastor Curtis Boehm is pastor at Grace Lutheran church in Edmonton. Reverend Jason Anderson and Reverend Ingrid Doerschel are pastors at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran church in Edmonton. Reverend Heidi Wachowiak is pastor at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran church in Ellerslie along with Jacob Rempel and Tammy Kirkwood who are staff members.

Reverend Clifford Haberstock is retired but was previously president of the Concordia Lutheran Mission Society. Dr. Harold Witte is also a retired pastor. We have Reverend Walter Hambrook. Michael Harmon is a pastoral intern at the Armena Lutheran parish in Armena, Alberta. Reverend John Haycock has a specific interest in my soul because he's my pastor from First Lutheran church in Lloydminster and Zion Lutheran in McLaughlin. We also have some members of First Lutheran, Ron and Ann Faulkner, long-time friends, as well as my son Roland.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to have these guests with me today, and I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, the Lutherans got suppers, but we Catholics got bingo.

Members' Statements

Martin Luther

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, 500 years ago today an unknown German priest in a backwater town wanted to start a discussion. You see, the Catholic church was needing to raise money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and for a few coins faithful members could buy an indulgence, a little piece of paper that absolved them of all sin and even sprung a dead relative from purgatory. Now, this priest had some problems with that. He compiled a list of 95 objections and nailed them to the church door at Wittenberg. That priest was Martin Luther. Today I join with my fellow Lutherans world-wide to mark the anniversary of Luther's courageous act of defiance, an act that triggered the Reformation and changed the course of world history.

Now, what Luther did was not without risk. Others had challenged the overwhelming power of the church and were rewarded for their efforts with execution as heretics. But Luther was a man of principle, courage, and unwavering faith. Forced to appear before the Catholic authorities, he was threatened with death if he refused to recant. His defence was simple. "I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."

Luther was excommunicated and declared an outlaw. To avoid execution, he disguised himself as a knight and went into hiding at Wartburg Castle. While there he began the work of translating the Bible into German so that the Holy Scripture could be read by the common people. He returned to Wittenberg, married a nun, fathered six children, and spent the rest of his life preaching and teaching that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, for the sake of Christ alone.

Lutherans do not worship Martin Luther. He would be the first to acknowledge his many human flaws and his need for God's grace. But people of all faiths can learn from what Luther embodied, his steadfast adherence to his principles despite tremendous personal risk and his unwavering devotion to his followers, lessons, Mr. Speaker, for us all.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Government Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With apologies to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*.

Once upon an election morning people woke with dire warning.
What had happened while we slept was NDP with 54.
As we stood there unbelieving, wondering, pondering world was reeling –
Came a shiver. It was quite a feeling,
thinking of what would happen more.

"Who are they," we asked ourselves, "who will run this province to its core?"
There were anti-oil activists there
who had picketed and protested everywhere.
They'd coauthored books with radical people and had signs they proudly wore.
They wouldn't try those radical taxes like their brothers did next door.
Surely not raising fees here nor carbon tax would be in store.
Quoth the Premier: all and more.

Suddenly we could see it clearly that their views were oh so nearly
to their comrades to the east. That did worry us ever more.
Bills they were so proudly passing
that were so far encompassing.
I felt for sure they would be pausing from their agenda oh so poor.
“Do you understand this?” we would ask, but their answers
were to come no more.
Quoth the Premier: there’s the door.

One look at Bill 6 consulting made the NDP look quite
insulting.
Battered, beaten, and downtrodden, farmers never felt so
poor.
Now those coal-fired generators
Were feeling like they’d met a gator.
Furthermore, communities that relied on coal were feeling
sore.
Carbon tax caused coal contracts turned back to pool by the
score.
Quoth the Premier: we’ll sue some more.

They tackled those that fish, and foresters and trappers did
wish
the Dippers had never looked their way and what they had in
store.
Caribou plans were quite extreme,
and they blamed the feds supreme,
causing counties, foresters, and towns to start to lean to war.
“Give it up,” they pleaded as they started to feel the poor.
Quoth the Premier: let them roar.

On and on they did continue, straining Albertans in their
quarters,
round and round and back and forth, damaging Alberta to the
core.
“Hey,” we asked them, “aren’t you done yet?”
Surely Alberta has too much debt.
Ninety billion dollars and \$3 billion interest is the score.
Isn’t that enough?” we yelled as we stood there keeping
score.
Quoth the Premier: billions more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Schizophrenia Support in Indigenous Communities

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m honoured today to talk about schizophrenia and its impact on indigenous communities. The Schizophrenia Society of Alberta works tirelessly to support people suffering from schizophrenia to lead independent lives and gain employment. The Schizophrenia Society is aware of the need for support and awareness programs in indigenous communities. They’ve developed an indigenous outreach project to provide support and programs to indigenous communities in Alberta affected by schizophrenia, with a mandate to develop strong, viable, and trusting relationships within indigenous communities.

Employed indigenous helpers and elders will engage community leaders in conversations about schizophrenia and share how services will be made available through indigenous helper support services. They’ll co-ordinate community education presentations for these communities that provide information about the illness, symptoms, support options, and recovery; share real stories and personal experiences of schizophrenia; and challenge common misconceptions. Presenters will be on call to answer questions and provide direct phone support to communities. The presentations

will be ongoing to ensure that the message continues to be spread and to provide helpers an opportunity to develop relationships with those in need of support. The Schizophrenia Society will also collaborate with other aboriginal mental health organizations.

This project will provide valuable support for many people in indigenous communities who are suffering without the information and supports they need. Early intervention and awareness helps people who are experiencing symptoms to reach out, receive help, and have a greater chance of recovery. This is a program offering help and hope to people in need of it.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Pipeline Approval

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I proposed a straightforward motion demanding that the federal government amend the National Energy Board Act to remove upstream and downstream emissions from its pipeline assessments. I did this because the NEB changes that they have done, at the instruction of the Trudeau Liberals, are directly responsible for the death of the Energy East pipeline, a pipeline that this Premier and this caucus claimed to have supported. I can think of no better message from this House than a unified message from all of us to Ottawa that we stand up for this pipeline. Will the government reconsider and support my motion? Will this Premier and will this NDP government do something to stand up . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I would ask all of the members – I mentioned it yesterday – that as we move forward, please contain your volume. There have been several members, at least one that I mentioned yesterday, so I urge you to keep your volume down and, as always, your comments respectful.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned and said yesterday several times, our government fought for Energy East every step of the way. We told the federal government that the downstream emissions should not be a factor in the considerations and the deliberations. Notwithstanding that, our government has done more to promote pipelines in the last two years than the members opposite did in the previous 44. That is why we have two pipelines approved and they got zero pipelines approved, indeed while their current leader was in Ottawa making those decisions. We’re proud of our record, and we’re going to keep going.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: This Premier and this government have been missing in action all summer on this file. The NDP has claimed that they oppose the federal changes, but their actions don’t back up the words, Mr. Speaker. It’s clear that the NDP just want this issue to go away so they can continue their love affair with the Trudeau Liberals despite Ottawa’s persistent attacks on our great province. This is not just about Energy East. This is about the viability of every future pipeline project that is proposed. I will ask again. Will this government send a clear message to Ottawa by supporting my motion? Will this Premier and will this government stand up for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Premier and this government have been standing up for Albertans, and in fact we will continue to stand up for Albertans. We will continue to do the work that they have been unsuccessful at doing. We got approval for a pipeline to tidewater. I am very proud of that. We will continue to fight for that pipeline because we know that that's what's best for Alberta's energy industry and what's best for the Canadian economy overall. That's why we won't stop until the job is done.

Mr. Nixon: All this Premier has is two cancelled pipelines. The federal government does not take into account downstream emissions when they cut cheques to Bombardier, whose planes burn oil. They don't take into account downstream emissions when cutting cheques to Ontario auto plants, whose cars burn oil. But Alberta pipelines, which don't burn oil but just move it, are being singled out for special treatment. Will this government finally send a clear message to Ottawa and finally stand up for what they say they believe in, stand up for our pipelines, our largest industry, and the people of Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the analogies, or one or two of the analogies, that the member opposite made are exactly the analogies that both our minister and myself used in speaking with the federal government about the issue of downstream emissions. You know, I said this last session about the previous Leader of the Opposition, and now I think it applies to the current leader of the UCP: nothing more than a sheep in sheep's clothing; 20 years in Ottawa and never stood up for Energy East. What we are doing is standing up for a pipeline to tidewater, and we will be successful.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second main question.

Pipeline Approval and Federal-Provincial Relations

Mr. Nixon: We know how insincere the government's objections are to the federal government, including downstream emissions in its pipeline assessments. They won't support a simple motion that all members of this House should be able to get behind. But just as troubling is this government's inability to defend Alberta's constitutional rights, rights fought for and won by Premier Lougheed. The government has not objected to the NEB meddling in upstream emissions, setting an extremely dangerous precedent. Will the government send a clear message to Ottawa and launch a constitutional, legal challenge to the NEB's invasion of our provincial jurisdiction?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, that's certainly a reasonable question to ask, and in fact we have considered that matter as we have also been working in consultation with Kinder Morgan as it relates to the pipeline to the Pacific. As things stand now, we don't have the legal position from which to engage in what the member opposite suggests, but we will take every legal opportunity that is available to argue that downstream emissions should not be considered, and I suspect that members opposite will be pleased to see that outcome as we go forward.

Mr. Nixon: Well, it might have been a reasonable question. That certainly was not a reasonable answer.

This issue should be bigger than partisan politics. Alberta has constitutional, enshrined rights, and we shouldn't sell those just to make friends with the Trudeau Liberals. Upstream emissions are clearly within Alberta's exclusive provincial purview. Can the government tell us what other constitutional rights they are currently willing to dispose of to maintain their alliance with Justin Trudeau? Is education next? Is health care next? What line is the Premier not willing to cross to maintain a relationship with Justin Trudeau?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting. The members opposite often talk about issues of being careful with our money. In that spirit, I'm not going to spend legal money grandstanding for the sake of political gain, which is what the members opposite are suggesting. What we will do is that we will stand up for Alberta in the responsible ways that are at our disposal, in a way that ensures that we respect the law and that we move forward in a way that gets us what we need to have at the end of the day, which is a pipeline to tidewater, something that we got approved and they did not.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: The hundred thousand jobs that have been lost are not political gain.

Again, this NDP government siding with the Trudeau Liberals over our province is disgusting. They're doing it on pipelines, they caved and agreed to Trudeau's 67 per cent carbon tax, and they refuse to speak out against Ottawa's attack on small businesses. Can the Premier tell us one significant issue, just one, where her government has spoken out against Ottawa? And I don't mean a toothless press release. When is she going to speak out against Ottawa, stand up for the people of Alberta, stand up for the province, and do the job that she was elected to do?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I was not actually elected to refight the lost election of these guys' new leader. Okay? I'm really sorry that they're having trouble getting over the fact that their new boss lost an election to the current Prime Minister, but you know what? Live with it. The fact of the matter is that our job is to do the best thing we can for Albertans, which is what we're doing. You know what? It's working. Things are looking up. Jobs are up. Manufacturing is up. Investment is up. We are leading the country because we're focused on the people of Alberta, not past political losses. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please. Volume.
Chestermere-Rocky View.

Catholic School Sex Education Curriculum

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A member opposite has proposed a motion on interfaith harmony week, and what irony coming from a party whose leader just defamed Alberta's largest faith community. Last week the Premier attacked the proposed Catholic curriculum by saying, quote: consent is the law in Alberta, and under no circumstances will any child in Alberta be taught that they have to somehow accept illegal behaviour in a sexual relationship. The end. By this she alleged that Catholics support marital rape when the curriculum she attacked says, "Consent is always necessary." Why did the Premier smear Catholic educators?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, there is smearing going on, but it's being done by the member opposite, quite clearly, and I'm surprised to see that kind of thing from that particular member.

But let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. What happened last week was that a document was FOIPed, and it was in the public realm. It included some very concerning statements, some of which were concerning, some of which were confusing. It was therefore the job of the Premier to clarify the position of the government in response to that document, and that is what I did. Under no circumstances will I apologize for it because it was the right thing to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think confusion should obviously lead to an apology right away. In her drive-by smear of the Catholic educators the Premier went on to say, quote: under no circumstances will we enforce or condone a sexual health curriculum that normalizes the absence of consent. In what world – I don't understand what she was talking about. The proposed curriculum states the opposite, that consent must always be present. Was the Premier misinformed or confused, or was she malicious? In any event, why won't she simply just accept the responsibility by apologizing to the Catholic community for these really outrageous remarks?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, the comments that I made were with respect to a particular document. Within that document there were statements that promoted discrimination against sexual minorities and also discouraged safe health practices and also raised questions about the matter of consent. As a result, it was important for me to clarify how our government would respond to the document on the issue about which there was confusion, about the fact that we will not ever tolerate any form of discrimination against sexual minorities, nor will we promote . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is specifically around the idea of consent. It's not just the Premier who claims that Catholics are supporting nonconsensual sexual relationships, but her Education minister also engaged in the same smearing, objecting to the Catholic curriculum, saying that teaching consent is a basic health and safety issue for students in regard to sexuality, obviously. Given that the curriculum clearly states that consent is always necessary, in what world was – we don't understand what the Education minister was talking about. If the Premier won't retract and apologize for this offensive remark . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, there was a document. The document was the subject of my comments. The document contained statements that discouraged safe, healthy practices, that promoted discrimination against sexual minorities and gender minorities, and that raised questions about how one should examine the issue of consent. As a result, we made it very clear that the way in which that document was constructed would

not find its way into a publicly funded curriculum, and I retain that position.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Political Action Committees

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this Halloween something very, very scary lurks in the shadows of these halls. Political action committees are subverting Alberta's election finance rules by bleeding dark money into leadership and election campaigns. Alberta Liberals are going to stop this along with the government. Alberta Liberals want to stop this; it's not clear the New Democrats want to stop this. What magic will the Premier work to ensure that Albertans decide elections, not spooky interest groups?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much to the member for that very, very scary question. In fact, I have to say that I agree completely with the sentiments that are expressed within that question. Our very first bill, once we got elected, Mr. Speaker, was to take big money out of politics and to enhance disclosure of the money that does go in. The member opposite raises an interesting question about the matter of PACs. Many governments across the country have tried in a number of different ways to limit the impact of PACs, and sometimes the courts have pushed back against that. We introduced legislation that we thought would get us there, but we . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Dr. Swann: Groups like Unite Alberta, United Liberty, and Alberta Together are channelling shadowy funds to the parties of my hon. colleagues to the right and to the far right, but it's the NDP's zombielike pace on regulating PACs that is very unsettling. Is the government dragging its feet because dark money flows in your veins?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm inclined to say boo, but I won't.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, you know, as I've said, our government is committed to taking not only big money out of politics but also dark money out of politics, and we are concerned at the rate at which we are able to see enforcement of the legislation that we've got in place right now. We are also looking at whether there are ways to strengthen that legislation within the confines of what the courts have said up to now, and we hope there is. I think you'll hear more from us on that very soon. There is no question that people need to disclose, and I would suggest that the new Leader of the Official Opposition might want to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Dr. Swann: You heard it, Mr. Speaker: "very soon."

The NDP really wants to bury this issue in the political catacombs, but the Alberta Liberals want to drive a stake into the heart so it cannot suck the lifeblood of our democracy. We'd do that by making PACs follow the same rules as everyone else, which is what my Bill 214 proposes. Will the Premier be Wonder Woman and pledge her government's support? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I will commit to the member opposite that you will see from this government the most aggressive legislation against PACs that we can possibly bring in and ensure that it stands

up to the courts between now and the next election because that's what Albertans need. They need dark money out of their politics, they need big money out of their politics, and they need a light shone on where the money is coming from, which is why I again suggest that Jason Kenney should disclose his leadership donors.

Indigenous Educational Curriculum Content

Mr. Rosendahl: Mr. Speaker, over 22,000 Albertans speak an indigenous language. In my constituency several schools offer Cree language programming, which is key to creating bridges between communities. To the Minister of Education: given your commitment to combat bullying, address issues of racial discrimination, and take concrete steps towards reconciliation, how will your ministry ensure that all students learn to respect and understand indigenous peoples?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and for the question as well. I'm very pleased to point out that we have put out lesson plans in regard to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit culture and teaching, and we will continue to do so. We saw a very big uptake with these lesson plans, and we're very excited about the appetite that Albertans and teachers and students and parents have to learn more about indigenous culture. All Alberta students will learn about the history and legacy of residential schools and the history of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada as part of the government's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The lesson plans that we have . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Rosendahl: Mr. Speaker, given that programs that provide a greater understanding of indigenous culture are often limited to small groups of students or do not continue beyond the elementary level, to the same minister: how will you ensure that indigenous programming is available to all students throughout their schooling?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of June of 2016, of course, we are building new curriculum together with thousands of Albertans, and included as an integral part of that building curriculum is to ensure that we have First Nations, Métis, and Inuit culture teachings throughout all grade levels in all subject areas. This is mandatory for all schools, this new curriculum, and I expect that it will help to drive a deeper understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit culture throughout our province.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that people who are exposed to different cultures and languages lead more tolerant and prosperous lives and despite Mr. Kenney's belief that this is social engineering, to the same minister: what further steps will you take to ensure students benefit from greater awareness of indigenous history and culture?

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At all points we know that education is the best way to fight against ignorance, against intolerance and to help to edify all of us and bring us closer together as a people. We know that together with the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Alberta Teachers' Association,

First Nations, and postsecondary institutions we're building authentic culture and language, to teach these things along the way. We're teaching indigenous language as well. I'm looking forward to expand Cree and Blackfoot language and other languages, Dene, to ensure that culture is not just preserved in a museum but it is lived, and it is lived together with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Opposition

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, Karen Mahon was appointed by this government to the Alberta oil sands advisory group. As a member of Stand.earth, an ill-informed oil sands organization, it is hard to think of a more inappropriate appointment for Alberta. Recently we learned that Ms Mahon was arrested in B.C., protesting against the Trans Mountain pipeline. Ms Mahon now says that this is only the beginning. What gave this government the incredibly foolish idea to appoint her?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, in all our groups when we consult, we consult with a variety of people. We consult with industry, and we consult with environment groups to get the best legislation possible. The person described is no different. She's been involved in different things. We've worked very hard to get our pipelines, and to be clear, our pipelines were approved because of our climate leadership plan. They have federal approval, and they will be built.

Mr. Barnes: Given, Mr. Speaker, that Ms Mahon is a radical who will continue to undermine the confidence in Alberta's oil and gas industry and thousands of jobs for all Canadians and given that Ms Mahon will be starting direct-action training to oppose pipelines, what will this government do to ensure that this pipeline will be built and doesn't just die on the vine like they killed Energy East?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? Our plan, including the climate leadership plan, is working. Jobs are up. Wages are up. Drilling is up. Production is up. That's because there's confidence in Alberta's energy industry. We've secured two pipelines. We're working to diversify our economy, something that this opposition has fought us on the whole way. At some point I need the opposition to work with us to support Alberta's energy industry, support Alberta jobs.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that despite the exposure of the oil sands industry through the panel Ms Mahon declared that this Kinder Morgan pipeline "will never be built," can the government comment on how much of our hard-earned taxpayer money went to work against Alberta's job prosperity and wealth creation, supporting radicals such as Ms Mahon and Ms Berman on this panel? How many of our tax dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we worked very hard on our climate leadership plan and on the OSAG as part of that. We engaged industry and environment groups to manage the 100-megatonne cap. You know what? In Alberta we just recently celebrated 50 years of the industry learning to take oil out of the sand. And you know? It's going to be innovation that's going to take carbon out of the barrel. We have the best innovators,

we have best technicians in Alberta, and we're going to have the best industry going into the 21st century.

Seniors' Housing

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, in my meetings with public, private, and nonprofit seniors' housing providers across the province, all have expressed concern over the ever-increasing financial burden being wrought upon them by this government. Minimum wage increased yet again with little consideration for the impact on the care and services for seniors. And now the already devastating impact of the carbon tax will escalate by 50 per cent in just two months. To the minister of seniors: why has your government disregarded the impact of these irresponsible policies on the health, well-being, nutrition, and compassionate care we owe to our seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we work very closely with our housing management bodies. In fact, we've invested \$88 million for them to do retrofits – improve furnaces, change windows – creating energy efficiency, so we're working very closely with them.

We know that we're caring for seniors and the opposition would be cutting millions of dollars. We know Kenney's plan would be hurting seniors. We're helping seniors.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're hurting them. We're not.

Given that the double whammy of the carbon tax and minimum wage increase will further threaten the financial viability of many seniors' housing providers and, indeed, many other Alberta businesses and given that many have told me that their last option is to reduce costs by cutting expenses related to food, care, and recreation given no credible financial relief offered by the NDP government, again to the minister: why do you continue to put your ineffectual ideologies, damaging wage policies, and burdensome carbon tax ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gotfried: ... ahead of the quality of life of the seniors who built this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we're very committed to supporting seniors. Besides the \$88 million that we've invested in housing management bodies for retrofitting and supporting them to do energy efficiency plans, we've also given them a grant of \$500,000 to look at energy audits. This helps them, again, reduce the costs of carbon. We're caring for seniors and protecting their benefits. Jason Kenney's reckless plan to cut 20 per cent from the province's budget would cut 30,000 seniors off the Alberta seniors' benefit. We're supporting. They're hurting seniors.

The Speaker: Second supplemental. Watch the preambles, hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe if your Premier lets Jason Kenney in the House, he can answer some of your questions.

Given that many seniors' organizations operate both privately funded ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Gotfried: ... and publicly funded facilities and given that many of these facilities are unable to afford much-needed capital maintenance due to escalating costs forced upon them by this government and given that in some instances the government has offered to pay for upgrades in exchange for allowing the government to own and operate the facilities, again to the minister: are you using rapid increases in minimum wage, carbon tax to force providers to transfer ownership of their facilities to the government to remake them under the NDP's ...

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Once again, Mr. Speaker ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Ms Sigurdson: ... we're investing and supporting housing management bodies across this province. Over 110,000 Albertans are supported in provincial affordable housing programs. We're investing significantly in supporting them to be energy efficient. We're investing. They want to cut and hurt seniors and people in the affordable housing public service delivery. We're certainly proud of all the investment we've put in.

Thank you.

Rural Crime Prevention

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, crime in rural Alberta is skyrocketing. At a town hall meeting I hosted in Mannville last week, the RCMP reported that property crimes in one detachment had increased by 68 per cent over the same period last year but the staffing levels were the same or even lower than in previous years. It is not uncommon for the RCMP to take over an hour to respond to a reported crime in progress. To the Solicitor General: what specific actions have you taken to ensure that rural RCMP detachments are assigned more members to address this increase in crime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Of course, no one likes to see increasing crime rates throughout the province. The RCMP is responsible for specific deployment of officers, but we continue to support them with the highest funding level per capita in any western province. We invest over half a billion dollars in the RCMP.* We also have programs available to municipalities so that they can add additional officers, and I'd be happy if that municipality were to reach out.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll certainly take the minister up on that because criminals don't work 9 to 5, and they don't take holidays.

Given that some rural detachments are so understaffed that they don't even have enough officers on duty to be around-the-clock and given that this situation would never be tolerated in our larger urban centres, to the minister: what measures have you taken to ensure that rural Albertans have the same 24/7 police protection that is standard for those who live in Alberta's cities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

*See page 1647, left column, paragraph 7

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I think the most important measure that the government can take at a time like this is to ensure that we're continuing to invest in front-line services. This government is taking those steps to make sure that that money is there, that we're not cutting 20 per cent out of the budget. That would reduce staff even further. In addition, we've been working with the RCMP. They have started a new integrated crime reduction unit, and they are already seeing results.

2:20

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that many perpetrators are repeat offenders who have underlying mental illness and addiction issues and given that the availability of counsellors in our remand centres is limited but that access to drugs is widespread and given that addressing the root causes of criminal activity through counselling and rehabilitation is essential to breaking the cycle of crime, to the minister: why are illegal drugs readily available in remand centres but counselling services are not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member and I definitely agree that addressing these underlying root causes is absolutely the right way to go about solving this problem. That's why our government is ensuring that we continue to invest in health care, that we invest in mental health supports, that we continue to invest in education so that we can assist people to make better decisions as they go forward.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issue of drugs in correctional centres, we have a number of different things that we do. We've announced just recently a new pilot project with respect to body scanners. Those have been very successful in other jurisdictions, and we hope to see that success here.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Airdrie.

Mouseland Read in Schools

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP has told Alberta's parents that there's nothing to worry about when it comes to curriculum reform. Earlier this month the Member for Edmonton-Decore proudly tweeted several disturbing pictures. What was so disturbing? He was reading a book called Mouseland to children in our classrooms. What exactly is Mouseland? Well, it's NDP hero Tommy Douglas's famous socialist story. Can the minister tell us if he thinks Mouseland is an appropriate book for our young children?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'm delighted to answer another question about curriculum here today. You know, it's important to have Canadian content in our curriculum, and Tommy Douglas is a perfect example of that. Certainly, we are working hard. More than 35,000 Albertans have contributed to the curriculum program so far. If the UCP and Jason Kenney are interested in constructive criticism of the curriculum, then they can join up and actually make submissions about what should be in our curriculum here in the future. I haven't seen them thus far, but the door is always ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given the minister's unwillingness ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Advanced Education, keep your voice down.

Mrs. Pitt: ... to give a straight answer about storytime with the Member for Edmonton-Decore and given that the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert also has been reading Mouseland to our school kids and given that it's really not just a fairy tale, that it's the story the NDP founder Tommy Douglas used to push his socialist world view and given that the minister's colleagues are pushing this world view in Alberta's classrooms ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet.

Mrs. Pitt: ... can the minister tell us if he thinks reading socialist ...

The Speaker: Hon. members, where are we? Answer to first supplemental?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I always get confused about these holidays sometimes. I can't see if it's April Fool's Day or if it's Halloween today. I'm choosing to take the question seriously. You know that Tommy Douglas was voted the greatest Canadian by CBC for a long time. I think that reading and learning about the past and the present and the future is a good thing as well. It's important to build curriculum and to develop curriculum over time. If you take \$1.6 billion out of the education system, certainly you can find a very interesting metaphor about big fat cats.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. [interjections]

Hon. members, please, not so loud with the pounding of the desks.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this is not a laughing matter. Albertans are sick of having their classrooms politicized.

Mr. Speaker, given the actions of two of his fellow MLAs – it appears that the minister is supportive of reading highly politicized books to young children – and given that Albertans are supposed to believe that the common curriculum reforms don't have an ulterior motive, will the minister denounce the reading of propaganda and demand that his colleagues cease their behaviour immediately?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, as it happens, I was a teacher for 20 years, and one of the important lessons that I knew is that you do not ban books, you do not burn books, you do not put books on lists because that's a slippery slope to a place where you just don't go. What we are doing, though, is building a transparent curriculum. We're building a curriculum together with Albertans. We have literally engaged tens of thousands of people. I'm very proud of that process. What I'm not proud of is Jason Kenney and the UCP turning that into a political propaganda machine and a circus. That I do not stand for. [interjections]

The Speaker: Well, you must be excited to get out and do some tricks and treats.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Christmas is on the way, and once again the NDP have a special present coming for Albertans. What's that? Well, it's a 50 per cent hike to its job-killing carbon tax. The NDP's tax on everything raises the price of everything

from fuelling your vehicle to heating your home and even buying groceries. Of course, the NDP never campaigned on this present, and they never even mentioned it during the campaign. Will the government give Albertans a break and put a hold on their massive tax hike?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're making life better for Albertans by reducing greenhouse gases, getting emissions down, and investing in green infrastructure and green energy projects. As I mentioned in a previous question, we have a lot of innovation in Alberta, and we expect that innovation and technology to take the place of carbon emissions. We have a made-in-Alberta plan, and we're making sure that this plan works for Albertans and works for our industry. Our plan is working. As I mentioned previously, we have two pipeline approvals because of this plan.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the minister's refusal I'll change tack just a little bit. Given that the NDP started with a \$20-per-tonne carbon tax and given that they're raising it to \$30 per tonne in just two months and given that, to make matters worse, the NDP agreed to a \$50-per-tonne carbon tax when Justin Trudeau demanded it – true dat – can the minister tell us if there is any limit to how high the price of their carbon tax could eventually go?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're taking leadership on this matter of climate change, something that the new Leader of the Opposition did not do when he was in Ottawa. We're making investments in energy efficiency and green technology, something that \$9 billion in cuts for infrastructure would kill, something like the Calgary green line. We're focused on creating jobs and making life more affordable for Albertan families. The Kenney government would prefer big tax giveaways to their wealthy friends. We're taking care of Albertans on this side of the benches.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the government's complete unwillingness to stand up to the Trudeau Liberals, how can we believe that they won't simply agree to another massive carbon tax increase should Justin Trudeau demand one? I ask the minister again: how high would the number have to go before the NDP finally says no to Ottawa?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this side of the House is unwilling to do is listen to an opposition that wants us to not create a made-in-Alberta solution for climate change and wants more Ottawa. They want more NEB, more imposition from Ottawa. On this side of the House we're taking care of Albertans by creating a made-in-Alberta plan for Albertan workers and Alberta families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Indigenous Economic and Climate Initiatives

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose is the home of the largest indigenous

communities in the province, including a significant urban indigenous population as well. This morning we proudly debated Bill 20, about water for First Nations communities. In 2016 our government made a commitment to the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations: what is being done to support good-paying jobs and economic development for indigenous peoples living in communities like Maskwacis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The Indigenous Relations ministry is currently working with all four bands at Maskwacis on economic development projects, and with each project we provide a variety of sources for the community to be able to better themselves and to create new jobs and revenue for their own community. An example for today is the Samson Cree Nation, who used our fund to provide a feasibility study and a business plan for a community-owned truck stop and gas station located near the city of Canmore. I've also been working with Montana First Nation for several years on their solar energy program.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that indigenous communities often struggle with access to energy, to the same minister: what is being done to ensure that indigenous communities can participate in Alberta's growing market for sustainable, renewable energy and support both their traditional commitment to the land and the goals of our climate leadership plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the question. We're very happy to have announced earlier this year seven different programs in the indigenous climate leadership initiative that will allow First Nations to participate fully in the program to restore our land, our air, and our water to its pure form. That includes programs such as the indigenous solar program, that funds rooftop solar, and the Alberta indigenous green energy development program, which supports funding for jobs in the communities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite proud of the leadership our indigenous nations have been making, but given that the 2016 federal census shows that the indigenous population in Alberta is growing rapidly, to the same minister: what steps are you taking to ensure that indigenous voices are included and heard in the discussions on all matters that concern them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I'd like to take just a moment to thank the member, who is working very hard with the indigenous communities in his riding as I know that he cares deeply about them.

In answer to his question, we have been inviting indigenous people to the table in a way that they have never experienced before. In fact, some of them tell me that we're almost exhausting them with the amount of opportunity we're giving them to speak to government policy and practice. Right now, for example, we're renewing the First Nations consultation policy, the Métis settlement

consultation policy, and the Métis consultation policy for the broader province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Surgery Wait Times

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, this government continues to fail Albertans. Under this Health minister the first quarter of 2017-2018 shows that Alberta Health Services is failing our constituents. Cataract surgery wait times are at their longest in three years, at over nine months. Open-heart surgery people now have to wait five weeks longer than last year. Does this Minister of Health, who's been at the job for 30 months, realize that her job is to reduce these wait times?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My job is to ensure that all Albertans get access to quality public health care, and I will not apologize for doing that. Obviously, we have work to do, and we are absolutely committed to doing that for all Albertans. We don't want to move forward with Jason Kenney style health care, where only the wealthy, probably the people who donated to his campaign – but we don't even know who those are because he won't tell us – get to access quality health care and the rest of us wait on our own because we have no options. That's the wrong path. I'm glad to stand with a government that's investing in public health care.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, according to AHS in Calgary you have to wait 35 weeks for a hip surgery. In the north it is a whopping 48 weeks, and in the south zone it is 55 weeks to wait for a hip surgery. To the minister: why is there such a large discrepancy within these regions? What are you doing to identify this and resolve these issues?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm incredibly proud of the fact that we are investing in long overdue infrastructure throughout our province. Let's talk about the southwest Edmonton hospital. Edmonton hasn't had a new hospital since the 1980s. That's shameful. Under the Official Opposition, were they to have the opportunity, they would cut \$9 billion from our infrastructure alone and 20 per cent from the Health operating budget. You know what that would do? That would mean seniors would wait in pain while they're requiring hip surgeries, and only the wealthy would get access. That's not what we're doing. We're moving forward to protect all.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, they're just practising for the opposition here.

Mr. Speaker, given that in the central region a report from the 2015 needs assessment shows a shortfall, when you're talking about infrastructure, of 96 beds, 18 ER beds, and three OR rooms, there's an infrastructure deficit in central Alberta. Have you identified that, have you looked at those reports, and what are you doing about it?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud to be part of a government that's investing in public health care. Just in the first three months of this year we opened 388 new continuing care beds. What would happen under Jason Kenney? Cuts, cuts, and more cuts. On this side of the House we're standing up for Albertans and we're investing in things that matter to them, like health care. The member opposite is delusional if he thinks that they can move \$20 billion in cuts, \$9 billion in capital, without having an even deeper impact. I am proud

of what we're doing on this side of the House, and you won't convince me otherwise. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister. [interjection] Hon. minister, please. The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, under NDP rule the government of Alberta has become the most secretive and least transparent government in our country. Canadian privacy experts have denounced entire departments as rogue agencies, and Alberta's own Information Commissioner has repeatedly called for the NDP to clean up what she has described as "fast approaching a crisis situation." Is the NDP incapable of cleaning up the cesspool of government policies, or is it simply too convenient to operate in the shadows?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. We believe the government should be open and transparent. Our government is more open and transparent than the government in the history of Alberta has ever been. We are hiring more FOIP processors to clear the backlog, we're streamlining the FOIP process, and we're proactively disclosing more information than the Alberta government ever has before. We're taking real action on this. It's clear to us that we inherited a mess, and it's taking a long time to clean it up.

Mr. Cooper: Given that the UCP has discovered through access to information what appears to be the deletion of over 800,000 e-mails from government servers and since these e-mails are public record and belong to the people of Alberta, is there anyone on that side of the House that can explain how record retention policies were so deliberately ignored and almost a million e-mails permanently deleted from the public record?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to add some clarity to my friends in the opposition. We certainly welcome the investigation by the Privacy Commissioner, and we are certainly of the view that this is a good opportunity to make clear to our public officials and, clearly, to the opposition that there is a requirement in the act that requires us to keep official records, but we are also required to delete transitory documents because nobody wants my Gap coupons.

2:40

Mr. Cooper: I can assure you that there are not 800,000 transitory records.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Information and Privacy Commissioner has informed us that she is in fact investigating four departments due to this apparent breach and since government officials were offering iTunes gift cards as prizes to see who could delete the most e-mails, Minister, when is your government going to face the music and tackle your terrible, terrible record on transparency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to answer this question. As I have said, our government is the most transparent that the Alberta government has ever been in the history of freedom of information and access. There is certainly more work to do, and we are constantly ensuring that our

senior officials have appropriate training. We encourage them to do so. While that kind of contest is not within our guidelines and we would not encourage that, we do encourage appropriate training so that our officials know which documents need to be saved and which ones need to be deleted.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Justice has requested that she make a correction to an earlier answer.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Rural Crime Prevention

(continued)

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to correct a response I gave to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. I had said that we provide half a billion dollars in RCMP funding, which is, of course, incorrect. It's half a billion dollars in police funding, because many of our municipalities have police services that are not the RCMP.*

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, that's fine. It's clarification. It's a good job. Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Government Policies

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I want to take you on a short trip down memory lane. You might remember the flamboyant vampire character Count Floyd, played by Joe Flaherty. You'll remember him in the Canadian TV show *SCTV*. Count Floyd became famous for the phrase "scary stuff." Seeing as this is Halloween, I want to honour the iconic *SCTV* Count Floyd by naming the top five scary stuff that this NDP government is engaged in.

In the number 1 spot we have this NDP government jumping at shadows any time they hear the name of our new leader, Jason Kenney. It's kind of like the hyenas in *The Lion King* movie that kept jumping at the name Mufasa. No wonder the Premier won't call a by-election. She's afraid of facing our leader in this Chamber.

In the number 2 spot: this government's deficit is \$10 billion, and its projected debt is going to be over \$90 billion by 2020. I can tell you that this is going to be a nightmare for children in Alberta. That is pretty scary stuff indeed.

In the number 3 spot is implying that Catholics condone spousal rape. Now, that's some sick, scary stuff.

In the number 4 spot: the carbon tax, capping oil sands productions, and Bill 6. Yes, there is more than one thing mentioned here, but all these things drive away investment and cost Albertans thousands of jobs. If that isn't scary stuff, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is.

To cap off the top five scary stuff this NDP government is doing is the F, Mr. Speaker. What I'm talking about is the grade F that they continue to receive from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business on red tape reduction. Did you know that Alberta is the only government in Canada that doesn't have a red tape reduction strategy? Did you know that this government doesn't even know how many regulations they have? Now, that is some very scary stuff.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Johnson MS Bike Tour

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My wife, Linda, and I recently had the pleasure of attending the 2017 Johnson MS mountain bike tour. This unique event brings riding enthusiasts to the backcountry trails around Hinton, Brûle, and William A. Switzer park every year. This year over 260 cyclists and 43 teams joined us on our spectacular Rocky Mountain trails. Participants rode 90 kilometres over challenging mountain terrain to raise money and awareness for MS. This event was a huge success. Just over \$300,000 was raised to support the work of the MS Society. They provide support to approximately 14,000 Albertans living with MS. While there are other rides for MS around the province, the Johnson MS tour is the only mountain bike event. Linda and I enjoyed meeting participants as we helped to serve a lunch at the Black Cat ranch in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains near Brûle. We were also there at the finish line and celebrated with everyone at the awards dinner in Hinton.

Now we are looking forward to the 2018 Johnson MS Bike Tour. The MS Society is especially excited since this will mark the 20th anniversary of this unique event. I hope that everyone will join me in supporting and congratulating the MS Society for their ongoing success in fundraising to support research and awareness of MS in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

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

Catholic School Sex Education Curriculum

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few days the Premier has essentially accused every Catholic in Alberta of being in favour of marital rape and of wanting to pass this belief on to their children. The Premier, having heard the over-the-top intolerant rhetoric of her Education minister, decided that she would be the head Catholic school punisher in Alberta and took her language and tone to a place all of us in this Legislature should be ashamed of.

Catholic school boards have been working in good faith – pun intended – with the Education ministry in trying to meet the requirements of the minister's ordered curriculum changes. The Education minister chose to take to the media channels to demean, threaten, and intimidate duly elected separate school boards from across this province from his ministerial bully pulpit. Remember, it is Catholic parents from all across Alberta who elected these people. In fact, the Catholic schools made it very clear in writing, in black and white, that consent before sexual activity is an important aspect of Catholic sexual education teachings.

Somehow the Premier chose to overlook this or did not check this key fact and went on a tirade against all Albertans of the Catholic faith. The Premier's words amount to saying that Catholics are teaching their children that consent within marriage is not required. Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree in this House that sexual activity without consent is illegal, criminal, and wrong.

The Premier has attacked Catholic schools and by extension every Catholic teacher, parent, school board member, and even child in Alberta. These good people are now tainted by the irresponsible, reckless, and hurtful words of their own Premier. The United Nations declaration of human rights under article 26(3) states: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

Mr. Speaker, it's a sad day in Alberta when a Premier of a province needs to be asked to apologize for such an abhorrent quote, but that's where we are today. It gives me no joy to say what I'm

*See page 1643, right column, paragraph 12

saying, but in the absence of an apology from this Premier it is my duty. Premier, do the right thing and apologize.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 21

Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 21.

Mr. Speaker, provincial government agencies, boards, and commissions play a pivotal role in delivering important programs and services to Albertans. This is why we are committed to continuing the review of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions. This review was first announced in November 2015 and looked at the 301 public agencies that existed at the time. Since then our government has reduced the number of ABCs, cut executive salaries and perks, and opened the recruiting process for those ABCs to all Albertans. The ongoing review of agencies, boards, and commissions ensures ABCs are transparent, accountable, and using public dollars effectively and efficiently. There are a number of agencies that are no longer relevant, and it is not prudent to keep them in place. We are combining with others to achieve additional efficiencies.

Bill 21, which we are introducing today, is the second omnibus bill that will implement the dissolution of public agencies that require legislative amendments as well as consequential amendments. Bill 21 proposes to repeal or amend nine pieces of legislation to dissolve 14 public agencies. These changes are intended to address inactive and defunct agencies as well as create administrative efficiencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

2:50

Bill 22

Resident and Family Councils Act

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Resident and Family Councils Act.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce this bill. I believe this act will support the establishment of resident and family councils in all long-term care and licensed supportive living facilities that have four or more residents. These councils are an important mechanism for establishing resident and family councils to present requests, concerns, and proposed solutions to facility operators.

I personally attended a couple when my mom was away when my grandmother lived at the Edmonton General and found that it was a very important opportunity for me to learn from facility operators as well as to express my grandmother's hopes, mostly as they related to doing laundry or the food that she was consuming as those were two things that she took great pride in before she lived in a facility, and she wanted them to be held to the same standard. It was certainly beneficial to be able to participate in those formal structures.

Mr. Speaker, this government believes that residents of Alberta's long-term and licensed supportive living facilities should have a say

in how care and supports are being delivered and how they can be improved. With this legislation these residents can be assured that regardless of whether their facility is privately or publicly funded, they will have a forum to voice concerns and share feedback to their facility operators.

I look forward to discussions and deliberations with my colleagues on this important initiative. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve thoughtful discussion on a wide range of issues. Given the day and in deference to the efforts of Martin Luther 500 years ago I'd like to table five copies of not 95 theses but 95 questions for debate that should be of concern to Albertans, and I invite the start of debate on these issues.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 19

An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to begin debate on second reading of Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers.

Standing behind a till or pumping gas should be safe work, Madam Speaker. Our kids do it. Our neighbours do it. Our friends do it. That's how they earn their living, pay for school, or feed their families. When one of these workers is hurt or injured through a gas and dash or a robbery, we are all shocked. We are saddened. We feel that to our core. No one should suffer injury and pain. No family should suffer the loss of a loved one just because someone else was selfish enough to try to drive away with a tankful of stolen gas. Over the last three years violence at fuel stations and convenience stores has killed five workers and seriously injured three others. As Albertans our hearts break when that happens, and our pain is nothing compared to that of the individuals and families involved.

It must stop, so it is with hope that I introduced Bill 19. I believe that these proposed changes before us here today, with the support of all members of this House, can prevent these incidents from happening again. I know we all recognize the pain on the families who were here at introduction yesterday.

Earlier last year I promised that I would address fuel and convenience store worker safety. Over the last 18 months my department has held engagement sessions with industry, labour groups, advocates for convenience store workers. Occupational health and safety officers have proactively conducted store inspections to better understand risks in retail fuel stations and convenience stores. The result is Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. Bill 19 does this in two ways; first, by making customers prepay for their fuel either at the pump or by prepaying the attendant before fuelling up and, second, by making violence prevention plans mandatory.

I will now take a bit of time to walk us all through both of these areas in Bill 19, starting with prepaying for fuel. Bill 19 amends the occupational health and safety code to make prepayment for fuel

mandatory. Right now it is voluntary. Already many retailers across Alberta have voluntarily equipped their stations with pay at the pump technology, and many have implemented prepay policies either at all times or in effect overnight. That will now be in effect for all fuel stations 24 hours a day.

Prepayment doesn't always mean pay at the pump. Prepayment options don't always need expensive pump upgrades. Our goal is to protect workers, not to create hardships for owners. Prepay options can include paying the service attendant ahead of time or going into the store and paying the cashier. Those options will make it easier for small operators to implement prepay quickly.

We know that there is a very small number of pumps in the province that can't be controlled by workers from inside the store. We are going to be working directly with retailers on other solutions to improve safety and potentially reduce fuel theft as well as make sure that worker safety is the priority. Bill 19 has that flexibility built in.

Data from the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police shows that in 2015 there was an average of 12 fuel thefts per day, 4,000 that year. Every one of those was a potential risk to the attendants, and yesterday Edmonton Police Chief Rod Knecht shared that each incident can take an average of four hours to investigate. We are talking about a huge amount of time from our police services across the province.

When British Columbia implemented similar legislation in 2008 fuel thefts and related violence virtually disappeared. In British Columbia drivers got used to prepay relatively quickly. We expect Alberta drivers will also adjust.

Bill 19 also complements other workplace legislation in Alberta. Alberta's Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act clarified that it is illegal for employers to deduct thefts from their employees' wages. Workers should not be held personally responsible for fuel thefts, and this change will reduce confrontations between workers and thieves, seriously reducing the potential for violence. Mandatory prepay provides Alberta workers with even greater protection, and it's a benefit to owners by reducing losses from stolen fuel.

The second way that Bill 19 protects fuel station and convenience store workers is by amending the occupational health and safety code to make violence prevention plans mandatory. We did the research and found that these kinds of programs, along with strong training opportunities, are the most effective way to reduce crime and worker injuries. Again, up till now violence prevention plans have been voluntary, and many fuel stations and convenience stores in Alberta already have some of these methods in place. They have time-lock safes that have no overnight access. They have minimal amounts of cash on hand. They maybe have video monitoring. Bill 19 will make these mandatory and require signs to be posted so that customers know these measures are in place.

We also know that tobacco and lottery tickets are common targets for theft. Bill 19 will require retailers to keep limited amounts of these available overnight.

Good visibility is the enemy of crime. Stores will be required to have good visibility both within and outside the premises. People working alone will need to have personal emergency transmitters, and all workers must have violence prevention training that includes how to deal with difficult or abusive customers.

3:00

I know that some people have called for rules preventing people from working alone at night. We looked at the research and found that using multiple workers showed mixed results. Violence prevention plans and training are the most effective ways to reduce

crime and violence at fuel and convenience stores and are appropriate for all stores across Alberta.

That being said, every store must complete a hazard assessment and address any identified challenges. That may mean for some locations that additional safety measures are warranted, and I encourage all owners and operators to work with OH and S, who can advise on safety measures to protect workers.

Again, I know that cost is a concern, and I can say with confidence that the cost of a violence prevention plan is expected to be minimal. Many businesses already have purchased time-locked safes and video monitoring technology, and those are the highest cost components. Personal emergency transmitters can start as low as \$3.50 per month per user.

So what happens if Bill 19 passes this fall? Fuel and convenience stores will have six months to adjust. The legislation will come into effect June 1 of next year, and we will be working very closely with store owners across Alberta to communicate changes to them every step of the way. As well, I will work with my ministry to prepare materials to assist owners, operators, and workers. For fuel stations and convenience stores these changes are not onerous. Many already have prepay in place, at least under certain circumstances, and a lot of them already have violence prevention systems and procedures.

Friends, Bill 19 is a response to the tragedies we've seen as Albertans, but it is also thoughtful legislation built on consultation with those who represent the businesses, workers, law enforcement, and the families of victims. It's driven by the conviction that every worker in Alberta should return home safely at the end of the workday. No worker should be injured and no family should lose a loved one because of a stolen tank of gas or other theft. Our government promised to take action and protect those precious lives, and that action starts with Bill 19. I welcome the debate on this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today with a heavy heart, a heart that is truly in mourning, to address Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. Ki Yun Jo, the gas station owner killed in Thorsby, Alberta, as a result of a gas and dash, was one of my constituents. I gassed up at this station many times over the past two years, and he was always polite, and he was always willing to be of service. You could tell that this was a family-run gas station and that he was a hard-working immigrant making a life for himself and his family in this adopted country called Canada.

There are times in life when you wish you could just change things, when you ask yourself: why? Too often there is no real answer, no real answer that helps us to understand the tragedies of life. It's at those times that you reach out to your family and to your community and to your God. You surround yourself with love, and eventually, after the grieving process has begun to turn to healing, you begin to ask and you begin to answer the question: how do we make sure that this never happens again?

The day before Jo was killed, I was in a meeting with several people, one of whom was the staff sergeant of the Drayton Valley RCMP detachment. At the end of the meeting he took me aside, and he said, "Mark, I want to talk to you about a problem that I want you to address in the Legislature." To paraphrase him, he said: "Mark, we have a serious problem in this constituency with people stealing vehicles, then gassing up the stolen vehicles, and taking off without paying. If we don't address this soon, someone is going to

die.” His recommendation was the introduction of a prepay system for purchasing gas.

So it was with great sadness and with great shock that the very next day I heard about the death of Ki Yun Jo. This death, like all of the other senseless deaths accredited to gas and dash, can be mitigated through a prepay provincial piece of legislation. It has worked in other jurisdictions around North America and in Canada, and it can work here.

Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers, will have my support. Bill 19 can be broken into two parts: part one, the mandatory prepay, and the second part, about a violence protection plan. While we have at times, I’m sure, all grumbled about the inconvenience of prepay when travelling in another province or in places like California, the reality is that prepay has saved lives by effectively addressing the issue of gas and dash.

In the days after Jo’s death, I made a point of stopping at several of the gas stations in my constituency to have a conversation about prepay legislation. Without exception they told me stories about their experiences with gas and dashes. Incredibly, in the small town of Calmar at one gas station there were two gas and dashes in the two days following the death of Jo. There was not only concern about the lost income and worker safety but, just as importantly, the safety of the citizens as the vehicles raced out of the gas station. One of the employees was very concerned that people on the sidewalks and cars on the road were going to get hit as these gas-and-dash vehicles went flying out of the gas station.

Bill 19 has a flexible approach to prepay in that it can allow citizens to prepay at the pump. You can prepay using cash or debit card at the till, and you can leave ID at the till and pay cash in the store. If stores do not have in-store pump control, the gas station can work with occupational health and safety to put together alternative measures that will ensure worker safety.

The second part of Bill 19 is a violence prevention plan. This will implement a series of measures designed to enhance worker safety. It will include employee training on safe cash handling and violence prevention, special safes with time locks or drop safes to take away the incentive for violence, a limited quantity of goods on hand of high-quality items like tobacco or lottery tickets. The flexibility on this issue has been built into the bill with a common-sense approach, whereby specific amounts will be determined by individual employers based on sales, past sales and projected sales. It includes increased high visibility regarding windows and lines of sight that will increase worker safety. It controls access into and out of the workplace, video surveillance, posters that will outline the safety measures that have been taken so that customers will be educated, and it will act as a deterrent to those that have other ideas. Personal safety transmitters will be employed to monitor employees that are working alone.

Madam Speaker, while there will be some cost to this, Bill 19 does provide enough flexibility that the cost does not need to be prohibitive. There are no fines or penalties built into Bill 19, but the plans and the training must be evident to OH and S inspectors on-site if requested.

3:10

Overall, Bill 19 addresses the issue of gas and dash with flexibility and effectiveness, and it will have my support. I realize that there may be some that will decry the inconvenience of prepay or believe that the cost to the gas and convenience store owners is too high, but I believe that the benefits to the community, to the promotion of law and order, to community safety far outweigh any perceived or real negative outcomes.

The week after Jo’s tragic death the community of Thorsby came together to mourn with the family. I watched as people cried and

prayed and as they attempted to love the family. I saw a long line of people give their condolences, and those same people would have, if they could have, done anything to reverse the events that took Jo’s life. While we cannot turn back time, in this Legislature we can ensure that we have taken measures to ensure worker safety and to address the tragedy that can happen when there is a gas and dash. It is my fond hope that should we pass this piece of legislation, this will be the last time that we have to mourn because of a death created by a gas and dash.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am proud to speak to you and through you to all of my fellow members in the House as cosponsor on the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods’ Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. Friends, family is the cornerstone of our great province. Family is there to get you through the tough times and is present to share the triumphs. We are compassionate to their safety and well-being because as Albertans we revere family as the fabric of our great province. We all work hard for our families and cannot negate that it is the fundamental cornerstone that drives us on a daily basis.

Madam Speaker, I wish to offer a moment of silence in the House as a respectful tribute to the families whose loved ones did not make it home because of the reckless actions of fuel thieves. Over the last three years five Albertans’ lives have been taken, and three have sustained serious injury as a result of their occupational vulnerability. This, fellow members, must stop. I rise today in support of Bill 19, an Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers, which serves to strengthen and protect those at risk of the needless consequences of their jobs. Pumping gas and standing behind a till is an essential service in our economy. As Albertans we have built a national, international, and global legacy from our rich resource. As many Albertans have built a life, we must do our best as a government to protect them in all facets.

I am saddened to have read that five lives have been taken as a result of violence arising at gas and convenience store locations, and I encourage Bill 19 as a further prevention to this minimization of our citizens’ lives. These crimes take a toll on Albertan society and threaten the sanctity of our workplaces. Through consultation and proactive store inspections we have learned that we can mitigate risk through legislation and thoughtful preventative measures.

Madam Speaker, it is a great opportunity for this member today and for all members in the House today. Legislation aimed at protecting our workforce is most definitely multifaceted. Reducing negative impact through prepay methods focuses on a strong deterrence to the risk for our gas and convenience workforce. At this point this voluntary mechanism has been adopted by many within the industry, with strong support from advocates and labour groups.

Prepayment need not be viewed as an expense if it enables our gas and convenience workers the liberty they deserve: going home at night. Options are available to support this legislation with minimal overhead costs. Our goal is to protect workers, not create hardship for owners. It is integral to recognize that there is no justice for a life lost, and over the last three years there have been five lost.

Current data supports that there were an average of 12 fuel thefts per day in 2015. Effecting prepayment mechanisms can significantly reduce this number, and this, Madam Speaker, resonates sound governance. The burden of these thefts exasperates our police force, and implementing prepayment further exemplifies mitigating impact.

When we look to our neighbours to the west, in B.C., we can identify the opportunities of effecting Bill 19. Prepayment resulted in the virtual disappearance of fuel thefts and crime-related violence.

Madam Speaker, I firmly believe that the lives of our gas and convenience store workers are well worth the few extra moments it takes to prepay for fuel. As Albertans our ability to be adaptable and resilient can assist in assimilating this legislation with seamless and flawless execution. When we partner Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers, with amendments to our occupational healthy and safety code, we are maintaining our mandate to make life better and safer for all Albertans.

Research supports that coupling prepayment legislation in conjunction with mandatory violence protection plans is an effective way to reduce crime and worker injury. Up until now both have been voluntary, and the aforementioned statistics correlate with a resounding need for change.

Time-lock safes with no overnight access, minimal amounts of on-hand cash, and video monitoring are strong deterrents to criminal activity. Good visibility on targeted premises further enhances the safety of our gas and convenience store workers. Reducing accessibility of commonly targeted commodities such as lottery tickets and tobacco products and personal emergency transmitters also serve to mitigate risk and vulnerability. Madam Speaker, these are viable remedial solutions that serve to protect our Albertans who are just trying to make a living.

Empowerment is attained through training investments that focus on how to deal with difficult and abusive individuals. This further stands to mitigate risk, which, in turn, recognizes profit potential, and this, fellow members, is a win-win.

3:20

Legislating Bill 19 is a call to action that serves to preserve the interests of our industry and its workers. It serves as a message that we as a government can and will respond to the predicating values of our great province. This is our commitment to reducing crime, preserving the safety and sanctity of our Albertans, and redefining the values of the lives and livelihoods of our proud Albertan men and women.

Madam Speaker and fellow members, if Bill 19 is passed, we are resolute in working alongside store owners across Alberta and maintaining the communications that enable these changes with thoughtful regard. But what we cannot misunderstand is the importance of this legislation and the safety mechanisms it serves to effect.

I wish to thank all those organizations who have effected these precautionary measures to preserve the safety of their staff and business. We wholeheartedly open the doors of communication to those who require assistance in implementing the mandate. We stand unified in our efforts to ensure the safe return home of all employees, who are, like everyone, working to make life better for all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. An honour and a pleasure to stand and speak to this very important bill that, yeah, has needed leadership for some time, and it's getting leadership, from my point of view.

Instituting mandatory prepayment for fuel purchases in Alberta will reduce gas-and-dash incidents. It will save lives. It just stands

to reason that if a person has to provide payment before filling up with fuel, theft becomes much more difficult. Requiring prepayment for fuel purchases is the next logical step after the government recently amended the Employment Standards Code to prohibit employers from holding staff financially responsible for stolen gas. Since the proposed prepay approach is somewhat flexible and won't actually require gas station operators to install prepay pumps, at a price tag of around \$30,000 each, the cost of compliance is also not overly burdensome. Many gas station operators already use prepay systems, so in some respects this is a case of the legislation catching up with the industry trends.

Evidence from other jurisdictions shows that mandatory workplace violence prevention plans can be highly effective in reducing crime at fuel and convenience stores and protect the health and safety of workers. While there are some naysayers, to me the concerns about freedom and choice pale in comparison to the importance of the safety and health of our workers.

I have no amendments to suggest and only full support for this as quickly as possible. Let's facilitate this and, obviously, wait the six months to allow for operators to bring into place these important changes. I applaud the government for its initiative on this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's very admirable to see that we're trying to keep Albertans safe, especially those that are working late at night and during the day. I think that any time we can move a law forward, that shows that we have the best interests of Albertans at heart, especially for those that have an entire vested interest in ensuring that these gas stations work.

Now, as I'm sure many of you in this House are already aware of, my constituency right now is going through some hard times: high vacancy, a lot of businesses struggling. I can tell you that every dollar that goes into a business right now makes a difference. I know that the gentleman that was killed in Thorsby probably was run over for \$50. I don't know the total, but it probably wasn't a lot of money. But when you put in perspective – and this is from the cosponsor. She said that 12 of these fuel thefts were happening per day in 2015. That amounts to a lot, and that's only what's been reported. I can only assume that a lot of what is happening right now goes unreported. When we've got a business that's already struggling to make the rent payments or pay their staff or bring merchandise in, it is incredibly bad for business to have your merchandise walk away.

Now, I can tell you that one of those things from the facts that we've done for research is that there are 1,500 gas stations, and about 12 to 15 of those 1,500 gas stations do not have pay at the pump. That seems like we've got a very small percentage of the whole right now that can already do this, so the impact should be low if we bring this legislation in. It should be very low impact, but there is going to be some impact. I do understand that when we're dealing with the fact that we need to make sure the employees aren't put in unsafe conditions, we need to also address other things.

Now, cash handling is definitely something that I think every business should be looking out for and putting a plan forward for. I know that as a past business owner myself we made sure there was never any cash on premises when we closed the business, but a lot of these businesses are 24 hours, and they don't have that ability, so it's important that the staff have training and are able to know that cash is just not on the premises. I think it's great that we're

starting to say that there shouldn't be sizable amounts of cash on hand. I also think that we do need to be cautious, though.

Now, I will say that possibly 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. may be a little bit onerous for some businesses. The reason is that some businesses are – in my constituency we've got guys that drive two hours away, so they need to gas up in the morning. That means they're getting to these gas stations at about 4, 4:30 in the morning. We do need to make sure that we have the ability for these gas stations to be able to deal with the high volumes in case there are peak periods, especially when they're close to oil sands projects and other large businesses.

Also, another one of the concerns that I've got here is if you go to the bill and look at 392.2(c), "maintaining good visibility into and out of the work site." It could be that they're going to be needing some significant structure upgrades, which could be very onerous. Again, safety needs to be definitely considered first, because you always want to make sure that safety is put forward first for every one of the employees that are within Alberta. I guess the question here is that if OH and S is going to be willing to work with these struggling gas stations and convenience stations across Alberta to ensure visibility, maybe they could do it with mirrors or something like that, but to actually have to go in there and change foundation – suddenly we're adding several hundred thousand dollars to something that may be something we can explore a little easier.

3:30

Or even making sure that there is video surveillance. I will say – this is another thing – that we have had remarkable gains when it comes to video surveillance, and I think that it's not very cost prohibitive right now. It's something that's accessible. I think that this is great, that we are able to say: this is important, that these groups are starting to look at identifying these people that are running away from a gas station without paying.

Now, I will say that I have a constituent who wrote me. This is a constituent. His name is Gerald Lafond, and I'd like to read the e-mail that he put forward.

[Dear MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake,] I am outraged Oil companies are surviving the economic downturn unscathed by maintaining high pump prices and not passing the only advantage of low oil prices down to the consumer. There seems to be an acceptable scam going on and people don't appear to be reacting to this shenanigan.

Please explain why Oil companies are not offering a direct proportional rate at the pumps vs. crude oil prices. I understand a lot has to do with inventories and a wheel barrow full of other excuses but [there's] no justification for inflated prices of \$40/[barrel of] oil.

Now, he goes on, but this is relevant because what's happening here is that we're seeing a rapid increase in gasoline prices within our province. Now, in this case I would argue that we have created a high value for this gasoline, and we've done that through taxes. By putting so much tax on this, it is becoming a real strain not only for those without work but for those that have jobs right now.

Now, for those that can't afford it, what we're seeing here is that a carbon tax is directly affecting their lives and the fact that you've got a GST on a carbon tax, a tax on a tax, if you will. Now, that means that what we're looking at here is a commodity that is becoming very valuable because it's very expensive.

Now, there's an article that was put forward by Global News. The article's title is Shot Fired during Attempted Fuel Theft near Red Deer: RCMP. Now, what happens here is that we're not only seeing this fuel theft at gas stations; we're also seeing this fuel theft out in rural Alberta. This is a real problem for rural Alberta because what we're seeing now is that there is an incredible spike in rural crime.

It's not just something we're seeing in the fuel stations; we're also seeing it across Alberta. This is what happens indirectly when you start overtaxing people. We start to see that there's an increase, or a spike, in theft, and what happens is that it puts people's lives at risk.

Now, when we hear that over the last three years five deaths have happened because of this fuel and dash – I'm not attributing these five people to a carbon tax because that's ridiculous, but what I am doing is saying that we're creating a real energy poverty within this province. When we create that, what we're doing is we are putting people in positions that are more or less saying: in order to heat my house, in order to fuel my car, in order to do basic things in life – and I can't afford them – what do I do? I would hope that we back off on some of these other things because in the end we're going to see larger spikes in crime and we're going to see more things like this as we continue to levy more and more taxes on Albertans.

I think this is a great bill. I think that the fact that we put this forward is a protection. I do think we need to be very cautious to ensure that there's not red tape that prevents business from operating, but we also need to make sure that the consumer is protected. I can tell you right now that as I see this carbon tax being implemented, we're going to see more and more energy poverty within our province.

I'd like to say that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster was very clear when he was talking about a large spike in crime. What we need to start doing is actually going after these criminals that are doing these things because if there is an end result, we start holding people accountable for their crimes, you're going to start seeing a decrease. We won't see shots fired on Red Deer residences. We won't see as many of these gas thefts.

I will tell you that people become more and more creative when it comes to theft. We'll find a way to reduce the amount of risk that comes with paying at the pump, but what's the next step here? Does that mean that these thefts – these thefts are going to happen anyway. Are we shifting these thefts from a gas station to farmers and ranchers inside of Alberta? Are we shifting these thefts? We know that they need gasoline. Are we moving that into a person's personal property? It's important that we bring this forward.

But it also is important that we address the fact that rural crime is out of control in rural Alberta. We need to make sure that our constituents and my constituency are protected. Now, that means that we need to put resources towards our prosecutors to ensure that they start prosecuting these crimes and getting these petty crime convictions ahead of time, before they create something like a death. What we're looking at now is that if we start to shift this out to rural Alberta – we do not want vigilantism to be part of protecting your property. We do not want people to be put in the position where the only thing they can do about ensuring that they have safety on their property is a gun by the door because that is tragic.

I heard from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that it takes an hour for people in rural Alberta to hear from the RCMP. Now, I have sat with my local RCMP. They're incredible. Both the detachments are incredible. They work hard. These men and women are incredible. They do an incredible job. I can tell you that I have heard that the frustration is that we have the same group of people committing the same crimes over and over again because we're not getting these people off the streets. Now, it could be, as we heard, again, from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, that there's a systemic problem. I can tell you that the detachment in Cold Lake specifically identifies drugs as that problem, and they've started to focus on that.

I think that as a province we need to start addressing that we have a real problem when it comes to this, so we need to start dealing with these kinds of problems, like how do we protect the workers,

but how do we ensure that that theft doesn't move out and start affecting more and more people?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, another speaker. I will recognize Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. I am very pleased that this government is introducing Bill 19. It's bills like this that I think all legislators in this Assembly should be proud to pass because it's a bill that will save lives. I'm actually inspired by the tone in here today.

3:40

Madam Speaker, the deaths of gas station and convenience store workers really are the catalyst to this legislation. For me, these deaths are the most heartbreaking and egregious of them all. That's because these deaths occurred while on the job, while people were merely trying to earn a living for themselves and their families. Every Albertan should return home from work. While accidents happen, if we can help reduce deaths at work through legislation, then we should, and we are doing that with Bill 19.

You know, there have been some tragic incidents of gas station employees, including June 2015 in Calgary, October 2015 in Edmonton, and, of course, most recently on October 6, 2017, in Thorsby, in which Mr. Jo, a gas station owner, was struck and killed. It was very emotional to have his family here in the Assembly yesterday, Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you're aware.

As I've stated in this Assembly before, the gas-and-dash death in Calgary in 2015 of Maryam Rashidi occurred in my constituency of Calgary-Klein. In fact, I was taking my daughter to the local hardware store that morning, the morning of Ms Rashidi's death, which is located right beside the gas station where she worked. My daughter and I were minutes away from seeing the incident. I can't imagine if we had. You know, I often used to purchase gas at this gas station, too, and unknowingly had met Ms Rashidi. I just didn't know that it was her. I also spoke at Ms Rashidi's funeral. It was heartbreaking – absolutely heartbreaking – and I never want to have to do it again. When I spoke at her funeral, I committed right then and there to ensuring that it never happened again.

Madam Speaker, after that incident this government committed to making work safer for Alberta's convenience store and gas station employees. That started last session with Bill 17, in which it was legislated that convenience store and gas station employees cannot be held liable for missing money due to theft. This protection will be enhanced with the passing of Bill 19. As the minister said, it will do this in two primary ways. It amends the OH and S act to mandate prepaying for fuel, and it mandates that a violence protection plan be in place.

In regard to prepay options the safest way, of course, is to pay at the pump as there is no interaction between the customer and the

employee. But for those operators who don't have pay at the pump technology, they can use the pay before you pump option. We've made this an option, being cognizant of the \$30,000 to \$35,000 required to upgrade a pump.

Research shows that violence protection plans with strong training components are the most effective way to reduce crime and injury at fuel and convenience stores. This includes security cameras, emergency transmitters when working alone, time-lock safes, and, of course, training to ensure that they are familiar with what safe workspaces are. Now, as we know, B.C. has had these measures in place since 2008 and has virtually eliminated fuel thefts and related violence.

Madam Speaker, this government committed to protecting Alberta's convenience store workers, and we are doing it, but we did want to get it right. That's why we did conduct extensive consultations over 18 months. This included discussions with industry leaders like Husky as well as health and safety associations, academics, labour organizations, families of workers impacted by violence. Also, our OH and S officers conducted focused inspections of over 250 gas stations and convenience stores across the province to get a real understanding of what the risk and safety measures are out there. According to data from the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police there was an average of 12 fuel thefts per day in 2015. This must stop as every theft has the potential for a violent confrontation.

Through consultation it was also determined that the majority of gas and convenience stores have many of the measures in place, and we will work with those that don't to ensure that they are safe and compliant. This is also why we're providing the six months to allow operators the time needed for compliance. It will also give consumers the time required to adjust as well. It would also be mandatory for these fuel stations to hang signs to say that prepaying or paying at the pump will be mandatory.

I'd just like to close by thanking the minister for bringing this forward. Thank you to everyone that's spoken on this, and thank you for the tone on the other side right now. I'm feeling that this is going to have no problem passing. I think we need this, and I think we all understand that we need this. I am very pleased to be a part of this government and this bill, and I do look forward to further debate and encourage all members on the other side and all members of this Assembly to help us pass this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

Cortes-Vargas: I would move that we call it 6 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:48 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 1, 2017

Day 47

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Kazim	Woollard
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 1, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Let us reflect and pray, each in our own way. May we always do the right thing for and unto others as we journey through this maze of life, for we are but servants chosen by others to bear the burdens, the challenges, and the duties of public life. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 20

Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I apologize. You've all moved a little bit on me.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Chairman. Good morning, everyone. A pleasure to be here with you all this morning and see all those wonderful, shiny faces first thing.

Today I have a few brief comments with respect to this bill. I'm not going to go over a lot of lengthy stuff about it, but certainly I would like to say that I'm aware of the issue. It seems like the hamlet of Mallaig and the Whitefish Lake First Nation are experiencing problems with their quantity and quality of water from their existing supply and that this bill will authorize the transfer from another river basin to this one, which is the Beaver River basin.

I further understand that Mallaig is a hamlet in the county of St. Paul, and it currently obtains its drinking water from nearby groundwater sources. While there are no immediate concerns with their water source in terms of quality, the drawdown as the supply is taken has seen the levels decrease in recent years, where it's becoming important that they look for a better source.

I also understand that the Whitefish Lake First Nation, on the other hand, is facing a slightly more critical issue and that they currently draw from a nearby lake which has recently seen a measurable and escalating decrease in the level. In my experience in the past it's evident here that there are concerns about possible contaminants, therefore. While it doesn't apparently present a short-term health problem, it's critical that a higher quality source be found as well for that, so the sooner the community switches, the sooner they can get on with getting a good, proper supply of water. I think everybody here would agree that this is so critical in these situations.

As my other colleagues may have mentioned – and I wasn't in the House earlier for this discussion yesterday, but I do understand – we have said that we are supporting this. We think that this is something that needs to be done as soon as possible.

I would like to raise a couple of extra points regarding this procedure in a way that supports this but also gives me a better

understanding for myself as to how these things take place within these departments. I see that I don't perhaps have the correct ministers in place for direct questions here, but perhaps there's someone else that can answer what I'm concerned about.

I'd like to say that in the case of southern Alberta we have an awful lot of situations where we're essentially screaming for water. The town of Pincher Creek in my area is an example. The creek is virtually nonexistent currently. The various streams that are supplying Pincher Creek and the small town of Cowley, which is a hamlet, and the hamlet of Lundbreck are essentially out of water as well. On a temporary basis – and I talked to Environment and Parks in Lethbridge just the other day – they are allowing, on an emergency basis, for those municipalities to dip a pump into the Oldman reservoir, which was more or less created for irrigation purposes primarily to get what water they might get to supply. They've also imposed restrictions in their communities to try to help on the drawdown. They realize that that is only a temporary situation, and thank goodness that Environment and Parks is providing that permission and they're allowing that to take place.

But this leaves me to wonder if we're allowing this – and I believe this should go, and I think this is a great idea. We have a lot of other communities, we have a lot of other situations, including a water co-op that has been planned, engineered, designed, the water sources there in the Pine Coulee reservoir that was created years ago west of Claresholm to supply over 180 residents, farms, et cetera, out in the rural area that have had to truck water for the past five years. They've been applying and applying and applying for funding.

I notice that this particular situation that we're dealing with today is partially funded, 50-50, from the federal and provincial ends. My question, if I could ask at this moment before I conclude, is: does anyone there have the ability to respond on why these other systems have not been provided similar treatment? In the south, by the way, I would like to add that the Environment and Parks ministry also suddenly gave approval for a waterline from the hamlet of Cowley all the way up to the Castle resort.

I'm just trying to figure out here how these things work, just trying to figure out if there's a way that we can look at more projects so that we can help people that are currently having to pay for trucking of water southwest of Claresholm. It seems that this is doing a great job today – we certainly support it – but I'm wondering if anyone over there can answer how this works, please.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for the questions from the hon. member across. We're very happy that you are supporting the water transfer for the Beaver River basin because it is very essential for the communities that are receiving it. You may know that there have been five water transfers, basin transfers, that have happened in the province of Alberta over the last number of years. All of those have occurred in the south because of the particular conditions in the south. This is the first time one has happened in the northern part of the province. So, indeed, the needs of the people in the south have been attended to fairly regularly over time.

However, with climate change occurring, what we're seeing is an increased exacerbation of the aridness in that area. We are going to have to attend to that in a new way because it's not a matter of transferring water in order to provide a cleaner source; it's an issue of there being a lack of the basic amount of water. So it's a slightly

different question that's at hand with regard to southern Alberta.

In the north water exists, but it's not drinkable. In the south the water doesn't exist, and you can't simply create water. Every time you take water away from another source to move in the south, then you have to worry about whether or not you're about to cause another problem in another area in the south because of the overall lack of water in the south. A basin transfer may be robbing Peter to pay Paul, so it's a bit of a different process.

I'm afraid I'm not the expert you're looking for, but I have taken extensive notes of your questions, and I will endeavour to inquire with the appropriate ministries about procedures moving forward. I encourage you to speak to the Minister of Environment and Parks to talk about the particular concerns you have with regard to Pincher Creek and, of course, the Pine Coulee reservoir, and I will endeavour to do the same.

Thank you.

9:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, and thank you for your response, Minister. I appreciate all that you've said. I just want to perhaps be clear on a couple of things that you've just said to ensure that we get the right message through. I have no concerns in the south with regard to the transfer nor the transfer here. My questions with relation to this were more focused towards the funding. I understand the funding model here has been 50-50 from the province and the federal government.

The one particular situation I am concerned about is where people have been up to meet with the Minister of Transportation as late as last year, where the engineering, the licensing, and everything out of the Pine Coulee west of Claresholm has already been done, but they've been refused for years on the funding. How does this funding work for both the waterline to the Castle and the waterline to these good people here that deserve this water? How does that differ, and why have they been granted and these others have not after all those years when it's a shovel-ready program just like this is?

Thank you for your response. As I said earlier, I have talked to the minister before. I will continue to do that, but I wanted to bring this up and be on record at this time with respect to this situation because there are a lot of communities that need water. If there's already a source available and a transfer is not required, if it's already been engineered, I find a lot of difference in how things are working here, and that's a bit of an anomaly I'd like to pursue.

With that, Madam Chair, I'd just like to conclude that we are in support of this bill, as was said earlier, and we look forward to moving on. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 20? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to stand today and speak to Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. You know, this bill is going to allow for the approval of the two interbasin transfers, from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin, and these interbasin transfers will allow the Whitefish Lake First Nation and the hamlet of Mallaig in St. Paul county to connect to regional waterlines in order to address long-running issues with drinking water in their communities. This is something we see in a lot of our rural areas. I know in my area the WILD project is a huge part of what we deal with. It took 12

years to get phase 1 finished, never mind the other three phases that we'd like to see go forward.

There's nothing more fundamental to life than access to a safe and secure drinking supply. Many of us don't even realize what a privilege it is to have safe, clean water. We don't give much thought to the source of the water coming out of our taps. We only know that it's there every time we need it, which is not always the case in some of our rural communities and some of our reserve communities.

While water quality and quantity are not top-of-mind issues for many of us who live in Alberta's cities and towns, the same cannot be said for those people living in rural and First Nation communities. The communities of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation have both dealt with drinking water quality and quantity challenges in recent years. Clean drinking water should be seen as a basic human right, and the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act is an important step towards resolving drinking water issues in these two communities.

Interbasin transfers are not to be taken lightly. The Water Act requires any licence which transfers water between major river basins in Alberta to be authorized by a special act of the Legislature, which is what we're debating today. All western provinces have legislation that prohibits transfers between major river basins with some exceptions allowed, and since 2003 five interbasin transfers have been authorized by Alberta by a special act of the Legislature. All five were for potable water extensions to rural communities.

Madam Chair, I will discuss those five just a little bit more. There was the North Red Deer Water Authorization Act, which was to supplement existing sources of reliable potable water for several communities in central Alberta, which happened in 2003, and it came from the South Saskatchewan River basin to the North Saskatchewan River basin.

There was the Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act, which was to address the problems with the quantity and quality of potable water. This happened in 2005, and it was repealed in 2007 by the East Central Regional Water Authorization Act. This came from the South Saskatchewan River to the North Saskatchewan River basin.

The Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act, which was to address problems with the shortage of groundwater supply for the village of Ferintosh, happened in 2007. Again, it was repealed in 2007 by the East Central Regional Water Authorization Act. This was again taking water out of the South Saskatchewan River basin to the North Saskatchewan River basin.

There was the East Central Regional Water Authorization Act to address problems with the quantity and quality of potable water. This happened in 2007, and it replaced the previous two acts that I just spoke of. It permitted a larger volume of water to service communities in the area, and it came from the South Saskatchewan River basin to the North Saskatchewan River basin.

There was the County of Westlock Water Authorization Act. This was to address the problems with quality and quantity of potable water for the residents of Westlock. This happened in 2007 as well, and it was from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Athabasca River basin. This is why our government has introduced Bill 20.

Both St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation explored multiple options, and connecting to the regional waterline was determined to be the best possible solution to address their drinking water challenges. To ensure a safe, reliable supply of drinking water for their residents, both communities have requested that the province approve an interbasin transfer, allowing them to extend existing regional waterlines.

Whitefish Lake First Nation looked at five options prior to pursuing an extension of an existing potable waterline from the highway 28/63 regional water commission in the North Saskatchewan River basin. The county of St. Paul looked at seven different options and came to the same conclusion. Both proposed waterline expansions crossed river basin boundaries, with water being transferred from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin.

It's important to note that funding has already been in place for both projects, as has been noted earlier this morning. The county has already received \$9.5 million in funding from the province and the federal government, and they must spend the federal funding by March 2018, or it will expire, so we are under a bit of a time crunch with this bill going forward. The highway 28/63 regional water commission received \$20.66 million from our government's United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples/First Nations regional tie-in project fund. An additional \$1.98 million was committed by the federal government to complete the waterline connection to the reservoir on the reserve.

Of course, environmental impacts were considered prior to introducing this bill. Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation are small communities, and the North Saskatchewan River is a reliable source of water, with an average annual volume of approximately 7.5 billion cubic metres flowing through Edmonton. The existing municipal allocation held by EPCOR to provide drinking water throughout the capital region totals close to 200 million cubic metres. The proposed transfers for St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation would total 600,000 cubic metres. Environment and Parks confirms that the additional transfer of drinking water will have no measurable effects on the North Saskatchewan River nor our river basin.

Consultation has been conducted, and both proposed interbasin transfers are widely supported among all stakeholders in the area. St. Paul county has also specifically engaged on water rate policy and the upcoming water rate increase for Mallaig residents prior to engaging on the regional waterline connection project. Water rates in Mallaig are set by the county of St. Paul and reflect the full cost of providing water to residents. Upon completion, the water rates in Mallaig will be the same as the other two hamlets in St. Paul county that already receive EPCOR-treated water via the regional waterline.

Mallaig residents will receive three months' notice that water rates will be increased to match the other two hamlets in St. Paul county that already receive EPCOR-treated water via the regional waterline. This is in addition to the written notice from the county in January 2017 regarding the county's move to full cost recovery water rates that came into effect as of March 2017. Provincial and federal grant funding for the project will help ensure that St. Paul county's water rate is the same as other users on the highway 28/63 regional waterline, and there is no water rate increase anticipated for the residents of the Whitefish Lake First Nation.

Alberta's water for life strategy sets the stage for a new way of working with Albertans to ensure safe, reliable, and quality water supplies for a sustainable environment and growing economy. Water for life is centred on the achievement of three goals: safe, secure drinking water; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water for sustainable economies throughout our province. Approving the interbasin transfers would support the water for life strategy and be a key priority to help provide safe and reliable drinking water on-reserve as part of the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

I hope the House will support Bill 20, thereby providing the necessary approval for the interbasin transfers for both communities, and it's important to note that both river basins are

open for allocations, so there is no impact to other licence holders, unlike some in the south end of our province like the Bow River basin, which is considered a closed basin.

9:20

Following the approval of the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act two water licences will be issued under the Water Act, one licence to the county of St. Paul and the other to the highway 28/63 regional water commission to provide water to Whitefish Lake First Nation. The Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act includes the maximum amount of water allocated to each community on an annual basis. I hope all members of the House will see the value of allowing these interbasin transfers to secure a reliable source of safe drinking water for residents of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation.

The solution does have, again, wide stakeholder support, and the environmental impact study identified no concerns regarding the long-term health of the North Saskatchewan River, which is something that we are obviously very concerned about in our province, the long-term sustainability.

Both projects leverage federal funding to be effective, and if approved, the county of St. Paul and the highway 28/63 regional water commission will be responsible for construction, operations, and maintenance following completion of the pipelines.

Madam Chair, I think that, you know, it's a great bill, and I think that it's something that's absolutely necessary for this part of our province. I don't think there's a single one of us in this House that can say that safe and reliable drinking water is not something that every community in Alberta deserves, and this bill helps us move forward on that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thanks for giving me a chance to speak to this bill, Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. This is a bill that is about something very central to our province and to our communities, the issue of having safe and secure drinking water, something that should be a fundamental need and right for all Albertans. It makes sure that safe drinking water is a top priority and will allow the extension of existing regional waterlines to carry water from the North Saskatchewan River into Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation, which are in the Beaver River basin, necessitating an interbasin transfer, which will be only the sixth in the history of doing this legislation.

I know how important the water for life programs are in this province. In our constituency we were very thankful to the Minister of Transportation for approving water for life funding in the community of St. Michael. It is a community where the licence for their – I'm trying to think of the word – shallow water aquifer is something that has been threatened over time with human development, and it is something that people out in rural communities are quite dependent on. When we know that in rural communities it is more difficult to have easily accessible drinking water, we need to as a province support the measures that allow for that to happen.

There are, of course, many factors that can affect water: agriculture use, oil and gas development, and, really, just growing populations of people drawing on the same amount of water. It's a good thing that we can see that there was a large amount of stakeholder feedback. There was a lot of consultation done. It's also

good to see that this is fully funded and that the residents of St. Paul county have been consulted to ensure that life remains affordable for them to be able to access clean drinking water.

Of course, this is especially important to First Nations, and I want to actually thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations for allowing me to wear this Métis scarf today while I deliver my remarks. Of course, it is an obligation to address treaty rights and to be very honest about the economic impacts that clean drinking water has. I've heard from other members of this House, unfortunately, that they would not support a budget that provides \$100 million to provide drinking water for First Nations. I was proud to stand in this House and support a budget that allows that fundamental need to be extended to communities that have been under drinking water bans time and again. That is just not acceptable in a province where we have so much.

That is why I'm very proud to be part of a government that is caring and inclusive and keeps these things top of mind. I know that, growing up in Edmonton, it was very rare to think about the availability of clean drinking water, but in getting to know some communities like Bruderheim, where they have a water co-op, people have gotten together without the consistent support of government to ensure that they do have water for their livestock, water for their communities.

Also, you know, even in urban areas we take for granted that firefighting is something where we have access to more water than we often do in rural areas. I know that when I was visiting families in the Skaro area in Lamont county, there was concern over water being returned to cow-calf operations where water had been drawn off people's farms to help fight the blazes that were in the area.

This, of course, is a fundamental need and something that should be a human right, but because it is not a right, we have to do what we can to incrementally make sure that communities that are most affected are supported by our government. Of course, there has been news that there are companies that would like to privatize all water, and that is troubling when we know how necessary water is for human life. I think it's something that is the role of government, to ensure that people have access to clean drinking water.

There has been respectful and thorough consultation with indigenous communities, and I want to thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations for taking a leadership role that is partnering with communities to make sure that people are not just having solutions forced upon them but are actually engaged in thoughtful dialogue to ensure that everybody that comes to the table is well aware of all of the issues and that when solutions are brought forward, there has been actual, real consultation with nations and indigenous peoples, that deserve to have their voice at an equal level at the table.

This does involve \$9.5 million coming from the province as part of that \$100 million that was in the budget for 2017-18. It helps leverage federal dollars. I know that in rural communities it is incredibly important that when there is money on the table from the federal government, we do everything we can to ensure that those funds are not left. There are sparse resources often in rural communities – I know this is something that came up with Internet connectivity in rural areas – and when there is money that is being offered, we must do everything that we can to make sure that none of it is left on the table. That does expire in 2018, so I'm glad that we are moving forward with this.

The government is ensuring that we move forward with strategies that allow us to have a clean and sustainable environment for all Albertans. This is something that follows in line with the climate leadership plan. I know that this was a huge election issue back in 2015, that people were concerned that there would not be the future for their children and for their grandchildren that they themselves

enjoyed growing up. I know that this is something that my constituents absolutely support.

9:30

You know, this is something that I hear from the opposition that we can't afford, and I think that that flies in the face of economic development, that we know can happen more readily when people are healthy, when people have just the basic needs of having clean water. So I'm glad to see that EPCOR is allocating 200 million cubic metres of drinking water to bring to bear on this project and also that there has been extensive consultation with NGOs and the area to ensure that water rates are still comparable with other communities and that no one is being unfairly put upon to be able to afford their own water.

This will affect St. Paul and Mallaig and the Whitefish Lake First Nation, and people out there will quite clearly benefit. This achieves the goals of safe and secure drinking water, healthy aquatic ecosystems, and reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy. It also implements the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. It is absolutely a vital necessity to have clean drinking water to small rural communities and to First Nations.

I understand that this bill will have no impact on other licence holders, and I think it's a really important thing to make sure that we go ahead and leverage federal funding to make sure that we make the most out of the dollars that we have in such a constrained economy.

So I am proud to support this bill. I know that the residents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville also support this bill because they know how important it is to have availability of water.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'll close my remarks there.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 20? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the speakers this morning who have indicated support for this very important bill. I'm really proud to stand in support of the passage of this bill, and I think that the debate this morning has brought forward interesting aspects that I hadn't really realized.

I was particularly pleased to hear how well the town of Bruderheim is doing with important allocations as well as dealing with the bigger picture, I think, than just the Whitefish Lake First Nation's and the hamlet of Mallaig's need for a safe water supply. We need to be thinking about how we can translate this water for life project, which is actually, if my math is correct, 15 years old and, obviously, still in development, and how we can make that project work even better.

The water for life strategy is centred on three goals: a safe, secure drinking water supply; a healthy aquatic ecosystem; and reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy. That third goal, I think, is something that really hasn't been talked about much in this debate so far, and I wanted to spend a little bit of time on that today. A sustainable economy means that the people that have access to water are actually able to create jobs, they're able to create a quality of life, and they're able to maintain their communities. I think that this is one of the major accomplishments of the water for life strategy, and I think that this bill that we're talking about today is going to have some real effects on that.

I was sitting here thinking about, if I lived in the hamlet of Mallaig, what I could do if I had access to a sufficient quantity of a safe water supply. Maybe I'd be able to flood the hockey rink. Or in my case, if I had to choose, I would flood the curling rink, actually. If you've ever flooded a curling rink, you know that using

groundwater is a disaster. You need to have the water that comes from EPCOR, actually, as a good source there.

Now, that's not the main use of this water. The main use of this water is going to be for drinking and for other household duties as well as agriculture and maintaining the aquatic ecosystem. But having vibrant recreational opportunities in a community is part of that sustainable economy, and I think that we need to think about these sorts of things when we're discussing this sort of thing.

It isn't just the hockey rinks and the curling sheets that would be helped out with this. There would be a good supply of water in the schools so that they didn't have to pay for bottled water coming in. The churches and the community halls and the other municipal operations presumably are going to be benefiting from this as well. All of this is economy. All of this means jobs. People are going to stay in that community. The people that stay in that community are going to need services. They're going to go to the restaurants, and they're going to buy food. They're going to go to the grocery stores and go to the co-ops to buy supplies.

This is a good source of economic activity in these communities. I think that this may be one of the main reasons that I'm really happy to see this. I think, as the Member for Livingstone-Macleod alluded to, we need to look at this on a province-wide basis, and the Minister of Indigenous Relations in his response talked about this.

I'd like to go back a bit in history. I think all of you know that since I'm one of the older members of this Assembly I love talking about history because I've lived some of it, actually, which some of my colleagues, like the man next to me, have not. I imagine everybody in this Assembly knows about the Palliser expedition. The Palliser expedition was Colonel Palliser from the British army. He was sent out by the government of Upper Canada in, I think, about 1850 to survey the west. This was at a time when Upper Canada was thinking about buying Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company.

Palliser came to Winnipeg and hired some Métis folks and other local folks who basically took him on a trek throughout what is now Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. He actually described a triangle. The base of the triangle is the Rocky Mountains, and the vertex of it is Winnipeg, and you can actually take the 49th parallel as one of the arms of that triangle. He made a report that is very interesting to read. He actually despaired at whether the government of Canada at the time should actually waste money on buying Rupert's Land because it was so dry. He thought that it would be impossible to raise grains because it was so arid in this area, particularly in the western part of the Palliser Triangle.

Now, as I said yesterday in discussing this, I grew up in southwestern Manitoba, and one of the benefits of growing up in southwestern Manitoba is that we actually have more rainfall in Manitoba than folks here in Alberta do. There's no doubt that there are times in Manitoba when there are actually floods and destruction from too much rain.

But even having said that, it is still a major issue here in Alberta on how we manage our water. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, that was a result of the Dirty Thirties, helps. We've got dugouts, and we've got aquifer management, and we make sure we've got irrigation supplies and dams and weirs that help protect that, but there's still a lot of work to be done.

9:40

That's where this water for life strategy comes in. You have to recognize that there is a massive shortage of water, particularly in the southern half of this province, and we have to be very careful how we husband that water. It isn't just for irrigation and for other economic reasons that we need that water.

Basically, I just want to step back for a moment. The other thing that we need to recognize, which I think the opposition is slowly coming to grips with, is climate change. The climate now is a lot different than it was in the Dirty Thirties, and some of that is due to the effects of man-made climate change. When we're talking about water conservation, we have to realize that the glaciers that feed the North Saskatchewan, the Athabasca, the Bow and the Little Bow and the Highwood, all of these major rivers that we depend upon for our water supply in this province, those glaciers are basically melting away, and we don't have the supply of fresh glacial water that we had even 20 years ago.

All one has to do is go up to the Columbia Icefield and, basically, stand on the road and look at the signs. Where was the glacier in 1950, 1960, 1970, all the way up to 2010? The glacier was at the road, by the way, if none of you have been there, and now it's a couple of miles or three kilometres, I guess, from the road. That Columbia Icefield is the source of the North Saskatchewan, which is one of the rivers we're talking about today, and we have to be sure that we're managing that water well.

Anyway, you know, I would advise the folks across the way to take a look at climate change and maybe help us with trying to mitigate the effects of man-made climate change, if you really are interested in water management and really are interested in maintaining a viable economy in this province that we can depend upon for the next three generations, instead of saying: "Oh, well. It doesn't matter. We'll just burn it up, and we'll let somebody else worry about it." I think that's very irresponsible. [interjections] I'm happy that I have some agreement on this side at least for that.

I mean, my advice to the opposition is that they need to be a bit broader in their view of things about: really, how does climate change affect our economy; how does it have an effect; how will it be mitigated, I guess? In my opinion, the way to mitigate it is with some of the things that we've talked about like getting alternate energy going and promoting the installation of solar panels, the solar panels that are going onto the roofs of indigenous communities, community leagues like Leduc and Camrose. A lot of farmers are doing this.

Personally I've put solar panels on my roof, so I'm doing my little bit for that, but there are a whole bunch of things. The auction that's coming up, the auction that the Minister of Energy is supervising for 400 megawatts of alternative energy: I'm really anxious to see the results of that auction because that's going to have a major effect on climate change, and it's going to help water quality directly. You know, from a strictly economic point of view, this is the right thing to do. Strictly on economics, it's the right thing to do.

I want to turn to something else that I probably know more about than the economy, and that is about health care, about what are contributors to health, social determinants of health, things like the quality of water. If you're in a situation where your water supply is not safe, your life expectancy can be 10 to 20, even 30 years lower than otherwise. About 30 years.

Again, it's maybe unfair to say that in the Alberta context. There's no place in Alberta where the quality of water varies so much that you would have that degree of effect on longevity, but all we have to do is look at the Walkerton story. Walkerton was a small rural community, if such exists, in Ontario. They basically didn't do the things that we're talking about doing today. They didn't have a safe water supply. This was largely because of the Conservative government of Ontario basically slashing – slashing – the support for things like water inspections. I know the Member for Banff-Cochrane probably knows this personally. The government of Mike Harris in Ontario fired, just like the Premier of this province fired, folks back in the 1990s out of water inspection, out of

infrastructure, out of the public health systems. The upshot in Walkerton was that several people died a horrible death.

Mr. Westhead: Common-sense revolution.

Dr. Turner: Common sense? It was nonsense. That was nonsense.

Several people died. If you don't remember your history, folks, the Walkerton tragedy resulted in several tens of people dying of a very preventable form of disease that I've actually had to treat myself. It's a form of thrombocytopenia. Hemolytic-uremic syndrome is the name of this. It's due to a form of E coli O157:H7 that produces a toxin that actually damages the kidneys, damages the blood vessels. People that get this die of kidney failure or of a horrible type of bleeding. They bleed from all of their orifices. It's like a zombie death if it could happen.

Now, fortunately, we doctors actually, if we get to it soon enough, often can help people through it. Sometimes it takes dialysis, renal dialysis, which is not pleasant to go through. Sometimes it takes a procedure called plasmapheresis, which means inserting a needle in one arm and a needle in the other arm and actually taking the blood out and in a sense washing that blood and replacing what you take out with other forms of blood plasma. I'm happy to say that we now have a voluntary blood plasma donation system that's going to make sure that it's safe.

I could get into a lot of gory details here about this, and I see that I'm not fascinating the folks across the way.

An Hon. Member: Remind us how it happened in the first place.

Dr. Turner: It is a good thing to remind us of what did happen.

Because of that Conservative so-called common-sense revolution – these were PCs, by the way. They're different than these guys, I know, but they were PCs in Ontario that did this. Because of that the Walkerton water supply was not safe. Actually, what happened was that they were getting water supply from wells. Those wells actually were out in farmers' fields. The excrement from some cattle actually found its way into those wells. Pretty simple thing. That happens a lot, I think, on farmers' fields.

This happened because there was, I think, a big rainstorm or something like this, and the contaminated water from the cattle was basically flushed into the wells, and then the Walkerton water system didn't have the systems to test it and make sure that it was going to happen. They didn't have it because that common-sense revolution had resulted in a whole bunch of people being laid off, and the people that remained actually were unqualified. They didn't know what they were doing, unfortunately. I don't think it was their fault personally, but these people were given responsibilities that they weren't up to. Anyway, it's a good example of why we need to have a safe, reliable water supply for all of Alberta but in particular the hamlet of Mallaig and the First Nations.

9:50

Now, I'm going to finish off my comments talking about how important it is that we take this federal money and basically leverage it for the help of this First Nation but actually all the First Nations in this province that don't have a safe – I've heard it's something like 15 communities that are on a boil water supply. Somebody may correct me on that.

An Hon. Member: What are you going to do about it?

Dr. Turner: What am I going to do about it? What we are going to do about it is that with that \$100 million dollars that you guys didn't want to support, we are going to build pipelines carrying safe water to the reserve, and we are going to make sure that every Albertan,

whether they're on a First Nations reserve or not, has access to a good, safe water supply.

An Hon. Member: What's Harper's record on the water on First Nations reserves?

Dr. Turner: Well, I've been asked what the previous Prime Minister Harper's result on – and possibly his minister of immigration. Was he minister of environment, too, or something? Well, anyway, he doesn't know anything about either. He doesn't know anything about either, but the Conservative Party of Canada government headed by . . .

Mr. Gill: Madam Chair, can you please ask the hon. member to speak to the bill, please?

The Deputy Chair: He's on the bill. It's okay.

Dr. Turner: I am speaking to the bill. I'm talking about how important it is that we get a safe water supply to our First Nations people, and we are doing what the previous government of . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your time is up. Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm proud to rise in the House today to support Bill 20, Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. You know, I concur heartily with my colleagues that no matter where you live in Alberta, we have an obligation to make sure that you have clean and safe drinking water. This is, you know, particularly relevant for rural areas, where that's something that we can't necessarily always take for granted.

An observation is that I notice my new desk here was previously used by Doug Griffiths. Now, I'm sure many members in the House will be familiar with Doug Griffiths. He's a former minister in a previous administration, and he has been touring the province talking to rural communities about how they can develop sustainably. One of the most critical factors in his travels that he's identified for the health, well-being, and, in fact, continued existence of a rural community is the quality of its water and the assuredness of its supply.

Coming from that part of the province, you know, this is something that we can't take for granted. I know that the Member for Edmonton-McClung was talking about his experience, his growing up in the countryside on well water and that the water ran yellow out of his taps. I'm assuming that they were his taps that the water was running out of. Where I grew up, near Plamondon, it was a little bit more orange – I guess a good colour for where we are today – just because of the high iron concentration. The challenges for having to sustain a community on groundwater sources are, first, putting an undue stress on the resource but, secondly, even if the water exists, it might take so much processing and so much in the form of additional treatment that the end product is not something that's desirable, which is my understanding of some of the concerns that these communities were facing.

I also happen to be from Boyle, where we had a very similar situation some years back to the one that's facing Whitefish Lake today. Boyle was getting its water from Skeleton Lake, which actually happens to be just on the very edge of the Beaver River water basin, and with the climatic changes in that part of the province a lot of these lakes, especially ones that have smaller watersheds to draw on, you know, are facing serious stress. I know that in Boyle's situation it brought us into a dispute with the landowners along the lake blaming us for drawing the water levels

down to the point where the lake was no longer the beautiful resource that it once was.

Now, what Boyle had to do was actually bring in water from the Athabasca, and there were fairly similar concerns over the risk of interbasin contamination just because, you know, it's a similar situation. In fact, work that's being done by the Skeleton Lake Stewardship Association – it could well be that all along the Beaver River basin and the Athabasca River basin have been in communication. The land is actually pretty flat in some parts, and there's very significant evidence that suggests that these water basins are already in communication. If that is indeed the case, I guess that could also meet at least partway some of the objections that some of our honourable colleagues have raised – or maybe concerns would be a better word – on the possibility of interbasin contamination.

Now, turning particularly to Whitefish Lake First Nation, I have to say that I'm extremely proud of our government. I think it's a very welcome and overdue change from the past. We're taking the needs of First Nations seriously. We're taking their water needs seriously and making positive steps to address them rather than simply passing the buck, which unfortunately has been something that this province has done far too much in the past. I know that Whitefish Lake is not in the same situation as some other aboriginal communities. In fact, they did at least have a water system. I've been to communities where there is no water system. You have the situation where elders, you know, sick people, children had to go outside and do what people had to do maybe a century ago to be able to deal with their sanitation and their washing and their drinking needs without any running water at all.

When these communities would come and talk to the province, the province would say: "Oh, that's a federal matter. That's none of our concern." I have to say that our new indigenous affairs minister has strong insistence that, no, that's not correct. We can't turn our backs on other citizens of Alberta based on their jurisdiction, number one, because it's totally unethical and, number two, because it has a harmful effect not only on the community being impacted but on the communities around them. I think it's a long overdue recognition that these First Nation communities are not islands. They are indeed integrating with the surrounding communities, and the damage or the neglect that's inflicted on those communities doesn't just impact them; it impacts all of us as well.

You know, that is particularly true with the quality of water. As my hon. colleague just mentioned, when you have poor water, you have poor health, and if you have poor health, not only are you causing problems for the people themselves, which is wrong, but you also are causing significant impact on the rest of us because we have to pay for the increased health costs, deal with the loss of employment and loss of opportunities and the loss of all the wonderful things we could get from these individuals who have been impacted by water that's not fit to drink.

I'm very, very happy to see us moving forward with this. I'm also very happy that we have a federal partner that's a bit more forthcoming on these types of issues as well, and that's also a really welcome change. That's an important thing.

10:00

I'm also very glad about the quality of consultation that went on. Now, I represent a lot of the communities that are actually part of the highway 28/63 water commission, and I did do some informal asking of some of the partners who are in my riding about whether they had any concerns over this line extension, over this transfer. It's quite the contrary. They were very positive and very appreciative of the work that the government has done in making sure that, you know, everybody was included as much as possible

in discussions and that any concerns that they might have had were answered in a fulsome and appropriate way. So we've got, I think, a very good project.

Now, my understanding is that this is not the first time this has been done, so I guess that's another reason why we don't have to, I think, be overly concerned over the risk of interbasin contamination. This is, in fact, the fifth interbasin transfer that's been authorized since 2003. Okay. I'm seeing six here. This would be the sixth. As far as I'm aware, I think the only other transfer would have been previous to 2003, and it would have been actually to increase the level of a former Premier's lake. I think that was the other one, but many know the cause, you know, in this situation.

Now, this is, of course, not just a credit to our government. There have been people that have been working for a long time, you know, very diligently to make this happen. Of course, that would include Whitefish Lake First Nation itself but also the county of St. Paul. I know that they've been looking at different options for years. They've been trying to find the money to make this a reality. It's wonderful that they've been able to help put this together. St. Paul now has – what? – \$9.5 million in funding from us and the federal government. I guess they have to spend it fairly quickly because my understanding is that by March of next year this funding will actually expire. It's a good testament to them and a good testament to the very welcome change in attitude and, I'd say, the evolution of values that we've seen in this province.

Now, I know that our government thinks about not just this particular area when making these types of decisions, but they do consider the concerns of all of us Albertans. When we make mistakes in these types of decisions, we might not be actually around personally to experience the negative outcomes, so I think it is really important that this gets examined very carefully.

I think that, fortunately for the people of Alberta, we have a government that does take the environment and environmental sustainability very seriously, in fact more seriously than other administrations that have come before us, which is really fortunate because, of course, we are reaching a very critical time, well, in our planet's existence. I mean, these are issues that aren't going to become less as we go forward. You know, there have been a lot of years where a lot of us have either debated the fact of climate change or debated just what type of impact it would have on us. I think that we've gone beyond those types of considerations. I see it in talking to people back in my riding, where not many years ago they were very much in the camp that this was a conspiracy by – I don't know – big solar, big wind, Al Gore, or other elements as just a way to grab money and resources, that: yes, this might be happening, but it could be positive for us, and it's probably natural in origin anyway.

Even for these people it's been getting harder and harder as we see climate models being proven with time. I mean, I think that, actually, just recently the first big climate model that was done up by the UN 50 years ago, looking back now in retrospect, is almost frighteningly accurate. But we don't even need to look to those types of climate studies. We can even look to the change in agricultural practices that we've seen in the northeast of the province, where with the change in the growing season there are crops that we can grow now that weren't really imaginable some years ago. We also see it, of course, in the challenges that our forests are facing with this pine beetle infestation, that we used to be able to depend on our harsh winters to take care of, and that just isn't any longer the case. It's the adding up of all these factors that makes doubting the seriousness of climate change and what impact it has something a lot more difficult to argue.

Now, as far as that section of the province, this is something that we've seen in the challenges we've had with many lakes and with

them dropping rather precipitously. I know that's the concern that Whitefish Lake itself in particular has. They're not unique in facing that type of situation, so I think that addressing this now by bringing water out from one of the more reliable sources that we have, where I know that the signs show that extending the water out to that community is going to have a negligible impact on the flow for the North Saskatchewan, is something that makes a lot of sense. By having the line out there, I think it's not just going to help these communities right now, but it's setting the stage for future uses, so I'm very happy to see this happen.

Now, the other thing I should say about this is just how well it sits with other government objectives. One of them, of course, is Alberta's water for life strategy, which, just as a reminder to the House, is centred around achieving safe, secure drinking water, preserving healthy aquatic ecosystems, and providing reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy. This project definitely fits within those parameters. It also puts some flesh on the bone of our commitment to the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, and that's something as well that was long overdue for our province to accede to and another reason to be proud of the work that this government has been doing.

It's for all these reasons that I'm going to support this bill, and I urge other members of the House to do so as well. This bill provides the absolutely necessary clean and safe drinking water for Mallaig and for Whitefish Lake First Nation. It has no impact on other licence holders. The consultation process was done appropriately, and it has widespread support without any significant objections. It shouldn't cause any concerns regarding the health of the North Saskatchewan River and its flow rate. Also, of course, it's always nice when we get help in paying for projects, and the fact that this leverages federal funding is definitely an asset and something that in these fiscally challenged times is really welcome. So I do hope that all members of the House see the value in allowing this interbasin transfer to go forward and that we indeed get unanimous support for this bill.

Thank you very much, Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 20? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

10:10

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be a bit briefer than many of my colleagues. I am certainly very happy to see this bill come forward. You know, for far too long we have had not just First Nations but communities across, really, the country, let alone Alberta, that have had poor access to clean water, and that's for a variety of reasons.

As many of my colleagues have, I do want to focus on our First Nation community in question here. You know, going back further, really, than Confederation, the Crown made a promise that our First Nations will have access to clean water, and that is not a promise that has been followed up on consistently throughout geography, let alone throughout time. That is one of the very many reasons that I am proud of this government. We recognized that this is an issue, we made a promise to follow through on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations, and with the last budget we saw money set aside specifically to get clean drinking water to our First Nations. So I see this as a very positive step forward. Really, seeing these two communities working together on the same bill to get clean water to both of these communities is something very positive.

As the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was saying, there are a lot of economic benefits as well as health benefits of access to clean

water. In my community it's not a population, but there's the Villeneuve Airport, that is currently having a hard time expanding because they don't have running water at the moment. This has been an ongoing discussion between the county and the airport for quite a while. Hopefully, we see some movement in the future, and then we can see some growth there. But I see that there are a lot of economic opportunities and a lot of health care opportunities and, ultimately, cost savings for the government because of savings on health care from access to clean drinking water.

I see this as a very positive move. I am very happy to see this bill come forward, and thank you to the minister for it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 20?

Mr. Rosendahl: Good morning. It's a pleasure to rise and speak on this important bill. There's nothing more fundamental to life than clean drinking water, and it's important that when we look at the essence of this bill, it's to provide that. When we look at the way in which we're going to move ahead with this, you can look at that we need to do an interbasin transfer. When we look at why we need to do that and why we need an act before the Legislature to allow this, we need to approve the interbasin transfer. It helps protect – and think about that: helps protect – Alberta's valuable water resources. It's important to consider that when you look at these interbasin transfers and how important it is when we deal with these kinds of things.

The proposals are reviewed to ensure the sustainability of water use in each basin. That's what's considered when you look at doing these interbasin transfers. Of course, because of that, interbasin transfers are subject to a thorough review and are only considered under unique circumstances such as this, to provide drinking water to Whitefish Lake First Nation and the small hamlet of Mallaig, which require decent drinking water.

We also look at the issue of: why do St. Paul county and Whitefish Lake First Nation need to draw drinking water? Well, both communities are dealing with water quality and quantity challenges that make it difficult to ensure a reliable, safe supply of drinking water for the area residents. Of course, a lot of members have talked about the effects on the economy and, of course, the effects on the health of the residents when they have a decent quality of drinking water.

After considering other options, it was determined that the best solution was to connect the highway 28/63 regional waterline, that carries drinking water from the North Saskatchewan River treated at the EPCOR facility in Edmonton, the best option in moving forward with the supply of water to these communities. Did they look at other options? Yes, they did. A total of seven options were considered to address the drinking water issue, I mean, when you're looking at water quality, quantity for the hamlet of Mallaig, of course, which is in St. Paul county, and a total of five options were considered to address the issues in Whitefish Lake First Nation. When you look at all these considerations, this is how important it is that we looked at all these options to make sure that this decision is one that is certainly arrived at to be the best solution to solve the drinking water issues for these two communities.

We look at the question of how many residents this will affect, right? Two hundred people in the hamlet of Mallaig and 1,500 people on the Whitefish Lake First Nation will benefit from the delivery of safe, reliable drinking water through this project. It's important, when we look at that, that it's going to affect these people in a big way.

Will the demands on the North Saskatchewan River affect the river? I believe no, because the volume of water that's flowing in

the North Saskatchewan is sufficient to supply the demand that's needed on that. The additional water is a .3 per cent increase in demand from what is flowing in the river. The average volume in the North Saskatchewan is 7.5 billion cubic metres that flow in the river, so, like I said, there would be no measurable effect on diverting that small amount of water for the project.

When you look at the other part of it, the consultations part of it, St. Paul county was consulted. First Nations, watershed planning and advisory councils, and area residents were consulted when they looked at doing this project. A similar process on the highway 28/63 regional water commission will be followed later this summer for the Whitefish Lake First Nation interbasin transfer. It was important that all these consultations were done, and of course through that consultation process all the options were looked at, and it was determined that the interbasin transfer is the best way to go to provide clean, safe drinking water to these two communities.

When we look at the other side of it, the costs, of course, we had already mentioned that the estimated cost of connecting Mallaig to the regional waterline is \$9.5 million. St. Paul county received \$4.75 million from the Canada clean water program and \$4.75 million from the Alberta water for life program to fund this important work, right? The estimated cost of connecting the Whitefish Lake First Nation is \$22.6 million; \$20.66 million will be funded through the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples/First Nations regional tie-in project funding from the government of Alberta. The remaining \$1.98 million has been committed by the federal government to tie the waterline to the reservoir on the reserve. It's important that we work together in providing this important project moving forward.

10:20

I could talk a long time about the water for life strategy as I dealt with it many years ago in looking at making sure that the water for life strategy in Alberta was a good one, a made-for-Alberta solution in dealing with water in Alberta. Like many people have said already, safe, secure drinking water, healthy aquatic ecosystems: those are very important when we look at our environmental issues and climate change and all those issues that are affecting our water today. A big piece of that, too, is reliable, quality water for a sustainable economy. Some members have already talked on that today, about how important it is to have clean, safe, reliable drinking water.

The main outcome of the water for life strategy is to ensure, like I said, a safe, secure drinking water supply while indirectly promoting higher standards of socioeconomic status to residents. To address this, a comprehensive review of all the waterworks systems in Alberta, 550 to be exact, was undertaken in 2003 in a study that identified the short- and long-term solutions to source treatment and, of course, operational challenges in the supply of safe, secure drinking water in the province of Alberta. Regional water systems were identified as the best practical solution in addressing these challenges. Regional water systems avoid expensive upgrades for stand-alone water treatment plants, which are aging, to meet current and future treated water standards. All of these issues fall under the water for life strategy.

The other part of it is to alleviate annual operational costs associated with stand-alone water treatment upgrade plans as well as retaining certified operators, which is also an issue in the fact that people operating these plants now have to be certified to make sure that when they're operating these plants, the water is, in fact, safe for everyone to drink.

Based on all those things, it's important that we support Bill 20, and with that, I thank everyone. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to get up and speak to this bill this morning. I kind of wanted to pick up on some of the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud regarding the history of Alberta and how it was settled and how prosperity and economic diversity came to the province.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the Brooks aqueduct. I know that's not quite the same thing as the interbasin transfer that the bill contemplates. Nonetheless, it involves bringing water to arid parts of the province so that . . .

Mr. Loewen: Madam Chair, he just admitted that it was irrelevant.

The Deputy Chair: Are you done, hon. member?

Mr. Westhead: I think he's raising a point of order.

The Deputy Chair: No. He didn't raise a point of order. Please continue.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: I just pointed out that it was irrelevant. He admitted it.

Ms Jansen: Why don't you let him speak?

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Brooks aqueduct was made in . . .

Mr. Loewen: I'm not stopping him. Let him go ahead.

Mr. Westhead: Madam Chair, do I have the floor?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I realize that we're in Committee of the Whole, so there can be side conversations, but if we could please be respectful so that the speaker can continue speaking.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. Like I was saying, the Brooks aqueduct was built in the early 1900s, and it was a project by the CPR to help bring prosperity to agricultural communities in southern Alberta. You know, at the time it was one of the largest construction projects in history and one of the largest man-made structures in the country and, I believe, in the world. The reason that the aqueduct was built was to bring water to parts of the prairies for agricultural purposes.

You know, historical accounts have it that projects like the Brooks aqueduct and the Bassano dam and the Eastern irrigation district are fundamental founding parts of how Alberta came to be such an incredibly prosperous province. When we compare the historical significance of the Brooks aqueduct to the formation of our province, in a parallel way, having this interbasin transfer to the Beaver River water basin is going to be equally important in the history of the communities that the water will be delivered to.

I think it's important. Sometimes we take water for granted, and we forget how central it is to safe, healthy communities and our prosperity. It brings opportunities as well to the communities. You know, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was talking about the social determinants of health, and I'd like to expand on that a little bit in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If we don't have the fundamental elements essential to life, we can't achieve those higher things in the hierarchy, so it's incredibly important that

people have safe, clean drinking water. We can avoid catastrophes like what happened in Walkerton.

The thing is that these projects require money. You know, we have committed \$100 million to bringing clean, safe drinking water to First Nations communities. That's a commitment that's unique, I think, in Alberta in terms of putting our money where our mouth is. In terms of the reconciliation process, helping First Nations achieve the fundamental human right of having clean, safe drinking water is something that's extremely important to this government. I'm really proud that we're finally making these things happen.

In terms of climate change, you know, climate change has been mentioned here this morning. I like to think of water as: in a future climate water is going to be the new currency. If you don't have water, as the climate changes, your economic and growth opportunities are limited by the amount of water a community has. On the other side they don't believe in climate change, so it's a little bit hypocritical for them to talk about how important water is when they don't even believe in climate change. But that's another issue.

Where we're trying to give economic opportunities and diversify our economy, having these interbasin transfers like this to help a community that's in need of water to expand: this is something that's essential and incredibly important to that community.

I'd like to support the comments that have been made this morning and support the bill. I'm really proud of our government for putting this forward, and I encourage all members to support the bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 20?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

10:30

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 20.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur with the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 21

Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Finance to move second reading of Bill 21, Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, provincial government agencies, boards, and commissions, or ABCs, play a vital role in delivering important programs and services to Albertans as well as providing oversight and advice. This is why our government is committed to continuing the long-overdue review of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions. The ongoing review of agencies, boards, and commissions ensures that ABCs are transparent, accountable, and using public dollars effectively and efficiently.

Madam Speaker, I want to start out by sharing some key facts and numbers that have come out of the ABC review to date. You'll recall that when we announced this process back in November 2015, there were 301 public agencies that were being reviewed. As part of Budget 2016 we announced a list of 26 agencies, boards, and commissions that were to be consolidated and dissolved, saving Albertans \$33 million over three years.

Phase 1 of the ABC review covered 135 agencies governed by the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, or APAGA. This review has resulted in the amalgamation or dissolution, now complete or under way, of 56 of those agencies, boards, and commissions.

Phase 2 of the ABC review looked at another 140 agencies that are not subject to APAGA, which includes a large number of professional and regulatory advisory bodies. While non-APAGA ABCs are more arm's length from government, each agency is accountable to the government for carrying on its mandate, meeting its objectives, and serving Albertans, including ensuring public safety, hearing appeals, and providing expert and public advice on important Alberta programs. As a result of phase 2 of the review, another eight agencies, boards, and commissions are proposed to be dissolved or amalgamated.

With that, let us now turn our attention to Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. This bill will enable us to implement dissolution where legislative amendments are required for 14 ABCs, 13 under phase 1 and one under phase 2. Some of these are the Access Advisory Council, under the Advanced Education ministry – the Access Advisory Council was established to provide advice to the minister regarding the access to the future fund; however, as payments have been suspended indefinitely, the council is no longer needed – and the Agricultural Operation Practices Act Practice Review Committee, under Agriculture and Forestry. This act is being amended to reflect that committees will be struck on an ad hoc basis rather than through a standing committee.

Another committee, the Alberta Economic Development Authority, under Economic Development and Trade, is no longer active or relevant. Therefore, the recommendation for dissolution was made as part of phase 2 of the ABC review.

For the Alberta Heritage Scholarship Act committees, under Advanced Education, the ministry will simplify programming for

the next scholarship application intake, removing the step of applicant selection by the committees, which will remove complexity and improve processing time for student applicants.

There are nine family and community engagement councils under the Ministry of Community and Social Services. These councils have never been established. Repealing the Building Families and Communities Act in its entirety will remove this act, which is no longer necessary, also the Students Finance Board under Advanced Education. It is important to note, Madam Speaker, that almost all of these public agencies are already inactive or defunct.

However, the Alberta Heritage Scholarship Act committees with Advanced Education were stood up when needed. Currently the Alberta heritage scholarship committees select about 70 of the 49,000 scholarship and award recipients supported by the department each year. Selection committees were initially established where the eligibility criteria were complex enough to justify external expertise to adjudicate applications. Most of the scholarships and awards programs administered by Advanced Education no longer use selection committees. They have rigorous processes to determine eligibility criteria and ensure accountability, transparency, and objectivity. These committees only meet when required to adjudicate particular scholarships. Recommendations were made to the department, and finalists were selected. Dissolving these committees essentially saves a step in the selection process. With reviews of scholarship programming leading to efforts to simplify programming, the eligibility complexity that made the selection committees valuable will no longer exist.

Madam Speaker, as I close today, I'd like to say that I'm proud that the review of agencies, boards, and commissions has resulted in numerous important changes to increase transparency, fiscal accountability, and diversity and to ensure better value for Albertans. We have seen significant progress government-wide in several different areas, including fair and appropriate executive compensation at ABCs; effective use of public dollars; transparency and accountability, including salary disclosure; revitalization of board appointment diversity; a diligent and public appointment process, an appointment process that is focused on what you know and not who you know; a compensation framework for 23 designated ABCs; cutting salaries and eliminating bonuses and perks like the golf club memberships for the highest paid top executives of agencies, boards, and commissions. The elimination of agencies that were defunct or whose functions could be better provided through another entity, including a government department, contributes to the efficient and effective use of public dollars.

I look forward to discussion on this bill and would ask that all members of the House support it. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 21, Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. At this point in time I'm very pleased with the intent of the bill to limit government, to look for more value for hard-earned tax dollars, and to reduce bureaucracy. It looks like it might be a rare instance where the NDP has actually brought something useful forward. We will see if the devil is in the details.

Madam Speaker, Bill 21 implements phase 3 of the government's agencies, boards, and commissions review by dissolving 14 agencies, boards, and commissions. Five other agencies, boards, and commissions will be eliminated that did not require a statute to effect the change. Nineteen agencies, boards, and commissions

were identified by this government as either duplicating work or not functioning. These are in addition to the 26 agencies, boards, and commissions identified in Budget 2016 for further consolidation or dissolution.

Madam Speaker, the United Conservative Party caucus supports reducing red tape and bureaucracy, of course, and finding efficiencies as long as consultation and engagement are maintained. Reducing the number of agencies, boards, and commissions is a common-sense approach to reducing the size of our government.

10:40

Madam Speaker, if anyone here has read Mark Milke's book *Barbarians in the Garden City*, at the time B.C. NDP Premier Glen Clark swears the NDP was a fiscally conservative party. When the B.C. NDP 1997 party convention adopted a motion condemning the B.C. benefits/welfare reforms package and called for an increase in welfare rates, Clark responded: no; we have a deficit. Sounds a lot like: no; we're broke.

Reducing the number of agencies, boards, and commissions might be one of those cases where the Alberta NDP is channelling Glen Clark. The United Conservative Party also supports arm's-length entities' ability to work without – without – political influence and interference by the government.

Madam Speaker, I'm not sure how the government can call this bill part of the third phase of their ABC review when phase 3 was supposed to tackle executive compensation, roles and mandates, and governance excellence in public postsecondary institutions. Bill 21 does not address any of those issues, leading me to wonder if the government is not going to tackle executive compensation, roles and mandates or if, like we just saw in the previous Committee of the Whole, the government brought us back here before they were ready.

We know that the university presidents and administrators are making exorbitant salaries, and Albertans want to know what we are getting in return when a former U of A president received a \$544,000 salary and just over \$1.1 million in total compensation in 2014 as well as \$930,000 for buying her house. Of course, with known NDP backer Michael Phair guarding the U of A board, I guess we'll never know, Madam Speaker. Again, government has fallen short of truly looking – truly looking – for fair value, value for hard-earned tax dollars, competitive processes to ensure that the right people at the right price are put into rare government positions. At least, it's encouraging to see the NDP getting rid of a little bit of bureaucracy and expenditures.

Madam Speaker, let's take a look at some of these entities the NDP are doing away with. We have three here from the Department of Advanced Education. We have the access to the future fund's Access Advisory Council, the Alberta Heritage Scholarship Act committees, and the Students Finance Board, where, in all, we are told that other entities can handle the work.

Then we have Community and Social Services' family and community engagement councils. These were set up in 2014 but never populated and would require millions of dollars to get going, so no doubt a good saving and a good reduction of bureaucracy.

The one that does concern me, representing a largely rural constituency, is under Agriculture and Forestry. We have the Agricultural Operation Practices Act Practice Review Committee. Madam Speaker, this committee has not been active since 2011. It was called as an ad hoc committee to conduct inquiries under part 1 of the AOPA. Apparently, it will continue to perform an ad hoc function. A change in legislation will clarify that the committee will only form when there is a complaint under the act, an event that apparently has not occurred since 2011. I'm concerned how crucial this could be.

Madam Speaker, we saw last year, with the early snow and frost, particularly in northern and central Alberta, how so many of our farmers and our farm families had to work extra hard, take extra financial risk, and then suffered some losses. This provision was supposed to help that industry, that's weather sensitive and time sensitive, if necessary, if you ran into a concern with an urban neighbour or an urban disagreement over timing and noise and those kinds of things. At this point in time I'll be watching what this government does in this next phase because we have to ensure – we have to ensure – that our agriculture producers have the best opportunity to feed Albertans, to feed the world at a time when it seems like urban movement is infringing on them more and more every day. So I'll be watching this and talking more about it in Committee of the Whole.

Madam Speaker, Economic Development and Trade is getting rid of the Alberta Economic Development Authority. Now, the Premier effectively shut this down in 2015, but I seem to recall that all those employees in AEDA simply got absorbed into the public service in one of the departments: Economic Development and Trade or Treasury Board and Finance or to work for the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Economy. So at the end of the day, if we limit government a bit with Bill 21 and shuffle all the savings to other departments, this is just reshuffling the deck chairs on the you-know-what. AEDA used to produce some excellent reports on the state of the economy and issues we face. I guess the NDP will leave that up to the think tanks like the Canada West Foundation now.

A good search of the government telephone directory tells me that the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Economy doesn't even seem to exist anymore. I wonder where it could be hiding if not in Economic Development and Trade. Has it gone silent? Is it unpaid? Is it volunteer? Or have the employee contracts just run out, the employees let go, and the Premier takes no special advice? Again, my guess is that bigger government still exists everywhere with our NDP government, but we'll see if that can be fleshed out during Committee of the Whole.

Now, the other five agencies, boards, or commissions that will be dissolved through other means include Alberta Health's Alberta Expert Review Panel for Blood Borne Viral Infections in Health Care Workers.

Under Environment and Parks there is the Reclamation Criteria Advisory Group. Yes, you'd think by now we would all know what reclaimed land looks like. Look at the great job that Suncor and other oil sands producers are doing in Fort McMurray to see their reclamation.

Under Economic Development and Trade there is the Alberta Innovation Council. This council provided leadership, advice, and system oversight on \$800 million in annual innovation funding in the province. I wonder: why, exactly, is this ABC being dissolved? Has Alberta Innovates taken over this role? Is this information deemed not necessary? I hope to get some answers from the government as we proceed.

The Small Medium Enterprise Export Council provided advice to expand, encourage, and facilitate access of Alberta SMEs to foreign markets. Again, gone.

Under Transportation there is the Strategic Transportation Advisory Council, a committee made up of public- and private-sector transportation representatives who advise Alberta Transportation on transportation issues affecting Alberta's economy. Again, gone. That's too bad. I didn't know the STAC was formalized. I thought of it as a coffee-shop talk of the airports, the railways, the bus and trucking companies all getting together to tell the minister what's right, what's wrong, and what needs to be fixed.

But, again, we've seen a government short on consultation, so I hope that that doesn't continue and this doesn't make that worse.

At the end of the day, we want to ensure that all of the ABCs planned for this dissolution make sense. We also want to ensure that the other avenues for consultation are working before we simply agree to dissolve the latest list of ABCs. The United Conservative Party also wants to make sure that there are no surprises. After all, Madam Speaker, we were expecting phase 3 to involve postsecondaries, and that is clearly not happening. Either the government changed their mind, or once again they were not ready.

At this point it should be noted that the United Conservative Party has seen the NDP have problems in rolling out its plans for ABCs. Case in point, the changes made to AIMCo under the same ABC program. The ministry responsible for AIMCo handled it so poorly that it threatened AIMCo's reputation by alarming clients about the government's apparent attempts to undermine the Crown corporation's independence. Incredible. Independence is critical to AIMCo, handling \$97 billion of Alberta's money, including 83,000 pensions of our hard-working civil servants and, of course, our \$17 billion heritage savings trust fund. While AIMCo's changes were high stakes, much higher than these ABCs, these ones deserve proper consultation and reflection as well.

10:50

These are some of the reasons that while legislation such as Bill 21 may appear innocuous on the surface, it is our job as legislators to scrutinize any bills carefully. Madam Speaker, while I recognize the chance to reduce bureaucracy and limit government, through Committee of the Whole and further readings we will be watching to ensure that this government got this one right.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 21.

First of all, I'd like to address something. It bothered me to hear condemnation of Michael Phair from the member opposite because he was named for his talents and his abilities to be the chair of the U of A board of governors. His long-standing reputation is one of excellence in everything he turned his hands to as a city councillor, human rights activist, leader in the LGBTQ community in Edmonton and throughout the province, and it was really disappointing to hear his reputation being maligned by the member who just spoke about him in condescending terms. I was upset about that, and I hope not to hear that type of comment again about somebody who is so well respected in our province.

I do, though, wish to speak further about my agreement to stand in favour of Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. Madam Speaker, the provincial government's agencies, boards, and commissions do play an important role in delivering important programs and services to Albertans, and they provide valuable oversight and advice.

Now, this piece of legislation isn't simply a housekeeping bill. It's a matter of looking at significant savings but also improving governance in the province. It was announced last year that 26 agencies, boards, and commissions were to be consolidated or dissolved, and this means big dollars saved. It means a \$33 million savings over three years for Albertans.

This isn't something that we're going to be looking at as a one-off. It's something that we need to be doing on an ongoing basis and something that wasn't done for decades under the previous administration. That's why we're faced with a situation right now

where there were a number of these agencies, boards, and commissions which were simply not functioning. They weren't operational, and they were left in the dust because of the neglect of the previous administration. So we're looking on an ongoing basis at these reviews and making sure that the remaining agencies, boards, and commissions are actually functioning and providing quality service at reasonable cost.

This government is intent on making sure that the agencies, boards, and commissions that we have now or ones that might be created in the future actually have a job to do and do so within a budget that is realistic and don't waste money, as I said, and that they provide valuable oversight and service and advice to the province. Bill 21 ensures that all ABCs are relevant and serving the best interests of Albertans. The agencies impacted by this bill are all, as had been mentioned before, either no longer operating, or the work they do could be done more effectively elsewhere. Almost all of the public agencies the bill addresses are inactive or defunct.

Some people have some questions that they have asked about the bill and this phase of the review. The intent of the review was to assure Albertans that the functions and services being provided by our agencies, boards, and commissions remain relevant, effective, and make life better for the people of this province. The majority of the public agencies being dissolved are already inactive or rarely meet. Dissolving these agencies means we are eliminating unnecessary processes. What we're doing is taking care of some of the neglect of the past administration in not really keeping an eye on what was going on with those agencies, boards, and commissions. They ended up falling into disuse, and we're now taking care of that.

This review also ensures that public agencies are transparent and accountable and are following good governance practices. I'm sure all of us have heard horror stories about how some of the agencies, boards, and commissions are not really following proper rules of governance, and having oversight of them right now, having this review take a look at governance of agencies, boards, and commissions is long overdue. I know that I've had expressions of relief from people who are on agencies, boards, and commissions that this review is being undertaken so that they feel comfortable in their operation as members of agencies, boards, and commissions that they operate on.

Now, in phase 2 of the review the outcomes can be described in a number of ways, but all three phases of the review were focused on identifying what's working, what can be improved, and what is no longer providing value or relevance to Albertans. Phase 2 reviewed 140 agencies that are not subject to the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, or APAGA. These agencies are more than arm's length for government and include a large number of self-regulated professional organizations. As a result of phase 2 of the review, an additional eight agencies, boards, and commissions are proposed to be dissolved or amalgamated. Government will work to ensure that all the agencies continue to meet the needs of Albertans effectively.

Now, it was brought to light that there are fewer dollars being saved from phase 2 than phase 1. People had that question. An important focus of the ABC review was to be sure that the agencies, boards, and commissions are using public dollars effectively and efficiently. It's also important that these public agencies are transparent and accountable and are following good governance practices. Last year, in phase 1, 26 ABCs were consolidated or dissolved, saving taxpayers \$33 million over three years. The eliminated agencies in phase 2 were no longer functioning and had no board and no staff. The review was thorough and extended to all

140 agencies, boards, and commissions that are not subject to APAGA.

Some have asked why some agencies are still under review. Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions provide substantial value, and we will continue to ensure that public agencies are relevant, effective, transparent, well governed, and accountable to government and Albertans. Some continuing reviews of agencies are tied in with broader systemic reviews in which the specific agency review cannot be undertaken in isolation. That's why some agencies are still under review.

Once all phases of the review are complete, that doesn't mean that we're going to stop the process. It will be an ongoing process. Our government believes strongly in agency governance, and this means that the reviews of agencies occur regularly so that we don't end up with a situation where we have agencies, boards, or commissions which are dormant, which cost us money, and do nothing. APAGA agencies must be reviewed by the government at least every seven years.

Non-APAGA agencies may also have prescribed review timelines in their enabling legislation. Whether prescribed or not, it's a good practice to regularly evaluate agencies to ensure that Albertans continue to be well served and represented. That is something that we intend to do over time by maintaining oversight over these agencies and on a regular basis reviewing them so that we don't end up with dormant, nonfunctioning, and costly agencies, boards, or commissions in the future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually, I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for a very good review of why we need this bill and what is going to be accomplished.

I actually want to also congratulate him for calling out the rather poorly chosen wording by the member opposite when that member was referring to Michael Phair. I consider Michael Phair to be one of the heroes of the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta. Indeed, I have known Michael Phair for 30 years, and I have never seen him do a mean thing in his life. He's always been a leader and always brought credit to whatever organization he works for, and that includes being the chair of the board of the University of Alberta. What a brilliant appointment that was, and I really congratulate the selection committee in doing that.

11:00

In fact, the appointment of Michael Phair as chair of the board of the University of Alberta actually occurred after our election in 2015. I wanted to bring this up because what the member opposite alluded to was the salary and perks of the previous president of the University of Alberta, and that person actually was given that contract about 10 years ago, I believe, or at least well before 2014.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, are you speaking to the speaker that just spoke?

Dr. Turner: Yes, I am.

The Acting Speaker: If you could please speak to the speaker that just spoke. I think you're commenting on comments that actually happened before that speaker.

Dr. Turner: I am referring to the comments that the Member for Edmonton-McClung made about Michael Phair.

I just wanted to point out that the government responsible for the contract for the previous president of the University of Alberta was actually a Progressive Conservative government, and they . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the previous speaker actually did not speak to the president. He spoke to Michael Phair, the individual. He did not speak about the comment on the prior president. So I would just like you to please comment on what was commented on by the member and not speak to comments that were made by the other member.

Dr. Turner: Well, then, I will basically ask the Member for Edmonton-McClung to give us some further information on who was actually in charge of the board of the University of Alberta at the time that that contract was signed.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I won't belabour the point or go too far off into the weeds on this, but my major disappointment was the fact that the reputation of the board chair of the University of Alberta was maligned, that being Mr. Michael Phair. As has been alluded to, I thought it was also a brilliant appointment. I consider Mr. Phair a true friend of mine as well, and his service and reputation are beyond reproach. It was maligned in this House, and I stand to protect that and to oppose anyone who might malign his reputation. That's basically the point of my comment on comments made in this House regarding Mr. Phair.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will now recognize the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate it. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, this morning. I do hope that the government will make very clear one particular issue for us: whether this bill was intended to implement phase 3 of the government's ABCs review act or, as seems to have been indicated by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, whether it's actually just a wrap of phases 1 and 2, bringing forward some of those things that were raised in phases 1 and 2. I think it does make a difference here, and we'll get to that in a moment.

This current bill, though, that we're speaking to, Bill 21, does bring forward 19 ABCs that have either been duplicating work or not functioning or minimally functioning, which is good. The 2016 budget identified that at that time there were 26 other ABCs that needed to be dissolved due to recommendations from various departments either for consolidation or dissolution. They were all identified as being cost-saving measures and duplication-of-work correction measures. Some of those agencies from phases 1 and 2 are obviously just now being dissolved, and I suppose that's partly because some of the consultation work, internal work for those agencies needed to be completed and brought to a good conclusion. So that's good practice.

In general I want to affirm the government's action on this bill. I will be voting in favour of it, pending how things go through Committee of the Whole, but in general I do affirm the government's action on this bill. Every institution, including government, has a tendency to create programs and new ventures in a burst of zeal, but then over time the need for the endeavour changes, situations change, and programs get left to sort of drag on and on and on way past their best-before date. While it's fun to start

new ventures, it's more like work to wrap them up. So I congratulate the government on an unglamorous bill that accomplishes much more than some of their more radical adventures which the government has brought forward. This is good management, a bill like this.

I would also encourage the government that if you can do this, then I think you can address some of the red tape snarl of regulations in our government as well. It's clear that we fully support the reduction of red tape. The reality is that red tape and bureaucratic reductions and strategies and all of those kinds of things need to sometimes be reviewed. For that reason, I'll be supporting second reading of Bill 21.

Redundant and costly ABCs are really much like redundant and costly regulations. They tend to build up, and every once in a while the home of government regulation needs a serious housecleaning. I trust that as we try to find efficiencies with regard to the ABCs, we can maybe find some prudent efficiencies as well with regard to some of the regulations that we have. I'm hoping that as we support this one, the government will also find it appropriate to, in a while, support Bill 207 from the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, that we'll be seeing. All those in this House can safely assume that at least our caucus does appreciate reducing any area of red tape, removing any duplication, and finding all the efficiencies that we can within the government and its various departments.

I do have a couple of questions, though, that I would appreciate the opportunity to have clarified, that I think should be answered. Clearly, is this bill going to address what was originally phase 3 or not? I wonder if the government would clarify where the mandate for phase 3 is. I believe phase 3, as has already been suggested, was intended to examine executive compensation, roles and mandates, and governance excellence in the public postsecondary institutions. That is not here. It's not even mentioned. Has this been forgotten? Is it going to be brought up later? What are the government's intentions on that? I think it's something that the people of Alberta would appreciate being able to know.

Let me move on. One of – actually, I'll save that for Committee of the Whole.

As always, I think there are questions that need to be resolved around clarity regarding some of the decisions that have been made, how they were made. But, at the end of the day, we just need to make sure that the cost savings actually outweigh what this might be costing the province. Some of the decision-making process, some of the protocols, the methods that were used to decide which ones to combine, which ones to dissolve, which ones were valuable, which ones were not, which ones were actually inefficient, which weren't: I think it would be helpful for us to understand some of that, for the people of Alberta to understand that to be able to be supportive of the intent and of the direction this is going, and having the agencies themselves being involved in that.

I know that the government has often said that they consult, but it's pretty skimpy consulting. Have the agencies and the boards and the people involved, maybe even the stakeholders, had the opportunity to actually contribute to these? Is dissolving them always the best solution? Is it the right solution in each particular case? We can get into some of that during Committee of the Whole.

Clearly, as has already been alluded to by the Member for Edmonton-McClung, I think it was, there are other agencies and commissions that have had serious challenges and serious problems. How are these being addressed? There are issues of overpayment. There are issues that I am aware of with conflict of interest. There are issues of management. These are the things that need to be watched and dealt with. How are we, the people of Alberta, to know that all of these have actually been dealt with in

ways that create a benefit for the people of Alberta? I think a cost-benefit analysis of some type would be very useful. Has that been done, and will that be presented at some time in the future?

11:10

The 2016 budget, as has already been said, identified \$33 million in savings over three years. Have we verification that those savings actually occurred, or is it just a nice public presentation? How do we verify actual savings of \$33 million? Along with that, I would say that while I totally applaud greater fiscal responsibility, particularly with this government, I do think that we need much more. That \$33 million, compared to a looming \$90 billion deficit, is a mere drop in the bucket of what needs to be happening here, so I would really like to affirm that we need to continue in this direction with a little bit more energy.

With every decision that's made in Alberta, though, I think it's important that we offer Albertans stability and that we restore confidence in the process and the management of their province and of government. There shouldn't be unexpected surprises. I hope that all of these, then, are well thought through, that the planning was in place, that it involved the people that are stakeholders, as I've said. I'm actually going to be connecting with some stakeholders this afternoon with regard to some of the specifics to see what their thoughts on this are, and we'll bring that back in Committee of the Whole.

Communication is extremely important to people. It's what gives confidence to the system. Alberta has had a lot of shaking of its confidence lately. It's affected our employment, it's affected people who work here, it's affected our businesses, and it's affected a lot of Alberta and our investment in this province. So we really do need to do this in a way that restores confidence to the people that the process, not just the result but the process, was proper and fulsome and adequate.

Those are some of the concerns that I have, and hopefully the government will be able to give us some indication of some of those things as well.

We support the idea of planning for dissolution of those that make sense. We recognize that there have been a number of problems with these in the past. I won't refer to AIMCo – it's already been brought up – except to say that it is important to maintain, generally with ABCs, the whole concept of arm's-length governance on operation. That's why they have independent boards. Yes, there should be an overall review of objectives and if they are fulfilling their mandate, but beyond that, I think it's extremely important that the government stays out of the operation and the daily decisions that these agencies and boards and commissions are asked to make. The whole question of protecting the concept of arm's length, which I think this government has struggled with in the past, is extremely important and one that I would like to have assurance will be protected as we move forward.

I think I'll leave it at that. I will support the bill at this reading. We will have some questions coming up. Let's do a good job on this one at least, okay?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm glad to hear that the hon. member is supportive of the bill that we're bringing forward. It definitely is our intention to find efficiencies and create opportunities for those. But I can't help but beg the question: how is tying up legal counsel in drafting a bill, how is tying up departments in drafting regulations, how is creating new

red tape to reduce red tape actually an effective use of resources? Talking about how they want us to bring forward a bill to reduce red tape but that the bill is red tape and therefore would create red tape, to me, just doesn't actually – I can't square that circle.

I think that what is prudent financial management, including management of human resources, is to ensure that staff are working diligently to reduce inefficiencies, to find redundancies and act on them, as opposed to political grandstanding around bills that have the words "red tape" in them. So I would really find it very helpful for the member opposite to help me understand how tying up all those resources and creating a bill to do exactly what we're doing would be an efficient use of public resources.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Orr: That is the snarl of red tape. It just never seems to end in government and in institutions. The reality is that I think that in order to address the challenge of – and maybe we should use a different language than just "red tape." It's just old and redundant regulation that sometimes needs to be reviewed, housecleaned, as I've said, and sometimes in order to do that, we have to just get deliberate about it. I fully acknowledge it will take some more work. It will take some doing. But, you know, every jurisdiction in Canada, every province at least in Canada except Alberta, does address that, does take a deliberate look at it. I think that we in the end will end up with significantly less redundant and obsolete regulation that nobody really needs but tends to sort of block the flow in our Alberta economy. Yeah, I think we do need to address it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Again, Madam Speaker, creating regulations and legislation to say that you have to do things on a certain schedule actually creates new red tape. When I came in, there were a set of past practices that said that regulations expired after a certain time limit unless they were intentionally renewed, which meant that we had to spend tons of department resources going through those regulations that we couldn't have expire. We couldn't have public health regulations expire and create health risks for the people of Alberta, so we had to put in tons of lawyers and department content experts just to deal with the renewal of expiry dates.

To me that is an incredible waste of resources, when there are certain pieces of legislation that are important that we have embedded in the safe operations of government and the safety and protection of people, creating new regulations and new legislation. To say that you have to do it every three years otherwise they expire and are no longer in effect, to me, is dangerous and risky and a waste of public resources because you're tying up all of that legal and content policy expertise on just dealing with expiry dates as opposed to actually looking at pieces of legislation that are worthy of the intentional examination and review and updating. You're spending all sorts of time on things like extending expiry dates, which, to me, is ineffective.

Having a piece of legislation to politically grandstand, saying that you're going to reduce red tape is actually a creation of red tape. I agree with the intention that you want to ensure that you're being effective about where you're using your resources, that you're updating things in a timely fashion that should be updated. But just to say across the board, "We're going to be getting rid of red tape as a political gesture rather than actually having thought and understanding around why some of those pieces might require a longer period of extension, why it isn't actually effective to say that

every three years everything is invalid unless it's been validated," could actually be a tremendous waste of resources, Madam Speaker.

While I agree with the intention around streamlining, as is evident in the government bill that's being debated here this morning, I think that some of the posturing that has been done in the past and may be done again on this floor in short order isn't an effective use of resources, Madam Speaker. Having lived through the intention of, you know, "We'll have these short-term expiry dates so that everything expires unless it's relevant," it actually did create a ton of red tape. I had to work to create efficiencies so that we wouldn't have either a public health crisis or the department spending all of its time just dealing with expiry dates.

That's a little bit of my learned experience that I wanted to share, and I hope that it will be useful in consideration of this bill and others.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand today to speak in support of second reading of Bill 21. I think that any effort, as the speakers before me already mentioned, to reduce red tape is a positive thing, and for that basic reason I support second reading of Bill 21.

I am curious, however. If Bill 21 is a part of phase 3 of the government's ABCs review, it will dissolve 14 ABCs. In that case I'm not really sure how the government can call this bill part of the third phase of the ABC review because phase 3 was supposed to tackle "executive compensation, roles and mandates, and governance excellence in public post-secondary institutions." Bill 21 does not address any of those issues.

11:20

Of course, we all know that that is a big project, and it will involve dicey negotiations with the postsecondaries. We know that this government hasn't performed previous consultations very successfully, and we can talk about that till the cows come home: like Bill 6, the carbon tax, et cetera, et cetera. It appears the key is to provide cover fire by focusing instead on dissolving 14 more agencies, with five others dissolving without the need to do so legislatively. In this way Bill 21 seems more like an addendum to phase 1, which saw 56 agencies amalgamated or dissolved. No word on what'll happen to the postsecondaries. The purported plan for phase 3 perhaps is not going so well. Perhaps the minister can provide an update sometime on that.

Still, the exercise to review ABCs to weed out redundancy and duplication has been a worthwhile one. As the bill moves through committee, the United Conservative Party caucus looks forward to carefully scrutinizing the ABCs targeted in this piece of legislation. Of particular interest is the plan to dissolve the following ABCs up for dissolution. I've picked only a few. I'm not going to go into detail on every ABC. For example, the first one is the Alberta Heritage Scholarship Act committee. It's still active, but its function has been brought back into government to be absorbed by other entities that handle all other scholarship decisions. We want to make sure this makes sense as Albertans are more and more curious about what this NDP is doing with their heritage fund.

The second one is the family and community engagement councils. These councils were created to replace child and family services authorities and persons with development disabilities boards but were never populated. The current government says that they would be too expensive and their functions would be better

handled through the department. Perhaps so, but we'll look into that. Maybe they were a good idea that should have been operational. Clearly, the department hasn't taken on these functions, which sound valuable. How do we know it'll happen if this ABC is dissolved? Like, we don't know the outcome of that.

The other one is the Alberta Economic Development Authority. It does indeed seem redundant with the creation of the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Economy, but what is the Premier's advisory council doing? We don't know about that. There are no reports on its website. Does it just report to the Premier in private? We haven't seen anything.

Another agency, the Alberta Innovation Council, provides leadership, advice, and system oversight on \$800 million of annual innovation funding. We have received little information on the need to dissolve this particular ABC when this government is so keen about diversifying the economy, you know, so keen on innovation, but we have no information on this, this ABC yet.

The other one is the Small Medium Enterprise Export Council. This agency's mandate has been to provide advice to "expand, encourage and facilitate access of Alberta [small medium enterprises] to foreign markets." Again, this would help to diversify our economy. The latter two councils might still serve a good purpose, but, as we all know, the NDP is not a fan of business, but we do need to do away with everything that might assist entrepreneurs.

Finally, the other one I have is the Strategic Transportation Advisory Council. Public- and private-sector transportation representatives advise Alberta Transportation on transportation issues affecting Alberta's economy. Is this public consultation occurring in another venue? That is an important point. I mean, we don't know anything about that.

There is an opportunity here to expand on red tape reduction. The UCP appreciates that Bill 21 at least purports to reduce red tape. This ties in nicely with my colleague the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner's Bill 207, which is also before this House, Madam Speaker. Since the NDP is suddenly so keen on red tape reduction, as evidenced by this bill, we hope that, you know, we'll get support for Bill 207 as well, a private member's bill.

But, anyway, let's get back to Bill 21. I noticed that you were going to give me warning, so I got back. In reviewing and providing possible amendments to ABCs in coming days, we want to ensure that all board, council, and advisory council plans for dissolution make sense and they don't have any unintended consequences. We want to make sure the government isn't just targeting them to make life easier for ministers who don't want to consult instead of, like, making life better for Albertans, as the government always claims. We have to be sure that the other avenues for consultation must be in place before we simply agree to dissolve this latest list of ABCs. We're also checking to ensure Bill 21 isn't serving up surprises. After all, we were expecting phase 3 to involve the postsecondaries, and that clearly is not happening, so we cannot take what appears to be a simple bill at face value. It is also the job of legislators to examine the government's eventual rollout of statutes.

Should Bill 21 really be what the government says it is, the ABCs to be dissolved have been identified to save costs, reduce duplication of work, then we will continue to support it and we should support it to make government more efficient so we can serve Albertans in a better way. However, we first look forward to fulsome discussion and debate on how it's going impact all these agencies and the end result, how we serve Albertans. We hope that should we offer amendments, our NDP colleagues will accept them in good faith so we can strengthen this bill and serve the intent of this bill, to serve Albertans in a better way.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

Now, if you know me, I am all about being in favour of getting rid of red tape and the bureaucratic process that hampers the people and saps the use of scarce resources that they have, so when I see Bill 21 coming to the Legislature for the people's endorsement, all I can say is: bravo. I'm glad that we see some common-sense solutions coming from the NDP government at this point. The bigger question is: two and a half years into the NDP mandate, what took so long? There must be incredible bureaucratic hurdles and red tape slowing this review down.

Phase 3 is supposed to focus on "executive compensation, roles and mandates, and governance excellence in public post-secondary institutions." When I see the gigantic salaries being paid out over at the University of Alberta and students from all over the world begging to be let in, I have to wonder: what are we getting for those giant salaries in university administration that taxpayers are paying for? Why are we buying million-dollar homes from university presidents when they retire?

11:30

You know, I just might ask the Public Accounts Committee to help this ABC review along by asking them to invite the universities and colleges in to be held to account. After all, we need great thinkers and innovators to be coming out of the universities to fill the jobs and create the jobs of the future.

Now, having read the press release, I understand that although 14 agencies, boards, and commissions are being dissolved here with Bill 21 and five are to be dissolved through other means, "several agencies are undergoing further review to ensure alignment with significant ministry initiatives, broader systems reviews, or [other] legislative reviews." This tells me that there may be yet more ABCs to come for dissolution.

When I take a look at the list of names of the agencies, boards, and commissions that are to be dissolved, I'm struck by why it took so long to make this happen. Are the public servants overworked? Can't they just clean up this bureaucratic mess?

In Advanced Education alone there are three ABCs to be dissolved. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar must have inherited a real mess of a department over there if he has to dissolve these three ABCs. I mean, look at it. The Students Finance Board, established in the 1950s, set the requirements for the access to student aid. Now the department says that this function is already being performed by quarterly reviews with the various student bodies in the province. In other words, the bureaucrats took it in-house and neutered the board.

Then we go to Community and Social Services. Nine of these family and community engagement councils were set up but never staffed or funded. It is like so much in government. It exists and it will get done as long as it is funded; if it is not being funded, it doesn't exist. Community and Social Services claims that outreach functions would be better handled elsewhere in the department at lower costs. That's excellent. Handle it. I like lower costs. Doesn't everybody?

Remember that NDP Premier who wouldn't raise welfare rates in British Columbia because he was running a deficit? He kept costs low. He was so good at keeping costs low that he was able to get a free \$10,000 deck built for him for his house, all for signing over a

licence for a casino. Now, if Glen Clark had an ABC like the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission to hand out the casino licence, he wouldn't have had to go to court over the nice new back deck and resign in disgrace.

You see, the point I'm trying to make here is that we conservatives support arm's-length entities' abilities to work without political influence by government. Take, for instance, the Alberta Economic Development Authority. These experts and captains of industry were brought in and kept at arm's length so as not to politicize the importance of the economic crystal ball gazing they were doing. They produced important research on the economy. Some of their studies included Fuel Shortages in Alberta and How to Fix Them; Water Reuse in Alberta: Experiences and Impacts on Economic Growth; Return on Innovation: Opportunities in Alberta's Innovation System; Alberta: A Global Energy Leader; Congestion Management: Vital Component of Today's Infrastructure Planning; Accelerating Broadband Enablement in Rural Alberta. We also know that these think tank or consultant-type reports are readily available or can be produced on an ad hoc basis with a contract.

When the Premier dissolved AEDA, in 2015, the staff came back to the bureaucracy and backstopped the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Economy. Now the website says that this committee exists, the last annual report says that it exists, but the phone seems to say that it has been absorbed by the line areas of the department as there is no separate area anymore.

I was a little surprised to see the STAC, the Strategic Transportation Advisory Council, on the list of ABCs to disappear. The feedback I heard from industry was that they enjoyed these round-tables to hear the issues of each mode of the transportation sector and provide feedback to the minister. I guess the minister did not. Though time-consuming and hosting costs are involved, the minister always has a chance to meet one on one with these stakeholders, and I hope that he does.

With that, Madam Speaker, Bill 21 is a good, positive step in diluting waste and red tape and bureaucratic inefficiencies that exist across the government.

However, I do want to address a point that was made by the Minister of Health – and this is about the idea of reducing red tape; I think she used the word – that this bill would be grandstanding. I find it interesting that she would use that kind of language to describe a bill that has been implemented by B.C., has been implemented by the government of Canada, under the Stephen Harper government, in order to be able to reduce red tape and the burden of red tape. In B.C. over a three-year period they were able to decrease regulatory red tape by 36 per cent.

Now, if that's grandstanding, then we need to get up and grandstand all we can because that kind of burden is what costs Albertan family businesses their livelihood. We need to make sure that we stop this kind of abuse of the people that actually create the jobs in this province. I was actually very disappointed to hear that the Deputy Premier of this government is saying that this is grandstanding. I hope that when this private member's bill, Bill 207, that I have presented to the House, comes forward, she rethinks her position on this so that we have the opportunity to have a fulsome discussion and actually see the real numbers for what they are.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members – oh, 29(2)(a). My apologies. The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to make a few comments regarding the previous speaker's

comments. You know, first of all, the Deputy Premier, when she was talking about grandstanding and a bill to reduce red tape, I believe her point, which is one that I share . . .

The Acting Speaker: Minister, please.

Mr. Bilous: This is going back to the bill and will be a question for the member opposite.

The Acting Speaker: I'm standing. Could you please sit down?

I think we deviated a little bit over to the private member's bill, and we are not focusing on actually the bill in front of us, which is Bill 21. I recognize that the Deputy Premier was asking some questions, so I allowed the member to respond in kind. However, I would like us to refocus now, if we could, please, on Bill 21. We can wait till private members' business on Monday to respond to the private member's bill, please.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My comments do go back to this bill. This is just putting my comments into context. If you would allow me a little leeway in these comments, you'll see that it does relate specifically to Bill 21, which I think members opposite – through the debate of this bill, their point has been that what this bill is doing is cleaning up some committees or bodies and previous costs associated with them as well as eliminating certain elements that will actually make it easier for business to be conducted. With those comments regarding Bill 21, not the previous member's bill, I agree.

You know, the point of a bill like this is that the legislation is needed to clean up some of these bodies, but I think my point is that our government, on an ongoing basis, looks at regulations through the lens of business as far as what benefits they provide. If they are creating impediments, then we have a thorough and robust discussion about that as far as: can we make it easier for them and for bodies to operate within the province of Alberta? Now, obviously, there are certain elements of some regs that provide specific benefits, whether environmental, health and safety, et cetera.

But the question, really, to the hon. member is that if there wasn't legislation needed to reduce barriers to doing business and it could be done through regulation – I think this was the Deputy Premier's point – doing it through regulation is more expedient, less costly, and also does not have to go through a longer process. The question to the hon. member is: would he be in favour of regulations being either adopted, amended, or discarded that would support doing business? Would that not be more efficient than bringing everything through the House via legislation?

11:40

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the question that was asked by the hon. member. I think that there's a disconnect here for the members opposite. The disconnect is clearly manifested by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This government receives an F every single year because they do not have a strategy. They're the only government that does not have a red tape reduction strategy in Canada. They talk about getting in line – I've heard this many times before – with other jurisdictions, getting up to speed with other jurisdictions. Yet with this one thing, where we have seen a real turnaround in the B.C. government in terms of their economy, red tape reduction – from 2001 to 2004 they decreased the regulatory burden by 36 per cent because they created a plan, and then they executed the plan.

What this government is saying is: we don't have a problem; we're already taking care of it. But they're not willing to share with this Assembly what the problem is. They haven't even determined what the baseline of regulation is. They haven't even shared with this group what the baseline of regulatory burden is. If the member opposite really does truly believe that we don't have a problem, that's the problem. The problem is that, first of all, you have to recognize that you've got a problem and then create a plan to be able to work it out. This is what Bill 207 is all about, being able to address the problem, make a plan. We invite the government opposite to support that bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 21?

Seeing none, I will now ask the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to please close debate.

Mr. Hinkley: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will close second reading with just a couple of comments, a thank you to the opposition for their support of Bill 21's intent and letting them know that phase 3 is under way and does indeed focus on government excellence in public and postsecondary institutions.

With that, I would close the debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing the good progress we made this morning and that we're very close to noon, I move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. today.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:44 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 1, 2017

Day 47

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 1, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and make a number of introductions, both my own and on behalf of the Minister of Education. I'd like to start out by introducing to you and to all members of the Assembly the man from whom I inherited my incredible good looks and cheerful disposition, my father, Glen Schmidt. I've learned many things from my dad over the years, not just all of the swear words but also a healthy disrespect for authority and some critical-thinking skills. I ask my father, Glen Schmidt, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Before going on to the next one, I must let you know that he learned very well not respecting authority.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With him today is a woman who deserves every order of merit that is available to a Canadian citizen, his partner for over 20 years, Judy Wilson. Judy is not only a fantastic, loving woman who cares very deeply for all of our family, but she works very hard to make sure that every family meeting is documented extensively with photographs, and she makes some of the best cabbage rolls in the whole province of Alberta. I ask Judy Wilson to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also visiting today, Mr. Speaker, is my nephew Jaden Leckie. Jaden is 14 years old and in grade 9 at Ardrossan junior-senior high school. He is shadowing his uncle the Minister of Advanced Education today to learn about what I'm doing to make life better for Alberta students and what our government is doing to make life better for all Albertans. I'm pleased to ask him to now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

I also would like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly 35 members of the NAIT radio and television program. Students in this program gain valuable skills in reporting, anchoring, and videography among other things. This program sets students up to fulfill their career options, and the teaching and direction of these individuals ensures that Albertans receive top-of-the-line education. Thank you, all, for your strong commitment to education. I ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly 30 students, teachers, and parents of the grade 6 class from Scott Robertson elementary school here in Edmonton. Scott Robertson elementary, through collaboration, focuses on developing the leadership potential in all students. Thank you for your hard work supporting Alberta's future leaders. We all look forward to seeing the amazing contributions that these young people, their teachers, and their families will bring to Alberta. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you Private (Retired) Stan Edwards, a veteran of the Dieppe Raid, that took place over 75 years ago in World War II. He has received the Canadian volunteer service medal, the defence medal, the 1939-1945 star, and the war medal 1939-1945. He is joined today by his children and grandchildren: Barb Kujala, Ron and Kathy Edwards, Kim Carter, and Bob Edwards. Mr. Edwards, thank you for your service. I would now ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Sir, I think you need to know that for individuals like yourself, who have paid such a price, that was a sincere applause. You do not get that very often.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly Jarryd Oosthuis. Jarryd is the son of Katja Oosthuis, who works in the Speaker's office, and is visiting the Legislature for bring your child to work day. Jarryd is a ninth grade student from Sir George Simpson junior high in St. Albert. He has also attended school in South Africa, the United States, and now Canada. He enjoys soccer, plays on his school's badminton team, and is an honours with distinction student. Jarryd was happy to become a permanent resident of Canada earlier this year.

Katja joined the Speaker's office in August of this year and has already proven herself to be a very friendly and hard-working asset to the team. In her time away from the Leg. Katja is a passionate volunteer with the humane society, fostering kittens and cats before they are adopted. Katja also gained permanent residency this year and is very proud to call Alberta home.

Jarryd and Katja are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you some of the most important people in my life. My partner, Will Gammon, not only supports my work in this House but supports all of us on this side of the House as the director of operations in the Alberta NDP provincial office. He supports me every day as a parent and partner and also supports my son's love of hockey as head coach of our son's hockey team. My father-in-law, Spurgeon Gammon, supports the work Will and I do and always makes time if we need him for anything. He hosts family dinners, which I truly do appreciate, and spends a lot of his time as my son's biggest hockey fan. And my son, Gabriel Babcock, is a grade 9 student at l'école Meridian Heights school in Stony Plain. I'm incredibly proud of the young giant that he is. I'm going to pull a bit of a mom moment and say that he is one of the kindest, smartest, most amazing young people I have ever met even if his sisters wouldn't always agree with me. I ask that my guests now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, we have a number of introductions today. I encourage the brevity of introductions as we move forward.

There is a school group, as I understand it. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm introducing this group for the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I would like to ask the

students from St. Richard, a green STEM academy, to rise. They are accompanied by their teacher, Daryl Chichak, and their chaperone, Mrs. Marta Van Wachem. Please join me in welcoming these students.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the members of the Metis Settlements General Council, who are in the gallery behind me here. They are here celebrating the 27th anniversary of the passing of legislation resulting in land and self-governance for those living on Métis settlements and making Alberta the only province in Canada with a recognized Métis land base entrenched in provincial statute, ensuring that Métis people in Alberta will always have a land base to call home.

Today I was pleased to join them all as we raised the Métis settlements flag in front of the Federal building, and I wear the Métis sash today in their honour. I would ask them all to stand as I read their names, beginning with the president of the Metis Settlements General Council, Gerald Cunningham; the vice-president, Darren Calliou; Dorothy Anderson; Sherry Cunningham; Blake Desjarlais; Jacqueline Bellerose; Dan St. Pierre; Arthur Tompkins; Stan Delorme; Harry Supernault; Irene Zimmer; Cory Cardinal; Ken Noskey; Greg Calliou; Herb Lehr. For any other council members who are in attendance today, please rise now, and I'll catch your names later to correct the record.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests today are seated behind me, and it's my pleasure to introduce them. They're a group who are advocates with Diabetes Canada. November is Diabetes Awareness Month, which is a time to focus attention on advocating for people living with diabetes and on prevention, research, and a cure. This year the theme of Diabetes Awareness Month is You Are the Centre of Your Diabetes Care Team. People across Canada are being encouraged to take part in the CanRisk test. Thank you to the dedicated volunteers, like those who are in our gallery today, for making life better for Albertans. I ask that Joan King along with the other staff and volunteers rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Derek Adams. Derek is a constituent and a student at Woodhaven middle school in Spruce Grove. He is here today as part of a take your child to work day program and is learning more about democracy and governance in Alberta. I would like him to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the wonderful students and instructor Clare Lazzar from CDI College, north campus, legal studies program. CDI College

offers vocational training and continuing education to adults in pursuit of a new career path in a welcoming, supportive, and collegial environment. CDI believes in giving back to the community through extensive fundraising, and I have even assisted in these fundraising efforts by volunteering to be in the dunk tank in their annual massage-athon. Proceeds from that event went to the Edmonton Firefighters Burn Treatment unit, and I'm happy to say that a cheque for over \$12,000 went there. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group from the Canadian Patient Safety Institute. This week we recognize Canadian Patient Safety Week. You may know that medication incidents are one of the leading causes of patient safety harm in health care, and most of these can be prevented. By placing a spotlight on opioids and medication safety, this campaign seeks to reduce harm related to medication use. Patient safety is an important part of ensuring all Albertans get the care that they need. I ask Chris Power, Cecilia Bloxom, and Sandi Kossey to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ms Sherrie Breese. Sherrie is the proprietor of the Lolly Pop Thrift Shop in Athabasca and the subject of my member's statement later this afternoon. I invite Sherrie to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you Garry Keller. For over 20 years Garry has had experience delivering strategic communication and political advice on domestic and international issues. Garry's experience in Canada's political landscape includes most recently serving as the chief of staff to Rona Ambrose, the Leader of the Official Opposition and interim leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. He's also served as the chief of staff to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as chief of staff to the Government House Leader, as chief of staff to the chief government whip, and on and on and on it goes, including serving as a senior policy adviser to the Prime Minister. His work has been recognized by media outlets, who have called him one of the most powerful and respected political staffers on Parliament Hill.

Perhaps, though, Mr. Speaker, his biggest challenge was serving as my chief of staff over the past summer. It was an absolute pleasure to work with him. I couldn't be more proud of the work that we did. He may have spent the last 20 years in Ottawa, but he certainly hasn't been Ottawa-washed. I invite him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of professors from China

who are here today with their program lead, Dr. Pamela Young. Every autumn the China Scholarship Council sends a group of professors to the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta, where they participate in a three-month professional development program designed to improve teaching and English skills. This year's group has a keen interest to know more about Canadian education, culture, history, and government. I'm so pleased that today they have the opportunity to learn more about Alberta's system of governance. I invite Dr. Young and her group to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Shepherd: I have an additional introduction, Mr. Speaker, if I may.

The Speaker: All right.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. I would also like to introduce to you and through you representatives of the Child Friendly Housing Coalition of Alberta. Formed in 2016, they're a nonpartisan coalition of people and organizations from across Alberta advocating for equal housing choices for all members of society, including parents with children under the age of 18. Representing the coalition are Heather MacKenzie, Jodie McKague, who first raised this issue with me in June 2015, her daughter Franka, and Kirsten Goa. They're here today for the introduction of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents of mine from the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. If you like sugar on your table and in your coffee and sweetening all your baked goods in Alberta, you have the sugar beet growers to thank. From the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers we have Melody Garner-Skiba, executive director, and Arnie Bergen-Henengouwen, president. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Family Violence Prevention Month

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize November as Family Violence Prevention Month. This month started in Hinton over 30 years ago as a local community initiative to draw attention to this devastating issue, to encourage victims to come forward, and to encourage all of us to speak out against violence. This year's theme is Reach Out; Speak Out; It Takes All of Us. Today I invite all members of this House to join me and send a powerful message that we stand with the victims and survivors of family violence and will continue to work together across party lines to end it. We all know individuals who have experienced family violence. I know that all of us recognize the tragedy of these crimes, and our hearts are with survivors and families who have been impacted. That is why we are all wearing the purple bow today, to show that we are here for all Albertans who are experiencing family violence.

It is our collective action that will ensure a prosperous future for our province and all those who live here. That is why our government and communities across the province are working together to end family violence. We are working closely with local community agencies, other orders of government, women's shelters, sexual assault services, law enforcement, health services, and others to help Albertans affected by family violence. We are funding women's shelters across the province to provide families a safe place to go to escape violence. We are supporting families to help them recover and break the cycle of violence, and we are reaching out to all Albertans to ensure each and every one of us understands how to stand up for those who are suffering. We have taken action, but there is more to do. November may be the month that is officially recognized for family violence prevention, but our support and our action must continue all year round.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we continue with responses to the ministerial statement followed immediately by the beginning of question period. I'd ask for unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

1:50

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, on November 1, to speak to all members of the Assembly about Family Violence Prevention Month in Alberta. Today marks the beginning of a month dedicated to the prevention of family violence in our province and to the protection of those who need our support.

Over 20 years ago four bold Albertan women based in Hinton were brave enough to take a stand against family violence at a time when it was considered taboo and never publicly addressed. Katherine Kennedy, Sonja Bennett, Faye Wheeler, and Glenda Carter fought against the norm and set the precedent when they created the Hinton Society for the Prevention of Family Violence and launched a campaign to empower those who faced domestic abuse and to educate society on this critically important issue. These amazing women launched a groundbreaking campaign that targeted all facets of society through school, media, public workshops, churches, and even setting up informal booths at local shopping malls. These women were determined and organized, and through their efforts they started an important discussion that continues on to this day.

Mr. Speaker, family violence destroys lives, and it's still too often wrapped in stigma and secrecy. Victims of domestic violence and abuse of all ages often feel the shame that they're alone in this struggle. That's why having a month dedicated to family violence prevention is so incredibly important. We need to continue to support those who have faced this kind of violence and those who are still healing. We need to ensure that they know they are not alone and that we as elected representatives in this House and their fellow Albertans are behind them one hundred per cent. We need to continue to create awareness about the scale of this issue and to highlight the services available for those who are looking for safety.

To the Albertans who are currently facing family violence, my heart and the hearts of every member in this Assembly go out to you. Know that you are brave, you are valued, and you have people in your corner. I would encourage all of my colleagues to engage with your local communities this month, whether it's wearing purple, attending or hosting a community event, putting up Family

Violence Prevention Month posters in your community, or simply collecting supplies for an emergency centre.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank from the bottom of my heart the front-line staff that work tirelessly in emergency centres, counselling facilities, and through community service providers to provide the supports for those facing family violence.

Every man, woman, and child in this province deserves to feel safe and loved in their own home, and I know that I speak for my entire caucus when I say that we will always fight to ensure that the rights of victims are protected and that they have the services that they require and that they have a legal system that will work for them and not against them.

Today, in recognition of Family Violence Prevention Month, I would ask that all members of this Assembly reflect on the amazing work that has already been done on the issues as we look ahead to the vitally important work that still needs to be done.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent of the Assembly to allow a representative of the Alberta Party caucus and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster to respond to the minister's statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ms McPherson: November is Family Violence Prevention Month, and I'm honoured to rise today and recognize such an important initiative.

Hard work by community advocates in 1986 in Hinton led to the creation of Family Violence Prevention Month in our province and helped bring light to a mostly secret issue that is far too pervasive. This issue affects everybody, and it can take many forms: child abuse; incest; spousal, domestic, and sibling abuse; parent and elder abuse. We all know someone who has been impacted even if they haven't spoken up. My heart goes out to those who face violence at home, have grown up in households impacted by it, and those who have watched their friends and loved ones struggle with family violence in their lives. Discussing family violence is deeply personal and can be very painful, and I commend everyone who has sought to heal from family violence and understand that not everyone is at a place where they can heal yet.

I ask myself: what can we do? How can we find ways to work toward healing, toward healthy families and healthy relationships, toward healthy relationships that can empower people rather than constrain them in narrowly defined roles? We can talk about family violence without shame and without reservation, knowing that by sharing our experiences with one another, we can begin to eliminate the secrecy and entrenched inequality that has allowed family violence to exist. We can take a stand that shows people that family violence is unacceptable, and we can support those agencies that do such great work in supporting and educating both survivors and offenders.

I'm reminded of the courageous speech given in this House by the Member for Lethbridge-East, who transformed the conversation about family violence in this Chamber, and I'm grateful for her bravery and for how she is a role model for anyone facing family violence.

We all have a role to play in eliminating family violence from our society, standing beside the survivors, and I'm grateful we're talking about it today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for allowing me the opportunity to briefly address a few remarks to this issue. I certainly concur with everything that has been said by the previous speakers about the gravity and the seriousness of family violence and that this is a scourge that we must work constantly to erase from our province, but I do want to address one aspect of this that has not been addressed thus far. It is one that is very familiar, sadly, to me, and that is that animal abuse is a part of domestic family violence and that animals are members of our families.

In fact, in many homes animals act as the silent sentinels for a more dangerous situation that exists within our homes, and sadly many people who are experiencing family violence do not flee an abusive situation out of concern for family pets that they can't take with them. That, Mr. Speaker, is a concern. Now, it's a concern that, thankfully, has been recognized by some agencies. For example, the Calgary humane society and the Calgary Police Service are working together already to try to erase some of the problems and to recognize in an early intervention way that animal abuse is an early indicator of a propensity for domestic abuse. This has been known for centuries, and it is time that we included animal abuse in the conversation.

As a veterinarian speaking for the silent, speaking for those who also suffer abuse at the hands of those they are supposed to love, the ones they are supposed to trust, I ask everyone to consider that if we're going to effectively address family violence, let's address the violence and the abuse that is directed at all members of the family, whether they have two legs or four.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Pipeline Approval

Mr. Nixon: The NDP continue to claim that they stand up for energy sector workers. Unfortunately, those in the sector don't seem to agree. The president of the Petroleum Services Association has blasted the NDP and its federal Liberal allies for failing to stand up for our industry. They point to the cancellation of Energy East as another blow to investor confidence. For the last two days we've tried in vain to get agreement on a simple motion that would call for the government of Canada to remove upstream and downstream emissions from pipeline assessments. Will the government finally agree to stand with us and stand for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do understand that the members opposite are struggling with their staffing resources right now, but I would have thought that we could have not completely recycled our questions from yesterday. That being said, the reality is, as I've said before, that our government has stood against the federal government on the issue of downstream emissions. We actually support the matter of upstream emissions because that's how you move forward on the matter of climate change, which is what we have to do if we're going to secure a market for our stable and sustainable energy industry.

Mr. Nixon: What a shame, Mr. Speaker, to watch the Premier of Alberta out here laugh with her caucus about people's lives and people's livelihoods. What we're talking about right now is hundreds of thousands of jobs. In this case why would a unanimous motion

from this House demanding removing upstream and downstream emissions . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.
Keep going.

Mr. Nixon: Why would a unanimous motion from this House demanding the removal of upstream and downstream emissions from pipeline assessments be in any way controversial? Why won't this government do what they say they believe and stand up for this issue, stand up to the Justin Trudeau Liberals, and make . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Lots of students in the place today, folks. Let's keep the tone on both sides positive, please, everyone.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said a number of times now in response to this question, the reality is that our government has indicated to the federal government that we don't believe that it is fair for downstream emissions to be part of the calculation, and we are working furiously on means of ensuring that it does not end up being a key part of it.

But, Mr. Speaker, upstream emissions do matter. That's how we say to the world that we are a responsible energy producer. That's how we make sure that we have more markets, not fewer, and that's how we got a pipeline to tidewater, something that the members opposite could not do because they wanted to stick their heads in the sand, pretend there was no problem, deny science, and generally stop the growth of our energy industry.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. This government has got two cancelled pipelines and does not have one built yet. I think it's clear what's happening here. The NDP raised polite objections to Ottawa's invasion of Alberta's provincial jurisdiction so they can tell the voters that they've done all they could. No, they have not. They're simply checking off a box and moving along to happy times with their Trudeau allies as per normal. For once could we finally see some emotion from the NDP when Ottawa attacks our province and our citizens and the people that they are elected to protect? When will the Alberta NDP finally stand with Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that what I will not do is have temper tantrums on Twitter in order to politically grandstand. Instead, I will continue with our government's record of getting results. For instance, when you talk about PSAC, we worked with the federal government to leverage \$250 million towards orphan well reclamation, creating 1,600 jobs in a sector that was looking for work. That's how you get things done. You work with people, you don't yell at them, and you don't grandstand.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier means that she won't have a temper tantrum again on Twitter.

Energy Policies

Mr. Nixon: While our drilling activity is slowly crawling back, it's still 30 per cent lower than 2014 levels. Yes, I know the NDP will try to blame the global oil price, and sure, that has played a role. But if that's the only reason, why have things bounced back much

more quickly in places like North Dakota and Texas? PSAC says that drilling growth could be much stronger, but unfortunately the government seems to be doing everything in its power to deter growth through new taxes, more new taxes, more new taxes, and even more regulations. When will this NDP shift strategies so that our energy sector can thrive? Just get out of the way.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What our government did do under the leadership of our Minister of Energy is we brought in a modernized royalty framework which actually stimulated – stimulated – economic growth, particularly in the energy sector. That's why, for instance, in Alberta we have more new wells than we do, say, in our neighbour of Saskatchewan. In addition, we have been working very hard to stimulate the economy. That's why the economy in Alberta is growing by over 4 per cent while next door in Saskatchewan, following their plan, every time you check, the projections are ramped down. We picked the right way . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, over the past two years we've seen tens of billions of energy investment dollars flee this province. Oh, the dollars aren't leaving the energy sector; they're just leaving Alberta as Albertans and investors realize Alberta is increasingly closed for business under this government. Companies are pulling out investments. Instead, they're moving to Texas and North Dakota but also places like Iran and Kazakhstan. Let us use common sense. Isn't it better to have oil from an ethical player like Alberta rather than deplorable dictatorships abroad? When will this NDP government stop driving business out of our province and start standing up for our oil industry?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Is Texas a dictatorship?

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the last election we made it very clear – and it was in a way that people voted for – that we are not interested in engaging in a race to the bottom with Iran or Kazakhstan or with Donald Trump. That's not what we're here to do. We are here to build Alberta. We are here to support our energy industry as we develop a sustainable and environmentally responsible energy industry that is able to compete world-wide for decades and decades to come because that's what the whole world is looking for. Sometimes it takes leadership to look more than a year or two ahead. I know it's a little hard for those guys. They're looking 10 years behind. But that's why we got elected and they didn't.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, despite what NDP supporters might want to think, oil is not going out of style any time soon. The International Energy Agency shows increased demand for the foreseeable future. That oil is going to come from somewhere; why not Alberta? Unfortunately, the NDP fellow travellers are working to ensure that oil doesn't come from ethical players like Alberta. They are working to land lock our province and our resources. Two pipelines have already been killed under this government, and now a third is in the crosshairs. When will this Premier and this NDP government stop giving the Trudeau Liberals a free pass, start denouncing what they're doing, start denouncing them sabotaging our economy, and stand up for Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite are so politically motivated to talk down Alberta that they just get so confused and disrupted by the facts. You know, in October of 2017 the BMO provincial forecast: “Alberta’s economy has returned to growth, and could potentially lead the country this year with 4.1%.” Meanwhile in Saskatchewan the economy is underperforming the national average. In September of 2017 TD Bank’s forecast said that it’s “full steam ahead for Alberta.” Our plan is working. Jobs are up, manufacturing is up, investment is up, and growth is up. That’s because we are standing with Albertans, not cutting our way to some alleged prosperity. This is the right choice.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the NDP promised that its massive new carbon tax would gain us a so-called social licence, but since then we’ve seen two massive pipeline projects die, Northern Gateway and Energy East, and the same environmental zealots are working to kill off Trans Mountain pipeline, too. That makes three. We’ve given an inch, and the opponents of our oil and gas sector have taken a mile. The president of PSAC said it the best, quote: that social licence thing is a myth; it is a set of goalposts that will never stop moving. End quote. Will the NDP admit that social licence is a failure?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will admit is that our plan is working. Jobs are up, wages are up, drilling is up, production is up, and it’s because of our climate leadership plan. That was the plan that secured two pipelines. One pipeline is in production and in construction as we speak. Make no mistake. The second pipeline, Trans Mountain, will be built. [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks, I don’t want to stop the clock, so allow me to hear around the rest of you here the answers to the questions and the questions.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the NDP’s own allies are actively working to kill the Trans Mountain pipeline. Their friends in the government of B.C. have said that they’ll use every tool available to stop the pipeline, and two of this government’s own appointees are more encouraged than ever. Ms Berman, the NDP’s hand-picked oil sands adviser, has pledged to stand in front of bulldozers to stop the pipeline. Ms Mahon, another NDP star pick, is currently training activists how to physically block the pipeline. Will the NDP at least admit that its social licence plan has failed as far as two of their own appointees are concerned? [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. members.
The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we know that pipelines to tidewater are critical. They’re not just critical for Alberta, but they’re critical for our country. They supply good jobs, they help the economy, and, as I said before, make no mistake: the Trans Mountain pipeline will be built. It has federal approval. The federal approval was because of our climate leadership plan.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the city of Burnaby is actively working to stop the Trans Mountain pipeline right now. They’re dragging their heels on the issuing of municipal permits for construction. The company has asked that the National Energy Board intervene as the city is clearly overstepping its bounds. A few days ago we asked this government of Alberta if they would back Kinder Morgan’s request, and the government said that they’d check with the company. Has that happened? Is the NDP ready to step up and stand up for pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, pipelines are critical, especially to tidewater. We have one customer which goes south. We need to expand our borders and our access to market. We are doing that, and to be clear, the Trans Mountain pipeline has a permit to be built. It has federal approval. Make no mistake. It is going to be built.

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

Cannabis Distribution

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One hundred and sixty-eight million dollars: the government could do a lot with \$168 million. It could hire a thousand teachers, a thousand nurses, fund a cardiac cath lab in Red Deer, and pay for a few schools, to boot. But this government is seriously thinking about spending \$168 million or possibly more to create a brand new government bureaucracy to sell cannabis. To the Premier: will you commit here and now to not establish an expensive, inefficient government retail model that would all but guarantee the black market would continue to thrive?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, there are a number of very complicated issues that our minister is working through very, very furiously to get resolved as it relates to implementing the directive of the federal government around cannabis. There are a number of complex issues, and there are a number of consequences to each of those decisions. She is working very hard, and she’s working very hard to ensure that we meet the following principles, that we kill the black market or reduce the black market as much as we can, that we keep people safe, and that we keep people’s health and safety uppermost. With that in mind, we are deliberating on how to do that best, and we’ll have more . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Premier.

Mr. Clark: If safety is important, you’ll go with the private model because the AGLC reports 98 per cent compliance for private liquor distribution.

One of the four objectives, as you say, is to eliminate the black market, but most recently one of your MLAs has speculated that you may be considering a franchise model. Aside from this not being one of the two models contemplated on your cannabis framework website, there is a significant risk that an inflexible retail model wouldn’t meet consumer demand, allowing the black market to thrive. Again to the Premier: is your government actually considering a franchise system, or is it just unauthorized speculation from an MLA?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work we've done around cannabis and of the consultation that we've gone out with, not once but twice, to ensure that we're talking to Albertans, that we're getting to all perspectives. We've had over 80 meetings with different stakeholders and different groups with different perspectives on things. We're going to take that all into account, we're going to make decisions, and we're not going to engage in wild speculation.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, if the government does do the right thing and allow Alberta entrepreneurs to operate cannabis retail shops, another important question is: who will be allowed to invest? There are potential benefits to allowing vertical integration, which is not part of Alberta's liquor retailing system. Cannabis producers understand the security considerations, and they understand the market. Again to the Premier: if you do allow private investment in retail cannabis, have you given consideration to allowing producers to open and operate retail stores?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, we've heard a lot of different perspectives from across Alberta. We do certainly understand that Albertans support our main values, which are to ensure that we are getting the black market out and to ensure that we are keeping the health and safety of children and of our roads and of our workplaces at forefront of mind. We intend to do exactly that as we work forward. Obviously, we've done a lot of thinking about this and a lot of modelling and a lot of conversations, but this is not the time for wild speculation. This is a very important issue.

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

Service Dog Training and Certification

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service dogs are vital supports for people with disabilities. Long wait-lists, unmanageable expenses, and restrictive legislation created by the previous government have resulted in Alberta's reality, only approximately 80 to 100 active service dog teams. In March of 2017 our government announced a pilot that would seek to improve the qualified list of trainers and testers. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: how has this pilot progressed in the last seven months?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know that Albertans have faced long wait-lists for too many years, and that is why we are taking steps to make life better for Albertans with disabilities. Last spring we took action to increase access to service dogs with \$250,000 of funding for a new training pilot. We are supporting more schools to train dogs, and we are making it easier for owner-trained dogs to get public access.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. There has been a great deal of work across the country developing national service dog team standards. How will the Alberta regulations and standards align with these national standards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question and for her advocacy on this issue. As I said, we will continue to monitor the progress of this pilot in our work, and in the meantime our new regulation makes it easier for Albertans with disabilities to have their service dog qualified. From March to July several organizations tested Alberta's new standard and qualified list process. The new qualified list of providers will be available in the coming weeks.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Not all service animals come from accredited organizations. Some are trained by their owners. How will this pilot support non traditionally trained service dog teams in terms of testing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our new regulation allows dogs that are trained by their owners to take a test and become qualified in Alberta. Through our new regulation we are certainly making life better for Albertans with disabilities, and unfortunately the opposition wants to make life harder. They view support for Albertans with disabilities as a giveaway and want to slash 20 per cent of that, and we won't let that happen. We will continue to work with Albertans with disabilities to make sure they get the supports they need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals (continued)

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP has repeatedly talked about getting our resources to tidewater, and unfortunately all they do is talk. According to the Petroleum Services Association, who are industry experts, you know, those people that actually work in the industry, the only thing this government has been successful at is destroying investor confidence, and it's time for the Alberta Premier and Trudeau to stand up for the oil industry. The PSAC president may agree with me when I say that this government needs a proctologist to do a cranium exam if they think that Albertans are buying that the carbon tax has bought this mythical social licence. When will this government stop the talk and start the walk?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when we talk about investment in Alberta, we're proud of Alberta companies who have stepped up and are doubling down on oil sands investment. We're proud of the recent Japanese investment in Alberta of \$2 billion. Those investments are because of our climate leadership plan, which is bringing carbon out of the oil and becoming a product that people want. We're working very hard for access to tidewater. Again, we have one pipeline under construction . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Given that that is more rhetoric and not an answer . . .

The Speaker: No preambles, please.

Mr. Loewen: . . . and given that when it was announced in 2015, the carbon tax was to reduce emissions and buy social licence for pipelines and that earlier this week the Finance minister claimed that

the carbon tax was responsible for the reduction of small-business taxes and that this summer the government claimed that it was for green line transit, Mr. Speaker, this government needs to get its story straight. I believe in recycling as much as anyone, but could the minister please explain how many times the same money from the carbon tax can be recycled and reannounced?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the climate leadership plan and the carbon levy money are being used to innovate and make Alberta greener not just in the energy industry, which is full of innovation and doing a lot of things to make the carbon greener in the oil industry, but we're making investments in things like the green line and green technology. Unfortunately, our opposition would make \$9 billion in cuts to those structures, which would take away the green line in Calgary, for example, something we don't want. We're working very hard in Alberta to create green . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. member, no preambles. Second supplemental. Go ahead.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the carbon tax was supposed to buy social licence for pipelines and that now Albertans just want a return for their defective social licence, which was simply not as advertised, and that this government claims two pipelines as a result of the carbon tax when in reality two pipelines have been cancelled and their friends are protesting the others and that just like the St. Lawrence Seaway downstream of Montreal, this doesn't pass the smell test, when will this government consider their own toxic emissions, simply admit that their crowning achievement is an abject failure, repeal the carbon tax, and start supporting Alberta with actions, not just words?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, our climate leadership plan was cited by the Prime Minister when he gave permission for the two pipelines, one of which is being built as we speak. But other investments that are being done with that with respect to the energy industry are \$998 million for large-scale renewable energy, bioenergy, technology, coal community transition, and other climate leadership plan initiatives. Because of the climate leadership plan we're looking at \$566 million for energy efficiency, \$565 million for the small business . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Workers' Compensation Board Surplus Funds Support for Small Business

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, today the CFIB released a report showing that workers' compensation boards across the country are retaining approximately \$6.8 billion in surplus funds, with Alberta's share amounting to \$1.9 billion. Typically Alberta employers see rebates, but in the wake of the WCB review panel report Alberta job creators have yet to see anything come back in 2016. To the Minister of Labour: will you confirm that your government will not be transferring WCB surpluses into general government revenue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, all employees have the right to a safe, fair, and healthy work environment, and our review of the WCB is supporting that to happen. We are absolutely committed to working with the WCB, who

works with workers throughout the province to make sure that they're treated fairly, and we'll be following the recommendations.

Mr. Hunter: Given that Alberta employers paid their premiums in good faith with the understanding that any surpluses would be returned to them at the end of the year and given that all the additional costs imposed on Alberta businesses by this NDP government are really starting to add up, to the same minister: will you do the right thing and direct the WCB to follow past practices and immediately return the \$1.9 billion to Alberta employers? That could really help them right now.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it's absolutely crucial that Albertans feel confident that the Workers' Compensation Board provide fair compensation and meaningful rehabilitation. The last comprehensive review was back 15 years ago. Certainly, we're working hard to make sure that Albertans are treated fairly, employers and workers, and we know that the opposition would be cutting billions from our budget and making it much harder for Albertans.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that in addition to corporate tax increases, minimum wage increases, and the carbon tax, the federal government now wants to impose punishing new tax increases on Canadian small businesses and given that this NDP government has consistently shown a propensity not to stand up to the Trudeau Liberals and fight for Alberta businesses, Minister, will you not help them now when they really need it? Small businesses desperately need you to champion them.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. Our government has stood with and stands up for small businesses. We know that Alberta small businesses have a larger impact on the economy than businesses anywhere in the country. That's why we reduced the small-business tax rate by a third. We are the second lowest in the country. There are a number of initiatives that we've introduced that are supporting businesses, whether they are starting up or they're looking at growing, including the investor tax credit, which will see Albertans have the ability to invest in companies in their own backyard. We support small business. The opposition would cut billions to hurt businesses even more. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Opioid Use Prevention and Treatment

Mr. Fildebrandt: In March the opposition asked for an emergency debate on the opioid crisis in Alberta. All members of this House worked together to help those battling addiction. Since the minister struck the opioid emergency commission six months ago, it has held just three meetings and made only one recommendation, the creation of safe injection sites. Between April 1 and June 30 119 people have died from opioid overdoses. Will the minister please tell this House why the emergency commission has not yet provided any recommendation on addictions treatment or prevention?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so happy to be able to comment on this. Just earlier today the opioid commission posted a series of other recommendations. I have accepted all of the

commission's recommendations to date. These include funding substance abuse treatment for doctors' offices at primary care networks, funding for indigenous communities to develop resources tailored to their specific needs, and exploration of supervised injectable opioid replacement therapy for Albertans who've not responded to other treatments. We've also made improvements and expansions to the provincial naloxone program as well as expanding treatment across the province.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, given that in April a 17-year-old boy from a village in my constituency was thrown from his horse, breaking his spine, and was discharged from the hospital with 80 hydromorphone tablets, which pulled this previously clean kid down into the world of addictions and street drugs, and given that he went to his mother seeking help but that in southeastern Alberta there was nothing available for him, what is this government doing to ensure that youth have access to detox treatment in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I would like to express my condolences for the member's constituent. That is a tale that is far too often told throughout Alberta, which is why we've been working very carefully with the members of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta to ensure that not only are opioids prescribed properly in our province but that there's also an extended treatment plan that involves tapering off in appropriate doses and supports as an individual ends their prescription period.

With respect to the question around treatment, we have worked to expand access to opioid replacement therapy treatments across the province, including telehealth, through . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that the family of this boy paid \$18,000 out of pocket to send him to a youth detox centre in Winnipeg and that his mother came to me not asking for the government to reimburse them but to ensure that in the future our youth have access to detox treatment in a timely fashion and given that I've seen first-hand the devastation that the opioid crisis is having in rural and First Nations communities, will the minister speed up her work to provide real results to prevent and treat youth addiction in our rural and First Nations communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. One of the key findings of the opioid response commission has been that there is a need for additional services across our province. We have moved forward on expanding many of the treatments that are currently available. There is more work to be done. The work that we have done is saving lives, but our work will continue.

2:30 E-mail Management in Government

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, yesterday this government outrageously claimed to be the most open and transparent that anyone had ever seen. The facts are different. Just ask the Information Commissioner. The facts are that the Premier's most trusted advisers and inner circle, Brian Topp and Anne McGrath, sent a total of two e-mails between them in their entire time at the Premier's office. No one believes this. The Premier needs to come clean. What are the Premier's key decision-makers hiding from Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have stated, we believe that government should be open and transparent. These are values that we work on very hard. Access to information is an important issue that we take very seriously. That's why we're practically sharing more information with the public than the government has ever before.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issue of e-mails, certainly I can attest to the fact that our ministerial offices receive training in terms of FOIP. With respect to what types of records need to be saved . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this secretive government has welcomed the opportunity to clear the air on the mass deletion of 800,000 government records unearthed by the Official Opposition, will the Premier reassure the people of Alberta that her innermost circle has not, is not, will not be using private e-mail servers to conduct government business and hide from Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've stated, we welcome the investigation, and we're confident that our actions with respect to records management are in line with the law. The opposition might like to yell and scream more than they like to listen, but I would like to give some facts to put in context. The government of Alberta processes approximately 1 million incoming and outgoing e-mails each and every day. When we put 800,000 in context, it might sound huge, but I think we need to put it in context of the government of Alberta, not our personal e-mail inboxes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: Given that the United Conservative opposition uncovered a shady scheme to reward government employees for deleting records and since yesterday this minister admitted that these incentives were not allowed by government policies, can the minister please update the House: what other rule-breaking, illegal government activities is her government turning a blind eye to?

The Speaker: I caution again the use of certain words and the implications that come along with them.

The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would invite the member opposite to wait upon the results of the Privacy Commissioner. I certainly intend to take her guidance on this issue, although he seems more interested in a smear campaign despite the fact that his own leader of his own party absolutely refuses to abide by honesty and transparency and the promises that he's made to Albertans. That's why I'm so concerned by the fact that Jason Kenney . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Ms McLean: . . . has continued to break a promise to Albertans with respect to disclosure of his list of donors.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
A point of order was noted.
The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Carbon Levy and Agricultural Costs

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition has been warning this government that their carbon tax, like their federal pal's plan, will do nothing to help emissions but continue to punish farmers and consumers. While it's long been maintained by this side that agriculture provides a carbon sink, a federal ministerial memo has now confirmed this. Minister, will your government stop your war on Alberta's farmers and roll back plans to increase the carbon tax January 1?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. In my travels across the province talking to producers, processors, importers, exporters, they don't ask me about the carbon levy, about what a burden it is. They ask me what more they can do to do their part on the climate leadership policy. They believe it's the right thing to do, as we do. Obviously, they do not.

Thank you.

Mr. Strankman: Again, Mr. Speaker, given that this recent federal memorandum, which I will happily table, shows that a carbon tax of \$50 per tonne will cost the average farmer \$3,700 per year in increased costs without any measurable lowering of emissions – in fact, the same document states that Canadian agriculture is creating more economic activity without increasing its GHG emissions – Minister, do you have any internal briefing notes, memos, or research documents disproving this federal memo's findings and, if so, would you table them in this House?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of this government's climate leadership policy. It also extends to the agricultural community. The agricultural community is looking for those incentives to be able to do their part for climate leadership, to do their part to lower emissions, to do their part to diversify this economy. When you lower your emissions, when you take advantage of the climate leadership plan, you also grow economically. Our farmers know that, and I'm assuming that eventually this side also will clue in to that fact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Strankman: Given that this memorandum also discusses a regional disparity between east and west – these ag input costs are primarily due to the different sources of electricity available to farmers; farmers in Alberta are punished financially because of the abundance of fossil fuels – Minister, will you admit that your carbon tax is more about punishing Albertans for certain geological realities and your negative ideological slants rather than actually reducing pollution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The facts will speak for themselves. We had some major investments in agriculture in just this past year. The Cavendish expansion in Lethbridge is the largest expansion in Lethbridge's history, a \$360 million expansion. Champion Petfoods near Spruce Grove will be able to increase their plant. It's a \$250 million expansion. These expansions are taking place because agriculture in Alberta is robust, will continue to be robust, and will continue to be even more robust because of our climate leadership plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Unharvested 2017 Crops

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although the grain harvest seems to have gone well in much of the province, many parts of north-central and northeast Alberta are not so fortunate. Because of the wet spring many farmers were forced to seed later in the season and are now scrambling to bring in the crops against rain and snow. To the minister of agriculture: could the minister update the House on the harvest progress to date and where there might be areas of concern?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Last year's harvest was certainly a challenge, and that continued into the spring, with wet conditions in many parts of the province. While crops in some regions did get planted later than usual, producers have been very busy this fall, and the vast majority of the harvest is in. As of this week about 98.6 per cent of crops have been harvested, leaving about 170,000 acres still unharvested, compared to 1 million last year. I'm being very optimistic this year that our harvest is going very well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the number of farmers that may be impacted this year – I'm glad to hear it's a few less than it looked like a week ago – what plans does AFSC have in place to expedite claims, adjustments, and settlements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. First off, I'd like to thank the crop commissions from Team Alberta for their work representing their members, providing the AFSC, the department, and my office with day-to-day information throughout the harvest. This valuable insight comes to how the government and AFSC can help producers get crops in the bin.

Last season was marred with very difficult weather. In response to this I directed AFSC to take action to streamline its process in order to deal with the high volume of claims. This season we've seen much better weather for harvest, so process has not been an issue. That said, AFSC and department staff learned a lot from last year's harvest, and we'll look into ways to be able to expedite . . .

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that last year many farmers in my riding questioned whether the present insurance coverage is sufficient in how it addresses their costs and covers their needs, in the recent talks with our federal partners was there any discussion on improving the program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. Taxpayers have long been supporting crop insurance as a very valuable way for our farmers to manage business risk so that they can put food on Alberta's tables and onto the market. The RME programs are robust and largely work well, but sometimes it's good to see if they can work even better. This was a topic during federal-provincial discussions, and we're currently undergoing a review of

business risk management products within the current federal-provincial agreement. As part of this review last week I had a round-table with agriculture stakeholders to find out where more of those opportunities for improvement are, and I look forward to more opportunities to discuss with producers.

Data Security in Postsecondary Institutions

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect that when they provide private information to public institutions, this same information is kept secure and is not to be used or held in jeopardy. Last year the University of Calgary's information and data systems were held for ransom, and the university was locked out of their information system by a third party, a hacker if you will. The university was forced to spend 20,000 ransom dollars to unlock their data systems, which they paid, I assume, with taxpayers' dollars. As the Minister of Advanced Education, what specifically have you done to assist the university to ensure this does not happen again?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you to the Member for Highwood for that question. Of course, I did send out a letter to all of the institutions in Alberta to address these issues of cybersecurity. We are convening a working group of members from each of those institutions as well as the government department to look into the issue, to share best practices, and to make sure that these kinds of security breaches don't happen again.

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, given that, interestingly enough, this year Grant MacEwan's information systems were also hacked and their information and data systems were manipulated by criminals to the extent that 11.8 million taxpayer dollars were extorted, redirected, and lost, can the minister tell us specifically how his department is assisting these institutions that he is responsible for and how he will reassure taxpayers that this will not happen again? Not just a letter.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, after that incident came to light, I asked the board of Grant MacEwan to conduct an investigation and provide a report to me. We had a preliminary report submitted to us a couple of months ago, and a full report will be submitted to us in the fullness of time. Of course, we're very concerned about these incidents. We're working with our institutions to make sure that all of the proper financial controls are in place so that these incidents don't happen again and that taxpayer dollars that are going to students are used for that purpose and not stolen by bad people out there.

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a pattern here. Perhaps the minister in conjunction with, oh, say, the Solicitor General: please explain to Albertans what specifically they are doing to prevent this type of criminal activity from happening again and again. What exactly are they doing to get the 12 million taxpayer dollars back from these criminals?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, as I said in my previous answer to the member, of course, we asked MacEwan University to provide us with the results of the full investigation. We continue to make sure that all of our institutions have the best financial controls in place so that we prevent these things from happening again. There is an ongoing investigation into the particular matter the member raises, and once that matter is concluded, I will endeavour to inform the House of the results of that investigation to make sure that we've done all we could to recover taxpayers' dollars, Mr. Speaker.

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

Highway 1 and 791 Intersection Safety

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jaydon Sommerfeld tragically lost his life at the age of 17 in Chestermere in June of 2015. His parents, my friends Kenton and Sheri Sommerfeld, and the entire city of Chestermere have looked at measures to improve safety. In fact, I was out with Sheri a couple of weeks ago at the intersection, and she put flowers there for her son, where he was killed. Minister, I have begged this government to do something to improve the safety of this intersection. An acceleration lane was added on highway 1 going west, and the speed limit has now been decreased to 80 kilometres an hour, which has actually made this intersection a whole lot more dangerous. I'm asking: what will the government do to improve the safety at this intersection?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can tell the hon. member that I have met with the mayor following this incident, and the department has studied it closely and has implemented a number of measures, including acceleration lanes and so on. So it is my view that the steps that have been taken will make the intersection or have made the intersection more safe. If the hon. member wishes to discuss with me why she doesn't think that's the case, I'm happy to do that and pleased to listen to what her concerns are.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's actually made it more dangerous.

Given that the concerned residents of Chestermere were actually invited to participate in an open house in April of 2017 and presented options for improving the safety at the intersection and given that many options are far too expensive given the economic downturn and the hemorrhaging budget deficit, the parents voted overwhelmingly in favour of a set of traffic lights that, using common sense, only need to be running during school hours at a cost of about \$800,000, so why hasn't the government listened to the people of Chestermere? Can you please explain to me what you know that we don't?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the department did evaluate that option, and quite frankly I think it would make the intersection and the highway very much less safe. We're going from a highway where the speed limit is 100 kilometres an hour or 110 kilometres an hour, then you've got to slow the traffic down, and then you put a red light there that only operates part of the time. You know, you create a lot of opportunities for very serious rear-end accidents and so on. So the department's professional assessment is that this particular solution would not make the intersection more safe but actually quite the opposite.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, in the evaluation given by Alberta Transportation, they actually made it clear that this option of reducing the speed does nothing to address the root causes of the collision. In fact, it's in the report. Given that this reduction contributed to new hazards and that the school buses don't even turn there at this intersection, can the minister please invoke some common sense and listen to the people, install a set of traffic lights

at that intersection so that anybody coming onto highway 1, all drivers leaving the high school can drive safely, or does somebody else need to die?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, of course, we all mourn the tragic death of the young man, but we want to make sure that this kind of thing doesn't happen again. If we're slowing down the traffic and that doesn't work in the hon. member's opinion, then adding a red light that only operates intermittently is going to actually create greater hazards, and it is not something that traffic experts recommend at all.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Energy Policies

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By now you probably might have heard that the Petroleum Services Association of Canada, PSAC, lambasted our Premier and our Prime Minister for not standing up for the oil and gas industry.

The PSAC president said, quote, it's totally irresponsible that Canada is not getting its oil and gas to tidewater, to other parts of the world. Mr. Speaker, this is just common sense. Karen Mahon in her petroleum-made kayaks should have been out protesting the city of Victoria, not Kinder Morgan, for dumping untreated sewage into the ocean.

The PSAC president also said that the social licence thing is a myth; it's a set of goalposts that will never stop moving. He is right. You cannot tame a tiger when your head is in its mouth. He said that the number of wells to be drilled in Alberta could have been higher, but investor confidence is low, and the cancellation of Energy East is a blow to investor confidence.

This Premier's NDP celebrated the cancellation of the Northern Gateway pipeline. Coupled with the carbon tax going up by 50 per cent in just two months, carbon leakage to the U.S.A. will accelerate. Our Legislature passed my Motion 505, which, if implemented, would have brought more Alberta oil to replace dictator oil in the Canadian market.

2:50

I have written to the Transport minister, Marc Garneau, opposing the unconstitutional tanker ban in B.C. One can only hope for the arrival of Jason Kenney's United Conservative Party government to let the world know that Alberta is open for business again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Excuse me. I would try Edmonton-Castle Downs. My apologies.

Dieppe

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 19, 1942, the 14th Canadian Army Tank Regiment took part in Operation Jubilee and landed on the beaches of Dieppe, France. As the tanks came to shore, they were brought to a halt by German fire and were trapped on the beach. They managed to form a protective ring of steel around the infantry who were under fire, and their efforts helped in the withdrawal of many soldiers. The valiant tankers fought until all their ammunition had been expended. All the tanks that landed

were captured along with 167 men. Thirteen men, including the commanding officer, were killed in action.

Mr. Stan Edwards, who I introduced earlier this afternoon, was a private at the time of landing on Dieppe. This summer he returned to Dieppe after 75 years to take part in the unveiling ceremony of a monument dedicated to those who died or were captured.

At a ceremony held in Calgary this summer, I was honoured to meet Trooper (Retired) Tommy Baker and Tank Gunner (Retired) Bill Stewart. Another veteran, Trooper (Retired) Bernard Johnson, also lives in Calgary. Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Baker, and Mr. Stewart were not able to attend today.

Mr. Edwards and Mr. Stewart joined the Calgary tank regiment at the same time. While in Dieppe they were part of that valiant effort to protect the infantry. Both were taken as prisoners of war. To this day they remain close friends.

I want to thank these Albertans, Trooper (Retired) Johnson, Trooper (Retired) Baker, Tank Gunner (Retired) Stewart, and Private (Retired) Edwards, for your sacrifice. To those who paid the ultimate price, to surviving veterans, to serving members and their families across Alberta and this nation: thank you. Lest we forget.

2017 Municipal Elections

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, as you know, a couple of weeks ago Alberta cities and municipalities held elections for town councils. I believe everyone here understands and appreciates the time, the effort, and the dedication that all candidates put forward in their bids to be elected. Today I want to thank everyone who put their names forward for public office, and I want to congratulate all those elected. It takes a lot of grit and confidence to step forward, and it takes even more once you're in office.

As provincially elected officials we have the honour of working with our municipal counterparts regardless of political leaning, and I'd like to take this opportunity to remind reeves, councillors, and mayors that their duty is not a light one but one which involves standing up for constituents and working for what's best for them.

Increasing tax burdens is not the way to do that, so I encourage each town council to exercise fiscal conservatism so that their cities and towns do not struggle with ballooning debt from the federal and provincial governments in addition to their own. There are lessons to be learned, Mr. Speaker, and not every government is a good example to follow, especially the provincial and federal governments, I might add. However, they can give you advice on good grooming techniques and selfies.

I urge these new municipal governments to encourage small business and industry to invest in their areas so that residents can see additional jobs and prosperity. I urge them not to put any ideology before the needs and concerns of the people they serve. I caution them not to make enemies of business by taking them to court or creating reasons for businesses to file lawsuits. Rather, I encourage each elected official to use common sense, so often lacking in government, to work with businesses and individuals to create healthy, prosperous towns, cities, and regions.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the Assembly to extend the Orders of the Day to completion past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Athabasca District Business Awards

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 19 of this year I was delighted to attend the fifth annual Athabasca District Chamber of Commerce business awards night. There was a great turnout, especially considering it was a good night for combining, and the buzz in the room was very positive, a far cry from the perpetual doom and gloom we hear from the other side of the House. Optimism is justified. BMO's latest provincial forecast states, "Alberta's economy has returned to growth, and could potentially lead the country this year at 4.1%"

It is a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans and the value of diversification that such a wide range of small businesses are able to thrive in our communities. But not only do small businesses pay taxes and create jobs; they can also help to reduce waste and help the environment and support worthy causes. Today I am happy to recognize a local business that does all of these at the same time.

The Lolly Pop Thrift Shop was the winner of the chamber's 2017 green business award, an inspired choice. Why the green award? Because what they do is accept and process community donations of books, clothing, and household goods otherwise destined for disposal, which they use to stock their store with extremely reasonably priced items. Then they in turn donate the cleaned and sorted remainder to other worthy groups.

Why do they do this? They do it for the environment, they do it to help low-income families get the products they need, but they especially do it for the children. Every child that walks into their store gets two free books, a lollipop, and a toy. But what's more, every month they use part of their proceeds to support local youth sports and literacy groups, truly a virtuous business model. Like so many of our small businesses, they put community first. I am proud to recognize them in the House today for the wonderful work that they do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

2017 Harvest

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to salute the men and women who have just completed a provincial megaproject, men and women who have toiled many long hours and at times were concerned whether or not they would be able to finish the project in time. Thankfully most in Alberta's largest renewable industry are now able to proclaim that they have successfully completed the harvest of 2017. Alberta farmers faced many challenges this growing season, but I'm proud to say that once again they've done a magnificent job growing many diverse crops and doing their part to feed the world.

Although the focus is so often on the harvest activity on farms, many industries and individuals are required to get the harvest done and to market, from equipment manufacturing and maintenance to the fuel and fertilizer supply chains, from businesses necessary to process and market the crop to the transportation industry providing the roads and rail necessary to deliver the product.

In all of this it is important to recognize it will be that bushel of wheat, oats, barley, peas, or canola paying the bills. It will be the sugar beets, potatoes, pork, or lamb paying for the jobs in all of these support industries. The jobs Albertans rely on are created and paid for by the commodities we produce, harvest, and process.

Mr. Speaker, this evening Chops and Crops gives MLAs an opportunity to meet directly with producers and their associations to learn about key issues faced by the agricultural industry while enjoying some delectable Alberta-grown food products. We as legislators need to recognize the role we play in maintaining a

globally competitive and viable agricultural sector. Any extra cost public policy adds is paid for by the products we produce and sell. We have a huge responsibility to get it right, so I hope all MLAs take the time to attend Chops and Crops this evening to demonstrate our commitment to agriculture in this province and its contribution to both the economy and the health and wellness of all Albertans.

Thank you.

Mace Tour

Ms Jabbour: All of us are aware of the importance and the significance of the Mace. It is a powerful symbol of democracy and of the rights of the common people to pass legislation here in this House. What members may not be aware of is that our Alberta Mace has embarked on a series of adventures of its own.

As part of Mr. Speaker's Outreach, you, Mr. Speaker, and I along with the Sergeant-at-Arms and visitor services staff have accompanied our Mace on trips around the province so that those who live long distances from the Legislature can connect with our work and understand the democratic process. While on the road the Sergeant-at-Arms closely guards the Mace and ensures that it is treated with the utmost respect. At the same time, the opportunity to see the Mace up close and learn about its history has been an unforgettable experience for the communities we have visited.

3:00

Our first visit was to Medicine Hat, including a stop at Siksika First Nation, where a group of dynamic young people shared ideas about incorporating a First Nation presence into the Legislature. The second visit was to Fort McMurray, Fort MacKay, and Anzac. This was around the anniversary of the fire, which reminded us of the important role government plays in caring for Albertans in times of need.

This month the Mace tour came to my own constituency of Peace River. Because of its size we only toured the northern part this time, including High Level, La Crête, Fort Vermilion, Manning, Blue Hills, Paddle Prairie, and Beaver First Nation. On our visit to Beaver First Nation one of the community leaders suggested that, given the important role of the Mace in making good legislation, perhaps the Mace should be smudged. We agreed, and the smudging ceremony we participated in was a solemn and profound moment that felt absolutely right and truly historic, another small step forward in forging new relationships with Alberta's indigenous peoples.

The Mace adventure continued as we crossed the Peace River by ferry. The Mace has now crossed most of Alberta's major rivers: the Peace, the North and South Saskatchewan, the Red Deer, and the Athabasca.

Other areas of the province will be visited in months to come. Mr. Speaker's Mace outreach tour is an important way to connect with Albertans, and I'm proud to be part of the adventure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 23

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017.

Bill 23 would add age as a prohibited ground of discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act under the areas of tenancies and

goods, services, accommodations, or facilities. Earlier this year the government agreed to these changes by way of agreement to a court order.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Mason: I'm not on your list, Mr. Speaker, but I do have some things to table on behalf of the hon. Premier. First, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the latest Toronto-Dominion Bank provincial economic forecast, which says that Alberta will lead the country in economic growth next year, and they are predicting a 4.2 per cent growth rate.

Secondly, it is also my pleasure to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of the latest provincial forecast from the Bank of Montreal, Mr. Speaker. This forecast indicates that Alberta is slated to grow by 4.1 per cent this year. They're one point off, but, you know, it's in the ballpark.

The third one I'd like to table, Mr. Speaker, is the economic forecast for the province of Alberta from the Royal Bank of Canada. This one agrees with the TD one, which says it's going to be 4.2.

I think that it's pretty clear that the economists at the banks are very bullish on the Alberta economy, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of the CFIB report that earlier I mentioned in my question, Finding Funding Fairness in Workers' Compensation.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder Reflections on a Nonmember

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we had a point of order today. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. I rise about some comments from the Minister of Service Alberta at the time that I raised the point of order in question period. At that time the minister, unfortunately, referred to the leader of the United Conservative Party as completely dishonest. First, I would draw your attention to 23(j) in our Standing Orders, which says: "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I would first suggest to you that referring to anybody would create disorder in this Assembly but particularly referring to the Leader of the Official Opposition or the party that is the Official Opposition as dishonest will certainly create disorder.

I would also go further than that, Mr. Speaker, and draw your attention to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 616 and 617, where it refers to reference by name to members of the public. For those following along at home, it says:

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and who do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in extraordinary circumstances when the national interest calls for this. The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander, but from any slur directly or indirectly implied.

Furthermore, the Speaker

suggested that Members avoid as much as possible mentioning by name people from outside the House who are unable to reply in their own defence.

Now, I have already risen on this once in a similar situation this week, Mr. Speaker, and you ruled in my favour, if you will, at that time over those concerns. Here we are now, three days into this week, seeing the same things. I am as excited as anybody about the election of the Hon. Jason Kenney as the leader of the United Conservative Party. I am thrilled, and I look forward to seeing him sitting shortly in this chair that I have the privilege of sitting in for the time being and, further to that, sitting in the chair that is across from me in the next two years.

But ministers referring to the leader of the United Conservative Party, a person who is not a member of this Chamber, who cannot defend themselves, is certainly slander. It is completely inappropriate, and, to my first point, Mr. Speaker, it's going to cause disorder in this House. So I would ask that the government stop calling people dishonest and start focusing on the work that they've been sent here to do, which is standing up for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not have, of course, the Blues, so I don't have a very comprehensive recollection of what was stated, but I will say, subject to your correction, that the hon. minister talked about the leader of the United Conservatives. I don't recall her mentioning him by name in this particular instance, but what the minister was referring to is the refusal of the leader of the United Conservative Party to disclose the dark money that he's received to finance his leadership race. This is an important issue, I think, that needs to be canvassed. I'm not sure what were the exact words used by the minister, so I'm at a disadvantage in that regard.

The Speaker: Let me read that to you, to all of the House: "despite the fact that his own leader of his own party absolutely refuses to abide by honesty and transparency and the promises that he's made to Albertans." I share that with you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's quite a bit different from what we've heard from the hon. House leader in his point of order. You know, one of the things that happens in political discourse is that the veracity of statements made by different individuals is often made – it's certainly made on the other side as well. I don't recall any prohibited language being used. I know that the individual in this case was not named, as suggested by the House leader for the United Conservative Party.

3:10

I think that it is within the range of comments that are within the normal range of political discourse. A little harsh, but I think that it was a clear reference to the fact that Mr. Kenney has received money for his leadership campaign which he is refusing to disclose. That was the subject of what the minister was trying to get at. I think that many Albertans are indeed deeply concerned about the source of Mr. Kenney's funds. I think that it would be resolved if the leader of the UCP would simply stand up and tell Albertans where he got his money.

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader has chosen to go where the minister earlier didn't, clearly finishing the job of slandering that was incomplete during the question period.

I would also point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Government House Leader, obviously, didn't address the issue of creating disorder in the House, I think, clearly because he's fully aware that that's

exactly what occurred here, which is why I would respectfully ask you to ask the hon. minister to withdraw those remarks and apologize.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been following the discussion and just wanted to ask if as part of your ruling there could be a point of clarification as well because members opposite used the names of many private individuals today, including former members of the oil sands advisory group, who also are not in this House to defend themselves and also could be considered slandered, I suppose. Could you clarify for us what the rules are around private names, if that applies simply to members of the opposition, the particular leader, or if that's all people outside this House?

Thank you.

The Speaker: I see that considerably more discussion of this will add limited value. First of all, to the point made by the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to the individual's name, in this instance it was not actually identified. However, there were references to the leader of a party. With respect to that, I'm not sure that a point of order has been made.

However, the question before: you'll recall, some of you, that just prior to the minister making these comments, I cautioned the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills about the language that he was using and cautioned immediately prior to the minister responding. And if I've learned anything in this House, it is about context.

To the question from Edmonton-Centre, we've discussed this many, many times. There is no exact science to these words, as to what's on the list. I continue being asked: what are the lists of what I can say and what I can't say? Well, you've proven in here that it's an impossible task, and it is contextual.

In this situation the minister did say: "despite the fact that his own leader of his own party absolutely refuses to abide by honesty and transparency and the promises that he's made to Albertans." She went on to clarify that it was the promise issue that she was intending, I believe. Nonetheless, I'd ask that the Government House Leader address all of his members. That includes the other side as well. However, in this instance I would ask that you caution the minister to not make those kinds of responses, making reference to the character of individuals.

Will I rule that there's actually a point of order? Today I will not. But it seems to me that you all have the responsibility to avoid that kind of language. It's certainly not contributing to the tone and production of this House.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 22

Resident and Family Councils Act

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North on behalf of the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 22, the Resident and Family Councils Act.

If passed, this legislation will expect the establishment of resident and family councils in all long-term care and licensed supportive

living facilities. In facilities that already have them, resident and family councils are an important mechanism for enabling residents and families to present requests, concerns, and propose solutions to a facility representative or operator. A number of Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services initiatives and activities over the last five years have identified resident and family councils as a means of improving the experiences of residents in licensed supportive living and long-term care facilities.

The Resident and Family Councils Act aligns with this government's direction by engaging and empowering Albertans living in facilities to take an active and engaged role in their own care. Furthermore, it will support traditionally underrepresented individuals and communities to be heard and participate more fully in their facilities if they so choose. The Resident and Family Councils Act will expand on the existing concerns and complaints processes and provide new opportunities for residents, families, and operators to work together on issues that affect them.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to enhancing the delivery of continuing care in Alberta's facilities, and we believe that those most affected by these services should have a say in how care and supports are being delivered and how they can be improved. With this legislation residents of Alberta's licensed supportive living and long-term care facilities can be assured that no matter whether their facility is private or publicly funded, they will have a forum to voice concerns and share feedback with their facility operator.

I'd like to now go over the legislation in detail. The Resident and Family Councils Act includes all licensed supportive living and long-term care facilities serving four or more residents. A supportive living accommodation is a facility where the operator provides for the safety and security of four or more residents and offers at least one meal per day or housekeeping services. Seniors' lodges as supportive living accommodations would also be included under the legislation. Long-term care facilities include nursing homes and auxiliary hospitals.

The requirements within this legislation will apply to facilities operated by public operators as well as those that are operated by private for-profit and not-for-profit providers.

It will also cover residences that support persons with developmental disabilities that have four or more residents, which are licensed under the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. The decision to include PDD residences was determined after initial conversations with advocates representing residents and families. They felt that councils would be a benefit to residents and family members and would give them greater opportunity to voice their concerns to facility operators.

Government is currently developing a plan to engage the PDD community should this legislation pass. This will be done to engage persons with disabilities, their families and guardians, who also support this decision to include PDD residences in this legislation.

3:20

Should the legislation pass and once it comes into force, any facility resident or family member will be able to establish a family or resident council. The act supports self-governing councils and is flexible to enable residents and family members to determine their council processes and procedures, procedures such as members' roles, meeting format and frequency, and when and how facility representatives should be involved in council meetings. If a facility already has some form of group in place at the time, the group will be considered a resident and family council for the purposes of this legislation.

Facilities with three or fewer residents, which fall outside the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, will not be

affected by this legislation. Though residents of these facilities are welcome to establish councils, we recognize that the mechanism of a council may not be appropriate for residences of this size.

Under the Resident and Family Councils Act operators will be required to do the following once the act comes into force. They must ensure a resident and family council can be established within a facility. Operators must notify residents and family members of their right to establish councils within 60 days of the act coming into force. Operators must also provide the council with assistance in making other residents and their families aware of the council and provide administrative support upon request of the council. They must provide facility performance information to the council; for example, results of inspections and survey results; consult with the council on issues; for example, meals, personal choice services, and social or leisure activities; develop and implement a written response process to address feedback brought forward by the council; provide the council information on how to access an Alberta health complaints officer; and attend council meetings when invited by the council.

Compliance with the act and its requirements would be monitored by Alberta health inspectors through the existing accommodation licensing process. Monitoring for compliance would include, for example, interviews with resident and family council members and a review of documentation to see whether feedback is being collected and that complaints are being logged and rectified.

If passed, the Ministry of Health will take a number of actions to ensure a smooth transition when the act eventually comes into force. First, as I mentioned, Health will engage PDD stakeholders, including meaningful engagement with persons with disabilities, their family members and guardians, to make sure the unique needs of their community are considered. Some early engagement has already occurred with PDD organizations, including the PDD Provincial Self-Advocates' Advisory Committee and Inclusion Alberta.

Secondly, Health will be developing a tool kit intended to help residents and family members establish effective councils. This will contain helpful advice and useful templates such as sample terms of reference to support new councils. The tool kit will be shared with stakeholders from both the continuing care and PDD communities, including operators, residents, and family members.

Alberta Health will also be developing an information guide to support operators in complying with the requirements. Associations representing operators will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the tool kit and information guide.

In conclusion, colleagues, the Resident and Family Councils Act will support long-term care and supportive living residents and their family members to take an engaged and active role in the delivery of care and accommodation services. It will strengthen the relationship between operators and residents and ensure that residents and their loved ones will have a voice in improving Alberta's continuing care facilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage my colleagues to support this bill, and I look forward to hearing the debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the second reading of Bill 22, the Resident and Family Councils Act. As a representative of Albertans and especially those from the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency I feel strongly that we have a critical and important responsibility to protect the vulnerable Albertans and Albertans that built our

province especially and that are now in lodges and nursing homes and long-term care facilities. Bill 22 guarantees that the residents of long-term and licensed supportive care facilities will have the right to establish self-governing councils that would allow them to pursue and to engage and to work towards ensuring a strong, healthy, high quality of life, and I will be supporting this initiative.

As the previous critic for Seniors and Housing and mental health for my caucus I've done research and outreach with residents of the facilities that we're talking about today across this province. I've met with these facilities and with the seniors that are living in them, and I can see that this piece of legislation can have a positive effect on their lives.

Now, there have been times over the last two years where we've been shocked and, quite honestly, appalled at some of the stories and some of the things that have happened to our vulnerable citizens and our seniors in this province. Albertans feel that sometimes our seniors do not have a strong enough voice in the current system that they're a part of. It should not take a story leaking to the press for changes to be made to a facility. As we saw last spring at the Lacombe long-term care facility, it should not take the events that occurred around that facility for something to be done.

Our caucus, the former legacy Wildrose caucus, shared and shone some of the light on some of those glaring issues, and while it's hard to say if a council would have been able to intervene effectively, it may have been capable of preventing some of the issues seen there. I would hope and I would believe that had there been a council of residents there, this facility would not have been allowed to deteriorate in the quality of its care to the extent that it did, and I believe that if the residents had been granted a seat at the table, they would have been more effective in their capacity to ensure a high quality of life. Ideally this legislation will give residents a voice and the power to make meaningful suggestions and to create change in the places that they live.

3:30

While I would hope that the facilities' operators would already be working with residents to improve practice and to improve quality-of-life outcomes and to address concerns, there are clearly facilities where this is not the practice. We can, through this legislation, encourage that to occur.

Bill 22 will grant the residents of long-term care facilities the right to establish a self-governing council and to work with facility operators to ensure that many of the quality-of-life concerns that they have identified are going to be addressed. I think that it's critically important that this legislation also allow for members of the residents' families to initiate the establishment of a resident and family council given that family members are frequently heavily involved in the decision-making and protection of their parents or their grandparents and other members of their extended family.

I think all of us have had family members that have been in some of these institutions, and I believe that for all of us it's not a stretch to understand that our loved ones at times need people to advocate on their behalf and to oversee and to make sure that our loved ones are being taken care of.

I've heard from many constituents that sometimes they feel discouraged by their lack of ability to protect their loved ones within a care facility. They feel that they are sometimes pitted against the facility's management in defence of their loved ones. They should be working together. Families, seniors, and the operators of these facilities should be working together, but that's not always the case, and sometimes that can lead to an incredible amount of frustration as family members are simply trying to take care of the people that they love. I believe that this legislation, which regulates the creation of a meaningful council that will

promote dialogue between residents and family members and care providers, will help to ensure that the ultimate goal of providing for the residents will occur and that it will occur with the highest quality of life possible.

Legislating that one or more representatives from the facility must be present at the meetings that they are invited to is also important for without the facility input and without the facility operators in attendance, changes cannot be effectively communicated nor probably implemented. So I believe it's important for there to be a place for the operators at the table on these councils. It is not helpful for residents of the facility to simply talk amongst themselves if that information is not transferred to the people that can effectively make those changes.

I've travelled across my constituency and have seen first-hand and have been involved in many of the lodges and the nursing homes and the long-term care facilities across my constituency. I've seen first-hand the wonderful work that is being done to support the seniors in my constituency. But I've also seen some of the pitfalls, and I've had feedback on many occasions from the seniors across my constituency. I can tell you that it is important to them to have a high quality of life. That doesn't mean a high standard of living sometimes. Quality of life and standard of living are distinct and different.

Quality of life is a far broader category. Quality of life includes not only the income but the health care, the nutrition, the transportation, the entertainment, the relationships, and the community that our seniors fall into when they are part of a nursing home or a lodge. All of these are important. We as people are far more than the income that we make, and our quality of life is very important. It's complicated, it's intricate, it's individual, and it's ever-changing. I believe these councils can help seniors come together to define for them within their individual communities what is a high quality of life and what are the necessary things that need to be improved as they live together in community.

When Albertans transition from being independent and from independent living into a lodge or a nursing home, often control of their individual decisions in life starts to be taken away a little bit, and many of the aspects of a person's life that previously were decisions that you and you alone would make now begin to be transferred to others in our lives or even to the facility operators. It's because of this reality that we need to ensure that there is regular communication between the residents and those that manage the facilities to ensure that all aspects of a resident's quality of life are being reasonably fulfilled.

Now, I've seen amazing initiatives across my constituency that take place in many of the lodges and nursing homes that my constituents are in. I've been asked to be part of church services, to help to barbecue at barbecues. I've been to dances, had picnics and entertainment nights, all of the things that make a community in our nursing homes and lodges and extended care facilities. I believe that most if not all of them do an incredible job of trying to make sure that the quality of life of our seniors is high and that it meets their needs and their desires. Events such as the ones I've talked about here allow our seniors and the vulnerable population to continue to be involved in their communities.

Unfortunately, I've also seen and heard that there are not always the logistics in place to facilitate community and to engage our seniors not only in the community of the lodge or the facility that they're in but even outside in the wider community that they're a part of. I know that residents of several facilities, lodges, and other nursing homes in my community and my constituency have been plagued with issues of not being able to access off-site services. Doctors' appointments, dentists' appointments, and even the

capacity to go shopping for many of our rural seniors is very difficult.

I believe that a council that we're talking about in this bill, Bill 22, may be a vehicle by which they could communicate and work together to try to address some of these really important needs, needs that will allow them to be independent, to move about, to go shopping, to be able to be a part of community. Should they have access to forming a council with a representative from the facility, I believe they would be better able to more effectively organize and to lobby not only the facility but the government and the organizations that serve their needs.

3:40

If these councils meet, listen, address the issues of our seniors, we can sidestep some of the things and some of the issues that we've seen occur even in this last year. You need look no further than the Berwyn lodge to see a prime example of what happens when there's a lack of communication between residents and the facilities and the operators that oversee those seniors. The lodge has been deemed financially unviable and is being closed down. The residents were informed of this. However, clearly, communication fell apart.

As a result, we now have some seniors who've had to do at their stage of life far too much worrying about being displaced and about even where they were going to end up. This poses a significant stressor for the residents and the families alike. They're already hard-pressed to find suitable seniors' housing in Alberta. Given the shortage of available housing, perhaps a council that would have supported communication and the capacity to be able to listen to the seniors would have allowed for some of the stress not to be placed on the seniors. Had there been a council of residents that was consulted, they could have taken steps to address the issues, and this would have led to the time that was necessary and needed to make alternative arrangements.

I believe that the document-tracking portion of this legislation is important for ensuring that a paper trail of the issues is highlighted, so that there is some accountability and so that residents and facility representatives can monitor the progress of the various projects and initiatives that they are working through.

Madam Speaker, a crucial portion of governance is outreach and stakeholder feedback. The United Conservative Party strongly believes in local decision-making and accountability. I hope this legislation will give the residents of our long-term and supportive living facilities the ability to provide regular feedback as they are the local experts. They are the ones that understand best how their facilities are affecting their lives and whether they're meeting their needs. These residents represent a font of knowledge, of wisdom, or of expertise that at this moment has not been given the weight that it deserves. We owe it to our seniors, the people that built this great province of Alberta, to ensure that they have a seat at the table and to empower them to be local decision-makers – dare I say, in the parlance of the new curriculum, “agents of change”? – regarding their quality of life.

I urge all members of this Assembly to support this legislation and to put the power back in the hands of the residents of our long-term care facilities. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Stony Plain . . .

Mr. Horne: Spruce Grove-St. Albert, Madam Speaker. Still across Boundary Road but a totally different community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, when I first saw this bill, I was very intrigued. It reminded me a bit of my visits with the

residents' councils in my own riding and the feedback that I hear from these people. Some of them have come to me with everything from, you know, that they've heard about a community event and they want to see me at it. My office is within a couple of blocks of several facilities, so they're by for coffee every once in a while. But we've also heard about residents being concerned about other residents' health as they're aging and whether or not the facility is still an appropriate place for them. So I think that the level of engagement that I've seen from these councils is very hopeful.

I was also reminded of somebody very important in my life, my great-grandmother, who, unfortunately, just passed away this summer. Any of the members across the aisle who have been active politically for a long time might know her. She was at one point the president of the now outgoing Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta. I know she was aware that I was elected. She was always keenly interested in my education. I'm still not sure if she ever knew what party I was elected for, but this was a woman who was always engaged in her community. For the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, she at one point served on the town council of Westlock. She was one of the forces behind the founding of the museum there. There's a story that my grandma likes to tell where they were on vacation in Banff. They went to the Banff Springs Hotel, and the staff there said: "Oh, ma'am, you are far too elegant to be at the normal tables in the restaurant. We must give you the presidential table."

She was so involved in her community that this is something that I know she would have been involved in. In her old age she wasn't in a designated facility until much later, when it would have been beyond her to engage in something like this, but she was so engaged in her community that I am positive that had she been, she would have been on a residents' council. There are so many people in communities like this, you know, people who serve on their ag association, or they're active with 4-H and volunteer at the library, often former principals. Then, as they age, they move into more supportive housing, but they still want to be involved in their community. This gives them a very great opportunity to engage in that community with their fellow residents.

This also gives them an opportunity to continue to work to make life better for their fellow Albertans through ensuring quality of life for the entire community, for the residents, and to really help provide that communication channel between the operators, even in some cases the owners, and the residents. You know, that's something that's very important in any situation. Even in our elementary schools we have feedback systems between the students and the administration, and certainly there is currently the Education Minister's Youth Council out. I had an opportunity to meet with them, and they provided excellent feedback. I think of examples like this, where we have feedback between, really, the people who are receiving the service and the front-line people who are providing the service as well as the upper management, effectively, managing the service. Having those feedback systems is something that is very positive and really helps to build a better quality of life for everybody involved.

I noticed, as I was looking over this bill and thinking about it, that AHS estimates that the majority of facilities already have a council like this. The only reason I can think of for so many facilities to be adopting this is that it's something that has been proven to work, that has been proven to show results for the residents and for the operators themselves. You know, sometimes for management, any management, really, whether it's myself and my office staff or the CEO of a large corporation, it's really easy to see an issue, think you know the answer, pursue it, and completely not address the actual issue. Having that communication with the people receiving

your services as well as the people providing the services themselves is something that is really important.

3:50

I am really happy to see this bill come forward. I'd like to thank both of our ministers of Health for all of their work on this. I know that the Minister of, if I can remember the name of it, Community and Social Services also put in some work engaging with the PDD community on this bill. My understanding is that most of them already have very similar structures in place, but the PDD community wanted to be included in this. I think that that is, again, a sign that these are systems that work, that have been proven to help provide better services for our communities.

I am very happy to see this go forward. I hope all members in this Legislature support it, and I look forward to the ongoing debate.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, another member to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 22. In the last two and a half years I've been a Member of this Legislative Assembly, and I've had the opportunity to be the critic of both Seniors and Housing as well as Health. In these roles I've heard complaints from all sides, including continuing care facilities and families, on a number of different issues. Hopefully, this bill will identify and help resolve some of these concerns that parents or families have, and it will give them some sort of a formalized influence on what happens in where they live. Let's face it. We all do want to have the ability to have a measure of influence and control over our lives and surroundings. That doesn't end when a person enters into a long-term care facility or supportive living. The difference is that you and I have greater ability to advocate for ourselves. Establishing these councils could create a better quality of life for residents and could help them retain a sense of independence while also enabling them to achieve and receive things that will increase their happiness.

But before you think this is a blanket approval for your bill, please understand that I should mention that I think there are a handful of things that could be addressed here to ensure that the bill actually does what I think the minister wants it to do. We need to ensure that the facility representatives are able to attend the meetings required, and we need to ensure that the facility representatives have the ability to carry out all their duties as an extension and integrated part of their duties and not as an impediment.

I mention these examples because we need to be prepared for the very possibility of very eager councils made up of very eager individuals. While we want to empower these councils and the individuals that serve on them, I'm sure that many of us can think of boards or councils that become unreasonably or overly demanding in their requests. Such a council could unduly and unintentionally put a strain on the facility representative.

In addition, what about membership? While each council does have the ability to determine its own governance structure and procedures, could that lead to unfair representation either by a proportion of people from the same background or family or to some groups of people being left on the sidelines for whatever reason?

What if multiple councils are set up within the same facility? This could happen if you have members who don't work well together or want to work for separate or opposing things.

These are items that should be considered, and these are certainly items that we will bring forward. We have life experience. We have work experience. We've dealt with a lot of these things before, and we're here to guide and promote.

But there's something else I was wondering about, Madam Speaker, and hopefully I can get answers on this. The government mentioned that "a toolkit and information guide would be developed by Alberta Health in consultation with residents, families, and operators." Now, that quote is from the government's news release on the Resident and Family Councils Act, but it does raise a question for me. You see, I was able to find online, dated September 30, 2017, a resident family council tool kit. Of course, I will table this later. My concern stems from the fact that it appears that the department is already trying to duplicate work that has already been done by Covenant Health, Covenant Care, Covenant Living, and Alberta Health Services.

Not only that, but the news release talks about conducting future consultations, yet it looks like they've already created the document. This represents a troubling scenario, that the government continues to do work first and consult later. Like I said, Madam Speaker, I know that this wording was found in the news release, but it's troubling to me because it once again looks like the government is jumping ahead without first consulting despite the fact that they say the opposite. This highlights some key things about bureaucracy and the parallel features of Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services. One doesn't know what the other is doing. They are working towards the same goal, but there's a lot of repetitive work that gets done. We're here to help clean that up.

I'll move back specifically to the bill, Madam Speaker, and I'm looking forward to further conversation on this. I think we need to polish it up a little bit, and of course the Official Opposition is happy to help with that. You've seen us in action trying to clean up and improve bits of legislation before, and we'll do it again this time.

I don't want to take up too much time this afternoon, so I'll run through a quick summary with you, Madam Speaker. Overall, this bill in its core intent is decent. It has some good ideas behind it, ideas that could help improve the lives of some of our residents in long-term and supportive living facilities if executed correctly. It's important that residents and their families have a venue where they can raise concerns and work towards improving circumstances and situations. It's important that we ensure the voices of residents and their families are heard, that council will not operate in isolation but will include facility representatives so that there is a direct link between residents and operators.

Like I mentioned earlier, we might need to make a couple of changes to this. We want to ensure it's done correctly, and we don't want to open up operators to the possibility of being dragged down by an overly bureaucratic council.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat in anticipation of further conversation to come later. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's amazing sometimes how the disrespect and the tone from some hon. members in this House can really impact you personally when you're thinking about your own personal experiences that many of us have lived through and that many of us have experienced, whether it's been working as front-line care providers in care facilities, whether it's been caring for somebody who also needed to move to a care facility and engaging, indeed, in these kinds of councils. I want to honour the life experience of all of my

colleagues, and I think that's very important for us to know, that there is a great deal of lived experience in this Chamber.

That being said, it's also important that we help all operators meet this rising tide, and while there are a number of tool kit documents that have been designed by service providers, it is certainly not a consistent standard that is being achieved throughout our province. That's why we're bringing this legislation forward, Madam Speaker. About 30 per cent do not have any kind of council that would actually create an environment for this type of work to happen, and of those 70 per cent that do, approximately, the standard is not consistent in terms of the engagement, in terms of the involvement of council members, in terms of the staff engagement, in terms of ensuring that the people who are living there have a voice themselves. They have some type of council, but not always is it even inviting the residents themselves to participate.

While some people speak in a very disrespectful tone and attitude, I think it's important for us all to reflect on the fact that we are here to serve Albertans. That includes making sure that the kits that are available through individual operators are aligned and that they are brought to the highest possible standard to ensure the highest possible level of engagement. That is my commitment, Madam Speaker. My commitment is to ensuring that we take the very best pieces that are available from other organizations and help them engage their residents and the family members to ensure that their voices are heard and actively considered.

4:00

I hope that my colleague who just spoke takes some of that under advisement and reflection. I would say that there are many people on this side of the House who have sat with somebody in a care facility either as a family member or as somebody who has worked in one of those care facilities, and I honour that experience. I honour their expertise. I know that if any of us were to relive those experiences, we would want to ensure that we were supporting each other and the other residents and family members in having those opportunities to engage.

I can't help but think about my own experience with my grandmother, who lived for over three years in a care facility. One day we were talking, and she said: "You know, it's so sad for me to see my clothes that I care about so much being folded and put in a drawer when I always took such painstaking measures to ensure that they were nicely ironed and hung neatly in my closet. That's why I have clothes that are as old as they are and they still look good." And I said, "You know, is that something you want to talk about with the operator here because I think that's something that they can probably accommodate?" and they did, because we had a structured environment to be able to bring that up.

I think this is actually going to make life easier for operators as well because they will have a co-ordinated flow of information to be able to access opinions of their residents and their family members. I think that that is important as well, as opposed to getting a bunch of one-off, individualized feedback.

One of the reasons why we very intentionally, in collaboration with service providers and residents and their family members, kept the organizational structure for the individual councils open is because we know that they have expertise of their own. We know that somebody who's living in a facility that provides care for people with developmental disabilities has expertise in how best they want to communicate and with whom best they want to communicate. Ensuring that we have the flexibility for the residents to be true agents for themselves is a value that we are bringing forward in this legislation, Madam Speaker.

I have to say that I brought this forward hoping that we would have respectful, productive conversations that would result in

actions that will indeed make life better not just for the 30 per cent of facilities that have no resident or family councils right now but also for those that do to ensure that they are working in a way that meets the very best standard.

Madam Speaker, I guess my question would be: does the hon. member want to work collaboratively to make this happen, or does he want . . . [Ms Hoffman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Speaking to the bill, the hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in support of Bill 22, the Resident and Family Councils Act. Many of my colleagues have discussed that this legislation, if passed, will establish resident and family councils in long-term care and licensed supportive living facilities. It also covers the residences that support persons with developmental disabilities that have four or more residents which are licensed under the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, also known as SLALA. That falls within my ministry's purview, so I thought I would speak to that part specifically and add my support to this bill.

Ever since we've been in government, one thing we've heard very loud and clear from persons with disabilities, their advocates, and their service providers is: nothing about us without us. What that means is that any decision that impacts their lives and their services needs to be taken with careful consideration to and in consultation with those who that decision will affect. We are committed to listening to Albertans with disabilities, their families, and advocates on the issues that matter to them.

All licensed facilities under the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act are currently included in the bill – they are all included – and we will be reaching out to all of them and will have a robust conversation with them on how best we can move forward with these councils. Those Albertans who live in licensed facilities, their service providers, their guardians, their advocates will all be consulted prior to establishing those councils. We have not and we will not impose any changes on Albertans with disabilities like the previous government used to do, and our track record proves that.

We listened to the community and repealed the previous government's supports intensity scale policy, a policy that was imposed by the previous government on the persons with developmental disabilities program. No one in the province liked it, but they were all subjected to that. We listened to the community, and we repealed that scale. As we move forward with these councils, we will certainly engage with them prior to establishing these councils.

We also repealed the persons with developmental disabilities safety standard, another example where the previous government just imposed a standard on persons with developmental disabilities without adequately consulting them or at all consulting them. When we became government, that was the number one issue. We worked with them, we listened to them, and we repealed that.

In this case we will listen to the community and work with the individuals with developmental disabilities to figure out the best approach to move forward with these councils. We will be sharing further details in the coming weeks about our engagement plan and how the individuals, families, agencies, and advocates in health care can participate in that process.

As this work proceeds, we will continue with our other work to make life better for Albertans with disabilities as we have increased funding for the persons with developmental disabilities program so that more Albertans can get the services they need. With increased funding for AISH, we are making improvements to the AISH

program as well. The establishment of these councils will ensure that those individuals have a direct say in the services they are receiving, in the decisions that are impacting their lives, and it will create a collaborative environment within those facilities. The individuals, their service providers, their families, guardians, and all concerned can sit down and address the issues facing individual persons with developmental disabilities.

Unfortunately, from the opposite side we have heard views such as that investment in disabilities are giveaways, and they also suggest that they want to cut it by 20 per cent. I think we are making life better for Albertans. We don't see those as giveaways. We think that vulnerable Albertans deserve the supports they need to be successful and be meaningfully included in our communities. We think that any suggestions that investment in disabilities are giveaways are reckless and wrong and heartless, and under our watch we won't let that happen. We will continue to work hard to make life better for all Albertans, including Albertans with varying abilities, and we will continue to listen and collaborate instead of imposing damaging policies on Albertans with disabilities.

4:10

Having said that, I look forward to working with the community and working with individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, guardians, service providers, and advocates to make sure that we get this right. Our hope is that having these councils in place will provide those individuals with yet another opportunity to get involved in decisions that impact their lives.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and respond to the hon. minister's remarks, which I thought were a little bit fantastic, particularly when he bragged about getting rid of the SIS standards, which he did, but he left a few important details out. He left the detail out that he was asked by the opposition for weeks and months on end to do this while he sat on his hands and did nothing. In fact, he sat on his hands for so long, he got fired from half of his ministry, between botching that and botching the children in care file. So when the minister stands up now and talks about what a great job he did, he actually ought to be pleased that he still has the half of a ministry left that he has before he loses it. If there was ever a minister that can't handle his ministry, that was the one that was pointing his finger just now, one of the least competent in the House. I just thought I would set the record straight since the minister seems unable to do so on his own.

Now, back to Bill 22, Madam Speaker. I think the idea in general of having residents of long-term and supportive care facilities take an active role in the care they receive is probably well intentioned and probably a good idea. Of course, the residents living there are the ones that experience the facilities day in and day out, which, actually, by definition, in my opinion, makes them experts at those facilities, just as, in my opinion, each of us are experts at the home, the block, and the neighbourhood in which we live. No one would be more experienced at those facilities than the people that actually live there and deal with the good service and not-so-good service and the good food and not-so-good food and whatever variations there are. Consequently, their voices could be valuable and important. This indeed extends to the families of the residents.

I have a couple of parents – one is 85, and one is 90 – and I'm blessed to still have them with me. My father is less able to make decisions for himself than he once was. My mother still lives

independently. For seniors that are in a position where they can't always make decisions for themselves, I think having family available to be involved in these councils could be very valuable, having advocates. Perhaps it should be extended to an advocate beyond the family if indeed a particular senior doesn't have any family prepared to come and advocate for them and they need that advocate. That's just a thought that goes through my mind as I speak to this.

I think that giving the family members that love and care for the seniors in these facilities a venue and an avenue to come in and advocate for and be involved in their loved ones' lives has value. I believe it could actually help the operators of the facilities do a better job, help the people living there have a better quality of life. It's certainly worthy of consideration. I'm sure there are other members of this House that do have or have had loved ones in long-term care facilities that may actually see that value as well.

The other thing, too, while we do this – and I think it's important to hold operators to account – is that it's really important not to demonize them. You know, I'm sure there are different opinions in this Legislature, on all sides, that some homes . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, are you speaking on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. McIver: Yes, I am. I am responding to the minister's comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Continue.

Mr. McIver: And I would say to the minister and all members of the House that while it's important to comment and make improvements, I think it's necessary not to demonize the operators, Madam Speaker, because I believe that no one gets into the business of operating a seniors' home without intending to do an amazing job for the seniors that are there. Indeed, it could be said that some will be better or worse than others. While we are striving for improvements, I think we need to avoid the demonization, and I think that that's something to keep in mind.

I think there's some value in this bill, so I would ask the minister to think about that and perhaps comment on that when he gets . . . [Mr. McIver's speaking time expired] Sorry, Minister.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to speak to Bill 22, the Resident and Family Councils Act. I want to commend the Health minister for introducing this measure. Even though, you know, perhaps some 70 to 80 per cent of the existing facilities in the province have these councils, I think it's good that they should all have these councils and that these councils can bring about a great deal of benefit for the residents, and I think that's a very positive thing.

My experience personally – and the minister mentioned it – is that, you know, in terms of the experience you have, whether it's visiting residents or spending time in these facilities or elsewhere, it's something that I think is truly eye-opening because it can provide a real perspective in terms of the compassion and care of the staff that work in these facilities. Universally, I never cease to be amazed at their compassion, their patience, their willingness to do for patients who in some cases aren't able to express their gratitude or in some cases, in fact, are almost reluctant to be helped. That can be a very challenging situation, yet they do this job, and they do it very, very well.

Some of my earliest experiences as an adult with these long-term care facilities actually were visiting these care facilities with

animals. This was something that in the '80s was not very commonplace, and I wonder, as we're debating this particular measure, had there been these councils in place in some of the facilities that I visited in the '80s, whether it would have been, in fact, easier to get access because it was quite a hurdle to get access. The administrators generally hadn't heard about the benefits of pet visitation in these facilities, and sometimes even some of the staff members were unconvinced until we arrived.

We would arrive usually with dogs and cats. Especially in Lloydminster and Vermilion a lot of these facilities housed people who were from rural areas. If there's one thing that had significantly changed in their lives other than, of course, moving from their homes, it was that they no longer had daily contact with animals, and that was a significant change for them. To have the opportunity to once again have contact with animals, that had been an important part of their lives, was something that was in some cases really changing for them.

In fact, my best recollection of that was when we went to one facility. I would always bring our clinic cat. We had a great, big, long-haired, orange tabby cat named Marmalade, and Marm was great for these visits because he was quiet, he was docile, he never scratched, and he was so calm. If you just put him anywhere near someone, he would start to purr. As we know, a purring cat lowers blood pressure and does, you know, a lot of benefit. I remember taking Marm into one patient in particular, and this was a very elderly lady. As soon as I put Marm next to her on the bed, she started talking about cats that she had owned, and she started talking about her recollection of cats that she'd been with. Pretty soon I saw the staff gathering around the door, and I thought this was odd. It wasn't until after I left that one of the staff members said that that particular resident had been there for over year and hadn't spoken the entire time. But she talked to Marm, and she talked to me about her experience with cats.

You know, what does this have to do with the debate? Well, what this has to do with the debate is that I think resident and family councils could provide a mechanism whereby things that are beneficial to residents in long-term care facilities – they would have an avenue to bringing these in. I think it's valuable. I think it has tremendous value.

4:20

I will issue a word of caution to the minister that these things can sometimes be a little bit controversial. My experience in that was actually after I was elected in 2012. Some members will remember that the decision was made to make sure that the food preparation for facilities happened in facilities. There had been an experiment to try bringing in food. It was a mess. It was ended, and that was a good thing, and the food preparation was returned to the facilities.

There was a general meeting of the residents of the Mannville continuing care centre about the food that should be prepared at this facility. Everything was going very, very well, and there were no particular issues until it came to the subject – and I'm looking over at my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Minister of Advanced Education – of cabbage rolls. Of course, the issue became what should be stuffed inside the cabbage rolls, whether it should be rice or ground beef. Well, I will tell you that I was waiting for the canes and the walkers to start flying across the room because the battle over cabbage rolls was the first thing that became a significant issue in the discussion. Everything else had gone very smoothly, but we had the hamburger, or the ground beef, faction and the rice faction. Then, to make matters worse, we had the argument as to whether the tomato sauce should be put on before baking the cabbage rolls or only afterwards.

Ms Hoffman: Not at all.

Dr. Starke: Or not at all. My goodness. A third faction.

Madam Speaker, you can see that the concept is excellent, and I would encourage it to go ahead, but, you know, sometimes we talk about unanticipated consequences. Well, I can tell you that the very fact that we would have conversations and discussions about the food, about other issues that affect the residents, I think, is very positive. From that standpoint, I'm in favour of this bill.

I'm in favour of this initiative going forward, but I want to also encourage the Health minister to consider taking this initiative farther, and that is to take it not just to our long-term care facilities but to our active treatment hospitals, to the patient and family council model that has been used for over 20 years in the province of Ontario. I first heard about patient and family councils in active treatment hospitals when one time I was listening to a program, believe it or not, on the CBC. Now, I'm a Progressive Conservative, so I listen to the CBC, especially on weekends, when I find the programming to be especially entertaining. I for one terribly miss Stuart McLean.

I will tell you that on this program, specifically the CBC radio's medical program, *White Coat, Black Art*, which is an excellent program, they talked about the patient and family council that was at the Kingston General hospital and had been in place there for some years. What was especially interesting to me was how that patient and family council had done something that we have been striving for in Alberta for years, but somehow we just can't seem to grasp it, and that is to provide patient-centred care. We talk about patient-centred care. We talk about putting the patient at the centre or, in the case of long-term care facilities, the resident at the centre, but the challenge is that there always seem to be things that get in the way. Well, at the Kingston General hospital the patient and family council, it appears, at least, is helping break down that barrier, making sure that patients' concerns and patients' needs are front and centre and that they are brought on a regular basis to the administration of the hospital.

According to a report that's published online from the Ontario ministry of health – it was a review report of how patient and family councils are working in Ontario at acute treatment hospitals, April 2016, and I can send the minister the link because it's outstanding reading. It talks about the changes that have resulted in some of these facilities because of the presence of a patient and family council. In some cases, you know, you might consider them to be small things like changes to visiting hours or adjustments to the policy with regard to how and when patients can leave the facility. In some cases they're bigger things like allowing parents to be present when pediatric patients going into surgery, going under anaesthesia, are anaesthetized. I will tell you that that's a big change if you're that child or you're the mother or the father or the guardian of that child.

These are things I think that we should look at very carefully because, you know, even to the point whereby in one of the active treatment hospitals in Ontario because of a patient and family council they found that the procedure of making sure that health care givers were washing their hands consistently when moving from room to room, which is the simplest, most basic – you know, you think, "Well, that's obvious," but unfortunately the rates of doing that are much less than they should be in our active treatment hospitals, and what changed it after many, many attempts in some of these hospitals is the recommendation of a patient and family council.

So I'm going to encourage the minister to look at doing that in active treatment hospitals in Alberta. Who knows? There may be

some that already have them, and that's great. But in the meantime, when we're considering Bill 22, whether it's considering cabbage rolls or visits from cats, I think this is something that is positive, and I think it's something that, certainly, I support.

We obviously will watch out. We need to watch for things and make sure that we're not duplicating, you know, the document that the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned. I think that's important. Let's not try to reinvent the wheel. I know that the Health minister is always looking for ways to save money, and that's one of her concerns. If we don't have to spend that \$150,000 to produce this document, you know, maybe we'll have to spend a third of that or a quarter of that or none of that if, in fact, the document that's already available can be used or largely plagiarized from or tweaked or whatever the verb you want to use.

But I do think that this is a positive development. I think any time that we can take our residents and their families and get them more actively involved with the operation of a facility, whether it's a private facility or a public facility, to me, makes less of a difference. What makes a difference is having residents and their families involved because I think that's very positive. It is a place where grievances and concerns can be aired on a regular basis, and they can be addressed before they snowball into something much larger, that becomes a concern for both the resident and the family.

I think it's incredibly important that we realize that many of our residents in these care facilities are vulnerable and in some cases have either a medical condition or some other situation that means that they are less able to care for themselves and that every mechanism that we can put in place possible to ensure that their needs are met and that their needs are addressed in a timely basis – and I see this is one of them – we embrace and we adopt.

So, Madam Speaker, I'm wholeheartedly in favour of this bill. I'll look forward to the debate in committee, and I'll also look forward to considering, perhaps, some amendments to the bill. But I commend the minister for introducing it, and, again, as I said before, I would certainly encourage her to consider expansion of this program to our active treatment hospitals.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North on behalf of the Minister of Health to close debate.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank all the members in the House today who engaged in the conversation on Bill 22, Resident and Family Councils Act, the act that gives residents and family members of long-term care, licensed supportive living facilities as well as the PDD community a mechanism for healthy dialogue with their facility operators. Truly a win-win for all. Even though I thoroughly enjoyed the debate today – cabbage rolls, cats, and all – at this time I would like to close debate.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

4:30

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 19
An Act to Protect Gas and
Convenience Store Workers

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. I'd just like to take a few moments of everyone's time here because I don't think we should delay passing this bill for another minute. Again, I'm very proud to be part of this bill and part of a government that is getting the job done in protecting our gas and convenience store workers.

This bill is necessary. It's a necessary bill and a bill that epitomizes how extensive consultation results in a bill that both protects workers and ensures that employers can be easily compliant with the mandates in this bill. It's also a bill that demonstrates that this government keeps its promises. We promised to move on protecting these workers in 2015 after the tragedy in Calgary, and we started last session doing that with Bill 17, which ensured that workers would not be liable for loss of money due to theft. Here we are with Bill 19, Madam Chair, further protecting Alberta's gas and convenience store workers. That's what this bill is all about, protecting those workers.

Also, just briefly, I know we haven't talked too much about this, but I don't anticipate that consumers will find these new laws to be burdensome at all. Most people already pay at the pump, and many gas stations who don't have that technology have a prepay mandated at their stations anyhow. Frankly, I can't remember the last time I walked into a gas bar and paid. Bill 19 also mandates that gas stations have signage indicating that prepay is in place, so I think that that's another item that will alleviate any confusion for consumers over what's required in order to get gas.

As you know, Madam Chair, on Monday, when this bill was introduced in first reading, Mr. Jo's family was here, the gas station owner who was the recent victim of senseless gas-and-dash violence. His family was in the gallery as well as his son. You know, his son was quoted in the newspaper after that devastating incident, and he said something that really gets to the heart of why we need to push this bill through. It was this, paraphrased. He said that my dad tried to make people prepay before fuelling, but many would say to him: it's not the law, so I'm not going to do it. So they would fuel up, and some would just take off after they fuelled up. But here we are now, and it is going to be the law. Signage will be out in these gas stations, and there will be no confusion that this is the law and that everyone must prepay for their fuel.

I want to thank all the members in this Assembly on both sides for the positive input that's been given on this bill. I really do appreciate it, and I do think that they see the urgency for this bill as well. Madam Chair, every time a death occurs at a gas station or a convenience store, it breaks my heart, and it breaks all Albertans' hearts. It's for this reason that I urge everyone in this committee to stop the heartbreak and support Bill 19.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 19? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to this bill in Committee of the Whole this afternoon. I agree with what my colleague from Calgary-Klein said regarding, you know, how our feelings go out to the families that have been affected by these tragedies. This is why I'm really proud of the Minister of Labour for putting this bill forward and protecting these

families so that this kind of thing doesn't happen again. It's common-sense legislation that we have before us. I'm pleased to see the support we have from the opposition as well.

You know, it's interesting that in Alberta sometimes we lead on legislation, and sometimes we don't. I'm really proud that we're stepping up with this bill here today. This is something where I wonder why we didn't have it before, and I wonder about the priorities of the former government and why, perhaps, they hadn't planned ahead and put this kind of thing in place a long time ago. I understand that there are a lot of things that have to be navigated in terms of small businesses and confusion at the pumps, but these are things that we can work out when we sit down at the table with our partners in business. I'm really proud that we're here today and doing this.

I really look forward to hearing what other members of the House have to say on this bill. This is something that affects all of us in each of our constituencies. Like the member said, I think we should pass this as soon as we can. But I think there's more to be said on this bill this afternoon, and I want to make sure that people get a chance to have their say and chime in on how important this is to them and their constituencies.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. Just a couple of months after I was first elected, a woman was killed on 16th Avenue. The Member for Calgary-Klein was talking about this. On June 7, 2015, Maryam Rashidi was killed when she was working at the Centex on 16th Avenue. She died just four months after leaving Iran with her husband and child and arriving in Calgary to work as an engineer. However, she was laid off soon after arriving and was working at the Centex just to make ends meet. I believe it was on her fourth shift at that Centex. She died because she was told that if somebody was in a gas and dash while she was on duty, she would be responsible for those funds. [interjection] No? I think I have that wrong. However, she did die because she was trying to protect the business and she was trying to protect those funds. If that person was forced to prepay for their gas, this would not have happened.

I was able to go to her funeral just a couple of weeks later. I told everyone present that her death would not be forgotten, and it hasn't been forgotten because we are here today to put forward legislation, just like we did with Bill 17, to protect these workers, because they truly do need protection. It's precarious work when you work for a gas station. It's not always the most secure job. It's nowhere near the highest paying job, but a lot of people do it because they need to make ends meet. That's what becomes a precarious job.

Just being able to put forward this legislation to show people that their lives matter and that the deaths of these people – I believe it's been five in just the past few years – are not forgotten, and we are making concrete action to make sure that nobody dies in the future because they have to stop a gas and dash, because they need to protect their place of employment and their job on top of that.

I'm really proud to stand here today to support this legislation. I'd really hope that every member of this Assembly supports this legislation as well because it's incredibly important not just to people who are working in convenience stores today but who'll work there in the future. Because these are jobs that will always be needed, we will always need people to work these precarious jobs. So I'm very happy to stand and support this bill.

I really want to thank the Member for Calgary-Klein for his words and everyone who has spoken because it is very important that we get up, that we support this legislation. I want to, of course, thank the Member for . . .

4:40

Mr. Smith: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Connolly: . . . Drayton Valley-Devon because, I know, just being from a community where somebody has recently died trying to protect his business, it is so important. We've all seen how it affects the families, how it affects the communities. No matter what someone's job is, you shouldn't have to go to work thinking — people go to work thinking that they may die. However, that shouldn't be one of your job descriptors. Everyone needs to come home safe, and everyone has the right to come home safe. I'm really proud to have this legislation and to bring it forward and to support it with all my might.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my privilege to stand up and speak to Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. It was with great happiness that I heard that this was coming forward. I think that it is a long time coming, and I know that the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police have been in support of this coming forward for a number of years now, which is why they were an incredibly important validator of this. Other leaders such as Husky and 7-Eleven have also said that they are coming onboard to make sure that there is prepay available at their stores.

Of course, one of my biggest concerns in my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville was that there would not be undue burden put on convenience stores or gas stations that are small, that cannot afford the cost of arming these gas stations with prepay technology, because it can cost \$30,000 or more per pump. That was a big concern of mine, so I was glad that the government did do very, very thorough consultation with the different stakeholders, that they went out and that occupational health and safety did thorough checks of hundreds of operations across Alberta to really see exactly what the story was with different types of operations, different numbers of staffing, different training levels, different models of how businesses have policies for how workers can keep themselves safe. There was a really good amount of working knowledge that the government undertook over the last almost two years to do that, so it's with confidence that I can support this.

I want to recognize and remember the people that have lost their lives over the years, families, including the families of Ki Yun Jo and Surinder Pal Singh, who were here to join us as we introduced this legislation, because, of course, every death is one death too many. It's with a lot of sadness but gratefulness that we were able to have them with us that day in the Legislature.

Of course, there are some questions that people have in terms of the rollout of the legislation. You know, people were asking, "Why have a mandatory violence prevention plan?" and "Is that what's best?" I know from the data that was gathered that having a plan is the most important thing, that the data does not back up having extra staff overnight necessarily. What is proven is having clear steps in place so that workers know that there is a set of standards that they can adhere to when they are at work and a certain set of standards that the business is adhering to to make sure that they can be seen, that they can see what's going on outside of the store, that there wouldn't necessarily be more money or more cigarettes, something

like that, overnight that is not secured, that might be a reason why someone would target a business for theft.

Also, people are asking questions about the length of time to introduce this. It is important to make sure that we know what the effects are and would be of implementing legislation like this here in Alberta. We need to know what Alberta businesses' concerns are, that they're not being overly burdened with something like this. So I'm glad to know that if a business is concerned about the costs that will be incurred or their ability to institute what the law is asking them to do, they can work with the Ministry of Labour, with occupational health and safety to look at exactly what their own picture is of what they can and cannot do.

Of course, prepaying doesn't mean a card at the pump. I know that in different co-op stores and Husky stores that I've gone to, it's not necessarily a matter of being able to pay at the pump, but you can go into the store. That, I know, is important to a lot of businesses because they want you to be able to come out of your car, come into the store, and actually buy the things in the store that have a greater profit to the store so that the businesses can stay viable. This was a concern that was voiced here and in Lloydminster when we were talking about the difference of the levy on fuel at gas pumps, that people might travel a distance to go to a different store because the margins that are at the pump are not actually a lot compared to the need for business, for people to come into the store.

That is something that I had asked the ministry about, to see what those effects would be. Apparently, what the research says is that it's possible that there might be some change in people's spending behaviour in the very initial weeks after implementing but that when people kind of get the way that they do business around this new way, a prepay system, they go back into the store. It resolves itself within a few months. I'm glad to hear that because I want to make sure that the stores that are out in our small rural communities are able to still keep their employees employed and are able to stay open in some of our smaller communities, that need to have availability to fuel and of necessities that are at the corner.

There were also questions about supports, and we know that these businesses will be able to work closely with the Ministry of Labour's support staff to be able to ensure that we are working with them every step of the way.

4:50

Some of the other points that I wanted to touch upon are that there would be time-locked safes, that there would be some methods of having that in place or having minimal amounts of cash on hand. Some have already gone to video monitoring.

It's important to make sure that we have workers safe because healthy workers that are safe are the first and most important necessity to a business being successful. Businesses can't be successful without having healthy workers that are safe and can go back home to their family at the end of the night, which is what every worker has an absolute right to do. So it's incumbent upon us to do what we can to make sure that we do everything within our power to make sure that that happens.

You know, I had heard some concerns from gas station workers that they have unfortunately come into contact with customers that have been quite combative and have blamed these sorts of prepay systems on the workers themselves, so it's good that part of the work is to make sure that there'll be signage so that people become more accustomed to the way that things are changing. We know that it's been working in B.C., so I have faith that it will work here in Alberta as well.

I think it's important to not just talk with the companies that represent these businesses and represent these workers but to talk to the workers themselves and really see what the impacts have

been on their lives up until now and what they hope to see going forward so that we can let them know that their voices are important, that their safety is important.

I'm looking forward to seeing this legislation passed, and I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak on behalf of some of the workers within my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville because they are incredible people who do a very tough job.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not going to take long. I think things have been covered very thoroughly, but a few things I want to talk about were – the fact is that this is a wonderful move. This is a wonderful bill. I'm so happy to see it.

I remember when they first brought this in in B.C. because I travel to B.C. fairly often. I have family there. I was like: "What? You have to go in to pay first, then get your gas?" I thought that was a little convoluted, but one adjusts. You adjust. After a few times you don't even think about it. Then I started thinking back to a long time ago when we always prepaid our gas. It was what we did, you know, before we commonly used credit cards to pay for gas, and a lot of times when we had full service, you would pay ahead of time.

Dr. Turner: You used to have to pump.

Ms Woollard: Oh, yes. I don't go that far back.

I'm making the point that people adjust. If we want to keep travelling, we buy gas. We adjust.

This is one that is so wonderful to finally bring in. I mean, the fact that B.C. has had no gas-and-dash deaths since 2008, when they brought this legislation in, like, is fantastic. You and I, if we have children or grandchildren going off to do work in all the many areas that they work at while they're going through school or postsecondary education, want them to know that they're going to be coming home at the end of their shifts and not be falling prey to someone who takes advantage of them and often takes advantage of the fact that they think they'll be on the hook for any losses incurred, which they may or may not be.

So, bottom line, I think that the more things we do, within reason of course, to try to help people to do their jobs and be able to come home safely at the end of the day is a good thing. You know, I was thinking, too, that back before we paid at the pump, we'd have to go inside to pay. We'll do the same thing now, just in a different order. This is pay first, pump later.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've really been enjoying the conversation this afternoon. I've actually been scratching my mind, desperately thinking: how could I relate climate change to this act? I know that dealing with climate change is a good thing, but how can I actually get climate change into this? I mean, I realize that burning gasoline actually leads to some adverse effects of climate change, so probably I can't get there, right?

Anyway, I do want to stand and actually congratulate the House on the discussion this afternoon. This is a good act. This needs to be done. I have a personal history that I can relate to this. When I was a university student, one of my summer jobs was actually in a gas station, and this was in the era that was referred to. It was not so long ago that you actually had to pump the gas. That's where the

name "gas pump" comes from, by the way. You actually had to pump by hand like, you know, a pump handle.

Ms Woollard: I've heard stories.

Dr. Turner: Yeah. I'm not that old that I had to do that when I was a university student, but I did have to work in a gas station on a busy highway, similar to the tragedy that occurred in Thorsby. I did have to work by myself in that environment on a busy highway in the evenings, and I did have to manage cash at the time, so I actually can really empathize with this situation and with the workers who are in that situation.

From that perspective, I can tell you that this legislation is good legislation, and it is going to save lives, as it has in British Columbia. It's going to improve the quality of life of the people that work in that environment and, I actually dare say, the small-business owners, that are going to basically have a more secure source of revenue from their operations. As was attested to by the presence of the folks from Husky, which is not a small business, the major chains like Husky and probably the others are going to benefit from this legislation as well, and that's going to add to the corporate taxes that we can collect in this province. I think all of us should be really happy about that.

I'm not all that worried about whether or not we have to go in and leave a credit card or other identification ahead of time. I'm actually doing that presently with the Element card that we have to pay for gasoline and other things as members of the Legislature. It adds about 30 seconds to the whole transaction, and the small businesses perhaps can get some benefit from it by having the customer come into the store and possibly purchase some other quote, necessities, unquote, at the same time. I think there really isn't a problem with that.

I would remind all members, actually, that Costco works on this model right now. They're very successful. You cannot buy gasoline at Costco without having a membership or a credit card or a debit card, and by the looks of it, from the lines that are at the gas bars at Costco, it's a pretty successful proposition. I think that these are things where, basically, we're moving with the times here, and we should get on with it.

5:00

I want to mention not just the gas-and-dash aspects of this bill. The other aspects of this bill are also very important, that cash management that I referred to from my experience when I was a university student. In those days we didn't have lottery tickets, but now there are lottery tickets which are fungible, and with having cash available, potentially, to be robbed, you know, with violence, because of that, I think it is a real major concern. I'm really happy to see that this legislation will go some way to ameliorating that situation. I think there are still other things that may need to be done, but we're going to probably continue with the consultation as we go forward.

This is good legislation. I'm happy to see that it's getting support from both sides of the House, and I'm happy to see that it's going to help with the economy if not with climate change. At least this province will be moving ahead.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Piquette: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 19.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, we have made wonderful progress in a spirit of harmony and co-operation that pervades this place from time to time. On that note, I will move that we adjourn until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:04 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, November 2, 2017

Day 48

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, November 2, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the density of our forests, the fertility of our farmlands, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, and the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as committed stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good morning. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 21

Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thanks, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to part 4 of Bill 21, the Alberta heritage fund scholarship committees. I do have some concerns here about how this has been managed and wonder if the transition that's taking place has been helpful or actually quite unhelpful.

I have in my hand a series of letters from a school in my riding. For the last couple of years they have been contacting me and challenging me about trying to do something about this. In one letter here from April of this year she continues to say:

I really appreciate Mr. Orr staying on top of this. I have not heard anything further from Scholarships Alberta regarding the Rutherford Scholarships, so I assume that there has been no change in policy and that they will continue to refuse to provide schools with lists of Rutherford recipients.

That began a couple of years ago. The schools always used to get the lists. The schools used to be able to celebrate with their students, with their staff the successes of students who had done well. The teachers had the opportunity to be encouraged and to be excited about their students.

But when this began to be changed over and, as is indicated, was I guess we could say absorbed into the government department rather than being handled by the committee, the policy changed. I wonder why, when it was brought back into government, the functionality of this thing declined. For the last couple of years students have been denied the right to receive the list of the students in their school that have received scholarships. As a result, when they try to hold scholarship award ceremonies, when they try to promote the scholarship, the whole thing is essentially stonewalled by the department refusing to provide to them the lists of who their students are.

I think this is entirely not helpful for the schools. The schools, clearly, are not very happy with it. Back in April as well I brought this up with the Minister of Advanced Education. He has been aware of it, but so far the policy doesn't seem to have changed. It continues to be the situation.

I've got other letters here going back a further year, to November 2016. She says: "Hello, Mr. Orr. I don't know whether you've managed to make any headway [at all on this] regarding the new policies." Anyway, she carries on: I want you to continue to work on it.

Here is the correct time and opportunity to ask this question: why are schools not being allowed to be included to celebrate, to acknowledge the students that are receiving the awards? The reason that was given to the school is because it's a privacy of information matter, which, quite frankly, I find extremely hard to believe. It would simply take one line on the application form when the students apply to say that they give permission for the school to receive the names and to recognize the students in their school. I don't see in any way how this policy is helpful. I would like to know if it's going to continue to be the policy of the department to refuse schools the opportunity to recognize their students, to receive the names, to know who in their school has received scholarships. That's my question to the government.

If getting rid of this committee is partly an attempt to deny schools and keep schools in the dark, then I think this is very retrograde policy. I do question what's happening here and would appreciate some answers from the government for the schools in our province in that regard.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to comment, question? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for continuing to raise this issue on behalf of his constituents. Certainly, I think we need to first be clear that we are talking about two very different things. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is talking about the Rutherford scholarships and the lists of Rutherford scholarship recipients that used to be provided to schools on behalf of the department as well as the Alberta heritage scholarship committee. I think it's important for everyone in this House to recognize that the Rutherford scholarships were never administered by the Alberta heritage scholarship committee. They were always administered by the government of Alberta. There are thousands and thousands of Rutherford scholarship recipients every year, and, of course, that's part of Alberta's promise. We have committed to making sure that every qualified Alberta student not only has a space in a university or college but has the financial means to get the higher education that they need to make their lives better.

By dissolving the heritage scholarship committee, we are in no way impacting government's ability to administer the Rutherford scholarship or any of the other scholarships that are funded by the heritage trust fund, Madam Chair. I just want to allay the concerns of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and anybody else who may be worried that the heritage scholarships are in any way at risk by dissolving this committee. They are not. The heritage scholarships are in very good hands, and our students will continue to get them as they always have to pursue the higher education that will make their lives better.

With respect to providing lists to schools of the recipients from their schools, of course, it's a little bit ironic that the members opposite are asking for more red tape on the administration of a

government program. That seems to be uncharacteristic of the way the members opposite carry themselves, but I have committed personally to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka in the past to look into this. We're still waiting for the department to provide me with a response on why the policy shift changed in the first place and what the factors are that we need to consider before we decide to make the policy shift back to providing lists to schools. Certainly, I will promise to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and anybody else who is concerned about this to look further into the matter and certainly appreciate the delicious irony of being asked to create more red tape for our schools and for the department.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: My thanks to the Minister of Advanced Education for the clarification. We did check on the Internet, and I guess maybe we misread there. I actually thought the Rutherford fund was under the heritage fund. So thank you for the clarification. That's very helpful.

I do trust we will be able to resolve the issue of the schools at least somehow being able to know who their students are because I do think it adds a real value to the schools and the teachers and the students.

Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I'd just like to recap the phases and timelines for the review of agencies, boards, and commissions, or ABCs. The ABC review was launched in November 2015 and released the first set of phase 1 results during Budget 2016, announcing the dissolution of 26 public agencies at that time. Phase 1 covered 135 agencies governed by the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, or APAGA. This review has resulted in the amalgamation or dissolution now complete or under way of a total of 56 phase 1 agencies, boards, and commissions.

9:10

The ABC review has now reached another critical milestone with the initial review of all ABCs in phase 2 along with additional recommendations from phase 1. Phase 2 reviewed 140 agencies that are not subject to APAGA, which include a large number of self-regulated professional organizations. As a result of phase 2, an additional eight agencies, boards, and commissions are proposed to be dissolved or amalgamated. Another 24 are undergoing further review to ensure alignment with significant ministry initiatives, broader systems reviews, or legislative reviews. The rest of the phase 2 agencies will be maintained at this point in time.

Various administrative and process efficiencies have been found and will be implemented to help ensure ABCs are efficient and effective in delivering their mandates and goals. We will continue to evaluate all agencies to ensure Albertans continue to be well served and represented.

The third and final review phase is under way now and is focused on executive compensation, roles, mandates, and governance excellence in public postsecondary education. Advanced Education is leading the work on this phase.

Turning our attention now to the bill that is before us, Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, will enable us to implement dissolutions where

legislative amendments are required for 14 ABCs. I'd like to take the opportunity to clarify a couple of questions from second reading as to which phases of the review of the agencies, boards, and commissions are covered by Bill 21. To clarify, Bill 21 covers phases 1 and 2 of the ABC review. Thirteen of the dissolutions proposed in this bill are from phase 1, and one is under phase 2.

I've also noted a few additional questions from yesterday, and I'd like to provide some additional information at this time. First, let me be clear that work continues on phase 3 of the ABC review with a focus on postsecondary institutions. We'll have more to say on this in the future.

Second, members asked about the savings of \$33 million over three years from the ongoing work of the ABC review. I am pleased that our government is working hard to find savings in a thoughtful and measured approach. For example, part of that \$33 million, including savings of about \$5 million in CEO compensation and additional savings, is being found through streamlined processes and efficiencies.

Third, let me take a moment to say a few words about the Alberta Heritage Scholarship Act committees for advanced education. As you recall, during second reading I explained that the Alberta heritage scholarship committees select about 70 of the 49,000 scholarship and award recipients supported by Advanced Education each year. These are specialized selection committees that were stood up on an as-needed basis to adjudicate certain scholarship and award applications. Recommendations were made to the department and finalists selected. Dissolving these committees essentially saves a step in the selection process, and Albertans will not experience any disruption in services. More importantly, Madam Chair, the changes we're bringing forward make the system more efficient, and that's a large part of the goal the government is trying to achieve with our review of ABCs.

In summary, Madam Chair, all of the changes being brought forward by this bill will make government as a whole more efficient, more streamlined, and will remove ABCs which no longer meet the requirements of government and of all Albertans. I strongly urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to my colleague across the way for some clarification on the government's intentions. You know, I'm still concerned about a couple of things in general.

First of all, again, we thought on this side that step 3 was going to look at some more value for the taxpayer, some more value for students, some more value and some efficiency and some effectiveness in our advanced education system, and it's not here. Hearing now that this is a consolidation of steps 1 and 2 and that step 3 is still to come, you know, two and a half years into this government's mandate, it makes me wonder. Why the delay? Why the wait? It's something where the opposition has stood up time and time again and said: "Yes. We applaud this. We look for efficiencies. We look for the opportunity for key agencies to be arm's-length and independent from government." So let's get on it.

But in two and a half years the other thing that surprises me is that we're starting to hear from some of our stakeholders about areas where what the government is doing in these changes may have severe unintended consequences. It may lead to more problems for Albertans conducting wealth, Albertans farming, Albertans ranching, Albertans out there who actually have built

Alberta and are actually the ones we rely on to feed us, to create wealth, to provide jobs. When we're getting information on this on such a fast basis, it's good for us to consult, but, again, we didn't have the time frame to know this was coming.

I'm most concerned about the unintended consequences of what this government's doing as it impacts the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. I said this yesterday in second reading. I said that I supported the intent, but did the government get it right? Obviously, in timing and consultation it appears that they haven't.

Apparently, the Agricultural Operation Practices Act is known by Alberta farmers as their right-to-farm law. For years and years there has been great concern about urban sprawl taking up important food production, agriculture land, and it's not easy to balance between people's freedom to choose where they live and how they live and our need to farm and our need to ensure that we live up to our opportunity to feed Albertans and feed the world.

We were originally told that even though this committee has been set and this act is there, it hasn't been used. Well, now we're hearing about a court case that's actually under way under the powers granted through the Alberta Operation Practices Act. Sometimes, you know, when a committee is there, that allows people to operate a little more openly, a little more transparently and make the right decision without going to court.

Of course, we've seen time and time again from this government, from what's happening in Alberta that our court system is so delayed and so clogged up and so backed up. Unfortunately, that makes it so very, very expensive for everyone. If the unintended consequence of what this government is doing with Bill 21 is to force agriculture producers or to force urban dwellers to a very, very expensive court situation, a very, very timely court situation, my goodness, what could the unintended consequences of this government once again not being prepared and consulting on a timely basis be? That greatly concerns me.

The right-to-farm law provides farmers with protection from lawsuits based on the common-law cause of action known as nuisance. I talk to my colleagues in my caucus about it, and they talk about how sometimes it's 2 in the morning and it's the best time to go and get that crop harvested. It's got to be done. We saw it this last fall with our producers when it snowed early, when it formed ice, when it cleared up and unfortunately hit them again, and the crop damage was severe. A lot of the crops stayed on the fields until the spring, and then that caused other problems. My goodness, if we ended up in a situation where a producer was in a lawsuit or a producer had to face an injunction because of the ability to take off his crop on a timely basis, on the highest yield basis – and consumers and Albertans depend on this. The more efficient, the more effective our producers are, the more supply there'll be, the more commodity there'll be, and, obviously, then the cheaper the prices can be for all of our consumers.

Of course, government's main goal, other than being prepared and consulting, is to ensure that competition is enhanced and to ensure that the producers have the best chance to produce effectively and with the highest yields they can.

9:20

Now, I guess what I'd like to hear at this point from somebody on the other side is: have we considered what may happen to farmers under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act if all these situations start to get dragged into court? You know, we have the Farmers' Advocate's office right now, which acts as an administrator for the committee, and then the complaint goes before the committee. We'd heard that there wasn't one; now we hear that there is one. I guess, you know, Madam Chair, my concern is: when

it comes to our solid agricultural producers, has the government thought this out?

I'm looking forward to further discussion on this, and I'm looking forward to amendments. I'm hoping that the government has analyzed their unintended consequences.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, hearing what the member has to say about, you know, the farming community and the concerns they have, he's right when he talks about how the Agricultural Operation Practices Act is an act that farmers and the farming, agricultural community use, as he characterizes, as the right to farm.

Now, he also the other day talked about how the public agency, the AOPA review committee, hasn't met in six years. They haven't. There are no public members on that committee. It doesn't preclude the ability for the ministry to be able to create an AOPA public review committee if needed. It will draw on members of the public. You can still do that. It doesn't need to draw on the public agency that, as far we're concerned, has become redundant, and I think that redundancy is obvious when it hasn't had any members on it and hasn't had any duties, you know, for the past six years.

I think it is clearing up, you know, some of that red tape. It is clearing up and perhaps streamlining the ability for farmers to do just that, and that's to get on with the business of actual farming. The Agricultural Operation Practices Act still exists. It's the main piece of legislation that gives the right to farmers to do just that, and that is farm. It's in place to look after especially those intensive livestock operations when there are issues of concern that can be brought up and can be addressed, can be rectified so they can get on again with the business of doing that actual farming.

You know, being able to dissolve the public agency will in no shape or form affect the ability of AOPA to do its job, the ability of the ministry to appoint, draw members from the public for a public review committee when and if it's needed. The ability still stays there. There's no loss of that ability to ensure that the work still continues. At the same time, there's an opportunity now to get rid of a portion that had become redundant and, in my mind, is no longer needed, stressing that the ministry still will have the ability to appoint a public review committee when and if needed.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning, everyone. It's a good day in Alberta to be in the Chamber here, and I appreciate the comments of the minister going forward in regard to this bill and the portions of it.

I think the minister knows that we live and die by the words of this Chamber. That's the reason for the recording of *Hansard*, to make sure that everything is recorded in a legal manner so that, should legislation be brought forward, everyone can publicly inspect the words that we use and, therefore, the way that they are interpreted beyond that, possibly even in courts, and the use of the legislation going forward.

I'd primarily like to speak to what the agriculture minister spoke to, the agricultural practices review act and, stemming from that, the review committee. There are important things going forward there.

Madam Chair, I'd like to table an amendment going forward, and then I'd like to be able to speak to that. Would it be your preference that I do that now?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, please. If you can just provide me with the original.

Mr. Strankman: I'll keep one. The original is on the top.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A1. Please proceed.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. To my previous conversation and the conversation from the minister, I'd like to present the amendment and read it as an amendment to Bill 21. I would like to move that Bill 21, Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, be amended by striking out part 2 of the bill completely.

My understanding of the bill, then, would be that any review or any inclusion of part 2 would be stricken from the act, and therefore we would not be faced with a review committee amendment.

I think, Madam Chair, that in reviewing the bill – and I have a copy of the bill right in front of me – it's important, as I've stated to the minister and to others in the Chamber and in *Hansard*, that we live and die by the words even though it's a small, two-letter word in the portion of the section under part 2.

Amends RSA 2000 cA-7

3 The Agricultural Operation Practices Act is amended in section 4 by adding "if a practice review committee is appointed to consider the referral," after "made and."

Now, I know that it's a small word. This may be some sort of a technical technicality, but I've seen it in legal precedent personally and in other cases, in this case the word "if." It's a small word. Even the minister in his dissertation moments ago said of the review committee, which is a part of the agricultural practices act: if the minister decides.

I think that's an important qualification, Madam Chair, because the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, which the farmers of rural Alberta and indeed many parts of the country view, perceive to be their right to farm as part of their heritage, is part of the property rights that they have. It was created as a protection of those property rights and a protection of their heritage and a protection of their ability to operate their farming practices as normal farm practices.

9:30

As a long-time and former aerial applicator I've applied chemical in and around farming communities and acreage communities from Innisfail, Alberta, to Frontier and Carlyle, Saskatchewan. In some of the cases where there are acreages involved and we're out there applying chemical, those acreage owners take great aversion to what they perceive to be the dangerous flying manoeuvres and application procedures of aerial applicators in applying chemical to the neighbouring farmland, but that aerial application manoeuvre is actually a standard practice. It's part of a standard practice, not unlike chasing cattle down a roadway, which can create dust, the spreading of farm waste, manure from hog operations that may have gone on on a farm operation for generations. Then they are forced by someone who moves there, as my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat has stated, in an urban sprawl situation, where those people take great offence to something that was actually a normal practice before they moved there.

Madam Chair, I think it's important that we be exercising and cognizant of our due diligence in this Chamber to protect the rights of agricultural producers. It's part of the heritage of where our food comes from, and I think it's very important. As my colleague

mentioned and as I've been made aware of, there actually is now a court case that is in procedure under the auspices of this act. The maintenance of this review committee is not necessarily a financial burden. These people do not get paid per diems. The maintenance of this committee is not an ongoing financial burden to the government. It's simply a definitive, verbal recognition of a legal requirement under the present legislation.

Not unlike my friends on this side in the Chamber, Madam Chair, I'm respectfully trying to make this argument to the minister and my colleagues, and many of my colleagues of the government and in the government are from rural-based areas, whether it be, in the case of some members, even an agricultural process called forestry. There is action that goes on that people who may move to an acreage feel offends them, but that has been a practice in those areas for a long time, and we need to have a respectful way, not based on the word "if" the minister decides. It should be enshrined in legislation as "when" there is a complaint so that we could go forward on and actually understand it. I think it's important to get this on the record, and I'm anxious and respectful, hopefully, of our time here today to hear what the rest of my legislative colleagues have to say about this. Even though it may sound like a technical argument, it is very important to a good part of the constituents of Alberta.

I need people to know that one of the pairs of legal eyes that saw and caught this was a property rights lawyer, actually, from St. Albert, who in a past time travelled throughout the province, with north of 50 presentations throughout Alberta. The previous government in this province faced the wrath of his presentations. That could quite possibly be one of the reasons why they are not in government this day, the information that he provided to Albertans about property rights and about the negativity of legislation where the government sloppily, I will say, or without due care and attention created unintended consequences that this gentleman spotted and referred to the rural people. There was a province-wide negative uprising to the legislation, Bill 36, that was presented at the time.

Madam Chair, I'm anxious to hear the comments of the rest of my colleagues. I stand down.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for his comments. I understand his concerns, the concerns of his constituents – his constituents are very similar to my constituents – to be able to have their operations. In the case of AOPA reviews it's often of intensive livestock operations. Now, the Agricultural Operation Practices Act Practice Review Committee hasn't had any members on it since 2011, right? Since that time, in this interim of six years or so, there have been new, you know, operations. New intensive livestock operations have taken place.

In many respects the public agency, you know, has become redundant. No new members have been appointed. Under AOPA, the Agricultural Operations Practices Act, the minister, myself, has the ability to appoint public members. In the past you drew on that public agency to draw those members from. There were no members to draw from because no one had been sitting on that agency since 2011.

This, you know, in many respects is clearing up red tape. It doesn't take away from the ability of the minister, myself, to be able to appoint members for a review when they come up. It is, I think,

somewhat good news that a lot of reviews don't take place. I think the vast majority of Albertans understand the importance of agriculture to the economy of Alberta and how important it is to our culture, a backbone of who we are.

Saying that, it is appointing individuals to the public review committee who would be picked from the agriculture community itself. We're making sure we have the expertise on the review committee to be able to review whatever the complaint might be. The complaints are often around dust, noise, odour in the case of intensive livestock operations. All of these are taken into consideration with the review committee. Like I say, the ability for myself as minister to be able to appoint from the public still exists. It always has. Now it does away with an agency that hasn't had anyone on it. It doesn't now, in fact, really exist.

I want to assure the Member for Drumheller-Stettler and I want to assure the members and Albertans that the ability to review any problems, any complaints based on the Agricultural Operation Practices Act will still continue as it always has. This is just clearing up a little bit that has become redundant over the past six years and continuing to do the good work that Albertans see that the department does, that the government does to ensure that agriculture remains the economic force in Alberta that it always has been.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

9:40

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I find it interesting that we're going to, by putting forward this part 2 in Bill 21, possibly drop a piece of a committee that has been very effective in allowing us to move forward with no cost involved. I believe that the fact that the committee is there has allowed Albertans to operate in a fashion where they know they need to operate fairly and in co-operation with each other, neighbours being able to get along and recognizing that there is a committee there to protect normal farming operation practices. If we move in a direction where we no longer have a committee there – you know, in the '90s it became very evident that the farmers' right to farm needed to be put into place to ensure that they could continue on with normal farming practices. Now we are to a point where it's been very effective, the fact that the committee is there and that people are not going to all of a sudden get into court challenges and that type of thing.

I do believe that with something that is costing us nothing yet is being very effective in allowing this Agricultural Operation Practices Act to be effective, we do it an injustice in recognizing how effective it has been by now getting rid of it. The fact that there's no activity, in my opinion, does not justify removing it. I actually believe that no activity in this instance is justifying the relevance of it being there. If it was a consideration based on excess funds having to be spent in order to keep this committee in place, that might be a different story, but in reality this costs us next to nothing – no money, maybe a limited amount of funds – to ensure that farmers continue to have the right to farm and that we have a mechanism in place that does not have to rely on court proceedings and those types of actions in order to protect farmers' right to farm and go about their normal farming practices.

So I speak in favour of the amendment as it's worded. I believe that this is definitely not necessary at this time and that we should move forward to ensure that with the right-to-farm laws and what other Canadian provinces were enacting at the same time, in the

'90s, we ensure that this type of committee is in place and that we protect that right to farm.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for his comments. I would, you know, agree and disagree with some of the comments he's talking about. I agree about the importance of agriculture in Alberta, without a doubt, but I disagree about the effectiveness of this committee, which, in fact, hasn't had anyone sitting on it since October 6, 2011, right? The committee: there's no one sitting on it. It's hard to validate the effectiveness of a committee that, in reality, doesn't exist.

At the same time, I want to again stress that under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act it doesn't preclude the ability for me to be able to appoint a practice review committee when complaints do come up. That still exists. The ability to protect the potential operation of a new facility anywhere in the province still exists and will continue to exist and always has. The fact still remains – you know, facts are facts – that the effectiveness of this committee doesn't exist because for the past six years there was nobody sitting on it, right? In that six-year time we've seen intensive livestock operations, new operations, open up across the province as farmers, ranchers, producers expand their operations. Maybe there are some new entrants into the industry that are operating new businesses, which is all great news.

Part of that great news is the ability of the Agricultural Operation Practices Act to continue the work that that act enables the minister and the department to do to ensure that those operations become viable and at the same time protect the interests of the public when there are some valid concerns. It's doing a dual job, and that is protecting the producers and protecting the public, you know, from potential issues that they might have. It goes a long way to educate the public as well of the importance of agriculture and the ability of farmers to do what they should be doing, and that's doing the good job they are of feeding us all.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. minister – or the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Oh, thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: I just wanted to make sure that you were listening.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Chair. The government's press release describes Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 – and I've been asked to be very short, so I will be – as a proposal “to repeal or amend nine pieces of legislation [in Alberta and] to dissolve 14 public agencies,” including the farm practices review committee under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act.

Now, as has been said here by both sides of the House, the AOPA is known by Alberta farmers as their right to farm, and it provides farmers with protection from lawsuits based on the common-law cause of action known as nuisance. Now, that common law allows a neighbour to seek damages and an injunction when they feel they are impacted by operations of a farm, which could be dust or noise or odour that comes from normal farming practices. In the '90s Alberta followed the lead of other Canadian provinces and enacted

the right so that farmers would have the ability to have complaints by neighbours such as this go to a committee. That committee is purely a peer committee; that is, made up of people that, you know, would be understanding of what goes on in farming operations.

If we were to look at a farmer that may just be outside of an urban centre, say he's been farming in Alberta since his grandfather homesteaded in the early 1900s and is still farming on the same land, and someone from a new subdivision that Joe farms beside – Joe Schmo, let's say, is the name of this farmer who determines that he has to combine until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, and he does this everywhere, but it just happens to be beside some people that have moved into a new subdivision.

You know, folks, there's one thing to remember here. In this agricultural life there's only one payday, and every farmer that actually has to get a crop off spends every waking minute either doing it or thinking about doing it. It's an important part of the entire agriculture industry in the province.

One more point I just should make – I was asked to be short, so I will. This committee at the moment has a case currently under way, if I'm not mistaken, under the powers granted under AOPA in regard to a hog barn and smells. Is the committee active and hearing this particular complaint? I guess that's a question for the minister. I have it under pretty good information that the committee has a case currently under way under the powers granted to them under the AOPA.

9:50

I mean, once again, if a different level of government, a municipality, decides setbacks for a hog barn, let's say, in this case, that's determined at that level of government. This is what always happens when, probably, urban sprawl starts and folks move into the rural areas and, with respect, bring urban ideas with them. We always have to be respectful of the fact that Albertan farmers and farmers all over the world are charged with feeding the world. Like I say, there's only one payday in this business, and you have to go and get it. The short amount of time that it actually takes for these guys to get this job completed has to be taken into consideration.

With that, I will just say that I do support the amendment and hope that the rest of my colleagues do as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a couple of more thoughts. I wholeheartedly support my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler's amendment for a number of reasons. First of all, the committee doesn't cost us any money – so it's not a valid argument that this consolidation saves us money – and it's working.

Potentially, the fact that right now all the complaints go through the Farmers' Advocate's office, who appoints a committee and then delivers a binding decision on whether the farmer is following generally accepted practices: it's obviously a situation where experts, where industry best practices are adhered to and honoured. As my colleague said and as I said earlier, at a time that we need more than ever our good agriculture producers, anything that a government does that could reduce a farmer's right-to-farm protection could have severe – severe – unintended consequences.

As my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler said, the word "if" concerns me greatly and the potential to make it political. What isn't an "if," as my colleague from Little Bow just stated, is that the common law, the generally practised law, allows neighbours to seek damages and an injunction where they feel they are impacted by dust, noise, and odours that can arise from a normal farming

practice. Thank goodness we live in a society and a province where legal remedies are there for all.

But, again, we've talked about urban sprawl and how the nature of the two ways of life can sometimes collide. Now we have a situation where the agriculture minister or the cabinet can make it political if – if – the minister decides to appoint the board, if a practice review committee is appointed to consider the referral. So "if" means "if not"?

My concern is that sometimes when something's there and is quiet, that means it's working. Madam Chair, I would seriously ask all of my colleagues in this House to stand up for farmers and ranchers, to stand up at a time when this industry has been again under attack from all sides, whether it's the environment, fires and snow, attack from urban sprawl and environment groups.

Mr. Minister, I'm very, very concerned that the lack of consultation, that the unintended consequences will come right out of Albertans' lifestyle and will come right out of Albertans' pockets and our heritage of fifth- and sixth-generation farmers and ranchers. I would ask you and your colleagues to reflect on this, to act with caution, and support my colleague's amendment to strike the word "if."

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:55 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Loewen	Schneider
Cyr	Panda	Strankman
Gotfried	Pitt	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hinkley	Piquette
Carlier	Hoffman	Renaud
Carson	Horne	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kazim	Sabir
Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Feehan	Miranda	Turner
Goehring	Phillips	Woollard
Gray		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 34
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I seek unanimous consent of all in the Chamber to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise on your behalf and to introduce some of the smartest and hardest working students in the whole province of Alberta, the grade 6 class of McLeod elementary school. They are here to attend School at the Legislature this week, and they have the privilege of watching us make life better for Albertans this morning. I appreciate them joining us, and I wish them all the best in learning about the practice of democracy here in our great province.

The Deputy Chair: Welcome.

Bill 21 Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (continued)

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 21. Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to commend my colleague for putting forward such a good amendment. The fact is that we're trying to improve this legislation and work with government, and sometimes it appears that partisanship gets in the way of actual common sense.

Now, this is something I'd like to discuss moving forward, the Alberta Economic Development Authority. This was something that was established in 1994, and I would say that from the notes I've got, the last time it met was early 2015. What's important to recognize here is that this group regularly puts forward reports on the competitiveness of government. The last report, coincidentally, was done in 2014, and this authority is now more or less no longer meeting.

It's interesting to see exactly what it is that this authority had done in previous years, so I'd like to read from a report that was moved in June of 2015, just after we actually took office. This is important. Now, the report itself is the Report on Competitiveness: Alberta 2014 from the AEDA. I'm going to quote from the message from the AEDA. Specifically here what's important and what they're trying to bring forward is information.

Alberta continues to perform very well in the benchmarking comparison – the province continues to have a high level of GDP per capita, low unemployment rate, and strong job creation. Gains in Alberta's relative ranking in productivity and innovation are also evident in the report. These improvements have come at a [critical] time for the province, as these support sustained prosperity for Alberta during downward cycles in resource prices. Alberta continues to be a leader in tax competitiveness and fiscal policy.

However, the economic landscape is changing as Alberta faces the challenges of a new low oil price environment. The impact of low oil prices on Alberta's economy and competitiveness will depend on how responsive the key players in the economy are to opportunities to innovate, improve productivity, and enhance competitiveness. Low oil prices will result in lower growth and higher unemployment in the short to medium term, but the slowdown in the energy sector gives rise to new opportunities for diversification (as human capital and resources are freed up for [each of the] other sectors) and also leads to a strong incentive to innovate and improve productivity and competitiveness.

Now, we recognize that low oil has had an impact on our economy. There's no disputing that. The move the government had made was that they started the Economic Development and Trade department. That was according to the press release – and I can be corrected if I'm wrong here – on October 22, 2015.

What we have is a group that rates our competitiveness, the Alberta Economic Development Authority. What they're doing is trying to see where we fit in the grand scheme of things. Now, we end up with a new ministry to focus on economic development. I will go and read from the press release from October 22, 2015, New Ministry to Focus on Economic Development. I'd like to specifically focus on the two quotes from the Premier herself and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Our government will be a good partner to job creators, by supporting the development of a more diversified and resilient economy. The new Economic Development and Trade department will provide leadership in efforts to create opportunity and lasting prosperity for all Albertans.

Now, that's the Premier.

Let's go on to what the Minister of Economic Development and Trade had said in the same press release.

We need to take the qualities that have made Alberta an energy leader – including an innovative, entrepreneurial culture and a highly skilled workforce – and apply them to the challenge of building a diversified, 21st century economy.

This was where the minister goes on and creates the wonderful Bill 1, the notorious Bill 1, that is more or less a job description of what he is supposed to do. It is Bill 1, Promoting Job Creation and Diversification Act. What's important here is that the minister was supposed to create partnerships that support entrepreneurship and focus on innovation. This goes right within this Bill 1. What we see here is that the minister more or less starts making new ways of creating grants; specifically, I believe it was \$5,000 for every new employee. This is something that was very underutilized because the fact is that almost all businesses within Alberta were shrinking.

10:20

Now, if the minister had been meeting regularly with a group of stakeholders, like possibly the Alberta Economic Development Authority, they probably would have been able to tell him that this was a mistake. They would have been able to go on and say: "We understand where you want to go with this. We understand that you want to get the money to the small-business owners to grow their businesses, but right now is not the time for us to be increasing taxes."

That is actually where we're needing to be very clear, which is why it appears that this government shut down this authority because we started to see reports or were concerned about seeing reports from this group saying that we were no longer competitive. When we start looking at the fact that we've got a carbon tax, we've got personal tax increases, corporate tax increases, we started seeing an education levy that was put on all of our property taxes, all of this stuff is impacting our small-business community, making us less competitive – less competitive – to our neighbours and other jurisdictions within the world.

What's important here is that when we start looking at groups like this one – and I'm not saying that this group necessarily was the answer to all of our problems, but it could have been a place for that minister to be able to hear what average Albertans were saying instead of putting forward a grandiose plan that failed completely. I'll tell you that my constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake – and I've repeatedly said this in the House – have been impacted by the failures that come from that minister and within his ministry. We absolutely need to be looking at reinforcing our business community, our small-business community. Why is that minister

not up in the House saying that we need to be competitive within Alberta?

Obviously, what happens here is that we've seen lower personal taxes, lower corporate taxes, and it comes down to the fact that when Economic Development and Trade is a ministry that is not doing its job, we end up with a failure to create new growth, and that's shameful. So what I would like to know is: did the government shut this authority down because they're terrified of the reports that are going to show that we're less competitive to our neighbours? And is there an incentive here to hide from Albertans how exactly we are doing in the grand scheme of Canada? I believe that when we start looking at this and we start investigating it, we're actually going to see that we're less transparent, less accountable to Albertans, and that's shameful.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 21?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? The vote has been carried for Bill 21.

Bill 22 Resident and Family Councils Act

The Deputy Chair: The Committee of the Whole now has under consideration Bill 22. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: I apologize, Madam Chair. You said Bill 22? Excellent. Well, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, Resident and Family Councils Act.

Madam Chair, I have a number of seniors' residences here in Edmonton-Centre. I can never remember the exact count, but I know that it's at least more than a dozen. I do make an effort every year to visit each of those residences at least twice a year to have the opportunity to meet with residents and to speak with them, to hear their concerns and be able to share with them the good work that we're doing here at the Legislature and some of the events and things that I've been working on here in the community.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that seniors in Edmonton-Centre are engaged. Out of all these opportunities I always enjoy the opportunity to hold a bit of a town hall, to take questions from the seniors that I'm visiting with, and they always have a number of very prescient questions. They're well informed about a lot of the work we're doing here in the Legislature. Indeed, I'm happy to say that a majority of the seniors that I meet with and speak with are very supportive of the work that our government has been doing and appreciative of many of the steps that we've taken on behalf of seniors.

But one of the things I have often heard from them about while we talk about government policy and other things: they often raise with me concerns about the residences where they live. Seniors, Madam Chair, are very engaged in building their communities. They're very engaged in speaking with each other and with looking at the different issues that happen. In some cases I've heard from

residents that they have concerns about how they're able to raise those concerns and being able to have them be heard. They've talked with me about, you know, raising concerns with management about one issue or another or speaking with others and trying to have issues addressed and that they feel that they have been shut out or that they're not able to have their voices heard or that they have difficulty engaging.

That's in a variety of different residences, Madam Chair, whether that's in public hospital facilities in some cases, in some cases other forms of affordable housing that have been provided, and, indeed, in some cases even in facilities like, say, life lease facilities and others, so I was really happy when I saw that the Minister of Health was bringing forward this bill to ensure that all seniors, all residents in these facilities will have the opportunity to engage in a council, to have that opportunity to be a part of the process to ensure that their voice is heard in the consideration of issues that affect them directly.

If passed, this legislation will expect the establishment of a resident and family council in all long-term and licensed supportive living facilities. We recognize, of course, that there are going to be some facilities that may have already set these up. Of course, we recognize that these are important mechanisms for giving them the chance to present their requests, their concerns, and propose solutions. It gives the opportunity for them to work together with the folks that manage these facilities to set up a resident or family council, to have that discussion.

The family part is important as well, Madam Chair, because indeed not only have I heard from residents of these facilities, but indeed we recognize that in some cases residents are not always able to advocate on their own behalf. This provides the opportunity for families to now have that opportunity to engage and to be able to look out for the care of their loved ones and to be able to have a well-established and defined process by which they can raise concerns and participate in discussions that are going to affect the lives of those they love.

You know, one of the reasons, Madam Chair, that I ran to be an MLA is because I saw that many people felt disenfranchised within the political system. I saw that many people felt that there was no point in being involved in politics, that there was no point in even voting in some cases because they felt that government would never hear their concerns. One of the reasons that I ran was because I wanted to improve that, that if I was given the opportunity to serve as an MLA, I would work with my community to help them better understand the way government functions, to inform them when they had opportunities to engage, and, indeed, demonstrate to them that their government representative, in fact, did care, wanted to hear their thoughts, and would fight on their behalf.

I see this much the same way, Madam Chair. This is an opportunity now for residents in these facilities to have a part, I guess, in what in many respects is a bit of a smaller government that looks after the affairs that affect them in their everyday lives.

I, for example, lived for eight years in a condominium that I own here in downtown Edmonton. Having the opportunity to participate on the condo board at that building was very important for me, and indeed that was my first taste of politics and where I sort of cut my teeth and sort of learned about organizing individuals and advocating for ideas and, indeed, having the opportunity to make change. This is an opportunity that we're now having the opportunity to extend – boy, I'm saying opportunity a lot today; word of the day, yes. This is a chance now for individuals who live in these facilities to have more of a connection, to participate in the decisions that are being made that affect their everyday lives.

I'm very happy to see that this bill covers persons with developmental disabilities who live in residences as well. That was

something that came forward after we had some initial conversations with advocates who represent the residents and families. They also felt that councils would be a great benefit to their loved ones and to the family members, give them a chance to have a greater voice and opportunity to engage.

10:30

Once this legislation comes into place, any facility resident or family member is going to have the opportunity to establish a family or resident council. It's led from the ground up, which I think is a good approach. The act will support self-governing councils, and it's going to be flexible, which is great.

Last night I was at an event, and I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Greg Christenson, whose company, Christenson Developments, has built many seniors' facilities across the province and around the city. I had a chance to speak with him a bit about this bill, and he expressed general support. It was important for him that there be recognition that not all circumstances in all buildings and all facilities are going to be exactly the same.

This allows some flexibility to enable residents and family members to determine the best processes and procedures for their individual councils, those being what roles members would play, the meeting format and the frequencies, and when and how the facility representatives should be involved in the council meetings. If a facility already has some form of group in place at the time, then the group has the opportunity to consider how the resident and family council would best integrate with the purposes of this legislation. I really appreciate that the minister has taken this into consideration, offering the opportunity for what is really the intent of this bill. This is to help facilitate communication.

In many respects, Madam Chair, my experience as an MLA has been that in a large majority of the cases when people come to me with questions and concerns, having the opportunity to sit down and talk through it, having a conversation to be able to explain clearly what policies and procedures exist often will solve a large majority of the problems. In many cases, when an individual may be angry, it's easily resolved by simply having the chance to sit down and talk it through.

I'm very happy to see this legislation come forward. I look forward to standing and voting in support and being able to go back to my constituents and let them know about this new opportunity. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to bring forward an amendment if I may.

The Deputy Chair: Oh. Sure. If I could just see the original and five copies, please. Once I have them, you can go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A1.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. Pardon me, Madam Chair. As . . .

The Deputy Chair: As A1. You can proceed.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 22, Resident and Family Councils Act, be amended as follows: section 2 to be amended (a) in subsection (3) by striking out clause (b) and in clause (d) by striking out "and not less than every 6

months thereafter until a resident and family council is established"; and (b) by striking out subsection (4). Also, section 5 is to be amended in clause (b) by striking out "or (4)(b)" and in clause (k) by adding ", if one has been established by the facility" after "whenever to the best of the operator's knowledge no resident and family council has met within a 6-month period."

I'd like to thank the member for bringing this bill forward. It's always wonderful to be able to open the lines of communication. As you have as well, I have spoken with many, many seniors in different facility groups and with special needs and disabilities. There is definitely a lack of communication at times for facilities that needs to come forward. The only concern that we have is that we want to make sure that the establishment of these councils is actually the choice of the folks that are in the buildings.

Any time you're establishing a board, for those of us who've been on those boards, there really has to be the momentum to be there. So if it becomes onerous to force an owner of a facility to create these councils, we have to make sure that the bill reflects that because within the structure of what's going on in these places, we would love to be able to legislate goodwill. If that was possible, I think all of us would like to be able to do that, but it's not always possible to legislate that. On top of that, we have to make sure, again, that the facility and the folks within that facility are actually asking for this particular thing.

The reason for the amendment to this is that there is a humongous burden that is then put on the facility owner to make sure that these councils are occurring. The question, I suppose, that I have, Madam Chair, is: if the residents do not want a council, then how will the bill facilitate that or support the groups that are coming forward that may of course want to communicate? I don't think it's a matter of questioning whether there's a need for communication. I think that's a very, very good point. My question is actually how you hold the facility operator accountable to create that.

Secondly, what if the people within the facility are actually not in need of a council and actually have something that functions for them? Does what they have already fall under the premise of what's being put in the bill? Can it be altered to manifest for what's already working in a particular building or facility? Those are some of the things that this amendment, I think, probably covers.

The other thing is that the amendment gives an initial set-up period where the owners have to play ball. What is the consequence for not setting up this facilitating group should it not be set up the way that is intended by the bill? Is there a consequence for the property owner? Is that more red tape for them to have to go through? As we know, there's a humongous burden on these folks already to make sure that facilities are operating the way that they should. By creating this group – again, I think it's a bit ambiguous. We're not quite sure how that legislation will impact those groups that are already there and, even more so, the owners of the facilities.

I appreciate the spirit of the bill. I really do. Like I said, if you could legislate goodwill, that would be wonderful. But as we know, in most of these facilities these are, you know, human beings, that function together. I'm not quite sure I understand the rigidity of the space and time in terms of putting that council together, especially if they have one. Then how do they come forward, again, and show that their program is working if it doesn't follow along the lines of what's being legislated here? These are just some questions that I have. If the member is able to answer those, that would be absolutely lovely. I'd appreciate that so much.

Some other concerns that I have. You'd mentioned that it's quite flexible. To the point of what I'm asking, maybe that's part of the legislation that I don't quite understand. I think, again, something that this amendment will help to bring forward is to make sure that whatever intended flexibility is to be there for the property owners,

that can probably be laid out in a way that, again, doesn't become quite so onerous for the facility owners.

When you're creating any sort of council, if you're forcing a group to come forward, my only concern, I suppose, in this situation: some of these folks that we're talking about could be considered vulnerable, right? You were mentioning that sometimes families may be stepping in to help out with the councils and have a say. As much as I'd love to believe that 90 per cent of those people are going to have, in good faith, the best interest of their family members that are there, the concern is: what if the intention is not so good, right? Do we have an availability to be able – I wouldn't know how to judge that, right? If there are vulnerable folks involved, which, technically speaking, we could be talking about at this point in time, the desire to create a council in order to communicate is great, but if the communication is being taken over by a really, really, you know, very adamant and animated family member based on their needs in that space, that also could become very onerous to the facility owner, which could cause problems between the folks who actually live there and the facility owner. Just something to consider in the grand scheme and the broad spectrum of what you're trying to create with this legislation.

10:40

One of the things I really like that you said is that you're wanting to build communities. I understand, again, what you're trying to do there, and I totally understand the process of wanting to put in a structure that could eventually, you know, potentially have that ability to build community. We just want to make sure always that the folks that are in charge are the folks that are in charge, right? [interjection] Well, if we're talking about a community – right? – and putting in a council to do that, the council obviously would be the communicator to the facility owners, as I understand it.

We want to make sure that that council is actually respecting and understanding what's in the best interest of the people that are there, not necessarily self-interest towards the owner, because, again, we only have a small group of people that are then representing the best interest of the people there. It's hard to oversee that. Again, if you could legislate goodwill and the ability to manifest good government in that space, that would be wonderful, but I don't think we can as a government have that sort of oversight. It has to be a choice, and it has to come from the residents of that building.

I was reading in this legislation that the structure and the procedures – there's a tool kit, as I understand it, that will come as a guide. The government would be making a tool guide to go forward?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. It's already in *Hansard*.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah.

These are some of the things that I'm just asking, within that tool guide, to consider with this amendment, the space in order to make this be a form of choice for these people and not to be legislated into creating something that by all rights – I totally understand where you're coming from. We want to make sure it actually is reflective of the residents that are in there and not of a group of people who, like I said, may have the best interests but might be a little bit, you know, self-involved, too, which happens, right? It happens to all of us. I've been on lots of boards. Sometimes you're in your bubble and you get stuck in the bubble, and as a result of that, you kind of forget why you're there in the first place.

I'm not sure how you'd legislate that, so hopefully within the tool kit that you're bringing forward is the ability also to help with how it is that you're collecting information, surveys, whatever it is, within that building to make sure they have concrete evidence going

forward to make a decision on the board to go to a facilitator – right? – those kinds of things. I'm sure you've thought about all those. It just wasn't in the broad spectrum of what I understood in the legislation.

The other thing is that – and I'd mentioned this before. When you give it up to the residents and the families to take the lead, as a mother of a child with special needs – although, believe me, my son is completely capable of taking on his own life. He's got his driver's licence. Just saying: watch out. He's awesome. I know for myself – and, those of you who know me in here, I'm a little Type A, and I have a very vocal voice – I love to participate in my son's life as much as he would like me to. I'm his major advocate in the world, but he would, I think, many, many times appreciate me stepping out of his life even as much as I'd like to be in his life. This was my concern. I'm actually using myself as the person that could oversteer my son's individuality and his right to make decisions because I think I know what's better for him.

I can only base it on self-anecdotal information, so that's where that piece comes from. Hopefully that's helpful because, like I said, I don't think that there's a family member out there that would willingly hurt or go against what their families are wanting. But, you know, things can get carried away with, especially if you see your family member in distress and something going on and the facility owner doesn't seem to be providing or doing what they need or the elevator is broken or whatever. There are lots of different things that we all know happen in these facilities that make it very difficult for the folks that live there. Again, I understand the spirit of this. I really do.

The other thing is, too, that we want to make – my assumption is that this bill is to actually create communication. By creating communication, you want to actually create allies. In the wording of the bill I think that that's very important. Again, the time that it would take in order to create these boards, I think, will create allies versus more of a sort of battleground between the board and the facility owner. If you can look at it from the point of view that by burdening a facility owner with more onerous tasks, we might be actually creating a situation where you're not creating an ally of the folks that we're actually trying to help and protect.

If within the tool kit or however it is that this is going to be presented the owner and the facilitator are part of the well-being of the people that are actually going to be impacted by these decisions, I think you're going to go a long way to creating allies versus a battering ram effect because if you're burdening the business owner with more red tape – you know, there's already a lot for a facility owner to do and take care of. Again, I would really highly recommend that with the time and the space – and I think this amendment does that. It gives that space and also honours whatever councils and facilitators have already been put in place in order to deal with the facility owners.

Again, you just want to make sure that this doesn't breed resentment. Within these facilities and the things that go on and for those of us who rent or own condos and those kinds of things, we know that that can happen. I think that if that line of communication is done with a sense of working together, you will get a lot more bang for your buck, as it were, and a lot more headway with these folks.

So I'm hoping that the government will accept my amendment on this. Like I said, I just feel that in the space of what's trying to be accomplished here, if we can make it less onerous to the owners of the facilities, if we can make sure that if the facility operator has to go and beg and plead to set up a council that legitimately the folks within that space don't necessarily feel that they need, again, we have to honour choice because these are individuals. You know, we're not trying to impose onto a group of individuals that live in a

space how it is that we feel they should live. We need to make sure that that choice is there.

More importantly, the amendment gives an initial set-up period, where the owners are able to come in and be able to find out and facilitate and make sure that that's actually going to happen for them. If we can unburden the business owner and actually make them an ally in this particular situation, I think it will go a long way to making sure that these folks actually get what they need.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Chair. While I thank the member opposite for the amendment, I am going to speak against it. I want to say first of all that of all the things I put on my Facebook, I have had more positive response to this, thanking the minister for doing this bill. I live in a small rural constituency, and as of just late yesterday afternoon I have 26 likes and several comments thanking the minister on this.

You know, this bill is about empowering seniors and making life better for seniors. It's going to provide a tool kit for their right to have these, and it's not just the seniors but also their families. I'm pleased to see that this also includes lodges. I've had the occasion lately to visit a couple of my lodges, and they are very active people. They come from their homes, they go into lodges, and they want to continue to be on committees, to be part of a community, and they are part of that lodge community. When seniors move in, they don't want to give up their interests, and they want their homes to be meaningful, so this legislation allows them to have a say in their new homes.

I can assure my colleague that in rural Alberta people watch these things and will be very aware. I honestly see this as my job as an MLA, to go around and make sure that all my seniors know that it is going to be their right to have this council available to them. Many of mine already do this kind of thing, but this makes it more formalized, and I'm very pleased to see that this is an important venue to provide concerns. Recently in one of my lodges we had a need for some mental health support that we weren't able to get, but having a group like this would be very much helpful for that.

Madam Chair, our government is committed to ensuring seniors can continue to live with security and dignity. I'm proud to support the bill as is, which empowers seniors as well as others in supportive living to have more involvement and influence on the things that matter to them as their home.

This amendment, actually, I think would weaken the legislation. I think there are lots of ways to ensure that every six months this comes up. Residents come and go, and as new residents come, they will be, you know, notified that this is a right of theirs. I think it's incumbent upon all of us in the House as MLAs to make sure that our seniors do know that when this bill is passed, they do have this right. So I am in support of the bill as is, and I feel that I need to speak against the amendment.

10:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill, Bill 22. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. At this time I'd like to propose another amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you could just wait till I have the original and five copies, then you can proceed.

Mr. Yao: Certainly.

The Deputy Chair: If you could, please, provide me with the original and five copies . . .

Mr. Yao: Yes, yes.

The Deputy Chair: . . . and then you can proceed.

Your amendment will be referred to as A2. Please proceed.

Mr. Yao: Madam Chair, with this amendment I would like to move that Bill 22, the Resident and Family Councils Act, be amended in section 5 as follows: (a) in clause (b) by adding "to the extent reasonably practicable," after "attend, or ensure a facility representative attends," and (b) in clause (c) by adding "to the extent reasonably practicable," after "document, or ensure a facility representative documents,".

What does that all mean, in a nutshell? Madam Chair, the legislation does not appear to prevent the formation of multiple councils from residents, and if I might take the copy of the Alberta Continuing Care Resident & Family Council Toolkit, which was created by Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health and other allied services, which will be tabled this afternoon, as an example, this talks about who can set up a council. Residents and families can set up a council on their own initiative or with the care centre staff and administration, who can create the council. But, anyway, this enables people to set up a council at their own will, which is great. We want to encourage that because this bill is a good bill.

I understand what the good Minister of Health is trying to accomplish with this. There are a lot of complaints that come through or a lot of issues. A lot of them can be resolved locally within that facility. Only then, if they can't resolve them internally, would they go to the advocate. Or, better yet, just send letters to the Minister of Health. I receive probably a few per cent of what she receives. I can only imagine. But I guess I've experienced those one-offs, those people that are extremely – I don't know if I want to call it passionate or overbearing, but they do become very extreme.

The clauses I add in here don't discourage these groups from forming, but what it does do is ensure that there's a practical level to the engagement of the agency. Again, when you look at the most extreme, there is the opportunity for people to set up their own groups within just the way a lot of this is drafted.

This toolkit is a practical, step-by-step process to follow for setting up and managing a Resident and Family Council . . .

Are residents and their families interested . . .

How prepared is your care centre?

They even demonstrate different models of administration for a lot of these. So if someone does not like an executive structure for their council, they could go with a leadership team structure, or they could even go with a more round-table structure.

But the point is that even within the definitions they provide more than one structure, and if it is not suitable for a certain individual or group, they may choose to go another path. So there does remain the opportunity or possibility of more than one group, or you have a group that is just simply incessant and very aggressive in their time. Some of these families have the ability to meet every day if they so desired and wanted to, and they would ask that there's a representative from the facility that attends each meeting or even a

weekly. Then if you have two or three of these groups, it could become cumbersome.

Again, the bill itself ensures, at the very least, that there will be a venue for these things to occur and for these boards to be created. But we need to ensure on the other end of it that it doesn't become too cumbersome because it does become about bureaucracy. We definitely want to see these people, these families, have their input and discuss these issues to address them at that local level in the facility, but we have to recognize that we just need to show some restraint there and have that ability.

That is what my amendment is, and I do ask the government side and all members of this House to consider this as a reasonable and practical amendment to this very fine bill. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Chair of Committees. I really want to begin by saying that I appreciate the tone with which the member is proposing his amendment and the collaborative nature that I feel today. Certainly, when we were in second reading yesterday, I was worried it wasn't going to be that kind of a dialogue, but I appreciate the opportunity that committee gives us to put out questions or concerns.

I want to just begin by saying that I think that existing AHS and Covenant tool kits could be a very useful piece in developing the broader tool kit that will flow from this legislation, but those are only for AHS and Covenant facilities, and this legislation will apply to all facilities, whether they're privately funded or publicly funded, no matter who the operator is. I think it's important that we take that into consideration. When I hear some language around, you know, overly cumbersome for the owner or for the company, those types of things, it speaks to why we absolutely need these councils, in my opinion, and why I think this amendment could be damaging to the intent of the original bill.

The language "to the extent reasonably practicable" I think is essentially creating a giant loophole that could allow operators who actually don't want to have these move forward to, in a way, diminish resident voices and family members' voices. It's right that the current structures that are in place in the tool kit – I think that the amendments as proposed could be taken into consideration for the logistics around, actually, how to support these through a tool kit, but most of these councils that currently exist in some form, which is in about 70 per cent of current facilities, are very communal, grassroots, much like school councils, to be frank, where people come together with good intentions to talk about ways they can help make life better for the students in their school, and that's exactly the intent with this.

I have to say that from my own personal experience as a family member, when there is an actual form or structure, sometimes people who are the most vocal have, actually, a structured, formal way to raise their concerns rather than creating a lot of distress for all of the people in a facility or all of the staff in a facility. I actually think this is a good way of finding a win-win in terms of having a structure.

To be completely frank, my intent is to empower the voices of the residents, and that is what I think this legislation in its current form can do. I understand the concerns around logistics, and that can certainly be taken into consideration in the tool kit. It will definitely be posted publicly, and I would welcome feedback. If there are specific pieces as a tool kit for all facilities rather than just one specific tool kit for AHS facilities or another one for Covenant or other allied facilities, I think it would be useful. And I think that acknowledging that there are a whole variety of different private,

public, publicly delivered-publicly funded, publicly funded-privately delivered, not-for-profit-delivered lodges, long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, congregated sites where people have a variety of needs will be very helpful, and I look forward to having opportunities through the tool kit to empower resident voice. Residents, in my opinion, should be the driving force in this legislation.

I'm of the opinion that this amendment sort of creates too large a loophole for opportunities to not empower the residents in having their voices heard. I understand the intent behind it, and I think that there are probably some structures that can be acknowledged through the tool kit that is created. I imagine much of it will be cribbed from other existing resources. I think it's good public policy that when you know something is working, to find ways to take it and amend it moving forward. I do want to say that for the reason that I feel this creates too large a loophole and could diminish resident voice, I am going to be voting in opposition to this amendment.

Thank you.

11:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you so much to the minister for speaking on this. I couldn't agree with you more. The intent of the bill is definitely to empower the voices of these folks, and that's fantastic.

I'm not quite sure I understand the aspect of the loophole. In fact, I think that this amendment may actually close that loophole. If you're having the potentiality of warring boards with any facility, this actually helps to make sure that that doesn't happen. Presumably, if they're being able to establish their own governance structure and procedure, if there are other issues or if they don't feel like they can talk to each other, you could put that into the tool kit every single day, but this actually helps to stop that from happening. So if your structure is intact, I think it would be more efficient and probably function better to actually empower the people to have a voice.

You know how that can be. If you have sort of two warring boards against each other, again, it's not exactly going to be helpful to facilitate on behalf of the people that are there. It becomes more of a war over a particular situation or an issue that's happening within that particular council.

To your point, you were saying as well that 70 per cent of these places already have this, so the thing is that, again, we don't want to impose a structure on a choice that's happening. If you're truly wanting to empower people, they have to want to do that, right? They have to feel empowered to do that. You can put in the structures – and I understand where you're going with that – but 70 per cent already have that. By not putting in that amendment, do you think that you could be counteracting the 70 per cent that are already there and functioning if, by chance, by putting this in, you create the space for another board to go against what's already working and functioning there? I think that's actually the spirit of this amendment, to actually make sure that whatever is actually functioning works within the space of what you're trying to accomplish here.

You had mentioned also that the bill is sort of the driving force behind making sure that the residents have their voice there. I would assume that we have to make sure, for example, depending on how often they meet – and some councils might have a lot more, you know, desire to meet more often or less often. If they're meeting daily, do they always have to meet in a particular facility? Does the

facility representative always have to be there? Is that part of the way that this is going to work? I'm not sure. Is that going to come out in the regulations or in the tool kit? I don't know if you can answer that for me, if you have any clue about how that's going to work.

Again, I think that the bill in its essence is very good. I mean, you want to be broad enough to be able to handle all of the different groups. These are all very unique facilities. Like you were saying, there is every type of facility that you can know that's going to be under the auspices of this bill, and I actually think that this amendment closes that loophole a little bit. I would love it if you could look at it from that perspective. I think it actually would be quite helpful in empowering.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Just to respond to the points raised, my concern is that this essentially creates a loophole for administration to not attend the meetings, to not document what's happening, and to not follow up on the advice given by the folks who are there. If we do want to empower their voice, somebody needs to listen. Your point is well taken. I think we can consider it, potentially, in the tool kit, but I want to be clear that if folks are gathering to be heard, somebody shows up to listen.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not sure if I've explained this amendment well enough just by the fact that the good minister might be disagreeing with it. These clauses that we're trying to put in are just to kind of put a bit of a ceiling on these things or enable a facility the ability to provide the service but only within reason.

Again, if I might look towards someone else's tool kit, the one that was created by Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health, which will be tabled later this afternoon, I might add, it does leave things very open if I might say. It talks about the structure of it.

This style has elected, formal positions (chair, vice chair, and secretary) and defined and assigned responsibilities.

Its benefits include:

- clearly defined roles – for some people, it is more comfortable to know exactly what their responsibility is.

As well, familiarity: people understand the formal structures with chairs, vice-chairs, and secretaries, much like the good minister worked on an education board, I believe. I've been on some boards as well.

Again, they also throw out other options here, a leadership team structure. Someone who might not agree with the one structure might say, "I want a leadership team" because they're more of a team player, if you will. That team structure provides more of a shared responsibility, duties that don't really particularly fall on any individual. They emphasize more collaboration and learning and playing on the strengths of the team, certainly.

Then there are other considerations for deciding the council's structure. Again, it's led by residents and family members, but with any of these groups the care centre staff and administration must collaborate, document, and respond to council items. Again, we recognize that with any council that is created, the facility will be bestowed to them and accountable to them.

From some experiences that I've seen, you do get some people who are on the extreme, people who become very, very vocal, who feel that they're being treated unfairly. It might not be the system,

but they are insistent and they are incessant. If I might provide an example, someone who is, say, under the care of human services. Maybe people in this room aren't as familiar with the health care aspects, so we'll go to human services. In my constituency, as many of you guys have dealt with, you get the people who fall through the cracks.

We had one. We had this family who has a child who has a lot of developmental disabilities. When they transition to 18, everything changes for them, as I know you guys have encountered as well, and we were helping this person to navigate. I found out through human services that they've had a lot of issues with people, and it wasn't the child. They had concerns about the mother. It was the mother who was actually the impediment to her child's care. She was very vocal, and she was very aggressive towards staff and other people. Then when the child turned 18, she was feeling all sorts of issues.

Our human services actually flew a team up from Edmonton to Fort McMurray to address this, an entire team of human services specialists to help this person get through this, to navigate this process. That's what makes me feel good. As an MLA I felt good that we were doing something good in our constituency and that we had government officials coming in here to assess this individual who required supports. The problem was that they couldn't help this person because it was the mother that was the impediment, and she is to this day, and it makes it very, very difficult when they can't treat it. Anyone here who has any experience in human services and that might have experienced something to that effect.

Certainly, I have also encountered that in the health care facilities. I was only a paramedic or a supervisor at the time, but I guarantee that we've seen those people, who are very aggressive. They become very aggressive at staff. I'm not talking about the patient; I'm talking about the patient's family. They're very rude. For lack of a better term, they're, like, very obnoxious. They would throw things at people, and these weren't even inhabitants in the care facility.

If we could give them another venue – I appreciate that this is more of a formal venue in which they could create that influence and possibly make it a positive influence – it would help things. But, again, like with anything, they can take it to an extreme. That extreme is that they would actually become a very cumbersome weight on a facility when more of the facility's resources are put towards this outlier group, much in the same way that the government has to deal with an opposition who's always in their faces. Surely, you understand that and recognize how much people can really get in your face and be aggravating to you when you're just trying to do good, but you're forced to listen to these guys over here, right?

11:10

Mr. Panda: Are they really trying to do any good?

Mr. Yao: Well, we hope they're trying to do good. We're trying to provide them with guidance to do things even better.

I guess, again, I just need to emphasize that that is what this amendment is about, putting in restrictions. You at least can call the time limit and say: "You know what? The House is closed. It's 3 in the morning. We're not listening to the opposition anymore." Some of these facilities might not have that same ability based on this legislation, and we need to ensure that they do have the ability to say: "Enough is enough. We've tried to find a reasonable amount, but we can't deal with multiple issues like this." Again, the words are "to the extent reasonably practicable." I didn't even know that was a word. I thought it was "practical." Me none too smart.

We need these clauses in here. We need to provide limits. Everyone is about limits, and we need to ensure that there are limits to these things. As an example, using the Covenant Health and

Alberta Health Services document here – and this is a fantastic document – it explains everything quite well as to what this government side wishes to do with these family councils. It is a good and noble thing. Again, as you stated, there are many facilities that already have this kind of documentation out there. Covenant Health even explained the background, how they've been experimenting with this for seven months in a few facilities. We need to promote it, and I commend this Health minister for identifying this and pushing it forward to ensure that the facilities who do not have it have that guidance to provide that. Again, it is about just tweaking things just ever so slightly so that they don't have to do what the government does and deal with an opposition that's always all over them, right?

Again, you as the government do have the ability to rein us in, to say that enough is enough, to stop, and ultimately you do have the vote. What we don't know with these councils is to what extent they will have that ability to restrain other groups. I have seen these other groups. They are the ones that go to the Health Advocate. The Health Advocate alone can provide you a list of these outlier people and many of these agencies who are actually barred from facilities because they were so aggressive. Those are the very same people that would be trying to start a board. We need to ensure that they do have that venue, but there needs to be some inherent restraint within that.

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

If it is not in the legislation, if it is not drafted as such, there will be people that will abuse it for their own – I don't want to use the word "malicious" because I think they really want what's best for their family member. But, again, they misinterpret. I truly believe people misinterpret and don't understand the health care field. They don't understand that we have to, like, lift someone up and pull them up so that we can wash their back or clean their buttocks after they've messed themselves. When you watch someone who's a professional and so good at that, someone who's not used to it might think it's rough and aggressive, but what they do is actually very efficient in how they can do it. It shows a certain level of strength and discipline in how they're able to do it and take care of their patients oh so well. The problem is that someone else might not interpret it as that, and they might lay a complaint against that person. I've seen that.

They don't like how a person is feeding their mother or their father when they're really using great care, and you see that they do have a great bond. Then that outsider family member comes in and becomes aggressive towards the caregivers. I've seen that many times. They accuse of withholding drugs or things like that or giving too many medications, and they're simply following doctors' prescriptions. There are a lot of issues that can come out when you give people that venue, which is great, but again it's about enabling a restriction on how much they can impede a facility. That's what it ultimately does sometimes. It could lead to impeding the ability.

Again, what about multiple groups? These facilities are going to have to provide someone to attend each meeting. As it stands now, I hope many of these facilities are demonstrating a lean administration and more front-line workers, but when they have to assign more and more people to these meetings, they could become cumbersome. There are no limitations on these things. We might ultimately become overbureaucratic within these facilities, and they would become immobilized. You guys know all about that, right? Bureaucracy? Immobilization?

With that, I do ask and plead with the government side and the Health minister to please consider the words "to the extent reasonably practicable" with both these clauses. I'm not asking for something extraordinary here. I just want to put a slight limitation in there. It doesn't discourage this legislation. Again, I agree with

this legislation. It's great. I would ask you to mull that over and consider it. Please talk to your subject matter experts. I'd love to have access to those guys behind the scenes and pick their brains on stuff, but I'm not the Health minister.

With that, I do ask you to please consider this amendment. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. When looking at Bill 22, I think it is an important bill. I think it's important for the residents of these long-term and supportive care facilities to have their voices heard. I know that in our constituencies we quite often get concerns brought forward by family members of these residents and by these residents themselves. Obviously, it is very important that these concerns are heard and dealt with in a proper manner. These councils have the potential to be very constructive and to help and enhance the quality of life for these residents, so those are good things.

I think what this amendment is trying to do is to just try to bring some common sense and some reasonableness to this process, and I think that's a good thing. I think we can have amendments like this come forward and bring some balance to this. You know, we don't know what could happen with these councils. These councils could have daily meetings or even multiple meetings per day, and facility representatives would have to attend each one of these. Of course, we don't know what kinds of documents could be requested or what kind of information could be brought forward at each of these meetings.

Again, if you're having multiple meetings a day, multiple requests for information, then it could become burdensome to the people that are providing the care. We want the people that are providing the care to focus their attention on providing the care and not, you know, attending an overabundance of meetings that may not be necessary. Now, of course, this is not saying that these meetings wouldn't be important. This is important. We agree with that. It is important to have these kinds of groups be able to be set up and represent these residents, but there needs to be, I think, just some sort of reasonableness to this.

For instance, when we look at these meetings and everything, I know in my constituency I've had multiple concerns brought forward about a particular resident from different family members. These family members don't always get along. They're not always talking to each other. They both have the common interest of the resident and the best interest of the resident in mind, but they don't always see eye to eye themselves. They don't see eye to eye in what they think that care should be and what's wrong with the situation.

When you have situations like that, obviously you could have one resident that could have multiple groups set up to represent their care. When you have situations like that, then you have the people that are the facility representatives being drawn into different meetings, talking about the same person with different groups having different interests.

11:20

I think that's what this amendment is trying to do. It's trying to bring some reasonableness to this process to make sure that this doesn't become a burden on the people that are being represented by these groups.

Now, when we look at the bill itself, it says in clause 5:

- (b) attend, or ensure a facility representative attends, all meetings of a resident and family council where invited to do so by the council and all meetings convened by the operator under clause (k) or section 2(3)(d) or (4)(b).

This amendment would be adding “to the extent reasonably practicable” after “attend, or ensure a facility representative attends.”

Of course, there’s nothing in this amendment to suggest that these facilitators not attend or avoid attending any of these meetings. They just need to have the opportunity to have that, to be able to make a judgment call and say: “Okay. Is this reasonable or not?” I think we can trust these operators to have that kind of reasonableness and to be able to make that decision themselves.

We go on to where it says:

- (c) document, or ensure a facility representative documents, any requests, concerns and proposed solutions expressed to the operator or a facility representative by a resident, a member of a resident’s family or a resident and family council.

Of course, add to that “to the extent reasonably practicable.”

Again, obviously, these facilities – you know, I think it’s important that they document these requests and concerns. I think that is important. But we need to make sure that if we have multiple people representing the same resident and having an inordinate amount of meetings and document requests and documentation to be kept track of, that we kind of bring some balance and have these operators have that opportunity to make that decision themselves.

I’ve met a lot of these different facility operators and the people that are working in them. I know that these people have a great amount of care for the residents that are there. They’re doing their best. They’re trying to make things as comfortable for the residents as possible. Let’s face it. It’s a job that, you know, takes a lot of love and devotion. It isn’t something that you just would show up and do without having a care for the people that you’re in charge of. These people, I think, can help in this decision process as far as what is reasonable and what isn’t in dealing with the residents and these groups that will be formed to represent the residents’ concerns.

So I think this is a reasonable amendment, and I would encourage all members of this House to accept this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I’d like to thank the member for bringing this amendment forward. First of all, I want to talk about that this should be a safe community for any of the residents and any of their family members and those that are working in any of these facilities, these long-term care facilities or supportive living facilities. If anyone comes into the facility that is violent in any way, I would strongly recommend that they phone the police immediately. This is the residents’ home, and we have to make sure that we take good care of them and that this is a safe place for them.

I want to talk about this bill. I think it’s such an important bill, and I think there’s maybe a little bit of confusion on the other side when it comes to this amendment. I’d just like to say that right now 72 per cent of facilities already have resident and family councils in place, that have been in place for years. Myself, I’ve worked in long-term care for many, many years, and just about every facility – and I’ve worked in many – have had and do have a resident council and a family council already set up, and they’re working great.

It’s a voice for the residents. This is the residents’ home. It’s their voice. It’s a venue for them to bring things forward, even when it comes to cabbage rolls, that we talked about yesterday, how they should be cooked or whether or not we want an aquarium with fish in it for the residents to look at or the cleanliness of the facility – maybe someone has an issue with that – or what they would like to

see Christmas look like this year. It’s their voice to be able to bring forward what they would like to see when it comes to their quality of life. That’s what this is about. It’s about a good quality of life for our residents here in Alberta.

The resident councils that are in place right now and the family councils are deciding what that looks like for each individual facility, what the members’ roles would be, what the meeting format would be, how often they meet. I have heard some members on the other side talking about, you know, meeting daily. Well, I’ve worked, like I said, in a lot of long-term care facilities, and I’ve never seen resident councils meeting daily. They probably meet weekly or monthly. It depends on what’s going on, what time of year it is, and what issues are going on, but that could be determined by the people that are attending the committee meetings.

I just want to remind everybody that this is a venue for residents, their loved ones, and the facility operators to come together and make things great for the lives of the residents and their loved ones and the employees and the employer. It’s just making things better for all.

I have to say that I think this is a good bill, and I don’t think we need to look at this amendment because everything that we need to do in the bill is already covered. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the vote?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:28 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Panda	van Dijken
Cyr	Pitt	Yao
Loewen	Schneider	

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hinkley	Phillips
Carlier	Hoffman	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Eggen	McKittrick	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring	Payne	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We’re back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 22? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to say that anything that we can do to help our seniors within these facilities is a good move forward. I think everybody in this Chamber would agree with that, that the people that created our province and grew our province to

what it is today are the ones that should be respected within these institutions that are dedicated to them.

I would like to say that I believe that the opposition had a part in this bill, in the creation of it. Let me explain. What we had over in Lacombe hospital and health centre was a very tragic situation. I'm going to read some from an article that was put out on May 9, 2017. The article's name is AHS Investigation Discovers Serious Problems at Lacombe Long-term Care Facility, and this was written by Keith Gerein. Now, what's tragic here is that during this time frame we had one of our institutions fail our seniors. This is terrible. Nobody wants to see that. Nobody.

Now, the concern was brought forward by a Wildrose Party FOIP that was released. What happened here was that a report was done when nursing students were doing their practicum, and they found that there were very strong problems within that facility. What we need to be doing is taking that very seriously. In this facility there were 75 residents. Seventy-five people. Now, if there had been a resident and family council at that facility, there may have been a layer of protection for those residents so that we may have been able to identify these things.

What's tragic here – and according to the document that the investigation found, I would argue that any one of the things that I'm about to read are something that would cause alarm for most Albertans. I'm just going to go through this because these are actually very incredibly insulting places that we've put these poor seniors into.

"Inconsistently updated care plans and patient charting." So if there's a problem, this isn't even charted. That is just phenomenal.

"Incomplete fall risk assessments, dietary assessments, vital signs monitoring and wound care interventions." Now, I have to say that I have heard that one of the leading causes – and I can be corrected – is falls for seniors. Once they fall, it becomes very, very hard for them to recover from that injury. So the fact that we're not creating a fall risk assessment on these individuals that are in these care facilities, which is their greatest risk: in my opinion, that is unfortunate.

"Improper security of private client information." Now, we had other instances where FOIP was broken, and this made news across Alberta because we all want our privacy. These are just part of the problems that they were having there. This is crazy.

The "presence of expired aseptic supplies such as wound care products and catheters." I don't know where to go with this, saying that we could have grabbed the wrong medications, and that could have led to one of our seniors going into – well, unfortunately, a fatality. This is the kind of stuff that we need to be watching for.

11:50

Now, we've got "dirty products stored with sterile products." I'm sorry, but I've got to assume that doctors or nurses are taught from the very beginning that sterile items need to be kept sterile. That's got to be the first thing they're taught. How is this not, in this long-term care facility, something that priority is put on?

Now, we've got "used client razors left unattended, and tubs found to be dirty." So we've got people taking risks based on the fact that we're taking shortcuts. That's awful.

We've got "soiled linen and garbage found . . . overflowing into hallways." Now, the soiled linen is unacceptable. I think we all can say that maybe the odd overflowing garbage – eh, it's not something that we would panic about, but I will tell you that soiled linens are something that we need to be very angry about.

Then we've got "unsafe medication practices, including a client administering his own insulin when it was unclear if he was competent to do so." Wow. Like, is that not what these facilities are for, these long-term care facilities, to ensure that they get the medications when they need them, to have the food that they need

to have to sustain them, to be able to move forward in this and be healthy and be in a place that is respectful for what they have done for our province?

We've got "medication rooms left unlocked." I've got to say that sterile has got to be first. Making sure the medications are always enclosed and watched and under key needs to be the second thing a doctor would learn, you would assume.

We've got "poor documentation around whether clients had received required tooth brushing and bathing." Now, I've heard that a lot of my seniors are actually in a lot of pain because of the fact that there's not enough dental care within these facilities, so the fact that we're not making sure that these individuals – because I will tell you that not having an active brushing regimen leads to cavities, and that leads to more pain that these people need to sustain.

We have "inconsistent practices to ensure safe water temperatures for bathing." This was a big problem that we had earlier in, I believe, 2016 – and I could be corrected – that we actually said that the facilities had to actually watch the temperatures and have temperature gauges and put priority on that because people were getting burned.

"High infection rates and antibiotic use." So we were getting people sick and using antibiotics to cure them when the potential was that they shouldn't have gotten sick in the first place.

We saw the government react to something the opposition did. They created a bill that says: let's bring accountability. This is what the good function of opposition is. I think that we should rename this to the Wildrose Protects Seniors Act.

I've got to say that it's disappointing that we have a long-term care facility within our province that has done this, but I will give credit to the Minister of Health for stepping up and doing the right thing and putting protections in place for our seniors because in the end it always comes down to honouring these people – honouring these people – who have been before us and have taken care of us all. You know what? We all will end up in a facility just like this one day, and we do not want this level of care. We want these councils in place so that we get our input to make sure that we are respected and able to at least have some input into our own care.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 21. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 22. I wish to table copies of the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like now for all of us after the good work we've done this morning to adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 2, 2017

Day 48

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
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Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 2, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Calmar elementary school. They are a class that gave me a lot of high fives and a lot of fist pumps and a class that I had a lot of fun with when we had our pictures taken. I have met the teacher, Jeanette Wilson, before, and we have a teacher here that does an amazing job with their kids. If I could have all the kids rise and if we could give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 40 students and 17 chaperones from the Centre for Learning@Home, which is located in the wonderful community of Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'm so happy that they could join us today for question period and to learn more about democracy in our province. I would now ask that they rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually standing today on behalf of my associate from Battle River-Wainwright, who, of course, is not able to be here because of his heart surgery. I would like to introduce Irma school with teacher Mrs. Tara Gwinn and Mr. Darren Grosky, principal, and also some chaperones: Mrs. Jackie MacKay, Mrs. Tausha Erickson – I hope I said that right; it looks right – and Mrs. Diane Prior. If they would please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House. There they are.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. The first is the team I have in my Edmonton-Glenora constituency office. The first is Marcela Lillo, who joined our team in May with a wealth of experience. If she can rise. She's pregnant with a little Dipper and will be a first-time mom in the new year. Next we have Michael MacLean, who helps connect me and my constituents to programs and resources that will help make their lives better. Please rise, Michael. And Hussein Shire, who started in my office as a volunteer. He is always smiling and willing to go that extra mile. Thank you, Hussein. And the newest member is Alex Paikada. He's a social work student, and he's engaged in youth outreach. I ask them all to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. minister, you had a second group.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, yes. Thank you for that reminder, Mr. Speaker. I have the great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to

fellow members of our Assembly eight dedicated, community-minded volunteers. They are among the 7,500 volunteers at over 100 chapters across Canada for Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Their efforts at public education and advocacy have saved lives and reduced injuries from impaired driving. Today these women are here to mark the 30th anniversary of Project Red Ribbon, in which millions of Canadians every year show their personal commitment to drive safe and sober. These guests are – and please rise as I say your names – Brenda Johnson, Gillian Phillips, Amanda Sawatzky, Rhonda Paterson, Jean Poole, Emily Poole, Lynda McCullough, and Darlene Urquhart. Thank you very much for being here today, ladies, for your ongoing advocacy, and the lives that you are saving every day. Please join me, colleagues, in extending a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the Alberta Sex Positive Education & Community Centre, also known as ASPECC. Here today are Angel Sumka, Mark Dorsey, Nicole Kraft, Eleanor Hamilton, Christine Panther, and Shannon Cavener. ASPECC provides sex-positive educational programs on sexual health, practising safe sex, and the importance of consent with zero tolerance for nonconsensual and discriminatory behaviours. Their services are invaluable in combatting misinformation and damaging views. I would ask that my guests please rise today and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members from the Battle River Watershed Alliance Society, and thank you very much for the saskatoon pies that they had in the rotunda this afternoon. The alliance monitors the water quality and quantity of the Battle River, which flows through the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency. They measure the overall health of the watershed, and they do outreach, field trips, tours, educational training. As we all know, water is life. If they would please rise as I introduce their names: Sarah Skinner, who is the watershed planning co-ordinator; David Samm, general manager; Susanna Bruneau, research and stewardship co-ordinator; Barb Bosh, board chair; Nathalie Olson, education and outreach co-ordinator; and Nathalie's parents, who are visiting us from Ontario, Rose Marie and Terry Stanley. Welcome to the House, and if everybody would give them a traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests today?

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly quite a number of guests, actually. I have, first of all: Ace Peace. Ace is a grade 12 honours student, the first openly trans student in his middle school and high school. I have his mom here as well, Lindsay Peace, who is a passionate and active advocate for queer youth and one of the co-founders of Skipping Stone Foundation.

I also have here this afternoon Dr. Kris Wells, an assistant professor and faculty director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. I also have Bryan Mortensen, who is the executive director of the altView

Foundation. I also have Michael Green, who is the deputy director, again, with altView. I also have Jen Alabiso, and she is the manager of programs and services for the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta.

They're here to see the introduction of Bill 24. If everyone could please give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Project Red Ribbon

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and to speak to an issue on which I think all of us in this House can agree, and that is to declare November 2 as Project Red Ribbon Day. Project Red Ribbon is a commitment to every Canadian to drive safe and sober. It's a highly visible community public awareness campaign which depends on volunteer participation to promote the message that death and injuries resulting from impaired driving are needless tragedies that are one hundred per cent preventable.

Mr. Speaker, each year from November 1 to the first Monday after January 1 volunteers across the country with Mothers Against Drunk Driving will distribute red ribbons, asking Canadians to display that ribbon on their vehicle, key chain, or personal item such as a purse, briefcase, or a backpack. The MADD Canada red ribbon is a powerful symbol. Displaying this ribbon is a personal commitment to drive sober and to pay tribute to the thousands of Canadians who have lost their lives or been injured as a result of impaired driving.

Mr. Speaker, I declare this as Project Red Ribbon day and offer my own full support as well as that of our entire government and thereby urge all members to show their support by displaying red ribbons as well from now through the new year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty years ago MADD Canada recognized that impaired driving incidents spiked during the holiday season. In its typically proactive manner it responded by launching Project Red Ribbon. But, in truth, through the long-time efforts of MADD Canada, our society knows that vigilance against impaired driving must occur year-round. This organization, which was born from the unspeakable pain of losing a child, has saved countless lives with public awareness campaigns like Project Red Ribbon, which we are honouring here today.

1:40

We know they work because there has been a significant decrease in impaired driving in Canada. MADD Canada, however, continually reminds us that every citizen has to remain vigilant if we are to maintain control over this deadly societal hazard. It is especially top of mind for legislators today as our nation prepares to deal with the legalization of marijuana. We must work with MADD and our police services to ensure our citizens are aware that impaired driving by drugs is as dangerous as drinking and driving, and mixing the two only amplifies the hazards.

This reality has made MADD and Project Red Ribbon just as critical today as ever. In my time as a Calgary police officer I not only dealt with impaired drivers; I saw first-hand the carnage their actions wreak on our streets. Attending these horrific scenes has a

long-term emotional impact on everyone involved. As a police officer I can assure you that you never ever forget them, nor do other first responders who also attended these scenes. And the impact is compounded in unimaginable ways for family and friends.

So, personally, on behalf of all Albertans today I thank MADD Canada for the incredible work they perform educating the public in preventing unnecessary deaths and injuries. The value of MADD in today's society, especially with Canada on the cusp of a societal change, cannot be overestimated.

Thank you to MADD for Project Red Ribbon, and thank you for all you have done in the past decades and will continue to perform as our future unfolds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to seek unanimous consent of the House for a member of the Alberta Party to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise to mark Project Red Ribbon day. Driving impaired is never okay. Injuries and deaths from impaired driving aren't accidents; they are totally avoidable tragedies.

Once again this year Mothers Against Drunk Driving will distribute red ribbons and ask Canadians to wear them, display them prominently on their vehicle or anywhere else they can help spread this message. Like my colleagues in the House, I offer my thanks to MADD Canada for your important work on behalf of Albertans and on behalf of those who have been lost to impaired driving.

I encourage all Albertans to wear their red ribbon proudly in memory of those who have lost their lives or have been injured by impaired drivers and as a reminder that as far as we've come, we still have work to do to end impaired driving in our society once and for all.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Persons with Disabilities' Workforce Participation

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October we recognize Disability Employment Awareness Month. As an employer I had the privilege to employ thousands of people. They, in return, rewarded me and enhanced my professional and personal development. While I had many positive moments and learned a tremendous amount from my employees, it was those I hired with disabilities that gave me the greatest reward in return.

Early in my career I had the opportunity to work with Red Lobster through its Cops and Lobster fundraiser, which raised money for the Special Olympics. During this fundraiser event we had a volunteer athlete named Nelson, who was full of energy and diligently busing our tables. Seeing how hard he was working, my GM, Jason Lane, offered him a job.

I was taken aback when I saw his mom in tears because this was the first job offer he had ever received. The encouragement he gave my staff, his sense of pride, and his great attitude toward teamwork helped with my bottom line by creating a bond within my team.

Mr. Speaker, as an employer I had the opportunity to hire many people with disabilities. While some may see their disabilities as a challenge, the abilities they had for hard work and the pride they carried for a job well done paid off in dividends.

Programs like the transitional vocational program at Mount Royal University provide supports for both employers and employees to ensure they are a perfect match. They also provide ongoing supports, and they even helped me as an employer to recruit and retain several successful employees.

When I go back to my old restaurant and I visit the individuals we hired from the vocational program, it gives me a sense of pride and encouragement. It is amazing to see them thrive in the ongoing success of the business while allowing them to have independence and pride in themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I trust and hope that everyone in this Chamber feels the same way, and I encourage my fellow members to spread the word to businesses in their constituencies. Hiring people for their abilities will pay off in dividends and interest.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Tow Truck Operator Safety

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you've ever had a vehicle break down and needed assistance, you understand the vital role tow truck operators play when it comes to public safety. These unsung heroes are oftentimes perilously close to traffic and in very vulnerable positions while aiding stranded motorists. More often than not this is done in adverse weather conditions. In the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, where we have expansive areas, the remoteness and nature of many of these situations add another element of danger while they carry out this vital function of highway safety.

Every day in Alberta selfless tow truck operators and other first responders are called upon to help keep us safe, sometimes under very trying and dangerous conditions. The safety of the people that provide this critical service is something we as legislators should always consider to help keep them safe. The designation of emergency vehicles at times is not comprehensive enough to cover all vehicles used on our roadways in emergency situations.

On October 17 we were reminded of the dangers all of our emergency services face when one of these emergency responders lost his life fighting a fire in Hilda, Alberta. Volunteer firefighter 34-year-old James Hargrave, a husband and father of four young children, all under the age of seven, was killed when the water truck he was driving rolled while carrying out his duties.

Everyone who works in dangerous situations should have our full support. With this in mind, during consultations with members of the tow truck industry they told us that they should be designated as emergency vehicles to help keep them safe. In the 2016 spring session, while debating the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock expressed everyone's disappointment after being unable to table the necessary amendment to change the status of tow trucks to emergency vehicles. We owe it to those who help selflessly to protect them as much as we can.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Guru Nanak Gurburab

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Edmonton-Manning I am fortunate to represent a diverse community, which includes a substantial number of Albertans of the Sikh faith. Sikhs

have been making Alberta their home since the early 1900s. Many arrived in Alberta and worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway, in sawmills, and on farms. Today Alberta is home to over 50,000 Sikhs, representing a vibrant and dynamic population of Alberta.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji is the founder of Sikhism and is the first of the 10 Sikh gurus. Today is celebrated world-wide as the Nanak Gurburab. He travelled widely, teaching people the message of human rights and justice. His life and teachings are of profound significance to all Albertans. In fact, his message of community, equality, and love provides inspiration for all humanity. Let us be inspired by his teachings of equality, unity, selflessness, and social justice.

Our government recognized April 2017 as Sikh Heritage Month to celebrate the contributions of Alberta's Sikh community to Alberta's cultural diversity. At a time when people are using cultural and religious differences to divide us, we are using them to make us stronger. That is why we are celebrating the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji alongside Sikh Albertans.

Sikh Albertans have contributed to Alberta's academics, health care, skilled trades, science, business, and politics but, more importantly, the values and principles of community, in giving, equality, hard work, and wishing wellness and happiness for all people. These are the core Sikh values, and they are also the core Albertan values.

On behalf of my colleagues I wish all those celebrating a joyous day. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Clerk, if you'd hold the clock for a moment.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to the next item of business in the daily Routine, I'd like to make some remarks on the rotation of oral questions and members' statements. As members may recall, I asked on Monday of this week that House leaders endeavour to come to a new agreement with respect to the rotation of questions and possibly the Members' Statements rotation to reflect the current composition of this Assembly. To date I have not yet received the new agreement, but I remain hopeful that one will be forthcoming and would encourage House leaders to work with members affected by any such agreement.

I'm available tomorrow and indeed over the weekend if necessary to discuss this with House leaders in an attempt to reach an agreement that is fair to all members. I will advise members on Monday about the question period and Members' Statements rotations, which will take effect on Tuesday. For today we will continue with the question period and Members' Statements rotations based on the current House leaders' agreements.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, on Monday the former Member for Calgary-Lougheed raised the issue of Burnaby illegally obstructing the Trans Mountain pipeline by refusing to issue municipal permits. The member asked the Premier whether the government would join Kinder Morgan in demanding that the NEB intervene. The Premier at the time did not appear to appreciate the suggestion, but today we were glad to read that the government took the former member's

suggestion. Will the Premier also take our common-sense suggestion to request that her good friend Justin Trudeau remove downstream and upstream emissions from the pipeline assessment process?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. The member well knows that we think it's important that upstream emissions be taken into consideration because we are proud of the made-in-Alberta climate leadership plan that was developed that is ensuring that we are being effective climate leaders moving forward. We think that that should be taken into consideration, and it was. That's exactly why this government very successfully, less than a year after they were in, got approvals on two new pipelines, one to tidewater, which the members opposite had failed to do for 44 years.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's shocking to watch this government over and over throw Albertans under the bus. Let's talk about what the NDP desperately don't want to talk about: 194,000. That's the number of Albertans currently unemployed, and countless more have completely given up looking for work. The NDP have made a bad situation much, much worse through their numerous tax hikes, increased regulation, and general hostility to job creators. To the Premier: when will you recognize the failure of your plans and finally focus on job creation?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we are so proud to stand up for Albertans, and we do that every day on this side of this House. We will not back down. We will work to ensure that we're getting shovels in the ground to get to that tidewater, and that's exactly what the Premier said yesterday. We're not going to stop there. We took our made-in-Alberta solution around a climate leadership plan, and we're taking that investment to build things like the green line in Calgary, the river valley line in Edmonton, things that we know the Official Opposition wants to cancel. They don't believe in moving forward with climate leadership. They want to throw it out. With that, they would throw out all these important infrastructure projects and our tidewater access. That's shameful.

Mr. Nixon: Well, let's talk about another number the NDP don't want to talk about: 67,000. That's the number of private-sector jobs destroyed under this NDP regime. Yes, the NDP like to tout all the jobs supposedly created under their watch, but where are those jobs created? The public sector, of course, Mr. Speaker, 21,000 of them. Now, we know on this side of the House that the public sector is important, but we can't have a strong public sector without a vibrant private sector. That's just common sense. When will the NDP focus on the economy and stop their senseless attack on the private sector and the job creators in Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: I really wish, Mr. Speaker, that the Official Opposition would stop cheering for Alberta to lose. Now, let's put facts on the table. Jobs are up in Alberta: 49,000 jobs. And the, you know, alternate facts that the member opposite wants to speak about are completely alternate and untrue. I'd be happy to see him table 21,000 public-sector jobs, but you know what? I'm proud to stand up for nurses and teachers and people who are working to make this province better . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: . . . instead of laying them off, as members opposite, we know, want to do. I want to see them actually table their

alternate facts because I'm proud to stand on ours, which is standing up for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Unemployment

Mr. Nixon: While the NDP desperately want to avoid talking about their economic record, we on this side of the House are happy to do it all day: 36 per cent is the increase in unemployment rate since the NDP came into power, and 8.5 per cent is the unemployment rate in Edmonton and Calgary. Today Alberta's unemployment rate is higher than all provinces but Nova Scotia, P.E.I., and Newfoundland. Who would have thought the day would come when we would see that in this great province? When will the NDP stop focusing on their divisive, ideological battles and instead focus on what Albertans are worried about, jobs and the economy? When will you start standing up for Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the work we've done to stand up for Albertans and the results that that is paying. For example, wages in Alberta are up. Albertans are about 2 per cent higher than they were this time last year in terms of their wages. Growth is up. RBC is forecasting the economy will grow by 4.2 per cent this year, faster than any other province in Canada, including those that you're so inspired by that are cutting public-sector jobs like nurses and teachers. Manufacturing is up. Sales have increased by almost 10 per cent over this time last year according to ATB Financial. The future is positive, it's bright, and the only ones cheering for our doomsday are the members opposite.

Mr. Nixon: The only people standing up for Albertans in this House is this side of the House. Forty-seven thousand: that's the number of Albertans that have been unemployed for six months or more. Alberta used to be the land of opportunity, but today dreams are dying. Jobs are coming back to other oil-dependent economies, places like Texas and North Dakota, places that are showing common sense, Mr. Speaker. But here in Alberta the NDP's policies are deterring growth. I ask again: when will the NDP stop playing cynical politics on ideological issues and instead focus on jobs and the economy and bringing investments back to our province?

Ms Hoffman: We have been, and it's working, Mr. Speaker. Retail sales are up. Housing starts are up. Exports are up. Alberta is a caring and compassionate province, and I'm so pleased to see so many Albertans reaching out to Jason Kenney during his time of need, when he's struggling financially. I also want to reach out and say that I have a few suggestions on how he can save more pennies. Maybe he can ask his friend to give him a discount on his Airbnb. Maybe he can take k.d. lang up on her offer for those free concert tickets and sell them, just like we know he'll sell off Alberta's public services. On this side of the House we're here to help. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I urge you yet again to be cautious about the words that are said and anticipate, please, what constructive consequences may or may not come from them.

Mr. Nixon: Here are some more interesting numbers: 13,000 is the number of jobs lost in mining and oil and gas, 19,000 lost in manufacturing, 18,000 lost in construction, 11,000 lost in agriculture. Shattered lives and dreams under this NDP government's rule, yet the NDP don't want to talk about jobs. They don't want to talk about the economy. In fact, yesterday the NDP laughed in this very House when we brought up people who have lost their jobs in this

province. When will the NDP stop pushing their ideological agenda, start focusing on getting people back to work, and stop laughing at unemployed Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, as I said before – and I'll say it again – things are looking up. The Royal Bank of Canada has declared that Alberta is back in the saddle. The team at RBC has raised Alberta's growth forecast from 2.9 to 4.2 per cent, upgraded that forecast. At the same time, RBC revised its forecast down for Saskatchewan, from 1.8 to 1.4 per cent. We know that that's the playbook you guys are playing from, but on this side of the House we're standing up for all Albertans. Our plan is working. And we're not even going to let Jason Kenney cancel the health care projects that he will rely on one day because we think they're important for all Albertans. It's time you guys did the same.

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

Government Spending

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Well, the anger machine over there is cranked right up.

Ninety-four billion dollars: that's how big Alberta's debt will be by the end of 2020 according to Standard & Poor's. We've gone from debt free not long ago to drowning in NDP debt today. And what's the NDP solution? Keep digging. Nobody believes that the NDP has a plan to get back to balance. No wonder the NDP does not want to talk about the fiscal train wreck they have created. Premier, when will the NDP stop pushing divisive distractions, use some common sense, focus on the economy, and help Albertans get back to work? It's your job.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: I'm absolutely proud of the job we're doing on this side of the House because – guess what, Mr. Speaker? – our plan is working. Under Jason Kenney his plan is extreme and risky, and we know that he'd make life harder for Albertans. We are protecting publicly funded services that Albertans rely on. They would fire thousands of teachers and nurses to pay for the \$680 million in tax breaks that they want to give to the top 1 per cent. The Conference Board of Canada is saying that things are so good in Alberta, that Alberta's economy is recovering so much faster. It's the fastest growing province economically this year. I don't know why the opposition are so opposed to reading all the facts from all these economic experts who say that we're on the right track.

Mr. McIver: Only this government would call almost 200,000 people out of work a plan working.

Mr. Speaker, 7.4 per cent: that's how much the NDP increased spending by in the last budget. Our economy is hurting, but they spend like there's no tomorrow. Despite NDP claims, nobody wants to see massive cuts on any side, so why the rapidly increasing spending and crippling the province's ability to carry on with services? We know that they're desperate to change the channel from financial issues. Premier, when will you admit that you have no plan to get this province back on track, and when will you start caring about Albertans?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is working because we are building those new schools and hospitals and seniors' lodges that Albertans need in the future. Instead, the Official Opposition would put all of these projects on hold. They would cut \$9 billion in infrastructure spending. That's shameful.

We're not going to let Jason Kenney and his conservative colleagues cut the very services that one day all of us will need and rely on, so we are carefully adjusting spending to make sure we hit a balanced budget. They would make reckless cuts, extreme cuts, and prolong the recession. That is definitely the wrong path.

Mr. McIver: Well, they've sunk to anger and exaggeration over there.

Mr. Speaker, \$2.3 billion: that's another number the NDP doesn't want to talk about. That's how much Alberta will spend in just a few short years for interest payments on all the debt they've piled up. That's \$2.3 billion that could be spent on social services, health care, or education here instead of foreign bankers' vacation homes. How is it that common sense says to give billions of dollars to foreign bankers? It's time for the government to stop distracting from the real issues and jobs in Alberta and help Alberta get back on track. Premier, when will you finally listen to the cries of Albertans who are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the progress that we are making while protecting nurses and teachers. Our economic diversification strategy is working as well as supporting the oil and gas industry, which we know has been a backbone in this province and will continue to be. I understand that things aren't looking up for everybody. While not everyone is feeling the effects of the economic recovery, especially Jason Kenney – we know his struggle is real – we want to help. We're going to stop Jason Kenney from cutting his own health care, we're going to stop Jason Kenney from cutting the future seniors' benefits that he requires, and we're going to stop Jason Kenney from cutting the green line, that he could use to get around Calgary. We are here to help and stand up for all Albertans, including Jason Kenney. [interjections]

The Speaker: Keep it cool, folks. Keep it cool.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Tobacco and Cannabis Reduction Strategies

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals recently met with Les Hagen of Action on Smoking and Health to discuss the NDP's inaction on tobacco reduction. This may blow over into another area, cannabis legislation. I want to thank the government for the menthol ban, but the government said at the time: we're just getting started. It seems like the motor has choked. To the minister: will you commit to fully implementing all provisions of the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act before July of next year?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that we've been able to do with Smoke-free Alberta and others and the great progress we've taken in moving forward on a number of initiatives, including the menthol ban, that we know the Official Opposition were opposed to. As a result, the organization in question did recognize this government's efforts and presented me with an award last year that I'm very proud of.

There are a number of other pieces that have changed since that legislation was originally passed, including the legalization of cannabis as well as vaping and e-cigarettes, which are what I hear about most when I talk to parents. We want to make sure that when we move forward, we're doing it in consideration of all of today's challenges, Mr. Speaker, and making sure we get it right.

Dr. Swann: Well, precisely, Mr. Speaker, because cannabis will be a similar air emissions problem.

One of the exemptions that government has allowed is shisha smoking in hookah bars, which do not have any age restrictions. If cannabis is allowed here, children's health will be further jeopardized. Tobacco smoking is banned in restaurants, workplaces, and public spaces, so will cannabis smoking be subject to similar prohibitions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member knows, we've recently gone out for a second round of consultation about a number of issues on cannabis. Our proposed plan, moving forward, is something like what we would call the tobacco-plus model. Cannabis smoking will be restricted everywhere that tobacco is restricted. In addition, there will be restrictions on smoking in vehicles and smoking within five metres of structures frequented by children like play structures and splash parks. In addition, as is the case with most tobacco, it will be banned in hospitals and in schoolyards.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's precisely why I'm asking the question. If we move forward on tobacco, then obviously cannabis will be included. If we don't move forward on tobacco, then it's in limbo whether cannabis restrictions will be in place.

With the NDP facing massive structural deficits, there's also a great temptation for you to dump the large amount of funds that's coming from cannabis revenue into general revenue. Will the government pledge today that revenue from cannabis sales will go to our mental health and addictions prevention and treatment?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to inform the House that, as I've said, we're still sort of moving forward on our plan around cannabis. Finance ministers from the provinces and territories are presently in discussion across the country as well as the federal Finance minister. In terms of what will happen to the excise tax that is proposed to be on cannabis, those decisions are obviously still being finalized, but at this time the projections in terms of what's necessary in terms of health care and public education and enforcement are quite high, so it doesn't look like there will be a huge excess.

Thank you very much.

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

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every student in Alberta deserves a school that is welcoming, caring, and safe. We know that LGBTQ2S-plus students face discrimination and stigma both inside and outside of school, discrimination which can lead to self-harm and even suicide, so I'm deeply concerned when I hear people, even some public officials, advocating that schools be allowed to out students without their permission. I have visited many GSAs across this province, as has the Minister of Education, so can he please provide more information for the benefit of some members of the House about the nature of GSAs in schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, yes, we've had a long journey looking at GSAs across the province, and we've certainly seen a demonstrable decrease in incidents that could be causing problems for kids for learning. We've seen better attendance. We've seen better graduation rates. GSAs in schools are not just beneficial to those who participate in the GSA; they're good for the whole school atmosphere, period. When you start to look after people who are vulnerable, we all benefit from that. I'm very proud to strengthen that with legislation today.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given our government's commitment to support Albertans' mental health and help them combat discrimination, can the minister provide any information about the positive impacts that GSAs and QSAs have on our students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you very much. You know, part of the reason that we are strengthening GSA legislation here today – we'll introduce that; hopefully, we'll get support from the House – is because people were talking about outing students. The GSA, by nature, is a place for vulnerable students to feel safe, so that talk about outing students was simply compromising that circumstance. If we pass the bill – and I urge everyone to agree – then we will build a safe space, we will make it illegal to out students, and we will all benefit as a result.

2:10

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that when crafting policy affecting LGBTQ2S-plus students, it would seem far more important to listen to those students than a career politician who has a history of repeatedly voting against their rights, can the minister tell us what he's heard on this issue from LGBTQ students or members of the Minister's Youth Council?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as I said before, I had an opportunity to visit many GSAs around the province. I've heard it time and time again. I remember a student from Red Deer that said that the GSA literally saved his life by having that place to be. It's very important that we recognize the value of peer support in our schools generally and the peer support that can happen in a GSA specifically. We're very proud to bring this forward. It's going to be a discussion that I think will help to restore the confidence that students need, to know that they are respected. Once you are respected, you are confident, and once you are confident, you can learn and succeed.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Calgary LRT Green Line

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, residents of northern and southern Calgary are upset that the promised green line to their communities is not coming any time soon. Many of these residents moved to these communities and paid their taxes in good faith on the promise that the green line was coming sooner rather than later. For communities not getting green line service as promised, has the Minister of Transportation offered any short-term fixes such as a Vancouver-style B-Line service?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to answer this question. We're happy to say that the green line is on track. We are hitting the milestones that have been set out for us, and we are working very closely with all of the community members involved. We look forward to the opposition supporting us as we help to improve the environment in this province and make life better for all Calgarians.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that the Minister of Transportation waxed lyrically during the recent municipal election campaign that the province might revoke green line funding if the city of Calgary tinkers with the current arrangements and given that many voters perceive this as the minister interfering in the municipal election campaign, to the Minister of Transportation: did you forget and think you were running for city council again, or was this an attempt to prop up your favoured mayoral candidate?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of the fact that we are working with all of Calgary to create over 12,000 direct jobs and over 8,000 supporting jobs on this green line while we take care of this environment. What we want to do is we want to make life better for everybody, not only in Calgary but throughout the whole province, by taking care of our environment. What they want to do is \$9 billion worth of cuts on our schools, on our roads, and on our infrastructure. They really don't care about the future. We do, and we're standing up for it. We're putting our money where our mouth is. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you have an amazing influence.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that Jason Kenney ensured the federal funding was in place for the green line as federal political minister for southern Alberta and given that the city of Calgary has changed the scope of the project by cutting the length of the line and the number of people served, does the Minister of Transportation fear federal Minister Sohi will pull the federal funding because Calgary has changed the scope of this incredible shrinking LRT?

Ms Phillips: What Jason Kenney has said, Mr. Speaker, is that he will cancel the carbon levy and therefore distribute 20,000 pink slips as a result. [interjections]

The Speaker: In 10 seconds or less can you answer that question?

Ms Phillips: What Jason Kenney has said is that he will cancel the carbon levy, Mr. Speaker, put 20,000 Calgarians out of work, and therefore cancel the green line. This green line will be cancelled if Jason Kenney has his way. This government is committed to getting Calgarians to work, to school, and to where they need to be on time and growing the economy . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Ms Phillips: . . . and putting 20,000 people to work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Minimum Wage Increase and Disability Services

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has mandated a minimum wage increase that has put at risk the delivery of

services for persons with developmental disabilities and the viability of the agencies that deliver those services. We begged the government to do an economic impact study before going ahead with this risky ideological plan and off-loading responsibility to these agencies. Now we are hearing that some agencies may actually be forced to close their doors. Government policy is effectively dismantling the service agencies. What is the government going to do to ensure their survival?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have done is that we have maintained and improved the supports for persons with developmental disabilities, and we have worked with them on all issues that matter to them. Minimum wage was no exception. Last summer my office and my department worked with the agencies, and we are providing them the supports they need to deliver the service in an efficient manner.

Mr. Orr: The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that many agencies have been forced into crisis mode due to the minimum wage increase and its devastating effects on wage compression and to the reductions in staffing levels that have accompanied it. Given that most agencies have projected the impact of the minimum wage over the next three years, why has this government not listened to their concerns and at least utilized their spreadsheets, that demonstrate the hard numbers of a crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have met with many agencies personally, and this summer my staff have worked with the agencies impacted by minimum wage. We are providing them with the resources to deliver the supports in the most efficient way possible. We are working with them on all issues that matter to persons with disabilities.

Mr. Orr: That is not what the agencies themselves are saying.

Given that people with disabilities have experienced a decrease in the care and the services that they need because of minimum wage encroachment and given that those in need of assistance are suffering alienation – they are at increased risk, and they don't understand why this government is marginalizing and abandoning them – is this how an Alberta government takes care of its people, or only an NDP government?

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, we have improved the supports for persons with disabilities. It's only folks over there who think that supports for disabilities are giveaways and think that the ministry working with persons with disabilities, 70,000 Albertans, is just half a ministry. What they are concerned about: if a 20 per cent cut is made to the disability budget, \$162 million, 2,000 people will be out of the supports who are getting supports today, let alone any new individuals with disabilities.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Value-added Energy Industries

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the price of oil has fallen dramatically, and though we hope that it continues to recover, we must acknowledge that there's a chance that it will never rise again to \$100 a barrel. One way we can adjust to the new reality for oil prices is to focus on getting the most value out of our resources through upgrading such as with the North West upgrader and supporting more petrochemical manufacturing like this government did with

its petrochemicals diversification program. To the Minister of Energy. I've spoken with these companies that were supportive of the program but are concerned that it is too limited in scope, making it hard to compete. Are there any plans to expand or begin a second round of funding for this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I had the honour of meeting with a number of people from the manufacturing sector last night, and they definitely expressed their excitement that we are indeed bringing forward a petrochemicals diversification program. The details are forthcoming around the rollout. They are excited, we are excited, and moving forward is very good news for Albertans, for Alberta jobs, and for Alberta employers.

Thank you.

Mr. Fraser: Given that energy companies in Alberta have many advantages such as a low tax environment and a highly skilled local workforce but also have to compete globally with companies that enjoy generous subsidies from their local governments and given that trying to outspend these governments on subsidies and tax breaks could do more harm than good to our provincial treasury, to the same minister: will you commit to identifying the competitive disadvantages that Alberta energy companies face, and will you bring forward policies that help level the playing field without driving the province further into debt?

2:20

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the important question. Many of these stakeholders last night when we were meeting were talking about how excited they are that we're moving forward in an environmentally responsible way and that, of course, they want an even playing field, which means an even playing field here in Alberta so that they are willing to be environmental leaders. Of course, with there being a national price, it will ensure that that is comparable across Canada as well. So they're proud of the work that they are doing to diversify. They're trying to get as many good consumable products out of waste products right now as possible, and they're making very significant progress in that area. I'm proud of our economic innovation that is in the area of industry and manufacturing and energy as well.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Given that the Minister of Energy appointed an advisory committee that had the mandate to look at upgrading and petrochemical manufacturing and given that this committee was given a year to deliver its report and that a year later still hasn't produced anything and given that energy companies in Alberta would benefit from knowing where this government is intending to focus its energy diversification efforts, to the same minister: why hasn't the diversification committee delivered their report yet, and when can we expect it to be delivered?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that we were able to get a group, EDAC, to get out and consult with many Albertans – industry, environment groups, manufacturers – and they've done thorough consultation. The report will be coming shortly. But I'm pleased to say that they looked at things to move

forward like: should we be partially upgrading? Should we do more petrochemical diversification? As the Deputy Premier said, we've had a lot of interest in this area, and it's really going to be good for Alberta to use our resources here in manufacturing in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Flat Top Complex Wildfire Review Recommendations

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, in the 2017 annual report the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry states, "As of 2017, all 21 recommendations from the Flat Top Complex Wildfire Review Committee have either been completed or fully incorporated within Agriculture and Forestry's day-to-day wildfire management program." If that is accurate as outlined in recommendation 6 of the Flat Top recommendations, can the minister please tell me where our B.C.- and U.S.A.-style initial attack hotshot crew is based out of, would he please table what their annual budget is, and were they deployed in the Waterton and Crowsnest Pass fires?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the somewhat detailed question that he proposed. I'm very proud of our wildland firefighters right across the province. There are a couple of facts I think we all need to know. Ninety-seven per cent of all wildfires are contained within the next day. Our wildfire fighters are able to support any wildfire-fighting crews, whether it was the Waterton national park this year or in B.C. or in Montana as well. Our wildfire fighters are able, capable, and more than willing to do the job to help our neighbours out as they have helped ours. I'm very proud of our wildfire-fighting crews. I would shudder to think what this crew over here would do with their budget that would jeopardize the health and safety of Albertans.

Mr. Schneider: Recommendation 6, Mr. Minister.

Given that recommendation 8 of the Flat Top Complex deals with preparedness and that the ministry has stated that they place water bombers according to the head fire intensity maps and given that prior to the Horse River fire of May 1 maps showed an extreme head fire intensity in the Fort Mac area since April 15 yet no bombers were staged there, Minister, in the future will your department base plans upon historical fire data or head fire intensity mapping as criteria for how you base water bomber groups prior to fire season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member again for the question. I feel that he is implying that somehow our wildfire-fighting crews, including our air tanker crews, are not capable of the work they do. They most certainly are capable. Our staff is capable, more than capable, some of the best. I would stand up and defend them any day of the week, that they're some of the best wildfire-fighting crews in the world. They know what they're doing. In no shape or form are any communities, including Fort McMurray, including Waterton park, in any danger at any time. They know what they're doing. I'm proud of the work they do.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, I'm implying that the minister may not know how to do his job.

Given that the opposition has learned that in the early stages of the Horse River fire the emergency preparedness control centre had locked themselves out of computers and were unable to retrieve emergency codes from the computer files until the passwords were

able to be reset by someone returning to their office in Edmonton, Minister, have you, as outlined in recommendation 10 of the Flat Top Complex, enhanced “standards and training for employees involved in liaison and wildfire management information”?”

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The government of Alberta, you know, through this government and through even past governments – some are sitting over there – has had the opportunity to review wildland fires to be able to see what we can learn from those wildfires. The report of the Horse River fire showed that anything we could have done there couldn't have prevented that tragedy that we've seen. We continue to do what improvements we can do. Whether it's recommendation 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15, or whatever he was quoting over there, all recommendations have been approved. We're working forward to make sure that those improvements are implemented.

Amazon Second Headquarters Request for a Proposal

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, big cities across North America are going gaga over the prospect of having Amazon.com's second headquarters. With Alberta having two cities in the race, the government of Alberta has seen fit to establish a team of investment attraction experts to help the cities to champion Alberta as the best place in North America to set up shop. Amazon or not, my question for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is simple. Shouldn't we have already had this team in place as per Bill 1? What was the holdup?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question and the opportunity to talk about this very promising economic development. Our plan is working, Mr. Speaker. We're making life better for Albertans. That includes having very specific, tailored plans for very massive organizations like this. I'll tell you that one of the things that they're looking at with great interest is the fact that we have a strong public health care system here in the province of Alberta, that as employers they'll be able to have healthy workers, and that they won't have to worry about the impacts of having privatized health care. We know that Jason Kenney and the conservatives that are aligned with him want to make sure that they make that harder, and that would threaten the very types of things that will help companies come here.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that the minister's job description in Bill 1 allows the minister to establish programs to attract investment and diversify Alberta's economy and given that the minister may already make regulations to implement such programs, will the minister now shower Amazon with Alberta's hard-earned taxpayer dollars to make up for the fact that this government has in fact not made life better for Albertans and has actually harmed Alberta's economy?

Ms Hoffman: I know that's what Jason Kenney and the members opposite want to believe, but the truth is that our plan is working. Because we have thousands of teachers working in schools providing good public education, Amazon is interested in coming here, Mr. Speaker. They know that families are going to be well supported, workers are going to be well supported, and they're excited at the opportunities that are presented. I am proud that we are putting the right team together to make sure that this is the most

attractive place for Amazon to bring thousands of jobs. Nobody should be laughing or cheering for that to fail.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. The failure is actually on the part of the government for not getting this started faster.

Mr. Speaker, given that Calgary's downtown office vacancy rate is around 30 per cent and that the city is an important supply chain and logistics hub within reach of over 50 million people by road in about 24 hours and given the high cost of operating aircraft out of the Calgary International Airport due to high fees charged by Ottawa milking airports like cash cows while American airports get federal subsidies, is the minister going to combat Ottawa's economy-damaging air transport policies and advocate for lower airport rents so Calgary actually stands a chance against a subsidized American competitor?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we're making great opportunities to make investment opportunities for major corporations from around the world. And it's working. That's why we've got major interest from organizations like Amazon. I know that the member opposite is continually cheering for Alberta to fail, for our pipelines to fail, for our industry to fail, but you know what? Jobs are up. Investment is up. We are growing faster than any other jurisdiction in this country, and that's because of the efforts of this government. We're going to keep working to make sure that Amazon comes here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:30 Agriculture Financial Services Corporation

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April of this year the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry appointed a new board of directors to AFSC. This new board replaced the interim board of directors, and they were tasked with strengthening controls over expenses, travel, and procurement. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: given that the AFSC board experienced significant issues under the previous government, what is being done to enhance the services that AFSC offers and improve the fiscal responsibility of this important organization?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The first step I took to address the culture of entitlement, that same entitlement that these folks want to return to, was to fire the old board and appoint a new one. It is the responsibility of the board to oversee executive expenses with producers in mind, and now that is happening under this government. The current board is very skilled and has worked very hard to clean up the agency and find ways where services can be enhanced. For example, we have recently been discussing business risk management programs with the federal government and have begun a review of those services.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: given that AFSC plays an important role in assisting agricultural communities to access insurance and risk management tools, how is the new board of directors working to expand and improve on all of these programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. As mentioned, we're undergoing the BRM review right now, and the new board is helping to oversee this. We'll be having ongoing conversations with members of the ag industry and the AFSC as this work continues. BRM programs such as crop and livestock insurance we'll have a close look at. An important component of this discussion will be ensuring that it remains within current budgetary considerations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: how are farmers, ranchers, and other stakeholders, who are so important in these processes, being included in the review of AFSC's programs and internal processes?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, as part of this we have been in touch with stakeholders from all levels of the industry through one-on-one meetings, industry round-tables, community hall meetings, correspondence, and an online survey. The review will continue beyond 2018, and to complete the review, an external panel will be formed comprised of producers, academia, and global risk management experts. Consultation will be ongoing, and we welcome feedback.

Southeastern Alberta Concerns

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, over the last few months Cypress-Medicine Hat has been devastated by wildfires in Cypress county in the Bindloss area. It serves as a reminder of more than just financial pains but of the personal risk that these people take. For over 100 years rural Albertans have borne the responsibility of feeding the province and the entire world. The community is strong, and – make no mistake – we will recover better and stronger than before. To the minister: what are you doing to ensure that the communities and individuals affected by the wildfire are supported and restored?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Without a doubt, the wildfires that swept through the grasslands and the southeast corner of the province have been devastating. We fully support those communities and the ranchers and producers there that have lost cattle, have lost crops, have lost fence lines. We're having an opportunity now to look at existing programs to see where we can perhaps expedite the process to be able to give the support to those producers as soon as we can.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the population of 200 elk introduced to CFB Suffield in 1997 quickly ballooned to well over 10,000 despite the government's guarantee that it would not exceed 800 and given that the Bindloss fire in particular saw 100,000 acres of grassland destroyed, putting even more pressure on the existing grasslands to handle grazing for so many elk, the status quo is not an option. To the minister: what is the government doing to bring the elk herd to a sustainable size of 800 head as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Environment and Parks is working with the Department of National Defence so that we can manage this elk population responsibly. The member is quite right that over a number of years the population did increase,

but since 2014 it's dropped from 7,000 to 3,300. The hunts for '17-18 begin in November. They continue into February 2018.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the horrific wildfire imposes significant financial losses layered on top of huge financial losses caused by a federal government-imposed protection order for sage grouse and given that the Alberta government dropped the ball in developing their own made-in-Alberta response to protect the sage grouse, will the minister commit to establishing a provincially led response which emphasizes local decision-making, best practices, protects our oil and gas, ranching, and farming livelihoods and better protects the sage grouse?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the member is quite right that the previous government absolutely did drop the ball on the sage grouse, and that is why that emergency protection order was imposed upon southeast Alberta ranchers and oil and gas operators and others. It was not a great situation. It was a situation where the government failed to protect the environment, and there were consequences that came through the courts. That's why we're investing in MULTISTAR. That's why we're working with ranchers. That's why we're working with the Calgary Zoo on recovery. We've got a sage grouse recovery system in place. You know, what wouldn't help is a whole bunch of cuts to the Environment and Parks budget. That would not help those ranchers at all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Cold Lake Seniors' Lodge Construction Issues

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency we are watching the construction of a Cold Lake seniors' lodge and waiting patiently for its opening. However, I have heard concerns from a former worker on the site who has noted serious OH and S violations of sections 4, 9, 14, and 29 regarding work he was expected to complete. This worker called OH and S, warned the government of violations on July 15, and has yet to receive any response. That's nearly four months ago, and that is unacceptable. To the Minister of Labour: why has your department ignored the concerns of this worker and not had the decency to follow up with him?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Occupational health and safety is incredibly important to this government and to our province as it is responsible for making sure that our workers are safe, following codes and guidelines, for making sure that every worker can come home at the end of the day. I would be happy to follow up on this specific inquiry. We always strive to respond to people quickly. We have OH and S officers on call to be able to respond to dangerous situations immediately when that call comes in. I would be happy to receive more information on this specific situation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we have unanswered concerns regarding work-site safety and given that I have just received pictures showing a further work-site hazard from a second Albertan who was alarmed by the potential long-term health implications of a mould infiltration on the work site dating back to June, to the Minister of Infrastructure: how much longer must Cold Lake wait for your department to address the work-site hazards that

could prove harmful to current workers and future residents of this facility?

The Speaker: The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the safety of residents of provincially owned buildings is always our top priority. The housing management body did inform me and my office of this issue immediately, and we're working closely with the contractor to make sure that the workplace is safe. Of course, there are no seniors in the facility now. We're certainly, you know, working hard with the contractor to make sure that everything is safe for the workers, too.

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, given that the city of Cold Lake needs additional seniors' housing and given that the Cold Lake seniors' lodge broke ground months behind schedule, therefore pushing back the estimated completion date, and given the concerns I've heard on work-site safety, to the Minister of Seniors and Housing: when can the citizens of Cold Lake expect this facility to be completed and opened, and will the dates be on schedule?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we're working very closely with the housing management body in Cold Lake to make sure that things continue. We're looking at next year for occupancy for seniors in the Cold Lake area. Certainly, our investment of \$1.2 billion in affordable housing across the province is making a big difference for seniors so they can age in their communities. We know that the opposition would be cutting billions from the budget and nothing would be done, but we're investing and supporting Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:40 Farm and Ranch Worker Safety Regulations

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the fall of 2015 the NDP government blindsided farmers with Bill 6. The NDP claimed that the bill was so important that it used its majority to shut down debate and push it through the Legislature. The next step requires the government to draft enabling regulations. To the minister of agriculture: can you please explain the importance of these regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It's important for workers in every industry, including farm workers, to have basic human rights. As a government we're very proud that we were able to do that, to implement these basic human rights for these workers, human rights such as having the ability to have the same safety regulations as other industries. I'm extremely concerned that Jason Kenney and folks on the other side would repeal that legislation, take away those basic rights from those workers.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that last week the minister announced that the working group provided its final report seven months ago – and now we learn that this was just the first stage in developing the regulations – and given that it's almost two

years since the act was passed, when are you planning to bring in the regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. These are recommendations that were made by the occupational health and safety technical working groups. I'm very proud of the work they have done and the work producers, processors, and import-exporters across the province have done getting those recommendations to us. We've opened it up to all Albertans to have a say on it till January 15, 2018. After that we'll have the opportunity to implement these changes to make lives better for those farm workers.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier made strong comments in the House about how critically important Bill 6 was for farm and ranch workers and given that it's hard to understand why the government would spend two years dragging its feet to create the required enabling regulations, to the minister of agriculture: has the urgency vanished, or was it simply false in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I and others in this government have made a commitment to fully consult with producers across the province, with Albertans across the province. We have done that. We're continuing, fulfilling that promise for full consultation. The member, I think, is fully aware of that. As the consultation process will wrap up, I'm more than happy to be able to stand in this House, more than happy to be extremely proud of the work we've done to protect these workers, to protect the farms and ranches across the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Political Action Committees

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your grace today. Unregulated third-party fundraising and spending are corrupting Alberta's democracy, as they have south of the border. Big and dark money is getting funnelled into leadership contests, municipal and provincial elections, and overtly partisan advertising campaigns, so much so that political action committees, or PACs, now rival mainstream political parties' ability to raise funds, support candidates, and get their message out. Rules governing them are inconsistent with how other political entities are treated. In fact, Elections Alberta has raised serious concerns that PACs are now being used as a way to get around campaign finance laws.

This government has appropriately banned corporate and union donations, but it permits a parallel unregulated system, which the NDP may be benefitting from already themselves and is making a mockery of the new rules the government recently put into place. If there is one system that limits contributions and requires disclosure and another that is largely free of oversight, where do we think the money is going to go? Integrity of our democratic processes,

fairness demand that PACs come under more scrutiny and regulation.

That's why the Alberta Liberals are bringing this issue to the forefront and calling on the government to close the loopholes by supporting Bill 214. Alberta has the opportunity to be a national leader in democratic accountability and electoral finance reform by doing something no other jurisdiction has yet done: actually defining what a PAC is and expanding the scope of restrictions to go beyond just political advertising.

Both the NDP and the Conservatives say that clamping down on PACs could violate the Charter right of free speech, but this has nothing to do with limiting speech or preventing third parties from participating legitimately in the democratic process. It's about making sure that the same rules apply equally to all political players and getting money further out of politics.

Allowing this free-for-all to continue means our democracy stays on sale to the highest bidder. Bold, all-party action is needed to get dark money out of Alberta politics. That's exactly what the Liberals...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Red Deer-North.

Family Violence Prevention Month in Red Deer

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since being elected as the Member for Red Deer-North, I've had the pleasure many times to speak about the outstanding organizations, businesses, and people that live in my riding. When things are at their toughest, that's when people demonstrate their true nature, and the people of Red Deer have demonstrated time and again that compassion and community are the true foundations of our province.

November is Family Violence Prevention Month. Families of all kinds are the core of our communities, and they must be supported, protected, and kept safe. If family is the bedrock of our society, family violence shakes that foundation and hurts everyone it touches.

I am very proud that Red Deer was the first city in Alberta to recognize this important month by lighting the city with purple lights. Many groups are involved, including our Red Deer chapter of Soroptimist International, a volunteer group dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls. In conjunction with our domestic and relationship violence initiative committee this group works to make everyone aware of this month and its meaning. Purple lights symbolize the fact that everyone is affected by family violence. It is a dark part of our society that must have light shed on it, and it must be eradicated.

I wear the purple ribbon to remind myself of this and to remind everyone that true compassion shows itself in action, not in words. When the drive to prosperity takes precedence over caring for each other, we fail ourselves and we fail our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

United Conservative Party Leader's Personal Income

Connolly: Mr. Speaker, the new leader of the UCP seems to be worried about his own finances lately. He says that he has less net worth than the average Albertan even though he's been collecting a generous six-figure salary as an MP for 19 years. At last count that was three times higher than the average Albertan's paycheque. While he kept that salary for months after launching his leadership campaign, he says that he hasn't had any income since last September. Since then, he says that he's been living off his savings without any paycheques from his leadership campaign or PACs.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are compassionate, caring people. They don't hesitate to help someone out in a time of need, and that's exactly what Albertans have been doing, offering helpful advice to Jason Kenney on how to make ends meet when finances are tight. Albertans had such generous suggestions that #kenneypennies was trending across Alberta all night. I'll read for members of the Assembly some of the wisdom Albertans have given.

"Stop buying avocado toast." "Save money on policy experts by recycling social policies from the 50's." "Take k.d. lang up on her offer of the free coffee." "Part-time job. I understand we finally pay a decent minimum wage." "Clean out your closet and have a garage sale!" "Recycle your cans and bottles." "Kill two birds with one stone; heat your home by burning books you feel are 'ideologically extreme.'" "Try making coffee at home instead of buying at caf  s." "Invite friends over instead of going out." And a final money-making tip: "Rent out your apartment on Airbnb."

Mr. Speaker, I thank all Albertans for their helpful suggestions to Jason Kenney on how he, too, can find ways to make the most of his finances.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Government House Leader and pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) I am rising to advise the House that on the next available Monday Written Question 17 will be accepted.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with great privilege and humility to introduce for first reading Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances.

This legislation, if passed, will make life better for all Alberta students. Our government is strengthening legislation that supports students who wish to create or join a gay-straight alliance or a queer-straight alliance, GSAs and QSAs. This legislation will ensure that every school in Alberta that receives public dollars has a policy that clearly allows students to form a gay-straight alliance, and these policies would be made publicly available. School principals would also be expected to help students who wish to create a GSA or a QSA at their school in a timely manner. We will also provide clarity on parental notification for student clubs, including GSAs and QSAs, and how this differs from notification around other programs of study.

In short, Mr. Speaker, no students will be outed if they choose to join a GSA or a QSA. Ensuring safe and caring schools for students is a top priority for our government, and we are continuing to ensure that all students feel welcome in school regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. We are following through on that commitment. If passed, this legislation will ensure that students across Alberta will belong, no matter what school they attend.

I'm proud of the work that our government has done to strengthen supports for LGBTQ students, and I'm proud of Albertans for engaging in thoughtful dialogue with me and with each other on how we can move Alberta forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am very truly honoured to move first reading of Bill 24. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table a quotation on the cost of a pack of cigarettes relative to other provinces in the country. Alberta has among the most affordable cigarettes, and there's lots of evidence that the cost of cigarettes has a direct bearing on the uptake of cigarettes among youth. I'll table the appropriate number of copies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings. One is a letter from the constituent that I had referred to who was concerned about job-site safety. The gentleman was very clear on all of the infractions that he had witnessed on this site, and this is the letter that had been sent to OH and S and the Ministry of Labour.

In my second question I referenced some pictures that came into my office. They are clearly pictures of mould that is within the facility. This is a new facility, and it is unbelievable that we are dealing with mould in a new facility.

Thank you, sir.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Gray, Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal, pursuant to the Chartered Professional Accountants Act the Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta annual report 2017.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Feehan, Minister of Indigenous Relations, responses to written questions WQ 1 and WQ 2, both asked for by Mr. Hanson on April 10, 2017.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we had two points of order today. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise again – and I can't believe we have to keep doing this every day – under 23(j) on the use of abusive or insulting language. You know, we have talked a lot over the first few days back here this sitting about the government continuing to try to find loopholes and unique ways to call people liars in this Assembly, when they can talk about people outside of the Assembly and call them liars and when they can't talk about people outside of the Assembly and call them liars.

What I do know, though, Mr. Speaker, is that we do have a tradition in this Assembly not to call other members liars, and that is not in dispute. At the time that the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills rose to raise this point of order, it was in reference to the Minister of Health, the Deputy Premier of Alberta, responding to a question from myself in which she said that what I was saying was untrue.

Now, I don't want to have to keep rising to do this over and over as this government continues to try to find new ways to call people liars. Our job, Mr. Speaker, is to come here and ask the government questions. Their job is to answer questions about their agenda, not to call people liars. I would suggest to you that if the government, while they're blinded by their fear of the Hon. Jason Kenney, continues to do this, it's going to continue to cause disorder throughout this sitting on this process.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you would caution and ask all members of this Assembly but particularly the government, who has this new-found love of trying to call people liars with every question, to stop this behaviour and let us get on with the business of the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize; I missed when this was originally raised. The member is saying that the word "liar" was used. I don't recall that occurring, but it's possible. But then when speaking about the incident, he said that it was a reference to a fact which was untrue.

So I would say that if it was a reference to a fact being untrue, that's a disagreement as to the facts and that's perfectly reasonable. But he's free to raise it. If the word in question was actually used, we're happy to apologize.

The Speaker: Well, if it's of any value, what was said, which I believe was the intended point of order, was: "Jobs are up in Alberta: 49,000 jobs. And the, you know, alternate facts that the member opposite wants to speak about are completely alternate and untrue."

So in this particular instance it was the facts that were being referred to, and I don't think there's a point of order here.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Point of Order Timing in Question Period

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise. During question period today you made a point of awarding somebody an extra 10 seconds. I'm not certain where in the orders you have the authority to do that. But since the person was allowed to go on for much longer than 10 seconds, I was just curious whether you were going to strike everything in *Hansard* that was after the 35 seconds that the rules allow or give the Official Opposition another question in the next question period.

Fairness is important. You are at a higher level, but I think it's not uncomplimentary to you to say that you are the referee here. I don't mean it in an uncomplimentary way. I think you would even agree that you're the referee here, although I hold you in higher esteem than just a referee. I think it would be a good time for you to strike that fairness that was passed by today during question period.

3:00

The Speaker: Do you have a comment, Acting Deputy Government House Leader?

Ms Ganley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, just that I'm not aware necessarily that it is in the rules, but it is my understanding that generally it is your function to maintain order in this House. You know, in this case you were unable to hear the answer because of the cacophony of noise coming from the other side, so I think that it was perfectly reasonable for you to allow additional time in this case.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I, too, have respect for you, hon. member, and all the members in this House. I do in fact have the authority, I believe. As we've talked about many times in this House, it is a freedom of free speech. It's our collective responsibility to defend it, and I intend to continue to do that.

You will also note, hon. member, that there have been very, very few times, in spite of the noise, that I have stopped the clock. In this particular instance I happened to have a minister answering a question who normally, sitting where she is, I would have been able to hear. I could not hear the question in place, and I therefore allocated additional time for the purposes of understanding what the question was. I will continue to be conscious of the treatment, of fairness, and you can count on me to in fact do that.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 20

Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I am very pleased to move third reading of Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act.

This is a special act of the Legislature to approve two interbasin transfers from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin to address drinking water challenges in Mallaig, which is in the county of St. Paul, and the Whitefish Lake First Nation. The act will allow for an extension of existing regional waterlines, which will ensure that these communities have access to a safe, secure supply of drinking water, and that safe, secure supply of drinking water is coming through the investments that the province is making through our capital plan.

The plans to connect the Whitefish Lake First Nation and Mallaig to regional waterlines leverage federal funds and ensure that our capital plan is meeting the needs of both rural Albertans and indigenous Albertans and making good on our commitments, Madam Speaker, under the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples to ensure drinking water is brought up to our reserves that still so desperately do not have access to that constituent part of life. These projects will make life better for the residents of Mallaig in the county of St. Paul and for the members of the Whitefish Lake First Nation.

I'd like to thank everyone for their comments and support for this bill, and with that, I'd like to move third reading of Bill 20.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak in third reading? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak in favour of Bill 20, the Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act. Our UCP caucus has shown strong support for Bill 20 because it truly will enhance the quality of life for the residents of the hamlet of Mallaig and Whitefish Lake First Nation by providing them with a sustainable source of potable water. The decision to transfer water between river basins, which is specifically the purpose of this legislation, is not made lightly, which is why it's before this House.

The North Saskatchewan River, however, is a reliable source of water, and the amount of water that will be channelled to these communities is a small drop in the river's flow. To be specific, according to Alberta WaterPortal annual discharge of the North Saskatchewan River is 7.3 million cubic decametres, and the total amount of water approved to transfer is 605 cubic decametres.

During the last few days of debate on this bill we also heard that the municipalities in the area support the transfer and the proposed pipelines using existing rights-of-way to reduce the effects on the land it will cross.

It is also good to know that Whitefish Lake First Nation will no longer be drawing their water from the lake. Goodfish Lake's water levels are expected to recover.

My colleague the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills spoke passionately about the importance of ensuring our northern communities are not living in substandard conditions. He talked of the Whitefish Lake First Nation and the work the community is doing to encourage its viability into the future. He also spoke of Mallaig and the special attributes of the hamlet and its thriving community. Permitting this water basin transfer and the resulting pipeline will bring fresh, clean drinking water to the residents of both communities. For most of us who take good quality drinking water for granted, it is hard to understand how this project will improve the quality of life for these Albertans.

I would like to note that the government of Alberta introduced its water for life strategy in 2003. This long-term strategy allowed communities to share water treatment, pipeline, and waste-water disposal infrastructure. This project fits nicely into the strategy and displays great value. The pipeline projects that will result from passing Bill 20 will see both the federal and provincial governments invest more than \$30 million into infrastructure, with the province picking up the lion's share.

Because Bill 20 is such a vitally important project, it is nice to see all members of the House make a positive effort to approve this legislation as rapidly as possible. In just a few short days and at the very early stage of this fall session we'll have accomplished that goal. I encourage all of my colleagues to support Bill 20.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to rise and speak on third reading of Bill 20. I'm very thankful that we could get through to third reading here on the fourth day of session in the fall.

I'd like to thank the Minister of Environment and Parks as well as the Government House Leader for addressing this so quickly when I brought it forward this spring, when the county realized that they had to get this passed through before they could take advantage of the federal funding that was available. We tried to get it through in the spring session, but it was just a little bit too late, so I was very happy to see that it was the first order of business when we got back this fall.

I'd also like to thank my fellow members for all the input here in the Chamber. I didn't hear very much negative about this transfer of water from one water basin to another. I did hear some concerns about transferring water from basins. I do understand that it's something that we can't take lightly, but in this case I think it's very important that we get good-quality water to these two communities. I really look forward to seeing these projects completed as soon as possible. I again thank the Chamber for getting this through in a matter of four days.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect if there are any questions or comments.

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill in third reading? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. This is a special act of the Legislature to approve two interbasin transfers from the North Saskatchewan River basin to the Beaver River basin to address drinking water challenges of Mallaig and, of course, the Whitefish Lake First Nation. The act will allow for the extension of existing regional waterlines, which will ensure these communities have access to a safe, secure supply of drinking water. Plans to connect Whitefish Lake First Nation and Mallaig to the regional waterline leverage federal funds, are environmentally sustainable, and enjoy strong support among stakeholders in the area. These projects are very important for those communities.

I'd like to thank everyone for their comments on this bill during the debate. We'll certainly take those comments into consideration as these projects move forward.

With that, I'd like to close debate on third reading of Bill 20. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you can't close debate.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect. Are there any questions or comments?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Bill 19 An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers

The Deputy Speaker: I'm looking for someone to move third reading on behalf of the minister. The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Pardon me, Madam Speaker. My apologies there.

Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak and close debate on third reading of Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers.

I wish to thank and acknowledge my fellow members on both sides of the House for their positive co-operation during the debate on this important bill. Many members shared personal experiences related to this issue of violence in the fuel and convenience store sector, and that tells me the issue touches a lot of people and underscores the importance of Bill 19. Our debate on this bill has been cordial, positive, and there had been near-unanimous agreement on the need to pass this bill. It is a wonderful experience to see this type of unanimity – unanimity – in this place. It's a tough word. I again thank all my fellow members for their support of this bill. I believe we all share a desire to make fuel and convenience stores as safe a place to work as possible.

Madam Speaker, Bill 19 is excellent legislation because it was developed in a thoughtful and effective way. The ministry worked hard to engage with the industry, police, labour groups, worker advocates, and other stakeholders. That engagement helped the ministry craft the thoughtful, effective bill we are debating today. I wish to thank our industry partners for participating in the creation of Bill 19 and for the commitment to worker health and safety. I wish to acknowledge leaders such as Husky and 7-Eleven for being proactive and moving voluntarily to prepayment for fuel ahead of this legislation. I wish to acknowledge labour groups and worker

advocates who helped us craft this important bill. Their input and experiences were invaluable in this process. I also thank our law enforcement partners for their contributions to this bill and for being unwavering in their support of mandatory prepayment for fuel and violence prevention plans.

Madam Speaker, I am sure my fellow members are also heartbroken when they see workers injured or killed during a gas-and-dash incident. I'm sure we were all equally saddened and outraged by what happened to Ki Yun Jo last month. He was the hard-working owner of a Thorsby gas station who was taken away from his family and community by a brazen gas-and-dash incident. This is just one of many such incidents during the past three years, incidents that have resulted in five workers' deaths and serious injuries to three others. Bill 19 is a positive step to help ensure that these types of incidents do not happen again. Every worker has a right to come home safely at the end of their workday, from the first shift right through to retirement.

Madam Speaker, I encourage my fellow members to continue the positive, co-operative tone in the House by supporting the final reading of this bill. Together we can help ensure that those who work in gas stations and convenience stores can return safely to their families at the end of the day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I cannot adjourn debate, right? Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Can I clarify, hon. member, that you are moving third reading of Bill 19 on behalf of the Minister of Labour?

Mr. Coolahan: That is correct.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to third reading? I will recognize first the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 19, an Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. As you know, I am a big supporter of making sure that we have less red tape in government. Even though this bill does add red tape to our society, I'm also a big proponent of making sure that we have best practices applied to our society, and I believe that this strikes the right balance in order to be able to provide that safety that Albertans can return home from work, whether they're workers or whether they're employers, to their families and have a safe society.

In my private member's Bill 207, talking about red tape reduction, I want to be clear – and there were some comments made in days past by the Deputy Premier that I was advocating for unsafe conditions. That is never the case. With Bill 207 I am certainly advocating to make sure that we don't have any redundancies in bills and making sure that the government is as efficient and effective as it can be.

Now, back to Bill 19. I think that it's important to say that it's tragic when we see any deaths happen in any sector of our province. It was terrible to hear of so many deaths in, especially, gas-and-dash incidents. So we are supportive of the action of this government, but we're waiting to see what the government is going to do in terms of the implementation of this. That's where the devil can be, in the details. I'm optimistic that this bill will hopefully be reasonable in its measures and also the regulations that it applies. Having a workplace violence prevention plan is sensible, in my opinion. I don't have any concerns about the sensibleness of this bill, but I hope that this does not add any more paperwork or a lot of paperwork onto already taxed business owners.

I heard from stakeholders that were concerned about the potentially debilitating cost of mandatory bulletproof glass or a

prohibition on working alone. I'm glad to see that we don't see that in this bill, especially if the worker that is alone is also the owner of the gas station. I think that they need to be able to make that decision for themselves.

From what I see, there is some flexibility for employers made within this bill, which I think was very important, and obviously that would come out during the consultation process. I'm optimistic and hopeful that this bill will not be so stringent in its application, that it will be able to take into consideration small, medium, and large companies. As OH and S will be involved, I hope that this law is – because it is very vague, I am a little nervous about inspectors and bureaucrats being able to rule inconsistently, Madam Speaker, when it comes to the compliance of this law, so I hope that when the regulations are done, we don't have that vagueness still in the law.

3:20

I have heard in some cases that employers want a law requiring prepay because then customers are less likely to get irate with the clerks when they're slightly inconvenienced.

We've been hearing many concerns from Albertans lately about an increase in property crimes, and it has been often talked about in this House, so I'm not surprised when this government says that on average there are 12 fuel thefts in Alberta every day. I hope this bill will help deter crime as a best practice that we see in other areas and other jurisdictions. Given the mandatory video surveillance and emergency transmitters that would be asked to be implemented and put into these gas stations, I think that's a very good idea. However, if a gas station or convenience store is already having problems and they could afford it, I would wonder why they are not already taking these measures.

I am very interested and actually very supportive of making sure that this bill is passed, and I will be supporting it in this reading. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise this afternoon to speak in favour of Bill 19, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers. This is a crucial piece of legislation, and I'm reminded of a story a colleague of mine told me probably about 10 years ago. He was a young man and working at a gas station to put himself through university. It was a night shift. It was late at night, and he was the unfortunate recipient of a shotgun shoved in his face. Someone robbed him at gunpoint in a gas station. I just remember feeling so afraid while he was telling me the story. It really shook me. It sticks with me today, as I imagine it does him.

Sadly, over two years ago I attended the funeral of Maryam Rashidi, who died after being hit by a vehicle driven by a man who stole around \$100 worth of gas from the gas station where she was an employee. Gas and convenience store workers are vulnerable and a part of Alberta's workforce that need and deserve legislated protections.

I've had the chance to take a look at the bill as it stands before the House, and I'm happy to support it in its current form. As my colleagues and fellow members of the House know, Bill 19 proposes a number of amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, particularly to part 27 of the safety code. This bill would not only mandate prepaying for fuel but will also enact a number of violence prevention plans, including time-lock safes that cannot be opened between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., which would have prevented

the shotgun being presented to my colleague. The bill also requires gas stations and convenience stores to employ video monitoring technology to keep employees safe and ensure that limited quantities of cash, lottery tickets, and tobacco are available during these hours.

In my view and in the view of the Alberta Party this is a sound piece of legislation that has been carefully crafted, and it is timely. As the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police estimates, several thousand incidents of fuel theft occurred in Alberta in 2015, and last month the Alberta Federation of Labour reported that there were between 80 and 100 incidents of gas and dash per week. While these incidents of theft are unsettling, they are nothing compared to the assaults and other acts of violence suffered by gas station and convenience store workers. Sadly, Ki Yun Jo of Thorsby recently died trying to prevent a gas-and-dash robbery.

Madam Speaker, as far as the Alberta Party is concerned, this bill is a no-brainer, and I encourage my colleagues to support it. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to take the opportunity to make a couple of comments on this bill. It's certainly the case that this is a very exciting move forward. I think in a lot of ways a society can be judged on how it treats those among us who don't have a strong position in society, and often the individuals working at convenience stores and gas stations find themselves in just such a position, so I'm very proud that we're able to move forward and to take these steps to protect those individuals.

I'm also pleased by the very collaborative relationship we've had with respect to this bill with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. I know that I had heard from a number of chiefs about this very early on. I think we all have an interest in any crime that can be prevented, especially crimes like this, that have such a senseless and violent outcome at the end of the day.

In addition, this is a method by which we can give police more time back to pursue other avenues of crime. Certainly, these incidents can have incredibly serious and tragic outcomes, and we're very glad to prevent those. We're also very glad to prevent some of the regular, day-to-day instances of theft that we have from convenience stores, from gas stations and things like that and to be able to refocus those officers on the more serious and violent crimes.

As a person who used to work in the area of labour and employment, I'm incredibly glad to see these regulations and protections for workers being put in place. I think that I'm incredibly excited to see that we have support on all sides of the House for moving forward with this.

With that, I will say just thank you very much.

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

Seeing none, any further speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein on behalf of the Minister of Labour to close debate.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to, first of all, just say thank you again to all my colleagues for all the collaborative work on this bill. I really appreciate what's happened over the last few days in the different readings of this bill and for all the positive comments that said that people recognize that this

bill is absolutely needed, a hundred per cent, and that we are making a difference here and saving lives with this bill.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn debate on third reading of this bill. Sorry. Close debate. I would like to close debate on behalf of the minister on third reading of Bill 19. We got there.

The Deputy Speaker: Got to get those words right.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 22 Resident and Family Councils Act

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, and it is a pleasure to rise to speak to the Committee of the Whole on Bill 22, Resident and Family Councils Act. I am particularly pleased to speak to this as this act is something that many of the residents of Edmonton-Whitemud have actually asked me for. I have six seniors' lodges, including one life lease operation, in Edmonton-Whitemud.

The concept of a governance system – I think one of my colleagues referred to it earlier as a way for the individual resident of the facility to basically participate in the management and to have their concerns heard.

3:30

I have had a deputation from one of the seniors' facilities in my riding where there is not a resident council, and there were many concerns that were raised. Indeed, on one occasion I had to intervene and actually contact the city of Edmonton. I'm forgetting the department, but this was a repair that had not been done for several months, and it actually resulted in an unsafe condition of the actual unit because of water leakage. The resident had tried to work with the management of the facility, and that had not been very productive. After I contacted the city of Edmonton, the management actually was apprised of that call, and it was not surprising that the repairs were done within a short period of time.

I don't think we need to have the MLAs doing sort of maintenance calls for residents of our seniors' facilities, and I think this act will give the residents some more leverage with the operation of the units. I think that this also applies to the lodges and to some of the other privately run operations.

In any case, I did want to rise because I know that this is something that's very important to the residents of my constituency, and I'm pleased to support this.

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to get on the record on this bill because I, too, have had quite a bit of contact with seniors in my community. I probably have over a dozen seniors' residences and long-term care settings in my riding of Calgary-Mountain View, and one of the common themes is concerns about various issues, decisions, management approaches,

food, processes of decision-making, lack of accountability – you name it – and when I ask if they have formed an organization, in many cases they're hesitant. They are feeling somewhat intimidated. They don't realize their own capacity to form voluntary committees if they choose, and this will go some distance in that 20 per cent or so that have not received or felt they had permission to go ahead and develop one of these advisory councils.

So there's no question in my mind that this is a good public policy. It's in some ways surprising that we have to legislate something like this, but in a case of, especially, people who don't feel empowered to create these kinds of bodies that hold management accountable, that ensure that there is some kind of dialogue that'll ensure that quality standards are maintained, that they feel they have a voice and can influence processes and decisions, it's important for us to move ahead with this. I fully support it.

I think part of what needs to happen also, quite beyond this – because it is limited power that these folks have. At the end of the day the management still decides what they're going to do, and there is concern that if they push too hard, they may be looking for another place to live or they may have conditions worsen for them in the setting. So beyond this, there certainly needs to be a requirement for all public and private institutions to have independent certification, evaluation that includes consultation with these committees. The certification needs to include some kind of interaction with a representative body of the residents to say that they are listening, they are trying to be responsive to clear needs, whether it's around food quality or maintenance of their residence or attitudes, bullying. We're hearing a lot about bullying in the workplace these days.

Whatever it is, there has to be accountability. That's the part that is a little harder to get to, and this certainly won't necessarily provide that, but it's a step in the right direction. I hope that we can also see the day where we require all centres for seniors and for those with disabilities, whether mental or physical or both, to be certified and that they're required in those certifications to consult with the representative group in that institution.

Thanks, Madam Chair. I'll be fully supportive.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 22?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would now move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Sweet: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 22.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Seeing the hour and the fact that the roads are a little bit miserable and many

of us have to travel this evening, I'm going to move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday and wish everyone safe travels.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:38 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, November 2, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c13]

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2017 c11]

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c10]

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c12]

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c14]

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c15]

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017, with exceptions; SA 2017 cC-2.3]

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft.*), 1534-51 (*Jun. 5, 2017 aft.*), 1553-67 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1589-93 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c9]

Bill 18* — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1567-79 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1587-89 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017; c8]

Bill 19 — An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers (Gray)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1648-53 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1695-98 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1729-31 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act (Phillips)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1627-35 (*Oct. 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1655-64 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1728-29 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 21 — Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1664-72 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1699-1706 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 22 — Resident and Family Councils Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1687-94 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1706-14 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 1731-32 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 23 — Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017 (Ganley)

First Reading — 1685-86 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 24 — An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances (Eggen)

First Reading — 1726-27 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 1614-20 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division (not proceeded with)*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 cA-5.5]

Bill 206 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 6, 2017

Day 49

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 6, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us take a moment to reflect. As today marks the beginning of Veterans' Week, may we take a moment to consider the remarkable service of women and men who so selflessly protect our great country. May we think of their spouses, their children, their families and friends for their own dedication and determination, from saying a difficult "See you soon" to exclaiming a most wonderful "Welcome home." We thank them and remember them.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome and be led in the singing of our national anthem by the Edmonton chapter of the Canadian Military Wives Choir.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you very much.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Dach: Merci, M. le Président. C'est avec fierté que je me lève à la Chambre aujourd'hui pour introduire 21 étudiants et étudiantes de l'école Our Lady of the Prairies. Les étudiants et étudiantes sont accompagnés par leurs enseignants M. Raphael Fortin et Mme Diaman Awaleh ainsi que par leur chaperon Mme Chelsi Reed, qui est aussi dans la Chambre. Veuillez vous lever, s'il-vous-plaît, et recevoir la bienvenue chaleureuse de l'Assemblée.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly participants in the Children's Services and Community and Social Services indigenous leadership program: from the Children's Services cultural knowledge and innovation branch Zachary Bliss, Kara Letain; from the Children's Services strategic policy branch Morgan Hrycak; from the Children's Services caregiver and permanency development branch Kassandra Landry; from the Community and Social Services workforce and career planning branch Chris Nadeau; and from Community and Social Services, Alberta's Promise Secretariat, Kateri Jones.

These interns are joined today by staff from both ministries who work to support the internship program, including Adison Wiberg from Alberta's Promise Secretariat, Thomas Woodburn from caregiver and permanency development, and Maria Drueco from human resources.

I would like to congratulate all of the interns on joining the program and on behalf of all of us here wish them the best of luck. I really look forward to seeing your contributions. I would ask them all to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Edmonton chapter of the Military Wives Choir. All members of the choir are partners of current or former service members, and some are active members themselves. In September members of the choir joined other choir sisters from across the country to perform at the opening ceremonies of the Invictus Games. Here today are Randall Thacker, Deborah and Florence Mullan, Debra Poley, Katherine Jackson, Lucinda Johnston, Sherrin Seguin. I thank the choir for their service and ask them now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if my guests have made it into the Chamber yet or not, but I will perhaps wait, if you don't mind, with your indulgence, till later on.

Thank you, sir.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a real pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the North Edmonton Senior Citizens Recreation Society. The society enables community elders to become more engaged citizens of Canada by removing barriers of isolation. They provide an excellent venue for learning, entertainment, and group activities, assisted by volunteers, in a safe and secure environment. Earlier this year I was given the blessing and honour of becoming an honorary member of this group. Joining us today are Harnek Matharoo, Majer Singh Dhillon, Jagdish Singh Rai, Jagroop Singh Sidhu, Dalbara Singh Dhaliwal. I would now ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to the House the very dynamic and progressive Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS. CAUS represents over a hundred thousand undergraduate students from the universities of Alberta, Calgary, Lethbridge, Mount Royal, and MacEwan. They're here in Edmonton this week for their annual fall advocacy days and counterpart conference, meeting with MLAs and their staff to advocate on issues important to postsecondary students and our future. I'd ask each to rise as I name them: Ilya Ushakov, Shane Scott, Robyn Paches, Royal Adkin, Amit Kumar, Daan Smit, Tina Miller, Hilary Jahelka, Ryan Wallace, Madelaine McCracken, Cordelia Snowden, Sebastian Bergeron, Whitney Hunter, and Josh McKeown. Let's give them our warm welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism, I understand you have two introductions.

Miranda: That's right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of my long-time friends and valuable members of the Calgary-Cross community here with us today, and I request that they rise as I call their names: Suzanne de Courville Nicol and Robert McPhee, known for their work in *Hello-Bonjour Calgary*, a popular bilingual talk show here in Canada; Wayne Garner and Alan Porter from the General Teamsters, local union No. 362; and Ken LaPointe, recipient of the Governor General's 2017 sovereign's medal for volunteer work in Rouleauville – Calgary's French Connection. I ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you a number of individuals from the Pakistani Canadian Cultural Association in Calgary who are here today for Eid celebrations. Joining us today are Tanveer Taj, Asjad Bukhari, Sardar Junaid, Javaria Masood, Asif Anwar, Umair Ahad, Sadat Choudhry, Ishrat Anees, Moin Mohammad, Imtiaz Ahmed. I ask them to please receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a number of individuals who are joining us for today's Eid celebrations and who are also constituents of Calgary-Bow. Today I am pleased to welcome Ahmer Memon and Farida Memon from the Sindhi Association of North America. This group seeks to unite Sindhis to foster friendship and understanding between Sindhis and other nationalities and educate people about Sindhi philosophy, values, language, and literature. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Drever: Mr. Speaker, I have an additional introduction. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members here Mashhood Qazi from the Live for Humanity Foundation and who is also the vice-president of my constituency association. The Live for Humanity Foundation is focused on economic independence and empowerment for fellow Albertans. They provide professional guidance through advocacy and education and help people cope with various adverse domestic situations. I'd like to ask him to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the Syrian Refugee Support Group. Saima Jamal and Sam Nammoura are cofounders of the group, which welcomes new Canadians and helps them settle into their new lives. Today with them are two Syrian newcomer business entrepreneurs, Mr. Abdul Fatah Sabouni and Mr. Walid Balsha. Mr. Sabouni is a third-generation soap maker who had a very successful soap factory in Aleppo. After the war Mr. Sabouni had to leave everything behind. Fortunately for us, he brought his knowledge of the soap-making trade and his business acumen to Calgary. His soaps are now very popular with Calgarians. Together with his business partner, Mr. Balsha, they are a shining success story of Syrian newcomers bringing new business to our communities. I ask Saima, Sam,

Abdul Fatah, and Walid all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the president and CEO of the Alberta Forest Products Association and also the director of communications for the association. The AFPA is an important partner of our government in keeping our forest industry strong as we continue the work of diversifying our economy and as we face market challenges along the way. They are here today to witness the introduction of Bill 25, which will strengthen our foresters' commitment to the professional management of forests in Alberta in a way that supports our economy. I would like to ask Paul Whittaker, CEO and president of the AFPA, and Brock Mulligan, director of communications, to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you 11 individuals joining us on behalf of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at in Calgary for today's Eid celebration. This group seeks to educate the world about Islam, to promote understanding between people of different religions, and to bring harmony among people. Joining us today are Mohyuddin Mirza, Jawad Virk, Kashif Sohail, Mashhood Chaudhry, Tanweer Ahmed, Nasir Mahmood Butt, Khalid Choudry, Rafiq Mohammad, Mubashar Ahmed, Mubashir Khalid, Daud Ahmad. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence, I do have three sets of introductions. First, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly executive members of the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals. We have here today executive director Wendy Graden as well as joint council members Colin Hanusz and Andy Shandro. In 2015 the college of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists came together to form one stronger voice under the name of the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals, 1,600 forest management professionals who ensure that Albertans benefit from healthy, sustainable forests. They are here today to see the introduction of Bill 25, which supports this merger. Thank you very much to our guests for everything they do to advocate for their members. I'd now ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to introduce to you and through to all members of this Assembly guests who are joining us for today's Eid celebration. Today I'm pleased to welcome Eyup Ozturk and Yesim Ozturk from the Intercultural Dialogue Institute. They seek to promote respect and mutual understanding among people of all cultures and faiths through partnership with other communities, cultural, religious, and interreligious organizations. By sharing the differences and similarities in culture, they hope to achieve global peace. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members Muhammad Umar Qasim from the Islamic Circle of North America. ICNA Calgary works to establish community centres and places of worship for Muslims and offers educational and training opportunities to increase knowledge of Islam and its members. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you.

The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have three sets of introductions, but I will try to be as brief as possible. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Zahra Somani, one of Edmonton's many successful business leaders. Zahra has also served as chair of the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and is currently serving as president of His Highness the Aga Khan's Ismaili Council for Edmonton. She's also a member of the board of governors at the University of Alberta and serves on the mayor's task force to end poverty. She was also one of the speakers at today's event. I'd ask Zahra to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

My second guest was also a speaker at the event today, Tariq Hussain. He's joined by his friend Ahmad as well. Tariq is on the Muslim Council of Calgary board, which is an elected body that provides leadership and guidance to Muslims within Calgary. I'd ask both Tariq and Ahmad to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Speaker, this is my last set of introductions. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you a number of my other distinguished guests who were part of today's event. They are Shaikat Hayat, Sana Jahangir, Shan Ali, Dr. Moiz Ramji, Arif Karmali, Sameer Thawer, Mohib Samnani. I thank each and every one of them for joining us here today and for their contribution to their communities. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise here to introduce to you and through you today my guests who are here celebrating Eid-al-Adha: Mr. Mahamad Accord, Mr. Abdi Warsame, Mr. Abdirahman Abdullahi, Ms Habiba Abdulle, Mr. Mohamed Hersi, joined by Kerry Cundal. They were present today for the celebrations. I wish you [remarks in Arabic].

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some guests who are joining us for the Eid celebration from the Bangladesh Canada Association of Calgary. Today I'm pleased to welcome Kazi Ahasan, Mohammad Roshid, Khair Khandaker, Asif Iqbal. The BCAOC seeks to promote and preserve the history, culture, and traditions of Bangladesh in Canada and foster a better understanding between Bangladeshi and Canadians in general. I'd ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sabeen Vasti, who has joined us for our Eid celebration. Sabeen is here on behalf of the Bab Ul Hawajj Islamic Centre of Calgary. The centre represents Shia Asna Ashrees in Calgary, with the goal of providing an opportunity for anyone to learn and practise Islam regardless of age or background. The centre was formed in 2014 by a handful of people but today has close to 600 members. I'd ask them to rise, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Oral Question Period

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

Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Opposition

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this past weekend was the convention for the B.C. branch of the NDP. I imagine the Premier might have attended a few of those back in the day when she was an NDP staffer in B.C. The Premier's counterpart, John Horgan, was again with glee touting his goal of blocking the Trans Mountain pipeline. Apparently, the NDP in B.C. haven't got the message that Alberta now has so-called social licence. To the Premier: have you raised the spectre of potential consequences with your B.C. counterpart should they illegally block the Trans Mountain pipeline, and if so, what are those consequences?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have been very clear in our position all along that we believe the position of the B.C. NDP is incorrect, is wrong, is bad for Alberta, is bad for British Columbians, is bad for all Canadians. We have made that position very clear over and over and over again, and we will continue to do it. The fact of the matter is, however, that the work that this government has done on climate change, on working with our energy industry did something that those guys over there were never able to do. We got a pipeline approved by the federal government.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't want words on this. They want the Premier to do something. What consequences will she use? Last week we asked the Premier if she would be travelling to B.C. in the new year to make the case for Trans Mountain and Alberta's ethical oil. Today we learned that the Premier is set to speak in B.C. on November 30 at the Vancouver board of trade. So to the Premier: will you use this opportunity to send a message to John Horgan as well as to the mayors of Vancouver and Burnaby that would include potential consequences if they block the Trans Mountain pipeline?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the member opposite learned last week that I was going to B.C. because, I believe, I indicated that to him in answer to a question. Nonetheless, what we will continue to do is that we will focus on talking with all interested parties and particularly the people of B.C., talk about how this is a good thing for B.C., for Alberta, and for Canada. Moreover, what we will do is that we will continue to do the work that we can do in the appropriate forums to advocate for Alberta's position, for Kinder Morgan's position. We will do

that because we will then support the decision that has been made, which is that the pipeline is approved.

Mr. Nixon: So no consequences. Just words again from this Premier, and no action on behalf of Albertans.

The new federal NDP leader has made his ideological opposition to pipelines crystal clear. The Premier has tried to dismiss her federal counterpart's opposition. However, Mr. Speaker, section 1.02 of the Alberta NDP constitution clearly states: "The Party shall constitute a section of the New Democratic Party of Canada." So they are the same party. Has the Premier spoken to her federal leader and informed him that he is wrong on his position on pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. The answer to that question is absolutely yes. I have told Mr. Singh that he is wrong. He is dead wrong. But just as important, he is irrelevant. And the reason he is irrelevant is because the decision has already been taken by the federal government. But you know what? I know that the UCP over there is gleefully predicting that the pipeline will fail. They are cackling, praying that it won't be built. But for Albertans this issue is bigger than partisan politics. I get that, and I think it's about time that they do, too.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy and Fuel Costs

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, winter is here, and I hope everyone is staying warm. Unfortunately, the NDP is making that harder for Albertans. In just under two months' time Albertans will be dealing with a whopping 75 per cent tax on natural gas in the middle of winter when heating is needed the most. Does anyone remember the NDP promising a 75 per cent tax on home heating in the last election? Of course not, because the NDP hid this part of their agenda from Albertans when they were campaigning. Will the NDP reconsider this draconian, cruel tax on home heating and bring in common-sense change?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, what we have been focused on doing in this government is, first of all, moving forward on a responsible climate change plan that ensures that we make progress on this important issue while at the same time being sure that we provide rebates to low- and middle-income families that cover the costs that might increase as a result of the climate change plan. That's what we've done. That is alongside a number of other things that this government has done to make life more affordable.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's amazing to see a government defend a 75 per cent tax on an item that is essential for most Albertans just to live, and remember that the Trudeau-NDP carbon tax will only go in one direction, up. Can the Premier tell us what other items the NDP believes should be subject to a massive 75 per cent tax? Clearly, we need to ask today since this secretive NDP government will not voluntarily disclose their ideological agenda to Albertans while they're campaigning.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the climate leadership plan is actually working. It's reducing

emissions. It's diversifying our economy. It's creating good jobs. I don't know; the member opposite might not have heard this, but it also ensured that we got not one but two pipelines approved, doing all that while tackling – tackling – the serious issue of climate change that, quite frankly, is long overdue for attention by someone that believes in science. I'm proud to be the one that's doing that.

Mr. Nixon: I count only cancelled pipelines under this NDP government.

It's not just the price of natural gas that is going up. Gasoline and diesel are also set for a 50 per cent tax hike as of January 1. When we are already seeing some of the biggest spikes at the pump, another tax hike is definitely not welcome by Albertans. But let's not forget the Premier's advice to Albertans last winter. She told Albertans to walk or to take a bus. Before that, she told Albertans that were already hurting because of her policies just to buy a new car. Will the Premier acknowledge that taking a bus, walking, or other options like that are just not options for all Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? Our government is building Alberta, and we're doing it by reinvesting the money from the climate leadership plan in critical projects that not only build Alberta but make life better for Albertans like, for instance, the \$1.6 billion investment in the green line in Calgary. I'd like the members opposite to come clean on what they would do on that project if they cancelled the carbon levy because – you know what? – the money isn't there, and the disingenuous statements that their leader has been making over the last two or three days are ridiculous. You either support the green line or you don't. You either support the climate change plan or you don't, and we know where they stand.

The Speaker: Third main question

Provincial By-election

Mr. Nixon: Last week we asked why the government wasn't demanding that the NEB intervene to stop the city of Burnaby's obstruction of the Trans Mountain pipeline, and the government followed our advice. We lead; they follow. We asked when the Premier would head to other provinces to promote Alberta's energy, and today we see an announcement that she is doing exactly that. We lead; they follow. It is clear that the Hon. Jason Kenney is getting results, and he's not even in this House yet. To the Premier: when will she request a by-election so that the Hon. Jason Kenney can join us here as the Leader of the Official Opposition and keep leading so that you can follow?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it might be of some use to the opposition for them to brush up on their fairy-tale telling because that was quite the revisionist history that I just heard there. Nonetheless, we will move forward in due course with respect to calling a by-election. As the member knows, the legislation gives us six months. I doubt that it will take that long. We will certainly move forward as soon as we can, and we look forward to having those debates subsequently. Let me be clear that our government moved forward on the Burnaby matter well before anyone over there ever raised it, and our plan to go . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: No, Premier, Jason Kenney is not a fairy tale. He's the real deal. Let's get him here in this House.

Last week the Premier's office told the media that a by-election would be called without undue delay. She just said the same to this

House right now, Mr. Speaker. The seat for Calgary-Lougheed sits empty. When will the Premier call a by-election and get the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition here in the House?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I said, again, we will call the by-election in due course. I don't believe that the seat has actually been vacant for even a week yet. It's important to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate fully in that by-election. We don't actually go by the schedule of the UCP. We go by the schedule that's best for Albertans, and we will do that.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we know the NDP like to talk about the Hon. Jason Kenney over and over. I suspect that actually last week his name was mentioned more in this House in one week than probably any other person in history. They repeatedly talk about him. They clearly are nervous about him. It's clear that they're eager to debate him. So why won't the Premier do the right thing, call a by-election immediately, and get Jason Kenney here in the House? Is she nervous?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me be absolutely – absolutely – completely clear on this matter. Not only am I not nervous; I can't wait. That being said, as I've said already twice, it will be called in due course.

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

School Construction

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Southwest Edmonton is full of young families and children that are attending the eight new schools our government has built and opened since the last election. However, the old schools built by the former government under their risky and failed P3 model have long lists of deficiencies, including fields that students can't play on. What is the government doing to ensure that schools are equipped for our children to perform their best?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much for the question. Certainly, we have learned a lot about building schools because – you know what? – we are in the largest infrastructure build of schools in the history of the province. It's going very well. We learned from the past and from the opposite members that the P3 model was certainly deficient. Certainly, I work with school boards and their lists to make determinations of where they need schools next. I'm happy to be doing that. You know, we've, as it happens, built quite a few schools in Edmonton-South West in the last number of years, and we will continue to do so.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our new schools often open completely full or nearly full, so these schools have a greater enrolment than expected. What is the government doing, what is the minister doing to ensure that we will have enough funding and teachers for every single student?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this government took office, we have funded for enrolment in education from kindergarten

to grade 12. We know that is important, and we can see that our enrolment continues to grow. It's a sign of a healthy economy. It's a sign of optimism for the future. Certainly, you cannot undercut the dreams of all of those young families by making massive cuts as Jason Kenney and the UCP would do.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now those students and families in my riding that are filling those schools are starting to grow up. When will the minister commit to building a high school in my constituency to support those growing communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we know that with all of the young families in suburban cities around the province, of course, they will end up needing to go to high school as well. You know, after many, many years we are building those schools that are needed to be built. It's a good investment in the future, and it's a good investment in our economy as well because, of course, when you see a healthy education system, then families can settle in, companies can move to Alberta, and we will all continue to prosper here in this fine province.

Thank you.

Pipeline Approval

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government recently declared war on Alberta and our energy sector when he stated during the NEB reviews that upstream emissions linked to the projects under review would be assessed. What this means for Alberta is that the federal government will be in direct contravention of the Canadian Constitution by meddling in provincial jurisdiction. We hear crickets on this issue from this government while hundreds of thousands of Albertans continue to look for work that could be created by the pipeline approval. Will the Premier finally commit to standing up for Albertans and our province, or is she happy to be Ottawa's pawn?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the oil and gas industry wants certainty, and that's what our government is giving them. Jason Kenney's Conservatives are only causing more uncertainty with their reckless and ideological promises. We've had two pipelines approved in two years. On that side of the House you have a couple of former Conservative cabinet ministers who didn't manage to get anything done in 10.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that blocking pipelines through overregulation is a direct contradiction of Canada's goal to achieve emissions reductions at the lowest cost to the economy and given that the Premier's Ottawa Liberal friends continue to control Alberta's environmental policy despite the fact that upstream emissions are clearly under provincial purview, is the Premier afraid to stand up for Albertans, or is she more afraid to admit her theory that staying in the good books of Justin Trudeau has failed to serve Alberta in any way, in any shape, in any form?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this government has taken action on oil sands emissions through the implementation of a limit. We're the only energy-producing jurisdiction in the world with such a limit, and we have worked on

that with the oil companies themselves. That is the kind of action that we have taken in addition to advising the NEB of our intent to participate fully to support Kinder Morgan in its dispute with Burnaby. On every possible front this government, this side of the House, is defending Alberta's oil and gas interests and putting people back to work while we do it.

Mrs. Pitt: That's not what the rest of Alberta thinks, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the federal government had previously committed to deferring to the provincial governments in its effort to curb emissions and given that it is unlikely that the NEB will be able to approve any pipelines if upstream and downstream emissions are factored into an already overregulated process, how much longer will the Premier allow her NDP government to be a puppet for Justin Trudeau at the expense of everyday Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, reckless rhetoric is not going to get these pipelines built any faster. Neither, too, is conservative cheerleading for those pipelines' demise. Jason Kenney's risky plan will only cause uncertainty. It is our plan that has put in place the certainty, that has taken the environment and the economy seriously and ensured that we can move this province forward, put people back to work, and make life better for all Albertans.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Opposition (continued)

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project has run into the red tape of Burnaby, where the mayor and bureaucrats complain of being too busy and needing more time for reviews with no end in sight. The delays are costing Kinder Morgan about \$35 million a month plus an additional \$90 million in lost revenue for every single month of delay. By wasting Kinder Morgan's money, is the NDP trying to kill \$7.4 billion in private investment and thousands of jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it's the conservative side of the House that would like nothing more than for this pipeline to fail. They've got their pompoms out. They are ready to cheer for Alberta's demise. You know what? We are focused on making life better for Albertans, fighting every day for good jobs for our energy industry by ensuring that our voice is heard at the National Energy Board with respect to the Trans Mountain pipeline. We are the ones who are making life better for Albertans.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that I have been to the Westridge marine terminal in Burnaby where the Trans Mountain pipeline terminates and given that the facility is a tiny footprint hidden among the trees and park space with only three tanks and a jetty to load boats, what has the Minister of Energy done to knock some common sense into the mayor of Burnaby to stop delaying permits for a project deemed to be a national interest by the National Energy Board?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This kind of violent language is completely inappropriate and just completely unnecessary. One jurisdiction does not have the right to obstruct a project of national importance. We've been clear as a government

on this matter. The city of Burnaby is overreaching, and we have been very clear at both the National Energy Board level, with the Premier of British Columbia, with the federal leader of the NDP inasmuch as that matters – we have been clear – from the very beginning that this pipeline is in Alberta's interest, it's in Canada's national interest, and it will get built.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I too find that words like “knocking on the head” are not advisable in this House. I heard earlier use of the word “war.” Can we just please use different language than refers to violence?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that Telus has its headquarters in Vancouver and major offices in Burnaby, B.C., and since Burnaby is no longer a business-friendly town and given the ample empty office space in downtown Calgary and given that the Premier is going to be in B.C. soon, will she meet the Telus CEO and entice them to relocate their operations and head office to a business-friendly city like Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we are focused on the two pipelines that we have gotten approved while Jason Kenney and the Conservatives are focused on themselves and their political interests. While we've been busy fighting to get two pipelines built, Jason Kenney is making reckless promises that would only mean more blocked pipelines. Our climate leadership plan got this done in two years; Jason Kenney sat in Ottawa for two decades and did nothing to move this matter forward.

Access to Information

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government continues to deny that it is the most secretive government in Alberta's history. The Official Opposition and the Privacy Commissioner have called this government out on many occasions, and now so is a group representing over 800 media sources. A new audit shows that access to information under the NDP has sunk to an all-time new low. To the Minister of Service Alberta: will you stop using recycled talking points and admit that access to information has deteriorated under your watch?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we believe that government should be open and transparent, and that's why when we took office, we got to work. We got to work ensuring that we can improve turnaround times, which we have done, for FOIP requests. We are proactively sharing more information with the Alberta public than any government in the history of Alberta ever has before. We will continue to work on this, we will continue to improve culture, and I think that we are certainly the ones to look to for appreciation of transparency.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that access to information has deteriorated under this government and given that this deterioration can be seen in processing and completion time, amount of records disclosed, and fee assessments and given the fact that this government also likes to talk about its supposed successes, to the Minister of Service Alberta: are you and your colleagues proud of being at the bottom of all levels of the government in the country with a D grade? A D grade.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret in this House that when we took government, we adopted 44 years of not caring about transparency and, in fact, a government that enjoyed being secretive. In fact, those attitudes still very much exist on the other side of the floor. When we look at the Leader of the Opposition, we need look no further than Mr. Kenney, who will not even disclose his campaign contributors. His plan for extreme social conservatism he has continued to keep secret, and he will not be forthright with the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that the government has brought in new levels of secrecy related to FOIP and given the fact that this government is being investigated for deleting e-mails and given that we have had scandals like this in B.C., Ontario, and the United States resulting in dismissals, criminal charges, and lost elections, to the minister: are you actually going to make positive changes to your department, or will you continue to promote further secrecy by maintaining the status quo? It is shameful.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really wish my friend on the opposition side would actually take knowledge of the fact that we have hired more people to clear the backlog, that we are streamlining FOIP processes, that we are proactively disclosing more information than the government of Alberta ever has. In addition to all of this, we have posted online all sole-source contracts over \$10,000, we have opened up the ABC appointment process, and we have posted all salaries and contracts of all the Premier's and ministers' staff. We are working hard. There is more work to do, but the opposition is no one to be stating anything on this issue when they enjoy the secrecy surrounding their leader.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Infertility Treatment Funding

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday Alberta Health Services confirmed that the province's only publicly operated fertility clinic will stop offering noninsured services such as in vitro fertilization in February. This impacts people across the province who want to grow their families and need support to do so. Services that help to find the cause of infertility are covered by the province, but procedures that attempt to find solutions are not. To the Minister of Health: why are there not more supports for families struggling with infertility in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this important question. We know how difficult it can be for families who are trying to conceive when they are unable to do so. That's one of the reasons why the space that will be created through the movement will focus on the insured services, just like counselling for families who are struggling with infertility and other publicly funded services that the member mentioned. In terms of the services that aren't under the formulary and aren't publicly funded, they will still be available in the city of Edmonton. We are absolutely working to address the wait time and using the space to make sure that the publicly funded services have less wait.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Given that existing patients must complete treatments by February or transition to other clinics and given that many wait-listed clients are still weeks or months away from their appointments and given that average wait times can vary between seven and 18 months depending on the clinic, what is the Minister of Health doing to ensure that those already seeking treatment within the system do not have further delays due to the decision to end these services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know it's extremely challenging to recruit for these positions, and I am being assured that the staff who are working with these patients will continue to do so and provide as many opportunities for them to receive the care in a timely fashion, particularly those that have already undertaken the treatments that they are a part of. Again, my heart goes out to anyone who's been impacted by this. I've worked to make sure that there will be a smooth transition for employees because that is also something that we want to ensure, that they continue to have opportunities to provide care and work and that the insured services that are available continue to be provided through Alberta Health Services.

Ms McPherson: Given that in February 2014 the Assisted Reproductive Technologies final report commissioned by the former government suggested that public funding for ARTs could see significant health care and societal cost savings over the long term and given that other provinces have a variety of options available, including unique funding models and tax credits, again to the Minister of Health: why is your government creating barriers for families struggling with infertility rather than supports?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the member could not be further from the truth if she tried. We are absolutely moving forward to expand access to publicly funded services, we are making sure that we're supporting families, and we are standing up for and protecting public health care in this province, as opposed to what members of the opposition are proposing, which is 20 per cent cuts. Jason Kenney talks about a 20 per cent cut. We know what that would do to public health care, and we know what it would do to these families. Instead, we're supporting them, and the staff are continuing to provide important services under a public model where it's publicly available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

2:20 '60s Scoop in Alberta

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, talk about Team Angry. While many people focus on the hurt and trauma caused by the residential school system, another program known as the '60s scoop resulted in the forced removal of indigenous children from their parents, resulting in the breakdown of the family unit, a loss of indigenous culture and languages, and a lost generation of people. I've asked before, and I'll ask again: Premier, will you issue an official apology on behalf of the government of Alberta for the actions undertaken by that government in what is known as the '60s scoop?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As the member is well aware, we've been working very carefully with the '60s scoop society on exactly what we promised, and that is a meaningful and sincere apology that incorporates people who had experienced this particular activity helping us to design an apology and a process leading to that apology that actually reflects a deep desire for change.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many survivors of the '60s scoop have difficulty applying for government documents outlining their removal from their parents on-reserve, have lost their language, their culture, identity, family, and grew a sense of shame towards their race, heritage, and traditional ceremonies, will the Premier admit that the '60s scoop was a poorly implemented, discriminatory policy that should not have been supported by our province? When can we expect an actual apology?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the question. Our government indeed stands with survivors and their families, and we're working very closely with the members of the '60s scoop society in order to effect an effective apology. The apology is coming forward, but we have agreed that our work with the community would be based on a sincere attempt to understand the experience and to apologize appropriately. Therefore, we've been working on a time schedule that's been not only agreed to by the members of the society, but they've asked for extensions, and we are providing that to them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the province of Manitoba has been the only jurisdiction to issue an apology for the '60s scoop and given that this past summer the federal government finally officially recognized the '60s scoop survivors, when will the Premier on behalf of the government of Alberta issue an apology for the government's role in wresting so many children away from their parents and loved ones in a botched policy? When?

Mr. Feehan: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure what more I can say. We are working with the very people who are asking for the apology. We are working on their timeline. Perhaps the Official Opposition wants to just toss off an apology, considering that they were in government at the time, of all of these activities so that they can get it over with. We're not rushing it to cover up for your errors and your mistake. We are taking care of an appropriate apology by working carefully with the community involved. I wish you had done the same.

The Speaker: Point of order is noted.

Land-use Framework

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, when the land-use framework that is based on regional planning was first approved as government policy in 2008, a timeline was set for the implementation where seven regional plans were to have been completed by 2012. Now, unfortunately, 10 years after approval, according to the government website only two out of seven regional plans have been completed, and one more is only partway completed. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: why is the Land Use Secretariat division

taking so long to get these tasks accomplished, and when will they all be completed, please?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite right that land-use planning does take time. It is a good tool when used appropriately, when resourced appropriately, and that's why we're taking the time to get it right. The member is quite right that, of course, we have the lower Athabasca regional plan in place, the South Saskatchewan regional plan, and we're moving forward with the North Saskatchewan. These things do take time, and they take resources. You know what wouldn't help with that? Several billion dollars' worth of cuts.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this delay in the regional plans is very problematic and given that the new Municipal Government Act bills that just recently passed now require all municipalities to do municipal development plans and intermunicipal collaboration frameworks and given that those MDPs and ICFs must be in agreement with the regional plans and given that only two out of seven regional plans have been completed, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how can municipalities possibly comply when there are no regional plans for their region?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the member is quite correct. In places where there's a regional plan in place, the municipal planning is done in accordance with that. The fact of the matter is that we inherited a situation, in particular with the lower Athabasca regional plan, that had a number of problems with it. It was subject to judicial review, and why? Because the Conservatives did not take the concerns of indigenous peoples anything approaching seriously. We have approached this problem in a thoughtful and balanced way, and we're going to move forward with those communities to make sure that they are meaningfully consulted and involved in this process.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, given that the land-use framework required the entire regional system to be completed in a timely fashion based upon the process that was in place 10 years ago and given that this NDP government has dragged their feet on this very important system and since getting into power has made it even more complicated by injecting dozens of new changes to the Municipal Government Act, to the Minister of Environment and Parks once again: with all of these changes to the system by Municipal Affairs, what now will be the timeline for the completion of the regional plans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we do have a review of the lower Athabasca regional plan under way right now. We have moved forward with a number of the different aspects of the South Saskatchewan regional plan, which were in fact unfinished business by the previous government, and we're moving forward with the North Saskatchewan regional plan as well. These things do take time. They take even more time if you're going to eviscerate the public service and cut to the bone the operations and the monitoring and the various aspects of the Environment and Parks budget, which is, of course, what the conservatives have put forward as something approaching thoughtful public policy.

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

Municipal Governance and Finance

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been quite a busy summer this year outside of the Legislature with both MLAs and ministers spending a lot more time in communities across the province, particularly the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who I understand logged over 10,000 kilometres visiting municipalities, including a few in my constituency. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what concerns did you hear this summer about the implementation of the new MGA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Over the summer I did have the opportunity to travel quite a bit to 37 different communities across Alberta, from Bow Island to Hinton to Oyen to High Level. I saw it all, and I heard a lot, too. An overwhelming theme that continuously arose was the intermunicipal collaboration frameworks. There are many examples across the province of collaboration, very good examples, but we don't want to leave it solely to ad hoc programs across the province and local initiatives. We want to have mandatory frameworks in place so that neighbouring municipalities work together and make sure that the dollars that they use, the taxpayer dollars, are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. Given that municipal officials in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville expressed great appreciation for the government's crucial investments in critical infrastructure such as the highway 15 bridge twinning and given that previous governments created and ignored these deficits and ignored needs in rural Alberta and now have proposed cuts to both infrastructure and services, what assurance can you give to rural Alberta when it comes to prioritizing crucial infrastructure builds?

Mr. S. Anderson: Good question. Thank you. Our government is working collaboratively with our municipal partners along with our federal counterparts to leverage our capital dollars towards economic growth. We got a preview of the type of pain advertised by the opposition when the former Premier of Saskatchewan made the same cuts as these folks are proposing. Rural Saskatchewan fielded the brunt of the vast majority of these cuts, slashing their funds to transportation, libraries, and classrooms. It's imperative that we maintain these critical economic corridors that create good-paying jobs and grow local economies. We need to build up Alberta, not cut it down. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.
Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the opposition continues to tear down the importance of regional co-operation and our municipal stakeholders' efforts and successes, what did you hear this summer from communities about the MGA frameworks and how it helps municipalities work together and plan for growth?

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Member, for the question. Despite the rhetoric coming from the opposition, municipalities, like Albertans, understand that a dollar goes a lot further through partnership. Albertans don't live their lives according to boundary lines on a map, and residents in different communities can often utilize the same services and the same infrastructure. Instead of duplicating these services that are very costly, municipalities need

to work together to deliver more effective and efficient services to their communities. That is why we have implemented these mandatory ICFs to ensure that Albertans are getting the best services and the best value for every tax dollar.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

2:30 Calgary LRT Green Line Funding

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To many people's surprise, the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills is telling his constituents that funding for the green line is, quote, being made available through the carbon tax, unquote. Why is that a surprise? Because the provincial funding was set aside long before this member was even in Calgary and the NDP was in government. To the Minister of Infrastructure: how do you plan to correct the information your caucus members are providing to Calgarians?

Ms Jansen: Well, I thank the member for the question. Ah, the green line, the plan the opposition loves to hate. [interjections] Jason Kenney doesn't want a green line. Jason Kenney doesn't want . . . [interjections] You know, Mr. Speaker, I know they don't want to hear from me, but to heckle through my entire answer is really exactly what I expect from them over there.

The Speaker: At least you guys are laughing. That's a good sign.
First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP members of the Legislature are providing the Calgary constituents with very misleading information and given that this project is such an important one that it is important to provide Albertans with the specific facts, to the Minister of Infrastructure: can you please tell Albertans the exact breakdown of funding for the ever-shrinking green line?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, Jason Kenney was happy to do a photo op when he wanted to get his picture in the paper, and that is when there was a theoretical plan. With an actual plan in place – the city of Calgary made that plan with residents of Calgary. This is the plan Calgarians want, the plan Calgarians are going to get, and it's because we respect the people of Calgary. Jason Kenney would make sure there would be no green line. That's a fact.

Mr. Gill: Given that out of the total \$4.6 billion of funding for the green line one-third is coming from each of the three levels of government and given that the original plan for the line was 46 kilometres and \$5.3 billion in funding and that now it's only 26 kilometres for the same price tag, to the Minister of Infrastructure again: if the original project was 46 kilometres without the carbon tax money, then why did it shrink to almost half with the carbon tax money? Can you please explain this math to Calgarians?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, Jason Kenney was interested in a theoretical plan. What the city of Calgary and Calgarians, through consultation, came up with was an actual plan. So if the member is interested in that, he might want to heed the words of our mayor, who said that it's a bit funny that members of the government who started this project without any studies are now criticizing the final plan, which was a result of consultation and studies. I know you don't like to hear it, but then you don't want to see a green line, and the rest of Calgary does.

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

Fentanyl Use Prevention and Treatment

Mr. Ellis: Great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a great day in the fight against fentanyl and other illicit opioids. Last week Calgary police laid charges under legislation I introduced which banned possession of pill press machines. This is the first time that anyone has been charged under this legislation. I am proud to know that two pill presses and more than 1,000 fentanyl pills are now off the street. To the Minister of Justice: what tools has your department introduced to help law enforcement keep these deadly drugs off the streets?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as our policing partners have said and as we have said repeatedly, this is certainly a process that requires the involvement of police but also the recognition that people need to be able to seek treatment. I'm sure that my hon. colleagues from Health can speak to that as well. One of the most important things we did was that we stepped in and funded ALERT after Jason Kenney cut it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that while my bill addresses one aspect of prevention, much more must be done in terms of intervention and, especially, education to save lives and to start to get a handle on what has certainly become a public health emergency here in Alberta, to the Associate Minister of Health: what are you doing specifically to educate Albertans on the extreme dangers of fentanyl?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We know that in the past there has definitely been a war-on-drugs mentality and that it hasn't worked. Instead of shaming Albertans, we're proud to work with them in a dignified way to ensure that they see their worth and that we're supporting them on the way. That's why we've distributed over 31,000 naloxone kits, we've brought thousands of new treatment spaces online, and we've brought supervised consumption services to Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. That's only the beginning.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that to date, as the minister mentioned, the NDP has chosen to focus the vast majority of resources allotted to address the opioid crisis on harm reduction strategies for addicts and given that naloxone kits and safe injection sites are not long-term solutions, to the same minister: when will you expand your scope to include more focus on addictions treatment, where long waits at facilities across the province are preventing so many Albertans from getting the help that they need?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We believe in the principle of harm reduction. We know that past governments have definitely wanted to deny Albertans these rights and these dignities. We think that people who use substances are still people and that they deserve to be protected.

I want to specifically thank the MLA for Calgary-McCall for his advocacy. The commission recommended supporting the Punjabi community health services addiction program expansion. We've

accepted this recommendation, and we're working with the community to ensure that their needs are met.

Smart Agrifood Supercluster Application

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the world is moving at an unprecedented pace of growth and innovation. The creation of superclusters fosters collaboration and partnership, with the goal of advancing Canada's role in the world as an innovation leader. Recently Olds College was selected as one of nine potential sites for investment in a supercluster and asked to submit a full application for its smart ag supercluster. The federal government is making \$950 million available for superclusters. To the minister: what kind of resources have you directed to Olds College in support of this application?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to member for the very important question. Without a doubt, agriculture is a fundamental part of Alberta's economy. It includes food processing, food service, and beverage industries. We're so pleased to support the smart agrifood supercluster application to the federal government's supercluster initiative. This supercluster initiative includes 50 firms representing industry, academia, growers, and government and includes the new CEO of Alberta Innovates, who's part of the steering committee. We're going to do whatever we can to support the federal government after they announce the short list to get this project where it deserves.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given the critical role of the ag sector and how it plays in our economy and given the opportunity for this supercluster to potentially make Alberta a world leader in smart agriculture and provide jobs for our province at a time when hundreds of thousands of Albertans are out of work and given that the government of Saskatchewan has already vocally supported their support for a supercluster in Saskatoon, will the minister of agriculture unreservedly offer his support, time, and attention to this very important project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. The smart agrifood supercluster is one of nine supercluster proposals across the country. If this particular proposal is shortlisted as one of those nine, that's great news. We'll continue to fully support the funding. The whole pocket of funding is \$950 million from the federal government. I, for one, and this government are always fond of taking money from the federal government to support very good initiatives such as this one, and without a doubt I will support this with all my worth.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the goal of the smart ag supercluster is to harness science and technology to enhance environmental and economic sustainability and since the technologies that will be developed will assist the ag sector to continue to lead in the environment, will the minister of environment now commit fully to support this application and work closely with her counterparts to ensure that Olds College is successful in its application?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I have met with Olds College and with this particular group a couple of times. Certainly, we continue to support their application. I will point out that one of the reasons why

Alberta was shortlisted and this particular initiative was shortlisted is because we are showing leadership on issues related to climate change, climate adaptation, and that the environment and the economy go hand in hand. That's what strengthens this province. It certainly, as the Conservatives would have it, doesn't take that away.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

2:40 **Calgary Regional Partnership Transition**

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Regional Partnership, or the CRP, was formed 13 years ago. It is a collaborative network of 11 municipalities in the Calgary region that work together and ensure that growth occurs in a sustainable manner. At the moment regulations for the new growth board are being drafted, and eventually the new board may replace many of the services currently provided by the CRP. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what will happen to the CRP and the geographic information system or broadband initiatives after the funding extension expires on March 31, 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CRP was a voluntary partnership of municipalities in the Calgary region, that's done really good work. There is now a transition towards a new growth management board – that's for sure – and this mandatory growth management board will be the new regional growth entity in the Calgary region. We are going to support that board going forward, of course, and decisions that they make, and we want to make sure that the initiatives that they've begun are supported as well. In short, it is up to the board itself to make the decisions on what they will do going forward, and I will support those decisions.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On-It transit is another service that was founded and funded by the CRP through their core grant. Given that phase 1 of a two-year commuter pilot currently provides an alternative transportation choice for the residents of Turner Valley, Black Diamond, Okotoks, and High River to the city of Calgary and given that their summer pilot project from Calgary to Cochrane, Canmore, and Banff carried approximately 12,000 passengers from July 17 to September 4, are there currently plans to extend the On-It transit pilot project when the CRP funding ends on October 10, 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I said, these decisions will be up to the growth management board, and our ministry will be there to support this. I know that this member is very keen on transit, and I recognize that the On-It transit project has had success and local support. I trust that the board's membership will make the positive decision that will help the region going forward, and we will be there to support them in that.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Finally, Mr. Speaker, given that on September 8 the Member for Calgary-Currie on behalf of the Minister of Transportation announced more than \$1.3 million for new transit projects in three Alberta communities, including building a new park-and-ride facility in Turner Valley, what will the purpose of this new transit infrastructure fund investment be if the On-It transit system discontinues service next October?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do know that regional transit is important not only to the member but to the Minister of Transportation. The On-It program has worked very well. Again, it will be up to the growth management board in the area to make those decisions. We do respect local autonomy and local leaders. I've been working quite closely with a lot of them of late and especially now that we have new municipal leaders out there. I'm getting ready to meet with a lot of them in the upcoming conventions. I'm hoping to hear some really positive things from them. I will be there to support them going forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll proceed with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members: if you would, conversations outside.
The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Grain Elevators

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about a piece of our history that is quickly vanishing. At one time grain elevators dotted the province. At their height there were over 1,700 wooden grain elevators across Alberta. In 2012 it was estimated that only 130 remained on a railroad right-of-way. Three of those elevators remain in my community, and like many across the prairies, they are preserved by local community organizations.

These structures once served as the centre of their communities. Aside from selling grain, local farmers often met there to enjoy the coffee the elevator agent always had on. Today's visitors tell stories of their past visits, many having accompanied a family member after the harvest, others helping the agent run the elevator. Everyone has a memory of seeing these tall structures dotting the prairies. My favourite story tells of how World War II pilots, having difficulty landmarking over the prairies, would follow the tracks until they could read the name on an elevator and then locate themselves on the map.

Many communities are losing their elevators. Maintenance costs are a continual concern. St. Albert's most recent restoration of the community's twin elevators included extensive foundation work and cost nearly \$1.6 million.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is moving Alberta forward and making life better for all Albertans. As we move forward, I ask all members of this House to look around as they travel the province, and when they see a grain elevator, to give it a moment's respect. Many communities would not be here today without them.

Thank you.

AAMDC and AUMA Fall Conventions

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, next week elected officials and administrators from 69 rural municipalities will descend on Edmonton for the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties fall convention. The following week mayors, councillors, and municipal administrators from over 250 urban municipalities will attend their annual convention in Calgary.

So why is this important and noteworthy? Any Albertan who has travelled our province has municipal governments to thank for managing 75 per cent of Alberta's roads and 60 per cent of our bridges. If you've visited a library lately or taken your children to swimming lessons or hockey practice, those facilities are thanks to your municipal government. Our municipalities guarantee that

Albertans have clean drinking water, emergency services, and amenities like parks, local museums, and community halls.

As the level of government that Albertans are most likely to interact with regularly, municipalities are often the first to identify emerging issues. For example, the cities of St. Albert and Spruce Grove have submitted a resolution that calls attention to the difficulties municipal governments have when dealing with disaster response. Another AUMA resolution requests that the provincial government allow nonprofit housing organizations the ability to borrow directly from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority. The AAMD and C have proposed resolutions on such topics as centralized assessment, Alberta's land-use framework, and the code of practice for asphalt paving plants. Lastly, this year's municipal conventions are the first following last month's municipal elections, and it looks like there will be many new faces in attendance.

As a former municipal councillor I strongly encourage all members of the Legislature, especially government members, to attend both of these important municipal conventions as this is a key link to hearing from the grassroots of Alberta through their local elected officials on all matters pertaining to programs and services utilized by Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Edmonton-Meadowlark Constituency Update

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the summer I had the opportunity to connect with hundreds of constituents in my community to hear directly from them about their priorities. Through the many conversations I had on porches and at kitchen tables, I heard over and over again that Albertans do not want massive cuts to the provincial budget. They want a government that works to diversify the economy while protecting publicly delivered services. They want a government that is ready to build the province up, not tear it down.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Edmonton-Meadowlark have been waiting decades for investments in new schools and badly needed upgrades to the Misericordia, and under this government those investments are being made. West Edmonton continues to grow year over year, and our community needs a government that takes our public services and transportation needs seriously.

I'm proud to be part of a government that knows its priorities and knows the value of our public sector. They are not simply numbers to be cut, Mr. Speaker; these are real people. They are the first responders on the scene of a crime or collision, they are the doctors performing complex surgeries, they are the teachers creating the next generation of leaders, and they are the nurses who take care of our sick children.

2:50

Our government has renegotiated physician salaries, amalgamated agencies, boards, and commissions, and found other practical cost savings. These are the kinds of careful savings decisions that will actually help Albertans. I'm hearing every day about how optimistic Albertans in my community are about the future and how absolutely essential the infrastructure coming in under this government is to our neighbourhoods. The decision to invest in our province for the benefit of all Albertans at a time when costs are low, jobs are needed, and population growth is increasing demand is not ideological, Mr. Speaker; it's simply common sense. Albertans know what our plan is, and they know it is working.

Thank you.

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

Philippa Madill's Fundraising for Scoliosis

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's an old saying: when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. Today I want to bring to your attention a young constituent and philanthropist, Miss Philippa Madill. Life can be hard. All sorts of lemons can come into our lives, but it is how we face these challenges that will often determine whether we fail or whether we succeed and make lemonade out of life's hard choices.

Philippa was diagnosed with scoliosis, a deformity of the spine, at a young age, and she received regular treatment at the Stollery children's hospital. Philippa did not allow this setback to pull her down. Rather than focusing on herself, she is focused on volunteering in the community of Drayton Valley and in raising money for the Stollery children's hospital.

Starting at the age of five, Philippa began a lemonade stand, and over the past 10 years all of the proceeds have gone towards the Stollery children's hospital. For the past two years she has set up outside of the Drayton Valley triathlon and the Drayton Valley 100 bike race, helping to re-energize the athletes, spectators, and, in turn, benefit the programs at the Stollery. She has been appointed as an ambassador of the Stollery and was recognized as the Stollery superstar of the year at the first annual Stollery superstars party.

Philippa has raised funds for the hospice home that took care of her grandfather, and every year she hosts a Christmas party where friends bring presents and food hampers to the local Alberta child and family services organization. This 15-year-old philanthropist is also a volunteer extraordinaire. In her short life she has volunteered for a myriad of local groups like Cause for Critters and the River Valley Players Zombie Run, just to name a few.

It is important in life to recognize when the human spirit overcomes the challenges in life and gives back to the community that they live in. I am very pleased to bring to the attention of Albertans this wonderful young constituent and proud Albertan, Miss Philippa Madill.

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

Abortion Rights

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 29, 1970, a travelling caravan passed through Calgary, a caravan of women on their journey to Ottawa to protest the deadly antichoice laws stopping women from accessing safe, legal abortions. A photo in the *Calgary Herald* from that day shows these women standing strong, shoulder to shoulder, in front of them a coffin that represented the 2,000 women who died every year from illegal abortions.

Eighteen years and 36,000 deaths later the Morgentaler decision came down in 1988. The Supreme Court of Canada overturned our country's criminal abortion law and gave women the right to abortion on request without restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, I have never lived without the right to choose, but generations of women before me have, generations of women who were denied the rights guaranteed to all Canadians under section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the right to individual autonomy and the right to liberty.

The struggle for access is not over. There are still many who work actively to strip away women's rights. Even in this province, Mr. Speaker, there are politicians who began their career as antiabortion activists, and their followers are celebrating what they believe is the beginning of the reduction of choice for women in Alberta.

Right now at the only two abortion clinics in this province staff and clients run a gauntlet of hostile protesters every day. They face assaults and abuse. Clients face trauma and harassment as they try

to access their legal rights. Mr. Speaker, it's even more of a barrier for women who live in rural and remote communities.

When we combine easier access to reproductive choices along with strong, evidence-based sexual health education, we create generational change. We will not go back, Mr. Speaker. We will not accept a lesser voice in decisions about our bodies. This government will not let down the future generations of women who need us to fight for their rights, because women's rights are human rights.

Thank you.

Wildfire Control and Compensation

Mr. Schneider: This fall southern Alberta experienced a number of large-scale fires that caused the loss of property, livestock, and the tragic loss of a volunteer fireman. In the case of the Bindloss-Suffield fire, the cause was said to be a controlled ordnance explosion on the base. This fire damaged numerous ranches and killed several hundred head of cattle. It's now been reported that the Department of National Defence has accepted responsibility for the fire. Unfortunately, it is still unknown when the federal government will work out any compensation arrangements with those who were deeply affected by this avoidable tragedy. As we saw with the bovine TB fiasco last year, information from both levels of government is slow to come.

Once more it's Alberta's farmers and ranchers that are left with more questions than answers. Mr. Speaker, given that media reported that during the Bindloss fire the local fire departments could not go into the base and base fire departments expressed that they wouldn't fight the fire off the base, we hope that the minister in charge will ensure that some form of cross-training and reciprocal agreements get into place between these local and federal agencies so that should a situation ever arise again, there will be better co-ordination of effort.

The facts tend to indicate that this government seems ill equipped to deal with time-sensitive matters. We saw it after the Fort Mac fires. We saw it during the bovine TB crisis and the unharvested crops confusion. It could be that after the clumsy handling of the Bill 6 rollout, they seem incapable of dealing with rural Alberta competently. I say this as it was evident that the Premier spoke too quickly on the fires recently in the Waterton and Vulcan areas. When pressed about the effects on area residents, she was quick to claim that the NDP have Albertans' backs. When asked about compensation, she was also quick to promise but is again slow on details. Residents are already calling the local constituency offices looking for answers. This government's history indicates that if not pressured by the opposition, any forthcoming details will be coming very slowly once again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand and ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) to continue the Routine.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Bill 25

Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Labour to table Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017, for first reading. [interjections]

The Speaker: He still can go. It's not 3 o'clock.

Mr. Carlier: As the government we are committed to ensuring that our professional regulatory organizations continue to serve and protect the well-being, safety, and public interests of all Albertans. The proposed amendments will merge the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists to create a single regulatory entity. That entity is the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals.

Both organizations have asked for these changes, and their members voted in favour, more than 90 per cent, to ask the government to amend the act. This will mean that there are increased administrative efficiencies and expedited disciplinary processes that will save the organization a lot of time and money. By consolidating these organizations into one governing body, we are ensuring that there will be a strong and unified voice for our forestry professionals, who do amazing work in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

The Speaker: I don't believe there are any points of order.

3:00

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to the next item of business, I'd like to make some additional remarks on the rotation of oral questions and members' statements. As you'll recall, in my comments on Thursday respecting the rotations, I encouraged the House leaders to come to an agreement on new rotations to reflect the changes to the composition of the Assembly. At 1:03 p.m. today my office received a House leaders' agreement; however, I have not had the chance to review it in any detail. Therefore, for the time being, I've prepared both an Oral Question Period and a Members' Statements rotation for the Assembly which reflects the current composition of the Assembly, and it is fair to all.

Before I delve into the details, I would like to note that I take seriously the first principle of parliamentary law, which is articulated in paragraph 1 of *Beauchesne's* sixth edition. It is the Speaker's role to protect the minority against the majority. I made several remarks to this effect in June 2015, at the beginning of this Legislature, in light of the House leaders' agreement on the Oral Question Period and Members' Statements rotations.

Additionally, I wish to implement these new rotations starting tomorrow, Tuesday, November 7, on what will be day 1 of the Oral Question Period rotation. As mentioned earlier, the House leaders, in consultation with the other members, provided another agreement. I'm prepared to consider it. Nonetheless, members will be provided copies of this rotation along with the revised projected sitting days calendar, which outlines the Members' Statements rotation.

For those members who may be wondering why it is the Speaker who ultimately determines the rotation of questions, I wish to quote from Speaker Kowalski's ruling from February 8, 2010. Facing a similar situation, Speaker Kowalski explained:

By convention, history, and practice the rotation of questions is not found in the standing orders, nor should it be. This absence is due in part to a recognition that is the Speaker's responsibility to recognize members to participate in debate and the question period. The chair is fully aware that it is the members themselves who make the rules through the standing orders, and this chair has given effect to House leaders' agreements, but it is ultimately up to the chair to recognize members during question period.

His remarks may be found on page 17 of *Hansard* for that day.

Additionally, Mr. Kowalski on April 11, 2001, said that the practice of caucuses submitting lists to the Speaker's office . . . of those members wishing to ask questions that day will continue. In accordance with traditions of the Assembly, the Speaker will ultimately retain discretion when it comes to recognizing members during question period.

As to that reference please see page 11 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

Before I outline the details of the Oral Question Period rotation, I'd like to alert the Assembly as to the key considerations I examined in arriving at the rotation. The context for this allocation: the current composition of the Assembly is of great importance. First of all, currently the Assembly has the largest Official Opposition since 1993. There are 32 private members from the government caucus, 26 from the Official Opposition, two from the Alberta caucus, and one each from four single-member or independent caucuses, for a total of 64 private members. It is with this context in mind that the Oral Question Period rotation was devised.

Starting with the Alberta Party caucus, I have determined the allocation for this caucus by considering the overall standings of private members in the Assembly. The Alberta Party caucus, which has two members and will be the third-party opposition, is entitled to receive 10 questions per two-week period. The Alberta Party comprises approximately 6 per cent of private members but will be entitled to approximately 10 per cent of opposition questions.

With respect to the single-member caucuses and independent members in this grouping, each member is allocated one question per week, which reflects each group's standing in terms of seats in the Assembly. I would also add that one question per week for this grouping aligns with the well-established practice of the Assembly prior to the 29th Legislature. For instance, starting in February 2011, the then Member for Calgary-Currie, the sole member of the Alberta caucus at the time, received one question per week. In 2004 the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the lone representative in the Assembly for the Alberta Alliance, similarly received one question per week starting in March 2005. This also occurred in October 2009 with the same member when he was the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, at that time the sole member of the Wildrose Alliance caucus.

There are many additional examples of instances in which independent members received one question per week. To name but a few, in March 2014 the members for Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-Foothills, and Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo each received the sixth question once per week.

The specifics of the rotation are as follows. With respect to the details of the Oral Question Period rotation to be implemented starting Tuesday, this rotation is based on an eight-day, 16 questions per day format. The Official Opposition is entitled to the first three questions each day. Additionally, the Official Opposition receives questions 7 through 9 and questions 13, 14, and 16 each day. The Official Opposition receives question 10 on days 1, 3, 5, and 7 as well as question 11 on days 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8. Lastly, the Official Opposition is entitled to question 12 on day 2 and days 4 through 8. This amounts to a total of 87 questions over the eight-day rotation.

The Alberta Party caucus, the third-party opposition, receives question 4 on each day of the eight-day rotation. The Alberta Party

caucus is also entitled to question 11 on days 1 and 5, for a total, as noted, of 10 questions over the eight-day rotation.

The Liberal member, Progressive Conservative member, and independent members will each receive one question each four-day period as follows: the Member for Calgary-Mountain View on days 1 and 5, Vermilion-Lloydminster on days 2 and 6, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks on days 3 and 7, the Member for Calgary-South East on days 4 and 8.

Private members of the government caucus are entitled to questions 5 and 15 on each day of the rotation. They also receive question 10 on days 2, 4, 6, and 8 as well as question 11 on day 7 and question 12 on days 1 and 3. As a result, the government caucus receives a total of 23 questions over the eight-day period.

Now I turn to the question of how the questions have been reallocated as compared to the rotation that has been in force since the fall sitting commenced. The increase in the number of questions for the Alberta Party caucus to 10 for the eight-day rotation has resulted in a decrease in three questions to the Official Opposition, one question for the NDP caucus, and one fewer for the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. The reallocation is justified based on the aforementioned allocation of one question per week to single-member caucuses, on the fact that the size of the Official Opposition has been reduced by one member with the departure of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, and, lastly, because of the reduction in the number of private members in the government caucus by one with the appointment of the Member for Calgary-North West as the Minister of Infrastructure.

I would like to remind members that questions and responses should be succinct, being up to 35 seconds in length, and that preambles to supplementary questions are only allowed for the first four sets of questions each day.

With respect to the Members' Statements rotation the House leaders' agreement for October provided for a three-week allocation. As Standing Order 7(4) sets out, up to six private members may make statements of up to two minutes in length each day. Private members of the government caucus are entitled to three statements each sitting day. The Official Opposition receives three statements every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday except on week 3, when this caucus receives two statements. They also receive one statement on Thursday. The third-party opposition will receive one statement each week on Thursday.

This allotment accords with past practices whereby a two-member caucus received one member's statement per week. In March 2010 the ND opposition, which was a two-member caucus, received one member's statement each week. The same allocation was applied with respect to the two-member caucus in April 2008.

3:10

In this current arrangement the Official Opposition will be entitled to one fewer statement per three-week cycle. The one-member caucuses and independents each receive one statement each three-week period. Please consult the projected sitting dates calendar for further details.

As noted, let me say again that I will review the House leaders' agreement and make further comments at a later date. If there are additional suggestions, I'm prepared to discuss those with the House leaders and others who are impacted by this decision.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written question, which had been accepted]

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act

Q17. Mr. Ellis:

How many charges have been laid under section 4 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act since this section came into force?

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 206 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I'd first like to start out just by reiterating what the bill is about because it's been a little while since we were talking about it. This allows for the publication of advertisements by licensed adoption agencies publicizing the profiles of prospective adoptive parents that meet the requirements prescribed in regulation.

I'd like to start off by first of all thanking all of my colleagues in the Legislature for really wonderful discussions over this, amendments that have been made, and changes. I'm very, very grateful for the collaborative work that's been done on this very important piece of legislation to bring us up to date with the rest of Canada with respect to adoption. Thank you so much. I'm very, very grateful for the opportunity to stand and speak to this. I do have an amendment, but I'll bring that forward in just a little bit.

As most of you know, with respect to adoption in this province folks have not been able to use updates or technology or any other aspects to be able to provide profiles online to expectant parents. One of the interesting things that we find going forward in this process is that, as you can imagine, for anybody who is in the process of adoption, it's very, very stressful for both the adoptive parents and the expectant parents. To be able to have this process put online, to be able to stay at home and look through options that are available to you without having to go into a space where you may feel uncomfortable – given any particular situation there are a myriad of situations that you will be dealing with at any given time – to be able to have the ability to be at home, Madam Chair, and to look through the profiles and have the opportunity to spend some really good time, especially for an expectant parent that is looking into the adoption process, is I think a very, very respectful mechanism to have available to them. There's just so much information that we can put online.

Of course, one of the main things and some of the concerns that have been brought up by my colleagues in this Legislature is making sure that the regulations are there to protect people but also to make sure that that information is available. So far Ontario and Yukon and B.C. have already put their legislation into this century and, as a result, have seen increases in adoptions, which, of course, is what we want to see in these particular situations.

How we communicate has changed. I know I was dragged into technology kicking and screaming. I was probably the last person in my age group to get a cellphone, let alone learn how to text. It was really forced upon me. It was never – I've always been one of those people who loved having phone conversations. But, as we all

know, once we get used to the technology and understand how it works, it really does actually help you out with your ability to communicate in a very, very small sense. I used to run a music studio, and for the students that I had in my studio, I could send them e-mails, I could phone them, leave messages with their parents, but they only ever answered their texts. Like, that was it. That was the only opportunity that I ever had to speak with these kids and with their parents, actually, quite often in order to communicate with them about issues much less serious and much less stressful than what we're talking about here.

But in that discussion it inherently describes exactly what we're trying to talk about here, which is access to information for families that are wanting to expand their families and for those expectant parents that are looking to put their child up for adoption and potentially provide a magnificent gift to a family wanting to have a child.

The instant communication is part of it, but we want prospective parents to be able to create profiles for the expectant parent so that the process becomes a much more collaborative process. It's something that is healthy. It reduces stigma, which is hugely important in this particular situation because the ability to communicate at that level changes the entire dialogue and the discussion around this. Again, I can't state how important it is under these situations, I believe, to be able to pursue this in the quiet of your own home, without the eyes of other people looking at you. God only knows how it must feel for some people going into that situation. But I can honestly say that I think that if the research gets done first at home and then continues in the process with the agencies, we all go into this with a much healthier understanding of what it is that we're trying to accomplish.

I would like to also mention that one of the things that was really, really important when we were doing our stakeholder outreach on this, especially to expectant parents, was being able to actually look at the details of prospective parents. I think that having that input and understanding of where the child will go, having a say, being able to look at that not just on a piece of paper in a book somewhere, where you have to sit down and look through it, but actually being able to sit and ponder over what is going to happen to the child in question is very, very important. Again, it just speaks very, very well to the process and how much healthier the process could be.

On the positive side is the fact that adoptions will be a lot easier for parents here in Alberta. As we all know, too, from our outreach, a lot of parents were reaching outside of Alberta to look for adoptions because these options are available in other provinces.

3:20

I also want to thank my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for collaborating with me on this bill. As you know, he has some very personal background in adoption. I have to say that after hearing his story and many, many other people's stories, some of the members from the other side as well, the stories of adoption and the families that are created as a result of this are just miraculous, and when you see that family grow and you can participate in that with us in this Legislature – we'll be able to help with that.

Again, I want to thank again all my colleagues in the Legislature for their feedback on this. It's been greatly appreciated, and I really believe that the legislation will be strong, and I think it'll do very well for our families here in Alberta.

The other thing I wanted to mention was that the parties that are involved with regard to adoptions have also spoken very clearly about the need to change the restrictions. Again, we're going to want to be very careful with making sure that families are protected, that their children are protected, but as we know, there are inherent contradictions in that some children are profiled, and it's interesting

that that hasn't been able to be transferred to parents. So, again, this is just about updating the legislation. We will end up helping families to connect, and that is so important. The guidelines around being eligible for adoption need to be very, very strong, and that process will happen as families work with adoption agencies, moving this process forward, especially before putting a profile onto the Internet. Again, this is something that will be worked out in the regulations. I would imagine that there are other jurisdictions, like I've mentioned before, that have had very, very huge success with the ability to put profiles online.

One of the things that had been brought to my attention was that we had received some feedback where we hadn't been completely clear, from just reading the text of the bill, as to the intention, so I would like to move an amendment at this point if I can.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move that Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017, be amended by adding the following preamble before the enacting clause:

Preamble

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to improving access to adoption;

Whereas the current legislation contains barriers that prevent prospective adoptive parents from publicizing their profiles for the attention of parents who are considering adoption in Alberta; and

Whereas removal of this barrier will enhance information regarding the options available to parents considering adoption that will assist and support them in making a decision appropriate for their individual circumstances.

The preamble, I'm hoping, will help to clarify the very, very simple aspect of what this bill is actually asking to do. Just to reiterate along with the preamble, the bill is very simply to be able to approve . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I apologize. You only get to speak for 10 minutes, and then somebody else gets a chance to speak, and then you'll have to – so I guess we've just run out of time to explain the amendment.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh, sorry. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: No problem.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I was so interested in the comments from the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View that perhaps she might just be able to conclude some final thoughts there.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I promise I'll be quick. As a result of the feedback, this is why this preamble was brought forward. Again, just to reiterate, the bill is to allow prospective adoptive parents to be approved to advertise their profiles online on legitimate websites like, for example, Canada Adopts, which has been shown to show great success.

As I had mentioned earlier, right now Alberta's legislation prohibits this. In other provinces, like B.C., prospective adoptive parents are allowed to post their profiles on Canada Adopts. We would like to change that right here in Alberta and make sure that

we bring our legislation in line with this century and certainly be able to make sure that these folks have the ability to be able to seek each other out and make those connections.

The amendment adds the preamble and, hopefully, will reiterate the spirit of the bill. I would ask that the members recognize that the bill is clear that advertising is only to be legal if it's in accordance with strict regulations. The bill is to enable regulations to be created that bring us in line with other provinces.

I would like to again thank all of you and everyone in this Legislature for considering this bill and for the excellent debate and work that's been done to bring this legislation forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017, as proposed by my good friend the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

This bill is truly a compassionate one as it assists adoptive parents, soon-to-be parents who want to ensure that their child is loved and nurtured their whole life. Of course, the bill is compassionate to the children who are needing a home.

There is no question that our adoption system will be better off from the changes Bill 206 introduces. I think our province has fallen behind the other provinces on this front, and I know it wasn't intentional, just an oversight. Thankfully, we have a member in this Assembly who paid attention to the individuals and then moved to action to help them. I think this is why Bill 206 is before us in this House.

While it might not be immediately apparent how it is going to affect our lives, let's be clear. I think it will impact our lives. I would like all my colleagues here today to think about the adoptive families that they know, and they undoubtedly know some families.

Before Bill 206, a motion introduced by the Member for Calgary-East which received unanimous support of the House wanted to know about the restrictions adoptive parents face in seeking to find a child whom they could make their own. Once looked at, the restrictions on posting their profiles are an unnecessary hurdle. It's been a long time, 30 years, since these restrictions have been reviewed and updated. We have seen a lot of changes ever since. We communicate far differently than before, as the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View was saying in her speech, so I think it's about time that we update some of the changes in this department.

Bill 206 will make the common-sense change allowing prospective parents to publicize their interest in adopting a child, which will let pregnant women and expectant parents who are considering adoption find them. What a well-intended change that is, I think. It'll do good for all the families who will be involved in this. Now, let's think for a moment. The bill will change the lives of two sets of parents and a child in a way that we'll never know. I think it's an honour for all of us to play a role in this humane process.

3:30

When the bill passes, it won't mean a free-for-all on advertising for prospective parents. The government will create regulations that will provide the controls necessary to ensure that advertising, prospective parents' postings abide by the necessary parameters. The big difference is that they'll be able to broaden their reach in their effort to adopt a child and complete their families. In a province that has seen a steadily dropping adoption rate, this kind

of move to facilitate more adoptions is critical, in my opinion. Now, if we look to B.C., which has modernized its adoption processes and allows prospective parents to publicize their interest in adopting, we can gain great hope that we will see a positive upwards shift in Alberta.

I hope that all members of this Assembly support this bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to the amendment to Bill 206. This is a very worthy bill, worthy of everyone's support in this House. I believe that this amendment will provide some clarity to this bill as we move forward in our debate. I think that clarity is always a good thing. We need to understand: what is the intention of this bill? This amendment provides that kind of clarity.

It starts by pointing out that we need to improve access to adoption: "Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to improving access to adoption." I believe that is something that all of us can support, and this amendment brings that clearly to the forefront for all of us in the Legislature, that this is the goal of this bill.

We see: "Whereas the current legislation contains barriers that prevent prospective adoptive parents from publicizing their profiles." Again, it brings clarity, Madam Chair, to the idea and to the understanding of this Legislature that there are some barriers that are stopping prospective parents from finding the children that will bring, in many cases, meaning to their lives and to both of them. The second point, about current legislation blocking prospective parents, I believe brings clarity to this piece of legislation.

Thirdly, the idea is that this prospective piece of legislation, Bill 206, is going to enhance information sharing, and it's going to assist and support prospective parents.

Again, these three points that are added to this amendment I believe will help all of us to understand the purpose and the nature of this bill. I believe it deserves our support.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of the amendment. As our colleagues in the House have already indicated, it's a great point to clarify some of the questions that were raised when we were initially discussing this in second reading. I'm a supporter of adoptions. I've had family members that have been through the adoption process in Alberta as well as looking at international adoptions. I believe that if we can support adoptive families to be able to work together with biological families and look at open adoptions, that's a benefit to all Albertans.

I will probably say more when we're back on the original bill, but I did want to just let the member know that I do support her amendment. I look forward to the continued debate in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, am happy to rise and support the amendment, which was given to us earlier today by the member opposite. I really appreciate putting the preamble in the bill because it clarifies, one, that the government is working really

hard to find the best solutions for all the children in Alberta. It also pays attention to the prospective needs of adoptive parents and is a reminder that it's not always easy for them to be able to move towards the path of adoption. Also, the reason I really appreciate having the amendment is that it clarifies that adoption comes in many different forms and that prospective adoptive parents are maybe adopting a baby or maybe adopting a child that's a toddler or, in a possible case, sometimes a teenager.

I appreciate that we are including the preamble that bears witness to what the government is trying to do around adoption. I will be supporting this amendment, and I will speak more fully later on about the main bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: I knew you'd get it. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak on the amendment to Bill 206. You know, we've received some feedback that shows that it is not immediately clear, simply from reading the text of this bill, what it intends to do. The intention of the bill is rather simple. It's to allow prospective adoptive parents, after being approved, to advertise their profiles online on legitimate websites like Canada Adopts. Right now Alberta's legislation prohibits this. In other provinces like B.C. prospective adoptive parents are allowed to post their profiles on Canada Adopts, and it's a shame that they can't do so here in Alberta.

This amendment adds a preamble explaining the spirit and intent of this legislation, and it will help to guide the crafting of regulations. Anything, I think, that we can do as government and as opposition to streamline the adoption process is going to be an immediate benefit to both the adoptive parents and the children. Lord knows how fast they change, especially when they're babies and toddlers. I would implore the members to recognize that this bill is clear, that the advertising is only legal if it's in accordance with strict regulations. The bill is to enable regulations to be created that bring us in line with other provinces as opposed to keeping a blanket prohibition on the practice. I would encourage all members to support this amendment to this great bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: To the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, rise in support of this amendment. But I actually had a question for the mover of the amendment. When I read the second part of the preamble – and I'll read it right now: "Whereas the current legislation contains barriers that prevent prospective adoptive parents from publicizing their profiles for the attention of parents who are considering adoption in Alberta" – I think that there is some redundancy in that statement or at least a lack of clarity.

I had thought that we were trying to make it easier for persons who are wishing to adopt a child to present their profiles and that those profiles would come to the attention of persons who are considering giving up a child for adoption. I think that perhaps you need to change the wording of the statement to clarify that. It's my understanding that we're not going to be allowing the person putting up a child for adoption to be publicizing their situation because that would go against a whole bunch of privacy constraints. I would actually like to know the response to that.

3:40

Mrs. Aheer: I'm not quite sure I'm understanding where you're coming from. Basically, what the preamble does is just to elevate

the spirit of what's happening in the bill. The bill itself, the meat and potatoes of the bill, is exactly what you had said. It's about making sure that families have access to the ability to put their family's profile online for expectant or biological parents in this situation.

What the preamble does is that it just enhances the legislation by suggesting that we're going to remove those barriers. The language that is being used here has been actually vetted between both sides of this Legislature quite extensively to make sure that we've got the language that both the government and our side can use to make sure that the spirit of making sure that families that are wanting to adopt are able to put their profiles online – and, of course, in this situation it's about choice. You don't have to do this version.

As the other member had mentioned, there are a lot of different types of adoptions, a lot of different ways. We want to make sure that the legislation has the ability to encompass and be inclusive of many, many different varieties of adoption.

Also, we want to make sure that that connectivity is there, right? That's been the biggest issue that we've been talking about this whole time, to connect birth parents and expectant parents with adoptive parents.

I hope that answers the question.

Dr. Turner: Thank you to the member for that.

I mean, if I could just suggest a friendly thing, “adopting” rather than “adoptive,” so “Whereas the current legislation contains barriers that prevent prospective adopting parents.” Actually, “adoptive” I'm not sure is a word.

Mrs. Aheer: To legal counsel it is.

Dr. Turner: What's that?

Mrs. Aheer: That comes from legal counsel.

Dr. Turner: Anyway, it's a comment. I appreciate that it is a preamble that won't have any effect on the actual . . .

The Chair: Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Just to clarify on the language, “adopting” is the assumption. We can't make that assumption until that actual relationship happens between the parents. “Adoptive” gives the obvious space that it is a possibility, but we don't know. There are no assumptions that should be made in legislation, let alone in a preamble, so we want to make sure that the description of what's going on with that verb actually describes the process, not the end result.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. It gives me great pleasure to rise and support this amendment and, of course, Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017, as proposed by my dear friend the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View. You know, when we join opposition caucus, we're provided with what we would call critic areas. It's then, of course, our job to review the work of a minister or ministry and their portfolio, which is assigned, and to work on behalf of the people of Alberta. I've played that role in the past as a critic for Children's Services, and it gave me great pride and fulfillment to perform that work. In fact, it's something that I will continue to do.

I mention this because Bill 206 and an amendment such as the one before us right now offer the kind of positive change that will enhance the lives of children, and for that reason alone it has, of

course, my full support. I congratulate my colleague the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for her foresight to bring this bill, that will change lives. You know, these much-needed amendments to allow prospective adoptive parents to advertise to expectant mothers and parents looking for loving families for their child have likely been a simple oversight over the past many years. But it takes someone to recognize the humane nature of the changes to Bill 206 and that they will bring and put this in a legislative agenda, which the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View has done. We are fortunate in this House to gain these opportunities, and they should never be squandered. You know, I've seen many good bills come before this House, and this, of course, is one of them, and this amendment is one of them.

Private members' bills are interesting pieces of legislation. To ensure success, the sponsoring members need a concept that all members of the House can support in a bill such as this. The member has to be targeted in what she is proposing, and she has to reach out and work with many others to ensure that everyone voting on it appreciates its importance. In this case my colleague seems to have covered all that she, of course, necessarily needs to cover. Bill 206, you know, will have a positive, humane aspect on the lives of Albertans, most especially Alberta's children. Of course, children are the most important thing. That, I think, we can all agree upon in this House. The proposed amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act are clear, and they are targeted. There is nothing partisan in any way about this bill, and I commend again the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for that.

Alberta's adoption rate needs improving. That is clear from the concerning drop in recent years, especially when compared to British Columbia, which does allow prospective adoptive parents to post profiles. If we can make a difference, we should make a difference, and we can make that difference through Bill 206. I applaud the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, and I urge all members to do so as well in supporting this amendment and supporting this bill. The big difference is that, you know, they'll be able to broaden their reach in their effort to adopt children and complete their families. In a province that has seen a steadily dropping adoption rate, this kind of move to facilitate more adoptions is critical. We look to B.C., which has a modernized the adoption process and allows prospective parents to publicize their interest in adopting, and we can gain great hope that we will see a positive upward shift here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

The Chair: Are any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to express some similar concerns regarding the second sentence in the preamble proposed by the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View that were expressed by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, in that it didn't seem as clear as it could be. When I was reading it, I thought that the last part, where it says “for the attention of parents who are considering adoption in Alberta,” didn't make it clear that it actually may mean parents who may offer a child for adoption in Alberta. That, I think, should be clarified so that it's really clear that the people who are prospectively publicizing their profiles are doing so to an audience comprised of people who may offer a child for adoption. I think that would help clear things up.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Sorry. This was in respect to the end of the second line there – right? – where it says, “from publicizing

their profiles for the attention of parents who are considering adoption in Alberta.” Is the lack of clarity between prospective parents and biological parents? I’m not quite sure that I understand the question. Would you mind clarifying again? I’ll try better to answer that.

The Chair: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’ll try to be clear in my clarity request. My understanding of the language in the second portion of the second sentence of the preamble is that where it says “for the attention of parents who are considering adoption in Alberta,” that describes people who are seeking to offer a child for adoption, correct? That would be the audience to whom people who are publicizing their profiles will direct that profile. I think it should be clear. Rather than saying “parents who are considering adoption,” it should say “parents who may offer a child for adoption” so that it’s clear exactly what end of the transaction they’re at.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I’ll answer that if that’s okay. It’s a very fair question. Actually, I think that originally it was worded that way. My understanding is that potential prospective biological parents or couples that are wanting to put their children into adoption preferred this language around considering adoption versus saying words like “put a child up for an adoption” or those kinds of – like, that was my understanding. I think this language is still trying to be very respectful of the biological parents.

Thank you so much.

3:50

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 206. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017, and to move an amendment. I do have the original and the copies, and I will wait to speak to the amendment until you have received that.

The Chair: This is amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Goehring: I move that Bill 206, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017, be amended as follows: section 4 is repealed and the following is substituted.

4 This Act comes into force on Proclamation.

I would like to start by thanking the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for bringing this important issue again to our House. I believe that every child in Alberta and every child deserves to grow up in a healthy, loving environment that supports their development and prepares them for a very bright future. I know that all members of this House are committed to ensuring that the adoption process provides the best outcomes for children and meets the needs of all families.

The fact is that adoptive families play an absolutely important role in promoting the health, safety, happiness, and well-being of many of Alberta’s children. That’s why we supported a motion by the Member for Calgary-East on this issue, and that’s why we are supporting the intention of this bill from the Member for

Chestermere-Rocky View. Our government is committed to ensuring that children up for adoption are provided with a loving and nurturing home. It’s important that we provide the appropriate tools for adoptive parents to ensure that families are prepared to succeed and support adoptive families and birth families as they move through the adoption process, which we know is difficult. Part of this work includes removing the barriers to adoption when removing these barriers is in the best interests of children and their families.

Madam Chair, we are aware that adoption is an important part of supporting strong families and building resilient communities. That’s why we’re committed to listening to our families and stakeholders as we explore how our policies can best support Alberta children and families.

We’ve heard from some families and licensed adoption agencies who support a change to current legislation which would allow prospective adoptive families to post profiles online; however, we have also heard from other families and agencies who do not support this change. We want to continue to listen to families as well as relevant stakeholders as we explore how our policies can best support families.

Currently section 85(1) of Alberta’s Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and section 25(2)(d)(iii) of the adoption regulation prohibit prospective adoptive parents and adoptive agencies from publishing any advertisements related to the adoption of a child. While legislation does allow the sharing of information between prospective adoptive families and birth families in order to facilitate an adoption, such information sharing must also preserve confidentiality. This often translates into private communication between parties rather than public dissemination of information; however, because public dissemination is seen as disclosure of information beyond the intent of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, posting of online profiles with widespread access falls under the category of a publication. As such, it’s not allowed under our current legislation.

Furthermore, the adoption regulation prohibits identifying specific adoptive parents. In other words, the posting of an online profile or a dear birth parent letter would identify a prospective adoptive parent and would therefore be contrary to the current regulation.

Given that the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View’s bill is seeking to do a very similar thing that the Member for Calgary-East called for, we’ve already heard from some families and stakeholders on this issue. Madam Chair, some families feel that Alberta’s current legislation is too restrictive. For example, families and agencies point out that other jurisdictions allow adoptive parents to connect with birth parents through social media postings, and there is merit to this. Currently British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon allow the posting of online adoptive family profiles. The other nine jurisdictions prohibit this practice. Our government shows a deep concern for this issue. We are always looking for ways to improve core supports and programs, including the adoption system in our province, so it’s important to understand what the best practices are for publishing online profiles.

Recent engagement with Alberta’s licensed adoption agencies and ongoing communication with prospective adoptive parents reflects a divided opinion regarding publication. Some reasons as to why there should be a publication ban are very valid. There are concerns relating to privacy. This might also remove the option of birth parent counselling before selection of an adoptive family, which might lead to inappropriate matching, where birth parents are selecting families. Several others have raised concerns, including increased costs for adoptive families as agencies would need to develop the appropriate information technology infrastructure to

support online advertising, cybersecurity measures, and a monitoring process to respond to online inquiries.

Insurance providers have quoted additional costs due to risks of fraud against adoptive families. At present Alberta adoption agencies can provide information about approved adoptive families to birth parents through a password-protected portion of their website. As mentioned, while legislation allows the sharing of information between prospective adoptive families and birth families in order to facilitate an adoption, such information sharing must also preserve confidentiality. But as has been discussed many times in this House, the amount of joy that adoption brings children and families is absolutely incredible. It builds strong communities and allows children to grow up in a caring, nurturing home where they can absolutely flourish.

While every adoption case is different, I agree with the intent of this bill. There is insufficient time to consult with the adoption agency community and develop necessary regulations before the current coming-into-force date. Moreover, the ongoing Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention may also be recommending changes to adoptions under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, and it would be best to consider all changes to the legislation holistically. So I propose this amendment to change the date that this bill comes into force to the date of proclamation.

Once again, I would like to thank the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and the opposition for their advocacy on this very important issue, and I would ask that all members of this House support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to 206. I have, certainly, some vested interest, having now five adopted grandchildren in the family and having learned a little bit about the process. These are all international adoptions, but they have to follow the same prescribed processes, of course, at least in country.

I want to just quote from my daughter's letter to me around this whole bill because she's so familiar with the issues and is herself a director of an adoption agency in Calgary. She's indicated that they're supportive of online profiles, consistent with what the previous member has stated, as long as they're password protected. The concern is that if they aren't password protected, birth parents could go the private route and arrange adoptions outside the protection of an oversight agency, and even though they would still be subject to the regulations under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, they would be very much on the move towards that particular relationship, that they'd developed online prior to any counselling or support that might be offered, while they're still in the process of considering who and how or even if to adopt out their child.

4:00

Their decision, in fact, to give a child to an adoptive family could be overturned in court if the birth parents can prove that they did not get the proper counselling before making a decision. If an agency protects the majority of the online info, they can just give a birth parent the password to access profiles after they have received the appropriate counselling and are still choosing to move forward.

I think that's an important consideration.

She also indicated that there should be, as early as possible in the process, some kind of assessment or home study. As it is right now, an individual could choose anyone to become the guardian to the child without any assessment or home study. That would be a

private arrangement. If the individual had seen, as my daughter has seen, a number of unwell biological parents make decisions they regret afterwards because they didn't have the awareness, didn't have the support, didn't have the time to consider – the lack of oversight or assessment required leads to ongoing challenges, ongoing conflicts, even litigation that could be avoided. So some real cautions here.

She also indicated that there needs to be significantly better collaboration between the private agencies and the department, with better training for front-line workers around adoption. For example, she has seen indications where a woman has repeatedly given up children, and that should have been anticipated in an individual's case. Counselling should have been given throughout the pregnancy instead of suddenly being faced with a birth and an emergency kind of situation where the child may be taken into custody, apprehended, placed in care, but not be eligible for adoption until much older because the preparations hadn't been properly put in place. So calling for more around the areas of regulations, for sure, but I didn't want that to get lost.

She also indicated that there is a lack of postadoption supports for all adoptions, whether government or private agency. Adoption breakdowns can result in an adopted child being placed in foster care if another family is not available for adoption, so they might as well get involved in prevention and further support of the adoptive families. We certainly have seen lots of evidence of this in our children in care review panel, where a number of young people have come forward to talk about the unsatisfactory placement, the difficulty in leaving that placement, and the trauma around multiple different placements after the first one didn't work.

Those are my comments. It doesn't contradict anything that the amendment is suggesting, but, I guess, many of us would want to make sure that the regulations to go along with this bill recognize these serious balancing issues that have to be made between the rights of the birth family to know and understand and be supported and the rights of the adopting family to have their information out there so that they could be considered.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. I rise today to speak with some cautious reservation in favour of the amendment as I think that this issue is of critical importance in that we arrive at a place where the legislation can in fact be passed. Madam Chair, you'll know that I've risen in this House on numerous occasions to speak to this important issue. I know that in times past my motivation has sometimes been questioned. But I've checked it with the Ethics Commissioner, and I'm okay to proceed.

My reservation today predominantly comes around what will ultimately allow the government's ability to potentially not proclaim the legislation. In changing the coming-into-force date to "on Proclamation," we have seen with numerous pieces of legislation in the past the legislation never be proclaimed. In fact, the government has five years to proclaim the legislation. I'm not suggesting that that is exactly what will happen, but I am suggesting that that could happen. From time to time there are difficult decisions to be made with respect to sensitive issues like adoption, and a government will encourage its members to go ahead and vote in favour of a piece of legislation like this for fear of the optics of voting against adoption. In fact, we just passed the amendment of "whereas the Government . . . is committed to improving access to adoption." There's widespread agreement with respect to that being the goal, but politically speaking there can sometimes be challenges around that. So from time to time I have seen other governments do

exactly what we see happening here. There's a change so that, in fact, the government can vote in favour of the legislation, but it provides them with a totally limitless time to proclaim it over the next five-year period. Then, at that point in time they would have to make a decision on what to do with that legislation.

There are numerous examples of legislation that has been passed in this Assembly and never proclaimed: the Forest Reserves Amendment Act; the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act; the Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act; the Energy Statutes Amendment Act; Health Professions Act; Health Professions Amendment Act; the Oil and Gas Conservation Amendment Act; the Education Act. There are lots and lots of examples where governments have passed legislation and then chose not to proclaim it.

Listen, I'm going to vote in favour of this amendment, but I do want to put a flag in the ground today that I hope that's not the government's intention and that the government isn't utilizing this as political cover for not wanting to make a tough decision on a very important issue. I know that members of that side of the House are genuine in their comments about the need to improve access to adoption, and I also know that members on that side of the House are genuine in their comments around the desire to improve access to information, and I know that they're genuine in their comments with respect to some of the concerns that have been shared here inside the House around regulations and the privacy concerns and the myriad of issues that come along with adoption. But, Madam Chair, you'll know that any time you involve people, things get complex.

It's our role to make sure that we're doing everything we can to balance the complexities. I appreciate the fact that that takes time. I also want to make sure that we do everything we can to ensure that this continues to be an issue that is at the fore, that doesn't just get passed and then forgotten about. I know that there are members on that side of the House that are passionate advocates for adoption, and I also know that it is very important to members on this side of the House that we do everything that we can.

I'd like to reiterate that this particular piece of legislation is not the be-all and end-all when it comes to some of the challenges that our adoption system faces. I know that I worked extensively with my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View. It was never her intention that we would solve all challenges but more to raise the profile of adoption in the province of Alberta. I think it is a critical profile that needs to continue to be raised. That's why I was so pleased to support the amendment that put into the preamble: "whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to improving access to adoption."

4:10

I can tell you as someone who has been intimately involved in the adoption system that there are lots of barriers to adoption. Some of them are in place with lots of great reasons, and others are in place that provide little value and only make barriers. I'm certainly of the opinion that putting Albertans at a significant disadvantage when it comes to advertising their profiles online is one of those barriers that doesn't promote adoption and, in fact, decreases people's ability to access the system and to be on an equal playing field with many other Canadians across the board. I think that it's very important that as we move forward, we put in the necessary checks and balances but not present barriers to the process. Unfortunately, sometimes the adoption process can also be an instigator of pain. This is certainly one pinch point that I've heard from many, many, many families all across the province, that they feel pain with respect to their inability to have the same sort of access that other Canadians have.

The adoption process, Madam Chair – and I'll close with this. I've said it before in this House. I wish that we lived in a world where adoption wasn't necessary. I wish that these sorts of issues didn't come before the Assembly, but that, unfortunately, isn't the case. It is imperative upon each and every one of us that we do everything that we can to find loving homes for children. To be clear, not every adoption works out perfectly, just like not every parent that has children biologically is perfect. I get some concerns when we see decisions being made upon the fact that some adoptions might not be successful. We need to operate with checks and balances and ensure that we do everything we can to make adoptions as successful as possible but also recognize that we cannot legislate for every eventuality.

So I will reiterate to the government members: when this amendment passes, please don't allow this piece of legislation to go on a shelf somewhere that no one cares about any longer. Don't use this for political cover to be able to vote in favour of an adoption bill that otherwise would be disappointing for many Albertans if you voted against it, that is truly just the tool that is used to ensure that the appropriate checks and balances are put in place.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I really think it's so great that we're talking about this bill today because this month, the month of November, is Adoption Awareness Month. This bill not only provides an opportunity to discuss the challenges of adoption but also to reinforce the fact that in Alberta we really support adoption and that we understand that everyone who's involved in adoption does it with a deep, deep level of pain very often but also that the government is committed to ensuring that all children in care or in guardianship or in other situations do have the best solutions for them as they grow up.

Because November is Adoption Awareness Month and we're talking about adoption, I thought I would start by talking about the importance of adoption in families and why I commend the member opposite from Chestermere-Rocky View to have raised this issue in this setting.

When I last spoke on this bill, I mentioned my youngest son, Isaac, and his adventure in Egypt. His adventure in Egypt really cemented for me the fact that when adoptive parents adopt children, they become your child. It doesn't really matter where they came from or how they become part of your family; they're really your own. What happened to me in Egypt was that my son, who was teaching in Egypt at the time, invited us to go to his classroom when we visited, but he had forgotten to tell his class that he was adopted. When we arrived in his classroom in Cairo, the children were very surprised that we did not look like him, that he looked like them and that we looked white. So for the first half an hour to an hour of the class time the kids were looking at us and looking at Isaac and really wondering about the fact that he was calling us mom and dad.

I like to tell this story because it shows how integrated it is, as other members have said, that when you adopt a child, they become your child and how they came to you is not important. What's really important is the love and care that you have for children in your home. When I think about adoption and the fact that we're talking about this bill, this is what I really think about. I think about

providing children who are in need of love and in need of parents, guidance, and support wherever they come from. So I'm glad that we're talking about it, and I'm glad that we're also talking about the challenges that both adoptive parents and birth parents may have.

First of all, I want to talk again about some of the issues that we raised the last time. I think we need to really clarify that this bill is not going to cause the ability for parents to adopt more babies. Adoption is not just the adoption of babies. You can adopt a child that's a baby or a toddler or a young adult. I really wanted to ensure that when we talk about adoption, we don't just mean babies but all children in need of an adoptive home. I know the government has done a wonderful job of trying to find permanent homes, be it in permanent guardianship or an adoption for these children, and I think that it's good for us to remind ourselves how many children in Alberta need a place to call home.

Also, I wanted us to be reminded that part of the challenge around adoption is that we have to protect the children, and we have to be careful of any kind of arrangements where children may be offered more as a commodity than a child that needs a home. I'm so glad that so many overseas countries have really tightened up their adoption services, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View said, to ensure that none of this happens.

I also think that it's really important that if we are going to start putting out profiles about families, we make sure that prospective adoptive families are not discouraged from adoption because of their status in the community, the money that they've been making, or the job that they have. That was very scary for me. I went to an adoption agency, and my profile was given to birth parents. I always wondered: you know, is it a problem that my husband was a letter carrier at the time, and what are birth parents looking for? I just want us to be very cautious that we don't continue an environment where people are selected as prospective adoptive parents just because of the money they make or their status in life. That's one of the things that makes me a little bit wary about the advertising, but I'm happy to support the bill and the intent. What we're trying to do is make sure that all the children in our communities find a home.

4:20

I also really want to talk about the language. I'm really glad to see that today we have changed our language and that we don't use the language "giving up." Really, it's hurtful for me when we talk about adoption as something that a loving birth mother and birth parents do in a negative way. I think we always have to respect the birth parents and the pain that they go through and how they really want the best for their children. It's a gift. It is not "giving up." I wanted to thank all the members today for using really appropriate language.

As we approach Christmas, I would like to urge all members to really make sure that we don't use the words "adopt a child" or "adopt a family" at Christmastime. It's very painful for me and for other people when we use the word "adoption" to mean a one-time event at Christmastime where we adopt a family and give them a basket. I think it really demeans the word "adoption," and it really demeans what happens in an adoption. I'd like to encourage us to view adoption always as a committed, permanent relationship between a child and their adoptive parents, and that very often includes the birth parents or the extended family of the birth parents. It reminds me how often I have talked to grandparents whose grandchild is part of an adoptive family and how they would long also, just like the birth mother, to be part of an open adoption. I'm really hoping that this Christmas we can urge everyone to change the language to honour the people involved in adoption.

Also, in this House many of my colleagues have spoken about their painful stories. I want to commend the MLA for Lethbridge-East, who shared her own story about adoption, and the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs for her story, too. I always appreciate when we can relate a bill like this to the fact that we as MLAs are facing the same kind of challenges and decisions that ordinary Albertans do. So I'd like to really commend them for sharing their stories, for sharing the pain that comes with adoption.

I want to talk a little bit about adoptive parents. I understand the pain of waiting year after year, whatever way you go through adoption, either through government, private agency, or international adoption, the time that you wait for a child to be placed in your home, how impossible it looks, the costs of it all, and the documents you have to prepare: the medical exams, the notarized documents, the history of your finances. I remember having to produce a document that told everyone how much money I had in the bank, and I thought to myself: if I was pregnant, nobody would want to know how much money I have in the bank.

Adoptive parents go through a lot in their search to have a child, and I don't think this bill is going to reduce the pain of waiting for a child or even the timing of having a child. I want to make sure that as we support this bill, we understand that it might help but that it's not going to lessen that pain, and especially it's not going to lessen the hardship that comes with the waiting.

You know, I think I spoke about it last time, but I remember wondering every single time that a friend of mine became pregnant or when somebody would talk about their children: when will it be my time to have a child?

I wanted to end by thanking the member. I will be supporting the amendment and the bill.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know that I had the opportunity to rise and speak to the amendment and raise some concerns and reservations, but I just wanted to briefly mention a couple of things with respect to adoption, specifically some of the language that we use around adoption, and also just highlight some of the things that I think we all need to keep in mind as we go forward with respect to adoption and how we interact with those who have or haven't adopted and just, hopefully, provide a little bit of context for the House.

One thing, I think, is very, very important – and I mentioned it earlier today even – that this bill certainly isn't the be-all and end-all. I think that we need to make sure as an Assembly and as a government that we are doing all that we can to be supportive of adoptive parents as well as biological or birth parents. I thank the member opposite for her comments around: this isn't about "giving up" but that it is about adding to. There's still a lot of stigma around adoption, and I think that we all need to be responsible for breaking down some of those barriers, not just the legislative barriers but just the way that people speak about adoption, generally speaking.

I know as an adoptive dad that from time to time people will ask some very unique questions. Listen, you know, we have open adoptions, and both of our girls know that they're adopted, and we speak openly to them about adoption and the joys and hardships and pleasures and pain that adoption comes with. Frankly, I am taking a lot of liberties this evening with their story, because while I have a personal adoptive story, they also have an adoptive story that is theirs to share and not necessarily mine to share. But in the context of the larger issue, I am willing to bridge that gap or cross that bridge because I think it's important.

I just wanted to remind the House or have a bit of a chat around the way that we engage with folks who have adopted. I think it's very important that as we engage with family of adopted children, we allow that family to determine how they would like that story to be told, so I encourage folks to be cautious with the words they use. I think a good rule of thumb for people to remember is that if you wouldn't ask a question, say, about plastic surgery, you wouldn't ask the same question with respect to adoption.

An example of that would be, "Are those your real lips?" if you'd had plastic surgery on your lips. I know that I have been part of a lot of adoptive questions like: are those your real kids? Or: do you love those lips as much as you loved your old lips? You get what I'm aiming at here in that sometimes people will differentiate my children because of the way that they arrived in my family. I want to encourage members of the House, as they're engaging in adoptive conversations, that they use caution. As I said, a good rule of thumb is that if you wouldn't ask it about someone who has had plastic surgery, perhaps don't ask the same question on adoption.

The other thing that I just wanted to highlight is around the way that families are built in our province. Families come in so many different shapes, sizes, and ways that I think it's important that we encourage families in all forms and shapes. I never, frankly, thought that I would be an adoptive parent. I had always believed or thought that I was going to have a large tribe of biological children. However, that wasn't going to be the case in our family.

I remember the very first day that I met our second-born. She was in care of the department, and we had provided a storybook for her of our family prior to us meeting her for the very first time. So she had a book of pictures of my wife and I and our first-born, and each day the foster family was going through the book with her and saying, you know, "This is going to be your dad, and this is going to be your mom, and this is going to be your brother, and this is going to be your dog, and this is the house that you're going to live in" and preparing her for what was a very, very significant transition in her life.

4:30

I remember the very first day. I had literally just gone to the foster family's home to drop off some clothing and a few things that she required in order to get the transition ready to roll. They happened to be home, and my daughter came around the corner, and we saw each other for the very first time. She looked up at me – and she had seen me in the book on numerous occasions prior – and she said: hi, dad. In whatever way it's possible, that moment was very similar to the moment when our first-born son was born naturally and the doctor said: it's a boy.

Families get knit together in incredible ways, and adoption is one of those things, so I'd just encourage all members of the Assembly to do what they can to celebrate adoptive families, to celebrate birth parents, to support adoptive children as they all go through unique challenges and struggles with things that they will never know. We all have a role to play in that. The language we use around adoption is so critically important.

I thank all members of the House for their input on this very important piece of legislation.

Mr. Smith: Madam Chair, I cannot think of anything that is more important in my life than family. As a teacher of 30 years I know and I saw many families, and I saw many kids. I know that not all families are perfect. I mean, mine wasn't. The family that I grew up in was not perfect. I did not have perfect parents. I was not a perfect parent. But I can think of nothing more important than having a family.

As a kid I was so blessed to grow up in a family where I had two parents that loved each other and still love each other. I grew up in a family where I knew that I was loved, and I am still living in a family where I know that I am loved without reservation. My father just had his 80th birthday. My mother just had her 79th, I think. And to this day I cannot remember a single time in my life, no matter how badly I screwed up, when I knew that I wasn't loved. I believe and I hope that my kids could say the same thing. If there's one thing that I would like to be able to go to my grave with, it would be that my kids would say at my funeral that they knew they were loved.

So when we stand up to speak about Bill 206 and we talk about the chance to help kids have a family, I'm not sure that there is anything more important that we could do in this Legislature than to help that come true. Family is the foundation of everything that we do in this society, and providing that opportunity for a child to know that they are loved and that they will always be loved: nothing is more important than that.

This bill allows us to help connect prospective parents to their prospective children. How could we not support this bill? It's been very gratifying to me to hear, on both sides of the House, people's support for this bill.

Anybody that wants to talk to my middle son will know that I am not, never will be, and do not want to be a technology geek. I am not very conversant with technology. I remember the first day I got my cellphone, which was only about six years ago, five years ago.

An Hon. Member: Seriously?

Mr. Smith: Seriously.

My wife had picked it up, and it was sitting on my plate in my kitchen. I sat down at the kitchen table. My son had been bugging us for a cellphone. He wanted a cellphone for probably three years. He says, "Dad, what's that?" "Well, I think it's my new cellphone." And this look of sheer horror gets on his face, and his jaw drops to the tabletop, and he looks at me, and he goes, "You're getting a cellphone?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "That's like giving a spaceship to a caveman." I couldn't even argue with him. Sometimes your kids are just right.

So I'm not sure that I really understand all of the technology about this, but I can say this, that if it helps to connect prospective parents with kids and if it helps to do so through a medium that is responsible and reasonable, then it has my support.

Many of us have talked about having adoptive kids. I know I've mentioned before in this House that I have got three cousins, two of whom are still alive, that were adopted, and I know that they were adopted into a loving family and that we are together, as an extended family, one unit. They are creative, loving, and caring individuals, that all have their own families with as well-adjusted kids as we ever can have, because of the love that was poured into their lives by my aunt and uncle.

I am quite happy to stand here today and to support this piece of legislation because I believe that it changes people's lives. In the faith that I follow, it says that there's nothing greater than love. Nothing greater than love. Now, sometimes my parents applied that love liberally to my backside, but it was still out of love. Sometimes I didn't understand that love when it was applied, when it said, "No, you've got to do your homework," or "No, you can't go out tonight," but it was all love. So I will support this bill because it helps to promote love and it helps to promote families and it helps to promote lifelong relationships. It's worthy of our support.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd just like to speak briefly. My colleague from Drayton Valley talked about the importance of family and removing barriers, and I think this bill actually does that. I spoke earlier, when I was talking to one of the amendments, about how fast kids change, especially babies. Some of you may not know, but I became a grandfather on September 5th. Believe me, I saw Lily on Saturday, and I know that when I see her next week, on Friday, she'll have gained a pound, and she'll be changing.

4:40

At that time they're also very, very attached to the person that they're with. In some cases, if a child is in foster care, they're getting very attached to that foster parent. Anything that we can do to reduce the wait times and streamline the adoption process, I think, is going to be very, very important for the child, and that's who we're really here for. We talked about that.

Now, I'd also like to speak about – and I'm sure that you all get the e-mails as well from the Child and Youth Advocate. You know, we talk about how important family is and how important love is, and when we look at these young teenagers that are in foster care and getting bounced around from one place to another, it would be so much nicer if we could have a permanent solution for them for the entire time that they're growing up instead of bouncing them around from one foster home to another.

You know, I sat on a panel for the member for Rocky Mountain House, who couldn't make it to a meeting. At one of the meetings they had some of the young adults, 17, 18 years old, that had been through the system. One of the comments that was made was that they survived not because of the system but despite the system. Some of the heart-wrenching stories that they told – I know, Madam Chair, that you were there at those meetings.

One in particular that stuck out to me was a young lady that was 17 years old at the time of our meeting and had been taken away from her foster home that she'd been at. I believe she was there from two years old to 14 years old. When she tried to get an explanation from the caseworkers, they couldn't really give her one because it was freedom of information. She later had to find out, through a FOIP request, that the reason that she'd been taken away from her family – and they were her family; they called her their child; it was quite a story – was because the family had an age allotment for foster care, so they weren't allowed to keep her after she was 14 years old. But nobody had approached the family to offer adoption or approach this girl to say: you know, adoption is a part of the process that could happen.

You know, when you hear stories like that – and then we get these reports from the Child and Youth Advocate – and you consider what some of these kids have gone through in their lives, it is heartbreaking. I think what we should be doing here is working on legislation that's going to make adoption easier, going to make life better for foster kids. Like I said, having that baby get attached to one foster parent and then moved to another foster parent and then moved to another foster parent and then eventually into an adoptive situation just doesn't make sense for the child at all.

I really hope that this legislation goes through and does get proclaimed in short order so that it isn't languishing on the backbenches or on a table in a backroom of the Legislature somewhere. I think we'd be doing a real disservice to children in our province, children in Canada, and adoptive parents like the case of our colleague who adopted two little girls. You know, anything that we can do to help streamline that situation and that process, of course, ensuring that the adoptive parents are the right people but also ensuring that the people that are giving up the child are making

the right decisions and making sure that they have the supports they need as well – with that, I believe I will sit down.

Thank you very much. I will be supporting this bill wholeheartedly.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 206 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 206. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 207 Regulatory Burden Reduction Act

Mr. McIver: I will move the bill on behalf of the hon. member and see what the House has to say about that.

Are there not 15 minutes of debate still left on this bill?

The Deputy Speaker: Just for clarity, because we did complete the process and the members voted and passed the bill out of committee, then we automatically go to the next order of business until the time on the clock ends.

Mr. McIver: I appreciate that.

The Deputy Speaker: For clarity, you're moving second reading of Bill 207 on behalf of the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner?

Mr. McIver: On that we're clear and we agree, yes. But people can still speak to it, correct? Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to second reading of Bill 207, the Regulatory Burden Reduction Act? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 207, the Regulatory Burden Reduction Act. As our government has made clear, Alberta businesses have a bigger economic impact than businesses anywhere in this country. However, this bill will not improve Albertans' ability to do business or help protect the health and safety of Alberta families and workers, so I cannot support this bill.

We know that we have the best businesses in this country, and that's why we're listening to them to make sure that Alberta continues to be the best place to do business. I'm proud of the work that our government has been doing to ensure that we create a more resilient, diversified economy. Our government is committed to working with businesses to make it actually easier for them to create jobs and get Albertans back to work, which is why we have done things like creating a Department of Economic Development and Trade. It acts as a one-stop shop that breaks down barriers and silos that existed under the previous government.

As part of phase 1 of the agencies, boards, and commissions review we have also done an amalgamation of 11 agencies, boards, and commissions and dissolved 15 more, creating efficiencies and saving \$33 million over the next three years. Also as part of the review we have created a single, nimble Alberta Innovates to ensure that our research and innovation system is more agile and help ensure that every research dollar is wisely invested. One of those examples is within my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, where we have the Vegreville location of Alberta Innovates, which I'm quite proud to represent.

4:50

We understand the role that businesses play in the province's long-term economic outlook while enhancing Albertans' quality of life and making life affordable for Alberta communities and families, which is why our government is committed to working with businesses to actually make it easier for them to create jobs and get Albertans back to work. I'm proud of the work that the government has done to make sure that good jobs also stay in Alberta.

In fact, some of Canada's most respected economic forecasts from our experts have been forecasting that our province will lead the country in economic growth for the next two years. This summer RBC had pegged GDP growth at 4.2 per cent this year, which is far higher than Alberta's average growth rate over the last 10 years, roughly, between 2005 and 2015, of only 2.6 per cent. The reports have also cited our historic infrastructure build as being part of the reason why we have continued to maintain jobs and increase investor confidence. That has also come with the approval of two pipelines as contributing factors to our economic recovery.

Albertans have no control, Madam Speaker, over world oil prices, but strategic investments from government and industry have helped cushion the blow and stimulate growth in our province. We saw 49,000 more jobs in our province this summer than in the summer last year, in 2016, and we continue to have the highest employment rate in the country and the highest weekly earnings.

I am very proud of the work that our Minister of Economic Development and Trade has been doing to ensure that businesses succeed within this province. The CFIB presented our hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade with the golden scissors award. It was to recognize the work that had been done on the Canadian free trade agreement, which also was quoted as helping eradicate red tape on Canada's small businesses. As noted by the CFIB, the Canadian free trade agreement was "a major step towards resolving often conflicting rules and regulations across provinces," so I want to thank the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade for having the backs of Albertan businesses and ensuring that they have the best landscape to succeed.

We also know that regulations do play an incredibly important role in protecting the health and safety of Alberta families and workers. Regulations help ensure that businesses compete on a level playing field, Madam Speaker, and ensure that clients and customers get a fair deal. One-for-one rules are overly simplistic because the number of individual regulations doesn't correlate with the burden imposed by regulations. One could easily create five

new regulations that have minimal administrative costs or one new regulation that is extremely onerous to comply with.

The bill proposed by the hon. member doesn't address the specificity that is needed when we look at each regulation that we have in the province. It doesn't address that need. For example, if the government created a new environmental regulation, would the bill necessitate the removal of another environmental regulation or a regulation from any field? It's important to ask what constitutes a new regulation that needs to be offset. What's most important, Madam Speaker, is that regulations are easily understood by a business, not just that they are at random created or gotten rid of. Some regulations could be needed to include agency guidance and to help clarify earlier regulations or to assist businesses. Other regulations might include enforcement policies, interpretations, directives, memoranda, or a number of other things.

Again, what the bill does is lack the specificity that is needed. One-for-one rules create more work for regulators, and they actually slow down the work that our departments do. It tries to reduce the number of regulations but really only makes things more dense and more complex. As I was mentioning earlier, it's more important to have easily understood regulations than to just look solely at what the numbers are. In addition, having to identify regulations to eliminate and perform comparative CBAs for each existing regulation versus the proposed new regulation is extremely time intensive and is not a good use of the time of those that work in our departments.

Let me reiterate that enforcing a one-for-one rule increases bureaucratic inefficiency and lag time because policy-makers need to spend that time that they could be doing other work identifying regulations to repeal and replace as well as drafting new policy. What they need to do is just to focus on making good policy and reviewing that which is already in place as regulations come up for review as necessitated.

A one-for-one rule would make it more difficult to co-ordinate our regulatory regime with that of other jurisdictions and, therefore, complicates trade for Alberta companies. Now is really a time when Alberta companies are concentrating on how they expand their exports, not to make it more difficult on our companies that are trying to do that work.

For example, if an Alberta small or medium-sized enterprise wants to access another market within Canada or internationally, it needs to comply with foreign regulations before it can export. This is one of the reasons why streamlining Alberta regulations with other jurisdictions simplifies this process for businesses. A one-for-one rule would hamper the ability of public agencies to create regulations.

I want to make it absolutely clear that reducing regulations, whether they're environmental, financial, or otherwise, can expose the public and the environment to risk, and our government remains committed to mitigating public risk and having a strong oversight system in place. While we understand that regulations and bureaucracy might be frustrating at some times, they exist to protect the public, to protect workers, to protect the environment, and really to protect business from unnecessary risk.

Madam Speaker, while I can't support this bill, if the opposition has examples of existing regulations that they believe should be removed, I know that I can work with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade to address those on an ongoing basis, to actually get down to the root causes of what the opposition may identify as some issues, so that we're not just doing so in an arbitrary way but doing so with an actual eye to identifying what could be some real issues to make it easier for Alberta businesses to be able to perform better and be able to support them in their success.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. With that, I will conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to bring up a couple of points with respect to the member's identifying of the one-for-one. Actually, some of the things that the member had said are why one-for-one would be necessary. When you identify where there are issues with respect to red tape, if we're talking about small business or many other things that you were actually speaking about, the whole point of having one-for-one is to go back and identify what wasn't working and what is going to work in order to create policy that actually is better and is more efficient and actually creates the space for businesses to be able to move forward.

Something that we've seen pretty regularly throughout my life anyway in small business is that you think you understand the regulations, you think you understand the concept, you put together the proposal, you do all of those things, and then the regulations change. But the regulations don't reflect changing anything in the old things that you've already accomplished. It just adds and continues the burden of red tape onto the process that you're already part of.

I believe that if I was to understand correctly what the one-for-one means, that's what it is. It's about not continuing to add a burden to what already exists. It's about being efficient, looking at the process as it stands and fixing it. Actually, the member had mentioned the review process. That's exactly ...

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but the time allotted for this portion of business has now concluded.

Motions Other than Government Motions

World Interfaith Harmony Week

508. Ms Kazim moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the first week of February as World Interfaith Harmony Week in support of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 65/5.

[Debate adjourned October 30: Ms Woollard speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, you still had some speaking time remaining on this motion. Did you wish to continue to use that time?

Ms Woollard: I have nothing more to say at the moment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

5:00

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise tonight and speak to Motion 508, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, the motion being: be it resolved that the Legislature of Alberta urge the government to declare the first week of February beginning in 2018 to be the annual United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. Indeed, I am a great believer in interfaith work. I've seen many great examples of this happen here in our city. In my work with EndPoverty Edmonton, sitting on the stewardship round-table on behalf of the Ministry of Community and Social Services – the chair of that committee is Bishop Jane Alexander. She is a woman who

is greatly respected here in our community – she was recently honoured at the University of Alberta – one who has made great contributions to the issues of poverty here in our city. I know that she works with many across various faith groups in her work to address this.

In fact, just about a month ago, Madam Speaker, or just over a month ago we had an incident here in my community in Edmonton-Centre where a gentleman took a vehicle, he struck a police officer, and then went on a wild ride through the downtown streets. He struck several individuals. Thankfully, the Edmonton Police Service was incredibly professional and incredibly quick in their response. They prevented any loss of life, and they helped reduce the number of injuries. The next day I had the opportunity to join with many down at Churchill Square in front of city hall, and I stood on stage with the Premier, with members of the opposition, with members of all political parties and all levels of government, and with leaders of all faith communities in our city. We stood together on that day, and we declared that we would not be divided, that we would not let the actions of a single individual change how we choose to live our lives, how we choose to interact in our communities, and that we would not allow that to drive us to hate or prejudice against any others.

That is the spirit, Madam Speaker, of this motion, acknowledging that faith communities all have much in common. They all share core beliefs of human decency, of supporting each other, of being there for each other in our communities, of the principles of working to help those who are not always able to help themselves, looking after the less fortunate, working together to make our communities better places. We have much more in common than we have dividing us.

I know that I have constituents from a multitude of faiths. I've had the opportunity to spend time with the Jewish community here in my constituency. I've had the opportunity to spend time with many of the Muslim communities here in Edmonton. In fact, on Friday night I just had the opportunity to attend the opening of the green room, which is a youth outreach program through Islamic Family and Social Services, IFSSA, here in Edmonton. They do some fantastic work, and the green room is an excellent youth outreach program that they have. Just one block away from my constituency office they've now opened the new location of the green room and, indeed, a new central office for IFSSA. They're doing wonderful work in the community. I know oftentimes when I've been dealing with other issues, with other communities, I can approach the folks at IFSSA and they're willing to reach out and they're willing to help and support and offer whatever resources and goodwill they have to help others.

I know there are many communities across this city that are the same. Indeed, Madam Speaker, the Christian community, which I myself grew up in – it's not a faith that I continue to hold but is one that has deeply, deeply informed how I choose to live my life, what I believe about leadership, and it is the reason I stand on this side of the House today and why I chose to run with the Alberta NDP. These social values that I learned through that faith in my upbringing informed my belief that we need to be supporting people and that we need to be providing the supports and services that people need.

I'm very happy to support this motion to ensure that we take that opportunity every year to recognize and celebrate and support all of our faith communities and look for further opportunities by which we can come together to celebrate what we have in common and the good work that we can do together. It was probably just about a year ago that I was invited to come and bring greetings on behalf of the government of Alberta at an interfaith conference that was put on by several people here in the community. That was a wonderful opportunity as well, Madam Speaker, to sit down and just learn

more about some of the other faith practices, to learn about some of their beliefs and, again, some of the things that we have in common, the many things we share, how we can collaborate, and to take apart some of the prejudices that may exist around some beliefs and some faiths.

I think it's very important for us to continue to encourage good dialogue between our faith communities, to look for opportunities on how we can work together, how we can continue to support much of the good work that each of these communities is doing separately in the community, and also then look at how we can work together to multiply that good work through collaboration.

I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this motion forward, and I look forward to voting in favour along with my other colleagues here in the House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that very much. I'm pleased to rise on the Motion 508, which states: "be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the first week of February as World Interfaith Harmony Week in support of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 65/5."

Now, this is a motion that is worthy of debate here and one that I am very much in support of. The faith communities contribute a great deal to our society, and there was a time, I suppose not that many decades ago, that the faith communities were largely responsible for delivering what we now call social services. It's not as much the case anymore. They still deliver a lot of social services today, up to and including today, but there was a time when governments didn't provide the level of social services that they do now. It was very much left to and largely embraced by the different faith communities to look after people, and that spirit of social service and looking after each other still exists today and lives on today.

The idea of having harmony between those faith communities is very important, which is another reason to support this bill. I've been blessed during my time in public life to have been involved with social events and even public service events with just about every faith community that I know of in Alberta. I have to tell you, what they have in common is probably bigger and more important than what they hold differently. There's been a pretty consistent belief, in my estimation, or pretty consistent, even though there is difference in their beliefs – what I see as consistent is the belief in helping the weakest and the poorest amongst us. The willingness and the desire to provide support when someone is in a time of stress or they have a mental health issue or a time where perhaps there is a sickness or a death in the family or amongst loved ones – faith communities gather around their own.

But more than that, they gather around those that aren't their own when they can, too, and provide support for them just because then need it. In my view, that's a standard that is important and a

standard that makes our society better. I'm cognizant of the fact that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore to close debate on Motion 508.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members of the House for the debate here today. You know, I'm proud to be part of a government that is making life better for Albertans and that has in its heart to build a community where people feel safe and free to live their faith and culture. The declaration of an annual United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week would solidify our government's support of diversity in culture and faith. By proposing this motion, my hope is that every community across this province has the opportunity to live without fear when it comes to their faith.

5:10

Madam Speaker, I believe that it is our job as elected representatives to make life more inclusive for all Albertans, and this is why I'm standing here today. I'm advocating on behalf of all my constituents and Albertans of various religious backgrounds. I believe that it is our duty as members of this Legislature to support diversity in this province.

As stated on the United Nations website for interfaith, "the World Interfaith Harmony Week provides a platform – one week in a year – when all interfaith groups and other groups of goodwill can show the world what a powerful movement they are." This week would be "a focal point from which all people of goodwill can recognize that the common values they hold far outweigh the differences they have, and thus provide a strong dosage of peace and harmony to their communities."

With that, Madam Speaker, I encourage all members of this Legislature to support this motion and set the goal for ourselves to celebrate interfaith in our communities and across Alberta.

Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

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

Cortes-Vargas: Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

The Deputy Speaker: Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: That's okay. I think she's done that a few times, too.

Seeing the time and the progress, I move that we call it 6 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 7, 2017

Day 50

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Morning.

Let us pray and reflect, each in our own way. As we observe national adoption month, may we reflect and consider the support of our families and loved ones. Let us appreciate our support systems in whatever shape or dynamic they exist and how their patience and love allow us to best serve our constituents and all of Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and move second reading of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017.

Bill 23 would add age as a prohibited ground of discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act under the areas of tenancy and goods, services, accommodations, or facilities. Earlier this year the government of Alberta agreed to a court order to make these changes.

Age is currently a prohibited ground of discrimination under all other areas of the act except for sections 4 and 5. Section 4 protects against discrimination when any goods, services, accommodations, or facilities normally available to the public are provided. Section 5 prohibits discrimination regarding tenancy, including both commercial and residential rental accommodations.

Madam Speaker, this government supports all Albertans, which is why we're proposing to strengthen our current human rights legislation and further protect Albertans from age discrimination. This is a complex issue that can affect many Albertans. Over the summer we consulted with a range of stakeholders and have heard many perspectives on the issues. We believe that these proposed amendments will strike the right balance between the interests of many different groups.

Madam Speaker, the legislation will protect programs or activities providing a benefit to minors or seniors such as discount movie tickets and ensure that they're allowed to continue without violating the act. Doing this will allow more programs and activities to be in financial reach of more people and will create greater opportunities for social interaction. We're committed to enhancing every Albertan's ability to fully and equally participate in society.

In terms of housing, older Albertans may choose to live together in a community of people of similar age and stage of life. Based on the results from our consultation this summer, many Albertans are in favour of allowing seniors-only housing to continue. Bill 23 would also protect the rights of seniors to live in seniors-only housing. The amendments set a minimum age for seniors-only housing at 55 or any age that's older than that. Seniors-only housing will also be required to accommodate, within their age restrictions,

special circumstances that are specified in regulation. This could, for example, address issues such as live-in caregivers.

Madam Speaker, we also recognize that many Albertans have made significant investments on the basis of condo bylaws in place at the time of purchase. We want to ensure that Albertans affected by the amendments have advance notice before the changes impact their condominiums. Existing age restrictions in condominiums will be grandparented for a 15-year transition period so that they do not violate section 4 of the act. Age-restricted condominiums, if they wish to, can transition to being seniors-only during the 15-year transition period.

These amendments will also immediately apply to rental buildings as soon as the bill comes into force. This means existing age restrictions in rental buildings will not be grandparented in. Rental units in condo buildings will be subject to the same rules as condo buildings are subject to. On a go-forward basis the only permitted age restriction for rental accommodations would be 55 or some age older than that.

Bill 23 also enables ameliorative programs or activities. This means that programs that seek to improve the situation of disadvantaged people, including creating more inclusive and diverse workplaces, would be allowed. An example of this would be youth employment programs. This exception comes with the requirement that the program or activity be reasonably likely to achieve the ameliorative objective. Currently Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada whose human rights legislation does not provide an exemption for ameliorative activities.

If passed, these amendments will come into force on January 1, 2018.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, our government supports all Albertans, and we believe these changes will make life better for them. This bill is an opportunity to embrace the diversity of Alberta and align our legislation with other jurisdictions across Canada.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. As we all know, this legislation was brought into the Assembly following a January 2017 ruling of the Court of Queen's Bench. The legislation will read "age" into the Alberta Human Rights Act as a prohibited ground of discrimination as it applies to goods, services, accommodations, or facilities.

As a representative of this Assembly I feel very strongly that we have a duty to Albertans to ensure that discrimination never has a home in this province and that Albertans are given equal opportunity. As Canadians we've always prided ourselves on creating a country that is welcoming and inclusive of all people, and it is because of that that the spirit of the Alberta Human Rights Act exists.

Previously age discrimination was addressed in the Alberta Human Rights Act as it applies to sections 3, 7, and 8; namely, the areas of publication and notices; employment practices and advertisements; memberships in a trade union, employers' organization, or occupational organization. However, it's important for us to ensure that all Albertans, regardless of their age, are also able to have equal access to goods, services, accommodations, facilities, and tenancy.

Madam Speaker, my legislative office has received a fairly significant amount of input from Albertans – I'm sure many members in this room have received the same – based on the

perceived overarching reach that this will have for all ministries and all Albertans. We've particularly heard from seniors, who are concerned about how this might affect their access to seniors-only housing, seniors' discounts, tax benefits as well as mandatory retirement and pension plans.

We've also heard from constituents concerned that, in the past, landlords have been able to discriminate against families wanting to rent their homes if they had children under the age of 18, who feel that the current system poses undue hardship on children, pregnant women, parents, and caregivers in general.

We've also heard – and I'm sure that the government did, too – from representatives of the insurance industry, who had concerns about how changing this legislation may affect their ability to calculate actuarially relevant rates, that age is one of the factors used to determine insurance coverage rates since younger, more inexperienced drivers typically pay more for insurance than older, more experienced drivers, as you would expect.

Given some of these large questions about implications for Albertans I was pleased to see many of these issues addressed by specific exemptions. Our seniors, in particular, quite often had strong feelings that at a certain point in their life they choose to live in communities with those of a similar age group and lifestyle. The exemption outlined in Bill 23 for 55-plus is an important step in ensuring that our seniors are given choice and respect.

10:10

I'm also glad to see that special benefits for seniors and youths such as seniors' discounts will continue without violating the act. As a mom I am also grateful for children's discounts remaining with the change in this act. This is an important distinction given that offering a benefit to a certain age group is not the same as withholding a benefit from a certain age group.

I'm also pleased to see that current age-restricted condominiums will be grandfathered into this process over the next 15 years to give both property management and residents the time and space to transition to either a 55-plus seniors' residence or to accept tenants and owners of all age groups.

I am pleased to see that policies and programs designated for disadvantaged Albertans will not be seen as contraventions of this act.

Madam Speaker, the exceptions that are being made for minors or classes of minors in defining age are crucial and cover off a significant loophole in this legislation. I would have serious concerns if, perhaps, police would be seen as discriminating against a 14-year-old for their age if they were trying to buy alcohol or tobacco or drive a vehicle unaccompanied or vote in a general election.

While I am pleased to see many of these key issues regarding age being read into the Alberta Human Rights Act, I also have some questions regarding specific programs that may be affected by this change, and I would like to ask the minister to speak to some of these as far as the regulations phase of this legislation is concerned.

Question 1: how will the issue of mandatory retirement and pension plans be addressed? Will the integrity of the bona fide pension plans that have mandatory retirement provisions be addressed in the regulations phase?

Question 2: how will the right of our seniors to a fair and reasonable evaluation for fitness to operate a vehicle be addressed? Will requiring them to be tested be in contravention of the act?

Question 3: will tax benefits for seniors such as income splitting be excluded in the exemptions of benefits for minors and seniors?

How will rental car agencies be affected?

Will a specific list of benefits currently offered to minors and seniors be created, or will the exemptions be a blanket statement?

How will the concerns expressed by insurance companies in regard to their ability to use age as one of the factors to assess rates and coverage options be addressed? Will they be allowed to use the relevant and actual data regarding age to determine insurance premiums? I would assume so in how I read the act, but clarification would be necessary.

How will this information be communicated to the general public to ensure that both renters, landlords, and building owners are aware of their new rights? Will there be assistance in the changing of bylaws for condo boards? Can it be done via amendments? A 15-year period seems sufficient enough that they can wait until there are a few bylaws to be passed and changed at the same time.

Madam Speaker, I'm more than happy to speak to this today. Every man, woman, and child deserves to have the opportunity, the choice in housing, and not to be limited by their age or family status. Landlords will no longer be able to reject tenants with children based on the label of 18-plus buildings. We know this, that the more inclusive we can be and the more we can protect the rights of every Albertan, the stronger we will be as a province.

That being said, this bill has far-reaching and potentially unforeseen consequences that touch all Albertans in some way, shape, or form, so I would very much appreciate the assurances of the minister on the concerns that I addressed – and Albertans certainly would as well – for the regulation phase of this legislation. It's new. It's not uncommon that the act is being updated this way in Canada. We know it's been done before, and we need to close up any loopholes that this may cause or confusion and just be very clear with Albertans.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and members of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to speak strongly in favour of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. Shortly after my election in 2015 I had a constituent who came to see me – she was here in this House just the other day; I had the opportunity to introduce her – and she came to share with me the challenges she faced when leaving an abusive domestic situation. She was looking for safe accommodations in Edmonton's downtown for herself and her daughter, and she found that she faced many challenges in finding a building where she felt safe that also did not have age-restrictive bylaws.

Shortly after that I received an e-mail from a new professor coming into the University of Alberta who had lived in many countries around the world and many different cities and was surprised to find that when he came to Edmonton and looked for a condominium downtown for him, his wife, and his teenaged son, they faced real challenges in finding a building that would allow children under the age of 18.

I began to research the issue, and I was surprised to find that Alberta was the only jurisdiction in North America that currently does not include age as a protected ground of discrimination in accommodations, housing, or tenancy. In the U.S., for example, the Fair Housing Act states that landlords are not allowed to explicitly or indirectly turn away anyone based on their family status or age. And in every other province and territory in Canada their human rights acts forbid discrimination on the basis of both age and family status.

It was interesting to read up on a bit of the history. I understand that when our provincial legislation was updated as the Individual's

Rights Protection Act back in 1972, under the government of Premier Lougheed, there was a single MLA who spoke up and suggested that they should consider adding “age” in sections 4 and 5. But after some debate in the Assembly it was decided that age was an issue that affected relatively few Albertans and therefore it wasn’t necessary.

Then in 1994, when the Alberta Human Rights Review Panel did a review of the act, in their report *Equal in Dignity and Rights* they, in fact, recommended that age be a protected ground in all areas of the Individual’s Rights Protection Act, as the act was then known. However, in the amendments which followed, by which the act was renamed the Alberta Human Rights Act, the government of the day chose not to implement that recommendation.

So that brings us to where we stand today, with Alberta as an outlier in this area of human rights. As a result, for many years, despite the fact that the Alberta Human Rights Act does protect against discrimination on the basis of family status, families in Alberta have faced discrimination from landlords and others who have argued that they aren’t discriminating on the basis of a family having children but on the basis that those children are below a particular age threshold. Bill 23 proposes to right that wrong and to bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions on what I believe is a key issue of human rights. I’m pleased to hear that on both sides of this House there is support for this bill and that all agree on this point.

I’m proud to stand in support of this bill because access to family-friendly housing is a key consideration in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. You see, Edmonton’s downtown is growing. As of the 2016 census there were just about 13,000 people living in the downtown proper, with another 18,000 in the adjoining community of Oliver. Of those, about 92 per cent and 95 per cent respectively are living in apartments or condominiums, yet out of that population only 1 and a half per cent are under the age of 18. Now, this is a concern and one that’s been noted by both community and business leaders. In my conversations with the local community leagues – the Oliver Community League, the Downtown Edmonton Community League – they’ve identified the need for more families to enrich our communities in Edmonton’s downtown and told me of the challenges that some of their members have faced in finding that accommodation or retaining that accommodation once they choose to have children.

I also have the honour of being a member of Edmonton’s downtown revitalization task force, a group composed of representatives from the city of Edmonton, the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, the Downtown Business Association, and major business partners like Stantec, Clark Builders, and the Katz Group. When we met this spring to identify what our key priorities would be, right at the top of that list was advocating for construction of and access to family-friendly housing in the downtown core. Indeed, in their recent report *Mapping Growth: A Comparative Look at Downtown’s Transformation (2010-2017)* the Downtown Business Association noted:

Making Downtown more family-friendly is one of the [most] important steps by promoting housing that can cater to the needs of families as well as development of supporting infrastructure such as child care centres, parks, and after school programs.

Madam Speaker, downtown Edmonton is currently about halfway to the kind of density that we need to incent and sustain a truly vibrant ecosystem of businesses and services. We aren’t going to be able to get there without embracing families and a truly multigenerational community. With these changes, there is going to be one less barrier to reaching that goal.

10:20

Now I’d like to take a moment to clarify precisely how this bill will impact my constituents because, as the Member for Airdrie noted, I think it’s very important that we have clear communication on this. Indeed, I hope that’s something that we will be moving forward with if the bill passes, to ensure that we are providing clear information to the public so they can understand precisely how these pieces will work. First of all, as noted, housing for seniors will not be affected as the bill allows for age restrictions of 55 and up, keeping us in line with all other jurisdictions across Canada and ensuring that seniors can continue to live in a community together with people at the same point in their lives and also to receive services and supports that are appropriate to their needs.

Condominium buildings that currently have an age-restrictive bylaw will have 15 years to either remove those restrictions or bring them in line with the threshold of 55-plus. Anyone who lives in one of those buildings, if it chooses to transition to a threshold of 55-plus, if that individual or a person in their family is under the age of 55, will be allowed to continue to own and live in that suite.

I also greatly appreciate that the minister went one step further in ensuring that she addressed special circumstances. Indeed, when I was having conversations about this in the community, I did hear from seniors that expressed that, you know, they wanted to be able to, if necessary, take care of their grandchildren for a period – that could be due to an accident or some other thing where they might have to temporarily take custody or perhaps permanently take custody – or indeed to be able to have a live-in caregiver, to be able to have their son or daughter who is under the age of 55 stay with them and help them out for a period if needed. So I greatly appreciate that the minister has included the opportunity to add some special exemptions to provide in those circumstances.

In terms of rental accommodations, these amendments will immediately apply as soon as the bill comes into force on January 1, 2018, meaning that age restrictions in rental accommodations will no longer be permitted unless it is a restriction of 55 or older. I greatly appreciate that the minister has been very clear on this point because, as I mentioned earlier, there has been some lack of clarity in that although the AHRA has prohibited discrimination on the grounds of family status for 20 years, for quite some time, that discrimination has continued to take place.

With the addition now of age as a prohibited ground of discrimination, that reinforces our current human rights protections for families with children. It makes it clear that the only permitted age restriction for rental accommodation will be for seniors only. Family status is of course defined as “the status of being related to another person by blood, marriage or adoption.” So for those constituents and others who have approached me and asked for clarity on this point, I will state here again on the record that discrimination on the basis of age in rental accommodations is not allowed in Alberta, and should this legislation pass, it will be doubly clear that it will not be allowed going forward. If anyone should run into such discrimination, they have the ability to file a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission and have the opportunity to bring that forward to be able to push back against that.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for doing some very robust consultation on this issue. I know it’s a challenging one. It’s one that I heard from many constituents on both sides of this issue. But I think the minister has done an incredible job of finding a healthy balance between protecting the rights of Albertans, providing them with the same human rights that are enjoyed by all Canadians, ensuring that we are providing a reasonable and just transition period for those who have made

investments, and allowing for some good exceptions, some good clarity, and the opportunity for all stakeholders to benefit should this legislation pass.

Thank you once more to the minister. I know this is a bill that's going to bring great benefit to my community.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to stand up and speak to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. While much of the focus of Bill 23 is on seniors and 55-plus accommodations, over the weekend it was brought to my attention that Bill 23 may also apply to rental cars. Right now a person has to be between the ages of 21 to 25 to be able to get a rental car. With that age barrier, the type of car is restricted, and often the rate charged is a lot higher. Young men and women cannot rent Ferraris or Maseratis or even Corvettes for the weekend.

Madam Speaker, this is blatantly discriminatory. In Bill 23, section 2 reads:

Section 4 is repealed and the following is substituted:

Discrimination re goods, services, accommodation, facilities

4 No person shall

(a) deny to any person or class of persons any goods, services, accommodation or facilities that are customarily available to the public, or

(b) discriminate against any person or class of persons with respect to any goods, services, accommodation or facilities that are customarily available to the public,

because of the race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation of that person or class of persons or of any other person or class of persons.

Madam Speaker, I'm reminded of the story of a young person moving to Alberta to take on a new job but being denied by the rental car company the rental of a light truck at the airport because he was 24. The rental company policy was that you needed to be 25 to rent that truck. Now, come on. This is Alberta, land of the light truck: Ford F-150s, Chevy Silverado, Dodge Ram, Nissan Pathfinder, Toyota Tundra. Mark Connolly on CBC Radio One on *Edmonton AM* has even been talking about the light truck as being the official vehicle of Alberta.

Speaking of those pickup trucks, it reminds me of a blue Dodge Ram pickup truck matching the colour of the Alberta flag, the same as the flag on your left, Madam Speaker. That big blue Dodge Ram truck brought about the unity of the United Conservative Party. Jason Kenney drove all around the province in that truck building the Progressive Conservative Party back together, winning him the leadership. Then once the unity agreement was struck between the PCs and Wildrose, the truck hit the road again to sell the unity deal. Once unity was achieved, the pickup truck hit the leadership race and drove all over the province, winning him the leadership of the new party and racking up over a 100,000 kilometres in 18 short months.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I think you're deviating a little bit from policy on the debate. If you could maybe bring your conversation back to the bill, please. [interjections] Okay, everybody. I've got it.

Mr. Panda: Madam Speaker, I'm talking about the pickup truck rental. In this House Jason Kenney's name has been taken every single day. I don't know why that worries them. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, good morning.

If you could please return back to the debate of the bill. You're deviating a little bit around, maybe, the work that the hon. member was up to this summer. It needs to come back to the policy, please.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Speaking of the truck rentals and how this bill impacts that young person who was looking to rent a truck, that young person needed the truck to buy furniture and move it into his new place, not to mention moving the boxes of his possessions he had couriered to the address of his new employer. So what does this enterprising young person do? He pulled out his pilot's licence and quite matter-of-factly told the rental car representative that they were taking the truck. The clerk dutifully complied and loaned him a Dodge 2500.

10:30

Yes, Madam Speaker, you can have a pilot's licence in this country at the age of 17 and legally be allowed to rent an aircraft, fly from point A to B, and upon reaching your final destination, with the aircraft on the ground and safely stored away, that pilot cannot rent a car. A commercial pilot can be 18 years old and fly passengers safely from Edmonton to Calgary and back again and, once on the ground, ask for a rental car and be denied. Because they are not old enough, they are denied. This is how stupid regulatory red tape has gotten, another red tape barrier.

It looks like Bill 23 fixes this, in Alberta at least. It is about time that air and ground transportation rules, regulated separately by federal and provincial governments and split by constitutional responsibilities covering rentals, be they for aircraft or cars, be aligned so there is no age discrimination. With that, Madam Speaker, Bill 23 is going to solve some very unique age discrimination issues happening in Alberta.

In fact, Bill 23 may help reduce barriers to growing the economy. Talk about all those young people out in the oil patch servicing equipment. Suddenly those 18-year-olds are more flexible. They can go to town and rent a truck and bring it back to their drilling site. It's red tape reduction.

Now, on the other major point of this bill, the discrimination against the prearranged 55-plus seniors' accommodation, my constituents in Calgary-Foothills have done an admirable job of reaching out to contact me about this important issue. It's a lifestyle choice to live with a similar category of people and enjoy condominiums' organized activities geared to this age category. In this 55-plus category other categories could be pet-free, smoke-free environments. All you cannabis smokers better watch out.

Senior citizens don't want the noise created by children inside and outside the housing units. Some buildings are wood framed and not designed to muffle the noise between the units. If you have teens and twentysomethings having all-night parties next to people who are senior citizens, it does not make for good neighbours or people getting their proper rest to preserve their health. Sometimes the space and facilities inside and outside the buildings, as in 55-plus condo complexes, are not designed for the active needs of children. Where are the playgrounds in the seniors' home, the space to run around?

Also, residents do not want the loss of financial equity in their unit. They paid a premium to move into 55-plus housing. They fear that a flick of the legislative switch will make this premium investment disappear. I think my constituents can rest assured that many of their fears are alleviated. Bill 23 preserves 55-plus living

but simply designates it as adult living and provides a 15-year transition period to conform to adult-only living.

I thank the government for bringing this bill forward, and I look forward to following the debate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017, which will read age into the Alberta Human Rights Act, specifically as it pertains to tenancy, goods and services, accommodation, and facilities.

Madam Speaker, I respect that this legislation is about battling discrimination. It is important to note that this legislation brings Alberta into line with the rest of the country. As of 2015 the only jurisdictions in Canada that did not offer age-related discrimination protection in the context of rental accommodations and tenancy were Alberta and Quebec.

I recognize that this is a complicated piece of legislation which may have ripple effects throughout many industries that currently factor age into their calculations of services, services such as rental car companies and insurance providers, so I would ask for assurances from this government that these industries will be extensively consulted during the regulations phase of this legislation. Clear communication and documentation should be provided to these stakeholders so that they can clearly implement this policy or, alternatively, appeal it under section 11 of the act, which states that the act can be contravened if it is found "reasonable and justifiable in the circumstances."

The most vocal opponents of this legislation as it was being drafted were seniors and condo owners who contacted our offices to express their frustrations regarding the fact that they deliberately purchased access to adult-only buildings. Our seniors built this province, and they deserve to retire in buildings that provide them with the peace and quiet they need in order to maintain their health. It is also important to note that Albertans under the age of 55 are more likely to have the financial freedom to move elsewhere should a building not fit their needs whereas our seniors have fewer options in terms of relocating. This is why I was very encouraged to see a 55-plus housing exemption written into this legislation.

Consider a working professional in their 40s who does not have children. They bought a condo in downtown Edmonton because it was 18-plus or adults only. This new legislation would mean that, starting in January 2018, families that have children could now be allowed to buy or rent the condo next door to the aforementioned working professional. This would mean that the working professional has two options. They would have a 15-year grace period to move into 55-plus housing, or alternatively they could stay in their current condo and accept the fact that children might move in as their facility transitions away from 18-plus.

Now, Madam Speaker, I have children and grandchildren, and I think that this problem of condo owners wanting to live in adult-only buildings will somewhat remedy itself. I say this because as a father and grandfather, if I had young children, I would be highly unlikely to choose a building to live in that has a concentrated population of, for example, working professionals in downtown Edmonton. Why would I as a parent choose a building that would cause continual headaches of dealing with noise complaints and possibly crabby neighbours when I could choose a building elsewhere that had a more child-friendly vibe?

My point, Madam Speaker, is that this legislation is not going to cause families with children to flood downtown apartments currently occupied by adults who wish to live in buildings without children, but it will protect Albertans from landlords that have been discriminatory, and it will bring Alberta in line with the national trend in Canada. On top of that, should condo owners have strong feelings about their neighbours being under 18 years old, again, they have 15 years to transition to another building that is defined as 55-plus or in another area, and they can make that choice.

I am also encouraged to see that ameliorative programs, so programs designed to help disadvantaged groups, have also been given an exemption in that senior and child discounts will be exempt from this act.

Madam Speaker, I do want to touch briefly on the escape clause of the Alberta Human Rights Act, section 11, which allows the act to be contravened if there are reasonable and justifiable circumstances. I feel that this is critically important to note given that it is this clause that could allow insurance companies, rental car agencies, pension providers, and other stakeholders that may be indirectly affected by this legislation to appeal for an exemption. I am hoping that the government will work with these stakeholder groups during the regulations phase, but I would like to see clarity now on whether these exemptions will be given on an individual basis or if they could be offered on an overarching basis. For example, will each individual rental car company have to petition the courts in order to receive an exemption, or would this government grant a mass exemption to all car rental agencies?

10:40

These are questions that I would like answered. I support the spirit and intent of this bill but do want to ensure that the government has a plan in place to deal with unintended consequences that could result from this legislation.

In terms of car rental agencies as well as insurance companies, rates would be adjusted for all users if actuarial age data was not allowed to be factored into coverage or rental rates. This would ultimately do a disservice to Albertans, especially those who have spent years establishing good driving records. Car insurance providers use algorithms based on decades of supporting data, and thus it may be reasonable for them to have variable insurance premiums because they are at different risks.

Madam Speaker, I would like to hear from this government its targeted plans to address my various concerns about implementation. I am all for an inclusive society that protects the basic human rights of all Albertans, but I also want to be sure that the long-reaching effects of the legislation have been carefully considered.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for his comments. Again, I'm very glad to hear the support from both sides of the House for addressing this area of human rights in Alberta and certainly, again, raising I think some reasonable questions, which I look forward to hearing the minister address later as well.

I did just want to make a few comments on one example that the member brought up. I agree with him that in general I don't think the changes in this legislation are necessarily going to lead to a flood of families suddenly moving into buildings that are currently labelled as restricted on the basis of age or adult only, in part

because I think that in many of these buildings there are going to be largely one- and two-bedroom suites. For many families that's simply not going to be an attractive option, so they will be looking for areas where they have access to three-bedroom suites or other amenities.

I did just want to address, though, the comment around buildings of professionals in downtown Edmonton. I'm sure it was not the member's intent to feed into, I think, a stigma that exists, but I thought it was important to address it nonetheless. Many families, actually, are interested in living downtown, and indeed in cities around the world families are raised in downtown communities, in small apartments, in tight spaces, and it is a common way of life.

People adopt an urban lifestyle, and here in Edmonton, even if you are living in a downtown condominium, you have the largest park in the world – well, pardon me, not in the world but the largest park in the city – just a few blocks away in the river valley. The city of Edmonton has been doing some great work as well in opening up local parks. The Oliver Community League and the Downtown Edmonton Community League are making great strides in opening up more park space and advocating for more playgrounds within our downtown communities.

Indeed, the city of Edmonton is making some great steps forward. We're seeing increases in child care and other services being available. There are many things that make it attractive for families to move into downtown Edmonton although, admittedly, it is a choice of a different lifestyle than suburban. But there are many, many millennials now who are moving downtown for school or for work and choosing to adopt that as a lifestyle.

I would just also comment that an important thing in terms of us attracting further jobs in our city is having this ability now for more families to be able to live in our central core. That makes it much more attractive for young professionals who want to live close to work, who may want to live a car-free lifestyle, who may want to engage in more active living by walking or biking to work. These are options that are presented to those as well.

That said, I thank the member for his comments, and I appreciate his support of the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm glad to have a moment to rise today to speak to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. You might recall that the need for discussion stems from a court order that was consented to on January 6, 2017. At that time the Alberta government agreed to expand the Alberta Human Rights Act to include age as a protected ground under sections 4 and 5. This was driven by an application brought by Ruth Maria Adria under section 15 of the Charter nearly a year earlier, in March 2016. Because of this a one-year delay was given by the courts to provide the government with time to consider what, if any, exemptions would be appropriate and to address any unintended consequences. Age is currently prohibited grounds for discrimination in the areas other than sections 4 and 5 of the act. Section 4 protects against discrimination when any goods, services, accommodations, or facilities normally available to the public are provided. Section 5 prohibits discrimination regarding tenancy, including both commercial and residential rental accommodations.

Madam Speaker, earlier this spring I received quite a bit of feedback from concerned residents from Calgary-Northern Hills that are living in age-restricted condominiums. They asked that we consider to continue to allow an exemption for age restrictions in

condominiums. Many of the letters spoke to a lifestyle choice that residents had specifically made for a whole variety of reasons. Many residents said that they had raised their children and that they don't want to live in close proximity to other people's children at that stage of their lives. Others spoke to a need for peace and quiet and the need for a solitary place. Others said that they preferred a quiet atmosphere, less rowdy activities, and people with shared interests and accountabilities. Others have bought into these units for the need for calm environments and for health-related reasons.

Madam Speaker, I held some consultations in a few of these condo buildings. Both were limited to ages of 40 and over. I noticed that these structures had been designed specifically for that age demographic. The building was like many in Calgary, wood-framed, but the units were in close proximity to each other, and many units had hardwood floors. Since many of the residents were on fixed incomes, there were also concerns about tidiness, and some mentioned that extra costs could arise from extra maintenance fees and what that would do to the monthly condo fees.

Also, many of the residents had health challenges and noticed neighbours taking care of neighbours in these buildings both in times of illness and in times of health. I've been told that they check on each other if someone hasn't shown up for something or is in need of a meal if they can't cook for themselves. It was a repeated concern about residents needing rest periods and quiet time as well. Another comment I heard a few times was: what about my rights for security, peace and quiet?

Madam Speaker, in addition to the research many MLAs did on our own regarding this issue, I'm aware that over the course of the summer the government also consulted with a range of stakeholders, and they had heard many perspectives on the issue. Based on the results of the consultations many Albertans are in favour of allowing seniors-only housing to continue. The amendments set the minimum age for seniors-only housing at 55 or any age older than that. Seniors-only housing would also be required to accommodate within their age restriction special circumstances that are specified in the regulation. This regulation would, for example, address issues such as live-in caregivers. During my own discussions with residents I heard this is a concern as well, and I'm glad to see that it's included.

Madam Speaker, many Albertans have made a significant investment on the basis of the condo bylaws that were in place at the time of purchase. It is important that we ensure that Albertans affected by the amendments have advance notice before changes impact their condominiums. That's why I believe it's important that the existing age restrictions in condominiums be grandparented in for a period of 15 years, a transition period, so that current owners in the 40-and-over buildings do not need to move and can hold onto their investments until they meet the new age limit of 55. The recommended age of 55 or older provides reasonable flexibility for older Albertans in terms of when an individual may choose to move to a seniors-only residence. This applies to the housing where all units are reserved for one or more persons, at least one of whom is 55 or older. It is also consistent with the approach for rental housing in Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, and B.C.

10:50

However, in the case of rental buildings these amendments would apply immediately as soon as the bill comes into force. After the bill comes into force on January 1, 2018, the only permitted age restriction for rental accommodation would be 55 and older.

To quote Luanne Whitmarsh, the president of the Alberta Association of Seniors Centres:

The largest increase in demographics is older adults in Alberta. With this proposed legislation change, older adults can be assured

of fairness in the areas of tenancy, goods, services and accommodations or facilities. Typically, older adults are not able to increase their financial resources to have a wider range of housing options available to them plus enjoy a life that is usually quieter. The fairness of government proposing 15 years as a transition period is [greatly] appreciated.

Madam Speaker, to wrap up, I feel this bill strikes a proper balance for the needs of many Albertans, and I think it represents an opportunity to embrace diversity in Alberta. It also aligns with legislation in other jurisdictions across Canada, and like much of what this government has done to date, it's long overdue and should provide the certainty that people have requested.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the moment to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good morning. I rise to speak to Bill 23, Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. In January 2017 a court ruled that age will be read into the Alberta Human Rights Act as a prohibited ground for discrimination in the sections regarding goods, services, accommodation, facilities, and tenancy. The court order takes effect in January 2018 or sooner if the government enacts appropriate legislation. While society has come a long way in reducing and identifying discrimination, there is more we can do. I want to begin by stating that I respect the court's decision to include age as prohibitive grounds for discrimination.

The bill defines age as 18 years of age or older. This is an important point that I want to emphasize because it means that minors will still be allowed to be discriminated against in situations involving alcohol, driving, smoking, voting, et cetera. While age is no longer prohibited grounds for discrimination, there are important exemptions included in Bill 23 that allow for policies, programs, or activities designed to improve the lives of disadvantaged people. For example, there is an organization in Grande Prairie, Sunrise House, which provides emergency shelter to youth between the ages of 12 and 17. They're doing really great work in our community, and Bill 23 shouldn't result in their organization breaking the law.

Another important exception is that benefits to minors and seniors do not fall under discrimination as benefiting a certain age group is not the same as withholding a benefit from a certain age group. That means there is still going to be the seniors' menu at your local eatery and kids will still be eligible for a discount at the swimming pool or amusement park.

This legislation brings Alberta into line with the rest of the country. While the rest of the country may continue to function, that doesn't detract from the important questions and concerns that Albertans have over the impact of this legislation. One of the major concerns that we heard over the summer and through the fall was concern about seniors-only housing. Would seniors be able to live in a facility that catered to their needs without running afoul of the law? I'm happy to say that, yes, seniors will continue to be allowed to live in facilities designated specifically for those over a specific age. Seniors-only housing is defined as 55-plus. Communities can set the age limit to whatever they like as long as it is older than 55 years of age. This applies to all housing where units are reserved for one person 55-plus or multiple persons as long as one of them is at least 55.

Housing that has current age restrictions in place that are lower than 55 will be grandfathered in for 15 years, and that applies to

both rental and owned properties, so at least there's some time for some of these other facilities to get into the process where they have to fall in line with this legislation. Like I say, it allows 15 years for that.

Another notable exemption is that section 11 in the code explains that the act can be contravened if it's found to be "reasonable and justifiable in the circumstances." I guess that does allow for some concerns that may come forward that maybe we've overlooked with this legislation.

I'll leave it at that with Bill 23. Obviously, this is something that we need to do as per the courts and also to protect the rights of individuals from age discrimination in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is a concern that Bill 23 is addressing that is actually one of the very big drivers for one of my constituents. Just to give some, I guess, protection for this gentleman, I'm just going to refer to him as John going forward. Now, John is a fellow that has concerns when it comes to his rights when it comes to his age. He is a senior within the city of Cold Lake.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, I'd like to start with an illustration from my own past, my own youth, actually. Now, as I was growing up, I lived out on an acreage, and our neighbours had large, very rambunctious parties, if you will. They used to a couple times a year bring in these huge, huge speakers. You know, when you're young, they looked like they must've been 10 feet tall, but I'm sure they were five feet tall. These speakers, when they would start them, would shake our windows they were so loud. It was very, very much a noise complaint, a reasonable noise complaint. But as my dad and our neighbours got along and as long as this didn't get out of hand, this is something that we accepted as an annoyance that we could get through.

Now, these parties would have people screaming in the middle of the night. We would have fireworks. This would go on till about 5 in the morning. Now, this party was so loud that people across the lake could hear the music. That tells you how rambunctious this party was. Now, again, it happened twice a year, so in the end this one here was something that, while it was a noise complaint, I would argue that in the end the neighbours worked it out on their own.

Now, what happens, though, when neighbours can't work this out on their own? This comes back to where the bill is. I appreciate everybody giving me some rope here, if you will. Now, John has a neighbour that is a youth, and he was having very loud, rambunctious parties several times a month. I can understand that as a senior John was saying: "You know what? This needs to be addressed." Just because this gentleman that is his neighbour is 25 years old is young, it doesn't mean that it gives him the right to be able to impede his ability to enjoy his own property and be able to sleep at night.

Now, he did say: "I understand that I need to give some allowances here. I need to be able find a compromise with him so that he can enjoy his property as well." Now, in the end what we've got here is that the two neighbours, this senior and this youth, couldn't agree on the number of times a year this should happen, so in the end John made complaints to our local bylaw enforcement.

Now, what we saw here was that after the fourth or fifth time he'd made a complaint in one month, the bylaw enforcement said: "This young man is 25. You have to accept that he's going to have parties, and you're just going to have to move past this because we don't want to continue, more or less, coming out to resolve this."

11:00

John filed a human rights complaint, and he said that there were two parts to this that are age related. For one, they're saying that because his neighbour is 25, he is allowed to have loud parties right beside John's home, that law enforcement is using that as justification. The other part of this is saying that just because John is potentially old means that he is more sensitive to loud parties beside him. So John filed this complaint with the Human Rights Commission. This was in July of last year. He goes on to say that it's something that he had tried to work out. He had tried to work with his neighbour, but in the end, this was not being resolved, so the only next step for him was to file a complaint.

Now, the response that John had received back from the Alberta Human Rights Commission in a June letter – and I'd like to quote this – was:

You checked off the Box against "Age" discrimination in Section E of your Complaint Form.

They actually had age on the complaint form, so they recognized at that time that age could be something that would be a human rights complaint.

You stated that your "neighbor (about 25 years old)" had "many very noisy parties" and you had complained about the noise to the . . . Respondent. You "made 4 noise complaints" over the relevant period. You stated that the Respondent's Peace Officer provided you with mediation services to resolve your complaint against your neighbor on August 13, 2015. You stated that "the mediation meeting ended with the neighbor promising to be less noisy." You stated that you again complained on May 15, 2016 about your neighbor's "2 very noisy parties" and the same Peace Officer responded to your complaint by phone, and told you "that young people are allowed to have fun" and that you "needed to be more tolerant." You alleged that the "unwillingness to pursue the sanctions provided by the city bylaws" led you to believe that you were treated differently because you are a senior. You stated that there were "no further noise incidents since 15 May 2016".

In this here, to go on, it says underneath My Assessment:

The information you provide appears to indicate that it is your belief that the Respondent's Peace Officer discriminated against you because of your "age". You stated that you are a senior and your neighbor is about 25 years old.

Even though you may believe that you were discriminated against because of your age, please note that under Section 4 of the Act, which deals with "Goods, services, accommodation or facilities", discrimination on the basis of "age" is not a protected ground. I am however glad that there were "no further noise incidents since 15 May 2016".

Now, here's the thing. This gentleman had a legitimate concern. This gentleman said, "I would like to have this before the Human Rights Commission," and the Alberta Human Rights Commission said: "You know what? We're just going to tell you that because it's age, we can't deal with your complaint at all." That's it. Then what happens is that we've got John going on, and he says: "Well, that isn't okay. I am going to take this to the next level. I'm going to appeal the decision of the Human Rights Commission. I am actually going to see what we can do next."

So then we bring the appeal in, and what happens here is that – this is the letter from the Alberta Human Rights Commission on the appeal.

I have reviewed all the information that you have provided to our office, as well as the Human Rights Officer's June 15, 2016 letter to you.

I have enclosed a copy of section 20 of the Alberta Human Rights Act. The Act requires that a person have reasonable grounds for believing that the Act has been contravened. I have also enclosed a copy of section 4 of the Act. The Act lists the protected grounds that apply to the protected area of goods, services, accommodation, or facilities. Age is not a protected ground under this area.

Again, this seems to be something that seems to have, I guess, lapsed.

Now, I do understand the challenges when it comes to age. At some point we need to say that age is something that is relevant in a certain circumstance. That is obvious. With this one here, whether John was right or wrong on all of this, whether John was right or wrong with his complaint, it can be argued that his complaint should have been heard. But in this case his complaint was not heard because he checked a box that said "age" on his form. I guess that I struggle with that.

You know, I have to say that the Minister of Justice – we did forward this letter up to her office – said: you know, we're waiting on a court case. Fair enough. That seemed to be very reasonable. And you know what? The court case came in January of 2017, so this wasn't a long period after that. The Minister of Justice recognized that this was going through the courts and that this was being decided by our justices.

Now, in the end, what happened here is that the judge decided that age needed to be added to our Human Rights Act, and it is to deal with these kinds of complaints. So whether John was correct with his complaint or not is irrelevant. What's relevant here is that we need to be able to bring people's concerns forward when it comes to age. We need them to say that this is right or wrong, not say that just because it's age related, it shouldn't be included or involved in a human rights complaint.

What we've got here is a change that appears to be very reasonable. It's something that is being asked for by one of my constituents to be addressed, and to see that it's being addressed by this government is a step in the right direction, in my opinion, so that we don't see these kinds of things happen to gentlemen like John in my constituency, who has concerns when it comes to municipal enforcement.

I will tell you, going back to my example of my youth, going back to that, that if that happened four or five times a month, where they brought these big speakers out and they were hammering at us, this probably would be a different discussion. This probably would be a noise complaint that needed to be dealt with.

Again, we have to say that it is important that we always ask neighbours to be working this out between themselves first, then we go to the mediation with the peace officers, and if it doesn't work out that way, then there's always the avenue of saying: "Is this impeding my human rights? Is this impeding my ability to enjoy my own property?" Property rights in this case are very important.

Now, I have to commend my constituent John for actually being an advocate in this area. He needs to be acknowledged for the fact that he saw a problem and didn't just say that, well, this is just the way it is. He actually decided to go to his MLA and say, "What can you do about this?" The answer was, "Well, let's see what the minister has to say about this." The minister had a reasonable response, saying, "Let's wait and see where this case goes." In the end, the process worked – this is good – and the fact that we are addressing my constituent's concern is, again, a step in the right direction.

I have to commend the Minister of Justice for bringing this forward. I do see that there are potentially some concerns when it comes to adding age to the Alberta Human Rights Act that we are going to maybe have to deal with as they come along. In the end, people should be able to have their cases heard. It is important that if you check a box off on a form, you're not already being denied the access, the ability to have your case heard before, in this case, a commission.

Mr. Speaker, this is an incredible opportunity that we can move forward with. I think this is great. I would like to close my debate down.

Thank you very much.

11:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: My thanks to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I enjoyed that presentation. It was very, very detailed. In fact, I really enjoyed listening to the situation around his constituent, who he's named John. My question, Mr. Speaker, through you to him would be – and I don't know; I might have missed it at the beginning of the hon. member's presentation – what age bracket was John in? Maybe he could just elaborate a little bit on how John would be impacted if he was, you know, below 55 versus if he was above 55 with this legislation that we're discussing today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. Well, a lot of the below 55 and above 55 stuff has to do around housing, I believe. It is important that we start to allow our seniors the ability to be able to congregate in areas where they can be the most comfortable. I have to say that when it comes to our seniors, they usually want to stay in places that they're comfortable in, somewhere where they know people that are around their same age.

You'll find that a lot of families are like this. You'll have areas within Alberta where you'll find a lot of young families, like the cul-de-sac that I live in right now. If you look around the cul-de-sac, the whole cul-de-sac has children, I would argue, probably between five and 13. In this case you can see that we love living in this cul-de-sac because my children have a lot of their friends in our little area that they can play with and not go very far. We also have a playground that is just half a block away.

In this case what we've got here is seniors saying that they want to be able to have condos or areas where they can congregate and enjoy each others' company, still be able to have their family there but be more or less focused on seniors.

Now, in this case here the exception, I would hope, for noise complaints is that it doesn't matter what age you are, whether you're 10 years old or 95 years old. In the end, you shouldn't be discriminated against because discrimination in every form is wrong. We need to always ensure that if there is discrimination, there's a balance to make sure that whatever it is that is happening, it's always something that is in the best interests of the person.

So I have to say thank you for the question. I have to say that in this case I believe that John is going to be pleased with this legislation. I do believe that it protects his rights as a senior but also gives balance – balance – to the whole system.

We've heard from colleagues already that insurance is going to be a struggle and some of these other things like, well, my colleague talking about commercial licensing, and we're hearing about how a 17-year-old can fly a plane but can't rent a car. There are things like this that, in the end, I do agree seem a little strange.

Overall, I think that, again, we'll find that this legislation may not be perfect in its current form, but it is moving in the right direction. As we continue to move the Alberta Human Rights Act forward, we're going to find that there are some things that we're going to have to tweak to make this right.

Thank you again to my hon. House leader. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a question to the member under 29(2)(a). I know in the legislation there was some reference as well to only one member of a household having to be 55-plus for protection. I wonder if you have any thoughts or comments on the fact that that can be a way around this – in fact, you may have very mixed generational tenants in a building – and whether that's of any concern with this, and whether you think that that's going to be addressed by the legislation, you know, to address the concerns of some of the residents of those protected and grandfathered residences.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I appreciate that. Now, the way I understand it is that seniors-only housing is defined as 55-plus. Communities can set the age limit to whatever they would like as long as it is older than 55 years of age. This applies to all housing where units are reserved for one person 55-plus or multipersons as long as one of them is at least 55. I do have to say that when it comes to our seniors in this case, we're looking at 55-plus. So at least one of them needs to be 55-plus.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think we've had a robust exchange of ideas on Bill 23 this morning, and with the discussion that's accrued, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on the bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask to move second reading of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances.

Through Bill 24 our government will make life better for Alberta students by ensuring that they can form a gay-straight alliance at their school without being in fear of being outed. We are doing this because every single student in this province deserves a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn. Our Premier has been very clear that no student in Alberta will be outed, not by Jason Kenney or anyone else, for that matter.

This bill, through a series of amendments to the School Act, will clarify school authority roles and responsibilities around supporting welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments for student-led organizations, including gay-straight and queer-straight alliances. I must stress that a lot of positive progress has already been made by school authorities, Mr. Speaker, and we know that teachers, principals, superintendents, and parents share our commitment to providing a welcoming, caring, and safe place for students to learn.

Before I get into the specific details of these amendments to the School Act, let me provide you with some additional context around why this legislation is necessary. The School Act was amended in June 2015 with regard to welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments. Three new sections – 16.1, 45.1, and 50.1 – were added to the School Act at that time.

Section 16.1 created new requirements for allowing students to create an inclusive student organization, which includes but is not limited to GSAs and QSAs. This was intended to be a school-based responsibility. However, it is our understanding that some principals may have been required to seek approval from their school authority when a student requests a GSA or a QSA.

Section 45.1 places responsibilities on school authorities to create welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments. School boards must create policies and include a code of conduct to address bullying behaviour. Some gaps that we identified, Mr. Speaker, in this section were that a code of conduct has to be publicly available but the supporting policies do not, and also it only applies to public school authorities and not private school operators that receive public monies.

Section 50.1 of the School Act currently states that parents may be notified of instructional time that focuses on topics related to religion or human sexuality. This is in place so that parents can choose to remove their child from these specific lessons. Again, some school authorities have asked my ministry to clarify whether or not GSAs or QSAs fall within this section of the School Act and that they should notify parents when their child joins one.

As you can see, after new sections of the School Act came into force, we began seeing inconsistencies in the way in which school authorities were interpreting and meeting these requirements. That's why in November 2015 I directed all school authorities to submit policies to Alberta Education. When we reviewed these policies, we did find some inconsistencies. That is why the proposed amendments in this bill are so important, because I believe that they provide the clarity that is required. While the changes made to the School Act in 2015 were a step in the right direction, our government also noticed some inconsistencies, so that's why we're looking to strengthen existing legislation through Bill 24.

11:20

Bill 24 will amend section 16.1 of the School Act to clarify the role of school authorities and principals in supporting students who want to create a GSA or a QSA. Typically principals are responsible for supporting student clubs, and they do not have to seek approval from their school authority. The proposed amendments were to clarify that the superintendent and the school authority are not part of the establishment process for a student organization, including a GSA or a QSA. Section 16.1 would also be amended to clarify that when students request a GSA or QSA in their school, their principal must assist them in a timely manner and allow the students to choose a name, which could include "GSA" or "QSA." Amendments to this section will also help to ensure that responsibilities of principals and the rights of students are clear.

Section 45.1 of the School Act will be amended to require all school authorities that receive public funding to develop policies and make them publicly available. This new legislation will ensure that every school in Alberta that receives public dollars has a policy that clearly allows students to form a gay-straight alliance if they choose. Making policies publicly available will help to ensure that school authorities provide transparency and accountability to the students and the communities that they serve. This section would also be amended to give the Minister of Education the authority to deem all or part of a policy onto a school authority. The ability to

deem a policy would be in place only if necessary. However, Alberta Education staff will first work with the school authorities as issues might arise.

Bill 24 would also amend section 50.1 of the School Act to clarify that parental notification around courses of study would not apply to student participation in a club, including a GSA or a QSA. We know that Alberta parents love and support their children and that they play a critical role in the children's lives and education, but we also know that some students might feel safer and more comfortable talking about these issues with their peers. This legislation makes it clear that no student will be outed for joining a QSA or a GSA. It does not prevent students from having conversations with their parents.

What it does do is to make clear that no politician or anyone else would be able to out gay students. Jason Kenney suggested earlier this year that schools should be able to out LGBTQ students to their parents, and that, Mr. Speaker, is dangerous. We're trying to create a safe and caring environment and a safe sanctuary for students in a GSA, and we cannot compromise the integrity of that. This will provide clarity to school authorities who are currently unsure and help to protect students who may not have shared their participation in a GSA or a QSA beyond their school community for safety reasons.

If passed, the amendments would come into force immediately. However, the ability for the Minister of Education to deem a policy would come into force on April 1, 2018, and the requirement for school authorities to post their policies publicly would come into force on June 30, 2018. We recognize that if this bill is passed, some school authorities might need some time to ensure that they are meeting these new requirements, and we believe that the bill coming into force on June 30 will provide school authorities with the necessary time to update their policies and practices, if needed, and publish their policies online. Some school authorities may post their policies publicly prior to June 30, which is why the ability to deem a policy would come into effect earlier.

I hope I have provided some useful explanation of the amendments proposed through Bill 24 and highlighted the purpose of this legislation. Every student, Mr. Speaker, deserves a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn, and these amendments will help to make lives better for students by emphasizing their rights and clarifying school authority rules and responsibilities.

I have visited a number of GSAs throughout my time as Minister of Education and talked to students who have joined these alliances. I have heard time and time again how important these alliances are, and in some cases they can in fact help to save lives. These safe places are places for students to just get together and visit, maybe share lunch, and sometimes have difficult conversations that they feel that they might not be able to share with certain people at a certain time in very sensitive moments in their lives. I have heard stories of students who have become part of a GSA or a QSA to talk to their peers about things that they don't feel comfortable talking about with other people, only to develop the courage to come out to their friends and family after they establish some confidence in themselves and in others.

Mr. Speaker, these can be very powerful and important places. GSAs indeed can help to change a student's life and, I would venture to say, help to improve the overall atmosphere of a school community to ensure that we're looking after everybody in a place that helps to provide the security and the comfort to improve the quality of a sense of community for everybody in a school.

Every single student deserves to feel safe and cared for in all of our schools. This, Mr. Speaker, is a basic human right. As Ace Peace, a grade 12 transgender student from Calgary, so eloquently put it last week, and I quote: I don't understand why this is so scary

to some adults; as far as I can tell, it's only scary if you're a kid; it's only scary if you're the kid and an adult wants to out you and you're not ready; that would make you unsafe.

Mr. Speaker, I do have to wonder about the same thing. We should not be doing anything that prevents student safety. In fact, we should be ensuring this for all students, and this bill would do just that. We see demonstrable gains in places where there are GSAs in terms of student safety, in terms of creating a better atmosphere for kids. You know, ultimately, that helps to increase attendance rates and graduation rates, reducing stress in the larger community as well as of those who choose to join a GSA or a QSA.

Ace Peace also said: although this journey has not always been easy, it has been one where I have been surrounded by love, support, and acceptance every step of the way. As time goes on, he's been sad to learn that it's not always this way for kids like him. Some kids, for different reasons, don't feel safe to come out. Some kids aren't as lucky as he was to have such an awesome family. For these kids, sometimes GSAs are the only thing that they have. GSAs are the only safe place that they have. He says that he doesn't want to imagine what it would be like for them if they would be outed for attending, and he's even scared to think about that.

It's important to listen to students, right? They are the ones in our schools living through these things. We should be doing whatever we can to protect them, and I would venture to say that this legislation would do that, Mr. Speaker. I know that across this province there have been thousands of conversations around kitchen tables on ensuring that human rights in Alberta are extended to everyone. We had those conversations. We had students at schools and school boards building policies. You know, I think that we have all been edified as a result. I believe that Bill 24, if proclaimed, will ensure just that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of the work that everyone has done to help support LGBTQ students from across the province. I'm also very proud of Albertans engaging in a thoughtful and authentic manner around this issue and on how we can move Alberta forward. I believe that this legislation is a big step forward, and I certainly hope that all of our members here feel the same way and support me in moving forward with Bill 24.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for . . .

An Hon. Member: Drayton Valley-Devon.

The Speaker: . . . Drayton Valley-Devon. My apologies.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of these days we will both remember where we are from.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature, my constituents, and anyone who has a passing knowledge of me knows that I was a high school teacher for 30 years in the town of Drayton Valley. After 30 years of teaching you have probably faced almost every situation that you can think of. Education always starts with a relationship, and it is always a three-way relationship between the educator, the parents, and the student. It's been my experience that this tripartite relationship was and, I believe, will always be the foundation of a successful educational experience.

Like all relationships, this partnership of educator, parent, and student takes effort to keep it healthy. Like all relationships, it is dependent upon mutual respect, trust, open lines of communication, and a recognition of the separate roles that each part of this educational compact is expected to fulfill. I do not think that I am breaking any trade secrets when I say that each part of this triumvirate are imperfect people.

11:30

There were times in my 30 years as a teacher when I blew it. There were times when I had to apologize either to a student or to a parent. But it was equally true over my 30 years that when a student or a parent would cross the line, we would have to address the breakdown in relationship that had occurred before any effective learning was going to occur. I start here because it is vitally important that our schools continue to remain institutions that promote open dialogue and respect between the educator, the parents, and the students. I believe that this is doubly so when a teacher is dealing with a student that is in crisis.

Over the course of my school career I have faced almost every crisis situation that I can think of. I've broken up fights, I've attended students suffering from epileptic grand mal seizures, I've taped ankles, I've rushed kids suffering severe concussions to the hospital, I've attended students hit by vehicles, and responded to incidents where students almost lost their lives. I've assisted students with Bell's palsy, I've provided emergency shelter to students without a place to stay, and I've tried to help mend broken hearts and defend the bullied from bullies. I've intervened to ensure that language in my classroom was respectful, and I've walked through the issue of respectful T-shirts and hats. Maybe most importantly, Mr. Speaker, I've grieved and I've tried to console my students as we've had to live with too many deaths that have occurred in my school, whether those deaths were by cancer or by suicide or by accident.

In all of those 30 years I have come to some very clear conclusions supported by professional expectations. As a teacher I could never walk away from a student that was at risk, nor could I ever wilfully place a student at risk. Every student deserves a safe and caring school environment, and as an educator I had a responsibility to protect the children in my care while recognizing that I was not the parent. That was a balance that always had to be maintained. For all of the fact that I was an educator – and I was an educator that cared for my students – I did have limits. I was not the parent, and I had to respect the fact that even if I did not understand a parent's decision, I would most likely have to respect it. There were many times when I and a student would, for example, want them to play basketball, but a parent would decide that this was not in their child's best interests, and I would have to respect it.

I mention this because I truly believe that one of the important things that help to make education function well is when everyone in this three-part relationship works together and respects the limits of their roles. Education works best when educators are educators, parents are parents, and students are students. When a student begins to believe that they are a teacher, things start to fall apart. When parents begin to believe they are a teacher, then things start to function less smoothly.

Educators are not the parents of the children they teach, and they must respect the unique family units that their students come from, whatever their variety. Educators must respect and must support reasonable parental decisions. Educators must use wise judgment when making decisions about the children under their care. Safety always comes first.

Parents were always part of the equation. My students were always unique and special – of course, some were more special than others – and my job was to hold the three-way relationship together as best that I could, in the most professional manner that I could. My 30-year career reinforced what I learned as a parent: that no one will love my kids more than me.

As a teacher I saw the remarkable lengths that parents will go to ensure that their children have a successful educational experience. I witnessed love in action over and over and over. I witnessed it

every day and at every parent-teacher interview, that the parents of the students that I taught loved them even more than life. They loved them enough to discipline them. They loved them enough to make the hard decisions that every parent has to sometimes make.

During parent-teacher interviews there were times when we would laugh and there were times when we actually cried. There were times when I had the opportunity to praise the children and the parents, and there were also times sometimes when we would get so frustrated that we would need to have a time out.

I only rarely met a bad parent. Yes, there were times when I had to intervene to ensure the physical safety of a child from an out-of-control parent. But in spite of those very rare circumstances over 30 years I believe that the vast majority of parents love their children and make good decisions in their children's lives and can be trusted to make the difficult decisions in their children's lives. It is because of these life lessons, it is because of my intimate understanding of the three-part relationship that makes up education that I will not be supporting Bill 24.

I truly hope this bill was brought forward with the best of intentions. I wholeheartedly support a number of the aspects of this bill. For one, this bill mandates the creation and the maintenance of a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe environment in all schools across Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that everyone in this Assembly supports that initiative. Everyone in the education community, I believe, supports that initiative, and I believe that all Albertans support it as well.

As a teacher, instilling a positive environment in the classroom was paramount. Ensuring that every student could come into class and feel secure and respected was a key component of instituting a successful learning environment, and it remains that way for teachers all across this great province of Alberta, which is why I trust these highly trained educators to use their professional judgment, to make decisions which are in the best interests of children that they see five days a week, 10 months a year.

11:40

It should be these teachers in conjunction with administrators and school counsellors who decide the best course of action for each student. It should not be up to politicians sitting in this place, far removed from the school, far removed from the community, and far removed from the children themselves, who make those determinations. Those teachers, principals, and counsellors see these kids every single day, and we need to provide these professionals with the ability to use their professional discretion. They already do this every single day in every community and school across Alberta.

This bill treats every situation in every community across this province as the same, and I just can't see the logic in that. Nothing is more important than protecting children, but I just do not see how removing discretion from teachers and principals and counsellors achieves that goal.

I also have serious concerns that this bill makes no distinction for the age of the child. Clearly, there are vast psychological, physiological, and emotional differences between a 17-year-old and a five-year old, yet this bill treats every child and every situation as the same. Many five-year-olds would eat dessert for every meal of the day if they were allowed to make all of their own decisions. How many would choose to do math when they could do social studies – what I taught – or phys ed? It is why parents and teachers in combination and co-operation must step in and offer guidance and support to raise healthy and productive adults.

These are just little kids. Bringing in complex topics which require a great deal of emotional maturity and doing so without the involvement of their parents is not a recipe for success with

children, which brings me to my next point. While the Premier and I disagree on a great many things, we do agree, at least, on one thing: parental choice in education is the law, and it needs to be respected by the government. Section 50.1(1) of the School Act clearly states:

A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

On this the Premier and I agree. On October 24 she stated – and I quote – that parents have the right and have had the right for a very, very long time to pull their kids from curriculum and education around sexual health, and they will continue to have that right. As the Premier said, parents have the right to pull their kids from curriculum and education around sexual health. Mr. Speaker, this has been the law in Alberta for a very long time.

Clearly, the Premier agrees with this section of the law, as does the government, because we are two and a half years out from the last election and the law still stands, which is why I was confused when I read through Bill 24. This bill, Mr. Speaker, amends the School Act so that section 50.1(1) does not apply to extracurricular activities. That means that material which would require parental notification if it was taught or addressed before 3:30 p.m. can now be taught in an after-school setting without any parental knowledge whatsoever. This change seems inconsistent with the Premier's public position on the School Act, and I just cannot fathom why this change was made.

Clearly, if there are materials, information, or subject matters which require parental notification before they are addressed in a school-based, school-sanctioned setting, that notification should be required whether it occurs at 9 or at 2 or at 3:45. Parental notification for matters that deal explicitly with human sexuality and religion does not expire at a particular time, and it should not be ignored because the final bell of the day has rung. Involving parents along with teachers and students is an essential part of creating a healthy, successful environment in our schools, balanced with the realization that students need to be safe and that teachers, not politicians, are best able to untie this Gordian knot of informing parents.

As I mentioned earlier, I truly do wish that this bill was brought forward with the best of intentions. However, I am concerned that the NDP introducing this bill at this time is a political ploy by the government to divert attention from their disastrous economic record and ever-decreasing polling numbers. The NDP did not propose these changes in its first two years in government, did not propose these changes during the election, nor did they propose these changes when Bill 10 was being debated. It's no coincidence that the NDP is introducing this bill now. It is very unfortunate that this bill is being used as a partisan political wedge when we should all be striving, Mr. Speaker, to work collectively to improve the lives of our children.

That brings me back to where I began. I have dedicated over 30 years of my life to educating children. I tried to make every child who came into my classroom feel safe and respected, and I have worked in conjunction with my fellow teachers, our administrators, and the school counsellors to deal with each crisis situation in the most responsible, careful, and respectful manner possible. Oftentimes these situations included the involvement of parents. The vast majority of parents in this province are loving individuals who would do anything in their power to support their children in any way possible. I do not think that treating all parents as inherently hostile is positive for teachers, for parents, and definitely not for children.

All educators who come into contact with children at the school are highly trained professionals . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my profound honour to rise in the House this morning to speak in support of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. In my view and in the view of the Alberta Party, this is a timely piece of legislation that both strengthens gay-straight alliances in Alberta's schools and reflects the social values of 21st-century Alberta. Most importantly, this is a bill that recognizes the unique needs and experiences of LGBTQ students while protecting and empowering them. Bill 24 demonstrates meticulous consultation with various stakeholders, most especially with those who benefit from the confidentiality, safety, and security of GSAs and QSAs. I congratulate my colleagues across the floor for defending queer youth, a constituency that is forgotten and misunderstood too often in Alberta and in this House.

This morning *Hansard* and the Alberta Legislature Library confirmed that the first mention of the word "homosexuality" in this House was in 1974, when a Social Credit member from Calgary asked the government if students at the U of C would receive credit for attending lectures on homosexuality and sex work, as if learning about diversity and human sexuality was something to be ashamed of. Moreover, the member asked whether or not the Ministry of Advanced Education would be funding these lectures, thereby implying that these events were undeserving of public funds.

11:50

We have come a long way since then, Mr. Speaker, and that is because of the tireless work of intersectional LGBT activists, open-minded politicians, queer theorists and scholars, and Albertans who believe in a progressive future.

When I take a step back and look at the broader picture of this legislation and try to understand its impact, the word that comes to mind is "kindness." While we in the Alberta Party may propose amendments to this legislation to better protect GSAs, the spirit of the legislation is one of kindness, and that is something we can all get behind. In the words of the iconic Lady Gaga, "The really fantastic thing about kindness is that it's free . . . and it can't hurt you or anybody else. It's the thing that brings us all together."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood under 29(2)(a). Is that correct?

Connolly: No, not 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today as cosponsor of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, to express my support for this bill. This bill ensures that every school that receives public dollars will follow the same rules when it comes to LGBTQ-plus rights.

LGBTQ-plus rights are human rights, Mr. Speaker, no matter what the opposition says. That is why it is important that all schools be required to protect the privacy of students that join a GSA or a QSA. When you're an LGBTQ-plus student, it often feels like you're the only person in the world who feels that way. It can be incredibly lonely. I came out to my school in grade 11, but I wasn't ready to come out to my family. This is actually very common among LGBTQ-plus youth. I came out to one friend in grade 9, then another friend in grade 10, and then at the beginning of grade 11 I was tired of living a lie at school, so I decided to come out to more and more people until I was out to the entire school.

I was very afraid. I was afraid that I was going to lose all of my friends. Many of my friends were religious, and coming from an agnostic and atheist family, I wasn't sure which sects my friends belonged to or even which sects would support me as gay. I was also very afraid that they would look at me differently, that people would spread nasty rumours about me, my sexual orientation, and my nonexistent love life. People asked me if I was sure, if it was a phase, why I hadn't told them sooner, if I wanted to go shopping with them to pick out new shoes. It was interesting, but no one asked me what I needed, because I really needed support.

When LGBTQ-plus youth can't find support at home or at school, they look elsewhere. We look elsewhere. That's why so many LGBTQ-plus youth end up in precarious situations like hooking up with people who prey on LGBTQ-plus youth using apps such as Grindr or Scruff or any other LGBTQ-plus dating or hookup app. When our youth can't find the supports they need, when our youth can't find or see or talk to LGBTQ-plus adults who can help and mentor them, who can answer their questions, who can be there for them and talk to them when they're feeling down, they look anywhere for that mentorship. When we refuse to talk about LGBTQ-plus rights in schools, when we refuse to give kids safe spaces to talk about what's going on in their minds and bodies, they turn to places that no child should have to.

I personally didn't turn to Grindr for help. I turned to depression and thoughts of suicide. I had no LGBTQ-plus people my own age to talk to. I felt so alone in the world that I felt that I'd be better off dead than to continue high school as a gay kid. Frankly, this is why GSAs are important. It provides a safe place for kids to go to talk about who they are and what they're feeling. It stops our youth from jumping into the arms of people who prey on LGBTQ-plus students.

What Jason Kenney in the opposition refuses to understand is that GSAs save lives. I have received e-mails from so many LGBTQ-plus youth, parents, teachers, and faith leaders who have told us why these GSAs and not outing students are important. One student from Jasper wrote me a letter saying:

The GSA is a really safe place for me to be, but it wasn't always. When my parents found out about me, I was grounded and it caused problems within my family. We have worked out our problems since, but I was not ready to be out. [This bill] would improve lives of LGBTQ+ youth, if there was no risk of being outed by our schools.

Ainsley Koebel.

A student from Calgary wrote to me and said:

The discussion of queer rights shouldn't be as complicated as it's made out to be. The fact that we have decided we need to talk about whether or not a group of people deserves rights is just wrong. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that you deserve the right to privacy, and that no one has the right to interfere with your reputation by violating your privacy. When a kid joins a GSA, there's a very good chance they're scared out of their skin. The very notion that they'd attend such a club would have them punished way more severely than they should be if their parents were to hear of it. Some parents never really get it. A lot of parents do end up on board and supporting their kid, but it is up to the child to decide when the time is right to tell their parents about their identity. No teacher, school, or government has the right to tell a parent something they should be learning from their own children.

That's from Sean Ruhland, a trumpet enthusiast.

These are just two of the many letters that I've already received from students across the province. Jason Kenney and the UCP don't seem to understand why this bill is important and why not outing kids saves lives. The main reason the LGBTQ-plus community makes up a larger percentage of homeless youth is because people come out to their parents or are outed and are forced to leave.

When we have politicians like the members of that side of the House spewing their hateful, bigoted ideology about LGBTQ-plus kids, it only makes matters worse for our youth. The words of Jason Kenney and the members of that side of the House matter to our youth, and the fact that they are opposing this based on social conservatism and the hatred for the LGBTQ community is disgusting. The members opposite should be ashamed of themselves. They're endangering our youth, they're causing unneeded strife and stress for our youth, and they're showing Alberta that if, God forbid, they are ever back in power, they will do nothing but take our province back to the age where only straight cis white men have power and the rest of us are forced to the back of the bus. Our LGBTQ-plus youth need us, and your dangerous ideology is killing them.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I deeply appreciated the words my colleague shared. Actually, now that I do look at the

clock, I see that we're coming up on time, and I'll look for another opportunity. I did want to say thank you very much to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Speaker, on this issue, the first place we should be going and the first people we should be hearing from are LGBTQ youth. They are the ones who have this experience. They are the ones who have been there. They are the ones that know what will keep them safe. So I appreciate this member sharing from his experience. I look forward to hearing from all members in this Chamber about the youth they have spoken to and the members of the LGBTQ community they have spoken to in forming their opinions and views on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With that, I would move that we adjourn debate and call it 12 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 7, 2017

Day 50

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the ambassador of Ireland to Canada, His Excellency Jim Kelly.

Our province's bond with Ireland is long standing, with nearly 540,000 Albertans of Irish ancestry. His Excellency's visit has allowed us to explore opportunities for Alberta and Ireland to grow our relationships in many areas. With opportunities emerging in fast-growing sectors like clean tech, life sciences, and information and communications technology, there is potential to expand not only trade but to form partnerships in areas like education and research. We look forward to working with His Excellency on expanding and strengthening our relationship with Ireland.

I now ask the ambassador to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to stand and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of grade 9 students from SML academy in Stony Plain and their teacher, Mrs. Vanessa Hamilton. I had a chance to meet briefly with them, and they asked what my most important job is in the Legislature. I said that my job is to advocate for our communities and the people that live there. I'm really proud to have them here today, and if they would stand up, we could all give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups, hon. members? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ardrossan elementary school. I think they're all over the two galleries. I'd just ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. I welcome also Miss Tara Kammerer, Karson Campbell, Richelle Krys, and all the parents accompanying them. They've been an absolute pleasure to work with and to go visit. Please give them a warm hand.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House an executive group with the International Association of Fire Fighters. This group in particular are the best looking and the most charming of them all. These are everyday people with a purpose and passion for the work and the people and community they serve. I'm pleased to introduce through you six such individuals from the Fort McMurray fire

department who I'd ask to please rise as I say their names: Robert Van Hecke, Patrick Duggan, David Maki, Ryan Pitchers, Hunter Langpap, and a new guy I don't know, Curtis Robinson. Please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: You must well appreciate that the Fort McMurray firefighters have a special place in this House. Welcome.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four guests today on behalf of the Minister of Finance. I ask them to rise as I call their names: Greg Pollock, who is the CEO of Advocis; Rob McCullagh and Kelly Smith, co-chairs of the provincial advisory committee; and Wade Baldwin, past chair of the Advocis board of directors. Advocis counts more than 12,000 members Canada-wide across 40 chapters. They're the oldest and largest membership association of financial advisers and planners in the country. I ask that they now receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce some of Alberta's perioperative nurses. This week we celebrate Perioperative Nurses Week. These nurses specialize in the care of patients immediately before, during, and after surgery, and we know that they are vital members of patient-centred, team-based care. I now ask these guests, who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker – Barbara Mushayandebvu, Rana Sleiman, and Darlene Rikley – to rise and receive our traditional warm welcome and the appreciation of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce a number of bright young people who are seated in your gallery today, the members of the Council of Alberta University Students, one of whom you know very well as she worked in your office for a year. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly these outstanding young leaders.

CAUS represents the interests of more than a hundred thousand university students from the universities of Alberta, Calgary, Mount Royal, MacEwan, and Lethbridge. I've gotten to know these students over the summer, and I'm looking forward to continuing to work with them to make life better for all of Alberta's university students.

I ask them to rise as I introduce them. With us today we have Reed Larsen, Conner Peta, Marina Banister, Hailey Babb, Aria Burrell, Stephanie Nedoshytko, Branden Cave, Puncham Judge as well as Josh McKeown, who is going to be working for the Department of Advanced Education in the very near future. I'm excited to have him onboard. I ask the members of the Assembly to give them all a traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you. It's my absolute pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you one of the huge champions in my life. You know, Mr. Speaker, that in this arena and this business there are only a few people who continue to stand by us through the ups and downs no matter what circumstances life throws at you. This is one of those people, whether he was protecting me from my little brother or beating me as my big brother. It's my absolute

pleasure to introduce to you – I invite him to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly – my brother Jeremy Cooper.

The Speaker: Welcome, big brother.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if I can compete with our Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo in introducing these fine gentlemen that I'm going to present next. These are firefighters from my constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View. If I could please have Glenn Jefferies, Jeff Salkeld, Bill Wohl, and Chad Peacock stand to receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House members of Advocis, the Financial Advisors Association of Canada. A delegation of over 40 small-business financial advisers are holding meetings at the Legislature today. For more than 100 years Advocis members have delivered financial security and peace of mind through high ethical and professional standards. Advocis is also having their reception this evening at the Royal Glenora Club. I look forward to seeing all my colleagues there. My guests are seated in the public gallery. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Affordable Child Care

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about one of the most important initiatives launched by this government, affordable, \$25-a-day child care. When I meet with parents of Calgary-Currie on their doorsteps, at community events, and at the grocery store, this is the most popular question they ask. In fact, just last week I met a mother in Rosscarrock who told me she paid \$65 a day and was forced to decide whether she could afford to go back to work and place her child in care. She could not, and she is not alone.

1:40

All across this province child care is one of the single largest expenses families have. According to a 2016 study the average fees in Calgary for infant care are about \$50 a day. Parents with toddlers saw their fees go up by 12 per cent between 2014 and 2016. Not only is child care expensive, but 60 per cent of all Calgary child care centres have wait-lists, and this is a program that creates much-needed spaces. To date Alberta's new \$25-a-day child care initiative is funding approximately 1,300 licensed child care spaces; 714 of these are new. And for those vulnerable families working shift work or multiple jobs, a portion of these child care centres are available outside the normal hours of 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Mr. Speaker.

It is also creating jobs, jobs for those MRU students that Minister Larivee and I met last week who are passionate about early learning and child and youth care. Because of this program approximately 120 new child care staff have been hired to support these new spaces and additional enrolment. For families, this program means that an estimated 357 Albertans can re-enter the workforce. There is no question that Alberta's new \$25-a-day early learning and child care centres are making life better and more affordable for families

across the province every single day, Mr. Speaker, and the people of Calgary-Currie want to see even more of them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, with your permission I would ask for unanimous consent for acknowledgement of guests who are with us today if you would be prepared to consider that.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for indulging me. It's my absolute honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly actually the best firefighters in this province – they are from Airdrie – I would like to say a friend of mine, Mr. Matt Elgie, and Trevor Breitenbucher. I want to call you Trevor B. because there's no way I can pronounce this name. I had the honour and pleasure of attending a firefighter training session with the members of the Airdrie fire department and the Calgary fire department, and I got an insight into the dangers that they face and the hard work that they do for each and every one of us so selflessly. We thank them for that. With that, would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Alberta Fire Fighters Association. We have with us today the president of the AFFA, Craig Macdonald, as well as fellow executives Brad Readman, Brent Shelton, and Jason Curry. The Alberta Fire Fighters Association represents thousands of firefighters across the province. They are committed, passionate, principled, and they have advocated for decades to ensure that firefighters have a strong voice in protecting the advancement of fire services in Alberta and ensuring that our firefighters remain safe on and off the job. I would like to thank them for everything that they do and for the work that they do to advocate for their members, their ongoing work for the safety and health of their members. I would like to ask them and all members of the AFFA who are in our House today to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, and thank you from the House.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Soviet Communism

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, 100 years ago the Bolshevik revolution unleashed a reign of terror that echoes through history. The Soviet communist regime, installed by the Bolsheviks in 1917, went on to oppress hundreds of millions behind the Iron Curtain during seven decades of brutal political violence. From Lenin's famine of 1921 to constant purges and deportations, from the genocidal Holodomor in Ukraine to concentration camps of the gulag, Soviet communism brought death and destruction to some 20 million people. My own family suffered from this communist terror, fleeing from almost certain slaughter and leaving behind all worldly possessions as refugees from Lenin's dictatorship of the proletariat, my father only 10 years old and the eldest of five children at the time.

The communist ideology that came to power on this day in 1917 went on to imprison most of eastern and central Europe. For example, this week we mark the anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, when the democratic dreams of brave Hungarians were crushed by Soviet tanks; Polish Independence Day, when we celebrate the freedom of a nation that suffered decades of communist oppression; and the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Germans brought down the Iron Curtain.

Mr. Speaker, these and other crimes are detailed in *The Black Book of Communism*, in which leading historians estimate that communist regimes are responsible for the deaths of some 94 million people from Katyn to the killing fields of Cambodia, from Mao's great leap forward to the North Korean concentration camps. So today I ask all members and Albertans to pause and reflect on these innocent victims, most of whom lie in forgotten and unmarked graves. In remembering them, we regret that most of their oppressors were never brought to justice and that today some of the symbols of this evil ideology are considered fashionable, with apologists continuing to deny or diminish crimes against humanity.

We are grateful for Canada being a refuge for so many victims of communism like my own family, and we rededicate ourselves to being forever vigilant in the defence of freedom and human dignity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

New Red Deer College Green Energy Residence

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to celebrate the announcement that Red Deer College will be making a \$19 million investment into a new main campus residence. The five-storey, 145-unit facility will provide increased space for more students to live and study on campus. It will only be footsteps away from the brand new Gary W. Harris Canada Games Centre, giving students access to state-of-the-art recreational and fitness facilities. I'm pleased to note that the first floor of the residence will be barrier free, providing accessible housing to those with mobility issues.

Also, this building will be an impressive example of alternative energy investment. The use of solar panels covering the east, west, and south facades will reduce both utility costs and their carbon footprint. More impressively, the college will use this technology for training and education purposes, linking this to the development of an alternative energy lab. Giving students the opportunity to learn about alternative energy resources in a period of increased energy diversification is a strong investment into the future of RDC, their students, and the energy industry in this province.

This investment into the facilities available to students in Red Deer and central Alberta is a sign that Red Deer College is succeeding in their goal of being a world-class postsecondary institution. I thank RDC for their commitment to this project and environmental stewardship and commend them on their pursuit of making Alberta and Red Deer places that students will more readily call home.

Thank you.

Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, a government running deficits and debt cannot continue to be a compassionate and caring government, but the one with a balanced budget can be. Through developing our God-given natural resources, we can grow prosperity to balance those budgets. As per the Premier's own royalty review expert, Peter Tertzakian, demand for oil is not going anywhere but up. The global market for Alberta's oil does indeed look good. OPEC sees more global demand despite electric cars, rising to 102.3 million

barrels per day in 2022 and trillions of dollars of investment in upstream.

Meanwhile the environmentalists who stand in the way of pipelines: someone, somewhere is their sugar daddy, bankrolling these hysterical ideologues against Alberta. But it is the environmentalists who are getting played. The commercial interests of the U.S.A. have played the environmentalists for the fools they are, hiring protestors for peanuts while making off with billions from Alberta's exports. Alberta's oil continues to flow south to the United States at a discounted price. Meanwhile the U.S.A. exports homemade shale oil at market prices at a rapidly expanding rate and no longer needs to buy as much Canadian oil.

1:50

The bought-and-paid-for environmentalists have done a real disservice to Canada for a paycheck. Canada had a chance to achieve energy independence, to stop importing oil from brutal dictators. Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce estimates a \$50 million a day loss to Canada due to lack of global market access for our oil. Common sense would say to build more pipelines in all directions. But, sadly, environmentalists have chosen more oil by rail rolling through the communities near . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Oral Question Period

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

Pipeline Approval and Construction

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we are pleased that the Premier has taken our advice to go outside Alberta's borders and defend our energy industry. The Hon. Jason Kenney has been pitching this idea for well over a year. Again, we lead; they follow. Trans Mountain received paper regulatory approval nearly a year ago, but aside from a very low-profile and nearly silent trip to B.C. last December, the Premier failed to defend pipelines outside of Alberta's borders even as opposition to them continued to grow. Will the Premier admit that she's been too passive on this issue and that it's time to finally stand up all the way for Alberta's pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the opportunity to talk about what our government has done to promote pipelines and to get pipelines approved. From pretty much the minute we were first elected, we started working with industry not only on the climate leadership plan but also on the royalty review. Almost immediately we started talking to our friends in Ottawa, particularly once we had an election and there was a new group of people in Ottawa, about the need for getting our product to tidewater. That work resulted in the Kinder Morgan pipeline being approved by the federal government, and we're very . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can't be surprised about the opposition to Trans Mountain in B.C. After all, her government appointed two of the ringleaders against it, Karen Mahon and Tzaporah Berman, to her oil sands advisory group. Last December the Premier had dinner with her old friend, the B.C. opposition leader at the time, John Horgan, who now happens to be the B.C. NDP Premier. About that dinner Horgan said that she, the Premier

of Alberta, had no intention of persuading him on pipelines. Shame. Will the Premier admit that it was a mistake not to try to sell the merits of ethical Alberta oil to her old comrade of 10 years?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I will admit to is taking every opportunity to speak to people not only in Alberta, of course, but in B.C. and across the country about the importance of getting our product to tidewater and how that is important for building our economy. I am glad that that message is getting through, and I'm also glad that our economy is going to lead the growth in the country this year because of the work that we are doing. I am glad that jobs are coming back to Alberta because of the work that we are doing. I am glad that manufacturing is up in Alberta because of the work that we are doing. I am very proud of our . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Kenney got four pipelines built during his time in government. All this Premier has is two cancelled pipelines and a so-called promise from Justin Trudeau. We know that the NDP like to tout their chief ally Trudeau because he granted paper approval to the Trans Mountain pipeline. The strange thing is that Trudeau never promotes the merits of Alberta oil when he's actually in British Columbia, but he will say while in other parts of the country: phasing out our oil sands. Will the Premier tell her good friend Justin Trudeau that it's time to step out and vocally defend Trans Mountain when he's in British Columbia?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that with a Conservative government here in Alberta and a Conservative government in Ottawa, they didn't manage to get one pipeline built to tidewater. They didn't even manage to get one finally approved. We have a different record. We are making progress. We are standing up for the energy industry. We are going to make sure that this job gets done because that's what we committed to, and we are very proud of that.

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.
Second main question.

Mr. Nixon: Four pipelines by Jason Kenney; none by this government.

Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Canada's current equalization formula expires in early 2019. Critical talks should begin as soon as possible given the urgency of the situation and the federal government's and other provincial leaders' sustained attacks on the primary source of Alberta's income and wealth, our energy sector. Will the Premier adopt Jason Kenney's lead and take an aggressive stance on renegotiation and inform this House of what her government's plans are to stand up for Albertans when it comes to equalization?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, given that it was the members opposite, their friends, leaders, and donors who negotiated the current formula that they don't like, I'm really quite perplexed by the fact that they are so keen on fighting it now. [interjection] But, of course, we will continue to stand up for Alberta. We will continue to work with the federal government to get more money to Albertans. [interjection] We got changes to employment insurance on behalf of Albertans. We got money for the orphan wells fund on behalf of Albertans. We have been

working to get more infrastructure money on behalf of Albertans. We are continuing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I kept hearing your voice. It couldn't be you.

Mr. Nixon: Much of Canada appears to love the fruits of Alberta's resource sector while simultaneously blocking market access to those same resources. The Trudeau Liberals outright killed one pipeline, Northern Gateway, and at the behest of Quebec politicians they changed policy to scuttle Energy East. The Premier has the nerve to stand in this House and continue to say that she has gotten pipelines approved when in reality all she has is cancelled pipelines and a piece of paper from Justin Trudeau. I'll let Albertans decide what they think that is worth. The question, though, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier is: will she support a joint resolution from this House to adopt an aggressive stance to renegotiate equalization?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the members opposite and their leader had decades to do something on the equalization file, but instead they sat on their hands when they were in Ottawa, absolutely sat on their hands, just like they did when it came to fighting for pipelines. [interjections] In fact, they got no pipelines to tidewater. Pipelines get built every day through this country, but pipelines to tidewater do not, certainly, under the Conservatives, only under us. [interjections] Thank goodness we're the ones in charge now.

The Speaker: Come on, folks. Keep it down.

Mr. Nixon: My leader spent the last 18 months travelling this province defending Albertans on equalization while this Premier has sat at home doing nothing. Again and again this Premier and this NDP government refuse to vocally criticize their federal allies, be it on carbon tax, small-business tax hikes, or changes to the rules for pipeline approvals. Albertans are extremely concerned that the Trudeau Liberals will use equalization to take even more money out of the pockets of hard-working Albertans. Will the Premier stand with us and support a joint resolution calling for an aggressive renegotiation of the equalization formula and stand up for Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we might be interested in a resolution to ask an aggressive question about why it was that the Conservatives and Jason Kenney, when he was in cabinet, didn't fix this problem when they had all the time in the world to do it. What's happening now is that the members opposite are engaging in cheap political stunts over an issue that they had years and years and years to fix and couldn't be bothered to deal with. The fact of the matter is that we are working collaboratively with the federal government to get infrastructure money, to get EI money, to get orphan wells money, and we are not done because we are standing up for Alberta.

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

Provincial By-election

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, late last week the Premier's office told the media that a by-election would be called, quote, without undue delay, but yesterday the Premier in answer to a question to me would only say that she would call an election "in due course." To the Premier. I sincerely and I politely ask you: will you call an

election so that the Hon. Jason Kenney has the opportunity to join us here in this House? Yes or no?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member opposite that I absolutely intend to call a by-election.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this is not just a nice favour that we are asking for. There's a long-standing constitutional convention that the Premier should call a by-election at the earliest opportunity so that a new Leader of the Opposition can take his or her seat here in this House. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed resigned a week ago, and his seat sits empty. I ask again: when will the Premier call a by-election so that the Hon. Jason Kenney can join us in this House?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it is interesting. The last time that the members opposite were in the position of calling a by-election, they waited anywhere from three weeks to six months. Suddenly, when it's our turn to call a by-election, it has to happen three days later. Now, that's not new for them because, of course, there's one set of rules for them and a completely different set of rules for us. The fact of the matter is that people have to have an opportunity to get ready for the by-election and ensure that all parties can participate, and we will make sure that happens.

Mr. Nixon: It's quite clear that the NDP are very eager to debate the Hon. Jason Kenney. I look forward to watching that personally, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you do, too. Yesterday the Premier said, "I can't wait," so what is the Premier waiting for? Why doesn't she walk down the hall right now or pick up the phone, call the Lieutenant Governor, and call a by-election so that the Hon. Jason Kenney can come and take his seat in this House?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we will call a by-election in due course.

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

Provincial Response to Pipeline Opponents

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Getting Alberta's energy products to tidewater in the most economic and environmentally responsible manner should be the number one priority for this government. It's their job to make the case for pipelines, but despite the supposed social licence that comes from this government's climate policy, we're still facing strong opposition. To the Premier: if you've done all you can to sell pipelines, why does Alberta still face strong opposition in B.C. and beyond?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said a number of times before, our government continues to work very hard to support the pipeline to tidewater. First of all, we brought in a climate leadership plan, which the federal government clearly identified as the reason why the pipeline was approved. Since then we have worked on a number of different levels, legal as well as political as well as communications, to promote the pipeline. We will continue to do that. I know that the members opposite wring their hands with glee at the hope that maybe the pipeline will fail, but – you know what? – mark my words; it will be built.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the UCP may cheer against Alberta, but I never will.

Now, I hear a lot about the economic benefits of pipelines, and there is no doubt that there's an airtight case that Alberta, B.C., and all of Canada benefit economically from pipelines. But there's environmental benefit as well, and that is where this NDP government has let us down. Again to the Premier: it is amazing that I have to ask this question, but do you know that there's a significant environmental benefit to building a pipeline to tidewater because it reduces overall global carbon emissions by displacing higher carbon crude from places like Venezuela and Nigeria?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite for the mansplaining opportunity. Let me just say that I am quite familiar with the file and, in fact, have made the case for the file from both an environmental point of view as well as an economic point of view in a number of different forums across the country because I know that it is good for Canadians both from an economic point of view and an environmental point of view and, in particular, with respect to the job creation that we know is important to Albertans, to British Columbians, and to all Canadians.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's energy industry is the most innovative and environmentally responsible anywhere in the world. Whether it's paraffinic froth treatment in oil sands mining or microwaves, solvent, or fire flood in SAGD or the many other technologies under development, it's Alberta innovations that will make oil sands' production carbon neutral or better. We are not the UCP; the Alberta Party does not deny man-made climate change. To the Premier: why are you not telling pipeline opponents that Alberta crude will actually reduce global carbon emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that the member opposite read the speech that I delivered about an hour and a half ago because the answer is: we do.

Thank you.

Hospital Construction in Edmonton and Calgary

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, yesterday my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-South West detailed the rapid growth in the southwest quadrant of Edmonton in his question about the need for a new high school. Thousands of young families have moved into the area, and along with new schools we desperately need a new hospital. In Edmonton-Whitemud, in addition to a burgeoning population, there are several seniors' facilities. These citizens are very much looking forward to having a hospital close by. To the Minister of Health: could you please update the House on the status of the first new hospital to be built in the city of Edmonton in 30 years?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the very important question. It's true that it's been over a generation since Edmonton got a new hospital under the former government, but guess what, Mr. Speaker? Things are looking up. Alberta is doing better, and under this government we are building a new hospital in southwest Edmonton. Over the coming months we'll be engaging with stakeholders and working with the city of Edmonton to ensure that access roads, public transit, and services are in place, and I look forward to updating this House about this important project.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Speaker. My constituents will be very excited to learn of this. Given that the Misericordia hospital provides urgent care to thousands of my constituents yearly, can the Minister of Health please provide an update on the progress of the expanded ER facility at the Misericordia?

Ms Hoffman: I'm honoured to do so, Mr. Speaker. When massive cuts are made to a health care system, like those proposed by Jason Kenney and the members opposite, critical facilities like the Misericordia hospital suffer. We won't do that. This government was elected to protect the things that matter to Albertans, like health care and education. The new emergency department at the Misericordia will be a part of this new expanded space built on the west side of the building. I'm so proud to be investing in Alberta instead of cutting like Jason Kenney and the opposition.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that a new Calgary cancer centre has been asked for by my oncologist colleagues in the Alberta cancer program and by cancer patients across this province for years, can the same minister update the House on progress made in meeting these requests and the anticipated timeline for that project?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very proud to stand with the Premier and the Minister of Infrastructure and many other government members on the Calgary cancer centre site. After more than a decade of being told that it was happening, not happening, maybe it would happen somewhere else, oh, maybe it won't happen at all, maybe it'll be \$9 billion of cuts, Alberta elected a new government. This government is moving forward with this important project and the 1,500 mortgage-paying jobs that it brings as well. Construction will continue until 2022, and we plan on doing a very public opening in 2023.

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

Health Care Costs

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to a CIHI report Alberta now has the distinction of spending more money than any other province on health care, yet our wait times and outcomes are not better. Dangerous emergency and surgical waits add suffering and cost, and many Albertans continue to languish in hospital beds, up to 25 per cent in one Calgary hospital, instead of in the community. Cuts to injury prevention and early intervention for addictions and mental health have not helped. To the minister: can the Minister of Health tell us where the money is going if not to improving health care?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the important question. Mr. Speaker, there are three main drivers in Alberta and, frankly, across Canada in terms of health care system costs. Those are hospitals, where we're working to move more care into the community, as the member noted, including building 2,000 badly needed long-term care and dementia spaces; drug costs, which have been seeing pressures across this province – and, certainly, a 20 per cent cut to drugs would only hurt the Albertans who indeed need them – as well as physician costs. We're proud that we renegotiated an amending agreement and will continue to work with physicians, with drug companies, and with front-line health care workers to bend the cost curve.

2:10

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, after two years of trying, things are no better than they were under the PCs when it comes to reducing wait times. AHS performance data shows that Alberta continues to fail in continuing care placement, emergency lengths of stay, and mental health access. These delays in care are costing billions and result in poorer health. Again to the minister: how long before we see an integrated preventive management primary care system that deals with severe, complex cases, that consume over 50 per cent of the health care budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. I'm very proud of the fact that we've worked with physicians and with the primary care networks to come up with a new governance model, that I do believe will improve outcomes for patients, as well as of doing it in partnership with those who are closest to the patient in driving the system.

In terms of what they refer to as unacceptable wait times, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that we're working to reduce wait times. For example, our hip fracture repair and radiation therapy and our 17 stroke treatment centres are now among the fastest in the world, and that's not something to diminish.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, a whopping \$5 billion of the \$21.5 billion this government spends on health care goes directly to physician services. That's an 8 per cent higher proportion than the rest of the country. Despite claims of holding the line on spending, the government ultimately caves in during contract negotiations with physicians and AHS senior management. Alberta's numbers are clearly out of line with the rest of the country. When will the minister follow the lead of Ontario and try to drive down these costs by freezing and, in some cases, rolling back the highest salaries of physicians and senior managers?

Ms Hoffman: That certainly is an interesting proposal, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be working with the front-line care providers, including those who are providing services as physicians. It's true that contracts were signed under the former government that saw what some might say are skyrocketing increases to that line item. When we came into government, we sat down with physicians, and we negotiated an amending agreement that resulted in up to half a billion dollars going back into the pockets of Albertans and the taxpayers of this province. I'm proud of that. That is significant. There is more work to be done. Trust me; it will be done.

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

Catholic School Sex Education Curriculum

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister can't seem to help himself. The Official Opposition and multiple media outlets pointed out that the documents presented by the Catholic school superintendents clearly state, "We support teaching about legal consent" and "consent is always necessary." Even with this information the minister, instead of issuing a long-overdue apology, doubled down yesterday and claimed that Catholic schools were taking exception to teaching consent. To the Minister of Education: do you really believe that Catholic schools intend to teach and promote marital rape? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, neither myself nor the Premier said any such thing, and to suggest it is simply trying to score political points.

We work very closely with the Catholic school boards in all ways. We've never built more Catholic schools than we have under this government, for example. We've never had a closer relationship with Catholic school boards in terms of building curriculum. Certainly, we know that we're working closely together with our Catholic partners to ensure that we build a comprehensive health and wellness program that works for all of our children that we are responsible for.

Mr. McIver: Well, until this week I'd never heard the church complain about a government, which they did this last Sunday across the pulpit.

Given that the *Calgary Herald* wrote an editorial about Catholic sex ed and that they make it clear that consent is a core part of the curriculum, again to the minister: why do you and the Premier continue to smear all Catholics in Alberta by accusing them of promoting and teaching marital rape?

Mr. Eggen: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member is just trying to score cheap political points for the sake of I don't know what advantage.

We work closely with Catholic school boards. We work closely with Catholic superintendents and parents and schools to ensure that we build a curriculum that works for all students. We had exception with a single submission, that was FOIPed, from the superintendents. We rejected that submission. But we're working together with Catholic school boards to ensure that we build curriculum, we're building Catholic schools, and we're building trust and goodwill as opposed to that divisive sort of language.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, a letter signed by all the bishops in Alberta is hardly cheap.

Given that all politicians make mistakes, nonetheless – no one is perfect – and given that when this happens, the right thing to do is apologize and make amends and take advantage of the Catholic tenet of forgiveness, to the minister: will you do the right thing and issue an apology to Alberta's Catholic community, or will you let your repulsive comments stand uncorrected?

Mr. Eggen: Well, once again, you know, Mr. Speaker, for this member to use this situation to score cheap political points, I find it very offensive. What the Catholic bishops did put in the letter was that there were some people that were fighting against Catholic education. Our government stands with strengthening Catholic education across this province. We have done so over the last couple of years, and we will continue to do so to promote school choice between public schools, Catholic schools, charter schools, home-schooling, and francophone schools in the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health Care System

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Six months ago the Auditor General released a report on our health care system. Only two months ago the AG said in a Public Accounts meeting that we need people of all backgrounds and at all levels "to act immediately if we are going to make a difference in the lives of Albertans." To the Minister of Health: with needed improvements identified six months ago, what exactly have you done since then?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I'm very proud of the work that we've done with our primary care network physicians to ensure that we have a new governance model and greater integration between acute care and primary care. We know that that's going to result in better outcomes for Albertans, supporting better care in the community. As well as the amending agreement, which I mentioned earlier, we're continuing to implement that and moving forward with other tenets as we prepare for further negotiations with physicians, and we're investing \$400 million to better integrate and share information across the health care system. I'm very proud of our track record, and I know that 20 per cent cuts proposed by the members opposite would do no such thing.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, during Public Accounts members from the Department of Health, Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Medical Association, and the College of Physicians & Surgeons all indicated their support for the AG's report. Given that they have all identified that improvements do have to be made, to the minister: can you define your plan and give us a timeline?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I share the concerns that were raised specifically around the instability that we've seen under Alberta Health Services in the past, and I have to say that bringing stability has and continues to be one of my guiding principles as we make a shift to community-based care and supporting all patients.

I'll tell you what wouldn't help with that: divisive, two-tier, privatized health care. I won't stand for that, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're moving forward to protect Albertans, not push the Jason Kenney cuts that the members opposite are so gleeful for.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, our health care system is still failing. Our wait times have increased in many areas. We're still paying 20 per cent more than our neighbours for the same results, and recently the head of AHS wrote a column celebrating our health care system when it is a system that is not working well. When will this government recognize that the Auditor General's report is reasonable and provides guidance to this Health minister? When will you act on this plan, how will you do it, and when will you do it? Give us a timeline.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of our public health care system in this province. I know that, just like with pipelines, the members opposite are cheering for Alberta to fail, but our front-line providers, our communities are standing with us to make sure that we improve health care, not lead to its demise by pushing a 20 per cent reckless agenda, which would result in closing emergency rooms, closing hospitals, probably many in opposition ridings as they so gleefully ask for more money and at the same time 20 per cent cuts. We're working with communities to bring about sustainability and improved health outcomes, and I'm very proud of that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Caribou Range Plans

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the federal progress report on caribou range planning we learned that the Alberta government has indicated they will be providing a draft provincial range plan to the federal government by December of

this year. In an effort to provide the transparency this process has been sadly lacking, can the minister provide specifics on what this range plan entails, and will the NDP provide the Legislature as a whole and even the groups most affected an opportunity to review and comment on the document prior to submitting it to the federal government in December?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the member is quite right that the province is putting together a series of range plans to recover the iconic caribou species. We've been doing that for a couple of years now and consulting with communities, particularly the most affected communities, as we try to find a way forward both for the caribou and for the jobs and the economic development that buoys this province. I'll have more to say about that in follow-ups.

Mr. Loewen: Given that this government has been severely negligent in timely consultation with communities and industries, creating enormous strain and worry for those most affected, and given that a socioeconomic impact study is a very wide-ranging study and that it is critical to gather information from many groups, organizations, and governments, can the minister tell us who has been consulted with so far on the socioeconomic impact study, who remains to be consulted with, and how will this information be used to form the caribou range plans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member well knows, there are a number of different range plans and a number of different geographic locations in the province. We have talked to First Nations, the forestry sector, small business, oil and gas, municipalities, a number of different stakeholders in addition to environmental groups and scientists as well, and the federal government. I have been around the province to discuss this matter as well. We know that we are going to have a made-in-Alberta solution to this issue. We will not have a protection order imposed on us by doing nothing, which is, of course, what the previous government did in the question of the sage grouse.

Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Given that in September I attended the Whitecourt panel discussion on caribou planning organized by the community and given the standing-room-only capacity of the event and the grave concerns expressed by the citizens at the event, why did the Minister of Environment and Parks feel it was unnecessary for her to attend this important event and ease the public's concerns, considering that the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry would not commit to no job losses as a result of the caribou planning process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice that the member got to Whitecourt. I was there last January. I was able to tour a number of facilities and consult with a number of folks in the area, including the chambers of commerce, municipalities, and others. The fact of the matter is that the Alberta Forest Products Association's president and CEO, for example, has said that the government of Alberta has engaged with stakeholders and that it's encouraging to hear our ideas and work together to conserve the caribou. We'll have more to say about that when we release the draft plans.

Thank you.

Energy Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, Berman, Mahon, Hudema, Pembina, Tides, Rockefeller, Trudeau, comrades Horgan and Singh, and our own local version of the job-killing, investment-repelling NDP: with friends like these, industry investors and hard-working Albertans don't need enemies. Given that industry leaders say that the common thread here is that Canada generally has displayed an unwelcoming policy environment and uncertain approval process, to the Minister of Energy: will you explain to Albertans how the NDP world view has resulted in the abandonment of over \$56 billion in energy sector projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I'm very pleased to be able to talk about the health of Alberta's economy and the fact that we seem to have turned a corner. Jobs are up. Wages are up. Drilling is up. Confidence in Alberta's energy sector is up. We secured two pipelines in two years of government. Just last week we learned that drilling activity is up sharply this year over last, and Suncor reported their best quarterly results since oil was \$100 a barrel. That's the record of this side of the House.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the carbon tax, the minimum wage, corporate and personal tax hikes, irresponsible deficits, and an unwelcoming investment climate have resulted in the flight of over \$35 billion in foreign direct investment and given that only one of your climate plan photo op crew even remains in the province with the departure of Murray Edwards, Brian Ferguson, and Lorraine Mitchelmore, to the Minister of Finance. Corporate tax revenue has been consistently down during your tenure. Can you tell us if you're expecting to be a billion dollars short of your forecast for a second year in a row?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, Amazon, RocketSpace, Swoop, Champion Petfoods, Pinnacle, Google, Cavendish Farms: in the last six months all of these companies have made investments here in Alberta. In the last seven months our retail sales hit \$6.8 billion, beating out the prerecession peak of \$6.7 billion. Alberta's economy is the fastest growing in Canada, and since the depths of the recession Alberta has created nearly 72,000 jobs.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, it would be interesting to see what the net new jobs are in terms of public sector versus private sector.

To the Minister of Energy. Given what we're hearing from Greenpeace: victoire; from Pembina: bam, victory; from Bayer Robertson: loud and clear; from NDP Horgan: see you in court; from clean coal technology: adios; from Hanna, Hinton, Forestburg, Keephills, and Grande Cache: nice knowing you; and given the recent cancellation of Energy East and continued uncertainty around Keystone and Trans Mountain, can you tell Albertans when you will stop playing social licence croquet and suit up for a little hardball in defence of Alberta jobs, investment, and national prosperity?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the members opposite, with this kind of hardball rhetoric, do realize that you don't get what you want by threatening to hurt people. You do understand that, right?

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have secured approval for two new pipelines that will bring over 20,000 good new jobs to Alberta,

20,000 jobs that the folks on that side of the House could never secure. Our petrochemicals diversification program will add another 3,000 jobs, jobs that those folks over there voted against. We're working to create 7,200 jobs with renewables projects, again opposed by conservatives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Diabetes Support in Schools

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. November is Diabetes Awareness Month. Last week I was fortunate to meet a diabetes advocate who passionately shared her story of how challenging it is as a single parent to manage her daughter's insulin-dependent diabetes while she's at school and the impact that it has on her daughter. As a working mother she struggles to get her daughter's insulin levels well controlled without appropriate help from the school. To the Minister of Education: why hasn't the government of Alberta created policies to work with schools and parents in order to address all of the needs of children living with diabetes in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of the relationship we have with our advocates in this province and the work that we've done to reduce the reckless conservative cuts that were proposed just prior to the last election and that are advocated for every day in this House. We know that members opposite are pushing for deep cuts that would hurt Alberta families. Instead, we're working with them and with other agencies across the province to ensure that the services they need are protected and supported, and I am proud of that record.

Ms McPherson: Given that Diabetes Canada has been advocating on this issue for years and support for children with diabetes is something that I'm sure everyone in this House agrees on and given that students living with diabetes have the right to be full and equal participants in school and all school-related activities without the fear of being excluded, stigmatized, or discriminated against, again to the Minister of Education: why is Alberta still one of the only provinces which does not have standards and policies in place for the health and safety of kids with diabetes in school?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is an issue that has been brought to my attention both by advocates here across the province and nationally as well. I think that we have made some progress in regard to type 2 diabetes, but certainly with type 1 diabetes there's lots of room for improvement. You know, we want to work closely with our partners every step of the way to ensure the health and the integrity of all students – right? – regardless of who they are. In order to do that, of course, you have to make sure that you make investments in education, which we have done over the last year.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McPherson: Given that diabetes is a complicated and sometimes life-threatening condition that requires close and careful management, not just treatment, and given that type 1 diabetes is a lifelong condition impacting more and more children every year, to the Education minister: has the government analyzed the implications of not having standards of care for students with diabetes in school as it relates to the long-term health and well-being of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I had said previously, yes, we certainly have been looking into it. There's been strong advocacy in regard to both type 1 and type 2 diabetes for children here in the province, and yes, we do determine that there are more students that have that very thing. We are ensuring that we will look into it further. It's important to make sure that you keep that level of investment in education every step of the way so that we can achieve these goals. If you make deep cuts in public education, then, of course, all of these things are off the table.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Seniors' Issues

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's seniors deserve to live affordably and in comfort. Back in August 2016 my office reached out to stakeholders that work with seniors in Calgary-Bow. We even have a name, the Calgary-Bow seniors constellation. At one of these meetings we heard that there's a shortage of affordable housing for seniors. Can the Minister of Seniors and Housing please address what our government is doing to help seniors access affordable housing?

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're making life better for Albertans by investing in safe and affordable housing. We're building more than 4,100 affordable housing homes through 62 construction projects and planning projects for 3,000 seniors specifically. Not only are we increasing capacity; we're maintaining affordable housing that the previous government left in disrepair. We know that Jason Kenney's Conservatives would be stopping these projects. We as a government are supporting seniors in our province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We also heard that dementia rates continue to be on the rise, and our population continues to age. To the same minister: what is being done to address this increased demand, and specifically what is this government doing to help seniors who face social isolation and lack of supports?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'd like to thank the MLA for Calgary-Bow for her advocacy for the seniors in her community. My ministry is supporting seniors to age in their communities, close to their family and friends, with our seniors' home adaptation and repair program. Further, seniors on low income can access various supports such as housekeeping, yard maintenance, and transportation. Health is finalizing the dementia strategy, which will be released this fall. We are making life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another stakeholder that was present at the meeting addressed an issue regarding the limited support for hearing and sight needs, specifically hearing aids. To the Minister of Health: what is our government doing to support seniors in meeting these basic needs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Alberta aids to daily living, which provides funding for medical equipment so that Albertans can live healthy and independent lives, is important to us and our government. These programs are relied on by Albertans, including those well below the so-called middle-class income of Jason Kenney's \$200,000. Our government is here to stand up for Albertans who need these services every day, not make drastic cuts like Jason Kenney and his friends opposite are pushing for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of mine were shocked to have their AISH supports clawed back. One spouse receives AISH while the other partner, a senior citizen, has moved into receiving old age security, guaranteed income support, CPP, and workers' compensation for a permanent disability. The clawback in one partner's AISH is due to the other partner's income from pensions whereas if this senior citizen was still able to work and earning the same amount, his partner's AISH would not be affected. To the Minister of Community and Social Services. Income is income. Where is the common sense in treating income differently?

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AISH is an important program that provides supports to 57,000 Albertans, and it works in conjunction with other support programs available. Over the period of the last two years we have released an AISH action plan and worked to make it more efficient and more transparent, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP bills themselves as the party of caring, sharing, and social justice and given that the minister is hurting seniors as they cross the threshold of old age, clawing back their income support programs, and seeing as how divorce by AISH or turn criminal and lie seem to be the only ways to restore needed benefits to make ends meet with couples, is the minister prepared to reform AISH income exemption tables to treat pension income the same as any other income?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We have released an AISH action plan, which outlines the steps we will take to improve the AISH program. We are doing it by creating a simpler application form, by training staff and providing them better training, and by providing clear standards to ensure the program works in the best interests of Albertans. We have added \$70 million to this program just this year. Some over there do think that supports to disabilities are just giveaways.

Mr. Hanson: An absolutely disappointing answer, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the Auditor General has come out swinging that assured income for the severely handicapped applications favour people who are persistent and good at completing forms and given that the Auditor General found inconsistencies with the program, where applicants who are working 30 hours a week have been denied coverage yet people who are already receiving AISH were allowed to work the same number of hours, is the minister going to

bring some common sense into his department and fix these problems before Alberta's most vulnerable fall through the cracks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We respect the work the Auditor General did and accepted all the recommendations, and in response we put together an AISH action plan, which outlines exactly the response, what the Auditor General asked us to do. But let me tell you about common sense. All Albertans across this province think that it's not common sense to cut \$209 million, 20 per cent, from the AISH program or to bring it back to B.C. levels by cutting \$600 from the supports they are getting. You can't have it both ways.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Workers' Compensation System

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, when Bill 6 was first introduced, many members in this House asked the Minister of Labour whether she and her department had initiated an economic impact study in order to determine how Alberta farmers and ranchers were going to be affected. Her answer: they had not. After over two years I thought surely they would have performed one by now, only to find out this morning: still nothing. To the minister: how do you plan on measuring the adverse effects on farmers and ranchers due to Bill 6?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that our government has done to work with farmers and ranchers on the implementation of Bill 6. As promised, before making any changes, we have been working with farmers and ranchers, giving Albertans the opportunity to review recommendations just recently posted from the occupational health and safety technical working groups. We will continue to work with the farming and ranching community on the implementation steps and those recommendations from our technical working groups.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that earlier today the PAC was informed that the reason why WCB is not returning \$1.9 billion worth of rebates to struggling Alberta employers is because they are unsure how new legislation and regulations are going to affect their bottom line. To the Minister of Labour: do you think Alberta employers should bear this burden while you figure out which direction you want to go?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to say that our government believes that all workers deserve fair rehabilitation in a sustainable system if they are injured. That is why we initiated the first review of the WCB in 15 years, to make sure that both employers and workers can have confidence in that system. The decision to not return surpluses was made independently by the board of the WCB using their sound financial practices. Surpluses are not being folded into general revenue for the government. Rather, we are making sure we have a sustainable system that provides fair compensation.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans are being saddled with the carbon tax, the minimum wage increases, the new labour

laws, to name a few hurdles, and given that the federal government is also increasing taxes, to the same minister: how can the WCB justify holding back on average almost \$12,000 of WCB rebates per Alberta employer when businesses are hurting so much in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely critical that Albertans can feel confident that they have a WCB system that will take care of them and their family when they are injured on the job and that employers know there is a system that is sustainable. That is why we began the first major review in 15 years, and I'm very proud of the work the panel has done and the recommendations that we have received on that. I know that Jason Kenney wants to make life harder for Albertans. We will continue to work through issues like doing the panel review of the WCB to make life better for Albertans.

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

2:40 Downtown Edmonton Health and Social Services

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of our government's support for essential health and social services like emergency shelters, supportive housing, and supervised consumption sites, and I deeply value our community partners who deliver them. However, in our central communities some have expressed concerns about their concentration in our city core even while police and others have called for a downtown wellness centre to serve those in crisis. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: given that all parties involved will be looking to our government for funding, how are you engaging stakeholders to determine the best way to balance our communities' needs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We are absolutely committed to making sure that all Albertans have a safe place to call home, and we all need to work together to combat homelessness and poverty. That is why we are working with the community partners, different orders of government, and all those who are concerned to get this right.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that our ultimate objective is to end homelessness and that this will require investing in a range of services and housing across our city and given that invaluable existing partners are seeking funding to improve and expand their services downtown, what factors will you be considering when you make recommendations to the Minister of Infrastructure on these projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I personally have worked in a homeless shelter, and I do know that homelessness is a complex issue, and we need to work across government with our community partners and with other orders of government. Before making any recommendation, I will make sure that we have a well-thought-out, well co-ordinated plan to address the issues in the downtown core and across this province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Councillor Scott McKeen of the city of Edmonton has called for Edmonton's urban wellness plan to explore supportive housing across our city and given that while communities like Oliver embrace this, others, some unfortunately encouraged by federal Conservative politicians, are instead embracing fear and perpetuating stigma, will you commit to supporting the city of Edmonton in asking all communities to play a part in helping to end homelessness?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are absolutely committed to working with all partners – community partners and other orders of government – to make sure that we have a well-thought-out and well co-ordinated plan to address this complex issue. That is why we have invested \$190 million, and we will continue to make those investments to make sure that Albertans looking for those supports have those supports. But there are folks over there who want to cut 20 per cent from that, which would mean that they will cut somewhere around \$35 million from existing supports.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

In 30 seconds we will proceed.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Fiscal Policies and Prosperity

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over a week ago the Leader of the Official Opposition said, "We understand that in order to be a compassionate, caring province, we must be prosperous first," to which I responded, "Actually, some of the most compassionate, caring and generous people I've known have been those who personally had very little." Some then suggested that I was financially illiterate and failed to understand the meaning of the original statement. Well, in truth, I think I understood it far too well because that statement doesn't simply stand on its own, devoid of history and content. It's deeply rooted in a failed conservative ideology.

The truth is that Alberta is a prosperous province. We long have been, and we continue to be. Yes, we're coming out of a difficult period, but we still lead Canada in terms of economic power and growth. We have the capacity, even during challenging times, to look after our own.

The record shows that when the price of oil has dropped, conservative governments consistently made life harder for everyday Alberta families with short-sighted, poorly planned cuts to services we all rely on. Albertans lost jobs; hospitals, roads, and schools were left to crumble; and the holes in our social safety net grew. When things improved, they used our increased prosperity not to invest in the long-term sustainable vision to help everyday Albertans but to help their friends with unsustainable tax cuts that left us even more dependent on volatile resource revenue.

Mr. Speaker, our government was elected on a promise not to make Albertans pay for the mistakes of previous governments. Instead we've invested to support and create jobs in growing sectors like agrifood, technology, and green energy, to build long-needed infrastructure, and to address social inequalities that hurt families and drag our economy down. Those aren't luxuries; those are key

measures that lay a foundation for increased prosperity as our economy recovers.

Mr. Speaker, what we can't afford are the sorts of empty rhetoric, reckless policies, and social regression promised by our opposition, policies that will undermine prosperity and make Albertans' lives worse. Albertans need a compassionate government committed to prosperity for all Albertans, and that's what we'll continue to be.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP proclaims itself an open and transparent government, but their actions are murky and contradictory. They communicate in voice mode because they don't want to be held to anything written. They ordered over 800,000 e-mails deleted with prizes for whoever deletes the most. There can be no reason except to cover their own tracks from public record.

Our constituency staff are frustrated with another disconcerting problem. Has the NDP given instructions to all government departments that no information is to be given to constituency staff in opposition ridings without first getting permission from the minister's office? Staff who have served for 20 years under different Premiers and cabinets say that they have never encountered anything like this. Constituency staff are government employees. They are to serve the people of Alberta. When their own government blockades them from doing their job to help Albertans, you have to ask why.

A constituent wanted to mail a letter to a central region Alberta Health Services manager but needed an address. They asked the constit office for a public official's government address. We called the minister's office for the address and were refused. We were told that all correspondence had to go to the minister. Constit staff argued that this is ridiculous and unheard of, to refuse the public address of a public official. Later, after getting permission from higher up, the address was provided. This is a most extreme form of control.

Another constit asked for clarification to an order taped to the door of her residence. It indicated that the suite she maintained was not suitable for rent. Okay. She asked us to find out how long the notice had to remain posted and provided us with the notice contact number that was provided. It was just a clarification question. The government department employee who answered the call was afraid to give an answer and said that her supervisor would have to. Ten days later we finally got a callback. Was the supervisor required to go to the minister's office in order to get permission to do his job? Limiting government staff because the ministers don't trust them...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42: be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately begin aggressive preparations for the 2018-2019 equalization renegotiations and update the Assembly on those preparations.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period I had some questions to the Service Alberta minister wanting an explanation on how we had a D grade for all of Canada for our freedom of information and how dreadful that is. There are five copies of the media release.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned an editorial in my question today, so I have the duty to table it. It says: "The NDP's position on sex education is a repudiation of diversity."

2:50

The Speaker: Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two documents related to my member's statement yesterday. I have the necessary five copies here. The first article is from CBC News entitled: Kenney's Unclear Abortion Stance Imperils Reproductive Rights, Analyst Says. It was written July 8, 2016.

The second was an article from PressProgress entitled Anti-abortion Group Tells Supporters to Buy PC Memberships and Help Jason Kenney Take Over Party. It also has a photo of Jason Kenney that says Jason Kenney, Anti-abortion Activist.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first would be the Alberta Health Services performance report, and I'll highlight just three indicators. I'll give them full marks on acute-care discharge rates in Canada but a failing grade in relation to continuing care placements and mental health access.

Also, the letter from the Health minister explaining some of the reasons behind the continuing low performance of the health system relative to spending and an article from the Canadian Institute for Health Information that highlights both Alberta's sky-high health care costs and Alberta doctors' costs, which have gone up 9 per cent over the past year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a document dated October 4, 2017, from ATB Financial's economics and research team. In the publication it shows that things are looking up in Alberta, including tourism. It states: "This year, tourism will continue that same momentum and may break another record." That's good news to people in Banff-Cochrane and across the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wish to table an Oral Question Period rotation referenced in my statement from yesterday.

I'm also tabling a copy of the House leaders' agreement, which I received at 1:03 on November 6. I will be making a statement with respect to the Members' Statements rotation outlined in this agreement later in today's Routine.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, responses to questions raised by Dr. Swann, hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View; Dr. Starke, hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster; Mr. Smith, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon;

Mr. Hinkley, hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose; and Mr. Loewen, hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, on April 11, 2017, Ministry of Health 2017-18 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: I believe we are at points of order. Is that correct? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Nixon: I'll rise for that point of order, Mr. Speaker, if that's okay.

The Speaker: Yeah.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Nixon: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays raised a point of order in response to an answer to a question by myself to the Premier. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'll rise on 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." In response to the question – we talk, actually, a lot about pipelines of late. It's a pretty important issue before the Assembly, and often there's some back and forth with it, but it's disappointing today to see the Premier misrepresent some significant facts. By misrepresenting those facts before the Assembly, I would argue, too, that she continues to cause disorder in the Assembly. In fact, she said that Mr. Kenney did not get any pipelines built when in fact the Harper government actually got the Trans Canada Keystone, not XL, the Enbridge Alberta Clipper, the Kinder Morgan anchor loop expansion, and the Enbridge line 9 reversal built.

Mr. Speaker, I know you want me to hurry. The point is that the Premier continues to rise in this Assembly when in fact she has no pipelines built, only two cancelled, and the Leader of the Opposition has four . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I think your case is . . . [interjections] Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, this is obviously a point of debate and not a point of order. The challenge facing our energy industry is getting market access. Really, to do that, what we need is to get a Canadian pipeline to Canadian tidewater, something which we have successfully managed to do and they have not managed to do. I know that they are upset by that, but that doesn't change the facts. Obviously, this is a dispute. It has nothing to do with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. I agree. It is not a point of order. It is one of opinion.

Calgary-Elbow, you wanted to what?

Mr. Clark: I called a point of order during my question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't know there was another point of order. I'm sorry; I've not been advised about the point of order, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: In response to the Premier's response to my question.

The Speaker: Okay.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to proceed on this point of order under 23(h), "makes allegations

against another Member"; (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member"; and (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I'd also refer to *Beauchesne's* sixth edition, section 486(3), discussing unparliamentary language. Subsection (3) just says that there are a few words that are always unparliamentary, and the list updates on a regular basis.

The new word I think that we should declare unparliamentary in this House, Mr. Speaker, is "mansplaining." It is a term that is essentially accusing me of sexism. It is an offensive term. It is not the first time it has been used in this House. It is essential that all members of the opposition and, indeed, all members of this House have the freedom to hold government to account and do so without being accused of sexism or just simply being called names. Mr. Speaker, I do take this accusation very seriously, and I categorically and emphatically reject this characterization. I would like for the Premier to apologize and withdraw that remark.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak on this particular matter. The exchange in question occurred between the hon. member and the hon. Premier. The Premier is, honestly, one of the smartest people I have ever met in my life, has been in this House for an incredibly long time, has been a vocal champion of pipelines, and the hon. member asked her if she was aware of the benefits of pipelines. Of course she's aware. Incidentally, so am I.

Just because sexism is polite doesn't make it not sexism. Mr. Speaker, I don't really think that it's appropriate to say, just because the question was asked in a polite but condescending manner, that it's not a condescending statement. I will read, for the record, the definition of mansplaining: "to comment on or explain something to a woman in a condescending, overconfident, and often inaccurate or oversimplified manner." Obviously, the member opposite thought that questioning the Premier on whether she understood the benefits of pipelines was appropriate. Obviously, she didn't feel that it was appropriate, but I don't think that calling a spade a spade should suddenly become unparliamentary language.

I think that this is obviously a case where, you know, just because it's said politely, it doesn't make it okay. We've had, obviously, some vociferous disagreements in this House, and, Mr. Speaker, that's fine. Everyone has the right to disagree and to state their opinion, but I think that saying that in this instance it was just fine for the member to ask the question the way in which he did and it wasn't fine for the hon. Premier to comment on the manner in which the question was asked is – we're just splitting hairs at a certain point. I think it is and shall remain my view that just because discriminatory behaviour is framed in a polite manner, it doesn't make it okay.

3:00

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

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to address this issue because of my long-held and strongly held feelings for parliamentary decorum. In this particular instance, I'm particularly concerned that we have a relatively new term that is creeping into usage within the House and that it has directly applied with it specific motives and backgrounds that are a problem and, I think, definitely diminish the overall tone within the House.

You will recall that last month I represented the province at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association seminar in Charlottetown, attended also by the members for St. Albert and Cypress-Medicine Hat. At that meeting we talked a lot about the

deterioration of decorum in the Houses of Parliament all across our land. These things happen incrementally. They don't happen all at once. They happen incrementally.

The term "mansplaining" is not in any list in *Beauchesne* because it's such a new term. It only started to be used in blog posts in about 2008. In 2010 it became the *New York Times* word of the year. In 2014 it became the word of the year in the Australian dictionary. It's in the Oxford online dictionary, but it's not actually in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. That's how new it is.

Now, why do I say all these things, Mr. Speaker? It's because mansplaining infers that the person asking the question, generally a man to a woman, is acting in a sexist or condescending manner. It implies that – as hon. members, if we were to call another member sexist, we would be called out of order, and rightly so. To say that there was mansplaining going on – and this is not the first time. Recently, in response to a question from the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat the Minister of Energy accused that member of mansplaining. Now we have the Premier accusing the Member for Calgary-Elbow of mansplaining.

Mr. Speaker, opposition members need to be able to ask questions regardless of the gender of the minister being asked. That is part of the overall equality we have in this House, and it is part of the honourable behaviour that is expected of all members. To immediately, then, suggest that a question is equivalent to mansplaining also suggests that the member asking the question is behaving in a sexist manner. That is not something that would be permitted, and because of that the term "mansplaining" should not be allowed within this Chamber.

There is relatively little parliamentary precedent in the use of this term, but if we borrow from the February 11, 2016, exchange between two Australian Senators, you will find an interesting exchange as to what exactly the term "mansplaining" is.

Mansplaining is most decidedly a damaging activity. It is a damaging thing to do, but to suggest that hon. members within this House are participating in something that is fundamentally sexist is insulting and most certainly imputing false motives, especially, I would say, to the Member for Calgary-Elbow, in whose track record has never been a shred of any form of sexism. To suggest that that's what is going on today by the Premier is parliamentarily out of order, and you, sir, should rule accordingly.

The Speaker: Is there something you'd add, Member for Airdrie?

Mrs. Pitt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly like to add to the discussion and the debate. Perhaps if the gender of the asker and the gender of the receiver were reversed, I think, if womansplaining were to be used in a direct reverse conversation, that would certainly be ruled out of order. That's something to consider in making your ruling because I absolutely think this should be ruled out of order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I learn many words in this place, and I think this is one of them that's on the list that I didn't even know existed before.

To the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, on the recent example that you cite from Australia: I don't have the opportunity in this short period of time – I will, though, look it up.

I think I need to read my ruling before I make a comment. I think I know the way I'll be going, but I want to make sure that I'm in alignment with the decision I made earlier. With that, I would like to come back tomorrow with a decision, if I might.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements House Leaders' Agreements

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you recall, yesterday I indicated during my statement on the rotation of questions that my office received a House leaders' agreement at 1:03 p.m. that day containing proposed Oral Question Period and Members' Statements rotations. I stated yesterday that I would review the proposals, which I have done.

In my statement yesterday, found at pages 1745 and 1746 of *Alberta Hansard*, I also spoke about the question period rotation, and I outlined a rotation that would be implemented today. That rotation, which was distributed yesterday and which I have tabled, will continue to apply, barring any new House leaders' agreement that is fairer to all members.

With respect to the proposed Members' Statements rotation, I accept the House leaders' proposal, and it will be implemented in accordance with Standing Order 7(5), which provides:

Members' Statements shall be allocated in proportion to the number of Members other than members of the Executive Council in each party represented in the Assembly or as agreed to by House Leaders or, failing agreement, as determined by the Speaker.

I note that both parts of the agreement are signed by the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition.

There is a notable absence, however, of any signature from the third party. I performed some research and discovered that a third party has been included in signatures to House leaders' agreements dating back to 1997. These include a signature for the time in April 2001, which the Government House Leader was a signatory to.

I would encourage all House leaders to be involved in future agreements, for those that are designated, and such agreements should include the signatures of each of the House leaders or their designates. I would encourage the two House leaders to do that to at least reflect that there has been genuine consultation.

Before I proceed any further, I want to point out that this rotation differs from the rotation described yesterday. The details respecting the agreement on members' statements are as follows. A three-week rotation will continue. Private members of the government caucus are entitled to three statements each sitting day. The Official Opposition receives three statements every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. They also receive one statement on Thursdays. The third-party opposition will receive a statement on Thursdays of weeks 1 and 3. The one-member caucuses and the independent members each receive one statement per week on a Thursday.

For additional details on the Members' Statements rotation, please consult the revised projected sitting days calendar, which will replace the one distributed yesterday and which will be distributed to all members.

The House leaders' agreement on rotation of Members' Statements will take effect tomorrow, Wednesday, November 8.

I think the Leader of the Official Opposition had a motion.

3:10

Mr. Mason: I had a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Mason: I want to ask you under section 13(2) to explain the reasons for any decision regarding the lack of a signature by the so-called third-party House leader. Considering that when this

agreement was agreed to and signed, there was no third party, much less a third-party House leader, how were we to fulfill your requirement, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You're partially correct. In fact, my office has not been advised that the third group has a House leader, so at this point it's part of the reason why I accepted the statement made by yourselves. I think my intention to the point that you're raising is that there will be at least consultation with the Alberta Party plus, also, the independents on a go-forward basis.

You are correct, though, that I have not been advised that there is a House leader. I'm simply referring to the future, that the chair can be assured that there has been consultation with independents and that the chair is reassured that the interests of the minorities are protected in the House. That's why I've agreed at this time to abide by the agreement that you and the Opposition House Leader signed in the Members' Statement order that you provided to my office.

Mr. Mason: You're abiding by it?

The Speaker: Yes.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Now are we at the Official Opposition with respect to the motion? Please proceed.

Federal Equalization Payment Negotiations

Mr. Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately begin aggressive preparations for the 2018-2019 equalization renegotiations and update the Assembly on those preparations.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me today. This is an urgent issue that needs to be discussed by this House. In the past Alberta was able to get our resources and our products to market, and today that is not the case, which is creating a certain amount of urgency, a significant amount of urgency. I think that most Albertans would agree with me on that fact.

We have a federal government currently that is directly responsible for killing two major pipeline projects. That has a dramatic impact on the country as a whole but, more specifically, on this province, creating a level of urgency to have a discussion on how the equalization process would work. Provincial and municipal politicians love the wealth, Mr. Speaker, from our energy sector but are currently working to block the transport of our energy products.

The opposition and the government in recent days are in agreement on that concern and the urgency to act as a province to be able to make sure that something is done about that. We were happy throughout this week and last week to see the Premier following our lead, leaving the province, and beginning to defend pipelines on that issue.

But when it comes to the equalization formula expiring in 2019, the negotiations need to begin immediately for us to be able to undertake negotiations of that magnitude. For the province and for this current NDP government to continue to delay that process and not have a discussion with this House and to report to Albertans on where we are at on that certainly brings me to the point where I'm rising today to try to pass this simple motion to make it clear that we are going to be moving forward to get ready for those important negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, I can think of no matter more important than this. I think that it would send an extremely good message to the federal

government and to the provinces if we stand united on this in this House to make it clear that what is happening is not acceptable and that if Albertans continue to be treated this way, we will look to renegotiate the equalization formula or we will start to do that as a result of the actions that are taking place.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this Assembly to give this motion support so that we can stand together to stand for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I need to remind you that under Standing Order 42 you're being called upon for unanimous support for an urgent and pressing matter, a necessity, as outlined by the Official Opposition leader.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 21

Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move third reading of Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

Provincial government agencies, boards, and commissions, or ABCs, play a pivotal role in delivering important programs and services to Albertans as well as providing oversight and advice on Alberta issues. We remain committed to continuing the review of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions to identify what is working and what can be improved and what is no longer providing value to Albertans. The ongoing review of agencies, boards, and commissions ensures that ABCs are transparent, accountable, and using public dollars effectively and efficiently. Make no mistake: we will continue to ensure that Albertans continue to be well served and represented.

Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, will enable us to implement dissolutions where legislative amendments are required for 14 agencies, boards, and commissions. This bill is one part of numerous key changes that this government has already undertaken for ABCs such as executive compensation reform, enhanced compensation transparency, an improved online board application process, and greater transparency and diversity on Alberta's public agency boards.

I appreciate the excellent discussion we've had with our fellow hon. members on this bill. Thank you for your work and for your commitment to transparency, efficiency, and value in government. The overall review of agencies, boards, and commissions has resulted in numerous important changes to ensure their ongoing relevance, increase transparency, strengthen fiscal accountability and diversity, and to ensure better value for Albertans. I ask all members now to support Bill 21 in third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka to speak to the bill.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to third reading of Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. We are in support of the

intent of the bill and will vote in support of third reading because I think the intent is good. I totally feel, like we have said before, that occasionally in life, as in government, there needs to be a little bit of housecleaning, and this is an opportunity to do some of that. It needs to happen on a regular basis. We're always in support of anything that examines the ever-growing collection of things that happen in any agency, including government, from policies to regulations to red tape. All these things always just seem to gather in huge piles until we truly do need housecleaning.

Having said that we're in support of it, though, I do have some comments that I think need to be said for the record, some things that are, I think, important and worth noting. First of all, I do want to say that I'm a little bit concerned that the UCP amendment was voted down with regard to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act Practice Review Committee. This is a committee that is important to Albertans. I realize it wasn't used much by Albertans, but the reality is that it wasn't costing anything either when it was not functioning or when it was not being used a lot. The reality is that with the increases in rural populations, increases in acreages, increases in agricultural densities there will and may be significant conflicts that should be reviewed, and there should be a mechanism by which to do that. We are disappointed that that amendment was not supported. The committee is viewed as being valuable by the farming community and should have been considered.

3:20

Secondly, I just want to make the comment that we're still a little bit confused here about the status of phase 3 of this entire ABC review. The phase 3 of this review was to cover postsecondary institutions. It was to talk about the issues of executive compensation, roles and mandates, and governance excellence in postsecondary institutions. What will the government do with that? Where is that review? When will the opportunity to discuss that and the plans be unveiled with regard to postsecondary institutions? This is a part of the conversation that does need to happen.

Thirdly, I would like to say that we really do want to affirm, especially with this government, the principle of at arm's length. This government has a poor track record with ABCs and, as I mentioned earlier, even with government departments and allowing people the permission to function as they should. This is something where it's important to review the governance, but when it comes to the daily operation and the decisions of boards, the government should not be meddling politically in them. They should not be subject to government oversight on a daily kind of basis, as one of the NDP members mentioned during debate. Government oversight of ABCs is directly contradictory to the principle of at arm's length. Accountability is one thing, but interference is a completely different thing. It's a concept that needs to be understood. We've seen that with AIMCo, we've seen that with a number of other departments, and it's concerning because ABCs are to operate at arm's length.

I'd also like to ask, as I asked earlier, the question: where is the evidence? Where is some kind of documentation, some kind of proof, that \$33 million in savings have actually been attained? That is the stated goal of this review. The NDP say that they've saved \$33 million. How do we know that that's truly happened? Is it really in the accounting, or is it just a nice-sounding estimate? Without some sort of actual numbers it looks to me like it might actually be a political puffball for the public. Where the savings actually come from we have yet to see and yet to hear. Are there really \$33 million in savings? I hope so. I will applaud the government if there are, but there's no evidence to that fact so far if it is, in fact, a fact.

Furthermore, I'd like to express some concern about the Alberta Economic Development Authority. One of our members questioned

the wisdom of dissolving this particular authority. This is a government that claims that it wants to promote diversification, that it wants to develop other kinds of industries, yet it hasn't used this authority, this Economic Development Authority. They've let it sort of just sit. This is an opportunity for a group, that previously was very active, to do the kinds of real things in terms of economic development and trade that should be an ongoing reality, quite frankly, no matter which government is in power, but especially for this government because this is the one thing they always want to talk about, yet in reality they're dissolving the very authority that was dedicated to accomplishing what they say are their objectives. So I do have some concerns that they weren't using this authority, that they weren't consulting with them.

I guess I would further like to say in that regard that a number of advisory councils across various departments with this government have not been called into action. I asked in estimates last spring about some of them. There has been no expenditure on them. There has been no calling of them. In other words, the government is continuing the practice of not consulting with stakeholders. We see a government that continually doesn't really care to consult with people. What it does continue to do rather than consult is to continue to take everything in-house. They demonstrate a centralizing, controlling DNA, and they really aren't willing to listen to what stakeholders have to say about much of anything. This bill, in a way, does reflect that ongoing tendency and other advisory councils that haven't even been called upon in the last two years. This is a little bit disturbing, and I want to point it out because I think any government should be listening to the people, should be seeking their input and their understanding. Stakeholders do matter. That's a concern that I have.

Lastly, I just want to say that it is important – and I said this earlier – that stability and confidence are the key drivers in many respects of trust for a government and for economic growth and investment, foreign investment to come into our province. We need to make sure that we have a government that's not just willy-nilly closing things down, shutting them down to align with their ideology, but they're actually doing things that are consulted with constituents, stakeholders that are wise and that are actually creating a stable government.

With that, Mr. Speaker, yes, we will support the bill, but I do have some concerns as I've just expressed. Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 21?

Seeing and hearing none, closure to the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the minister.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, thank you to everyone for their comments and insights into Bill 21. It is an honour to cosponsor this bill, which helps our government to curb unnecessary spending while delivering important services which help make life better for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring the debate to a close. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

Bill 22

Resident and Family Councils Act

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

Mr. Horne: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am very pleased to move third reading of Bill 22, the Resident and Family Councils Act.

I first wish to thank and acknowledge my fellow members on both sides of the House for the constructive debate on this Bill.

The act will support the establishment of resident and family councils in long-term care and supportive living facilities with four or more residents. These councils are an important mechanism for enabling residents and families to present requests, concerns, and proposed solutions to facility operators. They will empower residents to have a say on the issues that affect their facility and the services they receive. Councils will provide an opportunity to strengthen the crucial relationship between facility operators, residents, and their families. In fact, operators have helped to establish councils in over 70 per cent of these facilities already because they are a valuable mechanism for receiving feedback for the residents they serve.

Last week members spoke about the need for this bill after hearing from constituents who felt they did not have the ability to speak to their operators about their concerns and needs. Mr. Speaker, I believe this act will support residents and their families to take an active and engaged role in maintaining and enhancing the quality of life of residents in long-term care and supportive living facilities.

I'd like to once again thank everyone for their comments and support for this bill and to move third reading of Bill 22.

The Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 22? The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand in this House today to support and discuss Bill 22, Resident and Family Councils Act. This bill will be ensuring that residents of long-term and licensed supportive care facilities will have the right to establish self-governing councils.

This legislation would apply to all public, private, and nonprofit long-term care and supportive living facilities. It's going to ensure an avenue for residents and family members to have their voices heard and be able to have a place to discuss their concerns regarding food, services, leisure activities amongst themselves and also with facility operators. Families have long been advocating for a place where they can voice their concerns regarding the care of their loved ones. Seniors and people with disabilities are now going to have a place where they will feel heard and feel more empowered when it comes to their daily lives.

3:30

On that note, Mr. Speaker, the very first constituents that I had come and visit me after I was elected were a family regarding this very issue. It was on the very first day I worked. So I'm very glad to see this come forward now.

Every adult person has a right to participate in their own care and should have a place to voice their views. British Columbia, for example, has the similar Community Care and Assisted Living Act. Their motto is that each person should be able "to participate in the development and implementation of his or her care plan." This is not only vital to ensuring accountability, but it also can increase one's awareness and mental alertness.

Families need to feel that they have the right to participate in either a residential or a family council to represent the interests of their family member, especially if they have been feeling alienated or not feeling heard previously. This can give a sense of security in ensuring that their loved one is being supported and cared for properly.

In British Columbia they even allow an advocate other than a family member who would be willing to participate on their behalf if, for example, due to work or other issues they're unable to attend

the meetings. There are also situations where seniors or people with disabilities may not have family at all or one that lives nearby. An advocate can then participate on their behalf. Having these types of standards and protections in place is vital for the safety of any senior or person with disabilities and also for the accountability of the facility itself.

This bill will give seniors, people with disabilities, and their loved ones a place where there is access to a fair and effective process to express their concerns. I've heard many sad stories of the alienation that a resident and a family can face when they feel that they have no control over their daily lives or that their concerns are not being validated. Sometimes these stories have ended in tragic situations, where the families were feeling that they weren't heard properly and they end up carrying the guilt of not stepping in and removing their loved one.

When these councils are formed, it's going to give a way for a group of seniors or people with disabilities or family members to hear different complaints and find solutions in a unified manner for how to deal properly with the situation. This gives families much more control over situations that were previously unforeseen that could potentially be mitigated. It also gives the family a sense of security in being able to voice their opinions about the day-to-day care that their loved one is receiving or the dietary needs that each resident may have, the quality of food and services that may or may not be available. Individual needs that can be voiced in a safe environment where staff members, other patients, and the facility are being held accountable is a very good idea.

I've heard of situations where there may be issues between tenants that end up being volatile and hurtful. I had just such a one occur last year in my own riding. This will also give those affected a place to be able to talk with others, to perhaps garner the group for solutions to the issues.

I'm happy to hear that the council will be able to meet whenever they need to and that no restrictions have been put in place about the number of times they meet and that facility operators will be required to work with the councils on quality-of-life concerns. Diet, services, and activities play a very important role in the mental health of seniors and persons with disabilities. This bill will ensure that residents will have more say in their quality of life and how their respective homes are run. This is one place where everyone will be able to discuss the operations of the facility and be able to invite one or more persons that work at the facility to join the council and participate.

I do have a couple of concerns, and I'm going to voice them here. I'm concerned, though, that the meeting may become too onerous and that it gives a place and maybe even a right to those who are contentious to gain control and abuse that situation. There needs to be a balance between the rights of the residents and unreasonable demands put on a facility.

I would like to have seen some sort of protocol in place that states that when meetings with the facility are scheduled, schedules be taken into consideration. If the facility operator is expected to document requests, concerns, and proposed solutions, then there has to be some sort of boundary put in place. Things could get rather chaotic. I do wish that some more thought would have been given to this area.

The other question that I have is: who would have access to these records and meeting documents? If the true intent is to bring transparency and allow the residents to be heard, then the members of the council should also have access – full access – to these records.

The other area of concern that I have is that given that the councils are given the right to determine their own governance structure and procedures, what protocols have been put in place to

ensure that this council will be inclusive of all residents? If this is the case, again, in a rare situation, if you have someone dictating order and procedures that wants to control the process and decide who will or will not be on council, there may be more problems. These councils have been legislated to ensure that residents and family members are able to monitor, influence, and improve the care of residents.

Albertans should have a voice in all matters that concern their lives. I'm glad to hear that we are committed to working alongside those with disabilities, seniors, families, and advocates to improve their quality of life, and for these reasons I fully support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak during third reading of Bill 22. I would like to say that I am supportive of this act and the intended purpose of expanding residents' and families' ability to participate in issues related to quality of life. However, I would like to draw attention to some of the language used around people with disabilities.

In my previous life I did manage an organization. Now, I think, they're up to 27 residences or homes in the community for people with disabilities. Although there are many levels of government, whether it's municipal bylaws, provincial legislation, or safety codes, that are intended to keep people safe and increase their quality of life, they sometimes have the opposite effect, and they sometimes create rules and processes that can be onerous for the people living there.

I just want to talk a little bit about why I think it's a little bit dangerous to group people with disabilities living in the community with the other facilities that we're talking about in this legislation. We're talking about social care facilities like nursing homes; we have extended care and things like that. Community living is very different. Community living is about a person with a disability choosing to live in their community in the most normal, average way possible. Very often you see groupings of people with disabilities that are sometimes forced to live together simply because of the cost: the cost of renting a home, the cost of owning a home, but also the cost to the funder of providing staff supports. Often you'll see a little collection of people with disabilities living together, sharing supports so that they can split it sort of 3 to 1 as opposed to 1 to 1.

Community living is a fragile thing. It's as fragile, I believe, as dignity and respect. I think it's important every day to respect the choices of people with disabilities that live in the community, and that means being aware of how many rules and inspections and things we put in their way.

Now, I believe that the intent of this legislation is to create really meaningful, positive processes. As a service provider in my previous life we knew that it was very, very important that the groups of people that live together as well as their families, their guardians, and their staff had a mechanism to come together to meet and to talk about things that were important, things that were important to them, that they identified, and things that were important to us, that we identified.

Of course, I'm sure most of you at some point in your life have lived with roommates. It's not easy. I think sometimes that living with more than one roommate is really quite difficult. Many of the folks we worked with had lived with roommates for many, many years, so sometimes the issues they dealt with were very, very complex.

But we did see changes – really positive changes – when we encouraged and supported those groups to come together and to

address things like staffing ratios, roles of staff, the menu, nutrition, outings, activities, what colour the living room would be painted, whether or not the bathroom needed to be renovated, all kinds of things. It was very useful, but it was also a way for us to work with the folks that live there to teach them that, first and foremost, this was their home. Certainly, their parents or their guardians or other loved ones had a role to play, but they were not the primary decision-makers even though they may have been guardians and they may have legally had the right to help with decisions. What we taught people was independence. It was about expressing their needs and expressing their wants, and I think it was a really great vehicle.

3:40

So I am really encouraged that institutions like nursing homes, like the other facilities we've talked about will be supported to start these committees or these family groups or councils up. It does require quite a bit of support at the beginning until people start to understand what their role and function is, how the minutes are kept, where they're kept, how they follow up, who gets what information.

It was a little bit discouraging last week to hear that people were more worried about the operators. I think that we should always be focused on the people, on Albertans that are living in these facilities, not the operators. First and foremost, their quality of life is the most important thing. Their happiness, their safety, their security: all of those things are so important.

I was encouraged to hear also about the fact that before the regulations are implemented or developed, there will be consultation with other groups. I think it is absolutely vital that people with disabilities are consulted properly and that the correct groups are consulted. It's important to speak to the people that are impacted by this legislation, and it's not all people with disabilities. It's only those homes that fall under SLALA. That's the acronym that stands for Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. Those are only facilities that are in the community or homes in the community that have four or more people living in them.

Now, ideally, a community residence for people with disabilities should not be that large, I think, for real integration within a community. However, that is the reality of a lot of people. That is the cost of living in Alberta. It is very high.

Again I just wanted to remind people what community living is for people with disabilities. It looks very different from an institution, it looks very different from an auxiliary hospital or a nursing home, and the rules should be different. So when we do go out and consult, we have to go out and consult those very people that will be impacted by it.

Thinking about the operators in this sector, I think, is somewhat different. The rules that they live by and the accreditation processes that they go through actually mandate that they look at creating groups like this – they don't call them councils – that assist and support people that are living in those homes to express their desires on, you know, what the menu is or what colour their living room is or not necessarily their staffing ratios but what their staffing schedules are like. It is really, really important to understand that.

I wanted to give you one more example just to leave you with a picture of what it looks like when there are too many regulations in place for a group of people with disabilities living in the community. A few years ago we had one home – actually, it was a pretty big home – but we had four people living there simply because of the cost of living. So those four people, because there were four living in that one home, were required to meet some legislation or some rules and processes under that SLALA legislation. In addition to the accreditation process, where people

will come in and interview them and check that they're doing certain things with their staff – they have a plan in place; they have goals; they have objectives – in addition to the facilitator also doing service audits and staff audits, financial audits, monthly inspections, they were also subjected to other inspections that were triggered with this legislation. That was a health inspection, that was a fire inspection, and often there would be some someone from the city.

They would look at things – because the legislation is very complex and it does apply to facilities like a nursing home, we would get recommendations like: you need to have the menu posted within this many metres of the kitchen; the laundry has to be colour-coded; the people living there can't eat the vegetables that are grown in the garden because of food safety concerns. So you have to understand that to facilitate real community living for people with disabilities, you have to really consult and make sure that they understand what these changes mean to them in real time, in real life.

With that, I wanted to just say that I do support the legislation, but more than anything I support the consultation that will occur before the regulations are ready.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would wish to speak to Bill 22? The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: One moment. For the record does 29(2)(a) apply to the last speaker?

Seeing none, thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As Minister of Seniors and Housing I'm proud to stand in support of this bill, which will make a significant difference in the lives of Alberta seniors and their families. When seniors move into a lodge facility, they bring a wide range of backgrounds, life experiences, and interests with them. Citizens want to see those things become a part of their new residences.

You know, we have over 150 lodges across this province in corners all over our province, and one of the favourite parts of my job is to go to these seniors' lodges and visit with seniors all across our great province. I've certainly met so many. I feel very honoured and thankful. In fact, many of these lodges already have active residents' councils where people do come together and make decisions collectively. This bill, however, will ensure that every lodge will have a place for residents and families to feel safe to speak about their needs and desires.

In addition, seniors are vital, contributing members of their communities, and they're active and involved, and they have so much to offer. Not including them in the decision-making about the facility that they live in doesn't make any sense to me, so I'm so pleased that we are making this very explicit. Seniors have great suggestions, really unique perspectives, and we're much less if we don't, you know, support their contributions wholeheartedly.

As a social worker for many years what really excites me about this bill is the first guiding principle emphasizing that councils shall be person and family centred. These councils offer an important space for bringing issues of inclusion, diversity, and reconciliation into discussions about the care and quality of life. The reason that this is so important is that these facilities are people's homes. Everyone deserves to feel accepted and safe in their home.

One important reason for these councils is to support the LGBTQ seniors. Moving to a new residence should never force seniors to return to the closet, and they should never fear that they have to do so in order to be safe. This summer I had the honour of attending a

celebration in the Ashbourne assisted living facility here in Edmonton. They are the first seniors' community in Canada, here in Edmonton, Alberta, to be affirmed by the United Church as inclusive of seniors of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Ashbourne is boldly leading the way towards inclusivity, diversity, support, and acceptance for Alberta's LGBTQ seniors. The work they have done is exemplary.

Not every facility has been able to put in the same effort, however, and unfortunately that means that there are LGBTQ seniors who feel they are forced to return to the closet. Resident and family councils will ensure that seniors have a place to meaningfully engage with their concerns. The person- and family-centred guiding principle will ensure that that engagement supports the needs of seniors of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This is only one example of the ways that inclusion, diversity, and reconciliation in resident and family councils will help to make life better for Albertans who reside in facilities like seniors' lodges.

You know, not very long ago I was touring a facility in the Calgary area, and one of the things that the residents brought up to me was their concern about the decisions that were made in public spaces, so these are the lounges, maybe where they're having their meals together. They felt that they didn't have any input into those decisions. The chairs were quite large and cumbersome, and it was very difficult for some of the seniors to move them. Something even like that, you know, being able to influence and have people thinking about some of the challenges that the seniors might have – if the chairs are too big and cumbersome, they want to have more independence and be able to move them. Even things like that, them being able to contribute to these councils with their ideas.

3:50

Another thing that they said is that some of the items on display – like, there were display cases sort of in this lounge area. They had no input on what was in those display cases. It can be even as simple as that, but, I mean, still, that's significant. That is where people live.

Certainly, as I've travelled the province, the richness of the local communities is reflected in the lodges, and I would love that to be supported more. Like, you know, I was up in Falher this summer. That's known, of course, as the honey capital of Canada, and they have this very gigantic bee on display in their community, and this is a big part of their culture. There are lots of bee farmers in that area, so that impacts the people in the lodge and the decisions they make, and that's just one sort of local community aspect.

Religious and ethnic communities: they may be eating certain foods, have particular religious practices. The residents do want to be able to have input into that. Right here in Edmonton in my own riding, in Edmonton-Riverview, Canterbury Court serves seniors of all sorts of different backgrounds but through a Christian message of the Anglican Church. People need to have input into those kinds of decisions. It's so important that the seniors who live in these residences feel that they have the input, not only feel but they actually do have the input into making these decisions. You know, when you think of your own home, you have the ability to make decisions about your life there, what you have in your home. You have that freedom, and that shouldn't end when you move into a facility like a lodge.

This bill will give senior residents and their families a voice on those matters and protect their freedom wherever they call home. I have heard this from seniors all over our province, and I'm very thankful to the Minister of Health for hearing Albertans, too. I'm very happy to support Bill 22, and I strongly encourage all members to add their support for the resident and family councils as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other members who wish to speak to Bill 22? Oh, sorry. Under 29(2)(a) to the minister's presentation? No?

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert to close debate.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've heard from both sides of the House how this bill will really help residents in a wide variety of care situations. We've heard from the Member for St. Albert about what this means for the PDD community. We've heard from the Minister of Seniors and Housing, and, you know, we've heard from very many members on this bill about how this really helps to make life better for all Albertans.

With that, I would like to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 25

Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017, for second reading.

The Acting Speaker: You're moving it on behalf of the Minister of Labour?

Mr. Rosendahl: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Rosendahl: Madam Speaker, our forestry professionals do amazing work in our province to ensure the proper management of our forest land. Their work on education, research, conservation, reclamation, protection, renewal, and forest management planning is second to none. I can speak to that personally when we look at the first forest management agreement that was signed between the province and North Western Pulp & Power in 1957. We look at the work that they've done over the years in covering all those things that I just mentioned. It is great. The things that they've done have led the way in the way our forestry is done in the province today, and that's something that we can be very proud of.

Currently there are 1,600 professionals that identify as either a forest technologist or a forester. I'll tell you the difference between the two. A forester has a degree whereas a technologist has a diploma or a certificate. I suppose I might be able to fall into that category, being that I have forestry in my background plus wildlife management on top of that.

Madam Speaker, if passed, Bill 25 will amend the act to merge two regulatory colleges – this is the essence of the act – the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists, into one regulatory organization called the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals. For both organizations these changes are a long time coming. Both colleges asked government to make these changes back in 2014. Membership holders in both organizations voted way in favour, more than 90 per cent, of merging before approaching Alberta Labour to officially request legislative amendments to do so. In fact, both organizations came together in 2015. They have been sharing an office and are already sporting their new name and logo. Put it this way: Bill 25 basically just makes it official.

Alberta Labour has worked closely with both organizations, consulting them regularly on the various proposed changes. In addition, these changes also have the strong support of the Alberta Forest Products Association, the voice for the forest product industry.

You might wonder if the scope of practice for forestry professionals remains the same. What does this merger actually mean? For starters, merging the two organizations into one body would eliminate any confusion around the two organizations that provide the same service, which they do. To make things simpler, the professions' governing regulations would also be consolidated from three to one. This will save both organizations valuable resources in time and money that are being directed at running two organizations, so it's a money-saving issue as well.

4:00

The amendment would also improve administrative and disciplinary processes to be more modern and efficient without sacrificing principles of fairness. Complaints that are levied against the member would move to a central governing committee instead of relying upon a single individual. The number of people on the committee would also increase, which would allow for work to be shared among the members, creating administrative efficiencies. The membership would continue to consist of the many industry professionals but now would also include public members who are residents of Alberta. These public members would add a level of oversight and public accountability that was previously not represented. It's important that we look at that idea.

The amendments would also allow the committee to continue an investigation into a complaint even though, say, a complaint had been withdrawn or even settled. Such an action, when warranted, would allow the committee to conduct further investigations if there are repeated offences by one member, better serving the public interest.

Madam Speaker, by consolidating these organizations into one governing body, there will be a strong and unified voice for our forestry professionals, the creation of one regulatory body removing confusion around two organizations offering the same service and the consolidation of the professions' governing legislation to an act supported by a single regulation as opposed to three current regulations, making things easier for government.

The amendments being proposed were requested by both organizations. They have had opportunity to review the changes, they are supportive, and they are excited to see this get done. As such, I ask all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act. Now, this act governs both the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists. These two organizations act as the professional regulatory organizations for the governance of professional foresters and professional forest technologists. The biggest difference between these two organizations is education. Foresters have a degree, and technologists have a diploma or a certificate.

The bill proposes a number of amendments to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act in order to implement the merger of the two professional bodies and create a single organization called the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals. This

merger of organizations began with a memorandum of understanding back in 2013. In June 2014 both memberships voted overwhelmingly to proceed with a proposed merger. In fact, more than 80 per cent of foresters and 90 per cent of forest technologists who participated in the vote chose to vote in favour of the merger and changes to the act. This unification has been the culmination of years of dedicated work between these two organizations.

Consultation and approval were sought from both colleges' members prior to them approaching the Department of Labour and asking for the changes. This unity of organizations has already gone past the proposal level, and not only have these two entities reaffirmed this proposal year after year; they've already made inroads in combining several aspects of their organizations. These two organizations have been holding joint annual general meetings for the last several years. Additionally, they have also combined some administrative functions such as shared office space and organizational newsletters.

These groups have been very proactive with proceeding with the merger of the organizations. All that's needed is the change in legislation to allow for the formal merger of their professional organizations. Notification letters have already been sent to partners, which include the professional regulatory organizations and associations, postsecondary institutions, municipal stakeholders, government of Alberta ministries, provincial and territorial governments, and other forestry groups. This kind of notification gave all those parties lots of time to see that there was an intention to amend the act, and the fact is that none have come forward with concerns.

Should this legislation pass, these two entities, with a combined membership of 1,600, will now not only become one professional college and eliminate the confusion that goes with two similar organizations but will save costs associated with running separate organizations as well. Imagine that, Madam Speaker. An organization that finds ways to eliminate duplication services while actually saving money and becoming more efficient, a lesson that all governments could probably perhaps pay more than a casual glance.

But what about services and job losses? According to information we received, as these groups have been operating for one entity for some time, it is clear that no job losses are anticipated. Additionally, there will be no cost to the government as all expenses are incurred by the colleges, a win-win type of situation, for sure.

These proposed amendments would also improve the administrative and disciplinary process, modernizing it into a more efficient body, all the while without sacrificing the goal of fairness. The fact is that complaints levied against the member would now be moved to a central governing committee instead of relying upon a single individual. This can only increase the level of accountability and fairness. By increasing the number of people on the committee, it would therefore increase effectiveness by allowing work to be shared among members, thus creating administrative efficiency. Membership would continue to be made up of many industry professionals but now would also include public members from Alberta. These members would add a level of public oversight and accountability that the separate organizations simply don't have.

In a set-up similar to the Chartered Professional Accountants Act these proposed amendments would allow this new committee to continue an investigation into a complaint even though the complaint has been withdrawn or settled. Should such an action occur, when warranted, the committee could continue to conduct further investigations if there are repeated offences by one member, for example. This is not only in the public's best interests but helps ensure a fair and transparent process.

Madam Speaker, in Canada, of all of the provinces that regulate foresters and forest technologists, only Quebec continues to regulate through two separate organizations. These changes are clearly in line with what the two organizations have asked for and will bring us on par with other jurisdictions in Canada. With approval rates by the vast majority of both parties, a series of yearly reaffirmation votes, and an already high level of organizational interaction and co-operation, passing this act seems to me on the face as a no-brainer. When that many of a membership vote for a merger, who are we to stand in the way of democracy? Why, I haven't seen this level of co-operation among like-minded memberships that voted overwhelmingly in favour of unity since, well, July 22.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I plan to support this bill and what it will accomplish and encourage the members of the Assembly to do the same. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

4:10

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am proud to speak to you and through you to all of my fellow members in the House today to Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, 2014 saw both the College of Alberta Professional Foresters as well as the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists come together to consolidate both colleges after members voted in favour of a merger, with an overwhelming 90 per cent support. The consolidation of both colleges would ensure not only support of a strong and unified voice for our province's forestry professionals but as well efficiencies that will save the organizations time and money.

The forestry professionals who ensure the very important work of the proper management of our forest land are absolutely second to none. Some of the important work the forestry professionals provide is in research, conservation, reclamation, protection, renewal, forestry management as well as education. I would like to extend gratitude to all of our forestry professionals for making life better for all Albertans today and into the future.

Madam Speaker, 2015 saw both the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists merge into one regulatory organization, the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals. For the past two years they have been sharing office space under their new name and logo. Both organizations have worked closely with the Ministry of Labour, and Bill 25, Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, would ensure that the very important work of the regulatory organizations continues for the well-being, safety, and public interest of all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, the amendments proposed were requested by both organizations, and by merging these organizations into one, it will remove any marketplace confusion around two organizations offering the same outstanding services. At this time I would like to encourage all in the House to support the amendments, which would create a single regulatory entity for our forest professionals.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate on behalf of the hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, I thank all the members who spoke on this important bill. With that, I move to close debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

Bill 23

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017

[Adjourned debate November 7: Mr. Westhead]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane to close debate.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've had a great discussion on this bill, and I'm happy to get to a vote.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

[Adjourned debate November 7: Ms Ganley]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 24? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. As I rise to speak about this bill, I want to acknowledge the leadership of my fellow LGBTQ-plus MLAs, members of the LGBTQ-plus community, their parents and allies in ensuring that our schools are a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn for all students and members of the staff. I also want to acknowledge the pain, exclusion, and vicious comments that members of the LGBTQ-plus community have endured in our schools and communities.

The reason that GSAs in our schools have been successful and have been established is because of the leadership of the students who have advocated, worked for, and ensured that objections to their establishment were overturned. Thank you to the student leaders, their sponsors, teachers, and supportive administration that worked together to create the safe, supportive spaces that GSAs are. Thank you, too, to allies such as altView, la Fédération de la jeunesse albertaine, and ISMSS, who have supported the students and helped in providing materials and education within our schools.

Another group that has made the presence of GSAs in our schools supportive has been parents, parents who have sought information, supported groups, marched in pride parades, walked with their children in their development, and provided love and support throughout that path.

One such parent who has really impressed me is Lindsay Peace, the mother of Ace Peace, who spoke at the press conference announcing Bill 24. Ms Peace said:

As a parent I understand that I want to know what my kids are doing. I want to know who they are hanging out with, what activities they are engaging in. I want to know the decisions they

are making. Because it's important to me, I talk to them. I ask them. Over all else, I create and maintain an open dialogue with them and a sense of safety and security. If for some reason one of my children didn't feel that they could come to me with anything, then I believe that is a reflection on me. That's my bad, and I would need to look at doing things differently.

In the meantime I would be grateful if they felt that they could turn to a teacher. The more folks who support my kids and are committed to their health and well-being can only be a positive thing. Also, I think it's important to point out that it's not an either/or situation. Ultimately, I believe that we are working together, parents and educators.

When it comes to GSAs, specifically to the outing of students, I think that there is a misunderstanding that means that parents will never find out, that this will be some sort of dirty little secret between the student and the school forever. I have heard dozens of accounts from families in which it was teachers who helped their students disclose their queer identity to their families. I know a former student whose teacher helped him write a letter to his parents to tell them he was trans. I know many kids who are queer who spent a long time at their GSA until they became confident enough in themselves to have a conversation with their parents.

I also know that GSAs teach allies how to be better allies, how to be better people. I know that kids learn a greater understanding of the adversity faced by their peers and learn compassion. GSAs allow students an opportunity to be a part of creating positive change. Although I do know as a parent how great it is to hear that our kids are wonderful and doing amazing things, I certainly don't believe that anyone needs to be outed for doing so.

I really want to thank Ms Lindsay Peace and other parents who have loved and continue to love their kids unconditionally and have established an open dialogue.

4:20

I want to address the whole issue of parental authority and responsibility and decision-making for their children. Children are a gift, and as parents we want all the best for our children. We want to save them from hardships, pain, rejection, and isolation. We as parents demonstrate through our actions and through our words the values and ethics that we hold.

I wanted to tell you a little bit about those values that parents have. I'm sure that as parents we have all been in a situation where we find that our kids take our dinner conversation and repeat that to their friends, right? I think that's how parents influence their children. We instill in our children a sense of their heritage, the community that they are a part of, and our hopes for their future.

Our role as parents is to support and empower our students so that our students, our children make the best choices that they believe are best for them, make the choices that they have explored based on their interests, be it their careers, friends, sexual identity, gender expression. We can help and guide them by supporting and by getting information, talking to other adults. We cannot make the choice for them. Our children are not our possessions. We have to as parents believe in their ability to move towards adulthood and choice-making.

The bill does not lessen parental authority. Bill 24 does not lessen parental authority. Parental authority comes from the dialogue and openness we have with our children, that have been gifted to us. It is our role to provide our children with a safe place, an open conversation, and a supportive home.

Now I want to address my friends in the faith community, particularly in the evangelical spectrum. As a member of that community I understand the difficulty to address social justice issues in our community and the changing values. I still remember when in

churches men wore suits and ties and women wore skirts. It is rare now to see men in suits and ties in the churches, and even preachers wear casual clothes.

Not long ago single moms were pariahs in our congregation, shunned, prevented from leadership positions, and impeded within our churches and society. This has changed.

Not long ago divorce was frowned upon, actively discouraged even in abusive situations, and divorcees were prevented from remarriage or leadership roles within our church.

Women have long been prevented from leadership in most church communities as preachers, pastors, and on the board of elders. While this is changing, there are still too many places where gifted women are prevented from exercising their God-given gifts.

I could also mention how churches haven't been very good around accepting the poor and the homeless on Sunday morning.

It was also not too long ago that our churches supported slavery, segregation, and apartheid. It took courageous, prophetic leaders to actively call the Christian community to account for their role in supporting apartheid and segregation. We all know the names of Dr. Martin Luther King, Bishop Tutu, Father Berrigan, among others.

Other courageous, prophetic leaders are now calling for the church to stop the exclusion of the LGBTQ-plus community. One of these leaders is Tony Campolo, well known for his books, preaching ministry, social justice activism, and as a professor at a well-known evangelical seminary. Dr. Campolo said:

One reason I am changing my position on [LGBTQ acceptance in the church is that] . . . as a social scientist, I have concluded that sexual orientation is almost never a choice and I have seen how damaging it can be to try to "cure" someone from being gay. As a Christian, my responsibility is not to condemn or reject gay people, but rather to love and embrace them and to endeavor to draw them into the fellowship of the Church.

And for them to be married, too, he adds.

When we sing the old invitation hymn, *Just As I Am*, I want us to mean it, and I want my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters to know it is true for them too.

So if Dr. Campolo provides this kind of leadership, I think it's really time here in Alberta that we accept this. There are many others who, like Dr. Campolo, have prayed, read, and engaged in conversations and soul-searching to bring them to the place of full acceptance of the LGBTQ-plus community.

I would like to encourage members of the faith community who are reluctant to explore full acceptance of the LGBTQ-plus community to prayerfully consider their theological perspective on this issue and their reluctance to support this bill. Bill 24 does not negate parental love, acceptance, and the supportive guidance role of a parent. It does not give the government or schools authority over our children, as members opposite have claimed. All it does is to confirm that our young people have the right to attend any club activity under the jurisdiction of their school that they choose to without being outed to their parents. It is also clear that sponsoring teachers, principals will exercise their duties under the teaching profession to ensure the safety of students under their care and, in the case of potential harm to the student or to others, contact parents and the relevant other professionals.

Participating in a GSA is not a discipline issue, where teachers and principals contact parents and guardians and discuss potential consequences of the action. I still remember the time when I was called by one of my son's principals and told that he had lit firecrackers in a garbage can and about the consequences of his expulsion. Participating in a GSA should be viewed as a regular club at school that provides a safe place for students to participate in activities, explore their sexual identity, and get support for how

they may possibly disclose their exploration to the significant adults in their lives in their own time and in their own way.

As a parent we often do not agree with or understand the choices our kids make such as what they eat – such as my kid and no veggies – how they spend their money, what they decide to study, whom they choose to date. Some parents might not agree with their child participating in a chess club, a sewing club, or the theatre, but sponsor teachers in these clubs do not phone parents and tell them their child is involved. A club does not teach curriculum. This is why it's called extracurricular. It provides a fun place for students to pursue their passion and share that passion with others, including the adult teachers involved.

I am also pleased that the bill clarifies the role of the principal and his power in authorizing a GSA or a club. Students seeking to start a club need to have clear information as to who can support the establishment of the club, who they can go to to find a room, a sponsor teacher, and administrative support. They don't need to have the runaround in trying to figure out who can give the authority.

I am also pleased that the bill clarifies that the establishment of a GSA, from section 45.1 of the act, applies to all schools who have public funding. This will ensure that every single school in Alberta that receives public dollars has a policy that clearly allows students to form a gay-straight alliance and makes that policy publicly available.

The minister has also clarified that section 50.1 of the School Act, which currently states that parents may be notified of instructional time that focuses on topics related to religion and human sexuality, does not apply to GSAs. Parents can continue to choose that they're pulled from these curriculum lessons but not GSAs.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to urge all members of this House to think of this bill in supporting young people in our schools and communities by providing them a safe place to discuss their sexuality. I know that if GSAs had been in my sons' schools, I would not have been upset if they had participated in GSAs, and I would have encouraged it. This is not a bill that removes parental authority. It is not a bill that is not respectful of persons of faith. It is just a bill that clarifies school authorities' roles and responsibilities and ensures that students are the ones that decide who they tell, in their own time and in their own way, about their sexuality.

As a parent I have been blessed with the gift of two boys who were named to remind me of God's gift. I am so thankful to be part of a government that has done so much to strengthen support for the LGBTQ-plus students in the province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 24, and I want to thank my hon. colleague the Minister of Education for bringing this legislation forward.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, are you speaking under 29(2)(a), questions or comments?

Miranda: No. It's not a question. Sorry.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry, Minister.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by the hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

4:30

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. Before I begin, I think it's absolutely necessary to correct some misinformation that has been circulating with respect to the United Conservatives, our position on this bill, and GSAs in general. To be perfectly clear, we fully support GSAs and believe that they are an important tool to support students who may be going through a difficult time. In other words, we know that GSAs can and have saved lives. In fact, Bill 10, the legislation protecting students' rights to form a GSA, was passed in this House with unanimous support from both of the UCP's legacy caucuses' members. Suggestions that the UCP is not in favour of GSAs are offensive and quite simply false. The buck stops here today.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, the United Conservatives do not support the mandatory notification of parents regarding their children's involvement in GSAs, nor have we ever suggested that gay kids be outed to their parents or to anyone else, for that matter.

It must be said that attempts by the government to equate a vote against this legislation with a vote against GSAs, LGBTQ kids, or the LGBTQ community are particularly shameful. It's shameful because such false equivalencies are just that. They are false. It's also shameful because once again we see that the NDP are using children and youth as pawns in a political game. Not only that, Madam Speaker, many of these kids are vulnerable, and they're at risk. Do you think it benefits them in any way to turn on the TV and the news or open a newspaper and see members of the NDP falsely claim that United Conservatives want to hurt them and would delight in doing so?

I can assure you that this is overblown and completely misleading rhetoric, and it isn't good for anyone, least of all the kids that this legislation is attempting to help. I would encourage the members opposite to raise the bar a little and argue their case based on the merits of the legislation rather than using fearmongering, personal smears, and outright lies.

Madam Speaker, we do not take any piece of proposed legislation lightly.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I believe the Government House Leader has a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: I wish to rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker. The citation could be any number of things, but 23(h), (i), and (j) will do. The hon. member has just suggested that members of our government and our caucus have lied with respect to the position of the UCP with regard to their position on GSAs. That is a clear violation of the rules. Moreover, it is not true, so I would ask that you rule and that the hon. member withdraw the comment and apologize to the House.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Obviously, none of us have the Blues, but I believe the hon. member was reading off text, so I'll do my best to read it back to you: do you think it any way benefits them to turn on the news or the newspaper "and see members of the NDP falsely claim that United Conservatives want to hurt them and would delight in doing so?"

Well, I think we heard, just before the noon break, a member from the government side actually say those things, and the whole point of this paragraph is to point out that that's incorrect. That's

not how we feel about it. We might have a difference of opinion here, but surely we have not only the right but the responsibility to correct the record when we've had false motives applied to us, and that falls under 23(h), (i), and (j), too.

I believe there's no point of order here. I think the Government House Leader might be a little embarrassed by the remarks of his member, but his member's remarks actually require us to correct the record.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, it is not unparliamentary to criticize statements as being contrary to the facts, which is what I believe the hon. member was saying.

Mr. Mason: She said "lie."

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, I don't have the Blues in front of me at this time, and I didn't hear that.

At this point I will say that it's a debate around the facts. However, I would like to caution both sides of the House at this time.

Hon. member, would you like to correct your comments?

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, I do apologize. The word "lie" was used in the sentence that I read. I certainly do apologize, and I will withdraw that comment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Please continue.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, the United Conservative caucus does not take any piece of proposed legislation lightly. We carefully review it, we ask questions, and we wonder if it can be improved. We also look at each piece of legislation with an eye to determining if it has forged the right balance for Albertans of differing views.

This, then, is where we find ourselves when we look at Bill 24. When we look at the bill before us, it's interesting to note that the bill that first addressed GSAs was passed by this House in 2015, two years ago, so it is natural to ask why we are looking at updating the provisions today. When Bill 10 was reviewed and debated in the House just a few years ago, the NDP was in opposition at the time, and it did not propose the kinds of amendments that we are seeing come forward here in Bill 24 today. So why introduce them now?

This NDP government has had control over the legislative agenda for two and a half years. It could have brought this bill forward any time during that period, but they never took the opportunity to do so. It is most curious, Madam Speaker. This government first started talking about this bill just a short month ago. Prior to that, not a single word. There was no push from outside of this province either as far as other provinces updating their legislation. No one else is doing this, not even Ontario. In fact, there does not appear to be any similar legislation anywhere in Canada.

It is possible, Madam Speaker, that the NDP has decided to introduce this legislation now for political reasons. It could be. If that is the motive, this is a major concern because, as I mentioned earlier, it means that the NDP government is attempting to use children as political pawns to distract Albertans from the real issues, the NDP's incredibly poor handling of the economy. We know that public support for them is falling, and we know that Albertans continue to suffer from their fiscal policies, fiscal policies that will, by the way, put us \$90 billion in debt in just a few short years. Imagine that: Alberta, once the envy of the G-8, in desperate financial mire.

Then, like a magician using a sleight of hand, they bring forward legislation that will divert attention from the main issues that all Albertans are concerned about. What is that issue? It's quite simple. Will I keep my job, or will it disappear? Will my child get a job when they graduate next year? How will I pay the bills if I lose my job? Do you see a common thread here? Albertans are concerned about everyday, real-life issues, and that is why they want their government to focus on them.

But this bill is before us, and like the good legislators that we are, we will do our jobs. We will look at it with an eye to determining if it truly reflects Albertans and if it accomplishes what it seeks to do.

There are some issues in Bill 24 that are worth highlighting. Let me say again that peer supports, antibullying groups such as GSAs can and do play an important role in our province. Our society in just a few short years has come a long way in recognizing that we all have a responsibility to deal with bullying.

4:40

As legislators we have a great responsibility to protect our children, all children. We must, however, be careful that we do not use our positions to put up barriers for loving parents who want and need to play important roles in protecting their children. What could be more natural than parents wanting to be involved with their children? What?

Being a parent is not an easy job – I know – and it often gets harder as children grow into teenagers. Schools seek to keep parents involved with their children because they know it is a challenging time for them, and the students need all the support that is available to them. That is why we have professional educators who not only teach; they can act as valued counsellors for children, and they care. They really do. Which one of us can't think back to a teacher who took a special interest in us to help us through a difficult time? These teachers also forge relationships with parents because they know that involvement is important for both the child and the parent.

That brings me to another concern with Bill 24. You see, it prevents teachers, principals, and counsellors from involving parents when their child is experiencing difficulties. This part of the bill is worth a full public discussion. Parents should be aware of it and have the ability to weigh in. Remember when I said that it is the job of legislators to find a balance? This is one of those times.

Another aspect of this bill that is problematic is that it makes no distinction between a five-year-old child and one who is 17. Parents need to understand that this law would treat the decisions of a five-year-old the same as a teenager. Surely this kind of approach is worth full public discussion. We need to understand why it's been included and adjust it if parents disagree with it. Why should we as politicians make decisions that are best left to parents and trusted educators?

The third concern is that the bill proposes that section 50.1(1), which ensures that a school receives parental consent before teaching sexual content, will no longer apply to extracurricular activities. It's a new change. In other words, subjects that cannot be taught during school hours without parental permission could be taught after school and without their knowledge.

As you can see, we are concerned that politicians do not overreach on Bill 24. We need to involve parents and educators and young people in this full public discussion. That is the best way of creating legislation, legislation that works for all Albertans. Please consider my words today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to – oh, 29(2)(a). My apologies. Comments or questions?

Seeing none, I will now call on the Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 24. I want to of course thank my hon. colleague the Minister of Education for bringing this legislation forward. I admit that I am not entirely happy to debate this issue because I had thought that the days where the debate was permeated by misguided opinions about the LGBTQ community were a thing of the past, but here we are.

Now, admittedly, we have come a long way when it comes to treating all Albertans with respect regardless of their gender identity or gender expression. In my Ministry of Culture and Tourism, for example, we have made huge strides. We are growing LGBTQ tourism and promoting the province's destinations and attractions to LGBTQ travellers. I've also had the opportunity to represent Alberta at the LGBTQ-plus Service Providers' Summit in Ottawa. And, of course, we continue to openly and proudly raise the pride and transgender flags every year at government buildings to celebrate LGBTQ rights, inclusion, and acceptance, inviting students to attend as well. We do this because visibility matters, and it is an important part of progress. Our voices help to celebrate our successes, our diversity, and also highlight the continued challenges faced by our community.

Progress is indeed something that we should celebrate; however, we must also recognize that outdated views still exist in our province. You don't have to look very far or too hard to find those who are unable to make up their minds as to whether outing gay kids is okay. To be clear, it is never okay.

Personally, I wish there had been a Minister of Education around when I was in school because I think my school years would have been a lot easier. With the sense of isolation that is created within you when you are struggling with many, many issues that are coming to the forefront, having to suffer in silence and not feeling like you actually have anybody who could understand you, finding somebody who could actually just listen without any judgment is something that I think all of us pray for. Personally, I can attest to many, many days and nights where I struggled and looked for people who would give me that support and allow me to be able to express the many things that were going on in my mind.

Quite frankly, I think that having a GSA when I was growing up would have made my life so much easier, so today I stand here very proudly to see that this government is taking steps to ensure that that happens for students in our province. Every student deserves to have a school that is welcoming and caring and a safe place to learn. Gay-straight alliances help students, and in some cases GSAs can help save lives. This legislation, if passed, will strengthen the supports for students who wish to create or join a gay-straight alliance in their schools.

It is also worth noting that this danger is compounded for kids who are also new immigrants. You can imagine that this is something that I take very close to home for me, because being an immigrant is challenging. Not only do you have to adapt to a new way of life and how to fit into your new home, as an LGBTQ newcomer you also have to deal with the issues of gender identity and gender expression, that compound that experience. Of course, coming to a new country, often with limited grasp of language and having to adjust to a new culture, is emotionally, physically, and spiritually very taxing. It is a trauma that has a lasting impact, especially with somebody who is struggling to come to terms with that sexuality.

Coming out is not an easy experience for many. Most of us struggle for many years because a closet is a very lonely and awful place to be. Madam Speaker, you might be familiar with the online campaign *It Gets Better*, with videos from members of the LGBTQ community telling teens who are in school who are suffering not to lose hope because things get better after, of course, coming into a community, perhaps graduating and going on to adulthood. The thing is that as much as I like that message and as much as I see the importance of it, my question remains: why should you have to wait until you leave school for things to get better? Why do you have to struggle in silence? Quite frankly, there is no need for that.

Being different should be celebrated, but instead you face constant threats, threats like being outed before you are ready, exposing you to all kinds of pressures, all kinds of issues. There are dangers. As you know, we've talked about the issue of the increased risk for homelessness, things that deal with mental health and self-harm. All of these things are elevated in this community. Of course, it's not exclusive to it, but these are the things that this community has to deal with. All of these threats, including the threat of physical violence, are the things that this community and these kids have to deal with. Why not give them the space to have those discussions? Why not surround them with people who will love and support them and give them the strength to be able to face their days not only with pride but also with a sense of belonging and being part of a community that is there to support them?

GSAs, in fact, offer students a safe place to simply be themselves and be surrounded by those who will care for them on a daily basis. Now, as a parent I would wish nothing less for my kids. Who would not want their kids to have peers around them who will help them to grow up in every possible way and look out for them? What parent wouldn't be proud to see that their kid is the kind of person who stands up for their friends and who would join a GSA to look after their LGBTQ friends and stand up for them? I certainly would be among those people, and I think many people in Alberta would as well.

4:50

Now, I remember how things used to be in this province. I have the added right of being the oldest among the three of us LGBTQ MLAs in this Legislature, and I do remember things about this province, growing up as an LGBTQ person, that were not always pleasant. I remember not having experiences but having heard from those who were in the first pride parades, for example, having to wear paper bags over their faces because they knew that if they were out in a photograph and people found out who they were, they could potentially not only face violence but lose their jobs, lose their homes, and perhaps even additional consequences, all of which meant that they just couldn't be themselves.

It's not the kind of province that I want to go back to. That's not the kind of province I want my kids to grow up in. Having this legislation in place will ensure that when we go forward, every single child in this province can feel safe and secure in the knowledge that they can join a GSA in their schools and that they're going to find people in those schools who are going to support them and give them all the tools that they need to be able to not just thrive but succeed in every aspect of their life.

Now, as a member of the LGBTQ community I can tell you and all of the members here that it's simply not enough to show up, or perhaps not, in some cases, at pride parades wearing rainbow T-shirts to get your picture taken and put it out on social media. It's simply, quite frankly, not enough, for example, to go to wonderful places like Grande Prairie Pride and celebrate, and it's not enough to show up at the pride Shabbat dinner at Temple B'nai Tikvah in Calgary to break bread with the community and profess to

supporting the community. These gestures are simply not enough if you do not come to this Legislature to stand up and defend those same principles of inclusion and diversity that you seem to profess. Without those actions, those gestures are simply hollow and without any meaning whatsoever.

That is why I'm here today, to say to the LGBTQ community of our province: you matter, you are loved, and your diversity is embraced by this government. I am here to say to the students of our province that you will not be outed before you are ready because every single one of the members of this government is going to ensure that that does not happen to you. That's why I'm here supporting this legislation. It lays out the clear steps that must be taken to provide safe and caring places to learn for all students regardless of their gender identity or gender expression. I am proud to work in a government that is doing that, that is going to strengthen the supports for LGBTQ students in our province, every day making their lives better. I'm here to support legislation that will protect our students and ensure that they have safe, caring, welcoming, and loving places for them to simply learn, grow, and thrive.

I thank you all and ask you all to vote in favour of this legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the minister for such an impassioned speech. I really appreciate it.

One of the things I wanted to comment on – and I do have a question for the minister – is that my daughter is in grade 11, and my daughter is part of the GSA at her school. The way I found out that my daughter is part of that GSA is the same way that I found out my daughter is part of the Harry Potter club. She told me. She came to me as a parent, and she let me know that she wanted to be there to support her friends and be part of that group because she wants that safe and inclusive environment. So my question to the minister becomes: what would that have meant to you as a child growing up in your school to have friends who could meet you and be part of this environment with you?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, and thank you, Member, for the question. I think that for me it would have meant having had less time hiding and figuring out ways to avoid facing a schoolyard that wasn't the friendliest of places to be, with people not necessarily being nice to you, and spending more time learning and more time growing as a person. I think it would have given me the opportunity to simply thrive in different ways. I didn't have the opportunity to do that, unfortunately. Quite frankly, there are some of us who have never hidden who we are, and sometimes those kinds of things created situations in which you were, you know, bullied for many, many reasons. I think that having had a club like this would have meant that I would have been in a safe environment where I would have been able to just simply learn, thrive, and grow as a person. I think it would have been a magical experience, similar to the Harry Potter club perhaps, because it simply would have been nothing that would have created any sense of shame. It wouldn't have been anything that would have created any sense of isolation. It would have simply been just like any other club, something that would have allowed me to experience and be with peers that just wanted to hang out with me and be friends with me. So it would have meant a lot.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to enthusiastically, loudly, and proudly support Bill 24. That shouldn't be all that difficult in 2017, to stand up for a bill that does nothing more than protect fundamental human rights, the fundamental human rights of students in this province to live the lives that they were born to live, to live the lives they choose to live, and to do so in safety.

One of the points of discussion and debate on this bill has been whether we should trust parents to do the right thing, whether we should trust teachers to make the right assessments of safety and danger to children in schools. The vast, vast, vast majority of parents in our province are loving, caring, responsible parents, but this bill protects children who, unfortunately, don't have those parents. That's not a lot, but it's a lot more than zero. How do we know who those parents are? We don't know that, and while I have tremendous, tremendous respect for Alberta's teachers, it is not within their purview to make that determination. They can't always know what's happening at home. I don't think any teacher can say that they always know what's happening at home, so there is tremendous risk to LGBTQ2S-plus students in this province if they are outed without their permission.

This is about fundamental human rights, as I've said. What GSAs do is create a welcoming, caring, respectful, safe, inclusive environment for all students. There's very clear research that shows that LGBTQ students are more likely to feel safe and are more comfortable about being open in their sexual orientation, exploring gender identity and gender expression, in schools with GSAs or QSAs because they provide that place to create a sense of belonging. That, again, shouldn't be a tremendously controversial statement. Like for the Member for Stony Plain, my daughter is a member of a GSA. I know that because she told me in her time, in her way, that that was important to her, to be an ally, to explore who she is in this world. We are able to have that conversation – I'm getting a tiny bit emotional – because that's the relationship we have, and I cherish that more than I can express in words.

I think that's the situation for the vast majority of children, and that's a wonderful, wonderful thing. But that's not the situation for all children. The risks are clear. Between 25 and 40 per cent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ. That is a shocking and sobering and frightening statistic. GSAs help those students, ensure that they have a chance at a better education because they are focused on their studies, not focused on what might happen at home should someone out them without their permission. It has a tremendous positive impact on their academic performance. They have higher self-esteem, greater school achievement, improved attendance, increased sense of empowerment and hope. They make new friendships. They have improved home and school relationships. They're more comfortable being visible as LGBTQ or allies. They have reduced their stress due to hiding one's identity, increased confidence, and enhanced sense of pride.

5:00

Madam Speaker, this is the lived reality of members of this Assembly, and I want to recognize and honour those members of this Assembly who shared that lived experience with us. It takes a tremendous amount of bravery to do that, and I just want them to know that I believe very much that the positive impact they've had on our community hasn't gone unnoticed. Who knows what's going to happen in the next election? Who knows what's going to happen next week? We have no idea. But I know and I want those members to know that the impact that they've had on our community, on

LGBTQ youth in particular, is tremendously positive. It's a remarkable, wonderful legacy of their time as members. Long may it continue, but know that you have made a tremendous contribution.

I do want to make some comments about some of the words I've heard in opposition to this bill, which, again, I find mind boggling, that we would actually in 2017 even be debating such a thing, but here we are. There have been mentions by the hon. Education critic for the UCP that in his time as a teacher he would have interesting and challenging discussions about basketball with the students' parents or perhaps appropriate dress, hats and T-shirts and such. It stuns me to think that that's somehow comparable to gender identity and the struggles that a teenager may be having. That's chalk and cheese. Those are completely, utterly different things. There's not much risk that a child is going to be kicked out of the home for their love of basketball. That's a completely, completely different thing.

You know, just earlier today the Member for Airdrie talked about the economic impact that we as legislators ought to be dealing with, the challenging job situation, debt and deficit issues that are facing our province, and those are very important issues. Undeniably, they're very important issues. But surely to goodness this Legislature should be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. These things are not mutually exclusive. It's not that we can't address the human side and the economic side at the same time.

But if we'd like to address the economic side through GSAs, why don't we do that? In British Columbia there's research that found that gay-straight alliance clubs save a school as much as \$70,000 a year in health-related costs and prevent as many as seven suicide attempts. That's just remarkable. The human impact of a GSA is well known. We know that. There's also an economic impact. There's absolutely no reason not to support this bill.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion to my brief remarks here at second reading, it is silly to suggest that this bill is only a political wedge, a political ploy. It is a bill that fulfills what the Alberta Party has been calling for. It protects some of the most vulnerable students in our society who need our help and protection. It shouldn't be that difficult in 2017 to say that it's not okay to discriminate against LGBTQ2S-plus children.

By the way, there is such a thing as teenagers who are LGBTQ. That's a fact. That's a fundamental, simple fact, and some of those students are at risk. The job of us in this Assembly as legislators is to protect those who are at risk. That is our job. We have a very simple job in this case before us because the bill, I think, does a very, very good job of it. All people, all students deserve that respect. They deserve that protection. They deserve us to pass Bill 24.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a), comments or questions?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 24, and I want to talk a little bit about why I support this bill.

I grew up in rural Alberta. I went to high school a little over 20 years ago. I know that I don't look it, but it's true. Here's the thing, Madam Speaker. The first place I ever met a gay person was through church. The Anglican Church taught me as a teenager that an open-hearted expression of faith recognizes that our human spirit can only be fulfilled by honouring our love for one another. It is a part of our community, but I learned very young that it's also part

of our individual liberty and our individual agency to make our own way in this world as we become who we are, through that process, when we're youth and when we're teenagers.

I want to thank the Anglican Church of Canada, who taught me that foundational lesson, and I want to say that explicitly because I did not learn that lesson in school. I think my school environment can only be really described as aggressively homophobic, Madam Speaker. There was fighting. There was partying. There was exclusion. There was bullying. This was, you know, 20 or 25 years ago, and many of my colleagues who are my age identify with that. They remember that that was what school was like for so many kids. Things have changed a lot but not everywhere and not for everyone.

From my high school experience, I remember that anyone who didn't fit in did not have a good time at school, and they did not get to learn like I did. They did not have the same privileges as those of us who were allies to LGBT or queer youth. They just didn't, and you could see it. You could see it every day. Suicide, attempted suicide swirled around us as teenagers. I remember that keeping an eye on our friends was normal, grasping around for help for some of our friends who were at risk, who were vulnerable youth, trying to find counsellors or get a plan.

This was also at the time of the early '90s with a bunch of Education cutbacks, Madam Speaker. I remember as a 16-year-old trying to help my friends. I don't know how much easier that work would have been with a peer-to-peer support group that I and my friends could have joined. I'm going to imagine that it would have been a lot easier. But trying to put together a plan and muddle your way through those difficult questions as a 16-year-old: they are some of my most foundational memories. It's some of the foundational pain of my life that for one of my friends we didn't pull together a plan and we didn't succeed and we didn't have the help that we needed from a peer-to-peer support group, and I think of that often.

I also think often of the first person who ever came out to me, Madam Speaker. I called him the other day. I asked his permission to share this story. I'm not going to share his name. I don't have to. He was 17. We were in grade 12. I was 17 as well. He was one of my closest male friends. I remember using our rotary telephones to make arrangements to hang out, to go for coffee, to laugh until we were giddy. We were friends. I will never forget, after a certain period of time, him averting his eyes when he finally said to me: "You know what? I'm actually gay." Then he turned to me, and he actually looked me in the eye and said: "You cannot tell anyone, Shannon. They will kill me."

That was 25 years ago. When we spoke a couple of weeks ago, this time on a cellphone, Madam Speaker, I asked him if I could tell his story in support of this bill. I said: "You know, it was a long time ago, wasn't it? It was 25 years ago." Then we both said in unison, "Yeah, but it hasn't changed that much for lots of kids."

5:10

I've heard people asking: why are we doing this now? Why this bill now? Why Bill 24 right now? I think the first thing is that there's been confusion around parental notification, confusion created by conservatives. We've cleared that up, Madam Speaker. Why now? Because there's been politicization of this issue by conservatives who don't know their minds on this topic, who can't quite figure it out, that this is about protecting kids. We've put a stop to that, too. Why now? Because Jason Kenney has threatened to out gay kids. That's why now.

As a parent I find it helpful that my kids will have access to the kinds of peer-to-peer supports that I wish I had had. As an MLA, Madam Speaker, I am grateful that our teachers, our school board officials will have clear rules on how to deal with these issues.

As an MLA, Madam Speaker, I represent parents of queer youth that are going to want to have those services and those clubs in schools. I represent queer youth themselves. When I tour youth emergency services, there are rainbows and triangles everywhere, denoting that it is a safe and inclusive space. I represent those queer youth who end up in those services because they have been cast out of their homes in southern Alberta. I also as an MLA represent schoolteachers, administrators, assistants, counsellors who appreciate having these clear rules of engagement around gay-straight and queer-straight alliances. That's why now.

Madam Speaker, no young person should ever end their coming out experience with the phrase: don't tell anyone; they will kill me. No kid should scramble for help. No kid should grasp for a safe space. This bill, Bill 24, fixes that gap.

There is no excuse for inaction. There is no excuse of politics or expediency or for fundraising off a hard-right partisan base that needs this kind of dog whistle to rouse it. There is no excuse not to vote for this bill. Those who build their policies on these excuses trade on the fear that I saw in my friend's eyes 25 years ago. They want us to go back to that world. We're not going back, Madam Speaker. We're not going back to rotary telephones. We're not going back to flailing around for support for vulnerable youth. We're not going back to normalizing hate or violence or exclusion or bullying based on gender or sexual orientation.

Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, with this New Democrat government, we are only moving forward with love, with a feeling of great duty of care to one another, with solidarity, with trust, and with nurturing the great diversity of our human family, particularly as that diversity expresses itself in young people. That is what Bill 24 does, and that is why I rise in favour of this bill this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. We've heard from many people today on this bill, from teachers, and from LGBTQ caucus members, and I'm going to speak this afternoon from the perspective of a parent of school-aged children, the toughest job we'll ever have, even tougher than an MLA if you can believe that.

Madam Speaker, my wife, Sarah, and I, like all good parents, like to be involved in all aspects of our children's lives inside and outside of school. We know who their friends are; we know their friends' parents; we know what homework they have, what homework they've done, what homework they haven't done; and we participate in deciding what extracurricular activities they participate in and become their designated chauffeurs, of course. As much as we are involved in every aspect of our children's lives, Madam Speaker, and as much as we want them to tell us about all their victories and all their sorrows and all their troubles and disappointments, no matter how much you tell your children, especially teenagers, that they can tell you anything, the anxiety of some topics will not allow them to muster the courage to do so.

Now, here's the thing, Madam Speaker. If my children come to me and they realize they have an understanding that they are LGBTQ in spite of the fact that Sarah and I have created a family dynamic that supports open discourse and support for LGTBQ rights, that still may not be enough for them to feel comfortable coming out to us. I will not see that as a failure in our parenting, but

I will be grateful that they will have the support of a GSA in their school, a safe place where they have peer support and understanding. Perhaps most importantly, they will know that neither their teacher nor Mr. Kenney will be calling me to let me know that they joined a GSA.

Madam Speaker, GSAs save lives, and maybe one of those lives will be my Mehna or my Kieran. That just got to me a bit. Sorry. In addition, I don't see GSAs as taking away my right as a parent. I actually see it as giving my children rights. Most importantly, it gives them a safety net in case they are feeling that they're falling.

Now, I'm very concerned about the attitude coming from across the way in regard to their position that teachers are in the best position to understand what's best for all children. As I just explained, Madam Speaker, I know what's best for my children, and what's best is to have an open, supportive household that elicits dialogue. What I also think is best is to allow kids to come out to their parents on their own timeline, not a teacher's and not the leader of an ultra right-wing party.

I get a real sense, Madam Speaker, that my fellow parents on the other side believe that they would have failed as parents if their children joined a GSA and did not tell them, and that is simply not the case. They have failed as parents if they force exposure on joining a GSA upon their children. I believe the opposition's position on GSAs is at the very least demonstrating zero knowledge of LGBTQ issues, and this will not help anyone's children.

Madam Speaker, I grew up in a very ethnically diverse community in Toronto, and for us there race was not an issue, and I can't necessarily say that about the generation before me.

However, I do believe we still had some misunderstanding about LGBTQ issues, but of course that changed as we got older and went to university and we met more people. The fact of the matter is that times change, and we have to keep up with them, and a big part of that change is a move towards a more inclusive society. Unfortunately, we're not there, because if we were, there may not even be a need for GSAs.

I know we want to be the wise ones as parents, Madam Speaker, but the reality is that I have learned so much from the young people in my riding and in my office about LGBTQ and trans issues over the last few years, and I would implore the opposition to do the same. Spend some time talking to millennials, who have an unprecedented acceptance of LGBTQ rights. I am so proud of these kids today. They are creating a better and a more accepting world, and I am proud to be their ally. I refuse to be their enemy.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank you for everyone's time, and I would like to adjourn debate for tonight. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As we made some good progress and had some good debate this afternoon, I would propose that we adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:20 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 8, 2017

Day 51

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us each pray and reflect in our own way. May we remember to be deliberate, be thoughtful, meticulous but patient, determined but clear headed, and evoke that respecting our differences and celebrating our diversity is what makes us stronger together. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good morning. I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 23

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to have a moment to rise today to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. The need for this discussion stems from the court order that was consented to on January 6, 2017. At that time the Alberta government agreed to expand the Alberta Human Rights Act to include age as protected grounds under sections 4 and 5. Because of this a one-year delay was given by the courts to provide the government time to consider what, if any, exemptions would be appropriate and to address any unintended consequences.

Madam Chair, age is currently prohibited grounds of discrimination in all areas other than sections 4 and 5 of the act. Section 4 protects against discrimination when any goods, services, accommodation, or facilities normally available to the public are provided, and then section 5 prohibits discrimination regarding tenancy, including both commercial and residential accommodations.

Madam Chair, over the course of last summer consultations were conducted through July and August of 2017. During this period the government reached out directly to stakeholders and asked them to send us their feedback both in writing and some in person. There was also a discussion guide that was prepared with background information and questions for them to answer. In some cases stakeholders were invited in for face-to-face meetings.

We consulted a variety of stakeholder groups, including seniors' advocacy groups, seniors' housing and public housing groups, civil liberties and legal groups, condominium-related groups, rental accommodation groups, municipalities and related groups, large nonprofit entities, disability community groups, hospitality and accommodation industry groups as well. In addition, they were also asked to share the discussion guide with their own networks to ensure appropriate distribution. In three face-to-face meetings department officials met with representatives from 11 different

organizations, and in total written feedback was received from over 70 individuals and organizations.

Madam Chair, we believe these proposed amendments will strike the right balance between the interests of many different groups. Many have asked in the past: how is seniors-only housing going to be affected by these changes? As a government we recognize that older Albertans may choose to live together in a community of people at a similar age in life. Proposed amendments to the act intend to allow seniors-only housing to continue without violating the act, and although the minimum age for seniors-only housing is 55, it's also possible for buildings to choose an age limit higher than 55.

Also, through these consultations many have expressed a need to include live-in caregivers. Those concerns were heard, and the act will include exemptions in the case of live-in caregivers.

Madam Chair, the government recognizes that Albertans have bought condominiums on the basis of the bylaws at the time. The proposed approach is that grandparenting of existing age-restricted condominiums will end 15 years after the coming into force of Bill 23. This provides Albertans affected by these changes plenty of notice before the new rules impact their condos.

Now, just to quote Hugh Willis, the co-chair of the Government Advocacy Committee of the Canadian Condominium Institute, the north Alberta chapter, he said:

The belief that individuals should have a choice in their housing and lifestyle decisions is strongly supported by the condominium owners we consulted with in Alberta. At the same time, we recognize the national trend that restrictions by age can affect communities where there is a critical shortage of housing. As a result, we feel that the 15-year transition period is a reasonable and common sense solution to allow existing condominium owners to make consumer decisions.

Madam Chair, to wrap up, I believe this bill strikes a proper balance of the needs of Albertans, and I think it represents an opportunity to embrace diversity in Alberta. It also aligns our legislation with other jurisdictions across Canada, and like much of what this government has done to date, it is long overdue. It should provide certainty to the people that have requested it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to thank my colleague for his comments today. You know, one of the interesting things we do as MLAs is have the opportunity to speak to all sorts of people in our constituency. Certainly, as my colleague has pointed out, we all have folks in our constituency who are concerned about this.

I was visited by a lovely woman in my constituency who had concerns because she lives in a fantastic condo complex. I think we've heard this from a number of people in Calgary-North West. They have a 40-plus condo complex. Her concern was that most of the people in there were, you know, well into their 50s. She said to me: we've actually had our children, we've raised our children, and we're ready right now to be in a place where we certainly love having them come on the weekends, and that is fantastic, but during the week we kind of want the tranquility of what we have, which is a relatively child-free environment. A lot of these folks are grandparents, and they delight in having their grandkids around on the weekend.

Among her concerns, certainly, was a concern about the fact that she would be faced with the spectre of having people move in with multiple children, that young people would be moving in and

having parties, and she was concerned that what she and her fellow occupants had worked to achieve was certainly not something that they would end up with at the end of the day. We had a great conversation. I think, you know, one of the things about making sure that we get the communication right on this bill is to talk about the things that ensure folks like this woman who came to visit me are taken care of in all of this.

First of all, as my colleague mentioned, the exemption for live-in caregivers is an important one. It's important because people were worried about that sort of thing. Also, the idea that this is grandfathered for 15 years gives them an opportunity to sit back and take a look at what they want in terms of a structure and make some decisions; also, the fact that you can now convert to a 55-plus facility any point in this time over the next 15 years, and then you have a facility that, of course, is now 55-plus.

9:10

So for this lovely woman and a lot of the folks who live in this building, their fears were calmed by this idea. She went on to say to me: you know, we absolutely understand the need for the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. There was no argument there. In fact, as we know on this side of the aisle, human rights are something we have to look carefully at, especially in this day and age, and we know that we have to look even more closely at this because we are facing an ever-present spectre of groups of people who would rather see us enjoy less in terms of human rights, if I may be so vague.

At the end of the day, I think what we have here in the Human Rights Amendment Act is – first of all, we know that the courts have told us that age is prohibited grounds for discrimination. We also know that we have fantastic facilities for folks who have gotten to that point in their life where they've raised their children and they want to have a tranquil environment, where there's not a lot of noise to worry about and they're not worried about parties happening in their facilities. They love having their grandkids around and younger kids around, but at the end of the day they want to ensure that they have a facility that is what they paid for. When you go out and you buy a piece of real estate, whether it's a condo or anything else, you're making an investment, and you want to be careful that that investment is going to be worth, hopefully, more at the end of the day or when you decide to sell than it was when you bought it.

I think what we have here is a very well-thought-out piece of legislation. It takes into account that we have folks with concerns. We've addressed those concerns. You know, along with the 55-plus group of condos we have the 40-plus groups that have every opportunity now to take their time, to have their meetings of their condo boards, to canvass the folks who live in their buildings, and to say: maybe for a lot of these folks going to a 50-plus or a 55-plus is what they want to do right now. That ensures them the opportunity to do that and not worry about the value of their investment and not have to worry about the spectre of having now the place that they consider their home and their haven be turned into a place that potentially is stressful for them and loses equity. That is obviously a concern as well.

I think this is a fantastic piece of legislation. I think it is a long time coming. Certainly, when we talk in general about the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017, it's one that we in this day and age unfortunately have to pay a lot closer attention to because there are so many elements out there who want to take away those rights from Albertans. I would say that Alberta's NDP is looking to ensure that our Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017, is strong in so many different ways, and we will work at that every day.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Pleased to rise and speak to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. I'd like to start out by thanking the Minister of Justice for putting this bill forward, especially in response to human rights across the country and having a spotlight put onto this very important issue.

I guess I want to frame my comments this morning by just mentioning that, you know, Canadians are guaranteed certain rights under the Charter. For a long time, before we had the bill that's before us today, there were children that were being discriminated against in terms of their age and families and family status. Housing is a human right. And you know what, Madam Chair? Kids are humans, too, and they deserve not to be discriminated against.

You know, we need to also keep our communities whole. When we isolate communities or deprive communities of having families live in those communities, we're missing a large segment of the population that makes our communities what they are. I want to give a specific example in my constituency in terms of housing in Canmore and in Banff. In those two communities in the beautiful Bow Valley housing is at a premium. There's close to a zero per cent vacancy rate, and there are extremely long waiting lists for people to get accommodations, so much so that the landlords are able to charge almost whatever they want in terms of rent because they know that people are limited in terms of their choices. That presents a real challenge because we're seeing that more and more families have to move away from the Bow Valley because of the cost of living there. Even people like nurses and teachers, who earn a decent salary, aren't able to afford the cost of living and the cost of housing in the Bow Valley.

To address some of those concerns, we have invested in creating an affordable housing project in Banff along with the town of Banff and Parks Canada, who generously donated land to the town so that they can build an expanded affordable housing project.

You know, there's this kind of myth or misperception about people in the Bow Valley, that people there are very wealthy. Certainly, there are people who are very wealthy, but the vast majority of people in the Bow Valley just make a living wage. There's nothing wrong with that. Those are the people that we buy our coffee from at Starbucks. They're the people that look after our kids in daycare facilities. Those people need to be in our communities to keep our communities whole.

I'm really proud of the work that the town of Canmore and the town of Banff have done in trying to improve and increase the inventory of affordable housing projects because they recognize the fact that we can't have communities of people that just live there on weekends or use their homes as kind of a second home. There's nothing wrong with that either. But when those tourists come to places like Canmore and Banff, they want to have services available to them. Like, they want to be able to go to Starbucks. They want to go to restaurants. They want to go shopping at the grocery store. So in order to have those communities whole and have those services available, we need to ensure that there are housing spaces available for all ranges of Albertans, from the low end of the income spectrum to the high end. I think this bill, Bill 23, goes a long way to improving the ability of those communities to ensure that their communities can remain whole and have families living in them.

You know, in places like Canmore and Banff space is at a premium. There are land constraints in terms of the footprint of the towns. That's forced these communities to build higher density units and condo buildings. That's not a bad thing. But when we

discriminate against people based on age and the majority of housing stock that's available for families is condominiums, because they're affordable, or rental units, for that same matter, when we look at the stock that's available for them, when we start constraining that stock based on whether you've got a family or you're over 18, it really narrows the range of what's available for people there.

When we take away the ability of rental units to discriminate based on family status, then we expand the housing stock for people. That has a lot of positive effects in terms of affordability because the competition for those spaces – it allows it to be spread out over more people so, you know, people have more chance to access different housing options.

I just want to talk a little bit more in general about why I support this bill, and I just want to maybe go over a couple of the major factors and reasons that the bill was brought before us for consideration today. Bill 23, as most of us know, adds age as a prohibited ground for discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act under the areas of tenancy and goods, services, accommodations, or facilities.

Bringing this back to my constituency and the Bow Valley, I think people there really appreciate the 15-year transition period in terms of taking away the adult-only status from buildings because, you know, people put a lot of money into their investments in the Bow Valley. It's a very different real estate market there than the rest of the province because there are a lot of international folks who want to purchase properties there. There's competition both domestically and internationally for those spaces, so when people put a lot of money into their investments – this bill contemplates the 15-year transition period to allow people to get their investments in order and have that time to do what they need to do in terms of the investment that they've made.

9:20

Earlier this year the government of Alberta agreed to a court order to make the changes that we're speaking about today. Age is currently a prohibited ground for discrimination in all areas other than sections 4 and 5 of the act. Section 4 protects against discrimination when any goods, services, accommodation, or facilities normally available to the public are provided. Section 5 prohibits discrimination regarding tenancy, including both commercial and residential rental accommodations.

Madam Chair, this government supports all Albertans, which is why we're proposing to strengthen our current human rights legislation and also further protect Albertans from age discrimination. As has been mentioned here in the Chamber previously, this is a very complex issue that affects many Albertans, and it affects them in different ways depending on the kind of communities that they're living in. Like I mentioned, the Bow Valley has a unique housing circumstance, and no doubt every community has their own unique housing challenges. This bill goes a long way in helping to solve those.

People sometimes ask me: how did we arrive at these rules? Like I said, part of it was in response to a court order, but also over the summer we did undertake a wide-ranging consultation with stakeholders, who have given us many perspectives on this issue. We believe that the proposed amendments in Bill 23 are striking the right balance between the interests of many different groups.

Madam Chair, this legislation will protect programs and activities providing a benefit to minors and seniors such as discounted movie tickets to ensure that they are allowed to continue without violating the act. Doing this will allow more programs and activities to be in financial reach for more people and will create greater opportunities for social interaction. That's what I was saying earlier about

keeping communities whole and having a wide range of diversity within our communities. We are committed to enhancing every Albertan's ability to fully and equally participate in society.

In terms of housing, older Albertans may choose to live together in a community of people at a similar stage in life. Based on our results from the consultations that we undertook over the course of the summer, many Albertans are in favour of allowing the seniors-only housing to continue, and that is exactly what Bill 23 provides for. It also protects the right of seniors to live in seniors-only housing. The amendments set a minimum age for seniors-only housing at 55 or any age older than that. Seniors-only housing would also be required to accommodate within their age restriction special circumstances that are specified in the regulation. This regulation could, for example, address issues such as live-in caregivers.

We also recognize that many Albertans have made significant investments on the basis of condo bylaws in place at the time of purchase, which is what I spoke about earlier. Age-restricted condominiums, if they would like to, can begin a transition period to being seniors-only during that 15-year transition period, so that is another option that's available to folks.

These amendments will immediately apply to rental buildings as soon as the bill comes into force. I think an important distinction to make is between condominiums versus rental buildings in the 15-year transition period. Just to reiterate, the amendments immediately will apply to rental buildings as soon as the bill comes into force whereas age-restricted condominiums are afforded the 15-year transition period. Rental units in condo buildings will also be subject to the same rules as condo buildings except for that 15-year transition period. On a go-forward basis, the only permitted age restriction for rental accommodation would be 55 or older.

Bill 23 also enables ameliorative programs or activities, and this means programs that seek to improve situations for disadvantaged people, including making more inclusive and diverse workplaces. That would be allowed under the bill. An example of that would be youth employment programs. This exception comes with the requirement that the program or activity be reasonably likely to achieve its ameliorative objective. Currently, as we've heard earlier, Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada whose human rights legislation does not provide an exception for ameliorative programs or activities.

If passed, the amendments that we're speaking about today would come into force on January 1, 2018.

Madam Chair, I'd like to conclude my remarks by saying that our government supports all Albertans, and we believe these changes will make life better for them. This bill is an opportunity to embrace the diversity in Alberta and to align our legislation with other jurisdictions across Canada.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I want to start by thanking the minister and her staff for the careful consideration, careful consultations, and the work that have been done on this bill to make sure that we got it right, to make sure that we listened to seniors who were concerned about having to make changes in where they live or how they live, to make sure that we listened to the concerns of families that were finding it a challenge to find rentals or to find condos to buy. I think that the work that has gone on in the bill by the minister and her staff is going to, in the long run, remove some of the concerns and fears that a lot of Albertans

had when they heard that the decision had been made around the need to amend the age restriction in the Alberta Human Rights Act.

It's kind of interesting to me because I grew up in urban cities. Actually, I often say that I grew up in some of the world's biggest urban cities, and I always lived in an apartment in the core of the urban area. In Europe, in big cities like New York City having families live in apartments or condos is something that is normal. That happens all the time. I was kind of concerned when I heard a member opposite saying that it is not the right place for families to grow up in urban areas, living in apartments or in condos, because actually this is a reality for most people and for most families around the world.

We are very fortunate in Canada in having those wide suburban spreads with single-family houses and having all these extra rooms that we don't really use. I remember reading an article about all these what we used to call monster homes in the municipalities where I lived, how they're going to become boarding houses in the future because, really, people have so many extra rooms in their houses.

We've also had a lot of discussions about the challenges around these single-family houses and the way that they've been developed in some of our cities in terms of their cost and in terms of development of roads and, increasingly, around the environment. Living in an urban core such as Edmonton's or Calgary's is a way of life for families, and it's something that's going to happen more and more as places like Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and Calgary are looking at densification and creating more spaces for people to rent or own houses within the urban core. I think that this is really important for us to know, and we shouldn't be thinking that families only want to live in a single-family house in the suburbs.

The other thing that I think is important to know about this bill is that the kind of housing that is developed for seniors is the kind of housing that's perfect for families because both families and seniors need wide open doorways so they can have strollers. They need apartments where the doorways are wide enough, again, for strollers, or they need places that are easy to clean because, as you all know, families, toddlers can damage a carpet very quickly.

I once worked on universal housing guidelines, and I want to reinforce that what's interesting when you talk about universal housing guidelines and when you talk about the need for housing for people who may require a wheelchair or who may require strollers or who have some kind of mobility disability – the universal housing guidelines really address the needs of families, people with disabilities, and seniors. It is really my hope that as this bill comes into force, a lot of developers and housing providers will really adopt the universal housing guidelines. It will make it easier for both families, people with disabilities, and seniors to live in the condos and apartment buildings that they build. So it is my hope that this is going to be a by-product of this bill.

9:30

Now, the other thing that I think we need to know also is that for us to have vibrant communities in our downtown core, the mix of people who live in the downtown core, in the urban areas is very important. It is when you have a mix of seniors, families, and young singles that you create the vibrancy that allows urban cores to survive. Again, I'm really hoping that that bill will really facilitate those vibrant urban cores that we all like, where you have a mix of restaurants, where you have movie theatres, where you have parks, where you can have festivals. The more diversity of people living in an area, the greater the vibrancy is. That's what I hope is also going to be a by-product of this bill.

Now, in Sherwood Park we have a lot of condos. I think that after Edmonton and Calgary the MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park

and myself probably have the highest number of condo places in Alberta. I heard a lot from residents. The concerns of the residents really focused on that many of them had bought condos which were designed only for an older age group, and they were concerned that we wanted to have young children that were going to disturb the peace that they have as older adults.

I'm very, very happy that the minister and her staff have taken those concerns and that those people who live in existing older adult buildings, age 55-plus, are assured that this is not going to change. Now, I'm not sure that that's how I'm going to want to live, but I really respect the fact that for a lot of older adults living in a community of similar-minded people is something really important. I want to make sure that all Albertans know that seniors' facilities, seniors-only condos, or, I should probably emphasize, 55-plus condos are not going to change under this act.

Madam Chair, the other thing, too, that I think a lot of older adults were really concerned about is that when you start thinking about it, there are a number of things that older adults benefit from that are age restricted. I often think of the day that I first was able to get a discount at Shoppers Drug Mart because of their 55-plus and the availability to buy discounted movie tickets or access to a lot of things. I want to assure Albertans that this is not something that is going to change under this act because I know some of those things are very important to seniors.

What I think this act will do is it's going to guarantee that families who are struggling to find affordable housing in our urban areas will not be discriminated against. Housing is an expensive part of a family's income. If you're desperate to try to find affordable housing within a city like Edmonton and every time you go and try to find an apartment building they say to you, "I'm really sorry, but we don't want any children in there," not only is it discouraging for these families, but it's really creating undue hardships for these families who really would like to live in the urban core.

Madam Chair, one of the things that I also hope will be a by-product of this bill is the consideration that in having a lot of mixed housing, like mixed condo units and so on, there might be some really good benefits to both families and seniors from living in an area if that's what they choose. I could see an apartment building where there are a number of families and a number of older adults, and then the older adults might maybe choose or be interested in helping with child care or may find ways of supporting younger families, and then those families may also be interested in or become friends with some of the older adults in an apartment building and help them with getting groceries and so on. Living in a mixed apartment building may have unforeseen consequences for these seniors and families.

I wanted to conclude by reminding everyone that if you are living under existing age restrictions, you will be grandparented for a 15-year transition period, and I think that's really important. If you're, for example, in an 18-plus condo, the age-restricted condominiums, if they so wish, can transition to being seniors-only during the 15-year transition period. This is not about kicking people out of their existing housing. This is not about not valuing the investment that people have made in their condo building. This is just about ensuring that families are not discriminated against in finding housing, and it's also about ensuring that our older adults or seniors can stay in age-appropriate condos at the age of 55.

Madam Chair, it is my hope that everyone in this House will vote for this bill. I think it's a bill that has been really balanced and well nuanced by the minister, and it should really help reduce the challenges that many families have in finding housing in the urban core.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak to this very important bill. I can think of no issue that has generated more letters to the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud than this current situation. Over the last six months I must have received over a hundred letters, all of them very thoughtful and very well crafted, dealing with this issue of establishing a balance between, basically, competing human rights here. I think this bill actually establishes a really nice balance between making sure that seniors who have invested in a particular type of housing can continue to enjoy that lifestyle but also protecting the right of persons with young families to access accommodation that is suitable to them.

I think all members will be familiar with a case that came up six months ago in the city of Edmonton, where a constituent of mine, Michael Janz, became a proud father. He actually at that time was the chair of the Edmonton public school board, and he stepped down from being chair because he wanted to be able to devote the time that's necessary to deal with his new baby. But at the same time he was forced to actually look for different accommodation from where he was living at the time because of an age restriction in that facility, which is actually in my riding.

9:40

I think that this current legislation is going to help deal with that sort of situation, and I know that Michael is very appreciative of the work that the minister and her staff have done to establish this very balanced bill. I think we should all remember that the bill came about because the government agreed last January to basically deal with a human rights complaint about age discrimination against young people and that the ministry has been working hard since that time to deal with that.

It's interesting. There are always unintended consequences of these changes, but in fact the demographic that is most concerned about this change is not the young people and families; it's actually our seniors. It's our seniors who I think we need to be thinking about protecting as well. I think that this bill actually provides an excellent compromise – it's not a compromise – an excellent formulation that protects the rights of all. I can't think of another situation where the competing rights have been so well dealt with.

As is my wont in many of my interjections in the House, I want to bring a historical perspective to this. The concept of human rights actually came out of the devastation and the destruction and the genocide of World War II. Basically, the creation of the United Nations after the Second World War led to a number of positive changes: the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, UNESCO, dealing with refugees. There was also a universal declaration of human rights, and I think this goes back to 1947. This universal declaration of human rights basically mandated individual governments to make sure that their citizens were protected in all forms of human rights, you know: the right to assembly, the right to freedom of religion, the right to free press, the right to live in a healthy environment. There are several of these things.

It took from 1947 until 1960, actually, for that to be enshrined in Canadian law. I'm actually going to give some praise and some props to a conservative, to a Progressive Conservative, which I don't see many of across the way here, named John George Diefenbaker, renegade in power. John George Diefenbaker was the man from Prince Albert, and it was my distinct honour to actually receive a copy of the Canadian Bill of Rights, a framed copy of the

Canadian Bill of Rights, which he actually presented to my junior high school in Neepawa, Manitoba, in 1962. This was the first time I got to shake the hand of a great man or a politician, and I certainly will never forget it.

The Bill of Rights, that John Diefenbaker got passed in 1960, really applied only to the federal statutes. You know, it had some impact, but it wasn't until 1972 when the Constitution of Canada actually had the Charter of Rights and Freedoms incorporated into it. It's actually as a result of that that we're here today talking about making sure that the province of Alberta's human rights legislation complies. It's actually the Supreme Court of Canada, led by a distinguished Albertan, Beverley McLachlin, who has basically transformed the social life of Canada by making sure that the universal declaration of human rights, basically, is applied and enacted in Canada. Now, I know that there are some, perhaps some across the way, that might complain about judicial activism, but in fact this form of judicial review is essential to make sure that we have these human rights.

You know, the gist of this is that we've got to make sure that the province of Alberta's way of dealing with human rights is consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Bill of Rights as well as the universal declaration of human rights, and I think that we are achieving that in this legislation. I'm particularly pleased with the fact that people that are currently living in 55-plus housing, in condos at least and in rental accommodations, will be able to continue to enjoy that. There are a variety of these kinds of housing arrangements. It's not just multistorey condominiums. There are communities made up of townhomes, and there are life lease organizations. In any guise, these folks are going to be able to continue with this.

Now, if the age limit is less than that, there is an opportunity for that age limit to actually transform over time to 55-plus. But, most importantly, the proscription of folks living in housing that proscribes people as young as under the age of 18 from living in that is done. That's going to be particularly important in rental accommodations.

We're going to basically protect the programs and activities that benefit both young people and seniors and ensure that they're allowed to continue without violating the act. I will still get my free cheques from my bank because I happen to be over 60. The young person can still get a discount at the movies. Those are two perhaps pedestrian examples of the kinds of balances that have been achieved, but again this legislation, I think, is really doing a good job.

Our job in this Legislature is to make sure that the life of all Albertans is better, and I think that this legislation is particularly good at achieving that. You know, we've consulted on this, and the discussions I've had with the seniors that live in my riding have been very positive. This is really what they were asking for. This is not a threat to their property values, in my opinion. This is not a threat to the way of life that they've come to enjoy and planned for and now can continue to plan their retirement on.

I really think that this is an excellent bill, and I would urge all of my colleagues in the House to fully support it. Thank you.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am very pleased to hear all the wonderful comments about this bill, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017, which I'm really pleased to see. I mainly would like to speak about some of the examples and some

of the instances I've seen in the last while of people taking advantage of maybe greater flexibility in how people look at age.

For a long time it has been – actually, I go way, way back, to when I was a child – that if you wanted to visit someone in a seniors' facility, you'd feel guilty if you were too young because you were seen as disruptive and noisy, so even a visit would be kind of traumatic. That has changed, obviously, and there are a lot of benefits. There's more flexibility, and more and more people are seeing that having the options to choose different ways of housing is helpful. As the member from Sherwood Park said, what we may think is inappropriate housing for families, for instance apartments, is the norm in a lot of the world. This is just a reality, and it works.

I've got a seniors' accommodation not too far from where I live with an interesting story. It's a very nice building. They had a few empty units during the year, and they wanted to find tenants, but they didn't have seniors, you know, lining up to take them. It's a newish building. It's been renovated. After long discussion they made the decision to offer the tenancy in these empty units to university students. It's in a good location for that; it's walking distance. The units are small, but the price is right. They found tenants, but some of their seniors were apprehensive about what this would mean. Would there be partying and, you know, disruptive noise?

The students that moved in with them were so happy to find a building that they could afford where they could study in the evening. Because there were very few seniors that were making a lot of noise at night, they could just do their studying, do their university work in peace, quiet, and comfort. These seniors started to get to know some of the young people and found it very nice to have people in the building who could do things like help with lifting something if it was needed. They became a lot more acclimatized to each other, realizing that there are a lot of benefits to having mixed-age housing.

Now, that didn't go as far as small children in there, but at some point it could. I know a number of families, as many of us who are in our later years do, who are raising grandchildren. It wasn't in their life plan necessarily, but it happens. It seems to me that they should have as much of a right to have a choice in housing as anyone else, and their grandchildren deserve a good range of choices.

I'm thinking, too, and I've thought for years about some of the interesting configurations that are coming around. One is Baba Yaga housing for seniors. It's set up to be a flexible arrangement for seniors to share a space with somebody in their family who is under the age of 55 yet have the advantages of having some common areas and some companionship when they want it.

And just last on the list I was thinking about various places in Edmonton that have co-op housing. One place I saw was about a city block of houses. The backyard was all joined, with no fences in it. The people living in the houses were all different ranges of ages and configurations. In the backyard they had a garden, a common garden, a play area with a playground for children, and just grassy areas. The people that I knew were seniors living there, and it seemed to me that they were very happy to be in an area, you know, with families. They didn't have to have children under their roof if they didn't want to, but to share a space made so much sense. People who might not have the energy or time or strength to be digging up a garden might be really, really helpful in planting and in taking care of it and, obviously, reaping the benefits.

It's just made me think about how something like this, a human rights amendment bill, helps everyone in making sure that we don't stereotype people, that we don't try to pigeonhole people but give lots of choices. Obviously, with this, it's nicely secured that people who are over the age of 55 who would prefer 55-plus

accommodation will have that option. But many options for many people.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you. First, I wasn't planning on going in this direction, but since the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud brought it up, I too have a copy of the Canadian Bill of Rights. Mine was signed by Diefenbaker. I inherited it from my great-grandfather. He, of course, was a Member of Parliament at the time that the bill was passed and a close friend of Diefenbaker. I have mine in my office as well. I would also like to point out that Diefenbaker's was not the first Bill of Rights in this country. It was, in fact, Tommy Douglas's that was the first Bill of Rights in this country, but that's a bit of a digression.

Getting to the bill, Madam Chair, you know, for a lot of my former co-workers and classmates graduating from university, it was common to then evaluate the housing market and the job market in their field. I heard and still hear so often that the biggest challenge for many of my colleagues and former colleagues is that all of the housing that they can afford is age restricted. Even with the ones that are just 18-plus, their concern then becomes: "Well, what if I have kids? I don't want to have to pack up and move just because I decided to start a family." Instead, they end up looking for cheaper options, which usually means paying mom and dad rent. This, of course, factors into a rather harsh stereotype of people in my generation, that nobody is working and that everybody is living at home, neither of which is true, but that is nonetheless the stereotype that my generation ends up with.

This bill helps to address that in ensuring that there is access to housing, not just affordable housing but, really, all levels of housing, and helps to provide those spaces for, particularly, younger people but also, you know, people in their 40s and helps to make sure that they have access to housing that they really need, more often than not in a place that they want to be in. There are many young families in my community, and quite often they would prefer to be in a condo situation because it's a bit cheaper in some parts of the constituency, but they can't move into that space because it's got an age restriction on it, and they can't bring their kids in. That's a very serious concern, you know, not having access to housing because of your children, so I'm very happy to see this bill come forward.

The other side of this, of course, and one that many of my constituents have reached out to me on is that they are concerned that seniors' housing will be impacted. You know, these are often people who have worked their entire life, they've retired, and the last thing they want to have to deal with is somebody else's grandkids running around at who knows what time of day. It's just not the relaxing experience that they're looking for. So they were very concerned that a move in this direction would force them to allow – I actually had some people reach out to me, and they were concerned that there would be age quotas in place. I don't know where they got that idea from.

10:00

It's good to see that there's a balance here, that 55-plus residencies are still allowed, and even some of the current facilities that wouldn't match a 55-plus will be grandfathered in over a number of years. I'm assuming that the vast majority of facilities will interpret that as: "Okay. If we have some younger members, they can remain or even move in if they're within the right age

range. As those people age, then we'll bring in the age restriction when everybody is 55-plus." That seems to be a fair path in this direction. I'm really happy to see that, and I'm happy to see that there is this balance in making sure that there is access to housing for all Albertans but also that there is the balance between allowing for seniors' housing and 55-plus housing and really helping to support all of those Albertans.

I'd like to thank the minister for the bill. I know there was a lot of feedback leading up to this. Certainly, in my office alone I think we've had something like 50 letters on this topic. It's good to see that all of that was taken into consideration and that there's a good balance in this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. It's my pleasure to also rise and chat briefly about this legislation. What sort of struck me, hearing it over and over again, you know, when we're talking about this legislation, is that currently Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada whose human rights legislation does not provide an exemption for ameliorative programs or activities. Sadly, I find myself saying this again and again and again. It seems like we've had to address a number of problems, a number of issues that the previous government was not willing to take on. Anyway, we're in cleanup, catch-up mode.

I, too, was visited by many, many, many, many people in St. Albert and probably every day received mail on this subject. There was a particular group in St. Albert that was very active and busy coming to see us, and they're called Seniors United Now. I'm sure other people have heard of them. There is a St. Albert chapter, and they are very, very good about advocating for seniors.

Now, particularly in St. Albert there's sort of a unique issue around housing. Although it is a wealthy community, they certainly have their problems around housing. There's also, believe it or not, a homelessness problem in St. Albert. What I was hearing from the Seniors United Now group was that they wanted to do everything in their power to keep St. Albertans in St. Albert, so that meant addressing some problems or deficits in housing. Certainly, they were concerned about being allowed to have housing units or housing, I guess, communities that were specifically for seniors, and that legislation dealt with that beautifully.

I think it also dealt with the transition period for condo complexes that wish to do that. I think 15 years is very generous and allows for a healthy transition. The Seniors United Now group was really good about linking the need for stable housing and addressing poverty, and poverty among seniors, no matter where they live, sadly, is an issue. They did address that, and, you know, I was appreciative about their comments.

I think this legislation does a great job with live-in caregivers. You know, we talk a lot about aging in place, and it's vital. It's vital for people to be able to stay in their homes as long as possible. When people are in their communities that they're familiar with, that they feel safe in, where their friends are, where their families are, it's a winning situation all around. People are safer. People live healthy lives. I think that making that exception or addressing the need for live-in caregivers was essential.

[Mr. Dach in the chair]

Obviously, you know, it's sad that it's 2017 and we are only just now doing this, but I am thankful that our government has taken the time to address this important legislation because it was put off for

a very long time, for far too long. We've seen over and over again what happens in communities where people are excluded.

I'm very thankful that in St. Albert in the last year there were very progressive councillors, and many of them are back. We've elected some new councillors that are also very progressive, that have looked at streamlining processes around licensing for people with disabilities that want to live in communities. Again, it was because there's some old legislation in place or old bylaws that require letters to go out to neighbours so that a person with a disability can move into a community. I'm sure you all know the acronym NIMBY, not in my backyard, but it applies here, too. I'm very, very happy that this legislation is setting a new tone and a new direction that children are welcome – they should not be excluded – that families are welcome. Any time you have diversity in a community, it's just going to add to that community.

You know, I had a single-family home for many years when I was raising my children – they're both out on their own, well, sort of; let's be honest; I still help them out; I think we all probably do – but I downsized and bought a condo. I bought a small condominium, and that was sort of a new way of living for me. I'd always had my own space, but you're forced to share, in an apartment-style condo, with people above you, people you share walls with. I'll tell you that I absolutely love the fact that my condo association is inclusive. There are three buildings in my complex, and we have people that are clearly from all walks of life. There are young families. There are older people. There are people with disabilities. I see an adapted van, actually, that parks just out in front of my condo, and I'm thrilled to see this person. Whether he's going to work, I'm not sure. But I have an accessible complex. I have families; I have children.

I'll tell you that there is a rental unit above me, and I know this because it changes fairly regularly. Most other people, I think, around me have been the same people for the last nine years or so. I can tell when they change, and I'll tell you that when a family rents and moves in, I'm thrilled. No offence to younger people that have roommates that move in – you know, I was young myself once and likely made bad decisions like they do, with their parties and goings-on. I have come to appreciate some of their music because it is loud enough that I can hear it.

Mr. Malkinson: Expanding your horizons.

Ms Renaud: Absolutely.

But I always am very thankful when it's a young family or a family that moves in as opposed to maybe people that meet, you know, a different requirement. I'm thankful to live there because I learn something from the people around me. I love the fact that the people that live in my condominium are not restricted, so I am, again, very thankful.

I'm thankful to the minister for the way that concerns were included in this legislation, I'm thankful for the time that she took to consult with people to address needs that are very real and very current for all Albertans, and I'm thankful that our government has taken a stand and decided to address things that other governments or the previous government chose to let slide for far too long.

Thank you. I look forward to supporting this legislation.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Any other speakers to Bill 23? The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 23, Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. Of course, this bill is in response to a court order resulting from a constitutional challenge filed in the courts in March 2016, the

challenge being that the exclusion of age as a prohibited ground of discrimination violated the nondiscrimination provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

10:10

As a result, Bill 23 will add age as a prohibited ground of discrimination in section 4, regarding goods and services, and section 5, regarding tenancy, in the Alberta Human Rights Act while addressing the complex issue of balancing the interests of all Albertans that put their opinion forward through the large consultation process that was undertaken by our government.

Mr. Chair, over the last several months I've had the opportunity to consult on this issue with the Edmonton-Meadowlark community as there are many people living in the community that are staying in seniors-only housing restricted to those who are 55 years of age or older, and I do want to take a moment to thank all of them for taking the time to share their thoughts and concerns. I do believe that Bill 23, put forward by the Minister of Justice, strikes the right balance between keeping our communities family friendly while addressing the concerns of those who wish to age in place in a home which is adaptable to their needs.

As we age, we may choose to live together in communities of people at a similar stage in life. Bill 23 will protect the rights of seniors to live in seniors-only housing restricted to those 55 years of age or older. Through our consultation we heard that many Albertans are in favour of allowing this seniors-only housing to continue. There will also be opportunities within the regulations to allow special circumstances that will address complexities like live-in caregivers.

From the conversations that I've had, the main concern for those who are advocating for family-friendly communities is the properties that currently exist that restrict rental or ownership to those who are 18 years of age or older and not necessarily our older population, which we especially see within our downtown community. These existing age restrictions will be grandfathered over a 15-year transition period for those condominiums who wish to become seniors-only – this includes those buildings that are 18-plus or 45-plus now – while rental buildings that do not wish to make this transition will be subject to these new amendments as soon as this legislation passes.

I think it's important to note that this legislation will not restrict programs and activities providing a benefit to minors or seniors such as store discounts. Doing this will ensure we aren't negatively impacting the opportunities for social interaction or savings for those in our communities.

Once again I would like to take a moment to thank the Edmonton-Meadowlark community, who took the opportunity to share their thoughts on this legislation at quite a few round-tables, actually, throughout the last few months, as well as the Child-Friendly Housing Coalition and the many other organizations that are working to make our communities more inclusive while recognizing the importance of those who want to age in place with proper accommodations.

I believe that what has been brought forward strikes the right balance and ensures a more vibrant, inclusive community that will offer young families more opportunities in the housing market while ensuring our seniors have the opportunity to adapt their homes to their needs as they age in place.

Through our consultations on the proposed amendments we saw support from the Government Advocacy Committee from the northern chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute as well as from the Alberta Association of Seniors Centres and the acting director of education and engagement at the Alberta Human Rights Commission, among many others.

With that, I would just once again like to thank the Minister of Justice for her thorough consultation process. I do believe that Bill 23 strikes the right and a fair balance for all Albertans. I'm happy to stand in support of it, and I hope that all of my colleagues will do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much. As Minister of Seniors and Housing I'm proud to stand in support of this bill, which will address an important issue facing seniors across Alberta, ageism. Ageism is discrimination based on biases and stereotypes about people because of their age. Amending the Human Rights Act to prohibit age discrimination is vitally important to addressing this problem. Two-thirds of seniors across Canada say that they have been treated unfairly because of their age. I have had the opportunity to travel across this province to meet with seniors and to talk to them about the challenges that they face, and I know that ageism is a barrier for far too many seniors in this province.

Seniors built this province, they sewed the fabric of our society, and they continue to contribute significantly to all of our communities. Seniors in Alberta are active. They contribute more volunteer hours than in any other province in Canada. Seniors continue to be leaders and mentors, employees and employers, our colleagues, our friends, and our family. Their contribution should be valued and celebrated, and they should not face discrimination based on their age.

This summer we held the inaugural minister's Seniors Advisory Forum, where representatives from seniors' groups and senior-serving groups gathered to discuss and share their expertise about how this province can better serve senior Albertans. One of the most important issues they identified was the need to address and prevent ageism. Many noted that we must reduce the stigma around aging. I heard at the Seniors Advisory Forum that Alberta can provide leadership in preventing ageism. The importance of this amendment in that effort cannot be underestimated. Seniors built this province, and it is so important that we challenge negative perceptions about them.

Our government has taken other important steps to ensure that seniors do not face discrimination. Just recently we provided support to an initiative in Calgary, led by the Brenda Strafford Foundation, to educate and train communities and local businesses on how to recognize and serve people with dementia.

We're also investing significantly to expand seniors' affordable housing in our province, and we are building new lodges and new seniors' apartments. We're also investing in maintenance, which previously had been ignored, to make sure that existing facilities are safe and comfortable for residents.

I was also proud to declare October 1, 2017, International Day of Older Persons. It was long overdue for Alberta to join this important United Nations initiative.

These are just some of the ways that we are making Alberta a province that doesn't discriminate against seniors. Amending the Human Rights Act is the next step. I've heard from seniors all across Alberta, and I could not be more proud to stand in support of Bill 23. This bill will make life better for Albertans. It will help build a province where no one faces discrimination or persecution because of their age. I strongly encourage everyone to support this bill as well.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other speakers to Bill 23? The Member for Calgary ...

Mr. Malkinson: Currie.

The Acting Chair: Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll remind you where I'm from next time you come and sit down here.

You know, I'm happy to come up here and speak to this particular bill. We've had a very fulsome debate on Bill 23. This bill came as a result of a court challenge. The court gave the government until January 6, 2018, to bring forward these regulations which the Minister of Justice has brought forward.

Now, as a result of this court action, I found that in my riding – this is one of those examples where I'm not sure where it came from – there seemed to be initially a lot of misinformation after the court date. After going around in my riding talking to many seniors' groups and constituents, I'm going to give the Coles Notes version of what you need to know about this bill.

Many seniors in my riding thought that they were going to have their building changed so that they couldn't have the 55-plus restriction anymore. That is not true. This bill does not change that.

There was concern that perhaps the building wouldn't be able to put in reasonable restrictions that are allowed under the condo act. That is also, in fact, not true.

There was a concern that this court judgment would prevent discounts that businesses perhaps provide to seniors or children. Again, this bill and this court judgment do not do that.

Lastly, some people thought that this would come into force immediately, so those who owned an 18-plus building but not a 55-plus building would somehow have that taken out of their condo bylaws right away. That is also not the case. This bill provides for a 15-year transition period for those condo buildings that are currently an 18-plus but not a 55-plus building to transition off that or to transition to a 55-plus building.

With that, Mr. Chair, those are my comments. I think that hopefully provides a couple of Coles Notes for concerns that my constituents have brought up to me about this particular bill. I'll be voting in support of it. I think it is excellent that we'll be able to remove some of these restrictions, especially in the rental market, for those with families or those who are young adults who are just getting out into the world to be able to fully access the rental market and housing in all of our cities and towns and villages throughout Alberta.

With that, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

10:20

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I continue to be proud to be a member of this government, that when we identify issues around human rights, we move to identify them as promptly as possible, obviously, by working in consultation with Albertans. This move to support all Albertans, to strengthen Alberta's human rights legislation is certainly something I'm very happy to support.

Clearly, it is a very complex issue, and I'm thankful that our minister took great care to find the right balance between the many Albertans that could be affected by this legislation. I feel that that balance was reached through broad consultation to hear a wide variety of perspectives.

My colleagues have spoken quite eloquently about how the minister mitigated the impacts for seniors and how important it is for us to continue to support and value the contributions that seniors have made to this province throughout their lifetimes. I'm very thankful that we found that right balance for them.

However, Mr. Chair, I also wanted to take an opportunity as the Minister of Children's Services to talk about children and the impact that this has for children and families. I've been doing some very broad consultation around early learning and child care and what it takes for us as a society and as a culture to support learning and growth and development and nurturing of our children in order to support them to meet their full potential as individuals. What I heard from Albertans from right across the province is that what they want in order to raise children is to have that broad community involvement in the lives of children. It's certainly a very well-used saying to say that it takes a village to raise a child, but that saying is used often because it is quite true. Clearly, children are the future of this province, and we need to do everything we can to make them feel supported and connected to their communities.

Part of that is ensuring that they are surrounded by a wide variety of people and communities. A sociologist named Matthew Desmond from the United States states: "Home is where children find safety and security, where we find our identities, where citizenship starts. It usually starts with believing you're part of a community, and that is essential to having a stable home." Mr. Chair, we make life better and richer for our children when they have the opportunity to be in communities where they're surrounded by a wide variety and a broad variety of individuals. That diversity supports not only the development of children; it supports the families who are raising those children, it enhances our communities, and in fact I think it makes it a better community.

I'm really thankful that, again, we continue to make life better through the work that we do as a government, and I do think that this bill will do so for all of us. We will continue to protect and value our seniors, but we also will support children and families to do the very best they can to ensure that the future of this province is brighter than it ever has been before.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to stand up in this House and speak to the bills that we have before us. Of course, debate is the most important part of our democratic process. Being able to be in this House and debate the laws that we have in front of us and make sure that everybody has the opportunity to talk to the bills that we have in front of us: well, that's essential. You know, I'm glad that many of my colleagues have risen in this House to speak particularly to this bill because, of course, what else could be more important than the human rights of the citizens of this fine land?

I think that it's really important for us to acknowledge that within the Charter of Rights and Freedoms it specifically states, in section 7, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person." It's this phrase, security of the person, which is so important because – I mean, we can look at it and be like: "Okay. Well, what does that mean, security of the person?" Luckily, we've had courts within this country and in this province go into great detail about the security of the person.

Often when we talk about human rights – and I'm so glad that my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud brought up the universal declaration of human rights – people tend to focus on the freedoms:

well, I have the freedom to do this, and I have the freedom to do that, and I have the freedom over here to do these things. Yes, those are absolutely essential and important. Those freedoms are important. But often we overlook equality rights. We don't focus on them as much or even on the collective rights, for example, to housing, health care, and education. We don't stress those enough. I feel proud to be part of a government that tries to strike the appropriate balance when it comes to all of these types of rights, right?

I'm also proud to be part of a government that has consistently since taking office focused on bringing bills before this House that aid in a poverty reduction strategy. Now, it may seem a stretch but not to me. I think that this particular bill is addressing an important part of that poverty reduction strategy, and that is housing for the citizens of this fine land, again, one of the collective rights that we should be focusing on as a Legislature to make sure that our citizens have those rights. I will repeat them: health care, education, and housing. Now, why is housing so important? Well, if you look at the social determinants of health, it all begins there. If we want to have more healthy, prosperous people within this province, we need to make sure that people are housed appropriately, that we have affordable housing, that we make sure that everybody has access to that housing. That's why this bill is so important.

Part of the poverty reduction strategy that has been so important, that we've brought forward, of course, is An Act to End Predatory Lending. I just wanted to highlight that quickly because that's also associated with this. We found that people who are low-income are living paycheque to paycheque and were severely being taken advantage of by predatory lending practices here in this province. I'm so glad that we brought a bill to put an end to that. That's how it's associated with this particular bill.

I want to thank the minister and her department for taking an enormous amount of time to consult with a wide variety of stakeholders on this particular issue. That consultation process has led to the bill that we have before us.

Of course, I go back to this whole concept that we need to strike a balance. So often you will have individuals on one side of an argument, and they'll be making particular arguments about how something is black, and then you'll have other people on the other side of the argument making great arguments for how something is white. But we realize that there's a whole lot of grey in between. It is how we apply the laws in that grey area and make sure that the rights of all our citizens are respected that is how – we need to focus on how we make legislation here within this House. It's not about going to those extremes; it's about making sure that one citizen's right doesn't overcome someone else's. It's about striking that balance, where we need to be, making sure that everyone has that opportunity.

10:30

Now, of course, it's been mentioned by several of my colleagues here that we're responding to the court challenge and that we're trying to do our very best to make sure that there is no age discrimination here in the province of Alberta and particularly when it comes to housing. But I wanted to stress that Bill 23 will protect the rights of seniors to live in seniors-only housing. This is where I go into the balance that we struck. The amendment sets the minimum age for seniors-only housing at 55 or any age older than that, and seniors-only housing would also be required to accommodate within their age restriction special circumstances that are specified in the regulation. This regulation could, for example, address issues such as live-in caregivers, which several of my colleagues have brought up.

Mr. Chair, we also recognize that many Albertans have made significant investments on the basis of their condo bylaws at the place and time of purchase. We want to ensure that Albertans affected by the amendments have advance notice before the changes impact their condominiums. Existing age restrictions in condominiums will be grandparented for a 15-year transition period so that they do not violate section 4 of the act. This is the balance that we're striking within this bill. Age-restricted condominiums, if they wish, can transition to being seniors-only during that 15-year transition period.

Currently Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada whose human rights legislation does not provide an exception for ameliorative programs or activities. This is what this bill hopes to address.

Mr. Chair, our government supports all Albertans, and these particular changes will make life better for them as we continue to address poverty-reduction strategies in our province with the legislation that we're presenting in this House, trying to strike that balance. I highly encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other hon. members who wish to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Calgary . . .

Hon. Members: Hawkwood.

The Acting Chair: Hawkwood. Thank you.

Connolly: It's just more fun to let you look.

Thank you very much, Chair. I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 23. I've had the pleasure of hearing from hundreds of my constituents about this bill in particular, and I'm happy to say that this bill strikes the right balance. They told me that they wanted their seniors' housing and senior-living condos to be protected, so I'm very glad that this bill will permit age restrictions for seniors-only accommodations at 55 years or older. Our government is listening to seniors, and I'm proud to have been able to bring their concerns, the concerns of the seniors in my riding, to the minister and have their concerns met. As their representative it's my honour and duty to bring their comments and ideas to the forefront, and I cannot thank them enough for coming to me with their ideas so I could fight on their behalf.

Age will finally be added as a prohibited ground of discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act for all of the Alberta Human Rights Act. As one of the youngest members of this House I'm proud to stand alongside my colleagues to support all Albertans, young and old. Once again, these proposed amendments will strike the right balance between the interests of many different groups, so I am proud to stand in support.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Other members wishing to speak to Bill 23? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm really pleased to hear the debate today and the wide array of support for this legislation. I just do want to point out a couple of inconsistencies that people may want to be aware of. You know, folks across the way have often talked about being free-enterprising Albertans, and I think that when it comes to housing and human rights, we have to tread very carefully in terms of using words like "free enterprising" and the "free market." Sometimes the free market needs a little bit of a helping hand in terms of making sure people have their human

rights met. Human rights aren't for sale, and they're nonnegotiable, and sometimes governments need to intervene in strategic and very careful ways in the marketplace in order to ensure that those human rights are met.

Earlier this morning I talked about the housing situation in Banff and Canmore. You know, that housing market was left up to the free market, with some minor government interventions in terms of local bylaws in Canmore about the need to work in the valley. Also, in Banff there's a very special provision in the incorporation agreement for the municipality of Banff, and that is that in order for people to be able to live in Banff, there's what's called a need-to-reside clause. That's to ensure and prevent against people perhaps purchasing a home – of course, any land in Banff is leased land, so you don't actually own the land, but you own the home. The need-to-reside clause in Banff is meant to prevent against people coming in and purchasing properties and taking away that housing stock from people who need those homes to live and work in the town of Banff.

The town of Banff's primary mandate as a municipality is to serve tourists. There was an incorporation agreement signed with Parks Canada. Banff and Jasper are very unique municipalities within Canada and especially within Alberta in that these municipalities are located within national parks, and they've got a very particular mandate in terms of why they are allowed to be municipalities. So when we look at government intervention in terms of ensuring there is adequate housing to keep communities whole, places like Banff, Canmore, and Jasper are perfect examples of why we need to massage the rules in order to ensure that housing stock isn't taken up by people who just want to use those properties as vacation properties.

Certainly, that's a legitimate use, and there's nothing wrong with using a property as that, well, except, of course, in Banff, where you must reside in order to own a property. There's nothing wrong with owning a home as a cottage or a second home or a vacation home, but we can't lose sight of the fact that communities need all sorts of people in them. It's the diversity that makes us stronger. You know, we have much more in common than we have differences, but those differences that we have make us stronger. Having a wide array of families and communities and also all sorts of social spectrums and having a wide variety of people in our communities is what makes them better. This bill goes a long way to ensuring we have the ability to have that diversity. People can still have their vacation homes, but we also have adequate stock of housing for people to enjoy living in a community and something that they can afford.

I'm really proud of our government for proceeding with this bill. It's long overdue. I think it's going to benefit people across the province but especially so in communities where housing is at a premium – it may be difficult to find affordable housing – and where wait-lists are long. Let's face it. Alberta is a great place to live and to raise a family. People want to come here. They see what our lifestyle is and see how great this province is, and they want to move here. Jobs are returning to the province. When people come here, they need a place to live, and they need a place that they can afford. They also need a place where they can raise a family, whether that be in a downtown condo or an apartment building or in the suburbs in a single-family home. People should have the ability to make those choices, and when we remove the restrictions of things like age discrimination, it gives people a lot more choices.

Again, I'd like to encourage everybody to support the bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

10:40

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 23?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017?

[The clauses of Bill 23 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 25

Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Chair: Any members wishing to speak to Bill 25? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to speak to Bill 25 this morning, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017, in Committee of the Whole. This bill is all about our government listening to Albertans. When forest professionals passed resolutions to merge their various regulatory bodies into one organization in 2014, they knew what was best for their industry and their professions. To honour the vote and the direction that those organizations had taken, we are following through on our commitment to listen and respond to that expertise.

Mr. Chair, there are about 1,600 professionals who identify either as a forester or a technologist. Over 90 per cent of both organizations that currently regulate those professions voted in favour of merging prior to approaching government to officially request legislative changes. In other words, this merger was their idea.

The two organizations came together in 2015 and have been sharing office space and a new name ever since. Passing Bill 25, basically, Mr. Chair, will make it official. Alberta Labour has worked closely with both organizations and has consulted them regularly on the details of those proposed changes. Their request has the strong support of the Alberta Forest Products Association, which is the voice for the forest products industry.

I had the opportunity this past September to join the Alberta Forest Products Association at their annual general meeting in Jasper. I believe that the MLA for West Yellowhead was there as well. The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation at the time, and the Member for Edmonton-Manning were also there, and there might have been another one of our MLAs. I know that the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti was there as well because he is a strong supporter of the forestry industry. It was very informative for me to attend the AFPA annual general meeting. The forestry industry is doing the best they can to ensure that they've got a sustainable business model moving forward and are very conscientious about protecting the environment.*

Also, I think one of the highlights, actually, of the AGM, from my perspective, was that the ambassador for the softwood lumber issue for Alberta, Gary Doer, came for the AGM on the final day of the conference. You know, I'm really proud of the work that Gary Doer is doing. He is the right man for the job, and he has an extremely impressive background and pedigree for doing the work that he's done.

You know, he told the audience that one of the most important things about being an ambassador is the relationships that we make. One of his pieces of advice to us was: make relationships first and negotiate later because, especially from his perspective, Americans

*See page 1819, right column, paragraph 1

really like to get to know people on a personal level before they start talking business. That was very important advice. That kind of thing comes naturally to some people, but sometimes it's also nice to explicitly state the tried-and-true techniques on relations and negotiations and how we can be more successful to advance our interests. Gary was saying that we need to relate first and negotiate second. That way people understand where you're coming from and how important this topic is to our various economies.

You know, the housing market in the U.S. is dependent upon having affordable lumber to build their homes, and Canada has a robust forestry stock and a very healthy forestry industry. We can support each other's economies in mutually beneficial ways, so it's so important that we have someone like Gary and also, frankly, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, who have done an incredible amount of work on the softwood lumber issue and have made efforts and are making those ties with our trading partners to ensure that when we're having these discussions about NAFTA and softwood lumber, it's so important that we really understand how many jobs are dependent on those trading relationships and that they mutually benefit each economy.

I sit on a committee for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade where we meet with U.S. state legislators, and, you know, we've learned that products cross the border many, many times, and each time it crosses the border between the U.S. and Canada, value is added and jobs are created. Again, it's imperative that we understand what's at stake when we're talking about softwood lumber and NAFTA and those kinds of things.

You know, getting back to the forestry profession, I would like to thank, again, my hon. colleague from West Yellowhead, who spoke in support of the bill yesterday and moved second reading on behalf of the Minister of Labour. There are those who might wonder if the scope of practice for forestry professionals remains the same after the merger, so people sometimes ask: what does this actually mean for foresters and these professionals?

For starters, merging the two organizations into one body would eliminate any confusion around the two organizations, that provide essentially the same services. To make things simpler, the professions governing regulations would also be consolidated from three to one. We talk in the House about reducing red tape and regulatory burdens. Well, this bill is a perfect example of what it means to be reducing red tape, taking regulations away, and giving organizations like these regulatory organizations the tools that they need to function more effectively and more efficiently. This is going to save both organizations valuable resources, time, and money that are otherwise being directed at running two various organizations. The amendment would also improve the administrative and disciplinary processes to be more modern and efficient without sacrificing the principles of fairness.

You know, as a registered nurse I do understand the professional regulatory process fairly well in terms of the disciplinary process and what it means to keep your professional credentials and be proud of the work that you do as a regulated professional, and foresters are no different. One of the things the public likes to know about these regulatory organizations is that their members are held to a high standard, and what it means to be a self-regulating profession is that foresters regulate other foresters, just like nurses regulate other nurses, doctors, the same kind of thing.

Part of that regulation of members in a profession has to deal with the complaint process. Members of the public want to know that if there is a complaint against a member for acting unprofessionally, they are going to be held accountable. That's one of the key parts of regulations of professionals. There's a lot at stake. You know, people invest a lot of money in their education to become a

regulated professional like a forester, a nurse, doctor, social worker, that kind of thing. Besides doing what's right, people have another kind of motivation to do what's right because they know that if they make a mistake, they could be taken before a complaints board and they could potentially lose their licence.

10:50

So there's a lot at stake for these professionals. That's why the public has a lot of faith in the work that they do. They know that these professionals are held to this high standard. There are consequences if they make a mistake. You know, doing the right thing is reward in and of itself, but doing the right thing to make sure you avoid penalties is another motivation as well.

Speaking of the complaints process, complaints that are levied against a member would move to a central governing committee. Currently they are relying on a single individual. The number of people on the committee would also increase. That would allow for work to be shared among members, creating administrative efficiencies.

The membership would continue to consist of the many industry professionals but now would also include members of the public who are residents of Alberta. That is common, Mr. Chair, amongst other regulatory bodies. There are members of the public so that they can witness and take part and have a voice and a vote in these regulatory bodies. The public members would add a level of oversight and public accountability that previously wasn't represented in these various organizations.

The amendments would also allow the committee to continue an investigation into a complaint even though a complaint has been withdrawn or settled. Such an action, when warranted, would allow the committee to conduct further investigations if there are repeated offences by one member, better serving the public interest.

Mr. Chair, by consolidating these organizations into one governing body, there will be a strong and unified voice for our forestry professionals, the creation of one regulatory body, removing confusion around the two organizations offering the same services, and the consolidation of the professions' governing legislation to an act supported by a single regulation as opposed to the three current regulations, making things easier for government.

The amendments being proposed were requested by both organizations, as I've mentioned, and they've had the opportunity to review the changes. They're supportive, and they're excited to get this done.

I had the opportunity along with my colleague from West Yellowhead, the Minister of Labour, and the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry to meet the members of these various organizations when the bill was given first reading earlier this week, and they are enthusiastically supportive of this. They've been waiting a long time. They've been doing excellent work. They've been working closely ever since they voted back in 2014.

I'd like to thank them for the work that they do. I would like to thank them for the patience that they demonstrated. While it has taken some time to act on the request that they've made of the government, now we're here. We're in Committee of the Whole. We have the opportunity to listen to the voice of these forestry professionals and do what they've been asking for. As such, I would like to ask all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of the bill.

Thank you for listening.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 25? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's pleasure to rise today in support of the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017, in the Committee of the Whole today. Like we've already said, what is being amended in the act? The act is being amended to merge the two regulatory colleges, the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists. It'll make one regulatory organization, and the name Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals is what they're going to be called.

You can ask the question: why are we doing this? Why are we amending the act? Well, both colleges asked the government to make these changes way back in 2014, and we're doing that with this act. The stakeholders are very supportive of this amendment. They asked for these changes and they were consulted when we put these amendments together and when the amendments were also drafted.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Will the act change the scope of forest management professionals? No, it won't. The scope of practice for forestry professionals will remain as it is now.

I'll just go over some of the things that the forestry professionals cover out in the forest. The forestry professional applies scientific principles, learnings, and practices to forests and forest products and integrated management of forest land itself. Examples of activities include the creation and administration of programs to address inventory, appraisal, evaluation. Of course, they oversee harvesting that goes on out on a land base; renewal, which involves planting of new trees and all those kinds of things; conservation, which also includes looking at issues that affect wildlife.

I mentioned reclamation of the sites. Roads, all those kinds of things fall into that category of reclamation.

Protection and management planning. A large part of that, too, is also including teaching and research. The research is always evolving. Maybe there are things that they could do better out on the land base. The research, like I said, is always related to forest land.

These professionals are either a forest technologist or a forester. Like I said yesterday, there is a difference. Foresters have a degree whereas forest technologists have a diploma or certificate. It's important to understand a little bit of the difference between the two.

The bottom line is that our government is committed to ensuring that professional regulatory organizations continue to serve and protect the well-being, safety, and public interests of all Albertans. That's the important part of this. Like we've all said, the proposed amendments will create a single regulatory entity with increased administrative efficiencies, which is important today, and an expedited disciplinary process that will save the organization time and money, and that's important when we look at that. The colleges of foresters and forest technologists, like we said, have asked for this, and we are acting upon their request.

By consolidating these organizations into one governing body, there will be a strong and unified voice for our forest professionals, which is important when we look at dealing with the forestry issues today. Creating one regulatory body will remove marketplace confusion around two organizations offering the same service, so there will be less repetition and overlap on the services that either organization provides. Consolidating the professions' governing legislation to an act supported by a single regulation as opposed to three regulations, which we have now, would make it easier for government.

I know that we have stated that there were two regulations that were amalgamated into one, but there was one other one that we haven't mentioned today, and I'll do that. The names of the three regulations that will be amalgamated into one regulation: one is the registered professional foresters regulation, the other one is the registered professional forest technologists regulation, and the expenses and review fees regulation. All these will be amalgamated into one. The proposed name of the new regulation has yet to be determined, but it's suggested maybe that it could be registered forest management professional regulation.

11:00

As was mentioned by my colleague for Banff-Cochrane, the fact is that now we're going to be appointing the public to oversee some of the processes on the new council. Public appointments will follow a competency-based recruitment process to make sure that the process is fair and transparent. All appointments will be approved by cabinet, and for public appointments a recruitment plan will be developed in the new year. The needs will be identified, how many public members will be needed.

Public members may sit on the tribunal or other subcommittees, but as with other members appointed by the association, there will be restrictions on sitting on multiple committees considering a matter. The whole idea here is about a committee member that hears a matter while at the same time sitting on another committee that could possibly review the decisions of another. They want to prevent overlap and those kinds of issues.

Merging the two organizations into one body would eliminate, like I said, marketplace confusion around the two organizations that provide the same service. They both do that. To make it easier for government, the profession-governing regulations would be consolidated, like I had mentioned, from three to one. This will save both organizations valuable resources in time and money, which is very important today. The amendment would also improve administrative and disciplinary processes to be more modern and efficient without sacrificing principles of fairness.

That being said, I urge all members to support this bill as it's very important and is supported by the two organizations. In view of that, I ask everybody to support this.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 25? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. You get that right consistently.

Well, it's my pleasure to rise in the House this morning and speak to Bill 25, Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017. I'm going to speak in favour of this legislation. I think this is one of the easier decisions we need to make as an Assembly. I think that because the evidence, on balance, is so much in favour of allowing this bill to go through, this is something that we really ought to expect unanimous consent for. Why is that? Well, I mean, as my hon. colleagues have pointed out, this was supported by a very wide margin of both professional foresters and forest technologists. To get 90 per cent on a merger vote is quite a feat and not something that I've seen . . .

Mr. Yao: We've succeeded at that.

Mr. Piquette: I'm sorry?

Mr. Yao: Over 90 per cent for a merger.

Mr. Piquette: Oh, yeah. Not quite that merger, Member. Of course, you know, a lot of people could make a mistake at the same time, too, right? But not in this situation, definitely.

The Deputy Chair: Just a reminder to all members in the House: if you could please speak through the chair, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Piquette: My apologies, Madam Chair. I will do that.

Now, I know that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead pointed out just how much the scope of practice for the two professions overlaps. I mean, they have so many synergies that it's no surprise they were able to get such a high percentage of support.

This actually speaks also to the code of ethics that both professions are committed to follow. They both speak very clearly to the central importance that both these professions find in managing our forest resources in the public interest and in advocating, you know, for strong forestry management practices. Of course, this is something that their expertise has helped us to do quite successfully and sustainably for many decades now, so it's a credit to them, and I think it's also a real credit to the leadership of these organizations that they found this way forward for these types of savings.

It's often very tempting, when you're in these types of groups, to try to protect your own turf, to build little empires for yourselves. I mean, that tends to be how you can, you know, get more for yourself and not worry so much about the other person. It takes broad-minded individuals to reach beyond their particular silos and to bring people together to the benefit of not only themselves but the public at large, which is what the consolidation of these organizations represents.

You know, I think this is something that actually speaks very closely to a philosophy that our government has used in its approach to other areas, in particular the Municipal Government Act amendments, where the intermunicipal collaborative framework agreements are actively seeking those types of synergies that you get when you get people sitting down who have shared interests, who have shared concerns, and are working together to find a common solution. When you have these types of situations, you can never predict in advance the types of savings, the types of efficiencies that can be brought about because of them.

I mean, some other direct motivations for getting together are streamlining disciplinary processes, you know, workplace issues. Timeliness is, of course, one of the most critical factors in maintaining healthy, nontoxic workplaces. But I think that over time this can go beyond that into other avenues, where they could become more effective, ones we can't predict in advance. I know that it should make them a bit more successful in their advocacy efforts because what they're advocating for is strong, healthy public forests. The increase in that efficacy is of benefit to all of us.

It's for these reasons plus, of course, the reasons that my hon. colleagues have so carefully and . . .

Ms Luff: Eloquently.

Mr. Piquette: . . . eloquently – okay – spoken to that this bill should pass without any amendment and in an expeditious manner.

Thank you for your attention this morning.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 25? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to you and through you to all members of the House on Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act,

2017. The goal of our government is to ensure that our province's regulatory organizations are able to do their important work, to serve and protect the well-being, safety, and public interests of all Albertans. Bill 25 proposes to consolidate the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists into one regulatory entity.

Consolidating the colleges is what the members have been asking for since 2013. The consolidation would provide increased efficiencies. Both colleges were in favour of the consolidation, and in 2014 their members voted overwhelmingly in favour of the consolidation, with 90 per cent in support, in favour. The colleges then approached our government asking to amend the act. In 2015 both organizations began sharing an office space, using their new name and logo. This bill would make what is already being done official.

11:10

Our government has been consulting with and working closely with both organizations. I would like to add that the Alberta Forest Products Association supports the changes as well.

Having just one regulatory body would also eliminate any confusion as to two organizations providing the same services. A consolidation of the two organizations would save valuable resources and time as well as money. It would also see an increase in efficiencies of administrative and disciplinary processes. The consolidation of these two organizations into one governing body will provide for a strong and unified voice for our forestry professionals.

The proposed amendments we are speaking to today were requested by both the College of Alberta Professional Foresters as well as the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists, the forestry professionals who are so vitally important to ensuring the proper management of our province's forested land.

Our province's forestry professionals' work is second to none. They provide outstanding work in research, conservation, reclamation, protection, renewal, forest management as well as education. I'd like to thank all of the forestry professionals, the men and women, who make life better for all Albertans today and into the future.

In closing, Madam Chair, with the support of the College of Alberta Professional Foresters as well as College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists and the Alberta Forest Products Association, I too wholeheartedly support this common-sense bill and encourage all in the House today to support it as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 25? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm really happy to stand today and speak to Bill 25 as this is something that, of course, the associations involved have been asking for. You know, forestry is, of course, one of the largest industries in Alberta. Approximately two-thirds of our province is forested, and 90 per cent of that is held in public trust. This is a very important industry for our province as a whole.

The College of Alberta Professional Foresters was incorporated in 1985, with voluntary registration and protected titles, and in 2000 the registration provisions became mandatory. The College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists was proclaimed in 2002 although consultation began in 1995. The original Alberta Forest Technologists Association was incorporated in 1992. This new college signalled a change in the forest industry here in Alberta and a commitment to both scientific and sustainable forest management.

In the summer of 2015 the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists came together to form one stronger voice under the new name Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals. On the established website for the AAFMP they say:

Together we are becoming the provincial regulatory body for Alberta's Forest Management Professionals. We support the continual development of our membership so that all Albertans can benefit from healthy, sustainable forests.

As we move to the future we are excited to deliver not only a new name, but a fresh unified look.

Madam Chair, as we've stated a number of times, 90 per cent of their membership – their membership is 1,600 members approximately – has voted in favour of this amalgamation of their two associations. I think that removing that marketplace confusion for all Albertans will be vitally important to our professional regulatory organizations, and it helps us move more quickly and easily with a little less red tape, which is always a good thing, apparently. It'll be increased efficiencies and faster processing for all things that relate to the forestry models. Allowing them to come together is just something that – you know, they already provide the education, the research, conservation, reclamation, protection, renewal, and forest management planning, and it's the envy of other jurisdictions here in North America.

Because they've been asking for this change for quite a long time, I just would like to say that I wholly support us moving forward on this bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 25? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to quickly correct the record. In my remarks earlier today about this bill I spoke about the members of our caucus who had attended the Alberta Forest Products AGM in Jasper, and I neglected to mention the Minister of Labour, who was there holding a panel. The Minister of Transportation: I did mention the fact that he was there.

I just wanted to correct the record and thank the Minister of Labour for coming as well.*

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 25?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 25, Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017?

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, that's my cue, Madam Chair, so I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 23, Bill 25.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? Please say no. So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, we've had some wonderful debate today on our two bills in Committee of the Whole, so I will move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn till 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:18 a.m.]

*See page 1815, right column, paragraph 12.

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 8, 2017

Day 51

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly grade 6 and grade 9 students from Legal school along with their teachers Mr. Blair Wood and Mr. Jason Paik and parents Mrs. Trina Jones and Mrs. Nicole Gough in attendance with them today. I believe they have been having a pleasant time enjoying learning more about the Legislature, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the descendants of Mr. Alex Decoteau and Mr. Walter Sinclair. Perhaps they could rise as I say their names: Izola Mottershead, great-great-niece of Mr. Decoteau; Stanley Mottershead, husband of Izola; Brad Marshall, great-great-nephew of Mr. Decoteau and who is a government of Alberta employee in the Department of Environment and Parks; and also Mr. Walter Sinclair.

Alex Decoteau was famous for many things, mainly his talent in middle- and long-distance running. He was a Canadian Olympian, the first indigenous police officer in Canada, and a trench runner at the Battle of Passchendaele. He perished on October 30, 1917, over 100 years ago today.

Mr. Sinclair is a member of the Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta and served in the Royal Canadian Signal Corps. He has been stationed in Shilo, Manitoba, Soest and Lahr in Germany, and finally CFB Cold Lake.

Thank you to the Decoteau family for attending today's centennial of the Battle of Passchendaele and to Mr. Sinclair for your services. On a personal note, my grandfather fought at Passchendaele, and both my father and I have served in the naval reserves. I'd like to ask the House to give them a traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome and thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's my pleasure to introduce Sithara Fernando and her guests Jennifer Carter and Kanchana Fernando, who are seated in the members' gallery. I met Sithara in her community of Fort McMurray on a recent visit. She is a very strong mental health advocate and a wildlife biologist. She was unable to bring her rescue owl Hedwig here today, but we hear he's doing well, and we send him our best. I ask that the three guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction today, Mr. Speaker, is recognizing a group who are also in the members' gallery, and those are folks from the Canadian Lung Association of Alberta & NWT. They are seated, again, in the members' gallery. Today is lung health day. I hope my colleagues were able to take part in the display downstairs,

and I encourage Albertans to join me in recognizing lung health month this November and to offer their support to people in our province living with respiratory illnesses. I ask Leigh Allard, president and CEO of the lung association of Alberta, as well as the members who are here today to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the Alberta Society of Radiologists. Today is the International Day of Radiology. Radiologists are at the front end of a patient care cycle and are integral, collaborative partners within the health care team. Today they hosted an information session highlighting women's health and wellness. I now invite Dr. Robert Davies and other representatives from the society to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for climate change.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 24 members of Team Lethbridge. If I could please ask you to stand as I read your names: Amanda Berg of the Allied Arts Council; Paula Burns, Sandra Dufresne, Kerry Doyle, and Kenny Corscadden from Lethbridge College; Angela Cornforth, Kristen Demone, and Wes Carroll from the Canadian Home Builders' Association, Lethbridge region; Patricia Epp and Trevor Lewington from the Lethbridge economic development authority; Shaun Ward, Lethbridge Sport Council; Kim Gallucci, Lethbridge Lodging Association; Bob Girard, Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization; Cheryl Gilmore, superintendent of Lethbridge school district No. 51; Andrea Hlady, Lethbridge Family Services; Donna Hunt and Doug James, who are school trustees with Lethbridge school district No. 51; Sacha Johnson from the Lethbridge Lodging Association; Kristie Kruger from Lethbridge & District Association of Realtors; Bev Lanz from Lethbridge exhibition; Suzanne Lint from the Allied Arts Council; Erin Low from the Lethbridge Construction Association; Mike Mahon from the University of Lethbridge; Cathy Maxwell, Lethbridge & District Association of Realtors. I'd ask now that they please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the second half of the phenomenon that is Team Lethbridge. I will speak further about the team in my statement later today. Now I ask my guests to rise as I call their names and to remain standing to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Mayor Chris Spearman, Ryan Miller, Sandra Mintz, Rob Miyashiro, Nathan Neudorf, Erasmus Okine, Danny Ponjavic, Karla Pyrch, Keith Sumner, Jessica Robinson, Jenn Schmidt-Rempel, Chris Smeaton, Bridget Mearns, Jeff Carlson, Blaine Hyggen, Bill Spenceley, Shilpa Stocker, Ken Tratch, Richard Westlund, Nikolaus Wyslouzil – I hope I said it correctly – and Sonny Zgurski. Please, our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my parents, Marg and Barrie Luff, who are here visiting from Vancouver Island. They are folks who were stalwart community volunteers for their entire lives. If you played a sport in the Cowichan valley in the '90s, probably one of them coached you, including the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who isn't here today. [interjections] Oh, I apologize. They have been incredibly supportive throughout my life; always told me I could do anything that I wanted to. I don't think that this was what they expected when they said that. They are here visiting today despite the fact that the grandkids are at home in Calgary, so if you could please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

1:40

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the regiments and battalions and squadrons who participated in the Battle of Passchendaele 100 years ago. Please rise as I say your name: Colonel Eppo van Weelderden of 41 Canadian Brigade Group, the King's Own Calgary Regiment, South Alberta Light Horse Regiment, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, 20th Field Artillery Regiment, 41 Signal Regiment, 41 Service Battalion, and 1 Military Police Squadron. Thank you for your service, and please accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. member, you may have missed the inside story, but you forgot to mention Alberta's regiment, which is South Alberta Light Horse. We claim the province.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you an old friend of mine – this didn't start the way that I'd hoped – not that she's old but that she's been a friend of mine for a really long time. Allison Tatham and I had the pleasure of being in high school together, but more important than that is that she is a very strong advocate for Mothers Against Drunk Driving. A couple of years ago, unfortunately, Allison lost her father to a vehicle accident by a drunk driver, and this year she is the spokesperson for the red ribbon campaign, which is taking place this week. I know that she is also here this afternoon with her first-born son. I know that her father would have loved to have been able to be here to experience the joy of a grandchild, but that was so, so horribly taken by a drunk driver. I'd like to introduce Allison and encourage everyone to wear their red ribbons this week.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Carbon Levy and Seniors' Expenses

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been frustrated. I have been frustrated with this government's reckless, ideological policies and the detrimental toll that these policies continue to take on the lives of my constituents. This government claims that they care and that they want to make life better for everyday Albertans, but time and time again they put their socialist ideology ahead of common-sense policy. Albertans are facing the toughest economic climate that they have in decades. Hundreds of thousands of

Albertans are out of a job. Industry is fleeing the province, and this government continues to spend hard-earned tax dollars buying social licence from Ottawa with a carbon tax. It's unforgivable.

I recently sat down to chat with an elderly constituent in my riding, and what she had to say absolutely broke my heart. Edith has been a pillar in the Airdrie community for years. She paid taxes, raised her family, and helped to turn Airdrie into the thriving city that it is today. Like most seniors, she is on a modest fixed income, so she received the maximum carbon tax rebate. That rebate is a tiny drop in an empty bucket.

Mr. Speaker, Edith's favourite tradition is taking her grandchildren on a special outing on their birthdays. She's been doing it since they could walk and looks forward to it all year. Edith told me how her natural gas bill has gone up by 75 per cent, how her groceries are more expensive, and in fact she cannot even afford fresh produce any more. Then she told me that all of these unexpected expenses and her inability to earn any additional money meant that she can no longer take her grandchildren on their special birthday outing.

My heart broke as I watched her eyes well up when she said that she felt like she was failing her grandkids by not being able to provide for them like she had in the past. It was in that moment that I decided that I wasn't going to be frustrated anymore. I was more determined than ever because I know that it is not Edith who has failed here, Mr. Speaker; it is that NDP government.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Battle of Passchendaele Day

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 26, 1917, the Canadian Expeditionary Force entered into the Third Battle of Ypres in France, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele. Canada joined in the fight to relieve ANZAC troops who had been fighting at Passchendaele for three long months. Conditions were horrifying. Rain and shellfire, waterlogged craters, and knee-deep mud surrounded our soldiers. The battlefield was so destructive that it swallowed everything, including vehicles, horses, and men. Despite these conditions our soldiers captured the ridge on November 10. Nine soldiers won the Victoria Cross, and five regiments and battalions in Alberta would earn battle honours for Passchendaele. But the cost was great. Sixteen thousand soldiers were wounded or killed.

Today I along with the hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism were proud to declare November 10, 2017, Battle of Passchendaele day here in the province of Alberta. It is important that we honour the victory of Passchendaele and forever remember the sacrifices of the Canadian Corps upon the battlefield, sacrifices made by Albertans such as Private Alex Decoteau. He was a trench runner at the battle and lost his life on October 30 for his country. Today we have family members of Private Decoteau here in the House, and to them I say thank you for continuing to honour his legacy.

Today is also Aboriginal Veterans Day, and as the government of Alberta's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces I would like to take the time to thank all indigenous members of the Canadian Armed Forces for the dedication and sacrifice made to protect our boundaries both at home and abroad.

As we honour members both past and present this week with Veterans' Week, it has been an honour to spend time with veterans and to hear their stories. To those who are no longer with us, to the veterans across this nation, to current members, both regular force and reserve, and to families who support our forces: thank you. Let us not forget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Afghan War Monument Unveiling in Grande Prairie

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago I was honoured to attend the unveiling of a war monument in my community of Grande Prairie. A war monument, you may ask? That's unusual in this era. While it might be unusual, perhaps it shouldn't be. The monument that I'm speaking of honours the 158 Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan. I fear we sometimes forget about the sacrifice of the 40,000 men and women who served on that mission from 2001 to 2014.

It surprised me how much the local memorial brought the magnitude of their sacrifice in Afghanistan home to our lives in Alberta. It was brought home in another way, too, because four of the soldiers who lost their lives were from Grande Prairie. Plaques denoting their sacrifice mark the four corners of the impressive seven-foot-high granite monument. The soldiers' family members and their military families attended that day.

Their presence provided a sombre reminder that we need to honour those who participated in the Afghanistan mission. As we take part in Remembrance Day services this weekend, we can pay tribute to the veterans of Afghanistan as we pay tribute to the veterans of World War I and II and the Korean War.

During the moving ceremony I felt pride that our community had taken the initiative to create the monument, and it would not have happened without the passion of Renee Charbonneau. One dignitary who visited other memorials in Canada called ours one of the best he's seen. I believe everyone felt a special pride in the moment the monument was unveiled, and we now have a permanent reminder of all the veterans of the Afghanistan mission. We will remember them.

Thank you.

LGBTQ2S Students

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, leadership is about standing up for what is right. Here is what I know. Coming out takes an act of bravery. Outing LGBTQ2S is wrong. We must do better.

I look for inspiration in role models like a young woman in Sherwood Park. Recently she got up, took the mike, and spoke in a school speech competition. She talked about being a young gay woman, the discrimination she has faced, and the struggles still faced by the LGBTQ2S students. This takes courage, to speak in front of all of your peers and bring up the difficulties that come just from being who you are. It was a pleasure to meet with her, her very supportive mom, her girlfriend, and even her girlfriend's mom. I know that they are proud of her. She was bold in coming out in such a public sphere. It was her choice, and it should always be her choice.

1:50

This is just one of the many positive stories in our communities, a story of what coming out should and can be when a young person isn't pushed out of the closet. Along with my colleagues in this Chamber and Albertans across the province I strive to pave a path for stories like this as being the case for everyone who wants to come out. Jason Kenney and those that support his position on GSAs are going against what Albertans stand for. Albertans are vocal in their support for LGBTQ2S students.

Before I finish, for all of those Albertans who have reached out to me, know that I am proud to represent your voice in this Legislature. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Federal Equalization Payment Negotiations

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we called on the government to begin urgent preparations for the equalization renegotiation and to inform this House of its progress. Sadly, the NDP shot down our common-sense proposal. We know that the government has already taken two pieces of advice from us, intervening before the NEB on Burnaby's obstruction and travelling to B.C. to discuss pipelines. Despite their unwillingness to admit as much, we're glad to see them follow our lead. Perhaps they will do so quietly again. To the Premier: has the government begun planning for equalization renegotiation? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the member opposite's delusions of grandeur with respect to who is following who on those other matters, what I will say is that we will not be following the lead of the UCP on the matter of equalization. Interestingly, one of their friends, the Fraser Institute, outlined what they called the GDP growth-rate rule, which was introduced by the Harper-Kenney government in 2009. Interestingly, it is that rule which is in fact disadvantaging Alberta today in relation to equalization. My question is: why won't they take credit for it?

Mr. Nixon: There was a time in this country when pipelines were not a contentious issue, where pipelines were built as a matter of course, where Alberta could get market access for our resources. Unfortunately, that's no longer the case as certain provincial and municipal politicians across Canada work to block the source of Alberta's wealth, the same wealth they're happy to receive in transfer payments. Albertans are tired of it, and they want this government to take action. Given this, will the government propose a revised equalization formula during next year's negotiations? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, interestingly, Mr. Speaker, you know, as a result of the new rule brought in by the Harper-Kenney government, the province of Ontario will receive \$360 million more through equalization than they would have otherwise, and in fact the province of Quebec will receive \$215 million more through equalization than they would have otherwise because of the UCP and the Conservatives doing such a great job of standing up for Alberta. What I will do is ensure that the Conservatives and the UCP and their friends are nowhere close to the next round of negotiations.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I can't understand why this government won't take this matter seriously. Albertans do. This should not be a partisan issue. Alberta is under attack. Pipelines are being blocked. The federal government is rigging the deck against us here in Alberta, and this NDP government seems to be choosing to play nice with their Trudeau allies instead of standing up for the very Albertans that elected them. I ask again: will the NDP reconsider their motion and stand with us and stand with Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've just indicated, what we will do is to continue to stand with Albertans, but we absolutely will not stand with the Conservatives and the Harper-Kenney record on this matter because it hurt Alberta. Why won't the members opposite stop playing politics on this issue and take responsibility for the fact that their plan is making it harder for Alberta?

The Speaker: Second main question.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, last week the UCP suggested that the government should join Kinder Morgan's challenge to the NEB about Burnaby's pipeline obstruction. While the government was dismissive at the time, we are happy to see the NDP eventually take our common-sense advice. Again, we lead; they follow. Today we see that the NDP has rejected expedited hearings on this important matter. Can the Premier tell us what, if any, communication her government has had with the federal government or the NEB on the denial of expedited hearings?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, on the matter of talking about pipelines or intervening on the Kinder Morgan hearing, can I just introduce a new word into the Legislature, "hepeat," the definition of which is as follows: when a person, who might be a man, repeats what you say and takes credit for it. Just thought I'd throw that out there.

In any event, let me just say that the reason the matter has been delayed is because those guys over there, their friends in Saskatchewan asked for it to be delayed. We wanted it to not be delayed, but what can you do? Your friends are your friends. We will make every effort to stand up for Alberta when the matter is heard, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nixon: While the Premier may think this is a joke, Albertans don't.

Kinder Morgan has warned that every month of delay costs approximately \$90 million. This sends a terrible message to job creators and investors. Trans Mountain received regulatory approval nearly a year ago, but little actual activity is taking place. The company acknowledges that. The Premier has done everything in her power to support her friend Justin Trudeau; unfortunately, to date Albertans have not seen any benefits from that. Has the Premier directly asked the Prime Minister to clear the regulatory red tape?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to ask the Prime Minister to engage in the kind of behaviour that would actually get the whole matter clogged up in the courts for decades to come, because that really would be a delay. Thankfully, we're in charge, and they are not. Nonetheless, our government took a very clear position to the NEB, asking that they not proceed to delay the NEB hearing. Notwithstanding that that wasn't successful, we have filed our own position. We will be standing up to support Kinder Morgan's application with respect to the Burnaby issue because we know that this pipeline is good for all Canadians, and we will not back down from that position.

Mr. Nixon: It's good to see: taking our advice again.

Mr. Speaker, the time for action is now. We know that the Trudeau Liberals have no problem meddling in the NEB process and interfering with Alberta's constitutional rights to manage our own resources. After all, it was them changing the rules in the middle of the game that killed Energy East and the jobs that would have come with it and, worse yet, the dream of energy independence in our country. Can the Premier tell us specifically the last time she raised delays of Trans Mountain with the Prime Minister? A specific date, please.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are constantly working with the federal government to make sure, within legal parameters, that

we are able to work together to move forward on that important project. The reason we are doing that is because we are working together, and the reason we are working together is because through the leadership of our government we did what was necessary to ensure that we had that partnership with the federal government. As a result, we will get the pipeline built. I know that the members opposite don't want to see that happen, but it will happen.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Pipeline Approval and Construction

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government likes to tout its supposed success in receiving paper regulatory approval for the Trans Mountain pipeline, paper approval from Justin Trudeau, and I'll leave it up to Albertans as to what they think that paper is worth. They've been spiking the football in this House for nearly a year now. All members of this House hope that that pipeline is built, but that path seems to be getting more perilous by the day. Can the Premier confirm how many barrels of oil the Trans Mountain expansion has shipped to date?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite might want to confer with people who are in the business of building pipelines because, in fact, typically once it's approved, it doesn't actually start shipping until it's built. In fact, construction has begun on a number of different elements along the line. I know the members opposite wish that weren't true, but it is. The pipeline will be built. Alberta's energy industry will grow and be even stronger as a result of that, and it will be because of the work that this government has done.

Mr. Nixon: So zero barrels, Mr. Speaker.

Let's correct the record. Four major pipeline projects were completed while the Hon. Jason Kenney was in the federal Conservative government. One, Keystone: 435,000 barrels per day. Two, the Alberta Clipper: 450,000 barrels per day. Three, line 9 reversal: 300,000 barrels per day. Four, anchor loop expansion: 40,000 barrels per day. That's 1.25 million barrels a day of extra capacity for western Canadian oil. To the Premier: how much actual capacity has been added, actual pipelines pumping actual oil, under your watch?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that under Jason Kenney's watch, under the conservative party of Alberta's watch not one pipeline got built to tidewater. We are very close to breaking that landlock. We are very close to making that incredible step forward that our energy industry has been working very hard on. We've done it through diplomacy. We have done it through partnership. We have not done it through grandstanding and through misusing the facts. When it is built, as I've said before, the members opposite are invited to the party.

Mr. Nixon: Bizarrely, the NDP claim that the Conservative government didn't support pipelines. Let's examine the record. One, Trans Mountain was in the NEB approval process when the federal government changed. Two, the Energy East amended application was only filed after the Trudeau Liberals took office. Three, the one pipeline to the coast that actually came before the Harper government for approval was Northern Gateway, and it was approved. It was the Premier's friend Justin Trudeau that killed that pipeline without a peep from your government. Will the Premier acknowledge these facts: that she has zero pipelines, zero barrels of oil under her watch, and that she needs to do something about it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that the Gateway pipeline was killed by the courts because the Conservatives did not follow the rules. It is those kinds of bully tactics that ensure that we don't make progress on this important type of infrastructure. In fact, it is responsible for government to accommodate indigenous interests, to listen to communities, to respond to climate issues in order to ensure that when the decisions are made, they stand up. Yelling and bullying do not succeed. That's why Gateway is not built, and that's why we are adopting a different approach, one that will succeed for all Canadians.

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

Energy Industry Emission Reduction Initiatives

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Climate change: it is real, it is human caused, and it is something we can and must address. Alberta has so much to offer in helping the world innovate our way out of this problem. Some would have us believe the only option is to produce less oil, but yesterday I talked about the work already under way in Alberta to decarbonize oil sands oil. To the Premier: do you agree that Alberta's contribution to tackling climate change shouldn't come from reducing production but should come from increasing production of lower carbon oil?

Ms Notley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do agree with that. That, indeed, is something that I've said in numerous, numerous speeches in a whole bunch of different places. That's exactly what our climate leadership plan is focused on doing, taking the carbon out of the oil, reducing the emissions while potentially, for sure, increasing the actual production. That's what our plan is modelled on. We've been talking about that for two and a half years, and I'm pleased that the member opposite is aware of that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A California report showed that Alberta oil sands crude already has lower emissions than the Venezuelan and Nigerian heavy crudes it would displace. Alberta bitumen has three times lower carbon intensity than some Nigerian crude, and that was in 2015, before Alberta innovators started work on decarbonizing oil sands oil. Again to the Premier: why haven't Alberta innovations been the cornerstone of your case for pipelines, and on your upcoming tour will they be?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that it is this government that has invested in innovation, particularly in the oil sands. In September we put \$50 million through Emissions Reduction Alberta, which is recycling carbon revenues into an oil sands challenge. We had for that \$50 million \$1.6 billion worth of interest. The fact of the matter is that the energy industry in this province is ready to solve the problems of the future. It's too bad the Conservatives aren't.

Mr. Clark: Well, it's good news that I'm not part of the Conservatives, then, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta has the best environmental track record in the world when it comes to oil and gas development, and this should be something that we are shouting from the rooftops. With respect, while I agree that the economic argument is important, it also sounds like we only care about money. We're Albertans, Mr. Speaker. We also care about the environment. Again to the Premier:

when you go on your pipeline tour, will you emphasize these essential truths about the environmental benefits of pipelines in addition to making the economic case?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I would invite the member opposite to read some of the speeches that I've already given on the matter. This has always been a key part of the argument that we have made to people across the country: that, in fact, our energy industry is leading on this and that, in fact, our climate leadership plan will invest in the ability to reduce the amount of emissions per barrel and that the emissions cap is the fundamental cornerstone to that plan. Again, I invite the member opposite to look at what we've already been talking about. This is exactly the point we've been making.

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

Lethbridge South School Construction Project

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March 2017 approval of funding was granted to Lethbridge school district No. 51 for the design stages of the south Lethbridge elementary school project. Given the work that I've already seen completed, this project will be ready for tender in early 2018 as projected. Can the Minister of Infrastructure confirm for me that this project will receive approval for its funding on the anticipated shovel-ready timeline of February-March 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. You know, one of the things we're always very excited about is school builds. Certainly, in this province we are excited when we have a capital plan that includes almost \$30 billion for building in this province, and schools are certainly among that. We are well aware of the importance of making sure that school designs are done well, and that's why the design funds for the south Lethbridge elementary school were approved in Budget 2017. The designs should be of course completed by the end of 2018, and we look forward to seeing those when they're done. I'm sure they will be fantastic.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: when will Lethbridge district No. 51 be receiving this formal confirmation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. The formal confirmation will be given to the district once Budget 2018 has been approved. I understand that my colleague the Minister of Education has been in touch with the district to provide updates on the project. As I said, you know, we're very proud of the kind of investment we're doing in this province and delighted that we can have some folks from Lethbridge here as we talk about design/builds and how important Lethbridge is to all of us.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister be attending the sod-turning for this project? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I will never pass up an opportunity to come to the lovely city of Lethbridge. I thank

the member for the invitation and certainly look forward to it when the day arrives.

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

2:10 Remand Centre Mental Health Services

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, last week I questioned the Solicitor General on the ongoing issues of rural crime and drugs in our correctional facilities. The minister mentioned a pilot project to install body scanners to hopefully prevent the entry of contraband into remand centres. In the meantime counselling services for persons in remand are woefully inadequate. I spoke with one former prisoner who said that he'd spent weeks in both Calgary and Edmonton remand without ever seeing a counsellor. To the minister. We share your hope that body scanners are successful in keeping drugs out of correctional centres. What are you specifically doing to increase counselling services in those centres?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Given that we're touching on a mental health issue, I'd be happy to begin, and I'm sure that my colleague will have more to say in subsequent answers. When I toured the Edmonton remand recently, I was really proud to have an opportunity to meet with the extensive health care team that was in place, including counselling services as well as nurse practitioners, dental hygienists, a strong nursing team, and health care aides as well. I have to say that it was great to see the opportunities that are in play there. We know that often people who are incarcerated have other underlying social determinants of health, and to be able to address those, including mental health, is certainly a priority.

Dr. Starke: Well, Minister, you need more because the prisoner in question saw a counsellor once in four weeks.

Since those with unresolved mental health and addictions issues are eventually released into society and are at a high risk of reoffending and given that reducing rural crime must include a combination of increased enforcement, prompt prosecution, and robust prisoner rehabilitation, what counselling and drug rehabilitation services are offered to offenders who continue to have unresolved mental health and addictions issues after their release?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I imagine this House is well aware, certainly, campaign 2015 included a significant focus around mental health supports. That has been throughout the broader community. I understand and would be happy to follow up on concerns around transition from incarceration back to community, but certainly our goal is to ensure that all Albertans get the right care in the right place at the right time, and as close to home as possible is certainly that goal.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that criminal activity in my constituency is reaching epidemic proportions and given that this activity has caused people to feel unsafe both in their homes and in their communities and given that this government only pays lip service to the rehabilitation and counselling services that are critical to breaking the criminal cycle, to the minister. When it comes to rural crime, your government has failed both the perpetrator and the victim. Explain exactly how that is making life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We couldn't agree more that ultimately, at the end of the day, the best way to address issues of crime in our society is to ensure that people have adequate income, to ensure that they have access to adequate mental health support. That's why we were so happy to see launched a navigator program for people transitioning out of incarceration facilities to help them hook up with the supports that they need. We absolutely know that there is more to do on this front, and we will be moving forward with additional mental health supports. But what certainly won't help with that are 20 per cent cuts in health care budgets.

Energy Industry Emissions Assessments

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, another day, another FOIP showing that the NDP is trying hard to hide information. Alberta Energy hired Jacobs Consultancy to review the oil-climate index, an investment tool that slammed Alberta's oil sands. The document that the UCP received had multiple cover-ups, but the document that private citizens received had no cover-ups. Can the Minister of Energy explain what you are trying to hide?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're working every day to make life better for Albertans, and especially in our energy industry things, as I've said, are looking up. Jobs are up. Wages are up. Drilling is up. That's because of confidence in the sector. [interjections] If there's a specific question to a specific issue . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, please allow the minister to answer the question so that I can hear it as well.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the hidden contents of the Jacobs report contain information that scientifically debunks the oil-climate index and given that the hidden information showed the oil-climate index was riddled with mathematical conversion logic errors, can the Minister of Energy explain: why are you not defending the energy industry against this pseudoscience slander?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta. Certainly, while there's more work to do, as a government we have improved turnaround time for FOIP requests and proactively share more information with the public than ever before.

As to the specific contents of the question, we will endeavour to get back to you and update the House.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the rapid technological changes in heavy oil production in Alberta have decreased the energy used and emissions and given that the oil-climate index ignored those facts and given that the Jacobs Consultancy warned Alberta Energy and other stakeholders not to use the oil-climate index, will the minister admit that Alberta's oil sands are greener and cleaner than the myth conveyed by the oil-climate index and tell us why you are trying to hide it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I have not reviewed the document in question, there is no question that Alberta's climate leadership plan embraces the fact that the environment and the economy go hand in hand, and we can in fact grow the economy while reducing our emissions. That was the

central proposition of the climate leadership plan, supported by a number of different initiatives, including the oil sands emissions limit, that was broadly supported by industry. We are moving forward with those initiatives to ensure that we can grow the economy while at the same time reducing our emissions.

Thank you.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Barnes: This government has unjustifiably claimed that they are making life better for Albertans. A recent paper coauthored by Janice MacKinnon, a former NDP Finance minister, no less, calls that claim into question. It states: “A course correction is necessary. Otherwise, the burden from this government’s building up of debt will be unfairly shifted to the shoulders of future Albertans.” This government has already piled up \$45 billion in debt and is headed to \$90 billion. When will this minister admit that his plan is only hurting Albertans and stop piling unsustainable debt on the backs of young Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That report is limited in capturing what’s really happening in Alberta here today.

While I very much enjoy talking about Alberta’s economic recovery and the jobs that have been created, I was deeply troubled by the member opposite’s recent statements. This member thinks that there can be a good reason to out LGBTQ children. I can think of only one reason: when that child decides to come out.

Mr. Barnes: He’ll do anything to avoid this question.

Given that Alberta currently spends 1 and a half billion dollars each year on interest and given that that’s money taken from the wallets of hard-working Albertans and put into the pockets of Bay Street and given that \$1.5 billion could have built 75 schools or a full-size green line LRT or done 83,000 knee replacements – all of this from the party of the proletariat and Occupy Wall Street; it’s foolish and shameful – to the minister: why are you so committed to making the rich richer at the expense of regular Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as I’ve said over and over, jobs are up in Alberta, drilling is up in Alberta, manufacturing is up, and real estate sales are up in Alberta.

But I continue to be troubled by the member’s extreme ideas. Not only does he refuse to protect LGBTQ kids, but now he says that legislation on gas and dash would be onerous. [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, another paper, by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, found that Alberta has the highest default probability even before this minister of this NDP government’s recklessly increasing spending. The paper also states that Alberta could be headed towards default in as soon as 30 years. Given that MacKinnon’s report warns that the NDP’s plan to balance is based on the assumption that oil prices will rebound – only a fool would make that wish – when will the minister admit that the NDP is what ails Alberta and take corrective action?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our economy is recovering, and our government is working towards making life

better for all Albertans. We’re focused on creating jobs in this province, protecting public services that Albertans rely on and health care and education. Our plan is working. Their plan would cut out 20 per cent from today’s budget. It would make it harder for Albertans, and we would all be worse off.

Restaurant Industry Support

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, this government brags on its tourism website that it wants to diversify the economy and support culinary tourism. However, according to the Raise the Bar report issued yesterday by Restaurants Canada, Alberta’s reputation as a business-friendly place to run a bar or a licensed restaurant is actually slipping. The report indicates that since this government has taken the reins, in 2015, Alberta’s restaurant business friendliness has been downgraded. This government claims things are getting better when, in fact, they are getting worse. Why is this government misleading Albertans?

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

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We’re very proud of the fact that Alberta is an incredibly welcoming place, and every single tourist who comes to our province can look forward to the best service, to the best entertainment, to the best activities that they can find in this entire country. We’re very proud of our industry, and we’re going to continue working with our industry to ensure that every single one of our visitors has the best experience possible.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Given that one of the main reasons for the downgrade is this government’s increase in taxes such as the increased provincial liquor markup tax, carbon tax on food, utilities, natural gas, and everything else and given that confiscating surplus WCB employer contributions, if it’s not theft, amounts to another tax and given that the average restaurant makes a mere 3 per cent on operational revenues and that they’re mostly local-friendly businesses, will the government stop battering the food and beverage industry with this pile-on of increasing taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Restaurant sales are up. Albertans spent \$771 million in restaurants in August, \$5 million more than the record set in June. We’re going to continue working with our tourism partners to ensure that every single person who comes to our province can enjoy all the amazing things that we have in this province to offer. I invite the members opposite to join in celebrating all the amazing work that’s being done in this province.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: The restaurants don’t agree that you’re working with them given that the wages are the second-largest restaurant cost and the cancellation of the server wage, with a replacement of an aggressive one-year 14 per cent minimum wage escalation, is the other reason for Alberta restaurants’ downgrades. Given that the Restaurants Canada VP says, “For the government to hit businesses with these extra costs during a recession adds insult to injury,” will the government delay its job-reducing, bankrupting minimum wage increase?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we believe everyone who works a full-time job should be

able to feed their family when they come home at night and not have to stop at the food bank. I've heard from too many people in the last two years who've shared with me the struggles of having to work a full-time minimum wage job and still have troubles making ends meet. Jason Kenney and the Conservatives don't believe that raising the minimum wage will help people. Instead, they believe in tax cuts for their friends, cutting the tax rate on the richest. Our government believes that every honest, hard-working Albertan should be able to earn and make a living wage.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Investment in Alberta

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents have expressed a lot of excitement over Calgary's recent bid for Amazon's second headquarters. News recently broke that Amazon is breaking ground on a new distribution centre near Calgary, with 750 much-needed full-time jobs. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: we have Amazon's distribution centre, but what action has this government taken to attract even more businesses like Amazon and the jobs they bring to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Well, we actually believe that Alberta is a pretty good place to do business, and so do a lot of other folks. Even though the folks on the other side of the aisle would have us believe it's not, the businesses say otherwise. Alberta has no provincial sales tax, no payroll tax, no health care premiums, and some of the lowest gasoline and diesel taxes in Canada. Folks are actually listening. They like it. So to help attract more businesses to expand in our province, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has created a branch in his department called Invest Alberta. It is a one-stop government connection to doing business in our province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Amazon distribution centre represents a significant investment for my region. Is this investment part of a broader trend of business investment in the Calgary area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, it is. Folks are listening. They look at Alberta, and they really like what they see. The Invest Alberta branch has quarterbacked the expansion of Amazon, RocketSpace, and Swoop in Calgary, Champion Petfoods and Pinnacle in Parkland county, Google in Edmonton, and Cavendish Farms in Lethbridge. I think they're actually pretty happy about that. There are many more expansions to come. In addition to these, we've implemented our small-business tax cut. More than 29,000 new companies have incorporated in this province. That says everything.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you comment on any lesser known investments or projects that have perhaps been overshadowed by Amazon or Cavendish Farms or other projects that are helping to grow Alberta's tech sector?

Ms Jansen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we mentioned, of course, in addition to Amazon, RocketSpace, and Swoop, we've got companies coming in and saying: this is the place to invest in this province. You know, as you mentioned, the Amazon project is pretty amazing: 600,000 square feet, this facility, expected to be done next fall; 150 people are actually going to be working on it and 750 people working in it when the project is done. We are on the world map. People are noticing Alberta. They're coming here. They want to invest and do business with us.

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

Justice System Delays

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day more criminal cases are being thrown out of our courts because of this government's triaging policy. The senior Crown prosecutor, who shed light on hundreds of halted prosecutions, criticized the practice as, quote: the political mentality of putting your finger in a dike to hold the water back. Unquote. Minister, how many prosecutions have been stayed since the introduction of triaging?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member is very much aware, all jurisdictions have been struggling with the Jordan decision as a result of historic court backlogs that have built up over years. That's why our government has taken the step to implement the triage policy to try to find efficiencies to ensure that we are using courts for serious things and not for mental health conditions. In addition, we've also added additional resources to ensure that we have additional Crown prosecutors, additional court clerks. We've maintained funding to front-line police officers, something the opposition would have cut.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that triaging has created another problem in that it's hard for police who have spent time and effort investigating crimes to then watch criminals walk free and given that Alberta's practice of triaging cases can create a lack of faith in the justice system for police officers, Minister, when are you going to provide me and Albertans with the information I requested in Public Accounts outlining the criteria for staying charges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the hon. member across the way is absolutely wrong. No one is more supportive of moving to a more advanced justice system than our police partners. They are fans of restorative justice. They are fans of ensuring that we have mental health supports. They are fans of all of the things we are doing to try and improve the justice system and move it forward for a new century so that we can spend an appropriate amount of money and that money is going to ensure that the safety of Albertans is increased rather than simply going to churning people through the system over and over again.

2:30

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that even judges are wondering why Alberta is so far behind other jurisdictions in addressing the Jordan decision and given that this NDP government is famous for its unintended consequences and that triaging is

driving a wedge between police and Crown prosecutors, to the same minister: are you aware that your triaging policy has turned police and prosecutors into unintentional adversaries?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member could not be further from the truth. In fact, we've managed to convene police officers, the defence bar, judges, Crown prosecutors, all under one rubric, and you know what? They are very hopeful about the changes we are making to move forward to ensure that we have a modern justice system, a justice system that focuses on those things which are dangerous to Albertans and not simply on churning people with mental health problems through the system over and over again.

The Speaker: The Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin.

Home Insurance Policies

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, thank you. In the last four years Alberta has suffered its two worst natural disasters ever. One common thread in both the High River flood and the Fort McMurray fire is, in fact, that Albertans found themselves dealing with a confusing mess when it came to home insurance, next-door neighbours being treated very differently by different insurance companies because of different policies. Will this government change the Insurance Act to provide for standard language on home policies in the same way we have standard language on auto policies for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government committed to standing with the people of the Fort McMurray region after this disaster, and that's what we continue to do. Consumers are encouraged to review their policy coverage with their insurance representative to confirm their coverage and understand how it responds. The government of Alberta, through the office of the superintendent of insurance, has provided important insurance complaint resolution information online and to Albertans contacting the superintendent's office. As of the end of June of this year 85 per cent of the 25,000 residential insurance claims from the Fort McMurray forest fire had been settled, with \$1.3 billion paid out. We will continue to stand with the people of Fort McMurray as they ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: The minister simply doesn't understand the question.

You see, across the street from where my house burned down was a fourplex that was saved by the amazing work of our firefighters. However, each of the four homeowners was treated very differently by their insurers. One had their unit demolished while another was allowed to move in after a minor cleaning. The third received a buyout and proceeded to sell their home as is, and the fourth was offered a full, down-to-the-studs remediation from the rooftop to the basement, including replacement of insulation and drywall. Given that they all had insurance and they had much different experiences, doesn't the minister agree that the time has come for standardized home policies here in Alberta for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that some Fort McMurray families are still struggling, and we're working hard to continue supporting them. The government of Alberta, again, through the office of the superintendent of insurance, has encouraged the Insurance Bureau of Canada to actively promote and provide information to Albertans about resolving insurance complaints as

well as to maintain statistics on how well insurers are doing on settling claims. We'll continue to stand with the people of Fort McMurray as they recover, and we'll do what needs to be done to ensure that Alberta is as resilient as possible in the face of natural disasters.

Mr. Jean: This works in the auto insurance sector here in Alberta, and it should work in home insurance. My constituency office in Fort McMurray has spent the last year and a half hearing from Albertans who feel they have not been treated fairly by their insurers. They see their neighbours getting full coverage while they are denied on technicalities or put through the wringer as part of an insurance negotiation process. Given that not every fire victim has the resources for a prolonged dispute with an insurer who has unlimited resources, will the minister sit down with insurers and mandate a standard home policy so that Albertans clearly know what they're purchasing when it comes time to buy home insurance in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The road ahead for Fort McMurray is a long one, and our work continues. We've announced funding for \$7 million in tax relief for residents whose homes were affected by the wildfire. We announced \$1 million to support a program that accelerates training for plumbing apprentices; \$5 million towards a study of alternate access routes to the community; \$148.7 million in disaster recovery funding to help the municipality with the cost of the fire. We ensured that there are no obstacles to restrict rebuilding in waterways so the municipality can move forward with consultation. Over 50,000 evacuated households got \$99 million in disaster relief benefits. Right across the board we promised to stand ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Fisheries Management

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past April the Official Opposition released its 12-point fish plan. Inspired originally by the minister's disastrous aeration program, it covered multiple opportunities to enhance our fisheries and increase fishing opportunities for Alberta anglers. This plan was created by taking common-sense ideas from anglers and fishery experts instead of using the NDP government's failed approach to fisheries management. Minister, can you tell Albertan anglers what your government is doing to both improve our fisheries and increase opportunities for anglers other than, of course, making sure that fish don't die of oxygen deprivation during this winter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the member is quite right that there were some initiatives undertaken by the Alberta Conservation Association that did not succeed. Environment and Parks has fixed that problem, and those fish stocks have recovered. Our government is also taking swift action to protect our fish population from whirling disease – we've invested \$9.3 million to prevent the further spread of that disease in Alberta waters – which, of course, has the potential to wipe out our trout populations. That is a very serious matter, and that's why we took action.

Mr. Loewen: Given that our 12-point fish plan covers issues like harvest management of species that are presently not being

managed and predation control that is not being done and stocking opportunities that are not being taken advantage of and given that the expanded use of slot limits could provide increased angling opportunities that this government is failing to take advantage of, Minister, can you please tell Albertans why these concepts are not being fully implemented to restore our fisheries back to sustainable levels so Albertans can continue to enjoy this renewable resource?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the opinions expressed by the members opposite about Alberta's front-line workers, our wildlife biologists, our fisheries experts are just that, opinions. I hold different opinions. I hold the folks who work for Environment and Parks every day and who protect the environment in this province in higher esteem than the Conservatives across the way, who, by the way, with their devastating cuts to the civil service, would be relieving them of a job anyway, and we wouldn't have anyone to look out for our fishery.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I was clearly talking about this NDP government and that minister and given that the 12-point fish plan covers environmental issues like reclamation and the use of weirs and their maintenance to further protect our water sources and the use of stocking, which the government has failed to use to its full potential, and given that I attended a packed town hall near St. Paul where multiple issues regarding this government's failed fishery management strategy were discussed, can the minister tell us here today: what new initiatives have you instituted to receive meaningful input from stakeholders and anglers on fisheries management beyond online surveys?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the fisheries and wildlife regulations are updated annually, and they are done so as a result of consultation with a number of different groups, and they are guided by science. I know that that's something that's tough for the folks across the way to understand, but the fact of the matter is that we make these decisions based on the best evidence. The other piece of evidence that we have in place is that when you protect the headwaters, as we have done in southwest Alberta, you start to recover your fish populations. That's why we made the decisions we did around the Castle parks, and that's why we've restored environmental monitoring within the department.

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

AISH and CPP Disability Benefits

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, I have constituents in Chestermere-Rocky View who, upon receiving cost-of-living increases on their CPP disability benefit, have had it clawed back by the AISH program. These people with disabilities have the federal government increase this benefit to help keep them going and then have the provincial government take it away to keep them in poverty. Can the Minister of Community and Social Services explain why the NDP government is running a social program that perpetuates poverty, dependence by clawing back income instead of lifting up a person?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The way the AISH program works is that it makes sure

that individual income from all sources doesn't fall below \$1,588. Any other source of income that is there to provide income support to that individual is deducted from the AISH program. Having said that, the AISH program also provides other benefits, and we have taken a number of steps that benefit people who are receiving AISH as well. I will talk about that in my next answer.

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that AISH defines "severe handicap" as an adult Albertan with a permanent disability that impairs their ability to earn a living and given that the medical criteria for that disability are likely to remain permanent, limiting the ability to earn a living, and that AISH considers whether training, rehabilitation, medical treatment will help you to work enough to earn a living, why does the Minister of Community and Social Services want to perpetuate cruelty, poverty, and dependency by clawing back income from the federal CPP, income my constituent actually earned already when they could work, by reducing his AISH payments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have done is that we have taken steps to fix AISH. The AISH action plan is available on the Community and Social Services' website. We have added \$70 million to provide support for people who are receiving AISH. What will be really cruel is if you claw it back by 20 per cent and strip 13,000 people from that benefit. That would be really cruel, and that's what we will not let happen on our watch.

Mrs. Aheer: You know what, Mr. Speaker? What's really interesting is that this minister has the power to actually already do this. Given that there are no advocates for AISH clients except MLAs when problems arise with the AISH program and given that AISH also prevents clients from seeking adequate and fair due process during the appeals and that the clients are accountable for all and any errors that the AISH person may make, can the minister explain: if all things are equal, why are AISH administrators more equal than others? You can fix it in one moment.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, AISH is an important program that provides support to 55,000 Albertans. On our watch we have increased funding to make sure that people are receiving those important supports, and we have put together an AISH action plan. That is there to make the AISH process better, efficient and to make public reporting better. What will not work for people with disabilities will be a 20 per cent cut that that side is promoting, that that side stands for.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hope. Hope is not a plan, and hope does not pay the bills. I recognize that. However, hope is what Albertans have right now.

They have hope that we will soon have a government which will respect all people of all backgrounds.

They have hope that every day we move closer to a government which respects the hard work it takes for people to earn a dollar before taxing that dollar away from them.

They have hope that we are moving closer to a government which respects the dignity of work and recognizes the pride, the dignity that give an Albertan who's employed purpose every day.

They have hope that Alberta is moving towards electing a government which can be a key player in Canada without being a doormat for those who would like to see nothing better than Alberta suffer. Alberta has never been afraid to contribute our fair share and then a little bit more to the world. Albertans work hard every day and give back to those around us. However, that kindness cannot be confused with weakness.

There is hope that soon we will have a government which recognizes our place in the world and fights tooth and nail to improve that standing while selling Alberta to the world. Our international relationships, Mr. Speaker, need to be nurtured and supported. Sectors like energy, agriculture, and forestry produce far more than Albertans could ever consume themselves. We hope to sell these industries to the world to ensure that our producers get prices that enable them to grow their businesses while providing much-needed jobs to deserving Albertans.

Our tourism sector must be supported in selling our world-class beauty to the world and inviting them here to enjoy it.

Most of all, Albertans have hope that we will soon have a Premier who will proudly stand up for our province, for our people, for our history, and for our future on the national and international stage.

Until the next general election enables the realization of those dreams, Mr. Speaker, hope is what Albertans have right now.

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

Team Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will begin by saying yet again that I love Lethbridge, and I hope that when you come to visit, you're going to love it, too. I think today is Lethbridge day in the Leg.

Lethbridge is full of wonderful, forward-thinking people who want to share what they know about the city and area. Some of these people formed a coalition representing 19 different organizations in our city and called themselves Team Lethbridge. I first spoke about Team Lethbridge two years ago. They continue to grow and have just welcomed the city of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Indigenous Sharing Network reconciliation implementation plan and will incorporate this into the work they do.

Team Lethbridge works tirelessly to offer support to the government of Alberta in building solutions for the future and in showcasing how our city can contribute to provincial priorities. The city and the province benefit through these interactions. Team Lethbridge consists of representatives from cultural organizations, economic development groups, tourism associations, local government, school divisions, and postsecondary and seniors' organizations.

Team Lethbridge are here for the next couple of days to meet with ministers and MLAs to exchange information and discuss how they can contribute to the province's success. If you meet with Team Lethbridge, they'll be happy to tell you about the diversified economy, the rich arts and cultural heritage, the strong public sector, the great leadership, and the strong industries around Lethbridge.

Thank you, Team Lethbridge, for everything that you do to make our city, our region, and our province better. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Notices of Motions

Ms Luff: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that being Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017.

In 2015 we said that we would strengthen Alberta's Conflicts of Interest Act and expand it to the senior staff of our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. With Bill 27 we are fulfilling this commitment, ensuring that public agencies are more accountable, are protecting Albertans' tax dollars, and are being governed transparently. Public agencies are a significant part of Alberta's public sector and account for half of the government's total yearly budget. Quite rightly, then, Albertans have the same high expectations of their public agencies that they have of government and expect all to be held to a high ethical standard.

Our public agencies provide valuable services that make life better for Albertans, such as higher education, protecting vulnerable people, and delivering quality health services. Bill 27 is part of numerous key changes that have already taken place for provincial government agencies, boards, and commissions, including the ongoing review of all agencies, boards, and commissions; the executive compensation reform we've brought in; enhanced compensation transparency; improved online board application processes; and greater transparency and diversity on Alberta's public agency boards.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first two are in reference to a commitment I made when we were closing debate on Bill 203. The first tabling is a briefing document that I provided for the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region in Victoria a couple of days ago.

The second one is the presentation that I provided to the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region. For those who are unfamiliar, it includes all of the Pacific Northwest provinces and states. I want to thank my assistant, Katy Snut, who helped me with the preparation of that document.

The third is an update that we received from PNWER, specifically from Alaska. The document here is entitled Alaska Governor Announces a Plan for the State to Meet Paris Accord Climate Goals on Its Own.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of a document containing five pages of quotations from letters I received supporting GSAs. If anybody in this Chamber doubts that GSAs save lives and help schools and communities flourish, all they have to do is listen to these youth and the people who support them. To quote briefly from one of the letters from a teacher in Calgary, she said: "It is paramount that no one out members of a safe space. Coming out is the story of that specific individual. There is a time and place that is appropriate for them to tell their friends and family."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first two tablings are in reference to the speech that I gave yesterday on Bill 24. One of them is a speech from Lindsay Peace, who spoke at the press conference of the minister about what it's like to be the mother of a young person who came out as transgendered.

The other tabling is in reference to Dr. Tony Campolo, a leading evangelical pastor and theologian, about his view around LGBTQ and gay marriages.

The third tabling that I have is the October 2017 labour force survey by Statistics Canada. The survey shows that things are looking up in Alberta. It shows that 12,000 net new jobs were created in Alberta, and we are second in job growth in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of ATB Financial's Alberta Economic Outlook, August 2017. In the report it shows that housing starts are up in Alberta, jobs are up in Alberta, GDP growth is up in Alberta. The report also says, "Nearly 35,000 net new jobs have been added over the last 12-months." It forecasts Alberta's GDP to grow by 3.2 per cent this year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I get to table five copies of the StatsCan labour force survey documenting the number of full-time jobs created in Alberta. It shows that things are looking up in Alberta. It shows that since the depths of the recession Alberta created 72,000 full-time jobs, Mr. Speaker, and the 12,000 jobs referenced were in the last month alone.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the report I referred to in QP, the Jacobs Consultancy report, commissioned by Alberta Energy, about the oil-climate index review. Five of them are clean copies; five of them are redacted.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I referred in question period to Restaurants Canada's report entitled *Raise the Bar*, a Report Card on Provincial Liquor Policies for Bars and Restaurants, 2017. It does in fact show that they have downgraded Alberta's business-friendly climate in the last two years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Premier I rise to table a report, which she referred to in question period today, by the Fraser Institute entitled *Should Equalization Keep On Growing in an Era of Converging Fiscal Capacity?* The report focuses on a rule change brought in by the Harper-Kenney government in 2009. This rule change ensures that equalization keeps growing every year in perpetuity and results in an extra \$1.3 billion for Ontario over two years while Alberta gets nothing.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a tabling from the Privy Council Office of Her Majesty's Privy Council of Canada confirming that members of the Privy Council carry the title "Honourable" for life – there was some confusion from the members opposite as to Mr. Kenney's title – and confirming that on January 4, 2007, he did in fact become a member of the Privy Council and is therefore the Hon. Jason Kenney.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, I deferred a decision yesterday on a point of order. I would like to address that now.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow raised a point of order during Oral Question Period following the Premier's response to his first supplementary question. I did not hear the point of order called at the time, and therefore I deferred my ruling on it.

As to the facts of the matter, the Member for Calgary-Elbow asked a question about the use of pipelines to transport oil. In reply the hon. Premier responded: "Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite for the mansplaining opportunity." The full exchange can be found on page 1779 of *Alberta Hansard* for yesterday, November 7, 2017.

In their arguments concerning this point of order, both the Member for Calgary-Elbow and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster referenced *Beauchesne's* sixth edition. You can find those comments on pages 1787 and 1788 of yesterday's issue of *Alberta Hansard*.

Paragraph 486(3) of *Beauchesne's* references a list of words that have been judged to be unparliamentary and to have caused disorder in the House. I would point out that paragraph 486(2) of *Beauchesne's* states: "An expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week."

As I and my predecessors who have occupied this chair have indicated on a number of occasions, the use of a list of prohibited, unparliamentary terms is no longer the practice of this Assembly. Rather, it is the context in which a particular word is used that should be considered in determining whether a term is unparliamentary or not. A word that is parliamentary in one particular context may be considered unparliamentary on another day in a different context.

As an example, I refer members to the comments I made on the issue on April 11, 2017, when I ruled that the context always comes into play. When considering this matter, see page 607 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. [interjections] Hon. members, could you listen?

Speaker Zwodzesky on a similar matter on October 28, 2013, indicated that "the words uttered one day in a particular context may or may not be parliamentary. They may or may not be unparliamentary." These remarks may be found on page 2498 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

Additionally, on March 16, 2017, I ruled on the use of the term at issue when it was expressed by the Minister of Energy during question period. At that time I ruled that the use of the term was not unparliamentary, and therefore there was no point of order. However, I did strongly caution the hon. minister to be cautious with the words that are used in this Assembly when they are apt to cause disorder and to avoid the use of such terms. You may read my remarks on page 353 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

3:00

Likewise, in this instance, in this particular context I cannot find that there is a point of order. I would, however, caution all members about characterizing language in their responses such as saying “mansplain.”

I also caution members on the tone of their questions. Like our society has changed, so has this House. Tone can be as disrespectful as are certain singular words.

I want to assure members that if there is sexist or otherwise offensive language, the chair will intervene. Having said that, I find that in general members do not resort to sexist or otherwise offensive terms. Members likely share the pride about having a number of women elected in this Assembly that more closely represents the percentage of women in Alberta and also the diversity that is represented in the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: On another related matter, I would like to remind members to give respect to all members by not just allowing questions to be asked but also to be responded to without interruption. Earlier this week there was an inordinate amount of heckling directed towards the Minister of Infrastructure. I reviewed the incident, and while I did not intervene at the time, I certainly will intervene in the future if that kind of behaviour persists and is continued.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

[Adjourned debate November 7: Mr. Coolahan]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 24, an Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. You know, I have a bachelor of arts in professional communications. I worked in that field for about five years. As part of those studies, I took a particular interest in political communications, how ideas and policies are communicated, critiqued, presented, and, indeed, misrepresented. It's a fascinating study of human psychology, cognition, and behaviour.

On entering into the realm of politics, having studied that, I came in with my eyes wide open regarding the use of spin, framing, insinuation, all of the tools of the trade. Indeed, I don't take offence in general at criticisms of our government's policies on taxes, on climate change, or on labour legislation. Madam Speaker, those are fair game. I'm happy to shrug off hyperbole that suggests that I or

any of my colleagues hate Alberta or the energy industry or even everyday working Albertans. I can let that go. But where I draw the line is when that misrepresentation, even if it is simply intended to undermine our government or to advance another member's or party's political ambitions, threatens to undermine the safety of marginalized and stigmatized communities, particularly when that is aimed at vulnerable youth who are already the regular target of bullying, oppression, and shaming.

Now, in a press conference this week the Leader of the Official Opposition, in grasping for a justification to oppose this legislation, made the claim that some GSAs teach curriculum in political activism. He chose to double down on that position this morning through one of his social media mouthpieces and Twitter attack dogs, who tweeted a carefully selected and context-free snippet from a guide created by the Alberta Teachers' Association, GSAs and QSAs in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers.

Now, I understand that there is a need at times to throw a bit of red meat to one's base. Sometimes it's sirloin. Sometimes it's roadkill that's been scraped off the back alley. On this particular issue, Madam Speaker, Albertans and indeed marginalized LGBTQ2 youth deserve to have their safety and protection discussed on the basis of honest facts. So let's take a look at what this guide actually says.

On page 30 this guide lists four types of GSAs and explains the sorts of opportunities that each provides for youth. It's important, Madam Speaker, that we look at the paragraph that prefaces these descriptions because it makes a very important statement, and that is: “Students should guide the purpose of the GSA or QSA and its activities.” That's the guiding principle, that students decide, not teachers, not principals, not a fictional moustache-twirling villain pushing a gay agenda. Students.

With that context in place, the guide lays out four main roles that GSAs can play. First of all, a GSA or QSA that exists for counselling and support. This particular type of GSA, Madam Speaker, is intended for schools where students feel they are in a bit of a hostile environment, where there may be very little school-based support for LGBTQ2 students, so it's focused largely on individual students, led by counsellors – again, trained counsellors – who are there to work with and help support these youth and provide them with a safe drop-in space.

The second type of GSA, Madam Speaker, are ones that are there to provide safe spaces. These are officially sanctioned student groups, which, thankfully, under Bill 10, that was passed in this Legislature, are now required to be upheld, and this legislation will ensure that all schools follow the letter of that law as well as its spirit. They may have a limited visible presence, because, again, they're not there for the purpose of advertising; they're there for the purpose of supporting students in need. They focus on individual support and social activities for their members. They include straight allies, and the focus is on helping LGBTQ2 students to feel normal and feel like they are supported and can simply fit in in their school environment.

The third type of GSA or QSA, Madam Speaker, are those that exist to raise visibility and awareness. Once again, as is the case with all of these situations, they are student led. They are focused on student safety and take an additional interest in human rights. They have a visible, school-wide presence. They're characterized by social, educational, and, yes, political activities. They initiate school-wide educational activities and programs such as guest speakers, assemblies, Pride Week activities, and they focus on building tolerance and understanding.

Madam Speaker, the words that have been seized on here are “political activities.” Now, let me remind this House that there has been no advancement of human rights in the history of our country

or any other in this world that did not involve political activity. These are not dirty words. They're not scary words. They're not nefarious. They are simply a reality. LGBTQ students and their allies actively working to raise the profile of those students and of their community and working to build visibility and awareness: yes, that is a political activity, but it is not one that anyone in this province needs to be afraid of unless they have for some reason some concern with the LGBTQ community being visible and accepted in this province.

Again, these are student-led groups. I remember back in high school the Amnesty International club. We shared space with them when I was on the school newspaper. They advocated for human rights around the world. That, Madam Speaker, was a political activity.

I myself as a young man, having grown up in the church and at that point very zealous in my faith, would regularly wear my Mylon & Broken Heart concert T-shirt, and on the back it was proudly emblazoned: love God; hate sin. To some extent, Madam Speaker, that was a political statement. I was not trying to bring any agenda to that school. I was, as a student, simply being visible about my beliefs and who I was at that time.

3:10

That is all these students are doing. Again, student led. This is not some secret agenda being smuggled in. This is not teachers attempting to influence students against their parents' wishes. These are students who are working to raise visibility and awareness and stand up for their own human rights.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, they mention QSAs or GSAs that are there to "effect educational and social change." This is simply taking the last example and taking it one step further. They're not now at this point just working to raise visibility. They're not just working to raise awareness. They are actually working to effect change. In this situation the GSA may be used to "build networks and coalitions with other school and community-based groups." They may "focus on school climate and organizational change through outreach." So they're looking, then, at trying to actually transform the school environment, not just make people aware of LGBTQ students but ensure that their school is an accepting and open place for those students. They also organize activities, so things like diversity days, opportunities for staff training, and, indeed, discussion of inclusive curriculum.

Now, again, Madam Speaker, this is being used to try to paint these as something they are not. Again, this is a student-led organization, where students may, if they have reached the point where they are comfortable enough in their identity, in being who they are, and in their school environment, be able to advocate for that school environment, even for its curriculum to be more inclusive of their presence.

Again, the Leader of the Official Opposition wishes to use this to try to paint GSAs as some sort of nefarious thing that parents need to be afraid of or that if for some reason parents aren't told about it, students are going to somehow be misled. Madam Speaker, I believe that students have the ability to engage in critical thinking skills to be able to engage in standing up for their own human rights and indeed in commenting on and offering thoughts on the curriculum by which they are taught. These are not things to be afraid of, and there is nothing in this bill that undermines parental authority in that respect.

I've often wondered, Madam Speaker, as I've heard some members of this House speak on their position on this bill and their concerns about this bill, how many individuals from the LGBTQ2 community they have actually spoken to about this bill and asked their opinions on it.

Madam Speaker, I'm very proud to have probably one of the largest communities of LGBTQ individuals in our city right here in my constituency, in Oliver, and just a couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to join many of them at a Halloween night dance they had, a haunted hotel dance over at Denizen Hall, a great little venue here in my constituency, an event organized by Fruit Loop, a fantastic organization that holds social activities for the LGBTQ2 community and uses them to fund raise for important causes that support that community. Unfortunately, that organization has been besmirched by some in the community who have made accusations about the type of work they do, but I am proud to support them.

I attended that evening because they had been awarded a CIP, community initiatives program, cheque through the Canada 150 stream through the Minister of Culture and Tourism, and I deeply appreciate him putting forward that program. I went there that evening to present that cheque. I was brought up on stage in front of at least a couple of hundred members of the LGBTQ community, and indeed when I presented that cheque, I got a very loud cheer. But I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, that that cheer was nowhere near as loud as the cheer I heard when I told them about this bill.

This is a change. This is a step forward in this province that has been asked for by members of this community, individuals who know from their personal experience what it is like to be an LGBTQ student in our high schools across our province in all communities, who know what the experience is of struggling with one's own identity, of trying to understand who you are and, indeed, of how safe you feel at each stage of that journey. That is why they support this legislation. They recognize that the only person who should be making that decision, Madam Speaker, is the child themselves. The only person. They are the best judge of when they are safe. They are the best judge of who they wish to tell and when.

Indeed, as we've heard, I think the majority of students reach a place where they are comfortable talking to their parents, and indeed the majority of parents love and accept that child for who they are. That is a great thing, and I am so glad that we have come to that place in our society where that is the majority of the cases. But it is not all. It isn't all. I think back to my own youth, Madam Speaker. Growing up in a very strict fundamentalist evangelical home, there were many things that I had struggles with with my parents, you know, simple things like listening to Christian rock music or having a cross shaved in the back of my hair – a cross shaved in the back of my hair – back when the flat-top and fade were the big thing. Those were challenging times.

Madam Speaker, I love my parents. I love them dearly, and we have a wonderful relationship. We've had the chance to talk through a lot of these things, and we all grow and change. But I know there are things I would not have been comfortable sharing with my parents at that age, and I think I had reasonable and good judgment in myself to determine that. That does not say that my parents were bad people. Indeed, I hesitated to speak of this on the record because I do not want anybody to think that is the case.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member was about to continue on a story that he was about to share. I would ask him to continue if he'd like.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. I mention it only to say that for students in these positions, who are already so vulnerable, to be placed in a position, whether they reach out to a teacher or someone in their school, if they join that GSA or QSA to find the support they need, if they don't know one hundred

per cent for certain that that will be a secure space and that their privacy will not be breached, then that student remains in uncertainty, in anxiety, and, indeed, at risk.

This bill provides careful provisions that in an emergency situation school counsellors or teachers or anyone else involved in this process have the ability to contact a parent. At no point under this legislation would a student be at risk. This puts the needs, the concerns of the student first. In doing that, it does not in any way disrespect parents or contravene their authority. At any point in this process the students can choose to tell their parents. There is nothing in this bill that forbids this. There is nothing in this bill that insists a parent can never be told. It only insists that the choice to do so comes from the students themselves. That, Madam Speaker, is what my constituents have told me. That is what they have asked for, and that is the guarantee this legislation will provide so that GSAs and QSAs in this province can continue to do the good work they are intended to do; that is, to save lives and to build better lives for LGBTQ2 Albertans.

Thank you.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for his speech. I do have a question for him as the representative for downtown Edmonton. I wonder if he has experience that he might be able to share with the Chamber in terms of homelessness and LGBTQ youth. We know that when students have their identity disclosed to their parents before they're ready, unfortunately, sometimes there are parent abandonment issues, which lead to youth homelessness. I just wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Centre, representing the constituency that he does, might be able to share some of his experiences and the stories from some of his constituents there.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the Member for Banff-Cochrane. Indeed, shortly after my election in 2015 I was approached by a group called SAFQEY. They exist for the purpose of dealing with the issue of homelessness with LGBTQ and, in particular, trans youth. In speaking with them and watching a documentary that they put together, which features the stories of trans youth in our province, that, unfortunately, was a common theme. A large percentage of youth that are homeless come from the LGBTQ community, and the majority of those students are homeless because when their parents found out, they could no longer feel that they had a safe home environment.

Madam Speaker, this bill, this legislation can help to change that by ensuring that those students would have a safe place where they can talk about these concerns; where they can talk to others who've navigated this process; where they can work with others who are working for the same goal, that being the human rights and acceptance of the LGBTQ community in our province; or that may be able to give them the confidence and the safety to perhaps then be able to broach that conversation with their parents with the needed support. They can feel confident in going to that GSA or QSA, knowing that nobody without their permission will share that information, also knowing that should they be in a situation where they are at risk, the school has the ability to ensure that all parties necessary can be involved to ensure they're protected and supported.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. Let me start by

saying that we all need to strive to do our very best in this House to be respectful of each other and set a tone so that outside of this House, when we're discussing highly charged topics like this, we set the tone for our constituents to be respectful to one another.

As the minister of environment said yesterday in question period, yelling at people is not an effective way to create change, and I would agree. To accuse parents who are concerned that they're being cut off from their child in such crucial formative years and the MLAs who represent those parents of being bigots is unjust. To accuse the government of trying to use children as a political tool when it's clear from the passion that this bill is intended to protect children is also not fair.

All of us in this Chamber, all of us who are parents or who represent parents, who have children and who represent children are here with the best intentions. We should give each other the benefit of the doubt on this particular score.

With that said, I will be voting in support of this bill.

As a parent myself I like to believe that my children can tell me anything and that they know I'll support them no matter what. Just to interject a little bit of my life and if my dad is watching now: Dad, I didn't tell you everything. But it's not like the member just mentioned. My dad was the most caring, loving, gentle, kind person. I never felt that if I was truly in crisis, I could not go to him. That's a wonderful blessing, but I know a lot of parents aren't there yet. For that matter, there are a lot of children that aren't there yet either. It's not always a question of violence or abuse or the lack of acceptance. Students and teenagers aren't always the best at having big conversations like this, and I know that there are a lot of parents out there that struggle with having this sort of talk with their children around sexual health and other important topics.

I think we need to do away with the notion that if your child doesn't tell you about joining a GSA, it's because you haven't made your home a welcoming one. We also need to acknowledge that no matter how accepting you are with your children, there's no guarantee that they would tell you about joining a GSA. I think that this is where parents have concerns, that they could be left out of such a huge part of their child's life no matter what they do. The online comments to the effect of "If your kid doesn't tell you, then you're the problem" aren't helping the situation. Kids are always going to keep secrets from their parents, and that's a part of growing up. Parents worry that the secrets their children are keeping could be dangerous for the child, and that's a part of being a parent.

The bottom line, though, is that this is one case where it could be more dangerous for the child to have their secrets revealed. This legislation will ensure that students have the sole judgment and the sole responsibility to tell who they want when they want. I think that's a good thing. What I'd like to see, though, is for GSAs to take a more active role in preparing and encouraging students to have those important discussions with their parents. Parents are important partners in teaching their children about respectful intimate relationships, promoting safe sexual practice, and setting reasonable boundaries for their children. For all those students who are avoiding having this talk because they're worried about this safety – it can be a hard conversation to have – we need to support them, full stop.

While GSAs are wonderful peer-to-peer support groups, we should be encouraging students to find the support within their family where it is safe to do so. We should also be giving those parents that just aren't there yet the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that for any parent the safety and well-being of their child is the most important thing in the world. I know that other members in this House – we talk about how we acted when we were younger. I thank God that He has given me the understanding to come a lot

further from where I was because it has made me a better man and a better human being.

We should make resources available to parents to enable them to ask their children about these subjects in a noninvasive, nonconfrontational way. So I will vote for this bill as another step to protecting vulnerable LGBTQ2S children, but I hope this is the start of another conversation, a conversation about how, now that we have protected children from dangerous family situations, we move to engage more parents to be an active part of their children's journey.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Minister of Culture.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to take the opportunity to thank the member for his words and for his support of this bill. I have had the opportunity to discuss with the member at an event that we were both attending, Camp fYrefly. I saw how he was open to having discussion with young people who were perhaps needing to have support to talk to adults and to be in an environment that was very welcoming and loving. For my part, I have to say thank you very much for doing that because it is important to see that these kinds of issues can cross party lines. It's really about these kids and their safety.

It has not always been the case that my parents were open, and my parents were welcoming and loving. I know that not every child has that. It was only when I was ready to have those discussions that I was able to actually have them with my parents. My mother initially had a hard time, but she came around. I know that it is because of adults who are creating those spaces and allowing for those conversations to take place that we have children who feel safe enough to do so.

I thank the member for his support, and I invite everybody else to follow his example. Thank you.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the member. What he was saying is very true. It's very personal coming out. When people decide to come out to a parent or decide not to come out to a parent, it's not necessarily because they think that the parent is bad or they don't have a very open relationship with their parent. A lot of the time it's just because the child isn't ready or the youth isn't ready or even the adult isn't ready. There are people who are still in the closet in their early 20s, 30s, 40s, and it can go all the way up even until they die, unfortunately, without coming out.

I really want to thank the member. We have to remember that this bill is to protect children. It's to protect their privacy, to protect their safety. Really, like the minister was saying, it's a nonpartisan issue. We should all be able to come together and say that we should protect our youth, we should protect their privacy, and we're going to stand together and make sure that the mistakes that have happened in the past do not continue to go forward.

I again want to thank the member for his very impassioned speech. I know he is very passionate about this issue and that he's worked very hard with himself, with his family, with legislation in this House, with LGBTQ issues, so I want to thank you again.

That's pretty much it. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise in the House to speak to this bill, Bill 24. It's something that is important to me. It's important to many of my friends who are teachers. It's important to a lot of students that I used to teach. I'm just going to try to speak a little bit to what my experience around this issue is.

I do want to state first off that in speaking about this, I come from a position of privilege. You know, I'm a white, cis, middle-class woman, and really I've had the privilege of a great amount of education. This isn't something that I had to struggle with in my life, so I take it very seriously when I speak for others who have had to struggle with it in their life.

I grew up in a small town on Vancouver Island, Duncan. It seemed very far away from sort of any major cities at the time, and being gay wasn't something that we talked about. I don't remember anyone talking about it growing up. I don't remember any characters on television. I don't remember that it was an issue. It was sort of something that was swept under the rug and not talked about, and I imagine that if you were someone who was struggling with their sexuality at that time in that small town before the Internet was everywhere, you would have had a real struggle in terms of figuring out what your identity was and how you were going to get by.

My best friend growing up came out as gay when she was, I think, 30 or 31, after she'd been married and after she had kids. We spent hours playing together when I was a kid, and it wasn't something that she ever felt comfortable talking to me about at all until maybe she had left for university because the environment that we grew up in was just so stifling. Not on purpose, you know? It just wasn't something that people talked about.

When I think about what the opportunity would have been to have a GSA at our high school in Duncan in 1995, I think it would have made a huge difference to a lot of people, to a lot of people's lives. There were a lot of people I knew who had issues, who had depression or who had problems with alcoholism, because they didn't feel that they were able to talk about this. They didn't feel that there was anyone that they could go to talk to. So having a GSA in our high school would have been hugely beneficial, I think, for everybody, for everybody to understand that there are different options and different ways how to be, that you don't have to be a certain way to be recognized and to be valued in society.

You know, I contrast that experience with my experience now being a parent. I have small children. I have a five-year-old and I have a three-year-old, and I talk to them about these kinds of things. I talk to them about how sometimes men marry men and sometimes women marry women and that it's okay for my daughter to want to play with cars and that it's okay for my son to want to wear pink if that's what he wants to do. It always prides me when I hear him stand up and say something in public. If he's in public and someone says, "Oh, you can't have that; pink is not a boy's colour," he'll come out and say: "Of course it is. Pink is for everybody. Colours aren't for boys or girls. They're just for everyone."

It speaks to the fact that gender stereotypes are still such a huge factor in our society right now. There are ways that women are expected to behave, and there are ways that men are expected to behave, and I think it really limits what we can do and where we can go as a society when we have to fit into boxes that have been put on us for such a long time. GSAs are part of a movement to unbox people, if you will, to let people really, truly be who they are in any given circumstance.

What I'm hoping is that as my children grow up, this isn't something – like, it wasn't something I thought about as I grew up, but that was because no one talked about it. I want it to be something that my kids don't really have to think about as they grow up because everybody is talking about it and it just becomes part of our natural conversation about ways that people can be.

You know, I've been a teacher at a school. I taught grade 8, junior high. We didn't have a GSA at my school when I was there. But I have stayed in touch with a lot of my students on social media, and some of them have come out as trans, as gay in the intervening years. I am so proud of each and every one of them who took that on when they were ready and how they wanted to do it. I've seen them in pride parades, when we were marching in pride parades, and they're happy to be there. It's just generally really wonderful that they feel that they are safe to be able to do that.

That said, you have to make decisions every day as a teacher when it comes to when you're going to inform parents about something. While we didn't have a GSA at my school, there were times that I had to inform parents about mental health issues that children were having or, you know, learning disabilities and things like that. By and large, parents are usually supportive. Like has been said multiple times in this House, all parents want what's best for their kids.

Unfortunately, I've also seen situations where when you bring up an issue with a parent, they neglect to see it as a thing. I've talked to parents who didn't believe that it was possible for a teenager to have a mental health issue, and by actively ignoring it, it devalued that child's experience. I've seen where damage can happen when parents get notified of things before kids are ready. This piece of legislation, that really emphasizes that the decision lies only with the child and only when they're ready, is really important.

I talked to one of my friends who is a GSA sponsor at a school where she teaches, and she told me that one thing she's come to realize is how mysterious GSAs can be to people who aren't in them. So, you know, she wanted to tell everyone here a little bit about what people in her GSA do. She says that they like to eat. They like to have lunch and share snacks. They like music. They're not afraid to sing. They have a library of age-appropriate books, and they sometimes even read picture books. They discuss issues, and they take turns and ask questions and offer opinions. They post a flag of the month on their bulletin board, and they particularly love making buttons and handing out stickers. So you can see, really, that it's far from the sort of nefarious thing that is sometimes talked about in the media.

3:40

Let's face facts. Not every student who attends a GSA is at risk at home, but some are. Some LGBTQ kids come from homes that make aggressively homophobic comments and associate hideous shame with noncis identities. Some come from homes that would rather see them out on the street than accept them as who they are. Some come from homes that would beat them as a punishment or deterrent.

For myself as a teacher and many others who I've spoken to, if we were told that we had no choice but to potentially put a student in that position, I don't know what I would do. I don't think that you could ever tell a teacher that they had to put a child in danger. It's so counter to our every instinct, emotion, and training. These kids in our schools need a safe space. It's not something that's nice to have; it's something that they have to have. At a time in their lives when it's essential to the development of their identity, their self-esteem, and their mental health, it's crucial that schools accept, support, and protect their students. It's even more crucial to a kid who isn't getting this support at home.

Sometimes, you know, when kids are at home, they hear the terms "gay" or "fag" as a slur, and they're being told that who they are is an aberration or a waste of life. If that strikes you as a bit extreme, imagine how it strikes them. It strikes them down. Statistics for depression and suicide among LGBTQ youth far outpace those of cis and hetero youth. I'll say it again: every kid needs a safe space; not deserves, needs. GSAs provide that space.

On the surface much of a GSA is eating lunch, listening to music, and discussing relevant issues, including the decisions that we make here at the Legislature. Underneath, though, a GSA is about visibly showing and telling kids that you matter and you're okay like you are, that you're accepted and supported and valued, and that we as a society are invested and interested in keeping them safe. The gesture is simple, but it can be and has been life saving.

On a final note, no amount of attending a GSA can possibly erase the influence of the home. The student won't forget their parents' opinions or their family values, and no extracurricular club is going to usurp parenting or erase who a student is. We just ask that this one club be allowed to tell students that who they are is okay without having to endanger the child to do so.

Picture your ideal school. It's a place where true learning happens, where students are supported, accepted, and cared for. Now picture a student, a student growing up and navigating their world. They're starting to figure out who they are, and they're terrified. That student's school should have the right to support that student and keep him or her or them safe. Isn't it our government's job to do that same thing?

The crux of the argument with this for me is that a GSA is really no different than any other club. It's something that helps students feel secure and safe at school. So if you wouldn't call a parent to tell them that their kid has joined a chess club or that their kid has joined – I don't know – an environmental club, but you would call them to tell them that they're involved in a GSA, then what you're inherently saying is that there's something about being in a GSA that deserves notification. By saying that, you're saying it's different and you're saying that there's something wrong with it. That's the line for me. There's nothing wrong with being in a GSA. There is all sorts of proof that they support and keep kids safe, and kids are the ones who are asking for them. They're the ones who are making these decisions. I think we've more than heard that it's every individual's own decision as to when to come out.

I support this legislation because I've heard from teachers how important these are. I've heard that they wouldn't want to out kids, and I've heard from kids who don't want to be outed, who want to come out to their parents when they feel that it's in their best interest to do so. So I support this legislation, and I hope everybody else does the same.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-East for her comments. I think she can offer even more of a unique perspective to the Legislature this afternoon because as a former teacher and as a parent, you know, she can see both perspectives on that. What we've heard from the opposition: one of the reasons that they don't support the legislation is because they want to put the teachers in the position to make the decision whether or not parents should be notified. The Member for Calgary-East as a former teacher: I just wonder if she might share with the Assembly if she would feel comfortable in the role of a teacher making that decision. Would she want to be put in the position of making a decision for a child, and how would it make her feel as a professional?

Ms Luff: Yeah. For sure. As I've outlined before, there are certain parts of being a teacher. As a teacher you have a required duty of care. If a student reveals to me something that means that they are in danger at home, I am required to report that to Children's Services. It's always one of the hardest decisions that a teacher can make when you have to make that call because it means that you're intervening in someone's life, but under my duty of care and under the law I'm required to.

There are lots of times, as I've outlined before, when a teacher has to make a call about when to call a parent: if a kid's behaviour is not good and they're acting up in class or if a kid hasn't done their assignment, if a kid has revealed something to me about their personal life that I think their parents should know about. There are a lot of issues where I would have had to have made a choice that I don't really want to make, you know? There are so many things you have to do every day as a teacher. You have to mark papers. You have to make sure every kid is learning. You have to make sure every kid is safe in your class. There are so many decisions that you have to make.

I don't want to be responsible for this one decision that can make a huge difference in a kid's life. The only person who should be making that decision is the kid themselves, especially when you don't know how a parent might react. I taught a lot of kids whose parents probably had, I would say, conservative views on LGBTQ issues, and kids growing up today in Calgary with access to the Internet had really different views from their parents. I want to leave it up to that kid to have that discussion with their parents. They're going to be way better at it than I am. Given that opportunity, no, I absolutely don't want that pressure put on me as a professional.

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

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am so honoured to be able to speak to Bill 24, and it is with deep respect and humility that I'd like to speak about some very, very important points that the Minister of Education made yesterday with respect to the bill and what it's actually about. Before I go into that, though, there's one thing that I would like to make very clear, that no government knows better than the community, the educators, the parents, and, most of all, the child. That's the most important thing that we have to understand here in government. Oversight in any aspect of that undermines the way that a child has the ability to be able to function, especially in such important situations as GSAs.

These are statements that the minister made yesterday, statements that I align with and that I believe are conducive to strengthening safe and caring spaces, GSAs, QSAs for our students, so I'd like to quote the minister. On amendment 2(d), which adds subsection (6), regarding informing parents and that it should be up to the student organization, that is a very, very good step forward, in my opinion, in advancing the safety and the rights of all students. I was happy to see that amendment, and I just wanted to say thank you for that.

Secondly,

[we all] make life better for Alberta students by ensuring that they can form a gay-straight alliance at their school without fear of being outed.

This was a statement by the minister. I completely agree.

Every single student in this province deserves a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn.

That was the minister's statement. I completely agree.

3:50

It is not the school's place to dictate how children interact with parents, nor is it the government's. This is something that is up to the child, something that we can all agree on. Another statement that was made by the minister: he wanted to "clarify school authority roles and responsibilities around supporting welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments for student-led organizations, including gay-straight and queer-straight alliances." Again, clarity is good. I completely agree. "Section 45.1 places responsibilities on school authorities to create [these] welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments." I completely agree. The question of whether to notify a parent with respect to a GSA has already been clarified in that mandatory notification is not necessary. I completely agree.

Joining a GSA is, of course, student led, not government led. Student led. It is an antibullying group with real numbers behind the strength of having a GSA and how it enhances the school experience for those who have had access to one. There is so much research out there to show how important GSAs are. They're not a class. They are a place for kids to sit and talk, have a meal together, and learn about each other. GSAs reduce suicide rates amongst youth of all backgrounds and orientations. I completely agree. Students must be allowed to form gay-straight alliances. Again, I completely agree. Some students might feel safer and more comfortable talking about these issues with their peers. Again, the minister said this. I completely agree. No child should be outed. I completely agree. GSAs can "change a student's life," improving the "overall atmosphere of a school community to ensure that we're looking after everybody." I completely agree. Being safe and cared for is a basic human right. I completely agree.

One of the things that I resonated with most yesterday in the discussion was that the minister had mentioned one of the young men that was here during the introduction of the bill. I can't remember what his name was.

An Hon. Member: Ace Peace.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. I think so. Thank you.

This person said: how scary it must feel to be alone. I actually understand that. I think most of us do at some point in our lives. We can all relate to how that feels. The minister of environment gave one of the best speeches I've ever heard her do in the Legislature. One of the things that really spoke to me and hit the nail on the head was when she spoke about how when we were all in school – I'm a little older than her – exclusion was cool, right? To leave somebody out was cool. I don't think anybody ever had the intention of doing that, but if we can, you know, be participatory in something that ends that or at least works toward ending that, I completely agree.

I think about my children, some whom I have birthed and others who are my kids because I'm just fortunate to have them in my life. We have lots of discussions around this, and truly they are my measuring stick and truly represent the population of inclusive individuals, no matter their faith, culture, background, ability, or sexual orientation. My children expect me to make decisions that are based on fact and supported by my gut. I spoke with them about this along with one of my dearest friends, a true ally, Natasha Kornak. All of you are familiar with her. Natasha worked with and supported her GSA at school, and a very successful GSA actually, I might add. My oldest was also part of a GSA in school although I think it had a different name at the time. It is with their permission that I mention those facts. I actually didn't even know my son was in a GSA. I only learned about it recently because we happened to be having this discussion. The truth is that my children have been part of alliances their entire lives.

The only thing I can hope for is that – you know, we’re beyond blessed to have friends and family that are LGBTQ, other backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, and these people have enhanced my life in ways that I can’t even begin to explain. Hopefully – hopefully – I’ve enhanced theirs. I’ve travelled with these friends. Some of them are my kids’ teachers. I’ve cried and laughed with my family and friends. I would take a bullet to protect their rights, just to be clear. I also do not agree with everything that my friends say at any given time, and I consider people in this Legislature to be my friends.

The one thing is that once I’ve had a discussion with any of my friends – and it doesn’t matter what their background is – I don’t think any of them have ever felt that I was at odds with their rights or that of their children. I ask questions because, well, first of all, I’m inquisitive and I ask a lot of questions, but also it’s my responsibility to seek clarification. I would expect the same from you. So here are my questions.

Like I said, so much of this bill certainly resonates with me, so I’d like to ask some clarification around section 50.1(1). This section of the School Act states that parents must be notified of instructional time that focuses on topics related to “religion or human sexuality.” But GSAs are not instructional time – right? – as I understand it, so it’s a little confusing, as you can imagine. I’m not certain why that has to change, that section, or if I’m misinterpreting what’s happening in the bill. As I understand it, a GSA is a club. It is a group meeting. It’s an antibullying group. It does not require the legislation of 50.1(1). I’m not quite sure why this is a necessary change.

Youth that are over a certain age anyway – I mean, this is a voluntary group. Let’s be realistic, folks. If they’re over a certain age, they’re going to run this group as they see fit. No amount of parents, government, or any other intervention is going to stop a kid from talking about what they want to talk about, right? If it doesn’t fall under the rules of instructional time, why do we have to change that? I don’t understand.

The other thing is that if that’s going to be legislated, is it the government’s intent, then, to legislate what kids are allowed to talk about in GSAs and who they can bring to a GSA? That seems like a huge imposition on the rights of students who are in a voluntary group. They’re not there because they’re always vulnerable. It’s silly to assume that kids are just in a GSA because they’re vulnerable. Yes, there may be vulnerable students in there, but there are also kids there that are getting together because they want to start this group. They want to be together. Vulnerable situations that occur, like the member said earlier, are covered under other pieces of legislation completely different and separate from the GSA. One does not have to do with the other and should not be confused.

The question I have, then, is: do GSAs and QSAs even fall within this section of the School Act? Again, I need some serious clarification on this position. There may be a very good reason for doing this, but I’m truly confused. If the government can provide a hypothetical as to why this needs to be changed and how it enhances discussions on orientation, I would appreciate that.

The other thing – and maybe I’m asking the question, again, because I’m inquisitive, so please take this with the intention with which it’s being brought forward. With a GSA what are the qualifications of that person that’s overseeing the GSA? Has that teacher undergone sexual and gender diversity and inclusion training – right? – in order to lead that GSA? That’s very, very important because these are student-led groups, but they have to have a person to oversee this. I would want to make sure that a person that’s in a group where vulnerable situations may occur is qualified and capable to help move that person into whatever the next logical step would be there.

What are the protocols – actually, I think the member may have potentially answered this, but I’ll ask it anyway, and you can correct me if I’m wrong – for the kids who are showing signs of any sort of mental health needs that may present during discussions in a GSA, regardless of orientation, that have nothing directly to do with participating in the GSA? Are there teachers who recognize the need for help? Is there a specific directive as to: does the student go to counselling, do they contact a parent without notifying them about the GSA, or does the bill override that? I think I need to understand that as well. If the student has given permission to the educator to mediate, I’m assuming that that’s fine, but does the bill override that? Again, I would like to seek some clarification on that, and I think that in the broader spectrum of the bill that needs to be specific.

Another question that I have is: are parents considered allies and advocates at any point with respect to how the child feels? I mean, obviously, the child has to direct that, right? I’m just curious at what point a parent or a caregiver could become an ally or if that is dictated in the bill or if that’s just something that happens organically. Like, I don’t understand how government oversight is going to help with that situation.

4:00

How does the support, then, extend beyond the safety of the GSA? This is actually a really big one for me, having been involved in many GSAs. One of the things that has been very concerning for me is that the support is there at the GSA level at the school, which is fantastic, but outside of the GSA – I think that the other member had mentioned this with respect to incorporating families and other supports at some point, respecting the child’s choice at this point – what is happening to make sure that that support isn’t just for that half an hour or hour once a week for that child to be truly who they are? How are we continuing that process outside of school? What supports are available? How do we incorporate the other people and their families if that is what the child wants, or does the bill override that?

How does the support extend beyond the safety of the GSA, and will the supports, then, help the child to learn to cope if they are potentially thinking about bringing their parents into the discussion? As has been stated very eloquently in here and by everyone whom I’ve spoken to who has been a member of a GSA or who has come out on their own time, it doesn’t matter how much support you have. That is a deeply personal moment, and it comes with so much. So much. Is there the potential to bring parents into the discussion with the child’s permission? Are the GSA leaders part of that, or would that be considered going against the bill? This should be up to the kids, obviously, but we want to make sure that those kids and youth are supported outside of the GSA. Will it be clear in the GSA that if students would like to have discussions about sex, which, of course, they’re going to have anyway, there are specific things that are directed about that? Is there a need for parental consent? Does the bill override this? That’s section 50.1(1).

This is different from sexual orientation, obviously, but I think I should state it so that people are not misinformed by what I’m trying to say in here. No consent should be required from parents to have GSAs: we’ve already said that, and I’ll state it again to be clear. This is a completely different subject matter. My decision on how I will vote for this bill will be determined in some respects by these answers. I think that they are very logical questions, and I’m quite certain that the government will have very logical responses.

One of the things that I just want the government to consider is that we could end up going years backwards, forcing GSAs into the shadows and losing real advocacy on behalf of the youth. I think

that one of the things we need to think about when we're considering advocacy is that there are a lot of advocates in places where you don't expect it. I think that the prevalence of the ability for people to be able to see that is a real gift. Having been a teacher for over 23 years, and I'm . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today under 29(2)(a). Of course, some of those questions will be answered in the course of this debate, but I did want to talk about some of the elements because I feel that the bill, if it was to pass in this Legislature, would not cause undue harm. None of the things that she has stated that she's worried about would be detrimental if this bill was to pass.

I do want to talk a little bit about parental involvement, something that is deeply important to me. I was an educational assistant before this, and I worked with parents all across the board, and I continue to work with parents as an MLA. The member's statement I made today was about me talking to not just the students but to their parents and talking about what their involvement looks like. A lot of that involvement isn't confined to a GSA. Not having to release the information of a student to a parent doesn't preclude their involvement. It means that the student can come out to their parents. As many kids that are involved in GSAs will tell you, their parents know that they're a part of it. How did they find out? Because they told them, because they needed to be driven to the meeting, because they were setting up for a bake sale, because they were setting up for whatever activity they're doing. Usually they'll share that with their parents.

So when I talk about this, I think of the many parents that I've sat down with that have driven their kids to countless GSA meetings, that know that their kids are going to these clubs. I think what is confusing to us and especially to the LGBTQ community, that I know the member opposite was with when she went to the pride brunch at Camp fYrefly, when she met with different LGBTQ students, when the opposition party said that it was unfair to not let them march in the Calgary Pride Parade – all of these things were things discussed, but the reason for it, Madam Speaker, comes down to the basis of this bill, which, yes, is protecting that no person can out a student because of their sexual orientation or gender identity because they're joining a GSA, and it clearly defines that.

It doesn't mean that if a student comes to talk to a parent, they're not involved. They absolutely can be, and so many cases have shown that they can be involved. There are so many places. The story I told today about the student: it ended up happening that the student that came out told her parents beforehand and then delivered this amazing speech in her class about what it's like being a gay young woman, and then after that, they met with different teachers and parents and different parents of other people because she wanted to talk about it. Nothing in this bill precludes that because what this bill is doing is making sure that it is clear that teachers aren't going to be picking up the phone and saying: "Your child has just joined a GSA. Did you know that?" No. That's unnecessary in the instance that no other club has this.

I think the distinction is this. As an educational assistant I always had this complex debate with myself as to: what do I do if a child asks me about my partner? Under specific laws put forward by the previous government, it precluded us from talking about sexual orientation and gender identity while every other person that is not queer can talk about their families, their kids, anything like that. When someone asks me that question, which could be, "What did you do on the weekend?" well, that would involve my girlfriend, so

I don't know if I can say that. It becomes very clear that it's a conversation that is frozen out in schools and that it is not okay to have.

I say this understanding why it exists, too. I have grown up with a very religious family. Being a Colombian-Canadian immigrant, we're Catholic. We've always looked at the teachings of the church in order to understand and interpret the way to interact with other people, but it's something that became very complicated to manage. I think this is the point, that we're reaching an impasse of understanding how to amalgamate, that they don't have to be at odds with each other. When I grew up and because of this whole context that we're talking about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired for 29(2)(a).

Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the last couple of days it's been interesting to watch the attention that this bill has garnered. While I was away on business, one of the first things that I saw, one of the first feeds that I saw was a tweet from my predecessor, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, Jeff Wilson, who said: "I hope that . . . members don't blindly follow their leader on Bill 24. Use your voice and your vote to strike a balance. Follow your gut and stand up for these kids."

I think, you know, that sometimes we get very polarized, and we don't acknowledge those people who came before us and show the appreciation for the advocacy that they had. Mr. Wilson was very good at advocating for people with disabilities, and he was very good at standing up for LGBTQ members of the community. I remember I was taken aback when I saw him in the Pride Parade early on in his tenure. While there are many things that I disagreed with that previous hon. member on, I do have a lot of respect for him taking a stance on this and taking a stance on this in the past. His record was very clear on Bill 10 when it first came into the House, when he supported Ms Blakeman on the bill that was proposed, and I really respect him for that.

4:10

I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood as I had a chance to see him make his passionate speech and speak to the issues on this. It's great to have a young individual who has grown up dealing with coming out and who is now in a leadership role and who really stands with the other members from the LGBTQ community who sit here as hon. members as well.

It was interesting. This last Pride Parade I proudly walked with my three kids. My son who's nine is starting to understand what it is to be gay and what it is to be part of the LGBTQ community, so he asked me why I was walking in the Pride Parade and why I was walking with them. I said that for a time our governments and the Legislative Assembly have done many great things, but unfortunately there is a lot of shame that does exist in this building. It's things like how the Legislative Assembly supported residential schools in the past and how in the past compulsory sterilization was also supported in this Chamber, and for a time – and, unfortunately, it wasn't that long ago – not supporting LGBTQ individuals was supported in this Chamber. As a Member of this Legislative Assembly it is important for us to recognize the faults of the previous members and our history – we all own that – and it's important for us to stand up for the rights of all Albertans, and that was why we marched in that Pride Parade at that time and will continue to support it.

I also wanted to make sure that my kids knew that this was something that we supported, so ever since my son Alex was two

years old, we would always go and watch the Pride Parade together. The one thing I've always said that's the biggest shame about being an MLA is that I don't get to watch the Pride Parade because I have to be in the Pride Parade. I always enjoyed watching the Pride Parade. Maybe that day will come. Who knows when it will be?

Nevertheless, I want to reflect on my parents. I remember when I was a kid and we just started to find out what someone being gay was. It was a very contentious time, and people were shamed for coming out. But my mom, who is very progressive, who is a woman who refused to change her name when she got married in the '70s, which was another bone of contention, said: "I do have gay friends, Graham, but I am not going to tell you who they are because it is not my business to out them. I also don't want you to treat them any differently. Until you're old enough, I want you to recognize that they are individuals and that they have the rights that everyone else has." That is something that really resonated for a long time.

We're now entering this world where my son can see a man who loves another man or a woman who loves another woman and treats them no differently. Unfortunately, when I was growing up, that was not the case. We've made many strides, but we also have to recognize that the work is not done and that there are people who are young who are feeling marginalized and who are concerned about this.

I reflect back on when I was a student in high school in 2004. One of the main reasons why I remember getting polarized about this was, I would say, an ad hoc GSA that existed. And you know what? This is almost going to sound like a flashback to a *Glee* episode, but it was my drama society. My drama society at school was basically an ad hoc GSA, and my drama teacher was almost that teacher facilitator. While we made performances and we built sets and we did the drama festivals, it was an environment in which individuals felt comfortable enough to say who they were, and it was an environment in which we all felt comfortable enough to be allies. It didn't matter if you were gay or lesbian or bi or straight; everyone felt included in this environment.

But I can also tell you that there were many students who were in that drama society who came out to us but could not come out at home. One was an exchange student from Mexico. He could not come out until he came to Canada. It was funny; we were talking, I think, about Svend Robinson because we also were very politically engaged. He said, "Who's that?" and I said, "He was the first openly gay MP." That was when he came out. When he found out that we had a politician who was openly gay, he said: well, yeah; I'm gay. It was remarkable to see that, that we created this environment where he felt comfortable. You know, I was taken aback to see that.

There were individuals I knew who, if they told their parents, would be kicked out on the streets. It was an environment in which that teacher, had he told the parents, would have put that student in a very vulnerable position. But in any other normal circumstance or any other normal environment those parents love that child. I can't make any assumptions as to why, if they were informed of this one nuance, this one little thing about their child, if they found out, they would kick their child out on the street. But it was a situation in which we created an environment to help people feel informed. It was a situation in which our teacher could have that conversation, so there were individuals who came out to us first and then found a way to come out to their families. You know, I want to thank the late Mr. Rick Jobb. I was taken aback when he passed away in 2007. The number of lives that he positively impacted by creating an environment in which it was safe to be who you were and creating an environment in which we were all allies was tremendous.

The funny thing was that, like in many other GSAs that are forming, political advocacy came up because we were on this cusp of a time in which we were discussing same-sex marriage and

whether we should move forward with it. It was at that same time that this Legislative Assembly in majority was not in support. It was at that time when I challenged our political leaders, and the only leader who took a firm stance on that issue and said, "We support same-sex marriage, and we view discrimination of LGBTQ members the same as any other type of discrimination" was our hon. House leader. After that moment I went out and I bought my first political party membership. I am proud to still be a member of that political party.

It's interesting as well because as an employer who hires many youth, I've had many situations in which someone has come to me with a personal issue where they cannot come to their parents – they are seeking guidance – and on which, if they did not seek guidance from someone in an adult position or authority role, they could be in some serious danger. These things impact many things, whether it's alcohol, substance, or sexuality. The majority of the times I was able to guide these individuals to make good decisions and to feel safe. I hope to God that if my kids are in a situation where they don't feel comfortable coming to me, they can find that safe person to have those conversations with, because we all want what's best for our kids.

Last year I had an opportunity to go to a middle school. It was right after we had released our transgender guidelines. One person within the PTA had heard a lot of misinformation that had come from our Rebel media friend's sources. I and the principal talked about the policies, and, credit to the principal, he was very honest. We talked about what it meant for that middle school. I reflected back to when I was in junior high. I knew of one individual who you could tell was not happy because they couldn't be who they were. Fast-forward five years later: it was remarkable because this individual joined this drama society that I was part of and eventually came out and then eventually came out to their family. It was exciting two years later to have this opportunity to actually see them perform in a drag show at Twisted Element. This was about 10 years ago. I'm not sure if they still do the drag shows. I need for someone to tell me that because I don't go to the bars as much. Nonetheless, it was remarkable to see him feel comfortable with who he is.

4:20

But I digress. As I was at this middle school, after the meeting I talked with the principal about the transgender guidelines and the feedback that he'd been receiving, and we talked about GSAs. I asked him if they had a GSA, and he said: no, but one will be here soon because there are individuals already coming to us identifying as LGBTQ. It was remarkable to see that because at no point was there ever a situation when I was in junior high where someone felt comfortable enough to be honest with who they were and to start having these conversations.

We were also in a situation when I was in junior high where someone could not be comfortable by exposing that they were an ally. You know, I had an opportunity when I was in grade 9 to go to the Pride Parade when Joe Clark was the parade marshal. I remember putting up a bunch of banners in my locker after that. I also remember the significant amount of discrimination that I got for doing so, but – you know what? – it was remarkable because it was that leadership from Joe Clark which was why I didn't take those down and why I kept them up.

At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, as we look to bringing forth legislation that protects individual rights and keeps them safe, I think it's important that members within this House speak about why they are moving forward on these legislations, why they are taking a certain stance on them because, unfortunately, there has been a history in this House of not necessarily taking the proper

stances. It's moments like these where we're going to be judged by the history books by what we do, just like in 2014, when we saw Bill 10 come forward.

With that being said, I want to thank the members for their indulgence. I will be supporting Bill 24.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for your speech and for your explanation. I agree with you on so many levels. I wanted just to point out, too, that I know it might seem, because of our political realm and where we are in the world, that the only time that we participate is when we're having our picture taken when we're at places like Camp fYrefly or like the tremendous honour I had in speaking at the pride Shabbat. I just wanted to be clear and to add to your story and to comment that for me, anyway, my family experience, my friendship experience with all different communities but more specifically the LGBTQ community goes a long, long, long time before I was ever a politician.

I just want to be clear about that because the fact that we have an absolutely beautiful ability to be able to reach out to communities that we may not have been entrenched in before is one of the most wonderful things about the positions that we all hold here, Madam Speaker. It's one of my favourite things, actually. There are a lot of times where it's wonderful to be in here and have robust debate about those kinds of things, but really, for me – and I'm sure I can speak on behalf of many people – the best part of what we get to do is to be involved in communities we wouldn't normally be in and to be educated by those communities because they're the experts. I'm certainly no expert. I don't pretend to be. I would never profess to be, and the insinuation that I might try to or use it for political gain is quite wrong.

I just want to be clear about that. I wanted to say it because when you were talking about your story that you mentioned, you were speaking about all these wonderful experiences that you had had, and nobody would ever say to you that that's not legitimate, that what you've experienced is not true. Well, I'm standing here telling you that I agree with you and that the experiences that I've had are legitimate, they're real, and they're honest, and so are my questions. Maybe you'll be able to answer some of the questions that I put forward, which I think are logical.

I'd like to end with one comment, which actually talks directly about what you were saying. Actually, this comment comes from Kris Wells, the study's lead Alberta researcher and director at the Institute for Sexual Minorities Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. What he said and what I completely agree with is that if passed, the Minister of Education's bill will be the most comprehensive GSA legislation in the country. GSAs literally can save young lives, he said. They invite parents and families into a conversation. They don't exclude them from a conversation. This is from the expert. I draw my conclusions from this expert. This quote is incredibly important to how it is that we're looking at this.

Like I said and to be clear, because it was brought up again, I fully support GSAs. I fully support enhancing them, and I fully support the notion that it is mandated that we should not at any time out a gay child or any child that is a member of a GSA, just to be absolutely, perfectly, and unequivocally clear.

To the member, I would like to ask you about this statement that I said right now, based on a member that has been extremely vocal about how it is that we're supposed to move forward, what our responsibilities are as legislators towards the LGBTQ community. Is that a concept that you agree with?

Mr. Sucha: On this conversation, I apologize if I misconstrued it. It was in relation to speaking to starting this conversation between multiple parties, including parents. I think it's vitally important that, yes, those conversations happen, but when we're in a situation when a child is trying to find themselves, we need to make sure that it's on the child's terms and that the child is in the safest situation possible. That is why I support that it is for the child to find that decision and make that decision to ensure that they are most safe. I think I outlined that within my previous statements as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 24 this afternoon. I'd like to start out by saying that what politicians say and do matter. You know, we can say one thing but do another, or we can say things that are congruent with our actions, and people are watching us. People in general have a mistrust of politicians. Unfortunately, that's a label that we all wear. It's on all of us to work against that perception of an incongruence between what we say and what we do and people's perception of politicians and how they carry themselves.

I'd like to point out a bit of a paradox that we're dealing with, especially in relation to this bill, in that in this Chamber we often hear about the importance of consultation and how important it is to go out and speak to Albertans to inform our opinions as their representatives, that when we come to this place and have discussions about important matters that are going to affect their lives, how important consultation is for us to inform our view. The paradox that I'd like to point out is that the Leader of the Official Opposition has based his assumptions and the opposition caucus's position towards this bill, perhaps, on a fallacy. I think it's important to point that out.

One of the groups that we turn to when we're making decisions like this on whether parents should be notified and on the disposition of information that teachers may find out in the course of their work and what teachers should do with that information – we're trying to deal with that question and wrestle with that very question on this bill – and I think some of the most important people to speak to, amongst many, of course, including children and parents, are teachers. Fortunately, we have a public statement by the Alberta Teachers' Association that I would like to read into the record. I will plan to table the document in its entirety at my next opportunity. I think it's really important to bring the voice of the teachers to this debate, particularly because the Leader of the Official Opposition has placed the burden of whether or not to inform parents on the teachers. That's a burden that we heard about from the Member for Calgary-East in her former role as a teacher, that she wouldn't want that burden placed on her as a professional.

4:30

I know there are other teaching professionals in here as well. The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon spoke about his experience as a teacher, and I have no doubt that he had the best intentions for his students in mind and always did. I have no doubt about that at all. I do question – and perhaps he didn't have a chance to answer this – whether, if he was in the position, he would want to be the one making that decision. That's an awful burden to bear.

What the teachers have said – and I'll get to the quote in just a minute here – is that there's a bit of a grey area right now, and they don't want to be put in that position. I'll read the bit of the statement here. First of all, it starts off with a quote from the ATA president, Greg Jeffery, and it says:

Some students who are even nervous that their participation in GSA activities might be disclosed simply will not go – and the

support that they need disappears. Making it clear that the support is confidential removes some [of the] big barriers to access.

The statement goes on to say:

The Association has expressed concerns in the past about how the student privacy issue could place teachers in a difficult position. The ATA's Code of Conduct and provincial privacy law would likely preclude disclosure of GSA participation without student consent, but recent public attention and political discussion has raised questions about those obligations.

It ends with another quote from President Jeffery. He says:

Students and teachers will benefit from [the] legal clarity [that this bill provides]. The issue of GSA attendance and student privacy has become unfortunately politicised and unnecessarily divisive. If this bill is passed, teachers will no longer have to worry about managing competing pressures on such a sensitive topic.

Teachers will be able to point to the law and tell students and parents clearly [that] student privacy, safety and security comes first.

The statement concludes in saying that President Jeffery is calling for all-party support of this bill.

When we speak to our experts and teachers who would potentially carry the burden of this bill, if this bill weren't to be passed, the burden potentially goes back to teachers. They're clearly telling us that they don't want to be put in that position. The kids want their own privacy, and the teachers don't want to be put in the position of potentially being the ones faced to make that decision. To me, the fact that the opposition hasn't listened to the very people that they want to bear the burden of this incredibly difficult decision is disingenuous at best. They talk about the importance of consultation, and here they have failed to pay attention to what Alberta's teachers are talking about.

This kind of disparity between what they say and what they do, what I was saying earlier in my speech: the disparity of what the opposition is doing here is dangerous. It seeks to undermine what it means to be a politician, and I think politics can be and should be an honourable profession. We're elected by our peers and our neighbours to represent them, and they watch very carefully what we say and what we do. It's up to us to carry ourselves with dignity.

Getting back to what we say and what we do and inconsistencies, over the course of the summer, around the Calgary Pride Parade, there was intense debate and interest about participation in the parade. Leading up to the parade, I know that several members of the Official Opposition were in attendance at the Camp fYrefly brunch, and also the opposition was intending to march in the Calgary parade. At the time I honestly thought it was genuine, their interest. Maybe they had turned a page and turned over a new leaf and said: we get it now.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, when some not-too-glamorous statements that he had made in his younger years came to light about his feelings towards that community, said to the media: I've changed my views. I've come to realize, being a legislator and learning from the NDP, that he's come a long way, and I took him at his word for that. I know that there are other members of the opposition that I believe felt the same way. Now we come to a point where we're debating the very bill that that community, the LGBTQ community, is saying, "Please pass this. This is what we want. It makes sense for us. It makes us feel safe, and it makes it feel like you're listening." They want to know that the politicians are listening. It's not a partisan issue. It's about making safe places for kids, and it really just comes down to that.

I think that when we examine the entirety of the issue, it's really baffling to me. I'm coming from a genuine place when I say this. I thought this was going to be something that we can celebrate together as a nonpartisan issue, so I'm sorry to see that that's not

the case. But I do have faith that some members over there will have their conscience bring them to a place where they can't support the caucus agenda and the direction of their leader. The Member for Rimbe- Rocky Mountain House-Sundre did promise to the members over there that they would have a free vote. It's important for all the members of this Legislature to consider very carefully their position and how they're going to vote on this. As the Member for Calgary-Shaw said, history will judge you by your actions. People are paying attention to this. People want to know that they're being heard, and people want to know that what's at the element of this bill is keeping kids safe. If that's what's most important, they can demonstrate that by their actions.

I know that my father was a teacher. He taught high school English for quite a number of years. It was great to go visit him from time to time at school. When he walked the halls, everybody knew who he was and he was very well respected. I had the opportunity to speak with him and ask him: as a former teacher – he's now retired – would he want to be put in a position of telling parents about their kids? You know, he said: "I couldn't bear that. I couldn't bear that responsibility. It's not something that I would want to have done." What we're doing here with this bill makes a lot of sense.

You know, thinking about my parents and my own experience as a kid in school, I got bullied a lot in school. I was even afraid to tell my parents that I got bullied. I couldn't imagine, I couldn't put myself in the place of being an LGBTQ youth and having to tell my parents something like that when I could barely tell them that I was being bullied. I think the only way that they found out is that I might have gotten beaten up at school that day, and when I came home, they said: what happened to you? So I finally told them. They went and fixed it right away. I had a great relationship with my parents, and I felt like I could tell them anything, but sometimes as a kid you just don't see it that way.

When I think about my own experience and how difficult that was and put myself in the shoes of LGBTQ kids, you know, the courage that they express and also the courage that's been expressed by members of the Assembly who are openly LGBTQ in the community, it's remarkable. I think we owe them a debt of gratitude for their courage and for sharing their lived experience with us so that we can have a better understanding and appreciation of what they've gone through.

I do want to touch a little bit on language and how language matters to what we say and what we do, coming back to language. Sometimes things as simple as asking, "Do you have a girlfriend or a boyfriend?" or "Do you have a husband or a wife?" – when you ask someone that, if you don't know what their sexual orientation or gender identity is, that can put them off. So I've tried to make a conscious approach to trying to use nonbinary language. It's difficult, but it's something that I'm trying to be better at. Some people will say: oh, you're being too politically correct, that that's political correctness and political correctness has no place in our language anymore. Well, you know what? I don't think being politically correct is the wrong thing to do. I think it's about using inclusive language. It's about respecting the way people want to be addressed. If someone says, "I want to be called a he," well, who am I to say that they don't want to be called that way? That's the way that they prefer to be addressed, and that's the way I would address them.

4:40

One other thing, too, Madam Speaker, is in regard to LGBTQ tourism. Alberta is having a discussion in 2017 about whether to make safe places for gay kids. You know, the entire country and perhaps the world is watching Alberta have a debate about this

sensitive issue but also wondering: “Hey, it’s 2017. Why are you guys still stuck on this kind of stuff?” Unfortunately, we do need to have this debate because we do need to protect and save kids. But the debate we’re having also reflects Alberta’s position in the world. People look at us and go: “Hey, I’m a part of the LGBTQ community. I want to go travel and spend my travel dollars in places that support this community.”

If we can send a message to the world and make sure Alberta’s reputation is one where people feel safe no matter what their gender identity is or what their sexual orientation is, people from around the world will say: “I want to travel to Alberta. This is a place where I can feel safe, I can spend my money, and I know that the people that I meet on the streets are going to welcome me.” I think that’s incredibly important to understand and something that we want the world to take notice of.

I do want to just briefly mention two organizations in my constituency, Banff Pride and Your Life Out, which is a gay support group in Cochrane. They do fantastic work. I really appreciate the fact that they’re supporting the community and that they’ve also welcomed me. I’ve gone to a drag show a number of times in Banff and, wow, Madam Speaker. I invite all of you to come because it is a fantastic show. Their entertainment there is second to none. You’ll have a lot of fun. I’d really like to thank them for the work that they do supporting the community and making sure that we can have these kinds of conversations and make people feel supported.

I thank you very much for your attention. I’m a hundred per cent in support of this bill, and I encourage all members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to ask the previous speaker to talk a little bit more about the fact that sometimes as a child he wasn’t able to speak to his parents, and it didn’t necessarily reflect on a negative relationship with his parents but had to do with his own development and his own choices and how that played out. I’d just like to hear a little bit more about how his experiences maybe enlightened his decision to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Thank you very much for the question. In reflecting back to my experiences as a kid, I suppose I was embarrassed that I was bullied. I didn’t want to tell my parents that kids picked on me in school. I didn’t have any impression that my parents would laugh at me or anything like that, but I guess it was just a matter of personal pride. You know, kids get bullied all the time, so I knew that my situation wasn’t unique. But when I reflect upon kids who are trying to decide whether or not to come out to their parents, if I struggled with telling my parents that I was bullied, I couldn’t imagine the difficult decision and the difficult position those young kids are in. I want to make sure that they have a safe space where they can feel the support of their peers and teachers and get advice and make sure that they’re ready. When the time is right, it’s a choice for them to make.

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

Seeing none, speakers to the bill? The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to rise and to speak in favour of Bill 24. I want to begin by stating one point very, very clearly, and I’d like the members opposite who are still deliberating on what to do with respect to this

bill to think about this and to also pass it on to their leader. Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, is about one thing and one thing only: it is about protecting some of the most vulnerable kids in our province.

Madam Speaker, the new leader of the UCP has offered a number of rather self-justifying, almost conspiracy theories to excuse his decision or his direction to have his caucus oppose this bill. But despite those protests, which I will address in a moment, at the end of the day, the passage of Bill 24 will be an absolutely enormous step forward for LGBTQ youth in Alberta, and on that day, Madam Speaker, we will celebrate with them.

Before I speak about the substance of the bill, I do want to take the opportunity to clear up a few misconceptions that have been propagated in the public conversation about this bill and about what it means, and I hope that in so doing, perhaps I can persuade some members opposite to consider supporting this landmark piece of legislation.

First of all, Madam Speaker, the claim has been made that this bill is somehow all about wedge politics or creating a political distraction. I cannot think of a more cynical claim. It is insulting and, quite frankly, is hurtful to the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who need this bill to go forward. It’s also a well-worn red herring that is used throughout history to halt progress on fundamental issues of human rights.

So let me tell members a little bit about how and why this bill is coming forward to the floor of this Chamber. When our government was elected, we quickly became aware that schools and in some cases school boards, but mostly schools, were still able, under the regime of Bill 10, to actively discourage kids from requesting GSAs. The old approach or the approach that was put forward under Bill 10 simply wasn’t working. It asked those kids to be the heroes, to push against a culture and a set of rules and daily directions that still existed in schools throughout this province, to push against them in order to make that courageous choice to request that a GSA be formed. The fact of the matter is that the rights of young people were being actively frustrated, with little recourse.

Madam Speaker, what we are doing here is that in many cases we are talking about the most vulnerable children inside that school. We are not talking about Norma Rae. To expect those kids to be Norma Rae, to fight against all those subtle and not so subtle pressures against them, discouraging them to stand up and speak about who they are, is to expect too much from the most vulnerable. Quite frankly, when the rights of the few are denied, it is, in fact, the obligation of government to step in to protect those rights. That is what this bill is about.

Another objection to this bill is the allegation that gay-straight alliances teach curriculum and somehow they need to be managed through that regime. Now, quite honestly, that’s simply not true. That is a ridiculous suggestion. GSAs are clubs formed by young people as a safe place to go to find support, to find camaraderie, and friendship, often, as I’ve already said, at an extremely vulnerable time in their lives. GSAs are no more about curriculum than debate club or model UN club or basketball. But, strangely, the members opposite or, in particular, their leader are not suddenly bursting forward with an outcry that parents be informed when their kids join UN model parliament. They don’t. So why, then, must they be required to be informed when they form a GSA?

Well, I don’t think there is a good reason unless you dig a little bit further underneath the objections from the members opposite or their leader, and that reason, frankly, is not very satisfying or one about which anyone should be very proud. The fact of the matter is that these clubs are not about curriculum. They are after school clubs that are about camaraderie and support for kids who are vulnerable.

The third reason that the members opposite or their leader, Mr. Kenney, have suggested that we shouldn't be going ahead with this is that Bill 10 was good enough and that we should just leave the issue alone and move on. Well, Madam Speaker, again, as I've said, we know that's not true. Bill 10 was a step forward, but it just wasn't good enough. In allowing adults to out gay kids, it was, quite frankly, fundamentally flawed. We know that it would allow adults to out gay kids because the new UCP leader pointed to it himself when he said that schools should be able to inform parents if their kids join GSAs. More importantly, we know that because gay kids and their friends have also told us so, and they've told us that Bill 10 was not good enough. Those are the people that we spoke with and listened to when we sat down to get to work on this legislation.

4:50

It's a bit self-serving and, frankly, a bit self-absorbed of Mr. Kenney to say that somehow he is the target of this bill, because – let me assure you – he is not. What this bill targets are adults who want to out gay kids before they are ready, and it targets policies, practices, and procedures in schools that are designed to discourage kids from asking for GSAs under the law as it existed under Bill 10. That is what we need to fix, Madam Speaker.

The fourth objection that was brought forward, Madam Speaker, by the new leader of the party of the members opposite was that somehow this bill will mean that children as young as five will form GSAs. Now, it's hard to know where to begin with that claim. We know already that Mr. Kenney did not consult with young adults and teenagers who are members of the LGBTQ community. It is clear as well, apparently, that he's never actually spoken to a five-year-old. For the record, kindergartners aren't thinking about forming UN clubs, chess clubs, debate clubs, gaming clubs, basketball teams. No, they are typically learning the alphabet and focusing on learning how to tie their shoes . . .

Ms Hoffman: And recess.

Ms Notley: . . . and also recess and wondering if their Elmo will be around during recess.

To suggest otherwise is patently ridiculous. Again, I think the level of ridiculousness of that assertion actually shows the desperation to which the leader of the members opposite, Mr. Kenney, will go in order to avoid having an open, honest discussion of the underlying prejudices which stand between him and his ability to support this bill.

Another issue that was raised was that the governing party, we, the NDP, did not put this issue in our platform; therefore, we can't talk about it. Well, I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, that's an interesting take on the work that we do here. Let me explain something to Mr. Kenney. Sometimes in life unanticipated things happen. In this case, as I've said already, after we were elected, we learned that there were some serious flaws with Bill 10 and in our ability to enforce the very provisions that were designed to protect the health and safety of these vulnerable kids, and we knew that those flaws needed to be fixed. So we listened, and the Minister of Education worked very hard with school boards over quite some time to find ways to improve the situation in these schools. In some cases it worked but not in all.

If the only reason that you have for not supporting this bill is because it didn't appear in the 2015 NDP platform, then you know as well as I do that your leader is reaching for excuses, and you certainly, quite frankly, haven't been listening to what I as the leader of the NDP have been saying and fighting for throughout my whole public life. If anyone for a moment would have thought that I or anyone in this government caucus would hear about the kind of

injustices, that we heard about after getting elected, being suffered by kids in these schools and if they for one moment would have thought that we would have ignored them and not moved forward on them, well, first of all, you've underestimated every single one of us, and secondly, you are the only person in this province who will be surprised.

Another argument that Mr. Kenney offers up for why the Official Opposition should not be supporting this bill is that it doesn't mean you want to out gay kids if you give adults the right to out gay kids. Now, Madam Speaker, I think that's a bit of Orwellian doublespeak, but that, in effect, is what Mr. Kenney is now trying to claim. It's a fundamentally dishonest position, and it belies Mr. Kenney's own words when he discussed this issue with the *Calgary Herald* editorial board just a few months ago. The quote is: "I do, however, believe parents have a right to know what's going on with their kids in the schools unless the parents are abusive." And another quote: "I don't think it's right to keep secrets from parents about challenges their kids are going through."

Madam Speaker, I ask the UCP members opposite to consider those words and what they mean because those words mean exactly what they say: adults should have the right to out gay kids at school. So if you're going to vote against this bill, own why it is you are voting against this bill: you believe that adults should have the right to out gay kids against their will. At least own the position if you're going to vote against this bill.

Meanwhile, as Mr. Kenney tries to skate around this issue and hide from the pressures he appears to be feeling over it, he suggests that the answer to this problem is that we should trust teachers to make the decision on the basis of their professional judgment about whether to out gay kids. Just generally. Not on the basis of health and safety, which, of course, there's already provision for in this act, but just generally. Well, I do have a lot of faith in the professional judgment of teachers, Madam Speaker, but I also know that on matters like this it should be up to the kids; it should not be up to a teacher.

I also find this particular line of defence particularly disingenuous from Mr. Kenney given that he spent the last six months or so travelling around the province of Alberta trying to tell Albertans that teachers were part of some kind of strange conspiracy to impose socialist values in our classrooms. That was the case up until about four days ago, and now they are the arbiters of whether a kid should be outed or not outed. So I will just say that the obvious illogical and contradictory positions that are inherent in that, I think, again, really serve only to demonstrate the discomfort and the overall disingenuous nature of the arguments put forward by Mr. Kenney for why he's actually opposed to this bill, and I think that he should come clean about those.

Now, as well, Mr. Kenney has suggested that this bill is somehow a distraction from the other issues that Albertans want to talk about. And I do agree that we do need to talk about the economy. We do need to talk about our fiscal plan. We do need to talk about job creation. We do need to talk about economic growth. If that's what Mr. Kenney wants to do, then obviously what you should do is simply to vote for this bill and move on. That is the answer to the problem that it's distraction. That is the only answer.

At the end of the day, there have been a number of red herrings thrown into this debate. None of them stand up to any form of scrutiny. I think, quite frankly, that many people see that, not only outside of this building and not only on this side of the House and that corner of the House, but many of you on that side of the House can see through much of the irrationality or the absence of logic in the arguments that have been made by the leader of the UCP.

I suspect there are some members over on the other side of this room who are struggling with their conscience, and to those

members I would suggest that what you should do is to stand on the right side of this issue because you know as well as I do that only one person and one person only has the right to out a gay kid – and you should not pretend otherwise – and that, of course, is the kid.

So stand with us and support this bill. Your grandchildren and their children will be proud that you did. This is what we are talking about in this debate, Madam Speaker. This bill actually is not about partisan politics. This bill transcends partisan politics. When we did Bill 10, that's what it was meant to do, and that's what it's meant to do now. It's about fundamental issues of human rights and the kind of society we are all striving for. It's a bill where we will be remembered for where we stood and what stand we took.

We deal with many issues in this House, and we have honest and profound disagreements about important matters, but sometimes – and this is one of those times – an issue comes before us where we have to ask ourselves: really, whose side are we on, and how will history remember our work? Did we advance the cause of human rights and justice, or did we thwart it? This bill asks that question, and it demands an answer from each and every one of us in this House.

5:00

I say, with respect and with humility, that I know that the leader of the UCP has told the public that his caucus is united in its opposition to this bill. I also know that that truly cannot be true. The reasons Mr. Kenney has put forward are undermined by the facts and by the logic. They just don't stand up. They don't hold together. They are an attempt to excuse the inexcusable, opposing a bill that protects some of the most vulnerable among us.

I've had so many conversations just even over the last few days that bring that simple point home, not only with young people who this bill protects but, interestingly, with Albertans in their 20s, their 30s, their 50s, and their 60s, Madam Speaker, who described to me the painful experiences that they had, these painful experiences of being excluded in their communities, in their towns, in their families and having no one to talk about it with, you know, many, many years ago and yesterday. This is happening right now. These Albertans know that this is not a trivial issue. They know this isn't wedge politics. They know this is not about loopholes. They know, in fact, that this is about life and death.

Yesterday we all sat in here, and we introduced and applauded 50 or more first responders who were here, firefighters. I had the pleasure of meeting with some of them last night, and I had several of them come to me and talk to me about how important this bill was. I had one fellow come to me and talk about attending suicide attempts, suicide attempts that he knew were absolutely about the fact that the person who was attempting the suicide could not get the support they needed to deal with these issues and felt excluded and felt rejected and felt unloved. This is what we are trying to stop. They know well, those folks, the difference that Bill 24 will make in people's lives.

I know where people in my caucus stand, but I ask every other member of this House to know that when you cut through all of the excuses, there is simply one fundamental truth. The bill will protect the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens, too young to vote, many of them, but not without a voice in these halls, in this room.

So join us. Support this bill, support gay kids, support GSAs, and be proud saying that you did so.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments for the hon. Premier?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. If we can have a vote on second reading of Bill 24, I would be grateful.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:04 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jansen	Renaud
Clark	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Eggen	Mason	Starke
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Swann
Fraser	McPherson	Turner
Goehring	Miranda	Westhead
Gray	Notley	Woollard
Hinkley	Payne	

5:20

Against the motion:

Barnes	Gill	Orr
Cyr	Gotfried	Schneider
Fildebrandt	McIver	van Dijken

Totals: For – 44 Against – 9

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, did you have anything you wish to say?

Mr. Mason: I was voting with my feet, Madam Speaker, but I suppose we should take care of formalities. I will move that we adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, November 9, 2017

Day 52

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, November 9, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Let us each pray and reflect in our way. As we near the end of another week, may we maintain perspective and come together to remember those who fought and died for our way of life. By doing so, we have been afforded this incredible opportunity to stand in this very House each day. May we remember them today and every day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good morning. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I think that one of the things that's important to talk about as we continue this discussion on Bill 24 is the precursor to Bill 24, which was Bill 10. Bill 10 is a lived experience that profoundly changed me as a legislator. I want to say that as part of this discussion it's important to go over some of the details of Bill 10 because they were a learning experience for me. They were for my former caucus in the Progressive Conservative government. The lessons that we took away from Bill 10 really should create a framework for how our discussion goes forward on any issue surrounding the LGBTQ2-plus community.

Before I say that, I want to say that, you know, in 2013 I received the honour of being the first minister directly responsible for LGBTQ2-plus issues. It was an incredibly important moment. I want to give a nod to our former Premier Alison Redford, who was very progressive on social issues. She felt these were important enough to make sure that we paid special attention to them.

I had an opportunity to speak at Alberta's first gay-straight alliance conference at the University of Calgary, where students from around the province and especially ones from small towns told me and my colleagues in the government how important it was for them to have that one area of support, that one safe place in their day, in their community where they could be open and be themselves and not have to worry that someone was going to take that information forward.

Some of these kids told me that they had a guidance counsellor who would talk about that in the staff room, and the next day when they walked into a coffee shop, people would be discussing their sexuality in the coffee shop. That's the level of privacy some of these kids actually had. They were scared to talk to anyone about issues surrounding their lives, and a gay-straight alliance offered them the opportunity to do just that, a safe haven. That was critical.

We're talking about kids whose only option was sometimes having access to a phone line where they could have that conversation but never a face-to-face conversation with anyone, and that's really sad.

We released the province's first homophobic and transphobic bullying fact sheet – it's a very important piece of what we were doing – to start to layer in information for the public on how important it was to begin to have this conversation, to use the language, to start to feel comfortable with the idea that we had kids we needed to protect and we weren't protecting them.

We got the pride flag raised at the Legislature for the first time. That was during the Sochi games, if anyone remembers those Olympics in Russia and the conversation around gay athletes and the dangers they faced, the life-and-death dangers they faced. When we got that pride flag raised at the Legislature for the first time, people, gay and straight, said that when they walked by and saw that flag, they knew that the government had their backs. They knew that the government had the backs of their kids, their nieces, their nephews, anyone that was affected by these issues.

We went on to get, through much struggle, the relationship statutes and the Vital Statistics Act, through which became a statutes amendment act. The relationship statutes was removing the preamble to the Marriage Act, that states that marriage is between a man and woman. It was a struggle. It was a struggle because I had colleagues in the Progressive Conservatives who, frankly, even though gay marriage became the law in 2005, were still struggling with it in 2013. We remember then the Vital Statistics Act, removing the need to be 50 per cent of the way through gender reassignment surgery in order to get the gender changed on your birth certificate. That was another piece. These were all struggles. You know, by the time we got to the first conversation in this House on GSAs, we were still struggling with a lot of issues in our PC caucus.

Then came my colleague Kent Hehr's Motion 503. Motion 503 was the first discussion in this House, and our Minister of Education will remember very clearly that conversation; our minister of economic development will as well. And I want to give a shout-out to my colleague across the aisle the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti because he is a good man who is supportive of these issues, who walked with me in the pride parade, and who honestly has a good heart. So in any conversation I have, I want to make sure that I have honoured the fact that he is a good man. Motion 503 was definitely a fight in our caucus about whether we supported it or not, and some of us did.

Fast forward, then, to Laurie Blakeman's Bill 202. Bill 202 was one that a number of us had said that we were going to support, and it was a very contentious issue within our caucus. So what our former Premier at the time decided to do was come up with Bill 10, which, once it was on the table, you couldn't discuss Bill 202 anymore because you can't have two bills on the table that are too similar in nature. The reason for the original Bill 10 was a political decision to thwart Bill 202. Let's be very clear. When people are throwing around the accusation that someone put something forward with a political intent to embarrass or to change the conversation, that started in my former caucus, so I find the finger pointing a little bit ironic.

I talked about Bill 10 in terms of my flawed advocacy. I was handed this bill at the last moment because of the work that I had done. I was told to take it forward even though it didn't make gay-straight alliances mandatory in schools. It was flawed, it was discriminatory, it was harmful to kids, and it said to every child in Alberta who is LGBTQ-plus: you're a second-class citizen, and we are putting that in legislation.

I took that bill forward because I was told that I had to be part of a team and that as a team player I was responsible for making sure

that I did my part, and I did. I apologized to the LGBTQ community later because I profoundly disappointed them and many of my mentors, who then told me that they didn't know who I was anymore. It was a moment in my life where I decided that I could either quit politics and be who I was or be a team player and suck it up and take forward this horrifying, homophobic bill that hurt people.

At the end of the day, the bill was pulled because our Premier decided it hurt his brand. Ultimately, it came back – I had no part of the discussion – with mandatory GSAs.

9:10

The lessons I learned in all of this were painful but important ones, and they really were about making decisions not based on your electability but based on your moral and ethical framework. They were painful, but they were important, and they framed how I made my decisions going forward.

Fast-forward to the policy conference where I decided as a progressive politician to run for leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. I thought at the time that I would be able to bring progressive ideas forward, so I went to that policy conference. What happened at that policy conference was that I came to talk about natural gas cogen and a lot of good environment policy and a lot of good energy policy, and the very first thing that happened – and I will table this later – was that Jason Kenney's people, his supporters, came forward in a breakout room of hundreds of people, and they put forward a policy to out gay kids in school. So when Jason Kenney talks about the fact that he doesn't want to legislate on social issues, he doesn't have to because his people put the policy forward for him. The proof is right here.

Jason Kenney's people flooded that policy conference, more than 80 per cent of the people. You can tell by the final vote. You can tell that Jason Kenney's people wanted to talk about outing gay kids in school, and they wanted to talk about abortion. They did not want to talk about anything else. So when he talks about the NDP making social issues divisive, his people made them divisive. His people chose to have that conversation.

They didn't want to talk about making Alberta better. They didn't want to talk about energy policy. They didn't want to talk about anything on the education front but how to make sure that schools had the ability to out gay kids to their parents. That's what they wanted to talk about. And when they chased me up and down the halls and they called me a baby killer, they wanted to talk about abortion. They made it very clear that social issues were exactly what they wanted to talk about. So when Jason talks about members making grassroots policy, I think we can be very clear what that grassroots policy is going to be.

Jason released a statement on Bill 24. It is a dog-whistle document designed to invoke the worst prejudices about the LGBTQ community and about gay-straight alliances. In it he claims to "strongly support efforts to make schools free from bullying," which is an interesting comment to make since he didn't refrain from making the policy conference filled with his supporters free from bullying; the bullying was so intense that I dropped out of the Progressive Conservative leadership race. Is there anyone in this Chamber who thinks for a moment that he is interested in making any space in this province free from bullying? I don't think so.

He said, "Neither I nor anyone in our caucus has proposed 'outing' gay kids" in schools. Well, we know that's not true. Certainly, all you have to do is look on Twitter to see some of the folks across the aisle talk about how they think that's a good idea, so maybe he should have checked with his caucus.

He said, "We believe that highly trained educators are in a much better position than politicians to exercise their discretion." Well, it

was only a month ago that he was excoriating Alberta teachers for indoctrinating their ideology in schools all the way from kindergarten through university, and now all of a sudden those same teachers he trusts enough to decide when a child should be outed in school.

He talks about Bill 24 applying to five-year-olds in kindergarten. You know, this is the equivalent of saying that gay people are child molesters. Because you know what? You put out this vicious, negative kind of messaging, and you ask your followers to get riled up about it. That's what this is designed to do. It is a dog whistle of the most disgusting kind.

You know, I knew from that policy conference that Jason Kenney's base were homophobes – there is no other way to say it – and the best way to get that base riled up, to come out and to vote for you is to signal to them that their thinking is under attack. How do you do that? By making sure that you tell them that – and I quote from Jason's release on the UCP website – "the NDP is trying to do indirectly what it cannot do directly: that is teaching sensitive subjects."

Cortes-Vargas: Like being gay.

Ms Jansen: Like being gay.

You know, Bill 10 was a learning moment for us. Clearly, a lot of people didn't learn from it. But I'll tell you what I learned from it. I decided that I wouldn't at any point in the future after that moment allow a time in this House where I allowed myself to be shut out of a discussion about what's fair and what's right and what is truly Albertan. That's what Bill 24 is.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak on Bill 24? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have an amendment I'd like to present to you.

The Deputy Chair: If you could just wait till I have the original, please.

Mr. Ellis: Absolutely.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A1. Please proceed.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole to move an amendment to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. Before I continue with my comments, it bears repeating that the United Conservatives unequivocally support GSAs. Members of our legacy caucuses unanimously supported the legislation that gave students the right to form GSAs in their schools.

I stood in this Chamber along with a few people that are here today and, of course, supported Bill 10. I was new to the Chamber at that time, but I can tell you that – and I do agree with the Member for Calgary-North West – it certainly was a learning opportunity, and I, too, believe that I have learned from it as well.

Nobody on our side of the House wants to take that right away. We know the GSAs are an important tool to help support students who may be having difficulties dealing with sexual orientation or gender identity issues and that the peer support provided through a GSA can mean the difference between life and death for these children. We also do not support mandatory notification of GSAs, GSA participation for parents.

In other words, we are certainly not in favour of outing gay kids. This has to be said, Madam Chair, because the members opposite

continue to insist that these are our positions on this issue. Time and time again we have corrected the record, yet they persist in mischaracterizing our beliefs.

Now, it must also be said that opposition to the bill we have before us today does not equal opposition to GSAs. Another piece of misinformation perpetuated by this NDP. While we support elements of the bill, our caucus has identified a number of areas of concern. In particular, I am concerned that section 9 of this bill deliberately or unwittingly erodes parental rights when it comes to the education of their children, which is why I'm proposing to strike section 9 from it in its entirety. Section 9, as it currently stands, provides an exemption from section 50.1(1) of the School Act.

9:20

Section 50.1(1) states:

A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

Madam Chair, it has been a long-standing legal right of parents in Alberta to withdraw their children from religious or sexual health instruction should they see fit to do so. Section 50.1(1) of the School Act guarantees that. Now, the members opposite have spoken at length in this House about how GSAs are simply extracurricular, peer-support, antibullying clubs where students go to eat pizza, hang out, and talk to one another and that nothing even resembling instruction happens there ever. To quote the Premier just yesterday: "GSAs are no more about curriculum than debate club or model UN club or basketball." Some members opposite have spoken passionately about how upsetting it is that we would dare raise it as a possibility. The Premier herself said that the suggestion was "ridiculous."

Fine. I will take the government at its word, but then I can't help but wonder why the government finds it necessary to provide an exemption to section 50.1(1). As far as I can tell, there is no earthly reason for the NDP to legislate an exemption for something that isn't happening in GSAs anyways. Its presence in the bill raises serious questions about the government's intent, and many Albertans are questioning the government's support for the parental rights as outlined in section 50.1(1) of the School Act. I sincerely hope that section 9 is not a way for the government to do after hours what it could not do in the classroom during school hours. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, let the member speak.

Mr. Ellis: Madam Chair, the presence of section 9 in this bill has caused considerable confusion and anxiety for parents across this province. We have heard from many parents who are wondering what this means for their ability to know when their children are learning about sexuality at schools, which is their right under the law. In fact, the NDP appears to acknowledge this right since they are not repealing section 50.1(1) outright. If GSAs aren't instructing children in any way, there is simply no need to exempt them from this provision. It just doesn't make sense.

Thankfully, there is a simple, common-sense solution to this problem, which is to strike out section 9 from this bill. That would eliminate any doubt or confusion about the government's motivations or intentions when it comes to the parental rights enshrined in section 50.1 of the School Act. It would be a significant improvement to this legislation, and I would urge the government to support it. I would also caution the government to seriously consider the implications of defeating this amendment. Exempting GSAs from being subject to section 50.1(1) of the School Act while at the same time claiming that nothing that would require parents to

be notified under existing law occurs within GSAs is a contradiction so obvious that it invites suspicion.

Did the government seriously think that nobody would notice when they try to legislate something that they say isn't a problem in the first place? What are parents supposed to think when your actions are so out of step with your words? Now is the time for the government to reassure Albertans that they have no intention of coming after their rights as parents. Now is the time for the government to prove that it doesn't have anything up its sleeve.

Once again – and thank you, Madam Chair – I urge the government and all my hon. colleagues in this House to accept our common-sense amendment to Bill 24. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for this opportunity, Madam Chair, and thanks for the amendment. I think it's important to clarify why this section is in Bill 24 and the intention of this section as well. I think clarity is important, and what we are ensuring is that there is a differentiation between, first of all, instructional and then clubs, right? The health lessons, for example, are taught in health class – right? – but GSAs are peer-support groups, so there is a clear differentiation there.

You know, part of this provision is because of what we have seen over the last couple of years. It's part of the evolution of building this legislation in order to support kids and to strengthen the situation for GSAs. Some schools have suggested that there's an interpretation of section 50.1 that could be used as a justification to violate student privacy and to notify parents of participation in a GSA. We have seen some of this before, so this is a matter of clarity, right? We've seen some confusion in the past around school boards about whether section 50.1 should apply to voluntary student organizations like GSAs, so with the new proposal that we have before us here, we hope to bring clarity to this matter.

If we do pass this amendment, it's very important that it makes clear that section 50.1, which is intended to apply to instructional time, does not apply to voluntary organizations such as GSAs. Respectfully, that is the intention of this. It's a very important part of Bill 24, so I respectfully reject this amendment and would suggest that all members do consider that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to say that it's deeply disappointing that the members opposite continue to peddle dangerous conspiracy theories instead of accepting the simple fact that this is about protecting kids. Rather than standing up for the students who need these groups, the opposition would stand up for the rights – rights teachers do not want – to out gay kids.

Madam Chair, I completely agree with the Minister of Education, and I ask all members of this Assembly to vote against this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to take an opportunity to sort of share some of my experiences through my time on the Edmonton public school board. I'm so proud of the

fact that while we were on the board, we were able to move forward in ensuring that all schools would be safe, caring, respectful environments for students, staff, and their families. A big piece of that was ensuring that students had the right to form GSAs, and another big piece was ensuring that staff knew what their roles and responsibilities were around protecting those children, ensuring that they were well supported and providing opportunities for them to grow.

But the learning experience I want to share was one that actually happened when we were at the Alberta School Boards Association's conference. It was in debate. We brought forward a resolution to expand tenets of the policy that we had on our board to province-wide, and there was a lot of learning that happened on the floor. There were a lot of folks that said things like: "Oh, what's next? A support group for kids who are fat?" or "What's next? A support group for kids who have red hair?" I want to tell you that it is not the same to be struggling with your weight as to be feeling rejected and depleted for who you are and what your life is.

9:30

But the person who helped me learn the most at that moment when we were on the floor debating this was a gentleman I have great respect for. His name is Terry Riley. He's from the fantastic city of Medicine Hat. He came forward to the microphone. Terry is very well spoken and outspoken, and you never truly knew where he was going to stand on an issue until he started going.

To tell you the truth, it was a pretty hot room. Terry came up, and I was, like: oh, I wonder which way he's going to go on this. Terry started speaking from his experience as a teacher, how there were kids in his class that were absolutely bullied for being who they were, who were bullied, called gay, called queer, called everything that could hurt them. He didn't know what their orientation was, and he did not stop that bullying, and sometimes he even participated in it. He said that he did that because he didn't know any better, and he lived with that regret every day of his life since. He said that it was important for us to bring these policies forward because he didn't want any other teacher to live with the guilt of not standing up for a kid who deserved to have them on their side.

This amendment not only puts kids in a really awful position, Again, it puts teachers in a really awful position, puts teachers in a position where they don't know how to move forward, where they don't know how to best act in that role in loco parentis, which is part of their obligations as a teacher.

I have to say that bringing this forward is very, I'd say, disingenuous, but I think it is actually very genuine. I think it speaks exactly to the values of the folks on the other side who are bringing forward this amendment. I don't think they want to protect kids. I don't think they want to stand up for the kids who are most marginalized and vulnerable in our society, students who are statistically far more likely to be living on the streets, far more likely to engage in self-harm. These are some of the kids that are pushed to the margins by a variety of different systems, including sometimes their own schools and their own families, and this is why kids have told us that these groups matter and that they need to be protected and that they need to be supported.

I also want to tell you about one day, walking down the hall of a school in my ward at that time, when I was on the Edmonton public school board. I was walking down the halls of Vimy Ridge academy. It's a fantastic school. They had at that time cadets as well as hockey and dance and all sorts of different programs, outdoor pursuits. I think there are hon. members of this House that have their children going to that school at this very moment.

I want to say that it isn't often that you walk the halls of a school and kids come up and say thank you for a policy you passed, you

know, work that you did around assessment, work that you did around junk food. Not exactly things students come up and say thank you for. But for this policy, in that school, kids came up to me in the hallway and said thank you. They said: "You're making our lives better and safer because you're ensuring that we have the right to be who we are. We can actually show up to school, hang up our coats, go to class, and know that nobody will hold who we are against us."

I think that this amendment and its intent to do the exact opposite, to make kids feel fearful, to make kids have mistrust for the systems that are supposed to be there to support them, speak to the genuine distrust, hatred, disrespect that we've heard from so many members of the other side when it comes to protecting children who are marginalized. And that makes me not just sad. It's not actually shocking, but it is very disappointing. It's not just disappointing for me. It's disappointing for these teachers that are going to be impacted, it's disappointing for the kids who are going to be impacted, and I wonder how many people on that side of the House will not themselves be disappointed when they are in a position where they need to say where they stand on this issue. It will happen over and over again.

Again, the Premier said yesterday: you know, we're really keen to get back to discussing the items of the economy, jobs, petrochemical diversification in this province. There are lots of opportunities for us to engage on this, and bringing forward amendments like this, I think, says that there is an intent on the other side of the House for us to spend more time talking about what our social values are. I'm fine to do that. You brought forward the amendment; we'll rise and speak to it. I will encourage my colleagues to vote in opposition to this because this is absolutely doing the opposite of what, in question period, members opposite said they want to do, which is to talk about those other issues. Instead, they're bringing forward something that is absolutely detrimental to the people of this province. We're going to stand up and we're not going to allow this kind of very direct attack on children to continue.

Again I want to say thank you to Terry Riley for his courageous comments, for working to make Alberta a safer place for teachers and for students. That day will stand out in my mind for many years to come.

There was also another speaker at the mike. I'll keep his name in confidence. He said: you know, if kids didn't want to get bullied for being gay, they should act less gay. It definitely made the news, and there was mixed reaction in the room.

That, to me, is what this amendment says: if kids don't want to be outed, they shouldn't come to GSAs. In my opinion, in our caucus's opinion, in our government's opinion, we are creating these structures so that kids can come, so they can be themselves, so they can be supported, and they can get on with learning math and science and English and all of the other important components in their day knowing that they are respected, that they are protected, and that they will be supported in their schools and their learning environments.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to talk a little bit about some of the news that I was listening to on the radio last night. It was around clarity of rules and why this legislation is important and what it seeks to make more clear.

I know that my experience as an MLA since being elected, as I'm sure with a lot of experiences around the Chamber, is that

sometimes you don't know, when there is an issue, who the first person is that the phone call that you make should be to. When parents contact my office and they have questions and concerns on what's going on in their kids' school, often when they come to me, they're frustrated because they didn't know if they should go to the teacher, they didn't know if they should go to the principal, they didn't know if they should go to the superintendent, or they didn't know if they should go to the school board. Sometimes they don't even know who all those avenues are. Any time that we can make more clear the roles, where responsibility lies for what, I think it's something that acts in the best interest of families, of parents, of students.

Rob Breakenridge, who I was listening to on I think it was 630 CHED last night, was very clear about what the point of the legislation is, that it is to make clear that the responsibility to inform parents is not put on a teacher that is the one that is engaged to make sure that they facilitate these clubs. Like, we're talking about all clubs. That's what this section 9 does. It makes clear that there is curriculum in school and that then there are extracurricular activities outside of school, which are not curriculum, hence extracurricular. The idea that this is somehow to create a wall between parents and their kids: it actually does the opposite. It makes clear what the role of the teacher is and what the role of the parent is.

I know that, growing up, whenever I had issues in my life, if I was starting to date or if I was doing any of those sorts of things that kids learn about themselves and explore as they grow up, I told my dad as I was ready to tell him, because we didn't always agree. I grew up in a really religious household, that often disagreed with how things were in my generation.

I think it's important for parents to know what their role is, that it's the responsibility of the parent to know if they are a member of the Harry Potter club, if they are a member of the mathletes' club, if they are a member of these things that their kids are taking an interest in. The responsibility lies with the parents. It is important to have safe spaces for students that are vulnerable, that have all sorts of really shocking statistics on how hard it is still to navigate this world that has not been built for them to be a truly included part.

9:40

The fact that this section makes clear that it is a parent's responsibility to be involved with their child's life, to be close with them, to be having clear lines of communication is, I think, really important. You know, as an adult talking with my dad, I've made very clear with him – and he understands. He understands that if he didn't know something that was going on in my life, it was his responsibility. He knew that if he was not the first person to know, it was indicative of our lines of communication and not something that was someone else's responsibility.

I think that is why this section is so incredibly important. I would really like to know why the opposition would want to maintain the current way, where that clarity is not there, why the opposition would actually choose a system that puts other bodies in between a parent-child relationship and actually moves that responsibility where it really should not be. That's, I think, what I would like to know from the opposition, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. My colleague the Member for Calgary-North West spoke at length this morning about

the legacy of Conservative governments on LGBTQ rights here in this province. This amendment and indeed all of the statements we have been hearing from the opposition on this bill do not stand in isolation. They stand in the context of all of these actions of all of these previous Conservative governments in this province, who have consistently worked to provide loopholes, to continue to allow the promotion of intolerance and bigotry against the LGBTQ community in this province.

The opposition would like to frame this as a question where they'd like to try to put us in a little catch-22. They want to frame this in a way where they can try to say: oh, here's the NDP government again trying to sneak through an ideological agenda. We've seen this disingenuous argument from the Leader of the Opposition, in which he tried to insinuate that GSAs currently are implementing curriculum and trying to circumvent parental rights.

Madam Chair, this is a sideshow. It is a distraction, because they do not want to speak about the truth of this issue, which is, as my colleague from Calgary-North West outlined, that they have investment in individuals who are choosing to take a fearful view of the world, who want to believe that members of the LGBTQ community are trying to circumvent parental rights, who continue to spread misinformation that individuals from this community are actively trying to recruit children or in some way convince them to cross some putative line. This is paranoia. It is not reality, and it is beneath the members opposite and the Leader of the Official Opposition to in any way continue to feed into this false mythology about the LGBTQ community.

This amendment is seeking, once again, to insinuate that this legislation in some way is trying to push through a secret agenda, that we are trying to circumvent parents, that we are trying to work around people's rights. The fact is, Madam Chair, that this needed to be brought into this bill because individuals in different aspects of the school system in this province were actively trying to get around the provisions that were put forward in Bill 10 and the intention of that bill to guarantee that all students in this province have the opportunity to form or join a GSA without question and with privacy. It doesn't matter what nice language they try to dress it up in. They are trying to ensure that those sorts of loopholes and opportunities exist.

Our government will not stand for that, so we are providing in this bill a reasonable step, which makes it one hundred per cent, perfectly clear that GSAs are not curriculum. They are not a political activity. They are not something that has to be reported to parents because parents have some reason to be afraid of them. They are peer support groups that are student led, that provide youth with the opportunity to receive the support they need during a difficult time of their lives and, when they are ready to make the decision, to then come out.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I will not be voting in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Connolly: Before we vote on this amendment, I just have one more thing to say. If the members opposite vote for this amendment, I don't want to see a single one of them at pride next year. If you don't support our community now in this House – in this House now – don't you dare pay us lip service in June.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:47 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, W.	McIver	Pitt
Drysdale	Nixon	Smith
Ellis	Orr	Stier
Hunter	Panda	

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hoffman	Miranda
Bilous	Horne	Payne
Carlier	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Ceci	Larivee	Rosendahl
Clark	Littlewood	Sabir
Connolly	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	Mason	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Westhead
Goehring	McKitrick	Woollard
Gray	Miller	

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions in regard to Bill 24? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Yes. Thank you, Chair. You know, this bill falls in line with what is, to me, one of the most moving bills we've passed so far. I had a few friends from high school who had moved here from Nova Scotia. They'd been here for about six years when I first met them, and they still refused to identify as Albertans. Now, I didn't know this at the time, but these friends of mine had an older sibling, and when he came out to their parents, they threw him out. One of those friends later transitioned, and that friend was thrown out as well. This family has been torn apart because their parents are not accepting of this.

If they had joined a GSA and if the previous amendment that was just defeated had passed or if teachers decided that it was within the parents' best interests to inform the parents that their children were joining a GSA, that would have destroyed their household in high school. That is why there are so many homeless LGBTQ2-plus youth not just in this province but across the world, and that is something that I think we have to work to end. This bill is one step in that direction.

I believe it was back in 2015, with the first Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act bill we brought forward, that added protection for gender identity and gender expression, that I got some texts from these friends, and what they said to me is: this is the moment I am now proud to call myself an Albertan. These are people who have lived here for a decade, who until 2015 could not call themselves Albertans and live with that. I am so happy that we are finally moving forward in this direction.

I also was reflecting back on the speeches from my colleagues from Calgary-East and Strathcona-Sherwood Park about their experiences inside of schools and what many policies meant for them, and I was reflecting back again to my own high school experiences, which, as I'm sure most members here are aware, are not nearly as far back as some. I graduated in 2009. One of my

favourite teachers was a social studies teacher. I was fortunate to have advanced placement in my school, and I had this teacher for, I think, four classes when you include European history and world religion, which, surprisingly, under section 50.1(1), my parents didn't need to okay. I'm still unsure how that worked, but it did. My parents were more than happy to talk to me about that class every day, so I don't think they would have been concerned about it if they had been asked for permission.

This teacher would often share stories about his personal life, but it was never "my partner and I"; it was always "we." If he told stories of an individual in his family, it was always his nephew, and the only pictures he had in his classroom were Prime Ministers, the Queen, and his nephew. I clued in fairly early on why that was. Many of my classmates still dispute why that was, but the reason is that section 50.1(1) would not let him talk about his husband. In any other workplace that would be a human rights violation, but the fact that in a classroom we can't talk about the family structure of our teachers, about what they did on the weekend because they might accidentally out themselves is so baffling to me. Now, I realize this bill doesn't address section 50.1(1), and I hope that in the future we look at fixing that.

10:10

But at this moment we're talking about things where there isn't even any curriculum involved. A GSA is something that somebody wants to join. We're not talking about sex ed. We're not talking about a controversial book that an English class wants to read. We're talking about some kids looking for some support from other kids because they are often terrified to talk to anybody else.

You know, there's a group in my constituency – well, they recently moved out of my constituency but only by a block or two – called inQueeries. This is a group that was founded when a constituent of mine, likely a distant cousin – I haven't dug too deep into that; branches of her family married my family – came out to her family and looked around the community and saw that there was no support. The only option for this family to talk to other people her age about their experiences and the challenges they faced was to come into downtown Edmonton on a Tuesday night. It just totally disrupted the entire week. So this family said: okay; we're going to go out and create our own group.

I've met with this group several times. Shortly after their founding, they organized the first St. Albert Pride. I'll give credit where credit is due. Doug Schweitzer actually showed up last year, and so did my Member of Parliament, Michael Cooper, although he wasn't there long. My colleague from St. Albert, the Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre, and I, the three of us, were there the entire day, as was most of St. Albert council.

The stories that I have heard from youth at events like this are in many cases very touching, in many cases very tragic, and a lot of it comes down to whether or not they feel they have support and whether or not they feel the support that is available is a safe space. People like my friends from high school, who were thrown out of their house when they came out to their parents, would not be able to join a GSA if their parents were informed of it.

This bill is not about curriculum. It's not about trying to keep a secret from parents. It's about trying to protect kids. Not all of the members opposite, to be sure, but the conservatives opposite, anyway, have made it very clear that they don't intend to support this bill. Now, for some of them I think that that's based on a mistaken interpretation of the bill. That's one thing. I sincerely hope that they reach out to youth in their community or even around Edmonton. There are plenty of groups that I'm sure would be more than happy to talk to them, even if it's just to reach out to Dr. Wells,

who lives in St. Albert. I'm sure that somebody will be able to sit down with you and walk you through why this bill is so important.

I seriously hope that everybody in this Chamber supports this bill. I seriously hope that everybody takes a moment to reflect on why it is so important that we provide not just LGBTQ youth but all youth with a safe space to talk about the challenges that they are facing.

You know, Chair, on the other side of my constituency, in Spruce Grove, I'm told that there used to be a GSA and that the students felt that it was no longer necessary, so it just kind of pattered out and died, which is fine. If students feel that they have all of the support they need at the school, that's great to hear. But there was a constituent of mine who had recently transitioned, and they went to Spruce Grove council and said: "Why aren't we flying the pride flag? Why is there no pride celebration here in Spruce Grove? Every other capital region community is doing it. What's happening?" The answer they got wasn't: "Oh. Sorry. This was an oversight." That would have been understandable. Even if they had said, "Sorry; we don't have time this year; it's just not viable; we'll look at it for next year," that would have been fine. The response that they got from the Spruce Grove council was that it was too time consuming for them to raise the flag, to make an official statement, or to tweet about it.

So this constituent decided to organize their own pride, and about 20 people, including the Member for Stony Plain and myself, all joined this individual to throw the first Spruce Grove Pride. There were many people in attendance who had stories much like the member from Lethbridge – I don't recall which one is which – and the minister of environment, who grew up in my community, where not that long ago in the same community that was now saying that they didn't need a GSA, people were terrified to talk about it, were terrified to tell their best friends about their identity or their expression, their orientation.

It is for that reason that even in communities where we've made a lot of progress, we cannot forget that there's still a lot of work to do. We still have teachers who can't talk about their own personal relationships in classrooms, but right now my biggest concern is whether or not we can have youth talk to other youth about the challenges they face and give them a safe space to talk. That can't and won't happen if teachers or the administration choose to or are required to inform parents as soon as youth join a GSA.

In that spirit, I urge all members to support this bill. I urge all members that are on the fence to reach out to community groups in their community and across the province, to consult with the people that this impacts on the ground, with the youth that this impacts on the ground. I hope everybody reflects on that, I hope everybody does that consultation, and I hope that everybody, when it comes to third reading, chooses to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Madam Chair, I am honoured to stand in support of Bill 24. Now, my comments will be fairly brief because my colleagues have done a fantastic job of NDP-splaining why all aspects of this legislation must be supported. Every student of every school in my constituency and throughout the province has my full respect and support. I absolutely believe that any of those students who join GSAs not be outed. Students who join GSAs are Albertans and citizens who deserve to be and to feel safe, just like every other student. GSAs provide that safe place.

10:20

I've spoken to members of several different school boards over the last year, not specifically about GSAs but, rather, things in

general. I asked them, offhand, if the school normally reported to parents if their children were interested in or participated in the music club. The answer from all was that they did not.

When I went to school, a few years ago, I didn't share lots of things with my parents. I took music lessons – singing, piano, and violin – which my parents paid for and for which I did some extra chores, but I didn't bother to share that I joined both the glee club and the orchestra until I had to stay late at school as we were preparing for the Kiwanis Music Festival or a concert.

I also played sports: basketball, volleyball, and track, or, in fact, any other sport which offered me an opportunity to participate and possibly get out of the class. My parents didn't know until I was participating in an event which required permission. Even then I was hesitant to tell my mom, who often expressed that these were not activities in which girls needed to be participating. I was sure my father would support my participation because he was the one who taught me to play baseball. That was his sport. However, I did need permission to participate in a tournament, so a conversation with both my parents had to occur. I had to present my case.

Eventually my mother recognized the benefits of my being involved. For instance, I became more focused on my academics because I had to have good grades if I was going to continue on the team. Sports also grew my self-confidence. Her opposition ended, and her support was gained. She attended every game or track meet which she could attend. She also attended every concert that I or my siblings participated in. I always felt supported by my parents, but I certainly didn't share everything with them. I certainly didn't talk about the crush I had on so-and-so or other things that I felt were personal. Did you?

I am a mom. I always felt that I had an incredible relationship with my daughters. In fact, they agree that we did and still do have a very great and very supportive relationship. As young children I taught them, in an evolving way, how to make decisions: orange juice or apple juice, *Star Wars* or skating. As they grew, they made more and more decisions for themselves. They made choices, some good, some bad. I supported their decisions no matter what they were. When they were little, they would confirm with me or ask about decisions. As they got older, they needed to confirm less and less with me. However, they still, on occasion, ask my opinion about a decision. I trust my kids to make their own decisions. They are individuals who have learned how to make decisions, and I respect them.

Had there been GSAs when they were in school, I expect they both would have been members to support their friends, because that is the kind of person they are. I would have supported as well.

I stand in support of Bill 24. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's been quite an experience listening to people talk about this over the last few days, talk about their lived experience and share stories from constituents, from families, and, most importantly, from children, because I think they are the experts here. They're absolutely the experts.

You know, I was thinking last night that if you had the opportunity to save one child's life, just one, by giving blood or giving money or giving them a place to live or anything like that, I don't think any one person in this Chamber would hesitate. They would not hesitate to do whatever it took to save even just one child's life. Yet we're being told by children and their families that this GSA, the way that it's presented in this legislation, has the potential to save children's lives. This is based on real experience.

This isn't a world view of any kind, like you all like to talk about. This is real. This happens every day.

I'm actually confused as to why people would have a problem with this. You know, I like to kid that it's interesting watching members on the other side because it seems like they conduct themselves some days like they're auditioning for Kenney. I cannot imagine that all of the people on that side that are voting against this, that has the potential to save children's lives, actually believe it. Sometimes you need to do the right thing, and there is no job that is worth sacrificing what you believe or sacrificing the health, safety, or life of a child.

You know, it was horrible to read yesterday online that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks was again pushing this ridiculous narrative that this was about five-year-olds joining GSAs so that they could be part of sex or religion clubs. It's ridiculous. I've come to expect some ridiculous things from that side like the goofy things they say about equalization, whatever – it's a conservative wedge issue, apparently – or their concerns about ranch and farm workers' safety, but this really takes the cake. This is ridiculous, and I wish that Albertans could see what I'm seeing right now, the people across the bench that are just not listening. They're not listening to people who are telling them that GSAs save children's lives.

You know, a couple of weeks ago I attended a ceremony at the University of Alberta where they honoured distinguished alumni, and one of the people who was honoured was Dr. Lorne Warneke. I'm sure some people have heard of him. He is a psychiatrist who specializes in the area of transgenderism. It was amazing – amazing – to listen to his story, not just his personal story of the life and the journey that he's had personally but the ways in which he's been forced to support children and their families that have come to see him. What was really, really neat was sitting in that auditorium and listening to him say that for once he felt hope because he saw a government that was listening, that they were making decisions based on what was right, not based on ridiculous ideology that belongs to another – who knows? – generation, era.

Your children are not your property. They're not. They're their own people, and I think that as parents we work really, really hard to make sure that they find themselves. I find it so offensive that the biggest rationale for not supporting this that you hear from the other side is that it's parental rights first. It's not. It's about the children first. It's always about the children first. Always.

You know, I raised my children – they're adults now – and I think I worked pretty hard to be sure that I didn't just say that they could tell me anything, but I tried to support when they did tell me something so that, you know, my reaction encouraged them to tell me other things. Now, that wasn't always pleasant. There were times they told me things I sort of wished they weren't telling me, but that's the reality. If you're going to be an open parent, you have to walk the talk.

But as open a relationship as we had, there were times when I was not the first person that they spoke to. They spoke to their friends and their peers, and all of us have done that, every single one of us. We've told our friends things that we couldn't yet tell our parents. We've relied on them for support when we felt we couldn't tell our parents for whatever reason. That's how we live and grow. We look at ourselves through the lens of our peers, peers that we see are like us. Why on earth would you jeopardize that relationship by insisting that parental rights trump all? They don't. It's about children first.

10:30

You know, at about grade 6 I couldn't even help my kids with math. I mean, think about that. We're a little bit out of touch as parents. I know that's hard to hear sometimes, but we are. I make

Flintstones references, and my kids go, like: what? It sort of puts you in your place a little bit.

There's a woman that I work with. Her name is Dr. Carol. I won't say her last name. Carol is a gay woman, and I know that she has struggled. As a young person her friends – and I asked her, you know, because I think we are a voice and she is one of my constituents: if you had an opportunity to say anything, what would you say? I just want to read what she said.

Being gay can be a deep fear unlike many others . . . there are so many pressures and messages telling us to be a certain way . . . we all have absorbed these, so much so that kids feel that they're not only different but will be a disappointment to their parents . . . putting ourselves in THEIR position rather than that of parents helps . . . imagine what it would be like to have a safe place to just be . . . without judgement, [without fear] or pressure.

The other point [nobody is] mentioning it's a gay STRAIGHT alliance . . . how wonderful for straight kids to be able to learn to support others as they struggle . . . my gay cousin's straight friend accompanied him through his journey . . . and to his prom . . . and I have heard Nate say that it was a privilege and honour and taught him so much about the good and bad in people . . . Nate is happily married to a woman. And has a child.

That's just a simple message from one person, but I know that if you asked and if you listened, you would hear from your constituents. You would hear from the children. You would hear from families. You know, we cannot begin to address our children's safety and the problem with youth homelessness without dealing with this. When experts are telling you and children are telling you – and they are the experts – that this legislation helps and it helps the way it's written, you need to listen. You need to stand up for what's right.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 24. I wanted to make certain it was known that I grew up in the era of 1972-75, in a high school here in Edmonton, where I'm ashamed now to admit that I did nothing as well as all my other classmates did nothing to come to the defence of an individual and his partner in that high school, who either were outed or they actually lived themselves as a couple and did not have any protections that this Bill 24 proposes and that they would have enjoyed under this bill.

It baffles me why the UCP opposition to Bill 24 is so strong right now. They are obviously serving a constituency they believe is worthy of defence, and I find it indefensible. It seems to me they want to return to a different era. They're stuck in the past. It's unfortunate that they respond to this particular constituency rather than showing leadership and saying: look, we're not going to delve into the past; we're going to show leadership on this and really protect the rights of children for their safety and protection.

Perhaps it's telling to look at possibly the motivation or why the UCP is following this direction. I find some of that evidence in an article in the *Sunday Sun* of August 28, 2016. There's a page there where prominent people are asked 20 questions about what they're doing on a Sunday morning. There's a profile there where individuals are asked what they're having for breakfast or what their pet peeve is or if they could have one superpower, what would it be, if they could choose any superpower, out of any in the world, what would it be?

Well, I'll tell you what. On that particular day Mr. Kenney was profiled, and the *Sunday Sun*'s questions that he answered went like

this. As far as his biggest pet peeve is concerned, he said it was “people going slow in the passing lane.” Well, I’ll tell you what. We’ve got a party that’s going slow in the passing lane on this issue if I can say so myself.

The question that’s most important and most telling that Mr. Kenney was asked is: “If you could have one super power, what would it be?” Out of all the superpowers Mr. Kenney could have chosen, guess what he chose? He chose “to be able to go back in time.” Well, guess what? He’s leading his party in that direction. That’s probably one of the reasons that we see him taking this stance and leading his party back in time, getting stuck in time, taking positions which don’t reflect the direction that we are taking forward on this side of the House.

I’ll tell you what. If his pet peeve is having people going slow in the passing lane, what he should do is get the heck out of the way on this issue, vote with the bill, and make sure that he’s not stuck in time so that the majority of the province can move ahead and discuss the pressing issues of the day once we, hopefully, find the passage of this bill completed in this House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Chair, I’m just wondering if I can get unanimous consent to revert to introductions. My little brother is here, and I would love to ask for unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, please continue.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I’d just like to take this moment to acknowledge that my little brother today woke up early with me – he’s been staying with me all week – and I was explaining to him why I’ve been so late coming home every day, and he decided to spend his PD day visiting the Legislature with his older sister. I’m extremely proud of this kid. He is an incredibly wise soul. He has two very older siblings that have lived paths that are very, I guess, ambitious, and sometimes he gets put in the shadows, and I don’t think he should be. He’s an incredible person. I would just like to ask Camilo Cortes-Vargas to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

What’s up, bro?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: We are now on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to Bill 24. You know, I’m proud to have family here. I think family has a lot to do with why we’re here, why this process is so important. In fact, it’s been working with families around what it takes to create safe and caring schools and what it takes to create safe and caring environments for kids that has brought me to this Legislature and what continues to motivate me to do this very work. I believe that the bill today that we’re debating has an incredible path in enabling those supportive spaces and making sure that it’s not vague in any way that parental notification is not to go out, effectively outing children if they join GSAs.

I think part of that comes into also understanding that there’s a lot of misrepresentation of what GSAs have been that has been put out there. I know this because people have come to me in my constituency from parent councils, all over the place to ask me, you know, “What would happen in this circumstance?” or “What would happen in this circumstance?” or “It seems to me that this is happening.” And when I explain to them the actual process, they always sit back in their chairs and say: “Oh, that never made it to me. Like, that didn’t come across.” I think that is because of the dog whistling that happens from the opposition and the fact that they continue to elevate conversations that promote discriminatory actions towards LGBTQ, to us individuals. I think it fundamentally is rooted in that.

But I think as we progress as a society . . .

10:40

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 24. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move now that we adjourn for the morning and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:41 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 9, 2017

Day 52

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 9, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you students from Cochrane high school in the beautiful, charming, and historic town of Cochrane in my constituency. They are accompanied today by their teachers Mrs. Stretch and Miss Gill. The students from Cochrane have enjoyed their trip to the Legislative Assembly. I'd ask for the students to rise and to have the members give them the warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today three groups of guests. First, I'm pleased to introduce Niobe Thompson, Bonnie Thompson, and Rosvita Dransfeld, who last year teamed up with Alberta Health Services to make two groundbreaking documentary films. *Memento Mori* and *Vital Bonds* bring viewers into intimate contact with the stories of transplant patients, the families of organ donors, and the medical staff who make our incredible organ transplant system work. These films are receiving international recognition and send a strong message on the value of our screen production grant program.

It's my pleasure to also introduce four staff members from the University of Alberta hospital: Dr. James Shapiro, liver surgeon, CIHR/Wyeth clinical research chair in transplantation; Kim Worton, unit manager with organ and tissue donation; Dr. Jim Kutsogiannis, neurocritical intensivist and medical director in the human organ procurement and exchange program; and Margaret Lidstone, former human organ procurement and exchange coordinator. These are some of the outstanding staff who are pivotal in bringing transplant patients and donors into contact with the filmmakers in an ethical and sensitive manner.

Lastly, I'd like to introduce Leslie Keith and Carl Babchishin, who lost their son Matthew two years ago. They made the courageous decision to share their story, resulting in the first-ever real-time account of a family making the gift of life. The bravery of the Babchishin family means that people all over the world are learning more about the crucial need for organ donation and choosing to become organ donors.

I ask all of my guests to now rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to all members of the Assembly the winner of the Royal Canadian Legion's dominion poem contest, Ryan Kosa. Ryan is joined in the Speaker's gallery by his family: Annette and James, his mother and father, and Sarah, his sister. Ryan and his family are from just north of Sexsmith, a town in my constituency, where Ryan attends grade 12 at St. Mary's Catholic school. I'm sure that many members will

recognize Ryan, who read his profound poem, *Deafening Silence*, at the Remembrance Day ceremony earlier today. I'm sure that I speak for all members when I say that we are truly moved by the thoughtful words of the poem. Personally, I'm proud to have such a smart young man as a constituent. I did want to take just a moment to read just a couple of lines from this poem, and I know other members will be quoting some parts from this poem, too. Just a couple of lines:

From Brussels to Baghdad,
Vimy to Vietnam, the memory lives on.

I would ask Ryan and his family to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A great honour for me to stand and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Umair Ahad. Umair is a social worker in addition to having degrees in environmental science and political science. He's also the owner of a small business in Calgary. Umair is a committed Liberal and the regional chair for the federal Liberal Party of Canada. I'll ask him to rise, and we'll give him the usual welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two people who were helpful in assisting me with the bill that I will be introducing this afternoon. Kim Savard is part of a steering committee that organized a community conversation in Calgary with key stakeholders to gauge the interest and the capacity to develop a missing-seniors response in Calgary. A cross-section of stakeholders from all sectors agreed to move forward, and an action committee was formed as part of Calgary's age-friendly strategy. I had the pleasure of learning from Kim and others about their community pilot project, and I am pleased to have been able to use what they have learned about keeping seniors safe in drafting my private member's bill.

With them is my former legislative assistant, Maureen Gough, who brought the idea of the silver alert bill to me when she was caring for her mother, Anne McIntosh, who had advanced dementia and has since passed. This bill is in her memory.

May I ask Kim and Maureen to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly representatives of the Canadian Primary Biliary Cholangitis Society, Alberta region. PBC is an autoimmune disorder that attacks the liver, and the Canadian PBC Society works towards education, awareness, research, and support to help improve the lives of those living with the disorder. I had the pleasure of meeting with these representatives earlier today, and we discussed ways to work together to improve quality of life for those living with PBC. I now invite Dr. Swain, Shauna Vander Well, and Kristy Peterson to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Caleb Sorenson. Caleb is in the process of completing his political science degree at King's University and recently joined our team in Sherwood Park as a part-time constituency assistant. I would like Caleb to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two members of the Alberta Thai Association, Councillor Ngamta Tekauyporn and Vice-president Katia da Silva Vissers. The Alberta Thai Association has been serving the Thai and multi-cultural communities in the greater Edmonton area and throughout Canada and throughout Alberta for over 30 years. I would like to ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I rise in recognition of some of Alberta's medical radiation technologists who are seated today in our members' gallery. I am honoured to have these health care professionals join us this week, during MRT Week, to celebrate the outstanding contributions of MRTs to the well-being of Alberta patients. Whether it's active or palliative treatment during cancer, these professionals are at the side of our patients almost every day. I invite Fiona Mitchell and her colleagues Karen, Susan, Jackie, Cynthia, Laura, and Mona to please rise and accept our recognition and welcome to this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For my second introduction today it's a pleasure to introduce two visitors in the members' gallery from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. I invite them to rise as I introduce them. They are Aidan Wharton and his father, Kevin Wharton. Aidan is an air cadet with 395 Edmonton Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron and attends Britannia junior high. He aspires to be a fighter pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force and certainly makes his dad and all of his classmates very proud. Please rise, Aidan, and your father, Kevin, and receive our welcome to this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other guests today? The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

1:40

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests of mine, the Reiter family. There's David Reiter, David Reiter Jr., and Zoe Bungay. The Reiter family are joining us from the Beverly neighbourhood in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. David Reiter Jr. attends Beacon Heights elementary, where he is currently learning about the provincial government. He's very excited to see question period first-hand, and I have a feeling he's going to be in for a very eventful day. I invite them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I hope that they are good teachers.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Blair McCormick. Blair is the

executive director of the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Students' Association. Blair is a SAIT alumnus who has worked with the students' union for more than 14 years now before coming into his current role last year. He is a graduate of SAIT, a fan of hockey and craft beer, and as we all know in this House, we are fans of both students and craft beer. We're proud to work with individuals like Blair and SAIT students to make life better for Albertans. If you could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests? The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Deb Teed and Arnold Hanson. They're also joined by Deb's daughter Elizabeth and her friend Gabby. Arnold Hanson is president of the board of the FCSS Association of Alberta, and Deb Teed is the association's executive director.

The association provides crucial support to over 200 FCSS programs across our province, including advocacy, training, and professional development, and a variety of tools and resources to the programs. At the annual FCSS Association MLA breakfast this morning I spoke about the critical work that Alberta FCSS does in their communities. They make an incredible difference to children, youth, families, and seniors, and that's why our government was proud to increase our financial support to enable them to address issues like poverty, isolation, and family violence. We are proud to continue our partnership and collaboration with all of the association members to make life better for all Albertans.

I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Remembrance Day

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today we gathered for a solemn and moving ceremony in remembrance of all those who sacrificed greatly so that we might live in peace and enjoy our democratic rights and freedoms. Thousands upon thousands of Albertans and Canadians and indigenous peoples left everything behind to go into the unknown and fight for everything we hold dear. So many of them did not come back, and the ones who did return were changed forever by what they had to endure.

Mr. Speaker, 2017 is a particularly poignant year to mark these sacrifices. This year is the 75th anniversary of Dieppe and the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and tomorrow is the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele. We know several Alberta regiments were among the Canadians who captured that Belgian village and its ridge. British, Australian, and New Zealand troops had tried in vain to take back the village since July. We accomplished that victory in two weeks. Nine Canadians won the Victoria Cross for valour, but the cost in human life was unimaginable: 4,000 soldiers killed and 12,000 wounded. Those who died at Passchendaele were among the 66,000 Canadians who gave their lives in the Great War and among the more than 172,000 who were wounded. It would be another year after that battle before the Great War finally ended.

We remember all of those who served and sacrificed in the Great War, but we also remember those who have served in almost 100

years of war and peacekeeping duties since then, and we remember those who are still serving today. They are standing guard, they are keeping the peace, and they are bringing relief and comfort to those who have lost everything to disasters.

Mr. Speaker, many of us, on all sides of this House, have had the honour of meeting some of the incredibly brave and resolute women and men who've served in the last 100 years and who are still serving today. They are Albertans' parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. They are Albertans' brothers and sisters. They are Albertans' children and grandchildren. Every single one of them has the heart of a lion, and we say to them: thank you.

On behalf of the Premier and our entire government we remember them, and we give them our most heartfelt thanks. This debt of thanks we owe to those defenders, living and dead, is expressed best through our actions. So I respectfully encourage all of us to act on this great debt even in small ways, even in acts of kindness, to fight for freedoms everywhere and to make life for Albertans better, for Canadians better, and for those beyond our borders better.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, today we stop to reflect, honour, and remember the brave, our ancestors and the soldiers who were willing to sacrifice their lives in order to protect our way of life. They fought and died for this great nation and for this great province, but more importantly they fought for the right to live free. Our veterans recognize the incredible importance of freedom from tyranny and oppression. In fact, they were willing to give the ultimate sacrifice, even their lives, in its defence. It is right that we pause and consider the hopes and the dreams of the soldiers who courageously and selflessly gave their lives so that we could be free.

Freedom is not an end; instead, it is a continual pursuit. Mr. Speaker, we must be ever vigilant in our quest to remain free. Freedom allows us and allows individuals and communities to flourish and live happily. When all people are equal before the law and can interact peacefully one with another, great things can happen and often do happen. Freedom, peace, and democracy should never be taken for granted. We must remain alert as there are still people in this world today that seek to eliminate our democratic rights, our religious freedoms, our right to free speech, and much, much more that our society has to offer that makes life so beautiful and so rewarding.

It is my hope that our children and our grandchildren continue to cherish this day and recognize the sacrifices that were made by those who came before. Let us teach them to be selfless and to use the freedom fought for and won by their ancestors to pursue what is noble, what is good, and what helps their neighbours and fellow citizens.

Mr. Speaker, this morning we heard a poem written by a young man named Ryan Kosa entitled Deafening Silence. I was moved by his words as I could tell that even though Ryan had not experienced war, he was able to empathize with those who had. I share with you a few lines from his poem that stand as a reminder that we must never forget.

Two minutes,

A small price to pay.

One minute for those who returned

The other for the souls we've lost.

A two minute suspension of daily duties,

In respect to those who paid their duties.

Lest we forget, Mr. Speaker. Lest we forget.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent that we extend Orders of the Day to the completion of the Routine in order

to allow for such members who are not members of the two main parties who may wish to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today we remember the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defending our province and our country and also those who are currently serving our country with honour at home and abroad. Each year on November 11 we take time to show our gratitude and respect to those who have fought so bravely for our rights and for our freedom.

Through our history conflict has touched the lives of Canadians of all ages, all races, all religions, and all regions. Fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters: they were killed in action, they were wounded, and thousands who returned home lived their lives with the physical and mental scars. We must remember and help those who served and continue to suffer.

This year we mark the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele. It was another in the long list of battles that Canadians won where others had failed, but this victory came at a terrible cost, with thousands of Canadians losing their lives over the two-week battle.

We must also remember indigenous veterans. It is estimated that more than 12,000 indigenous people served in world wars I and II and the Korean War. Of those, more than 500 made the ultimate sacrifice, and none were treated with the equality at home that they enjoyed on the battlefield.

Each year it is my great honour to attend the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Military Museums in my constituency of Calgary-Elbow. Thousands of Albertans, young and old, come to pay tribute to veterans who have served overseas, veterans who have served their country at home and those who continue to serve.

To all of Canada's military men and women, thank you for your service. Lest we forget.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we start the clock, I would just make a request of the Leader of the Official Opposition. I could use your assistance. I continue to receive notes indicating that someone in the Official Opposition continues to say: tell the truth. I would ask for your assistance to find out if, in fact, that's true, and if it is, if you would ask that member to no longer do that.

Mr. Nixon: Happily, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize you for the first main question.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I know that the NDP want to avoid talking about their record, but here are some disturbing facts. According to Stats Canada Albertans' disposable income dropped a staggering 7.4 per cent in 2016, the NDP's first full year in office. Yes, we know that the drop in global energy prices hit our province hard, but this NDP government appears to have done everything in its power to make matters worse. When Albertans were already hurting, the NDP's response was to hike taxes. Given these devastating stats will the NDP admit their devastating mistakes and reverse their damaging tax hikes?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to talk about our plan and how it is working. We are working effectively to make sure that we get better value for our oil. We actually care about Albertans, and that's why we're working to make sure we get our pipelines built. You know what? Our plan is working. Just yesterday we learned that Chevron is investing up to a billion dollars more in the oil patch. Cenovus has more than doubled production this year, and the best one yet is to come. We will break the landlock, and we will get full value for our oil. Things are looking up.

Mr. Nixon: The NDP can try to shrug this off, but our neighbours in Saskatchewan, who were also hit by the drop in energy prices, only saw a disposable income drop of .8 per cent. This is not a coincidence, Mr. Speaker. The NDP have taxed our job creators, taxed income and property, and have also implemented the largest tax hike in Alberta's history, the job-killing carbon tax, which they never campaigned on and hid from Albertans. A simple question: do the NDP think that their ridiculous tax hikes increased or decreased Alberta's disposable income?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about some facts. Most recent numbers show that Saskatchewan lost 4,000 jobs; Alberta gained 12,000 jobs. Projections keep showing that Alberta is the fastest growing economy anywhere in Canada, and I'm not going to apologize for that. I'm going to work hard to keep bringing those opportunities for growth and development to the province of Alberta. Members opposite keep cheering for its demise, but we stand up for Alberta, and we are getting results.

Mr. Nixon: Since the NDP took office, sadly over 52,000 private-sector jobs have been lost, but at the same time the public sector has increased by tens of thousands. While Albertans were taking massive pay cuts or losing their jobs entirely, the NDP increased government spending. We can't have a strong public sector, Mr. Speaker, without a vibrant private sector. That is just common sense. Will the NDP admit that its policies suppress private-sector activities, which in turn decrease government tax revenues, making the NDP debt crisis even worse? It's obvious.

Ms Hoffman: You know what I'll proudly admit, Mr. Speaker? That we moved forward to make sure that education and health care were funded so that when kids showed up to school, they had teachers, and when nurses went to work, they didn't get layoff slips in the mail. We're working hard to protect good jobs, not doing what the members opposite are calling for, which is 20 per cent cuts. That is not responsible or fair to anybody in the province of Alberta. We're working with the private sector. Investment is up, jobs are up, and we're protecting the public sector at the same time, something the members opposite want to gut.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government has broken records on layoffs since they've been in government.

Carbon Levy and Fuel Costs

Mr. Nixon: Last week I drew attention to the fact that Albertans will soon face a 75 per cent tax on natural gas. In the middle of the winter the NDP are slapping Albertans with a massive, cruel tax on home heating. I've since heard from a number of Albertans that were shocked by this number. They weren't aware of how bad the NDP's

tax on home heating actually will be. Does the NDP acknowledge the damage that their tax will have on Albertans and their families?

Ms Hoffman: I'm very happy to acknowledge that we brought in a cap on electricity rates, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite want to keep them skyrocketing; we want to make life more affordable. The members opposite want school fees to go up; we rolled them back 30 per cent. The members opposite want to lay off teachers and nurses; we're protecting those jobs and the services that they provide to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see some evidence actually tabled in this House from the member opposite, but I'll tell you that the real evidence is that things are looking up in Alberta. We're on the right track. The recovery hasn't hit everyone, but it certainly is looking up in the province of Alberta, and I'm so glad to be able to deliver as part of this government.

Mr. Nixon: The cap is actually double the original price, so thanks for nothing, Madam Minister.

The NDP are clearly trying to hide the reality of their tax hikes from Albertans' eyes. Albertans know that GST is 5 per cent. They see it on their receipts every day. Why not apply the same standard to natural gas? If the NDP is so proud of their carbon tax on natural gas, why not let Albertans know? Will the NDP require that the tax appear as a percentage of the retail price on Albertans' bills and stop hiding this tax increase from the good people of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we are proud. We're proud of Alberta, we're proud of our jobs, we're proud of the markets that we're accessing. After decades in Ottawa and decades with Conservatives here in Alberta, we weren't able to break the landlock. But we've got approvals under the NDP government to be able to break that landlock, bringing great economic opportunities to the people of Alberta and also helping them with their costs. This is really good news for the people of Alberta, and I wish the members opposite would get onboard.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the landlock was broken until under their leadership, and it got cancelled.

But let me repeat it again: a 75 per cent tax on home heating. Not a 75 per cent increase of the tax; a 75 per cent tax, period. Shame. When you buy \$2 worth of natural gas, the NDP slap you with \$1.50 worth of tax. I'm happy to table it. It's appalling, Mr. Speaker. I ask again: if the NDP are so proud of their carbon tax on home heating, why not make it clear on the bills, tell Albertans the truth, and stop hiding this from them?

Ms Hoffman: We're really proud of the fact that Albertans came up with a plan to protect and support Albertans. I know the members opposite love spending their time in Ottawa and focusing on Ottawa's policies, but here we're focused on Albertans, making sure that we get jobs for Albertans. That's why we got two pipelines approved, Mr. Speaker. We know the members opposite want them jeopardized. They think that these pipeline approvals shouldn't go through. They're cheering every day for them to fail. But on this side of the House we're standing up for Albertans, we're standing up for our plan, and we're going to get those pipelines built. You mark my words.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, you have guests here. I hope you won't disappoint them. I keep hearing your voice too loudly. I'm sure that won't happen again though, will it?

The third main question, I believe.

Carbon Levy Economic Impact

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government just doesn't get it when it comes to real-world impacts of their policies. Yesterday I told this House about a woman in my constituency whose life has been significantly impacted by the NDP carbon tax. Groceries and other household necessities are more expensive. Natural gas has skyrocketed, and the rebates just don't cover it. As a result, her modest fixed income doesn't go nearly as far as it used to and her quality of life has suffered. To the Premier: what do you have to say to this woman and to other seniors across the province whose lives have been made much worse by your policies?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, but I beg to differ. Even with the levy increase in January natural gas prices are still the lowest they've been in the last 10 years, less than half the rate they spiked to in the winter of 2014 and less than a third of the rate they reached in 2006 and again in 2008. We've got a system in place that we're working hard to provide stability to all Albertans, including seniors. I'm proud of that record, and I stand up for it. I wish the members opposite would stand with us.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the seniors in my riding are not liars. In less than two months the carbon tax is set to increase to 50 per cent, which means that the burden it places on Alberta families will also increase by 50 per cent. With so many struggling under the weight of this carbon tax, that the NDP didn't campaign on, Premier, your advice in the past to lessen the impacts of your carbon tax have been for Albertans to buy a new car or take the bus. What out-of-touch advice do you have for us this time?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: I've got a reality check for the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. Their leader, Jason Kenney, is arguing that we should be moving forward to a model more like B.C. or Saskatchewan. You know what happens to seniors in B.C.? They'd lose \$230 a month because Jason Kenney's Conservatives would cut the Alberta seniors' benefit to match comparable rates. Two hundred and thirty dollars a month: that is not appropriate. Albertans receive more supports in this province than they do in our neighbouring provinces. We're proud to stand up for Albertans, protect their investments, and I'm really proud of the fact that about half of Alberta seniors are receiving the carbon levy rebate. That's going a long way to helping them make ends meet, and we're happy to do that.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, it's so unfortunate that this government just doesn't get it while millions of Alberta families have been hit so hard by this carbon tax. Virtually everything that we spend money on, from electricity to fresh produce to our kids' hockey fees, has gone up as a result of this tax. On top of this Alberta families also have to contend with job loss and unemployment as an unintended consequence of this NDP tax. Again to the Premier: will you apologize for what your policies have put Albertans through and immediately suspend the upcoming carbon tax increase? And don't tell me it's gotten us any social licence.

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of the fact that on this side of the House we stand up for Albertans. We make sure that the 2,000 desperately needed long-term care and dementia care beds are getting built in this province. We protect health care. We protect education. We protect seniors' drug programs. Members opposite are calling for 20 per cent cuts to the

very services that are designed to protect the people of this province, and I will not stand for that. I will stand up for the people of this province. They gave us that as our job. It's a promise we made to them during the election. Promise made, promise kept.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

School Transportation and Bell Times in Calgary

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September I hosted a round-table in my constituency, talking with parents who are concerned about bus scheduling and bell time changes in Calgary. The Education ministry promised to follow up on a number of issues. We have not received the answers that were promised at the round-table. These parents went out of their way to give their advice and ask questions of the ministry and trusted the ministry's word when they said that they would hear back from them in a timely fashion. To the Minister of Education: where are the answers to their questions, and why is it taking so long to address their concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, from September we've been working closely with the Calgary board of education – I have them under an operational review – where we were looking at, generally, their expenses but also specifically in regard to transportation. So, you know, we have made some advances, certainly, in regard to the congregated stops with them and putting more yellow buses on the road as well. We will continue to work closely with some of the new trustees and so forth and the Calgary board of education. I'd be happy to follow up on the information that the hon. member is specifically asking about.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the new busing system isn't working for kids or for parents. Both the CBE and the Minister of Education need to take responsibility for the untenable situation that's been created and start over. We haven't heard anything since the preliminary audit information was released on September 14, which needs to be complete in order to provide some answers to parents who are concerned over the chaos caused by busing and staggered bell times in Calgary. Why haven't we seen this report? Does the Education minister plan to release more information any time soon?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's very important that we work with the Calgary board of education closely. We have been doing so. Certainly, the operational review will continue on through this year so that we are looking for ways not just to build a better transportation system but looking at other operational issues. The Calgary board of education is our largest school board in the province and certainly does a great job in educating our kids, but there's always room for improvement. I'm looking forward to working with some of the new board members and so forth to make improvements and to ensure that kids are safe and getting the best education they can.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 1 had some serious unintended consequences, and the responsibility must be shared

between both the ministry and the CBE. Earlier this fall the Alberta Party asked the minister to reset, complete the ministry audit, and try again next year. On September 14, when the preliminary audit results were released, the minister said that he hoped the CBE would have concrete solutions by Thanksgiving. Once more for the Minister of Education: has the CBE submitted solutions, and when can parents expect a resolution to these disruptive changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, did just that, more than \$54 million going back into families' pockets. We're very proud of that. It's an act to reduce school fees, to make life more affordable for Alberta's families. Certainly, it had the two different things, between transportation and so forth and other decisions that the Calgary board of education made, that were separated from what we did in Bill 1, which was very, very successful. Again, we work closely in collaboration with the Calgary board of education, and the number one thing that we did was to make sure we put money in for funding. If you take away 20 per cent from education, all bets are off.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Calgary-Shaw.

Craft Breweries

Mr. Sucha: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Summer has officially ended and with it the ability to enjoy a delicious beverage outdoors at the establishment of your choosing. Many small businesses across the province prosper in part with the ability to sell liquor on patios and outdoor spaces. To the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance: what previous barriers prevented small craft breweries from thriving in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Small businesses are the engine of our economy, and everybody knows that that engine is starting to fire on all cylinders as a result of our GDP growth this year in this province being 4 per cent. Our government has supported small businesses in this province with a one-third tax cut to the small-business tax rate. More restaurants can open their patio spaces without onerous reservations or red tape. Brewers in this province can sell their great products at farmers' markets and involve themselves in the community more often. While the opposition would keep onerous prohibition era laws, we are open...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections] Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I could barely hear the response because of the heckling about our small craft brewery industry and given that there are now three times as many craft breweries in Alberta than before our government took power, to the same minister: what are you doing to remove regulatory barriers to help encourage the industry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll start with: beer is good. Our government has consistently stood up for small brewers in Alberta. It's undeniable that the craft sector has enjoyed tremendous growth. In the last year alone 18 new breweries have

opened their doors, the largest year-over-year increase ever in this province. I hear constantly from brewers that our grant program is the reason they opened their doors, hired staff, and expanded production. Troubled Monk Brewery in Red Deer says that the grant is the government sending a message that we'd rather support our local businesses and brewers and employ Albertans than...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we all know it takes more than just water to make good-quality beer – it takes hops, wheat, barley, and other agricultural products that Alberta already excels in producing – to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: in what ways does our craft brewing industry collaboratively work with our local producers?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member for the question. Here in Alberta we grow the best hops, wheat, and barley in the world. Our rural communities are benefiting from new local markets thanks to this government. The Village Brewery in Calgary, for example, has developed a direct relationship with the Alberta producers they buy from. That same kind of partnership exists and has been developed by Northern Girl Hops, who operates right in my constituency. This month the Alberta Hop Producers' Association will form because of the increased number of hop producers. I look forward to seeing this local industry continue to grow and create opportunities for Alberta's fine agriculture products.

2:10 Opioid Addiction Treatment for Youth

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, the emergency opioid commission has determined that treating those currently addicted is beyond their scope. While preserving preventative measures that the commission put forward is a step in the right direction, we still need to help those who are in desperate need once they're addicted, just like the 17-year-old kid from my constituency that I spoke about last week. Excluding treatment is running off thousands of people who could still be saved. Could the minister please tell us why the commission believes that its mandate does not cover youth addictions treatment?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. When the commission reviewed the recommendations around expanding subsidized access for treatment, one of the key things that was found was that we were lacking enough treatment spaces and having enough prescribers across the province. As a result, the commission decided that we should first prioritize expanding the number of treatment spaces. We have done that. We've doubled the capacity in the Calgary region as well as expanded access with thousands of new spaces across the province.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, this year over 450 Albertans have died from opioid drug overdoses. Luckily, the 17-year-old from my constituency was saved in time. He was a good student who got addicted to prescription opioids after he was thrown from his horse and ended up on street drugs. Given that it cost his mother and father \$18,000 out of pocket to get him the treatment that he needed because it simply wasn't available here in Alberta, will the minister please tell us: if not the commission, who is responsible for addressing youth opioid addictions treatment in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working with doctors across the province to increase access to prescription treatment for people suffering from an opioid-use disorder. We've also been working very closely around prescription guidelines for opioids so that patients such as the member opposite's constituent have the support that they need from their family doctor before their opioid prescription becomes a problem. There is more work to be done, and we are continuing to move forward.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that, but none of these measures are new.

This family came to me and told me that they don't want a penny of that \$18,000 reimbursed to them by Alberta taxpayers. They told me instead to ensure that the next kid who finds themselves in this situation will have the resources that their son did not. Given that I made her a promise that I would do everything I could to honour her request, will the minister and government honour this mother's request by expanding the scope of the commission to find a remedy to this growing addictions treatment problem and make sure that this doesn't happen to another Alberta family?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. One of the key areas that the opioid commission is working on is how we can offer better supports for families who have a loved one who is struggling with opioid-use disorder. The commission is also looking at ways that we can continue to expand treatment across the province. We know that this is a very serious concern. This is an emergency unlike one we've ever faced before, and it is not going to be solved by pretending that this is not a medical condition. This is a serious issue that has many deep roots in inequality as well as concerns about how we treat people with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Workers' Compensation Board Surplus Funds

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The WCB has chosen not to return \$350 million of 2016 premium surpluses to employers, as per its long-term practice. Employers who pay the premiums knew that the accident fund was in surplus, so they were naturally expecting their rebates to arrive early in 2017, and it is now almost 2018. Minister, as the WCB has more than \$10.5 billion in reserve, why does it need employer surplus money, too?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working to make sure that all workers have the right to a safe, fair, and healthy work environment and as part of that has engaged in a review of the WCB, the first in 15 years, to make sure that there was a sustainable system that offered fair rehabilitation to all injured workers.

The WCB is governed by a board, and that board has made a decision to not return the surplus to employers at this time. We will work with the WCB and with employers as we review the panel report that has been submitted to us and make recommendations.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gill: The board reports to you, Minister.

Given that this government claims that it has cut the business tax by 1 per cent, but it fails to confess that it has added far more in burdens such as the carbon tax, Bill 6, and increases to corporate

taxes, and given that the carbon tax is clearly remaining in place for now and that it's going up again in a few months, which means we will have to liberate Albertans from it now, Minister, if you won't help businesses with your policies, will you at least return \$350 million to business owners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is confused about the system. It is not a decision made by me or this government. We continue to work through the process that we've set out with the WCB. We are very interested in making sure that workers have access to fair rehabilitation when they need it. A system that, unfortunately, hadn't been reviewed in 15 years is shameful. We need to make sure that that system is sustainable. We need to make sure that it is there to protect workers. I think Jason Kenney and the conservatives want to make life harder for injured workers. We will be working with them.

The Speaker: Calgary-Greenway, you've got a second supplemental coming, but I want you to concentrate on listening because you were talking when the minister was giving her answer. Please proceed.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that \$350 million is a lot of money and given that we know this government likes to buy Albertans with their own funds and that another thing we also know is that this NDP government is frightened about the Hon. Jason Kenney winning in Calgary-Lougheed and sitting in this very Chamber, Minister, is your government holding businesses' money so that it can release it during the by-election campaign?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I and all members on this side of the House look forward to talking to Jason Kenney directly about jobs being up, wages being up, manufacturing being up, retail sales being up. Our plan is working. We will continue to work for Albertans and with Albertans to make sure that all of the systems that they need are there to support them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Completion

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Construction on the \$1.4 billion southwest Calgary ring road is well under way, but an environmental appeal has threatened its completion. The case has been before the Environmental Appeals Board since August, and a decision is still weeks away. To the Minister of Transportation: how much of the project has been completed to date? Please answer in terms of a percentage.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member that the schedule is well under way, that we are slightly ahead of schedule on the completion of this road. We have looked very carefully at the stay that was brought in, that he mentions. It will not delay construction. We are working to complete that project well ahead of schedule, and we will do that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I do not have to remind the minister that if the road is not completed by May of

2022 the land reverts to the Tsuut'ina Nation and given that the province lost valuable construction time this summer due to a court delay and that we cannot afford any further delay if it is to be finished before the deadline, to the Transportation minister: how will you ensure, one way or the other, that the southwest Calgary ring road is built on time?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member acknowledges the deal that was signed by the Transportation minister who is now the whip for his party and that if the road is not completed within seven years, the land reverts back to the Tsuut'ina and they get to keep the \$360 million and all the land at Bragg Creek. That was a deal that I inherited when I became the minister, and I have been working diligently to make sure that we get this project completed ahead of time. On time isn't good enough; we need to make it go really fast.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you. Given that when you became Transportation minister, the project was ready to roll and now it hangs in the balance and given that there is great urgency for this government to act decisively, to the minister: will you promise us today that this ring road will be finished on time?

Mr. Mason: Not only will I promise that it will be finished on time, Mr. Speaker; I promise that we will finish it ahead of schedule.

Government Announcements and Advertising during Election Periods

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the United Conservative caucus has pressed this government repeatedly on when they'd be calling a by-election to provide Jason Kenney the opportunity to fight for a seat in this House. While they've yet to give us a straight answer, we also have some very serious concerns about underhanded, cheap political tricks that the NDP may use during the upcoming by-election, including government funding announcements. This is the exact type of policy that the government used to fight against while they were in opposition, but they've neglected to make any changes to the law. Will the Premier commit today that this government will not make any funding announcements in the upcoming by-election in due course?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the minister responsible for democratic renewal talking about changes to our Election Act and election financing is my responsibility. I'm very proud that our government has done such important things like banning corporate and union donations, making sure we have spending caps. We will be discussing banning government advertising or rules around government advertising that make sense during elections and by-elections. Making sure that we have a fair, democratic system is very important, not trying to find loopholes and get money in the back door.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that last year this government used hard-earned tax dollars to subsidize their own political advertising and given that the NDP was found in contempt of Parliament for illegal advertising, we all know that they have an unquenchable thirst for government advertising even if it breaks the

rules. Will the Premier commit today to stopping all government announcements and advertising during the upcoming by-election, and when can we expect some transparency, including laws, that would prevent government advertising? [interjections]

The Speaker: Government House Leader, your side of the House as well.

Mr. Mason: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When talking about important issues like this, protecting our democracy, it's very important that we understand the issues at play. What the member opposite seems to be asking for is for the government to stop communicating with Albertans at all during any by-election or election. I think that that is a step too far. [interjections] We need to take a measured approach, and we need to do that as we have done with all things, like banning corporate and union donations, making sure that there are reasonable spending limits, and giving democracy back to Albertans.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, there is no bigger money than government money in politics, and we just heard that the minister wants to use it in the upcoming by-election to advertise government programs. [interjections] Will the minister commit to stopping all government announcements and government advertising during the upcoming by-election, that will clearly favour the government?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, you may remember – I believe it was yesterday – that I reminded you that in any event where one single member in this House was victimized by a group and not treated with respect, I'm going to call and name some people. So please respect each other and just don't as a massive group in any way detract them from their job to serve not only in this House but also in this government. Please.

Government Announcements and Advertising during Election Periods (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it was pretty interesting to hear the other side talk about cheap political tricks. Why, I remember in – where was it? – Calgary-Elbow, where a school announcement went out, and that school announcement happened to coincide with the former . . .

Mrs. Pitt: You were in government.

Ms Jansen: Exactly. And why do you think I'm over here now?

You know, Mr. Speaker, I can honestly tell you that anything they're complaining about on the other side should be done with a bit of sheepishness because they wrote the book on that kind of behaviour.

Mrs. Pitt: You did. You did.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie.

Ms Jansen: I can honestly say that when they talk about dark money, PAC money in this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Carbon Levy and Forest Industry Costs

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, I reference a FOIPed document from Ag and Forestry titled Advice to Premier: Summary of Carbon Levy Impacts to Forest Products Industry. Within it is expressed concern that the carbon tax affects all major stages of the supply chain of forestry, which consumes fossil fuels of all types. Premier, despite attempts by this side to provide amendments that would have seen exemptions for forestry operations in which those fuels are used, you ignored our suggestions and advice from your own department. Why did you do that?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm very proud of our forestry industry right across Alberta. It supports close to 20,000 jobs. It continues to be very prosperous, very sustainable. It continues to be so. As a matter of fact, they have near-record profits this year. You know, the member is questioning that they're somehow burdened by the carbon levy. When I talk to the forest industry, what I hear is: what can they do; what can they do to do their part to help with the greenhouse gas emissions reductions?

Mr. Schneider: Given that it takes fuels such as gasoline and diesel and propane and natural gas in order to harvest, log, and transport trees to the mill and given that trees need to enter the manufacturing process and then the finished product can be shipped to market and given that Alberta's forest product manufacturing is an export-oriented business competing in a global commodity market, Premier, what has your government done to help this situation of increased cost to the forestry business as a result of your carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, the forestry industry has had a very good year, even with the challenges around international markets. On those international markets both the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and I have been going on trade missions to promote all our products in Alberta, agriculture and forestry. I can tell you that those products are respected around the world. We're continuing that good work to make sure that all world markets can appreciate the good products we grow right here in Alberta.

Mr. Schneider: Given that this industry, like so many that are struggling through the economic devastation caused by this government's ideological agenda, cannot continue to pass on costs to their customers that the increase forces upon them and given that this is confirmed by the internal document, which, unfortunately, is mostly made up of an industry analysis that has been redacted, Premier, will you admit that your government didn't think before it acted and postpone your reckless pursuit of a \$30-per-tonne carbon tax until a proper economic assessment is completed, or are you already sitting on one?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We had some very good news earlier this year that there is an OSB plant that's going to reopen. They're reopening because the markets are good. They're reopening because the policies of this

government have allowed them to continue to be sustainable, continue to pursue those markets. I'm proud of the work we do. I'm proud of the work our department does, our professional foresters do. I'm proud of our industry, and I'm very proud to continue to support it.

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

Provincial Fiscal Sustainability

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada's Parliamentary Budget Officer took an extraordinary step recently of sending a strong warning to Alberta that its current fiscal policies are unsustainable. This NDP government was told that it must provide corrective action to avoid creating a fiscal hole so deep that it will force higher taxes and drastic spending cuts on future Albertans. The minister's response: a dismissive shrug. To the Finance minister. The Premier won't give a responsible answer. Will you?

Mr. Ceci: You know, when we look at the plan this government has brought in, Mr. Speaker, that plan is working. We will lead the country in economic growth this year and next year. We are firing on all cylinders after the deepest recession in two years. We've inherited a big hole from the previous government. They did not save money. They had deficits, deficits, deficits. We're turning the corner in this province. We're getting us back to balance in 2023.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Parliamentary Budget Officer's forecasts are not science fiction and given that the minister's are, since he actually had no net debt when he came into government, so he's not giving us the facts – in fact, the forecast from the Parliamentary Budget Officer looked at 2022, 2028, and lots of short-term increments – and given that this government will have a \$60 billion debt by the time the next election comes around and that, in fact, by 2041 it will be \$10 billion a year in interest payments alone, to the minister: will you actually deal with the facts instead of ignoring them? You're even being warned by Ottawa . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear. This province is going to grow fastest in the country. We are addressing the short-term problems. We're investing in this province. People are getting back to work in the thousands. We led western provinces with 12,000 net new jobs last month. People are coming back. They're working. Investment is occurring. We're going to get back in the saddle.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, given that it all looks good when you're spending as fast as you can until the money runs out – I'm sure it feels good right now to the minister – and given that the former Saskatchewan NDP Finance minister has warned the minister and given that, judging by the Premier's popularity ratings, Albertans are also severely concerned about the damaging effect of this NDP government's ideological fiscal policies, to the minister: do you and the Premier honestly believe that you're right and everybody else in the world is wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, the Conservatives seem to have the same answer for everything, but it doesn't work, Mr. Speaker. You can't cut your way to prosperity. We're seeing that in Saskatchewan right now. You have to invest in the future. We're doing that, and it's working. Retail sales are up. Manufacturing

is up. Drilling is up. Car sales are up. I know Jason Kenney doesn't like it, but Alberta is looking up.

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

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2017, for the first time in a very long time, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities has 15 members from across Alberta representing diverse communities and disabilities of all kinds. We have service providers, advocates, and a government MLA. The primary function of this council is to provide advice to the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the government in order to create legislation, policy, and regulations that are inclusive of all abilities as much as possible. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: please share with Albertans a working example of this council's advice on how it will enhance inclusivity for people with disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We are proud to have appointed a very talented, incredible group of people to this council. We have appointed Sheila Serup, Cam Tait, Darby Lee Young, Cheryl Cunningham-Burns, Alison Cutknife, Stephanie Myrick, Shino Nakane, Ann Nicol, Neil Pierce, Nabeel Ramji, Inara Samoylove, Cathy Smith, John te Linde, and Regan Treewater-Lipes. We look forward to working with them to make sure that we get the disabilities file right.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the many new members appointed to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, there are four people who are also members of the consultation team for the PDD safety standards review. Would the minister please explain why those appointments were made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to add another name, a very credible name: the hon. member who's asking me the question, the Member for St. Albert.

The reason, Mr. Speaker, we appointed those four people is because the review the consultation team did was exemplary and, in fact, groundbreaking in terms of how we reached out to the communities. That's why we have appointed them. Through their expertise, by working with them, we will make sure that persons with all abilities have the opportunities to be successful and meaningfully included . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 3 we will celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities with people from around the world. In Alberta the council will lead the celebrations by supporting community events and awards recognizing individual and community efforts. To the same minister: why is it vital that we continue to recommit to the UN declaration on the rights of persons with disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As government we believe in a province that is inclusive of Albertans of all abilities. That is why we are absolutely committed to protecting and advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. That is why we have increased the supports for persons with disabilities instead of decreasing them. On that side of the House their plan is to cut 20 per cent from those supports. Some of them – for instance, the Member for Calgary-Hays – call these supports giveaways.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Tourism Destination Marketing Funds

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hotels all over this province are concerned that changes to the Municipal Government Act and city charters will strip their ability to work together to grow tourism through voluntary destination marketing funds. Hotels are rightly concerned that if cities are allowed to administer destination marketing funds, local governments could redirect funds from their intended purpose of growing tourism to general revenues, as now occurs with the provincial tourism levy. Will the tourism minister assure industry that destination marketing funds will not be co-opted as a source of municipal revenue?

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

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm very proud of the work that we're doing within the tourism industry because we know that it creates the kinds of jobs that put food on the table and pay mortgages. We know that it's a resilient sector of the economy. We're going to continue working with our industry partners to ensure that we can promote tourism in this province, continue the visitation in our province, including promoting LGBTQ travellers to this province as well. I understand the concerns that are being raised. It's something that we will continue to work on with our partners.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the industry fears that if control of destination marketing funds is given over to municipalities, voluntary fees will become a mandatory tax, bureaucracy and administration costs will increase, and accountability and transparency to the industry will disappear, why is the Minister of Municipal Affairs writing ministry of tourism bills, and who is going to ensure that destination marketing funds remain effective, nimble, and efficient for tourism and for attracting visitors to Alberta?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. DMFs are actually a municipal jurisdiction. We're going to continue working with our partners to ensure that we have the best products in this province to offer to attract more travellers and ensure that this resilient part of the economy continues to grow.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hotels are very concerned that any talks about destination marketing funds are not being led by the Minister of Culture and Tourism. Given that this government

claims that they want to champion tourism as an engine of economic growth and diversification, why has the Minister of Culture and Tourism not been a part of this conversation directly, and how will he stand up for the tourism industry he represents, or is the DMF just a sacrificial lamb for the MGA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that we do with the DMFs around the province. They know their regions best. They are able to promote their regions by collecting the voluntary fees that are being given through the DMF levy. We're going to continue working with them to ensure that we have the best tourism products in this province, that we can promote this province, that we have continued air service to our province. We will have ongoing dialogue with our partners, including the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Thank you.

Teck Resources Frontier Oil Sands Project

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I tabled an Alberta Energy report from Jacobs Consultancy that laid bare the Carnegie oil-climate index as junk science slandering future investment in the oil sands. Now the federal government has granted an eight-month delay to the joint panel reviewing the \$20 billion Frontier oil sands mine proposed by Teck Resources. To the Minister of Energy: did you stand up for the industry and object to Ottawa holding up the investment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like the opportunity to clarify that the report that was referred to in that question yesterday was a report that was ordered by our previous government at a time when oil was very high.

You know, we work every day for the oil industry, and we will continue to do so. In addition to new projects, we have many projects that are onboard right now. Suncor just announced one recently. Cenovus, CNRL, Chevron: they're all coming onboard.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that we have eight mines already producing safely in the Athabasca oil sands and in compliance with the Alberta Energy Regulator for decades and given that the joint panel reviewing Teck's project has seen all this before and will see this all again, to the Minister of Energy. The joint panel was already given a three-month extension, now another eight months. Jobs and the business reputation of the province are at risk. Isn't it time to cut the red tape and get on with it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we've said time and time again that things are looking up here in Alberta. Jobs are up in the oil industry, wages are up in the oil industry, drilling is up, and so is production. That's because there's confidence in Alberta energy, and we're continuing. The work doesn't end. What I can say is that the reckless rhetoric coming from that side and the risky plan that they propose are only going to hold Alberta energy back. We're not going to let that happen. We're standing up for our Alberta energy folks.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given the number of cancelled projects in Alberta since the NDP came to power and given that the NDP's risky ideological policies have chased investors to Saskatchewan, North Dakota, and Texas, has the government learned any lessons,

or will you stand on the sidelines and quietly watch the potential cancellation of this \$20 billion project, as you watched Energy East and Northern Gateway?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm not going to talk about potential cancellations of things. I'm going to talk about what's going on right now. Line 3 is currently under construction. If you go out to Hardisty, you can go see that. Make no mistake; we're working hard for Trans Mountain. Make no mistake; that pipeline will be built.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll start with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

Cochrane Cenotaph

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, on Saturday Albertans will gather at cenotaphs across the province to honour the courage and sacrifice of our veterans and those who continue to serve our country. This year's Remembrance Day in Cochrane will be made even more significant thanks to the efforts of the Cochrane Legion and the entire community, that made significant contributions to the town's cenotaph enhancement project.

Just in time for Canada's sesquicentennial and the Legion's 90th year, in late October Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell and His Honour Doug Mitchell visited Cochrane to witness the unveiling of a life-sized bronze statue of a Canadian First World War soldier at the current Cochrane cenotaph to stand guard over the memorial. The bronze statue, unveiled by Her Honour and Cochrane Mayor Jeff Genung, is from the foundry of local artists Don Begg and Shirley Stephens-Begg of Studio West bronze foundry and is truly remarkable and impressive in every sense.

Thanks also to Todd Puzey for conceiving this vision to create a more welcoming space for visitors to the cenotaph park. The park is intended to be used and enjoyed as a place of reflection and as a landmark in the community.

Last week I was pleased to present a cheque for \$25,000 to Legion First Vice-president Mr. David Usherwood from the community facility enhancement program towards the cenotaph revitalization project. These enhancements to Cochrane's cenotaph are a significant milestone in the town's already rich history. They also help us renew our gratitude towards those who stand guard for our country, the injured, and those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

In Flanders fields we will remember them. Lest we forget.

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

Silver Alert Program for Persons with Dementia

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2016 over 500,000 Albertans were aged 65 and older, accounting for about 12 per cent of the total population. This number is expected to almost double by 2035, with further growth expected beyond that. By 2041 it is expected that almost 1 in every 5 Albertans will be 65 years or older. A decline in cognitive functioning is associated with aging, and the risk of dementia doubles every five years after the age of 65.

In Calgary the Alzheimer Society estimates that more than 13,000 individuals are living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias and that for every person diagnosed, 10 to 12 people are directly impacted. A significant concern associated with cognitive

decline and dementia is wandering. The Alzheimer's Association indicates that 6 out of 10 people with dementia will wander.

I would like to highlight a community-based response in Calgary that holds much promise for the rest of the province. A steering committee was organized to host conversations with key stakeholders to gauge the interest and capacity to develop a missing-seniors response for the city. This group is developing a framework for the community area's silver alert program. Dr. Liu and her team from the U of A and the Seniors Advocate, Dr. Sheree Kwong See, have been involved to pilot the program in Calgary. This strategy addresses both prevention and education to ensure that we learn more about the needs of seniors. I would like to commend all those involved in developing this made-in-Alberta approach.

The bill that I will be introducing this afternoon will provide a provincial framework that will support community efforts to protect our vulnerable seniors.

Thank you.

Remembrance Day

Mrs. Littlewood: Mr. Speaker, this Saturday, November 11, at 11 a.m. Alberta will join countries across our Commonwealth to remember those that fought and still fight and those that made the ultimate sacrifice defending our rights and our freedoms.

At Tofield school yesterday, under the guidance of Tofield Legion branch president Barbara Ferguson, I was reminded how important education is in telling the stories of those that have fought and died defending us. Students wrote poetry and created art as a means to tap into our past and connect with the present.

We were joined by Master Corporal Wilkins. She was asked by some: how do we show gratitude? And she said: just say thank you. Simple thanks is the least we can show for those who choose to enlist not for pride or glory but because they love their country.

2:50

Sombre milestones are being remembered this year, Canada's 150th: 100 years since the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the Battle of Passchendaele, 75 years since the Dieppe Raid. These battles earned Canada a lasting place in the memory of grateful nations. In more recent history we remember combat in places like Kapyong in North Korea and Kabul and Kandahar in Afghanistan.

Today I'd like to also thank the Royal Canadian Legion and its members for their leadership in Remembrance Day ceremonies everywhere and for their service year-round: raising money through the poppy campaign for those not properly provided for with federal government benefits and, on lighter days, fundraising through meat draws, hosting steak suppers and dart tournaments, and supporting our cadet programs. Their presence is felt throughout our communities.

So I want to thank all our veterans and all those serving in our military and all of our Legions for their service, past, present, and future. No government will ever be truly worthy of our military and their sacrifice. Let us forget.

King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am wearing black today in memory of a great king and father of the Thai nation. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the ninth king of the Chakri dynasty, passed away peacefully in Bangkok on October 13, 2016, at the age of 89 in the 70th year of His Majesty's reign. He was the longest reigning monarch in the world. Following Buddhist rites, His Majesty's cremation was performed on October 26, 2017, in an elaborate ceremony at Sanam Luang in Bangkok. Albertans with roots in

Thailand can be found in all parts of the province, and members of the Thai community in Alberta have been in mourning since the death of His Majesty.

In 1964, when I first lived in Thailand, I heard about the work of His Majesty. It was when I returned twice again to work in community development that I truly came to understand his legacy, for this was no ordinary king and certainly not the kind you find in fairy tales living a regal life of pleasure and luxury. This was a king who was dedicated to serving his people from the very first day that he ascended the throne till the very last days of his existence.

His Majesty travelled widely throughout Thailand, meeting with his people in order to understand their problems and seek solutions. I remember nearly daily seeing pictures of His Majesty sitting with Thai farmers, labourers, and office workers, listening and taking notes. His Majesty the king worked hard to ensure that all Thais had enough to support themselves. His Majesty also sponsored numerous economic and community development projects using his own funds. In his long reign the king witnessed many changes in his beloved country, but through it all he maintained a stabilizing, moral leadership.

The passing of His Majesty comes as an immense loss to the Thai nation. My condolences to the Alberta Thai community and to the people of Thailand. [Remarks in Thai]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Reconciliation between Indigenous and Nonindigenous Peoples

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For nine months I've been part of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, which seeks to understand how government action and inaction may have contributed to harm or death of children taken from their birth families and what we can do to improve it. Indigenous children make up over two-thirds of those brought into child intervention, consistent with the family disruptions that we heard about two years ago in the mental health review. Likewise, indigenous people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, the homeless population, and the health system.

The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada revealed the terrible genocidal policies, intergenerational trauma, and residential schools, with the inescapable cycles of family breakup, poverty, violence, and mental illness. Indigenous people have a better chance of breaking these cycles when they have adequate, culturally appropriate services, are involved in decisions affecting them and their families, and when they recover their own cultural identity. This requires real collaboration between the federal and provincial governments and ministries.

The mental health review also heard that our mainstream Canadian culture is also producing more and more mental distress and addictive behaviour in our own children and families. Some experts point to our individualistic, competitive, and money-focused society as contributing. Indigenous communities acknowledge that they need healing. It is now time that our western culture, in humility, acknowledge the same. Indigenous people value community, sharing, and Earth care. More of these values are clearly needed in our western culture.

Reconciliation means the exchange of positive values in the spirit of humility to replace and repair the negative stereotypes that continue to damage both our cultures. Our western indigenous cultures got to where we are in the 21st century together, and we

must find a way to move forward and heal together. After all, we are all treaty people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Fall of the Berlin Wall 28th Anniversary

Mr. Fildebrandt: On November 11 we will mark Remembrance Day. Remembrance Day this year hits particularly close to home for many in Strathmore after the passing of George Freeman on November 6. George was a community leader, a war hero, and, like my maternal great-grandfather, a D-Day veteran.

But today, November 9, is also an important day for us to mark. Today marks the 28th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Wall stood as the greatest symbol of oppression and tyranny for the latter half of the 20th century. Most walls are meant to keep an enemy out, but like a prison, the Berlin Wall was built to keep a people in, from escaping to a better life in the free and democratic and capitalist west. It stood as a visible and daily reminder that communism is slavery.

While many, including my family, risked their lives to flee the communist east, the Berlin Wall fell without firing a shot 28 years ago today. The will of free men and free women to live in unity, justice, and freedom – “Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit” – proved more powerful than the will of the Red Army and the Socialist Unity Party to cling to power. The peaceful fall of the wall was part of a chain reaction that saw communist dictatorships across the world fall. Never in world history have so many people gone from slavery to freedom in such a short period of time.

Nations that do not have to fight for their liberty become complacent and too easily bargain it away for small comforts. Benjamin Franklin is often misquoted as saying: any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both.

Let us be grateful that our generation has not been called upon to defend freedom as those of our fathers, but let us not forget the sacrifice that they made for our freedoms and be ever watchful against trading it away for small comforts piece by piece.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m rising to give notice that pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) Written Question 18 will be dealt with on the next available Monday.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 210

Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave of the House to introduce Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017.

This bill is patterned on the Amber Alert system already in place in Alberta, creating a silver alert system, which enables a notice to be issued when a senior citizen or other adult with cognitive impairment, a mental disorder, or a medical condition which may result in them being particularly vulnerable goes missing. The idea behind this is to ensure that when an individual goes missing, if this situation is deemed to be critical and they are in medical danger, the relevant authorities would have more tools to return that individual to safety.

I would not have been able to bring this bill forward without the fantastic individuals seated in the public gallery who I introduced earlier – Dr. Liu from the University of Alberta and Dr. Kwong See, the Alberta Seniors Advocate – along with Raymond Swonek and Irene Martin-Lindsay from the Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing Association. All of these individuals were integral to making this bill a reality, and I extend my most sincere thanks to all of them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent to waive section 7(7) and continue with the Routine past 3 p.m. today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:00

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to table five copies of an article from the *Edmonton Sun* dated August 28, 2016, which I referenced this morning during debate on Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. Specifically, I referenced Mr. Kenney’s answer to the question, “If you could have one super power, what would it be?” to which Mr. Kenney answered, “To be able to go back in time.” I believe that trip back in time will be in a little blue truck with the transmission firmly welded into reverse gear, eyes firmly glued on the rear-view mirror, careening into the ditch . . .

The Speaker: Okay, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to table five copies of ATB Financial’s economics and research team’s publication the Owl entitled Wage Increases Show Momentum. It shows that things are looking up in Alberta with wages up, and it states that the weekly take-home pay of employed Albertans grew to \$1,134, with wages up in mining, quarrying, oil and gas, finance, and insurance.

I have a second tabling.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mrs. Littlewood: My second tabling is five copies of the policy resolution, referred to this morning by the Minister of Infrastructure, from the PC convention last November that pledges to out gay kids in schools, supported by Team Kenney.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a number of tablings today. The first is five copies of the Horse Racing Alberta 2016 annual report. The horse-racing industry is thriving thanks to our government’s long-term commitment to the industry, and I’m pleased to report that thoroughbred racing has returned to Calgary. I was pleased to see it this past weekend live and win a bet.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to table five copies of the Alberta Securities Commission annual report 2017. I’m pleased to continue to support the local Alberta-led regulator that meets the unique needs of Alberta’s capital markets.

Next, I’m pleased to table five copies of the Alberta Capital Finance Authority annual reports for 2014, ’15, and ’16, Mr.

Speaker. As members will see, our government is pleased to continue supporting municipalities, school boards, and local entities like our airports with flexible funding for capital projects at a very reasonable cost.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to table five copies of the judges and masters in chambers pension plans reports for 2013-14, '14-15, and '15-16.

I'm very pleased to table my last report, five copies of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission 2016-17 annual report and 2016-17 Year at a Glance, Mr. Speaker. As this Chamber knows well, our local brewing industry is thriving. Since the changes our government has brought forward, we've added 18 new breweries this year alone. This is the single largest year-over-year increase in Alberta's history, and I'm very proud of the grain-to-glass culture we're building in Alberta. As I said before, beer is good.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of ATB Financial's economics and research team's Owl publication entitled Drilling Activity to Provide Lift to Economic Growth. This shows that things are looking up here in Alberta. In the report it states that "the latest drilling data . . . shows that Alberta's energy sector will be central to . . . the province's return to growth" and that "as of August, the total number of developmental wells drilled in the province was up 129 per cent."

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of BMO's provincial monitor entitled Sunny Skies. It shows that things are looking up in Alberta. In the report it states: "Alberta's economy has returned to growth, and could potentially lead the country this year at 4.1%." In the same report it downgrades Saskatchewan's GDP forecast to just 1.7 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise also to table five copies of a memorandum to the minister from January 17, 2017. This is a federal memorandum discussing the potential impacts of carbon pricing on the primary agricultural sector. Its purpose is "to provide a preliminary assessment of the financial impacts on the primary agricultural sector from the implementation of the announced pan-Canadian pricing on carbon emissions." I think it's absolutely relevant to the carbon-taxing regime here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a document to which I referred yesterday in my speech on Bill 24. It's dated November 2 and entitled GSA Bill Provides Important Clarity. This is from the Alberta Teachers' Association, and just a short quote from President Jeffery who says, "Teachers will be able to point to the law and tell students and parents clearly [that] student privacy, safety and security comes first," and President Jeffery is "calling for all-party support for the bill."

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am tabling a memorandum I received yesterday from the Government House Leader advising of a printing error in connection with Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, which incorrectly named the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General as the sponsor but should have named the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance. He further confirms that printed copies of the corrected bill are to be

distributed prior to this afternoon's proceedings and that the content of the bill has not changed apart from the correction of the name of the sponsor.

I would also like to table five copies of the 2016-17 Public Interest Commissioner fourth annual report, which was received in my office on November 8, 2017.

Finally, I would like to table five copies of the 2016-17 Alberta Ombudsman's 50th anniversary annual report and five copies of the office of the Ethics Commissioner of Alberta 2016-17 annual report, received in my office also on November 8.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Phillips, Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office, the Ministry of Environment and Parks environmental protection security fund annual report, April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I did want to get on the record, as I missed the opportunity in second reading. Our caucus will enthusiastically support the bill with some reservations and some comments about how we would like to have seen things roll out in a more constructive way.

3:10

Historically, we're extremely proud of our pivotal role as a Liberal caucus in forcing the hand of the former PC government on GSAs. That's why we support this legislation, which supplements and builds on the Alberta Liberal's original vision for GSAs under former MLA Laurie Blakeman, entitled Bill 202, Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act, 2014. We might not be here today had we passed that original bill because it addressed this issue in the original bill. Unfortunately, this was taken over by the PCs and watered down in order to be more palatable to their members and their constituents, I presume.

GSAs became mandatory in schools where students request them, and those steadfastly opposed have used a variety of means to skirt the law. The issues now relative to some schools not complying with the GSA legislation would have been avoided through the passage of the Alberta Liberal original GSA bill. The government is right to ensure that school boards follow both the spirit and the letter of the law by closing loopholes and giving the minister more tools to enforce the law.

GSAs unquestionably save lives and have been shown to reduce bullying for the entire school population where they have been implemented. It is therefore imperative that students wanting a GSA at their school are not denied the opportunity to create one.

We know that outing kids before they're ready, even if well intentioned, puts them at risk of family ostracism, self-harm, homelessness, and even suicide. If those aren't reason enough to legislate a student's right to privacy in regard to sexuality and gender identity, then I don't know what is. If there's a risk of students being outed by school officials on account of their membership in a GSA, it could very well mean the end of these groups because kids won't feel safe.

It's been suggested that Bill 24 is little more than a pre-emptive public relations strike by the current government, aimed at highlighting how extreme Jason Kenney is on this issue. From the perspective of the Alberta Liberals, the measures proposed in Bill 24 are warranted, notwithstanding the NDP-Jason Kenney political circus.

Jason Kenney has repeatedly raised the spectre of children as young as five years old participating in GSAs and school officials not being permitted to engage their parents. This is a red herring and detracts from the real issue here, which is protecting LGBTQ youth.

For its part, this current government would do well to tone down its hyperpartisan attacks on Mr. Kenney and start doing a better job of explaining why this legislation is necessary. Saying "Jason Kenney is the reason" is hardly good public policy and only reaffirms in the minds of many that this bill is more about politics than substance.

The NDP is also being heavy handed in their approach and dismissive of parents, school boards, and faith communities who are struggling to come to terms with this new reality. It is a little bit reminiscent of the poor rollout of Bill 6.

Having said all that, Madam Chair, I'm certainly prepared to support the bill, as I know many are in this House and across Alberta. It's part of our new age. It's part of a new reality and a new awareness of evidence and a new acceptance that the LGBTQ community has been marginalized, vilified, and in some ways damaged because of past policies and the lack of sensitivity across our society, including schools. So this is progress. It's not easy, but let's get on with it and help schools and communities and faith groups come to grips with what is an essential part of moving into the 21st century.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise and to speak to Bill 24 in Committee of the Whole. I was making a few comments beforehand, but I think it's important to clear up and to clarify the importance of Bill 24 and the specific sections of it that really do make a difference and have been a part of addressing and seeing the implementation of Bill 10.

Of course, that starts with ensuring that the policies under section 45.1 of the School Act affirm the rights of the students and staff provided in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think that that in itself is an important step that was there, and it provides clarification both for the students and the staff. I think that is an important part of this discussion.

I have some comments that I'll do later, but they're in regard to all of these, so I'll read these out. I think another section that is extremely important is to protect the students that join the GSA. I think this is a big part of the conversation. Of course, we had an amendment that was brought forward. One of the reasons that that section in Bill 24 exists is to clarify that the voluntary student associations, including GSAs, are not subject to the notification requirements. I think that that fundamentally is part of what we're

doing here today and why it's so important. I think it's also part of the overall, broader societal conversation as to: how do we bring forward this conversation about protecting LGBTQ students? What does it look like for parental involvement and making sure that everyone is part of this process?

I think the last part that I wanted to just point out is protecting the establishment of the GSAs from political interference. I think one of those comes in the amending of section 16.1 of the School Act. I think that what it does is to clarify the role of school authorities and the principals. I think this is really important because when a student is asking for a GSA, it shouldn't be on them to go through the burden of figuring out what it takes to get this GSA started. I think the professionals involved need to have a clear understanding of what their role is in that process and make sure that they make it as easy as possible for that GSA to begin and that it doesn't get stuck in the processes back and forth, in having to discuss with the broader board if this GSA is going to be possible. It's very clearly articulated in Bill 10 that if a student asks for a GSA, they should be able to start one up. I think that what we've seen in some examples are delays for various reasons, for lack of clarity, and I think it is important to move forward on a bill that really identifies who's in charge of what and what they need to do.

It brings me to the section where we talk about the timelines that principals are expected to work around when creating GSAs. The last one confirming – and this is, again, something that the member previous to me had mentioned. The previous Bill 202 actually already had this, which is making sure that the students have the right to name the organization a GSA and a QSA.

I think that a personal pet peeve of mine and, I know, of many members of the LGBTQ community is that we can exist as long as we don't talk about it. I think it underlines this conversation that it is hard to have this discussion, that it is a new, in fact, conversation, and that, yeah, we're making progress, but still there's this sense of discomfort or trying to tell us how to frame the conversation so it's palatable. I think that when we do that, we also underline the reasons why it's difficult to come out in the first place because it's hard to have that discussion. I think that's the fundamental reason. When you clear up those roles, responsibilities at the different levels of the people that are part of this process, it makes it easier on the student. Fundamentally, that's what this bill is about.

I go on to that because it's about the student, but it's a broad process of getting to that point. Madam Chair, I'm going to discuss these sections in a letter written to me by a constituent of mine that went through this process with their child. I think that that perspective really helps to explain that the GSA is part of the process and that it's part of a supportive role but that receiving support from their parents and all of that stuff can happen in its own way as well. You can come out to your parents, they can be supportive, they can meet with your teacher, and if those are all the parts that the student is looking for, that all happens. I think the story that he tells is very articulate on that.

I think that what GSAs really provide is a support group, and that's what they're meant to, right? It provides an additional support for these students. If that support isn't there at home, if that situation does occur, they have this to go to. That's why, when they ask for the GSA, it should be done in a timely fashion.

3:20

Madam Chair, I'm happy to table this on Tuesday to make sure that I follow the procedures, but I want to read some of this.

My name is Karson... and I am an advocate for LGBTQ2S+ individuals, issues and rights. From birth to age 12 I grew up and was raised in the small rural communities [all across Alberta]... Wembley... the City of Grande Prairie [and

a few others]. I mention these places because of the isolation, ignorance and [like-minded people] who lived in these places and nurtured me as I grew up. I'm sad to say that as a youth I was 100% a product of my environment. I cannot recall knowing anyone who was openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or otherwise a sexual or gender variant person . . . The extent of my knowledge of the LGBTQ2S+ community was the phrase, "That's so gay" which meant lame or dumb and was thrown around way too often. I learned quickly that "That's so gay" was a negative thing. As I grew up and started to express myself through clothing, hairstyles and piercings I would . . . regularly be labeled as gay. Because my . . . knowledge of the word gay was centered around being lame or dumb I took offence to this and I believe this eventually developed into a form of homophobia.

I'm going to just interject there. I know that the language being used here in many ways can impact a lot of different people in different communities, and I just want to recognize that, that definitely the intent is to tell this narrative from a very authentic place, where he's coming from. I decided not to edit this.

To continue:

Around Grade 10, my uncle that I idolized growing up, in a tragic series of events came out as gay. Because of the pain, and fear he had, and the magnitude of how he revealed to us his family that he was gay was so heavy, it really opened my mind to how ignorant my thinking was about anyone who is a sexual or gender variant person. Once he came out, and found the love of his life it really hit me. Happiness [is about truth] and truth is achieved when we allow ourselves to be who we really are, not what boxy and prescribed social norms say we have to be.

As I got older and went to university I was exposed to people that I never had before. The type of person who was the "norm" in the small towns I grew up in were few and far between in the big city of Edmonton. Around this time my wife and I had our first child. Like every parent, I will say the birth of my child is the best thing that ever happened to me. My child fills my heart with love . . . and has forced me to expand and challenge my rigid thinking in . . . many ways. For the first two years of our child's life we believed we actually had a son as male was the gender assigned at birth. However, as soon as expression would allow we quickly realized we couldn't have been more wrong. We most definitely had a daughter. At first we were confused and uneducated. Until the age of six, she didn't care what clothes she wore or what her haircut was so to anyone who looked at her, they would have seen a little boy. However, if you talked to her or watched her play it was evident that she was a little girl. Our daughter [had always led] the way and just last year, while in grade 1, at the age of 6 she [bravely and courageously transitioned to] align her outer expression of clothing, and hairstyle to match who she is on the inside. We didn't know how unhappy and unconfident she was until we saw the overwhelmingly confident and happy little lady that emerged when she finally let the world know [who she was, who the real her was]. Our daughter is currently in grade 2 and still attending the very same school she attended when she transitioned her physical expression from male to female last year. My wife and I decided to keep her at the school where she transitioned because she has a great group of friends who really support her in many different ways. However, there are many friends, and students who are not friends, that are compelled to share her story with people who do not and would never know that she at some point appeared as a he. We do not blame the children for their curiosities and internal desire to fill . . . unassuming people in with our daughter's story. We have come to terms that no matter how great [or close our] circle of friends are, there is a great possibility that our daughter will continue getting outed as transgender as long as she stays at her current school. That is extremely troubling as we look and plan ahead for adolescence. For those reasons we are actively

searching for [a new school] to enrol her in the new year that have strong GSAs and policies that are put into action that will protect our child's privacy from being outed and otherwise.

Where my wife and I feel . . . incredibly lucky to have such a strong and confident daughter we also know that she is very lucky to have supportive parents and family members who support her in all aspects of her life. We are well aware that . . . many LGBTQ2S+ individuals . . . do not have supportive families. We have met many of these individuals and our hearts break for what they have and are currently still going through. Many of these individuals who have unsupportive families hide and suppress who they are, causing emotional, psychological and physical harm to themselves. These people who either confide in their families or who are outed in any capacity are often met with neglect, abuse [and] abandonment; just for being who they are.

In a province where many individuals still hold onto their . . . narrow perspectives of anything that varies from the "norm" we need to protect the large population of vulnerable individuals . . . who do not fit into these . . . boxes.

It's crucial that all LGBTQ2S+ students in Alberta be given safe and healthy environments [and] anonymity and privacy that School GSAs provide for them so they can receive support [when they need it], because if their families do not support them the outcome could be catastrophic.

As a parent with a . . . mindset [of a] decent human being who believes in equity and fair treatment for all, I fully back the NDP's proposed legislation of protecting our children by making it illegal to notify parents if their child [is attending] a gay straight alliance.

Madam Chair, he signs:

Sincerely and extremely hopeful.

I know that the many parents I have met with that have a child, that are part of GSAs are just that. They are very sincere and extremely helpful. They might not know what it looks like to be a parent of that child, but they're willing to learn, and they're willing to talk to other parents as well. I think what disheartens me most about some of the rhetoric that happens here is that there is an amplification of these ideas of what GSAs are that is fundamentally untrue, and that causes harm to the people that are just trying to create a supportive environment, that are trying to support their children.

I believe that in having this conversation, it forces people to actually reiterate their positions. I think that's important, Madam Chair, because in this world of politics, people can say all the nice things, but their policy doesn't have to look that way.

I think that in many ways Bill 10 needed to be fixed, and that's what we're doing here today. It's something that is important because I have seen that if a GSA isn't done in a timely manner – you're talking about children – if they don't receive a GSA within that school year, they might be going to another school next time, and by the time they get a GSA there, it will be another process. I think that the whole point of this is to make sure that kids have a supportive, safe space, and I can't emphasize that enough. I can tell you that, from high school students to parents that have kids in GSAs at younger ages, all of them at some point get involved, or if not, it's because the student doesn't feel comfortable and needs some extra support. Where do they find that? In the GSAs. I think there's absolutely nothing wrong with that, and in fact it doesn't cause any harm.

I completely disagree with the opposition's narrative that they are not in agreement with that very principle but can agree with this bill. I think that's completely disingenuous, Madam Chair. I think the opposition really does need to come clean as to the reasons they oppose these bills. I think it's part of having healthy debate to actually be able to debate the positions you stand on.

I think that when we're unable to produce those reasons, we muddy the waters with concepts that are untrue. Some of the things that have been thrown out there like that the GSAs have a curriculum embedded in them, a curriculum that is student led, a curriculum that is talking about the things that are hard to talk about in every other room – it's not a world view being embedded in there. It's a safe space, and I think the opposition causes harm when they put things like that into the public sphere and doesn't clarify those points.

3:30

I'm so, so proud of the many Albertans that have come out and explained why this is so important. From reporters to parents to concerned citizens they have all taken time to explain again and again that GSAs can be as simple as throwing a bake sale. It can be as simple as meeting in a classroom and talking about what it's like to be you. It doesn't have to be these complicated things that they're making it out to be.

Furthermore, I think this is the place that they go to also get that support that they need in order to come out to their parents. I think it's one of the things that you don't talk about in normal society, how to come out. You know, I never knew the words of how to do that, and many other people that go through that process don't know. Where do we talk about it? So being able to have a space where you're able to hear the stories of other people that have done that gives you the words that you might need to articulate it, and I think that's what we do in other classes, because we need role models to see how to express ourselves, how to explain something that we've never known how to express.

I didn't know to use the word "gay" for these things, and many other students feel that way. That's what a GSA provides, and it's a really powerful thing. All they're really asking for in these situations are role models that understand their process, that can provide guidance, that can provide language to tie to the experience that they have, and that empowers them to reach out to their parents. That empowers them and emboldens them to do that work that we want to see, to engage the parents in this conversation.

I've met with many constituents that have asked me questions about this very fact. I completely reject that parents are not involved in this process. I think that they're an incredibly important part of this process, and nothing can take away from that. GSAs are a supportive role, and they will continue to be. They're an incredibly important one, one that I will never stop fighting for because I know that kids are also our future right now, and they're defining this role. I know that the next generation that's coming forward is not going to accept these kinds of backward-facing ideologies to govern our policies. That's the reality that the opposition has to look at, that they're trying to turn back the clock on progress that we've made on human rights in this province. They're trying to turn it back because that's what it would take to take this away, because it would be challenged, and it should be challenged that you are not recognizing that under human rights we have the ability to express ourselves, our sexual orientation and gender expression, and not to face discrimination on that basis. These are the concepts that we look at when we have a Bill 24, when we have these discussions in this House.

It's incredibly powerful to hear the number of parents that will say: what they're saying is completely untrue. It's something that needs to be said. The amendment that was brought forward was brought forward under reasons that were based on their own rhetoric. They built that platform and then presented the amendment. It wasn't based on the experience of the people that are going through this process, which is interesting to me because in every other thing they would say to the government: did you consult

the people that are impacted? In this setting I would say: did they consult before they put that amendment forward to the people that would be impacted? If you do not clarify the role of the schools' ability to not notify parents in the case of a GSA and QSA – who did you notify? I would love to know that. If you had talked to those folks, they would tell you that it's because we are making sure that privacy is of top concern.

I think that's where we need to continue this discussion, and I look forward to talking to other folks about the importance of supporting this bill. We've heard support across the province, and we must continue this conversation. I believe that we can do so in such a way that is constructive. I believe that we need to do it in such a way that it is moving this issue forward and that we're moving into a generation that will not accept those kinds of backwards ideals, where discrimination is something that we accept in our society.

Madam Chair, thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you. I'm really pleased to be able to speak in support of Bill 24. I'd like to start off with a little event I just read about that I hadn't even remembered till now. November 9, 1938, was the occasion when Jewish-owned stores, buildings, and synagogues were targeted in Germany and Austria. They were under attack, and authorities stood by and did nothing. This event was called Kristallnacht, night of broken glass, referring to the pieces of broken glass that covered the streets and a reminder of how lives can be shattered by such atrocities. Of course, as we know now, the events of that night were just a hint of greater harm to come.

The point of writing about it, the point of speaking about it is that they were saying that all of us know or should know that we have a responsibility to respond promptly and loudly when any group is attacked for their religious or political beliefs, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. When we all stand together, that is the strongest message we can send, whether it's something as horrific as that or something, like you said, like standing for people for their sexual orientation and making sure that they have the right to be able to be themselves.

As a parent and a teacher and a psychologist I think I've thought a lot about this, child development. One of the things we learn: not everyone is perfect at it. But we do know that as the child grows and they become more of an individual and less just an offshoot of the family, they have things where not every part of their life is shared with everyone. They begin to have different thoughts, ideas, beliefs as they become an adult. One of the things we learn to do is to trust them to tell us what's important, to communicate as they're ready and when they see the need.

As a teacher we try to encourage – definitely, we encourage – children and students to talk to their parents about important things and try to help them, as the previous speaker was saying, to prepare to share important information. But to do it on behalf of a person is very disrespectful. This is their personal issue, their personal decision to make, and for someone else to make it is invasive. It's a violation of trust. We have to help them make themselves known to others around them.

Giving people a GSA gives them a place where they can have unquestioning support. They can be free to speak about who they are. A lot of times things like that will give them the confidence they need to be able to express themselves in other situations such as to their parents if they're feeling a little uncertain about telling their parents what's going on with them.

One more story that was going through my head a lot as I was thinking about the various things that people were saying was about

a young man who I had taught. This was in a small rural community where I taught. He was the youngest of three children. He committed suicide at about age 19. Nobody had any idea what was going on with him. There was no obvious outside cause. The family was stable. His brother and sister were flourishing. He was intelligent. He had friends. He had capabilities. It always made me wonder: was there something that he wasn't able to share, and he just couldn't live with not telling people who he was? We'll never know, of course. But, you know, the devastation in the community from that death was really terrible to see.

Really, the whole idea of GSAs is in support of students. The more we can do to help them learn confidence in themselves, learn to speak up for themselves, learn to be secure in who they are, the better off they will be and the better off everyone will be.

Thank you.

3:40

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my great honour and privilege to rise today in the House to put myself on the record as being strongly in support of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. I hesitate to lend my voice to that of my colleagues in the sense that I don't think I could possibly match the level of eloquence, the level of sagacity that we've all had the privilege of hearing. However, particularly with my own roles as a rural person, as someone who grew up in a small rural community, as someone who's been involved in this issue since the mid-80s, and as a teacher of law and ethics in education, I think that maybe those roles might have maybe a bit of relevance to this discussion. It's in that spirit that I present my remarks.

Just to echo comments of other members that talked about what it's like in our smaller communities, where I grew up, the only discussion about these types of issues was as a way to discipline groups. It was a way to set the boundaries of what you belonged to. I mean, if you were gay, you were outside the group. You weren't worthy of any sort of recognition, and all of us lived in terror of being branded that way, you know? Whether there were gay or lesbian or questioning classmates that I grew up with – in fact, there were. I didn't find out about this until many years afterwards, and I know that I had a couple of classmates that never gave a hint. Years later they came out. How many years did they lose because of that? I mean, I suppose they were fortunate in that they had that opportunity. As the hon. member who just spoke, Edmonton-Mill Creek, we also, unfortunately, had out-of-the-blue suicides in our community that later on could be traced to just this total lack of communication and acceptance.

I could say that I'm proud to be part of a government that is putting this bill forward. You know, it's a sign of progress, but it's also a sign of how much progress we still need to make, that something like this is necessary. I do want to take a bit of issue with the comments that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View made when talking about us politicizing this issue. This is not something that you can divorce from politics, and this is because the opposition to this bill is motivated by a political agenda. I think that it's really important that we do understand that, and I think the hon. members across the aisle do understand that. I think there's probably a growing discomfort in, you know, the Faustian pact that they've made.

The talking points that came out in opposition to Bill 24, the statement that was released by Mr. Kenney, are word for word from Parents for Choice in Education, which has a particular agenda, and also very similar to the types of information put out by the Association for Reformed Political Action. When you understand

those connections is when you understand just how disingenuous the line is that we don't want to out gay children in opposing this bill. The reason I say that is that if you look to the information that these groups put out, they do not accept any other form of sexuality besides that between a man and a woman for the purposes of procreation. That's where they're at. The reason that there's opposition to this – this is not an issue of parental rights so much as a very particular right that they're claiming, and that would be a right to be able to determine for their child what their sexuality is and how they express it.

As a former instructor in law and ethics in education I've had the opportunity to look at the evolving role of the understanding of parental rights over history, and you have to go back a long way to find similar types of claims to that level of parental authority. Really, you don't go within religious traditions. You have to go into Roman legal tradition and Roman political tradition, and that would be the concept of *paterfamilias*.

Paterfamilias was an old Roman concept that the father basically owned his family. He owned his wife, he owned his children, and he owned his grandchildren. He had the power of life and death over them. He had the power to sell them into slavery if he so chose. There were some reforms later on where he only had that right three times, but that's where that came from. It was radical past the early republic, and in fact, you know, into the later Roman Empire you had that moderated. Why is that? Because with the growing understanding of what it means to be ethical, there was an understanding that you cannot claim your child. You cannot claim your spouse. You cannot claim your grandchildren. You cannot claim another human being, period, as your property to be able to decide to do with what you will.

It's that evolving concept that's also influenced what the role is of the parent in education, and it's not an unlimited role. Even the United Nations declaration of, you know, parental choice in education that the opposition is referring to is not unlimited. It's justified based on ethical principles, and, basically, when that parental authority exceeds the ethical backing of that principle, it's no longer valid. I think that parents – and there are only a few of them out there. I mean, the vast majority of parents, I think, are okay with legislation, and I think that this is true in rural areas as well.

I mean, we've evolved a lot since the Delwin Vriend case back in the mid-90s, I think 1998 to be precise, when that came through. We've evolved a lot since when I was on campus back in the late '80s, when we would have blue jeans day to try to raise awareness of gay rights. Then we were talking about the right for gay people not to be fired for their sexual orientation, not to be evicted for their sexual orientation, where you had basically the entire business faculty make a point of not showing up in jeans. What I'm making a point of is that it hasn't been too many years ago that it was totally socially acceptable to totally deny these rights.

But we've evolved. The majority of us have evolved, but unfortunately there is still a minority that needs further education, and I think that it's really unfortunate that you have people out there that are spreading misinformation and, you know, just crazy notions about what this means. I mean, I've been looking at blog postings, some by prominent former publishers, saying that these GSAs are, in fact, sex clubs and that we have to oppose them because they're going to be spreading venereal diseases. They're talking about that this is what's going to happen to 10- and 11-year-olds. That's really going quite a few steps back in the past, and it's unacceptable.

The thing is that I know that the members across the House – there are people that do have some real principles, and I just don't understand how they can feel comfortable in supporting this type of a tactic. We do need to speak to what's underlying this. We need to

speak to the politics of it, and it's because of this that we need to have legislation like this.

That said, I think that this is a good bill. Teachers support it. I think that the majority is on our side. I think that we have this moral obligation to put this through. There have been far too many children and youth that have suffered horribly and unnecessarily because – why? Actually, it's a good question. Because of what exactly? Something that has been erroneous from the start.

With that, I'd like to rest my remarks, and I do hope that, in the end, we can get unanimous support for this bill. Thank you.

3:50

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Indeed, like my colleague that just spoke, I'm very pleased to rise and actually register my firm support for this legislation. Indeed, about three years ago today I was outside this Legislature demonstrating against Bill 10. There was a multiparty demonstration that included the Alberta Liberal Party and the Alberta New Democrats as well as a whole raft of other supporters that decried what was going on with Bill 10. That was an important event in my political learnings.

I'm pleased to see that this bill is actually going to finish the work that was started by the then MLA for Edmonton-Centre, which our government has proceeded with and is now going to make sure that students, whether they're gay or straight or whatever, can join a club, just like the chess club or a United Nations club, and actually find support and encouragement in participating in that without concerns about being outed to their parents.

I find that to be a reprehensible position by the opposition, that there would be a forced outing of children because there was some concern about their sexual orientation. That's an abomination – I'm sorry; I have to use very strong language in this – and I entirely reject that assertion. I find the new leader of the United Conservative Party and his position to be equally reprehensible, and I'm hoping that all Albertans recognize this and act upon it in the next election.

I do want to bring up a few other points. As all members of this Legislature know, I've spent 40 years in the practice of medicine in the province of Alberta, and I over that time have learned a lot. There's a lot to learn about consent and ethics and professionalism that isn't being demonstrated by the other side on this particular issue.

I was particularly impressed with the presentation yesterday by the Member for Calgary-South East, who is a professional first responder and who has personal experience in this field. I also have been in conversation with and I was impressed with the presentation by the MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster. We actually had a discussion about how in our work as a physician or a first responder or a veterinarian on a daily basis, if you're in full-time practice, you would gain the knowledge of personal situations that literally cannot be divulged, and if they were divulged, in fact, I would be in threat of losing my licence. If I learned of a sexual orientation concern or a mental health concern or – I think the worst thing I could learn is that a young person actually thought that they might vote Conservative when they got to be of age. In fact, that's the one that I might want to divulge to their parents because I think that that child might actually need some education. But if I were to divulge something that was given to me in confidence by a child – and that includes to the parents – then I would be in threat of losing my licence. I should lose my licence for that.

Now, these guys over there want to force teachers into that invidious situation of being told that they have to divulge to the parents something that the student certainly would have told them in confidence. In fact, the teachers are supposed to make some judgment about whether or not the parents are capable of actually taking this information in and acting on it or not and whether the acting on it might be detrimental. How silly, how deranged almost in its logic. This just blows my mind.

I can tell you that the Alberta Teachers' Association agrees with me. Just this week 40,000 teachers came out and said: "This is impossible. Please don't do this to us." I can tell you that those 40,000 teachers are going to be voting for the New Democrats in the next election because of this.

I guess that's really where I want to leave this. Basically, what the UCP is asking us to do is something that is unethical, it puts a tremendous stress on teachers, and we should stop it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report progress.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion that the committee rise and report progress carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:56 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Hoffman	Miranda
Bilous	Horne	Payne
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Carson	Larivee	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Goehring	McKitrick	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woollard

Against the motion:

Cyr	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Smith	Yao
MacIntyre		

Totals:	For – 33	Against – 7
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[Motion that the committee rise and report progress carried]

The Chair: The committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Piquette: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 24.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, today we are fulfilling a commitment we made in 2015. At the time we said that we would strengthen Alberta's Conflicts of Interest Act and expand it to apply to senior staff of our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. That's what we are proposing to do with this particular legislation.

Alberta's public agencies play a pivotal role in regulating, managing, and delivering important programs and services to Albertans on behalf of government as well as providing oversight and advice on provincial issues. Public agencies are a significant part of Alberta's public sector, and together they account for about half of the government's total yearly budget. Quite rightly, then, Albertans have high expectations that public agencies are relevant, effective, transparent, well governed, and accountable to both government and to them.

Bringing in a consistent set of rules for conflicts of interest is critical in increasing the accountability of public agencies, protecting Albertans' tax dollars, and ensuring that public agencies are governed transparently. With the changes proposed in Bill 27, Albertans can be confident that clear rules and expectations will be put in place to ensure that public agency staff and board members are acting in the public interest.

Our public agencies provide valuable services that make life better for Albertans such as higher education, protecting vulnerable people, and delivering health services. It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same high standards that we expect of our elected officials and senior public servants. Bill 27 addresses several key provisions, which I would like to outline at this time.

The bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to APAGA, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, would also be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Currently, as of November 1, there are 136 such agencies. Also included in this list would be the three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries and Covenant Health.

Bill 27 proposes a number of prescribed elements that would apply to employees and board members of all applicable public agencies. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have codes of conduct including these prescribed elements: a requirement to conduct themselves impartially; restrictions on acting in self-interest or furthering private interest by virtue of one's position; disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest; restrictions on gifts, including monetary limits; limitations on concurrent employment and holding other offices, including processes of seeking approval.

All APAGA agencies would be required to submit updated codes of conduct reflecting these prescribed elements to the Ethics Commissioner within four months of the act being proclaimed. The Ethics Commissioner will review all revised codes to ensure that they meet the requirements of the act and sign off by March 31, 2019. Agencies would then have to publish their new codes of conduct no later than April 30, 2019.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. For all agency board members and

employees the core requirement would be a baseline standard enforced through codes of conduct that public agencies would be required to implement. Public agencies could have additional restrictions, but these are the ones that all agencies would be required to implement.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. These requirements include restrictions on private interest, restrictions on using influence, restrictions on using insider information, and disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest. There is an additional core statutory requirement that would apply to CEOs and equivalents, restrictions on concurrent employment and holding other offices. This additional core statutory requirement would take effect immediately for new hires, upon reappointment, or following a two-year notice period.

CEOs and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements upon designation, including restrictions on holding stocks and other public securities; disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, including financial disclosure; postemployment restrictions, specifically a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. These additional statutory requirements would be set out in the act, where the position would be designated in a separate order in council and come into effect on contract renewals and new appointments.

Where concurrent contracts are longer term, a two-year transition period would apply so that within two years all CEOs and board chairs would be subject to these enhanced requirements. Through order in council cabinet would have the ability to add or to exempt agencies and positions from any of the conflict-of-interest requirements. We propose a statutory requirement for all public agencies to have codes of conduct within the required elements.

To enhance oversight and enforcement, we also propose applying restrictions on furthering private interests using influence and using insider information as statutory requirements within the Conflicts of Interest Act. These restrictions would be carried out through order in council and would apply to board chairs and CEOs of public agencies on contract renewals and new appointments.

There would be a two-year transition period to ensure that CEOs with longer term contracts would also come under the new requirements within the two-year time frame rather than on expiration of their contract.

I would also like to note that in Bill 27 it is proposed that cabinet would have the ability to add or exempt agencies and positions from any conflict-of-interest requirement.

4:20

The Ethics Commissioner would have the authority to receive and review disclosures from designated CEOs and their equivalents; reduce requirements for restrictions on public securities and restrictions on postemployment; investigate alleged breaches of the act by board chairs, CEOs, and other designated senior positions; issue reports and make recommendations to the responsible minister and/or board; review public agency codes of conduct to ensure that they meet the statutory requirements set out in this particular bill. As well, disclosure information submitted to the Ethics Commissioner will remain confidential.

Today I'm proud to say that our government has been doing great work to maximize the value of agencies, boards, and commissions. We have seen numerous important changes to increase transparency, fiscal accountability, and diversity and significant progress government-wide in several different areas, including fair and appropriate executive compensation; effective use of public dollars; transparency and accountability, including salary disclosure;

revitalization of board appointment diversity and a diligent appointment process; a compensation framework for 23 designated ABCs, cutting salaries and eliminating bonuses for the highest paid top executives of agencies, boards, and commissions; more transparency for Albertans with the launch of the ABC recruitment website for recruitment of board members, appointments, and to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to apply on vacancies; and the public agency sunshine list, with public agencies required to publicly post employment and severance contracts of high-level executives and all board members.

I look forward to discussion on Bill 27 and would ask that all members of this House support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my privilege to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill 27, an act to expand conflict-of-interest rules to agencies, boards, and commissions. Agencies play a very important role in making life better for Albertans, and their executive and board members should be held to the same high ethical standards expected of ourselves as MLAs and of senior public servants. Our government is strongly committed to strengthening conflict-of-interest legislation and extending it to senior staff of public agencies, boards, and commissions.

Now, the reason for that is that conflict-of-interest requirements are not consistent across agencies, and a comprehensive, well-elaborated set of rules is simply good governance. Alberta's public agencies are a critical part of how we deliver services. They, in fact, account for about half of government's total budgetary spending. With these changes we can be confident that public agency staff and board members are indeed acting in the public interest.

Now, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie gave some background to the bill. What I'd like to do is just kind of explore some of the questions that this new legislation might bring up in the minds of other hon. members and, of course, the public. The first question would be: why are we changing the Conflicts of Interest Act, and how in particular will those changes benefit Albertans? Of course, as I just mentioned, we are committed to strengthening the conflict-of-interest legislation, and that's what we're proposing to do. While some public agencies indeed do have conflict-of-interest requirements in place through their codes of conduct or their employment contracts, there is not a consistent or comprehensive set of rules being applied to public agencies. This speaks to why we need to do that.

Now, what are the teeth in this? What are the penalties for breaches of the act? Currently there is an administrative penalty for not disclosing to the Ethics Commissioner on time or for failing to fully disclose conflicts as outlined in the Conflicts of Interest Act. This penalty applies to those currently covered under the act, including MLAs and senior ministerial staff, and cannot exceed \$500. It is currently an offence for a designated senior official to violate the postemployment restriction, subject to a fine of up to \$50,000. With amendments to this act, these penalties will become applicable to designated senior officials, and this will put this in alignment with current provisions for ministers and deputy ministers.

Another question, kind of following that, is: has any consideration been given to increasing the penalties for breaching the act? Now, this is not something that we are proposing to do through these amendments.

How will the requirements be enforced? Well, chairs and CEOs and their equivalents would be subject to oversight by the Ethics Commissioner for the statutory requirements that apply to them. In addition, all agency employees, including CEOs and equivalents, and all board members, including chairs, will be subject to conflict-of-interest requirements through a code of conduct which will be required for each public agency. The requirements for codes of conduct align with the approach used for the Alberta public service. Once again, these will, then, align it more closely with those in place for us as elected officials, including ministers, as well as requirements in place for deputy ministers.

Another question people might have in mind is: how do we decide that? How do we decide which agencies should be subject to the additional conflict-of-interest requirements? Now, this is still a work-in-progress, but there are indeed several considerations, including whether the agency is involved in the following activities. One would be performing a regulatory function, a second one would be making autonomous decisions and/or binding decisions, a third one would be managing and allocating substantial amounts of public funding, and finally, extensive interaction with the private sector. I think that with the reasons being stated, you can see that these are situations where a conflict of interest might arise on a more frequent basis and where there might be a greater temptation to end up in such a situation.

Another question that people might ask about this legislation that we're proposing is: why do some requirements apply to CEOs and chairs while others apply to board members and agency staff? Just how was it decided which staff would be affected by the changes? Now, chairs, CEOs, and equivalents will be subject to higher levels of requirements than agency staff and board members due to their heightened responsibilities and accountability, so a fairly obvious connection there. Chairs, CEOs, and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements as well as codes of conduct and core statutory requirements. Now, since these agencies are providing such an important and significant service and function on behalf of the government, it is indeed highly appropriate that there be more oversight in place for chairs, CEOs, and equivalents.

Now, another question that might be posed is: why will some requirements be in legislation while others will be administered through codes of conduct? There's a good reason for this difference. The use of statutory requirements for board chairs and CEOs and their equivalents creates the ability for the Ethics Commissioner to provide oversight, including the investigation of potential breaches. This approach recognizes the responsibilities and accountabilities associated with these positions. That's why that would have to go through the Ethics Commissioner.

Another question might be: how does this apply to postsecondary institutions? What are the requirements for them? The requirements for postsecondary institutions would be the same, essentially, as those for other public agencies. However, as with other public agencies, the use of codes of conduct will provide postsecondary institutions with some greater flexibility in order to address their unique needs such as those that are unique to postsecondary institutions having to protect academic freedom.

Now, are there additional requirements to this legislation? Like I said previously, they are the same requirements that ministers and deputy ministers are subject to, and they would include the following: the requirement to disclose financial information, information on direct associates; restrictions on holding public securities unless placed in a blind trust or otherwise approved by

the Ethics Commissioner; and a 12-month restriction on taking certain positions after leaving a CEO or other equivalent position.

When would these core statutory requirements take effect? That would be . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until Tuesday, November 14, at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, November 9, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c13]

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2017 c11]

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c10]

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c12]

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c14]

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c15]

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017, with exceptions; SA 2017 cC-2.3]

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft.*), 1534-51 (*Jun. 5, 2017 aft.*), 1553-67 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1589-93 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c9]

Bill 18* — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1567-79 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1587-89 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017; c8]

Bill 19 — An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers (Gray)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1648-53 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1695-98 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1729-31 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act (Phillips)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1627-35 (*Oct. 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1655-64 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1728-29 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 21 — Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1664-72 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1699-1706 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1789-90 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 22 — Resident and Family Councils Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1687-94 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1706-14 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 1731-32 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1790-94 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 23 — Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017 (Ganley)

First Reading — 1685-86 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1761-69 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1805-15 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 24 — An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances (Eggen)

First Reading — 1726-27 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1769-74 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796-1803 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft.*), 1833-46 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1847-55 (*Nov. 9, 2017 morn.*), 1870-75 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 25 — Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 1745 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1794-96 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1815-19 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 27 — Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1831 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1876-78 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 1614-20 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division (not proceeded with)*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 cA-5.5]

Bill 206* — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1747-56 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1756-58 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 210 — Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017 (Smith)

First Reading — 1869 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 14, 2017

Day 53

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

As we gather today in this Chamber, let us reflect on the great privilege that we all share in serving the people of Alberta, and let our deliberations be guided by the knowledge that we are here to serve all Albertans to make their lives better today than they were in the past.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 206

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move third reading of Bill 206.

I want to stress again what a privilege it's been to be able to bring this bill forward and to be able to work with the government and the various caucuses going through this bill. It's absolutely time to update the law in Alberta and to keep with the times, and we sure need to know that we're doing this the right way. The feedback that we've received from stakeholders, the ability to be able to go back and forth with the government over language and the way that this bill should sit: I'm very, very grateful for all of the input that has come forward. I'm very happy and hope that the entire Legislature will be able to support this bill going forward.

As we all know, if this bill is passed, it will be able to bring all of our parents that are hoping to adopt a child into a space where they're able to show who they are to parents that are looking to put their child into the system for adoption. There are so many things that are positive about this, but the most important positive step forward is that it gives prospective parents a chance to be able to advertise who they are. But it also gives the parents that are putting their children into the system, that are potentially looking at going into the system that ability to be able to look at prospective parents, take the time in their own home, with the ability to have whatever supports they need around them to be able to make this decision.

One thing I think I need to make clear is that when expectant parents are bringing their children into the system, this is a gift to the parents that are thinking about adopting, a massive gift, and we have to make sure that the expecting parents understand and that they are acknowledged for this beautiful gift that they're bringing forward. For anybody who has been in the system or has been adopted or who has adopted, we all know how important that is.

I actually can't even speak from experience, but I have quite a few friends that have had the privilege of being able to adopt. The look on the face of a parent who is receiving a child that another person has found it in their heart to bring forward and put into the system so that another family can complete their family or start to build their family and extend their family: there's nothing quite like

seeing that moment. I can honestly say that I've been there for a couple of those moments, not at the very first unification between this family and this expansion of the family but, certainly, shortly thereafter.

In my own family my cousin in India adopted a little boy, and I remember the letters and the videos and everything that came forward when that day happened for this couple. It's very, very difficult to put into words what that looked like and, certainly, how it felt for those of us who are his family and for other friends who have been through that as well. This is nothing short of a miracle for these families and is a tremendous gift.

For a long time now there have been some inconsistencies in the legislation. This is one of the things that will be fixed by being able to move forward with this legislation, that we actually give potential adoptive parents the ability to be able to put themselves forward and have a little bit more access for the parents that are the expectant parents to be able to look at parents going forward. It's important to restate that it's as important as possible, with, of course, regulations and all the other important things that go along with this, that we make it as easy as possible for people who need support and information to be able to access it and to be able to use the methodologies that are comfortable for them. This will be a huge shift in making sure that parents in Alberta have more access and are able to expand their families as soon as possible. We want to make sure that for the adoptions that are possible, those restrictions change, that we're actually able to make sure and open that up.

There's also been the talk – and this is one of the other things that we need to consider, too, that there have been signs and numbers that show us that adoptive parents in Alberta are looking outside of the province, and we really want to make sure that we can look within our province as well. It's hard to know whether there are fewer or more expectant parents that are putting their children into the system for adoption or it's simply that parents within this system have had to reach outside of the province to look elsewhere. It's hard to know for sure. Those metrics are not necessarily clear. But I think it's very important to make sure that we make as many options as possible for our parents here in this province and that they can post their profiles online and be connected as easily as possible.

One of the other interesting things – and we've brought this up a couple of times. Other provinces – Ontario, Yukon, and British Columbia – have already moved forward on this, and we've seen a tremendous, tremendous change in this and the ability of families to adopt there. Again, I think that we can look at that crossjurisdictional information to make some very good changes within our own system. I believe that the language that we've all used together and that we've come forward with together really provides the ability for families to be able to do that.

We want to make sure that we are able to make this as comfortable and that that learning and the research online are as easy as possible. Because of this, adoption agencies and governments both provide in-depth information on the adoption process on websites, and many agencies also provide a text line. The interesting thing about being able to use that technology is that, should an expectant parent want to actually contact a family that is a prospective adoptive parent, if they want to, they can leave a text line, or they can leave information, which is a really wonderful option. It just opens up the door to even more families being able to be in that space.

As we know, adoption can be extremely stressful not only on the adoptive parents but, obviously, on the expectant parents. We want to make sure that those supports are there and that they're adequate and that we're taking care of everybody who's in the system. Because we know this, if it's easier for the expectant parents to look

online, why would we not want to make that available to them, with the obvious restrictions to make sure that there is no access to the children or to the expectant parents, that the expectant parents are the ones that are leading the charge on this but that the adoptive parents make themselves as available as possible to anybody who is looking to put their child into the system?

I would like to thank the member opposite, too, who brought the motion forward in the last session. That motion was so important to starting this conversation about how to move forward and certainly inspired a lot of the language within this bill. Thank you for that.

We wanted to make sure, too, that as we went forward with this bill, we had changed the language in the preamble to make sure that we were very, very clear on the intention. The actual intention of this bill is really simple. It is simply to allow prospective adoptive parents to be approved to advertise their profiles. The reason for not having this come forward in the past was simply that we just hadn't caught up. There are no reasons for not having it, that we weren't able or that we don't have the technology; it's just never been brought forward. It is time. It is time to make those changes.

Again, I want to be extremely clear on how grateful I am for having been able to work with the government to be able to work on the language in this, being able to work with the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, who is truly the inspiration for me behind this bill, and for being able to work with all members of our caucus and the government caucus and the other caucuses to make sure that this legislation is able to be brought forward. Thank you so much for your contributions.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak just briefly to Bill 206. As many in this House will know, I have had the opportunity to rise on a number of occasions to speak to this particular piece of legislation, that has been carefully and diligently proposed and shepherded through the Assembly by my fantastic colleague the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

I'll just keep my remarks brief this morning as I know that there's lots of other great work to be done today. As well, I anticipate, from a lot of the comments that have been made in the Assembly from members both on this side and that, that we will see, in fact, this particular piece of legislation become law. It's my hope, as I mentioned in committee, that it, in due course, will also be proclaimed. You know, Madam Speaker, from time to time inside the Chamber, issues get quite politicized, and politics sometimes breaks out, and that sometimes means that the best idea doesn't necessarily win. But in Bill 206 what we've seen is that we have the ability to work together for a common cause and common goal. One of the reasons why I'm excited about the rest of the morning today is that we will in fact, I believe, see this piece of legislation passed.

Not only is it important that it's passed because it actually does good things for prospective adoptive families and it does good things for prospective biological parents in terms of adding to the process, but it's a good thing because, for a number of weeks now, we've had the opportunity to speak about such an important issue, an issue that is really at the heart for many in this Chamber, and an issue that is at the heart of making Alberta a better and stronger place. Madam Speaker, you'll know that in this House I have said on numerous occasions that strong families build strong communities, and strong communities build a strong province. Really, that's what adoption is about. It's about trying, wherever possible, to strengthen families. Sometimes that means working to

strengthen biological families. It means working to strengthen prospective adoptive families and, wherever possible, doing what's best for everyone in the process.

You'll also know, Madam Speaker, that I've said numerous times in this House that I wished we lived in a world where there was no need for adoption. Unfortunately, we don't live in that world, so we need to do everything that we can to be supportive of the process. We need to be supportive of all of the individuals involved in the adoption process, and I mean doing more to support biologicals, more to support adoptive families, more to support the children involved in this process and, wherever possible, lifting all of those folks up. All too often someone in the process is left behind.

I think that one of the great things about Bill 206 is that we've had this important opportunity to speak about this issue, to discuss some of the challenges, some of the stigmas, some of the successes, and some of the opportunities around adoption, all while doing a very small piece of the legislative portion of this to make this process just a little bit better, to make the process more equal across our country, to not put Albertan families at a disadvantage but to recognize that so much about our culture has changed over the last 15 or 30 years and, in many respects, the adoption process was left behind in that.

Now, as I've highlighted, obviously, there are some sensitive issues around this particular piece of legislation. I think it's important that we do allow the government to put the balances, the safeguards in place as they move forward. But, as I highlighted in the Committee of the Whole stage, I really hope that this isn't a delay tactic to not actually proclaim what is a good piece of legislation. So I encourage them to have the courage of their convictions, to have the courage that the House has placed on this piece of legislation in the form of Bill 206, and to ensure that the bill is proclaimed in an expedited way.

Certainly, on behalf of my family and my girls and all of us I want to say thank you to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and to the members of the government side of the House for their positive contribution to the adoptive process, the positive contribution around this particular piece of legislation today. I hope that we will continue as an Assembly to discuss together ways that we can help families grow, flourish, and thrive in our province and highlight the very important work that we all can do together.

It is exciting for me to say for one last time that I look forward to supporting Bill 206.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure – and I'm going to echo the words of the previous speaker – to stand and comment in third reading on Bill 206, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017. I have spoken to this in several phases of this bill, but I really think that there are some key messages here that we need to get across. I want to assure all Albertans that our government is committed to providing a loving, nurturing home to children who need one because every child deserves to grow up in a healthy, loving environment that supports their development and prepares them for a bright future.

Adoption is an important part of supporting strong families and building resilient communities. We want to make sure that the adoption process gives children and parents the best possible outcomes, and we need to ensure that changes to adoption are made in consultation with the adoption agencies as well as adoptive families and that all changes to adoption, including those that may

be recommended by the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, are made holistically.

The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View is to be congratulated for bringing this forward, and I echo her positive comments about the MLA for Calgary-East, who had a motion previously on this topic. It's something that all of us in this House agree with. I'm sure that everyone in this House has been touched in some way in their past experience by the adoption process.

I personally do not have direct experience with the adoption process, but I can tell you that one of the first constituents to visit my office after the election two and a half years ago was a family that was in a very comparable situation to the one that we're describing today. That family had been trying to arrange an adoption for about 10 years. They actually brought to my attention the fact that they couldn't advertise in the province of Alberta as they could advertise in other provinces their desire to adopt a baby and to tell adoptive parents what their family environment could provide. So I'm very happy for that family and the multitude of other families that are in this situation that we are moving ahead.

10:20

As was said by the previous speaker, there's a lot of regulatory activity that needs to be undertaken here to make sure that we preserve confidentiality. In my opinion, one of the most important things is that we make sure that these services are available to all Albertans, not just to those that have access to the Internet or have the technical skills to utilize social media but to all Albertans. I think this is probably the most important issue here. It isn't just the prospective adopting parents, but it's also the parents that are on the other side of that ledger that we need to reassure that all of these folks are getting all of the support that we possibly can give them.

I am very conscious of the social determinants of health, and you can actually translate the social determinants of health into this situation very well. The adoptive parents that are considering the adopting process need a lot of support. They need the support before this process, and in my opinion they need the support afterwards. At the present time we need to do more work in that regard.

I'm also concerned about some special situations. I've got constituents who have adopted children with Down syndrome. That's been a very positive experience for those families, but there's a lot of misinformation out there about what the struggle might be in adopting a child with Down syndrome. I think we need to maybe provide some better information in social media, perhaps, or in other ways as to what the rewards are for making those kinds of adoptions. That's just one example. There are many other examples of children with special needs that we need to make sure are accessing the loving care of adopting families as readily as possible.

You know, the social determinants of health basically relate to poverty. If a person is in a situation where they don't have the financial resources to support a child, I think it's sometimes too easy to say: well, we should make them think about being in the adoptive process. Let's make sure that they make that decision without the coercion of poverty. I think that's very important in all of this.

Basically, what we're talking about here are families. We're talking about enhancing families. In my introduction I talked about how having a resilient family leads to resilient communities. Having an adoption process that gives support to all components of that is very important, and I think that this private member's bill is going to lead to that in part. That's why I'm very pleased to provide my support and my urging to all my colleagues to support this bill in third reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be really brief because I've spoken at length about this both in my motion and in second reading of Bill 206. I just wanted to take the time to thank the member for her work in bringing this forward and for the collaborative nature that we've been through in this process. I want to thank the Ministry of Children's Services for addressing concerns within our caucus and caucus members who have come to me with concerns they have with this. I think we've sort of landed in a place that most of us can agree on.

I know that this will bring a huge amount of hope to a great number of people, and I think that's really the primary thing that we are trying to do with this. This is an issue that was brought to me by my constituents very early on after I was elected, just the struggles that they've experienced trying to adopt children: that it can be very expensive, that there are different things that can be barriers, whether that's age of prospective adoptive parents or financial status. This is just something that seems so obvious in this day and age that we live in. It's something that's already in place in B.C. and Ontario.

I'm just grateful that we've come to this spot and that this is where we are, and I know that so many families out there will be thankful for this opportunity. So I just hope everyone supports this bill moving forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 206. I do remember when the Member for Calgary-East brought forward a motion earlier in this Legislature and the conversations that we were fortunate to have around this particular topic and that we see brought forward here in a piece of legislation that will make this collaborative effort actual law. This is a great change brought forward by my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View.

I think that I certainly have heard from constituents that have experienced difficulties when adopting a child about the direct impact that this change in legislation would mean for them in their access, not only for them but for others who want to share their love with children that need a forever home. I'm so honoured to be a part of this discussion in this Legislature and the passing of this fantastic private member's bill.

I can see support from all sides in this House, and I know that there are many, many families that certainly appreciate this because whatever we can do to remove barriers and encourage it, make it easier to put people together in a forever home is exactly what we should be doing in this Legislature and especially here today. I'm very, very proud of my colleague for bringing this forward and doing a lot of the background work with all members in this House to pass through this legislation.

I certainly speak in support of this bill, and I urge all members that haven't already decided to also vote in favour. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to close debate.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, I wanted to say again, one more time, how grateful I am that the bill we have before us, if it is passed – and I'm hoping that everybody in the Legislature will support this bill – will ultimately bring families together, will ultimately bring the gift of family to families that have struggled in being able to put

families together for whatever reasons, whatever backgrounds, however we all come together with this.

The honest thing that happens as a result of this legislation is that many people become connected, and they're connected through this precious little person that comes into the world through parents that are willing to put their child into adoption and through the prospective adoptive parents that are able to grow their families. Just the thought of being able to make that easier, to be able to streamline that and to bring families together, is something that I think every single person in this Legislature can be very, very proud of. As I've said earlier, the inspiration for this bill comes from so many spaces and, I'm so proud to say, right across this Legislature.

Again, I'd like to say thank you from the bottom of my heart on behalf of the families that will benefit from this legislation. All of us are extremely grateful and look forward to seeing this legislation passed.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a third time]

**10:30 Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 207
Regulatory Burden Reduction Act**

[Debate adjourned November 6: Mrs. Aheer speaking]

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

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. Pardon me. I didn't realize I was on the speakers list.

The Deputy Speaker: Just for clarification, you have nine minutes left of your speaking time.

Mrs. Aheer: Nine minutes. Okay. Oh, my goodness gracious. Thank you so much. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of Bill 207, the Regulatory Burden Reduction Act.

The constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View is home to so many nonprofits. You know, nonprofits are actually what make lives better for Albertans. We have all sorts of youth sports leagues, social service providers. There are quite a few, actually, throughout the area. Some of those are Synergy, seniors' organizations such as the Whitecappers, Lions Club, Women in Need Society.

These not-for-profit societies do absolutely amazing work, and I don't need to explain that to this Legislature. All of us, having been in these positions for as long as we have, know how much the not-for-profits do for our areas. Sometimes it's as simple as helping out with getting baskets to families that are in need all the way to helping build arenas, funding for hockey teams coming in, making sure that the food bank is stuffed full over the holidays to make sure that we can take care of families in need. Of course, behind all of these organizations, Madam Speaker, are these incredible volunteers.

The constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View, that I represent, like so many constituencies across Alberta would have far less access to services and programs that are built by and for local communities and so much of our public funds would have to go towards these services that the not-for-profits actually provide, which is the point that I'm getting to. These not-for-profits not only supplement what's already there, but they actually add to it. There is usually quite a motivation behind a not-for-profit, their reason for

advocacy, so they're able to raise the funds that are needed which provide services that Albertans rely on.

The purpose of the organizations and the groups they support, Madam Speaker, is wide, and they vary. One thing all of these not-for-profits have in common is the requirement to spend donated funds on volunteer hours, and this is where it gets a little bit confusing and frustrating. They're spending it on volunteer hours to discover and understand complete mountains – mountains – of government paperwork. I don't know how many people in this Legislature have worked for not-for-profits. I know what it feels like to be under a pile, a mountain, of that paperwork, and so much of the money that is raised by these not-for-profits is going to dealing with these mountains of paperwork.

For instance, the CIP project grants consist of an 18-page application guide, eight pages of application forms of which two pages require around 10 long-answer responses each, 12 pages of more mandatory attachments, three pages of facts, and a four-page accountability report with two pages of instructions. Now, as you go through that, Madam Speaker, obviously, there are reasons for all of these things to be there, and this is in no way to disrespect the process by any stretch. But it took myself and my constituency staff at least two minutes per page just to read and understand each of those 47 pages of paperwork the first time.

You know, we're actually paid to do that job, right? So it's absolutely my privilege to be able to help with those forms and to go through the process, Madam Speaker, but that's an hour and a half of time to even begin to understand the paperwork, right? That's not even processing, that's not going through it, and that's not preparing the paperwork, and we're experienced at dealing with bureaucracy and paperwork from the bureaucracies.

The point that I'm trying to get to is that when constituents come into our office looking for help with their first CIP application and they have invested dozens, maybe hundreds, of volunteer hours into working with CIP programs, the officers are trying to understand what the program is actually looking for so that they can actually help to write the grant proposal so that it has a chance of being approved, which, of course, is why we have those grants available. We want these communities, these not-for-profits, these associations to have access to this very important money that actually helps families, makes life better for Albertans throughout every single one of our constituencies here.

Similarly, a larger application package exists for four other CIP streams, two of the CFEP streams, and one for ECAP. Again, I don't know how many people in this Legislature have sat down and gone through those mountains of paperwork, but they're massive. And then there's paperwork to maintain the status of the societies and the not-for-profit corporations, including an annual report to Service Alberta and audited financial statements that take weeks and months to prepare, sometimes costing these not-for-profits up to \$10,000 in hard-earned donations.

There are mounds of paperwork to file with the AGLC, including regular applications. And if we're even thinking – there are other groups, too. There are First Nations groups. There are other not-for-profit groups. A lot of these groups haven't even got access to somebody to help them fill out this paperwork. So there's a discrepancy amongst even the people that are applying for these applications as to whether they'll get their applications across the finish line because they may not have somebody in their area that is actually able to fill out that paperwork for them. It actually can be quite discriminatory.

We want to make sure that these applications and reapplications to be able to use charitable funds – the requirements on the applications should be the same programming the organization has done for years, and I don't think that that's too much to ask. This is

part of the red tape that we're talking about. If an organization has already filled out its paperwork, gone through the expertise, the work, the money, everything else that they've done to fund raise in order to get this grant, why is the programming for that organization not staying the same?

More concerning, though, is that the red tape makes it more difficult – more difficult – for nonprofits to change their programs to meet new and emerging needs in communities. I don't think I need to really clarify. All of us live in communities that are changing at the drop of a hat. I mean, the technology changes faster than we can blink, the families, the growth. I can just speak for Chestermere-Rocky View. Our growth is massive, absolutely massive, and to try and keep up with that and the different groups of families and the needs that are coming in and who needs what, I mean, that changes at the blink of an eye. So developing new programs or collaboration between organizations such as seniors' organizations, developing grant work for youth organizations is very difficult, very different mounds of paperwork.

A large part of the roadblocks, actually, to preparing the application package is that the AGLC uses the Charitable Gaming Policies Handbook, 151 pages – 151 pages – thick with pseudoregulations that are literally impossible to understand or negotiate. If you're lucky enough to have an MLA to help you go through it with you – it's absolutely unbelievable and mind-boggling. I hope all of you get a chance to do that.

That handbook is, by the way, updated a few times a year. It's not the same book that was there last year. It's not even the same handbook that was there a few months ago. It's updated on a regular basis, but nonprofit organizations don't always receive notice when the AGLC changes the red tape in ways that affect the nonprofits. Again, we're attacking the very people that help our areas, our constituencies, the people that we represent, to do great work and to actually make life better for the citizens in all of our constituencies.

Just to give a quick recap, because that was a mouthful, the average CIP application requires 80 volunteer or contractor hours to complete each. So depending on how much your contractor is charging or what your volunteer is available for, it's a good chunk of money and time. And that has to be completed for every single funding cycle. That's two weeks of time that is not used – not used – to provide services and programs to Albertans. The average CIP application requires 40 volunteer, contractor, or bookkeeper hours to complete each grant.

10:40

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

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 207. You know, all across the country provinces are moving to find ways that their regulatory burden can be reduced and government can be streamlined, but unfortunately here in Alberta we have a government that wants to do the exact opposite of that. Left, right, and centre we see additional regulations and added burden being placed upon all sorts of different sectors. So my hon. colleague the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has made a pretty simple suggestion in Bill 207 that when the government has that unquenchable thirst to regulate, that we all know they have, they then take a pause, be a little bit introspective, and find other areas where they could reduce regulatory burden.

Now, Madam Speaker, let me tell you that at the start of this process it's really easy because there is a lot of unnecessary regulation that continues to remain on the books – and my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View made some illustrations

of those – that really just needs to go away. They don't solve any problems. They solved a problem that used to exist, or it's possible that they were implemented and actually created problems. The point remains the same. What my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner suggests is that when one new regulation is implemented, one old or no longer needed regulation is removed. It's a one-for-one process – and we've seen in other provinces, including the province of British Columbia, where they've reduced 36 per cent of regulations in just three years – and this is reported annually, and it provides certainty that there is positive work in red tape reduction taking place.

I actually don't understand when I've heard members opposite say, "Well, give an example of one" or "There's no problem." The government in the province of Alberta is absolutely massive, with significant – significant – regulation. For members opposite to say, "Oh; there's no problem; there are no regulations that need be removed," is also like saying that every single dollar that the government spends is a dollar well spent. Well, that's outrageous. The government wastes lots of money, and there's also lots and lots of regulatory burden that could be reduced so that we can make a path for the economy, so that we can create certainty in business, so that we can minimize regulation on small and medium-sized business. As we all know, those are the drivers of our economy. This is a small step that essentially costs very little but really has the opportunity to make a significant impact on our province.

I've heard members opposite speak last week about how they don't think that there's a problem or that there's no real need for this particular piece of legislation. I know that there are a lot of people who disagree with that position, not just members of the opposition caucus but also business groups, members of the nonprofit sector. So I think what we ought to do is before the government goes ahead and votes this bill down without giving it proper time consideration and thought and hearing from a lot of experts – I know that Bill 203 had that same sort of opportunity, to hear from experts and get testimony from industry. I think that it worked out quite well. That's often what happens at committee, Madam Speaker, that the best idea has the best opportunity of winning. Not only that, but we can make a much better decision as a collective by hearing from experts. We can get testimony from bureaucrats who will be able to provide examples of this. We can hear from – I know municipalities.

In my previous life I was a councillor in the community of Carstairs, as you'll know, and I know that regularly we heard frustration from administration on the significant burden that the provincial government imposed upon municipalities. Now, listen, there need to be checks and balances – I'm not saying that there doesn't – but many of the regulations that existed actually didn't provide any value for the municipality or, in fact, for the Department of Municipal Affairs. Often the municipality was filling out reports and paperwork that were never actually reviewed by the government, so it would be great to be able to invite some of those municipalities to come and speak to the importance of reducing regulatory burden.

I'd like to provide the government members that opportunity by proposing an amendment. I have an original for you and the table as well as for all of the members in the Chamber, who, I'm sure, are waiting with bated breath. I'll just wait until you have a copy of the original.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you. Just double-checking: will we refer to this amendment as A1?

The Deputy Speaker: No. It's a referral motion, so it would be REF1.

Mr. Cooper: A notice of amendment to Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, be amended by deleting the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, before the Chamber now we have an incredible opportunity to refer this bill to committee. I know that I had a chance to speak with my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner, and I look forward to his comments with respect to both the bill as well as the amendment. I know that he is in favour of this amendment. Now, I'm sure that he would have appreciated a more expedited process, but I think that he even sees the value in hearing from experts on an important issue. What we're doing today is giving the government and the government members the opportunity to really be thoughtful about this process, to consider the consequences of not doing it, and also to get very valuable feedback from those that would like to provide feedback on this issue.

All across the country and in many states they have a plan in place to reduce the regulatory burden. The federal Conservative government saved Canadian businesses over \$32 million in administrative burden as well as 750,000 hours in time spent dealing with red tape each year. Regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by small business and small and medium-sized firms, and those firms constitute the largest segment of the Canadian economy.

10:50

These are the types of discussions that committee would allow to happen. It would really provide an opportunity for all of us to be able to ensure that we're doing the right thing for the right reasons at the right time. I would strongly, strongly encourage all members of the Assembly to support this motion so that Bill 207 can get the important study that it deserves.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I want to thank the member for referring this to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. I think it really shows some of the productiveness that the committee has had over time. If I can just kind of allude to some of the good work that this committee has done and why it would be important for a bill of this magnitude to actually come to this committee, it would be very prudent. Obviously, I sit on and serve on this committee with the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, who is my deputy chair, and I've actually really enjoyed my time with him on this committee because it's been very collaborative in the last little while.

We recently tabled the report, as all members would recall, on the review of daylight savings. To be frank, one of the things I was most taken aback by during that review process was that someone thought the committee was entirely made up of New Democrat members because of how nonpartisan the committee operated. I think it spoke volumes on the ability that we could actually work collaboratively together on this issue, and it was really great to see.

Now, prior to that, we did the review of the agrifood and agribusiness act. I know that the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater is nodding his head because he was very enthralled with

this one. We unanimously voted in favour of 13 recommendations, which the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry is starting to review, to really try to diversify our agrifood and agribusiness sector. During my work with PNWER and travelling abroad with them, I've had the opportunity to really talk about some of the great work that we've been doing within Alberta from that committee's process. Then, prior to that, we've had some other legislative reviews as well, a review of PIPA, which looked at some of our privacy legislation.

This one really intrigues me because, you know, I don't see red tape as a very partisan issue. Red tape impacts everyone. I always refer back to a challenge that my mother had, actually, when my grandmother was admitted to hospital a few years back. It was her trying to get her unadmitted from the hospital and having to get her walker certified. It was the exact same walker that she had while she was in hospital. My mom went out and bought it to make sure it was the exact same one. The doctor had given it to her in the hospital, but we had to wait for that doctor to come back to approve this walker that had already been approved even though the RNs who are in the hospital had seen this walker, had seen the doctor approve it. Everything was, you know, filed appropriately. That was regulatory burden that prevented her from being unadmitted from hospital for about three to five hours if I recall. I remember my mom speaking to me – and this was in 2014, so this was before I had this position – about the frustration that she had, and I recall that the words "red tape" came up in relation to that.

I'm also very cautious of the one-to-one rule. A prime example that I say as to why I'm cautious about this is that we're about to enact a lot of regulations soon, and that's going around the legalization of marijuana. To be frank, if anything is going to create more bureaucracy and more cumbersomeness, it would be trying to find thousands and thousands of regulations to eliminate just because we're enacting a bunch of new regulations through the legalization of marijuana. Regulations play a key point in helping with public safety and helping with public trust. You know, I came from an industry specifically that dealt with a lot of regulations. Some would refer to them as barriers; I think that they were great opportunities to make sure that we had good safeguards in place.

In the restaurant industry – I'm not sure if the Member for Calgary-Klein is aware that I was a restaurant manager by trade – I dealt with many different governing bodies that were managed by regulations. The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View talked about the AGLC. Not only did they facilitate casino revenues, but they also regulated and managed the way my business operated because we served liquor. We also were overseen by Alberta Health Services and specifically within the food safety portion of it. Then we were also regulated on the business aspect, but that was more on the city scope. However, there were elements of the MGA that we also had to abide by being a business that was managed by the city of Calgary. Then we also had to be regulated by the fire codes that were coming into place. All of these things that regulated us were all around public safety, you know, barring any of the taxation side of regulations that came from owning a property with property tax. Many of them applied to safety, and when you're dealing with them applying to safety, it was important that the ability to enact regulation on the fly ad hoc was available.

We've had many scares in the food service industry in relation to E coli outbreaks or outbreaks of food-borne illnesses or outbreaks of pathogens, where regulations have had to be enacted really quickly by Alberta Health Services to help prevent a lot of people from getting sick. Specifically, I recall there was one for a McDonald's, and it was a hepatitis outbreak. When that occurred, regulations had to be enacted very quickly to ensure that people could be immunized for hepatitis, so it was streamlining all of the

employees and all of the people who had eaten at that place to prevent them from contracting hepatitis. So one of the fears that I would have in having a one-to-one ratio of removing regulations is the fact that, you know, you do have a risk to public health. We shouldn't be overburdening bureaucrats to eliminate this.

However, on the other hand, I do recognize that there have been many regulations that have been cumbersome. I saw that, actually, specifically dealing with the AGLC, and that was specifically in relation to just some of the drink service regulations. It was something that I actually advocated for, from having first-hand knowledge of the act and having first-hand knowledge of how the AGLC operated, to really try to provide some recommendations to the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board, that oversaw the AGLC, and allow the board to independently make some decisions from some feedback that I received. I actually had an opportunity to play a part in an announcement to remove the time limits on happy hour. This was an example of some red tape that was created within the AGLC that basically prevented restaurants from being competitive because they put time limits on when you could define that happy hour could end.

The thing that was always frustrating was that it was 9 p.m. when it ended. I worked at a mall restaurant that had a bar, and 9 p.m. was when the mall closed. We wanted all the employees from the mall to come into our restaurant and receive a benefit or a perk from coming in. We weren't going to allow them to overconsume. They weren't drinking at work. We were only open for an additional hour, hour and a half if the business volume warranted it, so we wanted to have a drink special. We wanted to have maybe a \$3 highball for a mall employee or a mall closing happy hour to bring people in because it was actually a time when we started seeing a decline in business volume, in fact, to a point where we actually considered closing our doors a bit earlier because we weren't getting the guest counts and revenues. It was because of this burden that we had from the AGLC – it prevented us, actually, from being able to try to set a deal or a perk for an individual to come into our restaurant to be a patron of our establishment. I was very thrilled when we removed that regulatory barrier about happy hour.

It was very cumbersome, and it was actually a very – in my opinion, it was useless because there is actually an overarching regulation that exists within the AGLC and liquor service in general, which is: you don't allow people to overconsume. That is actually one of the biggest safeguards that exists within the AGLC. When I was being scrummed by the media, they said, "Well, aren't you worried about people getting drunk because you're doing later happy hours?" My answer was, "Well, no, because there's the golden rule within liquor service: don't allow people to overconsume." It doesn't matter when you're serving, how much you're selling the liquor for at that time; if you follow the golden rule about liquor service, you're not going to run into any troubles, and people are going to be very, very safe in relation to that.

11:00

One of the things that I have a focus on – and I'm sure all members do – is that none of us like overcumbersome red tape. None of us like, you know, work-creating methods. I know that the Member for Calgary-Hays and I sit on the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, just as you do, Madam Speaker, and we've already started seeing the overcumbersome work that many of our social workers have to do when it comes to filing paperwork and the challenge that comes from that. To be frank, as we look to making recommendations and trying to reform that system, we also run into a situation where one to one sometimes isn't even enough, and we actually may have to look at removing more barriers than just one individual one.

I'm always very cautious about being very prescriptive on this because I always view some vantage points where you want to wipe regulation that exists. I also worry that if you create something like this, we're just basically going to put regulations in the queue and wait for us to enact another regulation before we remove one. That's the last thing I ever want to see anyone do, basically, trying to set ourselves up to queue regulations being removed just because we might have future regulations coming into place, which is bound to happen because technology changes, things change. How many regulations have we had to enact because of Uber?

I'm really excited to hear many members speak to this because I want to hear many vantage points before I really decide in what direction I want to vote on this.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of this amendment so that we can take the time needed to address the issue of red tape reduction. I'd like to remind my fellow lawmakers that Bill 207 was designed to be simple. It states that for every regulation created or amended – and this is important – that adds a "burden on a business," one or more regulations need to be eliminated. I hope that they remember the wording of this. It is specific: that adds a "burden on a business." They talk often about the need to be able to bring Albertans back to work, and this is one of the best ways that I can think of for them to be able to do it at no cost to them.

I'd like to start off by quoting the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. She said:

I can't help but beg the question: how is tying up legal counsel in drafting a bill, how is tying up departments in drafting regulations, how is creating new red tape to reduce red tape actually an effective use of resources? Talking about how they want us to bring forward a bill to reduce red tape but that the bill is red tape and therefore would create red tape, to me, just doesn't actually – I can't square that circle.

She then went on to say that this bill is just grandstanding.

I hope to illuminate over the next few minutes for the Deputy Premier how this bill is certainly not grandstanding and how this bill can help everyday Albertans get back to work. Susana Martinez stated: the big corporations have a team of lawyers and accountants to help them; it's the small businesses, the ma-and-pa shops, that get lost in the layers of red tape. Madam Speaker, I think this government needs to remember that point because it's those ma-and-pa businesses that are the lifeblood of a thriving economy.

Germain Belzile wrote a great article on how red tape is affecting our oil and gas sector. It is entitled *Canada's Oil and Gas Sector at Risk?: How Excessive Taxes and Regulations Undermine Our Competitiveness*. In it she states, quote: new regulations in Canada, including things like carbon pricing, coupled with the reduction in the regulatory burden under President Trump in the U.S. have seen investments leaving Canada and flowing to the U.S. instead. Alberta, in particular,

is experiencing a dizzying downturn . . .

The regulatory burden seems to be primarily at fault, since it is estimated that its cost will rise by between 12% and 21% in the near future, and even more after 2023, when the carbon tax will be applied [in the oil and gas] sector.

If I finish my speech right there, members of this Chamber should have heard enough to motivate them to address the red tape issue, but I will continue. Let's get into the meat of this issue, the why of reducing red tape. I think the Minister of Health needs to ask herself: if her government doesn't even know how many regulations they have on the books, then how could she, as she

stated, already be dealing with red tape? If her government hasn't even figured out what Alberta's regulation baseline is, then she has no idea how big the problem is. How does Alberta compare with other provinces? Does the NDP even know?

The Alberta government is the only province in Canada that does not have a red tape reduction strategy. This is the reason why they receive year after year a failing grade of F from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who tracks regulatory burden across Canada.

As an example of a province that did it right, I want to tell you about B.C.'s red tape reduction journey. In 2001 the B.C. government undertook a comprehensive red tape reduction strategy. Their goal was to count all of the regulations, which would allow them to know how big the problem was. The count allowed them to create a baseline, which, in turn, allowed them to monitor their progress by simplifying legislation, regulations, policies, and forms. Within three years they were able to decrease red tape by 36 per cent. Seeing the success in terms of GDP and business growth, they continued streamlining government regulations. At the end of the project they were able to decrease red tape by 43 per cent, Madam Speaker.

British Columbia is clearly a model to follow. Every year the B.C. government undertakes a streamlining initiative, one, to reduce the length of processes and the time waiting for decisions; two, to eliminate duplication; three, to improve access and increase online services; four, to reduce the time and cost for public business in government. British Columbia even has a web portal for citizens to share their ideas in regard to red tape reduction. It even allows citizens to track the status of their ideas. This is an incredible way to tap into society's wealth of knowledge. This is the kind of entrepreneurship that Albertans want to see in their government.

Madam Speaker, British Columbia has created a comparative advantage over Alberta, and it's found in their lower regulatory burden. Alberta needs to catch up to regain that comparative advantage, and by coupling it with lower taxes, we can spur on economic growth in Alberta. The NDP government has been adamant that they intend on growing and diversifying the economy. Well, what better way to grow and diversify than to get government out of the way of business and let businesses do what they do best, create jobs?

Former federal NDP MP Glenn Thibeault said that looking at ways to eliminate unnecessary paperwork and save small companies time and money that they should devote to their business is a good idea. I hope this government will take the advice of their colleague and take action on red tape reduction and send this bill to committee. Making entrepreneurs devote time and resources to meeting regulations without a clear benefit to society is not only counterproductive, but it also acts to kill their spirit. Regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by small and medium-sized businesses, and it's important to remember that small and medium-sized firms constitute the largest segment of job creators in the Alberta economy.

Across Canada the Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that business owners spend over \$30 billion a year on regulatory burden. Madam Speaker, that is money taken out of the economy. If each job was making, on average, \$50,000 a year, that would be 600,000 private-sector jobs lost due to regulatory burden and red tape. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper called outdated regulation, which hobbles business, silent job killers. I've often heard business owners say that sometimes they wonder if regulation is more about keeping public employees working than safety. When job creators start to say that, we need to listen.

Five years ago the federal government launched the red tape reduction action plan. At the end of 2014 the government had

completed the administrative burden baseline, which calculated a total of 129,860 federal requirements and regulations and related forms that can impact Canadian business across different sectors and industries. As the opposition we do not have the resources of the government, but we can estimate. Our research team took a sample of regulations and found that in Alberta there were about 492 statutes as of last count. With an average of 230 regulatory pages per act, they estimate that there were approximately a little over 113,000 pages of regulations. Now, that is a lot of potential barriers, Madam Speaker. I'm not saying that every one is a barrier, but I'm saying that they are potential barriers that we need to take a look at.

Over the years other provinces have enacted red tape reduction task forces in order to reduce the number of regulations holding up small businesses. Alberta made a token effort to address red tape in 2011. A task force found that cumulative effects of regulations are detrimental to small businesses. The task force came back with four recommendations.

- Develop a small business strategy that acknowledges and responds to the needs of Alberta's small businesses.
- Strengthen Alberta government processes for making, amending and reviewing regulations.
- Work with other governments and related bodies to streamline business regulations.
- Encourage a service delivery culture in government that is collaborative, user-focused and ensures greater accountability.

Unfortunately, the report never called for reduction or elimination of regulations, and that, in my opinion, was its fatal flaw.

11:10

Reducing red tape doesn't have to cost the government anything, nor does it require the government to hire more public servants. All the work can be done in-house at the present staffing levels, as seen by the federal and B.C. models. The NDP government has said many times that they want to bring Alberta up to the same level as other provinces on a whole host of matters. Well, here's their chance to do it here. With red tape regulations out of the way, not-for-profits and businesses will be able to spend their time growing, not filling out government paperwork.

Jurisdictions across Canada and the United States have recognized the need to take action on this problem. If I had more time, I would tell you more about the excellent work done by Germain Belzile. I would also tell you about Laura Jones's work with Mercatus research and the red tape reduction work going on down in the United States. But due to time constraints I will just call your attention to these articles and hope that you and especially the Deputy Premier will read them.

I hope that now that I have explained how red tape reduction can support Alberta's business growth, especially small ma-and-pa businesses, all members will enthusiastically send this bill to committee and that we study it properly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I speak to this referral amendment, and I don't share the intrigue that my colleague for Calgary-Shaw does on sending this to committee. I think that when you send something to committee, there should be a very strong, compelling argument to do so, and I think we haven't heard that, to be honest with you. Of course, there are probably instances where, you know, there is room for improvement in terms of paperwork and reducing burdens on businesses, but I think this is better done being brought forward on a case-by-case basis rather than as a blanket policy that could help some businesses and hurt others.

Now, I know that when we introduce these amendments and bills, we all do so believing that it's in the best interests of Albertans and in this case Alberta's businesses. But sometimes, Madam Speaker, our friends on the other side of the Assembly get blinded by their ideology and deafened by the echo chamber that they reside in. Calls to reduce red tape: it's one of those dog-whistle phrases that the UCP base responds to, very well apparently. This bill and the amendment seem to be no different, light on examples and charged with rhetoric.

As you may or may not know, Madam Speaker, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation was once headed by the UCP leader and the former Wildrose critic, now an independent member. Neither seemed to be very good at practising what they preached at the CTF when they turned to politics. That's for sure. I say this simply because I feel that this is going down the same path. Most of the current regulations were put in place by the member's ideological counterparts. But they're now a part of the same group, so where is the problem now? There's a real sense that the opposition wants to have things both ways. They want accountability, but they don't want the paperwork that helps keep accountability.

Now, this government recognizes the importance of strengthening a business's ability to be competitive and have a business environment that encourages start-ups, which is why we cut the small-business tax by a third and why we have increased access to funding for businesses of all kinds. Taking advice from leaders, our jobs plan has unlocked over \$3 billion of capital for small businesses, Madam Speaker, through the ATB, through Alberta Enterprise Corporation, through AIMCo and Alberta Innovates. We're ensuring that Alberta continues to be the best place to launch and grow a business.

In the first quarter of 2017-2018 ATB Financial authorized almost 3,500 loans to small and medium-sized Alberta businesses worth a total of \$875 million. Also, Alberta businesses with incubator support average a 25 per cent growth rate, much higher than the national average. So why are small businesses starting and loans being granted when there's too much red tape? That wouldn't happen if it were true.

I had the pleasure of meeting recently with the Rainforest incubator in Calgary as well as the honour of speaking at the launch of the Queen's University venture network in Calgary. When meeting with these groups and other entrepreneurs in my riding and across Calgary, you know, I hear of lots of things that are challenges, but the words "red tape" have never come up. What they actually want is more capital, and that's exactly what we're doing, more access to capital. It's something that for some reason has eluded previous governments, that access to capital.

You know, it's working, Madam Speaker. Some of Canada's most respected experts are forecasting Alberta's growth to be the highest in the country right now. The RBC pegged GDP growth at 4.2 per cent this year, far higher than the last few years. There were nearly 49,000 more jobs in Alberta this summer. In October the Alberta government helped bring 750 new full- and part-time jobs to the province as Amazon announced a new fulfillment centre near Calgary. I'm just not seeing the evidence supporting what's being said over there, so I'm not going to support this going to committee.

Beyond the lack of perceived need for this bill is the clarity on how the bill would actually work and how we could possibly remove regulations that are specifically there for the protection of both businesses and consumers. I mean, Bill 19, for example, An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers: would that be considered a regulatory burden, red tape? It's just too simplistic, Madam Speaker, and it really lacks specificity, particularly the one-for-one rules, which are just far too simplistic.

Quoting the Canadian Chamber of Commerce report, it says that contrary to popular belief, enforcing a one-for-one rule actually increases bureaucratic inefficiency or lag time because policy-makers must spend time identifying regulations to repeal and replace as well as drafting new policies. Doug Fraser of the *Cape Cod Times* wrote that the obvious argument is that stripping away regulations, be they environmental, financial, or otherwise, exposes the public and the environment to substantial risks; i.e., mitigating public risk through oversight of private activity is the fundamental job of government. These one-for-one rules that are being proposed in this bill and now want to be sent to committee just don't cut it, Madam Speaker.

Again, of course, we, this government, recognize the need to make life better for all Albertans and our businesses, and this government is committed to working with businesses to make it easier for them to create jobs and get Albertans back to work. Alberta businesses have a bigger economic impact than businesses anywhere in the country. Between January and August 2017 over 29,000 new businesses were incorporated in Alberta, a level that is 10 and a half per cent higher than the same period in 2016. We've created tax credits that other provinces have enjoyed for decades. As Albertans we still pay the lowest taxes in Canada, billions less than Saskatchewan. Of course, I will repeat that we cut the small-business tax. With all this investment, Madam Speaker, where is the burden? I'm not seeing it, so I will not support this going to committee.

Also, a couple of other things that we've done to help improve businesses that kind of negate this red tape argument include that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has done many things to ensure that businesses succeed in Alberta. In fact, the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, presented that hon. minister, Minister Bilous, and other trade ministers involved in the Canada free trade agreement with the golden scissors award, which is presented to those involved in helping eradicate red tape on Canada's small businesses. Congratulations, Minister. I would say that that's probably, again, another argument against moving this to committee.

11:20

Also noted by the CFIB – I'm starting to like these guys – is that the Canadian free trade agreement was "a major step towards resolving often conflicting rules and regulations across provinces."

In closing, Madam Speaker, I won't be supporting the amendment or the bill thereafter. You know, we know that regulations have an important role in protecting the health and safety of Alberta's families and workers. Regulations also help ensure that businesses are competing on a level playing field and ensure that clients and customers are getting a fair deal. One-for-one rules are overly simplistic because the number of individual regulations doesn't correlate with the burden imposed by regulations.

With that said, I do find this referral motion – I would not agree with sending this to committee at this time. Beyond that, I will not be supporting the motion nor the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, to support referring it to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. This bill speaks to me because it has a strong single focus in that it will reduce red tape for all Albertans.

As we've heard during previous debates on this bill, red tape includes any regulation, policy, procedure, guideline, and/or order put in place by government that creates unnecessary administrative burden. It affects businesses, not-for-profits, and individuals by adding on paperwork and making them run around simply to satisfy some bureaucrat or politician. The problem with red tape is that it costs time and money, and that's why it needs to go to committee for a thorough review. It does not generate wealth or create private-sector employment. It only results in frustration and takes time away from our businesses and leisure activities.

Bill 207 mandates that for each regulation created that adds administrative burden on a business, one or more regulation be eliminated. The concept is simple: if you create one bureaucratic rule, you also eliminate one or more. It is important to note that we're talking about eliminating administrative burdens that do not compromise the health and safety of Albertans. That's the only caveat.

Why is it so important that this bill go to committee? Because in 2014 the CFIB tallied the cost of red tape at more than \$4.6 billion. That's a bureaucratic mire that hampers Alberta's economy and the equivalent of 15,000 lost jobs. The problem with red tape to our economy is that regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by the small businesses, and small and medium-sized firms constitute the largest segment of the Canadian economy. Quite simply, outdated regulations are latent job killers.

With our economy desperately needing jobs for tens of thousands of unemployed Albertans, one of the best ways to encourage job creation is by reducing the regulatory burden on businesses, but it goes beyond just cutting regulations and administrative burdens, which is another reason it needs to go to committee for review. Bill 207 requires a change in government culture to come up with solutions that don't involve more rules. As soon as we come up with a new rule, the government must monitor and enforce that rule. Even the Minister of Labour agrees. Last month she announced changes to the Alberta immigrant nominee program that make it simpler and streamlined. Those are code words for reduced red tape.

Madam Speaker, these are just some of the reasons why it is important to refer Bill 207 to committee. Reducing regulations and thus the red tape on the books creates a business-friendly environment where entrepreneurs can be productive, creating jobs and wealth.

You know, the member opposite asked for an example. I talked to CAPP when I was there about a month ago, and they told me of an oil company out of Lloydminster that has a large oil reserve that crosses the borders of both provinces. It's the same pool on both sides. They're drilling lots on the Saskatchewan side right now and nothing in Alberta. I asked them why that would be. He said that on the Saskatchewan side it takes about six weeks to get permits to drill; on the Alberta side it's 12 to 18 months. So that's a good example of how reducing regulations and red tape would help to bring businesses and activity to Alberta.

You know, small businesses don't need a handout. They just need government to get out of their way sometimes. With Alberta's economy continuing to flounder, we can really consider this a way of removing burdens and letting it fly on its own. In the end, we all benefit.

I hope that for the good of Alberta all members are ready to support this referral motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for bringing this bill forward for referral to committee, where I think it can receive the attention it deserves.

Madam Speaker, it seems like the NDP seems to like red tape, and I'm a little bit concerned about that. What we're hearing from small businesses is that they want government to support them, but they also would like them to get out of the way and let them create jobs and create wealth in our economy. Maybe some of the members that have spoken across the floor here are not talking to businesses as maybe they don't want to hear what they have to say. Maybe they don't want to hear about carbon tax, they don't want to hear about minimum wage, and most certainly, as we're hearing on this bill, they don't want to hear about the burden of unnecessary regulatory rules and compliance.

Madam Speaker, the regulatory burden negatively impacts things like competitiveness, investment, time sensitivity, business viability, affordability, innovation, and, yes, the result of all those things, jobs. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner mentioned the deregulation initiatives in British Columbia of the past during the Liberal regime there. They actually had a minister of deregulation, when they took power, whose sole job was to address the overburden of regulations. That member, Kevin Falcon: in fact, my sister-in-law worked for him for about four years as his constituency manager. I intend to speak with him to give us greater insights on the opportunity, and I encourage the members from the other side to read that report about the achievement there. This should not be a partisan issue. This should be about doing what's best for Alberta businesses to generate the wealth we need to support the services that Albertans demand and desire.

Reducing the regulatory burden placed on business by the government is an important step in allowing our job creators to flourish, as I've said before. Regulatory compliance costs disproportionately affect small and medium-sized businesses, who do not have teams and departments and staff to address them. These businesses are the economic drivers of the province, and they must be treated with respect. Again, these are struggling small businesses who are trying to keep their businesses alive and thriving under the burden of a tough economy, a carbon tax, and minimum wages. They don't have time to address the overburden of regulation.

Now, this doesn't mean that there should be a free-for-all and that every single regulation in place is unnecessary and should be removed. Far from that. However, there are instances where a regulation has become outdated, no longer reflects the realities of a particular industry, or simply is not producing the outcome which was expected upon its introduction.

During my time working in the home building industry in Calgary, I saw first-hand the detrimental effect that overzealous regulation can have on a particular industry. Oftentimes the company I worked with and many of our competitors would internally develop innovative and creative new options in terms of building form, lot sizes, building style, or neighbourhood design, indeed to take a risk, to break away from the proverbial cookie-cutter community and do something different: create more options, create more choice, and create greater affordability.

Now, anyone who has ever worked in home building or the development industry or the planning sector knows that receiving all the necessary approvals from various levels of government is a long and painstaking process, taking in some cases multiple years and millions of dollars of upfront investment with no guarantee of a return, the vagaries of an economy turning down in the middle of it certainly being one of them.

11:30

These insightful and unorthodox new approaches did not fit into the standard form that the various approval bodies had seen before. They addressed issues of affordability, density, creative design, the not-so-big house movement that we've seen emerge across North

America, and various other risk-taking initiatives with respect to lot size, building form, as I've mentioned before, doing something different, doing something creative, and doing something that's not currently necessarily on the books.

Instead of recognizing industry for attempting to create something new or different and working with them to ensure that proper regulatory compliance was in place, these new ideas often languished, waiting for approvals for months and months beyond the already drawn-out process in place for standard builds. In fact, there was no reward for innovation or creativity. That drives innovation and creativity out of an industry – in this case, the building and development industry – and can be the same in many other sectors.

Time is money, and in an often low-margin industry time will drive innovation out and make it an unprofitable venture. Then it ceases, and the consumer, particularly the first-time homebuyer in this case, loses out on the opportunity to actually take advantage of that creativity and innovation. At the end of the day, businesses have to make money to stay alive, and in fact they create wealth for our society – they're taxed on that; that's provided; that is where the first-stage wealth is created in our society – which then allows us to hire people to deliver the public services that we have. Without that first-stage wealth, Madam Speaker, we have nothing. Having your project sitting through never-ending approval delays means that you aren't making money, and neither are we as a province. We are not generating wealth.

This ends up forcing risk avoidance upon the industry because the companies are afraid that the reward for being innovative and creative will be months and months of delays resulting in reduced or even eliminated profits and greater risk as it stretches out over greater time and economies change. What the consumer ends up with is a lower number of companies who are willing to step outside the box and to try new things, in fact, in many cases deciding not to build the product which they are seeking to offer to the marketplace. As I said, it results in the same old same old cookie-cutter approach being the only way to do business because it's the only way to ensure timely approval of projects and getting to market without undue costs or costly delays, which can kill business. Madam Speaker, innovation often involves risk and risk dollars.

This results in reduced choice for the consumer and builders who do not want to try anything new because basic compliance becomes the end goal to ensure timely processing and approvals. Why try something new when you can just go to the approvals, fill out the form the way it's supposed to be filled out, and never say: "Can we try something different? Can we add something new here? Is there a write-in area here for us to do something a little bit different?"

Madam Speaker, recent legislation has only added to this burden, I dare say, and shame on all of us for having layered that on top of these striving and thriving businesses, striving businesses who are trying to thrive and trying to survive. Recent changes to the MGA and city charters have allowed the province to completely abandon any responsibility for timely and efficient approvals of building projects. These changes have essentially removed any repercussions for municipalities who decide not to make a decision on an application for a subdivision or development application.

Now, oftentimes this has nothing to do with a municipality. These staff may be overworked or inundated with development and subdivision applications, depending on the location. That regulatory burden is not just a regulatory burden borne by those that have to apply for it; it's actually borne by the civil servants and the bureaucrats that have to administer it. However, it also gives these staff the ability to refuse a decision on a project they don't like for arbitrary reasons, even if that project meets all the planning requirements.

Changes like this are exactly the type of thing that industry does not need and we as a province do not need. The province needs to be demonstrating leadership, Madam Speaker, in reducing the regulatory compliance burden on industry, allowing those businesses to survive and then, hopefully, thrive, and in many cases this responsibility is being shirked. As my colleagues have stated previously, these issues extend far beyond the building and development industry.

I would like to once again thank my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner for bringing this bill forward, and I hope that everyone in this Assembly will support these needed changes to ensure that we support the concept and the reality of a functioning and efficient administration and bureaucratic process across all levels of government and leave that partisan ideology behind.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak in favour of Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, and the amendment referring it to committee. This private member's bill has been introduced to reduce regulations that have previously been created and may be outdated and that also add administrative burden on small to medium businesses by mandating that for each regulation one or more regulations be eliminated.

Many other provinces already have implemented red tape reduction panels, task forces, and legislation, with good results. Some provinces, like B.C., mandate that a report be delivered every year on red tape reduction to help update information for better streamlining, to simplify process, and to make it easier and quicker for everyday businesses to deal with government.

Each year government should undertake and streamline initiatives, just as the B.C. government has, to reduce lengthy processing and added time for waiting and for decision-making, perhaps look into eliminating the duplication, and not only reduce the cost to the public but reduce the cost to businesses and to government. The question is: how do we modernize regulations and also maintain net zero increase?

Outdated regulations and overregulation has burdened business with so much red tape that costs to the business are sometimes costed in upward of thousands of dollars and many hours of unnecessary paperwork. Our economy has already been stifled in so many different ways through unnecessary taxes on small businesses and continual increases to the minimum wage that we need to always find ways to help small-business owners in this province succeed.

We need to streamline this process and perhaps begin by eliminating one or more of the outdated regulations that are already existing out there. Each and every time a new regulation is created, outdate an old one. Canadian-owned businesses spend over \$30 billion a year on regulatory compliance. For our businesses to succeed, we need to do everything in our power to help them achieve that.

The federal Conservative government saved Canadian businesses over \$32 million in administrative burden and also saved them 750,000 hours in time spent dealing with red tape each year. How did they do that? In 2012 they launched their red tape reduction action plan, which allowed them to complete the administrative burden baselines on businesses, which calculated a total of 129,860 federal requirements and regulations and related forms that could impact Canadian businesses across various sectors and industries all across this country.

The previous government in 2011 enacted a red tape task force. Their report concluded with four recommendations. One was to develop a small-business strategy that acknowledges and responds

to the needs of Alberta small businesses. As we can see, the needs of all of Alberta's small businesses have not been considered. This needs to change if we want Alberta to flourish.

Secondly, they recommended that we need to strengthen the Alberta government's process for making, amending, and reviewing all regulations. I believe that part of this equation would be dealt with if we enacted this bill.

Thirdly, they said that we need to work with other provinces, governments, and related bodies to streamline business regulations. This would also help to decrease the burden.

Fourthly, encourage a service delivery culture in government that is collaborative, user focused, and ensures greater accountability.

Unfortunately, at the time, the report never called for reduction or elimination of outdated or overlapping regulatory burdens. However, the conclusion was that the cumulative effects of regulations are detrimental to small business. If this was considered detrimental to small businesses, then it's no wonder our small-business industry is struggling under the current tax and wage conditions.

I do believe that as legislators we need to and can do better. This bill is a great way to start eliminating regulatory burden. I hope that all of us in this House will be able to agree on that today. You see, Madam Speaker, these regulations and the compliance costs are carried mostly by small business. A large segment of contributors in the Canadian economy is the small businesses and medium-sized firms and businesses here in Alberta. We need to do more to help them succeed. When they succeed, all Albertans will benefit.

11:40

A previous Prime Minister once said that outdated regulations hobble business and are the silent killer of jobs. This is only one piece of the pie of things that need to be fixed so that our businesses in Alberta can grow and flourish again and again and maintain and retain staff, employees, and growth factors. It is vitally important that government do all they can and work for the citizens of this province. Optimizing and minimizing regulations will only help to create an environment where regulations and policies are easy for everyday businesses to understand. It will create simplicity and a straightforward environment, and not only that; it lowers the regulatory burden on the women and men who work hard in this province every day. This needs to be the focus of our provincial government.

Canada has always been recognized as one of the best places in the world to do business. We had a solid fiscal standing, and when other countries were experiencing rising debt and increasing tax burden, Canada had a competitive tax regime and a robust regulatory system. We need to restore this confidence here in Alberta and in Canada. We need to maintain a competitive edge, increase small and medium businesses, and help them increase their productivity. We need to be constantly looking at innovative ways to improve the conditions for businesses so they can thrive here in Alberta. Businesses need predictability, transparency, and accountability, and that starts here with us in this House. We need to make red tape reduction a priority. We can help start and launch this by supporting this Regulatory Burden Reduction Act. It is vitally important for this province.

Of course, we cannot be overly cautious when it comes to health and safety. We recognize that in health and safety cases it may not be appropriate to strike through regulations.

Albertans are fully aware of the burden of too many regulations. Many businesses and families in my constituency face such burdens in bureaucracy and are burdened by bureaucracy on a daily basis. They've suffered due to tax increases and minimum wage increases. They are all too aware of the many hoops they are

constantly having to jump through. Whether it be time away from their families spent on paperwork or extra financial demands, these regulations imposed on their businesses are taxing on their time and on their efforts and on their personal lives. Having to continually process the same paperwork over and over and over again is frustrating, and it's a lot of money and a lot of time wasted.

We need to demand and require strong evidence of the need before regulating something. All existing regulations that remain should be relevant. Albertans need to have clear and consistent regulations simply and properly communicated. They also should be able to access and locate information on all provincial regulations relatively pain free. We need departments to verify the impacts of the regulations on stakeholders, whether they're developing a new regulation or reviewing an old one. This really needs to be the key when deciding which ones to update and which ones to discard. Albertans are often tired of being bounced around. We need to offer them more stability and some incentive to stay and bring back the Alberta advantage.

This is why I'm going to support the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act, and its amendment. This bill will ensure that each and every regulation created that adds administrative burden on a business, and no more, should be deducted. Across the House let's fully and finally all support something that will benefit business owners in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:44 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Orr
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Pitt
Drysdale	McIver	Stier

12:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Kleinsteinuber	Phillips
Carlier	Larivee	Piquette
Carson	Loyola	Rosendahl
Connolly	Luff	Sabir
Coolahan	Malkinson	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Schreiner
Dach	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Dang	McKitrick	Sigurdson
Drever	McLean	Sucha
Ganley	Miller	Sweet
Hinkley	Miranda	Turner
Hoffman	Nielsen	Westhead
Horne	Payne	Woollard
Kazim		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 40
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:02 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 14, 2017

Day 53

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthood (NDP)
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Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
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Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
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Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (UCP)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (NDP)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (NDP)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (NDP),
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Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)

Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
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Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP),
Leader of the Official Opposition,
Official Opposition House Leader
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk
Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
House Services
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services
Nancy Robert, Research Officer
Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Sandra Jansen	Minister of Infrastructure
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. members, please join me in the singing of *O Canada*, our national anthem, led by Mr. Robert Clark, in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly your daughter Nicoelle Wanner; her husband, Tyler Wiens; and their three children – Zachary, Marinn, and Gibson – who are visiting us today from Medicine Hat. Zachary Wanner Wiens is 11 years old and in grade 5 at l'école St. Thomas Aquin. Zachary enjoys playing hockey, is an avid follower of all sports, and is a big fan of the Beatles. Me, too. Marinn Wanner Wiens is nine years old and in grade 3 at l'école St. Thomas Aquin. Marinn is an avid follower of fashion, has a talent for sewing, and enjoys swimming. Gibson Cole Wanner Wiens is five years old and in kindergarten. Gibson's favourite pastimes include breakdancing and building with Lego. He recently lost his first tooth. Grandpa, you've got to come through on that one. Tyler Wiens works as an agricultural lender for Farm Credit Canada. He coaches kids' baseball and hockey and plays rec hockey. Nicoelle Wanner is a family physician with an interest in mental health advocacy, pediatrics, and lifestyle. The family and your wife, Mrs. Joan Emard-Wanner, are all seated in your gallery. I would ask them now to all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you. Nice to have you here.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a local, passionate United Conservative Party supporter and director of the interim joint board, Miss Natalie Pon. Some of you may recognize Natalie. She was the driver for updating the Conservative Party of Canada's policy declaration to be LGBTQ-plus inclusive and cospearheaded the change for the federal Conservatives to recognize marriage equality. I would ask Natalie to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly six volunteers from Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Their efforts at public education and advocacy have saved lives and reduced injuries from impaired driving. They are Brenda Johnson, chair of the National Board of Directors; Denise Dubyk; Amanda Sawatzky; Susan Semotiuk; Gillian Phillips; and Darlene Urquhart. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Mason: As I said, Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions today.

The Speaker: I'm sorry.

Mr. Mason: I have two guests from the Alberta Motor Transport Association. The AMTA represents all sectors of the highway transportation industry. They are valuable partners in promoting high standards of safety and compliance for safety of the public in the transportation industry. It's my pleasure to introduce Dan Duckering, the past chair of the AMTA board of directors, and Chris Nash, the vice-chair. I would ask them to also please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Now Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Executive Director Donna Oberik and members of the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta. The association provides a voice for injured workers and works tirelessly representing the needs and interests of injured workers. I would now ask all my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it's my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a family from the great district of Whitecourt-St. Anne. Two weeks ago I was pleased to announce on behalf of the hon. Brian Mason, Minister of Transportation, much-needed safety improvements, including traffic lights, better lighting, improved highway signage, and widened turn lanes, at the intersection of highways 43 and 22. The Walsh family of Mayerthorpe lost their loving father, Patrick, to an accident that took place at that dangerous intersection in 2013. They have been advocating for improved safety at that intersection, and our government took action. I would like to ask Ann Walsh, her daughter Kate, and son Mike Walsh to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kristine Ritchie. Kristine is a bachelor of social work student from the University of Calgary, central and northern Alberta region, the faculty that I used to be an instructor of just before I was elected, and she is currently doing her field placement in my office. She's a certified crisis worker at the Canadian Mental Health Association and is a passionate advocate for helping vulnerable Albertans. She's also one of my constituents,

so I'm very pleased about that, too. I'd ask Kristine to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce three long-time residents of the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. These three tenacious women are founding members and directors of the Old Glenora Conservation Association. The association is committed to maintaining the integrity of the community by keeping its history of over 100 years alive and its built heritage intact for the benefit of present and future generations. I'd invite Margaret Robinson, Barbara Finlay, and Lynn Odynski, seated in the members' gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other introductions today?

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jeff Nesbitt of the Canadian Men's Health Foundation and Michael Solberg of Global Public Affairs. Jeff is in town holding meetings to talk about the importance of men leading healthier lives. I look forward to speaking with both of them this afternoon. I'd ask them both to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

1:40

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my good friend Arundee Singh Sandhu, a small-business owner in southeast Edmonton, a long-time PC Party volunteer who campaigned for Conservative MLAs in Alberta, believe me, for almost 20 years – I'm sure that he must have started when he was two or three – past PC Youth and PC Alberta executive, and my friend. I have literally known him since he was almost this height. I'll ask him to rise and get the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Bullying Awareness Week

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in honour of Bullying Awareness Week. I spent this morning with a wonderful and engaged group of grade 6 students at Richard Secord school. I was fortunate to be able to listen in as they talked about what they think bullying is and how we can work together to make schools safer and more inclusive.

No parent wants to see their child witness or experience bullying, but when I asked how many students had witnessed bullying and how many know what to do to stop it, most of them raised their hands. It was heartbreaking to see so many young people who have seen or experienced bullying first-hand, but it was also inspiring to know that young people are aware and are working together to stand up to bullies.

As we all know, bullying can take place anywhere: in schools, at work, or at home. Bullying hurts everyone. It makes people feel isolated and alone and can have a significant and lasting impact on someone's life. So this week and indeed all year round we are

asking Albertans to stand up for those who are bullied and to watch out for each other to ensure that our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities are safe and healthy.

Our government is taking action by providing resources to enable Albertans to help someone else and support those who are suffering. Our family and community safety program has supported healthy relationships and antibullying projects across this province. Our \$25 million increase to family and community support services programs is helping build strong and resilient communities, and our 24-hour bullying helpline is available to those who need someone to talk to. We also have resources available across our partnering ministries and through the Alberta Human Rights Commission, and we are working with our community partners to promote respect and inclusion and to help everyone in our communities know what they can do.

We must do all we can to ensure that all Albertans but especially those who are at risk of greater marginalization and discrimination have safe, caring, and welcoming environments. We know that bullying can come in many different forms. When I listened to students today, it reaffirmed my belief about why GSAs are so important. Our young people must feel proud of who they are, and they deserve a safe and respectful environment to be who they are. Our fight to ensure that students can form or join a GSA without fear of retribution from peers, teachers, or parents is about reassuring them that they are free to be themselves on their own terms and in their own time.

We know that there is much more work to be done to realize our vision of a bully-free Alberta, an Alberta where everyone feels safe and welcome in their schools, communities, and workplaces. This week is an important reminder that it takes all of us to build safe and healthy communities. For those of us here in the Legislature, it means setting an example of what it means to differ in opinions and beliefs but to do so in a respectful manner. We are all no strangers to lively debate, but I call on all of us to ensure that we speak to each other in a way that sets an example for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very grateful to rise and speak about Bullying Awareness Week. I applaud the minister of human services for having events throughout the year to promote awareness about bullying. Our schools and workplaces need to be healthy and respectful places for all to allow us to grow. How can our children learn to trust and build healthy relationships if bullies break those trusts? It is critical to have healthy and respectful relationships. All of us and all of our children deserve that.

Bullying causes poor mental health outcomes, which can manifest into physical health issues. This causes school and workplace productivity issues, absenteeism, a drain on the health care system, and for matters that are one hundred per cent preventable.

This year's stand up is a call to stand up against bullying. If you are bullied, resources are available at Alberta human services, and the number for that is 1.888.456.2323. It is open 24/7. There is also an online chat at the human services website for children and teens facing bullying. That number: 1.800.668.6868. No one – no one – should have to go to work or school and face bullying.

In the Legislature we can disagree without being disagreeable. Bullying, threats, and intimidation do not work in the Legislature, and they should not work in schools or in the workplace. Let us all stand up and stop it now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was not informed that others wanted to respond today, but I will still ask for unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader of the Alberta Party to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise this afternoon to speak in honour of Bullying Awareness Week, an initiative that aspires to promote awareness about bullying. Across the province many young people are intimidated and ostracized at school and in their communities. On the playground, after school, in the hallways, and in the home bullying is endemic to our society and can cause depression and anxiety, sadness, and loneliness. We all can do more to build resilience to bullying and to make sure that no young person experiences the hardship and isolation that can come from it.

Something many kids today have to deal with is online bullying. The statistics and the numbers are concerning, with 2 in 5 parents reporting that their child has been involved in a cyberbullying incident. Social media is becoming an increasing presence in our lives and in the lives of our young people. Bullying Awareness Week should not only be about physical or verbal intimidation but digital aggression as well. If we want to make a real difference in ending bullying, we can call bullies on their behaviour, support those who've been bullied, and model what healthy relationships can look like. I ask all members of this House to be aware of all forms of bullying and to take action when you can.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday that the Nebraska Public Service Commission will decide on Monday whether to approve the proposed route for the Keystone XL pipeline. Sadly, we know that many of the NDP's friends, including current NDP caucus members, have been diligently working for years to kill off Keystone XL, working to kill off any and all other export opportunities for Alberta's oil. Can the Premier inform this House what the NDP government has done to argue the merits of Keystone XL before the Nebraska regulatory body?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government is glad to see progress on the Keystone XL pipeline project, which we know will help create jobs here in Alberta by allowing for our product to be shipped with less expense. At the same time, what we do all have to remember is that the U.S., while our biggest customer, has now also become our biggest competitor. What we need to do in Alberta is focus on getting our product to tidewater. That's a fundamentally important thing, and that's why our government continues to work so hard on achieving that outcome.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: We know that the NDP's current support for Keystone XL is half hearted at best. In fact, when in opposition, the Premier herself directly stated in regard to Keystone XL, and I quote: we're

against it. Perhaps the NDP have warmed to Keystone XL slightly since their friend Justin Trudeau has sunk two other major pipeline projects. Thankfully, Keystone XL received NEB approval in 2010 under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, well before Justin Trudeau had a chance to meddle in the process. Can the Premier tell us what, if anything, the NDP government is doing to ensure the success of Keystone XL?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, our government is absolutely focused on diversifying the markets for our important product and, particularly, getting our product to tidewater, which is why we continue to work very hard on ensuring that the pipeline, which has been approved as a result of our advocacy, actually gets built. So we will be travelling across the country to talk about that. We will be advocating at every possible level in terms of the adjudicative procedure, where we actually have standing, unlike in the States, where we don't actually have standing. We will continue to work very hard because we know that, at the end of the day, getting that pipeline built is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: We're against it: that's a direct quote from the NDP Premier of Alberta. On this side of the House we are in favour of pipelines in every possible direction.

Given that the same forces that successfully managed to kill Northern Gateway and Energy East now have Trans Mountain in their crosshairs and given that we have a Prime Minister that seemingly won't lift a finger to actually advocate for Trans Mountain, Premier, are you leaving this issue of critical importance to our province in the hands of Justin Trudeau, who has publicly mused about phasing out Alberta's oil sands? Do you actually trust Justin Trudeau with this process? I can tell you that Albertans don't.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, not only has our minister of environment and our minister of economic development and myself been down to the States to talk about the importance of enhancing energy trade and the pipelines associated with that over the course of the last several months, but in the areas over which we have control and agency, which is in Canada, we continue to work very hard and to represent all Albertans' interests and ultimately all Canadians' interests on the need to get the Trans Mountain pipeline built, and we'll be successful.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Federal Tax and Energy Policies

Mr. Nixon: We've been pushing this government for some time to actually stand up to the Trudeau Liberal attacks on Alberta, and on Friday I was happy to see that the government kind of, sort of took our advice. The Finance minister criticized Ottawa's revenue-sharing plan on the upcoming cannabis tax, and we agree. The provinces, which bear the majority of the costs, do deserve more than 50 per cent of the revenue, but why is it that the NDP are only willing to criticize Ottawa when it involves the state's bank account, not when it hits the pocketbooks of Albertans? When will the NDP stand up to their friend Justin Trudeau's attack on small businesses and his 67 per cent increase on the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what our government will do is work with the federal government, which has made a decision to take climate

change seriously on behalf of today's generations and generations and generations to come. We will work with them on matters of increasing renewable energy, on investing in green infrastructure, and on moving forward on things that will reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions because that is the way of the future. Pretending that the problem doesn't exist is a strategy of the past, and it is one that Albertans have abandoned.

Mr. Nixon: For months we urged the government to vocally object to the Trudeau Liberals' attack on small businesses. The NDP's response: they told Albertans to go weigh in on Liberal sham consultations. This NDP government stayed in hiding while people like Premier Brad Wall, Jason Kenney, the Official Opposition of Alberta, and others have been speaking out about this important issue. Now that the NDP, like the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, has found some courage to stand up to Ottawa, will they vocally denounce the Trudeau Liberals' attacks on small business?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Rather than relitigating Mr. Kenney's loss to the Trudeau Liberals, what our government will do is stand up for Alberta small business. That is why we cut the small-business tax by a third. That is why we introduced two new tax credits. That's why we're restoring training programs for entrepreneurs. That's why we're working to expand small businesses into new markets. That's why we are the fastest growing economy in the country, and we will continue to be.

Mr. Nixon: The Trudeau Liberals meddle in the pipeline approval process and kill a pipeline critical to Alberta. They invade Alberta's constitutionally guaranteed right to control our resources, and the NDP barely make a noise, not even a peep. But on cannabis taxes the Finance minister is sent out to hold an emergency press conference. When will the NDP respond to the Trudeau Liberals' attacks on everyday Albertans with the same enthusiasm they use to defend their own bank accounts? If the NDP is now in the business of standing up to Ottawa, will they now vocally denounce the NEB changes, including the constitutional intrusion on upstream emissions?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite ought to know, in fact, our government has made our position with respect to the changes on the NEB very clear on behalf of the energy industry here in Alberta. But, you know, all that the members opposite want to do is fight with Ottawa. It's as if they see this Legislature as the personal plaything of their new leader... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Ms Notley: ... who's trying to work out his issues from the last federal election. You know what? Our job is actually to govern and to work for and with Albertans to make Albertans' lives better, and that's what we will ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Four more days, and then we can all have a break.

The third main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Provincial Response to Opioid Trafficking and Use

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all have been working so hard to find ways to stem the tide of fentanyl deaths. My pill press law, more addictions counselling, money to help police uncover drug labs: the list of recommendations goes on. But this past weekend

the associate minister responsible for the fentanyl file opened the door to – wait for it – decriminalizing all illicit drugs. This is a grossly irresponsible message. Will the associate minister, fully and without excuses or equivocation, withdraw her comments?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no plans to decriminalize possession of any drugs at this time. The designation of drugs as ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Ms Payne: ... legal or illegal is a federal responsibility. Our focus is on addressing the opioid crisis, protecting public safety, and ensuring adequate treatment spaces are available to Albertans.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, this is outrageous. At a time when Albertans are dying at the hands of illicit narcotics, the government is sending a message that perhaps those very narcotics shouldn't be illegal. What message does that send to the drug dealers pushing this poison? Will the Premier clearly denounce her own minister's irresponsible and dangerous musings?

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, our focus is on addressing the opioid crisis. In this House we've spoken repeatedly about how this is a public health emergency unlike any that we've ever seen before, and it requires a response that's different than the ones we've seen before. That is why our government is focusing on addressing the harms of opioid use and providing treatment spaces. Substance use is a medical condition that requires a health care response, unlike the war on drugs, that has failed, that this side keeps pushing.

Mr. Ellis: Heroin, crystal meth, fentanyl, crack cocaine: I could go on and on. As a police officer I've seen first-hand the human devastation that these hard drugs cause. Now is not the time to speculate about making these poisons legal. I ask again. Will the NDP firmly and without hesitation denounce speculation about decriminalizing hard narcotics?

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, I will say it again. There are no plans to decriminalize possession of other drugs at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. [interjections] Order.

2:00 Auditor General Report on Health Care

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the Auditor General released a comprehensive look into Alberta's health care system. Instead of making new recommendations, he simply took the 41 recommendations he'd already made and summarized them. His conclusion: Alberta's \$21 billion health care system is an orchestra without a conductor, which led to poor co-ordination, ineffective information sharing, and fragmented hospital-focused care. To the Premier: what specific actions have you taken to break down barriers in our health care system and build a preventative, integrated model of care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm incredibly proud of the work that we've done with health care professionals. There certainly have been musings about transformation in the past, but they were done in a way that was doing something to the

profession rather than with the profession. What we've been able to do very effectively is bring about a new government framework with primary care networks. That is something I'm incredibly proud of. Physicians stepped up to the table with us as well as other members of the primary care network team, and we're being able to move forward in a way that's collaborative, working to make sure that the patient health home is the model we all have moving forward.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General found that much of the care Albertans currently receive is one-off and focused on acute care either in a doctor's office or in a hospital, but there is a big gap when it comes to managing chronic conditions, including mental health, over the long term. Instead of measuring quality, the system focuses on funding parameters, on union negotiations, and it puts bureaucratic rules ahead of patient needs. Equally troubling is his comment that politics continue to play a big role in our system. Again to the Premier: what specific, measurable actions are you taking to address these problems once and for all?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad to have an opportunity to respond. I took the time to sit down with the Auditor General as well and talk through his report and his recommendations, and he did have a lot to say about inflammatory opposition questions that certainly cause great disruption to the system. I hope they also took time to sit down and talk to him about that same evolution of the health care system. I'm incredibly proud of the fact that for the first time in probably since AHS was created, we are moving forward in a collaborative way with the health care providers, with primary care networks, with the government to ensure that we have the right care in the right place. A big part of that is the evolution of the PCN model and working with Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Clark: Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General called this government's actions piecemeal at best. You'd think that after two and a half years they would at least have started on a plan. And speaking of plans, the AG said that the government should urgently address the overlapping roles of AHS and Alberta Health. Simply put, Alberta Health should hand over a lot of responsibility, but I suspect this ties into his comment about politics. Again to the Premier: when will we finally see a plan to implement the Auditor General's recommendations? And when we do, will it include clear, measurable goals so Albertans can track your progress?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very happy to meet with the Auditor General. Again, this specific report doesn't actually have recommendations in it. It has a number of different findings, and we're happy to move forward in collaboration with the Auditor General to do that while making public health care publicly accessible to all Albertans.

We know that the opposition wants to privatize health care. We believe health care should be based on medical need, not based on the size of your wallet. We know that Jason Kenney and the opposition plan to give his wealthy donors priority access to health care, Mr. Speaker. That's been made clear. We are building new hospitals, protecting Albertans throughout this province. I know who I trust with public health care, and it sure isn't the guys opposite.

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

Consumer Protection

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have some of the highest consumer spending of any province in Canada. Consumer spending across the province rose by 8 per cent over the last year, and Albertans are now spending more than they did before the drop in oil prices. I was personally involved in the public consultation process to provide better protections to consumers. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how is the government working to make sure that Albertans are treated fairly, whether they spend their hard-earned dollars at the car dealership, the grocery store, or a local small business?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We're working to make life better by protecting families from scams, misleading information, unfair tactics, aggressive sales pitches, and price gouging. We're taking action to help businesses compete on a level playing field. This summer we heard from Albertans through an online survey and open houses on ways that we can create a level playing field for both buyers and sellers. That creates consumer confidence, and it's good for business.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the government hearing from its consultations with the public and stakeholders regarding consumer protection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We consulted with over 3,000 people this summer about consumer protection. So far the survey is very clear on two aspects. Albertans want strong consumer protections, as the paradise papers, for example, showed, and many fans, for example, feel that buying a concert ticket is a rigged game. Albertans want confidence that their consumer rights are protected. The details about the actual changes will come after we analyze all of the feedback received through the survey, open houses as well as the meetings that we had with business and community groups. The priority that we have will be ensuring that Albertans realize the changes that reflect their desire for strong protections and confidence that their consumer rights are respected.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, to the same minister: what is the government doing to consult with businesses on the issue of consumer protection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections]
Order.

An Hon. Member: Incoming. Incoming.

An Hon. Member: Tough one.

The Speaker: Order.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is about finding good solutions to getting bad actors out of the way that harm good businesses. Strong consumer laws are good for businesses. We know the majority of businesses are honest and that with strong rules that protect buyers, shoppers will be more confident doing business with them. We want a marketplace that's good for buyers and sellers, and that's why we've been consulting with a variety of

stakeholders from the business community to ensure that their perspective is reflected. This includes over 30 stakeholder meetings that we've had, including two round-tables held directly with members of the Edmonton and Calgary chambers of commerce.

Resources for LGBTQ2S Students and Their Parents

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the introduction of Bill 24 is an important step in affirming the privacy rights of children in GSAs. We know that GSAs promote the mental health and well-being of our LGBTQ2S students. One thing is being missed, and that is the involvement of supportive parents, that also contribute to the health and well-being of our LGBTQ2S students. Parents are the most important partners in discussing and promoting safe-sex practices, building respectful relationships with a partner, and setting reasonable boundaries for underage children. To the Premier: in situations where the student consents and where it won't compromise the privacy of other students, what's being done to bring supportive parents into the conversation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the very important question. As a former public school board trustee, I definitely spent a great deal of time engaging with students, and this was one topic that they frequently brought up. One of the things they talked about is that when you have time with your peers to talk about your coming-out experience, it can empower other kids on how to have those conversations with their parents. There certainly is a great deal of conversation to empower youth themselves to be able to be strong advocates and welcome their parents to a loving conversation which includes how they can live their lives as they are in a safe way.

Mr. Fraser: Given that in many cases LGBTQ students don't want their parents notified, not because there's any danger or lack of acceptance but simply that it can be a daunting conversation to have with their family, and given that many LGBTQ students may be negatively affected by wanting to tell their parents but don't know how and given that these students may come to their GSAs for advice on this issue, to the Premier: what resources are being made available to GSAs to support students that want to tell their family about their sexuality but aren't sure how?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member, again, for the important question. There are definitely support groups out there for GSAs and GSA facilitators. I know that when I was with Edmonton public, there was one staff identified at the school as a safe contact. They received professional development training. The ATA has extensive supports for teachers on how to run these organizations as well or support the youth in running these organizations, rather. Definitely, empowering youth to be confident in speaking and in engaging in these important conversations with the people who love them is a big part of what GSAs provide support on.

Mr. Fraser: Given that to a parent the health, safety, and well-being of their child is the most important thing in the world and given that in cases where their child is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others, the parent needs to be informed and given that one concern that I've heard from parents is that the increased privacy protection in Bill 24 will interfere with the school's ability to communicate with them in crisis situations, to

the same minister: can you assure this House that nothing in this legislation will interfere with the ability of schools to notify parents when their child is in immediate danger or crisis?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. Let me be definitively clear. If a child is at risk of self-harm or harm from another, there is a legal responsibility for individuals to be informed, that includes the parents if it's a self-harm concern. Teachers are well aware of their teaching quality standard requirements in that regard, and they will continue to provide their diligence in terms of acting in the role of a parent and providing information to the parent if their child is ever at risk.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is constantly under investigation for its rule breaking and secretive ways. Whether it's offering gift cards to delete e-mails or escalating delays for FOIP requests, this secretive government has a crisis of its own making. What's needed is political leadership to clean up this mess. Will the Premier agree that political staff interfering with access to information requests is not only unethical but is illegal?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government very much values the values of transparency, honesty, and protection of the public. We are confident that our actions are very much in line with the law. The results that the member across the way talks about – it's important that we put this in context. The e-mails he's referring to amount to less than .1 per cent of all GOA e-mails. It's important that we delete transitory documents so that they don't clog up the system and so that we have good, accurate accounting of documentation.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that today the UCP Official Opposition unearthed a FOIP document showing that this government is breaking the law and given that we released e-mails that show that one day before a freedom of information request was due to be released to the opposition, the Premier's former chief of staff put a full stop to the release and directly interfered and given that this was against all of the advice of the experts in the department, why, Premier, are your staff politically interfering with access to information requests? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. minister.

An Hon. Member: It's still illegal.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm not sure exactly who said that it was illegal. That's not the kind of word we want to hear in this House. Allegations such as that are very, very serious.

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, my comments were going to be along the same line. I would encourage the member opposite that if he feels a particular way, he ought to bring up his issues with the correct channels.

But at this time I will reiterate, certainly, that we are confident our actions are in line with the law, Mr. Speaker. Again, we take access to information very seriously. Certainly, there is more work to do, but we have improved turnaround times for FOIP requests by hiring more staff. We're also proactively sharing more information than the government of Alberta ever has.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's former chief of staff directly interfered with an access to information request from the Official Opposition, will the Premier denounce this sort of behaviour, or is this the type of unethical law-breaking behaviour we can expect from this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm taking it that the member opposite would like to apply for the position of the OIPC, given that he feels fit to determine matters of interest. They would know best what constitutes ethical and unethical disclosure, given that the leader of their party certainly does not see fit to disclose his campaign contributions or be particularly open with the public after having promised to do exactly that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I was wrong. We only have three days left, not four.

Coal Community Transition Funding

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, this government has finally gotten around to releasing long overdue plans to help Albertans currently working in thermal coal mines and coal-fired power plants after a summer where mayors of the affected towns referred to the government's communications with them as being pathetic and long on words, short on action. But two years late and a million short is better than never, I guess. To the minister of economic development. Royalty collection from coal last year alone was \$21 million. Do you think that your \$40 million Band-Aid is adequate compensation for the economic devastation your climate leadership plan has wrought on the affected towns?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, you know, coal workers have had a proud history in helping to power our prosperous and industrious province. We want to tell all coal workers: we're there for you. We're supporting workers by establishing a \$40 million coal workforce transition fund to provide income support for impacted workers. We're supporting them with tuition vouchers, third-party retraining, and a variety of professional certification courses, and we're supporting their communities. We have those communities' backs. We stand up for them and their workers.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that today almost 2,000 people work in coal-generated power and associated mining operations across Alberta and given that towns such as Wabamun, Hanna, and Forestburg rely on the economic activity generated by these high-paying jobs and will struggle to survive without this industry and its workers and given serious concerns that there will be no local jobs to replace good, mortgage-paying jobs in the coal industry, again to the minister: what specific industries with similar pay and benefits do you expect these workers in these affected towns to transition into, or do they all go on to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have the backs of these coal workers and these coal communities, who will get help from retraining and income supports. I must say that the Harper-Kenney governments did absolutely nothing for coal workers when Stephen Harper decided to phase out coal. We are supporting the communities through the transition with the coal community transition fund. Intake for that fund is open now and will run until November 30, 2017. We encourage all communities impacted to apply, and we will have people on the ground, talking to these workers directly, helping them.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gotfried: I think that's on their backs, Mr. Speaker.

Given that over the next 13 years more than half the people employed in thermal coal will lose their jobs and, again, given that the Finance Minister is constantly saying that the government will not balance the budget by putting more people out of work unless they work in coal, I guess, and given that your government has spent over \$9 million advertising your climate leadership plan, again to the minister. Almost \$10 million to advertise and only \$40 million to help: how many more Albertans could have been helped in their stressful transition away from thermal coal if you hadn't wasted all that money advertising your unpopular, unmeasurable plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are helping workers with tuition vouchers, with professional certification, with retraining. A lot of people have said positive things about this new plan. The mayor of Hanna, Chris Warwick, has said that these supports will go a long way for workers in the community. The Coal Association of Canada has said, "The release of the panel's recommendations and the announcement of the Coal Workforce Transition Fund is a step in the right direction." We have their backs, and we will be there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Methane Emission Reduction

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our federal and provincial governments are committed to reducing methane emissions. Tim McMillan, president of CAPP, is quoted as saying, "We have a solution that positions Alberta as a global leader on methane emissions reductions, while maintaining a strong economy at home." This solution would help us remain competitive and retain jobs. To the Minister of Energy: have you listened to the concerns of industry, or are you taking into account the fact that Alberta already has world-class regulations on methane reduction?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're proud that we have been working alongside industry on a made-in-Alberta plan to reduce methane emissions by 45 per cent. We'll soon be announcing the next steps in a balanced plan that's going to protect jobs while also reducing pollution. We know what's at stake, Mr. Speaker, including jobs and the health of our province, and we want to leave behind a province that's better for our children and our grandchildren.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans have seen that this government's idea of consultation is to act first and tell

later and given that municipalities in northeastern Alberta such as in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake have already expressed disappointment that they were not consulted by the federal government prior to the regulation changes, to the Minister: will you promise here today to protect 7,000 good-paying Alberta-wide jobs by not forcing the methane reduction plan on our oil sands without proper consultation?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the 45 per cent reduction target off 2013 levels came about as a result of consultation, in particular with industry who came to us with a plan saying that we can do better in Alberta, that we've got the know-how, we've got the workforce, we've got the clean tech capability just waiting on the sidelines. One of the things we did was fund \$40 million worth of the Emissions Reduction Alberta clean tech call. We developed an offset protocol to incent that early action. We are committed to solving the problems of the future and putting Albertans to work.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you've just stated you're not going to protect 7,000 jobs and given that new regulations may be detrimental to the economic growth of the Bonnyville-Lloydminster region and given that this area of the province cannot afford another round of mass layoffs that are anticipated to affect at least a thousand local workers in my constituency due to this methane reduction plan, to the minister: what assurances can you give the worried oil and gas workers in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake that this government will work with industry to save local jobs in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we're working with industry for a made-in-Alberta plan. We do not want a plan forced on us by Ottawa, so we're working very hard with industry for this. We're taking steps to reduce pollution and tackle climate change and preserve jobs. We are very proud of the collaboration we've had. When these regulations are introduced, there will be a period of time for anybody in Alberta to reflect back on it and give us the feedback. This is about Alberta jobs, this is about our energy industry, and it's about standing up for Alberta.

Postsecondary Institution Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, there's an infrastructure deficit on Alberta's college, university, and technical school campuses. As a student I know the value of having a quality space for all aspects of my education. Students simply learn better when they have a great lecture hall, a world-class library, and even somewhere to socialize with their peers. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that there are over 264,000 full-time and part-time students in Alberta, how is this government working to reduce the infrastructure deficit on campuses to give students the world-class facilities that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We know that students learn best in modern learning environments. That's why our government has invested more than a billion dollars over four years in improving

infrastructure on campuses all across the province, including projects like the Northern Lakes campus expansion in High Prairie and the University of Calgary's MacKimmie complex redevelopment. Our government is supporting the important campus infrastructure projects that were left by the wayside under the previous government. Alberta students deserve better than the huge infrastructure deficit that was left by the Conservatives, and I'm happy to say that they are getting better from our government.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Building a multilevel library or lecture hall is surely no easy feat. It involves architects, engineers, skilled trades workers, and many others to build something like MacEwan University's recently opened Allard Hall. To the same minister: how many good-paying jobs is this government supporting by investing in campus infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government knows that Alberta is home to the most talented workforce in the country, and we're proud to support good-paying jobs all across the province. Recent infrastructure projects on campuses have created thousands of good-paying construction jobs and will provide additional hundreds of ongoing jobs at campuses. Our government is going to continue to make needed investments in campus infrastructure because it's the right thing to do for our students, it's the right thing to do for our higher education system, and it's the right thing to do for the province of Alberta. Our government's plan is working, and it's creating good jobs. Jason Kenney's plan . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that a 20 per cent cut to Alberta's postsecondary institutions would be nothing short of devastating. Given the number of projects and significant investment in campus infrastructure by this government can the minister offer examples of projects that might not be built if his ministry had to cut its budget by 20 per cent?

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to. I've been hearing concerns from students all across the province about Jason Kenney's proposed reckless and extreme cuts on campuses. Students remember the last round of Conservative cuts that hit higher education, and they don't want to see that again. A 20 per cent cut not only would see all of the infrastructure projects grind to a halt but would see campuses with leaking roofs and crumbling buildings stay that way. It would mean Northern Lakes College doesn't get its new campus and that the U of A's Dentistry/Pharmacy building would stay in disrepair. Our government is not going to let that happen. We're going to keep making life better.

Supportive Living Facility Food Preparation

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, just like back in 2012 here we are five years later, and AHS is back to its old tricks again, where it is reported that in a supportive living facility in Claresholm residents receive little to no fresh food. Instead, despite an order by the Health minister back in 2012 the administration there has returned to substituting low-quality frozen then reheated preprocessed substandard food products. To the Health minister: why has AHS returned to this appalling practice of not supplying and preparing fresh food to the residents of this supportive living facility?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I'd be happy to follow up with regard to this very specific facility. But I'll tell you that's why I was so proud to bring forward legislation earlier this month that would make sure that we have resident family councils, and that would apply to all of these facilities. I really wish that members opposite would take time to reflect on what's being said around the importance of honouring our seniors and others who are living in care facilities instead of arguing with me while I'm answering their question and advocating for 20 per cent cuts. You want to think about what that would do to the people living in these facilities.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that in 2012 the CBC and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees did a video documentary on this terrible situation, titled *Tough to Swallow*, that provided clear evidence of this disgusting practice and given that the minister responded and gave an order to discontinue the practice of preparing meals off site and reheating and to bring back on-site food preparation, to the Health minister: what order was given by your office that reversed that decision of 2012 and caused the return of this appalling practice of not serving fresh food?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. No such order was issued by my office under my time in office. I can't say what happened when their dance partners were also in government between 2012 and May 2015, but under our government we're working to protect and strengthen long-term care and other types of supportive living. That's why we brought forward legislation that will ensure that we have resident and family councils. That's why we've protected their funding instead of advocating for deep, brutal cuts like the members opposite. We're working with and for the people who are in these care facilities.

Mr. Stier: Given that these facilities are home to the people who live there and that they deserve to enjoy fresh, nutritious food that looks and tastes home cooked and that satisfies cultural differences and given that the requirement to serve fresh food is reportedly not being followed by the administration in Claresholm and possibly in other similar facilities, will the minister order today to immediately require that these types of facilities discontinue the practice of preparing meals elsewhere and reheating them and instead serve fresh, nutritious food prepared on-site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Let me create an opportunity here to invite the member to meet with me and discuss this matter in more detail. I certainly welcome any information he has. But I've learned not to take these kinds of accusations at face value in the House because regularly when members opposite say these kinds of things, they're proven to not be founded. So I welcome the member to sit down with me, have a conversation, and we'll certainly look into it. But I have to say it's important that we honour the staff and the residents in these facilities, protect their funding, and stop Jason Kenney's abusive cuts, that would certainly make life far worse.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

2:30 Gravel Mining in Rocky View County

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard numerous concerns from my constituents regarding a growing number of concentrated gravel pits in the Rocky View county in the Bearspaw area. Residents are struggling with constant noise, health concerns, and increasingly overloaded roads as gravel trucks add to the already congested highways, which is causing an increasing number of accidents. In speaking with constituents and my municipal officials, they say that their concerns have fallen on deaf ears when it comes to this government. Can the Minister of Infrastructure please provide clarity on why such a large number of gravel pits were built so close together and what this government's plans are to address this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the question probably should come to the Minister of Transportation. We've been in contact with the municipality. We're very aware of the situation. We know that gravel pits have an impact on surrounding neighbours and traffic and so on, and it's important that we take steps to mitigate this. We are working with the community in order to do just that.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Minister.

The STAR gravel pit, which is provincially owned, has and continues to operate 24 hours a day at noise levels of 85 decibels, which is well above the legal limit. Given that the southwest ring road gravel pit was required to put mitigation measures in place such as a 10- to 30-metre buffer between the neighbourhood and excavation and a prohibition on rock crushing beginning at 9 p.m. and all construction ending at 10 p.m., can the minister please explain to me why their provincially owned STAR gravel pit is operating differently?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm certainly prepared to undertake to provide those answers to the member. I'm happy to meet with her to discuss this. It's a little bit complicated. There's been some correspondence back and forth, and the department is engaged with the municipality with respect to these issues.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. The municipal officials and constituents in my constituency haven't heard back from this government, so I'm hoping we can open up doors of communication. I will just ask: Minister, will you commit to engaging with the residents in the community and the municipal officials in fixing this problem?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, as always, we're very open to having conversations with municipal officials and MLAs representing the constituents. We know that gravel pits do have an impact, but I can assure the hon. member that we're working to make sure that whatever impacts there are as a result of the necessary work of these gravel pits are mitigated.

Agricultural Operation Practice Review Committee

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago in this House my hon. colleague from Drumheller-Stettler tried to pass a common-sense amendment to Bill 21, the Agencies, Boards and Commissions

Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. We now have producer groups such as the Alberta Federation of Agriculture expressing similar concerns over the dissolution of the agriculture operation practice committee. Minister, did your ministry take time to consult Alberta farmers and ranchers before you decided to use your majority to pass this piece of legislation, that ultimately could prove harmful to our ag producers?

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The fact is that the review committee that the member is referring to hasn't had members on it since 2011. There have been reviews of agriculture practices, obviously, since then that have worked quite well and will continue to do so as we pick members of the review committee from the larger agriculture community itself.

Thank you.

Mr. Schneider: Given that a recent *Western Producer* article quoted the minister as stating that, quote, he will always use farmers and ranchers on this committee should the need arise to activate it again, unquote, and given that the minister also stated that he would try to use farmers and ranchers from the same general area to serve on this committee should it be necessary, Minister, what about the next minister who serves in your capacity? What assurances do Albertans have that they, too, will abide by your decision and not use government staff to fill this committee?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The truth is that this very small amendment will have no effect on the work that the department already does, the ministry already does in making sure that farmers' voices are heard, in making sure that any issues that might arise from what might be an intensive livestock operation, those concerns, will still be reviewed as they always have been and always will be.

Mr. Schneider: Given that in this same article it confirms that there are two cases currently in front of the AOPA committee and given that we warned this government that this was the case and given that the minister repeatedly stated that the AOPA committee isn't necessary, that "facts are facts" and "the effectiveness of this committee doesn't exist because for the past six years there was nobody sitting on it," Minister, considering all of these facts, could your lack of awareness have unintended consequences for these matters currently being heard by the AOPA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The practice review committees: there are actually two cases in process right now. They're going through the process. The rights of Albertans continue to be known. You know, we felt that on these review committees – the committees are made up of people from the larger agriculture community, will continue to be so. I'll restate yet again that there have been no members on this disbanded committee, there haven't been since 2011, and everything in the review process is still going forward.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have grave concerns regarding the recommendations that have recently been issued by

the technical working groups with respect to the occupational health and safety regulations for farms and farm workers. I've been receiving feedback from stakeholders and agricultural service boards with respect to the OHS recommendations as well as the timeline for comments. Seeing as how this Minister of Labour has a poor track record on actually consulting with Albertans on her policies, can the minister explain why she has once again introduced an inadequate consultation period prior to important changes in legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that our government has done to make sure that farm and ranch workers and owners and operators have been involved in the technical working groups, and I thank the technical working groups and their chairs for the important work that they have done. We have posted their recommendations, along with plain-language summaries to make those recommendations accessible to all Albertans, on our website for a review period that will cross into January. We wanted to give farm and ranch workers, operators, and owners significant time to be able to review these recommendations when they aren't during a busy season. I look forward to their feedback.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, given that producers across the province are completing harvest, bringing feed in, moving cattle, weaning and marketing cows and given that the timelines placed on the comment period do not allow for ample enough time for farmers and ranchers and farm workers to review the recommendations and to clearly understand their impacts and to comment on them and given that this minister has received correspondence asking to extend the comment cut-off date to April 2018, is this minister prepared to extend the cut-off date and ensure that farmers have the input they need to ensure that these recommendations truly reflect what is in their best interests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've spoken clearly to Albertans about making sure that they are fully engaged in the reviews that we are doing, and the work of the technical working groups was a very important step in that process. We've given 11 weeks for comment on these recommendations as well as plain-language summaries of the recommendations so that Albertans can take the time to review what is happening and provide their feedback to our government. I look forward to receiving any correspondence that the member opposite is referring to. We want to make sure that farmers and ranchers are engaged and that workers are safe.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Bill 6 was passed by this Legislature despite the concerns of Alberta farmers and given that this government promised that it would fix the problems through regulations that would respect the concerns of Alberta farmers and given that you've been asked to hold at least two town hall meetings in each region regarding the impacts of the OH and S recommendations, is this minister prepared to hold these town hall meetings to ensure that the impacts of the OH and S recommendations will actually benefit Alberta farmers, or is introducing some NDP, ideologically driven agenda more important?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Working with the farm and ranch community, working with stakeholder groups like the AgCoalition: these are important to me. We have given 11 weeks for Albertans to be able to review a plain-language summary or the detailed technical recommendations of the technical working group. I look forward to hearing feedback from Albertans over the next several months about the work that the technical working group has done. It is a priority for our government to make sure that workers are safe and that the farm and ranch way of life is protected. We are working to do both of those things in collaboration with the community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll begin with Members' Statements.

2:40

Members' Statements

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

Métis Week

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Métis Nation of Alberta has declared this week Métis Week, a time to celebrate the history, culture, traditions, and contributions that Métis people make to Alberta. As a Métis person I am exceptionally proud to stand in our Legislature and to speak to the contributions of Métis people in Alberta and across the country.

Alberta is home to the largest Métis population in Canada, with over 114,000 Métis people living here. We are proud to be the only province with a recognized Métis land base in the forms of eight Métis settlements. We are appreciative of the important role Métis people have played in Alberta's history, society, and economy.

November 16 is Louis Riel Day, which honours the legacy of Louis Riel and commemorates the anniversary of his death. Louis Riel devoted and sacrificed his life defending the rights of Métis people. His legacy continues to resonate across Alberta and the country.

Many Louis Riel Day and Métis Week events are happening in our province this week. Tomorrow the Métis Nation of Alberta and the city of Edmonton will host a Métis Week proclamation and Métis flag-raising ceremony. A ceremony commemorating the hon. Louis Riel will occur here at the Legislature on Thursday morning. The Métis Nation of Alberta region 5 is hosting a number of events on Thursday in Slave Lake, including an open house and community dance. The Métis Nation of Alberta region 3 is hosting several events in Calgary this week, including dinners and family fun days. These are just some of the many events going on this week.

I encourage everyone to take this opportunity to learn more about the dynamic culture and traditions of Métis people and the significant role Métis people have played and continue to play in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Policies

Mr. Loewen: This government is selling so much bull that you'd think they were auctioneers, but Albertans aren't buying.

Let's start with Bill 6, that was sold as farm safety. The facts: we know it had little to do with safety and much more to do with organized labour.

How about the revenue-neutral carbon tax they never campaigned on? The facts: it didn't take long for the truth to be revealed, and then they called it revenue recycled.

Next was the claim that the climate leadership plan would buy social licence. The facts: two cancelled pipelines, zero pipelines built, and the protesters protesting pipelines are still protesting pipelines. Go figure. Billions of dollars for nothing.

The environment minister was warned repeatedly about the impending disaster regarding lake aeration but insisted that everything was under control. The facts: dead fish.

Every time the NDP have announced a budget and foolish spending, we warned of credit downgrades. They laughed. The facts: since 2015 five credit downgrades.

When the government passed legislation to cap the debt-to-GDP ratio at 15 per cent, we warned the government that unless they tackled spending, it would be meaningless. They shouted that we were wrong. The facts: they repealed their own bill just three months later.

When this government decided to mess with the electrical system, this side of the House warned the NDP over and over again to at least read the contracts. We were told that they knew better. The facts: the government has been scrambling to pass bills to counteract consequences, even suing power companies for legal provisions clearly articulated.

Now, this is one of my favourites. When I stood in this House and called out the Health minister for not being forthright with the people of Grande Prairie on their hospital completion date and other pertinent information, she suggested that I didn't remember what was discussed at a meeting. The facts: I do remember; I was there. There are documents proving that the information was available to the Health minister and the Minister of Infrastructure months before the meeting, but they did not share it. When responding to my question on the delays, the minister said: "I wasn't aware of any deadlines. That's absolutely fact." Sorry. Not fact.

So when we hear the government say that they are making life better for Albertans, the fact is that we know that it's absolutely not true.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

World Diabetes Day

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to acknowledge World Diabetes Day. November 14 is recognized around the world as World Diabetes Day thanks to a UN resolution passed in 2006. Diabetes, although very common, is not a chronic illness that gets a lot of attention, and it is important to raise awareness of the hardships diabetes sufferers encounter every day.

I know how difficult dealing with diabetes can be because I myself suffer from the chronic illness. It also pains me to say that my husband's mother passed away as a result of complications from diabetes. Diabetes has affected my family, and chances are it has affected yours. More than 20 per cent of Canadians over the age of 20 deal with this disease.

This illness puts people in a position that necessitates serious lifestyle and dietary changes in order to avoid complications and live the best life they can. The Alberta government also recognizes the challenges of diabetes and is continuing to invest in supports such as providing coverage for supplies, medication, and insulin pumps. We recognize the challenge individuals living with diabetes face every day and the strength and courage needed to manage your illness.

Lastly, as a show of solidarity with those dealing with diabetes, the Alberta Legislature will be embracing the colour of national diabetes month by being lit up blue.

Thank you to Diabetes Canada for its efforts to support those with diabetes and to help others understand how to minimize their risks and to all of the charitable organizations who support research and those who are affected by diabetes. Together we can continue to educate about the risks of diabetes and work towards making life better for those that suffer from this condition.

Thank you.

Access to Information

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is running its operations with an unprecedented, CIA black ops level of secrecy. As we know, last spring the office of the Privacy Commissioner tabled two reports in this Legislature highlighting the systematic secrecy deployed by this government when it comes to the FOIP Act.

The Privacy Commissioner's report read more like a 1920s mob story, with lawyers speaking on behalf of FOIP witnesses, political interference at the highest levels, and findings that led the Privacy Commissioner to state:

What should have been a relatively straightforward investigation has concluded under a shadow that brings the very notion of independent oversight of the executive branch . . . into question and has the potential to erode public confidence in an open and accountable government.

This in conjunction with massive delays and backlogs in the FOIP system, direction for political staffers in government departments to delete over 800,000 e-mails, and the fact that the Premier's chief of staff had one e-mail in his sent box, 78 in his inbox, and an empty deleted mail folder for the entire time in his role in the Premier's office. It is very clear that the government has something to hide from Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, on top of all of the insurmountable evidence that the government has exhibited a pattern of secrecy and manipulation, the UCP has now released evidence that shows that the Premier's then chief of staff, Mr. Heaney, politically interfered with a FOIP request from the Official Opposition at the last minute, when it had already been cleared by the department's FOIP officials, which is a clear contravention of the FOIP Act and is against the law.

Mr. Speaker, political interference like this is unacceptable. The fact that this government feels it's above the law, independent oversight bodies, and Albertans' access to information speaks of a new level of arrogance. I call on the Premier to immediately make changes, take some accountability.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Workers' Compensation Review

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, our government believes that all workers have a right to a fair, safe, and healthy work environment, and if any of them happen to get hurt on the job, they should be supported.

Albertans are often interacting with the workers' compensation system at one of the most difficult times for themselves and their families. That's why it's absolutely crucial that Albertans feel confident that the WCB provides fair compensation and meaningful rehabilitation for their workers. At the same time, the employers that fund the system also need to be protected from potential lawsuits.

Today in the House I will be tabling a document produced by the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta that contains the

names of hundreds of Albertans who want to see changes to the WCB.

Mr. Speaker, the last comprehensive review of the WCB was done more than 15 years ago. The Conservatives had years to act on this, but instead they chose to ignore this. I'm very proud that, unlike the Conservatives, our government has taken action and is working to make life better for all Albertans through the WCB review. I know that the Minister of Labour has received recommendations from the WCB Review Panel, and whatever changes result, I am incredibly proud that the review was an open and inclusive process.

2:50

But today I want to focus on the people who are personally affected by the WCB and its policies. No matter what changes are made to the system, it is not the system that feels the pain but the workers who suffer from physical disability, that cannot support their families because they can no longer work. These workers and their families deserve our compassion and our support.

I would like to recognize and thank the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta for their tireless work in representing the interests of injured workers in this province. I know that both they and all Albertans look forward to hearing from the Minister of Labour and the WCB very soon about these important changes that will make life better for workers and families across the province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Red Tape

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, this morning compelling arguments were presented that there is a need for government to implement a red tape reduction strategy. The point of reducing red tape is to stimulate economic growth, which in turn leads to more jobs. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade has repeatedly claimed that his number one priority and the number one priority of this government is job creation. So it is baffling to stakeholders as to why the NDP members would speak against this common-sense bill this morning. Small and mid-sized businesses are the engine of economic growth in any economy, and they are disproportionately affected by red tape.

Governor Susana Martinez said, quote: The big corporations have a team of lawyers and accountants to help them. It's the small businesses, the ma-and-pa shops that get lost in the layers of red tape. End quote.

Germain Belzile states, quote: New regulations in Canada, including things like carbon pricing, coupled with the regulatory burden under President Trump in the United States have seen investments leaving Canada and flowing to the U.S. instead. Alberta in particular is experiencing a dizzying downturn. The regulatory burden seems to be particularly at fault since it is estimated that its cost will rise by between 12 per cent and 21 per cent in the near future and even more after 2023, when the carbon tax will be applied to the oil and gas sector. End quote. If there ever was a time when the Alberta government needed to help entrepreneurs succeed, the time is now, Mr. Speaker.

Brad Wenstrup states:

Politicians think that government can make better decisions than you and me. But we know better. We know it's smaller, less intrusive government that will lead to real economic prosperity. We know it's business-friendly policies, not more red tape, that will create real growth.

Small ma-and-pa business owners and not-for-profits are drowning in red tape, Mr. Speaker. They wear multiple hats, and that wears

them out. Wouldn't it be nice if the government recognized their contribution by recognizing their regulatory burden?

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Bill 29

An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving.

Mr. Speaker, impaired driving is the leading cause of criminal death and injury in Canada. If this bill passes, it will support our government's goal of zero impairment-related collisions and fatalities on Alberta roads.

I look forward to good discussion on the bill with my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

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

Bill 209

Radon Awareness and Testing Act

Ms Luff: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that we protect the health of Albertans against the very real dangers of radon. Radon is a colourless, odourless, and tasteless gas which is responsible for an estimated 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths every year. In 2006 alone an estimated 1,900 lung cancer deaths in Canada were due to radon exposure. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Bill 209 will support greater education about radon and will ensure that child care spaces are tested for radon to help safeguard the well-being of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

I look forward to discussion and deliberation with my colleagues in the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This being Bullying Awareness Week, I rise to table five copies of a story from the *Edmonton Journal* about toxic workplace culture inside the city of Edmonton that is causing employees to quit.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table the requisite five copies of a document produced by the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta that contains the names of hundreds of Albertans who want to see changes to the Workers' Compensation Board. I would like to recognize the Canadian Injured Workers Association of Alberta for their work in representing the interests of injured workers all over Alberta.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first will provide context as to why the Member for Edmonton-Decore was wearing a University of Calgary Dinos jersey. The first one is entitled Dinos Stop Bears, Advance to 10th Straight Hardy Cup with a 39-22 victory.

The second one is DiFonte Good from 59 as Dinos Win Epic Hardy Cup Title. As you may be well aware, Niko DiFonte scored a 59-yard field goal to bring the University of Calgary Dinos to the Mitchell Bowl next weekend.

The third tabling, for context or for anyone who's interested, is the lineup for the Calgary edition of *Dancing with the Stars*, in which I'll be participating on Wednesday, November 29.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a press release done by CAPP, Methane Plan Can Cut Emissions by 45%, Protect 7,000 Jobs: CAPP. I will say that it is distressing to see that we're going down a road that could cost my constituency a thousand jobs.

I have four other letters here. One is from an individual, but most of these letters are just explaining to the Minister of Energy how, if not implemented correctly, the 45 per cent reduction in our emissions cap will actually cause immense amounts of grief within Alberta, and that's not just my constituency.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a copy of a report from the climate leadership plan on the Alberta climate change website, which indicates that there are six to 31 years of lost economic activity, royalties, and power production over and above those legislated by federal regulation. I have the five requisite copies here.

I also rise to table a media report from the Parkland county news, a news release saying Parkland County Responds to Advisory Panel on Coal Communities Recommendations in which Mayor Rod Shaigec says, "The power companies have been paid through the off-coal agreements, yet the government continues to forget about the communities that built this province."

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I rise to table five copies of the November 2017 results-based budgeting report to Albertans.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Bilous, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, return to order of the Assembly MR 14, asked for by Mr. Cooper on May 1, 2017.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Alberta Law Foundation financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2017.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, return to order of the Assembly MR 20, asked for by Mrs. Pitt on May 1, 2017.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there was a point of order, but it was withdrawn.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Morning Sitting Cancellation

31. Mr. Carlier moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 3(1) and Government Motion 30, which was passed on October 31, 2017, the morning sitting of the Assembly on Thursday, November 16, 2017, be cancelled.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This change is made to accommodate greater participation in AAMDC events that morning. As members are also aware, Louis Riel Day ceremonies are also scheduled to take place in the rotunda that day at 11 a.m.

The Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak to the matter?

[Government Motion 31 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned November 9: Mr. Piquette speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, please proceed.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise in the House this afternoon to continue discussion on what I think is a very good, very timely bill that is living up to our promise to Albertans to make life better.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I think, definitely, that this is a bill that, in particular, will make life better for board members and staff of the agencies, boards, and commissions who, as I mentioned previously, are in charge of almost half of our government's total budgetary spending. With that type of resource in play, obviously, the public has a very keen concern that the money and the decisions around the money that these agencies, boards, and commissions make are above reproach. I think that that's a very reasonable expectation for them to have. Unfortunately, in the present situation it is not always clear just what that means in practice. Of course, that's because these requirements are not consistent across agencies, boards, and commissions, leaving perhaps sometimes board members or staff with unclear guidelines on what constitutes a conflict of interest.

As we as elected officials know in our own public lives, it's not always clear-cut what would be considered to be a violation of conflict of interest. I can give you examples where members in the past have gotten into difficulties with accepting tickets to events or plane rides to particular locations, and the list goes on. I mean, these are things that are sometimes taken without really thinking through the consequences and thinking through the impact that they might have on the independence of mind when making decisions about those groups.

Why is this a concern? Well, it's simple human nature. It's human nature for people to return good for good, you know, to behave towards people that they consider friendly in a friendly fashion. Although that might work well in our personal lives, when you're making decisions based on the overall public good,

sometimes that can lead to decisions being made that otherwise would not have been made.

I think that, you know, this type of culture or perception of this culture indeed speaks to what happened just two years and a bit ago when first we had a new government put in place by the people of Alberta. I know that when I was out door-knocking during that election campaign, that was one of the concerns that was brought up, that the previous government had been in power for so long and had appointed basically all the members of the agencies, boards, and commissions, and there was a perception in some quarters that it had become kind of an old boys' network situation, where if you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back.

Now, fairly or unfairly, I think that that perception is something that we needed to address. Indeed, it was something that our Finance minister had promised to address, and I think that Bill 27 goes a long way toward doing just that by making sure that these conflict-of-interest requirements are consistent across agencies, boards, and commissions. I think that it would help restore confidence for Albertans that agency, board, and commission members and staff are indeed acting in the public interest.

That being said, I don't want to impugn, you know, members of agencies, boards, and commissions as it stands now. Sometimes it just takes a few bad apples. Sometimes it just takes the perception of a few bad apples to erode public goodwill and trust. So it's very, very critical that when our citizens go before these agencies and boards and commissions, there is an understanding that, yes, they are indeed not in anybody's pocket, that they are indeed really making impartial decisions which reflect the best possible decision for the public trust. Once again, I think that this is an excellent bill to bring that forward.

When I left off last Thursday, I was just going through, you know, some of the questions on the details of this conflict-of-interest legislation. Now, one question would be regarding timing. Once this bill is passed, when would the core statutory requirements take effect? This would happen immediately on proclamation of the amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act; however, there will be a two-year transition period in some situations, simply because it's recognized that restrictions particularly on concurrent employment offices and appointments and these additional requirements may not be consistent with current employment contracts. To allow for a two-year transition period will help mitigate these types of issues and would be utilized prior to requirements taking effect or upon a new contract or a contract renewal for impacted staff or members, whichever comes first.

Now, I did draw the comparison between elected officials and the conflict-of-interest legislation that applies to us. Are there any differences in how this act would apply to public agencies as opposed to what we and our political staff, you know, currently have to follow? Well, in fact, it's going to have many of the same requirements for chairs, CEOs, and equivalents in public agencies as what we currently are working under. However, there are going to be some requirements for public agencies that are going to be a bit different, of course, because there are some requirements of the existing act that are specific to elected officials and their senior staff. So that's there.

3:10

Another question might be: what's been the public response so far to this legislation? Well, I mean, this hasn't been on the top of the news cycle; however, it has been attracting some interest. You know, from the constituents that I've had the opportunity to talk to about this, the response has been not just generally but completely positive. I think this is a bill that reflects the wishes and interests of the Alberta public and definitely, like I said, is upholding real

commitments that we made, and that's always appreciated. Albertans, I think, do appreciate to see a government that is sincerely working to make life better and sincerely working hard to make its commitments real.

It's for all of these reasons that I think this bill is an excellent one and one that I would strongly encourage all members of the House to support unanimously. With that, I think I can conclude my remarks.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017. Bill 27 proposes to create a consistent set of rules for the province's agencies, boards, and commissions that fall under the jurisdiction of the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. The agencies included in Bill 27 include Alberta Health Services, postsecondary institutions, the Alberta Securities Commission, and the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. In addition to the ones I've just listed and the other 136 agencies, boards, and commissions that fall under APAGA, Covenant Health and three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries – Calgary Laboratory Services, the CapitalCare group, and Carewest – are also being included under these new conflict-of-interest rules.

Something that I have discovered during my time as an elected official is that often the perception of a conflict is as concerning as the actual conflict of interest. Bill 27 addresses that issue by closing loopholes that appeared to allow executives and board members of Alberta's many agencies, boards, and commissions to conduct themselves in ways that simply didn't stand up to the public's demand for accountable and transparent governance. I believe that Bill 27 will improve the public's confidence in Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions, something that has sometimes lacked in the past.

A few highlights of the legislation, Madam Speaker, include a requirement that all agencies, boards, and commissions submit their codes of conduct to the Alberta Ethics Commissioner for review within four months of proclamation. I hope that most of these organizations would already have codes of conduct in place, but Bill 27 will bring greater clarity to Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions.

Another requirement in Bill 27 is for the Ethics Commissioner to review the codes of conduct by March 31 and report their findings a month later. In addition, Bill 27 will require board members and employees, first of all, to conduct themselves impartially; second, to disclose real and apparent conflicts of interest; then, to place restrictions or limitations on acting in self-interest or furthering private interests, the acceptance of gifts, and, finally, to holding concurrent employment or other offices.

Due to their executive position within the organization, CEOs and their equivalents would be subject to additional restrictions on other employment and business undertakings, appointments to other organizations that constitute a real or apparent conflict of interest, a requirement to disclose financial information to the Ethics Commissioner, restrictions on holding stocks and other securities, and additional restrictions for a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency to prevent CEOs from benefiting from any decisions they have made. This provision will take effect after a two-year notice period or immediately after a reappointment or a new appointment.

Now, some may claim that the provisions of Bill 27 are not needed and unfairly cast aspersions on many people who work, sometimes voluntarily, Madam Speaker, without pay, on Alberta's many agencies, boards, and commissions, and I agree. Most of the

people that this legislation will affect are good, morally upstanding, and good-hearted people. They conduct themselves with the utmost respect for the taxpayers, that ultimately fund all these organizations.

However, there have been a number of high-profile cases where individuals have failed to conduct themselves in a manner that befitted the office they held. One example was widely reported in 2014, when Alberta's Public Interest Commissioner investigated and ultimately confirmed that an AHS staff member had a conflict of interest when they awarded a \$75,000 contract to a consulting company in which they held shares. If this bill can eliminate that type of blatant disregard for basic good governance policies, I support Bill 27 at second reading.

But, Madam Speaker, while I am supportive of Bill 27, I have a number of questions that I look forward to getting answers to as the debate continues. One of my questions is: how will the employment restrictions affect those people that represent their industry? These are people that are appointed or elected to their position largely based on their work experience in their specific industry. An example would be a realtor serving on the Real Estate Council of Alberta. As debate moves to Committee of the Whole, I may have amendments to move that reflect some of the feedback I have received since this bill was tabled.

However, at second reading members are asked to consider the intent and context of the legislation being debated, and I believe fully that the intent of Bill 27 is one that I can support. Therefore, I will be supporting Bill 27 at second reading, and I urge all members to do likewise.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will now recognize the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The public trust. Who does the public trust? What does a mandate to govern give you other than the public trust? I think that's what we're fundamentally debating here today, and I'm pleased to rise today to express my support for Bill 27, an act to expand conflict-of-interest rules to agencies, boards, and commissions.

Madam Speaker, that public trust is something we all seek on both sides of this House, and we obtain, gain, and maintain the trust of the Alberta public every day that we operate in this House. It was determined in May of 2015 that when that public trust is lost, even in Alberta, politics 101 applies, and a government will change.

That's what we're talking about today, maintaining that public trust by strengthening rules around conflict of interest as they apply to agencies, boards, and commissions. [interjections] I'm not sure what members opposite are laughing about. I thought I was being pretty serious about some fundamental principles that we operate under in this House and that I take extremely seriously and seek to find agreement in this House about.

The fundamental foundation of what we really seek to do here is to maintain that public trust, which is a sacred trust between us and the people we serve. In order to do that, the transparency of our interests must be very, very open and clear. I think Bill 27 does that. It makes sure that we strengthen the Alberta Conflicts of Interest Act and expand it to apply to senior staff of our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. That's what our government is proposing to do with this legislation.

3:20

Alberta's public agencies play a pivotal role in regulating, managing, and delivering important programs and services to

Albertans on behalf of government as well as in providing oversight and advice on provincial issues. Public agencies are a significant part of Alberta's public sector, and together they account for about half of the government's total yearly budget. That's a significant amount of the public trust that is entrusted to agencies, boards, and commissions. Albertans have high expectations that publicly governed agencies are relevant, effective, transparent, well governed, and accountable to government and to Albertans. A consistent set of rules for conflicts of interest is critical in increasing the accountability of public agencies, protecting Alberta's tax dollars, and ensuring that public agencies are governed transparently.

The public trust is a sacred trust which must always be protected and never be taken lightly or with, I would say, a lack of seriousness at any point. Every day that we are in this House, we must always keep that public trust and the sacredness of it paramount in our minds when we deliberate and talk on any bill, no matter what the bill happens to be. So in second reading I'm pleased to express my support once again for Bill 27. The changes proposed in this bill make clear the roles and expectations that would be put in place to ensure that the public agencies' staff and board members are acting in the public interest.

Once again, if indeed the public determines that their interests are not being served, they will exercise their right to change governments. We are ever more cognizant of that on this side of the House than any government ever has been in this province, and we aim to keep the public trust uppermost in mind in every bill that we bring forward, including this one, Madam Speaker. Once again, our agencies provide valuable services that make life better for Albertans such as higher education, protecting vulnerable people, and delivering health services. It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same standards that we expect of our elected officials and senior public servants.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat across the way mentioned the real estate industry not too long ago in his comments, and one of the things that I wanted to talk about as well is the fact that no matter whether it's business or government, the public trust is something that must be fundamentally top of mind in how we operate with the members of the public. Business has the same responsibility. Most every industry, including the real estate industry, has conflict-of-interest guidelines and rules of ethics and codes of conduct. That public support, that public trust, on an individual basis, on an industry basis, and also on a government basis, has to be maintained and held as sacrosanct on an ongoing basis and never be forgotten because the public will remind us of it, whether we're in business or in government, of the responsibility to make sure that their interests are served in this democracy we so dearly love.

It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same high standards. As I mentioned, the bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to APAGA, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, would also be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. As of November 1 there are 136 of these agencies. Also included in this list would be three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries and Covenant Health.

Bill 27 proposes a number of prescribed elements that would apply to employees and board members of all applicable public agencies. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have codes of conduct that include these prescribed elements. They are a requirement to conduct themselves impartially; restrictions on acting in self-interest or furthering a private interest by virtue of one's position; disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest; restrictions on gifts, including monetary limits; limitations on concurrent employment or other offices, including processes for seeking approval.

Now, these principles really seem to be something that many industries follow. I know that in the real estate industry, where I worked for 30 years as a real estate agent, they are very reminiscent of the rules that we were expected to follow. Our industry guidelines reflected similar principles.

Whether in government or business, the public expectation is high that their interests will be served beyond the interests of those who are in place to serve the public. I think that Bill 27 just goes to continue that demand of government that the interest of the public is sacrosanct and continues to be considered as a paramount and fundamental necessity in maintaining the public interest and that trust that our democracy is built upon.

All APAGA agencies would be required to submit updated codes of conduct reflecting these prescribed elements to the Ethics Commissioner within four months of the act being proclaimed. The Ethics Commissioner will review all revised codes to ensure that they meet the requirements of the act and sign off by March 31, 2019. Agencies would then have to publish their new codes of conduct no later than April 30, 2019.

Now, the legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. For all agency board members and employees the core requirements would be a baseline standard, enforced through codes of conduct that public agencies would be required to implement. Public agencies could have additional restrictions, but these are the ones that all agencies would be required to implement.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. These requirements include restrictions on private interest, restrictions on using influence, restrictions on using insider information, disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest, once again principles that, whether in business or government, those serving the public are expected to hold dear and adhere to without exception. They're fundamental to maintaining the public trust, which, as we know so well in this province, actually will be taken from a government that disregards it.

There's an additional core statutory requirement that would apply to CEOs and equivalents, restrictions on concurrent employment and holding other offices. This additional core statutory requirement would take effect immediately for new hires, upon reappointment, or following a two-year notice period.

CEOs and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements upon designation, including restrictions on holding stocks and other public securities; disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, including financial disclosure; postemployment restrictions, specifically a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. These additional statutory requirements would be set out in the act, but the positions that they would apply to would be designated in a separate order in council and come into effect on contract renewals and new appointments, once again measures that, no matter whether you're in business or in government, the public expects to be enforced to hold government and business to a high standard.

In this case Bill 27 looks at holding these executives, CEOs of the agencies, boards, and commissions to that high standard of public trust that the public in this province insists that they deserve and demands that they have. The consequences of May 2015 showed that in a most excellent way.

Where current contracts are longer term, a two-year transition period would apply so that within two years all CEOs and board chairs would be subject to these enhanced requirements. Through orders in council, cabinet would have the ability to add or exempt agencies and positions from any of the conflict-of-interest requirements.

We propose a statutory requirement for all public agencies to have codes of conduct with the required elements. Now, to enhance oversight and enforcement, we also propose to apply the restrictions on furthering private interest, using influence, and using insider information as statutory requirements within the Conflicts of Interest Act.

Madam Speaker, these elements of this legislation, this bill, really just simply make sense and are an extension of our respect for the fundamental principle of maintaining the public trust, that we think the public in Alberta deserves and governments right throughout this country and any democratic country should be applying and maintaining. These restrictions would be carried out through orders in council and would apply to board chairs and CEOs of public agencies on contract renewals and new appointments.

There would be also a two-year transition period to ensure that CEOs with longer term contracts would also come under the new requirements within the two-year time frame rather than on expiration of the contract.

In Bill 27 it is proposed that cabinet would have the ability to add or exempt agencies and positions from any of the conflict-of-interest requirements. The Ethics Commissioner would have the authority to receive and review disclosures from designated CEOs and their equivalents. It would reduce requirements for restrictions on public securities and restrictions on postemployment. Alleged breaches of the act by the board would be investigated, and other designated senior positions issue reports and make recommendations to the responsible minister and/or the board.

3:30

In closing, I'm really proud to say that our government has been doing great work to maximize the value of agencies, boards, and commissions. We see numerous important changes to increase transparency, fiscal accountability, and diversity and a significant progress government-wide in several different areas, including in fair and appropriate executive compensation, effective use of public dollars, transparency and accountability, including salary disclosure and revitalization of board appointment diversity, and a diligent appointment process.

Madam Speaker, I wish to encourage all members in the Legislature here to support this important piece of legislation. We all seek, as I said before, on both sides of this House, to obtain and maintain the trust of the Alberta public. That sacred trust is something that they will remove if indeed it is breached, and May 2015 proved that beyond a shadow of a doubt. Whether we're in business, whether we're in government, our practices and behaviours must be governed by and founded on the fundamental principle of the sacredness of the public trust. That public trust is something that we on this side of the House and, I believe, all members of this Legislature take seriously every day as we sit here to serve our constituents in the best way that is within our abilities. I believe that this piece of legislation will continue to maintain that principle and observe the responsibility that we all have to serve the public interest and keep the public trust uppermost in our minds.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to congratulate the government. This is probably the third time that we've addressed issues of conflict of interest and the act in this Legislature since I got in 12 years ago. I don't think we've done it

in as comprehensive a way as has been happening. In fact, along with the review of ABCs I think there's every reason to think that we're going to be developing more confidence in the public around our activities, our credibility around gifts and exchanges of favours, and issues of perceived conflict of interest.

All of these, while they kind of fly by in the busyness of our lives as we attend meetings and events and make connections with people from the business community, the NGO community – we're being evaluated constantly on the little things that they see happening. To have this much more explicit and consistent in the ABCs I think is a critically important part of our job here, and I think it will serve all of us well. I don't think there's any question that it needs to be done. This systematic review has helped us to think through some of the inconsistencies that currently exist, that I've certainly been aware of and raised as recently as last week with the minister because of concerns in my constituency about senior members of educational institutions and what's happening there.

I commend the government. This Bill 27 proposes to create a consistent set of conflict-of-interest rules for the agencies, boards, commissions, and all of the positions associated with that. The new rules will apply to board members and employees in 136 public agencies that fall under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, including Covenant Health and three subsidiaries of Alberta Health Services; that is, Calgary Lab Services, which is an anomaly, as far as I'm concerned, and persists; CapitalCare Group; and Carewest. How these ever escaped the consistent rules for so long is beyond me. The proposed rules are similar to those that already exist for elected officials, political staff, and senior officials in the public service but clearly have been neglected.

ABCs, then, will be required to prepare and submit to the Ethics Commissioner, within four months of it coming into force, one or more codes of conduct, which the Ethics Commissioner must approve. These codes will require board members and employees of ABCs to conduct themselves impartially; to disclose real and apparent conflicts of interest; and to place restrictions or limitations on acting in self-interest, on furthering private interests, on acceptance of gifts, and on concurrent employment and other offices.

The chief executive officers or their equivalents such as board chairs and university and college presidents will be subject to restrictions on other employment. This came up very strongly in the last five years at the University of Calgary when the energy environment commission was set up there with the help of Enbridge and some of the issues that that raised around conflicts of interest. Indeed, it came up with the Calgary School of Public Policy when Jack Mintz, who continued to receive hundreds of thousands of dollars from Imperial Oil, was the director of the policy school, supposed to be independently looking at policies relating to the oil and gas industry.

It's a long-standing issue. If we take in any seriousness the notion that public trust is critical in this business and that anything we can do to improve that is to the good of democracy and to the good of our democratic health, then we have to recognize that these have been oversights, that these have been areas of neglect that are, sadly, needing remedy.

Additional requirements are applied to CEOs of significant agencies, including disclosure of financial information to the Ethics Commissioner, restrictions on the type of stocks and financial securities they can hold, and a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency to prevent CEOs from benefiting from decisions they made while in a position of influence. We all remember from June of last year the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation scandal around gifts of alcohol, theatre tickets, and unnecessary travel and the suspension of three AFSC executives.

An Alberta Health Services staffer was also accused of having a conflict of interest in 2014 after giving a \$75,000 contract to a consulting company where he had worked and still held shares. I don't think we can take this seriously enough.

Clearly, we'll be supporting this. The new rules will bring Alberta in line with jurisdictions such as Ontario, Manitoba, and the federal government, that have comprehensive codes of conduct governing agencies, boards, and commissions. The rules are part of a broader effort to standardize compensation and conflict-of-interest rules across the public sector, something that we very much support.

It makes little sense to have a consistent set of conflict-of-interest rules for part of the public sector and a patchwork of rules for agencies, boards, and commissions. Inconsistency in how conflict-of-interest rules are applied creates confusion and increases the likelihood of abuse. Agencies, boards, and commissions account for almost half of all provincial spending, so we cannot simply assume that because they are outside of the regular governance, they are following any standards without creating those, monitoring them, and holding people accountable.

Madam Speaker, I won't belabour it. It's been said by many others that this is progress, and we'll certainly be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will now call on the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017. We've heard a lot on this bill already from many colleagues in the House, particularly about the importance of public trust, that a previous member, Edmonton-McClung, had talked about, and I think it's important that we think about that.

3:40

In the Conflicts of Interest Act itself, I mean, right in the preamble it says:

Senior officials, members and employees of public agencies are expected to act with integrity and impartiality and must avoid conduct that violates the public trust or creates a conflict of interest or apparent conflict of interest.

If we want the public to continue to have trust in our agencies, I think that this is indeed very important.

Now, some questions came up about this bill and why I'm supporting it. You know, one of the questions is: why are we changing the Conflicts of Interest Act, and how will these changes benefit Albertans? Well, of course, we are committed to strengthening conflict-of-interest legislation and extending it to senior staff at public agencies, boards, and commissions, and that is what we are proposing to do with this legislation. While some public agencies have conflict-of-interest requirements in place due to their codes of conduct or their employment contract, there is not a consistent and comprehensive set of rules being applied to public agencies. I think it is important that we correct this, Madam Speaker.

Alberta's public agencies, as a whole, account for about half of the government's total budgetary spending, which is why they need to be held to a high ethical standard and, of course, governed with the integrity that Albertans expect. With these changes, I feel that Albertans can be confident that clear rules and expectations will be put into place to ensure that public agencies' staff and board members are acting in the public interest.

Of course, these rules are all good until somebody breaks them, so it's important that there are penalties for those who breach the

act. Currently there is just an administrative penalty for not disclosing to the Ethics Commissioner on time or for failing to disclose conflicts as outlined in the Conflicts of Interest Act. This penalty applies to those currently covered in the act, including MLAs and senior officials, and, as we know in this House, cannot exceed \$500.

It is also currently an offence for designated senior officials to violate postemployment restrictions subject to a fine of up to \$50,000. With amendments to this act, those penalties will become applicable to designated senior officials. This is in alignment with current provisions for ministers and deputy ministers who currently serve the people of Alberta.

Now, a question that has come up as well is: how will these requirements be enforced? Chairs and CEOs and equivalents would be subject to the oversight of the Ethics Commissioner for the statutory requirements that apply to them. As the deputy chair of Legislative Offices I see first-hand the hard work that our Ethics Commissioner does in enforcing the Conflicts of Interest Act as it relates to us as MLAs as well as to other agencies, and I look forward to her taking her duty seriously in enforcing the new provisions that are in this bill.

Also, the requirement for codes of conduct aligns with the approach used in the Alberta public service. The conflict-of-interest requirements for board chairs, CEOs, and equivalents align closely with those already in place for elected officials, including deputy ministers.

Lastly, after this bill passes and it comes into force, agencies will be required to send their codes of conduct to the Ethics Commissioner for review by the Ethics Commissioner within six months of this act's proclamation.

Also, Madam Speaker, there were some questions about the statutory requirements and what this means. Currently there is a two-year transition period. It is recognized that restrictions on concurrent employment, on offices and appointments, and on additional requirements may not be consistent with current employment contracts. We, of course, want to allow individuals who are in that particular position to transition out. To mitigate this, the two-year transition period will of course be utilized prior to those new requirements taking effect or, of course, upon a new contract or a new contract renewal, whichever one comes first.

To end off my comments, I believe that Bill 27 is a good bill that does much to restore public confidence and trust in our agencies, boards, and commissions, and I, of course, encourage all members of the House to vote for this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing – oh, 29(2)(a) first, please.

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Not to be repetitive, seeing as how so many people had such good things to say already, but I stand to support the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, Bill 27. I take it very seriously, the trust that the public has in both their elected officials and the agencies, boards, and commissions that the government has. They're so important to and such an important part of the lives of Albertans.

The executives and board members need to be held to the same ethical standards expected of MLAs and senior public servants. Ethical standards is an interesting topic because we can assume that we all know what is the right thing to do in all the various situations, but it's easy to, you know, change assumptions as time goes on or as the situation changes. Having the rules and having the codes of

conduct laid out not in prescriptive detail but general enough so everyone knows what the expectations are of their behaviour makes it a lot more likely that everyone will behave accordingly. Any time we have a situation where we are working for the public, we do need to make sure that we are expecting everybody to behave responsibly in that position.

Trust is essential, and that's been emphasized at different times, but I'm also in favour of consistency, making sure that we can presume that the people that we trust in these positions will behave appropriately. Having the oversights and codes of conduct in place, too, is really helpful for our new appointees. We're always having people that are asking about it, especially if they want to get involved in public service, and we talk about openings on various agencies, boards, and commissions. If people know what the expectations are, then they know what is expected of them, and they walk in with their eyes wide open. Again, it's the transparency thing. They know what is expected of them. Knowing that, for instance, there's a cooling-off period in certain positions. CEOs and equivalents are expected to abide by a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. That's really important information to have, knowing that they have to disclose to the Ethics Commissioner on a regular basis.

Having timelines for instituting the codes of conduct makes sure that people aren't procrastinating or just putting it to one side as not being very important. It makes sure that everybody is treating the codes of conduct and the conflict-of-interest rules as serious and important to the operation of the various ABCs.

I really am proud of this bill. I'm very in favour of it. It is transparent. It will aid in transparency. As one validator said here, a large part of agency governance is setting a level playing field and clear expectations as to what practices are and are not acceptable. This legislation does just that by setting clear parameters and expectations for executives and board members of agencies, so I support this bill and certainly hope that everyone else will.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close debate on behalf of the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As always, it's a pleasure to get up in this House and speak on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, a good friend of mine. We see eye to eye on many things. Of course, I want to applaud the incredible work that this government has done in the review of the agencies, boards, and commissions. Now, you may say, "Okay; yes, you've done a considerable amount of work here," but of course I want to highlight specifically the major change that we've been able to implement with the review of the agencies, boards, and commissions and, specifically, with Bill 27 and how we're expanding the conflict-of-interest rules to the ABCs.

One of the things I'd like to state before is that all this work is focused around four major themes: transparency; fiscal accountability of the agencies, boards, and commissions; fair and appropriate executive compensation; and perhaps the most important, to me at least, diversity.

You know, earlier today, Madam Speaker, you gave an excellent member's statement regarding the Métis Nation of Alberta and the culture that it's going to be celebrating over the next few days here

in the province of Alberta. I want to share a small story with you, actually.

One of the things that I was very honoured and proud to do with one of the new schools that opened up in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie was to go to the school opening and gift them three things. One of them, of course, was the flag of our province, the Alberta flag. The second was the Treaty 6 flag so that they could hoist it up when necessary, when they thought it was important to do so. Then, of course, the last one was the Métis Nation flag. I want to say thank you very much to one of their executive directors, a good friend of mine who actually lives in my constituency, Mr. Aaron Barner. I got a wonderful text from Aaron, one that really just filled my heart with so much happiness.

First of all, he sent me a picture. They had hoisted the Métis Nation flag along with the Alberta flag in front of the school, and guess who was standing in front of those flags? His children. His children were standing in front of those flagpoles with that Métis Nation flag up there. He wrote me, and he said: Rod, I'm so happy because I spoke to the principal at the school, and he told me that you were the one that gave them the Métis Nation flag, and you made two young children very proud of their culture.

Why is this important and, specifically, how does it relate to the Métis Nation? Well, guess what? Years and years and years ago there was a man named Louis Riel, who we'll be celebrating right here in this Legislature on Thursday morning. Now, Louis Riel was the leader of the provisional government at that time, and do you know one of the main reasons why they had a provisional government? They did not feel that they were being represented.

Now, you may say: okay; well, how does this apply to conflicts of interest, to Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions? Well, it has to do with this issue of diversity. It has to do with this very important issue of diversity and the culture that was created within the agencies, boards, and commissions up to the date when we started to review the ABCs.

My hon. colleague here from Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater got up and said: oh, well, you know, it's an old boys' club that used to exist; they would just appoint each other to these different agencies, boards, and commissions. You know, I think he was being really kind when he just kind of tapped the surface by saying old boys' club. We can say that it was . . .

Mr. Rosendahl: More than that.

Loyola: Indeed. It was indeed more than just an old boys' club, but I will reserve my comments because, you know, I don't want to create discord here in the House, unlike some of the other colleagues with statements that they make.

But I will say this. The time has come for agencies, boards, and commissions in this province to start a new culture, a new culture where there is more transparency, there is more fiscal accountability, there is fair and appropriate executive compensation, and, yes, also increased diversity amongst all these agencies, boards, and commissions as we continue to move forward.

You know, one of the other things that I'd like to say is that usually government is supposed to be setting the example by creating codes of conduct. Those codes of conduct that are implemented at this level are then followed by other organizations within our society: nonprofit organizations, unions, you name it. They can see the example that the government of Alberta is setting and make the changes as they continue to grow and strengthen their institutions.

But I've got to say that after 44 years of Conservative government in this province that was not the case. In fact, it was going the other way around. Nonprofits and other institutions

within our society were creating codes of conduct, making sure that there was no conflict of interest among their boards, and they were setting the example so that finally we could catch up and make the changes at this level, here in the government of Alberta. After 44 years of Conservative government here in this province I'm glad that it took an NDP government to come into power and start making these changes. This is the kind of leadership that Albertans want to see. This is the kind of leadership that requires vision.

As you are, Madam Speaker, I'm also of mixed blood. Not of this country, but I self-identify as an indigenous person as well, and I'm proud of that indigenous heritage. It's not only here in North America, or what Anglos call North America, that indigenous people look seven generations down the road. You know, that's a practice of many, many, many indigenous groups throughout the entire world. You're looking at seven generations. When you make a decision, you're asking: how is this going to impact the children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren and so on and so on? Well, I'm glad that this government has come into power here and is finally working on getting this correct.

You know, I look forward to the day when we can be proud to see not 10 per cent – it's not even that yet – or 20 per cent or 30 per cent but when we see that 50 per cent of the people who are making up agencies, boards, and commissions are people who are racialized people in this province, when the people of Alberta look at not only their government but also their democratic institutions within their society and can see themselves reflected in those institutions. But for that, Madam Speaker, we require more transparency, and we require more diversity because the culture has to change.

Now, I'm not going to say that it's going to change overnight just by the passing of this one bill because it takes more than that. You and I both know that, Madam Speaker. You and I both know that it takes, yes, implementing legislation but then also going out there and having the conversations with people so that they can see and so that, as I was saying before, through the work that they do through nonprofit organizations in this province, they can tell us how we can improve and strengthen these institutions.

4:00

Many hon. members have spoken to this bill already, but I feel that it's absolutely necessary to highlight just a few aspects of this bill before we end today. Of course, Alberta's public agencies account for about half of the government's total budgetary spending. With these changes Alberta can be confident that public agency staff, board members are acting in the public interest.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung spoke at length about the importance of the public trust. I would say – and I go back to that whole issue of diversity – that in order to have that public trust, Albertans have to see themselves reflected in our institutions.

It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same high standards that we expect of our elected officials and senior public servants. This bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act would also be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Again, this goes back to the issue of transforming the culture that we currently have in this province, one where people didn't feel represented by the institutions.

The changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have a code of conduct that includes the following prescribed elements. These are a requirement to conduct themselves impartially; restrictions on acting in self-interest or furthering private interest by virtue of one's position; disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest; restrictions on gifts, including monetary limits; and limitations on concurrent employment with other offices, including processes for seeking approval.

All APAGA agencies would be required to submit updated codes of conduct reflecting these prescribed elements to the Ethics Commissioner within four months of the act being proclaimed. The Ethics Commissioner will review all revised codes to ensure that they meet the requirements of the act and sign off by March 31, 2019. Agencies would then have to publish their new codes of conduct no later than April 30, 2019. As you can see, Madam Speaker, this is a process, a process by which we are engaging in this path towards transforming the culture that was long established by Conservatives here in this province. It's going to take a while, but we'll get there. We'll change that culture.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. These requirements include restrictions on private interest, restrictions on using influence, restrictions on using insider information, and disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest.

CEOs and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements upon designation, including restrictions on holding stocks and other public securities; disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, including financial disclosure; and postemployment restrictions, specifically a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. These additional statutory requirements would be set out in the act, but the positions that they would apply to would be designated in a separate order in council and come into effect on contract renewals and new appointments.

Where current contracts are longer term, a two-year transition period would apply, so within two years all CEOs and board chairs will be subject to these enhanced requirements.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 23 Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move third reading of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017, on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Kathleen Ganley.

As we've discussed . . .

Hon. Members: Name.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh, I apologize. I withdraw that name and will attempt to read a little further ahead in my notes before speaking.

Bill 23, as we've discussed here in the House, would add age as a prohibited ground of discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act under sections 4 and 5 of the act. These sections, as we've discussed, include the areas of tenancy, goods, services, accommodation, and facilities. Now, Madam Speaker, this government supports all Albertans, which is why we're proposing to strengthen our current human rights legislation and further protect Albertans from age discrimination.

Earlier this year the government of Alberta agreed to a court order to make these changes. During the one-year period provided by the courts, our government took the time to ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of the different perspectives surrounding this issue. Based upon what we heard, we're working

to ensure that the specific types of age distinctions can continue without violating the Alberta Human Rights Act.

In regard to seniors' exemptions, first, it's important to note that this legislation will allow programs that provide benefits to minors and seniors, such as discounted movie tickets or reduced bus fares, to continue.

Second, we recognize that older Albertans may choose to live together in a community of people who are at a similar stage in life and may require similar supports. Therefore, Bill 23 would protect the ability of seniors to live in seniors-only housing, with the minimum age cut-off set at age 55.

We were pleased to hear support from members of the House, especially on the exceptions for seniors-only housing and for programs and activities that provide a benefit to seniors and minors. Many Albertans also expressed their support for these exceptions during our consultations.

Bill 23 also grants existing age-restricted condominiums a 15-year transition period. We recognize that many Albertans have made significant investments based on condo bylaws that were in place at the time that they made their purchase. The 15-year transition period is meant to provide notice so that Albertans who are affected by these changes have the opportunity to make informed decisions about where they wish to live.

In addition to the age-related amendments, we also want to allow for ameliorative programs and activities. These programs such as those that support inclusive and diverse workplaces improve situations for disadvantaged people. An example of this would be an employment program for indigenous youth.

We recognize the need to ensure that Albertans are made aware of these changes. Certainly, that's something that's been discussed here in the House and that's been brought up during the debate. If Bill 23 is passed, our government will be actively reaching out to Albertans who shared their views about this issue. We will also work with the Alberta Human Rights Commission to ensure that this information is publicly available through their many programs and services. They promote much of this information online, which they use to educate and engage with Albertans and organizations, and we have already posted information about this legislation on the government of Alberta website. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I've had the opportunity to make use of that in responding to my own constituents who have written in looking for clarification and looking for opportunities to be able to link to that information to share with others in their condominiums.

If passed, Madam Speaker, this bill will come into force on January 1, 2018.

4:10

Madam Speaker, we are committed to enhancing every Albertan's ability to fully and equally participate in our society, and our government supports all Albertans. We believe that these changes will indeed make life better for them. We believe that the proposed amendments strike the right balance between the interests of many different groups while enhancing human rights protection and embracing diversity in Alberta. I ask that all members support me in moving third reading.

Continuing, I'd like to take the opportunity while I'm here and while I've had the opportunity to rise to discuss a few questions that have arisen during the debate and, indeed, that I've heard about from my constituents to ensure that we have a full understanding of the steps this legislation would take. There has been some discussion around the issue of mandatory retirement and pension plans, how that would be addressed under this legislation and whether the integrity of the bona fide pension plans that have mandatory retirement provisions would be addressed in the

regulations phase. To this I can note that age is already a prohibited ground of discrimination under the act in the context of employment. Bill 23 does not change anything in that regard, so that protection remains in place.

In terms of questions around whether we're protecting the rights of seniors to a fair and reasonable evaluation for fitness in operating a motor vehicle, indeed I was just speaking with the Member for Calgary-Currie this morning, and he was telling me of his grandfather's journey with that and sort of working through that process. We certainly recognize that it's an issue that comes to light for many seniors as they age and still want to be able to get around their community, get to the places they need to go. Well, all drivers regardless of age are legally required to report any medical conditions that may affect their ability to drive safely. Currently there is required a medical report to be signed by a physician at the age of 75 years, at the age of 80 years, and every two years after the age of 80. Their doctor may also recommend that they take a road test or further testing before they approve that medical form.

Once age is added to section 4 of the act, anyone who feels that the existing regime discriminates on the basis of age would have the option to reach out to the commission to discuss bringing a complaint. Now, section 11 of the act does permit practices that are reasonable and justifiable in circumstances to continue without violating the act. We believe that the existing practices fall under that defence and that no further amendments, therefore, to the act are needed at this time.

In regard to tax benefits for seniors, speaking of things such as income splitting and asking whether those would be excluded in the exemptions of benefits for minors and seniors, sections 4 and 5 of the act currently are specific to the areas of tenancy, goods, services, accommodation, and facilities. Therefore, Bill 23 does not impact tax benefits since those are not addressed in those sections, so things such as income splitting and other aspects of the tax regime will not be affected in any way by this bill.

There have been some discussion and some questions around rental car agencies and how some of the concerns that have been brought forward by insurance companies in regard to their ability to use age as one of their factors in assessing rates and coverage options would be addressed and whether they can use the relevant and actual data regarding age to help determine insurance premiums. Well, in that regard, Madam Speaker, I can say once again, as I noted earlier, that section 11 of the act does permit practices that are considered to be reasonable and justifiable in the circumstances to continue without being considered to violate the act.

That's the approach that's been taken to date in Alberta for discrimination in the insurance industry on the basis of gender and physical disability, for example, because we do know that young men, for example, are often charged higher insurance rates than young women because they're statistically found to have more incidents. Once age is added to section 4, this type of analysis could also be applied in the context of age discrimination for car rental agencies. That means that age distinctions are permitted where legally justifiable. That would be something, then, that would be up to the commission and the courts to determine.

In regard to specific lists of benefits currently offered to minors and seniors, whether those will be created or whether the exemptions are going to be more of a blanket statement, at this point on the exception for programs and activities that offer benefits to seniors and minors, the intention is to go with more of a blanket exemption as opposed to trying to cover all of the ifs, ands, whats, and possibilities.

As I mentioned, there have been some questions about how this information will be communicated to Albertans, and certainly,

Madam Speaker, I recognize that this is a significant change and one that impacts many stakeholders across our province, including renters, landlords, building owners, property managers, so it's essential that we make sure this information is clearly communicated and made available to the public so that they understand both what their rights are and what their responsibilities are.

When we first proposed this legislation, Minister Ganley did hold a news conference to explain how the legislation would work if passed.

An Hon. Member: Names.

Mr. Shepherd: Oh, pardon me. I apologize.

The Minister of Justice – I'm withdrawing the name – held a news conference to explain how the legislation would work if passed. We've also listed the proposed legislation and the impacts on the government website, and indeed, Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, I can say that it is a fairly robust and clear explanation that I've found very useful in reaching out to my own constituents. We will also, then, be reaching out to Albertans who contacted us, so everybody who wrote in to provide their thoughts to the minister and through the survey will be hearing back from the government as to the changes that would be in place if this bill should pass.

Again, we will work with the Alberta Human Rights Commission, who does some excellent work around education in the province and does a great job of posting this information on their website, to ensure that we're utilizing that resource in every way possible to make sure all Albertans are aware of the changes.

Now, another issue that has come up and that indeed I've heard raised, I think, by some of my other colleagues from Calgary and here in Edmonton is in regard to the changing of bylaws on condo boards.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Certainly, we recognize that in order for condominium corporations to decide whether they're going to move to 55-plus or indeed whether they may choose instead to simply remove age restrictions, that may require a change in their bylaws. The question has been asked whether that could be just simply done via amendments to those bylaws. As in regard to all areas covered by the act, it is up to those who are subject to the act to conduct themselves in compliance, but we are giving that transition period of 15 years, which allows condominiums to amend their bylaws so they're in compliance with the law. It's a reasonable process. It's something I know we're going through with in the condominium building where I own a suite and rent that out. We're working with lawyers here in the city to update our bylaws. It's not too onerous a process, but if condominium associations and condo residents do have questions, they can of course contact Service Alberta's consumer contact centre, and that phone number is available online at servicealberta.ca. There are also some condo tipsheets there, which may provide some further information on how they could go about that process.

Now, there were also some questions, as I understand, in regard to provisions for 55-plus, in regard to only one member of a household having to be 55-plus in order to be grandparenting or being able to remain in an age-restricted building. There have been some questions, I guess, asking about the fact that that could then mean that you have very mixed-generational tenants in a building if only one individual, say, is over the age of 55 and then you have, you know, their son and his partner and their children all living there in an age-restricted building because one person is 55 years old. On that, I would just note that the lowest age restriction, as we've said, that would meet the seniors-only housing exception is that one person needs to be 55. That's the rule that's set out through

the legislation. However, landlords and condominium complexes are free to choose a higher age restriction if they wish. They could choose to set it at 60 or 65. They could set it at any age above 55.

For example, the age limitation could be set at 60, or the age restriction could specify that only spouses or adult interdependent partners younger than 55 would be allowed. Condominium corporations retain the right to have a bit of flexibility there, to define things for what would best suit their building. We've tried to build that in and accommodate that in any way that we can within this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that I do fully support. I think it's important that we offer Albertans the same human rights protections that all other Canadians enjoy. And as I've been clear about in my previous statements, this is a bill that I feel is beneficial for my constituency. I have heard from some constituents who have some concerns about losing access to age-restricted facilities, but I think the provisions that we've provided here, the fact that we are offering that grandparenting for 15 years, recognize that some buildings are simply not going to prove attractive to families simply because they only have one- and two-bedroom suites, perhaps because of their location, because of their lack of other amenities that are attractive to families.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, this is going to open up all sorts of new possibilities for downtown Edmonton. As I said earlier, in downtown Edmonton right now we're just on the cusp. We're about 50 per cent of the way to the sort of population density we need to have a truly vibrant and thriving downtown economy that really supports the kinds of services that people are looking for like grocery stores, child care centres, active schools. Grandin elementary school, just a couple of blocks from here, is undersubscribed by over 100 students. This opportunity for us to have more families living in our urban communities, something that many millennials are very interested in, is a great benefit for our community.

As we're working also to attract new businesses to our city and new young professionals, many of them are interested in that urban lifestyle. We want to bring these businesses to downtown Edmonton and downtown Calgary, too, to help fill that vacancy rate. Many of these young professionals want to live nearer to their work, to take advantage of our new downtown bike grid here in Edmonton or the bike grid in Calgary. I have to shamefully admit that you beat us to that one, but we appreciated the example, the ground that you broke for us so that we could move forward on that, too. These steps help make Alberta a more family-friendly and indeed, as a result, business-friendly place.

I'm very happy to stand in support of this bill. I deeply appreciate the work that the Minister of Justice, whose name I will not mention, did in consulting on this bill and talking with stakeholders and really, I think, finding a good balance that's going to allow all of us to move forward to protect those rights that we need to have for Albertans and allow them to enjoy the same rights as all other Canadians while having as minimal an impact as we can on those who bought their homes and were operating under the previous regulations.

Thank you again to the minister. Thank you to everyone who's spoken in support of this bill. I look forward to voting in support at the end of third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The chair will recognize the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to rise and speak in favour of Bill 23. Speaking

immediately after the Member for Edmonton-Centre I think is a good place to pick up.

One of the things that one of my hon. colleagues here and I were talking about earlier is that this bill has managed to do a very good job of finding the right balance on what is a very complex issue. As I'm sure a lot of my hon. colleagues have found, our constituency offices, especially those of us in inner-city, urban constituencies, although it's certainly not limited to that, have received a lot of feedback on this legislation, at least certainly initially. There was a lot of concern that there was going to be an overreach in reaction to a bill that is ostensibly to respond to a court ruling. In this case I think the government has got it right. They found the balance, and it is just remarkable, Mr. Speaker, that in this Assembly there actually are some issues that aren't purely black and white, where, actually, we can find some middle ground and some thoughtful nuance.

Having heard from many of my constituents, I'm certainly very happy to be able to respond to them that, in fact, the bill does meet the court-mandated changes without overreaching and does provide protections, especially to older Albertans, so I'm very happy to support the bill.

Given that the court order came down back in January 2017, of course, we knew that these changes needed to be made, and it brings Alberta into line with the rest of the country. I always have a red flag go up every time I hear that Alberta is the only province or one of the only provinces that does or doesn't do a certain thing. That's always an area for further investigation, and this is another one of those areas where we were, in fact, one of only two provinces that did not have age read into our provincial human rights code. Now, with the courts having done that for us, this legislation makes that change official.

I do want to thank everyone who has reached out both to my constituency office and, I know, to many other members to provide feedback. There was a very comprehensive and thoughtful consultation process on what is a very complex issue, and I'm happy to know that this bill will pass. It does recognize that Albertans over the age of 55 may opt out or opt to live together in a community of people with the same interests and the same age demographic, and that 15-year grace period does give Albertans an opportunity to transition into the new rules.

Condo owners consulted along the process strongly indicated that individuals should have a choice in their housing and lifestyle decisions, and this legislation, including exemptions for seniors-only housing, does mean that buildings can cater exclusively to those over 55, and that phase-in period allows people who are now currently in their 40s to move into that senior age bracket. Condo owners now, then, therefore have more than a decade to phase in the new rules, but renters, of course, will notice the changes as of the 1st of January of next year.

The point I wanted to make on that is that this does seem to, again, strike the right balance between allowing Albertans choice in their housing but also recognizing that there are families who will choose to live in condos and apartments. It does expand the housing options for those families. While I certainly have heard from some landlords who are concerned about that, I believe that any issues or challenges that may be faced by landlords are far outweighed by the benefits to Albertans, who now have more housing options. In striking that balance, where we cannot meet the needs or the requests of both sides of an issue, I think that in this case we've come down on the right side of this issue by allowing more housing options in a way that I don't believe greatly impairs the ability of a landlord to make a living or to rent out their buildings.

Other exemptions in the bill, the ameliorative programs – for example, buildings set aside to help members of a vulnerable

population – of course, are necessary and welcome, programs such as employment or internship programs for youth. Prior to the introduction of this legislation, again, we were the only province whose human rights legislation did not provide an exemption for ameliorative programs or activities, and again I'm very happy to see that. We ensure in this legislation that the proposed amendments ensure that programs providing a benefit to minors and seniors such as discounted movie tickets, those sorts of things, are in fact allowed to continue.

Given all of that, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Party caucus is very proud to support this bill, and I look forward to voting in favour in third reading. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today in support of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. I'm not going to comment on the bill in its entirety. I'm going to focus more on the real estate elements of it, that I've had a fair bit of experience in and also that I've had the opportunity to speak with constituents about at length during the course of the deliberations over the bill.

Bill 23, as we have heard other speakers say, would add age as a prohibited ground for discrimination to the Alberta Human Rights Act under the areas of tenancy, goods and services, and accommodations or facilities. Now, earlier this year the government of Alberta agreed to a court order to make these changes, and it's important to note that it was a court order that required that these changes be made. In accommodating and reacting to this court order and accepting the court order, one wants to be careful as a government that one doesn't open oneself up to further court challenges, and that's why it's very important to respond in a way that where you're implementing reasonable exemptions to the court order, you choose those exemptions in a way that is going to pass the test of the courts. Now, of course, somebody could challenge down the road, but you do your best at this point in creating the legislation to ensure that to the best extent possible you avoid court challenges that might be successful.

What I wanted to speak about in particular, as you, Mr. Speaker, may be guessing by now, would be with respect to the age limits in seniors' condominiums, in particular in owned condominiums. As the House knows, I've sold real estate for over 30 years, and I sold many, many condominiums with various different age restrictions. The common age points that one would find in Alberta in these condominiums which would have age restrictions on them would be 18-plus, 45-plus, 50-plus, and then 55-plus. These were the most common age points that condominium associations or developers/builders would place on their buildings when they sold. Then forevermore, unless the condominium association decided to change them, those would be the age restrictions that would govern the sale of those units to prospective successive buyers.

4:30

In choosing 55 as the age limit at which we would consider it to be a reasonable exemption, I think, in my personal view, that the considerations that were made were well considered. If you add 40 plus 15, you get 55. I mentioned the different age breaks that were there. Many of the units you'll see are 45-plus. Indeed, we've grandfathered the condominiums which have age restrictions right now to a 15-year period, so beyond the 15-year period they will have to adopt 55 or higher as an age limit for the condominium association, giving plenty of time to transition to the new restriction, which satisfies the court order. It will allow people who

are living in these condominiums the ability to age in place up to and beyond the 55-plus age limit.

I think that in setting the age limit to 55, what we're doing – and this is my interpretation of things – is protecting the quiet enjoyment in retirement years for those individuals who wish to be among those of 55-plus in age versus prohibiting younger people from becoming residents. I think that's probably the choice or the decision point that courts may make if there are subsequent challenges, Mr. Speaker. The subsequent challenges may actually be based upon that determination, whether indeed the intent of the legislation was to protect quiet enjoyment in retirement years or whether the intent was to prohibit younger people or ban them from becoming residents.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

That's a critical point, in my view, in suggesting that the 55 age limit was the right age limit to fall upon, where I think it can be argued effectively in any subsequent court challenge that 55-plus is meant to protect the quiet enjoyment of people in retirement years who wish to live together with folks of similar age or older versus a desire to prohibit little feet or young adults or partygoing 18-pluses from being residents in their condominiums. Once again, the reasonable exemptions must potentially avoid court challenges. This 15-year phase-out, I think, was a proper number to arrive at because it allows people to age in place even if they are starting at a 40-plus age limit in a building they're in.

Certainly, not everybody is going to be happy. I did have a town hall in one of my very large 55-plus condominium complexes in my constituency, and during that town hall there were, I believe, 90 people who attended, and 82 was the average age. I think they gave up precious time coming from their suites down to the lobby, forgoing their afternoon session of watching the Legislative Assembly, to come to that town hall and discuss their concerns about the protection they thought they might be losing from the 55-plus age limit. I know that they were very, very pleased to know that that 55-plus age limit will be preserved as a result of this legislation and, I believe, preserved in a way which would survive a potential court challenge in the future.

It's a complex issue, and it affects a lot of Albertans. I know this is probably the most contentious issue in the legislation. It was from my perspective. I know the Alberta Real Estate Association seriously consulted with its members and made representations on the issue. I know that there are still some individuals attempting to lobby to reduce the age restriction to a lower number. But I think the 55-plus number is the right number, and I believe that it will survive a court challenge. A lower number, I think, would be at risk of not being successfully defended in the courts. I'm glad that we did land on this 15-year grandfathering time frame and the 55-plus age limit or age ceiling.

I wanted to mention that the number of individuals in my constituency who are in 55-plus residences number in the hundreds. They can be in adult bungalows, they could be in high rises, or they could be in more of a seniors' assisted living situation. But there are lots and lots of people in not only the downtown area but also in the suburbs, where my constituency is located, who really appreciate the fact that this 55-plus age limit will be protected in this legislation and that it will, in my view, survive a court challenge that might be deemed to be inevitable by some parties who still feel that they want a lower limit in place, especially in owner-occupied condominiums.

However, one thing I wanted to comment on as well is the fact that we've actually grandfathered this in. I think it's a really good idea to do it. Some have argued that the age limit should have been

protected in perpetuity for existing buildings which had an age limit, whether it had been 18-plus or 45-plus, 50-plus, or 55-plus, whatever the case may be. Some have argued that we should maybe keep that in perpetuity, but in fact what it would have done, if you really think this through, is that it would have created a class of properties, whether it be in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, wherever they happen to be, which would have been unique in their nature and probably escalate in market value because of their rareness and make them an unusual and rare bird, which would create a bit of an anomaly in the market.

I don't think it would have survived a court challenge either. It really wouldn't have been a great idea to not grandfather these in and to have a final date where the 55-plus was the minimum age limit at which you could restrict residency. Then you don't have the complication in the future of court cases which would end up having one forced to revisit the whole issue all over again. Once again, you don't know for sure. Somebody could file a court challenge about anything, but I believe we are safe at age 55-plus in terms of being able to survive a court challenge, this reasonable exemption to the court order.

Once again, I believe that over time people will get used to this. There will be some objections to it. There will be a little bit of an adjustment period. But it was a court-ordered demand that Alberta responded to, and it's something that we have the most respect for in this province and, I think, in all provinces: human rights legislation. When a court order insisted that we comply, we didn't challenge it. We chose to respect the Human Rights Act and the courts and make accommodations with reasonable exceptions so that people who are over 55 can reasonably enjoy their retirement in housing with other people of similar age. At the same time, we're not prohibiting younger people from accommodating themselves in buildings that they would like to live in that might suit their purposes and which otherwise would be unavailable to them.

For those and many other reasons I support this piece of legislation, and I ensure that I'll do my very best to explain to my constituents who still might have some reservations about it the reasons why it's necessary to follow the court's demands and ensure that this balance between the different age groups is struck and that we move forward to continue looking to accommodate each other in this society we so dearly love.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

4:40

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to the third reading of Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. Our caucus, the United Conservative Party, does support the spirit of this bill and the fact that we do recognize that it will bring Alberta in line with the rest of the country.

Canada: we are known as a world leader in progressive, nondiscriminatory policy in human rights, and I am proud to support any legislation that reflects that. But that said, I just wanted to say briefly with Bill 23 that I do not believe that the people who built these buildings had discriminatory thoughts in their heads when they were doing this. I will challenge that when they were using age as a definition of who can live in their buildings, it was more to address a lifestyle, and they're using age to identify a certain lifestyle of people that wanted to live in a certain building that was perhaps quieter or whatnot or that fit their lifestyles.

I would also argue that . . .

Mr. Dach: Age is not a choice.

Mr. Yao: Tell me about it.

I'd argue that, again, these apartment buildings and these developments: it wasn't their intent to discriminate. Their intent was that they've identified a market, a group of individuals who were willing to invest in a home that suited their lifestyles, and I think everyone in this room can appreciate that we are all slightly different and that birds of a feather stick together.

I mean, I had a fellow who came straight from East India who came up to Fort McMurray. I was talking to him, a lovely man, and he asked me, "Tany, where should I live in town here?" I asked, "What are you talking about?" "Well, where do the brown people live?" That's what he asked me. I told him, "I honestly don't know, but maybe we can ask some others." But that's what he was looking for. He wanted his kids surrounded by other kids who spoke his mother tongue, and I respect and appreciate that.

Again, with this bill, though, we do recognize that there is a discriminatory angle to this and that we need to keep that door open because I myself would feel very discriminated against if a building chose to have some sort of a basis on colour, or maybe they didn't want politicians in there. I don't know, but the point is that there are many lines in the sand that we can cross that hint on discriminatory practices. That's why we fight discrimination, and that's why we need to allow this bill, because it is the foot in the door for discriminatory practices.

Certainly, in our buildings here we have all sorts of discriminatory practices. All along this Federal building here that we have our offices in, they have "no dog" signs everywhere. You know, it is sad, and it is unfortunate. I can only assume that it was the government side that put these signs up because they hate dogs so much. I would bring my dog in because he actually does give me comfort and helps me deal with certain stresses even though he is not official. That is one example of where I felt discriminated against because of what happened at the Federal building and what the government's objectives are with that.

With that said, in conclusion, I guess, we do have to be worried about discrimination. We do have to ensure that it's fought at every angle and in every possible way, and we need to ensure that we maintain a country that does have nondiscriminatory policies throughout.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak. Again, we do support this bill and recognize the aspects of it, but we also have to recognize the nuances in which these developers were building these buildings, and I appreciate that there is a grandfathering clause of sorts that allows 15 years for these buildings to convert over. In the end, yes, I support this bill.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was so enthralled by what you had to say, especially about dogs. You spoke about the UCP perspective on the bill itself and how you support the bill, but I'm interested in knowing a little bit more about how the UCP supports access to housing for all people and what you would like to see as we continue to move forward. Of course, the bill specifically is addressing the fact that we need to create more spaces and more access for, I would even argue, young families, those people who are in their thirtysomethings, you know. Maybe you already have one child, perhaps even two. They need more spaces to live. Of course, accompanying that is also the fact that we

need to create affordable housing here in the province of Alberta. So I'm interested in knowing a little bit more about what the UCP stance is on both these aspects that the bill is really trying to create.

Now, of course, at the end of the day, you've heard me get up and speak to this bill before, specifically around the collective human right of housing. Like that of education and health care, housing is also very important, so on this side of the House we're really focused on trying to make sure to address all these issues, and we understand that the best way that you can address poverty or, better stated, poverty reduction is by first making sure that people are housed within our society. I'm very eager to hear what the hon. member has to say, what the stance of the UCP is on access to housing specifically for young families and, of course, those for whom housing is out of reach and who require affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, this is a bill that I was very happy to see come forward. Shortly after the election this was something that I looked into myself as the potential for a private member's bill. [interjections] Hon. member, through the chair, please. Thank you. Apparently, that's hilarious. Anyway, I was very concerned about this myself.

There are, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking about, many people my age who have a hard time finding housing that they can afford, and a lot of that comes down to a lot of the affordable housing being either already full or designated often as 45-plus or in many cases 18-plus. Now, the challenge with that is that when you have somebody fresh out of university looking for a job and also trying to find a house, often they're moving cities, and they're trying to find work in their field. They are trying to get established, but they can't find a house, or they can't find long-term housing. In some cases they're lucky and they can find a six-month rental, but then, you know, six months down the road they're back looking. They're looking for housing, and they don't have the stability to really focus on their career. This is something that they're very concerned about, this access to housing based on their age. So I was happy to see that this bill was coming forward, but there was also some concern about what this will look like.

You know, there are a lot of great facilities that are fairly called seniors' facilities, seniors' housing. They're not supportive, but they are built with seniors in mind. They are usually at grade, have an accessible washroom. Some but not all will have things like a walk-in shower, all of the typical things you would think of in a facility specifically built for seniors. Many of these communities were concerned that with age discrimination being added into the Human Rights Act, they wouldn't be allowed to continue as they currently exist.

4:50

One example of these facilities is the Grove Seniors Village in my constituency. They're a 55-plus co-op. The Member for Sherwood Park visited I think it was last year and was very impressed with their model. I've been there a few times myself, and they do a lot of great work for the community. Their primary focus is creating housing and community for residents over the age of 55, and they do that very well. All of their facilities are at grade, no stairs. In my times there I haven't found a single flight of stairs except down to the storage room at one of the facilities. I think maybe some of the furnaces are downstairs, but, you know, the residents aren't often going down there anyway. This is good to see,

that they are allowed to continue. I keep wanting to say that they're grandfathered in, but when we're talking about seniors' villages, that seems a bit punny.

I'm very happy to see that this is coming forward. I'm happy to see that there's the compromise there between, you know, allowing for the 55-plus facilities and for programs. Like the hon. member was saying earlier with movie tickets and such, I'm glad to see that there's that compromise between making sure that seniors' facilities and programs are still functional but that younger residents in particular and residents with families can still find housing and have access to many of those programs and housing that they really need, especially when they're first getting established in a new city or a new industry.

I wanted to thank the Minister of Justice for bringing this bill forward. I look forward to everybody voting in support in third reading and passing this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Pleased to have the first opportunity to speak to Bill 23, a fine balance, I think, based on some of the concerns expressed in my constituency and beyond, where people feel a legitimate concern around, especially, over 55s and needing to have a certain cultural and environmental ambience that they are comfortable with and at the same time recognizing that other restrictions on young families with children shouldn't be a basis for discrimination.

I think the government has found a nice balance here with respect to the Human Rights Act historically protecting against age discrimination in the areas of applications and notices; employment practices and advertisements; membership in trade unions, employers' organizations, or occupational associations. Age was not a protected ground in relation to the provision of goods, services, accommodation, or facilities customarily available to the public in relation to tenancies.

The court ruling stems from a constitutional challenge to the Human Rights Act initiated by Ruth Adria, who is a well-known seniors' advocate here, motivated by concerns about discrimination against the elderly in the areas of services and tenancies. I haven't heard from her since, but certainly she's been a very strong advocate here for a number of years. I think this addresses many of the concerns that she's had.

With respect to the Human Rights Act, though, I've repeatedly over the years raised other issues that need to be addressed under the Human Rights Act and discrimination based on some other common characteristics, I guess I would say. The minister, I would say, two years ago indicated that they were going to look at those issues as well, and I fear that it's now too late in this to again address some of these issues that have to do with constraints such as indigenous heritage; social condition, which can still be used as a means of discrimination because it's not explicitly identified in the Human Rights Act; language in this case; and pregnancy.

There are a few provinces that have tried to address some of these issues in their legislation. Pregnancy, for example, is an explicitly protected ground in Quebec and Nunavut, and variants are found in Manitoba and the Yukon, but it has not been explicitly identified beyond that. I think there's opportunity here, if we do indeed address some of these issues through the Human Rights Act in future, that we consider that.

Social condition is another explicitly protected ground in Quebec, New Brunswick, and the Northwest Territories but, again, not here in Alberta. Social condition is a broader descriptor. Rather than being someone on public assistance, it includes anyone who is low income or living in poverty. I think there are many people who have felt that their social condition was a basis for discrimination in their accommodation.

Aboriginal origin is explicitly protected only in Nova Scotia. Again, an opportunity for us to move from implicit protection to explicit protection because, in the main, very few people who feel that discrimination as an aboriginal person will take it to the human rights tribunal, which is unfortunate. The Sheldon M. Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership pointed out in its 2007 report that it's the indigenous people that desperately need to have this become a more explicit part of our Human Rights Act.

Political belief is another, that has been protected in British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, and Northwest Territories, with some variants to this found in Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. But we haven't to date decided within this province to explicitly protect people from discrimination on the basis of political belief.

Finally, language is explicitly protected only in Quebec. Again, the question, I guess, for us is to think about why we wouldn't want to be explicit about some of these basic rights that people have, that should not be in any way discriminated against.

While I fully support this bill and the intent – and it will make progress, I think, in finding that balance in terms of young families, including children's accommodation – I hope that the government will take it under advisement with the next review and we will indeed look at some of these other characteristics that are eminently suitable to protect under the Human Rights Act.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak at third reading to Bill 23, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017. In January 2017 the government of Alberta agreed to expand the Alberta Human Rights Act to include age as protected grounds under sections 4 and 5. Before this the Alberta Human Rights Act only protected age against discrimination in section 3, publications and notices; sections 7 and 8, employment practices and advertisements; and section 9, membership in a trade union, employers' organization, or occupational association.

Madam Speaker, this bill, Bill 23, will add age as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the areas of tenancy, goods, services, accommodations, or facilities. This government supports all Albertans, which is why we are proposing to strengthen our current human rights legislation and further protect Albertans from age discrimination.

Madam Speaker, my office, like many others here, received plenty of feedback regarding this issue. In one condo residence in Calgary-Northern Hills there is a condominium unit that has 252 suites. It was built in 2002. The building was designed for an older, mature population to age in place, with wheelchair-accommodating bathrooms, doorways, and open floor plans. The residence also has many amenities, including a pool with ramp access, a fitness room, a movie theatre, and daily social activities to encourage residents to remain active, both physically and mentally, due to the age of the

residents in this community. Ninety per cent or more of the population is 55 or older, with most being 70 and older.

5:00

The owners and tenants in this building have purposely purchased or rented units in this community because of the age restriction. I've been told repeatedly that children are welcome as visitors, but the residents are happy to live without the constant noise of young people. Their common areas include coffee shop areas, libraries, and games areas with pool tables and shuffleboard, and they strongly believe that these spaces would suffer with children living there permanently.

The condominium unit also relies on volunteers for their condo boards and to maintain their beautiful flower beds and gardens.

Finally, during one of my consultations I was told that living in a community like theirs saves the government from having to provide assisted living and long-term care facilities to these older residents. It is generally recognized that people live better and longer when they live in their own homes with the support of their neighbours and friends.

Madam Speaker, it is because of feedback like this and the consultations the government conducted last summer that many Albertans are in favour of allowing seniors-only housing to continue. The bill sets the minimum age for seniors-only housing at 55 or any age older than that. Seniors-only housing would also be required to accommodate, within their age restriction, special circumstances that are specified in regulation such as live-in caregivers.

Madam Speaker, we also know that many Albertans have made significant investments on the basis of condo bylaws in place at the time of purchase. This is why we have grandparented existing age restrictions for a 15-year transition period so that they will not violate section 4 of the act. Also, during this 15-year period age-restricted condominiums can transition to being seniors-only.

If passed, these amendments will come into force January 1, 2018. Madam Speaker, after hearing and reading all of the feedback I have received from residents in Calgary-Northern Hills, I believe this bill will strike an adequate compromise for all Albertans. This bill provides an opportunity to embrace diversity in Alberta and to align our legislation with other jurisdictions in Canada.

I will be supporting this bill in third reading, and I encourage all of the others in the room here to do the same. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none for 29(2)(a), are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to get to be part of this change in the Alberta Human Rights Act, to have been part of some similar changes that were made earlier to include gender orientation and transgender identity in the act as well. It's always good to see this kind of progress happen and see society move forward, and it's an honour to be a legislator that gets to be part of it.

I thank all of the members for their comments, I thank the minister for her work in putting this bill together, and I encourage everyone to vote in support. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Chair. It is my pleasure to finally be up to speak on the record in support of Bill 24. Throughout this debate it's hard not to be moved by the many personal stories shared by my MLA colleagues. I have to say that I am proud to be an MLA and ally. I am proud to support my colleagues on this particular issue and proud to support this bill without reservation. This bill provides clarification to school boards about how GSAs work in schools.

One of the things I found very interesting about the debate is that in my office I've been getting some letters, and I think it's interesting to sort of go through what one of those letters looks like and just sort of talk about those concerns and how, for this particular bill, perhaps those concerns are unfounded.

I'm going to quote a little bit from one of the letters I got recently from a constituent. It starts off by saying:

My criticism relates to the lack of nuance in the bill. There may be situations where parents ought to be notified about their children's involvements at school as these matters are serious: high rates of self-harm in trans kids, suicide risks, et cetera.

I will note that this particular point in the letter was actually addressed by the Health minister, in fact, in QP today, when she stated that all teachers, if they feel that there's a child that is about to put themselves in danger, will take the appropriate steps to make sure that that doesn't happen, which may of course include informing that particular child's parents.

The letter goes on to say:

Some kids are just not mature enough to work through their issues without the help of their parents, especially if they have other issues such as autism, et cetera.

Then it goes on to say:

I don't believe professionals can be trusted to have our children's best interests at heart.

Of course, I disagree with that. I believe that teachers who work in our school system are well trained and, you know, are able to work to the best of their ability to support students in whatever needs they may have. Also, I think that if there's a child that believes that they need to go to a GSA to talk about what they're feeling, then I believe that students are indeed mature enough to do that. But they are still kids in school, and that is why the GSAs exist, to allow them to talk that through with their peers or perhaps with the support of a teacher. So I disagree with that point.

The letter goes on to say:

Tragically, some parents can be hurtful to their LGBTQ kids, but it is a serious error in logic to say that most parents are hurtful.

I agree with this. It is, in fact, unfortunate that, you know, there are some parents that might for whatever reason perhaps not be as open or accepting if their kids came out to them as LGBTQ-plus. I always have faith that parents, upon learning this, would eventually come to learn to accept their children, but that might not be the initial response.

The same letter goes on to say:

This bill makes that problematic assumption.

That, like I said, parents could be hurtful to an LGBTQ kid.

It also assumes that the “system” is more equipped to support kids than their parents, which has historically been a disastrous assumption.

Now, I disagree with some of the assertions in there. We’ve heard from many people in this House and from the GSA rally that I attended at McDougall Centre this weekend about how disastrous it is when children and LGBTQ individuals are outed before they are ready. At the end of the day, that is what this bill is preventing.

5:10

Yeah, in some ways the system is actually able and equipped to be able to deal with this because, just like any other club in school, it provides a place for LGBTQ or otherwise supportive individuals to talk with their peer groups. At the end of the day, this is essentially just like another club, any other club in school. You know, if I had a child and he or she joined a club at school, say a chess club, for example, I’m pretty sure that schools don’t send a note home that your child has joined the chess club.

With that, the letter goes on, of course, to talk more about that assumption that, like I said, schools aren’t able to deal with it. I think they are.

This legislation, you know, makes sure that students are the ones who decide when and how they will have this deeply personal, important conversation with their parents and their loved ones and friends around them. This legislation does not force students to keep secrets from their parents. Students who are comfortable talking to their parents about their sexuality will do so. This bill does not prevent that. This bill saves lives by providing students with a safe place where they can support one another and find camaraderie and friendship. This legislation strengthens supports for students who wish to form or join a GSA and protects students who need these spaces.

Others have seemed to have been on the record that, you know, they believe that parents have a right to know what’s going on with their kids at school unless the parents are abusive. I feel like that may be a position to take. However, it puts teachers and school administrators in the very awkward position of having to determine if that is the case. I think that this bill provides the right balance of being able to protect our LGBTQ youth while, of course, not preventing those children from having that important conversation with their parents. At the end of the day, this bill is about the kids. It’s about the importance of protecting students who are questioning, who want to be supportive of their friends or talk to their peers about their various experiences.

I hope that we can get this bill passed because of what I heard at the GSA rally that I attended on the weekend. There was an individual who got up and spoke about her experiences in Catholic school, about the troubles in trying to form a GSA and what happens when individuals who were in a position of administration were not being as helpful as perhaps they otherwise could be. She said: I am not a court case. When there is a student who is in school and is questioning and is ready to come out, they should be able to do so, and this bill protects that.

I’d like to finish off by saying that I’m in a very privileged position in that I identify and am a straight white male, and that puts me in a position of privilege. But I’ve heard so much from those in the LGBTQ community when I was growing up, from those who are now adults in their 50s or 60s who had to hide their sexuality when perhaps we were at a much different place of acceptance, and I know from them that this bill is right. I know in my heart that it is right, and I am so happy to be on the record to unequivocally support Bill 24.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a real honour to be able to rise today and speak in support of Bill 24. You know, a great number of members have already risen in this House and talked about the impact and the benefit of this bill and of ensuring that all students across Alberta, no matter where they go to school, no matter which city or town or village they live in, have a safe, welcoming, and caring place to learn. Ultimately, we want to make sure that all students across the province have that same right and that same ability, and I think that this act does a really great job of making sure that that consistency is there across the province.

Early in my tenure in this role I met a young woman, a young lesbian, actually. She came out to me at the end of a forum. I and a couple of other hon. members from across the way were at a youth forum that was held here. At the time the students had an opportunity to ask us all questions, and we had an opportunity to talk a little bit about what was important to us and our parties and what we believed in. One of the questions that we got asked, like, four times, I think, by four separate students was around the right to access the bathroom that a child identified with, that matched their gender identity. Members opposite dithered a little bit on it, but I was pretty clear with the students that human rights apply no matter where you are, no matter who you are, and that that was something that was really important to us and to our government.

This young woman came up to me after the forum, and she came out to me. She said thank you for the fact that we were so clearly in support of young queer youth. She talked about some of the fears and concerns that she had as a young queer woman and about some of the experiences that she had had at school. We chatted a little bit about the club that she was part of at school and how helpful it had been to her. You know, I think of her story a lot. I think of our conversation a lot. I think that every student across our fine province, wherever they live, should have that same access to a loving, supporting, and caring group who identify with them.

I wanted to also take a moment to speak to the mental health side of this legislation and to the mental health and other impacts of this healthwise. Last month, in October, a survey came out. It was called Being Safe, Being Me in Alberta: Results of the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey. Now, it was a comprehensive survey of transgender and gender-diverse youth from across Canada that included a selection of youth from Alberta specifically. It included a lot of information and results that, in my opinion, really point to the importance and value of this legislation. It also underscored a lot of the things that, you know, we hear a lot from LGBTQ-plus youth and some of the issues that they face.

I just wanted to highlight a couple of points. To me, the one that stood out the most was that of the youth surveyed, 91 per cent of Albertan trans youth don’t seek help for their mental health because they’re scared that their parents will find out – 91 per cent – and that is under a situation where counsellors, therapists, and mental health professionals are obligated to protect their privacy. Can you imagine how few would come forward to seek help for their mental health concerns if they thought that they ran the risk of their teacher calling their parents to tell them that they joined a GSA?

Additionally, nearly three-quarters of the youth surveyed reported self-harm, and about two-thirds reported serious thoughts of suicide. More startling, more stark is that more than 2 in 5 had attempted to end their lives – 2 in 5 – and only 1 in 3 said that they had an adult in their family whom they could talk to about their problems.

Madam Chair, I think that, really, when you look at those numbers, we see that there's a real need for that peer-to-peer support for young LGBTQ-plus youth to have someone whom they can talk to who's been on the same path that they've been on, who's maybe further on in the journey or maybe in a similar place and still really exploring their identity and questioning who they are. Having someone that they can talk to about their fears and their worries is critically important for their well-being.

5:20

Another thing that was noted in this study was that high levels of parental support and family connectedness correlated to better health outcomes, not just mental health outcomes but also physical health outcomes. I would also say that, you know, in the absence of family support, peer support is incredibly valuable. It's one of those things that throughout the mental health field we are seeing more and more, that having the opportunity to talk to someone who has had a similar experience to you and who can talk about their own personal and lived experience is incredibly valuable for people to be able to see the way through any concerns or worries that they're having, and it's something that's being recognized throughout the mental health care system.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has recently graduated their first group of peer-to-peer volunteers in the Calgary branch, and those folks are out now working with people in all fields, supporting through similar experiences, whether it's someone who has a family member who is living with a mental health concern or whether it's someone who's struggling with substance use or maybe someone who's struggling with issues around homelessness. Having that support available in the school, where children are, is just so critical.

Ultimately, you know, we've seen that GSAs have been existing in a number of schools for some time, but this allows those to be at every school and ensures that that equality is there for students across the province. I really can't speak more highly in favour of this.

I would also note, just kind of in closing, one of the recommendations that was in this report, this report that has some concerning information about the mental health of transgender children. It was the recommendation to improve the safety and the welcoming nature of schools, whether that be through changes to the curriculum or through the establishment of support for GSAs and QSAs.

Madam Chair, I have to say that I am just so proud to be part of a government that not only takes this issue seriously but is working to address it and make sure that those supports are there for vulnerable youth when and where they need them. I'm really proud to be able to vote in support of this bill, and I would urge all members of the Chamber to do likewise.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 24?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 24.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those agreed, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

[The voice vote indicated that the report was concurred in]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:24 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For:

Anderson, S.	Jabour	Phillips
Carlier	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinstuber	Sabir
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Eggen	Miller	Swann
Gray	Miranda	Turner
Hoffman	Nielsen	Westhead
Horne	Payne	Woollard

5:40

Against:

Ellis	Nixon	Smith
Hanson	Pitt	Strankman
Hunter	Schneider	Yao
MacIntyre		

Totals: For – 39 Against – 10

[The report was concurred in]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've had a great debate this afternoon, and I'd like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:42 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 15, 2017

Day 54

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Kazim	

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Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Let us bow and reflect or pray, each in our own way. Let us be mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents, for our province, and for each other. I hope that this work gives all members the strength and the wisdom that we all need during our deliberations, supporting each other and building relationships every day.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to move third and final reading of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances.

Mr. Speaker, in this time that this bill has been in front of the Assembly, I have heard from many Albertans about how important this legislation is to them. I heard from students who shared their stories about how their GSAs have helped them become comfortable with their own lives and in their own skin and teens who have written passionately about their own stories coming out and how GSAs gave them the community of support that they needed to make that brave journey. I've heard from parents who have seen how GSAs have helped their children, and I'm grateful for the positive impact that these clubs have had on the health and the well-being of their children. I want to thank those Albertans for reaching out and sharing those stories of support.

I have also heard from some Albertans with questions and concerns about the legislation. Our government knows that parents love and support their children, and this legislation will simply make sure that students are the ones who decide when and how to have those deeply personal and important conversations with their parents and their loved ones.

If a student's safety is at risk, parents will be notified. GSAs are not covert sexual education classes, as some people have very wrongly suggested. Health lessons are taught in health class. GSAs are peer-support groups. They are safe havens for young people who need that safe place.

What this legislation does is make it clear that all schools that receive public dollars must provide a welcoming, caring, safe, and respectful learning environment and that no student will be outed for joining a GSA. Students will still be able to ask their teachers and other school personnel for help if they're in trouble, of course, and/or want support when they have these conversations with their parents. One of our government's top priorities is ensuring students' safety, and that's why GSAs are so important. For some students GSAs are the only place where they feel safe and appreciated. I want to maintain the integrity of that position.

I'm extremely disappointed to see unanimous opposition from the members of the Official Opposition who were present for our

votes on this bill at each stage of passing. We all know that this bill will protect the lives of some of the most vulnerable citizens we have, children and youth. We need to stand up for them and not out them. I hope that today's debate convinces the members opposite to look past their partisan allegiances and take a stand in supporting LGBTQ youth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to third reading.

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a responsibility to listen to our children. Gay-straight alliances or queer-straight alliances are student-led and staff-supported organizations that promote the creation of peer-support networks and foster welcoming and caring and respectful, safe environments for LGBTQ2-plus students and their allies. Having a GSA in a school reduces suicidal ideation for both LGBTQ2-plus identified youth and those who are straight.

The question we have to ask ourselves is: what is truly important? Well, GSAs are important, and they're necessary. We have, in fact, on our entire side of this caucus said that. The entire Legislature agrees with ensuring that there are no mandatory notifications as to whether a child is in a GSA. We all completely agree. To create the environment where bullying is not accepted – we honour antibullying week this week for those exact reasons.

I'd like to speak about bullying a little bit, actually, and I'd like to share some correspondence with the House. One of the quotes is: I watched, and then I watched her walk out and not vote; how much homophobia are you going to excuse until you, too, wear the label? The second one: she is paid to vote, not to hide. These are the people that you are exposing our vulnerable children to, people who are offended because we ask legitimate questions, Mr. Speaker, about the safety of our children, all of our children. You know what is important? Standing up for our children and for our youth and asking questions even if they're difficult questions.

I have never in my life had to prove that I'm an ally. I don't have to tell people that I'm an ally, and I certainly do not need to prove in this House that I'm an ally. If the government wants to attack me or anybody else just for the sake of attacking, by all means that is your right. Attacking one's character has been the overwhelming method of this government and using every single methodology to do that. Honestly, if you want to admonish me or my caucus for our votes, that is your right, Mr. Speaker, but it does nothing to help move us forward. Nothing.

You can call me whatever you want. You can certainly try. You can even say that if I come near any pride events, you will out me. I would love to actually know what that means, Mr. Speaker. Maybe somebody can clarify that for me.

These are the people you want influencing our youth, the people who are saying those things? That's not bullying at all, is it, Mr. Speaker? Not at all. These are the friends that you want to have coming in to help the youth work together? These are common bullies, the kinds of people that we want to protect our children from. The government, just because they call themselves allies, that makes their attacks okay? In what world is that okay? Literally I have to ask myself – I mean, this is ridiculous: the behaviour, the mistruths, the lack of common sense. You may not tell me whether or not I can attend pride, or did you forget that we live in a free society? Maybe you've forgotten that. You may not tell me whether or not I can go. In fact, I've been there for years, long before I was a politician.

I stand here in front of all of you now. Let me be clear. I will never vote for any government, mine or yours, to influence a student-led organization ever, any GSAs. GSAs are supposed to be

student led, not government led. I will actually stand up for these kids, for their rights and their ability to have a club that is created by them for the reasons that they needed one, not for what politicians want. Neither you nor me come in and set a standard as to how a GSA is going to work. They already have this autonomy, Mr. Speaker. They're already above the School Act. They're outside of it. Why would you even consider bringing the School Act into something that is already autonomous and has the ability to run on its own, run by the students? These kids need the space to do this themselves. They already have a GSA director to help them with their club, and that is their person. That's their go to.

Instructional time, indicated in section 50.1(1) of the School Act, is not presently part of the GSAs, and that's a good thing. I can't for the life of me figure out why the government is opening this club up to instructional time. That has nothing to do with the GSA. How can you ensure students' safety by doing that? That is what the minister just said: to ensure student safety. How is that possible if the GSA is no longer run just by the students, for the students, on behalf of the students?

A GSA is a peer-support antibullying club, and it's already out of the scope of the School Act. It is a club. If the government wants to change that, then it should state those intentions clearly. State them clearly. Create a new bill, Mr. Speaker. Create a new bill to amend the School Act with the appropriate consultation, outreach, and debate that a change of this magnitude would require. If you did that, I could respect that. But to do it under this bill that states for the record that for some reason if we don't vote for it, we're voting against GSAs? That is not true.

9:10

We already believe in GSAs. We already support the present legislation, and I actually would have voted for this legislation if that would have been amended, happily, and I've stated that for the record. No government or other organizations of any stripe should be able to walk into a student-led organization, Mr. Speaker, and begin to influence students as it sees fit. You know what? I know the government is going to think that that's just pointed at them. I don't want my government going in there either. No government should ever have the ability to do that. There is no good reason to exempt GSAs from something that they're not part of in the first place.

I've spoken to so many constituents and teachers and principals and students and GSA directors and parents, and the one thing that we can all agree on is that we want safe and caring spaces for our students in their schools.

The issue around Bill 24, in that section, is that that section deals with the rights of parents to be informed. If the government wants to deal with that section, bring it out separately. Let's debate it here in the Legislature and look at the School Act separately. If that's the way the government wants to go, Mr. Speaker, that's what you do. You don't hide it in another piece of legislation.

Voluntary student organizations referred to as GSAs could allow any government via this section – any government – to be able to go in and influence a student-led organization. Why does the government want to seek that? Why would they want, if for some reason they're not in government in the future, that some other government could do that for any of their own purposes? This is so wrong, Mr. Speaker. It's completely contradictory to what this legislation is supposed to do in the first place.

These are peer-led support clubs, and the whole point is to have a space where kids can become friends and allies. They're supposed to be outside of the scope of the School Act, Mr. Speaker, outside of the scope, independent, and safely away from the influence of anybody else other than the students that lead them. That was the point. That's who this is for. These groups give a child who is

questioning their sexuality or has friends who are or wants to talk about things a chance to be able to do that without the influence of anybody else. Isn't that the point?

They also allow other students to gain a better appreciation of problems facing peers. They talk about any number of things. Anybody who has attended a GSA, who has had the privilege of talking to these kids, knows that they talk about absolutely everything. I can't imagine if I had the ability to influence that the wrong way. If they invite me in, that's one thing. I'm there to listen, not to direct.

I mean, the fact that 40 per cent of our homeless are LGBTQ youth that are turned out by their parents: why would you give any opportunity to come in through an opposing place when they are able to do this on their own right now? I mean, I cannot understand. Again – I have to state this again, Mr. Speaker – if the government wants to change the School Act, then do that. Bring that legislation forward with integrity and research and background and stakeholder outreach and inclusive of everybody who's involved in that. Yes. Let's debate that. Happily. That's what we were asking for. The fact that there is a loophole now that could open that door to anybody – anybody – to be able to come and influence a student-led organization is completely wrong.

I would like to state for the record that most of this bill is extremely logical to me, and I felt I could support it. But I dug deeper, and I talked to so many people, and I felt it was necessary to amend the bill and strike this section that brings the potential for this instruction in. Unfortunately, that amendment was defeated. I can't understand why because it does nothing – that amendment has nothing to do with GSAs. Nothing. Section 50.1(1) has nothing to do with GSAs. Nothing. It's outside of the scope of GSAs, so take it out. Take it out, and I'll vote for it. Take it out. It has nothing to do with GSAs. Nothing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Minister of Infrastructure.

Mrs. Aheer: If the government wants to call us disgusting, go ahead. By all means, call us all disgusting. Say it for the record, though, and have the guts to say it loud and proud.

An Hon. Member: I have.

Mrs. Aheer: I know you have. Thank you for pointing that out. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, because – guess what? – that's what's been directed at me, and that's what's going to get directed at our children. Honestly, if this is how leadership is going to lead, what are they going to do on the back side? Not just that government, any government, and I include myself in that. [interjection]

The Speaker: Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, if the word “disgusting” is allowed to be used in this, then let me use it. It's absolutely disgusting that the government would not look at this part of the bill separately, bring it in front of people, bring it forward, debate it legitimately in this Legislature so we can all have an opinion. Instead it's hidden in smoke and mirrors. You wear that. You wear that. [interjections]

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order?

Point of Order
Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Mason: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hate to interrupt the hon. member in full dudgeon, but the remarks ought to be directed

through the chair, and pointing and saying, “You, you” in the speech is clearly out of order. You know, perhaps the hon. member might remember that.

The Speaker: Thank you. I’m sure she will.

Mrs. Aheer: I will. Thank you for pointing that out.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Aheer: The interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that there’s a double standard here. Just so you know, abstaining from a vote is a legitimate vote. I will be abstaining from this vote because I agree with 90 per cent, well, even probably 80 per cent of this bill. Abstaining is done only by leaving the room. If I could, if there was a change made where I could sit with my body physically in this House and abstain, I would. Unless that change is made by this afternoon or before this vote is done, there is no chance for me to be able to do that. But I will not vote against this bill. I will not vote against this bill, and there’s nothing that the government can say to me that has not already been said that hasn’t made me understand the consequences of what I’m saying right now. The difference is that I’m willing to say it here.

The government has argued, Mr. Speaker: GSAs are not instructional, so there is no need for it to be part of 50.1(1), (2), (3), or (4). Remove that section, and you’ve got me. The government is overstepping its authority with this change and has absolutely no right to interfere with a student-led organization, not this government, not any future governments, not any government that I should be a part of in the future. I would want no part of influencing a GSA ever. Let’s bring that section forward and debate it appropriately. That’s all I’m asking for.

You know, you can call all Conservative MLAs homophobic, Mr. Speaker. You can fearmonger that we’re the enemy, which is really not a logical answer to any of the questions that I’ve put forward.

Mr. Carson: You’re voting against LGBTQ rights every time.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Meadowlark, tone it down.

Mrs. Aheer: And if that’s what you want to see, you can.

Mr. Speaker, this is what I’m talking about. This is exactly what I’m talking about. Every single person that I talk to, including all of my friends that are LGBTQ2-plus youth, adults, everybody who is in my life, the people I love most in life from here in Canada all the way across the world, every single one of them that I explained this legislation to couldn’t understand why something that is already beautiful and protected would need to go through the situation of what this government is putting it through. There’s absolutely no logical reason to include 50.1(1), (2), (3), or (4). The only reason to be able to do it is to try and change and exempt and amend something within the School Act without actually bringing that act forward. It’s the only logical answer.

The comments that will come are that, you know, I’m voting against this bill because I’m being forced to. I’m not voting against the bill; I’m abstaining. I will physically not be here – I’m telling you that – because I don’t want to vote against the bill. It was never my intention. I’m saying that in front of my caucus. They’re all right here right now. We’ve had this discussion. You can suggest that I don’t have my own voice. Well, you don’t know me very well.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that this government can say that a vote against this bill makes us whatever it is that they’d like to present in the rest of the world, but the rest of the world doesn’t believe them. Do they think that they can change people’s opinion about

me or anybody in my caucus or these wonderful people, anybody in the House who has an outreach of people that they love, that all of us are impacted by in how we vote on this bill? Don’t you think that anybody on this side of the House has had people that have come to them and said, “Can you explain to me why you would vote against this bill?” and that they haven’t had to do that? Do you think that they’re just not aware that this vote could have an impact even on their own constituencies, the people that they love . . .

Connolly: Yeah. They’re sitting as independents now.

The Speaker: Calgary-Hawkwood, keep it down.

Mrs. Aheer: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is what we’re dealing with. I am bringing forward a legitimate question, asking about why 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) are in this legislation and why it can’t be pulled out and debated separately under the School Act, where it should be. That is a separate piece.

9:20

If the government keeps saying that this is not instructional, then why does it need to be exempted from instructional? Please. It’s a really simple question. Oh, I know. I know what it is. It’s to protect kids from me. That’s right. I forgot. It’s to protect kids from my caucus. Right. How silly of me. I didn’t realize that. Thank you for protecting me from myself. Boy, I’m absolutely blown away. And thank you for protecting all of the people that I love in the world from me because you suggest that my intentions could possibly be anything other than asking about section 50.1(4).

Honestly, by all means – and bully away. None of us are in this House because we’re afraid of bullying, but those kids outside are. For anybody in the government to assume that a teacher would purposefully go out of their way to do that is wrong. If the legislation needed to be strengthened for that, I’m a hundred per cent behind it. All the GSA teachers, instructors, and everybody that I spoke to, Mr. Speaker, thought that that was a good idea. It’s a great idea. I’m a hundred per cent behind it.

That has nothing to do with 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4). Nothing. Completely separate. But if you want to strengthen the legislation to make sure that teachers understand their role within this, you have my vote, a hundred per cent. That was fairly much a consensus amongst the people that I talked to as well, that 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) have nothing to do with whether or not a teacher can notify a parent outside of the scope of – I mean, let’s separate GSAs and the regular scope. The government, thank goodness, was finally clear yesterday when one of the opposition members asked about parental involvement. These were my questions from the beginning, so thank you for clearing that up.

GSAs are completely separate from whether or not teachers have the authority to describe what’s going on in a child’s life, completely separate, so 50.1(1), (2), (3), and (4) do not apply. The legislation is clear that if a teacher needs to tell a parent something, for reasons of distress or anything else, it has nothing to do with the GSA, nor should it. I completely agree.

All I’m asking – and call me what you want. Nobody will believe this government if they want to throw accusations this way at me. By all means, go right ahead. In fact, I challenge you to try and find it. But my point and what I will continue to say is that if the government is willing to take out this section and debate it legitimately outside of the scope of this bill, especially because GSAs presently sit outside of the scope of this bill, I will stand here and vote in favour with you. I will.

An Hon. Member: No, you won’t.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, I will. [interjection] Thank you, Minister.

See, this is the thing, this is the funny thing about being in here: everybody on that side thinks they know better. They just told me what I'm going to do. Welcome to what that looks like. Obviously, I don't know my own mind, and I'm being directed by somebody else. That's hysterical. I could have just as easily been directed by the bullying coming from that side, which, I might add, was profound – I only shared a minuscule amount with you – massive amounts. I actually thought that one of those guys was going to show up in my bedroom and yell and scream at me. It was unbelievable. You know what? This face-to-face and this kind of discussion: I'm okay with that because you can tell me to my face what you think. I dare you.

One thing I'm going to say, Mr. Speaker, about the word "disgusting." You know what? There is an interesting thing that what you put out is what you get back. Well, people who say things like that better be looking at their own reflections. Quite frankly, I would assume that that sort of language is unparliamentary.

Thank you.

Cortes-Vargas: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute pleasure to stand today on Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, and it's a pleasure because this bill is about students. As much as we can go on as to the personal interpretations of what it takes to come to this place, this bill is about that. And it isn't about our own personal experiences. I can tell you that I'm self-identified and have talked many times about being part of the LGBTQ community, and it is not about me. It is about a community that I'm a part of.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I don't get to call myself an ally because I am part of this community, but I do want to talk about allyship because I think it's important to talk about the elements that make up allyship. I'm not going to argue who is or who isn't. I'm just going to say for the record that it's important to reflect on those things because an allyship is not an identity. It is a lifelong process of building relationships between trust, consistency, accountability with marginalized individuals or groups. Allyship is not self-identified. Our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with.

Now, I'm not going to continue this debate of whether she is or she isn't. I want to say that if the members that are in this House today have the very privilege of being here by being elected by over 40 million Albertans . . .

An Hon. Member: Four million.

Cortes-Vargas: Four million. Sorry. I grew Alberta.

We're here to represent them, and that's our greatest privilege, to come into this Legislature and have 87 votes to determine the laws that govern our society. The law that we're talking about today is a law that protects children.

Again and again the example is taken of subsection 50.1, which is section 9 of this bill. That one has been explained. The reason it exists, the reason it is necessary is because there have been interpretations saying, "Because in GSAs you talk about sexual identity and children choose to talk about that, that is a reason why you need to notify parents," essentially the reason that we're here. Understand that this circumstance has occurred and that these cases have happened, and the reality is that this bill supports the belief, the understanding that gay students, LGBTQ students should be determinant of how they come out and that that is a fundamental principle for the resiliency in our communities.

I've continuously rejected the notion that GSAs and refusing to force children out prevents the ability for parents to be involved, and I continue to reject that premise, presented mainly by the majority of the opposition. I think that it should be done, that it should be rejected, because it fundamentally undermines the importance of the conversations that we're having right now. Parents, in fact, are involved when their child is supported through the coping mechanisms that GSAs provide in that they are able to come out to them, able to acquire the language that is necessary to be able to come out to their parents and have that difficult conversation.

When those parents want to be involved in those areas, there are many examples. I've read them into the record; I've put it into a member's statement. There are many examples of how parents are involved in this process, and – let me repeat – GSAs do not preclude that, and this bill does not prevent that. It, in fact, enhances the clarity of the roles of the people involved within GSAs, which is the fact that the principal needs to acknowledge the request for a GSA and make sure that it comes forward, make sure that if people are saying – and understand this: we come to the process of LGBTQ protections from the fact that talking about it has been criminal at some points.

That is why it's such a charged conversation. That is why generations and generations of LGBTQ people before us have had a hard time discussing this, because it, in fact, has been and continues to be in parts of the world a criminal act to be someone that loves a person in a same-sex relationship. Let us not forget that, because it creates a society where it is very, very difficult.

So, no, I disagree that this is anything about you, that this has anything to do with anything other than the students that need to be a part of this conversation. I think that making sure that it's clear that parental notification is not mandatory for these GSAs, which is a concept that actually is promoted by parents for choice, a group that was introduced by the member that spoke previous to me – one of the fundamental things that they support is mandatory notification for parents. [interjections] I think we need to take responsibility for the moments that we are endorsing and supporting certain groups to come out and . . . [interjections]

9:30

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Strathcona-Sherwood Park has the floor.

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, I think that this is an important conversation, and we need to continue to have it.

I think the reality exists for LGBTQ students that they need a safe space. That reality exists because it is very difficult. I can speak to that from a personal lens. I can speak to that from the many hundreds and hundreds of stories that I have heard. I think the reality continues to exist that people don't understand that it's not just an antibullying club. We couldn't name it that because it doesn't completely encompass the elements of a GSA that are important to it.

The realities are – and I'll use female same-sex relationships as an example – that you will face crude questions about who you are, and people will ask for explanations of why you decide to exhibit your identity or not to hide it. Whether it comes to your – people continuously ask: "Well, how do you know? How do you know that you are that?" You're continuously asked to validate those elements.

A place like a GSA becomes somewhere that you can talk to other people that have gone through similar experiences and are able to come up with the language to reiterate to, frankly, a society that is still adjusting to this idea. I can say as a person from the LGBTQ

community that experiencing harassment on the basis of my sexual identity or gender identity is something that I have experienced within the past week, so I don't doubt that young students, vulnerable groups need to be supported in this process. It is a real, real existence.

I think that we have a privilege today, and the privilege is to come here and make a choice that there are other ways to – I frankly think it's disingenuous to say that the reason we're here is to vote and to say that we're going to abstain as a way of doing that, because there are other measures, too. The fact remains that Committee of the Whole is the main place where you address those things. It's decided by the majority of the House, but it also has an element in it that talks about voting on each part of the clauses. You can vote on each clause separately, Madam Speaker, and that opportunity was missed.

I still believe, though, Madam Speaker, that in the discussion of allyship – and it is determined by your accountability to that very community, and it is not self-assigned. I think that is important because that is part of how the community creates an identity, creates circumstances that are truly safe for them and expectations that they want their advocates to uphold. I think that that is a critical element in this process.

I believe that we must remember that we're here for the students, that it isn't about us as individuals, and that protecting those very students, protecting the students that are experiencing this harm, is incredibly important. The reason that we're here today discussing this very bill is because there have been circumstances where accountability was not put in place for GSAs to be formed, and that needs to change today.

I hope that every member of this Legislature will support this bill and will continue to support the progress that we have made in Alberta and not promote this concept of taking away rights from groups of vulnerable students. That's a very selfish way to propel your political movement. I think that it has to be articulated that it is based on that political gain, that that represents why their position is where they are.

I think that throughout my speeches – throughout my speeches – I have communicated how GSAs are supportive to students in coming out to their parents. I've also communicated how section 50.1 is an important section of this bill and, in fact, is a main element of making sure that parents' mandatory notification is not acceptable, because it forces gay students out of the closet.

I think, Madam Speaker, that there's a lot of rhetoric around all of this. I want to assure my constituents, Albertans that at the end of the day, what we need to focus on is making sure that we're putting a system in place that protects those students, that creates safe and welcoming, inclusive spaces that are student-led, that provides them with groups of people, of peers that can talk to the realities of their lives, and that that isn't limited by what the opposition tries to create as a narrative of a sex group that exists within GSAs. I mean, that's so harmful in so many ways.

I think of the history of the LGBTQ community and think of the many times that in regard to not giving us rights, we were compared to predators, we were compared to communists – actually, that was a comment on one of my member's statements – we were compared to any number of name-calling things, things that could have us thrown in jail. Why? Because people interpret my living my life not in the closet as a promotion of homosexual lifestyles. I think that's a very real concept that we need to discuss because the ability for me to exist without discrimination is just that, me existing without discrimination. It's not a promotion. It is me existing and every person in the LGBTQ community existing without being discriminated against, Madam Speaker.

I am proud that this government and that the members opposite and the independents have spoken to this because it is incredibly

important not to get lost in rhetoric that is actively engaging their political allies. I think that at the end of the day, if the politicians in this House lose sight of the fact that this must remain about the students, about our school system, about a society that is free of discrimination – we must look for ways to support this form of legislation now and continuing in the future. I think that it's absolutely imperative, Madam Speaker, that we all come together and we have conversations that are constructive and that, in fact, don't promote a concept that for many years has said that GSAs or the gathering of LGBTQ people are in some way something that should be hidden in the corner.

I think this is a time that we reject this very notion, that it should be censored, because that is the other element about this, that if we want to restrict what these students are talking about even if it's student-led, which, frankly, is, like, just a fleeting sense – I mean, they're meeting at lunchtime. They could meet at lunchtime anyways. They're going to talk about this because it's student-led. I believe, Madam Speaker, that if we don't put things like this in place, we cause harm whereas, I believe, if we put something like this, we don't.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe that the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park had a few more things to say, so I'd ask her if she'd like to continue saying a couple of words.

9:40

Cortes-Vargas: Madam Speaker, one of the last things I want to say is the fact that I do believe that when we don't create safe spaces, we also create a sense that those children that need those support groups will look to alternative spaces for belonging. I think that that's what we should evaluate.

The reality is that we live in a society filled with social media, with Internet, that no amount of filters, blocking can really censor and that transgender youth especially are at risk of getting involved in sex trade industries. I think we need to talk about the reality of what happens when we continue to marginalize these very students because that is the foundation of where they continue after that. They look for a place of belonging, and they look – and you see the numbers – to drug use and alcohol use in order to cope with the realities that they're facing. If we don't allow for a space like this to exist without forcing them to be outed, then the reality is that we are causing harm. We are causing harm.

And the folks that are still, you know, on the fence on whether these GSAs should exist or not have used again – and I need to repeat this multiple times: have used – this section on the fact that GSAs talk about sexual identity and gender expression to demand parental notification beforehand. This part of this bill needs to be here, and there's absolutely no way I would ever have supported that section being removed from this bill.

Madam Speaker, I am proud of the discussions we've had, the conversations that we continue to have, and the progress that we make for every Albertan, because it is every Albertan. GSAs provide a really caring space for everyone in that school. Whether one member attends that GSA or not, you see a decrease in substance dependence in that school. Why? Because there's a sense of acceptance and belonging regardless of who you are and where you come from. I think that's important to recognize.

Madam Speaker, I truly appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 24 and to continue to debate this bill and to support it. Thank you.

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

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As you know, the United Conservative Party's leader, the Hon. Jason Kenney, does not hold a seat in the House, and while we hope that the Premier will call a by-election soon so that he can join us, he's not able to speak on the record.

As such, I'd like to briefly read into the record some of the key elements of the United Conservative Party's leader's remarks on this bill from last week. Madam Speaker:

We strongly support efforts to make schools free from bullying, and to provide peer support, counselling, and safe [places and] spaces for kids who might be subject to bullying.

We believe that is especially true for students who are subject to bullying or prejudice because of their sexual identity.

We support Gay Straight Alliances, which became law with the unanimous support of MLAs from both of our legacy parties. We believe that these, and other anti-bullying peer groups, can be a useful way of supporting students going through difficult times.

We do not support, I repeat we do not support mandatory notification of parents regarding the involvement of students in GSAs.

And neither I nor anyone in our caucus has proposed "outing" gay kids. To suggest otherwise is offensive and dishonest. It is the opposite of what [we] have actually said.

We believe that the vast majority of parents have unconditional love for their kids, and we acknowledge the research underscoring that parental [involvement and parental] support . . . is one of the most important factors in supporting youth at risk, including sexual minority youth. This research has been recognized by some of the strongest GSA advocates themselves.

We also support the longstanding principles – enshrined in law – that parents are the primary educators of [their] children, and that schools operate under legal authority delegated by parents.

We affirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' recognition that "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children," and [we support] the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' defence of "the liberty of parents . . . to ensure the moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions," rights which were recently affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada.

We believe that every child is unique, and that every circumstance faced by kids at risk is different.

We believe that highly trained educators are in a much better position than politicians to exercise their discretion on whether it is in the best interests of a child to engage parents . . .

Teachers, not politicians, should decide when it makes sense to engage parents.

The unique circumstances of [every] child should be the key factor, not the blunt instrument of law.

This is especially true given that Bill 24 applies to five year olds in kindergarten, treating them the same way as it treats seventeen year olds in grade twelve.

That makes no sense.

Bill 24 would make it illegal to engage parents about certain school activities for children beginning in kindergarten, regardless of their individual circumstances.

What about children with developmental disabilities, or those who have suffered abuse or trauma, or have mental or emotional health challenges? Schools are to be legally barred from engaging parents, even if teachers, counsellors or principals deem it prudent to do so.

We are also concerned that the Bill undermines the longstanding legal obligation of schools to inform parents, and I quote here from Section 50 of the School Act:

"where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality." (Section 50.1(1) of the School Act)

Bill 24 says this will no longer be the case with respect to educational activities associated with GSAs.

According to the Alberta Teachers' Association Guide on GSAs, GSAs are not merely peer support groups, but also include "curriculum," "schoolwide educational activities," "political activities," etc.

In other words, the NDP is trying to do indirectly what it cannot do directly: that is teaching sensitive subjects that would normally require parental notification. Parents would be barred from knowing anything about the guest speakers, programs, or content being taught, a clear violation of the spirit of the School Act.

Bill 24 also concentrates enormous new powers in the hands of the Minister, undermining local decision making by principals, school boards, and independent schools. By doing the latter, the government is very likely setting itself up for costly Charter litigation by violating the 2015 decision of this Supreme Court of Canada in the Loyola High School case.

These powers are without precedent anywhere in Canada. Not even Ontario's Liberal government, which has taken a very aggressive approach to these issues, has proposed anything like the powers in Bill 24.

The NDP has never proposed powers like this before.

They did not do so prior to the adoption of Bill 10.

They did not propose these powers as amendments to Bill 10.

They did not raise any of this in their election platform.

And they have governed for the past two and a half years without concern about teachers being able to engage parents when appropriate.

The only rationale they have offered is transparently cynical: as a political instrument to attack their partisan opponents, part of their desperate effort to talk about anything but their failed economic record. We aren't going to let them get away with that.

So to recap:

- The United Conservative Caucus supports Gay Straight Alliances and other peer support groups to help provide safe environments for youth at risk, including sexual minority youth.
- We support Bill 10.
- We oppose mandatory notification of parents of membership in GSAs.
- We absolutely oppose the notion of schools outing gay students.
- We believe every child is unique, and that educators should be left with the discretion they currently have to engage parents when it is in the best interests of the child to do so.
- We believe that parents should continue to have the right to be informed of educational programs or materials that deal with human sexuality.
- We believe that it is wrong to treat young elementary school children the same . . . as teenagers in high school on sensitive matters.
- [And] we believe in local decision making by principals and school boards, rather than constantly amassing new powers in the hands of one politician.

So, in other words, we support neither extreme of mandatory notification nor of a legal prohibition to parental engagement. We support the common-sense status quo, the same status quo the NDP has supported until this [past] week [or so].

9:50

Madam Speaker, these are the words of the United Conservative leader, Jason Kenney.

I would like to thank you for this time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just have some quotations that I'd like to read into the record. This one is from March 29, 2017, from Global News. The title is Jason Kenney Slammed for Comments about Gay-straight Alliances. Mr. Kenney said:

"I have said that I would not repeal Bill 10, if that's what you're asking me. And I do, however, think that parents have a right to know what's going on with their kids in the schools unless the parents are abusive.

I think generally speaking, parents have a right to know what their kids are doing in school," Kenney continued. "If there's evidence that the parents are abusive, then they shouldn't be involved."

That sounds like outing kids. I don't know about you guys.

From September 28, 2017, the *Edmonton Journal*: Education Minister Vows to Tighten Privacy Rules around Gay-straight Alliances in Schools. The quote from the article is: "Kenney has said it should be up to school staff to decide whether to tell a child's parents or guardians whether they're in a gay-straight alliance." That again sounds like outing students. I don't know if the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon had talked to his leader before he made those statements.

Again, from the Red Deer newspaper. What's the Red Deer newspaper?

An Hon. Member: *Red Deer Advocate*.

Connolly: *Red Deer Advocate*.

Province to Introduce Law Preventing GSA Students from Being Outed. The quote from the article is: "Kenney says in some cases it's best to tell parents their kids have joined a gay-straight alliance and that school officials are in the best position to make [that] decision." That also sounds like outing gay students. I don't know if that's wrong or if the paper is wrong or if they misquoted or what, but I'm pretty sure the paper wasn't wrong.

Again, from a CBC News article on September 28, 2017: Alberta to Outlaw Outing of GSA students, Education Minister Says. That article states that "Kenney said the NDP government was too aggressive in making religious schools follow the law, which compels all schools to allow gay-straight alliances if students ask for them."

I would like to ask the member why he thinks that religious schools shouldn't follow the law, why he thinks that Jason Kenney believes that he should out gay kids, if he believes that these quotes are true, and whether or not he agrees with his leader, Jason Kenney.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise in support of Bill 24. I've been thinking a lot about this bill. This bill will have a direct impact on people's lives. GSAs and QSAs save lives, period, and every student deserves a school that is welcoming, caring, and a safe place to learn. For those who are listening and

maybe are not familiar with the bill, I'll just give a really quick Coles Notes version of what the bill is.

This piece of legislation will strengthen supports for students wishing to create or join a gay-straight alliance or queer-straight alliance at their schools by requiring publicly funded schools to create and publicly disclose their policies in regard to GSAs, protecting the privacy of students who choose to join a GSA or QSA and preventing their identity from being outed, ensuring that principals have a responsibility to help students create a GSA or QSA in a timely manner, and providing clarity about roles and responsibilities among school authorities for the establishment of welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments.

I was interested to hear my colleagues speak about the context for this bill and why this piece of legislation is so necessary. I would like to talk a little bit about my high school experience and then talk about other people's experiences that I've met because I think it's important to have their voices heard in this Chamber. I went to a Catholic school, not necessarily because I'm a religious person but because they had an excellent theatre arts IB program. I knew many people in that program who were LGBTQ2S, people that I am still friends with today. I only knew they were LGBTQ because they told me. But I remember them saying to me to not tell anyone because our school wasn't exactly LGBTQ friendly.

The only mention of sexuality was a brief conversation in our CALM class about how abstinence is the only true form of birth control, with no mention of sexual orientation or gender identity nor consent. I also don't ever remember seeing advertisements for a GSA or QSA in my school, and, to be honest, I doubt there was one. So my friends didn't have a safe space to go to to talk to other LGBTQ-plus students or their straight allies. They just had our small circle of friends to confide in.

I remember one of those friends that came out. He came out to our peer group and asked if he should tell his parents. My response to him was to only do so if you feel comfortable and safe. So he decided to do it but was kicked out of his house shortly after. He became homeless just because he wanted to be himself and not stay in the closet. A friend of mine took him in for a few months, and finally his family took him back. But I remember how hard that was for him.

This, unfortunately, is not uncommon. According to the LGBTQ2S Youth Housing and Shelter Guidelines from the Ministry of Community and Social Services

- Nearly one in three homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQ2S.
- LGBTQ2S youth identify the primary reason for homelessness as family rejection due to gender identity or sexual orientation.
- LGBTQ2S homeless youth face higher rates of discrimination, violence and abuse in the shelter system than their non-LGBTQ2S counterparts.
- LGBTQ2S youth are at higher risk of mental health concerns and self-harm and exhibit higher rates of [suicide] than the general [public].

I can only imagine, if that friend decided to join a GSA and then became outed by his parents when he wasn't ready, the anxiety that he would have felt, the fear of abuse, the fear of rejection. It could have been a lot worse for him.

Last Sunday I attended a GSA rally in Calgary, and I would like to say that not a single member from the UCP was there – not a single one – and that's shameful. I saw some familiar faces and some new faces. I ran into a dear friend of mine, Amelia Newbert. She wanted to share her story with you all today and wanted to share what Bill 24 meant to her. She also mentioned that she had barely told anyone these details, but she felt compelled to show how important this bill is.

10:00

I'm going to quote her here.

From the age of 5, I've always known I was transgender. However, it wasn't until my 30th birthday I started living as who I was. This was in large part due to repeated, ongoing physical abuse I suffered as a child every time I tried to express my gender identity. It left me feeling worthless, less than human, and most of all alone. As a result [I] attempted to take my life numerous times. All I ever wanted or needed was to know I wasn't alone. That someone understood.

This is what GSAs [and QSAs] are providing. They aren't pushing an agenda, they aren't violating rights. They are ensuring that our children don't have to suffer through what I've gone through. They are creating support and connection. They are saving lives.

This is also why under no circumstance can children be outed to anyone for attending GSA[s], it literally isn't safe. Period.

And I can tell you that, heartbreakingly, stories like mine aren't a thing of the past. I hear them over and over again from youth I work with.

It is not [a] complicated matter. Kids are dying without access to the safe spaces GSAs create and we need to do everything possible to ensure they have them.

I don't understand the debate or posturing or amendments, Bill 24 is essential. We owe it to our kids. They deserve better than this.

Another person I met at the rally was Leigh. They wanted to tell their story and express the importance of GSAs and how Bill 24 is essential. These are their words.

I hate using public bathrooms. They are just so uncomfortable to me because I don't feel right in them. I don't use the men's room because I'm not a man, and I don't use the women's room because I'm not a woman. I use the men's room purely because that's what I look like.

Whenever I go to see a doctor, I'm always referred to by my old name. Even if the nurse puts a note on my chart, most doctors ignore it. At work, they can't change my name in their computer, but everyone knows me as Leigh. Last time I went to an office to get information, I told them my name was Leigh and they got confused because my legal name was different. And I'm used to showing multiple IDs to get my mail.

This is the difficulty I face as an adult. There is something so exhausting and discouraging about having to say again and again that my name is Leigh, and I want they and them pronouns to be used. I'm tired of explaining why my name is different on my ID. I'm tired of being referred to by he by people that know I prefer [otherwise]. And I'm an adult. I am comfortable with my gender. I've already gone through my discovery phase.

Now imagine this. You're in grade nine. You're beginning to feel a little [bit] weird. Puberty is starting, and all your classmates are talking about crushes and stuff. The conversation turns to you. They ask you which girl you have a crush on. The truth is, you don't. You don't feel the same way that your friends are describing. You don't know what to call it because you have only been taught about human reproduction in sex ed. You have no idea what's going on. You think that you are weird. Or broken. Or gay. Not gay as in a boy who likes a boy, or a girl who likes a girl. Gay as in weird, broken, stupid, wrong. Alone at night in your room, you turn to Google. There you find half-truths and no reliable resources. So you struggle. You feel alone. You feel like no one understands you. And you feel wrong.

That's the kid that never got a GSA. That's the kid that never felt comfortable going to a teacher or parent or anyone to talk to. That's the kid who could turn to self-harm, substance abuse, and could end their life.

[The Member for Calgary-Hawwood] stood in front of the legislature and said that GSAs save lives. That kid that felt alone,

and clueless, and hurt needed that GSA. They needed some sort of support and education to understand that not being what everyone else was, was not wrong.

GSAs absolutely save lives. I know this first hand. With the help of a teacher, I founded the Pride Club at WG Murdoch School in Crossfield Alberta. I had a solid group of kids that regularly came, and we made a name for ourselves when we organized Spirit Day in our school.

I found myself the main person to talk to about Pride Club. One night, near midnight I got a message from someone. They told me that they thought they were trans and asked me for help. They were so afraid of their parents finding out, and they only felt comfortable with who they were in the Pride Club space. She could be herself and really explore who she was.

We laughed in our meetings because we were sharing memes, and funny videos. We ate pizza and shared snacks and made jokes. We got serious and talked about what we struggled with. And we became a close family. I could look at one in the hallways of the school and see the light in their eyes when they saw me. I could watch them become so much more comfortable with themselves, and with their friends and classmates.

GSAs not only save lives, they enhance them. They take a kid that is struggling to find themselves and gives them a place to be who they want with people that get them.

Bill 24 does not give schools or the state any power to indoctrinate young queer kids in GSAs. Bill 24 does not create small political cells in schools that are protected. Bill 24 does not make GSAs a tool of an authoritative state that Mr. Kenney seems to be so scared of.

Every GSA in this province is run completely by students, for students. Teachers do support, mainly as an adult mentor figure that the kids can trust implicitly. Bill 24 protects the privacy of those kids. Bill 24 makes sure that the students can keep this space safe for themselves. And Bill 24 makes sure that the prying eyes of potentially abusive parents stay away from at-risk kids.

Bill 24 solidifies the existence of GSAs in schools, saves kids lives, and helps them become the best version of themselves possible. Bill 24 makes sure that GSAs can exist without opposition so that kid I described earlier can be comfortable and safe. Bill 24 is so important because that kid was me. First having a group of like minded people helped. And then getting exposed to the wider community I didn't know was out there created who I am today.

Bill 24 guarantees this for kids in the future. They need to know that the government has their back. And they need to know that people like us are out here willing to fight tooth and nail for this.

Madam Speaker, it is so important that this bill is passed, and I encourage all members to support it. Looking across the way with the UCP, I know that every MLA sitting over there has LGBTQ2S people in their ridings. In fact, the person I was just describing lives in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and I hope that he votes for this bill. I hope that he stands in this Chamber on behalf of Leigh and says yes to Bill 24.

We speak about the importance of consultations in this Chamber. I'd like to know if they consulted with the LGBTQ2S community in their constituencies, because they are not supporting a bill that literally saves lives, a bill that is meant to make a community feel safe and supported by their schools. It is truly a shame that they won't listen to them.

Good news, though. Here is their chance to be on the right side of history. They still have a chance to vote for this bill, and I strongly encourage them to vote for it and stand with the LGBTQ2S community and not against it.

To conclude, I will be supporting Bill 24. I really hope that the opposition listened to what I had to say, listened to Leigh's story, listened to Amelia's story.

Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This morning I rise to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. Members from all sides of the House have spoken to this bill with both passion and concern for Alberta, our schools, our parents, and our youth. I've listened to all sides of the House and have reviewed the bill carefully. I have also had the opportunity to consult with constituents, staff, and members opposite and have paid close attention to amendments proposed by opposition members.

Ultimately, little has changed for the Alberta Party with respect to Bill 24. Since the very beginning the Member for Calgary-Elbow and I have supported this legislation because it's progressive, necessary, and it can save lives. Madam Speaker, I'm proud to rise in the House today to support this bill on behalf of the Alberta Party caucus, and I implore my colleagues down the aisle to do the same.

Bill 24 has generated impassioned debate that has been at times eye-opening and at times humbling. On other occasions it's been downright sad. While the Alberta Party, the Liberals, and the NDP recognize that this bill is about the safety of kids and teens, the UCP's position centres on the preference and desires of parents as if they are the ones who have to show up at school as gay teenagers and deal with mockery and belittling from their peers. This has been a consistent hole in the UCP's case. Madam Speaker, why does the life of a gay kid matter less than the beliefs of a homophobic parent?

The research on GSAs and QSAs is vast and growing. Overwhelmingly, it points to the success of these organizations, their ability to provide kids and teens with a safe space in which they can share, learn, and grow without the disapproving eye of homophobic or transphobic classmates, certain religious groups, and/or society at large.

Dr. Kristopher Wells and Dr. André Grace, professors at the University of Alberta, have long been the go-to scholars on the issue of gay-straight alliances. While their research is invaluable, other scholars take a different yet equally affirming approach to this issue.

In her article published in the *Journal of Homosexuality* in 2014 Meredith G.F. Worthen argues that GSAs aren't just beneficial for LGBTQ students but transformative for other students who merely attended a school where one was present. Students need not even join the GSA at their school in order to display higher rates of acceptance of LGBTQ people once they reach postsecondary, a fact that speaks directly to the ability of GSAs to educate, enlighten, and transform.

Madam Speaker, to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill 24 is a proud moment for me, and it is one that I'm sure many Albertans cherish inside and outside the LGBTQ community. In fact, it's rare that we stand up for LGBTQ people in Alberta. Historically the provincial government has actually stood in the way of progress. In 1991, when Delwin Vriend was fired from King's college in Edmonton for being gay, the Alberta Human Rights Commission refused to recognize sexual orientation as protected grounds for discrimination. Vriend took the government to court, and after he won, the provincial government appealed. Vriend took his case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and ultimately won in a landmark case known as Vriend versus Alberta, or simply the Vriend decision.

While we salute courageous figures like Delwin Vriend in the House today, we must also acknowledge the rarity of passing

legislation in support of LGBTQ people. In years past we have left them to fight for themselves in the courtroom, afraid to offend social conservatives who would sooner see gay people back in the closet. No more, Madam Speaker. No more will Alberta put human rights on the back burner, and no more will we allow pernicious stereotypes about the social values of Albertans to perpetuate.

The last time I rose to speak about Bill 24, I spoke about kindness, and just to reiterate, this is ultimately what Bill 24 is about. However, it's about something else, too: progress, not just progress for queer people but for their friends, families, allies, and classmates. When a GSA is present in a school, Madam Speaker, compassion, love, and kindness win, and without these things we cannot progress. GSAs and the autonomy and confidentiality they provide are a huge step forward for Alberta youth and the cornerstone of a happy and healthy school. It's time we acknowledge GSAs for what they are, crucial networks of support that deserve respect, autonomy, and the ability to blossom.

Back to the issue of parents. They've come up a lot during these debates, and rightfully so. They are the people that love and care for our students in ways that we cannot describe. However, Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the narrative of parenthood that the UCP caucus has constructed for us. In their view, parents are omniscient and universally kind figures who are being denied access to their kids' lives and information because of GSAs.

As we approach voting on this legislation, I ask that we not think of the homophobic parents who disagree with GSAs and their message but the parents of gay kids and teens who sleep a little bit better knowing that their kids go to school with a safe space that respects their lives, their sexualities, and their privacy. Let us not get hung up on the parents who would see GSAs crumble. Let us instead celebrate the parents who support their kids no matter who or what they are and the parents who want a safe space for their kids.

Most of all, Madam Speaker, this legislation calls on us to celebrate children, kids, and their interests. It calls on us to recognize them as needing decency, privacy, and respect and as being diverse beings who just want to be safe. That's why I'm supporting this bill and why I believe my colleagues should as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will recognize Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've been disappointed by the tone of debate on this bill. I'm proud to be a member of Alberta's gay and lesbian community. I know that some members across, very soon after we were elected, joined me in Canada's only gay rodeo hosted right in Strathmore. That was a great time. Unfortunately, that event is no longer with us as it ran into some financial troubles, but we've been doing what we can to try and restart it. I know that they're working with the Calgary Stampede. But there is more to being an ally than showing up at a fun rodeo.

I vote based on reasoned analysis of this bill, not its name. The name of the bill would certainly make it easy to vote for it, but we have to vote on its contents, not its name. Bill 24 is an attempt, I believe, to use the desire of most Albertans to protect vulnerable youth in order to divide Albertans for partisan gain. This issue is far more complicated and sensitive than the usual partisan banter between parties.

We can normally have some pretty strong words in this House and differences on tax policy and spending and any number of issues. The divide between our parties is very great on those issues,

but on this topic I actually don't think the differences are all that great. They're rhetorical differences in so many cases. They are partisan differences. But the actual substance of these differences is relatively small. That difference has been exacerbated by the political tone in the province. That tone is something I think that all of us in this Chamber carry at least some responsibility for, myself included.

Gay and lesbian youth are at significantly higher risk than their peers for suicide, substance abuse, and homelessness. Being a teenager is tough enough already, so I can only begin to imagine how much more difficult it would be for kids who feel that out of place. This is compounded if they don't have loving and caring friends, family, and communities.

I think back to my experience in high school. I grew up in mostly small army and air force towns across the country, but I went to at least three years of high school in Trenton, an air force base. We had, as far as I know, only one kid, one of my peers, out as gay. It was not easy for him. There were certainly more than just him who were not out: some who were thought to be, some who probably would have surprised us, but only one kid who felt he could come out. Frankly, I don't know how the heck he did it because he was not treated well. He had some friends, but the majority of his peers, while maybe not hateful, were at least snickering and unsupportive.

10:20

I think times have changed. If I think back to, you know, just 10 years ago, I think that all of our views on these issues have changed in one direction, some more than others, but I think the vast majority of people's views – Canadian views, Albertans' views, and people in this House – have changed over the last 10 and 20 years on these issues. I like to think that if that kid who I went to high school with was around today, he would have a very different experience than he did when I was in high school, but I imagine that it would still be greatly difficult in any circumstance.

Bill 10 was passed, I think, in 2014, and since then there has been some debate if parents should be notified if their children join a GSA. Bill 24 will make it illegal in virtually all circumstances for teachers to notify their parents if their child is involved in a GSA, and the ostensible reasoning behind this is that any parental notification would out a gay or lesbian kid before they're ready and put them at risk. If I believed for one minute that that was the case, I would vote for Bill 24, but I don't believe it is.

I know the NDP sent out a press release last week. I keep a ticker in my office about how many days I can go without being mentioned in NDP news releases, and that number gets pretty small. They mentioned in a news release that at the Wildrose Party convention in 2016 I spoke against a resolution that would have made notification to parents for GSAs mandatory. Someone had put forward at the policy convention a resolution there that would have made it mandatory that if their kid joins a GSA or is involved in anything involving sexuality, period, the parents would be notified. I was proud to speak against that at the last Wildrose convention that we held, and members voted between 95 and 98 per cent against it, decisively opposing it.

What I said there was that a blanket law requiring parental notification, which would out some gay and lesbian kids before they're ready, was foolhardy. But just as equally, I believe that a blanket law banning parental notification in any case whatsoever is also foolhardy. I've been on the record speaking against mandatory parental notification because that would out gay and lesbian kids before they're ready, and that is wrong.

The overwhelming majority of parents love their children unconditionally and care more about their children than any government, bureaucrat, or politician possibly could. This is not to

say that some parents would not be loving or accepting and supportive of their children coming out. In some circumstances that could even put youth at risk, and that is where the government has a legitimate role to play in intervening to protect children, but government should not create a blanket law entirely forbidding any and all notification. A blanket ban on notifying parents is as irresponsible as automatically notifying parents regardless of the circumstances. Teachers and other education professionals are better suited to make such a sensitive decision on the ground, not politicians, myself included.

Bill 24 makes no distinction whatsoever between a five-year-old and a 17-year-old. Blanket laws like this, that are meant to achieve political objectives, are overly blunt and do not account for nuance.

Bill 24 also overrides the principle that schools have authority delegated to them by parents, not by government. We should remember that parents, not the government, are the primary authority over children. The government should only ever intervene in that special relationship when there is abuse or neglect, not differences over politics. This is a legislated wedge being driven between parents and their children, not intended to protect those children but to change the political channel, and this is doing so using the most vulnerable youth in our society.

I've spoken with my constituents, I've spoken with parents, I've spoken with kids, and I've spoken with members of our gay and lesbian community. The vast – vast – majority of them want us to act to protect sexual minority youth, but this is a blunt instrument, and it is overreach.

Most members of this House know where I stand on issues of personal liberty involving sexual matters. I don't believe that it is any business of the government what consenting adults do in private, but matters involving our children, especially young children, are more complicated. When we as legislators are making laws concerning the most vulnerable children in our society, sexual minority youth, we should take care to put them first and remember that in the vast majority of cases their greatest ally is mom and dad.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: I just have a really brief question, Madam Speaker. The lead point made by the member opposite started off by saying that he's part of the gay and lesbian community, I think, was the quote. I just want him to clarify what that means.

The Deputy Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks, did you wish to respond?

Any other questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have to say that I'm so proud to stand here today in support of Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. I'm going to be as brief as I can today because I think that throughout this debate we've heard many incredibly moving speeches that have been made from some of the members on this side as well as some of our independent members.

I mean, when we look at the people on this side, people who actually understand this bill and the effect that it will have on our school system, I think it's important to listen to their thoughts. I think it's important for me to stand and show my support for this piece of legislation for the many people in my life who have helped me understand why it is so important to protect these rights, the rights of my friends and the larger community, for the people who

go through every single day of their life being attacked for how they identify or for who they love.

This bill, of course, will require publicly funded schools to disclose their policies in regard to GSAs and QSAs. It will ensure that principals have a responsibility to help create these in places where they have not already been established, and it will clarify some of the roles among school authorities for establishing a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment. But, most importantly, as has come up several times throughout this debate, it will ensure that the privacy of a student that chooses to join a GSA or QSA will be protected.

Madam Speaker, every single student in this province deserves a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn and a place where they are respected. We need to understand the value of protecting GSAs in our schools.

The choice of a student to not disclose to their family that they identify as LGBTQ does not necessarily have any reflection on the quality of a parent or guardian. I was a student not that long ago, surprising or not, and I have the most incredibly accepting parents. I am so blessed with the respect that they have given me, but that does not mean that I told them everything. I identify as a straight, cis male and never had to struggle with the incredibly complex decision to come out to the wider community, but if I did have that, I can imagine that it would have taken me quite a long time before I was willing to tell my parents, even with the acceptance and the love that they showed me. It's a deeply personal matter, and no one has the right to decide when a student should come out besides the student themselves.

From the discussions that I've had with teachers and from the articles that I've seen coming from the teaching community, they do not want the responsibility to have to inform a parent when their child joins a GSA, so I am not sure why the Conservative opposition continues down this line of messaging. I really don't understand it. Once again, it is the child's decision, not a teacher's decision.

I want to share a story with you that was shared with me by a close friend in response to this legislation. When they were in school, they were coming to the realization that they identified as part of the LGBTQ community and went to a teacher. The teacher had no understanding of this issue and asked if the student was gay. Worried that the teacher might out this student, they told the teacher no and continued to have to hide their own identity.

10:30

Without a support group at that time this friend of mine was bullied, harassed, and even assaulted in the washrooms. They were told at home that it was wrong to be gay. They were told at school that it was wrong to be gay. Hence, they believed that they themselves were wrong to identify how they did. Imagine the impact that that has on a child. This scenario is obviously not the only way this conversation can play out, but it often has played out that way, and it's damaging to our community.

Of course, we've heard the numbers around how our LGBTQ community can so easily end up and do end up marginalized, numbers like: 40 per cent of those who find themselves homeless identifying as LGBTQ; 33 per cent of LGBTQ youth have attempted suicide in comparison to 7 per cent of youth in general; 49 per cent of trans students, 33 per cent of lesbian students, and 40 per cent of gay students may have experienced sexual harassment in school in the last year. I wonder how the opposition can stand in this House with all of the facts in front them and still vote against the rights of our students. At what age do our human rights start to be recognized? Once they're voting age? I really don't understand. When they can vote for them?

Madam Speaker, the opposition say that they are allies, yet their newly elected leader in his long history of politics has never supported the LGBTQ community, not even once, as far as I know, over the many, many human rights bills that he has had to make decisions over. I really think that that says something. Whether the opposition would like to admit it or not, that is their leader. We just heard a member of the opposition read into the record that Kenney has concerns about a child with a disability considering joining a GSA, that their parent should be notified because, God forbid, a child with a disability joins a GSA. It's truly shameful. I cannot even fathom how that member was willing to read that on behalf of their new leader. It's just shameful.

I just have to say that, well, over the last week or so of this debate I have never been more disappointed in this opposition party, yet I have never been more proud of this government side of the Legislature as well as some of our independents, I think most of them, who have stood up, showing their support. And I have never been more proud of the people in our communities who identify as or are allies to the LGBTQ community, who continue to fight for their own rights to be respected.

There is still so much more that we need to do to support this community, Madam Speaker, to ensure that they are heard, respected, and protected, but I am happy that through Bill 24 we will take one more step towards that goal. I do thank the Minister of Education for bringing it forward. I have seen the positive impact that GSAs can make in our schools.

One of the first things that I had the opportunity to do after being elected was join our Minister of Education and the Premier of Alberta at my high school, Jasper Place high school, which I not only attended but now represent. It was an incredible day for me and all of those high school students. Today we take another step in protecting their inalienable rights as human beings to love who they want, identify as what they want, or be an ally to who they want without being outed.

I just want to wrap up by saying that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks said that over the last 10 years a lot of people's views on this issue have changed. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but my belief in the equal rights of all people has never changed. I'd ask all of you – if you came to the conclusion that being a member of the LGBTQ community is wrong at one point or another throughout your life because of something that you were taught, I think you should take a second look at what you're learning from.

Madam Speaker, there is still a lot for me to learn about supporting those in the LGBTQ community, but it starts with listening to those in the community. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I will recognize Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This debate should be really simple. In 2017 it is okay to be gay. In 2017 it is okay to be an ally, it's okay to be in a GSA, and it is never, ever, ever okay to out gay kids without their consent. That's pretty straightforward. That's what this bill is about, and the opposition we see to that shows that the UCP is on the wrong side of history. They are trying to somehow play both sides by on one hand saying: well, we support GSAs, but – nudge, nudge, whisper, whisper – actually, we're with you if you're homophobic, if you somehow question the legitimacy of LGBTQ peoples to simply be who they are. That's what this is. There's really no more to it than that.

In 2017 in Alberta there should absolutely be no question that it should be up to students and students alone to disclose to whom they wish, when they wish their own sexual identity. Period. Any

discussion or debate about whether this undermines the rights of parents completely misses the mark. This bill allows for teachers to disclose in the rare but serious cases where a student may display a risk of self-harm or harm to others. That accounts for any concerns that may exist over the best interests of the children who are in our school system.

Now, the vast, vast, vast majority of parents in our province and our country care deeply about their children. They want nothing but the best for their kids. They can have open and honest conversations with their children about who those children are, who they think they are, who they're becoming. As a parent of a teenager I can tell you that these are trying and challenging times. We've all gone through that. We know how difficult that is, discovering who you are. But I can also tell you that as a parent of a teenager that your teens don't always necessarily want to talk to you. They want to talk to their friends. They want to explore those challenging questions and discussions with one another, and they want to do that in a safe and supportive environment. That's what a GSA is.

What this bill does is protects those kids, the small but still substantial number of kids whose parents would do them harm, whose parents would kick them out of the house, whose parents would abuse those children. The UCP and no one else can tell me who those parents are. We don't know. That risk is real. Upwards of 40 per cent of homeless youth are LGBTQ. That's all we need to know to tell us that there is a risk to these kids. This bill does nothing more than protect the simple fundamental human right for these kids to be who they are.

It's not about whether or not we have GSAs. I take the UCP at their word that they don't mind there being GSAs. That's fair. That would be a truly remarkable statement if they didn't like that. But they're somehow trying to equivocate, somehow trying to find some middle ground that just doesn't exist, nor should it. This bill is only about who discloses to whom and when. It puts control in the hands of students, where it absolutely should be.

So I am calling out the UCP on their rather interesting and I think disingenuous strategy of conflating and confusing people using technical sections of a bill that really have nothing to do with whether or not the bill is acceptable. It's just simply the way the bill is written for all the correct technical reasons that enables students to have control over their own lives. That's all this bill is about. It's no more complicated than that, so to evoke section 50.1 and try to confuse, as if this is some sort of nefarious plot by the dastardly NDP to undermine the family unit – that's not what this is. That's absolutely not what this is, and it is disingenuous to suggest otherwise.

In the end, without hesitation, the Alberta Party and the Alberta Party caucus enthusiastically, unapologetically, unequivocally support Bill 24. We support LGBTQ kids, we support gay-straight alliances, we support fundamental human rights, and I encourage every single member of this Assembly to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

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

10:40

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll try to be brief as I've spoken a fair amount to this bill, but I want to iterate one thing. This bill is about one thing and one thing only, protecting our LGBTQ-plus youth.

I'm very tired of these misrepresentations of the truth. These aren't even alternative facts, Madam Speaker. These are outright mistruths. I've spoken to hundreds of adults who have said that this

bill would have helped them in school, and I have spoken to many, many students who have said to me that this bill will help them and their friends.

Now, for the benefit of the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View I'd be happy to read section 50.1 as it presently reads:

50.1(1) A board shall provide notice to a parent of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

That's (1). The section that we're adding is (4), so I'll skip (2) and (3).

(4) For greater certainty, this section does not apply with respect to the establishment or operation of a voluntary student organization referred to in section 16.1 or the organizing or holding of an activity referred to in section 16.1.

The words I really want to highlight are "for greater certainty." The leader of the UCP is constantly saying that these student-led clubs are a way for the ATA to covertly teach sexual education. That is why this section is needed, because there is misinformation that is being spread by Jason Kenney. This is to ensure that our youth are not being outed, that schools are not finding ways to get around asking parents for permission.

The Member for Calgary-South East brought up an interesting point yesterday. He asked if schools would still be allowed to notify parents if a child is at risk of harming themselves or others, and the answer is yes. Now, I have experience with this. When I told my drama teacher, who knew I was gay, that I wanted to kill myself, he had to tell the guidance counsellor, so he did. He didn't tell her why I wanted to kill myself as he didn't know and, quite honestly, neither did I. The guidance counsellor then told my mother and didn't mention my sexual orientation because it really didn't matter. This bill will not change that. Let me repeat: this bill will not change that.

This bill will help protect our youth. This bill will make sure that our LGBTQ-plus youth don't have to worry about being outed if they need to tell someone that they're thinking of harming themselves. From experience I can tell you that that is liberating. At the time my mother knew of my sexual orientation, so I didn't have to worry about being outed, but not everyone has the same history that I do. No one's coming out is the same, and no one should be rushed into coming out.

It's our job as legislators to ensure our youth are safe. It's our job to legislate. That's what we're doing with this bill. That's why I'm proud to come to work every day. Our youth need us. Our youth deserve to have their legislators on their side. That's what they have with this government, but I am so disappointed with the Official Opposition, Madam Speaker. When I first spoke to this bill, I was angry. I was incredibly angry. I did not think that the Official Opposition was going to vote against this bill. I thought we had moved along from this. I thought that the UCP, the Wildrose, and the PCs had learned.

When Bill 10 came out, I was also very upset. I remember viciously tweeting at the now current Minister of Infrastructure about how upset I was. The bill led me to call my MLA, who at the time was Heather Forsyth. I called her office and told her staff that I wanted her to vote against the original Bill 10. I remember crying on the phone, telling her staff why this bill was important to me, why this bill was needed, and how it would have helped me when I was in school. After that call her staff assured me that she was going to vote against the bill. Now the UCP seems to easily forget that Bill 10 did not have unanimous consent of both legacy parties and all of its members, as has been stated. There were two former Wildrosers who crossed to the PCs who could not support the bill and so abstained from the vote.

I point this out not to shame the two members but to, one, correct the record and, two, show that the UCP are not moving forward when it comes to LGBTQ-plus rights but backwards. We had two members who decided to abstain from the last vote, and now we have an entire caucus who thinks that voting against LGBTQ rights is perfectly fine. We have a whole caucus, we have 26 members of this House who believe that voting against LGBTQ rights, who believe that voting against our youth is perfectly fine, who think that homophobia has a place in this House, and I can tell you that you're wrong. There are two sides to this. There's the right side of history, and there's Jason Kenney's Alberta. We here on this side of the House and even on part of that side of the House are happy to state that homophobia does not have a place in this province.

On a nonpartisan level I'm just so disappointed. This is a nonpartisan issue, and I wish it would get unanimous consent from this House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to take an opportunity to speak to a particular aspect of this debate that has disconcerted me over the time that I've been listening to it over the last week or so. The points that have been brought up by the opposition have been refuted quite well and eloquently by many members on our side of the House, so I won't repeat all of those.

The piece that is upsetting to me is the use of misdirection that has been happening in this debate. The fact that we bring together a bill that simply is protecting the rights of young people to be able to attend a club without danger of being outed before their time – and as a parent I know that very often even if I do know something about my children, I don't necessarily go to them and confront them with it because as a parent I know they need the time to get the courage up or to think their way through it, to settle on their words in order to come forward and tell me things. I think it's just a natural part of parenting to understand that children need their time and their place and their rhythm and their process in order to move forward.

The basic intent of this bill is not inconsistent with good parenting. It's not inconsistent with the laws in this land. What the opposition has done instead, because there's nothing intrinsically wrong with where we're going, is that they've employed a bunch of misdirection. They've brought up ideas that are simply not in the bill and then refuted those ideas as if they were in the bill.

For example, they've talked about GSAs including curriculum. Nowhere in the bill does it suggest that there be a curriculum for GSAs. They misdirect with that. They brought up the idea that GSAs are sex clubs. Ridiculous on its face, but also nowhere in the bill does it prescribe them to be sex clubs, but they misdirect in order to be able to have something to refute. They talk about GSAs including five-year-olds. Nowhere in the bill does it talk about including five-year-olds, but they misdirect. It's this point of misdirection that I think is very concerning here. Even this morning we heard a little bit more about section 50.1(4), talking about it as if it's somehow an amendment of the School Act, but nowhere in the bill does it suggest that we amend the School Act. Again a misdirection.

That brings me to the point that I want to speak about today, and that is the fact that there are many things that are different between me and the Hon. Jason Kenney, but I can tell you that one of the things that's different is that I actually finished my theology degree.

So I'd just like to take a moment to speak to the theology a little bit behind this.

Thank you for the gift of the Holy Bible I received in my office just this week, in fact, perhaps a message from God.

I know, in having read through both my New Testament and Old Testament classes, that Jesus himself never once spoke against homosexuality. At no point did he say that homosexuality was bad or wrong. Now, Jesus was not a fragile man. He didn't avoid topics because they were scary to him. He did speak out against the accumulation of wealth. He did speak out about issues of poverty, the very things that we bring up in this House all the time. He associated with tax collectors and prostitutes. He was not fragile, and as God I suspect that he didn't just forget to talk about homosexuality. I suspect his memory is pretty good.

Here I am, then, left wondering: what is the basis for this kind of anger toward homosexuality? I realize that it has nothing to do with the New Testament. Take us back to the Old Testament, and take us back to Leviticus, where it is suggested in Leviticus 18:22: "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman."

If that is the basis for the argument here as to why someone would be against LGBTQ rights, then using the principle of misdirection that I've witnessed across the floor all the time, I can also assume that if you're accepting that line from Leviticus, you're also accepting other lines from Leviticus. I'd just like to take an opportunity to read into the record some of the other things that Leviticus suggests. Now I know that the members opposite in the House are in favour of these things as well because they are in Leviticus. For example, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge." I assume none of the farmers on the other side have actually cleared their fields in the time that they've been farmers.

10:50

I also understand that in Leviticus it indicates that you should not plant two different crops in the same field. So I gather that nobody on the other side in the farm community is into crop rotation at all. I do appreciate that.

Continuing the misdirection that I've been educated in by the members opposite in the House, I'd like to point out that Leviticus 19 says that "If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made." You'll notice that it doesn't say that slavery is bad; it just says simply that if you have sex with your slave, you shouldn't kill the slave. It seems to me that in continuing this misdirection, the opposition is clearly in favour of slavery, something I didn't realize until this particular event, something that I find a bit confining.

One last little piece I might add in here, Leviticus 19:27, in case you're following along in your own Bibles: "You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard." I'm a little disconcerted to find so many beardless people across the floor here since they seem to have defied the Bible itself.

"You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead" or tattoo yourself. I'm very interested in hearing the opposition's complaints and concerns about allowing tattoos in society and their speeches asking us to shut down tattoo parlours to be consistent with their belief system.

Now, Madam Speaker, of course I'm being absurd in my commentary here because I want to say that I have found the discussion from the other side to be completely absurd. We have put together a simple bill, a simple bill that recognizes that human beings have rights. Human beings include human beings of every age. The right to be able to engage in a process of coming out that is consistent with your personal emotional needs is a right that I

think we need to protect. That is all this bill is about. It's about protecting children so that they can make the choices that they need to make.

I'm very happy to stand on the side of the House that protects human rights, that is concerned about people and how they express themselves. I use "misdirection" to point out the absurdity of the misdirection on the other side. Very discouraged to hear comments about sex clubs, about five-year-olds, about curriculum, all of which are patently false, and I stand here to accuse the other side of that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? No questions or comments.

Any further speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Education to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the debate on Bill 24. It's been edifying and illuminating. Certainly, not just members of this House have learned a lot; I think that all Albertans have as well.

Our government has made it clear that we are committed to ensuring that all students, no matter what school they attend, have welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments. We do this by strengthening legislation that supports students that wish to create or join a gay-straight or queer-straight alliance. Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, is about one thing and one thing only. It's about protecting some of the most vulnerable kids in our province.

Madam Speaker, this bill would ensure that no student would be outed. We know that parents, of course, love and support their children and that they play a critical role in their children's lives and education, but we also know that some students feel safer and more comfortable talking about these issues with their peers.

The UCP claims that this bill somehow is all about wedge politics or creating a political distraction. Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth, and that itself, that assertion, is very illuminating about how they feel about these very vulnerable students.

This bill, Bill 24, emphasizes that students have the right to create and choose the name of their clubs, GSA or QSA, and that school principals must help students create these clubs in a timely manner and appoint a staff supervisor so that students can have access to peer support when they need it in a timely manner. This bill also makes it clear that every school in Alberta that receives public dollars will follow the law.

Madam Speaker, our government knows the positive difference student organizations can have for youth, and I know very well that these alliances can in fact save lives. I visited a number of GSAs throughout my time as Education minister. I was in Fort Saskatchewan just yesterday visiting a club, and it was fantastic.

In April 2016 I had the honour of hosting here at the Legislature several students from GSAs across Alberta. Some of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle joined me in speaking to these youths. We heard first-hand from students about their work and the work of GSAs. Across the province these alliances provide safe havens for students to be themselves and to talk about things that matter to them.

Madam Speaker, let me be clear. What those students want to talk about is about homework, about school, about combatting bullying, and looking after each other. It's a safe sanctuary for these kids, and we all know just how important that is.

Students who join GSAs just want to be regular kids. They know that they need a safe space for themselves and for others. They look

after each other, and they stick together. Let's not forget about allies that join these clubs as well, creating an alliance with students, with their friends, creating a whole school community, Madam Speaker, that is a safer and more just place for all kids. We know it creates a better atmosphere for every student in the school where there's a GSA.

We are talking about basic student rights here and that you must provide a safe space where every student can feel safe. Why would we not do this? Madam Speaker, this is reason enough to ensure that each and every school create a GSA or QSA should a student ask for one.

They have also told me that GSAs gave them the courage to come out to their friends and family.

I urge every single member of the Assembly to do the correct thing this morning and vote to pass Bill 24 without prejudice. Like we've heard from my colleagues, you'll be on the correct side of history. It will be something that you can be of clear conscience and certainly with the best of intentions for all students.

Madam Speaker, this legislation is making waves not just across the province but right across the entire country of Canada. I just watched the Rick Mercer show on my device here, and it was great. It was great support and great comments.

Why would we let students suffer in silence when we can ensure a safe place for them to share their feelings with their peers? Yesterday I spoke to some students, like I said, from Fort Saskatchewan, who had typical issues around junior high, doing their homework, but they also talked about the importance and the safe sanctuary of their GSA, very important for them. It's very important for them to be able to look after each other and to reach out not just in their school but to reach across the whole city to other students in the same situation.

When we are talking about notification, I mean, so many of these provisions within Bill 24 are as a direct result of opposition that we saw to GSAs across the province over the last couple of years. We had to make sure that we put in the provision that students would be in a safe space in a GSA because schools were sending out notifications. If they heard word that there was a GSA, they would send out letters to the whole school, saying: "Warning. Warning. There's a GSA in your neighbourhood." You know, that was hurtful, and it was against not just the spirit but the actual intention of a safe sanctuary of a GSA, so we had to make sure that that was a safe place. It's not an instructional place; it's a support place for students. If anybody tries to spin it in any other way, they're simply going down the road of, as many people have mentioned, misinformation, and that misinformation leads to hurtful and hateful consequences for students.

11:00

You pull that thread a little bit, Madam Speaker, and you will find that talk about notification is because – again, it's that same thing – they're having secret sex clubs, right? I've seen this in very hateful letters and journalism. Ted Byfield put out a horrible, horrible article about this that I found very offensive. Again, you pull that thread, and that's what is being talked about here.

Yeah, of course, we are creating a safe space, a safe sanctuary, with GSAs. No, there will not be a letter going out for students who join that. If they want to be confidential, if they want to have that safe sanctuary for themselves, then we will provide it. That's the law. Anybody who does anything different will be breaking the law, Madam Speaker.

All schools that receive public money must follow the same law, too. There's no exception, right? If you take public money from the province of Alberta for your school, you make sure that you follow the same safe and caring policies as anybody else. We don't make

special exceptions to the law for different people in different circumstances. I think that's a very big step forward, too, and provides the protections that we need.

I ask everybody to please consider supporting this bill. It's a very, very solid bill. We've been working hard on this process over the last number of years. We started with Bill 10, and it was a good step forward, but over the last number of months we have found places where we can make it stronger to make sure that kids are protected, to make sure that we're creating a better Alberta for all students and creating a more equal and socially just place as well. When you provide equality and social justice, Madam Speaker, everybody benefits. All Albertans benefit from that as a result. You know that this government has your back.

Based on that, I will close debate on third reading of Bill 24.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:02 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carlier	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Jansen	Notley
Clark	Kazim	Phillips
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Coolahan	Larivee	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Sigurdson
Drever	Malkinson	Starke
Eggen	Mason	Sucha
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Ganley	McPherson	Turner
Goehring	Miller	Westhead
Gray	Miranda	Woollard

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Pitt
Barnes	Hanson	Schneider
Cooper	Hunter	Smith
Cyr	Loewen	Stier
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Strankman
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Yao
Gill	Orr	

Totals: For – 42 Against – 23

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

11:20

Bill 25

Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Now for something completely different. I am honoured to rise to introduce third reading and speak to Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, Bill 25 responds to a request from Alberta's forestry professionals to merge their two organizations into one. Together Alberta's foresters and forest technologists ensure the proper management of our forested lands. Our government is

committed to working closely with both professions to ensure they continue to provide the highest level of forestry services in the country. There are currently 1,600 Albertans who identify either as a forester or a forest technologist. If passed, Bill 25 will amend the act to merge two regulatory bodies, the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists, into one regulatory organization, the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals.

Both organizations have been asking this government as well as the previous government to make these changes since 2014, Madam Speaker, and I'm very proud to be able to respond to their call with this bill. Over 90 per cent of members of both organizations approved merging prior to approaching government to request legislative changes. Since 2015 the organizations have been sharing office space and a new name. Alberta Labour has worked closely with both organizations and has consulted with them regularly on the details of these proposed changes. Their request also has the strong support of the Alberta Forest Products Association, the voice for the forest products industry.

Merging the two organizations into one body would eliminate any confusion around the two organizations that provide the same service. The professions' governing regulations would also be consolidated from three into one. This will save valuable resources in time and money. The merger would also improve administrative and disciplinary processes to be more modern and efficient without sacrificing the principles of fairness. Complaints against a member would move to a central governing committee rather than to a single individual. Work would be shared among members, creating administrative efficiencies.

The membership would continue to consist of the many industry professionals but would now also include public members who are residents of Alberta. These public members would add a level of oversight and public accountability that is standard practice for professional associations.

The amendments would also allow investigations into complaints even after a complaint had been withdrawn or settled. Such action, when warranted, would better serve the public interest.

Madam Speaker, by consolidating these organizations into one governing body, there will be an even stronger and more unified voice for our forestry professionals. Creating one regulatory body and removing confusion around the two organizations offering the same services and the consolidation of the professions' governing legislation to an act supported by a single regulation as opposed to the current three regulations will make things easier for government and for our vibrant forestry industry.

Madam Speaker, as previously mentioned, they have been calling for these changes since 2014. They are supportive, and they are excited to move forward together. I ask all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of third reading of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and speak to Bill 25, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017. I spoke to this bill in second reading. I supported it then, and I'll be supporting it in third reading today. As we by now, I'm sure, are all aware, the proposed amendments in Bill 25 will merge the College of Alberta Professional Foresters and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists in order to create a single regulatory entity. That entity will be named the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals under the Regulated Forestry Profession Act.

There are about 1,600 professionals that represent the forestry profession in Alberta which identify as either forest technologists or foresters. The fact is that the biggest difference between these folks that are members of either college is education. Foresters have a degree whereas technologists have a diploma or a certificate.

Now, Bill 25 proposes a number of amendments to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, which are being brought forward to implement the merger of the two professional bodies. It seems that this proposed merger of the two colleges began with a memorandum of understanding, an MOU, back in 2013, and in June of the following year the memberships voted overwhelmingly to advance with the projected fusion of these two colleges. The fact is that more than 80 per cent of foresters and 90 per cent of forest technologists who actually took part in the vote determined that moving forward was the right thing to do.

Actually, this unification has been the result of hard work over several years between these two organizations. Consultations and approval were sought from both colleges' memberships prior to them approaching the Department of Labour and asking for the changes.

Both of these colleges since that vote in 2014 have once again approached the government to officially request that the Legislative Assembly allow the merger of these two organizations. Once again, it's important to reiterate that the two organizations have reaffirmed their interest in merging since 2014. They've also been holding AGMs together for some time and have combined some administrative functions, things such as sharing office space and also putting together organizational newsletters.

Generally speaking, when we talk about a merger between two professional bodies, we begin to think of what the costs may be in order to accomplish such an action, and we think about the costs that will be incurred by the government of Alberta in order to complete such a task. As it turns out, there will be no cost to the province at all in order to see these two organizations merge. The foresters and forest technologists have been basically operating as one entity for some time, and all expenses that are incurred in this union will be borne by the two colleges. No taxpayer is on the hook on this one.

They certainly have done their due diligence here, Madam Speaker. The kind of consultation these organizations gave their stakeholders would provide a high benchmark for some governments, for sure. Not only was there lots of time to show that there was an overwhelming desire to amend the act, but as I stated in my previous speech, they gave ample notification, and the fact is that, to our knowledge, no groups have come forward with concerns.

Madam Speaker, I said it before, that amending this legislation is a no-brainer. It's what the colleges and their membership want, and it is incumbent upon us to respect that. I'll be voting for this bill and encourage my colleagues on both sides of the House to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise and speak in favour of this bill. You know, just a personal story. When I grew up, of course, the terminology for forestry professionals was a little bit different. A little bit. We used to call them lumberjacks when I was a kid. Of course, as a child I long dreamed of being a lumberjack, rushing down the wild rivers of British Columbia with my best girlie by my side. Unfortunately, life has taken a different turn, and I find myself as a member of the Alberta Legislature. But I'm proud to stand with the government,

who is saying to the lumberjacks of this province that they are lumberjacks and they are okay. Whether they're cutting down trees, whether they're eating their lunch, whether they're going to the lavatory, whether they're going shopping on Wednesdays and having buttered scones for tea, they are lumberjacks and they are okay. Our government has their backs, and I'm proud to support this bill.

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

Any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Labour to close debate.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all speakers to this bill. I very much appreciate the support that this bill has received, and I move to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

11:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 27 Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to propose an amendment on behalf of the government to this piece of legislation, and I have the requisite number of copies here. Would you like me to read out the amendment in detail?

The Chair: As soon as I get a copy, then you can proceed.

This will be known as amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the bill be amended as follows: In clause A section 1(4) is amended (a) in the proposed section 23.97 (i) by striking out subsection 23.97(1)(a) and substituting the following:

- (a) the person holds
 - (i) a senior official position, section 23.925 applies, or
 - (ii) a senior official position referred to in section 23.926(1), sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply,

or

(ii) by striking out subsection 23.97(2)(a) and substituting the following:

- (a) the person holds a senior official position, sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply, according to their terms, to the person, or
- (b) in the proposed section 23.971(2) by striking out "the code of conduct referred to in the terms of employment of the official in effect immediately before the relevant date" and substituting "the code of conduct, if any, in effect immediately before the relevant date."

Now, Madam Chair, I'm sure that it's all perfectly clear to everyone exactly what's happening, but for those at home I would just like to make a few comments with respect to this amendment.

The bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to APAGA, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, would be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Currently, as of November 1 there are 136 such agencies. Also included in this list would be three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries and Covenant Health.

Bill 27 proposes a number of prescribed elements that would apply to employees and board members of all applicable public agencies. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have codes of conduct that include these prescribed elements.

At this time I'd like to mention that it is important to note that this amendment is focused on the transitional provisions and does not impact the broader policy, intent, or effect of the bill. This amendment deals primarily with the application of the transitional provisions to board chairs.

The proposed amendment is composed of two changes, clause A(a) and clause A(b). First, it amends the transitional provisions under section 23.97 to make clear that the concurrent employment provisions are limited to CEOs and other designated positions. As currently worded, it would have applied to all chairs as well.

Second, it amends section 23.97(2) to ensure that chairs who are not subject to an employment contract are also covered by this transitional provision. Unless amended, the transitional provisions will misapply certain provisions to board chairs, undermining the intention of some of the legislated requirements.

Madam Chair, I'm sure that that elucidates fully and completely the nature of the amendment, but just for the further interest of hon. members, I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has a more fulsome description of the amendment.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. We've introduced these amendments just for the sake of clarity, but before I go on to specifically speak about the amendment, I want to recap, just to make sure that we have everything that we're trying to address here in Bill 27, which has several key sets of provisions, which I'd just like to outline at this time.

The bill proposes that public agencies that are already subject to the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act would also be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Currently, as of November 1, there are 136 such agencies, and also included in this list would be three Alberta Health Services subsidiaries and Covenant Health.

Bill 27 proposes a number of prescribed elements that would apply to employees and board members of all applicable public agencies. Changes to the Conflicts of Interest Act would require all public agencies to have codes of conduct that include these prescribed elements. All APAGA agencies would be required to submit updated codes of conduct reflecting these prescribed elements to the Ethics Commissioner within four months of the act being proclaimed. The Ethics Commissioner will review all revised codes to ensure that they meet the requirements of the act and sign off by March 31, 2019. Agencies would have to publish their new codes of conduct no later than April 30, 2019.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs. For all agency board members and employees, the core requirements would be a baseline standard, enforced through codes of conduct that public agencies would be required to implement. Public agencies could have additional restrictions, but these are the ones that all agencies would be required to implement.

The legislation also proposes a set of core statutory requirements for CEOs and board chairs which include restrictions on private interests, restrictions on using influence, restrictions on using insider information, and disclosure of real and apparent conflicts of interest.

There is an additional core statutory requirement that would apply to CEOs and equivalents: restrictions on concurrent employment and holding other offices. This additional core

statutory requirement would take effect immediately for new hires, upon reappointment, or following a two-year notice period.

CEOs and equivalents of significant agencies would also be subject to additional statutory requirements upon designation, including restrictions on holding stocks and other public securities; disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, including financial disclosure; postemployment restrictions, specifically a 12-month cooling-off period following employment with a public agency. These additional statutory requirements would be set out in the act, but the positions that they would apply to would be designated in a separate order in council and come into effect on contract renewals and new appointments.

Where current contracts are longer term, a two-year transition period would apply so that within two years all CEOs and board chairs would be subject to these enhanced requirements. Through orders in council cabinet would have the ability to add or exempt agencies and positions from any of the conflict-of-interest requirements.

We propose a statutory requirement for all public agencies to have codes of conduct with the required elements.

To enhance oversight and enforcement, we also propose to apply the restrictions on furthering private interests, using influence, and using insider information as statutory requirements within the Conflicts of Interest Act. These restrictions would be carried out through orders in council and would apply to board chairs and CEOs of public agencies on contract renewals and new appointments. There would be a two-year transition period to ensure that CEOs with longer term contracts would also come under the new requirements within the two-year time frame rather than on expiration of their contract.

11:40

The Ethics Commissioner would have the authority to receive and review disclosures from designated CEOs and their equivalents; reduce requirements for restrictions on public securities and restrictions on postemployment; investigate alleged breaches of the act by board chairs, CEOs, and other designated senior positions; issue reports; make recommendations to the responsible minister and/or board; and review public agency codes of conduct to ensure they meet the statutory requirements set out in this bill. As well, disclosure information submitted to the Ethics Commissioner will remain confidential.

The amendment we have introduced is focused on the transitional provisions and does not impact the broader policy, intent, or effect of the bill. This amendment deals primarily with the application of the transitional provisions to board chairs.

The proposed amendment is composed of two changes, clause A(a) and clause A(b). First, it amends the transitional provision under 23.97 to make clear that the concurrent employment provision is limited to CEOs and other designated positions. As currently worded, it would have applied to all the chairs as well.

Second, it amends 23.97(2) to ensure that chairs who are not subject to an employment contract are also covered by this transitional provision. Unless amended, the transitional provision will misapply certain provisions to board chairs, undermining the intention of some of the legislated requirements.

I look forward to questions and ask for full support of the bill. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any questions or comments on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the speakers. I just have some questions and some concerns and some comments

that, hopefully, can be addressed. Obviously, we're having an amendment in case some chairs of ABCs or Covenant Health or Alberta Health Services' boards that are being added, I guess, can't comply with the concurrent employment conditions that the new Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, is going to have.

I'm wondering if anybody on the government side can state some specifics. Is there somebody specifically that's a chair of one of the 36 agencies, boards, and commissions or Covenant Health or one of the I believe it is three new Alberta Health Services' commissions that will be included in this that will have a conflict in the four-month period where they have to submit their conflict rules to the Ethics Commissioner, which the Ethics Commissioner has, give or take, a year to review and approve? Are we doing this for somebody specifically?

It opens up, Madam Chair, the concern that I've had with this Bill 27 from the start. Absolutely, Albertans have told me everywhere, every day to reduce conflicts of interest, eliminate them, to make it so that we have the best people working for Albertans in our agencies, boards, and commissions. That's not going to be hard because everywhere I go, Albertans are willing to selflessly give their time, their effort, their advice, to work hard to make sure that that happens, and to give the opportunity for all Albertans to share in our prosperity, to share in our freedoms, to have the chance to control their lives and make an impact on our communities and our families.

One of the concerns that we had around Bill 27 was: does this do this? I see that there's a lot relying on the regulations that this government is going to come forward with. There's a lot relying on how the Ethics Commissioner and her people interpret things and come up with things, and those are the unintended consequences of what the future of Bill 27 may bring. Again, the strength is that this side of the House and I and every Albertan I talk to were concerned about conflict of interest in the past but know that Albertans all have the best interests of the future generation in mind and are willing to sacrifice for that.

I am kind of wondering, though. I see on today's Order Paper a government motion that the Conflicts of Interest Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship. We're scrambling on this side to find out if that is a once-every-five-years happening that has to happen or if this government truly wants more input from Albertans as to how to make Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, as strong as it possibly could be.

I have concerns. It can be done because everybody's heart and head are in the right place, but we're having some situations where the Ethics Commissioner is going to have to rule on concurrent employment disclosure and a year's cooling-off rights, where certain types of work aren't being allowed. Yes, those all are good tools to make things happen.

But does Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, fully protect Albertans so we make sure that the people who are totally willing to serve and sacrifice – say, somebody in the real estate industry or the agriculture industry or the financial industry who just by their nature acquires the expertise that Albertans have to rely on – are going to be able to serve? Are they going to be able to ensure that good knowledge, good advice fully impacts for all Albertans? With Bill 27, in the short, short time we've had that, it's almost impossible to see that that will be protected, and we'll have to rely on the Ethics Commissioner and her people, and we'll have to rely on the government's rules and regulations.

What I'd like to ask the government at this point is: what's up? What's going on? If we're referring the Conflicts of Interest Act to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and it shall be a special committee, can we review even the amendment part? Can

we make sure that we get this bill exactly right or as close to right as any government can for Albertans? What's up? Why are we doing this?

Let's take advantage of consulting with Albertans. I've long thought and I've stood up many, many times in this House, Madam Chair, and said that way, way more of our bills if not all of our bills should go to special committees so that the public can have input, so that second thought can happen, more reflection and input.

At this point in time, again I'm wondering: are there any specific chairs of these 136 ABCs or the new ones being added that will have a conflict for consecutive or I guess it's called concurrent employment provisions during the transition period? Should that be disclosed to fully ensure that, you know, there's not a conflict that may affect Albertans, of course honouring the private citizen's rights to privacy and protection?

Hey, what's going on, government? Why don't we just send all of Bill 27 with this conflict-of-interest amendment to the Resource Stewardship Committee? Let's hear from more Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the questions. First, I would just like to say that there's no specific individual that we're thinking about. What the amendments are really focused on here is making sure that – as you and I both know, we want Albertans that are in specific industries, in nonprofit organizations, people who have a little bit of experience and who want to volunteer for the government – they can have the ability to have that space. I mean, that's what our government is completely focused on and what I'm really proud of.

11:50

As I spoke about in the House yesterday, one of the things that we're really focused on is trying to create more diversity on these boards, agencies, and commissions. I'm very proud to say that I know of two constituents of my own that I referred and to whom I said, "Please apply," because, of course, now the application process is much more transparent, right? They're applying directly as opposed to where, you know, perhaps in the past – I wouldn't want to judge every appointment – it was kind of done internally. The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater said yesterday that it was like an old boys' club. We've created more transparency so that people, when interested in a particular agency, board, or commission, could apply directly. Of course, one of the most important things is making sure that we're addressing diversity and inclusion, which, as you know, are really important to me.

Now, we don't want to stop these people from participating in making important decisions within, you know, our democratic institutions, so what the first amendment is specifically focused on is making sure that chairs are not subject to restrictions on concurrent employment, because oftentimes these positions are either part-time or they're volunteer positions, right? We're making sure that we're getting it right so that individuals from our communities can come and participate in a role that they should be given every right to, and we're making sure to select the best candidates so that we can make sure that those people are giving us insightful information based on the industry that they may be a part of or the experiences that they have had living their lives and participating in both our economy and society.

I'd love to entertain any other questions that members may have.

I will say that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat did bring up the Conflicts of Interest Act. Of course, I want to remind everybody in the House that the Conflicts of Interest Act was

originally sent to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which I had the honour and pleasure of serving on. Of course, I remember that there were quite a few things that we had in common when we were addressing the Conflicts of Interest Act. I think that we got a lot of input from Albertans on the Conflicts of Interest Act. There was a lot of agreement on ways that we could strengthen the Conflicts of Interest Act. Being the chair of Resource Stewardship, I welcome the opportunity to look at that act once again along with colleagues on both sides of the House so that we can make sure that we're strengthening this as we move forward, especially now as it applies to agencies, boards, and commissions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, currently we're on the amendment, and I have a question, actually, regarding the transition nature of this amendment as it applies to the act. Well, I will back up a bit. I'm very happy that this bill is going to go to committee and that we are going to have an opportunity to discuss it at great length and to get stakeholders in the room and hear what they've got to say. I would hope, given that the chair is with us, that there will be a process that is lengthy enough and detailed enough that we can hear from if not all then certainly most of these people involved in ABCs, because my concern is that we could end up with a one-size-fits-all, and the ABCs are simply not that way. They are very unique in their makeup, each and every one of them.

I realize that this amendment that we have before us right now, as was explained, is more or less a transition document to get

some changes made to the bill during the transition time for employees and senior officials within the various ABCs, and I don't find anything wrong with it at all. I think it clarifies some things that we were wondering about. From my point of view, this amendment to Bill 27 is fine, and I will be supporting it as it stands. It's all right.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 27. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Having completed the work of the morning, I would move that we call it 12 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 15, 2017

Day 54

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly students from St. Jerome Catholic school who are here to visit the Legislature today. They're here with their teachers Alicia Centis and Julie King as well as chaperones Dianne Wozniuk, Curtis Morrison, and Nadine Estrada. I'd like them all to stand up, please, and get a warm welcome from the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you 31 students from Monsignor William Irwin school in Terwillegar Towne in Edmonton-Whitemud. I've had the pleasure of meeting with this class and doing a Read In Week. They're accompanied by their teacher, Michael Leskow, and student teachers Sydney McLeod and Jessica Tannahill as well as some parents: Joanne Mitchell, Deanna Morrison, Sandra Smith, and Deborah Merriam. They're behind me, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the usual welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of Alberta's paramedics from the north and south areas of our province. These caring professionals work every day to keep Albertans safe, healthy, and well, and I'd like to thank them for their dedicated service. I'd invite them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of Alberta's committed paramedics serving in the central Alberta area. Paramedics are often the first on the scene, providing urgent care in traumatic situations. We are making sure that the staff have the mental health supports they need to deal with the emotional stress caused by this type of work. Thank you for your service. I'd invite the paramedics from central Alberta to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

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

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two constituents and friends of mine from the great town of Rocky Mountain House. The first is Stuart Burke, who works for Husky in our community as a safety co-ordinator, and around our community we affectionately refer to him as Safety Stu. He keeps us in line.

With him today is Her Worship Tammy Burke, who is the new mayor of Rocky Mountain House, the second female mayor that our community of Rocky Mountain House has had. The reason I bring that up is because, of course, our first female mayor was Helen Hunley, who would go on to be the first female Lieutenant Governor of our great province and the first female many things for our community and this province. Tammy has some big shoes to fill, but I can tell you that our community believes that she can, and we're looking forward to seeing what she does with her term.

I'd ask if both of them would stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly some of Alberta's dedicated paramedics serving in the Edmonton area. I'm proud to call them my colleagues. We're proud of the contributions paramedics make to the health and well-being of Albertans in communities all across Alberta. I particularly want to mention the excellent and professional care that was provided by these paramedics to one of our colleagues yesterday. Thank you for your service. I invite you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Jessica Lamer, a senior captain with Edmonton fire rescue services; Amy Benson, a paramedic with Alberta Health Services; and Constable Sylvie Boy, who is with the Edmonton Police Service and also a former sergeant in the French army. Together they recently ran in the Servus Edmonton half marathon wearing their uniforms and full gear to raise money and awareness for PTSD. Thank you for your service and your dedication to this cause. I'd ask you now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly nine fantastic paramedics from Calgary. Our paramedics work extremely hard and provide great service to Albertans, ensuring emergency medical services are there when we need them. Thank you for your caring, compassionate, and professional service. I invite you all to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on your behalf today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Rick Massini, the chair of the board of trustees of the Medicine Hat public school division; Mark Davidson, superintendent of the Medicine Hat public school division; and Arlene Hrynyk, president of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta and trustee for the Northern Lights school division. These three individuals are deeply committed to our province's public education system, and I know that we are all proud to call such dedicated people our fellow Albertans. I would ask that they all stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Thank you for coming.
The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you members of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. I think Arlene was already announced, but she's worth two introductions since she's so awesome, and the same with Rick Massini from Medicine Hat, certainly deserving of the same. We also have Cathy Hogg, who's the executive vice-president of the PSBAA. I also have Lanie Parr, who's the director of the PSBAA, and Cheryl Johner. She's an Edmonton public school trustee and at PSBAA as well. I think Nathan Ip is here. He is with Edmonton public schools, of course, and must have something to do with the Public School Boards' Association because he's sitting so close to them.

If you don't mind, Mr. Speaker, I can just give my other introductions as well. I have the president of the Alberta School Boards Association, Mary Martin. I have the executive director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Barry Litun. I have Michael Hauptman, who is the vice-president of the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

So lots of people here today as part of the introduction of Bill 28, and I would be very proud if everyone could give them a big round from the floor.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not to be left out, I too want to recognize some of the members of the Health Sciences Association and the Alberta executive board seated in the members' gallery. They represent approximately 3,300 EMS practitioners across Alberta. We are committed to assisting EMS with resources issues through a greater emphasis on paramedic integration and community-based care by reducing wait times for EMS crews and emergency departments. Thank you for the advocacy and partnership in making life better for Albertans. I ask that Mike, Trudy, Travis, Evan, and Cameron please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

1:40

I have a second introduction as well, if you would indulge me, and that is to recognize the province's nurse practitioners who are here today and the high quality of care they provide for Albertans every day. This week we celebrate the dynamic contributions of nurse practitioners to the wellness of Albertans by recognizing nurse practitioner week. Nurse practitioners in Alberta are a valuable part of patient-centred care, and we are proud to partner with them to ensure the best care for Alberta families. I invite Jared, Teddie, Lesley, Margaret, Tara, Marcie, and Lisette, who are seated in the members' gallery, to also rise and receive the warm welcome and our gratitude.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kyler Chittick, a new comms assistant for the Alberta Party caucus. Kyler is very well qualified, with a master's degree in political science from York University. He's a recent graduate – and quite young as well – of the honours program in political science at the University of Alberta and a debate champ, which I'm looking forward to some training from him on. He's also published

a review in the *ESC: English Studies in Canada* publication as well as helped me a great deal with the speeches that I made in support of Bill 24 this and last week. If he could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and in the most neutral way possible – because I know that from time to time this particular individual, who's been introduced in the House before, is a little bit sensitive about being introduced by anyone inside the Chamber. On behalf of the Government House Leader and myself, so that it is as neutral as possible, I would like to welcome to the gallery the newest Canadian that is here. She's a wonderful part of the press gallery, plays things right down the middle, doesn't pick favourites ever. As an important part of the process to all of us, I think we can say: congratulations and welcome to your new Canadianness, Emma Graney.

The Speaker: For her and for you, hon. members, it wouldn't be the first time that you folks saw everything and I saw nothing.

The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to introduce some very amazing kids to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. Here today we have two Great Kids award winners. For the past 17 years the province has hosted the awards to recognize children and youth across Alberta from ages five to 18, and these great kids receive the award for helping, inspiring, and changing the lives of others. Today I was pleased to meet with these two young leaders to celebrate their successes and thank them for their continued contributions to our province.

I also want to take a moment to encourage Albertans to nominate great kids for the 2018 awards. This year the awards will recognize great kids who've made a positive difference while overcoming difficult life circumstances. Nominations are open until November 24, and more information is available at greatkids.alberta.ca.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask the following individuals to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: great kid Tyra Cardinal and her mother, Melody, and great kid Aisha Symington and her father, Gerry.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Government Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I moved here with only dreams, willing to work hard, and for a decent shot at the opportunity this land had to offer, and this land did not disappoint me because it is built on Alberta values. Under the NDP the very values which made this province the greatest place to live in the world are under serious threat. The NDP is hiding from Albertans the severe damage that's being done with their policies such as the carbon tax, the departure of almost \$40 billion in investment out of this province, the almost 200,000 people who have lost their jobs, and now it's showing disrespect to religious minorities and their beliefs. Albertans, as we know, voted for the NDP not knowing that they were going to get an anti-Albertan, anti free enterprise, anti family values, and antireligious government.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier and members of this NDP caucus have openly protested against oil and gas pipelines, and now, all of a

sudden, they claim to be champions of Alberta's resources. Please. If that is the case, why can't the Premier stand up against the Leap Manifesto and denounce it? But that would be considered doing the right thing for Alberta, the complete opposite of this NDP ideology.

A lot of this NDP caucus moved to Alberta from other provinces, looking for jobs before they became accidental MLAs, and now they want to change the fundamental values of this province. Mr. Speaker, Albertans will not let that happen.

Before I was a Conservative, I was an Albertan, and I will always stay that way. I am willing to put every single thing on the line to protect these values so that we can pass them on to future generations so that once again this land becomes a beacon of hope for hard-working people around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Coal Worker Transition Supports

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We in Stony Plain know that the coal industry plays a crucial role. Families and generations have been built around it. I know the transition, driven by a combination of federal and provincial regulations and other global circumstances, has had its toll on families in my region. Coal workers are asking questions like: what's next, and will I still be able to support my family?

I want all of you, the coal workers, to know that I have your back and this government has your back. That's why we recently announced new transition supports for coal workers, supports that will help bridge your income, whether you're retiring or finding a new job; supports that will help with retraining, employment placement, and job matching; supports like tuition vouchers to help cover costs related to postsecondary education. And we will have facilitators meeting directly with you, your union, and your employer to figure out the supports that work best for you. Please know that I will fight as hard as I can to make sure that the federal government steps up on this issue as well. You have my full support every step of the way.

Stony Plain is a strong, resilient, and compassionate community, and to all of those coal workers I want to say this. You should be proud of your hard work, powering our province and building our communities, because we are. We want that good work to continue, so we stand ready to support you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a request for unanimous consent to introduce a guest who arrived late.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of the newest team members in the Edmonton-Decore office, who has come into the position hitting the ground absolutely running. I don't think my team could survive without her now. She's made an incredible impact coming into our office. I would now ask Janelle Venne to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Programs for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This September I received a visit from a very distraught constituent in my St. Paul office. She along with others had received a letter from a local not-for-profit that funding from Alberta Health Services to the St. Paul Abilities Network, or SPAN, would not be continued and that the STRIDES program would be cancelled as of October 2017. This program directly affects the daily lives of people in our area suffering from brain injuries. The STRIDES program assists these individuals, expanding their independence through volunteering and socializing.

I immediately contacted the management at SPAN to get the facts. I was shocked to hear that we were talking about a program that costs AHS \$24,000, all of this while our government went out and toured the province over Bill 203. How much did that cost? I then contacted AHS to find out why this front-line funding was being cut. Frustrated, I was told the funding was not being cut.

On November 3 I met with SPAN board members as well as an AHS representative by phone. Finally, I found out that this front-line program would be shutting down in order to divert funds to another program – and get this – because the other program could not afford to continue due to the increases in minimum wage.

1:50

In this House we warned this government about the consequences of their ideological policies like the carbon tax and minimum wage increases on not-for-profits and food banks. Now brain-injured individuals in my constituency can't gain the skills and reassert their independence.

Mr. Speaker, policy matters. This government's policy has lost common sense, and now the results are showing up. Those that need help and support the most are hardest hit. This government that vows to protect the front lines in Alberta is doing anything but. The unintended consequences of the increases to minimum wage and the carbon tax are hitting Albertans on fixed incomes and negatively impacting organizations that try to make life better for Albertans in need.

This government claims to be making life better. Go and tell that to the folks that depend on the STRIDES program.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Response to Federal Policies

Mr. Nixon: Yesterday I pointed out that the NDP had been unwilling to challenge their Trudeau Liberal allies on their constant attacks on Alberta, whether it be the taxes on small businesses, the carbon tax hike, or attacks on Alberta's constitutional right when it comes to upstream emissions. But now they will speak out when it comes to taxes on marijuana sales. The NDP have barely made a noise over two years of constant attacks from the Trudeau Liberals until now. Perhaps the NDP are seeing the errors of their way, Mr. Speaker. Here's hoping that this is the beginning of a new era, but I will say that I'm not holding my breath. Will the NDP now vocally object to the Trudeau Liberals' unacceptable tax hikes on Alberta small businesses, and will they stand up for Alberta?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in answer to essentially the exact same question, our minister at the time had conversations with the federal Minister of Finance around some of the concerning elements of their plan, and we have seen that some of those elements have in fact been changed as a result. In addition, what our government has been doing with respect to small businesses is supporting them here, from the government of Alberta here in Edmonton. For instance, what we did was we brought in a 33 per cent cut in the small-business tax. That's the actual record that we are taking to Alberta small businesses, and that's why the number and the prosperity of them . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Nearly 200,000 Albertans are currently unemployed, and many more, sadly, have quit looking for work altogether. Thousands of businesses have gone under. Tens of billions of dollars of capital have fled Alberta. The Trudeau Liberals' attacks on our province certainly aren't helping matters. They're making it worse, Mr. Speaker. But only when it might affect their bottom line does the NDP government decide to speak up. It's shameful, and Albertans deserve better. Now that the NDP have crossed the Rubicon and dared to challenge their close allies in Ottawa, will they object to the Trudeau Liberals' attack on our energy sector?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated before, our government has been standing up for Albertans with respect to the federal government and on behalf of Albertans since the moment we got elected. That's why, for instance, we have a pipeline to tidewater approved, because we've been working with the federal government. On top of that, we got them to change their position with respect to EI as a result of the job losses that we were suffering from, you know, 12 and 18 months ago. We're pursuing their support with respect to our coal transition program, that the Member for Stony Plain just talked about, and we'll . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Two cancelled pipelines, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta does need to get a fair deal from Ottawa on the upcoming marijuana tax since it's the provinces that will bear most of the costs. But what about a fair deal for Alberta workers? What about a fair deal for Alberta's industries? Or does only the government income matter to the NDP? Why is the NDP only willing to fight the Trudeau Liberals when it's about who gets the profits taken from hard-working Albertans? When will the NDP get their priorities straight and start standing up and fighting for Alberta, start standing up and fighting for small businesses, for families, for the unemployed, for the energy sector, and for this great province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Do you want to chat, or do you want to have another question?

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we will not do is grandstand in order to relitigate the fact that their leader lost the election to the Trudeau Liberals a year and a half ago. I'm sorry that they can't get over it, but they clearly are having trouble with it. What we are doing is focusing on supporting Albertans. You know what? It's working. Over 70,000 jobs have been created since

last June, housing starts are up, manufacturing is up, growth is up. We are leading the country now because of the work that we are doing focused on Albertans, not focused on yelling at Ottawa.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Provincial Policy on Illicit Drugs

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, on to another apparent priority of this government. Yesterday my colleague from Calgary-West asked about the Associate Minister of Health's public musing regarding decriminalization of hard drugs, drugs like fentanyl, heroin, and crystal meth. The Member for Calgary-West clearly asked whether the minister would back away from her reckless speculation. The minister responded with this: "no plans . . . at this time." At this time. Will the Premier denounce her minister's irresponsible and dangerous comments?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will do is denounce the member opposite's reckless characterization of what the associate minister said. What I will further say, as the minister yesterday said, is that there is absolutely no plan of any type, not now, not in the past, not in the future, to legalize hard drugs. The member opposite spreading misinformation as though that were a true thing is profoundly irresponsible. We have real problems to address in this province, and it's about time they start focusing on them.

Mr. Nixon: When hundreds of Albertans are dying at the hands of hard drugs, this is what the NDP are talking about, Mr. Speaker. It's outrageous. And this from the minister that is supposedly responsible for handling the fentanyl crisis. I've personally seen the toll these hard drugs take, and I can tell you that making these drugs more available will not help. Will the government clearly state that it is against the decriminalization of hard drugs, including in the future, none of this "at this time" hedging and that type of stuff, make it extremely clear, and apologize for the minister's comments?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the member expected a different answer, but the thing is that you actually have to listen to the answer that the Premier gives. She made it very clear that we have no interest in working to decriminalize possession of illegal drugs. The designation of legal or illegal drugs is a federal responsibility. Again, they're spending all of their time wanting to argue with Ottawa. We're spending our time focused on Albertans. We're making life better. We're increasing access to services. It's about time that the members opposite started focusing on Alberta, too.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. What we just watched the Premier do in this question was deny what her associate minister said in the press. It is a clear quote from her associate minister that the Premier is dodging. This is the question on behalf of Albertans: will the Premier step back from her associate minister's comments, apologize for what her associate minister is saying, and make it clear to Albertans that the NDP do not support decriminalization of hard drugs?

Ms Hoffman: We do not support the decriminalization of hard drugs, Mr. Speaker. We've made that clear. The members opposite keep trying to whip up things and create discord, but on this side of the House we treat . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Please continue.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we look at the public health crisis, and we are finding ways to address it instead of trying to stigmatize and scare people about what may or may not happen. We're working with patients. We're working with their families. We respect them, and we are fighting to save their lives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Provincial Fiscal Policies and Disposable Income

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, we recently learned some very troubling data from Statistics Canada. Last year Albertans saw their disposable income drop by an astounding 7.4 per cent. Alberta was last in Canada by far. Saskatchewan only saw a drop of .8 per cent. When Albertans were already down, the NDP's only solution was to hike taxes, killing business and taking more money from Albertans. The NDP doesn't want to talk about their track record of devastation; they want to talk about anything else. Will the NDP take any responsibility at all for the drop in Albertans' disposable income?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I just outlined, in fact, we know that Alberta families were suffering as a result of the price drop for oil. We know that that caused a lot of hardship. What our government did was we made a choice. We made a choice to stand with Albertans, to stand behind them, to not take a bad situation and make it worse. That's why we invested in Alberta, and now we're seeing results: over 70,000 new jobs since last June, when those statistics were calculated, housing starts up, housing sales up, manufacturing sales up, retail sales up, small-business confidence up, and it . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, their choices drove \$40 billion worth of investment out of Alberta.

Just six weeks from now the NDP has another big tax hike planned for Albertans. That's right. Albertans can look forward to a 50 per cent hike to its carbon tax. From fuelling your car to putting food on the table, the carbon tax hits them all. The NDP has even planned a massive 75 per cent tax on home heating in the middle of winter, no less. Given the documented disastrous effects of the NDP policy and the StatsCan report will the NDP give Albertans an early Christmas present and put a hold on the massive 50 per cent tax hike?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I can say we will do is that we will continue after January to be overall the lowest taxed province in the country. In addition to that, we will also be the province that for the second year in a row leads the country in economic growth. On top of that, we will continue our record of building and creating more jobs, 70,000 since June of last year. We will continue to have Albertans' backs. We will protect their important public services. We will make life more affordable. We will make life better for them. Thank goodness we were in charge when the recession hit because it wouldn't look that way if these guys had had their way.

Mr. McIver: You're right. It wouldn't look that way, Mr. Speaker. The tax advantage has shrunk dramatically, and we've got to get rid of them before it's zero.

Albertans are hurting, and the NDP is only making a bad situation worse. It's sadly ironic that when Ottawa threatens to take a cut out of the government's income, the Finance minister goes to the mat, but when the NDP or the federal government takes money out of

Albertans' wallets, crickets from this government. Will the NDP get its priorities straight, stop allowing Albertans to get attacked without defence, and stand up for them instead of just for your own treasury? Families matter, too, Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I think I've just answered that question – I don't know – about five or six times this week already. Nonetheless, the members opposite talk about what they think we're doing wrong, but they won't come clean on what they're talking about. Their leader is talking about a 20 per cent cut to the budget. Do you know what that would do to our schools? Do you know how many thousands of teachers would be laid off? Do you know how big class sizes would get? Do you know how many people, how much longer the wait-lists would be in our hospitals and for surgeries? [interjections]

The Speaker: Please.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, that kind of reckless, irresponsible approach to managing our budget would hurt Albertans and hurt Alberta families, and it will not happen on our watch. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister.
Calgary-Elbow.

Dementia Care

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last spring I asked the Minister of Health why Alberta lags the country on dementia care. I asked when we would see a provincial dementia strategy and the funding that goes along with it. In June she promised that we would see a strategy in the next couple of weeks. In September she said that it's coming soon. Albertans are still waiting. To the Minister of Health: where is the dementia strategy, when will we see it, and why is it taking so long?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We know how difficult it can be for families when they themselves or somebody they care about is struggling with dementia or other types of mental conditions that impact their ability to recall. We know how heartbreaking that is. That's why we're working with our front-line providers as well as with community partners to increase resources. The dementia strategy is definitely a work-in-progress. I want to make sure that we get it right, and I will be happy to table it in this House when we do.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, more long-term care beds, we know, are desperately needed, but that is only one aspect of dementia care. Seventy-one per cent of people with mild or moderate dementia live at home. There are remarkable people working in the community to improve the lives of everyone impacted by dementia, and while this work has tremendous meaning, without a provincial strategy they can only do so much. These are the people who spent so much of their time providing input into a draft strategy, that already exists. Again to the Minister of Health. You were handed that draft strategy back in the summer of 2015. Why haven't you implemented it, will you, and when?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Like him, I want to make sure that we have all of the right supports in our communities and that we're

protecting and strengthening public health care. I hope that's what he believes, anyway. Time will tell. It's important that we make sure that we have those resources and that when we have the strategy, it's the right strategy. The department did receive it. They've done some work with the contributors, and they're working to make sure that it has the fulsomeness that we all expect. I look forward to that being the case and being able to share it in this House in, hopefully, short order.

Mr. Clark: But with respect, Mr. Speaker, how does the government know what they're doing or why they're doing it if there is no strategy? Albertans are struggling, and the cost of doing nothing is high. People living with dementia can't get the supports they need at home, they have difficulty navigating the system, and their families and caregivers are struggling to support loved ones. Ontario committed \$100 million to their dementia strategy and an additional \$20 million to improve respite care for unpaid care partners. Again to the Minister of Health I will ask one more time: will we ever see a provincial dementia strategy, and if we do, will it come with the funding necessary to have an impact?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member again for the question. We definitely have tabled many pieces of finance bills in this House. You know, it's been interesting to see what the opposition's record is when it comes to funding public health care properly. We continue to work with our partners. We continue to make sure that we're protecting health care. We've done a number of initiatives. Alberta Health Services last year launched 811, the Health Link number. You can speak to a certified nurse who can help you with accessing these specific resources and so forth. We're supporting the community agencies. We'll continue to do so. When it comes to budget time, I really hope that members opposite put their money where their mouth is because, absolutely, we plan on protecting and strengthening public . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Emergency Medical Worker Supports

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency medical services workers provide an incredibly important service to Albertans, often when they need it most. EMS personnel respond to dangerous, often life-threatening situations in order to literally save lives. Given the dangerous conditions that EMS staff work in every day, to the Minister of Health: how is the government ensuring that EMS workers receive health and occupational health and safety protections?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I was fortunate to meet with some incredible paramedics earlier today. EMS personnel work tirelessly to protect and save the lives of others, often at the greatest risk themselves. One of the issues raised today was the high injury rate for paramedics. That's why I'm proud that we're working with paramedics to invest \$20 million to equip more than 350 ambulances with power stretchers to help EMS workers lift people safely without injury to themselves.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EMS workers are also exposed to significant trauma and work in stressful conditions. To the same minister: how is the government caring for EMS workers who are suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Without a doubt, EMS workers deal with some of the most horrific and difficult trauma scenes imaginable. I want them to know that we recognize their hardships. We have worked to ensure that paramedics have access to trauma counsellors and training supports, and we recently announced Canada's first accredited facility dog program, giving EMS personnel therapy dogs to help after traumatic events. We know that there's more to do, and we thank them for coming to the call and being there with ideas as well.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. EMS workers are part of an integrated response to an emergency. Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals are part of a co-ordinated response to an individual in crisis. To the same minister: is the government supporting the role of EMS workers as an integral part of the health system's response to an emergency?

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. EMS crews are a vital link in our health care system both as first responders and as medical practitioners in the community. We changed the scope and practice of paramedics so that they can treat patients directly on the scene, giving better care to Albertans closer to home and sometimes in their home. You know what won't help? EMS will not be helped if Jason Kenney moves forward. His 20 per cent proposed cut to health care would lead to skyrocketing wait times, trauma to those workers, and trauma to the Albertans who rely on them. Instead, we believe in giving our health care workers the tools, support, and resources so they can do more, not less.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Methane Gas Monitoring

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province is full of hot air when it comes to the NDP pledge of a 45 per cent reduction in methane gas emissions by 2025. The Alberta Energy Regulator fails to reliably monitor the amount of leakage from Alberta's 400,000 oil and gas sites, and industry is underreporting by between 60 and 360 per cent, according to independent studies. To the environment minister: how can Albertans trust that your government will meet the target when it has no credible measures?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:10

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when we discuss methane regulations, we're proud to work alongside industry for a made-in-Alberta solution to plan to cut methane pollution by 45 per cent. We'll soon be announcing next steps in our balanced plan, that will protect jobs while reducing pollution. We do know what's at stake. It's jobs, but it's also the health of our children and our grandchildren, and we take that job very seriously.

Dr. Swann: It requires independent science, Mr. Speaker.

Methane also leaks into groundwater. For example, Encana's coal-bed methane exploration in Rosebud in 2006 was alleged to have contaminated drinking water, forcing expensive studies. It's

still before the courts. The NDP has missed another opportunity to prevent similar disasters with shale gas activity by failing to require baseline groundwater testing before industrial activity. To the Energy minister: when will you hold industry accountable by requiring baseline groundwater testing for all shale gas wells?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're using facts, science, and innovation to develop a balanced plan, the approach that will create the best conditions for the oil and gas sector using innovation and implementing new technologies. These draft regulations that I mentioned will be available soon. There's going to be plenty of time for feedback, and I invite all members opposite to be part of that feedback loop.

Dr. Swann: Without baseline testing, Mr. Speaker, nobody knows what's going on under there.

As if the lack of monitoring of methane gas leakage in the atmosphere and groundwater is not enough, the NDP also eliminated the independent monitoring agency and relies solely on the Alberta Energy Regulator, which is entirely funded by industry. All of this makes NDP promises of better environmental stewardship ring a bit hollow. What is the government doing differently to ensure credible, independent monitoring of methane in our air and water?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, we're working alongside not just industry but environment groups and all kinds of groups involved with the oil and gas industry to develop a plan. But when our hon. colleague there mentions hot air, what we hear from the opposite side is not to get a made-in-Alberta plan. They want an Ottawa-imposed plan. They don't want us to use science or innovation to tackle that. They want us to create uncertainty about Alberta's industry so that we will get an imposed plan. On this side of the House we're standing up for an Alberta-made plan, and we're going to get that plan done.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

FOIP Request Process

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to know what this government is hiding. While this secretive government pays lip service to openness and transparency, they offer gift cards to mass-delete e-mails, and their key advisers are interfering with access to information. Yesterday this government refused to condemn political interference by the Premier's former chief of staff in the FOIP system. In fact, the minister casually dismissed our questions. Now that the minister has had a chance to review the documents, does the minister wish to change her answer?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've reviewed the matter in question and continue to be confident that Mr. Heaney's actions were in line with the law and best practices on handling FOIP requests. We take Albertans' right to access information very seriously. We continue to improve turnarounds for FOIP requests and are proactively sharing more information with the public than ever before.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that in April 2014 the Government House Leader, while in opposition, felt that simply a political staffer reviewing a FOIP request was enough to make

accusations of political interference in the process and given that the Premier's former chief of staff intervened to outright stop the release of information that was deemed legitimate by trained FOIP officers, would the Government House Leader agree that Mr. Heaney's action, without a doubt, constitutes political interference in the FOIP system, or has a seat in government changed his mind?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since day one we have been working to make this government more open, transparent, and accountable to Albertans. In fact, we're the first government in Alberta's history to post the salaries and contracts of all the Premier's and ministerial offices' staff. Again, we take Albertans' right to access information very seriously, and we'll continue to do so as we go forward.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that this government takes access to information so seriously that they continue to allow the former chief of staff's action that directly interfered with the release of information that was deemed appropriate by FOIP officers, will the minister commit to a full investigation of what is clearly a breach in the law?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We very much believe that Albertans deserve honesty and transparency, which is why we're working to make government open and transparent. We're proactively sharing more information than ever before. We're hiring more employees to clear up the FOIP backlog. In contrast, Mr. Kenney won't disclose his campaign contributions. He's keeping his plan a secret and would make reckless cuts and fire front-line staff. We absolutely will continue to ensure Albertans get the honesty and transparency they deserve from the government sitting on this side of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Children's Services Concerns

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An employee of Alberta Children's Services who was operating an unlicensed day care is facing child pornography charges. This employee of the province works in a department tasked with looking after our most vulnerable children and is being charged with multiple child pornography charges. To the Minister of Children's Services: have you initiated an internal investigation to the alleged activities within your department, and is the department fully co-operating with the police?

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If concerns are ever raised about the conduct of our employees, we take every concern extremely seriously and act quickly so that Albertans know we are doing whatever we can to support their safety and well-being. We are committed to co-operating fully with police as they continue their investigation and providing whatever assistance is required to ensure that all young people are safe.

The Speaker: Could I seek an opinion from the Justice minister? The line of questioning: is it sub judice with respect to the criminal charges that may be pending?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, I think I'd say for now that that first question related to an internal investigation.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that all the employees of the province receive a criminal record check before being hired and given that youth workers in the not-for-profit sector have to have a vulnerable-sector screening, to the Minister of Children's Services: does every single employee in your department also have a vulnerable-sector screening, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All new Children's Services hires are subject to pre-employment checks, including a criminal record, vulnerable-sector check, and a check in our internal case information system. Employees are also subject to background checks again when they change jobs or are promoted. Once again, we are doing whatever we can to support the safety and well-being of Alberta's children.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that that is grandfathered to existing workers as well.

Given that the 2016 corporate employee survey showed that in the former superministry of human services only 45 per cent of employees felt that essential information flows effectively from senior leadership to staff and given that many of the people in this House have spent almost a year now attending meetings of the child intervention panel and recommendations should be coming forward soon, does the minister have confidence that her department has the ability to communicate critical information and protect the children that they are tasked with protecting?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Absolutely. Since becoming the Minister of Children's Services, I've made tremendous efforts to reach out to front-line staff from right across this province, recognizing how important it is to learn from them about what their front-line experience is. I continue to work with senior leadership within the ministry at all levels to ensure that we work together to ensure that information flows as easily as possible and to recognize that that's beneficial to the commitment that every single one of us shares to making sure that the children of this province are safe.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

NAFTA Negotiations

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, in 2016 Alberta industries exported \$68 billion in goods and services to the United States. Maintaining a strong trade position with the U.S. is vital to the success of Alberta's economy, which is why we must ensure that Alberta's voice is strong and steadfast at the table where NAFTA is renegotiated. To the minister of economic development: what assurances have you obtained from the federal government that Alberta's trade-exposed industries will be protected during the NAFTA renegotiations?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, on behalf of the minister of economic development I can assure the member that this government is very active in promoting Alberta's interests both as a government on its own but also by representations to the federal government. In terms of the specifics that he would like to know with regard to these negotiations, I will take it under advisement and provide him with the information at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that roughly 86 per cent of Alberta's exports go to the United States, making the NAFTA negotiations imperative for the success and viability of Alberta's economy, and given that the federal Liberals have already demonstrated wilful negligence with respect to Alberta's economy by killing two pipelines and given that there are far more seats and votes for the federal Liberals in Ontario and Quebec than there ever will be in Alberta, again to the minister: what are you doing to ensure Alberta is not sold down the river in exchange for favourable concessions for Quebec and Ontario?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, the Official Opposition is trying to pit Alberta against everybody else in the world and in the country. It's not helpful, because we've taken a very strong position with the federal government, and they know that we've advocated very strongly for pipelines, for protection of Alberta's industries, including softwood lumber. All of those things have been top priorities for our minister of economic development and for the government as a whole. Unlike the opposition, we want to work constructively with our partners in the United States and the Canadian government and right across the country in order to further Alberta's interests. They could learn from that.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, just take your social licence with you.

Given that the United States is a key export for Alberta markets and given that organizations such as the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Alberta Wheat Commission have indicated that they are in favour of the status quo and given that the federal government seems more interested in image politics and virtue signalling, not unlike our government, than actually getting a deal which is good for Alberta and Canada, again to the minister: how are you ensuring that Alberta's best interests and not the Liberal's style-over-substance machine are being represented at the NAFTA negotiation table?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think if the hon. member had a social licence it might be taken away for reckless driving. We're working very closely with the federal government on the negotiations. The American position has been very, very tough, and the Canadian position I think has been equally tough. We believe that by working with the federal government, we can protect Alberta's interests. By attacking everybody that doesn't live in this province as the opposition does, all we do is isolate Alberta and set our interests back. That's not what this government does. We stand up for Alberta and for Alberta jobs and for Alberta exports.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Merry Christmas, Alberta. January 1, 2018, will mark a 50 per cent increase in the carbon tax, that means nearly 30 cents in excise taxes on every litre

of gasoline, 25 cents in excise taxes on every litre of diesel, and a 50-cent tax increase on every single gigajoule of natural gas to heat our homes. Can the Minister of Energy describe how increasing the cost of fuel for vehicles and heating our homes is making life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are moving forward in this province with building Alberta and with a climate leadership plan that has secured us two pipelines. We are recycling those revenues back into things like, for example, cutting the small-business tax by a third. We're also doing things like investing in the Calgary green line and making sure that we lower our greenhouse gas emissions, create 20,000 jobs while we do so, and grow the economy in Calgary. That's the way we're going to move this province forward, and we're going to make sure that we have a made-in-Alberta plan, not made in Ottawa, to do it.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that over 70 per cent of homes in Alberta are heated by natural gas, meaning a significant increase in cost for families right across the board, and given that estimates of increased direct and indirect costs due to this upcoming carbon tax hike range anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 per family, knowing this, why is the NDP still pursuing a policy that hurts families and makes Alberta much less competitive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, two-thirds of Albertans do receive a rebate for their average use of CO₂ in a year, CO₂ that causes climate change. I will bring us back to the news conference that I did on January 2 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Stop the clock.
Keep going.

Ms Phillips: . . . of this year, where that hon. member stood in his place and denied the science of climate change. He did it over and over again. You know what? On this side of the House we embrace reality. We're going to move this province forward.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that this government clearly expects Alberta tradesmen to lug their tools around in Smart cars and scooters or face punitive costs at the pump and given that just a few short years ago Alberta had some of the lowest fuel excise taxes in the country but now, under the NDP, citizens in the heartland of agriculture, oil, and gas will be paying the third-highest fuel tax in the country, will this government be considerate to Alberta families and small businesses and delay implementing this unreasonable carbon tax increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member asked the question about affordability, which is why we are providing two-thirds of Albertans with a carbon levy rebate. We are also eliminating a number of school fees, making life more affordable for thousands of families, in particular in Calgary. We have frozen tuition. We have invested in child care. We have capped electricity rates. We have introduced a new child benefit. You know what else we've done? We've made life more affordable by raising the minimum wage for our most vulnerable workers, including women. On this side of the House we believe that sustainability means taking care of our neighbours, and we will get it done.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Workers' Compensation for First Responders with PTSD

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day Albertans rely on first responders such as firefighters to stay calm and use their training to make life-saving decisions for us in life-threatening situations. Not surprisingly, they experience high levels of posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of the situations they attend to. To the Minister of Labour. It's been brought to my attention that the current Workers' Compensation Board claim process for PTSD is causing more harm than good. Why isn't a more modern and thoughtful approach being taken when evaluating these claims?

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is asking about the processes at the Workers' Compensation Board. I'm very proud to be able to say that we initiated the first review of the Workers' Compensation Board in 15 years to make sure that we have a system that is sustainable, that is providing rehabilitation services for workers. Part of the recommendations that the panel we created provided were around presumptive coverages for PTSD as well as the processes at the Workers' Compensation Board. We continue to review the report received by the panel and work to make a better Workers' Compensation Board system for all Albertans.

Ms McPherson: Given that the 2012 change to WCB legislation was designed to make it easier for first responders to seek treatment for PTSD, can the minister please explain why firefighters who are seeking treatment for PTSD are being required to get a second and a third opinion as to whether or not they meet the diagnostic requirement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When someone is insured at work or someone suffers from PTSD that has been caused because of their work, we need to know that they are getting fair compensation, that they're getting help to get back onto the job and to be able to return to work safely. That is the purpose of our Workers' Compensation Board system. Initiating the first review in 15 years was an important part of our government's commitment to making sure that we have a Workers' Compensation Board system that fits all Albertans, is sustainable, and offers fair rehabilitation. Making sure that workers are receiving the care that they deserve is a priority . . .

2:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McPherson: Given that having to repeatedly relate the experiences that lead to PTSD without the benefit of a therapeutic relationship actually further traumatizes a person and given that the WCB published a fact sheet in February of this year detailing that PTSD is a presumptive disorder for first responders, again to the Minister of Labour: when can we expect that the WCB will stop the practice of compelling first responders to seek multiple assessments for PTSD, further damaging their mental health and discouraging their colleagues from coming forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that firefighters and first responders are able to access the presumptive coverage that they are entitled to is very important. I am concerned to hear that there are firefighters who feel that they are not able to access presumptive coverage for PTSD. Making sure that we have a strong WCB system is why I did do something, why I enacted the first review of the WCB in 15 years. The previous government let the system languish. I'm very proud to be taking action to make sure that all Alberta workers can receive rehabilitation, to make sure that we have a sustainable system going . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Kenow Wildfire Response

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, the Kenow fire that occurred in Waterton Park and areas of the MD of Pincher Creek has raised many questions about the emergency response by a coalition of area landowners. These residents have grave concerns regarding communication difficulties, fire preparedness, and the lack of proper notification. Therefore, this group is requesting a formal inquiry into the events surrounding this fire as it relates to all of the government agencies involved. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Previous wildfire events have led to such inquiries. Will your ministry be conducting a formal inquiry that covers all aspects of the Kenow fire, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. While it is true that we've had, you know, some wildfires in the southeast corner of the province, overall we've had a very good fire season, with only 15 per cent of the 10-year average of fires, so only 15 per cent of that. Our firefighters have been doing a fantastic job. Their presuppression efforts have been, bar none, some of the best in the world. I'm very proud of our firefighters and the excellent work that they have done.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if he answered the question about my formal inquiry.

Given that there were several different government entities involved in this event, including the forestry ministry, Environment and Parks, Parks Canada, the MD of Pincher Creek, and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, and given that landowner questions remain mostly unanswered by the various agencies, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will your ministry, which includes the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, have a key role to play in an inquiry into the Kenow fire, and to what extent does it have any responsibility to see that this results in a report being completed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfires are always scary, and we empathize with anyone who lost property or livestock as a result. I'm immensely proud of the first responders who fought these fires, both their own wildland firefighters and the many municipal firefighters who helped protect homes and businesses. Officials from the AEMA are in constant contact with affected municipalities and local leaders, and always after an incident such as this they work together to analyze what happened after the experience in order to continue to make the services that we deliver better after every single event. We will learn from this experience. We'll continue to move forward. But in the meantime an incredibly . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're still not getting an answer to the request for a formal inquiry.

Given that the various local government agencies directly involved in your emergency response to the Kenow fire have not yet been able to provide any clear details on a formal inquiry and given that the affected residents have some very serious concerns and questions on this incident and given that the ministries involved will hopefully conduct an inquiry at some point, to the forestry minister again: are you prepared to meet with these local concerned landowners and also provide an opportunity for public input into the questions at public meetings yet to be held, and if so, when and where might they be?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question and the suggestion. I think it's a worthwhile suggestion, and I'll most certainly look into it, talk to my officials to see what we can learn from this. In every experience in wildfire season we do learn something. I am proud of the co-operation between the various government departments, between the municipal departments that does take place. In every emergency situation, wildfires or not, there will be something to learn, and I will most certainly take his suggestions into consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Farm and Ranch Worker Regulation Consultation

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago the government announced that it was going to begin public consultations on the OHS recommendations from the technical working groups as part of the farm and ranch workplace legislation. These online and other consultations will take 11 weeks, ending mid-January. It's also been reported that the government has sat on these recommendations for seven months and are just now releasing all the technical information, which means they were completed about the same time as the labour and employment standards working groups. Minister, why the delay?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that our government has done to ensure the rights of farm workers in Alberta and that they have the same protections that farm workers across the country have had for years. We've received, with gratitude, the work of the technical working groups. The OHS groups spent significant time because it is technical information. We needed to take time to review the recommendations of the technical working groups as well as translating that into plain-language summaries so that when we went out to talk to farmers and ranchers during a time when they would have time to be able to respond, they would be able to respond to all the recommendations.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the hon. Minister of Labour stated that the delay was due to harvest but the report was completed in March or April, long before the normal harvest, which is when these OHS working groups' recommendations were completed, Minister, what is the real reason your government delayed the release of almost 200 pages of technical details seven months after completion but are only giving farmers

and the public less than three months to consult on these recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We promised Albertans that prior to making any changes to the regulations, they would have an opportunity to review those recommendations and provide their feedback, and we have followed through on that promise. All of the technical working group reports are now posted online. As well, we've taken the time to do a plain-language summary to be able to assist farmers and ranchers when reviewing this information. Making sure that we are having safe workplaces and that we are making life better for farm and ranch workers is a priority for this government. Jason Kenney and the Conservatives would not be supportive of this work and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's a given that the government is desperately trying to give the impression that it believes in proper consultation and given that we have seen time and time again that the approach is all sizzle and no steak, Minister, given that you will be introducing the OHS bill later in this session, wasn't the seven-month delay nothing more than to give your department time to work on your bill in such a way as to make passing farm and ranch safety regulations easier in 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that question had a lot to chew on, but I wouldn't have called it steak in that case. I'm very proud of the work that our government has been doing to ensure that farm workers in Alberta have the same rights and protections that farm workers across the country have had for years. So thank you to the technical working groups and all who participated, and I'd like to thank the farmers and ranchers, the owners and operators, who are right now giving us their very valuable feedback into the draft regulations and the technical working group recommendations. Their work is appreciated. I will continue to do everything I can to keep Alberta's workers safe and to engage with Albertans about these important changes.

Advanced Placement Courses for Rural Students

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to represent many gifted, ambitious students. Recently one of those students came to me, concerned that she was not able to take any advanced placement classes as a student based in a rural area because there was no online programming offered. Advanced placement is an internationally recognized program that prepares students to experience college- or university-level courses while enrolled in high school. Given that AP programming is offered through Edmonton and Calgary schools, can the Minister of Education please provide clarity on why equal opportunity is not being granted to children that live in rural areas?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Certainly, it's important to look for equity in programming and so forth in all of our schools around the province. I was just up in the hon. member's constituency last week, with very engaged parent groups and teachers as well. Certainly, it's important to look for choices that people can have for their

students in all corners of the province, so I'd be very interested in pursuing this further. I think it's a very important thing to point out, and I thank him for that.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Education released a statement touting that dual-credit programs are available to every corner of the province. Given that specialized programming such as advanced placement is offered in urban centres and given that all Alberta students should have access to programs that allow them educational enrichment opportunities and the ability to get a head start in postsecondary education, can the minister please tell me if there is currently programming in place to empower ambitious students in rural areas to participate in high school programs such as advanced placement, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, thank you for pointing this out to me. I mean, it's interesting that, in fact, the school board in the hon. member's area also is providing the distance learning programming here in the province, so certainly we can work together with Pembina Hills to perhaps pursue this further. I certainly know the advanced placement programming very well. I used to teach it before I was elected here. It's very worth while, and it would be worth while to look for ways by which we could provide it to all students in the province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Giving our rural high school students a head start on their postsecondary education is crucially important. Given that we live in a technologically advanced world and given the growing prevalence of educational platforms that are now being offered through online or distance learning and since advanced placement programming is not offered in rural communities directly, when will the Minister of Education commit to rural communities to provide equal access to programming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been working to achieve equity in programming across the province. Like the hon. member mentioned, I'm putting in a long-term, stable way by which to provide dual-credit funding for everybody in all corners of the province. You know, I was just up a few months ago in the hon. member's area at Neerlandia school, a very nice new school. We took a very bumpy road down to Westlock. Neerlandia school would not have been built and that bumpy road would stay bumpy if you took 20 per cent out of the GOA budget as the UCP would be doing if they ever got elected. I don't think that's going to happen. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

Statement by the Speaker

Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, just to remind you, it's been a long-standing practice in the House that when members' statements are made, comments and observations or thoughts are not to be expressed at that time. There were one or two earlier in the session today where that was not the case, so I continue to ask you to respect each other for the two-minute period.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Residential School Intergenerational Impacts

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between 1880 and the 1990s in Canada some 150,000 indigenous children between the ages of four and 16 were placed in residential schools, where they would be away from their families for 10 months a year. Living conditions were often poor, and many suffered from physical and sexual abuse. In fact, some 6,000 children died at these schools, and more died of exposure trying to escape. There were 25 such schools in Alberta.

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented 94 calls to action for Canadians to help rectify this dark chapter in our history. Alberta is committed to using the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as a framework for reconciliation. The government of Alberta's approach to implementing the principles of the UN declaration, inclusive of the TRC's calls to action, directly includes indigenous participation. We are implementing a number of the truth and reconciliation calls to action.

Government has supported the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Government has also directed the development of an indigenous cultural awareness program, which will focus on learning about treaties, residential schools, and the historical and contemporary experiences of indigenous Albertans. Alberta Education is enhancing curriculum to provide additional opportunities for students to learn about indigenous histories, perspectives, cultures, and contributions.

Budget 2017 included \$120 million for off-reserve housing, \$100 million to ensure that more First Nation communities have access to clean and safe drinking water, and millions to help indigenous peoples participate in Alberta's climate leadership plan.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the harmful effects of the residential school system on indigenous communities will last generations, but I am proud to be part of a government that is finally moving forward in the right direction.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Government Policies

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, I try to live by the principle of disagreeing without being disagreeable, but frankly I'm struggling under the weight, record, and actions of the Alberta NDP. Nothing personal, but in the style of a great Canadian hero, Rex Murphy: never waste a good rant.

I committed myself to public service with many goals and objectives for a better Alberta. I believe it is the responsibility of my generation to hand the baton of the future of our great province to the next generation better than we found it, full of hope, optimism, prosperity, and a compassionate society that allows each and every Albertan to reach their full potential, free from the shackles of paternalistic, self-righteous ideology and what I have come to view as business-decimating, investment-repelling, job-killing policies and what I once characterized as anti-Albertan, but I'll now reframe that as antiprosperity in the name of political correctness, which I'm not universally recognized for.

How did I come to such conclusions? Let me count the ways: an overreaching, anticompetitive, environmentally immeasurable carbon tax; a punitive minimum wage that hurts those it purports to help; irresponsible coal shutdown, decimating an industry, towns,

people, and short-circuiting a technology play and export opportunity; turning the Balancing Pool into a borrowing pool, where we may drown in yet more red ink; social licence that acts like a learner's permit, unlikely to make it past the graduated licence phase with a limited number of passengers, home before midnight, and still zero tolerance from the authorities who issued it; playing croquet with federal Liberals, Lotus Land NDP, and envirocrusaders like Berman, Mahon, and Hudema, when Albertans truly need us to play a little hardball; supersonic flight of \$35 billion in foreign investment; a debt burden that will take generations of austerity to repay.

Mr. Speaker, I rest my case. Is this the baton we wish to hand to future generations? I think not and encourage all of us in this House and, indeed, all Albertans to reject this reckless and irresponsible path and demand a return to the Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Technology and Economic Development

Ms Luff: Thank you. Everywhere I've been over the last four months, whether it be the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region summit or Calgary Economic Development outlook 2018, I've heard variations on one theme, disruption. Alberta experienced a profound disruption in its economy with the global collapse in the price of oil and is currently adapting to a new normal, where oil is hovering at half of what it once was. We are living in a time of unprecedented speed of technological improvements, and we need to be adaptive enough in our economy that we take advantage of these technologies rather than being left behind.

Whether it's self-driving cars, artificial intelligence, or decentralization of electricity production, the world 10 years from now is going to look a whole lot different than it does right now, and it's going to affect the way that we work. Recent reports suggest that more than 40 per cent of jobs are likely to be affected by automation and advanced technologies over the next 20 years. Todd Hirsch, the chief economist for ATB, noted that in times of economic crisis humans have a tendency to want to just go back, go back to a time when things were okay. However, most of us know that this isn't possible. We must embrace the talents and skills of our people and look to the future.

2:50

Calgary and Alberta are full of entrepreneurs who are shaking things up and embracing the new economy. Prefabricated self-designed interiors like those that DIRT produces are revolutionizing the way that we build things. Cask canning solutions invented and produces the first canning system for small breweries right in Calgary. Benevity is a global leader in workplace giving technology, and our recent bid for Amazon HQ2 showed off Calgary's creative talent at its best.

When I speak with Calgarians about the future of business in Alberta, many of them tell me that they could never vote for a party that would repeal the carbon levy, which is making their businesses more sustainable and more efficient, that the investor tax credits are making a difference in helping to attract investment, and that they appreciate our small-brewing grants.

When we look to the future, it's high tech, it's low carbon, and it's local. We're doing it in Alberta now, and we can do more of it. We have to because going back isn't an option.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of a motion for tomorrow's Order Paper, that motion being:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing November 27, 2017, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the Third Session of the 29th Legislature 2017 fall sitting unless the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 42:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately develop a co-ordinated strategy responding to the government of Canada's recent policies that are detrimentally affecting Alberta including but not limited to the proposed amendments to the income tax legislation that impacts small businesses and its position regarding the assessment of upstream emissions that encroaches on Alberta's constitutional jurisdiction with respect to the development of Alberta's natural resources.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the end of the Routine, Motions under Standing Order 42, we will discuss it at that point.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Bill 28 School Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with great privilege to introduce the first reading of Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. This is legislation that through a series of amendments will make life better for Alberta students to strengthen our province's education system. After thorough review I've decided to propose amendments to the School Act to better reflect what needs to be done to strengthen our education system. The School Act has served Alberta students well for almost three decades, and we're confident that as a result of these amendments it will continue to do so. This legislation builds on positive existing practices and paves the way for future work that will also help students, schools, and communities.

If passed, the School Amendment Act, 2017, would pave the way for new professional standards for principals and superintendents, which would ensure that they are equipped to lead modern, inclusive schools that are prudently administered and prepare each and every student for success.

Other proposed amendments include establishing a common age of entry for students entering kindergarten, improving the process for the creation of separate school jurisdictions, authorizing the Minister of Education – that's me – to establish standards of education service agreements between First Nations and school boards in order to help close the achievement gap for indigenous students.

This bill is comprehensive and will ensure that the School Act continues to form a solid foundation for success of Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system. I'm very proud and truly honoured to move first reading of Bill 28, the School Amendment Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of Statistics Canada's job vacancy and wage survey. It shows that things are improving in Alberta, that jobs are up in the province. From the first quarter in 2016 to present job vacancies are up 11,725, meaning that more Albertans are getting back to work.

I have a second tabling. My second tabling is a letter from the town of Vegreville. It is to the Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. It is a letter that is thanking the government for its ongoing support during its fight against the federal government over the closure of the case processing centre, and it speaks to the importance of the CARES program, the community and regional economic support program, for rural Alberta. It says that "these actions reinforce that rural Alberta remains a priority for our leaders and that our community has not been forgotten."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of two newspaper articles, one entitled Alberta Dementia Strategy Coming Soon, Health Minister Promises. That is from June 5, 2017.

A second is five copies of an article entitled Alberta Dementia Strategy Promised for This Fall, from September 18, 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Renaud: St. Albert.

The Speaker: St. Albert. Sorry.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an article from PressProgress entitled Alberta's New Interim United Conservative Leader Was Spokesman for Group Opposed to 'Homosexual Agenda'.

The second is a copy of an open letter to Mr. Brian Jean, former leader of the Wildrose Party, entitled Wildrose Misrepresents Albertans on Official Legislature Documents – Why?

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table three documents that I referenced in my speech earlier on Tuesday. The first document is entitled Cutting Red Tape in Canada: A Regulatory Reform Model for the United States? by Laura Jones of the Mercatus Center, George Mason University.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is entitled Canada's Oil and Gas Sector at Risk? How Excessive Taxes and Regulations Undermine Our Competitiveness by Germain Belzile, Montreal Economic Institute.

The third document is an executive order by the President of the United States of America from February 2017 ordering the cut of two regulations for each one regulation proposed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of ATB Financial's economics and research team publication titled Employment Insurance Numbers

Highlight Labour Market Recovery. It shows things that are looking up in Alberta. Jobs are up, and the publication states that “more Albertans continue to find employment” as the “downward trend in EI recipients is expected to continue.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document, a letter that I penned to the Minister of Transportation. It says: “Do you recall on April 23, 2014, when you [said] the following . . .?” I just might add, “Mr. Premier, will you please stop the bafflegab” — that’s my favorite part of the letter — “and admit that your government is interfering with the freedom of information process?”

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think we’re at the point where there was a motion earlier. I would call upon Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Response to Federal Policies

Mr. Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately develop a co-ordinated strategy responding to the government of Canada’s recent policies that detrimentally affect Alberta including but not limited to the proposed amendments to income tax legislation that impacts small business and its positions regarding the assessment of upstream emissions that encroach on Alberta’s constitutional jurisdiction with respect to the development of Alberta’s natural resources.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 42 I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move the following motion. I have the appropriate number of copies for the page.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members . . .

Mr. Nixon: I get to speak to it. I was trying to wait and make sure that it was okay to speak.

The Speaker: Okay. I thought you’d finished.

Mr. Nixon: Am I okay to continue?

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks. For months Alberta’s small-business professionals and farmers have expressed grave concern with the Trudeau Liberals’ proposed changes to the tax code. I’m sure my colleagues in the government have heard the same thing back in their constituencies. I know my colleagues in the United Conservative Party have heard a lot of concerns from Albertans, a lot of concerns about the need to urgently deal with and address this issue, concerns particularly on how this move by the federal government, the Trudeau Liberals, will impact their small businesses in Alberta, farms here in Alberta. I know there were town halls held all across this province for months, well attended. I’m sure you had the opportunity to be at a couple yourself, Mr. Speaker, to listen to some of the concerns your constituents in Medicine Hat probably have with this.

The reason this is urgent, Mr. Speaker, is that small businesses are the engine of our economy. Ottawa’s changes, the changes that are being brought forward by the Trudeau Liberals, are risking

derailing any sort of economic recovery here in the province of Alberta. Constituents that I have spoken to and that many of my colleagues have spoken to believe this is an extremely urgent matter. They are very disappointed to see that so far the NDP government has not addressed this issue at all, has not taken the time to stand up on this issue. The reason why I bring this to this House is because of that urgency, the urgency that I’m hearing. I know you are probably hearing from your constituents as well that there be a firm stance from this place, from this Legislature, standing up for Alberta, standing up for small businesses, standing up for farmers, standing up for Alberta families against what is clearly an attack.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, I’ve talked a lot about the fact that the government has been silent on other areas of intrusion into Albertans’ rights that are urgent, in my mind, stuff like upstream resources, et cetera.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Speaking to Urgency

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hesitate to stand on a point of order, but section 42(1) clearly indicates that the person proposing the unanimous consent to bring forward the motion can speak to the reasons why it is “of urgent and pressing necessity.” The hon. member is arguing the case. He really should wait for the vote before doing so.

The Speaker: To the point of order?

Mr. Nixon: I’m responding to the point of order.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: The Government House Leader may not have heard how clear I was on how urgent this is for constituents and for Albertans. That’s what I was speaking about. I appreciate that he may want to downplay the urgency that Albertans are feeling on this issue, but clearly I’m speaking about the urgency of the matter.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I tend to agree with the Government House Leader. Your requirement is to speak to the urgency and the pressing matter. If you could get to that. I hadn’t quite heard it yet.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will try again, then.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, this is an urgent issue because small businesses, farmers, Albertans, hard-working Albertans are under attack by the federal government. They’re urgently asking — and I know they are asking the members across the way — for this place to stand up for them, which is why we’re bringing forward this motion. We’re giving the government and this whole House an opportunity to show that level of urgency, and I would ask all members to show that they actually stand up for Albertans like their Premier says in this House every day. If they don’t, then clearly they don’t stand up for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. member has asked for unanimous consent to proceed to debate the motion.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 27
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there any further speakers to this amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to stand on this amendment to Bill 27 as the Member for Calgary-Hays. The amendment actually talks about striking out section 23.97(1)(a) and substituting:

- (a) the person holds
 - (i) a senior official position, section 23.925 applies, or
 - (ii) a senior official position referred to in section 23.926(1), sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply,

or

by striking out subsection 23.97(2)(a) and substituting:

- (a) the person holds a senior official position, sections 23.925 and 23.926 apply, according to their terms, to the person.

Madam Chair, I've no doubt that the bill is well intended, and I expect that members from all sides of this House are interested in making sure that the way we do our business meets a high ethical standard of business, but there are certain questions I think we need to consider. One is whether the people on the agencies, boards, and commissions are going to be allowed to have the skill sets, the experience, the business background in order to make informed, quality decisions that are always in the interests of Albertans. I have no doubt that whoever is on the committees will do the best that they can, but again it's the informed, quality decisions that you will get from having people with experience in the different endeavours that the agencies, boards, and commissions look after.

Of course, the obvious dichotomy here is that if you have someone in a particular line of work and they're speaking on rules and regulations about that line of work, it might be able to be said that they are feathering their own nest or trying to make things better for themselves. That's actually a legitimate thing to think and to worry about. This is not criticism. The government may well consider also that if you don't have people that work in that line of endeavour, that business, that industry, that profession, you may well not be getting the best quality of information from that agency, board, or commission. So I'll acknowledge that that is a bit of a catch-22 or a dichotomy or something not obviously and easily solved.

We need to think, Madam Chair, about whether the price of having somebody involved in these areas of endeavour is worth it to get the best quality of advice. I think, in my view, there is a place for people that are actually working in the different areas of endeavour that will actually be able to make rules, regulations and advise the government on things more effectively and provide better advice and make better decisions than those that are from other areas of endeavour. No matter how good those people are, there's nothing like actually having your hands in a particular area of endeavour in order to give good advice.

3:10

I acknowledge that this is something that will probably always be a struggle. I guess I would ask that we consider what is in the best interests of Albertans, at the end of the day. I think this amendment is designed to support that.

Madam Chair, I think there are other sections – no. You know what? I'll just stick to what I think is before us now, and I will ask members on all sides of the House to consider what, at the end of the day, is going to get a better decision made for Albertans.

For that reason, I will be supporting the amendment and would ask other members of the Assembly, respectfully, to do the same. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will keep my comments brief. I just wanted to mention that, really, in many respects this piece of legislation is about trying to strike the right balance, to make sure that agencies, boards, and commissions and those who serve on them are also held to the appropriate levels of accountability and responsibility, and I think that it's incumbent upon all members in the Assembly to ensure that that happens.

However, what we don't want is to get to a spot where the pendulum swings so far in the opposite direction that those who are experts in a field are going to be put in a position where they are unable to serve on an agency, board, or commission, particularly on some of those which are voluntary. The heart of the amendment is to try to get closer to that balance.

I think, from my perspective, that this amendment works in that direction. I can't tell that it would also be a perfect scenario, but in so many cases we are working to the best-case scenario and the best solution possible, and I think it's very important that we make the appropriate considerations to legislation. I think that's what this amendment does in trying to strike a better balance so that we aren't limiting people's ability or desire to participate in agencies, boards, and commissions but also making sure that the Ethics Commissioner will have the ability to have some guidance and oversight.

I think that at present inside the legislation it is a little less than certain in that respect, and I think the amendment before us now provides some clarity and some certainty. I encourage all members in the Chamber to go ahead and support the amendment so that we can move forward to have a better balance involved in this particular piece of legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. I would just like to further contribute to what's been said, and I would like to add some specifics, actually, some concrete examples, I suppose you could say.

Let me begin, though, just by referring to section 23.926(1) of the act before us, which states that "if any of the . . . senior officials is involved in any appointment, business, undertaking or employment, including self-employment," then they are in breach of this act. If you consider that the kinds of people who are allowed to sit on boards are not allowed to have any appointment, business, undertaking, or employment, including self-employment, related to the commission that they might be sitting on, then my question specifically becomes: who are we to appoint to the Safety Codes Council?

The Safety Codes Act, quite frankly, is a fairly technical document, and the only people who really know anything about it are either the tradesmen, the contractors, or municipal officials who, in fact, actually work with that act and who are involved in the safety codes industry in this province. If none of them are allowed to sit on that council because they, in fact, do have an appointment or a business or any kind of undertaking or any kind of employment, including self-employment, that puts them in breach of sitting on that council, then my real question is: what kind of people are going to be allowed to sit on the Safety Codes Council who will even understand anything about it?

The same goes, for instance, for the Alberta Boilers Safety Association. Boilers are extremely complex, highly dangerous, require various levels of steam tickets in order to even operate them based on the size of the boiler, et cetera, et cetera. Again, only the tradespeople, the contractors, the industry owners who are involved with those kinds of things would even understand the nature of what it means for a boiler to be run safely. But now, in terms of overseeing this, all of those people are hereby exempted from having anything to do with boilers because, again, if they have any business, undertaking, employment, or self-employment that has anything to do with this, which would in fact give them the knowledge to qualify them to sit on a boiler safety association, who is going to sit on that association? Where are we going to pull people from that have any idea about this? Are we restricted to simply retired people, maybe students who are just learning?

What about the elevators that we go up and down every day? There is an association that governs the regulations, the maintenance, the operation of those things. Once again, it's the tradespeople, the companies that run these businesses, some of the regulators that understand this. But by section 23.926(1) all of them are in fact excluded, and they are in breach of the act if they seek to become a chief executive officer, a chairperson, or a person holding any other position identified under this section.

So I don't quite understand how we're going to get qualified people to actually manage these important safety associations – building codes, boilers, elevators, and all kinds of others that we could name – where they're going to come from.

We could also talk about the Alberta Securities Commission. We've already been through this a little bit in recent history. Are we going to appoint people who know nothing about securities? The people who actually understand how securities operate, how the markets operate are the people who are involved as brokers and traders and businesspeople and bankers and all of the people who, quite frankly, actually have some other form of business or undertaking or employment in this industry. They're the only ones who actually know what the Securities Commission should be doing, and we're going to now exclude them.

We could take this one step farther, which I'll ask about. How about the Labour Relations Board? Is anybody involved in labour relations now going to be excluded? That could include union people. That could include employers. It could include contractors. All of these people now are not allowed to sit on or engage in labour relations. It could include the lawyers that work in this area. There are all kinds of people, but if they are employed in that field, they're now excluded.

I would really appreciate the minister explaining to me how we're to get qualified people on these agencies, boards, and commissions under these rules. Because of that I think the amendment warrants some serious consideration, maybe a little retweaking if you want to do that. But I would really appreciate the answer to some of these questions for these agencies, boards, and commissions.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak in support of the government amendment to Bill 27. I'm glad to see that members of the opposition see the merits in the amendment. It's always a pleasure to see the House transacting business the way that it ought to be doing. Well, with a couple of exceptions here, perhaps. Yeah. Just to sort of, unfortunately – well, I guess I can't refer to my absence.

Now, my understanding is that this amendment that was introduced is focused on the transitional provisions, and it shouldn't

be understood as impacting the broader policy intent or the impact or effect of this bill. I think it's important that that is very clear. Instead, what it does is that it deals primarily with the application of transitional provisions to board chairs.

3:20

Now, of course, great care goes into drafting bills, but, you know, there's always a chance for improvements, and, like I said, that's why we're here. I mean, if bills could be drafted perfectly on the first go, there wouldn't be much work for hon. members, would there?

I think that, like I said, it's welcome that discussion and debate have helped us to improve this. Now, the broad bill, I think, we have some good consensus on, and it's good that we clarify this, you know, partly because of some of the points that the hon. members have brought up as well.

Now, this proposed amendment is composed of two changes, clause (a) and clause (b). Referring first to clause (a), first, it amends transitional provisions under 23.97 to make it very clear that the concurrent employment provision in the original bill was limited to CEOs and other designated positions as currently worded, and we have to grant that. It would have applied to all chairs as well, and applying to all chairs would have caused some of these issues, you know, potentially excluding qualified personnel and qualified personnel that couldn't otherwise be attracted to these positions. I think that clarity is welcome.

Secondly, it amends section 23.97(2) to ensure that the chairs who are not subject to an employment contract are also covered by this transitional provision. Now, unless we amended it, this transitional provision, not the broader bill, would have misapplied, certainly, these provisions to board chairs and, you know, basically undermined the intention of the bill itself, of some of these legislative requirements.

I don't know if I need to belabour this point. It looks like we have, you know, broad consensus around accepting this amendment, so I do hope that we do have your support on this amendment and on the larger bill.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to take the opportunity to respond to some of the issues that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake brought up earlier this morning regarding this particular bill, and of course our other colleagues in the House have brought up issues as well regarding specific industry players and their participation in some of these agencies, boards, and commissions.

I want to state specifically that we are not prescribing the codes of conduct by which these agencies, boards, and commissions would address some of the issues. I want to make it abundantly clear that it's the responsibility of these agencies, boards, and commissions to come up with the codes of conduct themselves.

Now, I think that we who have been in the House know when there is a conflict of interest, and we also know when there is a perceived conflict of interest well enough so that we know, as has been done by a few members in this House when we're debating

particular bills – they have excused themselves from the House, and they have left because they understand knowingly that there could be, if not a conflict of interest, at least a perceived conflict of interest.

Now, the great thing about this is that on these agencies, boards, and commissions the people involved themselves would be coming up with these codes of conduct. Now, again I want to stress that we are suggesting things that they have to look into in terms of establishing the codes of conduct, and those are a requirement to conduct themselves impartially, restrictions on acting in self-interest or furthering a private interest by virtue of one's position. Notice how it says "restrictions," right? We understand that. We want to have people who are involved in the industry playing an instrumental role on the agencies, boards, and commissions when they apply, especially if they're volunteers, right? Especially if they're volunteers.

The other aspects there are restrictions on gifts, including monetary limits; limitations on concurrent employment or other offices. As we've already debated and moved, the amendment has clarified specifically what we were talking about in those instances.

Of course, this isn't like a one-size-fits-all, and all the agencies, boards, and commissions are going to have to apply the same rules or, better stated, the codes of conduct. However, they're using the Conflicts of Interest Act as a base from which to establish those codes of conduct as they continue to move forward.

I remind all the members of this House why it's so important in order for us to move this particular piece of legislation. It's because we're trying to create greater transparency. We're trying to work towards more diversity on our agencies, boards, and commissions. We want to make sure that people are remunerated appropriately for the work that they're doing, of course, and therefore continue to strengthen these institutions that further complement the work that we're doing here in the House, which is at the service of all Albertans as we try to move this province forward.

I believe that those were the main concerns that members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition expressed during the discussion on the amendment and the discussion on the bill itself. I hope that that satisfies, at least to some degree, the questions, the inquiries that they had.

I also want to remind the members that, as was discussed this morning, we will be reviewing the Conflicts of Interest Act. We know that eventually it will be handed over to the Resource Stewardship Committee, where I look forward to discussing that in great detail so that we can further strengthen the piece of legislation itself, now knowing that it will also specifically apply to agencies, boards, and commissions of the government of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I would like to actually speak to the bill itself here in Committee of the Whole. Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, has been brought forward as a way to create a more consistent set of rules for the province's 136 agencies, boards, and commissions, which I will just refer to as ABCs for short. The bill will affect, actually, all of the ones that fall under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. It includes many of the health agencies and other groups as well.

As a United Conservative Party member, as a conservative, quite frankly, I support anything that contributes towards good governance, clear rules, transparency, and accountability, especially when it comes down to these government agencies. I think this is extremely important, and I think many of my colleagues would

support also the respect for taxpayers' money and just the accountability of government to citizens for the spending of money and the use of it by members who are servants of the government.

While I get the value of rules – as just sort of a personal thought aside, I guess, sadly, I wish that laws would actually solve the problem – unfortunately it seems too often that laws don't actually constrain those without morals. It's really only people of character and integrity who will act honourably. But having said that, we still have to do the best we can. We still have to be clear about what the expectations are and trust that people will actually of their own volition choose to act with honour and respect.

3:30

In terms of the actual content of the bill, clearly it does ask for the ABCs to write a code of conduct, which is good governance practice on the part of all boards, quite frankly.

Senior officials will be asked to make regular declarations to the Ethics Commissioner of their involvement and their potential conflicts, and there will be some restrictions on them for up to a year after in terms of what jobs they might be eligible or able to apply for.

Within four months of proclamation of this bill it will enforce that all ABCs and their subsidiaries submit a written code of conduct to the Alberta Ethics Commissioner for review. The commissioner will then review them by March 31 and report on all the findings a month later. All the ABCs within Alberta Health Services, postsecondary institutions, Alberta Securities Commission, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, and others will be included in this required submission.

Across government this bill will provide, I think, some increased clarity and consistency around what conflicts of interest might be. What are the rules? What are the procedures? Hopefully, it should close any loopholes with regard to conflicts of interest. The government does need to increase the public's trust when it comes to the hundreds of thousands of tax dollars that are being used in some cases, quite sadly, to line individual members' pockets.

I do have the concern, though, as has been voiced and somewhat resolved, I suppose, by this amendment, that it will be harder to find good people in some cases because of the limitations on their other involvements, because of the – I don't know – challenge of filing with the Ethics Commissioner. We know that the Ethics Commissioner has been fairly strict or fairly narrow in interpretations of what conflict might look like and the limitation on work for the year following service. I do think it's going to make it harder for good people to step forward because of these concerns. I guess that is the question that will need to be sort of resolved in the working out of this.

It's something that we've already raised: the deep concern within many communities that the bill will affect the ability of industry experts to serve. We've heard that from ranchers, farmers, with the farm commissions. Many of them were really not entirely clear on, at least in the administration of this, how Bill 27 will affect the many expert boards and commissions: the Wheat Commission, the Barley Commission, the canola, Chicken Producers, egg producers, many others, just to name a few. Our concern is that it will prevent industry experts from serving on these boards, especially in a voluntary or quasi-volunteer role, yet allow them to maintain their employment or their business or their job that pays for their living while they're trying to serve on these commissions.

Can the canola commission not have canola farmers or marketers? They're really the only ones who know the market. Can the chicken producers' commission actually have chicken producers because they're in conflict? No one else really knows what's going on, and unfortunately raising two urban chickens really doesn't

qualify a person to know anything about the production of commercial chickens for the marketplace. So there is a question about who will be able to serve on these agencies, boards, and commissions as we go forward.

My question, I guess, in simple boils down to: is this bill actually finding the balance between ethics and expertise? I do think that is the challenge. How do we balance the ethics versus the expertise? I hope we're not trading one for the other, because that wouldn't move us very far ahead. How do you provide for the many ABCs that depend on expert knowledge in their area in order to contribute knowledge and leadership that's needed for the ABCs?

The main Conflicts of Interest Act, not just the amendment here but I'm going back to the original act, as has been mentioned, does call for a special committee to be struck every five years starting from December 1, 2012. Five years is 15 days away, quite frankly. Why is this bill presented now, when, in fact, we're 15 days away from a required committee being entrusted or committed to looking after this bill? I really think we probably would have been wise to actually let it go to committee, have a full and thorough review, a deep look at it, take time to engage with stakeholders. I guess I raise the issue of stakeholders at this point, too, because a number of these boards and commissions, their mandate responsibilities actually require that certain industry stakeholders have a seat at the table, so there's a real question there of how that will work for them on these things.

I think actually having waited the 15 days, allow the committee to begin to do its work, begin to speak with stakeholders to consult with them to actually do a really good job of this: being as it's only 15 days away, it would have been a better thing to do. Why is it introduced now, 15 days in advance? I wonder if it's political staging. Or is it an attempt to upstage the proper, mandated work of a legislative committee? I do have concerns about the timing of this thing being presented.

But, all in all, the principle, the intent of the bill, is moving in the right direction. I might have preferred to see it presented in a slightly different way, but I will support the bill, and I do think the intent is one that we need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 27. I spoke earlier, but I didn't have the opportunity to speak at second reading, so I'll just maybe provide some comments of a more general nature with respect to the bill.

I think it's important to recognize that here in the United Conservative Party we support good governance and improved clarity for agencies, boards, and commissions, and at the end of the day we want to make sure that we get to a spot where this legislation has provided a real framework for that to happen. You know, we've seen over a long period of time that there have been examples of high-profile agencies, boards, and commissions where the behaviour of some of those individuals who have been appointed to that hasn't been ideal, and there's been little to no recourse to rectify that situation. So it's my hope that that is exactly where we can arrive on Bill 27.

It's important to note that the United Conservative Party strongly supports transparency and accountability, and we want to work to make sure that we get that across the line. Accountability is a core function of the United Conservative Party. I think that was made clear in question period today, where a number of members on our side of the House highlighted some of the challenges that the current

government is having with respect to openness and transparency, so it's my hope that over a period of time this government will heed some of their advice and ensure that we do remain open and transparent.

We've seen this government engaging in political interference at the highest levels, including in the Premier's office and directly interfering with access to information requests. It is of key underlining importance to the United Conservatives that we have openness and transparency in government, so it's my hope that we can get there for some of the agencies, boards, and commissions on Bill 27. We have been founded as an organization specifically with reference to respect for taxpayers' money and greater accountability from government to its citizens, and hopefully that is exactly what Bill 27 will provide.

I'll conclude my comments on that and look forward to some continued debate and look forward to hopefully being able to continue the discussion around this and around the review at committee as well, as that is an important step.

The Chair: Just before I recognize the next speaker, hon. members, I've had a request to revert to introduction of guests very briefly, for which we need unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:40

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair and to all the members for indulging me. It gives me great pleasure to introduce a few people who are really important to me, a couple of very young conflict-of-interest enthusiasts who are joining me after school today. First of all is my daughter Opal Schmidt. She is in grade 5. She's learning the cello. She's quite a skilled athlete, and she has her dad's sense of humour if not his good looks. I ask that Opal Schmidt please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Joining her today is her brother Gus Trefz. Gus is seven, in grade 2. He's learning the violin. He's a video game enthusiast. He can play Minecraft like nobody else. He also really likes Batman, and it's my pleasure to call him my son. Gus, if you would rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Joining them today is my assistant Karlie Hanoski, who kindly shepherded them safely from school to the Legislature because child care in this province doesn't meet the demands of a legislator's schedule. Karlie, it's a pleasure to include you on my team, so would you please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

(continued)

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: A hard act to follow, Madam Chair, indeed. It's nice to have them with us today.

I will move that we adjourn debate on Bill 27 and that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 27. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 29

An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving, for second reading.

Impaired driving injures or kills thousands of Albertans every year. Any form of impaired driving is unacceptable and dangerous and puts everyone on our roads at risk. This government has made a commitment to improving safety on Alberta's transportation network. In order to maintain safe roads and deter impaired driving, we must have a robust program of provincial administrative sanctions and roadside detection processes in place.

This is particularly true as the country prepares for the legalization of cannabis. By amending and updating the Traffic Safety Act, we would continue to honour our commitment to promote safety on Alberta's roads. Too many Albertans have lost loved ones or seen loved ones suffer injuries that alter the course of their lives forever as a result of an impaired driving incident. We've heard from Albertans concerned about what legalization of cannabis will mean for the safety of our roads. The vast majority of Albertans support robust impaired driving laws to ensure the safety of everyone.

The proposed amendments that I will speak about today are the result of consultation with Albertans and our traffic safety, law enforcement, and industry stakeholders. They reflect the changes being proposed by the federal government to the Criminal Code of Canada and ensure that we would have the provincial sanctions in place that reflect the new federal impaired driving laws when they come into force in the near future.

What this bill means for Albertans is that our law enforcement organizations would have the tools they need to sanction impaired drivers to get them off the road immediately, with consequences that are serious enough to deter drivers from getting behind the wheel impaired by any substance in the first place.

In April 2017 the government of Canada introduced legislation that would legalize the use and possession of nonmedical cannabis in Canada – that's Bill C-45 – and make changes to federal transportation-related laws, including impaired driving laws, in the Criminal Code of Canada. That's Bill C-46. These federal changes include three new impaired driving offences specific to cannabis, to cannabis-alcohol combination, or other illegal drugs.

In addition, in May 2017 the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled that section 88.1 of Alberta's Traffic Safety Act is unconstitutional. This section imposes an indefinite licence suspension on a person charged under the Criminal Code with impaired driving, a suspension that lasts until the disposition of the Criminal Code court

proceeding, an indefinite period of time, Madam Speaker. This indefinite licence suspension must be changed, according to the court direction, to a fixed-term suspension no later than May 18, 2018.

To respond to these changes, we are proposing amendments to Alberta's Traffic Safety Act. Currently the government of Alberta uses a combination of tools and sanctions to encourage drivers to make safer choices. These provincial administrative sanctions include licence suspension, vehicle seizure, remedial education, and ignition interlock device installation among other requirements.

The administrative sanction programs include zero tolerance for alcohol for drivers who are in the graduated driver licensing program; the immediate roadside suspension program, an escalating series of sanctions for drivers found with a blood-alcohol concentration between .05 and .08; and the Alberta administrative licence suspension program, a series of escalating sanctions for any driver charged with a Criminal Code of Canada impaired driving offence, such as driving with a blood-alcohol content over .08. Two of these programs, the zero tolerance program and the Alberta administrative licence suspension program, would be updated as part of these amendments.

The first amendment to the Traffic Safety Act addresses the Alberta Court of Appeal decision from the Sahaluk case. At issue was the indefinite term of a licence suspension for drivers criminally charged with a blood-alcohol concentration over .08. When the law was put into place in 2012, the licence suspension remained in place pending the outcome of criminal court proceedings, a process that could take anywhere from three to 24 months.

The new suspension will no longer be tied to the criminal charge. We propose changing the term of the licence suspension for these drivers to 90 days, followed by a year of monitoring through the ignition interlock program. This would succeed in addressing the court's ruling, which also included a recommendation to establish a monitoring system for demonstrated high-risk drivers. At the same time, we would provide a way to take impaired drivers off the road, along with a serious enough sanction to deter impaired driving in the first place.

Madam Speaker, the next proposed amendment reflects the overwhelming response that we received from Albertans during consultation about zero tolerance for drivers in the graduated driver licensing program. GDL drivers are new to driving and have yet to build the driving skills that more experienced drivers have attained. This program is designed to give novice drivers an opportunity to gain driving experience while limiting known risks. This proposed amendment would allow a zero tolerance policy for GDL drivers for cannabis, cannabis-alcohol combination, and illegal drugs in exactly the same way that we currently do for alcohol.

The next proposed amendment would expand the Alberta administrative licence suspension program to reflect the three proposed new federal Criminal Code offences for drug-impaired driving and drug-alcohol combination impaired driving. These offences relate to new blood-drug concentration limits and new blood-alcohol concentration limits.

3:50

Drivers reasonably believed to be at or over any of these new concentration limits would be subject to the sanctions laid out in the Alberta administrative licence suspension program. The program includes immediate licence suspension for 90 days followed by one-year participation in an ignition interlock program as well as other consequences. This means there would be the same consequences whether a driver was impaired by alcohol or cannabis alone, cannabis-alcohol combinations, or other impairing

substances such as illegal drugs. This reflects what we heard from stakeholders; namely, impairment is impairment and should be treated the same even if the substances causing impairment are different.

This is important because drug users rarely use drugs alone. Drugs, particularly cannabis, are often paired with alcohol. Research shows that combining two impairing substances like cannabis and alcohol greatly increases the level of impairment beyond the level that would be achieved with one or the other alone.

Having the same sanctions for all kinds of impaired driving, especially the requirement to use an alcohol ignition interlock device, would help to ensure that high-risk drivers cannot combine drugs and alcohol and place themselves and others at greater risk. Ignition interlock devices are one of the consequences that effectively work to deter any form of impaired driving, and courts already order ignition interlock monitoring for drug-impaired drivers convicted under the Criminal Code.

The following proposed amendments reflect the reorganization and renumbering of all transportation-related offences as part of the federal Bill C-46, part 2. These proposed amendments update references to the Criminal Code of Canada in the Traffic Safety Act. Additionally, they correct a previous legislative drafting error, ensuring that all peace officers who are properly trained and appointed can enforce impaired driving laws. If these proposed amendments are not made in advance of the federal legislation, sections of the Traffic Safety Act would become unenforceable.

We're also taking this opportunity, as we make amendments to the Traffic Safety Act, to update and streamline some of the processes and procedures of the Alberta Transportation Safety Board. The board is the final administrative authority for decisions about drivers' licences for motor vehicles. They review the conduct of unsafe or high-risk drivers, including impaired drivers, and determine sanctions and hear appeals of decisions made by law enforcement and the registrar of motor vehicle services.

The first proposed amendment would clarify how the board would reconsider its decisions. Upon application, the board would have to grant one reconsideration but only if the circumstances of the appeal have substantially changed since the original decision. Decisions already reconsidered would not be reconsidered again, which, Madam Speaker, is the current situation. That said, drivers always have the right to appeal a board decision to the courts.

Another proposed amendment would remove the authority of the board to hear appeals on court-imposed drivers' licence suspensions. This would align with other quasi-judicial boards in Canada. Drivers may always appeal their court-imposed suspensions to a higher level of court.

Finally, the Minister of Transportation – that's me – would be authorized to make regulations respecting the use of electronic documents and e-signatures.

Additional proposed amendments are administrative in nature and would clarify incorrect references and processes. The Alberta Transportation Safety Board has both requested and is in support of these proposed changes.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, the amendments proposed under Bill 29 are not only necessary to ensure continued safety of all users of Alberta's roads but vital. These proposed amendments anticipate changes to the federal Criminal Code while providing a made-in-Alberta program of administrative sanctions that would send the message that impaired driving in any form cannot and will not be tolerated. Our stakeholders and our constituents have made it clear that this is the response they want to see as we prepare for cannabis legalization in this country.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity. I look forward to debate on these proposed amendments, and I encourage all members to support Bill 29.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. This bill makes necessary changes to Alberta's Traffic Safety Act to reflect the pending federal impairment laws, which are before Parliament in the form of Bill C-46. Bill C-46 establishes standards for impaired driving under the influence of cannabis. It also allows for a saliva test with an approved screening device, but more on that in a minute.

With the legalization of marijuana arriving on July 1, a little more than seven months from now, Alberta needed to amend its own provincial administrative impaired driving sanctions to reflect those changes. This bill makes those changes and, in doing so, treats cannabis, our new legal drug in Canada, the same as alcohol in our province's existing administrative sanctions. These sanctions, which all provinces add as an added level of deterrence to driving impaired, can include licence suspensions, impounding vehicles, and requiring interlock devices.

I am pleased to see that Bill 29 extends zero tolerance to new and novice drivers for marijuana. This is an important point because the majority of these drivers who hold what we call graduated licences are young, and driving while impaired takes a disproportionate toll on them. While Alberta is proposing zero tolerance for these novice drivers, some provinces have set their zero tolerance level at 21 and under, and MADD Canada is requesting the age level to be 22 across the nation. As we discuss Bill 29 further, I would like to hear why government has chosen to focus on drivers with graduated licences rather than following other provinces who have set the age at 21.

Another target of zero tolerance laws elsewhere is commercial drivers. Ontario has proposed this in its legislation. The Alberta Motor Transport Association has indicated it supports zero tolerance for its industry, but it prefers government to wait until a roadside screening device for marijuana is available. That's an interesting proposal and one that we would have time to discuss in a committee but not here in this Chamber, where we cannot invite stakeholders to address us.

Now I return to a very important issue, and that is that the legalization of marijuana is not Alberta's doing. The federal government has thrust it upon our country and left provinces to figure out the rest. Bill 29 is just a small part of that although impaired driving is such an important part of legalization that the government has smartly pulled it into a separate piece of legislation.

Let's address a key issue the province faces in keeping Alberta safe on the roads come July 1, 2018. Police have a dependable roadside screening tool to test drivers for blood-alcohol levels now. It has been tested in the courts and is used for roadside suspensions as well as licence suspensions if drivers have a blood-alcohol level between .05 and .08, which is common in other provinces as well. But while there is a dependable screening tool for alcohol for officers who suspect impaired drivers, no such device exists today for marijuana. A saliva test is in the works. The federal government hopes to have it ready to go on July 1, but at this point it's unlikely. Even if it can approve one in time, these devices will be fraught with challenges because testing impairment through THC levels is much different, with some being less effective than testing blood-alcohol levels. Everything is fluid when it comes to drug-impaired driving right now, and it will remain so for some time.

To detect impaired drivers without a saliva test, Alberta will need more officers trained to do the standard field sobriety test at the scene, and the province will need more drug recognition experts who can perform the next step, which is blood testing. Today that specialized training is only offered in the United States. Other provinces say that they will need to double the number of officers who can perform the kind of testing required to enforce these new rules when marijuana is legalized. That training and the anticipated additional officers will cost millions of dollars. It is quite a load on the province, and that is a lot to prepare for before legalization becomes a reality.

I was pleased to hear the minister say yesterday that a public awareness campaign will be an important aspect of its strategy.

There are a lot of unknowns about marijuana and impairment, as I alluded to before. One of them is: how long should someone wait before they drive? Experts are saying 24 hours. Albertans need to know this.

4:00

Medical marijuana use is another question for many people. The truth is that if someone is taking the prescribed amount, we understand that screening devices, which, as I mentioned, do not yet exist, should not red flag them. However, they do need to know that if they imbibe too much, whether they have a permit for medical marijuana or not, they will be charged if they are impaired. It's no different than someone impaired by prescription drugs.

Another myth is that marijuana is less impairing than alcohol. In fact, it affects drivers' reactions and depth perception, among other factors. They are a hazard behind the wheel. We know that most Albertans do not want to get behind the wheel impaired, and with so much uncertainty about this newly legalized recreation drug, the government needs to help them understand the dangers of using marijuana and driving. They also need to know about the new federal and dovetailed provincial rules for combining alcohol and marijuana. Because there is an elevated risk if a driver has both alcohol and marijuana in their system, both levels of government are proposing rules that target the combination.

Bill 29 addresses something else that has been on the sidelines for Albertans, which is the court ruling that struck down Alberta's indefinite licence suspension. Bill 29 reverts to defined terms for licence suspension, a move that needed to occur before May 2018. As we can all see, Bill 29 offers the provincial government an important opportunity to stress the dangers of drinking and driving, smoking marijuana and driving, and taking illegal drugs and driving.

As I said, Madam Speaker, on the training of the officers, to get them all trained in time for July 1 is a huge expense and probably not even possible. My concern is that in rural areas and remote areas of Alberta that expertise will not exist, so I'm not sure how they will be able to enforce these laws. But that's something that the government is going to have to work out, and it's going to be very expensive, and it's going to take some time.

Legalization of marijuana clearly offers a lot of challenges to provinces, but it is important that the government do its best with this legislation for the sake of all Albertans. Our goal in the next few days is to help ensure that Bill 29 becomes the best legislation for our province for dealing with this important issue.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise in support of Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol

Impaired Driving. Bill 29 has really been brought in to respond to the federal government's legalization of marijuana, but the responsibility has been imposed on the provincial governments to implement sanctions for impaired driving. The province has decided to align their deterrence sanctions for impaired driving with those of the federal government's Bill C-46, where part of the act amends the provisions of the Criminal Code that deal with offences and procedures related to drug-impaired driving.

Alberta needed to amend its own provincial administration impaired driving sanctions to reflect those changes as well. Bill C-46 establishes those standards for impaired driving under the influence of marijuana. In this legislation it states that more than 2 and less than 5 nanograms of THC per millilitre of blood is a summary offence and that more than 5 nanograms of hybrid is a hybrid offence. The legislation allows for saliva testing, which authorities can use to prove that a driver should go for more definitive testing. One problem with this is that saliva testing for marijuana levels does not yet exist. These are some of the issues that will need to be hashed out before legislation becomes effective on July 1, 2018.

We've seen that other provinces have been experiencing an increase in impaired driving incidents after legalization, which goes against myths about cannabis being not as impairing as alcohol. Something needs to be done so that police officers and authorities on the road can quickly measure the amount of THC in someone's system and at what level it is considered an impairment. I believe it is the government's responsibility to ensure roads are safe, and when we come to July 1, 2018, we may not have the road saliva testing available. Has this government thought about the repercussions of not being able to test this way?

Public awareness is also very important. We need to not only train our police officers but increase the public's awareness of the dangers of and the repercussions of driving under the influence of cannabis. Does the government have a plan in the works to include public awareness, and what kinds of campaigns would you be considering? All of these questions need to be answered.

Another question is: has this government considered the cost to implementing this act? Authorities will need specialized drug impairment training. There will be a need for increased enforcement on the roads and at this point in time a greater ability to test higher volumes of blood. Bill 29 states that blood testing will be streamlined. If the government has considered this, what is the estimated increase in costs, and how will this affect other blood tests? What will take precedence, and at what cost?

We know for sure that there will have to be increased enforcement on the roads. Other provinces have stated that there needs to be double enforcements on the road. Not only that, but not having enough officers with required sobriety and specialized DRE training in rural Alberta, where there are fewer officers already, could lead them to not being able to respond quickly, which will no doubt increase the time for them to get to accident scenes or pull someone over who is under the influence. How will the province address the many unique issues, ensuring Alberta's rural roads are safe? Without the added support, how will the government cover this cost? The money will have to come from somewhere. It will cost millions to implement legalization, and we know that the federal government will not help cover the costs to the provinces.

Bill 29 will treat cannabis and illegal drugs the same as alcohol in its administrative sanctions. As well, administrative sanctions will be extended to drivers who choose to combine alcohol and cannabis. One of the rules set out through provincial legislation is that it will set zero tolerance for new and novice drivers. This is great, but some of the provinces have included all drivers under the age of 21, and MADD Canada asks that the legislation be set at the

age of 22. I would like to know what process this minister went through when considering the rules and if they've even considered an older age. This does not have nothing to do with the legalization of marijuana but has everything to do with road safety. I'm hoping that perhaps the minister will rethink that one through and weigh the pros and cons regarding Alberta's safety on the roads.

Other provinces are also proposing zero tolerance for commercial drivers such as truckers and transport operators. Why was this not considered when there were discussions regarding road safety? If it was considered, what was the rationale behind not including commercial drivers? While I am pleased to see that new and novice drivers will see zero tolerance, we also need to think seriously about the consequences and rules we all set out. The Alberta Motor Transport Association has indicated that it will also support zero tolerance for their industry but prefers that we wait until there are adequate roadside cannabis screening devices. In my estimation, this is responsible thinking. We need more time. We could possibly have had greater discussion regarding the need for cannabis roadside screening and more.

However, given the time we've been allocated for discussion, it has been really difficult to seek stakeholder input and hear what others might have to say about the legislation. We need to really ask a couple of questions here. How are we going to keep all Albertans safe on the road, whether through legislation, policing, or public awareness? When are we going to be able to use roadside screening and not just rely on blood testing? How much will blood testing cost the province? How will we be able to test blood-cannabis levels quickly and say what is and what is not impaired? What are the consequences of the rules that we have set out? Should we tighten the rules for drivers? What's the cost of all of this going to be, and how is this cost that is forecasted to be in the millions squeezed out of the taxpayer?

Madam Speaker, there are a lot of unanswered questions that really should have been hashed out in committee. My hope is that in the next few days we'll be able to discuss and perhaps bring forward some solid amendments to ensure the very best legislation for the citizens of Alberta.

Thank you.

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments if anybody has any.

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to cosponsor a bill that will make the roads in our province safer. Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving on Alberta roadways, comes to us as a result of a new period in Canadian substance consumption laws. We are happy to work with the federal government to usher in this new era, but we are aware of the major risks that accompany it. The purpose of this legislation is to make avoidable death and injury a thing of the past. As the minister has said, impaired driving is the leading cause of criminal death and injury in this country. This is wrong. It breaks my heart knowing that so much pain and suffering for families and friends is easily avoidable.

Impaired driving is an avoidable and short-sighted decision that hurts the driver and many more around them. Legislation reminding people that impaired driving is an avoidable and unnecessary choice is a worthwhile pursuit for this government. Times are changing, so with the times legislation must change as well.

Our government is happy to work with the federal government on the legalization of recreational cannabis, but that also means

working in tandem with them to address the risks that this brings to our community. Often people consider impaired driving to mean driving under the influence of alcohol. Madam Speaker, I was shocked to learn that according to a 2013 study of fatally injured drivers in Alberta over 55 per cent of them tested positive for drugs, and 25 per cent of them tested positive for having consumed cannabis. This is unacceptable. We are proud to educate Albertans on the risks of driving impaired, but in order to make sure that they understand the severity of this issue, we need to move towards fostering the idea that making these decisions will put your life and the lives of others at risk. These changes are necessary to deal with the reality of increased risk with the legalization of cannabis.

Other jurisdictions across the country are working on legislating changes to impaired driving laws in response to the federal government's decision. Without this legislation we could be left with a void in the legal system when dealing with increased risks of impaired driving. The changes we are making to the Traffic Safety Act are going to hopefully save lives. By moving towards a 90-day fixed-term suspension period for impaired driving, our government is making it clear that there are consequences for careless and unnecessary dangerous choices. While we don't want to be heavy handed in our approach, we know that this will be a major deterrent in taking the careless risk of driving under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs.

This legislation stems from concerns that everyday Albertans have regarding the new cannabis policies coming forward next summer. Over 45,000 Albertans had shared their input and concerns regarding the impacts of cannabis legalization, including their concerns over impaired driving. Albertans made clear that this is a serious issue for many of them, and we are proud to have taken their feedback seriously in drafting this legislation.

Over the summer we also had frequent consultation with major stakeholders such as law enforcement and industry players. Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving on Alberta roadways, is a piece of legislation I am proud to put my name behind. Road travel is an essential reality for the majority of Albertans, and this bill will help give more people peace of mind when it comes to getting on the road. Our goal as a government that prioritizes safety is to have no impairment-related collisions or fatalities. Although this is a lofty goal, the legislation I'm speaking on today will help us get that much closer and make great strides in making our roads safer.

Madam Speaker, I'm sure many of us in this room have been touched by a story regarding impaired driving. This is an unfortunate reality, but it doesn't need to happen. Reminding folks to think twice before turning the key is an effective way to make sure they make the right decision. There will still be instances of impaired driving, but we hope that with Bill 29 we will be able to make people more aware that the risk is not worth the consequence.

When you drive impaired, you're making an extremely selfish decision, and I'm not shy to say that. Too many families have been broken as a result of impaired driving, and Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving on Alberta roadways, will make these gut-wrenching stories less and less common. As a mother, a grandmother, and someone who values safety, whether it be in the workplace, at home, or, in this case, on the roads, I'm eager to get this bill into becoming a law so that we can make life safer for Alberta and its drivers.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the government. This is extremely complex, and I can't even fathom having to deal with all of the information that's coming from the federal government and then trying to apply it here. So thank you for all of the work that's been done so far.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about Chestermere-Rocky View and just the areas around our schools. As the minister well knows, we have some very interesting issues on our roads near the high school in Chestermere, and I've talked at length in this House about all of these youth that are travelling across a divided highway. The speeds have been reduced, and there are all sorts of other things that are going on. Add to that an afternoon where kids – especially if the age, as I understand it, here in Alberta is going to be 18, Madam Speaker, which is younger than in some of the other provinces, you can imagine that there are going to be youth partaking in some cannabis, potentially, before getting into their vehicles and crossing the highway out near Chestermere.

This is one of the things I wanted to talk about, and hence the complexity lies in trying to figure out how to deal with this. I bring this up because I'm not sure how the age was brought in in this province, but it is just something to consider. As my colleagues have mentioned, Mothers Against Drunk Driving is looking more at the age of 22 simply because, as I understand it, the incidence of serious accidents under that age tends to be higher than post age 22. Just something to take into consideration. I am sure it's probably being discussed amongst you as well. But the best way for me to understand that is to have the image of that going on, and being in a rural area, I'm sure that my school is not one of the only ones that would have this situation.

Along with the education that, obviously, needs to come with the complexities of this, as the member had mentioned – I don't think I would call it ushering in a new era, but if that's the language that we're using, then ushering in a new era it is. But also with that has to come the immense amount of education not just for our youth, obviously, but for anybody who's going to be using.

I have to say again that I have zero experience with any sorts of drugs at all, so I can't even speak to the impacts of that other than medicine that has been prescribed to me. I can assure you that with anything that has made me slightly loopy, I've been in the hospital. I haven't actually been outside of a hospital with anything that would alter the way that I think or feel, so I come at this with really, really – I'm asking the questions because I don't know.

On behalf of the young people that are going to be partaking in this, I would ask that the government take a look at these ages to see how the body takes it and to see how they react and, along with that, at the immense amount of education that has to come along with that. It's one thing, of course, to say: don't drink and drive. We know all of these things. These are long tried-and-true opportunities to try and stop people from doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. However, as all of us know, all of us have stories of people in our own families and close networks that have not always done the right thing.

4:20

I love to hear the words “zero tolerance,” all of those kinds of things. That's wonderful. But as my colleague mentioned, we don't have the methodology as to how to test for this. As I understand it, a sobriety test is going to be basically walking down a line and touching your nose and making sure that you're able to drive.

There are so many things that are going to be happening around a situation like that on these busy roads, especially out on highways near my area. Truthfully, Madam Speaker, I don't even know how they patrol that. They can't even patrol it right now to keep the kids safe going across the highway . . .

Mr. Gill: That's 791.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, 791 and highway 1.

. . . let alone patrol it, forgetting across the highway, for slowing down the speeders and making sure that kids that may have had some cannabis before getting into their vehicles are going to be safe to cross that highway and get home. Not that the government can control that. You know, you can't control every person in what they're going to do, but I really, really think that, with the complexities along with that, we have to take into consideration that these things are going to happen. Like I said, I can't even fathom the amount of work that's going to go into this to try and handle legislation that has been put upon you by the federal government.

With respect to the graduated licence program – this has been mentioned a couple of times – it also includes new and novice drivers and newcomers to Canada as well. Is this education as well, Madam Speaker, going to be provided to newcomers coming to our country? I don't even know what happens with respect to alcohol with that, how that's transferred. We have a lot of people coming from all over the place that may not always understand. Of course, because the legislation provincially is different from province to province, how is it that we're going to make sure that not only our youth understand but that our new Canadians, new Albertans understand and understand, actually, how cannabis is going to impact their bodies? That part of the education.

To the point again: are we actually going to be able to provide enough officers on the road to manage this on July 1? I'm not sure how that's possible. Again, I'm so grateful that this legislation is being brought up now. I'm sure I'm not saying anything that you haven't already thought of, but it's important to discuss it.

I just want to state one more time that the education piece of this is going to be, I think, probably more important even than the enforcement of the behaviours. We have an entire generation of young people here that are going to be, unfortunately, for lack of a better word – I don't know if this is the right word – guinea pigs, you know, for a new substance. Well, probably not; maybe they've had the substance in their bodies before. But as far as we can tell, a new substance in the open. On top of that, we're going to have to make sure that they understand what that substance does to their bodies and the severe consequences that that could cause them down the road should they decide to not follow the laws.

With that, again, I don't think that I've brought anything new to the discussion, but I appreciate the opportunity to talk about it in the Legislature with my colleagues. I would really like to thank the province for jumping on this as soon as you have, to bring this legislation forward so that we can take a look at this societal shift – that is probably more what I would call it – in less than eight months. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Like many others, I haven't had a great opportunity to research this important bill yet. I think it's one that we're going to have some lengthy discussions about, with, hopefully, more and more of the evidence brought to bear on the whole question of the timing of substance use, the combination of alcohol and marijuana and other drugs and their impact on capacity to drive safely, the age at which we in Alberta are going to see legalized use of cannabis.

What I am aware of, mostly through medical journal articles and interviews that I've heard, especially around the whole use of

opiates and the combination, often, of some of these opiates with marijuana and indeed the synergistic effects of alcohol and cannabis, is that they are real concerns.

Having said that, I think we're all aware that we're embarking on new territory in Canada, including Alberta. I am one of those who feel that it was important to move towards legalization of cannabis, that prohibition has not historically been effective, and that the criminalization of this drug has contributed to a lot of suffering, a lot of crime, and a lot of damaged individuals when, in fact, it's a very mixed bag. Cannabis has some significant medical benefits, and it has some significant harms when it's misused and when it's started too early.

I guess I'm influenced to some extent by the recent *Canadian Medical Association Journal* reporting that there appears to be very limited support for legalizing cannabis use or for regular use of cannabis under the age of 25 in the medical literature. That's partly because, especially in males, the frontal cortex development is slower than in females. It is the area of administrative control. It's the area of judgment. It's the area of second thought. There is evidence that under 25, especially in males, there is much more significant risk of cannabis use. So I think it's an area that we're going to have to hear more research on, I hope, and have more discussions about.

Certainly, 18 is the very minimum where one would consider legalizing this, and I would argue and will argue that we should be having a very serious conversation about moving that up beyond 18 simply because of the immature brain and the susceptibility of that brain to the harmful effects, in some cases psychiatric effects, certainly serious psychological impairment associated in younger people with regular use of cannabis. It's an important discussion to have.

I think it's timely that the government has brought this forward, and it's important that we have some pretty solid evidence presented here in this bill to help us make rational decisions about how we're going to monitor and enforce standards of safety on the roads, measurements and penalties associated with the use and abuse of these substances.

There's no question in my mind that our culture has come to the point where we have to take responsibility for the array of substances that we're all having access to that have the potential for addiction, have the potential for harm, have the potential for some benefits. It's finding that balance and ensuring that we invest really well in the educational process, both for young people and for older folks, who maybe think they know something about cannabis, who think they know something about the combinations and impacts of the combination of alcohol and other substances. I'm here referring to some of the psychiatric meds – sedatives, hypnotics, painkillers – that are being consumed by people in conjunction with, for example, alcohol or cannabis. Tobacco: another one that's increasingly being associated with cannabis, with the mixing of the two and some of the harmful effects there that may or may not be recognized.

4:30

We're in a brave new world. We've got a lot of important risks and benefits associated with this new wave of tolerance, I guess, and permissive use of these substances, and it behooves us to take our time to hear the best of the evidence.

It's certainly increasingly being researched around North America. I heard a researcher recently at the University of Calgary speak about the fact that there is no safe level that she's aware of of cannabis use in young people. She was referring to under the age of 25. She said that the evidence simply isn't there yet that we know how to predict safe levels of cannabis in youth under the age of 25.

That's somebody who has spent her life researching primarily adolescent addictions and rehab programs for young people with mental health and addictions problems, including cannabis. She was very cautious in her recommendations at the nursing school about the earlier onset of cannabis use in young people.

While we're debating the principle of the bill, I can fully support the direction we're taking. I hope we can take the time to pull in some of the very latest evidence and that we will seriously look at the age of restriction and that this government might consider extending beyond the age of 18 because I think the evidence is not there for safe use at that age. Understandably, with the alcohol legal age being 18, it may in some ways send an inconsistent message, but until we know more about some of the negative impacts of cannabis on the young brain, I think it behooves us to really be careful and consider raising the age beyond 18 at this stage. We can always lower it later. It'll be a lot tougher to raise it in the future.

I think erring on the side of caution would be my one recommendation, that we look at all the evidence and start to address the whole question of: what is the appropriate age, and what's the evidence from around the world where they have had some different age legalization standards?

I look forward to the debate. I think it's one of the most important bills that I've seen come before this Legislature, and it's going to have long-term implications, as we're all aware, since there's nothing that has caused more suffering and death on our highways than alcohol and drugs. We're now being asked to look very critically at this new dispensation under federal law that's going to allow legal access to cannabis.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to further debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to support Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. Like the previous speakers, I think this is one of the most important pieces of work that we as legislators can be doing. What we're doing today is trying to affect behaviour, and the behaviour that we're trying to affect is the perception that you can operate a motor vehicle after having consumed either alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs. We need to drive home the point that you should not be operating a vehicle in that situation, particularly if you're combining alcohol and cannabis. Very dangerous.

I'm privileged to be a cosponsor of the bill, and I'm also privileged to represent the citizens of Edmonton-Whitemud. Edmonton-Whitemud is a great area. We've got great schools, great rec centres, great community leagues, and good roads, pretty well, yeah. I asked the Minister of Transportation to get Terwillegar Drive fixed, but he hasn't gotten to that yet.

My neighbours in Edmonton-Whitemud are very concerned about impaired driving. There was a tragic case a few years ago in which a small child was sitting on a patio of a restaurant in the riding, and an impaired driver actually caused the death of that child. It has had reverberations throughout the city of Edmonton and, I dare say, the province of Alberta, maybe the country. That was a case of obvious impaired driving, and we need to make sure that we get our laws changed so that we can tell people that that sort of behaviour is not acceptable and that we won't tolerate it. In that case there was some confusion about the rules around refusal to blow – I'm using a generic term for the legal concept – but I'm pleased to note that in this legislation that legal option is no longer available. In fact, it wasn't at the time of this terrible accident – I

shouldn't call it an accident – this terrible event. I know that the citizens of Edmonton-Whitemud are very pleased to see us acting on this.

Now, we're also acting on it because the Court of Appeal of the province of Alberta has given us a deadline. We have to have this legislation in place by May 2018, so while we may wonder about what the legal limits should be for cannabis and for other things, we need to get the roadside suspension laws changed.

This event and other similar events have changed my personal behaviour. I now routinely am taking a taxi home from social events, and I am routinely taking advantage of friends who don't consume intoxicating materials and can be designated drivers. This is important. Actually, my wife is on my case all the time about this. The example she uses is: do you want your name as the MLA to appear in the newspaper as having been charged with impaired driving? Now, that's one impediment to me doing this, but I have to say that the major impediment is that I don't want to be in the situation similar to the driver that caused that event in Edmonton-Whitemud.

Any form of impaired driving is unacceptable, dangerous, and puts everyone on our roads at risk. Impaired driving kills and injures thousands of people in Alberta every year, and we have to fix this. We have to get to the point that we've got as close to zero impaired-related collisions on Alberta roads as possible. I think this legislation is going to help in that. It's a universally accepted fact that alcohol impairs motor skills and judgment and must not be done in conjunction with driving. The same is true for cannabis as well, particularly as the combination of cannabis and alcohol and other drugs causes an enhanced impairment of driving. These new impaired driving laws will help to educate people about the consequences of cannabis and drug impairment and deter people from driving after consuming.

We've consulted with Albertans about cannabis legalization and its implications. The majority of Albertans express concern that there will be increased drug-impaired driving following the legalization of cannabis, and those folks support robust impaired driving laws to make sure that everyone is safe on the road.

We are aware that the federal government is proposing legal limits for cannabis and the combination of cannabis and alcohol, the same way they've done with alcohol, with the .08 blood alcohol limit. We want to update the Traffic Safety Act now to ensure that Albertans are ready to apply provincial administrative sanctions that would reflect the new drug-impaired driving offences under the Criminal Code. The changes will also include zero tolerance for cannabis, cannabis-alcohol combinations, and other drugs for drivers in the graduated driver licensing program, as currently exists for alcohol.

We want to make additional changes to the act to align with the Alberta Court of Appeal ruling, to apply additional federal legislation changes, and to clarify existing processes and policies as part of the province's impaired driving approach.

4:40

Alberta's use of a system of immediate provincial sanction is currently one of the greatest deterrents for impaired driving. Proposed changes would be the first step to be ready for the legalization of cannabis. We're going to continue to look at best practices across jurisdictions. We anticipate that Canada's provincial and territorial governments will be updating their administrative programs as well in order to reflect the changes in the Criminal Code of Canada, and maybe we can look to Ontario for what they've done already.

The purpose of administrative sanctions like roadside licence suspensions, vehicle seizure, and ignition interlock programs is to

get impaired drivers off the road. The second and every bit as critical purpose of the province's administrative sanctions is to deter people from driving impaired in the first place. Administrative sanctions like the licence suspension program are proven to reduce impaired driving. They are also in place to provide consequences for new drivers with any level of alcohol in their blood and for all drivers whose blood-alcohol content is between .05 and .08. While not a criminal offence in the Criminal Code of Canada, administrative sanctions for these lower limits are common across Canada. Studies have shown that drivers with a blood-alcohol content of .05 or greater are impaired and are much more likely to be involved in collisions.

Serious consequences and strong deterrents are needed to keep impaired drivers off the road. That's why organizations like MADD Canada, whose pin I'm proud to wear today, the Alberta Motor Association, and the Alberta Motor Transport Association support Bill 29. And I can tell you that my colleagues in the Alberta Medical Association, particularly the colleagues that work in emergency medicine and in surgery and in the intensive care units, are also strongly in favour of these sorts of measures.

In closing, I'm very proud to be a cosponsor of this bill and believe that it's taking an important step to making our roads safer. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: I just wanted to ask the hon. member if he is aware that the Whitemud is a city road.

Dr. Turner: Thank you for the question. I'm actually pleased to get the name of my riding in *Hansard* once again. In fact, I was referring to Terwillegar Drive, which is a road that I think the province could help us with.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To close ...

The Deputy Speaker: Are you closing debate on the bill?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I appreciate very much the comments on all sides of the House. I found them very useful, and I look forward to the discussion in committee, potential amendments, and further opportunities to answer some of the questions that have been asked. A number of really interesting points have been made.

Madam Speaker, I think what's important is that we're moving as quickly but as carefully as we can to implement these measures before the deadline in the middle of next year, when cannabis becomes a legal substance. It's very important that we get ahead of that and not be caught out. The federal government has, to be very honest, made it somewhat difficult with the timelines that they've put in place. There are unanswered questions about the distribution of financial benefits, taxes, and so on as well as the additional costs borne by provinces, which, quite frankly, are outside the scope of the bill, but they are real and important questions as well.

The important thing here is to put in place a strong and robust system to minimize the dangers of extending legalization to cannabis. We already know that there are very significant and

ongoing problems with accidents related to the consumption of alcohol when driving. One of the points that I think we need to make very clearly is that impairment from cannabis is just as serious as impairment from alcohol. Impairment is impairment is impairment, and we need to take steps to make sure that impaired drivers are kept off our roads. That is the objective of this legislation. In every real respect the treatment of impaired drivers using cannabis or other drugs parallels the treatment of impaired drivers with alcohol, and that's one of the overarching principles that we've established in this bill.

I want to thank all the hon. members for their comments. I've taken good notes, and I know that my department has also been listening attentively, so hopefully those questions can be addressed during the committee stage. I do thank all the hon. members for their support in principle.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm happy to close debate on second reading of the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, I know that many members are interested in participating in some of the events of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, which is here in Edmonton right now. Since we have concluded successfully the debate on this bill, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:47 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 16, 2017

Day 55

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 16, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us reflect or pray, each in our own way. Hon. members, this morning we commemorated the life and efforts of Louis Riel. As we head back to our homes throughout Alberta, may we remember his words. "Deeds are not accomplished in a few days or in a few hours. A century is only a spoke in the wheel of everlasting time." Let us continue to be diligent, determined, and thoughtful in the work we do for the people of this incredible province.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly your parents, Gary and Leslye Sweet, and your constituency office staff, Page Moniz and Kevin Aulakh. Gary and Leslye are visiting all the way from Campbell River on Vancouver Island. They are here to see you and their future son-in-law Paul settle into your new home, assist with wedding preparations, and watch today as you ensure that all hon. members are on our best behaviour. Page and Kevin are not only your constituents, but they work at the Edmonton-Manning constituency office, ensuring that all constituents are heard and have the information that they need. I would now ask all of your guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two introductions today. It's a privilege to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Nathan Collins, an ambitious social work student who is studying at Grant MacEwan and currently doing his practicum placement in my constituency office. Nathan has a keen interest in learning about government policy and how it can relate to his future career.

Second, I introduce a group of Grant MacEwan social work students, including Mikhayla Patterson, who my office had the pleasure of hosting last year for her practicum placement. She's here today with fellow students Trevor Buttery and Louise Speakman.

I'd ask my guests now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly the grade 6 class from the Calgary French & International School, which is joined by their teachers, Catherine Bernard, Isabelle Gauthier, Chantal Fyfe-Hudon, and Benoit St-Arneault. Ranked as a top French immersion school in Alberta and one of the largest independent French immersion schools in Canada, I'm proud to say that students at the Calgary French & International

School are amongst the brightest and well-rounded individuals, benefiting from a diverse and rich curriculum that includes global focus, cultural diversity, and international perspectives. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my great pleasure to stand today and introduce to you and through you a great friend of mine for a long time, a great local southeastern Albertan, who has just been elected to Cypress county and has already shown that he is very, very willing to be involved in hearing what his constituents' needs and ideas are. I salute him for that, and I also salute his fellow county councillors for immediately stepping in with funds to help alleviate and help do the cleanup after the serious wildfires. Please, colleagues, extend the traditional warm welcome to my friend and newly elected Cypress county colleague Councillor Robin Kurpijuweit.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ken Kobly. Ken is the president of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, a very important role, no doubt, but he's also a constituent of mine and a fine, fine member of our great community of Leduc-Beaumont. I know that Ken is well known to all members of this House. I'm very proud to have him as a constituent, and I'm very proud to work with him to make Alberta's communities stronger. Ken is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I'd ask that he stand and you all join me in giving him the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour today to rise on your behalf and to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of my constituency. Seated in the Speaker's gallery we have Peter Rafa, the reeve of the municipal district of Acadia; William Vandeligt, deputy reeve; Tim Peers, Ron Hoyt, Aaron Skappak, all councillors for Acadia; and their CAO Brent Williams. Would they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

For my second introduction I have members who are here today from the special areas, again, in the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you, indeed, to all members of the Assembly, representing the Special Areas Board, one considerably younger chairman, Jordon Christianson, and advisory council member Travis Foot along with Oyen town councillor Doug Lehman. Would they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. My first is some constituents of mine from Rocky Mountain House, Laura Andreas and Paul Andreas, and along with them some friends of ours from Red Deer, Brad Vonkeman, Brenda Vonkeman, and Heidi Vonkeman, who do a tremendous amount of work with parent councils all across Alberta. That's how I know them. I'm glad to see them here today visiting with us, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

For my second set of introductions, Madam Speaker, I have a large group of people from Sundre and Mountain View county here today, including His Worship Terry Leslie and Bruce Beattie. Terry Leslie is the mayor of Sundre and has been here many times. Bruce Beattie is the reeve of Mountain View county, my home county. He's actually my councillor, and I would like to tell you whether I voted for him or not, but he keeps getting acclaimed, so I don't have to answer that question.

Along with them are several councillors from Mountain View county and the town of Sundre along with Dr. Eugene Landsbergen from Sundre; Teddie Tanguay from the Nurse Practitioner Association; Jared Friesen from the Nurse Practitioner Association; Gerald Ingeveld, the chair of the Sundre hospital committee. Several citizens from the communities of Sundre and Mountain View county are here today with Tammy Surbey, who is a nurse practitioner in our community who, because of certain circumstances associated with the funding model, which we will talk about later today, will no longer be able to practise in our community, and it's causing 350 patients to not have access to their nurse practitioner. They're here today to show their support for Tammy and that important issue.

I would ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity to introduce my four visitors today, who are in the members' gallery. I ask that they rise as I introduce their names. Cooper Pirtle is also here with his mom, Arla, and his grandparents Fae and Morris. Cooper wants you all to sign up to be organ donors. He's been working to raise awareness about the importance of organ donation since his grandpa's double lung transplant in 2011, and we are so glad that he's here today. Cooper was named 2016's Canadian Transplant Association youth ambassador, and I'm so thankful for people like Cooper standing up to raise awareness and encouraging all of us to register and have those conversations with our families as well. Please join me in welcoming these guests to our Assembly.

1:40

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly your aunt and uncle Robert and Nancy Sweet. Robert and Nancy are visiting from Hinton, which is located in my constituency of West Yellowhead. I would like them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand in the House today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Chamber a school group from the wonderful constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, with their principal, Mayor Moghrabi. I call them students because it's the brand new, newly elected council, all brand new faces, of Lac La Biche county. They're here in town to attend the AAMD and C for the first time, and they were also here, most of them, to attend the Métis Week ceremonies in the House today. If you'd please rise as I mention your names – I hope you're all here – Jason Stedman, Lorin Tkachuk, Sterling Johnson, Darlene Beniuk, Colette Borgun,

Charlyn Moore, Colin Cote, George L'Heureux, and, of course, Mr. Moghrabi, the principal. I hope you all enjoy your time here in Edmonton. I will ask everybody else to please help me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my distinct privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some folks from my riding of Little Bow, Mrs. Serena Donovan from the Mossleigh area and Mr. Ryan Smith from east of Champion. Both of these folks were recently elected to Vulcan county council in the fall election, and they are, of course, now in the process of figuring out how municipal politics works. I met Ryan over at AAMD and C this morning, and I'm pleased that Serena decided to come with him. They thought they'd come over to the Legislature during their trip to Edmonton from the deep south and watch question period today. My guests are sitting in the public gallery. I'd ask both Serena and Ryan to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Calgary Cancer Centre

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to stand in the House today as a member of this government and a Calgarian to talk about just how proud I am of the new Calgary cancer centre, that will be built on-site next to the Foothills medical centre. Just last month our Infrastructure minister and I visited the site of what will be the brand new cancer centre. Work on this project is well under way. My colleagues proudly stood with the Premier a few weeks ago and made history by breaking ground on this facility. With shovels full of dirt we are already ahead of schedule on what will be a leading international facility for cancer care and research.

Madam Speaker, Calgarians have been waiting a long time for this badly needed facility. Klein, Stelmach, Redford, Prentice: promise after promise after promise after promise for a cancer centre in Calgary, and time after time these promises were broken. For more than a decade Conservative governments announced and then welshed on this vital infrastructure project. None have delivered on giving Albertans the medical care they deserve.

During the 2015 election campaign the NDP promised to build a cancer centre for Calgary, and we are delivering on that promise. Our \$1.4 billion investment will bring 160 much-needed in-patient beds, more than 100 chemotherapy chairs, research laboratories as well as an additional 1,650 new parking stalls on-site. In addition to the much-needed care this facility brings to Calgarians, I am very pleased to say that by the time it opens, this cancer centre will add 1,500 jobs to Calgary's economy.

Madam Speaker, we know that this project would be among the first to be cancelled under Jason Kenney's reckless and extreme cuts. This government has the right priorities. We are following through on our promises, we are bringing hope to those fighting cancer, and we are making lives better for generations of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Nurse Practitioners

Mrs. Pitt: What if Alberta had an opportunity to dramatically improve the delivery of health care, especially in rural parts of the

province, and achieve significant cost savings at the same time? It sounds crazy, right? The government has been telling Albertans for over two years that it simply can't be done. They argue that any attempt to reduce the amount of money we spend on health care in this province would result in deep, punishing cuts to front-line services. But what the government isn't telling Albertans is that they have had an effective, common-sense solution for improving access to high-quality health care right under their noses the whole time.

The solution, Madam Speaker, lies with nurse practitioners. These highly trained health care professionals can perform many medical services to Albertans at a reasonable cost. Yet despite the evidence and despite promises from this government to develop and implement a sustainable funding model for nurse practitioners so that taxpayers could save millions, we have seen no action.

Madam Speaker, the community of Sundre provides us with a perfect example. The local nurse practitioner has approximately 350 patients, that this particular nurse sees and treats on a regular basis. To date she has been paid by local doctors who hire her to work out of their offices to assist with their large caseloads. But that funding model simply isn't sustainable. The doctors can no longer afford to pay her out of pocket for her work, and as a result her 350 patients will now have to join long wait-lists to see a doctor for the same service. This serves no one, not doctors, not nurse practitioners, and certainly not patients.

I can't for the life of me understand why, when faced with a golden opportunity to improve front-line services while simultaneously reducing costs, the NDP still refuses to act. It's yet another example of a government focused on ideology rather than on what's best for the people it serves. It's yet another reason why Albertans are already shopping for a new government.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Sexual Violence and Harassment

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thirty-three out of every 1,000 sexual assaults are reported to police. Me Too. Twelve of those have charges laid. Me Too. Ninety-nine per cent of people arrested for sexual assaults are men. Me Too. Eighty per cent of women with disabilities will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Me Too. Indigenous women suffer sexual assault at three times the rate of other women in Canada. Me Too. Forty-three per cent of Canadian women have been sexually harassed at work. Me Too. Sexual violence costs the Canadian economy \$4.8 billion every year. Me Too. Hope that we can make the world a safer place. Me Too. Hope that we can take this from a meme to a movement. Me Too.

Gratitude that the RCMP is allowing women to report anonymously through third-party organizations. Me Too. Gratitude that we are talking about harassment and consent in schools. Me Too. Gratitude that Tarana Burke had the foresight to start. Me Too. Harassment depicted as love in movies. Me Too. Every day a new accusation: Harvey Weinstein, Woody Allen, Al Franken, Kevin Spacey. Me Too. A lifetime of catcalls, drunk men with bad intentions, feeling unsafe after dark. Me Too. Climate Barbie. Me Too. As bad as it is here, we're safer than women in developing countries who face sexual violence used as a tool of war. Me Too. People who want to move on from Weinstein, like they moved on from Ghomeshi, like they moved on from all the ones before. Me Too.

It's not about sex. It's about power, and it happens to men and women, boys and girls. It happens every day. It happens everywhere, including right here. Me Too.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Calgary Region On-It Transit

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Founded and funded by the Calgary Regional Partnership, or the CRP, On-It transit is a public transportation service in the Calgary region, furthering the smart growth envisioned by the Calgary metropolitan plan. On-It Regional Transit reduces traffic emissions and congestion while connecting communities. It also enhances the region's economic competitiveness by allowing employers to access a broader employee base.

In October 2016 the CRP launched a two-year pilot project providing commuter service from Black Diamond, High River, Okotoks, and Turner Valley to the city of Calgary's Somerset-Bridlewood station.

This past summer a weekend pilot project linked the existing On-It Regional Transit system to Cochrane, Canmore, and Banff. The service carried approximately 12,000 passengers, or about 450 a day, for each of the 26 days the pilot was in operation. For \$10 passengers could take On-It from Okotoks to Banff and Lake Louise, reducing emissions and the number of vehicles on the road.

1:50

Madam Speaker, On-It has not required heavy provincial or municipal capital investments for facilities and buses. The annual grant of \$1.25 million to the CRP subsidized the pilot program in a cost-sharing arrangement with participating municipalities. In addition, On-It involved a public-private partnership with Pacific Western. As Ettore Iannacito, the regional transit program manager, said: the costs of designing and working one regional system are far less than the individual systems working independently.

Madam Speaker, the On-It system continues to grow in popularity, and I hope that it continues to set an example for other areas of the province that need to relieve traffic congestion and emissions while adding transportation alternatives for their residents.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Acting Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Professionals in Rural Alberta

Mr. Nixon: It's nurse practitioner week. Nurse practitioners provide high-quality, cost-effective services. They could play an important role in alleviating pressure on Alberta's health care system and help to improve rural health. Unfortunately, one of our visitors here today, Tammy Surbey, has about 350 patients that will soon be without a nurse practitioner because the system doesn't fit practitioners within existing funding frameworks of rural health care delivery. Premier, do you recognize the importance of the cost-effective role nurse practitioners play in rural areas, and will your government change the funding model to acknowledge the various types of health care professionals?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We are certainly working to make life better for Albertans by investing in health care and improving services that families count on. In Alberta right now we have about 510 nurse practitioners, that are a valuable part of that health care team. We are working to find ways

to continue to expand their role in the system, and we certainly wouldn't be able to do that if we followed the advice of the Leader of the Official Opposition on cutting 20 per cent from the budget. Instead, we're working with our health care professionals to find ways to expand scope and increase opportunities for them and all Albertans.

Mr. Nixon: Right now in many communities throughout rural Alberta there are no doctors accepting new patients. Instead, there are wait-lists just to have a doctor, let alone to see a doctor. This is unacceptable in a province that spends \$59 million per day on health care. Recruiting and retaining doctors, nurses, and nurse practitioners is a never-ending battle in rural Alberta. It's not that medical professionals don't want to live in these rural areas; it's that they keep having to overcome political red tape while what they should be able to do is focus on taking care of their patients. Premier, what is your government doing to address their frustrations and ensure that rural Alberta gets efficient and effective health care?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I was proud this morning to be at AAMD and C and have meetings with a number of folks. We know that attracting and retaining health care professionals is an important priority for this government and one that we take very seriously. We've been able to revisit the RPAP program, I think, with great effect. Just this morning I met with folks from the Fairview area and Worsley and was happy to make sure that we informed them that we've been able to secure a new doctor who is a Canadian-trained medical graduate who will be starting there this summer. We'll continue to make sure that that happens in all parts of the province, that we get the best care in the best place.

Mr. Nixon: Ms Surbey has lived in the community of Sundre for decades, and she wants to stay there, but her employment as a nurse practitioner in her community won't last much longer. Just to maintain her licence, she would need to commute to Calgary or Red Deer to practise. All the while people in her local rural community need her services. It's outrageous, Madam Speaker, and it makes no sense. There are people in our gallery today and hundreds of people in Mountain View county that are about to lose access to their practitioner. Premier, will you work with your minister to solve the problems with the funding model that are affecting people like Ms Surbey and her patients and get nurse practitioners working all across rural Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I'd be certainly happy to meet with the constituent of yours, hon. member, and to have an opportunity to discuss this. We do work with our primary care networks on a model that gives them \$62 per patient per year to ensure that they have the wraparound services for all of their patients. I'm proud that primary care networks have stepped up to work on a new governance framework, but we definitely are giving those resources to the folks that are closest to the ground to make the best decisions for their communities. Again, I'd be very happy to meet with this constituent and have a conversation, but we do trust the local primary care networks to use those resources as best possible.

The Acting Speaker: Second main question.

Health Care System

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, day in and day out this government would rather talk about the opposition than about what they are doing. When it comes to health care, Albertans need results and not ideological rhetoric. Here are some facts. Alberta spends billions more on health care than it did only a few years ago, with worse results. Albertans are waiting longer for surgeries. The system is failing our seniors who need long-term care beds. It's failing our most vulnerable children as they suffer waiting for mental health treatment that they need. When will this government take health care seriously, and can this Premier tell us what she's actually going to do to make our health care system better?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Let me just say that our government is absolutely committed to ensuring that we protect and preserve and, in fact, improve upon our important – important – public health care system because we know it matters to Alberta families, and we know that it matters to Alberta communities. It is not something that will be done, though, if someone takes 20 per cent out of the system or if someone starts experimenting with new ways to privatize, which, of course, are both things that the members opposite have already talked about doing. We have work to do, we know. We have many challenges we inherited, but we're going to get the job done.

Mr. Nixon: I'm not surprised that the NDP anger machine is choosing to deflect from their abysmal record. However, notable professor Dr. Tombe said in response to the NDP's fearmongering: "Goal by [Jason Kenney] to balance by [2023] is entirely credible. Doesn't (necessarily) require any spending cuts. Certainly not drastic." Jason Kenney has said that we need to grow our economy to get it balanced. We need to encourage our private-sector job creators to get our economy going again, something this NDP government just does not understand. Will the Premier tell us what she is doing to get our health care system back on track for Albertans? Stop dodging the question and tell us what you are doing, not what you think Jason Kenney is going to do.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. What we are doing is ensuring that our front-line health care workers have the support of their government to do the important work that they do for their patients each and every day. So in order to do that, we've ensured stable and predictable funding while at the same time moving away from the up again, down again chaos that had been created under the previous 10 years of the PC government's administration. We are absolutely committed to providing good-quality health care to Albertans in the right place and the right time by the right person, and we will continue to work on that because we know it's important to Albertans.

Mr. Nixon: What this government is doing is that it's continuing to act like the rules do not apply to them. Earlier today the NDP candidate for the upcoming by-election in Calgary-Lougheed appears to have used his patient list to send what was clearly a campaign e-mail to his patients. Does this government believe that this is an appropriate use of patient information? Madam Speaker, I'll remind you that this is a government that has been found in contempt of this Legislature, it's continually under investigation by commissioners and independent officers, and now this is the behaviour of their candidate in Calgary-Lougheed. Albertans are

tired of it, Premier. When is your government going to start acting ethically and following the rules?

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, first of all, the whole sort of allegations about contempt of the Legislature: actually, I think that the first person to be penalized for breach . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Notley: . . . with respect to conduct in this House is actually a member opposite, not anyone here.

But with respect to the matter that the member raises, we can certainly look into it. I'm completely unaware of the issue, so we'll certainly be happy to look into it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Health Care Costs and Service Delivery

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, a new report from the Canadian institute of health reconfirms that Alberta continues to see high per capita costs in our health care system. Amongst provinces we're second highest in the country. However, our population is the youngest in the country. These numbers don't add up. To the Premier: with sky-high health costs accompanying our young population, how will this government deal with the exponential growth of seniors in Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am definitely proud of the fact that under this government we've worked to provide stability to the people of Alberta in terms of health care and education, and I'm not going to apologize for that. We know that in the past former governments had costs go up, you know, 6 to 10 per cent a year. We've certainly gotten that much more under control. We're working with our health care providers to make sure that we have sustainability for all Albertans, and I'm proud of the fact that we are working with Alberta Health Services to deliver quality services, including the expansion of home care and building 2,000 new long-term care and dementia care spaces.

2:00

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, Alberta is not just the biggest spender in Canada but also internationally, with terrible results. We spend more per capita on health than the U.K., Australia, Netherlands, Germany. In fact, of the top 11 developed nations in the world we're only more cost-effective than two other countries, and we have the lowest results to show for that. To the Premier: what are you doing to ensure that the funds allocated to health are spent efficiently and effectively?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We certainly inherited that spending record from the colleagues of the member opposite, so I suggest that he ask them some of those questions. But I'll tell you that over the last two years we've made significant progress. If you read the CIHI report further, you'll see that we actually have the third-lowest projected increase among provinces. That's because we're taking a steady hand, a stable approach. We're working with front-line providers. We're protecting and investing in nurses; they would fire them. We're building the Calgary cancer centre; they would cancel that project. We're making sure that 24-hour access is available in communities

like Airdrie. We don't know where they stand other than that they want cuts and privatization. On this side of the House we stand with health care. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, just a reminder. If we could please listen to the question and the answer.

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, privatized health care. Well, this minister needs to explain to Albertans why she is supporting and promoting the very thing that she accuses this loyal opposition of. She needs to explain why 90 per cent of physician funding, 100 per cent of primary care network funding, 50 per cent of lab services, 60 per cent of diagnostic imaging, and 100 per cent of air and ambulance service funding all goes to private institutions and corporations. What is this government talking about when they're the ones that are supporting privatized health care?

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, be still, my heart. I am very grateful to have an opportunity to collaborate with the hon. member and talk about what we're doing to actually protect public universal access and expand opportunities for public investment and public delivery. I'm very grateful that the member opposite highlights the track record that his colleagues have created in terms of privatizing a number of services across this province. But we're working in partnership with health care professionals to make sure that we're expanding opportunities for public investment and making sure that we take care of one another. On the opposition side they would be slashing budgets, firing, and privatizing. On this side we're protecting, investing, and supporting Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Addiction Treatment Facility Oversight

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thousands of Albertans continue to struggle with addictions to opiates and other substances. Not surprisingly, this has led to an increased demand for residential treatment facilities, several of which I'm proud to say are in Calgary-Elbow. But in conversations with some of the highly professional addiction treatment agencies in Elbow and beyond, I learned that there is no provincial regulation in this area. Anyone can just hang a shingle and call themselves an addiction treatment facility. To the Associate Minister of Health. It is amazing to me that Alberta doesn't regulate something as critical as addiction treatment. Do you have any plans to address this, and when?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the very important question. We certainly are moving forward to expand opportunities for opioid-dependency treatment and for supports for those who are struggling. Just yesterday the associate minister and our colleague from Strathcona-Sherwood Park were in that community to announce that there is a whole new range of opportunities for opioid-dependency treatment, something that we know is going to save lives. We're working to ensure that we can continue to expand access in communities as close to home and through the patient's established medical home, whenever possible.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: With respect, Madam Minister, this question is about regulation. We've already had one particularly egregious case in this province when Addiction Canada facilities in Sundre and

Gleichen were shut down following the suicide of one of their clients. Later it was revealed that the facility's owner was facing drug-trafficking and fraud charges in Ontario. Again to the Associate Minister of Health. You said over a year ago that you would make changes to ensure that addiction treatment facilities are regulated and that Albertans are protected. What specifically have you done this past year to address this, and when will we see regulation?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We are certainly in partnership with the Minister's Opioid Emergency Response Commission working to address a number of factors, including ensuring the safety and oversight of all these facilities. In terms of exploring additional supports, we have invested significantly in opioid-dependency treatments, supervised consumption services and are continuing to expand opportunities for all Albertans to have the care they need where they need it. We want to get to the point where, just like you can with smoking cessation and other areas, your first stop is your patient health home, your family doctor, with additional supports available from there.

Mr. Clark: Let's try one more time. You're not anywhere close to answering my question. Madam Speaker, there are many industries in this province that are regulated by the government. They include hairdressers, auto mechanics, massage therapists, and so many more, but for some reason addiction treatment remains totally unregulated. The job of government is to ensure that unqualified or unscrupulous operators don't take advantage of vulnerable people, again, such a critical area. Residential treatment is proven to work, and I am a big proponent of facilities that allow people to recover with dignity in a community setting. Again to the Minister of Health: will you commit here and now to requiring addiction treatment centres to be accredited by Accreditation Canada or another reputable agency?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We'll certainly take the member's advice under advisement. We're working to make sure that we've got opportunities for all, and certainly when public funding is available, it should be put in a way that ensures safety for all as well as when individuals are reaching into their own pockets. Like all Albertans, I want to ensure that when somebody I care about needs medical help, it's done in a safe and respectful way. I welcome the recommendation from the hon. member and will be happy to report back on progress to this House.*

Age 55-plus Residential Buildings

Ms Goehring: Madam Speaker, I firmly believe in the rights of Albertans to not face discrimination based on their age. Older Albertans should also be able to live together in a community of people who are at a similar stage of life. I have personally advocated for the residents of Edmonton-Castle Downs by bringing forward the importance of inclusive legislation while respecting the 55-plus adult-only condo request of constituents. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: what is the ministry doing to support 55-plus adult-only condos in Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the important question. Based on our consultations over

the summer, we know that many Alberta seniors choose to live in seniors-only buildings, both condos and rental. That's why we've moved forward ensuring that our legislation protects those sorts of buildings so that those folks can continue to live together. I'd like to thank all members of this House and the member in particular for advocacy on this issue in terms of buildings in their constituency and people they've been hearing from. I think we were able to strike a good balance here.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that this change will affect something as important as housing for thousands of my constituents, to the same minister: for those who are in a 40-plus adult-only condo building, can they transition to a 55-plus adult-only condo building?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the important question. We know that many Albertans have made significant investments on the basis of bylaws in place at the time when they purchased those condos. That's why we're protecting the status quo for existing age-restricted buildings for a 15-year transition period. Those buildings will be able to transition to 55-plus if they feel inclined to do that, and they can make that transition whenever they like. At this point those individuals who are living there who would be below that limit will be grandparented in for a period of time, and we think this strikes a good balance between the rights of Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have also heard concerns about when these proposed changes would come into effect. To the same minister: can you please provide a timeline of when residents would see these changes take place?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. If the legislation is passed by this House, the new rules will apply immediately to rental buildings. However, when it comes to condo buildings, as I've mentioned, we are proposing a 15-year transition period. We are also protecting benefits for seniors and youth so that those programs can continue to provide a benefit to those groups.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

2:10

Methane Emission Regulations Alberta Energy Regulator Application Timelines

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. After promising an imminent release of draft methane regulations three times, the Energy minister has announced that discussion groups will go back to the drawing board with new committee members. This oversight committee has invited CAPP, CNRL, Ecojustice, and the Environmental Defense Fund to the discussion table for the first time, so clearly these regulations are nowhere near ready for release. This process has dragged every step of the way with promises of draft regulations in the summer, then September, then November, and now who knows when? Will the minister finally

*See page 1977, right column, paragraph 9

admit that the draft regulations are nowhere near completion and commit to a timeline for release?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I will admit is that we've worked very hard with industry to develop industry and environment groups to develop a 45 per cent reduction in methane. I mentioned last week and I'll mention again that these regulations are about to come out very soon. There will be a period of reaction to them before the final regs come out. This second group is just a last look before these regs come out.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, with respect, very soon was last summer, the first time we heard that promise.

Given that Lloydminster is the heavy oil capital of the world and our innovative producers developed the cold heavy oil production with sand extraction technique, better known as CHOPS, and given that the new methane regulations could jeopardize CHOPS production, resulting in massive job losses and economic damage to Lloydminster and area, to the minister: will you commit to reviewing the proposed new methane regulations with Lloydminster-area producers in order to minimize the impact of the potential negative impact of these regulations?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, we are working, as I mentioned, with industry and a number of groups such as CAPP and many of the oil and gas industry players for a made-in-Alberta solution because the alternative is that we will get an Ottawa-imposed solution if we do not do that. We are taking steps to reduce that pollution. We know that we have to balance industry needs with the certainty they need, but we also have to get this done. We're using facts, science, and innovation to accomplish this.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, let's talk about innovation. Given that the producers in the Lloydminster heavy oil region have already begun the process of transitioning to a less methane intensive thermal flood extraction process and given that seven of these new thermal plants have recently been approved, all in Saskatchewan where the approval process takes 12 to 18 months compared to the AER's record of over four years, to the minister. This discrepancy hurts heavy oil production in Alberta and certainly doesn't make life better for Albertans. Will you commit to streamlining the AER's approval process?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The AER has had the lead on this along with my department, along with the Ministry of Environment and Parks. We have worked with industry, both heavy oil, traditional oil, oil sands, and we have the regulations coming, as I've said, very soon. I invite any of you folks over there to have your constituents look at these regulations, provide feedback before the final regulations come out.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Lacombe Hospital and Care Centre

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Health minister will recall that in the spring there was a standards of care audit at the Lacombe long-term care centre. This was triggered because nursing students on practicum were so concerned that they spoke out. Eighty standards of care at the facility were breached. Management

personnel were replaced. Families were notified. The Alberta Health Services deputy chief of staff assured me that a public report of findings and, more importantly, solutions to the crisis would be made public. It's now half a year later. When will that report be released?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. Albertans deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Our focus now is and always will be on our residents. We're grateful to the Red Deer College students who came forward with the concerns. That's why immediate steps were taken to investigate the concerns and conduct an audit to ensure that quality care is provided to all residents. PPIC also conducted an investigation. Any Albertan with concerns is certainly asked to raise those. I would be happy to elaborate on additional steps that were taken in the member's supplemental questions.

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that at the time of the investigation long-term care managers were put on a leave of absence and interim managers were brought in, then later I was advised by the AHS deputy chief of staff that the managers have been permanently let go and that a search was on for new managers, now six months have gone by, the interim team is still there, and permanent managers are not hired: when will the managers for the long-term care centre be installed, and why has it taken so long?

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, the member is right that three staff were fired in this situation. AHS and Alberta Health auditors have been on-site weekly for six months to monitor facility progress and continue to monitor the situation very closely because we take the safety of all residents very seriously. Thorough health assessments on all 75 residents have been done. A thorough cleaning of the site with guidance from infection prevention and control professionals occurred immediately, and we're continuing to work to make sure that we have the best care long term and in the immediate term for the residents and their families. I'm proud of all the steps to date and look forward to continuing to have great health outcomes there for the years to come.

Mr. Orr: Given that at the time of the crisis the long-term care centre was full and that since the crisis there has been an intake freeze – now there are 19 beds sitting empty, but no new residents have been accepted; applicants would like to get in; patients in the critical care wing should actually be transferred to the long-term care wing but are not; a 90-year-old ailing man's wife has phoned me looking for answers and help – with 19 waiting spaces available, why are patients in need of placement being refused care by AHS? Is this the right care in the right place at the right time?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We certainly aren't going to do anything that would create any concern for any of those patients. That's why we're making sure that we're moving forward in a thoughtful way to make sure that the staff have the opportunities to be retrained. We've launched a re-education awareness program at the site for all clinical staff. AHS has met with the residents, families, local stakeholders, and community leaders to advise them about the investigation and the actions. We're moving forward thoughtfully and carefully to ensure the safety of all residents. I'm proud of that. I know the members

opposite want to rush quickly towards deep, drastic, brutal cuts that would jeopardize the care of patients, but we aren't going to let that happen. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Just a reminder to all members of the House that I can actually hear some of the heckling, and the "tell the truth" part needs to stop, please.

Supportive Living Facility Food Preparation

Mr. Stier: Madam Speaker, earlier this week I asked the current Minister of Health why AHS has been ignoring the order of the previous minister that required supportive living facilities to discontinue reheating frozen meals from off-site and instead bring back on-site fresh food preparation. The response received questioned the validity of my information, with no commitment to order the facilities to immediately begin to serve fresh food. Minister, this problem exists under your watch as the person ultimately responsible for these facilities for the past 31 months. How could you allow this appalling situation to continue for so long?

Ms Hoffman: Well, the member is right that I did question the validity of his statements, and let me tell you why, Madam Speaker. In the past these kinds of accusations have been made, and they have not been accurate. Yet, again, at Willow Creek continuing care centre in Claresholm today 60 per cent of the meals are prepared on-site for residents. That's an increase from the 40 per cent under the previous minister.

Mr. Stier: Well, Madam Speaker, given that both the minister and I recently received a disappointing letter from a relative of a patient in such a facility and given that her father was told that he must wait for fruit as he was the 11th on the list, that he only received three salads in four months, which are supposed to be available six days a week, that beef is either scorched, smells bad, or cannot be eaten, and given that complaints to the advisory councils there are ignored and they seem unconcerned, Minister, what more evidence do you think you need to take action on this issue and restore fresh food?

Ms Hoffman: Well, what the member didn't hear was the answer to the first question, which was that under the former government, his new best friends, 40 per cent of the meals were made locally. We've increased that to 60 per cent. I'm proud of the progress we're making, Madam Speaker. I know he's happy to dance with his new dance mates, but we're working to protect Albertans, including those living in Claresholm. In this instance we've met with the resident and their family. They've been given a tour of the kitchen and talked to about the food and nutrition program on-site. Residents and families in Claresholm are participating in tasting of a new menu and new menu items. Based on their feedback, items may be added to the menu or modified to meet the individual residents' tastes.

Mr. Stier: Madam Speaker, given that regular seniors' lodges serve fresh food without problems but that in AHS facilities there are numerous complaints about poor food quality and given that so far the minister seems uninterested to address the substandard food problem in these facilities and given that the minister has been frequently bragging that her ministry has made promises to provide over 2,000 new supportive living beds, Minister, please kindly tell this House: will those new facilities provide their new residents fresh meals prepared on-site, or will they, too, have no alternative but to eat previously frozen, reheated, mushy food?

2:20

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, I said it in the first question and the second question. We're working with residents and with their families to increase opportunities for their tastes to be addressed and met. That's why it's gone from 40 per cent fresh food to 60 per cent fresh food in this facility in particular and why we're continuing to work with residents and their family members to make sure that their tastes are catered to in a local manner and another reason why I'm so proud we brought forward legislation to ensure that resident and family councils are available throughout Alberta. I'll continue working with families, working with residents, and working with health care providers to provide good-quality, safe living environments for all residents.

Health Care Service Integration

Mr. Barnes: Madam Speaker, for 25 years the government has been saying that integrating physician services with other health professionals will lead to cost savings and better service. Costs have gone from \$4 billion to \$21 billion, and costs are still climbing. Alberta now has some of the longest wait times amongst OECD nations. For many procedures in Alberta the family pet gets better service. To the minister: when will the minister admit that the system is failing, sit down with doctors, and fully integrate their services and fix the problem?

Ms Hoffman: Well, I have to say how proud I am of the work that we've done sitting down with doctors. As a result, one of those doctors is running for us in the by-election, Madam Speaker. Just to clarify for anyone who was wondering, as they were earlier, the doctor did send a note to all of his patients to say that he was taking a leave of absence because he was running. He did clear that with the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and he's proud to let them know what he'll be doing for the next month while they'll be seeing other expert health care providers. But we're working to make sure he has an opportunity to keep giving back in this Chamber.

Mr. Barnes: The Alberta government, going back over two decades, has talked about integrating physician services to better serve Albertans. Given that Al Gore created the Internet in the early 1990s but for some reason our health system still cannot manage to share a patient's medical records unless they're running for the NDP, to the minister: when will the doctors and patients be able to access their patients' medical records on a timely basis?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I imagine that there's an emoji being created up in the press gallery right now to match that very question. We've been working hand in hand with physicians and with patients to make sure we're increasing access to their electronic medical records. That's why we're investing to make that project move forward, so it can be a seamless ownership of information. Just like when your child gets a report card, parents and students have access to that information; it's the same principle that we're moving forward to ensure that patients have access to their information. Instead, the Official Opposition is proposing 20 per cent cuts, which would deeply damage health care, all of the information. None would be there because the . . .

The Acting Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: When Alberta Health Services was created, it was lauded as a masterpiece of efficiency and the ultimate in integration. It's become a monster, which Health ministers repeatedly have

been helpless to combat. Given that the Auditor General's report on health care states that one of the problems is that the health care system is monitored by administrators and government officials, to the minister: when will this minister stop interfering and increasing bureaucracy and let local experts and allied health care professionals get involved and fix our system?

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, if you want to talk about fixing a mess, ask your own party members because you guys are the ones that created this system. I'm proud to be the one at the charge of fixing it, and I am so proud of the fact that this morning at AAMD and C one of our constituents – one of our constituents – walked up to the mike and said that for the first time he feels that AHS, the department, and the minister are on the same team. That's the side of Albertans, and I'm very proud of that. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Calgary LRT Green Line

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last week my constituent the Member for Calgary-Greenway stated that I was, quote, surprising constituents by telling them that the provincial portion of the green line funding was coming from the carbon tax. It's true that I would never have said that. However, I did say that the funding is coming from the carbon levy. Could the Minister of Infrastructure please clear up the confusion for the member and clarify how the carbon levy will fund the green line and when the provincial funding was announced?

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, Calgarians told us that they want to see the green line built, and we are doing exactly that. That's why our government announced \$1.7 billion so that the city can start work on phase 1 of the green line. The majority of funds are coming from the carbon levy. Don't take my word for it, though. Here's what the LRT on the Green Foundation had to say about it: "One of the main reasons the City of Calgary can now begin construction on stage 1 of the Green Line is thanks to ... the Alberta Government."

The Acting Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would not want to be accused by the Member for Calgary-Greenway of providing, quote, misleading information, so for the benefit of Calgarians could the Minister of Infrastructure please tell us the exact funding breakdown for phase 1 of the Calgary green line?

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, our government was proud to support the green line LRT with \$1.7 billion in investment. We're getting good help from the federal government. One of their biggest fans, of course, is the Member for Calgary-Greenway, who was quoted as saying on Twitter: God bless Canada for the Liberal government, and it's about time Mr. Sohi got rid of the CPC. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members. You can tell it's Thursday.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that I attended nearly every green line consultation on the north end of the project and given that I did not once see the Member for Calgary-Greenway at any of these consultations, where the member could have seen for himself how engaged Calgarians were

designing their green line with city planners, could the Minister of Infrastructure please provide us an explanation as to why the project took two years to plan and explain the advantages of using revenues from the carbon levy?

Thank you.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member. I did not see the Member for Calgary-Greenway there either.

This project is a project that was approved by the city of Calgary. They needed to do the appropriate planning work. We trust the city of Calgary and, of course, all of the folks they consulted with because it is a made-in-Calgary plan for Calgarians who are using this green line. The reality is that without the revenues from the carbon levy the city of Calgary wouldn't be able to begin construction on phase 1 of the green line. Calgarians wanted that green line. We're building that green line. That is exactly how it was supposed to be.

Hospital Heliport Capital Funding

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, the judge overseeing the fatality inquiry has called for the restoration of helicopter landings at the Fort McMurray hospital with all due haste after the landings were discontinued a decade ago for upgrades and compliance as Transport Canada shut down numerous Alberta hospital helipads in 2007. Former Premier Prentice announced a new 5 and a half million dollar helipad for Fort McMurray's hospital in October 2014. To the minister: what is the holdup?

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is absolutely true that we care deeply about ensuring that all Albertans have access to the EMS services they need in all parts of this province, and that means that we have to have newer, faster, safer air equipment and safe places for individuals to be able to land.

With regard to this very specific helipad I'll be happy to get further details and table in this House with regard to this very specific question. If there are other specific questions, I certainly welcome members to call my office about their specific local issues. We definitely have an open line in the Alberta Health office.

2:30

Mr. van Dijken: Given, Madam Speaker, that Budget 2013 allocated \$26 million over three years to fix the provincial heliports and given that Budget 2015 allocated \$23 million over two years to fix the provincial heliports and that now Budget 2017 has \$10 million over two years to fix the provincial heliports, to the minister. The heliports were supposed to be fixed in 2015. Instead, the NDP kicked the can down the road, and now a judge has called you out for the delay. What is going on in your department preventing you from getting these things fixed?

Ms Hoffman: With regard to the first question that was asked, let me make sure I update the information that the hon. member has. The truth is that AHS announced that construction would begin this year in the spring, so the construction is moving forward. It is true that this didn't happen for decades under the former Conservative governments in this province. You might want to ask your caucus mates about that. It's also true that we're continuing to invest to ensure that Transport Canada's regulations are in accordance with what's in the best interests of Albertans, which are safety and ensuring that they can land helicopters at health care facilities. But,

really, with your issues about the past you need to ask your colleagues.

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, given that CN can replace a major bridge near Mayerthorpe in all of 20 days, a lot faster than this province takes to fix hospital helipads shut down by Transport Canada in 2007, and seeing as how the judge said, quote, there are many circumstances under which rapid helicopter transport to the hospital would contribute greatly to the saving of lives, end quote, why is the minister contributing to the increased risk of death and poor health outcomes in Fort McMurray and other communities by increasing travel times and delaying access to care?

Ms Hoffman: You know, Madam Speaker, over the last two years we've worked diligently to make sure that there is investment to ensure the proper health care services and opportunities throughout the province, including in a number of opposition ridings, including in the community of Fort McMurray. At the same time, the members opposite vote against those budgets that put those very dollars into providing that safety. It's pretty rich for the members opposite to advocate for 20 per cent cuts and tell us that we're not moving fast enough, but – you know what? – I don't care. I'm going to move forward taking care of Albertans, providing them the very best care, including that helipad in Fort McMurray, that's already been announced.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Opioid Addiction Treatment in Central Alberta

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government does not understand the serious drug problem consuming our province and its impact on central Alberta. Vulnerable Albertans are reaching for drugs, destroying their families and their own lives in the process. They need our help, they need our compassion, yet the NDP refuses to declare the opioid crisis the public health emergency that it is. Minister, there are 440,000 people in central Alberta facing a lack of services and a lack of a plan to address the drug problem. Why doesn't this government care for them?

Ms Hoffman: Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from reality. For years Sylvan Lake was promised better health care services by the Conservatives. Nothing was delivered. I'm proud that we're finally bringing better access to health care to the town of Sylvan Lake. You know what? We're doing that in other towns across the province as well because we care about all Albertans and ensuring they get access to the care that they need, where they need it. You know what drives our decisions? Taking care of people and making sure we've got their backs. You know what drives opposition decisions? Headlines and 20 per cent cuts. There is no way that I'm going to allow that to happen. I'm going to make sure that we continue to move forward protecting Albertans, protecting the front-line providers that serve them, and making sure that we give them better health outcomes.

Mr. MacIntyre: Drug use and abuse is a serious issue destroying families. Given the associate minister's remarks here earlier this week that "substance use is a medical condition that requires a health care response" and given the fact that central Alberta has been neglected by this government and is still not receiving anything close to an adequate health care response, to the associate minister. Central Alberta doesn't need empty words; they need action. When will you provide the health care response that the families in my riding need?

Ms Hoffman: Everyone who is using substances is loved by somebody. That's why, Madam Speaker, we're moving forward to make sure that we do have a health care model to provide that increased support, just like yesterday's announcement of new opioid dependency treatment options. You know what? We're not going to stop there. We're going to keep moving forward to make sure that Sylvan Lake has opportunities for the urgent care that they need so that they don't have to travel to specific isolated communities. Here's what Susan Samson, who's chair of the Sylvan Lake and Area Urgent Care Committee, said:

I cannot put into words, how exciting and momentous this news is – that this government has recognized our community's need, and reinforced [the community's] commitment to providing enhanced health [care] services to our region.

I'm proud to do that work for all.

The Acting Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. The question is about drug use and abuse, Minister.

Given that drug-fuelled dependency can escalate to increased social and health concerns, which further strain our already maxed-out health care system, and given that this government talks about having the right treatment in the right place at the right time but misses on every one of those metrics in a health care system that habitually ignores the health needs of rural Alberta, to the minister: when can central Alberta expect the same level of treatment as big cities?

Ms Hoffman: Well, the mayor of Sylvan Lake, Sean McIntyre, said, "Today, the provincial government has proven that not only did they hear us, but they've listened [to us]." These are the kinds of municipalities in the hon. member's riding that we are proud to be working with, proud to be making sure we're giving them the care that they need, where they need it. We are moving forward with actions and with real results and with a budget that shows that we care about communities. That's why we have a reasonable path to get to balance in 2023, that's why we won't be firing nurses and teachers, like the members opposite are pushing, and that's why we're continuing to improve access for opioid dependency treatments through a patient health home model, all of which I'm very proud of.

Alberta Health Services Laundry Service

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, a little over a year ago the government interfered and stopped an AHS decision to use a private contractor to take care of their laundry services. AHS was concerned about the decaying state of their infrastructure. In order to stop the creation of private-sector jobs, this government had to spend what was estimated at between \$54 million and \$200 million in order to keep the laundry in-house. That would equate to between \$400,000 and \$1.5 million of taxpayers' dollars per full-time job. Minister, how much did it end up costing taxpayers to keep the laundry service facilities in the public realm?

Ms Hoffman: The previous government left Albertans with a significant amount of deferred maintenance in our hospital laundries, as they did with many parts of our health care system. And you know what, Madam Speaker? When the hon. member talks about creating jobs in the private sector, he's talking about firing people working in hospitals, washing our sheets, and making sure that the environments that our residents and our patients are living in are safe and clean. I'm not going to apologize for providing the same level of care, the same jobs, and the same opportunities for Albertans

in rural communities, just like we are in urban communities. I'm proud of the fact that we're working in a sustainable way to provide consistent service for all Albertans.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, given that it was more than the Official Opposition pointing out that the NDP were making an ideological decision when it came to laundry services and given that outsourcing laundry services does not pose a threat to the public health care system and given that doing so would have actually saved taxpayers' money, which could have been spent on the health care system, it begs the question: does the minister value public-sector jobs more highly than private-sector jobs even if they are providing the same service?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me explain what the member opposite is advocating for. He's advocating for me to lay off hundreds, probably thousands of laundry workers in rural communities throughout our province and centralizing that service to a private provider in the big cities. To those women and men working diligently to clean the sheets, to make sure that the residents have a safe place to live and work, I say thank you. We respect you. We respect the work you do in your local communities, and we've got your back. The members opposite should take note.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, given that it is impossible to sustain a stable public sector without a vibrant private sector that is growing and creating tax revenues and given that this government's spending is saddling taxpayers with enormous debt that will need to be paid off and given that this government has stated that they will balance the budget at some future date, how does the minister plan on balancing the budget while still decreasing wait times?

Ms Hoffman: Let's remember what the member opposite is calling for. He's calling for us to fire hundreds and thousands of local workers in rural communities and to move those jobs to the private sector in the big cities. Instead, we're working on a site-by-site basis to ensure these services are protected. This, hon. members, is an attack on working people in our health care system. It's the same old angry name-calling and outsourcing that they've done in the past. We believe hospitals need to be clean. They need to have clean sheets, equipment to keep patients safe. Jason Kenney isn't hiding what he said time and time again. They want a private health care system in Alberta. Instead, we're protecting the one we've got.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

2:40 Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta's postsecondary students and administration are worried. With no indication about what will be happening with tuition for the coming year, institutions are being forced to plan for significant cuts because of no backfill. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how long does the government plan on keeping students, administrators, and academics in the dark?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Perhaps the member thought that he was asking the Minister of Health a question and didn't realize that it was theme day, but I'm happy to talk about postsecondary education. We've kept tuition frozen for three years because we're making sure that every Albertan has access to an affordable education regardless of the amount of money that they have in the bank, and we are

committed to continuing to do so in the future. We're looking at a number of ways to continue to promote accessible, affordable education for our higher education system in this province.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, Madam Speaker, given that Alberta's colleges, universities are planning for the future – well, they're trying to – and given that they do not know how much base funding this government will provide and they do know that if they will be able to raise tuition, they don't know when they might, and they don't know what to do, would the Minister of Advanced Education please enlighten us as to when the students and institutions will have the indication of their future funding?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, we are going to be making those announcements very soon. I would like to inform everybody listening about what Jason Kenney's plans for higher education would mean. It would mean shutting down the University of Alberta. It would mean shutting down the University of Calgary. It would mean shutting down NorQuest College. It would mean shutting down Bow Valley College. In fact, it would shut down every university and college in this province, and they still would need to find money in the budget because that's how big the cuts that they're proposing are.

Mr. W. Anderson: Madam Speaker, given that 19 months ago this minister stated in this House – and one can read it in *Hansard*, April 7, 2016, at 2:40 – that the tuition review would start “in the fullness of time,” well, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what does the “fullness of time” mean to you? Please enlighten us.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Madam Speaker, I don't know what the member's problem is. We are committed to keeping the deadline that I gave them on April 7, and we are still committed to doing that. We will be making the announcement in the fullness of time. We're still on track to meet that commitment, but I would remind everybody again that if they had the opportunity to get their hands on the budget of the postsecondary education system, they would close down every university and college in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Minister of Health, did you want to appoint a supplemental to the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow?

Addiction Treatment Facility Oversight

(continued)

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to confirm for the Member for Calgary-Elbow that there is indeed a process under way to ensure that we do have regulations. It is proving to be cumbersome for that specific project, but we're working on it. We look forward to being able to update this House and all Albertans about our progress.*

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I'll give you 30 seconds to leave.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Members' Statements

(continued)

2017 Football Championships

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's November in Canada, which means football playoffs are under way. The talk of the town has been the University of Calgary Dinos win over UBC and Niko

*See page 1972, left column, paragraph 5

DiFonte's 59-yard field goal. This game came with a lot of excitement, interceptions caused by balls bouncing off body parts, and a fourth quarter that saw both teams trade off the lead. But with no time left on the clock, DiFonte broke a U Sports record and broke social media by successfully kicking a nearly impossible field goal without the wind to assist. Credit to Coach Wayne Harris for having faith in his players and to quarterback Adam Sinagra for his amazing play, that propelled the Dinos to a 44 to 43 win. The Dinos will have a rematch this Saturday against Laval Rouge et Or to determine who will advance to the Vanier Cup in Hamilton.

Madam Speaker, further to this, I look forward to attending the 105th Grey Cup in a few weeks. During this festival many great groups from Alberta will showcase our hospitality, including the Spirit of Edmonton and the Calgary Grey Cup Committee. Since Calgary's original Grey Cup win the Calgary Grey Cup Committee has showcased western hospitality by visiting schools, conducting public outreach, and holding its annual pancake breakfast, a Calgary tradition. They are also responsible for the horse in the hotel lobby that is seen every year, and I thank them for their hard work.

On a final note, one absolute, with the CFL west final occurring, is that for the fourth straight year Alberta will be represented in the big game in Ottawa. This shows the first-place Stampeders battling against the Edmonton Eskimos, who had a record seven straight wins to open the season.

There is one thing, however, that overshadows these games and the remarkable Canadian players who participate in this. "Edmonton Eskimos" is a serious concern, the name, for some of our indigenous leaders. I support the league, and I am attending the Grey Cup for the ninth time, but I do call on this community-owned team to take this concern seriously.

With that said, I look forward to an exciting weekend as Alberta prepares to play host for the Grey Cup in Edmonton in 2018.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Political Action Committees

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Albertans deserve to know who is trying to influence their elections, and that's why our government's first act was to take big money out of politics and make our election system more fair and transparent by banning union and corporate donations, imposing strict spending and contribution limits, and bringing in new accountability measures for third-party advertisers.

But despite all this work, there are folks out there who are dead set on returning Alberta back to the same system of entitlement that Albertans rejected last election, and the person who thinks that they're the most entitled to take Alberta backward and make their own rules is Jason Kenney. I've heard from constituents who've told me that they want elections decided based on the ideas, not corporate money and the size of a bank account. Our government answered their calls, but maybe Jason Kenney missed the memo since he's been accepting big corporate donations to his PAC from outside of the province since day one. Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve better than Jason Kenney's and the Conservatives' dark-money PACs trying to spend their way back to power.

What's clear is what the Conservatives' priorities are. It's not what's best for Albertans; it's only what's best for them and their wealthy friends and insiders. Even though Jason Kenney and the Conservatives have claimed that they don't have any policies, we all know, based on their actions lately, that that's just not true.

With the by-election coming up, I thought I'd help them out a little bit so their leaflets aren't empty. Jason Kenney told us that his first priority is massive tax giveaways for their richest friends and insiders

and brutal cuts for everybody else. Next on the agenda: outing kids in schools who want to join a GSA. But one of his biggest priorities of all is refusing to release his donors and ensuring that dark money and big money stay in politics.

Madam Speaker, Albertans have a choice in front of them. Do they want a government that's making life better and more affordable, or do they want those Conservatives' entitlement, with one set of rules for wealthy insiders and another set for everyone else?

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to table a petition containing nearly 2,000 signatures from Alberta residents, that's been approved by Parliamentary Counsel. The petition reads as follows:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to declare a moratorium on logging in the Upper Highwood near the junctions of Highways 541, 40, & 940 immediately and urge the Government of Alberta to assess the impact of clear-cutting in all of Kananaskis.

Over the long-term we ask the Government of Alberta to invite conversations with Albertans to consider the environmental value of our wild lands and watersheds for water quality, tourism, low-impact recreation compared to clear-cut logging.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to table a petition today, two of them, actually, having 326 online signatures and 1,233 paper signatures in support of the use of more nurse practitioners in our rural communities right across this province.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 26

An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege for me to rise today and introduce for first reading Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. They tell me that Weed Control Act was already taken.

Madam Speaker, cannabis is set to become legal across our country in July 2018. Despite the tight timeline our province is on track to meet that deadline. We have developed a framework to legalize cannabis that Albertans told us they support. With the input of tens of thousands of Albertans we developed a system that reflects their views and values and will protect our children, prioritize our health and safety, and limit the illicit market. The amendments in this bill mark one of the first important steps in establishing that system.

I'm proud of the work we have done so far, and I ask that we move first reading of Bill 26. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one – I have the appropriate copies here – is from the Greenwood Family Physicians, in support of the increased use of a sustainable funding model for nurse practitioners.

The second tabling I have is from the AAMD and C, in support of a sustainable funding model for nurse practitioners in Alberta as well.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to table in the House on behalf of the hon. Premier the response to Written Question 14, which was accepted May 2017.

The Acting Speaker: The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to table the required number of copies of the Report of Selected Payments to the Members and Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, also known as the MLA report. This is tabled for the year ended March 31, 2017, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act. The disclosure of MLA payments ensures that we remain accountable for public dollars, that they are spent responsibly and in accordance with legal and ethical standards. Information listed in the report includes salary, expenses, benefits, allowances, fees for serving on standing committees of the Legislative Assembly, and travel expenses while travelling on MLA or government business.

I have several other tablings as well for written questions. Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to table the response to the MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills' Written Question 11: "What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in each Ministry in each fiscal year from 2012-13 to 2016-17?"

Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to table the response to the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks' Written Question 12: "What groups were given an invitation to the Government's Budget 2017 consultations?"

The next one it's my pleasure to table is the response to the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks' Written Question 13: "As of March 1, 2017, how many individuals were employed by the Government, and of that number how many were classified as managers or above?"

The next one it's my pleasure to table is the response to the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks' Written Question 15: "As of March 1, 2017, what was the unfunded liability for each of the following public sector pension plans: the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, the Management Employees Pension Plan, and the Special Forces Pension Plan?"

Mr. Mason: You don't have to read them all.

Mr. Ceci: The House leader wants me to hand these over, and I will.

Mr. Mason: You have to say which ones, which questions they are.

Mr. Ceci: Oh. Okay. This is on Written Question 16. It has to do with money on carbon offsets the government of Alberta spent.

The last one is Motion for a Return 17 for the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks, requesting copies of the budget restraint memos issued by the government between April 1, 2013, and March 1, 2017.

It's my pleasure to table all those.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table five copies of the Conference Board of Canada's

Metropolitan Outlook for Edmonton. It shows that things, indeed, in Edmonton are looking up: retail jobs are up, jobs are up, housing starts are up. The report states, "Edmonton's real GDP is expected to increase by 3.9 per cent in 2017," the first increase in three years and, I think, due to the steady support of our government.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of ATB Financial's economic and research team's publication titled Restaurant and Bar Receipts Continue to Impress. It shows that things are up in Alberta. In this publication it states that restaurant sales are up. "Albertans spent \$771 million at restaurants and bars across the province . . . [That] total was more than \$1 million higher than the previous record set the previous month."

The Acting Speaker: Oh, sorry, hon. member. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Starting to feel like a gopher.

Thank you. I'd like to table a document titled The Interactive Impacts of High School Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) on College Student Attitudes toward LGBT Individuals: An Investigation of High School Characteristics, authored by Meredith G. F. Worthen. I referenced this during the Bill 24 debate earlier this week.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: On behalf of the Hon. Ms Notley, Premier, response to Written Question 14, asked for by Mr. Fildebrandt on May 1, 2017.

On behalf of the Hon. Ms Phillips, Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office, return to order of the Assembly MR6, asked for by Mr. MacIntyre on May 1, 2017.

On behalf of the Hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta annual report 2016; pursuant to the Fatal Accidents Act, review of damage amounts, fall 2017; responses to written questions 4 and 6, both asked for by Mr. Cyr on May 1, 2017.

The Acting Speaker: I believe there was one point of order. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise on this point of order. I rise, for the benefit of the Government House Leader, on 23(h) and (i). Earlier today in response to a question from me to the Premier – at the time that I raised the point of order, the Premier was, from my perspective, certainly implying that I was misleading the House or not telling the truth in regard to her government being found in contempt of this Legislature. Certainly, she was making an allegation against me as another member of this House when she said that, and she was also imputing false motives as to my question.

3:00

The reality – and I don't want to belabour the point of this on Thursday afternoon – is this. If you look at page 1609 of the November 1, 2016, *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, you will see a ruling from the Speaker of this Assembly that makes it very clear.

In this case pursuant to Standing Order 15(6) I find that there is a prima facie question of privilege, which may be called a question

of contempt, as the dignity of this Assembly was offended by the actions of the government in publicizing certain aspects of Bill 20 and presuming its passage prior to the bill making its way through the legislative process.

This government was found in contempt of this Legislature for its actions. I was there when that decision was made. I certainly would appreciate why the Premier would not want to talk about it, but the reality is that in no way was I misleading with the facts. It was a dark day in our legislative history and certainly a day, I'm sure, the government would like to forget, but the reality is that they were found in contempt.

With that said, they clearly were offended by me raising that, so I will happily withdraw my point of order.

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, that's a neat trick, to stand up and put on the record a point and then withdraw the point, which has no basis at all. I don't know what we can do in the future to prevent that kind of manipulation of our rules, but I suggest that we do put our minds to it, because if you want to make a point of order in this place, you should stand up and you should be clear that you're making a point of order and not claim to be making a point of order just to make some kind of a member's statement.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister and Government House Leader. At this time it has been withdrawn, but I hear your concerns, and we can discuss it in the future.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Committee Referral for Conflicts of Interest Act

32. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that:

1. The Conflicts of Interest Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, and the committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review pursuant to section 48 of that act;
2. The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
3. The committee may take into consideration any material prepared for or submissions provided to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee;
4. In accordance with section 48 of the Conflicts of Interest Act the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within one year after beginning its review, and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Madam Speaker. As background I should indicate that the Conflicts of Interest Act currently in place includes a requirement that a committee of the Assembly undertake a comprehensive review every five years.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In accordance with section 48 of this act this review must begin by December 1, 2017. Motion 32 allows for that review to begin in time to meet that obligation.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader to close debate?

Mr. Mason: No. Thanks.

[Government Motion 32 carried]

Evening Sitzings

33. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing November 27, 2017, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the Third Session of the 29th Legislature 2017 fall sitting unless the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

[Government Motion 33 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 28

School Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to move second reading of Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017, here this afternoon.

Through Bill 28 our government intends to make life better for Alberta students. The Alberta School Act has served our province's students, schools, and communities for over three decades. The amendments within this bill will help to ensure that it continues to do so well into the future.

The amendments included in this legislation align with the government's commitment to make life better for Albertans in general and for our students specifically. Building on the strengths of our school system, we will continue to build a modern, inclusive education system that prepares students for success, ensures fair and equitable access to education, and continues to support the closing of the achievement gap for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

The amendments have been arrived at through careful consideration as well as consultation with stakeholders and education partners. In short, these amendments will help to bring the School Act up to date with other pieces of legislation and pave the way for future changes that will further support students' success.

A key theme in these amendments is changes that will help to ensure that schools and school authority leadership are supported in leading modern, inclusive, and prudently administered schools. Bill 28 does this in several ways, but the primary focus is on changes that would support enhanced professional practice standards for principals, superintendents, and school jurisdiction leaders.

This act will help us to establish a set of certification requirements for principals and superintendents in the province. Once these standards, which would describe the leaders' professional competencies, are also in place, we will be on our way towards more consistent practice and therefore more consistent outcomes for Alberta students.

The amendments related to principal and superintendent certification will come into force on September 1, 2019, if the bill is passed, ensuring that school authorities and school leaders will have time to prepare and adapt for the certification process. I believe, Madam Speaker, that this could be the very first set of standards for superintendents and district leaders in the entire country of Canada.

Bill 28 also specifies that school boards will be required to develop and implement a code of conduct that applies to school board trustees. The minister will be able to set out a set of principles for these codes of conduct and must specify sanctions for those who breach the code. While we respect and appreciate the amazing work done by elected school boards across the province, this amendment would ensure that provincial legislation recognizes the importance of work done by the trustees. These changes would also better align the expectations of trustees with the expectations of other elected officials as outlined in the Municipal Government Act.

These amendments would come into force on September 1, 2018.

Another one of the priorities in this bill is to ensure fair and equitable access to the education system for all students. That focus on equality of access will begin at kindergarten, and the bill will establish a common age of entry for students beginning their schooling. Right now the age at which a student may start kindergarten is set individually by local school authorities and varies across the province. Bill 28 would set a consistent standard that students must be five years of age by December 31 of the year that they are entering kindergarten.

3:10

Madam Speaker, there is research that shows that older children perform better academically than their younger peers in the same grade. By setting a common age for all students across the province, we will better set up all students for success no matter where they live in the province. We have set a date of September 2020 for this change to take effect, leaving school authorities and families plenty of time to plan for this new standardized age of entry for kindergarten.

We know as well, of course, that we're building new kindergarten curriculum and so forth, and we're building new curriculum in keeping with sort of age-appropriate material. This will help to align our teaching in kindergarten for the kids at a specific age.

Access to the education system stretches well beyond kindergarten, however. Alberta has a very large and growing First Nations population, and for some of the families and students in these communities, attending a provincially funded school may be preferred. In cases like this, where students living on-reserve want to attend a school in a public, separate, or francophone school jurisdiction, an education service agreement, otherwise known as an ESA, is signed between the First Nation and the school authority or school authorities. These ESAs currently vary widely across the province, Madam Speaker. As a result, how these agreements deal with accountability and reporting, renewal practices, and dispute resolution is not consistent from one geographic area to the other.

Bill 28 will allow the Minister of Education to set standards for these ESAs to ensure that students are able to access the provincial education system on equitable terms no matter where they live in the province of Alberta. Giving both school authorities and First Nations clear expectations on how ESAs operate will break down one further barrier that may exist between some students getting the sort of education that they expect and deserve.

But it's also important for me to note that these standards would still allow for significant flexibility to permit the First Nation and the school authority the room to negotiate an agreement that is in the interests of all parties involved. The draft standards have actually been previously consulted on, and they have been widely

supported, with some stakeholders utilizing these draft standards to help guide their current education service agreements. Improving the education outcomes of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students is one of the ministry's highest priorities, Madam Speaker, and I believe that this will help to do exactly that.

Madam Speaker, we are also changing the School Act to increase collaboration around transportation for students, especially in the process around establishing separate school districts. It's important to note that both Catholic and public school board associations, the main voices for issues on this matter, were driving forces behind developing this process outlined in the updated act. They should be commended for this. Certainly, I was very pleased with the outcome. This would provide a consistent approach with standardized timelines and specific steps throughout the process. It will also encourage all parties to work together in close co-operation with the communities in which the establishment is taking place.

We are also updating our financial reporting requirements for private schools to bring them into alignment with practices in public schools. While many private schools already provide this information to Alberta Education, this change would ensure that all schools that accept public dollars are subject to consistent financial reporting expectations, and it would go to ensure greater accountability for public funds that go to our schools.

Madam Speaker, the bill that's before us today also includes a legislative change that is the first step in reviewing transportation eligibility criteria across the province of Alberta. We've heard from stakeholders and parents that the walk limit was too far, especially for young children, and now we're looking for ways to fix this challenge. School boards would still have the legal obligation to provide transportation to students that live within a certain school board boundary according to the specific criteria set by the province.

Our government is committed to working with our education partners to ensure that updated student transportation regulations address the concerns that we have heard from parents, students, and school boards. It's important to note that for the 2017-2018 school year school board obligations won't change. Once the regulation has been put into place, it would be in effect for the 2018-19 school year. We aim to have these eligibility criteria set out early next year so that schools, families, and others will have time to plan for and implement any changes that must be made.

Finally, Madam Speaker, there are a number of small amendments in this bill that are largely administrative in nature. Many of them focus on bringing the School Act up to date and to align with other pieces of legislation. For example, this includes matching the changes to the Municipal Government Act that have changed election timing for school trustees. These smaller amendments would come into force upon passage of the bill.

Madam Speaker, I hope that this provides a useful description of the amendments proposed in Bill 28 and explains how these changes will be able to bring improvements to the students, who are at the core of our education system. Ultimately, these changes are done to ensure that education remains strong, accountable, and serves the public of Alberta in the strongest way possible.

I hope that you will stand with me and support this bill as it supports the students of our province. I look forward to constructive debate on this particular bill, Madam Speaker. With that, I move that debate be adjourned on this bill this afternoon.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms. Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 29
An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol
Impaired Driving

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to rise to start the deliberations of the Committee of the Whole on Bill 29, which is an act to reduce cannibal – I think we want to reduce cannibalism, too, don't we? I don't know. Can you get that corrected in *Hansard* or not? I'm going to be labelled as being in favour of cannibalism, aren't I? These guys aren't smiling over there. I don't know why.

Mr. McIver: We weren't listening.

Dr. Turner: Anyways, Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. I'm pleased to be a cosponsor of this along with the MLA from Red Deer-South. You know, this is an update of the Traffic Safety Act, that will ensure that Alberta is ready to apply provincial sanctions when the federal government gets its act together in terms of the legislation that's going to have to be in place by next July.

I think an important thing to consider is that impaired driving is impaired driving no matter what the substance is that is impairing the physical or mental capacity of the driver. Albertans have expressed concern about a perceived potential for an increase in impairment when cannabis and other similar agents are combined with alcohol. It's important that this province basically have a robust program of penalties and roadside detection processes in place. Impaired driving is unacceptable, dangerous. We know that it's a plague, and it kills and injures thousands of Albertans every year.

3:20

Our government's goal – and this would be shared, I'm sure, by all members of this Legislature – is to move as quickly as possible to zero impairment-related collisions and fatalities on Alberta's roads. It's the first step to being ready for the legalization of cannabis. There are going to be more steps coming. The details that are in this legislation are basically what are needed to prepare our law enforcement agents and the justice system as well as the Transportation ministry for the federal government's legislation.

I think one of the things that I wanted to bring up today is that these administrative penalties are also being changed as a result of the decision of the Court of Appeal of the province of Alberta, in which the Court of Appeal said that having an indefinite licence suspension was not constitutional. Our government, at least the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, decided not to appeal that decision; therefore, by early next year we have to have administrative penalties that would fulfill the mandate of that court decision. I think that having a fixed administrative penalty, as is in this legislation – if a driver is found to be impaired by alcohol or by any other substance and, following that fixed suspension, if the driver does want to go back to driving, to have an interlock system that would prevent someone that had consumed alcohol from operating the vehicle is very rational.

As I mentioned in second reading on this, it's important to also recognize that this legislation also applies even if the operator of a vehicle who is thought to be impaired by law enforcement refuses to provide a blood sample or a breath sample. The refusal to blow

will not circumvent the intent of this legislation. It's not so much to get those drivers off the road as to really put into Albertans' minds, who are considering going and operating a vehicle after they've consumed intoxicating substances, a second thought. Perhaps they should think about not driving, to use a taxi, to use the help of a designated driver, or to organize their social activities such that they don't involve using a vehicle.

It's that attitudinal change that I'm hoping will pervade this province. I think that if we can get people's attitudes changed about the acceptability of operating a motor vehicle after the consumption of intoxicating materials and make that, basically, a moral and ethical situation where it just is unacceptable to do that, I think that will be one of the best outcomes of this legislation.

There are particular situations in which this legislation I think really is going to make a difference, too, and one of those situations is with the young person who is acquiring their first driver's licence. That situation you can call the graduated licence situation. Basically, in that context there is zero tolerance for the consumption of intoxicating materials before one operates a vehicle. If a person in possession of a graduated licence does break the rules in that situation, there are going to be significant repercussions for that individual. If we can catch these 18-year-olds, 17-year-olds, 16-year-olds and get their attitudes changed, that's going to reverberate over the years. They are going to be the role models for their younger brothers and sisters coming up or their friends who haven't yet acquired a licence and will make our roads a lot safer.

I think that this gets around this concern about: well, is cannabis really as intoxicating as alcohol, and, you know, are illegal drugs really the problem? I think what we'd want to focus on or what I'd like to focus on in this bill is making it unacceptable and, in a sense, illegal to operate a motor vehicle and put the general public at risk of significant injury and harm, not to mention the terrible toll in property damage, not to mention the terrible toll that I can speak to personally of posttraumatic stress disorder, dealing with the carnage that some of these terrible motor accidents lead to among our first responders, among our nurses. They are the ones that have to deal with most of the quote, unquote, dirty work in this. I mean, we doctors get to come in and look like we're running the show most of the time, and most of the time the nurses have done all of the work. I think the Member for Banff-Cochrane can back me up on that.

It isn't just the fatal accidents on the road; it is all these other repercussions of impaired driving. Again, I mentioned this the other day: Mothers Against Drunk Driving, MADD, the folks that have the red ribbon that I've got on my lapel, the victims, the survivors, if you wish, of these terrible accidents that have to live with the consequences for years and years and years. I think it's really important that we get on with this.

Now, there is part of this that we didn't discuss in great length in second reading, but this refers to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board. We're also taking the opportunity as we make amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to update and streamline some of the processes and procedures of the Alberta Transportation Safety Board. The board is the final administrative authority for decisions about drivers' licences for motor vehicles. They review the conduct of unsafe or high-risk drivers, including impaired drivers, and determine sanctions and hear appeals of decisions made by law enforcement and the registrar of motor vehicle services.

The first proposed amendment would clarify how the board would reconsider its decisions. Upon application the board would have to grant one reconsideration but only if the circumstances of the appeal have substantially changed since the original decision. Now, in the past there have been repeated appeals to this board, and it has basically delayed – it's like deferring your taxes. This is

basically that you're delaying a judgment here. I'm really pleased that this loophole, that some of the defence bar has utilized to allow impaired drivers to continue to operate vehicles, is going to be closed. Decisions already reconsidered would not be considered again. That said, drivers always have the right to appeal a board decision to the court.

3:30

Another proposed amendment will remove the authority of the board to hear appeals on court-imposed driver's licence suspension. This would align with other quasi-judicial boards in Canada. Drivers may always appeal their court-imposed suspension to a higher level of court.

Finally, the Minister of Transportation would be authorized to make regulations respecting the use of electronic documents and e-signatures.

Most of the other amendments are administrative in nature and would clarify incorrect references and processes. It's important to note that the Alberta Transportation Safety Board has both requested and is in full support of these changes. These amendments are absolutely necessary to ensure continued safety of everyone who uses Alberta's roads. The purpose of the bill is to make our roads as safe as possible for all road users and to prevent impaired driving as this country prepares for the legalization of cannabis. As I said before, the goal is to see zero impairment-related collisions and fatalities on Alberta roads. This is a process. We're going to work towards that. It will come in the fullness of time, as has been suggested in response to one of the questions during question period, but the fullness of time will hopefully be as short as we can make it.

A robust system of immediate sanctions has been proven to be one of the greatest deterrents for impaired driving. Updating the Traffic Safety Act now ensures that Alberta's impaired driving sanctions reflect the new proposed federal offences, and Alberta would be able to continue to effectively deter impaired driving.

Anyway, in conclusion, I would encourage all members of the Legislature to support Bill 29, and I look forward to the ongoing discussions of this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, amendments? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. You know, I just want to note that it does seem that we're rushing this process, and I'm not blaming the Alberta government and the NDP for this. I am blaming our federal counterparts, the Trudeau Liberals.

Now, I'd like to start off this speech with a quote based on a press release done by the Alberta government. Alberta to Bolster Drug-impaired Driving Laws: that's the name of the release. I'd like to quote the Minister of Transportation.

Impaired driving due to alcohol, cannabis or any other impairing drug or combination of drugs, is the leading criminal cause of death and injury in Canada. These tragedies are entirely avoidable. Alberta's impaired driving laws aim to reduce the number of impaired drivers on our roads, encourage safe driving behaviour and strongly discourage impaired driving.

Those are very strong words, and I wholeheartedly agree with our Minister of Transportation that this is something that we need to identify, that we need to move forward.

Now, the problem that we've got here is that impaired driving is a societal problem, and we do need to address this. I do go to a report done by Stats Canada. The report's name is Police-reported Crime Statistics in Canada 2015. I'm going to quote this throughout my speech here.

Drug offences involving cannabis continued to decline in 2015. In total, the overall rate of police-reported offences involving the possession, trafficking, production and distribution of cannabis decreased by 15% between 2014 and 2015.

So we're actually seeing a decrease. Now, I'm not sure if it's just that the law enforcement is deciding that cannabis is no longer a priority that they need to start cracking down on or that maybe, possibly, the harder drugs are something that they need to focus on.

It goes on to say:

In contrast, offences involving the possession, trafficking, production or distribution of methamphetamines grew 25%.

These are the fentanyl and the other things that are really, really terrible, the ones that are actually killing people. So I understand why the RCMP would shift their focus away from a drug that probably isn't killing people to drugs that are killing people, killing lots of people. I think we're over 300 as we speak right now. Now, what's interesting about this is that we're seeing a decrease in the conviction rate of cannabis charges.

It goes on to say:

Almost all police-reported impaired driving incidents continued to involve alcohol in 2014 (96%) while a small proportion (4%) involved drugs.

We see that the vast majority of these convictions for impaired driving are alcohol related. The vast majority. Is it because we can test for alcohol and we can't test for cannabis? I believe that is the true problem here. What we've got here now is a drug that we have no way of being able to really test impairment on. This goes back to my point on the reckless actions of our Prime Minister, Prime Minister Trudeau. By bringing in legalization of cannabis with no way of being able to make sure that our roads are safe or our job sites are safe, this is a problem.

Now, this bill goes on to state a lot of important things like saying that it's important that we identify that driving under the influence is wrong. Well, if we're not coming up with how this is illegal and in what way for the individual, we're putting a law forward where we have no way of actually holding people to account. This is not like alcohol, where we can give them a test, take that test to a court, and then they lose their licences. They may lose their family's income. But there is a result from this impairment: we get them off the roads. We put the public's safety first.

Now, it goes on to say:

Unlike the overall decline in impaired driving between 2014 and 2015, the number and rate for almost all drug impaired driving violations increased.

They're actually saying in this article that driving under the influence of alcohol is decreasing right now but that drug impairment is increasing. Now, does that mean our society is possibly moving away from alcohol impairment and going to drug impairment? This is something that can only get worse.

In total, there were 2,786 drug impaired driving violations in 2015, 268 more than the previous year. Despite a 10% increase in rate...

That's alarming, a 10 per cent increase in rate.

... the rate of drug impaired driving (7.8 per 100,000 population) remained low compared with the rate of alcohol impaired driving [which is] 193 per 100,000.

We're seeing again that wonderful difference I was telling you about, that 96 per cent right now are being charged with alcohol convictions, 4 per cent with drug convictions. That's, I would argue, in my opinion, because we can't test for marijuana impairment or cannabis impairment.

The low rate for drug impaired driving may be partly explained by the fact that determining and measuring the level of drug impairment can be more difficult and less reliable than the measures used to detect alcohol impaired driving.

3:40

This is within the report that I'm quoting right now. It is actually acknowledging that right now we have a gap. We can't test reliably for the amount of impairment with drugs. Now we're legalizing this and we are going to be putting people behind the wheel, saying: we're still working out how this is going to play out.

What we've got here is that, overall, Alberta has decreased by 9 per cent when it comes to our impaired driving rates, declined by 9 per cent. This is within the same report. So we're seeing all impairments going down, but our percentage of drug related is going up. At some point we have to acknowledge that cannabis use behind the wheel and not being able to test for any sort of impairment with a reliable test is a problem, a problem that needs to be addressed.

I would like to see our Minister of Justice ask the Prime Minister to slow down this process. Where did this arbitrary number of July 21, 2018, come from? Why are we rushing towards that date?

Now, I understand and I have been told that when the Prime Minister was elected, we saw a spike in convictions of cannabis use right after the election. That's because what happened is, from my understanding, that just because Prime Minister Trudeau was elected, suddenly cannabis use was legal. Obviously, that's flawed because we need to go through the legislation. This is more complex than just suddenly being elected and cannabis being legal.

Now, I'm very sad to see that we're moving at such an alarming rate. We need to identify how to close this gap before we start to legalize, and again we need to push back on the federal government, saying that it's not just taxes that are a problem with this. I hear that the province is pushing back on the fact that there is going to be a 50-cent tax per gram on each side. Why should the province, who does all of the work, only get half the tax? So we're pushing back on taxes, but why are we not pushing back on the date that this is all moving forward on or it becomes legal?

The Prime Minister needs to demonstrate that we can ensure that our roads and our work sites are safe. He needs to demonstrate that, and the only way to demonstrate that is to have a reliable test to hold people to account. We have seen that there is already a disproportionate number of people that are being charged under impaired driving convictions for alcohol use, and again that's because we can test. Until we can test this, why would we move forward?

Now, again, I stated right off the bat that I do have sympathy for the Alberta government because they're told by the federal government that this is the route that we have to go. We have to legalize by July 1. But we do need to acknowledge that there is a serious gap. We are putting people at risk, and until we can test for this, I am going to say that we're probably going to find that we're going to see a spike in potential fatalities on the roads.

I had a constituent come to me about a month ago. Their family was leaving the Bonnyville area – this is a sad story – going to Edmonton, driving to Edmonton. What happened was that a young 24-year-old who was impaired, from my understanding, both with alcohol and drugs struck them head-on. Tragically, out of this family – there was a father, a mother, a child, and a grandmother – the grandmother passed. It's a terrible story. Now, the day that this constituent came to my office was a year from the date that his mother had passed. He was saying that he really feels that there is a problem in Alberta. He also felt that our victims of crime fund was not actively being able to represent them as well, but that's a different problem.

We have examples of impairment that are causing deaths within Alberta. We also have another quote stating that impaired driving is one of the leading causes of death within Canada. So we're now going to be adding a whole new genre or group of people that are going to be impacted. I understand why MADD would be upset that

we are now allowing the potential for more impaired drivers. We've got concerned people that are saying that marijuana, or cannabis, is something that needs more time. We need more research. We need to be able to make sure that our job sites and roads are safe so that an example like that young family within my constituency doesn't happen within your own constituencies.

To strengthen this legislation, what we need to start doing is looking at how we put in limits. Let's start by making sure that if a person is suspected of being under the influence of cannabis, we are able to ensure that they're not on a job site unsafe and they're not on the roads unsafe as well. Again, you know, I think that we all want to get home safely. Every Albertan wants to be able to go to work and come home and be able to hug their families and spend that time. But when you've got a literal bullet on the highway, where somebody is unable to make reasonable decisions within a snap of a finger, you end up with fatalities, and I don't think anybody wants that.

It's not that I'm saying that Bill 29 is a bad bill – actually, I probably will be supporting this bill – but I will say that we need to ensure that there is a rule to hold people to account. If we can't hold people to account, then all that's going to happen is that we're going to have a large spike in fatalities, and we're going to say: well, we saw it; we saw this coming.

And you know what? Really, it's the federal government's fault. Well, I don't think that we can solely put the fact that we've got a problem here on their shoulders, but we do need to acknowledge that the Trudeau Liberals are a big part of this. Why is your government not pressing harder? Why are we not sending delegations to Ottawa to ensure that that July 1 deadline gets pushed back so that we have the time to make sure that we get these appropriate tests done so that we can ensure that our roads and our job sites are safe? This seems to be a gap within the government.

Now, I have to commend the Premier for going to B.C. to promote our pipeline, but we also need that Premier to be going to Ottawa and speaking with the Prime Minister, explaining that this is an unreasonable time frame. Let's bring safety and accountability and integrity back. We can't allow something like this to move at an accelerated rate just because the Prime Minister feels that we can pick an arbitrary date out of the air to somehow be able to, I guess, fulfill a campaign promise that was made before thought was put into it. I can say that there were a lot of people that were pressuring the Prime Minister to have this done a lot earlier, which is even more shocking.

3:50

What I'm trying to get at here is that we really need to ensure that our roads – our roads – are safe. If we can't test for impairment, then we are taking the risk that people are going to be driving unsafely on that road, and we are unable to take them off when they are unsafe on the road.

Madam Chair, I just want to reiterate, in final, that it's not just our local MLAs that need to be debating this. It needs to be something that we take as a serious thing going forward because lives in Alberta matter.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, before we proceed, would there be any objection to returning briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly council members from Mackenzie county. If you would please rise, we would like to give you the traditional welcome applause of all members of the Assembly. Please rise.

Thank you.

The Chair: I love it when I have visitors from my constituency. It doesn't happen often.

Bill 29
An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol
Impaired Driving
(continued)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to briefly make some remarks this afternoon with respect to Bill 29, an Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. In September of this year there was a 40-year anniversary of the class of 1977 of Queen Elizabeth composite high school that was attended by one of the members of that class who is a member of this Legislature as well, that being the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. Now, I wasn't a member of that graduating class, but he was. He was in grade 10 when I was in grade 12. I thought I might attend that reunion last September, but I wasn't able to.

There was somebody else who was not able to attend that 1977 40-year class reunion from Queen Elizabeth composite high school. That individual was the graduating class president for that year. That individual, who was the grad class president, had been killed in a car accident in a collision caused by a drunk driver six months after he graduated from that high school. That individual was my brother Kevin Dach. Kevin was my younger brother, and in that criminal collision his 17-year-old life was snuffed out.

I can tell you that we've been talking about the effects that drunk driving or impaired driving has on families, and I don't think there's a family represented by the members in this Legislature that has not been touched by impaired driving. I can tell you honestly that the family that my brother belonged to remains deeply touched by his death and the tragedy of that lost promise that was created by the reckless action of somebody who got behind the wheel while impaired. The individual was charged and convicted of drunk driving and received a \$1,500 fine and six-month licence suspension. There possibly was marijuana involved – I'm not sure – but as we've said in this legislation, impairment is impairment. I'm very pleased to see these measures go forward.

I know that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster remembers my brother well. He was attending Lakeland College, wanting to be a park warden. Of course, that never came to fruition, but we were able to place his ashes in Jasper national park, above the place where they had a field trip during his class training at Lakeland College. I do manage to usually get there every year and visit the site, knowing that they're placed in a spot where he would have hoped to have worked, had he had the opportunity to live a normal lifespan without it being cut short by somebody's reckless actions.

Members opposite talk to me about whether this legislation is happening too fast, whether maybe we should be waiting for an adequate test to be determined before we move forward with it. I agree that the timelines are tight – I think that all provinces across this country know that the timelines are tight – but I don't say: too fast. I say: giddy-up.

Members opposite like to talk about business opportunities and letting private business find solutions to problems. Well, guess

what? Here's one. Let's get private business and/or government labs going on this right away. There's a heck of a business opportunity. If you solve the issue of testing for cannabis in a person's blood system and come up with a good test solution, you're going to have a very profitable business on your hands.

As we approach Grey Cup day – November 27, 1977, was the date that a drunk driver killed my brother as well as two others in the same car. So three dead, one injured for life and changed forever. It happened on Grey Cup day in 1977. All were students at Lakeland College, full of promise, and every family affected horribly by it. Every member of this Assembly knows how it affects families, and those that have been directly affected, really never forget and always are affected by the death or tragic injury of a loved one.

I seldom will have a drink if I'm going to drive, and I do ask myself whenever I'm at a function: how many joints or drinks would I like my airline pilot to have before they get into the cockpit? That's the question we should be asking ourselves and Albertans when we talk about how much tolerance there should be for any alcohol or impairment substances we might put into our system before deciding to get behind a wheel. Personally, I'd like to see zero tolerance extended to everybody who happens to get behind the wheel. That may be a point we get to at some point. Ultimately, I'd hope we get there.

But for the moment I'm glad to support this legislation. I do hope that we do elicit the business community to recognize a business opportunity and develop a test system very quickly, and I hope that we are able to find something that satisfies the scientific needs for proving charges in court. In the meantime implementing the legislation now will act as a deterrent and save lives even as we seek a reliable test method.

So enjoy yourselves this holiday period, Grey Cup period, but I suggest that you employ zero tolerance in your habits when you decide to get behind a wheel for all the reasons that you've outlined or have seen outlined before you today.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for sharing that very personal story and also all of the other members who have participated in the debate this afternoon. This bill is very wide ranging. A lot of us would also benefit from continued conversations with our constituents.

With that being said and seeing the hour, I would move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 29.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur on the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just seeing the hour and the incredible, robust debate we've had this afternoon – I also

understand that the roads around the province might be a little bit icy today – in consideration of that, I'd like to move that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. on the Monday following the constituency week.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:59 p.m. to Monday, November 27, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, November 16, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c13]

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2017 c11]

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c10]

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c12]

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c14]

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c15]

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017, with exceptions; SA 2017 cC-2.3]

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft.*), 1534-51 (*Jun. 5, 2017 aft.*), 1553-67 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1589-93 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c9]

Bill 18* — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1567-79 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1587-89 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017; c8]

Bill 19 — An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers (Gray)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1648-53 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1695-98 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1729-31 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act (Phillips)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1627-35 (*Oct. 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1655-64 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1728-29 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 21 — Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1664-72 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1699-1706 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1789-90 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 22 — Resident and Family Councils Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1687-94 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1706-14 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 1731-32 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1790-94 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 23 — Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017 (Ganley)

First Reading — 1685-86 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1761-69 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1805-15 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1910-17 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 24 — An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances (Eggen)

First Reading — 1726-27 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1769-74 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796-1803 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft.*), 1833-46 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1847-55 (*Nov. 9, 2017 morn.*), 1870-75 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1917-19 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1921-35 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 25 — Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 1745 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1794-96 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1815-19 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1935-36 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 26 — An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis (Ganley)

First Reading — (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 27* — Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1831 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1876-78 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1904-10 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1936-39 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn.*), 1955-59 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 28 — School Amendment Act, 2017 (Eggen)

First Reading — 1953 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1980-81 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 29 — An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving (Mason)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1959-66 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1982-85 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 1614-20 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division (not proceeded with)*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 cA-5.5]

Bill 206* — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1747-56 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1879-82 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1756-58 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft.*), 1882-90 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 209 — Radon Awareness and Testing Act (Luff)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 210 — Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017 (Smith)

First Reading — 1869 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 27, 2017

Day 56

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 27, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Great game, sad score.

Please join me in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. Sing in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, if we might reflect and pray. As we gather today, let us not forget that this Assembly, Alberta's Assembly, is an institution created to represent every person who calls this province their home. We are all here. We are all Albertans. In our deliberations today we must be mindful of how each person's identity is shaped by many different things. Thus, we must keep in mind how each would be affected by the decisions that we will make.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans are incredibly concerned about crime, so much so that over 100 of them are in our gallery today to show their concern to this government. Included in that group are Alison Marshall, who has done a lot of groundwork in preparation for today; Red Deer county's Mayor Jim Wood and councillors Richard Lorenz, Dana Depalme, and Christine Moore; Raven Crime Watch executive members Richard Foesier, Fred Grono, Richard Gundersen, and Margaret Lowe; and my beautiful wife, Maggie MacIntyre. I'd ask them to stand now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce some of the finest, brightest, wildly intelligent, competent, capable, incredible, fantastic students from Prairie Christian academy. They're joined today by a good friend of mine, their teacher Michael Robertson, and Bill Redifer. If they would all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you 30 students, who are seated in the galleries today, from St. John XXIII Catholic elementary school, a school in my constituency, the most beautiful constituency,

I think, and probably some of the smartest students in the entire province. I had the pleasure of opening that school with the Minister of Education. They are accompanied here today by their teachers Mme Jennifer Steedsman and Mme Ashley Stevens along with their chaperones Mrs. Debra Somani, Mrs. Nicia Gerhard, and Ms Jodie de Moissac. If they'd please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups here today?

Seeing and hearing none, the Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. With your indulgence, I do have three sets of introductions. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Dennis Malayko and his family – Merrilou Malayko, Mark Malayko, Erin Angelstad, and Mya Angelstad – who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. In 1974 the Alberta government established the Gale commission to provide advice and recommendations on how to prevent workplace injuries and deaths. As the first occupational health and safety officer in Alberta Dennis worked on that commission's recommendations, advice that would form our province's first health and safety system. He advocated strongly to the Lougheed government for improvements and to Lougheed himself directly in meetings, and while much of this work was done, his advice to form mandatory joint work-site health and safety committees was not taken. Today is a testament to the old adage that you should never let them tell you that it can't be done, even if it takes over 40 years. He is now retired, but his hard work on health and safety will benefit all Albertans for decades to come. I'd like to ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to also introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Shirley Hickman and Donna Van Bruggen from Threads of Life. Workplace tragedies don't just affect the workers involved; they have a profound impact on families. After losing her son in a workplace tragedy in Ontario in 1996, Shirley cofounded Threads of Life, a national registered charity dedicated to helping families affected by workplace tragedy. Many families have been helped by Threads of Life, families like Donna's. Donna, too, lost her son in a workplace tragedy, in 2012. Now Donna is a volunteer speaker for Threads of Life. They work every day to lead and inspire a future where all workplaces are safe and workplace injuries, illnesses, and deaths are unacceptable. I would now like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Gray: For my final introduction, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Alyssa Smith from the Workers' Resource Centre in Calgary. The Workers' Resource Centre is a charitable organization funded through the United Way of Calgary and Area, the Alberta Law Foundation, and donations from individuals and organizations across Alberta. They assist and support Albertans by helping them to complete applicable forms, writing letters, initiating claims and complaints and appeals when workers are injured. She helps in representing them at appeals and hearings and referrals to appropriate agencies. I'm very pleased

to have her here with us today. I'd like to ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of advocates from the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Hemophilia Society. November 26 marked the 20th anniversary of the Krever inquiry, which investigated contamination of the blood supply with HIV and hepatitis C. Thousands of Canadians with hemophilia and other blood disorders were impacted through the use of tainted blood products. We continue to honour the memory of those who were impacted. The tainted blood tragedy remains one of Canada's worst-ever public health disasters, and it stands as a reminder of why patient safety must be at the heart of our public health care system. I ask the following guests – Carmen Nishiyama, Cleaven Pagani, and Joanna Halliday – who are seated in the Speaker's gallery, to please rise and receive our welcome and our gratitude.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a friend, mentor, and my former boss, Yvonne Fast. Yvonne worked in health care for many years before becoming involved in the labour movement. She held many positions, including president of CUPE Alberta, the national staff representative for CUPE national, and, recently, provincial director. I came to know Yvonne when I worked with CUPE negotiating for workers in nonprofits and women's shelters all across our province. Yvonne was a caring boss and always challenged me to sharpen and refine many of the skills that have helped me in my role in this House. After a career spanning over 30 years fighting for the rights of workers in our province, Yvonne is retiring as the regional director of CUPE Alberta, and she will be missed. Yvonne is joined here today by her husband, Mitchell Fast. I wish them both well in this new chapter in their lives. I hope that they spend time, of course, during their retirement travelling around this province and spending some tourism dollars. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a visiting delegation from Lakeland county crime watch. They are part of a group of over 100 Albertans here today upset and concerned with the rise of crime in rural Alberta. I would ask that they please stand as I call their names: Gabrielle Bayduza, Myra Bochon, Trevor Dunham, Levina Ewasiuk, Lillian Ewasiuk, Dennis Heffernan, Erna Holliday, Deborah Lawrence, Wray McCoy, Jonny Nielsen, Carolyn Onusko, Louise Poirier-McCoy, Orest Sereda, Lyn Young, Dolores Zacharuk, and Lawrence Zarowny. Please join me in extending my guests the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, you have a second group. Is that right?

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and introduce some wonderful constituents from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They've travelled here to watch the proceedings today. Well, they have some significant concerns about rural crime and the continual victimization that's going on in rural Alberta with the amount of crime that is taking place. There are seven folks from the constituency here today. If they will rise as I call their names: Glenn Bishell, Connie Huelsman, Bryan Kasha, Richard Ross, Dave Stauber, and Lorraine Richards, who, I might add, has been broken into seven – seven – times. These guests are seated in both galleries. I hope that they will be here and that the minister will accept our request for an emergency debate on this very important issue of rural crime.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you a number of folks from the central Alberta area who are here because they are very concerned about rural crime and violence that they are experiencing. From 2012 to 2015 Lacombe county experienced an increase in total crime offenses of 141 per cent, reported by the RCMP, and a property crime increase of almost 200 per cent. I would ask that as I call out your name, you would please stand: from Lacombe county a member of the Burnt Lake crime watch, Harvey Buit; Lacombe county councillor Dana Kreil and Edward Kreil; the Benalto crime watch president, Jim Morton; a citizen from Lacombe county, Joan Smith; the mayor of Alix, Robert Fehr, who has also been a past crime watch president and is still actively involved in crime watch; Lacombe county's deputy reeve, Ken Wigmore, also a member of the Lacombe rural crime watch, that he serves on; from the city of Lacombe a citizen, Garth Campbell; the mayor of Amisk, Bill Rock; and, lastly, from Battle River-Wainwright crime force organizer Blake Moser. If you would please all receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests, hon. members? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of concerned Albertans. Rural Albertans are tired of living in fear. They're tired of having police on speed-dial, they're tired of being robbed, and they're tired of being forgotten. Included in the over 100 people here today looking for answers are Mr. David Hamilton, Kayli Henrikson, Mary-Ann Henrikson, Clarence Jobs, Inez Jobs, Lorie Johanson, Edith Kaiser, Arnold Kaiser, and Carol Lawson. I'd like to invite them to please stand and to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you today a group from the over 100 people that are here today to bring communication on the concerns that they're seeing of crime in rural Alberta. These people that I'm introducing to you are from Red Deer county, one of the beautiful counties that I have the privilege of representing in this place. Sadly, it ranks as number 5 in *Maclean's* magazine's most dangerous places to live in Canada, and the people that I'm about to introduce to you know why. I would like to ask them to stand as I say their names.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're not introducing all 100?

Mr. Nixon: No, Mr. Speaker. I'm not introducing all 100, but I suspect all 100 will be introduced before we're done. I have Kent Anderson, Lynn Hambly, Pamela Davidson, Jim Loughheed, Terry MacKenzie, James Martin, Sandra Martin, Elgar Newsham, Linda Nielen, Doris Norman, and Gerald Oxtoby. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it is an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you again a group of individuals who are very frustrated Albertans. Their friendly communities have turned into communities of suspicion, and instead of relaxing at home, they are on edge and here with us today. Included in the group from Red Deer county are Fred Andersen, Bernice Andersen, Tammy Cocke, Robert Bilowus, Jeremy Crossman, John Marshall, Allan Erickson, Garth Fitch, Wendy Wilson, Kenneth Rogoza, and Mabel Hamilton. If they could please rise, we can extend to them the warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you for being here.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans are being victimized and revictimized by criminals. They are openly frustrated and scared, and many of them have come here today because of that. I'd like to introduce to you and through you – and I'd invite them to stand as I mention their names – Vincent Lohman, Cameron Lohman, Lisa Newton, Jack Oszli, Catherine Perry, Edward and Alfred Schatschneider, and Judith Winn. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly concerned citizens from a group of over a hundred who have joined us here today. I can assure you that we would have more, but there are not enough seats. Living in fear is no way to live. Being afraid to stay in your home and afraid to live is an impossible situation. I'd like to invite Kellyann Rude, Brian Rude, Sandra Smith, Margo Staniforth, Edward Whitehead, Kenneth Whitehead, Roderick Strong, Dwayne Tyrkalo, Gary Wagers, and Glen Wordie to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to continue with the introductions, to postpone question period, until they are finished and to extend the time for the Routine until it's completed.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Are there any other introductions here today, hon. members? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was going to do this introduction later, but I believe that my guests are in the gallery. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the amazing occupational health and safety and legal team that has worked hard on the legislation being

introduced today, Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. We have with us Diane Radnoff, Elizabeth Chung, Melinda Yiu, Amanda Stephenson, Ray Cislo, Ann Laing, Teresa McKinnon, Mark Rice, Chelsea Evans-Rymes, Jill Willis, Candice Kinal, and Mark Greene.

Mr. Speaker, lots of hard work goes into proposing positive change, and we couldn't be here without the knowledge and expertise of our civil servants in Alberta Labour. They work hard every day to ensure that Albertans have safe and healthy workplaces, and they have my utmost gratitude for the work that they do. I'd like them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Response to Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we've been urging this government to step up and start defending our energy sector, and good on them for at least trying to do so this last week. They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, so I guess the Hon. Jason Kenney should be quite flattered to see the Premier borrow some of his language. But talk is cheap. To the Premier: if her Trudeau Liberal allies refuse to actually advocate in B.C., will she rescind her support for Justin Trudeau's 67 per cent hike on the carbon tax? The job-killing carbon tax, I might add.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for giving me an opportunity to talk about our government's continued and ongoing support of our energy industry and about the work that we've been doing over the last week and a half and that will be going on next week, which, of course, is a continuation of the work that we began months after we got elected. It's very, very important for us to deliver the message to all Canadians that our energy industry supports all Canadians and that our energy industry provides stability and good jobs for working families across this country. And, quite interestingly, another message that I will . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: If you think that a 75 per cent tax on natural gas is bad now, just wait until Ottawa's carbon tax hike comes into place, with Justin Trudeau demanding a 67 per cent increase to the NDP's own job-killing carbon tax and the Premier conceding to that without a fight and without one inch of pipeline actually being built. In fact, Ottawa has killed two pipelines since then. I previously tried to pass a motion demanding that Ottawa rein in the National Energy Board's decision to include upstream and downstream emissions in a pipeline assessment. Unfortunately, the NDP government blocked my efforts. But since the government is again following our lead, will the Premier now . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, carrying on with what I was saying before, our government was very proud to work with and stand with our energy industry from the point when we got elected and moving forward. One way we

started doing that was by working with those progressive leaders in the energy industry who understood that we needed to position ourselves as the most sustainable and responsible energy producer in the world, which they have successfully done, and they have my great support. But what they need is for the members opposite to stop calling them down, stop political grandstanding, and start pulling together with the rest of the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this Premier is the one who called Albertans embarrassing cousins. I'm glad to see that she doesn't think that anymore. But let's talk about this. The last time the Premier visited with her friend John Horgan, who is now the B.C. Premier, the B.C. NDP Premier, he said that she had no intention of persuading him when it came to pipelines. It's a simple question. The Premier will visit Vancouver later this week. Will she meet with her old comrade John Horgan, the NDP Premier of B.C., and will she actually defend and stand up for pipelines with him? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know that you're all glad to be back in this happy, joyous place and you're looking forward to exchanges with each other. Let's make sure that we are quiet, and we can enjoy this time together.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to begin, when it comes to past references to awkward relatives, let me be entirely clear. That reference was with respect to the Conservative Party and their predecessors over there and their record, the record that they have in not succeeding in terms of getting pipelines built. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: The message that I've been delivering this week to the federal NDP is: a climate plan that doesn't understand and support working people is bound to fail. The message to the federal Liberal government is: stand up and get the job done. And the message to the Conservatives is: stop playing politics about something that's so important to all Canadians.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Keystone XL Pipeline Project

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are sincerely pleased to see Keystone XL approved in Nebraska last week. On this side of the House we support pipelines for Alberta oil in every direction. Unfortunately, the NDP can't say the same. When in opposition the Premier said that they were against it when asked about Keystone XL. When in government the NDP abandoned the fight for Keystone. When Hillary Clinton came out against the pipeline, the Premier agreed. Now we hope that the NDP has had a genuine about-face when it comes to Keystone. Will the Premier admit that her party's previous opposition to Keystone was wrong headed?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated last week, our government was pleased to see the progress that was made with respect to Keystone because we understand that it is important for our energy industry. It's important for ensuring that we reduce costs and ultimately increase returns for Albertans and

for Canadians. Of course, the allegations about things that our government did were in fact something that's two sword lengths, one nose length in between here and there. I will say that we've been standing up for the Alberta energy industry, and the members opposite need to start acknowledging it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Calm it down, folks. Calm it down.

Mr. Nixon: The hon. Rob Merrifield, Alberta's former envoy to Washington, DC, revealed last week that the first order he received from this incoming NDP government was to stop advocating for Keystone. I'll remind you that at that time Keystone had not been rejected by the White House. In fact, there was a major effort to get congressional approval, and the NDP scuttled that effort. The government has denied Merrifield's claims. To the Premier: if you have nothing to hide, will you table your communications between your office and Alberta's mission to Washington in 2015?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, the assertions made by Mr. Kenney and his political friends are absolutely, deeply, profoundly untrue. The reputation that the members opposite are starting to develop with respect to their relationship with facts is something that all Albertans are beginning to worry about. You know what? You've just got to stop making stuff up. That's what the member opposite is referring to, something that was made up, and that's all I have to say on the matter.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I gave the Premier an opportunity to provide facts. She did not. Instead she insulted the hon. Rob Merrifield, insulted the Hon. Jason Kenney. Instead of standing up in this House and proving that what she says is true, she continues to use decoys and to go out of her way to insult people. The question is: table the documents and prove that what you're saying is true, or it's not. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. There's snow in Toronto, but it's very nice outside today here, so you want to make sure that you get out there and enjoy that fresh air.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I can't table documents that don't exist. But had I ever given direction to Mr. Merrifield, what I would likely have said was something along the lines of, "Stop using your diplomatic position to promote the political aspirations of your former party," much like he's doing right now.

Interestingly, though, what I can say is that I am very proud that this government appointed a professional diplomat who has been working on behalf of the people of Alberta and supporting our energy industry in Washington ever since. We've gotten success, there will be more, and I'm very proud of that.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Rural Crime

Mr. Nixon: Rural Albertans across this province are expressing their concerns about the dramatic increase in crime in their communities. They're being victimized, they're being abused, and the Justice minister for this government says that everything is okay and the system is working okay. The people in the gallery and the people back home in my constituency and across rural Alberta disagree, so today I will move an emergency motion before this House. I ask through you, Mr. Speaker: will the Premier and her

caucus support that emergency debate motion so that we can stand up for the people that are victimized by criminals in this province?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite ought to know that the proposal that they're putting forward is undoubtedly outside of the rules of the House although we'll see what happens when the matter is discussed.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Ms Notley: That being said, it doesn't take away at all from the importance of this issue to all Albertans and especially to rural Albertans. We know that they want to feel safe in their communities, and we know that crime is going up in certain communities across the province. That's why our government is continuing to invest in policing. That's why our government is supporting the rural integrated crime unit. That's why our government is continuing to support all the funding that prevents crime.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the Premier thinks that she's you and she can decide what's in order in this House, but that is ridiculous.

Here are the facts. The people that she's talking about are in this gallery today. The people that she's talking about are being robbed, are being abused, are being victimized, and are scared to be in their own homes. I am tired of going home on constituency breaks or on the weekend and hearing the abuse that the people that I represent are going through. Again, I will ask through you, Mr. Speaker: will the Premier stand up, vote with us, declare an emergency debate? Let's get down to work for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you and most other members of this House know, that's not exactly the way the process works. That being said, I'm very pleased that our acting Minister of Justice will be having the opportunity today to meet with a number of the people who are here today, and we are also very pleased that over the course of the last week and a half we've been able to have even more meetings through AAMDC and AUMA. We have in fact heard the head of AAMDC, who said that he trusts that this government is working as hard as it can to address the issue that we know is a very serious problem for rural Albertans. But one thing that I will definitely say . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, if you're not in support of this motion, you may as well be with the criminals that are victimizing my constituents. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. People are being robbed in our communities. People are being victimized in our communities.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: They're here . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to caution the use of words by implication with respect to criminals in the House. I did not hear the preamble as clearly as I wanted because it was too noisy. However, I hope that wasn't the case. Please, continue with your question.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, is this government going to stand up for Albertans or hide behind the ridiculous procedural arguments that

this Premier is trying to bring forward? We will bring forward a motion where we can stand up for Albertans in this House today. Is the Premier with Albertans, or is she against them? It's that simple.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, did you make a point of order?

Mr. Mason: I did.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the people of Alberta need is a reasoned debate, reasoned government actions to deal with this crisis. What they do not need is grandstanding and name-calling of the sort that we just saw. That won't help anything. I'm pleased that the minister will be meeting with these folks. We are very pleased that we are continuing to fund these important, important programs. You know what won't help this problem? Cutting it by 20 per cent. How in heaven's name does the member opposite expect to make progress with the kinds of cuts that they keep demanding?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Study after study after study has shown that the Springbank off-stream reservoir is the cheapest, most effective, and most timely way to ensure that the downtown Calgary and river communities are protected from flooding like we saw in 2013. My constituents and everyone who cares about the economic engine of downtown Calgary were very concerned when the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency sent back a long list of questions about the Springbank environmental impact assessment. To the Minister of Transportation: given that your department has put a lot of resources into preparing that EIA, why are there still so many outstanding questions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. He's been a solid advocate on behalf of the Springbank reservoir, which is something that is strongly supported and continues to be strongly supported by this government because it is the right answer to protect Calgary from future major flood events. We have not wavered. We are not wavering now. Now, having said that, there are a number of deficiencies in the EIA, as has been pointed out, but these kinds of requests for further information are normal and part of the normal process. We're working very hard to supply the additional information.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This spring will represent five years since the devastating southern Alberta floods, and every year that goes by brings more risk, so it's incredibly frustrating to see that there may be yet another delay on this project. The timeline has already been extended, and I'm worried this latest setback will put the people and businesses in southern Alberta at risk for even longer. Again to the Minister of Transportation: what impact will this information request have on the project timeline, and what are you doing to ensure that your department will work quickly to answer the CEAA's questions and keep the project on track?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member and the House that the department and I are working full out to make sure that these deficiencies are remedied as quickly as possible and as thoroughly as possible. We think that any delays will be measured in weeks and not months.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was revealed that the few remaining landowners opposed to this project are coming up with new and creative ways to try to block it. Most recently they've proposed a development in what appears to be an attempt to frustrate the province's legitimate plans to acquire the land. Again to the minister: will this tactic have an impact on the project costs or timeline, and can you reassure the countless thousands of people who would benefit from this project – including my constituents, everyone who lives or works in downtown Calgary, the people downstream of the city, including those in Siksika, Medicine Hat, and rural Alberta – that you remain committed to the Springbank off-stream reservoir?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure unequivocally that we remain committed to the Springbank off-stream reservoir as a solution to the protection of Calgary from future flood events. I want to assure him that we are doing everything possible. This particular proposed development will not change the value of the land, and we don't consider it a serious proposition. It's an attempt to drive up the cost of the land, and we're making sure that we do everything possible to make sure that does not happen.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Sexual Violence Survivors

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that sexual violence predominantly is a gendered crime. The vast majority of survivors are women, and our government is making good progress on this, but there's still more work to be done. We have all seen the flood of disclosures of gender-based violence on social media with the Me Too hash tag. To the Minister of Status of Women: how can we support survivors of sexual violence who have disclosed abuse that's happened to them?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have certainly been humbled by the outpouring of disclosures of sexual violence. All Albertans deserve to be free from the threat of violence. We know that the root cause of gendered violence is gender inequality, and that's why our government has taken a number of steps to address violence against women in this province and to shift the culture, including investing over \$800,000 over three years to fund the I Believe You campaign, because it's important that survivors know that if they come forward, they will be treated with respect and dignity. By tackling women's equality, we tackle violence against women. That's why for the first time in Alberta's history we established a ministry dedicated to advancing women's equality.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had many survivors of sexual abuse come into my constituency office to share their stories

and seek help. One constituent in particular was sexually abused at a very young age and was put into various foster care arrangements, where the abuse continued for many years. To the same minister: what is our government doing to protect and support sexual abuse survivors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in this country, we, unlike our friends opposite, understand how critical it is to invest in women's safety. We boosted funding for women's shelters by \$15 million to help ensure that women and their children fleeing from violence are not turned away. We increased access to the legal system for survivors of domestic violence by removing the time limit to bring forward civil claims. We made it easier for survivors of domestic violence to get out of dangerous situations by allowing them to break residential leases without financial penalty. Even with these important steps we on this side of the House know that there is much more work to do. We will continue to work with our valued community and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

2:10

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that survivors are feeling empowered to come forward and get help. To the same minister: what is our government doing specifically with initiatives to help empower survivors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Survivors of sexual violence deserve to be believed, feel safe, and be supported. Our government is taking action to make life better for women and girls in Alberta. We've invested more than half a billion dollars in front-line policing and established guidelines for police to help ensure a consistent response to domestic violence incidents. We've increased funding by \$25 million to help family and community support services address issues like sexual violence and to promote healthy relationships, and we've promoted sexual assault prevention programs with stable funding. We've invested more than \$21.7 million in family and community safety grants to support programs which focus on preventing domestic and sexual violence, all things that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Rural Crime (continued)

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler the community of Donalda has started to put together a rural crime watch to help deal with the ever-increasing problem of rural crime. They understand that the RCMP have vast areas to patrol. They have concerns that even when it's common knowledge about who the problem citizens are, police resources are so sparse that they can't properly investigate. To the minister: what are you doing to support these small communities beyond telling them to request additional officers? If that actually worked, why would rural crime be so rampant?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to answer all of these questions on behalf of the Minister of Justice today. I want to first of all reassure the members of Donalda and everybody in the galleries today that our government takes the issue of rural crime very seriously. We believe that every Albertan deserves to live in a community that's safe, and our government has invested significant resources in policing all across this province.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Schmidt: Five hundred million dollars a year to be exact, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to look forward to the opportunity to meet with some members of the gallery after question period to discuss some additional steps that our government can take to reduce rural crime.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that known criminals with lengthy criminal records are committing crimes such as petty theft in these areas and given that when these criminals are finally brought to justice, they are given a slap on the wrist by the courts, Minister, Albertans want to know what your government is doing to promote minimum sentencing in order to ensure that these habitual offenders are taken off the street and out of our communities.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it's my understanding that the issue of minimum sentencing is a federal jurisdiction issue and not necessarily one that the province would deal with. With respect to getting notorious criminals off the street, the integrated crime reduction unit in central Alberta has already been successful at taking three extremely well-known individuals off the streets. These people have been responsible for over 300 calls over the last few months. Our government continues to support the RCMP in their work to reduce crime in central Alberta and in rural areas all across the province.

Mr. Strankman: Given that these Albertans are fed up with what seems to be a common practice of the Crown to drop cases over an overtaxed court system and given that the recent ruling on the Jordan case has compounded this troubling issue and given that justice delayed is justice denied, Minister, your government claims to be doing everything it can to alleviate these issues. Will you table the performance measures that you're using to track how effective your policies are at combatting this troubling situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we continue to push the federal government to fill the additional judicial spaces that we created, and I'd be pleased to table a copy of the letter that the Minister of Justice sent to her federal counterpart after question period today. We've also hired 50 additional Crown prosecutors. We've hired additional court staff. We're confident that those measures will accelerate the processes through the courts and make sure that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Crime and Public Safety in Airdrie and Area

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, Airdrie has a vibrant business community that has grown significantly over the past decade. We've also had the CrossIron Mills mall open nearly eight years ago, and another

new megamall is set to open up right beside it. The business community is getting increasingly concerned about the rising incidence of crime in the area, particularly theft, property damage, and criminal mischief. The Balzac Business Community Association and local RCMP have identified and communicated a need for increased manpower to handle the larger population. The Airdrie and area RCMP remains at eight members, same as it was eight years ago. What is this NDP government doing about this very major problem?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government is committed to making sure that the businesses in Balzac as well as the residents of every community feel safe in their homes. Our government is working diligently to do that. We continue to provide over half a billion dollars in funding to police services all across the province to make sure that we have adequate resources on the streets. In addition, our government has taken meaningful steps to reduce the red tape that police officers have to deal with so that they can spend more time on the streets and less time pushing pencils behind desks.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this situation isn't improving, and this government isn't helping. With the business park near CrossIron Mills mall experiencing a 24 per cent increase in property crimes in one year and given that multiple businesses have actually been broken into multiple times and given that owners have taken to sleeping in their shops overnight out of fear for their property and livelihoods and given that this shouldn't happen in a democratic, orderly society, again, what is this government doing to address my constituents fears and concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the Minister of Justice's office has already heard from the people of Balzac that the hon. member referred to, and we've provided them some additional information, some steps that they can do to enhance crime prevention in their communities. Of course, our government continues to provide adequate financial resources for police officers all across the province, financial resources, I would remind you, that those members voted against.

Mrs. Pitt: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I sure hope that those criminals get that memo.

Given that the province of Alberta is responsible for ensuring that an adequate and effective level of policing is maintained throughout the province and given that crime is on the rise everywhere – we're seeing it in rural areas, and we're seeing it in urban areas – and given that this is not just about material possessions but that people are fearing for their personal safety, their physical safety, and given that we live in a first-world country, what is this NDP government doing to keep people safe?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, I've heard from many rural Albertans from all across the province about their concerns about crime, and our government is committed to making sure that our communities remain safe places to live. What we are doing is providing stable funding for police services all across the province during the worst economic downturn in a generation, financial resources that those members continue to vote against and are in fact proposing to cut.

Rural Crime (continued)

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, rural Alberta is under siege. Rural residents are in constant fear of coming home to find that they have been robbed. But they are not only concerned with the loss of property; rural Albertans are also concerned about themselves and their loved ones being physically harmed at the hands of these criminals. Rural Albertans do not feel safe. I know one friend personally who was attacked in his home by five assailants, and he was beaten with a baseball bat. What is this government going to do to ensure that rural Albertans receive the same level of protection as those in cities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've very concerned to hear these stories of crime happening all across the province. Our government is committed to making sure that every Albertan feels safe in their home, and that's why we continue to provide resources for police services all across the province. Additionally, the new deputy commissioner of the RCMP in Alberta has undertaken a number of initiatives to tackle rural crime, which include a crime reduction strategy, renewed focus on the intelligence program, continued focus on traffic services as well as the development of the call management strategy so that police resources are used as efficiently as possible so that we can tackle these issues of rural crime.

Mr. MacIntyre: Rural Albertans, frankly, are fed up with the exorbitant wait times for police to arrive on the scene. Given that just last year the Red Deer area topped Stats Canada's crime severity index, if the government will not protect rural Albertans, who will? Does it fall to rural Albertans to protect themselves? Is this government prepared for the implications of that? Nobody wants to see people physically hurt or even killed. What is this government's plan to address this severe injustice?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you who they can't trust, and that's Jason Kenney because he wants to cut the police budget by 20 per cent, which would take half of all of our police officers off the road. In fact, he has a track record of making these cuts as a government member in cabinet in Ottawa. He cut funding to ALERT and will continue to turn his back on Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members.

Mr. MacIntyre: This NDP government has done nothing but fail Albertans on the Justice file. Given that triage protocol from this NDP government has meant violent criminals have gone unprosecuted, further endangering victims, and given the known high incidence of recidivism and corresponding danger that rural Albertans now face as a consequence of this gross inaction, will this NDP government finally listen to Albertans that enough is enough and get tough on crime?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government is in fact investing resources in dealing with criminal processes. We've invested in hiring 50 more Crown prosecutors, we've increased court staff, and we're building a new courthouse

in Red Deer so that we can deal with these cases in a timely manner. Our record shows that we are, in fact, tough on crime. A 20 per cent cut in the budget would be tough on police and would leave these people in the galleries to continue to be victimized by the criminals roaming rural Alberta.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that rural crime is rampant in areas of Alberta, and quite frankly citizens are sick of it. I've reached out, and I have some questions from victims. It used to be rare, you know, to know someone that had something stolen out on the farm. Now it's rare if you know someone that hasn't. Minister, does the NDP even know or care what's happening outside the large cities, and what are they doing about it besides asking the AUMA to write their local MP for more RCMP resources?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, I have many friends and family who live in rural Alberta communities all across the province, and I've heard from them how scared they are in their homes and how fearful they are that they could be potential victims of crime. That's why our government has continued to invest in police resources. I'm not sure, if the members are concerned about theft, why they're endorsing Jason Kenney to steal money from the budgets from police so that they will no longer be able to do their jobs.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

I want to caution everyone with respect – we've heard on at least two occasions from each side of the House references to personal character, words like "criminals," "theft," and "stealing." I want to remind you all that . . . [interjection] Hon. member.

The first supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Given that these rural victims feel alone after crimes perpetuated against them and given that the police don't come sometimes for a day to investigate, if they come at all, and given that law enforcement don't let victims know and the public know if they actually catch anyone or try to, Minister, does this government intend to direct law enforcement to keep the victims of crime informed during the investigation process instead of increasing their sense of isolation and uncertainty by not informing them whether the perpetrator is still at large?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All I can say on this issue is that we continue to provide the supports to police through providing half a billion dollars in funding to make sure that the police are on the streets fighting crime. In addition, like I said before in an answer to a previous question, we've reduced the red tape the police have to deal with so that they can spend more of their time fighting crime and not dealing with busywork behind their desks.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, given that a constituent had his truck stolen and tools and equipment within the back of it in one week and then the criminals came back to try to steal his son's truck the following week and given that insurance rates rise rapidly once claims are made and given the lack of communication by law enforcement which would keep victims in the loop and given that self-defence makes criminals out of law-abiding citizens, Minister, he wants to know: when will this government stand up for the victims and ensure that these criminals are prosecuted to the full extent of the law, not given a slap on the wrist?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I would remind the member that the federal Conservative government was in power for 10 years and they did nothing to increase the number of judge positions here in Alberta. They also, with Jason Kenney as a member of that cabinet, cut funding to ALERT. They continue to turn their back on Albertans and created this. We stepped up with funding. We replaced the federal funding that was taken away by Jason Kenney. Our government is supporting rural Albertans. We're tackling crime. Those guys, when they had the opportunity, actually made it worse.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. You have a point of order?
The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Rural Police Service and Crime Prevention

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta policing is in a crisis. The RCMP are the lowest paid force in the province. They cannot get enough recruits. Member morale is at an all-time low. I know ex-RCMP members who quit the force. Ottawa doesn't care, and we are not getting value for the contract money we pay. Will this government tell us how much money we spend on the RCMP's policing contract and how much of that actually goes to real Alberta community policing versus federal national security and non-Alberta administrative expenses?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the member is that we provide over \$500 million to support policing all across the province. If the member opposite is concerned about what the federal government was doing with funding police in this province, he should probably ask his friend Jason Kenney what he did on the issue because what we know is that he actually made the issue worse by cutting ALERT funding, funding that we had to step up and fill in because the federal Conservative government wasn't willing to, money that we could have used to further prevent rural crime and reduce rural crime, but we were given no choice because Jason Kenney turned his back on Albertans when he was in Ottawa.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, one woman writes: "Our new business in a fenced, locked compound has been broken into four times in four months. I can't sleep at night worrying, waiting for the next hit. Another victimless crime? I don't think so," she says. Given that she went to a Citizens on Patrol meeting in Rimbey and 230 crime-affected, fearful, and frustrated community members filled that room, does this government intend to leave citizens to enact their own patrols? If so, how will you assist them, or will you just abandon them to fend for themselves?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very sorry to hear about this case. Of course, I've heard concerns about crime from members of rural Alberta from all across the province, and our government values safe and caring communities. That's why our government is stepping up to continue to fund police officers across the province.

In answer to his previous question, the RCMP contract salaries went up this past year, and we pay 70 per cent of the RCMP costs. I will endeavour to get further information for the member if he should so request.

Mr. Orr: I would appreciate that information. Thank you. Helpful.

Given that the justice system protects the rights of violent criminal repeat offenders, sends them laughing through revolving doors so they can continue to revictimize with their violence, and given that the rights, the safety, the civil security, the peaceful possession of law-abiding, unarmed, defenceless citizens are continually threatened, families are terrorized by gun-toting invaders while children literally hide under their beds – these are real and repeating events – when is this government going to fix a broken system that in real consequences actually tramples all remnants of safety and justice to rural, law-abiding citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you. Like the member opposite, I, too, have heard these kinds of stories of people being victimized in their own homes in rural Alberta. Our government doesn't find that situation acceptable. That's why we've taken steps to make the court system work more efficiently by hiring more Crown prosecutors, more court staff. We're also building the new Red Deer courthouse so that we can deal with these in a timely manner so that the criminals are off the streets and that people feel safe in their communities.

2:30 Opioid Use Prevention and Treatment

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, I could tell you many heart-wrenching stories about many individuals who face a complex path when trying to break the cycle of abuse. It is one of the many reasons I came into politics. The opioid crisis is affecting every community in our province, and rural communities face the additional barrier of limited access to services. To the Associate Minister of Health: how are you working to support Albertans' substance use issues in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number of Albertans that we have lost to this issue is so high, which should remind us all that the opioid crisis is serious and requires a government that is taking action. We have brought in thousands of new treatment spaces in every part of the province, including clinics in Cardston, Ponoka, Strathcona county, and expanded telehealth into the central zone and also to remote areas. As a result, the number of Albertans getting help has more than quadrupled this year. That's thousands and thousands of people out of harm's way, and that's good news.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. PCNs like the one in Sherwood Park play an important role in addressing this issue. To the minister: how are you working to ensure primary care networks have the expertise and resources to provide substance use treatment to patients?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our response to the opioid overdose crisis is guided by a diverse and committed group of Albertans. One of the commission's recommendations is to provide funding to bring substance use treatment into doctors' offices at primary care networks. We know that primary care physicians are on the front lines and are often in a position to provide early interventions and care. That's why I've accepted this recommendation, and we will be working with our physician partners to implement it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that last week the Canadian Institute for Health Information noted that Alberta dispenses opioid medications to patients at a higher rate than other provinces and given that this story of how addiction to opioids starts is all too common, what are you doing to help the medical profession evaluate their opioid prescribing practices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We supported the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta when they changed their standards of practice for opioid prescribing in March. Overprescribing is a serious problem, and I know that physicians understand that. They are changing their behaviour as a profession, and the early data shows that we are turning a corner on opioid overprescription.

Southern Alberta Wildfire Recovery

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the wildfire that devastated southeastern Alberta may be officially extinguished, but the devastation it caused continues to impact thousands of people. In Saskatchewan the provincial government is committed to matching private donations up to \$100,000 in support of wildfire victims. Here in Alberta our government is silent, and there is no such help. To the minister: will you commit to following Saskatchewan's lead and support Albertans devastated by wildfire by matching private donations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. Our government is committed to working with municipalities around the province to do our part to ensure that communities are protected. We know that wildfires in southern Alberta had significant impacts on the communities, and that's why we're continuing to work with them in their recovery.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that while the immediate danger from the fire has dissipated, many of the people that were impacted by the southeastern wildfires are now facing significant water quality issues and given that wildfires can cause a number of concerning changes to water quality such as increased sulphates and dissolved solids, including organic carbon, chloride, and iron, changes to pH level, and changes to the colour, taste, and odour of the water, again to the minister: what is being done to ensure that those impacted by the fire have safe drinking water for themselves and their livestock?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The member is right that, certainly, we have seen these effects on drinking water quality both in Fort McMurray and southeast Alberta and elsewhere, so that's why as a government we're committed to ensuring that we invest in water and waste-water treatment facilities.

As for the specifics of the question, I'm very pleased to follow up with the hon. member and any of the municipal officials or other ranching families or other landowners that might be affected by this.

Thanks.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you for that.

Given that in order to be eligible for DRP funding, a disaster must be extraordinary, insurance not reasonably or readily available, and that there is evidence the event is widespread and given that after talking with constituents affected by the wildfires, I understand that insurance for agricultural fencing and livestock is available but not widely purchased, to the minister: shouldn't it be considered unreasonable to expect farmers and ranchers to purchase a product that isn't widely purchased by their industry? Help these affected producers.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did meet with some folks last week at AUMA and, actually, previously at AAMD and C on topics like these, the wildfires and insurance. I'm working and my ministry is working with Ag and Forestry. Our administration folks are working with municipal officials in their areas as well. We're always trying to help Albertans, especially in times of need like this, and trying to figure out the existing programs we have, how they work, and how, you know, we could make sure that we're looking out for all Albertans. We'll continue to do that. Like I said, I've met with many municipal officials, and I'm happy to continue to do so going forward.

Crime in Carbon and Area

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I recently received a letter from a constituent in Carbon, Alberta, about the continued challenges in crime that they are facing in that community. In the month of September the grocery store was robbed four times along with vandalism and robberies at the gas station, the east campground lockbox, the garbage dump money box, the car wash change machine. This is on top of multiple vehicles that have been stolen from local farms along with fuel, tools, and equipment. How does this government expect the people of Carbon and surrounding area to feel safe in their homes and in their businesses when crime is so rampant?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we want the people of Carbon as well as people in communities all across this province to feel safe in their homes. That's why we're continuing to invest in police resources in rural areas all across the province. In addition, of course, we continue to invest in the court system so that we can move these cases, when criminals are charged, through the courthouse so that criminals are off the streets and people will continue to feel safe.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that in late September the grocery store in Carbon was robbed twice in a 48-hour period and that at one point in time the door was ripped off its frame by a truck and dragged down the street, causing significant damage, and given that following that incident the store owner, a civilian, had to camp outside the hole in the wall of his own business to protect that business because the RCMP was unable to intervene or attend, does this government expect civilians to act as full-time law enforcement officers, or what exactly is it planning on doing to provide communities and business owners the resources they need?

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you.
The Acting Minister of Justice.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'm very sorry to hear these stories. We want every Albertan to feel safe in

their homes and in their businesses, and that's why we've provided stable funding for police services across the province in the face of the worst economic downturn in the province. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Schmidt: I will remind the members that, of course, the answer to crime isn't to cut the police budget by 20 per cent so that there are fewer cops on the roads to put people behind bars.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that Lorraine Richards is in the gallery today and given that her home has been broken into seven times, including the loss of thousands of dollars of property, she asked me to ask directly the Minister of Justice: is Alberta Justice and the Sol Gen incapable of responding effectively and responsibly to the growing wave of crime in rural Alberta? Yes or no?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, to Lorraine, I'm very sorry that she suffered so many break-ins. You know, I don't think that any Albertan should have to go through that, and that's why our government wants everybody to live in a safe and caring community. We continue to provide resources for police services across the province, and like I said, we continue to cut red tape so that police no longer have to take bail hearings or deal with tickets and can spend more time on the streets reducing crime.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:40 Cold Lake Air Weapons Range Agreement

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. ID 349, more commonly known as the Cold Lake air weapons range, had its municipal revenues agreement lapse at the end of 2016. Many of my constituents in Bonnyville-Cold Lake are concerned that this agreement is 11 months overdue and that the Municipal Affairs department is deciding between transferring the funds to Alberta's general revenues or keeping the funds in my constituency. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can you confirm that this agreement is done and that the property tax revenues for ID 349 are staying in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake region, that I have advocated for for a long time?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. It is critically important that the revenue-sharing agreement for ID 349 go forward. It did expire, as the member said. We've been working on it in conjunction with the municipalities in the area. We asked for feedback on that. I will say that the money will stay in that region because that's what it's meant for.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that last week the mayor of Cold Lake stated that he was blindsided and treated with disrespect by this NDP government due to a lack of consultation on the new ID 349 agreement and given that the unilateral decision made by this minister has the city scrambling to make sustainable budgets, reprofile capital projects, and potentially places the development and buildup of the only city in my constituency on hold, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how did you determine the new redistribution of the funding agreement for ID 349?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, everything I try to do in my

role is to try to be fair and equitable. What we did was that we got feedback from the municipalities in the region. I've met with the mayor of Cold Lake multiple times since I've been appointed, which was last January, as well as with other folks in the region. We asked for input from them. We got that input; we looked it over. We asked for different people to give us even more input from the public. We brought forward this proposal to them last week. Frankly, sir, we've been in contact quite frequently, so "blindsided" is an interesting term to use for consultation with them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the La Corey north resource road, better known as highway 41X, is 50.3 kilometres long and is handling approximately 3,000 vehicles per day, well above the threshold for paving, and given that many residents in Cold Lake drive the road to and from work in ID 349 but that the MD of Bonnyville is responsible for the road and received no revenue to pave this road until just now, can the minister outline the details of the new ID 349 agreement that apply to this road, and should it have been made a provincial highway?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It's a good question. Actually, what the MD of Bonnyville had advocated for were the funds to make sure that they could take care of the road. They were okay with it. What we did do, through the new proposal, is that we've allocated them \$2.2 million, which is more than enough for them to make sure that that road is adequately paved and redone. We know that there are a lot of vehicles that go across there, and we want to make sure that those folks have a good, safe road to drive on in all conditions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've had a request for unanimous consent to introduce some guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to, please, call upon a few people that are coming in from rural Alberta. They have been targeted by criminals, attacked, had their property stolen. When I mention your name, if you could please stand: Bruce Calder, Robert Erickson, Candice Gardiner, Walter Haupt, Michelle Hayden, Lori Taylor, Lawrence Howell, Ronald Jarvis, Leslie Johnston, and John Lemke. If the House could please give them a warm round.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, November 25 is recognized as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. In 1999 the UN General Assembly chose this date to honour the

Mirabal sisters, three political dissidents who were assassinated on November 25, 1960. Each year we remember and honour the contributions and sacrifices of the sisters and of those who work to eliminate violence against women and girls. The date marks the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender violence, and it ends on December 10, international Human Rights Day. The 16 days present an opportunity to change the conversation, change attitudes, and change behaviours to prevent gender violence.

Last year Alberta abusers victimized 10,030 women and children and forced them to utilize women's shelters. Despite our government's increased funding for shelters there are still many women out there who are abused and may need our help. This is unacceptable.

We are responsible to stop gender-based violence. Each of us has the power to create a culture where healthy relationships thrive. I challenge everyone here today to start by paying attention to the words you use and the tone of your conversations. Are they respectful and valuing, or are the demeaning and condescending? Do your words and actions empower or diminish? Do you use your privilege to make another feel less than? Do you understand the importance of consent? Do you laugh when a friend makes a derogatory comment, or do you challenge the behaviour?

Change starts in each of us today, and it must continue well past December 10. It's time to step up, reach out, and speak out. It takes all of us. I will do my part. Will you?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Rural Crime

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Frustration about rural crime has risen to a boiling point. That is clearly in evidence today, when we look up and see the galleries filled with residents who have driven hours to send a message to NDP government members who do not seem to understand their concerns or their very real fears. Alberta's population has grown substantially, and with it has come crime. Especially alarming are the guns, the gangs, the drugs, and the violence that have become prevalent in rural Alberta. Citizens are here today because they openly fear for the safety of their families and friends. It is that simple.

Rural Albertans' victimization is different than urban Albertans'. Opposition members have been trying for at least a year and a half to underline the point to the Minister of Justice, but she continues to brush us off. The truth is that while everyone is vulnerable to crime regardless of where you live, rural residents do not see the same response times as do urban residents, and rural detachments confirm this fact. That is why they are encouraging neighbours to look out for each other and also suggesting that they invest in video surveillance systems. Now, those are good measures; however, there is a potential unintended danger of vigilantism, which nobody wants.

Police know that the people they work so hard to protect are at risk, and despite their best efforts they worry about their ability to keep them safe. What has the minister done to acknowledge this rural crisis? Time after time she lays it at the feet of the municipalities. She says: if you want more officers, then hire them yourselves.

This is a province-wide crisis, Mr. Speaker, and the answer is unacceptable. If you don't believe me, then just ask all these people that are in the galleries today.

Thank you.

Krever Blood System Inquiry Anniversary

Dr. Turner: November 21 was the 20th anniversary of the release of the final report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada, known as the Krever report. I've been a hematologist involved in transfusion medicine in Alberta since 1977. A safe and adequate blood supply is vital for patients with bleeding disorders in particular, but blood products are also used in obstetrics, surgery, and for chemotherapy patients. I testified to the inquiry and have been involved in applying its recommendations to the blood system in Alberta ever since.

2:50

The inquiry was called by the federal government to look into the tainted blood tragedy of the '80s, which is widely recognized as our nation's worst-ever preventable public health disaster. The Krever inquiry set a high standard for public inquiries and recommended that all victims of tainted blood receive compensation. It publicly named those who had failed in their duties. Héma-Québec and Canadian Blood Services are a direct result of the inquiry's recommendations.

Because of sophisticated testing and screening anyone now receiving blood products from a Canadian donor can be assured that the risk of viral transmission is very, very low. The final report emphasized the importance of Canada being self-sufficient in its procurement of blood products and that our health care system must remain public and reject the risks of private, paid blood collection. Today our blood system is accountable to Canadians and is founded on the generosity of nonremunerated blood donors from across Canada.

The 20th anniversary of the Krever report reminds us of the time our country came together to change the blood system for the better. The collaboration of funders, regulators, patient groups, and other stakeholders has resulted in a safer and more sustainable blood system for all Canadians. I'm proud to be a part of a government committed to doing everything we can to avoid such a tragedy from ever happening again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Rural Crime

Mr. MacIntyre: Imagine that you chose to raise your family on a quiet, sprawling plot of land in the kind of place where helping your neighbour is a priority and where the word "community" finds its meaning. Now imagine the morning where you've been gone for less than an hour, and as you drive down your driveway, you start to notice that your property isn't how you left it. The bolt locking the shed has been cut. The shed doors are open, and the tools are all gone. The truck you left parked in the driveway isn't there. Your front door is kicked in.

You walk in the house, and your personal possessions are strewn across every room. You panic and search for the things you hold most dear. Maybe you're like Lois Gordon from Strathcona county, and it's your recently deceased mother's urn or maybe the wedding ring that's been passed down from generation to generation. You find those irreplaceable mementoes are gone.

Imagine knowing that someone has been watching you, planning this violation for weeks. Imagine the desperation. Imagine no longer feeling safe in your own home, how it might leave you feeling scared to leave your wife and children on the farm as you go to work in town. Imagine how scared you would feel to be alone,

how you might start to sleep with a baseball bat or something even like a gun next to your bed.

For too many Albertans these traumas aren't imagined; it's their daily reality. And for many it's been repeated multiple times. Rural Alberta is facing an epidemic of increasingly violent crime. Today I rise on behalf of the good people seated in the gallery behind me and in front of me. They deserve an emergency debate on this epidemic. They deserve solutions from their government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Emergency Medical Services and Health Care Funding

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month I had the pleasure of meeting with some Health Sciences members representing EMS workers across the province, including some former colleagues of mine. They were here in Edmonton to argue EMS funding has largely been forgotten and are now faced with significant shortfalls both in personnel and equipment. Calgary and Edmonton alone are facing a shortfall of 12 ambulances each. This may come as a surprise to Albertans who have continued to receive world-class health care from our paramedics and emergency medical services, but to maintain that high level of service in our major cities means calling in trucks from other surrounding municipalities. Of course, this is only a temporary fix and also very expensive.

If we as a province choose to invest much-needed resources into our EMS services, we would see cost savings from reduced overtime, reduced job-related trauma, and reduced hospital wait times. Investing a little to save a lot is a common idea, but it is especially apparent when we're talking about health. Mental health supports, preventative care, addiction treatments: these are all based on the idea that we can not only help people by making these investments early but save public money in the long term.

We need to take that same sort of thinking and apply it to the health system right across the board, and we need to be better at communicating and demonstrating the connection between investing and saving, with targets and tracking measures to gauge that success. When the investments we make in our health system show benefit over the long term, we need to be vocal about that and see where else that investment might apply. When investments aren't successful, we also need to be vocal about that and get back to the drawing board.

Maintaining current levels of health services is expensive, and it isn't going to get any cheaper if we don't start getting smarter about how we deliver them. Failing to act on increasing costs will have real, negative consequences for our health sector and the Albertans it serves. We need to look no further than EMS funding to see why that is. The unrestrained growth in health costs means that even as the health budget jumped significantly year after year, EMS still did not receive the badly needed additional funds. So let's start by addressing the concerns of our front-line EMS workers and move to the next major challenge in our health care system.

And on a note, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that four paramedics were exposed today to a fentanyl crisis. My thoughts are with them and their families today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Rural Crime

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rates of crime in rural Alberta continue to climb, leaving Alberta with 12 of the top 50 most

dangerous places to live in Canada. According to a recent *Maclean's* article the city of Cold Lake came in at an astounding number 21, which means that the city I live in has almost twice the crime severity index of the Canada-wide average. This is unacceptable.

I often hear accounts from my constituents about crimes they have fallen victim to, including one person who had his truck stolen three times – three times, Mr. Speaker. This is unacceptable.

A Facebook page called Lakeland confessions provides a link for people to confess anonymously. One such post reads in part: "I've already targeted an admin on the neighbourhood [watch] page. And coming for anyone else who thinks they know what's going on . . . You're all a bunch of next victims." This is unacceptable.

People are being brushed aside because that is what insurance is for, yet some of those same people are turned away by insurance companies because they've had too many claims. This is unacceptable.

My constituents and countless others across rural Alberta are frustrated. They're scared, and they've lost hope in this NDP government keeping them safe in their own homes. This Friday a local regional crime forum is set up in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake because of the clear inactivity of this Justice minister when it comes to rural crime. I'll be attending that forum to hear the concerns of my local residents. Will the Minister of Justice join me to hear the fear, the frustration, and the hopelessness? If not, what answers can I take to them? So far this NDP government is: the right place at the right time, but anywhere but in rural Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give oral notice of a motion for tomorrow's Order Paper, that motion being:

Be it resolved that pursuant to section 11(1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission entitled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta: Final Report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, October 2017, which was tabled by the Speaker of the Assembly as an intersessional deposit on October 19, 2017. It is listed as Sessional Paper 456/2017.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to provide notice that at the appropriate time I will move the following motion today.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the growing incidence of property-related crime and an accompanying escalation of violent crime in rural communities and the resulting fear for safety that is felt by the residents of such areas, which now constitute a state of emergency.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Bill 30
An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being
of Working Albertans

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, for first reading.

Mr. Speaker, every year hard-working Albertans are killed or injured on the job, and these incidents don't just affect the workers involved. They affect families, communities, friends, co-workers, and employers. But workplace illnesses and injuries and fatalities are not an inevitable part of life. They can be prevented with proper precautions, public awareness, training, and effective enforcement of legislation. This legislation would ensure that Alberta's health and safety system is continually improving to better prevent injuries from happening, respond to changing hazards, and support an injured worker's return to work. Bill 30 updates both pieces of legislation, Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Workers' Compensation Act, for the workplaces of today and tomorrow and respects the rights of all workers.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say thank you to all of the Albertans who contributed to this bill. Thank you to the staff, who have put in countless hours to get this legislation here. Thank you to my guests in the gallery for their contributions as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

3:00 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Acting Minister of Justice or Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies from the Minister of Justice to her federal counterpart, the federal Minister of Justice, the Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould, pushing the federal government to fill the vacant Court of Queen's Bench positions. She highlights that Alberta was left under the previous federal government with the lowest number of superior court judges per capita of any province in the country, and we're asking the current federal government to fill those positions as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to table the Lakeland confessions anonymous post on Facebook that is pretty much calling out everybody that's on the local watch.

I have several e-mails from local constituents that are saying that rural crime is a real problem in Bonnyville-Cold Lake and that this is something that is not being addressed.

Lastly, I have an article in the *Bonnyville Nouvelle*: RCMP Combating Rising Crime. This is something that is very, very disappointing to see, that we had no answers today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table documents with respect to the Airdrie provincial rural detachment, letters from the Balzac business community, as well as a letter that was received from the Minister of Justice with respect to things that were going on in Balzac and that community as well as the RCMP enhanced policing services, which was what was recommended to the people of Balzac given the fact that there is not enough policing

to help with their current situation. This is with respect to the CrossIron properties. Since 2013 to 2016 there has been a 280 per cent increase in crime.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings today. The first is from a hard-working couple in the Spruce View area in my constituency in Red Deer county, expressing their absolute disgust with the way that crime is being treated in their community.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is also from Red Deer county from another hard-working family that has been robbed over half a dozen times, again, while this government sits on their hands.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from the Eckville and Lacombe county area, from another family who has been robbed repeatedly and is looking for help from this government.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, all letters from individuals who are extremely frustrated, fearful, and concerned about rural crime. One references the fact that the best response time in the particular area where they live is 45 minutes, and in many cases it's actually four to five hours. How that is supposed to curtail crime, I don't understand. Anyway, I provide the three letters as constituents have asked that we do that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a number of letters from constituents of mine who have been writing in regarding the multiple times that they have been robbed. This one is from Lisa: "It disgusts me that just because we're in a rural area, some people think that they can trespass on our property" and take what they want.

Here is a letter from one of my constituents. Their farm has been robbed five times in the last 12 months. This is unacceptable.

I have another one here where they are concerned that: if we try to defend ourselves, we will be called the criminals by this government. Five copies for you.

Here is a family who was robbed, and then the day they went to the police station to finalize their statements, their home was robbed again.

Here's another one from people within my riding. They're concerned that the same people that robbed them are now back on the street robbing some more.

Another one regarding the same kind of thing, the revolving door at the courthouse. I have hundreds of these coming in. I'm not going to give them all to you today, sir, but you will be getting them all.

It's time to bring back front licence plates. How can we see who's coming in our yard on video camera? They want the front licence plate on that vehicle noted.

Here's another one. They're afraid the legal system is just releasing and releasing criminals back out into the public. This has to stop.

Another one from my riding to the minister again. A copy was sent to me regarding the reckless and dangerous behaviours of criminals who have vandalized their place and, I believe, injured their dog.

Here's another one from Jim from my area regarding crime being totally out of control: it's like anarchy; what happened to my Alberta?

Another one. They just go on and on. It's the same thing over and over. All of these letters, Mr. Speaker, are from multiple robberies, not just one.

Another one. Their truck was broken into in the church parking lot.

I'll give them all to you. This is an epidemic, and we need a debate on this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have two tablings today. The first I would like to table are five copies of the DVD and attached letter to the 87 electoral division boundaries from the 2016-17 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission final report.

Second, I rise to table five copies of the 2016-17 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate, received in my office on November 27, 2017.

Chestermere-Rocky View-Three Hills. Excuse me.

Mr. Cooper: Whichever. It's okay. She's better than me anyway.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a copy of a letter from Lorraine Richards and her husband, Jerry, of Olds, Alberta, who state, "In our opinion, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General is the weak link in a failing justice system in Alberta." They raise some significant concerns about the amount of times that they have been broken into, the amount of property damage that they have sustained, and the fact that it has come at a significant cost to their personal financial well-being.

I also will table two documents from the village of Carbon that highlight a number of the concerns that I raised in question period today with respect to the continued break-ins at the grocery store as well as other local businesses and the fact that the community is doing a security block party to try to find some solutions that certainly aren't coming from the provincial government.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. S. Anderson, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act authorized accredited agencies summary, April 2016, Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Association annual report 2016-17, Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report 2016, pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the Safety Codes Council annual report 2016.

3:10

The Speaker: I believe we may be at points of order. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first point of order I rise on today is under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The Premier, in response to a question to me at the time that the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I believe, called that point of order, implied – no; it didn't imply. She outright stated that the motion that we are going to vote on shortly was in fact out of order. But the fact is that written notice has been provided to you, the Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 30(1), and it has met the conditions of Standing Order 30(7). It's stamped. It's up at the table right now. In fact, you are going to put that question to the House at some point today and make a decision.

She was wrong, and by implying and answering that question with that I was misleading the House or had some sort of a motion that was not in order, it's ridiculous and is exactly the Premier and her government running away from the fact that in a few moments they'll have a choice, the choice to stand with Albertans on a serious issue or to vote against it and run and hide.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To suggest that it is against the rules to say that someone believes that a motion may not conform with the rules of the House and to attempt to equate that with accusing a member of misleading the House is absurd. This is one of the silliest points of order I have ever seen. The Premier is entirely within her rights to suggest that their motion is out of order. In fact, I'll think we'll see some further arguments to that just a bit later in the afternoon, and I hope he doesn't stand up on a point of order about that.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, I do have the Blues. This is what it said, and I won't read all of it: "the proposal that they're putting forward is undoubtedly outside of the rules of the House although we'll see what happens when the matter is discussed." In this particular instance I don't believe there is a point of order. It may have been a difference of opinion, but nonetheless I don't believe it's a point of order in this instance because what we've always talked about is context.

I'm prepared to hear point of order two, which I think is you, Government House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on this. I'm rising on a point of order under Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), which read as follows:

- 23 A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .
 - (h) makes allegations against another Member;
 - (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
 - (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Today in question period the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition made the absolutely outrageous claim that if the government does not support his motion, we are in some way standing with criminals. To accuse the government of being on the side of criminals is offensive and extreme, Mr. Speaker. The government has taken a number of actions on this important issue, actions that have been outlined by the Premier and the minister today in question period.

Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of the equally outrageous claim made by the Member for Calgary-Elbow where he claimed that due to the actions of the government "whoever murdered Serenity is walking free today." At the time I wrote on a matter of privilege to argue that such overblown rhetoric impinged on the privileges of the member in question.

Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that one needs to watch one's language when it comes to members of the House, and to suggest that the government's position relative to their order, which we only heard about just a few hours ago for the first time, is somehow equivalent to being on the side of criminals or supporting crime in some way offends the standing orders, it offends the practices of the Assembly, and it is beneath the hon. member to make those statements.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a matter of debate. I did not, in my question, accuse anybody in the government or the Premier of being a criminal. What I said very clearly was that either the government was going to stand with my constituents and the people of rural Alberta who are being victimized and abused every day or they may as well be standing with the criminals. You know what? I stand by that fact one hundred per cent. Either you're going to stand with Albertans, or you're going to continue to allow them to be abused on your watch. That is extremely disappointing, and it's disappointing to watch the Government House Leader try to defend the ridiculous actions of this government this way.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. member may recall that at the time I heard the comment, I rose in the House, and I cautioned. I do now have the Blues. In fact, what was said was: "Mr. Speaker, if you're not in support of this motion, you may as well be with the criminals that are victimizing my constituents." [interjections] Hon. member, I'm making the decision now. It's irrelevant to me whether or not you believe it's true. The important part is what I decide.

Mr. Nixon: I believe it's true, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I do believe this was a point of order, and I would ask that you withdraw the comment.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Nixon: I rise for you to explain your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

Mr. Nixon: I rise on a standing order for you to explain your ruling. Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, I rise on 13(2) for you to explain your ruling because it's quite a contradiction from most of the rulings that you've made on this issue before the House.

The Speaker: Well, I think I did explain my reasoning on this. You might have noticed that I also drew attention to the word – I can't exactly remember, but there was a minister that I cautioned at a different point in the House. When we are alleging, making comments in this House that other members are associating with criminals, it seems to me that you've crossed a line, and that is my reasoning. That is my reasoning, and it shall stand.

Point of order number 3. I think that is yours.

Mr. Nixon: That is mine, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I would request that you withdraw the comment.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly withdraw and apologize for pointing out that the government is standing with criminals and not with my constituents. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

You withdraw your comments, and you apologize to the House. Is that right?

Mr. Nixon: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw and apologize for pointing out that the government is standing with criminals against my constituents.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would have preferred a more sincere apology, but it seems to me that there might be other objectives in play.

Nonetheless, the Leader of the Official Opposition. Point of order number 3.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on 23(h),(i), and (j) in regard to a comment by the Minister of Finance at the time that that point of order was raised, at which point he used what I would call swear words and certainly, actually were swear words. I won't repeat them in the House, but he used some language with the word "bull" in front of it and then a swear word. It's disappointing, at a time when these galleries are full of people, again, who are being victimized across rural Alberta, that a minister of the Crown would stand in here and use that language and treat it like a joke. I would ask him to stand up, withdraw, and apologize for his words.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

3:20

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't hear the words that were allegedly spoken by the hon. Finance minister. I don't know if the hon. Opposition House Leader at this point is looking to qualify for an acting school, but the grandstanding today is pretty outrageous. If indeed – if indeed – the Minister of Finance uttered words that are unparliamentary in this House or insulting to members opposite, then on his behalf I will withdraw those words and apologize to the House.

The Speaker: Thank you. Nor did I hear the comment, but I appreciate that you have acknowledged and apologized.

Number 4, I believe, is also the Leader of the Official Opposition's.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this one on 23(h), (i), and (j), also on *Beauchesne's* 493. At the time that this point of order was raised, the minister of postsecondary and Acting Minister of Justice accused the leader of the United Conservative Party, the Hon. Jason Kenney, of stealing. He used the exact word "stealing." In fact, at the time you cautioned him on the way he was going down that road. It is completely ridiculous that, again, at a time that the people of Alberta, hundreds of people, have driven here to be able to express their concerns about what's happening in their communities, another minister would stand and accuse a leader of another political party of stealing instead of standing up and defending their record. It's ridiculous, and I ask that the minister stand and withdraw and apologize for those comments.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, these rules apply traditionally when directed at a member of the House, but I'm also aware of the rulings that have been made many times in this place by Speakers, yourself included, that people who are not in the House and can't defend themselves require a certain degree of caution on the part of members. Now, having said that, Mr. Kenney is, of course, the leader of the party that forms the Official Opposition and is a very political figure.

But, having said that, Mr. Speaker, I did hear the word "steal," and in my view that word was inappropriate. On behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education I would withdraw that and apologize to the House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I did hear "stealing," and I appreciate the thought that the minister – that's thus the reason why I cautioned in the first instance.

If I might bring closure to the matter, these are two examples of what ought not to happen in this House.

Request for Emergency Debate

Rural Crime

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to propose a motion under Standing Order 30. I should note before I begin that written notice was provided to the Speaker in accordance with Standing Order 30(1) and has met the conditions of Standing Order 30(7). The motion reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the growing incidence of property-related crime and an accompanying escalation of violent crime in rural communities and the resulting fear for safety that is felt by residents of such areas, which now constitute a state of emergency.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the importance of this issue facing rural communities across Alberta, facing rural communities that I live in and rural communities that the people in the gallery, that are here today, live in. Skyrocketing crime rates across rural Alberta have been a source of major concerns for residents in these communities for several years now.

The Speaker: If I might, just a moment.

For the sake of all of the House members, the thrust of this discussion and the objective on your part at this point is – and I quote 30(2) – “The Member may briefly state the arguments in favour.” So the issue at hand here is the urgency of the matter, and I just want all members of the House to be aware of that.

Please continue.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s gotten to the point where a great many rural Alberta families no longer feel safe in their own homes. That is simply unacceptable, and I would say that that’s urgent. As I got in my car to drive up here last night and spend the week with you, I worry about my family back home in rural Alberta because of what’s happening. I would say that that’s urgent. That’s why today the United Conservative caucus stands united with victims from across the province to urge this government to allow emergency debate on a provincial response to what has fast become a crisis in our rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, this issue is not before this House in any form of bill debate, and the most reasonable opportunity for debate is today. I would like to reference *Beauchesne’s* 387 to 398, regarding motions to adjourn the House to discuss an important matter. Standing Order 30(7)(a) states, “The matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration,” as you were pointing out. If the sharp escalation in crime across rural Alberta doesn’t constitute a genuine emergency, I don’t know what does. Over the last year alone breaking and enterings are up more than 130 per cent in Bonnyville and 94 per cent in Innisfail, just to give two examples.

Beauchesne’s 390 also states that a motion for emergency debate must meet the test of urgency; that is, “when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.” Our caucus believes that when it comes to the well-being of Alberta’s families, when the safety of Albertans is at stake, nothing is more urgent than this. Over the last number of years members from both of the UCP legacy caucuses have raised this issue in the House over and over again, yet we have not seen any meaningful action from this

government at all. It is our hope, Mr. Speaker, that an emergency debate will bring much-needed attention to this critical issue that is affecting so many of the communities that we represent.

Beauchesne’s 389 states that the matter “must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate [action].” I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this issue, if not dealt with in a real and comprehensive way, will be nothing short of a suffering of the public interest. I think that the fact that we have over 100 rural Albertans here in the gallery today demonstrates just how much this debate is in the public interest. Quite frankly, it’s a sad state of affairs indeed when that many concerned citizens need to descend upon this Legislature in order to get this government to pay attention.

I’ll continue with a quote from *Beauchesne’s* page 113. “Most decisions based on these conditions are bound to be subjective and few clear cut decisions can be made. In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate.” Mr. Speaker, hundreds of families have been victims of crime in rural communities, and they are depending on your decision that this matter is urgent enough to proceed. I consider this to be an emergency. I would suggest to you that you consider the last point, where *Beauchesne’s* says, “In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate.”

House of Commons Procedure and Practice says the following on page 695:

However, in one exceptional circumstance, an application was approved for an emergency debate on “the sudden and unexpected revelation of events which [had] taken place in the past [and] that . . . might precipitate a course of conduct which, if allowed to continue unchecked, would certainly classify itself as an emergency and a matter of urgent consideration.”

Mr. Speaker, the system is failing Albertans in rural communities, who now live their lives in fear of not if but when their homes will be broken into and their property stolen. They live in fear that they might be home with their children the next time these criminals show up. They’ve lost sleep waking at every noise and wondering if this is the moment that they have dreaded.

We need to do everything in our power to make sure that the problem does not get worse, and that can start right now. This is a public crisis, and it must be dealt with in this Assembly as a state of emergency. I ask you to rule in favour of this important motion, Mr. Speaker. The people that I represent are depending on you. When I went home this weekend, if you want to hear about urgency, I heard of four more people in my community that suffered through home invasions, including some having firearms pointed at their heads in front of their children. Every day that members in rural Alberta go home, this is the number one thing that we hear from our constituents. They are sick of being victimized, and they want a debate in this Assembly right now so we can see some solid action to get ahead of this issue once and for all.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can say unequivocally that the issue of crime and safety in our communities is very important to the government, and it’s a matter that we take extremely seriously. We believe that all Albertans deserve to live in safe and strong communities. Now, I know that the Acting Minister of Justice is meeting this afternoon with many of the representatives here today, and we have, as he pointed out, made changes to ensure that police officers are on the street instead of doing paperwork. We’ve funded ALERT, which last week laid more than 120 charges against 11 suspects for dealing drugs. The

ICE unit is going after online sexual exploitation of children, and the new integrated crime reduction unit is targeting property crime and break-ins in rural Alberta. This is indeed a very important and, in fact, critical issue across the province.

3:30

I can relate to the feelings of people in rural Alberta who are represented by some of the people in the gallery today. In our family our vehicle has been broken into twice in the last couple of months, and I can tell you that that provides a feeling of insecurity and violation, so there's no doubt. And I know that other members in the House on both sides have probably had some similar experiences.

So being a very serious issue, Mr. Speaker, doesn't necessarily satisfy the criteria for this particular Standing Order 30. It must meet a number of conditions, including that it "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – you know, I know that I'm wowing you, hon. member, but I sat quietly through your application, and I would appreciate it if you would do it as well for me. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Mason: The *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* provides further guidance.

An emergency debate should be on a topic "that is immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation."

That, of course, applies to the federal House of Commons.

Thus, matters of chronic or continuing concern, such as economic conditions, unemployment rates and constitutional matters, have tended to be set aside whereas topics deemed to require urgent consideration [have not].

Beauchesne similarly states that the item

must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention.

Another significant factor has to do with whether there are further opportunities to debate the matter. *Beauchesne* states that an item must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

And that is the significant piece, Mr. Speaker, that I want to draw attention to.

There must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

It also states that

emergency debate provisions cannot be used to debate [such] "items which, in a regular legislative program of the House of Commons and regular legislative consideration, can come before the House by way of amendments to existing statutes, or in any case will come before it in other ways.

That's on page 694.

Speaker Kowalski put it well on May 26, 2008, regarding gas prices.

I guess the whole question in here: if it's urgent today, why wouldn't it have been urgent a month ago?

Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because that is the point that, unfortunately, in the rules and in the precedents of the House I believe the Speaker has to consider. Whether or not it's serious or even extremely serious is not the question. The question is: is it an emergency happening now, or is it something that's happened over a longer period of time, in which case there are ample opportunities in the House to debate this?

He went on to say that:

Actually, I understand that this is of great interest to a lot of people, but in terms of is it an emergency today when it was not an emergency a month ago and will it be an emergency of the same latitude in a month from now, it's quite interesting.

[interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Additionally, Mr. Speaker, when there are other avenues in which to debate a matter, it does not qualify for Standing Order 30.

Speaker Zwozdesky set a very high bar in 2013, when he allowed debate to proceed regarding medevac services.

I'm taking into account that the move of the medevac [to the] . . .

Airport is occurring tomorrow.

There's the difference. It's occurring tomorrow.

Therefore, I find that there will be no other opportunity for this Assembly to debate this issue, which is of importance to many Albertans.

Speaker Kowalski again made the same case in ruling that the allegations of conflict of interest involving Premier Redford in the choice of lawyers for tobacco recovery lawsuits should not proceed, and he said:

Urgency deals with whether or not there are other opportunities available to raise the matter. Now, I want to clarify for you that there are several vehicles available for you to do a variety of things. One of them is question period, where a well-crafted question that meets the rules and proprieties of this House and of Houses across the world that are part of the Commonwealth parliamentary system – that exists there as one of those vehicles.

Secondly, a carefully crafted motion for return might accomplish something very similar, or a carefully worded written question might accomplish something similar. There is room for some debate within some of these vehicles.

That was November 28, 2012.

I might also add that the opposition has opportunities to introduce private members' bills and to introduce private members' motions, and time is set aside on Mondays for exactly that purpose, so they have ample opportunity to raise this. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they raised it extensively today in question period. That can be certainly supplemented, but they have other opportunities which do not require the setting aside of the regularly scheduled business of the House.

Mr. Speaker, having established that whether emergency deals with a matter or not, there are other opportunities available to raise the matter. I can indicate that there are a great many avenues of debate in this Legislature. The opposition has raised this matter a number of times in the past in the spring sitting of the Assembly, but in reviewing *Hansard*, it seems that until today the Official Opposition has chosen not to raise this matter in question period during this fall sitting. However, the fact that the members opposite chose not to avail themselves of those avenues does not mean that it should be considered under SO 30.

Mr. Speaker, if I could just conclude . . .

The Speaker: Brevity.

Mr. Mason: Obviously, it is your job and your duty under Standing Order 30 to rule whether or not the request for a standing order is in order, and should you so rule, Mr. Speaker, the government caucus will be prepared to debate the motion.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're rising to what?

Mr. Cooper: To speak to the matter of emergency.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Mason: It is the custom of the House and has been as long as I can remember that these matters are not debated before the Speaker. The person who makes the motion has a chance to state it, and then a member of the other party has a chance to respond, and other parties, if the Speaker uses his discretion, are also invited to respond. But it is not a debate, and you don't get to refute the arguments that have been made endlessly in the House.

The Speaker: There is a leader of the third party. Any wish to speak to this? Private members?

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I'll be very, very brief. I do believe that this is a matter of great urgency. Notwithstanding the fact that the Official Opposition has raised several questions here today in the presence of so many Albertans, I do believe that given the data and statistics that have been presented today and the stories that I've been told as leader of the Alberta Party caucus from talking with not just my constituents but with many Albertans, this is a grave concern to many people. I would really encourage you to allow this debate to proceed because I do believe that not only is it important, but it does in fact constitute an emergency.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The independent Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, to be very brief, I would certainly also agree that this is a matter of urgency and it is, in fact, a pressing emergency, and I felt that perhaps while the hon. Government House Leader said that we shouldn't engage in a debate as to whether this is an emergency, I found his arguments to be extremely weak on behalf of saying that this is not an emergency.

I'd just like to quote a statistic that was raised at a town hall discussion on this issue, that I hosted in Mannville on October 25, in which the Vermilion RCMP detachment announced that while the number of incidents of property crime in our constituency from June through August averaged 48 per month, in the month of September that number had risen to 169.

Now, the minister argues that this isn't an emergency. Try and tell that to the people that are sitting in the galleries, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Speaker: Hon. member, is there any additional information that you can add to the discussion that speaks to the urgency of the matter?

Mr. Fraser: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We're elected in this House to represent our constituents. When a number of constituents come with a concern to this Legislature, it is abysmal that the Government House Leader is not taking this opportunity to show how government can be nimble and address this concern.

Now, the hon. Government House Leader mentioned that there were all these courses that we in the opposition could use to address this issue. They did mention the statistics, whether it's funding of ALERT, going back and forth – Mr. Speaker, bear with me – at the end of the day, what the heck are we supposed to be doing here other than representing the constituents? And exactly like the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said, tell that to the people who are afraid to go down their driveway, worrying if they're going to get hit with a bat. I don't know any other reason why or what we would be debating this afternoon that's more important than protecting these fine people.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe this is the second issue that I've needed to deal with as this kind of incident in this Chamber. As with all of the decisions that we make in here, none of them don't rank up in terms of importance, and each causes us to listen not only to our own arguments but to each other.

I am prepared to rule on whether the request for a leave for motion is to proceed under Standing Order 30. The Leader of the Official Opposition has met the requirement of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office by providing the required notice at 10:47 a.m. this morning. The motion reads as follows.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the growing incidence of property-related crime and an accompanying escalation of violent crime in rural communities and the resulting fear . . .

[interjections] Hon. members. Hon. member, if we could focus on the listening part.

. . . for safety that is felt by residents of such areas, which now constitute a state of emergency.

The relevant parliamentary authorities on this subject are pages 689 through to 696 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* and *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387 to 390. As is noted on page 690 of the second edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

matters of chronic or continuing concern, such as economic conditions, unemployment rates and constitutional matters, have tended to be set aside whereas topics deemed to require [emergency] consideration have included work stoppages and strikes, natural disasters, and international crises and events.

This House, I believe, and certainly we all appreciate that there is no doubt that Albertans' safety and feeling of safety in the province are absolutely important issues. The member notes in his motion that crime in rural communities is increasing, but the member did not point to any particular instances that would give rise to a genuine emergency as required by Standing Order 30(7).

Accordingly, I do not find the request for leave in order, and the question will not be put.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Autopsy Completion Times

Q18. Mr. Ellis asked that the following question be accepted.

In each of the calendar years from 2013 to 2016 what was the average completion time for an autopsy and what was the longest time spent completing an autopsy at the office of the Chief Medical Examiner?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can tell you that this specific question arose out of the tragic incident of little Serenity, which, I believe, has affected everyone in this Legislature. I think we all, as a matter of public record, understand that Serenity's autopsy investigation took two years.

If we're going to do our jobs as legislators, if we're going to make the system better, I believe that this is a question that needs to be answered. We need to know how long an autopsy investigation is going to take or what the average is for an autopsy investigation to find out if it is comparable to other jurisdictions and whether there are efficiencies that we can do to make the system better. It's not

about, you know, pointing fingers. It is about doing what is right for people who are victims of homicides and, of course, their families to ensure that we get proper numbers to understand how long an autopsy investigation is taking within this province and figure out what measures we can take to correct that and make it better.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice I would be pleased to move that Written Question 18 be amended by striking out “an autopsy” wherever it occurs and substituting “a death investigation.” The amended written question would read as follows:

In each of the calendar years from 2013 to 2016 what was the average completion time for a death investigation and what was the longest time spent completing a death investigation at the office of the Chief Medical Examiner?

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the minister I want to make just a few comments. A postmortem autopsy is a specialized surgical procedure that consists of a thorough examination of the deceased by dissection to determine the cause and manner of death. Routine postmortem examinations can take one or two hours, with complex cases taking upwards of four to six hours. A death investigation involves a complete review of the history, circumstances, and autopsy findings, with additional laboratory investigations by the medical examiner. Death investigation cases may require additional time for consultation with external experts such as in neuropathology and consultations with the police if the case is part of a criminal investigation.

As the term “death investigation” is inclusive of all of the steps taken from the initiation of the investigation to case file closure, this amendment is intended to provide a more fulsome response to the question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has moved an amendment to Written Question 18. Would anybody like to debate the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

3:50

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Government House Leader. I believe that we're at least on a co-operative path to finding a solution to this actual question. I guess my concern about the words “death investigation” is that at the time, of course, of somebody's passing, you know, we have an investigation that occurs, and then the completion of the investigation, from my perspective as a former law enforcement officer, would ultimately be the time when we essentially hand it to the Crown prosecutors' office, which would be the length of the investigation.

For me, I certainly understand, upon reflection and looking at the original question where it says, “How long does an autopsy take,” okay, well, is it from the time that the doctor conducts his initial investigation until the time he concludes it? You know, is that a matter of minutes, hours, or longer? The way I see it is: how long does the autopsy investigation take place? So, really, from the time that the Chief Medical Examiner's office receives that request from the law enforcement officer, how long does it take for them to conclude their investigation?

There are some variables, but I think it is important to know how long not the entire death investigation is but, the way I see it, and I'm only one person here, the actual autopsy investigation conducted by the Chief Medical Examiner's office, from the time they get the request to the time that they are able to provide that

information back to law enforcement, which either supports the suspicion of a homicide taking place or basically says that it's nonsuspicious.

Is it possible, Government House Leader through Madam Speaker, that we amend this even further to say:

In each of the calendar years from 2013 to 2016 what was the average completion time for an autopsy investigation and what was the longest time spent completing an autopsy investigation at the office of the Chief Medical Examiner?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I am acting on behalf of the expectant hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, I'm not in a position to respond to the suggestion, unfortunately. So I have no choice under those circumstances but to suggest that we need to proceed with the amendment as I have put it forward.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-West, I just need to clarify that the initial amendment had been approved by Parliamentary Counsel. A counteramendment to the amendment, the subamendment, would have had to have gone through Parliamentary Counsel. So we can't accept a subamendment as of now, but we can still debate the amendment.

Just a reminder to all members of the House that you can only speak once to the amendment. I do see that the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays would like to speak.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm grateful for the opportunity to stand on Written Question 18 from the Member for Calgary-West. I think most people at home listening to this would find it quite reasonable that he's asking: “In each of the calendar years from 2013 to 2016 what was the average completion time for an autopsy and what was the longest time spent completing an autopsy at the office of the Chief Medical Examiner?”

Madam Speaker, I think that if there was ever a question that was worthy of being answered, this is it. For each of the cases in those years, of course, each one represents a life that has ended and a life that has ended in circumstances that would actually require the medical examiner to do an autopsy, I would suggest a much more than normal examination other than determining that someone is dead and why they're dead because autopsies often – sometimes it is a medical issue, but very often it's also to get details for what might have happened as the result of a crime or a violent act or some other . . .

Mr. Mason: An accident.

Mr. McIver: Or an accident. I agree with that, Government House Leader. Despite the fact that I've got the floor, I'll actually take that with gratitude. That's a good suggestion.

Madam Speaker, for each of these instances I'm of the belief that the medical examiner would have both the record of when the file on the deceased person arrived in their office – I'll be surprised if they don't already have a record of all the seconds, minutes, days, and hours that they spent working on the autopsy. I realize that when you see these things on television, it's all automated, and that may or may not be the case, but whether it is or not, I would be surprised if the medical examiner did not keep a very detailed logbook of which deceased person they were working on and for exactly how long and their impressions and their learnings from the work they do.

It occurs to me that this should be almost, if not completely, readily available information. In each case it represents the final determination of how a life ended. Because it deals with how well we determine our investigations at the end of a life, I think it really speaks to how important it is.

I don't know what purpose the government would have for not wanting to provide this information unless there's something in there that they don't want the public to know. They may have a different explanation, and I welcome that if they offer it. All I'm saying is that from my viewpoint that's certainly what comes to my mind, that there's something that's true that the government doesn't want the public to know about. Again, I will repeat that I welcome the government to give a different explanation. But without the explanation to be offered, Madam Speaker, I don't know what other conclusion the public would draw here.

If I might go there, every life matters, and as a consequence every death matters. During this period of time there is certainly the file that's been talked about a lot in this House, the file of young Serenity. I think that all members from all sides of the House – I would be surprised if they didn't all unanimously believe that Serenity's file was not handled well, surely not as well as it could have been and should have been.

My belief is that the hon. Member for Calgary-West is trying to cast a light on this and any other files that take place in order that this House might understand it better and in order that this House might make either budgetary recommendations, legislative recommendations, policy recommendations either for ourselves or to the different police services or to the different medical examiners or indeed to the medical system at large to such an extent that it may have an effect on the autopsies and how long they take to be completed.

Of course, the facts surrounding how someone dies when the medical examiner does that in some circumstances may well affect how a court case goes on an untimely, criminal, or accidental death. It may well affect recommendations that get made by the Legislative Assembly or by the medical examiner about the safety, perhaps, of a piece of equipment, of a place, a time, a business. It could be anything from playground equipment to the way that the police do their business to a whole range of, in every case, important issues when they indeed affect how someone's life comes to an end.

Madam Speaker, I would sincerely hope that the government would actually draw back from their amendment and support the original written question from the Member for Calgary-West because I think any other decision will unfortunately cast aspersions on what might be hidden. That's why I would be in favour very much of answering the original question rather than trying to reformulate it, redocument it, switch it around, particularly, if I might, since it was from – with all due respect, it's not from me; it's from the Member for Calgary-West.

Why is that important? Because the Member for Calgary-West has served as a police officer for a long time, and his knowledge of what's important and what's not about what the medical examiner's office does I would suggest to you is, I know, far above mine. There may be a few members of the House that have knowledge as good as the Member for Calgary-West's but, I would suggest to you, not very many of us. So when he asks this question, it's not a random question. It's actually a question more informed than most of us would be able to ask because of his professional background; all the more reason to indeed answer the original question rather than some other question that the government has concocted.

Thank you.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to make a couple of comments in response to the Member for Calgary-Hays. Unfortunately, we do have very tragic events that happen in our constituencies and in our constituents' lives. I had the honour of having a local constituent talk to me about an investigation that was going on with her daughter that was on its way through the courts and about the incredible pain that I witnessed in this mother's experience with that. I completely understand, especially losing two members of my own family in the last couple of weeks, that having closure of a death in your family is one of those final pieces that are important to finding some peace and being able to move forward and have that person's memory be fully intact.

I just wanted to draw attention to something that I had learned in going through this story that this mother had to tell me. One of the important things in talking with those that are on the other side, that deal with these cases, is that "death investigation" is the term used by the office of the Chief Medical Examiner and that this office does not have data for something that would be an "autopsy investigation." It's my understanding that the term "death investigation" is the term that will provide the member opposite with the information that he is seeking.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?
Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: We are now back on the original question, Question 18. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the question as amended?

Seeing none, hon. Member for Calgary-West, would you like to close debate?

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know what? As I previously indicated through you to the Government House Leader, this is a nonpartisan issue. I do thank the Member for Calgary-Hays. A lot of thought went into this particular question. I think it is very important to get an answer to this question so that we can have an understanding of the system so that we as a group of legislators can better the system for victims of homicide such as in little Serenity's case.

I thank you for the response and the terminology that the Chief Medical Examiner's office uses in regard to death investigation. I will state again through you, Madam Speaker, that it is important to know the information: from the time that the Chief Medical Examiner receives that request to the time that they conduct their autopsy investigation, or, as you indicated, death investigation, to go back to the police officers so that they can conclude what they need to do to determine if something is indeed an accident or indeed a suspicious event. So thank you; I think this was a good co-operative test. Hopefully, the rest of the week will play out in that way as well.

I'd like to thank both sides of this House for supporting this question. I hope we get the answer that we are looking for to better the system. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Written Question 18 as amended carried]

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 207
Regulatory Burden Reduction Act**

[Debate adjourned November 14]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act. The purpose of this bill is to protect businesses and, actually, government, too, from excessive red tape. As members of this Assembly our job is to make new legislation that is in line with the developing needs of our constituencies and, in fact, all Albertans.

As society evolves, our laws must also adapt, but that begs the question: what should be done with the dated regulations that only serve as an obstacle to growth? Well, Madam Speaker, the short answer is to repeal them. Bill 207 proposes that for every single new regulation implemented, one or more regulations are eliminated. Now, we know that the free market regulates itself more efficiently than government can, so there are obviously a lot of these regulations that have been in place for many years that need to be reviewed.

Now, as far as just a little bit of history about myself, one of the reasons that I'm here in the Legislature today, that I've gotten deeply involved in politics, was a small business that I ran myself that involved exporting products. The exporting of products required both a provincial permit and a federal permit. At the time I started my business, I could go into a local office and get both permits. The information required for those permits was the exact same for both the provincial and for the federal, so the provincial government at the time had decided that they would take care of both of those permit processes in one office at one time. I could walk in there with the information, and I could walk out with both permits.

Well, somewhere along the way somebody decided that the provincial government wasn't going to do the federal government permits anymore. What they did was that they put that back into the hands of the federal government in Ottawa. So the process right now is that I go to the local office with this information to get a provincial permit, and then I send the exact same information to the federal government in Ottawa and wait six weeks for the permit to come back. Here we have a situation where regulations don't make sense. The government has refused to take back that process. Now, if I went to British Columbia and did the exact same thing, I could walk into one provincial office and walk out with both the provincial and federal permits. It only makes sense because it's the exact same information that's needed for both permits.

Somewhere along the way somebody said: well, the provincial government doesn't want to pay to do this permit process for the federal government. But what was forgotten in that comment is that no matter where that permit process takes place, it's paid for by the taxpayer. It's paid for by me, by all of us, so why not do it in the most efficient way possible? Whether it's done in the provincial office or the federal office, I have to pay for it. We as taxpayers have to pay for it. Wouldn't it make sense that you walk into one office once, get the permits, walk out? That's the most efficient way. It actually adds to the cost two to three times, the government dealing with it by having it done at two different places.

In business there are the three Ws: walking, waiting, and working. With those three Ws, there's only one of those that generates revenue, that actually gets anything done. You're not

getting anything done when you're in business walking; you're not getting anything done when you're in business waiting. Only when you're working. Regulations, burdensome regulations that don't accomplish anything: we need to reduce those so that small business can be spending more time working, being productive.

4:10

Now, some of these regulations you could compare to, let's say, Betamax videos or eight-track tapes or anything like that. I mean, is there any advantage to having a Betamax video player in your home if you don't have any Betamax videos to play in it? Do you need to have an eight-track player in your truck if you don't have any eight-track tapes? It's the same with a lot of these regulations. It makes no sense to have them if they're so outdated that they're unusable, that they have no purpose.

Here are a couple of Canadian regulations that you might find interesting. If you live in Souris, Prince Edward Island, it's against the law to build a snowman taller than 30 inches. Having an Internet connection faster than 56 K is illegal in Uxbridge, Ontario. Well, there are a couple of good regulations. How about this one? This is right at home here. You cannot paint a wooden ladder in Alberta according to 2009's occupational health and safety code. This is apparently to ensure that you can tell the condition of such a ladder. "A wooden ladder may be preserved with a transparent protective coating." That's according to the code. You can't paint a ladder here in Alberta. There are just a couple ideas of some regulations that, you know, don't make sense. I'm sure there are lots more.

Anyway, in this bill for each regulation created, one or more regulations will be eliminated. The federal Conservative government saved Canadian businesses over \$32 million in administrative burden as well as 750,000 hours in time spent dealing with red tape each year. Now, that's substantial. Regulatory compliance costs are disproportionately borne by small businesses and small and medium-sized firms that constitute the largest segment of the Canadian economy. A one-size-fits-all approach to paperwork does not necessarily work, and it hobbles small business.

I think we see it a lot in government, too. In government they have layers of bureaucracy and layers of paperwork that's redundant. We don't need that. The people that are there to serve us in government, the front-line people, need to be serving patients, serving the people, serving students, whatever that is. Shuffling paper is not a service. Doing regulations that don't make sense anymore is not a service to the people. That's one of the biggest things. We see how expensive things are in Alberta in government compared to other jurisdictions. Some of that has to do with the amount of regulation that we have to deal with here that isn't necessary.

Of course, we have to have some regulations. There's no doubt about it. That's our job here, to create, you know, bills that help Albertans, but we need to make sure that we don't have a burdensome number of regulations in place.

Now, stakeholders like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business support legislation that reduces the administrative burden on businesses. Outdated regulations are a silent killer of jobs. Canadian business owners spend over \$30 billion a year on regulatory compliance; \$30 billion a year. Other provinces have set up red tape reduction panels or task forces. British Columbia has reduced 36 per cent of regulations in three years and reports annually. Of course, British Columbia is one of the jurisdictions that spends substantially less per capita than Alberta, so I think we could learn something from British Columbia in this regard, as far as how they reduce red tape and regulations and how that can actually save taxpayers money. The money, even if it's not saved,

can go to more productive things in government instead of being wasted on wasted regulation and bureaucracy.

Now, even a former federal NDP consumer affairs critic, Glenn Thibeault, said: looking at ways to eliminate unnecessary paperwork and save small companies time and money that they should devote to their business is a good idea. That's right from an NDP colleague of this government. We need to change the government culture to come up with solutions that don't involve more rules.

Of course, we have lots of opportunity here to do good work. This is our job, to come up and debate bills and come up with these things to make life better for Albertans. That's our job here. We don't need to keep these regulations in place that are not doing any benefit for Albertans. All they do is that they take time and they take money away from small business. Small businesses generate in the economy, and we should protect that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? Oh, we're on private members' – you can tell it's Monday. I apologize again.

All right. Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise today to speak to Bill 207, Regulatory Burden Reduction Act. Our government is committed to working with businesses to make it easier for them to create jobs and get Albertans back to work. We know that Alberta businesses have a bigger economic impact than businesses anywhere in the country. Between January and August 2017 over 29,000 new businesses were incorporated in Alberta, a level that is 10.5 per cent higher than the same period in 2016. That's great progress. We've created tax credits that other provinces have enjoyed for decades, restored training programs for new entrepreneurs, and added an array of supports for established ones. We're helping businesses diversify and expand to new markets and increasing their access to capital. Albertans pay the lowest taxes in Canada, billions less than in Saskatchewan, and we recently cut the small-business tax by a third.

Madam Speaker, our government has made it clear that Alberta businesses have a bigger impact than businesses anywhere in the country. However, this bill will not improve Albertans' ability to do business or help protect the health and safety of Alberta families and workers, so I cannot support this bill.

We know we have the best businesses in the country, and that's why we are listening to them to make sure that Alberta continues to be the best place in the country to do business. I'm proud of the work our government has done to ensure that we create a more resilient and diversified economy. Our government is committed to working with businesses to make it easier for them to create jobs and get Albertans back to work. That's why we created a Department of Economic Development and Trade, a one-stop shop that breaks down barriers and silos that existed under the previous government.

As part of phase 1 of the agencies, boards, and commissions review we are amalgamating 11 agencies, boards, and commissions and dissolving 15 more, creating efficiencies and saving \$33 million over the next three years. We're already incorporating into our behaviour and practices as a government the spirit of the bill that's being proposed today without creating unnecessary burdens on the administration of government in the process.

As part of that review I mentioned earlier, we've created the single, nimble Alberta Innovates to ensure that our research and innovation system is much more quick to react to changing processes and procedures in the world of business and ensure that every research dollar is wisely invested. We understand the role businesses play in this province's long-term economic outlook while enhancing

Albertans' quality of life and making life more affordable for Alberta families and communities.

Madam Speaker, I fully understand, having been a small-business man all my business career, all my adult life, what the benefits are to ensuring on an ongoing basis that so-called red tape or government regulations are reviewed as part of the normal part of a government's administration. It's the responsibility of any government to do that on an ongoing basis, but to hamstringing a government on an ongoing basis with a one-for-one type of requirement is in excess. It's something that would create problems and make it more difficult for government to operate and doesn't actually solve the problem you're trying to address.

4:20

We are committed as a government to working with businesses to make it easier for them to create jobs and get Albertans back to work, and I'm proud of the ongoing work our government has done to make sure that good jobs stay in Alberta. In fact, some of Canada's most respected business and economic experts are forecasting Alberta to lead the country in economic growth for the next two years. This summer RBC pegged GDP growth at 4.2 per cent this year, far higher than Alberta's average growth rate of 2.6 per cent, Madam Speaker, between 2005 and 2015. Their reports have cited Alberta's historic infrastructure build and the increased investor confidence that comes with pipeline approvals as contributing factors to our economic recovery. Albertans have no control over world oil prices, but strategic investments from government and industry have helped to cushion the blow and stimulate growth. There were over 70,000 more jobs in Alberta this summer than in summer 2016. Alberta also continues to have the highest employment rate in the country and the highest weekly earnings.

I'm very proud of the work the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade has done to ensure that businesses succeed. The CFIB presented our hon. minister and other trade ministers in the Canadian free trade agreement with the golden scissors award, which is presented to those involved in helping to eradicate red tape for Canada's small businesses. Madam Speaker, the process is already under way within the administration of our government, and Bill 207 is certainly not a necessity to prod that effort. As noted by the CFIB, the Canadian free trade agreement was a major step towards resolving often conflicting rules and regulations across the provinces. Thank you to the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade for having the backs of Albertan businesses and ensuring they have the best landscape to succeed.

Now, we know that regulations have an important role in protecting the health and safety of Alberta's families and workers. Regulations also help to ensure that businesses are competing on a level playing field and ensure that clients and customers are getting a fair deal. One-for-one rules are overly simplistic because the number of individual regulations doesn't correlate with the burden imposed by the regulations. One could easily create five new regulations that have minimal administrative costs or one new regulation that is extremely onerous to comply with.

This bill proposed by the hon. member also lacks the specifics needed for this type of change. For instance, if government creates a new environmental regulation, would this bill necessitate removal of another environmental regulation or a regulation from any other field? It's important to ask: what constitutes a new regulation that needs to be offset? Some regulations could be needed to include agency guidance and to help clarify earlier regulations or to assist businesses. Other regulations might include enforcement policies, interpretations, directives, memoranda, et cetera. Again, this bill lacks the specificity needed.

One-for-one rules also create more work for regulators and slow down bureaucracy, Madam Speaker, because trying to reduce the number of regulations will only make new regulations more dense and complex. In addition, having to identify regulations to eliminate and performing comparative CBAs for existing regulations versus the proposed new regulation are extremely time intensive. Let me reiterate that enforcing a one-for-one rule increases bureaucratic inefficiency and lag time because policy-makers must spend time identifying regulations to repeal and replace as well as drafting new policies.

One-for-one rules make it more difficult to co-ordinate our regulatory regime with that of other jurisdictions and therefore complicate trade for Alberta companies. For example, if an Alberta small or medium-sized enterprise wants to access another market within Canada or internationally, it will need to comply with foreign regulations before it can export. This is one reason why streamlining Alberta regulations with other jurisdictions simplifies this process for individual businesses. One-for-one rules also hamper the ability of public agencies to create regulations.

Let me be clear. Reducing regulations, whether they are environmental, financial, or otherwise, exposes the public and the environment to risk, and our government remains committed to mitigating public risks and having strong oversight systems in place. While we understand that regulations and bureaucracy may be frustrating at times, they exist to protect the public and the environment from unnecessary risk.

So, Madam Speaker, while I cannot support the bill, if the opposition has examples of existing regulations they believe should be removed, I know that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade would be happy to discuss them, and I'd be happy to hear from them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is imperative that we take a look at some sort of red tape reduction priority in this province, and that's the reason that I'm pleased today to stand up in the House and not only speak to but support Bill 207, the Regulatory Burden Reduction Act.

Alberta is the only province in Confederation that doesn't have a plan or a procedure to reduce red tape in our province. This is the only province that is so backwards and so far behind on this that we're willing to blow smoke and claim, "Oh, we're just going to do it privately," that it's too much work, that it costs too much energy. We're the only province that still has our head in the sand and doesn't believe that it's important that we take a close look at the regulatory burden that businesses have to endure in this province. Why are we so far behind in this? I really don't understand that.

We need to start with some sort of a basic principle of commitment, and we can do that by implementing this piece of legislation to restore the ability of our businesses to be competitive, to restore foreign investment, and, I also might say, to restore the innovation that has driven Alberta's economy, that has driven our prosperity, made families do well. But as long as we're going to say, "Oh, it doesn't matter" or that there's some aspect of this that takes too much work, it's like being a hoarder, quite frankly. If you don't want to clean out your house because it's too much work, then the regulations just pile up higher and deeper and higher and deeper till, finally, no one can even move in the house. We need to take a look at the competitiveness, the foreign investment benefits, and the innovative benefits that would come from reducing some of the regulation that,

quite frankly, is obsolete and redundant. That's the regulation that needs to be looked at.

Interestingly, British Columbia did this. They didn't decrease their taxes at all to attract business. All they did is to decrease their red tape burden by 43 per cent, and it doesn't seem to have hurt them in any way. They didn't find it too expensive or taking too much effort or that it somehow bound them as a government that they had to get rid of one when they put a new one in. They got rid of 43 per cent of their regulation, which is a severe cost to business, and that severe cost to business is what will limit our competitiveness, our investment, and our innovation. It's a substantial amount of money that goes to the administrative costs that both small, medium, and large business have to carry on top of the other burdens of an economic downturn and other things.

You know, running a business is hard. It takes a massive amount of work. All the business owners that I know spend probably twice as much time and effort at running their business, work late at night at home, back there first thing in the morning, in order to survive. They don't have a nice, cushy, safe 8-to-4 job and get a guaranteed pension and all that stuff. Running a small business is extremely hard. Do you know that the average small business – 50 per cent of small businesses will not survive their first five years. Fifty per cent of them will not survive the first five years.

Then you can go to the big businesses. I know that people across the aisle here think that big business is the evil monster, that somehow they're destroying everybody and sucking their blood and that they're unkind and everything else. But did you know that the biggest businesses in North America, the Standard & Poor's 500, on average will only survive 15 years? Company mortality is extremely high in North America, and part of the reason is the regulatory burden that they have to face.

Not only do they have to face economic changes and economic ups and downs, changes in markets, competitors, and all the rest; they have to deal with the weight of outdated and overregulation, that costs them immense amounts of money.

4:30

We've already heard that in Canada \$30 billion a year goes to basically complying with regulation, much of it obsolete, much of it outdated, much of it utterly ineffective in accomplishing any kind of good for the public. The numbers of hours and the employee contributions that have to go into paperwork and compliance and reporting and testing and all these different kinds of things: they all overlap.

These things are truly a burden upon business. I think we need to think of it as a bag of rocks, quite frankly. Every time you create an unnecessary burden, you put another rock in the bag that that business has to carry. Every step they want to take, they have to move that bag of rocks first. It's not in any way efficient. We are killing our businesses, which is killing the job opportunities, the employment opportunities by maintaining and keeping unnecessary regulation and by burdening businesses with these heavy weights, which in many cases are truly obsolete and redundant and do nothing to promote public safety in any way, shape, or form.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has been so clear in issuing their report card during Red Tape Awareness Week. This report card has graded the provinces and the territories on their commitment to red tape reduction. It looks at political leadership, public measurement, constraints on regulations, and guess what this province gets? Every year we get an F, a failure. We have completely failed in this. It's unbelievable. B.C. gets an A. Quebec gets an A. Alberta gets a complete failure on this. We are adding not just rocks but big stones to the burdens that businesses have to carry in order to try to survive. It's no wonder that the majority of small businesses fail

within five years and that even the big ones don't make it past 15 years on average.

Running a business is extremely hard. We should be making it easier for business. Business is what earns tax revenue for this province. Business is what provides jobs for people. Businesses are the ones that provide services and even charity donations and all the rest of it. If we continue to burden them with excessive amounts of obsolete and redundant regulation, they don't stay. They leave.

The member across brags about how many new businesses have been started this year. How many actually left, and how many of those new businesses were started because people lost their jobs due to the policies and regulations of this government? They don't have any employment, and they have no other choice but to try and create a new business. Then let's remember that more than half of them are going to fail within the next five years. People will have lost even more.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the private member's bill to close debate, I would like to now invite the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to close debate.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The goal of this bill was to give the government an opportunity to address the burden of red tape on our society. When business costs increase or are high, that cost is always passed on to the consumer – always – unless they leave the jurisdiction and go to another jurisdiction, which is equally devastating to our society.

Now, B.C.'s success, in which they were able to do a 36 per cent reduction in three years, should be reason enough to support this bill. Receiving an F from CFIB every year should be enough to support this bill. The fact that we are the only provincial jurisdiction in Canada that doesn't have a red tape reduction strategy should be reason enough to support this bill. The fact that red tape disproportionately hurts small businesses should be reason enough to support this bill. The fact that this government has no idea how many regulations are on the books, called the regulatory baseline, should be reason enough to support this bill. The fact that a majority of the members opposite have never signed the front of a cheque should be reason enough to support this bill. The fact that the jurisdictions to the south are reducing red tape and that this makes us uncompetitive should be reason enough to support this bill. [interjections]

According to the Conference Board of Canada we have lost . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, if we could please let the member close debate. Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: As I was saying, Madam Speaker, according to the Conference Board of Canada we have lost \$36 billion of investment in our province due to – and they state it – high regulation and regulations that this government has put on businesses.

Now, I had cited before, when I introduced this bill, Canada's Oil and Gas Sector at Risk? How Excessive Taxes and Regulations Undermine Our Competitiveness, by Germain Belzile. I just want to quote once again for the members to hear. She says:

As governments in Canada increase the regulatory burden and corporate taxes in the oil and gas sector, the U.S. government is moving in the opposite direction.

. . . Canadians should be aware that Canadian competitiveness is already being affected by measures that have been adopted, and could be affected even more if other reforms succeed [in the United States]. The relative equilibrium we've enjoyed with our southern neighbour will be thrown off kilter,

and will only be re-established if governments in Canada follow suit.

The problem, Madam Speaker, is that this government is going in the opposite direction of where we should be going. When we have a jurisdiction to the south of us that is lowering taxes, lowering regulatory burden, then we need to do the same in order for us to be able to compete with foreign investment. This is where this government seems to fail. They seem to fail in being able to understand that we are in global competition not just with other jurisdictions in Saskatchewan or in B.C. but that we actually compete globally with the United States, with Europe, with Asia especially, in order to be able to sell our products.

When B.C. decided that they were going to approach this issue, what they decided was that, yes, they could lower taxes. Instead, what they said was: we're going to try to just decrease regulatory burden. They did that, and they saw such success with GDP growth in their own province that they decided to keep on doing it year after year. When it was all said and done, they were able to decrease the regulations by over 43 per cent.

This is not asking to decrease regulation. This is actually just taking a baby step, which is to say a one-for-one rule. I heard members this afternoon. I heard the Member for Edmonton-McClung saying that we don't want to hamstring the government. The problem is that if you don't give yourself something to work towards, a goal to work towards, then you're not going to achieve anything. At least, we have the opportunity to be able to say: here's the problem; let's fix it.

I would implore all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this bill. This is a good first step in being able to help our small businesses, especially, to get back to work.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:38 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gill	MacIntyre
Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Orr
Cooper	Hunter	Pitt
Drysdale	Loewen	Stier

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Phillips
Bilous	Jansen	Piquette
Carson	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Ceci	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Connolly	Luff	Sabir
Coolahan	Malkinson	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Schreiner
Dach	McKitrick	Shepherd
Dang	McLean	Sucha
Drever	Miller	Swann
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Turner
Goehring	Nielsen	Westhead
Gray	Payne	Woollard
Hinkley		

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 40
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 207 lost]

**Bill 208
Government Organization (Utilities Consumer
Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017**

The Speaker: The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to introduce debate on second reading of Bill 208, the Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017.

Electricity in today's modern communities is a necessity, and consumers need to know that the government has their back when they are dealing with companies that distribute and market electricity. They cannot be left to fend for themselves on their own in a market where the terms and conditions of electricity contracts are often hard to understand. To protect those consumers and to provide them with the information they need to make informed and safe choices for their families, it is important to create an easily accessible information source that gives them the background they need. Providing electricity to their families is one of the most important choices that people can make. We need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to protect Albertans from undue and unanticipated costs.

I've had many conversations with people in my communities who have raised questions about electricity marketing and how their bills work. The fact is that there are many elements to electricity pricing, and we need to take as much guesswork out of the equation as possible. The bill will ensure that consumers have the information they need to make good deals in the energy marketplace.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, this bill will give the Utilities Consumer Advocate the authority to gather records such as complaints made under the Alberta Utilities Commission Act or the Electric Utilities Act and the outcome of any recommendations, hearings, or settlements; also investigations, orders, administrative penalties, or convictions conducted, awarded, or made under the Fair Trading Act, the Electric Utilities Act, or the Alberta Utilities Commission Act; also compliance records of a distributor, provider, or retailer in adhering to the standards and codes prescribed under the Electric Utilities Act, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, and the Fair Trading Act; and any other matters that the Utilities Consumer Advocate considers necessary to carry out the purposes of this clause. It will also ask the UCA to make the information they gather public in an easily understandable format. This will help consumers when they go to purchase electricity contracts.

I've also had the opportunity to meet with the Utilities Consumer Advocate and hear about some of the fantastic work that that office does to help energy consumers in Alberta. This bill will enshrine the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate in law so that the UCA can be there for Albertans for the future.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate is an important resource for Albertans. Every year they handle some 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries. They produce educational material and run outreach events across the province. They provide mediation services to consumers who cannot reach agreement with their utility providers, and often their intervention is enough to settle most disputes. They run a program every year reconnecting utilities for people who have had their services disconnected so that some of Alberta's most vulnerable do not suffer through a winter without heat or power. They conduct research and represent consumers at proceedings of the Alberta Utilities Commission. Since 2013 the UCA's intervention at commission hearings has helped save more than \$800 million on energy bills.

This is an important role, Mr. Speaker, and I am proud to be putting forward a bill that will allow this valuable office . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time limit for consideration of this matter is concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Carbon Levy Impact on Seniors' Care

509. Mr. Gotfried moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly establish a special committee to assess the financial impact of the carbon levy on organizations that provide front-line care to seniors in Alberta, including but not limited to for-profit organizations, not-for-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, and government-owned and -operated facilities, and in conducting its review, the committee shall consult with key public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders and make recommendations for the mitigation of any impacts deemed a threat to the provision of front-line care.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During my time as Seniors and Housing critic for the legacy PC caucus I had the opportunity to sit down with many care providers from all across Alberta. The one thing that continued to come up with them and with the seniors affected by it was the negative impact the carbon levy was having on organizations which provide front-line seniors' care. This motion is deliberately broad in nature, including for-profit, not-for-profit, faith-based, and government-owned and -operated facilities because it's not just one type of provider that is experiencing difficulties because of the carbon levy; quite frankly, it is all of them. These difficulties extend all across the spectrum of operators in Alberta.

Many seniors are on fixed incomes, whether that be government support, savings, family supplements, pensions, or some combination of the above. These fixed-income seniors who live in facilities which have the ability to raise rates to protect their ability to provide appropriate services along with operating and facility funds, life cycle maintenance, and in some cases, yes, a modest profit are concerned about the affordability of accommodations and services as well as their ability to remain self-reliant while enjoying life in their golden years.

Mr. Speaker, we all know seniors who have moved from their homes into some type of seniors' housing. These are the people who built Alberta into the place it is today. They're our parents, our grandparents, and soon it will be many of us. All they want is to be able to age in comfort with respect and dignity. Layering the additional costs of the carbon levy onto facilities which have the ability to raise rates irrespective of carbon rebates may price some seniors out of facilities that they are happy, welcome, and engaged in and in which they have become a part of those communities.

I think studying the impact the carbon levy has on these organizations, had had, and will have and the individuals affected by such increases driven by increases in operating costs for all facilities only strengthens what is a flagship policy of this government, whether I agree with it or not. Mr. Speaker, refusing to study something because you're afraid the results might not be all that flattering, sunshine and rainbows, is no way to govern.

Other accommodation, service, or care providers do not have the latitude to raise rents or fees to cover the impact of additional costs brought on by the carbon levy. They operate under a fixed-price environment. If they're able to raise their rates to cover the

increased costs, it means they have to cut somewhere in order to stay afloat. We have heard from such organizations that they're facing costs which could escalate into the hundreds of thousands of dollars and severely impact their ability to meet the needs and expectations of their residents and clients, senior Albertans who have given their blood, sweat, and tears and hard work in building our great province.

In a seniors' facility which cannot raise rates, the things which will suffer will be things like the food options and recreational activities they offer. Do you want to be the one who does not understand or appreciate the impact on their lives? Is it the fresh salad, fruit, or vegetables on Tuesdays, Thursdays, or Saturdays, the podiatrist or massage therapist on Wednesdays and Fridays, or the thermostat setting that leaves them chilled in the winter? Should you decide, or should we understand it and appreciate that impact, as this motion asks our government to do? These quality-of-life components should not have to suffer because of the carbon levy.

Not only has the carbon levy affected the ability of these organizations to provide the same quality of life for their residents; it is threatening the financial viability and sustainability of many for-profit, not-for-profit, and co-operative seniors' accommodations and care and service providers. I know that some members opposite have made public statements that they would like to see the government own and operate all facilities, but that is not the case today. Quite frankly, we need all the operators, including the government facilities, to be operating to meet the needs of our seniors. There needs to be robust consultation with the faith-based, nonprofit, and private-sector providers with respect to the sustainability of their facilities, operations, and services. The lives and dignity of our seniors depend on it.

As noted by the Ministry of Seniors, Alberta's senior population will almost double in the next 14 years, reaching approximately 920,000 by 2031. The baby boomers are about to explode the demand for seniors' housing and services, and it's important that we understand the consequences of our actions and policies on these growing demographics. We cannot afford to lose beds, facilities, programs, and professional services provided by these compassionate independent providers. These organizations do great work across Alberta. The vast majority of them provide high-quality care and work extremely hard to keep their residents and clients happy and to improve their quality of life. Mr. Speaker, I have seen that in action.

Mr. Speaker, the carbon levy is, again, increasing by 50 per cent on January 1. This will further increase the cost. That will mean that seniors' care, accommodation, and services will be under further pressure and, quite frankly, will be severely challenged to provide the same services that they'd been doing in a cost-effective manner. The minimum wage increases we have seen, which will escalate further in the years ahead, only compound the impact and challenges for many of these organizations. As legislators we need to be fully cognizant and be willing to be transparent with respect to the unintended consequences the carbon levy is having on front-line seniors' care. It is our responsibility to these vulnerable Albertans, and we all need to be concerned about their care, housing, and well-being and to help them thrive in their golden years.

It is absolutely having an impact on the financial health and quality of life for our seniors, who by 2031 will represent fully 25 per cent of the population. Do they deserve your attention, concern, and compassion? I would argue that they do. I know that the members opposite often accuse us of using the carbon levy as a bogeyman, but that is just not the case. Every policy put forward by the government has an effect [interjections] – laugh at the seniors if you will – intended or unintended. In fact, we consulted broadly on

this issue over the past year. We have communicated with the Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing Association, ASCHA, some of their members and residents of their facilities, and know that they have passed a resolution hoping that the impact of the carbon levy on housing operations would be reviewed and addressed. In fact, I am certain that housing and services providers would be happy to roll up their sleeves and work with all key parties collaboratively in a nonadversarial manner to ensure that front-line services are not impacted for their guests, their residents, their clients.

Additionally, the Alberta Continuing Care Association, which represents over 14,000 residents in supportive living and long-term care, has brought the issue of the carbon tax implications for congregate living care providers to my attention and fully supports this motion, which brings me back to one of my previous points. We as legislators and representatives of our communities need to be able to take the time and look at how the things we do in this House affect everyday, normal, hard-working Albertans, particularly those seniors that built this province. We need to ensure that the legislation and policies implemented in this House improve the lives of Albertans and allow them to thrive and live a dignified life and not make it more difficult for them to do so. I do not see the harm nor any risk to anyone other than Alberta seniors if we don't do so in taking the time to look further into this issue and the impact.

It is clearly an issue for a wide variety of front-line care providers across Alberta, and arming the government with additional information can only serve to improve a policy which affects every single Albertan in some way, shape, or form, indeed, the seniors we respect, love, care for, and owe so much to. It is for these reasons that I would encourage all members of the Assembly to think about the seniors in their lives, to think about the seniors in their community, to think about the seniors of the future, that doubling of the number of seniors, 25 per cent of this province's population. I would encourage you to think about them when you're voting and to vote for this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek for his passionate defence, and I really want to thank you for your passionate caring for seniors and your emphasis that we need to be nice to our seniors. That's why I am on the government's side, because our government has invested so much in seniors. That is why we started building more long-term care. That is why we invested in the infrastructure budget. I am thinking that you are very much supportive of the efforts of the government and in investing in the seniors projects that we are doing such as in my own riding and in Calgary and so on.

5:10

I'm not going to be supporting this motion for a number of reasons. First of all, our government is providing services that families and seniors need. I want to emphasize time and again that our government has made a priority of ensuring that we have the funds to support seniors and families and that we are not planning to do any cuts, as the members of the opposition randomly tweet about.

I also think that this motion distracts from the government's goals of carefully reducing the deficit while strengthening Albertans' priorities in health care, education, and seniors' care. As a senior I am very well aware of the needs of seniors and the investment that our government has already made around seniors. We have also taken action to protect and support jobs, build new roads and

hospitals, support the energy industry by securing approval of new pipelines, and build more long-term care units, assisted living, and now facilities like the affordable housing that seniors need.

Our government is making life more affordable for seniors. At the moment a quarter of a million Albertan seniors are eligible for a maximum of \$300 annually from the carbon levy rebate, Mr. Speaker. That's almost half of the seniors in the province. I know, having talked to the same housing providers as the previous speaker has, that the housing providers are very well aware of the \$300 carbon levy that seniors have received and have adjusted their rates to take into account that rebate. Nearly all seniors in government-owned and -supported seniors' facilities are receiving the rebate. Our plan is working.

Our government also supports seniors by protecting more than \$800 million in seniors' benefits over the last two years. I am sure you've talked to a lot of seniors who have available health care and receive health benefits and receive dental care and so on. This is an important program that provides the monthly income supplement to federal income sources for seniors. I am proud that we maintain this commitment through challenging economic times, and I plan on making sure that we are committed to continuing, to maintaining support for our seniors rather than the 20 per cent cutback which the opposition, the UCP, keeps talking about.

Mr. Speaker, our government knows that every Albertan has the right to access safe and stable housing, and that's why we have built almost 3,000 new homes for seniors in Alberta. We also know that by building new homes in Alberta, we've also provided jobs for a lot of Albertans. We're also helping seniors around low-income equity loans, and a lot of the seniors have been using their loans to become more energy efficient.

Mr. Speaker, I kind of wanted to talk about those nonprofit and for-profit organizations which the previous speaker has spoken about. Having talked to a lot of these organizations, one of the things that always interests me is that these organizations are interested in becoming energy efficient and in using renewable energy and in upgrading the facilities to be more energy efficient. I'm really hoping that the previous speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, come on.

Ms McKittrick: . . . has made sure the agencies in his own riding have access to the government grants to support them to do that. One of the purposes of the carbon levy is to make sure that those organizations have the opportunity to reduce their energy needs and reduce their monthly outlay in energy costs. You know, a lot of seniors are very interested in that issue. I have a sustainability committee in my own riding, and I would say that three-quarters of the members of this committee are seniors because they know that the investment in the carbon levy and the investment in energy efficiency is not only good for them, but it's good for their grandchildren, and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, hon. members.

Ms McKittrick: . . . it's good for all of Alberta.

I also think that we have to really believe that these organizations that take care of seniors are themselves invested in reducing their energy. In September there was a conference in Calgary, 400 nonprofit organizations whose purpose is to be more energy efficient and to ensure that the nonprofit sector becomes more energy efficient. I think it's disingenuous of the opposition not to pay attention to the fact that the same people who provide care for our seniors are also themselves invested in energy-efficient use and in reducing their carbon footprint.

Mr. Speaker, two years ago, when the economy was in free fall, we refused to make a bad situation worse by making cuts to services that families count on. Instead, we got down to work to help Albertans weather the storm. This means that we're not only maintaining existing provincially owned facilities but we are building new facilities to support the communities who need housing the most. One of the really great things when we're building new facilities is that we're making them more energy efficient.

Our government has never wavered, also, in their commitment to protecting public health care. I am so proud that we have not just maintained but we have increased funding for home and community care, bringing the total to more than \$2 billion. This funding will give seniors and Albertans with disabilities services such as nursing and personal assistance, day programs, respite care, palliative care, and wound care so that they can continue to live at home and participate in their communities. Now, we know that things were not always easy for Albertans over the last few years, but one of the things that we've done as a government is to support seniors and low-income Albertans, and we have committed to that. We've also committed to supporting families.

One of the things I think we really need to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is how, unfortunately, the opposition has been spreading misinformation and blatant falsehoods about the carbon levy and the contrived 75 per cent hike to home heating bills, all to incite a climate of fear and confusion. I end up spending so much time on Facebook and Twitter having to counteract and give facts to people. [interjections] That's really what disturbs me the most about this . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms McKittrick: . . . fear for seniors that this motion is calling for. I think we have to be honest and say facts and not put out so much misinformation.

As we also have seen – and one of the things that I'm really starting to find so frustrating as an Albertan is how often the opposition wants us to fail. Every single time it's always negative. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms McKittrick: Why don't we be positive sometimes? Why don't we think about what's happening around the carbon levy . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you'd direct your comments through the Speaker, it would be appreciated. Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm feeling very energized about this issue because I really don't like to have to spend so much time every single day on Facebook and on Twitter trying to say the truth to people, okay?

I think it's really good for us to kind of remind ourselves about some of the true facts. For example, current gas prices are so low that Albertans are paying less than they have in over a generation. As I've travelled all over Canada, our gas is one of the lowest throughout Canada. At its peak Albertans were paying between \$140 and \$160 a month to heat their homes and run their businesses.

Often, with my constituents, I spend a lot of time reminding them that they have options as to who they can use for providers of their gas and electricity. The average household is paying less than \$100, and that is not to mention the rebates we are giving to low- and middle-income families and our seniors. As I mentioned before – and I think it's good – so that everybody is reminded, low-income seniors in Alberta are eligible for a \$300 carbon levy rebate. I would

like to take the opportunity to remind all seniors to make sure that they fill out their income tax in January so that they can be eligible for a rebate. This goes for families, too.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion 509. The actions behind this motion have been needed for the past year. Yes, it's been a year. This NDP's job-killing, non social licensing carbon tax – and I will not call it a levy; let's put it on the record – has created the need for me to rise and for my hon. colleague for Calgary-Fish Creek to introduce this motion. Motion 509 calls for this Assembly to study the financial impact of the carbon tax on seniors' care in Alberta. If this is a godsent carbon tax, why are we afraid of doing an impact study on it? What are we trying to hide from the seniors, the seniors who have built this province, who have done so much? Why are we trying to hide from them what this government is taking away from them?

5:20

I also ask this Chamber to launch a thorough and comprehensive consultation with the public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders; in other words, every single organization and business that is involved in seniors' care. We know that the NDP's poorly-thought-out and unnecessary carbon tax hurts seniors and everybody else living in this province. It hurts them at every level. My colleague the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek became concerned about the impact of this tax on the accommodations and services offered to seniors when he was the critic for Seniors and Housing. Since then, I have taken over the role, and I plan to continue his crusade to have a proper and fulsome discussion about how this carbon tax affects seniors' care. This is step one.

It must be disappointing to Albertans who voted for this accidental government, Mr. Speaker, to learn of the NDP's lack of concern for seniors. It must be disappointing for them. They talk it up fine, buying headlines every single day, front-line this, front-line that, but in the end there's no concern for caring for Alberta's vulnerable citizen. It's like – I'm trying to remember the saying – it's an all hat but no cattle kind of thing, right? It's all talk but no care. We all know that seniors are among those citizens – you would think an NDP government would put their care as a top priority because they claim to be champions. Instead, they are targeted like everyone else when it comes to this indiscriminate carbon tax. Again, not a levy, a tax.

It is a warning to all Albertans, for all of us will become seniors. One day we're all going to become seniors. Some are going to become sooner than later, but we're all going to become seniors. For many of us our parents are already there or on the verge of becoming seniors. We can't escape that. It should be a quieter time, a time to reflect, not a time to worry daily about paying bills, not a time to worry: what will become of me if the carbon tax forces an increase in my price of accommodation? It's cruel to even consider the consequences. To be in a position to do something about it and to not do anything but increase the price for the sake of an unnecessary tax is crazy.

My colleague's motion is a common-sense one. Common sense, as we know, is not the NDP's strong suit, but we continue to hope that they may see value in it one day. This motion asks for an economic impact study. That should have happened before imposing the tax, like all the other bills, Bill 6. We can talk about those things that the government claims they have done consultation on but haven't, but since they didn't, it doesn't mean we brush it off now. [interjections] The members on the other side

think it's funny. It's not actually funny, and we should not be laughing at seniors who are going to be impacted by the increase in this tax. This is not funny, actually.

Why not do the study? What are we trying to hide from the seniors who have built this province? Why not meet with the organizations and businesses that provide services to the seniors, who understand how this year-old tax is affecting our older citizen in a very real way? Why not find out if changes to the tax, such as exemptions for certain sectors, make sense? There are always common-sense ways of mitigating the impact of government policies. Wouldn't the government want to know what these policies are? Why are we not doing that?

If this government claims that we have Albertans' backs, let's show Albertans that we actually do have their backs. We're not saying to stop or start anything. Let's do an impact study. That's all that this motion is about. Let the professionals do the impact study, and let's improve seniors' lives. That's all we're saying. But the government is not willing to do that. There must be a reason why they're not supporting this motion. There must be a reason why they don't want to share the information with seniors and Albertans. I don't understand why. Perhaps these changes, these policies would be easy to implement. Perhaps they'll make sense. But we'll only find out when we do this economic impact study of it.

This motion, Motion 509, from my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek is especially crucial now, with the tax slated to increase at the end of this year. That's only a month away. Actually, 34 days, 35 days, Mr. Speaker. The UCP has promised Albertans that, yes, we will repeal this tax, and that will happen. [interjections] Don't laugh. That will happen. I'm telling you.

But in the interim it continues to exist. You would think that an NDP government who claims to care about people would vote in favour of this motion. Again, they don't want to do it because maybe they're trying to hide something from seniors. What do they have to lose? Apparently, these days – you have all seen the polls in the newspaper – they have very little to lose, actually, right? They don't have much to lose. We've all seen the polls.

Still, let's stick to the motion. At the very least I'm asking the government: let's pretend that they actually care about seniors. Let's pretend. They pretend when they buy the news headlines. Let's pretend, by supporting this motion, that they actually care about Albertans and they care about seniors. But they don't want to do it. For these citizens it could be suffering as a result of this poorly-thought-out tax. Again, not a levy, a tax.

If they don't do this consultation, this NDP government will never know the truth. Or maybe they do know the truth, and they don't want to share it with seniors and Albertans. Is that the reason? Is that the reason? I don't know why members aren't laughing about this now. You must know the truth, but you're afraid to share it with Albertans. If you have nothing to hide, let's support this motion, and let's do the economic impact study. That's all we're asking. But perhaps their plan in making policy and actually denying it: they don't want to accept that it's actually hurting people, because it is. It is hurting. That's why they're just, like, busy buying headlines. That's why they're denying the fact that, you know, this carbon tax is impacting people in a negative way. That's why they're trying to hide the truth from . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

5:30

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to the motion before the House. It's interesting, having listened to the most recent speaker from the

Official Opposition, who spoke very eloquently about the entitlement that he thinks the members of the Conservative Party still have to govern this province. He predicted an election outcome which was one where he believed forcefully that his party would win the election. Well, we don't deign on this side of the House to predict what Albertans will do. We certainly do everything we can every day to earn the right to govern once again.

Mr. Malkinson: That's leadership right there.

Mr. Dach: You better believe it.

As far as assuming what direction this province will go in in 2019, we believe strongly that we are going in the right direction, that we're on the right track, that putting a price on carbon is a forward-looking policy. Not doing so, allowing the federal government to set that policy for us, is a rear-view mirror attitude. That's exactly the type of attitude that the members opposite express time and time again, driving looking in the rear-view mirror. To be able to go back in time, as their leader has said that he'd prefer to do – if he could have any power that he wanted, he would choose to go back in time.

Well, I'll tell you what. We're not going back in time; we're moving forward in this province. We protected the seniors' benefits so that seniors have up to \$280 a month when they really need it. Jason Kenney's Conservatives would cut the seniors' benefit, making life harder for low-income seniors. We are strengthening the public services that seniors count on, like health care. They would make extreme cuts to health care and other front-line services, going back in time. We're working to make life better for everyday families. They want to give big tax giveaways to those ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, I wonder if you could direct your comments just a little to the left.

Mr. Dach: Our government works hard to protect the public services that families count on. Our priority is investing for the future, not forming committees.

As you have heard previous speakers talk about, in addition to all sorts of investments that we are going to be making as a result of being able to have a carbon levy at our disposal, we've invested \$88 million in much-needed repairs to fix furnaces, windows, and roofs for Albertans living in affordable housing. We're investing in new projects like the Sakaw lodge in Edmonton, Bow River lodge in Canmore, and Gilchrist Gardens phase 2 in Calgary.

For home care, we've increased funding for home and community care, bringing the total to more than \$2 billion. This funding will give seniors and Albertans with disabilities services such as nursing and personal assistants, day programs, respite relief, palliative care, and wound care so they can continue to live at home and participate in their communities. That's what a carbon levy gets you, Mr. Speaker.

Long-term care. We're committed to building 2,000 long-term care and dementia spaces, and we're on track. In the first quarter of this year we opened 388 continuing care beds. Ask our seniors in this province if they like those kinds of statistics, Mr. Speaker.

We are making life better and more affordable for seniors through the carbon levy rebate and, as I said, investing \$88 million for housing riders for upgrading furnaces and windows. All the opposition is focused on is cuts proposed by their leader that would make life harder for seniors. A 20 per cent cut would mean as many as 30,000 seniors losing their benefits and 25,000 Albertans losing their housing supports.

We continue to work for seniors, not against them, by protecting more than \$800 million in seniors' benefits over the last two years,

investing in almost 3,000 new homes for seniors in Alberta, and providing access to low-interest home equity loans. We appointed a new Seniors Advocate to bring seniors' concerns directly to government, to continue working with seniors to make their lives better.

Now, I could go on at length, but I will talk a bit more about the reference to front-line seniors' care that seniors are receiving in Alberta. I'm proud of our government record that we continue to protect supports and services for seniors across the province; not only that, but we are making life more affordable for seniors. Approximately 260,000 Alberta seniors are eligible to receive a maximum of \$300 annually from the carbon levy rebate. Mr. Speaker, that's almost half of all seniors in the province.

The conclusion that I wanted to come to is to know that in the last few years we understand in this province that it's not been easy for people. Our plan, however, is working. Alberta is moving forward, and things are looking up. Supports for seniors and low-income Albertans are stronger. We're protecting the services that families count on, and this will continue, Mr. Speaker, to be our focus.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, in the last few weeks we have seen the opposition spreading incorrect information about the carbon levy and a contrived 75 per cent hike to home heating bills, which bears no resemblance to reality, all to incite a climate of fear and confusion, which is really unfortunate, especially when we're dealing with seniors, who really want to know what the actual numbers are. We know they would cut the benefit for Alberta seniors, making life harder for hundreds of low-income seniors. They would make extreme cuts to health care and other front-line services, putting many vulnerable Albertans at risk. These reckless cuts to health and education will hurt Alberta's economic recovery and do real damage to Albertans.

The direction this government is going in is one that is protecting seniors and their health care and their housing, and the carbon levy that we have implemented is helping us do that. We are looking forward and putting a price on carbon, and the opposition wants to drive looking in the rear-view mirror, and they'll put that blue truck in the ditch every time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise tonight to speak on Motion 509, which was put forward by my colleague for Calgary-Fish Creek. I just wanted to clear something up about the carbon levy, tax. The fact that it's called a levy also means that the federal government can tax that tax. I just don't understand in anybody's world how that helps out Albertans. Just to be clear, that's \$3 billion that goes from this province to the federal government because this government chose to call it a levy instead of the tax that it actually is, just to get the math straight there for a second.

We have continually seen that this government lacks forethought with rushed legislation, and the rule for the last few years under the leadership of this government is to legislate first and consult second. One of the prime examples, of course, is what we're talking about right now, which is the carbon tax. Maybe the government hasn't figured it out, but it is contentious, it is unpopular, the government did not campaign on this, and it takes money out of the pockets of every single Albertan, including seniors. The province has failed at social licence because they're buying it with our tax dollars, and there has to be buy-in from people in order for that to work.

When it was introduced last year, the members on this side of the House fought extensively to the bitter end to advocate for Albertans

to ensure that their interests were represented. We begged the government to reconsider and to do the economic impact study, Mr. Speaker. We would really, really like to understand the real-world impacts. That's actually all that we're asking for. There's a lot of rhetoric that's going on. We're actually just looking to have the numbers and the metrics. Actually, during the debate over the carbon tax in the first place it was one of the main things that we asked for: within a year show us the metrics, show us the changes, and show us how the footprint has been altered.

We also pointed to other jurisdictions across the world, Mr. Speaker, to see that the carbon taxes that have been put in place have been reversed because the legislation proved to be ineffective in actually changing consumer behaviours, which I believe is actually the whole reason for having a carbon tax in the first place.

We also pointed out that in rural Alberta there's not always the ability to take public transit, which was one of the things that I believe the Premier pointed out, to just go take the bus. Well, for some of the seniors in some of the areas that I happen to represent, I have a feeling that that might be a bit difficult, so I think a different solution might be necessary. Again, the consumer needs to buy in. That does not make life better for seniors.

We have pointed to the fact that there would be a tax on every consumer good since Alberta is landlocked. Guess what? We rely on trucks and rail to ship goods and services. Yes, we do. And because of the rising cost of fuel and because of the carbon tax, it will now be substantially more expensive to move those goods and services to Alberta. That impacts our seniors, especially because a good chunk of them are on fixed incomes.

We pointed to the fact that this was a backdoor PST, and at a time of recession and struggle it was crippling to add these further expenses to the bills of Albertans that are already struggling to balance their chequebooks around their kitchen tables. Unfortunately, even though there were cries of exasperation and desperation, they fell on the deaf ears of this government.

5:40

One group in particular that we're talking about, the seniors, are amazing Albertans who built this province, who should now be enjoying their well-deserved retirement, Albertans who are largely on fixed incomes and may not be capable of earning more money to offset the costs of the carbon tax and who may not be even capable of changing the consumer habits that they have. Many seniors in Alberta are already taking the bus, and they also live in eco-friendly group housing, but they are vulnerable and on fixed incomes. Those who are not able to make further changes to their lifestyles: we're just going to penalize those folks so that they have less of a carbon footprint, that the government is refusing to show metrics on to show that it actually is working?

What about the fact that there's no – so we're going to invest in green technology but not in the seniors. There are long-reaching implications caused by this. Our offices, my office anyway, were inundated with letters and e-mails and calls from seniors and seniors' advocates, stakeholders, care providers, who – again, I'm not really sure how they're supposed to take the bus in rural areas. I would like to know how that's supposed to happen.

It became so clear to Albertans that seniors were targeted unfairly by this tax, and despite their best efforts the care facilities at some point are going to have to face those rising costs, which will be downloaded onto their residents on a fixed income or the families and loved ones and caregivers that are taking care of those people. This caused an enormous amount of stress for seniors, who may already be depending on other people to help them be where they are. Their families and the administration personnel for seniors' care facilities asked the government to consider an exemption for

seniors, and guess what? They were denied. For anybody who is a worker, who helps out with these people: are they supposed to drive us?

Oh, actually, speaking of that, I'd like to go over some of the commentary that was put forward about the carbon tax with regard to how you can reduce your carbon emissions. One of those was to drive less. Okay. I'd like to know how our front-line providers are supposed to drive less when we actually need them in the places where our seniors need them. What was another? Oh, fly less. So seniors who have spent their lives working are not supposed to now travel in their senior lives and visit their families? You tell them, especially people who are grandparents, to not go visit their families overseas. Ride-share: Uber doesn't exist in rural areas, Mr. Speaker. The other one that I loved that also came from the Premier is to just go buy an electric vehicle. Well, I'm sure that seniors, based on their carbon tax rebate, will be able to afford that, not to mention the front-line workers who are already putting everything they can into making sure that our seniors are protected.

Unfortunately, the government doesn't value the service that is given and chose to hike taxes on every aspect of seniors' care through the carbon tax.

One of the other things that I loved reading about from the government was that it's only \$13.25 a month. Well, on a fixed income, with expenses increasing everywhere else – this isn't the only thing that they pay for, Mr. Speaker – this is more than just a few cups of coffee, and that does not make life more affordable for seniors.

The carbon tax makes it more expensive, in fact, to transport seniors, to make the food that facilities purchase to feed their residents due to the rising trucking fuel costs that are downloaded onto the consumer. How does that make life better for Albertans and especially our seniors, Mr. Speaker? It's more expensive to heat these care facilities. What's happening with that? That's going to get downloaded onto the seniors, the families, and everybody else who is helping them.

In the state of this current economy the seniors' care facilities are struggling, just like every other Albertan right now. The government cannot be this naive to think that they could put in place a tax – again, it's called a levy so that they can tax the tax so that our friends in Ottawa are receiving \$3 billion in extra money that could have actually gone to helping our seniors into their pockets and actually everybody else's, including the caregivers and families who take care of these precious people.

The businesses are now going to have to absorb these costs, and they're going to price that out to their consumers. What does the government think about the fact that there are now seniors and families across the province struggling to pay these ballooning seniors' care facility fees? How is that going to be managed? We understand that dollars have been put into beds and all of those other kinds of things. Those are part of the equation, but we're talking about what is actually going out of seniors' pockets.

Mr. Gill: Let's do a study. We'll find out.

Mrs. Aheer: I agree. If we do a study, then everything the government is saying should be true. It should be true. Prove the equation.

Motion 509 seeks to remedy some of the damage already done by this government to our seniors and the front-line services by calling for a financial impact study. This should be an absolute necessity in any bill, especially a money bill, to prove that those dollars are actually doing what they're supposed to do, which was to influence consumer changes in behaviour, in what they're doing, and also to reduce the carbon footprint, none of which is expressly

put forward in any of the regulations, nor is it being shown in any of the vulnerable groups that we are talking about with an impact study; specifically, seniors, people on any sort of fixed income like AISH or anything else like that.

This is a common-sense solution. If this is truly about making things better for Albertans, then show us. It should be easy. In fact, I would think the government would be jumping up and down, happy to show what they're doing and to expose that we're asking for something that is wrong. Please prove us wrong. We'd love that.

I think that one of the things we have to consider prior to implementing a tax like this and what we were hoping for, given the fact that the carbon tax is going to be going up in 2018, is that the government would understand that not only is this expensive for the average person but for our front-line services and seniors. This government will now not take any time to heed the warnings of the opposition and support this motion.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, I'm just standing to seek unanimous consent for one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to stand and speak to Motion 509, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing it forward. You know, I really like the Member for Calgary-Fish-Creek. He's a swell guy. We share a lot of similar interests. We really have an affinity for Southeast Asia. We've talked about it many times.

Connolly: Facial hair, balding.

Mr. Coolahan: Whoa. I resemble that remark.

Anyway, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I find that this motion is not as genuine as he wants it to be. It's more of I'll call it a trial balloon, if you will, and it's done to, you know, incite the rage machine and the climate deniers inside and outside of their caucus.

I have many, many seniors' facilities in Calgary's greatest riding, Calgary-Klein, and I visit often. After they've thanked me for the muffins or the cookies, they don't talk about the carbon levy – and we talk about it – as a burden. They don't talk about it as a burden. You know what they thank me for? They thank me for the new windows they just got installed. That's what they thank me for. They thank me for the new furnace that was installed. You know what else they thank us for? They thank me for the carbon levy rebate that they receive.

You know, this government has put a great deal of focus on ensuring that seniors are healthy and that they have good facilities to live in. I think the opposition is ignoring the fact that the infrastructure deficit was massive in these facilities, which is why we had to put all this money back into them, and I'm very happy that we're doing it. You know what else the seniors that I speak to in my riding do? They understand that it was an issue over the 30 years, facilities just deteriorating. We're picking up the pieces, and it's not easy. One of the ways to do that is through the carbon levy.

You know, we continue to work for seniors and not against them, Mr. Speaker: \$800 million in seniors' benefits over the last two years – \$800 million – investing in almost 3,000 new homes for seniors in Alberta, and providing access to low-interest and home equity loans. Not only that, but we're making life more affordable for seniors. Approximately 260,000 Alberta seniors are eligible for the annual rebate from the carbon levy. That's almost half the seniors in this province. That's why we continue to build seniors'

housing projects. Currently we're seeing almost 3,000 new homes for seniors in Alberta. Three thousand.

5:50

You know, the sad reality of this whole situation, with a lot of what the opposition puts forward and this motion, is that 99 per cent of what the opposition puts forward is very difficult to take seriously. Between the climate denying, the Rebel media appearances, the fake memes with fake numbers on them, I mean, it's really hard to take anything they put forward seriously because we're not sure if they're actually doing something with a genuine interest or just, again, to poke at the rage machine. Who knows? Does the opposition understand that for the provinces that don't have a climate leadership plan in place next year, it's going to be imposed on them? Really, do they not want a made-in-Alberta solution to this, something that we need to do?

Mr. Carson: They prefer Ottawa-imported, like their leader.

Mr. Coolahan: Ottawa-imported, like their leader.

But it's okay because they do have a plan for that. They're going to get rid of the Alberta climate leadership plan, they're going to take the imported, and then they're just going to sue the federal government. That always works. That's always a solid plan. Always a solid plan.

You know, when the opposition plays games and they mislead the public on many of these things and they make false statements, what they're doing is that they're rooting for Alberta to fail.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Coolahan: It is shameful.

You know, Mr. Kenney opposes absolutely everything we do. We know that they would cut Alberta seniors' benefits. They would make extreme cuts to health care and other front-line services. They'd put many vulnerable Albertans at risk, and their reckless cuts to health care and education will hurt Alberta's economic recovery and do real damage to Albertans. As my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-McClung said, it's rear-view thinking. I like that term. It's good. We're moving the province forward, absolutely, and in doing that, we're making sure that people don't get left behind – that's the important piece – including seniors. The cost of doing nothing for many years with these facilities was astronomical. This is why we're having to play catch-up, and it's shameful that that happened for so long.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to end it there. I'm going to say that I won't be supporting the motion, but thank you for bringing it forward.

The Speaker: I'll call on the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by saying that I am profoundly disappointed. I've worked hard for the past two and a half years to understand and appreciate the seniors-care ecosystem with diligence, spending nights in facilities and talking to seniors, so shame on the members opposite for not taking that time to understand the significant challenges being faced by seniors and seniors' service providers. Shame on them for being willing to blindly throw Alberta seniors under the bus, for blindly supporting a policy whose impact they do not even want to measure. As the saying goes, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. But perhaps the lack of management acumen on the other side or ability to balance a budget should not surprise me. I have 10.3 billion reasons that prove my point.

My motion quite plainly and simply asks for us to better measure and understand “the financial impact of the carbon levy on organizations that provide front-line care to seniors in Alberta” and to mitigate “any impacts deemed a threat to the provision of front-line care.” Front-line cuts, indeed.

I’m disappointed that the members opposite are afraid that the study may yield results that could negatively reflect on the unintended consequences of their policies. Whether they agree with my assertions and that of my party and the majority of Albertans of the damage caused by the carbon tax, they are misguided in rejecting this motion, an opportunity to do the right thing by Alberta seniors, Mr. Speaker. Or are they more concerned about the impact on their personal standing with respect to their partisan futures? Let Albertans answer that question in the future. On the contrary, I believe that supporting this motion would actually enhance their political capital. But I guess they can face that music and Alberta seniors at the polls if they truly cannot see their way to protecting these same seniors and their well-being today and into the future.

I’m disappointed that they would even consider putting their own self-interest ahead of that of our seniors, Mr. Speaker, and I’m disappointed that we have a government who is afraid of measuring impact, doing the right thing, and taking the time to ensure that their policies are as strong as they can be and that the impact, positive or negative, and unintended consequences are understood and quantified. That is what good government looks like and acts like in the protection of vulnerable Albertans.

We have seen numerous government policies result in unintended consequences, to the detriment of making life better or more affordable for Albertans. This motion could have allowed for representatives from this House to come together, putting our differences aside for Alberta seniors, to see how we can work to ensure that the carbon tax does not and will not have a negative impact on the lives, health, and well-being of our seniors. Is that too much to ask, Mr. Speaker? Having this additional information on hand would have provided the government with valuable data as they move full speed ahead, albeit irresponsibly, in my mind, with a 50 per cent increase in the carbon tax.

Like it or not, we have a carbon tax until at least 2019. But refusing to study the impact that this policy is having on our seniors is not only profoundly disappointing but disturbing in its callousness toward the plight of our seniors, who deserve not only better but the best we can deliver in terms of affordability and sustainability with respect to housing, care, nutrition, and essential services. If this government is so afraid of studying the impact that one of their flagship policies is having on a population with a limited ability to pay for the increased cost of living it is impacting, they must already know in their hearts and intuitively in their minds the damage the carbon levy is having every single day on fixed-income seniors in this province. Failure to measure, failure to manage, indeed.

I know that many members opposite have convinced themselves that supporting the carbon tax somehow grants them moral high ground from which they can look down on the majority of Albertans who do not support this tax, but it clearly does not. It means that they would rather feel good about themselves than take the

opportunity to measure and manage, in this case damaging and harming vulnerable seniors. The carbon tax is having real impacts on seniors across Alberta every single day, and refusing to study that impact despite numerous calls, in my mind, is irresponsible.

Tomorrow morning, Mr. Speaker, is the Alberta Continuing Care Association’s MLA breakfast, and I hope to see you all there. I hope that everyone who votes against this motion comes prepared tomorrow to explain why they voted against the motion, which the caring, compassionate, and community-spirited members of this association are supportive of.

Mr. Speaker, seeking information and supporting stakeholders and caring for and about seniors is something we should all have as a priority. Clearly, that is not the case with respect to this motion, and I’m saddened by that on behalf of all Alberta seniors.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I’m deeply disappointed that an ideological partisan dogma could not be put aside today in support of our Alberta seniors to ensure that their lives are as rich and as respected as we possibly can. There’s an incredible group of service providers, care providers we are blessed to have delivering compassionate care in our province. We should respect them and honour them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 509 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gill	Orr
Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Pitt
Drysdale	Hunter	Stier

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Jansen	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Connolly	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Luff	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dach	Mason	Shepherd
Dang	McKittrick	Sucha
Drever	Miller	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Westhead
Goehring	Nielsen	Woollard

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:04 p.m.]

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Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 27, 2017

Day 56

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
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Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
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Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
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Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
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Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
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Hanson	van Dijken
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
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Barnes	Malkinson
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Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
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Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta**7:30 p.m.****Monday, November 27, 2017**

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.**Government Bills and Orders****Second Reading****Bill 26****An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis****The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Don't be fooled by the clock on the wall. Even though that clock says that it's a little past 7:30, I can guarantee you that somewhere it is 4:20, which means that it is high time to move second reading of Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Now, Madam Speaker, this spring the federal government announced that cannabis would become legal across the country by July of 2018. That announcement gave Alberta and all provinces and territories just over a year to develop a system that would provide reasonable access to cannabis while protecting public health and safety. Our government immediately turned to Albertans to ask for their input. We needed their feedback to develop a system that would reflect the views and values of the people who live in this province.

In one of the most successful engagement processes in the Alberta government's history more than 60,000 Albertans responded. Their input guided the drafting of an Alberta cannabis framework, which will allow adults to legally and safely access cannabis while protecting Alberta's youth and public health, ensuring safety on our roads and in our workplaces, and limiting the illicit market. Albertans agreed that these are also their priorities. The framework and the legislation we are proposing to enable it are just part of a number of steps in establishing a system founded on these priorities.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to taking an approach to legalize cannabis that works for Albertans. At the heart of Bill 26 is the intent to establish a system for legalized cannabis that Albertans can trust. That's why a number of the amendments it proposes are related to the role of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission in the system. The AGLC has been a trusted regulator of Alberta's private retail model for alcohol for more than two decades.

We want to enable the AGLC to bring that wealth of experience to our system for cannabis. Bill 26 will empower that agency to oversee the distribution of cannabis, ensuring that all cannabis products that come to our province's retail market are legally produced and come from licensed producers. The bill will also grant authority to the AGLC to oversee the retail aspects of cannabis, ensuring that products are distributed to specialized retailers that only sell cannabis, not with tobacco, alcohol, or pharmaceuticals.

The cannabis retail market will be privately owned and operated, licensed, and strictly regulated by province-wide rules set by our government. The specifics of these rules will be outlined in regulations introduced in the new year, but they will cover such things as hours of operation, setback distances for stores, age of staff, staff training, and the requirement for all retailers to undergo background checks. The intent is to ensure that Alberta's system for legalized cannabis, its cannabis products, and the venues they are

purchased from are safe and, more importantly, that Albertans are safe.

Madam Speaker, Bill 26 also lays the foundation for the sale of cannabis online. If this bill is passed, Albertans will be able to buy cannabis online from the outset of legalization. We heard support from Albertans for online sales, but we also heard concerns about verifying the age of those purchasing cannabis online. We want Albertans to be confident that we can meet their expectations about safety and security, and that's why our government will directly manage all online sales. This will allow us to know who our customers are and ensure that they are of legal age. It also gives purchasers more confidence that they know who they are buying cannabis products from. Establishing government-operated online sales will ensure that Albertans have access to safe, secure cannabis products even if actual retail storefronts are not yet ready to go or would not be economically viable in their communities.

Finally, Madam Speaker, Bill 26 includes amendments that will protect the health and safety of Alberta's youth. Our legalization establishes provincial offences related to youth possession, smoking and vaping cannabis in prohibited areas, and consumption of cannabis in vehicles. We heard concerns from Albertans about the health impact of cannabis consumption around young people, and indeed keeping cannabis out of the hands of children and youth is one of the main policy priorities of Alberta's cannabis framework. To that end, Bill 26 proposes a zero-tolerance approach to youth possession.

We are also addressing concerns about exposure to second-hand smoke, especially by children. Bill 26 prohibits smoking and vaping of cannabis in any place where a person is prohibited from smoking tobacco under the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act. It also makes it an offence to smoke or vape in any outdoor spaces typically frequented by children such as playgrounds, spray parks, and on school and hospital properties. Madam Speaker, Albertans were clear that we don't want people high as balls around our kids.

Another major concern we heard from Albertans was related to drug-impaired driving. The Transportation minister has introduced important legislation to help address this serious issue. Bill 26 also includes amendments to reduce the risk of impaired driving, including prohibiting any consumption of cannabis in vehicles. This includes by the driver and by any passengers. In addition, any cannabis products must be stored away from the reach of drivers and passengers. Just to repeat, keep your roach out of reach while driving.

Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, the legalization of cannabis represents a huge change in our province and in our society. We are absolutely committed to getting this right. Make no mistake; we still have a lot of work ahead, and members of this House will hear more about this as it unfolds.

I'm proud to see the work that's been done to date and in such short timelines. It has resulted in the legislation I have shared with you today. Bill 26 puts in place the many pieces that will allow our government to create a system for legalized cannabis in our province that Albertans can trust and will ensure the safety and well-being of the people who live here. I hope that members on both sides of the House will support this legislation.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. Now, I think it's very important to note while I speak to this bill that this discussion is not about whether or not cannabis should be decriminalized. Criminal

law falls under federal jurisdiction. Whether we agree with it or not, smoking or vaping cannabis will be legal this summer. Our Constitution does not allow provinces to define and establish crimes, so provincial governments, without a lot of time, have to regulate cannabis to prevent a legal vacuum. This is our duty as legislators, to be responsible and do the best job that we can in the implementation and regulation of this new law that the federal government has passed down to us.

Overall, I think that the government's response to this is actually quite reasonable. Now, we do have some concerns, as I'm sure that all members of this House do – I do; our caucus certainly does – and we do hope to receive some clarification on this because we are responsible to our constituents as well. This is information that we can be helpful in passing along and, of course, helpful as we debate this bill.

As legalization begins, it would be better to start off strict. That way we can gradually loosen restrictions as people in law enforcement adjust to new realities. It's important that we keep a lot of this in check. I imagine there will be quite a few bumps and bruises along the way, and we will need to come back and look at this and make changes and that type of thing. We're going to be smart about the regulation of this product that we had nothing to do with the legalization of, so we're going to ease into legalization carefully, monitor the implementation and the successes and failures of the regulation, and make adjustments.

Now, some people are already doing cannabis illegally, and we know the sorts of effects that cannabis has on them. They know the effects that it has on their bodies. With it being legalized, there will very likely be some people that will try it for the first time, and those who were doing it illegally might get a little bit bolder. As we know from discussions earlier today on the crime crisis in rural areas, our police are already stretched pretty thin. It's a big concern that we have on this side of the House. I'm sure everyone in this House has a concern about crime and the lack of resources that we have, which is a bit of a concern when we're decriminalizing something that has caused so much criminal behaviour in the past and when police have very few resources at their disposal.

7:40

In saying that, what is the plan to equip and train police officers? I've spoken with many police officers that just really aren't prepared. They're quite concerned, actually, with the implementation of this. I'm not saying that it's this government's fault, but this is something that we need to address. Do we have public education campaigns planned? What is that? I've heard some on the radio from MADD Canada. They're trying to get out ahead of this impaired driving, which is great, but there is way more to the education component than MADD Canada on the radio, and this government certainly has a responsibility when it comes to education.

Now, with regard to distribution we're extremely pleased to see that the government is allowing private retailers to sell cannabis. That's exactly what we heard from the industry that is to be. It's something that makes sense, and I'm really happy to see that moving forward. I think that's, like, bang on with what you guys were hearing as well, so kudos.

I'm pretty happy that it's not co-located with alcohol, tobacco, or pharmaceuticals. I think that's a great way to start the regulation here. We don't want to be encouraging people to consume or try cannabis, so we're not going to try and tempt people as they're picking up medications, gas at the gas station, that type of thing, or people who are buying cigarettes or alcohol and cross-using these products. So that's really, really great to see.

Now, as far as I can tell, this legislation allows cannabis accessories to be sold at these retail outlets, which seems reasonable, and that's also some of the feedback that we've heard from industry in this regard. There are going to be different tools and accessories that you need to be able to use the cannabis, and I think that having those trained staff members in these stores with all of these products is a good step towards education. So we think that's quite reasonable.

I'd be interested to see what the rules are around advertising and the promotion of cannabis. We know that this is somewhat similar to the implementation of tobacco in our province; however, it's not like tobacco. The distribution model is a bit more similar to our liquor distribution model. It's a bit of a hybrid of both, but we need to understand what advertising and promotion is allowed or planned or how that works.

Can you have a poster that children can see on the outside of the store with somebody smoking marijuana or whatever that might be, for example? We know that there were similar strict advertising rules around alcohol in the past. There are certainly stricter rules around tobacco in this day and age even from when I was growing up. I mean, tobacco companies used to sponsor tennis tournaments and other sporting events, which was kind of ironic. I think that that's important, and we need some clarification on that.

As for the government-run online stores, this is where we need a little bit more detail. I think that it's reasonable to see where you were going with the online portion of this in regard to government running this. Perhaps it's not a bad idea coming out of the gate to do it this way, just given the multitude and the magnitude of the regulations that are needed right now. There's so much.

I do expect, you know, that down the road that could very easily be pushed back into the private sector, where a lot of the experts are already operating and running their businesses. It makes a lot of sense, especially in terms of relationships with customers. There are a lot of users that will be going into these cannabis stores and buying their products and getting the information, the education, and the expertise from the people that work in these stores. They're going to have relationships with them, and I think that they would feel comfortable ordering online from that particular retailer as well because that's just the society that we live in.

We see a lot of retail stores closing down right now, malls closing down right across North America because people aren't going into the retail stores anymore. I know that's probably one of the reasons why the online purchasing component is so important in this implementation of regulation, because you do need to allow access. If we're going to try and combat some of the criminal element, we need to make sure that people have access. If they're not comfortable walking into a retail location, they can purchase it online. For now that's the government, but I foresee down the road that that would be something that would very much make sense to be in the hands of private retailers in, obviously, a very controlled and regulated way. I think that would be responsible.

Some of the questions. Because the government has chosen that the online purchasing portion be done through the government, the questions I have are: how is the age verification process when ordering online going to work? Do you put in a driver's licence number? Do you take a photo with your camera, and your picture proves who you are? Who's to say that minors aren't using mom and dad's ID or a brother's or sister's or any of that kind of stuff? I know you can't stop it all, but when somebody is on a computer, you don't know who's on the other end. When it's delivered to the house, how are those packages, how are those deliveries accepted? What is the process for that? I need some clarification there.

Speaking of minors, the bill prohibits smoking and vaping cannabis within a prescribed distance of areas frequented by minors

such as a playground, zoo, or outdoor pool. Awesome. Great. We've all smelled cannabis. If you don't smoke it right now, it certainly stinks, and our children shouldn't be subject to any of this. So that's really great. But less harm would be caused by someone smoking cannabis in the playground in the middle of the night than by somebody smoking beside a minor in an area perhaps not usually frequented by minors. I'm hoping we can have some clarification on that. That can very well simply be walking down the street. I just need some clarification on that. It's not an area frequented by minors, but there very well may be minors there.

Now, the research. As you know – I know that the government knows this certainly – the human brain hasn't finished developing till the age of 25. There are arguments, certainly, for ages higher than that as well. Allowing cannabis consumption that may expose a larger number of Albertans to negative health outcomes that could result from cannabis use is a bit of a concern. I do understand that it's consistent with the legal age for alcohol and tobacco in our province, and I certainly believe in personal responsibility. When you're 18, you're an adult, and you definitely have the right to access and use these products. But, again, we need to see that educational component in this, and I'd like to see a big stress on this. I imagine that's probably something in regulation, or the minister is certainly going to answer all of these questions and ease some fears and that type of thing moving forward.

Another note on the online store, that it reduces the chances of people falling prey to falsified or illegitimate websites: again, like I said, I do see the logic in initially implementing the government running the online portion of this distribution. That absolutely makes sense, but I think that when some of these kinks get worked out, we could see that maybe passed off or at least revisited and go from there. We're also going to have to be concerned about fraud and that type of thing.

Now, with regard to growing cannabis at home, I understand that illegal grow ops completely destroy a house. Is there a risk – an honest question – of four plants destroying a home? I don't know. I know four spider plants or four ficus plants in my house are not going to damage anything. I know that we're not talking about grow ops in a home, but these are legitimate concerns that landlords in our province do have, and these need to be addressed. The landlord right now has a right to say, "No pets" or "No smoking." They can no longer say, "No children." But will they have the right to say, "No cannabis plants grown in this house for whatever reason"? I understand it's a legal plant, but it is a controlled substance, and I think the landlords need to have that ability even just for now.

7:50

I mean, there's so much that's going to be changing with the implementation of this over the next years, and it's going to evolve and grow. Like I said and stress again, we'll be back here, certainly, fixing things, and it's not because it wasn't done right the first time. It's just that this is a big, big deal, right? We'll be back here one day. Landlords have a lot of questions around this and how this is going to go.

The other question that we would have in regard to cannabis plants growing in the home. Right now, when you buy or sell real estate, there is a declaration form that needs to be signed if you've ever grown marijuana in the home. With every home purchase you need this to be signed. How does that fit into this? Is that addressed somewhere in here?

I certainly look forward to discussion on this piece of legislation. I think there are a lot of Albertans watching what's going on. These are really interesting times. For now, you know, I'd just like to say that I really don't think you guys did a horrible job on the first piece of this legislation. I think it's very likely the best-case scenario. I

will probably never say this again. I look forward to working with you down the road as this will need to be adjusted, as I'm sure you can agree – I think the minister already said that – in a thoughtful, respectful manner so that our children are safe. This is hopefully going to have fewer problems than it will create down the road. I'm hoping that you can address some of my concerns, and I look forward to this discussion on Bill 26 as we move forward.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah. Thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. We're all aware that this is legislation that has been drafted in response to the federal government's legalization of cannabis, Bill C-45. I won't read it because it's a long title. In short, it's the cannabis legislation. It was introduced April 13 of this year, and the sales and distribution of cannabis will start immediately following legalization in July of 2018.

It will make legal the distribution and various aspects of the marijuana trade, including the questions of at what age a person can legally consume and possess it. People will now be allowed to grow up to four plants, as has been said, in their homes. There will be an online way to purchase it. Sales should be ready to go this coming summer with private retailers, with the whole question of public possession limits being set at 30 grams and discussions about the questions of where cannabis can be consumed. We understand that the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission will be the authority to carry out the compliance function and the oversight issues. They'll also manage wholesale distribution of cannabis to licensed sellers, which I think is a very good thing.

I do want to say that we will be supporting this bill. There are lots of questions in everybody's minds, of course, but I do think that the general public recognizes the need for us to be in line with what the federal government is doing. Even though there are lots of questions out there about implementation and regulation and who does what and who's allowed to do what – and it will probably take a few years to sort it all out – we do need to have something in place before July of next year. There are questions, though.

I think one of the real issues that this bill is intended to resolve is to take the cannabis trade out of the hands of criminals. I think we really have to think that through, though. Will it, and how? Taxes will drive up the price a little bit, and the black market, quite frankly, can cut prices in order to gain market share. After all, it is a business to them, and they will respond accordingly.

I also think there is the question of the fact that there is a segment of our culture which is antiauthority, the "government can't tell me what to do" attitude, that is very much a part of the cannabis culture and that will continue to thrive in the minds of many people who are sort of antiauthoritarian and that sort of thing. Will this legislation actually make the enforcement of illegal cannabis even more difficult in some ways? There'll be illegal and legal stuff, and who knows which is which? There are no clear ways for the police to sort that out without doing a lot of work on it. I actually think it's not going to be as easy as everybody hopes it might be.

Another aspect of this, of course, is to try and keep cannabis out of the hands of minors, to keep it away from children, a very important question that I think has to be addressed. I'm not sure that we have the answers figured out there either. How do we guarantee that minors will not be making those online purchases? We already know that minors go on all kinds of Internet sites that they're not supposed to be able to have access to, and they do. They do get

identities, and they do share identities, and they do all kinds of things. I'm not sure that you can regulate that in a way that's safe. So I'd like to hear more about those kinds of security measures that might be put in place to safeguard our youth.

Well, in many ways, I guess, it's an arbitrary decision to say that 18 is the magic age. This is a decision that on the surface seems reasonable. It aligns with tobacco regulations, with alcohol regulations. But I think that with cannabis it's more complex than that. We've already heard that many doctors and AHS have expressed some serious concerns about the risk of legalizing cannabis for those who are under the age of 21 or 22, 23. There's pretty good science out there that demonstrates that the human brain really hasn't developed fully under the age of 24 or so. There is a risk of giving a social licence to young people. On the one hand, we say: you shouldn't do it because it's not good for your health. On the other hand, we create a social licence that says: well, in fact you can do it because it's legal.

I think that's going to be extremely confusing for young people who are trying to decide what the right thing is for them to do, particularly with the risk of early-onset schizophrenia. I think that's a concern that we really have not wrestled with here. And in the process of asking that question, have we wrestled at all with the spinoff medical effects that might happen? Have we wrestled with the realities of the social costs that will come with increasing psychotic issues, with young people that maybe get drawn into this and it not being the best thing for them, for their health? I think these are real concerns. I personally wrestle with that one because I have family members who started out with early use of marijuana. It has led to schizophrenic issues, and it has completely impacted their lives in very negative and harmful ways, so I think we really have to ask questions about these particular items.

How do we help families who are trying to keep their young people safe, keep them healthy? We say: "Oh, it's legal. It's okay. You can go ahead and do it even though it might harm you." I just find a contradiction in saying, "We want to protect young people" but, at the same time: "We're going to make it legal for you. You can do it if you want." There's a contradiction there. There's a cognitive dissonance there that just doesn't quite add up. I think we have to wrestle with that more deeply. Maybe as we gain more experience with this over the next few years, we'll see appropriate opportunities for amendments and corrections.

What about the issue of smoking and vaping? We have huge concerns about second-hand smoke in our society, about the health impacts of that. [interjection]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member.

Please continue.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. What about second-hand smoke and even the possibility of second-hand intoxication for young people? We realize that there will be some prohibition against smoking or vaping in public places and, particularly, a restriction against doing it in proscribed places such as close to schools, other public areas. But, again, I just think that we haven't quite figured out yet how we do this in a way that's truly safe and truly does protect our young people. So we need to ask some of these questions.

8:00

What about the whole issue of being forced to roll this out? I think there is a need for education, for teaching, for explaining, for awareness to people so that they understand what's happening, so that they understand the dangers, the magnitude, the significance of this, what they can and cannot do. We really don't want people getting charged for something that's still illegal when they thought

it was legal or things of that nature. We definitely need to have something in place to help people know what really would be the right thing to do here.

The regulations around no sales at co-locations with alcohol or tobacco: I think that is a great decision, putting it out there in places that have to be specifically dedicated to that. While it may be a business challenge, I think it's a wise social health decision, and I think we need to actually continue to support that particular piece of it.

While there are lots of questions about the social aspects, there are also some questions about the legal side of it, the enforcement side of it: how are we going to enforce some of these regulations, and how are we going to train the police officers as they move forward? We have another bill to talk about, the issue of driving, and we'll get to that later. We have a lot of work to do in terms of preparing our police forces, in terms of preparing our municipalities, in terms of helping them discern what they can and cannot enact in terms of their own regulations. We've already seen at the recent AAMD and C and AUMA conventions that there are positions all over the map from different municipalities on how they should approach this. I think municipalities as well are going to need some real help in terms of coming up with something that actually works. Again, I guess that to a certain degree we'll learn by trial and error. We'll see what works and what doesn't, and that's just the reality that we're forced into.

I personally am not quite as concerned about the issue of people being able to grow four plants in their house. I really don't think it's going to destroy their houses. I don't personally think, in contradistinction to some others, that it's going to destroy the market value of your house. Four plants is four plants. I do think, though, that if that gets carried away and the police aren't able to keep it to that and you end up with a house that's got 400 instead of four, you're into a totally different situation, and, yes, there could be real estate issues, health issues, legal issues on the sale of properties. Again, I think that's something that has to be wrestled with because it's probably not going to be as straightforward and simple as it might look on a piece of paper.

What about landlords? What about those who rent, those who share properties? What about apartment buildings, where you've got multiple people in the building, yet it's their own personal residence where they live? We already know that there are issues in some seniors' complexes just between those who smoke and those who don't and about the tensions and the problems that that creates in the building. Will this impact rental properties, apartments, condo buildings where people are forced to live close together physically, geographically? How is that going to impact them in these kinds of places? Again, I think this is going to lead to a lot of conflict and tension amongst people in their different places. So lots of questions on that one as well.

I just think we need to really be careful where we go here. I think we need to not be in a hurry about this. I realize there's a deadline coming. But I definitely think that we need to put this up for review in a couple of years or so because I think that as we get into it, we'll see that there are things we didn't quite get right.

Hopefully, the government will be open to reviewing the legislation as we move forward, really, really consulting with people in our province and listening to what their concerns are and making sure that it is actually safe, that it does get it out of the hands of criminals, that children are protected from it, and that it's a positive experience.

We already know that it's probably not going to be a very financially positive experience for the government. The relationship with the federal government is not going to give us much cash. I hope the government is planning to have some budget

money available to manage this whole thing because it is going to be difficult to manage moving forward.

With that long list of concerns and questions, I will conclude. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will now recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise tonight and speak to Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. I spent about 12 years working as a musician and studio engineer, so certainly I am well familiar with the scent of cannabis and with its use in many respects. I've been around many people who have used it for a variety of reasons. I think it's important to recognize that this is, in fact, a substance that has been in use in our society and by many for some time. What we are dealing with here is not something, I think, that is a radical shift for us as a society. I think it's a reasonable one to make. I think we've seen it happen in other jurisdictions around the world where it's been done safely and reasonably and led to good outcomes, and I believe that we as mature adults in a democratic society have the ability to manage this transition in a wise way.

Indeed, I would say that Minister Ganley, in putting together this bill after having done considerable consultation across the province, having spoken with stakeholders on many sides, has come forward with a very balanced piece of legislation. Indeed, we've heard the same from across the aisle, so it's my hope that we'll be able to move this forward with a minimum of acrimony and make improvements where necessary and be able to work well.

One thing I did want to note, Madam Speaker, is that there has been some comment about decriminalization. It's important to be clear that what we are dealing with here with the federal government is not decriminalization, which would be simply not charging people for something which would still technically remain illegal. This is, in fact, legalization, so with cannabis itself we are removing it from being illegal, and it is now a legal substance to possess as of July 1 of next year. So just to be clear on our terminology.

The principles that we've looked at, that the minister looked at, and that as a government we indeed wanted to ensure through this legislation were the four policy priorities: first of all, keeping cannabis out of the hands of children; secondly, protecting public health; thirdly, promoting safety on roads and workplaces and in public spaces; and lastly, limiting the illegal market. Again, Madam Speaker, I do feel that the provisions that have been put forward in this legislation after robust consultation across the province achieved those four goals very well.

Indeed, what we see in the legislation here is that the minister has chosen to propose setting the age limit at 18. Now, one of the members opposite did raise some concerns about that, did note that some doctors and others have suggested that we go with a higher age limit for access to cannabis. The important thing to recognize, Madam Speaker, is that Canada already has one of the highest youth usage rates for cannabis in the world, so we already have a large number of young people that are managing to access and make use of cannabis. For us to set a higher age limit, say at 21, would go against one of the principles that we are looking at here, that being limiting the illegal market.

Right now we know we have a robust illegal market. Anybody who is interested in purchasing and obtaining cannabis does not have difficulty in doing so, and that includes youth. So it's very important, Madam Speaker, that in the rules that we put forward

and in the steps that we take, we are eliminating that illegal market. Setting the limit at the age of 18, which is the same age at which young people can access alcohol, can access tobacco: that, to me, seems reasonable. That eliminates any need for a black market to continue whereas if we set it at 21, we have youth that are drinking, that are smoking, and that are looking for ways to access cannabis, which, as I said, we know they already do in large numbers.

I recognize what the member opposite was talking about in terms of concerns with health and safety, and indeed I agree with him one hundred per cent that we need to have good education and awareness as part of this, Madam Speaker, as we have good education around alcohol and recognizing the damage that that can do to young minds and young bodies and overindulgence and that sort of thing, the costs that can be associated with that. We work very hard to educate both before youth reach the age of 18 and afterwards. Indeed, in terms of tobacco we're quite clear about the health effects that that has and, again, work towards that education and continue to improve education around that area. I think we can do the same in terms of cannabis use. I think that setting the age at 18 is indeed a reasonable restriction.

8:10

There were some concerns raised by a member opposite around public consumption, and indeed I recognize, Madam Speaker, that in terms of public consumption cannabis is – how can I say it? – fragrant. It has a strong aroma. Indeed, it's something that we need to be considerate of in terms of how people are exposed to it, but I believe that we have come to a reasonable place in this legislation in limiting it in the same way that we limit tobacco. Recognizing that tobacco itself and second-hand smoke can have health hazards, we have reasonable restrictions around where tobacco can be consumed. We are regulating cannabis on the same level as tobacco in terms of recognizing that second-hand smoke from cannabis can indeed also have similar health effects.

Now, there was a comment made in regard to second-hand smoke and what's known as a contact high in terms of cannabis. It's important to note, Madam Speaker, that there was a recent study, conducted in 2015, by the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in which they had volunteers sit in an enclosed space and be exposed to heavy amounts of cannabis smoke, second-hand, for an extended period of time, over an hour, and those individuals showed a mild impairment, extremely mild. They reported feeling slightly pleasant and a little bit hungry. Now, individuals who were exposed to the same amount of cannabis smoke in a ventilated room showed no symptoms and no presence of THC or any other metabolites in their bloodstream.

So while there is some mythology around contact highs and that sort of thing from second-hand smoke, there is no credible scientific study that shows there would be any concern about that in a well-ventilated space. Indeed, in the public spaces where the consumption would be allowed similar to tobacco, I would dare say that there would be next to no chance that anybody could possibly become even mildly impaired by exposure to smoke in that space.

Now, that said, Madam Speaker, municipalities do retain the right to further enforce and create additional regulations or bylaws around where cannabis could be consumed. For example, here in Edmonton-Centre, just over by city hall, we have Churchill Square. Recently the city of Edmonton added additional bylaws restricting the use of tobacco in Churchill Square. Under this legislation, then, cannabis would also be regulated in that space, so it would not be allowed to be consumed.

While I recognize, again, Madam Speaker, that some have concerns about the odour, I can tell you that, for myself, I am a person who is scent sensitive, so the bane of my existence, for

example, is being caught in an elevator with someone wearing a large amount of perfume. However, the fact that I don't enjoy the scent of perfume doesn't mean that I need to regulate whether or not people wear it in a public space near me. I choose to avoid it, I may not like to be around it, but again I don't think it's something that we need to take further in that respect. I do think that this is a reasonable step in terms of how we regulate the consumption of cannabis and the spaces where it may be used.

Now, there's also been some discussion, I guess – and I have had this concern raised to me as well when I visited some seniors' residences, and I've heard it from some constituents – around the consumption of cannabis, indeed, in multi-unit, multi-resident buildings. Certainly, I recognize that that can be a challenge in some respects. Having served as president of a condominium board in a condominium building where I used to live here in Edmonton-Centre, I recognize that that can be a challenge, but there are already rules in place which allow a condominium board or indeed a landlord or a property management company to address such issues within such buildings. All individuals living in suites, whether they own or rent, have the right to peaceful enjoyment of their suite, and if that's being interfered with by other residents within the building, there are means available by which that can be addressed.

Certainly, again, this is something that's going to take some time to adjust to. It's going to take some time for everyone to get used to new rules. Those mechanisms are available.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, with landlords. If I'm a landlord and I'm renting out my suite, I have the ability, with proper notice, to conduct an inspection of said suite or said property, and if I find that my tenants are indeed undertaking actions of any sort that may damage that property, I have rules and regulations that I can make use of to address that. So if they were, say, growing tomatoes indoors and they had a small greenhouse space and the moisture from that was damaging the walls, I would have the ability to take action to address that.

Similarly, while I recognize that, yes, we do need to have proper enforcement to ensure that people are not going beyond the four plants that are allowed under federal regulation, I believe we have much of the structure and mechanisms in place already to be able to address this. There may be some small adjustments and things that we have to tweak over time, but I think, again, that as a democratic society of mature adults we're able to engage this process, and we're able to move forward, I think, with a minimum of difficulty on this.

I was pleased to see, Madam Speaker, that the minister opted to move forward with private retail sales of cannabis. That was certainly something, again, that I heard from many constituents about. Indeed, we saw that from Albertans, I think, in the surveys and that that were conducted, that they prefer to see the sales of cannabis regulated in the same way as our sales of alcohol. We do allow that in private retail spaces, so indeed we are doing the same with cannabis. I think it's reasonable that we also make use of the mechanisms that are already available through the AGLC, the distribution, et cetera, that they have already perfected – well, perhaps not perfected; there's always room for improvement – that they have set up over time, that they've got to a place where they work fairly efficiently, make use of that infrastructure, make use of those regulatory powers that already exist, and use them then for the regulation of cannabis.

I appreciate the steps that this legislation takes in terms of saying: you know, yes, cannabis should be sold in a stand-alone store; it should not be sold alongside other products so that indeed for anybody that is going to purchase the product, it is an intentional

purchase. They are going there for that purpose. They know where it can be found, and they know why they are going there. Selling cannabis and cannabis-related accessories alone in these locations, Madam Speaker: that seems to me to be a reasonable step to take.

Of course, in the future we're going to have the opportunity to consider how we might then license or regulate this in terms of use in cannabis cafés or lounges or other such opportunities. I think it's reasonable that this legislation at this time chooses not to allow those as of yet but to give us the opportunity to take some of these initial steps and see how things might go from there.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, I think these are good first steps. I think this is a good first direction. We recognize that, you know, come July 1 this is the beginning of a process. We are not hurtling or rushing towards an imposed deadline. Instead, I think we're acting reasonably for what's going to be that initial legalization that's going to come forward and setting the framework in place that will allow us to begin the journey of seeing how we as a province are going to be able to regulate and allow the legal sale of cannabis, how we can do that safely in a way that's going to keep it out of the hands of youth, in a way that's going to protect Albertans. Indeed, we have another piece of legislation which we're considering which will ensure that we're kept safe on our roadways. This is going to allow us the opportunity to continue to have that conversation and continue to move forward as a province and a society.

I look forward to further debate and the thoughts of other members on this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane to close debate. Oh. The minister. My apologies. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, for finally recognizing me after searching so hard.

Madam Speaker, I appreciated the discussion. You know, the province of Alberta is going on a trip to legalize cannabis. The members opposite, of course, have raised some concerns, and I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for allaying a number of those concerns that have been raised in his eloquent speech.

8:20

Madam Speaker, I think that at this point we have to recognize that both our police enforcement officials as well as our AGLC officials are new to this legalization of cannabis. You could say that they're green as grass, but I think we have to be patient as we try to get this right. That's why I would encourage all members to puff, puff, pass this bill into Committee of the Whole so we can really get down into the weeds around the issues that are of concern to members with respect to this legislation.

With that, I close debate on Bill 26 at second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've made some great progress tonight and had a great debate. I would move that we adjourn the House until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the House adjourned at 8:21 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 28, 2017

Day 57

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us pray and reflect, each in our own way. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gift of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued tradition of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving the people of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 28 School Amendment Act, 2017

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Eggen]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 28, School Amendment Act, 2017. Bill 28 addresses a number of issues surrounding education and is in this sense an omnibus bill. The fact that the minister continues to delay the proclaiming of the Education Act and instead has chosen to amend the School Act is, on this side of the House, concerning simply because it continues the trend of a lack of clarity regarding the Education Act.

If the Education Act has serious flaws in the eyes of this government, then it should make it clear to Albertans that this government has no intention of proclaiming the Education Act. It should then be willing to articulate the reasons why it believes that the students of Alberta would not benefit from its proclamation. It is time for this government to not simply amend the School Act but to also explain to Albertans why it is unwilling to proclaim the Education Act.

Bill 28 makes a number of changes to the School Act that will affect a wide spectrum of educational delivery across this province. However, let us be clear: these amendments would appear, once again, to give the Minister of Education more power at the expense of local autonomy of school boards. It also places important elements of education outside of the School Act and into the regulations. Both of these are serious issues, the first because it continues the trend towards a distant and far-off minister deciding what is best in education for local parents, for students, and for educators.

I believe and this party believes very strongly that local boards and local schools and parents are best positioned to make decisions which affect their day-to-day activities in education. These individuals understand their own schools and their communities far better than the Minister of Education does. Continually eroding the responsibilities and the ability of local decision-makers to make decisions for themselves does not improve the education system in Alberta.

Secondly, this piece of legislation once again asks this Assembly to have faith, faith that the regulations will reasonably reflect what

the people of Alberta want as represented through the informed consent of the MLAs in this Legislature. Regulation is important – don't get us wrong – but legislation, the part that is most directly controlled by the people of Alberta through their representatives, must first and foremost speak to how education will run, not simply regulation.

The lack of clarity provided by this legislation is very apparent as you read through a number of the major changes made by this legislation. For example, this bill introduces professional practice standards for principals, superintendents, and certificate-holding central office staff. Now, this has the potential to be a great addition to the School Act. This side of the House is in agreement when it comes to the setting of professional practice standards. We have some of the best teachers, we have some of the best principals and superintendents anywhere in the world, and this portion of the legislation will allow Alberta to prove that. However, we are concerned for how these standards will be developed and what they will look like and who will oversee them, for none of this has yet been decided. This bill pushes that off to regulations.

This bill allows the minister to establish standards for educational service agreements and to allow increased access to education for on-reserve First Nations students. That is a concept that our party wholeheartedly supports. Every student in this province has the right to a high-quality education no matter where they live or what their background is. However, we are not sure what these agreements will actually look like, if there will be federal funding available to school boards, and when these standards will be finalized.

This bill also moves the walk limit into the school transportation regulation. That is also something that we can support as that is probably, in our view, a more appropriate place for the walk limit. However, what will replace the current 2.4-kilometre limit? That has not yet been decided, and we have heard concerns from some of the major stakeholders and school boards that they will not be given enough flexibility to meet their local needs.

This bill introduces a trustee code of conduct. This is also an idea that our party can support. It is my understanding that many boards across this province already have codes of conduct that they have developed and that they are pursuing, but the minister once again took a good idea and shrouded it in regulation and asked us to trust him as he works out the details in private. We don't know what mandatory elements the minister will impose on trustees, we don't know how or when these codes of conduct will be made public, and we don't know how much flexibility local boards will be given when they develop these codes of conduct.

There are also parts of this bill that we believe will need to be addressed through a series of amendments that would help to make this bill better for Albertans. The United Conservative Party will be able to support a standardized age of entry, the creation of educational service agreements with First Nations, and most of the technical amendments and administrative amendments suggested for Bill 28. These are common-sense proposals, and I think everyone in this House can get behind them.

The professional standards of conduct for principals and superintendents and the code of conduct for trustees are, as I previously stated, ideas that we can support. Some of the details we have some issues with, but we will have some amendments to address some of our concerns at a later stage in the debate.

The transportation piece of this legislation is worthy of discussion, but we would caution the minister to ensure that local decision-making on distances and the scope of co-operation between the diverse school jurisdictions in the province be addressed in this debate and that respect for local autonomy of school boards be presented in this debate. Forcing school boards to

co-operate is a dangerous precedent as we've heard some very good reasons as to why boards do not currently co-operate, including the most obvious, that some school boards already run all of their buses completely full.

10:10

Lastly, we look forward to the debate in this establishment on the establishment of separate school districts. Bringing clarity and balance to the process of establishing or disestablishing Catholic education, especially in light of the antifaith, antichoice paradigm of this government, is a good thing. In light of recent decisions and comments by the Premier and the Minister of Education it will be important that Bill 28 actually bring clarity and reinforce to Albertans that this government believes in choice in education, especially choice based on something as important as faith and the creation of faith-based separate school boards.

We will speak to our desire to ensure that education in Alberta will continue to respect choice in our education system here in this great province, and we would ask the government to support the amendments that we will put forward at a later stage in the debate as we believe that they will help to bring clarity and in turn make Bill 28 a stronger piece of legislation that will benefit Albertans and Alberta students moving into the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Hanson: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry.

Mr. Hanson: That no longer exists after next week.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Education for bringing forward this bill as there are some very good things in it. Ultimately, though, the legislation simply gives the minister and Alberta Education the platform to work with various stakeholders and professional associations to implement changes over the coming years.

But I'm a little confused, for not too long ago the Assembly passed a bill known as the Education Act. The Education Act was supposed to replace the School Act. The Education Act remains unproclaimed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which leads me to wonder why on earth we are here tinkering with the School Act again.

As with any bill from the hon. Minister of Education, the United Conservative Party has to question, with all those actors around the NDP who advocate for one public system and the end to the separate and charter schools: can we trust the Education minister to act in good faith with the powers being requested in Bill 28? The Education minister denies any wrongdoing and malevolence towards separate and charter yet has been caught twisting and construing concerns expressed by these institutions for their curriculum rewrite.

Bill 28 continues a troubling trend of consolidating power by the Minister of Education, and this is one of the biggest issues I have with this bill. A number of changes over the past two and a half years has increased the power of the minister, which in turn decreases the power of local decision-makers. This trend needs to stop. Our school boards are elected by parents to reflect their views, and this needs to be respected.

Let's get into the bill and take a look at what the minister is asking for. Bill 28 will require mandatory notice to the local public school

board of the establishment of a separate school district. I can already see the public boards howling in outrage of a competitor for education showing up. They already do.

When the city of Edmonton asked the public board what to do with undeveloped school sites, the board was okay with releasing the sites to the city. When charter and independent schools showed up wanting to buy the undeveloped school sites, the public board very quickly changed its tune about releasing the assets. I'm seeing the same situation up in Lac La Biche right now, where the public school board is dragging their feet when it comes to releasing the Dr. Swift school to the Catholic board and also another school to the francophone school board.

Bill 28 changes the nature of student records and financial records, which need to be kept by private and independent schools. Increased transparency and accountability is a very positive step; however, these changes could be cost prohibitive for small schools with a limited number of financial and staff resources.

There are also going to be professional practice standards that will be implemented for principals and superintendents. This, again, is probably a good idea to mandate a consistent level of training for principals and superintendents. Now there's also going to be a school board trustee code of conduct developed that will mirror the code of conduct found in the Municipal Government Act. In principle and concept this is also a good idea, but the devil will be in the details when the regulations the minister creates come out.

It's very good to see education service agreements with First Nations in order to enable access to provincial schools for on-reserve First Nations children. This plan will ideally increase the graduation rates and educational success of on-reserve First Nations students in Alberta, so I applaud that.

Standardizing the age of entry for kindergarten – children must now be five years old by December 31 in the year they are entering kindergarten – is also a step in this bill.

Now, the fiscal conservative in me likes this provision around busing co-operation. I've already been working toward that end with some of the school boards in my area, trying to consolidate busing where it's practical. Bill 28 gives the minister more power to compel school boards to co-operate with respect to the transportation of students. I don't know about the urban MLAs, but I'm sure that just about every rural MLA hears from people that have three or four buses going through their area, and they don't see the economics in that.

There have been transportation concerns for children in both rural and urban Alberta, and these changes seek to solve some of those issues. Currently there is a 2.4-kilometre walk limit in the School Act, which means that if you live within 2.4 kilometres of your designated school, the school is not responsible to bus your children as it is assumed that they could walk. Bill 28 drops this, but again there is a ministerial power grab here to compel when the minister could simply be the facilitator. It should be up to the individual school board to determine the walk limit before busing begins.

This is how I see Bill 28. I look forward to productive debate and potential amendments.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in the House this morning to speak to Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. While the School Act was last amended in the spring, Bill 28 proposes some of the most substantive changes to the act that we've

seen in many years. Some of the changes are long overdue. Some could be problematic.

In particular, this legislation mandates a one-size-fits-all solution for transportation that does little for students enrolled in alternative school programs. Students in traditional learning and French immersion, for example, not to mention their parents, are completely sidelined by the bill, and many will have to continue walking, driving, or taking the bus long distances in order to reach the school of their choice. The government seems to be under the impression that every kid goes to their designated school. While they may see this bill as a case of the needs of the many outweighing the needs of the few, they should recognize the nuances of school transportation in the province. Of the several families that have contacted my office in the last few months, very few would be helped by the bill.

The value of standardizing the age at which students enter kindergarten makes a lot of sense from an administrative perspective, bringing all the school boards in the province into alignment with one another and ensuring students moving from other jurisdictions within the province will be held to the same standard. For example, if a young person in Grande Prairie is eligible to start kindergarten in the fall and their family moves to Calgary, they're still able to start their studies on the same timeline in their new home. Similarly, students who move within their own municipality, join another school district are all held to the same mandatory age of entry.

But what about students who move to Alberta from other provinces, particularly students who have already started kindergarten in their home province? This is not in step with other jurisdictions. For instance, Newfoundland and Labrador's Schools Act allows school boards to admit a kindergarten student who is less than five years of age if they are enrolled in kindergarten in another jurisdiction or will be five years of age before the end of that school year. That's from their Schools Act, 1997. Unfortunately, Bill 28 does not instantiate any mechanism by which the Ministry of Education or any of the province's school boards can use their discretion and allow a student to enrol in kindergarten in Alberta who is eligible to do so in their home province but will not turn five by New Year's Eve.

There are certainly many positive changes proposed in Bill 28. I'd like to particularly commend the government for establishing and strengthening education service agreements with First Nations communities and for putting a mechanism in place to establish a code of conduct for school board trustees. As elected officials, like MPs, MLAs, and municipal council members are, trustees should be held accountable to their constituents and for their actions, especially since their conduct has an enormous effect on our children.

10:20

As we are still in the early stages of debate on this legislation, the Alberta Party is not taking a firm stance on Bill 28 at this point. What we will do is ask questions, pay close attention to amendments, and possibly propose some of our own. In the end, we'll see where the bill goes.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today as a cosponsor of this bill to speak to it at second reading. As many

people know, I think, and certainly when people ask me why I decided to run for politics, I got into politics because of education. Education was the primary reason and primary driver for me getting into this because, you know, over my five years in the Calgary board of education I saw the previous government not valuing education to the degree that I thought was necessary and often what I saw as playing politics with education.

I'm a firm believer in equitability in education and equitable access to education. For me it's incredibly important that every kid in every school in every part of Alberta receives the same education as any other kid, that they have the same chance to go to university or that they have the same chance to pursue a trade, that their education prepares them for whatever it is that they want to do in life. It's one of the things I'm proud about Alberta because we actually do a really good job of this. We're not perfect, certainly. There is often a perception in Alberta that your kid will be better off if you go to one school instead of another school in one part of the city instead of another part of the city.

The fact of the matter is that we really do an excellent job in Alberta of educating every kid in every school in every part of the province. It's not perfect, but we're working on getting there. That's one of the reasons that I support this bill, because it really does help to support equitable access to education on a number of fronts here in the province of Alberta. Largely this is an enabling piece of legislation. It enables the minister to do things going forward that will help to solidify and improve our school system in Alberta.

The first thing that several people have spoken about already is that it makes the age of entry standard for kindergarten all across the province, which I think is really important. My son actually entered kindergarten this year. I was a little unsure about putting him in kindergarten this year because he has an October birthday, and I know that some people like to hold their kids back from school, boys especially, if they have a later birthday because there is all sorts of evidence that shows that children who are older in kindergarten have a tendency to do better, especially boys because they learn a little bit differently than girls at that age. They like to run around, and they like to roughhouse. That's not always an environment that is allowed in kindergarten, but that's another thing that we're working on.

Mr. Mason: When will that change?

Ms Luff: Soon, I hope.

It's wonderful to see that, like other members have suggested, the age is the same, so if you move from one place in Alberta to another place, it's easy for you to make sure that your child is entering kindergarten at the same age as others. An important part of this, I think, is that this is an amendment that's being grandfathered in. There are four years, I think, to make this shift, so people who have already planned to put their children in kindergarten, who have planned kindergarten around child care schedules and things like that have time to adjust. You know, if your child is being born now, you know that for sure by the time they're entering kindergarten, they're going to be entering at the same age as everybody else. That helps us support equitable access to education.

The other part that I am really excited about is the strengthening of First Nations education service agreements. Unfortunately, we know that it's a major problem that we have in Canada that First Nation students don't receive the same amount of funding as other students in provinces. It's a fundamental inequity that we have in Canada. We've had it for a long time, and it's something that we really need to work towards fixing because saying that someone is less valuable through the amount of money you provide to them for education when education is one of the most important things that

we do and one of the most important things that we can do for the future of our province is just fundamentally unfair and wrong, actually. Hopefully, through the strengthening of First Nation service agreements, what we're going to be able to do is provide more equitable access to all of our First Nations kids in Alberta to make sure that they have the same access to education as other children in Alberta. It's going to help close the achievement gap between First Nations students and other students in the province, which is something that our school boards have been doing a really good job of lately. It will help further with that.

The other thing that helps promote equitability is the professional practice standards for principals and superintendents. All teachers have to follow the teaching quality standards, the TQS. It's something that is drilled into you as you exit teachers' college to make sure that you are upholding a particular standard of professional practice. Up until now this wasn't something that had been necessary for principals or superintendents. Although I know that all principals and superintendents are doing the best they can, what it meant was that you might have a varying quality of principals or superintendents across the province. What this does is work to help standardize that principals have the same quality standard all the way across the province. You can be assured that, again, whatever school your child is in anywhere in Alberta, their principal has to follow the same quality standard as any other principal and that your school board superintendent has to follow the same quality standard as any other superintendent. I think that's really important.

I've heard some concerns about making sure that school boards still have the autonomy to do what they need to do. I absolutely agree that school boards do need to be allowed to have the autonomy to do what they do. In developing these amendments, the ministry has worked very closely with school boards to ensure that school boards are okay with these changes and to make sure that this is something that they're going to be able to deal with and to address.

The school transportation walk limits. Taking that out is actually the result of some consultations that we've had with school boards. Various school boards have said that the 2.4-kilometre walk limit was inappropriate; it didn't work for them. What that does is it allows some flexibility to be able to work with school boards to decide what will work for them. I know that transportation has absolutely been a struggle. It's been a struggle in Calgary for a wide variety of reasons. Hopefully, what this will do is help boards to plan and help them to figure out how they can move forward with transportation.

Another example of how we worked with school boards. I was talking to some folks from the ATA in Calgary last week who asked me why the age of access wasn't extended. That was something that was in the consultations. People were considering extending access to education to the age of 21. What school boards told us in those consultations was that they prefer to be able to offer that option on a case-by-case basis rather than making it the norm. That's, you know, an element of flexibility for school boards that we chose to leave out of this legislation because that was what they told us they wanted.

Overall, this is just enabling legislation that will help to improve equitable access to education in the province. You know, I'm going to be happy to hear from the opposition what amendments they have proposed coming forward. I will leave it at that for right now.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thanks, Madam Speaker. Good morning, everyone. I am very happy today to rise and speak about Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. There is a lot in this bill that I'm extremely happy to throw my support behind. Obviously, there have been positive changes that have been made in standardizing the age of entry for kindergarten, implementing the trustee code of conduct, providing additional support for First Nations children that would like to attend provincial schools, and increasing collaboration and co-operation around school transportation, which, as we know and as other members have spoken about, has been an extremely contentious issue not just in the urban areas but in the rural areas especially.

10:30

We elect these boards because they understand the thumbprints of the schools that they are privileged to work for. It's absolutely imperative that they are included in those discussions beyond consultation but actually to understand what is necessary for each of those schools.

I'm also very encouraged to see that Alberta will be leading in Canada as the first province to set professional practice standards for the principals and superintendents. Thank you very much for having that in this bill.

Many of these changes are obviously widely supported by our caucus and seem to be supported by stakeholders across the province as well.

One of the things I'd like to mention is that, as we all know, 50 per cent of the folks that are working in these jobs now are new, so there's a lot of transition that needs to happen between the previous trustees and the new trustees coming in, something that I think we need to consider as we're pushing through legislation. A lot of this transitional information that is going between previous trustees and new trustees hasn't quite been solidified between these folks. I have spoken with some of ours, and that is of some concern with respect to regulations that will be put forward with this bill.

Unfortunately, though, we also see in this legislation a continued pattern of behaviour where the government puts forward legislation that actually doesn't have a whole lot of content and then promises that all of the concerns will be addressed during the regulations phase. I can tell you that from the perspective of the trustees and the school authorities, that is a little bit concerning.

Madam Speaker, we have to consider democracy when we're talking about these things. Obviously, things need to be left up to regulations, but if the meat and bones of the bill are not descriptive enough for the folks that are actually being impacted by this bill, I think we need to relook at the information that's coming forward. We have a crucial job in holding the government accountable and asking tough questions, but it's hard to present and ask questions when a bill is vague and to debate and question them on this and then just to have the legislation rammed through and the real work, the nitty-gritty work, done in regulations. Those regulations have real-world implications for Albertans.

The question, I guess, I'm asking is: how am I supposed to ask the government pointed questions about their plans if the programs that roll out essentially give the Minister of Education the platform to do whatever changes that he may deem necessary? I mean, if you look at what boards are required to do and what their responsibilities are, they know what the communities need, so generally speaking a government will delegate the authority to the boards.

That's why they're elected in the first place. They know what their communities need, they know how to use the resources, they understand the educational practices of the communities they represent, and they keep education in line with today's world. They

also evaluate the school board superintendents and understand that they have to work within the annual budgets, and they guide the goals within the district and within the communities. They're also responsible to make decisions regarding the health and safety of their students.

When you have vague legislation like this that gives the minister this level of oversight, we have to understand that – the question, I guess, is that if the minister believes so strongly that people are going to support every aspect of this legislation and that there's no contentious hidden agenda, then why would there not be a comprehensive plan brought forward, Madam Speaker, so that we can actually debate the bill and debate the intentions and this massive oversight and understand how it's going to be regulated so that we understand going forward, going to our communities, what their intention is and what the minister's intention is for the future?

The reason why this is concerning is because this isn't just one bill where this is happening. This has been a continued pattern with this government, where a piece of legislation comes forward, you look at it, and you can widely support it, but it's hiding other legislation under that legislation. So it's incredibly frustrating to me as a legislator, Madam Speaker. I love the practical ideas that are in a piece of legislation like this – and I don't want to vote against legislation – and there are so many fantastic pieces that are in this bill that I'm encouraged, but then there are several other pieces of this legislation that are really, really vague. It's very concerning even though there are pieces that all of us can agree on, that are necessary changes.

But then why does the government insist on putting almost like deal breakers in each one of these pieces of legislation that go against the practicality of the intention of the bill? There are so many significant changes that would be brought on by this bill that are not contained within the bill itself, and that's ludicrous. How are we supposed to debate that? How are we supposed to bring that information to the public, which is actually our responsibility, with the vagueness of the bill? There are actual pieces that I've spoken about, that we've all agreed on in here, that are good, are excellent, but there are chunks that are concerning with regard to this oversight.

Giving a minister, any minister within the government this much power without the decisions having to actually come through this House, Madam Speaker, is very concerning for me, and I think it erodes democracy in our province. Part of the necessity of having a strong opposition and having government is to be able to vet any of those concerns in this place, in this House.

Whether you're on the government side or the opposition side, I think we can all agree that regardless of what ends up happening with the legislation, we all learn a lot about that legislation by being able to go through that process. That's why this is concerning, because the more information that the government can bring forward – I mean, we may not agree on everything, but at the very least the discussion is opened up and the discussion becomes something where we can all understand where everybody is coming from.

But the vagueness that is supplied in this bill at this point in time: I'm not really sure why there are so many pieces that will be left up to regulation, that aren't being brought forward in this Legislature to actually discuss. The concern is if there's a workaround in the process of this legislation because maybe it's just – I don't know – for lack of a better word, Madam Speaker, inconvenient to bring it in here. I don't know. But the question always needs to be: why would the government not bring it forward so that we can actually debate it and speak about it?

Also, again I need to speak about the timing of this bill. I realize that the government did do outreach with stakeholders and all of

that, and thank you for that. However, again, with 50 per cent of our trustees being new, the timing of this bill is difficult because a lot of the new trustees would love to be able to put their input in. The trustees that have left may not have had the chance to transpose all of the information coming from previous trustees to new trustees, especially if there is a lot of oversight by this minister to actually take power away from the boards and the trustees. Like, that's why this is really important, to make sure that all eyeballs have had a chance to really look at this legislation before we put it through.

There were also very significant efforts undertaken by previous governments and this current government to consult and inform stakeholders. However, has the government taken into account the fact that our province has had this significant turnover? It's just something, I think, that we need to think about. I'm not sure what the right solution to this is at this time. The bill didn't come forward as a result of timing. That wasn't done on purpose, but I think it's something where there's a sensitivity that needs to be there with respect to actually going forward with how this legislation is going to present itself, especially because so much of the legislation will not actually be debated in this House.

I'm sure that we're going to have many more opportunities to discuss this bill. I would like to thank the government for the significant changes that they have made, that, again, I really appreciate. However, I am concerned. We will be bringing some amendments to it.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

10:40 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 29 An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have an . . .

The Deputy Chair: Oh, sorry. I didn't see you, hon. Government House Leader. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Before we begin on the main bill, Madam Chair, I have an amendment to propose.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you could just wait until I have the original and the copies, please. Your amendment will be referred to as A1.

Government House Leader, please proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I propose a government amendment to Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving, that the bill be amended as follows.

Section 14 is amended in the proposed section 88.11(1) by (a) striking out “the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2017” and substituting “An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving,” and by (b) in clauses (a) and (b) striking out “the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2017” and substituting “An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving.”

Madam Chair, the naming of the bill came towards the end of the process. The original working title of the bill was the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2017. When the official name was adopted, a drafting error neglected to correct the name in the bill, and this is simply an amendment to make sure that all references in the bill refer to the actual name of the bill as presented to the House. It's as simple as that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any comments, questions on the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have an amendment as well if I could present it to you.

The Deputy Chair: Please wait till I have the original and the copies.

Thank you, hon. member. It just needs to be sent to Parliamentary Counsel for approval.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Mr. Ellis: Are you asking for speakers?

The Deputy Chair: Yes. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Actually, hon. member, the amendment that was just introduced is out of order at this time. It needs to go back to Parliamentary Counsel.

Do we have any other speakers that would like to speak to the bill as it is right now? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate this very much. You'll forgive me because I thought the amendment was before us. But you did explain that quite nicely, so I'm grateful for that.

First of all, let me say that we recognize over here that the government is in what I would call a bit of an awkward situation inasmuch as they didn't make the decision over there on the other side of the House to legalize cannabis. We certainly will not give them either the credit for it or the blame for it, depending on your viewpoint. We recognize that that was something that was foisted upon them by the federal government, and they are merely trying to do their duty to manage the situation. We're grateful that they are indeed trying to step up and do their duty to manage a situation that's been put upon them by the Trudeau government. Even to some extent we recognize that it was a promise that the Trudeau government made. I guess it's always a little bit difficult to criticize people for keeping their promises, so we'll recognize that, too. [interjections] They're making fun over there, so I'll take the opportunity to point out that the carbon tax was never promised yet delivered.

But we are on the marijuana bill right now. It is truly incumbent upon provinces to take safeguards to protect as much as possible the public in their areas of jurisdiction when the federal government makes new rules. Bill 29, by the now corrected title, deals with impaired driving, and our government needs to take this most seriously. Protection of every member of the public is of utmost importance.

Madam Chair, in 2013 a study found that more than half of the drivers killed in automobile collisions in Canada tested positive for drugs, with 1 in 4 of those people consuming cannabis. Interestingly enough, 1 in 4, not necessarily the same 1 in 4 statistically, also tested positive for alcohol and drugs in that 2013 study. Another statistic out of that study which is, I think, worthy of mention this morning is that nearly half of all the licence suspensions were due to drug impairment.

The Traffic Injury Research Foundation found in 2012 that drugs were detected in 41 per cent of fatally injured drivers in Alberta. While it maybe knew that cannabis is going to be legal here next year, it surely in no way knew that people consuming cannabis have been behind the wheels of their automobiles for some time and, via the statistics that I just mentioned, sometimes with dangerous and even tragic circumstances resulting.

Statistics compiled by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction show that cannabis impairs psychomotor skills and judgment. Of course, its effect on driving includes deficits in tracking of objects, reaction time, visual function, concentration, short-term memory, and the ability to respond to multiple sources of information and to react to unexpected events. This, of course, responding to multiple sources of information and reacting to unexpected events, is a fairly constant requirement for anybody driving.

Surely, even on a calm day with low traffic and good weather and on a sunny day with bare, dry roads there are certainly lots of things to keep track of just in terms of vehicle speed, the dials on the dashboard in front of the driver, the objects on the road, the width of the road, lane changes, speed changes, signs on the road. There are multiple sources of information to be kept track of even in the best of circumstances and, of course, indeed when we go from the best to normal but not best circumstances, where there might be heavy traffic, people leaving the lane, coming into the lane, bad weather, change in speed, maybe mistakes by other drivers, perhaps an animal coming onto the road. Under less than ideal circumstances someone unfit to respond appropriately and in a timely way to multiple sources of information would be, obviously, more likely to be at risk of getting into a collision.

10:50

Since all of the above are critical to driving and problems occur when unexpected events happen, maintaining people's wits about them is an important aspect of driving, and on this I am fairly certain that there is agreement on all sides of the House. Studies on driving performance show that marijuana use results in an increased likelihood of swerving and difficulty maintaining speed and maintaining a safe distance from other vehicles. Studies also show that an increased risk of collision begins at very low levels of marijuana use and escalates quickly. One recent study concluded that cannabis use doubles the risk of collision for drivers.

The message to drivers I think has to be that we always need to be careful, and of course now the difficulty that I'll acknowledge that the government has is in trying to set up a set of rules during this time in history, when there isn't really a generally accepted way of measuring the amount of cannabis that is in a person's bloodstream or in their body. It doesn't seem to be that there is — although some number is out, I don't believe that there is

widespread agreement on what amount of cannabis in the bloodstream will be the equivalent of making the driver impaired.

Again, the government is not at fault for any of this. These are just facts that we're all presented with and that we're all dealing with. It does make it awkward in a situation where (a) you don't have a good way of testing cannabis use and where (b) you don't even have widespread agreement on how much is too much or if indeed any amount is too much. We don't have agreement on that either. I acknowledge that the government is in a difficult situation. Nonetheless, they are trying to wrestle with this issue that's been foisted upon them, and our job is to help, as always.

The government has said that it will launch a public information campaign about marijuana and driving. We on this side think that's a good idea. Really, my opinion, Madam Chair, is that zero tolerance should be an important part of that campaign. Now, the day may come, not unlike with alcohol use, where the science is there and the testing is there and you can say, "This amount of marijuana use will not have you impaired, and it's safe to drive," similar to how in our law today it says, "This amount of alcohol in your bloodstream means that you're not impaired and that you're okay to drive, and once you go over that line, you are impaired and you're breaking the law, and if you go over it further, you're impaired and you are criminally breaking the law."

It would make me happy when we can agree on the science and the testing, where we can get to that point with marijuana, now that it's going to be legal. I don't see any signs that the federal government has dropped any hints, either broad or small, that they're changing their mind. In fact, the signs that I see are that the government is completely committed to doing this and completely committed to doing it on July 1 next year despite the fact that police services across this great country of ours, Canada, have said to the government repeatedly: please don't. At least, they've said: "Please don't yet. We're not ready. We don't have ways to know whether drivers are safe. We don't have ways of testing drivers to know how much marijuana they've used, and we don't even have agreement on how much is too much."

With these really awkward and unfortunate circumstances before them, if marijuana becomes legal before these situations are sorted out, the police services in this country are going to be in a terrible position, and frankly, Madam Chair, the drivers on the road and the pedestrians on the road and the children crossing the road and the seniors crossing the road and people going to their jobs in businesses crossing the road are all going to be at risk when the availability of cannabis will be greater because of the fact that it will be legal and be readily available.

You know, I don't think anybody is going to argue with me on this. The fact is that today it's not legal, but it's surely readily enough available. When you've got half of the people in accidents and deaths having marijuana in their bloodstream, I don't think you can reasonably argue that the illegal status of marijuana has made it any less available. Sadly, it's often said – I don't think it's scientific knowledge; it's probably generally accepted – that if you're looking for marijuana, you can probably find it in the average high school or junior high. That's a sad statement although it's probably a true statement.

I would ask the government about – and I would be interested in hearing their opinion on it – zero tolerance as a standard, at least until such a point where we have good testing, at least until such a point where the police are comfortable, at least till such a point where there is agreed-upon science about at what level of marijuana in the bloodstream we could still have a person unimpaired and a good way of testing it. If you don't know how much makes you impaired and you can't test it, I'm not sure what level the government could possibly make legal.

At this point, even if they did figure out at what point it was legal, with no way to test it, you're leaving the poor police with no way to enforce it and, by extension, the public at risk. I would be interested in having somebody from the government side, perhaps the minister if he sees fit, stand up and address this issue. Frankly, the Transportation minister, as the lead on this thing, is in a terrible position because of the facts that I have talked about here. I don't know how he can make any other decision although if he has something in mind, I would certainly be grateful to hear his thoughts on it. Again, I'll acknowledge that this awkward and terrible position that the minister is in is none of his own making but, rather, has been put upon him by the federal government.

Another thing to think about is that the existing system allows for drivers to obtain a temporary licence and appeal a suspension on some things, and for zero tolerance that could be something that's considered tough but fair.

Madam Chair, if you look at this, the government is in a tough position. The police have said publicly and, I think, responsibly that they're not ready, and it's not for lack of them wanting to be ready. There is an existing device, as I understand it, a saliva test or cheek swab, which can determine the presence of THC in someone's system. The device may be ready for use by July 1, 2018, but there are no guarantees. If it's not, then police are left in a position where they have to seek a blood sample.

Now, the federal government has set levels for cannabis in a driver's blood, but unlike with alcohol, I don't believe that it's generally accepted whether the limits the federal government has set are the right ones and what they actually mean. So there's another problem for the courts. You could end up with a situation where the provincial government allows a certain level of cannabis to be used. I don't know how they could do it, but again my mind is open, and I will be interested in what the government or the minister says.

I don't know how the courts are going to enforce it when there's not a reasonable way, really, of determining that, and I'm not sure that the police are going to be anxious to run everybody down to the police station to take a blood sample every time someone is under suspicion or is found using cannabis while they're driving. I think the only sure way to make sure that the public is safe is to just say: "You know what? Cannabis is legal. If you're an adult and you want to use it and you make that choice, that's up to you, but please don't endanger your fellow citizens." I actually think that's a reasonable thing to ask responsible adults to do.

11:00

When we consider all the unknowns, when we consider what the police have agreed is a lack of time for them to prepare and make way for the safe regulation of cannabis on the roads, it certainly makes sense to our caucus to delay the regulation, but we also recognize that for our provincial government that's not their choice. The federal Trudeau government has said that they're not going to delay it, so we acknowledge that our colleagues across the floor have a difficult, almost impossible, and time-limited decision to make. We're going to try to help and give the best advice we can along the way.

Now, Quebec, interestingly enough, has gone the zero tolerance route, as I understand it, with their legislation. They have said publicly that they also believe that the federal government is acting too quickly. My understanding is that they haven't necessarily said that they're against the federal government legalizing it, but they've said that the building blocks to create a safe environment are not in place and that they don't believe they'll be in place by July 1, 2018. That's something I think we should take seriously and consider carefully here in Alberta. Rather than have what could be a

dangerous free-for-all on the roads, Quebec has decided to do what I think is a responsible thing and go with zero tolerance, at least at this point. It seems like it's the safest route for everyone.

Madam Chair, I'm not suggesting that it's going to be safe because the roads aren't safe now. Marijuana is illegal for all users, yet with the statistics that I laid out earlier, there is a very high percentage of deaths and accidents and injuries that happen right now with drivers with marijuana in their bloodstream. So to think that any rule that the province puts in place – any rule – is going to completely eliminate that would be unfair to expect. To be clear, the government is not at fault for that because, of course, they have nothing to do with, you know, people driving illegally right now, using an illegal substance right now. Those people are indeed causing death, injuries, and a certain amount of mayhem on the roads.

For all the people that may be watching or listening that have had a loved one injured or killed by someone with marijuana in their blood, I'm sure they're looking at this very, very carefully today and certainly hoping that the government and all of us in this important place do the right thing to keep them safe and their loved ones safe.

The delay is not going to occur, I don't believe, with the federal government, so I believe that it's incumbent upon us to set the highest level of safety on the roads that we can. I believe that's what Albertans at home would want us to do. Here's a quote from the Quebec health minister who is in charge of the marijuana file. It says: the proposed measures aim to limit risk and mischief linked to the abuse of this substance and to fight the trivialization of this product; we will be prudent and restrictive from the start. I would suggest to you, Madam Chair, that that is a responsible attitude for the Quebec minister to have taken. I would suggest to you that that would be a responsible attitude for our Alberta government to take.

We are hopeful that our government here in Alberta takes a responsible, careful tone and spirit on this, similar to what Quebec has done. Again, the day may come when there is science agreeing on what level of cannabis use makes you impaired or not impaired, and we may also some day have a test where you can actually test for when someone has reached that level when they're impaired or not impaired. When that bright and shiny day comes, I think we can have another discussion, but until that bright and shiny day comes, I don't believe there's any safe, reasonable, or responsible position to take other than to say that you can't drive when you're using.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I see that my colleague from Calgary-West has now got his amendment with a legal blessing, but before he introduces that, I do want to respond to some of the comments made by my colleague from Calgary-Hays.

One of the problems that we're struggling with as we move towards the legalization of marijuana in the middle of next year is the perception that impairment by cannabis is less serious than impairment by alcohol. Setting aside for a moment the question of the uncertainty of what the levels are and the variability of the levels of impairment that might be produced in different individuals, I can say that the statistics show that there is considerable mayhem on our roads that is caused by impairment due to cannabis and often cannabis in combination with alcohol, which worsens the impact of both drugs on a person's ability to operate a motor vehicle.

I've certainly been hearing from people on social media and elsewhere that, in fact, they don't believe that impairment by

cannabis is really quite as serious. So we'll be taking steps, as the member has indicated, to try and correct that through public communications. It's an important thing to do, I think, and badly needed. I wanted to just set the record straight on that.

The issue of levels and the amount of impairment caused is still not definitive in the research. There's, I think, no question of that. There's debate about that. There seems to be some evidence that impairment levels vary by individual. As the member has pointed out, a good roadside screening device is yet to be perfected although we understand that the federal government believes that one will be in place by the time that their legislation is implemented, so we very much look forward to that.

In any case, the bill provides the opportunity for an immediate roadside appeal of any sanction by a person demanding a blood test, which is then considered definitive one way or the other. If the blood test shows lower than the prescribed limits in the federal legislation and in this legislation, the sanction is dropped. If it shows a higher level than corresponding to the charge, the higher level is then utilized. That is an opportunity for everyone to demand an appeal of any sanction under this particular piece of legislation.

Now, the hon. member has referred to the federal limits – the per se limits is what they call them – of two to five nanograms. Just for the record the proposed federal legislation makes it a criminal offence at two, and at five the sanctions are just higher. In the federal Criminal Code that is being proposed, anyone found with a level of two nanograms per milliliter in their blood is going to be charged with a criminal offence.

The per se limits for alcohol are .05 and .08, and I remember when the previous PC government under Premier Redford introduced the .05 because the Criminal Code is just .08. Administrative sanctions were introduced by the previous PC government for a lower level. I remember and quite enjoyed the fierce opposition of the Wildrose opposition to that legislation. I used to love it when the PCs and the Wildrose would tangle because it reminded me of dinosaurs fighting, you know.

11:10

An Hon. Member: Well, dinosaurs and cavemen.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Dinosaurs and cavemen.

Okay. Enough of that. Enough of that.

Mr. Strankman: But you digress.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I do digress.

What that bill did – and we did support that change – was supplement the Criminal Code with some administrative sanctions because the government believed, and we agreed with them, that it would keep our roads safer. It provided opportunities to provide sanctions that were not criminal in nature, that would not create a criminal record on the part of the offender. We are mirroring that with one important difference in this particular legislation as it relates to cannabis.

Evidence shows that immediate administrative sanctions have a better deterrent effect than a prolonged criminal proceeding. It has a greater effect. It can in many ways lessen the collateral damage to families and so on. So it's a very effective way to keep people off the roads because it has a better deterrent effect, it's quicker, and it does not leave people with criminal records. It's a useful tool, and we're mirroring it here when it comes to cannabis. The difference is that the previous legislation with respect to alcohol provided administrative sanction at a level below that prescribed for a criminal act; in other words, .05 instead of .08. In this case we're using limits that correspond exactly to the Criminal Code; that is, .02 to .05 and higher.

Getting back to my previous point, which is that there is some unsettled science with respect to impairment, I've heard this – and I know some of our members have, and I'm sure members opposite have as well – why did we pick that? Well, it wasn't based on the fact that we had made the determination of what constitutes impairment. The administrative sanctions are meant to supplement and to dovetail with criminal sanctions. That's always been the case, so it's important that we use the same limits as in the Criminal Code. It will in some cases provide a peace officer with an alternative to laying a criminal charge. That is the direction that B.C. has gone in, and it's proven quite effective.

I just wanted to make it perfectly clear that it's critical that our administrative sanctions contained in this act correspond to the levels of impairment set out in the Criminal Code as is proposed by the federal government, and that is why those limits are there. I can't see any other way to go but to make sure that we use the same standards as the federal government does.

I just wanted to put those facts and those points on the record, Madam Chair. I appreciate some of the comments by Calgary-Hays about the difficulty that our government has been placed in by the federal decision. We are working very hard and as quickly as we can to make sure that as marijuana becomes legal in the middle of next year, we've done everything possible to keep our roads safe. That's what this bill is about.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Government House Leader for those comments. I do believe that this government is taking this bill seriously and is trying to do what is in the best interests of the people of Alberta, so thank you for those comments.

Madam Chair, I do have the necessary stamped requisite copies for you.

An Hon. Member: Details, details.

Mr. Ellis: Details, details. I know.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A2.

Mr. Ellis: Great. Thank you very much. I move that Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving, be amended by adding the following after section 29.

29.1 By December 2019, and every 5 years after that, a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of this Act and must submit to the Legislative Assembly, within one year after beginning the review, a report that includes any amendments recommended by the committee.

I do have the necessary copies for you, Madam Chair, of course.

Madam Chair, really, the only point I want to highlight is that this amendment looks for a review after two years instead of the traditional five years. That is to ensure, of course, that we can address any issues that arise with the legislation of cannabis. I just want to say, really, just to piggyback, actually, on the Government House Leader, that I believe that everybody here is working in the best interests of the people of Alberta, and we're talking about safety. This is really, truly an unknown at this time.

To put this in perspective, this is an industry that is currently, for the most part, owned and operated by organized crime, so there is a paradigm shift in the way that we are thinking. It's a cultural change in regard to cannabis and marijuana, and I think that it is only

reasonable that the Legislative Assembly after two years just reflect back with a report to make sure that the legislation being put forward is satisfying the needs of the people of Alberta and, certainly, if there are any recommendations as a result of that after two years, to make sure that that legislation can be improved upon to make things better. Again, I think that this is a very reasonable amendment, and I certainly hope all members of this House support this common-sense motion.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleague from Calgary-West for putting forward this amendment in relation to this legislation, Bill 29. You know, as we have this legalization of marijuana thrust upon us from the federal government, there are many different aspects that this government is responsible for in terms of public safety in our province and certainly on our roads. So here we are today amending legislation to update these changes.

The amendment put forward by my hon. colleague created quite a discussion – and I'm sure everyone in this Legislature has had this discussion – around, you know, how the safety on our roads is extremely critical. Everyone here drives quite a bit. We're on the roads all the time. We see all sorts of different drivers, and a lot of them aren't great. It's even more concerning to think that some of them might be impaired regardless of age. We certainly know that there's maturity to one's driving ability when it comes to age and length of time they've been driving. Certainly, actuaries calculate this with insurance rates, those types of things, so we know that age matters and that maturity of the driver certainly matters. It's important that we recognize that in all types of impaired driving.

Now, it's interesting that Bill 29 is actually very much so putting alcohol and cannabis into the same level of impairment area. I suppose that's okay a little bit, but I think it's not the same. We know that cannabis is not the same. We know that its effects are not the same. It's not calculated the same. We don't have all of the information, to be fair. That's no fault of this government by any means. I think it would have been great to have more time from the federal government to sort some of this stuff out, you know, when the technology actually catches up with where we need it to be to have cannabis fully legalized and integrated into our society.

11:20

I suppose they had the same problems with alcohol many, many years ago, when drinking and driving was not frowned upon or looked at in any way. It just wasn't a thing. Then people just started dying all over the place from getting into crashes and that type of thing. So the laws have since evolved from there. As with Bill 26, I believe that Bill 29 will be amended and updated as the technology catches up and the training catches up.

I have many concerns around the training of our police officers when it comes to road safety and simply just the vast amount of training and knowledge that our officers need to have in recognizing cannabis impairment in our drivers. I know we've heard from these organizations, police organizations across this province, and they're very, very concerned about the lack of resources and training and information and all of that stuff that will come around this. I mean, it is what it is, and, you know, we're just going to have to do the best job that we possibly can making sure that they have all the resources and tools that they need to ensure the safety of our citizens

and, more specifically in relation to Bill 29, the safety of our citizens on our roads.

In saying that, where marijuana and alcohol are not the same type of impairment, it's hard to put them into the same type of category. I would honestly like to see zero tolerance straight across the board with no age limit. We don't know what this impairment on the roads does. You know, you can have one or two beers and get into a car, and you're not impaired in any way, shape, or form. You're able to operate that vehicle, no problem. It's a small amount, a very small amount. I suspect some can have more than others, which is obviously a factor. But with marijuana, like, how much marijuana makes you impaired? Some of that will come up the ranks. I think we'll have more information on that by the time this is actually implemented or the legalization comes into effect. But, I mean, is it one puff on a joint and you're impaired? Probably for many people.

I think that right off the get-go there are going to be lots of people who have never indulged in the cannabis products, and they're going to be trying this for the first time. There might not be that level of education there where they know that, you know, they can have a smoke and go for a drive or whatever this might be. I mentioned the other day in the Bill 26 debate that I think we should go really tough off the get-go and then ease back from there as we get more information and try things out and that type of thing. But under 21 zero tolerance is certainly a good step. I like that this is in line with the GDL program in our province. MADD Canada certainly sort of likes that correlation. I know that they would like to see it under 22, zero tolerance across Canada. This is a little bit more in line with the laws that already exist here in our province. In saying that, the GDL does take into account the age and experience of the driver and how they might react to using cannabis as a product.

However, I mean, there are a lot of people that will get a driver's licence in their 20s and 30s, and they're going to adhere to the GDL, but they're not necessarily good drivers after that period is up. So there's lots to think about there. I really hope that there's going to be an education component to this and that, you know, there's a lot of information out of there and a lot of training for the people who are handling and distributing these products and that type of thing.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

I think it's really important that this legislation comes back for review, mandatory review, not just, you know, old laws kind of on the books and that type of thing. It's important that we thoroughly go through this legislation and figure out what works and what doesn't, as with anything, right? We've all been through elections, certainly, of our own, and one of the important things that happens after an election is that we sit down and we go: what went wrong, what went well, and what do we do next time? That's just a very small example and not as serious as impaired driving legislation in this province.

But it's very important that we really do take a thorough look at this because our kids are on these roads, right? Our parents are on these roads. Our loved ones, our friends, family everywhere need to know that we are doing the best job that we can to keep everybody safe, and for us to be able to bring this to a special committee to undergo review of the legislation and make sure it's the best that it possibly can be – I think that there should be more regular updates on this, as I'm sure any responsible government would do, reacting to the inner and outer workings of the realities in the province. You know, if there are lots of reports of impaired driving incidents in the province, I would certainly hope that the government would take immediate action and make those changes where they see fit. However, I think it's really good with any

legislation, to be honest, to have a sunset clause where we are forced to review legislation.

I know the city of Airdrie still has a law on the books that says that you can't tie your horse up in front of city hall. There's maybe no need to really get rid of that law. There's also one that says that you can't store your dynamite underneath the stairs. I would suspect that that probably needs a bit of updating, and maybe we shouldn't be storing dynamite in our homes at all. I would suspect that that's a great example of where to update our legislation and review it.

First and foremost, I think that everyone in this Legislature can certainly agree that safety on our roads is absolutely paramount, and whichever is the government when this review comes up, I'm sure that they'll be responsible in the undertaking of this review. But that certainly doesn't take away from the fact that if issues arrive in the meantime, there will be a swift call to action to make the necessary changes that need to be done to ensure that our friends and family members that are travelling on the roadways or anywhere near them are safe and secure.

This province used to have a very good reputation for checkstops. I know that we're going to have the very few highly trained police officers when it comes to impairment detection in these checkstops placed across the province, and that's going to be great, and I certainly hope that they'll have support from the government. I am fairly certain that they will, absolutely, and we the opposition will fully support checkstops in this province. I just really hope that we can get the training across to the officers that we need, if we can afford to do it. As well, it's a bit of a challenge. I know that it's costly to put these officers through that type of training, but it's very necessary to make sure that we have the proper procedures in place to detect impaired driving or impairment in general.

11:30

That education component: I can't stress this enough. As I said yesterday, MADD Canada has put out some advertising about impaired driving, and they're really pushing across that zero tolerance component, which is great. Maybe that's the way we go. We know that Quebec has done zero tolerance for driving impairment, and I think it's a great way forward. I mean, again, you can go too hard coming out of the gate and be safe, be on the safe side, and then make changes as necessary as you move forward.

I think that we have, you know, a very responsible population here in Alberta, but there are always those that don't necessarily think before they do things. I had a friend who died in a drinking and driving accident, and he was the one that was drinking. I said to his widow, "This is unfortunate, this is tragic, and I'm so sorry, but you know that there are a lot of people that are going to learn from this in the future." She looked at me and said: "They're never going to learn because they're drunk when they're doing it. This is when they're making these decisions."

What I'm trying to say is that we're still going to always have those people that make really dumb decisions because they are impaired, but if we can get that education piece in front of it – and I know that for my generation it was ingrained in us, certainly, by my parents: "If you ever need a ride, you just call us, right? Think ahead so that you're not tempted to take your car home if you're impaired," that type of thing. We really need to get that message out. We need to do it in our schools. The re-enactments that Crime Stoppers and MADD Canada do in partnership with our emergency workers in the community – EMS and the RCMP – are imperative and really important in that education component when it comes to our youth, who are sometimes not necessarily stuck in their ways.

I really hope to see that piece come forward, because this is something new. This isn't alcohol. This is marijuana. This is very, very different, and I hope that we can all recognize that. It'll be

important in this conversation, right? This is a controlled substance, but this isn't like tobacco. There are some of the same dangers in it. This is a controlled substance, but it's not like alcohol. There are a lot of similarities, but they're not the same, right? They're sort of pieces of all, and you can see in the legislation that's been brought forward bits and pieces of all of that type of thinking. As this thing evolves, this sort of hybrid, regulated product that's being decriminalized, legalized in our society will need to be treated as such, the hybrid product that it is from the controlled substances that we currently have in this province.

All in all, I feel like there's a willingness to work together, but I certainly hope that I have been able to stress enough the importance of reviewing this piece of legislation in particular. I think it's important. I think that it's probably not easy to disagree with. We can work together in special committees, and this is a nonpartisan issue. There's not a single person in here that doesn't agree that we should do everything we possibly can to keep our citizens safe, our residents in Airdrie, and those travelling and visiting here, whoever it is on the roads. We all have a personal vested interest, and we certainly have a duty, as representatives of the people that elected us to be here, to ensure their safety. They expect us to do that, and I think that they would expect us to make sure that we're properly reviewing legislation.

At the end of the day, it doesn't cause harm to put a sunset clause in this legislation to review it and to really sit down, bring in experts, anyone that we may need to give us the feedback and the knowledge to tweak where there are problems. I think we can all see the advantage of doing that, really, with any legislation but certainly, in particular, with our driving impairment legislation. I'd like to see that.

I mean, we've seen it. The minister had a great example of when the government changed the limit from .08 to .05, right? It was not an automatic review, but it was an example of revisiting the legislation and making changes where the government of the day felt that it would benefit the residents in our province, the citizens in our province. That's really great to see, but, you know, it would be nice to see nonpartisan committee work. This is a great piece of legislation that would work really well in an all-party, nonpartisan committee, where we can bring in the experts and the people that know how and where and what to tweak.

I mean, this is something so new and so kind of crazy, a little bit. I still can't believe we're legalizing marijuana, but it's here, and it's on us. It's our responsibility to do the best job we possibly can in ensuring that this legislation is right for the people of Alberta. I know that every single person in here would certainly agree with that.

With that, I humbly ask that you support this amendment as it is important that we be responsible and that we put this in there. Let's bring this back for review.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-West for his amendment. I believe that it is a well-intended amendment. Certainly, it's very important that the legislation is reviewed, and it will be reviewed in about a five-year time frame.

One of the things that I've talked about with my department rather extensively and with the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General with respect to this legislation is the fact that not all the data that we need is currently available. We're going into some uncharted territory with this legislation. There's no question about

that. I freely admit that that is the case, and quite frankly it's just unavoidable. As we go forward, we will gather more data, and it will inform our review of this particular piece of legislation. That has to be an ongoing process, and it has to be conducted by government, by law enforcement agencies, by organizations that represent I guess what used to be called the motoring public, and so on. A lot of information will be garnered as we go forward that will help us evaluate the bill and make changes as required, and that process needs to take place.

However, we don't know for sure when the information will be available, so it has to be an ongoing process. This is not an ongoing process. It's an every-five-years kind of a process and done strictly at a committee level by the Legislative Assembly. That's not normally how we develop and evaluate legislation, Mr. Chair. But I want to assure all members that this will be an important priority for the Transportation department, for the government as a whole, and, I'm certain, for law enforcement agencies.

11:40

There will be ongoing review of this legislation; I want to assure the House of that. I also want to undertake that when we have sufficient data, which may not be according to the schedule set out in the amendment – and that's, I think, a key point – it will be shared with members of the House. If there are additional changes and amendments to this legislation to be brought forward, that will be done, and it will be scrutinized here in the House. We will be gathering the input of our partners in keeping our highways safe.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

With respect, I do appreciate very much the intent of the amendment, but it is not how we propose to proceed with the ongoing review of this legislation, so I would urge hon. members to defeat this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased that Drumheller-Stettler gets a chance to be recognized. Due to some miscommunication on my part when you mentioned Airdrie, I thought maybe you were just describing the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler incorrectly.

It's a pleasure to talk to Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. I rise, respectfully, as one of the members of the former Wildrose caucus and perceived in some circles to be of a generation previous to what we have here, in some circles referred to as dinosaurs, which is not necessarily the case but stronger, different versions of a conservative sort of government.

I'm wanting to support my colleague's amendment here, which talks about: "By December 2019, and every 5 years after that, a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly [would] begin a comprehensive review of this Act." Simply to build on what the Government House Leader has said, we are going into in many ways uncharted territory in the establishment of this legislation in regard to this new ground that we're reaching, not to approve or deny the acceptance of the medicine or the product that's being regulated in this case but to approach it in the spirit of a regulatory review and/or therefore a potential reduction of it.

I looked at a piece of legislation that was handed to us yesterday, described as Bill 30, and respectfully, with the greatest respect, it's 150 pages of legislation. But the last page, Madam Chair, of the legislation talks about a review of the act. With that depth of going into this situation, I can read from it: "shall, on or before February 1, 2021 and at least once every 5 years thereafter." Now, this is a

proposal by the government to effect a review. This is quite onerous legislation, so I fully understand and I believe that it's appropriate that this legislation would be reviewed. I think it's only due diligence that we do this sort of thing.

My friend and colleague from Airdrie talked about – and I was pleased that she talked about it – an old act in the town of Airdrie that would take away or add or have legislation that you can or cannot have a facility where you may or may not want to tie up your horses in front of a place of business or appropriately or inappropriately store your dynamite. In a modern world these things are not necessarily needed.

There needs to be a process where this type of legislation can be brought to a review by the people as it goes forward. I think that it's important that we have this process. The government has presented that, in fairness, for one of the most onerous pieces of legislation that we've seen in this session, Bill 30. We're already at 30 pieces of legislation. Should we be at three, or should we be at 50? I don't know. But this is what the government is bringing forward. I think that on the technical side of things it's a self-cleansing way of re-establishing, reapproaching these bills in a committee of this Legislature, not unlike what we do for budgets and estimates, where the opposition gets a chance to question the government on their approaches to budgeting, et cetera. It's an annual occurrence that takes place. I think it's important that we as government in respect of taxpayers' dollars have a legitimate process, that we can review the activities that go on in here in an open, public, and transparent way. The recent government legislation talks about that.

I think that the amendment before us is simply a reiteration of a process that the government has already initiated. I'm in favour of the government's model, and I'm in favour of the amendment to continue on with the government model.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the amendment. I'm sincerely hoping that the Transportation minister reconsiders his opposition to it. The amendment actually makes sense, particularly in the context of what the minister said.

The minister did say that the government has promised that there will be a device to measure cannabis content by July 1 of next year. I don't know whether that's true or not. I'm sure that when he said it, he meant it. I'm sure he believed it, and it may actually be true. [interjection] No. I appreciate that. I'm not questioning the minister's integrity at all here. I'm just saying that he was told that, and I believe that he's telling us what he believes to be true.

But just the fact that he hasn't got it yet – and considering the fact that even if indeed it does come, we're so new in the legalization of cannabis situation here, there are bound to be more and more improvements on ways to measure the amount of cannabis. There's bound to be more and more science available on determining what level of cannabis is in the bloodstream or some other method of testing. Who knows? They might find something that tells the level of cannabis in your hair follicle. I'm just making that up. My point is that there are people working in laboratories all over the place now looking for ways to measure the amount of cannabis in a human body in order to, by further extension, determine what level actually is impairment and which one isn't.

This is all so new. It seems to me that the most responsible thing we can do is to commit to reviewing the legislation at an early date. In this particular case, it doesn't even cast any aspersions on what

the government is doing here. It just seems like the responsible thing to do. There is so much – and the minister agreed – in flux here. He also agreed with me that what the federal government has set as a standard, between two and five nanolitres or something – it's between two and five.

Mr. Mason: Nanograms.

Mr. McIver: Nanograms. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate it.

Perhaps the minister has more experience with cannabis than I do because he seems quite specific about what's high and what isn't or what level is a lot and what isn't, but I'll just take his word for that.

Mrs. Littlewood: At least somebody knows what's going on here.

Mr. McIver: Well, we've got somebody from Fort Saskatchewan that seems an expert on cannabis, too. I hope that she'll get on her feet and enlighten us more.

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Mason: I like a little jocularly in the House as much or more than anyone, but the hon. member seems to be casting aspersions on the personal lives of members, which I think crosses a bit of a line.

11:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I had the floor, and members were volunteering information across the floor, including the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, that just said: at least somebody around here knows what they're talking about.

Mrs. Littlewood: Sorry. Point of order.

Mr. McIver: No. That's what she said while I had the floor. So if she doesn't want it talked about, then perhaps she should leave the person with the floor to discuss the issue at hand rather than say something that she doesn't want reported back. And I think that's a good warning for all of us in this House because all of us at times say things across the floor.

So with all due respect to the Government House Leader, let's get back . . .

Mr. Mason: Let's get back to the matter.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. With your co-operation, Government House Leader and those on that side, I'd be very happy to get back to the topic at hand, which I will now do.

Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: I think the hon. Transportation minister did say that even the federal government standards, that they've set as a level to determine what is impaired and what is not – and I agree with him, just for the record. My understanding is that that's not fully and generally accepted. It's a standard they set. I'm sure that it's based on some research, but there are certainly a lot of people that may not agree with that. My understanding is that it's not generally accepted as the right number. I'm sure the federal government is doing the best they can, too, with the science, such as it is, and

probably using a number that they believe is the best available today. My point with this amendment is that since the science is still unfolding, since the technology for measuring impairment due to cannabis use is unfolding, I think it might even be seen as a little bit irresponsible.

But I will say that it definitely would be seen as responsible to review the legislation at an earlier stage rather than a later stage, knowing how much is unfolding right now, because that will give us an opportunity to look at it and make adjustments. We may pick a different level for impairment. There may be a different piece of technology to approve rather than the cheek swabs and the blood test and so many other things. In this area of newness, uncertainty, and constant research going on right now, it makes the amendment extremely responsible, and I would hope that the government would reconsider their position on that.

Again, it's not even to slag or knock their legislation; it's just a recognition of an area with a lot of moving parts here for all of us. It would be good for all of us in the House to be able to review it at an earlier rather than later stage in order to make sure that we can adjust something that I think is probably a pretty good piece of legislation under these tough circumstances with more information. There's almost for sure going to be a way to make it even that much better, not because the government has necessarily made a mistake right now but, rather, because more information will become available that is in no way available to the government now. For that reason, I would hope that they will support the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: I would like to speak on this amendment, please. Thank you so much. Madam Chair, I'm here to amaze and dazzle you with my experiences in emergency services over the last 20 years in regard to this bill here. This is a good bill, and this is a fair amendment. I guess what I'm trying to say is that there's a lot of diversity, and people are going to take these things that inebriate them in different ways. Some people are just wired differently. Some of these things, these narcotics and other things, might not even affect them, but we have other people who are at the far end

of the spectrum that are very susceptible to the influences of these supplements, if you will.

With this bill, the act to reduce cannabis and alcohol impaired . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) we shall now rise and report progress.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 29. I wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I move that the committee rise and report progress. [interjections] Did you just do that? Well, then let's go for lunch. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you are now calling it 12 o'clock, and you would like to adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon?

Mr. Mason: Yes. That's what I said.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:57 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 28, 2017

Day 57

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
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Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of very bright young students from Beacon Heights school in my constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Meryl Roberts, along with one of their chaperones Emily Robertson. I must say that I had an opportunity during Read In Week to go and talk to this class. I speak to Ms Roberts' class every year, and I can tell you that she's got a very bright young group of students this year that are very interested in learning all about our democratic system. So they've spent the day here at the Legislature and are looking forward to question period. I'd ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly what I argue are the most beautiful and some of the smartest students in the entire province, 35 students from Dr. Lila Fahlman school seated in the public gallery today. They are accompanied by their teachers, Scott Slatter and Sean Falkner, today. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 10 staff from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Every day I witness the passion and commitment that our Culture and Tourism team has, members of the Alberta public service delivering programs and services that contribute to making our province such a great place to live, visit, and invest in. This afternoon I'm proud to welcome them to observe first-hand the work that we do in the Legislative Assembly. C'est après-midi je suis fier de les accueillir pour observer le travail que nous faisons ici. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Lucie Beauchamp, Catherine Braun-Rodriguez, Karin Buchanan, Nathan Cross, Lisa Gauthier, Brandon Nadeau, Alexis Nelson, Heather Northcott, Christina Harbak, Jessica Yu, and Mary Gilev. I'd ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups for introduction today?

Seeing and hearing none, Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Great honour for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the

House a constituent, an active environmental protector with the Alberta Wilderness Association, Carolyn Campbell, here on behalf of the Wilderness Association and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. AWA's work will be familiar to many of us in the Assembly, the oldest wilderness conservation group in Alberta, seeking a network of representative protected areas throughout the province for caribou. Founded in 1965, AWA has a proven history of raising awareness and achieving conservation actions for wildlands, wild waters, and wildlife. Carolyn is a conservation specialist with AWA, and in her 10-year tenure she has taken the lead on caribou conservation and continues to work tirelessly with her colleagues throughout Alberta and across the nation to see habitat protected, just as the caribou need to be. She has now risen, and I'd ask that we give her the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I have a couple of more introductions, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; I'm just not quite finished. Today we are tabling a petition and over 300 postcards highlighting the threats to caribou in northern Alberta. Among those signatories is Robert Bateman, the famous painter from the west coast. I'm afraid I've left the other names back in my office, but I'll submit those to *Hansard* for the record.

Thank you.

The Speaker: There's another time in the agenda when you could table that document.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly four Calgary-Bow residents: Marnie and Richard Deschenes and their sons Hudson and Nathan. Recently I met with the Deschenes to discuss their experience of pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders, also known as PANDAS and PANS. I will speak more of PANDAS and PANS later today with the intent to bring increased awareness and education on this serious and devastating disorder. I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an organization representing very skilled and fine entrepreneurs in Alberta, in fact, I think the most skilled and finest entrepreneurs in the whole province. Mr. Brad Mitchell, CEO designate of the Alberta Real Estate Association, and approximately 47 additional members of AREA are attending their annual Government Liaison Days conference. AREA provides a wide range of advocacy, professional development, and member services, which benefit both professionals in the industry and the clients they serve. I thank my guests for their great work and service to Albertans. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise with two sets of introductions today. The first is Art and Sandra Heinrichs. Actually, I'll ask them to stand. First, I will thank them through you, Mr. Speaker. They are the parents of Brianna, my long-time legislative assistant, who is one of the hardest working people that I know. They are also, interestingly enough, constituents of Calgary-Lougheed, and I will say that I was happy to see a picture the other day where they do have a Mr. Kenney lawn sign on their lawn,

which is excellent. This is their first time at the Legislature, and I would ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is two fellows that I am very close to and always happy to see here. One is no stranger to this House. He's been here before and has friends in all parties, and that is my dad, Pat Nixon, who's by for another visit, and I'd ask if he'd stand up. With him today is my little brother Shane. As I've told you before, I have five brothers, and if you think it's hard keeping control of me, you can imagine what it's like keeping control of six of us. Shane is back from gallivanting all over the world. Recently I think he's been to about 38 countries. I know this because he's been gone a long time and he leaves his dog at my house. But I'm happy to see him here at the Legislature for the very first time. I would ask that they both receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I appreciate that you had your hands full. The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House three Calgary-West constituents who are working hard on behalf of their community. Elio Cozzi, Suzette Pereira, and Fiona Christiansen are all members of the Springbank Hill Community Association. They are here today to learn more about plans for the southwest ring road as it pertains to their community. I'd ask my guests to please rise – they are sitting in the public gallery – and I'd ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Amber Ruddy, who is the director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Based out of Calgary, Amber has been an advocate on behalf of members in Alberta, working with governments on files like finance, labour, and – you guessed it – red tape. Amber and I had a great meeting today, discussing the challenges facing small business and the ways that we can respond as a government in terms of her advocacy work. It is my hope that all of our colleagues in the Legislature can mark the third week of January on their calendars as Red Tape Awareness Week. If I could ask Amber to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a number of citizens who work very hard advocating for seniors in Alberta. I'm pleased to introduce Roy Avery, Julie Ali, Ed Lonsdale, Irene Simpson, Jack Masson, Kerry Modin, and Ruth Adria. They're all right there. I was going to ask you to stand, please, and if I could have all the members give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Athabasca – I'm sorry.

Mr. Gill: No problem. Thank you, sir. Once again it's my honour to rise and introduce my dear friend Sanjit Singh, who is a past president of the Appraisal Institute of Canada, Alberta chapter. We

went to school together. He's attending the Alberta Real Estate Association MLA meet-and-greet today, and unfortunately he lives in Calgary-Foothills. I'd ask him to rise. On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Foothills and I we welcome you, and I'd ask all the members to give him the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly George Ellen, Dennis Schmidt, and Seth Gulevich. George and Dennis are the president and vice-president of my riding association as well as my good friends, and I appreciate all the hard work that they do for us in Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. Seth has a keen interest in politics, and I'm very glad that his grandfather George was able to bring him to the Legislature so he can see what we all do here. I would ask that they now rise – I see that they are seated in the gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two people who are visiting us today. The first is Bill Moore-Kilgannon, who has been my chief of staff in Advanced Education for the last 11 months. He is visited by his son Neil Moore-Kilgannon, who is turning 25 today. And to celebrate his birthday, he decided to leave the drab and dreary city of Vancouver, a city which I would note is an excellent place to build a pipeline, and come and spend his 25th birthday visiting us here today. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly members from the Medicine Hat Real Estate Board: Garry Ruff, past president and current director; Jeff Lanigan, political action representative; Randeem Bray, executive officer; and Jennifer McKenzie, the AREA director for Medicine Hat. The Medicine Hat Real Estate Board was chartered in 1955 and serves 140 realtors in 11 brokerages. They are members of the Alberta Real Estate Association and the Canadian Real Estate Association. Medicine Hat is Canada's sunniest city, and its realtors offer their services with an equally bright disposition. They are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. Thanks for coming.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a guest who was already introduced by the Member for Calgary-Greenway, but he thinks he's fortunate to live in the beautiful, fantastic, outstanding riding of Calgary-Foothills. His wife, Jimmi Singh, is also running a retail business. They have three beautiful sons, and they call Calgary-Foothills home. I'd ask everyone to give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce Les Landry. Many of you have introduced him and have seen him here. He is an advocate for human rights, special needs, PTSD, and service dogs. Can we please give him the warm welcome of the House?

The Speaker: Any more introductions, hon. members? The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly advocates with Muscular Dystrophy Canada seated in the members' gallery. We're truly fortunate to have organizations like Muscular Dystrophy Canada. Our government was proud to declare September as muscular dystrophy month in Alberta. Their advocacy and fundraising efforts are vital to improving the lives of individuals and families living with this condition. I'd ask that Fraser Hall, services specialist in Alberta, along with Cedric Way, Adeline Way, Meagan Klatt, Tami Klatt, Nathan Dyjur, Shanon Brausen, Louann Perry, Heather Forsyth, and Pyper Whitecotton rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Support for Small Business

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Small businesses in Alberta make local communities across our province hum. They fuel local economies and are the lifeblood of rural Alberta.

In my constituency are cafés like Kinny's Sweet Retreat, which serves eggnog lattes and turkey brie sandwiches in a warm, inviting space in downtown Fort Saskatchewan; pubs like Two Sergeants Brewing, which continues to expand their business reach with new access to local farmers' markets made possible by recent government regulation changes; Vegreville's local country music radio station, 106.5, which connects the region to the latest news, community events, and the trading post; local value-added food like Stawnichy's meat in Mundare, which sells back bacon and pepperoni out of their storefront and distributes their world-renowned Ukrainian sausage to grocery retailers across Alberta.

Ventures like these, created by passionate people willing to take on the risk of making a living for themselves, make up 95.5 per cent of all businesses in Alberta and 35 per cent of our GDP. This is why it is crucial for our government to support them by doing things that matter like reducing the small-business tax by one-third, to 2 per cent, providing \$1.5 billion in small-business loans to Alberta Treasury Branches, creating Alberta's export expansion package, and continuing to scrutinize each and every regulation to determine if it is easy for businesses to understand and if it is still relevant in a quickly changing world.

Mr. Speaker, small business provides hundreds of thousands of jobs to working families, and they inject \$100 billion a year into our hometowns and communities. They are our coaches, our volunteers, our neighbours, and they are the engine of Alberta's economy.

Merry Christmas, Mr. Speaker, and remember that Santa shops local.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin.

Fort McMurray Wildfire Recovery

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was just over a year and a half ago that I got a call from my nephew Phil Jean that my home and the homes of many Fort McMurray residents were on fire. It was an event that would become the most expensive natural disaster in the history of Canada and would devastate my hometown, claiming my home and the homes and businesses of 2,400 other families. It forced the evacuation of 80,000 people, and the cleanup and rebuild is estimated to be in the range of \$5.4 billion. The temporary shutdown of the oil sands alone due to the wildfire impact led to a \$1.4 billion loss to our oil industry here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the fire has not just taken an economic impact but has also taken an enormous personal toll on the residents of Fort McMurray. As of this month AHS has received over 36,000 requests for help with addictions and mental health since the wildfire, and in-patient beds for people at risk of harming themselves are always full. That is up dramatically from previous years, where they fielded approximately 1,000 calls per year. The effect of this fire will go on for decades, if not generations.

The Speaker: Take your time, hon. member.

1:50

Mr. Jean: Policy decisions by the people in this place are important and have a dramatic impact on people's lives.

While the damage done to Fort McMurray is undeniable, our community has also persevered with grace, courage, and compassion. Homes are springing up in areas all around Fort McMurray that were reduced to ash. Not-for-profit groups are actively working to rebuild the homes of the under- or uninsured. School enrolment in both the public and Catholic school boards is back to prefire levels. Business engagement is growing through the chamber of commerce, and unemployment, which is a serious concern, is falling.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the people of Fort McMurray. While we may have been knocked down, we are not knocked out, and we are well on our way to being back in fighting form.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Tax Policies and Provincial Revenue

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the latest numbers from this government yet again show the foolish assumptions of the NDP's plan. The NDP insists on raising taxes, supposedly to raise more revenue. The results? They bring in far less than anticipated: \$330 million less in personal income taxes, \$43 million less in corporate taxes. It's clear what happened. The NDP brought in ideological tax hikes and drove away economic activity. The question to the Premier is this: will the NDP admit that their ideological tax increases were wrong and that they've actually damaged the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms. Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is certainly a very creative interpretation of the numbers that were released today by the Minister of Finance. In fact, we know revenues are down because the price of oil dropped from over \$100 a barrel to below \$30 a barrel, and over 100,000 Albertans lost their

jobs. We know that Alberta families are suffering and were suffering, and that's why our government made a choice to stand with them. Our government made a choice to invest in Alberta, to stimulate economic activity, to support job growth. The other thing in the report that the member opposite quotes from today is that it's working. Our growth is up by 4 per cent and . . .

Mr. Nixon: In the middle of a recession the NDP hiked taxes on job creators by 20 per cent. They keep wanting to hide from their tax hikes. It's ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. They hiked taxes on income, they hiked taxes on property, and of course they brought in the largest tax increase in Alberta's history, the job-killing carbon tax, which they hid from Albertans and did not campaign on. Yet revenues from taxes are consistently lower than planned for. The question is simple. Will this government, will this Premier admit that they made a mistake, they're actually damaging the province, they're damaging our economic growth, and they're causing problems for the people of Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will admit is that growth is up, jobs are up, manufacturing is up, retail sales are up, small-business confidence is up. The last thing on the planet that I would do is take advice from the members opposite so that we could see the kind of negative outcomes that we see just one province to the east of us. We made a decision to support Albertans and to support Alberta and to support Alberta businesses, and I am proud to say that it is starting to work.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, a minute ago the Premier said that business was down. Now she says that business is up. I'm confused.

The NDP are now hilariously claiming that the deficit is shrinking. And how is it supposedly shrinking? Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is taking a quarter billion dollars from the risk adjustment fund. It's a shell game. Will the NDP and this Premier admit that the deficit would have actually modestly increased if not for using the risk adjustment fund, or will they continue to deceive Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, in our budget the Minister of Finance projected that we would deliver a \$10.3 billion deficit this year as a result of our government making a choice to invest in jobs, to invest in important public services, and to invest in making life more affordable for regular Alberta families. That plan is working. Jobs are up. Investment is up. Growth is up. We are turning a corner. We didn't turn our backs on Albertans like the members opposite would have had us do, and I am very proud that it was our government that was in charge when this crisis hit.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy Questions to the Premier

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Premier took calls on CBC Radio. A job creator named Norm called in. Norm said that the NDP's carbon tax is costing his business \$40,000 a year. Norm asked the Premier how she thought that was justified. The Premier's response: in short, she told Norm that he must be mistaken, that the carbon tax was not hurting his business, that it was actually helping. She had the nerve to tell the man what the carbon tax was doing to his business. It is appalling. Will the Premier take back her answer to Norm, apologize for what she said, and stop insulting Albertans as she tries to defend her ideological policies?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again the members opposite are really taking liberty with the facts. What I indicated this morning was simply that the carbon levy has not yet been applied to most of the oil and gas sector. That's all I said.

Mr. Speaker, what I also did was talk about how it's a fundamentally important part of our plan to help leaders in the energy industry reposition our industry as the most sustainable and responsible in the world. It is that plan that is going to help us do what the members opposite were unable to do for 10 years, which is get . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what she told Norm was to take the bus, basically, like she told Albertans already. The Premier was dismissive of this hard-working Albertan, who's been walloped by her carbon tax. Let me read his question in full.

I operate an industrial business here in Edmonton. We get most of our work from the energy industry. The carbon tax this year has resulted in an increase in cost to our business of \$40,000 roughly, and I'm curious to hear your thoughts on how that is justified. And why does that make sense?

The Premier's response to that was to tell Norm that he was wrong and that his business was not being impacted by her ideological, job-killing carbon tax. Will the Premier take that back and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is that the member opposite should simply stop making things up. I think he is learning some very bad practices from his brand new leader, and I would suggest that he probably ought to stop it.

The other thing that I will say is that as a result of our climate leadership plan one of the things we were able to do was to drop the small-business tax by one-third. That is something that arose as a result of the climate leadership plan.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of programs that support businesses which are trade exposed that have significant impacts as a result of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: It's interesting with this NDP government. They're always right; everybody else is always wrong. When they're called on the things that they're doing, they then call their opponents liars. It's shocking, Mr. Speaker.

But here are some facts. Norm says that the carbon tax is costing his business \$40,000 a year, and that will of course increase next year as a result of this government's policies. This Premier on the radio today – it's very easy to get; you can get it on the Internet anytime that you want – insulted this man, this job creator in our province, did not acknowledge that her job-killing carbon tax was having a negative impact on this man's business and on the people that he hires. It's disappointing, and she should . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, our government is proud to have brought in a climate change leadership plan, which was the fundamental reason for why the Kinder Morgan pipeline was approved by the federal government. That is why we are able to work successfully to get a pipeline to tidewater, something that

will improve economic activity throughout this province, something that will improve the outcomes for the energy industry throughout this province, and something that will also contribute to the level of growth that we're already seeing in this province amongst businesses.

The Speaker: Third main question.

2:00

Rural Crime

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday over a hundred people, victims of crime in rural Alberta from where I'm from, particularly in central Alberta, came to this House, drove for hours, to get results from this government, to look at this government and say: what's happening to us is wrong. The opposition brought forward a motion, a motion for emergency debate, to help those people, and this NDP government stood in this House and spoke against that motion. They refused to help the people of Alberta that are being robbed and abused, and I can tell you that I've had a lot of phone calls about it. They're tired of it. Will this government reconsider and finally call a debate so that we can stand up for the victims who are being victimized by criminals in our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you well know, it was actually you who made the decision. As well, we never actually debated the motion, so we certainly didn't speak against the motion. But what we will say and what we said throughout question period all yesterday is that we understand that people in rural communities are concerned about crime, and that is why we are continuing to invest in crime prevention, whether it be through the over half a billion dollars that we put into policing, whether it be through the additional programs that we're seeing with the RCMP, with the integrated crime unit, with ALERT, and the many . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. You made a decision, but this government across the way spoke against this motion. They spoke against getting results for the people of central Alberta in this Chamber. They provided no alternatives to those people. They completely refused to acknowledge that they are being victimized. They, the Government House Leader, had the nerve to say that it wasn't urgent. Well, I can tell you that people in my communities that are being robbed daily at gunpoint or having home invasions think it is urgent. Will this NDP Premier and this NDP government finally do something about it?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that providing more grandstanding opportunities for the member opposite to make untrue statements and call people names over on the other side of the House is not going to deal with the legitimate crime concerns that people feel in a number of different communities. However, the work that our government is doing will. That is why we supported the ALERT program even after the federal Conservatives pulled the funding for it. That is why we continue to support well-funded policing in our rural communities. That's why we will continue to do it notwithstanding calls for massive cuts.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Let me be very clear. I will stand in this House every day and defend the people of rural Alberta. I will stand in this House every day and defend Albertans while they're being victimized. Mr.

Speaker, through you to the Premier, if the Premier wants to call that grandstanding, that's ridiculous. It is time for her to stand up as the Premier for the people of Alberta. This is not a partisan issue. They are being robbed. They are being victimized. The crime rates in rural Alberta are an epidemic. The police are appalled. They're asking for help. We're asking for help. Will this Premier stop blaming people, stand up, do her job, and help the people of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thankfully, it's not my job to yell and scream, and frankly that's not actually going to be what gets outcomes. What is our job is to protect the important funding to our justice system that would be significantly jeopardized were we to move ahead with the 20 per cent cuts that the members opposite want us to pursue. The members opposite constantly refer to B.C. as the standard that we should be following. The members opposite might be interested to know that in B.C. rural communities of 5,000 and less have to levy their own taxes to pay for 50 per cent of their policing costs, yet in Alberta it's fully funded. Those are the kinds of decisions that we chose . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Provincial Fiscal Update

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's fiscal update shows that despite the government's best attempt at budgeting, Albertans face \$248 million in unplanned increases in operating expenses and a \$247 million revenue shortfall, largely because of lower corporate and personal income taxes, which reflect Alberta's fiscal health. This is after two and a half years of budgets which have all missed the government's own mark. When will the Finance minister learn from these mistakes and make accurate and realistic budgets that Albertans can trust?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, our plan is working. The plan of compassionately reducing spending is working. We are pulling that spending down. In the meantime the economy is growing. We had the backs of Albertans. Now the economy is growing. We can look at our budgets more closely now, and going forward, we will reduce that spending. [interjections]

The Speaker: Keep calm, folks.

Ms McPherson: Today's fiscal update revealed very large capital plan reductions, including \$359 million from Transportation, \$258 million from Education, \$126 million from Health, \$69 million from Infrastructure, and \$30 million from Seniors and Housing. To the Minister of Infrastructure: which communities will not get the desperately needed schools, health facilities, and seniors' facilities that the government promised, and how can Albertans trust any Infrastructure promises this government makes in the future?

Ms Jansen: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that I think is always important to remember is infrastructure in this province and that what we have been doing with a monumental infrastructure build, almost \$30 billion over four years, is repairing the damage that was done during the Klein years, when, of course, we had some folks who are on the other side who made the decision that it was actually more important to have a fiscal bottom line . . .

The Speaker: Please stop the clock. [interjections] Order. Now. [interjections]

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order. [interjections] Hon. members, please. Fortunately, at least one of the school groups left.

Ms McPherson: This government promised major changes to the way government operates but shows no sign of doing things differently than the previous government, including basing its budget on nonrenewable resource revenue, cutting school and hospital construction, and repeatedly failing to manage operational spending. When will this government abandon the Conservative playbook of endless infrastructure cuts and arbitrary political decisions about critical program spending?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, well, that's a bit rich coming from the conservative party over there. My understanding is that that party has just been taken over by the PCs because the Wildrose took over their party, so I don't know where the Alberta Party people are going to go.

But you know what? On this side, Mr. Speaker, we made investments when it was time to make investments. We made good investments, and we got great support from the municipalities. I was just at the AUMA and the AAMD and C, and the support was wonderful. But you know what? It's time that we take another look at it and look at the budget and look at the debt and the deficit and fix it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The Member for Red Deer-South.

School Nutrition Programs

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been a long-time advocate for school nutrition programs. Children cannot learn if they are hungry. I also understand that school nutrition programs cost money. To the Minister of Education: is there adequate funding for the number of students involved now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our school nutrition projects across the province of Alberta have been an unqualified success. Last year we had 14 school districts, with about \$250,000 to each of them, move on school nutrition. It was so successful that we expanded to all 62 school boards now in the province of Alberta. We can definitely see measurable increased attendance rates, and students' behaviour is improving. Their focus is better. It's better for physical and mental health as well. The school nutrition program here in the province of Alberta is working, and our government is very, very proud of it.

2:10

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: are schools saving money by utilizing community partners, and if so, is that money supporting local economies?

Mr. Eggen: Well, yes. It's been very interesting because we gave plenty of latitude for school nutrition programs to unfold across the province. For example, in the Livingstone Range school division they have a farm-to-table approach, which is using local food and existing programs that were already there. The Medicine Hat school

district is using the science curriculum as part of their programming as well. In the Northern Lights school division we have elementary school students being fed by the high school cooking program. So, Mr. Speaker, yeah, there's been a lot of creativity, a lot of latitude. The school nutrition program is working, and it's something we should all . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many children are being supported by the program expansion now, and have we seen improved learning outcomes for these same children?

Mr. Eggen: Well, yes. The pilot program from last year was feeding about 5,000 students per day. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that with our recent expansion we are now feeding more than 22,000 students per day across the province of Alberta. It's something to be very proud of. We see increased attendance, more healthy food choices. There is education associated with those healthy choices, so students can be learning not just to eat on that day a healthy choice but to have those habits for the rest of their lives.

Emergency Medical Services and Worker Supports

Mr. Fraser: I spoke yesterday about the pressing need for more EMS funding. Providing adequate resources for our emergency medical services seems like an issue we can all agree on. It will increase the level of care provided to Albertans in medical emergencies and save the province money in the long term by reducing expensive EMS hospital wait times and allowing rural ambulances to stay closer to home. While this problem won't be solved overnight, we need to take the first step in bringing EMS funding to meet the current demand. To the Premier: will you commit, at the very least, to provide enough EMS funding in the next budget to add an additional ambulance in both Calgary and Edmonton, or can you do better than that?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's very important for us to ensure that EMS has proper coverage, not just in the cities but right across the province of Alberta, and further to that point, we have seen that there's been plenty of consultation in regard to how EMS people on the ground can help us to make those decisions. I mean, that's part of the budgeting process. For example, they are just equipping more than 350 ambulances with power stretchers. This was a direct result of advocacy from EMS personnel on the ground to make their jobs better and, thus, to make life better for Alberta families.

Mr. Fraser: Given that paramedic services are in high demand, with year-over-year increased call volume, and given that paramedics are highly trained and competent practitioners – they could be doing more to treat and refer nonemergent patients to more appropriate care facilities rather than the most expensive, the emergency department – and given that hallway waits kill paramedic morale and that it's also substandard patient care and costs millions in wasted resources, to the Premier: when will you allow paramedics to practise to their full scope to provide the care Albertans deserve, and will you commit to ending the practice of EMS hallway waits?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, these are issues that are being dealt with in consultation with EMS workers on the ground. We know that to utilize the full scope of practice of any health care worker will help us to reduce wait times, to improve health outcomes, and to save money as well. So in consultation with EMS providers and the unions that represent them, certainly I believe that AHS is working to achieve that full scope of practice for paramedics to treat patients immediately and to ensure that we have the timely dissemination of health services.

Mr. Fraser: I want to thank this government for offering presumptive coverages for cardiac events under the Workers' Compensation Act for paramedics. Given that a cardiac event took the life of my friend, colleague, and mentor David Sartorelli just hours after his last EMS shift, which highlighted this issue – Dave was a loyal servant to this province for over 32 years – to the Minister of Labour: would you be so kind as to name this new clause that protects paramedics the David Sartorelli clause?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is because of stories like David's that we did adjust that clause within Bill 30. I appreciate very much the recommendation, and I'd like to follow up with the member after question period.

Thank you.

Tax Policies and Economic Development

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Finance minister released the second-quarter update, and it shows yet again that income and corporate tax revenue are down significantly despite the NDP raising those same tax rates. And the NDP's union bosses are demanding: raise taxes higher. On this side of the House we know why higher taxes don't result in higher incomes and more wealth. To the minister: do you understand why raising income and corporate taxes results in less revenue overall?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. You know, it sounds very much like the question that was posed to the Premier just a few seconds ago. What I would add to her answer is that we went through the toughest recession in a generation. People were out of work. People's incomes were lower. Corporations were not doing as well. Mr. Speaker, those are the reasons why corporate and personal income taxes weren't as high. But they will come back because the economy is coming back as a result of the work of this side, not that side.

Mr. Barnes: Given that the Fraser Institute released their Global Petroleum Survey, which surveys petroleum managers regarding barriers to investment in oil and gas in various jurisdictions around the world – and the good news is that Alberta isn't last. NDP, you have your B.C. cousins to thank for that. While the B.C. government is openly antipipeline, Alberta's NDP has purchased social licence. To the minister: are you embarrassed that your government's social licence has resulted in the same weak investment climate as British Columbia's?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I think what the speaker should be embarrassed about is the fact that he's quoting Rebel media and he's quoting the Fraser Institute. You know, take a huge grain of salt, a barrel of salt, when you listen to those quotes, Mr. Speaker.

What I can tell you is that the economy is coming back, jobs are up, wages are up, growth is up, crop and livestock sales are up. Up, up, up: what about quoting that? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Given that I'm prepared to answer Albertans' questions, why won't you answer mine?

Given that when asked to identify why they weren't investing in Alberta, investors blamed the tax rates, the tax regime in Alberta, and all the new climate change regulations that your government has put in place – so much for social licence – to the minister: when will this government come to its senses, abandon these foolhardy and impulsive tax increases, and return Alberta to the place it should be, the best place to invest in the entire world?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you who has invested in Alberta in the last six months: Amazon, RocketSpace, Swoop, Champion Petfoods, Pinnacle, Google, Cavendish Farms.

Let me get back to my "up" list, Mr. Speaker. Retail sales are up, housing starts are up, exports are up, restaurant sales are up, business incorporation is up. Up, up, up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Opioid Use Prevention and Treatment

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Associate Minister of Health spoke about the latest opioid data in the province, saying, quote: the most important thing we can do is to keep doing what we're doing. End quote. That's a real poor answer since opioid overdoses have increased 40 per cent from last year. To the government. Albertans don't want more opioid-related deaths; they want to see significant action and decline in those numbers. When can Albertans start seeing a multifaceted and co-ordinated approach to reducing these unnecessary deaths?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the number of Albertans who are losing their lives is very high in regard to this opioid crisis, and it should remind us that the opioid crisis is very serious and requires serious action. This government is opening thousands of new treatment spaces across the province, expanding telehealth to more remote communities. As a result, about four times as many Albertans are getting the treatment that they had last year. It's a grave situation, and we all need to work together to find a solution.

2:20

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, this issue needs a unified and co-ordinated approach, and we, the Official Opposition, are here to help. Some questions for you, sir. Are you looking at empowering families, encouraging them to be involved in the rehabilitation therapy? Are you screening and providing a risk analysis of potential opioid users in our system and providing them with oversight and education? Are you incorporating law enforcement, the courts, and social workers in the solution? What are you doing to combat the opioid crisis other than discouraging gentrification in Edmonton's Chinatown with injection clinics?

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, this is an unprecedented emergency, and it requires many different responses, something that has not been perhaps done in the past. The response is being guided by an emergency commission of public health leaders, physicians, law enforcement, parent advocates, people with lived

experience. If the opposition wants to help with that, that's fine, too. We've certainly accepted all the recommendations from this commission, and we're looking to implement those as quickly as possible.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, simply throwing money at this situation will not get things better. Has this government identified treatment solutions that bridge the gap between detox and addiction treatment to prevent overdoses? Have you investigated drug courts and rehabilitation as opposed to incarceration? Has this government looked at re-educating not just physicians but orthopaedic surgeons, pediatricians, and dentists to ensure understanding and education about opioids? Will this government heed advice from so many reports and provide a solid plan to Albertans that encompasses a multifaceted and co-ordinated approach to this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, another important addition to that is to have supervised consumption services in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. I think the members opposite should take a serious, hard look at their opposition to these things because it's certainly part of a way by which we can help to work on this crisis. We have also distributed more than 31,000 naloxone kits and \$3 million in funding to indigenous communities and organizations for their supports. I mean, this is a very challenging situation. It's important that we all work together and work with vigour to ensure that we reduce deaths and injury from opioids.

Publication Ban on Children Who Die in Care

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, last year, in response to the tragic handling of Serenity's file, the opposition proposed a robust motion that would have seen a select special committee of the Legislature review the safety and security of children in government care. The government chose to form a ministerial panel instead. Now, we all tried to work hard on that, but so far the NDP does not want to talk about the publication ban on children who die in care. The panel has been operating for a year. To the Children's Services minister: when will the panel be allowed to talk about the publication ban regulation?

The Speaker: The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I will be able to respond to the question once I have the opportunity to discuss this further with the ministry, and I'll be happy to report to the Legislature.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Where's Sabir?

The Speaker: Hon. member, remember about names.
First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. That was the same amount of discussion the committee has had just for the record.

Given that in 2014, when she was in opposition, the Premier had an amendment passed in the Legislature requiring that changes to the publication ban regulation be made through a committee of the Legislature and given that the minister's panel is not an actual committee of the Legislature, to the Children's Services minister: will you admit that instead of being transparent, you've put politics and self-interest ahead of good policy, as the Premier recommended, when it comes to the publication ban issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We care about what happens to children in care in this province, and we're going to do the work that is necessary to ensure that we arrive at a process that reflects the needs, that we are meeting the needs that are being presented to us. We're going to be able to do that if we put aside the partisan politics and actually get down to working on ensuring that we arrive at a situation where everybody who is involved is comfortable with the way forward. But the cuts that the members opposite would propose would make that work very difficult.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that it's the government that's stopping this from being talked about. Everybody but them has been nonpartisan on this issue. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Given that back in 2014 the Premier herself expressed deep concerns about the publication ban regulation as it still stands this day, two and a half years after the NDP have been in government – they have done nothing on it – and given that the panel hasn't been allowed by the minister to address this issue even though the expert members of the public want to, to the minister: what will you do to fix concerns that Albertans and your own Premier have with the publication ban? Will you do something?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, what we need to do is to come together and work as a Legislature. We are going to do that by ensuring that the collaborative process, that we have already started, continues. We're going to listen to the advice that we're going to receive and make decisions going forward. But, once again, trying to turn this issue into a hyperpartisan situation is not going to get us results. I ask them to please put that aside and start looking at a collaborative way because these children are depending on all of us to get this right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Public Libraries

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Libraries play an important role in communities right across Alberta. Beyond just lending out books, they provide meeting and study spaces, administer exams, and support Albertans in their pursuit of acquiring new skills. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how does this government support libraries across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Our government understands the crucial role that libraries play in their communities as hubs. That's why we've continued to fund libraries through these economic times rather than slash like some other provinces have. This year alone we've provided \$30 million in operating grants to 225 public library boards. Our government also funds SuperNet connectivity and funds and provides e-content such as e-books to libraries across the province. This government is committed to maintaining and continuing the resources and services that Albertans rely on, and that includes libraries.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the growing use of online tools in job recruitment and given libraries' role in Internet access for many low-income Albertans, to the same minister: is this important function in job-seeking supported by the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. As previously mentioned, the GOA does support access to SuperNet connectivity for all public libraries in Alberta. This happens through an investment in SuperNet of between \$1.5 million to \$2 million a year. In addition, the province also invests and provides access to e-content such as Mango language learning so patrons can develop language skills and prepare for jobs. We also provide resources for people with print disabilities through our investment in the National Network for Equitable Library Service, and our government is also expanding services to people in indigenous communities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that while demand for online digital services is increasing, at the same time the demand for brick-and-mortar library space is also increasing, to the same minister: what options are available for communities as they struggle with limited space in their libraries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Providing space for public libraries is a municipal responsibility. The province supports public library services by providing \$30 million in operating grants and over \$4 million in network support. However, due to the infrastructure deficit, communities were left with years of inaction. Our government did recently provide a one-time \$10.7 million grant in capital funding to six regional library systems to renovate their headquarter buildings. This investment will help regional library systems better serve their rural libraries and support the communities and regions around Grande Prairie, Spruce Grove, Lacombe, Strathmore, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Electricity Power Purchase Arrangement Lawsuit

Mr. MacIntyre: The court has ruled in favour of Calgary's Enmax yet again, compelling the once independent Balancing Pool to fulfill their legal obligation to assess and verify that the NDP's tax increase on electrical generators violated the government's contracts by rendering Keephills more unprofitable, just like every other thermal PPA. Minister, why did your government interfere with what is intended to be an arm's-length agency when it prevented the Balancing Pool from doing its legally mandated job?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, first of all, I'm going to make no apologies for standing up for Albertans against unfair electricity charges that resulted from bad deals made by the previous government. To be clear, this legal decision has no bearing on whether or not Enmax has the legal right to return the agreements in the first place. For the record, Enmax is the only company that has not settled with us on this matter, and we are

confident that our legal position is solid. We will still fully participate in proving this in court, that they have no ...

2:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: The court disagrees with you, Minister. Given that this decision confirms that injunctive relief is available to parties where a statutory body fails to perform its legal obligations and given that Enmax isn't the only job creator in Alberta that this NDP chose to tar with mistruths about violating the terms of a long-held government contract, how many more dollars will it cost taxpayers on account of your government's misguided decision to interfere with the Balancing Pool's independence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we took action on this side of the House to protect Alberta families. The other side of the House would continue with a broken system that favours industry over Albertans. We're not going to do that. We negotiated with companies and gave the Balancing Pool a loan. They continue to defend the backroom deals that the previous government did, and they're standing up for industry. Rather, on this side we're standing up for everyday Albertans.

Mr. MacIntyre: In granting this injunction, the court held that Enmax had proven that they would suffer irreparable harm because of the Balancing Pool's inaction. Given that Albertans have now seen multiple rulings demonstrating the incompetent manner in which one of Alberta's most critical files has been managed and given the clear record of political interference with what is meant to be an arm's-length Balancing Pool, Minister, when can Albertans expect your letter of resignation over these billion-dollar mistakes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend the Minister of Energy for the job that she's done. This is an outstanding Minister of Energy who has worked very hard on a number of very critical files. One of the important things to remember here ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Mason: One of the important things to remember here is that this minister and this government stand up for consumers in this province to protect them from unrealistic and unreasonable prices, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Agricultural Society Funding

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has almost 300 agricultural societies whose work enhances the lives of hundreds of thousands of rural citizens. These societies operate arenas and community halls, and they host rodeos, fairs, festivals, and trade shows, all of which enrich their communities. To the minister of agriculture: do you support the work of our agricultural societies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for his very important question. Our government very much values and recognizes the important work that ag societies do

all across this province. We understand that they make life better for Albertans in small towns and rural communities across this province. Our government has been in the process of assessing the current budget to find savings in order to fairly and responsibly reduce the deficit, but I can tell you that we know the great work that ag societies do. That is why we are completely funding them at the exact same levels as we did last year.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister deserves thanks for finally giving ag societies the grants they were expecting this year and given that ag societies went through a lot of unnecessary worry while they waited to learn if they could continue to operate their recreation centres and other community amenities, to the same minister: why did you leave them hanging so long?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. I mean, it's interesting that, you know, depending on who pops up over there to ask a question, some want cuts; some want spending. I think it's just a whole lot of confusion going on on that side of the House.

What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that our government is very thoughtfully, compassionately, and prudently looking at ways that we can reduce our spending. We recognize, as the Minister of Finance has pointed out, that we are moving toward a path to balance, but we did recognize the important work that ag societies are doing in this province. That's why the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry has decided to fund all of our ag societies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I know that the minister of agriculture is working hard to secure next year's grants for ag societies – and I thank him for that – and given that it is actually the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance who dictates the ag minister's budget, to the Minister of Finance: can you please tell the volunteers today if their grants will be available for them as they prepare their budgets for next year, not halfway through their operating year?

The Speaker: Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member will know from when he served in government, it's a little premature to be talking about next year's budget. This is one of the processes that we're going through. However, we do recognize the valuable and important contributions that ag societies make to all of rural Alberta and, in fact, all of our province. That will be one of the factors that the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry looks at when he looks within his budget under the direction of the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Construction Concerns

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-West constituents are very concerned about the design and plan for the portion of the southwest ring road that is adjacent to their communities. The Springbank Hill Community Association along with the Slopes have both expressed concerns surrounding noise attenuation and quality of life. Can the minister confirm that his department has addressed these concerns, which the communities have specifically brought to his department's attention?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can assure the House that our department has been very open with respect to meeting with communities, and I've been very open about meeting with members of the opposition and of the government who are representing their constituents on these matters. Construction, unfortunately, has been planned by the previous government very close to existing neighbourhoods, and that presents a number of operational problems during construction. We've done our very best to mitigate all of the concerns relative to dust, noise, and odour.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that the minister has met with me on two previous occasions for ring road concerns only after I have asked him questions in the House and given that here I am again, having received no correspondence from his office about these ring road concerns, again to the minister. The quality of life of these communities is suffering. Will you please commit to building the berms and the sound attenuation walls they are requesting?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member knows that I am always available, open to meeting with him and other members. All he has to do is ask instead of referring to some correspondence. I don't know where it comes from.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Because your office isn't responding.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that when I have the opportunity to meet with the minister, our conversations have been professional and respectful – and I appreciate that – and given that I would like to continue that relationship on behalf of the people of Calgary-West, Minister, will you commit today to meeting with the Springbank Hill Community Association and the representatives from the Slopes and personally address their concerns?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, our department and my ministry have been open to meeting with community members and their representatives here in the Assembly. That has not changed, but if the hon. member wants to represent his community in a more effective way, he should just pick up the phone, and I'll fix his problems if I can.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Carbon Levy Revenue and Rebates

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government added its carbon tax to the price of fuel, household heating, and many other basic supplies, but it pats itself on the back for providing a small rebate to Albertans. Minister, can you please tell Albertans how much it costs to administer the rebate program? Minister, Albertans are looking for a number, not the rhetoric, not the anger machine, not what we have done or what we're going to do, just the number.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the fact of the matter is that two-thirds of Albertans are receiving a rebate for the carbon levy, which is being administered through Treasury Board

and Finance. Two-thirds of Albertans will get a rebate on the carbon levy. It will increase on January 1. If you're a couple who makes less than \$95,000, you're getting a \$450 rebate. If you have two kids, you'll get \$540.

2:40

Mr. Gill: Again the same rhetoric.

Given that this government's budget figures indicate that it expects to collect over \$1 billion this year alone and the total will jump to \$1.4 billion after the carbon tax increases again in, like, a few days and given that the government is taking Albertans' money from one pocket and resending a portion of it back into the same pocket, Minister, how does this sleight-of-hand manoeuvre possibly allow you to claim that your government has the backs of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the rebate system is being administered by the Canada Revenue Agency, and the Minister of Finance did confirm at estimates debate, if the member was paying attention, that it's about \$1.5 million. Now, the question before us is not about whether we have a price on carbon; it's about what kind of plan we have. The position that we've taken as a government is that it's going to be a made-in-Alberta plan that moves our energy industry forward. It won't be a plan that's made in Ottawa. I know that Mr. Kenney is very fond of Ottawa, but on this side of the House we're going to be standing up for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It took me two questions to get an answer.

Given that as of January 1, which is just around the corner, the carbon tax on diesel will increase to 8.03 cents per litre and given that a constituent of mine has told me that this NDP's unfair carbon tax is costing his trucking company almost \$3,000 per month and he's not getting anything back from this government, Minister, why is this government taking money from families and businesses who could better use it now to reinvest in their businesses and in their children's futures?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have recycled carbon levy revenues back into reducing the small-business rate by a third. Certainly, that represents about \$180 million worth of benefit to our small businesses. If you're a couple who makes less than \$95,000, you are getting a \$450 rebate. That will increase to \$540. Low-income seniors in Alberta are getting a \$300 carbon levy rebate. That is in addition to a number of energy efficiency programs and a made-in-Alberta plan that got us two pipeline approvals, not a made-in-Ottawa plan.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a request for unanimous consent to introduce guests who have arrived.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the Insurance Brokers Association of Alberta. The IBAA is a nonprofit association representing over 4,200 members in 250 brokerages across the provinces and territories. We have with us this afternoon Gerry Baert from Blue Circle Insurance Brokers in Calgary, Ken Holst from Saunders Insurance in Taber, Mitch Holst from Saunders Insurance in Taber, Jonathan Brown from Peters Insurance in Wetaskiwin, Scott Romans from Ing & McKee Insurance in Red Deer, Jody Lohr from Blue Circle Insurance Brokers in Calgary, and we have George Hodgson and Rikki McBride from the Insurance Brokers Association Alberta proper and, finally, Chad Leibel from Leibel Insurance Group here in Edmonton. These folks are at the Legislature to meet with the MLAs and to advocate for the insurance industry and their clients. Having worked in insurance myself, I know the critical work insurance agents and brokers do to manage risk and to help make life better and more secure for all of us. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Alberta Real Estate Association

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to you about an industry and an organization in which I am proud to have served. Prior to being elected as the MLA for Edmonton-McClung, I had a 30-year career in real estate and was a proud member of the Alberta Real Estate Association. Seated here in the gallery today are 48 members from that same association attending their annual Government Liaison Days conference.

The Alberta Real Estate Association was incorporated on February 11, 1947. Then, as now, property ownership is one of the cornerstones of the high-quality life that Albertans enjoy. As their part in maintaining that quality of life, the Alberta Real Estate Association provides professional development for their realtor members as well as advocates on behalf of their membership to ensure that industry professionals are able to serve the Alberta public effectively. They advocate for realtors and their clients on issues like land transfer taxes, the land titles registry system, standards for home and property inspections, marijuana grow op remediation, and Alberta's Condominium Property Act regulations. In fact, the association was an important contributor to the recent consultations on the Condominium Property Act and age-restricted condos.

The Alberta Real Estate Association is a valued and constructive stakeholder on government issues related to real estate in Alberta. I know because I've been on both sides of the equation as a property owner and as a realtor. The Alberta Real Estate Association and the Alberta government share the same desire to protect and promote the interests of Albertans by making sure that there are rules and guidelines in place to help make significant real estate decisions, like purchasing a home or selling a subdivision, easier and trouble free.

I hope you'll all join me in congratulating the Alberta Real Estate Association and its member realtors for 70 years of dedicated service to our province and its people.

Rural Cellphone Service

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, recently the *Western Producer* ran a story on rural cellphone coverage, and the picture they painted was condemning. It found that many developing nations have better cell coverage at a lower cost. Another study conducted by the think tank New America found that when it comes to voice service, Canada was the most expensive on the planet. The sad part is that many of my constituents would gladly pay the outrageous fees if they were just able to get even half-decent service. Unfortunately, outside of the major centres cell coverage is spotty at best. The *Western Producer* found that even along the Trans-Canada highway there are extended dead zone pockets.

The issue isn't about rural Albertans having the same luxury as our urban neighbours. This is quickly becoming a serious health and safety issue. When someone has an accident on one of Alberta's many gravel roads and no one else is around, it is critical that when they take out their cellphone to call 911, they actually have service.

When it comes to notifying Albertans of potential or ongoing disasters in their area, Alberta has an established alert service, which pushes out important information. Unfortunately, in many places there simply isn't any Internet or cell coverage through which you can receive these important and often life-saving alerts. Alarming, during the recent wildfires that tore through my constituency, many people were caught completely off guard due to the lack of Internet and cell coverage. They may as well have been on the moon.

As we have all heard loud and clear yesterday, rural crime is a growing problem, and often the police are hours or even days away. In fact, the issue is even worse since in many areas of rural Alberta you don't have the cell coverage to make 911 calls anyway. This is a serious problem that needs attention now.

Instead of capping oil sands development, unionizing family farms, or establishing a job-killing carbon tax, this government should be working with the telecommunication industry through its regulatory and legislative tools to improve basic service in rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, when disaster strikes, help should be just a text away. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member. [interjection] Hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Pediatric Neuropsychiatric Disorders

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 9, 2017, our government declared it pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections, also known as PANDAS, and pediatric acute-onset neuropsychiatric syndrome, or PANS, awareness day in Alberta. I'm wearing the PANDAS shirt in honour of this member's statement.

This happened after two of my constituents, Marnie and Richard Deschenes, brought to my attention that their two sons were diagnosed with PANDAS. The Deschenes struggled for a long time to have their first son appropriately diagnosed after a sudden-onset mental illness. The Deschenes have organized a group of Albertans to spread awareness among patients, parents, physicians, and community members about PANDAS and PANS. The group meets in Calgary regularly. I was happy to not only help facilitate a declaration to bring awareness to PANDAS and PANS but to also do a member's statement in order to raise more awareness as this is not a well-known disorder.

2:50

PANDAS occurs when streptococcal, or strep, bacteria triggers a misdirected immune response resulting in inflammation of a child's brain. The child quickly begins to exhibit life-changing symptoms such as obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, tics, personality changes, decline in math and handwriting abilities, sensory sensitivities, restrictive eating, and more. PANS has the same symptoms, but there is no associated infection. We need to continue to take steps in promoting awareness to help ensure children receive a timely diagnosis and treatment.

Supporting the mental health of Albertans is something our government takes very seriously. Our government is committed to helping all Albertans. That includes those with multiple and complex needs such as children diagnosed with PANDAS and PANS and those who love and care for them. I would like to thank the Deschenes family for bringing this to my attention.

Thank you very much.

George Frederick John Gosbee

Mrs. Aheer: George Frederick John Gosbee left us on November 12, 2017, at the age of 48 years. George was born in Kingston, Ontario, on August 30, 1969. He and his family moved to Calgary, where he would go to school, start a family and a business, and touch the lives of many. The brevity of George's life is no indication of its vibrancy. No matter the endeavour, George approached it with gifted resoluteness and inspiring curiosity. When not sporting a suit and tie in downtown Calgary, George was an avid mountaineer, a practising yogi, philanthropist, and, above all, a loving father, husband, son, and brother. George's abrupt end affects many around the globe. He considered himself to be an international world traveller who embodied the three-pillared philosophy of explore, experience, and educate. His legacy and benevolent relationships he leaves behind are a testament of his character.

Prior to founding AltaCorp Capital in 2010, George was the chairman, president, and CEO of Tristone Capital Global Inc. As a corporate, financial, and philanthropic leader his accolades include vice-chair of Alberta Investment Management, chair of Arcadia Biosciences, co-owner of the Arizona Coyotes, alternate governor of the NHL, chair of the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary, adviser to the Haskayne School of Business, director of the Chrysler Group, member of the economic advisory council for the present Prime Minister, and positions on numerous other organizations.

George will be remembered dearly by his wife, Karen; their three children, Carter, John, and Isla; his parents, John and Edna Gosbee; sister and brother-in-law Jean and Trevor Marks and their three children, Ty, Jessica, and Tayden; along with countless other family and friends he has touched. He was a gifted visionary, a pillar in the community, a philanthropist, a force of nature, a leader, a man of compassion and energy, a hockey fan, a motivator, and a dear friend. George left a giant hole in our lives and hearts when he left us far too soon.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present – as I noticed in the introduction of the AWA and their advocacy for caribou, we passed off over 300 postcards with a statement to the Premier. "Wild caribou belong in Alberta, not just on

our quarters.” That is our money. “Protect Alberta’s caribou habitat now!”

In addition, there were five specific ones I wanted to mention, including one from Abigail Hadden in Calgary: caribou need a home, too. And from Treaty 6, Crystal Lamamen: caribou mitigation, conservation, and protection fall within the body of inherent treaty rights, original peoples of the land, as long as the sun shines, grass grows, and the rivers flow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four letters here from concerned constituents regarding rural crime. This one is from Edie, who says: “We clearly are not winning the battle over rural crime.” She’s seen a significant increase in her area.

This one is from Melvin and his family: we feel like we are the “victims with no voice or provision to protect ourselves in our community.”

This one is from Fern in Red Deer county. Her son has had his truck stolen twice, and her neighbours had their truck stolen from the field where they were combining.

This one is from Tara from Red Deer county. She’s a working parent and leaves her teenage son home alone until she gets home after work to their acreage, and she is desperately afraid for their safety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have three letters. One is from 75-year-old Mildred, where she lists all of the personal irreplaceable items that have been stolen from her in the last six months.

The second letter is from Trevor, who states that he’s been broken into five times between July and October of this year. Five times. In one he had a bush camera set up where they took pictures of the guys loading rifles as they came onto his property.

The third letter is from Connie, and I’ll just read a couple of statements that she makes. She says that she’s a grandmother. She says: “I’m angry that I have to worry about self-defence in my own [house]. I’m angry that my peace of mind has been stolen. I’m angry that criminals have more rights than their victims.”

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjection] Table the document. [interjection] Hon. member. [interjections] Members. Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table today documents containing a petition of over a thousand signatures presented by Grant Ferby, a long-time fisherman in Alberta. The title of it is Save a Perch. It says:

Together, with the support of the Beaver River Fish & Game Association, we are requesting the ESRD of Alberta to initiate an enhanced cormorant control program in the Lakeland area. Our goal is to reduce the number of cormorant colonies in the Lakeland to help restore our fisheries. Our yellow perch fishery has been decimated over the last 25 years due in large part to the increased cormorant population. It is estimated that the current Muriel Lake cormorant population alone removes one million lbs of fish per year from our local lakes.

I have five copies of that.

The Speaker: You have another?

Mr. Loewen: Yes. I also have the appropriate five copies of some maps regarding the boundaries commission and how the boundaries could have been redrawn simpler to fit in the parameters of the populations that the boundaries commission was set with.

The Speaker: Any others? The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies here of a tabling in regard to comments in my question that the Premier asked me to do a tabling on in regard to her interview earlier today on CBC and her comments to a gentleman named Norm that I spoke about in which clearly the Premier disregards Norm’s comments about what the carbon tax is costing and even implies . . .

The Speaker: Come on, hon. member. Table the document. [interjection] Hon. member, excuse me. When I say, “Table the document,” that means you stop talking when I stand up and please sit down. Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it’s my job to speak for my constituents, and you can’t stop me.

The Speaker: Excuse me. Could I ask that you rise and apologize for that last comment.

Mr. Nixon: I apologize for the comment.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe that we had a point of order, but it was withdrawn.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I’d like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 29

An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving

The Chair: We are considering amendment A2. Are there any further speakers to this amendment?

Mr. McIver: This is the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-West?

The Chair: Calgary-West. This is the amendment.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. All right. I’m grateful for you making that clear. Thank you.

The Chair: I’ll recognize you to speak. Did you wish to speak to it, hon. member?

Mr. McIver: No. I already did.

The Chair: Okay. Any other members wishing to speak to this amendment? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. Just to confirm, this is the amendment to Bill 29?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Hanson: Okay. Yes. Perfect.

I just wanted to, you know, stand up and speak in support of the amendment. There are a couple of things. This is brand new legislation that's coming out. It's new law coming from our federal government. It hasn't really been tested anywhere other than a couple of the states down in the U.S. and over in Europe, in Amsterdam, where it's legal there. Again, it is certainly new to us, and I think that putting a clause in there where this legislation has to be reviewed – I think the private sector, when they realize the potential here, if you come up with a testing device or some sort of testing that can prove impairment by marijuana, the wheels are probably turning already out there. I think that in the very near future we may see something that could substantially change this legislation, so I really think that it is imperative that we put a clause in there that gives us the option to reinvestigate this at the end of 2019 and then every five years after that.

For that reason I will be supporting this, and I think that everybody else should as well. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question? [interjections] We're on Bill 29, yes. We're back on the main bill. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, while our friends across the hall sort things out, I just want to take a little time to talk about what a wonderful bill this is, and I hope that if there are further amendments, they will be forthcoming shortly. I think it's important to move ahead with this bill. I think we know that the pressure from the decisions of the federal government is bearing down upon us all, and it's incumbent on all of us to do our utmost to make sure that we are taking every step possible to protect the lives and safety of the people who are travelling on our roads.

That's one of the things that we've been trying to do in this particular piece of legislation. It reflects changes to the Criminal Code that are being proposed by the federal government and also conforms with the decision of the Alberta Court of Appeal which struck down a section of our Traffic Safety Act as it related to the length of suspensions under the act. We are required to bring forward these changes in order to do that.

With that, just a little reminder of the wonderful virtues of this bill, which I know has been supported by the Alberta Motor Transport Association and by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, so I commend it to all members of the House.

The Chair: Questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Now, I'd like to focus on one of the press releases that the Alberta government or the NDP brought out. The press release is regarding Drugged Driving is Impaired Driving. It's August 5, 2016, so this was an older press release. We just heard the Minister of Transportation speak on the importance of this, and I have to agree that impaired driving is something that we all need to be very cognizant of. The quote that the hon. minister has put forward in this press release:

It comes as a surprise to many people that drunk driving and drugged driving carry the same criminal charges. This is because both substances impair a driver's ability and increase the likelihood of being involved in a collision.

That seems pretty self-explanatory. If you have impairment, you shouldn't drive. I think that everybody can get that lesson in life, saying that it doesn't matter what it is that you are doing; if you are planning on taking a vehicle and going out into the public, you need to be very clear that you are one hundred per cent in charge of that wonderful vehicle.

Now, just below the minister's quote is a quote from Andrew Murie, the CEO of MADD Canada.

Impaired driving is Canada's leading cause of criminal death in Canada. The number of drugs present in motor vehicle fatalities in Canada continues to grow. It is absolutely essential that when you are using drugs that you not drive and create that risk of death or injury to yourself or others.

Again, this is common-sense stuff. We should be making sure that people do not go out and drink and drive or be drugged and drive. When we hear some of the facts – and there are some facts here that we need to be very cognizant of, saying that these are important.

Now, the last time I spoke in second reading, I brought some important Stats Canada research that came forward, and one of the Stats Canada research is called Police-reported Crime Statistics in Canada, 2015.

Drug offences involving cannabis continued to decline in 2015. In total, the overall rate of police-reported offences involving the possession, trafficking, production and distribution of cannabis decreased 15% between 2014 and 2015.

This is something that is important because I believe that a lot of our enforcement are starting to see that cannabis is something that's important that we keep out of children's hands, but with the change of government we're starting to see that the Trudeau Liberals are more cannabis friendly, so we're seeing a decrease in drug offences happening here.

What's important here is it says that "in contrast, offences involving the possession, trafficking, production or distribution of methamphetamines grew 25%." We're seeing that maybe people are moving away from cannabis and maybe potentially moving towards some of these really bad drugs, so what is it that we need to be continuing to be cognizant of here? We need to be very clear that driving under the influence of any drug, whether it's alcohol, whether it's cannabis or it is some other drug, is not okay.

3:10

Now, going further, almost all police-reported impaired driving incidents continued to involve alcohol in 2014 at 96 per cent while a small portion of 4 per cent involved drugs. I would say that when we start to legalize marijuana or cannabis, we're going to see that this number should spike, but it's not going to spike. The reason that it's not going to spike significantly is because we have no way to test for this drug, no way to test for impairment of this drug. It is important to understand that in the end we need to be always moving forward with being able to bring these impaired drivers off the road. If we go back to MADD and our hon. Minister of Transportation, it's common sense. It is common sense in the fact that we need to make sure that these individuals are not on the roads. I have a hard time making it from point A to B here.

Right now we're at a place where we can't test for this drug. We're going to legalize it, which means we're putting people behind the wheel potentially that could hurt Albertans. Now, blaming the NDP for the fact that our federal Liberal colleagues are bringing through or ramming through legislation at an alarming rate without preparing our provinces – it's not their fault. I can

understand that. But I will tell you that what we do need to do is make sure that if we have no way of testing for this, then we need to start looking at a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to our roads. We need to start saying that until we can test for cannabis in a way that prevents impaired driving, we are not going to allow people on the road who are utilizing this drug. It may be legal, absolutely. The federal Liberals are pushing us in this direction, but in the end we need to maintain safe work sites, we need to make sure our roads are safe, and we need to make sure it doesn't get into the hands of our children.

Now, I'm just going to go through some more of this press release that was done on August 5, 2016, because there are some interesting facts here when it comes to impaired driving.

- The Traffic Injury Research Foundation determined that in Canada during 2012, drugs were detected in 40 per cent of fatally injured drivers.

Forty per cent. So when we start looking at the fact that Canada has a real problem already when it comes to impaired driving causing fatalities, why would we add a new drug that we can't test for and allow for people to be able to drive under the influence? This is not okay. This is one of the flaws that we have when it comes to this bill. We need to be making sure that Albertans are safe on the roads. We need to make sure that Albertans are safe on job sites. That's why it's so important that we start doing some research into making sure that we have the appropriate test.

Now, I hear that the test right now is more or less going to revolve around sobriety tests. Well, fair enough. So now we're bringing back walk the line and touch your nose, that kind of stuff. I believe that we moved away from sobriety tests because they were largely subjective, and what happens is that people are able to do a lot of things when they're under the influence of drugs that a normal person may or may not be able to do. When we start to look at the fact that sobriety tests are more likely to be challenged in court and the fact that our officers haven't pursued sobriety tests for a number of years, we're actually going to have a long period of time where people are going to be able to be caught underneath this impairment and then get away with it when it hits the courts.

As we have heard, the government so far hasn't been so good at rural crime. Now let's add impaired driving into that.

Now, let's talk about the next impaired driving facts.

- Alberta is slightly above the national average at 41 per cent. This represents 82 drivers who were killed in collisions during 2012 who tested positive for drugs. For perspective, 71 fatally injured drivers tested positive for alcohol during that same year. Of those, 34 had both alcohol and drugs in their system.

We're seeing some very large numbers here that are already proving impairment when it comes to drugs. What we're seeing here is a group of Albertans who have decided to put others at risk. This is something that is not acceptable, and we need to address the fact that we cannot prevent these people from going onto the roads. We have no way of testing, no way of making sure that our roads are safe. Now, I do again sympathize with the current NDP government because this is something that is being rammed down our throats. There is no doubt about it.

Now, another point that's brought up here:

- Mixing alcohol and drugs of any sort is also a concern. Combining impairing substances has major risks. Always use substances responsibly.

It could be that they are just underneath the legal limit for alcohol, but they also have cannabis, or THC, within their blood. What we're saying here is: is that person legally impaired or not? We don't know, because we don't know how the two drugs interact with each other within a person's system. We do know that there is an effect

on those people's systems. So we need to be making sure that we not only are testing for cannabis within the individual who's potentially impaired, but we also need to be making sure that the combination of drugs is not impairing them even though they're below the levels that have been prescribed by the government.

Here's the next point.

- Studies of driving performance (both simulated and on-road) show increased likelihood to swerve, following distance, and speed as a function of cannabis use.

What I am reading into this is that cannabis use affects your response time. I don't know if anybody would disagree that cannabis or, in many cases, alcohol is preventing your ability to be able to swerve if that child gets in front of you or if that family pet is in front of you. What happens here is that we've put somebody at real risk, and it's all because we can't get that person off the road.

Now, in the case of my constituency – and I will go back to my constituency – I had a couple come into my constituency office. They were a family driving to Edmonton, actually to Fort Saskatchewan. This couple was hit head-on by an individual who was impaired by drugs and, I believe, alcohol. In this tragic situation what we've got here is that their family was in this terrible accident, but they also lost the individual's mother. So a person died. There was a fatality. This woman was a statistic within the 2016 year. This is tragic, and nobody wants to hear this. I'm not blaming anybody on this other than that individual that got behind the wheel and decided he was going to drive impaired.

Now, let's say that that individual had been pulled off along the side of the road by an officer. He had the THC in his blood, and he was impaired, but we have no way of being able to remove him from the road. That accident still would have happened, cause and effect. Cause and effect. What we're looking at here is an individual we could not prevent from the actual fatality. Now, at some point as a government we need to acknowledge that we have a responsibility to take that individual off the road.

Let's say, for instance, that this individual had been pulled over, had been given a sobriety test by that officer, that that person passed that sobriety test, like we had described before, that the officer – obviously, this is a very subjective test – decided that that individual was okay to drive. Then let's say that half an hour's drive down the road that person runs into a family and that somebody is a fatality at that point. The question is: is the Alberta government liable for that? Is this something where we are putting our province at a particularly large chance of liability payments coming out of the Alberta government?

3:20

Is this something that we could have prevented but didn't? Now, I'm not questioning an RCMP officer or a peace officer, questioning the decision they made at that time, because – you know what? – unless you're that officer, it is too hard to know what's happening with that individual. But I can tell you that with that person hitting that family, causing the death of a loved one, us then finding out that there was THC in the blood and that maybe this death could have been prevented had we had a better testing system: that is the true question here.

If this is something that we can actually bring forward, that is a fault within the Alberta government system, are we looking at a whole lot of lawsuits? When we start looking at this – they said that 41 per cent of the national average are fatalities due to drugs detected in their systems – are we opening up a class-action suit against our province because we jumped too quickly at this? Is this something where, in the end, we should have slowed down?

Again, it's important to say that zero tolerance when it comes to marijuana, when it comes to our roadways I think is something that we need to consider.

Now, my colleague put forward a sunset clause, and it's shameful that this Assembly voted that down, specifically the government. In the end, what we need to be doing is reviewing these important pieces of legislation and then updating them. I would say that the fact that we don't have a good way of testing should automatically trigger the need for a sunset clause to this legislation. We should be reviewing this. You know what? My colleague put it at five years; I would put it at two, not five. Two years. We need to be making sure that this law is more or less protecting our residents.

What we're looking at here is Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. That's admirable. The act is named that. But what we need to be looking at here is an act that actually prevents deaths if it's possible. I don't see that in this act. This is not something where we can say that this act is acting responsibly to protect our roadways. We need to address the fact that there could be impaired people driving on our streets, putting our families – my children, my parents, my brother and sister, my nieces, everybody that I know – at risk just because we can't get this right in the fact that we have no way of ensuring that a person who is impaired gets off the streets. This is critical.

We need to have a way of testing. If we can't test, this shouldn't be moving forward. I will say that when it comes to our government, it does seem that we are moving a little fast in this direction. But, again, I don't think that it's something that can be prevented as this is being brought forward by the Trudeau Liberals.

Now, from that survey, the impaired driving facts:

- In the 2014 driver ... survey, seven in 10 Albertans agreed that too many people are driving under the influence of legal or illegal drugs.

Again, this is a government press release. So we have a very large portion of Albertans already saying, back in 2014, that there are a lot of people already doing this, driving under the influence. This is shameful, but this is something that we are going to see jump very, very sharply as soon as we legalize cannabis within our province, and it is going to be even larger once we can't test for it and get it off the roads.

The next point:

- The 2014 Driver Attitude Survey also noted only 55 per cent of Albertans make other driving arrangements when they have taken drugs which can affect their ability to drive.

People think of drugs differently than alcohol – this is important – whether it's prescription drugs or methamphetamines, opioids. What we've got here are people that are saying: I am okay to drive ... [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to correct a couple of things with regard to that. The hon. member talks about the lack of a test for THC. He doesn't, I don't think, quite have it right. What we have are roadside screening devices that are still under evaluation. There is a test for the per se limits of two and five nanograms set forth in the amendments to the Criminal Code, and that's a blood test, and that is accurate, you know, for measuring the quantity of THC in the blood. It doesn't measure impairment, but it measures the amount of THC in the blood and can do so quite accurately.

The question is on roadside screening devices; for example, the breathalyzer. If an officer suspects that you've been drinking, he gives you a screening device to blow into. It's not sufficient to

determine your blood-alcohol content, but it does detect, with a certain degree of accuracy, that you have consumed alcohol in a certain amount. Then you're taken down to the station or to the on-site station that they've set up for a breathalyzer, which is a similar device but much more accurate, that is then used in order to lay a charge.

We have that for cannabis, and that is the blood test, but the roadside screening device to detect the presence of THC is still under evaluation.

I do have a little bit more information with respect to that. If I can maybe take a minute to read that. Oral fluid drug screeners are devices that are able to detect the presence of some kinds of drugs in saliva, including THC, the main impairing component in cannabis. The device is inserted into the mouth of a driver, and once saliva is collected, the device indicates the presence or absence of drugs. These devices are fast, noninvasive, and accurate. Bill C-46 proposes legislation that will authorize police to use an oral fluid screener at a roadside if they suspect a driver has a drug in their body.

The government of Canada is in the process of reviewing roadside testing devices for use in Canada. Once roadside testing devices are approved, should a driver test positive for the presence of a particular drug on such a device, the blood test will also be taken to show whether the level in the blood is over the new limits in the proposed act.

At present oral fluid screening devices have not been approved for use in Canada. The Drugs and Driving Committee of the Canadian Society of Forensic Science has recently examined the performance of oral fluid screening devices and determined that they have an acceptable degree of accuracy in the detection of cannabis, methamphetamine, cocaine, and opioids, some of the major drugs of concern to road safety. These screeners will be evaluated by the federal Drugs and Driving Committee and approved by the Attorney General of Canada.

While it's not a hundred per cent certain, it looks like we are well on the way to approving a roadside screening device for THC. The federal government has indicated to us that they fully expect that one will be approved for use in Canada prior to the proclamation of the changes to the Criminal Code.

I just wanted to set those things on the record. There are tests for THC levels. They have set out per se limits of two and five nanograms. That is not definitively established as impairment in all drivers. That part of the science is still a work-in-progress, I guess you could say. But, in actual fact, I think we're well on the way to being able to detect cannabis at the roadside, and we already have the ability to measure the concentration of THC in the blood.

3:30

The Chair: Hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, you wish to speak to the bill?

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an opportunity for me today to address Bill 29. I wanted to just relate a couple of specific areas of concern that I have with regard to the bill, and, you know, as we're moving through the committee stage, we can address these. But I do want to back up just a little bit to give some of the reference or at least my frame of reference with regard to impaired driving in general, whether that impairment is due to alcohol or, in the case that we're discussing today, alcohol and drugs.

Last Thursday the Member for Edmonton-McClung told the Chamber about his brother Kevin. Kevin was my grad class president. The Member for Edmonton-McClung and I both attended Queen Elizabeth high school here in Edmonton. He was two years ahead of me, in my sister's class, and he was grad class president of

my sister's class. Then two years later I actually ran against Kevin. I'm not sure if you even knew that. I ran against him. He trounced me thoroughly in the election for grad class president, but we were friends in high school.

As was related by the Member for Edmonton-McClung, tragically Kevin's life along with two other young women, who were attending Lakeland College in Vermilion – it's ironic that I would eventually end up representing that institution in my constituency. Kevin was attending Lakeland College along with two other women, and they were travelling back to Lakeland College before highway 16 was twinned. A drunk driver came across the road, and in a head-on collision all three young people were killed. Our first high school reunion happened about three months after we left high school. It was at Kevin's funeral. I can tell you that that experience had a profound effect on my view towards the whole question of impairment and driving. I appreciate my colleague bringing up the question of his brother, and he really honoured Kevin in what he said.

It would be 30 years later, in the middle of the night in May, that I received a phone call from some good friends of ours, and in a stammering voice I heard the voice of a good friend who said: "The RCMP are here along with victims' services. They've just told us that Devin has been killed in a car accident." Now, who was Devin? Well, Devin Racz was a speed skater that I had the privilege of coaching for a number of years. He was my son's best friend. In addition to being an outstanding speed skater, Devin was also an outstanding high school football player, and that was sort of a combination of athletic pursuits that was unusual. You had the big, tough football player, and then you had also the guy who wore a spandex outfit and 18-inch-long, razor-sharp blades and could skate like the wind. That was Devin Racz. After graduating from high school, Devin returned, and he helped me coach at our speed skating club in Lloydminster.

While returning to Lloydminster from a concert in Saskatoon, a drunk driver came across the road and struck Devin in his truck head-on. Devin was killed, and Devin's sister Melissa was very badly injured. Thankfully, she has recovered since then. For the next week I worked with Devin's mom and dad to help arrange Devin's funeral, to help the mourning process in our community because Devin was a very popular young man. He was very well known as one of the captains of the football team and very popular amongst speed skaters as a coach that everybody loved. Over 1,200 people were at Devin's memorial service.

That's the kind of carnage that drunk driving has caused in Canada. Sadly, despite the best efforts of organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and other organizations the message is still not fully getting through. Canada, especially western Canada, has some of the highest levels of impaired driving anywhere on the planet, and it's completely unacceptable. Taking the wheel of your vehicle after you have had too much to drink is an act of supreme selfishness, and it reflects a wanton disregard for not only your own safety but the safety of others on the road. Too many families in Canada, too many families in Alberta have had to endure the heartache and the suffering that have been suffered by the Dach family, by the Racz family, and by so many others.

Understandably, Albertans are concerned that now there's another substance that we know causes impairment that is going to be legal. We know that on July 1 cannabis will be a legal substance in Canada, and we also know that cannabis affects your ability to do things in a way that requires split-second decision-making and fine motor skills. I would not want a surgeon who was impaired by cannabis doing an operation on me. I would not want a backhoe operator digging around gas lines and power lines who was

impaired by cannabis in doing that operation. But as of July 1 it will be quite legal in Canada for people to recreationally use cannabis. Now, we can debate whether we are in agreement with that position or not. I think that that's obviously a debate – in fact, we have another bill that we are discussing that in.

But when it comes to the operation of a motor vehicle, that is potentially the most lethal weapon that anyone is allowed to operate, we don't yet have good, strong guidelines for exactly what constitutes impairment. Unlike alcohol, which is rapidly metabolized in the body and has a linear destabilization curve in the body, THC and cannabinoids do not. I have considerable concern as to how we are going to make those assessments.

Now, I know that there's work being done, and I'm glad that there's work being done. I'm a little bit concerned that we are first throwing the doors wide open and then trying to figure out how we're going to regulate all this, but that's the hand that we've been dealt. I'm glad to hear the Transportation minister when he says that there is work that is going to be ongoing. I certainly encourage the government to leave the doors open on this issue to make sure that we can continue to have the kinds of regulations and legislation put in place to make sure that this happens.

You know, back in 2012 the government that I was part of introduced a lower restriction, .05, for alcohol impairment, 50 milligrams per 100 milliliters of blood. It was vehemently opposed by the opposition party of the day. I remember being asked about it, and I told some folks in a group that was very much opposed to the .05 limit about Kevin and Devin and that if they were looking for someone who was going to advocate for more lax regulations for impaired driving, they were talking to the wrong person, that I would never advocate on behalf of more lax regulations.

In this regard, I am concerned, as I know many Albertans are concerned, that come July 1, we are going to see an increase in the number of drivers who are impaired by a substance which unfortunately – and the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is quite correct. Sadly, there's an impression, a false impression, that while alcohol certainly causes impairment, the consumption of cannabis does not. I've even had some people try to tell me that they're better drivers after they've consumed cannabis. [interjections] You know, I hear some laughing over there. It's not a laughing matter. That's part of the public education process that has to go on. You know, I'm very concerned that we will see more drivers who are operating motor vehicles, one of the most dangerous things that you can do to public safety, under an impaired situation after July 1 of next year than we currently have now, and that, quite frankly, is the last thing we need to have happen.

3:40

I mean, overall, motor vehicle accident rates are on the decline. Certainly, fatality rates and major injury rates are on the decline, and those are positive things. There are a lot of factors involved. One of them is that our vehicles are safer than they used to be. You know, with some of the advancements in technology, our vehicles are safer, but the wild card in so many fatal and injury-causing collisions is the driver. If the driver is impaired, if the driver does not have the motor skills and the ability to make the kinds of split-second decisions that have to be made in the operation of a motor vehicle, then there's a problem.

From my standpoint and speaking certainly from my, you know, past experience with these two young men, these two young men who had tremendous promise, both of them, these two young men who would have been leaders and already were leaders in their peer group and would have become great leaders, because of them I will always be a very staunch advocate in favour of any additional

restrictions to reduce the incidence of impaired driving, whether that be by cannabis, by alcohol, or by any other substance.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Other members wishing to speak? Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. Pleased to add my comments to this very important piece of legislation, that has been obviously accelerated as a result of the federal decision to legalize cannabis, a decision I support. Clearly, it has risks. Clearly, it has caused lots of suffering already, especially in young brains. Clearly, too, we have to come to terms with it, as we have had to come to terms with other substances that alter our mental capacity and alter mood. We're moving ahead into this brave new world.

I think I want to recognize that the government is putting forward some reasonable legislation, apart from my concern still that the age at which it should be legalized should be raised. My colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster has alluded to the fact that young people are more vulnerable, certainly, behind a wheel, where they have limited experience, using substances that they have limited experience with and being subject to peer pressure in a way that other age groups are not. I don't think we should be following the federal guideline of 18. I think we should set our own standard.

Given that the research on the young developing brain and the impacts of cannabis – there's still a lot of mystery. There are still a lot of unknowns around the impact on motor control, on judgment, on executive functions, on attention, and the tremendous variability in the young developing brain. Quite frankly, the male brain – it's clear from the research I've read – developmentally is slower than the female brain. Therefore, there is more concern about an 18-year-old male than there is about an 18-year-old female, but we can't distinguish those in terms of our legislation. They have to go together, and frankly it'll be safer for both males and females with an older age range.

The Canadian Medical Association has suggested 25. I don't think that's realistic, frankly. If the rest of the country is using 18 or 21, I think the best we can do is to push it to 21. That's three years of maturing, three years of experience with some degree of alcohol exposure and, hopefully, a recognition, both through educational and through life experience, that this combination of alcohol and cannabis is absolutely lethal for the young brain in terms of its ability to judge and to make sound decisions.

Bill 29 proposes to amend the Traffic Safety Act to comply with the May 18, 2017, Alberta Court of Appeal ruling that found it unconstitutional for the province to impose an indefinite licence suspension on a person that is charged with an impaired driving offence. The court gave the Alberta government until May 2018 to fix the legislation. That was the result of the previous government's attempts to try to be very, very clear and strong about reducing the carnage related to alcohol. Now we're going to have to amend that. That's fine. I think this is appropriate given the constitutional challenge.

The bill also updates the Traffic Safety Act to reflect the impending legalization, as I mentioned, pursuant to Bill C-46, specific to cannabis, cannabis-alcohol combination, and other combinations of drugs. People charged with impaired driving in Alberta will now face a 90-day licence suspension. Once that period is complete, drivers can get their licence back if they join the ignition interlock program for a year. That was a decision of the previous government that I supported.

This bill imposes expanded provincial administrative sanctions for drivers with a blood drug concentration or drug-alcohol combination over the new criminal limits proposed by the federal

government in Bill C-46. The sanctions will be the same as those imposed on drivers suspected of being criminally impaired by alcohol. This bill adds impairment by cannabis, cannabis-alcohol, and other illegal drugs to the zero-tolerance rules for new drivers in the graduated licence program.

Parenthetically, there are a lot of medications out there now that are going to add to impairment: psychotropics, sedatives, hypnotics, drugs that many, many Canadians are taking for other reasons. This really requires a tremendous amount of, I guess, preparation of our police to be able to assess impairment quite apart from our ability to measure it in breath or blood. We're going to rely heavily on our police force to assess impairment by behavioural means and observation. That's going to be a challenge, but given the cocktails that are out there and that many people are using for important medical purposes as well as for recreational purposes, we have to be, I guess, recognizing that we're putting a lot of onus on our police force.

Just for the record, over the 10 years from 2006 to 2015, 1,000 people died in Alberta, approximately 100 per year, as a result of alcohol- or drug-impaired driving, and 15,000 people were injured. The ratio of deaths to injuries is staggering. The costs to our health care system, to our productivity, to our family life, to our employment are staggering. Mixing alcohol and drugs such as cannabis results in significantly increased impairment. In 2013, the last date that I have data for, 24 per cent of fatally injured drivers tested positive in lab tests for both alcohol and drugs, so about one-quarter of those fatalities were associated with a mixture.

Under Bill C-46 drivers will now face a maximum \$1,000 fine if their blood tests positive for two to five nanograms of THC per millilitre of blood, the main psychoactive compound in cannabis. For drivers with more than five nanograms per millilitre of THC on a first impaired driving a minimum of \$1,000 will be imposed, with increasingly harsh penalties such as jail time for subsequent offences. We can debate the rigour or the severity of these consequences, but there's no question that we need to send a strong message with any levels of impairment. The rules also impose penalties for combined alcohol-cannabis use of 2.5 nanograms per millilitre of THC with a blood alcohol of .05.

I guess I stand, Madam Chair, in general support of this bill.

I do hope that the government will seriously look at the legal age of use of cannabis. I think that we could set our own standard here; we don't need to follow the federal standard or that of our neighbours. I do caution that there is a tremendous lack of research on the young, developing brain and the use of cannabis. We're sending a certain message, I guess, to young people if we legalize it at a certain age, suggesting that we believe that people under the age of 18, in this case, have the maturity to decide not only whether or not to use the substance and the substance perhaps in combination with another substance that we know to be risking injury and death, but we are also saying that we believe that at 18 these individuals understand the consequences and can perceive, have the insight, have the personal maturity to see and recognize the risks that they're taking. I don't believe that's appropriate at a time when we are, if anything, seeing research that indicates that under the age of 25, certainly under the age of 21, young people are going to be at risk of having not only some significant impairment but are at risk of not recognizing the potential for addiction, the potential for this being a gateway to some other inappropriate drugs and risky behaviour.

3:50

Again, I guess I would remind the government that when we get to the other bill on legalizing cannabis, we look at the age and get the best possible research at the time because I know it's ongoing

and there are new studies being reported almost weekly in the literature about some of these extra risk factors associated with younger brains and cannabis.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the words from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I certainly recognize his long work and expertise in the medical field and certainly respect his thoughts and his opinions on this. Though I recognize that, indeed, on this bill we're not specifically debating the question of age of access, though it does come into some of the discussion here, I did just want to respond to some of his remarks.

I can certainly appreciate the concerns he brings forward regarding, I guess, youth access, but I would note that in Canada we already have one of the highest rates of youth access to cannabis and usage of cannabis in the world. This isn't a question, I think, where if we set a higher age limit, that's suddenly going to disappear or that's necessarily even going to reduce that amount. Under the system that we currently have, with no restrictions in place, youth are already freely accessing cannabis.

Now, that doesn't mean, Madam Chair, that I think that youth at the age of 14 or 15 or 16 or those that are currently accessing it at these younger ages should be doing so. Absolutely not. But I think setting a higher age limit at 25 or 21 is simply then going to encourage the continuance of that black market that exists. They will continue to look for ways to purchase it from older people, who maybe are going to purchase it and provide it to them, or other ways that might happen. I don't see that setting that higher age would necessarily prevent that from occurring.

Those are just my own thoughts on it. That's why I support the current age limit that we're bringing forward, 18. Certainly, I recognize that youth at that age are still developing and are still learning decision-making skills, but we do trust them to make those decisions around alcohol. We trust them to make those decisions around tobacco. We trust them to make their decisions around driving a vehicle. I think that we can continue to provide education, support, understanding to make sure that at the age of 18 they understand better the implications of some of the decisions they may choose to make. Indeed, we can continue on research and looking into effects, but I do think for the reasons that I stated that we do need to move forward with the age limit of 18.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Rocky Mountain House-Rimbey . . .

Mr. Nixon: And Sundre. Can't forget about Sundre.

The Chair: Don't forget about Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: It's a pretty important place. I do love Sundre, Madam Chair. The Government House Leader likes Sundre as well. I do enjoy that he comes and visits every once in a while. He leaves a note when I'm not around. He's very considerate, as I have always said.

Madam Chair, I actually have a couple of questions for the minister – the minister may be able to take a brief moment to answer them – just in regard to this bill. One of them is that some provinces are proposing zero tolerance for commercial drivers, as the minister would know, such as truckers. I guess my question to him: was that a consideration for Alberta? Is that in the works for the future, when roadside screening is available?

I would also point this out or ask it this way. Because there's no approved roadside device for THC yet, which of course the minister would know, it's not very clear how dangerous our roads may become on July 1. I don't think anybody could fully determine that yet. Other jurisdictions, though, have seen an increase in impaired driving incidents after legalization, which the minister also knows. I guess maybe if he could comment a little bit on what he foresees as the ability to be able to test for THC as this legislation goes forward.

Then my last question is that there are many myths that are associated with cannabis not being as impairing as alcohol when people are driving. Maybe the minister could comment on some of the plans for public education around that issue. I think all members of this House agree on the importance of not having people driving impaired or operating equipment in an impaired way. I think we all agree on that, but the fact that that myth does exist: it would be interesting to hear what the minister's thoughts are on how public consultation, public education would go forward on that important issue, I think, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for those questions, hon. member. Yes, we have been in discussions with the Alberta Motor Transport Association. They are supportive in general of zero tolerance for people operating large trucks, but they've indicated that they want to await a reliable and approved roadside testing, just as the hon. member has said. We'll certainly be considering that when that comes forward. It is not something we've ruled out at all, but we'll continue to have discussions with them on that matter.

With respect to advertising going forward and the communications side of this in general, I also agree that it is a very important thing. I think there are misconceptions with respect to cannabis, and I think we've got a bit of work to do in terms of public awareness and perception of that question. So we will be initiating a public education campaign supporting the implementation early in the new year, and the message is that cannabis is an impairing substance and is going to be treated by the federal government under the Criminal Code and by us through our administrative initiatives in the transportation safety act as seriously as alcohol is.

There are going to be a number of approaches, hon. member, including bought advertising. I'm currently in the process of being briefed by the department with respect to specific messaging, specific media buys, that sort of thing. But we are going to be working on that and taking that as an important priority in the new year. There will be sort of a very vigorous, I think, public information campaign around this legislation and around the dangers of impaired driving involving drugs.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. As I spoke in second reading, I support the bill, and I realize, you know, the provincial government is forced to rush this through because of the federal Bill C-45. You know, that still leaves some questions, and I'm sure the minister has questions as well. He has talked about them and, hopefully, having a roadside test available by July 1. I always hate to count on hopes, but hopefully he does.

Even if we do have a reliable roadside test, then you have to take them back to the police station for blood tests. That's a little bit unclear to me, but it sounds like it's the police station. So you have to train people to take the blood, and I know from what I've been told that the training is only in Arizona, in the States. I could be wrong, but that's what I've been told. In order to get enough people

trained in order to take that blood, even once you get the roadside test approved, you know, who's going to be taking the blood, and what's the cost of this? There's going to be quite a bit of cost if you've got to send people to Arizona to take the course. Are you going to have access to that expertise in rural Alberta and all over? Like, that's a lot of work to get done in a hurry.

4:00

Quite frankly, with no disrespect to the police, obviously, I don't think I'd ever have to. I'm quite confident in myself not having to do it, but I don't think I'd ever want a police officer jabbing me with a needle to take blood out. Even some of the professional nurses have trouble doing that once in a while, so I don't want him doing it either. You know, then you run the risk of infection. Like, there are a lot of questions. I'd sooner have Starke doing it than Ellis. Well, we're not supposed to talk like that.

You know, it just leaves a lot of questions. In a hurry, usually when you're rushed through something like this, it's when mistakes happen. But I know it's not your fault. You're forced to do that. I don't know if you can answer any of those questions.

Also, there's the question about that even if a blood test shows THC in the blood, there's a challenge. Does that mean you're impaired? It can stay in the blood for a long time, the levels, so then it's going to be challenged in courts, I'm sure, and this could drag out for quite a while.

You know, I think the whole thing here in this bill is to take impaired drivers off the road and to keep our roads safe. I know that's what the minister is trying to do, and I think that's what we all want. It's just how we do that. It has been mentioned, the combination of drugs and alcohol. There are a lot of questions. I know our friends from MADD want it to be 22 years of age with zero tolerance.

You know, I just can't see having enough people trained quickly enough by July 1 to be taking the blood tests even if we do have a roadside screening test that sends them there. I know that's putting the minister on the spot, and I know he's forced there by the federal government.

In the end, we'll support this bill because we need legislation to keep our roads safe. There are still a lot of questions around it. That's all.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Madam Chair, I'm very sorry. I need to attend at the Premier's office right away, but I'm going to answer these questions. I have my cosponsors here to answer other questions.

First, to deal with the question of impairment, you know, the federal amendments to the Criminal Code are quite clear. They are using a per se limit, as we have done in this country with the .08. So if you are at .08 blood-alcohol content or higher, you are deemed to be impaired without any further proof required. The federal government is adopting the same approach with the two- and five-nanogram limits. A more serious penalty is applied if it's five or higher, but it is also a criminal offence at two and higher. In the act there's not a requirement to prove actual impairment. It's a simple per se test, and that's how they're going to proceed.

With respect to costs, there are costs associated with this. As you know, we are not in agreement with the federal government's position on the splitting of the revenues because all the costs come to the province and to municipalities and very few of the costs accrue to the federal government, yet they're going to take 50 per

cent of the revenue from the sale of cannabis. We don't agree with that position.

Costs to us have been estimated at about \$10.1 million over five years. We expect \$6.6 million for one-time costs and \$3.42 million in ongoing costs, and the cost recovery is estimated at \$190,375 annually. Those are preliminary numbers. We are certainly going to have to train additional people. One of the things you didn't mention, hon. member, is that in addition to technicians that will be required to administer the blood tests, we are also employing drug recognition experts and training them to recognize the symptoms, and that will be considered sufficient in order to lay a charge under the transportation safety act that we're proposing, perhaps not a criminal charge.

As the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has indicated, the range of drugs available that aren't captured by this legislation or by the federal Criminal Code that cause impairment require the kinds of tests that aren't necessarily a chemical blood test or, you know, a saliva test or a breathalyzer or something. It requires the ability to recognize impairment. Yes, it is somewhat subjective, but actually the evidence shows that people properly trained have a very high success rate in identifying not just impairment but the drug causing the impairment. It's not perfect, but that is something we're going – so those will be costs as well. My experience is that when they bring you the first set of numbers, they may not be the last set of numbers. Just an observation, watching government for a long time. But those are the numbers we have now.

The Chair: Any other comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to move an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A3.
Go ahead.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment is an important addition to Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. This amendment will save lives, I believe, as our province deals with a newly legalized recreational drug which our police services are not necessarily ready for at this time. I recognize that "saving lives" is a strong statement, but this amendment will do just that by implementing zero tolerance for any driver found with marijuana in their system.

I would seek guidance from the chair. I can read the amendment in its entirety into the record, or I can essentially highlight the part of the amendment for members to take notice of.

The Chair: Hon. member, it's not necessary to read the whole amendment. If everybody has got a copy, they can follow along as you highlight for them.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. Essentially, what we're dealing with here in amendment A3 is on page 3 of the amendment under item D, where

Section 15 is amended as follows:

You'll see a line there entitled

(a) the heading preceding section 90(1) is amended by striking out "re novice driver";

and in

(b) in clause (b) by striking out the proposed section 90(2.1) and substituting the following:

(2.1) If a peace officer reasonably suspects that the driver of a motor vehicle, having consumed a drug, drove the motor vehicle, the peace officer may require that the driver

forthwith provide a bodily substance sample for analysis by approved drug screening equipment.

When we look at the current bill, we see that novice drivers would have zero tolerance. But our UCP caucus has many concerns with the way our federal government has forced legalization and legalized marijuana on us, and we recognize that our provincial government has to be prepared for it. My concern with Bill 29 is that our government should be taking maximum measures to ensure safety on our roads once this drug is legalized.

4:10

Madam Chair, there is no approved roadside device at this time to measure cannabis impairment, and even if the Trudeau government manages to sanction one in time for July 1, 2018, many court challenges are expected to follow. Despite this, our Liberal government in Ottawa is forging ahead, but my question is: are we ready? That is why our UCP caucus is asking our provincial government to join Quebec in setting zero tolerance for all drivers on our province's roads.

Currently Bill 29 proposes only to extend zero tolerance for drugs to novice drivers, but establishing zero tolerance for every driver sends Albertans the strongest message possible about the dangers of using marijuana and then getting behind the wheel. I believe it also sends a firm message to Ottawa that fast-tracking legislation is not acceptable, especially when the objective is solely to cross a campaign promise off a list.

We must be ready before we move forward, and I believe that we need to ensure that we are proceeding in the safest possible manner and sending the signal to Albertans that the provincial government is ready to take a firm stand on the use of cannabis and the operation of motor vehicles. We need to ensure that our roads are safe. We might not be able to slow down legalization, but our UCP caucus believes that zero tolerance is vital for the safety of Albertans, particularly when legalization is, I believe, occurring prematurely.

I do want to point out that zero tolerance is an administrative sanction for low levels of THC or, for that matter, any legal drug that's in a driver's system. If police deem a driver is impaired by drugs and they lay criminal charges, the driver would face another layer of administrative sanctions. Of course, they would have to deal with the criminal charges in court, but zero tolerance is the same kind of system that is in place now for novice or inexperienced drivers, and I hope that all members of this House view this amendment as taking a strong stance that is needed as we deal with a newly legalized recreational drug in Canada.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm actually pleased to rise again to discuss this important bill. I rise basically for many reasons, some of which I outlined in my comments on second reading. We do need to keep our roads safe in this province, and we do need to be able to respond to what is coming down the road – sorry for the pun – in terms of federal legislation. We can't put our heads in the sand and not react to what the federal government is proposing. Basically this province is showing a great deal of anticipation and innovativeness in dealing with this and giving our police services as well as the public clear messages about how we are not going to tolerate impaired driving on the streets and roads of Alberta.

I'm speaking, actually, in opposition to this amendment. I think it is well intentioned, and I appreciate the words of the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, but I don't think it deals really with the reality of 2017. The reality is that cannabis is an important part

of the medical armamentarium for many people, and as of July of 2018 it is actually going to be a legal substance. To say that all drivers, adults as well as persons with graduated licences, cannot have any cannabis in their saliva or in their blood if they're operating a vehicle really is not realistic. I'm particularly concerned about my patients that I prescribe medical marijuana for. If we would follow the reasoning of the UCP opposition, those people would actually be denied the opportunity to operate a motor vehicle because, as has been said several times by several speakers here, cannabis actually persists in the body.

You know, I go back, actually, to the Winter Olympics – I think it was 20 or 25 years ago – and I know that some of my colleagues remember this. Ross Rebagliati was initially denied a gold medal that, in my opinion, he richly deserved for his efforts, and it was subsequently replaced because it may be the situation – I don't think we know all of the details of this – that he was at a party in which he absorbed some second-hand cannabis smoke and that this material actually persisted in his urine for a long time.

Dr. Starke: It's okay. Ross isn't sure either.

Dr. Turner: He's forgotten about the episode.

But that's an example of this sort of thing. Certainly, my patients who I prescribe medical marijuana for would be subject to the same sort of limitations.

I think that to burden this act with this sort of legislation would be very short-sighted. For sure, the defence lawyers are going to be taking this to the courts, and it will go all the way up to the Supreme Court, and it will take years to do this. In the meantime our ability to enforce a reasonable legislation in this province will be hampered, in my opinion.

You know, the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock talks about forced legalization by the feds. Well, I really disagree with that sort of verbiage. It is and was in the power of the federal government to do this. This sort of so-called forced legalization has occurred in many jurisdictions in the United States and elsewhere, particularly in Europe, and there doesn't seem to be the crisis that is being implied by that verbiage.

There's also concern that there isn't an approved roadside device. Well, apparently, those roadside devices are being developed, and I think we have to take the assurances of Health Canada and the federal government that those devices will be available by July 2018.

The fact that Quebec has decided on zero tolerance I have some problems with, too. I mean, I don't understand why they didn't support the Energy East pipeline. I don't understand their approach to human rights with persons wearing the niqab, et cetera. I'm not sure that I want to join with Quebec in this kind of legislation, which I think is also very short-sighted.

You know, the point of this legislation – I'm going to come back to the main point of this legislation – is to get Alberta ready for the legalization, and that means that we have to have procedures and practices in place that are going to be able to withstand at least most of the court challenges and keep our roads safe.

4:20

In today's *Globe and Mail*, actually, there is an obituary of John Bates. He was actually the founder of MADD Canada, and he was the son of Dr. Bates, who was Canada's original anti drunk driving advocate. It was actually a story that's very similar to the story that was told by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung and my colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster that led Dr. Bates, the father of John Bates, to develop this. This was the death of a friend, a 17-year-old son of June Callwood, who's a famous Canadian

author and publisher. This led to the development of an organization, primarily in Ontario and Quebec, that agitated for improvements in the prevention of impaired driving through legislation as well as public education things. Basically, John Bates continued throughout his life. He was 90 years old when he died, so much of the work that he did was 20, 30, 40 years ago.

What MADD Canada would tell us to do is to get ready for the inevitable, which is that there is going to be cannabis being utilized in a recreational manner as of July 2018. The other thing that's important that MADD would want me to be reminding folks of is that this particular bill that we're discussing, Bill 29, is also going to be correcting a hole in the Alberta legislation in regard to mandatory suspension of driving privileges. I think that to try to tinker with what we're doing at this date rather than waiting for next year, when we know that the devices are going to be available and what the various impairment things are, is very short-sighted.

For all of those reasons, I'm going to basically urge my colleagues not to support this legislation – to not support the amendment. I'm opposed to amendment A3.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification, hon. member.

Any other speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I had said earlier, before A3, I believe that we need to do a better job of making sure that we can take impaired drivers off the road. I can tell you that my colleague has brought forward a very important piece of legislation, an amendment that will actually take into account that right now we just don't have the ability to protect our roads from drivers that are under the influence of drugs. Now, what I will say is that this is something that we can change once the tests are in place. Once we have the ability to be able to test for this drug, then we'll be able to move forward and say that we've got a good, strict set of guidelines to be able to do that.

Now, obviously, Quebec is not one of my favourite provinces right now as they have had some trouble with our pipelines, but I will say that they did bring forward a clear direction for their roads. They saw the problem. They saw that this is a result that could cost the province millions if not billions of dollars in liability, which is something I just brought up in the speech before, saying: because we have no way of testing and getting impaired people off the roads, will our province become liable, when it comes time, from the fact that these people could be caught and that we let them go and that then they create a heinous crime? Quebec has seen this as a problem. I don't know why we would not see this and give this the same gravity that they are giving this same issue.

Now, I hear the concern from the government member saying that he feels that we're in the right spot and that we should just trust the federal government because they're going to do the right thing. I would say that Prime Minister Trudeau and the Liberals made a campaign promise, realized that they had to fulfill the campaign promise, and now we're stuck with a rushed-through piece of legislation with no ability to be able to deal with the fact that we have unsafe job sites, that we're going to have unsafe roads, and that we have the potential of this getting into the hands of children.

Now, if this is something that the federal Liberals wanted to move towards, then they needed these solutions ahead of time. That is what a responsible government does. We can either accept that our roads are unsafe, or we can use zero tolerance as a platform to move forward, and this is where our amendment before was so important. We had a request for a sunset clause put into this because we can always go back to correct this. With the first few deaths that come through where it can be shown that they may have been preventable,

this is on us as legislators for not saying right off the bat that driving under the influence of marijuana is not okay under any circumstance until we have the ability to test for impairment.

Now, I understand the Transportation minister – and I thank him for his answers and the clarity brought forward after my last speech – saying that we do have the ability to do a potential roadside screening eventually, but I'll tell you that it doesn't fill me with a warm, fuzzy feeling that we don't have that technology here now. We also don't have the ability to be able to say: "Hey, you know what? This is where an impaired person's place is once we've caught them." Now, I understand that there are some certain milligrams of THC's in the blood and that kind of stuff, and again I do share some sympathy for the current government from the fact that this is being rammed down our throats even though the member from across feels that this is something that has been long in coming, probably.

I will tell you that, in the end, we are looking at unsafe roads. This is something that is incredibly unbelievable and irresponsible for us as a government to move forward with. That's why A3 is so important. It is so important. How many tragedies are we going to see, moving forward, until we realize as a government that we need to prevent them? Are we going to be going back in a year from now? The government has done this several times. If you look at the debt cap that was put on there, three months later we got rid of it. It's because what happens is that if you don't fully think out how this is going to impact Albertans and the safety of Albertans, the risk outweighs what the benefits are here, and I don't see any benefits. I just see a whole lot of risk. Zero tolerance is the clear way to go. It is the clear way for us to be responsible parliamentarians, to be ensuring that our citizens are safe.

Now, I see that we do have other provinces that are moving along in the same direction, but in the end are they going to run into the same problems that we are running into when we are having people, potentially, on our roads that are very, very unsafe?

4:30

Now, the one thing that is brought up by the Minister of Transportation is that we don't have the swab ready to be able to test for it quite yet – that's at the roadside – so then we are going to the next part, which is a blood test. I am always concerned when you start jabbing people with needles, and we heard that from one of the other members, saying that we need to be careful when we start putting needles into people.

Dr. Swann: I don't like it either.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you to my colleague, who agrees that being stuck with needles is not a favourite thing of his.

But you know what? I have to say that we are seeing a movement these days that shows that we constitutionally have the right to have our own bodies. Is it something that we're going to see someday, where you're going to need a warrant in order to get blood out of a person? If we need a warrant, how do we get to that blood? Even if for some reason, let's say, this test comes through, the swab test on the road, this test to be able to decide whether or not this person has some impairment – let's say that the government of Canada, the federal government, is able to bring that forward before July 1, fully train all of our police forces on how to do it responsibly even though I hear it's something like \$18,000 per officer to do that training, and somebody can correct me if I'm wrong – what we're looking at here is an incredible cost, but we're also looking at a person's rights. When we start to say that if a warrant is needed, then we will know for a fact that that person is impaired, but we are not able to test to

be able to get to that impairment, this is a problem. We really need to ensure that we have people that are impaired off the roads.

Now, I don't know if the solution is ever going to be a breathalyzer like alcohol. That is something that I would say that someday we might get to. I do believe that we're probably in the long term going to be looking at blood tests when we look at impairment when it comes to our marijuana use. So until we have the science in place, zero tolerance just makes sense. It makes sense. It is something that we need to start investigating right now. We need to start saying that at this moment we agree that the federal government is moving towards legalizing marijuana, cannabis. It is looking at moving in this direction, fine, but let's keep our roads safe, let's keep our jobs safe, and let's make sure that this stuff is out of the hands of our children. As we have seen repeatedly, this is something that is completely destructive for youth.

When we start looking at what's happening these days, we're actually having people on the roadside refusing to provide breathalyzers. I can only assume that same response is going to happen with marijuana. If we're looking at the fact that denying or refusing breathalyzers is something that is out there at present and that they know that at the end of this a blood test is going to be there for marijuana, will we see a ton of people refusing these tests right on the roadside?

Now, I fully have confidence in our RCMP, I have full confidence in our sheriffs, I have full confidence in our peace officers that they will use every tool they have to keep our roads safe. All confidence. But if we don't give them the tools, they can't do the job, so it's not their fault when this stuff happens, when terrible things happen. It comes down to us as legislators making the right decisions, making sure the roads are safe.

My colleague has brought forward a reasonable amendment that this House needs to see, needs to move forward, and actually needs to put into this legislation. Let's not think about this right now. Let's think about this a year from now, when this government realizes that it made a mistake and will be looking through *Hansard* and seeing my comments saying: why do we not do this now, before it becomes a real problem to correct later on down the road? For some reason the federal government rushed through the process – that's what it looks like they're doing – for roadside screening, and you know what ends up happening? We throw out all of the cases for six or eight months because it's not a responsible way to roadside screen.

That is awful that we have people that have victimized Albertans and that have put Albertans at risk that have no chance of seeing justice. This is exactly what's happening with the Jordan case that moved forward, that our courts are holding criminals in them for too long without actually following through with the case. This is the same kind of thing that lets criminals onto the streets that should be in our prisons or our correctional facilities, our remand centres. These people who drive under the influence need to be held responsible for the crime of driving under the influence. That is just a fact. Until we can do roadside screening, until that happens, until we see the federal government has had proven cases through the courts, until we see that the blood tests will always be available to us, we need to step back, we need to re-evaluate, and we need to go zero tolerance for marijuana when it comes to driving.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers on amendment A3? I'll recognize Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm standing to speak against the amendment. I'm sure everyone in here has a friend, a loved one who has been affected by an impaired driver. It doesn't

matter if it's cannabis or if it's alcohol or any other kind of drug: zero tolerance for cannabis isn't going to stop people who don't believe they are impaired.

I'm a total nondrinker, so I don't personally understand how someone would choose to get behind the wheel when they've been drinking. It's just something that's foreign to me. But you've got people like Brad Arsenault, who was 18, Kole Novak, who was 18, Thaddeus Lake, who was 22, who were killed by an impaired driver going 243 kilometres in a 70 zone, and he pled not guilty because he didn't think he was impaired.

It doesn't matter what substance you're impaired on; it's your choice whether or not you're going to drink and drive, drug and drive, or drink and drug and drive. In the end it is the person who is imbibing the substances that is putting the people at risk. It's not saying that it's zero tolerance, which it is for GDL licences. Saying that we're going to put people at risk because everybody isn't at zero tolerance, that's just wrong. It's the person who is drinking or drugging and driving that is putting the people at risk. That's not right to blame it on all of society. It's the perpetrators who are the guilty ones.

Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It is a pleasure to stand and speak to this amendment in regard to zero tolerance. I think it's widely known, of course, that I do have a background in law enforcement. You know, I've been listening both in my office, of course, and here now, and I would really at this point like to take my partisan hat off and speak to you as a former sergeant with the Calgary Police Service. This is not an amendment that is taken lightly. I agree with my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I mean, what we're talking about here is saving people's lives.

4:40

I heard a comment earlier, and I agree that there's a cultural shift, and I agree that it is going to be legalized. But there are many prescriptions, there are many opioids that people are prescribed where it specifically says: do not operate heavy machinery; don't drive. I mean, we have to understand the impairment of tracking, reaction time, visual function, concentration, short-term memory, the ability to respond to multiple sources of information, and reaction to unexpected events. I mean, these are all parts of a human being that are impacted by marijuana.

I've certainly had an opportunity to do my homework on this subject as well and talk to law enforcement from around the province, not just the Calgary Police Service but around the province. I've talked to high-ranking officials. So let's take a step back here and talk about how this would play out. Right now there is nothing to test whether somebody is impaired. I know that there is a swab test that is potentially in the process that is hopefully going to be done by the federal government by July of next year. Let's just make the assumption that that swab test is going to be approved.

Okay. Great. Now we're assuming that we're dealing with co-operative individuals. I can tell you as a former certified breath technician with the province of Alberta that when we're dealing with people that are impaired, they're not always co-operative. When I read somebody a breath demand, I cannot tell you the number of times that I've been informed that – of course, they say it with a slurred tone when they're talking to me – the instrument is broken or defective in some way.

But let's just assume – let's assume – that this swab test is going to work and it is going to say that the person has THC content in them, which, of course, will give that officer reasonable grounds

now to lay the arrest when it comes to impaired driving by drugs. Okay. Now what do we do? Well, I've heard numerous people, even in my investigation here, say: well, we'll just go and get a blood test. Who's going to conduct this blood test? What resources do we have to take blood? Let me tell you – I'm going to correct, with all due respect, my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake – that taking somebody's blood is the most invasive thing that law enforcement or any government can do.

Yes, you need a judicial warrant in order to take anybody's blood. So, okay, let's assume now that I go and I get that judicial warrant. God knows how many hours it's going to take to get that warrant. Are we going to take these people to the emergency room? Are we going to have all of our hospitals now filled with impaired drivers by drug? Are the doctors going to need that warrant in order to extract that blood?

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Then I heard a possible theory, and the theory goes: well, we'll just have law enforcement do it. Well, let me tell you that all the high-ranking members of the law enforcement community that I spoke to, when I told them this, met me with complete and utter laughter: "You're kidding me. There is no policeman that's going to extract anybody's blood." There is no law enforcement community in this province that, even if you say that this is something they can do, will do it. I'm telling you that right now.

Okay. So let's assume that you've now decided that we are going to take these people to the police station. Okay. Now we're going to have to set up some sort of infrastructure with somebody that we're going to have to pay or on a call-out basis to extract blood, which is obviously going to be some technician, some nurse. I don't know, right? These are things that we have to consider, but I can tell you that it is not going to happen that the law enforcement community is going to extract people's blood.

We do that right now for impaired driving by alcohol, and we do it when somebody has been involved in a very dangerous accident, like was previously mentioned by my colleague on the other side, where the person has been unconscious or unable to give a breath demand. Yes, when the person is taken to the hospital, we do get a blood sample from them. However, that is done through a judicial warrant. There is, again, nothing that this Assembly can do that will likely not require a judicial warrant to extract somebody's blood, not to mention – and I think it was previously mentioned. Let's figure out how this is going to play in court, shall we? I can tell you right now that numerous defence attorneys that I have spoken to are salivating right now at the challenges that are going to occur with this.

So when we talk about lives, when we talk about saving people, really, from a nonpartisan perspective, honestly, zero tolerance is really the way to go on this. You know, when we now put the partisan hat on, I can't believe that we're the ones arguing for zero tolerance and that the other side is not.

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

I'm sorry, but I have attended so many traffic accidents. I'll give you one. When I first attended district 2, which is the community in which I live, the first call I went to as a sergeant in that specific district was a 3 o'clock in the morning incident whereby these two lovely people were driving people home who were too impaired to drive a vehicle. They were minding their own business. They had finished dropping off the people that were impaired, and they were driving. I don't want to give too many details because I don't want to. They were driving people home. Along comes Mr. Offender in

his brand new \$100,000-plus Mercedes-Benz doing 200-plus kilometres on the road and, bam, nails them, T-bones them. Both people died. The poor lady that was in the vehicle was flung from the vehicle. The top of her head was decapitated. That's not just alcohol, you guys. That's impaired. That's marijuana as well. That's opioids. It's anything that can affect one's ability to operate a motor vehicle.

You are putting lives at risk – I swear to you – by not accepting this amendment. This isn't just me talking. This isn't a partisan person talking as part of the Conservative Party. Now I'm going to speak on behalf of my friends in the law enforcement community, who I am proud to unofficially represent, and say that you're affecting them. You are affecting their ability right now, and you are putting lives at risk.

I have been to the impaired accidents. I do not want to see – and let me tell you something. I have charged people with impaired driving by marijuana because you can obviously smell the burned marijuana, right? The signs, the indicia: the bloodshot eyes, the slow and deliberate movements.

Yes, it is a choice. I agree. It is a choice that they make, and people make poor decisions while under the influence of alcohol and while under the influence of drugs. Sadly, in the world in which we live, we need to help them not make those poor choices. That is through education, that is through prevention, and that is through intervention. That's why it is actually very important to support this amendment, not because, you know, you think you're going to give the UCP a win here and that somehow it's going to advantage them in some way. No, no.

4:50

This was thrust upon you guys. It was thrust upon us by the federal government. This was a law that was not thought through. I gave the House leader credit – didn't I? – earlier today because I know that they care. I know that you guys are doing the best that you can do. Nobody in this world is perfect, but we can do it better together. We did it in Bill 205. I give you guys as much credit as I get for Bill 205, and I'm happy to give you guys credit for this. You guys were given this. I don't want to swear here and use my police language, but you guys were given a sandwich that doesn't look very good, and you guys are trying to make something out of it. I get that.

An Hon. Member: It doesn't taste very good either.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I get that – right? – and I give you guys credit.

But this is something that, quite frankly, we can do to make this better. Yeah, we have GDL drivers, and, yeah, we have, again, you know, all different types of commercial drivers, but I can tell you right now that, from marijuana to opioids to alcohol, specifically here in regard to marijuana, there has to be a zero tolerance because, as to my previous amendment here, this is just an evolving sphere, an evolving process that none of us – I don't expect you guys to get a grasp on this.

This is a cultural shift in our society. This is an industry that is currently owned and operated by organized crime. Organized crime is who deals with this industry. So we need to work together on this for the people of this province, for the constituents whom we represent, for the people who could potentially become victims of impaired drivers through marijuana no differently than impaired drivers through alcohol.

I was proud to hear earlier today – it was before my time – that the previous NDP caucus under the House leader did support that .05. I had some influence on that, and I'm proud to say that I did – right? – because I understood what was happening in our court

systems in regard to impaired drivers. I saw the lives of the people who were victims of impaired drivers. That couple that I told you about: I haven't even touched on their families, that were impacted.

Yeah, that guy: he pled not guilty. He pled not guilty not because he thought he wasn't impaired; he pled not guilty because, quite frankly, that's the system which we're in right now. Sadly – sadly – quite frankly, it's become a running joke amongst our law enforcement community that for \$10,000 or \$15,000 you can get off an impaired driving charge. Sure. Does that make it right? No, right? Sometimes it's over technicalities. I've heard of technicalities where somebody alleged that their shoes were the wrong size, which is why they were walking a little awkwardly. Come on. You guys know as well as I know that that was probably not accurate, again trying to be really nice here. However, these are likely people that got off impaired driving charges.

So what can we do to help protect this community, to help protect the people we represent? I think that we work co-operatively on this bill, which I think we are doing, from what I've seen, and we actually support this zero tolerance. We support it. I don't think there's a person over there that doesn't want to save a life. Otherwise, you wouldn't have supported Bill 205. I think that by supporting this bill, you can have another chance to say again that you did something and that you've done it before and you'll do it again. But this is another opportunity to say: hey, we did something good today, and we can save some lives.

I want to thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak here. I don't think I even touched any of my notes. I spoke with passion because I care, and I believe – I believe – that you guys will do the right thing here. I really do, and I say that with the sincerest, sincerest part of me. You will do the right thing. I believe that zero tolerance is the right thing here in this particular case.

Madam Chair, thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. I'd just like to take a few minutes to speak to this amendment, too. Obviously, this situation that we're in here now was brought on, of course, by the federal government. This government and we in this Legislature are forced to come up with something to deal with this issue that's been brought forward. I think it's very unfortunate that the federal government put the cart before the horse. They didn't come up with the proper way to do this. I mean, here we are, where there's something that's going to become legalized that creates impairment, that could create many safety issues on our streets, and this government hasn't fully thought this out and doesn't have a plan in place. There's no strategy here to deal with the situation of safety on the highways and on the streets in our cities and towns and across Canada.

I wanted to read here just a little bit from a CBC article. It's from a July 2017 report by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Now, the spokesman for this organization, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, says:

Tests alone are not good indicators of cannabis impairment.

"The thing about cannabis is the effects are quite variable . . . You can find impairment at very, very low levels, as well as higher levels."

According to this report

THC levels in blood drop dramatically – as much as 80 to 90 per cent – within 30 minutes after ingesting.

But, the report said "peak impairment occurs at 90 minutes after smoking while the THC level has declined over 80 per cent from the peak level."

What this report concludes is:

THC level in blood (or oral fluid) does not appear to be an accurate and reliable predictor of impairment from THC.

Here we have a situation where this person who would be considered an expert, far more expert than myself or anybody in this room because this is what they do, has concluded that "THC level in blood (or oral fluid) does not appear to be an accurate and reliable predictor of impairment from THC." We're sitting here in a situation where this will become legal on July 1 according to the federal government. We talk about: "Okay. There are blood tests. There are saliva tests. There are all these different things that are coming about that supposedly work." But we have experts saying that they don't work, so we don't have anything that's reliable. We don't have anything that's for sure, but of course the federal government is going to push this through anyway.

We have an opportunity with this amendment to have a safety net, basically, for the people of Alberta until something comes up that is reliable, that is proven, that they can rely on. We can have that safety net in place by passing this amendment until such a time as there is something to accurately gauge these substances and their effects on people and their driving. I think we need to support this amendment. We need to carry on with the business of protecting Albertans. This is all about impairment. This has nothing to do with the legalization of marijuana, because that's a federal issue, and that's what they're bound and determined to do. This has to do with protecting the public of Alberta on the streets and highways, and this amendment allows us that opportunity to have a greater influence on the safety of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

5:00

Mr. McIver: Yeah. And I will be brief. I promise you, Madam Chair. The other reason that hasn't been, in my view, talked about today is the uncertainty. There have been different comments about how good the tests are for marijuana, knowing whether you're impaired. I think it's fairly documented that there are strong legislation and well-accepted tests for alcohol. What we haven't really talked about, which is another reason to pass this amendment, is the uncertainty about the combination of alcohol and marijuana. If you're under the legal limit for alcohol and you're under the legal limit for marijuana, combined are you impaired? I don't know. If somebody in this room thinks they've got the answer to that, I wish they'd pop up when I'm finished and tell me. But if nobody in the room does have the answer, then perhaps you should pass this amendment in order to keep the roads safe and to not, by virtue of not asking the right questions, put the roads at risk of being unsafe.

So I'll ask the members of the House to think about that. I haven't heard anybody suggest that they had the answer to that question along the way here, and without that answer I'm not sure what choice we have but to vote for this particular amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to the combination – and I'm not sure that this is the answer he's looking for because it's right in the materials – in case there's some confusion about it, the federal Criminal Code amendments include limits for combined alcohol and marijuana use, and they are 2.5 nanograms per millilitre or more of THC combined with 50 milligrams per 100 millilitres or more of alcohol. The first offence

is proposed at a minimum \$1,000 fine and a criminal record, a second offence is a mandatory 30 days' imprisonment, and a third or subsequent offence is a mandatory 120 days' imprisonment.

With respect to some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Calgary-West with respect to difficulties involved with collecting blood, blood samples have always been available without a warrant at the hospital pursuant to the Criminal Code blood demand. Bill C-46 greatly expands police power to obtain a blood sample by creating qualified blood technicians – and we have money budgeted for this expense, which I answered in response to the hon. member earlier today – who can take samples which would not be taken at the hospital. Bill C-46 will allow these samples to be made without a warrant whenever an officer has reasonable grounds to believe the person is impaired, over .08 or over the blood drug concentration. And an accused can request a sample for independent testing if it is taken pursuant to the code.

I just want to indicate that while I recognize the experience of the hon. Member for Calgary-West, under the current regime the rules are being modified in the new legislation, which will make it considerably easier to utilize blood samples.

I just wanted to provide that, Madam Chair and, with that, hope that we can proceed, then, to a vote on this amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 29?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to continue debate on Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017. Alberta's public agencies play a pivotal role in regulating, managing, and delivering important programs and services to Albertans on behalf of government as well as providing oversight and advice on provincial issues. The amendment to the current Conflicts of Interest Act will strengthen the legislation, expanding it to apply to the senior staff of our province's agencies, boards, and commissions.

At this time I would like to propose a House amendment to Bill 27. I would like to explain the purpose of this amendment.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. This contracted service provider, Covenant Health, has been included with three subsidiaries of Alberta Health Services as four health entities under the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017. However, Covenant Health is not defined as a public agency under APAGA, the Alberta Public Agencies

Governance Act. In fact, it is a nonprofit health care provider that provides contracted health care services to Alberta Health Services. Covenant Health should still be covered by the legislation. In fact, as a publicly funded health care provider it has assured the government that it supports being part of the conflict-of-interest framework.

However, we have determined that we can capture this another way and ensure that Covenant Health is still appropriately covered under a conflict-of-interest framework while also providing room to add other similar entities in the future. We propose to remove Covenant Health from being specifically named in the act. Instead, we would develop a description of nonprofit health care service providers that would take effect through an order in council such that Covenant Health would still be subject to the act. This is important as it means that Covenant Health would still be subject to the same requirements as APAGA agencies. It would still have to develop codes of conduct as well as core and additional requirements and be subject to review by the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner would still have the same oversight. This oversight would include the statutory authority to investigate breaches or report on the sufficiency of the organization's code of conduct requirements.

We also recognize that in the future there may be similar organizations to Covenant Health that could be captured in a broader description, depending upon the financial threshold that is established. Government will develop a definition that includes nonprofit health care service providers that receive a substantial amount of public funding for their operating budgets. This amendment will provide greater flexibility should we determine there are other similar organizations.

I'd also like to point out that this amendment does not impact the broader policy intent or effect of the bill.

With that, I would like to address the proposed House amendment that is before the committee today, the proposed amendment amending section 1(4) in proposed section 23.921(1) by striking out clause (b) and then in clause (d) by adding "or described" after "identified."

I look forward to your questions and ask for your support on this amendment to the bill itself so it would say:

- (d) any other body, whether incorporated or not, that is identified or described by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, by order, as a public agency for the purposes of this Part.

And above on page 5, (b) would be struck out.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

5:10

The Chair: Any members wishing to speak to amendment A2? I'll recognize Calgary-Mountain View first.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just a little bit confused at why we would single out one of many, I assume, organizations that are under the rubric of nonprofit or charitable services contracted or supervised by, in this case, Alberta Health but the government of Alberta. Does this not unnecessarily complicate the whole range of organizations that would now be under question if they're not included in this bill?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. Actually, what we're doing is not singling out Covenant Health. We're putting a more general description in clause (d), and we will take time to appropriately define what those services should be that are covered under clause (d). In future there may be additional entities that need to be included, and clause (d)

as it's amended, I'm suggesting, would allow us to bring those entities in. In fact, we met with Covenant Health, and they requested this change. We were agreeable to undertake it because, really, Covenant Health and other entities might be the ones we want to include in this public agency for coverage under the conflicts of interest.

I think this is more comprehensive than what we had identified here. We'll follow through with that to define appropriately those entities that need to be covered under conflict of interest and to give us some time to do that.

Dr. Swann: Can I just follow up? It's not clear at all to me why we are singling them out for exclusion, and who else – I mean, are you asking us to trust you that you're going to go forward and include this and other such agencies? I thought we were talking about all agencies, boards, and commissions that are currently under the auspices of the government of Alberta. Why would we even single out Covenant Health when we've been talking about all agencies, boards, and commissions in addition to the government? It's not clear to me why this is needed.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. If you have the bill in front of you, they were singled out under this clause (b). What we are endeavouring to do is to say that agencies like Covenant Health will be included under the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act.

Mr. Mason: This is not just Covenant Health.

Mr. Ceci: Yeah. This is not just Covenant Health. This is all entities that receive public dollars that are APAGA and non-APAGA, but we will have the ability to describe them now in (d). Going forward, there may be additional agencies we want to put in there, so the description will be broad enough that it can include those agencies that receive public dollars. Covenant is one of those.

The Chair: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to my colleagues for presenting this amendment and the colleague from Calgary for helping with a clarification. I guess one of my concerns, though: when we go to (d) and we're talking order in council, "is identified by the Lieutenant Governor in Council," we're talking cabinet. We're not talking the 87 representatives of Alberta's people. Obviously, your government has had a long time since our last break to get this organized – okay; an important oversight – but it's going to be viewed by fewer Albertans, by fewer elected representatives.

You also said, hon. minister, in your comments that you would be looking or cabinet would be looking to include more, hopefully, than Covenant Health. Now, I think back to some of the earlier concerns that I and my colleagues had with this bill, and it was a fact that agricultural practices was the big one. We heard the answer that maybe it was working because no committees had been struck to ensure that agriculture had its given right to do what it needed to do to put food on the table for Albertans and for the world. We had an opportunity to understand each other better and to understand where that could go, but that doesn't happen in cabinet meetings. That happens here in the Legislature.

I guess I'd like to hear from you, sir, your thoughts on how big clause (d) may get and why we couldn't have done this with an amendment here today. Or let's hoist the whole law, and let's take

some time to do it properly. I mean, there are other things, there are other ways to do this other than behind the closed doors of cabinet.

I'd appreciate an answer.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance we are on the amendment specifically, so if the hon. member has some other sections that he wishes to address relative to the authority of Executive Council versus the Legislative Assembly, you know, I'm happy to address that.

This is in the act. It's called Application, 23.921(1). It basically says that

this Part applies in respect of the following public agencies:

- (a) a public agency to which the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act applies and the subsidiaries of the public agency.

So those are the APAGA agencies that the minister is referring to, and that's (a).

(b) Covenant Health and the subsidiaries of Covenant Health, which are named specifically in the act.

Then others are:

- (c) regional health authorities and subsidiary health corporations under the Regional Health Authorities Act;
- (d) any other body, whether incorporated or not, that is identified [or described] by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, by order, as a public agency for the purposes of this Part.

That may be what the hon. member is referring to. It is not being amended by this amendment, which simply strikes out clause (b) and adds "or described" under clause (d). So clause (d) is amended but not in the part that the member is suggesting.

You know, there's always this conflict or tension between what's appropriate for legislation and what's appropriate for regulation. We have in legislation many responsibilities. It's my view that a body that is identified or described, whether incorporated or not, as a public agency is not something that we want to come back to the House for a bill on every time we decide that a particular clinic or some other health organization should come under the Conflicts of Interest Act. I don't think that's practical. These kinds of things are normally left either at the discretion of the minister or of cabinet as a whole, and then it would be subject to an order in council.

If we adopted the principle that all of these things had to be brought before the Legislative Assembly, we would be meeting in continuous session throughout the year and into the evening. I'm not sure that we would actually be able to focus on the important legislation that we're responsible for.

With the greatest of respect, hon. member, I don't think that the suggestion that this should be done by legislation in the Assembly is a practical suggestion.

The Chair: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

5:20

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleague for that answer. Again, I'm concerned. We're going to have a gap in time until an order in council puts Covenant Health and others there.

Why I mentioned that agriculture incident is because it was originally included in this bill. We heard from several Albertans that it was a problem, that even though a committee hadn't been struck since 2011, maybe a committee hadn't been struck because the law was working, that access to the Farmers' Advocate office, I believe it was, instead of a more expensive court system maybe was a check and balance between urban development and the

opportunity that we need for that and agricultural practices and the ability to do best practices.

I guess I would say again that this, to me, looks like a step to putting more decisions in the hands of cabinet and fewer in the Legislature. You know, my hon. colleague talked about that, well, we shouldn't have to come here if we want to do clinics. Well, maybe you should. I mean, thank goodness that we were able to shed some light on the agricultural practice part.

I guess that at this point in time – I mean, we had a nice long break. You had lots of time to get this organized, and I appreciate that there's maybe a change there. But, again, my preference is to have the 87 of us have the opportunity to debate these, to have the 87 of us have the opportunity to debate it when some media are here rather than in cabinet.

For that reason, at this point in time I think I'll be against the amendment.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments with respect to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the vote?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 27?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 27 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 29 and Bill 27. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, if I may, I want to thank everyone for their great contributions this afternoon and for the efficiency with which we conducted public business, and I would move that we adjourn the Assembly until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 28, 2017

Day 57

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
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Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
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Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
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Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
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Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
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Barnes	Malkinson
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Littlewood	Westhead
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Government Motions

Electoral Boundaries Commission Final Report

34. Mr. Bilous moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Section 11(1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission entitled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta: Final Report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, October 2017, which was tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly as an intersessional deposit on October 19, 2017, Sessional Paper 456/2017.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone wishing to speak to the motion? The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to all gathered here in the Assembly and the millions and millions and millions watching around the world. It is a pleasure to rise and speak to such an important topic as Government Motion 34, the Electoral Boundaries Commission motion.

Mr. Speaker, you'll know that there are tens and tens of people who are very, very interested in exactly what is about to take place here with respect to what really is a very important report. All too often in this place and around the province some of the really, really important things that take place are also not that interesting. From time to time the electoral boundaries and where those lines are drawn on the great map of Alberta don't engage the people of Alberta, but it is very, very, very important. In particular, this report that we have before us is very important.

I'd like to just begin by thanking those Albertans who served on the commission over a 12-month period. I know that they gave a lot of their time, talents, and energies to that report and to that work, and for that we should all be thankful.

Having said that, there are a lot of challenges in that report, and I would like to spend a few minutes speaking about some of those challenges and why I would recommend that all members of the Assembly not accept the report that was presented. I've heard that the Government House Leader has proposed this particular motion, and I hope that they'll consider making some adjustments and reconsider that because I really firmly believe that the commission, unfortunately, didn't get the report right for our entire province. Certainly, there were some significant winners and losers in this report. I believe that the legislation that is provided gives the commission the ability to have winners all across the province, and unfortunately that wasn't where they arrived.

Many of my remarks today will focus around some of the remarks that were made in the final report by Commissioner Gwen Day. I would just like to say a very special thank you to Commissioner Day. I know that she worked very diligently and hard on her report and in many respects in isolation as well. I know that that can take a lot of time and energy. I think we all owe each of the commissioners a debt of gratitude but in particular

Commissioner Gwen Day because of the important work that she did and how that affects all of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I think of our province as a family table, if you will, and each person and each constituency around that family table has a very important voice. One voice shouldn't be greater than the other based solely on one factor, and I think that's what Commissioner Day spent a significant amount of time trying to identify. I want to highlight a number of things from her report that should bring us all to pause and consider whether or not the report is what's best for Albertans.

Commissioner Day speaks about some of the challenges that the commission faced right at the beginning of the work, and she refers to:

The Majority began the work with the priority of population carrying the most weight, which of course led to the desire to have a minimal deviation from the average number of 46,803 people per constituency.

Her view at that time and in the final report

began with the premise that effective representation is comprised of many factors of which population is but one . . . [that should be considered but that there is] discretion to use variances by the Supreme Court and the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act.

This is where Commissioner Day began her work, but there was a divergence between her and the majority. As such, not an ideal outcome was achieved.

I'll quote briefly from the report here.

The Majority began its work by using population to justify a new riding in both Calgary and Edmonton. I do not believe that this was necessary given the discretion allowed for variances and additional considerations besides population in the Act.

I might just add and I'll point out in my remarks this evening that it's not just in the act. Certainly, there have been a number of Supreme Court rulings that allow for those variances and discretion.

I think it's important that Commissioner Day took the time to review some of the historical Canadian foundations around the variances in the size of electoral boundaries and constituencies. She said:

We need to honor our Canadian historical standard of "representational democracy," which has served us well, all across Canada for 150 years. In the Dixon decision, Justice McLachlin wrote that "the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Charter must be defined against the wider historical and philosophic tradition of Canadian Society."

Commissioner Day points out that from the beginning of our Canadian history our forefathers made a conscious effort to balance these two things, effective representation as well as proportional representation or the representation of populations, as factors to create constituencies and that this has taken place both at the federal level as well as the provincial level. In fact, it has taken place since nearly the beginning of Canada.

In 1872 Sir John A. Macdonald commented on readjustments of constituency boundaries [at the time], "While it will be found that the principle of population was considered to a very great extent, other considerations were also held to have weight; so that different interests, classes and localities should be fairly represented."

I think it's important to know that not just at, essentially, Confederation but all throughout Canadian history we see this very important piece of effective representation being taken into consideration. In fact, I'll quote briefly from section 20 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. The reference is the provincial electoral boundaries Saskatchewan 1991 ruling, where it says:

Historically, the drawing of electoral boundaries has been governed by the attempt to achieve voter equality with liberal

allowances for deviations based on the kinds of considerations enumerated in s. 20 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act.

This is an example of a court ruling that provides these very important variances.

From the outset we've seen Commissioner Day state that the majority was focused solely on population. I think if you go back, Mr. Speaker, and review the first press conference, you would have seen Justice Bielby speak specifically and, in fact, I would suggest possibly even brag about how close they got to voter parity with respect to population.

We see time and time again, since the dawning of Canadian Confederation, this importance of representation. I'd like to quote a couple of situations which are supported by the Charter as well as case law around this important preference for effective and equal representation.

7:40

I will quote from the 1991 ruling again.

"The broader philosophy underlying the historical development of the right to vote must be sought and practical considerations, such as social and physical geography must be borne in mind" and "The purpose of the right to vote enshrined in s.3 of the Charter is not equality of voting power per se but the right to 'effective representation.'" The right to vote therefore comprises many factors of which equality is but one. The section does not guarantee equality of voter power.

It goes on in page 33 of that ruling to talk about some of the examples to be considered.

These are but examples of considerations which may justify departure from absolute voter parity in the pursuit of more effective representation . . .

It emerges therefore that deviations from absolute voter parity may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, that these considerations are given fair weight, and Commissioner Day goes on to say:

In fact, the concept of "one person, one vote" is not a Canadian construct.

The concept of one person, one vote: not only is it not a Canadian construct, but it is not mentioned anywhere in the Charter. So we've seen the commission act essentially focusing on one key priority, which I will admit is valid, but the act provides a number of opportunities for variances.

Let's just speak briefly about that act, the mandate of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. Section 14 asks the commission to consider the following factors:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- in it's priority placed in (a),
- (b) sparsity and density of population,
- (c) common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Metis settlements,
- (d) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (e) wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries.

There are a number of other factors, but for the sake of time I will proceed.

So it is very clear that the commission had, one would say, a duty to consider multiple factors, yet we see the justice that is chairing in this case on numerous occasions, including in the draft report and at the first press conference, speaking about how this commission had done the best job, better than the last commission, because they had gotten closer to parity. In fact, equal representation or effective representation is just as important. We see a number of folks and the commission saw a number of people coming to the commission

trying to highlight – desperately trying to highlight – this to the commission.

In fact, AAMD and C clearly communicated their presentation to the commission that:

the process or means through [which effective] representation is achieved [is] by balancing population and demographics, community interest and characteristics, existing municipal and natural boundaries, and other relevant criteria. Over-reliance on absolute voter parity may not achieve the desired outcome and may inhibit the ability of Albertans to be effectively represented – effectively weakening Alberta's democratic institutions.

That is a quote from the submission of AAMD and C that Commissioner Day also included in her minority report.

I think it's a very important fact to consider, that AAMD and C, who I know this government and the Minister of Municipal Affairs are huge fans of and really, really respect the great work that they do there, are calling out and saying that, effectively, not paying attention to the difference between effective representation and equal representation essentially is weakening Alberta's democratic institutions.

In fact, just two weeks ago we saw at the AAMD and C's fall conference that they voted to support a motion to maintain the rural ridings. I think it's important that because of the commission's zeroing in on the major urbans and their desire to achieve this elusive goal of absolute parity, the cost will come to rural Alberta.

It's important that we truly understand the variances that are allowed in the legislation. The critical provision in the act around variances is to ensure that effective representation is granted to all Albertans through the use of variances. So we shouldn't be afraid of variances. In fact, we should embrace variances.

The Act states:

15(1) The population of a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25% above . . . [or] 25% below the average population of the proposed electoral divisions.

I'll quote again briefly from the minority report that Commissioner Day provided.

To this point on variances, in the Charlottetown (City) vs. Prince Edward Island (1998) case, the majority of the Court concluded that the variances were well within the tolerances accepted by McLachlin. In the Saskatchewan Reference "there is considerable acceptance in Canada for a variance of +/-25%," which is exactly what we have in our legislation, which should not be feared, Mr. Speaker, but embraced.

This is the quote from Commissioner Day:

In spite of the provision for up to +/-25% variances, a priority by the Majority . . .

She's referring to the majority of the commissioners.

. . . was set to achieve the lowest variances possible, particularly in Edmonton and to some extent in Calgary, thereby justifying an additional riding in both cities. The average variance in Calgary and Edmonton for the proposed electoral divisions is +/-5%. This is a full 20% below that [amount] allowed by the Act.

As I've already highlighted, it was very clear from the beginning of the commission that the majority were primarily focused on this goal of voter parity, which, in fact, is an unachievable goal because the census isn't perfect. The census on which they base their data is a head count of all folks in the constituency; it does not provide an absolute number. So it's a myth, at best, that we can achieve voter parity.

Commissioner Day references a very, very smart man – no relation – whose name is Mr. Cooper. In his submission EBC-2016-17-2-610

Mr. Cooper gives the following example which illustrates that the percentage that the eligible voters is of the total populations is not consistent from one riding to the next: "the entire population of any riding is not the electorate. The electoral list (Elections

Alberta web site) tells us that Lesser Slave Lake has 19303 registered voters (67% of the population) while Calgary-South East has 46555 (51% of the population)."

This is one example of how achieving voter parity is actually not possible because it is not the same in every constituency. We're chasing after a number that is not possible and at the same time not providing the variances that the act allows, and as such, there is a significant challenge for rural Alberta in the continued diminishing of that voice around the family table, that family table, the table that I spoke about at the beginning, of equally important voices both in urban and rural Alberta.

This continues to have an impact on our province. As we see, cities continue to grow at a greater rate than the population in the rest of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. There is this perceived notion that we need to achieve voter parity when, in fact, the results are going to be the ongoing erosion of rural ridings. Alberta won't be sustainable if all Albertans are to be effectively represented. If Alberta continues to grow at such a rate in the areas of the city, we run the risk of losing significant history and culture, and other economic drivers could potentially be lost in rural Alberta because of the lack of effective representation.

7:50

It's not to say that a city MLA is less or more busy than a rural MLA but that their roles are sometimes very different. We see in the city the interchangeability of MLAs at certain functions whereas in rural Alberta, for example, in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills there are over a hundred elected local officials. There are 14 municipalities, and there are nine high schools, all that require a certain level of attendance by the local MLA, but we see fewer and fewer of them able to impact their local communities because of this erosion of the number of MLAs in rural Alberta, and we run a significant risk that we put rural Alberta at risk.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was really enjoying that speech from my colleague. Just on a little bit of a more personal note, I'd like to talk about the boundary commission's report and the submissions that we were allowed to do over the summer. It was quite frustrating. You know, I listened to a lot of them. There were a lot of MLAs from both sides at a lot of these commission functions, a lot of municipal government people, reeves and mayors. They all had the same message, and by the look of things from the final report that came out, it fell on deaf ears. It was basically a waste of all our time going to these things.

One of the most concerning was when I was at the session in Vermilion after the interim report. I was given a five-minute opportunity to do a submission. After that submission the commission questioned me for about 20, 25 minutes. In the very first question out of the chair's mouth – and I believe she is a Provincial Court judge – she asked me to explain why there was a relationship between the Saddle Lake reserve and the town of St. Paul. Now, the gasps from all the other people that were there were deafening, and I know that some of the members opposite were there as well and were quite shocked to hear that this person, who is in charge of these significant changes to the boundaries in the province of Alberta, had that little touch and that little connection with what goes on in rural Alberta. Saint Paul de Métis was established in 1909. Those two communities have been interacting within 30 miles of each other for over a hundred years. That's the connection. In the first version, the interim report, they were

separated into two different constituencies after all this time. These are the kinds of things that we were looking at. These are the kinds of arguments we made.

Now, they argued that it was going to be based on population and on the fact that every vote in Alberta should have the same power. Well, I agree with that. For every voter that comes out to vote, you know, we should be electing members with the same amount of power.

But I'd like to also point out – and I did point it out to the commission – that if you look at the Elections Alberta report from the 2015 election, the average voter turnout in Edmonton or Calgary varies anywhere from 25 per cent to 50 per cent maximum. Out in rural Alberta it's 60 per cent plus. So you tell me whose vote is more powerful: that person living in Edmonton, where there's only a 25 per cent voter turnout, when they're selecting a member for this Legislature or the people out in rural Alberta, where they're actually getting out and travelling sometimes 20, 30, or 50 miles to a voting station – but they're getting out there to vote – and have a 60 per cent voter turnout and get to select one MLA? There's a lot more to equal representation and equal power to a vote than just numbers on a sheet.

Let's talk about rural versus urban. My colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills touched on it. In my constituency I have 23 communities. Some are smaller; some are bigger. You know, they vary in size. I deal with 10 municipal governments – 10 municipal governments – that all want you there at this function or that function. Especially after this municipal election I was invited to the swearing-in ceremonies. I mean, you have to turn some of these guys down.

I represent over 20 schools in my area. I attended nine graduation ceremonies. This is all stuff that we do when we're not in the Legislature at the end of May and into June. There's a big difference when we talk about representation and how easy it is for an MLA to get around their constituency.

I've got five hospitals in my area. There are some of the MLAs that live in Edmonton and Calgary that may not have one high school in their area or one hospital in their area. How is this equal representation? All of these things need to be considered, not just numbers on a census. There's a lot more to representation and effective representation than a bunch of numbers on a piece of paper.

Along with the 20 schools, 10 municipalities, and 23 communities, unnumberable nonprofits, ag societies, women's shelters, seniors' groups, and 4-H clubs all want a piece of their MLA. It's very difficult to spread yourself around. There are times on a Saturday where I have five functions to go to between Lac La Biche and Elk Point, St. Paul, Two Hills. There are days when I put 400 kilometres on on a Saturday just trying to get around to represent all of these people.

Mr. Gill: Take a bus.

Mr. Hanson: I should take a bus, I guess, or hire a driver. Wasn't that what we were told, to hire a driver?

Mr. Gill: Make better choices.

Mr. Hanson: Make better choices.

These are the things. It's very upsetting when you go and present two submissions and at each one of those there were probably 20 people doing submissions. They all had the same message, Mr. Speaker – all of them – yet here we are. We've got this slam dunk, with no changes, the loss of three rural ridings, the loss of three rural voices. The northeast part of our province and indeed the entire province outside of the urban centres are the economic

drivers of the province, all of the oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, tourism – well, other than West Edmonton Mall, which is a big tourist attraction.

All I'm saying is that in these areas we may have a population of 35,000 people, but on a weekend, on a long weekend, some of these communities can double in size overnight. Bonnyville during an oil boom can have a shadow population of 25,000 to 30,000 people that show up in a two-week period. With all of that infrastructure, all the things that go with that – the hospital access, the school access – people not only come and work there, but they bring their families down, and they rent properties. It snowballs, right?

We want to talk about fairness to Albertans. Every Albertan not only should have the same power in voting; they should have the same access to their MLA. Is it fair that an Albertan, just a regular voting Albertan, that lives in Edmonton can jump on public transit or on his bicycle and ride down and be at his MLA's office in 10 minutes while another Albertan with the same vote has to drive 200 miles on sometimes sketchy roads in the wintertime or that a senior is trying to get from place to place to go and deal with the MLA to get some help with some paperwork? Is that fair? How is that fair? How is that fair and equal representation?

Now, I know that there are a lot of MLAs across the way that agree with some of this stuff. This is an opportunity for you to show Albertans that you actually stand up for them. I know that there are rural MLAs. You know that this is what you're hearing from your folks. Let's stand up. There was really no reason. The only recommendation or requirement by law was that a commission had to be set up to look at the boundaries. The boundaries as they were could have been easily redistributed.

There are constituencies in Edmonton and Calgary that are, you know, close to matching or maybe plus five that will never ever – ever – see the potential growth to bring them over the limit. There's no possible way unless you're going to change the whole system and build high-rises in residential areas. There's no possible way. They're already maxed out. You can throw a few infills into some of the old areas in Edmonton and Calgary where they have big lots, and you can split one house into two, but there's no way that you're going to increase the population by 10,000 people in the next 10 years. Impossible. Yet our rural areas are being sacrificed for this. We could have easily juggled some numbers in Edmonton and Calgary and equalized the numbers in Edmonton and Calgary and left the rural alone.

8:00

We still have that possibility, that option. All we need is for the people in this House to see the reality of it, see the fairness of it for Albertans, vote against this motion, and vote against this report by the commission. Unfortunately, I think it was a waste of time.

That's about all I've got to say. I really hope that some of the folks across the aisle that I know agree with this, because I heard their submissions at the interim report submissions – I know that they agree with it. I know that their constituents do, so I hope that they stand up for their constituents.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm very disappointed with these proposed electoral division areas, boundaries, and names for Alberta. It makes me feel like my constituency is now the doormat of Alberta. Literally, the decisions that were made that revolve around my constituency of Bonnyville-

Cold Lake are quite upsetting, upsetting to the point where I believe that someday, should these boundaries be challenged in court, they will actually use the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake for that constitutional challenge. This is how bad it is when it comes to Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Now, I put a little bit of time into writing an article for my local constituents to know, and I want to read parts of it because it's important that they understand how poorly this government, if they consider this report to be a reflection of Alberta's ability to have effective representation – it's so false. It's so false. We need to vote this down. This is a terrible report. I have to say that it's disappointing to see that they even put this together in northeastern Alberta.

Now, the article that I wrote I put on my Facebook page. It's called *Erosion of the Rural Voice in Alberta*. I put a lot of effort into this, a lot of thought.

Electoral Boundaries Commission final report came out last Thursday and it does not provide adequate provincial representation for a wide swath of Albertans. To be clear, it's disappointing that such a large focus was placed solely on population when there are so many other factors outlined in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act that should go into developing riding boundaries.

Rural Alberta has been overlooked and is grouped together in piecemeal ways that don't reflect our communities. It appears that the Commission only focused on population and ignored many of the requirements that they should have taken into consideration when making the new boundaries for Alberta that lay within the mandate given to the commission.

This is important because we've got a commission that focused only on population. This is upsetting. This is upsetting because we are using Stats Canada numbers during a decline in my constituency. We were hit, one of the worst in all of Alberta, up in northeastern Alberta, up in my constituency with mass vacancies in all of my housing, mass layoffs, and that's when they did the figures for population. This is shameful. This is truly shameful.

Now, we've got this section 14. I don't want to go too far into it, because I could read that word for word, but there are a lot of things in section 14 that determine the fact that what we've got here is a lack of following what, I would argue, was clearly set out as a mandate for the commission.

Now I'm going to read a little further here.

On July 24, 2017, I stood before the Electoral Boundaries Commission and presented that our constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake had very unique struggles that apply mainly to northern Alberta. My presentation was broken into four... points. I have four points I'd like to address. These are covered more thoroughly in the report to the commission that I've... handed you, but I will attempt to highlight them quickly in my presentation today.

This is a presentation that I gave to the commission. This is something that I sat and took the time to prepare for the commission to understand my constituency and the struggles within my constituency. I do know that there were several – that is, mayors and reeves – that also went out and took that same time.

The first point is about the communities served in Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The interim map shows that they are looking to add an additional 25 communities, which can be visibly seen on the map, along with two reserves.

Now, this was at the time of the interim report. We were looking at already increasing my constituency by a large number. The interim report doesn't look exactly like the final report because, I'll tell you, they did a big increase in the actual amount of population within my constituency.

I will read on. This is more about the interim report, but it is still reflective of the final report.

This [means] a total of 40 separate communities, two settlements, and five reserves within my constituency. Considering that each area is . . . comprised of a mayor, council, chief, reeves, and community leaders and elders, this would mean almost tripling the number of communities within my riding. Increasing the size of [my] constituency will make it extremely hard for an elected representative such as myself to properly represent the people within the constituency.

It comes down to size. It comes down to size. It's a large constituency with a lot of people packed into it.

I will say that the commission actually went on to say that it's a small rural constituency so it's okay to grow this to the size it is now. That's ludicrous, just truly ludicrous.

The second point surrounds shadow population.

My colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills touched on this.

In the report entitled Shadow Populations in Northern Alberta, which was prepared by the Northern Alberta Development Council . . .

This is a council that is dealing with just northern Alberta. We actually have our Deputy Speaker sitting on this council.

. . . the author looks at the prevalence of shadow populations and highlights how current federal census data does not accurately reflect the true population of the region. According to the report the percentage of the population for Cold Lake region is approximately 29.5 per cent higher.

Twenty-nine point five per cent higher: that's crazy. That's shadow population. That's population that Stats Canada is not capturing.

While I recognize that [this] committee is making a decision on the federal data, I would not be doing my region a huge service by failing to state that the shadow population is a real problem. It is a substantial part of my community. I believe that this [is a dramatic] increase [that] will result in people having an MLA who is serving a significantly larger population than purported.

This is important. Shadow population needs to be considered when we're doing this.

The third point is about the population being represented by the community. On page 36 of the interim report it [says] that the majority believes that the variance above 7 per cent of the population "can be supported as . . . an area where future population growth is likely to fall well below the provincial average." This is an issue that I would like to address. In the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake there are several major projects that are currently in the process of being started. I would specifically like to mention a few of the companies for these announced projects: [we've got] Cenovus, Husky energy, Imperial Oil, Osum, and CNRL.

All of these companies have large projects that are in the process or along in the process of starting.

Mr. S. Anderson: So the economy is picking up.

Mr. Cyr: No.

The government is all happy saying that it looks like it's starting up. No. These projects are actually put on hold till – you wouldn't believe it – 2019. Is that a time frame where you hear, like, maybe an election, a change of government maybe?

An Hon. Member: A coincidence?

8:10

Mr. Cyr: I think there's a huge coincidence there, that we've got all these projects put on hold. I do hope that these projects move forward. I have stated that to the Energy minister, that these projects are important to my constituency.

But what's important here to recognize is that these projects contributed a huge shadow population and a population within my

constituency. When we did the StatsCan population count for my constituency, we did it at the lowest possible time for my constituency, when there were no projects going or almost no projects going. Then suddenly this commission unilaterally, with no backup, says that my area is declining, and that is why it is okay for them to shove a whole lot of population into Bonnyville-Cold Lake. That's shameful, just shameful.

The commission's own statistics show that the region has not been declining [but], in fact, has been increasing. This is echoed by the completed report by Stantec for a regional waterline.

I will state that that is something that I take pride in. I was able to work with the Minister of Transportation to help get a waterline from Cold Lake to Bonnyville. This is a huge thing that adds to it.

Mr. Mason: You're welcome.

Mr. Cyr: He's as ecstatic as I am, which is good.

But what's important here is that that very report that he used to base his decision on in deciding whether that waterline was needed showed big population growth within my constituency. Big population growth. We've got a boundary commission that unilaterally made a decision – unilaterally made a decision – to say that my constituency is decreasing and therefore it's okay.

The fourth surrounds common community interests.

I'll say that I won't go too far into this because my honoured colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills did a great job explaining that the St. Paul region is its own little region. Putting this region into my constituency was really something that shouldn't have ever happened. This is a wonderful community, there's no doubt. I am fortunate if they are added to my boundary, but I will tell you that, in the end, this is its own area, its own region.

What we've got here is a commission that unilaterally decided, with no proof that I could see, that my area was declining. They couldn't come up with any reasonable boundary lines. They decided to almost double the size of my constituency. They made my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake the largest over the constituency average of all of the constituencies. The largest. We're 15 per cent over. After this interim report, after I presented to them telling them that 7 per cent was too much, they added 8 per cent more. Eight per cent more. I have to say that it's very disappointing to see that, in the end, you see that a rural boundary – a rural boundary – has the largest constituency for population over the average. That's unbelievable, truly unbelievable.

When I started off, I said that if there is a reason to challenge this in the courts, if we challenged because of the boundaries, it is going to be Bonnyville-Cold Lake that they're going to use because, in the end, this whole commission made an error when they made some facts that were, in my opinion, misleading. In the end, what we've got here is a constituency that is vibrant. We're growing. We are an incredibly strong constituency. Yes, we had a hard time. We had low oil prices. There's no disputing that. You know what? When we change government, I will tell you that my constituency will end up with 70,000 or 80,000 people. That is significantly larger than what this boundary report is saying, and that is tragic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. member?

Seeing and hearing none, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see you here this evening at this hour. I will say, through you, good night, Austin and Chyanne Nixon, and I will go ahead and move an amendment. I have the appropriate number of copies for the page.

I'll just wait for the amendments to make it to the table.

The Speaker: They're just handing it out. In the interest of time . . .

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I kept a copy with me, which should help me do this briefly.

This amendment changes the names of some constituencies that are in the current report. Each of the constituencies proposed to be changed in this amendment had lost towns that are in their current names right now under the current boundary districts that were then removed during the first draft, but then those communities ended up back inside these constituencies. This amendment simply returns those original names back to those constituencies. I think I speak as a rural Albertan about how important it is for these towns to be still within their constituency with their names, how proud they are to be part of that.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that it actually shows the full jurisdictions and, I think, just corrects a minor error that will help these constituencies out. I would ask all members to support this amendment.

The Speaker: With respect to the amendment that the House is dealing with, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can certainly support these amendments. I think they are sensible, and they reflect the communities. I think that's the right approach for the naming of constituencies, to focus on the communities and the municipalities, the jurisdictions that may fall within the electoral boundaries of that unit. All of these reflect that. I have no difficulty in recommending to government members that we should support this amendment.

The Speaker: Any other members under 29(2)(a) to the Government House Leader?

Any other members that would like to speak to the amendment, which we will call A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: I believe we are now on the motion as amended. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to speak out on this vitally important topic. I'm not going to restate a lot of the points that were made by my colleagues from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills or from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. These comments were reiterated many, many, many times over during the course of the public hearings, and I know they were also repeated during the course of many of the written submissions.

I will say that as a representative of a largely rural riding I am very disappointed with the Electoral Boundaries Commission in what I would describe as their tone-deafness to the concerns of rural Albertans. The recommendations that they list in the final report both on pages 61 through 63 and also on pages 26 and 27 under what are called rural concerns, or broadly lumped into rural concerns, are extremely disappointing because they reflect a total lack of understanding of the challenges of representation of a geographically large rural riding. It's not like they weren't told. Many of the members of this Legislature presented to the commission, and they detailed the kinds of challenges that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills talked about. We know what those are: representing, for example, nine or 10 or 12 or more municipalities, each with its own municipal council; representing four or five school boards; representing 13 or 15 or 20 ag societies, as I do in my constituency.

8:20

The thing of it is that each one of these bodies has a board, has a president that expects to have some face time with their MLA, and

when the MLA simply cannot provide that face time, then it's equated to poor representation. That simply is unacceptable. But effective representation is a two-way street. It's not just the ability of constituents to get to the MLA, but it's also the ability of MLAs to get to their constituents and get to their constituents where they live. In large, geographically diverse constituencies that becomes a real challenge.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that over the five and a half years that I've represented the people of Vermilion-Lloydminster, I've been fortunate to attend dozens and dozens of summer festivals, high school graduations, university convocations, and a number of other events, but one thing I have noted that I find interesting is that when you attend, your attendance is appreciated. When you fail to attend, it is noted and remembered. It's a dichotomy there, but it is a reality of representation that there is an expectation.

I was personally shocked to read in the final report on page 26 where the majority of the commission felt that rural Albertans are going to have to accept a cultural shift. You know, to me, that's just an insulting thing, that they have to accept

that a cultural shift toward making an appointment to see an MLA or making contact by telephone or e-mail is a more balanced means of addressing voter access than a reduction in the geographic size and population of the constituency.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that my constituents expect to see the whites of my eyes, and they want to know that they can see my reaction, not do the communication via e-mail, not do the communication via Skype. They expect that representation, and when they suggest, "Well, open satellite offices," I've already got two satellite offices in Vermilion-Lloydminster, and I know of other members who have three and four constituency offices. While that is helpful, it doesn't lessen the workload. It, in fact, makes it greater.

Mr. Speaker, the report by the commission indeed is an extremely disappointing document, and I certainly concur with the conclusions of the minority report by Commissioner Day. Commissioner Day brings to the commission considerable experience as a representative. You know, I will tell you that I was certainly very, very disappointed with the report, and I would encourage members to vote against it as well, but in anticipation that that may or may not happen, there is one specific request that I would make. I would like at this time to move an amendment, and I'll hand the requisite number of copies over to the pages.

Mr. Speaker, I'll wait to have that read into the record, but it's very much following along the lines of what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre – that's with regard to the naming of a constituency. In my case it's a little bit of a different situation in that the interim report called for the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster to be expanded to the west to include the town of Vegreville but to not include the name of the town of Vegreville. As anyone who's familiar with Vegreville – and I know the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is very knowledgeable of this – Vegreville has had a tough year. Their name was dropped from their federal constituency. They, of course, are still advocating for the retention of the case processing centre, and their name was now to be dropped from the provincial constituency, so I suggested that it should be added.

Now, there was a shift between the interim and the final report to orient the constituency on a north-south axis to add the community of Wainwright. That's fine. That makes sense. But where I do have a problem is that the new name of the constituency was going to be Vermilion-Wainwright and that the city of Lloydminster, by far the largest city in the constituency, the city whose population is nearly half the total population of the constituency, was to be dropped from

the constituency name. I can tell you that I heard a great deal from the residents of Lloydminster, from the mayor and council of Lloydminster.

All I'm asking in this amendment – and I will read it into the record. I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after “Sessional Paper 456/2017”:

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Vermilion-Wainwright be changed to Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Speaker, these are the three largest communities within this constituency. They represent a large proportion of the population, and they, in fact, reflect that two constituencies have been melded together, Vermilion-Lloydminster and Battle River-Wainwright, and certainly Wainwright is the largest part of that constituency that is being added in. I would argue that that provides some consistency and some clarity, and it also acknowledges the fact that these three communities are all very important in their own way to the constituency.

I would ask my colleagues to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

We'll refer to this as amendment A2.

I recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think the hon. member has made the case that Lloydminster is the largest community by quite a bit within the constituency, and the omission of its name doesn't sit right with the people of that community, and rightly so. So I have no problem in urging my colleagues to support this amendment.

The Speaker: Any questions to the Government House Leader under 29(2)(a)?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Speaker: On the amended motion, are there any other members who wish to speak? The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak to this motion. I guess I want to start with a little bit of the process involved with this boundaries commission and the work that they did. Now, what happened in our communities up in northwestern Alberta, Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti in particular, is that the interim report came in. Of course, it had the city of Grande Prairie receiving its own constituency, and it had taken Grande Prairie-Wapiti, a significant portion of the farming community west of Grande Prairie, and put it up with Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Of course, when that interim report hit the communities, there was substantial backlash to that. The communities west of Grande Prairie didn't feel that there was any kind of correlation between their community and the communities that they were lumped together with in the interim report, so they all spoke against that. It was odd, too, because in order to go from Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley in the north to the west in the interim report, they would actually have to travel through two other constituencies to get there. It didn't make a lot of sense to have it that way, and of course there was lots of backlash. The suggestion that most had was to leave the constituencies as they are.

Now, I think what was very surprising is that when we received the final report, we found out that instead of taking Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley and taking the west side of Grande Prairie and

putting it into that constituency, they changed it and put the area east of Grande Prairie into that constituency. Of course, the people in those communities east of Grande Prairie – Valleyview, DeBolt, Crooked Creek, Ridgevalley, that area there – never had an opportunity to express any concerns over that because they didn't find out about that until the final report came out. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it was quite alarming to the people to find out that the final report was so substantially different than the interim report. Obviously, that doesn't give an opportunity for communities to have a say in the matter. It completely negated their opportunity to have a say in what happened. What's happened is that we have a substantial chunk of what used to be the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency now lumped together with Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, and of course they now in the final report have called it Central Peace-Notley.

8:30

This new constituency is 400 kilometres long. On the map alone there are 66 different communities listed. Now, I've gone through, and I actually found I think at least five other communities that aren't listed on the map, so that brings it up to about 71 different communities in that constituency. There are four First Nations reserves. For two, I believe, it doesn't include the whole reserve because the reserve is split into two parts, with part in one constituency, part in this constituency. There are eight MDs and counties and, of course, not the complete eight: half of some, all of another, kind of a random hodgepodge of how the MDs and counties got split up into these constituencies.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, as a matter of interest, I don't live in the farthest corner of the constituency, but the Legislature is actually just as close to my home as the farthest community within this constituency now. Downtown Edmonton is just as close for me to drive to as the farthest community, not the farthest area in the constituency but the farthest community from me in the constituency. That's a three-and-a-half-hour drive.

Now, it appears that what the commission did was that they used populations to justify giving more urban seats or, actually, I guess, more accurately, to remove three rural seats. Of course, they actually removed more rural seats than that because they gave some cities their sole constituency. Before, some of them were split into rural and urban. They've actually taken away four, maybe even more, rural constituencies.

Earlier today I tabled in the Legislature some maps. Now, it's as simple as eight maps to redraw all the constituencies in Alberta and have them populationwise fall within the parameters of the current legislation. That affected only 21 constituencies, which means that 66 constituencies remain completely unchanged. To me that makes sense, but unfortunately we have a situation here where we've changed 87 constituencies, some dramatically – some disappeared altogether – when we could have adjusted 21 and had the same result.

Now, the problem with some of the constituencies, in fact the Central Peace-Notley constituency, is that there are no natural trade corridor similarities in that constituency. The people of Fox Creek or the Fox Creek community have nothing in common with the community of Clear Prairie or Worsley, yet they are lumped into one constituency.

Now, I don't think anybody should feel sorry for an MLA that has to represent their constituency and their constituents no matter how big the constituency is, no matter how diverse it is because we're here to do a job. We're all happy to do our job. I know I am happy to do my job. I don't mind driving. I don't mind getting up

early, and I don't mind staying up late to do my job. I'll drive across Alberta. I'll drive through the night. I'll do whatever I have to. I'm not asking anybody to feel sorry for me, but what I would ask is for somebody to take just a little bit of consideration for the people in these communities, these 71 communities, that want to feel like they're represented. That's what I want to have. That's what I would like somebody to have just a little bit of consideration for.

With the existing constituency I had to make a decision on November 11 between four different November 11 Remembrance Day events. With the new constituency I don't know how many it could be. It could be six or seven. I'm not even sure. Now, if you have three or four in your constituency, I guess in a four-year cycle as an MLA you should be able to hit each one at least once, but if you have seven or eight, some of these communities will never see you on November 11 because you won't have an opportunity to get to them all. The same with Canada Day. Most of these communities would love to see you on Canada Day. I've done it where I've hit two or three or four events in a day, but with over 400 kilometres in between it's going to be hard to hit multiple events.

Now, I know that when I look at the map that this final draft has put forward, I think all anybody would have to do is look at the constituency of, I believe, Cardston-Siksika and look at the shape of it. I mean, it's absolutely bizarre. I don't know the dimensions, but I'm going to guess it's close to 200 miles wide at the bottom and close to 200 miles wide at the top and is probably five miles across in the middle and right in the middle.

An Hon. Member: Alberta hourglass.

Mr. Loewen: Hourglass or number eight, whatever you want to call it, two triangles stacked on top of each other point to point. Now, does that make any sense to anybody? I'm sorry, but what this looks like is gerrymandering. When you have bizarre stuff like this, that's what it looks like.

Madam Speaker, there's been a lot said about this already, but there's going to be more said. My colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills had several comments. He was looking at the minority report. I just want to read a couple of parts from it.

1. The eroding number of MLAs representing Albertans outside of Calgary and Edmonton as discussed above. This concern was expressed consistently throughout our hearings in both rural and urban settings and in a great many of the submissions.

This is something discussed both inside and outside the cities, the eroding number of MLAs representing Albertans outside of Calgary and Edmonton. That was a great concern that was brought up many times. Like I said, the most common submission in our area was: leave it the way it is.

I'm going to go on.

2. Sparsity and density of population 14 (b). The increasing geographical size of some rural ridings has made it even more unmanageable for the MLAs to effectively represent their constituents as we heard repeatedly in our hearings. Conversely, in the densely populated urban divisions MLAs are more able to well represent their population even with a larger positive variance because of easier communication and travel logistics, shared responsibilities amongst neighboring MLAs, ease of access to other levels of government officials and the availability of other resources to meet the constituents' needs. In our hearings, I don't recall hearing concerns expressed by urban MLAs and their constituents that their riding was not sufficiently and effectively represented.

Clearly, the concerns were on the rural representation, not on the urban representation, on the rural representation, but that didn't seem to affect what the commission came up with.

It goes on to say:

Both types of MLAs work tirelessly to represent their constituents; I acknowledge and respect that their roles are very different and equally important. On February 21, 2017, urban MLA Ric McIver at the Calgary Public Hearings said: "I think the expectations are in many cases harder on the rural MLAs because in Calgary there are 25 or 27 of us, and if you can't get McIver, you can get somebody else. If you can't get somebody else, you can get McIver. I think that in the public's mind there is an element of interchangeability whereas in Rocky Mountain House: That's our MLA. We want you there."

8:40

I think it was already mentioned here today, too, how much these communities actually appreciate their MLA showing up. I know that because that's what I hear and that's what I feel when I'm travelling around in the constituency. People appreciate it. I'm not sure why. I don't think I'm that special. But for some reason they appreciate their MLA showing up. I guess it shows that there's some care, some concern for that community, so they want to see that.

3. Unnecessary disruption. In spite of population growth, many existing ridings could have remained unchanged . . .

Like I said, 66 could have remained unchanged, 66 out of 87.

I'll carry on.

. . . and been within the allowable variances both positive or negative. Because of the perceived need to reach voter parity, the final maps include significant changes to most rural and urban boundaries. This disruption, in my view, was unnecessary given the provision in the Act for justifiable variances.

4. The effects of increasing the geographical size of the ridings. Sections 14 (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) mandate a Commission to consider many factors, including sparsity and density of population, community interests and organizations, community history, First Nation reserves and Métis settlements, number of municipalities and local authorities, urban neighbourhoods and municipal boundaries. I am concerned that we may have joined together disparate communities in the pursuit of lower variances. This joining together of disparate communities puts pressure on MLAs to meet the diverse needs of unique communities and the key economic industries like agriculture, oil and gas, forestry, mining, recreation and tourism. Additional organizations, municipalities, hospitals, First Nation reserves and Métis settlements, schools and school boards often increase in numbers along with the geographical size of the riding.

That's one thing I haven't gone through and figured out, how many different school divisions that will be in this new constituency. Obviously, it will be many.

I do want to go on to another part here. Just bear with me. [Mr. Loewen's speaking time expired] Aw. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before I recognize the hon. member for 29(2)(a), I remind all hon. members that we don't use individual surnames in the House. Even when quoting or reading, use the constituency name, please.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Cyr: I think that that was a great job you were doing there. I would love to hear how your constituency is being impacted by the

fact that it's growing so much and how diverse it is, so if you would continue, Member.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Loewen: What I would like to do is – and this will maybe help answer that question – read from one of the submissions. It's from the county of Grande Prairie, from the reeve Leanne Beaupre. In this letter to the commission she says:

Section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as the Supreme Court decision on the topic of Electoral Boundaries (Sask) (1991), states that effective representation takes into account "factors like geography, community history, community interest and minority representation" . . .

With this in mind, the County's preferred option is to maintain the status quo – an option also supported by many of our neighbours. Our region, under the current electoral boundaries of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky, has been very effective at developing partnerships that promote shared goals between our municipalities, while supporting each municipality's autonomy and perspectives. This is a formula that has proven to be very successful. It can be measured by our region's strong economy – one of the most robust and fastest growing in the nation – an unemployment rate that sits below the national and provincial average, and our competitiveness on a global scale.

Obviously, this is from the reeve of the county of Grande Prairie, right there in the heart of this previous constituency. That's what they requested from the commission, and obviously this voice went completely unheard or unrecognized.

I did want to go on to one other one here. Just let me find this here, too. Now, this is a quote from another presenter.

Although the commission argues in the report that respecting urban and rural balance per se is not listed in the legislation as a factor for consideration, that the commission has the authority to assess all factors deemed appropriate is indeed explicitly provided for. In fact this distinction is acknowledged by previous commissions as we see here. Otherwise, how are we to make sense of the 2010 recommendation on rural representation . . . referenced above? Setting a precedent for ever increasing the size of rural ridings due to the lower proportion of rural residents to urban ones impacts effective representation in other ways as well. Making rural ridings even larger than at present and thus even more time consuming to represent effectively while being able to maintain anything approaching a work/life balance will deter [the] quality people from considering running at all – especially those with family responsibilities, mobility challenges and so on.

Now, what's interesting about that one there is that that was brought forward by the MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, so I'm presuming that he can't be very pleased with what's happened with this commission either as far as what they've brought forward. I would hope that he'll be voting along with us against this.

Now, I just want to read from the conclusion of the minority report. She says:

I admit that I am not able to fully address all the possible results to potential boundaries and variances applying my perspective. The opportunity was not available to explore this.

As an Albertan, I believe that we are very fortunate to have such a variety of electoral constituencies: rural ridings that also encompass towns and villages, 16 small cities, city/rural blends, and two metropolitan cities. We need to focus on the gift that this social mosaic brings to us as Albertans and recognize that we are in fact interdependent. Working hard to preserve effective representation for all Albertans, as we review boundaries, will best maintain better government as a whole and preserve our strength as a leading province in Canada.

The Majority's final report reflects a great deal of thought and diligence. The resulting maps and report have been an immense amount of work. Using the lens and fully believing in the primacy of population, the results of the report are understandable.

But obviously we have issues here.

She goes on to say:

Respecting our Canadian historical style of representative democracy sets the foundation for effective representation, which is further affirmed by existing legislation and case law. It is clear that population needs to be balanced with the other elements of effective representation. In conclusion, I believe it would have been in the best interest of all Albertans to adequately consider all mandated factors and, where justifiable, preserve existing ridings using allowable variances. Adding ridings to the cities of Calgary and Edmonton could have been avoided, which would have resulted in much less reconfiguration throughout Alberta while still providing effective representation for all Albertans.

Very interesting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to respond just to one comment made by the hon. member who just spoke, and that is that the suggestion that what the commission . . .

The Speaker: I'm advised that if you were to speak, it would be to close debate.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly forgot that it's a motion and that you can only speak once except to close debate. As tempting as it is, I'm not going to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. She taught me a lot about memes.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about the boundary commission and its final report and just a little bit about the interim report. The way that the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville looks right now is – I'll describe it to you. There are 12 municipalities, including villages, towns, and cities. There are four county municipalities. There are more than 10 agricultural societies. There are more than 20 schools. There are seven high schools, which means seven high school grads, seven high school awards nights. There are schools across the constituency, which is sometimes a lot of fun because you get to do Read In Week all across rural Alberta. Because there are so many municipalities, there are three Legion branches.

8:50

You know, everything in rural Alberta has an exponential factor. Each municipality has lodges, libraries, Elks clubs, Lions clubs, fish and game associations, ag service boards, Boys & Girls Clubs. Every summer is a tour of rodeos, parades, ag days. All year it's perogy dinners, steak fries, fish fries. I probably go to a hundred hot dog fundraisers a year, the same when it comes to pancake breakfasts – this is how a lot of fundraising is done in small municipalities – seniors' drop-in centres, fire departments both hired and volunteer, EMS services, junior trap shoots that take place in different rural areas. There are cemetery blessings that take place in many of these communities. There are rotating church services all across. It's a really, really diverse way of life. Anyone that thinks that it is sleepy in rural Alberta is quite mistaken. It is a nonstop way of being able to represent a constituency.

I'm just going to read a little bit out of the final report here and just comment on a few things that are mentioned here. The first line: "It is recommended that the boundaries of the electoral division . . . be as shown on Map 62." And it calls it, of course, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, which is nice because in the interim report Vegreville had been dropped, and it was on a drawing that pulled in St. Paul north of the river, which made no sense.

The commission had been asked to pull together constituencies that were based on shared interests, and what that did was that it pulled St. Paul away from its shadow communities and families and people and business dealings. It made no sense. We went to the commission I guess it was in late summer, and it was what everyone said. I love St. Paul. It's a great place. I love to visit it. But it makes no sense to be pulled in, away from its communities with shared interests, from above the river. It's tough to argue against pulling some people in, but sometimes you have to look at what that bigger picture is. I made sure that I spoke to the county of St. Paul and the town of St. Paul before I argued against those communities being included in that new redraw, and they felt the exact same way, that it just didn't make any sense.

Also, the name Vegreville being pulled, as was mentioned earlier: it's 6,000 people, which may not seem like a lot, but it is currently the second-largest municipality in the constituency. To make no mention of why this community was being moved between constituencies, why there was seemingly no reason to mention 6,000 people being moved made absolutely no sense, and it added insult to injury in a year that has been devastating with the continued moving forward of the closure of a federal government centre there that does case processing for refugee, citizenship, and immigration claims. It is the worst man-made disaster in a generation, and they didn't even deserve a mention in the report.

I'll go on. It talks about the variance. The new variance of population would be 11 per cent above the provincial average. As much as I understand that it is a real challenge across the province to try and find an ability to balance populations and figure out how that works – because once you change one, you know, an east, west, north, or south boundary, it has a knock-on effect across the province. I understand that that's a challenge. But when you pull it 11 per cent above – and in the report it says that it's justified because the growth is expected to drop – it is very difficult to have a report that sounds like it is counting on rural areas to depopulate. I find that very, very troubling.

The commission was told that the average age of residents in parts of the electoral division is well above that of other Albertans. That is absolutely true. There are municipalities that are not having new families the same way as they once were. It's difficult to move away from your community sometimes because you don't have the same socioeconomic means as other families. So we have communities that do continue to age, and it brings with it a lot of needs, a lot of one-on-one needs that these people have, where they need to come into an office and be provided a service. Knowing that there are different challenges when it comes to growing, booming young populations, as I have seen in Fort Saskatchewan with an incredibly young average population, there are other needs on the other side of the spectrum when you're talking about aging populations. I just wanted to address that.

I am glad to see that the request for counties to be kept whole was brought more together, not completely together but brought more together, in some cases. The new boundaries of this constituency pull Minburn together, pull Two Hills in, keeps Lamont whole, so I appreciate that work.

It talks about a public concern of travel distance. Absolutely. In the interim report they wanted a constituency that went from Fort Saskatchewan all the way to Saskatchewan. That makes it really

difficult, to know that you are putting someone on a highway potentially in the middle of winter to come to your office because they don't have the same connectivity that people in urban areas enjoy.

Part of the interim report was talking about Internet connectivity. It said, you know, that we're in a changing dynamic of having more people online, more people able to access offices through e-mail. Well, that's really nice if you have connectivity. But in the report itself it says that they're hoping that everyone gets connectivity by 2026. So we would be changing these boundaries knowing full well that we are hoping for some distant date in which we would have more farms, more rural municipalities connected into our offices, into our Internet. That was also quite frustrating to hear.

But there are some very good things with this. Like I said, it keeps some of the counties whole. It focuses on the highway 16 corridor as being more taken in because those are areas, municipalities with shared interests. I know that, representing Fort Saskatchewan and getting to know so many of the families there and getting to know families in Vegreville and around Strathcona county, people live, work, and play between those communities very much so. They live in Vegreville and work in Fort Saskatchewan. They live in Fort Saskatchewan and work in Vegreville. It's a very, very fluid area, where people travel and are connected. And when people move and sell their farm, it is often one of those communities that they choose a home to retire in. The families that I meet in places like Fort Saskatchewan have really deep roots, very recent roots to farming communities that are just outside in the region.

9:00

It was said earlier – and it is quite true – that with all of these events and places that you are graciously invited to, your attendance is appreciated, but your absence is noted. That's because you are the only representative for your constituency. You don't have the same ability to call on your neighbour to come and fill in for you if you can't be there. Truth be told, they often don't want to see someone else; they want to see you. You are their connection to the government, to the Legislature. You are their voice.

I absolutely love the constituency that I have the privilege of representing. You know, it's big. There are a lot of people, there are a lot of municipalities, and there's a lot to do, but I am privileged at the picture of what my position affords me the opportunity for, to get to know so many incredible people doing so many incredible things all of the time. It is just second to none.

I don't begrudge the growth in the area or the growth in the population. It will have its own set of challenges, but I absolutely support the changes to this constituency. I know that there was a lot of work put into this report, so I will be supporting this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions to the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Just a pleasant warning to the Speaker that from the way she described her riding when she started – it's not a criticism but, rather, a warning. If you describe your riding that way, you might have 87 people running against you for the riding. You made it sound pretty good.

That's what I had to say, Mr. Speaker. Outside of that, if the hon. member has something to say, I'd be glad to hear it.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It pleases me to rise this evening to speak to this important topic. I did want to make a couple

of comments and agree with many of my colleagues on both sides of the House that rural voices have always been incredibly important to our province and remain especially important as we continue to grow. Even with the advances in technology there will never be a substitute for a handshake or a face-to-face meeting over a cup of coffee, as the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville spoke to and, as well, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster talked about. That can be a challenge as an MLA, especially when these people are as far away as three hours, as we've seen proposed in several of the new maps.

However, to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the recommendations of the commission were tantamount to gerrymandering, as suggested by the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, I think is overstretching things. For example, if you look at the riding of Camrose, you can see that that socialist bastion now includes such communities as Loughheed and Hardisty and the Tofield area. There's no evidence to make the suggestion that the commission is dipping into the field of gerrymandering, and I really think it's beneath the dignity of this House to suggest that the commission has conducted themselves in a way that would be considered contriving the ridings other than in a way that they saw fit, following the rules and the mandate they were given. We may not be completely satisfied with the results, but to go ahead and suggest that gerrymandering was involved is, I think, something we should all avoid in this House, being respectful of the commission, that did very hard work in a very difficult situation, as it always is when you come up with new boundaries for the electoral divisions in the province. Let's please avoid those types of accusations in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions for the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an amendment to move, and I have the requested copies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I basically want to move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-Falconridge be changed to Calgary-Bhullar.

As you know, Calgary-Greenway got divided into a few other ridings, got redistributed, and the new name is, like, Calgary-Falconridge. My humble request to all the members of this Assembly is that we change the name of Calgary-Falconridge to Calgary-Bhullar to honour the man who passed away coming to work, representing his constituents, and who, in my humble opinion, was the best public servant I have come across, a personal friend. Still, to date, there isn't a day when I go into my constituency that I don't come across anybody who gives me a reference to Manmeet, about how he made him feel, how he treated him, how he helped his constituents. Whether they were part of Calgary-Greenway, whether they were part of Alberta, whether these Sikhs were in Afghanistan, he was there to help.

Mr. Speaker, you always tell me to keep quiet in the House and tone it down. I can't even speak today. It's one of those things for me, knowing him personally for over a decade. You've all worked with him. We have all known who this person was, what he meant for this province, for this land. And it's really, really hard for me to carry on and talk about Manmeet.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I just ask all the members to support this amendment so that we can honour his legacy for the future generations, so that they know who Manmeet Bhullar was, what he did, what he meant, what his legacy was. That's all. Thank you very much. I wish I could speak more, but it's emotional for me to talk about my friend.

I hope I can get support from all of you. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) for the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway?

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the proposed amendment A3? The Member for – how could I forget? – Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just rise briefly to offer a very small token of support to what I think is a very important amendment to the motion. You know, we were all present in the House together as a large family when we experienced such a great loss together. I think that we have a unique opportunity to honour and respect that unique public servant that was Manmeet Bhullar.

9:10

You know, I would just like to point out that we aren't deviating at all from the traditions of this Assembly when it comes to honouring and respecting those who have lost their lives during their public service. I know that the government side will be very aware of that case. I think that this is another opportunity for us to take a really appropriate step and provide an appropriate honour to a public servant who tragically lost his life doing what he did best, and that was helping other Albertans. On that tragic day just a little over a year ago, on the side of the road, on his way to this place, on his way to work, he so tragically lost his life. I think this is just a small, small step to be able to honour and respect that sacrifice and that service that he made to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members that would like to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for his words, clearly delivered with a great feeling of respect and friendship for his friend. I worked with MLA Bhullar as well across the aisle, and I have to say that I did respect the work that he did, particularly as Minister of Children's Services. He certainly opened up the process and provided, I think, significant improvements in a very bad system. I recognize that.

I note, however, Mr. Speaker, that the commission's report deals specifically with this issue, and we have moved that the report should be adopted. I'll just read this:

While the Commission acknowledges the sincerity behind those recommending that Calgary-Greenway be renamed Calgary-Bhullar as a memorial to MLA Manmeet Bhullar, who died in [a tragic] accident while on his way to the legislature, it continues to believe that his legacy will receive a more enduring and effective tribute when recognized in other ways, as for example, by way of the naming of a Calgary elementary school for him, a school that opened in August 2017.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is a very difficult issue to address because I know that all hon. members were very deeply touched by the death of Manmeet Bhullar. As Minister of Transportation I was one of the first to be informed of the tragic accident and had the unpleasant duty of informing members of the Progressive Conservative caucus about the accident involving their colleague although the death was

not confirmed for several hours. I recognize the deep feelings that people have and the emotions that this stirs up.

I have a concern – and I’ve expressed this in the past – that the public would rather have the constituencies named for them reflect the communities in which they live, whether they be urban communities or municipalities within a rural constituency. I continue to believe that very strongly.

We have a number of instances of members who have died in office. For example, the Justice critic of the NDP opposition, Gordon Wright, passed away while a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and that was very tragic. There are others, Mr. Speaker. My concern is that if we continue to name constituencies after politicians, whether they be deceased or alive, as the case was with Ralph Klein when that riding was renamed for him, very soon we’re going to have a fairly confusing situation for citizens and so on. I think we now have one constituency named for a Social Credit member, being Ernest Manning, two named for Progressive Conservatives. We have one named for Laurence Decore, the Liberal leader, and one named for Grant Notley, the NDP leader. That naming took place 20 years or more after Mr. Notley’s death and was introduced by the Progressive Conservatives and very much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the practice has got to have some limits, and unfortunately, with regret, I don’t believe that we can support this amendment.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Government House Leader?

Any other members who would wish to speak to amendment A3? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this amendment. I guess I would respectfully ask the Government House Leader to reconsider the position he’s just taken. I don’t think it’s any stretch to say that Manmeet was a special individual. You know what? I recognize that we’re all special individuals, and I mean that in the most sincere way. Everybody that’s here has their place in history and does things that those that sent them here will be proud of along the way.

But Manmeet was a little bit different in many ways: the first turban-wearing Sikh to be a minister, I think, in the British Commonwealth – I think that’s historically a little bit more remarkable, as remarkable as the rest of us are – certainly, somebody that, in my view, was probably bigger than one political party, with the way he conducted himself during his time here. I’m not sure that all people on all sides of the House think that I’m their teammate. I had the feeling, though, when Manmeet was here that members of all sides of the House felt like he was their teammate. I mean that with the most respect. Historically he certainly did some difficult things during his time in office, including the work that he did on the children in care file. He was an icon and remains an icon in Calgary and, I think, in other parts of the province, and that’s a status that not all of us elected people get to achieve. On top of all that, he lost his life on the way coming to work here while trying to help somebody else in difficult circumstances. He put himself at risk.

For all of those reasons and more that don’t all need to be said, I sincerely hope that the Government House Leader will change his position and support this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Hays?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I too feel compelled to rise on this and encourage the Government House Leader and members of the government caucus to reconsider their position on this. I don’t think anybody in here disagrees with just what Manmeet Bhullar brought to this Assembly and brought to the province of Alberta. That’s not up for debate here.

Really, the question boils down to, you know: how do we appropriately honour and remember one of our colleagues? The minister brings up some good points. There have been other MLAs who’ve passed away while in their term of office. Tragically, we learned just a couple of weeks ago that an MLA that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the Member for St. Albert and I met in Charlottetown last month, Kevin Phillips, the MLA for Melfort, Saskatchewan, passed away suddenly in Saskatchewan. I don’t believe for a moment that there should necessarily be any expectation that the Melfort constituency be renamed in his honour. I don’t think that’s an expectation.

9:20

But I do think there are special circumstances in this particular case. It’s already been pointed out very clearly that in this situation Manmeet was travelling to the Legislature to work. I will never forget for the rest of my days that that morning he was on the caucus conference call with us. He was scheduled to give a question that day, and as House leader I told him to not rush, to take his time, that we would have somebody else cover his question slot, and that he could have a question the next day. Well, as we all know, that next day never came. You know, there are still times when I wonder if that was advice I should have given, but the reality of it is that Manmeet is not with us.

Specifically in the political realm, the naming of a constituency is one of the very small things that we can do as a group of colleagues, as a nonpartisan group of colleagues, to honour a former colleague. I know that the constituency name has already been changed. Falconridge is not known to anybody other than the folks that maybe have specifically read the report. The idea that there is proposed to be a constituency called Calgary-Falconridge is not known by a large number of people.

We already have a number of examples of not just members of specific political parties, as was pointed out by the Government House Leader, but of other figures from Alberta history: Alexander Rutherford, Nellie McClung. You know, these are all folks that have a place in our history. I think we have a unique opportunity here as the colleagues of Manmeet to honour him in this very special way, because I’m not entirely sure that as time passes and as the natural passage of time occurs, some Legislature 20 years from now who never had that privilege of working with Manmeet will ever make that decision to rename a constituency in his honour.

Manmeet was the quintessential public servant, the quintessential representative, and I think that we can all feel very privileged to have worked with him and worked alongside him. I know that I feel that way. While I respect, certainly, the opinion of the Electoral Boundaries Commission on this issue and I know that this was no doubt a difficult decision for them to make as well, they didn’t know Manmeet Bhullar. But we did, and because we did, Mr. Speaker, I would urge members of this House to honour his memory by renaming Calgary-Falconridge to Calgary-Bhullar.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster?

Any other members who wish to speak? The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: This is to amendment A3?

Mr. Gotfried: To the amendment, yes, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to speak very briefly on this. You know, I knew Manmeet before I was given the privilege of serving in this Legislature. Through much of the great work that he had done in the community, he had become a friend, a contact, someone I respected. He was a young man. At the time he was the youngest legislator in this House. That floor has been broken, and I'm glad to see that. Maybe it will be broken again, but at the time he was the youngest MLA to be elected in this province. I know that not only was his community proud of him, but I think that all Albertans were proud of him for doing so.

He was a mountain of a man, and with great power came great responsibility. I had the pleasure – he sat right here beside me. I posted a picture the other day of the Alberta flag and some flowers and a holy book that was sitting in here, and it reminded me of the time that I was able to spend with him here and to sit with him, as a younger man, some probably 20 years younger than me, and to take the time to learn from him. And I think that we learned much by living and working with him and embracing him as a colleague.

But I think we also learned on his death that his commitment and his passion and compassion for people allowed him to put himself in danger on that fateful day, the one day that we had bad weather on the Queen Elizabeth II highway, Mr. Speaker. I look back on that. We had two winters in a row where we hardly had any bad weather, and that was that one we did. He took the time. He could have kept on going. As the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster noted, he didn't have to come back. He had given a speech to a group that morning on, I think, children and youth rights. He didn't have to come back, and we urged him not to come back. But he chose to come back because of his sense of duty, and he chose to stop to help those people because of his sense of compassion.

Here's a chance for us to honour that memory, Mr. Speaker, not just the memory of someone who died while they were helping someone and who served in here but a young man who, by any imagination, was in the prime of his life, with a young wife and no family started yet. We all run into his family back in Calgary. You know, I think that some of this is not just about us in the House. This is deeply personal when we run into them. He is still being missed every day.

As I think the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said, this is an honour which we have one chance to do here. He may be forgotten in future Legislatures. This is a chance for us to honour that memory. I think there is precedent to say that we can do this. We don't have to do this. We're not compelled to do this.

I would ask you all to reach into your own hearts today. It's just over two years ago now that he passed. It seems like just yesterday that I was listening to him giving his whoops and hoots and hollers and being quite an unusual seatmate here, and I miss that. Let's think and reach into our hearts, think about his family, think about the legacy, and let's give him the honour of that, as we would hope for any of us who distinguish ourselves as he did, both in service to this Legislature and service to his constituents but in service to strangers on the streetside. This is an opportunity for us to honour that. We have one chance to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under 29(2)(a), are there any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Speaker: Back on the motion as amended, the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking to Government Motion 34. I wish we'd passed that amendment moved by my colleague from Calgary-Greenway.

Anyway, I'm speaking to the main motion here for now. Mr. Speaker, I do not concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I would like to echo the comments of my colleagues on both sides of the House who are facing substantial increases to the size of their constituencies across rural Alberta. The increases are so big that some of the constituencies are even disappearing.

I currently represent the constituency of Calgary-Foothills. Under the redistribution plan my constituency as it exists would be redistributed among three new constituencies: Calgary-Edgemont, Calgary-Foothills, and Calgary-Beddington. It's going to be three ridings. While certainly the new Calgary-Edgemont contains the Calgary community of Edgemont, this constituency is the largest part of the old Calgary-Foothills. It provides spectacular views of those foothills and the mountains to the west, and residents there have lived in Calgary-Foothills for decades and decades.

9:30

The new constituency of Calgary-Foothills is up on a plateau, largely north of Stoney Trail and west of Panorama Road. The growth of the new suburban neighbourhoods will happen here, where the plateau slopes down into the Symons Valley and across Nose Creek. These are the newer communities and are collectively known as Symons Valley.

Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe the new constituency of Calgary-Edgemont should be properly named Calgary-Foothills. I also firmly believe the new constituency of Calgary-Foothills should be appropriately named Calgary-Symons Valley. For these reasons, I would like to move an amendment, and I have the requisite copies.

The Speaker: Please proceed. Are there comments you'd like to make in reference to amendment A4?

Mr. Panda: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, speaking to the amendment. I'm just waiting for the copy. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment. I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Calgary-Foothills be changed to Calgary-Symons Valley and Calgary-Edgemont be changed to Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate and trust that the members opposite will agree with my assessment and adopt this proposed naming convention for the future constituencies in the north end of Calgary. I actually spoke to my neighbouring MLAs who represent those affected constituencies. Also, for the reasons the Government House Leader mentioned, people would prefer the names of the communities where they live.

Today we actually approved a few other changes through a few amendments, so I hope the Government House Leader and all members of this House use the same logic as when they agreed to the amendments from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and also from other members today.

There are already examples, so I'm asking everyone to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Foothills under 29(2)(a)?

Any other members who wish to speak to amendment A4 as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Foothills? The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regret, I don't believe we can support this particular amendment. The hon. member has referenced some of the amendments to names that we did support, but these were simply a matter of restoring names that had been previously attached to those constituencies as opposed to creating new names.

You know, we certainly haven't had the opportunity to look into the appropriateness of this name. For example, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre: there was a proposed name change, and the proposed amendment changed it back to the same name. In the case of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, St. Paul was added. In the case of Highwood a different name altogether was proposed, and the amendment just moved it back to Highwood. So in these cases, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty straightforward. We didn't have any difficulty making these changes. But in this particular case it's a new name, not one that was recommended by the commission and not one that we've had a chance to look at. So, unfortunately, I don't believe we can support this amendment.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments to the Government House Leader under 29(2)(a)?

Are you ready for the vote on amendment A4 as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Foothills?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Speaker: We're back to the main motion as amended. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 34, that's before us, on the Electoral Boundaries Commission's final report. Similar to the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I do believe, as she felt, that the interim report was a failure by the commission. I believe that the final report is failing to allow effective representation for all Albertans. I concur with a lot of comments that have been made already with regard to rural representation and the need to recognize the different dynamics within communities, but the thing that I will highlight that we need to also recognize is that effective representation needs to recognize the effective representation of industries throughout the province also.

When we move in a direction that has considerations primarily on population for representation, we fail to recognize that MLAs that are in the rural ridings not only represent people, but they represent industries. Many of us are working with industry in bringing forward the concerns from industry and the concerns that they have on being able to successfully compete in a global environment, and these are very significant concerns that need to be properly represented.

When we look at the need for proper representation for industry, I believe that when we have proper representation for industry, whether it's from the oil and gas industry, mining, forestry, agriculture, tourism, which largely takes place in the rural areas of our province, when we have effective representation for industry, then we also have very good looking out for the best interests of all Albertans.

I believe that when we talk about effective representation, we have to recognize that industry and all of those that are working in industry create jobs down the line. In my riding last week I received a report of a mill that was shutting down, Mr. Speaker, a mill that had not a lot of jobs right at the mill, but when you take a look at

all the jobs that it affects down the line, from the loggers to the truckers to the equipment suppliers to everything that has played into it, it affects a lot of jobs. Good representation for industry is important, and I believe that MLAs are not only representing constituents, people, but they are there representing the industries that are within their ridings also. To spread that MLA too thin makes it difficult for the representative to do a good job for their constituency.

9:40

I look at the constituency that's been proposed, and I'm thankful that we were able to add the name "Westlock" into the Athabasca-Barrhead constituency. I live in the county of Westlock, and that is the proposed riding that I would desire to represent if the people so choose. It extends all the way from Swan Hills in the northwest right into St. Paul county. If I was to drive from St. Paul to Mallaig – and you can google this and get a better understanding of the kind of drive that would be faced. According to Google it'd be three hours and 38 minutes without traffic. You take a little bit of moderate traffic: all of a sudden you add half an hour. You take some poor weather and driving conditions: you add even more. For context, the distance from Swan Hills to Mallaig, that driving distance, is the same as driving from St. Albert to Okotoks, south of Calgary, which, in my mind, just doesn't make sense. This type of constituency, with those types of distances, makes it very difficult to have effective representation.

You know, we look at the legal requirements that the commission was given – the requirement is effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to ensure that – and we go through a lot of the decisions that were made and that the commission talked about with regard to Madam Justice McLachlin. The primary goal of effective representation: this is very important to consider in being able to have a vibrant economy as well as a vibrant society and social aspects within our society. I am quite disappointed that we now have a riding that's Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock and many other rural ridings that I believe are going to have a very hard time receiving the effective representation that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is demanding for us to have in our democracy.

The other thing that I'm quite concerned about is that the commission decided that representation by population was the target and then didn't have enough foresight in their final report to see that having a riding, such as my colleague here with the Cold Lake-St. Paul riding, that would be 15 per cent above the recommended number, a rural riding that is the largest by population, has all the difficulties of a rural MLA trying to represent all of those people and all of those communities.

You know, it's necessary to take a look at what the commission talks about. They talked about it in their interim report, but they also talked about it in their final report. With regard to 10 years from now because of slower growth, I don't believe this was in the commission's mandate, to decide or to try and interpret what the growth was going to be in these constituencies. They were supposed to be looking for effective representation now, not for 10 years from now. Yet they made a decision that they feel that that riding was going to grow slower than the rest and that in 10 years it would probably meet the requirements. Well, that wasn't their mandate. That wasn't what they were charged to do. They were charged to do a job, to find effective representation not 10 years from now but for those people in that region now. So I believe that they failed in their job.

You know, I can take a look at the new riding of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. They took and split many of the counties, little

corners off here, little corners off there. There are now nine counties in that one riding and several towns, summer villages, hamlets, and just in county and town councillors well over 100 individuals that the rural MLA needs to build a relationship with and get an understanding from of the needs within their municipality. These are significant concerns.

The new riding has 232 townships, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and thirty-two townships. If you take a look at a township, that's 36 square miles.

An Hon. Member: The township count?

Mr. van Dijken: Two hundred and thirty-two. An urban riding is likely to be smaller than one township. How does that make any sense? It boggles my mind that they were able to feel that this commission, that this report was in the best interests of effective representation within our democracy that would serve us well well into the future.

Now, with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to move forward. I have an amendment to move, so I would like to move forward with that at this time. I have the copies necessary, but I didn't keep an amendment.

The Speaker: In the interests of time, hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment that I've put before you now was a request from Sturgeon county. It's a county within my current boundaries; I represent them. They came forward with concerns that the name "Sturgeon" was being dropped in the commission's report. The amendment is that I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Morinville-St. Albert be changed to Morinville-St. Albert-Sturgeon.

In consideration of the fact that Sturgeon – there's always been a riding of Sturgeon. All the way back to 1905 we have had a riding of Sturgeon within the province of Alberta. The name "Sturgeon" is in the current riding of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, and we have an understanding that, moving forward, from this point on there should be a consideration for the names of original electoral districts and that, out of respect for Sturgeon county and the request that they're putting forward at this time, this House would recognize the name as being Morinville-St. Albert-Sturgeon.

I would submit that this meets the requirement of the commission and also meets the requirements of the naming advice that's put forward, so I would ask that this House consider it and allow this to move forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock? Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, with respect to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Correct. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to my colleague the esteemed Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock: I'm just curious to know if you've had the opportunity to speak to the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater or anybody else in that region that may be affected by this and if they had the opportunity to provide any comments to you with respect to this particular amendment as well as some of the changes in that region and how they may affect some of the neighbouring MLAs that are, you know, quite likely to be affected as well and

if they had the ability to provide comment either to the House or to you or some of the other counties in the region as well.

9:50

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you for the question. The request that came forward to me also came forward to other MLAs that are representing Sturgeon county, so the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater received the same e-mail that I got. The Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert: there's some of his riding that is part of Sturgeon county. We actually had a quick little talk about it when the e-mail came forward, and it was agreed or we had considerations that, yeah, it's worth making a request known to this House and trying to work towards the request from Sturgeon county. Hopefully, that answers your question.

I encourage everybody to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Speaker: Any comments or questions to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock under 29(2)(a)?

Any other members that would speak to the amendment, which we will identify as A5, as proposed by the hon. member?

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Speaker: I believe we are back to the motion as amended. The Member for Chestermere-Westlock.

Mrs. Aheer: That would be a big riding, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: So many names. That's big. Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: It just takes a little bit of country, a little bit of rock 'n' roll.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to be able to speak to the commission. There have been so many interesting things that have happened. One of the more interesting parts that I found when I was able to participate was actually going to the boundaries commission and sitting and listening to so many of the groups that came in and spoke.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

One of the things that was really noticeable was that when so many of these communities, especially even in the urban communities, would come in, their discussions around the boundaries were a lot around people who shared community centres and had a lot of interesting things that were similar about their communities. A lot of these folks that came in were volunteers on these committees that had been put together to actually talk about their particular ridings. It was very passionate; it was very thoughtful. The amount of work that went in when these folks would speak about what was important to their ridings: I actually found it quite overwhelming at times to listen to all the information, Madam Speaker, and all of the things that were put into putting together the information on a particular riding.

What I found also really compelling was that so many of these people that came together actually had to reach out to many of the areas that they hadn't normally spoken with and would come together to the commission to speak about the various changes that were happening and how it was going to impact their communities, their children, the schools, a lot of different things. As a person who's rural, I guess, being Chestermere-Rocky View, it was very, very interesting to hear their information.

A lot of changes have come down, and we've heard a lot of discussions around name changes, around the way that we should look at the way the lines are being drawn. One of the things that

was also very interesting was that the commission had originally proposed that they wouldn't be going past natural boundaries and all those kinds of things. Actually, just before the last part of the commission was put through, there were a bunch of different ridings that had gone past the natural boundaries. The people that had come forward from these various areas to speak about their ridings had very compelling information with respect to natural boundaries that actually had not been taken into consideration when those lines were being drawn. Thank goodness so many of the people that volunteered their time to bring that forward had the ability to be able to speak about this.

I have an amendment, but before I go on to the amendment, one of the things I'd like to mention is that all of the people that are coming here into the House to talk about the changes to names and all those things: these haven't come lightly. They've come with a great deal of thought behind them. All of the MLAs in here who have had concerns have done a great amount of outreach into their communities to speak on behalf of the municipalities, on behalf of the people that live there. There's emotional attachment to some of these names. I think it's very, very important that we take that into consideration.

With that, I'd like to move an amendment. I move that Government Motion 34 be amended by adding the following after "Sessional Paper 456/2017":

except that the name of the proposed electoral division of Central Peace-Notley be changed to Peace-Notley.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, another speaker to amendment A6? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Just under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: Did you want to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: I do. Yes, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Why?

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. Government House Leader. I was confused. Did you want to speak under 29(2)(a), or did you want to speak to the bill?

Mr. Mason: I did. I've already done that. The question I asked was: why?

The Deputy Speaker: All right.

Hon. member, we're still under 29(2)(a). You don't choose to respond, hon. member?

Go ahead.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The reason why this amendment is brought forward is that I think we can tell now that there's hardly anybody in Alberta that's really happy with this commission's report. It changed so many boundaries, so many names, created so many issues that there isn't a lot of love lost for this.

Now, one thing that happened here is that because of the commission and how they changed things, I guess they proved how little they knew of these constituencies and how little they knew about Alberta in how they were reworking it. For one thing, in the commission's report they've done away with Grande Prairie-Smoky. Well, in the final report they couldn't even spell "Smoky" right. So that gives you just a bit of an idea.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, what happened is that when they created this new constituency, Central Peace-Notley, what they didn't realize, I guess – I'm not sure what went through their heads at all, actually. They added in a huge chunk of the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency. Now, the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency included a town called Fox Creek. Fox Creek is not in the Peace Country. Valleyview, DeBolt, Crooked Creek, that area there, is considered south Peace. The existing part of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley is Central Peace, and of course the northern portion of this new constituency is north Peace. By having this constituency still called Central Peace, it does not at all reflect what the constituency is, which is Peace plus part of Fox Creek.

10:00

It may have been more accurate to call it Dunvegan-Smoky because Dunvegan has such a rich history along the Peace River, over 200 years, in fact. Dunvegan-Smoky would have represented the constituency much better because Dunvegan would have taken in the Peace River, and Smoky would have covered the Smoky River and the Little Smoky River, which actually runs fairly close to Fox Creek, which is about as close as we could get to having a name that's actually representative of the area. By having Central Peace in this name when south Peace, north Peace, central Peace, outside of Peace are all in the constituency – I think it is a simple change, you know, maybe to give some sort of satisfaction to the people from these areas that have been so disrupted by this process. I think it would be a simple thing to support this amendment to the motion and have this called Peace-Notley.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: The hon. member, if he ever loses an election, certainly has a future as a geography teacher, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I don't think the hon. member has made the case, so I would urge my colleagues to vote against the motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone under 29(2)(a) to the Government House Leader?

Mr. van Dijken: Simply, why?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question. I was looking closely at the map, and while the hon. member certainly did do a job of sorts of expressing the extent of the riding, essentially it still covers the central Peace, Mr. Speaker. That's why.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other speakers?

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Speaker: Back to the amended motion.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I just rise to tell you that I think that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the motion as amended?

The Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: I know that the hon. members would like me to close, but I'll pass, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 34 as amended carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:04 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hoffman	Miranda
Babcock	Horne	Nielsen
Bilous	Jabbour	Phillips
Connolly	Jansen	Renaud
Coolahan	Kazim	Schreiner
Dach	Kleinsteuber	Shepherd
Dang	Littlewood	Sigurdson
Drever	Loyola	Sucha
Eggen	Luff	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Turner
Gochring	Mason	Westhead

Gray
Hinkley

Miller

Woollard

Against the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Rosendahl
Barnes	McIver	Schneider
Cooper	Nixon	Starke
Cyr	Panda	van Dijken
Gotfried	Piquette	

Totals:

For – 37

Against – 14

[Government Motion 34 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for their contributions to this debate. It's not always easy and not perfect. Nevertheless, we now have the basis for bringing forward a piece of legislation to implement the changes recommended by the commission.

Having completed the evening's work, I would move that we adjourn the Assembly until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:10 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, November 29, 2017

Day 58

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
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Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 29, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farms, towns, and cities comes the call of our people. We as legislators must act with responsibility and sensitivity towards our province and its people. May we have the wisdom to meet such challenges.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 26

An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis

The Chair: Any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies here. Would you like me to wait until you receive the amendments?

The Chair: This will be amendment A1.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. The United Conservative caucus strongly believes that this amendment is important because it aligns the public use of cannabis with the same rules pertaining to alcohol along with some of the prohibitions in Bill 26. Let me read the amendment in.

Mrs. Pitt to move that Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, be amended as follows. A, section 7 is amended by striking out the proposed section 90.28 and substituting the following.

Use of cannabis

90.28(1) Except as provided in this Act, no person may use cannabis

- (a) in a public place,
 - (b) in any area or place where that person is prohibited from smoking under the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act or any other Act or the bylaws of a municipality,
 - (c) on any child care facility property,
 - (d) any area or place other than a residence, temporary residence or a place or class of place prescribed in the regulations where cannabis may be used.
- (2) Despite subsection (1), a person may consume cannabis with food in a picnic area designated by the owner or operator of a public park during the hours designated by the owner or operator if a sign is posted that
- (a) states that a person may consume cannabis with food in the designated picnic area,
 - (b) sets out the designated picnic area, and

- (c) sets out the hours when cannabis may be consumed with food.

(3) A person must stop consuming cannabis in a designated picnic area if a peace officer on reasonable and probable grounds believes that the person is intoxicated or is not consuming food while consuming cannabis in a designated picnic area and the peace officer requests that person to stop consuming cannabis.

B, section 27(i) is amended by striking out the proposed section 129(x.7) and substituting the following:

(x.7) respecting the use of cannabis in any area or place;

Madam Chair, this bill mirrors liquor laws in section 90.28(1)(a) and (d) and subsections (ii) and (iii). The other clauses are already in Bill 29, specifically that marijuana falls under Alberta's smoking laws and municipal bylaws.

Marijuana is a controlled substance. Alcohol is a controlled substance. It makes sense to treat these intoxicating substances the same in the law. To do what the NDP is proposing and treat marijuana as if it's no different from smoking a cigarette would not be responsible. Tobacco is a restricted substance; it is not a controlled substance. It's not the same as marijuana. You do not get high from smoking tobacco, but you do with marijuana. In that way this amendment injects common sense into the NDP's proposed legislation.

The government will tell you that they are adding more restrictions for marijuana to ensure that children aren't affected by the fumes, but why would any adult who doesn't want to smoke marijuana have to breathe in second-hand smoke, especially if there is no evidence to show that they might not also feel its effects? This evidence does not exist. One of my colleagues across the way even likened smelling perfume in an elevator, which we don't control, to marijuana. It is not the same at all. When members of this Chamber make that kind of remark, it shows you how little they are concerned about the second-hand marijuana smoke. I can assure you that my colleagues on this side of the House are extremely concerned about second-hand smoke, especially with marijuana.

Bill 26 as written also allows someone to walk down the street smoking marijuana and partake in a myriad of other public places. You can't walk the street with a beer or a glass of whisky. Why would we allow it with marijuana?

This is the crux of the amendment that I am making here today. It will treat marijuana like the controlled substance that it is and provide more safeguards for the general public, and I think the public would agree. This is the kind of common-sense amendment that recognizes that while legalization is going ahead, which is no fault of this government – everyone understands that – we need to do everything that we can right from the start to provide Albertans with the protections that they have from alcohol and that they certainly deserve from marijuana, too.

I hope that all members in the House view this amendment as an important one to include in this bill. I look forward to your thoughts. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the hon. Member for Airdrie for her suggestions. One of the things that's important to consider: you know, the member opposite suggested that cannabis has properties that are more similar to alcohol than tobacco. The effects of cannabis are certainly more intoxicating than tobacco. I will grant her that.

One of the significant differences, though, between alcohol and cannabis consumption is that there are no public buildings with bylaws that prohibit people from drinking in their own homes, Madam Chair. I can point to any number of apartment buildings or condominium buildings in this city, in the city of Calgary, probably

in the city of Airdrie where the bylaws of that building prohibit the tenants or the residents from smoking cigarettes, which is fine. There is nothing in the legislation that is before us this morning that alters the ability of the owners of buildings to prohibit people from smoking on the premises.

The issue, though, that that creates, Madam Chair, is that people who live in these buildings will have no place to consume cannabis outside of their homes if we pass this amendment. This amendment prohibits smoking of cannabis in any public place. So I ask the Member for Airdrie: where does she think that somebody who lives in a condominium or an apartment building or some other facility that prohibits smoking within the building, a person who will be able to consume a completely legal substance on July 1, 2018, where does she propose that those people go other than the parks, that may or may not be designated under subsection (ii)?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd be happy to respond. I think perhaps the hon. minister is misunderstanding the text in this amendment. This is about walking down the street smoking a joint and having no laws around that. I think it's an extremely reasonable amendment. We know that this is an intoxicating substance. This is not like cigarettes. We already have a movement towards smokeless places in general, so it would be extremely reasonable to assume that the public would certainly want safeguards around public places where our children are, which is not addressed in this legislation. I think that it's a completely reasonable amendment and safeguard to put in so that we don't have (a) intoxicated persons wandering around, (b) the extremely unpleasant smell and smoke of the marijuana use.

I understand that members opposite – perhaps Calgary-North West enjoys smoking down the street or smoking a joint down the street, but the children who walk around you are not going to be okay with this. [interjections] Perhaps it's my turn to speak to this amendment. I'm trying to clarify a very reasonable amendment that protects children in this community. If this government is not interested . . .

Mr. Feehan: Point of order.

9:10

The Chair: A point of order has been raised, hon. member.
On the point of order go ahead, Minister.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just noted that the previous speaker made a comment about a member on this side of the House smoking a substance which is illegal at this time and indicated that the person on this side of the House is engaging in that behaviour. I think that is a violation of the code of conduct in this House.

The Chair: Do you have a citation, hon. minister?

Mr. Feehan: Sorry?

The Chair: A citation, please.

Mr. Feehan: Yeah. Sorry. Under section 23(i) and (j), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member" or "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," I would ask that the member rise and withdraw her comments.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Chair, thank you very much. I can appreciate that there was an assumption made from myself to another member in this House, but the words that were used were: perhaps the member may enjoy smoking marijuana walking down the street.

Mr. Feehan: Madam Chair, I think we are walking a very dangerous slope here if I can simply say anything I want about the opposition members by introducing the word "may." I am more than happy to provide a variety of examples right here in the House right now if you'd like me to, but I imagine the House would be upset about the ways that I would suggest for the people on the other side of the House. I ask again that they simply stand up and withdraw what is clearly a violation and a comment which is intended to cause disruption in the House and is clearly a violation of Standing Order 23(i) and (j).

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Chair, this is simply hypothetical. There is no point of order here.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to the point of order?

Hon. member, I heard the comments that you made, and I listened to the minister speak to the point of order. I, too, was concerned with the implication, and I would rule that this is a point of order, that you be cautious with the language and the potential accusations that you may make. Did you wish to offer an apology to the House or withdraw the statement?

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, I will apologize if anybody was offended with the comments that I might make, but I would ask that members opposite use respectful language as they heckle across the way when I'm making a reasonable amendment to strengthen legislation to protect children in this province.

The Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Airdrie has apologized. We'll move on.

Debate Continued

The Chair: Continue. The next speaker is the hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to urge all members of the House. We've got a lot to get through. We have very little time. I know that these kinds of comments are frustrating and annoying, but let's focus on the work at hand here and get down to acting in the best interests of Albertans and acting like we care about the best interests of Albertans.

You know, I asked the hon. Member for Airdrie for an answer to the question. She didn't clearly provide one. She did, however, raise a concern that she wanted to protect children from exposure to cannabis in public places. Madam Chair, it's our belief, it's our government's strong belief that the provisions in the legislation that have already been brought before this House without amendments adequately provide for the protection of children in public places. Section 90.28(c) already says that no person may smoke or vape cannabis

in or within a prescribed distance from

- (i) a playground,
- (ii) a sports or playing field,
- (iii) a skateboard or bicycle park,
- (iv) a zoo,
- (v) an outdoor theatre,
- (vi) an outdoor pool or splash pad, or
- (vii) any other area or place that is prescribed or otherwise described in the regulations.

Mr. Cooper: What about a prescribed distance?

Mr. Schmidt: If the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills would limit his comments, perhaps he would be able to hear what I have to say about this issue.

Madam Chair, we consulted with Albertans on this particular issue twice. Albertans told us loudly and clearly that the provisions that we were proposing in this legislation adequately protect children from any potential exposure to cannabis, and we believe that these provisions in the legislation as presented to this Legislature strike that right balance between protecting children from a potentially harmful substance while allowing people to enjoy a substance that is completely legal if they don't have the ability to enjoy that in their home.

What the Member for Airdrie failed to answer and was the original question that I asked her: where does a person who lives in an apartment building or a condominium or some other facility that prevents smoking on the premises – where is that person supposed to enjoy a completely legal substance? The amendments as presented would prohibit them from enjoying it anywhere outside of their home. Now, perhaps they would have friends whom they could visit and they could enjoy this perfectly legal substance with friends in the privacy of their friends' homes, but that's a severe limitation on their freedoms, Madam Chair.

We think that our legislation as presented strikes the right balance between granting people the freedom to enjoy a perfectly legal substance under reasonable conditions while protecting children from the potentially harmful effects of being exposed to that substance, Madam Chair. We think that the amendment presented here by the Member for Airdrie is unreasonably curtailing the freedom of people to enjoy a perfectly legal substance, and for that reason our government will not be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning. I would like to just speak a little bit to what the member was just speaking about, a couple of different things. Just to clarify, this amendment is talking about public spaces, not private spaces, just to be clear. So if we're talking about condos or anything like that, those are homes. If there are bylaws already that stop people from smoking, then marijuana falls under smoking. If you're smoking and there are already bylaws in a private condo or any places like that, it's a significantly different thing from what we're talking about here.

On top of that, the interesting thing is that the comparison that was made by the member is that we're talking about a couple of different things here, a couple of balls up in the air. I really, like, can't imagine the difficulty there is to create legislation under this because we're talking about a lot of different balls in the air. We've got two controlled substances, right? We have cannabis and we have alcohol, both of which fall under legislation of consumption because of the substances that they are. Then we have smoking, which is legal; however, in places like condominiums, certain buildings, things like that, there is legislation and bylaws that disallow you from being able to smoke within a building. There is a balance there, I suppose, that needs to be struck, and that's potentially with a condo board or anything else like that that could be determined at that time.

I think that what we're trying to accomplish here is to understand that there are going to be people – and I think the member across the way actually said it. You were talking about limitation of freedoms. Well, when we're talking about limitation of freedoms, that's not only the person who's smoking but also the person who's smelling that and the person who is having to be in the same space

as the smoke, which is why legislation was changed in the first place about smoking in public. It's the same sort of thing. It is a fine balance because you do have a substance that's being legalized. I agree that if it's legalized, people should have the freedom to be able to enjoy that. However, to the point of the minister, the thing that we have to look at here as well is that along with enjoying that – cannabis also has many forms. Maybe it's a matter of a condo board making the decision that you can vape and not smoke or whatever that is, whatever the decisions are made.

9:20

Again, we're talking about completely different things here, and this amendment is specifically to make sure that we are having the ability to maintain distance from children and people who have allergies or whatever that is. There was another member who had spoken about perfume. In my studio when I was teaching music, one of our accompanists that was in our house was completely allergic to absolutely everything, any kind of perfume, lavender, candles, all that kind of stuff. I have lots of candles, so that was a major issue. But in order for her to be able to teach in my home, we had to make sure that the space that she was working in was conducive to her being able to do her job. I think we're talking about some common-sense aspects here.

I don't think the amendment goes as far as what the minister is entailing.

Mrs. Pitt: Condos are private.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Condos are private.

I'm not quite sure what the minister was trying to put together here because I believe, if I'm understanding the amendment correctly, that one has nothing to do with the other. However, I think that the points that the minister brought up are very worthy of discussion. I think that even with all the stakeholder outreach that we have done, Madam Chair, the finer points of this are some of the things that we haven't really had a chance to hash out and talk about. I think that though it may be difficult to legislate, we have to make sure that legislation is there in order to help people out who may be exposed who are not wanting to be exposed with a legal substance that, as the minister said, should be enjoyed by those who would like to partake.

The Chair: Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I can't support this amendment, and I'll tell the House why. One of the things that the Wildrose, or now the UCP opposition, continued to talk about was local autonomy, and one of the things that we've really addressed and that we've committed to doing when we brought forth this legislation was to allow local municipalities to be empowered to have that local autonomy in decision-making. One of the things that we have allowed within this is that we have found nuances and caveats where the using of cannabis shouldn't be allowed. These were talked about to us by the public, and it was overwhelming feedback that we received that said that they don't want this being done on hospital grounds or in playgrounds or within vehicles, very similar to what we deal with in smoking.

The other thing I have to suggest here, too, is that there is an exception to this. This is still a pharmaceutical in some fashion. People are still using this to treat anxiety, cancer-related illnesses, or any challenges in relation to that. One of the things that we've done with our legislation and through regulations is that we are empowering municipalities to make these decisions, and an amendment like this would take away the spirit of that, so I cannot support that, to allow local autonomy in decision-making.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to speak to the member again about local autonomy, we couldn't agree with you more. However, again, this amendment isn't in any way impeding on that. I'd like to speak about the nuances of medical versus recreational marijuana. We are going to be seeing quite a different piece of legislation. We are all going to be having to deal with this on July 1, and as much as I can appreciate the nuances of medical marijuana, I would assume based on local autonomy that in those places that are making those decisions based on smoking, consuming, however medical marijuana needs to be used, common sense will prevail in those situations. Otherwise, the legislation provided already allows for those things to happen, so to the member: I believe that the comments that you made with respect to this amendment are in no way in respect of what this amendment is trying to accomplish.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak?
Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:24 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gill	Starke
Anderson, W.	Orr	Stier
Drysdale	Pitt	Strankman

9:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Miranda
Babcock	Horne	Nielsen
Carson	Jansen	Payne
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Goehring	McKittrick	Westhead
Gray	Miller	Woollard

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today in the House and speak to Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. Many of my colleagues have spoken at length already about this issue, and I thought that I would like to just provide some additional comments as well as I'm sure that we will be working on that this morning. I just hope to be able to provide a little bit of insight, particularly from the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on some of the things that are important to them during this period of time.

I know that there is a wide range of opinions on exactly how this legislation should be implemented. As we all know, the federal government has made their decision and has said what they have said and are going to do what they're going to do, so we need to make sure that we take the appropriate steps to try to implement this particular direction provided from the federal government with respect to cannabis.

I know that in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills we have already seen some significant expansion inside the economy with respect to medical marijuana. We have a couple of facilities there that I'm sure are looking forward to their ability to produce additional revenue that will come along with the legalization of cannabis. While there are certainly a lot of concerns in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and while some folks are quite apprehensive about the decision that the federal government made, we are moving forward.

I think that there are certainly some pros and cons around this particular issue. You know, as we look around the province, Madam Chair, we see an economy that has really taken a lot of blows over the past number of years, both from the fall of oil prices as well as from the economic policies that have been implemented by this government. I recognize that those are two separate things with respect to the fall of oil prices, but certainly the government . . .

Mr. Schmidt: One of them is true, and one of them is false.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: I hear the minister making an accusation that what I am saying is false. I don't know that that is adding to the decorum inside the House. The Acting Minister of Justice said that one of them is true and one of them is false. I think that this afternoon we'll be able to see in the Blues, now that we've identified exactly what he has said, whether or not he said that. In 23(h), (i), and (j) it talks specifically about language that's likely to create disorder here inside the Chamber, and making accusations that what one member is saying is false is very likely to create disorder. It's a pretty simple process. He can withdraw and apologize.

Mr. Schmidt: In the best interests of moving this process along, I withdraw my comment, Madam Chair.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. I appreciate and fully accept your withdrawal of your comments.

As I was saying, there is a lot . . .

Mrs. Pitt: He didn't apologize.

Mr. Cooper: That is also true. He withdrew his comments. That's exactly what happened, but I have accepted him withdrawing the comments, and I think we can all move forward.

Debate Continued

Mr. Cooper: As I was saying, there are significant challenges that have been before the province, from the fall of the oil prices as well as through a number of very, very wrong-headed decisions that the government has made in the implementation of their economic policies. We've seen significant increases in our unemployment rate, and recently they've been the highest in the country. We've seen the highest spending that the province has done. We've seen significant challenges with respect to our economy in many areas

of the government. All of these things are a direct result of the NDP's ideology and the decisions that they have made, with the exception of the international price of oil. We have seen a lot of challenges that have been placed before the people of Alberta, many of which are a direct result of the NDP not making great decisions.

You know, I think the implementation of the minimum wage is another example where we've seen significant job loss across the economy, particularly in the food and beverage industry. I know that I had the opportunity this summer to meet with Restaurants Canada. I'm more than happy to table the information from Restaurants Canada that shows significant job loss. I personally met with the owner of Hudsons tap house. Their company laid off over 300 employees as a direct result of the minimum wage. They're now willing to speak out. My point is, Madam Chair, that there are lots and lots of situations that the NDP has made worse.

The good news is that it appears at first blush that they're not going to make the implementation of cannabis significantly worse for our economy. I think that we have seen some signals and certainly inside the legislation some opportunities for industry, like some of the ones that are in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that have already seen some positive job creation and investment in the region. We have seen some real positives in that regard, and I would just like to say thank you to the NDP for not making a mess of this particular piece of legislation as well. Now, there's still a lot of time, and certainly we've heard the minister speak this morning about the regulations and how fantastic they're going to be, so there's still an opportunity for the NDP to make a mess of something that they've done a good job of so far with respect to the regulation.

But I think that we are certainly on the right path. You know, there was a lot of concern in the early days of their consultation around just exactly how cannabis would be sold in the province of Alberta. Certainly, we were, or I was at least, pleasantly surprised when they made what I'm sure was a very difficult decision for them, particularly with some of the pressures that they would have been receiving from a lot of their big union friends and colleagues around how cannabis should be sold. I think that I'd like to commend the government for making the right choice with respect to engaging private industry on selling cannabis.

9:50

Certainly, we have seen some successes around private industry and the sale of restricted substances, particularly in the privatization of liquor stores by the provincial government. Of course, we all know that that took place in 1993 and was really, in many respects, a real net positive for our province. In the last 24 years we've seen that the Alberta Liquor Store Association, that, of course, is governed by the AGLC, has grown to represent 1,400 liquor stores in the province. We are open for business, if you will.

I just hope that the government is finally getting the point that private industry, small and medium-sized business are the real driver of our economy here and that competition and strength in the marketplace are really what provide great service to Albertans. We see that people have the opportunity to purchase liquor where they'd like. We have some of the best selection all across the country. This is really a driver, if you will, these small and medium-sized businesses that literally employ thousands and thousands of Albertans. There's an opportunity that has fallen in the lap of the government because of the federal government, that they have addressed as a chance for small business to succeed within the cannabis industry as well.

As we know, the ALSA and the AGLC have been successful in creating safeguards for minors in communities through policy development in conjunction with the provincial and municipal

governments. I believe that it is very important that we do everything we can to keep our communities safe, that we do everything we can to make sure that we are moving forward in a positive direction but also working with retailers, with the regulatory bodies to make sure that we are in fact keeping minors safe and that communities are kept safe and that we aren't going beyond the scope of what is fully intended.

I think that's one of the reasons why we should be having conversations around: where is it going to be okay to consume cannabis and where is it not going to be okay to consume cannabis? I think that really was the heart of my colleague from Airdrie's amendment when she rose to talk about restricting the public use of cannabis. You know, we see that with the restriction of the public use of alcohol. Now, not everyone agrees that that is the best path forward, but certainly it is something that at present as a province we do have a value on. You can't just sit in a park and get hammered, perhaps, or you can't just walk down the street with beer and alcohol. I believe that the intent of the amendment from my colleague from Airdrie was to have restrictions on just exactly where you can and cannot consume cannabis.

As we all know, cannabis has a significant effect on the individual that's taking it. As well, there is some effect or at least impact on those who are close by when that individual is smoking cannabis, whether it is a direct result of the second-hand high or it is just the impact of the scent, as has been spoken about here in the House. I think that, you know, we've seen significant progress made around smoking legislation, but in many respects I'm just not sure that we've struck the right balance here in Bill 26 around the public use of cannabis.

Back to my primary point about making sure that we're doing what we can to ensure safety as well as engage with private industry. We need to make sure that we're providing the right checks and balances without overburdening the small and medium-sized business owner that's going to do that. I think that, generally speaking, people across Alberta are interested in this as an opportunity in a recessive economy.

But I will just add that I have had a number of comments and folks from the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills region that have significant concern about, frankly, the federal government's decision to make cannabis legal in the province, so I think that it's fair that I acknowledge that there are a large number of constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that would prefer us to take a much more aggressive stance and try to push back against the federal government. While I'm not entirely sure, personally, that that is the best path forward, I do want to take the time to acknowledge that individuals, quite a few individuals, have contacted my office to express their concern with what exactly this will mean, particularly in their communities and in rural Alberta.

I think that as we move forward, it is important that we do all that we can to navigate these very important viewpoints and that we do what we can to empower municipalities to ensure that they can provide the safeguards that they feel are important in their community with respect to cannabis use. I think that goes beyond just what's currently in the legislation. I think that one of the things that will be important – and I'm just speculating here, but I believe that my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler will be providing us an opportunity to build in some structure where we will be able to review this legislation to find out: just how is it working for communities and for Albertans as we move forward?

One of the other things that I did just want to briefly touch on is the government's decision to regulate online sales of cannabis. I know from some interactions that I've already had with private industry, particularly those in the medical marijuana business, that they are already providing a lot of secure online sales of cannabis.

So I get a little apprehensive or a little concerned any time the government says, "We can do this better than you," because there are so many examples of the government making a mess of that exact mindset where they say, "We can do it better than you." I mean, liquor sales, insurance sales, utility sales: you know, there are just so many examples where the government has actually made things worse. I don't just specifically mean this government although they have made a lot of things worse; I mean that government generally has a bad track record of being in business, and that's exactly what the online sales are going to be.

I know that there's a wide variety of opinions on all sides of the House about whether or not the government should be implementing the online sales, but I do have some significant reservations about that. Perhaps it's a fine way to get started, and then as we can provide some additional checks and balances or we move forward with being more comfortable with exactly how it's going to be rolled out, I think that it is a potential spot where we could review and then turn that over to the hands of those who do that the best as well.

Madam Chair, I think that as we move forward, we need to make sure that we're partnering with business, that we are applying appropriate regulation but not to overregulate all at the same time. We need to balance those two things and ensure that we're protecting our communities, making sure that they're safe, and respecting what the federal government has decided on this cannabis legislation.

10:00

You know, private industry has a keen interest in this opportunity, and I think that that is quite important. I think the setting up of bricks and mortar operations that the government has proposed, which is going to require no upfront costs to the government, certainly was the right choice. We've heard from some of my colleagues about keeping the sale of multiple products separate and a pretty widespread support for that particular decision. It will be interesting to see what else winds up taking place in locations where cannabis is sold in terms of the other products that they may wind up selling and things that will continue to drive their business as I know that private industry will do what it can to be competitive, and that means providing good service as well as the right products. I think that it's something that we need to keep an eye on as we move forward.

You know, one of the questions that I think that a lot of folks have with regard to this particular piece of legislation and, as such, the regulations is on just exactly what the licensing process and application is going to look like, and how is the government going to implement those regulations? I think that it is a really, really important piece of this very big and complex puzzle. These particular licences have the potential of being quite valuable, so I'm always apprehensive in the early days of this sort of change in industry with who winds up becoming the winners and who winds up becoming the losers and just making sure that that process is going to be as fair and as open and as transparent as possible.

I want to strongly encourage the government to make sure that that is exactly what happens with the licensing and application process as we move forward because what we definitely don't want to see is the government picking either people close to the government or not close to the government but just really making sure that this process is as open and as fair as possible so that Albertans have the best opportunity to win, not the government.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm very, very honoured to be able to speak to this bill, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. I really do, from the bottom of my heart, understand what a tough spot that this government has been put in, especially that this is a really, really unbelievable timeline that you've been saddled with to implement absolutely humongous changes to society through this regulation and legislation. So I would just like to commend the members opposite for the work that they have done so far. I can't imagine how humongous this is and the effort that has gone into creating this legislation.

I'm encouraged that there are priorities around the following goals during the outlining of this legislation. For obvious reasons I think it's worth speaking about keeping cannabis out of the hands of children and youth and protecting safety on the roads and in workplaces and in public spaces, protecting public health, and limiting the illegal market for cannabis.

Madam Chair, the legislation that has been passed at the federal level will make Canada the very first G-7 country to legalize cannabis and the second in the world after Uruguay. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to eliminate or at least reduce the black market for drugs in our country, and I understand this aspect. I mean, the damage that a drug dealer has on our streets and to our youth is staggering. Obviously, it's not as connected, but I still feel that this is an important point, that we see drugs like fentanyl being laced into other recreational substances, and they are killing our fellow Canadians at an unprecedented rate. So I truly believe that anything that we can do to limit the drug dealers' contact with Canadians is definitely a step in the right direction although it's a bit of a digression from what it is that we speak about.

There are so many opportunities to have philosophical discussions about this, the pros and the cons, philosophical, moral discussions, but the federal government has made the decision to go ahead with this initiative, and it falls on the shoulders of government and the opposition to ensure that we've covered all of the bases by putting in laws and regulations that keep Albertans safe during this transition. So again, thank you for all the work that's been done so far.

Of course, like usual, I'm sure you won't be surprised that I have questions around this. One of the things I wanted to talk about was the legal age of consumption at 18. Obviously, I understand that it correlates with alcohol consumption, but at some point if the minister could elaborate on what the factors were that went around considering that other than the obvious age of choice because of alcohol. The reason I'm asking is because there is no shortage of science to point out about the development of a brain at 18 years old, and I'm sure, I'm absolutely positive the government has looked into this. However, in the legislation or even in the discussions have we taken that into consideration at all? It would be nice to understand how that was put forward.

I think in order to have people buy into the legislation, to understand that, it's an important part of the discussion because we, of course, have the MADD groups, we have other people that have brought information forward that tells us, actually, that 25 is the better age for cannabis in terms of development of the brain. Having said that, I'm not sure that knowing that would change the way that people would consume or anything. But I think that it's necessary in order for the public to understand the differentiation so that as the legislation goes forward, as you're making decisions about what you're going to do with your precious brain, at least we have some understanding of what's going on with that.

I do appreciate how comprehensive this legislation is, Madam Chair. My primary concern with regard to regulations – again, this is a pattern that is concerning – is that those regulations will be implemented after the fact. Though I understand that it's difficult

to understand how to do it at this point, there are so many things that could happen within regulations that aren't going to be discussed and debated fully here in this House. I would like to highlight some of the questions and concerns that I have that I imagine will be taken within the regulations; however, I'd like to bring them forward here.

It's really encouraging to see that the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission will be granted the oversight and distribution authority, and of course, as we all know, they have a tried-and-true record of overseeing the compliance and distribution of liquor in Alberta and already have the facilities and logistical abilities to take on this task. Given that the AGLC will be tasked with overseeing directly how cannabis gets from the producers to the retailers, will they be expected, Madam Chair, to build the new distribution centres?

A couple of questions that at least have come across in my constituency, anyways, are: are they going to be housed in the same facilities as alcohol? I know that we've had these discussions around the table. Will cannabis be housed in the same facilities as alcohol before it is shipped out, or will additional separate facilities need to be built? What are the expected costs for the AGLC taking on these additional responsibilities? I would imagine that there is going to have to be a humongous change in staff in order to be able to handle this because there's a lot more that is within cannabis legislation than even with alcohol because it is also for medicinal use as well.

For example, does the government have an approximate idea of additional staff, transportation for distribution centres? How many are we going to bring on, and how are those costs going to be offset so that the taxpayers aren't subsidizing distribution of cannabis? The reason I'm asking this is because there's nothing in the legislation that actually explains how that's going to work. While we're grateful that there have been discussions about the private sector being involved in this, there's an entire other part of this equation with regard to distribution, transportation, all those kinds of things. It's not really clearly laid out in the legislation, and understandably some of that will come with regulations, but I think Albertans need to know how that's going to come forward.

10:10

We have delivery drivers of on-sale cannabis as well. Actually, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills brought up online. This is actually a really big deal for me personally because if you're delivering to the door – I have a friend who has purchased the tinctures and has done the vaping. It just comes to his door. That's the thing. For the online sale of cannabis, how are we going to identify and verify the age at doors? Is that going to be left with the driver that comes to – the Purolator courier guy is going to come and have to ask you your age. I mean, if it's my son, who's got a real baby face, obviously, they're going to ask for his ID. But how do you prove that that ID is legit? I mean, all of a sudden you're giving a driver the same responsibilities as what? We don't even have a police force yet to deal with it. There are a lot of things that come to your door, obviously, that are age appropriate, but this is serious. This is a substance, right? [interjections]

I'm just asking these questions. I'm not trying to aggravate the government. I just think these are legitimate questions. These are things that people have asked me. I'm sorry if it upsets you, but I think it's legit. If you're upset, maybe you have a solution. I'd love to hear about it. That's why I'm asking. It's not to anger you in any way. This is what people are asking me. I'm sorry if you're frustrated, but I think it's a legitimate question. We're not talking about just a regular item here. We are talking about cannabis. On top of that, we don't even know, we're not even sure what products,

particularly, are going to be coming to the door either. On top of that, is there a liability, then, to the driver who maybe doesn't check? What happens then? What if your 14-year-old looks like an 18-year-old? The assumption is made. The product is given. What happens then? You can be as angry as you want about that, but that could happen, right? I'm just asking the question because I think it's something that we need to discuss here maybe previous to the regulations, and if you have a solution, great. That's why I'm asking. So identifying the age at the door: how will this be addressed?

What if the individual who orders this cannabis is not at home? Is another individual not ordering the cannabis able to sign for that like you can with other products at the door? My kids can sign for pretty much anything for me. That was before they were 18 years old. If no one is home, then, would the package be just left at the front door? [interjections] You can say no, and that's great. Again, it's not in the regulations. That's why I'm asking. Like, these are the questions that I'm asking. That's great if you know the answer, and again that's wonderful that it's in the regulations, but I think that it's worthy of a discussion in here. We can't assume; Albertans just can't assume that government is just going to have all these answers. These are actual questions that are coming across my desk.

Now, is it sent back to central distribution, then, if it doesn't end up at your door, and then how does one go about doing that? Is it just the same as a normal package? Like, you just go pick up your cannabis at the cannabis distribution centre, show your identification and whatever it is, and away you go? I just don't know. There are security risks with both these options. If people want to get away with it, these folks are savvy, right? They are going to know how to do this. I'm asking these questions not just for everyday Albertans but because there are going to be people that need and want these products that may not be able to afford them for whatever reason and may be looking to steal them from other people's homes. There are a lot of different things. I could go on and on because every household is different and every situation is going to be unique. There are a lot of things that are caught up in just those small little things. Again, I'm sorry if I have angered the government, but I really think these are legitimate questions.

For example – I just wanted to give a personal example – if I order a package from Amazon and they come to my house to deliver it and my husband or children are home, they can sign for it. Then that package is taken on my behalf. If no one was home, they've left a note, or do they plunk it right in front? It doesn't matter what it is. Or Canada Post or another mail provider will come and pick up the package, and you can go and pick it up by a nearby post office. Is Canada Post involved with cannabis distribution as well?

Again, these are really, really legitimate questions, and they're expensive questions, too, because distribution is going to be very costly, especially if it's not being done through the mainstream, for the obvious reasons of making sure that said package is ending up in the hands of the person that is actually requiring or needing or paying for it or of legal age.

Will local pickup centres be established? I'm asking this because of rural areas as well. There are not always local distribution centres in some of these areas. We were just talking about how large some of these ridings are going to be. For those people who are wanting to partake or for their medical marijuana, now are they going to have to drive to the city of Calgary from way out at the edges of some of our ridings or to the larger centres in order to be able to pick up their products? Are the drivers required to return to the same home and deliver that order? I mean, aside from the aspect of cannabis itself this could become a really, really expensive endeavour. All of a sudden, you know, your dead costs on a product and all of those other things have quadrupled as a result of

distribution and all these other kinds of things. Again, if this is being done through regulations and under the auspices of government and that's not part of the private sector, we could have some problems there.

We have heard from some organizations such as the Alberta Liquor Store Association that have for several decades sold liquor safely and already have the trained staff and protocols in place to ensure that minors do not have access to controlled substances. And while I understand that the federal government has recommended that cannabis not be sold in the same location as tobacco and alcohol, will owners who have the experience running those stores be considered and prioritized, I suppose, in the licensing phase should they wish to open up a separate or private retail facility?

The only reason I ask that is because it's not about prioritizing a particular group of people, but they do have the knowledge and the background and the wherewithal. I'm just curious if that outreach has been done with those folks simply because they do have the knowledge of how to distribute this appropriately. Maybe there's going to be training. I'm not sure. This is another thing. I don't think that people understand quite how this is going to be done.

Will there be measures put in place to track individuals buying large quantities of cannabis? Now, I'm asking this because, as I understand it, adults can only possess 30 grams – that's great – but how do you know that Cannabis R Us driving up to your house every day isn't delivering 30 grams every day to you? Is there a tracking mechanism to do that? What if you have four people in the house consuming or eight, for that matter, or eight people order it from that house and it's going to one person? Like, are we going to be able to track that?

We have four plants in the home. That's fine. But, again, are there going to be limits? We understand that there's a limit to how much you can possess, but are there limits as to how much you can purchase? That's the question.

Again, if your neighbour is growing it and has a licence to grow it, are you allowed to have more and purchase even though technically speaking you're only allowed to have 30 grams? Then are you allowed to distribute it after that – what about that? – especially, you know, if that truck is rolling up to your house every day and you have the account and away you go?

Just a couple of things to consider. These are all, I know, small details, but these are the things that are really going to matter as we transition, and these are life-altering changes to how we function here in Alberta.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was talking about the online store. What's that going to look like? This is a substantial undertaking from a technology perspective. Is the government also going to take steps to protect personal information on those sites in the form of personal order information? I'm assuming that, again, some sort of personal identification will have to be submitted to the website in order to verify age. This isn't just your credit card now; this is your driver's licence or your passport or whatever piece of identification you need to prove that you're 18. How are we going to verify age online? What's that going to look like?

Given the fact that firewalls and other protective measures will have to be in place in the development of the websites, this is extremely, Madam Chair, sophisticated and complicated and again will be an extremely expensive process and will likely take regular maintenance and updating. The cost implications of the government taking on the oversight of online sales: will the cost be offset by the sales, or is there a risk that the taxpayers will be subsidizing this online store as well? Again, I really think that for the sake of the taxpayers we need to make sure that they understand what we're getting into here.

10:20

Madam Chair, one of the things that I heard about specifically was: do rental owners have any say over any damage that could be done through smoke of cannabis? I'm assuming that based on the type of smoke that it is, it's probably significantly different than tobacco smoke. What we'd heard of is that – are we understanding that the government will be taking steps to prevent renters or condo dwellers and residents of multifamily dwellings also from growing cannabis?

As the Member for Airdrie had mentioned, it might not be different than having four ficus or four whatever. However, as I understand it, there are hydroponics that may be involved with growing cannabis. I'm not sure. Again, I think that for those folks we have the smoking piece, which, of course, is up to that condo board, those people, the folks that are living there, but the damage that's actually done in the space: is that taken into consideration should there be damage done? Are there going to be regulations in order to make sure that those people are protected, too, as well as protecting the rights of the people that are wanting to partake in cannabis? You know, we already have the ability to prevent people from smoking cigarettes.

When an individual is selling a home in Alberta, will they be required to disclose that they grew cannabis in their homes or smoked cannabis in their homes previous to selling their home? When I was young, my mom smoked in our house, and so did my grandparents. I can tell you that when we painted the walls, there was an obvious, obvious colour change about four feet up to the top of the ceiling when I purchased my first house from my parents and painted that house. Bless my mom's heart – I love her to bits – but there was a really, really significant change in colour on the walls where she was.

I was curious. As parents, like, if your children are young and you're looking at buying a home, is there an impact to the environment of that space having had people smoke cannabis in there for a long time or growing it, for that matter? You know, we, obviously, when we're moving into homes, take adequate safeguards to protect our children. What if there are any leftover substances or residue? I think that could substantially change the price of a home.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning, all. Interesting conversations so far this morning. I rise this morning to speak to Bill 26, which is An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, as we all know. I'd like to begin by saying that, frankly, I'm not in favour of legalizing marijuana myself, but I understand that it is a federal issue, and I'm not here to debate that particular point. But there are many times in your life when you don't get what you want, and ultimately you use what means you can and deal with an issue that you'd rather not deal with sometimes. But as the old saying goes, when you're given a lemon, you make lemonade. So that's exactly what I intend to do.

Unfortunately, for us here, though, the Prime Minister has legalized marijuana and, much as he has done with a lot of other things, in a somewhat rash manner, perhaps ill advised and perhaps, I dare to say, half baked. But because of his lack of a coherent approach, much of the responsibility to implement the safeguards has been delegated to the provinces and to us. So that has led to the bill that's before us today.

Unfortunately, the government here appears to have somewhat followed in some respects the Prime Minister's example, I think. While the government is quick to explain that it's doing everything

it can to protect Albertans, when we take a moment to dig into this legislation, what we find is that there is a whole lot left yet to be desired, in my opinion.

I speak on behalf of many members of my constituency in southern Alberta who contacted me regarding this. A lot of my constituency, as many people know, is made up of small towns, a lot of older citizens there, and they're just not acquainted with this particular situation. And I don't blame them. They didn't have it when they were young. So I'm trying to convey what they're telling me in my remarks today.

One aspect of their concerns and of my concern is the ability to use marijuana in public places similar to cigarettes. I will admit to being a bit out of my area of expertise here, folks. I really want you to know that. I don't have a lot of experience when it comes to these products. I never participated myself, nor do I wish to participate in the consumption of these products. I've never felt the effects of marijuana personally. I cannot personally attest to whether being intoxicated from this product is a similar experience to being intoxicated from alcohol.

But what I do understand, though, is that tobacco is a restricted product or substance and alcohol is a controlled substance. Restricted versus controlled is what I've just been speaking of. When marijuana is officially legalized, apparently it will be as a controlled substance if this bill goes forward. This leaves me to believe that it should probably be treated in a similar manner to alcohol because it's a controlled substance.

Likewise, I don't believe anyone in this House is making the claim that marijuana is not intoxicating. I think that most people are aware that it has effects on the human mind. It might not be the best use of the word, but the word "intoxication" immediately brings to mind someone drunk on alcohol. That's what we normally think of when we talk about intoxication.

Again, while I've never experienced the effects of marijuana, as I've said, according to Health Canada, though, the effects of marijuana or, more specifically, the chemical THC include confusion, drowsiness, anxiety, fear, or panic and/or impaired ability to remember, concentrate, and pay attention. I often wonder why someone would want to do all of that to themselves. According to Health Canada, again, THC also affects co-ordination, reaction time, decision-making abilities, and your ability to judge distances.

How does that compare to alcohol? Well, going back again to the Health Canada report, they list the effects of alcohol as drowsiness, dizziness, slurred speech, reduced inhibition, loss of co-ordination, inability to think clearly, inability to estimate distances, decreased reaction times, amongst others. Again, one wonders why someone gets involved with alcohol as well in many of those types of situations.

There appears to be similar circumstances or an overlap, which I believe further demonstrates why we should be treating marijuana, therefore, the same as we do alcohol. Why wouldn't you do that? Again, let me be clear. I don't believe that marijuana and alcohol intoxication manifest themselves in the same way. What I believe and what Health Canada clearly supports is that they are both intoxicating substances. And while it is not a perfect solution, I believe placing the same restrictions on marijuana as are placed on alcohol is therefore the best course of action that we could take.

Currently under Bill 26 – and I'm not an expert on this bill – it is my understanding only that it proposes to prohibit smoking or vaping marijuana in any area where a person is currently prohibited from smoking under the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act or any other act or bylaw that a local municipality may undertake. I'm actually happy to see that municipalities are going to be empowered to create bylaws governing the use of this substance in their communities because as we've seen in the past, different

communities have different needs and preferences. I think that is a good thing, and I'm sure the Minister of Municipal Affairs would agree with me.

10:30

However, where this bill currently falls short is that it doesn't appear to prohibit the public consumption of marijuana, and I know we've discussed that at length this morning. Again, it's my understanding that if this bill is left unamended, it would allow anyone legally allowed to consume marijuana, which is what we're intending to do, I understand, to do so in any public space where they are currently allowed to smoke tobacco.

Now, part of my background, by the way, includes working for over 25 years, roughly, in an environment known as the business world of downtown Calgary, in oil and gas. So many times I've seen where people in the public are required, if they're smoking, to stand aside from the outside of the building for several yards so that they don't hamper the enjoyment of the fresh air outdoors of the people going in and out of those businesses. I know, too, that what Health Canada seems to say is that marijuana smoke can, it sounds like, be even more impactful to people that may be out in the public air, where this is possibly going to take place.

Again, what it seems to me to mean here, from what I've read of the bill, is that on a sidewalk or at a park or any other public space in Alberta consumption of this product would be allowed, and that is what concerns me, if the public is going to be negatively impacted by this. And that is what concerns a lot of my constituents.

This isn't necessarily about the effects of second-hand smoke, therefore. I believe that some members from across the aisle have mentioned that there isn't any research that supports the claim that second-hand marijuana smoke results in bystanders getting intoxicated, but I do think that there would be some negative impacts. I think it's undeniable that when someone is vaping or smoking marijuana, they could have an adverse effect on those immediately around them, no matter where they are. However, if we limit the use of marijuana in a public place or any place other than a residence, temporary residence, or a place approved through regulations, which we've talked about, that would limit the negative impact of marijuana to only those who make the choice to be around someone consuming that product. That seems to make sense.

No one is claiming that being around someone who is drinking is going to result in a person nearby getting drunk. That is not why public consumption is limited. However, all Albertans have a reasonable expectation that when they go out in public, they won't be exposed to alcohol under our current rules. I believe Albertans should have, therefore, the same reasonable expectation when it comes to marijuana. It just makes simple sense. That is why I've been supporting amendments to limit its public use. The current laws in this province prohibit people from consuming alcohol in a public place or any place other than a residence, temporary residence, or place approved through regulations. Why can't we do that with this?

Therefore, Madam Chair, I believe an amendment should be passed that would extend that same provision for alcohol, a provision, I might add, that has, in the case of alcohol, withstood the test of time and enjoys the support of all Albertans and from many provinces across Canada. Should such an amendment be supported, I think it would be great because it would treat controlled substances – controlled substances – the same.

As I have already mentioned more than once, marijuana is an intoxicating substance like alcohol, so ensuring that users of this newly legalized controlled substance would comply with the same kinds of laws that are currently in place for alcohol would provide the greatest protection for Albertans and their children and families,

who have a reasonable and, I think, natural expectation that they are not going to be exposed to marijuana when they are in public places.

Madam Chair, to conclude, I think I've made my points with regard to the use of marijuana in public spaces very clear. I think that although the previous amendment, which was a little bit detailed, did not get passed, I believe that without such an amendment being made and passed, I will have great difficulty in supporting this bill.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Strankman: Madam Chair, could I have two minutes, please, to revert to Introduction of Guests?

The Chair: We've had a request for unanimous consent to revert. Is there anyone opposed to this request?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's with great pleasure that I would like to lighten the atmosphere in the Chamber here today to introduce various guests that are up in the Chamber. We have a young gentleman by the name of Porter, who is 10. We have Paxton, who is eight, and Peyton, who is four. I've got a secret message here that says that tomorrow Porter is getting a puppy. With the greatest of respect, ma'am, I want to introduce our caucus leader's dear wife. Her name is Tanya. If she'd please rise and receive the respectful, warm welcome of this Chamber, because I think she absolutely deserves it.

Bill 26

An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis

(continued)

Mr. Strankman: I'd like to revert to speaking to the bill, ma'am.

Madam Chair, I rise today to initiate an amendment to Bill 26. If any of the pages could present this, I'll speak to it briefly.

Bill 26 is an important piece of legislation, and we need to be as respectful as we can going forward here. It's important. With respect – and I talked about admonishing respect to our visitors here in the gallery today – legislation, which is what we do in this place, can be here for many days, hours, years, months, and that's part of the reason why we have the recording body here, known as *Hansard*, to record every word that we use.

You know, in the case of this substance, as my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod said, it hasn't been controlled. It's been outside the boundaries of legislation prior to this time. The federal government has sought to try and bring some sort of control to it, I guess, if you will, and we in the provincial jurisdictions have to try and manage the presentation that the federal government is bringing forward.

As the pages distribute this piece of legislation, I'd just like to read into the record, Madam Chair, if I could, the amendment. I move that Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, be amended by adding the following after section 27:

27.1 The following is added after section 130:

Review of the Act

131 Within 5 years of the coming into force of this Act, and every 5 years after that, a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of this Act and must submit to the Legislative Assembly, within one year after beginning the review, a

report that includes any amendments recommended by that committee.

10:40

Now, Madam Chair, I spoke the other day to the significance of the potentiality of a review to legislation. This review would be a comprehensive process, and that's because this is the attempt to legalize a substance. Some would call it a drug; some in the past would call it an illegal drug. My colleague from Airdrie talked about locations. It's unfortunate that it created a condition in the Legislature where the Member for Calgary-North West took offence at the presentation of that, and they went through a whole harangue, I guess, if you will, in that case.

The idea of this amendment, Madam Chair, is not without precedent. As I said the other day when speaking to Bill 30, that we have in front of us in the Legislature, in the short period that I've been in this Chamber, since 2012, I believe this piece of legislation to be one of the most in-depth and, some would say, onerous. It's approaching 150 pages of legislation and changes thereto, but at the end of that act it specifically talks about the possibilities or the requirement for a review, and I think that's important.

There are many jurisdictions in the U.S. and many precedents set here in Canada and indeed in this Chamber about review. Some would use the slang term "sunset clause." It's not talking about the legislation actually going off the books at the end of five years; it's talking about the need for a clear, comprehensive review going forward. We have that, Madam Chair, in bills that have come forward from this Assembly: the disabilities advocate act, the Child and Youth Advocate Act, the Conflicts of Interest Act, and the Missing Persons Act.

Madam Chair, I'm asking for the indulgence of the Chamber to understand that this is not a new precedent. This is quite standard. I believe that this government or any government would try and keep, as many of us have, talking about red tape reduction and the potentiality of keeping the bills, legislation that are created in this Chamber fluid but current to the people that we represent, whether it be in the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler or I think it's the fabulous constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Outstanding, actually. Outstanding.

Mr. Strankman: Outstanding. My error, ma'am. We see that by some of our fabulous, outstanding guests that we have in the Legislature here today.

You know, to go back to seriousness, this isn't an approval or denial of the subject at hand. This is a legislative change that I would like to see brought forward when it comes to all legislation. This isn't approval or denial of the societal issue of cannabis. It's an admission that we cannot see every possibility or include, possibly, every liability and not force that onto the courts or the legal system to be the final judge of that so that it can come forward.

Madam Chair, it's a point of timing, I guess, to bring this forward. I spoke of it the other day as a form of cleansing of the legislative bureaucracy that we have here and a way to create or, if you will, incentivize modernization of the work that we do in this Legislature.

I'm open to hear discussion on this, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing forward this amendment. I got taken aback because there's so much pot talk here, and I thought

this was out of order because we had this amendment yesterday, but I realize that that was Bill 29, so my apologies.

Mr. Strankman: Good morning.

Mr. Sucha: Yeah. Right. I have my coffee, so I'm good.

Nonetheless, you know, this is one thing where we're setting up a framework to really continue to evaluate. I'm very reluctant to be very prescriptive about specific reviews to the act.

One thing that I reflect on is that Alberta has been down this road in a different fashion before, in the '30s, which was Prohibition, on the legalization of alcohol, and since that time we have never stopped changing the way regulations are done. We have never stopped changing elements of the act. It's something that is continuously going on. Even today we just got a press release, that everyone probably got in their inbox, about the AGLC handling special-event licensing and the fact that that's already changed again.

Really, this is going to be something that is unprecedented, that's very new for our province and for our country. In some ways five years doesn't go far enough. In some ways we're going to be continuing to watch within some of the ministries, and we're going to continue to be questioned during question period. I think that there are many different ways that we'll be able to address members' concerns of being able to review this within this House on a regular basis, even within discussions between ministries and feedback that we receive and also even through the AGLC, that is empowered to help recommend, through Treasury Board, regulation changes about distribution and sales of marijuana.

With that being said, at the end of the day, even looking as we move forward, as our ministries are going to continue to re-evaluate this, both Justice and Treasury – with it being part of AGLC, it will fall under their purview – I think we will already be making sure that we can regularly monitor this, that we will be responsive to the House, and that their annual audits will be issued publicly for people to review.

So I don't think that this amendment, while well intentioned, is necessary. Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll just rise and speak briefly to this. You know, when I saw this amendment, my first thought was: well, that seems entirely reasonable. As I listen to the debate and think more about it, if anything, five years is perhaps too long, given the scale of the change that is before us here. While I am certain that the Member for Calgary-Shaw is not incorrect when he says that changes and tweaks and reviews and analysis will go on on an ongoing basis – I'm sure that will happen – I think it is important for us as a Legislature to put in some firm timelines to actually do formal reviews of something so substantively different.

If anything, frankly, I would suggest that a three-year timeline might be better than five, because what this really says is that within five years of coming into force, we'll appoint a special committee that then has a year. We're now two and a half years into this Legislature. On this timeline there's a reasonable possibility that this wouldn't even come up for review in the next Legislature. So, you know, if anything, perhaps we could be looking at three years or even one year in sitting down and tasking one of our committees with doing that work.

I think this is an entirely reasonable amendment. You know, while I'm certain and have no doubt that the government will do their part in reviewing this as it rolls out over time, it seems entirely

reasonable to me that we would support this amendment and hope the government will reconsider.

Thank you.

The Chair: Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing this very, very important amendment forward. Just to clarify, there is a huge difference between a legislative piece like this and looking at evergreening our reviews, which is very, very different. Obviously, with legislation of this magnitude, evergreening is necessary. Within the AGLC and any of the other bodies that are required to participate, there are going to be tweaks along the way. We understand that. That, in essence, actually, is where your regulations would come into play, to actually help with those kinds of things.

10:50

However, when we're looking at a complete review, especially at a time when things are changing so much – we can talk about Prohibition. We can talk about alcohol. We still don't even have that right. We're talking about a situation where we don't even know how our police forces are going to deal with this on the roads. We don't even have a mechanism yet to test for this. There are so many unknowns, Madam Chair.

Personally, instead of being reactive and just going into question period and asking questions after something has already happened, I would prefer to err on the side of being prescriptive and preventative versus being reactionary. This isn't a game, right? This is a serious change in how lives are going to be impacted in this province. With all due respect to the member, I do believe that it's imperative – as a body in here we have the absolute responsibility of transparency – to be able to show to the people of Alberta how we're doing and how things are going, not just about little tweaks and changes but actually looking at the legislative piece of this to see if things need to be changed.

Again, I'd like to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing this amendment forward. I think it's very necessary. I'll be supporting it.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:51 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Drysdale	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Gill	Starke
Clark	Hunter	Strankman
Cooper	Orr	Swann

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miller
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Connolly	Jansen	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kazim	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sigurdson
Dach	Littlewood	Sucha

Drever	Luff	Turner
Feehan	Malkinson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Mason	Woollard
Goehring	McKittrick	
Totals:	For – 12	Against – 32

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. One of the questions that we in the Alberta Party caucus have, between my colleague and I, is around the online sales component. As the government, I think wisely, has done, the retail sales aspect of Bill 26 is being allowed to happen within the private sector, and I give the government credit for taking that step. It's a wise one. Our analysis had showed that at least \$168 million would have needed to be spent to stand up a government retail system. So, again, I give them kudos for listening to that feedback and the feedback of many thousands of Albertans who shared that view.

However, when it relates to online sales, they have gone with the government monopoly model, and that creates, potentially, a number of challenges in a number of different areas: in online security, public safety, and, I think, most importantly perhaps – well, if not most importantly, at least the challenge here is maybe most acute – in government costs. We don't have cost estimates yet, to date, from this government on what it will cost to stand up the online system, and my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill and I along with our diligent, thoughtful, and incredibly hard-working staff have thought about whether, in fact, it is justified to do a government model on the online sale component.

With that, Madam Chair, I will move an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies here and will hand those to you.

The Chair: This will be amendment A3.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, be amended as follows. In part A section 7 is amended in the proposed section 90.08 by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

- (2) Subject to the federal Act,
 - (a) no person may sell cannabis online other than a department, agency or cannabis licensee designated by the Minister, and
 - (b) no person may purchase cannabis online except from a department, agency or cannabis licensee designated by the Minister.

In part B section 27(c) is amended by adding the following after the proposed clause (i.1):

- (i.2) respecting qualifications and conditions for cannabis licensees that engage in online cannabis sales pursuant to section 90.08(2).

Madam Chair, this actually is an amendment conceived by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, whose idea this was, who, unfortunately, is out... [interjections] Thank you very much. Despite her commitment to public health by having received the flu shot, one wonders perhaps if she's managed to get the flu anyway. She's out – she's not out. [interjections] I'm going to just move on. This is when you've hit rock bottom and you start to dig.

11:00

The amendment, Madam Chair. Our concerns revolve around the concerns about online sales. We recognize that online sales are

particularly important to help undercut the black market in rural and other communities that may not have a retail presence at least at the outset of legalization or perhaps may just not support a retail presence in those communities. That's a concern that was raised by municipal councillors in the AAMD and C in particular and, I believe, AUMA as well. The question is: will the government model, a monolithic one-size-fits-all government model, in fact satisfy that desire to undercut the black market by providing a quality product in a timely way cost-effectively to rural consumers as well as urban consumers anywhere in the province?

This amendment seeks to allow the minister to make certain regulations around the safety and security of online information as well as regulations around storage, transportation, purchase, and authentication for purchasers. It allows for the government to designate cannabis licensees as online vendors alongside government departments and agencies, which will, we believe, mitigate some of the risk regarding online information being stored in one location. We've had some quite serious hacking incidents of government computer systems in the postsecondary sector and in other areas. When we have all of this information in one place, I think Albertans are right to be concerned about their information security. It also mitigates the risk of overhead when it comes to government supplying and delivering online sales.

As I said in my introduction, our concerns are threefold: online security, public safety, and the government cost. When it comes to online security, there is going to be a large volume of information, including people's contact information, their address and location, payment options, age verification, and other identifying factors. This creates a particularly high risk if that information is the target of a security attack. We know that the government is a fairly obvious target, a large target, for hackers and online security threats – we've seen those breaches before – given that the information shared is of a particularly confidential nature. In addition to personally identifiable information, it relates to the consumption of a now legal but intoxicating product.

We feel that the time required for government to ensure that these regulations are in place and meeting certain safety thresholds is going to be challenging to meet if they're relying exclusively on a government model. Adding additional vendors as an option helps spread the risk both from all that information being in a single location online and from being a less desirable target because there are many of them. Also, it reduces other risks in terms of the timely rollout of online sales.

From a public safety perspective some of the concerns that we have have been expressed, I believe, previously by other members. Online sales will require storage and transportation. Neither Canada Post nor FedEx nor any of the others are security agencies. Age and identification verification, a signature required upon delivery: those could be challenging. Certainly, there are risks, then, of minors obtaining cannabis illegally.

In addition, there are concerns around storage. First, the government is likely going to have to stand up some sort of distribution warehouse. Perhaps the idea is for it to come out of the central warehouse. I don't know if the government would set up their own online retail location in the same way that the physical retailers would be set up and there would be that wholesale model or if the government would simply take it out of the central AGLC warehouse. That's, obviously, to be determined, but if there is to be an additional warehouse, again, there is a cost.

If there are locations outside of the warehouse, especially as we see in rural Alberta, we've heard much in this House, quite justifiably, about the increase in rural crime. Will a government online retail model risk an increase in being targeted, say, at post offices or PO boxes in rural Alberta? If you've got the local drug

store/post office, are we going to have boxes full of cannabis for delivery behind the counter at the local post office? If so, how are they going to handle the climate control or the quality control aspects of that? More importantly, how are they going to handle the security aspects of that? Is that even an option? All of those potentially in one place create a very attractive target for criminals, in particular in rural Alberta. That is mitigated if multiple stores or multiple organizations are making online orders in smaller communities, as opposed to all of that being in a single location.

Finally, a grave concern we have about the online component being run exclusively by government is both the start-up and ongoing costs. How will government determine the market for this and therefore the amount and types of cannabis? How are they going to measure demand? One of the things the private sector does incredibly well is understand and react very quickly to consumer demand. With tremendous respect to the wonderful people in Alberta's public service, if we look at other government-controlled liquor models in other provinces, they're not world renowned for being responsive to consumer demand. It tends to be one-size-fits-all. That will take time, it will take research, and, most importantly, it will take money, so if the government does want to do an online approach, they should not rush it and also consider spreading the risk, the workload, and the cost to other, private-sector vendors.

Again, we've talked about storage. Government storage for online sales would need to be regulated, temperature controlled, and monitored in order to maintain the quality of product and make sure products don't expire, et cetera. Again, we have a real opportunity here to leverage local vendors, who will already have those facilities, and those facilities will be spread throughout the province.

We're very concerned about the cost of government online sales. This is a cost that could easily be borne by the private sector. In the absence of any sort of details it's quite difficult to evaluate this bill, and it raises significant concerns for us. What we're seeking through this amendment is to expand the options that government has in terms of rolling out online sales to include the private sector if they choose. This does not preclude the government from setting up their own distribution system, but I do have concerns that both the cost of this as well as the quality and responsiveness of a government online system may not meet consumer demand, may not satisfy the government's desires to undercut the black market, may not be any more secure, in fact may risk being less secure because all of that information that Albertans will submit to the system will be in a single location and vulnerable to online attacks.

I would hope that the government would give some thought to passing this because it just simply expands the options. It does not restrict or tie their hands, as they have in the current legislation. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow for bringing forward this amendment. I know that he and myself have had copious amounts of debate online on Twitter about this and what the right models are, and it's been very wholesome.

I think it's important that as we move forward on this legislation that, to be frank, we're forced to enact because of federal legislation that's coming into force July 1, 2018, we have to be very cautious and concrete with how we're moving forward. That was why the first thing that we did was hear from 60,000 Albertans, who helped us develop our cannabis strategy.

As we moved forward with developing this, one of the key issues that we've heard and, to be frank, the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View even alluded to this in some of her questions, was age verification. Age verification is a huge concern of mine, specifically because I know that my son is growing like a weed, and he, within a matter of a few years, could potentially look like he's 18.

11:10

Mr. Coolahan: No pun intended.

Mr. Sucha: Oh, I didn't even realize that. Thank you, Member for Calgary-Klein, for that comment.

With that being said, there are two elements in which that has to be verified because there are two potential markets. There's point of sale, and then there's point of delivery. We have already seen from the liquor market that we have here in Alberta that we are going to be able to manage the point of sale. I feel wholeheartedly that while there may be some hiccups from here and there because we've dealt with that with the AGLC, I feel very confident that the point of sale is going to be well managed and well regulated, especially with oversight from the AGLC because they really hold a hard line when it comes to sales to minors and suspending licences whenever instances run the risk of occurring. Even if individuals are over 18, if they don't have proper identification, failure to provide that or failure to ask for that has some swift penalties to the salesperson.

The main concern that we've been hearing is the point of delivery for the online mailing system. You know, I've heard from some key stakeholders – and to be frank, some of them are within the private sector – that there is a lot of concern in relation to drug trafficking through online distribution sales, that it is harder for us to manage quality control, and that sometimes things can be masked through that fashion. That's why we looked at safety as the top concern and keeping this out of the hands of kids when we move to a public model.

Now, with that being said, I don't have the crystal ball. Down the line we might not have the public model. Down the line we might be able to address these concerns, and they might be able to be managed. But at this moment, right now, from all the evidence that we have received and from all the feedback that we received from the public, the public model seemed the best way to go to ensure that it stayed out of the hands of kids.

You know, Jeff Mooji from the 420 Clinic said in our news conference that we had that the online sales were just as effective as the private bricks and mortar sales for the age verification. Further to that, he said: there are some concerns in that the public model is the only way we feel that we can ensure age verification at point of sale and point of delivery. It's also a way for us to have a centralized system, where if we're running into issues, we can manage it accordingly. That's why we've committed to going for a public model.

Now, I want to remind members of when we went to the private model for liquor stores in Alberta. That was in 1993, and that was the Liquor Control Amendment Act, 1993. When we opted to change from doing a public model to a private model of liquor sales, it went through the House. I think that in the spirit of this, this amendment, while well intentioned, recognizing that down the line we may have to change the way we're doing things: I respect that. To be frank, we will. You know, I can't predict what that will be, but down the line there will have to be amendments to whatever legislation we create. To be frank, we'll be doing it with liquor, as I alluded to, 20, 30 years from now as well. With that being said, this empowers it to be through regulations, not legislation, and I think that if we were to shift from the publicly formed online

distribution model, if we were going to move that to a private model, it would need to go through the House. So I can't support this amendment because I think that if we do go down that path, it should be debated in the House.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Elbow for this amendment, which I will be supporting. I just want to clarify a few things. This isn't about changing the centralized nature of the way that cannabis will go into the centralized piece and then be distributed from there. Just to be clear, this is actually specifically about who can sell and how it gets in there.

Again, the safety piece of it: as the member pointed out very well, with the safety of this and all of the complexities that go into having an online rollout of this, there's no doubt that this is going to be extremely complex and is going to take a lot of tweaking to get right; hence, the reason evergreening will happen; hence, the reason that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler also put forward a piece of an amendment to look at this within the next five years to make sure we're actually on the right track with this.

This actually isn't about that centralized piece. We're actually talking about different vendors that have nothing to do with the centralized oversight. This is about making sure that everybody who wants to be involved in this particular venture is actually able to come forward. I don't know enough about cannabis to understand quality control or all of those kinds of things. I imagine that within the regulations those will be fairly standard.

However, when we're talking about regulations versus legislation, again here comes a new concern, hence the need for the amendment. If this is happening within regulations without any outreach to the public who are actually consuming this product, who actually might want to be able to sell this product to that centralized group of people under the same auspices as any public choice that may be made by the government – to the member's credit, I think that that's a very, very important piece of this.

To your point, Member for Calgary-Shaw, I completely agree with you. Things are going to change rapidly in this. But I think that to kibosh the ability of the private sector to have a say and, at the very least, participate so that it's all coming into this centralized model – nobody is talking about changing it to a private model. It's about having that centralized piece for safety and all those other kinds of things but making sure that vendors also have the opportunity to participate, because if things do change – let's say that five years from now it ends up going private sector, you know, in some capacity or other. Well, those folks aren't going to have had the ability to understand what the regulations were in the first place in order to be able to participate, and then we're going through this whole mechanism again of quality control, of understanding the appropriateness of how it's going to be distributed, all of those pieces.

I think it's very important to understand that the Member for Calgary-Elbow is actually helping with legislation to make sure that it's all-encompassing so that as we tweak, as we move forward, we've actually covered bases that are imperative to the go-forward with this particular substance.

I will be supporting. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. Just briefly, one piece I wanted to mention which I didn't mention in my first round of comments. I will be brief. There is also a question about the markup

that the government would apply to their online system. I'm very curious if the government will charge their own retail markup for the online delivery, which potentially, obviously – it's a markup – would increase costs. Would the government online retailer be a retailer and therefore charging a retail markup, which, again, would increase costs to the consumer and perhaps not achieve the black market reduction? Or, vice versa, would they not charge a retail markup, therefore undercutting the private retailers? That's a very important question that I don't have an answer to and, I think, that those who would seek to invest in the private retail model deserve an answer to.

The other point I'd like to make about the online delivery piece is that medical cannabis is already delivered through Canada Post. There are many people in this province who use that service quite safely. There are age verification processes that do work, and that is done through a private model. So we already have that. It concerns me that the government would be reinventing the wheel as it relates to their own government online model.

Those two brief comments: I just wanted to get them on the record as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:19 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Drysdale	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Gill	Starke
Clark	Hunter	Stier
Cooper	Orr	Swann

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	McKittrick
Babcock	Gray	Miller
Carson	Hinkley	Payne
Connolly	Horne	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Jansen	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Sigurdson
Dach	Larivee	Sucha
Drever	Littlewood	Turner
Feehan	Luff	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Woollard

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 30
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the bill. I actually don't support the idea in principle even though the federal government has forced it upon the provinces. I think it's a social and economic experiment that is not likely to succeed as well as promoted. I'd like to speak to those two issues, the economic side of it, partly, and also the human cost of this.

Clearly, this is a tax grab by the Liberal government. They're taking 50 per cent of the revenue, have very few of the costs. It's

economic piracy. Ottawa wants more money, and the provinces, quite frankly, are the losers. I don't think that we as a province should be necessarily just submitting to that. While we do have to make regulations to govern it because we have no option, I do think that we should be speaking to the other Premiers. We should find out where they are at. I think we should be challenging Ottawa on the wisdom of this, on the benefits versus costs that this will cause to our society and to our culture.

This is supposed to be some kind of fantastic economic boon for governments. Really? I don't think it's going to be. Nobody has done a serious business plan on this thing yet. What actually are the revenue streams? Do we have any idea what the revenue streams are going to be? Have we looked at the competition? And I'll come back to that in a moment. Have we looked at what the costs are going to be? And I'll come back to that in a moment.

Let's talk about the competition for the moment, which is the black market, the illegal trade. You know, the black market does this for one good reason. It's a good business plan for them. Let's look at it from a business point of view. The black market doesn't have to pay taxes. They don't have to pay WCB. In most cases they don't have to pay for any capital expenditures on land or buildings. They don't have to buy business licences . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, Lacombe-Ponoka has the floor.

Mr. Orr: In many cases they don't pay for power. Beat that with a business model.

Anybody who tries to do this legally is going to have to pay all of these expenses, and you think you can compete financially on that level with them? I don't actually think you will. Now they'll actually have the opportunity to blend into the legal market. The police are in many cases not even going to bother to investigate, and we'll actually see an increase in black market activity.

I'd like to refer to an article that comes from Washington state, written by Austin Jenkins, published on November 21 of this year by Northwest News Network in Olympia, Washington. He points out that while cannabis

may be legal in Washington and Oregon . . . police [there] continue to bust illegal marijuana operations that are not licensed by the state.

They have a business model that will overpower the legal model.

The latest numbers from the Washington State Patrol show that [in the last year there were] 89 illegal marijuana growing operations . . . shut down.

There were over 24,000 marijuana plants seized, over 100 weapons seized, over 100 arrests made. This actually represents a significant – well, I should quote it correctly.

This represents a big jump from 2016 . . . arrests and things,

. . . except in one category . . .

where it doesn't increase, and that's

. . . the number of plants seized.

Why is that? Well, it's because

that [particular] number is down significantly this year. The State Patrol said that's because federal funding for marijuana eradication on public lands was cut.

They don't even bother to look for it anymore. It's not that there are fewer plants out there; it's just that they're not even spending the money to look for it. It's still there. Usually they identify it from airplane or helicopter. They quit spending money on it, so it went down.

In recent months, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has expressed concern about black market marijuana operations in states like Washington and Oregon.

There's a business model on the black market that will continue to prosper. In fact, it's increasing in Washington state, and anybody who tries to sell this or tell me that this is actually going to eliminate the black market is delusional. It's not going to happen. Look at Washington state. It is going to continue to increase. If you just look at it from a pure business plan, the black market has every advantage. They don't have to pay all of the costs that real businesses do, and they just continue to prosper from it. The black market and all of the effects of the criminal element have not decreased at all in Washington state. In fact, they have increased over the last year.

What about the business plan costs of this for the Alberta government, for the people of Alberta? We're now going to have administrative costs. We're going to have warehousing costs. We're going to have potentially difficult and increased enforcement costs, especially when you think about the traffic side of it and other aspects of it. There are going to be increased medical costs, psychiatric costs, increased costs for education and awareness of the public, and we're supposed to cover all of this with a supposed great revenue gain in taxation? I don't actually think that it's going to turn out that way.

I think that we should be very careful about just jumping on some kind of joyous bandwagon that says that all of a sudden this is the best thing that ever hit North America. How much has our government actually budgeted to pay for all of the associated costs to the province that go with this experiment in chilled-out delusion of intoxication? I don't think we know, and I think we're going to have some serious surprises. So, from a purely business point of view, I have serious questions about how well this is actually going to work out for Alberta.

11:30

But, then, I also have serious concerns about the human cost of how this is going to work out. The member just down to my right here spoke a few minutes ago about how Health Canada defines the effects of both alcohol and marijuana. I was actually going to take a slightly different angle on it. His was more detailed, but if you actually look up the dictionary definition of intoxication, there are two primary ones. First of all, it's an abnormal state that is essentially a poisoning. I'd like to know how developing a culture where we continually poison ourselves is going to make a better society, better families, better business environments, safer roads, and all the rest of it.

The second definition is that intoxication is the condition of having physical or mental control markedly diminished by alcohol or drugs. You know, you can't perform well when you are physically or mentally diminished. How are we going to make a society that prospers, a society that does well in sports, a society that's good for families, a society that does good in innovation and business and prosperity when we have both our physical and our mental control markedly diminished on a regular basis and we create a social licence that says that it's perfectly fine, that it's okay? I don't understand how that's going to benefit us as a society.

I do think the federal government is making a serious mistake for Canadian society. I recognize there are lots of people out there who want to support this – and they may; it's a free world; they can make that choice – but in the interests of others who look at it from a different point of view, I don't think that this is going to be a beneficial thing for Canada as we look at it over the next 100 years or so. I think we have yet to hear how our society will be diminished and the capacity of our people – our employees, our governments, our individuals – will do better when we have that diminished effect both mentally and physically.

Let's all just chill out. Let's all get high, sit on the sidewalk, and become unable to earn a living. [interjections] Don't mock me on that. I've worked in drug rehab centres. I've seen the fear. I've seen the delusional thoughts. I've seen the inability – I have it in my own family – to even go to work, where mothers and fathers can't even care for their own children. Why? Because their mental and physical capacities are so diminished that they're afraid to go outside of the house. There's an incredible isolating effect that happens with drug addiction, and people find themselves lonely, unemployed, dysfunctional, unable to survive. The human social cost of this is going to be astronomical, and nobody has taken a moment to think about it.

I'd like to draw a historical parallel. If you go back to another culture and another time – I'm going to refer to China and the opium trade that occurred in China – you know, when opium first began, it wasn't a whole lot different. There's actually a direct historical connection here. When opium first began in China in about the seventh century, it was brought forward and first discovered as a medical piece, and it was presented that way. I won't argue that there may be some medical benefits to very carefully understood and prescribed marijuana as well, but the problem is when it moves from a medical product into a social, entertainment kind of piece.

The direct historical connection is that towards the end of the opium era in China, most of the opium trade moved into Southeast Asia. In the 1960s and '70s 20 per cent of Vietnam-era soldiers that came back from Vietnam were addicted to opium. Many of them came back – and we were in the 1960s. I actually was part of it, the psychedelic age. Everybody was experimenting. A lot of that came with U.S. soldiers coming from Southeast Asia into the States, bringing with them their addictions, looking then for an opportunity to obtain something else, which became marijuana and, at the time, LSD. It's grown in our culture partially from that.

But here's the thing about the opium trade in China in the early days. It began as a medical thing. Then it started to become something that was a fashionable, refined pastime, especially among the young. We have today a fashionable, refined pastime amongst the young, which is smoking marijuana, and unfortunately now it leads to other things that are much more dangerous and much more destructive.

It got to the point where that 17th-century recreational turn to opium became a great economic opportunity for a bunch of people. We see many people today just lusting to profit off the drug trade. We see governments standing in line, supposedly, to get this great economic boon that probably won't happen. In 17th-century China the opium trade – by the way, when it first began, it was sort of like marijuana. It wasn't nearly as strong. It wasn't nearly as concentrated. It was just a flower. How can that hurt you? It was smoked like marijuana is smoked. But it became an addiction that was rampant across Chinese culture. It actually led to a number of serious wars over the trade and because of the trade. Governments became utterly dependent upon the taxes that fuelled the human crisis and the addictions. The Chinese culture was decimated by up to 10 million opium addicts. Ten million opium addicts.

It wasn't until the 1950s that China began to seriously eradicate the opium trade, the opium business, the opium tax revenue, and all of these wonderful things that are supposed to be generated from recreational use of drugs. They actually got so serious about it, their whole society was so broken down and debilitated by it, that it contributed to the Chinese Cultural Revolution under the Communists, with the execution of thousands of people. Dealers were executed. Fields were plowed under and planted with real food.

I, for one, am not really willing to go down this road. The human tragedy of what's going to happen with this has yet to be revealed.

Yes, opium smoking, like marijuana, was a fashionable, refined pastime, especially among the young. But I'll tell you something: it doesn't lead to the good life. It's an escape. When you sit in a drug rehab centre and you talk with the people and they're shaking and they're afraid and they can't hold a job and they can't go to work and they know they don't have the mental capacity or the physical capacity to even function in life and they can't look after their children, you tell me how that makes a good society.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to put forward an amendment relating to location of use and will speak to it when appropriate.

The Chair: This will be amendment A4.

It appears the amendment is in order, hon. member, so go ahead and speak to it.

11:40

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I know there are some similarities to a previous amendment that was suggested, but this has some different dimensions to its public use and the protection of child health.

I move that Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, be amended in section 7 in the proposed section 90.28(c) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (vi) and by adding the following after subclause (vi):

- (vi.1) a public park,
- (vi.2) an event that is open to the public, or

This follows both from some discussion earlier on concerns about making more consistent application on environmental tobacco smoke and the exposure of children and now cannabis smoking in public places where children would be expected to be present.

I have a letter from the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association that addresses specifically their concerns about children and access to parks and exposure to second-hand smoke, both tobacco and cannabis. I'm quoting from the letter.

The approach taken in Bill 26 is of concern for two reasons. Firstly there are a number of events that are not listed [in Bill 26], such as festivals, fairs, rodeos . . . and other public events where children could be exposed to second-hand cannabis smoke. The section also does not prohibit smoking cannabis in other public places such as trails and parks. Secondly, as demonstrated in the attached chart, there is an assorted range of restrictions that currently exist regarding smoking tobacco in a number of Alberta's municipalities. Such a patchwork approach through municipal restrictions may result in a gradual erosion of the protection of children as communities are compared and pitted against each other.

We encourage the Government of Alberta to consider alternatives such as:

- (1) Prohibit tobacco and cannabis smoking and vaping in all public places and events where children can reasonably be expected to be present; and
- (2) Allow municipalities to exempt by bylaw certain events where they are of the view that children will not [likely] be present.

That would be evening events, events where alcohol is being served, for example. They could individually exempt those where they don't believe there's a reasonable risk to children.

This approach will ensure consistency in the protection of children from . . . carcinogenic smoke across Alberta in all venues and events, and at the same time allow municipalities to

exempt certain events based on local circumstances. It would also be appropriate to require signage for events where... carcinogenic smoke has been permitted to allow other individuals... [including] pregnant women, to be informed in advance of the exemption. We find this approach to be consistent with the current medical evidence on the issue.

While I know you discussed earlier some of the exemptions, I think the particular concern here is: where children are expected to be present. The protection of, in this case, children and pregnant women from carcinogenic second-hand smoke, whether it's tobacco or cannabis, would be the goal of this particular amendment.

It's not a big issue. It should be relatively easy to ensure that people can consistently expect public places like parks and festivals would be free of tobacco smoke if children are likely going to be there. On the other hand, municipalities can exempt those activities where children are not likely. The onus would be on exempting rather than a blanket acceptance of second-hand smoke, whether it's tobacco or cannabis. That would also require, when the new tobacco amendments come in, that we ensure they're consistent and that children and the protection of children's health are kind of the overriding concern.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know that my views in relation to this amendment – I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for bringing this forward and his well intentions to this. He expressed many concerns in relation to second-hand smoking or vaping, from that area. I'd like to remind members of the House that right now some of the provisions that are currently in this bill that we have here include any place where a "person is prohibited from smoking under the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act or any other Act or the bylaws of a municipality," and then further it talks in relation to playgrounds, sports fields, skateboard and bicycle parks, zoos, outdoor theatres, outdoor pools, splash areas, and any other areas or places that are prescribed or otherwise described in the regulations. So it does allow us, down the line, as we continue to hear feedback from a lot of respondents, to further regulate this.

We've also spoken earlier about allowing our local decision-makers and our local municipalities to be empowered to make further regulations and restrictions should they deem fit, so I'm hesitant to support this amendment. I will be voting against it just so that we can continue to allow our local decision-makers to be making those calls.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, you know, I certainly take the comments of the Member for Calgary-Shaw with some interest because he references the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act, large sections of which remain unimplemented by this government. That bill has been on the books for four years, and yes – agreed – the first couple of years of that was when our party was in government, but they've had two and a half years to implement it, and they have done precious little.

In fact, it's rather interesting that that act actually does have a five-year review clause in it, and we're four years into the act. Pretty soon we're going to be reviewing an act that hasn't even been fully implemented. So if you're relying, as the Member for Calgary-Shaw indicated, on the provisions of the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act to provide the same protections for the use of cannabis in public places, maybe you should get around to

implementing it. Maybe you should get around to proclaiming those unproclaimed sections and to closing some of the loopholes.

You know, it seems to me that what this government has done is that in a certain amount of rush and pressure to implement cannabis legislation, they've kind of forgotten that tobacco smoke is far more dangerous, that tobacco smoke kills far more Albertans than cannabis smoke does. Now they're rushing to go ahead with cannabis, and the tobacco legislation is languishing. That's problematic. I mean, if they are in fact interested in preventive health care, if they are in fact interested in bending the cost curve on health care, then one of the easiest ways to do it, one of the easiest and lowest hanging fruits on the branch, is to do more to discourage young people from smoking and to discourage young people from smoking all products, not just cannabis but tobacco as well.

There are a number of loopholes left open in the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act, that, again, curiously comes up for review in a year and hasn't even been fully implemented, that remains unimplemented. So I can't take any consolation, I can't take any confidence from the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act, that somehow that's going to provide the necessary protections.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, with his considerable medical experience and experience in the field of public health, you know, certainly identified that there is a need to protect children from all forms of smoke, not just tobacco smoke but also from the smoking of cannabis.

One of the things that is interesting in Canada, curiously, is that of all the nations in the world cannabis users in Canada have a higher percentage of people using cannabis by smoking it than in just about any other nation in the world. There is no real explanation for that. Somebody said that it's to keep your hands warm when you're lighting your cigarette or your joint. But, quite frankly, whatever the reason is, the statistics show that Canadians who use cannabis predominantly consume cannabis by smoking. So not only do we have the potential health effects of the actual active ingredients; we also have the health effects of inhaling a combustible product into our lungs.

11:50

Now, we've had discussions before. I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has worked very hard in terms of reducing those negative effects and that he has worked, unfortunately, with patients who have suffered from the negative effects of tobacco usage throughout his career. I've had a little bit of experience with that myself in my career. Sadly, I've had to treat some of my patients that have lived their lives in homes where tobacco was used widely, and curiously, with the short lifespan of most of my patients, I did have to deal with instances where my patients suffered as a result of second-hand smoke. I also dealt with some patients who inadvertently consumed their owner's cannabis supply. It's an interesting, shall we say, client-patient-veterinarian confidentiality situation when you have to deal with that.

Nonetheless, I can tell you that there's nothing positive that comes out of being in an environment where tobacco is being smoked or where cannabis is being smoked. This province rightly took some steps to protect workers, to protect youth, and to protect people who didn't want to be exposed to second-hand smoke. I can remember, in fact, in youth parliament in the '70s arguing on behalf of legislation to restrict smoking in public places to reduce the second-hand smoke deleterious effects.

My hon. friend the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has put forward a very reasonable amendment that addresses some of these issues. You know, I find it curious that a government that

purports itself to be interested in the health of Albertans, that purports itself to be interested in the health of workers, in the health of youth would not at least consider supporting this very reasonable amendment to this bill.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I won't be long. I would just like to be on the record speaking in favour of the amendment from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. As I stressed earlier today, it's our duty to ensure that public spaces are safe and free from cannabis exposure, especially in regard to children, and I think that whatever we can do here in this legislation is important. What I heard from my hon. government colleague that spoke to this was that there's actually no disagreement with an amendment like this. This, in fact, will be something that is put into regulation. This in no way, shape, or form takes away local autonomy and decision-making from the local municipalities.

I think it's a good step forward in the right direction, and I will encourage my colleagues in this Legislature to vote for this amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A4? Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just briefly, similar to my hon. friend from Airdrie, I want to be on the record as supporting this amendment. I think it's important that we do everything we can to keep any harmful effect of cannabis second-hand smoke away from children.

I just will take this opportunity to comment that it is fascinating that the approach this government has taken to public consumption of cannabis is intended to align broadly with the consumption of tobacco and not with the consumption of alcohol. I find that quite interesting. Where the second-hand effects of both tobacco and cannabis smoke can be felt by others around us, notwithstanding some of the more negative social consequences of the behaviour of those who may be consuming alcohol in public, the simple act of having a single drink somewhere outside of the four walls of an establishment, in and of itself, does not have a detrimental effect on

others around them. Again, I just note it's an interesting approach that the government has taken here to cannabis.

But, you know, specifically to this amendment, I think it does seek to protect any potential harmful effects on children and others in terms of second-hand smoke. I echo my colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster's comments on the tobacco reduction act, if I have that correct, and would encourage this government to look very carefully at implementing the outstanding provisions of that act as well to reduce the harmful effects of tobacco on our society and potentially cannabis as well going forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill, Bill 26. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to confirm, hon. member, that you said: report progress.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. There is another sentence I would like to add. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 26.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the committee concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing the progress of the House, I would just move to adjourn until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 29, 2017

Day 58

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 29, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of bright young students from Belmont elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are joined today by two of their teachers, Selynn Buchan and Marissa Chankasingh. As well, they have four chaperones with them today: Lynn Allison, Breanne Dagnone, Nikki Ringma, and Melissa Squarek. I'm thrilled that they are joining us here today. I apologize to them. I wasn't able to make it down in the rotunda for a photo with the school, but I do look forward to coming and visiting them some time throughout the year. Now I'd ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today 52 students from Hilwie Hamdon school. They're here with Mrs. Amy Badger, Mr. Perry Allan, Lena Berjawi, and Cindy Frewin. This is a very special occasion because this is the first school group from Hilwie Hamdon in the history of the school because, of course, it just opened this fall, so I'm super proud. It's in Edmonton-Calder, and they deserve the very best. Let's give them a warm welcome, everyone, please.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you a group representing the Canadian Finals Rodeo and Northlands. Here today are Tyler Riopel of the Canadian Finals Rodeo committee; Geoff Oberg and Tony Payne from the Northlands board of directors; Northlands vice-presidents Kevin Gunderman and Shiva Dean; and last but definitely not least, Tim Reid, president and CEO of Northlands. I sit on the Northlands board of directors as a provincial appointee, and I am proud to introduce this group to you today. I would ask that my guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Iggy Domagalski, CEO of Tundra Process Solutions, an Alberta-based supplier of innovative process technologies that employs 150 Albertans. Tundra provides the mechanical, electrical, measurement, and automation solutions that help make the energy world safer, cleaner, and more productive and is recognized as one of Canada's 50 best managed companies.

Tundra also recently opened a new 15,000-square-foot facility in Grande Prairie.

Iggy is passionate about innovation, leadership, and his community. Last year he launched the acceleration centre for entrepreneurs, which helps green tech entrepreneurs to get their products rapidly to market. He also launched Tundra University, which helps young leaders advance their careers, and he sits on the board of the Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta as fundraising chair. Iggy has recently been featured on CBC, in the *Calgary Herald*, *Oilweek*, *Alberta Oil*, is one of Calgary's top 40 under 40, and was featured on CTV's *The Entrepreneurs*, which is filming its second season. Tundra will once again be featured nationally, showcasing Alberta's innovative and entrepreneurial spirit. I would ask Mr. Domagalski to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this year's 4-H Premier's award recipient. This young woman from Bashaw, Alberta, has been a member of the Central Lacombe 4-H Beef Club for a decade. She has held executive positions in her club and in her district and has attended numerous forums and trainings. This young leader is currently a first-year student at the University of Alberta, where she's enrolled in a preveterinary program. I would like to ask Alyssa Henderson, her parents, Arleen and Greg Henderson, and her grandparents Donna and Stan Johnson to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Debbie McKenzie, who is one of the coleaders of the Genome Alberta research project focused on chronic wasting disease among Alberta's deer, elk, moose, and caribou population, which we'll be hearing more about in my member's statement today. I would ask that Dr. McKenzie please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my incredible honour to rise and introduce to you and through you some members of the Jewish community. Today we have leaders from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and Calgary Jewish Federation, the Alberta Jewish federations. I'm proud to introduce to you Adam Silver, Judy Shapiro, Jeff Smith, Jared Shore, Debby Shocter, Ellery Lew, Matt Godwin, and Ariella Kimmel. I want to thank my guests for their work in fighting anti-Semitism and discrimination in our province. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Bonnie Gostola, Val Whelen, Barbara Brolly, and Somboon Eggen. They are here today representing the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees' Pay and Social Equity Committee. The committee has been working hard on the issues of wage inequality, gender income

gaps, and the underlying systems in place that put women at a disadvantage. I will speak more to this in my member's statement later today. I ask now that my guests rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other introductions of guests? Seeing and hearing none.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to highlight a major failure of this NDP government, specifically the so-called social licence the carbon tax was supposed to buy us. Since the NDP rolled out the tax in 2015, a tax which they did not campaign on during that year's general election, the justification used by the members opposite has been that it will get us the social licence we need to get pipelines built. This, they argued, is the trade-off we have to make to gain acceptance for our oil and gas industry from environmental zealots and eco-warriors that have vowed to shut Alberta oil down.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's no disputing that Alberta is one of the most responsible energy-producing jurisdictions in the entire world, and this has been true for decades. Moreover, Canada's human rights record speaks for itself, especially when compared with the likes of Saudi Arabia or Nigeria, who are more than happy to take our market share. There's no question we are doing more than our part and have been for a very, very long time.

But enter the NDP, who called Alberta and our industry the embarrassing cousins of Confederation for our supposedly poor environmental record. That's when they sold Albertans the false bill of goods that is the carbon tax. Yet more than two years after that announcement and almost one year since the carbon tax was implemented, not one shovel is in the ground on a pipeline to tidewater, and the very same eco-warriors that the NDP said it would bring onside with this carbon tax are fighting tooth and nail to block the one pipeline that has been approved. The carbon tax has not deterred them one bit, nor has it softened B.C. NDP Premier John Horgan or the mayor of Burnaby, who both also vow to use every tool at their disposal to block this project.

I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I don't see any more social licence today than we did before the NDP was elected. That's because social licence is a myth, a fairy tale perpetuated by the NDP for the sole purpose of justifying the imposition of a new tax on Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

1:40

Chronic Wasting Disease

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On to something factual.

Right now Alberta researchers are on the land collecting data and samples while consulting with First Nations people. They are part of an ongoing research project to deal with chronic wasting disease, or CWD. CWD is a fatal disease affecting deer, elk, moose, and caribou.

Since it was first discovered in 1967 in Colorado, it has spread into 24 U.S. states, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. B.C., Manitoba, and Yukon are also at risk. This disease could spread through 2 million animals in Canada that are susceptible to CWD. A sustained outbreak would affect those that rely on animals for food or for

traditional practices such as First Nations people, and it would threaten biodiversity and ecosystems and have an impact on Alberta's reputation as a wildlife destination.

The 11 and a half million dollar project was made possible with cofunding from the Alberta Prion Research Institute, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, the University of Alberta, and the University of Calgary. The work is being led by University of Alberta researcher Dr. Debbie McKenzie and Genome Alberta. The research team is developing tools that can be used to identify strains of CWD and predict the spread of the disease. The project has been ongoing for a year, and while there is still no direct evidence that CWD can transmit to humans, early results reveal that further research is needed to investigate the potential for CWD transmission across species. The team will also assemble kits for use by First Nations, hunters, and managers to help identify disease and prevent its spread.

Genome Alberta funded projects such as this one make a point of involving end-users of the research and those most likely to be affected by the project results. This model ensures that funding dollars have the best chance of having real-world impact.

This is just one more example of how collaboration and science are making life better for all Albertans. Thank you.

High River Flood Disaster Recovery Program Claim

Mr. W. Anderson: June 23 was a devastating time for the town of High River, yet today there still lingers the remains of several who have yet to have fair compensation for their loss. Orvella Small is a pillar of the community, someone who works with disabled people, volunteers countless hours, and organizes fundraising and community events so those affected by the 2013 flood may recover in a graceful way. She is a wonderful lady who is a victim of this government's bureaucracy. She has had personal financial loss and has yet to receive fair and adequate compensation from disaster recovery program administration.

Orvella owned and operated a small business in High River. When it was wiped out by the flood, a DRP application was filed and rejected. When she appealed, it was denied because they took the total household income, but her business was incorporated, so that should never have happened.

Recently DRP changed their policy regarding how small businesses are compensated. The DRP stated that the changes would be retroactive, but for Orvella this was too little too late, and she was told that she was never going to be allowed to file another appeal. Another reason for denial was that they stated that she did not invest any of her own money. Ridiculous. Orvella tried to show them her bank statements, but they clearly didn't listen.

Small-business owners in the town were given poor advice, saying that if they wanted DRP to assist them, they would need to invest in starting up their businesses all over again. Well, Orvella maxed out her credit cards and line of credit to start up her business again. At this rate she will not be able to retire any time soon. She continues to work at other jobs to pay her debt.

Orvella believes that her individual circumstances were not even considered. She received this message, and I quote. In regard to your small-business file it has proceeded through the complete appeals process after independent review by both the managing director of AEMA and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The minister has final decision-making authority on our legislation. I regret to inform you that there are no more avenues to appeal. Your file is closed.

The DRP bureaucrats need to just simply follow their own policies and guidelines and do what's fair for Orvella. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Northlands

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk to you with pride about an institution that has served Edmonton, northern and central Alberta for close to 140 years. On October 15, 1879, 275 people gathered in Fort Edmonton to exhibit their best livestock, grain, vegetables, and crafts. They were a collection of farmers, ranchers, and agriculturalists eager to volunteer their time for the greater good, to serve the community in a way that would benefit everyone. This is what we now know as Northlands.

As a provincial appointee to the Northlands board I've had the privilege of being part of this fantastic group, who carry on the legacy of community service every day.

The Canadian Finals Rodeo and Farmfair International are hosted by Northlands every November, and both events are very important to Edmonton. The 2017 Canadian Finals Rodeo boasted an attendance of 90,268 people over five days and six performances and showcased over 108 professional rodeo athletes, all competing for a whopping \$1.5 million in prize money. In 1989 they established the Edmonton Rodeo Cowboy's Benevolent Foundation, and in 2003 they established the Bill Kehler memorial scholarships. Together these initiatives have helped more than 300 members of the rodeo community deal with financial hardship or continue their postsecondary studies.

Farmfair International is one of the premier agricultural events in Canada, with over 101,000 people in attendance as well as 140 international buyers from 14 different countries.

Combined, these two events bring in an estimated \$50 million in economic impact to the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta every year.

I want to congratulate the CFR committee, the executive of Northlands, and the Northlands board for 44 years of the Canadian Finals Rodeo and their continued hosting of Farmfair International. This organization has a profound impact in making lives better for Albertans, and we should all thank them for their hard work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Castle Downs. Excuse me. Wood Buffalo. [interjections] A pretty big constituency.

Mr. Yao: Those lines changed more than I thought.

Opioid Use Prevention and Treatment

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, we have a strategy and we need to execute a plan to deal with this opioid crisis. There have been enough studies done on this, not only here in Canada but around the world. We need to do something that encompasses all supports available and enables people to engage, intervene, and help. It starts at home. We need to empower families by helping them identify the issue, then help and guide them in dealing with it through counselling and other supports.

Police, our courts, and social workers have very unique, practical views on these victims of addiction. They need to be part of the conversation. They can provide guidance on the critical times between detox and rehabilitation, as an example, when so many overdoses do occur. Law enforcement in other jurisdictions has supported drug courts for more immediate remediation of abusers, with sentences consisting of stays in rehabilitation facilities. It helps clear up our court system and allows for more immediate interventions with our drug-stricken population.

Rehabilitation isn't just about beds. It's about an environment that supports these victims with art, job training, and home economics. It's also about taking cultural attributes into consideration when designing these facilities and programs.

Education is at the forefront, and from elementary school right up to universities and colleges we need access to accurate information on opioids. Education also includes the health professionals. It's not just the family doctors. It's the sports practitioners and physicians, the orthopaedic surgeons, the nurse practitioners, and the physician assistants. It's the dentists and the pharmacists. They all need to step up, provide reasonable advice and guidance as well as education, especially for the patients.

This education must also recognize that over the last few decades doctors have been misinformed by the pharma companies, who claim that their product is the best for pain management with none of the addictive qualities. Re-education for all providers should be mandatory, and this education must be continued as pharma continues to develop the next best thing.

Ultimately, we need to hold these victims of addiction accountable and support them accordingly every step of the way. We need a multifaceted attack on this very real crisis, so I hope this ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Women's Income Equality

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later this afternoon I will be tabling documents that contain over 9,000 signatures from across the province as part of a campaign by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees' Pay and Social Equity Committee. The public urgently needs to be aware of this issue. Alberta has been leading the nation in wage inequality, with a gender income gap of 41 per cent compared to the national average of 33 per cent.

Over the years income equality for women has become worse. In 2000, when the previous government replaced graduated personal income taxes with a single rate, this shifted disproportionate amounts of the province's annual tax share to women and lower income Albertans in order to fund tax breaks for corporations and high-income individuals. Our NDP government reversed this regressive system and since then has taken a number of important steps to continue addressing inequality in our province.

By creating the country's first gender-balanced cabinet and establishing Alberta's first-ever Status of Women ministry, we are putting women's equality at the forefront of our work.

By increasing access to affordable child care, we are supporting women in gaining a better foothold in the job market to be able to meet the needs of their families. Resources from Alberta's Status of Women and Economic Development and Trade are supporting women entrepreneurs to advance their careers and improve their economic security.

We know that the majority of part-time and minimum wage jobs are held by women and that increasing the minimum wage has a direct, positive impact on our lives and on their lives. Through continued investment in postsecondary education and the establishment of the Alberta child benefit, our government is helping Alberta families to succeed, but we also know that the problem of gender inequality is rooted in cultural expectations and that it's going to take much more work to end women's inequality and the wage gaps that exist.

I want to thank the AUPE's Pay and Social Equity Committee members for all the important work that they are doing to bring this issue to light.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Carbon Levy Questions to the Premier

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I raised the case of Norm, who confronted the Premier on how the NDP's carbon tax is costing his business \$40,000 per year. Sadly, the Premier was dismissive of Norm. In fact, she went as far as to say that he was mistaken and that the carbon tax did not apply to his business. Only an NDP politician would tell a businessman that they knew more about his business than he did. The question is very simple. Will the Premier and the NDP acknowledge that their job-killing carbon tax is having a negative impact on all sorts of different businesses and nonprofits, from simple shops to homeless shelters to kids' swimming pools? Acknowledge it.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite probably does know, Alberta continues to be the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country, by a country mile in fact, and the differential is between around \$7 billion and \$8 billion a year on a per capita basis. Now, our climate leadership plan was part of a very clear decision to help support the energy industry as we move towards creating a more sustainable and more environmentally responsible product for a world that is looking for just that kind of product. We work together with the energy industry. We believe very strongly that it's going to result in growth, and so do members of the energy industry, and we're proud of it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I asked the Premier, through you, a very simple question. The Premier went down a whole different road, which she does quite often here in this House, and Albertans, quite frankly, are tired of it.

The question is this. She dismissed a businessman's, a job creator's concerns on the radio with her yesterday. She dismissed him. She told him he was mistaken. She refused to acknowledge the impact that her job-killing carbon tax, the NDP's job-killing carbon tax, was having on him. Will she take the time, recontact Norm – I'm sure it'll be easy to do – and find out what is going on and finally acknowledge what she is doing to everyday Albertans, what is happening because of the consequences of her carbon tax, stop denying it, and stand up and tell the truth?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I will say that the member opposite again is making things up in terms of his characterization with respect to the interview in question.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, in terms of business leaders and their view of our climate leadership plan, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers had this to say:

Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan provides direction that will allow the oil and natural gas industry to grow, further enhance its environmental performance through technological innovation,

and is expected to improve market access to allow Canadian oil to reach more markets.

That's what some business leaders actually think about the program, and we think they're right.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again the Premier will not answer the question. She will not acknowledge what her job-killing carbon tax is doing to everyday Albertans. She doesn't want to talk about it. I don't blame her. I wouldn't want to talk about it if it was my tax either, but it's not. It is her number one policy, something she's brought through that she says she's proud of, but when asked about the consequences to the people of Alberta as a result of this ideological tax, she won't answer the question. She completely dodges it and goes in a completely different direction. The fact is that this is a tax on everything. It's hurting nonprofits. It's hurting homeless shelters. It's hurting swimming pools. It's hurting you at the grocery store. It's hurting you at the gas pump. It's killing jobs, and she needs to stand up and acknowledge it.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, the carbon levy came into effect January 1, 2017. Since June 2016, actually, the alleged job-killing carbon tax has been around while we've created 70,000 new full-time jobs for the people of Alberta. So the evidence doesn't seem to support the assertions. That's hardly anything new. It never really does with these folks.

The Speaker: The second main question.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Nixon: Again the Premier does not want to talk about her job-killing carbon tax. She told us that she was going to get social licence and that this was going to help us. She told us that this was what's going to create pipelines and that all of this was going to happen. But we know what's going on in B.C. We see politicians and people lining up to be able to fight against the Trans Mountain pipeline, that this Premier touts as being built – it's not built – touts as going to be built. Here's the question, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier stand up and tell us of one politician on the other side there, in B.C., that has had their mind changed as a result of Alberta's carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly, the politician that ultimately had to approve the pipeline did so because of our climate leadership plan, and that's the politician that matters.

I'll tell you that I'm not going to take advice from the UCP on this pipeline. Their new leader spent 10 years in Ottawa and did nothing, and now his plan is to yell, much like the guys over there, and to make trade threats to British Columbia. Every day Mr. Kenney sounds more and more like Donald Trump. That's not how you get pipelines built. You get them built by having adult conversations. I'm pleased to report that earlier today the federal government announced that it is supporting Trans Mountain . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: I can tell you what Albertans are sick of, Mr. Speaker. They're sick of the NDP and their Premier calling people names in answers to questions.

This is what the NDP told us would happen: they told us that we would get social licence and that things would change. Here we

have a carbon tax that's impacting my constituents and your constituents. This is the plan: we're going to get social licence. But the Premier can't stand up and show us anybody who has changed their mind in B.C., where they need to change their mind for this pipeline to happen, as a result of that carbon tax. Here's another question. Can the Premier name one environmentalist that has changed their mind on Trans Mountain as a result of her job-killing carbon tax? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I had a chance to quite finish my answer to the last question, so I will do that now. I'm very pleased to report to all members of the House that earlier today the federal government announced that it is supporting Trans Mountain and the government of Alberta in the appeal at the NEB around the decisions being taken by the city of Burnaby. That is the kind of thing that happens when you have adult conversations with your colleagues across the country. Mr. Kenney's brand of economic isolationism will not work. It will cost jobs, it will cost our reputation, and it will get us the same kind of results that they already got . . .

The Speaker: Third question.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again the Premier avoids the question. The question was about B.C. She has no answer to it because nobody has changed their mind in B.C. This is the problem. This is the serious problem that we have. Will the Premier acknowledge that problem, acknowledge that her carbon tax has not made any changes, as a result, to the west of us, that we are still in a serious situation where many people, including her friends, former advisers of hers, former people that she put on government panels that are extreme environmental activists, are trying to block these pipelines, and will she acknowledge that her carbon tax has not actually got us any social licence and is not building any pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to be able to talk about what I am going to be doing tomorrow, which is going to B.C. and making the case for our strong energy industry and making the case that working people must be included in all efforts to combat climate change, something that is absolutely fundamental to this government, that we need to do both. We need to combat climate change, we need to join with the rest of the country and not turn our backs on them and pretend that they don't have real concerns, and we need to stand up for working people, and the pipeline is part of that plan. That is the case I will make on behalf of the people of Alberta. I'm working for something, not against it.

Rural Crime

Mr. Nixon: On Monday the United Conservatives requested an emergency debate on the rural crime crisis. It's just been a few days, but we've heard more stories justifying that emergency debate, that was blocked by the NDP. The mayor of Alix sat in this very Chamber on Monday defending his community. When he returned home, he learned of another shocking case. A gas station owner, a Korean immigrant, was robbed again. The front of his store was rammed with a truck, a worker was assaulted, and thousands of dollars were stolen. Sadly, this is the new normal where I live in rural Alberta. This is an emergency. This must be debated. Will the

Premier finally stand up for rural Albertans and stand up against this crime crisis?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, any time any Albertan is a victim of crime, we are concerned. We know that it creates stress and anxiety for the communities, and we know that people want to feel safe. That is why our government has remained committed to maintaining funding for our police services, why we have increased funding for our court services so that we can be more effective in terms of getting these things through the courts and ensuring that people are held accountable for the crimes that they commit. We will continue to work on these things. We will not grandstand, nor will we cut hundreds of millions of dollars from the justice system.

Mr. Nixon: What this NDP has done is to say, "It's not urgent" to the people that are being victimized.

This hard-working business owner has been victimized multiple times. He actually had an employee sleeping in his business at night because of the threat of repeated robbery. Nobody should have to live like this. Criminals, sadly, know that rural Alberta is ripe for the picking. The problem is just getting worse, and this government won't even have a debate on this matter. They won't even acknowledge the urgency. In fact, they continue to deny the urgency. They won't stand up and acknowledge what's happening to the people that they represent. They won't stand up for people that are being robbed and abused. Instead, they say that it's not urgent, and they deny them the ability to get justice here. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

An Hon. Member: He's got to ask a question.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, there wasn't really a question in that. But what I will definitely say is that we know that Albertans do deserve to feel safe in their communities and in their own homes. That's why, as I've said before, we are committed to ensuring stable funding. In fact, in many respects we've increased funding to support action to combat crime across the province. One of the things most recently that the RCMP has put together is the integrated crime fighting unit, which actually looks at specific communities where there's a spike in crime and then looks at the ways in which they can work with other communities to look at the big crime motivators. Anyway, they're doing . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I guess at some point there's almost no point asking the Premier the question. She's just sitting here laughing at rural Albertans and not answering the question.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: That's what she was just doing there, Mr. Speaker, actually laughing. Let's be clear. This is not a partisan issue.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Mr. Nixon: I know my rural colleagues in the government are getting the exact same phone calls that I am getting. I know that their constituents are being abused the same as mine, and I know

that they are just as disappointed that their Premier and their leadership have fought against an emergency debate in this House and have fought against being able to stand up for rural Albertans that are being abused. Again I will call on the Premier to do the right thing, listen to the people in this House that know that their constituents are being abused, stand up, give us a debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've lost count of the number of things within that last tirade that were made up, but there were many. That being said, however, we will continue to do the work that we have been doing. We will continue to support our police, and we will continue to ensure that our courts can move as fast as they can to make sure that when criminals are apprehended, we can prosecute them appropriately. This is what Albertans expect from us. What I will say is that you cannot cut 20 per cent from the provincial budget and not see those kinds of programs jeopardized. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: And the members opposite . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier. [interjections]
Order.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was almost exactly one year ago today that I asked the Premier what the government was doing to get off the resource revenue roller coaster. Here's what she had to say: "We are getting off the roller coaster, we are not tying our spending to the price of oil, and we are carefully bringing our spending into line." But here we are today with a budget that relies more on resource revenues than it did when this government took office. To the Premier I will ask the same question that I asked last year. Do you have any plan to get off the resource revenue roller coaster, or will you simply cross your fingers and hope that the price of oil goes up? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member. [interjections] Hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I think it's important to note that our credit rating remains the second highest in the country. [interjections] It also comes on the heels of the biggest recession seen since the 1930s. Alberta, notwithstanding that, is recovering, and things are starting to look up, even though we know there's more to do. Sales are up, wages are up, and we are forecasting growth of 4 per cent. [interjections] This is good news. The members . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I can't hear the information being shared. Would you keep the tone down, please?
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite clearly want to drag us down. They also hate facts, but here's a big one. Since last June our economy has created 70,000 full-time . . .

Mr. Clark: Lots of things are up except our credit rating, Mr. Speaker. It's going down, and the numbers don't lie.

When this government took office Alberta needed 19 per cent of its revenues to come from resource royalties to balance. Today that

number is 27 per cent. Economist Trevor Tombe said, "We have to be honest that policy choices led us here and that we are still very much along for the ride." DBRS agrees. They're concerned that a return to balance relies on recovery and resource revenues rather than a fundamental adjustment of the budget. Again to the Premier: what is your plan? How many teachers, nurses, and front-line employees will we not have because of the money now needed to pay the interest on the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly, our plan is focused on ensuring that we protect our teachers and our nurses and our front-line workers. That's exactly the choice that our government made when we got elected and discovered the mess that had been left, so we are carefully working on that plan. You know, a couple of these credit agencies: what they actually want us to do is to raise taxes by \$3 billion to \$4 billion or cut spending by \$3 billion or \$4 billion. Neither of those things are going to help us get out of the recession. Those are not the things that are going to create jobs and stimulate economic growth; what we're doing is.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, unlike the NDP or the UCP, the Alberta Party has an actual plan. Our plan curbs government spending without hurting front-line services, reduces reliance on nonrenewable resource revenue, and not only balances but actually gets to a place where we get to pay back debt. Now, that is quite a concept, I know, but as part of our analysis in our shadow budget we modelled the NDP budget plan, and guess what? It never, ever balances. To the Minister of Finance. You claim that you'll balance the budget by 2023. Will you prove it by showing your work, including a detailed year-by-year plan to balance? [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please. Quiet.
The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are engaged right now in the beginning of Budget 2018 preparations. There will be a web line. All Albertans can have an opportunity to tell us where more savings can be found at budget.alberta.ca. There are also going to be telephone town halls. There are also going to be opportunities for Albertans around the province to hear me, and I'll hear them. Budget 2018 is under way, and we have a path to balance. We'll be releasing it then.

Affordable Housing

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, Sherwood Park is a growing community. This population growth often means that certain groups of people have trouble finding safe, affordable, and accessible housing in their neighbourhoods, especially Albertans on a low income and seniors. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what are you doing to support residents of Sherwood Park who need access to affordable housing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I'm proud to say that in June we launch the provincial affordable housing strategy, and this strategy is making life better for Albertans by improving how affordable housing is delivered and addressing the needs of current

and future tenants in our province. The strategy includes our government's historic commitment of \$1.2 billion over five years for housing capital needs. This summer I committed \$32.4 million to replace the Clover Bar Lodge in Sherwood Park, increasing capacity for seniors to age in their community by 65 units. This project will be complete by the spring of 2019.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear of the provincial affordable housing strategy, that was launched this summer. A comprehensive and sustainable housing strategy was long overdue for this province. However, many stakeholders in my riding are still wondering what the next steps will be. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: can the minister give us an update on what concrete actions have been put in place since the launch of the strategy?

2:10

Ms Sigurdson: We're making life better for Albertans by investing in safe and affordable housing. We're building over 4,100 homes for Albertans who are low-income through our capital investment in affordable housing. We have also invested \$88 million in much-needed repairs to fix furnaces, windows, and roofs. New projects like the Sakaw lodge in Edmonton, Bow River lodge in Canmore, Gilchrist Gardens phase 2 in Calgary are under way. Our government believes that everyone should have access to safe and affordable housing, and we continue to protect the services families count on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her work. The economy is, however, still recovering, and many families and organizations in my riding are still struggling. What are some of the challenges and opportunities facing communities as they work towards establishing responsive and affordable housing systems?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've travelled across the province, and I've heard directly from Albertans regarding community needs. Many communities are struggling with significant outstanding repairs inherited from the previous government. As the economy recovers, I'm focused on Albertans' priorities, strengthening the public services families rely on. That's why we increased operating funding to housing providers last year to ensure they continue to help Albertans. Our \$1.2 billion investment in affordable housing supports an effective and sustainable housing system that makes life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Addiction and Mental Health Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With each passing quarterly opioid report it becomes painfully obvious that this government does not have a handle on the opioid crisis. A 9 per cent increase in fentanyl overdose deaths from last quarter and a 40 per cent increase over last year are a disaster. Despite these troubling facts our mental health and addictions system still lacks specialized leadership, early intervention in mental health and addictions. It lacks integration, navigation, and essential communication across the sectors. To the minister: when will Albertans see an integrated, comprehensive strategy to deal with this emergency?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The number of Albertans that we've lost to the opioid crisis is high, and it should remind us how serious this crisis is. It requires a government that is taking action. The Minister's Opioid Emergency Response Commission has brought forward 12 recommendations so far, and our government has accepted and moved forward on them all.

Dr. Swann: Albertans are dying at a rate of almost two a day. Clearly, the approach is not working. We need mental health and addictions specialist leadership. We need a more integrated and comprehensive action plan on mental health and addictions, and we need it now. We are four years into this ongoing crisis. How long will you allow this rising toll until you change your strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we've been working very diligently on is ensuring that there is access to treatment for Albertans when they need that. To that end, we have expanded access across the province so that Albertans, when they reach out for help, have a place to go. We've opened thousands of treatment spaces at communities across the province, ranging from Grande Prairie to Strathcona county, and expanded telehealth access so that there's that support there for Albertans no matter where they live.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Services third-quarter report suggests otherwise, especially in relation to mental health issues as they go along with addictions. Addressing the rapid increase in mental health concerns in youth and children, especially anxiety, depression, and traumatic experience, is crucial to getting ahead of this opioid crisis. It takes over two weeks for adults to get access to addiction services in the major service centres and over a month for children, especially in Edmonton and north. What are you doing to increase access for childhood mental health and prevent ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working with our partners in Education to expand supports for students at school. We've also done some great work with the Ministry of Advanced Education in terms of expanding supports for mental health services on campuses. I'm also really pleased that we were able to expand the Rutherford mental health clinic, which serves particularly children and youth in the southern Edmonton area as well as the surrounding communities. There is more work to do, and our government is going to continue to work to support Albertans living with substance use.

Support for Unemployed and Underemployed Albertans

Mr. Fildebrandt: Let me tell you a story about a young man I know in Strathmore. He came from a place in Nova Scotia where he worked for half the year and collected EI for the other half. He didn't want to be dependent on government or anybody else, so like so many other young men and women, he packed up and moved to Alberta. Here he could earn his bread and raise a family, but in 2015 he lost his job. What is this government doing to ensure that people like this young man are still able to enjoy the Alberta dream?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question, a very good question. We recognize that the last couple of years have been very challenging for Albertans all across this province with the sharp decline in the price of oil. This has impacted every community, every business owner, and every family across the country. What I can tell you is that we had a choice, and our government chose to not only protect public services but invest in infrastructure and introduce a number of initiatives under our Alberta jobs plan. I can tell you today that that plan is working, with over 70,000 new full-time jobs in the past year. I'll tell you more in the next . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, this man from Strathmore is back to work, but he's struggling to make ends meet for his young family as he is earning just a fraction of what he used to make before he was laid off. As we learned in the fiscal update, his story is not unique. Some Albertans are back to work, but for far too many these jobs just don't pay as much as they used to. Some Albertans have recovered, but for much of the working and middle class this has been an asymmetrical recovery. What is this government doing to ensure that this is a recovery for everyone?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have been working very hard to connect unemployed Albertans and Albertans looking to retrain with training opportunities. We have increased funding to programs that allow Albertans to learn new skills as well as made sure that we understand the labour market so that we can provide the best advice to an Albertan trying to understand what's happening within the labour market and where their best place may be.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that there is no greater social ill than unemployment – if we have two men with the same income but one of them works and the other does not, which one will be more likely to succumb to depression, substance abuse, and domestic violence? There is value and dignity in all work. There are no dead-end jobs, just an end to hope, and too many Albertans have run out of hope. What is this government doing to give every Albertan the hope that they can still live and work with dignity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Staff at Labour and Community and Social Services work with employers and laid-off employees to make sure that they have career counselling, resumé preparation, job search assistance, and information on retraining opportunities. These resources are out there for Albertans. I encourage all Albertans to contact their Alberta Works centre, to contact the resources that the government of Alberta makes available so that we can get them reconnected within the job market and get them back to work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Credit Rating

Mr. Barnes: What a difference a day makes. Yesterday, when announcing the province's second-quarter fiscal update, the Finance minister couldn't stop gushing about how great a job the NDP were doing. Twenty-four hours later credit-monitoring agency DBRS downgraded, saying, quote: up until now they've been signalling that their intention is to return to balance, but we have not seen credible action or we have not seen a real meaningful plan

to do so. End quote. When will the minister put away the smoke and mirrors and start making decisions that are in the best interest of Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, this side is dedicated every day to make life better for Albertans, make life more affordable for Albertans, and we'll continue to do that. Talk about a credit-rating agency. We heard from credit-rating agencies before, and they said that we would have to cut billions out of our budget or raise taxes for billions. That's what Saskatchewan did under the misguided direction of Brad Wall, the opposition members' buddy there. They cut postsecondary funding. They imposed a 6 per cent tax on construction. That's right: a sales tax they imposed. That's not leadership. We're not going to do that.

2:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Given that yesterday the minister gleefully announced that the NDP had reduced deficit spending by \$300 million and are on pace to not spend \$400 million by year-end and given that our debt is projected to be \$71 billion by 2019 and at \$400 million a year it would take this government 177 years to eliminate Alberta's debt – with a plan that bad it's no wonder the government has been down, down, downgraded six times. To the minister: are you aware that you will be 237 years old before Alberta's kids are out of debt?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, we could all be so lucky.

I can tell you that our plan is working. Jobs are up in this province. We've created more than 70,000 new full-time jobs since last summer. Mr. Speaker, we're going to be sharing more about our path to balance with Albertans in the near future for sure. But this work takes time. We must be careful and compassionate about the spending that we do, and we're turning that down.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that every time the Finance minister makes an announcement or holds a press conference, it results in a costly credit downgrade for Albertans, to the minister: will you stop wasting taxpayers' money with wasteful ideological decisions like public ownership of linen services? Stop scaring away billions in investments with misguided attempts to manage the decline of our economy and make some tough decisions so Albertans are out of debt before the year 2194.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I am so proud of the work of all of these front-bench individuals. I am so proud that our plan shows 4 per cent growth this year. I am so proud that we're leading the nation this year and next year in GDP growth. That side would stunt GDP growth. That side would throw us back into a recession. That side has no plan at all. They have no budget plan.

Oil and Gas Transportation to the West Coast

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we lost a historic opportunity last night to name Calgary-Greenway after Manmeet Singh Bhullar. Now the NDP government has another historic opportunity to make up for two pipelines, Energy East and Northern Gateway, by supporting the Eagle Spirit Energy corridor in partnership with all the First Nations who are backing this \$16 billion project. To the Minister of Energy: are you prepared to have a debate under Standing Order 30 on this new pipeline? Yes or no?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you, to respond to the hon. member's question, that there are ongoing conversations as far as other opportunities to get our product to tidewater. We recognize that this is absolutely critical, and that's why the Minister of Energy along with the Premier have been championing pipelines to tidewater. We know it's the safest way to move our products. We know we need to get it to tidewater. We're going to continue to make that our number one priority, and we will engage with all communities and look at all different possible routes.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that federal Parliament now has Bill C-48, the tanker ban bill, at the committee stage and the government of Alberta did not show up in person to defend Alberta's interest and given that all the First Nations backing the Eagle Spirit pipeline oppose the tanker ban, to the Minister of Energy again: instead of paying lip service to the indigenous people, will you stand up and defend Alberta's interest and support this all First Nations backed Eagle Spirit pipeline?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, our government will never back down from fighting for Alberta jobs and Alberta's energy sector. We've been clear with Ottawa that economic development can coexist with environmental protection. One does not need to sacrifice the other. In fact, I believe it was the Minister of Energy that wrote to Minister Garneau to express our specific concerns with the federal tanker ban bill earlier this month.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that our government is working collaboratively with other provinces and the federal government . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Keep it down.

Mr. Bilous: . . . unlike the opposition over there, that would jump up and down and scream and get no results.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that within 24 hours after returning from Europe I submitted a letter to the parliamentary committee arguing on the Canadian free trade agreement on constitutional grounds against the tanker ban and given that the Premier is the minister responsible for intergovernmental relations, can the Premier explain to this House what her back channels to the PMO are saying about the tanker ban and the social licence, and when will this discriminatory tanker ban bill be stopped?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what, I'm not about to take advice from those guys over there. Their leader was in Ottawa 16 years, and you know how many pipelines to tidewater he got built? Zero.

What we are doing is – not only did we put forward a robust climate leadership plan to show that our energy sector is the most environmental and takes all precautions necessary to protect our environment, we're showing that energy and environment go hand in hand, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we will continue to work with the federal government to deliver results, unlike the opposition, which will continue to deliver hot air.

The Speaker: Thank you.

North American Free Trade Agreement

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, I recently asked the minister of economic development a question on NAFTA, and his written follow-up is most sincerely appreciated. In that response he stated that his officials "ensure the federal government is fully aware of Alberta's position" and that they are "actively promoting our interests in the negotiations" and policy positions despite introducing Bill 30, which we are hearing may not be NAFTA compliant. To the minister of economic development: what is Alberta's official position on NAFTA, how is that exactly being articulated to the federal government, and will you share your position with Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. We've been engaged with the federal government from the beginning. In fact, if I can just briefly walk us through time. Back when the NAFTA negotiations started and actually six months prior, the Premier brought together four different industry round-tables: with energy, with agriculture, with forestry, with manufacturing. From those round-tables we've been engaging with industry and ensuring that they're engaging on the other side of the border. We've also been working very, very collaboratively with the federal government to ensure that they know Alberta's position.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given the minister has publicly stated that the collapse of NAFTA is a very real possibility and given that we have a federal government which seems more intent on bolstering the Trudeau celebrity brand than actually negotiating a trade deal, at the expense of Alberta's interests, which he is not renowned for defending, again to the minister: how are you holding the federal government to account for recklessly jeopardizing NAFTA negotiations by leading with virtue signalling, image politics, which the American administration is highly likely to reject?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I would caution the member for making accusations on that which he does not know. To say that the federal government is not standing up for Canada is false. The federal government working with the provinces is ensuring things like chapter 16 and the dispute resolution chapter are not removed from NAFTA. I can tell you that the federal government has been very engaged with us. Our number one position is to do no harm and to increase trade and improve trade. I find it interesting that the other side keeps nattering, while our side is actually trying to govern.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about standing up for Albertans, not federal politics.

Given that the minister has indicated that Alberta is preparing for the very real possibility that the NAFTA negotiations could collapse and given that this would have extremely widespread negative ramifications across Alberta's boundaries and given that having a fully functional backup plan is now an absolute necessity, again to the minister. Worst-case scenario: NAFTA falls apart. What is your backup plan, and how will your government support affected Alberta businesses in the event of such a collapse?

2:30

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to sit down with the member to explain what happens should NAFTA go off the rails, but I'll tell

you this much. Our government is continuing to work to ensure that the federal government is aware of Alberta's position and our interest in continuing this trade. Whether or not the members opposite know this, the U.S. is our largest trading partner and is absolutely significant. Although we are looking at increasing trade in other parts of the world, we are continuing to work with the Trump administration as well as the Mexican administration to ensure that this trade deal continues to move forward. We want to see borders reduced. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Rural Crime (continued)

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, on Monday it was good to see the UCP join me in calling for greater action on rural crime. One might say that I lead, they follow. Now, this issue, though, is more important than politics. The Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General website states that the primary goal of its first core business is that Alberta's communities are safe. On this goal the ministry has had an epic failure. Since my constituents don't feel safe, what will it take for the minister to get engaged and actually deliver on this core promise?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the important question. Our government believes that all Albertans deserve to live safely and in strong communities. That is why we have worked with our law enforcement partners. We have started a new integrated crime reduction unit, which is focusing on the crimes in rural Alberta. We are also providing supports to law enforcement by providing them with \$500 million every year to make sure that they can keep our communities safe.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister has fallen into the same trap as all of his other colleagues, equating spending with results. Given that the time-honoured NDP recipe to just add money and stir isn't working and given that Albertans in both rural and urban areas are not seeing decreases in crime from the money that is being spent, to the minister. I am not advocating cuts to policing, but Albertans want to see results. When is this government going to show results?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are absolutely committed to making sure that Albertans are safe in their communities. That is why we are supporting our law enforcement. We are supporting police, we have increased funding for ALERT, we are working with the provincial rural crime watch, and we are working with community partners to make sure that we have communities which are safe. People can be assured that government is taking steps to make sure that safety of the individual is ensured.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the challenge of increased criminal activity is not confined to Alberta and given that the province of Saskatchewan recently announced a redeployment of over 250 police officers from other areas of enforcement specifically to battle rural crime and given that if this government would set aside its animosity against our neighbours to the east and actually do something to combat crime – here's my question for the day. Whoever is in charge of that file today, will someone over there

pick up the phone, call the Saskatchewan Justice minister, or has the Premier's office told you not to? [interjection]

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Hold on. Just wait.

Calm it down, folks.

Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are proud of our law enforcement. We have full confidence in their capacity to deal with that. As a government we are providing them with the needed supports so they can handle that issue. The Alberta law enforcement response team is a key part of our integrated province-wide response to serious crimes. ALERT, which was previously funded by the federal government, was cut by that side under Jason Kenney's watch . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Affordable Child Care

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Families in this province have experienced the challenge of finding quality, affordable child care. Jason Kenney's Conservatives are out of touch with that reality. They've called it a waste of money. They said that our \$25-a-day child care pilot is putting dollars at risk. Could the Minister of Children's Services please provide the House with evidence that suggests that spending tax dollars on child care is a good investment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that moms and dads across Alberta know that making child care affordable is not a waste, and experts agree. The Conference Board of Canada recently released a report showing that every dollar invested in early childhood leads to \$6 of economic benefits in later years. Investing in our children now leads to better development outcomes and reduces income inequality. That's why we're going to continue working to make child care more affordable, because an investment in a bright future for our kids is an investment in a bright future for Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has invested \$10 million into these early learning and child care centres and given that the other side of the House has said that that investment is ideological, what are Albertans saying about access to affordable, high-quality child care in their communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jason Kenney's Conservatives may want top-down quality child care, but that's not what everyday Albertans are saying. Moms and dads across this province tell me that affordable child care has been life changing for their families. One mom told me that she cried when she found out that her child care fees were reduced by more than half. Alberta families want to see more affordable child care in their communities, and our government is working to make that a reality.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake said that \$25-a-day child care in his constituency shows that the government is looking out for northeastern Alberta, when can the opposition expect to hear more good news about the government's commitment to making lives better for families in their constituencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was truly a pleasure to attend the grand opening of a \$25-a-day child care centre in Bonnyville with the member opposite, and I'm excited to visit more affordable child care centres as we work towards universal \$25-a-day child care in Alberta. We're working with the federal government on a bilateral agreement on child care, and I'm excited to share details about that work with Albertans in the coming weeks. I hope that Jason Kenney's Conservatives will share our excitement for making child care more affordable for Alberta families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Rural Crime (continued)

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Monday over a hundred Albertans from rural Alberta drove to attend session to have their concerns heard about the rise in rural crime. We heard many stories about the escalating violence, theft, and even murder in rural Alberta. To the minister: what is it going to take for you to open up debate in this House so that we can all work together to come up with solutions to address this problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government believes that Albertans deserve to live in safe and strong communities. What Albertans want is action from this government, not debate. That is why we are providing half a billion dollars to law enforcement to make sure that our communities are safe. That is why the RCMP have started a new integrated crime reduction unit to make sure that we can provide safety to our communities, and that is why we have increased funding for ALERT.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hanson: Given, Mr. Speaker, that Crown prosecutors in rural Alberta are known to have upwards of 2,400 cases each while the same prosecutor in Edmonton may have 600 cases and given that any of these numbers are unmanageable for any location but the Finance minister has seen fit to implement a hiring freeze for these folks, to the minister again. Crown prosecutors are begging for relief. What do you think is a reasonable caseload, and how are you going to achieve that number?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Crown prosecutors we are proud of our record. We have increased Crown prosecutors so that their workload is reasonable and they can do their job. We have also created new positions for judges so that the judiciary can do their job. Last week the Justice minister joined ALERT to announce Alberta's largest drug bust in Project Offshore. ALERT laid more than 120 charges against 11 suspects. They seized two vehicles, one mansion, and more than 15,000 fentanyl pills.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the state of the justice system has Crown prosecutors burning out, insufficient judges to hear cases, Legal Aid out of money, not enough police on the beat, and a rural crime epidemic fuelled in part by opioid addictions and fuelled by the NDP's bad economy and given that the Jordan decision is going to ensure that justice will be denied to people who have been robbed or held at gunpoint in front of their own children, Minister, how bad does the NDP's soft-on-crime approach have to get before the government takes action, cracks down, and gets the criminals behind bars, where they belong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a priority for our government to ensure that our justice system functions in the most efficient way possible and protects the rights and interests of Albertans. That is why we have added new positions to the justice system. We do know that because of the Supreme Court decision, the Jordan decision, it's a marked change in the justice system, and some delays are expected. That is the reason we are increasing Crown prosecutors, we are increasing judges' positions, and we are making resources available to make sure that the interests and rights of Albertans are protected.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have a petition here in relation to a question I asked yesterday in regard to the southwest Calgary ring road. I have a petition here from 526 residents of the Springbank Hill community. They certainly have concerns that there will be an adverse physical and psychological impact on the quality of life of the residents in that neighbourhood, including unbearable levels of noise, vehicle emissions, and light pollution. As well, the proximity of the on- and off-ramps creates a risk of vehicles careening into residents' backyards, which, of course, is a safety issue. I'm proud to submit this on behalf of the people of Calgary-West and the Springbank Hill Community Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta and the Minister of Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act.

Mr. Speaker, over the summer months thousands of Albertans told us that they want to be protected when shopping or signing contracts, and businesses told us that they want to compete on a level playing field. Albertans deserve a government that protects their interests. That's why we're improving consumer protection laws. Stronger rules boost consumer confidence, and that's good for the bottom line. Bill 31 represents our government's commitment

to protecting Albertans' pocketbooks and making life more affordable. We are also helping businesses succeed and grow our economy. I look forward to debating Bill 31 in the House.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of a document that I mentioned earlier in my member's statement prepared by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees' Pay and Social Equity Committee. This document represents the names of over 9,000 Albertans concerned about pay equity in our province. As a government and as a province we must work towards justice and equity for all Albertans. We must work together to address the wage gap.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of a graph by economist Dr. Trevor Tombe entitled *Alberta Still Firmly on the Royalty Rollercoaster*, which displays the resource revenues required to balance the budget as a percentage of total government revenue. That number is going up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is Alberta Health Services' performance report on wait times for addictions and mental health by zone. That was for quarter 1, 2017/18.

The second is from the Alberta Liberal Party, a brochure on political action committees, *What is a PAC & Why Should I Care?*

Thank you.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung, do you have a tabling?

Mr. Dach: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document I referenced earlier in question period today. I have the five requisite copies of the *Bonnyville Nouvelle* from which I quoted the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake when he said that \$25-a-day child care in his constituency showed that "the government is looking out for northeastern Alberta."

The Speaker: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter that I received from Allan in my riding, from the town of Innisfail, stating that "in the last 90 days there have been 7 locations [around] my farm which have suffered break and enters," one of them on three separate occasions. Those were home invasions and break and enters.

Another one here from Glinys in my riding. She says that "we are very fortunate to have a caring and active group of neighbours" that have thwarted break-ins in their home.

Another one here from Ruth, the director of the Raven Crime Watch, stating: "With all the crime in rural areas why would [people] want to stay?"

And, finally, when this individual called in regarding this particular incident at their place, the people on the other end of the phone at the police station told them to go "get a dog." [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of annual reports for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and the Alberta Sport Connection.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I believe we have a point of order. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(i) specifically. A member will be called to order if he or she "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member."

Sometime around 2 o'clock this afternoon during question period the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition accused the Premier of, quote, laughing at rural Alberta. Now, Mr. Speaker, I was sitting next to the Premier, and I was paying close attention. She did not in any way laugh or show amusement about the plight of people in rural Alberta with respect to the subject of the question, which was crime in rural Alberta.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, when another member stands in the House and makes a statement about another member that is not true and that has the effect when it's heard by the public and perhaps other members in the House of then damaging the reputation of the person about whom the false statements are made, it's a very serious matter. I think in future should that happen, it may give rise to a point of privilege, but in this case I'm prepared to raise this under 23(f).

It may be that the hon. member opposite does not like the answer that the Premier has given. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if that was the case. He may even believe that the approach that the government is taking is insufficient and represents some sense of lacking in terms of what needs to be done. But the Premier did not laugh at rural Alberta. She takes this matter extremely seriously, as do all of us on this side, as does everyone in the House.

Mr. Nixon: Now I'll laugh at you.

Mr. Mason: Now, there the hon. member is laughing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure all members of the House that while we may disagree on how to proceed, the government has taken this seriously and does take it seriously and wants to ensure that we do everything possible to assist with this problem. However, to suggest that the Premier is laughing in this House when those questions are put to her is completely false, it is most unfair to the hon. Premier, and does a disservice to all members of this House.

So I would ask, then, that you find that the member's statement is out of order and that it be withdrawn. We should not have this kind of thing going on in the House, where people are standing up and saying that a member did something that they did not do, especially if that statement is believed outside this House, which then damages the other member's reputation. That is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to clarify. Did I hear correctly? I thought I heard two subsections of 23 that you cited. You mentioned (f), I believe.

Mr. Mason: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. It's subsection (i), "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." I think I got it right the first time and not the second time.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, this is quite clearly a matter of debate. I would suggest that the Government House Leader should be very careful considering that most of the comments that come from that side of the House are usually saying things that are putting words into our mouths or indicating that this side of the House is doing something that they are not. But that's what they continue to do, and that's fine. It is a matter of debate. You've ruled that way many times.

The fact is this, Mr. Speaker. I was asking a question on behalf of Albertans – just the other day hundreds of them were here – about something that is very, very serious, very serious for the communities that I represent and the people on this side of the House and some of the people on the other side of the House represent, that is causing devastation in those areas. I asked that question, and during the time that I asked that question, the Premier was laughing. That's a fact.

Now, I will respect that the Government House Leader may interpret her laughter in a different way than I did, but then, again, that would be a matter of debate. He was laughing himself at the time, Mr. Speaker, so maybe he didn't understand what she was laughing at. The reality is that when I asked that question, he was laughing. It was certainly our interpretation of that that he was laughing at our constituents and the people who we were asking the question about and without a doubt is a matter of debate. I respect that he disagrees with the way that we interpreted that, but from this side of the House they were laughing at Albertans. They were laughing at people that are suffering from the crime epidemic that we are asking questions about.

I think that's disappointing. You know, I think the Government House Leader even standing on this point of order to try to defend that behaviour is quite ridiculous.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll choose to think about this one. I can only tell you at a general level that I shift it back to all of you about the degree to which you reflect on each other in this House and how those statements are interpreted. For that matter, I will defer . . .

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, can I say one more thing? Not an argument on the matter or anything, just a comment before you move on.

The Speaker: I think we're past that point.

Mr. Nixon: Well, I think I'll just save you some time.

The Speaker: You'll save me some time?

Mr. Nixon: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I think that this House has much more valuable work to do, and if the opposite side is extremely sensitive to us pointing out when they laugh and that that hurt the Premier, I will happily withdraw that comment so that we can move on with our day on behalf of Albertans.

Mr. Mason: Another point of order under the same section. The hon. member continues to . . .

Mr. Nixon: You can't do a point of order on a point of order.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nixon: Well, then, point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm listening to another point of order here, hon. member. You'll get a chance.

You have another point of order, is that correct?

Point of Order

Imputing Motives

Mr. Mason: The Opposition House Leader continues to sneer at the rules of this House, Mr. Speaker, to disrespect this House, to stand up and engage in all kinds of disruptive and disrespectful behaviour with respect to important matters that are before the House. I did not laugh nor did the Premier today during his questions. That is absolutely false.

The Speaker: Do you have – are you speaking to a . . .

Mr. Nixon: Well, I'm responding to the Government House Leader's point of order. I will note that he didn't cite anything. I'm not really sure. I sense that you're probably confused, Mr. Speaker, about what the government's point of order is. But now who is declaring motives to somebody in the House? It's ridiculous that the Government House Leader is doing this. What is happening here is that the government is upset because they've been called . . .

The Speaker: I think I will retain my right to review the matter. This exchange is illustrative in my mind of requiring effort from everyone.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 29

An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased and proud to rise today to move third reading of Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving.

This bill was proposed based on consultation with Albertans as well as with our traffic safety and law enforcement partners concerned about what the legalization of cannabis will mean for impaired driving in our province. This bill honours our commitment to maintaining safe roads and to deterring impaired driving through a robust program of provincial administrative sanctions.

By amending and updating the Traffic Safety Act now, we can ensure that Alberta stands ready to reflect the changes being proposed by the federal government to the Criminal Code of Canada. Bill 29 establishes the laws and procedures that our law enforcement organizations need to deter and to sanction any form of impaired driving as we prepare for cannabis legalization in Canada. This will help keep all road users safe as we move into this uncharted territory as a nation in 2018, not much more than seven months from now, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the members of this House for their support for Bill 29. This bill ensures that we have the provincial sanctions in place to mirror the new federal impaired driving laws when they come into force. The bill responds to the Alberta Court of Appeal decision by providing a 90-day licence suspension rather than an

indefinite licence suspension until the disposition of the court proceedings. What this bill means for Albertans is that our law enforcement organizations have the tools to get impaired drivers off the road immediately and consequences serious enough to deter anyone from getting behind the wheel when impaired by any substance. This legislation is vital to continued public safety in Alberta.

3:00

I want to thank you for the opportunity to take this very important step towards our goal to see zero impairment-related collisions and fatalities on Alberta roads, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask the members of this House to put their support behind this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to support Bill 29, An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving. It is unfortunate that this legislation had to come forward so quickly and with so many unknowns about how our police services will actually enforce its provisions at roadside, but we recognize that it is not the fault of our provincial government. Our government has to be prepared for the legalization of marijuana on July 1, 2018, which is now only seven months away.

The Ministry of Transportation through Bill 29 has aligned Alberta's provincial administrative sanctions with the proposed Criminal Code amendments which are currently before Parliament. I support those alignments along with the way Alberta also dealt with the court ruling requiring it to alter its administrative sanctions for impaired driving.

I also want to take a moment to thank the Minister of Transportation for the time he has committed to be present in this Chamber during all the Bill 29 debate. He did a good job answering questions from this side of the Chamber.

Having said that, when I review the short time we have had to consider this bill, the greatest concerns that the UCP caucus has voiced during this debate have not been addressed. These are crucial concerns based on legalization occurring before our police services can be ready for it. We have heard police leaders in Alberta and across the nation express that point time and time again, yet here we are on the cusp of this new recreational drug becoming legalized and our police officers do not yet know how they'll identify drug-impaired drivers at roadside.

We keep hearing that a roadside device is going to be ready for July 1, but even if it is approved in time, it will only identify whether a driver has THC in their system. The roadside device that has been tested will not identify a driver's level of impairment in the way a breathalyzer indicates whether a driver is over .05 or not. So that leaves our officers to perform sobriety tests at roadside, and that requires them to undergo special training. Not all officers have that training, so they will have to call for a colleague who does to respond to the scene.

If it occurs and the driver is brought to the detachment for more investigation, a drug recognition expert would have to perform specialized tests on them. We haven't quite figured out, even with the discussions that occurred in this Chamber, who will be doing the blood testing and subsequent forensic work. But let's return to the drug recognition expert for a moment. These officers are even more specialized than those who can perform the field sobriety test, and right now they have to travel to the U.S. for that training. Does this all sound costly and time consuming? Clearly, it is.

While we are supporting this bill today, it is the implementation of it and in particular the implementation by July 1 that poses the

greatest hurdles, and that creates hazards for all Albertans on our roads. This government has precious little time to train officers and ensure forensic testing facilities are in place in seven months. I strongly believe that Albertans deserve answers to this government's level of preparation for our police services.

I would also have liked to have heard more concern from our government. One 2013 study, which the government itself quoted, found that more than half of all fatally injured drivers had drugs in their system, and 25 per cent of those had consumed cannabis. As you can see, we've not been alarmist. These are the facts, and after a number of days debating this bill here, we do not know how our provincial government will ensure our police services can protect us on the roads postlegalization in the way they would want to.

The Minister of Transportation has talked about a public awareness campaign to address myths about marijuana use and driving and mixing marijuana with alcohol. That is within his purview, and he has promised that the government will do a fulsome job of communicating these dangers. I have no doubt that he'll ensure that his ministry does its best to do so, but I do ask him to make it a priority.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I support third reading of Bill 29, but I urge the government to address the gaps in training and the number of personnel and facilities that will be needed to properly address this new recreational drug. Many Albertans fear that it will make our roads that much more hazardous, and we have lots of evidence to prove that their fears could become a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to third reading of Bill 29? Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to thank the Transportation minister. I'd like to thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for speaking just now. I, too, of course, will be supporting the bill.

You know, I spoke yesterday. I spoke very passionately, of course, in regard to some of the challenges that police services will be facing, especially when it comes to blood tests, and I talked about that.

One thing that I didn't touch on was what the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti brought up, which is the drug recognition experts. To his point, this is not a service that is actually provided here in Alberta or even Canada at this time in regard to training of these specific officers. This is very specialized training within a specialized unit within police services, which is the traffic unit, whereby somebody has to travel to Arizona in order to get this training. It is very challenging. It is extensive, it is a really, really difficult course – you must get 100 per cent in order to pass this course – and it is very, very costly. So to pretend that all officers are going to be trained as drug recognition experts is completely, absolutely false. That will not be happening.

My concern is not just the challenges of having a drug recognition expert available within a larger municipality. I can tell you as a former alcohol tester within the province of Alberta that there were times when the concern was that we were not always readily available. There were times when we did not have a tester that was available, and there will be times that a drug recognition expert will not be available. But if we go back into rural Alberta and we talk about the challenges that they are currently facing at this time, they will be facing challenges in rural Alberta when an officer pulls somebody over who has been stopped for impaired driving due to marijuana. There may not be a drug recognition expert available. At that point all we have are the signs or indicia.

You know, at this time is that enough to lay a charge under the Criminal Code? Yes, for impaired driving. But I can tell you that it's typically not enough. I mean, there's a reason why when we charge somebody with impaired driving for alcohol, we charge under 253(1)(a) and (b) of the Criminal Code. It's because we're laying two charges. We're laying one charge for impaired driving, and we're laying another charge for being over .08. Then that gives the Crown the opportunity to deal with the defence attorneys when it comes to impaired driving. It becomes very, very challenging if all we have are signs of indicia or the smell of marijuana in order to lay a specific charge of impaired driving when it pertains to marijuana.

Now, that being said, I am truly disappointed. I was very sincere in regard to the zero tolerance amendment that was made yesterday. The decision that was made by this Legislature: I certainly respect that, but I do believe it was a mistake. I believe that zero tolerance was something that we should have put in from a nonpartisan perspective for the safety of the individuals on the roads of Alberta.

3:10

The police are not ready. There are many police services that I have spoken to, many high-ranking members of police services that I have spoken to. They are not ready. They're not prepared right now to deal with this cultural shift.

I believe that there are going to be people at risk. I do believe that the Transportation minister as well as this government did the best that they could given the situation that they were put under by the federal government. However, I believe that we could have made this better. I mean, I know we don't have Committee of the Whole, but I certainly hope that the government, maybe through regulations, you know, takes zero tolerance in this bill very seriously, again from a nonpartisan perspective, in order to save lives of the people of Alberta.

In conclusion, I just want to say that, of course, I do support Bill 29. I support making these roads safer. I do believe that there are good things that are in this bill. However, I do believe that it could've been better.

I'd like to thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak, and I'd like to thank everybody for participating. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any hon. members under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will concur with the comments from my colleagues from Grande Prairie-Wapiti as well as Calgary-West and thank the hon. Minister of Transportation for his approach to this bill and for hearing out the arguments and the case made by members on this side. With Bill 29, of course, we find ourselves here, whether we like it or not, both through the Alberta Court of Appeal ruling but also through the legalization of cannabis by the federal government.

I do stand also in support of Bill 29 here at third reading because it attempts to address some of the very serious challenges that our society faces with impaired driving of all kinds. It, of course, as we know, is a major contributor to fatal road crashes in Canada. Unfortunately, even before legalization, drug-impaired driving is an increasing safety problem. In 2010, the most recent statistics we were able to find, there were nearly as many road fatalities as a result of using drugs, about 34 per cent, as there had been as a result of alcohol, 39 per cent. Those numbers are striking and a very significant problem in our community.

I want to recognize the work of MADD and many other groups who advocate so strongly against impaired driving of all kinds. Unfortunately, they continue to have their work cut out for them,

and I do worry that that will only get worse as legalization of cannabis is upon us.

Young people, of course, are the largest group of drivers who will test positive for alcohol or drugs, and they'll also be involved in accidents and crashes and fatalities.

The technology isn't the same when dealing with cannabis or other drugs as it is for alcohol in terms of roadside screening. The hope is that there will be a device that is able to be used at the roadside come July 1. Frankly, I suspect that we will be in a situation where that isn't the case, certainly nothing quite exactly equivalent to a breathalyzer, which creates challenges in terms of resourcing for police: the types of resources they need, the types of expertise to draw blood either at the roadside or at a precinct or perhaps in hospital. Those are not only scarce resources and officers that need to be trained up to do so, but of course there's a tremendous cost in doing so as well. Those police forces will require substantial resources. Municipalities around the province will require substantial resources. The RCMP will require substantial resources to roll that out.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, as seems to be the case in our world, the only winners in all of this are likely to be the lawyers. When we talk about the percentage, that 2 to 5 nanograms per millilitre of THC is our threshold, I strongly suspect this is the sort of thing that will be litigated here over the course of many years up to the Supreme Court in terms of figuring out exactly what impairment means. When we're dealing with cannabis and blood testing, that is detectable, as I understand it, for potentially weeks or even months down the road from having actually been consumed.

So determining exactly what impairment means: we've made an attempt to do so in accordance with the federal laws. Unfortunately, we are in a position where we're doing the best we can. While I have some sympathy for the position that zero tolerance would be the desired goal here – and that certainly is what the Alberta Motor Transport Association was pushing for as well – I do understand that that in itself may introduce some legal challenges and that in not adopting a zero tolerance approach, there is more likelihood of this legislation withstanding a legal challenge.

In conclusion, then, I will say that we do support this bill. Again, while there are some challenges with it, it is the best attempt I think that the government could make to address the challenge both with cannabis as well as with alcohol impairment, so we in the Alberta Party caucus stand in support of Bill 29.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Elbow under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to third reading of Bill 29?

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to move third reading of Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017.

In 2015 we said that we would strengthen Alberta's Conflicts of Interest Act and expand it to the senior staff of our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. With Bill 27 we are fulfilling this commitment, ensuring public agencies are more accountable, protecting Albertans' tax dollars, and being governed transparently.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's public agencies play a pivotal role in regulating, managing, and delivering important programs and services to Albertans on behalf of the government as well as providing oversight and advice on Alberta's issues. Public agencies are a significant part of Alberta's public sector and account for about half of government's total yearly budget. Quite rightly, then, Albertans have the same high expectations of their public agencies that they have of government: that public agencies are relevant, effective, transparent, well governed, and accountable to government and to them.

While some public agencies have conflict-of-interest requirements in place through their codes of conduct or their employment contracts, there is not a consistent and comprehensive set of rules being applied to public agencies. If passed, Bill 27 would create that consistency for the province's agencies, boards, and commissions as well as the confidence of Albertans to ensure positions are not being used to further private interests.

Our public agencies provide valuable services that make life better for Albertans, such as higher education, protecting vulnerable people, and delivering health services. They need to be held to a high ethical standard and governed with integrity. It's vitally important that our public agencies are held to the same high standards that we expect of our elected officials and senior public servants.

Bill 27 is part of numerous key changes that have already taken place for provincial agencies, boards, and commissions, including the ongoing review of all ABCs, executive compensation reform, enhanced compensation transparency, an improved online board application process, and greater transparency and diversity on Alberta's public agency boards.

I ask all members to now support Bill 27 in third reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017, at third reading. I am pleased to see this government take initiative on improving transparency and accountability in government. As we know, this legislation will bring Alberta in line with Ontario, Manitoba, and the federal government, who have seen the benefits of similar legislation in improving their track records on accountability. I feel strongly that giving representatives of the boards in our province clear rules and guidelines is crucial to ensuring their compliance with those rules.

In the past different agencies and boards have had different rules and regulations, which has led to confusion and a lack of transparency about hard-earned tax dollars. The legislation will hold board and agency members to the same standards as elected officials and senior public service officials. There should never be a question of impartiality or personal gain when it comes to Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars. Albertans need to be assured that the decisions being made by their elected officials in any capacity, whether that be by MLAs, CEOs, or board members, are in their best interests and not personal vested interests.

As an elected official I have to comply with the guidelines and disclosures through the Ethics Commissioner that ensure that any decision I make is above board and that I have nothing to gain personally or financially from any dealings that I may partake in or legislation that I pass or gifts that I receive.

It would be nice if we lived in a world where personal interests were not easily corrupted, but unfortunately, as we all know, that is not always the case. In the last few years we have seen several

examples of bad behaviour and dishonesty on our public boards and agencies that have led to entire boards being dismissed and that have seriously eroded the public's faith in these organizations and their ability to best represent Albertans. It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the actions of a few have tainted the great works that so many of our agencies do on behalf of Albertans. My hope is that this legislation will help to rebuild that trust that Albertans have lost in our system.

While I support this legislation and commend the government for their work on this undertaking, I also want to ensure that the government has considered all the possible ramifications of this bill, both positive and negative, given the far-reaching and potentially unforeseen consequences of this bill. This legislation would give an enormous amount of power and influence to the office of the Ethics Commissioner. While I have absolute faith in the integrity and judgment of that office, I think that it is also important to ensure that there are always checks and balances in our democracy. This will also download an enormous amount of work, on top of new responsibilities, to this office.

Mr. Speaker, there are also concerns regarding the impacts this legislation may have on CEOs' and board members' abilities to obtain employment in their field of expertise following the expiration of their terms. I hope that talented, bright candidates continue to seek out these positions. We need, Albertans need qualified and honest people to serve in these critical roles, and I know we don't want to be driving away prime candidates that bring valid experience to the table with some of these restrictions.

I understand the reasoning behind the policy to not have board members actively involved in the industries that could create a conflict of interest in their governance. For example, within my portfolio of Treasury Board and Finance are a number of boards that will be affected, including the public service pension plan, which is responsible for ensuring that the plan is properly funded, recommending changes to the plan's rules, and setting general policy guidelines on investment and management of the fund's assets, amongst other duties. The Public Service Pension Board has six members, three nominated by the government of Alberta, representing employers, and three representatives nominated by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, representing employees. I believe all the members of the Public Service Pension Board are highly qualified and morally upstanding citizens, but we need to ensure that we are not limiting these individuals' ability to find work in their related fields after their term of service to Albertans is complete.

Another example is Agriculture and Forestry. In Agriculture and Forestry is the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, which has a number of farmers and agriculture-related businessmen and -women currently on their board. I don't think I'm the only hon. member in this House that believes it is important for the AFSC board to have very qualified individuals who understand farming and ranching, and who better than the farmers and ranchers themselves? I am confident that Bill 27 strikes the right balance between preventing individuals from unduly benefiting from their positions with their ability to find gainful employment once their term of service to Albertans is complete.

That is why I will be supporting Bill 27 at third reading and why I am encouraging all my hon. colleagues on both sides of the floor to support this bill as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. I rise to support Bill 27 at third reading. What is encouraging and I want to give the government credit for, and it's nice to see in this Chamber, is that we're pursuing

what I would consider to be the gold standard of conflict-of-interest legislation in our country. I think that it's nice to see. This afternoon's debate on the first couple of bills has been remarkably civil, and it's been kind of a nice change from what we saw earlier in the afternoon. Long may it continue, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you would agree with that.

What I like about this is that consistency is very important in terms of applying ethical standards. As the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat said, we in this Chamber have certain rules that apply to us in terms of conflict of interest. Those rules are entirely appropriate. We have to comply with them and have a very active Ethics Commissioner's office, which is, I will also say, very responsive to any requests that I have certainly ever had of them and very helpful in clarifying and interpreting the rules and making sure that we stay onside with those rules.

The 140 public agencies that will be affected by this will not only be seen to be more accountable to Albertans but will be more accountable to Albertans. They will and, I think, correctly should be held to a high standard by the people of this province, and this legislation certainly helps them do that.

Mechanically the agencies will now have to submit their codes of conduct to the Ethics Commissioner for review within four months of the bill being proclaimed. My sincere hope is that the Ethics Commissioner's office is provided with the resources they require to process this rather substantial amount of work because, of course, that is a relatively short time frame, but that's going to ensure that this happens relatively quickly. The agencies themselves will be forced to update their own codes of conduct internally, to disclose conflicts of interest, and to have restrictions placed on gifts, for example. Again, that's work for those agencies to do. That work is not entirely new work but certainly worth while.

I will say that a question I did have when I was going through the bill was on what impact it may have on attracting and retaining high-quality candidates for these very important roles, especially at senior levels, and in particular the 12-month period after leaving a job, where future employment is subject to conflict-of-interest rules. In the end, I think that's a good rule. It is very important that no one use their position to benefit personally in an inappropriate way. I grapple and just raise a small concern that perhaps that would mean it would require us to increase the salary that would be required to attract qualified people or perhaps reduce the pool of qualified people, which are two sides of the same coin. I just encourage the government, of course, to keep an eye on that particular challenge, but given the two-year notice period or immediately after reappointment, which allows for people in those positions to make a choice, that seems to be fair.

Again, with really no hesitation, Mr. Speaker, and notwithstanding the small concerns that I have – I wouldn't even call them concerns, really, just questions or points to note in terms of implementation – I and the Alberta Party caucus are proud to stand in support of Bill 27.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Elbow?

Are there any other members who wish to speak to third reading of Bill 27, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017?

Seeing and hearing none, then, Edmonton-Ellerslie, would you like to close debate?

Loyola: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance I now close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

3:30

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 26

An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis

The Chair: We are currently on amendment A4. Are there any further questions or comments with respect to this amendment?

Dr. Swann: Are you wanting me to close discussion on this amendment, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Just to clear up any confusion that we're in the right spot, this is the information I have here. We're on Bill 26, amendment A4, which is a continuation from this morning's session.

Go ahead, Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'm just wondering if we're closing discussion on that amendment. I certainly think that in the interests of children's health we should be including parks, public events, festivals and that, again, the onus should be on municipalities to identify events that are not going to include children, to be able to give those entirely permission to go ahead and have open tobacco and for those private events that will not be including children to have open events that include smoking, whether it's marijuana or tobacco. Again, we need to make the two consistent. We need some changes in the tobacco reduction act to ensure that we have some consistency there, and I believe we need this amendment to ensure that children are protected.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A4?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Dr. Swann: No. I have another one.

The Chair: Oh. My apologies, hon. member. I thought you were getting up to move. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll cede the floor as I seem to have misplaced my amendment copies. I'll be right back.

The Chair: All right. We'll go to Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: If you've never seen a six-foot-two man tap dance, Madam Chair, you're about to see it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and I have had long discussions, and one of the topics of discussion as it relates to Bill 26 and the legalization of cannabis is what an appropriate age for consumption ought to be. I know this is something that the federal government has set as a minimum nation-wide, the age of 18, and then has of course allowed the provinces of this country to establish their own age limits for consumption. Every province that I'm aware of that has passed their legislation or proposed legislation has set the consumption age of cannabis at the same age as their

consumption for alcohol and, I would assume, tobacco. I don't know that to be an absolute fact, but I believe it to be the case. This bill, Bill 26, proposes to do the same.

One of the questions that I had when the idea of legalizing cannabis was first presented was whether or not, in fact, that is the appropriate age. There's rather compelling scientific evidence that individuals' brains continue to develop not just through their teenage years but up to age 25. Anyone who's interacted with folks in their teens and early 20s would perhaps agree that brain development continues through their early 20s. We hope it does.

One of the great benefits of my youth, when I was in my early 20s, was that, in fact, there was no social media. Cameras were few and far between. You had to actually take a photograph and take the film out of the camera and then take it to a film laboratory in order to actually produce a photograph. If not, there's a reasonable chance that I would not be standing here before you if all that information was readily available online.

Be that as it may, in all seriousness, the science, I think, is quite clear that human neurological development continues until age 25, and there's a question as to whether or not it is, in fact, appropriate to have legalized cannabis at age 18. I know that's certainly a question I have. Perhaps we will have an opportunity to debate an amendment when it arrives. It's not here yet, so we'll continue to talk about this. I look forward to hearing from the hon. member.

I understand that perhaps the Member for Calgary-West would like to weigh in, so we'll allow him to do so. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You know, obviously, I was just listening to the Member for Calgary-Elbow. He obviously brings up some excellent points in regard to age. When I was doing my initial investigation in regard to marijuana as well, the age of consumption was a concern. I brought this to our attention yesterday in regard to Bill 29. Again, we cannot compare alcohol to marijuana. It's not the same thing. If I spill some alcohol on you, you're not going to get drunk – right? – but the second-hand smoke, of course, is a different story.

In regard to age, though, there is scientific evidence. There are studies, and every study shows that under the age of 25 it significantly impairs the development of that person, that young person. So it is a concern. It is a concern. It's a deep concern.

3:40

Now, remember. Eighteen: why do we always have this number? In all the studies and all the books that I have read – right? – I mean, 18 was used, really, for criminal purposes. There had to be an age at which somebody can be charged with a particular criminal offence. But we're talking about the development of a young person. For any of you that have children and, especially, older children, it's not that they're the age of 17 and the second they turn 18, bam – you know what? – they're an adult now. No. They're still developing. They're still growing. They're still our young person. They're still our child.

In regard to the age, yeah, I have serious concerns and reservations about the age being 18 for the consumption of marijuana. Do I know what that age is? Is it 21? Is it 25? Talking to MADD, they suggested 22. I don't know. What I do know is that anything under the age of 25 – right? – significantly impairs the cognitive development of that young person.

You know, when we talk about this bill, certainly I want to reiterate that we were handed something from the federal government. I believe that with all the best intentions, with the work

that was done by the government, for the most part they've done their best. I do. I really, truly believe that they've done their best. But we have to be so very careful here. Again, this is a cultural shift in the way that, really, Alberta if not Canada is going to operate.

I think the other thing that concerns me in regard to that age limit has to do with young people. If we are using the age of 18, how many young people are in high school at the age of 18? Quite a few. Can they bring their marijuana to high school? At that point, can they smoke it within five metres of a doorway? Now we're starting to impact children aged 17, 16, 15, 14 in those high schools. That's a concern. That is a deep concern.

We'll see what this amendment is that is certainly going to be coming forward from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I really, truly hope that in the best interests of the people of Alberta, especially the children, we actually, really reflect as a Legislature and do what we believe to be in the best interests of the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to continue to speak on the age issue in Bill 26. You know, I will take this opportunity, now that I have the floor here again for that rare opportunity, to say that I think that, on balance, as much as I believe that – no question – the science is clear that there is likely potential damage from, certainly, heavy cannabis use to developing brains, perhaps even to developed brains, as any intoxicating substance or psychoactive substance would have, having a differential age for a substance like cannabis, frankly, could be problematic. It's quite difficult to tell someone that they can purchase alcohol, they can smoke cigarettes, they can go represent their country in military service but not participate in a legal product like cannabis.

I understand the arguments. In fact, it's one of the things that my staff and I and that my wife and I – my wife is a physician – discussed and debated. Of course, we have one teenage daughter and another, a 10-year-old, who believes she's about 25. We discuss these things as a family in terms of the impact they may have on our lives and what might be an appropriate age for the legal consumption of cannabis. I will say that it is challenging and problematic to make that age different.

Having said that, I do look forward to hearing the arguments from the member because I think it is a concern that many Albertans have, a concern that parents have certainly expressed to me in my constituency as I talk with other parents at school. This is going to be something that we need to address with our children as, in my case, our kids get up towards the ages where these are the sorts of things that are going to be happening at school. To suggest that it isn't already in our schools, junior high even, unfortunately – it's just simply an unfortunate reality in many cases. Having said that, we need to make sure that we're having open discussions and that we have every opportunity to educate students, teachers, parents, and all Albertans about the effects of cannabis, legal or otherwise.

If I'm not mistaken, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View will now take the floor and present his amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: If I may, Madam Chair, thank you for indulging me and to my colleagues for their willingness to stand and talk intelligently about this whole question. I think this is one of the key issues that we have to discuss around this bill. Everything else is absolutely important to deal with. This amendment, though, has a

chance to make a significant difference and improvement in the bill, in my view.

Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, would be amended in section 7 by adding the following before section 90.01.

Definition of a minor

90.001 Notwithstanding the definition of “minor” in section 1(1)(w), for the purposes of sections 90.03, 90.04, [et cetera] “minor” means a person under the age of 21.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I’ll begin to speak to it immediately if you wish or await your direction.

The Chair: This will be amendment A5.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wish I’d had a chance to present this evidence to the minister’s office earlier and to the members of the Legislature so that they would have some of the most current research that I have around age and health related to cannabis use.

First of all, let me say that I support the important federal shift in cannabis policy to remove the criminalization of cannabis and ensure quality control in both medicinal and recreational use of cannabis. While the drug has both risks and benefits, as with most everything that we provide in modern society, it’s important, as we saw with alcohol and tobacco, to regulate and use evidence to establish strong guidance for individual and public health. Precautionary principle suggests that, you know, we use whatever evidence we have and, in the absence of evidence, err on the side of caution. That’s part of what I’m proposing today. Where there is reasonable evidence of significant and increased risk in adolescents, let’s err on the side of caution.

With respect to my first argument, if we establish 18 as the age of legal access, we cannot go back if we find evidence to suggest that this is increasing harm and motor vehicle injuries, for example. If we start at age 21, we can go down after we see the evidence. One of my arguments is that since the Paediatric Society has suggested 25 and the government of Canada suggested 18, let’s at least start somewhere in the middle and potentially go down to 18 after a few years of monitoring what the impact is of legalizing.

All of the five U.S. states that have legalized marijuana have established 21 as their legal limit. In Canada we have a mix. Some across the country have gone to 18, and some have gone to 19, but here we would be a little bit of an outlier at 21. We would therefore be able to look at the data over the next few years and look at the provinces and where they have the different ages, and we’d be able to say: well here’s at least some evidence of whether the age was appropriate or inappropriate. By all means, let’s push it down to 18 if the evidence suggests there’s no difference across the country in the impact of this age of legalization. We have some important information and research to do that would influence both federal and international communities by establishing our own age.

3:50

All five U.S. states, as I indicated, established 21 as the legal access for use. Epidemiologists have found that 9 per cent of those smoking at age 19 or older develop dependency, about 9 per cent of those starting at 19. The dependency rate actually triples under the age of 18, so about 25 per cent of those who start earlier have a higher risk of developing a dependency on cannabis.

The Canadian Paediatric Society made this statement this year.

Cannabis use during adolescence can cause functional and structural changes to the developing brain, leading to [measurable] damage. Marijuana use in this age group is strongly linked to ... dependence and other substance use disorders; the initiation and maintenance of tobacco smoking; an increased

presence of mental illness, including depression, anxiety and [even] psychosis; impaired neurological development and cognitive decline; and diminished school performance and lifetime achievement. Rates of acute medical care and hospitalization for younger children who have ingested cannabis [accidentally] are [also] increasing. Ongoing debate concerning cannabis regulation in Canada makes paying close attention to the evidence for its health effects and ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place, vital public health priorities.

That’s the Canadian Paediatric Society, who is suggesting an older age for legalization.

The Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research made the following submission to this government. I quote:

Jurisdictions that have legalized the use of recreational as well as medical cannabis have experienced increased rates of injury due to burns, pediatric accidental ingestion. Drivers testing positive for cannabis and alcohol and drugs have a 9 per cent increase where it’s been legalized and drivers testing positive for only THC a 6 per cent increase. Of greatest concern are traffic outcomes. Fatalities substantially increased after legalization in Colorado and Washington, from 49 in 2010 to 94 in 2015, almost a doubling, in Colorado and from 40 to 85, more than doubling, in Washington after legalization. These outcomes suggest that after legalization more people are driving while impaired by cannabis. Alberta can expect to see similar changes in injuries when the new laws take effect.

End of quote. That’s our own Alberta centre for injury prevention.

Here’s an Ipsos poll from across Canada, that was done in April of this year, polling Canadians on what they think about the appropriate age for cannabis. I quote the Ipsos poll: When it comes to age restrictions around buying pot, the polling data found that about 50 per cent of Canadians believe the minimum age should be 21; 5 per cent believe it should be 20; 18 per cent say it should be 19; and 23 per cent suggest that 18 is the right age for legalization. So most Canadians believe that an older age at legalization is appropriate.

That’s the evidence that I hoped to present and to have a robust debate about. As I said, I don’t think we can go back. If we set it at 18, nobody’s going to say in five years, “Oh, we should raise it,” because it will be totally inconsistent with the rest of our adult restrictions. We have some evidence that it’s going to increase injuries the younger the age, both personal injuries and, potentially, public injury. Let’s stand out a little bit in Canada and establish an older age group and actually have something to compare over time with the rest of the provinces and show the evidence within a few years that we were right in setting it higher, or we can relax the standard if the evidence contradicts that. But we can’t go back.

Those are my arguments. I know the minister’s office is now looking at this information, that I was only able to submit in the last 24 hours. I don’t know the extent to which we are all prepared to have the debate, but I think there’s good evidence for us to take a second look at this and make some minor change that will not have a negative impact on almost anything that we do and that potentially has a significant positive impact on the health of adolescents and the health and safety of our communities.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’d like to thank the member for your amendment. I know that you have the best interests of Albertans at heart.

We know that the federal government introduced the legalization of cannabis, and one of our government’s major concerns was making sure that we’re keeping cannabis out of the hands of children. That’s why we are going to be ticketing offences for youth

under 18 who possess fewer than five grams, much like we do right now with alcohol. This builds on the federal government sanctions in the Criminal Code for possession of five grams or more. Our government set the age of consumption at 18 because it aligns with our age of majority for alcohol and tobacco but also because a substantial number of cannabis users are between the ages of 18 and 21 years old. We would rather have those Albertans access government-regulated cannabis through our government-run online retail system or government-regulated store. This way our kids aren't getting cannabis from their neighbourhood drug dealer. A drug dealer can sell them cannabis laced with other drugs. A drug dealer will also try to push harder and more addictive drugs on their young clients.

That's why we set the age of consumption at 18, something that was supported by the majority of the over 60,000 Albertans that our government surveyed. It was also supported by the Canadian Paediatric Society. Dr. Christine Grant from McMaster University coauthored the Canadian Paediatric Society position paper, and she wrote that young adults frequently experiment with marijuana. By aligning the legal age for cannabis use with that of other legally controlled substances, young adults will have access to a regulated product with a known potency. They'll also be less likely to engage in high-risk illegal activities to access cannabis.

Again, I would like to thank the member for his concerns, his advocacy, and his desire to protect our children. It's a concern that we absolutely all share. However, we will not be accepting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Just to add this to my earlier comments before this amendment, I certainly want to support the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in this amendment. I do believe it is reasonable.

As I expressed earlier, my concerns really have to do with marijuana in the schools. Again, for an adult who is, let's just say, even 21 or older, that's fine. If you want to smoke marijuana, smoke marijuana. You know, even if you think of alcohol. If you're 18 or above, I get it. If you want to consume alcohol, it certainly is your right. It goes back to choices. Sometimes they're poor choices; sometimes they're good choices.

Really my biggest concern here is that there is going to be marijuana in the schools, in the high schools where young people who are 18 years old, in whatever grade they're going to be in, who are going to be legally allowed to carry this marijuana as well as legally allowed to smoke this marijuana as long as it falls within the smoking rules – well, that, to me, puts children at risk, and that's really too much. In regard to 21, you know, the likelihood of somebody being in a high school at the age of 21 is probably very rare. As far as age is concerned, I think that is a reasonable age.

So I would like to stand up and, of course, support the amendment by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I thank him for submitting it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

4:00

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to the amendment and to speak in favour of it. I have, as the House knows, spent many years in the education system. I have seen many kids make poor choices. I would speak to both sides of this issue. I've

listened. I've heard the issues that were brought up, yet at the end of the day I have to fall on the side of protecting the young people in our society. I believe that there's merit in the comments that were just being made about how you're going to see marijuana introduced into the high schools, and that's very concerning to me.

I have never smoked marijuana myself, but I can say that I have seen the deleterious effects of drug use on many of the kids that I've taught over the years. I know that I've gone and volunteered at the Mustard Seed church on many occasions, and on almost every occasion that I've gone to this church and served food, I've had former students of mine come through the line, all of them with addictions issues. Because I know their lives and because I was with them in grades 10 and 11 and 12 – and sometimes I even knew them in grades 7, 8, and 9 – I can say that in almost every single case it started with smoking marijuana. [interjections] It's the truth. The other day I realized that four of the individuals in my community that were homeless were former students of mine, and it broke my heart. Again, in talking with them, in trying to help them, we sat down and were talking and reminiscing, talking about how they ended up where they ended up, and in every case it started with some poor choices in high school.

I want to thank the member for bringing some statistics into the House. We've had the conversation about the fact that the brain does not stop developing until around the age of 25. When we make decisions about the age here, I understand the arguments about trying to match it with the age for alcohol, but I'm not sure that this substance is the same as alcohol. I think there are some significant differences, so I don't believe that it is unreasonable to consider an age of 21. As a teacher that believed throughout their entire career that we should not be placing students at risk, I would suggest that the age of 21 is a reasonable compromise, maybe not a perfect one. But it recognizes the medical facts, it's a step towards trying to limit access to vulnerable youth in our high schools, and it will have my support.

The Chair: Any further speakers to this amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to clarify something for the Member for Calgary-West regarding schooling and cannabis. I'd like to point out that in section 90.28 of the proposed legislation under Smoking and Vaping Prohibited it specifically says: "on any hospital property, school property or child care facility property." We are suggesting that it absolutely not be allowed to be smoked on school property. Just to clarify.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. But they will be able to smoke on the perimeter, just on the sidewalks outside of school property. Look, I really, truly believe that both sides of this House are on the same page here. I think we all want to protect kids. Like, come on. We all want to protect kids.

You know, I have to talk about some experience here because there were a few moans and groans in regard to we'll call it the gateway drug, marijuana. [interjections] No, no. Let me just speak to this. I'm going to just speak to my experience in dealing with thousands – and I'm not kidding you – of people who have been in addictions. I had a unique opportunity. For two and a half years I worked in what we called the city jail. I got to speak to people who had mental illness issues, who had addictions problems. I was also the only law enforcement officer as part of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, in which I, again, spoke to people who

had addictions issues, mental health issues. When I spoke to these people, quite frankly, I took pride in talking to them, getting to know these people. I wanted to know: what was the root cause? What led that person down that particular path of, let's say, addictions in these particular cases?

Now, I never met any person with an addiction that started with heroin. I never met anybody that started with crystal meth. I never met anybody who started with crack cocaine. But what I did meet – and, again, this is just experience talking – were people who started with marijuana, who started with alcohol at a young age. A lot of times as a young person you don't want to let the night end. You want to party all night. Marijuana along with alcohol are depressants. So in order to get that stimulant, what do you do? You go and take ecstasy, or you go and take cocaine, highly addictive substances that lead you down an even worse path.

One thing that people don't know about these drugs – and I'll use cocaine as an example – is that when you get that high, you never achieve that high again, ever. What happens is that all you want to do is try and get that high again, which you never do. It's called the chase. So then you progress to crack cocaine, and then you progress to crystal meth. But in all these cases, sadly – and it really, truly is sad – it all started with marijuana.

Ms Jansen: No. It starts with mental health issues.

Mr. Ellis: You're right. There are mental health issues, a hundred per cent. There are mental health issues. There are addictions issues. You and I don't disagree on that.

But marijuana is not the be-all and end-all. I accept that it's coming. I totally accept that it's coming. I just want to protect the kids, and that's why I believe that this is a very reasonable amendment. With the age at 21 it keeps it away from the kids that are in the schools. It's not going to stop that 18-year-old. Like, if we go back and we have it at the age of 18, that 18-year-old can still go and have it in his or her possession in the school and then step outside of the school property, no different than with smoking. It's still there. But we cannot normalize this for children. We cannot.

I get that young people experiment, that they try. A good friend of mine, the Member for Calgary-Greenway, called me the other day. He said: "Member for Calgary-West, you've got to help me out. I have a good friend of mine whose son went away." I think it was to British Columbia, but where it was in British Columbia is completely irrelevant. The fact is that, while away, he started consuming copious amounts of marijuana, and as he's come back to Calgary, he's experiencing psychological issues, at which point my advice to him was to take him to the doctor to get him treatment.

4:10

He does have some mental health issues. I'm not a doctor. I can't say that that's attributed to marijuana, but I'm sure it didn't help. You know, you talk about mental health, and you combine that now with an addiction problem. I think he indicated to his parents that he just could not stop consuming marijuana, that it was just something he had to do or that he felt he had to do.

Look, I think this is, again, a reasonable amendment. The age of 21 just helps to keep it away from the schools and not put children at risk. Therefore, I will stand up again and I'll continue to stand up and continue to support children.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the opportunity for me to rise and speak to this important amendment. As my hon. colleague from Calgary-West was mentioning, it's been

almost two months. I did call him for help. Obviously, I don't want to share the name and the details and everything about this young child, full of life, you know, an A-grade student, a very good kid from a good family. Everything just fell into the wrong hands. He was dealing with a little bit of mental health issues. He abused this drug way too much.

Then I approached my colleague and said: "You know, I need your help. I need your advice. You have been exposed to these kinds of situations in your previous career as a police officer." He advised me that we take him to a doctor and hospital immediately. His parents ended up doing that. It's been just about three months now, and he still has not recovered from the withdrawal syndrome. The child still has mental health issues. This is the damage that this drug can do at that young age. The child is still suffering from the damage this drug has done to his brain, his mental capacity.

That's all we're saying. Let's rise above and, you know, put the politics aside and just think about, like: what is the purpose of us being here? It is to do the greater good for Albertans and our future generations, the generations who are going to be taking care of us and this province. Let's not make this a political issue. Let's think about it and do what is right to protect our youth.

I think my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View's amendment is very reasonable, and I think we should all support that.

You know, the example I shared, Madam Chair: thousands of those are available. A lot of people are going through that in this province and probably in this country. The only reason I know is because I had to deal with that on a family basis. I can't even imagine what the family is going through. I can't even imagine what the child is going through. He had a bright future, and now his parents have no clue whether he'll be able to even finish university or not, whether he'll be able to even hold a normal job or not, just because the damage was so extensive to his brain that it may not be able to repair itself.

Please give good consideration to this amendment. I hope all my colleagues can support this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A5?

Dr. Swann: Madam Chair, can I just make one final comment?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: I appreciate the discussion. I know it's difficult to change from the other side once you've got a bill in place and you've already had directions from the minister. My last pitch is that in health behaviour we know that making the easy choice, the healthy choice results in adoption of more healthy behaviours. We know that making the unhealthy choice, the easy choice, increases the risk of unhealthy behaviours. So the question that we're debating today is: at what age are we more likely to get the healthy choice made? I think it's clear that we'll have healthier choices made at the age of 21 for the majority of young people who decide that they don't want to breach the law, because it is against the law if we made that. Most kids will not want to breach the law, and they will wait to make the decision about the use of cannabis a little later than if they are 18.

That's the final comment that I would make, and I appreciate that the government may choose not to follow that. That's kind of a compromise, it seems to me, between the national government and the health organizations that are suggesting we be a little more prudent in reducing the risk of adverse affects at the age of 18.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to A5?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:16 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	Nixon	Strankman
Gill	Smith	Swann
MacIntyre		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Fitzpatrick	McKittrick
Babcock	Goehring	Miller
Bilous	Gray	Miranda
Carlier	Horne	Nielsen
Carson	Jansen	Payne
Clark	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Sigurdson
Dach	Luff	Turner
Drever	Malkinson	Westhead
Eggen	Mason	Woollard
Feehan		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 37
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[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 26 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 28 School Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to present to you today an amendment to Bill 28.

I'll wait until it is picked up and distributed.

The Chair: You can go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I speak to my first amendment here on Bill 28. Mr. Smith to move that Bill 28, School Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 19 in the proposed section 115(1) by striking out "The Minister may make regulations" and substituting "The Minister may, in consultation with boards, make regulations."

Madam Chair, I would like to first state that this is a good thing to enact this set of professional standards for superintendents and

for principals. We have some of the best teachers and principals and superintendents anywhere in the world here in Alberta. Adding an additional layer of accountability allows the education system to ensure that the best people are in these very important positions of leadership overseeing our children.

My concern and the concern that was raised during my stakeholder outreach is that the current wording of this section of the legislation does not explicitly state that the school boards will be consulted, that they'll be consulted with when the superintendent leadership certificate process is being developed. Now, the relevant stakeholders indicated to me that they would be more comfortable if the wording in the bill was changed just slightly, as this amendment that we're speaking to seeks to do, in order to ensure that the school boards are consulted during this process.

Now, I'm sure that the minister would in all likelihood do this, but my stakeholders and the ones that I was talking to have indicated that they would feel more comfortable if this consultation process was written directly into the act itself. I don't think that this changes anything, really, in some ways. I don't believe it will impede any of the outcomes that the government has with this piece of legislation, what it's attempting to do. I believe that it will indeed strengthen this piece of legislation and will help it to achieve what the minister would want to see at the end of the day. I believe that by making this amendment, it is placing at the forefront of this legislation the thoughts of my stakeholders, of the stakeholders of Alberta, that want to see that the minister will indeed consult with school boards as they begin to put forward these standards for professional conduct.

I would ask this House to consider this amendment and to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. You know, one of the questions and the concerns that I have with this bill is the substantial authority that it grants to the minister. Much of the legislation as written strengthens the power of the minister or the ministry. Almost every amendment as we go through the bill allocates further authority, discretion, and power to the minister, and in parts that seems to be the only thing that this legislation does.

4:40

Now, in many cases that may very well be appropriate. It clarifies certain things and allows the minister some discretion and latitude to do what the ministry feels is necessary and to do so efficiently. But the question I have, really, actually, ultimately comes to: what exactly is the role of school boards? The powers of school boards have been eroded over the last number of decades, dating back to the changes in removing taxation authority from school boards, and gradually over time authority has been taken away. I think, especially when we're dealing with something like education, where the roles of parents and students and the unique characteristics of a given community are different around the province, it's very important that we have that local representation in some form or fashion.

My hope would be that in making regulations, the minister, when making those regulations, would consult anyway with school boards. I can only assume that the minister would tell us in fact what his intention would be, but we can never trust, unfortunately, future ministers. While I do trust this minister, I would like to trust but also verify that that is in fact the case. So really what this amendment does is that it seeks to require the minister, then, to

consult with school boards. Now, that consultation doesn't need to be an onerous or long process. It could simply be a phone call with the school board. One would hope that that's something that the minister would do. There are also organizations that represent school boards, so it certainly would not be a requirement for the minister to make 61 phone calls. I believe that's the number of school boards in the province, similar if it's not exactly 61.

There are many opportunities. I know that the minister already interacts with the school board associations, public and separate and charter and private and francophone as well. I'm sure that it is something the minister is already doing. I know that that's something that he and his ministry do. They should just, I would hope, capture what is already happening within the ministry and certainly should happen going forward to make sure that school boards are always consulted on changes that impact them, ultimately because those changes would impact students, and that's really the entire objective here, to make sure that students get a good education throughout our province.

I do stand in support of this amendment and would encourage all my legislative colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't believe that this amendment is necessary. I've looked at the documents that have been produced before this legislation was proposed, and it's been obvious to me that the minister has already consulted widely as he sought to make amendments to the School Act. Maybe I should go and list all the people that he has consulted with. I think that one of the groups that is very important to note is the superintendents themselves, who have their own organization. Superintendents also are teachers, so there is already a teaching association, the ATA, that the minister consults widely.

I'm just going to read for the record the people who have been consulted: the Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta, the Council of Catholic School Superintendents of Alberta, the association of Alberta charter schools, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta, Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Rupertsland Institute, the Alberta Teachers' Association, Confederacy of Treaty Six, Treaty 8 First Nations, Blackfoot Confederacy, Tsuut'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Strategic Alliance for Alberta Students with Learning Challenges, Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta.

I think that this demonstrates that the minister, as he proposes amendments and seeks to make our schools even better than they are, always consults. Suggesting that the minister may consult with school boards in order to make regulations on superintendents' qualifications is not necessary.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A1?

Seeing none, are you ready for the vote?

[The voice vote indicated that amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:45 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Clark	Hanson	Strankman
Ellis	MacIntyre	Yao
Gill	Smith	

5:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Fitzpatrick	Mason
Babcock	Goehring	McKittrick
Bilous	Gray	Miller
Carlier	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Connolly	Jansen	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kazim	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Schreiner
Dach	Littlewood	Sigurdson
Drever	Loyola	Turner
Eggen	Luff	Westhead
Feehan	Malkinson	Woollard
Totals:	For – 8	Against – 36

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to move an amendment to Bill 28, School Amendment Act, 2017. I will wait for the amendment to be distributed before I continue my remarks.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

You can go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. My amendment reads: Mr. Smith to move that Bill 28, School Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 8(c) in the proposed section 51(3.1) (a) by striking out “boards” wherever it occurs and substituting “boards or operators of private schools” and (b) by adding “with any decisions concerning the sharing of costs to be decided by the boards or operators of private schools that are involved in the transportation arrangement” after “specific transportation arrangements.”

Madam Chair, I think everyone in this House agrees with the government that equity of access to education is extremely important and something to be sought after. Every student in Alberta, regardless of where they live or what school they attend, should have the capacity to be transported to their school of choice at a reasonable cost. Overall, we support transportation co-operation as long as local boards are not being forced against their will to make decisions which do not fit the needs of their local community. Working with these boards is extremely important.

No one wants to see empty buses driving past waiting kids, and no one wants to see four buses driving down the same road every day when one bus could transport all of the children, which is why we think that private schools, where it makes sense at the local level, should be included in the transportation co-operation arrangements the minister is looking to implement. These kids are, after all, Alberta students, and that is not to suggest that we think these kids and their parents should be given free transportation. They obviously need to pay their fair share, just like anyone else.

That portion is addressed in the latter portion of this amendment, which seeks to specify that decisions regarding the cost sharing of the school transportation arrangement, which will need to be negotiated by school boards and/or private school operators, should be left to local decision-makers. These boards and these operators are best positioned to make decisions on behalf of their communities, and they are the most connected to the local issues and to the nuances that they face.

I think that this amendment seeks to strengthen Bill 28, and I believe it promotes additional transportation co-operation, which should make busing more affordable for parents across Alberta. That is something I think, I hope, I believe that we can all agree on.

So I would encourage everyone in this Assembly to support this amendment. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Just a reminder, hon. members, that we don't use surnames in this House. We always use constituency names even when reading or quoting. We've had a lot of that going on lately.

Mr. Mason: Even your own name.

The Chair: Even your own name.

Are there any further comments on amendment A2? Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Chair. While I, you know, thank the member for bringing this amendment forward and the consideration of making sure that busing is affordable for all students in the province, currently the transportation regulation within the School Act doesn't cover or apply to private schools. Private schools are wholly their own thing. We also, in coming up with this bill, haven't consulted with private schools or private school boards. As such, we don't feel comfortable at this time accepting this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to A2?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:07 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	MacIntyre	Strankman
Gill	Nixon	Yao
Hanson	Smith	

5:10

Against the motion:

Carson	Horne	Miller
Connolly	Jansen	Nielsen
Coolahan	Kazim	Payne
Dach	Larivee	Rosendahl
Drever	Littlewood	Sabir
Eggen	Loyola	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Luff	Turner
Goehring	Malkinson	Westhead
Gray	Mason	Woollard
Hinkley	McKittrick	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Are there further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, let's see if the third time is lucky here. I would move that Bill 28, School Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 10 in the proposed section 78.1 (a) in subsection (1) by striking out “, in accordance with principles

set out by the Minister by order” and (b) by striking out subsection (2).

I have the amendment here. I will wait before I deliver my comments.

The Chair: This will be amendment A3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know that I have said this before during the debate on this bill, but again I am concerned and I believe this side of the House is concerned that this legislation consolidates a great deal of power within the office of the Minister of Education. This is not a slight against this minister or any particular minister. Our caucus just does not agree that the centralization, or the centralizing of power, within the office of any minister at the expense of local decision-making is a wise course of action.

I would also like to state that introducing a trustee code of conduct is a good idea. It is my understanding that many boards already have these codes of conduct. School board trustees are elected officials, and introducing increased accountability for elected officials is always something that I and this party will support. However, the current wording of this bill along with the materials that the minister's staff distributed at the technical briefing indicate that the minister will have the power to include mandatory elements in the trustee code of conduct. We do not agree that this is the best approach to developing a document which will meet the needs of all of the affected parties in the various school boards across this province. This code of conduct, in our opinion, should be developed in a co-operative climate which allows local boards the flexibility to develop a code of conduct which works for them.

That is not to say that the minister should not have oversight or input. We just believe that if the minister has the power to implement mandatory elements that local boards may not want, it poisons the process from the outset by providing the minister with all of the power, and this leaves school boards at the mercy of the minister of the day, whoever that may be. We just don't think that this is the best approach to create the best possible trustee code of conduct.

It is important that all boards across Alberta get this right as this is a very positive step for the education system, and this is why I believe that moving this amendment, which was born out of stakeholder feedback, will make this a better bill. It's important to allow local decision-making and local school boards to be the authors of their codes of conduct. They take it very seriously. Many already have them. We do not believe that it is necessary for any minister to have the power to mandate. To have oversight, to have input: absolutely. To mandate: we believe that takes the power of the minister too far.

So it would be our desire that this House and this Assembly would support this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and certainly I would thank the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon as well for his efforts here. In regard to the code of conduct provision here in Bill 28, I kind of went back and forth on it. Of course, these are democratically elected people, and it's important to have that autonomy built into the elected officials.

That being said, there was quite a strong provision put into the new Municipal Government Act – the MGA I think it's called – that

had a code of conduct built into it for councillors and so forth, so, you know, to align us with that and the municipal level of government that trustees and councillors are a part of, I went along with the idea of having this.

A code of conduct, of course, doesn't include a provision for some kind of recall or, you know, other members voting somebody else off the board. I think that that's a line that should not be crossed because these are elected officials, and we can't have other elected officials somehow sanctioning, removing other elected officials. That's not on.

Certainly, this just lays out the groundwork for consulting with the various school board associations and individual school boards. You know, it opens submissions as to what the code of conduct would look like. So once we get that information, we put it together, and away we go. I mean, I have no sort of preconception about how or what might be included in such codes of conduct, but I'm kind of responding to surprisingly very favourable feedback of individual school boards and various school board associations actually wanting this, right? That's as simple as that.

I appreciate the member's interest in this, and, you know, we can watch it and help to shape it as it moves forward, building a code of conduct for trustees here in the province of Alberta. Thanks.

So I would reject this as it's written. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other comments on amendment A3?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:20 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	MacIntyre	Strankman
Gill	Smith	Yao
Hanson		

Against the motion:

Babcock	Goehring	Mason
Carlier	Gray	McKittrick
Carson	Hinkley	Miller
Connolly	Horne	Nielsen
Coolahan	Jansen	Payne
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Rosendahl
Dach	Larivee	Sabir
Drever	Littlewood	Schreiner
Eggen	Loyola	Turner

Feehan	Luff	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Woollard
Totals:	For – 7	Against – 33

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 26 and Bill 28. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the opposition in particular for the progress that we've made tonight and for their contributions to the debate.

I want to indicate that pursuant to Government Motion 33 I wish to advise the House that we will not have an evening sitting tonight.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will move that we adjourn the Assembly until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, November 30, 2017

Day 59

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, November 30, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Good morning.

Let us each reflect and pray in our own way. May each member of this Legislature maintain a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Help us to use this power wisely and well. May we be inspired to reach decisions which establish and maintain a land of prosperity and decency where freedom prevails and where justice rules. Amen.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to second reading of this important legislation. It was a very good day for Alberta workers when the Assembly passed the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act during the spring session of this past year. That act finally brought Alberta's 30-year-old labour relations and employment standards codes into the 21st century and in line with most of the country. Albertans will no longer lose their jobs if they get sick, if a child needs care, or if they have a death in the family. Workers will no longer have to wait a year to be able to take unpaid leaves or get full use out of employment insurance. But there's still more work to do. Other workers' rights need to be protected in today's workplaces, and that is where Bill 30 comes in.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to move Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, for second reading.

Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act is important legislation. It sets the minimum standards for workplace health and safety and outlines the roles and responsibilities of all work-site parties to keep workers healthy and safe. The OHS Act came into effect in 1976. That was 41 years ago, before Wayne Gretzky was a rookie, before the Internet and cellphones, and two years before the Syncrude mine opened. The OHS Act has not had a comprehensive review since then, but over the last 41 years technology and social growth have changed our workplaces. They are much more diverse. There is more shift work, contract work, and more people working from home. The OHS Act must reflect these realities.

Then there's the Workers' Compensation Act. The last comprehensive review of that act was more than 15 years ago. Kids born back then are in senior high today and are starting to think about their career options. Our kids deserve to graduate into workplaces that are keeping them healthy and safe, and that should apply to all workers here and now. They have every right to expect that they will go home safely at the end of the workday. If people

are injured or get sick on the job, they have a right to get help and get well and get back to work. They have the right to be treated with basic human respect, and that's what Bill 30 will accomplish. It will update both the OHS Act and WCB act to respect workers' rights to a healthy and safe workplace, to proper care and attention for job-related injury and illness, and to be treated with respect, Madam Speaker.

I'm going to speak briefly about Bill 30 and how it will update each of these two long-standing acts to meet these rights, starting with the OHS Act. Hard-working Albertans know that health and safety can affect their lives and the lives of their colleagues and families. These Albertans work at heights of over 15 storeys. They work with metals heated to more than a thousand degrees Celsius. They work with complex machinery and hazardous materials. They work at night, in severe weather, and under difficult circumstances every single day. No matter where people work or what work they do, every single one of these Albertans should be able to go home healthy and safe at the end of the day.

Sadly, last year there were more than 44,000 workers who were injured on the job, and 144 workers never made it home. Our most recent full set of data is from 2015. In that year Alberta was number 2 in the country for the number of workplace fatalities per million working population, and that's an unfortunate record, Madam Speaker. It's a record that Bill 30 is seeking to change. Workplace trauma and tragedies can change survivors' lives forever. They have a lasting effect on families, friends, communities, co-workers, and employers, and what makes workplace incidents even more tragic is that even if they are survived, almost all of them are preventable. They can be prevented with proper precautions, public awareness, training, and effective enforcement of legislation, legislation that is up to date with modern workplaces and practices.

Bill 30 will create a responsive system that can adapt to changing hazards, to better prevent illnesses, injuries, and to support a worker's return to work. Bill 30 does this first by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of everyone in the workplace, employer and worker alike, to ensure everyone's health and safety, each to the extent of their authority and control.

Bill 30 enshrines workers' rights: the right to know about workplace hazards, the right to participate in health and safety through workplace health and safety committees, and the right to refuse unsafe work. The bill would also ensure that workers have the ability to exercise their rights and fulfill their duties under the law without fear of reprisal or threat of reprisal.

In addition, the bill works to ensure our workplaces are free from violence and harassment because workplace violence and harassment are unacceptable, and we all have a role to play in building a safe and respectful workplace.

Bill 30 will also require that OHS laws be reviewed every five years to keep them relevant as workplaces continue to change.

All of these changes do more than bring occupational health and safety laws into the present. They also bring Alberta workplace rights and protections on par with the rest of Canada. That will make it easier and cheaper for employers to do business across the country.

Madam Speaker, a strong system of workplace health and safety programs saves lives, and it also helps businesses save money. When employees feel protected and respected, morale goes up, both performance and profitability increase, and that contributes to a strong economy because our economy does not exist without workers. This legislation protects our workers. Bill 30 will make it mandatory to promote a strong health and safety culture in our workplaces. As legislators we have an obligation to make it happen.

Bill 30 deals with OHS and WCB in the same legislation because the two are so closely related. When workers are injured on the job,

the result is often a WCB claim. In 2016 the WCB accepted more than 44,000 claims. Of those, WCB accepted 144 fatality claims, and in 2015 Alberta had the fourth-highest total number of claims for injuries that resulted in lost time. Still, if a worker does get injured on the job or develops a work-related illness, then the Workers' Compensation Board is supposed to provide the medical and financial supports that person needs to return to work.

Albertans deserve a WCB system that is compassionate, accessible, fair, and easy to navigate. That's hard to do with legislation that had its last comprehensive review more than 15 years ago. Bill 30 makes changes to the WCB Act that will bring workers' compensation into the present and in line with the rest of Canada. These changes will improve existing benefits for surviving spouses and children and for injured workers' retirements. Injured workers will have more choice in selecting health professionals. Employers will continue to provide health benefit programs to injured workers under existing coverage for one year, and while compensation decisions are under review and appeal, employers and workers will be able to apply for interim relief.

Bill 30 also introduces new provisions: presumptive coverage for first responders, which can now be expanded to occupations like those recommended by the panel, correctional officers and emergency medical dispatchers. Coverage for psychological injuries, including posttraumatic stress disorder, will now be more easily available to all occupations.

Employers will have a new obligation to return workers to the job who have suffered work-related injuries and illnesses.

A new independent fair practices office will let people raise concerns and will monitor trends in the workers' compensation system.

The current WCB act caps maximum insurable earnings at \$98,700 per year. Bill 30 will remove that cap, and workers will get fair compensation at 90 per cent of their earnings.

9:10

With Bill 30 workers will see a WCB system that treats them as people instead of a number, that helps them get back to work, and makes sure that they can take care of their families.

Employers will see a WCB system that is effective, sustainable, and has affordable premiums. In fact, Madam Speaker, yesterday the WCB announced the average premium rate will not increase for 2018.

Madam Speaker, the changes in Bill 30 to both the OHS and WCB acts are long overdue and deserve our full support. They are based on thorough reviews and extensive public input. They will better protect workers from injury and illness and also will better support workers if they do get hurt on the job. These changes and Alberta's workers deserve our full support.

I look very much forward to the debate on Bill 30. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Just a reminder to all members of the House, we are currently in second reading, so if we could just make sure we keep the volume down so those speakers can be heard.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 30? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. Early morning. It's wonderful.

I actually want to preface my remarks by quoting one of the favourite writers of the NDP, Graham Thomson. This was in an article from the 27th of November, so I hadn't actually even had a chance to look at this, so somehow he must have gotten an inside

track on this. I'll just quote to you one of the paragraphs that talks about this. He says:

The title of Bill 30 – An Act to Protect the Health and Well-Being of Working Albertans – says it all. This bill couldn't be more New Democratic if it was printed on union-made paper and included a picture of Tommy Douglas.

Now, after reading that, Madam Speaker, you can understand that on this side of the House we were a little nervous about this bill coming forward, so I preface my remarks with that little trepidation.

I rise in this House today to speak to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. This bill intends to repeal and rewrite the existing Occupational Health and Safety Act and amend the Workers' Compensation Act in a single omnibus bill. As I understand it, the purpose of this bill is to modernize our current OH and S and WCB acts to address various gaps in the legislation that have come to light since they were last reviewed over 16 years ago, and I applaud the government in its initiatives to take these steps in an attempt to make our job sites and places of business safer for employers and employees. Disruptive technologies and innovations have changed the way we do work and do business, so a review was in order.

With that said, this bill includes a number of provisions that will have minor and in some cases massive unintended consequences, something this government seems to be famous for. As we review this bill, we must account for one overarching and fundamental question: how can we make sure Albertans' small, medium, and large businesses continue to operate efficiently while making a maximum effort to maintain the safety of our most valuable resource, the men and women of Alberta's workforce?

Madam Speaker, before my tenure as a member of this distinguished House I was in private business for 20 years, and during that time I learned that you can't put a price tag on sending each worker home safe to their families each and every day. To me these men and women weren't employees; they were mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sisters, brothers, and, most importantly, my friends. Their well-being was paramount, and without them the business could not have survived. We created a symbiotic relationship that helped all parties.

Based upon the hostile business environment this government has produced, I would venture to say that there are few members on that side who have actually signed the front of a cheque. It's a privilege that is born of hard work and sacrifice. But from personal experience, I can say that it becomes increasingly difficult every time new unnecessary regulations are implemented to keep that symbiotic relationship between employer and employees going.

When I think of red tape as it relates to Bill 30, the implementation of joint work-site health and safety committees and representatives immediately comes to mind. In the previous OH and S Act these committees were only established at the recommendation of the minister. Now they're required for all workplaces with 20 or more employees. It is unclear to me why the government would require such a committee when they have been tested in other provinces and proven to be expensive, ineffective, and, worst of all, fail to make any workplace measurably safer.

In 2004 *Just Labour* published a paper by Aleck Ostry and Annalee Yassi that explained joint health and safety committees in British Columbia. It reads:

Mandatory Joint Health and Safety Committees for workplaces with 20 or more employees were legislated in BC in 1977. Nonetheless, despite the long-term existence of JCS, in the BC healthcare sector in 1998 the injury rate was 54% higher than the average rate for all workers in BC. And, from 1997 to 1999, direct claims costs were \$180 million in BC healthcare.

Now, it's interesting that the minister likes to quote how long ago these acts were changed. In fact, I'm looking forward to finding out which movies were in the '80s here soon. This work that was done in B.C. was done back in 1977, so for them to say that we're bringing it up to where we need to be, unfortunately it's not true. This has been around since 1977 in B.C.

In principle I see the value of these committees as they attempt to engage workers in decisions pertaining to their health and safety, but industry doesn't work in principle; it works in practice. In practice they fail to meet their mandate of reducing workplace accidents and injury. In fact, stakeholders I spoke to on joint committees said that they actually reduce safety because the time and resources put into forming, training, and maintaining these committees takes away from resources needed to buy new safety equipment, conduct training, and inspect the job sites for real dangers.

They also take the burden of care away from everyone on the work site and place it on a committee. This decreases the overall safety of a work site rather than enhancing it. What I mean by this is that these committees meet and talk about safety when they could actually be out on the job site working to improve safety measures. The cost of these JCs cannot be discounted. [interjections]

Now, I know that the members on the other side are laughing about the safety of Albertans, but I can tell you that on this side of the House we do not laugh about the safety of Albertans. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: You can tell it's Thursday. Can we please respect each other while each other is speaking? We are in second reading. If we could please let the speaker speak. You have times to rebut if you choose to, but for now we'll just listen to the speaker.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Safety measures sure can be expensive, and joint committees are no exception. All training for committee members is required by this bill to be covered by the employer. Workplace training for employees is usually covered at the expense of the employer, primarily because the knowledge and skills acquired will go to the long-term benefit of the business. However, committee members are entitled to an annual maximum of 16 hours of training at the expense of the employer for a committee that will only reduce workplace efficiency and fail to improve the safety of the workers.

Furthermore, the cost of these courses has not been determined, nor has the amount of travel required to attend them. Who will offer the courses? Will it be only OH and S, or will there be third-party providers who will be allowed to offer these courses? If just OH and S offers the courses, then I would say that this is going to bring a lot of money into the government coffers. What's stopping the government from increasing the cost of these safety courses, like they have done with the certification courses for EMTs? There are some large companies that would be able to absorb the cost for training committee members; however, small and medium-sized businesses are at a distinct disadvantage, and trying to estimate the overall expense to an employer is unrealistic.

9:20

While this bill contains positive elements, we are concerned that the sweeping and overly ambitious changes to the Workers' Compensation Act will make the system unsustainable. Jeopardizing a positive employment environment is certainly not in the best interests of Alberta workers.

Actuarial firm Eckler, retained by this government, estimated that the additional cost for WCB to implement the changes outlined in this bill will be \$94 million annually; however, this is hard to

believe given the sweeping changes, and an independent actuary has not crunched the numbers.

One area of particular concern is the government's decision to remove the maximum insurable earnings cap of \$98,720.20 per year and increase the minimum permanent total disability payments from \$900 per month to \$1,640.90 per month. This cap allowed WCB to make cost projections based on average annual claims and average payouts; however, without a cap a person making hundreds of thousands of dollars or even millions of dollars would be eligible for massive payouts, and projecting these figures would be nearly impossible. Undoubtedly, premiums would rise and only further increase the burden on employers to cover the difference, especially small and medium-sized businesses. This is most certainly another unintended consequence that this government did not think about.

But it's not all doom and gloom, Madam Speaker. This bill does a good job of outlining the purpose of the OH and S Act and specifically protects a worker's right to comply with the act without fear of reprisal from employers. The current OH and S Act fails to clearly outline its intent whereas Bill 30 states that the purpose is to promote health, safety, and well-being of workers and prevent workplace incidents, illness, injuries, and disease. Bill 30 also includes a worker's right to know about dangerous or unsafe work hazards. This provision is not enshrined in the current OH and S Act. The benefit here is that workers are given an opportunity to be involved in decisions pertaining to workplace safety and OH and S practices.

Under this new legislation all OH and S claim appeals are heard by the Labour Relations Board rather than the existing Occupational Health and Safety Council. The reason given for this was that the board had more resources to deal with appeals than the existing council and can expedite cases quicker. Under the current act all OH and S appeals are handled by the Occupational Health and Safety Council. The council was comprised of industrial personnel. Now the Labour Relations Board will deal with these appeals, putting decisions in the hands of bureaucrats who have little or no industry experience.

We applaud the protection of worker safety but ask for empirical evidence for the change in wording. What is the difference between a right to refuse unsafe work practices versus a duty to refuse them? While Bill 30 removes the burden of proof for WCB claims, the onus is on the employer to prove that an injury was caused by other factors unrelated to the workplace.

Now, it has a section in there that talks about a fair practices office. This is quite a deviation from the way that we did things before. This provides an omnibus-type role for the workers' compensation system where workers and employers can raise their concerns about board process, administration fairness, and conduct code breaches. Fair practices offices have been established in other provinces, like B.C. They are seen as an obstacle to getting a claim addressed, and this is a concern that we have. What data has the government reviewed that indicates there was a need for a fair practices office?

Now, Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity of being able to look through this bill. It's 150 pages. It is an omnibus bill. They have completely rewritten the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and they have revised the Workers' Compensation Act, and once again I applaud their efforts. The problem is that this government is notorious for the unintended consequences, and I have had very few short days to be able to consult with stakeholders, whether they be businesses, business owners, supervisors, stakeholders, labour organizations. The concerns that I hear from these stakeholders are that this government did not take into consideration those unintended consequences in their consultation process. With that, the problem with this bill – in fact, I imagine this bill will probably

be rammed through this House within a week. A 150-page bill rammed through this House in a week. It's deplorable, what they're trying to do.

I look forward to the opportunity of being able to speak many times to this bill and hope that we have the opportunity to be able to bring forward some reasoned amendments that will allow this bill to be less bad.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move an amendment to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. I have the requisite number of copies for the Clerk and member distribution.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, if you can just wait until I have the originals, please.

Mr. Gotfried: I will. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as REF1. Please continue.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Members, this is now the third time I've had to ask you to respect the speakers.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll start again:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, once again, here we are in the dying days of session, and the government introduces an extremely large – some might say overarching; others might even say overreaching – omnibus piece of legislation. As a PDF document this bill is 208 pages long, and here we are just beginning to talk about it, appropriately address it, and consult with constituents. We have a weekend ahead of us to do so, with just five days left in our session schedule.

This bill introduces sweeping changes to both the workers' compensation and the occupational health and safety systems in Alberta. These changes impact virtually every single person and business across this province. The impact will be extremely far reaching, and therefore any changes need to be considered carefully and extensively before they are introduced. And, yes, we are all interested in safe and healthy workplaces, all of us.

Taking the time to diligently review, consult, and study huge pieces of legislation like this should not be treated with hostility or derision by this government or the members opposite. We are, after all, all here to put forward the best possible legislation to advance the best interests of Albertans and by extension Alberta's employers, who contribute to the vibrancy, resiliency, and health of our communities and the economy.

If improving a piece of legislation means that it ends up being addressed in a more detailed manner in committee and then passed a few months hence with potential improvements through consultation, albeit slightly later than this government might have originally intended, truly, what difference will that make if the final legislation better meets the needs of Albertans? Strengthening the legislation should be the key objective of debate in this House, and there is no better way to strengthen legislation, particularly of this nature and depth, than by sending it to a focused, all-party committee for scrutiny, improvement, and recommendations. Sending it to a committee allows for robust discussion amongst all parties, including those not on the committee, who are welcome to participate at any time.

9:30

What we have here is a bill drafted by the government, perhaps for the government but really for all Albertans, which they may intend to push down the throats of Albertans, perhaps, in just five sitting days. Madam Speaker, I think Albertans deserve more diligence. Sending it to committee allows for an extremely thorough stakeholder consultation process. We've seen that before. That process is far superior to the process which occurred prior to the introduction of this bill because it would allow for all parties in this Assembly and all Albertans at large to step forward and bring forward the stakeholders that they feel are relevant, not just those consulted to this point. Forcing this legislation through allows the government to avoid possibly talking to people outside of their traditional sphere, big labour, perhaps, while consulting thoroughly with their friends. Again, Albertans deserve better.

Sending a piece of legislation to committee is all about careful, cautious, thorough, and robust consideration of legislation before it is passed into law. Unfortunately, in the last two and a half years the only time a committee has been used to study legislation in this House in order to improve it is when the government backbenchers brought forward unpopular and possibly unnecessary private members' bills which the government needed to deflect negative attention from. Madam Speaker, I've sat on that committee, and we've done a lot of consultation. Some of it has resulted in some great input, but it's certainly informed us as we've gone through the process, and I think that's a valuable exercise.

This would be an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that this government is willing to use the time-honoured nonpartisan committee process where it actually makes sense to do so, to use that committee to do good to bring forth better legislation and to inform this Assembly on how we can achieve that. Workplace safety should be an issue that is not politicized but fully and comprehensively addressed for the betterment of all Albertans. Every Albertan deserves the right to come to work and expect a safe environment so they're able to go home to their families each and every night. No one on any side of this House would ever debate that primary objective. The government can prove that they have no interest in politicizing this issue nor in avoiding the impact, feedback, and concerns of Albertans at large, by sending it to committee. At that stage, a multitude of presenters and stakeholders, both individual and organizational, can be brought into the process to discuss how this legislation will actually impact everyday Albertans and what it will cost Alberta businesses and business owners, both on the employee and employer sides.

Further, Madam Speaker, this government has an abysmal track record when it comes to unintended consequences with respect to various pieces of legislation, but I do not have time today to list all of them. Suffice it to say that it includes Bill 6, Bill 17, and many others. In many of these instances bills have been introduced and end up doing the exact opposite of what they were intended to do,

with Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, being the most glaring example. If in that case, along with many other examples I could cite, the government would have been more considerate, respectful in the introduction of far-reaching legislation and taken the time to actually listen to all stakeholders, they may have been able to prevent the fallout that we continue to see to this day, the unintended consequences that are rife.

There's no way that the government can sit here and pretend that this bill is perfect. In fact, that's why we're here. That's why we debate. That's why we amend. That's why we address legislation. Don't pretend that there are no flaws in this. Madam Speaker, we have an opportunity here to let a committee, an all-party committee, address that and pull in the stakeholders that we need.

Our caucus and the stakeholders that we've spoken to have a number of concerns with the bill as it currently stands, including but not limited to the joint committee training program protocol, the joint committee's cost to employers, the actual effectiveness of the joint committee, the transferring of OHS appeals from the OHS Council to the Labour Relations Board, the expanded authority of OHS officers, the implementation of a new fair practices office, and how the effectiveness of that fair practices office will be measured.

I'm just beginning. That's just the beginning. It's 208 pages long. We're taking time to go through it, and we're talking to many stakeholders now. I think going to committee would allow all of us to do that in a way that actually reflects the needs and the priorities of all Albertans and Alberta employers. I'm sure my hon. colleagues will be able to elaborate further on these points in due course, and I'm sure we will.

But this bill, Madam Speaker, has its issues and deserves greater attention and scrutiny, which can be brought to it via an all-party committee, the Economic Future Committee in this case, which again brings me back to my original point. This legislation has an extremely wide-ranging and far-reaching impact on virtually every single business and person in this province. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce, a well-respected advocacy group which represents businesses in every single riding in this province, has stated that they would like the government to send this bill to committee for further review and analysis. They state, "Taking this step will help identify how employers and employees can best adjust to changes introduced with the new legislation, which are intended to prevent illness and injury in the workplace." Again, no equivocation with respect to what the objectives are. I couldn't agree more with them.

The bill is one of the most far-reaching, perhaps overreaching pieces of legislation we have seen in this session. Both employers and employees need to be allowed the time to properly understand and appreciate how this affects them, what it costs them, how it will impact them, and the possibility of unintended consequences with respect to and as a result of this bill. The government might think they can boil this bill down to a couple of quick talking points, a press conference, and have it just breeze through this Assembly with nary a concern – maybe, invoking past tactics, we might even hear some cult movie references – but that is just not the case. [interjection] *Beetlejuice*, indeed. Albertans deserve better, Madam Speaker.

This bill affects virtually every single employer in this province and virtually every single employee in Alberta. That cannot be overstated. Committee is a perfect place to thoroughly address those concerns. To allow all impacted stakeholders the opportunity to come before that committee and share their concerns, yes, an opportunity for input, consultation, and engagement of those most affected: a novel idea. Is that too much to ask? Madam Speaker, we need to slow down this process, take the time, listen to Albertans – the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, Keep Alberta Working, CFIB, employer and employee associations, unions, private citizens, and

more – and do the right thing by Albertans and send Bill 30 to committee.

I would encourage all members to vote in favour of this referral amendment so that we can do the right things on behalf of our constituents. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not going to spend too much time talking about the referral amendment because I think we need to get it off the table as quickly as possible, but I will say that I find this amendment – we're talking about the amendment, right? [interjections] Okay. You had a puzzled look on your face.

I think this referral amendment is actually insulting to all working Albertans, frankly, because a lot of consultation was done on this. I think they need to accept the fact. What I find insulting about this is that they want to delay safety, they want to delay benefits, and they want to delay solutions that other workers in other provinces have had for many, many years. This is just another example of what they call the Alberta advantage, which is lax labour laws and low benefits and low wages. We're not working on that. We're working on the Alberta advancement, Madam Speaker. If they had their way, they would delay this for another four decades. Four decades. Come on. Alberta workers deserve better.

As I said, I don't want to spend a lot of time on this, but I won't be supporting this at all. We need to move forward. Let's discuss the bill, and let's move forward. Let's protect our workers. There are a lot of great things in here. Actually, the speaker prior to the amendment acknowledged that there are some very positive things in here that they can agree with. We all agree with it, and all Albertans agree with it. Let's move on, let's not support this, and let's pass this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

9:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to ask the member – I'm very interested in his perspective on this – what statistics he has to prove that the other legislation in the other provinces actually contributed to greater safety for employees. You know, we should be focusing on objectives and outcomes when we're talking about workplace safety. We should be talking about the number of incidents. We should be talking about the number of accidents. What have you got to prove that? I'm interested very, very much, and I think it speaks to my amendment, in that we need to know these numbers, we need to understand, and we need to talk to stakeholders about how this is going to improve and help them. We also have to understand the costs of achieving that and actually the results we're going to get from it.

So I'm very interested to hear where your statistics are from, and I'd be very interested to understand what you've compared it to and to see what kind of outcomes you expect with this and how you can give us more information that we might receive from stakeholders if we were to do more consultation.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, one statistic, Madam Speaker, is the fact that we understand that for every dollar spent on safety, three dollars are saved by not having people out of work.

Mr. Gotfried: That's from where?

Mr. Coolahan: That was from an independent actuary cited by the speaker from . . .

Mr. Rosendahl: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Coolahan: That place.

It is also my understanding that Alberta has the highest incidence of deaths on the job. There are your statistics, and that's why we need to move forward on this.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes. I guess I was listening to the Member for Calgary-Klein talk. He said that it was insulting to workers to send this to committee to be looked at and have more consultation. Now, he also said that this is delaying safety and delaying benefits. But we're sitting here on November 30. This session started on October 30. Now they bring this 200-page document to us, in the last few days of this session, when they could have brought it forward at the beginning of the session. We could have sent it to committee, we could have looked at it in committee, and we could be sitting here discussing a far better document, that's had more consultation. As it is, they want to get up, and they want to talk about a delay to send us to committee to have more work and to have more consultation.

Now, they said here that they actually had eight round-table discussions. Eight. Wow. This is over a nine-week period. Madam Speaker, I think this government has spent much more time on bills that are much smaller. I bet you they spent much more time and money on the time change bill, and now they're sitting here talking that this is going to delay something.

Well, Madam Speaker, we had an instance last night in a committee where the members in the committee didn't want to spend two hours to listen to people present to them. They turned down an opportunity to listen to stakeholder groups. Two hours. I guess I can see why they don't want this to go to committee because they don't want to do any work in committee. They want to do as little as possible in committee. I guess that's why they don't want this to go to committee. I guess this is all making sense now.

So when we hear them talking about how this is something about delaying something, I mean, obviously they just don't want to do it. A nine-week period. This bill is huge, it's far reaching, it takes into consideration things that haven't been changed in 15 years. They've done all this consultation, eight round-table discussions in a nine-week period, and they can't send this to committee, presumably, I guess, because they don't want to do any work in committee. Last night they couldn't find two hours in the next few months to talk to stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, I just don't understand. They actually said that they had 1,300 . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A little bit of a coffee incident here, but I imagine we'll be fine.

Here's my question or my concern that I have, not so much with the specifics of the bill because it's such a large piece of legislation. The reason I'm going to speak in favour of the referral

motion is not because I question the overall concept of updating critically important legislation with the objective of protecting workers in this province. I would think, I would hope that all members of this House would agree that it is far overdue to update especially the Workers' Compensation Board legislation. It's been an organization that has had its great challenges. I'm sure all of us have many constituents who bring the struggles that they face with workers' compensation to our constituency offices. Now, WCB, I think, has done a reasonable job in adjudicating many of those concerns but by no means all of them, so the idea of creating an effective ombudsman-type model within the WCB on the surface seems like a really, really good idea. I think that's welcome.

I want to be really clear that I'm not questioning the overall merits or the general principle of this bill. What I will say is that the bill that is before us here is of such magnitude and scale. It's larger, I think, than the MGA changes that we saw. It impacts two massive pieces of legislation that have wide-ranging impacts on Alberta workers and wide-ranging impacts on Alberta business. What I would have preferred to see is an approach by this government to this legislation similar to what we saw with the MGA, where significant consultations had been undertaken. I will say that I actually think the consultation process on this legislation was not bad. It was better than on minimum wage, which, as far as I understand it, was probably two meetings with two different groups. That wasn't nearly enough.

The MGA consultation, however, was a long-term, thoughtful, wide-ranging process where many, many, many stakeholders all around the province had an opportunity to come and sit at round-tables, provide feedback and input into the changes they would like to see in the MGA. Then legislation was tabled. Initial relatively minor or generally agreed-to changes were passed through the Legislature. Then legislation was tabled, and there was a long consultation process through the summer where all relevant stakeholders, all Albertans had an opportunity to weigh in on the legislation itself and actually provide feedback on the proposed rules that were going to change.

From that, the legislation itself was amended somewhat. But more to the point than the changes that were made, the stakeholders from all sides felt like the process was a good one. Not everyone at AAMD and C agrees with everything that was changed in the MGA. Not everybody at AUMA agrees with everything that was changed in the MGA. Some wanted it to go further, some thought it went too far, and some felt there were some things missing. That's always going to happen. We're always going to have that type of situation with any legislation in this Assembly.

But when we have changes as far reaching and wide ranging as we're facing here today, I think it would be incumbent on the government to take a long-term, thoughtful process to this because the problem the government faces is one of perception at the very least, the perception that here we are, four and a half days from the end of the Third Session of the 29th Legislature, and we're going to be perceived, if not in reality, to be ramming through hundreds of pages worth of a bill. Now, whether that actually bears out in truth, in reality, we live in a political world. I hope that doesn't come as any great surprise to anybody in this place, right? Imagine that.

This is really a caution to the government or a request to take a thoughtful approach to this. I think we all agree, I hope we all agree that this is a really, really important piece of legislation, and it's really important that we get it right. It's important that we get it right for working Albertans. It's important that we get it right for employers.

9:50

This is going to last for many, many years. If the perception of this bill is that the NDP is bringing in a bill with a title that makes it hard to vote against – because who's not going to stand up for the rights of working Albertans? – and that on the surface looks like it's all about improvements to WCB and worker safety, well, frankly, no one ought to be against those things, and I would argue that no one probably is against those things. But the question is a question of degree and approach and scale.

The reason I think it's important that we do support this referral motion is that we take the time to thoughtfully go through and allow stakeholders from all over the province to provide input into the bill itself, not broad-brush concepts, not online surveys, not an occasional round-table, but the actual legislation itself. Let's let labour and employment lawyers have a look at this. Let's let public unions, the public and private sectors have a look at the bill and actually digest all of the different clauses. Let's let employers and chambers of commerce have a chance to digest the bill and look at it clause by clause.

Let's let our constituents have an opportunity to weigh in. I'd love to do a town hall on this. I'd love to hear what my constituents think. I think we should all try to do those sorts of things on really important legislation. I think that not only does that result in better legislation that better serves the needs of all Albertans, but it helps this government with a perception problem that they're going to have with this bill.

I encourage all members to please support this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, we've been talking a little bit about the consultation process, and I'm, you know, dismayed at how we seem to minimize what's been done. I just thought we'd clarify here on occupational health and safety, just that, the consultations that occurred there. We've received over 1,300 online surveys. Nearly 90 written submissions were put in through eight in-person round-table discussions with over 200 stakeholders. I'm just kind of curious if maybe some of the members are kind of feeling that those 200 stakeholders and their opinions are not very important. That is just simply for occupational health and safety.

I think when we start talking about the WCB review, Madam Speaker, we're talking about responses of over 1,700 questionnaires, 200 written submissions, 67 workbook responses, and when the panel submitted its report for review, there were over yet another 60 responses to the panel's review. So to say that we're just having one-off consultations here and there is a little bit, I think, demeaning to that process and the folks that happened to participate in that. I think one thing that we must remember over all is that we're talking about a system that hasn't been significantly reviewed at all in over 15 years. Any chance that there might be some organizations and groups and people out there that over the last 15 years have been working on this? Probably a whole lot more than some of the members on the other side have been working on this.

We have another system that hasn't been looked at for an extremely long period of time. I think it's probably pretty safe to say that there are some organizations, some individuals, and some groups that have also been working to move that process along.

I think we just probably want to keep some of those things in mind when we're thinking about this referral motion, and I would certainly suggest that we not support that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. You know, I actually want to agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. This hasn't been updated in 15 years, in exactly the same way that the MGA, if my dates are correct – and someone may correct me if I'm wrong about this – hadn't been updated since, I think, 1995, and that's actually exactly the point. This is a government that's gone through some really good process, and it's a government that's gone through some perhaps not great process.

You know, one of the challenges and the feedback that we're getting from employers is: "Great. We want updates to this legislation, to both OH and S and WCB. We want to improve safety conditions." Every responsible organization that I've ever worked with, in particular in the energy industry, is laser focused on safety. It's an absolutely urgent imperative for them from a human perspective and from a business perspective. These are really important things in industry in this province. I know that they will welcome many of these changes, and they're certainly onboard and onside with them.

But to table legislation yesterday or earlier this week and give them less than 10 days with the actual bill itself to digest all of those changes, to provide feedback to us in this Assembly just isn't enough time. It really isn't. If this government seeks to make substantial changes to legislation like this, you ought to do it at the very beginning of session and give us a number of weeks to get through it. The perception is that you are dropping it near the end so that we've got to sprint through it, and we don't have time to really get through it because you don't really want to spend the time it takes to actually thoughtfully review the legislation.

Again the Member for Edmonton-Decore is bang on. It hasn't been done in 15 years. Yes, there were round-table processes, and, yes, there were many submissions, hundreds of submissions – absolutely, there were – but that was before we saw the legislation. Now that we've seen the legislation, based on that input, let's have another round, just like we did with the Municipal Government Act. That's a good process. This government should be praised for that good process, and you should take your own example of what good process looks like.

Unfortunately, this is not good process. There is no other way of saying it. We're going to rush this legislation through. We're going to be here late at night. We're going to get fractious. The Speaker will call points of order and call us all to order, as you rightly should. It doesn't have to be this way. It really, really doesn't. I know that everybody wants workers to be safe.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this morning to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. Now, this bill significantly amends the OH and S Act and the Workers' Compensation Act; in fact, a major refurbishment of workplace safety rules, certainly. I think that major refurbishment is a reasonable description of what Bill 30 proposes.

Questions that I would have as an Alberta taxpayer, understanding the sheer amount of change that will be required to amend the WCB act and the included huge costs that will be related to those changes, are: has the government determined whether or not such costly changes will make the system unsustainable, and

has there been any work done with regard to any kind of an independent study in that regard? Those are just questions that I would start with, I guess.

I guess I would also suggest that it isn't surprising that such an omnibus bill would show up in the fall legislative session, late in the fall. A flagship bill for each session generally shows up late in session, and not always but quite often they tend to be bills that affect Albertans in a substantial way. This bill does not disappoint. We are told that this bill will fix a broken system. We are told that the measures being proposed in Bill 30 will actually enhance health and safety.

I'm reminiscing on this government ramming through in this Legislature changes to the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code all at once, monstrous changes to two very labour-related bills. It appears that we're doing it again by proposing changes to both the Workers' Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act at the same time. Because of the sheer size of this bill and the size of the acts that the bill proposes to amend, I think it would be safe to say that the government could easily have split this rather large, complex bill into two more manageable separate pieces of legislation. But, as they say, it is what it is.

Yet another small question seems to loom. We talked about this here a moment ago. There were indeed consultations held. That much we know. But critics of those consultations allow that the questions may have been leading. This could lead to another question: in its due diligence to perform some sort of consultation, did the government try to confirm and gain approval for predetermined ideas rather than actually try to listen to what was being said by stakeholders and the public? I looked at the submissions. I didn't look at them all, but I did look at the Alberta Wheat Commission's submission. I suggest the members opposite read that.

10:00

Remember Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act? May I remind everyone that freedom of information documents obtained showed that the government's consultation on workplace laws last spring had a predetermined outcome. This is like déjà vu all over again.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, are you speaking to the referral?

Mr. Schneider: I'm speaking to the referral.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Just clarifying.

Mr. Schneider: I'm getting there, Madam Speaker. [interjection] Would he like to speak to the referral? [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, let's refocus, please. [interjection] Hon. member.

Please continue.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate it.

Let's just turn the corner here a little bit to something I found was rather interesting about Bill 30. I received in my inbox yesterday morning an e-mail from the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce. I receive e-mails from the Lethbridge chamber on almost a daily basis – notices of luncheons and meetings and information on business issues and business accolades and such – a very busy organization. They do good work. However, yesterday morning they actually forwarded an issue-based e-mail from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. Now, I may be wrong, but I believe the

Alberta Chambers of Commerce would be considered stakeholders of the Alberta government.

The opening comment in the e-mail was:

The Alberta Government has introduced Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans . . . Bill 30 makes significant changes to the [WCB] and [OHS] standards, which will result in new costs and administrative burdens for employers.

Small business, it appears, is somewhat concerned about the changes that are about to be thrust upon them. They are worried about changes to workplace standards and responsibilities for employers. I should say that I think they have some very good points here that I'd like to share.

As far as hard costs are concerned, the Alberta Chambers are concerned about the fact that

- the cap on maximum insurable earnings through the WCB will be removed. Workers earning more than the cap will now be fully compensated for 90% of their earnings.

They are also concerned that

- WCB claims will now include a \$90,000 fatality benefit.

They are also concerned that

- stop work order[s] may be issued on multiple work sites of an employer [and that]
- when evidence is equal, WCB claim decisions are to be resolved in favor of the worker.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce is also very much concerned with the speed with which these changes will begin to take effect. The biggest concern is small business, which will have very little time to try to adjust to their new responsibilities and very little time to fine-tune or become well educated as to how to take on and fulfill those responsibilities.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce contends that the Alberta government has not completed nor provided any kind of economic impact study for Bill 30 on employers and essential industries. They state in their e-mail:

At first estimate, it is anticipated that the changes introduced by this legislation may result in approximately a 10% increase in the total WCB premiums collected from Alberta employers.

Another shot at small business.

Until this legislation came along, Madam Speaker, I had kind of forgotten that this government and their friends at the federal level believe that small-business owners are some kind of wealthy cheats that have been doing their best not to be fair with employees. Small and medium-sized businesses will be especially at risk. They are not nearly as able to absorb what boils down to increased administrative costs, added training costs, and alternative work placements.

If we think about this for a minute, does it not appear to anyone on the other side of the House that money spent by a small or medium-sized business on supporting the new proposed administrative costs may actually take away from those sized businesses the ability to invest in new safety measures and equipment? I mean, as much as you may believe that small and medium-sized businesses have this amazing stash of money somewhere, piling on more administrative costs can start to put some of these guys' bottom lines in jeopardy. There isn't some bottomless pit of money to draw on. It's like death by a thousand cuts. It's simply unfair to pile burden upon burden, expense upon expense onto small and medium-sized Alberta businesses. These are the people you claim to be looking out for, yet every piece of evidence shows that your slant is simply not compatible with independent business. After losing hundreds of thousands of Alberta jobs, this government acts proud in adding 70,000 new jobs. Heck, it's one of their talking points.

Are you going to ask me to get to the referral?

The Acting Speaker: I am going to ask you to please get to the referral, yes.

Mr. Schneider: Okay. This bill is too complex, too burdensome simply to jam it through the House using the NDP majority without taking into account how hard it may impact these businesses, the same businesses that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce are concerned about, the same businesses that provide jobs in towns and cities all across Alberta, the same businesses already impacted by increased costs from the impending carbon tax hike, raises to the minimum wage, and so on. It's economic death by a thousand cuts.

What harm could there be in taking the time to get this right? I don't believe there should be much of an issue with sending this off to committee for further study and comprehensive analysis, as my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek just proposed. This is the same recommendation that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce proposed in their e-mail yesterday morning. [interjection] The same businesses, yeah.

Every week we hear gut-wrenching stories of long-standing businesses closing their doors because this government has created a climate that makes the challenge of running a business even more difficult. You can only increase the size of the public sector so much to pad your job stats before the bubble bursts. The Alberta Chambers realizes that the government has failed to provide "an economic impact analysis of this legislation on employers and core industries." It is an unfortunate refrain that we've heard time and again from stakeholders. I believe that this government, once again, has failed on this bill, and it will be the fine people of Alberta that pay for this government's follies.

Let's heed the words of my caucus mates and the Alberta Chambers, step back, and send this bill to committee, where it can go through proper vetting. I ask everyone in the House to please support the referral amendment. It seems to me that this is certainly what the Alberta Chambers, a stakeholder of the government, prefers to believe is the right way to do things, and even that little piece of information is enough for me to determine that that's what should happen.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was interested to hear my neighbour to the north, my colleague from Little Bow, speak about the need for an economic impact study. One of the components of an economic impact study talks about that important vetting process of making sure that you've got proper consultation, that you get not just the advice that you're looking for but, actually, advice from both sides so that the legislation can be measured and properly vetted.

From what I understand, there are a little over 160,000 businesses in Alberta. I'd heard a comment made about how robust the consultation process had been. From what I understand, there are 1,300 online survey responses, 90 written submissions and eight in person, round-table discussions, over 200 stakeholders represented there.

But I want to just do some really quick math here to figure out what that does in terms of consultation. I want to ask my esteemed colleague to comment on this. If there were 200 stakeholders that were represented of the 160,000 and some-odd businesses in Alberta, from what I understand, that would be about a 1.25 per cent representation of businesses in Alberta.* Now, when we talk about a robust consultation process, I cannot believe that this government

and the government members on that side would stand here and tell us that that is considered robust, a 1.25 per cent representation of 160,000 businesses in Alberta. Yet that is considered as robust.

Now, one of the concerns that I have about their concept of robust consultation is that they would consider 1.25 per cent to be robust. I'd like to ask the member who spoke to this so eloquently to help this Chamber and, hopefully, the members opposite understand how 1.25 per cent could be considered as a robust consultation.

10:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Interesting question. I'd have to say that at 1.25 per cent I think this House should be embarrassed. Over a nine-week period we gathered – I don't remember what the stats were, but if it ends up being 1.25 per cent, I think what we're going to find is that when business finally does get a hold of Bill 30 and starts looking this over, we're going to start hearing a lot of issues come forward. It would be nice to have heard more than we have to get our teeth sunk into right now, but I think that before the session starts next week, we should have some more interest from those that are actually going to be affected by this.

I spoke about the Alberta Wheat Commission submission, and this now also affects the legislation that Bill 6 brought forward. I would suggest that they didn't go so far as to say that it was a negative way, but it's just the same as it is to small business, another attack at the bottom line of small business in Alberta.

Yes, I would suggest that 1.25 per cent of 160,000 businesses is a little bit embarrassing. I would suggest that possibly an opportunity to get to committee so that we could hear from 4 per cent of businesses in Alberta would be substantial.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to make a quick comment on some of the things here. There was a reference to the actuarial report, which, I'm happy to say, of course, has been done. There were some concerns around the sustainability of the program. It's been set up very specifically to be sustainable. When we talk about supporting our small and medium-sized businesses, the changes that have been proposed here in Bill 30 are changes that are reflective of what's going on across the rest of the country right now, and to the best of my knowledge businesses and whatnot have not folded up.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the referral of Bill 30. I'll just kind of try to put what I think is some reasonable perspective on this thing.

This is a substantial bill, and I will say, in fairness, that there are some good things in here, but this is changing the way that every business in Alberta is going to have to operate, so I think it's incumbent upon all of us, on all sides of this House, to be responsible in the way that we deal with this and the way we talk about this. Frankly, when I hear members saying, "If you don't want to pass this today, you are not in a hurry; you want to delay safety for workers; you want to delay workers' rights," I've never heard such a pile of bunk in my life.

*See page 2143, right column, paragraph 12

If it was as immediately life and death as the one hon. member that said those things would have us believe, then the government should have brought this forward two and a half years ago, but they didn't. It would be unfair of me to say that but not any more unfair than what the hon. member said earlier this morning. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, can we please let the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays speak. Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My point is not that either viewpoint is fair. My point is that neither viewpoint is fair and that it's a severely irresponsible and reckless way to talk about a bill that affects so many Albertans. One of my esteemed colleagues said that there are about 160,000 businesses in Alberta. He may be right. I don't know, frankly, whether he's right or wrong or indifferent, but I can tell you that if it's anywhere in the neighbourhood, you know, with 87 ridings, all of us have somewhere probably between, on average, 12,000 or 20,000 businesses in each of our ridings, just using rough numbers and averages.

My point is not to pinpoint the number but, rather, to bring the perspective, Madam Speaker, that that is a lot of people that we are responsible to that we're going to change everything about how they make their living, because people in businesses make their living. They feed their families, they support their communities, and very often they have money left over to donate to charities, nonprofits, and other things that make Alberta better. When you think of it that way – all of us should think that way and think to ourselves that if we're going to change everything about 12,000 to 20,000 people in our riding that we represent, we should probably put a little bit of thought into it and be just a little bit careful that we're not making their lives worse.

Now, the government always says that they make Albertans' lives better, and I'm sure that some of them actually believe that. I would say that on this side I don't think we agree, but that's okay. They're entitled to say that, and they're entitled to think that, but if they actually believe it, that would mean that this would be a good time to get this right, when it affects, on average, 12,000 to 20,000 businesses for each of the 87 of us in this important Legislature.

Before we put their businesses at risk, before we put their livelihoods at risk, before we put their contributions to the betterment of Alberta through the wages that they pay, the money that they earn, their contributions to the betterment of society at risk all at once, one would think that just the sheer enormity of this bill and the sheer enormity of the number of Albertans – I think you could legitimately say that it affects if not every Albertan virtually every Albertan because the vast majority of those that don't have a business work for one. Even if you don't have a business or work for one, probably someone you love does either have a business or work for one. I don't think that's much of a stretch. I doubt anyone from any side of the House would argue with me on that. They may, but I'd be surprised, frankly. I just think that they understand that that's intrinsically true.

When you actually look at that perspective, to accuse members of the House of trying to delay safety – in fact, trying not to be accusatory, I would just ask members to think about how careful they ought to be before we bring this forward. Further, you've got to wonder, frankly. I know the government has talked to some people, as pointed out by somebody in here, 1 or 1 and a half per cent of Albertans, but it affects a hundred per cent of people.

It's not just a matter of changing the rules, Madam Speaker. It's a matter of having the businesses understand the rules. It's having them put in a position to obey the rules. Even if they want to obey the rules, first they have to understand. They have to get access to

what paperwork needs to be filled out. They have to get access to what committees they're going to have to have.

I mean, just look at the index of the bill. It's the obligations of prime contractors, self-employed persons, temporary staff agencies, multiple organizations, service providers, suppliers, workers, supervisors, and employers. I think most of us know what the word "employer" means, but the fact is that it's important that the businesses understand it in the context of the legislation. If somebody says, "Well, you're being silly," well, no. Actually, for many of these things within the legislation there is a definition of these things, which means that the government acknowledges that not everybody will automatically and intrinsically and immediately understand the definition of these terms because the government has taken time – and I think it's a good idea, frankly, that they did – to outline what all these things are.

To think that our hair has to be on fire and we have to pass this in 10 minutes when you're going to have 160,000 Alberta businesses and, by extension, hundreds of thousands or millions, literally, of Alberta jobs depending upon the businesses being able to interpret, act on, and obey this legislation – man, I don't think we ought to hurry. I think it's more important that we get it right than we get it fast.

10:20

You know what? I'm not prepared to say that the government got it wrong. I'm not prepared to say that they got it all right either, and that's exactly the point. Something as big as this ought to be out in the public realm for more than seven days or 10 days before it's passed. When it affects that many people, that many livelihoods, the future of – everybody in this Legislature will have people in their lives that they love that this will affect dramatically. Members of the House may say: well, there are people I know in my life it will affect positively. Great. All the more reason to get it right. If it's going to affect them positively, then it should be out in the public realm long enough so that the businesses can actually know it, understand it, and put those positive effects in place.

I'm prepared to try to believe that there are things in here that will make some people's lives better, but since it's 147 pages and I've only had it in my hands for a couple of days, I'm not prepared to say that I understand it well enough to say that it won't affect some people's lives negatively also. In either case, in the good cases and the bad cases, I think it's prudent, I think it's responsible, I think it's important, and I think it's our duty to get it right. I think it's our duty to make sure that Albertans understand it. Under this dome is a microcosm of this great and diverse province of ours.

You know what? Some large companies may have hot- and cold-running lawyers and accountants and consultants that can roll out a report based on this legislation in a week or 10 days and say: this is what we need to do in our large, big corporation. Great. But even in those large corporations it might take longer. My point is that a lot of the bigger businesses will have resources to apply straight to understanding and obeying this legislation. But what about the flower shop that the couple owns and operates who are maybe working 16 hours a day and barely paying the rent in the strip mall that they're in and barely making enough money to pay their mortgage and their rent at home and barely making enough money after, you know, sometimes 14- and 16-hour days to pay for their kids' tuition or daycare or whatever else it is in their life that they have to pay for? To demand that they instantly have to drop everything and on very short notice put themselves in a position to obey what I will acknowledge is a very important piece of legislation: I just don't think that's fair. I don't think it's reasonable. I don't think it's right.

If the government believes, as I sincerely hope they do, that their legislation is good – we on the other side are not required to believe that their legislation is good because we haven't had it in our hands as long as they have because they have actually created the legislation, so let's hope they believe it's good. But even if they believe it's good, that's all the more reason why the government should support this amendment, should send it to committee for no other reason – hopefully, it would provide opportunities to make what they think is good legislation even better. It might provide opportunities for them to say: "Oh, yeah. Whoops. We thought that was good. It wasn't quite as good as we thought, so it's an opportunity for us to improve it a little bit." I don't think I'm insulting the government in any way in saying this.

More importantly, it will be out in the public realm, hopefully for a few weeks or a few months, so that 162,000 businesses, including that couple running the flower shop that is working 16 hours a day and barely making it, can actually have time to read it, understand it, get some advice on it, and obey it because we all have to obey the law or face the consequences for not obeying the law. I would hate to think that we are going to put all these businesses, big and small, in a position where even if they want to obey the law, they don't have time to because they don't have time to understand it by the time they have to obey it. It's not a one- or two-line change. It's not, you know, that you're going to pay a different tax percentage, one calculation difference and you're off to the races or something of that nature.

This, by the minister's introduction of the bill, changes the fundamental nature of business and work in Alberta. If the government is going to make a change like that, you've got to respect what that does to 4.3 million Albertans. I'm sure there are members on the other side that probably agree with what I'm saying. If you're going to change everything and you think it's good, then maybe you ought to give Albertans a fair amount of time for them to understand just what great work you've done (a) so that they can obey the law, (b) maybe so they can appreciate the current government and what great work they've done if indeed it's as great as they think and hope it is.

To be clear, I haven't given up on that, that there may well be good stuff in here. In fact, from my initial understanding of it I think there are good and not so good things in here, but there are good things in here. That is why I think it's important that you take the time. It's not just one act; it's the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Workers' Compensation Act.

I'm sure I am not the only Member of the Legislative Assembly who gets a lot of people coming into my office and saying: "I was treated unfairly by the Workers' Compensation Board. I don't agree with their medical assessment. I deserve better coverage because of my injury than what I've got. How do I file an appeal? I don't think I was treated fairly at the appeal." Whatever it is, you know, I'll be surprised if there is any member of this important Legislature that hasn't had people come into their office and do that. Those people need to understand what this legislation means if they either have been injured on the job or there's a chance they could be. The employers need to understand what their obligations are to those employees so that they can meet those obligations.

And it's about time. It's about time. It is about 160,000 businesses, big and small – again, those corner flower shops, those bars and restaurants, the dry cleaners, the oil and gas companies, the private doctors' offices, and every other manner of business that you want to name – with varying degrees of resources, being required to completely change the way that the occupational health and safety codes affect them, to completely change the way the Workers' Compensation Board rules affect them.

I think it's only right, fair, and reasonable for members of this House to say to those Albertans: "We're doing something really important here, and we need you to understand it. We need you to have time to obey what we think is a great piece of legislation. We need your workers to understand what their obligations are." There are millions of workers in Alberta, and there is a section here on the responsibilities of workers. You know what, Madam Speaker? Expecting them to do it in seven or 10 days is not reasonable.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank my colleague from Calgary-Hays for his comments. He brings up some very, very good points about how this affects small business and the time frame it takes for this implementation.

I just want to read a little bit out of the bill here. It's under Coming into Force.

51(1) Sections 11(1)(a), 12(1)(a), (b) and (d), 26, 27, 28, 35, 38, 42, 44 and 45 come into force on January 1, 2018.

Now, Madam Speaker, we're sitting here, of course, on I believe it's November 30. This session started on October 30. We've had members opposite, particularly Calgary-Klein, suggest, you know, that we can't delay this. This is all about safety and benefits. This can't be delayed. Of course, we've already delayed it a month because we're sitting here on November 30. We started on October 30. It could have been brought into the Legislature right then. Now, this is their argument for not sending this to committee, when we could have had a committee working on this for a month already.

I'd just like to hear the Member for Calgary-Hays' thoughts again on this as far as: if this bill does pass, it'll most likely pass here in the first few days of December, maybe by the 5th, 6th, 7th of December. I'd be guessing that's what the government wants to do here.

Now, a good portion of this bill comes into force on January 1, 2018. We have many small businesses, of course, like the member pointed out, that don't have lawyers and accountants and people that are just sitting there waiting for government legislation to show up so that they can figure out how they're going to implement it in their small business.

10:30

Now, these small businesses, these ma-and-pa organizations, will have roughly three weeks through Christmas and New Year's to figure out how they're going to implement a large portion of this bill. I would be interested in hearing how the Member for Calgary-Hays feels that will affect them, how that'll affect these small businesses that have three weeks through the holiday season to figure out how to implement something with so widespread effects as OHS and WCB, basically a total rewrite of these legislations, an omnibus bill that will affect every business in Alberta.

So I would just like him to maybe expand on that and let us know how he feels this will affect the businesses in his constituency.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, and I appreciate the question from my colleague. I think he makes an important point. Over the next three weeks and month or so over Christmas and even New Year's for some businesses that will be the time when they make all their money for the year if they're in the retail business, so they are working down to dusk. At the end of the day, those poor people – I wish them well because I'm grateful that they're doing some of these jobs and I'm not, and I admire them for doing them – will be

dead on their feet at the end of every day because they will be going into their business during the busiest time of the year. They'll be swarmed with people. They'll try to have a smile on their face though they're dog tired for 12 or sometimes 14 or more hours a day, and then they're going to go home.

If we rush this, they're going to actually think: "Man, how am I not going to be put out of business by the health and safety inspector if I don't do this? I'm too tired to read it, but if I don't read it, I'm out of business, and if I do read it, I won't be on the ball to make my year's sales tomorrow." For another class of businesses, industrial and others, this is some of the time when they actually can give their employees some time off and get some time off themselves, so time is a big issue.

I will say that there are important questions that haven't been answered yet in the legislation, and I think a committee would be a great time to explore some of these things. For example, the actuarial firm Eckler said that these changes in WCB will cost \$94 million annually, yet when we were at the bill briefing, we said: why has the government not paid back the half a billion dollars of WCB overcontributions? We were told by the government's representatives that that was in anticipation of Bill 30, that some of that money might be needed. Now, there might be a very good reason. I'm not at this point casting any aspersions or saying that anything untoward is going on, nothing to that effect, but I am saying that one of the questions that could be answered is: why the difference?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good morning. I rise this morning to speak to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, the notice of amendment, the referral from my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek. Mr. Gotfried moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

My goodness, what a great opportunity for engaging Albertans, consulting Albertans, reducing unintended consequences of a huge, late omnibus bill and the opportunity to get it right. But, Madam Speaker, as we know, unfortunately this government has a bad habit, a bad habit of introducing their largest and most complex pieces of legislation as close to the end of session as possible and then insisting that the bill move through the Legislature process at 1,300 kilometres per hour. That particular ploy always confounded me. Does the government honestly believe that the opposition members' desire to get back to their constituencies for the winter break is so powerful – so powerful – that we're going to simply let bad legislation become enshrined into law without doing our due diligence, the due diligence that Albertans granted us in the opportunity to represent them within this House? Is that the mentality of the four hon. members of the NDP caucus elected in 2012, when I was first elected? Is that the mentality that the four hon. members had in 2012 when they were in opposition?

Or, Madam Speaker, is it because the government believes that the contents of this bill are so bad that if anyone took the time to read it, the government would actually have to defend its own

legislation? I certainly hope that both are not true. I would be most disappointed, as would the rest of Alberta, I am sure.

But let's be clear. This bill will pass, and it will become law regardless of whether the opposition members want it or not. Quite frankly, Bill 30 will pass and become law regardless of whether the people of Alberta want it or not, which is a much bigger oversight and sin. The government is supported by a majority of the members of the House – and I respect that – but the fact that the government is supported by a majority of the members here does not give the government the moral authority to introduce legislation that doesn't put the best interests of Albertans first.

However, if that's not the reason the government waited so long to introduce Bill 30, then it begs this question: why did the government wait until November 27 to introduce a bill that is over 200 pages long in the Legislature? As stated, we've been here since October 30, the government has passed the two-and-a-half-year mark, and here we are at 1,300 kilometres an hour: got to get this done.

The only other reason why the government would wait over four weeks after session began to introduce this bill is because they hadn't finished writing the bill and they needed that extra month to finish writing it. This many pages of legislation written that quickly needs to be referred to committee, needs to have oversight, needs to ensure that we are protecting Alberta workers, Alberta families, and Alberta communities.

Madam Speaker, I'm not sure which reason is worse – I'm not sure what the government's reason is – that the government is trying to ram legislation through that it knows doesn't put Albertans first, or is it worse that it cannot develop legislation within the schedule that the government itself fully, one hundred per cent, controls? The NDP government fully, one hundred per cent, controls our schedules.

If our government needed more time, it had a number of options it could have used. First, it could have delayed or postponed the start of the fall session until it had all of its legislation completed and ready to be tabled in the Legislature, save the taxpayer a few dollars, allow us to consult better with our constituents around Alberta. They could have done that but didn't.

The NDP government also could have tabled the legislation and then adjourned the debate until the Legislature reconvenes in the spring. Madam Speaker, that is what this same government did with Bill 21, the Modernized Municipal Government Act, in 2016. The previous Municipal Affairs minister tabled the bill near the end of the spring session and then adjourned debate over the summer while she and a number of senior department staff conducted a fairly comprehensive tour across the province. I understand that based on the feedback that she was able to gather from stakeholders, the government developed some amendments to the bill before it was ultimately passed unanimously. Ultimately passed unanimously. They took the time to consult, they took the time to do it right, they took the time to engage the opposition, and it was passed unanimously. The feedback I received from stakeholders on the government's handling of Bill 21 was overwhelmingly positive regardless of whether the stakeholder ultimately agreed with the government's changes or not.

10:40

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, and finally, the government could support my hon. colleague's referral motion, which would result in the bill being referred to the legislative standing committee made up of members of this House, members of this House that could review the bill in fine detail, call witnesses and stakeholders to present their feedback, and ultimately provide recommendations

back to this Legislature, back to cabinet, back to this government based on that feedback.

Madam Speaker, those are three options this government could have used to ensure they present the best possible bill to Albertans.

It's too late to delay or postpone the fall sitting, but, Madam Speaker, there is still time to adjourn debate until the Legislature reconvenes, of course, again in the spring, or the government could support the amendment to refer to committee as brought forward by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek. While I would prefer that we adjourn debate, I think referring Bill 30 to committee is fine given the circumstances. What referring Bill 30 to committee allows is for members of this House to dive deeper into the bill and actually work through a lot of the changes, actually work through the changes with Albertans present, with experts present, employers, employees, communities, have the opportunity to minimize the unintended consequences – we can never eliminate them – and get this right.

Madam Speaker, referring the bill to committee would also allow the government more time to make the case as to why certain changes are justified, make the case to Albertan employers and employees who have been under considerable stress in the last two and a half years with taxes rising, regulations going up, a lot of employees being underemployed, our slowdown in our economy, managed or otherwise. It would allow the government more time to make the case as to why certain changes are justified.

Madam Speaker, one such change I would like to see the government justify to the committee is the government's proposal to replace the Occupational Health and Safety Council with the Labour Relations Board as the arbiter of OHS appeals. According to the Labour Relations Board's website About the Board, the

Labour Relations Board is the independent and impartial tribunal responsible for the day-to-day application and interpretation of Alberta's labour laws.

It goes on to say:

The Board consists of a Chair, two full-time Vice-Chairs, three part-time Vice-Chairs, and approximately 28 part-time members. The members are representative of both labour and management, and appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

Madam Speaker, the last part is interesting language. The members are representative of both labour and management. The terms "labour" and "management" are not normally together unless referring to a unionized workplace. The common terms when referring to a workplace in general are "employee" and "employer."

Madam Speaker, further on the Labour Relations Board website it says:

Are you looking for information on this website that you cannot find? That may be because The Alberta Labour Relations Board administers the Labour Relations Code dealing with disputes between employers and trade unions (and employees represented by trade unions).

Madam Speaker, I don't understand. Why is the government referring OHS appeals to a body that is specifically designed to handle disputes between unions and employers? I think that there are a lot of Albertans that would like to know that. I think that there are a lot of Albertan employers and employees that are worried about the actions of this government that would like to know that. The last I checked, Alberta's economy was made up of a mixture of union and non-union workplaces. In fact, most Albertans do not belong to a union. According to the government's own statistics Alberta's unionization rate is 23 per cent.

My understanding of OHS rules is that they apply to both union and non-union workplaces. Madam Speaker, is the NDP government claiming that the overwhelming number of OHS appeals stem from unionized workers? I question the validity of that

claim, that unionized workers are more likely to suffer a workplace injury. But if the government is confident, I don't see why they wouldn't welcome the opportunity to justify that to the committee, referred under time, under reason, and under the best information that we can get to do our jobs for Albertans, all the more reason for the government to support my colleague's amendment to refer this bill to committee so it can be properly, extensively reviewed by Albertans and by experts.

A couple of other issues I want to touch on. It's always surprised me in the five and a half years that I've been in here that a bill can completely pass in 48 hours, a one-day break on either side of Committee of the Whole.

The Acting Speaker: You have five minutes.

Mr. Bilous: Time flies.

Mr. Barnes: Yeah. No kidding. Time does fly. Thank you.

I understand that either the vast majority or all government bills in the federal Parliament go to a committee, a committee where Canadians have the opportunity for input, where experts have the opportunity to talk about the unintended consequences, to talk about getting it right, to talk about trying to reach the outcomes, the objectives, what the government is trying to achieve.

Madam Speaker, we know that the government controls the committee, too, by having the majority of members on it, so they have tremendous oversight on who's allowed to talk, the time, the agenda, the end result at the end of the day. But it's one higher level of accountability to Albertans – accountability to Albertans – that at the end of the day you're doing this for the right reasons, not for ideological reasons, not an honest accidental mistake.

This kind of oversight, this kind of second look is crucial when we're dealing with 4.1 million of our friends, our neighbours, Albertans, when we're dealing with communities, when we're dealing with what's been a fragile economy for a short time, when we're dealing with an economy and employers that have seen so much change from this government. Why wouldn't we take the step to get their involvement and to do this right? Madam Speaker, that's another reason why I solidly support my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek's amendment.

The other reason that's been touched on is the half billion dollar surplus Workers' Compensation has now. I've read and heard that it's because they were getting ready for the uncertainty around the changes that this bill may have.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to correct something that I said earlier. It's a case in point as to why when you do something quickly or hastily, you could be wrong. You know, we're talking about this issue right now, about how we need to send this to committee because it's been put together too hastily. So I want to just point out something. When I talked about how many people had been consulted, 200 of the 160,000 businesses, I said that that equates to about 1.25 per cent. In sober second thought I recognize that it's actually one-tenth of that number.* So it's actually only one-tenth of 1.25 per cent, which makes the case even greater.

What we're dealing with here is not proper consultation. The sample size is very small. I would like to ask the member, again as I asked the Member for Little Bow: what does he think about the sample size that they've used in terms of being able to do consultation?

*See page 2139, left column, paragraph 11

10:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. It's minuscule. It's amazing that they think that is full and comprehensive. Thank you to my hon. colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner for the question because your constituency, like mine, has so many diverse businesses, has so many diverse people out there that create jobs, build wealth, pay taxes. I think of the ones in the family ranches and businesses that have done it for 125 years. Then I think of the new start-ups in technology that are trying to find their way.

You know, I wonder how this will impact charities and not-for-profits. Unfortunately, I believe it was the Parkinson's society in Medicine Hat that just closed their doors citing extra costs because of the minimum wage and carbon tax and those kinds of things. We've just had a couple of restaurants close.

I guess the burden on these people and the burden in trying to get it right – how can 1 per cent, or whatever the number is, convey the different wealth creators that we have in Alberta and the different stresses, the different opportunities? I mean, my goodness, forestry to agriculture. Agriculture all by itself has so many diverse elements, from ranching to irrigation to greenhouses.

Hey, a quick shout-out to Redcliff, Alberta's and Canada's largest greenhouse capital: tremendous hard work and tremendous value-added to what these people have done for Alberta and feeding the world. I mean, they would have a different set of impacts from this legislation than a wheat farm would, and that is one of the reasons that, again, I'm so concerned and so startled that the consultation to this point has been as minimal as it has been.

Again, you know, we just spent large parts of the summer in our constituencies. I don't recall hearing anything about these changes. I don't recall any opportunity to go forward and speak to these. So can you imagine the Alberta business owner who's working 60 or 80 hours a week to provide jobs and provide, you know, taxes for his community, and then on top of that has the burden of extra paperwork, and then on top of that now has the burden of this? My goodness, I couldn't imagine how many of them would have had the opportunity to sort through the layers and layers and the burden and bureaucracy to give their input on this.

You know, that's why this huge bill dropped on our desks here late in the session is – well, it's not surprising. It's happened before. But there is a better way. There is a better way to handle it. That's why I'm asking all my colleagues in this House, on both sides, to accept the motion from my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek and send this to committee, where we can make it the best possible law for all Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Just to be clear, you haven't spoken to the referral yet, right?

Mr. van Dijken: I have not.

The Acting Speaker: Just 29(2)(a). Okay. Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to express my opposition to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans as it is in its current form. I will support this motion to refer Bill 30 to committee. I should be clear that the goal of ensuring that hard-working Albertans are safe and healthy in

their working environments is one that I and undoubtedly all members of this Assembly do support.

My opposition is to the way this bill makes broad and sweeping changes to the existing legislation without regard for the potential cost to taxpayers and the additional burdens that will be placed on Alberta businesses. In a climate where deficit spending runs rampant and our small, medium, and large businesses already face excessive regulation, these are not concerns that the government can simply throw aside in pursuit of its ideologically driven agenda, trying to ram through Bill 30 in just a few days.

Should we look at updating occupational health and safety legislation? Absolutely. Should we seek to improve WCB? Yes. However, any potential legislation must ensure that in doing these things, it helps Albertans rather than creating more economic and fiscal problems for our province. Madam Speaker, since this government came to office, Alberta has lost its reputation of being one of the best jurisdictions in which to do business in all of North America. In part this is because of reckless legislation that has been passed to satisfy partisan and special interests rather than to effectively serve Albertans.

One of my motivations to speak against this bill now is because it is incumbent upon me and it is incumbent upon this Assembly to stand up for ordinary Albertans, who expect us to be thoughtful and deliberative in our work, making sure that any legislation we pass serves the interests of Albertans and does nothing to worsen the economic problems that they face. In doing consultation for this bill, we saw an all too familiar strategy for this government. They asked their questions to precipitate the answers they wanted to hear. Alberta workers and employers deserve real consultation, not stage theatrics. Real consultation would mean going back to committee. It would mean going back to Albertans and asking them what they think without any preconditions.

Madam Speaker, the government seems to be only interested in rushing this bill through the Legislature before the end of this session. To produce good results for those we represent, the government needs to slow down to make sure we get these issues right. Ideally, these kinds of changes would come as several pieces of legislation, allowing proper scrutiny and debate on each individual issue that is addressed. At the very least there should be some substantive consideration of amendments. We need to make sure that each issue to be addressed by the legislation is in need of change and that any changes being made are supported by evidence showing that they are likely to produce the desired result. I don't see any indication that the government intends to support this kind of legislative scrutiny that Albertans deserve from their elected officials.

One issue I would like to see particular scrutiny of is the matter of joint work-site health and safety committees. This bill proposes to make these committees mandatory for any employer with 20 or more people working for them. Under the existing legislation these committees can already be mandated by the minister based on individual circumstances, or they can be formed voluntarily by workers and employers who think they are necessary to their unique situations. These existing rules allow for flexibility, and they allow for the formation of effective joint committees where there is specific need or merit. Unfortunately, as usual this government seeks to impose a top-down, government-knows-best approach without regard to the necessity and without consideration of the wants and needs of workers and employers on any particular work site.

It is legislative changes like this that make Albertans wonder if this government is prioritizing the needs of ordinary working Albertans or if they are more worried about the priorities of big labour and the union bosses who have been clamouring for these

kinds of changes for years. I don't know about the members opposite, but I have yet to hear from a single constituent, a single ordinary working Albertan who is extremely concerned about the lack of mandatory, bureaucratic, government-imposed joint work-site health and safety committees in Alberta. My guess is because the people of this province want their elected officials focusing on fixing problems with common-sense legislation, not looking for opportunities to insist on more government interference in an area where there is seemingly little cause to do so.

11:00

Now, this is about more than the government telling workers and employers what to do; it's also about needlessly imposing new costs on businesses which, in too many cases, are struggling to get by in Alberta at this present time. The costs that the imposition of these committees would impose potentially takes money away from hiring more Albertans or providing other training to existing employees, which could in many cases provide more effective improvements to workplace safety.

There are many areas in which mandating these committees will cause additional costs, but is it worth going through them? First, we should recognize what the impact of lost time will be on employers. Every hour that is spent working on committees is time that cannot be spent engaging in productive economic activity. We must also observe that the employer is required to pay salary for the time that workers spend on committee duties away from their normal work and responsibilities. One must also consider the costs of training. Not only will there be the costs of the training itself, but in many instances there could be costs for travel and other associated expenses.

Madam Speaker, yet another point we must consider is the direct costs of implementation for proposals brought forward by these committees. These have the potential to be significant and numerous. Something else to be mindful of is that the cost of running and administering such committees is bound to hit small and medium-sized businesses the hardest. These businesses are integral to our communities and the backbone of our economy. Large corporations can more easily absorb costs like these, but smaller local businesses tend to have less room to work with new costs imposed on them. For those kinds of businesses, these changes could mean not hiring an out-of-work Albertan, or it could mean laying another one off. Frankly, I believe it is sad that when Alberta's small-business owners are already under attack from the Trudeau government in Ottawa, this government not only refuses to stand up against those changes, but it also finds further costs to impose.

This area is a critical example of why this bill needs further consultation and why it needs to go back to committee for further review. The government needs to go out and speak with hard-working small-business owners in our province and listen to what the individual impacts could be. Let's get a frank assessment of the costs, the burdens they will impose on business, and then ask the government to justify why these mandatory joint committees are necessary.

Madam Speaker, you have now heard me speak about why I cannot support this bill. We have gone through the changes the government wants to make in regard to imposing joint work-site health and safety committees rather than leaving the flexibility of the current legislation. I have also spoken about the costs that these changes will create for Alberta businesses. What is now important to address is whether or not there is actually any evidence that these proposed changes would have the desired effect of improving health and safety in the workplace.

In looking to other jurisdictions which have imposed mandatory joint committees on their workers and employers, we can find examples of the results that this part of the bill might elicit if it were to become law. One example is the province of Ontario, which imposed similar committees on certain industries beginning in the 1970s. The results of one study in Ontario led to the conclusion that the result does not lend itself to supporting the view that reductions in serious accidents have resulted from the legislation. In regard to the conclusion by some that joint health and safety committees led to a reduction of injury rates in Ontario, a 1994 report says that the statistical evidence for that conclusion is less than overwhelming.

Another study of relevant data, from the United States, was unable to find a significant correlation between the existence of a committee and the number of Occupational Health and Safety Act complaints or the level of hazardous workplaces as measured by OSHA.

I could go on with numerous other examples, but I believe the House understands that the facts demonstrate that these kinds of changes have produced unclear results at best. There is some speculation from multiple sources as to why mandatory joint health and safety committees do not have a strong record of producing the desired results.

One observation made in relation to similar legislation in Ontario says the following: simply mandating committees is unlikely to have much effect at workplaces where the internal responsibility system and the comanagement of health and safety matters is not embraced by both management and/or labour.

What is referred to as the internal responsibility system is the idea of comanagement of health and safety by both employers and workers. This idea underpins the concept of joint health and safety committees. What this and other observations are saying is that a top-down government imposition of these committees has little inherent benefit in itself. Rather, they are saying that successful examples of joint committees are characterized by situations where they have engagement and buy-in from both employers and workers.

Now, Madam Speaker, if the government believes it can universally legislate engagement and buy-in, more rethinking is needed than I had initially expected. Otherwise, the government should take this opportunity to listen to opposition members and support my colleague's referral motion so we can take this back to committee and look for a more evidence-based plan to improve workplace health and safety.

While we are talking about potential effectiveness of committees, it is also worth while to talk about training once more. Other than the identification of engagement and buy-in from workers and employers as a key factor, studies also identify training as important to whether or not any individual committee can be a success. The bill is vague on many details of training that would be required for success of joint health and safety committees.

Should the government intend to move forward with this bill, the establishment of mandatory committees would create a significant demand. So the questions are: who would provide these training services? Would the government do it? What training would be provided? Would all industries participate in the same training programs, or would they be individually tailored?

It seems that these questions inevitably lead to more questions. Does the government genuinely believe that it can either create effective health and safety training for industry in general or for all industries separately? Further, does the government believe that it knows how to better run health and safety than the employers and workers who practise it every day in their respective fields?

The government has a responsibility to address these kinds of questions and lay out a comprehensive plan for training prior to

moving forward with these substantive changes. Surely, we will not see this government repeat the mistakes of their past legislation where they told businesses that they would be further regulated but refused to detail specifics before ramming the relevant bill through the Legislature.

Madam Speaker, I hate to sound like a broken record, but I would once again encourage the government to take a step back, to slow down, to support the referral motion, and send this bill to committee for proper consultation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say that my colleague does put out a very strong case on why a referral motion is needed here. I know that, for myself, I've seen our side put forward referral motions several times now, saying: let's move this away from rushed legislation, where we make errors, to a place where we can actually put forward legislation that is complete, where we have that time to discuss this in the House. A lot of times it comes down to discussing it in a committee setting before we can move forward.

11:10

Now, I can't imagine a more important piece of legislation than protecting our workers. I really can't. There are others – don't get me wrong – that we can quote and say are very, very important, but really, when we start looking at making sure that those that get harmed or potentially could be harmed have a mechanism to be able to get the help they need to be able to have a life that any one of us would want, how exactly is it okay that we have a government pushing this through so fast?

Now, I will tell you that when we see the bill before us here, the question is always that this bill is so thick – I'm looking through the bill here. You start looking at this bill, and it's actually quite a lot of information to get through. You see that this bill just hit the table on Monday, and we're already in second reading, and in going through this large a bill, this important bill, we do not have the time to be able to get the quality conversations that we need. I cannot actually get out to my constituents to even discuss this bill because I have been in the House since Monday. That's the lunacy of how fast this process is going. It's there Monday. We're sitting in the House.

But you know what? My colleague will convince you more on why this is so much more important than just, I guess, throwing it through and hoping that we hit the right target. My question is: could you please explain why a referral is so important?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. You know, I'm highlighting just one portion of this very large bill, one aspect of it, that needs to have proper consideration. There are many more – many more – but to have the proper time that we need to properly review this bill and to consult with stakeholders is important.

I would like to reiterate a few general points. All of us in this House know the importance of workplace health and safety. All of us want to make sure that when needed, the relevant legislation is reviewed and updated. What we should not want is legislation that is pushed forward without demonstrating a need. We should also seek to ensure that legislation is not rushed through this place in order to meet a government deadline. Bills that are passed by this

Assembly should be well thought out, backed up by evidence, carefully reviewed, and properly deliberated. They should take into account all the potential impacts, and they should seek to serve the interests of Albertans rather than serve special interests and partisan purposes.

It is for these reasons and for those I have addressed throughout this speech that I cannot support this bill as it stands. Again, I ask that it be referred to committee so that improvements can be made and so that this Assembly can hear from Albertans on some of the unintended consequences that are potentially coming from this bill, unnecessary costs for one thing.

You know, I've highlighted the joint health and safety committees because I do believe that there is some flexibility that is necessary in order to ensure that these joint health and safety committees are effective. To just mandate a joint health and safety committee does not create an effective joint health and safety committee, and to think that we can just legislate it and that all of a sudden there's buy-in, in my opinion, is nearsighted.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Is there any other member wishing to speak to the referral amendment? Hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, have you spoken to the amendment?

Mr. Loewen: No. Only under 29(2)(a).

The Acting Speaker: Just under 29(2)(a)? Okay. Please go ahead.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to the motion on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, to refer Bill 30 to committee for study. This bill is over 200 pages. The NDP could have brought this bill before the Legislature at the end of October to allow time for proper scrutiny, debate, contact with stakeholders, and gently brought the bill along in the House for debate, a speech here, a speech there. Instead, the NDP brought this bill here at the end of November.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There is an incredible amount of material here that needs to be gone through, and it would only be prudent for a committee of the Assembly to study this bill and bring it back with the appropriate amendments if found required. With a bill like this, that affects all working Albertans and their employers, we need to be able to hear from both groups to understand what the implications of this bill mean for them.

Now, Bill 30 wants to add mandatory joint work-site health and safety committees and health and safety representatives. Safety is a culture. As much as we may try to legislate a nanny state culture, we can miss the mark. Bill 30 proposes to make these committees mandatory for any employer with 20 or more people working for them. Setting up joint work-site health and safety committees, while a good idea for large employers, can be a significant burden on many smaller businesses. Twenty people isn't that many, and it is these enterprises that make up most of the workforce here in Alberta.

These committees need to be resourced by the employer. This means that resources will get taken away from other areas, possibly even from actual safety training programs for the employees if the employers allocate a certain amount of their budget to work safety. Under current legislation these committees can already exist, and many of these companies already have these committees set up or maybe informally have them set up. Either the minister can order them into existence, or they can be formed voluntarily by workers and employers. I think it's far more effective to have this done

voluntarily. But the NDP thinks they know what's best for everyone across the board. They don't seem to recognize the uniqueness of each individual workplace.

Yes, there will be costs, costs for Alberta businesses that are already struggling. Many have closed already. How many small businesses have we lost in the last two and a half years? Many small businesses have gone broke under this government.

If the NDP government is very excited about these joint work-site health and safety committees and touts their value, then I would like them to also recognize the value of legislative committees examining complex pieces of legislation and to support this motion. You see, on one hand, they suggest that the companies have committees and make them work, but these committees we have in the Legislature: they don't seem to want to use them. They don't seem to want to work in them.

Madam Speaker, I'm also concerned that we haven't talked much yet about the new information-sharing provisions in this bill. A lot of people don't have any say in whether they are part of WCB or OHS, and their personal data goes to them. Now we have this information sharing that we haven't had time to look at, to discuss, to try to find out what kind of ramifications, what kind of unintended consequences could happen. In this day and age privacy is a concern for many people. It's one of the greatest concerns out there for many people that worry about their privacy and losing their personal information. We hear every day of large organizations being hacked for personal data. So we need to hear more about the provisions for expanding information sharing to more agencies and organizations. What types of agencies will these be? These are questions that we need to have answered.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, there are all kinds of reasons why this needs to go to committee. This needs to be looked at more carefully. We need to have more input. Many concerns and questions have been brought up by my colleagues in addition to my reservations about the joint committees and information-sharing provisions. There have been lots of things that have been brought up here this morning that are concerning, concerning to Albertans, concerning to the members on this side of the House, answers that we would like to have.

11:20

I think Albertans deserve those answers, Madam Speaker. They deserve to know how this legislation is going to affect their lives, how it's going to affect the small-business owners, how it's going to affect the small-business managers, how it's going to affect the employees of small businesses. In fact, this affects, of course, not only small business but medium-sized business, large business. It affects government, government agencies. It affects every worker in Alberta.

I think that that is very important to realize, how this can affect every worker in Alberta and why it's so important that we take just a little more time, time that we could have taken in the last month had the government brought this forward in legislation at the end of October. Instead, we're sitting here at the end of our legislative session, and the government has brought through the biggest piece of legislation so far, the most far reaching, legislation that will affect more people. They've brought it in at the end, and I don't think that's fair to Albertans.

Albertans rely on us in this Legislature to look at these bills that come before us and decide whether they are going to help, hurt, or whether there's any way that we can improve this legislation. That's our job here. That's what we do. We have committees for a reason. Committees don't just exist so we can get together three, four, five times a year and look at each other across the room. There's work that has to be done in those committees, and it's important work.

It's work that can make legislation better. There can be things that come forward in a committee that nobody thought of before, when this legislation was being drafted. I know there are intelligent people that draft this legislation. I know they're trying to think of all the different angles and all the different things that could come up, but nobody is perfect.

What this does is allow that second thought, you know, for people to come forward to present to the committee, that can think of the different angles and the different things that could come into effect because of this legislation. Obviously, there are a lot of potentially positive changes that we could discuss how we could make them even better. I urge the NDP to support this motion so that we can learn more and do our due diligence here.

Now, Madam Speaker, again, this is a 200-page bill. It's a rewrite of occupational health and safety. WCB hasn't been looked at in 15 years. All of a sudden this government has come forward with this legislation, and it's going to, I guess, fix all the problems at WCB that have developed over the last 15 years. I would think that something so big and so important would be worth a little extra scrutiny. This is omnibus legislation. This is big. It covers a lot of different things. Again, it affects every business in Alberta. It affects every worker in Alberta. If this is all about safety, then we owe it to Albertans to make this legislation the best we can. We're not suggesting that this bill be scrapped. Right now we're just asking for it to go to committee. That's all we're talking about here today, to have this go to committee.

Now, we've seen in the past where this government has had problems with unintended consequences. We look at how they worked with the electrical act and how they passed one bill, and then they passed three or four more bills to correct the problems that the first bill created, all sorts of lawsuits and everything. Those are some unintended consequences that, had the government listened, could have been avoided. We've also seen examples of poor consultation, and we've seen examples of fairly good consultation. Look at the MGA: the bill was actually introduced in the Legislature, and then months of consultation. But we also have examples like Bill 6, where the government just all of a sudden plopped it down and rammed it through without proper consultation, virtually no consultation.

Now, I know they've talked about the 1,300 online survey responses to this bill while they were preparing for this bill, but the Member for Edmonton-South West brought forward a bill here some time ago regarding the time change, and he had over 30,000 responses. We have safety legislation, wide-reaching safety legislation: 1,300 responses. And the government is touting that as being fantastic.

Mr. Cyr: In nine weeks.

Mr. Loewen: In only nine weeks.

Then we have the time change legislation with 30,000 responses. Now, we know that with the time change, they travelled all across Alberta collecting input from Albertans. They took a lot of time to deal with the time change. What happened with the time change bill? The government sent it to committee even after all that. They sent it to committee. We have examples where this government has used committees, has done consultation and still sent it to committee. So I would like to suggest that this is what we need to do here. This needs to go to committee.

Well, I guess what I want to go on to now is that they've had this time, they've done this nine-week consultation period – that's what they've said they've done – they've had these different responses, and they've had eight round-table discussions, and everything. They talked to 200 people in these round-table discussions. Again,

they had the 1,300 online survey responses. The Grande Prairie Chamber of Commerce has about 1,300 members. That's one chamber of commerce. That's not every small business in Grande Prairie. Those are the ones that have joined the chamber of commerce. Obviously, Grande Prairie isn't the largest city in Alberta. So when we look at this kind of consultation, I don't know that we can say that we're setting any records here or doing any really great consultation.

One thing we know for sure is that none of these people that have been consulted with have been consulted on this bill because this bill just came to us here two days ago or a day ago, whenever it came. They haven't seen this bill until now. Now is when they can actually have some input on this bill.

Now, we talked already about how it comes into force and how a good portion of it will come into force on January 1, 2018. By the time this bill passes in the Legislature, that will give these businesses roughly three weeks through the holiday season, through Christmas and New Year's, to decide how they are going to implement all these changes in their business. The small businesses don't have people just sitting there waiting for government legislation to show up so that they can say: okay; you know, what are we going to do with this? They don't have a large staff that they can do this with, but they're still going to be responsible, by January 1, to be living by this legislation.

Mr. Cyr: Through the holiday season, too.

Mr. Loewen: Through the holiday season. This is the busiest time of year for some of these businesses.

So I think it's unfair to the businesses of Alberta, the people of Alberta to not have this kind of opportunity to have this go to committee and to be able to have their input. I think it only stands to reason that we send this to committee and have this looked at properly.

11:30

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Yes. I found that enlightening. Now, it's not just the retail sector that my colleague is talking about. When we're talking about the holiday season, we have all of the children being off. We have all of the companies short-staffed at this point because of vacations around the Christmas holiday season. Do you think it's reasonable that no matter what size the business, whether it's small, medium, or large, they will have the staffing requirements to be able to do this? The government, from what I understand the member is saying, is literally asking people to sacrifice their Christmas season to implement this legislation. Would you mind commenting on that?

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. Yes, of course I believe it's very unfair. This is not the time of year to be doing this to businesses. On the time alone – I mean, three weeks – even if it wasn't Christmastime, even if it wasn't the holiday season, even if it wasn't the busiest time of year for some of these businesses, three weeks to go through something as big as this, 200 pages, and decide how the portions will start affecting them on January 1? Of course, there are other sections that come into force on April 1, so three months down the road they'll be looking at more legislation that comes into effect to try to figure out how that's going to affect their business and how they're going to respond. So, no, I don't think this is fair, and I don't think this is what the people of Alberta want or need at this time.

I think there are a lot of good things in this legislation, I'm sure, but this should have been done properly. It should have been brought in a month ago. They had all the opportunity in the world to do that. This should go to committee. We should be in committee right now reviewing this.

Now, I just want to go back to what the Member for Calgary-Klein said, that we're delaying safety and benefits and kind of an insinuation that we on this side of the House don't care about the safety of the people of Alberta. That is absolutely wrong. What I do want to do is read from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. They say here:

If Bill 30 is passed this legislative session, the ACC is concerned with the speed changes will begin to take effect. Business, particularly small business, will have very little time to adjust or even be effectively educated on how to take on and fulfill their new responsibilities.

So this isn't me. I just said something very similar, but this is the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

It says:

The ACC has recommended that the Alberta Government send Bill 30 to a committee . . .

Go figure. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce is suggesting the same thing we are, that this should go to committee.

. . . for further review and analysis following First and Second Reading. Taking this step will help identify how employers and employees can best adjust to changes introduced with the new legislation, which are intended to prevent illness and injury in the workplace.

Now, it also goes on to say:

WCB premium surpluses collected from employers in 2016 are approximately 350 Million.

Actually, before I get into the money part of it here, because I don't have that much time, I just want to point out that it's like the ACC is suggesting that this go to committee for further review. Now, if the members opposite want to suggest that we on this side of the House don't care about the safety of the people of Alberta, then obviously they're suggesting that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce don't care about the safety of Albertans either, and I think that's absolutely bizarre. I don't even know how to describe, without getting into any more colourful language, that this government would suggest that we on this side and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce don't care about safety. I know for a fact that that is wrong – that is wrong – and to insinuate anything of the sort I think is very, very disrespectful.

Like I say, if this was such a great concern for the government, they had all the opportunity in the world to bring it forward a month ago. They've been in power for two and a half years, but they waited till two and a half years into their term, till we're at the very end of this session, and then they're going to ram this legislation through without proper consultation. Like I say, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce are just seeing this for the first time, too. Everybody is just trying to react to this.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this referral motion. Now, the same e-mail that my colleague was talking about, from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, had a link to a technical briefing on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, November 27, 2017. It says, "Confidential – Embargoed Material." At 61 pages this is literally the short version of the bill. This is quite the piece of literature that the Alberta government came out with.

But you know what? I have to say that at least they have a copy of something that we can utilize and look through.

I am more or less putting forward some of the points that are in this, and I will be referring to this document, probably, through a lot of my speeches because I think that it shows where the government of Alberta is standing on a lot of topics.

Now, what we have here is a document that is clear that they've done their due diligence when it comes to consulting. It says:

Consultation Summary

- A comprehensive review of Alberta's OHS system was undertaken in 2017
 - The themes of the review were:
 - Clarifying responsibilities of worksite parties in legislation
 - Improving worker engagement in OHS
 - A renewed focus on illness and injury prevention.

The themes of the review didn't include employers. That seems incredible here, that we've got clarifying of the legislation, we've got worker engagement, and we've got injury prevention, but we didn't actually include the employers in this part of it. That's bizarre, and this is in their technical briefing.

Now, we also didn't include all of the different industries in this. It's not just the employers, but we didn't include the different industry bodies in this as well. It goes on to say:

- Received input from Albertans over a [wonderful] ...

It doesn't say the word "wonderful," but it should.

... [stunning] nine-week period.

We're supposed to get this right with nine weeks of consultation?

Now, then, what we've got here – and this is something that the government is bragging up – are accomplishments.

- Over 1,300 online [surveys].

Yes.

- Nearly 90 written submissions.

That's another great win for this government.

- Eight in-person facilitated roundtable discussions involving over 200 stakeholders representing employers ...

At least, they involved employers here.

... workers, OHS professionals, health and safety associations and academics.

Now, my question in all of this is: what was the percentage of those 200 stakeholders that were actually employers and industry? I am going to bet we had probably 10 per cent of these people who were actually from industry or employers, and this is going to affect their businesses. This is an answer that maybe the government can get me later, because I think this is important.

But let's backtrack here. Let's talk about this legislation. I had already mentioned in one of my questions to one of my colleagues that we had gotten this legislation put on our desk on Monday and are expected to be able to debate this on Thursday. Now, the problem here is that the government has made sure that we're in morning, afternoon, and night sittings, so I don't even have the opportunity to put a lot of time in to be able to review this bill, to be able to get into the meat and potatoes of this bill, or even go out and consult my local constituents on this bill. This is sad.

11:40

An Hon. Member: You shouldn't have fired your staff.

Mr. Cyr: Unfortunately, the government's answer to that is that I should fire my staff.

An Hon. Member: Shouldn't.

Mr. Cyr: But I would argue that, in the end, this is terrible. What we've got here is four days to actually be moving forward on such an important piece of legislation.

Now I'd like to talk about workers' compensation. Actually, you know what? I'll take a step back. If this was the first time the government had done this, we would be going: well, jeez, you know, this isn't okay. But this seems to be a regular occurrence, especially when it comes to the Labour minister. We had Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, pushed through our wonderful Legislature, starting on May 24, 2017, to June 5, 2017. So we literally had 12 days to debate this important piece of legislation on our employment standards, and we had the same problem. I think they had some – what was it? – 60 days of wonderful consultations. In this case at least they put nine weeks in. That's – what? – 73 days. We're seeing improvement. We're seeing some improvement. They gave us an extra two weeks of consultation. We should all be thankful for that.

What we're seeing here is a clear direction from this government to say: we know how to make legislation, and we don't want anybody else's input on it. We saw what happens, because Bill 6 was a good flop. It ended up being so traumatic for everyone that was involved with that bill because they pushed it through the House.

Now, I think – and I think I could speak for most of my colleagues here – that we all want people safe on the job site. I can't imagine one of my colleagues standing up and saying: gee, I hope somebody gets hurt. Putting that aside, what is it that we're looking to do here? We're saying: let's get it right the first time. Now, I'm a guy that says: "Let's look at what happened when they first brought in legislation. Let's look back, because we can actually learn lessons from the past."

The Workers' Compensation Act was brought in in 1973. The first reading was October 12, 1973. Then what happened was that it made it through the House. Now, I would like to talk about that first day that they brought that in for second reading. The second reading date was October 22, 1973. They actually gave 10 days between first reading, which would have been when they first put the bill down so people could read it, and second reading. To be able to get it done, we got 10 days.

Now, I understand that that is also a very short time frame. But what I will say, which is important to all of this, is that this legislation came from a committee. This actually came from a committee. They saw the importance of all parties putting their part into it.

I'd like to quote some of the *Hansard* from October 22, 1973. This is on Bill 70, the Workers' Compensation Act. I would like to talk about a member, Dr. Hohol – and I apologize if I got his name wrong – and the intent here is important. What he says is:

I wish to recall the membership of the special Select Committee of the Legislature and to extend to them the government's and, through you, sir, the Legislature's appreciation and thanks for the many, many hours of selfless work on so important a matter.

So, then, when they first brought this in, they recognized the importance of a committee. They recognized that this needed more discussion than just being rammed through the House.

Now, it goes on to say:

Mr. Anderson, Mr. Drain, Mr. Cooper, Dr. Paproski, Mr. King, Mr. Diachuk, Mr. Harle and Mr. Werry each brought to the deliberations his own occupational background and also his own unique convictions, his own beliefs, his own value system and his own ideals to the job.

This is important, that we have a variety of opinions in making legislation.

It goes on to further say:

It was with this background that this dedicated group of legislators developed the recommendations of the committee on which the bill was formed. That there were strong disagreements from time to time attests only to the calibre of the committee members. But there was one overwhelming agreement throughout, and that was that without fear or favour we must make the strongest possible effort to bring to the Legislature the best report of which we were able.

They absolutely saw the value of this.

You know what? Excluding the opposition in creating legislation creates problems. Excluding the stakeholders of this legislation creates problems. This government continues to move down that road, and you know what? We're going to continue to see these kinds of problems. When you stop listening to people and start thinking that you know everything, that is where the true problem is. That's where ideology trumps reason, trumps integrity, trumps all aspects. It's important that you understand that this referral motion is very important. We need to get this legislation right. We need to make sure that we protect our workers. I don't believe anybody in this House – again I will quote this – wants to actually hurt another human being, whether they're in a working space or not.

Now, to go on a little further down:

To chair this outstanding committee, dealing with such very human considerations, was for me one of my most challenging and rewarding responsibilities in government.

Industry and the worker and Albertans generally, have been well served by the legislators who sat on this committee and by the legislation which will emerge from the report that it put together. The committee was strong in its unanimous view that reviews of The Workmen's Compensation Act, which have to be undertaken from time, should be made by a special select committee... in contrast to, for example, commissions or tribunals.

What we're looking at here is a recognition that our committees can do wonderful things. They can get out there, and they can actually make a piece of legislation all that much stronger. Yet what we've got is committees being used for daylight saving time. Now, this was an important topic. There is no disputing. This was something that very strongly engaged Albertans. Fair enough. That was something that we could use a committee for. But when we've got a piece of legislation as important as workers' compensation, this is something where we need to make sure that we get all sides of it, make sure that we hear all points of view.

What I would like to go on to here is a little further down. This is something that I think was very interesting because when we start to look at what we're dealing with today, we're seeing that a lot of the same issues or same things that were brought forward 40 years ago, we're bringing forward in this piece of legislation that we see in front of us. Now, I'm going to quote this.

The board pays permanent disability compensation, that is to say pensions, by capitalization, meaning setting aside money from which earned interest will pay compensation during the lifetime of the worker. This being the largest single cost against board funds, it is imperative to obtain the best possible investment returns, thereby reducing the cost to the industry.

The government, Mr. Speaker, is well impressed with the committee's deep concern with safety. It is not moving on this one part of the committee's report, and for reasons that I believe the committee and this Legislature will accept. In view of the government having made the judgment that the whole matter of occupational health and safety should be a sign for comprehensive study and report by a commission, it is reasonable to await that report.

In the meantime, the legislation does reflect our serious attitude on this important matter. In addition, every effort will be made to improve and to upgrade safety in all the departments and agencies wherever such responsibilities may lie. At the same time we appeal strongly to industry and labour to work together to ensure the safest possible...

11:50

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes, please. I believe the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake was just finishing a very important point, and I would like to be able to hear the rest of what he was letting us all enjoy.

The Deputy Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. To finish the sentence off:

... conditions with respect to the worksite and the workshop in their enterprise.

Here is what happened. The committee put forward the report. The Legislature or the government in charge didn't accept the whole report. That's okay. Just because you have committees working on reports or working together doesn't mean the government is required to enact those recommendations. You would hope that they would listen, hope that it would influence the decision. In the end, going and doing committee work is only going to strengthen the legislation. Even though maybe the government may not like the direction of the report in some cases, you will find that overall you'll get a stronger piece of legislation through it.

Mr. van Dijken: It's important for transparency.

Mr. Cyr: It is absolutely important for transparency.

Now, what I'd like to move on to is where the NDP leader at the time, Mr. Notley, was also speaking on this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think first of all I would like to say, in reading over the report of the committee, that a number of excellent recommendations were made. It's obvious, Mr. Speaker, that a good deal of work went into the preparation of the report which was tabled in the Legislature last spring.

I certainly agree with certain aspects of this report and of the legislation we have before us.

I'm bringing up the past NDP leader and the discussion where he's saying that he saw value in moving forward with committee work. He didn't agree fully with the committee recommendations, just like the government didn't agree with the committee recommendations. That's the adversarial part of our democracy. In the end, we may not agree on everything, but if we work together, we get a better piece of legislation moving forward.

Now, Mr. Notley in his speech goes on about a lot of the things that we see within this bill, so this is something that we can see is important to our NDP colleagues across the aisle. Fair enough. But what is it that we could have contributed to this piece of legislation if we had the time and the ability to be able to go through this legislation more thoroughly? If there is one that we should spend a year on getting it right, this is definitely one of those pieces of legislation.

I will tell you that a referral motion to the committee just makes common sense. I would ask every member of this Legislature to please consider it because we've seen what happens when you rush it. You get things wrong, and then you have to do a piece of legislation to Band-Aid and fix the problems that you've created. The unintended results of rushing through legislation always impact the person you're trying to protect. What is it we're going to see that is going to impact those workers in a bad way or a negative

way because we didn't fully think through how to get this legislation in place?

This is an important discussion, and we're going to be done this whole discussion within, most likely, two weeks with almost no consultation from the actual employers who have to implement what we're putting forward. You know what? They might have a better way. We might have a better way.

You know what? I don't believe that the government is trying to put red tape in front of these employers so that they can't put people to work. But, in the end, if we do put red tape in front of these employers, we end up putting people out of work or preventing people from getting work. We've heard the government talking lately about 70,000 new jobs. Is this something that could affect that? I don't know because – you know what? – we haven't had enough time. We haven't had enough time.

I guess that getting past the last bill, Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act, the one that was just pushed through, that still . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to my hon. colleague's referral amendment. There have been some really fantastic arguments made here today, and I really do hope that all members in this House have been listening and thoughtfully paying attention because, after all, we're here to debate in an effort to change each other's minds. Unfortunately, we're not hearing much from the government, which is hard, because I believe that the government has had a lot of time to digest the information in this bill, clearly, before it was tabled.

You know, we've heard a little bit about extensive consultation, and that's something that I think would be valuable to this debate in the House. That certainly would be something that we could do in committee with this piece of legislation. We could bring in experts, bring in anyone who wants to provide feedback on this very large piece of legislation. Yet we see this tabled just a few days ago.

We've been given very little time to digest the information, to get feedback from Albertans. I'm going to go home this weekend and have two days, because I also have committee work tomorrow, to consult with my constituents, which gives me a Saturday and a Sunday. I'm not really quite sure that that's going to provide proper feedback.

I think that the only option that we have at this point, Madam Speaker, is to put this into a committee, where meaningful work could take place. I doubt very much that anyone in this Chamber doesn't think that Albertans are in first place, that Albertans' voices matter, and that they need to be brought forward to a committee to gather these recommendations, gather the expert advice, and then bring back those recommendations to this Assembly, where we will have enough proper, thoughtful, expert information in front of all of us.

Very clearly, the opposition here today has been saying that we don't have the information, and we don't have time to get the information. You know, we're about a week away from adjourning this House for the Christmas season, and we had the largest bill of the entire session tabled just a few days ago. It's frustrating not only for the opposition but, I can assure you, for Albertans because they only just got this information a couple of days ago. They haven't had time to digest this information.

You can't tell me that the government, Madam Speaker, has talked to every stakeholder in this province. That's insane. There's no possible way. It would be prudent, however, to do the work of consultation in committee, which is what this amendment proposes here today. It's important. It's democratic. I just don't quite see what type of argument could be on the table as to why we wouldn't refer a piece of legislation to a committee for meaningful work.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 30, 2017

Day 59

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 30, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of visitors joining us today. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the ambassador of Austria to Canada, His Excellency Dr. Stefan Pehringer, and the honorary consul general of Austria in Calgary, Mr. Nikolaus Demiantschuk.

His Excellency's visit has given us a chance to identify areas in which Alberta and Austria can grow our relationship. With the Canada-EU comprehensive economic trade agreement now provisionally applied, there are plenty of opportunities for our two jurisdictions to expand bilateral trade and collaborate, especially in research, clean tech, and life sciences. We look forward to working with His Excellency on further developing and strengthening our relationship with Austria.

I would now ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising as well to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Abhilasha Joshi, who is the consul general of India, as well as Consul Mr. Amar Jit Singh. Mrs. Joshi was posted as consul general of India in Vancouver in August this year after having served as consul general in Brazil.

Alberta's trade with India is about \$350 million each year, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, they are one of our largest agricultural export markets, and I was pleased that the minister of agriculture led a trade mission to India this spring. Like Alberta, India has a young population and a fast-growing economy. Our relationship will continue to be a priority as our government expands trade opportunities for local businesses, working closely with the Alberta office in New Delhi.

Mrs. Joshi and Mr. Singh are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 young students from the grade 6 class at Calder elementary school along with parents and teachers. Thank you to the teachers, parents, and volunteers who support these young leaders and help them lead healthy, happy lives. I'll now ask them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Wye elementary school. There are three classes, and their teachers – Sheryl, Tanya, and Janet – and many parent chaperones are here today. It's a very engaging school to visit with. They've been engaging in the process of what bill debate looks like, and they look forward to being here for question period today. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, are there any other school groups today?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members a group of activists from the rally to save fertility treatments, just held on the steps of the Legislature. Thanks to these women and many other activists and Friends of Medicare and United Infertility Edmonton, I'll be tabling a petition with over 25,000 signatures to bring back fertility treatments at the regional fertility and women's endocrine clinic at Edmonton's Lois Hole hospital. I'll ask them to please rise as I name them so that we can give them the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature: Sandra Azocar, Friends of Medicare; Dajana Fabjanovich, Crystal Pratt, Angela Pfeifer, all from United Infertility Edmonton. Thank you for coming and expressing your needs. Let's give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce visitors from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora who are seated in the members' gallery, and I invite them to please rise as I introduce them. They are Rick Stewart, David Hook, and Beverly Lafortune from St. John Ambulance. St. John Ambulance has a long history with our province. It was instrumental in building compulsory first aid training for workplaces in the 1920s, and they are valuable community partners and volunteers serving communities across Alberta, providing first aid and emergency response support and training. I want to thank them for their commitment to providing a culture of safety in Alberta and ask my colleagues to please join me in extending the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to introduce to you and through you to other members in the Chamber four members of the group United Infertility who are in the public gallery today. They organized a rally on the steps of the Legislature earlier in support of keeping fertility services available at the Lois Hole hospital for women. I had the pleasure to address their supporters, who are indeed a dedicated group of champions for public health services. I'd ask that they rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of the House: Amanda Butt, Dani Bourget, Carissa Therou, and Sara Spence.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sabina Lange and her grandson Tom Boyce. Sabina moved to Alberta from Germany almost 50 years ago. She raised

her two daughters, Connie and Rose, here. She's a vibrant, independent senior, a loving mother, a grandmother, and a devoted partner. Her grandson Tom is my ministerial assistant, and he told me he could not be more proud to be showing his oma around the Alberta Legislature. Thank you, Tom, for your service and dedication to making life better for all Albertans. I'd ask that they both stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Darby Lee Young, a remarkable person who's never allowed her physical limitations to stop her from following her dreams. One of those dreams was to apply her personal experiences as a disabled individual to her professional life so she could help others with physical challenges chase their own dreams, and she's done that and so much more. She founded Level Playing Field Inc., which promotes accessible and universal design solutions in urban environments. Darby is also on the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and I can tell you she looks forward with keen interest to seeing the council move forward at a pace perhaps somewhat quicker than it has to date. She also won one of the Calgary Stampede's western legacy awards and most recently was named one of YWCA Calgary's 150 women who dare. I'll be joining Darby and others at city hall tomorrow to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and I ask Darby to please stand now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Minister of Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you a group of advocates from HIV Edmonton, an organization that is near and dear to me and my family. Tomorrow is December 1, and it is World AIDS Day. It's a day to reflect on the awesome and amazing achievements that have been made in HIV and AIDS and, most importantly, to renew our commitment to end HIV. HIV Edmonton's long-term vision is zero new infections, zero stigma, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths. The support of dedicated volunteers like our guests in the gallery today will get us to zero. I ask that Shelley Williams, executive director, and other staff, volunteers, and advocates please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all the members in the House my guest, Stacey Carmichael. Stacey has worked in the community of Red Deer for many years demonstrating leadership related to homelessness, mental health, and addictions. She is currently the executive director of Turning Point Society, which is the local harm reduction organization in Red Deer. Turning Point has been working to foster healthy responses to HIV and related issues through support, education, and research. I would ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you. With your indulgence, I have three introductions today. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two of Edmonton's city councillors. My riding of Edmonton-Decore is overlapped by two of the wards, but of course they also overlap into some of my colleagues' here in Edmonton as well. Ward 3 is represented by Jon Dziadyk, who was just elected to the position for the first time in the recent municipal election, and ward 7 is represented by Tony Caterina, who is serving Edmontonians now for his fourth term. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask that they now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Nielsen: It's also a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my constituents, Moatasem Samara. Sixteen years ago Moatasem arrived in Canada, Edmonton specifically, for graduate studies at the University of Alberta. He's a proud small-business owner. He co-owns three pharmacies in Edmonton, one of which is in my riding of Edmonton-Decore, and is working to set up the fourth pharmacy now. His businesses employ nine people in addition to himself and his business partner. I would like to thank him for taking such good care of my constituents in Edmonton-Decore, and I would ask now that he please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Nielsen: It's also, again, a pleasure to rise for the third time and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two staff members from Edmonton Meals on Wheels, Caitlin Fleming and Sarah McCrimmon. Although Edmonton Meals on Wheels is not in my riding of Edmonton-Decore – they are in the great riding of Edmonton-Centre – my office does have a very special relationship with this organization. As I have 21 schools in my riding along with numerous organizations that serve children, we have a special partnership where the children in my riding design and make cards for the numerous special occasions to be sent out with the meals. These cards have brightened up the lives of numerous seniors throughout the city of Edmonton, and I'm very proud of all the children who have taken part in this special endeavour. I would ask that Caitlin and Sarah now please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Katie Kitschke, the executive director of Saffron. Katie has shown an incredible dedication in assisting those in Strathcona county who have been affected by sexual assault. Katie and her staff at Saffron sexual assault centre provide counselling to victims and their loved ones. I'll be speaking more about her work in my member's statement later on today. I invite all of them to stand and receive the traditional welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very dear friend of mine. She's a tireless crusader for the conservative cause in Alberta. Leah Wood was the provincial director of the legacy Wildrose Party before serving on the interim joint board and is now a director on the United Conservative Party board. Outside her political engagement Leah and her husband, Alton, run a cattle ranch close to Drayton Valley and are staunch advocates for Alberta's agricultural community and the rodeo, having served on the ag society board and on the Rotary Club. Leah is a business owner, a community leader, a mom, a proud Albertan, and a very dear friend. I would ask that she rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents of mine that I've gotten to know over the last number of years. They are the father and the grandmother of one of our page program attendees, Amanda Porter. I'd like to introduce to you Joan Porter – she worked for many years as a nurse in the Barrhead area and also on a farm in the Fort Assiniboine area and was there to help my wife and me as we got into parenthood and helped to deliver some of our children – and also her son James Porter, who was available to help on our campaign in 2015. I would ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

World AIDS Day

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am humbled to rise today to speak to World AIDS Day. Alberta is proud to join the international movement in declaring December 1 as World AIDS Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness around AIDS and HIV infection and remembering those who have died of the disease. Since 1988 World AIDS Day has recognized the devastation this disease causes and that every nation has a responsibility to ensure universal treatment, care, and support for those living with HIV.

The first Canadian case of AIDS presented itself in 1979. By 1983 Canada established the National Task Force on AIDS to help fight the epidemic. Since that time science and medicine have changed HIV from a death sentence to a chronic but mostly manageable disease. However, today there is still a lot of stigma and discrimination for those who live with HIV. The mere mention of the word "HIV" can bring judgment and can instantly change interactions. Few diseases are more misunderstood or feared than HIV and AIDS. World AIDS Day is important because it reminds us that HIV has not gone away and that more work is needed to end it.

Our guests from HIV Edmonton support a vision of zero: zero new HIV infections, zero stigma and discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths. Similarly, my guests from Turning Point in Red Deer echo the same determined vision for the Red Deerians they serve. On this day let us reflect on the advancements we have made in our fight against AIDS and HIV. More importantly, let us

renew our commitment to ending HIV. Now is the time to get to zero and end it for good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I must say that it is nice to hear a child in this place on occasion.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Volunteers in Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two thousand and seventeen has marked a year of celebration to recognize our country's 150th birthday. I've had the pleasure of attending many events organized by volunteers throughout my constituency to help celebrate this special birthday.

Two individuals from my constituency have earned the Senate of Canada's 150th commemorative medal, which was created to recognize Canadians who through dedication and volunteer work make their community a better place. Mr. André Noël of Morinville has been contributing for many years to the vitality of Centralta's Francophonie. Involved for more than 13 years in the Centralta Tourism Society, he has worked to ensure that the contribution of francophones is recognized and recorded in both official languages. He is a director and member of the Morinville Historical and Cultural Society, and he is a founding member of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day festival held in Morinville in June of each year.

Mrs. Joy Wierenga from Neerlandia has invested significant energy and time into community events and celebrations. In addition, she organized the compilation and writing of her community's history, detailing the lives of the first settlers in the region and, later, the community's more recent history. She is described as one whose dedication and passion for her community is boundless, and the impact she has had on the lives of those in the local area is hard to overstate.

On June 28 I stood on the banks of the Athabasca River with over a thousand people to welcome 15 large voyageur canoes. About 170 paddlers had launched their canoes six days earlier by Jasper and paddled about 333 kilometres to Fort Assiniboine. This brigade was more than just a canoe trip; it was a celebration of our nation's history. The welcoming event volunteer organizers Quentin and Teresa Olson along with many other hands did a wonderful job to provide entertainment and a barbecue dinner for all.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of these and all of the volunteers in my riding who selflessly give of their time and efforts. Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Credit Rating

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, under this NDP government's watch Alberta's credit rating has been downgraded a staggering six times. Here's what a respected credit-rating agency said about the latest: the downgrade reflects large operating deficits and rapid debt accumulation, and Alberta's negative trend is because the province has yet to demonstrate any real willingness to address the weakest budget outlook among all Canadian provinces. It's clear that this government has no real plan to rein in its expenses. To the Premier: does she think that this reckless behaviour with Albertans' money can continue, or will she finally begin to rein in Alberta's expenses?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a good thing the member opposite corrected his language because we have reined in the expenses that Albertans are facing. We've made sure that we capped tuition. We've made sure that we capped electricity prices. We've rolled back school fees. All of these things are making life more affordable for Albertans, and we're not going to stop doing them. We're going to stand up for Alberta families and work to make it better. Guess what? Not only are we making life more affordable, but our jobs plan is working, too. That's because we have 70,000 new full-time jobs since just over a year ago, this time last year. It's working. It's time you guys got on board.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the NDP can say it as loud as they want, but I can tell you that Albertans don't think that six credit downgrades is acceptable. When asked about this yesterday, the Finance minister said that this will all come out in the wash and be a wash. The Finance minister is clearly confused. More taxpayer dollars for debt servicing will actually reduce services despite what the Deputy Premier just said. So will the Finance minister stand up in this House and make it very clear how much these credit downgrades are going to continue to cost Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.
The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's credit rating remains among the strongest in the country, and our balance sheet is the strongest among provinces, with the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio. Those are actual facts. I know that the members opposite like to whip things up, but it's important for us to lay the facts on the table. We'll be sharing more about our path to balance with Albertans in the near future, but this work takes time, and it must be done carefully and compassionately with Alberta families. We are proud to be doing that work, and we are on track absolutely to make sure that we continue to have the strongest economy and the strongest balance sheet in our country.

Mr. Nixon: The NDP want to talk about facts; let's talk about some. Last year debt-servicing costs alone were over \$1 billion, that's \$240 for every single person in our province that could have been spent on services, things that are needed by Albertans. If this government does not change direction, it's going to become more and more expensive. But, again, Mr. Speaker, I asked a very simple question. Will the Finance minister stand up in this House and tell us how much the increased costs will be as a result of his sixth credit downgrade?

Ms Hoffman: Minimal, Mr. Speaker. As the Deputy Premier I'm happy to answer this because – you know what? – what they're asking us to do, the members opposite, is to stop spending, and they're asking us to cut 20 per cent. That's what their leader, Jason Kenney, said. What would that mean? Firing 16,000 teachers and doubling our class sizes, closing half of Alberta's acute-care hospitals and 600 emergency spaces, and wiping out the student aid budget for postsecondary learners. That's what they're calling for. We won't stand for it. We'll stand up for Albertans.

The Speaker: It's a lovely day in the neighbourhood.
Second main question.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous. Again, a very clear question was asked on a very important issue. Six credit downgrades under this government's watch. All I've asked in these last few questions is something very simple. Will the Finance minister stand up and tell us what that increased tax will be, what

the increased costs will be to Albertans as a result of his mismanagement? Yes or no, or does he not know?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that we know that Alberta is the envy of many, many provinces. We have a strong balance sheet, we have the lowest debt-to-GDP, and we are in good shape. You know, we've heard from credit-rating agencies before. They want us to cut \$3 billion to \$4 billion out of our budget so that they can keep our credit in place. That would hurt Albertans. That would stunt the recession. That would put us farther back. That would make us like Saskatchewan.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yet again all the NDP have is fearmongering. They want to get up and they want to talk about fearmongering and all sorts of different issues except for the record. Here is the question I am asking. Six credit downgrades under this government's watch, under this Finance minister's watch. I have simply asked in this House for him to stand up and tell us how much that will cost Albertans as a result of that mismanagement. He either does not know or he is refusing to answer. Yet again, through you to the Finance minister: how much more will it cost Albertans as a result of your mismanagement and these credit downgrades?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, the other side doesn't want to talk about the good things going on in Alberta. The other side doesn't want to talk about the return of 72,000 jobs since the low of July 2016. [interjections]

The Speaker: Keep the volume down.
Go ahead, Mr. Minister. Finish.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, they keep running our economy down. Mr. Kenney and the Conservatives are so eager for the good economic story not to get out in this province. We are starting to return to 4 per cent growth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, nothing but deflecting the question. This government has a failed record. They have two cancelled pipelines. They've got another one that everybody in B.C. seems to be working to stop. They have a carbon tax that they brought forward that they said would buy social licence, and it hasn't worked. But putting all that aside, this is an extremely simple question to the Finance minister. He has six credit downgrades under his time as Finance minister. I've asked, I think, six times now in this House today if he will rise and tell us how much that is going to cost Albertans. Do you know? Yes or no, Mr. Finance minister?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite are very clear in that they want to push for deep, brutal cuts. We've lived through that before; we've experienced that before. Instead, what we did is move forward with a plan... [interjections] I know they want to yell and shut me up, but they're not going to do that because I'm going to stand up on this side of the House for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: I can't hear.
Please continue.

Ms Hoffman: On this side of the House we're going to stand up for the families who are sending their kids to school, who want to make

sure they have a quality education in a reasonable class size. On this side of the House we're going to borrow to make sure that we're building much-needed health infrastructure. We've opened hospitals in communities like High Prairie and Edson, and we're going to keep moving forward because it's been since the 1980s since Edmonton got one. We're not going to cut 20 per cent like the members opposite. We're going to stand with Albertans.

The Speaker: Third main question. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again they want to continue to stand up over and over in this House, not answer simple questions, avoid the facts around their records. We're just asking very simple questions. The credit-rating agencies say that this is a result of the management of this Finance minister and this government of the province. Again, how much more is this going to cost Albertans as a result of these credit downgrades? Does the Finance minister know, or does he not know? Extremely simple question, and we don't want to hear any more fearmongering. Stand up and answer the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, we had a choice in this province. We could go down the road they wanted us to go down, or we could stand behind Albertans and ensure they got through this recession. The costs are minimal. I've said that. We are going forward. We are going to grow the fastest of any province in spite of their activities.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the costs are minimal? What are the costs? It's a very simple question. Already we know that it's \$1 billion in debt-servicing costs alone before this latest credit downgrading. That is over \$240 per person in this province. It's not minimal. I don't think my constituents think that, and I don't think your constituents think that. What I do know is that your constituents and mine want an answer to this simple question: how much more is this going to cost them as a result of this Finance minister's mismanagement and six credit downgrades? It's as simple as that. Can the Finance minister answer that question, or does he not know? It's okay if he doesn't know. Just stand up and say it.

2:00

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, we are doing the work that this province needs to put it back on its feet. They would have kept us on our knees for years. The costs are minimal. It's \$50,000 to the end of the fiscal year.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is finance 101, Minister, you would think. This is about as simple a question as I could ask in this place. I'm now about to ask it for the ninth time. This is the Finance minister of Alberta, that oversees one of the largest economies in the world. Does the Finance minister know the answer to this question or not? Will he take it seriously, stand up, and tell us how much this is going to cost Albertans and what he's going to do about his gross mismanagement of our economy, that has resulted in six credit downgrades under his watch?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, the previous Leader of the Opposition was a deficit backer when he was in the federal government. He saw that you needed to support your economy. I answered the question with the last question. It's \$50,000 to the end of the year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Infertility Treatment in Edmonton

Ms McPherson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I spoke at a rally on the Legislature stairs today about the service transition at the Royal Alex regional fertility clinic, which won't be offering important, uninsured services like IVF, and we haven't seen details on additional supports these patients will need. AHS said that they'd look into it, but we haven't heard a thing. Patients have been told that they will not be reimbursed for services they already paid for and now won't receive. To the Minister of Health: what is the status of the support for patients who are affected by the changes at the Royal Alex fertility clinic?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Of course, to all families who are struggling – and we all know somebody who is. About 1 in 6 Alberta families does experience infertility at some point. Our hearts definitely go out to them, and we're working to make sure that there's a smooth transition. Every single one of the patients at the current clinic has been contacted by a letter and follow-up attempts by phone call to be able to talk about the transition plan, and any costs related to transferring biological material are going to be carried by AHS to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, families who have been on wait-lists at the clinic are now facing further delays. Some of these families have been trying to grow their families for years and are heartbroken at the prospect that they may not even be able to store their embryos as these wait times come with additional costs for storage and transportation, creating further barriers. To the minister: how are these people supposed to plan for their future family when they don't know when or even if they will be able to get treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, just to reiterate, the transportation costs from the current storage facility to the new facility will be borne by AHS, not by individual patients. I absolutely understand the nervousness, and we do encourage all of the families who are impacted to please reach back out to AHS. They've sent letters and made phone call attempts so that they can arrange for as smooth a transition as possible because we know that additional stress is not conducive to good care. That's one of the reasons why the counselling services and other publicly insured services at that clinic will continue to be in place.

Ms McPherson: Patients of the Royal Alex clinic have been told by AHS to seek out services at the new private clinic on Jasper Avenue or the existing one in Calgary or perhaps in B.C. Doctors trained in IVF at the University of Alberta may now have to look for work in the private sector instead of in the public system. Can the Minister of Health explain to us how she intends to strengthen reproductive health in the public system or if she intends to continue to encourage privatization?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, our track record is very clear. On this side of the House we stand for public health care and public access. Everything that is publicly insured will continue to be offered at the hospital and continue to be publicly insured. The pieces that were already privately delivered at that facility at that hospital: the

physicians are moving to a new clinic, and the physicians will continue to offer those privately insured services in the city of Edmonton. We are standing up to continue to reduce wait times and improve access for the publicly insured services. Again, our hearts go out to any family that is struggling with fertility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone in this House knows someone that has accessed fertility treatments to help them start a family, and I've heard how deeply personal that journey is. So I understand that the concerns came up after the changes to the fertility clinic at the Royal Alex, an important resource for families seeking support. Given the importance of these fertility services for Alberta, to the Minister of Health: why will IVF services no longer be available there?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for what we know is an important topic of interest to many Albertans. I know that infertility is a painful struggle for many Albertans, and again my heart does go out to families dealing with this uncertainty and stress because of the change.

Two physicians have made the choice to leave the fertility clinic at the current location and to go to a different one. My understanding is that they're hoping to transfer their patients, those who are interested in doing so, because the clinic will no longer offer the noninsured services at the current location. However, the clinic will remain open at the Lois Hole hospital and will continue to provide all the insured services that are available and, hopefully, with shorter wait times, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there have been concerns about privatization of services at the fertility clinic, to the same minister: what fertility services are available through our public health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the services that are publicly covered include diagnostic testing, endocrinology, and semen analysis. Once the transition is complete, we will in fact be able to expand capacity for those insured services so that more Albertans will be able to access them. This change will also increase space for other important women's health services such as reproductive mental health supports and bereavement programs, cancer screenings and treatment, and care for high-risk pregnancies.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is a difficult transition for many families, to the same minister: what measures are being taken to communicate these changes to patients using the clinic?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, AHS has informed me that they have sent letters to the patients and have made some attempts via phone to follow up. We certainly do invite patients to – I've invited some of the folks involved with the rally today to meet with me. We reached out to them earlier this week, and I wanted to have an opportunity to meet with them today, but I understand that they'll be available in the coming days instead. AHS has reached out to patients to answer questions, review their care plans, and to transfer

to other clinics as necessary. All transition costs for cryogenic material, again, will be covered by AHS. Again, I have absolutely extended an invitation and hope to meet with them at their easiest convenience.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there appears to be a credibility gap between what the minister is saying and the experience of the folks suffering with this. The abrupt removal of fertility treatments from the Lois Hole hospital for women in Edmonton has come as a devastating blow for hundreds, and I don't see it as likely to improve access and improve wait times. Today a rally on the steps highlighted many of those affected, and they're in the gallery today. Thousands more have signed formal and online petitions, which I'll table shortly. To the minister: will you reverse this decision? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Two physicians at that clinic that have been providing uninsured services have chosen to move their practice to a different clinic. I can't force them to reverse that decision. It was the decision that was made. They're continuing to provide their services in the city of Edmonton. I have made very clear to AHS that we want to ensure that any transition is done with ease to the patients and to their families and that all insured services continue to be provided there. AHS believes that they'll be able to reduce the wait times and provide more of the insured services with that space.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we'll take that as a no.

Since 2015 Alberta Liberals have campaigned on a promise to provide public funding for costly fertility treatments, which would save patients money and save the health system money. No other party has made the promise, choosing instead to send couples to private clinics, whose prices are much higher than those at the Lois Hole. Today I want to give this government an opportunity to change that. Will your government commit to funding at least the first round of expensive IVF treatments, saving both patient costs and the system costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I look forward to an opportunity to meet with some of the folks who have been involved in organizing this. I have a desire to meet with them and have reached out and look forward to discussing this more. Again, I know how difficult challenges with fertility can be on Albertans. One of the things is that we're working very diligently to protect and strengthen our public health care system. We know that members opposite are calling for deep and brutal cuts. We're not going to do that. We're working with Alberta families. I don't want to make commitments that I won't be able to follow through on, but I certainly look forward to and am open to opportunities that we might be able to explore.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Swann: Well, the other important impact here is the loss of academic training programs and opportunities. This clinic is one of only two academic IVF centres in Canada. More IVF specialists have been trained at the University of Alberta in the last 10 years than any other university in Canada. Now AHS has encouraged successful doctors to leave the public system for the private system.

What is the government's plan to train the next generation of fertility specialists, who've been forced into the private system?

Ms Hoffman: Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify that AHS has informed me that the physicians made a decision to move to a different practice. That is a decision that I think we need to respect. We certainly want to ensure that all the publicly delivered services continue to be offered in the hospital, and that's our intention. We respect the decisions that others have made to move their practice, but we are going to make sure that everything that is publicly delivered we're fighting to protect, strengthen, and improve. I know the members opposite are yelling at me to move privatization models, but we're not going to do that. We're going to keep fighting for the publicly insured services to continue to be publicly insured.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister has said that he can and will balance the budget by 2023. Does he still maintain that he can achieve it? Yes or no, please?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, we'll be sharing more about that path to balance with Albertans in the near future. As we move towards Budget 2018, we are going to be carefully and compassionately watching our spending. We have opened up the web lines so that people can tell us what their views around cutting and shaving our budget are. But, yes, the plan is still to balance by 2023.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that multiple times today the Deputy Premier and the Finance minister have said that they won't cut 20 per cent from their budget and given that a 10 per cent, or \$10 billion, deficit is 20 per cent of your budget, how can you do both?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, there is a growing economy in this province. Everybody knows that we're going to grow at least 4 per cent. I met with economists earlier today, and they were all bullish on our numbers. They said: yes, those numbers make sense. As the economy grows, as we restrict spending, and as we diversify our economy, we will get to balance in 2023.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, that sounds a lot like our plan.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister has said that he will balance the budget through hiring freezes and attrition. Can the minister balance the budget on these measures alone?

Mr. Ceci: You know, that side's plan to balance the budget is different, Mr. Speaker. They want to give massive tax giveaways to their friends and insiders. They want to pay for those massive tax giveaways by cutting the programs and services that we all rely on. We're not going to let that happen. We're going to balance by 2023 in the sensible way that we've talked about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Land Titles Registry Website Outage

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since Sunday evening Alberta realtors, lawyers, buyers, and sellers of property have been stuck in limbo after the land titles search website crashed. This means that hundreds of thousands of dollars in transactions were stalled. No real reason for the site failure was given other than a technical glitch. It is this kind of secrecy that is a concern to all Albertans. To the Minister of Service Alberta: for the record did the site actually

crash due to an update, or was your department hacked and we lost total control of the Alberta land titles system?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve a government that makes life better by focusing on what matters most. Certainly, we know the importance of the land titles system. [interjections]

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it really doesn't help the situation with this, like, hyperbolic, you know, out-of-thin-air suggestion. The reason that has been given is the actual reason, I can assure the member opposite, and we're working on it.* We've extended land titles hours to be able to deal with this issue, and we have everyone working on this to get it back up and running.

Mr. Cyr: Given that this complete site failure clearly shows the limitations of the government's IT system and given the serious impact that stalled transactions and the inability to pull property information have on our real estate industry, if this is truly an update failure, why was there no contingency system in place to ensure that businesses and the personal interests of thousands of Albertans were protected, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is one platform available for these purposes. It's the SPIN platform, and unfortunately when something as serious as what occurred happens, there are unfortunate consequences of sites going down. This is not terribly unusual, unfortunately, when we talk about websites overall. But I can assure the public that we are working on this, and we will ensure that it's repaired, and we will learn from it to prevent this kind of thing from happening again.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this critical failure of the land titles system was so serious that you had to shut down your Edmonton and Calgary land offices and given that these IT disruptions could negatively affect the privacy and security of individuals and businesses and given that the system went down yet again today – there are clearly no adequate backup measures in place – to the minister: what assurances can you give to Albertans that our land titles system is safe under your direction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the assertion that there is somehow a privacy issue here is just way out to lunch. There was an update that came. It caused the system to crash. We are fixing the system. These assertions are not helpful to anyone. We are working on the problem. We will have it back up and running, I assure the public. When we talk about transparency, they really are ones to talk. When we look at the record of Mr. Kenney, he refuses to disclose anything to the public. This is a computer glitch, nothing more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Student Achievement in Mathematics

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The trends in international mathematics and science study, or TIMSS, has been administered

*See page 2163, right column, paragraph 3

across the world every four years since 1995. TIMSS data is collected from students in grades 4 and 8. In 1995 Alberta's grade 4 results indicated that our math achievement results were roughly in the middle of the countries that participated. However, our results have been steadily declining ever since. To the Minister of Education: are you concerned about the steady decline of our math results in standardized international testing over the last 22 years?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. In the last two years, absolutely, we've been taking a number of efforts to make sure that they're moving forward. For the 20 years before that, you'll have to talk to your benchmates, hon. member. In terms of the last two years we've invested over a million dollars to create a new bursary to support teachers in strengthening their own math knowledge and math education knowledge, to modernize the curriculum, ensuring that our school teachers have the basics or the pieces that they need to be able to provide quality learning environments, and of course we've improved testing, including the addition of a no-calculator portion to the PATs. That's certainly a move in the right direction, and we continue to move forward with Alberta teachers, students, and families.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that when the most recent cohort of Alberta students who wrote the TIMSS in grade 4, in 2015, wrote the provincial achievement test in grade 6 this past spring, they demonstrated the same decrease in math ability that was demonstrated through the TIMSS two years ago and given that the PATs are the official communication of the provincial standard, again to the minister. Two different tests, same result. Why are Alberta students continuing to struggle with math?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking as somebody who was trained as a math teacher, I have to say that it's incredibly important that teachers and students have reasonable class sizes to ensure that they can have good opportunities to engage one on one. That's why when we became government, instead of moving forward with the deep cuts that were proposed, that were going to result in far worse opportunities for students to learn and teachers to have a productive work experience, we moved forward to ensure that we provided stability to class sizes. We are updating the curriculum. We are updating testing. It takes some time, obviously, for implementation, but we know that we're headed on the right track, and we know that students and teachers are . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

2:20

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member knows that it's far more than just class size.

Given that the PAT program assists schools, authorities, and the province in monitoring and improving student learning and given that if we had grade 3 PATs, the province would have had earlier data to help those kids succeed and given the failure of the SLAs, again to the minister. Waiting for an international test in grade 4 or your exam in grade 6 is too late. Why do we not have grade 3 PATs to identify these issues as early as possible?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, we worked with Albertans to make sure that there's a test. Actually, instead of having a PAT at

the end of the grade 3 year, there were earlier assessments brought in at the beginning of the year to do diagnostic approaches so that that year didn't lose the whole opportunity that it had to ensure that students were on track and prepared and able to move forward. I certainly think that in my experiences with the public school board and training as a teacher, the earlier you can get opportunities to sit down with parents and with students to talk about gaps in knowledge, the better. That's exactly why these tools are being developed and why the curriculum is being redesigned. We know there's room for improvement. We know our students can do better. They're doing it in science, and we know they can do it . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Child and Youth Recreational and Cultural Programs

Ms Luff: Mr. Speaker, children and teens across the province deserve to be able to participate in valuable activities when the school day is done. All Albertans benefit when our kids have access to cultural, recreation, and arts programs. When I speak to constituents about community concerns, one thing that I hear frequently is that there's a lack of after school programming in my constituency, especially for adolescents. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is this government doing to help organizations that provide school programs for students in my riding?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government knows that the best way to support programs for youth is to ensure that we continue to deliver funding for facilities and programming in these organizations. That is why our government is investing in community facilities like the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary, the Forest Heights Community Association, and the Cornerstone Youth Centre Society, all of which have a significant benefit for youth in communities across the city and the province. While the opposition would have us cut, we are going to continue working to ensure that we continue to deliver the services that these children and youth . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While all of those organizations are doing amazing work, many ethnic communities in my riding are working to provide programs for youth that will help to strengthen cultural ties and help students succeed in school. However, they find difficulty in accessing government grants. To the same minister: what is this government doing to help address systemic barriers for these groups to improve access to grants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud that our government supports nonprofit organizations that help to build stronger, healthier, and more inclusive communities. Not only are we investing in important grants that these organizations rely on; we have also made the application easier and clearer for groups who are applying so they can access the funding. If the member has specific questions about specific grants, programs, I'm more than happy to talk with her and provide additional information. The most important thing to remember here is that while that side will continue to cut, this side and this government will continue to support our province's nonprofit and voluntary organizations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you. Given that community groups throughout the province also rely on funds from gaming to help support recreation and cultural programs, I often hear from new and small nonprofits, particularly in cultural communities, that receiving a bingo or casino licence from AGLC can be a huge challenge. To the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance: what is the government doing to ensure that all nonprofits have equal access to these opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. In the last fiscal year alone 17,904 charities were licensed to carry out charitable gaming activities in support of their communities. They raised in excess of \$330 million. The dedicated team at AGLC strived to work with each and every one of these groups to assist them through the licensing process, ensuring that each group has equal and efficient access to information. The AGLC staff are passionate about the work they do for Albertans, and I'd encourage anyone facing challenges to reach out to AGLC.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Calgary Cancer Centre Construction Contract

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The awarding of the Calgary cancer centre design/build contract is great news for Calgary and fulfills a long-made promise to the city, but documents and sources indicate that the winner got the job for \$1.122 billion, a full \$206 million, or 22 and a half per cent, higher than the lowest bid. Two hundred and six million dollars is the equivalent of five new high schools or 80 per cent of the highway twinning and widening budget for this year or six years of medical equipment replacements. To the Minister of Infrastructure: can you explain why the highest priced bid won the job?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that it probably sounds attractive to members of the opposition to think that the cheapest bid is going to win at the end of the day, but we actually look for something beyond that. We actually look for quality of building design because, you know, when it comes to something as important as a cancer centre, we think it's incredibly important that we get the right build at the right time and that we get something in a structure that is going to provide decades of effective, quality service, care, research, and design for Albertans who are affected by ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that at the end of the day, we are building a box – mind you, a fancy box – to do the job of treating cancer patients and given that the Infrastructure minister has the right price at the right time and that the winner will take eight months longer to complete construction of this facility than the lowest bidder, to the Minister of Infrastructure: what are Albertans getting for the extra eight months of construction and the extra \$206 million being paid for the Calgary cancer centre?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact that the member opposite would talk about such critical infrastructure, needed for compassionate care for cancer patients, as a box, to me,

is disrespectful and disheartening. The patients who are involved in the creation of this project have put their hearts and their lives ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Hoffman: ... on the line to make sure that it is a quality building that respects the kind of care and dignity that I would expect all members to give to them. The dad who was at the announcement with his daughter, who was grieving the loss of his wife, the daughter's mother, is building that hospital, helping to build the design. It is going to be a thing of beauty, Mr. Speaker, far more than a fancy box. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, a thing of beauty costing \$206 million more and eight months longer. What are Albertans getting for the extra time and the extra money? A simple question. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to cancer care, I think we have to consider a lot of things. As someone who has a mom who goes for chemotherapy for one week out of every month across town at the Peter Lougheed, I will tell you that the idea of bringing all these services together under one roof, in the kind of state-of-the-art facility that we can be proud of around the world, is something I am incredibly proud to spearhead. And the idea that we do so with the consultation of cancer survivors and with the idea that we are creating a space that is going to bring comfort, care, and innovation to cancer patients everywhere ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Health Care ID Card Fraud

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, in our meetings with Health we asked about the costs associated with fraudulent use of our health system by non-Albertans. This fraud is perpetuated by the fact that our health care identification is extremely outdated. It exposes Alberta to millions of dollars in losses due to this simple oversight. At the time, the minister did not have a clear answer on financial loss due to fraud. To the Minister of Health: have you finally identified how much Alberta is losing due to health care fraud?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. What I did say is that there are international studies that are being done that propose projections. Any time we identify fraud, we do that in partnership with the public service and Service Alberta. Any time we identify fraud, it is addressed, it is gone after, and those funds are recovered or attempted to be recovered. If there is fraud that the member opposite knows about that he wants to point us in the direction of, we'd be very happy to recover those funds.

2:30

Mr. Yao: Given that concerns with our health care cards are not just financial and that our current health ID is vulnerable to allowing noncitizens to access health services and this could impact the actual medical record of our citizens, facilitating erroneous and possibly conflicting health information on Albertans' health records, which could be detrimental to their health, have you made

a decision to institute a permanent form of identification for health's sake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These are certainly some of the conversations that I think are important for Albertans to have. We know that there would be an increased cost in being able to do so. We've discussed this with our partners in Service Alberta and others. I do think that there is merit to the idea. I do also acknowledge that we are in a period of time where we're tightening our fiscal belt and we're making sure that we're investing in what needs to be done. They're calling for cuts in question one, they're calling for us to reduce the deficit, they're calling for 20 per cent cuts, and they're calling for increased investment. I think the idea is worth merit for further conversation, but it's time to figure out which page you guys want to be on when you're asking your questions in question period.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, even the most simple retail outlet can give an identification card to somebody.

Given that other provinces have incorporated photo ID with bar codes with basic personal information, which does help discourage fraud, and given that people who are addicted to illicit drugs are desperate and will use any option available to access opioids, including impersonating others to access prescriptions, and that this is another contributor to our opioid crisis, when will the minister come to the realization that she needs to make a decision on this issue? You've had 30 months to look into this. Why are you neglecting the simple, simple piece of the puzzle that really is inexpensive?

Ms Hoffman: It's simple to be a critic and to ask questions. I'll tell you that it is not a low-cost initiative. [interjections] That doesn't mean it's not important for us to be investigating. That's one of the reasons why I've asked Service Alberta and my Health officials to do that, but I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is a very costly initiative. The members opposite are heckling me, talking about cuts, talking about spending. Enough is enough. Come up with a plan, and tell us what it is. Where's your shadow budget? Don't tell us we can cut 20 per cent without telling us where you'd cut it, because I can tell you that we're going to stand up for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Energy and Environmental Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier appointed Tzeporah Berman to the oil sands advisory group. Berman was paid Alberta taxpayers' money to give recommendations on how to implement a 100-megatonne emissions limit for the oil sands. Now, I'm sure Ms Berman was happy to give recommendations on how to implement this limit that has and will be detrimental to Alberta's oil and gas industry. Berman recently wrote an article for the *Guardian*. In this article Berman said that "there is still time to shine a light on Canada's most shameful environmental secret." Does the Premier believe that Alberta has a shameful environmental secret?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell the members of this House and all Albertans is that our Premier and our government are very proud of our oil and gas sector. We know that

our practices here in the province are world leading when it comes to environmental responsibility and sustainability. I can tell you that over the past year our oil sands, our oil and gas sector are growing. We know that drilling activity is up, with 64 per cent more wells being drilled this year than last year. This month we learned that Chevron is ramping up spending in the oil patch, investing up to \$1 billion on their Duvernay shale basin. Our oil and gas sector is thriving.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Given that they're so proud that they call us the embarrassing cousins and given that this government has implemented a damaging carbon tax, punishing emission caps, and community-crushing coal shutdowns and has agreed to the federal government's horrific carbon tax increases that are even higher than what the NDP will be ramming down Albertans' throats even after the 50 per cent increase starting January 1, does the Premier believe Ms Berman's comment that Canada has "weak climate targets"?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, our Premier will never back down from fighting for Alberta jobs and Alberta's energy sector. Frankly, our Premier has done more to promote pipelines and deliver results in two years than the members opposite did in 44. Here's what some of the members of the industry are saying about our Premier: you have been a strong and unwavering partner of ours and our industry; your voice is being heard across the country. That was from Ian Anderson, who is the president of Kinder Morgan Canada. I can tell you that the president of the chamber of commerce in Calgary said: Premier, your remarks are passionate, patriotic, and fantastic; thank you for your leadership and for standing up for Alberta.

Mr. Loewen: Given that this government's carbon tax has been responsible for two cancelled pipelines and given that this government has been late in its support for pipelines and Albertans do not believe the words that have been followed by actions and given that the NDP MLAs have protested pipelines and that the Premier has hired anti-oil activists and that one of them, Tzeporah Berman, has said, "The tar sands have been dubbed the largest (and most destructive) industrial project in human history," to the Premier: do you stand behind the quote from your past adviser?

Ms Hoffman: Let me be clear. The Trans Mountain pipeline expansion will be built. We will break our land lock. We will get our product to new markets. Our Premier is in Vancouver fighting for the support of this critical project. She carried the same message to Toronto and Ottawa last week. The Leader of the Opposition sat for decades in Ottawa. You know what? We didn't get to tidewater. Frankly, our Premier has done more to promote the pipeline in two years than Conservatives did for 44.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Regulations

Mr. MacIntyre: The NDP haven't got a clue how to attract and keep money in this province. It's called investor confidence, and every ministry has failed in it, especially Energy. The NDP want a shiny new sector-by-sector, output-based allocation system with performance standards. That was two years ago. Now the current system, SGER, will expire in a month with no details on a replacement yet. How can investors be expected to do a detailed financial analysis when the greenhouse gas regulations affecting emitters have not been released?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I'm very proud of the work that the Minister of Energy, our minister of environment, and our Premier have been doing, working very closely with industry. We are working collaboratively with them to ensure that when the new OSAG rules come in, we're going to be working with industry to ensure that they can continue to invest. I can tell the member opposite that investor confidence is up in this province. I can give you a number of examples, from Amazon to Google to Pinnacle to Champion Petfoods, who are all investing in the province. In the energy sector Cenovus Energy has more than doubled their production this year.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: Regulations limiting GHG emissions from Alberta's largest emitters are a core financial concern and ought to be a large part of this government's social licence narrative in advocating for market access for resource exports. Given that the government could have used the last two years to ease industry into the pending changes and instead chose to lollygag at industry's expense, why have these regulations not been a priority for this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I can appreciate the fact that the Energy critic is in the dark when it comes to the work that we've been doing with industry as far as coming up with our targets. I can tell you that when the Premier announced our climate leadership plan, she did so with a number of key industry stakeholders that support the cap on emissions, that support methane reduction. I can tell you that our government is working collaboratively with the energy sector, investing dollars in innovation to drive down our environmental footprint, reduce costs . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: California, Ontario, and Quebec define large final emitters at a 25,000-tonne threshold, yet this government, being cash strapped, never turned down an opportunity to adversely punish Alberta's job creators. Given that one-third of our province's available power is used by heavy industry and given that added costs for our electrical generators means added costs for our job creators, will the minister commit here and now to keeping Alberta attractive to investors by keeping our definition of large final emitters in line with our neighbours?

2:40

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, you know what's attractive to investors? Stability in government, investments in infrastructure, investments in our oil and gas sector, knowing that a government is a partner, as opposed to the opposition, who love to jump up and down, throw our energy industry under the bus, drive back and forth over them, and then claim that they're somehow supporters. These guys are cheering for the two pipeline approvals to fail. Well, I'll tell you what. Our Premier is in B.C. right now advocating on behalf of Trans Mountain. We've said that we would intervene if need be, and we are confident that they will be built.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Service Alberta has a supplemental comment to a response to be made.

Land Titles Registry Website Outage (continued)

Ms McLean: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have supplemental information to the question that was asked. As early as 10:14 a.m. SPIN 2 was restored.*

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, a comment?

Mr. Cyr: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. What was the response?

Ms McLean: My supplemental information to the question that was asked earlier is that as early as 10:14 this morning SPIN 2 was fully restored.

The Speaker: Any questions, hon. member?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have information that says that that system has gone down several times during this very day, so it sounds like your answer right now is maybe incorrect. Please go back and check your facts. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.
The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I certainly appreciate that there have been difficulties with the system, I can assure the member opposite that, despite his assertion, I am not lying and the system was restored as of 10:14 a.m.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Alberta Party

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a remarkable place. The people of Alberta are the most extraordinary, talented, resilient, kind, community-minded people anywhere in the world, and this didn't happen by accident. It happened because we're the kind of place that rewards people who take risks, who work hard, who make something of themselves, and, more importantly, who make something of their community. Albertans are both fiercely independent and at the same time we rely on our community and we look out for our neighbours. We are not the stereotype of the single-minded, profit-motivated, tax-despising Albertan. We are entrepreneurial and independent – make absolutely no mistake – but we also care deeply about our community, and we care deeply for one another.

But Albertans are smart and practical, so we won't support politicians who are spendthrifts, who persistently rack up huge amounts of debt for our children to pay. Albertans deserve a government that shares all of those values. We've shown this time and time again. When given the opportunity to vote for politicians who are narrow-minded and mean-spirited, we won't do it. And we also won't support a government that's out of step with Albertans' innate sense of fiscal discipline.

Albertans don't have to choose either/or. We don't have to choose left or right. We don't have to choose between a strong economy or a good quality of life. We can have both, and we deserve both. That's the message the members of the Alberta Party endorsed at our recent AGM. It was a packed house, but it wasn't just the number of people in attendance that was exciting; it's who they were: community leaders, activists, doers. Most importantly, the room reflected the diversity of this great province.

*See page 2159, right column, paragraph 5

The province of Alberta is a place of possibility, and the Alberta Party is a party that reflects the optimism that we should all share about this great place. We want Albertans to get involved and join in one of our many upcoming events throughout the province, join a CA, share your ideas. Yes, Alberta has its challenges, but they will be overcome by working with can-do people in a can-do province. That's who the Alberta Party is, and that's who Albertans are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Saffron Sexual Assault Centre in Sherwood Park

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and speak about an incredible organization, Saffron, the Strathcona county sexual assault centre. Their relentless commitment to providing critical services to survivors and families is truly appreciated. Saffron hosts many community awareness campaigns, the walk for consent, discussing toxic masculinity, public education in schools, and that's not a comprehensive list. They go above and beyond their task because of the high demands placed on their services.

Katie, the executive director, leads this organization with passion that is inspiring. Creating safe environments for survivors to come forward and seek the help that they need is a task that sexual assault centres can't do alone. It takes the whole community to become involved in changing attitudes.

November 25 marked the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. Today is day six of my pledge, during which individuals and governments around the world recognize the deep impacts of gender-based violence. Recently we've seen the global outcry where millions of folks have used the Me Too hashtag to bravely share their stories. As a survivor I know that these experiences impact us for a lifetime and that we can and should be preventing these occurrences.

Our government is taking actions to address this. We have stabilized and in many cases increased funding. As part of the NDP government's commitment to making life better for Albertans, FCSS funding has been increased to over \$100 million.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Addiction and Mental Health Services Outcomes

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Surely, one of the most significant challenges that government needs to acknowledge is that spending does not equate to improved outcomes. Nowhere is this more valid than in Alberta's health care system, the most expensive in Canada. It is now two years since the Valuing Mental Health report, and I acknowledge efforts to develop targets and timelines and the new 18 next steps identified on the website. More plans and reports and spending, particularly on addictions and the opioid crisis, though, are not enough.

The sticky part continues to be measuring whether they are improving, one, access; two, quality; three, cost-effectiveness of our services. This needs new, bold, dedicated leadership to achieve medical care that's better co-ordinated; communications with other service providers, especially for those with mental health and addictions; prevention as a higher priority, with better outcomes. Why are we not measuring these?

The most recent AHS performance report does indicate that some major urban centres have reduced wait times for children and youth with mental health challenges though not in Edmonton and rural

areas. Current indicators are not actually measuring improvements in co-ordination, communications, and results for folks with mental health problems and addictions – such as subjective improvement, ability to work, reduced drug dependency, and reduced recurrences – and they should be. Proper management involves oversight of both process and outcome. Our fragmented mix of public health services do not do so.

As the Auditor General indicated in several reports in the past decade, Albertans are not seeing value for money in a health system that spends more per capita than any other province, especially on physicians. In short, it's not enough to do things right if you're not doing the right things and not measuring the right things. Ultimately, accountability, of course, falls to deputy ministers and managers . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Parliamentary Debate and Political Discourse

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, overblown political rhetoric and hyperbole erode the quality of political discourse and undermine our capability to act as elected representatives. Take, for example, the varying reactions to the current economic recovery. For some it doesn't fit their political narrative, so they deny it's happening or actually cheer against it. Now, I won't do that. I am encouraged, but I also recognize that the recovery is fragile and has not yet reached all corners of Alberta.

Now, the government brags that the recovery is proof that their plan is working. What an unmitigated load of tripe. Not too long ago the Finance minister drew on his thespian skills and gave an Oscar-worthy performance, blaming the downturn solely on the steep and prolonged slide in oil prices. But since then oil prices have doubled and the industry has made difficult but necessary adjustments to return to modest profitability. Stabilizing oil prices and resourceful Albertans are the reason for the recovery, not this NDP government. When the economy was struggling, they accepted zero responsibility, and now that it's on the uptick, they say that they caused everything. Well, they didn't. It was not due to their poor policies.

And just when you thought the self-congratulatory rhetoric couldn't be topped, the Official Opposition steps forward and says: hold my beer. Staying true to their usual modus operandi, the folks on my extreme right make yet another attempt to confuse and confound Albertans. Their claim that the January 1 50-cent hike in the carbon tax on natural gas will cause home heating bills to increase by 75 per cent is at best misleading and at worst full-blown folderol. Several sources have already pointed out the glaring flaws in their math, but, hey, why let accuracy get in the way of a good meme? Their claims are totally incorrect. They know it, yet they defend them with the tenacity of a Jack Russell terrier trying to defend a savoury pork chop that it's just unearthed.

Mr. Speaker, governing in a province is a privilege earned by building trust, not by rhetoric and hyperbole. Albertans deserve better.

2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table on behalf of Friends of Medicare a petition signed by hundreds of Albertans to keep fertility treatments at the Lois Hole health centre.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With sincere apologies to the Child Friendly Housing Coalition of Alberta, I rise to belatedly table a petition calling on the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to “end discrimination against children and their caregivers in condominium and rental housing,” something which was largely accomplished with the passing of Bill 23.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 214

An Act to Regulate Political Action Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I have some tablings. I’m tabling copies of a petition . . .

The Speaker: We’re at bills now, hon. member. Do you have an introduction of a bill?

Dr. Swann: Of course. Yes. Bills.

Today I rise, Mr. Speaker, to introduce Bill 214, an Act to Regulate Political Action Committees.

Mr. Speaker, political action committees represent a means of circumventing Alberta’s campaign finance laws. Even the Chief Electoral Officer has said so. At this very moment dark money from corporations, unions, individuals from outside Alberta, outside of Canada, even, is freely flowing into Alberta to influence our electoral process. This was all supposed to stop with the passage of the Fair Elections Financing Act, but clearly major problems still exist. Even when their money comes from within Alberta, political action committees can still operate in the shadows if they don’t engage in advertising. For that very reason, some are choosing not to.

The Speaker: Hon. member, this is the introductory part. A little faster. A little less detail.

Dr. Swann: A little faster.

That’s why this legislation is so critical, Mr. Speaker. Quite simply, we need to maintain the integrity of democracy in Alberta.

Lastly – well, no, not lastly. Mr. Speaker, this bill does something that’s never been done before in Canada.

Do you want me to close?

The Speaker: Yeah. I really would like that.

Dr. Swann: I got that message, sir.

I will put this bill up against anything the government is proposing – it appears it certainly will – and I ask that members . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Thank you. I think we’ve got the message.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More letters continue to pour in from very concerned rural Albertans who’ve been experiencing very bad crime. This one involves a lady, a nurse and mother of five, who was home alone and had to watch from her living room as they destroyed the contents in her garage and stole her possessions. She was unable to protect herself, and the police did not show up.

Another one says that “rural residents should not have to barricade our homes and yards every day” and fear being prosecuted ourselves if we should try to protect ourselves. This is from Donna from my riding.

This one is from Sarah from my riding. She is a mother of three who lives on a farm outside of Spruce View who had to build a safe room in her home in central Alberta just to protect her children because they’ve been robbed so many times.

This one is from a pastor of a church which has been vandalized five times. They installed security cameras and recording equipment. That was all stolen.

This particular individual, Glenn, says that the people that were arrested and charged came back into his community within one year doing the crimes again. They feel absolutely powerless to stop this.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m also tabling copies of a petition to keep fertility treatment at the Lois Hole which did not meet the requirements of a petition from the Legislature.

Finally, I am tabling an online petition with over 25,000 names calling on the government to reverse its decision on the fertility clinic. I have one of several boxes here. The able assistants here may or may not be able to carry them.

The Speaker: I’m sure we will be able to circulate that very soon.

Hon. members, I have two tablings today. The first I’d like to table is five copies of the revised DVD, attached letter, and table of the 87 electoral division boundaries from the 2017 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission final report, incorporating the amendments to Government Motion 34.

Secondly, I have five copies of the 2016-17 annual report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, return to order of the Assembly MR 1 asked for by Mr. Cooper on May 8, 2017. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Feehan, Minister of Indigenous Relations, return to order of the Assembly MR 3 asked for by Mr. Hanson on May 8, 2017. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mason, Government House Leader and Minister of Transportation, return to order of the Assembly MR 15 asked for by Mr. Cooper on May 8, 2017.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday I advised the Assembly that I would be deferring my ruling on a point of order raised by the Government House Leader relating to comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition during question period. Subsequent to my statement the Leader of the Official Opposition indicated that he would be withdrawing his comments. At that point I’d hoped that the matter would have been at an end. However, in withdrawing his comments, the Leader of the Official Opposition made an additional statement to which the Government House Leader raised objections. Therefore, it is necessary for me to return today with a ruling.

The initial point of order was raised by the Government House Leader in response to a claim by the Leader of the Official Opposition that the Premier was laughing at rural Albertans. The Government House Leader argued strongly that this observation

was incorrect. You can find those comments in yesterday's issue of *Alberta Hansard* at pages 2116, 2117.

As paragraph 494 of *Beauchesne's* provides, on occasion the Assembly will be required "to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident." I may not have found an order in this instance, as I will take the Leader of the Official Opposition at his word that his comments reflected his true perception of what occurred.

However, I note that this situation could have been avoided if members refrained from making personal comments about other members that may be misconstrued or that imply motive or that may give rise to disorder in the Assembly. I further note that arguments on the matter yesterday managed to inflame the situation rather than to defuse it.

Hon. members, we are in this House as a method for representing the people of this province. If we want this institution and this House and, in fact, all of us to be respected, it seems to me that we need to show respect for each of the members, and when that does not happen, we are in fact not showing respect to the people represented by any member who is in this House.

3:00

Generally speaking, on the matter of withdrawing comments I will make one clear statement that I expect all members to follow going forward. If a member is withdrawing comments or making an apology, that withdrawal or apology should be unconditional and offered in a sincere tone and manner. An apology should not be used as an opportunity to debate the matter further or to have the last word. Additionally, if a member sincerely withdraws a comment or apologizes unconditionally, it should be accepted without further comment by members.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 26

An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move third reading of Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis.

If passed, this legislation will establish a system for legalized cannabis that will provide Albertans reasonable access to cannabis products when it becomes legal next July. It is a proposed system that prioritizes the health and safety of Albertans.

Bill 26 proposes amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act, including amendments related to the role of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission in this system. This legislation will grant the AGLC authority to oversee the distribution of cannabis, ensuring that all cannabis products that come to our province's retail sector are legally produced and come from licensed producers. The bill will also authorize the AGLC to oversee the retail aspect of cannabis, ensuring that products are distributed only to specialized retailers that only sell cannabis; no tobacco, alcohol, or pharmaceuticals.

If passed, Bill 26 will enable our government to begin establishing the elements of the system that will include privately owned and operated cannabis retailers who are licensed and strictly regulated and online sales of cannabis that are controlled and operated by government, allowing us to verify that all customers

are of legal age and ensuring that all Albertans will have access to cannabis products on the first day of legalization.

Our legislation establishes provincial offences, making it illegal for anyone under 18 to possess any amount of cannabis. It also restricts smoking and vaping cannabis in public where smoking or vaping tobacco is not allowed and bans the consumption of cannabis in vehicles. It makes it an offence to smoke or vape in any outdoor space typically frequented by children, such as playgrounds, skate parks, spray parks, and on school grounds and hospital properties.

Finally, Bill 26 includes amendments to reduce the risk of impaired driving. If legislation passes, there will be no consumption of cannabis in vehicles, either by the driver or passenger, and any cannabis products must be stored away from everybody's reach.

I know there has been a lot to discuss around the minimum age issue, which is why I want to reiterate why we are proposing the age of 18 in Alberta. We have certainly heard concerns about the health risks associated with cannabis used by young people under 25, but we also recognize that people between 18 and 25 are the largest age category that already uses cannabis. We want to encourage young adults who would otherwise frequent the black market to instead purchase legal cannabis from a licensed and regulated retailer, reducing their exposure to other criminal activity and potentially using unsafe cannabis products.

The legal age does not mean that we promote its use. It means that we feel that an 18-year-old is equipped to make an informed and responsible choice regarding cannabis. Eighteen will align with the minimum age for alcohol and tobacco in our province as well as the federal minimum age for cannabis.

Madam Speaker, more than 60,000 Albertans made their voices heard through consultation this summer and fall, and most of them said that they approved of the system that we proposed in October. If Bill 26 is passed, we will begin setting up a system for legalized cannabis that we believe will work for Albertans because that's what they told us.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank all members who spoke to this bill this week. We appreciate your support, concerns, and your suggestions. As was mentioned throughout debate, this bill marks a good beginning, with more to come as the system evolves.

I ask that all members support me in moving third reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, can I clarify that you are moving third reading on behalf of the Minister of Justice?

Ms Goehring: That's correct. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to speak to third reading? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I rise today to discuss this government's Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis. While it is indeed the government of Alberta's bill, it needs to be noted that this is a reaction to the federal government's legislation on cannabis under Bill C-45, which is to take place on July 1, 2018. On the whole, I think this provincial government's reaction to this, Bill 26, is decent legislation but could probably be tweaked slightly to provide some clarification and dispel some concerns that I've been hearing from Albertans. These points I'll get to shortly.

However, I'll begin with some main points of this bill, beginning with online sales. Under Bill 26 this gives the government a monopoly on public sales. My concerns with this revolve around a

couple of issues. While online access to medical marijuana has been in place for a while now, it's clear that each company can price their strains as they see fit. Of course, like any other commodity, it would have to be priced competitively. Under a government monopoly, however, no such flexibility exists. A user of cannabis would be required to pay what the government says you pay.

Another important issue with regard to online purchase of cannabis is age verification. For years it was near impossible to get wine or beer delivered to your home. Same thing for something like Wine of the Month Club. The reason it was difficult was due to concerns about ensuring that purchasers are of legal age to purchase the stuff. In other words, how do you validate an 18-year-old or the age of that individual? Yet the government has no issues with this for online marijuana. At least with medical cannabis there is a process you must go through, including medicals and prescribing doctors and referrals, and if your info is verified by your government ID and your health card, then you get your medical marijuana.

I guess a question that I would have is: where are the safeguards for this legislation? We don't even know if the government will make a profit on this operation. I mean, it's implied, but have they done any sort of economic study on this? If so, can those results be shared with the House or tabled? That'd be nice. I know that the federal government has suggested that they will take 50 per cent of the profits on the tax applied to the sales of cannabis, but another question is: will there be a risk that taxpayers in Alberta may end up subsidizing these operations?

Another pressing concern is retail sales. Under this legislation retail sales will begin on July 1, 2018. There has been plenty of discussion about where and who will sell cannabis, but will the same restrictions on proximity to schools and liquor stores have to be applied? Will municipalities have the ability to limit the number of stores or the distance between competing stores, such as 500 metres, in a bylaw? I believe that these are some questions that need answers.

Madam Speaker, much debate has been around whether to allow pharmacies and liquor stores to sell cannabis or just stand-alone retail stores. The government has decided to go to independent stand-alones, with the government monopoly on online sales as their model, so quite frankly I think that ship has already sailed. It can't be overstated, however, that the liquor industry has the training and experience to deal with issues that arise while selling a controlled product like alcohol or cannabis, so I hope the government will ensure that the same standards are adhered to by these new stand-alones and their owners and, of course, their employees.

What sort of public education campaign will be introduced in order to school citizens with regard to the effects of cannabis? Certainly, the feds will have come up with their version because they're the ones legalizing the product. What has this government done, you know, in this regard?

3:10

Another issue is enforcement. I touched on this throughout my speech already, but other thoughts have occurred as I go here. Why won't the same restrictions apply to smoking or vaping cannabis as do around the consumption of alcohol? You know, would the rules for smoking be different for vaping? I don't know. Can someone in the future open a nightclub exclusively for vaping as it is very different from smoking? Will these questions be answered in time for the July 1 deadline? People just want to know. It's certainly not fair to our law enforcement folks to have them play catch-up with legislation. We owe it to them to try to give them every possible tool to ensure that all Albertans are protected. It's about safety.

Perhaps the best way to ensure that is that as this technology and this bill progress, we put in place a sunset or autorenew clause in this legislation that ensures that this act is renewed every so often, perhaps every three years, just to ensure that this legislation keeps pace with what is going on with society and how this act works with Albertans at large.

It's too bad the government turned down my friend from Drumheller-Stettler's amendment, which I find odd because in some cases this government's own technical briefings often mention that there will be a review done and that it will be done in three to five years. It seems to me somewhat hypocritical of this government to pat itself on the back for inserting a review of legislation clause in some other bills, but when we propose it on a bill that brings about such a major shift in society, that side of the House just drags their feet.

Madam Speaker, this is a highly complex issue, and there are many aspects that need to be worked out before I'm totally comfortable with this bill, while understanding, of course, that the government has been put in this position by the federal government. I guess the success and failure of this bill will come down to how the police and the AGLC deal with regulations and the consequences that come out of this legislation.

Whether this is an ideal model can always be debated, but be assured that the UCP will be watching closely to see how this bill is rolled out, and as with all legislation we'll continue to engage with the public and stakeholders to ensure their concerns are always heard.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on third reading of Bill 26, a bill that amends the Gaming and Liquor Act to become the gaming, liquor, and cannabis act. The United Conservative Party supports a private model for marijuana retail, which is a major portion of this bill as well as online sales and other regulating aspects in this legislation.

We disagree with the NDP's plan to treat marijuana like simply a new tobacco product; however, tobacco is a restricted substance. Alcohol is a controlled substance. Marijuana, which is currently illegal, will soon become a controlled substance, too. Unlike tobacco, alcohol and cannabis are both intoxicating substances.

When this law passes, adults can walk down the street smoking marijuana just like they can a cigarette. They can't, however, walk down a street in Alberta drinking a beer. We made an amendment that would allow us to treat both of these as the same substance under the law.

The UCP public consumption amendment would have created public consumption laws for cannabis that mirror as close as possible liquor's, a bit of a hybrid from smoking and the liquor laws. These liquor laws are well known and well accepted by Albertans.

The UCP believes it's the government's job to help protect members of the public from exposure to unwelcome marijuana use and second-hand marijuana smoke. Albertans who prefer not to be around people drinking can easily avoid being in environments that allow it. The NDP is not applying that same measure to marijuana.

The NDP insists Bill 26 protects Albertans from smoking or vaping cannabis by making the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act apply to the substance. Kudos. It also provides specific protection to children by prohibiting use near playgrounds, sports fields, and child care facility properties, but those are very narrow provisions, and interestingly they don't include public events. I

know that one of my hon. colleagues in the House in opposition proposed an amendment to address this. This means that families may think twice about bringing their children to one of Alberta's many family events and festivals.

Modelling of children is of special concern. I know many of my colleagues in this House share that. Many parents will wish to shield their children from seeing adults using recreational drugs. It makes sense. A family can walk down the street now and not be concerned about someone walking by with a beer. So why wouldn't it be the same for marijuana?

On July 1 people will be able to smoke marijuana on sidewalks, outside of buildings other than schools and hospitals as long as you're not within five metres of a door or window, and almost anywhere else in Alberta that you are allowed to smoke a tobacco product.

The NDP may make it sound like it has good restrictions on public use of marijuana, but it simply does not. We tried to highlight this with our amendment. Thankfully, municipalities can make their own bylaws restricting or allowing marijuana use. It's interesting to note that the NDP has complained about the federal government downloading responsibility onto the provinces, but now the province is doing the same thing to the municipalities.

Our amendment would have treated marijuana more similar to alcohol in its public use. It was a common-sense view that reflects that of Albertans and many other jurisdictions that have legalized cannabis in their society. I think this is the best-case scenario for something like this in the provinces. It's unfortunate that the NDP didn't accept our very reasonable amendment in an effort to strengthen this legislation. However, I will effort to do that as we go down this path in making safe spaces for the children and families in our province.

I will support this piece of legislation, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Bill 26, An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis, at third reading. This legislation is a turning point for the province, and while it has been imposed upon Alberta given the changes made at the federal level, each province and territory has been tasked with legislating its sale and distribution. Like the province of Manitoba, the government of Alberta has decided to adopt a hybrid model of private retail and government online sales.

On the whole, we're generally satisfied here in the Alberta Party caucus with this plan. The NDP has created a system that both allows and encourages entrepreneurship at a very important time for our province, when Calgary's unemployment rate remains above 8 per cent and the overall unemployment rate in the province hovers around 8 per cent. In the truest Alberta fashion, people from across this province will be able to do what we do best, set up shop.

With respect, Madam Speaker, it's hard to imagine the government setting up a system, though, that can adequately protect the information of cannabis consumers with online sales given the fact that they carelessly deleted 800,000 of their own e-mails and up until today can't seem to keep critical systems like land titles online. In an age when a great deal of our personal information is stored online, we need assurance that the government can and will protect it, and at this juncture we are not convinced that the provincial government is ready to take on this responsibility.

Madam Speaker, I have spent most of my career in the information technology and business sectors, and I know all too well the importance of data security and the dangers of having personal information exposed, and frankly so do most Albertans. The government is proposing that they undertake online sales of cannabis to the exclusion of private business. Now, currently medical marijuana is sold exclusively online and through government-approved vendors. While concern about public safety in the distribution of cannabis is a legitimate priority of Bill 26, there are some concerns about safety and security of online sales that do need to be addressed.

As we discussed in committee under the amendment that I proposed, delivery of cannabis is sometimes compromised by the delivery method. If a vendor doesn't check the box indicating that a signature is required on delivery, the package is left at the doorstep. It's now difficult for police to seize illegal drugs in the mail system, and there's nothing in this bill that addresses that particular issue.

As well, I've heard from stakeholders that one of the challenges is checking for ID in online delivery. Will the government online sales be delivered by a service more expensive than Canada Post to ensure proper delivery, and in that case, if it costs more money, will it make the black market more attractive to customers?

Another priority I haven't seen the government address is the security of the data that will accompany online sales, data like consumers' names, ages, addresses, payment details. If there were a data breach, not that I'm aware that any necessarily have occurred, it would still be a small subset of records that were compromised if the government adopted a hybrid public and private model for online sales. With a single vendor those records will essentially be aggregated in one place, making it a very attractive target for online criminals. What system of authentication and IT security do the NDP propose to keep the information of Albertans safe? What measures will be in place to ensure that this information is kept confidential?

Again, we have not heard or seen from this government a demonstrated ability that this government can be trusted with IT systems, so why would we trust them with the information of thousands of potential consumers? As far as we're concerned, the government has a long way to go before it can be trusted with our data in this new context.

The other issue, Madam Speaker, is cost. The amount of money it's going to cost to stand up an online sales system is going to be substantial. If that cost was borne by private retailers, the savings to Albertans could be substantial.

3:20

Ultimately, my caucus colleagues and I feel like this legislation is half baked. Even the slightest online security threat could leave us dazed and confused, hungry for reassurance that Albertans' data isn't going to go up in smoke. Right now what we need is sound digital leadership, a government that proves it can be responsible with our information.

However, we will still support this bill because I think that, fundamentally, the retail aspect of it the government has gotten right. While we'd like to see private sales available online as well, the Alberta Party caucus will stand in support of Bill 26 at third reading.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to close debate on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank all members of the House for their passion and debate on this issue. When the federal government legalized cannabis, all of us had the same concerns. We all want to keep cannabis out of the hands of children, protect public health, promote safety on roads, in workplaces, and in public spaces, and we all want to limit the illegal market. I believe our framework meets these important objectives. While some of our solutions may be different, I know that when it comes to the legalization of cannabis, all members have the best interests of Albertans at heart.

I'd like to thank you for your constructive and thoughtful debate on this important issue. I move to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 28 School Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park on behalf of the hon. Minister of Education.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker, Mme la Présidente. I am pleased to rise today to move third and final reading of Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017, on behalf of the Minister of Education.

This legislation will ensure that the School Act, which has served Alberta well for over 30 years, will continue to do so in the future. Bill 28 brings a number of small changes to the act to ensure that it remains relevant with other existing legislation as well as paves the way for important changes in standards to come into effect in the coming years. This includes establishing certification processes for principals and superintendents that are similar to those of teachers now and ensuring that the leaders of our education system are well equipped and held accountable as they work to ensure every student is prepared for success. The bill also allows for the creation of standards for education service agreements, which will help students on First Nations access provincially funded schools, thereby helping to improve the educational outcomes of indigenous students.

We're also establishing a common age of entry through this legislation. By setting the age at which students start kindergarten, we will ensure that all students in the province have a good basis for success in their academic future.

This act will also ensure that establishing a separate school district will be made clearer and more collaborative under the proposed amendments, ensuring communities are well aware of any potential impacts.

As well, the act will be building a measure of flexibility by removing some provisions from the School Act that set student transportation requirements in stone.

Finally, Bill 28 is ensuring that the School Act aligns with other legislation and will continue to help schools upgrade smoothly for the foreseeable future. Madam Speaker, this act will make Alberta's education system stronger and thereby make the lives of students and communities in our province a whole lot better. I therefore hope that everyone in this House will be supporting me in voting yes on this legislation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill at third reading? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017, at third reading. We all understand that Bill 28 has many parts to it. In many ways it's an omnibus bill, and because of its many parts, it tackles some very important issues, many of which the United Conservative Party will support and can support.

One of the parts of this bill deals with the age of entry. We know as educators that sometimes in many children's lives it's best if we delay the entry into school. Especially for boys, it seems to be important. You know, with a little bit of age, a little bit older, they will perform much better academically. Establishing that age of entry as December 31 and having a common age of entry across the province, in our view, is beneficial for students.

Having an education service agreement between the provincial and the federal governments for First Nations children is a good thing. Bill 28 allows the minister to be able to establish standards for an education service agreement that would allow First Nations students to be able to attend provincial schools. In our party we believe that all children in Alberta deserve a high-quality education. We believe that all children in Alberta should have access to a provincial education on equitable terms and that these education service agreements between the province and the federal government will take positive steps towards ensuring that that occurs. We believe that establishing these education service agreements actually works towards providing all Alberta students with the ability to have choice. Should First Nations parents and First Nations children desire to attend a provincial school because they deem that it is in their best interests to do so, that is a positive step forward.

Updating the references to the Chartered Professional Accountants Act: a good thing.

Updating the terms of office for trustees to four years: a reasonable thing to move forward on.

It's a good thing to enact a set of professional standards for principals and superintendents. Madam Speaker, superintendents are charged with a very important duty, the duty of ensuring that education is functioning smoothly, that our schools, our educators, our children, and the education that occurs within the walls of our institutions are meeting professional responsibilities and that education is in fact taking place. Setting professional standards for principals and for superintendents is a positive step.

Our concern with Bill 28 and with this particular setting of professional standards for principals and superintendents revolves not around the intent but around the lack of confidence that we believe Albertans have in this government to oversee the regulatory process. We have seen in the term of this government a lack of proper consultation, and they have sometimes, some would say, purposely placed poor legislation before this House – an example would be Bill 6 – with the promise that they will fix this poor legislation through the regulatory process. Then the consultation process to develop the regulations can be controlled by the government, and the regulations can address those parts of the bill that should have actually been addressed in the Legislature but, instead, are being worked out outside of the Legislature and without the input of the Assembly.

This government has a habit of not listening to its stakeholders, and we are not convinced that this government will work co-operatively with the stakeholders involved. We don't believe that they will work co-operatively with the stakeholders involved when drafting up things like the professional standards that principals and superintendents will be expected to live up to.

3:30

Madam Speaker, Bill 28 addresses, within this omnibus bill, a trustee code of conduct, and in this we see a trend beginning and continuing towards the centralization of power – the centralization of power – with the minister. In an education system which for decades has been characterized by a decentralization of power, where we've had local school boards elected by the people of Alberta, the parents of Alberta, that have made local decisions that have governed the education system of our children, we begin to see and have continued to see a centralization of power in the hands of the minister.

Bill 28 also provides the minister with power to set mandatory elements when developing a trustee code of conduct. The United Conservative Party does not agree that the minister needs to centralize and to continue to centralize the decision-making power of education in his office.

Over the course of the past two and a half years we have seen the minister take control away from the school boards across this province and invest it in himself. The minister abandoned local bargaining in favour of a provincial bargaining system where he appoints the majority of the representatives on the negotiating team.

This minister's solution to the school fees issue was to vest the decision-making power regarding school fees in himself rather than leaving it for a local school board to decide. While the minister may believe that vesting that power within his office is a positive step, we've seen even just this past week that it has had some very real issues creep up, some unintended consequences, some might suggest. As we've seen over this past week, in the Elk Island public schools they've cancelled their half-day kindergarten as they had paid for the noon hour busing through fees. The result? Parents who at one time had a choice to have a half-day kindergarten program now no longer have that choice in Elk Island public schools. Why? Because the minister has vested the power within his office and has made decisions on a province-wide basis that do not have the capacity to take in local considerations.

The minister supported an amendment and spoke to an amendment in this Legislature to a private member's motion that would have made the minister and the public school boards the determiner of school choice in Alberta, a private member's motion, that should have been easily supported and eventually was by the government when they backed down, to support private and charter and home-schooling options. Instead, the minister at first supported, as the government did, an amendment to the motion that would have made the minister and the public school system the guardians or the gatekeepers over whether you could have had those educational options.

This minister has taken a most determined stance to be the guardian of school choice by refusing to expand the charter school alternatives in this province. We've had several charter schools over the last two and a half years that have applied to be able to be a charter school in this province. They've had waiting lines of parents to enrol in these schools once the minister has agreed to allow that charter school to move forward, yet they have been turned down by this minister without reasonable explanation even though the minister could have clearly added these additional charter schools and, in the process, would have met the needs and the desires of Alberta parents.

Now this minister has determined that he will mandate the elements of the board of trustees' code of conduct, another step in a long line in consolidating power within this minister's hands.

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we've had a point of order. Go ahead, hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance Items Previously Decided

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise on several points in the Standing Orders of the Assembly.

- 23 (b) [When a member] speaks to matters other than
 - (i) the question under discussion . . .
- (c) persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session . . .
- (f) debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that Member's intention to [see] that it be rescinded.

Madam Speaker, with respect, I recognize that the chair needs to allow wide latitude to members when they speak to questions, but it does occur to me that the member is not at times in his speech referring to the bill but, rather, is taking the opportunity to read a litany of his complaints against the minister for things that the minister has done, which may or may not relate to this bill. I understand that he has been rather frustrated as our government has embraced a progressive approach to education during our term in office. Nevertheless, it is important that you focus on what is before the House, what is on the floor, and also that you not reflect on previous decisions of this Assembly because those are clearly matters that are dealt with in these particular clauses of the standing orders.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on the attempted point of order, which I don't think is one. I think what I heard the hon. member doing was trying to create context as part of his debate on the bill to make it clear, not only to people in this Legislature but the people that may be watching through other means, why he feels the way he does and why he's taken the position that he does. I don't think there's a point of order here. Frankly, I thought that while the Government House Leader may not have cared for what the member was saying, he was speaking in a fairly respectful way and, again, was giving context to both the things that he did appreciate and support about the bill as well as the things that he did not appreciate and support about the bill.

One of our jobs here as we debate these things is to debate in such a fashion that the people that vote for us or against us at home or any Albertans watching would have an idea of why any of us here do choose to vote for something or against something. Part of that is context, which I believe the hon. member was providing, and I thought that in a fairly respectful manner he was doing that. I appreciate that the Government House Leader feels tender about some of the decisions that, you know, his minister has made, but I don't think the member was so much trying to redebate the items that have already been decided as giving context to why he would or would not support the bill. With all due respect, Madam Speaker, I think the Government House Leader is being a little bit more sensitive on this Thursday afternoon than he needs to be.

Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the point of order?

Seeing none, I will note that as the hon. Government House Leader recognized, the Speaker does tend to give fairly wide latitude when speakers wish to express their comments regarding a matter or a bill. For the most part that's how I was interpreting what the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon was doing, providing a background explanation of why he perhaps could not support some elements in the bill. However, I would caution members that

it is important to try to stick to the bill being debated and not drift too far off the context. However, in this matter I think we can simply proceed. Just be a little more closely aligned to the bill itself. Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will endeavour to take your counsel into consideration here as I move forward, okay?

Debate Continued

Mr. Smith: May I bring us back, then, to this bill. This minister has determined that he will mandate the elements of the board of trustees' code of conduct. Now, education and codes of conduct in education are best developed in a co-operative climate where the people at the most local level would develop their own codes of conduct as many school boards have already done across this province. Rather than co-opting local authorities so that he can mandate elements of the board of trustees' code of conduct, the minister could, should issues arise, direct his concerns to the school board involved and work with that school board and help them address any of the concerns that the minister may have.

Each of these trustees, Madam Speaker, has been elected. They've been elected by the parents of the constituency that they serve in education, and these trustees are accountable, at the end of the day, to the constituents that have elected them and to the expectations that these constituents have of them. We know that in this province, that is larger than most countries in the world, every school board is unique. We have rural. We have urban. We have some school boards that in their territory alone are massive, and the educational issues that they face are absolutely unique. In that case, the trustees may need some very unique expectations written into their codes of conduct.

What happens if the mandatory portions of the code of conduct from the minister conflict with the wisdom of the trustees and/or the people that they represent? If the minister believes that he needs this additional level of power, then he must have a pretty clear idea of what these standards would be that he wants to mandate. So why not build them into the legislation, where they could be debated by the members of this Assembly?

Busing across the province of Alberta: the problems that school boards have to overcome regarding their transportation in this province are incredibly varied. Urban needs, rural needs: they will vary greatly.

The United Conservative Party agrees that the walk limits are a problem and that they need to be addressed. Setting a 2.4 kilometre limit in legislation was an issue in some jurisdictions, but in other districts it was not the primary busing issue. Rather, the number of routes or ridership or travel distances or funding: these were the primary issue. The United Conservative Party can support placing distance limits in regulation. What we find worrisome is how the distances will be decided. Our position would be that local boards know best what is needed as far as walk limits, and they should have reasonable flexibility to decide what those limits will be. This should be locally driven, not driven by a bunch of bureaucrats who are making up regulations that may not particularly reflect the local concerns or the realities of the parents and the students where they live.

Madam Speaker, in an urban setting asking a five- or a six-year-old to cross several busy intersections regardless of the total distance may not be safe, and putting forward a provincial formula is not going to allow for local situations to come under consideration. Our school districts are simply too varied. They need the boots on the ground making these decisions, not some province-wide formula.

Indeed, we've heard from many stakeholders that their concern is less the formula and is more focused on the process for fulfilling their responsibilities regardless of whatever the walk limits are. The opposition would strongly remind the Minister of Education that funding decisions regarding transportation will affect the bus routes that will be provided. We are not talking about the amount of money set aside in the budget for transportation, while that can be an issue, but, rather, an issue of timing.

For many large urban school boards, the bus schedules are driven by money. If the budget is finalized and approved by the Legislature in the spring, many school boards fear that there is not going to be enough lead time for the school boards to be able to implement the busing plan. For instance, we've been told that the Calgary board of education has more bus routes than the city of Calgary. Imagine trying to organize all of those bus routes, pick-up times, et cetera, in only a few months. This minister must be sure that the decisions regarding walk limits and the budgets that accompany them also consider a reasonable period of time in which to implement the bus routes and the schedules.

The minister continues his trend towards the centralization of power when he provides himself with the power to force school boards to co-operate regarding busing through Bill 28. Providing the minister with the power to force school boards to co-operate over busing simply removes the decision from being a local, community-driven process to one where the decision is made by a minister who may not understand the local sensitivities or nuances regarding transportation. Let the people, the voting parents, decide whom they are willing to vote for, and let those school board trustees decide if it is in their children's best interest to have a co-operative busing agreement.

The United Conservative Party supports co-operative busing agreements and arrangements. We believe that co-operative busing arrangements should be pursued where savings can be accrued and where it can be done meeting the local needs of the parents and the students. We believe that these decisions are best made locally and that providing the minister with the ability to enforce co-operation is a troubling sign that reveals once again this government's mistrust of local elected decision-making.

There are parts of Bill 28 that we do support, but like all omnibus bills, the good portions of this bill will sometimes be lost because of other parts of the bill that need improvement. For instance, the United Conservative Party, as we've said, supports the updating of the terms of office for school board trustees. Yet because of the increasing power creep of the minister built into this omnibus bill, we will have to vote against good parts of Bill 28. That is the nature of an omnibus bill. It leaves the potential that good legislation, legislation that has the support of the House, is lost if the entirety of the omnibus bill is defeated.

It is therefore with a sense of an opportunity lost that the opposition will not be supporting Bill 28.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Education for bringing this piece of legislation forward. We were elected two years ago based partly on our commitment to strengthen the education system across our province. Of course, we've had many discussions around the importance of our government's promise to fund enrolment growth and build new schools throughout the province, but we must also work to enhance the legislation that governs the system as well.

3:50

It's important to recognize that the School Act has served our province's communities for over three decades. I believe that through Bill 28 and through its amendments to the current act we will be able to address many of the complexities within the act that have become somewhat outdated, ensuring that the legislation meets the needs of our communities now and into the future.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you that through the conversations I've had with educators, parents, and the wider Edmonton-Meadowlark community, I've heard many great ideas about how we can modernize our education system. The amendments within Bill 28 address many of the concerns within the current act that have been brought forward to my office. As a government we must do our best to address the changing needs of our communities. The way in which the province delivers education and the fairness in how it is delivered are of the utmost importance to my community and to all Albertans.

Among the changes to the School Act contained within Bill 28 is the proposed establishment of school transportation co-operative agreements, which would encourage co-operation between school boards to ensure efficient transportation for our students, sharing transportation services where possible. This is an idea that has come up often while considering this legislation and even before then with my constituents, and I'm happy to see it move forward.

We also see changes proposed to the school transportation walk limit, which would eliminate the antiquated 2.4-kilometre restriction on bus services, taking effect in the 2018-19 school year. Once again, I've heard from many people in my community that having children walk anywhere near 2.4 kilometres every morning and every night to receive transportation services is simply too much, especially when we look at some of the complexities within my community like Westview Village, which is measured from the front of the manufactured home community and doesn't take into account those who live near the back of the massive property. There is no doubt that these changes will have a positive impact on the families in my community and for others across the province.

Bill 28 also specifies that school boards will be required to develop and implement a code of conduct that applies to school board trustees, recognizing that these trustees play an important role in leading our education system and should have established guidelines much like the ones laid out for municipal councillors under the MGA, or the Municipal Government Act.

Bill 28 will set a consistent standard that a student must be five years of age as of December 31 of the year they are entering into kindergarten, something we've heard broad support for, I believe, at least on this side, for sure. Right now the age at which a student may start kindergarten is set individually by local school authorities and varies across the province. Consistency across all boards will ensure fair and equitable education for all students, of course taking effect in September 2020 to allow school boards and parents and families to plan around these changes.

Bill 28 will also allow the Minister of Education to set standards for the education service agreements to ensure that students are able to access the provincial education system on equitable terms no matter where they live throughout the province. In cases where students live on-reserve and want to attend schools in a public, separate, or francophone school jurisdiction, an ESA is signed between the First Nation and the school authority. These ESAs vary across the province, and as a result, once again, these agreements are not consistent. Having standards for these agreements will ensure accountability and will remove some of the barriers that exist when students on-reserve look at their choices for education while

maintaining and allowing continued opportunities for First Nations and school authorities to collaborate into the future.

Madam Speaker, within Bill 28 we also see changes to increase collaboration of and transparency for the public in the process around establishing separate school districts. This would ensure, once again, a consistent approach with standardized timelines and specific steps throughout the process. It will also encourage all parties to work together.

We also see within this legislation updates to financial reporting requirements for private schools to bring them into alignment with practices within our public system. While many private schools already provide this information to Alberta Education, this would ensure that all that accept public dollars are subject to consistent financial reporting expectations and would ensure greater accountability for the public funds that go into all of our schools. It's important to note that for the 2017-18 school year there would be no changes. This regulation, once put in place, would take effect in the '18-19 school year.

Madam Speaker, I am very supportive of the amendments proposed within Bill 28. Through the changes that I have discussed and other changes to the School Act, we will ensure that the professionalism and dedication demonstrated by educators across our province will be supported by legislation that has been updated for the 21st century. These changes will go a long way in terms of addressing some of the challenges that have presented themselves within the current School Act, and I believe the implementation of this bill will result in stronger collaboration, more transparency, and better service delivery to many Albertans that rely on our education system while making the system more fair overall. I know that the minister has spent a lot of time consulting with educators, parents, and all interested stakeholders in the development of these amendments, and I believe it shows through the common-sense changes that have been put forward.

I'm happy to stand in support of Bill 28, and I hope all of my colleagues will do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Pleased to rise and speak to Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. The Alberta Party caucus will be supporting Bill 28. It is not a perfect bill, but I think it does do more, certainly, good than not.

Briefly, just speaking to some of the aspects of the bill that we support and then some areas of concern, the professional practice standards for principals, superintendents, and certificate-holding central office staff I think is a very positive move. I think what's especially positive about this is the grandfathering for existing people who are in existing positions. It allows for continual improvement within the system but doesn't place undue burden or new expectations on people who have legitimately achieved the positions they have to date.

The establishment process for separate school districts as well, I think, is a result of a good, collaborative process between separate and public school boards, and I hope it ushers in a new era of collaboration which will benefit Alberta students primarily, also perhaps offering an opportunity for cost savings.

That then leads me to the school transportation and co-operative agreements. The opportunity for the minister to have an increased ability to examine and address situations where co-operative transportation may be beneficial is a good thing. It can eliminate duplicate service and increase service levels. I was pleased to see

that the minister was so clear on that point, that school boards that choose to collaborate will be treated more favourably by the minister. I think Albertans would expect that our education system would collaborate wherever possible to both reduce cost and improve service. That seems like a good, common-sense outcome.

Education service agreements with First Nations I think are very particularly important and very welcome. In a conversation I had with the chief and council at Tsuut'ina Nation recently, which is adjacent to my constituency of Calgary-Elbow, they raised this issue with me, and they had some grave concerns about some of the inequities in education when Tsuut'ina students would participate in either the public or separate system, primarily in Calgary. This will, I hope, allow the government to establish standards that will ensure that all students are treated fairly, that indigenous students have every opportunity for a great education, be that on-reserve or in partnership with off-reserve schools.

The transportation walk limit. Of course, it's great to see the 2.4-K limit gone. I do have some questions about how exactly the new walk limit will be set. That's a tremendous amount of work to do all around the province, and for the ministry to be involved in that with each school board is going to be a long and complex process. This could very well have a knock-on effect that, I hope, does not have a further detrimental impact.

I can tell you that many of my constituents in Calgary-Elbow – and I've heard from many, many parents in Calgary and around the province who have real, genuine concerns with how transportation has been handled. There have been some significant changes to bell times and busing and transportation within, in particular, the Calgary board of education, which has had a real detrimental impact on parents around the city, in particular parents of children in alternative programs. We have situations where students now as young as 10, 11 years old need to take multiple city buses plus a C-Train, then cross a busy street just to get to school. I think that as a parent that doesn't feel right to me.

I think that we as legislators should ensure that we're thinking of making sure that education is the prime area of focus and primary objective for all of our school boards. The way one parent put it to me is that it felt very much like the system was transportation focused and happened to also educate students as opposed to an education system that happens to also provide transportation. They felt that the situation was reversed, where the focus seemed to be on making sure that transportation worked and that if the kids happened to also get an education at the end of it, well, so be it. Of course, I think we would agree that that certainly is not an acceptable situation.

4:00

My hope is that removing the 2.4-kilometre walk limit and allowing school boards to work collaboratively with the ministry to establish new walk limits that fit the context of each community and each school board will be a positive thing and, equally, that the ministry will provide backfill funding to school boards to enable proper transportation to make sure that students have the opportunity, of course, to get to and from school in a way that makes good sense for them and good sense for their family.

While I have the floor and speaking of transportation and alternative programs, one of the frustrations that many constituents have expressed to me is that French immersion, in particular, is treated as an alternative program when it is so widely available, especially in our larger cities but even beyond, and that that's captured as part of this umbrella, which creates tremendous inequities when it comes, especially, to transportation for parents whose children choose French immersion. It is an official language of this country, as I'm sure we all know. I understand that up to 1

in 5 or even 1 in 4 students in the Calgary board of education participate in an alternative program, the vast majority of those in French immersion. It's widely available throughout the city. One would hope that there would not be an inequality in transportation as it relates to alternative programs of all kinds, but especially French immersion.

Standardizing the age of entry to kindergarten: we certainly will support that as well as the trustee code of conduct, requiring each school board to establish a code of conduct. I would hope that that would help improve governance and accountability of school boards and make sure that school boards are, in fact, responsive to the needs of parents and students. The good news, Madam Speaker, is that I think that is the case in the vast, vast majority of situations amongst the dedicated trustees who serve our province, but this, I think, can only seek to improve that.

The technical and administrative amendments to update some of the references to things like the Chartered Professional Accountants Act, updating the term of office for trustees to four years: these are sort of technical amendments that also exist in the legislation that are a positive thing.

With that, Madam Speaker, we in the Alberta Party caucus are happy to support Bill 28 at third reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've spoken to this bill a few times. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to Bill 28, the School Amendment Act, 2017. There are a couple of things that need to be addressed. You know, a lot of the members have spoken about the good changes in this bill, and again I would completely agree. As the Official Opposition we have a crucial job in making sure that we are holding the government to account with respect to any new legislation that comes through this House. It just feels that time and time again so much legislation comes so quickly through the House. It's large, large legislation, and to debate and question it appropriately and to get to the nitty-gritty of the legislation – I mean, this legislation has real-world implications to Albertans.

How is one supposed to ask appropriate questions, no matter how difficult they are, about the plans for these programs and the rollout of the legislation, especially legislation like this, that really gives the minister a tremendous amount of oversight, Madam Speaker? Actually, the changes that can be made by the minister can be made whenever he deems it to be necessary. If the Minister of Education felt so strongly that we should support every aspect of the legislation and if there were no contentious things hidden in this legislation, then why is there not a comprehensive plan to actually address the larger portions of this legislation, that we're supposed to just believe are going to go through regulations? We're supposed to just be okay with that? There are large parts of this legislation that I believe Albertans would prefer to make sure have the opportunity to be debated, especially as there are so many good things in this bill. Again, it's so frustrating as a legislator to see so many good things that need to be changed.

From the stakeholder outreach that I was able to do and from many of the trustees and the board members that I spoke to, especially with the new elections, I have to tell you that there is a lot of information in this, institutional information that was with the other trustees and past boards that hasn't been transferred, necessarily, at least not at this point, to the new trustees.

So there's a whole bunch of information that is huge within this bill. I understand that the government did some two-day

consultations and discussed it. But to tell you the truth, Madam Speaker, how much of the feedback that came from stakeholders was actually put into this legislation? We won't know because we're being expected to understand that everything that will happen in this legislation, the larger portions of this, is just going to happen in the regulations. As much as I would like to think that everything is just going to be okay, I do believe that our responsibility in this House is to actually be able to look at the meat and bones and the guts of this whole thing and to be able to discuss it appropriately.

But this is a continued pattern, where legislation is hidden within other legislation. You know, again, it's mind boggling. You want to be able to support practical ideas and policies that the government puts forward, really great policies, really great ideas. I'm not interested in voting against those things, especially the more relevant things that we know that the stakeholders are looking to change. However, there are pieces of this legislation that are very concerning that will not even come to see the light of day, Madam Speaker, so how are we supposed to ask questions about those when it's going to just go through the regulations?

You know, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was speaking about modernizing and how, when we get the bill, it's going to be changed. You can modernize the bill as much as you want, but how are we supposed to understand what those modernizations are going to look like if that's not in the guts of the bill and that's going to happen in the regulations? We can't debate that.

He also spoke about collaboration and transparency. Well, the only way that we can collaborate and create transparency is to actually have access to understand what's going to happen in the guts of this legislation.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow, you know, is agreeing to vote in favour of this legislation, but if the minister doesn't show the ability to consult widely and all things happen in the regulations, how can we possibly vote in favour of a piece of legislation that does not adequately tell us exactly what's going to be going on? This is a tremendous amount of oversight, and it will give the minister – and I don't believe any minister should have this level of it – the oversight to legislate on these issues as he sees fit in the future.

Like I said, there are so many good things in this bill, but there are things that are contentious, and it just makes it a huge deal breaker to otherwise very strong legislation.

The crux of the matter is that the significant changes to the way our province is run need to be vetted through this Assembly, Madam Speaker. We need to ensure that we're creating policies for the betterment of all Albertans. The government doesn't just get to create workarounds for that process through one piece of legislation whereby the practical pieces of that legislation seem to be the main idea there.

But then as you go through the legislation, there are all of these other things that are really concerning. The timing, of course – not that that's the government's fault. I mean, there was an election. However, I think there's a sensitivity that needs to be there in understanding that there's a whole bunch of stakeholder outreach that hasn't been done, with 50 per cent of the changes happening to school boards and school authorities and to our trustees.

Of the board members past and present that were aware of this bill, many had been communicated with initially, but did you know, Madam Speaker, that many of the boards and the trustees have yet to see the final report on how their feedback was implemented? I don't think that that is transparent at all. I don't think that that is collaborative at all. Those are all of the things that the government keeps saying, but we have yet to see that happen in real life.

4:10

Would the government be willing to table the consolidated feedback that was supposedly used to inform this legislation? That's just one of the questions. If you have that, I would be very, very grateful to see that. I think it would, at least to some degree, put at ease some of the questions that at least the folks I've spoken to have had. That feedback is of high importance, the feedback that comes from these people. These are our elected bodies, our elected trustees and school authorities, that have the thumbprint of each one of these school boards. It is absolutely imperative that that feedback be tabled or that we understand it so that as the process goes through and these regulations are put forward, Albertans actually understand and are part of at least the understanding of the process that's going to be put forward here.

What is the government's plan, then? If so much of this is going to change within the regulations, I'd like to know what the government's plan is to communicate these sweeping changes to the school boards, many of which, like I had said before, have newly elected trustees. Were the trustees aware of this legislation? Many of them felt that this bill had potential to further erode local decision-making.

Now, as you know, on this side of the House that's a pillar of our party. That local decision-making process is so important because we put faith in the folks that are elected by the people of those local areas. That is the level of accountability that is imperative at all levels of government. We really believe that the people in those areas have a responsibility to be able to understand and elect who they believe best represent the people in those areas. If local decision-making is being taken away as a result of eroding the work that is done by the school boards, the school authorities, and the trustees, I do believe that we have a responsibility to the people of Alberta to make sure that we are not undermining a process that is imperative to making sure that decisions that are being made at those levels are impactful, appropriate, transparent, and accountable to the folks that elected them there.

You know, the most important thing about those local school boards and school authorities – and I think all of us can agree on this – is that schools are the focal point and the centre of a lot of communities, especially in rural Alberta. These schools are the heart of the community, the hub of the community. The teachers live in the communities. The principals shop at the same Safeways as the parents. They see each other all the time. They have dinners together. These people know each other. These are very, very important relationships. Those communities and that communication and that level of understanding: we can't take that for granted, that local aspect.

Even in the larger cities you see that, with so many of the schools being the hub of so many of the communities. This is what brings parents together and families together. We do not want to be doing anything that divides that local decision-making from the families that rely on the people in those places that take care of their babies for eight hours a day.

I just think that, with respect to those entities, we need to respect and understand and really, really look at the intricacies of those schools and their communities and the families, and we need to make sure, Madam Speaker, that we're actually empowering those communities, that we're empowering those bodies, because they have the heartbeat of those communities. We need to empower them, not erode their power. I believe that any time a minister is going to have that level of oversight into a school authority, you are undermining the ability for that school authority to actually act in the best interests of that community.

We need to ensure that they're engaged, that with the changes that are made, their positions are not being made redundant by a provincial government that is overstepping, especially with the running of the school boards. Changes being made to school transportation and the establishment of separate schools are two instances where trustees should be heavily involved in the decision-making. These people know what is going on with their schools.

As the Member for Calgary-Elbow had mentioned with regard to transportation in the cities, when Bill 1 came forward, the level of letters that came across our desk with regard to transportation, especially with regard to our alternate schools – he'd spoken about French immersion. We had many, many, many families that were in alternative programs that are provided by CBE that all of a sudden could not access the schools because of ridiculous changes in transportation. That is a direct result of lack of consultation, Madam Speaker.

That is comparative to the exact situation that we could find ourselves in with the passing of this bill, with not actually pulling it apart a little bit and finding out what it is that we need to do. Why not do one part of the bill with the changes that need to be made that have been consulted on, obviously, and then take a look at these other pieces and consult appropriately on those?

I also have questions regarding how the smaller private and independent schools will be impacted by sections 5, 6, and 7 of this bill, and those are the technical components of this. That was extremely vague. They are quite concerned, given that, you know, Madam Speaker, schools come in all shapes and sizes in this province, which really is an absolutely magnificent part of the schooling system in this province, our choice and the different kinds of education that are possible. I'm constantly blown away by the amazing – amazing – people that educate our children in this province. School choice is a pillar of education in this province.

When we're looking at the administrative components that would require schools to hang on to student records and financial statements, as important as that is, that oversight within the schools in those situations, I think that you can't look at it as one size fits all, Madam Speaker. We have larger school boards that obviously have a very different component, but when we're looking at small schools, I think that we need to be sensitive, and we should look at the unique perspective of each of those schools before we go rushing in to create policy that oversees a whole bunch of different school authorities. Again, consultation amongst all of these school authorities I think could fix a lot of the issues that I could foresee happening in this bill due to the oversight of the minister and maybe not particularly understanding the thumbprint of that particular school.

My list of questions on implementation of these incentives is long, Madam Speaker, and the point is that this House should have the opportunity to debate those and question all of the sweeping changes. Honestly, if the minister was ready to bring forward a cohesive and well-thought-out piece of legislation, I think most of us would be more than happy to have a robust debate on those specifics. I believe it is necessary to do that. Given the engagement

of Albertans and given the changes in the education system and given what is happening – we were talking about math scores and all sorts of things earlier – there are a lot of families and parents that are frustrated right now.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will have the hon. Member for Sherwood Park on behalf of the Minister of Education to close debate.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour for me to close debate on Bill 28, School Amendment Act, 2017, and ensure that the School Act is meeting the needs of the students and the school trustees that we have in our education system at the moment.

I have to say that I'm very disappointed that the members opposite are not supporting this common-sense legislation that will move the education system forward. I would like to remind everyone in this House that this legislation was built in extensive consultation, and I would be willing to repeat the list of groups that the minister consulted with, but as it is in *Hansard* in my speech yesterday, I think I will refrain from doing so.

I would also like to really thank those people that have been consulted: the school trustee associations, the Teachers' Association, the parents' associations, the First Nations groups, and everyone that participated in the consultations over the last few months. I think it's a really good reminder of how the Minister of Education values the collaborative work that happens in our school system. He values the work of school trustees, the work of superintendents, the work of teachers, and the role that parents play in the school system.

4:20

These amendments are going to ensure that our students in Alberta have the best education possible and that they can succeed in their chosen endeavours in the school system. I would like to suggest to the members opposite that they reconsider their decision not to support this bill, that is really going to meet the needs of our students.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

Mr. Mason: We're finished third reading, yes?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Mason: There is no more business before us for the afternoon, Madam Speaker, so I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 on Monday afternoon and wish everyone very safe travels and a great weekend.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:21 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, November 30, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c13]

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2017 c11]

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c10]

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c12]

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c14]

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c15]

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017, with exceptions; SA 2017 cC-2.3]

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft.*), 1534-51 (*Jun. 5, 2017 aft.*), 1553-67 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1589-93 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c9]

Bill 18* — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1567-79 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1587-89 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017; c8]

Bill 19 — An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers (Gray)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1648-53 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1695-98 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1729-31 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act (Phillips)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1627-35 (*Oct. 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1655-64 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1728-29 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 21 — Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1664-72 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1699-1706 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1789-90 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 22 — Resident and Family Councils Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1687-94 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1706-14 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 1731-32 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1790-94 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 23 — Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017 (Ganley)

First Reading — 1685-86 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1761-69 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1805-15 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1910-17 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 24 — An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances (Eggen)

First Reading — 1726-27 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1769-74 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796-1803 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft.*), 1833-46 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1847-55 (*Nov. 9, 2017 morn.*), 1870-75 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1917-19 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1921-35 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 25 — Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 1745 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1794-96 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1815-19 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1935-36 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 26 — An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis (Ganley)

First Reading — 1978 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2021-26 (*Nov. 27, 2017 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2087-2104 (*Nov. 29, 2017 morn.*), 2121-26 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 2166-69 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 27* — Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1831 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1876-78 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1904-10 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1936-39 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn.*), 1955-59 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft.*), 2066-68 (*Nov. 28, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 2119-21 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 28 — School Amendment Act, 2017 (Eggen)

First Reading — 1953 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1980-81 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 2027-31 (*Nov. 28, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2126-29 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 2169-75 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 29* — An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving (Mason)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1959-66 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1982-85 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft.*), 2031-39 (*Nov. 28, 2017 morn.*), 2053-66 (*Nov. 28, 2017 aft., passed with amendment*)

Third Reading — 2117-19 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 30 — An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans (Gray)

First Reading — 2000 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2131-51 (*Nov. 30, 2017 morn., adjourned, amendment introduced*)

Bill 31 — A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act (McLean)

First Reading — 2115-16 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 1614-20 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division (not proceeded with)*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 cA-5.5]

Bill 206* — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1747-56 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1879-82 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1756-58 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft.*), 1882-90 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn.*), 2008-11 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2012 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 209 — Radon Awareness and Testing Act (Luff)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 210 — Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017 (Smith)

First Reading — 1869 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 214 — An Act to Regulate Political Action Committees (Swann)

First Reading — 2165 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 4, 2017

Day 60

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 4, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let each of us pray or reflect, each in our own way.

Dr. Albert E. Hohol

December 27, 1922, to November 17, 2017

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we pay tribute to a former member of this Assembly who has recently passed away. Dr. Albert Hohol was elected as the Progressive Conservative member for Edmonton-Belmont in 1971 and was re-elected in 1975. Dr. Hohol earned his bachelor of education in 1950 and his master of education in 1954, both from the University of Alberta, and his PhD from the University of Oregon in 1967.

After his teaching career progressed, he rose to the position of associate superintendent, educational administration, for the Edmonton public school board in 1969. He then turned to provincial politics and served in the cabinet his entire tenure. Dr. Hohol held the portfolios of Minister of Labour from 1971 to 1972, minister of manpower and labour from 1972 to 1975, and minister of advanced education and manpower from 1975 to 1979. In his last portfolio he advocated for the creation and ongoing support of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta. Dr. Hohol passed away on November 17, 2017, at the age of 94.

In a moment of silence I would ask that you remember Dr. Hohol as you may have known him.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration and respect, there is gratitude to members of the families who shared the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome members of the family of Dr. Hohol who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your names: Ms Barb Oberg and Mr. Ted Prebushewski. Hon. members, if you would express your appreciation to the family members of Dr. Hohol.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to remind everyone that we have a very busy day, and I would encourage each and every one of

you to keep your introductions as brief as possible.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of outstanding individuals who are here today celebrating Human Rights Day at the Legislature with us. I would like them to stand as I call their names: Karen Lee Gall, Jim Gurnett, Austin Mardon, Catherine Mardon, Chevi Rabbit, and Muriel Stanley Venne. Please, let's give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you today and to this Assembly members of the electricity and sustainable energy division in my ministry. These folks serve Albertans very well with all their hard work. In their division they've been helping to launch the renewable electricity program and transition to a more sustainable market system for Alberta's future. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Brent Kelly, Chelsea Donelon, Christine Armitage, Christopher Ewert, Ewa Kultys, Helaina Zyp, Isabelle Vouvé, John Ferrera, Kimberly Budd, Sandy Lee, and Scott Crawford. I'd ask them to stand and members to join me in welcoming my staff.

The Speaker: Welcome.

An oversight: school groups first, hon. members.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a number of students, some of the hardest working and smartest students in the whole province of Alberta, who are visiting us from the humble constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, those being the students of Forest Heights elementary school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Frau Marion Fritz, and some parent chaperones, Alexander Brunnée and Brian Salisbury. It should be noted that Forest Heights offers a German-English bilingual program, and in recognition of that, I have saved up some of my heckles in both English and in German this afternoon. I'd ask that the students please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Darby Young and Amy Stevens with Level Playing Field Inc. Darby visited us on Thursday. She's back again today with Amy in commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Amy runs the office and is known as the amazing Amy at Level Playing Field. I'd ask now that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly guests who are also here celebrating Human Rights Day. Seated in your gallery are Roxanne Felix-Mah, Joel French, Jill Green, Harchand Grewal, Charan Khehra, and Hai Nguyen. I'd ask my guests to stand – I thank them for all the hard work that they do – and that we give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests who are here today for Human Rights Day: Alphonse Ndem Ahola, Cynthia Palmaria, Harriet Tinka, and Xiang Zhang. This year Human Rights Day also commemorates the 50th anniversary of the international covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights. I thank my guests for celebrating this day with us and ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests who are here today also celebrating Human Rights Day at the Legislature. They remind us of the importance of human rights in our own lives and that every person is entitled to human dignity and worth. Here today are Fakhra Abrar, Lorna Dancey, Gary Hansen, and Blake Loates. If you four would all stand, I would thank you all for your work and ask you to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

1:40

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you guests who are here today celebrating the annual event of Human Rights Day at the Legislature. Later today I will speak more about Human Rights Day and the importance of a common standard of equal dignity and worth for all people. My guests here today are Susan Dut, Tammy Kaglik, Shahriyar Khan, and Jonathan Robb. I'd ask them now to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three of my favourite constituents. Two of them were too young to vote for me. One probably did, but she is my wife. I guess there's no way to know for sure. But it's good to see Tiffany Nixon – I'd ask if she would stand up – and our twins Austin and Chyanne, who have been guests in this House many times, but they've never seen it quite this way. Most of this last year they've seen their dad in unity town halls across all of central Alberta and then on a leadership race all across central Alberta. So I say to them through you: "Here it is. We united. Thanks for all your help, and thanks for being here." Please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. You must be a very patient wife.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a group of 19 from the United Steelworkers who are here with us today. The United Steelworkers is Canada's most diverse union, proudly representing workers from a number of fields, from steel mills to health care, social services to telecommunications.

As well, we are joined by two other people very important to me. First, my mother-in-law, Dr. Bette Gray, has been an educator all her career, an award-winning teacher. I've been very honoured to have Bette in my life and am very happy she's here to join us. She is joined by Edna Dach. Edna is also an award-winning educator and innovator. In fact, there are now awards named after her that are being given out. She's an inspiration to me personally and, I know, to all who know her.

If I could have all my guests stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this year's inductees into the 4-H Alberta Hall of Fame, Linda Gooch and Sylvia Mathon. Linda Gooch has been a 4-H leader and volunteer for more than 25 years in many roles, including district key leader and on the Provincial Equine Advisory Committee. The late Sylvia Mathon was a 4-H parent, leader, and volunteer with a passion for family, youth, and agriculture. Sadly, Sylvia passed away in 2016, and her presence will be sorely missed by her 4-H family. Linda and her family as well as a member of Sylvia's family are here today, including two-and-a-half-month-old Rebecca. I'd like to ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a group of medical students who are here from the universities of Alberta and Calgary. They're seated in the members' gallery. Each year a group of students from both programs visits the Legislature to meet with MLAs and share their ideas about health care. I look forward to meeting with them later today. I now invite Howie, Kaylin, Angela, Adom, and their colleagues to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several organizations. To start, the Victims of Homicide of Edmonton Support Society. The Victims of Homicide Society was founded in 1995 by Noel and Joyce Farion following the murder of their son. I've attended several of their meetings, and I can say that it's a profoundly emotional experience first-hand. The group provides ongoing emotional support to help people deal with the pain of their tragic loss and to help them slowly rebuild their lives one day at a time.

They are joined by representatives from both CDI College and UFCW local 401: Lori Kapler and Renata Maione from CDI College as well as Charmaine St. Germain and Sheena Thomson from UFCW. They're joined by my constituency manager, Maria-Elizabeth Vicente. All of them along with 16 of my colleagues' offices work to make the UFCW local 401's third annual shoe drive a success, and I'll be discussing that later in my member's statement.

I would like to ask all of my guests now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly representatives of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Joining us today are the following members: Cam Tait, Neil Pierce, Regan Treewater-Lipes, and Darby Lee Young as well as Darby's assistant, Amy Stevens. I'm pleased to have them here today in honour of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Our government was proud to appoint 15 new members to the Premier's council for the first time in years, led by Chair Sheila Serup and the deputy chair, my colleague the MLA for St. Albert. I appreciate having an incredible group of individuals on this council and look forward to working with them. I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Sabir: I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly ambassadors for the CommuniTea Infusion project and Skills Society who are visiting us today in honour of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Skills Society is one of the largest disability rights and service organizations in the Edmonton area, with a 40-year history of supporting over 400 people with disabilities in the Edmonton area. Skills Society is a valued partner of my ministry and is known locally and nationally as an organization that lives and breathes innovation in order to help people with disabilities live full lives in the community.

One of their innovations is called CommuniTea Infusion project, which converted a 1972 Volkswagen bus into a tea house that travels to Edmonton neighbourhoods, creating and strengthening community relationships. This is an innovative employment program, and I wish to congratulate all participants on its success. Joining us today are Paige Reeves, Larry James, Emily Hannem, Momo Yekee, Chris Bruce, and Shelby Larson. I ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, December 3, I was pleased to join millions of people around the world to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This is an important day to recognize the valuable contributions of persons with disabilities in our communities. Disability is not inability. Every day across our province individuals with disabilities are making incredible contributions and building stronger communities. The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is an important opportunity to celebrate these remarkable accomplishments and promote inclusion in all our communities.

This day is also a call to action. While much has changed since the day was first proclaimed in 1993, many issues and barriers continue to face individuals with disabilities. These issues are important to our government and to me personally. Before I was elected, I worked at the Salvation Army. I have seen how important it is to have reliable public services for individuals with disabilities and their families.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that is focused on taking action to make life better for Albertans with disabilities. Instead of making reckless cuts, we are protecting and

improving the supports Albertans with disabilities count on. Since we were elected, we have increased funding for PDD by \$55 million so that more individuals and families have access to support. We have increased funding for AISH by \$93 million and released the AISH action plan to make improvements. We have stopped regressive and dehumanizing policies that hurt Albertans with disabilities.

One of the things I'm most proud of was repealing the safety standard regulation in its entirety. This was a damaging regulation that was imposed on the community without much consultation, and the community told us loud and clear that it had to go. I was proud to remove the supports intensity scale, that people with developmental disabilities called invasive and dehumanizing.

It has been a source of pride and a profound privilege to do this work, but I know there is more work that needs to be done. Individuals, families, and advocates have had to wait for real action for so many years, and I know it sometimes feels like improvements aren't being made fast enough.

1:50

That is why we are creating the first disability advocate in Alberta's history, someone who will represent the rights, interests, and views of persons with varying abilities, with a view to improving programs and services available to them. We look forward to sharing the job posting soon. We are also making AISH more accessible and user friendly and will be releasing new application forms and a user-friendly guide for Albertans later this month.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing this work in collaboration with many incredible individuals, advocates, and organizations who are working diligently to make life better for persons with varying abilities. Over the next week several Albertans are being recognized with awards for their outstanding leadership. Awards are being presented in communities throughout the province by members of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, a council that we were so proud to appoint 15 incredible advocates to this past year.

I'm so proud that Alberta not only promotes but embraces and celebrates inclusion and diversity. I want to recognize all award winners for their incredible work. I also want to recognize all individuals with disabilities, their families, advocates, and front-line workers for the work they do to make life better for Albertans each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, we are here, we are listening, and we are committed to working with all concerned to build an even stronger and more inclusive Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would propose to continue with the response from the Official Opposition, and then we will move to Oral Question Period.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so honoured to rise today in the Assembly to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and to celebrate the enrichment that people with disabilities provide world-wide. In 1992 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed December 3 as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities to promote equality, inclusion, and the empowerment of persons with disabilities and to highlight the obstacles that they still face in society. To date this convention on the rights of persons with disabilities has 160 signatories to the convention, 92 signatories to the optional protocol, and 175 ratifications and accessions. This convention identifies the rights of

persons with disabilities and serves to promote, protect, and ensure those rights. In March 2010 the government of Canada joined this list when it ratified the convention.

While our country, Mr. Speaker, has made incredible strides in creating equal opportunity and welcoming spaces for the disabled, we still have a very long way to go. Based on 2012 data from the Canadian survey on disabilities, almost 14 per cent of the Canadian population is affected by some sort of disability. People with disabilities are still too often struggling to seek secondary education, equal payment, and employment. The stigma surrounding disability has to end, and it needs to end today.

As the mother of a child that faces these challenges, I know what my child along with others with disabilities are capable of. I'm incredibly encouraged that the government will soon be creating the first disability advocate in Alberta's history. This is an important first step in creating the essential role that advocates for these incredible individuals and helps them to navigate a system that can often seem overwhelming.

Mr. Speaker, as elected officials we must lead the charge in creating an inclusive and welcoming society that values equal opportunity, kindness, diversity, and acceptance. I feel so completely blessed to be able to use my voice to support and to advocate for and to empower persons with disabilities, and I will continue to strive to shape a world in which every day is a day that celebrates these remarkable and extremely able individuals from across our province and the world.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent to allow a representative from the Alberta Party to respond as well as to ask for the Routine to extend past 3 p.m. today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December 3 marked the 25-year anniversary of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The United Nations founded this day of observance to promote awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities and to mobilize action around issues of accessibility, mobility, and dignity. I'm proud to rise in the House to acknowledge this important day and to salute all persons with disability in our province and around the world.

While we have observed the International Day of Persons with Disabilities since 1992, the sentiment goes back a number of decades. In 1976 the United Nations proclaimed 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons, and two years later the decade of persons with disabilities was proclaimed. These were important steps, and there are many tangible ways the world has changed for the better because of these initiatives.

In the past it was common to think of disability as a problem rooted in the body. This was an assumption upheld by those in the medical profession and one that often found its way into political discourse. Now we have to ask each other and ourselves some tough questions when it comes to ability and disability. Do we as a society fail to empower people whose abilities may be atypical?

Today I ask that all members of this House take the time to reflect on this important day and how we think about ability and disability. I ask that we consider the diverse needs of our constituents, colleagues, and friends, who may themselves grapple with a disability. I would also like to send a gentle reminder to all members of this House. Disabilities may not always be visible and may not

always be obvious, but they are no less real. Disability does not exist in a vacuum. We must continue to acknowledge how disability intersects with other forms of discrimination and thank the community for bringing forward their diverse experiences.

I look forward to a day where we can support one another with the goal of a progressive and mindful Alberta that reflects all of our needs, goals, and limitations.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there was a request for unanimous consent, if you would, for an introduction of guests who were missed.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House for indulging me. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you 12 members of the council administration staff from Thorhild county. Here today are Wayne Franklin, Richard Filipchuk, Janelle Cornelius, Chynne Shaw, and Cheryl Pasay. They're all here from Thorhild county to bring Christmas wishes to the government and the members of the Assembly. I would ask you to extend the customary warm greeting of the Assembly.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction Opposition

Mr. Nixon: Last December, when our Premier met with B.C.'s NDP leader, he said after that meeting that she had no intentions of persuading on pipelines, and the Premier seemed content with this, saying: I haven't changed his mind; he's still very committed to standing up for his constituents, and that is fine. Now we find out that during her visit to B.C. last week, the Premier didn't even bother to meet with B.C.'s Premier, instead choosing a Vancouver audience that was safe. A simple question to the Premier: is this government doing anything at all that is consequential to advocate for a pipeline to tidewater with the B.C. government?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me be very clear about one thing, and that is that the Trans Mountain expansion will be built. We will break the landlock. We will get our products to new markets. I was so proud to go to Vancouver last week to build support for this critical project amongst opinion leaders throughout the Lower Mainland. I did the exact same thing the week prior in Toronto and in Ottawa.

The Leader of the Opposition is familiar with Ottawa. He sat on Parliament Hill for two decades and did nothing to support the industry, Mr. Speaker. We have a very different record.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government has a failed record when it comes to much-needed resource projects. They've gotten two pipelines cancelled and another one that everybody is trying to obstruct. Words won't help. Words are not enough. We are glad to see the Premier starting to take action with words, as we have asked, but we need consequences. We need serious actions. Will the Premier stand up and make it clear what the consequences will be to B.C. if they continue to obstruct our pipelines, or will she

continue just to have words? Albertans are looking for more than words, Premier.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what we won't do. We will not yell. We will not scream. We will not build a wall. We will not act like someone from south of the border. We will work respectfully and collaboratively with our colleagues across the country. We will talk to citizens across the country about the very important role that our energy industry plays for all citizens of this country, and we will continue to work to get this pipeline built, and we will succeed on behalf of all Albertans, and I invite the members opposite to join us.

Mr. Nixon: The federal NDP MP for Burnaby South, Kennedy Stewart, last week compared the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain expansion project to the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. It isn't a surprise that the new federal NDP leader also opposes the project in no uncertain terms. He said that, quote, we must oppose the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline. It's fine for the Premier to continue to stand up here and give words, but there need to be consequences. There needs to be serious action taken beyond words. Will the Premier stand up, make it clear what the consequences will be to B.C. if they continue to block pipelines? If not, it's nothing but words. Albertans need action.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Interestingly, while we're in the business of quotes, the president of Kinder Morgan Canada, you know, the company that's actually building the pipeline, describes our government as, quote, strong and unwavering partners of ours and of our industry. End quote. That is because we are doing the grown-up thing. We are not making threats. We are not making outrageous claims that we have no ability to back up. We are working carefully and respectfully with the citizens of this country to get the job done.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Provincial Credit Rating and Debt-servicing Costs

Mr. Nixon: Last week under this government's watch Alberta's credit was downgraded yet a shameful sixth time. Last week I tried asking the Finance minister about the increased borrowing costs that would come from this downgrade. After repeatedly dodging the question, he finally admitted to Albertans how much that downgrade would cost but only in this fiscal year. The crippling debt is a problem that extends well beyond this year. Is the government willing to release the expected costs of these downgrades over the next decade, or will they continue to hide behind ridiculous answers?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, the Minister of Finance answered his question last week and indicated that the cost of the most recent downgrade would be roughly \$50,000. But you know what? The important thing is that our government had a choice when the price of oil fell. We could have Albertans' backs, we could invest in jobs, we could invest in public services, we could invest in affordability, or we could take the tried-and-true efforts of the past, blow up

hospitals, lay off teachers and nurses, and make a bad situation worse. We chose the former, and things are looking up.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I pointed out that the minister finally did answer that question after eight questions, but I see we're yet again in the same spot now with the Premier. I asked a very simple question: how much will these six downgrades under her government's watch cost Albertans over the next decade? We're not looking for rhetoric. It sounds like the Premier is campaigning to be Leader of the Opposition. Stand up. Tell us your government's policy. Tell us how much this will cost Albertans. Simple question; simple answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the long haul the cost of financing our debt will be well below 1 per cent of the overall budget, but to eliminate that debt this year, for example, would mean getting rid of \$9 billion. That is the whole education system in the province. That is firing every teacher and shuttering every classroom. We are not going to go ahead with those kinds of ridiculous plans. Albertans expect a more responsible form of government. That is exactly what they are getting.

Mr. Nixon: Again more fearmongering, more deflections to simple answers.

Last year debt-servicing costs alone were over \$1 billion. That's \$240 for every man, woman, and child inside the province of Alberta, and all this Premier can stand up and continue to do is fearmonger over and over and over. So I'll try a different question but very simple. Does this Premier and the NDP government have any plans to avoid a seventh credit downgrade, or are they going to continue down this ridiculous, reckless path?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is that what we won't do is cancel important projects that matter to Alberta families; for example, the project that the members opposite were calling down last week, disrespectfully calling "a fancy box," the new cancer centre. It was unbelievable. Albertans need a government that will stand up for them, that will invest in their future, that will invest in their families and invest in the public services that they desperately need, that for so long were overlooked. I'm so proud that it is our government that is here now making these decisions finally on behalf of the people of our province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Please, hon. members.

I believe we're at the third main question.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's disappointing to see the Premier continue with this behaviour. It's unbecoming of the Premier of Alberta. Here's a fact – you want to talk about facts – 12,000 Albertans lost full-time jobs in Alberta alone last month. Calgary and Edmonton still have high unemployment, and this Premier has stood in this House after putting in the largest tax increase in the history of this province, a tax increase that she hid from the people of Alberta when she campaigned, and we still have no social licence. So I will ask a question. Will the Premier recognize that her carbon tax has not worked and stop her reckless 50 per cent increase at the end of the month? [interjections]

The Speaker: Folks, just let me know when you're ready.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the unemployment rate in Alberta is at a two-year low. Tens of thousands of new jobs have been created. We know that we still have more work to do. Do not forget. We know we have more work to do. We care about Alberta families, so we're not going to throw a bunch more out of work for some ideological pursuit like theirs. In the meantime, drilling is up, retail sales are up, small-business confidence is up here in Alberta. Our plan is working, and we're going to keep working it because we know that's what's going to be best for all Alberta.

Mr. Nixon: This Premier wants to talk about ideological plans. She brought in the largest tax increase in the history of Alberta without even telling Albertans about it while she was campaigning. Again, I asked a simple question to the Premier today, through you, and she stands up with nothing but fearmongering and rhetoric. It's just ridiculous. Will the Premier and the NDP acknowledge that their carbon tax has brought no social licence, that it is hurting Alberta families? Stand up and do the right thing and stop the increase. In fact, I would go as far as to say: withdraw the carbon tax.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will stand up and do is remind the member opposite that, in fact, when the Trans Mountain pipeline was approved at roughly this time last year, the people who made the decision to approve it actually identified our climate leadership plan as the reason for why it was approved. So I will not apologize. I will celebrate, and I will say that this is the kind of leadership that Albertans have been looking for for a very long time. Now, the members opposite say that they want to cancel it, so will they now stand up and tell the people of Calgary definitively that it is their plan to cancel the green line? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Nixon: The Premier's Trudeau Liberal allies may have liked her plan, but the people in B.C. that are blocking the pipeline that she keeps saying is going to get built certainly don't. The environmental activists, the extreme ones, actually, that she put on government panels that are working now to block Trans Mountain, didn't accept that social licence was a result of her carbon tax, that she lied to Albertans about when she was campaigning.

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: Happy to withdraw that comment there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: But the reality is this. The NDP government do not have any social licence as a result of their carbon tax, and the question is: will they stop their reckless behaviour and recognize the consequences that Albertans are receiving as a result of their ideological policies?

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, I talked about, on your collective behalf, respect for each other. I would hope that that message will sustain itself for the next, I hope, 18 months.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it is very interesting to observe the creation of the strangest of allies, the extreme left and the extreme right, working together to somehow cut down Canada and our future. The message that I delivered in Toronto, Ottawa, and Vancouver is that the progressive majority of Canadians want to move forward, need to move forward, need to

support our sustainable and responsible energy industry, support the jobs it creates, and support what it will do for Canada on the international stage. I believe that we are growing support for that very vision. I think that those on . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Services for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I want to draw the government's attention to the work of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. In their most recent annual report the council made 30 recommendations across 15 government departments and six community agencies. However, there's no follow-up about past recommendations, and there are no measures to track the implementation of current recommendations. To the Premier: how are you co-ordinating your ministers to ensure that these recommendations are fully implemented in a timely way to the benefit of all Albertans with disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the important question. We know that it is of critical importance that we constantly look to find ways to improve our services and supports to Albertans with disabilities. As a result, there is a great deal of work that is going on, whether we're talking about reviewing the AISH program and the criteria there as asked for by the Auditor General, whether we're talking about the work that the disability council will be doing under the leadership of the MLA for St. Albert, whether we are talking about the work that's been done with respect to PDD . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier, with apologies.
First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I recently received a business card from a member of the council, and I was shocked to see a Gmail address. I learned that government staff had created a Gmail address for each council member. Now, this raises a lot of troubling questions, including whether Gmail is FOIP compliant, how the government will manage the increased IT security risk, and how the public perceives something so unprofessional on official GOA business cards. Again to the Premier: is it standard practice for your government to use Gmail, or is it only happening on this council, and if so, what does that say about the value that the government places on this council's work?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that we very much value the work of the advisory council on disabilities, and we've been working, of course, collaboratively with a number of agencies as well as representatives and self-advocates within the disability community since our government was first elected.

On the matter of the e-mail I will be happy to have the minister get in touch with the member in order to answer that specific question.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, earlier this year this House unanimously passed a bill to create the disabilities advocate.

Albertans were very hopeful that this position would be created quickly to the benefit of Albertans living with disabilities and their families, friends, and supporters. But six months later not only do we still not have a disabilities advocate; the government hasn't even started the recruiting process. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: will you commit here and now to a timeline to recruit the disabilities advocate, and will you include the Premier's council in the process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the important question. We do know that Albertans have waited for decades to have that office set up. We are proud of the work that this side of the House did. We have that office now approved. It's not just hiring one individual; it's about setting up an office. We have done the background work, and fairly soon we will be moving with recruitment, and, yes, the Premier's council will be included in that process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Community and Regional Economic Support Program

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community and regional economic support program, or CARES, has allocated \$30 million to support economic growth and prosperity throughout our province. In my constituency the town of Stony Plain recently received \$40,000 in CARES funding to help support business development and create high-value jobs. Given the importance of this program in creating jobs and diversifying the economy, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what new projects have been created as a result of the CARES program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for her question and also for being such a strong advocate for this program and other economic development opportunities within her riding. Dozens of communities across the province are creating jobs and diversifying their communities through the use of the CARES program. I can tell you that at AUMA two weeks ago I announced funding for 50 new initiatives. Some of those include a small-business incubator focused on supporting entrepreneurs looking to start social enterprise in Calgary, an indigenous pipeline monitoring program in Edmonton, an entrepreneurship mentoring program in Canmore, and a training program for small Alberta businesses . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

There seems to be a culture of using the desks as objects, but we have not yet crossed over that Rubicon about clapping.

First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one of the goals of CARES is to support diversification of the economy, especially in our critical industries, to the same minister: how does CARES encourage that diversification?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just want to talk for a moment about the importance of this program. These are initiatives by local leaders and community leaders coming to government and saying: we have ideas on how to diversify our economy. Now, for some reason the opposition seems to think that

they know better than the local leaders who have received funding all across this province, including in every single one of their ridings. I'd love for them to have a conversation with their local leaders to find out how they feel about CARES funding. These are critical diversification projects they have not been able to move forward on. Just because you guys don't believe in diversification, the rest of Alberta does.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CARES program is also very popular with municipalities, with over 80 applications from communities across the province. Given that co-operation between provincial and municipal officials is key to delivering programs successfully, to the same minister: what incentives are there for municipalities to both work together and work in tandem with their local MLA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've been going around the province promoting this program – we've now had three intake windows for CARES – I made it very clear to local municipal leaders, including entities like Alberta's regional economic development alliances, who can all apply for CARES funding, that what we want to encourage is a regional approach to economic diversification. We know there are 344 municipalities in the province of Alberta. What we'd like to see are municipalities working together with each other in order to compete on the world stage. And you know what? This program has been very successful. I look forward to announcing the next round of CARES successful applicants and encourage all communities to apply.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, last week we learned that personal and corporate tax revenues were down lower than projected and that many Albertans who have been lucky enough to return to work are making significantly lower wages. Some Albertans have recovered, and we celebrate their success, but for far too many this has been an asymmetrical recovery. Many in the middle class are afraid of falling lower, and many lower income Albertans are struggling just to hang on. What is this government doing to ensure that we have an economic recovery for everyone?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for his question. It is an important one. You know, Alberta is just coming out of the worst recession, some say, since the '30s. The past two years have been very, very challenging. This is why our government made a choice to invest in infrastructure, to invest in front-line services. I can tell you that there are a number of different economic institutions that are forecasting that Alberta will grow at least by 4 per cent this year, and they attribute that primarily to two things. One is our historic infrastructure build, but as well investor confidence is up, coming from the approval . . .

2:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this time of year has a lot of added costs for moms and dads, this Christmas is going to be

hard for many Albertans, with many people's incomes reduced significantly from what they were just a few years ago. Perhaps there's not much that the government can do directly to help them right now, but there is something the government could not do that would help them. The carbon tax is scheduled to go up on January 1 by 50 per cent, significantly increasing the costs of home heating fuel, electricity, and food. Will this government show compassion to these families by repealing the increase in the carbon tax on January 1?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and discuss the details. Of course, rebates will go to 60 per cent of Albertans, a full rebate, the first week of January, just as they did last year. In addition, this government has undertaken a number of different initiatives to make life more affordable for families. We've eliminated a number of school fees. We've got a tuition freeze happening. We've got investment in \$25-per-day child care. We've got a cap on electricity rates. We've got the rebates, as I said. We've got a number of efficiency programs that are also putting a lot of Albertans to work. We've got a new child . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Given, Mr. Speaker, that there's nothing compassionate about raising taxes on the most vulnerable and there's nothing compassionate about running up so much debt that we jeopardize the social safety net that protects the most vulnerable Albertans – all of us in this House agree that it is our duty through charity and government to provide a safety net, but I'm not sure if everyone here understands how important sound financial management is to ensure that that safety net is sustainable – does the Finance minister not agree that unless he changes course, he will be jeopardizing important programs that vulnerable people rely on?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. You know, the things we won't jeopardize are public education and public health care. That side has marked solutions for both of those things that would make life far more expensive for Albertans. We're going to follow through with our program. We're growing the fastest of any province. That's good news for everybody in this province, for companies and people. We're going to continue on that track because that will get us back to full recovery.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Carbon Levy Increase (continued)

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In less than one month the carbon tax is going to jump 50 per cent, creating more of a financial burden for Albertan families across this province when they can least afford it. Perhaps the most troubling fact is that this backward tax will attack our most vulnerable populations: seniors, low-income Albertans, those on AISH. When the legislation was introduced, this side of the House put forward multiple amendments asking the government to exempt our vulnerable populations and the organizations that serve them. These were voted down. Why is the government targeting vulnerable Albertans with the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the full rebate goes to 60 per cent of Albertans. Two-thirds of Albertans get a rebate. If you're a couple who makes less than \$95,000, you're getting a \$450 rebate. If you have two kids, that goes to \$540. Low-income seniors in Alberta are getting a \$300 rebate. We've also set up energy efficiency programs for nonprofits, for small businesses, for community centres, for farms, for First Nations so that they can save money on their bills and live more comfortably.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, the rebates don't help the not-for-profits, and the rebates are less than the cost.

Mr. Speaker, given that we've heard from countless not-for-profit organizations that assist vulnerable Albertans that they will not be able to provide the level of service they once did or be able to serve the volume of clients they were once able to because of the impact of the NDP carbon tax and what it will do to their bottom line, why is the government not supporting our not-for-profit organizations by refusing to exempt them from the carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we moved forward with a number of different initiatives for nonprofits. Last year, if the hon. member was paying attention, she would have noticed that we had an audit program. We have the business, nonprofit, and institutional program. It's those energy efficiency programs that the folks across the way have done nothing but make fun of the entire time that we have had them introduced because they don't want those organizations to save money. They don't want to put people to work on energy retrofits and other forms of efficiencies. They want us to be stuck in the Stone Age.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we talked about judging the motives of other parties last week. I want to remind you about those kinds of comments.

Hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, I think we are at second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't know how energy efficiency is going to help not-for-profits at this point in time, however, if that's the way that the minister is going.

Given that not-for-profits are already struggling, Mr. Speaker, and there are high demands for their services and fewer donations because of the stressed economy and given that the carbon tax is a significant expense for these organizations regardless of the efficiencies, where does the government expect Albertans to run when the not-for-profits that actually provide the services for them are forced now to turn them away because of the carbon tax that is making it more expensive to operate the not-for-profits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have invested in a number of new initiatives for businesses, nonprofits, and institutions that are allowing folks to retrofit their operations to save money. I just toured a recreation centre on Thursday, Vivo in Calgary. They retrofitted their lighting, and they're saving \$80,000. That's exactly the kind of leadership that the Conservatives would turn their backs on. Those folks in Calgary: they're doing the right thing.

Tourism Industry in Northern Alberta

Mr. Loewen: Every hotel customer in Alberta pays a tourist tax, whether they are working, visiting family, or touring the region. In

2015-2016 northern Alberta paid \$9 million in tourism tax and received \$732,000 in return for development and events, and that number eroded by 36 per cent the following year. Does the minister feel that it's fair to neglect the tourism needs of northern rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our government is investing in jobs and diversifying the economy by working through tourism infrastructure. It's very important to ensure that we are making those investments to bring not just Albertans on holidays to other places but also internationally as well. There is a considerable investment, and it's an equitable way by which we can help to promote the tourist industry.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the government talks about diversifying the economy but the government does everything to do anything but diversify the economy and given that northern Alberta's economy has been hit hard by the carbon tax and given that tourism taxes in northern Alberta are down \$1.4 million year over year from 2016 to 2017, will the minister admit that his provincial tourism promotion spending is not working for northern Alberta and that the job-killing carbon tax is hurting tourism, just like it's hurting the rest of Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's funny that the hon. member would say that because, certainly, there is more tourism in the province of Alberta than we've seen in a number of years, and investment internationally is considerable as well. I was just up in his neck of the woods last week, and the economy is booming. You know, he can't have it both ways. You've got to make sure that you make the investments and then you reap the rewards as appropriate.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the minister maybe needs to look at a few facts before he answers a question and given that on May 30 of last year the minister of tourism suggested that a higher U.S. dollar increases buying power and therefore helps tourism and given that the government has implemented a job-killing carbon tax, driving up the price of everything, and it will rise another 50 per cent on January 1, to the minister: if a rising U.S. dollar increases buying power, does it not make sense that visitors will have less purchasing power and that the carbon tax will drive tourism away?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, what doesn't make any sense is to constantly run down our province, as the UCP does. They make it sound as though there's something wrong with our province. I'm proud to be an Albertan, and I'm proud of our tourism industry here. It has seen record years, and it will see another record year here come next summer.

Thank you.

Provincial Fiscal Policies (continued)

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, when the question of balanced budgets is raised, government-side MLAs race to be the first to shout out and misrepresent others' spending restraint. However, the government loosely suggests moving towards a balanced budget by 2023 without any strategy or plan. To the Minister of Finance. It is clear that you have no plans to restrain public-sector spending, and your policies are clearly not attracting global investment to bolster

jobs, economic activity, and revenue, so tell us, Minister: how do you intend to balance your spendthrift budget?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I take objection to the idea that there have been no savings achieved by this government. That side let CEOs go to golf courses, have really great health memberships. We cut all of that. We cut the salaries and eliminated the bonuses of the highest paid executives of Alberta's ABCs by \$33 million. We extended a salary freeze until September 2019 for management, and that's going to save \$29 million a year.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, all that and you still can't balance a budget.

Given that the minister clearly believes he can address the deficit without actually controlling spending [interjections] . . .

The Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Gottfried: I'll start again, Mr. Speaker. Even then they can't balance the budget.

Given that the minister clearly believes he can address the deficit without actually controlling spending and given that he is clearly counting on creating a new magical revenue stream despite consistent underperformance of both personal and corporate revenue and has yet to conjure up any revenue magic with his red ink provincial fiscal wand, again to the minister: you have clearly demonstrated your inability to manage expenses, so where will you find \$10 billion in additional revenue in order to balance the budget by . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, you know, Jason Kenney wants to look out for his friends and insiders. He'd like to keep the golf club perks.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Ceci: He'd like to keep the memberships and access to private health care. We're not going to do those sorts of things. We're going to carefully look at where the reductions need to be made, Mr. Speaker, and we are. We're going through all of that. That was all set in place by those folks. We're reducing that because that's the right thing to do, and Albertans expect it.

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, I wonder how much the membership to the red ink club is going to cost them.

Given that U of C economist Trevor Tombe astutely observed that based on the recent Q2 update we need resource revenues to be 26 per cent of our budget and given that in 2015-16 we only relied on 19 per cent of our budget to come from resource revenue and clearly the NDP are making Alberta more reliant on oil revenue, not less, and given that the minister has been telling Albertans incessantly that the NDP are getting off the resource roller coaster, again to the minister: why are you blatantly misrepresenting the facts to Albertans? [interjections]

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, that doesn't seem parliamentary over there.

But I will tell you that we're not going to take advice from members opposite, who couldn't balance the budget when oil was

a hundred dollars. Their friends in Saskatchewan have imposed a 6 per cent sales tax on new construction and other things, Mr. Speaker. We're not doing that. We're responsibly looking at those places a budget can be cut, and we're bringing those in. Under the Q2 update I can tell you that drilling is up, retail sales are up, manufacturing is up. Things are looking up. They don't want . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Flood Damage Mitigation in Calgary and Area

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A flooding event devastated Calgary in 2013. In the aftermath of the disaster the government promised the shaken citizens that it would take concrete steps to protect them from future flood waters. But four and a half years later Calgarians are still waiting. To the Minister of Transportation: where is the promised flood protection now?

Ms Jansen: I want to thank the member for the question. Certainly, when we talk about the Springbank offstream reservoir, it's one of the issues that I think this government is taking extremely seriously. The government of Alberta committed to the Springbank offstream reservoir project in October of 2015, and that commitment has not wavered. In fact, the project is the best option, we feel, to protect the city of Calgary and other downstream communities from another flooding event like the one in 2013. We continue to work on that and consider it a very viable option for us in the future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the neighbouring Tsuut'ina Nation opposes the Springbank dam, as do most of the landowners who would be displaced by the project, and given that surely the minister has consulted with all of the parties involved, to the Minister of Transportation: what kinds of resolutions have you fostered to move a flood project ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the member that conversations with Tsuut'ina and the local landowners are ongoing as the province moves forward with the Springbank project. But it's not just about Springbank; it's also about that we're investing \$150 million for local flood protection projects in the city of Calgary. Of course, we also created the Bow River Working Group to assess potential future Bow River flood mitigation options. Those are all funded as operating grants. Those are the kinds of things that you could not fund with the kinds of cuts that are being proposed by the Conservatives.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the cost of this project has already doubled to \$400 million over the past few years and given that neither the Calgarians nor the Tsuut'ina Nation nor taxpayers can afford to have it drag on, to the minister: when will flood mitigation be in place for Calgarians?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, we think it's important, obviously, to do the work of consultation. That has been important through this whole process. Working in tandem with the Glenmore reservoir SR1, we're going to ensure that flood mitigation is

capable of protecting against 2013 levels. I do want to say that when we talk about the importance of these projects and about cost savings, it's important to remember that our government is committed to these issues in terms of how they work with environmental issues while our friends across the way are interested in scoring political . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Cannabis Distribution and Sale

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On July 1 of next year cannabis will be legal across Alberta. Selling cannabis illegally has been extremely lucrative for criminals in Alberta for decades. They seem to be able to make millions of dollars, yet the government has indicated that in the first years of legalization Alberta will actually lose money on legalized cannabis. To the Minister of Finance: how is it possible the NDP government will make no money in the same line of business where criminals have been getting rich for years?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to reiterate, there are three guiding principles: one, making sure that our roads and our workplaces are safe; two, making sure that this product is kept out of the hands of youth; and three, making sure that we take out the illicit and illegal market. To be able to do that, you need to make sure that you price it at the right point. We're working to ensure that that happens, and at the same time we're doing the other important investments to make sure that the other values are also followed through. Alberta is not alone in this. We need to do this as a national effort to keep our communities safe and to take out the illicit market.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the government has left the door open to have provincial workers deliver cannabis purchased through their online system instead of having Canada Post do that job and given that Canada Post successfully delivers medical cannabis across Canada every day, to the minister: since you've already stated that you can't make money selling the stuff, why are you even considering creating a brand new, money-losing public service to duplicate what Canada Post does now and has done for over a hundred years?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. We did do consultation with Albertans on a number of different components, and we've decided to make sure that we move forward with a private retail model, public distribution and private retail for the storefront piece. We do believe that there is a significant opportunity for greater oversight and support in terms of the online component, and we look forward to following models that I understand other jurisdictions are looking at as well. This is not unusual. This is something that we're going to keep working at to provide that protection for the youth, protection for our work sites, protection for our roads, and making sure that we cut out the illicit market.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker: losing stores, losing mail service. Given that criminals sell marijuana because it's illegal and they have no law-abiding competition for that market and given that they make lots of money doing trade in the shadows, again to the Minister of Finance, if he'll get on his feet: how do you convince Albertans of your financial competence when you're running \$10

billion plus annual deficits and you can't even figure out how to make a buck selling dope?

Mr. Ceci: You know, the whole discussion about cannabis sales and taxation will be coming up at the federal-provincial-territorial first ministers' meeting on Monday of next week, Mr. Speaker, a week from today. I'll have more to say about all that, obviously, after that period in time, but as the Deputy Premier has already said, we're responsibly going into this whole thing with our eyes wide open after consulting with Albertans about their wishes. Albertans have directed, have said: this is the way we want it to unfold in terms of the private and public.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:40 School Construction and Modernization in Northeast Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northeast Edmonton is one of the fastest growing parts of the city. The community of Pilot Sound is full of young families and children that are in need of a school, or they may have to deal with the prospect of long commutes and cramped classrooms. Despite the fact that this neighbourhood was first laid for development back in the 1980s, it has yet to receive a public elementary school. To the Minister of Education: can the minister report on the progress being made to build an elementary school in Pilot Sound?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this side of the House recognizes that an investment in new capital projects for schools means an investment in our children and an investment to diversify our economy here in the province. For example, people in Medicine Hat, Cold Lake, Grande Prairie are enjoying the new schools that we built using this process, but they would have not been built if the UCP had their way, cutting 20 per cent.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Sweet: Our new schools often open full or nearly full, and the schools which aren't full have greater enrolment than expected. Can the same minister please explain how the government is planning ahead on the community growth?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to share that using the lists that we get from school boards as the way we build priorities for which schools are being built – for example, last week I announced funding for a much-needed high school in southwest Edmonton, adding 1,800 spaces. Just last week we also announced a new elementary in south Edmonton and a special high school in Lewis Farms. We use the process, we use it in a scientific way, and we make sure that the schools get built as the school boards outline for us.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that a new school for Pilot Sound was announced, but during the same announcement the minister also announced funding for redevelopment of Ben Calf Robe Catholic school. To the same

minister: what is the government doing to increase the capacity by modernizing our schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Certainly, it's important to modernize schools as well as build new ones. We listen to the priority needs of each of our school boards, and we make the decisions as we see fit. Once again, students in Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, and Cold Lake are certainly outstanding students, but you know what? If the UCP had their way, they would be out standing in a field because those schools would never get built.

Agricultural Plastics Recycling

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, agricultural plastic waste is growing in central Alberta and the province. In 2012 it was reported in the Alberta government survey titled Agricultural Plastics Recycling: Agricultural Producers Survey, page 18: "It is notable that burning agricultural plastics is a common practice." Why has this government not been willing and not been involved in looking for solutions for all agricultural plastics recycling in the two and a half years that they've been elected?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. I, too, have heard from a number of people on the matter of agricultural plastics. It's come up at the federal-provincial-territorial table as well. Our recycling regulations are in need of update – there's no question about that – and that will be coming in the coming weeks.

Mr. Orr: So far there's no sign of it.

Given that a working group called the Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group formed in 2016 and involves the majority of stakeholders in the agricultural sector in the province, including recycling organizations, municipalities, ag fieldmen, plastics manufacturers and retailers, even Alberta Agriculture and Alberta Environment, do they have the minister's commitment to move ahead with a provincial ag plastics recycling program to provide an environmental solution for farmers and Albertans, or should they just have to keep burning it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, people should not burn their agricultural plastics. There's no question that our recycling regulations were left to languish by the previous government, and there were a number of different consultations that occurred that went nowhere, so we picked it up, and we're going to make sure that those consultations are accurately reflected in the new regulatory package. That takes time. We want to make sure that we talk to municipalities and to others to make sure that we're getting it right on recycling of these plastics and others. There's no question that this work remains to be done, and we're going to do it.

Mr. Orr: Consultation has been going on for years already. Does this government really care about the environment or only if they can hijack it in order to justify a massive tax grab? Given that this government has done nothing to address the growing problem of ag plastic, which as it gets burned is highly toxic and emits greenhouse gases, and given that the Saskatchewan government has had an ag plastic recycling pilot project for several years now, when will this

government commit to introducing an ag plastics recycling program for Alberta agricultural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member would like to ask questions about why the consultations in 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014 went nowhere, he should ask his new colleagues from the former Progressive Conservative caucus because they did nothing. So we are examining this. We've gone out and made sure that we've got a few new consultations to make sure that we know exactly where everyone is at, we know exactly how to get this thing right, and we will do so. We'll be bringing forward new regulations, and we'll get done what the hon. member's new friends couldn't do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Imperial Oil Cold Lake Oil Sands Project

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-two months ago Imperial Oil applied to the Alberta Energy Regulator for the approval of a 55,000 barrels per day SAGD expansion project near Cold Lake, and if approved, that project will bring thousands of direct and indirect jobs and a \$2.2 billion investment. To the minister. Twenty-two months sounds and looks like red tape. At what stage is this project approval, and if there is any holdup, is that your ministry or is it the Alberta Energy Regulator?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, our focus is making life better for Albertans, and we are working with industry on a number of matters. We have two pipeline approvals. There are good jobs coming back in the oil patch, there's more production, there's more investment, and we're proud to work with industry on made-in-Alberta solutions for each of the areas.

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta Energy has been sitting on a report dealing with the safe recovery of bitumen from beneath water bodies for over three years, refusing to publicly release it to the industry, and given the number of lakes and water bodies in the Cold Lake, Athabasca, and Peace River areas, to the minister: why does the Official Opposition have to fight for the release of the taxpayer-funded research while the NDP would keep industry in the dark when much-needed jobs are on the line?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we work within Energy on a number of matters, and I'm proud to point out that the AER recently has been working on leading in the methane regulations, which industry has been co-operating with us on. We're coming up again with a made-in-Alberta plan rather than something imposed from Ottawa.

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the Cold Lake area has been hit hard by the economic downturn and that these highly skilled, well-paid jobs would go a long ways to recovery and given that the unemployment rate now stands at 8 per cent in the Cold Lake area, Minister, if the proponent comes to you and commits to complying with the safety and environmental standards, will you expedite the approval of this Cold Lake project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I had mentioned, we work with industry, we work with the AER, and if there's a particular problem that is not being addressed to your satisfaction, I'd welcome you to give me the details because I can't speak to that one particular project.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we will continue with Members' Statements.

2:50

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 3 of every year since 1992 communities around the world observe International Day of Persons with Disabilities. In 1992 the United Nations General Assembly declared an annual observance of the rights of persons with disabilities. The aim of this declaration is to promote the rights and well-being of people with disabilities in all spheres of society and development.

How do we ensure that we leave no one behind? How do we do everything we can to promote the individual autonomy and independence of people with disabilities? We create real solutions by seeing the existing problems and barriers. We acknowledge that women and girls with disabilities are at far greater risk than their nondisabled peers for violence, injury, abuse, neglect, negligent treatment, and exploitation. We acknowledge the significant barriers to community living, inclusive education, and full employment and that they continue to exist and must be methodically addressed by all Canadians. We acknowledge that poverty is a grinding reality for far too many people with disabilities.

Once we acknowledge the realities, we can effectively work towards eliminating barriers to full inclusion for people with disabilities. Barriers need to be torn down by creating inclusive legislation that is not created for people with disabilities but created with them. Full inclusion must be expected and supported by doing things like removing humiliating processes that are put in place to exclude people from living and moving into communities. Full employment for people with disabilities will only be the norm when employers see and appreciate the value of employees with disabilities.

Freedom from abuse and violence requires empowerment, and empowerment comes from the lived experience of equality, inclusion, and access, so today and every day let's acknowledge the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and take a moment and think about what you and your community can do to ensure no one is left behind.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As winter closes in on us with all its might, it's a good time to talk about how this government's ideological carbon tax is going to harm Alberta farmers and ranchers when it goes up to \$30 a tonne on January 1. On this side of the House we have long warned about the unintended consequences to some of this government's poorly thought out bills.

Farmers and ranchers are not, as many people seem to believe, exempt from the carbon tax. While it is true that they do not pay the tax on dyed fuels for the equipment directly involved in farming, they are still greatly impacted by this tax on everything, a tax this

government didn't campaign on. When the cold temperatures hit, costs will soar on January 1. Expenses such as transportation costs will go up for the trucks and trains that ship the grains, crops, and livestock to consumers around the world. These costs will have to be absorbed by the producers or passed on to the consumer, leading to rises in food costs at grocery stores and restaurants. The price of natural gas will increase, so heating greenhouses, barns, and other outbuildings will become that much more expensive.

Mr. Speaker, there used to be a cheaper alternative to producers, stoker coal used as an economic alternative to heating in areas where natural gas isn't readily available. But this government made sure that was taken completely off the table. You may recall the farmer from Vermilion who uses stoker coal to heat his shop and outbuildings. On his load of coal he paid \$42 a tonne. In addition, his carbon tax was \$35.49 per tonne, so he ended up paying an additional 90 per cent in taxes. Guess what? As of January 1 the carbon tax portion on a \$45 tonne of stoker coal will be \$53.09. That's a 118 per cent tax.

With increased costs like this I wonder if Santa Claus will join other companies fleeing for friendly economic climates, but, hey, this government's got our backs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Human Rights Day

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 10 every year we observe international Human Rights Day. That's because on December 10 in 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the universal declaration of human rights. This year marks the 69th anniversary of the declaration and kicks off the year-long campaign to recognize this milestone document for its 70th anniversary next year.

I cannot overstate the importance of this document. The declaration proclaimed the inalienable rights which every person is inherently entitled to regardless of race, colour, religion, gender, language, personal politics, national or social origin, birth, or class status. It's available in over 500 languages and is the most translated document in the world.

The declaration sets out universal values for our global community and establishes the equal dignity and worth of every single person. While there is still a lot of work to be done, the declaration has stood the test of time. Its principles of equality, justice, and human dignity have endured, and the spirit of the declaration, those values and principles, are just as valuable today as they were in 1948. As members of this Legislature and members of our communities it's our job to stand up for others. That's why I was proud to stand in this House and vote to add gender identity and gender expression to the Alberta Human Rights Act and for greater protection for young Albertans to join GSAs. That's why we work so hard to make life better for Albertans, and that's how I'm going to celebrate this milestone, by committing to make life better for everyone.

I look forward to joining my colleagues in celebrating this important document in the days ahead, remembering that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Thank you.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, for over five and a half years I and other members of this House have been raising serious concerns regarding the vast array of problems with the rural ambulance system. Despite constant complaints by residents, elected officials, and EMS paramedics, patients across Alberta continue to feel the

impact because of this failed system. Ambulance time wasted on nonemergency transfers, flexing of units into other communities, paramedics needlessly tied up for hours in emergency departments, units not being returned to their home regions, and faulty centralized dispatch protocols continue to plague the system.

These problems were emphasized once again recently, when on November 15, 2017, a number of Alberta paramedics came to the Legislature in desperation, claiming that the number of events that led to emergency calls has increased nearly 36 per cent since 2009 while the population of Alberta has increased by more than 15 per cent, yet we have virtually the same number of ambulances. They added that resources have been stretched to the breaking point. Injured and sick Albertans are paying the price for the lack of resources as they wait for help to arrive. Paramedics also pay the price with increased stress and mental health injuries.

Over the years several significant reports have been conducted on these problems, including that of the Health Quality Council of Alberta, Rural Health Services Review Committee, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the central Alberta municipalities group, and the southern paramedics that produced the suburban-rural EMS deployment review. Yet this government ignores all of this. It's time to give our paramedics the resources they need, that we return to local dispatch, that we stop the practice of using ambulances as taxis, that ambulances are released from emergency rooms within an hour and are then mandatorily returned to their home regions.

These are solutions that United Conservatives will continue to advocate for. We will fight tirelessly to put Albertans first and fix these critical ambulance problems once and for all.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

UFCW Local 401 Shoe Drive for Women's Shelters

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm here today to talk about a very important initiative: the UFCW local 401 annual shoe drive. This is the third year that this event has taken place and the second year that my constituency office has participated. The purpose of this shoe drive is to collect shoes to donate to a women's shelter in Alberta. Last year shoes were donated to WIN House, and this year the shoes were donated to the Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society.

I'm very proud of the fact that the number of individuals and groups assisting to collect shoes this year has grown. In addition to the hard work of the Women's Committee of UFCW local 401 and my constituency manager, Maria, we were joined by 16 other caucuses within our group of offices as well as CDI College north campus. Together, we were able to collect over 500 shoes in the Edmonton area alone for women in need.

Violence against all women is simply unacceptable, yet it continues. This has got to stop, Mr. Speaker. Together, you and I can help make a difference.

I highly commend the Women's Committee of UFCW local 401 for taking on this initiative to assist women fleeing from domestic violence. I would also like to thank my colleagues for collecting all the shoes at their constituency offices, and finally, I would like to extend a huge thank you to CDI College north campus for all of their assistance, from collecting shoes to being the site where the shoes were presented to the Ermineskin Women's Shelter Society. Together, each and every one of us can make a difference, ensuring that violence against women is completely eradicated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

3:00 Racism and Religious Discrimination

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a proud history as a land of opportunity. Many Albertans today are either immigrants to Canada who chose to live in Alberta or are the descendants of those who did. No matter one's cultural heritage or religious practice, our province has been one where everyone has the opportunity to find work, raise and support families, and worship in peace. We can and should be proud of Alberta's model for diversity.

Disturbingly, a recent media report this weekend captured a deeply troubling, racially motivated tirade in the middle of a Calgary Superstore. I know that all members here today will join me in condemning such forms of racism and bigotry. The angry racism captured in that video is simply not the Alberta we know, love, and serve.

This is an opportunity for all of us to reaffirm our commitment to reject and eliminate racial and religious discrimination in our province. Alberta must continue to be a place where all are welcome no matter their cultural heritage or religious practice. We must be mindful of ensuring that nothing we do here can be interpreted as being against diversity. Sadly, on a few occasions I've seen some members opposite belittle Albertans of faith. I can only assume that they were not aware of what they were doing. We must all agree that Alberta must continue to be a place where all are welcome. There's no room for bigotry and racism in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that being Bill 216, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Bill 32

An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today to introduce Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta.

This bill proposes to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to make elections more fair, accessible, and balanced. As well, this bill, if passed, will mean new rules to prevent the flow of dark money influencing our elections, to make elections more accessible and easier for people to get out and vote, Mr. Speaker, as well as making sure that we essentially update our Election Act, which has not had significant updates since the 1980s. It's time we move forward with a fair and more democratic and modern electoral system, and it is my pleasure to introduce this bill.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 33 Electoral Divisions Act

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader to request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act.

This bill would make certain changes to the names and boundaries of Alberta's electoral divisions. These changes reflect the proposals of an independent Electoral Boundaries Commission. The commission conducted an extensive review of Alberta's electoral map and received written and oral submissions from the people of Alberta. The commission recommends the creation of three new electoral divisions and the consolidation of three areas with below-average population growth over the past eight years. We're moving forward with the recommendations to ensure this process is both transparent and objective. As members are aware, this matter was brought to this Chamber for debate on the evening of November 28. The Assembly concurred with the report while making a small number of changes to individual constituency names. It is on that basis that Bill 33 is presented today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I asked my question today, I made reference to the government actually talking about delivering marijuana through a mirrored system to Canada Post. What I have here is a *Globe and Mail* article from December 4 confirming that that is what the government has said is a possibility.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, today I talked about a report that Alberta Energy is sitting on and that the industry has been demanding the release of, the Assessment of SATAC for Hydrocarbon Production for Underground Facilities below Water Bodies. This is a 415-page report. I'm only tabling 181 pages. This report was prepared by the Reservoir Geomechanics Research Group at the U of A for Alberta Energy and delivered in October 2014, and the industry has been looking for this. I'm glad to table this report.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a document entitled Jason Kenney Proposes Drastic Cut to Alberta's Per Capita Spending, Balanced Budget in 3 Years, that I'll be speaking about briefly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table a letter, dated November 30, received from the AAMD and C. I believe all MLAs have received a copy, and I encourage them to read it before we get into deliberations on Bill 33. They are calling for effective representation for rural Albertans in Alberta's Legislative Assembly.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Gray, Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal, pursuant to the Government Organization Act authorized radiation health administrative organization annual

reports for the following organizations: the Alberta Association for Safety Partnerships for the period from September 1, 2015, to December 31, 2016; the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors for the period from July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017; the Alberta Dental Association and College for the period from January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association for the period from November 1, 2015, to October 31, 2016; the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta for the period from January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016; the University of Alberta for the period from April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017; the University of Calgary for the period from April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe there was one point of order, which was withdrawn.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 208 Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017

[Debate adjourned November 27: Mr. Hinkley speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we had the chance to introduce debate on second reading of Bill 208, the Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

This particular private member's bill has been constituent driven. It started during the campaign and has continued ever since, where constituents, consumers have been looking for clarity and information on their utility bills. They've often indicated that they've controlled consumption or that it has gone down but that the bills continue to rise. They want to know whom they appeal to if they have disputes with those retail companies, and they want to know what can be done about unexpected and perceived unfair utility bills. To help consumers when they purchase electricity contracts, this bill will give them the opportunity to do that by connecting with the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

I did have an opportunity to meet with the Utilities Consumer Advocate and hear about some of the work that that department is doing already to help the consumers of Alberta with their energy concerns. This bill will enshrine the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate in law so that the UCA can be there for Albertans for the future.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate is an important resource for Albertans, and every year they handle 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries. They produce educational material and run outreach events across the province. They provide mediation services to consumers who cannot reach agreement with their utility providers, and often their intervention is enough to settle most disputes. They run a program every year reconnecting utilities for people who have had their services disconnected so that some of Alberta's most vulnerable do not suffer through a winter without heat or power. They conduct research and represent consumers at proceedings of the Alberta Utilities Commission, and since 2013 the UCA's interventions at commission hearings have saved more than \$800 million on energy bills.

This is an important role, Madam Speaker, and I am proud to be putting forward a bill that will allow this valuable office the authority to do its job under legislation and not just under regulation.

The bottom line, Madam Speaker, is that this bill is about consumer protection. With this bill, we are ensuring that consumers are protected against potential unforeseen financial stress. I am proud to be part of a government that takes the responsibility to provide a stable and fair electricity system seriously. The government has already taken steps to ensure that the generation system meets the needs of Albertans into the future. Moving to a capacity market and providing the Alberta Electric System Operator and the Balancing Pool with stability into 2030 will help ensure a smooth transition to a more sustainable and stable economic market for the future. Supporting microgeneration for consumers and supporting renewable energy projects for schools and municipalities will help Albertans take more control over their own electricity needs and generation.

But the electricity generation system is only one part of what makes Alberta's energy market work. The government recognized that energy contracts are complex and took action to ban door-to-door sales of energy contracts and services after receiving more than one thousand complaints from Albertans about aggressive and misleading sales tactics.

The consumer also needs to be informed about their options, and Bill 208 takes steps to make sure that all Albertans have the information they need about their rights as consumers when it comes to purchasing electricity or natural gas contracts. Prior to and since the bill's introduction I have received a lot of positive feedback from those constituents. The goal here is to ensure that consumers have the greatest possible protection and to ensure that they have clarity and confidence that they will not be taken advantage of.

Madam Speaker, it has been great to hear the perspectives of everyday Albertans on the proposed legislation, and I look forward to hearing more from them as we move through this process. At the end of the day, this legislation simply will allow consumers to access the information they need to make smart choices.

Madam Speaker, as I've said before, this bill builds on best practices already in place in the industry here in Alberta and in other jurisdictions. This bill will be another important step in an ongoing discussion around consumer protection in Alberta, and I look forward to the opportunity to continue the debate here in this Assembly about making life better for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In looking at this bill, one of the initial thoughts that I had as I was going through it was whether or not the advocate's office had actually requested these sorts of things or whether this was just something that the hon. member took on his own initiative. I would still like to know that.

There are, of course, with any piece of legislation pros and cons. Increased consumer awareness is always a good idea. More information being made available to the consumer in one centralized place is a good thing for Albertans. Consumers deserve to be informed about their options and any issues that others in their community have faced when it comes to choosing their power provider.

I don't see any reason, however, why this cannot already be done by the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office under the existing

legislation and regulations. I just question whether this was actually an effective use of the House's time since these things could already be done. I understand that the hon. member wants to see this enshrined in legislation – and that's fine – but these powers were already held by the consumer advocate's office under the regs.

I would also like clarification from the hon. member, when he's got a minute, on whether the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office was involved in the writing of this amendment. Was it something they specifically requested? Were these issues that they themselves brought up as, you know, issues they wanted to see in legislation because the regs were insufficient for them? Those sorts of things, I think, are important for us in the House to know.

I recommend to my colleagues on this side and all the members in this House that we support this bill. It's not that there's anything particularly wrong with it.

You know, in the consultation that we had with people within industry and different organizations, they all wondered the same thing: well, why do we need this since the advocate's office can already do these sorts of things? Perhaps it is that the amendment spells out in more detail existing powers of the Utilities Consumer Advocate and turns some of their underutilized or unutilized power into a requirement to disclose and collect and use information about distributors and providers and retailers from the Market Surveillance Administrator, the AUC, the director of fair trading, and any other person the advocate's office considers necessary. Again, just pointing out that it's already within the minister's power to have the advocate's office disclose this information called for under any proposed amendment.

I'd be interested to hear from the hon. member what sort of feedback he got from the advocate's office regarding this and the need for it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me pleasure to rise and give a few remarks with respect to Bill 208, Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017. I thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward. I know that it really was embedded in a desire to strengthen the role of the advocate and enshrine the regulations in legislation, which will give it the importance that I believe the regulations should have.

I'm pleased today to rise in support of Bill 208. I commend my colleague the MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose once again for bringing this bill forward. It plays an important role in the ongoing effort of our government and caucus to make life better for Albertans. Many in this province will have noticed our emphasis on consumer protection items. We definitely asked Albertans to come forward with their ideas with respect to areas where they thought consumer protection might be improved. This measure is one result that I think will be lauded by those Albertans who seek a higher level of consumer protection for people in the province. Our caucus firmly believes that our laws and regulations should be effective and enforceable so that consumers and businesses have confidence in our marketplace. Not only will this bill help protect Albertans' pocketbooks; it will lead to increased consumer confidence, and that's good for business.

3:20

One of the great things about this bill, Madam Speaker, is the fact that it will, if passed, enshrine the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, or UCA, in legislation, as has been mentioned by

previous speakers. I was impressed to learn from my colleague exactly how important the office of the UCA is to consumers in Alberta. The UCA is a powerful voice for safe, reliable, cost-effective energy utility services that meet the needs of Alberta consumers.

Did you know, Madam Speaker, that every year the office handles about 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries? This includes everything from answering questions and connecting consumers to the right resources to actually mediating disputes between consumers and utility companies on issues such as bill charges or energy contracts. The office also runs outreach events across the province to educate consumers and engage them in conversations on making informed energy-related choices. Through its website, ucahelps.alberta.ca, the office reaches about 200,000 Albertans every year with consumer resources and services, indicating strong support for this service and making a case as well for enshrining the regulations in legislation to ensure that they continue to serve Albertans no matter what the ongoing, long-term thoughts of a government might be.

One of the hallmarks of the UCA's activities is its work helping vulnerable Albertans maintain or restore utility services during the cold winter months. I know from my past experience as a real estate agent that there were properties which had been threatened with getting utilities cut off or actually had a reduced flow of electricity. They had a special meter on them. This method of obtaining some type of arbitration to ensure that utility services weren't interrupted in cold winter months was a great relief for those people who were owning the properties and also for families who were going through hardships, and utility bills were some things that were perhaps being left aside in order to buy groceries. The utilities they relied on to keep their houses heated weren't cut off. The UCA intervened and did help many, many families and homeowners with maintaining the utilities they rely on in the heating months.

Now, in partnership with the Alberta Utilities Commission, utility retailers and distributors and government agencies such as Alberta Works and assured income for the severely handicapped save many families from having to go through a loss of heat during the heating months. The UCA helps those at risk through the winter utility reconnection program. As part of this program the UCA makes multiple attempts to contact customers with disconnected utilities to help them get reconnected before the cold weather hits.

Another role the UCA plays is representing the interests of consumers at Alberta Utilities Commission rate proceedings. The UCA intervenes in dozens of rate proceedings each year, and since 2013 their interventions have helped Albertans save more than \$800 million on energy bills. That's a significant amount of money back in the pockets of Alberta consumers. Last year alone the evidence and arguments that the UCA presented to the commission prevented \$204 million in extra energy costs from being passed on to consumers. That, to me, Madam Speaker, is a huge benefit of having a Utilities Consumer Advocate in Alberta.

I'm proud of my colleagues for bringing forward this legislation, that will support and enhance the role this office plays and enshrine it in legislation. I'll leave my remarks there and thank my colleague once again for bringing this important measure forward. I look forward to encouraging all members of the Assembly to support the bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 208, the Government Organization (Utilities Consumer

Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017. This bill is simply making a redundant amendment to the Government Organization Act, schedule 13.1, which governs the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office. This amendment's only real function is that it now requires the advocate's office to disclose information, complaints, and investigations lodged against a distributor, provider, or retailer. It's just about as simple as that.

To spell this out more completely, the existing power of the advocate has now just been turned into a requirement. They will now be required to disclose, collect, and use information about a distributor, provider, or retailer that comes from the Market Surveillance Administrator, the Alberta Utilities Commission, the director of fair trading, and/or any other persons the utilities advocate considers necessary.

Now, I will be supporting this bill since it's really not all that controversial and it may in some ways benefit the consumers, but I do feel that it's just another version of the NDP paper-pushing, make-work projects. It makes the advocate, now required, do something that it can already do under the existing clause (c), "to inform and educate consumers about electricity and natural gas issues." I do think that this is a bit of a waste of the House's time and that this amendment is really just spelling out the same clause that was in there before but in more detail and at added cost.

I just hope that this won't distract from what is the most important role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office, which is supposed to be to represent the interests of Alberta residential, farm, and small-business consumers of electricity and natural gas in any and all proceedings or conflict. A question that should be asked and, hopefully, answered by this government is: will the advocate need to hire additional staff to make sure that all information is collected and disclosed and also continue to function as an advocate in proceedings and conflicts? Without providing the advocate with additional resources, this could prove to be onerous and distractive. Has the government thought about the financial costs? Where are you planning to get the extra finances from? Is this government planning on providing additional funds, or are they simply going to hand over the responsibility to the advocate's office? Are there any protocols in place to ensure that there is continued advocacy for those facing conflicts?

It's great that Albertans will have all the information and disclosures made available to them in one centralized place. This will increase awareness, and consumers should be informed about their options and any issues that others are facing in their communities. This will hopefully increase awareness and help them make important decisions about which power provider they would like to choose, but I still cannot see why this amendment is really required. I'm hoping to hear more about the reasoning that is behind this amendment during our debate time later today. Consumers do deserve to be informed about their options. However, I really don't see how this can't be done already by the Utilities Consumer Advocate's office under the current legislation.

Other questions that we have. Has the Utilities Consumer Advocate office been involved in the writing of this amendment? Did they request that this amendment be made? Was the advocate consulted, and what did that look like? These are some of the questions we have here on this side of the House. By no means are we saying that this amendment shouldn't be done. We just want to know if this is just another make-work project. Has the financial component of this been looked into? Or perhaps this is just another way that the government says that it's creating jobs for Albertans, because this bill will certainly create more work.

Saying all of that, Madam Speaker, our caucus will be supporting this bill in its present form as we feel that it does not add unnecessarily to any controversy, and I do believe that it will benefit

consumers. Just please answer the many questions that I and my colleagues and, I'm sure, everyone have looming in the back of their minds. It's not like this government has a glowing reputation in making the most responsible financial decisions.

Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm about to rise and speak in favour of Bill 208, and I'd like to commend my colleague from – oh, jeez. I'm trying to remember the name of his riding.

The Acting Speaker: Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Piquette: Wetaskiwin-Camrose. He's nodding. I guess he knows that it's his bill.

I think this is an excellent bill. I'm actually very pleased to hear that the opposition will be supporting this bill, and I'm sure that the hon. member will be able to answer any specific questions they might have, you know, going forward.

As for myself, I wanted to concentrate on a couple of aspects of this bill that I find particularly useful and helpful, well, especially to the constituents that I represent in Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. I guess, personally, I wasn't aware of just how busy and active the office actually is in helping Albertans deal with concerns over their utility services, their utility billing, that the office reaches out to around 200,000 Albertans every year with consumer resources and services. It definitely shows that this is a very, very well-utilized service and, you know, very much a service that deserves to be protected and supported by legislation. I'd like to commend the member for making sure that this resource is available to Albertans.

Of particular interest to me, because unfortunately there are residents that I represent and, I'm sure, that other members do as well that are having some economic challenges – one of those challenges is, unfortunately, not necessarily having, you know, money at the end of the month to make all the bills. As all Albertans know, one of those bills that you need to make sure that you're meeting is your utility service during the wintertime.

You know, where you have vulnerable Albertans that have had their utility services cut off or maybe are in danger of that happening, I think it's just absolutely critical that we do have an advocate that, in my understanding, in partnership with the Alberta Utilities Commission, utility retailers and distributors, and, of course, our own departments – it's Alberta Works and assured income for the severely handicapped – works to make sure that those at risk are helped out through the winter utility reconnection program.

I mean, that's definitely one among other aspects, this absolutely critical role that the advocate fulfills. My understanding is that it's a very proactive approach that the UCA makes, that they will actually reach out and attempt to contact customers that have disconnected utilities and try to get ahead of the problem because, I mean, the very last thing I know any members want to see is Albertans facing winter without utilities. Unfortunately, some people are simply too proud to reach out when they need the assistance.

As a matter of fact, last winter, unfortunately, I did have one of my constituents whose utilities had been disconnected the previous fall, and somehow there was an issue where it kind of fell through the cracks. Now, to be fair, she might not have been on natural gas,

but in any event, I mean, she actually did freeze to death in her house. You know, this is something that is a tragedy which very much could have been identified and prevented. I'm just very happy to realize that, I mean, there is this program. Obviously, it's not one hundred per cent, but anything that the UCA can do to prevent this type of tragedy going forward is a huge plus.

Now, I know another important role that the UCA plays is representing the interests of consumers at commission rate proceedings. I think this is a very critical role because, you know, it's very rare for individual citizens to feel comfortable when you go up to this type of commission environment without some type of support. I know that in the past when I've talked to people who have to go through similar hearings, the language is opaque and the rules can be very complex and hard to understand, and it's really good to have someone on your side.

My understanding is that through their interventions the UCA has been able to help Albertans save more than \$800 million on their energy bills since 2013, which is amazing, and that last year alone the UCA presented the commission evidence and arguments to prevent \$240 million in extra energy costs from being passed on to consumers. It's in light of this type of information that I think, Madam Speaker, there is a huge benefit to having the Utilities Consumer Advocate in Alberta, and I think it's very, very important that it's protected.

My understanding is that this legislation, if passed, would indeed ensure that the government would have to return to us here in the Legislature in order to do away with this office. So it's not some sort of cut you can make and, you know, people don't realize it till it's done. I think it also speaks very strongly and centrally to what our caucus believes in, that it's important that we stand for the consumer and that it's important that we always work to make life better for all Albertans.

With that, I'd like to urge the unanimous support of this bill, and I think I'll rest my remarks there. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A lot of what I was really interested in in this bill, the Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017, a lot of the issues there have been raised by other speakers, which I am very happy that people see as we all are consumers of the various, you know, means of energy in our lives.

One of the things I really was impressed with about this bill was that it would serve to make sure that people were able to have better understanding of what their actual energy bills contain because – I mean, obviously, the winter utility reconnection program is great. The proaction that the Utilities Consumer Advocate, you know, is involved in is great. The fact that they work with the energy providers and government agencies, Alberta Works and assured income for the severely handicapped, is wonderful because when we see collaboration like that, there are fewer chances of people falling through the cracks. There's a greater likelihood of problems getting solved before they cause more damage than is necessary.

I like the fact, too, that this would see a means of enshrining this program in legislation. It's a valuable service. It provides something that is not a duplicate of anything else that's being done already, and it is really worth while having this enshrined. The amount of money it saved consumers, as many other people said, and the number of consumers it helped was absolutely phenomenal.

I really like the fact that it said that the intent of Bill 208 is to support the UCA to make the important information more visible

and accessible so that consumers can make well-informed energy choices. This is a really important matter. I find energy bills rather incomprehensible and have to make an effort to read them. I'm imagining someone with a lot less education or someone just not familiar with the kind of language used, and it would seem like a foreign language.

3:40

Also, people have a hard time – we all do sometimes – deciding what's a legitimate good deal when we're being offered one of the deals that companies commonly give us and what is just a means of getting us to sign up longer, sign a contract. So having a neutral, nonpartisan means of giving us information is really helpful.

I like the fact that the focus of the bill is on allowing Albertans to see operating records of energy retailers and distributors in areas such as customer service, compliance with laws and standards, history of enforcement actions, and history of complaints and major issues. These companies should be able to be transparent and have their history made public so it would help people better understand who they're working with and who they're engaging in business with.

The UCA provides such a valuable role. I'm totally supportive. Obviously, we want it to continue standing up for Alberta's energy consumers. I support this bill totally.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 208?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close debate.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members who participated in debate on this important bill. I really appreciate your thoughtful feedback. I want to reiterate that this bill is about consumer protection. It is about making sure Albertans have the information they need about their rights as consumers and reducing some of the anxiety and nervousness that many people feel about electricity contracts. Since the bill's introduction I have received a lot of positive feedback, and I really appreciate all of the discussion.

I have also met with the Utilities Consumer Advocate and had a good discussion with that office about the bill and how it can help them in their task of protecting Alberta electricity consumers. I was very impressed with the work that they do. The UCA office did not request this bill. They did not write it. They did not revise it. It is constituency driven. However, they were very happy and definitely supported it. They appreciated that being able to put the information in one place would be more efficient and effective for consumers who want information. Consumers did want details about their bills and disclosure of complaints about the companies and resolution of those complaints. The UCA agreed that that would be valuable information for them to have.

Also, the advocate did not see the need for additional staff. They handle 30,000 to 40,000 inquiries. This might change the nature of those inquiries, but the most important thing for them, in addition to the one place for that information, was – it may be just terminology – changing a regulation to legislation so it's "by law these issues can be resolved" as opposed to just "they might or could be resolved."

I enjoyed listening to all of the feedback. Yes, this bill was not meant to be controversial but just to support the work of the UCA's office in becoming more efficient and effective and letting consumers know that they would have protection. There would be somebody that they could appeal to. I want to ensure that this bill

provides the strongest protection possible for consumers. I look forward to the opportunity to continue the debate about consumer protection in the Legislature and hope that everyone will join in supporting this bill at its second reading today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a second time]

Bill 209 Radon Awareness and Testing Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy today to be able to introduce debate on second reading of Bill 209, Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

This bill does pretty much exactly what the title indicates. It seeks to raise awareness of radon here in the province of Alberta and to encourage more radon testing to happen.

The idea for this bill came about when my husband read a newspaper article in the *Calgary Herald* about the work of Dr. Aaron Goodarzi, who is a cancer researcher at the Charbonneau cancer institute at the University of Calgary. We quickly ordered an electronic tester for our home, and I also scheduled a meeting with Dr. Goodarzi to learn more about the issue. I would absolutely encourage anyone who hasn't had the opportunity to hear Dr. Goodarzi speak about radon to do so as I have yet to meet somebody who has been to one of his presentations and hasn't come out a radon awareness advocate. He's very passionate about the issue and does an amazing job of really identifying what the problem is. After that meeting I began hearing from concerned citizens, health advocates, and radon mitigation experts, and I knew that I had to do something to increase awareness of this very important public health issue.

Radon is a colourless, odourless, tasteless radioactive gas. It occurs naturally and is formed by the natural breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water. Radon that escapes from the ground into outdoor air is diluted to low concentrations and, as such, isn't a problem. However, radon that enters an enclosed space such as a home or a daycare facility can accumulate to a very high concentration. Radon gas in a home or any other enclosed space undergoes a process of change called radioactive decay, which produces solid particles that can be breathed into lungs. When these particles change, they emit a tiny burst of radiation that damages the cells inside of your lungs, and prolonged exposure to high concentrations of these particles can lead to lung cancer. According to the Surgeon General in the United States radon in the home is the second-leading cause of lung cancer after smoking.

Here in Alberta we're fortunate to have Dr. Goodarzi, who is doing research into this issue to establish a better understanding of the extent of the problem here in Alberta. In March of 2017 Dr. Goodarzi published a peer-reviewed study of radon in Calgary. The study was entitled Comprehensive Survey of Household Radon Gas Levels and Risk Factors in Southern Alberta. He tested the radon levels in 2,382 residential homes in Calgary and the surrounding townships. To quote from the report:

Our findings show that radon exposure is a genuine public health concern in southern Alberta, suggest that modern building practices are associated with increased indoor air radon accumulation, legitimize efforts to understand the consequences of radon exposure to the public, and suggest that radon testing and mitigation are likely to be impactful cancer prevention strategies.

The study found that 1 in 8 homes in the Calgary area had radon concentrations above the recommended level of 200 becquerels per metre cubed. This is a higher level than was previously thought to be present in Alberta and reason enough to increase awareness and encourage more Albertans to test for radon.

Cancer is the leading cause of death for both men and women in Canada, and the Canadian Cancer Society estimates that 28,600 Canadians will be diagnosed with lung cancer in 2017, that 21,100 will die from lung cancer, and that an average of 58 Canadians die from lung cancer every day. They state, "Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers and the second leading cause . . . in smokers." Health Canada estimates that radon exposure is linked to 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths, or more than 2,000 Canadian deaths, every year. Madam Speaker, the idea that 2,000 Canadians die every year because of radon exposure is shocking to me.

When I think about families and loved ones of those who have died from this horrible illness, it makes me very sad and very angry because many of these deaths could have been prevented. There are simple and inexpensive tests available to all homeowners that would tell them the radon levels in their homes. I ordered an electronic one that tells me the average. I can look at two different levels: I can look at daily levels, or I can look at the longer term levels. I have noticed that there has been a little bit of a spike since winter came. It's best to test for radon in the winter because that's when your heating is happening and you've got your windows and doors closed. It's recommended that people test between November and April of each year. These kits are available from local retailers and from specialized radon mitigation companies.

If radon levels are over the recommended limit, remediation is relatively safe and inexpensive. Every home is different, but the most common type of radon mitigation involves installing a vent pipe that lets the radon gas outside of the house instead of inside. The average cost for this mitigation is around \$2,500. Now, there are many private companies in Alberta that offer these services. Although there is a cost, I believe this cost is very low compared to the cost, both emotional and financial, of having a loved one or a family member be affected by lung cancer. As soon as I learned about this, I had my home tested, and I told other people, too.

But the sad truth is that most Albertans don't know about radon. They don't know the dangers that it poses, they don't know how to test their homes, and they don't know how inexpensive and easy it is to lower the risk for themselves and their families. Groups like The Lung Association of Alberta and the Northwest Territories and Health Canada do their very best to promote these risks, but so far it hasn't had a big impact in Alberta. A recent study has suggested that of all the provinces in Canada, Alberta has the lowest level of knowledge about radon and its dangers. To me, Madam Speaker, that's unacceptable and, to a certain extent, inexcusable. When we as legislators have the ability and the knowledge to improve the health of our constituents and we do not do so, we're not doing our duty.

3:50

There is much we can do. We can educate, we can encourage, and we can lead the way by requiring that daycare facilities test for radon levels, and this bill does all of these things. It requires the ministry to produce materials for radon awareness to encourage Albertans to test, and it requires child care centres to show that they have tested in order to renew or to receive a new licence. It's crucial for child care centres to test for this carcinogen because small children are more susceptible. They breathe more rapidly than adults and, as such, can inhale more radon into their lungs. I don't know a single parent, Madam Speaker, who would want their child spending significant amounts of time in a room with second-hand

smoke, and radon is no different. British Columbia requires child care centres to test, and this bill will require Alberta ones to do the same.

I'm also hopeful that this bill and the efforts of others will raise awareness to a point where parents begin to demand testing in schools as well. I didn't choose to mandate school testing in this bill because I think that it's important to respect school board autonomy, but I also think it's important to note that very few schools in Alberta have been tested for radon. Our neighbours to the east in Saskatchewan and also to the north in the Yukon have tested 100 per cent of their schools. However, according to the most recent data available, here in Alberta we've only tested 3 per cent of our schools.

In summary, radon is a naturally occurring gas that can be concentrated in indoor spaces and is the second-leading cause of lung cancer in Canada. As legislators we have a duty to act to protect the health of Albertans, and increasing awareness of radon will do this. Any time we can prevent cancer, we not only save our health care system money, but we prevent pain and anguish for Albertans and their families. Child care centres should absolutely have mandated testing because no parent wants their child in a room breathing in a carcinogen all day long.

Overall, I think this is a common-sense bill that will help to prevent lung cancer in Alberta and quite possibly save the lives of some Albertans. I hope and trust that other members of the Chamber will support this bill, and I look forward to the debate at second reading.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate being recognized today. I wanted to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this private member's bill. I think it's an important bill and an important topic to discuss, and it certainly has my support.

You know, it's interesting. My mom, Madam Speaker, who probably is not watching but just in case, is excellent, and I'm very fond of her. She was very good at cooking. You may be able to tell. She came to my house not too long ago, probably about a couple of years back – I've got two kids that sleep in the basement of my home; it's a renovated basement, and they've been down there for a while – and she starts talking about this radon thing. "This sounds like a bunch of hokey-dokey there, mom. Where are you going with this?" She was pretty passionate about it. She started to talk about all these statistics, which I think the hon. member did a great job of illustrating for the House. It's a serious thing.

I mean, it's the second-leading cause of lung cancer. I think all of us probably know people that have suffered from lung cancer in our lives that never smoked a cigarette in their lives. You often hear that. It seems to me that most of the people that I know that I've lost in my life to lung cancer often say that, too, because they didn't smoke, so there are other things causing that situation.

You know, mom went through that with me and talked about that, and she said: "You know, Jason, you've got a couple of kids living down in that basement. Have you ever tested your basement for this radon?" She went through in great detail about different testing products, Madam Speaker. I have a mother who is one of those people who spends their time on Google. If she's going to put some sort of testing thing into the basement, she will have spent more time than it would take to do the testing just to determine what would be the appropriate product to use to do that testing.

She did it in her basement, my childhood home, where I grew up, where my mother actually works in the basement. She had worked in the basement of that house for well over a decade, doing the work that she does. She put this testing kit in there for a period of time and got the results, and it turned out that the levels were really, really high, way above the recommended amounts that should be in a basement. Of course, she had been exposed to that for a long period of time and would not have known about it. The fix, as the hon. member pointed out, is actually pretty cheap, pretty easy to implement in a home or another area.

Also, where she works is the basement room that I spent most of my teenagehood in, and we would not have, of course, known about that at the time, me and a couple of my brothers that lived in the basement. One of the things, Madam Speaker, about having five brothers is that you all have to bunk together. There are some other stories there, but we won't get into that.

Then my mom took the kit, and she brought it to my house, and we did the test, the same thing, in my house. Our levels were actually low. As the member pointed out – for whatever reason, where our basement had been built, in our area the levels were not that high, but in her house it was. She proceeded to do that to all of her six boys' homes. She's more worried about her grandchildren, I think, than us, Madam Speaker. She proceeded to do that. It was interesting. About half of us had levels that were too high in our homes, and about half of us did not. It's that random.

My understanding as well is that it can be different very close by. Just because my house came in well below the limit or the recommended exposure limit does not mean that my neighbour on the next farm or my mother's neighbour would not have a different level. It does change, and it's important that it's checked for those homes.

I think the point that the member who brings this piece of legislation before us is trying to make is that most people probably did not have their mom show up and start installing radon detectors in their basement and checking how much their children were being exposed to it. The reality of that is because most people probably just don't know about this. I think that even in our caucus, when we saw that this piece of legislation was coming before the House, Madam Speaker, and we talked about it, probably only about half of us actually, really knew what radon was and the potential for significant consequences to one's health as a result of exposure to that product.

I think the hon. member talked a little bit about how easy the fix is, at least on the residential side. I don't know how much the cost increases for larger facilities, commercial facilities, municipalities, high-rises. I actually don't know. I do know that for a home, for a residential home, the ability of the kit to fix it is pretty insignificant in cost compared to the potential consequences, for sure, of not doing it but also the cost to the system.

As a conservative, Madam Speaker, I don't often rise in this House and speak about a member from the NDP caucus bringing forward a bill that I think is very conservative as well and is in a position to help save our system money in a positive way, but today I would like to point that out, that I actually think that in the end this legislation will save taxpayers money. It'll save our system money. It'll save our health care time. Something that I know that we talk about a lot in this House is the need to address the serious health care delays and the waiting lists and those things that our health care system faces. This piece of legislation, when implemented, over time, I think, will have a positive impact on those. Of course, it won't eliminate all of those concerns, but it will certainly have a positive impact, ultimately lowering costs.

I also think that it's important to point out, Madam Speaker, that Health Canada has already deemed radon a serious health risk, so I

think that we're talking about a fact that has been determined through science. I know that often the members across the way like to imply that this side of the House denies science. Maybe later on today they'll rise and point out that I'm not denying science. I'm recognizing the science behind this important health issue.

You know, Madam Speaker, I didn't actually get to hear all of the hon. member's comments, but one thing that shocked me was that in Canada 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths are attributed to radon exposure. Sixteen per cent of people in our country that are losing their lives because of lung cancer is because of something that costs, in most households, a thousand dollars or so to eliminate most of the exposure.

Again, at the same time, when you've got parents, often I think that – I don't know how it was for the members across the way, but lots of my friends growing up happened to live in the basement of the home. That's where you ended up going. In fact, Madam Speaker, I was pretty happy when I got moved from upstairs to be able to go down into the basement. When I was a teenager, I kind of had my own domain down there, and it was pretty exciting. But our parents certainly would not have known that they were potentially exposing us to hazards in the air that could have catastrophic consequences for us much later on in our lives.

4:00

I certainly think that the comparison to second-hand smoke was a fair comparison for the hon. member to bring forward. I remember growing up in my house, and people still smoked in our house when we were little. I couldn't even fathom that happening in my home, you know, not even with guests or anything along those lines. But it was pretty commonplace when I was a young toddler, and that's changed. Our culture and our society have learned about the devastating impacts of second-hand smoke, and we recognize that it's not appropriate to expose children to that second-hand smoke. It's one thing for adults to make a decision to risk their health and consume that product; it's an entirely different thing to have children, who can't make those decisions for themselves, be in a spot where they're exposed to second-hand smoke.

I think the other thing that we've learned is that it's not fair to those of us in our society, like myself and many others, who choose not to smoke to be exposed to second-hand smoke as we go about our lives. That's the same now for radon. Knowing the science that we know now, knowing the consequences that we see as a result of radon and the potential consequences to individuals and to their health, how important it is that we begin to look at that on the same level as second-hand smoke and that we take steps to make sure that, particularly, children are not exposed to that.

I think the hon. member also pointed out that children are most susceptible to it because of the way that they breathe and are developing. You know, add that together with the fact that they're not in a position where they can make choices for themselves – I mean, when my mom sent me down to the basement there, Madam Speaker, I really didn't have a choice. Even if she had had a radon test that showed that it was lethal, I had to go down there without delay, of course.

Now, I talked a little bit about the fact that it can't be seen, smelled, or that you would not know that you're exposed to it. As I was talking earlier, Madam Speaker, about the basement in my childhood home, where my mom works and where my room was when I was a teenager, we would not have been able to smell it, and there would be nothing visible to us or to our senses that would let us know that we were being exposed to this. That actually makes it different than second-hand smoke in a way. Well, it does make it different than second-hand smoke because, you know, with second-

hand smoke, you see it in the air, you can smell it, and you're being exposed to it.

Now that we know as a society the consequences of second-hand smoke, when I'm in a spot where somebody is smoking – you know, for example . . . [A timer sounded] I actually have another 10 minutes. [interjection] Yes. Thanks. That's okay. I know that members are excited about my next 10 minutes. [interjections] That's the reaction I get everywhere I go, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is going to speak, and everybody is excited, I'm sure. I know I am.

You know, it's almost Christmas. Every year we have to go to my brother-in-law's house. My wife is going to kill me for telling this story. It's a good thing she's not in the gallery. They sit in their garage, and they smoke. They're smokers. They don't smoke in the house because they don't want the kids exposed to it. But the whole family ends up in this garage every Christmas. It drives me nuts because I don't smoke. I can't stand the smell of it. It's just no fun.

They sit in this garage, and it's like their hot box with cigarette smoke. Nobody bothers to open the darn door. They're all: hey, come in and visit; tell us how things are going. I don't want to go in there. My clothes will stink, you're going to kill me, and all that stuff. I know of the hazard, like I do now for radon. I can see that hazard, though, when I'm there. I know that if I sit in that garage all night, I'm being exposed to second-hand smoke, and I'm concerned with the consequences, let alone just the smell, Madam Speaker. I'm sure you can help me out if my wife is watching because I am going to be in trouble now at Christmas. Or maybe I'll get lucky, and they'll stop smoking in the garage. I don't know.

But I digress. The point is that I now could be in their home or in a new home that I buy and not have that ability, like I would for second-hand smoke, to be able to sense with my regular senses that there is danger as a result of the radon in the air in the basement. This legislation is extremely sensible because it puts us in a position where we could start to actually educate people about the dangers of radon and the consequences but also put in steps so that we could actually start to prevent that for people, particularly children. I do commend the hon. member for pointing that out because I think that is a valuable point.

Again, Madam Speaker, I think I will point out one more time, because I actually think that it's an important part of this legislation, the fact that in the long run it will actually save money. You know, we've talked a little bit, as I have been talking today, about the human cost that it will prevent. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud knows about that human cost probably more than many of us in this House.

Certainly, this legislation will help towards preventing that in the future, with fewer deaths as a result of radon. The generation that's coming up behind us will not be exposed to it in the same ways that we were because parents like myself now will be able to take steps to make sure that they're not, which our parents could not have because they would not have understood that.

It also is a win-win, which I think is rare to find in politics sometimes, where we are going to be able to save the system itself money, which will lower the number of people that are in the system as a result of lung cancer, dealing, of course, with the human cost and then taking pressure off the system, saving money for the system, in the long run creating more space for people that are dealing with other sorts of diseases to be able to come through the system because people have been able to put in something as simple as, you know, a \$1,000 kit in the basement of their house.

I am interested in – and maybe we'll hear more about it at future stages of the bill – the idea of how we would approach the education side of it, how we would be able to take the time. I guess, Madam Speaker, through you to the member, I can't get Mama Nixon to

stop by everybody's house, like mine, and install it and teach us all about the consequences. I mean, I kind of had nightmares the first night because she had us so scared of radon. It's important enough of an issue that we need to take the legislation through, make sure that we're requiring testing, requiring this important issue to be dealt with but that we're also taking time to educate people as to why so that they understand the dangers of being exposed to radon.

With that, Madam Speaker, I do think that my time is drawing near to an end. I think that it's something to . . . [interjection] What was that, hon. member? If you've got another idea you would like me to discuss, I'd be happy to discuss it while I'm up here. Yeah. I mean, it's pretty spectacular the time that we've spent together already, Madam Speaker.

You know, here is another one that I want to leave with you. There is a 1 in 20 chance of developing lung cancer if exposed to high levels of radon over a lifetime. A 1 in 20 chance is quite a bit. It's pretty significant when you think that we have people working in basements or sleeping in basements or in other areas that expose them to this. They have a 1 in 20 chance, and they don't even know it. They don't even know that it's in the air. They don't even know that that is taking place.

I think another important thing to point out, actually, before I finish, Madam Chair – I keep thinking that we're in Committee of the Whole today, and I don't know why; I apologize every time I call you Madam Chair – is that it's not just in basements. It can be on the main level of your home where you could be exposed to that. I think that the further up you go, the less likely it becomes. I think there's actually a point, from my understanding, where once you reach a certain height, it's a nonissue, but certainly it can be on the main floor of a home or on the second floor of a home or on the second floor of a commercial building that has a daycare in it. It's important that we look at it beyond just the basement thing, which is kind of my experience with it because of my experience with my mother when she was testing our basement. It's important that we recognize, which I think was the hon. member's point as well, that this is beyond just residential applications. It could be into areas where people could be exposed to something that is significantly dangerous for them.

You know, Madam Speaker, I think that given how dangerous this can be, given the significant consequences as a result of it, both the human cost to people and their families that ultimately will suffer from cancer as a result of exposure to radon as well as the overall cost to the system, which I think the hon. member did a good job of articulating, I can't see why any member of this Legislature would not support the hon. member's private member's bill. I personally am looking forward to voting with her on this piece of legislation at some point, and I certainly do hope that it will receive unanimous consent of this entire House and will go on to be a law, because I do believe that it will save lives.

Again, I just want to close with this, Madam Speaker. It is a conservative bill as well, which I am always happy to see.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 209? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

4:10

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually, thank you very much to the previous speaker as well as to the mover of this motion. I think this is one of the most important topics that we've had the opportunity to discuss in this House. As has been said several times already – but it certainly bears repeating – prevention of lung cancer is an imperative that we all should be aware of. Lung cancer is a

leading cause of death in Alberta, and whatever can be done to reduce the toll, which is very expensive – the cost of treatment of lung cancer, once it is established and diagnosed, is very expensive and, unfortunately, is not as successful as one would like it to be.

I basically want to amplify a few points that were made. I think that it's very important to realize that it took a New Democrat government in this province to bring this matter to the fore, and I don't think it's a coincidence. I think that what we're talking about as a New Democrat government is making life better for Albertans, and making life better means making our roads safe, making our schooling as good as possible, making our hospitals and other health care facilities as efficient and as effective as possible. When we think about this sort of thing, about public health, about ensuring that, for instance, vaccinations are promoted and that we promote exercise among the whole population, we want to basically follow the same precepts and, where there is evidence, try to eliminate things such as radon that might cause disease in young people.

I was just in contact with a constituent of mine who works for the Alberta Lung Association, and he's very pleased to hear that we're making progress on this. The Alberta Lung Association has long recognized that radon exposure is a preventable cause of lung cancer, and indeed about two years ago they initiated a program to give radon monitors to anyone who wanted them. I actually availed myself of that a year ago and installed the radon monitor in my own home, and about a couple of months ago I got the report that was facilitated by the Alberta Lung Association, my friend and constituent as well as the manufacturer of the monitors. Fortunately, the result showed that in my home there was less than 25 millibecquerels of exposure, well below the 200 limit and certainly way below the 800 mark, which means that you really need to do something about it.

I'm fortunate in that I don't need to be looking at making renovations, but I'm sure that for anybody that did this sort of thing, particularly if they have children, as was mentioned in the previous two speeches, modifications to your home may be necessary.

Now, I have another constituent and friend who used to be on the Edmonton separate school board. She's actually doing a master's in public health, and she chose as her thesis topic a dissertation on radon exposure in schools in Alberta. She just published her report. Basically, the report says what we've heard from the Member for Calgary-East, that radon exposure to young people is particularly a concern.

I thought I'd spend a few minutes just talking about why it is that young people are particularly at risk for this. It's related to length of exposure, if you have children in a daycare or in the basement, as was mentioned by a previous speaker, for long periods of time, where they're being exposed to radon gas over long periods of time, and those young children have a long life to live after the exposure. That's why these children are particularly at risk. Children also have smaller lungs than adults and smaller tracheas and bronchi, so these radon particles can actually get lodged in the adventitial tissue around the bronchi. Because they're radioactive, the radon actually decomposes into other substances which can be damaging to the lung. The longer that they are lodged there, the more likely they are to cause changes that would lead to cancer. So it is probably less important that somebody my age pay attention to whether or not they're being exposed to radon although that's still a concern, I'm sure, than a two-year-old or a five-year-old or a 10-year-old. The 10-year-old is, hopefully, going to enjoy at least 70 years of life expectancy after the exposure.

An Hon. Member: They're going to live to 100.

Dr. Turner: Well, we can make them go to 100.

The other thing that's key in all of this is that, basically, this is something where we have a duty to protect. We as legislators have a duty to identify public health risks, and if a public health risk like this is identified – and it's been identified by the University of Calgary as well as by the Canadian Cancer Society and by my friend Marilyn Bergstra, who was the trustee, as something that can be done. So I'm very pleased with the response of my colleague for Calgary-East in getting this done.

The other consideration I think that we need, that's important, is that every house will have a small amount of radon. So it's important in this education process not to make radon sort of a bogeyman and have effects on, for instance, you know, property values and other sorts of things. I think that we need to make sure that our population is educated about what radon is, what it can do if it isn't mitigated but also what can be done to make sure that these risks are abated. Certainly, the education aspects of this bill . . .

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 209. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward. I know that when I started reading through this bill and when I realized the issue that was being brought before the House, I knew very little about it. I think that probably one of the things that this House can do best at times is the education process, so I want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward if for no other reason than that it has helped to educate this Member of the Legislative Assembly.

You know, I remember standing in front of my kids in my classroom and talking about the benefits of a democracy and of a parliamentary system of democracy and saying to them that at its best in this Legislature the opposition is not just there to oppose for the sake of opposing. Good parliamentary procedure and good Legislatures are where the opposition opposes in order to make bills better. While we may disagree sometimes on whether a bill needs to be made better in this Legislature, I know that we have done our part to always try and bring forward amendments that would help the government to improve a bill. There are times when we can actually support a bill because it is a good bill. I think that this bill falls into that category today, so with sincerity I want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing it forward.

Now, I said that I knew very little about this issue before the bill was brought to us and before I had a chance to read through the bill. It got me thinking about the times in my life when I was growing up, about some of the other issues that I can remember very specifically having to educate myself on and sometimes in not the usual ways. I can remember being in my high school when they realized that there was asbestos throughout all of the gyms and were having to shut down the gyms and having to bring in the workers and putting up vapour barriers and making sure that when they took that asbestos out of the gymnasium, it wasn't going to create a problem in the rest of the school, not knowing anything about it and just feeling really quite frustrated that I couldn't go to one of my favourite classes, which was phys ed, and having to find alternate arrangements and finding out that now we were going swimming and now we're going out and we were going to go to the hockey rink because we had to find alternate places to be able to go to and not really understanding the importance of the whole issue of asbestos. Now, as I've grown and matured and as life has taken place, I can see back, and I can see the real importance of that. We've had friends and we've had people in our community that

have passed away from asbestosis. We can see the real wisdom of the movement that was taking that material out of the schools.

I can remember that my dad, when I was about 13 or 14, purchased a car wash in Edmonton. As many times as we tried as 15-, 16-year-old kids to tell the people that were coming into our car wash that they couldn't leave their cars running when the doors were down, sometimes they just weren't willing to listen to a kid. While you know that there's a problem with carbon monoxide, it was never brought home more closely than when my brother came home one night and said that he had to rescue an individual that had gone down in the bay. He'd been busy pumping gas, and when he came in, he realized that this guy had left his car running. He had to throw the doors open and call 911 and bring the people in. We were able to save the man's life, but it really drove home the whole issue of carbon monoxide.

We need to be educated. I guess that's why I really believe that perhaps the most important function of this bill is going to be in the education of your average, everyday Albertan.

I think that all of us probably have grown up in situations where one or more of the family have been banished down into the basement when they became teenagers. I know that in our case it was because the bedroom that my brother and I shared was getting a little too small for the pride and the egos of the two boys that were in it, and we had to make a choice as to who was going to go down into the basement. Since I was the eldest, it was my job to take on that burden and to go down into the basement. Never did it ever come into my thought or into my parents' heads that that might be an issue.

I know that when we were just starting our family, we had three kids and two bedrooms in the entire 800 and some-odd square feet of the house. We had to have that debate. Could we put our five-year-old down into the basement? Now, I had no idea about radon, but I guess in hindsight that would have been a real easy decision. We made the decision not to because we thought he was too young. We went looking for another house where all of the kids could be on the same floor as the parents.

How many parents today, if they were aware of this issue with radon, would make the decision not to place their kids down into the basement at least until they had it checked? I really believe that the educational materials that could come out of this program and this act are perhaps the most important piece of this legislation. One year after passing this act, the materials will be going out to Albertan parents. I think that's going to be absolutely crucial.

Now, I'm really very glad that in the process of reading through this bill, I was able to learn that you have a 1 in 20 chance of developing lung cancer if you're exposed to high levels of radon radiation over a lifetime and that in Canada 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths are attributed to radon exposure. That's a human tragedy. Now that we know – at least, now that I know – this is a completely preventable thing, I believe this act moves us towards and in that positive direction that will allow us at the end of the day to save lives. I can't think of a more worthy thing that this Legislature could do than to save lives and to pass good legislation that will make the citizens of this province truly more safe. In this case I believe there's a very clear connection between the passing of this piece of legislation and increasing the safety of Albertans.

We've been told by hon. members already that children are at greater risk, and I don't know if there's anything that is more precious in our world than the children that we've been given. I know that I have yet to meet a parent in all of my long teaching career that would purposely make a choice that would harm their children. I believe as a legislator that the option in this case is very clear. We take the positive step. We support a piece of legislation that is going to make the lives of Albertans better.

Not only will this save lives, but at the end of the day it also reduces the costs that we'll face when it comes to our health care. Again, maybe not the primary reason why I would support this but a very good reason for supporting this piece of legislation. You know, we're going to have to make some really serious decisions. We've had the conversation, Madam Speaker, in this House about some of the decisions, about whether the government is making wise decisions in accumulating the debt and the deficits that we've had over the last several years. Well, here's an example where we can, with prudence and with wisdom, support a piece of legislation that may actually end up reducing some of our health care costs. That's a positive thing that needs to be considered.

We know that one of the reasons we can move forward with this piece of legislation is because there is a way of testing for radon radiation, and we know that it's possible to have radon detectors within the house. They can be used for a short period of time, I understand for two to seven days, or they can be for a longer period of time, over months, and that Health Canada... [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act. I'll have to admit that I'm one of those people who, while I did know about radon gas, only had a vague understanding of it and not a real appreciation of the health risks of radon. I think that's particularly of concern to me because, as some members may be aware, I was previously an insurance agent. I actually used to do home inspections, and this was not something that we really looked for. It's my understanding that today most residential home inspectors don't actually check for the presence of radon. But, you know, after hearing the MLA for Calgary-East and some of the other comments in the House, I think I'm motivated to get a radon detection kit for my own house to see where my levels are.

As a government and as a caucus I think we've proven that we really do care about the health and safety of Albertans, and we've done and supported a lot of things that directly help to make Albertans' lives better and help them with their health. The first one, to kind of start off with a bang, is Bill 6, of course, which was about health and safety and at this point has helped over a thousand injured farm workers receive treatment and compensation for their injuries. We just passed Bill 19 this fall, and that will work to help protect the lives and safety of gas and convenience store workers. Of course, Bill 26 has just passed and will help ensure that Alberta is ready when cannabis is legalized by the federal government, and we'll work to keep cannabis out of the hands of children; protect public health; ensure safety on our roads, in our workplaces, and public spaces; and, hopefully and ideally, limit the illicit market.

Now, all of these are high-profile pieces of legislation dealing with things that are on the top of the public mind and often in the media, but unfortunately radon is not an issue like that. One of the reasons that I rise to support this and why I commend my colleague from Calgary-East is for the very reason that it is not something that's in the public mind, and it's something that ought to be.

Beyond a few news stories done last year – I know that the hon. member referred to Dr. Goodarzi and his colleagues at the University of Calgary, you know, where there was a little coverage of the reviewed radon levels in southern Alberta – there hasn't really been a lot of news about this. That could well be because it's

something that is kind of an out-of-sight, out-of-mind issue, just because, as the member said, it's colourless, odourless, tasteless, and there's no apparent way of knowing whether you have it or not unless you test for it. Surely, that's why it is so important for us to be talking about it here and why we should be bringing this forward to the attention of Albertans, precisely because it doesn't have that attention.

Now, radon gas is responsible for 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths in any given year. When we do have a simple and inexpensive test that can tell you whether it's been an issue for you or not, I mean, this is something that needs to be getting a lot more exposure. So I think it's really important that we bring this up.

A few important facts about radon that I was able to find out through this debate and in preparing for this is that there are a few myths that I think need to be dispelled. One that maybe I was guilty of – my house was built in 1976, so I didn't think there would be an issue for me – was that it doesn't really matter whether you live in an older home or one of the newer airtight types of homes. You find high levels in both. It doesn't matter what area of the province you live in or even what your neighbours' tests are at. I mean, every house is built individually; every house has its own issues. Every house, really, could be affected, so it's important that we make sure that we test for this.

Now, Health Canada has spent millions of dollars establishing guidelines and certification standards for mitigation specialists and on media campaigns to raise awareness, but unfortunately the message hasn't been getting through. I think it's really important that we do what we can to get that message out, you know, and I think that's a very good reason for why this bill is necessary.

For all these reasons, Madam Speaker, I think that it is important that this bill is passed and that Albertans are warned about the dangers of radon. Thank you to my hon. colleague for bringing this up. I hope this bill gets speedy and unanimous passage.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak in this House today regarding Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act. Obviously, youth are extremely important to all of us in this House, and I just want to thank the Member for Calgary-East. I will not only be encouraging my colleagues here in the Official Opposition to support your bill, but I'm so happy to be able to stand and support your bill as well.

It's so tragic that so many deaths have occurred from an odourless and tasteless gas like radon. The risks of radon are obvious, and so many people have died from lung cancer. I was truly saddened that so many people may have been living with such high levels of this disastrous gas in their very own homes, in a place that we are all hoping will be our safe haven. Every day we all go home to our houses, wherever that may be, to rest and rejuvenate and feel safe and be with our families, not ever thinking that there could be very serious concerns and dangerous radon within our own homes.

Madam Speaker, there's so much information on the Internet these days, but unless you specifically know or hear about something from a friend or on the news, you would rarely stumble upon something on this that could potentially save your entire family. So thank you so much for bringing this bill forward.

There are a lot of families that have lived in the same dwelling for many, many years, and they're breathing in the same air thinking nothing different, certainly not thinking that there are

gases or poisons in their homes. I mean, why would you? We don't go home thinking about the properties of air quality in our house – at least, I don't, anyway – or wonder about the long-term ramifications of that unless you can smell it or feel it or, you know, you can sense it. I've never truly thought a lot about that – I'm so grateful that you've brought this forward – and I bet most of us in this House have never thought about that. Day after day people go home to their safe place from the world, and they're not even aware that there could be poisons in their air and that it could be hurting their families. I'm so delighted to stand in the House today and support this legislation intended to educate the public so that Albertans can protect their families.

Now, about children and child care programs across the province. It is spectacularly important that they will also be protected just as soon as the legislation is proclaimed. That is fantastic news. Again, I just don't think it crosses a lot of people's minds. You're assuming that you're taking your children to a safe place, not ever assuming anything about the air quality. So thank you. This has been a really, really mind-opening discussion. Children spend, obviously, long periods of time in child care, and when they are there, it is absolutely imperative that those areas are being tested. Children have been reported to be at a greater risk than adults for certain types of radiation exposure. So I can't reiterate enough, I'm sure: thank you, to the member again, for bringing this forward.

The World Health Organization has material specifically for training the health sector on children and radiation, and it's actually pretty amazing when you think about it. That manual has absolutely everything in it from understanding the basic principles on radiation physics to identifying the source of radiation exposure right down to describing preventative strategies. So it really, really sets the tone and the availability to make sure that we're doing right by our kids in these spaces. It's super important to understand those basic principles for the pediatric health care system world-wide, actually.

One of the things, Madam Speaker, that the manual stresses is that "ionizing radiation is a known carcinogen to which children are particularly vulnerable"; that is, the effect of radon when there are high concentrations of this gas in enclosed areas such as a house or facility. This is when it becomes extremely volatile. It also says that when there is radon in a home or a building, "children may receive higher doses than adults because of higher intake and accumulation [and that] sensitivity to radiation is highest early in life."

4:40

Madam Speaker, our children are severely more susceptible to ionizing radiation that creates what's known as oxidative damage, or the free radicals, and that leads to recognizable changes in their cells and their DNA molecules. It's just terrifying. To think that children are at a higher risk and accumulate the radiation faster than adults is just horrifying.

There are also other pieces of information, Madam Speaker, that speak to the epidemiological studies that have shown that moderate to high doses of exposure to ionizing radiation actually lead to higher rates of cancer in adults. Again, I can't begin to explain how much more terrifying it is to know that our children are even more susceptible to this radiation than we are. Ionizing radiation has been linked to things like childhood leukemia, thyroid cancer, brain cancer, and radon has been, as some of the other members have, I think, mentioned earlier, linked to lung cancer. The studies of uranium miners have consistently shown that miners that have been exposed to high levels of radon are obviously going to be at an increased risk of lung cancer, but the actual statistics are staggering.

In 2007 Health Canada sponsored a workshop to review the current state of the science on radon health risks. The specifics of the workshops were to collect and assess scientific information

relevant to setting national radon policy in Canada. They gathered information on social, political, operational considerations in setting national policy. The workshop at that time, Madam Speaker, was attended by 38 scientists, regulators, and other stakeholders from Canada and the States. A number of strategies to reduce radon came forward in this workshop, including testing, mitigation of existing homes, and, really importantly, changing the building codes to require that radon mitigation devices be installed at the time when a new home is constructed.

We know that new homes are required to have radon detectors installed and roughed-in radon pipe should the home or building require removal. However, Madam Speaker, what is very concerning is that we know that old buildings may not have these remedial detectors and pipes. So it is imperative that the owners that are going to buy these properties are properly educated. As I understand it, under section 4 of the Child Care Licensing Act, prior to licensing any child care program, the facility where children will be will have to have radon testing completed the year before.

Again, I would like to take this moment to thank the member for her thoughtful bill, and I look forward to seeing what changes will be made in the regulations.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to speak to Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act. I just have to say to the Member for Calgary-East that the fact that the sole purpose of this bill is about educating the public about dangerous health risks I think is excellent. I think you've identified a very good subject. I agree wholeheartedly with this bill. Good job. [some applause] And that's all the kudos you're getting from me today.

Quite honestly, I do just want you to know that as soon as I heard about this bill, the first things that came to my mind were asbestos and carbon monoxide poisoning, some very similar, some very real issues that do affect us. Actually, when I thought about radon and read farther, I often think about house construction. I used to do house construction. I wonder how much the way we design homes here in Canada affects this compared to, say, in some warmer climates where they only build on a slab. Those were just some internal questions that I had.

The fact is that we do have to build these homes that are deep enough so that they avoid the frost, and we probably are digging deep enough that we are exposing our houses to the potential minerals, uranium, that produce this radiation. It makes me wonder, like, how much we have to do to alleviate these things in our houses. I see we've changed our building code, but we'll get back to that later.

Let us talk about asbestos and carbon monoxide poisoning, though. Carbon monoxide poisoning is something that fire departments across our nation have embraced, especially our Alberta firefighters. Up until recently they were handing out carbon monoxide detectors, which I strongly recommend people have in their homes. You have to remember to put those very low in your house because it is very similar to radon. In fact, it is a tasteless, not visible gas that is very heavy and stays low to the ground. Obviously, folks like the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre wouldn't have that issue because he's such a tall man, but Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills there might be affected by this greatly. This is no laughing matter, though.

Carbon monoxide is a very similar issue. Though we have some awareness of carbon monoxide – groups like the firefighters have

embraced this – there still needs to be more education on carbon monoxide. There is a push, perhaps, to make it a standardized thing, a mandatory thing, and I'm not sure that is necessary as long as everyone is aware and takes those precautions for carbon monoxide. Unlike asbestos and the other things carbon monoxide can kill you very quickly, even just a few hours of it. In Ontario they made carbon monoxide detectors mandatory because a family did lose a family member to a carbon monoxide leak just a few years ago. That's what instigated Ontario to push this forward. Again, the fire commissioner of Alberta has more than embraced carbon monoxide.

Asbestos. Here's another issue that was much more dramatic because we used asbestos for everything back in the day. It was a really good insulator. It actually has very good qualities to it. The unfortunate thing is that when you disturb it or it's in its form, it can easily be inhaled into your lungs, thereby causing a lot of obstruction to the oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange in your lungs. It makes things a little bit difficult. I've dealt with asbestos myself. You have to cover yourself from head to toe. You have to put on at a minimum an N95 mask, and you have to seal everything up. You have to seal the site up. It's a cumbersome issue, but it's well worth it to clear your home of such a prominent hazard within our homes.

I guess that's the point here. We continue to evolve; we continue to learn about all the different things that can affect us in our homes. Our homes are being built more airtight. We have very good windows. We have very good foam insulation that goes around any opening. We have paints and other seals that ensure that the air cannot escape anywhere from your home because we don't want that heat loss. That's a big energy issue. But the flip side to this is that we have to put things in our homes that exchange the air and whatnot. In the cases of some of these things like radon there's very much a need for that air exchange to occur.

Arsenic. Another issue that is very relevant. It's another carcinogen. It's something that we sometimes get from our groundwater. It seeps through. Obviously, it can come through the air and ultimately through our food as well. Arsenic is something that is very deadly. It very much kills us. Health effects include skin and lung and bladder cancers, liver, kidneys.

We know that because of the identification of a lot of these things like your arsenic, like your asbestos, we have different rules for different organizations. Health Canada, for example, continues to monitor the concentrations of various chemicals, and one of the things they do measure is arsenic. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency also takes a look at arsenic in all of our various foods, including baby foods and toys and things like that, to make sure that we are clear of this.

To the effect of radon: we do have extensive radiation laws, so I'm glad that this bill that is being put forward by the Member for Calgary-East is not imposing any hard laws – it is about education – because the fact is that there are laws out there that identify this issue. Certainly, the Radiation Protection Act; the radiation protection regulation; the Government Organization Act, schedule 10; and the radiation health administration regulation are all legislation that ensures that we're trying to protect our workers, our people, our citizens from radon. Again, so much more can be done, and that's why this Bill 209 has been provided by Calgary-East to increase the public's awareness, very much in the vein of carbon monoxide and asbestos. This is a good bill. This is education that we need to invest in and push forward.

4:50

I do hope, though, that when we're pushing these things, we can streamline things as well, make things more efficient. We shouldn't

always just be educating on radon. It can be done in conjunction with carbon monoxide. It can be done in conjunction with asbestos. It can be done in conjunction with anything else that we discover. Certainly, something to consider is how we educate people. Again, carbon monoxide isn't quite out there. We have some education on it, but people continue to be unaware. It's something that hurts us all. It's good education.

As houses get built and we're building sturdier homes – again, they're very high quality; they're more environmentally friendly in the fact that they don't allow heat and other things to escape – we have to be concerned that we can circulate that air and have a system of getting rid of this product. What I'm really happy with on radon is the fact that in 2014 the Alberta building code addressed this very issue. Basically, with this issue the only thing that a builder has to do when they're building their foundation is the submembrane. They're just putting some gravel. Before you might put some fill, even some sand, they're also asking for a layer of gravel, another substrate, which allows the air to escape in between those particles and to possibly vent it off if you were to rough-in a pipe into your cement. That is a good recommendation by the building code because it's very expensive and very time consuming to have to put these things in after the fact: breaking out concrete, hauling that out, digging holes, putting pipes in, putting in new concrete. I really like the fact that they addressed this a few years ago.

They talk about all the building objectives that builders must perform to alleviate this very issue. This bill is very much in alignment with that. I love it. The building code ensures that we do have a properly sealed and labelled radon pipe, and it discusses the width. It should be at least 10 cm in diameter. It should run underneath the floor up to the midpoint of the home. Again, if we do discover radon in that particular home, it's very easy to simply add a fan and a vent pipe to it.

You know, I fully support that these educational materials will be developed and will address all these issues. Again, like I say, if we can do this in co-ordination and conjunction with some other things that we are concerned about, like carbon monoxide, like asbestos, I think we have to continue on with this education.

Calgary-East, good job.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to mention a few other things when we're talking about radon gas. Again, it's been said many times that it's an unseen particle that we can't really detect unless we have the proper equipment. It has very long-term effects and is especially harmful to small children. I noticed in the bill that they're requiring child care services to do testing prior to getting a new licence, and I think that's a very good idea. A lot of the day homes and that: their basements are set up specifically for that purpose, and they have, you know, a bunch of little kids down there. I think it's a great idea to have that testing done.

Also, when we talk about these things, in the oil and gas industry we have what's called NORM, the acronym for normally occurring radioactive material. It can be very, very dangerous as well because, again, you don't know that you're even dealing with it. I was quite surprised. We had a stack of old drill pipe that was laying around, and we did some experimentation. We were actually looking for radon gas and radioactive materials. We got a Geiger counter out, and it was amazing how many of those pieces of pipe that people were handling – you know, a lot of times they're sold off to farmers to build corrals with and stuff, and these guys don't even realize

that some of this normally occurring radioactive material is in the pipe and inside the scale that's in it.

The other thing that really concerns me – and if there are any amendments to this bill, Bill 209, that I might add in, it would be also the testing for black mould. This is another thing that very commonly occurs in basements, especially damp basements. Again, you don't really know that you're being affected by it. I know that people can get very, very sick from it and have things that, you know, doctors can't even really tell what is harming these people. They've come up with all kinds of diseases, unexplainable causes. Then, I think that if you did some of the root causes – I know that down in the United States it's very, very difficult to get rid of black mould, and a lot of times they'll just destroy a home.

Again, if we're going to be testing for things like carbon monoxide, which is a great idea, and radon gas now, I think that is fantastic, but maybe something that we should be looking at also is testing for black mould in houses. I know that if I were going to buy a new home in the city or in the country or anywhere that had a basement in it, I would definitely be testing for black mould. Just a simple matter of not doing the right things, not getting the vapour barrier the right way in a basement or even in an exterior wall, can trap moisture. Once you get the drywall and the paint on top, you don't even know that you've got black mould behind there, but it's in the air and it's permeating your house the whole time that you're there. Especially, like I said, with small children around it can have a very, very harsh effect on them.

I agree with the member's Bill 209. I think it's a good step, but I think we could add a little bit to it and maybe throw in that black mould thing. What do you think?

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's wonderful to hear support from all sides of the House for this piece of legislation. I am always pleased when, you know, this private members' business can go well.

I just want to quickly mention a couple of things. First off, someone I think mentioned: what was the cost for larger buildings? It is true that the cost from radiation in larger buildings would be more expensive than the cost for an individual home although sometimes, like in the school that I was in, which was a very, very old building, it had vents in the ceiling, and it's just an issue of changing the pressure in the whole building. If you change the pressure from being negative to positive, you're going to push gases out instead of sucking them in. Sometimes these things in larger school buildings, especially older ones, can be remedied quite quickly.

Where to test? There were a lot of people who discussed the basement. The main purpose of radon testing: you want to put the test anywhere that you spend four hours a day or more in your home. If you're spending most of the time – my house doesn't have a basement, so we put the test on the ground floor because that's where we spend most of the time in the house. If you do have children in the basement, obviously that's the closest to the ground. That's going to be your priority. If you spend a lot of time on the ground floor of your house, you probably want to do that, too.

Where are the best places for education to happen? It is my great hope that every person who buys a house in Alberta will get a pamphlet that says that radon is an issue. I'm not opposed to the idea of other things. When you buy a house, that's when you're

looking at fixing things that could be wrong with it. I would sincerely hope – and I've spoken to folks with AREA and AFREA.

I'll end quickly by saying that I appreciate the thought that this was a conservative bill. If you appreciate prevention as a means of saving the health care system money, I'd just like to say that all of my Conservative colleagues should also appreciate supervised consumption sites and reduced air pollution from coal, among other things.

I'm very happy for everyone's support for this bill, and I hope for continued support at further readings. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a second time]

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Traffic Safety Act Amendments

510. Mr. Hanson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consult with physicians and optometrists and make recommendations on possible amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to address patients who in the opinion of a physician or optometrist have a medical condition that makes it dangerous for them to drive a motor vehicle.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's just another day. Sometimes we take that for granted, you know. Just another day.

That's how October 25, 2012, started out for the students, teachers at Racette junior high school in St. Paul. Then at 9:20 in the morning, without warning, a minivan driven by a man with severe chronic health issues plowed through the wall of a grade 6 classroom. It was estimated he was doing 80 kilometres an hour at impact. Three 11-year-old girls were severely injured in the wreckage. Eleven-year-old Megan Wolitski passed away from her injuries the next morning. Eleven-year-old Maddie Guitard, severely injured, never regained consciousness. She survived until August 31, 2016, and then she, too, succumbed to her injuries sustained in that incident. The third girl miraculously recovered though will carry the lasting effect from this incident for ever, as well as the rest of her classmates, her teachers, and indeed everybody in that school that was there that day.

Madam Speaker, shortly after I was elected, I was contacted by Megan Wolitski's grandmother, and I promised her that I would do whatever I could to prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening again.

Richard Benson, the driver of the van, had suffered from seizures for over a decade yet was still able to procure a driver's licence. Currently in Alberta doctors are governed by their own code of ethics when it comes to reporting patients that they feel may be a danger to themselves and the public and should not be driving a vehicle. In Saskatchewan it became mandatory in 2004 for doctors or any duly qualified medical practitioner to report anyone 15 years of age or older that, in their opinion, is suffering from a condition that will make it dangerous for that person to operate a vehicle.

British Columbia passed the same law, enacted as early as 1996. It says under the Motor Vehicle Act:

Report of health professional

230 (1) This section applies to every legally qualified and registered psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner . . . who has a patient 16 years of age or older who

- (a) in the opinion of the psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner... has a medical condition that makes it dangerous to the patient or to the public for the patient to drive a motor vehicle, and
- (b) continues to drive a motor vehicle [even] after being warned of the danger by the psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner...
- (2) Every psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner... referred to in subsection (1) must report to the superintendent the name, address and medical condition of a patient referred to in subsection (1).
- (3) No action for damages lies or may be brought against a psychologist, an optometrist, a medical practitioner... for making a report under this section, unless the psychologist, optometrist, medical practitioner... made the report falsely and maliciously.

The concern among physicians that I've talked to is the patient-doctor relationship. They're worried that if they report a person, word's going to get around, and then people will avoid going to that doctor. Currently the onus is on the doctor. Legislation would take the onus off the doctor. I've asked this question to the College of Physicians & Surgeons, and they agree that mandatory reporting would level the playing field for all doctors.

On December 9, 2016, the results of a public fatality inquiry into the death of Megan Wolitski were released. The inquiry was held in St. Paul on September 21 through September 23, 2016. Recommendations from that report support what I am asking for in Motion 510.

Madam Speaker, Megan and Maddie would be 16 years old this year and in grade 11. They should be joining sports teams, going on first dates, and planning their futures. Our current system failed them. Megan's family, Maddie's family, their classmates, teachers, school, and community were traumatized by an event that could have been avoided.

It is incumbent on us as legislators to do what is right to prevent tragedies such as this one and protect the public. Our current legislation does not go far enough to ensure public safety. I encourage all members to please support Motion 510 in memory of Megan and Maddie.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's kind of an interesting conundrum of feelings that I get when I rise in this Chamber because I was in the Chamber the day that the event happened, that my friend from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills talks about. I can specifically remember the exiting of the Chamber by the Minister of Transportation and the Member, at that time, for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills because they thought that something completely nefarious had happened. I may be incorrect in saying that it was the Minister of Transportation; it may have been the Solicitor General. But I remember back in that time that we had access to government aircraft just right nearby, over here at the municipal airport. There was a bipartisan joining together of the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills member at that time and the other government member that went out to the scene, thinking that there was something extremely nefarious that had gone on.

As we've learned since then, it was simply a health issue of the person that had the health condition, and that contributed to the incident. But because of that, now we have people negatively affected by that, and my colleague now from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is trying to seek proper, I will say, vindication, if you

will, or verification, possibly, of the seriousness of the event of that day.

I too have had constituents in my constituency of Drumheller-Stettler who have reached a ripe age of 80 years old and were completely of proper health. One gentleman that I know personally, who has now since passed, at over 80 years of age was trying to achieve and did achieve his class 1 driver's licence and maintained it to drive what we in the agriculture and the bulk carrier commodity industry, transportation industry know as a super-B. These are multiple fifth wheel units. I have the qualifications to drive one forward, but it's a whole other series of experience and whatever to try and back one up. This gentleman, although he was in perfect health, was running into a bureaucratic hurdle there to maintain his licence.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think that my colleague's motion here to achieve proper professional medical adjudication of a person's health condition and achieve accountability for that condition is very important. I would like to stand with personal conviction. Because of my knowledge of the events of that day, I can stand here and ask for the compassion of the Chamber to support this motion and create full and open accountability for the doctors and the people that are, hopefully, going to be adjudicating the medical conditions of these people that are involved. I would plead for the passing of my colleague's motion as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Motion 510? The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise to speak in support of this motion. I want to commend the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for bringing this forward. I agree with him that this is important.

Now, I can speak directly to the case that brought his attention to it in a moment, but prior to that, I mean, I guess I just referenced it in my last speech that I used to be an insurance agent. As an insurance agent representing communities where you did have people with some health concerns, maybe sometimes you had elderly drivers that really shouldn't have been on the road.

There's one thing I can say, that a process I sometimes would find frustrating myself is when you'd have a motor vehicle operator that you knew was unsafe to be continuing driving, and you didn't have concurrence from the local physician for whatever reason, that there really weren't any resources available. Now, for myself I'd end up, depending on the severity of it, actually trying to get the family into the loop and trying to have those types of discussions, but as many hon. members are well aware, I mean, it's a very delicate matter when you're talking about someone's driver's licence, especially in rural areas. There's a lot of resistance. I mean, pride is one thing, but the health and safety of people is another, and unfortunately the second one should probably trump the first one.

There's another issue when you have unsafe operators that continue to drive. Members of the Assembly may not be aware of one of the qualifying questions when you get issued an actual policy for auto insurance, that the onus is on the individual to disclose any health conditions that may affect the safe operation of an automobile. If they fail to do so, the company may be at the discretion of denying the claim. There might not actually be liability coverage in situations like that, so it can be a very grave situation indeed.

Now, it is my understanding that officials in the Department of Transportation are already at work on this issue. Of course, we are unfortunately and personally well aware of that, you know, terrible, tragic death in St. Paul just over five years ago. You had a driver who was noncompliant with seizure medications and did not disclose his medical conditions to the registry of motor vehicles as required. This type of tragedy is preventable, and we need to take action to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Today, as it stands, if a physician deems a patient medically unfit to drive, the physician can indeed report that individual to Alberta Transportation. Canadian Medical Association guidelines recommend that a physician report to the provincial registrar any patient they deem to be unfit to drive. Now, I understand that Alberta Transportation has been working with Alberta Health as well as with the College of Physicians & Surgeons and the Alberta Medical Association to make such reporting a mandatory practice. I also believe that it's very important that affected groups, especially seniors, are included in these conversations so that there are no unintended consequences to these changes. There are some very delicate issues that are at play with this.

Now, we must continue this important work. I would urge members of the House and government to continue working to achieve the desired outcomes of the motion by considering all means at our disposal, including regulation changes and potential updates to legislation. With that, I'd like to rest my remarks, once again commend the member for an important motion, and urge that it be supported.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Speaking to Motion 510, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Yes. Thank you. I am pleased to rise and speak in support of this Motion 510. I'm very aware of this topic given my profession as a physician. I think that the intent of this motion is very good, but it's going to take a lot of consultation, as was mentioned by my colleague just before me, to fashion a response. That's actually the purpose of this motion, as I read it, to go to the Ministry of Transportation and ask them to expedite a process in which a scientific approach to this vexing problem can be taken.

There is a real problem here. This motion actually has "physicians and optometrists" in it. I have to say that it's 99 per cent physicians and 1 per cent optometrists. Going through my mind now, medically I can't think of a medical situation that an optometrist could identify other than poor vision, which we already have taken care of. Actually, on my driver's permit – I'm a class 5 – it says that I cannot operate without corrective lenses. I don't think that an optometrist would have been able to, for instance, detect the issues, that the member mentioned, that led to the tragic events in Cold Lake.

The situation that did occur in Cold Lake actually involved a person with a seizure disorder. These are relatively common. In fact, seizure disorders can occur in childhood, or they can occur after trauma. For instance, if somebody has a brain injury, then a seizure might be the result. It can also occur, you know, with the presence of a tumour in the brain. The onset could be either in childhood, or it could be well into adulthood. If it is diagnosed, it is a reason for the privileges of operating a motor vehicle to be rescinded.

In my experience – and this is something that I do not have a lot of personal experience with – patients who have a newly diagnosed seizure disorder are routinely told to give up their driver's licence, and those persons that are told to give up their driver's licence are severely affected in terms of their quality of life. They then become

dependent upon friends and relatives for transportation. This is particularly, I think, a problem in areas like Cold Lake, where there may not be public transport available like there is here in Edmonton and in Calgary and other larger cities. A point to remember when we're discussing all this is that besides making sure that the doctors and optometrists are reporting these things, we as a government have a responsibility to make sure that the situation doesn't occur where somebody would try to get around those rules and operate a motor vehicle inappropriately.

In fact – and this is speculation on my part – I think that that was a large part of what led to the difficulties with the Cold Lake thing.

Mr. Hanson: St. Paul.

Dr. Turner: Sorry. St. Paul. They're close together, aren't they? Yeah.

The individual, I think, may not have been compliant with medications that would have suppressed the seizure disorder that led to this situation. Again, that's speculation on my part. I don't have any factual information about that. There may have been situations – for instance, a lack of sleep or consumption of intoxicating materials – that might have exacerbated the tendency for a seizure to occur in a particular situation. Even going without eating for more than 90 minutes can actually make a person more likely to have a seizure than they would otherwise be.

5:20

I'm not making an excuse for the doctors in this situation – that certainly is not my intent – but I'm actually trying to give you some context to think about how difficult it is in a situation like that for a family physician, for instance, or for a neurologist or a neurosurgeon or a cancer doctor, like myself, to be able to make the judgments that are being asked to be made in this situation.

I think that probably the strongest part of this motion is that we ask the Department of Transportation, the Ministry of Transportation, to basically consult with various groups such as the Alberta Medical Association or the Alberta family medicine association to come up with suggestions. They should also consult with the patient support groups. There is a large epilepsy association in this province. There's also a brain injury group at the Glenrose, for instance. Louise Miller is actually the most famous Edmontonian that I know of who works with people that have a brain injury. These groups would have a lot of very valuable information to bring to the table to make our roads safer and to protect the quality of life of the persons that have epilepsy or brain injuries or other things that might lead to this situation.

While I'm fully in support of this, I think it's important to recognize that this is a problem that the province has been dealing with for a long time. Certainly, physicians have been dealing with it for a long time. I learned about it in medical school. I get reminded about it regularly by the Alberta Medical Association as to my responsibilities in this regard as well as by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, and I dare say that the optometrists might get the same advice from their colleges.

I think, with that proviso, I will end my comments on this article. It is an important step in managing transportation safety, but we need to strike a balance between the individual's transportation needs and the public's right to road safety and to basically live with that. If we do monitor the driver's fitness as well as safety records and their medical conditions, Alberta's roads can be made safe, and that will make life better for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for providing us a bit of a doctor's perspective on this particular motion. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for bringing forward this motion.

I think it is a good motion, and, you know, I'd like to share a little bit with the House as this is something that is particularly timely for me personally. As some of you may know, I have a grandfather who is 87 years old. Any time somebody loses a driver's licence, particularly, for example, if a doctor says, "Hey, perhaps you need to go and retake your driver's test," if you are somebody who has lived your whole life as an independent person who survived the Great Depression on a farm, was able to raise your family and then to see your grandson becoming a legislator, as you can imagine, it is always extremely rough on somebody's dignity and independence of being able to travel around when you need your grandson to drive you to the registry office to go take a driver's test and then inevitably fail that driver's test and have your grandson again drive you home from it.

It is important that, you know, as we think about this, we think about, particularly with seniors, keeping in mind that driving is often that last piece of independence. I find that this is sort of an observation in my constituency. When a person loses a driver's licence, there are consequences to that. I'm going to talk about this again from the context of seniors. When somebody loses their driver's licence, perhaps even temporarily, this might be the first time somebody might have to come to grips and admit the fact that they are old. I know this is something my grandfather is struggling with.

You know, some things were mentioned. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud mentioned that when people are talking to a doctor about the problems they may be having, whether you are an elderly person or a younger person with some other medical condition, you might have a fear of admitting your problems to your doctor for fear that they might send a letter off to the director of transport and you might lose your licence. That is what happened to my grandfather, and he is living those consequences right now. He chats with me and my family regularly about not wanting to go back to his doctor because he's afraid of what other consequences may come out as a result of that.

I get that we need to make sure that our roads are safe. The hon. member, when bringing forward this motion, mentioned a very tragic incident with an individual who, you know, sounded like they definitely should not have been driving, and I don't think anyone in this House is going to argue against that. Certainly, I would not either. Again, particularly with seniors, sometimes in the past it's also been family members that have reported individuals who are seniors: you know, perhaps it should be time for grandpa to retire the keys.

Again, that is also a very tough conversation to have because, like I said, that can be a very big hit to the dignity and independence of a person who might not respond well to that, which creates some family tensions that might prevent other care and help that that person needs as they grow older to happen in a nice way. I mean, these, of course, are all problems that need to be dealt with, you know, within the family and with that person.

This is a story that I've heard before. I have Bow Cliff Seniors and Good Companions 50 Plus Club in my riding, and I have heard this before. This seems to be a problem that seems to be particularly prevalent with older men, and it's something that we have to deal with.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, that is why I really appreciate that your motion as worded, although it comes from a very tragic incident, is also very calm and nonalarmist about

making sure that we do have to consult with doctors and optometrists to make sure that there's, you know, consultation to work through all the potentialities of this, particularly, I think, when it comes to our seniors on when it's time for a doctor to say, "Hey, perhaps I'd like to make a restriction that you can't drive at night anymore" or "Perhaps I think it's time for you to go re-evaluate the driver's test."

5:30

I appreciate that your motion has that built into it, that consultation, and isn't being alarmist, you know, from that tragic event. That tragic event did shine a light on this problem, and I'm definitely supportive of that consultation going forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my comments there. Again, I thank the member for bringing forward this motion, and I thank the member for making a very good motion that I think will help with consultation and will allow us to, you know, explore this issue and come up with a solution to it that I think takes into account some of the things we've heard from other members across the House today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others who would like to speak to Motion 510?

Seeing and hearing no one, I would allow the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills to close debate.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I'd like to make a couple of comments. Maybe the choice of wording when I used "optometrist" – what I was trying to do was match legislation with our neighbouring provinces. But perhaps we should use Saskatchewan's, especially with the upcoming use of nurse practitioners. Theirs actually states that any duly qualified medical practitioner can make that decision. We could definitely go with that. But that'll be part of the whole collaboration and consultation on this process.

I'd just like to also mention that my mother passed away a few years ago. She had COPD, and she was on very high levels of oxygen for quite a few years. She loved to drive. She loved to go to bingo, loved her little car. As a matter of fact, I helped her out and bought her a car so that she would have something dependable to drive around in.

But she had this condition where she had a bottle of oxygen with her all the time. Her doctor recommended that she stop driving and go for a test. She was quite upset about that because it took away her independence. You know, she used to pick up her friends. She was the go-to for bingo, right? She could pick up a couple here and there, and they'd all go out and enjoy their bingo.

When she had her consultation with her doctor, he asked her: how long would you last if the oxygen line got pinched or if you hit the brakes and your bottle fell over and became disconnected? That was all it took. She knows that if she doesn't get that bottle changed right away, she's not operating at a hundred per cent by a long shot. You know, she almost took it upon herself – she realized at that point that she was dangerous to herself and to other people. I think that's very important.

I mean, this whole exercise and even the bills in B.C. and Saskatchewan start at 15 years old. This is not an attack on seniors by any means. This is an attack on anybody that has a condition that's going to really affect their ability to operate a vehicle, their safety, their own personal safety, the safety of the kids riding in the vehicle with them or an oncoming vehicle if something happens and they have a seizure.

We saw in the case there in St. Paul, very tragically, how it's disrupted – I guarantee you that there are kids in that school that will never ever recover from that incident mentally. It is horrendous that they had to go through that. If there's any way that we can put through legislation that's going to help to avoid a situation like that, somebody else having to go through that kind of a tragic event, especially, you know, kids in grade 6, 11 years old – I don't know how much more I can say about it.

But I really do appreciate that I think the members opposite are going to support this motion. I really appreciate that. I think it is a

good motion. I think it's something we need to look at as legislators.
Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point, given the amount of progress we've made this afternoon, I'd like to move that the House adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:35 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 4, 2017

Day 60

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk
Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
House Services
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services
Nancy Robert, Research Officer
Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Sandra Jansen	Minister of Infrastructure
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
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Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 4, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening, everyone. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

Mr. Gotfried moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment November 30: Mrs. Pitt speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to continue my speech on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. Here we are again at 7:30 at night in this family-friendly Legislature in the dying days of the legislative session dealing with an omnibus bill, and once again it’s major legislation that is important to both employees and employers. For that reason alone, it requires and deserves thorough scrutiny, for that is our job in this Legislative Assembly.

Bill 30 is 147 pages of significant changes to two acts, the Workers’ Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The NDP has decided to combine its proposed amendments to these acts in one bill yet again. They even came up with a title theme that makes it appear that all of these amendments should be together, yet this government could have easily kept them separate, just as it did for its two marijuana bills, which we do appreciate.

Let’s look at the common-sense way of dealing with these changes. Recently the government introduced Bill 29, which only amended the Traffic Safety Act to deal with marijuana and impaired driving. Two days later it introduced Bill 26, which amended the Gaming and Liquor Act to include cannabis. Separating the bills in this fashion allowed members of this Chamber to focus on the specific objectives of each of these bills, extremely important when we’re making smart decisions in this Legislature. It allowed for good debate, positive amendment proposals, focused debate, Madam Speaker.

However, when it comes to sweeping labour legislation, the NDP seems to have a pattern of choosing a different track. First, we had Bill 6 for farm workers. This bill has a rich history of controversy, as I’m sure everyone in this House remembers, initially due to the fact that the NDP chose not to consult with the very people its proposals would significantly impact. But let me point out another trend. Bill 6 was introduced on December 1 and was before the House for all of four days. I think you can certainly call that fast-tracking, Madam Speaker.

Now, let’s turn to the comprehensive labour legislation this government introduced last spring, once again in the dying days of session. That was Bill 17, a 252-page bill, that was before this House for three days longer than Bill 6. Yes, seven days: that’s all the time that was afforded for a massive piece of legislation, which, just like Bill 30, also amended two comprehensive acts, the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code.

To recap, Bill 6, at 12 pages, was before the House for four days, and Bill 30, a whopping 252 pages, was before this House for seven days. Now we have another comprehensive labour bill before us, and there are only a few days left before this House rises for Christmas. Maybe, I suspect, we’ll be here longer than that.

Not only is this government not the least bit worried about pushing through sweeping labour legislation at the last minute and invoking closure when the debate gets dicey for the government, but it continues to see consultation as a nuisance. With Bill 6 the government thought it was unnecessary, and then thousands of farmers turned up on the steps of the Legislature. Then with Bill 17 it held sham consultations with business organizations. The minister assured everyone that these were fulsome consultations, yet we learned that many business leaders had been pleading with her to meet with them prior to introducing the legislation. She refused to do so until some went public with her refusals. Then she held meetings after she introduced the legislation and claimed that they were part of her original consultation, but business leaders called her on that, too.

For Bill 30 the NDP instead chose to consult through a comprehensive web survey, yet that survey only provided options the government wanted to see implemented. In other words, it was designed to get the answers it wanted, not what Albertans wanted. Where’s the proof of that? Well, the bill was presented last Monday, and today influential business organizations like the Alberta Chambers of Commerce are urging the government to send Bill 30 to committee to allow for a thorough review. And now with my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek bringing this referral motion forward, we have a true test for this government. What will they do, Madam Speaker?

This is the third piece of labour legislation that we fully expect to see pushed through this House in quick order. I will hold out a small bit of hope that this government will do the right thing. The NDP has a chance, a chance to prove the opposition wrong and do the right thing by Albertans. It can agree to this motion. Referring it to committee is the only way to properly assess Bill 30, and the government knows it. If it doesn’t agree to it, clearly it’s not interested in having Bill 30 scrutinized at all. What does this tell you, Madam Speaker?

Perhaps I shouldn’t hope that they will do the right thing, but I can’t help it, and I will hold out hope. If just this once the NDP government takes the advice of the Official Opposition, it may find that spending time consulting with stakeholders pays off not just in legislation that better reflects Albertans but that Albertans will appreciate them for it as well. I can promise you that Albertans will notice. They could also pull the bill and split it into two, one for WCB changes and one for OH and S.

The choice is theirs, Madam Speaker, and I will hold out hope that this government will do the right thing and vote to refer this bill to committee, where it can be properly scrutinized, where experts can be brought to the table. They can testify, can offer help, changes. They can ensure that the majority of Albertans will have input into this piece of legislation. They can be assured that this is the right thing for Alberta, not just what they think is the right thing but what Albertans think is the right thing, which I can assure you is the most important thing that we as legislators should be doing in

this House. I would hope that I wouldn't need to remind the government that they are here on behalf of Albertans.

They can prove here today that they're here for all of us, all Albertans, all of the people that we represent by passing this motion to put this bill to committee, where it can be properly scrutinized. Heck, it could even be a quick process. But let's invite everyone to the table. Let's allow everyone to have a voice on such a massive, sweeping change of legislation that affects so many people in this province. We can really make sure that some of the good things are put forward, that some of the harmful things can be thoughtfully debated. Proper evidence could be brought forward, Madam Speaker, so that Albertans will feel confident in the legislation that is passed in this House, not only by their government but by opposition members as well.

I would urge all members in this House to vote in favour of the motion by my hon. colleague for Calgary-Fish Creek to refer this to committee. If the government truly feels that this is the right thing for Alberta and that the people of Alberta want to see these changes, then that evidence will be clearly shown in a committee setting, and all members can have input as, after all, we're all representatives of the people that have elected us to be here. That's an important role, which I know many of us take very, very seriously. We need to see the bill in committee. We need to bring experts forward.

7:40

We need to have proper scrutiny of Bill 30, and perhaps, maybe, the government will see that this bill is actually two bills that should be separated. That would certainly be a recommendation from the opposition. I think it would be a fair thing to do, to separate WCB and OH and S. It would certainly create a more fulsome debate. It would be a lot easier for Albertans to engage with, when there is a focus and an area of direction. But, hey, maybe that's not what comes out of committee. I don't know. We don't have that opportunity.

That's why it's important for members of this House to support the referral motion to bring this forward in a committee setting, where we can do the right thing by Albertans for Albertans.

With that, I thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a quick comment with regard to the consultation. I think that saying that consultation is being treated as an inconvenience on this side is not exactly overly respectful to the multitude of folks that participated. With anywhere from employers and workers and labour groups, municipalities even, health and safety technical experts as well as safety associations, you know, I don't think we necessarily want to be placing their comments that they've put forward with regard to this bill – I mean, more than 1,300 online surveys, 90 written submissions, with over 200 stakeholders participating, and that's just in occupational health and safety, not to mention the over 1,700 questionnaires, 200 written submissions, 67 workbook responses for WCB, and then the 60 responses to the panel's own report.

I think that this is, you know, some very good information that has been put forward for consideration with this bill. I would just maybe ask members to keep that in mind when we talk about their submissions being treated as inconvenient.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for your input, certainly something that's available online.

I think that it's important to mention that the document says that it received input from Albertans over a nine-week period. That's 45 business days. I can appreciate that there was some consultation that took place. However, this is not information that is shared with all members in this House, and to ask members of this House to support or trust the word of the government and the feedback that they received, that is not open to everyone in this Assembly, is not exactly a good example of responsible governance.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I have to say that we mentioned earlier the daylight savings time act. We decided that we would move that to committee because it was so important to Albertans to hear about an hour difference on one side or the other of the day. And you know what? My constituents actually were very vocal when it came to daylight savings time, both for and against. So just to hear that we spent all that time on daylight savings time, which is definitely important to a lot of Albertans, but not be able to speak with a more thorough consultation about worksite safety seems strange.

You've said 1,300 online surveys, 90 written submissions, eight in-person, facilitated round-table discussions involving 200 stakeholders representing employers, workers, OH and S professionals, work and safety associations and academics. And you know what? Of course, I agree. You don't want to demean these people for what they've done. But you sure didn't give them enough of an opportunity to speak. You gave them, it looks like, a survey where you got the answers you were looking for. I've seen your surveys before. They are terribly misleading. They are trying to get to answers that you're hoping to get to so that you get some overwhelming affirmative of yea or nay to the questions that you're trying to ensure, that more or less fill out the opinion you've brought forward.

So when we look at the scope of this, we could do better. I think that's really what my colleague is saying, that we can do better. We can actually do a better job of consulting with Albertans. From what I understand, the committee that reviewed the Daylight Saving Time Act had – and somebody can correct me if I'm wrong – 14,000 online responses. This is less than 10 per cent of what we did with daylight saving time. It tells you that we have the ability to outreach to Albertans. Why wouldn't we?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this evening to speak on the motion for referral of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, moved by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. When it comes to Alberta's workforce, nothing is more important to me and the members on this side of the House than protecting these hard-working men and women. That is why it is paramount that we not rush this bill and that we get it right for the people it is intended to protect. Put in the simplest terms, the OHS Act and the WC Act have not been revised since 2000, over 17 years ago. What is the harm in taking a few extra weeks to ensure that due diligence is complete? Let us put the lives of Alberta workers ahead of ideological agendas and an unrealistic timeline. The best way to do that is to refer this bill for further study by committee.

Madam Speaker, anyone who has been in my constituency in southern Alberta knows that you'll find some of Alberta's hardest working, compassionate, and caring people there. Whether you're just visiting, new in town, or your family dates back to the early pioneers in the mid- to late 1800s, you're always treated like family and made to feel welcome. That's because where I come from, we look out for each other. There are all kinds of communities in the south brought together by religious conviction, athletics, vocation, hobby interests, and the list goes on. But when faced with adversity, we circle the wagons round each other. We look out for each other. No one gets left behind. That's the Alberta way, and that's the spirit that this bill should be written with.

Unfortunately, Bill 30 fails to accomplish this goal on a number of fronts. In the short time I have been given to meet with stakeholders since this bill was first read, it's become clear that their interests have not been accounted for or they have been flat out ignored. For that reason, this bill should be referred to committee for review so that we have an opportunity for all members, both sides of the House, to be able to hear the concerns and the wishes of the people who are being represented in this bill. That's the best way to be able to vet this bill and to make it so that it's open and transparent.

Madam Speaker, this bill in its current form will severely jeopardize Alberta's path to recovery. I want to say that again. I truly believe that the unintended consequence of this bill could potentially cause severe problems for the recovery that Alberta is on.

The existing and future success of Alberta's employers rests on their ability to recruit and retain talented employees from around the country, even from around the world. A large portion of this success will be a result of a system in place to compensate injured workers that is effective, efficient, and, most importantly, sustainable. However, Bill 30 doesn't address the real problems here. One of the biggest failings of the current system is not the amount of money or level of benefits distributed but how the rulings passed impact employees and employers, including the burden of proof required by employers or the new provision for WCB staff to use creative licence and solutions.

Creative licence sounds like a fancy progressive term, but when boiled down, it really translates to lack of consistency. When we are dealing with the livelihood of Alberta's workforce, the last thing we can leave subject to interpretation is how money and benefits are distributed. When making rulings, a significant amount of responsibility will be placed on case managers and their level of skill as advocates. Instead, we should be relying on precedents and standardized procedures to ensure that the needs of claimants are met and dealt with fairly and impartially.

7:50

Madam Speaker, we also can't have the appearance of the WCB picking winners and losers when it comes to claims. Standardization of process will eliminate any chance of worker resentment towards colleagues and the WCB system. If two workers with equal claims are treated differently during review, there will likely be an appeal process that follows. This will cause unnecessary strain on our system. With a system that brings in \$1 billion worth of payments from the 160,000 some-odd businesses in Alberta to the Workers' Compensation Board, I think it's extremely important to make sure that this does not inflate, and I'm concerned about this bill inflating those numbers to the point where it cannot be sustainable.

The workers' compensation system is built on the tenets of the Meredith principles. These state that employers will pay for the workers' compensation system and share the liability for injured

workers, with the understanding that injured workers get the benefits they deserve while they recover but are unable to litigate their employers. To be effective, the Meredith principles require that all decisions made on a claim be done impartially, based on sound evidence, legal precedents, policy, and an impartial process. For this to take place, the Workers' Compensation Board appeals process must – and I repeat: must – remain at arm's length from the government. This is to avoid any real or perceived government intervention and influence.

However, this bill gets a failing grade when it comes to influence. Here is just one example. The occupational disease and injury advisory committee is to be established under the minister and consists of a select number of members with distinct qualifications. First, the director of medical services, occupational health and safety, will chair the committee. That makes sense, to have occupational health and safety and medical services personnel on there. Next, the board should designate someone who is a physician: again, reasonable given the nature of the claims the board will see. Another committee member must be from the Department of Health, also a worthy addition. Fourth, an employee of Alberta Health Services, designated by Alberta Health Services. Next, an employee of Covenant Health: obviously, an organization with some expertise in the field.

What about the sixth provision? The committee may also include three persons appointed by the minister. Why would the minister need to appoint three members of a committee this small? Furthermore, what would said members bring to the committee? Each of the previously mentioned appointees have an existing level of involvement in the WCB or the OH and S field. However, these three appointees have no requirements for them besides being appointed by the minister.

The problem we have here is twofold. First, there is certainly political injection into this committee that was not there prior. Second, there is no merit-based approach for appointees from the minister's office. Similar to the issue I raised earlier about creative licence, I see a lot of opportunity here for creativity on the part of the occupational disease and injury advisory committee.

There are significant concerns, Madam Speaker, with enshrining the obligation to return an injured worker to work within the Workers' Compensation Act. Provisions already exist within human rights legislation, and this is a situation where we see a disconnect between human rights and workers' compensation legislation, which would be detrimental to both workers and employers. Having a different standard in the WC Act creates conflict between the two pieces of legislation, and applying the same standard is redundant. It already exists and applies to Alberta employers. That's taken from the Industry Task Force release on Bill 30.

Talk about removing the cap for maximum allowable earnings: this will make it impossible for the government and the WCB to accurately cost out the program. This will rise . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. We are on the referral amendment, not the bill, so I'm just wondering if you could please speak to the referral instead of the content of the bill.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comment, and I will make sure that I get back to talking about the referral. I wanted to make sure that I gave context so they understood why we need to make sure that we bring this back to a committee to be able to study it. In order for us to be able to understand why it's so important, I have to give context. This is the reason why I'm giving this information.

I have no doubt that the members opposite, especially the minister, have taken the time and done everything they can to try to make this the best bill possible. The problem is that there are over 160,000 businesses in the province of Alberta, and because of that, we need to make sure that we get as many of their perspectives on this bill as we can in a transparent, open, committee forum, that will allow these businesses to be able to present their information. Then we can have an all-party discussion about which are best practices and what actually should be brought forward.

Now, I also want to point out that according to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce one of the more significant indirect effects of Bill 30 will be the rapid onset of the new legislation, that small and medium businesses will be unable to afford. Many parts of this bill will come into effect only a few short weeks from now, January 1, 2018. The remainder of the bill will come into effect on July 1 and September 1 of the coming year. The chamber recommends, like the members of this side of the House, that the government refer this bill to a committee to be further reviewed. This will allow us to meet with stakeholders from the business community about how to best implement the new legislation without causing lasting damage to local businesses.

The truth is, Madam Speaker, that we do not want to have unintended consequences for our businesses, especially right now, in this current economic downturn. Businesses have been hit on multiple levels with legislation from this government, that has caused them a lot of struggles in their business. Yes, we are in a downturn in the economy, and, yes, that will cause pressure to be on businesses, but the problem is that this government has compounded the situation. They've compounded the situation with minimum wage increases, they've compounded it with the carbon tax, and they've compounded it with labour legislation previously introduced as well. The list goes on.

Now, one of the things that I believe is important, Madam Speaker, is the vetting process. We're supposed to be sober thought for the ideas of what makes a better society that we live in. I want to describe to you what I experienced in watching the federal process, where what they have is the opportunity to bring forward bills, but those bills are vetted quite rigorously through committees – they are all-party committees – where they have the opportunity to be able to bring forward stakeholders, and those stakeholders have an opportunity to present not just to the governing side but actually to all parties. Then the opposition sides have the ability to say: "You know what? I know that maybe this doesn't work for the government's agenda, but this is actually a good idea, and a plethora of stakeholders is telling us that this is a fantastic idea. We need to look at this." And if the governing side says that this isn't a good idea, then they can take it to the press, and they can start drumming up important public opinion.

That is a process, I believe, that will get you closest to the right answer. And when we send it to committee, at least in this context, we send it to committee in order to be able to, again, bring it to the closest approximation of a good bill, that would be good for the majority.

Once again I will say this: the problem that we've seen in the past has been the unintended consequences. I would have to venture to say that the reason why these unintended consequences have been popping up so much is because they refuse to do an economic impact study. We have asked numerous times on this side of the House: has an economic impact study been done?

8:00

Now, I don't know whether or not members opposite feel like they know better than what the professionals would be able to present in an economic impact study, whether they know what is

better for Albertans, or whether or not they've done an economic impact study and the information is so terrible that they're not willing to share it with us. Either way, it does not work for Albertans, what they're trying to accomplish. I would say that it's extremely important that we send this to committee so that at least we come closest to an approximation of a good bill that will actually help.

I've heard the Minister of Economic Development and Trade say: our number one responsibility is creating jobs. For two and a half years we've heard him say this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe my colleague has some really, really good points. He's really trying to bring understanding on why committees are so important to this House. I believe that he didn't have enough time to get that point forward, and I think that we should let him have the time that he needs to explain further to this Assembly why referral motions are so important.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It actually is my pleasure to be able to stand and speak a little bit more to the importance of sending this bill to committee.

Now, I will say this much, though. Sending it to committee is not the silver bullet. In fact, there was a situation, actually, a week ago, where I was in a committee, and there was an interest by stakeholders to be able to come to this Resource Stewardship Committee. They wanted to be able to present what they felt was important in their own industries to this committee. The committee, unfortunately, refused to see these guys and made a point of it.

Committees are not actually the silver bullet. But I will say again, going back to the point, that we want to come to the closest approximation of a good bill that will actually help, as I was saying earlier, accomplish what the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is looking for, which is to get Albertans working again.

We have a little over 160,000 businesses in Alberta that contribute to the Workers' Compensation Board and, from what I understand, 200 stakeholders representing in a round-table discussion. The problem with that is that that equates to one-tenth of 1.25 per cent of the businesses that are actually out there. So when we talk about a fulsome consultation process, I can't see how this government can say with a straight face that that is considered fulsome.

Now, the other thing that I wanted to point out about this process of consultation is that I would be very interested to see, after they presented the bill, what kinds of letters the members opposite are receiving in their offices, in their constituencies. I can tell you that in my office, Madam Speaker, I'm receiving e-mail after e-mail from concerned businesses on how this will affect their ability to keep the people who they consider their friends, even family employed. How can the Minister of Economic Development and Trade achieve his desired goal of keeping Albertans working when the Minister of Labour is taking his feet out from underneath him?

It doesn't make sense. The ministers need to get together. They need to talk about common goals so that they can actually get Albertans back to work, which was the number one responsibility of this government. They've said this many times.

Now, when I was going through the technical brief of this bill, I asked the person that I was going through the technical brief with to give me empirical evidence about why they were doing the changes they're doing, especially with the WCB, and they presented an empirical study called the Joint Health and Safety Committee Education and the Value of Bipartite Co-operation in the Health Care Sector in British Columbia, Canada, 2005. It's interesting because that same study I actually quoted in one of my speeches earlier. That same study says:

Mandatory Joint Health and Safety Committees for workplaces with 20 or more employees were legislated in BC in 1977. Nonetheless, despite the long-term existence of JCs, in the BC healthcare sector in 1998 the injury rate was 54% higher than the average rate for all workers in BC. And, from 1997 to 1999, direct claims costs were \$180 million in BC healthcare.

In other words, at best . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. It's the new lane in between your seats. I don't know why I can't get it.

Mr. Hanson: That's fine, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. I rise to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. Now, that's a title that you can't really argue with, right? I mean, how are you going to vote against that?

Now, I understand the desire to do good and look after our brothers and sisters in the workforce. I came from a construction background. I worked out in the oil and gas industry and construction industry for upwards of 35 years. And I'll tell you how safety has changed in the time from when I started my apprenticeship to when I left as a consultant. I worked out in industrial where coveralls weren't mandatory, safety glasses weren't mandatory, and gloves weren't mandatory, but if you were working with a welder, you know, you learned pretty quick to put them on.

Even something as simple as wearing a face shield while you were running a grinder wasn't mandatory. They were all there in the tool shacks, and you could go and get them, free issue, glasses and safety masks, but a lot of guys didn't use them. It's like: "Oh, yeah. I'm tough. I can do this." I for one liked to use the glasses. I used glasses and a face shield. The trouble with a face shield is all that grinding dust would get on top, and then you go to look up, and it would all fall on your face anyways.

What I'm saying is that industry itself has been taking care of workers and trying to teach that mentality of safety. At times they've had to force it on people. At one point there were getting to be so many eye injuries even with safety glasses that they went to the monogoggles that were a real pain when you were trying to work, especially in a warm environment. You'd get all fogged up and that. Again, as we went along, now safety glasses are mandatory. Hearing protection is mandatory. Fire-retardant coveralls out in the oil field is a mandatory piece of equipment now. So everybody has evolved, and it's all been due to – at some point or another the incidents get to a certain point where the companies say: "You know what? Enough is enough. Everybody has to do this."

I know that you were not supposed to go back to the bill itself, but I'd just like to point out something. You know, I've been working in the management capacity at least for the last 25 years, and every morning on all of my job sites we always did a safety meeting. One of the very first things every day was: you have a right

to refuse unsafe work. This has been in our construction industry for as long as I can remember, yet here I see it on page 20 of the manual coming up again. So I just get a little confused that some of this stuff is coming right out of the occupational health and safety manual. It's already been there, and I don't understand why it's in this legislation.

So I really think that we could probably reduce this thing a fair bit if we send this to committee and get some industry and safety – safety is an actual industry all on its own, especially in oil and gas right now, so there are a lot of experts out there that could help with this. I can tell by looking at it that there wasn't enough consultation done on this because there are things in here that don't make a lot of sense. Anyway, like I said.

8:10

Now, another thing came up when I was in the oil and gas industry. I had an engineer come up and talk to me one day, and she said: "Why is it that we're doing these exact same projects all the time, yet the price seems to escalate all the time? It can't be just from material. We should be finding efficiencies and getting better at it." So I explained to her how things had changed in just over about a two-year period, where on a 50-man crew each man was spending close to an hour and a half a day just filling out safety paperwork. We'd do a safety meeting in the morning. Then each group would go out to their area, and they'd do a tailgate and hazard assessment. All that stuff is good, but what we found is that it hadn't done anything at all to improve the stats safetywise. We were still getting the eye injuries, the pinched fingers, you know. I could make one of my colleagues nervous by using an old saying that we used to use, but we won't go there.

What we found that worked the best was mentoring, where you would get somebody that was brand new to the industry, and you would stick him out with a journeyman or somebody that had been doing that project or that job for 10 years, and you would march them along instead of just turning them loose with a piece of paper and a hazard assessment that says: if I check off all these boxes, everything is going to be good; I'm safe. That's what we were finding, that people would get so complacent with, you know: we've checked all the hazards; there's nothing that can go wrong. Then something would go wrong, and somebody would get a finger squished or they'd get a spark in the eye or something like that, and off we were to the first aid tent.

I really think that there are a lot of professionals out in the oil and gas industry that would be more than happy to come and talk to the committee about what's good about the bill, what's redundant about the bill, that's already in OH and S regulations as they stand. I think we could, you know, go a long way to making this a better bill.

As I said, you know, I supervised sites for many years and, thankfully, no major injuries on any of my sites. It was always something that we took very, very seriously. We were working a lot of times in live gas plants with lines that had a 1,000 psi of natural gas in them, and if, you know, somebody cut into a wrong line or made a mistake like that, it was going to be disastrous. So we were always very, very careful about safety. You know, it was always: we want you going home safe, just like you came into work.

Really, you know, this kind of a bill with all the pages and pages and pages: I think a lot of it is already in OH and S. I really think that we should push it to committee, bring in the professionals, bring in the safety professionals that could actually write a manuscript themselves.

Let's get it right. I mean, there are a lot of really good things in the bill. Like I said, my biggest concern when I was working and the guys were working for me was that everybody went home safely with all their digits and their eyeballs in their heads. I don't think

there's a construction company out there that doesn't think that way. I really don't. I think we're barking up the wrong tree there, but we should bring those guys in, let them have their say.

I don't think that we've spent enough time on this. Like one of my colleagues said, we spent a lot of time over the summer on daylight savings time and gave it a lot more credence than what we're giving this manual that's going to affect so many businesses as it is. Like I said, you know: how much more paperwork do you need to do? Do you need to bubble wrap people? It doesn't help. I really think that if you looked at the stats, just a common-sense approach on job sites and some proper supervision would go a long way to reducing injuries.

Again, I'd like to see the evidence, like I say, from the government, that we're actually fixing a system that's broken. Like I said, my experience tells me that the OH and S manual is pretty good. There may be some additions. It's always a growing document that grows with the changes in industry and technology. There's nothing wrong with changes, but when I look at the wholesale changes that are going on here, I just wonder how many of them are, like I said, redundancies. I think the only way to find that out is to bring the professionals in, bring the businesspeople in, construction professionals, safety professionals, and let's try and get it right.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate what was said by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I just wanted to make a couple of comments and ask a question. Yes, I think that in this bill there are a lot of things that we recognize, but I think we have to get into the nitty-gritty of this, and there are some very nuanced differences.

One I'll bring up is the right to refuse unsafe work. How it previously read was that it was a duty to refuse imminent danger. As you may know, being in the Legislature here, words mean a lot in legislation, they mean a lot in contracts, they mean a lot in collective agreements, and those small words make a big difference. In the previous incarnation the duty to refuse imminent danger was really left wide open and open to interpretation, mostly by the employer. This way brings it up to speed with a lot of other provinces and their OH and S legislation that says, you know, that if you recognize it as an employee and you think it's dangerous, you go tell somebody, and you refuse it until you figure out how you can do it safely.

Now, one thing that the member said there really hit the nail on the head, about how important this legislation is and why we should not put it to committee at the moment. He was talking about how over years in construction sometimes it would take two or three near incidents or accidents for the employer to finally say: "All right. Enough is enough. We've got to do something different." Right? Safety needs to be preventative, not reactionary. That's the big thing. That's what we're trying to do with this legislation.

I would ask the question of the member. There's no number in their referral motion. How long do they want to see this in committee?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah, you're absolutely right. You know, you can call it an evolution in safety when you

see the incidents rising. Like I said, we went to wearing safety glasses, and it wasn't being helpful. It was mandatory. Everybody had to wear them. We were still getting eye injuries, so we went to the monogoggles. It wasn't something that was in occupational health and safety. This was something that the industry, the company we were working for, did just in trying to nail this stuff down and protect these guys. But it turned out that that didn't work either.

It's just a matter of, you know, proper training and getting guys to be working properly, a simple matter of, "When you're grinding, make sure the sparks are going that way instead of hitting you in the face," stuff like that, right? Like I said, it wasn't that we were saying: "Oh, just go out there. Oh, too many guys are getting hurt, so we're going to do something about it." It's a constant evolution out on the job site. We're trying to find the best ways so that guys aren't getting hurt.

Now, when he talks about the right to refuse work, I'm going to have to check with my former employer, but we had a checklist that I used for indoctrination. When we were bringing in a new hire, I always did the orientations on-site for these guys. I can show you in there from 10 years ago where you have an absolute right to refuse dangerous work. It wasn't something like: oh, you know, assess the work and if it's too dangerous. If you thought it was too dangerous, in your opinion, you had the right to refuse it. Nothing would be said, and you could not be fired for it. I have to clarify that, but if you like, I can see if I can get a copy of that, get permission, and I'll table it here for you.

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I enjoyed the presentation from the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. He reminded me of something when he talked about a work site where you operate a grinder wheel so that the sparks don't fly in your face or something like that. He also mentioned the potential loss of digits or body parts. I was wondering if he could explain and talk to the people about the lack of regulation and the camaraderie that happened on those kinds of work sites, where the goal wasn't to injure anyone but to create more production. I know that as a young man I worked on a pipeline crew, and our goal was to increase production without getting hurt.

I was wondering if the member could talk about an informal matter of safety and regulations that came forward that would allow self-performance and self-initiative to create a safer workplace.

8:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. Thank you, Member, for that question. Yes, you know . . . [The time limit for questions and comments expired] I'm done?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this evening to speak to the referral amendment, which, if passed, would see this bill, Bill 30, sent to committee. For me – and I've risen many times in this House to talk about referral amendments – it happens to be my opinion that every bill should find its way to committee at some

point to allow members representing all parties not just to investigate and review the bill but also to review the reason why the government crafted the bill.

Now, the government claims that they held robust consultations, and while that might be true, I want to point out to the members in the House that there is a huge difference between consultation regarding a concept or a number of concepts and consultation regarding a bill that becomes law. There's a difference between consultation prior to the crafting of a bill, consultation over issues, and then, when the bill is created, consulting back with Albertans again so that the created thing gets back before Albertans again so that they can see what the government has done with the information gathered during the initial consultation.

That's why we're saying that, yeah, we acknowledge the consultation, the survey, and the other things the government tried to do at the beginning, but now we have a very substantial piece of legislation before this House which, we are told, is the fruit of this consultation. Well, it would be very interesting, Madam Speaker, to consult with Albertans when they have that bill in their hand and they can go through it page by page by page.

I can recall, Madam Speaker, back during the Bill 6 issue, that when that bill came to this House and we attempted to have the government agree to refer that to committee, we were assured over and over and over again about all kinds of consultation that this government had done regarding this bill. Yet all of us in the Official Opposition at that time were getting pummelled by letters and e-mails from the agricultural community across this province, who were telling us that they were not consulted. They did not feel consulted. They felt insulted. Here was this bill which contained things that they in their wildest dream wouldn't have believed. If that bill had been so perfect, why, then, did the government issue six pages of amendments to their five-page perfect bill? It's because they didn't take the time to take the bill and consult Albertans on the content of the bill. I don't want this Legislature to make that mistake with any legislation.

Again, consulting over concepts and ideas is one thing, but consulting a group of Albertans and, especially as the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills pointed out, giving that Bill 30 into the hands of health and safety professionals in this province and asking them to give their input to a standing committee on now the contents of that bill is a whole different matter than an online survey.

Now, some of the members opposite claim that this bill is important and urgent: we need to get it through this House, and we need to get it out there so that we can start protecting workers. The question that comes to my mind is: then why wasn't this bill introduced on the first day of this session rather than almost at the end? If it's such a great masterpiece and we cannot afford to delay the implementation a single moment, why are we introducing this bill now instead of back around October 30, the first day back after summer recess? It would be interesting to get the answer to that.

Now, as I understand it, the Member for Calgary-Klein intimated that he was insulted by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek saying that he would consider delaying the implementation by suggesting that the bill be referred to committee. Then why did the minister wait so long to introduce it? I encourage the Member for Calgary-Klein to maybe redirect his disgust to the minister for taking so long to get it here.

Now, make no mistake. This bill incorporates some really encouraging aspects, but I have concerns with other aspects, including the wholesale and potentially costly changes to the WCB that I believe could make the WCB system unsustainable. We need to hear from health and safety experts on that, the people that have to deal with WCB legislation day after day after day. That's one of

the many reasons why I'm supporting the amendment to refer this bill to committee.

Now, if the government is so very confident that there are no issues with this legislation, then I don't see why they wouldn't welcome the chance to put it before committee, have experts from across our province review the bill, listen to what they have to say, and let them come to that same conclusion themselves. You see, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, this government has got a credibility gap, where this government has been known to say one thing and then later we find out that, well, it's not exactly as they had said. I'm going to point out one of those with regard to this bill, which will highlight why it's so important to put this to committee.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, I don't trust this government when it says just about anything. They have a credibility gap when it comes to the truth. The government has created this credibility gap for themselves by introducing a carbon tax that they never talked about during the election or when it promised to be the most fair, open, and transparent government ever. Of course, we've had report after report from the Privacy Commissioner's office that that's just not so. The credibility gap grows every time this government touts its positive economic record, but the experts, the real experts in financial matters like the Standard & Poor's and Moody's and DBRS's of this world, respond by dropping Alberta's credit rating. This government says one thing, but the facts say another.

Now, here's an example of exactly that with regard to this bill. It concerns the Occupational Health and Safety Council. The role of the Occupational Health and Safety Council is outlined in section 7 of the current Occupational Health and Safety Act. I'm going to quote a little bit from there. I want the House to see what I mean about this credibility gap.

- (7) The Council shall
 - (a) advise the Minister on matters concerning this Act, the regulations and the adopted codes and potential changes to them, and the regulations and on matters concerning the health and safety of workers;
 - (b) hear appeals in accordance with this Act and the regulations;
 - (c) perform any duties and functions assigned to it by the Minister with respect to the administration of this Act, the regulations and the adopted codes.

Now, that seems real clear to me.

The council, which according to section 6 of the OH and S Act is made up of no more than 12 OH and S experts, acts as an adviser to the minister on issues related to the OH and S Act, any regulations and codes related to it, and on any matters concerning the health and safety of Alberta workers. When there is an appeal filed over any decision in accordance with the OH and S Act, the council is the arbiter of that appeal. Finally, the council is also sanctioned to perform any duties and functions assigned to it by the minister related to the OH and S Act, its regulations, and adopted codes. To be clear, that is the current version of the OH and S Act. Bill 30 proposes some pretty significant changes to that particular section of the OH and S Act.

8:30

The changes I will get to in a moment, but here's the issue with credibility, Mr. Speaker. When the government introduced Bill 30 last week, they posted a summary of the changes on their website, and one of the changes that the government noted on their website was to this OH and S Council. According to the government's website: "The OHS Council would become an advisory council to provide specialized advice to government to better protect working Albertans." But I just read to you the existing section of the OH and

S Act where it states that that is precisely what the OH and S Council already does. When someone goes to the website and reads what I just read to you, that the OH and S Council would become an advisory council to provide advice to the government, when someone reads that summary, they would be left with the impression that very little is changing in terms of the OH and S Council. I mean, it's already an advisory council.

The government's credibility crumbles the moment we look at the actual changes the government is proposing in this Bill 30. Let's start with section 93, which can be found on page 92 of Bill 30. Under the heading Part 13, Related and Transitional Provisions, Consequential Amendments, Repeal and Coming into Force, it states the following. "The Occupational Health and Safety Council referred to in section 6 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act . . . is dissolved and the appointments of members of the council are terminated." But wait a minute. The government website says, "The OHS Council would become an advisory council to provide specialized advice to government to better protect working Albertans." As I just read to you previously, that's something they can already do. They already do that job. Now the website says: we're going to change this. The act says: no; it's dissolved, and the appointments of those members are terminated.

As I said, consultation with Albertans before a bill is in their hands is one thing. It's a far different thing than consulting with Albertans after the government has taken whatever consultation they did earlier. They craft this piece of legislation, and then make the absurd claim that they consulted with Albertans. Frankly, you did not consult with Albertans while they were holding Bill 30 in their hand. It is actually disingenuous of members opposite to say that they've done all this consultation before anybody has actually seen this bill.

What needs to happen is that the bill needs to be referred to a standing committee. It needs to be advertised far and wide across this province to people who have to work with the results of this bill to hear what they have to say. I have received communication from the chambers of commerce in my area that (a) they don't feel like they were consulted, and (b) they've got some serious problems with Bill 30. They would love to have the opportunity to come here and talk to a committee regarding the actual details, because as you know, Mr. Speaker, the devil is always in the details of these things. One of the questions the committee might ask the minister is how she expects the OH and S Council to advise her after they've been fired and escorted off the property.

Bill 30 goes on to repeal that section of the OH and S Act, so make no mistake. This government has no role for the OH and S Council and never intended for the OH and S Council to have a role, and the website that the government has created is misleading. It is misleading Albertans right now. This is the credibility gap this government has created for itself in this bill and others and why this bill must be referred to committee.

I'm sure there are many more areas where the government has claimed that Bill 30 will do one thing when, in fact, it's going to do the opposite. When this government claims that it has consulted on this bill and there are no other stakeholders to consider, every member of this Chamber ought to automatically question that claim.

This bill must be referred to committee because as the representative of the people in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake I need to see the evidence for myself that Bill 30 is fixing a broken system, where it's fixing that broken system, and that the legislation that this government has proposed actually will increase health and safety in this province.

I have strong concerns that the questions that the government asked in their online survey were leading, which again calls into question whether this government was simply confirming its own biases rather than considering what the stakeholders and the public actually had to say.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake under 29(2)(a)? Correct?

Mr. Cyr: It is, Mr. Speaker. I really enjoyed hearing the points that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake brought forward, especially the fact that misleading surveys are something that this government has completely endorsed. It continues to search to fix things that the government feels that – it really doesn't reflect what I believe Albertans are looking for. If the hon. member could please explain more on how these surveys are misleading, I would really appreciate it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for the question. The thing about surveys and consultation is that, as I pointed out earlier, it's one thing to conduct a survey, conduct a poll, have a questionnaire go out to people in our province, the stakeholders in our province, but you're never going to reach everybody that ought to be reached on something.

This bill has far-reaching impacts, just like Bill 6 had far-reaching impacts that this government never foresaw, mostly because the people that this government had helping them craft Bill 6, for example, were not actually the experts in farming and not the experts in family farming. So we saw farming communities right across this province rise up, and they were adamantly opposed to Bill 6. They were adamant that they had never been consulted, and they felt insulted over some of the statements that the government was making, statements such as that farmers were forcing their workers to do dangerous work and so on. You know, being a former farm worker, that was just not the case. I always had the right to refuse anything that was dangerous without fear of losing my job. I don't know any farmers out there that were like that, yet that was what this government was making the farmers feel like.

Well, here we have another bill that is massive, it's far-reaching, and the government claims that they have conducted surveys and they have conducted consultation. But as I said earlier, it's a very important distinction, Mr. Speaker, to consult on a concept and to consult with a bill in your hand that is supposed to be the result of that consultation earlier in the process.

This is the reason why it is parliamentary convention in many places that at second reading bills automatically go to committee, so that the people – and this is supposed to be a democracy – who that bill is going to impact have the opportunity to look at what the government has created and see if it is what the people need. Let the people decide. This government doesn't want to do that. Repeatedly, over and over again, they're cramming stuff through this House. They don't want it going to committee because they don't want the scrutiny and they don't want the feedback from Albertans who are going to bear the brunt of whatever that piece of legislation may be putting upon Albertans.

Well, I would hope that the members opposite will respect the people of Alberta, respect their level of intelligence, and respect their, I think, right that they should have to scrutinize every and any piece of legislation coming through this place at committee, where it should be. I would hope that all members of this House will support a sombre second thought, refer this Bill 30 to committee, and let Albertans have a good look at it and hear what they've got to say.

Thank you.

8:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other questions or comments? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster under 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Starke: No. Actually, Mr. Speaker, I was going to beg leave of the House for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

The Speaker: I was just waiting to see if there was anyone else under 29(2)(a). I was going to do that next. Any other speakers?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my very great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three colleagues that are visiting today to attend the debate on Bill 31. It's my pleasure to introduce the president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, Dr. Margitta Dziwenka; the registrar of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, Dr. Darrell Dalton; and the deputy registrar and complaints director for the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, Dr. Phil Buote. I might also parenthetically point out that Dr. Dalton was my fourth-year buddy in veterinary school and taught me how to do my first jugular venipuncture on a cow, a cow that survived the procedure, I'm proud to say. I'd ask that my colleagues here in the House greet and welcome my colleagues in the gallery with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. I hope the instructors gave ample direction and detail about how we'd operate on a bull versus a cow.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

(continued)

The Speaker: Now other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to stand in support of this referral by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. We are here, of course, again today debating a large omnibus bill that offers sweeping changes to both the Workers' Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act just days away from the end of fall session or, at least, hopefully the end of fall session.

Now, last time we did this, it was in the spring session. This government had introduced Bill 17, which amended both the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code. That was last May, and after weeks of filibustering its own bills because Bill 17 clearly wasn't ready, they finally brought forward legislation seven working days before the House was ready to recess for the summer. And I'm not even going to get into Bill 6, which was, once again, thrust upon us and unsuspecting farmers just before Christmas of 2015. The point is that the NDP government has a pattern of bringing forward comprehensive labour legislation at the last minute, towards the end of session.

But let's look at this bill. Perhaps it is suitable for the dreaded "omnibus" word. I'm happy to of course tell you why, Mr. Speaker. First of all, despite some positive aspects, it introduces and will implement far-reaching changes to the Workers' Compensation Act that include a price tag. Why is that a problem? Well, I'm of course happy to tell you. This government has another habit, and that is perpetuating the idea that small and medium-sized Alberta businesses have a well of money that cannot be tapped out.

As an example, Alberta's business community collectively provided the WCB with a lot more in premiums last year than were needed. Were some of these WCB funds due to the earnings off its \$10.5 billion reserve? We understand that they were. Regardless, when the accounting was done at the end of the year, the surplus in the WCB's accident fund was \$350 million, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what normally happens to that money? It is returned to the businesses paying for the program in the form of rebates, and that did not happen in 2016. The WCB kept the money because a panel recommending changes told it to cover the costs of the upcoming changes. But the cost of those upcoming changes – that is, those based on the legislation – is \$94 million.

Hang on a second. Let's do the math here. The WCB withheld \$350 million, which is normally returned to business, due to an upcoming \$94 million cost. Mr. Speaker, that math just doesn't make sense to me. Either it is going to cost a lot more than \$94 million to implement the sweeping changes in Bill 30, or there is no reason for the WCB to keep that money, which, by the way, is over \$250 million.

I mentioned that the WCB has a \$10.5 billion reserve. That's coming into Alberta heritage trust fund territory, Mr. Speaker. That's a lot of money. But according to this NDP government businesses do not need this money. After all, the money only goes to paying employees, who have families, mortgages, and school fees to cover; the money only goes to programs that improve safety in the workplace; and the money only goes to pension plans and benefits for their employees. This practice isn't new. We've seen it before from the NDP, and we will certainly see it again. Bill 30 is just another continuation of the NDP's erosion of business here in Alberta.

My colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek has proposed a most sensible solution to the problem we face before us, Mr. Speaker. First, let me reiterate the problem. This bill makes comprehensive changes to two very large and very different acts. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has proposed sending Bill 30 to committee, so let's review the positive aspects of that motion.

The committee can invite stakeholders to present and, of course, ask them questions. They can do so over time to ensure that everyone has time to prepare and that the committee members have time to think about their questions. But the NDP wants to ram Bill 30 through this House in mere days. The Legislature is supposed to rise at the end of the week, possibly, and there are numerous other bills to review during these last few days. We have not had a lot of time or the opportunity to discuss proposed changes with stakeholders. Versus four days, pretty much three days are left now and now no opportunity to consult with stakeholders, let alone have discussions with them as a group of legislators – and we have legislation that can wait.

As the minister so enjoys pointing out, the OH and S Act came out when Wayne Gretzky was a rookie and when cellphones did not exist. Syncrude had opened its mine. Minister, what is the rush? As for the WCB, the minister kindly pointed out that the last comprehensive review of the act occurred 15 years ago. Once again, is there a need to rush and force it through in days? I think not, Mr. Speaker.

I was involved in the debates on the two marijuana bills this fall. I'm going to give the government credit for separating out impaired driving and distribution as it relates to marijuana. It could have combined the two bills into one like Bill 30, but it chose to portion them out, and that's a good thing. We had good, focused debates in the House on Bill 26 and Bill 29. Will we be able to do that on Bill 30? I don't know. I suggest to you that this government does not want to do that.

The next question is: why? Is there an ulterior motive? Are they trying to hide something? I don't know, Mr. Speaker. When an omnibus bill is brought forward just as session is waning and is then forced through, Albertans have to ask: why? Businesses certainly are, and so is the Official Opposition.

With any luck, albeit small, this government will listen to the reasoned argument that we are presenting to send Bill 30 to committee. Now, Mr. Speaker, I will not hold my breath for it to accept this common-sense course, but I can certainly hope.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-West? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

8:50

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker – or Mr. Speaker. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. It's getting late.

I was actually very interested in what my colleague had to say, and to reinforce something that my colleague had touched on, I thought I would use the Minister of Labour's own words here.

Every Albertan should be able to go to work and come home healthy and safe at the end of the workday. When they don't, they deserve to have access to the medical and financial supports they need to get healthy, care for their families and return to work. This bill would better protect hardworking Albertans and provide fair compensation to Albertans injured on the job.

This is from a press release titled *Bill Would Improve Safety, Well-being of Albertans*.

I have a hard time connecting how we're seeing such very eloquent language being put forward by the minister – she's saying: what they need in the right time and right place. The government likes to use that quote all the time.

An Hon. Member: The right place at the right time.

Mr. Cyr: The right place at the right time. Apparently, I misquoted that.

But what we're hearing here is very different from what we are seeing by the government not allowing us to sit through a committee and discuss this with the people that it's going to be affecting.

We have a very clear – a very clear – mandate from Albertans, I believe, that they all want to get home safely to their families. I can't imagine anybody that wants to go to work, come home, and get hurt on the job site. I can't imagine anybody that would hope that if they did get injured on the job site, they would not be taken care of by their WCB coverage. The fact that we've spent nine weeks, nine whole weeks, of consultation on such an important topic – that's 63 days.

As I mentioned in one of my last speeches, the Minister of Labour spent a whole 60 days of consultation on the last WCB and OH and S rules that she put through the House. Sixty whole days of consultation. [interjection] She's telling me I'm wrong, and she can correct me if I'm wrong. I apologize if that is – I'm not meaning to put in words. But I am saying that in this case we do have nine

weeks, nine whole weeks, 45 business days. This is something that is unfortunate.

If we're taking this seriously, then the answer is a committee. This is exactly what my colleague was talking about, that we need to bring this to a committee. If we can't show Albertans the respect they deserve by allowing a committee to flesh out all of the issues at hand – and I don't believe that nine weeks and an online survey, a whole 90 written submissions, eight in-person, facilitated round-table discussions are enough to be able to draft such an intricate piece of legislation.

If we're looking at this piece of legislation . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm very patiently waiting for the question.

Mr. Cyr: This is a comment, Mr. Speaker, but with, I guess, my respect for you, sir, I will ask my colleague: do you feel that 1,300 online survey responses, nearly 90 written submissions, eight in-person, facilitated round-table discussions involving 200 stakeholders, only 200 stakeholders, are enough to get a reasonable answer and to be able to call this consultation? Do you believe that the government has done its due diligence in its requirement to go out and consult with Albertans? To the member: do you think that the consultation has been adequately done?

The Speaker: Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, and thank you to my hon. colleague for asking that question. You know, I think that it's always good to do more consultation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of my colleague's motion to refer Bill 30 to committee for further work and scrutiny. As the members of this House know, Bill 30 represents the most significant changes to Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation as well as to that governing workers' compensation in decades. There is no doubt that from time to time we should review critical legislation areas like this to find if there are any existing deficiencies, to seek solutions to any that may exist, and to remedy them through the legislative process. This, however, is not what the government has chosen to do at this time. How do we know this? The first clue is that these sweeping changes had a review and consultation period of just over eight weeks, eight weeks for some of the largest changes to Alberta labour law in a generation.

Mr. Gill: How many?

Mr. Yao: Eight weeks.

There are nearly 170,000 businesses in Alberta, and there are close to 2.3 million Albertans in work. Well, there were until the government came in. Surely, the government could have spent more than a few weeks to speak with those who would be affected by these changes and gain their input. If I might go off script here, Mr. Speaker, the government side is really terrible at consultation. They set the bar so low that a mouse from Mouseville couldn't even creep under there.

Where they did show some good consultation was on the daylight savings bill. The daylight savings bill is where they showed good consultation. [interjections] They did. They spent time, they threw it to committee, and they asked and reviewed with so many groups.

That was an excellent demonstration of review of a bill. They came to a very good conclusion, that this has to be a co-ordinated effort with the rest of the provinces of our fine nation, and they put it aside. But it demonstrated that they could consult if they wanted to. They showed some glimmer of hope there.

We know that for some reason they want to rush this legislation through this session, and for others they insist that these changes cannot wait. But it is important to recognize the importance of the legislative process, that is integral to our parliamentary democracy. While we, of course, recognize that this government enjoys the support of the majority of members and that it has the right to pursue its agenda, it does not remove the importance of legislative scrutiny, it does not remove the importance of the opposition to demand better, and it does not relieve the responsibility of the government to consult with those who will be affected regardless of whether or not they agree with a particular ideological agenda.

Since we do not have an upper House in this province, which I wouldn't want anyway, it does place a greater duty on us as Members of this Legislative Assembly to exercise a degree of sober second thought. [interjections] No, no. Let me be clear there, Mr. Speaker. I in no way want a Senate here. I'm glad that our provinces got rid of such a level of bureaucracy.

My friend from Calgary-Fish Creek has put forward this motion for referral. I would ask this House to consider supporting it because it is part of the job that our constituents have entrusted us to do. Mr. Speaker, beyond our duty to the legislative process, from a practical perspective we also need the time to go through this massive omnibus bill and seek further improvements on its content. In the relatively brief period of time since this bill was introduced, my colleagues and I have identified several sections that are in need of improvement and second thought. We have also heard from stakeholders who have legitimate concerns with parts of this bill, concerns that should be heard and remedied in committee before moving forward.

We all want to see improvements to the WCB, and we all want to ensure that occupational health and safety legislation is adequate to protect Alberta workers, but as these are such crucial areas, it is imperative to make sure that we get it right. One area where I believe there should be particular concern is the fiscal sustainability of the Workers' Compensation Board. In this bill the government has stated that they want to support a sustainable workers' compensation system for the benefit of workers and employers. It seems that if this is their goal, they would have sought an independent and in-depth analysis on the potential costs of the changes they are proposing to WCB.

9:00

Mr. Speaker, this government has started to speak a rhetoric that they're going to start balancing the books and provide more fiscal sanity to our fine province, but they aren't demonstrating it here. Their numbers state that the annual cost of implementing these changes will be roughly \$93 million. My question is: why haven't they engaged that independent analysis to look into this estimate? Either they are confident that this number is accurate and that doing so would simply be ensuring due diligence, or they harbour a notion that the actual costs will be significantly higher and do not wish to have it confirmed.

If this bill were to be passed and the costs of these measures did spiral out of control, these circumstances would threaten the fiscal sustainability of the program that the government itself purports to be concerned about. Frankly, this government's existing record on fiscal sustainability and prudence is reason enough to make sure that there is an independent and in-depth analysis done. We cannot

let this be yet another case where Alberta taxpayers and future generations are left to clean up the fiscal mess created by the ideological tunnel vision of this government.

Also, in the matter of changes to WCB it is worth while to look at the proposed changes to the maximum insurable earnings. The change would take the current cap of \$98,700 and eliminate it entirely. This seems to be an extreme change, one that has the potential to be very costly. If we were to refer this bill to committee, it would provide an opportunity to look at raising this cap to a fair and equitable level and potentially incorporate provisions for an indexed increase. This would allow us to ensure that there is a stable and predictable model for the future that benefits workers, employers, and taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, we owe it to the workers of Alberta to be exceptionally deliberate and make sure that we get this legislation right. It should always be policy to try and anticipate the potential problems with new legislation and to avoid unintended consequences. It is better to take a little more time to iron out the wrinkles than to encounter problems down the road and have to fix them after the fact. Surely that is a strategy that can be embraced by all regardless of ideology or partisan politics.

I'd also like to address the new rules and responsibilities that are being given to the Labour Relations Board. The transfer of occupational health and safety related appeals to the Labour Relations Board and expansion of its authority are major changes, which do need to be examined closely. What prompted the dissolution of the current Occupational Health and Safety Council, which is made up of neutral legal and workplace safety experts, and why is the Labour Relations Board better suited to handle appeals?

The new legal authority granted to the Labour Relations Board in regard to enforcing orders from the Court of Queen's Bench should be addressed as well. Why is this new power needed? Have there been problems in the past that would justify its inclusion?

While this bill dissolves the existing OH and S Council, it creates a new OH and S advisory council, which exists only to advise the minister on related issues. If the current council was not needed, then why is there a need to create a new one? I'd love to understand some more clarity around this particular issue, totally taking apart one council and rebuilding it only for the minister.

These are all questions that need to be answered, and the best way to do that is by referring this bill to committee, sir. If a change is justified, then there should be no problem with greater scrutiny. As I expressed before, they demonstrated the ability to do some consulting with the daylight savings bill, and if they were to repeat that, they would certainly provide me with some encouragement that they're doing this in a fair manner.

Now, Mr. Speaker, another potential problem I see with the provisions related to discrimination in the workplace: it goes without saying that workers should be free from discrimination in the work environment, but what concerns me is the process created by this bill. As it stands, the new provisions on discrimination create for employers a presumption of guilt unless proven otherwise. This is in clear conflict with the fundamental principle of justice as it exists in our country. It is likely that if ever examined by a court, it would be found constitutionally invalid.

If we want to combat discrimination in the workplace, we need to make sure that the legislative provisions will stand up to legal scrutiny and that they are fair and just for everybody. Once more, if this bill is given the opportunity to go to the committee, it will give a chance to sort out the issues like this, where there are glaring errors. They may get in the way of the good intentions of this legislation.

It may be apparent to some that the idea of unintended consequences is a common theme raised by myself and some of my

colleagues. Now, part of this is because the government has proved to us in the past that their method of legislating does produce its fair share of problems, ones that they do not foresee. That is also one of the reasons that we must be so insistent in our suggestion to get this bill to committee. Even if this government didn't have this reputation, it would still be a critical step to pursue. The consultation piece is so important. There are so many employers, so many employees.

There's so much that can be corrected here. This is such an opportune time to really get this legislation right because even when the legislation is well intended and even when it does things that we know can be practically good ideas, the overarching results can still differ from what we expect. One example where this may be would be, well, pretty much all the legislation the government puts through.

But one example may be the new standards on incident reporting. These new standards broadly expand what incidents need to be reported under law, including things like near misses and precautionary hospitalization. While one can certainly see how more information could be a good thing to help keep track of workplace health and safety, there is a possibility of some significant unintended consequences. Think of an example where it appears that an employee is all right after a workplace incident, but an employer sends him to the hospital to get checked out, just in case. The employee in many cases may be fine or may need only minor care, but in other cases this precautionary measure may turn out to identify something critically important. Under this new regime a report would need to be filed even if the worker turns out to be fine. This record could reflect poorly on an employer who is simply exercising caution. Ultimately, this could disincentivize employers from taking this kind of precautionary measure, which is the exact opposite of what we want to happen if we are seeking to better workplace health and safety.

It's also worth mentioning the vast amount of additional administrative work that these new reporting measures would create. This kind of work could not only inflate costs for business, but it could also mean that time that would otherwise be spent on other workplace safety incident measures is spent documenting innocuous incidents.

I can speak to this, sir. In my previous life we filled out a whole bunch of WCB forms and HIAs and everything else, and it was cumbersome. The paperwork was extremely thorough, almost too much, and there was a lot of repetition in that paperwork. I can tell you from members on the floor that had to fill that stuff out that they even became very frustrated with it. It was very much a demonstration of bureaucracy.

Were this bill given the opportunity to be examined in committee, potential issues like this could be given further thought. The committee could highlight potential problems and tweak the legislation to proactively solve matters that may arise.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to close with a couple of last thoughts. First, I just wish to reiterate the importance of further consultation. It is so important to understand so many perspectives, and this government is in that position, where you can put all your resources to it, whether it be your public media, social media, official requests from so many groups, so many business groups. You can definitely talk to the unions, which I'm sure you have, but there are so many more. You can talk to workers in independent locations as well. There are many people to consult.

With this bill being introduced so close to the end of session and with the relatively short period of time the government took to consult on such a large and wide-reaching piece of legislation, I would urge all members to consider that we owe it to Albertans to spend a little bit more time listening to them. The people of this

province are the ones who sent us here, and ultimately we need to remember that while we are here to represent them, they are the ones who are in charge.

Secondly, I would just reiterate the importance of legislative scrutiny.

9:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Strankman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting subject matter here tonight. The member touched briefly on his past work experience with the EMT and the paperwork burden that they were faced with. I was wondering if you could expound on that and how that might relate to the need for greater discussion on the bill and changes to that.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, in my previous life working for the Fort McMurray fire department, we took safety very seriously. Obviously, that is our job, that is the profession, safety all around. We reported everything. I was a supervisor. I was a senior man. I always insisted that my guys write the paperwork out, even if they had their BA off and walked by a house that was on fire. They were very aggravated when I was telling them to fill out paperwork after they just walked by that without their BA on – that's breathing apparatus – to ensure that they don't inhale that smoke. You know, a bunch of tough guys: they don't need the BA when they're just doing some outdoor duty. Unfortunately, it would lead to paperwork like this because what they didn't understand was that sometimes these things are how they get the firefighter cancers and stuff like that. So I did insist that they fill out things like the OH and S, WCB forms, the hazardous incident accident forms.

That's the thing, that we had repetition of forms. Many of them were asking for the same thing. We needed them for the municipal level. We needed them for the provincial level. We needed them for the firefighters' union. Sometimes, depending on what they got exposed to, maybe there had to be some federal reporting. It was an ongoing battle to get these guys to fill out these forms, quite honestly, because in the end they just saw that there was a lot of unnecessary information that was being asked for or redundant information, a lot of repetition. It was a task. It was a battle.

We did emphasize safety, but we recognized that there's a lot of bureaucracy behind it and couldn't help but notice that there weren't some ways to influence WCB to streamline and clean up their forms to ensure that there was a certain level of efficiency while still getting all the information. This would have been a beautiful time to do that, to clean up those forms.

You know, there are aspects to this legislation, Mr. Speaker, that I do find interesting as well, I might add. The right to refuse hazardous work: in California, if my memory recalls correctly, they were going on a big push for safety officers in the fire department because they felt that the safety training that they ingrained in us wasn't enough. These safety officers were given a very high level of authority. If I recall, it took one major disaster in California where basically it was a building on fire, from my understanding, a warehouse, and the firefighters had the opportunity to go in and stop this fire very easily and very efficiently. Because there's this new safety chief, he shut the incident down because it was too hazardous, and it blew the mind of every fire chief and every firefighter who was on that incident.

I can say honestly that shortly after that incident they actually stopped putting those safety guys in those positions. They took away their authority, and they made them subofficers. They recognized that firefighters and other emergency service workers,

for that matter, will be exposed to certain conditions that are threats. Those are the things that we expect and we anticipate when we go in because our job is to get people out of those situations. That said, we are gifted with the equipment and the training and the resources to do that safely.

But I fear the day when there is some bureaucrat that comes in and tells them that that is too dangerous a situation, not trusting the experience and the training of those fire officials, because they do not haphazardly throw people into a building that is burning or collapsing for any reason. They understand how to identify if a building is safe to go in and if it's feasible to try to find people in there, the search and rescue aspects, things like that. That is the job. That is the training that we do. I'm curious about that aspect.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. Sorry. Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Good leg exercise, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly happy to have that. It's better than exercising the backside. Sometimes the brain will only absorb what the backside will endure.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of the referral proposed by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. This bill makes broad changes to both the OH and S Act and the Workers' Compensation Act. We're here again late into the session, and the government is dropping a major piece of legislation on us with something around a week to go, some would say, and I could say that I'm surprised. It's unusual but not necessarily totally irregular, I guess I would say.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak even though we're in a process of the democratic process. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster honourably recognized other members from his profession that are in the gallery tonight, and I'd like to speak to them if I could. We're talking about OH and S regulations and the potentiality of legislation. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo talked about various forms of safety going forward.

To the members in the gallery. They may or may not know of three locations where veterinary services are being performed on similar large mammals known as bovines, cows: in the town of Oyen, in the town of Consort, and in the town of Provost. All three of those communities have veterinary services that I've partaken of through my farming career, and all three have very similar but dissimilar ways of dealing with a dangerously large bovine animal in what they perceive to be a safe fashion. Each has their own protocol for OH and S, but they process the animals and allow them to proceed through their facilities in a different fashion.

Mr. Speaker, that's part of the reason I'm standing up tonight to speak to this legislation. These three facilities: they're all honourable, honest professions serving very large, gigantic, actually, cattle operations where the owners of those practices actually go out to do on-farm visits, where they process hundreds if not maybe even thousands of cattle. They do it in different fashions but all generally in a safe fashion, in quite possibly an OH and S approved fashion.

The regulations that are created are broad and varying in many cases, and they're not necessarily created in this Chamber. Those are the common-sense kinds of regulations that we're talking about here, ladies and gentlemen in the gallery, to bring this stuff forward so that you as Albertans and your client base, the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association members, can work in a safe fashion. That's the surgery, if you will, that's going on here tonight. We talked about that earlier, and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster –

now it's known as Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright or will be after the legislation is passed – was talking about his venture off into the jugular surgery there.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's important – and I'm alluding to members like those in the gallery – that stakeholders are given the proper time to be consulted, and it's a pleasure that they are here tonight to witness some of the goings-on. This is only one facet of businesses across the prairies and in the rural area at least, but there are whole other facets of labour, et cetera, et cetera, that we need to be able to allow to have input into the changes in this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the train has passed about the legislation, but I'm here to stand up and make sure that my voice is heard for people like my constituency and the businesses that are involved there in that we ask for a referral to move this legislation to a committee. I think it's important. We are assured by government that this bill will fix a broken system.

9:20

I was here in the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, when our current Premier, while in opposition, railed at length and repeatedly about the WCB's constant failure to help hard-working Albertans. I remember that extending into the wee hours of the day following, and the current Premier, then an opposition member, took great relish in doing that. I think that's part of the democratic process. Even though to the people in the gallery this form of surgery may be quite awkward, this is what we do in this place. The then opposition member, now the Premier, vilified the system, saying that this system needed to be fixed. I don't know if it'll be fixed by this piece of legislation, but if we would send it to committee, we'd have a full, open, and accountable method of digesting all the information going forward, a 200-page document that I doubt the average employer will even have time to read through this holiday season, let alone ensure that they are one hundred per cent compliant by the time significant portions of this bill come into force in the new year.

As I hinted at earlier, this omnibus bill smokes of – yeah, we're talking about that, too – smacks of the government's Bill 17, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. I retraced myself back to places of business like the Oyen veterinary clinic, where the owner is actually Dr. Ruschkowski. She in her younger years used to have her family members running around the facility there. It was kind of like old home week when you went there.

The fix was in on that piece of legislation, as borne out by FOIP documents – to the people in the gallery, FOIP stands for freedom of information and protection of privacy; some use open slang letters, and they're not fit for this place – on the outcome of the workplace laws despite assurances of fulsome consultation with those affected.

My colleague from Little Bow has already talked about how we have heard from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and how much their member groups were concerned about the act. They also recommended that this bill get much more input and study in committee. I imagine that over the next while more individual stakeholder groups will also chime in, but with the unlikelihood of the government taking pause on this bill, those groups may not get their chance to be heard until well after the fact.

Mr. Speaker, that's why I believe that it's incumbent upon us to vote favourably for this referral and take the time to continue to consult and to hear concerns from stakeholders. After all, these businesses are the backbone of Alberta. While the much-maligned energy sector is the economic engine that drives this province, these small and medium-sized businesses help employ thousands of Albertans as well. As numerous members have already pointed out,

these businesses don't have an army of lawyers in-house or on retainer to delve into the complexities of these significant changes.

Did I mention that this is almost a 200-page piece of legislation and facts? If this is having Albertans' backs, then I shudder to think how they would feel if this government actually wished them ill will.

Mr. Speaker, this bill needs to go to committee for another, longer look and continued feedback. It is never the wrong tack to ensure that a piece of legislation that makes so many changes to how businesses must operate in order to comply – surely, a little more care can be taken. We simply don't know how these sweeping changes are going to change the economic reality that these businesses face, and we're hearing about that on a daily basis. As I happened to be returning to the constituency, at the gas bar in Hardisty a gentleman pulled in there and bought some gas and such and such. He said to the gas station attendant: with tax on tax on tax, I'm hoping I can make eight bucks today. I thought, "That's kind of an interesting comment," unprovoked, just a sidebar conversation.

After all, this government has once again failed to do a proper independent economic impact study. And for the people in the gallery, economic impact studies are something that many businesses do.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I encourage you to speak through the chair and not to the madding crowd.

Mr. Strankman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to include you and the citizens of Alberta. It's important.

They claim to have estimated the additional costs for the WCB to implement these changes at about \$94 million. However, this is hard to believe, given the broad changes proposed. While I can acknowledge that this bill contains some positive pieces, the concern is that these costly changes to the Workers' Compensation Act will at some point make the system unsustainable, Mr. Speaker. We're putting another burden on an already hurting business environment, which is certainly not in the best interests of workers or employers in the province of Alberta, people like the guests we have tonight in the Chamber.

I will briefly highlight some of the proposed changes to an already fragile economic climate. The cap on maximum insurable earnings through the WCB will be removed. Workers earning more than the cap will now be fully compensated for 90 per cent of their earnings. WCB claims will now include a \$90,000 fatality benefit. Stop-work orders may be issued on multiple work sites of an employer. Some businesses have multiple work sites, Mr. Speaker, and they're spread in various places throughout the constituency.

My biggest concern, Mr. Speaker, is how this affects small business, and I can't reiterate that enough. Still speaking through you but to Albertans and to the guests we have, there is very little time to adjust to their new responsibilities, very little time to fine-tune and become educated as to how to ensure they will become compliant with these new realities.

Mr. Speaker, I did in my preamble talk about small businesses, three of which I have in my constituency – there are more but three that I remember – and which, specifically, process bovines in simple, simplistic ways, but they all have safe methods of doing it. There are some that are self-driven, innovative changes that these facilities have created.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you were recently out and visited the devastation in the communities of Acadia Valley and Hilda as a result of fire, and in one location you were well aware of the deaths of cattle by the fire. But right beside where the cattle were kept was

a facility to safely load the animals, and that was all done by the farmer from the area.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I encourage you to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Strankman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

I'm asking: how are these changes going to affect Albertans' ability to continue to operate in a profitable manner? Many of these businesses simply don't have the ability, be it the time or the knowledge, to quickly determine how these changes will impact them. Some of this has been going on for hundreds of years in a safe, effective manner.

This is why this referral is desperately needed to protect these businesses. Mr. Speaker, even the Alberta Chambers of Commerce estimated that the changes introduced by this legislation may result in at least a 10 per cent increase in the total WCB premiums collected from Alberta employers. Haven't this government's policies done enough damage? How do they measure that? They haven't done an economic impact assessment. I would hope that they don't wish to further burden these entrepreneurs with additional costs and administrative burdens that they simply haven't had time to absorb.

The remedy, Mr. Speaker, I believe, is simple. We need to take the time to do this right and send this legislation to committee. I remember presenting a private member's bill that went to the Labour minister's committee, and we still haven't seen that. Is that the fear that the government has, that if we go to committee, it won't be resurrected, that it'll never see the light of day? I think that's an unfair comment. I think we're here trying to do the democratic right thing. In committee we would continue to do due diligence and make sure that those who are impacted by this legislation are not unduly harmed.

I make my argument, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to have everyone support this referral. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his motion for referral.

9:30

The Speaker: Any questions for the Member for Drumheller-Stettler? Bonnyville-Cold Lake under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, my colleague had brought up some good points about consultation. It appears from the press release that the government has consulted at least two people, at least two here. I'm going to go back to the press release, and I'm going to ask his opinion on the level of consultation that the government has done with these two individuals. The press release is Bill Would Improve Safety, Well-being of Albertans. I'd like to read the quotes here.

The proposed changes to the occupational health and safety . . . are generally in line with the oil and gas industry's best practices. Our objective as a safety association is to develop and support standards and best practices across the oil and gas industry and we see these changes as a positive step forward in advancing worker health and safety in Alberta.

This is from John Rhind, CEO of Energy Safety Canada.

The next quote is:

Even one tragedy – one fatality, one life-altering injury, one occupational disease – is too many. Threads of Life is dedicated to a world where these tragedies become morally, socially and economically unacceptable, so that all workers return home safe and healthy to their families. We support Alberta's steps to . . . move us as Canadians closer to that vision.

This is from Shirley Hickman, the executive director of Threads of Life.

This press release came out on November 27, 2017. Specifically, it was e-mailed out. This was actually what hit my constituency account at 3:30 p.m. on that Monday. This also coincides with the time that this bill was first introduced in the House, just before 3 o'clock. So we literally have half an hour between the government putting this bill down for its first reading – it's this thick, like, 200 pages long. Does the Member for Drumheller-Stettler believe that these individuals had been thoroughly consulted to the point where they could give these quotes saying that this is an incredible piece of legislation? That is my question. Does he think that half an hour is enough time to make this determination?

Mr. Strankman: Hopefully, I can respond in less than half an hour to that. I think the response that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake got was a reaction to an onerous piece of legislation, and that's why they're requesting, in my mind at least, that we would want to go forward with a process like our referral – and I would openly and irrefutably apologize to you, Mr. Speaker, for addressing members in our gallery here – because they have varied and different ways of working with the same processes. I mean, it's important that there are variables. Just like the member from Fort McMurray, who every time they approached a fire or whatever – it's not a cookie-cutter situation that they're involved in. There needs to be broad and consultative discussion to bring this forward.

We've seen this multiple times, that the government is in a hurry to process things and sometimes due diligence isn't done. That's all we're here for, to reinforce the request for action of due diligence and sending this to a committee.

The Speaker: Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, any members who wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the referral amendment for Bill 30 in second reading. A referral amendment is a device that we use in this Legislature to try and help create better legislation. It would be my firm conviction and my belief that every one of the legislators in this Legislature would desire to create a better piece of legislation. By referring to committee, we have the capacity to try and strengthen a piece of legislation by incurring some very robust discussion at the committee level. We have the capacity to call in different stakeholders and for members of the committee to be able to share different perspectives on the bill, to dig into the bill, and in a bill that is 147 pages long, there is indeed a great deal of material here that we could be digging into.

We want to ensure – and as an opposition it's a part of our job – that whatever legislation is passed in this House is good legislation. It's important to get the feedback of stakeholders. It's important to have the committee look at nonpartisan feedback and to create a balanced understanding of the piece of legislation under discussion and to be able to get that second body of sober thought, so to speak, through the committee process. There is no perfect bill – there rarely is – especially one that has as many parts as this. You know, when we take a look at a bill that has as much detail as this does, it's important for us to try and fix the flaws that have been identified by stakeholders, by the opposition, by Albertans in general. And when it's dealing with employer-employee relationships, it's time to maybe take some opportunity to reflect and to listen and to try and figure out how any of the internal flaws that may be in this bill could be corrected.

Mr. Speaker, debating legislation in this House is supposed to be done in a manner that allows all members to contribute fully to the discussion and to improve whatever the bill that is before us has

within it. You know, I guess one of the concerns that's been brought up – and I think it's a legitimate concern – is that this bill, an extremely lengthy piece of legislation, has been brought to this Legislature so late in the legislative session. This bill, I'm going to assume, took many, many months to produce and to bring forward. I'm sure there was a significant amount of work that was placed into this bill, and it would seem reasonable that the elected representatives of this province, the legislators of this province, would have the capacity to spend more than just a few hours looking at this bill, proposing amendments, looking to try and make this legislation better.

It begs the question: why not bring this legislation to this body much earlier? Why not in October or November, when we could have started to give more time to be able to pick this bill apart and to really give it the due diligence and the justice that it needs, Mr. Speaker? I would remind all of the members that this was supposed to be, this was scheduled to be the last week of the sitting of the House. To place this bill at this point in time, in what is supposed to be the last week of the House, I believe, does a disservice not only to Albertans and not only to this Legislature but also to the bill itself.

9:40

Now, this bill, in all of its complexity, introduces some pretty sweeping changes to both the workers' compensation and the occupational health and safety systems in Alberta. I believe that there are 147 pages in this bill. You know, when we take a look at this, it's going to take some time to go through this bill and take a look at the really incredible impact that it's going to have on our workers' compensation system and our occupational health and safety systems in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, these changes are going to impact virtually every single business across Alberta, and the impact is going to be far reaching. Therefore, any changes that we're going to make need to be extensively considered, very carefully considered before they are introduced.

You know, I'm going to speak a little later in my speech here about a constituent that came to me on Friday. I spent a significant amount of time on Friday afternoon with this gentleman. He was so upset that I had to come and meet him again on Sunday afternoon. This is the book that he gave me. It's the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, Regulations, and Code Handbook*. This is the book that he had, and you can see some of the places where he's identified areas of concern in it.

One of the things that really surprised me was the intensity of his concern. I can see him now in my mind's eye, Mr. Speaker. This book is sitting on the table between us, and he's pounding it with his hand, and he's calling this the Bible. We understand, I think, the analogy that he's trying to make here in that it's a very important piece of legislation. In his mind, outside of a few things in this *Occupational Health and Safety Act, Regulations, and Code Handbook*, outside of a couple of changes that he would make, he said that this is an amazing document, one that should not be tinkered with, one that should not be casually set aside for the piece of legislation that has been brought before us. Now, I would suggest that any member in this House would not and should not be opposed to taking the time to thoroughly study this piece of legislation, especially when we can see that for many of our constituents this is considered to be a very, very important document.

Now, we are here, at least in theory, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, to put forward the best possible legislation, and I would suggest that taking this to committee is going to help forward that progress to make sure that we will get the best possible legislation. We owe it to Albertans, we owe it to Alberta employers, and we

owe it to the employees that are in this province to make sure that we get the best possible legislation we can.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Now, as I said, I met with a concerned constituent in my town. His job is to work in the oil industry as a part of safety. When we were talking, Madam Speaker – all of a sudden you’ve gone from a Mr. Speaker to a Madam Speaker; that’s quite a feat – one of the things that this constituent brought to my attention was a concern that he had with regard to section 31(1) of Bill 30. It reads:

A worker may refuse to work or to do particular work at a work site if the worker believes on reasonable grounds that there is a dangerous condition at the work site or that the work constitutes a danger to the worker’s health and safety or to the health and safety of another worker or another person.

Well, his concern is that this piece of legislation, Bill 30, is actually less protective than what is already in the Occupational Health and Safety Act, regulations, and code. If we go to section 35, on the existence of imminent danger, it reads:

- (1) No worker shall
 - (a) carry out any work if, on reasonable and probable grounds, the worker believes that there exists an imminent danger to the health or safety of that worker.

His point, to me, was that there’s a significant difference in the language when we use the word “shall” or “may,” that when you use the word “shall,” it is an obligation. You must perform this. You must as a worker. “No worker shall carry out any work” versus “a worker may refuse.” “May” gives the worker some latitude, an option. They can choose to or they can choose not to. He was quite concerned that this bill is actually an inferior piece of legislation when it comes to protecting workers.

I would suggest that perhaps it would be good for us to go to committee, where we could take a look at and could compare these and where we could see if this individual, who is far more educated on this piece of legislation than I am right now, could come to the committee and could give his expertise to us as legislators, and at the end of the day we would have a far better opportunity to put forward positive legislative work coming out of this bill.

Madam Speaker, my constituent also pointed out some other interesting pieces in this bill. For one, he pointed out that there is a potential that if an employee did not want to do a particular task, they could simply say that the work is dangerous. Now, I think that that might be something that we need to take to a committee to see if there’s any validity in that. He believed that in this bill no other employee can perform that work until after a full assessment has been done to see if indeed that’s dangerous and that this leaves the system open to abuse, where an employee may just not want to perform the task and therefore say that it is too dangerous.

Madam Speaker, I would suggest that by the way the government here is mumbling and grumbling, perhaps we need to take this to committee. Obviously, they believe that this might not be a scenario that is worthy of discussion, yet this man, who, I would argue, probably knows a whole lot more about the Occupational Health and Safety Act than I do or probably even some of the members on the government side, could come and give us his interpretation of why he believes that’s a reasonable position to take. I, for one, would like to be able to hear him go further down this path to see if it is indeed a reasonable point, and I would argue that it probably is a very reasonable point.

I would suggest that taking this to a review by the committee could at least allow us the capacity to ensure that whatever legislation we are passing, it’s weighted equally so that all parties can thrive and so that all parties have the capacity to ensure that there is safety in the workplace.

You know, strengthening legislation is one of the key reasons that we’re here as an opposition. We are here to help the government and to make sure that they provide the best legislation for Albertans, and strengthening the legislation should be one of the key objectives, I would argue, for debate in this House. It’s one of the reasons why we go through all of this effort, why the government has gone through the effort of putting together this piece of legislation, why we have studied it, why we have come up with suggestions for how we can make it better, so when we . . .

9:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cyr: I was very riveted by my colleague’s enactment of how his constituent was very passionate on OH and S standards, and I would love to hear some more on what his constituent had to say to him about OH and S guidelines.

The Acting Speaker: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, as we were saying, debate within a committee setting allows for perhaps a more robust discussion than what we can sometimes have in this Chamber. We all come to this Chamber and to committees with different points of view, with different backgrounds, different experiences. It’s one of the joys, I would suggest and I would argue, of being in this Legislature and being on the various committees that we all sit on.

You know, I had the opportunity to travel down in California for a while last winter, and I got into a conversation with a lady. Believe it or not, Madam Speaker, you do a lot of things for love in this world, and one of the things that I do for love in this world with my wife is that I sometimes have to go to knitting stores with her. There are a lot of places I would like to be, but knitting stores are not necessarily one of them, okay?

So here I am sitting in this knitting store, and I am striking up a conversation with a couple of ladies who are busily knitting away and talking about the finer points of how to do this stitch or that stitch. They said, “What is it that you do?” I said, you know, “I’m a Member of the Legislative Assembly.” Well, most Californians don’t really understand what a Legislative Assembly is, and they’re really not too sure about the finer points of the parliamentary system of government, but they got talking about their frustration with the system of government in the United States. One of the things that they said, Madam Speaker, was that in the last race for governorship in California the loser of that election spent \$65 million, and they were quite shocked.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I know we’re under 29(2)(a) and that it’s comments or questions, but you usually need to speak to the referral, so if we could get there, please.

Mr. Smith: We are getting to the referral, Madam Speaker. My story is riveting.

So here we are. We’re sitting in this knitting store, and we’re listening to these ladies, and they were really shocked when I told them, you know, that I raised a grand total of \$29,000 to run in the last election and that I spent \$22,000. They couldn’t believe how little we spent here.

But one of the points that I made out of that whole thing was this. One of the results of that was that anyone in this fair province of ours, this great province of ours, can probably afford to run for election. It means that the people that get elected into this Legislature often come from a wide range of diverse points of

view and businesses. You don't have to simply be from the rich elite.

Mrs. Littlewood: Yeah, on this side.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Yeah, well, on this side as well. Trust me on this one: I bet you that if we looked at our bank accounts, mine would have less in it than yours does.

When we take a look at this diverse group of people that we have here, taking and referring this to committee allows us the capacity to bring that diversity in this province, through the Legislature and through the people that have been elected, to this piece of legislation. I would argue that it's a very healthy thing to bring this to committee.

Now, I am sure that we all love a good debate, and part of getting the extensive stakeholder feedback is that it allows the stakeholders to bring forth their opinions and to spur the debate about whether or not this bill is a fine piece of legislation or not. Madam Speaker, I would argue that we need to be willing to use the committee structure that we have built into our system to be able to allow effective and nonpartisan committee work to take place and to build the best legislation possible. We need to ensure that, at the end of the day, we've looked at things like the joint committee training program and protocol.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just a reminder to all members of the House – I know we're getting a little bit late into the evening – that we are on a referral amendment. We are not on the bill as of right now. I would encourage all members to speak directly to the referral, not to the bill, please.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral? Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know what? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is a hard act to follow, but I will try. You know, all we're saying on this side of the House is to refer this bill to the committee so that the committee can engage all the stakeholders, like we have seen with the daylight savings time bill, right? In that bill we had our airline industry, our NHL teams, all those different stakeholders that would have been impacted by changes to daylight savings time. They came, presented their cases, and the committee made a decision.

We look at the track record of this government. Carbon tax: no consultation, tax. Bill 6: no consultation. Right? I mean, we can talk about those things.

Mr. Nixon: Rural crime.

Mr. Gill: Rural crime: again, no consultation.

This is the opportunity right now. If this government really claims to be on the side of Albertans, there's nothing to hide. Let's engage the people whom you're trying to help, and let's hear from them. That's all we're trying to say. Let's hear from them. You're claiming to be helping them, but you don't want to listen to them. You don't want to give them the opportunity to tell us what would help them.

What is the intention behind it? What is the hidden agenda here?

An Hon. Member: Control.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Gill: Control. That's what I heard. I don't know.

With that, I ask all members to, you know, please consider this and send this bill to the committee.

I'd also like to move a motion that we adjourn debate on this bill, please. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:58 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Babcock	Hanson	Nixon
Bilous	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Hoffman	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Ceci	Jansen	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Schmidt
Cyr	Littlewood	Sigurdson
Dach	Loewen	Smith
Dang	Loyola	Starke
Drever	Luff	Strankman
Eggen	MacIntyre	Sucha
Ellis	Malkinson	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Gill	McKitrick	Woollard
Goehring	McLean	Yao

Totals: For – 51 Against – 0

[Motion to adjourn debate carried unanimously]

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members for the warm desk thumping. I'm pleased to rise and move Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, for second reading.

This bill is an important part of our government's commitment to make life better and more affordable for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, consumer spending plays a strong role in Alberta's economy. It makes up more than 4 per cent of Alberta's GDP. In fact, statistics show that so far in 2017 the retail trade sector grossed more than \$53 billion. Given the significance of consumer spending to our economy, it is vital that consumers have confidence when dealing with businesses. This is especially important now that Alberta's economy is looking up and we are expected to lead the country in economic growth this year. Our government is taking action to help businesses attract and retain customers and grow the economy.

So far our government has made several practical changes that help protect consumers from unfair practices and businesses from unfair competition. We've put a stop to unsolicited door-to-door sales of energy-related contracts and products such as furnaces. We've stood up for vulnerable Albertans and put an end to predatory lending in our province by introducing Canada's lowest interest rate and the country's strongest protections for payday loan borrowers. We also undertook a comprehensive review of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council. Our government also introduced stronger protections for condo buyers. Because a home

and a car are the two biggest investments any Albertan will make, we believe consumers and their assets deserve protections.

Mr. Speaker, my department is also hard at work investigating and taking enforcement actions against unscrupulous businesses and individuals. Scammers hurt consumers and businesses alike. Our enforcement actions help support a level playing field in the marketplace and minimize losses for consumers and honest businesses.

Mr. Speaker, the realities of the marketplace call for more action. The current consumer protection legislation was put in place in 2000 and has not been significantly updated since 2005, yet our marketplace continues to evolve. Advancements in technology led to and continue to cause unprecedented changes in consumer behaviour and in the way businesses operate. Additionally, the availability and volume of information, some of questionable validity, has put consumers at risk by challenging their ability to make well-informed decisions.

This government's ability to respond to marketplace issues is also challenged. A prime example is the difficulty of protecting consumers in the online world, whether it's enforcing our laws against online suppliers from other jurisdictions or protecting consumers who post online reviews from potential lawsuits designed to intimidate them. Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that our laws are relevant and enforceable so that consumers and businesses have confidence in Alberta's marketplace.

During our consultations over the summer months Albertans told us that they want to be protected when shopping or signing contracts, and businesses told us that they want to compete on a level playing field. That's exactly what Bill 31 will deliver. Bill 31 will bring in smart rules that support a trusted marketplace, a marketplace where consumers are confident to spend their money, and that's good for business.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 31 proposes to rename the Fair Trading Act to the consumer protection act. This will help us reaffirm our commitment to consumer protection and better communicate the intent of the act. Further, Bill 31 proposes a plain-language preamble to be added to the act. The preamble will help explain the intention and purpose of the act. The preamble could also be used by courts as necessary to interpret any provisions in the act that are potentially unclear.

10:20

Another proposed amendment is the introduction of a consumer bill of rights. This will help create awareness of consumer rights and responsibilities and support consumers in making informed purchasing decisions. Bill 31 also proposes improving consumer protections in priority areas as identified in the consultation with Albertans as well as business and consumer stakeholders. This includes new protections for consumers to help ensure a straightforward car-buying experience and to ensure that they get what they pay for when their vehicles are being serviced or repaired.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. He has done some excellent groundwork which laid the foundation for this part of Bill 31. We have taken what we learned – and we learned a lot – from Bill 203 and implemented the recommendations from the committee report by consulting with industry stakeholders.

We are also proposing new rules for online ticket sales to help ensure that Albertans have a fair shot at seeing their favourite performers, additional protections for borrowers of high-cost credit products to support a safer borrowing environment and encourage responsible use of financial products, transformation of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council into a statutory corporation subject to the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act – this move will

better protect the interests of consumers and ensure integrity in the automotive industry – and new protections for pet owners, which will enable Albertans to find the best veterinary services with full confidence that the prices will not contain any surprises.

With respect to these protections for pet owners I want to be very clear about what the proposed legislation does and does not include. First, the amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act will only allow vets to advertise their fees. This does not require vets to advertise their fees. Rather, they simply have the option to advertise if they so choose. Second, the amendments will only apply to domestic animals. It will not apply to livestock or any animal used for the production of food.

Bill 31 also proposes new provisions in the act to protect consumers from unfair lawsuits and other intimidating tactics, expand grounds for recourse when consumers suffer losses, and enable the government to act in the public interest and proactively release information about pursuing bad actors. These provisions mean that unilateral amendments to contracts will not be allowed. It goes without saying that consumers have a right to know all of the terms and conditions of their purchases or services that they pay for. This provision will help ensure that consumers are fully informed, and it will reduce the potential to take advantage of consumers. This change is intended to establish consent standards and to allow businesses and consumers greater flexibility when making decisions in relation to contract changes.

Next, mandatory arbitration clauses in contracts will not be allowed. Mr. Speaker, some businesses will impose a condition in contracts preventing consumers from using the courts for dispute resolution. As such, consumers are required to use a mandatory arbitration process, with the arbitrator chosen by the business. Consumers deserve better. That's why our proposal prohibits mandatory arbitration and allows consumers a choice in their dispute resolution avenue.

Clauses that prevent consumers from posting negative business reviews will also not be allowed in contracts. Additionally, consumers who file complaints in good faith or who issue a negative review will be afforded a new right of defence against lawsuits intended to have consumers withdraw those negative reviews.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the majority of Alberta businesses provide great products and services to their customers. Often online reviews come in handy in helping other customers find those reputable businesses. All consumers benefit from having the information that will help them make the very best decision on where to spend their money. That's why consumers should be able to openly review good or bad service. This is an essential part of a successful marketplace.

However, where bad service calls for a bad review or a complaint, consumers should not fear unwarranted retaliation from the business. Yet we've heard from Albertans that businesses sometimes use lawsuits as a method of intimidation for consumers who notify Service Alberta of alleged unfair business practices. This is why we're adding this level of protection, specifically for consumers who file complaints in good faith or post honest reviews as a way to help others make well-informed decisions.

We're also proposing that consumers have an expanded right to sue in instances of losses. This provision gives consumers options for recourse when they experience losses from business behaviour not constituting an unfair marketplace practice under the act. For example, a business may not disclose key terms on a gift card. Or, in another example, a business may not meet contract cancellation standards under the legislation. While these actions may result in consumer losses and are violations of our current laws, these actions in and of themselves are not considered unfair practices, and

consumers do not currently have a legislative right of action against these types of violations even in instances of experiencing losses. Mr. Speaker, we want to fix this because Albertans deserve a government that looks out for their interests.

Finally, it is proposed to allow the minister or delegated authority to publicly release the information about charges and convictions with liability protection from releasing such information. The legislation does not currently allow us to release the information about businesses that have been charged or convicted of offences. This can result in consumers unknowingly entering into contracts with potentially unscrupulous businesses. Making this information publicly available will help consumers make well-informed decisions and minimize their risk of losses.

Mr. Speaker, as a whole, all of the amendments contained in Bill 31 are intended to build a trusted marketplace by strengthening consumer protections, enhancing business and consumer confidence, and reducing the risk of consumer losses. I am proud to move forward Bill 31 as a practical approach to balance consumer and business interests in the marketplace, expand protections in priority marketplace issues, and level the playing field between businesses. In the end, this will lead to a better deal between consumers and businesses, which will lead to increased consumer confidence. We all know that increased consumer confidence is good for our economy.

I am confident that Albertans will support this progress on improving our consumer protection laws. I look forward to debate on this bill, answering questions, and providing further explanation so that all members of this House have adequate information to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. It's important to begin at the beginning, and that's what I'm about to do now.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Service Alberta doesn't need legislation to legislate the ability to create a consumer bill of rights. If the minister and her government want to draft a consumer bill of rights, it's well within her ministerial power to do so. There is no need to include this legislation except as a way to distract from the less savoury things that they're putting forward here. Don't get me wrong. I have no problem with a consumer bill of rights, especially if one is written in plain language. What I have a problem with is the fact that the minister seems to need to create legislation for every aspect of her job.

But let's start actually talking about some of the consumer protection measures that the government is hoping to bring in, Mr. Speaker. Now, I don't know the last time you went online to purchase tickets for a concert or a game or some sort of entertainment, but I don't think that there's a person here who would deny that it can be extremely difficult to obtain any tickets these days. This bill purports to ensure that more customers and fans can actually get their hands on a set of tickets before they are otherwise snapped up. Additionally, the bill allows for consumers to seek reimbursement when they are the recipient of invalid tickets.

This is actually a decent idea, and I congratulate the government on seeking to correct this. However, despite the fact that the government says that legal action can be taken against individuals and companies using bots outside of Alberta, the reality is that it just isn't that simple. This language provides consumers with a false sense of security, which I thought was what this government was trying to protect against.

10:30

In December 2016 President Obama signed the Better Online Ticket Sales, or BOTS, Act, banning all use of bots in ticket sales. But there are still bots, and it won't be so simple to get one's money back. An article in the *Economist* states: "Federal law enforcement may be unable to hunt down bot-operators based outside America. And the scale of the racket is daunting. Last year bots made 5bn attempts to buy tickets on Ticketmaster, at a rate of roughly 10,000 a minute." Mr. Speaker, federal law enforcement in the United States is unlikely to be able to track down the bots that this government also hopes to crack down on.

It is, as with this government, a worthy endeavour, but we need to be honest with ourselves as well. If American law enforcement, the most powerful country in the world, can't do it, how do we think we are going to be able to succeed at this? This is not downplaying Alberta in any way but, rather, being honest with our limitations. This legislation is unenforceable, and by legislating an unenforceable law, we're not doing anyone any favours.

But, Mr. Speaker, let's move on because there's plenty to talk about in this bill. I must say that I'm concerned with the apparent lack of respect for what members are here to decide. A year and a half ago Bill 203 came forward, and the bill was referred to committee by the members of the Assembly. After receiving submissions on the subject from numerous concerned stakeholders, the committee informed the Legislature that they recommended that the bill not proceed, yet here we are seeing it again. This clearly represents a backdoor attempt by the government to bring in legislation that was panned by stakeholders and voted down by members of this Assembly.

The problem here is that many industry associations and many business owners already operate under best practices. Unfortunately, those that don't may not change to fit the legislation. But customers know, Mr. Speaker. They take their business elsewhere. You can't legislate behaviour no matter how much this government may want to.

Now, the next area is a bit different, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure you know I am talking about AMVIC. I mentioned being honest with ourselves earlier, and I think it's important that we do so again. The honest truth is that AMVIC has struggled over the years in a number of different areas. There have been complaints, there have been reviews, and there have been investigations. There's nothing to sugar-coat here. I'll be doing a disservice to everyone if I tried. AMVIC has had a turbulent past.

When this government came into power, the minister did some work on this, and I know that at least one of my colleagues assisted her in various ways. It's important that we work together because that's when Albertans truly benefit. The minister has strong feelings about AMVIC, even going as far as calling it a gong show earlier this year. Those comments followed a 2016 report stemming from a review commissioned by the minister in August 2016. This report, by George Cuff, was thorough and pulled no punches. In the end, there were a few recommendations that were submitted. Well, a few more than a few, or a few more than a couple. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Cuff put forward 23 recommendations, and this minister accepted all 23 of them. What's interesting in all of this is that in December the minister accepted all those recommendations – there's a news release that confirms this – and in March of this year the minister said, quote: we're finally on the right track. End quote. We're finally on the right track. AMVIC has been making progress on these recommendations.

The minister is aware of this, yet now, a year after the report came out and after AMVIC started to make changes for the better, the minister is pulling the plug on all that work and pulling AMVIC

under her direct control. It doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker. Why, when according to the minister we're finally on the right track? Why, when progress is made, do we stop and go in a different direction? Why does the minister throw more uncertainty into the air with a metaphorical gut punch to AMVIC? What's the point of accepting the recommendations and watching progress being made only to pull the rug out from underneath the restructuring AMVIC?

If this was the only plan she wanted to take, it would have been wiser to have done it two years ago rather than going through the restructuring phase. Instead, we are throwing Mr. Cuff's work and the report out the window, and we're doing the same with AMVIC, that has already showed so much that they've accomplished. It is insulting to all their good work, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking of insults, I don't think it's an overstatement for me to suggest that including the veterinary profession in a consumer protection bill is seen as a huge insult and slight against the profession. Mr. Speaker, I have tried to understand why veterinarians have been lumped into this bill, and I just can't. I just can't understand it. It's an affront to veterinarians everywhere that they are being treated as unsavoury characters who can't be trusted with their work. If you ask the public, this is just truly, incredibly insulting to veterinarians across Alberta.

A simple look at their annual report shows the lack of complaints. In case you're unaware, Mr. Speaker, allow me to tell you the statistical truth. In the ABVMA's 2016 annual report it reported that there were 23 – 23 – written letters of complaint received. Twenty-three. In total, there were 26 complaint cases, and that's based on 3,211 members. The information is all right there. They've even done the math for us: .8 per cent of registered members were the subject of complaints in 2016. That's down from 1 per cent in 2015, and it was only 1 per cent in 2014, too. Let's be clear: those are complaints in relation to the number of members, not to the number of interactions.

This is not a profession that is in crisis. This is not a profession that is vastly in need of help. There is no need for government interference here, and it is a disgrace that this government is choosing to overreach in this area. The question is: what does this government have against veterinarians? For what reason have they embarked on this vendetta? It doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't add up. I'm disappointed that the government right now has done this. As an Albertan I think we all can see that, and we expect better from this minister.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleagues for their co-operative effort in allowing me to speak to this bill, Bill 31. I'd like to start by saying that earlier today I contacted the office of the Ethics Commissioner with regard to a specific question on my participation in this debate. The Ethics Commissioner has advised me to state the following: both my wife and I are currently not actively practising as veterinarians although we both hold licensure in the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association; however, we do own a minority share in a business that has property that rents to a veterinary clinic amongst other tenants. I have disclosed this information to the Ethics Commissioner, who has advised that I may participate in these debates and vote on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to start by saying that I'm in general agreement with a lot of the principles of this bill. How can one argue against consumer confidence and consumer protection? I agree when the minister says that consumer confidence is vitally important. Having run a successful small business for close to 30

years, I recognize that consumer confidence is everything. The ability of people to trust me as a trusted professional is the greatest asset that I had in my practice, and I would do nothing to jeopardize that asset. I think that is a statement that is true of all veterinarians.

10:40

It's interesting, when we were reading through Bill 31, how the government in each case is addressing, you know, areas where there is public concern with people operating on what I would call the fringe of otherwise reputable business ventures. You can imagine my shock and surprise and that of my colleagues when we get to the last three pages of the bill, where the veterinary profession comes under direct attack by this government. I suppose I should thank the minister. Nothing else I've ever seen has galvanized our industry in the same way that this bill has, and I should thank the minister that she has unified both the registered veterinary technologists, who were admitted to the profession thanks to Bill 13 from the Minister of Labour, and veterinarians, some practising for only a very short period of time, some still students, others who've practised for 40-plus years and are now retired. It's a little bit offensive when our proud profession is lumped in with ticket scalpers, curbbers, and loan sharks, Mr. Speaker, but that's what this bill does.

When it comes to the consultation process, Mr. Speaker, the consultation process on this bill consisted of two phone calls that basically could be summarized as: brace yourself; this is what is coming. That is not responsible consultation, and it certainly is a far cry from what we enjoyed working together with the Labour minister on Bill 13.

My objections, Mr. Speaker, to this bill are fourfold, and they all deal with the veterinary profession. First of all, I object to the clauses with regard to informed consent and prior fee disclosure. Second, I object to the clauses dealing with advertising by veterinarians, specifically the advertising and publication of fees. Third, I object to the broad, unlimited, and vague powers that are given to cabinet in setting regulations under section 48.3(1) and giving precedence to those regulations over regulations made by the ABVMA council, as is stated in section 48.3(2), which, in essence, strips the veterinary profession of the privilege of self-governance that we have earned and discharged faithfully for over a century, since this province was less than one year old. Finally, my fourth objection is to the lack of proper consultation with the profession.

Let me go through these individually. First of all, informed consent. The provisions in this act, specifically 48.1 and 48.3(1)(c) and (d), requiring informed consent are completely and totally redundant. Informed consent and prior disclosure of fees are already mandated by the bylaws of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, and the use of proper consent forms for all procedures is an audit requirement under the practice inspection and practice standards requirements of our profession. Our practices are regularly and routinely audited by inspectors that go all around the province. I know this because I know a number of the auditors, including the president of the association, who has been a consultant and practice auditor.

To suggest for even a moment that veterinarians perform procedures on their patients without owner consent is not only completely wrong but deeply offensive to veterinarians in our province. Yet when this piece of legislation was introduced, that is exactly what three different media outlets – and I will table their news stories – stated in their news articles. That was the impression given. The impression was given that currently veterinarians do not have to obtain informed consent from their clients, that veterinarians do not have to disclose the fees for procedures from their clients, and that now something new will happen that will be

required of veterinarians. That is wrong, it is false, and it casts our profession in a very negative light and lumps us in, as I said before, with ticket scalpers, loan sharks, and curbers.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as you can probably guess, I'm passionate about our profession. Well, you don't work at something as long as I have and not get passionate, not just about our profession and about our clients and about our patients but our contribution to Alberta.

You know, I'm not alone. I received this in one of the hundreds of e-mails that I have received – and I know that most of the members opposite and most of the members on this side have heard from my colleagues – from a registered veterinary technologist. She said:

I am a veterinary technologist and have worked in the veterinary profession for over 25 years. We have always disclosed fees for administering treatments as this is a provision already existing in the practice inspection and practice standards bylaw and is just plain good common sense to avoid conflict with our clients and ensure that we are providing the best care possible for our pets.

Now, what did we just hear from the minister? We heard from the minister that the goal of these provisions is so that they could choose the best veterinary services. Choosing the best veterinary services involves proper consultation, proper disclosure, and obtaining informed consent. There is no question about that. Mr. Speaker, that provision within this act is completely unnecessary and redundant. It's already there.

Section (2), advertising fees for procedures. You know, this is an issue that has been discussed by veterinarians throughout the course of my career, and I will say that each and every time that it has come up within our association, our members, acting together, debating the issue together, have rejected the advertising of fees and the publishing of fees as being unprofessional and the potential for leading to commodification of veterinary services.

Mr. Speaker, this has been tried elsewhere. It was tried a couple of decades ago in British Columbia and resulted in the almost total implosion of the association. Veterinarians started undercutting veterinarians, not only started undercutting prices, but more alarmingly they started undercutting the procedures.

There are certain things, Mr. Speaker, in veterinary medicine that you can do to reduce the costs of providing, especially, a surgical procedure, but they are not in the best interest of the patient. The people who are the best judges of what is in the best interest of the patient are the people who have been trained, in some cases for eight or more years, to become veterinarians, who are licensed, who require continuing education to keep up their skills. They're the ones who are in the best position to decide what is in the best interest of the patient and then to communicate that to their clients. This bill takes that away from veterinarians and puts it in the hands of cabinet. That is wrong.

The jurisdictions that have tried that, British Columbia and Ontario and also a number of the states in the United States, in all cases wish that they could turn back and remove the advertising of fees. Veterinarians don't want to advertise fees, and the few that do, Mr. Speaker, have always been voted down by the vast majority, who feel that it does not lead to a more professional veterinary association.

Mr. Speaker, just choosing your veterinarian based on the lowest price, just like it's wrong to choose the contractor for the Calgary cancer centre based on the lowest price, is wrong. It does not necessarily get you the best product or the best service, and if it's right for the construction of buildings, surely then it is also right for the selection of obtaining veterinary care.

Another quote from a registered veterinarian technologist:

In my experience people would rather go to a Veterinarian who they trust than shopping for the cheapest option. The public already has choices and can use whomever they wish to care for their pets. I would hate to see animal care reduced to a dollar figure versus what is best for an individual patient and their care givers.

Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the Pandora's box of fee advertising and fee publishing, which has been tried in other jurisdictions, would be a mistake.

Mr. Speaker, veterinarians have a duty of care. This brings me to my third point. This bill would place that duty of care in the hands of cabinet. I ask the Health minister: do you feel qualified to decide whether there should be a regulation as to whether a two-year-old collie pup should be treated with ivermectin for internal parasites? I ask the Infrastructure minister: do you feel qualified to decide whether a six-year-old cat suffering from osteoarthritis should be treated with acetaminophen? I ask the Finance minister, who I know is a horse-racing fan: if you are presented with a 1,200-pound thoroughbred stallion who is showing signs of abdominal pain, would you feel comfortable deciding on whether you should advise to have the horse's gallbladder removed?

10:50

Well, Mr. Speaker, in all three of those examples it's absurd to expect members of cabinet to know what the best course of action is. But if they were to answer yes to those three questions, in the first two cases, the collie pup and the cat, it would result in the death of the patient. In the third case, well, that was a bit of a trick question for the Minister of Finance. Horses don't have gallbladders.

But, Mr. Speaker, I don't expect the Minister of Finance to know that, and I don't expect cabinet to be able to make regulations for the veterinary profession. They are not qualified. Since 1906, since the very first veterinary profession act, cabinet has had final approval on every regulation and every bylaw passed by the Veterinary Medical Association. They have final say on anything we pass, so they still have that power. This bill would turn that power over first to cabinet, and then it says: in consultation with the association.

Well, let's talk for a moment about consultation. Consultation on this particular bill was shameful. What was so alarming was that it was such a departure from what we enjoyed during the lead-up to Bill 13, which was in May 2016, after months of consultation with the Minister of Labour, who, by the way, is responsible for the Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, not the Minister of Service Alberta. After months of consultation the introduction of Bill 13 resulted in the incorporation of registered veterinary technologists into our profession, a very positive step, one that has been embraced within our profession. It has brought a unity within our profession that I have certainly enjoyed, and I thank the Minister of Labour for her respectful consultation on that issue.

Then this summer, when our association learned that there was a survey going around asking questions about veterinarians, letters were sent to both the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Service Alberta. In mid-August the association president waited two and a half months to hear back from the Minister of Service Alberta. That letter, which arrived barely a month ago, on the 2nd of November, stated, and I quote: further consultation and engagement with industry stakeholders will be necessary to develop the details of any potential legislative or regulatory amendments. Where is that consultation, Minister? The truth is that it didn't happen. It didn't happen. There were two phone calls from the ministry office, and all requests to meet with the Minister of Service Alberta went unanswered. Mr. Speaker, two phone calls are supposed to be the

basis of consultation to turn the veterinary profession completely on its ear and to reverse over 100 years of operation.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we talk about consumer confidence. Veterinarians are one of the most trusted professions in Canada. A survey last year indicated that we're the third-most trusted profession in Canada, behind only nurses and farmers, at 87 per cent. By comparison, politicians only have support from 23 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Strankman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. It's marvellous to hear the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster talk so eloquently about his former profession. I was wondering. He's missed out on a couple of words, I think. He hasn't talked yet about due diligence and care and compassion that are demonstrated by the industry, and I'd appreciate it if he'd elaborate on that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we take the responsibility for due diligence very, very seriously. There is no question in my mind that the best people to discharge that due diligence are, in fact, veterinarians. If we were to ask Albertans: whom do you trust in terms of taking care of the animal population of our province? Whom do you trust in making laws and making regulations that determine cases of animal welfare? Do you trust a group of politicians, who have a trust level of 23 per cent, or do you trust veterinarians, who have a trust level of 87 per cent? I should point out that in Alberta it's even higher. It's 93 per cent in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, to suggest that there is a problem here is not true, and to suggest that there's been consultation is also not true. But that's what they've been told by the minister. For example, one of the constituents who wrote to one constituency office was told:

During this consultation process we met with the AVMA and other industry stakeholders. We have also heard from ordinary Albertans who told us they want to be better informed when looking for veterinary services for their pets. That's why we're proposing reasonable new rules requiring fee disclosures that are in line with other provinces like B.C. and Ontario.

Fee disclosure has been in place in Alberta for years.

And then to another person who wrote to an NDP constituency office:

Thanks for the e-mail. My understanding is that the government did consult with the AVMA and that the elements of Bill 31 were a compromise negotiated with the association. If this is not correct, please let me know.

I'm letting the member know that it's not correct. The association did not agree to Bill 31, and it will not agree to the provisions that turn our association and lump it in with used-car salesmen, ticket scalpers, and loan sharks.

Mr. Speaker, I received in the last three days, as this is yet another one of these bills that is being jammed through at the end of session, hundreds of e-mail correspondence from members, but the one that really struck me was one from a veterinarian who has only been in practice for three years. He's a veterinarian practising in central Alberta. He wrote:

I find these proposals very invasive and infuriating. We are an honest profession, which is full of good-hearted, hardworking, and compassionate people. Following through with the changes proposed by Bill 31 without consulting members of our industry will harm our profession. This is another example of this government's ignorant overstepping without proper due diligence. This makes me very upset. I feel this is a step in the

wrong direction, which will ultimately misguide the public to value price over quality.

I strongly urge our government to retract these amendments.

This is a misstep which will shift the focus of veterinary medicine away from providing the highest standards of care.

Mr. Speaker, we don't want to go down that road. We don't have to go down that road. This government is trying to fix a problem that doesn't exist. You heard the statistics on complaints. I sat for years on the discipline tribunal and hardly had anything to do. Veterinarians are an honourable profession, and when things go wrong, we do our very best to make it right with our clients.

Mr. Speaker, I'm deeply offended by this bill, specifically the provisions for the Veterinary Profession Act, but I know that we will have another opportunity to discuss it, so at this point I would move to adjourn debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:58 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	McLean
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carlier	Hoffman	Payne
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jansen	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Loyola	Sigurdson
Drever	Luff	Starke
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Goehring	McKitrick	Woollard

Against the motion:

Cyr	Hanson	Smith
Ellis	MacIntyre	Strankman
Gill	Nixon	Yao

Totals: For – 39 Against – 9

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

Mr. Gottfried moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 4: Mr. Gill]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, we were talking about Bill 30 and the referral of this bill to the committee so that we can engage all the stakeholders and make changes based on what they

tell us. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster was telling the cabinet ministers that they're not specialists at their jobs, that they don't know how to do the surgeries. I think the people who best know how to do their work are the people who are in those professions. So why don't we bring those stakeholders... [interjections] You won't. I will. Trust me.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, continue.

Mr. Gill: The issue is this, that if we don't bring the stakeholders together and we don't listen to them, how can we, like, make a constructive bill?

Again, it's going back to the same thing. You know, the government claims that they have the backs of Albertans. Yes, you do: the carbon tax without any consultation, without any clue in the last election, and now it's going up again 50 per cent in another month, basically. We had Bill 6: no consultation on that. I don't know. Basically, on every bill that we had, there was no consultation with the exception of the daylight saving time bill, which was finally... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are now on second reading of Bill 30 and the referral amendment. If we could please focus on the referral and listen to the speaker, please.

Mr. Gill: How it was done on daylight savings time, I think, was a great example of how we can send this bill to the committee and hear from all the stakeholders to make the right decision. We're trying to do the right thing for Albertans, whom we're all here for. Every member, every single one of us, has the responsibility towards our constituents to represent them in the best way we can. If this is our duty, why aren't we performing our duty? Why are we trying to hide away from the truth? Let's engage them. Let's engage the stakeholders, right?

This bill is making changes to the WCB system, to the OH and S Act. I mean, the list can go on and on and on. I don't think the minister has talked to even a safety company personally yet, right? They wouldn't know unless they engaged with somebody.

Every time we ask the government side to do something, all we're saying is – and I know you're not going to listen to our side; we get that – to at least listen to Albertans, to at least engage them. Send it to the committee. Let's do the whole tour like we did with daylight savings time, with the town hall meetings in different parts of the city, in different parts of the province, and hear from Albertans. But the government doesn't want to do it. Why does the government not want to do this? Like, what are they trying to hide from Albertans? My question is this: how can we serve our constituents better if we're not engaging them?

You know, we have occupational health and safety. It's a repeal and rewrite of the existing Occupational Health and Safety Act. Why are we doing this thing? These questions will be answered when we engage the stakeholders.

I'm going to keep on going back to the same point. I know the members on the opposite side are probably saying that I keep on saying the same thing, but apparently they're not getting it. It's important. It's important to engage the job creators of this province. We didn't do it last time we did WCB changes. By the way, the government still hasn't returned their money, the overpremium. Now we're going to burden them more.

11:20

These small and medium-sized businesses are getting impacted by the increase in the carbon tax on January 1, by the minimum wage increase, and now by these changes without their input. It's going to add more of a burden on them. Now, the government

claims that we have increased the number of jobs. If the government has increased the number of jobs, why has the revenue coming from income taxes dropped? Because we are not creating quality jobs. This government's policies are not creating quality jobs. That's what it equates to, in my humble opinion.

I'm going to go over a few things. One of the changes: all OHS claim appeals will be heard by the Alberta Labour Relations Board rather than by the existing Occupational Health and Safety Council. The reason for this is that, allegedly, the board has more sources to deal with appeals than the existing council.

Now, this adds another definition of harassment.

The right to know is added to this bill. It clarifies what type of health and safety information must be made available and how. I mean, I don't know how many members on the other side have actually attended these kinds of meetings. Every time I had gone on a site in my previous role, the first thing was that all these changes were already discussed in these safety meetings. Every organization would have a different name. We used to call them tool kit meetings. All the potential risks...

Mr. Nixon: Hazard assessments.

Mr. Gill: Yes. Hazard assessments would be done, identified, and, you know, brought to every single employee's attention. I mean, we already have all these regulations, and the employers are taking very serious steps towards these things. Now we're asking our small and medium-sized businesses to enforce these without their consultation. If the government thinks that this bill is such a godsend, why don't we hear from them? Why are we not involving them in discussions with us? Why aren't we holding town hall meetings?

My request is simple. Let's call a time out and send this bill to a committee. Let's bring in all the stakeholders so that we can get a decision which is the right decision for the people we're trying to help. The claim is that this government is working well for Alberta families. Apparently, it's not. I haven't seen one thing that this government has done except – well, I've got to give them credit. They united the conservatives, so that's a good thing. Other than that, I haven't seen that they have done one good thing for this province.

I mean, why don't we send this bill to committee?

Mr. Nixon: Nothing unites conservatives like an NDP government.

Mr. Gill: Nothing. Nothing.

You know, Madam Speaker, this guy campaigned against me, this hon. member, but now we're together. The credit goes to the NDP government, right? This is the only thing that they have probably done, united the conservative family together. But that's a separate topic. Thank you very much. Other than that, this government has not done anything good to make this province a better place to work, to raise a family, right?

When the foundation is not there – I remember that somebody sent me a tweet from a Twitter account, you know: don't let them tell you that you can't have quality health care and education and infrastructure and can't balance the budget. What happened to that now? We have, like, 75-plus billion – I don't even know; the number might be going up by tomorrow – maybe a hundred billion dollars by the time the term is done.

Going back to the same thing, this government is not listening to Albertans. This government is not listening to the stakeholders, and I don't know why. [interjections] I mean, the government members are, you know, heckling now, but when the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster was talking to the veterinarian folks over there, we didn't hear anything. Nobody said anything against that,

right? The whole request on this one is to send the bill to the committee. Send this bill to committee. Engage the stakeholders so that we can hear everything from everybody. If we need to make some changes to the OHS Act . . .

Mr. Nixon: Some would say: refer it to committee.

Mr. Gill: Refer it to committee. Sure.

With the OHS Act, the WCB Act, whatever those things are, let the stakeholders decide. I don't understand. Like, why are we not sending this to committee?

An Hon. Member: One more time.

Mr. Gill: One more time? Okay. Hold on one second. Let me find something good. Madam Speaker, just give me one second.

You know, this bill is bringing major changes and costly changes to the Workers' Compensation Act. In my opinion, that is going to make the system unsustainable. It's going to jeopardize the employment environment because it's not going to be sustained by the small and medium-sized employers.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds – no. That's not right. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: That's okay, Madam Speaker. That is close to Olds. I appreciate the confusion though I do have to say that there is a considerable size difference between the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. But he is a good guy, a good hon. member, and I don't mind being confused with him. There he is, actually, speaking of the hon. member.

Madam Speaker, I very much enjoyed the presentation by the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway. I think that he was speaking extremely passionately about this referral motion and the need to take this bill to committee. The hon. member talked a little bit about daylight savings time and the way that this government approached that legislation and that issue compared to how this government is approaching Bill 30 and compared to how the government has approached other legislation in the past in this House.

The reason that's important – and I think he did a good job of pointing this out – is that there's a considerable difference in the way that the government proceeded with daylight savings time in the consultation. You know, they spent a considerable amount of time on that. They brought it to committee, an all-party committee that discussed that issue. They reached out to Albertans at length, had surveys, consulted, and in the end actually decided to do the opposite of what they intended to do in the first place based on that consultation, which shows that the government in that case appears to have wanted to go in a different direction.

You know, Madam Speaker, the hon. member brought up several other excellent examples. Bill 6, I think, is probably the most serious example that has faced this Legislature, an outright attack on rural communities and the family farm and, you know, not any consultation with those individuals or family farms and ranches and the people that were impacted by that legislation. We know the consequences of that.

11:30

One, you know, the NDP politically had some significant consequences in rural Alberta and probably can't come back as a result of that in rural Alberta. But the consequences to the family

farms in those communities that had to go through that process – and they're still having uncertainty as a result of that process. We're concerned because these have similarities, Bill 30 and Bill 6, on the health and safety side and the occupational health and safety side.

Madam Speaker, you may not know, but the committees that are associated with or that were put together by this government as a result of Bill 6 and their attempt to quickly consult with people after they really got caught with their hands in the cookie jar, so to speak, still have not reported. There is still a tremendous amount of uncertainty on the family farms and with the agriculture community as a result of that. How is one to know that that's not what's going to happen again now as we see another occupational health and safety bill and WCB bill being forced or rammed through this House at a rapid speed?

I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway did an excellent job of pointing out why we need to make sure that this bill is referred to committee. I did enjoy his comments. I hope that he will rise and elaborate a little bit on the need for consultation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House . . .

Mr. Cooper: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Gill: The Leader of the Official Opposition. You know what? The consultation is important, and we saw that when we did it with daylight saving time. I attended a few of those town hall meetings along with members from the other side and my colleagues on this side, and people brought their concerns from the different sides, right? It was important to hear from the general public. It was important to hear from NHL teams. It was important to hear from, like, the Calgary and Edmonton airport authorities. It was important for how that bill is going to impact later on our relationships with the other jurisdictions. That's why I think it is important that if we do the same consultation procedure for this bill, maybe something good will come out of this thing. Maybe this, whatever the government is claiming, is the right thing, but we wouldn't know because we have seen the government's track record on consultation on the different bills. Albertans have seen it in the last two and a half years.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. I didn't realize my mom was in the gallery today, clapping like that.

It's a pleasure to be here this evening and rise to speak to Bill 30 in particular, a very, very, very important motion that's before the Assembly this evening. I know, Madam Speaker, that you will know that from time to time over the past couple of years I've had the pleasure of rising to speak to motions in this place, in particular referral motions and the importance of committee. I know that the minister of economic development also from time to time has spoken on referral motions just like this. I think there was certainly a time and a space where the hon. member, the minister of economic development, believed strongly in the importance of referral motions and just the things that committee can provide in terms of adding to the democratic process. And I know that the minister of economic development rose on numerous occasions to speak for motions referring to committee.

I remember a particular time during his service in opposition when there were a couple of bills before the Assembly, and in fact they were both labour bills, bills 9 and 10. I think, Madam Speaker, you might even remember some of those pieces of legislation because they had a significant impact on public-sector employees and their pensions and otherwise. I know that you have been a diligent servant of the people over a long period of time in the public service, so it's quite likely that bills 9 and 10 would have had a direct impact upon you.

I know that the member opposite rose in this very Assembly to speak about the importance of referring those bills to committee. You'll never believe what happened. Madam Speaker, I know it's hard to believe, because rarely in this place does a piece of legislation actually get referred to committee, but on that particular occasion, the occasion of bills 9 and 10, both of those pieces of legislation, the government of the day heeded the wisdom of the Assembly and then, in fact, referred those bills to committee. Some would say that a lot of very positive things happened as a result of that decision, in particular on these important issues of labour, of employment safety, of OH and S, and of WCB.

At those committees members from all across this great province of ours had the opportunity to come and engage on an important piece of legislation that had a significant long-term impact upon the labour market, upon small and medium-sized businesses, and in that case, certainly, amongst the public service. I know that not only did the minister of economic development but the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Education as well as the Premier all believed fully in the impact that that committee could have. Madam Speaker, I'm sure that you know what happened to bills 9 and 10 after they arrived in committee because there was significant input from the public. As it turned out, the government realized: "You know what? Maybe this isn't the best path forward." Now, there still could be some debate on whether or not it was or it wasn't, but the government of the day made that decision. One of the reasons why they made that decision is because they heard from experts from all across the province.

I know that the Minister of Labour will quite likely rise in the Assembly and say: but we've already done that; we've already consulted. The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that this government spent about six weeks, if I remember correctly – or maybe it was less – speaking to their friends and colleagues about what should happen with respect to Bill 30. On numerous occasions in this House we asked as to whether or not we would see the piece of legislation tabled before the Assembly. In the early days of the session the Minister of Labour played a little bit fast and loose with whether or not we would or we wouldn't, that they were busy consulting and reassuring us that the legislation hadn't yet been written although a case probably could be made that a bill of this size would have taken more than just a couple of weeks to throw together.

Now what we see is this significant piece of legislation . . .

Mr. Gill: A hundred and forty-seven pages.

Mr. Cooper: . . . 147 pages, placed in front of the Assembly with the expectation that in just the few short days that are left in the session, barring, of course, the motion of the government to extend the session, this would quite likely be accepted.

Or perhaps even better than that and perhaps better than even sending it to committee, they could heed the advice from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who, I believe, tabled a very significant-sized piece of legislation in one session, let it sit on the Order Paper through an entire break, then came back in the following session and, in fact, turned that legislation into law. I

think that that's the sort of thing that provides for good government because it allows for feedback. It allows for input from Albertans. It allows experts – and I know that the government believes they've got all the expertise they need, and I know that the government believes they're smarter than Albertans. But the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that good governance takes time, and that's one thing that committee can provide: time, a pause, if you will, a dramatic pause in the legislative process that provides an opportunity for impact and good legislation to be created. Unfortunately, I have the sense that the government actually doesn't want that. They only want what is currently in this legislation.

11:40

Madam Speaker, I'm certainly no expert – I've only been here a couple of years – but my guess is that before the end of this Legislature we'll actually come back to Bill 30 and make some adjustments to it. A good case in point for that is the fact that now for the second time we're seeing electoral legislation before the Chamber. If we had just taken time the first time to get it right, perhaps we wouldn't need to come back to this same piece of legislation.

A perfect example of that, Madam Speaker, and another good use of committee, I might add, is a piece of legislation that was put before the House – I believe it was Bill 203 – by my hon. colleague from Drumheller-Stettler, who proposed an idea around government advertising and government advertising during a by-election. Interestingly enough, we're going to see a piece of that in the legislation now. We're going to see the government actually implement some of the things from that Bill 203, that was sent to committee, and I think that there are actually going to be some positives in Bill 32 because of the work that was done at committee.

I firmly believe that that's exactly what we need to do with Bill 30: take the time, send it to committee, which is exactly what this referral motion does, and then we will have the opportunity to call in experts. Madam Speaker, I know that you will know that there are a lot of labour experts that are more than willing to share their opinion when it comes to legislation like Bill 30. I happen to also know that there are some labour lawyers here in the province of Alberta that would love to share their opinion. Not only would they like to share their opinion with members of the Assembly, but they would like to do that in a public forum. Why? So that the best legislation can be passed for the people of Alberta. While our opinions differ significantly from one side of the House to the other, I firmly believe that all members of the Assembly are efforting to do what's best for Albertans, and I believe that of the government.

Now, they take us down some pretty unique trails on their path to trying to do that. I think that they should listen to Albertans much more widely and from a wider range of Albertans, which, again, is exactly why we should go to committee with Bill 30. It allows the government not just to hear from their friends and allies but to also hear from other Albertans who may not have the same, to quote the Health minister, NDP world view. I believe that we have seen many, many, many pieces of legislation – that was a lot of "manys" – that are specifically driven by that NDP world view, and I think that a committee, in this case for Bill 30, would allow for individuals who don't subscribe so wholeheartedly to the NDP world view to be able to provide feedback to the government. In fact, we would wind up with a piece of legislation that was much more fair, that was much better – much, much better – than what we currently have. You know, Madam Speaker, I will take that phrase, "much, much better," back. It's possible that the government has this right. Not likely, but it is possible.

A committee would then allow the opportunity for us to really break down the ins and the outs of this piece of legislation, this massive piece of legislation that provides offences and penalties, that provides additional powers to the court to make directions, that talks about the boards of inquiry, the funding of organizations, and that provides in the second section amendments to the Workers' Compensation Act. I think, Madam Speaker, that going to committee is so critically important to allow workers to have a voice here within the process. I mean, we're talking about some important matters, including the right to refuse dangerous work. We've heard members of that side speak specifically about that.

You know, let me be very clear that there are good, positive pieces of legislative work inside Bill 30. Now, on the long portion of the bill there are enough significant challenges in here that I think that I personally – I would never speak on behalf of my colleagues – am quite likely to have a challenge supporting the legislation at the end of the day, but I think that there are some good things inside Bill 30, so it would give the government an opportunity, if in fact they voted in favour of the referral motion, to also speak about those things.

Albertans who have been impacted by some of the things that they're going to be correcting inside Bill 30 would have the opportunity to come and speak about those very specific issues. I often find that that is a net benefit for us all, Madam Speaker. As we look at the broad range of individuals that Bill 30 affects, both on the WCB side and on the OH and S side, we look to small and medium-sized businesses, who this bill presents a significant risk to. There will be many changes within some of the premiums that they will face. There will be some changes around how they may engage with employees.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. You got the riding right and everything tonight. That's just excellent. I do appreciate the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills' comments. I know that earlier in the day you thought I was him, but clearly he looks nothing like me. I just want to point that out.

Anyways, I appreciate him bringing up the importance of this referral amendment that has been moved, the need for consultation in particular, bringing up his concerns with the things that he's seen in his time in this place with the government bringing forward legislation that they had not taken time to consult with people in Alberta about, the pattern of behaviour that we have seen from this NDP government and the consequences that have happened to Albertans as a whole as a result of that. I do appreciate him pointing things out like Bill 6 and the difference between how bills like Bill 6 or this bill have been treated before this place compared to daylight saving time and the fact that there seems to be a double standard.

I also do appreciate him pointing out that the government has a really bad habit, Madam Speaker, of bringing forward legislation in the final days of a sitting instead of bringing it forward at the beginning so that people could take some time to actually debate it. It's disappointing. I know his constituents. We share a county. Both the hon. member and I come from the same county that we call home. I know that we hear concerns about that often, about the government's lack of consultation, which is why this referral

amendment is important. I hope the hon. member would spend some time elaborating on that.

11:50

Mr. Cooper: Yes, and what a fine county it is in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Of course, Mountain View county is the county that the hon. member refers to. Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is where the folks from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre come to vacation because it's just a little bit more outstanding than Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

You know, Madam Speaker, to make sure that we are very specifically speaking to the very important referral motion that's before us, I spoke briefly about Bill 203 and by-election and government announcements and that being referred to committee. I spoke about the passion that the Education minister used to have, when he was in opposition, about the use of committees and how we can really produce high-quality legislation that is better for all Albertans. I know that from time to time the government likes to talk about what the opposition would or wouldn't do, but I can assure you that the opposition takes its job very seriously when it comes to ensuring that we get the best pieces of legislation possible. I think that it's very important that we do that work, that we do our due diligence and ensure that the legislation receives the due diligence that it deserves.

I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, but I can only speculate that we'll be having more conversations quite like this with respect to other pieces of legislation that we've seen this government ramming through at the end of a session, morning, noon, and night, you know, introducing pieces of legislation that are 146 pages and then another one that's 200 pages long, all introduced in the dying days of a session, all with the singular purpose of not providing the opposition with the best opportunity to do their jobs. Oftentimes governments will do this. We see it happen not just here but in other places as well. Governments will do this while they're trying to pass legislation that has a significant benefit to them or to their stakeholders but may or may not have a significant benefit, a much more widespread benefit, or certainly a benefit to the opposition and our role, that is very important.

Madam Speaker, I know that there are members of the other side that will know what it's like to be in opposition, that will have experienced exactly what is happening tonight and will quite likely happen tomorrow night and the rest of the week, and that is a government that . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With that, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 30.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe we have made significant progress this evening. I thank my colleagues for their stimulating conversation across the floor and would like to move that we adjourn until 10 tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:55 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, December 5, 2017

Day 61

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. As we begin our work this week, let us proceed with the respect and honour our institution deserves, filling hearts and minds with wisdom and a determination to always do what's right for our constituents, for our province, and for our country.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

Mr. Gotfried moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 4: Ms Larivee]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in the House today in support of the motion for referral of Bill 30. It would benefit the bill and the people of Alberta as well as, actually, the work of the members of this House if we were to refer the bill to committee, as has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

As all members of the House know, this is a bill that would make substantial and sweeping changes to the legislation surrounding, actually, two major pieces of legislation in our province, the Workers' Compensation Act and also the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Both are very large bills that are substantial in their sweep and in their impact.

The changes we have before us in these bills would have a long-lasting and potentially a very significant impact on every worker in Alberta. They have the potential to redefine the workplace for all those Albertans who will not only be working now but coming into the workforce in the years ahead. To put it a bit in perspective, there are more than 2 million people actually currently employed in our province and, of course, also at any time lots of people looking for work. Especially in this time of downturn and retrograde legislation against our industries in Alberta there are a lot more people looking for work than there used to be. The legislation we make in this House regarding labour laws will in some way affect all those 2 million plus people. It'll affect whether or not their jobs continue to exist or whether or not new jobs are created for Albertans who are struggling to find work, and yes, this may have an impact on the work that is available for them in the future.

With all of the people who are therefore counting on us to make sure we get things like this right and with all those whose lives we may affect through our work here, we need to do everything we can to get this straight. And it impacts not just workers, quite honestly, but families and whole communities, our society at large. So it's much more than just the immediate impact. There's also the secondary impact, that impacts our children, that impacts whole extended families, all of the rest of that.

This means that we need to put a stop to this practice of a government that spends very little time on the consultation process, the practice of introducing omnibus bills just days before the end of session, the practice of trying to ram through legislation while ignoring the legitimate concerns of many members in this Assembly. Truthfully, I think we should all be here to try and find the best legislation, to create the best context, the best environment possible for employees and for families and for communities here in Alberta.

The people of Alberta deserve better than just having major pieces of legislation rammed through without the time for consultation, without the opportunity for the key stakeholders to be involved, to participate, to express their thoughts and their concerns. By referring this bill to committee, we would have the opportunity to invite some key people in, to hear what their thoughts are.

You know, the reality is that we're always better together than we are individually. When we put things through from one perspective only, there are all kinds of things that we overlook, that we're blind to, that we don't get. By listening to others, we actually benefit the people of Alberta. We actually improve the quality of the bill. This government could be producing work that would last for many generations if they would take the time to do it well. The people of Alberta deserve that. They deserve a legislative process that will make sure that we do more than just pass bills as fast as we possibly can. They deserve a process that ensures that we simply take some time to get the bills right in the first place. If we don't get it right on these kinds of issues, we aren't serving Albertans well, and if we don't get them right, we aren't doing our jobs, which may mean that they're not getting their jobs.

What can we do to make sure that we get this bill and others right? We can use the tools that have been available to us in this place and send the bill to committee for further review and consultation. Is that really too much to ask from a government? I would have thought the proper legislative review and careful scrutiny would be a given for a government that has such a poor track record with unintended consequences and problems with their past legislation. Too often we've seen legislation shoved forward in a hurry. Then even the government has to amend their own bills halfway through the process.

I know the government will say that they've done their consultation; they've had so many submissions and so many round-table meetings. I know that they'll say that there isn't time to review the bill. I know they'll say that it's fine without amendments. But the reality is that time will prove that, and the reality is that when the process is pressured and rushed, the end result is rarely the best that it could be. The fact is that these are just their tactics, their talking points to avoid being asked hard questions, to avoid facing the reality that so many Albertans are actually not onboard with their legislation and their ideological agenda. Just because they accidentally got elected doesn't give them an authority to push these kinds of things through. The reality is that trying to push the legislation through with an unwillingness to even consult with people, with the intent to try to shove it through so quickly that people don't have the opportunity to even understand it, let alone respond, is not good legislative practice.

Madam Speaker, governing for Albertans isn't supposed to be easy. It means listening to opposing opinions. It means facing evidence that doesn't fit with your narrative. It means putting our province and its people ahead of all else. NDP members don't come first; Albertans do. Union bosses don't come first; the Albertans that actually have to work for them do. Ideological dogma doesn't come first; Albertans do. While I know it will mean facing up to a reality and while I know it will mean a little more work for all of us, let's send the bill to committee for further review, for further consultation. Let's actually just do our job in this House, listen to the people of this great province, and make sure we get this legislation right.

I want to spend a little bit more time now addressing a couple of the potential problems that may arise with this bill. I know that it can be difficult to be one's own critic, so hopefully I can do something to lift the fog and help the government see some of the sections of this legislation that need work. I trust that I can impress the practical importance of spending more time on this particular piece of legislation.

First, I want to speak about the introduction of mandatory joint health and safety committees and health and safety representatives. This bill would universally mandate, depending on the number of employees in a workplace, a health and safety committee or representative. In the existing legislation the minister already has the power to mandate these situations where it makes sense. Why is this individual approach not sufficient? Do we really need to impose the hassle and cost of these committees and representatives on businesses who have good track records on health and safety and where no problem is apparent? Are we creating an environment of conflict where before there was an environment of co-operation, of support, of working together, and of team effort to create a safe workplace with people?

10:10

The government needs to be cognizant of the fact that while their intentions with this measure may be good, the costs may needlessly put an excessive burden on businesses or, worse, may actually distract from other health and safety programs that have been proven to be effective. This seems like more of a political move than anything else.

To try to put such a large bill through and push it through right at the end of session, hoping that the opposition members will just cave in because they want to go home for Christmas: that's not a good idea. We're not going to do that. We intend to stay here. We intend to speak up for Albertans. We would like to go to committee. We would like to work on this.

You have to question: is the government doing this deliberately, or is it through incompetence? I really am not sure. I mean, either they're deliberately trying to push a snow job over on Albertans because it's winter, push this stuff through, try to get it through before the media, before the people can even understand it, or they're just not ready. They haven't had time to get their act together. They hadn't finished writing the bill until the very last minute. They haven't allowed themselves time to take it to committee. Why wouldn't they allow time to actually take it to committee? I think that there are serious ways that this bill is being handled in trying to ram it through at the very end of session, a very large bill. It's not a good way to develop legislation.

There are a number of options that the government could have used. They could have delayed or postponed the start of the fall session until they were actually ready. They could have chosen to adjourn debate on the bill and then reconvene it in the spring, which would give opportunity for the people and stakeholders to have a good look at it, to make valuable contributions. They did this once

already with Bill 21, Modernized Municipal Government Act. That was probably a good practice. I commend them on that. Why don't they do the same thing again here and invite stakeholders to contribute to this in healthy and positive ways? Or they could just simply embrace the referral motion that we have before us now and allow the bill to go to committee. That would be the next best option. It would actually benefit the bill and the province, and it's something that I think needs to be supported by all members of this House. It's too late for some of the other options, but it's not too late to refer this bill to committee and to make sure that it gets the best treatment possible in this House.

I'd like to refer to another suggested change that I think would be valuable. I question the intent of replacing the Occupational Health and Safety Council with the Labour Relations Board. This is interesting. What it's doing is essentially trying to suggest that all employees in this province are labour representatives. They're not. In fact, less than 1 in 4 employees actually belong to a labour union, but here we have the Labour Relations Board being set up to resolve issues and to deal with this for employees who are not even labour employees.

The point is that the Alberta Labour Relations Board administers the Labour Relations Code, dealing with disputes between employers and trade unions, not with all the other employees in this province. I'm not belittling trade unions. I think that they actually have a value. I belonged to two of them in the past. There is a place for trade unions. But I don't quite understand why they're being tasked with a job that isn't within the definition of their mandate. This isn't what they're supposed to be doing, so why is the government turning it into something that it isn't? It's something that we need to look at and take serious consideration of.

There are a lot of issues with this bill. I will stick with the referral motion at the moment. The other details we'll address later, but I think there are serious concerns that need to be addressed. That's why this bill should go to committee, and I encourage all members to support the referral motion and please move forward with it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to agree with my colleague. He has brought up some very, very good points, that referring this to committee is something that we need to actually consider.

One of the points that he brought up specifically was the fact that maybe the government has not thought this through. One of my questions here revolves around a quote that has come out with the press release that was done by the Alberta government, Bill Would Improve Safety, Well-being of Albertans, on November 27, 2017. So on the day the bill was read in first reading, this press release came out. Now, one of the points here – and this is a good reason why we need to consider the referral motion. My question to my colleague is – the quote here says:

The Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) provides no-fault benefits and supports a safe return to work for injured workers. The proposed changes would mean an improved WCB system that [would provide] greater benefits to [employees] to support their return to work, with premiums that remain sustainable and affordable for employers.

One of the points that our caucus has brought up is that there's been really no economic impact study that's been done on the impacts on the WCB. We've had a government say that this is only going to cost something like \$94 million – I could be corrected if I'm wrong there – but we really don't know what this is going to

cost because of the fact that we're open-ending a lot of things to the point where the actuaries will not be able to give us a very clear indication of where this is sitting, the true cost of this.

Now, workers' compensation, in this quote, is very clear that they're all okay with making sure that our people that work in Alberta, who get injured in Alberta, who are covered under WCB have the ability to get better and get back to work. I don't think any one of my caucus would disagree with that. I don't believe one person would say: we don't want one of our injured workers to get the help that they desire. But the WCB board, after the quotes from the minister and two stakeholders, has stated that "premiums that remain sustainable and affordable for employers" are just as important to the WCB. They're saying: we need to get people the help that they need. We also are saying that this needs to be something that our employers have the ability to maintain the payments for or that does not become a serious hardship that will actually put them out of business.

My question to my colleague is: do you think that the consultation has been done well enough so that we have the understanding to be able to see that this WCB is sustainable and will remain sustainable and affordable for employers into the future? This is an important, important question because if we put WCB off the rails, this is something that we cannot get back on the rails when it comes to sustainability. If we end up trying to help people but harm them because the WCB fund is no longer sustainable, this is not okay. This is not okay.

To the member, that I respect: do you feel that a committee would help to flesh this out even further and, I guess, give more balance to what the WCB is saying within the quote that they have provided to our government, that this is such an important topic? To the gentleman, if he could please answer why it's so important to have a good referral motion move forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Orr: Well, I think that the whole point of committees is that there's an opportunity for the stakeholders and the people of our province to express their thoughts and their concerns and to add to the value of the discussion that takes place. Without a fulsome discussion, quite frankly, we don't have answers to many, many of the questions, even the actuarial kinds of questions, sustainability questions . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Highwood.

10:20

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this morning to speak to the referral amendment to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, to ask that this bill be referred to committee. There are many reasons why this bill needs to be referred, one being the size of the bill. For the government to bring forward a bill of this size with little debate time – it just makes sense to forward it to an all-party committee where issues with the bill can be hashed out properly. If the government's intent is that this piece of legislation be passed in this session and that we not delay, why didn't they introduce this bill sooner? It's not prudent to push through such a huge piece of legislation when there are so many disruptive implications for small and medium-sized businesses.

This bill makes sweeping changes to Alberta's workmen's compensation system, and these costly changes will make the system, I believe, unsustainable. We can't continue down this road, at every turn jeopardizing a positive employment environment. That is certainly not going to help all Albertans. We need to see

evidence from the government that they are indeed planning to fix what they think is a broken system. We do not need to take an unstable environment and make it more unstable with the flick of a switch. Something of this magnitude needs to be thoroughly discussed and understood before just throwing it out here at random, if only for an excuse to ram as much legislation out there as possible in this sitting.

I do want to say that there are many pieces in this legislation that have been needed for a while. Frankly, a lot of it was well thought out, I think. I'm positive that there has been a lot of consultation around many of those great pieces.

But there's also too much at stake here for the employment environment that could affect many small and medium-sized businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses will not be able to absorb the increased administrative burden resulting from supporting joint committees, added administrative training, and alternative work placements. It's just not feasible. Can the Minister of Labour please just think about that for a while?

Unfortunately, this bill makes some changes that I am very concerned about. These changes will make for some additional cost changes to the Workers' Compensation Act and, if enacted, will make the WC system potentially unsustainable. For this reason, I wholly support an amendment to refer this bill to committee. While, like I've stated before, I do believe there are some very good pieces of this legislation that are good and well-deserving, could they not be possibly crafted on their own?

But I would like to discuss some reasons why I think this bill should be referred to an all-party committee. For one, new reporting of serious injuries and incidents would require an excessive amount of administrative work. Reporting of near misses: a huge bureaucratic burden, I think, on small to medium-sized businesses. This adds significant red tape, something that may be needed, but if thought out and thought out well in an all-party committee, we could come up with options to help mitigate these costs for already struggling businesses here in Alberta. I'm not saying, "Hand out money," but all I am suggesting that we do is that we talk about some of the options.

Another serious issue affecting small to medium-sized businesses is the worry about higher premiums, the costs of maintaining and managing your small business. This could have significant financial repercussions, so why the rush? Let's refer this to committee and let the details be worked out there. A piece of legislation of this size and magnitude needs to be mulled over with all members.

Another problem is that while there may be good in this legislation, there is little trust in what legislation this government produces. I and many Albertans whom I have talked with on a regular basis do not trust that this government won't introduce legislation that will have serious economic repercussions in their daily lives. Take, for instance, the carbon tax. This NDP government did not campaign on the carbon tax in the last election. They didn't even bring it up. Now here we are, almost three years later, getting ready to absorb this massive tax that once again will be increased, by 50 per cent, this January.

There's no credibility with this government. They've destroyed all that. They've destroyed it with their risky and ideological pieces of legislation that they forced through this House. They've created morning sittings just for that purpose. They have hurt Albertans in so many ways and have hit them in all directions. There's absolutely no trust when it comes to any promises this government has to say. This is why we need a huge omnibus bill to be referred to committee. This bill is just another piece of legislation that has the potential to do just that.

Think about what just happened the week before last. The Minister of Finance stated that the economy is looking up, up, up,

up. He talked about what great fiscal management they have. He talked about how they're reducing spending. He talked about how great the economy is under their reign, and then the day after this fantastic promise Alberta gets hit for the sixth time in a row with a serious credit downgrade. Not the government but the S&P Global Ratings report said that unless this government undertakes "material fiscal reforms . . . to address budgetary shortfalls and . . . [stimulate] the economy . . . Alberta will continue to post, on average, significant after-capital deficits in excess of 23% of total adjusted revenues." This was right after the Minister of Finance's boasts of how great he and his government were handling the financial situation of this province.

I suggest that those on the other side of the House think for themselves and look at the facts. Don't just blindly follow what you're told. It is very obvious somewhere between this government's intent and what actually happens seems to get lost – we've continued to warn this government about reckless ideologies and have repeatedly warned that even though they sound all warm and fuzzy, they just do not work in the practical world.

If you haven't listened to us before, do so today. Refer this bill to an all-party committee, where we can discuss each issue and work together for the common sense and the common good of all Albertans. History has shown that this government has done minimum consultation with the workforce and with Albertans. Follow through on that. Refer this back to committee. Let's redo this in the springtime. Let's think this legislation through. I think it's extremely important that we spend time with Albertans, go through all the details so all Albertans will understand the impact of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise under 29(2)(a) on the Bill 30 referral to committee. Now, I was listening to the hon. member. He made a lot of points that make sense to me, but I thought I would ask him to reflect on a few things.

Certainly, Bill 30: I tried to talk to people about this, because it popped out just late last week, while I was home on the weekend. I was curious about the hon. member's experience and whether it was similar to mine because what I really found and really noticed was that a lot of people that I talked to, in fact, just about everybody, had no idea what was in the bill. Of course, that matters because, as has been pointed out here, there are more than 2 million people who work in Alberta, and the WCB changes will affect virtually every one of them. So when you think about putting something into place right away that 2 million people have to be brought up to speed on, surely – I just wonder whether the hon. member heard anything similar or whether the people that he talked to in his riding and where he was on the weekend had a same or similar experience.

10:30

Of course, you know, Albertans are good people, Madam Speaker. They want to be law abiding, and they want to live within the rules of the land, but of course they can't do that unless they actually know what the rules are and understand them and have time to adjust. Of course, for those people in particular need in my riding and in the hon. member's riding and who may be in the middle of a WCB claim, one of the things that I'm sure they're unclear on – at least, I believe they're unclear on it now, and I'd be interested in the hon. member talking about any that he had talked to in his riding – is whether their claims will be under the new rules or the old rules.

That matters because a lot of claims before the WCB now could have been for an injury on the job six months ago, a year ago, two years ago, or it could have happened yesterday or tomorrow but before the legislation is proclaimed. That can make a big difference, so that's one of the reasons I wouldn't mind if the hon. member could expand on that.

The other piece that I would be interested in him addressing, of course, is on the employer side, if he's had a chance to talk to employers in his riding. Under the OHS rules, now you've got somewhere in the neighbourhood of 160,000 different employers in Alberta, and all the rules that they have and live under on occupational health and safety have to change all at once, too. Of course, I'm curious about anything that he might have said or heard between himself and the employers in his riding. Alberta's employers want to be law abiding, too. They want to be good citizens. They already try to keep their employees safe and do a great job, but there's a new set of rules and guidelines now, potentially, with this legislation, that they'll have to live under, including, of course, requirements for – I'll make sure I get the wording right here – prime contractors and service providers. A lot of businesses now probably don't have something that they call a prime contractor.

Certainly, employers from my riding were unaware of what's in the legislation and what their obligations are. Of course, it makes me curious about whether the hon. member who just spoke, the hon. Member for Highwood, had similar concerns or whether he had an opportunity to talk to employers in his riding. Again, Madam Speaker, this is important because this is a big chunk of legislation, 147 pages. It's a lot to consume for Albertans. It's a lot to consume at any time but particularly if this happens to be a busy time of their year. Indeed, if it's a slow time for businesses, it's tough, too. It's getting more expensive for them, if it's a slow time, to bring in extra staff to look at the ramifications in the bill, to perhaps put new accounting practices in, to perhaps . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Good morning, Madam Speaker, and good morning, all. Thanks for having the moments today for folks in the House to listen to what we have to say regarding this amendment. I think it's important to start out with a few comments with respect to what has gone on in my past experience here in the House with respect to the amount of time that has been spent in my constituency office regarding the subject of workmen's compensation. There have been probably hundreds of calls to my office regarding this subject, and it's one of the most sensitive issues that small-business owners and employees will probably have to deal with. It's also one of the most common subjects, I've heard, for every constituency office. Workmen's compensation has been problematic, to say the least.

But this morning I'd like to speak in favour of this referral amendment, which my hon. colleague has moved, and I would like to submit that the process for Bill 30 has not provided Albertans with adequate time to be consulted on the numerous and significant changes to the Workers' Compensation Board and the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

I know that not enough time was spent consulting with Albertans, and I know that not enough due diligence was done by the government before they introduced this bill. I know that because that is what this government tends to do on all of these bills. Bill 6 was a classic example of that. [interjections] Whether or not the government agrees is beside the point because the people out there are talking to us about this, and they have not had the opportunity.

They do not know about it. They didn't even know it was being dropped until last week, and it's 147 pages long.

They only held, apparently, I've been told – and I could stand to be corrected – eight consultation meetings prior to the drafting of this bill. They're relying on an online survey that did nothing more than confirm this government's radical biases, that we've known them to have before when they've introduced bills.

An Hon. Member: Radical biases?

Mr. Stier: Radical biases, yes.

Every time this government has brought in huge bills, it's common knowledge, Madam Speaker, that the government tends to load up a bunch of questions at some of these open houses, suggests things that aren't necessarily the case to try to persuade people to agree with what's being presented.

I am supporting this amendment in part because the government has not shown it has taken the proper steps; specifically, to consult after they've introduced the bill in the Legislature. That's where all this comes out. Let's face it. The information that we get about these bills comes out after they introduce it. It's one thing to consult on ideas. I think the phrase that's often used when referring to this type of consultation is that it takes a 30,000-foot view, so let's take a 30,000-foot view of this.

What I mean is that stakeholders are asked to provide feedback and suggestions on broad statements that describe the intent behind the proposed changes. The consultation will also ask for people's ideas or suggestions on things that they would like the legislation to cover but, again, nothing specific. The important thing to note is that no one outside of the government really knows what the specific changes are going to be. That will probably come down in regulations or some other form of double whammy that always takes place when legislation goes through.

I don't profess even to have been at these consultations. I didn't know that they were going on. But if I was to wager a guess as to how they went, I think they probably went something like this. The meetings were probably held at a community hall, a union hall, or another public place like a library. I don't know, but I bet they could have been there, some place with a lot of room for people to get up and walk around. Before the formal consultation process began, the minister or the deputy minister probably opened up the meeting by welcoming everyone and telling them how great it was that everyone could be there. Of course, they undoubtedly thanked them for taking the time out of their busy schedule to do the really important work of improving the occupational health and safety and WCB acts. That would be the normal process.

Following that, everyone was probably given instructions on how the session would proceed and how the participants' input would be collected. I wouldn't be surprised if the participants were told to keep an open mind and that the process was really about the government gathering ideas that it can take back to the drawing-room table when they begin the job of crafting the legislation.

I'm going to guess that there were probably stations set up around the room and that government representatives whose expertise was in a specific area that the government wanted to gather feedback on were there. These representatives were there to answer, possibly, any specific questions that a participant had and to encourage an open dialogue. I'm sure that did take place, but I'm going to go out on a limb here and bet that each station level probably already had a really high-level, biased concept of what they were trying to achieve, that the participants were to consider and then provide their feedback on by writing their ideas or suggestions on sticky notes or flash cards that the government would collect at the end.

As to the specific questions or aspirational statements the government asked, the participants possibly would consider a lot of questions, but I submit that they probably sounded in many ways like the following list that I'm going to provide.

What areas of the current legislation work well? What areas of the current legislation don't work well?

Another would perhaps be: would you support changes in improved access to the medical and financial supports injured workers need to get healthy, to care for their families, and to ultimately return to work? Would you support changes to legislation that would modernize Alberta's health and safety system to reflect the modern workplaces of the 21st century? I bet they would all answer in a preconceived way to that.

10:40

Another would be: would you support an improved Workers' Compensation Board system that provides greater benefits to workers to support their return to work, with premiums that remain sustainable and affordable for employers? I'm sure they would have said something like that.

Another: do you support changes that better protect workers to ensure that they have the same rights and protections as other Canadians? Well, that makes sense. I'm sure they might have asked that.

Another one: do you think that Alberta's current occupational health and safety and workers' compensation legislation effectively empowers Alberta workers to take a participatory role in promoting healthy and safe workplaces? I'm sure they would ask that.

Another one: did you know Alberta currently does not have an independent office tasked with assisting Alberta workers injured at work to help them navigate the complex WCB system? I'm betting they would have thought of that, I hope. If Alberta were to adopt an independent office, what do you think their responsibilities should be? Perhaps that was asked then, too.

Another. Currently Alberta workers have a duty to refuse unsafe work. This has caused some Alberta workers to be confused as to whether they have a right to refuse unsafe work. Do you support clarifying what Alberta workers' rights are? I'm sure that that question, too, was probably asked at one of those meetings.

Yet another. Currently Alberta workers injured at work are only able to collect wage benefits up to \$98,700. However, many Alberta tradespeople earn significantly higher annual incomes. Do you think Alberta workers should be eligible to receive more of their wages if they suffer a workplace injury? Likely that was asked, I suspect.

Another. Under the current legislation workplaces with 19 or fewer employees are not required to form health and safety committees. I know that I spent many years downtown working in offices in the oil and gas sector, and this came up at that time, 15, 20 years ago, as well, to some extent. I know we were always scratching our heads downtown. Were we really scared of that photocopier? Was it going to hit us in the head one day? I know that we used to try to kick it a lot of times and make it work a little better, but what were we to be scared of in our offices downtown when they tried to raise that issue before? What are we going to do about that now? That is what I'm worried about. Are we going to figure out some way to put a safety cage around our photocopiers? I don't know.

Maybe, perhaps, they might have asked about that: do you support expanding the mandate of the health and safety committee to include all Alberta workers? That's the point here, folks. We know that those photocopiers can be animals from time to time. I know the ones in our offices certainly are. They're in fixing it again this morning.

Yet another question. Under the current legislation, when an employee is injured at work, their employer's obligations to accommodate their return to work are not clearly articulated. Perhaps they might have asked: would you support changes that clarify what an employer's obligations are when an employee is injured in the workplace? I'm sure they would have asked that. That should have been in there for many years. That's usually part of any regular office operations, any workplace operations. That's normally the case.

I won't belabour my point with any further examples, folks, this morning because I think I've made my point, and I thank you for your attention and interest in what I've had to say. None of the questions the government probably asked nor the feedback they received from stakeholders prior to the introduction of this bill in the Legislature probably dealt with specifics that we're now having to deal with. They probably skipped over some of the sensitive things. They probably didn't include some of the stuff that's in this bill. Oh, by the way, as the previous members have said this morning, it's a fairly large bill. It's got 147 pages.

An Hon. Member: A hundred and forty-seven pages is scary.

Mr. Stier: Scary 147 pages: I agree, hon. member. Really scary.

It couldn't have dealt with all the specifics in those open houses because we're going to have to do that. We're not going to be able to deal with all of the specifics here today either nor in the next few days, I would suggest, because it's too important and it's too difficult. Why this is brought to us in this manner at this time, at the end of the session, is beyond me. It's again, obviously, another attempt at trying to slide something through without giving it proper attention.

The examples that I provided illustrate that very fact. There's a fundamental difference between consultations held prior to a bill being introduced versus consultations held after the legislation has been tabled in the Legislature. There's a difference between asking a stakeholder if they support expanding the mandate of health and safety committees to include all Alberta workers versus asking a stakeholder for actual feedback on whether they support something specific, including:

If there are 5 to 19 workers in total from 2 or more employers or employers and self-employed persons or one or more employers and one or more self-employed persons at a work site and the work is expected to last 90 days or more, the prime contractor or, if there is no prime contractor, all employers and self-employed persons shall coordinate the designation of a health and safety representative for that work site.

Now, that bunch of gibberish is part of this bill's section 17(3). I bet that wasn't asked in one of those meetings.

I'm not claiming that stakeholders or particular employers are against it, including the proposed section 17, that was quoted. What I am saying, though, is that asking someone to provide feedback on the ideas of expanding the mandate of the health and safety committees versus asking that same person for feedback on the very specific language that legislates the expansion of health and safety are two entirely different things. Claiming, as this government has, that they are the same is not just incorrect. It's wrong, and it's misleading.

If the government truly doesn't understand the difference between consulting on an idea versus consulting on a written piece of legislation, then they shouldn't be introducing this legislation in the first place. We need a long discussion on this bill. It is one of the most sensitive things to every person that works in Alberta and across this country, and it has been the most controversial issue for decades. Why, then, should we be faced with having to just smash this through the House at the end of session? We should not.

That's why I'm supporting this proposed amendment to refer this bill to committee, Madam Speaker. Despite the partisanship that goes on in this room, I would encourage all members to consider all of their constituents, all of the workers in Alberta, all of those people that don't normally deal with legislation, all of the people that may be affected by this, take this into account, and support us in moving this to committee.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say that my colleague for Livingstone-Macleod brings up some very good points. You know, to reinforce some of the points that he brought forward, I just want to read a business alert that was put out by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce to get a better understanding of where the business community is sitting in this regard and why it is so important that this needs to go to committee.

The ACC...

That is the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

... has recommended that the Alberta Government send Bill 30 to a committee for further review and analysis following First and Second Reading. Taking this step will help identify how employers and employees can best adjust to changes introduced with the new legislation, which are intended to prevent illness and injury in the workplace.

That's pretty clear. I can't think of anything more clear.

10:50

They're putting out a business alert saying that businesses across Alberta should be talking with their local MLAs to make sure they understand that we need to have more fulsome, more thorough discussions when it comes to this legislation. I really feel that, in the end, when we see the Alberta Chambers of Commerce putting forward letters like this, they don't do it lightly. They don't say: gee, are we here just to make the government's life more difficult? I believe that they truly want to be included in the process.

Now, as I stated before, what we've got here in the Alberta government's technical briefing is that there was not a fulsome consultation. I do not mean to belittle the people that did participate because – you know what? – their points of view are important. The question is: was it sufficient for the gravity that this legislation will bring forward for all Albertans who work?

Like, the fact that over 1,300 online survey responses were done seems like a lot, but then you look at the fact that when we sent the daylight savings time act to the committee, we had over 14,000 people do responses. Nearly 90 written submissions sounds like a lot, but the bill itself has such a large number of pages that it's hard for us to be able to see if those submissions – those 90 submissions, those 1,300 responses, those eight in-person, facilitated round-table discussions – and the points that they brought up are actually reflected in this legislation.

But we're not going to find out because we're going to rush through this so fast. This referral is saying: let's slow the process down just a little bit, make sure that we get it right, make sure that we have a sustainable WCB that moves forward so that we protect Albertans who are workers that get hurt on the job site into the future. That is what we are asking for. This is important to Albertans.

Now, to move on in that same business alert, there's another concern that was brought up.

WCB premium surpluses collected from employers in 2016 are approximately 350 Million, with similar surpluses expected for 2017. Past practice of the WCB has been to rebate surpluses back

to employers because the WCB is fully employer funded. The ACC is pleased that the Alberta Government rejected the WCB Review Panel's recommendation to not rebate . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder, hon. member, that you should table those documents you were quoting from later, please. Thank you.

Any other speaker to the amendment motion? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the referral motion, which I will be voting in favour of. There are so many things that I want to talk about with respect to this bill and with respect to the referral motion. In order to be able to make my point clearly, I think I'm going to have to go back to a few other bills that we've wanted to refer and the reasons for that.

But before I do that, Madam Speaker, one of the things that I wanted to talk about – and I think that a lot of the members on this side have spoken to this – is just the size of this bill. It's just a massive bill. It's a complicated bill. There's a lot in there that needs to be discussed. I cannot imagine, again, the amount of work that goes into something like this. There's just so much information in here, but there are a couple of key points that I'd like to speak about. One of the things is that when a piece of legislation like this makes it to us, especially in the opposition, we are obviously tasked with making sure that we speak to the people, that we reach out, that we have the opportunity to explain what's behind the legislation, what we think and what we understand is going on.

The biggest thing that's actually come across my desk in the few days that we've had this bill is: where was the consultation? Now, I'm not saying that there wasn't consultation but obviously not adequate consultation, Madam Speaker. Honestly, people are questioning where the government was on consultation with this. I'll bring up some specific areas that I've been asked about, and I'd love to hear some answers from the government. Specifically, the reason for needing to go to referral on this is due to the nature of bringing in stakeholders, bringing in folks that are experts in this.

I mean, I can only speak for myself, but the privilege of being in here has taught me many things. One of those things is that I don't know a whole lot about a whole lot of things, but I also know a whole lot about a lot of little things. The only reason why I know those things is because I've had the privilege of speaking to a lot of people who have educated me. This province is full of savvy, intelligent, incredible people that are really experts in so many fields. You know, I'm a person who loves people. I love speaking with people. I love hearing what they have to say. I've learned so much. The biggest thing that I've learned is that when people aren't consulted properly, you're told about it right away. I'm sure I'm not the only one. I'm sure the government side has had people asking them questions about this legislation, too, because it's so humongous.

One of the things that I think needs to happen is, potentially, to pull the bill into two pieces. We ask about this all the time. There are pieces of this bill where there are some really good things that are happening that needed to happen, but there are also chunks of this bill that I really, really believe would do so much better for us if we took the time to have adequate consultations.

If I may, Madam Speaker, I just want to delve into the past a little bit. You know, when I was reading this bill and going back to some of the issues, I was reminded of when we were in here discussing bills 25, 27, and 34, so that's the Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, the Renewable Electricity Act, and the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 2016. We'll start with Bill 25, the Oil Sands

Emissions Limit Act. I mean, this was such a huge gamble with industry – such a huge gamble – and we spoke on and on about the industry's place, about how that was going to impact industry wanting to be here, especially because the other countries that we're dealing with with respect to oil sands and oil production do not have the same kinds of restrictions that were being put on by this oil sands cap.

One of the things that we had said over and over again was that the industry itself – and we're not even talking about the larger industries but the smaller businesses, the fabric of what makes up this province, Madam Speaker, especially when it comes to oil and gas, and how so many of these smaller businesses that were involved in the oil sands were not going to be able to see those leases go to fruition. This was a huge, huge impactful piece of legislation, and there was absolutely zero consultation with these smaller groups that are going to eventually be eaten up by these larger groups, which ultimately reduces competition. Then, on top of that, we who produce the greenest product in the world and should be the most proud of our resource development are going to lose out to other countries because of carbon leakage and many, many other things, which we've gone into over and over again.

There was so much less public discussion on the oil sands emissions than there was even on the climate leadership plan. If you look at the consultation – I was at all of the consultations for the climate leadership plan, and I saw all of the sticky notes. I actually have pictures still, after going to all of those meetings, of all the sticky notes of everything that people said about phasing out coal and all those kinds of things. We've talked about this at length.

However, one of the things that we realized during this, going through that whole process, was that the industry had not been adequately consulted, and even aside from the industry, the public wasn't. As Albertans and Canadians we own the resources. It is something that Albertans, in particular, are savvy about. There's not a single person in this House or anywhere in this province that is not touched by our resources or some offshoot of business that is impacted by how well or how poor we do in this industry and a policy that impacts it. I mean, we sent, I think, several amendments asking for referrals, all sorts of things on that.

11:00

Another one is Bill 27, the renewables act. Here's an interesting one, Madam Speaker. Just to speak about consultation again, because that's why we're doing this referral, coal phase-out wasn't even adequately defined in Bill 27. There was no definition for what coal phase-out was actually going to look like.

More interesting than that, did you know that the AESO didn't even make its recommendations public until the day that the bill was delivered to our desks on November 3? I remember personally scrambling to try and figure out how we were going to understand what the AESO's recommendations were, some of which the government took. A good chunk of things were actually not taken into consideration; for example, what was going to happen with respect to the PPAs? How were the taxpayer and the ratepayer, who are the same person, I might add, going to be impacted by that?

The recommendations were made public exactly at the same time that the bill came out. Interestingly enough, this is very similar to that. We have three or four humongous pieces of legislation being rammed through right before the end of session.

Now, as an opposition member my responsibility is to ask questions. So I'm looking at this, and I'm wondering a lot of different things. The whole point of doing a referral is because there are good things in this legislation, but there is a lot that really, really need some serious time, Madam Speaker, and I don't think that there's enough. I don't have enough energy to express how

important it is that a piece of legislation this large go to committee and that we have an opportunity to speak about it.

Bill 34, the electric utilities act, is my favourite. What was it? The minister defined it as her receiving a volatile electricity system. Well, “volatile” is a good word that I would use for the decisions that the government made, based specifically around the fact that it rendered the PPAs unable to be able to – being that the Balancing Pool would have no money, \$65 million, to be exact, that goes to making sure that the Balancing Pool can do its job.

Under the previous act we would’ve already had the responsibility to do that. The taxpayer is on the hook for the Balancing Pool as it runs out of cash, and the government, who is responsible for making the PPAs unprofitable, did not want to go to referral and talk about the issues therein. Instead, we had another massive piece of legislation which also gave the minister the ability to bring on renewables without bringing it in front of this Legislature. She had the complete capacity to make those decisions without anybody else knowing what was going on.

This is another reason that we wanted to go to referral on this. Lookit, if there is a reason and a capacity for these things to change, and as you speak with industry, there’s a lot of desire to go forward, it is the responsibility of government to be transparent with the people of this province about how that’s going to impact their livelihood. There needs to be buy-in, Madam Speaker; hence, the reason why going to referral is so important and going back into committee is so important.

They can ram through as much legislation as they want on any given day, Madam Speaker. The government has the majority. They certainly have the ability to do that with or without our blessing. However, we represent a humongous chunk of people on this side as well. It would behoove the government to actually listen and understand that the reason for going to committee is to actually justify some of the legislation and potentially strengthen legislation that’s going to go through with the help of the opposition. Ideally, that would be the way that things go. This is a collaborative approach. This is the way that we get things done. We can make some very, very good tweaks and bring in the people.

I want to go to the bill, just for a second, Madam Speaker. The one I found most interesting – and there are a lot of interesting things, but this is my particular piece for today – is the creative sentencing options. Doesn’t that sound like fun? Creative sentencing options. What is this relating to? Well, this is relating to the fact that the levies and the fines in the previous act are – the way that the levies and fines were in the previous act are still being held over. However, the court has now the ability to use creative sentencing options for employers found in contravention of the act. What does that mean?

I would love to understand the definition of that. I can’t even fathom what that’s going to look like in regulations, and the best part about that, Madam Speaker, is that we’re not going to know. We are not going to have the ability to say: “Wow. Creative sentencing options. What does that mean? What does that look like?” It seems like an awful lot of oversight for a body in the sense that the regulations are going to be made by cabinet and the government and the minister, which will have absolutely no space in here for us to talk about it, and then it’s going to go out into the world in some capacity with people not understanding not only the contravention of the act, because they have to learn and understand how they’re contravening the act, but more importantly how they are going to deal with that.

My goodness, as far as I understand, a court is an interpretive body. They’re going to interpret the law. So you will have interpretation and creative in the same sentence. It’s great for a song, musical theatre. I’m sure even Beethoven would approve. But

I don’t think that this is something that we should be putting into law without actually discussing what creative sentencing options actually means. I would really, really appreciate the government at any point being able to point out for me exactly what that means. That’s just one of them, and that one made me really, really nervous.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about, too, is that when we were talking about Bill 17 in the past, the FOIP documents showed that the consultation workplace laws last spring had a predetermined outcome. So what do we mean by that? Well, if you look at the way the consultation went, Madam Speaker, the questions are designed in such a way that a certain answer will come. There are only a couple of options. This has the exact same feel. It harkens back to that space of: wow. This was: “I’ll lead, and you follow. I’m going to set this in stone. I’m going to say that I consulted with you, but I’m going to lead the discussion, and you’re going to say okay.” That’s how this feels, and this is a humongous piece of legislation.

The other interesting thing is that if we’re looking at small and medium-sized businesses, if we’re talking about the costs that need to be absorbed as a result of what’s going to happen with the Workers’ Compensation Act, it is completely unsustainable. I would love to know the amount of consultation that was done with small and medium-sized businesses. Or are they just not important? Again, it reminds me Bill 25, the Oil Sands Emissions Limit Act, where the smaller companies and smaller leaseholders were not consulted and were not brought into the discussion. Ultimately, they’re the ones that will pay the price for the billions of dollars they’ve already sunk into the leases that will not come to fruition as a result of the cap.

I’m curious: how is it that the government expects small and medium-sized businesses that are at risk, because they’re not able to support those administrative costs, to support the joint committees that have been added to the ministry of training and alternative work placements? Wouldn’t it be better, Madam Speaker, to be able to bring in some of the associations, the chambers, anything, to be able to discuss this so this legislation is as strong as it needs to be? Obviously, there are changes that needed to be made.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. Having listened to my hon. colleague go through such an important thing like a referral motion, I truly want to hear the rest of her thoughts on this because I believe that she’s passionately encouraging this government to really look at the direction they’re going in, especially when the fact is that we seem to be running if not galloping towards a result that was predetermined by a very select few within this government. So if the member wouldn’t mind talking a little further on the fact that there doesn’t appear to be enough consultation, and how it would affect her constituents.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Chestermere-Rocky View.

11:10

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to continue to speak. Consultation is an interesting concept, isn’t it? Again, with all the humility that I could possibly muster, in my experience in the last, you know, two and a half or so years the consultation aspect for me has been more just sitting and listening and trying to understand and then trying to figure out how that would fit into a piece of legislation. I’ve really tried with all my

heart to not lead a person into a way of thinking. It's been more that they direct, and I take notes.

I think I can speak for most of us. I mean, I've been in consultations with a lot of my friends on this side of the House. I haven't been in a lot with my friends on the other side. But my assumption is that when we have people coming into our offices, as MLAs, you know, a good chunk of our job is to listen, to take notes, and then for us on this side we'll usually go to the minister that's responsible for that and try and bring forward suggestions and ideas or at least give some heads-up about a particular situation.

That can only happen, Madam Speaker, if you actually have the ability to sit and listen, not come and be told, not be directed. It's actually sitting down and listening to the people. As I've said on many occasions and I will continue to say, the people of this province are highly intelligent, thoughtful, common-sense, resilient human beings, and it just makes me beyond proud to be able to work in this beautiful place and to be able to represent them.

Consultation is actually for me a word of respect. It's a word of collaboration. It is a word that means that more than one idea can come to the table and that the conversation will be respectful and thoughtful and kind even if you're on completely opposing sides of an ideology or a thought process or anything. It's a very, very respectful dialogue that takes into consideration the feelings of the people that are going to be mostly impacted.

Over the course of the privilege of being in this House, the most consistent thing that I hear over and over and over again is: "Where was the consultation? We didn't know this was coming. They didn't reach out to us." These are, like, actual stakeholders that have a real, real stake in this game, that have the ability to actually direct government, which my understanding was, at least to some degree, how that's going to go.

Obviously, government is not going to make everybody happy. That's okay. I think all of us can live with that if there's common sense behind this. But you bring in this level of legislation that has two completely different components and smoosh it together in, well, what should have been the last week of the Legislature. Obviously, we're going to go on, smoosh it into this little-bitty time, expect us to consult, and then everything that we bring forward with amendments is not respected even though we're not making this stuff up. This is coming from consultation, Madam Speaker.

This is about referring it to committee so that we have the ability to actually talk to these people. I would think that the government would love to get that extra buy-in. This would be good for the government to do this. This is about gaining approval from the people that we represent, not getting approval for your own ideas. That's a completely different thing. This is actually about respectful discourse, actually having a discussion come out of that and coming to a conclusion. Like I said, you're not going to make everybody happy – I wish that was the case, but that's not going to happen – but listen to the public with an open mind.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know we are proud to see the response from Albertans on this review. We (a) received more than 1,300 online responses, (b) received nearly 90 written submissions, and (c) conducted eight in-person round-table discussions with more than 200 stakeholders across Alberta. On top of that, we had the independent WCB panel's recommendations for a workercentric system that were posted online on July 6, 2017, and Albertans had until September 30, 2017, to provide feedback. The panel received more than 1,700 questionnaires, 200 written submissions, and 67 workbook responses, and over 60 responses were submitted in response to the panel's report.

However, I would like to thank the opposition for wildly speculating, and I look forward to more wild speculations coming in the future. But at this moment I would like to adjourn debate on the amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:15 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Eggen	Malkinson
Babcock	Fitzpatrick	McKittrick
Carlier	Goehring	Miller
Carson	Gray	Nielsen
Ceci	Hoffman	Payne
Clark	Horne	Piquette
Connolly	Kazim	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Schreiner
Dach	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dang	Loyola	Sigurdson
Drever	Luff	Sucha

Against the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Pitt
Barnes	McIver	Schneider
Cyr	Panda	van Dijken
Gotfried		

Totals: For – 36 Against – 10

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

[Debate adjourned December 4]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 31? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to rise today to speak to Bill 31, and I would like to actually start off by bringing forward an amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: This amendment is REF1. Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, I would like to speak to this amendment, in support of it, of course. This bill is an ambitiously titled bill whose accuracy is yet to be determined. I say that because this bill is flawed in so many ways that you have to wonder if this bill is even salvageable in its present form. This bill is a piecemeal legislation attempting to fix problems where none existed. It will attempt to fix perceived shortcomings in areas such as lender credit rates, motor vehicle repair and sales, concert and event ticket sales and resale,

and even veterinarian medicine. I think we can tell by the diversity of the things covered in this bill that it's trying to cover a lot more than what any one bill should be trying to cover.

On top of this, we see a policy proposal that doesn't contain any enforceable items but seemingly exists only as a type of consumer information brochure, which is why my fellow MLAs and I believe that if there is to be any hope of making all parts of this bill work, it needs to go to committee so additional consultation and fulsome examination of its merits and shortcomings can be discussed properly.

Madam Speaker, to be honest, this bill as it's presented is a Frankenstein of sorts, parts of previous failed bills jammed together with changes to other pieces of legislation. We have elements of both Bill 203, Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016, and Bill 207, Veterinary Profession (Clear and Timely Price Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2016, with a smattering of the agencies, boards, and commissions review thrown in for good measure. This bill is then fleshed out with a concert and entertainment ticket reform section, that attempts to enforce an almost assuredly unenforceable problem.

Let's start there, Madam Speaker. What the government is trying to do is deal with, among other issues, software programs, or bots, that companies use for online ticket sales to concerts and events. This legislation would prohibit the use of any software which circumvents security measures designed to control and regulate ticket sales, the use of which tries to establish measures meant to reduce mass purchases which restrict access while also inflating resale prices.

This section causes us to question the enforceability of these provisions. The legislation would prohibit the resale of tickets that one knows were acquired using such software. Unfortunately, this places legal onus on primary sellers such as Ticketmaster, et cetera, to exercise reasonable diligence to prevent tickets from being purchased this way and cancel any that are believed to be bought in violation of this with this new bill. How are they going to enforce what someone may or may not believe? How is this government going to enforce bots that are out of province or out of country?

In fact, our neighbours to the south under the Obama administration passed an antibots-style of legislation as well. It didn't work. Bots keep operating, and legislation is unenforceable. Let's face it. As we bring any kind of legislation forward, when it comes to operating anything like this with these bots and that sort of thing, as long as there's somebody willing to come up with a system to stop it, there's somebody willing to come up with a system to bypass it. That's what hackers do. That's what they do all the time.

The government hasn't got any answers to these important questions. That's the problem, Madam Speaker. We have these issues with this bill, and there are no answers to these issues. Of course, the government that wants to bring forward legislation like this has to be willing to think of all these things and plan for these things and come up with answers. If there are no answers, then obviously the legislation is flawed.

Let's make sure that this section will actually achieve what it's trying to accomplish. I mean, the goal is a worthy goal, but if it can't be accomplished by this legislation, then it's a waste of time. It needs to go to a committee to make sure that every opportunity to enforce these goals is made. That's where we can have those kinds of discussions. We can bring in experts. We can have all of these things going on. But, obviously, this government can't answer those questions on how to solve these problems, and committee would give a great opportunity to have that discussion and have the experts come in and, hopefully, work out a solution to make this work.

Now, as to the portion dealing with veterinary medicine, I can tell you that the vets I've heard from and we've heard from over here – and I'm sure that side has heard from them as well though maybe they won't admit it, but they have – are not impressed to see their profession tacked on to a consumer protection bill. They believe that this does a disservice to their professional image by being lumped in with high-cost lenders, scalpers, and the dubious reputation of the auto industry. Of course, probably only one group of people that's got a worse reputation than the auto industry is possibly politicians. When we're dealing with legislation like this, there's no wonder, I guess.

11:40

Now, they are highly disappointed that they weren't consulted on these changes. Well, that can be remedied simply by inviting the ABVMA to appear before the designated committee. It'd give them the perfect opportunity to have a say in this legislation because, obviously, they've never seen this. They weren't consulted, and they haven't seen this legislation till now. But now they've seen it, now they've reacted to it, and in a committee they could have a chance to explain themselves to us as legislators what their problems are with this.

After all, you are now taking a self-regulating industry, such as the veterinarians enjoy, and putting it under ministerial control. That will give other self-regulating industries reason to be concerned. Who will be next? Again, it seems like in this Legislature we spend a lot of time trying to solve problems that don't exist. If the problem does exist, we go about it the wrong way. We don't consult with the people that are most affected by it.

In regard to the legislation itself they would have a chance to share their concerns about the powers given to cabinet in the regulations. They haven't had that opportunity yet. This bill along with a couple other of the biggest bills we've seen this session have been dropped on us at the very end of the session. They're big bills, they're very comprehensive, they're far encompassing, and they're dropped on us at the end of the legislative session. It's not just dropped on us as opposition; it's dropped on all Albertans. It's dropped on veterinarians, so they have minimal opportunity to respond and contact the people that represent them to have a say in this. That's why it's so important that we have this opportunity to send this to committee.

The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association has recently updated policy regarding advertising fees, and they offered to put this into bylaws as opposed to doing so by changing legislation. So some of these concerns they've already brought forward themselves and are willing to solve themselves. Of course, now the know-all government decides: "Okay; this is the way we have to do this. We're going to legislate it. We're going to ram it down their throats." Where do the concerns the government seems to have with the ABVMA stem from? Where do they come from? Where have these concerns come from? Why didn't this government take a more fulsome, collaborative approach to this? Why not work together via committee and do exactly that?

Since the consultation wasn't done beforehand, by sending it to committee, we at least have the opportunity to have the consultation afterwards. That's not the best way to do legislation, but when we're dealt this kind of deal and the people of Alberta are dealt this kind of deal, then this is an opportunity we have to fix this. Again, it's not the best option, but it's the only option we have right now.

Finally, I want to touch on the operations of AMVIC, the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, which is Alberta's automotive industry regulator. AMVIC is an independent delegated authority and is accountable to the Alberta government through a delegation agreement with the Minister of Service Alberta. This was done under

I support this bill, and I'd urge my colleagues in the House to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Bill 210, the silver alert act. I think it's an important piece of legislation. I will take my brief time here speaking to this bill to just speak broadly about the challenges that dementia and dementia care present for our province and, of course, most especially for the people who face dementia and their family, loved ones, and caregivers.

You know, as I talk to my constituents and Albertans around the province, I hear repeatedly about the magnitude of the gaps in dementia care in this province and the lack of knowledge and understanding about dementia and what it actually means. The hon. member speaking immediately before me talked about some of the impacts. For every 1 person who is diagnosed with dementia, it has an impact on 10 to 12 people on average, and in many cases that's even more than that.

I find it curious that this province does not have a provincial dementia strategy, something I've been pushing for for some time now, dating back to the spring, when I asked the Minister of Health about that. At that time she indicated that we would see a provincial dementia strategy coming, quote, unquote, within a couple of weeks. That was back in the spring. We saw no action on that. Again in the fall I was told that we would see a provincial dementia strategy with the funding associated with that sometime this fall. Well, we're still waiting, Madam Speaker.

A provincial dementia strategy is something that other provinces have taken on. Ontario has committed \$100 million over three years to a provincial dementia strategy, and that is in addition to \$20 million that they have allocated to respite care. Those sorts of funding commitments and an overall strategic framework are entirely missing from this province, so while we talk about Bill 210 and the importance of that, it is important that we understand the context in which we're debating this, and that is that there is no provincial dementia strategy.

The government has said in the past that more long-term care beds are coming. That's good. That is one important piece of dementia care, but it is by no means the sum total of what the provincial government ought to be doing. Yes, it's an important piece, but not every person in a long-term bed has dementia, and certainly long-term care would not be an appropriate setting for every single person with dementia, particularly true of those with early onset dementia who are in the early stages of this progressive illness. It's certainly not something that should be considered a replacement for a provincial dementia strategy.

As I think of the silver alert legislation, one of the reasons I'm so strongly in favour of it is the story of our neighbour Ken. Ken was in his early 80s and, unfortunately, had progressively worse Alzheimer's and would wander. He was still able to live at home. He's lived in the neighbourhood for almost all of his life and was born and lived in Calgary and moved to that neighbourhood when he was a small boy. Our house was his friend Graham's house, and he would come and knock on our door on a regular basis. He would wander through the neighbourhood, but those of us in the neighbourhood were able to look out for Ken and make sure that he was able to always find his way home. When I think of the importance of legislation like this, I think of Ken, and I would say: may Ken rest in peace. I had a nice opportunity to speak with Ken's wife last night at a community holiday event.

Dementia does touch all of us in this province, Madam Speaker. It's incredibly important that we support this legislation, and I do urge all of my hon. colleagues to do so.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 210, Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017, put forward by my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Devon. I'd like to commend my colleague for putting his time and his efforts and a lot of research into this piece of legislation that we see here before us today.

I think that many Albertans, in fact I might even be so bold as to say that most Albertans would certainly agree that having the ability to issue a silver alert is an important signal in our society. Anything that we can do in this Legislature that protects vulnerable persons and aids in finding missing persons is certainly a good step forward that we can all take here together today, Madam Speaker, in second reading.

I won't say much. I won't take up much time. I do support this piece of legislation. I think it is an excellent step forward in assisting in protecting and having the backs of our vulnerable seniors in this province, where dementia and other deteriorating diseases like that are a reality and where wandering off happens. It's no one's fault, and it is what it is, but having the systems in place that can help these people find a safe way home is a good step forward.

I will certainly be voting for this piece of legislation, and I urge all members in this House to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to have a couple of comments here. Again, thank you to all of the people that helped put this bill together. I think we all have been touched by people that we love who have wandered off and who need assistance, and if this bill can move us forward in that direction and towards safeguarding the lives of some of our Albertan citizens, then I think it's an important bill that we should all support.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising to seek unanimous consent that notwithstanding Standing Order 8 the Assembly will move into immediate consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to request the unanimous consent of this Assembly to waive Standing Order 8(7) to allow the Assembly to proceed to Committee of the Whole on Bill 210, Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Now, if we look at Bill 31, it's a pretty good-sized document. I don't know what it is, maybe 50 pages or something like that. Of course, it's thrown in at the same time as Bill 30 and Bill 32, which are both probably about 200 pages and brought in in the last week of the legislative sitting.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I speak to the amendment to refer Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, to committee. I speak in favour of the amendment. I believe that this Bill 31 makes several changes to the Fair Trading Act and includes the changing of the name of the act to the consumer protection act. A number of the changes may include regulatory powers granted to the minister. That does concern me with a number of these cases where we have more government overreach into the marketplace. I believe that there is potential, especially with the Veterinary Profession Act, for interference in a professional agency, quantifying it as essentially commodity protection under consumer protection. These types of things need to be discussed in committee, with individuals and professionals brought forward to ensure that what's being proposed is going to actually help and not hinder, is actually going to strengthen and not harm the people that are being affected by this.

The one thing that I will recognize is that Alberta is a car and truck driving and owning province, and now the NDP wants to change the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council. This is a body that makes sure that people are protected when they're purchasing automobiles, used automobiles primarily. This bill, Bill 31, aims to change AMVIC from being incorporated as a society to a corporation and a delegated regulatory body. AMVIC will be the only such body to exist, and the government claims not to have designs on creating any others, but I am not necessarily convinced that the government is being completely transparent with their claims. I do have concerns that we're setting a precedent here that is concerning. We know that the Canada free trade agreement is allowing the government to set up a Crown corporation to administer all government procurement, so the statement that AMVIC is the only corporation the NDP are going to set up may possibly not be accurate.

Changing AMVIC to a government agency creates uncertainty for the industry that they will have adequate representation on the new board of the government agency. I believe that all individuals that are within this industry have the right to have their say in a

transparent manner, and I believe that doing this through committee is a very necessary part of bringing forward clear legislation, transparent legislation so that all Albertans can be confident that the right legislation has come forward.

When we have uncertainty in the industry on adequate representation on the new board of the government agency, this creates concern about the ability to educate the public members about AMVIC's role and responsibilities. I witnessed that the minister neglected to fill empty board seats for up to two and a half years, and this is concerning, including seats she added after the independent review came out. This includes a time period of six months when there were no public appointees on the board at all.

Now, Service Alberta is also known for red tape and the red tape that it administers, and Bill 31 requires disclosure, creation, and use of a standard bill of sale for all automobiles. But disclosure is meant to be worked out in the regulations, and a standard bill of sale still represents a concern to industry as it would need to take into account both large and small vendors. We won't get to see what the NDP is proposing for regulations for some time. This is a lot of stuff for the automobile industry to digest, and as such, I believe the referral amendment to be quite in order.

When it comes to veterinary medicine under Bill 31, Bill 31 would require estimates and customer authorization for all veterinary medicine requests and seeks to legislate advertising and, on top of that, more regulatory powers. I have received communication from local veterinarians in my constituency that have significant concerns over this. I received a letter this morning where the individual, a doctor in veterinary medicine, says that veterinary medicine has many pillars to it but two very important pillars, the first being a valid client-patient relationship and the second being responsible stewardship of the antibiotics. Why I bring that up is that I believe that we can't necessarily legislate veterinary medicine in the same way that we would legislate other commodities that are being offered for sale and offered for consumer use.

Not all aspects of the commercial world apply to the medical world, and I think we have to be careful in how we move forward with this type of legislation and how we see that it can have significant damage, can present significant ...

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 5, 2017

Day 61

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my very great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a gentleman who is no stranger to this Assembly or to these halls. He served as the MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose from 2008 through 2015 and also served in cabinet as Minister of Justice and minister of agriculture and rural development, and he's someone that I'm very privileged to call a great friend, Mr. Verlyn Olson. He is here with his grandson Josh, who is visiting the Legislature not for the first time, I've learned, and it was really great to see Verlyn and Josh once again. I'd ask everyone to please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you the students from one of the finest schools in central Alberta, Delburne school. They are accompanied today by teachers Tricia Simpson and Derk Unterschultz along with chaperones Jacquie Myers, Jacquie Svederus, Heather Davidson, James and Christina Guynup, Mandy Marek, and Lance Neilson. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: My guests aren't here.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you the students of Provost public school with their teacher Mrs. Sherrilyn Spencer along with some chaperones: Mr. Robin Folkins, Mr. Jim Fanning, Mrs. Roxane Murray, and Mrs. Cindy Hill. I ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly 60 incredibly intelligent students who are the pride of the riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie and are here from Daly Grove school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Lisa Bruce and Andrea Sloat, as well as by one of the parent chaperones, Jit Chaudhary. I ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other school groups to be introduced?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Jonathan Jacobs. Jonathan is an entrepreneur. He is an oil sands electrician, and he's also part of the Alberta Party's energy policy team in Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I would ask Jonathan to please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members in the Assembly Mark Taylor, who is a long-time Alberta Party member. He was a candidate for the party in the 2015 by-election in Calgary-Foothills. His background is in engineering, business coaching. He's a long-time online fan of question period, and this is his first time to visit us in person. He's also been recently appointed as the executive director of the Alberta Party. I ask Mark to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Sherry and Matt Sartorelli, who are seated in your gallery. Last week the government introduced presumptive legislation in Bill 30 that would further protect paramedics who suffer from a myocardial event within 24 hours of their shift. I spoke to the clause in the bill, referencing my good friend and teacher David Sartorelli. Dave suffered a heart attack just hours after his shift on medic 8 in Calgary, only to have the same unit and the crew that he relieved respond to his emergency. To our sadness, Dave passed away. Dave served this province for over 32 years but not just him; his family served, too. With the four-on and four-off schedule – and I speak from experience – you give up half. You miss half of every experience, and so does your family. To honour Dave and his family, I ask that Sherry and Matt stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the guests seated in your gallery and the members' gallery, paramedics who worked with Dave Sartorelli. As the MLA for Calgary-South East has just spoken beautifully about, Dave was a 32-year-old paramedic in Calgary, but more than that, he was a beloved leader and mentor. Today we have with us: from Calgary, David Van Bakel, Donna Zarecki, Raj Dattani, Stuart Brideaux, and Greg Undershute; and from Edmonton, Mike Webb, Dave Hansen, Julian Power, Amy-Jean Easton, Hayley Ballantyne, Angela Lussoso, and Alex Campbell.

Madam Speaker, I'm very pleased that some of his colleagues are here today as we continue to debate Bill 30, which will ensure myocardial coverage for first responders. They will tell you that if Dave were here today, his message would be: "Love your job. Love the fact that you get to make a difference. Love the fact that you can and will make a difference." I'd now like to ask these dedicated men and women to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Madam Speaker, I'm also honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly senior leadership from the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. Today we have the HSAA president, Mike Parker, and board member Donna

Farquharson. The HSAA represents over 24,000 paramedical, technical, professional, and general support employees in the public and private health care sectors of Alberta, and on behalf of all of their members they're here to help us honour Dave Sartorelli. They will tell you that there are many people Dave touched and influenced through his passion for advanced cardiac life support and EMS education. I would like to ask Mike and Donna to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I'm very excited to introduce three residents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview: Jennifer, Joel, and Sapphira Lewin. These are community leaders and strong advocates for people with special needs. I hope that we can give them a warm traditional reception from the Assembly now, please.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituency assistant, Teresa Sutherland. Teresa brings over 25 years of experience as a social worker and works hard every day to make life better for the people of Spruce Grove-St. Albert. She is here today for the introduction of my colleague's Henson trust private member's bill. If passed, the bill would make a real difference in the lives of a number of my constituents. I would ask her to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am truly pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some fantastic employees from Service Alberta, one of the two best departments in the GOA. This past summer this team led Service Alberta across the province to engage with consumers on improvements to our consumer protection legislation, which I had the honour of tabling just yesterday. As a result of their hard work, we have tabled significant updates to our consumer protection laws. I'm so proud of them, and they will better protect consumers' pocketbooks, help Alberta businesses succeed and consumers have more confidence. I wish that I had the time to introduce all of them individually. They all mean a great deal to me. I'd like them all to rise together as a group and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce some very special guests who are seated in the public gallery. I invite them to rise as I introduce them, please: Sam; his parents, Kirstin and Mathias; as well as his grandparents Marianne and Kelly. Sam walked 100 kilometres over 100 days for the Kidney Foundation. Several members of his family have been donors and recipients, including his grandmother, who is here today, who donated her kidney several years ago. I had the pleasure of joining Sam for a portion of his journey this September, when we walked around the Legislature fountain. Sam has raised awareness about organ donation, and it's great to see three generations committed to this project. Please join me in welcoming them to our Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a number of guests who are here today in support of my proposed bill on Henson trusts: Erin Waite, agency director at Connections Counselling; Andrea Hesse, who is the CEO of the Alberta Council of Disability Services and also serves on the board of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations; Gordon VanderLeek, founder of VanderLeek Law, a firm specializing in disability issues; Leonard Lozowy, the president of the Gateway association in Edmonton; Julie Boucher, family support liaison at the Edmonton Down Syndrome Society; Robin Slater, a strong AISH advocate who came all the way from the beautiful town of Canmore. I'd also like to introduce several people who took part in the bill consultation process: Dr. Frances Harley-Urtasun, Shirley Bruha, Gino Ferri, Denise Layton, Dr. Robert Pearcey, and, last but certainly not least, the coexecutive directors of the Medicine Hat and District Food Bank, Celina Symmonds and Tammy Vanderloh. If I could ask all my guests to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thanks, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the CEO of Inclusion Alberta, Mr. Bruce Uditsky. Inclusion Alberta advocates for and supports individuals with developmental disabilities. Mr. Uditsky is here today to show support for Bill 211, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (Discretionary Trust) Amendment Act, 2017. I would ask Mr. Uditsky to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House again the two codirectors of the Medicine Hat food bank. These two ladies are excellent directors, but they are also tremendous community builders, leaders in a brown bag lunch program for over 30 schools in Medicine Hat, leaders in community garden enhancement for providing food and opportunities for family members, and are great at making solutions to help use and harvest the elk population for those that are in need. If I could ask Tammy Vanderloh and Celina Symmonds to again please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Henson Trusts for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Today is an exciting day because I'll be tabling my first piece of legislation, which, if passed, would enable families to set up Henson trusts for their loved ones living with disabilities. The process of drafting this bill has taught me a lot about community-led consultations and the importance of Nothing about Us without Us. With the help of my staff and members of the community, that's what we set out to do, to learn what the community needed and to put forward proposed legislation that they had a hand in crafting.

The problem that my proposed private member's bill would fix came to my attention when a constituent in Calgary-Currie came

into my office to ask why a family member with a disability who inherited assets after a loved one passed away could have their AISH supports clawed back. This didn't seem right to me, Madam Speaker, so we began province-wide consultations. We heard from Albertans in Calgary and Peace River, from Edmonton, Chestermere, and Taber. Over 3,400 names are on a petition begun by Inclusion Alberta, asking the government to allow Henson trusts. The result of those consultations and outreach is my proposed private member's Bill 211.

For Richard, who lives in Calgary-Shaw, it is, to quote him, an absurd situation that Henson trusts are not allowed. Supporting them, quote, would only be logical. And as Tannis, who reached out to my Lethbridge-East colleague, explained, it is, quote, unfair that I, with a speaking voice and earning potential, am not limited in saving for the future but my brother, with neither, is.

This proposed legislation never would have been possible without the hundreds of Albertans who worked together to help me form this proposed legislation, and to them I say a very sincere thank you.

Forest Industry Concerns

Mr. Schneider: Madam Speaker, as the year winds to a close, I wonder what lessons this government will take away in regard to how they deal with forestry issues. We had another year of devastating fires in Alberta and B.C. The southern Alberta fires in the Suffield, Waterton, and Crowsnest regions, while not nearly on the scale of destruction of the Horse River fire of 2016, indeed were devastating and emotional to those affected, as much as those in Fort McMurray. We have the unresolved issue of Alberta's caribou strategy already several months overdue, which continues to cause worry to a forest industry just recently smacked with duties imposed by the U.S. softwood trade issue. We have an ever-increasing problem with the mountain pine beetle, and while Alberta has been doing a decent job in the past dealing with its effects, different solutions need to be found to win this battle.

Madam Speaker, this industry is already reeling from the issues of the past few years, and now January 1 is looming, and the NDP's tax on everything is set to go up to \$30 a tonne. That means increases on fuels such as gasoline, diesel, propane, and natural gas in order to harvest, log, and transport these trees to the mill. Then these trees need to enter the phase of processing, and the finished product must be shipped to market. Basically, this government will increase costs on practically every stage of the manufacturing process on a global commodity that simply cannot pass the increased costs on to consumers and remain competitive.

We already find ourselves in a situation where this government's complete mismanagement of numerous departments has seen investors flee the province. The province's credit rating dropped six times. Unemployment skyrocketed to the tune of 12,400 jobs lost in November alone.

Madam Speaker, this government needs to shelve the ideology, step back, and start doing what they can to stop the bleeding so that we have something to salvage in 2019.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Member for Lacombe-Ponoka's Remarks

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last week the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka made comments here in the House about the Chinese community. The members' words were more than just absurd; they were troubling, unhelpful, and offensive.

The member should know that Chinese-Canadians are not defined by what he said in those comments. We are more than that. We contribute significantly to this country economically and culturally. We don't need people perpetuating old school prejudices from the 1890s.

I believed that these stereotypes had subsided with time, but apparently they're still alive and well in the UCP. The fact that the member would use the Chinese community and these stereotypes in this Legislature to conjure up a narrative to score cheap political points is tasteless.

And it's not just me, Madam Speaker. I've spoken with leaders from the community, and they are not impressed. When I spoke with William Lau, a member of the Edmonton Chinese Young Leaders Council, I heard from him that the comments were inappropriate regardless of the context. They crossed a line. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka never should have used those stereotypes. He never should have used those stereotypes in this House, and he should apologize to the Chinese-Canadian community.

I spoke with other prominent leaders in the Chinese community who stated that the member's words simply were not grounded in facts. She told me that his speech would do more harm than good and was an unsupported opinion.

This member needs to do the right thing. This member needs to apologize in this House for his comments about the Chinese-Canadian community and recognize that stereotypes do not contribute to political discussion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order noted.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction

Mr. Nixon: Just over one year ago right here this Premier's Energy minister said in regard to Trans Mountain that shovels will be in the ground within the year. Here we are a year later, and Kinder Morgan says that, unfortunately, the scope and pace of permits and approvals received does not allow for significant additional construction to begin at this time. It's clear that when it comes to getting Trans Mountain approved, this government is just not getting the job done. To the Premier: when was the last time that you bothered even reaching out to the federal and B.C. governments in regard to these important permit issues on Trans Mountain?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, the Conservatives couldn't get a pipeline built for 20 years, and now they want to act like tough guys, threatening a trade war with B.C. It would be amusing if it wasn't just so sad. I'll tell you something. I am not going to take any advice from the ready, fire, aim crowd over there. I'm going to continue to do what I've been doing since day one: fighting for good schools and hospitals and our kids and our loved ones, fighting for good jobs, and, of course, fighting to get this pipeline built.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, again, we do this every day. The Premier stands up. She will not answer simple questions. She goes on and on with fearmongering. All she can do is read her speaking

notes with her talking points. It is ridiculous. It was a simple question. So I'll ask another simple question. How many permits have been approved for Trans Mountain, and how many more need to be approved? That's it. Just a simple question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, I will say that talk is cheap because, of course, the member opposite is reading from his press release of a mere two hours ago. Anyway, you know, I will say that, notwithstanding the price of talk, the members over there certainly can talk, but they just can't get anything done. Conservative government in B.C., Conservative government in Ottawa, Conservative government in Alberta, and still – still – they couldn't get a pipeline built. You know, you just have to really work hard to be that ineffective, but we aren't going to repeat those failures. We're going to get this pipeline built.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, I have listed many pipelines that have been approved under the federal Conservatives, but we're here today to talk about the provincial NDP, who have two cancelled pipelines and another pipeline upgrade that looks like it's about to be prevented from being built despite this Premier saying that she would get it built.

Here's why the Premier doesn't want to talk about permits. The project requires 1,200 permits. Sixty-six of them have been approved. That is a long way from this Energy minister saying that shovels would be in the ground at this time this year. So the question to the Premier is: what is she doing to get those permits approved? Is she putting forward serious consequences to B.C. if they continue to block our pipelines, or is she just going to continue to stand up in this House and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I do admit that we're not going to convince absolutely everyone, but what we are doing is working very hard to convince the moderate, progressive majority of Canadians. Indeed, I've set out across the country to do just that, and just last week I was in B.C. Now, I get that the members opposite might not be aware of that because, you know, they've been yelling and screaming so long, they're not part of the progressive, moderate majority of Canadians any longer. But I will tell you that, in fact, that's who we're talking about, and that's who we're talking to. We will not build walls. We will build pipelines, and we're going to get the job done.

The Deputy Speaker: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, all this Premier has left is personal shots. Here are the facts. Paper approval from the Trudeau Liberals is not a project that is completed. That is not shovels in the ground. We were promised, we were told in this House that there would be shovels in the ground at this time. There are not. The Premier doesn't want to stand up and acknowledge that serious issue. She continues going forward with a carbon tax that is killing jobs in our province. In fact, the NDP are going to increase that carbon tax in less than a month. The question is this: if you can't get B.C. to work with you on those and you've proved that social licence is not working, will you cancel your carbon tax increase?

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, as you know, we are continuing our hard work to get the pipeline built. In addition, the federal government is also continuing that work as a result of not screaming

at them but actually talking to them on a regular basis, as we do, like adults. They have now joined our application at the NEB to ensure and to request that this matter move forward on a more timely basis. That's the kind of work that you do when you want to get outcomes, and that's why we will in fact deliver outcomes.

Mr. Nixon: Outcomes? Two cancelled pipelines and another one that's on the ropes.

The Premier says that she's talking to people about the pipelines. Well, I've pointed out that she's not even taking any action, but let's talk about talking. The last time that she met with B.C.'s NDP leader, precisely one year ago, to discuss this project, he said that she had no intention of persuading him on pipelines. My question, Madam Speaker, to the Premier is very, very simple. Do you have the intention of persuading them on pipelines now, or are you going to continue to allow this project to be blocked?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As the member opposite probably knows, the reality is that the decision has already been taken, and the delay in having this matter go forward is actually in relation to the decisions with respect to the city of Burnaby. That is why the matter is before the NEB, and that is why the government of Alberta is there alongside Kinder Morgan asking the NEB to move the matter along and to ensure that Burnaby doesn't overstep its authority. That is a reasonable thing to do. Having temper tantrums, grandstanding, and doing what they do pretty much from the minute they get up in the morning and look in the mirror does not help. It really doesn't. What we are doing does.

Mr. Nixon: Just over one year ago, when Ottawa gave paper approval to this project, the Premier said: we are showing here today that's how to get actual results. Well, one year later this project has only 66 of 1,200 permits needed. There are delays and no expected date for actual shovels to be in the ground. But Albertans in my constituency and your constituency are stuck with the job-killing carbon tax that will increase by 50 per cent. Given the failure of the NDP's plan on social licence, will they stand up, acknowledge it, and cancel the carbon tax increase?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Madam Speaker, let's talk a little bit about cost, and let's talk a little bit about affordability. Our government has capped electricity rates; the members opposite would jack them up. Our government extended the tuition freeze; the members opposite would make parents pay more. Our government banned door-to-door sales; the members opposite would lift the ban. We cut school fees; the members opposite would increase them. What we are doing is actually not increasing costs but increasing affordability, and I am very proud of that record.

The Deputy Speaker: Third main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: They capped electricity rates at double today's price, so thanks for nothing, Madam Premier.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Nixon: In less than a month the job-killing carbon tax will be hiked by 50 per cent. This is a massive tax that the NDP did not campaign on in 2015. In fact, they hid it from Albertans. Despite their vague talk of social licence at least \$34.8 billion in investment has fled our oil sands sector alone since the NDP announced the

job-killing carbon tax. The economy is still suffering, and we have no new pipelines. Will the Premier admit that her social licence carbon tax scheme is a failure and cancel the increase?

Ms Notley: Well, what I will do is continue talking about the things that we have done to support Albertans and to reduce costs. For instance, we brought in a child benefit helping 380,000 children in the province of Alberta. The members opposite voted against it. We lowered the small-business tax. The members opposite certainly wouldn't do that because that's part of the climate leadership plan. Madam Speaker, 60 per cent of Alberta families get a carbon levy rebate to help them bring down their emissions to reduce their costs for years and years going forward. The members opposite think that's awful. The fact is that our plan is working, and those folks don't like it.

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, the NDP brought in the largest tax increase in the history of our province, a tax increase that they did not campaign on and that they misled Albertans on.

Yesterday the government of Saskatchewan announced their climate change strategy, but Saskatchewan's plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions without any sort of a carbon tax. So the question, Madam Speaker, is this. When the NDP were designing their climate change plan, did they even consider not having a carbon tax, or is this always just about the tax grab for this NDP government?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm so glad that the members opposite brought up the province of Saskatchewan. Let's compare. In Saskatchewan their growth rate is stuck at 1.4 per cent, and in Alberta our growth rate is 4.1 per cent. In Saskatchewan the government just brought in a made-in-Ottawa carbon tax, and what we have here is a made-in-Alberta carbon levy that industry got to be part of. That's what happens when you do your homework instead of sitting in the corner having a temper tantrum.

Mr. Nixon: The government of Saskatchewan did not bring in a made-in-Ottawa carbon tax. They actually stood up for the citizens, something this government should look at.

The Alberta economy has a long way to go until it recovers. Last month Alberta lost over 12,000 full-time jobs under this NDP government's watch. Alberta reports show that 13,000 insolvencies in our province happened last year alone, and this government is bringing in a 50 per cent increase to their job-killing carbon tax. The Premier can't defend it. That's why she talks about everything else. Will she stand up and admit that she's got it wrong and announce that she's going to cancel this increase on Albertans?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. What I'll stand up and admit is that since June of last year our province has created tens of thousands of new jobs. In addition, manufacturing is up. Retail sales are up. Housing starts are up. Small-business confidence is up.

Mr. Mason: Drilling is up.

Ms Notley: Drilling is up, Madam Speaker. Investment is up. Things are looking up. I know that makes the guys over there seem very sad, but thankfully it's making life better for Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Nonprofit Organizations

Mr. Clark: Why, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Alberta's not-for-profit sector has a long history of delivering high-quality, efficient services to Albertans, but there's a lot of worry that the government's so-called compassionate cuts will have a big impact on not-for-profits. There's evidence that they're attempting to take over rather than partner with certain programs that are delivered far more efficiently by the not-for-profit sector. Funding Alberta's not-for-profits is the most efficient way to deliver many services because it matches volunteers and donors with the comprehensiveness of government. To the Premier: will you commit to working with not-for-profits rather than taking a government-first approach?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Of course, I will commit to that. In fact, I can also point to a record of exactly that ever since we were elected. One of the first things that our government did when we were elected was, through the urgings of our Minister of Finance, to make a significant increase in FCSS funding, which, of course, as the member opposite knows, is critical to many nonprofits across the province. We've done that on that matter. There's a raft of other ways in which we work closely with nonprofits, and we are pleased to do that because, of course, they contribute so much to the quality of life in our province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, with respect, I think that many food banks and school nutrition programs would disagree that it's not a government-first approach.

One of Alberta's strengths is our ability to innovate, and innovation often means government working with partners to find new ways to deliver programs, but surprisingly this government has continued the Conservatives' inflexible funding approach through the AGLC, CIP, and CFEP, this to the detriment of not-for-profits that want to innovate, collaborate, and build capacity. Again to the Premier: will you commit to modernizing funding models to support innovation and collaboration in the not-for-profit sector?

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, we of course will always commit to work with nonprofits and to hear any concerns they have with respect to the efficacy of those programs for them, and we do work very, very closely with them. Last fiscal year alone over 17,000 charities were licensed to carry out charitable gaming, for instance, in support of their communities, and they were able to raise in excess of \$330 million. A lot of this is working. In addition, we've increased our partnership with many of these organizations. We've increased funding to them in a number of different ways because we value the important work that they provide to Albertans across this province, and we want to continue to build on those relationships.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's not just the amount of money; it's how those organizations are restricted in how they can use the money.

More and more Albertans are turning to the not-for-profit sector to simply survive the largest economic downturn in a generation, yet our constituency offices hear repeatedly that innovative project funding and funding applications continue to be denied. Now, I happen to know that this Finance minister knows a lot about this

sector, so my last question will be to you. To the Minister of Finance: as you consider your compassionate cuts, how can the not-for-profit sector trust that future funding will support the most innovative, creative, and effective programing?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, we have a dedicated team at AGLC. Just today I announced the hiring and appointment of Alain Maissoneuve, a 30-year employee of AGLC and the board before that. He is dedicated to making sure that charities in this province get what they need as a result of their gaming activities, 'racinos,' and other kinds of things. We're going to continue to work with all of our partners to make sure they have what they need going forward to serve the citizens of this province.

Seniors and Housing Minister's Activities

Ms Fitzpatrick: Madam Speaker, during our fall session we have heard about the many ministerial visits this summer. I know that the Minister of Seniors and Housing, who represents a wide diversity of Albertans, attended many of these visits. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing. Connecting with Albertans is essential in creating inclusive social policy. What connections have you made?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This summer I travelled all over this province and had the opportunity to listen to Albertans from Peace River to Medicine Hat. I visited 23 Albertan communities between June and August. I met John and Mable Baxter in Whitecourt. They contributed 3,500 volunteer hours serving their community – this included sharing their gift of music – which inspired their receipt of the minister's seniors service award.

Ms Fitzpatrick: To the same minister. I know that the constituents of Lethbridge-East certainly appreciated your visit. During your tour what did you hear from citizens?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Communities like Lethbridge-East are seeing the economy recover, and they want to know how our government is making life better for them. I met seniors at Green Acres lodges receiving excellent housing and social supports as respected and valued members of Lethbridge. I heard from seniors and Albertans on low income that they want our government to carefully find savings while protecting the public services that families count on. Albertans are looking for inclusive, caring, and steady leadership, and our government is providing it.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Madam Speaker, I have also heard from my constituents that they want government to focus on a steady economic recovery while helping vulnerable Albertans. What actions have you taken to address this issue?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We've protected more than \$800 million in seniors' benefits over the last two years. We're building 4,100 homes for Albertans through our \$1.2 billion investment in affordable housing. We have 62 construction and planning projects currently under way. We know that Jason Kenney's Conservatives' reckless plan to cut 20 per cent of the province's budget would hit Albertans hard. Our government

is investing in safe and affordable housing to make life better for Albertans.

Alberta Health Services

Mr. Fraser: Our health system is very large and increasingly complex. The Alberta Health Services organizational chart shows hundreds of positions, with responsibilities ranging from patient care to IT services, and it can be hard to keep track of just who is responsible for what. While many of these positions are filled by passionate people delivering quality work for our health system, our financial reality means that we need to ensure that the maximum number of dollars is focused on the front line and not on management. To the Minister of Health: when was the last time the organizational structure of AHS was reviewed with the intent of eliminating obsolete or underperforming positions?

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the important question. Let me assure the member that it is a constant effort and that every time there is a budget done or every time there is a position that is vacated, it is certainly taken into consideration as well. I also want to assure the member that every year the Canadian Institute for Health Information, also known as CIHI, does an annual review, and he should be assured knowing that AHS's total administrative expenses are 30 per cent lower than the national average. Any time there's an opportunity to be even more efficient, we definitely take that into consideration, but in terms of comparisons to other jurisdictions, we are certainly far ahead, in a better position than others.

2:10

Mr. Fraser: Given that AHS is responsible for a number of projects to improve health care and given that it's important to note performance measures that indicate a clear end date and given that we can save money by wrapping up projects that have either achieved the objective or gone several years without significant progress and reinvesting that money in supporting front-line services and effective management, to the same minister: will you direct AHS to conduct a review of all ongoing projects to determine whether these projects are still delivering value for tax dollars and to ensure that staff positions associated with these projects are phased out if they're no longer needed?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the question. Again, this is something that we've been working on with AHS, to review the grant cycle. Of course, every time that those are up, we think it's important that we consider whether or not we're getting full return on those investments. We do that both with AHS as well as with Alberta Health. For example, when the RPAP contract was up, we looked at whether or not it was being done most effectively, and we determined that there were opportunities to expand RPAP from specifically looking at physicians to looking at all health professionals in rural and remote communities. I'm really pleased to see that that's been expanded and that we're moving forward in a very thoughtful way to get better results for rural communities.

Mr. Fraser: Given that organizations like AHS and Alberta Health look to their leadership for guidance and given that reforming our health system is going to take an enormous effort and good ideas from all across the health system and given that workers in our

health system will be more willing to bring forward their cost-saving and innovation ideas if they see the heads of their respective departments doing the same, to the same minister: what are you doing along with AHS leadership to demonstrate to employees of AHS and Alberta Health that you're committed to fostering innovation and implementing cost-saving measures in our health system?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Madam Speaker and to the member for the thoughtful question. I want to reiterate that it's one of the leaner management structures across Canada at a ratio of 1 to 29 per staff leader, but that doesn't mean there aren't opportunities to do more. I certainly welcome the member opposite to continue these conversations if he has specific initiatives he'd like to bring forward. Just yesterday I spoke to the president and CEO of AHS. I meet with the board regularly. We continue to push for innovation, efficiency, and getting the most resources possible to the front lines instead of moving for rash, ideological cuts, like the Official Opposition's, of 20 per cent. That's not going to happen as . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I once again raise the name of Serenity. I do so for her mother, who does not want to see other parents suffer the pain that comes from losing a child. Last spring I promised her that I would do my best to convince my colleagues to implement a simple legislative change that will save the lives of Alberta's children. Premier, I made this proposal a year ago. Why has your government failed to adopt this common-sense, life-saving change on its own?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to start by thanking Serenity's mother for being here today, for your bravery, for your steadfastness in advocating for your daughter even in the face of such a great loss. I want you to know that we all stand behind you in your continued advocacy for Serenity. Let me be clear. Reporting suspected abuse and neglect is the law. Our whole Legislature is committed to honouring the memory of Serenity by taking action to prevent child abuse.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: But you're not taking action, Minister.

Madam Speaker, thank you. Given that Serenity's law would make it the responsibility of every adult in Alberta to contact a police officer if they know a child is in need of intervention, Premier, will you commit to support passing Serenity's law today?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the member for his proposal and his commitment to preventing child abuse, a commitment that we both share. Our law enforcement partners, including the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, have suggested to us that they have some concerns with this proposal, and we continue to have concerns about unintended consequences and confusion with this proposal. But I certainly made the commitment to Serenity's mother that I will work with the member and I will work with the police force and all that I need to do to advance the cause of preventing child abuse and preventing a tragedy such as happened to Serenity from happening again.

Mr. Ellis: Those are not the same law enforcement officers I've spoken to.

Given that on December 12, 2016, the Premier told me that Serenity's law is exactly the kind of practical idea her government was looking for to improve the child intervention system and given that despite their request for solutions and despite me handing them a solution that can be passed today – Premier, what is your excuse going to be now? And don't tell me. Tell Serenity's mother. She's here. She's behind me. Tell her to her face.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did sit down with Serenity's mother earlier today to hear from her about her suggestions and to offer my continued condolences. I want to thank the member for this proposal and acknowledge again his commitment to the issue. I have all intentions of having a meeting with the member opposite immediately to discuss our shared objective, which is preventing child abuse. I truly believe that by working together, we can ensure that other children are safe and supported.

Workers' Compensation Board Surplus Funds

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, far too often in this House we find ourselves at odds with each other. However, today I have a good-news story that I'd like to share with you and especially with Alberta businesses. The other day I learned that the WCB will be returning over \$350 million of surplus premiums to Albertans. As the Official Opposition we've worked hard and put a lot of pressure on the government to do the right thing and give back the money to Alberta's struggling businesses. To the minister: when will this money go back to the Alberta employers, and how will it be distributed, through a rebate or through offsets to the 2018 premiums?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very proud of the work that our government has been doing to review the Workers' Compensation Board and to bring in Bill 30. As part of Bill 30 we chose not to direct the WCB on what to do with surpluses in their accident fund. That leaves the decision with distributing or using the accident fund surpluses to a purpose that benefits the entire system in the hands of the WCB. This is not a government decision. This is one that WCB makes. I understand, having read the announcement from the WCB, that there will be credits issued to employers.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, given that it is always best practice to do an economic impact study and that surely the Minister of Labour performed such a study prior to engaging in a WCB review of this magnitude, to the minister: when did the actuarial firm Eckler complete their costing analysis, which indicated an increase of \$94 million due to your proposed changes, and why would the WCB withhold the full \$350 million? Did you expeditiously share Eckler's findings with the WCB?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government believes that comprehensively reviewing critical workplace legislation like the Workers' Compensation Act, like the Occupational Health and Safety Act, pieces of legislation that had not been reviewed in decades, is a priority, and that is why we

turned our attention to performing in-depth reviews and have brought forward results from those reviews through Bill 30. Making sure that we are making sound decisions that create a sustainable workers' compensation system, that gives employees fair rehabilitation is a priority.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, given that the Official Opposition has been insistent that this government return the surplus and given that the WCB felt compelled to hold back the \$350 million until they knew what the cost of these changes would be, is the minister willing to admit that she caused Alberta businesses undue hardship because of her year-long musings about how to change the WCB? In fact, even better, is she willing to apologize to our job-creating business owners who had to do without this much-needed money during one of the worst recessions in Alberta history?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a little rich to hear the accusations coming from the members opposite when we know that their plan of billions of dollars of reckless cuts would hurt Albertans, would hurt business, would hurt business confidence. We engaged in a comprehensive, robust investigation into the workers' compensation system. We worked with businesses. We worked with users of the system. We worked with representatives. We brought forward through Bill 30 a package of responsible changes to make sure there is a sustainable system that delivers fair rehabilitation.

Renewable Energy Land Leases

Mr. Stier: Well, Madam Speaker, just like a year ago, my constituency office continues to receive questions from landowners regarding leasing of their agricultural lands for solar and wind farm proposals. Despite what was promised in the climate tax plan propaganda, this government has obviously failed again to provide information or local consultation sessions to potentially affected landowners about locations, unsightly transmission lines, substations, nor anything on subsidies and compensation. To the Premier: why hasn't your climate tax plan included local information and consultation sessions?

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the very important question. On my trips across the province – I made many of them, putting on many miles, talking to farmers and ranchers across the province, farmers and ranchers that, when I talked to them, they let me know: what can they do? They want to be able to do their part for the green economy. They want to do their part to reduce emissions. They want to do their part to gain those energy efficiencies and those economic benefits, and they're more than willing. We'll continue working with them to find those efficiencies to make them more profitable in the evergreening economy.

Mr. Stier: Well, Madam Speaker, despite what the forestry minister has just said, given that a landowner who called just yesterday has to date received no information about those infrastructure and compensation concerns and given that agreeing to such a contract would cause loss of use of his prime agricultural land, where hundreds of acres will be taken out of production, and doing so would violate the primary goals and objectives regarding agriculture of a regional plan, to the minister: with all the rhetoric

that has accompanied your climate tax plan, again, why has your government, obviously, not informed Albertans of this vital information?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker and Member for the question. To reiterate, farmers and ranchers do want to do their part. They're looking forward to be able to take part in the climate leadership plan. They do their part to generate electricity on their properties. They do so willingly. The member is trying to allude that somehow they're being forced into taking part in the green economy. They're not. They're more than willing, and we're working as a government, making sure that they have those opportunities available to them and that they take advantage of them.

Mr. Stier: Well, Madam Speaker, just like landowners, I have no trust with this faulty climate tax plan.

Given that the particular landowner involved is also concerned about how these projects will be funded and how much subsidy has been given to those companies that are inquiring about his property and given that he has legitimate concerns about what might happen to his agricultural land if one of these companies goes insolvent, will the minister confirm today that all participating landowners who risk their property and join negatively impacted neighbours will be fully compensated in the event of a project failure?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you again to the member for the question. Important to note that there are many advocacies out there that are able to help landowners in negotiating a lease with companies. That includes the Farmers' Advocate and Alberta Utilities Commission. You know, the government is routinely working with the Farmers' Advocate to ensure that landowners' rights continue to be paramount, that they continue to have those rights. They will continue to do so. This government, my ministry, the Ministry of Environment and Parks will continue working with farmers and ranchers across the province to ensure that they have the opportunity to take advantage of the green economy and that they are protected in their landowners' rights.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

New-home Owner Consumer Protection

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Buying a home is one of the most important purchases that a person can make. With more and more young families moving into and raising their families in my riding, many constituents I speak to are thinking about making the jump to home ownership but are apprehensive about potential consumer risks after reading stories about Reid Built Homes. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the government doing to protect Albertans that invest their savings in a new home?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't know how you could miss me.

Buying a new home is the largest investment an Albertan can make. It's an investment in their family and their kids and their future, and when Albertans make that investment, they deserve to be protected. We've been working with our GOA partners in

Service Alberta and Treasury Board and Finance along with the Alberta New Home Warranty Program to ensure we are offering consumers comprehensive protections on both the front end and the back end of buying their homes. Our government will continue to engage with Albertans and stakeholders while we make practical changes to put consumers first.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Madam Speaker, you need a licence to go fishing in this province, and now you need a licence to construct a home. To the same minister: how is this government protecting homebuyers from builders that have a history of fraud or negligence?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. One of our government's top priorities is putting people first and protecting consumers. After hearing from Albertans, we took action to implement a better licensing framework that will protect consumers and help them distinguish the few bad builders from the many, many good builders. Builders must provide information about their track record with related consumer protection and safety legislation, disclose any history of fraud or building-related court proceedings, and provide information about their corporate structure. As I said, our government is protecting and improving things that will make a difference in the lives of all Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you. There were over 22,000 housing starts in Alberta in 2016. Given the large number of Albertans that purchased a new home, can the same minister inform the House about what he heard from the public and from new-home builders on this issue?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member. What we heard was that while mandatory warranty for new homes in Alberta was a positive step, additional measures had to be taken to strengthen the program in order to meet the program outcomes, so as of December 1 all residential builders will require a licence to obtain building permits for new homes and to build new homes. This licensing program was a collaborative solution created by our government, industry leaders, and everyday Albertans to protect consumers and make life easier when buying a home. I am proud of this new program.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Blue Quills University Funding

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Almost everyone I talk to agrees that postsecondary education is a gateway to prosperity and self-sufficiency, but it appears not to this government. To the Minister of Advanced Education: does the minister believe that Albertans, regardless of their location or ethnicity, should have the same support and access to postsecondary education?

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to talk about all of the good things that our government has done to support the students of Alberta through the Ministry of Advanced Education. Just last week I was proud to announce the continuation of our government's freeze on tuition. That means that more than 250,000 students in Alberta will pay the same price for tuition that they did last year and the year before and the year before that. Under those guys we had the highest tuition in the entire country. Under our government we're among the lowest in the whole country.

Mr. Hanson: Madam Speaker, given that the minister wouldn't even say yes about equivalent support and given that graduates with various degrees from Blue Quills First Nations university, a university only recently given accredited status, are being hired to run programs at major universities because of the superior and unique training they've received, does the minister support the idea that provincial support should be relatively equal for equivalent degree programs and that a degree is a degree is a degree?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased that our government is supporting university and college education all across the province. We've done a number of things in addition to freezing tuition. We've increased operating grants by 2 per cent every year to every university and college in the province. In addition to that, we're increasing foundational learning opportunities through adult learning providers and English as a second language programs. We're doing a number of things to support adult learners in this province, and our government is very proud of our track record in supporting the students of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that operating support for postsecondary institutions is a \$2.3 billion line item while Blue Quills struggles to afford a load of gravel for their parking lot and given that a degree program at a major university can be subsidized by Advanced Education upwards of \$9,000 per student while a degree-granting program at Blue Quills First Nations university only receives in the area of \$2,400, to the minister: if a degree is a degree, why does Advanced Education discriminate against Blue Quills degrees? What inherent bias is your department practising?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Madam Speaker, we're proud of our continued support of the First Nations colleges in the province of Alberta, but let's talk about what their plan would do to the offering of degrees in the province of Alberta. They're proposing cuts so large that they would be the equivalent of shutting down the University of Alberta, the fifth-highest ranked university in the country of Canada. Those guys want to close it down or the equivalent thereof. Under their plan tuition would skyrocket and very few students would have the opportunity to pursue higher education. We're standing against that. We're in favour of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:30

Long-term and Continuing Care Beds

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Wait-lists continue to grow for people waiting to enter into a continuing care, long-term bed, with an increase of 32 per cent to our wait-list reported in Alberta Health Services' latest annual report. Our seniors population is

growing exponentially, expected to hit a quarter of our population by 2032. Recognizing that we need to plan for the future with forethought into the planning, how does this government identify, plan, and promote the development of facilities that cater to seniors?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for the important question. Certainly, we did inherit a significant infrastructure deficit, predicated by the deep cuts that we all bore in Alberta during the '90s. As a result, when our government was elected, we were elected on a platform to provide 2,000 new long-term care and dementia care spaces for the people of Alberta. That's why we're moving forward to make sure that those happen as quickly as possible in the areas where they're most needed, including in the hon. member's riding, in the community of Fort McMurray. We're really proud to move forward on a project that his colleagues promised for decades, didn't move on, and this government is doing so.

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, this government has promised 2,000 long-term, extended care beds since 2015. According to Alberta Health Services our need for continuing care placements has gone up from 1,411 to 1,873 people just last year. The facilities required to meet this need will alleviate many of the pressures on our hospitals that are housing these patients. How is this government planning, designing, and budgeting for continuing care and long-term beds that serve Albertans?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker. Just in the first three months of this year, for example, we opened 388 new continuing care spaces for the people of this province. We're helping them transition from a hospital back into community, which we know is a better opportunity for them to age in. We're also working to make sure that we can keep them in their homes longer by ensuring that we have adequate supply of home-care funds, something that we know has been neglected for many years. We're moving forward on increasing investment in those areas instead of moving for deep ideological cuts like the members opposite. I'm happy to work with this specific member, who seems to be asking for a very reasonable line of questioning around investment, instead of all of his colleagues who are calling for deep cuts, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, there are six acres of prime land in downtown Fort McMurray which are ideal for the aging-in-community concept, and the design that's being pushed forward by the government is a sprawling four-storey complex that fills the majority of the site for only 144 beds. It's common knowledge that it's cheaper to build up. Does this government understand that this site could potentially house thousands of residents at a reduced cost with a different design so that as demand increases, land is readily available. Or do you enjoy spending money studying communities and purchasing more ideal parcels of land for future growth?

Ms Jansen: Madam Speaker, one of the things that has been a real pleasure for me is to be able to work with the folks of Fort McMurray. I met with my good friend the new mayor of the Wood Buffalo region, Don Scott, and with his new council and just had a fantastic conversation about the continuing care centre at Willow Square, well under way and on track to start construction in the spring of 2018. One of the conversations, one of the things that we

talked about, and one of the great things about the folks in Fort McMurray and our excellent relationship is that they are an incredibly collaborative new council and looking forward to working on...

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Wildfire Response Reviews

Mr. Schneider: Madam Speaker, as Forestry critic it is important that I ask these questions. Despite assurances by this minister that his department has learned valuable lessons from the Flat Top Complex and Horse River fire reports, it's plain to see that only lip service is being paid to several glaring issues. A debrief of the Kenow wildfire paints a bleak picture of fire communications in complete disarray, similar to what was experienced in the early stages of the Horse River fire. Minister, there was nearly an 18-month gap between those two incidents. Why are the same communication issues popping up?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you very much. You know, Madam Speaker, the Kenow fires were very wild and unpredictable, and we know that we empathize with all the folks that have lost livestock or buildings. We have been working closely with people on the ground. My folks and AEMA are always in contact with them and throughout those fires. It was a pretty hairy situation, I know, with the different jurisdictions that were involved. The municipalities that were there: we are working with them to educate them on, you know, what they need and what we can do better to help them, as we do after every disaster.

Mr. Schneider: Given that the municipality of Wood Buffalo only learned of the city's evacuation order from Twitter, of all places, and given that during the recent fire that we all know as Kenow, it's alleged that the Premier commented on loss of buildings and the status of the wildfire within the MD of Pincher Creek, information that was never shared with either municipal staff or elected officials, Minister, when will your department fix the glaring lack of information sharing between local, provincial, and federal entities during disasters that happen in this province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, we had field officers on the ground during this fire. They communicated directly with local officials, and it is completely inaccurate to say that provincial officials had the information before they did. We had the POC in contact with them day by day, minute by minute. Every time something was happening, they were informed. We will continue to work with them, and I don't appreciate the opposite member's inaccurate information that he's trying to portray about the hard-working people in those municipalities and the first responders.

Mr. Schneider: Madam Speaker, I expect that I will have to FOIP that to try and get an answer.

Given that it has been over five years since the Flat Top recommendations came out and given that the minister stated, "As of March 17, all 21 recommendations from the Flat Top Complex Wildfire Review Committee have either been completed or fully incorporated within Agriculture and Forestry's day-to-day wildfire management program," Minister, will it take another tragedy before

your department fixes these dangerous shortfalls in emergency situations?

Mr. S. Anderson: Madam Speaker, as I said, we continuously work with the municipalities on what they're doing during a disaster. This is an extreme event. Whenever there is a disaster, we do lessons learned after the fact, we discuss with officials on the ground, and we try to do things better. [interjections] Thanks, guys. I appreciate that if you'd listen to my answer, you'd hear me. We continue to work with everybody on the ground. We have resources available for municipal officials, CAOs, for the fire departments in those areas. We are always working with them, and we will continue to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton-Valley-Devon.

Half-day Kindergarten School Transportation Fees

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Having access to high-quality education at an early age is important for the healthy development of any child, and many parents choose different educational routes depending on their backgrounds and their circumstances. One choice that many parents make is to enrol their children in either a half-day kindergarten program or an alternating full-day program. Many experienced educators and parents believe that their children are best served by having the half-day option. Does the Minister of Education support half-day kindergarten and this educational option for all Albertans who choose it?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, it's up to the school boards on how they choose to disseminate kindergarten education across the province. I mean, certainly, different places make different choices according to their resources and their population of kindergarten children. That being said, the recent example of the member, I think, is pertaining to Elk Island for their kindergarten. That school board made that choice, and that's the path that they chose to take.

The Deputy Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that many educators and parents believe that a half-day kindergarten option is best for their children and given that the Elk Island public school board has stated that changes to the fees they are able to charge as a result of Bill 1 mean they are no longer able to offer the noon-hour busing service and given that this is yet another transportation issue dumped on school boards, schools, and parents by Bill 1, again to the minister: how is Bill 1 improving the lives of parents and their children when it continues to have a negative impact across Alberta?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm glad that this is brought up because, of course, what we have done is to make sure that we put in more than \$54 million to school boards in order for them to reduce school fees. If they choose to have school fees or increase those fees, we have a mechanism by which they can do that. I've yet to hear from Elk Island kindergarten as to why they chose to put these two things together. I believe it was about \$34,000 that was the reason that they were choosing to go down this route. Certainly, they should be careful to listen to the parents

in Sherwood Park to make sure they're providing the services that they need for their children.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplemental.

2:40

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Bill 1 has now been directly cited by multiple school boards in both rural and urban Alberta as a reason that they are no longer able to offer transportation services, which parents previously relied upon, and given that the upcoming 50 per cent increase to the carbon tax will significantly increase transportation costs for school boards across Alberta, again to the minister: what is your plan to address the increased cost that your 50 per cent increase in the carbon tax is placing on school boards?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, all of the reductions to school fees were backstopped by the government of Alberta giving to those school boards. If any school board is suggesting that they are short of those funds, they, in fact, did receive that money from the provincial government. You know what? We fund public education on this side of the House. If you made 20 per cent cuts, as you from the UCP would suggest, you wouldn't be seeing any of these things. You would end up with very large class sizes and very inadequate education courtesy of Jason Kenney and the UCP.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed with Members' Statements, I've had a number of requests here to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: We can go ahead, but I would remind members to please keep it brief.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature my fantastic constituency staff from the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Fort. Maxine Parris and Lisa Hari do an excellent job through outreach and casework to help constituents in Calgary-Fort. They do an excellent job in my office. They are my right and left hand when they're there, thunder and lightning. I would ask that they stand up and take the wishes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly representatives from the Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments research project in Drayton Valley. In attendance today are some of the kids that I used to teach: Chaise Combs, Lacey Sicinsky, and Sarah Jane Peltier, who make up the youth advisory committee, and Lola Strand of our district FCSS, who is part of the local advisory committee. Laura Wright is the site research co-ordinator. Unfortunate for us but fortunate for her, she is currently in China for work and was unable to make it here today. RYSE is a five-year multinational research project that will explore patterns of resilience among young people in changing environments. I would

ask that the individuals please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of the most fantastic students in all of the province from Balwin school. Unfortunately, they had to run to go catch their bus, but it's still a pleasure to be able to introduce them today. They were joined by two of their teachers, Ms Christine Allarie and Ms Alanna Wolgien, and also joined by one of the parents, Bridgett McAllister. Like I said, they had to run for their bus, but if we could still provide them with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Being a first-generation immigrant, I have learned a lot comparing and contrasting how we do business in Canada and elsewhere in the world. The world is mocking Canada. In India, when I worked for Reliance Industries, we built the world's largest refinery and petrochemical complex in three years. Three years, Madam Speaker. Last night word broke that the Trans Mountain expansion project is going to be held up for permitting. This pipeline is a lifeline for Alberta energy exports, expanding the existing right-of-way where a pipeline has operated since the 1950s without significant incident. Kinder Morgan's president told the audience in Calgary last month: in the presence of our Premier it's been six years and counting now that we've commenced this journey and almost a year to the day when we heard that we had federal approval for the project; there are no shovels in the ground yet and nothing until at least September 2020. The company is concerned that it could cost them about \$35 million in expenses while they also stand to lose more than \$90 million in revenue for every month of delay.

We all want to see the Trans Mountain project succeed. Unfortunately, the NDP was naive and flat footed. The NDP sold Albertans a false bill of goods when it said that its job-killing carbon tax would buy social licence for much-needed pipelines. No social licence was ever achieved, just a wink and nudge between the Premier and the Prime Minister that the one's actions have given cover to the other's.

Madam Speaker, we need to fix this problem and fix it fast, or else the Trans Mountain expansion will meet the same fate as the Energy East pipeline, and the world is watching.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Athabasca Coalition 4 Success

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Recently I had the opportunity to attend a presentation by the Athabasca Coalition 4 Success, and I was so impressed with what they've accomplished that I want to share it with members of the Assembly here today.

Madam Speaker, as a parent of a child with special needs I know from direct experience how difficult it can be to find appropriate summer care, especially in rural areas. The partners who make up the Athabasca Coalition 4 Success recognize this and have created

a unique summer program in Athabasca to help youth grow. This initiative allows community partners to work together to help children and youth attend events and activities in their community on a regular and consistent basis, to interact with their peers, develop social skills, and have the opportunity to successfully participate in community events. What's more, they do this by leveraging existing funding streams and capacities.

Over the course of the summer children who participate have shown amazing progress in achieving developmental goals. As just one example, at the start of the program almost none of the children were able to stay with activities until they were finished, but at the end almost the entire group was able to do so.

I want to thank the many partners who made this initiative happen, including AHS, ACS, ACSS, Aspen View public schools, Athabasca county FCSS, Whispering Hills Day Care Society, and Aspen Collaborative Services.

Although we often speak of the challenges of providing services in rural areas, there are also great advantages, one of the greatest being just how interconnected everyone in smaller communities is. The groups that form the Coalition 4 Success are a perfect example of local organizations working in partnership to answer a local need, and it is a model that other communities might want to look closely at.

Thank you for your time.

The Deputy Speaker: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Resilient Youth Study in Drayton Valley

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Oil and gas production and climate change have significant impacts on social, economic, and environmental systems that often affect young people's mental health and overall well-being. To better understand these complex relationships, the Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments, or RYSE, research project has been studying the resilience of the young people in Drayton Valley; Secunda, South Africa; and Cambridge Bay, Nunavut.

This project is led by the Resilience research centre and Dalhousie University in partnership with other institutions and organizations such as the University of Pretoria in South Africa, the Resilience by Design lab, and Royal Roads University. Researchers have worked with partners from the oil and gas industry, government, school boards, and key organizations to better understand how to support the health and well-being of young people in changing environments.

This research is critically important in Drayton Valley as educators and mental health professionals report rates of anxiety and depression higher than the national average and a threefold increase in the caseloads of family support workers. The town of Drayton Valley has made efforts to support young people's resilience in a variety of ways, including developing social policies and family supports and addressing social problems like substance abuse. Our town was well positioned to participate in this international research project.

Among other things, RYSE participants in Drayton Valley have prepared digital stories that outline their concerns, perspectives, and ideas for community and social change. They also have participated in the resilience innovation skills certificate program. These youth are developing a vision of community and engaging in conversations that will help shape our future, and I would like to commend them for their participation. I would call on all members of this Legislature to work in partnership with children and youth from their constituencies. We need to recognize our youth.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

2:50

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report recommending the reappointment of Mr. Del Graff as Child and Youth Advocate for a term to expire on March 31, 2020. Copies of this report are available online and through the committees branch.

Notices of Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I stand to give oral notice to the Assembly that I will be raising later today a question of privilege against the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Bill 211

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (Discretionary Trust) Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is with great pride that I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 211, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (Discretionary Trust) Amendment Act, 2017.

This bill is intended to make life better for Albertans with disabilities by defining a Henson trust, also known as a discretionary trust, in the AISH Act and then specifically exempting the Henson trust from the consideration of assets. Madam Speaker, the love and care that parents and guardians have for their children with disabilities extends throughout their life and beyond. By exempting Henson trusts from the AISH Act, we are standing behind both the people with disabilities and their parents and guardians just like so many other jurisdictions in Canada already do.

This bill is the result of extensive consultation with the AISH community, and I believe this bill will honour the work of all those Albertans who helped me with this. I look forward to the discussions and deliberations with my colleagues in the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 211 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Bill 216

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 216, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017.

Bill 216 amends the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to ensure that all adults in Alberta know they are responsible for contacting authorities if they know of a child in need of intervention. Currently the legislation requires adults to contact a director of child intervention. This bill will direct them to contact a director or a police officer. Adding the term "police officer" clarifies that all adults are responsible for helping children in need

of intervention and that there is an easy way to do it. Far too many times in Alberta children have died in horrible circumstances that could have been prevented if an adult had spoken up.

I would like to thank Professor Juliet Guichon, who is a law professor at the University of Calgary, for pointing out this ambiguity in Alberta's law, which Bill 216 is addressing, as well as a friend, Mr. Brendan Miller, who is a prominent lawyer as well in Calgary, who called attention to the same issue and assisted me in addressing this bill, Madam Speaker.

It is with the sincerest honour that I pay special tribute to the mother of little Serenity, whose little girl inspired this bill, and her family. I'd like to thank you for being here today, and I sincerely hope and believe that this Legislature will do the right thing in order to help protect children in this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 216 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to table five copies of a document containing hundreds of pages of signatures of Albertans who signed to show their support for Henson trusts. It's time for Alberta to get in line with the rest of the country and to allow the use of the Henson trust to support people with disabilities without having their government payments clawed back. This document represents the names of over 3,400 concerned Albertans, and we need to listen to their voices.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Yes, Madam Speaker. I have four tablings I'd like to do. I referenced an article in my speech last night: The War on Ticket Bots Is Unlikely to Be Won. This is an \$8 billion, world-wide problem, where ticket bots cannot be simply eradicated with one piece of legislation saying that we shouldn't do it.

I also referenced the ABVMA annual reports for 2014, 2015, and 2016. The ABVMA is the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. In this one, the 2014, I have 25 complaints for the entire year, for 2015 I have 36 complaints on veterinarians for the entire year, and for 2016 I have 26 complaints on veterinarians. It's unbelievable, Madam Speaker, that we are taking the governance away from the veterinarian society.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an article out of the *Edmonton Journal* dated June 2013 that's titled B.C. Rejects Northern Gateway; Says Environmental Concerns Were Not Adequately Addressed.

The Deputy Speaker: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a number of letters that continue to pour in regarding rural crime, this one from Sandra in Spruce View. They are in fear for the safety of their homes, their farms, their small businesses, and now their own lives. They've had violent offenders on their property.

Another one is from Gary in Markerville, Alberta, on a similar situation. He's happy that the UCP is setting up a rural crime task force. They've had a number of violent offences in their area.

Here's another one. Madam Speaker – they just keep coming in – from Vince and Wanda from Red Deer County: “We cannot do anything to protect ourselves without being criminally charged,” it seems.

Finally, the last item I have to table, Madam Speaker, is a newspaper article from Andrew Coyne of the *Vancouver Sun*: Kenney Channels Albertan Angst: Province Entitled to Feel Alienated. He says that “there is every reason to think he reflects the public mood in Alberta.”

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Vermilion-Lloydminster, very quickly.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a number of documents to table that I referenced in my speech last night on Bill 31. The first is a letter dated August 14, 2017, from the president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association to the Minister of Labour.

The second is another letter, dated August 14, 2017, from the president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association to the Minister of Service Alberta.

The third is a letter dated November 2, 2017, a response from the Minister of Service Alberta to the president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association.

The fourth is an e-mail from Kim Blomme, a registered veterinary technologist who made comment with regard to informed consent and fee disclosure.

3:00

The fifth is from Penny Radostits, an e-mail in which she discusses the importance of not allowing advertising of veterinary fees and the degradation of the veterinary practice it creates.

The sixth is from Dr. Skylar Bieleny, which I quoted at the conclusion of my speech last night.

The final item is an article which I quoted from, a poll from Insights West, that indicates that according to a 2016 survey, the veterinary profession is the third most trusted profession in Canada and, interestingly, politicians are the least trusted.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, do you wish to make a motion? We have a number of tablings still remaining, but we're out of time.

Mr. Mason: Oh. I would move that we continue with the Routine, please.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: I will recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a short tabling today. This one is an article from a well-known journalist, Mr. Rex Murphy, regarding the little bit of a tiff that's going on between the Alberta and B.C. governments and social licence. I have the requisite number of copies.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I have a tabling to do. This is an article in the *Toronto Star* by Chantal Hébert: Nation-building Pitch Not Working for Pipeline. It's about a tweet by the Saskatchewan Premier, Brad Wall, and some people also say the best Premier Alberta has right now. He tweeted that “Montreal should hand back the equalization money it has been receiving, part

of which comes from wealth generated by Western Canada's oil and gas industries.” It also says in this article, you know, that “in the face of mounting Quebec opposition to the Energy East pipeline, the TransCanada plan to link the oilfields of Western Canada to the refineries of the Atlantic region . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Just do the tabling, hon. member. Continue, please.

Mr. Gill: . . . is not officially dead but it is, at best, on life support.” Here are the copies.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite copies of an article by Don Braid from the *Calgary Herald* on February 23, 2017: Numbers Spell Trouble for NDP Government. This is with respect to an article that we used about how more money is being paid out from the carbon tax than is being received over the course of the year, and that it's not doing anything to win social licence.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw – sorry. Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: I didn't want to talk until I was recognized, Madam Clerk – Madam Speaker. Now I definitely apologize, with no disrespect to the Clerk. There. That was awkward.

I have a tabling. It's entitled NEB Cancels Pipeline Hearings in Montreal; Quebec City a Go, from August 2016. It deals with the track record of pipeline hearings leading to negative results.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm tabling an article from the *Edmonton Journal* by James Wood. He was talking about the Saskatchewan Premier warning that the oil patch was under siege by activists. Premier Brad Wall visited Calgary at that time, and he mentioned: “We're in the middle of a battle and, frankly, we haven't been winning too many battles. By we, I mean this sector and the resource importance of Western Canada.” As you know, Brad Wall has been the champion for western Canada in defending the industry. They indicated that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Just table the document, please, hon. member.

Any other tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of an article by James Wood of the *Calgary Herald*: Activists a Threat to Oilpatch, Wall Warns; Slams National Carbon Tax Idea, Obstacles to Major Energy Projects. He warns that “the energy industry is under ‘existential threat’ from environmental activists.”

The Deputy Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have two articles to table. One is from the *Globe and Mail* – A Search for Social Licence in a Deep Well of Distrust – in which the author searches for the bureau of social licence, discovers a lot of disinformation, misinformation, and deep distrust.

The second one is from our national spokesman Mr. Rex Murphy. The article is Will it Be Paris or Calgary? Quite frankly, it says that the two agendas are not compatible, and he concludes by saying that “killing the pipelines under any guise – safety, social licence, upstream emissions – is the sly path to killing the oilsands.” That’s what this government is up to, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other tablings? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today with the requisite number of copies of an article from the *National Post*. The headline reads Notley Learns Hard Truth About Social Licence. I’ll just read one line. “Notley would have had more success chasing a moonbeam than satisfying social licence.”

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I table the copies necessary. It’s an article by Chantal Hébert, that “so-called social licence for such projects is a pipe dream” and that “advocates are urging the prime minister to use the declaratory power . . . to declare a work to be for ‘the general advantage of Canada.’”

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a *Vancouver Sun* article quoting former federal minister David Emerson where he talks about expressing cynicism over the concept of social licence.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Grande Prairie-Smoky, you have a tabling?

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’d like to table an article here by Chris Varcoe in the *Calgary Herald* on the 12th of May, 2017, entitled Alberta Must Devise a Plan to Handle Pipeline Politics. In it he quotes Mark Scholz who says, “It was incredibly naive . . . we have to go back to the drawing board, because obviously the strategy didn’t work.” And that’s in reference to the carbon tax and social licence.

I have one other article here to table, too. This is by Chris Nelson in the *Calgary Herald* on May 20, 2017. The title is Taking the High Road Will Get Alberta Nowhere; Preventing Power from Shifting West Is Part of the DNA of Federal Liberals. And he says, “It’s time Alberta’s . . . light bulb switcheroo crew made a quick stop at the Rachel Notley household. Because, for someone who seems so smart, our premier . . .”

The Deputy Speaker: Just table the document, please, hon. member.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Gray, Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewable, pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act the College of Alberta Professional Foresters annual report 2016-17 and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists annual report 2016-17.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we had two points of order. I believe, hon. Government House Leader, that you are doing a point of privilege rather than a point of order?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Point of order, then. Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, did you wish to proceed?

Point of Order Members’ Statements

Mr. Nixon: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly (j), language of an abusive nature or likely to create disorder. During a member’s statement today – I should have the sheet in front of me. I don’t know the hon. member’s constituency.

An Hon. Member: Edmonton-South West, I think.

Mr. Nixon: Edmonton-South West.

The member’s statement was in regard to some comments or the interpretation of those comments in regard to the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

I rise because, Madam Speaker, members’ statements – I’m going to refer to a couple of things here – should not be used as a personal attack, and clearly in those statements it was a direct personal attack against the member. Now, the hon. member in his member’s statement, I believe, was very mistaken and has taken the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka’s comments in debate earlier in this House completely out of context and has chosen to cherry-pick one portion of a full speech. That aside, it’s fine to have a discussion within this place about policy or different concerns with party policy or government policy, but to take a direct attack at a member in a member’s statement I would argue is inappropriate.

3:10

I would refer you to rulings and comments made by Speaker Zwozdesky in the past. One ruling I would like to draw your attention to can be found in *Alberta Hansard* on November 29, 2012, page 1171, in which the Speaker says:

I just want to remind you again that members’ statements are not to be used for personal attacks, nor are they to [use] language that might cause disruption or disorder.

I mean, how far we’ve come, Madam Speaker. I agree.

In addition to that, on May 31, 2012, on page 140, the Speaker goes on to say:

I would ask you to review in your good conscience what the purpose of Members’ Statements really is. It is not an opportunity to stand up and deride or throw derogatory comments at another member. That is not what it’s all about.

Clearly, that is what the member did with his member’s statement today, and I think he should apologize for that and withdraw his comments.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With respect to this matter I would first draw the member’s attention to rules that suggest that members’ statements are not subject to interruption or to points of order.

Nevertheless, I will deal as well with the allegation that this was a personal attack. Madam Speaker, what took place – and I have the member’s statement here from the hon. member. He clearly deals with the content of some comments made by the Member for

Lacombe-Ponoka during debate on the bill that would deal with the regulation of legalized cannabis here in the House, and he was making comments with respect to those particular words.

To suggest, I think, that we are not permitted in this House in members' statements, in question period, or in debate to question and challenge the authority of comments that are made by other members, to challenge their logic, or to suggest that they in some way were inappropriate or, in fact, insulting to other individuals would be to rule out the use of freedom of speech in this Assembly almost entirely. Quite frankly, on all sides of the House that is a fundamental aspect of the debate that takes place here. This is a debate about ideas, about words, about the positions of other members and of other parties, and that is in the very nature of the work we do here.

I would just caution that to suggest that a member's statement that simply deals with objecting to another member's comments, to their tone, and to whether or not they were appropriate or may have been hurtful to some individual or group is, I think, hardly worth considering as a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak to the point of order?

If not, I am prepared to make a ruling. Certainly, the precedent is that members' statements are not used to levy personal attacks. You referenced a couple of rulings from Speaker Zwozdesky. I have another one from Speaker Kowalski in 2010, found on page 1755 of *Hansard*, where he makes the comment that although giving a wide latitude, members needed to "discipline themselves" with regard to members' statements and "deal with policy matters and not personalities." That's quite clear there. He also reinforces that "civility, decorum, respect are very important" and that members' statements are "not an opportunity for someone to personally attack someone else." Certainly, these are serious matters, and members' statements should not be ever used for that.

Then the question is if this particular member's statement was a personal attack. I did listen to it quite closely, and I weighed whether it was directed at the individual. But I also heard the member referring to constituents and how they had felt about some of the comments, so it felt to me that he was reflecting a viewpoint that he had heard from other members of that community and was not himself engaging in a personal attack against that member. However, the line was very, very close, and the language used and the topic was, as I say, coming very close to the line.

While I'm not going to find it as a point of order this time, I think all members really have to be careful about how members' statements are used. In fact, Speaker Kowalski in his ruling back in 2010 made the point that there could be a case to have members' statements completely removed from the routine if members were not being respectful of each other in the ways they're presented. I would caution all members to really be aware of this in the members' statements that they are giving.

Thank you.

I'm prepared to hear the point of privilege at this point.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. At 2:50 p.m. today, just at the start of question period and just at the conclusion of Members' Statements, the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo looked across at the Member for Edmonton-South West, who had just completed the member's statement that was referred to in the previous point of order, and at that time he made a threatening gesture to the Member for Edmonton-South West,

which I can only interpret as a deliberate attempt to intimidate him. This was not just seen by me; it was seen by a number of members as well.

With respect to privileges I rise under Standing Order 15(5), that says that "a Member may always raise a question of privilege in the Assembly immediately after the words are uttered or the events occur that give rise to the question, in which case the written notice required under suborder (2) is not required." This being the first opportunity on the Order Paper to raise this matter, I do so now.

In *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* by Maingot it is stated that Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any Member on the floor of the House or while he is coming or going to or from the House, or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament, is a violation of the rights of Parliament.

That's at page 230.

It goes on to say:

Any attempt by improper means to influence or obstruct a Member in his parliamentary work may constitute contempt. What constitutes an improper means of interfering with Members' parliamentary work is always a question depending on the facts of each case. Finally, there must be some connection between the material alleged to contain the interference and the parliamentary proceeding.

Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice discusses intimidation on page 146 and states:

To attempt to intimidate a Member in his parliamentary conduct by threats is also a contempt, cognate to those mentioned above. Actions of this character which have been proceeded against include impugning the conduct of Members and threatening them with further exposure if they took part in debates; threatening to communicate with Members' constituents to the effect that, if they did not reply to a questionnaire, they should be considered as not objecting to certain sports; publishing posters containing a threat regarding the voting of Members in a forthcoming debate; informing Members that to vote for a particular bill would be regarded as treasonable by a future administration; summoning a Member to a disciplinary hearing of his trade union in consequence of a vote given in the House; and threatening to end investment by a public corporation in a Member's constituency, if the Member persisted in making speeches along the lines of those in a preceding debate.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice by O'Brien and Bosc goes into the most detail, beginning on page 108 in chapter 3.

Over the years, Members have regularly brought to the attention of the House instances which they believed were attempts to obstruct, impede, interfere, intimidate or molest them, their staffs or individuals who had some business with them or the House. In a technical sense, such actions are considered to be contempts of the House and not breaches of privilege.

3:20

It goes on to quote Speaker Bosley from a 1986 ruling.

If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions, that he or she has been threatened, intimidated, or in any way unduly influenced, there would be a case for the Chair to consider.

Further, he says:

In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly

related to a proceeding in Parliament. In some cases where prima facie privilege has not been found, the rulings have focused on whether or not the parliamentary functions of the Member were directly involved. While frequently noting that Members raising such matters have legitimate grievances, Speakers have consistently concluded that Members have not been prevented from carrying out their parliamentary duties.

At page 110:

In circumstances where Members claim to be physically obstructed, impeded, interfered with or intimidated in the performance of their parliamentary functions, the Speaker is apt to find that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred.

Incidents involving physical obstruction – such as traffic barriers, security cordons and union picket lines either impeding Members' access to the Parliamentary Precinct or blocking their free movement . . . as well as occurrences of physical assault or molestation . . .

Madam Speaker, there are certainly more precedents, but I do want to just indicate that there is no question, in my view, that the gesture made by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was meant to intimidate the Member for Edmonton-South West as a result of the member's statement which he had just delivered, where he expressed the unhappiness of the Chinese community with respect to some of the debate that had taken place earlier by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

As such, Madam Speaker, I would ask that you find that there has been a prima facie breach of privilege by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and that we would then prepare a motion to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I mean, I'm in a bit of a position where I did not see what was taking place at that time because it was behind me and I was also, if the time is right, rising to ask a question.

I think a point of privilege is a serious thing to bring before this House and as such would ask that we will present my response to that tomorrow if possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the matter? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: The citation under 15(4) is that "if the Member whose conduct is called into question is not present," which is the case today, "the matter shall be deferred to the next day that the Member is present unless the Speaker rules that" it must be dealt with right now.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it appears that under the circumstances it would be appropriate, then, to defer the matter to allow time to discuss it with the member and deal with it tomorrow.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Nixon: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8(2) to allow the Assembly to move immediately to consideration of second reading of Bill 216, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017.

I'd further like to ask unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 77(1) to allow us to debate second reading of Bill 216, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. We have to separate that into two questions. Could you just repeat the first one that you're seeking unanimous consent for?

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8(2) to allow the Assembly to move immediately to consideration of second reading of Bill 216, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Speaker: The second matter, please.

Mr. Nixon: I further would like to ask unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 77(1) to allow us to debate second reading of Bill 216, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I've been advised that that is not relevant now that unanimous consent was denied for the first one. It's just a process matter, but thank you for going with that. We'll move on.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

Mr. Loewen moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment December 5: Mr. van Dijken speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to continue to speak towards a referral amendment prepared for Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I had spoken earlier in the day with regard to concerns about Bill 31 and some of the changes happening with respect to AMVIC.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I was speaking with regard to some communication that I had received from a constituent of mine, Dr. Collin Lawrence, a doctor of veterinarian medicine, and the concerns that he had with regard to that the government was going down a dangerous road, where not all aspects of the commercial world need to be interpreted and applied to the medical world. His concerns are that where the veterinary medicine has many pillars to it, two very important pillars are a valid client-patient relationship and also the responsible stewardship of antibiotics. His letter goes on to talk at length with regard to some of the concerns. He points out many aspects of why the changes to the Veterinary Profession Act contained in Bill 31 would be not in the best interests of the practice of veterinary medicine in Alberta. He points out that the highest standards of veterinary medicine are developed by veterinarians and veterinary technologists and that these standards help to safeguard the public

interest but not only the public interest but animal health and welfare.

It's very important that we recognize that this is a medical profession and that we recognize the intricacies in performing that profession and how it is critical that animal health and welfare be considered as more than just a consumer product and that it's not brought in where we just consider it a commodification of the practice.

He talks about the degradation of veterinary care resulting possibly from aggressive marketing and pricing, and that's part of the concerns within other letters that I have received, where veterinarians are more than just selling services; they are an integral part to the animal well-being throughout Alberta, in the urban centres and in the rural centres. The changes to the veterinary act that are being proposed have the potential to degrade the quality of veterinary care in some commercial livestock operations, which could create potential risks to food safety. Having raised livestock myself, the relationship that the producer and the veterinary share in ensuring that the livestock are maintained with proper usage of medical practice and proper usage and application of medicines and antibiotics and such is critical to food safety within Alberta and throughout Canada.

3:30

I would also like to point out that based on some of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association's documents for their annual report for 2016, they received a total of 30 complaints. Thirty complaints. They have over 3,200 registered veterinarians practising in Alberta. Thirty complaints would be less than 1 per cent of registered members, but more importantly these registered members are possibly performing hundreds of procedures throughout the year. It's a very small number of complaints: 30 in an entire year for 3,200 registered doctors. Of those 30 complaints there was only a need to forward three complaint letters to their Complaint Review Committee.

I do believe that this is trying to identify a problem that does not necessarily exist, and the risk that we have to the high standards that are being implemented within the veterinarian medical profession in Alberta – it's not worth it to make these amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act, the amendments that are contained in Bill 31. That's why it's incredibly important to have open and transparent discussions and bring that to committee so that those that are involved in the practice and the veterinary association have the ability to bring forward in an open and transparent way the concerns that they have with these amendments to the act.

Putting veterinarians under ministerial control instead of keeping them self-regulated could be a bad precedent, and I would hope that this government does not see it as possibly being used for other self-regulating bodies. Veterinarians are concerned about the damage that this could do to their professional reputation and their image since there have been no scandals or concerns that would warrant the profession being put on the same level – as we see in Bill 31, they're being lumped in even with the high-credit lenders.

Bill 31 also includes event tickets. Bill 31 seeks to establish a legal requirement for secondary sellers to refund consumers in instances where tickets are unable to be used due to refusal. However, the minister is empowered to exempt certain sellers from this provision.

It's interesting. This morning I was reading in the *Globe and Mail* an article with regard to the province of Ontario and some of the policies they're hoping to move forward with. In that article it did talk some on how refunding consumers the price of a ticket does not necessarily bring it to a place of satisfaction for the individual that has been victimized. The experience is lost and also, possibly,

the effort that it takes to go to the event and to make the effort to bring others to an event. This is not going to be able to be refunded to the consumers.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a concern, too, with the direction that the minister is taking with the veterinary profession. I'd like to reference the press release that the minister put out on November 29, 2017, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses, and I'm going to quote from it because I think that this is important.

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act would support a level playing field for businesses and improve protections for Albertans making big purchases like buying or repairing a car, buying concert tickets, taking out a loan or getting medical care for their pets.

That seems out of place in this press release. The items that she's describing here really don't seem to be in sync with the health of animals.

But let's go a little further here.

If passed, the bill would also empower shoppers with more information and put bad actors on notice, with strong recourse for consumers if a transaction goes wrong.

You could only assume that "bad actors" applies to making big purchases, buying or repairing a car, buying concert tickets, taking out a loan, and getting medical care for your pet. That means that we can actually more or less say that the minister, like what she did with AMVIC, stating that it's a gong show, is more or less saying that there are significant problems with veterinarians as bad actors, if you will, and that the profession isn't doing a good enough job in regulating itself. I think that we can jump to that conclusion.

We got a quote from her. I'll be quick because I do want to get to my question here to the hon. member.

Albertans deserve a government that looks out for their [best] interests. That's why we are strengthening consumer protections to make life more affordable. And we are bringing in smart rules to support businesses, because they should not be undermined by bad actors [who] don't play by the rules. Bottom line, stronger protections boost consumer confidence, and that's [what's] good for business.

Let's be clear. They're talking about our veterinarians.

I also take offence here that it also is mentioning people that I have a great deal of respect for. You know, car dealerships: the salespeople have been nothing but respectful to me. My local mechanics have been nothing but respectful to me. Even though I will tell you that I have never had to use a high-interest loan, I am certain that those individuals stay within the rules that are given to them. There are some examples that show that there is always a point in every profession when somebody does, maybe, something that is questionable, but that is why you let the industry deal with them because – you know what? – the last thing you want is the industry to be tarnished because of a bad apple, if you will.

To the member: do you feel that veterinarians should be lumped in as bad actors that need to be put on notice?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, and thank you for the question. You know, I alluded to the relationship that as a livestock producer for over 20 years we had with our veterinarian. It becomes a relationship that is in the best interests of our operation but also in the best interests of our livestock and the best interests of all Albertans or those that are going to be consuming the food product

that we produce. It's important to recognize the professionalism that is brought forward by these individuals. I, from the time that I started in the production of livestock, found it extremely helpful that I was able to develop a relationship with my veterinarian on regular visits. The veterinarian didn't just necessarily come to our farm when we had an incident, whether that was a sick animal or others; they came for regular checks to help us with our health protocols, to ensure that we were able to . . .

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just a reminder to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. If you could table tomorrow what you've read to the House today, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Cyr: Sorry. Which one?

The Acting Speaker: The press release.

Mr. Cyr: I can.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Minister of Status of Women and Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to the referral amendment. There seems to be a lot of misinformation being communicated throughout this House as well as outside of this House, so I would like to take another opportunity, in addition to the comments that I made upon introduction of second reading, to provide further clarification.

First of all, the bill makes very clear upon the face of it that the legislation only applies to household pets. Livestock is not included. It seems that I need to reiterate this a number of times because despite the clarity in the legislation, on the very face of it, which specifically says household pets, there may be confusion of individuals as to whether or not a horse constitutes a household pet. I assure you, Madam Speaker, that that is not the case. Animals that are raised for the use of food in our food chain are also not contemplated, again, as household pets would not constitute part of livestock or our food chain.

This piece of legislation, in respect of veterinarians, which seems to be the turning point for the referral amendment, from the comments that I've heard, is quite simple, Madam Speaker. It does two things. One, it requires veterinarians to disclose all fees and obtain a client's consent prior to treating their household pets. And it seems to me that the association agrees with us. They have said that this is something that is a best practice of their profession, that this is something that they want veterinarians to do. So it seems to me that it would be very simple for vets who are acting with the highest of integrity and in good practices, as – I agree with members opposite – they are, to do this. No problem. Okay.

Then the next piece is with respect to giving permission to veterinarians to advertise or post their fees. Now, this is a simple matter of transparency. I think that the value of transparency is something that we can all get behind. Madam Speaker, the assertion that somehow the ability to post or advertise fees would degrade a profession, I think, is a comment that is unsettling to a number of professionals, lawyers included, as lawyers, in fact, are permitted to advertise and post their fees, yet there's no suggestion and it would be inappropriate to suggest that that would somehow suggest a degradation.

Furthermore, I completely agree. The vets that I've dealt with: many if not most, you know, the vast majority are very honest,

upstanding. They take the highest standard of ethics to heart, they put their patients first, and they want good outcomes. I certainly don't buy the suggestion that by allowing them to advertise, they would somehow put their ethics aside and they would put the quality of care aside simply because they're not allowed to post their fees. Certainly, if somebody were to suggest to me as a lawyer that in my practice I would put aside my ethics simply because I am allowed to post my fees, I would be offended, Madam Speaker.

Certainly, this is a good thing for consumers. Madam Speaker, I've heard from Albertans, I've heard from individuals who are afraid to take their pet to a vet because they have zero clue of what costs they could incur if they walk in the door. This kind of concern can lead to negligence on the part of a pet owner in not taking their loved pet in for good care because they're so paralyzed by the fees.

This is just good information, arming individuals with more information so that they can make the best, most informed decision. I wouldn't suggest that anyone would put aside the quality of care of their loved one and just engage in a race to the bottom, Madam Speaker. I don't think that that does justice to the conscience of most Albertans and most pet owners, who want the best for their loved ones. I am speaking against this referral. The comments made by the members on the other side of the House just don't hold water in this regard.

You know, another consideration is that we talk about the medical profession in the United States, which is entirely privatized. Doctors operating on humans advertise their fees. Again, I think that they would likely take umbrage at the assertion that their advertising of fees causes their services to be degraded in some way. This really just gives the owners of their loved pets more tools to be able to make a well-educated decision so that they can find quality of care – all vets are going to give that quality of care; I believe the member opposite when he says that – but also be able to find that quality of care within their budget and not have surprises.

There are many good protections in this legislation, Madam Speaker. We've heard from a number of our stakeholders, and they have told us that they are in support of this. You know, just briefly I will quote Janet Riopel, the president and CEO of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. She said:

Consumer confidence and fair competition are essential for a vibrant and healthy economy. Businesspeople understand this, and the vast majority treat their customers fairly. The Chamber hosted sessions . . .

They were lovely.

. . . to ensure our members' voices were heard through these consultations.

She says:

This legislation shows that government was listening, and we're confident it will foster even greater trust between consumers and the business community.

They know that's good for business. The people who are at the front lines of this know and appreciate that.

There were some comments, too, about automotive repair. Our legislation is supported by a small-business owner, for example, the owner of Sandy Lane auto. It's supported by the Alberta Motor Association, which is very trusted in Alberta. They've said, "We believe all Albertans should have confidence in the service they're receiving." You know, they've got a long history of standards that make them the experts, really, on the voice of this. I would encourage the members opposite to listen to the experts.

Bill Burnett, the chair of the AMVIC Board of Directors, has said:

I am very excited about the announcement of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. It is a very important

step to support AMVIC's mandate of consumer protection in Alberta. Thank you to the Government of Alberta for their leadership and commitment to consumer protection in Alberta.

You know, the opposition speaks of listening to the experts. The evidence on this, the support that we have for this legislation from the experts, shows just that. I would suggest that they should take their own advice on this matter, Madam Speaker, and that they should support this bill.

There are certainly protections with respect to ticket sales, Madam Speaker, the issue of bots. Yes, this is a very complicated issue, software buying up tickets. It's said time and time again in every bit of ink spilled on this issue that it's a complicated issue, that there is no simple solution. But we are in the forefront of this issue here in Alberta; this has not been done in Canada previously. Certainly, we will be watching the situation. But these are first steps. We have support from the music industry on this, from artists. We have support from their promoters. We have support from primary sellers. This is truly a team effort. We are taking different enforcement steps than have been tried in the United States. We are taking different enforcement steps than are being proposed in Ontario. We feel that this is a made-in-Alberta solution. We have a different market here in Alberta. It's smaller than what you see in Ontario, so it requires a unique approach.

3:50

I just want to touch again on the veterinary piece of this legislation. We consulted. We had two in-person meetings with the association. We had an additional phone call with the association. I'm told that this is, in fact, more consultation than what was done when there was the amalgamation of the technologists and the vets. You know, there was good and substantial consultation. We're very clear on the position. We've also spoken to individual vets, Madam Speaker, and we've heard support from individuals vets. We also have spoken to pet owners, and pet owners are very pleased with these changes.

Madam Speaker, there have also been some comments from the members opposite suggesting that putting vets into this legislation somehow by association is insulting. I don't think that that's a fair comment to make with respect to those who regulate auto sales and repairs. I don't think it's a fair thing to say to those who sell new or used vehicles. I think that those comments really bring down the level of discourse when we're talking about Alberta's businesses and Alberta's small businesses, the contributors to our very economy. They drive so much of our economy. They're quite pleased that we are taking action on those grey areas where there are those who bring down the reputation of various industries.

Some of these pieces in this legislation, Madam Speaker, touch on a wide range of industries, touch almost every industry. There are provisions in here with respect to contract terms. Now, there are so many industries that engage in contracts as part of their business operations. To suggest that they're bad company for vets, that, you know, 99 per cent of Alberta's businesses would be bad company for vets to keep, is, in my view and my colleagues' here, not something that we would ever say. We support Alberta's businesses. We support Alberta's small businesses. They're pleased with the action that's being taken here because, overall, this legislation will increase consumer confidence, which is good for the bottom line. It brings up the overall level of discourse.

Madam Speaker, we've heard from the opposition about wanting to remove, quote, red tape. There is red tape on the veterinary profession. Not being able to advertise or post your fees is red tape. Those businesses are not able to operate their business in the fashion that they see fit. Now, I understand that there has been, you know, some discussion through the association from a number of

their members on this issue, but I have heard from vets that they would like the opportunity to be able to be more open and transparent with their consumers, that this would be good for consumers, being able to post their fees, which they're prohibited from doing at the moment. We're removing that prohibition and giving more flexibility. Obviously, they're not required. It's very clear on the face of the legislation that they won't be required to advertise their fees, that they won't be required to post them. These are additional freedoms.

Much of this legislation, frankly, deals with improving freedom of speech for Albertans. There are pieces in here that have to do with the ability to post an online review, Madam Speaker, without being able to be threatened with intimidation by a business because they simply do not like an honest but good-faith review. These are principles that we hold dear: principles of free speech, principles of access to information, principles of being able to make good, informed choices.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? Under 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Dr. Starke: No, not under 29(2)(a).

The Acting Speaker: Okay. The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to ask if it would be acceptable to the other members of the Legislature if we would temporarily revert to introductions to introduce some members in the gallery.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce some of the members of one of our largest and strongest unions here in Alberta and a union I was very proud to be part of as an LPN. Vice-president Mike Dempsey and the political action committee, if you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act (continued)

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, you had to expect that after the minister's rambling diatribe there was a going to be a response. You know, it's interesting because this is a debate on referral, and the purpose of the referral in this case is to allow for the consultation that did not happen. It would allow for the minister to actually meet with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, which she refused to do. It would allow for multiple

dialogues on a number of different things that are located within this bill, but I'm going to confine myself to some of the comments made by the minister and by others with regard to the bill.

Now, the minister stood up. She stood up last night, and she said it again just now, that this bill would only deal with household pets. Well, if it only deals with household pets, why doesn't it say that in the bill? Nowhere in the bill is the phrase "household pet." The phrase in the bill is "in respect of a domestic cat or dog or other specified type of domestic animal." Cows are domestic animals. Pigs are domestic animals. Horses, sheep, goats, elk are domestic animals. The minister says "household pets." If that's what she means, "household pets" should appear in the bill, not a wide-open domestic animal definition. If that's what you're talking about, that's what needs to be in the bill.

That is part of the reason why it's important that referral be done, so that we can take another look at this bill to get the proper language. [interjections] Right now, the minister's . . .

The Acting Speaker: My apologies, hon. member. There's a lot of talking back and forth. If we could please just allow the member to speak to this referral amendment.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the intention is to talk about household pets, then let's have that language in the bill. Right now the bill allows cabinet to designate which domestic animals are included, and you can understand the members of the Veterinary Medical Association – I'm sorry; I will respectfully disagree with the Minister of Service Alberta – who were not properly consulted. The consultation was a shadow of the consultation that was consulted with the Minister of Labour on the bringing together of the associations. To suggest that there's confidence within the veterinary profession for cabinet taking over the definition of what constitutes a domestic animal under this bill – that confidence has been shattered by the actions of this minister.

Now, the next little thing that I found interesting was: rely on your experts. Remember that we heard that phrase: rely on your experts. Who exactly are the experts when we're talking about veterinary medicine? Is it cabinet? Is it the Minister of Service Alberta?

4:00

I would suggest, Madam Speaker, that the experts in this field are, in fact, veterinarians. Veterinarians have come out in large numbers and have written to this minister, have written to me, have written to most of the members, I would suggest, here in the Chamber and have indicated their displeasure with this bill. They've been very clear on that. This bill takes a direct attack at the self-regulating nature of our profession, and it takes a direct attack on our ability to govern ourselves and to decide not only what is best for our profession but what is best for the welfare and health of animals in Alberta. That is a responsibility that we have had since Alberta became a province, and it is a responsibility we take very, very seriously.

Now, the minister mentioned a concern about transparency on costs and that there were some people who were scared to go through the door of a veterinary clinic for fear of what it might cost. What a ridiculous statement. What a ridiculous statement. Unlike some businesses – lawyers, I would point out – we don't start charging people the minute they walk through the door. We provide lots of free advice, whether it be on the phone or over the counter, and if somebody wants to know what a veterinary procedure will cost, we provide that information willingly over the phone. Every veterinary hospital that I've ever been associated with has dealt with

what we call price shoppers. There are price shoppers that are there every day, people that ask for the price of a service. But whenever we got a call from a price shopper, what we did was engage in a conversation with that person to let them know what was included in the price, what sort of procedures we took, what protocols were included so that they understood exactly what it was that they were purchasing.

You know, Madam Speaker, I started a veterinary practice in 1983. In 1983 performing general, routine surgery, things like spays and neuters of dogs and cats, was very different from what it was when I retired in 2011. In some ways I am so very glad that our profession moved forward over that period of time, and it has moved forward since. I would never do a spay or a neuter today the way I did it in 1983 – never – because it would be not the best care for the patient.

Now, have those changes resulted in additional costs? Yes, they have. Those changes to the way we do things in the operating theatre, in the examination room: those things cost money, and they have increased the cost of veterinary care. There's no question; there has been an increase in the cost of veterinary care. But there has been a commensurate increase in the quality of veterinary care, and when the price gets driven down, so does the quality. Price competition, whether it's in veterinary medicine or in other fields, results in a decrease in quality. That has been the experience in every other jurisdiction that has allowed the advertising of veterinary fees. That is what has happened in British Columbia, that is happening in Ontario, and it has happened in multiple jurisdictions in the United States where that has been done.

Now, you can call it a better practice because of transparency, you can call it a number of different things, but in reality it results in the degradation of practice. It results in the degradation of procedures. It is not in the best interests of, certainly, veterinary medicine, it is not in the best interests of the client, but most importantly it's not in the best interests of the patient. The patient cannot speak. Who speaks for the patient? Who is the patient's advocate? In most cases that is the owner, but in many cases the owner does not have the knowledge or the information to know what is best for the patient. That knowledge, that information comes from the veterinarian through his or her training and experience.

Clients come to us asking for our recommendation based on what is called Aesculapian authority. Aesculapian authority is a term used in the medical profession and also the veterinary medical profession, and it indicates the authority we hold because of our knowledge, because of our experience. Just like a lawyer or an accountant or another professional has authority and knowledge in their field that we rely on, veterinarians have knowledge that we apply in our situation. That knowledge, Madam Speaker, is gained over time, it is gained at a great personal cost, and that knowledge has value.

Over the years that I was in practice, yes, things became more expensive, but those fees were to cover better quality veterinary medicine. Those fees were to do better sedation, better anaesthesia, better intra- and postoperative pain control, for better materials that were less reactive for the patient. They allowed for intravenous monitoring and intravenous support of the patient.

When I first graduated, in 1983, we didn't put dogs on IVs for spays. Unbelievable. Today I would never pay a dog without an IV line, but in 1983 that was okay. That meant that the procedure was cheaper in 1983. If you want to make a procedure significantly cheaper, you have to cut corners. There is no other way to do it.

Now, the concern over costs is not one that is foreign to veterinarians. We deal with the need to balance the owner's ability to pay with the cost of providing the service every day, Madam

Speaker. In our situation we've come up with a lot of different ways to help owners with that. We encourage owners to take pet health insurance, which is widely available, to shield them against the shock of a large veterinary bill. We have started four different charities in Alberta that provide financial assistance to clients who require assistance for veterinary care. Four different charities exist in Alberta. They all have significant veterinary involvement. We want to be able to help our clients treat their animals. We provide tens of thousands of dollars every year in pro bono work, stuff that we do for free or at severe discounts just because we care about our patients, we care about our clients, and we want to do what's best for them.

While this minister says that this isn't an attack on veterinarians, maybe you should ask the veterinarians how they feel about it. I will tell you that from the hundreds of letters I have received, we feel under attack. We feel that we've been targeted. We're the only self-regulating profession that's in this bill. Are doctors here? No. Are lawyers here? No. Are dentists or pharmacists or chiropractors or physiotherapists or geophysicists in this bill? No, none of them, but veterinarians are. Veterinarians are. Madam Speaker, you know, that is a problem.

Consultation is something that we value and we would like to see this minister undertake with us. That's why I'm in favour of referral. Referral will allow for a more robust discussion that lasts longer than a week. When I told my colleagues that this bill received first reading last Wednesday and that then it was to be passed by Thursday, their reaction uniformly was shock. "How can the government do this? How can the government, in the space of a week, turn around the way a profession has been operating in this province for 111 years?" When I told my colleagues that it can be done and that that's what is under way, they were shocked.

That is why I'm saying that if this bill is referred to committee, we at the very least have the opportunity to hear properly from veterinarians and, yes, hear from clients who feel that they would be better served by having fees advertised, and it would be an opportunity to have that dialogue and, in fact, discuss: why fee advertising? Where it has been tried in other jurisdictions, it has always been an unmitigated disaster. I'll say that again: an unmitigated disaster. Talk to veterinarians who practised in British Columbia through the '80s and the '90s and ask them what fee advertising did to their profession. Alberta veterinarians don't want that.

My colleagues have already stated what the level of complaints that we have to our association is. It's astronomically low. When one considers the number of veterinary transactions, the number of interactions that we have with clients and patients on an annual basis, the percentage involved is so minuscule.

4:10

Now, could we do better? Yes, and we strive to do better all the time. Our association has staff, has volunteer council members, has many, many members, myself included, who volunteer for discipline tribunals and practice review and practice inspection to try to always improve, to continuously improve veterinary practice in Alberta. That's what we try to do.

That's why we find this bill, brought in on such short notice, brought in for no explainable reason even though we asked – we asked the Minister of Labour and we asked the Minister of Service Alberta back in August: "What is the driving force behind this bill? Why does it feel that this is necessary?" We didn't get an answer from either one. Then the one answer we did get from the Minister of Service Alberta was that there would be extensive discussion, consultation, and engagement. Well, that hasn't happened. Also, we would much prefer, frankly, to deal with the Minister of Labour,

who is responsible for the Veterinary Profession Act, not the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Cooper: Why?

Dr. Starke: Well, that's a good question, one that has not been answered by either minister.

Madam Speaker, that is the reason I'm pushing for referral. That is the reason I speak in favour of referral, specifically with regard to the provisions within the Veterinary Profession Act. We are a proud profession. We work hard, and we have done nothing to earn the ire of this minister or to be targeted by this government in this way, but if they do want to proceed and steamroll the veterinary profession, I guess that's their prerogative. But I didn't think it would and I certainly had hoped it would not, Madam Speaker, come to that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we all can learn from that member, seeing his passion for his profession. I think that anybody that has taken the time and put a lot of years into dedicating it to an industry – in my case, it would be accounting; for him, it's the veterinarian practice. I can tell you that when it comes to a government moving on a professional body that regulates a profession, that is an attack on an entire profession, and it is an attack on exactly what it is we are trying to prevent, which is creating red tape so that they can no longer do their job. To hear the minister say that we are reducing red tape by bringing in this legislation is preposterous.

I would like to hear a little bit more from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster about how he feels that the minister can really justify this lack of consultation when it comes to such an important topic and say that 1,300 online surveys really will improve the ability for him to help the pets that are within his care.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, I'm happy to say that. I mean, my responsiveness within my practice was always to talk directly to my clients, and I encouraged that.

You know, it's interesting. One of the provisions in this bill is with regard to negative reviews online, and I actually support those provisions. I think those are a good idea. But just out of interest's sake, I went to the Facebook page of my practice, now my former practice, to see how they're doing. Of the 27 reviews they've received, 26 reviews are five star, and one is three star, averaging 4.9. I was proud of my colleagues. They are doing a good job, and they continue to do a good job.

You know, they don't need the provisions within here, but don't take it from me. For years the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association has had a public member on the board, and that is to protect the public interest. I received this quote from a public member.

As a 7 year Public Member of the . . . ABVMA – I can state without any bias – the current Act is working for Alberta's public. Veterinarians receive specific training about client relations/fees/records and other critical areas of professional communication/practice when they get their provisional licence. I note Public Member input for amendments was not sought in any form by the Minister of Service [Alberta]. Public Members are the eyes/ears for Alberta's self-regulated professions.

Minister, why didn't you pick up the phone and ask the public members that you've got sitting on the ABVMA board whether they have input into this? Why have we been singled out for this

treatment? Why have we been attacked? You can't tell me that accountants don't have big bills. You certainly can't tell me that lawyers don't have big bills. That seems to be the only criteria. The reason we have big bills is because of the quality of practice and the demands of the public.

The public want orthopaedic surgery. You know what? If you need your dog's hip replaced, you don't have to wait 10 months; you can get it done within the week. If you need nuclear scintigraphy on your dog, you can get it done within days. If you need to go see a specialist, you can have that done within days as well. That does cost money. I recognize that. But to suggest that there is price inflation and that somehow that is unfair to the general public – the general public are the people that are demanding these enhanced services.

I myself have been the consumer of these enhanced services in the past year, and, yes, they are expensive. You know what? They're worth every penny. They're worth every penny because my colleagues are professional, my colleagues provide value, my colleagues are in touch with clients, and they know what they're doing. They deserve it. They have earned that right, and they have the knowledge, the expertise, the dedication, and the experience to be able to provide that service, and I think they provide it not just for me but for all Albertans, and I would like them to be able to continue doing that in the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we are back on the referral. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to be able to rise in the House today to speak to the referral motion to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act.

I don't think I'm going to be able to speak as eloquently about veterinarians as my colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster. However, what I can say is that one thing that we don't do very often in this House is refer a piece of legislation to committee. It does seem a little odd that we don't do as much of that as we could be doing. Certainly, I think the committees have time for this kind of thing. I sit on one, and we haven't done anything together since, I think, the Alberta Standard Time Act, so I guess I would say that they're overrun with work. It really would prove to Albertans that the Legislature was very interested in getting to the bottom of the piece of legislation that was being sent on to committee, very interested in having folks that are affected by that particular bill be able to come and make submissions to the committee, make their points of what may be good about the legislation or bad about the legislation.

Don't get me wrong. At times the government has certainly spent time wording some questions that are available to those that wish to make submissions online. I am not sure if there was an online questionnaire about this bill or not, and it doesn't matter. The complaint, at least sometimes here on this side, about online consultation is that the outcome seems to be predetermined on some of the bills that actually do have online questions for consultation. We sometimes hear that the questions tend to lead the person submitting exactly where the government wants that person to end up. Far be it for me now to be accusatory. Those are just comments that I tend to hear. I would not be accusatory.

Back to the referral amendment. In this particular instance I believe that sending Bill 31 to committee for scrutiny by those that will be affected by the bill is the right thing to do. Considering the

vastness of this bill – ticket resale, automotive sales and repair, high-cost credit, AMVIC, and lastly but certainly not the least of the things that this bill covers, veterinary advertisement – there's definitely a lot of stuff to stick into one piece of legislation.

4:20

The bill actually makes several changes to the Fair Trading Act, including changing the name of the act to the consumer protection act. Speaking of the Fair Trading Act, let's just reflect for a moment. Bill 203, Fair Trading (Motor Vehicle Repair Pricing Protection for Consumers) Amendment Act, 2016, was introduced on March 17, 2016. Just over three weeks later this private member's bill was referred to committee. At the end of the day, the Standing Committee on Families and Communities heard from numerous stakeholders about Bill 203 and the effect that it would have and then recommended to the House that Bill 203 not proceed.

Now, that's what happens when a bill is referred to committee. I'm not being political here. I'm just suggesting that what should have happened to the bill in committee, one way or the other – I'm merely giving an example of what one of the potentialities of a bill going to the committee is. It's true that there is actually a chance that the bill will be found to be flawed in some way that affects the people that will be forced to adhere to it. Bill 203 was such an example. To be perfectly honest, when a bill is referred to committee and the public gets a chance to voice their opinions about that bill instead of answering a one-answer-only question on the Internet about the same bill and when the public has had their say, everyone in this House can be proud that they did the right thing.

My colleague from Livingstone-Macleod this morning gave a lengthy description of what leading questions may sound like. I don't believe that I can remember all of them. There was quite an eloquent little display. His point was that the questions asked probably didn't pertain to anything like what is in front of us, the people in the Legislature, in this bill. Average Albertans that are affected by this bill would not have been given the ability in any online survey to comment on portions of the bill that we see before us.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

When I go back to Bill 203, the people of the province and the people that were to be directly affected got to come in and face the committee to give their opinions, and because of what was heard in the case of Bill 203, the committee did the only thing it could. It recommended to the House that the bill not proceed any further. It didn't make it past second reading. Now, that appears to me to be democracy in action. Like I said, those of us in this Legislature can be proud of that particular action because it allowed Albertans to have a voice. It actually allowed Albertans to say, "No, this proposed legislation doesn't fit the bill," so to speak.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I sit on the committee that had Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act, sent to it for input from Albertans. We had two or three sessions of Albertans that came before the committee – you were the chair of that – to express their concerns with the bill. Not only were everyday Albertans part of those meetings; we indeed had professional sports representatives in front of that committee as well giving their humble opinions as to what the time change could do to those professional sports in Alberta if the time were indeed changed. Now, there was a lot of discussion about that as we moved through committee. Those guys swung a pretty big bat. We certainly had letter after letter written to the committee, some in favour, some not.

That committee also went on the road to get input from Albertans from all over the province. Travelling around the province, taking a group of committee members along so that people could be heard

on an issue is a pretty big deal. There is a team that actually takes care of audio. You know, I hadn't thought about it too much, but of course *Hansard* has to be along on a trip like that in order to record all the input from Albertans when a committee is taken on the road like that.

Anyway, I sat in on one of the meetings when it was in the south. There were banks of audio equipment and microphones and on and on and certainly people in order to run all that equipment. It was done right. Don't get me wrong. Upon walking into that room in Lethbridge, I was impressed at the equipment and the operators of the equipment and the security officers that we see around here every day that were there to protect – I see my friend in the gallery – those of us that were listening and those that were participating, giving their opinions, and of course those who were running the equipment. I think that the travelling show went across Alberta and met in five areas. I could be wrong there. I think it was Calgary, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, here in Edmonton, and then Lethbridge. Five? [interjection] Oh, four. Okay. Was it not in Edmonton? I'm asking the Speaker. I shouldn't be doing that.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, there were four, and you know that. Thank you for correcting me. You know, as much as I didn't completely understand why we were travelling from one end of the province to the other to hear the opinions of everyday Albertans, it could certainly never be said that the committee didn't bend over backwards to get all possible input in order to make a decision for presentation to the Legislature. Of course, we all know what the outcome of the committee work resulted in, but, once again, Albertans got to voice their opinions. They got the chance to be part of a decision of this Legislature, and that really is what this is all about. Everyday Albertans or small businesses or corporations or businessmen, whatever bill it may be, whatever those folks feel about portions of whatever that bill may be, are in fact given the opportunity to give their opinions and, from what I found, actually facts about the bill in question.

Now, Bill 31, which covers all of those things that I mentioned earlier, also covers a consumer bill of rights portion. It's clear that a plain-language bill of rights would be created and publicized by the minister. As far as I can see, this will basically be a policy piece that does not contain any enforceable items but, rather, exists for consumers' use. Bottom line: it will turn out, I think, being an information piece, for lack of a better term. If indeed that is not the case, I would be happy to hear from the minister to explain the reasoning for this document. It appears to me that the minister already has the ability to draft a consumer bill of rights at any time that she wishes. I'm just not sure why it needs to be an act of the Legislature. So here we go once again. The government appears like it's trying to legislate a part of its job description. I've never understood why the minister just doesn't go ahead and move forward using the powers already granted.

Now, I've already mentioned that this is a vast bill with multiple sections in it. In all honesty, it's somewhat convoluted, I would say, a little bit of a convolution of different issues, some of which will likely not be fixed by this bill. Others such as aspects of the veterinary advertising: well, judging from the blowback from the industry and their concern over the lack of consultation on this bill, considering that we've heard probably 40 minutes of discussion about it from one of those very professionals that shares this House with us, it just seems to me that this is exactly why this bill should be sent off to committee and given the due discussion, something as broad reaching as this bill is.

While certain aspects of this bill have some merit, others seem to lack purpose. While I'm at the veterinary portion of this speech, I should say that I received an e-mail from a veterinarian in my riding yesterday. Now, upon speaking with her, this lady suggested that

the reason, she believed, to remove the section on advertising in Bill 31 is that it is unethical for veterinarians to be advertising professional medical fees. She continued and said that this would be considered unprofessional activity by their profession. They are professional medical doctors, and advertising service fees to the general public is not considered an activity appropriate for professional medical doctors to do. This is what the veterinarian from my riding said to me. It undermines their profession, she said, the professional requirements and code of conduct, and is considered by veterinarians to damage their professional reputation and credibility with the public as professionals.

4:30

Now, she did suggest, in regard to the sections on consumer awareness of costs of service prior to those services being conducted, that removing that now is probably a mistake because, in her opinion, the provincial government did not discuss this matter with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, who is responsible for the licensing and oversight of veterinarians in regard to the veterinary act. The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association already has requirements in place for veterinarians, and veterinarians such as the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, that shares this room with us, have the responsibility to inform clients of the costs of services and to get agreement from the client prior to providing those services.

Therefore, in this veterinarian's opinion, there is no need for that legislation. She said to me that if there is an individual in the government that had a specific issue with a specific veterinarian, then they can lodge a formal complaint with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, who will investigate that issue and ensure that that veterinarian is dealt with appropriately, as per their existing requirements on that matter.

Now, this is the kind of stuff that I think we'd be hearing a lot of if we did determine to send this bill to committee. We've heard from a veterinarian that shares the room with us. I'm in the middle of telling you what a veterinarian said to me. I think every member on this side has probably received an e-mail from a veterinarian. Every situation, of course, has to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members who wish to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on . . .

Mr. Schneider: Madam Speaker?

Mr. Cooper: Oh. Mr. Speaker, sir, the great Speaker that you are.

It's still a pleasure to rise and speak under 29(2)(a). I was listening diligently to my hon. colleague from the incredible constituency of Little Bow. The lovely constituency of Little Bow, I think, is probably appropriate in this case. He was speaking about consulting with veterinarians and why that might be important.

I know that earlier today we heard from members of the government speaking in question period about how ministers had the opportunity to travel all across the province and speak to Albertans from all different areas of the province. The Minister of Seniors and Housing spoke very interestingly about hearing from seniors and how important that was to her ability to deliver on the important initiatives of the government. Mr. Speaker, that sort of makes me pause a little bit. Clearly, the minister felt that it was important to listen to Albertans when it came to issues of housing. The Member for Lethbridge-East asked a question about just how

glorious and magnificent the trip to Lethbridge was and the opportunity to hear from Albertans in southern Alberta.

I know that my colleague from Little Bow has received at least one contact from an Albertan that doesn't believe this government has done their job of listening with respect to veterinarians. I'm curious to know if the Member for Little Bow has had multiple folks contact him and just exactly what his opinion might be of the government coming to question period today and bragging about how good a job they're doing of listening to Albertans when, in fact, there are all sorts of piles of evidence that are coming into our offices that speak to the exact opposite of the government doing a good job of listening, that they're not consulting, certainly, with veterinarians in this case, that they're not listening to the important feedback about the good work that's being done by veterinarians in this province, and, in fact, lumping them in – I think we've heard the minister in this House talk about unscrupulous industry and service providers and then, in the next breath, talk about veterinarians. I know that veterinarians do a fantastic job because I hear that from constituents, and I also hear from veterinarians who are concerned about this very issue with respect to the government not listening.

I was so appreciative of the minister of seniors' comments when she spoke about listening to Albertans. I'm just curious to know if the Member for Little Bow thinks that this government ought to listen to all Albertans and not just the ones that they like to hear from.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Well, that's a tough one to follow there, Mr. Speaker, but I've got to say that it's a great question. I guess I would have to say that I agree one hundred per cent with the Minister of Seniors and Housing travelling around the province, trying to get some information so that she can make a decision in her ministry as to how she should proceed. I would say that that's exactly what we should be doing, and we should continue to be doing it.

We're talking about veterinarians at the moment, veterinarians that have had something slammed on top of them that they didn't exactly know was coming, I don't think, especially when the veterinary profession was asking the ministry to include them in all discussions, and that would have been with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. Certainly, I've received more than one letter. There are likely going to be several speeches on this matter as we continue forward.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of this referral amendment. Given that we're hearing from stakeholders, I think that the only recourse is to send this to committee so that we can get proper consultation, so that we can actually reach out to Albertans and hear their thoughts. I understand that the government spent a whole nine weeks to go out and consult, and they feel that that's appropriate. Sorry, I'm thinking about Bill 30. I'm confusing the bills. Well, they're all eight inches thick, it looks like.

But to get back to consulting, the actual answer here is that they didn't do nine weeks of consulting on this. From what I understand, what they did do was that they asked people to come in to consult, and then they told them what was in the bill. That sounds very clearly like the no-consultation bill called Bill 6, way back when we had farmers and ranchers across Alberta very upset with our current government. So you'd think that this government would

learn to allow for consultation, but it appears that when it comes to consultation, they always come up lacking.

Now, I do want to say that I am going through the press release that the minister brought forward, and again I'm quoting from the same press release as before, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses, the one where the minister pretty much had said that "bad actors" were all in this bill, more or less. I started to look to the people that she actually consulted and quoted inside of her press release because these are important. Now, the reason this is important is that these individuals that were clearly consulted on this bill got to see the bill and comment on the bill, but this press release was let out at exactly 4 o'clock on November 29. The bill was tabled for first reading at 3 o'clock on November 29. So they've had extensive time to get through Bill 31, this whole thing, in an hour, to be able to come up with an opinion for themselves and the industry that they represent. That seems to be a little loaded.

4:40

They're very excited about this bill. You know, like, we've got several examples of individuals that are showing that this is actually something that they feel will move their industry forward. I certainly would say that these appear to be, "We want your support for something even though you haven't seen it yet," that kind of support for this bill. That is not the same thing that I am getting from my constituents and the Member for Little Bow and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster are getting from their constituents. So we've got some Albertans that have given endorsements to this that have had an hour to see the bill – and I think that is shameful – but we're getting actual people that are in the industries affected by this saying: we want more consultation. I don't think that's unfair. And that is why a referral motion is so important.

Certainly, the government put forward a survey in the summer to solicit opinions from Albertans. However, if you've read those questions, Mr. Speaker, you would see that they're incredibly slanted and leaning. That's not proper consultation. When you ask a loaded question, you expect a loaded answer. This government continues to talk about how they consulted with Albertans in order to put forth the best legislation they can. Well, it appears our veterinarians are very unhappy with this legislation. It doesn't appear that this is the best legislation they can put forward.

But you know what? Albertans continue to talk about how they're not actually consulted. They're told what will happen, and they're not listened to. This is just another example. What's the point of consultation if it's only one sided? "We put out an online survey. We put loaded questions in there, and then we get the answers we're looking for, and then that's our consultation." That's shameful. There is no point to it. It's simply something that sounds good for the government to say.

But when it comes to actually moving forward with legislation, we end up with Albertans frustrated with this government. My colleagues and I are speaking with the stakeholders, we're speaking with regular Albertans, and we're speaking with the veterinarians. They're all saying the same thing, that there's a lack of consultation. Furthermore, people and boards are absolutely blindsided when they finally get to see a copy of the legislation. That's not consultation; that's clear disrespect. That's clear disrespect, Mr. Speaker.

Take, for example, stakeholders in the automobile sale and repair industry. They came forward with a submission when Bill 203 was before the standing committee. As a result, the committee recommended that the bill not proceed. Imagine their surprise to find the legislation retabled less than two years later. I find it very interesting that the government has had an about-face on the topic,

and I wonder if they tossed out the input from stakeholders in its entirety or if they chose others who are just in line with the government's intent on these issues. It seems to me that it's quite disrespectful behaviour by this government.

There is so much more in this legislation that can be arbitrarily decided by the minister, and that is the true concern that stakeholders have. We actually do not know where the government is going because a lot of this is done in regulations. She is giving herself the power to more or less create something after this legislation has been completed. No consultation. The industry is not being able to show that they have been and will be an active participant when it comes to their industry. Who knows this industry best? It is the people that live and breathe and work and make taxable income. This is how we afford to move Albertans forward. And you know what? This government has failed.

There is so much more in this legislation, but I can tell you that when it comes to our stakeholders, I will reiterate, they just are concerned where this government is going because they just don't know what to expect. Industry, regardless of the type, deserves to have certainty so they can continue on in their businesses in a professional way that seeks to provide customers with best practices and services. If you keep changing the model, how will they be able to create an environment that is competitive like what the government wants in Alberta?

Or take, for example, the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and veterinarians as a whole. They offered to work with the government. I believe that. AMVIC offered to work with the government. I believe that. The automobile repair industry would have offered to work with the government. We have all these people saying: let's work together to make this happen. But what we get in the end is a government that ceases to bring forward what we actually want to see, and that is a diversified economy in Alberta that is sustainable and is something that we can all be proud of.

Now, we'll move on to the fact that they've recently updated the bylaws and policies of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. They offered to strengthen them, and even though it was what the government wanted, this was ignored. They're willing to be a partner at the table. They approached it with the best intentions and willingness. They were ignored. Instead, the government has completely ignored the work they've done, the co-operation they've shown, and they've hurriedly pieced together some piece of legislation that makes no sense for the profession that operates well and sees a very, very small number of formal complaints each year.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

This government is rushing in, Madam Speaker, and we've seen this happen before. This government talks about partnerships and collaboration, but the truth is that they don't know how to approach the table in good faith. They inform Albertans and stakeholders what they're going to do after the fact that this bill was already in motion. It was already written. And sometimes after it's done, they're surprised with the result. You know what? When you don't do consultation right, you end up with an industry that is angry and a consumer that is not serviced. Alberta is holding its services to the highest standard. That's not good faith. That has nothing to do with inspiring confidence, and it sure doesn't build trust. It's a shame that this NDP government thinks that this is the way to do business, an absolute, complete shame.

Let's talk about AMVIC. AMVIC started acting on the recommendations from the George Cuff report, and they were fully accepted by the minister. They started making progress. They started correcting mistakes that should have been corrected a long time ago. Then, out of nowhere the minister and her government

step in and shake everything up yet again, creating more skepticism, mistrust when it started to be slowly rebuilt. That's not a way to run a board, a business, a government, or a province. Again, this is shameful, Madam Speaker, utterly shameful.

What about if we're going to look at ticket sales? We're trying to legislate things that are unenforceable like offshore ticket-buying bots. The intent for this at least is admirable, but it doesn't change the fact that it's unenforceable. Legislation should not be made for legislation's sake, nor should it be made to create a false sense of comfort or security.

4:50

Ontario has recently brought in similar legislation, and after it was introduced, CBC published an article from which I'd like to quote briefly. It reads in part:

Off-shore ticket bot operators are famous for being almost impossible to hunt down. The law sounds tough, but [it doesn't] prevent another debacle like the Hip's tour tickets if the responsible parties are seaward.

The goal of the legislation should not be to make symbolic statements that comfort people but do nothing or even worse, not address the problems at hand.

The goal of legislation should be to actively (and practically) protect people from force and fraud. In the case of ticket selling, that means keeping transactions transparent and safe. Not simply decreeing fairness and hoping everyone listens.

We need to have legislation that makes sense and is about problem solving, not problem seeking. Madam Speaker, this government just hasn't done its homework, and it needs to send this to committee to rectify the mistakes contained within it. This government has shown time and again that it rushes legislation through the House without fully considering the impact, without actually conducting proper consultation. This bill needs to go to committee in order to ensure that no time is wasted in getting it right the first time. It's better to get it done once the right way than have to come back and edit and fix it and amend it like we've had to do with other legislation this government has put forward.

If this is truly a bill about consumer protection, let's ensure that everyone has a seat at the table and this government is not blindly pushing forward on some ideological bent that is at the risk of honest, hard-working Albertans, who are doing their best and doing their jobs correctly. Please stop referring to Albertans as criminals, Minister.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to thank the member for such great work on this bill and for everything that you're bringing forward.

There were a couple of things that you were talking about with respect to respecting Albertans and their choices and how we move legislation like this forward. I mean, obviously, there are changes that need to be made, but when we're talking about groups of people that have been self-regulated up until this point and understanding what that means to them and how that impacts their businesses and who they are and how they work with the people that they service – you were mentioning something along the lines of how it makes Albertans feel when their ability to provide services that they've provided over this length of time is all of sudden coming under ministerial overreach. Could you please go on further to explain a little bit more about that?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, you know, I hope that the members opposite are actually listening to what we're saying over here and what our stakeholders are saying. I hope that they're not being blinded by the side of the Chamber they sit on, and I hope that they're asking questions to this minister. I can't be the only one in this Chamber that has concerns with this. I do hear my colleagues having a lot of the same ones, but my colleagues across the aisle, the NDP colleagues, have to be hearing from their constituents as well, from veterinarians, from automobile salespeople. What is it that they're doing? Are they ignoring their constituents? I hope – I really hope – that they do ask this minister some questions.

This bill needs to be sent to a committee. There are some valid reasons. Albertans are reaching out to us because they are concerned, and they're very frustrated, Madam Speaker. I encourage all the members in the Assembly to support this amendment that my colleague has put forward. Let's look at every part of this bill, get it right before it goes too far and down the wrong path. Let's listen to our constituents because the constituents normally bring forward valid concerns. And you know what? A loaded online survey does not represent all of Alberta.

I understand that this government really feels that it's done its consultation because after Bill 6 I wouldn't want to go out and consult with Albertans either, but – you know what? – you're government. It is your responsibility, it is your due diligence to actually go out and talk with the people that you are governing right now. You don't just tell them the way this is and hope it works out because that rarely works.

I know that for myself I've got several e-mails from veterinarians within my e-mail. I do not have the same number as Vermilion-Lloydminster, but I will tell you that each and every one of the vets that have written to my constituency have valid concerns. They want to be heard. They need to be heard. You know what? Giving us about a week to get this legislation right is not giving those veterinarians the ability to be able to get the message to the government to make sure that this legislation gets it done right.

I still don't understand what this minister has against veterinarians. The fact that she is completely taking the governance away from a board that has worked tirelessly for Albertans – if I saw in the papers that we had problems across Alberta with veterinarians, then maybe this is a justifiable action that the minister is bringing forward, but I have not heard that. I will tell you that when I did google – and I know Google knows all. When I googled veterinarian problems, I couldn't find a whole lot of issues with this profession because – you know what? – these are good people. These people are highly respected in every rural community, and I can only assume that's in urban communities like Edmonton and Calgary. We trust these people with an animal that is close to us. I trust my dog Lexa to the local veterinarian. I know that when I bring my beautiful dog to that veterinarian, at that point it is the sole focus of that veterinarian to take care of it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure tonight to be able to speak to this referral motion to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. I would like to first of all say that this an issue of, you know, whether or not the government has been able to achieve fulsome consultation with stakeholders that would be affected by this bill, and I have to say that my concern is that I

am starting to see, from the letters and from the information I received and telephone calls, that in reality they have not.

My office has been inundated by calls from veterinarians in my riding. In fact, it makes me question whether or not the government was successful at being able to get to the southern part of Alberta and speak to the people and the veterinarians from my riding. I can tell you full well that the vets in my area do not feel that they have been consulted and that they would be very much in favour of me voting in favour of the referral motion to bring this to committee so that their voices can be heard.

Now, I am very interested to know whether the minister can table reports and table the support that she's received from vets specifically, who this is going to be affecting, so that we can take a look at this evidence that she says is so fulsome. I also have to ask the question, you know, in terms of saying: well, this needs to be done. What was the real, burning need? My question is: did the vets complain? Did they complain about their own self-regulation?

5:00

Really, we're talking about three groups here. We're talking about veterinarians, animals, and their owners. Now, I'm pretty sure that the animals didn't complain, and from what we understand, the vets didn't complain about being self-regulated. In fact, it's interesting to note that one of the other members from Vermilion-Lloydminster earlier tabled an article saying that vets are the third most respected profession in the professions. It begs the question of whether or not the clients would be complaining or saying that there's such a need for this regulation.

Now, I also want to point out, Madam Speaker, that in that same article it said that politicians were at the bottom of the list of those people respected. Based upon that information, the fact that we have this government wanting to regulate the third most respected profession that we have, I am scared to think about the regulation that they're going to be bringing forward for politicians, to regulate politicians, being the lowest and most disrespected of all professions. It's interesting that they're planning on, based upon their logic, regulating their own selves.

Now, the Minister of Service Alberta said that she knew of people who wouldn't take their pets in because they were paralyzed with fear – I believe those are the words that she used – of the cost. Now, as a pet owner who does live on a farm, I can tell you that pets are part of the family. I don't believe that there's anybody in here that, when your pet needs the help and the support, would be paralyzed because of the cost. This is like saying that you wouldn't take your children in to get the support that they need. I can't imagine anybody would do that to their children or to their pets. It didn't make sense when she said it, and I'm not sure whether or not she thought about that comment.

Now, we talk about the process of consultation that they went through. They said that there were two in-person meetings with vet associations, and this almost seemed like this was the main reason why this should go forward, because there were two consultations. Well, I would, first of all, be very interested in knowing what these associations said. What best practices did they say needed to be presented in this bill? Did these two veterinary associations say that we actually even need a bill? That information should be presented to the House so that we can take a look at it because if these associations really, again, felt such a burning need to have their own self-regulated organization become a regulated organization, then we'd like to be able to see that evidence. I would like to be able to see that evidence.

Now, it was stated that, you know, in the bill it specifically – and I'm going to use this as context, Madam Speaker, so that I can help you and my fellow members understand the reasons why I believe

that this needs to be referred to committee. On page 23, in part 5.1, it says:

- 48.1(1) A registered veterinarian shall, in accordance with regulations,
 (a) disclose to a client . . . all fees for the prescribed type of veterinary medicine services proposed for the client's animal.

Now, I've taken my pets to a vet. I don't know. Maybe in small communities it's different than in larger communities, but I can tell you my experience. My experience was that when I took them in, first of all, it was a very caring environment. I didn't know the vet at the time, but I thought: here is someone who is professional; this person actually cares about who I considered a family member, my pet. And I thought: I feel safe bringing them to their care.

The first thing that I received from this vet was a description of what the problem was and what it would cost to fix it. In fact, I wasn't just given, you know, what the problem was and how to fix it, but I was actually given options. I had options about how I could do certain procedures which would cost a little bit more, but this would be the outcome. It was actually really nice that this vet was so willing to provide that kind of care to myself.

Now, I can tell you that there are other professions where I don't feel the same kind of care, I don't get the same kind of care when I go in and I speak to different organizations and professions. Again, the reason why I say this, Madam Speaker, is because I'm trying to understand how the minister could say that there was such a burning need for regulation on an association of vets.

The other point that I think is substantial in this is on regulations, section 48.3(1). It says: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council, after consultation with the Council" – now, it's good to hear that it's after consultation with the council – "may make regulations respecting fees and authorization for veterinary medicine, including, without limitation, regulations." Then it goes from (a) through (h) on different ways that they can be able to regulate this industry.

Now, I have to ask: why is it such a big appetite of this government to micromanage every single aspect of our society? Again, in context, the question here is: was there actually a reason, a burning reason, to be able to regulate this? Was there a public outcry that said: we need to regulate vets because they are doing X, Y, and Z. I haven't heard any reasons other than the minister, again, saying that she had heard of people who were paralyzed with fear of the cost of going in and having probably what they would consider a family member treated. Why do we need to take an organization that is self-regulated – and obviously the self-regulation seems to be working because they are the third most respected of all professions in Alberta – and put them under one of the least respected of professions, which is politicians? How does that make sense? Third most to the lowest, and this makes sense.

An Hon. Member: Just certain politicians.

Mr. Hunter: Just certain politicians, I absolutely agree. One of the members opposite said that, and I couldn't agree more.

Now, the interesting thing is that this cabinet is allowed to prescribe types of veterinary medicine services. They are allowed to describe respecting the disclosure to a client of fees on prescribed types of veterinary medicine services, respecting the advertisement. I mean, we're not talking about just saying: we're going to inject into what we consider is the problem, which might be the fees. We're saying: we're going to tell you how you can advertise; we can tell you what kind of suite of products you're going to be allowed to provide. This is all of a sudden becoming a big problem for veterinarians. Again, I have to say that if there was no problem, why would they inject themselves into this? Why would they inject

themselves into an industry that was the third highest of all professions, the third most respected profession? I don't understand why they would inject themselves into this situation, other than that they must have a monumental appetite for micromanaging every aspect of society.

5:10

Maybe what needs to be done here is that we need to be able to tell everybody by talking about this that if you are a self-regulating body, you have a big target on your back with this government, that from now on don't tell everybody that you're a self-regulating body in Alberta because heaven forbid that you actually are successful at that and that you actually have an industry that is very good at what they do and that the client support is very high and that everybody thinks you're a great organization, because you're going to get regulated by this government. Again, going from an organization that is the third most respected to being regulated by the profession that is the least respected: it makes absolutely no sense.

Now, obviously, a concern here is that we've got five pages in this bill that talk about how they would like to change this veterinary practice in Alberta. Here's the problem. The problem is that the cabinet has the right to be able to write regulations, and the devil is always in the details, Madam Speaker. What kind of regulations are they going to be bringing forward? Do we have an opportunity to be able to know what the government's thoughts are on how they need to regulate this? And if these are regulations, then we need to make sure that those regulations are something that the veterinarians would want.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 30 **An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being** **of Working Albertans**

Mr. Gotfried moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 5: Connolly]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me time to add my voice to the debate around my colleague's amendment that would refer Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, to committee. Part of the strength of this Legislature is that we not only have the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of many members but that that diversity allows us to collaborate to make sure legislation is as good as it gets before it's passed. Included in that process is the ability to send a piece of legislation back for additional information because I'm sure we all know it would be better not to pass something than to pass a flawed bill.

Madam Speaker, this bill is one such that needs to be sent to committee for a more fulsome look and a more substantive consultation. This is a large and complex bill that deserves to be treated slowly and methodically. We have seen this government

push through large, complex bills before, and it is a disservice to Albertans everywhere to do that.

There are some good pieces in this legislation, and that is part of what makes it so frustrating. Had this bill been pared down into several pieces, we might not be having this conversation now. Instead, the government is forcing us to deal with the entirety of it, and that's one reason we need to push this to the committee before proceeding.

Take, for example, the fact that we could be putting small and medium-sized businesses at stake because the administrative charges associated with enacting this bill are too cumbersome and costly for them to absorb. We saw another 12,000 full-time jobs lost by Albertans last month, and we don't need to add to that number or create more uncertainty around the job market that exists currently.

What I and my colleagues would like to see and hear from the government is evidence that the changes proposed in this bill will actually be helpful. The government members like to talk about the evidence all the time when it's convenient for them. Well, we're asking them to provide some hard-and-fast evidence that this legislation will be helpful in moving things forward. You heard me talk about concerns with the employment market and workforce. Again, we'd like to see some facts associated with whether or not this is truly in the best interest of working Albertans at this time.

I'll be frank with you, Madam Speaker. If the government had done its job, we wouldn't need this referral motion. If the government was not so keen on pushing through a huge bill shortly before we're supposed to rise for Christmas, we wouldn't need this referral. If the government had run comprehensive consultation, we wouldn't need to talk about the need to refer this bill to committee.

Now, the government will of course say that they have done a lot of consultation in regard to this bill, but one can hardly count a public opinion survey with heavily slanted and leading questions as consultation. That is much more a case of the government knowing which answers they want to hear and doing what they could to ensure they received those answers.

Another example is that this bill goes even farther than what is suggested by the WCB Review Panel's recommendation. Yet again we see government doing a semblance of consultation but actually just using it to cover for the fact that they are going to do whatever they want to regardless of the input they receive.

You see, Madam Speaker, the evidence is clear that it is best for government and Albertans that this bill be sent to committee for further research, consultation, and discussion. This is the one reason why legislative committees exist, to provide an outlet for all members here to ensure that due diligence is practised by the government. We need to ensure that due diligence is practised now.

You know, Madam Speaker, I've never been one for filibustering. When I was in government, I used to be frustrated sitting over there, listening to the opposition filibuster. Now that I am in opposition, earlier this fall I had to sit here and listen to the government filibuster their own bills. It's just frustrating. I mean, we adjourned early. We adjourned at 4 o'clock, and the government was filibustering some simple, minor bills that we all agreed on and supported. I wish they'd have brought them at the end and brought these complicated ones first, when we had time to consult. Like, yesterday we got a bill dropped like this, still hot, a book, and you want us to pass it tomorrow.

We were able to filibuster this bill to the weekend, which I was glad of because when I went home to my constituency on the weekend, I met with the chamber of commerce. What they had to say was nothing like what the minister was saying. Yeah, they consulted with them. They told them what they were going to do, and the chamber didn't support it and told them that. The

consultation doesn't mean that you tell them what you're going to do and just do what you want; you should actually listen to the people. The chamber of commerce represents the businesspeople and the small business of this province, which drives it, and the chamber of commerce is not supportive of this bill, believe me. I talked to mine on the weekend and to lots of businesspeople that are not supportive of this.

I have no choice but to support referring this bill to committee so we can have a better conversation with the real people of Alberta. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak under 29(2)(a) with respect to just some of the comments from my hon. colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti. You know, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has been a member of this Assembly for quite an extended period of time, and he is a very well-respected legislator on both sides of the Chamber, certainly on this side and, I'd expect, on that as well.

5:20

I know that the Minister of Education, the Premier, the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade would have had the opportunity to work with the member when he was, in fact, some of those same ministers on the other side of the House. You know, I think they quite likely would tell you – and I know, Madam Speaker, because I happened to work in the precincts here supporting members at that time and had the opportunity to work with the minister of the day. I'm sure that the Minister of Education and others would tell you about the good work that he did and how open and accessible he was. I know as a member of the opposition that we quite appreciated the transfer of information and his general knowledge about what was happening around the precincts.

I think it's so interesting to hear him now speak about some of his frustrations, when it comes to the legislative process and how we see this government operating, as a member who's had lots of experience with preparing legislation to ensure that we can allow for the appropriate amount of debate possible with respect to the sessional calendar.

As he highlighted, the very fact that at the start of this session and, certainly, at the start of the spring session we saw the government speaking at length about their own legislation, that they had introduced in the Chamber, while seemingly they scrambled to get other pieces of legislation introduced – a good example of that is what we saw yesterday with Bill 32. It's important, Madam Speaker, because it's exactly why we should be sending pieces like Bill 30 to committee, to ensure that we have the appropriate time to study it. If we look at Bill 32, this is what a bill that's been rushed through the printers and sent to the Chamber looks like. As you can see, it's on this paper, eight and a half by 11, stapled together at the back of the Assembly somewhere and did not actually come from the Queen's Printer, who has the opportunity to have it bound appropriately. I'll just show you exactly what it should look like. If the government wasn't rushing legislation into the Chamber, they would have had it already bound like we have come to know and expect legislation to be.

But what we've seen this session is the government rushing legislation in the dying days leading up to Christmas, intending to run the opposition morning, noon, and night, and rush legislation through the Chamber. That's exactly what we've seen with Bill 32.

It's what we're seeing with Bill 30. Listen, there are a number of different sections of this legislation that we agree with, that are a very positive step in the right direction. What we don't want is to have to come back in the spring to fix the errors of this government. We know that it's happened regularly.

I'm just curious to know if the member would like to provide any additional commentary on the significant challenge that's before the Assembly with respect to not being as respectful of the Chamber and respectful of the process as perhaps would be beneficial for all Albertans so that we can get the best piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I referred to it, you know, it was Bill 32, but we were speaking to Bill 30. I'm embarrassed that I have to get up and filibuster because I've never done it in almost 10 years. I'm doing it now because there are some big pieces of legislation. There's one left to be supposedly introduced yet. It looks like, I think, Bill 34 is yet to be introduced. We were actually supposed to rise on Thursday. Are they going to introduce the bill the day we rise?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the referral? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. McIver: He hasn't spoken to it already?

The Acting Speaker: I'm just double-checking. One minute.

Hon. member, you've already spoken to second reading, and you've also spoken to the referral, so unfortunately you can't speak.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my real privilege to be able to speak, particularly when you're in the chair, and I wish to discuss referring Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, to a legislative standing committee. I really like this referral motion brought up by my colleague. There are so many valid reasons to do that. Both my benchmarks here, sitting on my left and right, spoke very eloquently of this need to refer this bill because this bill makes sweeping changes to the Workers' Compensation Board system.

That's why it's really important to refer bills like this, because the government has a pattern here. At the end of every legislative session suddenly, you know, they wake up and bring thousands of pages of bills which are really important for Albertans, and then we, being the Official Opposition, are expected to respond to those last-minute, important bills, voluminous bills. With that, actually, the quality of the debate in the House will suffer because of lack of time. It's not a laughing matter. It impacts every Albertan and their livelihoods.

Madam Speaker, I find that the work in committees is incredibly important in order to shape the future policy direction of the province. I like committees so much that I keep asking my party's leadership to add me to more committees.

Some Hon. Members: That's true.

Mr. Panda: But I don't get any more pay. Let me be clear. I'm not getting any more pay by asking to be included in more committees. [interjection] Yeah, but I get the opportunity to learn about what's happening out there and also the rest of the province. That's the reason I want to be involved in standing committees.

The legislative standing committees are the best venues for conducting public consultations on any legislation, yet the NDP

government fails to see the value in this exercise, Madam Speaker. If the government missed public consultation in creating a law, the legislative standing committees are the last line of defence. These committees sometimes do a real good job. We have seen with the time change legislation, brought forward by one of our young friends from Edmonton, that there was a lot of interest throughout the province. It generated lots of engagement across the province, and the subcommittee went around the province and gathered information. Finally, in consultation with Albertans we made the right decision. Similarly, we should be trying to refer this bill, as suggested by my hon. colleague here, to the standing committee so we can debate it thoroughly.

You know, if we had been sending more bills to the committees, we could have avoided many legislation amendments down the road, because that's our job. We are here to make the bills better, the government's bills better. That's what the previous speaker also mentioned, that, you know, we should be doing real consultations, not, like, telling Albertans: "Oh, okay. This is how I want to do it. You just rubber-stamp what we are saying." That's not the job of the Official Opposition. That's not what we're sent here for.

5:30

Now, Madam Speaker, as Forrest Gump used to say, "Stupid is as stupid does." As much as we want to legislate stupid away, stupid is as stupid does, and accidents will happen on work sites when workers are not paying attention or are not careful and not thinking things through. This Bill 30: the core principle of this bill is that all work-site parties have a responsibility for the health and safety of all workers. I completely agree with that. However, Bill 30 puts significantly more responsibility on employers.

As you may know, Madam Speaker, I worked in the oil sands industry for a long time and also in the oil and gas industry for a long time. We all know that workers already have a right to refuse dangerous work. If the work is deemed to be dangerous, then they have the right to refuse. We all have a responsibility to ensure that stupid things don't create a Swiss cheese scenario, where the holes will line up, allowing bad things to happen on the job site.

Bill 30 includes a number of provisions that are absent in the current Occupational Health and Safety Act, the OHS Act, either in part or in whole. Just like this government rammed through changes to the Labour Relations Code and the Employment Standards Code all at once, they're doing it again by changing the Workers' Compensation Act and the OHS Act at the same time.

This large, complex bill could easily be split into separate pieces of more manageable legislation. I'm not the first one to suggest this, Madam Speaker. Previous speakers also talked about the merits of splitting this bill into biteable pieces of manageable legislation. This is where sending the bill to the committee would come in handy. Small and medium-sized businesses are especially at risk because they're not as able to absorb increased administrative costs to support the joint committees, added administrative training, and alternate work placements.

There are administrative tasks like mandatory joint work-site health and safety committees. Previously they were only mandated at the discretion of the minister. The money spent on supporting the new administrative costs can actually take away from a small or medium-sized business's ability to invest in new safety measures and equipment.

Madam Speaker, now, I suspect that the NDP are trying to legislate a cultural change into the workplace. The NDP are trying to be noble here, but then they're trying to rush this legislation. Cultural changes happen from the leadership in charge. One cannot wave a magic wand and expect things to be fixed. As we speak, the

people, Albertans, are wising up, and they're able to see through, and the opposition to Bill 30 is growing every day.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce came out swinging against Bill 30, Madam Speaker. Wouldn't you like to hear their arguments in detail? If you do want to hear their arguments, then send it to the committee. I would love to see Mr. Kobly from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce provide his argument against Bill 30 in contrast to Mr. McGowan and the Alberta Federation of Labour's supporting Bill 30. You should entertain their counterviews. You know, if you just take the input from Mr. McGowan and ignore other valuable input, it's not helpful to Albertans.

The NDP government has claimed to have conducted consultations on Bill 30 before it was tabled. However, the stakeholders found that the questions on the consultations were leading and are a sign the government was looking to confirm and gain approval for their own ideas rather than actually listening to stakeholders and the public with an open mind. The previous speaker, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, mentioned that on the weekend he went and talked to the stakeholders in Grande Prairie, and that's what they told him, that they were not adequately consulted and that consultations were just leading in a particular direction rather than hearing out the real concerns of the stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, this is a déjà vu of Bill 17. FOIPed documents showed that the government's consultation on workplace laws last spring had a predetermined outcome, so there is a pattern there. The NDP has learned well from the progressives to make that square peg fit that round hole and use those boilerplate and leading questions to confirm the bias you want and lead people down the garden path to their answer. You just wanted to hear what you want to hear, but you're not seeking the input.

We see that the court's ability to use creative sentencing options for employers found in contravention of the act is now contained in Bill 30. The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View talked about . . .

Mr. Cooper: A good member.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. She talked about the creative sentencing options, and I can use some examples, Madam Speaker. If the owner of a KFC sells a bad batch of chicken, the judge could conceivably make the owner dress up in a chicken suit and have him hold a sign shaming him. It potentially could happen. I think this is where the NDP is taking us. [interjection] I'm not in that suit, but it could be so creative because you're giving that option in this bill. I think this is where the NDP is taking us with this bill, and this is why we need to go to the committee.

Madam Speaker, I have done what I can here to demonstrate the concerns with Bill 30. I have only barely scratched the surface. There are even more important things going on in here with Bill 30 that are reason enough to send this bill to committee for study and consultation. We have the time before the next election for a study and consultation unless the Premier and the cabinet are planning to prorogue or call an early election. I don't see why there is a rush for this. We can still refer it to the committee.

5:40

By not sending this bill to the committee, the NDP are signalling to the province that something is up. We don't know what that something is. People are just speculating. They are planning something: maybe a cabinet shuffle, maybe an early election, maybe a prorogation and new throne speech. We don't know what it is. We don't know why they are rushing this bill. Or are the NDP just selfish and want to avoid any real work in the month of January because that will mess up all our holiday plans, vacation plans?

I just came back from the Westminster seminar.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've got a few comments for my colleague for Calgary-Foothills. A lot of the talk around why they want refer it to committee: a few large areas, I guess. Consultation. As we've explained, you know, we received 1,300 surveys, 90 written submissions, eight in-person round-table discussions, and the government consulted with a number of Albertans, including employers, workers, and trades groups. Also, a big part of that was the WCB independent panel in which they completed a review, and they themselves received 1,700 questionnaires and 200 written submissions, and 60 responses were submitted. What they determined as well is that what we are putting in place here is sustainable and affordable.

You know, I think what's being missed here – I don't want to delay this legislation by sending it to committee. Part of the reason is that I've seen, I guess, the behaviour of the opposition in committee, and I don't think it would get us anywhere. That's one reason. The other reason is that, I mean, if you don't want to take this consultation seriously, then how's 40 years? Forty years is a pretty long consultation, 40 years ignored.

Mr. McIver: Forty years of success.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. Yes. Forty years. Forty years.

I guess my greatest concern is that the opposition is always harping on consultation, and of course we take consultation seriously. We take it seriously; however, consultation should not supersede workplace safety. That is the key. So that's why we need to move on and discuss this through second reading and third reading right here in the House. That's what we're doing. That's exactly what we're doing.

Another of the issues that the opposition has and why they want to refer this to the committee has to do with the fact that this is a large bill. That's fine. It is a large bill, but it's a large bill because we've combined OH and S and WCB, which are intrinsically connected, and it's quite logical to do so. Again, the other reason is that we're playing catch-up after 40 years, so there's a lot to fill in that other provinces already have.

You know, I don't think we should be referring this to committee just simply because the opposition can't manage their budget and they don't have enough staff to get through the bill successfully in enough time to put forth reasonable arguments, reasonable amendments. That's not my problem. That's not Albertans' problem. Albertans' problem is workplace safety. That's their issue. They have said that they do like some of this, but they want to refer it for other pieces. I wasn't quite clear on what those pieces were, actually, but . . .

An Hon. Member: The bad ones.

Mr. Coolahan: What are the bad ones? I'm not sure.

Why I think we need to move forward on this bill and not refer it at this time is the joint work-site health and safety committee. [interjection] Yeah. I think this is a fantastic idea. Most other provinces have this in place. They're very successful.

You know, I was actually pretty disappointed with what the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka said earlier today on this. It was a very cynical view of a joint health and safety committee. He said something to the effect, you know, that it would create more

conflict at work. I don't believe that at all. Did the member actually read what is done in a joint health and safety committee?

- (a) the receipt, consideration and disposition of concerns and complaints respecting the health and safety of workers.

An Hon. Member: Sounds scary.

Mr. Coolahan: Frightening.

- (e) the development and promotion of programs for education and information concerning health and safety.

Why should we delay this?

- (b) participation in the identification of hazards to workers . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members that wish to speak to the referral?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:46 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Drysdale	Orr
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Panda
Cooper	McIver	Stier

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Connolly	Jansen	Piquette
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Rosendahl
Dang	Littlewood	Schmidt
Drever	Loyola	Schreiner
Eggen	Malkinson	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Sigurdson
Goehring	Miller	Sucha
Gray		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 31
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The House will now stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:03 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, December 5, 2017

Day 61

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
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Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)

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Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

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Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
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Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
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Chair: Mr. Shepherd
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Cyr	Littlewood
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Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Drever	Nixon
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Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Dang	Orr
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McIver	

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Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
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Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
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Kazim	

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Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Motions

Adjournment of Fall Session

35. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the Third Session of the 29th Legislature 2017 fall sitting of the Assembly be extended beyond the first Thursday in December until such time as or when the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly stands adjourned.

[Government Motion 35 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 33

Electoral Divisions Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: I move second reading of Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act.

Madam Speaker, Bill 33 comes about as the result of an independent commission which conducted an extensive review of Alberta's electoral map, received a great many written and oral submissions from Albertans, and ultimately put forward its recommendations. As members are no doubt aware, the commission recommended the creation of three new electoral divisions and the consolidation of three areas that have seen below-average population growth over the last eight years.

Certainly, many people on both sides of the House believe that the Electoral Boundaries Commission could have found a less disruptive way to make the changes that it ultimately recommended. I know there will be many resulting challenges, especially with respect to rural representation. However, we believe that the alternative of having politicians set their own boundaries rather than having an independent panel doing it would not be productive or appropriate.

While we may not agree with everything in the report, ultimately it's important to remember that the seats in the Assembly belong to Albertans and not to any one MLA or any one political party. It is for that reason that last week the government presented a motion to concur in the report. That motion was approved on the evening of November 28 with some amendments to boundary names, and it is for that reason that the government is now introducing Bill 33.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise on this glorious evening.

An Hon. Member: Glorious.

Mr. Cooper: Glorious. Simply marvellous.

In the long, time-honoured tradition of my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, I'd just like to say good night to Porter and Paxton and Peyton. I hope you have a great sleep. Dad will be home soon, and by soon I mean sometime next week, by the looks of things.

You know, Madam Speaker, Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act, is a very important piece of legislation, as many things that we discuss here in the Assembly are, but there are some significant challenges. The Government House Leader just rose and identified how we arrived here. I want to begin by thanking the members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for their hard work and their service to Albertans. Those five individuals gave up a lot of their time, talent, and energy to produce the final report as well as the draft report and to do some real public consultation. That work was important and diligent work.

Having said that, just because important and diligent work has been done, it doesn't mean that we arrived at the right conclusion. I think there are a number of factors at play that should provide enough reason to not accept Bill 33. It was one of the reasons why I voted against the government motion that was before us last week or the week before, because I am of the opinion that we haven't struck the right balance, particularly in respect to rural Alberta and the negative impacts that it will have on rural Alberta.

I might just add that Commissioner Gwen Day, who provided a minority report, highlights some of those concerns. Particularly in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, that I have the absolute honour and pleasure of representing, as you know, Madam Speaker, I have heard from numerous individuals who have expressed this significant concern. I'd like to walk through some of those concerns this evening and encourage members of the Assembly to carefully consider the ramifications of making the decision to accept the legislation.

I want to remind members that we each have a responsibility and a duty to Albertans, and I want to remind particular members of the government caucus that represent rural Alberta of the negative consequences that this particular piece of legislation will have over a long period of time for not just rural Alberta but all of Alberta. All voices around this mosaic that we call Alberta are critically important, and that includes those voices in rural Alberta. You'll know, Madam Speaker, that as a result of the report and, I would submit to you, the inaccurate decision that the commission made to weigh the variance of population as more important than effective representation, this decision that the justice and the majority on the commission made to not accurately reflect these very important Supreme Court guided parameters around effective representation, I would encourage members of the Assembly to not accept Bill 33 and to vote against it.

Too often, unfortunately, the right to effective representation is confused with the concept of equality of voting power. They are two very separate things, Madam Speaker. Inside the legislation that provides the boundary commission with the guidance they are to base their decisions upon, there is this allowance for a variance of electoral divisions, that of 25 per cent more or less than the average of the proposed electoral division. What we wound up with are some very, very challenging impacts of this decision and, certainly, Justice Bielby's commitment to get to what she referred to as voter parity, which is this concept of one person, one vote.

I think that Commissioner Day made a very compelling case in the minority report that this parameter of one person, one vote isn't a Canadian concept. It's not outlined in any overarching piece of legislation. In fact, you can go as far back as the founding fathers of our country, when they spoke to the fact that variance was reasonable and acceptable. We all have different roles here in the

Chamber, Madam Speaker, and when we make a decision based solely on population, we could have just done that in a spreadsheet. We could have just made a very cold, calculated decision based upon straight-up numbers.

I think you'll find that in the urban areas the commission did quite a good job of getting as close to that number of zero as possible. It's unfortunate that in Calgary and Edmonton we see the vast majority of the variances and certainly, in Edmonton's case, the vast majority of them being under 6 per cent variance and in many cases under the average population of the electoral districts. Yet we see in constituencies like Bonnyville-Cold Lake a 15 per cent population variance above. So not only do you have challenges with the representation of the size of the constituency, the number of schools, school boards, municipalities . . . [interjections]

7:40

The Acting Speaker: Hon members, just a reminder that we are in second reading, not Committee of the Whole. If we could please respect the member who is speaking.

Mr. Cooper: I will, Madam Speaker, do my very best to be exponentially more engaging in the remainder of my remarks.

When I think about how I may better engage the members opposite, one thing I do know for certain is that there are a number of members opposite that share some of my concerns. I have had conversations on the highways and byways of the legislative precincts – for the record that was good for engaging, the highways and byways – about this very issue, that many members on that side of the Chamber feel like rural Alberta perhaps didn't get a fair shake because of this commitment to population parity. So we see all across rural Alberta negative impacts from just that.

I think that it's important that we consider the report in its entirety and, as such, the legislation in its entirety. Madam Speaker, there are other options available to the Assembly than just accepting it because the report has been placed before us. We could strike a new commission. We could delay the commission past the next general election, as, I might add, was the recommendation of the Official Opposition from the beginning of this process. We all know that the commissions were compressed together because of the closeness of time between general elections. We actually had some opportunity to delay it. If we were to say no now, we could push past and either have a new commission after the next general election or potentially accept these results after the next general election, including sending the commission back out.

One thing I think you will find is that the draft report and the final report were extremely different reports. A case could be made that the final report was so different from the draft that we ought to have consulted on the effectiveness of the draft report as well. Now, unfortunately, there aren't the parameters within the conditions which the commission had to operate under for that to happen. As you know, Madam Speaker, the Legislative Assembly is the master of its own domain, and we have the opportunity to provide guidance, if we want, to the commission, and we could have provided them the tools and the resources to ensure that they could go back and take the draft and find out exactly what Albertans were expecting.

You know, Madam Speaker, when it comes to effective representation, it's important, particularly in rural Alberta, that Albertans have equal access to their member as well. You know that I represent the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and under the new report that outstanding constituency will grow in size by approximately a third and will be close to 300 kilometres from one corner to the next.

Let me be very clear. I'm more than happy to do that work, to drive the kilometres, to see the people, but when you compare that to an urban riding, the amount of travel time, the amount of engagement that's possible are significantly reduced. As such, some people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills may feel that they don't have the same sort of access or effective representation as they would with an urban MLA, which has been my long-held opinion as well as the opinion of Commissioner Day. We should, in fact, be using the 25 per cent population variances in the cities so that we can have more opportunity in the rural areas to disperse those rural MLAs so that rural Albertans have equal and effective representation in their constituencies as well. I think that it is very critical to the success of our province that rural Alberta continues to be strong and vibrant and successful.

The large physical demographics of rural ridings: it is nearly impossible for rural MLAs, particularly in some of the constituencies – one I know the Deputy Speaker represents – to effectively represent those areas. I know that my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre from time to time will ask this question of individuals, particularly out in the rural areas – sometimes we'll even do events together in the city, and I hear him ask this question, Madam Speaker: what is the difference between a rural MLA and an urban MLA? Some would say better looking. I'm not sure that that is . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Miles. Distance.

Mr. Cooper: Miles. Distance. That's another good guess.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre will tell you that the difference between a rural MLA and an urban MLA is that a rural MLA has to have toilet paper in their truck because there are significant distances and you never know. You always need to be prepared. If you're an urban MLA, that's never a problem. You are always very close to your next stop.

I think that these are the sorts of – well, that's a humorous example of some of the differences, but there are some very real challenges that exist in rural Alberta. The commission, in my opinion, certainly hasn't taken into consideration those challenges and those concerns. In fact, in the draft report the majority on the commission actually recommended or said that it might be possible that rural MLAs would be able to hire a driver so that they could do more work while travelling the great distances that they travel. Now, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the good folks of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills would not look too keenly on their member having a driver. I know that the government is into job creation and growing government jobs, but I don't think that this is the best path forward for that. We need to consider these very unique differences between urban and rural Alberta and ensure that rural MLAs are able to effectively represent their constituents and keep that voice strong.

One of the other things that you'll find, Madam Speaker, is that in urban areas it's quite possible to have MLAs that are more interchangeable than in rural Alberta. While each MLA brings their own unique personality and perspective to their role, if the chamber of commerce in Calgary is holding an event that may or may not actually even be in their constituency, an urban MLA may attend on behalf of elected officials whereas in rural Alberta that presents more of a significant challenge because members of the constituency really have a personal connection to their MLA and would like to see them, whether it's at a graduation or a chamber lunch or otherwise. As much as the good people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills might love to see the Member for Livingstone-Macleod at an event, it is certainly not the same type of personal connection that rural Alberta appreciates or would like to see.

7:50

It's been well documented that despite variances in larger populations, those urban MLAs are often in a better position to represent their constituents because of their collective, shared responsibility with other MLAs and the lack of distance from their actual constituency.

As we move forward, you know, I think there is a responsibility of all members of the Assembly to ensure that we are doing our very best to protect the interests of all Albertans, and that means ensuring that we have effective representation all across the province. This is a concept, as I mentioned, that is enshrined by case law in the Supreme Court. I think that Commissioner Day did a great job in the minority report of laying out a lot of those facts.

I would encourage members on the other side to think carefully about what options we may have as an Assembly to ensure that we respect both urban and rural Albertans. I know that there are members of the other side that voted with the opposition against the motion because they have some real reservations, and that's a great thing. I think that in a free and open Legislature we should look at what's best, not just for our constituency but for Alberta as a whole. A strong rural Alberta means a strong Alberta. We need strength in both urban and rural, and having that sort of representation in rural Alberta is critical to the success of our province.

I think you'll agree, Madam Speaker, that at AAMD and C just a few weeks ago they passed a motion at their biannual conference to enshrine some of – or calling upon the government to not accept the boundaries commission report, to not proceed with the weakening of democracy in rural Alberta but to stand strong and represent the very unique and important needs of rural Alberta.

I think that we should also be having a large conversation around: how are we going to ensure that Alberta remains strong and robust? Over a long period of time we can expect that in rural Alberta some areas – well, certainly we have declining populations, and in the cities those populations will quite likely continue to increase. If we don't stop this shift of the urbanization of our Assembly, we run the risk long term of presenting some real challenges to the strength of our democracy. I think that that's an important conversation that we as an Assembly should have at some point in time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Don't forget Taber. Okay.

Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to be able to rise to speak to this bill and talk about this Electoral Boundaries Commission report and some of the concerns that I have with it. I'd just like to, first of all, start out by telling you about a situation that I encountered last week with an MLA from the NDP side. We were at a mayors and reeves meeting, and presented to the mayors and reeves was that this NDP MLA felt that she needed to vote in favour of this because the report was done and she had no choice but to vote for this.

Now, I just want to speak to this issue. From what I understand, the commission's responsibility or mandate was to write the report. It's not their responsibility to make sure that it gets passed or that it doesn't get passed. So it's our responsibility to take a look at that report and find out whether or not it works for us individually in our ridings and for the people who we represent.

Now, I know that there are many members on the opposite side who are rural MLAs and try to represent their constituents to the best of their ability. Here's the problem. The problem is that from listening to this MLA, it sounded like she was either told or under the belief that they must vote for this bill. They must vote in favour of this bill. So I was looking forward to the opportunity to be able

to say to all of the members opposite that the mandate of the commission has been fulfilled in the writing of this report. The mandate that is on your shoulders as MLAs is to find out whether or not this works for you in your individual ridings and whether or not you should be voting for this.

I believe that if we take it on that merit, we will be in a situation where we have the opportunity to really see this for what it is, which is a disenfranchising of rural Alberta. At the AAMD and C conference, if you were there – and I know that a lot of members opposite were there, which I'm grateful that they actually went to these stakeholder outreaches and talked with the people. I heard it over and over again there that if these MLAs were to vote for this bill, they would see it as a slap on rural Alberta's face and that they would see this as disenfranchising rural Alberta and that they would not take kindly to this.

You know, we saw the same thing happen with Bill 6. With Bill 6 the government side of the House was new, and I think that had they had the kind of experience that they have now, I do not believe that especially a lot of the rural MLAs would have voted in favour of that bill. When they saw how upset rural Alberta was about Bill 6, I think that what would happen is that with the experience that they have now, they would have voted against Bill 6.

Getting back to this bill ...

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, a reminder: second reading, not Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to point out that in my opinion you've got the strengths and the weaknesses of this, and I think that each MLA needs to ask themselves: what are the strengths of this, and what are the weaknesses of this?

We've got three new ridings that are going to be introduced. We have one in Edmonton, one in Calgary, and one in Airdrie. Now, if polls are maintained at the same levels that they are right now, I would have to say that the NDP have the chance of getting one of those three.

An Hon. Member: How about three?

Mr. Hunter: I'm glad you're so, you know, enthusiastic at this late hour, but the polls have been fairly consistent. So I would say that 1 out of those 3 they have a chance, a possible chance, of being able to win.

What is the cost that they are trading, you know, that kind of potential gain? The cost is that I also know that a lot of the MLAs on that side have been working really hard in their ridings. I've actually heard of people who actually get out there. They knock on doors. They try to engage with the stakeholders. Now, here's what they give up. What they give up, especially in Calgary and Edmonton – Calgary is obviously going to be where the battle lines are drawn. They've been working in their specific areas, and now all of Calgary is redrawn. So the MLAs that have been working hard there now have to go into the next election without having the ability to work. They have maybe a year, year and a half to be able to work on the new boundaries. Now, everybody is going to have to deal with that, obviously, but if I was an MLA from the NDP side, I would have to ask myself: am I giving up way too much cost for a very minute and small gain? Taking a look at it, I can't see how they would see this as a benefit to them.

8:00

I will say this much. If you take a look at a heat map and the heat map represents where people voted in the 2015 general election, you know, I can see why they drew the boundaries the way they did. But, once again, based upon the polling information that we

have, I don't think that those heat maps can actually be taken seriously. So I would have to say that once again I don't think that this government or the members opposite have been taking a serious look at what they are giving up for a small gain.

You know, once again, I want to go back to the original point, and that is that the mandate of the commission was to write the report. They did that. The mandate of each individual MLA in here is to be able to just vote yes or no on that report. They are not mandated to vote yes for that report, if I understand it correctly. However, listening to one of the MLAs on the other side, it would seem that that was what was presented to the MLAs, especially the backbench MLAs, on the NDP side. I wanted to make sure that it was on *Hansard* and it was publicly stated that in no uncertain terms is it ever mandated for any of the NDP MLAs to vote in favour of this, other than maybe you're being whipped to do it. Now, if that's the case, that's one thing, but it didn't seem like they were being whipped to be able to do this. What it seemed like was that they felt that they had no choice because of the way the report was written. They had to vote for it. They had no other choice. I wanted to make that point very clear.

Now, taking a look at some of the good points that were made in the minority report, it talks about the mandate of the commission. They had to take into consideration, obviously, population. There's no doubt that that was supposed to be taken into consideration. But, as some of my other colleagues have already pointed out, when you take a look at the way that they distributed the population, it seemed like they took into consideration Calgary and Edmonton, really trying to make sure that it was close and there was no deviation from the norm. They tried to go as close to that as possible. In fact, a lot of the Edmonton seats that I saw were plus or minus one or two.

Now, as a rural MLA I will say this much. From one end of my riding to another end of my riding it takes me almost three hours to drive. In the first iteration, the first draft, they had split my riding up into two ridings. There was an eastern part and a western part to the riding. In the first iteration the riding was called Taber-Vulcan, and it was interesting because this riding's boundaries went from about 20 minutes east of Calgary down to the southeast corner of Alberta.

Now, we took a look at this first iteration, and we thought: how in heaven's name can any MLA represent that many communities? Now, I understand that in northern Alberta there aren't as many communities, so I understand how they can be a lot bigger, but in southern Alberta that would have represented, I believe, four MDs and about 40 different communities of varying sizes. I can tell you that it would be impossible. So we wrote and talked to the commission and told them that this was unacceptable.

In the second iteration, the final report, that we received, all they did is that they took Taber-Vulcan and they made that into Taber-Warner. Now, that riding is actually a lot easier to be able to circumnavigate and get around, but what they did is that they then made it into the Cardston-Kainai riding, which takes it again from about 20 minutes outside of Calgary right down to the south border, just south of Cardston. Once again, this riding, with the way that the boundaries were developed, looks like an hourglass, and the reality is that once again I believe there's over 36 communities in this riding.

Each of these communities wants to have their own events that they would like to see their MLA come to, to be able to hear and talk with them, hear what their concerns are. Each of them has a council. Each of them has a mayor or a reeve, and they want their MLA to be able to come on a regular basis to be able to represent them. How do you represent that many communities properly? I have no doubt that it's going to be virtually impossible to do it effectively.

The mandate of this commission was very specific: to write the report. They did that. Many people in rural Alberta believe that they did that based upon the heat map that they took a look at to be able to find out how they could actually gerrymander this process for the NDP. [interjections] I'm just telling you that this is what they said.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly (j). There are a number of rulings that have been made from the chair in the past about reflections on people who are outside the House. The suggestion, whether it's a second-hand suggestion or a direct accusation, that in some way members of the commission were involved in gerrymandering is offensive, and it is a very bad reflection on the work that they did. We may not agree, and I think the hon. member is quite right that many members on both sides of the House disagree with some of the decisions in the report, but to suggest that it was done deliberately and with malice, in my view, is unacceptable. We ought not to show such serious disrespect for people who have undertaken a job on behalf of this Assembly and the people of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. What I just heard from the Government House Leader was pretty rich based on his argument earlier today about the statement in the House today from the Member for Edmonton-South West, combined with the number of times the members of the government use the name Jason Kenney in a disparaging way in this House. If you just consider that alone, his sudden sensitivity to talking about comments that other people have made is astounding. It's so astounding as to be incredulous, and if the Government House Leader was to consider his earlier... [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. members, we're speaking to a point of order, so if you could please wait. Thank you. We're lively this evening, I see. If we could please listen. We have a point of order on the floor right now, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays is trying to declare his argument. If I could please hear his argument, I would appreciate it.

Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Government House Leader, if he actually heard what he said earlier today and then heard what he just said five minutes ago, would probably have a very red face and probably be ashamed of himself. On that basis alone – you know what? I think that we all need to be a little bit sensitive of each other's feelings here, but really what the hon. member was saying was certainly far less offensive than what the Leader of the Opposition defended vehemently not very many hours ago, on this very day, from that very seat.

8:10

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, at this point, I'm going to say that it's a dispute of the facts. Part of the struggle that we're having this evening is that I can't actually hear what the speakers are saying

because there's too much noise on both sides of the House. I would recommend that all members respect the fact that we're in second reading, respect the fact that as the Speaker I need to hear what our members are saying, and stick to the bill, please.

Hon. member, please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will restate my point, and that is that the perception – the perception – that rural Alberta has of this slight is obviously not well received, so the NDP might want to consider the optics of what they're trying to gain from this. Once again, the issue is . . .

The Acting Speaker: Member, can you speak to the content of the bill, please, and not make any assumptions around perception?

Mr. Hunter: Let me finish what my point is. My point is this: we have three . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members.
Please continue.

Mr. Hunter: . . . seats that will be brought from rural Alberta into the urban setting, and of those three, according to polls, the NDP at this point have the chance of being able to win one of them. So the cost of the optics for the NDP is high versus what they're actually going to gain. That was the only point that I was trying to make with this. If I offended anybody on the other side, it was not my intention.

But let's carry on with the minority report and the concerns that were brought forward. Under the rights that we have in this democratic society, we have the right to . . . [Mr. Hunter's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing – oh. My apologies. We're on 29(2)(a).

Mr. McIver: We are on 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Nixon: He is on 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Would anybody like to speak to 29(2)(a)? Oh. Okay.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That's what I thought you were originally offering, but I do appreciate the clarification.

Thank you to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for his excellent presentation, particularly his attempt to explain, I think, in a very good way how rural Alberta feels about parts of this report. I think the facts are pretty clear, when you look at the report and have talked to people across the province, that this is impacting constituencies on all sides of the aisle and all parties that are currently inside this Legislature, particularly on the rural side. I suspect that my rural colleagues across the way, like myself, are hearing the same concerns from their constituents in rural Alberta. There are a lot of concerns, particularly around how communities have been impacted, communities that have traditionally been together, that have common economic corridors and relationships and situations like that.

The Government House Leader, actually, when introducing this bill just about an hour ago, articulated that. He actually made it very, very clear that there were problems with this report and that

he did not want to see this House gerrymandering ridings, which I agree with. I don't think that it is within our mandate as MLAs to try to redraw individual constituencies because of the conflict, which is why we use a committee to do that. But the Government House Leader was clear that there are problems with the report, and if there are problems with the report and the committee did get it wrong and has caused tremendous impact – I see the Minister of Service Alberta smiling about that, but she doesn't have a rural riding. She may not understand what is taking place in rural communities and what is upsetting them as a result of that.

I would like it if the hon. member could just expand a little bit on the frustration that is happening in rural Alberta.

Ms McLean: It was a grimace, not a smile.

Mr. Nixon: Okay. A grimace, then. Same thing.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, Minister.
The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Look, there is obviously frustration. I know the members opposite have heard it when they've gone to the AAMD and C. I'm not telling them something that they don't already know. The real question that we face here tonight is: will there be a win or a loss for rural Alberta? I don't think that the government gains anything from slighting rural Alberta, but this is a decision that they have to make.

In this situation I actually just wanted to make one other point here, Madam Speaker, and that is that in 1991 the Supreme Court in Saskatchewan stated that there can be a deviation up to 25 per cent and that that will not undermine section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that even in cities that deviation can happen.

Now, I've seen the maps. I saw certain iterations where they drew just Calgary and Edmonton, and they could make Calgary and Edmonton work within those deviations of 25 per cent higher or lower. Again, the way that the report was drafted seemed to take into consideration just Calgary and Edmonton when it came to those deviations. I think that whether it was intended or not, when rural Alberta takes a look at losing three seats out of rural Alberta, then they have to see this as a slight to them.

I've tried to speak to especially the member that was talking before when we were with the mayors and reeves, the NDP member, because she did seem like she felt that they had to vote for this. I do know that there were a couple that voted against but at great duress, from what I understand, to what they were told. Yet I think that there should be at least a majority of the rural MLAs that would say absolutely no to this report because it does slight rural Alberta.

There's lots more that I could talk about on this issue. Those people on the commission: I appreciate their efforts. This was a lot of work, and I think that we need to applaud them for the work that they did.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good evening, everyone. Thank you very much, hon. colleagues. I'm rising to speak to Bill 33. I just want to start by reflecting on the process that got us to this point, the process that the Electoral Boundaries Commission went through, the two-stage process. There was a series of public hearings, at the very least eight if I'm not mistaken, an online submission process where Albertans could weigh in, and

a draft set of boundaries that were distributed. Albertans then had an opportunity to weigh in on that with another series of hearings and a tour around the province, rural and urban, another opportunity to provide input in person and online, and ultimately the report was finalized.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

I just want to remind the House – I'm sure you all know this – that the commission was made up of two members appointed by the government, two members appointed by the Official Opposition, chaired by a Provincial Court judge. The process itself, I think, should be respected, and we need to understand that the process, at least ostensibly, ought to be a nonpartisan process. I will say that, yes, we have two members appointed by the government, but two members appointed by the Official Opposition.

Now, it's worth noting that one of the members appointed by the Official Opposition did write a minority report differing from the perspective of the majority, and she was certainly within her rights to do so. I think she made some very, very important points in that minority report, points that I think rural Alberta reflected in their submissions.

8:20

Members here in this House on both the government and opposition sides have made some points through their voting on Government Motion 34 and also what we've heard in debate about the feelings of rural Alberta as they relate to electoral boundaries. What it comes down to is: how do we balance the need to have representation by population in dense urban areas and areas that are not densely populated but have a large, large geographic area, and then how do we ensure that the Assembly represents a reasonable balance of what our province looks like?

In the end, given that it was such a thorough process – and I acknowledge the very legitimate concerns that rural Albertans have with the new electoral boundaries – I will support Bill 33, primarily because of the process that the commission went through.

But I will say, though – and I know this is not an issue specific to what we can address in the House with this particular bill; however, it is something perhaps that Members' Services could address, and that is: are there other ways of ensuring that rural Alberta has the representation that they need through constituency offices? Is there an opportunity – and I suggest that there certainly is an opportunity, and it's something we should look very closely at in Members' Services – to adjust the formula to ensure that rural Alberta, especially the new larger constituencies, have more resources available to them to have more constituency offices or offices open longer. Perhaps we could have a formula that any municipality above a certain size would be allocated a constituency office or a partial constituency office.

That doesn't change the fact that it's very difficult for MLAs that represent large rural constituencies to actually physically get around that constituency, to be in the communities when and where their constituents want them to be. It is a different situation than the situation I face in an inner-city, urban constituency. It just is. It is tremendously challenging. I have great empathy for MLAs who have to cover such tremendous geographic distances.

However, in the 21st century we have new communication technologies that allow for us to be engaged with our constituents in a different way than we were able to even a decade ago. I know that doesn't replace face to face – it's not as good – but it is an opportunity to at least stay engaged with what your constituents are talking about.

The other way, that's a bit of a halfway between a straight online interaction and a face to face with the MLA, is by having a

constituency office available to those residents and expanding those out. I would absolutely be supportive of two or three constituency offices for some of the larger rural constituencies. It doesn't replace that one-on-one that you would get with the MLA, but it's a halfway point. It's a start.

In the end, I think that notwithstanding the fact that I understand the concerns of rural Alberta, I would encourage all members in this House to support this bill – the process was thorough – and we can move forward and address other legislation here in the brief time that we have remaining together before the festive season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Excellent. Any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, I'll recognize the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to begin by saying that I've said to my caucus and I've said to many people that I thought the report was a very difficult report in that my constituency wasn't touched; however, I looked at the whole report, and I saw that there were many constituencies that were affected.

The other thing is that I was absolutely not told what way to vote. I make up my own mind even though, as I said last week with the mayors and reeves, I felt that I was mandated to do so. I did that because, in fact, if I interfered in what was presented by an independent commission, I would be gerrymandering because I'd be doing it for our advantage. I will not do that. I will not do it for anybody.

I know that the member across is greatly affected by this report, and I know that it is difficult when you have a large constituency. He, in fact, is very fortunate because he has the opportunity at least once a month to meet with all of the mayors or reeves that are in his constituency. I know because I go to those meetings whenever I can, and I get to meet those mayors and reeves as well. But I will not gerrymander by voting against the commission's report.

As the previous speaker said, there were five members on that commission: two were appointed by the opposition, two appointed by the government, and the judge. I suspect that if somebody is a judge, I suspect that if people were appointed to that commission from both the opposition and the government side, they were there to do a job. They spent the time. They met with constituents across this province, and they came back with a report.

I certainly don't think that it's the best report that could have come across, but in fact it is their report. It is what they were mandated to do, and I will support their report.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Excellent. Questions under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Under 29(2)(a). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listen, I have tremendous respect for the hon. member that just spoke. I actually hold her in very high regard even if we don't agree on everything. I've seen that she works hard and tries her best to look after her constituents. But I have to say that this is one of those times when I disagree with her fairly strenuously when she said that to vote against this bill is, by definition, gerrymandering. She couldn't be any farther from being accurate by saying so if she tried. I'm sure she means well.

There are a lot of things that she said that I agree with. She said that the people had a job to do a report, and they did it. I think whether we agree with the report or not, we should thank all five members of that committee for the work they did because I'm sure it wasn't pleasant every minute travelling around this province and listening to a variety of opinions which did not all match up and

then trying to sew them all together into a report that makes sense for Albertans.

But the fact that they did the report to the best of their ability does not automatically guarantee that it's a good report. By voting against it, it doesn't even guarantee that that means you think it's a bad report. It could mean that you don't think it's as good as it ought to be. That's quite a difference from a bad report. By voting no and calling that gerrymandering, that's just wrong, absolutely wrong. If that was the case, why would we even be talking about it here? Why would we even be having this debate? Why would we even be having this discussion, Mr. Speaker?

In fact, as the hon. member herself pointed out – and, again, I respect her opinion on everything, and I agree with her on this – there was a minority report, and the minority report needs to be considered carefully as well. If members of this Legislature agree with the main report, great. If they agree with the minority report, great. If indeed they disagree with both reports for whatever legitimate reasons that we have here, that's also great. That is us doing our job. So I really felt obligated to get on my feet to point out that making the massive leap from disagreeing with the report to gerrymandering is just not accurate.

Now, if any member of the House, me included, stands up and starts redrawing all the lines to our personal preferences, that's actually the definition of gerrymandering, and I hope that doesn't happen. I hope that doesn't happen by any of us. But to talk in general terms about the report and what's right and what's wrong and particularly talking in broader terms about whether it's better for rural Alberta or better for urban Alberta is not gerrymandering. It's actually legitimate. It's legitimate debate, legitimate comment on this report.

Mr. Speaker, I felt it necessary and ever so slightly painful, because I respect the member so much, to stand up and disagree with her so strongly on some of what she said, but I just felt it was that important that I had to do it. If the hon. member has further comments, I'd be happy to hear them, but I've surely laid out how I feel about it, and I feel quite strongly.

8:30

Ms Fitzpatrick: I thank the member for standing up and exercising his democratic right to disagree with me, but I stand my ground. I do believe that gerrymandering is manipulating the boundaries in any way. I think that if I vote and say no to this report, then I'm saying: no, they've got to be rejigged.

Four out of the five members on that commission presented a report. I believe that all of them did the best that they could. I did look at the report from the dissenting vote. I agree that they presented a report, and if I were not to support this, then I am essentially gerrymandering.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Excellent.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask one question to the member. Look, I said: an NDP MLA. I was not trying to single the member out. It is important for her to know that. I have the greatest respect for her as well. She makes fantastic sweet tarts, that I enjoy. It's been a pleasure being able to work with her.

The Acting Speaker: Excellent.

The chair will recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. Good evening, everyone, and thanks for being here tonight to pay attention to some of us who wish to speak

to this very important matter. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, perhaps once they're done, we could carry on.

Mr. Speaker, this is probably one of the most important decisions that we will possibly be involved with during this term that we in this House have been elected to serve. I can recall back in 2010 – I was not in the House at the time but was involved with municipal politics – when this matter came up and how controversial it was then. Some members that are here tonight, including the Minister of Transportation, will recall those events and some of the discussions perhaps that came up.

Nonetheless, this is important. We have to get this right. I want people to know right from the outset that I'm not in favour of passing this bill as it reads today. I don't think it is anything except a huge mistake that we will have to endure and put up with in the rural areas as far as effective representation. It's going to be a major problem for a lot of the people that will serve not only in the near future in these new ridings but for some time afterwards.

A lot of reference has been made to the report itself that came through with the decision on the boundaries. Of course, the most important report that we got I believe came through from the minority commissioner, who did the marvelous job of submitting her own report, called the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission Minority Report, by Commissioner Gwen Day. I know that during the discussions on the motion earlier in the week and also in the conversations tonight we have talked a little bit about this minority report. It is focused on effective representation or, perhaps better said, the lack of effective representation with the decision that was rendered.

A lot of information was supplied by the commissioner. She talked about how the majority of the commission began the work with the priority of population carrying the most weight, which, of course, led to the desire to have a minimal deviation from the average number of people per constituency. But Gwen Day decided that effective representation should be the priority, in her mind. She has written several pages that have come to the conclusion that this report did not pay enough attention to that subject.

I'm going to be bringing forward a motion now, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask the pages to come to take that, and then we'll discuss what my motion is about.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the pages distribute the motion, I'll just read it for the benefit of those that are waiting in such excitement to hear what I have to say. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the descriptions of electoral divisions referenced in the bill and described in the DVD tabled as Sessional Paper 624/2017 do not adequately provide for the effective representation of rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, to carry on, I'd like to present some of the information that was contained in the minority report and discuss some of the conclusions that were drawn by this commissioner because this person was right there throughout these discussions throughout Alberta. In that report she raised a number of very, very concerning observations that I think are worthy of review. I know that just a couple of evenings ago this was discussed in some detail. I think it is worth while to go over it once again because the facts are, according to this report, that the board may have overlooked some other factors in drawing up these boundaries and therefore

may not have necessarily made the best decision they could have in trying to do their work.

Mrs. Day goes on to say:

The Majority . . .

The majority of the commission, that is.

. . . began its work by using population to justify a new riding in both Calgary and Edmonton. I do not believe that this was necessary given the discretion allowed for variances and additional considerations besides population in the Act . . . I am convinced the correct response to growth in urban population should have been an increase in variances within the cities and not an increase in the number of ridings in the two major cities.

She concluded:

This would best provide effective representation for Albertans as a whole.

She describes what effective representation is, and I think that's a key argument in this situation. She quoted section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It states that every citizen

"has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein." The Charter does not guarantee that we have equal weight to our vote to achieve democracy but [only] the right to vote.

. . . Factors like geography, community history, community interest and minority representation may need to [also] be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic. These are but [a few] examples of considerations which may justify departure from absolute voter parity in the pursuit of more effective representation.

In other words, other factors should have been considered, yet the commission seemed to be focused solely on population and primarily on population in rendering their final decision.

8:40

I'd just like to talk now a little bit about what she also went on to describe as the mandate that was in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. Section 14 is appropriate here, and it mandates the commission to consider the following factors. The first item there is:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

If you recall, I just quoted that very portion from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms where it talks about how every person has the right to vote but that it does not guarantee that we have equal weight to our vote to achieve democracy, just the right to vote.

The second part of section 14 says that the commission should consider

- (b) sparsity and density of population.

The third item:

- (c) common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Metis settlements.

The next one says:

- (d) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Calgary and Edmonton,

as they should.

The next items:

- (e) wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries,
- (f) the number of municipalities and other local authorities,
- (g) geographical features, including existing road systems, and
- (h) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries,

natural boundaries, in other words – rivers, gullies, ravines – major kinds of natural boundaries that exist.

It is important to note that the act is consistent with our historical foundation and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and relevant case law in mandating the commission to consider all of these factors to ensure that voters have the right to effective representation. Once again, that is the key to this entire discussion, effective representation. It is our position here on this side of the House that having these huge, huge ridings in the rurals pretty well prevents having effective representation.

I heard one of the members talk tonight about: well, I guess, supposedly, maybe you could increase the number of offices in one of these larger ridings. I can tell you right now, having one of the largest ridings in Alberta, it doesn't matter how many offices I have, hon. member. I'd need to clone myself about five times if I was to have effective representation.

Mr. Cooper: The world needs more Pats.

Mr. Stier: Exactly. Thank you, hon. member.

There's an important factor to consider about the rurals. Rural Albertans, again according to the minority report,

control the land, access to the land and provide a significant portion of the labor force that most of our primary industries depend on. Because the rural population is small compared to the cities, in order to be "effectively represented" the rural population must be granted more than a "one person, one vote" voice in order to ensure that good stewardship is exercised over the resources that the primary industries of Alberta depend on.

That is an important point. One person, one vote may be fine, but with the situation in the rurals, we have to consider other matters.

We need to consider variances.

The critical provision in the Act to ensure that effective representation is granted to Albertans is the use of variances.

The act states in section 15(1) that

the population of a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25% above nor more than 25% below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions.

In this case, though, in spite of the provisions for up to 25 per cent plus or minus variances, a priority by the majority was set by them to achieve the lowest possible variance. They set that as their mandate. They decided that they wanted to not consider variances, and I think that is a crucial problem in the situation that we're having to deal with now because this is what justified additional ridings in the cities, and this is what has justified removing some ridings from the rurals. They had the ability to consider that.

If you look at one riding against another, that would mean that one riding could be as much as 25 per cent less than the average, that the next riding adjacent could be 25 per cent more than the average. Therefore, between those two there could be almost 50 per cent difference all told, and that would still meet the mandate. But for some reason the majority of the commission decided to ignore the variance factor and ignore all of the other main considerations that should have been given more emphasis. As the final maps show, there are several detrimental effects to our divisions resulting from that focus on population. The eroding number of MLAs representing rural Albertans is one of the key ones.

I would like to conclude my portion of this submission, Mr. Speaker, with this. The member that did this minority report from the commission, Gwen Day, said:

In conclusion, I believe it would have been in the best interest of . . . Albertans to adequately consider all mandated factors and, where justifiable, preserve existing ridings using allowable variances. Adding ridings [therefore] to the cities of Calgary and Edmonton could have been avoided, which would have resulted in much less reconfiguration throughout [all of] Alberta while still providing effective representation,

that we all sought. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that this lady has outlined what should have happened. She has given us the reason for supporting the amendment that I have put together for us to go back to the drawing board, for us to not make a serious mistake.

I would also like to add that the AAMD and C has concurred in the resolution they just passed at their last convention. I'd just like to read their resolution here that they had made because I think that it's important to understand what all the rural association members thought. It said:

Further be it resolved that the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) urge the Government of Alberta to prioritize effective representation for rural Alberta by not approving a reduction in the number of constituencies in rural Alberta.

Secondly, they said:

Further be it resolved that the AAMDC request the Government of Alberta . . .

That's you folks there.

. . . to not implement the Alberta Electoral Boundary Commission's final recommendations until the following principles are prioritized:

- That geographic size limitations, local variations in population density, and accessibility of [all] MLAs be prioritized as a determining factor in developing [these] boundaries; and
- Constituencies structure should be maintained to combine urban and rural areas to include a balance of urban and rural populations to reflect the urban-rural connectedness and dependency that exists on the ground for Alberta's regions; and
- To the extent possible, no ridings fracture rural municipalities into multiple constituencies.

I would submit, then, Mr. Speaker, given what the AAMD and C has said and all the arguments, that we pass this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. This is under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a), absolutely. I'll be brief. I think that other members would like to ask the hon. member a question.

I did appreciate his comments describing some of the uniqueness of some large rural constituencies. I certainly have one. My current one stretches from north of Rimbey in an area called Bluffton to south of Sundre, from B.C. to Gull Lake in an area roughly the size of some European countries. My new constituency in my area will go from the south shore of Pigeon Lake to Water Valley, just almost outside of Cochrane.

I love it. I love driving around that area. It's my home. It's where I will hopefully remain the rest of my life, and it's full of some of the best people, including some that are watching right now. To my kids back home near Sundre, Austin and Chyanne, I'd like to say goodnight to them through you, Mr. Speaker. I know that they are getting ready for bed, and they're probably the only ones watching us tonight.

I do appreciate the hon. member expressing that he may want to elaborate a little bit more on the uniqueness of rural constituencies.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, hon. member. I appreciate your kind thoughts. I would only like to finish my conclusion, and that is that I'd like to state again that, ladies and gentlemen of the House, we have an opportunity to correct a wrong. We have an opportunity to eliminate what could be, according to the commissioner Gwen Day

in her minority report, a serious flaw in the decisions that were made on these boundaries. We could correct a mistake that may be passed here if we do not take another look at this.

The motion that I have put forward would give us a chance to take another look at this thing in a very serious way and make sure that we get it right the next time. I would urge all members over there, if you're in a rural riding, if you have any considerations that are questions in your mind about these boundaries, to please give this motion a thought and consider it for the vote tonight.

Thank you.

8:50

The Acting Speaker: Excellent.

Under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Cooper: Please. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to briefly ask the member. The member's constituency of Livingstone-Macleod prior to redistribution – I don't know the specific number given the new maps, and frankly I don't know all of the nuances of the changes in the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod – was 15,174 square kilometres. That is in comparison to the constituency of Calgary-Shaw, which I believe you're quite familiar with, that is 20 square kilometres. I might add, just for comparison's sake, that the constituency of Calgary-Bow, the smallest constituency in Alberta, is a whopping six square kilometres, and you compare that to the constituency of Peace River, which is 99,144 square kilometres.

I'm just wondering if the member might provide some commentary on how the massive difference in size, from six square kilometres to 99,000 square kilometres, might impact the ability of a member to effectively represent the constituency in which they are duly elected.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for his question. I think it's important for people to realize that, not unlike many members of the government side, my riding is large, as he has pointed out. In fact, in the submissions that I made to the commission earlier this year along with my friend and colleague from Highwood, I made note of the fact that you could put approximately 16 cities of Calgary into my riding and, in comparison, you could put 12 to 13 Highwoods in my riding. In the Calgary area you have, I believe, 20 some-odds MLAs, yet in mine there's just me divided by 22 communities. So I'm divided by 22 from time to time.

How can we possibly pass such an important bill that is so inconsistent in how they decided the sizes of these boundaries? How can we possibly pass it after we've received a report from one of the members on the commission, where there are such critical factors that obviously were overlooked? This does not make sense.

I know there are a lot of members on that side that feel the same. I would urge you to support the amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Just for the record this will be amendment RA1.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod for his comments and for the amendment that he's offered tonight. I want to, you know, just indicate that I have some considerable sympathy for the position that the hon. member is in and has taken. I know that on all

sides of the House there are members who are concerned about the boundaries that have been recommended to us by the commission.

You know, there are a number of factors that have to be balanced, as the hon. member has said. I remember when I was on Edmonton city council and we prepared a submission for the boundaries commission. At that time there was a huge disparity in terms of population in ridings such that the courts actually made a ruling, which the member has referred to. I remember – these are very rough numbers as it was a number of years ago – that the riding that had the smallest population was the Cardston riding at that time, which had around 8,000. I'm doing this from memory, so, people, forgive me if it's a little bit off. The constituency that had the greatest population was Edmonton-Whitemud, which had a population well over 24,000. I think it was after Premier Getty was defeated by Percy Wickman, so it briefly was a Liberal riding. Of course, the Premier of the day took refuge in Stettler, where he was easily elected in the by-election at that time. Let me just say that the disparity between the populations of rural ridings and urban ridings was so striking that it absolutely was determined that this was in part a disenfranchisement of people. That's the basis of the 25 plus or minus ruling, which was a very, very wide range, I will admit. That was the outside boundary set by the court at that time.

Now, there are many difficult choices that we have to make and that the commission had to make in balancing things. To say that we're coming down in favour of this particular approach doesn't necessarily negate the importance of some of the ideas that have been put forward. Certainly, the size of constituencies makes a difference in terms of how easy they are to represent. On our side we have some of the very largest ridings in the province by a wide margin, so we are indeed familiar with that challenge.

Then, of course, there's the question of population, which was the subject of the court challenge way back when. The argument was made that, roughly, people's votes needed to be of equal effect in terms of selecting governments. The court took a very wide view of what that acceptable range was, but that's an important consideration. I hope people on the other side recognize that. In order to maintain rural ridings at their current size and not to let them get much larger, there's a trade-off. These are all trade-offs. The trade-off for that is that the growth in Edmonton and Calgary is not reflected in the makeup.

There are other options. I know that the previous government, not the last time but in the past, would take the easy way out and simply add more ridings. So this place grew, and we had more politicians and more politicians. I know that for hon. members on the other side their natural conservatism leads them to, you know, reject too many politicians in the public's lives. That's a solution the previous government found that satisfied rural and urban people, but it didn't satisfy people in general. The Chamber was getting a little bit crowded, so we've taken a strong position in opposition that 83 is enough and that we shouldn't be expanding those.

I was also on city council on another redistribution where Edmonton lost a seat because of relative growth in the province. Like the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, I did my best to represent the people of Edmonton in my constituency. I'll save people the trouble of looking up in *Hansard* what I said at the time. I strongly argued, as I think a good representative should, that we shouldn't be losing seats. In fact, in the end, Mr. Speaker, all of those things have to be balanced in one way or another.

What I think tipped the balance with respect to our position is that we did not wish to be seen to be making political decisions when we had appointed an independent commission to do the work and that it was important, I think, for democracy and certainly for the people of Alberta to see that we weren't trying to arrange things to our own benefit. I think that that is the risk. I'm not suggesting

that people on the other side are doing that by any stretch of the imagination, but it was actually that particular issue that tipped the scales from our point of view. We wished to make that very clear, that we appointed an independent commission, and we're going to respect their recommendations with regard to this.

9:00

The House made its determination when it debated the motion, which was then passed in the House and a number of amendments were made. Some were accepted. That sets the tone, that sets the ground rules for the drafting of this particular act, and that's where the debate, in my view, should have remained. Nevertheless, the hon. member is well within his rights to introduce this amendment, and I respect what he is doing. I respect what the opposition is saying with respect to this because they have a point, but there are other points as well. To deprive Edmonton and Calgary from having the same representation that reflects their growth and their population is also a problem. These things all have to be taken into account and balanced.

With respect, Mr. Speaker, I will encourage members of the House to defeat this amendment because I believe that the Assembly has made its decision in principle. I see no reason to change the direction that we have set, so I would hope that we would pass the bill that has been put forward by the government.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Yes. Thanks. Thanks to the Government House Leader for his well-thought-out comments. I do agree with some of what the hon. Government House Leader has said. The first thing, Mr. Speaker, though, through you to him, that I would like to offer is that I'm very sure – I'm almost positive – that the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler would be happy right now to resign if the Premier would like to come and run in Drumheller. I don't think that's going to happen, though, and history probably won't repeat itself with that constituency.

In addition to that, the hon. Government House Leader is talking a lot about population and variances in the population. He took us down a long history lesson of some of the history around that. It was very interesting. He's been around a little longer than I have, Mr. Speaker, so he probably remembers a lot more of that.

Mr. Cooper: Or less.

Mr. Nixon: Or he remembers a lot less than I do. I don't know which one it is. That's a good point.

The problem with that, Mr. Speaker, is that when you look at the constituencies that have been put forward in this report, the rural constituencies often have higher populations than the urban ones in this current report. It is a little better in the second draft. In the first draft my constituency, for example, would have had 17 per cent more than any other urban constituency in the entire province. It was larger than the country of Belgium. The argument that this is about . . .

Mr. Ceci: In population?

Mr. Nixon: Yeah, 17 per cent more in population than any of the urban ridings. That's what it was. It would have been the highest populated constituency in the entire province and bigger than the European countries. [interjections] Yes, but it also had the highest population . . .

The Acting Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, through you to the Finance minister, who is struggling with the numbers, it would have been 17 per cent higher in population than any other constituency in Alberta, and the land mass would have been bigger than Belgium. Now the Finance minister is with us, and we're ready to continue.

The point that I am making to the Government House Leader, through you, Mr. Speaker, is that I sympathize with his argument. I agree with his argument. I do not believe that it is this place's responsibility to draw the lines, and I think that if we went down that road, we would certainly be gerrymandering, which you will not see the opposition attempt to do.

We are talking about this report. The report has been brought forward to this place for us to determine whether or not that committee met the requirements. The committee worked hard. I know two people that were on it. I know how hard they worked, but the reality is this. This is not just about adjusting populations for Edmonton and Calgary, which is important and is certainly a factor that had to be addressed. But what we have ended up with is populations in rural Alberta that are actually higher than in many of the city ridings and at the very least on par.

As the hon. member pointed out, we have stuff within the act to make sure that that doesn't necessarily happen so we can have variances for rural Alberta to be able to recognize the uniqueness of representing large constituencies like that, a constituency, again, like mine, where my southernmost populated place to my northernmost populated place is over two hours one way or stretches from the B.C. border and goes almost all the way to highway 2. [interjections] Again the Finance minister wants to heckle, but I've been to his constituency. It's a great place. I was born and raised in Calgary, near his constituency. Even I can walk across it in about 10 or 15 minutes. But I've got two national parks in my constituency, 12 provincial parks, three hospitals, over 160-some elected people. It's just different. It doesn't mean that it's better or not. It is different.

The law allowed for some variance associated with that, and this panel that went in there, except for Mrs. Day, who rejected that, went ahead and ignored that variance and tried to bring everything to par, which is not within the law or their mandate and, in addition to that, went further than that and tried to predict our communities that would be declining in population over the next 10 years in order to accommodate the cities, which certainly was not in their mandate.

Again, I appreciate the hon. Government House Leader's comments, but I think he's wrong on this one, particularly when you look at the fact that many rural ridings have now higher populations than urban constituencies.

The Acting Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just curious to know if the member opposite would like to comment on situations like Calgary-North being minus 16, Calgary-North East ... [Mr. Cooper's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Excellent.

Any speakers to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak on behalf of my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod and in favour of his reasoned amendment to Bill 33. But before I do that, you know, I appreciate the Government House Leader's history lesson somewhat, but, with all due respect, we are losing three rural

MLAs. That's a fact. Whether you consider it or not, I think that shows that the report specifically states that based on the population numbers – as my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills pointed out, the numbers are rather exorbitant and rather large.

I want to speak in favour of this because, you know, I kind of have a feeling that in the long haul I think rural constituencies are getting a bit of a short stick. It's kind of frustrating to see the rural-urban interchange. A lot of people don't understand, living in the rural constituencies, the amount of effort it takes to maintain the relationships with different councils, different towns, and different areas. I don't have the same size constituency as my friends from Livingstone-Macleod or Little Bow although they border mine. I can guarantee you that in two and a half years I've got well over 120,000 kilometres on my truck, and he's already gone through one.

I just want to point that out that, you know, the mandate of the Electoral Boundaries Commission was to update the electoral districts while respecting certain conditions, but I want to say that there are significant issues with some of the data used. In the minority report it was suggested that in my constituency – it completely ignored all natural boundaries, which was part of the original mandate, as I understood it, and ignored the natural boundaries of the Bow River to the north and the Highwood River to the east.

For some strange reason it was mentioned in the minority report that several various submissions were put in place to have highway 2A as the eastern boundary of Highwood and extend it west all the way to the Rocky Mountains. It's interesting. When the commission said, "Well, the Rocky Mountains: that allows for growth and expansion." And I said: "Who lives there? Sasquatch?" I mean, there's no population growth in the Rocky Mountains. I found that rather interesting. Moreover, after we did a comprehensive data search of all oral and written submissions, we found that actually there were no submissions made to include highway 2 as the eastern boundary. There was no way they should have ignored the true natural boundaries of the Bow River and Highwood River. So I question some of the data sources of the commission. Fortunately enough, in the second report I think they saw justice there to include the Highwood River now and the Bow River as the eastern and northern boundaries and part of the Davisburg community, where I currently reside.

Again, as I pointed out, we're going to lose three rural MLAs, and it just doesn't make sense to me. It kind of boils down, they said, to the rapid growth of the urban centres of Edmonton and Calgary, but I don't think the commission really took the opportunity – maybe they didn't Google map – to drive through some of our rural constituencies. There are a lot of great distances that we have to drive and travel just to get to a couple of meetings a day. I maintain two offices. I keep a fairly tight budget in High River and Okotoks. They're not open eight hours a day – I can guarantee you that – but we manage to get by to meet with all the MD of Foothills folks and the commissioners as well as the two town councillors.

9:10

I understand that the mandated consideration of the Electoral Boundaries Commission was to take into consideration the requirement for effective representation guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Doing a little research, I found that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not guarantee that we have equal voice to our vote to achieve democracy or the right to vote. Hmm. The concept of one person, one vote is not a Canadian construct and is not in the Charter, actually. It suggests to me that maybe they revisit the ridings. Maybe it's just done in the wrong way. The Canadian Charter of

Rights and Freedoms, rather, was set in place to guarantee that Canadians deserve fair representation.

It's not clearly the case in rural ridings. Again, we're losing three rural MLAs. How can one constituent who lives hours away from a constituency office drop in to pay a visit? Calgary-Shaw, it's fairly close. For my friend in Livingstone-Macleod, Little Bow, and myself, it usually takes two or three days of setting up appointments and people taking time from their day to spend a half an hour or so on the road just to get to our office to have a personal meeting or vice versa in our case. I don't think it's fair and equal, and I'm not sure that the commission defined the Charter correctly.

In the urban ridings, in spite of the fact that the act allows for plus or minus 25 per cent variances, the commission chose to create two new ridings in Edmonton and Calgary, and ironically they're only plus or minus 5 per cent. I don't think, in my opinion, that it's quite fair. It's obvious that the desire, however, came to be to prioritize populations as a primary factor to achieve minimal deviation from the average number of residents per constituency. Does that make sense in Drumheller-Stettler? I think the country of Belgium is smaller. I mean, it's going to take a horrendous effort just to transport yourself across that one constituency.

I mean, when the commission talked in the initial minority report about excluding the Highwood River and the Bow River from my constituency and talked about submissions for highway 2A, I had to kindly remind the commission that the Highwood River has only been a part of the Highwood constituency for 115 years. It's been there forever. I mean, it's part of the constituency. The natural economic corridor between Okotoks, High River, and Aldersyde has been present there since 1905. Moreover, John A. Macdonald actually founded the first school in my constituency in my neighbourhood, and, no, I'm not a graduate of the first graduating class. But there's a lot of history there.

Just around the corner from my place is the South Calgary Airport, and that airport provided facilities for up to 2,500 Allied pilots to train during the Second World War. We just put a plaque there. That's part of my constituency. The history there is quite phenomenal. The town of High River was part of the infrastructure and the people who supported those pilots and, obviously, the support staff that went along with providing services for those individuals who actually learned and trained to fly aircraft and fight in the Second World War. You know, there's a lot of history in my neighbourhood.

Thankfully, I think the commission on the second go-around found the right perspective to bring that back into my constituency, but they completely eliminated the town of High River. The town of High River is the natural economic corridor. Especially after the flood in 2013 Okotoks and High River were in a natural symbiotic economic relationship. Plus, you know, the MD of Foothills and the Foothills school board commission run both of those areas. It was a trade-off between High River and Livingstone-Macleod's area of Turner Valley and Black Diamond, an identical population that was completely ignored. There was no understanding of the rural symbiotic economic relationship between those two towns. It's like separating a brother and a sister. We still don't understand why. We're hopeful that if this amendment goes forward, we'll be able to add some reason and relevance to that decision.

You know, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, no matter where you're from, you can see that this commission, regardless of how it was set up, is supporting the urban population of the province at a higher value, those living in cities versus those living in the country. There's no regard for those living in large constituencies in rural areas, where people are forced to travel great distances to meet with their MLAs. It's not equal representation, in my mind. I still find it unfortunate that this government has decided just not to listen to the

erosion of the rural ridings. It doesn't allow for effective representation of all Albertans. I mean, when the Government House Leader spoke of redistribution based on population, he completely ignored the fact that we are losing three rural MLAs. I spoke to many MLAs and many Albertans who feel this way, and I haven't met one MLA that I know of in the rural areas that doesn't focus on how hard it is and how they understand what it takes to run a large rural constituency. They worry about the furthest away from the offices. They just don't think it's fair.

After hearing the stories from those in rural ridings and urban ridings talk about the lack of consultation and complete disregard for those affected by the changes, I can only oppose this bill, and I hope that members on the other side of the House and, obviously, members on my side of the House want to support this reasoned amendment. Let's just do something that is right. Let's bring common sense back to this boundaries commission.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to rise to speak to my colleague's reasoned amendment of Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, which essentially says that it should not be read now because it, in fact, does not adequately provide for effective representation for rural Alberta.

Let me begin by saying that I don't actually have any issues with the motives of the commission. I think that they probably went about their work in good faith. But I do have issues with the end result. I speak of this mostly on general principle because, quite frankly, in my own riding I really don't have any concerns at all. There were very minimal changes to a couple of my border regions. The population is just about right in the middle of where it should be for the average ridings, and in fact to their credit I think that they did the right thing in consolidating some of the Maskwacis reserve properties all into one riding instead of having them split between three ridings. So I think they did the right thing in those regards.

But I still think that there are significant concerns with the Electoral Boundaries Commission report, and I'd like to approach them from a slightly different angle than has been spoken about so far. As I've said, I don't feel that they properly represent rural portions of Alberta. The mandate was in fact to create a representation that's fair and equal. It's the very issue of equality that I think I struggle with. The reality is that I think the boundaries commission in setting a priority on population only, or at least stating that, has both made a mistake and also maybe even exposed their own bias. I'd like to go into the details of what I mean by that. The boundaries commission, as I've said, sets a dangerous precedent by reducing the count of rural ridings by two and increasing the already large proportion of representation of Edmonton and Calgary.

Quite frankly, there's a balance of power here that is shifting toward an urban-centric bias in our province. I say that, I guess, for a couple of reasons. Even just simply looking at the raw numbers, what we have here are 46 seats now for the two urban areas of Edmonton and Calgary and the remaining 41 seats for all the rest of the province. That works out to about 53 per cent for the two urban areas and 47 per cent for the rural areas, or all the rest of the province, quite frankly. But that doesn't fairly represent the population. The population figures are that the two urban areas are about 51.1 or roughly 51 per cent of the total population of the province, but somehow they ended up with 2 per cent more of the seats and the exact opposite in the two rural areas: we end up with

about 49 per cent of the province, but we only get 47 per cent of the seats.

9:20

So I think that there is, in fact, an imbalance of the actual population numbers. The priority of using population wasn't even used fairly. It in fact betrays, I think, an urbancentric bias that has been for too long prevalent in our province. It's an issue that I've raised a number of times in this House in the fact that I think there is a distinct negative bias to the rural areas of our province from the government that we have in our province. There is a centralization bias, and I think it comes about primarily because the majority of the people who often make decisions in government and the two urban areas, of course, only see their own immediate circle. They're completely unaware of what the rural areas are really about. The decision-makers are too often entirely urban individuals; therefore, there is a bias in decision-making that's made there.

I'd like to cite a few specific examples of that.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I can carry on? Okay. Thank you.

A couple of specific examples. We have heard endlessly in this House about the inequitable and unfair health care funding that goes to the central and rural regions of Alberta. On a per capita basis the two urban areas get a substantially higher amount of funding to their areas, and the health care provided to central and rural Albertans is substantially substandard, substantially subgrade, and the money that's spent on those areas is substantially less than they actually contribute in their fair portion of taxes. So there is, in fact, a real and a serious imbalance here, an injustice in that regard.

We have the same thing with policing. We heard about this just last week. The police forces are inadequate. They're spread across vast areas. They're unable to adequately provide policing services, so rural people live in terror and fear, have their stuff constantly stolen, their houses broken into, guns pointed at their heads. There is an injustice and an inequity here that does not represent in any way, shape, or form a fair and an equitable representation in this House of the people that have to struggle with these kinds of things.

We have the same issue with lottery funding, where there is an unfair bias. The groups that participate in lottery funding, the nonprofits, in the urban areas get a higher percentage than those in northern and rural areas.

So you add all these things up, and the reality is that we have an unjust representation of people from rural areas versus those in urban areas. I really do believe that there is in fact a continuing bias toward urbancentric government and Legislature in our province, and it's something that I don't think rural people should be willing to stand for any longer.

You can't use logic to justify these imbalances and these injustices, so we have to reassess the report that the Electoral Boundaries Commission has provided and make sure that this House is balanced. The people who are being unjustly treated need the opportunity to have full and fair representation in this House, not a decreased representation.

The fact that there is one commissioner of the five members who stated a dissenting opinion tells me that in reality there was some tension within the boundaries commission. There is not full agreement there. There are considerations that need to be taken into place, and in fact it is a flawed report. I'm not saying that they didn't do their best job. I'm not questioning their motives, but I am saying that the facts of the matter are that in terms of fair and equal representation it's not happening, and this makes it even worse.

The argument is that the ongoing erosion of rural representation for Albertans does not allow for effective representation of all

Albertans, and, Madam Speaker, I think this is something that we should correct. I quote the minority dissent. She stated that, "if Alberta continues to grow at such a rate, a critical part of our history, culture and primary economic voice will be lost, [and] if at every boundary review we collapse two or three rural ridings," she wrote, we will simply end up in a place where it is not sustainable, and this is "not a sustainable approach" to the challenge that we have of trying to find fair and equitable ridings. Then she mentioned that giving both Calgary and Edmonton an additional riding was unjustified, which is another way to simply say that it is in fact unjust. That's my biggest point. I think it truly is unjust.

There need to be solutions found to it. I think that there could be solutions. I don't necessarily personally think, as the Government House Leader has said, that adding more seats is a good idea either, but I do think that we need to have a more just and a more balanced approach to truly fair and equitable representation for all Albertans, and in this particular case the unjust cousins are the rural ones over and over again.

The main complaint of rural Albertans is about the decreasing reality of representation, and all of these other things that have been said are reasons that contribute to that. I won't rehearse them. We've already heard them. But I do believe that this in some way is a betrayal of democratic representation for rural people. Even though in my riding I don't have those particular issues, when I look at the overall direction of the report, I don't think that it's reasonable. I think that we really do need to make sure that one region or group of voters is not dramatically underrepresented in an unacceptable kind of way.

I just think that there's a dangerous precedent set here. I'm not the first one to say this. It's dangerous in the sense that if future constituency assessments pattern themselves after this, the plan will almost guarantee that rural Alberta will be in line for further reductions in the future, rendering the area virtually unrepresentable. This is a problem for many reasons as have already been said. Part of it, of course, is the land access, the size of it, all of these things.

One part that hasn't been mentioned is that the constituents themselves have complained to us about the difficulty of them even getting the opportunity to come to see us, to come into our office. They can't make the trip. It's too far. The elderly are most concerned. It's difficult for them to travel long distances. Making these trips during the wintertime on bad roads is not only an inconvenience; quite frankly, in many cases it's flat-out dangerous.

The key here is effective representation, and that, quite frankly, is just not happening now. While I commend the commission for the work that it's done – and I think in many ways they probably did the best that they could – the reality is that the government does need to make the right decision. I recognize the Government House Leader's concern about appearing to try to control or manipulate it politically. None of us want to go there. I commend him truly for having taken that position. I do agree with him. But I think sending this back for further study to an unbiased group would be the right thing to do because truly it does not in fact represent fair and equal representation for rural Albertans.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise, and I'd just like to thank my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka for his remarks this evening. I'm just curious to know what his thoughts are with respect to population size and constituency. I know that

I've had the opportunity to rise and ask a couple of members. Unfortunately, I missed the opportunity to ask the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood about this particular concern of mine.

I often hear members from the government talking about how there are more people in urban ridings than there are in rural ridings and that somehow it makes it better, if you will, or it makes the representation more equal, even though we've laid out all the other factors around what is effective representation or not. If you look at a constituency like Lacombe-Ponoka, that's approximately 4,000 square kilometres, we see that the population is very close to parity, you know, which is, obviously, the target. But there are other significant challenges. If we look at Edmonton, we see the vast majority of constituencies being less than 5 per cent of variance: minus 1, minus 1, 2, 5, 3, 3, minus 3, minus 3 all across Edmonton.

9:30

Then we look at some constituencies in rural Alberta. Particularly, as I've mentioned this evening, Cold Lake-St. Paul is the most glaring at a plus 15, with a population of almost 54,000. We only have to look to Calgary. Calgary-Lougheed is a minus 8. The swing between those two constituencies is over 14,000 voters, yet the members from the government side seem to want to lead people to believe this evening that constituencies inside the cities have more population in almost all cases. Calgary-South East is a perfect example, with only 40,000 constituents. Calgary-North East, a minus 14. Calgary-North, the largest of all, is minus 16, which is 39,000 people and less than 30 square kilometres.

I'm just curious to know if the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka has any comments on the government members trying to lead us to believe that, in fact, the city ridings have way more of a population base, so it is essentially equal, when the numbers in the report tell a very different story than that.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yeah. Well, you know, to be honest, doesn't everybody think that they're the centre of the universe? Of course, we all think that we're the centre of everything. But the reality is that the numbers tell us the actual case here, as has just been pointed out a few moments ago, and I refer again to the general population numbers of the entire province. The reality is that the two urban areas barely represent, by about 1 per cent, any more than half of the population. The other half of the population actually lives spread all around the rest of the province, but about 99 per cent of the actual territory geographically is also spread out there.

As I said, I think it's truly not equal representation when the big geographic areas also have the big population numbers. In spite of the illusion of those who may feel like their riding is the biggest just because they live in a city, when it's carved up in so many little pieces, their numbers aren't bigger. In fact, in many cases, according to the report, they are actually smaller numbers. For the commission to have made the assumption that... [Mr. Orr's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising this evening to speak to Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act, and more specifically to the amendment that my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod moved just a little while ago. In our work as MLAs we debate a lot of legislation on a number of different topics, but perhaps none of

them so closely affects us and the work that we do in the way that this bill does. Every member here was duly elected by the people living within a specified set of boundaries. Over the past two and a half years or for some of us four, 12 or more years, whatever, we've spent time cultivating relationships with the people and the businesses in those areas.

It is more than that, however. The boundaries currently in place do a good job of grouping areas together that fit well together. Of course, I'm talking more about the rural areas here, Madam Speaker. Fortunately, the United Conservative Party caucus is well equipped to address these rural issues. The government has a much simpler job when it comes to representing their constituents. That's said as a practical fact and not as an excuse or an off-putting comment. The truth is that when you're representing a rural riding, you face challenges that urban MLAs just cannot understand.

For example, it's not outside the realm of possibility to have the MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview take the spot of the MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood when a scheduling conflict occurs, and I'm sure that the member is happy to do so. All that involves is a quick drive across the boundary line at 50th Street or Yellowhead Trail, and you're likely already halfway to where you need to be. That's just not the way it works in the rural ridings. I mean, even if the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was in Kernohan, it's still not a huge undertaking to go to the Alberta Avenue area, for example.

Now, let's transport that into rural Alberta. Say, for example, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler is asked to step in and help the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, outstanding, I might add. The first member is busy in Oyen when his neighbouring MLA asks for someone to help in Didsbury. That's nearly a three-hour drive in the summer with good road conditions. On winter tires it's just not as practical.

Let's face it. Rural MLAs are already hard pressed to cover the entire territory of their constituency due to the large geographical area involved. Even if you take out trying to help out a neighbouring MLA, the new boundaries in this proposed legislation are even more cumbersome. I think we can all appreciate that the job of an MLA is not one where you can sit back and relax and wait a couple of years before you need to put in that effort again. The increased difficulty with a rural riding is that a very substantial portion of our time is spent on the road, which means it's more difficult to have as much quality face-to-face interaction and conversation as our urban counterparts, which leads me to talk about representation.

I've hinted at the lengthy distances that rural MLAs need to traverse in order to meet those constituents across their ridings, but those are about to increase further since rural Alberta is about to lose three seats. This is devastating to rural Albertans. Nobody would deny that urban centres are growing. To do so would be ridiculous, but equally ridiculous is the idea that due to urban growth rural areas should be passed over, lumped together, and receive less representation. What it all comes down to is that single word, "representation."

Perhaps our education system needs a bit more work in this area because it seems that people think that our Canadian parliamentary system allows for the notion of one person, one vote. While it may sound nice and that's a facet of the American electoral system, I'm sure that all of us here this evening have come up with our own opinions on how that electoral system works south of the border. Regardless of what it looks like, it's not the way things are done up here. Rather, we work with a system of variances that ensure that, generally speaking, every MLA represents roughly the same number of people. The variance is actually pretty generous when used properly, which allows for some maneuvering. Unfortunately, what happened here is that the commission attributed undue weight

to population, which means that Alberta's ridings see a very low variance but risk ineffective representation in our rural areas, which contravenes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Madam Speaker, what we just need to remember is that MLAs do not just represent the people within the ridings but the businesses and industries, too. As the representative for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo oil and gas are huge stakeholders. I need to represent them as much as I represent every individual person who lives in the area. Oil and gas in this situation own and control great swaths of land. They are job creators, and their business, all sides of it, impacts the secondary businesses, that further employ people and provide the goods and services we all need.

You know, Madam Speaker, my constituency has increased substantially, which I'm fine with, but it is a good descriptor for the government side as to what I have to do to travel across my constituency. I have the communities of Fort Chipewyan and Fort Smith in my constituency. Anyone over there know where those are? No? I didn't think so. Four and a half hours just to get to Fort Chip.

Now, Madam Speaker, I have three routes to go with. I can travel by road, air, or water. But the thing about driving by ground is that I can only do it in the winter on an ice road, and I have had the pleasure of doing that. It is a very interesting road. I had the pleasure of driving next to a buffalo that was running on that road, and it was truly a cool experience.

An Hon. Member: Did you pass?

Mr. Yao: I passed the buffalo.

I almost got hit by a semi truck coming over a rise because those hills are pretty dramatic, and they're very narrow, so you make sure you hug on the right side when you're going over a hill because there are large fuel trucks coming the other way with empty loads, and they're trying to hustle back to Fort McMurray.

Just to get to Fort Chip, it is four and half hours on that ice road. Literally there are moose and all sorts of good stuff. In the summer, though, it is a beautiful area because, despite the myth, not all the sand up there is mixed with oil, and there are some beautiful, beautiful sand dunes up there. I would highly encourage the government side to do their next retreat up there. I will guide you up there. I won't necessarily guide you out, but I'll guide you into that area. You will recognize the beauty of the Canadian Shield as well because that is also my area, a lovely, lovely, fantastic piece of property up there with beautiful lakes that are pristine and clear. That's just to get to Fort Chip. I do encourage you to go visit Fort Chipewyan because it is beautiful.

9:40

The other ways to get to Fort Chipewyan, by the way, are to hire a small plane or go by boat. I did go by riverboat once, a jet boat. That was quite the adventure because Lake Athabasca is actually a very, very dangerous lake to go on. It is very large. The winds are harsh, so it is very turbulent out there, and there are tons of patches of weeds through there. Let me tell you what. My friend did not have a proper cleanout on his jet boat. So we drive through some weeds. We're in the middle of this huge lake. It is like an ocean. We are stuck, and we are scared. We did rock, scissors, paper to see who had to do the deed, and it was me that lost. I take a knife, have to kind of peel off some clothes there, and my buddy is going to hold me by my ankles as I go underneath that boat and I'm trying clear the intake of weeds. Boy, is that water cold, and that was in the middle of summer. It was a very dramatic thing. I'm still scarred from it, actually, but we got out. I got all those weeds out.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I really appreciate your story, but I'd like us to get back to the reasoned amendment, if we could, and why this is important.

Mr. Yao: Ah, yes. This is a good reasoned amendment, and I highly recommend that we support this amendment.

Certainly, I was just trying to teach the city mice across the way about the challenges we do have in the rural areas. I did not even get to speak about Fort Smith because Fort Smith is another four and a half hours' drive – and that is going 100 kilometres an hour, by the way – north of Fort Chip. So I have to drive nine hours. But I'll tell you what.

An Hon. Member: One way?

Mr. Yao: That's one way.

I do guarantee you that Fort Smith is a treasure. It is a gem. If you ever get the chance to go up there, that is the neatest community that you will ever see. The people are amazing and wonderful. They're very friendly, and it is phenomenal. But they're very concerned that my representative skills are going to be so thinned out. They have very many concerns there. That is very much an area that is concerned, where they are very independent and very able to survive on their own. But nine hours just to get to Fort Smith, and it is a very interesting drive.

To sum up, I am going vote in support of this reasoned amendment because the legislation as it is denies Albertans equal access to our elected officials, which is what Canadians have a right to do. So I ask that when you think of these people up in Fort Chipewyan and Fort Smith and you think about me on that road, that ice road with big buffalo on there – I tell you that I need to bring one of my co-workers here who has a gun so that we can eat some buffalo meat. Madam Speaker, have you ever eaten buffalo meat? It is fantastic. It is good. I guarantee that should you ever experience a rural riding, you would very much enjoy such cuisine. [interjections] Buffalo. No. Don't get me wrong. I recognize that in socialist countries dogs are your cuisine.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Yao: Nothing.

Anyways, Madam Speaker, in a nutshell, though, I do agree with my friend's reasoned amendment. I think it's a good amendment. I think we have to reconsider these lines, and I hope the government side truly considers this.

Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I've actually been to Fort Chip, so there you go.

Are there any other members that wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wanted to rise in the House tonight to support the reasoned amendment to Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, on the grounds that this bill did not have adequate consultation with stakeholders from rural Alberta. In fact, in the consultation that they did have with rural Alberta, they didn't always listen to them. There are several instances where we can see that the stakeholders in Alberta said what they would like but the commission did something different. Now, the Electoral Boundaries Commission was given a mandate to provide government with new electoral districts that respected a number of

factors, including the needs of community organizations, population density, and most importantly, effective representation.

I want to focus the majority of my time on effective representation and why this bill should not proceed to second reading. It threatens our ability to remain just that, effective. The mantle we bear as legislators can be difficult given the number of hats we wear on a daily basis. As we travel through our constituencies, we have different duties to perform in each community, and these different duties that we perform are duties that our constituents want us to do, things that they want us to attend, things that they want us to consult with them on, and to listen to their concerns. Though titles range from Premier to minister to critic or simply member, we all represent a constituency that elected us here in the first place, but those constituents don't always get the attention they deserve.

The most important resource we have is our time, but it is always in short supply. Of course, our time becomes a lot shorter when we're spending so many hours travelling to and from different events within our constituency. Madam Speaker, it takes time to visit with these constituents and stakeholders. It takes time to host town hall meetings. It takes time to travel back and forth to the Legislature, and it takes time to travel throughout the constituency and canvass the neighbourhoods, some more than others.

So, Madam Speaker, it's important that we consider not only the populations within our constituencies but also the amount of area that we cover. We strive to be as efficient as possible with our time, but it is not always an option, and if this bill proceeds to second reading, it will jeopardize the already limited time we have with our constituents. Again, we spend so much time travelling in our rural constituencies, travelling back and forth and going to different events and different meetings. That travelling time isn't time that helps our constituents. It's basically wasted time. It's the steering wheel time is all it is. It's not time that benefits us, our families, or our constituents.

One area of concern that is of a particular interest to me is the geographic size of our rural ridings. The Electoral Boundaries Commission neglected this key consideration. According to this report the makeup of this House after the next election will be several rural constituencies fewer. How is it possible that this decision can be in the best interest of Albertans?

On one hand, there is the optical side of the argument. Constituents that rarely or never see their elected representatives make the assumption that their member is just lazy or doesn't care. In very few cases this may be the result of a member just not making an effort, but for the most part it's a matter of time, time that it takes to travel and to go back and forth between the communities within the constituency.

Rural constituencies are littered with small towns that have many of the same needs as urban centres, but what takes an urban MLA minutes to travel from one community to the next may take a rural MLA hours. How can anyone think that this kind of travel requirement leads to effective representation? It doesn't, and that's why I support this reasoned amendment.

Madam Speaker, with the new constituency boundaries that they're proposing right now, I've done some calculations. Coming to the Legislature takes me about three and a half hours to drive. Driving to the furthest community in this new constituency would take three and a half hours, and I'm not even on the furthest south portion of the constituency; that's actually another hour south. So it's a four-and-a-half-hour drive from the furthest communities within the same constituency. And that's not even the borders of the constituency; that's the communities within the constituency.

Now, in the constituency that I represent right now, Grande Prairie-Smoky, one of the furthest northwest points is a small community called Webster. It's about 40 kilometres north of Grande Prairie, and it was established in 1916 as part of the Edmonton-British Columbia railway. To the southeast in the constituency is the town of Fox Creek, an oil and gas town with gas processing plants that employ much of the town's population.

9:50

Now, I mention these places because each of them has similar needs as urban centres. They have small and medium-sized businesses that employ other workers. They have children that need to go to school. They have sick and elderly people that need medical attention, and they have concerns about the safety of their communities. The problem is that these two towns are over two hours apart but need their concerns addressed equally by their provincial representative. Again, Madam Speaker, those two towns in the existing constituency are two hours apart, well over two hours apart, actually, but the new constituency will be over four hours apart.

Now, at the risk of sounding overly confident, I work tirelessly to ensure that the communities in the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency get the proper attention that they need. I do everything I can to hit as many events as I can and cover as many meetings as I can and get to everything that I possibly can within the constituency. But there are countless other communities just like Fox Creek and Webster that are similar in distances apart but have equal needs to the rest of this great province, and I can't get to them all as often as I would like. I'm not making excuses. I'm just simply stating facts. I'm not complaining either. That's my job. I love my job. I enjoy going to these communities. I enjoy hearing the people's concerns. I enjoy going to the events.

It's incredible, the amount of work and the number of community-minded people that are out there in my constituency that are doing good work in their community. They're volunteering. They belong to organizations to help their communities grow and thrive. It's incredible to see that. In fact, that's probably one of the greatest things that I've learned by being elected to this position, the amount of community involvement there is out there and all the different organizations doing such great work. But these organizations want to see their elected representative at times. They want him to show up to an event once in a while. They want to know that their elected representative cares and is concerned about what they're doing. The only way to do that is to be there. By making these constituencies so large, it doesn't benefit these communities. In fact, it hurts.

I know that in some of the urban constituencies there are concerns about population. We understand that. We have rules in place for when the constituencies are drawn out, you know, the variances of population, what's allowed and what isn't. But, Madam Speaker, the redraw that we've seen in this commission's report was huge in the number of changes that they made, drastic changes. In fact, probably one of the most frustrating things, I think, in our communities up there was the difference between the interim report and the final report and how drastic the change was between the two. I mean, in the interim report we lost Grande Prairie-Wapiti. It disappeared. In the final report we lost Grande Prairie-Smoky, and Grande Prairie-Wapiti was still there. Now, that's a pretty drastic change, which the people never had an opportunity to influence. The final report comes out, and there it is. It's done. It shows up here, in this Legislature, and then it's here in front of us to vote on. But those communities that had such a drastic change done to their constituency never had a chance to have input.

When there's such a drastic change between the interim report and the final report, the commission couldn't have had input on that because nobody had any clue that it would even have happened. If there had been some slight adjustments to boundaries here and there, just a little bit of cleaning up, I mean, that's one thing. But when you totally take out a constituency and put back in a constituency, that's pretty drastic. When you change the size of a riding from probably 20,000 square kilometres to about 60,000 square kilometres, that's a big difference. When you lump communities that are totally unrelated, where there's no travel or trading corridor between them, and you put them together and those communities never had a chance to have input on that or share their feelings with the commission on that, those are drastic things. Those are things that just aren't right.

Now, my constituency isn't even the largest constituency by geography. It's huge, yeah. I think I counted that there are about 71 different communities in this new constituency – 71 – and eight different MDs and counties. Now, I know that one of the things they were supposed to do in this report was to take in natural boundaries of MDs and counties, but they didn't even do that with this. I mean, of those eight MDs and counties, there are parts of three or four of them and all of some of them. It's just a mishmash of everything there.

This committee's report only wants to make these rural Alberta constituencies bigger. I can't fathom it, which is why we must refrain from reading this bill a second time. Effective representation also implies that the local issues require local solutions. Who is better suited to address them than someone that's local? The minority report from Commissioner Gwen Day of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission states that the new constituencies need to account for "common community interests and community organizations." As I just mentioned, there's no relativity to these communities that are now lumped together. How can a member be expected to understand the needs of his or her entire constituency when it's so big that these interests conflict?

Urban centres don't struggle with this problem as much as rural constituencies do. To some degree representatives in cities like Calgary and Edmonton are interchangeable because they are close enough to each other where matters under provincial jurisdiction are similar. But what about outside these centres? How big is too big when it comes to these constituencies?

Grande Prairie-Smoky, the existing constituency, is a district that includes both an urban and a rural component, and it's peppered with amazing little communities in between. But it also includes the

northern half of one of Alberta's largest cities. The population was a good-sized population in that constituency. The thing is that with that constituency there was a natural trading corridor from the rural area around Grande Prairie to Grande Prairie. People outside of Grande Prairie, if they want to go to a Walmart or a Costco or one of those big box stores or if there are some specialty stores in Grande Prairie that don't exist in smaller communities, then they would go to Grande Prairie. There was a relativity. The people in Grande Prairie, a lot of them worked outside of Grande Prairie in a rural area, in the oil and gas sector or the forestry or farming industry.

There was a lot of relativity in that area, but the way the constituencies are now, they've taken away that, that opportunity that these communities – before, in the existing constituency, there was some sort of relativity. There was some sort of common interest. There was some sort of common bond there. But that's been taken away when you take communities that are four and a half hours apart.

On one hand, you have a strong energy component in Grande Prairie upon which our provincial economy depends. On the other hand, there is an agricultural component, also vital to our success as a province. What do the needs of my constituents in Grande Prairie have in common with the people of New Fish Creek, a rural community an hour and a half to the east? They're in a similar trading corridor. The people from New Fish Creek go to Grande Prairie and shop. The people in Grande Prairie, some of them, might work in the New Fish Creek area or some of the other communities around in the oil and gas sector or whatever. But they both deserve equal representation in this House. That's why we must not read this bill a second time.

At this time I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I believe that we have made progress, however incremental, this evening. As we had a late night last night, I'm pleased to move that we adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, December 6, 2017

Day 62

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Today is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. Let us reflect not only on the 14 young women who lost their lives 28 years ago in Montreal but on the powerful movement of women world-wide who are standing against acts of misogyny, violence, and hatred. Together we can create a province and a nation where love, acceptance, and tolerance are stronger than hatred.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 32

An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to move second reading of Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta.

With this bill we are continuing our work to renew democracy to Albertans. We started this work soon after being elected by banning political donations from unions and corporations, and we followed up on that work with the Fair Elections Financing Act to help ensure that good ideas are valued above campaign budgets and that the interests of everyday Albertans are put first.

Earlier this year the Legislative Assembly passed the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act to further the principles of open government in Alberta by increasing accountability, ethics, and transparency, and now we are proposing amendments to the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act.

Bill 32 would strengthen the existing third-party advertising rules by extending spending limits to three months before the election period. Starting December 1, prior to an election year individuals, corporations, unions, employee groups, or other third parties would not be permitted to spend more than \$150,000 on political advertising prior to the election being called. Of that \$150,000, no more than \$3,000 could be used to promote or oppose the election of one or more candidates in any one electoral division. Money spent on canvassing and organizing events to promote or oppose a party, nominee, candidate would be considered advertising expenses. Political parties, nominees, and candidates would also be prohibited from colluding with third parties such as political action committees to circumvent spending rules.

Corporations, unions, employee groups, and similar third parties that are not individuals would be banned from incurring expenses to sell memberships, fund raise, or collect information about voters in support of a party, nominee, or candidate. By doing more to keep corporate and union money out of politics, these proposed changes would help ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to share their views and meaningfully participate in an election.

Our government has also previously committed to prohibiting MLAs from using government resources during an election. Bill 32 includes restrictions on advertising or publishing any information about government programs or activities after the writ has been issued for a general election. At the same time, it is imperative that the public service be able to provide Albertans with the information they need about ongoing programs and services. Our proposed amendments are aimed at prohibiting taxpayer money from being used to influence elections but also avoiding a total shutdown of all government communications to the public. Advertising or announcements required by law would still proceed, as would those needed for procurement or employment purposes. Health or public safety messages would also be permitted.

For by-elections there would be restrictions on advertising or publishing information that disproportionately involves or affects the electoral division in which the by-election is taking place. That way, the scale and scope of the advertising rules will concur with the scope of the election taking place.

To help ensure these rules are followed and that complaints are thoroughly investigated, a new election commissioner would be responsible for fully investigating complaints, taking enforcement action, and recommending prosecutions. The election commissioner's annual report would include information on the number and types of complaints received, investigations conducted, and the disposition of each complaint or investigation, and we propose that that new election commissioner be an officer of the Legislature and report to this Assembly.

On another note, we are also proposing to make voting in a provincial election easier and more convenient than ever before. Up to this point for both advance polls and for regular polls Albertans needed to be close to home to vote. In all provincial elections so far people have had to cast their vote at a polling station in their electoral division. We are proposing that on any advance voting day Albertans should be able to vote at the polling station closest to them no matter where they are in the province. Voters would still choose a candidate running in the electoral division where they live, but they would have more freedom in terms of where to vote and how to plan their day. This means that if you live in the suburbs and work downtown, you'd be able to potentially vote during your lunch break on an advance voting day without driving all the way back to your neighbourhood.

We're also giving Albertans more opportunities to fit voting into their schedules by allowing for one more advance voting day and putting that advance voting day on a Saturday, where we know we have the highest turnout and people find it easiest to come out and vote.

In addition to opening up more advance voting opportunities, the bill is also going to allow Elections Alberta to hold more mobile polls. Currently they can only be held in supportive living facilities and treatment centres on election day. We are proposing that mobile polls must also be held in emergency shelters and support centres for those experiencing homelessness or poverty as long as there are at least 10 eligible voters who are getting support there.

Voting is a fundamental right in our society, and we want to make sure that voting is accessible in Alberta. Our legislation will also enable Elections Alberta to establish special mobile polls elsewhere, maybe a postsecondary institution, work camp, correctional institution, or other public buildings. Elections Alberta would be required to determine in consultation with an official from each postsecondary institution, work camp, or other facility if a special mobile poll makes sense for that facility and if there are the supports that are needed: power, space, et cetera.

We also believe that everyone is entitled to vote with privacy and dignity, and that is why Bill 32 would enable Elections Alberta to

use voter assist terminals in general elections. Currently if someone needs help voting due to a disability, a friend or an elections official would help them, but voter assist terminals let voters mark their ballot using a Braille-coded keypad, audio cues, or breath-operated devices. Voter assist terminals have been successfully tested in advance polls in by-elections. It would be an offence to tamper with or interfere with this equipment, and they would not be connected to the Internet. They will create a paper ballot.

Not only do we want to make it easier and more straightforward for people to vote; we also want to encourage more people to vote. Voting is one of the best ways for Albertans to voice their opinion on government and democracy, but Alberta has rarely seen voter turnout above even 60 per cent. To help change this, we want to ensure Albertans are aware of their right to vote and how to exercise it. Our proposed legislation will make it mandatory for Elections Alberta to provide information to the public about the elections process and their right to vote. There would be a specific requirement to implement public education and information programs to make the electoral process better known to the public, particularly to those persons or groups most likely to experience difficulties in exercising their democratic rights.

Elections Alberta will be required to prepare educational materials for students who have reached voting age or who will reach voting age soon, including information about how to have their information added or removed from the register of electors. Albertans who are in the 18- to 24-year-old range are the least likely to vote, and only approximately a third of them are registered to vote, which is by far the lowest of all age groups. To help address this, we are proposing that Elections Alberta be allowed to collect information about 16- and 17-year-olds without their express consent so that they can be automatically registered to vote when they turn 18. Elections Alberta would be required to inform young people added to the register in this manner that they may object to and request to be removed from the register. This provision would not come into force until proclamation.

We also believe that when Canadian citizens move to our province, they should be eligible to vote in a provincial election right away provided they are of voting age. Currently even if they are otherwise eligible to vote, new Albertans have to wait six months before they're able to vote in a provincial election. Many Albertans start contributing to their local communities and economy the day they move here. Therefore, we are proposing to remove the minimum residency requirement. Voters would still need to be ordinarily resident in Alberta in order to vote. They would still need to be a Canadian citizen and 18 years of age or older. By removing this barrier for Canadian citizens, we hope to engage new Albertans in the democratic process sooner and encourage them to continue voting into the future. I would note that this mirrors how our federal government allows voting.

9:10

On another note, it's currently the case that a person who is unable to go to an advance poll or regular poll due to a specified criterion such as a physical incapacity, absence from electoral division may request a special ballot. Unfortunately, given our short writ period there's often not enough time for applications to be processed, for ballots to go out, for someone to complete that ballot and return it by mail. To address this, we are proposing that we allow people to apply for special ballots as early as January 1 of that election year. Special ballots would then be mailed out to electors as soon as the writ is issued.

While making voting easier, we are also proposing to enhance the efficiency of elections and ensure they can run more smoothly. The Election Act currently does not allow Elections Alberta to

change polling place hours even in the event of a disruption or emergency. We're proposing that in the event of a local emergency, a blackout or a burst pipe, the Chief Electoral Officer should have the authority to adjourn voting at that polling place to later in the same day or perhaps change the polling place location. According to our proposed amendments if the emergency is more serious and voting cannot take place on the same day, the CEO can then apply to the court to discontinue the election in one or more electoral divisions and hold the election at another time and place. The election would have to be held within six months, and ultimately the timing would depend on the seriousness of the emergency at hand.

In closing, Madam Speaker, the pillars of our plan are: encouraging more people to vote, making it easier to vote, ensuring elections run smoothly, and protecting the fairness and integrity of elections. If Bill 32 passes, this would be the most significant update to the Election Act since 1980. This is a very comprehensive bill, and while I've covered all of our major proposals, I encourage all of my colleagues to read through the bill to see the full suite of proposed amendments. I look forward to hearing what my colleagues in the Legislature have to say.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. Good morning, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you this morning. It's a pleasure to be here on this fine December morning, just a couple of days before the House was intended to rise, and here to debate a very, very significant piece of legislation. As the minister has just said, it is wide ranging, covering significant portions of how our democracy runs here in the province of Alberta, and let me just say that there are a number of things in this big piece of legislation that I think are steps in the right direction. I think there are a number of things that the government has done to move the needle on access to voting, and I look forward to being able to speak positively about some of those things.

Having said that, there are some significant challenges within Bill 32 that I also hope to be able to address over the next number of days as we debate it here in the Assembly and then speak about this piece of legislation as we move through the legislative process and provide some what I believe will be positive alternatives to in fact further strengthen Bill 32.

You know, Madam Speaker, you have heard me in this House before rise about some concerns that I often have with the way that the government chooses to run the legislative session, and here we have another perfect example of that, of the government not being ready or prepared for the legislative session and then, as such, rushing through what I would consider to be very important pieces of legislation towards the dying days of that legislative session.

I think Bill 32 is a great example of that. Here's a piece of legislation that two days ago was introduced in the House, and the government was rushing to do that, rushing so much that they didn't yet have the actual piece of legislation back from the printers. They provided all members of the Assembly this photocopied version of the legislation. Then, like the good environmental stewards they are, the following day, Tuesday, they provided the actual copy to the House.

While I appreciate their desire to ensure that all members of the Assembly have the appropriate version, it's unfortunate to me that they went through the process of rushing this legislation into the Chamber and not doing the due diligence in terms of having this ready at the beginning of the session so that we could have studied it, so that we could have taken it to Albertans and actually got

feedback from them. Instead, on Monday they rushed this copy into the House, stapled together in the backrooms or the gallows, if you will, of the Legislative Assembly building, and then on Tuesday provided another copy, that's actually returned from Queen's Printer and is the way that we would expect legislation to be introduced into the House.

It continues to be frustrating that the government doesn't seem to quite get how this place works. They continue to rush legislation. They continue to not provide the sort of respect and time that this type of legislation deserves. You would think, Madam Speaker, that after a couple of years they would catch on that this is what happens, that every spring we come, we debate legislation, and that every fall we do it again. They could be prepared for that.

I remain frustrated that this is what happens at the end of each session. I know that the good people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills would like to be able to provide some feedback on Bill 32 as this particular legislation has a direct impact on many of them. It's disappointing that three days prior to the scheduled end of the session this sort of piece of legislation would be introduced. Now, at best, if I was speculating, we'll have one weekend in the constituency prior to the passing of this legislation, making the assumption that that's what the government continues to choose to do.

I find that the irony is significant. We're talking about a piece of legislation that has the title *An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta*, yet we're virtually going to have no time to ask any Albertans if they support it or think that the government has gotten it right. It seems a bit rich to me that the minister of democratic reform and renewal – apologies if I haven't gotten the name exactly correct – isn't actually going to do anything to take this piece of legislation to Albertans and get some feedback and comments from them.

Having said all that, there are some positives in Bill 32 that I think, overall, will be net positive to the process, but any time that we are making changes to these very important acts, these changes shouldn't be taken lightly. The government is certainly taking steps to modernize the election process, and for that I am thankful. I support that. In particular, the use of voter assist terminals, the use of mobile polling stations as well as expanding the advance polls: I think that these can be a real net positive. Now, that's not to say that those things don't come with some unique challenges, and frankly I don't think that the government has considered all of those unique challenges and what their decisions are going to mean for Elections Alberta.

I had the opportunity to speak briefly with the Chief Electoral Officer yesterday, and in fact I wrote him a letter because I am hoping that we can receive some feedback from the Chief Electoral Officer directly. I don't mean through the minister, but I mean directly from the Chief Electoral Officer. He has a very important role to play in this process, as you know. In some of my conversations with him he identified right off the hop some challenges around the vote anywhere advance polls. That's not to say that these challenges can't be overcome, but I want to make sure that the government has done everything that they can do to make sure that those challenges are mitigated, and at this point in time I don't believe that that is the case.

9:20

When it comes to advance polls, even if we look at something as small as the how and where to vote card, it will not be possible for Elections Alberta to issue how and where to vote cards prior to the opening of advance polls. That does present a unique challenge and is certainly a significant departure from how our democracy has worked in the past, so we should be asking ourselves: is that okay?

How important is getting the information to Albertans about where actually to vote in advance polls? I understand that they're going to be able to vote in any electoral district in any spot in the province, but, you know, the electoral district of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, for example, will be at the time of this next election approximately 10,000 square kilometres and may have one, two, possibly three places to vote in the advance polls.

It would be important for the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to be able to identify where those locations would be, but it's not going to be possible for Elections Alberta to inform Albertans prior to the start of advance polls. There are some challenges that need to be addressed, and I hope that the minister will be able to do that. You know, I think one way that we could ensure that we have feedback from the Chief Electoral Officer, of course, would be to send this bill to committee and have him be able to come and speak about some of these very specific challenges.

You know, Madam Speaker, there are a number of real challenges inside this legislation. I appreciate that the government is trying to make this bill and our democracy stronger, but we need to ask ourselves some questions about what's important to us as Albertans with respect to voters. I for one have some concerns around the total elimination of a six-month residency period. I appreciate that six months is way too long and that when people arrive in Alberta, they should be able to take part in the democratic process, but going from a residency requirement of six months to zero I don't believe is a step in the right direction. I know that just in the last couple of days I've spoken to a bunch of folks around the precinct as well as a number of constituents. I have a number of constituents across the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that I would say act, if you will, as the chair of the coffee senate.

The coffee senate, Madam Speaker – I know that you'll know, being from a rural riding – takes place in a lot of small communities all across rural Alberta. For example, in the community of Linden it's at Country Cousins at 10 a.m., with the best peanut butter pie money can buy every day of the week. I encourage you, if you're ever in the area, to stop by and join the coffee senate in Linden. At Three Hills it's at 3 o'clock at the Get 'n Go every day of the week. In the community of Olds the coffee senate is at the A&W between 7 and 8.

My point is that I've reached out to some of these folks at the coffee senate and spoke to them specifically about Bill 32, and they also share a significant concern around reducing the residency requirement from six months to zero. I look forward to being able to try and represent those folks with some amendments at committee that will still encourage new Albertans to be a part of the process but also with some reasonable requirements around residency, perhaps 30 or 60 days.

You know, I'd like to thank the government for taking some proactive steps on the prohibition around government advertising. I'd also like to thank my hon. colleague from Drumheller-Stettler, who has been working on this project over a number of years. Unfortunately, the government didn't listen to him and to many members of this Assembly when they recommended this change in the form of Bill 203, private member's business, that was introduced here in the House and then killed by the government and then revived by the government and then sent to committee and then killed again. Now it seems that Bill 203 is like a cat with nine lives and has found its way into this piece of legislation, so I would like to say thank you for that.

Having said that thank you, there are enough loopholes in the proposed direction that you could drive a giant government advertisement through it, and I don't think that that is a step in the right direction. I certainly appreciate the fact that the government needs to continue to be able to advertise, even during an election,

on issues of important public health or safety, on issues required by law like employment and procurement, but there's no reason to be making government announcements in a by-election in the same city, at the very least. I'm of the opinion that a school in Edmonton can wait to be introduced 28 days while there's a by-election in Calgary. So I look forward to proposing some amendments around this very important issue with respect to government advertising as well.

The minister spoke about the establishment of an independent officer of the Legislature with the election commissioner. While it is important that we ensure that we have the appropriate checks and balances within our electoral system, adding an independent office of the Legislature I do not believe is the right path forward with respect to the independent election commission. If, in fact, the government would like to have an independent election commissioner, there is no reason why this commissioner cannot function within the confines of the chief electoral office.

This happens in other places across the country, and I'm sure that we're going to hear from the minister touting the benefits of an independent election commissioner within the province of Manitoba, a province where good portions of the NDP world view have come from, and as such, they like to point to it as a real pinnacle of NDP thought, so they like to do some of the things that they've done there. One significant difference between Manitoba and what they're proposing here is that the independent election commissioner in Manitoba actually reports to the Chief Electoral Officer and works inside the confines of that office, not as an independent office of the Legislature.

There are some significant challenges with making it an independent office of the Legislature. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has expressed some concerns about the additional costs that come along with independent officers of the Legislature, particularly when there were individuals advocating on behalf of people with disabilities. He said that he also would like to observe that

there are other costs that also come with appointing an independent officer of the Legislature. For example, in appointing a new independent officer of the Legislature, we've had to go through a significant search process, which has involved a number of meetings with committee members... involved having to take time and go off-site and book rooms off-site.

He continued and said:

It involves extra time where the legislative office's staff has to be involved [with] that process, hiring an external HR firm.

He identified a lot of additional costs that come along with an independent office of the Legislature.

Also, with respect to seniors there was some desire of folks in the Assembly to have an independent seniors' advocate, and many people spoke out against that because of the additional costs. Now, having an independent election commissioner is not necessarily a bad thing, but there's no reason why it needs to function outside of the Chief Electoral Officer, and I look forward to discussing that further later on.

One of the other surprising things – and I think it's important, worth noting – is that this piece of legislation, Bill 32, does a lot of administrative tasks with respect to the abolition of the Senatorial Selection Act. That was the act that Albertans used to vote for Senators. Albertans were very proud to be able to elect Senators, and Albertans from all across the province engaged in a process of electing Senators. Those individuals were then later appointed by the Prime Minister, but he appointed those folks because he respected Albertans' choice with respect to the Senate election. So

I was surprised to see in Bill 32 that all of the references to the Senatorial Selection Act were being removed.

9:30

So I started doing some looking around, and as it turns out, Madam Speaker, under the cover of darkness last December this government let the Senatorial Selection Act lapse. It had a sunset clause in it. [interjections] The government might be clapping, but I can assure you that Albertans appreciated the fact of electing senators because the vast majority – the vast majority – of Albertans don't hold the NDP world view and believe that senators should be elected. Well, this government might like to clap that under the cover of darkness they allowed a piece of legislation that Albertans believed in to lapse. That is not what Albertans are hoping for. I can assure you of that. The purpose of a sunset clause in legislation is to bring it back to the Assembly to decide if this is the best path forward for Albertans. But the NDP knew that Albertans would be disappointed with the decision of letting Senator elections lapse, so they didn't bring it back to the House.

They say they respect democracy, but they don't. This government, Madam Speaker, has a long track record of saying one thing and doing another. They say they want to strengthen democracy, but they don't. They have weakened democracy by removing the ability to elect Senators in the province of Alberta, and I can tell you that the vast majority of Albertans will agree with me and not with that government.

Madam Speaker, there is going to be extensive discussion on this particular piece of legislation. While there may be some upsides, there is a lot – a lot – of work to do, and I know that colleagues on this side of the House who believe in respecting and strengthening democracy are excited about doing that work, and we will be here as long as it takes.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 32 in second reading. I hold Bill 32 in my hand right now. It's a fairly large piece of legislation that was put on my desk, this second copy yesterday, the original rushed paper copy only just a few days prior to that. You know, there's a lot in this piece of legislation to go through and to sift through. Unfortunately, I have had very little time to consult on this piece of legislation whereas I imagine that there are many involved, interested parties that are also still sifting through this very large, extensive piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, at first glance there are some really good points, pieces in this legislation that I do believe will strengthen democracy here in Alberta, and there are also some really concerning pieces. You know, one just off the top of my head that I was initially quite shocked at was the creation of an election commissioner. I believe it was maybe just a little over a year ago when members in this Legislature asked for an independent office for the Seniors Advocate and an independent office for a disabilities advocate. Both of those ideas were actively shot down by the government on the other side of this House, citing that it was too expensive. So I find it interesting, now that we talk about elections here, that we have another independent office being created from this piece of legislation, yet very little thought or consideration was given to our seniors and persons with disabilities in this province. I find it quite shocking, to be honest.

It's also shocking that this is the NDP government's third attempt yet to change election laws in this province.

Mr. Gill: How many?

Mrs. Pitt: Three times we've been here with large pieces of legislation where this government claims that they are trying to strengthen democracy in this province. I think they've failed on many accounts.

Madam Speaker, there have been some successes, I believe, in strengthening democracy and accountability in this province.

On three separate occasions the government puts forward massive pieces of legislation with sweeping changes, allows very little time for consultation, and forces through legislation in the dying days of the fall session, so close to Christmas, with very little time to consult. This isn't very democratic, yet we have An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. I have some major concerns with what we're doing here in this House. I think Albertans have major concerns with what is happening here in this House.

Madam Speaker, there was an emergency committee meeting called just a few weeks ago where the government called in the Chief Electoral Officer and pretty much only asked questions around the investigation of the Chief Electoral Officer. Some members actually didn't understand the questions that they were asking when further clarification was needed, yet they read the questions they were given all around the investigating powers of the Chief Electoral Officer, and that was the meeting. It was very, very strange, very, very odd.

I now know why. The government knew, obviously, I would say, pieces of what is in this bill. It's very clear that they weren't ready with the legislation, but they certainly had a focus in that meeting to be – I don't know if they got the answers in this committee meeting that would argue the case for making some of these changes in the legislation. I don't think they did. Every investigation that's been reported to the Chief Electoral Officer has been investigated. Every complaint that has been reported has been investigated by the Chief Electoral Officer, yet the NDP feels that it's important to create a whole other department.

When we asked for independent officers for the seniors and for persons with disabilities, it was cited that this would cost at least \$1 million. So it would be safe to assume, from the information that the government has cited in previous sessions in this Legislature, that the election commissioner would also cost Albertans at least \$1 million if not more.

Madam Speaker, one of the other things that happened in the Legislative Offices Committee with the Chief Electoral Officer, in the presentation that he gave to us, was around the door-to-door enumeration. He fairly clearly stated that the door-to-door enumeration is a thing of the past. It's expensive. It's dangerous – multiple injuries were reported by the door-to-door people doing the enumeration, insults – yet the government is choosing to go down this route. They're choosing to put people in danger even though it's very clearly stated that this is not the way to go, choosing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars more . . .

Mr. Cooper: Millions.

Mrs. Pitt: . . . millions of dollars more on something that has already been identified as just not working.

Madam Speaker, this government is choosing to continue to do the things that have proven to not work in the past, and the evidence is there – it's very, very clear – from the Chief Electoral Officer.

An Hon. Member: Show me the evidence.

Mrs. Pitt: The government says: "Show me the evidence." Well, ask the Chief Electoral Officer. I would hope that at least the government did that before they tabled this legislation. I imagine they did. And if you were in the committee meeting for Legislative

Offices, he very clearly stated the facts around door-to-door enumeration. I suggest you get a copy of the committee meeting.

Madam Speaker, given the government's third attempt at trying to get democracy right in this province – unsuccessfully, I might add, because this is the third time in just two and a half years – and given the enormity of this legislation and the lack of consultation time that this government has provided to us, I propose to move an amendment.

9:40

Mr. Cooper: Oh. A surprise.

Mrs. Pitt: Madam Speaker, I'll wait till you tell me to proceed. It's a shocker.

Mr. Cooper: Spoiler alert.

Mrs. Pitt: Spoiler alert.

Mr. Cooper: It's a committee referral.

Mrs. Pitt: Hey, you just took away the surprise element.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment REF1.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will read this into the record. I move that the motion for second reading on Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Madam Speaker, I along with members of my caucus and the United Conservative Party have expressed many times on many different pieces of legislation that they be referred to a committee, where committee work can be done, where witnesses can be brought in, and where, especially in this case, the government can hear yet again from the Chief Electoral Officer that, specifically, door-to-door enumeration is expensive and dangerous, which I think is something they very clearly need to hear.

Not only that; the age limit has changed, so we're going to be hiring younger people to do more dangerous work. Unbelievable. I would think that the first rule of government is to do no harm, but in fact this will do quite the opposite, especially to those quite young who are just trying to make a buck, \$15 an hour.

It's important, Madam Speaker, that the government hears of the effects of its changes, especially in regard to a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. It's a massive increase to the budget of the Chief Electoral Officer. Now it's going to be even more because they're going to have to hire even more people to do the door-to-door enumeration, which also means that we will now go back to committee to approve a new budget for the Chief Electoral Officer and the new election commissioner, plus there will be a hiring process and those types of things. I'm not sure they have enough time.

An Hon. Member: Appoint.

Mrs. Pitt: Oh, wait. Oh, wait. They will appoint. This government doesn't believe in elections anymore.

Madam Speaker, I also believe, because, as I've stated before, this is the third time that we are here changing legislation that is to protect and strengthen democracy here in Alberta, that the

government could probably get something right in committee and then come back with only one more piece of legislation to strengthen and protect democracy here in Alberta instead of continually coming back here, in the dying days of session, with a very large piece of legislation, asking us to rubber-stamp it, pass it through: "Don't worry. We know what's best. Trust us. We're the government." It's unbelievable. The third time.

Perhaps if the first piece of legislation that this government put forward to strengthen and protect democracy went to committee, the government at that time might have realized that they were missing a whole bunch of stuff or that they were putting too much stuff in. That's the kind of work that gets done in committee. That's why committee is important. That's why I am moving a motion to put this bill in committee, the Legislative Offices Committee, where it can be properly debated, where perhaps we can help this government finally get something right.

Albertans expect us to do important things in this Legislature, but after the government's third attempt to try and strengthen democracy, I think some Albertans would be a little bit concerned about what we're doing here in this Legislature. I certainly am, but I'll have very little time to actually talk to Albertans because of the length of time that this government actually gives to debate and democracy in this Legislature. It's frustrating.

Our stakeholders are frustrated, Madam Speaker. I can imagine that the Chief Electoral Officer is going to be extremely frustrated. I imagine he was when he read this bill and said: "Wait a minute. I already told you that door-to-door enumeration is a thing of the past. It's too expensive, and it's dangerous. I already told you that. Not only that, but I'm going to need some more money to do this should this be the way that the government is choosing to go."

I imagine it will be because, as history has taught me just in the short time that I have been an MLA, this government is not willing to work with opposition members. I would also infer that this government is not willing to work with Albertans. Their history on consultation is atrocious. They act more like dictators to the people of this province. "Here's what I have, and I'm going to tell you this is what's good for you."

This government, Madam Speaker, refuses to listen to reasoned debate. They refuse to actually debate themselves most of the time. This is a come-and-be-told type of government. They accept very few recommendations, the government, very few. I'm waiting for an amendment to be accepted by this government, certainly a reasonable amendment, like the one I'm suggesting here today, that would refer this piece of legislation to the Legislative Offices Committee. It's important that we protect democracy here in this Chamber. It's important that we debate.

It's important that we take the time to bring this back to Albertans, ask them what they think. They might say that this is great. Wouldn't this government want the seal of approval on their legislation from the majority of Albertans? That would be what I would effort to do if I were in government, Madam Speaker. That is what I will do when I'm in government in 2019. I will make sure that I bring forward the voice of the majority of the people here in Alberta because that's responsible – it's absolutely responsible – and I wish that this government would feel the same way when it comes to democracy here in this Chamber and in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and answers to the previous speaker should any member wish to take advantage of that. Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise. I'd just like to thank my colleague for her comments with respect to some of the recommendations that the Chief Electoral Officer made with respect to door-to-door enumeration and how ineffective it is yet how committed the government is to spending approximately \$11 million on that very project. It seems to me that the government is intent on spending significant amounts of money on tasks that don't have very good returns.

Another one of those tasks is the independent election commissioner, as I remarked in my comments earlier, this discussion around the independent office of the Legislature and how the independent election commissioner would add significant cost. Of course, in this particular piece of legislation it doesn't lay out what those costs would be, but we know that independent legislative offices – for example, the youth advocate is about \$14 million. The Member for Calgary-North West mentioned on Bill 205, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act:

Now, with a price tag like the Child and Youth Advocate's of about \$14 million – that's a pretty big price tag for an advocate, so I thought to myself: well, in this current economic climate how do we move these issues forward when the resources don't seem to be there to put an independent office into place?

9:50

You know, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the fact that democracy costs and we need to have checks and balances, but the government seems intent on spending money on door-to-door enumeration, which doesn't actually make things better, and on creating an independent legislative office. When it came to an independent leg. office for seniors and an independent leg. office for persons with disabilities, they didn't see value in that, or they felt that the current structure of government could suffice. Yet with the independent election commissioner they have a very different opinion.

I'm curious to know if my colleague from Airdrie shares my opinion that having an independent election commissioner might be a good idea but inside the confines of what already exists. The Chief Electoral Officer, Madam Speaker, as you'll know, already has all of the abilities that the independent office would, but we're just going to do it for twice as much money. This does sound like the type of project that this government likes.

I'll just conclude my thoughts with some remarks from the Member for Edmonton-Shepherd – sorry. The Member for Edmonton-Centre. They're kind of interchangeable there. He does such a great job, so maybe it should be named after him someday.

I think, Madam Chair, we have many resources that are already available and in existence within the Legislature, within the mechanisms of government. Indeed, some of those are independent officers of the Legislature. A disability advocate will have the opportunity to establish their office, to draw on the resources that are available, and to collaborate with some of the other individuals that serve the people of Alberta to begin to lay the foundation and the groundwork to truly be able to support those who are in need in our province.

My question to my colleague is: are you also confused by how the government wants to do some things in some circumstances but not in others like they're trying to do with an independent election commissioner, remove them from the chief electoral office and cost...

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on the referral amendment. I just want to iterate that this bill is about accountability. Now, the opposition is obviously

just stalling because they want to keep Jason Kenney's dark money in politics and continue to use the funds from their PACs in order to fund their elections, but members on this side of the House are making sure that our democracy is accountable to our electors and accountable to all Albertans.

Now, the members opposite may have a short memory, but we have already had a committee about this bill filled with consultation. During the elections and accountability committee we had hundreds of Albertans come forward to tell us what they wanted to see changed in the Election Act, and that's exactly what we're doing with this bill. We're following the recommendations that were given to us by Albertans during that committee and are moving forward, unlike the opposition who are constantly wanting to go backwards. We spent months talking about the Election Act and consulting with Albertans, and beyond that the minister has also spent a ton of time consulting on this bill.

We will not be accepting this amendment because we are determined to take dark money out of politics. While the opposition can filibuster all they want, this side of the House is determined to make life better for all Albertans, and that includes making our democracy more accessible and more just. That's why we're moving forward with this bill, that's why we tabled it, that's why we're debating it, and that's why we will not be voting for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise, with some level of disappointment, I might add, and shock and surprise that the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood wouldn't want to support an amendment that would actually strengthen democracy, that would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to report on some of his concerns with this piece of legislation.

Let me just say, Madam Speaker, that we will be happy to speak about third-party advertisers, but there is so much work to be done in this legislation that we haven't even got there yet this morning. While we have been on the record on numerous occasions about the importance of ensuring fairness in our process . . .

Mrs. Littlewood: Except for dark money.

Mr. Cooper: There's nothing that makes me smile more than the government talking about dark money, because if there is darker money in politics than union dollars supporting the NDP, I don't know what it is.

Let's talk about third-party advertisers, then. Let's talk about third-party advertisers that all have a requirement to disclose. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has the floor, please.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I actually had an important question to ask the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. In particular, I'd be curious to know some of his thoughts on some of the other questions that we've raised and why it wouldn't be important to send this piece of legislation to committee so that we could hear from Albertans on whether or not they think removing a residency requirement is a good idea. I'd be curious to know from this member what his thoughts are on why it's a good idea to not send this to committee so that we can discuss some of the big loopholes, big enough to drive a government advertisement through, when it comes to government advertising. And I'd be

curious to know why we wouldn't want to send this to committee so that individuals could come and speak to the committee about whether or not it's a good idea to provide the private information of 16- and 17-year-olds without their consent to an independent leg. officer.

I think these are reasonable questions to ask, and I think committee is the best place, and I'm curious to know why he doesn't agree with that.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. I just want to reiterate that we are opposing this amendment. We are strengthening and protecting democracy. We are making elections more accessible.

There are a lot of concerns raised by the opposition on money and financing, but let us be clear. This bill will end Jason Kenney's money from PACs. We are making sure that this Assembly and all of its members and all the members of other political parties are accountable to Albertans, and we are making sure that that side of the House isn't using their dark money. We still don't know who Jason Kenney's donors are, Madam Speaker. I don't know if you realize this. He promised us those donors, and we still don't have a single one. Not a single one. He promised Albertans those donors. He's breaking his promises to Albertans already, and he's not even in this Assembly. What can Albertans expect from Jason Kenney?

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you. It's a pleasure to rise on a point of order today. My reference today will be on 23(h), (i), and (j), language likely to create a disorder. I'm just wanting to reference some comments that were made by the Government House Leader yesterday with respect to the way that we speak about individuals who aren't inside the Chamber.

10:00

I know that the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood's favourite pastime is choosing ways in which he can speak disparagingly against the leader of the United Conservative Party, against an Albertan who very soon will be in this Chamber, and then he can speak to that.

But I think that there has been a tradition, and unfortunately I don't have it here in the *Hansard* from yesterday, but the Government House Leader spoke at length about how we ought to be careful with the language that we use with those who are unable to defend themselves, and I would encourage the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood to heed the advice of his House leader when it comes to speaking about those who are not inside this Chamber and the disparaging remarks that he might continue to make.

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I want to point out that the concerns that were brought up here or brought up about speaking disparagingly about someone outside of the House—I don't believe, although we can check the Blues tomorrow, that any comment about the personality of the person indicated in the comments was made but rather a quite defensible position that no names have been

provided after having promised those names. As such, it's simply a statement of fact, one that would be agreed upon outside of the House. As such, there is no point of order here.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the point of order?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to rule on the matter. As members are well aware, there is a long-standing tradition that we don't speak disparagingly regarding persons who are outside of the House and cannot defend themselves. In this particular instance, however, I'm inclined to agree with the argument that the comments were not directed personally, and we have had a discussion yesterday about comments directed personally against a member's integrity, that sort of thing. I don't believe that occurred in this case, so I won't find a point of order on that. However, that said, I think it's more important that we stay with the relevance of the topic at hand and the discussion. So I would encourage members to please keep that in mind.

Let's continue.

Debate Continued

Connolly: Well, thank you very much for that ruling, Madam Speaker. I am sorry, and I am discouraged that there is a leader of one of the political parties in this room, namely the UCP, who has not disclosed his donors, and that's why we're bringing this bill forward, because we are tired of dark money in our politics. We are tired of dark money in this House. It is completely, completely the opposition who are constantly berating me, berating this side of the House, and who are being backed by people not even in this province. So I am very disappointed by the opposition, and I am . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's not 29(2)(a), right?

Mr. Cooper: No. You're on.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you. Sorry; I couldn't hear in the commotion. Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to and support my colleague's motion to refer this bill, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, to committee. I mean, I do have my speaking notes, but I really don't think that we need it. This is the track record of this government, not consulting Albertans for the past two and a half years, and this government is at it again. A few days from today this House is scheduled to rise, and this NDP government – I don't know – sent their staffer to Staples to print this, like, photocopy this bill and bring and introduce it and then send it to Queen's Printer and then brought it again and introduced it as an omnibus legislation that demands thorough review and a broad consultation from all the stakeholders in this province.

I guess, going back to the track record of this government, consultation is not one of their fortes. We have seen Bill 6. We have seen Bill 30, Bill 31, and – oh, I forgot – the carbon tax, which wasn't even on the campaign of this government. I mean, we can still hope that this government would listen and respect Albertans because that's why we're all here, to respect and represent them. This government does not miss an opportunity every single day to disrespect Albertans by not involving them in any consultation, especially when we're talking about, you know, strengthening democracy, and those Albertans who voted for us, who sent us here: they're not even involved in it, and this government is, like, bragging about it, how great of work they're doing, right?

Let me explain, Madam Speaker, the massive undertaking of Bill 32. Many of the concepts and proposals in this bill were previously discussed in committee. It ran out of time, and the government refused to extend its mandate, so we have a clear idea of the complexity of the discussion that needs to occur for this bill. As my colleague from Airdrie said, we cannot do this in the dying days of this session.

Madam Speaker, the fundamental reason for Bill 32 to go to the committee is that – what does committee allow us to do? Let's focus on that. It consults Albertans. It consults all stakeholders. We have seen the consultation that took place on daylight saving time. I know it looks like déjà vu because I gave the exact same speech here, it seems, on Bill 30 on Monday night at 11:30. We had stakeholders, NHL teams. We had the airport authorities. We had Air Canada, WestJet, Calgary Airport Authority, Edmonton airport authority, who brought their concerns that the changing of daylight saving time is going to impact their business. It's going to impact the economic activity these stakeholders bring to this province. And all of a sudden the government realized: okay; we should put a stop to that. Why can't we do that on this bill? What is this government trying to hide – that's the real question – from Albertans?

These accidentally elected officials sitting on the other side are not giving their respect to Albertans, right? To begin, we must ensure that we're reflecting the views of Albertans when we come to this House, to review, amend, and pass legislation that will benefit all Albertans, not ideology, not their own interest groups but that will benefit all Albertans, which is the reason that we're all here. Clearly, that is a challenging job for this government because they don't want to listen to Albertans. As I said, we can go at it again. They haven't listened to Albertans on the carbon tax. They haven't listened to Albertans on Bill 6, Bill 30. You know, we can talk about this till, like, midnight tonight, about all those things this government has disrespected to Albertans.

Veterinarians, one of the most reputed professions . . .

Mr. Cooper: Respected, not reputed.

Mr. Gill: Respected. Same thing.

Mr. Cooper: No. Very different.

Mr. Gill: I know.

But respected professions, and this government is disrespecting them and not even getting them involved in the consultation. But, again, that's a separate bill, and we'll stick to this bill.

I was just giving a reference, a track record of this government claiming that they have the backs of Alberta families and Albertans, but clearly they don't because they will not entertain them, they will not listen to them, they will not get them engaged in the consultation process. So this amendment sends this bill to committee. Get all the stakeholders involved and decide this bill. Maybe this bill is a great thing. Well, let Albertans give us their input. I don't know why the government is trying to hide this thing. But let's get back to this thing.

10:10

As a Legislature we need to look at each piece of legislation with an eye to determining if it has forged the right balance for Albertans. The purpose of why we're here is to strike a right balance with every legislation. That's why we send bills to committee. Some bills are simple, but Bill 32 is not. This bill needs study, and the place to do that, in my opinion, is in the committee. We need to thoroughly understand the proposals in every bill for none of us want to pass a flawed bill, so let's send this bill to the committee

and let the committee members look into that. I think the government side does not even trust their own committee chairs. That's why they don't want to send this bill to committee. I don't know what their reason is to not send this bill to committee.

I mean, this government wants to create an independent office of the Legislature. We don't know why, but we know that this independent office will cost millions of dollars, and as the member from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, an outstanding constituency, said, this government did not want to appoint a seniors' advocate. This government opposed other important appointments, but they want to create an independent office for this reason. Sending this bill, again, would allow the committee to explore the concept of what works and what doesn't work so we can do it correctly the first time.

Bill 32 proposes to allow Elections Alberta to launch a door-to-door enumeration before every election. We have heard from the office that this is not the most effective way to do things, but again this government does not understand the meaning of efficiency, obviously. They don't respect Albertans' money. That might be a great idea, but again the cost is too much, and it's massive. There are other ways to do it, but this government doesn't want the committee to explore and listen and hear from stakeholders. Sending Bill 32 would allow us to look at the justification and determine if that expense can be justified every election. Perhaps it can, but right now we don't know if it is, yet we'll have to vote on this in a few days without having proper knowledge and consultation from those stakeholders, again, going back to the same point.

Then there are seemingly minor amendments such as the length of time a voter needs to live in Alberta before being eligible to vote in an election. Is that a minor amendment? I don't know. Let's hear from people who are going to be impacted, Madam Speaker. Sending this bill to a committee will allow us to ask Albertans what they think of that change, the very Albertans who have built this province, the pioneers, the people who work hard every day. Like, somebody can come here and change the fabric. Some people may like it. Some people may not. I don't know. We don't know. So why can't we involve people in this discussion? Perhaps people would want longer residency requirements. We don't know.

Here's another good one. Bill 32 eliminates a portion of the Senatorial Selection Act, which the NDP government let fall by the wayside, by the way. Those elections were a big step for Alberta. They sent an important message to the federal government of the time, and Albertans may well want to keep those sections.

Madam Speaker, the NDP may not realize it, but Albertans do care about elections and voting processes. They care very much, and pushing this bill through this House in these last days of session, as the NDP clearly intend to do, is wrong. I mean, like we haven't even scratched the surface of this bill. Let's remind everybody that it's, like, what, over a hundred pages long, and these are not just technical amendments. These are going to change the nature of voting in elections in this province.

Some of the amendments in Bill 32 are good, and I applaud the government for the modernization aspect of this bill, easing up the rules for advance polling and allowing for the use of new technology. That's good work, and we must acknowledge that on the government side. But on the other side there are other things that need to be discussed, and, you know, the stakeholders' input is important. I'm sure, in typical fashion, the NDP will only market these positive aspects of the bill to Albertans, but they will never ever mention the contentious side, the technical side to Albertans. They will only, like, show those positive sides to people. They'll never show the full picture.

So, Madam Speaker, sending this bill to committee will allow the public to engage in this process. We rely on them, we are here to

serve them, and I think it's our responsibility to engage them. That's why – let's do the right thing. Send this bill to committee, and let's hear from Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, that was interesting. The Member for Calgary-Greenway made a couple of comments. What I find really quite interesting is that he's probably the third person to speak now and they seem to be avoiding a topic, that topic being political action committees. To quote a local journalist Mr. Graham Thomson: "PACs... are becoming [a somewhat] invasive species in Canada." That was December 4 of this year. CBC: just a little reminder that "Jason Kenney spent 7 times as much as other candidates in [the] race to lead Alberta PCs." He filed \$1.46 million on campaign expenses. It seems to me that he and his comms staff made a promise to Albertans before he was elected that he would disclose, but he didn't. Interesting.

The Member for Calgary-Greenway asked us: what are you trying to hide? What are you trying to hide? Why won't you speak up? Your leader, your dear leader, has chosen not to disclose who backs him. Again, this is not the Wild West. That's why the first piece of legislation this government brought in was to change financing in Alberta because Albertans were sick and tired of it.

So I turn it around to you. What are you trying to hide? Why are you avoiding talking about PACs?

Mr. Gill: Thank you. An important question. The political action committee: I think it's important for – we do care about those political action committees.

Ms Jansen: Answer the question.

Mr. Gill: I am answering the question.

You know what I'm not trying to hide? The Hon. Jason Kenney actually did raise probably, they're saying, ever since we have elected him as a leader, more money than the NDP government has. We're not trying to hide that. We're not trying to hide that 75 per cent of Albertans do not like the carbon tax. We're not trying to hide that. We're not trying to hide that it's, like, over 55 per cent after the unity that will support if the election were held today in this province. We're not trying to hide that.

What we're trying to ask the government is: why are they not involving Albertans in a committee? Maybe when the Albertans get involved in the committee...

Mrs. Littlewood: Answer the question.

Mr. Gill: I am answering the question. Can you please stop heckling and let me answer the question?

Maybe if we involve all the stakeholders in the committee work, we will tell people what they think about PACs, political action committees. We're not trying to hide anything. I think the government side is trying to hide. That's why they're not willing to send this bill to committee. That's why.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I very much thank the hon. member for his comments with regard to this motion to refer to committee. We know that referrals to committee are an important

part of our democratic system, and they help us to strengthen the legislation that comes before this House. Referring to committee allows the stakeholders to get involved, and you begin to have more robust discussion on these kinds of issues. I want to know, to a degree, how the hon. member sees that these committees can enhance that kind of discussion and that kind of debate. What kind of stakeholder? What kind of stakeholders would we like to see come before this committee to be able to strengthen this piece of legislation?

10:20

I really appreciate the member's comments there when he brings up the fact that on this side of the Legislature, when we look at this bill, we do see that there are parts of this bill that will strengthen democracy. For those parts of the bill we would thank the government for bringing those forward because I think it's in all Albertans' interests to strengthen democracy. We would point out that in this bill there are things like the mobile polling stations or the voter assist terminals that we can support because it does bring democracy to the people and strengthens our democracy. But that doesn't mean that the entirety of this bill is worthy of support. That's why we would suggest that this would go to a committee for discussion.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak on the referral motion for Bill 32. Now, there's been a lot of talk on the other side about PACs, and they say that we're afraid to talk about them. Well, I'm going to talk about them right now.

They also talk about dark money. I'm going to talk about that, too.

But I'm also going to talk about another acronym. It's called AFL, the Alberta Federation of Labour. [interjections] See? Now they're excited. Now they're excited.

Madam Speaker, I've been a union member. I've paid my dues. I paid my dues for 10 years, and I had no problem with that because we had a very strong organization that fought for its membership and fought for our rights. I was very proud to be part of that group. What bothered me was that a portion of my union dues every month, without my consent, would go to the Alberta Federation of Labour to pay for advertising for the New Democratic Party, to pay union members to go out and door-knock for the New Democratic Party, and I had no choice. I had no choice. I couldn't say: I want my portion of my union dues that's going to the AFL to support the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party or the Green Party or whatever party.

There are a lot of union members. I know that. I actually know some members of the Alberta Teachers' Association that don't support this party, but a portion of their union dues, without their consent, goes to support the AFL: \$1.25 a month per union member that is affiliated with the Alberta Federation of Labour. That's a lot of money. You take every union member in Alberta that's a member of that organization, \$1.25 a month, that's a lot of dark money. That's very dark money. You know what the difference is, Madam Speaker? The difference is that the people that are donating to PAC organizations are doing it with their own money of their own free will. That's the difference.

Mr. Carson: In Ontario.

Mr. Hanson: Of their own free will.

Mr. Carson: In Ontario.

Mr. Hanson: Of their own free will, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the point is that people are donating their own personal funds of their own free will. Now, if that comes to an end, that's fine. But let's really end it. Let's end that mandatory donation from your union dues that has to go to the Alberta Federation of Labour.

Maybe this is why they don't want to send this to committee. Maybe they'll find that a lot of people will come forward and say: "You know what? I didn't realize that was happening, and I would like to get that changed." Maybe that's going to end the dark money that's been funding this party for years. Nationally, it's one party.

You know, they've tried to separate themselves from the federal NDP Party because they know that that the Leap Manifesto is widely supported across this country by the NDP Party. But now they're trying to pretend that they support pipelines and the oil and gas industry, and, boy, they got this monkey on their back that's the Leap Manifesto. They want to hide away from that, yet their friends in British Columbia are substantially banning pipelines, and they're supporting the Leap Manifesto. The federal NDP supports the Leap Manifesto. Maybe this is the stuff that they don't want brought out in a committee. Maybe this is why they don't want to refer this to a committee.

Now, there are some good things. One of the things I saw is that it establishes that organizations such as shelters, community support centres, and work camps, Madam Speaker – work camps that are full of thousands, literally thousands of oil and gas workers that do not support this government, and I'm glad they're going to have a chance to vote in the next election. I can't wait. This enables Albertans that are far away from their normal residences – construction workers are very, very concerned at the way their wages have dropped, at their ability to work and make their mortgage payments because their wages have dropped. The work has dried up under this government.

We have seen a resurgence just lately.

Mr. Feehan: Under this government.

Mr. Hanson: Under this government.

But it seems to be very coincidental that we're starting to get reinvestment right after the United Conservative Party joined forces. [interjections] You can laugh, but it's quite a coincidence that people are seeing that there's going to be a change in government in 2019, and they know that that government will have the backs of the agriculture and forestry industry and the oil and gas industry.

Is that what they're afraid of? Are you afraid to bring this to committee so that people can actually come and present to you? You're afraid that people are going to come and maybe union members are going to come and say: "You know what? I don't want you to use my union donations to support this party that I don't support."

An Hon. Member: No answer.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah, pretty quiet. They don't like that.

One of the things that I don't like – and it doesn't surprise me from this government because they like to build the bureaucracy – is that it proposes the establishment of another independent office of the Legislature. Now, everybody knows that we're supposed to be, at this point in our finances, with a looming, ever-increasing budget deficit, ever-increasing debt that we're going to hand to our

children and grandchildren and probably great-grandchildren. I think they said that it would take 127 years to pay off this debt after they're done.

So it doesn't surprise me that they're trying to increase the bureaucracy. That's what they've done ever since they got into power, but what we should be doing is looking at fiscal responsibility. We already have an existing office in the Legislature to govern elections, Elections Alberta. They've been doing a fine job.

Mr. Carson: Forcing a by-election is really fiscally responsible.

Mr. Hanson: Well, there's a difference, you know. You can force a by-election or you can just walk across the floor, but I don't know which is better, right? [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members.
Please continue.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's really nice to be supported by your chair that we can actually speak freely in the House. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Please continue, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My main point is, you know, that we did talk about PACs, and they have brought up dark money, and they say that we refuse to talk about it. Well, let's talk about it. I'd like somebody from that side to stand up and defend the fact that people's money is used against their will to support a party that they don't believe in. I know that there are a lot of union people out there, and I think that maybe if you did a poll at all the union meetings or sent it out to membership – maybe that's something you should do, send it out to memberships and say: "Which party do you support? Are you actually happy that a portion of your money every month goes to support an organization you don't believe in?"

Mr. Yao: Oh, they'd probably take the opportunity to out all those guys that didn't support them.

Mr. Hanson: Would they take that opportunity to out those guys? I bet they probably would. It probably wouldn't go over very well.

10:30

Again, like I say, I know that there are a lot of union and non-union workers that are up in camps that have had enough of this government. They've watched what happened. You know, the most disappointed people that I've talked to are people that actually supported the NDP government all their lives. They were ecstatic on May 5, 2015, when their government finally got a chance to get into power, and now after two and a half years they are so bitterly disappointed in the way they've acted, the way they've increased the debt of this province, the way they can't seem to manage a budget, the way they've got six downgrades.

You know, they talk about democracy. It's a big word they like to play with, "democracy." Yet giving Albertans the opportunity to come and talk to them at committee, giving organizations an opportunity to come and talk to them at committee: isn't that what democracy is, giving the voters an actual voice, letting them come and present their ideas on this topic? We continually, Madam Speaker, try to promote putting important legislation to committee. We have the bill on occupational health and safety. We've got industry experts that would love to come and talk to get it right.

I talked about my experience in the oil and gas industry, over 35 years in construction in total and many, many years of that as a

supervisor or as a consultant, where we dealt with safety on a daily basis. I know that there are people, there are actually companies in Alberta that specialize in occupational health and safety. They know that book inside and out, I guarantee a lot better than any of the members across the aisle. Why wouldn't you want those kinds of people coming and talking to you about this?

There are a lot of people that would probably love to come and talk to us about Bill 32. Why don't we give them that opportunity? We've got time. The election is not until 2019. There's nothing wrong with that. The frustrating part in some of the committees that I've been on is that we don't allow Albertans to approach us. They've asked, but every time we get an opportunity to bring them in, there's some legislative matter that we have to deal with, that we're not allowed to deal with anything else.

Last summer we sat for a four-month period, didn't have any meetings, waiting for a report from the Ethics Commissioner. Meanwhile there were three groups of Albertans that had been dying to come and talk to the Resource Stewardship Committee but not allowed. We suggested that we put a motion forward to change the standing orders so that we would have that opportunity while we were sitting in limbo waiting for a major report – sometimes these reports can take six months to a year – when that committee can't do anything else.

We actually put motions forward to this government to change the standing orders to give us that opportunity, that while we're waiting, instead of being a do-nothing committee, let's bring in these people. There's nothing wrong with having them. It's not going to interfere with the Ethics Commissioner's work or anybody else's work. It's not going to influence their work. So why wouldn't you allow Albertans to come to committee? What are we so afraid of, that they might have a good idea? There are a lot of very smart Albertans out there, a lot of corporations, a lot of organizations that have done a lot of work, and I'll tell you what: they're a lot more efficient with their money than this government is. A lot more.

I talked yesterday about the Blue Quills University out in St. Paul and the budget that they have. Madam Speaker, you know the fine work that they're doing out there on a shoestring budget. They can't afford a load of gravel to put in their parking lot because they spend it in the classrooms and supporting their students. These are the kinds of things. You know, there are specialists there, and I've mentioned to the Minister of Indigenous Relations on a number of occasions that there are some great people out there that potentially, if he had them as advisers or on staff, might help him with his job, might make it a lot easier.

There's nothing wrong with talking to Albertans. Why wouldn't we do that? We're going to continue on with pieces of legislation such as Bill 32, pieces of legislation like Bill 30. We will continue to put in referral motions to have this stuff sent to committee. There's no reason at all why we couldn't deal with this over a six-month period and allow Albertans and organizations and even union organizations to come forward and give us their thoughts.

I fail to understand why a party that continually talks about democracy refuses to listen or allow dialogue with the people we're supposed to be representing. Very, very frustrating. We have groups that have been waiting to meet with the Resource Stewardship Committee for two and a half years, and they get roadblocked. Literally, they've been waiting, they've applied, and they've called but can't get a meeting, yet we sit, like I said, for four months doing nothing.

Mr. Gill: Why?

Mr. Hanson: I don't know. Why wouldn't you want to talk to Albertans?

You know, one of the groups that wants to come and talk to us are the recycling organizations of Alberta. That's a really big thing. Why wouldn't you want them to come and speak to the Resource Stewardship Committee? I mean, I think our job is to protect resources in Alberta, to protect the environment in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always such a pleasure to get up in this House and correct the misguided information that's coming across from the opposition. You know, the opposition likes to light its hair on fire so much, and I think that might be the problem with the member over there. I want to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. He's a good man. He's a good man. I love working with him on committee, on the many things that we do together.

Of course, you know, for all the lovely people following us at home, this House has specific rules. We are sent here on behalf of Albertans to create those rules, the laws of this land. It's a wonderful thing to do. It's a wonderful thing to be a part of, especially for me, someone who came from a country where there was a dictatorial regime that took away the human rights of individuals.

Mr. Strankman: That's a success story.

Loyola: Yeah, and it's an important story, and it's an important one for you to hear, sir.

Madam Speaker, through you to the members on the other side, protecting democracy is absolutely essential. I can tell you how passionate I am. I've stood in this House several times to talk about how passionate I am about this.

Now, one thing I want to comment on regarding the speech from the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. One of the first things that we did, one of the absolutely first things that we did was that we put a stop to corporate and union donations and the influence of that money over our democracy. But you know what? Let me tell you this. Having been a union member for a long time and even having been a union vice-president and president and having worked my way up in the union, when I wanted to see a change in my union, I started participating in that union, because that's the way that democratic institutions work. If you want to see a change, then start participating, right?

Now, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills says, "Okay; well, there are some union members that don't want their money going to particular campaigns, programs," whatever the case may be. Well, guess what? They have an opportunity to go to their union's annual general meeting, where the treasurer of the union has the responsibility to disclose everything that the union is going to do, and much like in this House, the people vote on exactly what the union is going to be spending their money on. It's a democratic process.

Now, I understand there are always going to be a minority of individuals that perhaps have different ways of seeing the world. You know, they have different ways of even communicating what their thoughts are, and we need to respect them. One of the fundamental rights that people can expect, not only in this province but in democratic institutions all over this province, is that they will be listened to, and that's what we are doing.

10:40

Now, one of the most important pieces of information that I need to correct the member on is because he's saying: oh, we don't want

to listen to Albertans. I'll remind the member that one of the first things that we did is that we struck the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, and the responsibility of this committee was to listen to Albertans regarding the Election Act. Here we have in front of us this referral motion to send this bill back to committee so that we can listen to Albertans. But guess what, Madam Speaker? We've already been through the process of listening to Albertans. We listened to Albertans on the issues of not only the Election Act but the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act as well, and we brought those changes forward to this House. That was more than two years ago. So to all those people who are following along at home . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, I mean, I'm not surprised that the motion is to again refer to committee. But just to expand on what my colleague just said, we spent a lot of months on a special select committee reviewing four pieces of legislation, actually. I'm trying to think about the time members of the opposition walked out of that committee because they didn't like something. Hard to remember, but it's okay. They got a little bit uptight, but that's understandable.

I wanted to go back and talk a little bit about some of the things. We already know that the speakers on the other side are choosing to not really talk about PACs – and I get that because it's a little bit embarrassing for them – where they once stood for their constituents to say: "You know what? Let's make this a level playing field. No more of the Wild West. We want to know. We don't want people able to buy elections anymore. We want fair and democratic elections." Now they don't say too much because their new boss plays a different game.

I want to go back and talk about some of the things that are essential in this bill and why it is so important that we get this done now. Obviously, one of the things that I think is truly important and why I don't think this should go back to a committee is that for far too long people that have been marginalized, people with disabilities, maybe people that live in communities that are not very accessible have been excluded for a number of reasons. That sometimes is just accessibility. What this bill does is that it just takes it a step further, and it includes in the language of the bill the importance and the need to make it not just accessible but barrier free. There is a big difference between accessibility and barrier free.

There's a reason that particularly people with disabilities in large numbers don't consider themselves or count themselves as electors. Because not only do they face barriers in regular, everyday life, but the barriers to this process are very real. They're architectural, they're physical, they're attitudinal, they're cultural, they're informal, they're in terms of communication, and they're legal. This bill does a lot to correct some of the problems. I know that people with disabilities and their thousands and thousands of supporters right across this province want to be heard. They're tired of having legislation created for them and not with them. This is a way for people with disabilities and their supporters to get involved, to be assured that the places where they go to vote are accessible and barrier free.

The other thing I really liked about this bill is that it talked about providing information, educational materials to our young people that are still in school. Now, I think we've all probably at some point as teenagers received information, if not in class, specific information about elections, how that works, how to get involved in the process. We've perhaps had debates at our schools and things like that. But this puts another emphasis on the

importance of informing our young people, and that is so important because they are our future. They really are our future. When we are no longer in this House, we are perhaps no longer working, and we are relying on our young people, they will be there to take care of us, and they will be informed. They'll believe in science. They'll believe in the need to address climate change and so many other things.

I'm really quite hopeful that they'll also recognize the dangers of allowing Canada, particularly Alberta, to engage in the kinds of activities that we see going on in the United States and that political action committees have truly become a problem. Just look, read the news any day of the week, and you will see that.

Mr. Cooper: Like a third-party advertiser like the ATA.

Ms Renaud: Third-party advertising: funny that the member should mention that.

You know, I did a really quick scan earlier today to look at the website just to see – I'm trying to think. It was the third-party advertiser. I think it was the period from January to September of 2017. I just picked three of the political action groups that are known supporters of Mr. Kenney or the UCP or one and the same or whatever, and the amount of money that they raise to take out ads, to do billboards, to do endless reams of memes on Twitter or Facebook . . . [interjection] Sorry. I'm just teasing. We know that those are PACs. We know it.

I did a quick scan just for one, let's say the first one I picked, the Alberta Fund. We have a numbered Alberta company donating \$15,000 in that particular quarter. I don't know. I think Albertans want to know: who is that? Who is that that is buying votes? Who is that that is supporting that party? Another one: Balanced Alberta Fund. There were a number of – I'm not saying that it's wrong for energy companies or developers or special-interest groups to donate, but, you know, in just two lines it was over \$50,000 in one quarter. I don't know. Wouldn't you like to know who makes up these groups, who are buying elections, who are supporting and financing and bankrolling politicians? The Alberta Advantage Fund. Any day of the week, if you frequent social media platforms, just go and have a look at the memes, go and have a look at the messages and what they are saying and who they are supporting, and you will get a very, very clear picture of who's doing what in this province.

I will say it again. I find it – you know, when we sat on that select special committee, we heard extreme disappointment from the then Wildrose Party about the inability in the time that we were allotted to address PACs. We agreed, and we continued to do the work. Yet now that they've become the UCP, with a brand new leader, we're not hearing much. When a member stands up to talk about PACs, all we hear are some incorrect comments about the Alberta Federation of Labour, which is a democratic organization, by the way. I've never personally belonged to a union or participated in one, but I've certainly learned a great deal from my colleagues. I have huge respect for them.

Those are some of the things that I think are very, very important.

I want to talk about enumeration. I think I heard somebody earlier today talking about, you know, "This needs to go back to committee" or "We don't see the use in this." I'm sorry, but we heard people last night talking very passionately about the differences between rural and urban ridings and why it's so important to pay particular attention, to understand the differences. I think that's what this bill also does. It provides the time and the effort to ensure that we get to communities that are often not counted, in the most respectful and inclusive way possible, whether

those are Métis settlements or in First Nations. So I think the bill very eloquently sets out how to communicate with those communities and how to get that work done.

10:50

I want to go on a little bit more about PACs, and the reason that I guess I'm focusing on that is because it was – very quickly we saw, at the very beginning, in 2015, when we brought in Bill 1 to address corporate and union donations, that the Wildrose Party was very proud to support that. I remember that. I think most people in the House remember that.

Suddenly they're not saying too much, which, to me, is really quite disturbing. They now have a leader that did promise Albertans, looked right at them and said: "I will disclose. Transparency. I will disclose." And then didn't. Now we're not hearing anything about it. We're not hearing the members stand up and talk about the need to make elections democratic and fair, and that's essential. It is essential. Your man spent \$1.47 million, seven times more than competitors, to buy that election. Or to get elected. I'm sorry. I'll correct myself. That should be concerning to you because that's what we saw for decades in this province – decades, decades – and the minute that the new legislation came in to make it a more level playing field, to make it more transparent, to make it more democratic, suddenly you're so quiet. Why is that? Why is that? It's like you're auditioning for a new boss. I don't know. Could be.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to say proudly that I will not support this. I will not support a referral to committee because we did the committee work, and we heard loud and clear – and you all should have heard loud and clear in 2015 – that Albertans were tired, tired of the old way of doing business. Here we are. We have Mr. Kenney from Ottawa. We know his track record. We know his voting record. We know his promises. How many broken promises do we have? He's not even elected to this Chamber, to this House. We're hearing crickets about the dangers of PACs and the need to level the playing field, to make it fair, to make it accessible, to make it barrier free, so what are you afraid of? Back to the Member for Calgary-Greenway, who asked us repeatedly: what are you afraid of? What are you afraid of?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It was a pleasure to hear the comments from my seatmate here. You know, she mentioned, right at the end, the importance of having barrier-free elections. I also do a lot of work with persons with disabilities in my riding, and I know that those particular amendments are something that would be much appreciated.

Now, of course, we've sat here and heard a lot of debate this morning on this bill. You know, I find it very interesting that the opposition talks continuously – and you talked about it in your speech as well – about PACs, political action committees. I find it interesting that they were talking about problems that we've already fixed. Instead of talking about those political action committees, we had several members that went on very enthusiastic interpretations of the truth of, perhaps, how unions function when it comes to the approvals that they need from their members in order to, at least before we solved the problem, donate to organizations and parties that they felt would be helpful for their members.

Now, they bring that up over and over again, and, I think, why that is – and I would like the member's thoughts on this – is because it changes the conversation to something that we have already solved. One of the first bills we brought in, as was mentioned by

the hon. member, was to ban corporate and union donations, yet they talk about it in this House over and over and over again in order to change the conversation and not talk about the political action committees that the hon. member mentioned, that are actually associated with the members over there.

It's not just them. I mean, I don't mean to, you know, pick on one particular party. The party to the right of you in the House, the Alberta Party, has also mentioned that they have a political action committee as well. There was, in fact, a news article that said that that political action committee was going to help pay for that particular party's leadership race. Now with this bill we are trying to correct some of those problems.

I would be curious what the member thinks about the opposition and these political action committees, where the opposition keeps talking about something we've already solved. I was wondering if you had any thoughts about why that is and how our bill actually solves the problems that the opposition seems to have problems with.

The Deputy Speaker: St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you. Well, you know, I'm not entirely sure, but I would guess that they don't want to talk about PACs, so what they say is: bad unions, bad NDP, bad unions. I think that's been the shtick that they've been flinging for the last couple of years, so I don't see them stopping any time soon. But I do want to say that if I were sitting on the other side and I looked at this legislation and I truly wanted to include as many people as possible in an election, in a fair and democratic election, I would support this.

Here are some other reasons that I did not mention. In one of the sections it talks about accessible voting equipment, and it goes into quite a bit of detail about allowing people who require some adaptations to be able to do that. It allows them to vote privately. It allows them to do so independently. For those of you that have loved ones or friends or family that have disabilities or you are a supporter of people with disabilities, you'll know how important that is and how essential that is and how easy it is to prevent somebody from participating with something as simple as a curb cut or one stair. To have this legislation lay out the accessibility and barrier-free nature of voting in Alberta is fantastic to me.

Again, I don't entirely know why the opposition does the things that they do, but again I want to quote a reporter, a local reporter, Mr. Graham Thomson. I keep going back to this because I think it is so important and insightful. He said on December 4, "PACs ... are becoming [a somewhat] invasive species in Canada." They certainly are, and we see that all the time. We see the damage that it has done in other jurisdictions, and we see what's happening here. The moment that legislation was brought in to take care of the problem of levelling the playing field and banning corporate and union donations ...

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for letting me rise to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. I want to start by saying that in this House the opposition takes seriously its job to be able to take a look at legislation, to identify those parts that it can support, those parts that it has problems with, and then to make a decision on whether or not we believe this bill should move forward into the public realm.

There are parts of this bill that we do support, Madam Speaker. There are parts that we believe will strengthen voter engagement.

There are parts of this bill that we believe will strengthen and will protect our democracy. Modern election practices like mobile polling stations and voter assist terminals and electronic polling books, we believe, take us a step forward in being able to protect and strengthen our democracy. Automatic registration for 16- and 17-year-olds, to try and engage younger voters, is a positive step.

11:00

We believe that there are parts of this bill, Madam Speaker, that would be deserving of respect, but we do also note that there are portions of this bill that, we believe, rather than strengthening democracy, will actually weaken it. So parts of this bill, we believe, would benefit from a referral motion to committee.

A referral motion, Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you well know, is designed to try to help legislation, to try to make legislation stronger, to help the people of Alberta have a stronger legislative underpinning to the actions that they partake in every day. We believe that robust discussion in a democracy, alternative points of view, and the discussion of those points of view are very, very positive things. We believe that bringing in stakeholder input is a positive thing. So a referral to committee is a wise thing when you can identify areas in a bill that need work. We believe that there are some significant portions of this bill that rather than strengthening democracy actually have the opposite effect.

There are questions that this committee should ask and try to answer. For instance, does door-to-door enumeration actually make our democracy more effective and therefore make it stronger? Does eliminating the six-month residency requirement actually make our democracy stronger? Does striking out portions of the Senatorial Selection Act actually strengthen our system of democracy? Does putting spending limits on third-party advertisers strengthen or weaken our democracy? Will a six-month window strengthen democracy if the Chief Electoral Officer has to discontinue an election? These are questions that we would like to refer to committee, that we believe need to be discussed, need to have stakeholder input, need to have Albertans' input in order for us to determine if this bill is the best bill that it can be.

From our position as the opposition, Madam Speaker, we believe that this bill does need improvement. Are there parts that are worthy of support? Absolutely. But there are significant portions that we believe need further clarification and discussion by Albertans. The door-to-door enumeration, we've already heard from other hon. members, will cost somewhere around \$11 million, and Elections Alberta and the Chief Electoral Officer are not convinced that it's actually an effective way of strengthening our democracy. Elections Alberta and the Chief Electoral Officer recommend that target enumerations be put forward, that a full mail-out accompany it, and that this would actually save Albertans money, that it would actually only cost about \$5 million.

Mr. Gill: How much?

Mr. Smith: About \$5 million. A savings of \$6 million.

In the last election 60 per cent of the returning officers said that they had a hard time finding enumerators and that those enumerators believed that at times their safety was being compromised. That's why we send them out in pairs. If the government actually believes that this is going to strengthen our democracy yet the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Alberta question that, then maybe it's time to bring in more people to be able to have a reasonable discussion and debate on this particular issue.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie just spoke in this Legislature and said that he wanted to bring in – and it's a

goal that we would support – barrier-free elections. We can support that. However, we also understand that there are at least a couple of hurdles and a couple of barriers that would be seen as reasonable in a free and democratic society. We've placed some of these barriers in there for very, very good reasons, because they actually help to strengthen democracy. That Canadian citizens should be the ones that participate is actually a barrier, but it strengthens our democracy. That you should be 18 years old, the age of majority, and have the capacity and the maturity to be able to function and to make choices in a reasonable fashion is a barrier, but it's seen as a reasonable barrier in our free and democratic society.

Traditionally we have said that having a six-month residency requirement is a reasonable barrier and that it actually strengthens our system of democracy. Why? Well, I know that when I was in my social studies classes and we talked about a residency requirement, we talked about things like making sure that when people vote, as much as possible it's an informed vote, Madam Speaker. Living in the area, living in the province, living in the community and understanding the issues of the day, having a history with the issues of the day, understanding the people that are bringing forward the issues, the organizations that are bringing forward the debate is important. When you live it, when you are a part of it, that brings an informed participation. We know that a democracy is only strong if the people that are involved in it are informed.

So it's concerning to this opposition, and perhaps it's a really good idea – I would argue that it's a very good idea – to take this to committee and let Albertans have some say on whether or not it should be a six-month residency requirement. This is a significant change. This is a very significant change, and it's one, Madam Speaker, that I believe should be referred to Albertans, to give them an opportunity to voice any concerns that they may have about this particular requirement being removed from the Election Act.

Madam Speaker, I want to spend a couple of minutes here talking about the checks and balances that are necessary in order to have a strong democracy and how I believe that referring this to committee would allow us to have the discussion on whether or not we are getting rid of one of the important checks and balances in our democracy, in this country, and in this province.

I want to agree with the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I want to agree with that hon. member when he says, "If you want to see a change, then start participating." Participation and active engaged citizenry is critical to a functioning, healthy strong democracy. And when I look at this legislation and I see what some might call housekeeping, that some people would say that taking out and eliminating portions of the Senatorial Selection Act from the Alberta Election Act is just a piece of housekeeping, Madam Speaker, it is anything but a piece of housekeeping. If we want engaged participating citizens, I don't know how you do that and how you strengthen democracy by removing our right to vote.

We have a Senate at the federal level for some very significant and important reasons. When we created this country in 1867, it was determined by the provinces of this great country that it was imperative that we have a Senate. It was important to have that Senate because it would provide not only a body of second sober thought, but it would provide protection for the less populous provinces of this nation. Madam Speaker, if we're going to take the right to vote away from Albertans, I would suggest that there should be a conversation about that, and referring this to committee allows Albertans to have that conversation. This should not be eliminated through a back door: let's just not explain anything to anybody and let a sunset clause happen. This is an important democratic right that is being taken away from me and every other one of the 4 and a half million Albertans that are in this province.

11:10

Madam Speaker, the reason that a Senate is so important in this federal institution, this federal government that we have, is that there is a thing in democracy called a tyranny of the majority, where the majority in a democracy – we understand that rules and that acts and that legislation should be determined by the will of the majority, but that majority, when it acts, must respect the rights of the minority. When we started this nation, this great nation of ours, we said that it would not be okay for provinces like Ontario and Quebec, that had a significant population base, to be able to pass whatever legislation they wanted without the support of the less populous provinces. So we included a Senate where the less populous provinces would have a considerable say even to the point of being able to deny legislation coming from the House of Commons if they believed that it was important to defend the rights of other parts of this country.

For this government, as a piece of housekeeping, to eliminate the senatorial elections rather than having the discussion, reviewing that piece of legislation, rather than allowing us to go to committee to have those conversations, in the height of my mind is one of the most antidemocratic things that I have heard of any government at any time in the history of this country. It is a very serious, serious thing that we are doing when we do this, Madam Speaker.

I had the privilege of running and working with the first elected Senator in this province, a man by the name of Mr. Stan Waters. I helped work on his campaign. I campaigned with him. I voted for him because he was an amazing individual who was worthy of becoming our first elected Senator in the history of this nation. We should never stand quietly by when our rights to be able to vote are being taken away from us. That, at least, should be able to refer this to committee and to allow Albertans the opportunity to speak on this.

Madam Speaker, it is a sad day when this Legislature will not support a referral amendment that will allow us to defend the democratic rights of our citizens. I believe that it's important to let Albertans have a voice, and I believe that referring this to committee will allow us to allow those Albertans to have that voice.

You know, in this piece of legislation there's a six-month window that is set aside should the Chief Electoral Officer have to in an emergency discontinue an election. Now, there are some reasonable reasons for why a Chief Electoral Officer may need to discontinue an election. That is not our concern, Madam Speaker. Our concern revolves around the six-month window. That's a significant portion of time that members of a constituency . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity. I'd like to ask the member a couple of questions, without making disparaging remarks about anybody's hairstyle or choice of hairstyle.

Mr. Coolahan: Friendly.

Mr. Hanson: Anyway, friendly. Friendly.

The members opposite talk about full disclosure and dark money. I'm just wondering if he could possibly comment on whether he thought that, in the idea of fair play, if we're going to talk about full disclosure, that possibly the Alberta Federation of Labour should disclose how much money it spent in the last two elections, federal elections or provincial elections, how much money it spent on advertising, how much money it spent on paying members to door-knock or campaign for the NDP. At the same time, do you think it's reasonable to ask all unions in the province or across Canada to

inform their members, make it mandatory to inform their members, that a portion of their union dues are going to a PAC that supports a government or a party that they may not necessarily support? Just wondering if you would comment on how democratic you feel that is.

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. member for his questions. You know, when I became a teacher, Madam Speaker, I was in the public school system and very proud to be in the public school system. I spent three years of my life in the public school system. I absolutely support the public school system, and I absolutely support all of the choices that we have in education.

But one of the realities when I became a member and a teacher within the public school system was that I had to become a member of my professional association, and I was proud to be a member of that professional association. It's called the Alberta Teachers' Association, and it does some excellent work, Madam Speaker. But I also understood that there were times when I was a little frustrated with my professional association because there were times when I believed that monies were being spent on issues that I know I didn't support and on things that I was not willing to see my money personally being spent on. Yet because I did not have a choice – I had to be a part of the professional association – I also then did not really have a choice into how that money was going to be spent.

I think that's the distinction that I would make in my own personal life. I understand and I support the concept that professional associations like the ATA will be run on a democratic basis, where I had the opportunity to go to the ARA, I had the opportunity to speak, and I had the opportunity to vote. But I did not have the choice as to whether I was going to join or not. I could not, in any capacity, if they began to spend money on issues and things that I truly, really did not support and really found personally, on my conscience, objectionable, I could not even refuse to be a part of that association, the ultimate choice that we should have.

There is that reality that there are times when life puts us into that grey area. I guess that from our perspective over on this side of the House the problem that we have with this piece of legislation and how it deals with PACs isn't so much that we are afraid of talking about PACs or that we don't even want to see some restrictions on PACs. What we are concerned about is that there doesn't seem to be a balance for how this piece of legislation will also address the problems of big money being spent by unions, when they pay for people to knock door to door, when they advertise for a particular political party. Those are equally egregious. We would expect that this government would be willing to send something to committee that would be able to address this and perhaps bring forward some amendments and some ideas for the government to be able to amend this legislation, to also deal with their dark money. That's the reality of where we're at, Madam Speaker.

You know, referring to committee is just . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral motion? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the pleasure to speak on this referral. I've been a big part of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee that had been put forward. The opposition and the government celebrated the creation of this committee – celebrated this committee – saying that this was huge.

You know, I think that it's disingenuous for this government to start saying that sending legislation to committees is a direction that is offensive and they feel that they've got it right and nobody can really improve on the legislation that they're putting forward, and

the fact, too, that they have more or less stated: we got it right. Well, this is the third time now that we are getting it right.

11:20

I would say that if the NDP were committed to actually showing that they wanted to see that this legislation is right, then what's going to end up happening is that we're going to see them wanting to move this back to a committee.

Now, I want to do a quick quote that was done here. Bear with me here. I apologize.

What we've got is a committee that, in my opinion, was functioning very well, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. The problem with that committee – and this was identified to the government – is that we ended up moving four pieces of legislation into the committee to review. Now we can't even seem to get one piece of legislation to the committee from this government, but they decided that the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee was going to review four pieces of legislation within one year.

Now, I have to say that I took on that daunting task because I believe that all four pieces were that important to Alberta. I more or less used my summer along with the members from the NDP and along with the other opposition members because we saw the need that these four pieces needed to go through and be done right.

However, when we had this researched, this was the first time four pieces of legislation had ever gone to a special committee. What happened was that we went to the government and said: we need a little bit more time to finish our job to make sure we get this right so that we can get the recommendations from the committee. We went to the committee, and the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee unanimously put forward a motion, and I will read from that motion that went before the House:

that the Assembly appoint a . . . special [ethics accountability] committee during the fall 2016 sitting for the purposes of reviewing the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, Election Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act, that these reviews be completed by March 31, 2017, and that this committee comprise membership similar to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee and have complete access to and use of the submissions, research documents, and other information collected by the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

So what we did was we said: "Give us six months more. We can get this done. We're so close. We're so close. Just give us the opportunity, and we can get this done, even though this is unprecedented." We sacrificed our summer to get this done. We literally spent meeting after meeting to try to get this done. But you know what is offensive here? At the end the NDP's House leader said that the committee was being filibustered by the opposition and that in the end we couldn't get our work done because of that. That's the first time I heard of it. I didn't hear that being stated within the committee, that we were being disruptive in any way. I can tell you that when there were issues brought forward, obviously, we wanted to make sure our constituents were heard, but in the end the government stated that this was a failure and that we needed to stop, which is why we stopped seeing committees moving forward with legislation, I believe.

This referral motion is just saying: let the committee finish its good work that we had started because we had already talked about a lot of the stuff that we're addressing today. Specifically, we spent a lot of time on related parties, especially debate on their interactions. Now, in this committee we warned the government that PACs were going to become prevalent if they weren't addressed with the legislation. We warned the government that this was a reality. And you know what we hear today? The government

is saying: we don't want to discuss this because we are suddenly huge PAC fans.

Now I'd like to quote a debate from our current House leader, who brought some good points forward during a December 8, 2016, debate on Bill 35. Now, what he's saying here is that he's bringing forward an amendment regarding related parties, specifically trying to address PACs. So the government saying that we suddenly aren't wanting to talk about this: that's absurd.

Madam Chair, we recently discovered that the NDP has at some point in the past created what I would refer to as a shadow party. It appears, in our mind, when we look at this shadow party that it's being built to get around the rules that are regulating political parties or certainly is set up in a way that could get around the rules of political parties or at least skirt the spirit of the laws that this current government is bringing forward.

They, they being the NDP, have created an unregulated and unaudited, secret version of their party which can do things that the NDP as a party is not allowed to do. Now, I call it a secret shadow party because I believe most of the members sitting on the government side don't know about it, or at least what it truly is. I [believe] Albertans have never been told about it, and I certainly suspect that the bulk of members of the NDP Party are not aware of the secret shadow party that they are automatic members of.

Now, what's important here is that we warned the NDP during the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which we're looking to refer this legislation to to make sure that we get it right, that this is exactly what was going to happen. Then what we saw was that as soon as the NDP had an opportunity, they created their own secret shadow party.

They talk about dark money. But what we've got here is that the opposition has warned repeatedly this government that this was going to happen, and – surprise, surprise – it is happening. This is definitely something that we want to talk about. The only ones that don't want to talk about this is the NDP government.

I'm just going to go on because there are some important parts here.

Now, this leads to some weird issues that I think we need to discuss in Committee of the Whole. Two days ago the MLA from Edmonton-Whitemud rightly recused himself . . .

[interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has the floor. The volume is starting to get quite loud from this side. If you have conversations, please take them outside.

Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was raising my voice to get over, and I apologize.

. . . from the debate on Bill 35 [because] he . . . signed loan guarantees for the NDP. Now, that member participated in the committee associated with those loans, but specifically for us here on Bill 35, he did recuse himself from the process, rightfully so. I commend him for recognizing the potential conflict and working with the Ethics and Accountability Committee and declaring that a conflict and taking the appropriate steps. I think we all should recognize that, and we recognize [that] the Speaker properly at that point asked him to leave the Chamber while we were debating this bill, so he [would not be] in conflict. Again, I commend the member for doing the appropriate process.

So we actually have government members who recognize that the direction we were going actually gave them conflicts of interest and took themselves out of the Chamber. This was the start of our government moving towards this, again, shadow party, and it's shameful.

To go on:

But the fact is that every single member of the NDP, whether they know it or not, is a member of the shadow party. This shadow party exists to guarantee the debts of the NDP that are in its official registered bylaws. Now, this organization is doing exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is doing, and he honourably recused himself from this debate, rightly so. But every single member of the NDP is automatically a member of this secret organization that I'm referring to.

Now, this is within *Hansard*.

11:30

I'm going to go on to a response that the current Minister of Labour provided to our current House leader. The minister said:

Thank you very much, Madam Chair. There is no shadow party. The way that the member opposite is describing something that Elections Alberta and the Chief Electoral Officer are completely aware of and have been working with the . . . NDP [government] on is dramatic but incorrect.

So we have a matter of debate here. We're saying that this is incorrect, but the minister is saying that, more or less, she disagrees that this is happening, that this shadow party isn't happening.

To go on, I would like to go further down in her comments.

We will be working with the Chief Electoral Officer to make sure that our party complies fully with the acts that we have brought forward to get big money out of politics and to make sure that there is transparency and accountability in all [the] things that we do.

I certainly would like to thank the member for his concern, but I do . . . stress that there is no issue here. Unless he can explain how this exclusion from the definition of third party does what he is talking about, I [do] not [support] this amendment because, again, I think it shows that the member does not fully understand or have the details on this issue.

What we've got is that we warned the government. We warned them that, in the end, we would have parties using shadow parties to do their advertising because it is a loophole that the government left in their legislation that we repeatedly told them about. They chose to ignore this. Now we're seeing some of those results. These individuals that they are saying are working within dark money are within the rules the NDP themselves have set, and I believe they purposely set this because, in the end, it gave their NDP union brothers and sisters the ability to funnel money inappropriately.

Now we're seeing that this is working both ways. They're getting upset with the corporations who work diligently within Alberta making sure their voices are heard through the regulations that the NDP set for third-party advertising, and they're calling them, more or less, criminals. That's what this dark money is insinuating. Either their union friends and these corporations who are working within the guidelines that the NDP set are criminals, or they're actually just utilizing what loopholes this government left that the opposition has completely and thoroughly tried to explain to them as being a problem but that they ignored.

Well, this is just another example of why we need a committee. This is another example why we need to refer this to another committee, to ensure that we get this right.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to the referral motion for Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. This is a bill that brings forward some very important changes related to our electoral system. It's hard to argue

against changes to advance voting like adding an extra day for people to make it out to their polling station or like enabling people to vote wherever they are. Let us face it. Voter turnout is not typically all that great. When you read comment sections of news media or on social media or you look at platforms such as Reddit, you can see that people are quite happy to engage in conversation and debate around politics, but somehow that doesn't necessarily translate into election polling numbers.

If you look at the Elections Alberta site and seek out information on the past few general elections, you will see what I'm talking about. A full 53 per cent of people voted in May 2015, just over half. The election of 2012 also saw the same percentage of voters cast a ballot, and in 2008 only 38 per cent of Albertans turned up to vote. I think it's a good idea to try to find more ways of making voting easy and accessible for Albertans in the hopes that more of them will have their voices heard when it comes to choosing the new government.

I can reflect on my own constituency, Madam Speaker. The regional municipality of Wood Buffalo has traditionally the lowest turnouts for municipal, provincial, and federal elections nationally. That's because we work for a living, and we don't have time to necessarily consider those things even though you hope that our citizens do recognize the need to vote. Of course, with our next election just over a year away, this is an important time to be speaking about these election items and issues. I'm sure there are a large number of Albertans who are counting down the days until there is a new election and they can choose a new direction for our province.

Today, though, we're debating whether or not this bill should be sent to committee. Now, so far I've only touched on one aspect of the bill, and there's a lot more information contained in those pages that I've yet to talk about. But when I first stood up to speak, I said that I was speaking to the referral. Let me be perfectly clear that I don't think we need to send this legislation to committee to talk about advance voting opportunities. Like I said, I think there are some good pieces about portions of this bill. [interjections] Man, I'm getting it from all sides here.

I do think that there are a few things in the section that could somewhat complicate the matter, and I won't dwell on those for now. The reason I think this bill should be sent to committee is because of some of the other matters this legislation introduces. I think we need to have a longer conversation about the residency requirements. I think it is important that we hear from stakeholders and the Alberta public about what they think about what is being proposed here. And, quite honestly, there's nothing being sent to committee. At the federal level every bill gets sent to committee, where it allows an open debate with the contributions of the opposition. As well, it's mandated that they do consulting and that they do a proper consult and that they do hear from all the interested parties.

Again, your bill on daylight savings time was the model for consultation, and it's a shame that you don't consider that for the rest of your bills. I'm just not convinced that that's the way to go for some of these proposals here.

You move into a province on a Wednesday, and on Thursday you head into the polls? At that time you likely don't have proof of address, which makes it extremely difficult for elections staff to ascertain whether or not someone is able to vote. That's one reason why I think that this should be referred to committee. I'd like to see us have the opportunity to have some further discussion on this. Let's be sure that we know how this will work before we move forward with this legislation so that we can have a seamless process after the fact.

Committee is so important to our legislative process. Nowhere else do we have the ability to call forward experts, subject matter experts, people who are directly influenced by the legislation that we propose. It's a privilege to be able to call on these experts and hear their information and insight and be able to ask them questions, and it's a privilege that, unfortunately, we don't take advantage of enough here in this Assembly. When there are still countries where democracy is fragile at best, it seems a shame that we don't use all the avenues available to us to practise democracy to its fullest.

I should clarify that I think this government thinks that sending a bill to committee is somehow a slight against the minister or the legislation, and that is not true. You heard me talk about some of the advantages of this bill a bit earlier, Madam Speaker, so I think it's clear that taking this step would be to ensure that we're giving the bill proper due process and consideration.

11:40

Another thing that I think needs to be discussed more fully is the introduction of another new independent office of the Legislature. These are not steps to be taken lightly and, in fact, would be accompanied by what could be a substantial cost. Perhaps not everyone is aware right now, but our budget is not exactly what you would call balanced, and the government is still investing in more red ink.

I think it bears repeating that previously this government denied the legacy caucuses of the United Conservative Party when they put forward suggestions about creating independent offices for seniors or for the disabled. Actually, that is true. I was one of those people that did propose that the seniors' office be independent and appointed, for that matter, because we went over a year without one.

Why were these requests denied, Madam Speaker? I'm glad you asked. They were denied due to the costs involved with setting up such offices. It's a double standard being employed here. I think that it's also worth noting that the independent office being proposed here already has an office out of which they could work whereas the offices previously put forward by our legacy caucuses were unique offices. But the thing is: why does a proposed office of an elections commissioner need to be an office unto itself? It seems perfectly reasonable for me to operate the roles they're suggesting within the current Elections Alberta office. I see no conflict of interest between the Chief Electoral Officer and the elections commissioner. If there is such, I would be happy to hear about it from the minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Again, this is where the committee is so useful. We can hear from Elections Alberta, and we can hear from other electoral process experts. We could see what Albertans and stakeholders think. Albertans are counting on us to get things right, and I think that part of the process here involves sending this to committee to be able to flesh things out, to listen to those subject matter experts, to have that discussion, to engage the public.

There's nothing to be lost by sending Bill 32 to committee but possibly everything to be gained. For the benefit of all Albertans and to demonstrate a true transparent and accountable system, I ask that we do send this to committee, and I hope all members of this House will agree with this.

I thank you for your time.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Good morning, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to be recognized in the Chamber this morning. I'd like to compliment the member from the Fort McMurray region on his comments, and

I was wondering if he could expound on his comments there in regard to the idea of democratic renewal.

Mr. Yao: Madam Speaker, we should be quite proud of the democracy we have here. It is important that we need to encourage and emphasize for our citizens to be engaged more.

The flip side to this is that the number one country in the world where they are discouraging any oil investment – they're considered the lowest ideal place for investment in oil – is south of us, far south. It is a country where they currently and have for the last several years repeatedly jailed the opposition. Believe it or not, they'll put members of the opposition in jail. They will take the licences away from media groups like radio and television, from anyone who criticizes that government. There are persons who have been vocal against that government that have gone missing or have been discovered dead, and there is a lot of literature on this. Venezuela is a very tough country right now. The hope is that maybe they can get some democratic reforms in. Unfortunately, they are under the rule of a dictatorship, and it is very, very disconcerting to me that there would be members of this House that would support such a regime.

An Hon. Member: Really?

Mr. Yao: Absolutely. [interjections] You should check *Hansard* some time.

We need to recognize that we do have a beautiful country with amazing people and a system that has evolved and developed to the point where we do have the right to speak without fear of reprisal and that we have the right to influence who gets elected with our vote and that we have the ability to do other influences like freely go door to door without repercussions.

That said, in Fort McMurray I do have a hard time going door to door. It is a unique community because there are people that work long shifts, night shifts. You need to be careful about knocking on doors where they've been sleeping after working a night shift. But beyond little issues like that we're emboldened, we're empowered to communicate with our citizens. That is key, and that is important.

This bill, though, just requires some additional love, quite honestly, and that is why we do need to send this to committee. The committee is an opportunity for all groups to have their say in this. It has the ability for people to get more involved. This is a very large bill, and it was a very short time period that this government was asking for input. I've talked to some groups up in Fort McMurray, and they weren't even aware of – quite honestly, they're probably reflective of the general population – this bill. They weren't aware of many of these bills. But that said, no one reached out to them, and these are labour groups as well that have not been able to participate in this.

So to answer my good friend's question, democratic renewal: certainly, we need to demonstrate that we do have some transparency and accountability, that we need to move forward, and that we do need the input of all our citizens. I certainly hope that this government will consider that and support sending this bill to committee and support this referral motion on Bill 32.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his comments. He certainly said many things, and I believe I learned quite a bit. I was wondering, though: I don't recall him touching on the elimination portion of the Senatorial Selection Act, and I

wonder if he had any comments about what he thought maybe Albertans might have to say, of course, as it pertains to the importance of sending this for referral to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired for that particular portion.

Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, and good morning again, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and talk about democracy in the Chamber. It's interesting that for some members, many of us, that's why we are in this place, to make our opinions known, and it's interesting that other members have different experiences in regard to democracy and the presentation of it.

This government's Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, is important, and it's important to all Albertans, particularly my colleague from Airdrie. Moving this to committee, I believe, is a well-reasoned referral, and it's important that we be allowed to have the democratic process, Madam Speaker. That's part of the reason why we have the galleries, both the members' gallery and the government's gallery behind me, so that participants can come and at least watch the work that we do in this place. It's important.

Madam Speaker, I've been in this Chamber for some time, and it's interesting to note that the first presentation of this approximately 150-page document was presented in somewhat of a loose-leaf fashion, and the final, I would say more legal, presentation of it is presented in a proper bound fashion. This one, I guess I would say, is from the Queen's Printer. It's unfortunate that the government, even though they talk about environmental awareness and environmental consciousness in slang, you know – not many would appreciate the loss of this much paper and the desecration of wood products to create all this legislation. With some foresight and foreplanning, we have modern electronic ways of presenting this multifaceted omnibus style of bill.

11:50

To be presenting it late in the session with a great deal of urgency is somewhat of a go-to motive possibly, Madam Speaker, that the government has in their playbook and are doing their very level best to lever their actions with this 150-page document. Quite frankly, it could easily have been separated into two bills in the Legislature, one for election reform and one for election finance reform. I think that would be more definitive. But that could be sorted out in open committee discussion, and that's what our opposition members are trying to present to the Legislature here, that when it comes to open democracy, it's important. It's a significant part of democracy and democratic reform. Coming from a party that's named the New Democratic Party, I think it's somewhat ironic, but it's worth noting.

I would quote from my notes, Madam Speaker, that this legislation touches on many different areas, so I wonder exactly how much particular care and attention was given to ensuring that many if not all Albertans were consulted and that various stakeholders such as even Elections Alberta were fully engaged, including in the development of the bill. My colleague from Airdrie's motion for referral would ensure open and robust public discussion about that. We could bring all sorts of people to committee to present in many different fashions. And I have to think it's important to point out that there are portions of this bill that may actually enhance voter engagement, but unfortunately there are equally as many portions that, Madam Speaker, miss the mark.

It's great that the government has taken steps to prohibit government announcements during elections so as not to use taxpayer dollars to promote their obviously partisan interests. It's too bad that the exemptions for this portion of the bill are so numerous and extensive and leave too much wiggle room for the government to use their so-called discretion. The potential for abuse under the guise of keeping the public informed is still available. The list of exemptions needs to be shortened or restricted to ones dealing with public safety or any announcements that are required under law.

This government has already shown in the past that it can't resist making announcements while there is an active election going on, and with this long list of exceptions I have my doubts whether this will restrict them in any way. That's why hashing this out, Madam Speaker, in committee is so vital. It gives the opportunity to take that long list of exceptions and distill it down to those that will help make this more nonpartisan.

While on the topic, Madam Speaker, of fair elections I would really like to know where the idea for removing the six-month Alberta residency requirement came from, just as an example. We're here today to discuss this in an open public forum, a public place, so possibly the government members could talk about that. I'm fully in endorsement and receptive to new Albertans wanting to become politically engaged while in their new home. I've worked with many new Albertans coming from Europe in different fashions and who are so happy to be here in a freer and open and democratic environment. But I'm wondering if this isn't making too great of an allowance. Possibly another length like 30 or 60 days for the residency factor would be more reasonable. Some might say that the stipulations that we have in this proposed new legislation would allow some sort of a frivolous holiday excursion, and somebody would enter and think that they could vote.

That's why, Madam Speaker, an all-party committee is important, with proper engagement from interested stakeholders and public members, to give it absolute open and free time and proper due diligence. Surely the government wouldn't have an issue with that. Maybe the government will find out that it had it right this time and the committee will find that a complete removal of some portions is the thing to do. I would doubt that that would be the case, but why not allow a public and open discussion for that to take place?

You have noted how consultation always seems to miss the mark with this government. Either they did it incredibly poorly, as we found out and many members learned, I think, from political experience about the Bill 6 fiasco – Madam Speaker, I can remember that day standing up in this Chamber and asking why we as opposition and government members can't communicate, why the government members weren't communicating with the over 1,800 Albertans who were out on the steps of this Chamber. I think that there may be the possibility that there were leading questions

and that you can't help but arrive at a predetermined outcome, or they simply didn't engage with affected professional bodies like a certain group of nonhuman-practising medical professionals that weren't included in some more recent bill preparation.

Another point that needs to be brought to light is around the expense of a mandatory full door-to-door enumeration in every riding in the province prior to the next election. After all, Elections Alberta has priced out this option to cost approximately \$11 million. Given that the CEO has clearly stated that door-to-door enumeration is no longer an effective way to engage with the electorate, what we want to know is: why is this government not willing to take the advice of the CEO and allow for targeted enumeration combined with a full mail-out, which has been proven to yield more accurate results? That would cost, Madam Speaker, less than half, estimated at approximately \$5 million. Judging from our ballooning debt, this seems a much more reasonable alternative. As the debt rises, we need to tighten our economic belts, and sometimes the government misses that mark as well.

It was found out that in the last election 60 per cent of returning officers had difficulty recruiting enumerators. Enumerators also expressed safety concerns and are now required to travel in pairs, leading to skyrocketing costs for door-to-door enumeration given the doubling up of their staff. We also see that increasingly Albertans are not willing to answer their doors to strangers. That was one complaint that I heard from folks when we discussed legislation around the merits of getting rid of door-to-door energy sales in the last election. The government was very adamant in coming forward with that legislation. Madam Speaker, this is the kind of insight we would get into deeper if only we engaged with Albertans through the use of a legislative committee.

Madam Speaker, I see members opposite looking at the clock, wondering why we're continuing to be involved in this democratic process. It's the reason that we're here. I know you're listening intently, Madam Speaker. It's an important part of what we're doing.

If I could continue speaking about fiscal belt-tightening, I wonder why when we asked that the government advocate for the creation of an independent office of the Legislature for seniors or the disabled, it was denied based on the expense, but now we see that the government is interested in establishing an independent officer of the Legislature for the investigation and prosecution of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 6, 2017

Day 62

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Statement by the Speaker

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women

The Speaker: On this day 28 years ago 14 Montreal students were killed for being women. I'm the proud father of four daughters, who I encouraged to grow up and to ignore artificial boundaries which others may place on them because of their gender. I now share the same message with my granddaughters. This event, more than a quarter century ago, was a hate-filled attempt to prove to myself and other proud fathers and mothers that we were wrong to encourage our daughters to be whatever they wanted to be, whomever they wanted to be, and to love whoever they wanted to love.

That man failed in his objective, and that is proven to me on a daily basis when I come into this Chamber of the Legislature each and every day. This man's failure is not only proven to me by the number of women in the Assembly but by the millions of Albertans who voted in 28 female MLAs and by those who voted for hundreds of other candidates who were not as successful. Our citizens do not look at gender but ability in casting their ballot.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the ambassador for the State of Kuwait to Canada, His Excellency Abdulhamid Alfaiakawi. Kuwait and Alberta have much in common, especially the strength of our energy sectors and the common goal of increasing renewable energy production by 2030. We were happy to lead a delegation of Alberta companies to Kuwait last month, in November 2017, to explore opportunities in the region. In fact, there are many opportunities to collaborate and innovate in the energy sector, but there are also many opportunities in agriculture, agri-food, advanced manufacturing, education, and health services, to name a few. We look forward to continuing to explore these avenues with His Excellency, to expand relations between our province and Kuwait. I'd now invite all members of the Assembly to join me in giving the ambassador a warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to be able to introduce some friends and students from l'école Greenview school in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The students are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Cheri Krywko and Ms Amanda Kates. They also are

joined by chaperones Mrs. Miranda Macauley, Mrs. Renae Dyck, Jill Cahoon, and Leonard De Guzman. I hope that they've enjoyed their time here at the Legislature. It is such a pleasure to be able to see them here. I will be by to read stories soon. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of seniors it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a school group from the riding she represents, Edmonton-Riverview. There are 30 grade 6 students who are here from Crestwood junior high. We're confident that they'll enjoy their time here at the Legislature and have many good, probing questions to follow up with their teacher and others. They are here with their teacher, Trina Ludwig, and the adult chaperones Mr. Lane Monteith and Dianne Kirwin. We thank them very much for being here. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. First, I would like to introduce 11 members of the home-school field trip group who reside in Edmonton-Rutherford along with their chaperones, Mrs. Joanne MacDonald, Mrs. Karen Roth, and Mrs. Heather Reich. I would ask them all to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Now my second introduction. We have some friends in the gallery from the South West Edmonton Collaborative. It's a group of service providers who get together in my riding of Edmonton-Rutherford every month to discuss how they can provide services for our neighbours and families who call Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Whitemud, and Edmonton-South West home. My staff have the pleasure of attending these meetings as I am often unable to do so. I will read through their names and ask them to stand as I do so. We have Ev Simpson, Karen Lee, Wendy Melnyk, Rhea Bowman, Connie Marciniuk, Jennie McLester, Andrea Seeger, and Thomas Bonifacio. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of grade 6 students from the beautiful city of St. Albert, from the Wild Rose elementary school. I believe they are behind me. I'll get them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today in the House to introduce to you and through you my constituency assistants Sabeen Vasti and Mohammad Alam. They are very dedicated and very devoted CAs, such as I could possibly imagine having, so I would like to thank them for their efforts and for being with us today. Thank you so much. Please give them a round of applause.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a constituent, dear friend, community

volunteer, and mentor, Mr. Jack Redekop. I met Jack when he was volunteer president of a community-managed family leisure centre, and through a long process of trust and collaboration we were able to establish the Trico Centre for Family Wellness as a corporate, public, and community partnership with Trico Homes, who I was employed with at the time. Jack is a graduate of the U of A, a chartered accountant, a successful business owner, employer, entrepreneur through his company Computer Upgrading Specialists. As an aside, another pinnacle of Jack's life is having summited Mount Kilimanjaro with his two sons.

Mr. Cooper: Twice?

Mr. Gottfried: No. Just once.

Jack is an inspirational community volunteer, having coached hockey for many years, served as president of the Trico Centre, and has served in senior leadership roles on various provincial and federal constituency associations, including his current role on my newly formed Calgary-Fish Creek UCP association. Jack is also a giving and passionate member of his church and brings his commitment and spirituality to all he does for Alberta and in the community. Mr. Speaker, I would ask Jack to rise and remain standing to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly seven people who contribute greatly to agriculture and forestry research in the communities I'm proud to represent in Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. As I introduce their names, I'd ask them to rise. Audrey Gall and Vance Yaremko are from the Smoky Applied Research and Demonstration Association, better known up our way as SARDA, which is based in Falher. It was established in 1986 to bring research institutions, industry, and ag producers together to share information, and their vision is to one day own an advanced ag resource centre of excellence.

We also have Liisa Vihvelin from the Peace Country Beef & Forage Association, which is a hub of innovation and research that benefits beef, forage, and crop producers in the Peace region. Also, I would like to welcome Tom McMillan from the Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta, Melissa Freeman from the West-Central Forage Association, Roger Harbord from the Lakeland Agricultural Research Association, and Sean LaBrie from the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that these groups receive and work together under a fund from the Alberta opportunities fund. I wanted to recognize each of them for their contribution to both ag and forestry. My personal thanks to them. Please join me to welcome them here in the Assembly today.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly, it's my pleasure to introduce and congratulate a long-time Edmontonian who was recently inducted into the Hershey Bears' hall of fame. Roger DeJordy was a prolific goal scorer for the Calder Cup winning AHL Bears, including 52 goals scored in the 1966-67 season, and Roger also played many years for the Edmonton Flyers and the Edmonton Monarchs seniors. He's accompanied today in the gallery by his wife, Mary Paraszczak, and I would ask my guests to now rise and all my

friends in the Legislature to extend the customary welcome to this hall of famer.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a long-time friend of mine, Mr. Al Browne. Al has been a businessman in Alberta and British Columbia for over 45 years. He's past president of the Alberta hotel association, past board member of the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association and of the SAIT Board of Governors, and a proud UCP volunteer. I would ask Al to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you today a pair of people, starting with Zoe Szeremet. Zoe is with us all the way from Australia to witness a legendary Alberta Legislature question period. Zoe is accompanied today by Tyler van Vliet, a long-time friend. Tyler has been door-knocking with me since he was 15 years old. He currently works in my office in Calgary. I would ask both of them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 19 students from Londonderry junior high school in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning. They are accompanied by Annette Zielinski, assistant principal at Londonderry junior high, and Peggy Wright, a teacher at John Barnett school. Last year I held a consultation with all the grade 6 classes across the constituency on how an idea can become a bill, and I'm honoured to have some of those students here today for the introduction of my private member's bill. I would like them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some amazing individuals from the Paralympic Sports Association. Joining us today are Amy MacKinnon and Gary Marcellus. The PSA offers supports and recreation programs for children, youth, adults, and seniors with physical and/or developmental disabilities and has been the launch pad for many national and Paralympic-level athletes. Also, I will add that they have offered to organize sledge hockey tryouts for the members if they so choose. I will ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

You have another introduction.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three distinct guests who have returned from volunteering at the Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. As you are aware, there is extreme persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and while the

conflict and crisis seem to be a world away, let's be clear that racism, discrimination, and prosecution, regardless of where in the world they're occurring, are unacceptable. Our guests are family physicians who travelled to help by volunteering at a medical camp and continue to do important work here in Canada to assist those who are so desperately in need.

Joining us today are Dr. Fozia Alvi, Dr. Sameena Bajwa, and Dr. Fizza Rafiq, with husbands Dr. Zahid Rafiq and Dr. Abdul Kamran. They are showing us the importance of standing together to put an end to persecution and racial violence, both here at home and abroad. In light of the heartbreaking racial vandalism in Calgary yesterday, their visit to our House seems even more timely. I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a day when we remember 14 women whose lives were taken from them because they dared to enrol in an engineering program at l'école Polytechnique, it is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two amazing women from the Women Building Futures organization, which calls Edmonton-Centre home. Women Building Futures prepares women for careers in skilled trade industries, where women have historically been underrepresented. These career paths are transformational for women, their families, their communities, and Alberta's workplaces. WBF has graduated over 2,000 women and has an employment rate of over 90 per cent.

Here today are Kathy Kimpton, CEO and president, and Jacqueline Andersen, director of stakeholder relations. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you Jana Tondou, who is a constituent of Edmonton-Glenora. She's seated in the members' gallery today, and I ask her to rise. Jana is an energetic, passionate, and community-minded volunteer. She is a hard-working limnologist, our water quality expert, with Alberta Environment and Parks and ensures that Albertans have safe drinking water. Jana was born in Wainwright and now resides in the community of Woodcroft. I'm very fortunate to know her, proud to work with her and for her, and proud of the work that she does to support our government. Please join me in extending the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my fabulous and hard-working constituency office staff, Kathryn Casement and Michael Mooney, who do everything they can every day to make sure the constituents of Calgary-East are connected to the government and also make sure that I look good, whether I'm in need of coffee or speaking notes or, you know, sometimes lipstick. If they could rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature two guests who are founding members of the building safer communities block watch program in the northern hills of Calgary. Tavis Settles lives with his family in Covewood Green in Country Hills. He's a lifelong resident of Alberta and works with Secure Energy Services in their IT department. Shane McEwen lives in Coville Circle with his family. He grew up in Quill Lake, Saskatchewan, and is a project marketing manager for the life safety division of Honeywell. I'd like to thank them both for joining us here today. If they'd please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: If I may, Mr. Speaker, I have a second introduction here. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members Dylan Liley, who is originally from Davidson, Saskatchewan, and now lives in the Mill Creek Ravine area of Edmonton with his family. He proudly raises his children Marigold and Fredrik, who are in grade 1 and preschool and attend the Escuela Mill Creek immersion program. Dylan has had numerous businesses on Whyte Ave., including Vespa Edmonton, and now works in business development in oil and gas and in industrial capital and maintenance projects internationally. I'd ask Dylan and his daughter Marigold to rise, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Greenhouse Gas Large Emitter Regulations

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, today the minister of environment announced the replacement of the specified gas emitters regulation with something called the carbon competitiveness incentives regulation. Alberta has had a price on emissions for a decade now, and since the NDP imposed the 100-megatonne cap on those emissions, now the NDP are tightening the belt, squeezing this same industry for more money.

A confidential leaked government analysis of the NDP's own plans reveals the devastating cost of the NDP policy. The Alberta climate change office estimates the total cost to the energy industry at around \$1.3 billion per year, starting in 2018. The Alberta climate change office estimates that six oil sands projects may be at risk under the proposed output-based allocation structure. An Alberta Energy analysis, on the other hand, identified up to 15 oil sands projects that may be at risk, which could result in reduction in production and investments in Alberta.

Alberta Energy anticipates that the potential impact from output-based allocation combined with the pending methane regulations could have a greater employment loss than the estimated impacts associated with the coal phase-out. Yesterday's announcement of \$1.4 billion over seven years for innovation projects, of which only \$440 million is innovation to increase production while lowering emissions, is nothing but trying to close the barn door after the horse has left.

The facts remain. The NDP is siphoning billions of dollars from our productive oil and gas sector and handing the money to their special-interest friends for risky schemes. NDP policies, Mr. Speaker, are killing the economy and jobs, and they'd better stop it.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Greenhouse Gas Large Emitter Regulations

Mr. Nixon: A confidential government analysis of the NDP's own plans reveal the devastating costs of the latest NDP policy. The government's own analysis says that the output-based allocation requirements will have material impacts on the competitiveness of the oil and gas facilities in Alberta. It goes on to say that the total costs of the OBA requirements to the energy industry in Alberta will cost approximately \$1.3 billion a year. The question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier. Why are the NDP once again knowingly attacking the oil and gas industry and the Albertans that they employ?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the opposition is living in the past and wants to beat Alberta right into the ground. The material in this particular case that they are referring to over there is months old, and they know it. It's based on decisions that were never taken. Here in the present, however, we are investing \$1.4 billion in innovation, and people like CAPP are saying: it is good to see innovation being recognized as part of the carbon plan; it's something that our industry is obviously very committed to. We are proud to work with Albertans. That other side just wants to keep yelling at them.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the internal analysis makes reference to the sale of oil sands assets by international companies, events that occurred just this last spring, but if the government wants to insist that this analysis is outdated, all they need to do is release their latest updated impact analysis. To the Premier: will you release your government's latest analysis of how many Albertans will lose their jobs over your heavy-handed, ideological decisions? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the minister of environment was in Calgary today releasing the actual decisions that this government has made. But, you know, when it comes to the members opposite, keep in mind that these are the same folks who have denied climate change again and again. In contrast to that, what our government is going to do is responsibly reduce emissions, and we are going to work with and support industry as we do it. For instance, the president and CEO of the Cement Association of Canada said that our work on carbon competitiveness included – and I quote – the most collaborative stakeholder consultation exercise I have ever seen.

Mr. Panda: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier is calling people names when we're talking about something as serious as thousands of people losing their jobs.

This internal memo says that \$1.5 billion will be lost. That's a significant amount. It says that thousands of jobs will be lost, another significant amount at a time when we've already seen 12,000 jobs lost last month alone, 1,000 jobs alone just as a result of the methane decisions that this government is making, more jobs lost than we've seen because of the coal phase-out that this government brought in. That is serious. The Premier wants to say

that this is outdated. Will she at least stand up, then, and guarantee that nobody will lose a job as a result of her latest ideological decision?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to do that, you know, because, as I've said, the memo that the member refers to is completely out of date and is based on decisions that we never took. In fact, what we did instead was that we spent months meeting with and consulting with industry to find a way to work with them collaboratively. That's exactly what we did, and that is why yesterday we announced a \$1.4 billion innovation fund to work with industry to help them reduce their emissions while repositioning ourselves as the progressive energy producer in the world. That's what we are building in this province, and I'm very proud of that.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are concerned about the sustained attack by the NDP government on their jobs, on their energy industry, and on things like that because of ideological agendas that are being put forward by this government. The Premier wants to say that the analysis has changed since the analysis that I am referring to, so I will ask her: what has changed that will now result in us not losing thousands of jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, for instance, the document that the member referred to refers to a methane plan which we haven't actually introduced or acted on yet. In fact, that work is going on with industry right now. It refers to an OBA plan, which we also didn't introduce. Instead what we introduced is the one that we introduced today, which is significantly different. So there are a number of ways in which that document is completely false, completely inaccurate. I would suggest that the member opposite do a little bit more research before he comes into the House and asks these questions over and over and over again. We're working with the industry. We're proud . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the document that I referred to also says that six oil sands projects will be cancelled as a result of these decisions. Many, many more will see reduced investments as a result of the NDP's decision. The Premier wants to stand up and question the analysis that is from her own government and say that it's outdated. But the question I have asked already and will ask again, despite the Deputy Premier heckling while I speak, is: will you stand up and will you make sure to release the new analysis? Yes or no? If not, there probably, really, is not one.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the new analysis and the work that we have done was actually released today by our minister of environment in Calgary. I urge the member opposite to read the newspaper tomorrow, and hopefully he'll find the answers to the questions that he's asking. Of course, that announcement is part of our larger plan of working with industry to reduce our emissions and reposition our energy industry, again, as I said, as the most sustainable and responsible energy industry in the world, something that will actually grow jobs and ensure the sustainability of the industry for years and years.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is dodging this issue again. Yes, the minister announced something this morning. That is what

I am referring to. Because she says that the analysis that we have from her government is now out of date, what I asked the Premier was: is there a new economic analysis associated with the minister's announcement this morning? Yes or no? If there is, will the Premier release it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is referring to a memo that is not an economic analysis. The member opposite is referring to a memo that talks about a couple of policies that may or may not have been introduced, which weren't, and that includes a bunch of general statements that are not an economic analysis. What is true is what we announced today as a result of working with industry. Part of what we've done is that we've announced a \$1.4 billion innovation fund, which we know will create jobs, will create diversification, will reduce emissions, and will help Alberta's economy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Third main question.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we lost 12,000 jobs last month alone under this Premier's watch. We have an economic analysis, a document from her own government that says that we'll lose thousands more as a result of her decisions. I asked a simple question to the Premier. She says that this analysis is now out of date. Fair enough. If it is, have they done a new one? If they have, will they release it? If they haven't, that's even more alarming, that they would move forward with these policies without doing a true economic analysis of the impacts of their ideological decisions.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, one person's ideology is another person's acceptance of science. Now, I understand that for the members opposite, their ideology struggles with the notion of climate change. Their ideology struggles with the notion of dealing with the environment, respecting the environment, supporting people who are concerned about the environment. Their ideology struggles, frankly, with planning for the future at all. Thankfully, they are not in charge; we are. We've been working with industry. We are so proud of the relationship and the partnership that we've been able to establish, and we know that together we are going to move Alberta forward.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are getting really tired of the Premier doing this. When she can't answer a question, she stands up and calls this side of the House names. She calls me names. That's what she does. She yells; she screams; she fearmongers. I asked a simple question: do you have another economic analysis of the decisions that you have made and announced today? Yes or no? If you do, will you release it, and if you don't, can you explain why you have not done one? [interjection]

The Speaker: Caution.
The hon. Premier.

2:00

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, the minister released the OBA decisions today. Those are the product of significant conversations with significant players in industry, conversations about where we would be able to move forward in terms of investing in emissions reduction, in diversification, and in jobs, ultimately. We are going to go forward with that. We know that in the long haul the climate leadership plan was critical to getting the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline, and of course we know that that is a critical element in . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the NDP have lost all credibility on this file. They have two cancelled pipelines, another pipeline that is being blocked and is looking more and more unlikely to be built, unfortunately, because the NDP won't take clear action. The question is so simple that we have repeatedly asked this Premier. She will not answer. She is obviously dodging it because she clearly does not have an economic analysis. The most recent one that we have in our possession clearly shows that thousands of jobs will be lost. Billions of dollars of investment will be gone. Albertans will be punished as a result of this Premier and this NDP's ideological decision. Do you have an economic impact analysis? Do you have any analysis that you could provide, or if not, why not?

Ms Notley: Well you know, Mr. Speaker, again I would suggest that if the member opposite is looking for the updated version of the document that they refer to, I suggest that they go to the front page of the *Edmonton Journal*. It's there for them. I know it's a bit of a challenge in terms of their research budget. Nonetheless, by all means, go ahead. Read the paper. I'm hopeful that that will answer their many questions. We're very proud to work with industry, and we are proud to continue to move Alberta forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

PDD Service Delivery

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supports for persons with disabilities are needed now more than ever. Recently I learned that the turnover rate of PDD staff is 40 per cent every six months, meaning many families have a new caseworker at least twice a year, and caseworkers are already stretched with 200-plus cases. This is not sustainable. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: after two and a half years of your mandate why is the caseload still so high for PDD caseworkers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government is protecting and improving the supports Albertans with disabilities depend on. That is why despite the tough economic time we have added funds so that people can get the support they need in a timely fashion.

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Party has learned that new intakes into PDD are funded at 2013 rates, and people who rely on PDD services are in dire need of predictable service. Further, advocates report that when asked, the government has been unclear regarding how many dollars are allocated for certain services and how much can be spent to provide them. To the Premier: when can the government guarantee that PDD funding will directly reach people who need it most?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PDD program has two different streams: the family-managed stream and through agencies. Eighty five per cent of the funding reaches Albertans directly through service providers, and 15 per cent is family managed, where the family gets the funding, and they get to hire the staff and services. That's how this funding gets to Albertans.

Ms McPherson: Recently I learned that PDD staff are required to submit personal outcome index reports on a quarterly basis but do not receive feedback in return. I also learned that there is not a clear

line of communication between Alberta Health Services and PDD despite the fact that a liaison between the two was announced. To the Premier. These are only two examples of communication breakdowns that negatively impact PDD clients. How will you fix this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of our record when it comes to working with PDD. We have worked with the community on all issues that matter to them, and we are taking a crossministry approach. We are working with our partners within government and within the community to make sure that the community gets what they need, and we are involving them in all decision-making.

With respect to communication the Premier's council on persons with disabilities is one example, that it got 15 members for the first time in a long time under our watch. We are also moving forward with hiring a new disability advocate, which will make sure that their voices are reflected . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Education Concerns

Loyola: Mr. Speaker, parents in the constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie have contacted me directly to specifically request why the government has struck the word "specialized" from the School Act in section 16.2. To the Minister of Education: can you please explain the rationale for this change and what the end objective of this change means for parents in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The term "specialized" was only appearing in one section in the School Act, 16.2, and this change will make the legislation clearer. Removing the term does not in any way reduce or alter the supports that students receive. Of course, all students in our fine schools have a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn, and our investment in education and our progressive policies aim to keep it that way.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you. Again to the minister: to ensure that parents in school communities have clarity on this important issue, what is the expectation of parents regarding their role in their children's education as defined in the School Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the critical role that parents play in our children's education has been reinforced throughout the School Act and in all of our policies that we move forward on. Our government understands that helping through homework and parent-teacher interviews and any other countless ways that parents help to have their children have a fine education – we reinforce that both in policy and in investment and in action.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that parents play a critical role in the education of their children and that it's important that their role be understood, respected, and valued, again to the minister: how are school staff expected to involve parents in

decisions about the kinds of supports and services provided to help their children succeed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, that's a very good question. The school boards are obligated, in fact, to respect the rights of parents when it comes to decisions around education and for programming and so forth. That includes the ability for parents to choose school programming that they think best ensures their child's success and to advocate for that programming or special means that their child might need in order to get the best education possible in our schools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Veterinary Education

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October it was announced that the University of Calgary's school of veterinary medicine would increase enrolment from 130 to 200 students. Now, that move is widely supported, but what's not so popular was the very quiet announcement that Alberta was pulling out of a 54-year-old agreement with the other western provinces to fund the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon, a move that has disappointed both that college and our provincial partners in the agreement. To the minister: at a time when our province is trying to work with our western neighbours, why are you deliberately snubbing them by tearing up a deal that has served Albertans so well for over a half century?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's important for us to invest in postsecondary education, which our government has done. The focus of the veterinarian money for the University of Calgary, I think, is a good one because we're of course investing in the University of Calgary, so students are being able to go from the province of Alberta and focus on a school. We're supporting that postsecondary institution and thus helping to grow this form of postsecondary education here in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Saskatoon and Calgary veterinary colleges use very different approaches for teaching clinical skills to their students and given that some students thrive in a more closely supervised teaching hospital environment while others thrive in an externship in a practice in the field and given that having a choice in learning style has been a huge advantage for Alberta students training for their veterinary careers, to the minister: why are you eliminating choice in veterinary education for Alberta's veterinary students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I think that investing in an Alberta school and investing in the capacity of an Alberta school to actually perform and to deliver veterinary services is not such a bad idea. As they grow along the way, they can certainly continue those long-standing partnerships that we've had with the University of Saskatchewan, thus building a relationship that will strengthen veterinary services right across this province.

2:10

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, that's weak.

Each year over 400 Alberta students apply for the 50 available spaces at the Saskatoon and Calgary veterinary schools, and given

that the shift to the University of Calgary adds exactly zero new spaces for Alberta students wishing to pursue veterinary education and since the forecasted need for additional veterinarians in Alberta in the next 10 years exceeds that number by nearly 500, to the minister: given the high demand for veterinary education from Alberta students and the need for hundreds more veterinarians, why not keep the 20 spaces at Saskatoon and add 20 to the University of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hardly think that investing in an Alberta university to build support and build veterinary services – it's not weak. It's quite the opposite. It's foresight. It's a strong decision. It's looking ahead to build that capacity right here in the province of Alberta. We can work with the University of Saskatchewan as well, but what better place to invest Alberta money than in an Alberta university?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Carbon Policy Economic Impact Analysis

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are used to seeing the NDP rob Peter to pay Paul, but yesterday they put a new spin on it: Peter goes bankrupt. Out marched three smiley ministers to tell the energy industry not to fret because the NDP is going to return, well, a sliver toward innovation from the billions they're taking. This Minister of Environment claims that output-based allocations are to lower emissions by forcing innovation, but how on earth does giving back a fraction of what you're costing the industry keep our job creators thriving, and what are you doing with the rest of that money?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. I mean, I'm going to try to introduce the members opposite to the fact that the world is changing. The world is moving toward more ethical, sustainable ways of extracting and producing our resources. That is something that our government is supporting through innovation. I think it's a little offensive that the member opposite refers to \$1.4 billion being invested in innovation across our energy sector but also food processing and agricultural space – I can tell the members opposite that industry is very, very pleased with this announcement.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. MacIntyre: I think it's shameful that this minister would call our industry historically unethical, Mr. Speaker.

It is clear that this government's own bureaucrats know that the NDP's denial of facts is sending our province into an irreconcilable tailspin. Given that the minister of environment said that she had not seen the leaked report yet still somehow knew the data was, quote, quite outdated and contains inaccurate information, how can Albertans trust this government's quick dismissal of this report when the minister decided to cast it as inaccurate before she even saw it?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, once again the members are citing a document that is old and outdated and that put forward a number of different options that our government did not choose to pursue. What we did pursue: the environment minister announced today in Calgary that we are not only going to reduce our emissions, but we

also have a best-in-class approach. What we are doing is incenting a race to the top to ensure that we can get our high-quality products to the international markets.

Mr. MacIntyre: The hon. Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier sincere questions about Albertans' futures that are on the line. These are not just numbers. These OBAs are more than just numbers. They are jobs. They are livelihoods. They are the well-being of Alberta's families. Given the Premier's comment moments ago to watch for the front page of a newspaper, are we to understand that this Premier refuses to answer direct questions in this Chamber and instead communicates to this Legislature via news releases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are investing in a low-carbon economy of tomorrow while Jason Kenney and the UCP are picking fights and putting up walls. Our industry gets it. In fact, this week Suncor took its first step to set up two cogen units at its oil sands base plant. Steve Williams, the Suncor president and CEO, said, "We believe that bold, ambitious action is required by all of us to effectively tackle the climate change challenge," something where we're still trying to convince the members of the opposition that it exists.

Greenhouse Gas Large Emitter Regulations (continued)

Mr. Panda: So much for news releases, Mr. Speaker. Today's announcement of the carbon competitiveness incentives sees another blow to Alberta industry. A hundred and ten companies across 13 industrial sectors will pay for their output-based allocations based on industry-specific benchmarks, costing \$1.3 billion per year and every year. To the Minister of Energy: whose benchmark are you using for the oil sands industry? It better not be the Carnegie oil-climate index. Is it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new carbon competitiveness incentives will support large industrial emitters to be more competitive while reducing emissions and encouraging investment in renewables. Rather than paying lip service to reducing emissions, something members over there, former members, when they were in government did, our approach rewards a best in class for large emitters. This is going to encourage a race to the top. The members opposite have no clue what that is. They would rather see a race to the bottom, stick their heads in the ground, pretend that climate change isn't real, and beat our Alberta oil and gas . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the leaked memo says that the Alberta climate change office puts six oil sands projects at risk and given that Alberta Energy believes that 15 oil sands projects are at risk of negative gross profit margins from these output-based allocations and since the Energy and Environment departments are at odds and cannot agree, to the Premier: how many oil sands projects are at risk, six or 15? Who is telling the truth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll remind the member and the House and Albertans that, once again, the information the opposition is using is completely dated and does not reflect the

substantial work that our government has done with industry. Now, I appreciate that the opposition loves to jump up and down and scream and run down Alberta businesses, run down Alberta industry. What I can tell you is that our government for over two years has been working collaboratively with industry to come up with a plan that ensures that they are not only going to remain viable but that we are going to increase their competitiveness to be able to compete on the global scale. We have the support of industry. I wish the opposition . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP plan to spend \$1.4 billion on innovation over seven years to cut emissions and given the analysis on the output-based allocation shows that royalty revenue is projected to drop by at least \$140 million by 2021, to the Premier: how do you expect to balance the budget when the NDP succeeds to shut down the oil sands, lay off workers, and lose royalties?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, the premise of that message or question couldn't be further from the truth. I'll remind the members of all of the investments that have been occurring within our oil and gas sector, including JACOS, the Japan oil and gas company, that invested \$2 billion to expand their facilities. We see Suncor is investing. We see other companies expanding their assets and looking at making investments. Thank goodness the opposition isn't government because they truly would kill our oil and gas sector.

Mrs. Pitt: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: We are working collaboratively with them. We are coming up with programs that are going to incent innovation.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: I'll just make this observation to both sides of the House. You've heard me speak to this before. Nonetheless, I just want to remind you that words that are of violence are not well received by me. However, please note that I drew that to your attention on a couple of occasions but have chosen to pass thus far.

2:20 Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction Carbon Policy Economic Impact Analysis

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, on November 30 last year in this House I asked the Minister of Energy about the Trans Mountain pipeline, and she stated, "I understood that shovels will be in the ground within the year." Well, a year later and only 66 of 1,200 permits have been issued, never mind any shovels in the ground. So let's try this again. To the Minister of Energy: today, so Albertans will know, within which year do you understand that real shovels will be in the ground for Trans Mountain?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, our government is not backing down on our fight for Alberta jobs and the Alberta energy sector. We're closer than ever to breaking landlock, and we're working with the energy companies, in particular Kinder Morgan, on the permitting issues. We're working hand in hand, and that pipeline will be built.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, I might have to go to my Chinese zodiac to figure out which year.

Given that Trans Mountain shovels will create good, mortgage-paying jobs in Alberta and B.C. and given that a leaked internal memo indicates that a combination of output-based allocations and methane requirements will lead to significant job losses – we will need those Trans Mountain shovel jobs just to combat NDP driven job loss – to the Minister of Energy. The minister of the environment called this information inaccurate and outdated. Surely, you have completed a thorough economic analysis. When can Albertans see this economic analysis, or are you flying blind with no regard for the impact your policies are having on Alberta job retention and creation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you, again, that today in Calgary the Minister of Environment and Parks announced our new output-based allocations. The documents the opposition continues to refer to are outdated. It's information that our government did not act on. What they can see if they want to go online is what our government is doing when it comes to output-based allocations. I can tell you that yesterday we made an announcement about investing \$1.4 billion in innovation that is going to enhance and improve the processes and practices. We are collaboratively working with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One job. Outdated and inaccurate.

Given that the NDP has never released an economic impact assessment of the carbon tax despite holding that information internally and given that the NDP will not release an economic impact assessment for the upcoming changes to the output-based allocations and methane requirements, which the leaked internal memo indicates will cost more jobs than the coal phase-out, again to the minister: why does your open and transparent government continue to wilfully withhold important economic impact information from Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Jason Kenney and the members opposite are more interested in putting their own political interests before the economic interests of our companies and the employment of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and that is shameful. On this side of the House we take thoughtful information received by the public service and use it to inform good public policy. We're working with employers, and we're investing in an industry and in jobs to support all Albertans. It's about time you guys stopped playing politics and started standing up for Alberta jobs.

Caribou Range Plans

Mr. Loewen: The government's response to the caribou situation in Alberta has been fraught with a lack of transparency, consultation, and, frankly, a lack of common-sense solutions. Many citizens, industries, and local governments across Alberta are nervously waiting as protection plans are being developed. Albertans were promised that the plans would be shared by the fall, but the leaves have fallen, the snow has arrived, yet we still have not seen any caribou range plans. I'm concerned that these delays will limit the time the government has to consult with impacted communities. Time is running out. Will the minister of environment

commit to properly engage with industries and the residents around them before the plans are finalized?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell the member and the House is that the Minister of Environment and Parks and the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry have been working very collaboratively to ensure that we're doing two things. One, we know that we need to protect our caribou. We know that if we don't come up with a robust plan, the federal government can impose one on Alberta. But what I can tell you is that we have also been working very closely with the forestry sector and will ensure that we are protecting forestry jobs. What we are doing is finding a balance to ensure that we're protecting caribou and also protecting the jobs of hard-working men and women in the forestry sector.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the collaboration the minister talks about is nonexistent according to the people involved and given that the caribou range planning process could profoundly reshape our communities which have natural resource dependent economies, what is the NDP doing to ensure that the 13.4 million hectares of Alberta's working forest that are claimed to be caribou ranges remain available for proper development by our forest and energy sectors, which the communities and families of the region rely on to provide employment and economic development in the area? Will these opportunities be hampered in any way?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. I will tell him that we have been working closely with First Nations communities, with municipalities, with the forestry sector. I come from forestry, Mr. Speaker, and my family, so I understand what good forestry jobs are like. I had the opportunity to go up to High Level this summer. I know that previous to that the minister of environment was up there to explain about the plan. This is a good plan that we're trying to put forward and work collaboratively on with people in this province so that the feds don't impose their plan on us, which would harm our sectors of forestry and energy and the municipalities and the First Nations. We're sticking up for Albertans.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the people affected would like to see these plans before they're finalized with the federal government and given that this government seems to be missing deadlines with the federal government and given that there is still an enormous amount of consultation to be done and given that section 11 within the Species at Risk Act allows for a conservation agreement and discussion to continue, to the minister. At the federal level I've heard that you and this government are refusing to invoke section 11 to continue discussion on caribou range plans with the federal government to avoid a protection order and plan to go straight to final approval. Is this true, minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, and thank you very much to the member for the question. As I said, we've been working closely with groups that are affected and with the federal government. I'll tell you this. We're working with industry and environmental groups, and the previous government had 20 years to fix the problem and did nothing. We're taking action to develop a balanced

strategy, to balance caribou and jobs. They'd rather we sit on our hands, which would lead to more job losses.

An Hon. Member: Be honest, minister. Be honest.

Mr. S. Anderson: We're working to provide economic certainty for industry and people in these communities. They would leave industry and workers in limbo. That's not how we do work on this side of the House. We have Albertans' backs, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the use of phrases such as "be honest" do not help the tenor of this place. I want to remind you in a friendly way again to avoid those kinds of comments. They do not show the respect that is warranted.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

PDD Service Delivery (continued)

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans continue to face long wait-lists for PDD services, especially for FMS, or family-managed services. With a centralized and overwhelmed intake department and slow assessment process, many people end up stuck on a wait-list, which compounds health crises for people with developmental disabilities and burdens families and caregivers. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: what have you done to shrink wait-lists and red tape for people who depend on FMS?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess it's a spend day on that side today.

What we have done, Mr. Speaker, is that we have increased funding to PDD programs, which include programs for families with children with disabilities so that they can get the supports they need in a timely fashion. We have also appointed a new council, a parent advisory council, to advise us on issues that matter to families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the wait-list for PDD and FMS is growing and given that no system is in place to co-ordinate services between AHS and PDD, again to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Albertans are caught in a bureaucratic nightmare, and in the two and a half years you've been in power you've done nothing to fix it. When will we see a one-stop shop for PDD services, no matter which government department is responsible?

2:30

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, there is a one-stop shop, and Community and Social Services is responsible for administering this program. In two and a half years our track record is clear. We have worked with the PDD community to repeal safety standards, which were imposed by the previous government. We've worked with them to repeal the supports intensity scale. We worked with them for a new contracting template. And we are continuously in touch with all of our service providers, stakeholders, advocates to make sure that this program remains relevant to the needs of the community.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that government policies have increased costs across all sectors and given that the PDD sector is hurt most by these cost increases and given that this has led to a significant reduction in service hours, again to the Minister of Community and Social Services: will you commit here and now to restoring lost service hours, and can Albertans expect proper funding in the future to ensure that service hours aren't cut again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. PDD is not a defined benefit. How this program works is that the department works with service providers and families and comes up with a plan, which is customized to each individual, and whatever is determined in that outcome plan: that's what the department provides funding for. So we haven't got any services; we have increased funding. On that side we hear that they will cut 20 per cent, which will eliminate services for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Highway 3 Twinning

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, in southern Alberta the most important key transportation project that is now in the advanced planning stage is the twinning of highway 3, which stretches from Medicine Hat to the B.C. border. For several years now an association of key municipalities known as the highway 3 twinning association has been working with community stakeholders and Alberta Transportation officials, who just recently held several open houses on project refinements. However, what is not known now is the timing for the next steps to this process. To the Minister of Transportation: what is the next project phase, and how soon will it begin?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we recognize very much the importance of highway 3 to the economy of southern Alberta. The hon. member knows that some time ago I met with almost every mayor from every rural and urban municipality, and we did provide funding for them in order to do some studies with respect to that. We are fixing crumbling and inadequate infrastructure. We're investing over \$3 billion overall, and we're going to continue to make sure that highway 3 is as safe as possible and does its job of supporting the economy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's all well and fine, but the highway 3 transportation corridor project is an extremely important project that must continue moving forward as soon as possible. Given that last May the report conducted by an economics professor from the University of Lethbridge and partially funded by the province showed very positive economic returns for this project and given that these recent open houses are now completed, to the minister: when will the next expected phase, known as the functional planning studies, be completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that our department is working on planning forward for that particular road, and he's quite correct that that would be the next stage. I can just tell the hon. member that in due

course we will be moving ahead with those studies because we recognize the importance of highway 3 to southern Alberta.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, the sooner the highway 3 project moves forward, the sooner Albertans will reap the economic benefits. Given that several landowners and developers have contacted my office regarding land acquisition issues and early negotiation difficulties with the department and given that no clear public information has been released regarding this aspect of the project, to the minister: has the land acquisition phase actually begun? If not, when will negotiations with affected landowners, including the Piikani Nation, begin?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member and all members of the House that as we progress with the planning for this road, we will also be seeking to acquire land in a timely fashion in order to accomplish the construction schedule that we have set out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week we talked about how coal used to be an effective, cost-efficient alternative to natural gas in remote areas. We talked about the fictitious coal social licence the accelerated coal phase-out is supposed to be buying. I'll tell you what isn't fictitious: the devastation that this ideological policy is doing to communities like Hanna, Forestburg, and Grande Cache. Minister, do you propose to replace these mortgage-paying jobs that the coal industry provided in all these communities with stopgap programs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take a little trip down memory lane when Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister of Canada, back in 2012. Jason Kenney was one of his cabinet ministers when they put forward regulations that would see the end of coal-fired electricity after 50 years of a plant operation, including not allowing them to convert to natural gas. That government put a nail in the coffin of coal in Alberta. They turned their backs on the workers, they turned their backs on the communities, and they had no plan to help them transition. I look forward to telling you all about it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government's accelerated coal phase-out far exceeded the federal mandate and given that these communities' property values are now half of what they used to be, Minister, when are you and your caucus going to face the residents of these towns, look them in the eye, and tell them that your accelerated phasing-out plan is worth them losing everything they've worked for?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, what we did do was that we immediately worked with the current federal government to change those regulations to ensure that coal-fired plants can convert to natural gas. That's something that the Minister of Environment and Parks spearheaded. What I can tell you is that over the summer I visited most of the coal-affected communities and had very productive conversations with mayors, including Chris Warwick, the mayor of

Hanna, who, when we announced our supports for workers and our supports for communities, said that this is going to go a long way to help the community and their constituents to transition. Again, I'll remind the members opposite that it was not only the Alberta government's regulations . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite. Given that this government has no long game to help these communities and given that places like Hanna and Grande Cache are on the brink of becoming ghost towns under this government, to the minister: what industry, manufacturing, or processing business has your government approached about locating to one of these areas so that generations of Albertans do not become historical footnotes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish the member opposite would talk to the municipal leadership in the communities that he represents. They would tell him that we introduced the coal community transition fund, which is a fund that is designated to support affected coal communities to look at opportunities to diversify their local and regional economies. We not only have the backs of workers in the coal-affected communities; we are working collaboratively with the municipalities. The members opposite would turn their backs, turn out the lights on these communities, and do nothing to support them. I can tell you this much. When is Jason Kenney going to apologize to the workers and communities?

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, we have asked numerous questions over the years about the situation with rural ambulance service. Recently a number of my constituents have let me know that an ambulance responded to a call at a residence in Alcomdale where a woman was having what appeared to be a heart attack. Upon arriving at the scene, the EMT asked if there was an automated external defibrillator in the hamlet because the ambulance did not have one on board. CPR was performed until a second ambulance with an AED showed up. To the Minister of Health: are AEDs considered standard equipment on all ambulances, or is this the NDP's idea of kind, compassionate cuts?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, any time an Albertan calls 911, they want to know that EMS is on their way and that they'll have the tools that they need to respond as quickly and safely as possible. I'll be happy to look into the very specific situation. I wonder if maybe it was a nonemergency transport vehicle or something. I'll be happy to look into the very specific details.

Of course, we want to make sure that we have the right tools in the communities so that Albertans get safe transport. That's one of the reasons why we moved forward with stable, predictable funding to support our front lines instead of moving for the deep cuts that the Official Opposition have been lobbying for and that their leader continues to lobby for.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that the residents of Alcomdale are now in discussions to purchase an automated external defibrillator for their community and given that St. John Ambulance has AEDs for sale ranging from \$143 to \$1,980, does AHS have any idea how many ambulances are serving rural Alberta without this life-saving piece of equipment, and is the minister prepared to stock all ambulances with this very low-cost kit, or do the MLAs have to take up a collection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his offer. Certainly, any time resources are available, we put them to good use in supporting communities throughout our province. I know that when I was on the school board, we put AEDs in a number of different high schools as well because we knew that there was an important opportunity to have that immediate life-saving technique and technology available. But certainly any funds that the hon. member is willing to pass the hat for and use to support the cuts that he and his party are lobbying for – this government will actually put those funds to good use in making sure we're improving health care.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that in the town of Legal the seniors' lodge has 12 out of 42 rooms vacant, partly because seniors are nervous over inadequate rural ambulance service, and given that the town of Legal has had difficulty attracting a doctor because there is no pharmacist and given that they now have a pharmacist coming but still no doctor, can the minister help solve this situation in Legal, which lies within the Edmonton health region, and help seniors to feel confident that they will be taken care of in their community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our family farm is just east of Legal, and my grandmother had the honour of living there independently until she was well into her 80s. Just like her and her neighbours, we want to make sure that all parts of the province have access to good quality health care. We certainly are enabling the tools through organizations like RPAP to support the acquisition of good health professionals across our province, and we look forward to continuing to do that important work. We'll be happy to look into this specific question around this one community. Thanks again for the question and for standing up today for the investment that this government has been putting in. I look forward to seeing how you'll be voting on our budget come the new year.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll continue with Members' Statements in 30 seconds.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Grade 6 Student Engagement and Bill 212

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to making life better for all Albertans, and today I will be introducing a private member's bill that does exactly that for our children.

Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta students learn about democracy and governance in grade 6. The social studies curriculum encourages students to ask the question: what is democracy, and how does it work in Alberta? Last year I talked to students in Edmonton-Manning about these questions and found out what issues mattered most to them. I wanted to demonstrate to the youth in my constituency that regardless of their age, they too could affect change in their community. I had great conversations with students about legislative processes and how ideas become law. I also encouraged students to brainstorm with myself, their teachers, and their parents how to make this province a better place for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that the students of Edmonton-Manning demonstrated leadership and eagerness to engage in the democratic process that surpassed expectations and shattered preconceived notions. People said to me: they're grade 6s; what ideas are they going to get? But these young and brilliant minds are very aware of what is happening in their communities. In fact, the idea for my private member's bill came about as a result of these consultations, where every class talked about wanting to see tougher smoking laws. I am honoured to have many of those students here with us in the House today.

As a former social worker it is important to me to continue to work to make life better for all children in Alberta. It is my belief that the leaders of tomorrow need to be encouraged today and every day, and I am proud to show that in our province Albertans of any age can enact change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Blackfalds

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I celebrate the wonderful town of Blackfalds, originally known as Waghorn after the first postmaster. In 1904 Waghorn was incorporated as a village and renamed Blackfalds. In 1980 they became a town and a community of choice, being Canada's fastest growing municipality in the 2016 federal census.

Since 2007 its average annual growth rate of 8.6 more than doubled the population to today's 9,916. Blackfalds is young, vibrant, and active. Its growing families have an average resident age of only 29 years. People choose Blackfalds because of its safe environment, affordable living, and award-winning recreational amenities like the recently developed Abbey Centre. Other new facilities include the Optimists' all-wheels park, the bike skills park, and the bark park for those who speak woof.

On the 1st of July, 2017, in celebration of Canada 150 the Wadey Centre opened. This Eaton's package house was purchased by the Wadey family over 100 years ago and was their residence, but it remained vacant for many years. In November 2016 the town, the historical society, and others, with Canada 150 funding, moved and restored the structure to a new, prominent location. Now it is a premier visitor information centre, with offices for the chamber of commerce and the historical society. For this project of regional collaboration and historical preservation the town received the municipal sustainability and action award at the recent AUMA convention.

Regional collaboration and partnerships create successes, whether it be in the regional water and waste-water commissions, the regional alliance in protective and emergency services, or the partnership with the cities of Red Deer and Lacombe in the BOLT transit system. The successful bus service between the three communities offers expanded routes within Blackfalds.

With growth come challenges for a high school, improvements to highway 2A, and a second highway 2 access, but Blackfalds is amazing, and amazing things will continue to happen there. You just watch and see.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Neighbourhood Watch in Calgary-Northern Hills

Mr. Kleinsteuber: "Get to know the neighbours around you. This is key as the group is stronger than the individual. If neighbours are on the lookout for criminal activity and if we as a group continue to secure our valuables, thieves will move on, and we will be safer." Mr. Speaker, these words come from Tavis Settles, a leader in the Northern Hills Community Association Building Safer Communities Block Watch.

Just over two years ago crime levels were up. To raise awareness of practical action people could take to secure their property and to watch out for one another, Coventry Hills neighbours began to report property crimes on social media. As neighbours connected on various community pages, Coventry resident Brian Wells created the Facebook group called the Watchdogs. Three months later the Watchdogs group joined the NHCA building safer communities program. With help from a resource officer for advice and support they focused on a cleaner, stronger message of what is acceptable and what is not.

Interest and participation from residents only continued to grow. "In the beginning nobody knew anybody," said Settles. "Now neighbours are meeting neighbours and connecting." Mr. Speaker, sightings of kids playing ball hockey, climbing in trees, and playing in yards are up while crime in Coventry is trending down and now among the lowest in Calgary. Today over 2,000 Northern Hills residents participate in Facebook groups that are divided into 11 smaller neighbourhood-based groups, each with a moderator.

They have some noteworthy successes. In one case a car prowler was noticed. Word went out through the Facebook group with calls made to Calgary Police Service to confirm sightings. When police picked up the prowler, his comment was: "How did they find me? I only started this 15 minutes ago."

In April 2017 the Federation of Calgary Communities formally recognized Tavis Settles, Shane McEwen, and Jesse Sinclair for their leadership within the Northern Hills communities.

Mr. Speaker, this is how a community association can take a program that costs them nothing, engage their community, reduce crime, and can inspire community stewardship.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Pipeline Approvals

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP likes to brag about pipelines, but they ignore the facts completely. During the Harper government Alberta had four pipelines approved. Three of these were built, adding one and a quarter million barrels a day and many jobs with it. When the accidental NDP government arrived on the scene in 2015, the fourth pipeline, Northern Gateway, was also approved, and Energy East had a conditional approval. This would have given us access to tidewater on the east and increased access on the west coast. Under the NDP's watch Northern Gateway, cancelled; Energy East, cancelled. The Keystone XL pipeline was approved with zero help from the NDP government, and in fact when asked to champion KXL, the Premier would not agree to help

at all, so when she tries to take a victory lap on KXL, which still may or may not be constructed, it truly is laughable.

2:50

Now that Jason Kenney has entered the picture, the Premier has suddenly changed her mind and decided to aggressively sell pipelines to the rest of the country. We hope Trans Mountain gets built, and I wish the Premier nothing but success with that plan. But here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. If Trans Mountain gets built and expands the shipping of oil that's already there to the west coast, it will still not be enough to undo the damage already done to Alberta by the NDP.

So, Mr. Speaker, here's what we should conclude. When the NDP points to pipeline success, they had little to do with it. When the NDP points to pipeline cancellation, most of it happened on their watch. If they do take a small part of Trans Mountain's hopeful success, their spendthrift ways have dug such a hole that one Trans Mountain pipeline will not be enough to bail them out. They will need two or three Trans Mountains to keep up with their spending and debt. So the next time the NDP talk about social licence, someone should pull them over and take that licence away because it was never real in the first place. Alberta cannot put Jason Kenney in charge of Alberta soon enough.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we recognize December 6 as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. We remember December 6 as an example of extreme, planned violence against women. It is a national tragedy, and we can join Canadians in mourning the loss of 14 women at the école Polytechnique in 1989. This horrific massacre was a crime against women and against feminism itself, against the struggle for gender equality.

Almost 30 years have gone by, and we still face a horrific reality. Women are disproportionately affected by violence in Canada, and the numbers are worse in Alberta. Ten women have died in Alberta in the last few months at the hands of current and former partners. Violence tears lives apart, yet it remains hidden, quiet in society. We must talk about violence against women, and we must take action to eliminate it.

My colleague from Lethbridge-East shared her personal story of living with violence, shaking the Legislature to silence before we stood to support her. With that act of courage and many acts of courage she's made through her life, my colleague demonstrated why the truth about violence must be heard and recognized.

Under the Premier's leadership the Ministry of Status of Women was established to improve gender equality in Alberta and to work on the elimination of violence against women. The more we support Alberta women to thrive and not just survive, the stronger our province and everyone in it will be. We all know that this will not be easy. The barriers we need to remove have been entrenched for a very long time. We must speak out. We must do better for the women murdered in the Montreal massacre, for the women alive today, for our daughters, granddaughters, and generations to come.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Bill 34

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm deeply honoured by introducing a wonderful piece of legislation to the House known as the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017. I would request leave to introduce this wonderful bill, and I commend it to all members of the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Bill 212

Tobacco and Smoking Reduction (Protecting Children's Health) Amendment Act, 2017

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 212, the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction (Protecting Children's Health) Amendment Act, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making life better for Albertans, and Bill 212 does exactly that for our children. The idea of this bill came about as a result of consultation I did last year with grade 6 students in Edmonton-Manning. Bill 212 will amend the Tobacco and Smoking Reduction Act to prohibit smoking on all school grounds, playgrounds, sports fields, and public outdoor recreational activities, and smokers will be required to smoke 15 or more metres away from these areas.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Bill 215

Tow Truck Safety Act

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce the Tow Truck Safety Act.

Bill 215 amends the Traffic Safety Act to allow tow trucks to use optional blue and white lights on their vehicles when they are performing their duties. This is in addition to the mandatory amber light provision. The purpose of Bill 215 is to improve road safety for all motorists, tow truck operators, other responders at a scene as well as all users of Alberta's busy and often hazardous highways. I would like to thank Jeff Kasbrick and Ryan Lemont of the Alberta Motor Association and J.F. Gagnon, Keith Stebner, and Devon Poole of the Towing and Recovery Association of Alberta, who are here today, for their assistance in developing this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 215 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, we may need to move past 3 o'clock.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that reminder, Mr. Speaker. I would ask for unanimous consent of the House to extend the Routine past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of documents which support Bill 212, the Tobacco

and Smoking Reduction (Protecting Children's Health) Amendment Act, 2017. These documents are copies of letters and e-mails from the town of Redwater, the town of Pincher Creek, the town of Raymond, the mayor of the city of Wetaskiwin, the mayor of the city of Grande Prairie, the town of Calmar, the Oyen and District Chamber of Commerce, and the city of St. Albert. All of these municipalities in Alberta support the idea that our school grounds should be smoke free and that our schoolchildren should be able to play in smoke-free environments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a *Financial Post* article authored by Kevin Libin, and the title of the article is Beware of Fake News Reporting that Liberals Are Better than Tories on Pipelines.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling for you today. I'm tabling an article from the *Calgary Herald*, titled Alberta Takes Serious Steps to Battle Bots and Scammers, which outlines how the chambers of commerce, the BBB, and Ticketmaster are all cited as supporters of this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table four documents with the requisite number of copies. The first is from a constituent that has written here saying, "I am writing to you to ask for more assistance for rural Alberta in the form of RCMP. Crime in the rural area is at a high and it seems that there are break ins daily in our area."

3:00

The second is another one. It says, "Almost every week, we hear of another person we know being robbed."

The third is from a constituent that asks the government to please help stop rural crime.

Rural crime is going rampant! We're sure it is the same few that are causing this in part because they know that they can get away with it in the country.

Our home was broken into in June of this year.

As a government please help stop this.

The last is an e-mail received that says, "We now say 'when you get robbed' as opposed to 'if you get robbed'."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an article and a press release that I'd like to table. The first one is titled Legislation Banning Scalper Bots Will Cause More Problems than the One It's Trying to Solve. It was in one of my speeches yesterday.

The second one is a press release from the government of Alberta, Improving Consumer Protections in Auto Industry. I quoted that on several occasions yesterday in my speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of, first, a letter from Donna von Hauff that I referenced yesterday in debate on Bill 31, in which she as a former public member of the ABVMA council

noted that she had not been consulted, nor had any other public members.

The next three documents are all copies of news articles by members of the Legislature press gallery – Michelle Bellefontaine of the CBC, Emma Graney of the *Edmonton Journal*, and Julia Parrish of CTV – in which, when reporting on the release of Bill 31, they reported that disclosure and consent were new things in veterinary medicine. Obviously, they were given a very erroneous interpretation of current legislation by the Minister of Service Alberta in her press conference.

The Speaker: I have one tabling this afternoon. I rise to table five copies of the 2016 Legislative Assembly Office annual report.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Bilous, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council annual report 2016-17.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that there is at least one point of order. Is that correct? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm referring to Standing Order 23(i), (j) and specifically to what the Premier said today. Right out of the gate today when I made the first member's statement, followed by the question period questions by our House leader, the Premier in her answer accused this side of the House, including me, that we're climate change deniers.

Mr. Speaker, we've had lots of discussion on this subject. I just looked at the *Hansard*, and last year on June 1 and June 2 we had discussed the same subject. That time it was the minister of environment who called me a climate change denier, and I took pains in clarifying that I was a science student and I studied science and I believe that climate change is real. In my defence at that time the hon. Government House Leader also stood up, and he said he heard me saying that in the House a few times. He was on record defending me, saying that I believe in climate change.

Mr. Mason: We're lucky to have you.

Mr. Panda: Now he says he's lucky to have me in the House. Thank you for that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Panda: Through you, Mr. Speaker, the same Premier in her further answers insulted this House again. Unrelated to the point of order, but when members are asking questions, telling us to go and read the newspapers is very undemocratic.

Mr. Speaker, you sent me to the Westminster seminar recently, and there I learned that these kinds of insult and abusive language directed at the Official Opposition are not acceptable in the Westminster system. The Premier has the authority, but she can't just misuse the floor and call Official Opposition members who are on record saying that we believe in climate change – she can't label us like that for her electoral benefit. There is a by-election going on, so she is trying to address this to gain votes there. I don't know what she's trying to do, but the intention seems to be very clear, and it's

repetitive. They keep calling us climate change deniers even after you ruled on June 1 and 2 last year. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster also spoke on that occasion, as I'm seeing on the Blues here.

Mr. Speaker, I'm bringing it to you to rule on this once and for all so we don't suffer this pain every time persons in authority call us climate change deniers. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this point of order because it has indeed been spoken of many times before. This situation is no different than in the past, so we anticipate the result will be the same as in the past. In this particular case the MLA from Calgary-Foothills is suggesting that the Premier made a comment about him personally, which did not in fact happen. The Premier made a comment generally about the opposite side of the House.

This same notion has been brought up previously in the House on a number of occasions, and it's simply a dispute over facts as opposed to a point of order. The facts are fairly clear that on a number of occasions members of the opposite side of the House have indeed been on the record, made statements that show their ambivalence toward the science of climate change. I can provide a series of examples when that happened. For example, when a journalist challenged the MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake by noting that the majority of scientists say that humans are the main cause, he replied: you can't say that anymore; the science isn't settled. That was on CBC, January 3, 2017, this very year.

The same member circulated a cartoon attacking scientists and suggested the science underpinning climate change is a socialist conspiracy. He responded: "Is the scientific community on the degree of man's contribution harmonious? Are they all together on that? I haven't seen it. I haven't seen that anywhere." That's *PressProgress*, January 8, 2017.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat actually funded a climate change denying film. The American Energy News, March 28, 2017.

The Member for Drumheller-Stettler has in this House called on the minister of environment to, quote, table the scientific research upon which these specific policies are made. End quote. *Hansard*, March 10, 2016.

As members know, the term "climate change denier" or "climate change denial" has been used several times in this House in describing the members opposite: on May 2, 2017; May 11, 2017; April 5, 2017; November 29, 2016; May 2, 2016; April 11, 2016; November 23, 2015; June 1, 2016; June 2, 2016. In fact, they repeatedly have reinforced the notion that that is exactly the issue at hand.

On a number of occasions you yourself have been asked to make a ruling on these terms, and you have chosen not to do so. You have urged members to be cautious in our turn, and we have indeed been cautious but respond to the facts of the behaviour of the members opposite.

I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that there is anything new in this particular situation over the previous rulings, and I can't see that there's any reason why we should be continually returning to this in spite of clear rulings on it in the past.

Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to this point of order?

Hon. member, I want to make sure that I've got it. You referred to a ruling that I made in June. Is that right?

Mr. Panda: Yep. I can give you copies of that, June 1 and June 2.

Mr. Nixon: Give him the page numbers.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Page 1384 to 1385 and then 1454 on June 2. Therein, Mr. Speaker, you clearly asked them to refrain from using that language. The government members ignore your suggestion and then keep making those false accusations. It is creating disorder in this House.

The Speaker: It's okay, hon. member. I just wanted to know the date because I didn't have the benefit of the point you were making. Was it in fact at that time that I made a ruling, or was it a comment that you yourself made?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. I'm sending these pages. You clearly advised them not to use that language again and cautioned them. It's really causing disorder in the House with that approach.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I don't have the specific issue that you're speaking to. With permission, Pages, could you bring that to me, please? Is that agreeable? Thank you, hon. member.

The exact statement that was made by the Premier today was as follows. "Keep in mind that these are the same folks who have denied climate change again and again."

To the Deputy Government House Leader: your evidence that you submit was considerable; however, we need to all be reminded of 23(j). The matter that's requiring a ruling is whether or not certain words cause disruption in the House.

Hon. member, I think that at the time I did not rule it, if I have the correct one, as a point of order. In fact, I also did the same in November 2015. At this time I think the references you may have made, or at least the references you made in your verbal comments, were that it was directed to yourself. That's my recollection of what you said. Nonetheless, today I will stick by my ruling.

However, I want to remind the government that there was an earlier ruling that is causing me to go back and reread this again. I quote Speaker Zwozdesky. In 2013 he said, "It's had its mileage, and it's been used on this side to some effect . . . [it may be] time to move on."

In this particular instance I don't believe there was a point of order made. Nonetheless, I did caution on several occasions, and I would hope that the government is conscious of that and urges all the members to – the issue is not the particular word but: will it cause disruption to the House?

In that regard, hon. members, I know there is a point of privilege that arose yesterday. Since the Deputy Speaker was in the chair, I would ask that she take the chair.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday we had a point of privilege raised by the hon. Government House Leader, and the Official Opposition had requested at that time that we defer hearing their commentary and a decision until today.

I would invite the Official Opposition to speak to that, please.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before the House deals with government business, I would like to rise and make this brief statement. Yesterday, during a particularly emotional moment in

this Assembly I made a gesture towards another member, a gesture that I would like to apologize for. While I certainly meant no harm or offence, it's clear that this was the interpretation regardless of intention. My actions were not befitting of this Chamber, and I humbly ask for the Assembly's forgiveness.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Pursuant to custom and the rules of the House the matter is now considered closed.

Did you wish to add anything further to that, Government House Leader?

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, I don't agree that it is closed until I withdraw the point of privilege, which I now do, with thanks to the hon. member for his sincere apology.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

We'll now move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

[Debate adjourned December 5]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 30 in second reading, where we get an opportunity to discuss the principle of the bill. I have spoken, of course, to Bill 30 on the referral motion previous and did support that referral motion because of the scale of the bill, as we look at the 147 pages of it, having heard from stakeholders that they felt they needed more time to digest what is a substantial bill and the substantive changes.

However, I want to talk today about the principles that are enshrined in Bill 30. I do support the vast majority of what we've seen in Bill 30. I do have a number of questions, but, you know, unlike the Official Opposition, I will not just reflexively oppose legislation because the NDP government has proposed it. What I really care about is making sure that we're in fact improving the lives of Albertans, in fact making lives of working Albertans safer, in fact making sure that the Workers' Compensation Board system is functional and actually serving Albertans. So that's what my comments will focus on here today.

It is of course challenging to evaluate a bill of such size in such a relatively short period of time, again, which is why I supported the referral motion. But I do believe that this bill has the potential to offer much-needed protection and to update occupational health and safety laws in this province, that have not been updated in many years, and to ensure that there is stronger and better support for employees and families and employers and especially for the workers themselves and for the families in the unfortunate case where a worker may be injured or, even worse, tragically, killed on the job.

Prevention and taking better care of families and workers could in fact reduce anguish. Ultimately, a safer workplace is a more cost-effective workplace. Keeping people at work and employed and not off the job injured is, in fact, the best occupational health and safety

system that there could possibly be. We would obviously strive to ensure that we make sure that workplaces are, in fact, safe.

3:20

I will hasten to add, Madam Speaker, that in my time, having worked directly, in particular, in the oil and gas industry from about the mid-2000s – well, earlier than that, I guess; I'm older than I think – the late 1990s up until about three, four years ago, the evolution of the safety culture within oil and gas in particular was remarkable. I think a lot of credit should go to companies, the vast majority of whom are tremendously responsible. They recognize that keeping their workers safe is just simply good business practice. More than that; it's the morally right thing to do, ensuring that people are safe. The safety culture has become a huge part of not just oil and gas but companies increasingly realizing the importance of a safe workplace.

Unfortunately, the reason we need to make rules and laws is that not every employer is, in fact, that responsible. Although the vast majority – vast majority – are, there will be cases where that is not, unfortunately, true.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This bill signals major changes in philosophy and perspective about worker and workplace safety, which reflect those changes that I think we've seen in our society here over the last number of years. The idea that we empower employees and employers to be more safe, if it's implemented well, is what I'm most interested in. That's why I'm hoping that the government, through the course of debate, will be able to answer some questions for me about implementation.

First is the question of capacity, the capacity of employees to learn about this legislation, to truly understand their rights and the supports that are available to them; also, the capacity of employers to develop and implement those new policies and practices to conform to this legislation. That includes the capacity, of course, of Alberta's public service to effectively identify and address safety issues both inside and outside the clauses of this legislation.

Employees, in this province in particular, come from a variety of backgrounds, a variety of different parts of the country and different parts of the world. That includes newcomers to this province who are working in Alberta, who have English as a second language or are English language learners. There are lifelong Albertans who may have had to work in multiple precarious jobs in the past or even to this day to make ends meet. The vast majority of their experiences are uneventful and are safe. But there are those employees as well who are well represented by collective bargaining agreements that keep up with modern workplace concerns. It's important, of course, that every one of those employee groups can enjoy the protections envisioned in this bill.

Given the wide variety of employees that face barriers accessing protections in the current workplace legislation, including basics such as being paid for all hours worked or even knowing that employees' rights exist, the question I have and, I think, the question all Albertans should be asking is: how will the government ensure that the increased protections will be meaningfully accessible by Alberta's most vulnerable employees? I've had many constituents interact with my office who had challenges accessing services through Alberta Labour not because those services don't exist but because the capacity doesn't exist to deal with them in a timely manner. So while they're filing complaints or they're trying to reach out and access those services or a resolution to workplace issues, they have a difficult time doing so because the system is quite backed up.

I'm curious, then, if the fair practices office on the WCB side – I'd like to know how the government will ensure that the fair practices office will be there to guide injured workers through the WCB system and make sure that that is, in fact, more accessible to all workers, not just those who understand how to work within a bureaucratic system and not just those who have English as a first language.

Like employees, employers come from many backgrounds like charitable groups, not-for-profit groups, and small businesses, who may not necessarily have the resources to implement new HR policies required under the bill. I recognize that there are some delineations – 20 and above, five to 19, and then below – but, still, that is something I think the government ought to think about in terms of providing those resources. One might suggest that a competitive market would remove the businesses, through the process of creative destruction, if you will, that can't comply with safety requirements, but at the same time, it's important that we recognize that companies who do strive responsibly to follow the rules ought to be given the resources they need to ensure that they can successfully implement and follow those new rules.

Charitable organizations providing essential services to communities already have very limited resources and very limited support. In particular, granted dollars from government very often do not cover administrative expenses. This bill may in fact increase their administrative expenses. So a question I have is: how will the government work with charitable organizations to ensure that they are not unduly impacted by this change and instead work with them to build capacity, perhaps work on some changes to granting formulas?

How will government help workplaces in general to build capacities to identify and report near misses that could have killed or seriously injured someone? What additional risks might employers be exposed to should they identify or misidentify near misses in good faith?

Like employees and employers, public servants will also need to be familiar with a variety of different backgrounds. How will this government develop capacity to understand practices at the wide variety of workplaces and locations of work? Training and work environments are fraught with scenarios with employer language and behaviour that outsiders may view as unsafe or abusive. Within rural communities throughout Alberta many industries and workplaces may be unfamiliar with safety and workplace inspectors based in large cities. Are there some challenges there? How will government officials be able to effectively learn about diverse workplaces, both their cultures and the workplace activities?

How will employment officials develop the respect and trust of workers needed so workers are able to fully disclose abuse and unsafe work conditions? How will government inspectors develop trust to work constructively with skeptical employers, and how will the government show the value that employees, employers, and Albertans are getting for that \$94 million a year the government estimates is the additional cost we'll face?

While we're on that particular point, Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear that I do absolutely support the principle of improving WCB as a whole. I think that's long overdue, and I'm certain workers in this province would agree with that. I think employers would also agree with that. We know that WCB has had challenges for far too long, and there are many injured Albertans that WCB has really not met the needs of. So Bill 30 does represent a significant update and a major, largely welcome, and overdue change. However, I do worry that the increased costs of these changes will ultimately lead to increased premiums down the road. It is clear that this government has a lot of work to do to make sure that the

substantial changes that are going to be implemented by this bill are, in fact, as effective as they hope.

So I would really encourage the government to identify metrics and measures of success to make sure we're gathering good data and to recognize that measuring that progress is going to help build faith in the system by all Albertans, both workers and employers. Again, I just want to make sure that – I emphasize yet again that every credible company that I know places a high priority on safety. That goes for oil and gas companies, it goes for construction companies, and it goes for IT companies. Any organization that I've worked with that I would consider credible is very focused on health and safety. But measures really do matter. It's also important that those measures are understood by stakeholders and that they can be used to hold employers and government to account for implementing the measures contemplated in this bill and to quantifiably – quantifiably – improve safety.

Albertans want to learn more about what government estimates to be the size of the safety, bullying, and harassment problems that it seeks to address through this legislation. We'd like to know. Let's quantify the problem that we're facing in this province. Is the goal to prevent tens or hundreds or thousands of these deaths, injuries, or bullying? How do we know we're going to be successful?

Now, I know there likely are some metrics in the Department of Labour, perhaps in the budget and their annual report and the business plan, but these are the sorts of questions, I think, that should be asked, and the data should be readily available. How much reduction in which measures of unsafe workplaces does this government expect as a result of Bill 30? What are the outcomes we anticipate from such a large piece of legislation? How can the effects and benefits of improved worker safety be used to motivate other stakeholders to do better? How can we recognize the long-standing good work of employers and employees who develop a culture of safety, whose worker protection may not be practicably further improved?

3:30

There is, of course, always an opportunity to be better, but how do we ensure that the companies that are already doing great work are recognized and, in fact, are not disadvantaged by these changes? We also have to ask how the government plans to support workers and their families outside the direct OH and S and WCB systems. For example, what is in place to strengthen professional services and support for mental health for workers who feel the long-term effects of harassment and bullying? How will we know when that system is effective? How much responsibility will employers need to take in order to strengthen mental health beyond simply disallowing bullying and harassment? How will Albertans know we have sufficiently improved benefits for surviving spouses and children when a worker is killed on the job?

Now, I want to focus on the maximum insurable earnings cap at this point. This is the piece of the legislation, frankly, that I'm most curious about. Is it sufficient simply to remove the insurable cap at \$98,700 a year? It certainly would allow injured workers to receive benefits in line with their expected annual earnings, but that may end up focusing a disproportionate amount of total benefits towards a small number of high-income workers. Certainly, I think we would agree that in a province that does employ people who have higher earnings, a higher cap is needed, although at \$98,700 I understand Alberta has the second highest cap in the country to Manitoba, which I believe is around \$125,000 or \$127,000, but it's a cap all the same.

So what I'd be curious about is – perhaps we need to simply still have a cap but raise it up to a higher number and then index it so it continues to increase in the future. Simply removing it entirely: I

wonder what the cost implications of that are. I would hope perhaps the government has some actual data that can show us how many workers are at a higher earnings level and then what the impact of that is going to be on the costs of WCB, which ultimately are borne by employers. Again, I'd like to see the numbers. I'm not questioning the need to raise the cap. I do wonder, though, why it is that we in this province would be the only province in the country that has no cap at all. I asked my staff jokingly: well, if the CEO trips down the stairs, can they claim a million dollars of WCB? I actually ask that quite sincerely and legitimately. I don't know if the companies are . . .

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Elbow? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for his comments. There certainly were a lot of questions in there, and only having five minutes, unfortunately, to answer is not quite a whole lot. I'll try to provide a couple of comments on a couple of items that he had brought up, firstly, I guess, around potential capacity for employers to adjust. I think what we're really talking about here a little bit are some of the coming into force dates. We've already heard in the House that one of the dates, of course, is January 1, 2018. That is surrounding the WCB. When it comes to the occupational health and safety, that date is June 1, 2018, and the Ministry of Labour and staff are very ready to help employers to move along that journey in terms of help for what they can do to make sure that they're going to be compliant with those rules coming in.

I guess around the WCB and some of the things that employers can do to navigate that system, that was part of the reason why we had the office coming in for this. You know, we've heard concerns that WCB can be quite complex sometimes to navigate, very difficult, and this office will be available not only for the workers to help navigate the system but for the employers as well. There's going to be help there in terms of them being able to access that when trying to navigate that system.

Of course, the one I'm always interested in is the health and safety. It's always exciting to hear about, you know, the success of an industry that has gone very, very far to really raise that bar for workers' safety. One of the things that I heard very clearly from organizations is that joint health and safety committees work. There's absolutely no doubt about that. As a matter of fact, we've had organizations such as the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association that have said that health and safety committees work. They're there in a joint capacity between the workers and management to be able to create a work site that is absolutely safe because when your workers are safe, they're at work; they're productive. Lost-time accidents: there are always costs to that. When you don't have them, there's not the cost to that. There's not potentially the cost of having to retrain somebody who's filling in for those individuals.

We've also had the Construction Owners Association of Alberta that have also said that joint health and safety committees work, and we should be having them. We happen to be the only jurisdiction that doesn't have those things mandated. We've also seen that the Building Trades of Alberta have also said that joint health and safety committees work.

You know, it was very exciting to hear the member send out the kudos to the organizations that work very, very hard to take that bar and raise it up. If we can keep our workers at work, we're reducing those costs that are associated with an injured worker, including the WCB premiums that are taken on by employers. I know from personal experience that the company I worked for was very, very

proud of the fact of the work that they did on the joint health and safety committee, which I co-chaired, in terms of reducing those costs. They were incredibly excited about those kinds of things.

Again, I know there were a lot of questions from the member, and with the short time given here, I'm not able to completely answer them all. But I'm hoping that at least a few of those comments that I've been able to make might help address some of the questions that the member might have had.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Again, it does answer, certainly, some of the questions that I've had.

I'll just, you know, finish off here in the brief couple of moments I have left here just to say that in general I believe this bill does go a long way to genuinely resolving the concerns that I've heard from my constituents. I know that there are some questions out there from the business community about whether some of the things that are represented in the bill do in fact represent an overreach. I look forward to hearing from more of those stakeholders, but in general the principles of improving safety and improving the efficacy of the WCB are really, really important.

We will be offering at committee stage some amendments, some of which we've shared with the minister, which we hope genuinely, truly seek to improve the bill, and I can hardly wait to talk more about this later.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have to say that it is yet another great honour to be able to rise in this Chamber today and speak to a bill that is moving to protect hard-working Albertans, and of course this time that bill would be Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. Now, you're probably asking yourself why I'm so excited about this bill. Well, because we are going to update legislation and the Workers' Compensation Act. That has not seen a comprehensive review in over 15 years. I've been asking around, and some people don't even have vehicles that are 15 years old, so it's probably a bit of time, you know, that we now get to that.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? If that wasn't enough to excite you, we're also going to be updating the Occupational Health and Safety Act. That has not been significantly renewed since it first came into effect in 1976.

Loyola: When?

Mr. Nielsen: Nineteen seventy-six. Now, Mr. Speaker, I know I was only nine years old at the time, but one of the things I guess I should point out is that back then not only was I nine years old; I was starting to enjoy eating Timbits for the very first time. Yeah. They came back in 1976. I got to enjoy a really cool new program that was on TV at the time while I was eating those Timbits at nine years old called *Family Feud*.

I think it's high time that we tell hard-working Albertans that we have their backs and to give our full support to the proposed changes to both WCB and occupational health and safety because, frankly, Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve to have the same rights and protections that Canadians already have.

3:40

Let's talk about some of those changes by starting with occupational health and safety. Mr. Speaker, last year we saw that more than 44,000 workers were injured while on the job, and, even worse, 144 of those workers did not return to their families. I hate

to say that that number positioned Alberta as the second largest in the country for the number of workplace fatalities per million working population. I think we need to do better. We can't continue to do that. We have to ensure that hard-working Albertans get to go home to their families every single day after work. What's even more tragic is that most of those injuries and fatalities are preventable, okay? With proper precautions, with public awareness, and with diligent ongoing training and the effective enforcement of legislation, I think we can strive to reduce those numbers to zero.

Bill 30 creates a responsive system to better prevent illness and injuries by adapting to changing hazards while also supporting an injured worker's return to work. I was mentioning that a little bit earlier. You know, when you have an injured worker, the faster you can get them back to work in a productive manner – that means we need to provide them the supports they need to get one hundred per cent back to work being fully productive for their employers because in the end that's what helps not only them but their employers to be successful.

Bill 30 will also qualify the roles and responsibilities of both employer and worker to ensure everybody's health and safety, and Bill 30 will also enshrine the worker's right to know about workplace hazards. I know I experienced some of this in my early days in my former role at my employer. You know, times were a little different, so we weren't quite necessarily as diligent at informing workers of some of the hazards that we should have been watching out for.

There's also the right to participate in health and safety throughout the workplace through the health and safety committees. I had, again, mentioned this. My experience at my former employer: I co-chaired the health and safety committee for probably at least 15 years of the almost 20 that I spent on that committee in that workplace. I can totally get into more of that story in Committee of the Whole, but I think for now maybe I'll just give a little bit of a teaser for later on. [interjection] Exactly. A teaser. You know, get you built up, waiting for the story later on. Let's remember the number: 1,650 days. Maybe just remember that. Of course, the one very crucial thing: I know there's been a lot of people over the years that have been striving to get this changed. It's the right, not the duty, to refuse unsafe work, okay?

This bill will also ensure that workers can exercise their rights and fulfill their duties under the law and do it without fear of reprisal or the threat of reprisal. I have heard multiple times where individuals were afraid to report something because they thought that they might get terminated at their place of employment. That should never happen.

We also need to ensure that workplaces are free from violence and harassment, and I think that those are going to be addressed here through Bill 30.

Finally, Bill 30 requires that occupational health and safety laws be reviewed every five years, not every 41 years. I think we need to do a little bit better than that.

Mr. Speaker, a strong system of workplace health and safety programs saves lives. It saves lives. It prevents injuries, and it helps businesses save money. Again, I can get back into my story later on about that. I know that a mandatory health and safety committee: when there is that buy-in to that from not only the worker but the employer as well, incredible things start to happen. Incredible things start to happen, and there becomes a culture – the member that was speaking before me had mentioned how, you know, the oil and gas industry had really set that bar high. At some point in time in their past, in their history they had made that decision to make that a priority.

Bill 30 will also address some of the long overdue changes to the Workers' Compensation Board. Now, Mr. Speaker, you might be

asking: why are we dealing with both occupational health and safety and WCB at the same time? I know I've certainly heard that from the other side. It's because the two are closely linked and related. You can't have one without the other. When you're talking about an injured worker, they usually end up filling out a WCB form, and if it turns out to be a lost-time accident, you now have a claim. So when you're talking about how you can deal with that, the two are interrelated, and you must do them the same. I know we saw some discussions before about splitting bills up and stuff like that, and it's just not the way that kind of thing works. The two are very, very interdependent.

An injured worker often results in the filing of a WCB claim, and in 2016 WCB had accepted more than 44,500 claims. In 2015 Alberta had the fourth-highest total number of claims for injuries that resulted in lost time. I think we need to do a little bit better, and I think that with the changes to OH and S, we are definitely expecting to see those numbers go down, which, again, is very much more healthy for the workers, and it's a lot better in terms of money for the businesses that employ those hard-working Albertans.

When we're talking about a worker when they are injured or develop a work-related illness, then WCB is supposed to provide medical and financial support so that that person can get well and can get back to work and be productive for their employer. And while they're accessing the WCB system, it should be in a compassionate and a fair and accessible and easy-to-navigate way, which doesn't really happen a lot right now with the legislation. Again, it's more than 15 years old. We need to get to modernizing that. We need to make it better for people to be able to access in a very compassionate – you know, treating people like people. As I mentioned, again, I don't think most of us have vehicles that are 15 years old.

Changes to the WCB act. Bill 30 will now bring workers' compensation firmly into the 21st century and, of course, join the rest of Canada. There are also changes that will improve existing benefits for surviving spouses and children, changes for injured workers' retirement, and changes that will provide injured workers more choice in selecting health professionals.

Employers will continue providing existing health benefit programs for injured workers for one year after the date of injury. Employers and workers can also apply for interim relief while compensation decisions are under review and appeal.

There are also some new provisions that Bill 30 proposes to introduce. Presumptive coverage for first responders will not be changing, but the coverage for psychological injuries, including PTSD, are now extended to all occupations. Employers will have an obligation to return workers to the job after they have suffered a work-related injury and illness.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to get people healthy when they do have an injury. We need to get them back to their employers so they can be productive for their employers because they know how to do the job and they know how to make sure that their employer is successful in the marketplace.

Another exciting new addition, of course, will be an independent fair practices office, that both the employer and worker can access for help to navigate through the WCB, and we had quickly discussed that a little bit earlier. This office can also be available to let people raise concerns as well as monitor trends that are occurring within the workers' compensation system. So if we see some things that are going on that maybe aren't so positive or aren't working so well, they'll be able to identify these things and help guide us to make the system even that much better.

Bill 30 proposes to remove the insurable earnings cap of \$98,700 per year so workers can be compensated at 90 per cent of their

actual earnings. I know, Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of friends that work up in the oil and gas. They're very, very successful electricians, and I can tell you that they happen to make more than \$98,700. The reality is that if they were to get injured and only get 90 per cent – I mean, they happen to have built their lives around that basic income that they worked very hard to get, and I think they have a bit of a right to ensure that they're able to take care of their families, should they be injured, until we can help them get back to being productive for their employer again.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, with Bill 30, workers will see a WCB system that doesn't treat them as a number but as a person, helping them get back to work while still caring for their families. Employers will see an effective and sustainable system while still having among the lowest premiums in Canada. As I said, as I alluded to earlier, when you have a safe workforce, when you have a healthy workforce, you don't have any lost time in accidents. You don't even have high premiums; again, my example from where I'd worked before.

Mr. Speaker, the changes proposed in Bill 30 are based on extensive input through the public and through reviews. Again, we've had organizations that have been working a very, very long time to see some of these changes come through.

Hard-working Albertans will be better protected from injury and illness while receiving better support if they do happen to get hurt on the job. Employers will have an effective and sustainable system that they can count on to be there for them as well. I think Albertans deserve these changes, Mr. Speaker, and these changes deserve our full support.

So I am going to recommend to all my colleagues in the House that we support Bill 30 through second reading and then, of course, on through Committee of the Whole and third reading and get the changes that hard-working Albertans have been looking for for a very, very long time. They deserve it. We owe it to them, and we now have the chance to get that work done so that they are protected to the best they can be.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments to the Member for Edmonton-Decore under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your speech, hon. colleague. I just want to ask about – you were telling me a story earlier today. The Member for Calgary-Elbow was talking about how the vast majority of employers do a great job trying to protect people at work. There's no question. However, sometimes in their enthusiasm to protect workers, they do things that are somewhat misguided in their, you know, approach to helping. You were telling me a story about that. I thought that was pretty interesting in how the new legislation with the joint health and safety committees might be helpful.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I remember telling him that story. Essentially, again, as I kind of alluded to a little bit earlier, once that decision is made to really buy into that – how can we make our work sites as safe as possible? – quite honestly, some magic almost starts to happen between the workers and management. They start, you know, watching each other's back very, very diligently.

We were in one health and safety meeting talking about how there was a potential risk of some stuff that was going to fall off a

conveyor in the plant. Management, in their excitement, said, "Well, you know what? We'll just put up these guards, and we'll get this done, and that'll just absolutely, you know, solve the problem," which it absolutely would have. There were a few of us on the committee on the workers' side that kind of had to say: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow down. Do you have any idea how much that might cost?" We thought that there might be some other ways that we could have worked with that, maybe reduced some of the costs to try to make that safe. The good news, of course, is that we did manage to do that. It was significantly less, and as far as I know, it still protects those workers from any items falling down to this day.

Again, when you start talking about some of the buy-in, not only from the employers' side but from the workers' as well, to come together, the best vehicle to do that is through a joint health and safety committee: you know, work towards making that workplace safe, make sure that everybody is going home at the end of the day, and thereby make sure that the employer is profitable and competitive so that they're able to continue to pay their workers and not have to worry about all the other associated costs when a worker does get injured.

I thank the member for that question, and I'm sure there's still more of the story that I can tell later on.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments to the Member for Edmonton-Decore under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cyr: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have, I guess, a general question for the member. The member across is making this sound like we're breaking ground here and going into new areas.

I have a *Hansard*, October 22, 1973, speech by Dr. Hohol. Unfortunately, we just had this gentleman pass on, but I will tell you that his words live on for generations now because he's in *Hansard*. His quote is:

I should now wish to outline some of the new provisions for compensation. I suppose the most important one is compensation for death. Presently, provision is made for burial expenses, including the plot, transportation and other related costs. New legislation would provide future pensions to the surviving spouse and equal the pension the worker would have received, if living and 100 per cent disabled. The allowances for children would be included within this pension and expenses in connection with the funerals would be consolidated and adjusted. An important principle of the recognition of loss, whether it is by complete inability to work or by cause of death, is [important] in this new approach to this particular disability benefit.

Then he goes on to say how WCB has broken ground in this area.

Now, if we look at the legislation, it seems to mirror a lot of what they had said when they first set up WCB in 1973. I guess what we need to reinforce here is that these aren't new ideas. So if they're not new ideas, how come this government voted down a referral motion to a committee? They came up with the same ideas that we're coming up with now. Wouldn't it be ... [Mr. Cyr's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Klein. Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Right riding, wrong city. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just quickly before I start, to the member that just spoke, yes, we were implementing these things in the WCB back in '73; however,

we haven't updated them. That was the issue, but I'll talk more about that.

I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, today. I know that it's been a long week for all of us, so I'm going to give you a break today. I'm not going to dwell on the inaction of the previous government for 40 years on WCB and 15 years on OH and S.

But I will say, though, to sort of set this up, that what it does demonstrate is a government's priorities. That's okay because Albertans are smart people, and they recognize which parties are looking out for their interests and those parties who are kind of stuck in antiquity, if you will, and complacent, with outdated labour legislation and economic ideas. Those ideas are ideas that leave Albertans and Alberta's economy vulnerable and on the wrong end of history, in a place where we don't want to be.

With all that said, you know, these changes to OH and S and WCB are long overdue. These changes will better protect workers so they can stay healthy and safe and also better support workers if they get injured or sick on the job. Alberta's workplaces and the way we work have changed over the years. A lot has changed since these acts were introduced, and we need to ensure that our standards and practices meet the needs of modern workplaces. These changes, quite simply, bring us up to par with the rest of Canada. That's a very reasonable approach to legislation.

Every year hard-working Albertans are killed or injured on the job. These incidents don't just affect the workers, Mr. Speaker; they have a devastating impact on families and friends and co-workers and employers, too. It's devastating to the employers. Workplace illnesses and injuries and fatalities are not an inevitable part of life, and we can't approach it like that because many of these are preventable, and that's what this legislation is about. It's about being preventative and not reactionary.

4:00

You know, this legislation will ensure that Alberta's health and safety system is continually improving to better prevent illnesses and injuries from happening, to respond to changing hazards, and to support injured workers and their return to work.

Now, we've talked quite a bit about consultation. I'll just reiterate that there were more than 1,300 online survey responses, 90 written submissions, and eight in-person round-table discussions with over 200 stakeholders. The big piece of this was, of course, that in June 2017 the independent panel reviewed the WCB to ensure that the system continues to support Albertans and maintain its sustainability and affordability.

I'll touch a bit on – it is a large bill, and we've talked about that, but I'm going to focus a bit on kind of the OH and S piece first. With OH and S, the changes up front on this, the foundation is on three tenets, and they are the worker's right to know, the worker's right to participate, and the right to refuse unsafe work. Those are rights that all Albertans should have.

A big piece of this for me – and my colleague spoke to this a bit, too – is the introduction of a mandated joint work-site health and safety committee. I think that's really one of the best examples that demonstrates the three tenets that I just mentioned. I kind of alluded to this yesterday as well in a 29(2)(a), but, you know, the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka had a very cynical view about joint health safety committees, and he actually expressed the fact that he thought that they would create more conflict on the job site. I really do think that that is absurd. [interjection] Well, it is, and I'll tell you why.

This is what joint health – I'll just name a few. There are a few really fantastic ones in here. What the joint work-site health and safety committees will do is that they will develop and promote

programs for education and information concerning health and safety. They develop and promote measures to protect the health and safety of persons at the work site and check the effectiveness of such measures, and they participate together in identifying hazards to workers or other persons arising out of connection with activities at the work site. You know, when you work together, that's how you make people safe, and that's how you have an understanding of what is dangerous at work.

I absolutely agree with the Member for Calgary-Elbow, who earlier said that the evolution of safety has occurred over time. Absolutely. It's become better and better over time. I can't tell you the things that I've done on job sites when I was younger. If I ever told my parents what I did, my father would pass away again, and my mother would have a heart attack, I'm telling you. Some of those things were just outrageous. But you know what? I didn't know any better at the time. I was getting paid. I'm lucky to be here, and I'm sure there are many of us in here that have these same stories, absolutely.

The other piece I'm very pleased with under OH and S is the right to refuse dangerous work, which, of course, as I'm talking about things I did when I was a teenager and in my late 20s at work – I mean, we would have never done that. I would never have refused it. That was just the way it was. My colleague alluded to this, to the change being the right to refuse dangerous work. That is the big difference. That is a nuanced difference, but it makes a very big difference from a duty to refuse work. Actually, what it does is that it commits the employers to ensuring that we have a safe workplace as well, and it commits the employees as well. Through the joint work-site health and safety committees, together: that's how we're going to make our workplaces much more safe.

There was some mention yesterday, I believe, too, about having to report near misses. We've never had to report near misses in Alberta before, but in most other provinces they have to. I think this is a great addition to the OH and S Act, and the opposition should really like this, too, because they really like to talk about empirical data and having data to make decisions. This is what's going to help us make decisions about what's dangerous at a workplace and how to make it safer, and through that, you can also develop training programs that help to make it safer.

Now, in my previous life, before being elected, some of the companies that I would negotiate with – we actually had it in our contracts, and smart companies get this. They had set aside \$30,000 a year just for training and for very specific training, which isn't much, but they understand, you know, that a trained employee is a smart employee, is a safe employee.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased – I'd like to talk about this – with the fact that this bill does address psychological hazards and harassment in the workplace. As you may know, last fall I introduced a private member's bill to address psychological harassment and bullying in the workplace. Unfortunately, as is the fate of many private members' bills, it did not run the course of debate, and it died on the Order Paper. You know, the idea for that bill walked right in the front door of my office. A constituent came in and told me this horrific story about three years of harassment at the workplace and about her struggle to get any sort of resolution at the workplace, which then turned into this quest to get legislation. Again, Alberta is one of the few places that didn't have this type of legislation until now. So I'm very proud of that. I also tabled a petition for her that had over 1,300 signatures on it.

You know, what I did find funny when I introduced that private member's bill last fall, Mr. Speaker, was that although it didn't make it out of first reading, it sure got a lot of attention. It got a lot of attention in the media, and I did four or five speaking events through different organizations. Clearly, it got so much attention

because it hit a nerve, a nerve that there's a need for this type of legislation in the province. I would like to sincerely thank the Minister of Labour and the ministry for incorporating these types of protections into this legislation and, specifically, for clearly defining what workplace violence and harassment are and defining the roles and responsibilities of employers to prevent violence and harassment in the workplace.

It also requires workers, your colleagues, to not participate in or initiate harassment or violence in the workplace. I've told many stories about things that I've seen as well in the workplace when I did speak at these events, and they're pretty horrific, some of the things that I've seen over the years. Although in doing my research – there were about 70 per cent of employers that already had harassment policies in place – Mr. Speaker, the issue with it was that it wasn't mandated. They were all written, or they were all kind of piecemeal, or, you know, what they said was quite a bit different in each facility. The big issue was that without the legislation, it just simply had no teeth, and sometimes employees didn't take it very seriously.

I had one business in my riding that I went to when I was consulting on that bill. He said: oh, I'm so happy to have this type of legislation in place. He was experiencing people harassing their colleagues at work, and he really didn't know how to stop it. I think a lot of people don't take it seriously if it's not the law. In fact, Mr. Speaker, some of the other numbers I discovered on that were that 60 per cent of Albertans have experienced bullying or harassment in the workplace in their lives. That's 6 out of 10.

Again, thank you so much, Minister, for recognizing the need to include this language on harassment in the workplace.

4:10

I'd like to talk a bit about the important changes to the WCB as well, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as we heard, it's been about 15 years since a WCB review. An independent WCB Review Panel, in delivering its report and recommendations, recommended that the legislative changes be designed to entrench a worker-centred system. I believe that this bill does a very good job in doing this. The first big step is to actually just simply clarify the purpose of the act, which is done in the preamble of the act. Actually, it's really odd that it was never there before, if you think about it. How did we know what it was all about? It's kind of funny that way. At least, it defines what workers' compensation is supposed to do. It's "founded on the principles of no-fault compensation, security of benefits, collective liability, independent administration and exclusive jurisdiction." That's just one part of the preamble, but at least we have that set straight for all of our employers and all of our employees.

Of course, a big piece of this and something that many people are very happy is being introduced in this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is new provisions for presumptive coverage and PTSD coverage. This will now be made more available to other occupations, and that's a very important piece here. You know, first responders: nothing will change for them in a sense. There's likely going to be more presumptive coverage there, but now it will include paramedics and presumptive coverage for myocardial events.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nielsen: Under 29(2)(a), yeah, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. You know, I think the member was getting to some rather crucial information there with regard to presumptive coverage. I was wondering: during his consultations around violence and

harassment what kinds of thoughts had he received with regard to how Alberta was lagging behind? He had made a quick mention that people just didn't know that Alberta didn't have these kinds of things, and I was wondering if you might be able to touch on that at the same time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Coolahan: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that. Perhaps I'll save the presumptive coverage for a different point. We'll have more time to talk about this in Committee of the Whole.

In terms of talking to many different companies, many different organizations, it was quite humorous sometimes to walk into a very large oil and gas company in downtown Calgary and ask them to consult on this bill and ask them for an endorsement. Almost unanimously the first thing out of their mouths would be: "What? We don't have that?" It's quite shocking to people, right? In fact, I'm not sure I knew it either until I had that constituent come into my office to tell me about her story. Again, even when these large companies would say to me, "What do you mean we don't have that? We have a very solid culture of nonharassment and a harassment policy in place," I'd say: "But there's no legislation, so how do you back up that harassment policy? How do you enforce what you're doing?"

That would spark their interest, and I had unanimous support in consultation on this. There was not one company or one organization that said to me: I disagree with the notion of putting harassment and bullying in the workplace into legislation. Absolutely not. Again, that hearkens back to the fact that the vast majority of employers are fantastic employers, and they want to make their employees safe and happy and healthy. You know, this legislation, that type of legislation, is not meant to vilify employers, and it's not meant to be punitive either. It's meant to be preventative, which is what all of this legislation is. I think that when there's any doubt from the opposition on this type of legislation, we have to always think that this is about being preventative. The more we understand what's happening at a workplace, the easier it is to prevent it, and that's a very important aspect of this.

What was kind of funny, too: when I tabled that petition with 1,300 signatures on it for my constituent, I got another one in my office shortly after, another petition from a different person. You know, unbeknownst to either of them, they were doing the same thing. Through that, I got to know quite well Linda Crockett from Alberta Bullying. What was also humorous about that was that it's a nonprofit organization where they train employers on how to prevent bullying and harassment in the workplace, so as soon as the private member's bill hit the Order Paper, her phone rang off the hook because companies were concerned. This is going to be legislation. Her business skyrocketed, of course, because every employer was calling her up saying: you have to train us; you have to train us.

I had other companies, not just nonprofits but other companies who focus on safety and harassment in the workplace, come to me after it as well and say: "How can I work with the government? I want to make sure that everyone is trained properly on this." Again, this really hit a nerve with a lot of people because, as I said, 60 per cent of Albertans . . . [Mr. Coolahan's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to talk about Bill 30. I actually have a little

bit of experience with occupational health and safety and the Workers' Compensation Board. I have the privilege of being a national construction safety officer in this country. I owned and operated an occupational health and safety consulting company in western Canada for several years before I went back to work in nonprofits, with the family business, if you will. I specialized primarily in large high-rise type projects, massive construction projects of that nature, and you learn a lot about the technical side of occupational health and safety. You learn a lot about the importance of it as well, making sure that moms and dads can go home to their families after they've been working, which I think all of us certainly believe in.

I've also certainly seen the ins and outs of workers' compensation from that side, working with employees of clients of mine as they've navigated the workers' compensation system in our province, and I've seen first-hand a lot of the problems that we have with the WCB in our province. The government is trying to address some of those issues with this legislation.

There's a lot to talk about in this bill, Mr. Speaker, and fortunately I have lots of time to talk about it. It is a very large bill, a very technical bill that deals with some very technical aspects of legislation that we already have. The occupational health and safety side, which is extremely technical and should be, is a piece of legislation and then regulations that govern many varieties of industries in our province that have to deal with very technical things to be able to keep people safe but at the same time be able to construct projects or produce energy or the things that we do in our province. And then the WCB has been an ongoing source of conflict in our province for a very long time, longer than any of us have been in this Assembly. I don't think the concerns that many of us have with WCB are any secret.

I think, though, that the reason I start there, Mr. Speaker, with the size of the bill, the complexity of the bill – and the fact that it has been brought here late in the session raises a lot of concerns for me, and I think we'll talk about that a little bit, with an amendment that I will move later on in our time together.

4:20

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein talked about one aspect of this legislation that I would like to start with, and that is, first, around the concept of an employee's right to refuse unsafe work. An employee's responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to refuse unsafe work is already in legislation in our province. It's already a current practice in our province. It's already a responsibility of employers to allow employees to refuse unsafe work. Employees are expected to refuse unsafe work as a result of that legislation. It's certainly part of safety programs associated with the Alberta Construction Safety Association, the manufacturing safety association, the petroleum safety association. It is a common practice.

In fact, I unfortunately was involved in the investigation of an employee that lost his life in a construction accident, that worked for a client of mine. I worked for the client during that investigative process. Mr. Speaker, you may not know that when an employer loses an employee or has a significant accident, including, obviously, the death of an employee, the employer is responsible for also producing an investigation report that will go in. That is one of the responsibilities that they do, and consultants like myself would often be hired to do that task for them in those circumstances. Occupational health and safety officers would be doing the same process on their end, and those investigations would go together. Sometimes they would end up in court. Sometimes certain things would be settled outside of court, depending on the circumstances.

This one situation comes to mind when I think of refusing unsafe work: a site inside Ponoka. In the town of Ponoka there was a

condo, about a three-storey building, if I recall, Mr. Speaker, but it may have been a two-storey building. There were two young gentlemen who were probably in their first year in construction, definitely, as we would call them, greenhorns. They had been assigned by their foreman, who was in charge of the job site and worked for my client, to operate a scissor lift. They would go up and down the scissor lift. They were removing stucco from this building.

Along the way their foreman positioned them with another gentleman, a man who had been in the trade a lot longer. He was operating the scissor lift, and he was supervising them. They went to the other side of the building. They would go up, and the gentleman asked them to go out and move the bottom power line, which is the neutral line of these 14,400-volt power lines that were above their heads, so that the scissor lift could get above it. Then they would proceed to work with those power lines just above their heads. First of all, it's a good thing they weren't as tall as I am – it was extremely tight by that point – or there would have been something that happened to those two young gentlemen.

They then had a coffee break. The two of them began to talk to each other and said: this doesn't feel right, what we're being asked to do; this feels wrong. They actually said to the foreman: we refuse to do that. They knew their rights. They had been taught that during their safety orientation with the company. They knew that they had the right to refuse unsafe work, in fact that they had an obligation to refuse unsafe work and to bring it to the attention of the rest of the crew. They exercised that right. A very tough thing for 18-, 19-year-old young men on a job site, their first real job, to do, but they did, and good on them.

The foreman made fun of them and then chose to get on that scissor lift himself and then proceeded the rest of the day to go up and down, moving that neutral line, with 14,400 volts above his head running through a line, he and the other gentleman that was in the scissor lift. On the last trip down of the day the foreman was operating the lift, and he asked that man, a father of several children, to go and move that neutral line. That father stood up a few seconds too early as the scissor lift went down, and his head connected with the back of that power line, killing him instantly.

I tell you that story, Mr. Speaker, to point out two things. The first is that the right to refuse unsafe work already exists. I'm not really sure why the NDP is acting like it does not. It makes us as opposition and people in the industry start to ask more questions about what may be going on with this lengthy bill that was handed to us. Either they don't know what's going on with their legislation, or they don't know that you can refuse unsafe work already, or they're trying to do smoke and mirrors, and to what effect I don't know. It makes me question what's going on with the legislation.

The second thing, though, Mr. Speaker, that I point out is that these issues, these technical aspects, these important pieces of legislation have life-and-death implications. They have significant consequences. We have to make sure that we get it right. Safety has evolved, and many members have pointed that out.

My grandfather, who was a coal miner, Mr. Speaker, is still with us. He's about 98 years old. He's been, actually, in this House with you, and I've had the pleasure of introducing him before. When he first started, they still had birds down there in the mines. The stories he will tell you would make my hair as white as yours if I had to go through that. But the culture was different. In fact, when he first started, it was superstitious to allow a female to participate in a coal mine. Ridiculous, of course. So things have evolved, which is the point.

We have learned from safety as we go on. We learn lessons, which is why regulations and practices within the industry evolve,

but what's important is that the people that are in the industry need to be the people that drive that forward.

I know a little bit about commercial construction. I participate in commercial construction. I certainly should not be the guy that moves a neighbour's drilling rig south of Sundre tomorrow. I most definitely in this House would not have the ability to write regulations or procedures or laws associated with something as complicated as that. I see the minister nodding with me in agreement. I think she would agree with me, Mr. Speaker, through you to her, that our capacity as politicians to write that level of detail would be inappropriate.

But if you acknowledge that fact, you also acknowledge that the industry needs to participate in the process. The industry needs to drive the process. For safety to be successful, it needs to be driven by the industry. The reason that we have accelerated in safety along the way, whether it be from mining, like my grandfather, Mr. Speaker, or manufacturing or petroleum or construction, is because we've put the responsibility on the industry to drive that forward. But when we come forward to this House and we have to change a significant piece of legislation, some of it good – and I'm going to talk about some of the good points in a minute – some of it troubling, without having adequate consultation with the industry, it's concerning because I don't think that we are qualified in this place to do that. We haven't even started talking about the WCB, which is a whole other mess.

That brings me to another concern that I have with this. If the government was seriously concerned about doing a good legislative process on important issues like this, important issues that involve people's lives and livelihoods, if the government was seriously wanting to work on that in a serious legislative way in this place, they would not bring legislation that was combined like this on these two important issues just before the end of a sitting.

Nobody can say with a straight face, Mr. Speaker, though I'm sure they will maybe try, that the government seriously wants to work with the opposition, wants to work with the people of Alberta, wants to work with experts involved in this situation, involved in the industry, people that will be impacted by this legislation that's before us. Nobody could say with a serious face that this government is actually wanting to work with them, because they would not want to bring forward this level of legislation – complex legislation, a large piece of legislation – with very few days left in the sitting and without providing enough time to deal with that.

The second thing is that if you broke the legislation apart, it would be easier to manage. You could focus on the occupational health and safety side of it, which is very complicated, Mr. Speaker. Then you could focus on the WCB side of it, which is significantly different than the occupational health and safety side of it. There is some overlap, I will acknowledge to the minister, but they are significantly different issues.

In British Columbia the WCB does the occupational health and safety part in their province for the government. The WCB itself would be the investigative body. They would implement fines if somebody lost their life on a job site. If those types of things were going on, the WCB comes in like our occupational health and safety officers, but here they are two different things. One is primarily on the insurance and compensation end of the safety spectrum and another on the actual regulations, the rules, and the enforcement of occupational health and safety.

Now, I heard some of the members across the way, Mr. Speaker, heckling, but just quietly and politely, which is a change, that they did consult. Now, I've been talking to people in the industry for the last several days, since this government tabled this large piece of legislation, and they certainly do not feel like they've been

consulted. [interjection] The indigenous affairs minister is asking me how many people I talked to. I'll get to it in a minute.

Mr. Feehan: No, I didn't.

Mr. Nixon: Oh, he's not. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I misheard what he said. I've talked to occupational health and safety officers that work for the government that I know from my time in the industry that have called with concerns that there has not been proper consultation on this legislation and that there could be consequences as a result of the speed of this legislation going through this House.

4:30

I have talked to former colleagues of mine that run large health and safety programs for massive, large companies in our province, significant construction companies and energy companies, that say that they have not been consulted about this. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the fact that I articulated the story that I told you and the fact that workers already have a right – they already have a right – to refuse unsafe work and that this is the government's biggest talking point of this legislation so far today make me really wonder even more now if they consulted people, because that is a very simple thing to know.

In fact, if you were to go, Mr. Speaker, to a large commercial construction project in Edmonton or Calgary right now, it would be fenced off. You see it when you walk around downtown. I'm sure you've seen it before. They'll be fenced off. There'll be safety signs. There'll be those type of things. You would enter the work site, and the first thing that would happen is that you would be brought to a trailer or an office of some sort, and you would receive a safety orientation. That is the very first thing that would happen. I know I've done many of them. You'd have to fill it out, and you'd have to sign that you'd received that safety orientation. They would go over some standard things. They would also go over some unique things for that job site specifically that were there.

When the company has their safety audit in order to get their COR requirement, whether they're with the Alberta Construction Safety Association or some other type of safety association, that is one of the first things the auditors will check. I know this, Mr. Speaker, because I'm a COR auditor. That is one of the very first things that I would check when I was doing audits, whether those safety orientations happen. And on those safety orientations, which would include all sorts of stuff, some of it very specific to that job site – where to go, the muster points if there was a fire, those types of things, what the alarm systems are for that job site, what would be required of them, where certain fall protection things have been put in place, unique things for that job site – before you got to the unique things for that job site, there would be a bunch of lines of standard process. In them that company would remind you of the legislated right of an employee to refuse unsafe work.

The incident that I talked about of those two young men who exercised that right – and good on them. I really think it's a great story of why it's important that that rule is in place. When I did the investigation that was associated with that and I interviewed those two young men, I asked them how they knew they had that right. It was like their first or second construction site, just out of high school. It's because they were told by the safety officer for the company in that orientation that that was their right under the legislation.

So it already is a right. It's important that we acknowledge that. That is not something that is new. We support it. You want to change the wording around it. That's fine, but to try to say that employees do not have a right to refuse unsafe work is troubling. It

shows, in my mind, there has not been enough work done on this legislation, Mr. Speaker, and brings me to the amendment that I would like to move at this time. I have enough copies for the page. I'll just wait till the table receives it.

The Speaker: We will refer to this amendment as REA1.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment that I'm moving says the following. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not provided Albertans enough time to be consulted on the specific changes being proposed and, further, has not provided assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impacts on the economic well-being of Albertans.

Now, I move this amendment, Mr. Speaker, for several reasons. Some I have already talked about, one in particular that is an example of the government coming to this place, clearly, and not talking to anybody from the industry because anybody who has been in the industry would already have told them that the right to refuse unsafe work has been taking place on construction sites and petroleum sites for a very, very long time.

I see some of the members across the way shaking their heads. I would challenge them to stand up and tell me how many safety orientations they've been involved in on construction sites – clearly, it's not very many – because that is how it goes.

There are parts of this legislation that are good. There are parts of this legislation that are important, that we consider before this House, particularly, right off the bat, on the WCB side but also on the occupational health and safety side. There are lots of aspects of this bill that I think are important. There are more protection and benefits for injured workers. From my time working for clients with workers that have been hurt or on job sites that I have participated in, I know what a challenge workers' compensation and getting benefits when you've been hurt can be. I know what a challenge it is for people, particularly, that have had injuries that last a very, very long time or that they will never overcome again in their lifetime. They have been through, I think, in their view – I think the minister would agree with me – the wringer as they've tried to deal with workers' compensation on that and the catastrophic consequences to them and their family.

It gives employers access to assistance during appeals. It used to be, Mr. Speaker, just for workers. Speaking as somebody who represented, during my time in occupational health and safety, many employers, I can tell you that this was actually a big issue. It's very complicated for the employer as well as they're interacting with workers' compensation. I think this is a good idea, so I commend the minister for bringing that forward.

It protects workers from getting in trouble or having something done to them by their employer for not complying with the act. I think that's a great idea.

It protects workers from being penalized for their employer's lack of compliance. Another good idea.

It protects crossjurisdictional renegotiation of OH and S and WCB regulations if standards are equal or better. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy again. I pointed out another thing last night in this House that the NDP was doing that was very conservative, and this is another great conservative idea, so I have some faith that some of our conservatism is rubbing off on the other side. I know I'm standing

right now beside the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, one of the most conservative individuals I know, and I think, through you to him, that maybe it's starting to go over there a little bit. I think they've got a long way to go, but keep it up there, hon. member.

But there are other parts of this legislation that are deeply concerning, particularly if the government has not taken time to consult, if the government has not taken time to work with the industry to make sure that what they are bringing forward will work, will not have other consequences.

One of the ones is – and the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein talked a little bit about this – the job-site safety committees. Job-site safety committees have been going on a long time as well. I understand that this legislation would change that to make some of that more mandatory. It already is a standard part of all safety audit programs in the province. I can't think of one audit protocol for COR in any of the industries that does not make this already a mandatory requirement of their audits. If you're with the Alberta Construction Safety Association, manufacturers' safety association, petroleum safety association – you name it; the list goes on and on – this would be a standard practice for their audits. So I guess the question would be, one, Mr. Speaker, why we would need to bring that into legislation when it is already happening within the industry.

Second, if we take it too far, we actually could end up having another problem. Safety committees have an extremely valuable role to play in occupational health and safety on job sites, but if you make it too restrictive or prescriptive and do not allow flexibility on certain job-site applications for what that looks like, you ultimately end up really forcing companies to spend a tremendous amount of money, that will actually end up being diverted from their actual safety training programs. That's maybe an unintended consequence that the minister did not think about with this legislation, but there will be a point, if you force all that money into just being spent on tool box meetings or those types of meetings – some of us would be more familiar with that language – when you will see companies end up having to just divert a tremendous amount of their safety training into that.

4:40

Occupational health and safety committees are not enough training for many of the safety applications that companies have to deal with. When you work on high-rises – I spent a lot of time building multiple-storey buildings. Fall protection training, in particular, on some very complicated issues: you know, working on forms that are coming up, structures that actually did not exist that morning that are being brought up; ironworkers who are walking steel in certain applications, literally now walking in a place where a few minutes ago there was no structure because they are the first ones there, that had to build the structure. That costs people their lives. We would all agree on it. But if you don't train people on how to properly use that equipment because you end up diverting so much of your time and safety resources into just the tool box meetings or the health and safety committee side of it, you could have unintended consequences as a result of that.

Unintended consequences in health and safety are scary. I can think of a time when eye protection became a real big deal in the industry, Mr. Speaker. Workers' compensation rates were going up as a result of lots of eye injuries. There was a lot of pressure from WCB on employers to deal with that issue, and rightly so. So almost a blanket policy came in. Everybody had to wear eye protection at all times. Young safety officers would be on job sites. I ended up on a large project in southeast Calgary where the ironworkers were working. They were my clients. They were walking out of hoarding,

a heated area that was being heated in the middle of the winter behind tarps, and they had to walk out on steel, on steel beams. This is before you had to tie off on steel beams. At that time ironworkers were exempt when they were walking the iron, a very dangerous job. They were putting Q-deck down as they would come in and out.

There was a young safety officer there who kept insisting that they wear their safety glasses, and the old veteran ironworkers kept explaining to him: "When we're coming in and out of this hoarding, we're freezing up. We're carrying these pieces of steel. We're coming out." I have glasses, Mr. Speaker. Every morning when I come to the Federal building on the way to work – I like to walk here from my condo – as soon as I walk into the Legislature, I freeze up. It gets all foggy. These guys are going in and out of a heated place like that; it's getting fogged up. The young safety officers are: "That doesn't matter. You have to wear that. That's what this says."

The veterans were smart enough to put it in their pocket and just ignore the guy. A 22-, 23-year-old young man who was working with that crew listened to the safety officer and, later that day, walked off the beam and was paralyzed. That's an unintended consequence. The person was trying to do the right thing, was trying to follow the rules, but nobody had taken the time to talk with the people that are in that industry to find out how that rule would impact them. Things impact people, and it's complicated.

So when we come to this Legislature and we see the government bring forward a bill of this magnitude, a bill of this size, and then some of the stuff that's in it – and I'm going to go back to the refusing unsafe work thing because I can't get over it, Mr. Speaker – that tells me that they have not seriously consulted people. The fact that I have had phone calls from people that I trust in the industry saying, "No, we haven't been consulted, and we see problems with this legislation; we see problems and unintended consequences with this legislation," tells me that they have not consulted people, which is why I bring forward this amendment.

I bring forward this amendment because not enough time has been put into this bill, and we need to get it right. We need to make sure that we've dealt with the unintended consequences. We need to make sure that we end up with a piece of legislation that will actually make sure that we don't create more problems within the industry, that we give the tools to the people that are on the front line to do our goal, to make sure that we have a piece of legislation that allows them to increase safety, to keep evolving safety within the industry.

You know, one of the things, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein talked about in his presentation – and I did enjoy listening to his presentation; I agreed with some of it, disagreed with some – was on the harassment side of this. His argument was that there was a bunch of companies – I hope I'm not mischaracterizing this because I'm not trying to – within different industries that had mishmashed up harassment, different policies. One place would maybe be dealing with harassment this way. Another place may be dealing with harassment this way. Some places may not be dealing with harassment at all, but in the member's experience most places were already having some sort of a policy in place.

Companies or other people associated with the government were now calling him to say: "Oh, thank you. We didn't know how to do this. Now the government is here. It's legislated. Now that it's written down in legislation, we can do this."

In my mind, what I hear when I heard that, Mr. Speaker, is that companies can't do this without the government's help. We've got industries that take concrete and turn it into skyscrapers. We've got people in our province that take sand and turn it into gas in our cars. We have people that are 10 times smarter, many times smarter, than most of us politicians in the room. I have never been and I don't

think any of my hon. colleagues on this side of the House have ever been in a meeting with anybody in the industry or in any capacity that said: "Oh, whew. Now that government wrote this in, we can finally write this all down properly in our safety books." It's a silly thing to say, in my mind.

It also shows in my mind, again, that the government did not consult with industry. If you spent any serious time within all the industries that this would apply to, you would see that harassment policies have been strongly in place for a very long time in most companies, and the right way to deal with it is to get the industry to address it, to work through their safety associations, to understand the uniqueness of each organization, and they will do it. They've already proven it. There was a time in the 1980s, before we started bringing in the Alberta Construction Safety Association and those types of organizations to focus on stuff like core audits, that our safety record in this province was dismal. It's not perfect now. I would not submit that as an argument to you, Mr. Speaker. But it was really bad. It was front-page news all over the country. It was having significant negative effects on the stability of the oil and gas industry in our province, and the industry started to make local or industry-specific safety associations, and they would begin to address it.

Are we bringing forward legislation to help people write things that they're already writing, or is this a real situation that the minister has come across in her consulting with people in the industry? Maybe it is. It's a fair question. But certainly the people that we're talking to are already dealing with that. It's already a policy that's in place, and it's the government's responsibility to come here and say: the reason we're changing this law, the reason we're making this part of the law, is because this is the problem we're trying to fix, not because we don't trust experts already in the industry to write up their own policies. With due respect to the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein – and I would include myself in this. I can think of many people that are probably better at drawing up policies than I am.

The question with this amendment, the purpose of this amendment is to say that the government has not done their job. This is another example of the government not doing their job. They have not done their job to consult properly with the industry before they bring this forward. I believe their intentions in most of this legislation are well thought out. I support most of their intentions in a lot of this legislation, but I do not believe that they have done their job adequately to get this right. I do not trust the government that they got this right. I don't. My constituents certainly don't trust the government. My colleagues that work in occupational health and safety don't trust the government. My friends that own and operate construction companies or those other things don't trust the government to get this right.

Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because this government has a track record of not consulting people before they bring the legislation here. They have a track record of bringing legislation to this House that has not even been discussed outside of the inner circle of the NDP or, as the Deputy Premier once said in this House, outside of the people that have the NDP world view. That is a problem when you're bringing forward legislation of this magnitude that impacts so many things.

4:50

It is the government's responsibility to make sure that the legislation that they bring before this House has been adequately addressed. If not, it should go to a committee. It's one of the problems, I think, with the Alberta political process. Unlike Ottawa, legislation of this magnitude can just come here and be forced through this House, the government using their supermajority to

force it through and get beyond that consultation whereas in Ottawa this would have an opportunity to be able to have a proper discussion. We could bring in experts. We could talk to occupational health and safety officers. We could talk to industry representatives, safety experts, people from the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering. We could talk to people who have been impacted by WCB. We could talk to WCB co-ordinators. We could talk to WCB. We could bring them in, and we could have a real conversation.

Then the government would probably have learned that employees have a right to refuse unsafe work. They probably would have learned many other problems that I don't even know about that are happening because technology is moving on. We would have been able to get this legislation right. Instead, what the government did with this was took two significant issues, workers' compensation and OH and S, lumped them into one big bill, put it in this House near the end of a session after they had adjourned debate for days and adjourned the House for days because they didn't have legislation ready, and jammed it all in at the end.

Mr. Speaker, what was interesting to me at the time was that this legislation didn't even come from the Queen's Printer when it was given to the opposition here in the House. It was photocopied on a photocopier here.

An Hon. Member: No, it wasn't.

Mr. Nixon: I would assume. It definitely wasn't from the Queen's Printer. It was a package . . . [interjection] It was not from the Queen's Printer when we got it, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Yes, it was.

Mr. Nixon: Well, not when we got it in this House.

That is not consultation. If you're preparing a bill the night before on the fly, it is not consultation, Mr. Speaker. You cannot look at the opposition with any seriousness when you continue to bring legislation over and over to this House that you have just prepared hours before you table it.

An Hon. Member: How much longer do you have?

Mr. Nixon: The hon. member wants to know how much longer I have, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure, but it's quite a bit. I'm happy to help, but the Clerk may be better off to tell you.

You cannot tell the people on this side of the House, who have a responsibility, like you do, Mr. Speaker, and like every member of this House does, to our constituents and to the people of Alberta, that you consulted on a piece of legislation that you are doing basically overnight and bringing into this place. You're not ready, and if you're not ready, how do we know you're not making mistakes? How do we know a bill of this magnitude, a big, thick bill with lots of complicated issues, has actually been thought out?

They wanted us, Mr. Speaker, to take their word for it when it came to Bill 6, a very similar area of law or legislation, that they had consulted about it. I remember it clearly that week: they consulted. They talked – it was the same thing. It was the same type of bill. It came in here. It hadn't been prepared in advance. It came the night before. We began to read it, and then we went home, those of us who represent large farm communities, like me, whose neighbours were ranchers and were farmers. We went to our constituency offices, and the phones were ringing and the e-mails were coming. Every major player in the agriculture industry was saying: "We never knew about this. We never saw it." That's not consultation.

It's no different with this bill. There's no difference with this bill. They brought forward a bill with good intentions, lots of it. Parts of

the bill, just like, you know, parts of Bill 6, were with good intentions but not properly consulted with the industry, no time taken to make sure they got it right, no time to have a discussion about what impacts there will be. In this case the big hot-button issue became family farms. This bill will be something different because there is no time to address it. The government took forward the piece of legislation.

When you have a track record like that, Mr. Speaker, as this government has, a track record of not consulting Albertans, of not consulting the people their legislation impacts – and then they continually want to come into this House and say: "Hey, it's okay. Hey, it's okay. It's okay. It's fine. We consulted. Take our word for it." Well, I apologize. I'm done taking the government's word for it. I'm done taking the government's word for it. This side of the House is done taking the government's word for it. If they're not willing to do the job, then we will have to continue to do the job for them, which is why we're bringing forward an amendment like this to say: "Stop. You have not done your job. Send this to a group of people that can do the job. Make sure that experts get to participate in the process. Take your time."

What is so wrong with that? What has taken place in the last couple of days that would require this government to try again to ram through a piece of legislation like this in the dying hours of a session before Christmas? What has taken place that would take that to a level of emergency? I'll tell you why I ask, Mr. Speaker, because this side of the House would be happy to take that part out once we understand it and get it passed immediately in one day and then take time to get this right.

Now, I get passionate about it because I'm concerned about the people it will impact. I also happen to think that probably in about, you know, 18, 19 months this government will be fired by the people of Alberta. That's up to them, but that's what I think is coming.

Ms Fitzpatrick: I don't think so.

Mr. Nixon: They don't think so. That's fine. We have an election.

But my point is that I think that they will be sent a very clear message at the polls largely because of stuff like this. Then this side of the House has to go over to that side of the House and fix the mess they made. In the meantime people, real people, are being impacted by the legislation that they write. Employers are being impacted by the legislation they write.

That doesn't mean that I don't want employers to make sure that they work on safety. I think safety is important. I've been on job sites where I've seen people lose their lives. I get it. It's important. I've got a son right now who's working in construction back home, my oldest son. I would not want to see him get hurt. I would, certainly, when I go home this weekend – he lives just inside Sundre near me, and if I stop to visit him, I hope that he is there, just like I know you would for your daughters or your grandkids. We all do. That's not what is at argument here. Keeping people safe, making sure that the system evolves, that we take safety seriously, that we continue to give tools to the industry, that we continue to say as a province that we demand that mom and dad get to go home after work: nothing wrong with that. But why not take the time to do it right?

Why take two big issues, WCB and OH and S, and jam them all into one? Why? It's a good question, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you wonder. Why move legislation through at the last minute? If this was such a big issue and a priority for this government, why did the government not have this ready at the beginning of the session? Why did the government not send it to one of our standing committees to begin to have discussions and make sure that we were talking to the people in the industry? Why am I getting e-mails

from occupational health and safety officers who work for the government saying: "Oh, my gosh. Have you read this part of the bill? Do you understand what this means? Do you think the government has?" That's the most common one I'm getting right now: do you think the government, the NDP and the bureaucrats that are involved in this legislation, understand what the implications are of what they've brought forward? That's pretty scary, that occupational health and safety officers are feeling the need to reach out to an opposition MLA and say: whoa, you've got to go talk to them.

We're going to talk about a lot of those details as we go through this legislation, the concerns they have. I'm on a reasoned amendment, so I'm going to focus on why this needs to be stopped for the time being and go back to being consulted with Albertans. But we will talk about some of this, and we will try to change some of the most significant issues that the industry and people have with this legislation. It will be determined at that time, Mr. Speaker, if the government wants to co-operate with that. I don't know. I don't want to guess that until we see what happens.

Occupational health and safety: big act. You know, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon spoke the other day on this bill, and he pulled out a little book that they hand out, usually called an OH and S handbook. This one had a blue cover, which is similar to the Occupational Health and Safety Act's actual cover. There are other books that are red that come out from different safety associations, and they summarize the act. It's a big book, and he was showing you, Mr. Speaker, at the time, and I'm not actually sure how you let him get away with using a prop like that, but he was on my side of the House, so I didn't argue. They've got this book. It's big. It shows the significant components of this end, you know, of occupational health and safety. That wasn't even the act. That's a handbook. If you were a superintendent on a job site right now or a foreman working with a drywall crew, that's the handbook they give you to try to summarize the act. I've got the act still sitting on my deck – or on my desk. It's not on my desk; otherwise, it would probably be wet. It's pretty snowy there. It's old because I've been out of the industry for a long time. I know the act has been updated since then. It's like this. That's what we're talking about right now.

5:00

The opposition now knows that the government hasn't consulted with people because we've heard from the people that they should be consulting with saying: we haven't even been talked to. We've seen the government stand in this House and talk about things that they would have known if they had talked to anybody in the industry. Now we have to go through this legislation and find out everything that they got wrong on behalf of Albertans. We have to reach out to the stakeholders that are impacted by it – safety organizations, safety officers, construction companies, road companies, and the list goes on and on – because we know that they didn't do it. That's why I have to bring an amendment like this, Mr. Speaker, to this Assembly, to give a chance for that to happen.

The question for the minister, in my mind, is: why was this consultation not done? Why the speed? Why, if this was so important, are we not dealing with at least two pieces of legislation so that we can get it right? Why mix it all together and complicate the issue? Is the goal, Mr. Speaker, to have a good piece of legislation at the end of this? It's a good question. If it's not the goal, I don't know what the government is doing here, but I want to give them the benefit of the doubt. If that is their goal, then why not do it? Why not do it right? Why not separate these issues? Why not deal with these in separate pieces of legislation? Why not send it to

a standing committee with a reasonable period of time, get people to that standing committee, let them present?

Let's make sure that we get it right. Let's make sure that the next government doesn't have to clean up a mess. Let's make sure that there are not some consequences that are going to cost more jobs or hurt different industries. Let's make sure that the ability is in place to make sure that we go beyond those two young men that I told you about, Mr. Speaker, that refused to do unsafe work, and do other things to make sure that we're putting money into education for our young workforce and that we're teaching people about their rights so that they understand that on a workforce. I could support that. But what I can't support is bringing forth a massive bill that's been prepared, basically, the night before, dropped on the opposition's desks, hot off the presses.

An Hon. Member: The night before?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, some of the hon. members are laughing about me saying: the night before. I suspect that is because it was being printed the morning of, but fair enough. The night before is maybe a little bit too generous. I've had legislation of late in this House that still felt hot from the photocopier. That's what we're dealing with at the end of the session.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we were sitting in our seats, the opposition, eagerly excited to be at work, and the government is adjourning the Legislature hours early because they haven't got a bill ready. Now here we are at the end of the session – and we're going to talk a lot about some of the other bills between now and February or whenever we'll be able to finally get this work done – and we're talking about this one, and this is a big bill. Nobody on this side of the House can argue with me about the size of this legislation. It is a big bill, a big bill that we now know the government never consulted on with any large number of people.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I suspect that they get excited and they say that they consulted with people, but I've talked to the people that they should have consulted with, and they say that they haven't. I don't know, Madam Speaker – welcome to the chair – if that's just because they were only consulting with occupational health and safety officers that have the NDP world view. I don't know if that's because they're only consulting with employers that were friendly to them about this legislation. The question that's being heckled at me and that I'm going to try to answer is: do these occupational health and safety officers not care about safety? That just proves, again, the problem.

These occupational health and safety officers work for the government. They're responsible for enforcing the rules. They're responsible for investigating up to even when people have been killed. It's a pretty big responsibility.

Madam Speaker, maybe I heard the member wrong, so I want to be careful about that.

An Hon. Member: You did.

Mr. Nixon: Okay. It sounds like he's saying that I misheard him. It wouldn't be the first time. My wife says that I do that quite often. So I will apologize to the hon. member.

The point is that we are here again with large legislation that needs to be sent to be properly consulted on with the people that are impacted by it. The problems with the legislation itself, Madam Speaker, will take several hours and days of debate to address. We will bring amendments in good faith to try to help deal with the mistakes the government has made in this legislation. But the right

thing for this House to do is to pass this amendment. Stop this bill from being read a second time, get it to a standing committee, make sure the industry gets to participate, and make sure the people responsible for enforcing the laws get to participate because they're actually the ones that have the biggest concerns right now with the legislation. That's troubling.

Then we can start talking about the WCB, because I don't think the government is going to split these apart. I don't know what they're trying to do, but they're mishmashing the whole mess together and creating a superbill. The same point stands on that amendment. Send it away. You have not properly consulted. Through you, Madam Speaker, to the government side of the House: they have not properly consulted. They have not done their job.

Have you seen, Madam Speaker, an economic analysis on the decisions of this legislation? [interjection] The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway is pointing out that in his time in the Legislature he probably hasn't seen one ever from the government, which is why we have to spend so much of our time standing up talking about referral and reasoned amendments.

An Hon. Member: Except for the leaked ones that they send us.

Mr. Nixon: I do appreciate that, Madam Speaker: except for the leaked ones that we do get. The government really should be careful about where they leave their documents lying around, but I do appreciate it.

This government has a responsibility to do that. This amendment says that they have not. I'll give you a couple of reasons why they have not. I'm going to give you some more before I sit down, but the purpose of this amendment that I brought before this House is to stop the process because the government has not done its job.

I think it's also important that the members of the government who rise to speak to this legislation who imply that because we have concerns over on this side of the House, we don't care about the safety of workers or that we don't want to see safety advance or that we want to see, you know, construction sites and petroleum sites in our province stay in the Dark Ages correct that tone as well, Madam Speaker, because that's not what we're saying. I've been very clear in my presentation today that we support many aspects of this bill, including more protections for workers, clarification of issues around workers' compensation, making sure that workers can't be punished for exercising their rights.

As I said briefly earlier, Madam Speaker – you weren't in the chair at the time – putting in the ability for employers to get help while navigating the WCB system is something that was not there before. It can be very complicated for employers as well as they're dealing with the system, extremely complicated, particularly when you get to large employers and complicated injuries and those types of things. I think we all agree that we want that to work better.

Now, I spent a lot of time, Madam Speaker, talking about the occupational health and safety side of it, but let's talk about workers' compensation. One thing that's interesting is that the NDP and my former legacy party, before we were the United Conservative Party, the Wildrose Party, agreed that the WCB was broken. It was one of the few things that I think both of these parties agreed on very, very openly. It's why at the time we were shocked that the NDP was going to take that broken system and put it on the farmers and ranchers that we represent despite the fact that they had better private insurance at the time that was taking better care of their employees.

5:10

At the time, Madam Speaker, I'm sure you heard from some of your constituents that the biggest concern they had was that they

had better coverage and fewer problems, because of the problems that we're talking about here today with WCB, and they were also protected in bed. They weren't just protected at work; they were protected in bed or when they were on vacation or when they were driving their quad or when they were doing other things, for less than the WCB cost their employer. That was the biggest thing on the WCB side of Bill 6. They were scared that they were going to lose all that coverage. Employers were going: man, I'm going to have to pay way more, and my employees are going to be less protected.

Mr. Gill: It doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Nixon: It doesn't make any sense. The system is broken. The minister is trying to address some of those issues with the system, and I agree with that. But, again, now you've got a complicated system that has now been forced upon the farmers and ranchers that I represent, that the rest of the industries in our province are forced to work under, that is broken. The government's intention to fix something that has been going on for decades and that is a mess in some cases is to bring that forward by printing the legislation the morning of or the night before – between the heckles earlier I'm trying to figure out which one it was; but, either way, within 24 hours – bring it in here hot off the presses, and say: "Pass it. It's going to be good. The whole system is busted. It's broken. We've been complaining about this situation for years, and rightly so. So have you. It's all good. We fixed it."

An Hon. Member: Trust me.

Mr. Nixon: "Trust me. It's good, Jason." Oh, sorry; I said my own name, Madam Speaker. "It's good, hon. member. All good. Your constituents are fine. I've got you covered. I've got you covered." We don't accept that.

This is the party that the last time they were talking about WCB had bureaucrats or at least some people that were associated with them telling farmers of ours not to put their bulls out with their cows at nighttime so the calves would come in the day. I can tell you that if you consulted a rancher, they'd tell you that's not how it works. I suspect that if you consulted a few other people, they may be able to help with that as well.

No, we don't trust them, Madam Speaker. It's not our job to trust them. It's not our job to come to this place and say: "Sure. Give us 200 pages of legislation overnight, and we'll let it go through. We'll let it go through. Nah, you don't need to consult on something as important as workers' compensation. Why would you consult on that? That's silly."

Occupational health and safety: something that governs and puts forward rules that make sure workers and employees are safe at work in places where they could die at work. And this side of the House wants us to go: "It's all good. They've got it." Madam Speaker, we don't think they've got it, and that is the point of the amendment. If you don't even know that workers already have a right to refuse unsafe work, then you have not done your job. You have not done your job. All you've done is reword it, which is fine. It's cool. I think the wording is fine, the new wording. But to imply that that is some major difference and why you're trying to bring this legislation through the House is ridiculous.

In fact, Madam Speaker, I think tomorrow I will begin tabling safety orientations from all across the province. I will table the current act, that says that you have the right to refuse unsafe work, and then we can move forward from that. [interjections] Because you do. They laugh. I have met and interviewed two 18-, 19-year-old men that are still here because they knew that they had the right

to refuse unsafe work and did. They did. They exercised their right to refuse unsafe work.

They consulted, Madam Speaker? They didn't consult, because this government doesn't consult on anything. This is a problem. But it becomes a bigger problem when you're dealing with legislation of this magnitude. It becomes a significant problem when you're dealing with legislation that impacts people's livelihoods. It becomes a significant problem when you're dealing with legislation that impacts people getting compensation after they've been hurt at work and they're trying to pay their family's bills. It becomes a significant issue when you're addressing legislation that is associated with individual workers that will climb up on large buildings tomorrow and expect to still be able to come home to their families, and rightly so. They should expect that, but they should also expect this government to consult properly before they bring in legislation like this.

They should also expect this government not to bring forward legislation with almost no time left in a sitting. We're happy to be here as long as it takes, Madam Speaker. I want to be clear on that. In fact, I was a little bit shocked in the last few days by how frustrated the NDP appeared to be that session was going late, particularly given that they tabled a piece of legislation like this and many more in the last days of their scheduled sitting after they never brought any legislation forward for days and days and days and kept adjourning the House early, early, early because they weren't ready.

If this bill was really consulted on – I want you to think about this, Madam Speaker – if there was extensive consultation done on this bill, certainly I would know people that had been consulted. I've worked with many people in the industry. I've talked to them as recently as today. I think that at least a couple of my colleagues would have heard of some organizations and stakeholders that they've been talking to that had been consulted. I certainly think that our shadow minister in charge of this issue would have heard from many stakeholders that had been consulted.

I know that they would have been ready to bring in the bill at the beginning of the sitting instead of sending everybody home sometimes as early as 4 o'clock in the afternoon because they weren't ready. Why was that? Because the legislation was not ready. They did not take the time. They're ramming this through, like they always do before Christmas, legislation that impacts people's lives. It is so ridiculous that this keeps happening in this place, which is why I moved this amendment. The government has not done their job. They have not consulted. They have not done economic analysis. They have not shown Albertans that they know what they're doing. Why does this keep happening? Why?

If the minister was serious about this legislation, it would have been handled, actually, a lot like the government handled the MGA: proper consultation, taking the time to talk to people, making sure things are being discussed. Now, in that case, they still should have gone to a proper, full committee, made sure it was addressed in a democratic way, let the opposition talk to certain experts that only the government has access to to make sure that we're getting this right. But they got closer with it, certainly a lot closer than with Bill 6. What scares me here, Madam Speaker, is that we see the government now going back to where they were with Bill 6.

Now, there are not as many problems with this piece of legislation as with Bill 6 from what we've seen so far. The content itself is different, but the consultation portion of it is the same problem. It's the same problem, and over and over and over we have to rise in this House, stand up and say: why are you not doing your job? That's what this amendment does, Madam Speaker. It says: "Stop. You have not done your job. Stop this. Make sure it is not read a second time. Properly consult some people."

I mean, here are some questions. Has the minister – she may have; I don't know the answers to these questions, Madam Speaker – consulted with the Alberta Construction Safety Association? Has the minister talked to the Manufacturers' Health & Safety Association? Has the minister talked to the petroleum health and safety association? Has the minister talked to the new association that is trying to start up for farmers and ranchers as a result of the legislation that was forced through this House by the government with their supermajority? Those are fair questions. The people we're talking to associated with those agencies do not feel that they have been consulted.

Has the government talked to representatives and a variety of different levels of officers in occupational health and safety? Has the minister met with front-line occupational health and safety officers and asked how this would impact their work? It's a fair question. If you haven't, you haven't consulted. It seems logical to me that those would be people that you would address. Has the minister met with some of the leading experts on law in occupational health and safety? What about the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering? Have you met with the Canadian registered society of safety professionals? I'm talking to many people in their leadership that say: no, but we're here.

5:20

The WCB side. Have we talked to workers that have been impacted about the consequences of their frustration with the system? Have we brought in large employers or representatives of different levels of employers and talked about how these changes will impact their businesses? Have we made sure that we put in proper portions of this legislation to make sure that we're going to educate people associated with these changes? Do we know that we've fixed the problems?

Here's the one I'd really like to know, Madam Speaker: did they identify the problem they're trying to fix? In my time in the Legislature most of the time the government has not identified the problem they're trying to fix. They're just randomly fixing stuff, and they end up making it worse. The focus so often for this NDP government, just like it is now, is on the ideological portion. When you're dealing with just ideology, you'll sometimes get parts of it right, but you'll be blinded, and you won't realize the other stuff that's going on because you don't want to hear the other part, the other concerns, the things that aren't the NDP world view or don't fit in with the manifesto. Did they identify a problem?

Why is this important, Madam Speaker? Let's talk about Bill 6 because it's a good comparison. We are now two years or so away from the Bill 6 debates. We've still got committee messes, and nobody knows what's going on with Bill 6, but put that aside. The government never clearly identified the problem they were trying to fix at that time. They never made it clear what would be accomplished as a result of their legislation that at the time was going to crush the family farm until the opposition showed up and the good farmers and ranchers of this province came to this place and forced the NDP to pass an amendment. But they never put forward clear objectives and said what they were attempting to fix with this legislation. So do we know if Bill 6 is a success? I would argue that it was not. Nothing has really happened with it because it's bogged down in committees, just like we said it would be. But we would not know.

How do we know how to judge this legislation in the future? How do we know or how does the next government know or how do the next people that sit in these seats know which way they've got to go to adjust what we did? They could say, "Hey, they got that part right; they recognized that issue; that one worked, but they were trying to fix it for this issue, and it didn't work," and they could

make adjustments. How do we know? I mean, we just come here and we have a government that continues every day to stand up and randomly throw out legislation without consulting people and then tells the opposition, "Hey, we consulted people." Then the opposition gets called and told: "No. We weren't consulted." Then we're, like: "Oh. Well, which one is it? What's real here? Were they consulted? Were they not consulted?" They try to balance that. Then you come to the Legislature, and you hear the government get the current law so wrong that you get confused.

Then we have a responsibility. We have a responsibility to hold you accountable for the legislation that you're bringing forward, to make sure that you consulted Albertans, to make sure you're bringing in proper legislation, to make sure you're doing it right. If you're not talking to the people that are impacted by it, we don't know if you're doing it right. Then we're getting called by the people that are impacted. They're saying: "No. They're not getting it right. They're not listening to us. They're not talking to us. They only want to talk to people with the NDP world view."

This is too important. This is too important. I get really offended when hon. members across the way get up and try to imply that because we're doing our job and saying that you guys didn't do your job, that means that we don't want people to be safe or that we don't care about safety in workplaces. I remember the first time I was on a large construction project. The tower crane operator took two two-by-sixes and put them across to the building we were working on – and we were probably up 18, 19 storeys by that time – and was walking across them on the flat, back and forth from this tower crane. I remember looking at that and going: "Oh, my gosh. That guy has got a wife and kids at home, and he needs to get home." I want people to get home from work. I care about them. I've got family members who are working out there now.

But this government wants to ram through their ideological portions, only focus on certain aspects of it that are a priority to them. It's fine that it's a priority to you – there's nothing wrong with that – but you've got to recognize that it has other impacts, and you've got to make sure it's right. You know, in my experience, the problem that this government, the NDP Party and the NDP members across the way, has is that they meet with stakeholders, and when the stakeholders say, "No, we don't agree with you; you have this wrong," instead of listening and saying, "Oh, that's an interesting aspect to that; they have a different view of that; what does this individual do for a living, and what experience do they have with that?" they go, "We want nothing to do with you."

They live in a bubble, Madam Speaker. They live in a bubble, and they prove it time and time again, and they've proven it again with this legislation, that they don't want to expand out and hear from other people. And it's sad, because there are many parts of this legislation that are good, that I support. I would like to be able to support the whole thing, and maybe I will be given the opportunity if we go to committee. Assuming that the government is going to continue with their pattern and vote down my reasonable amendment to get this to consultation, then we will continue to do our jobs to try to make this legislation better. Because this government is not listening to the people they should consult with, we will do it for them.

That's what we've been doing the whole time, but it is a heck of a lot more effective if the government does it the right way, if the government includes everybody in the process, if the government takes their time, gets legislation right, makes sure that this will be in place for many years to come and will have the positive impact that they want, and, even better yet, Madam Speaker, as I've already said, if the government identifies the problem they're trying to fix before they fix it.

In my view, the NDP in their time in power have created more problems than they've fixed. It is our responsibility to try to prevent that. We are sent here to hold them accountable, to hold them accountable for ramming through legislation at the end of a sitting and hoping that the opposition just goes: oh, we want to go home. You know what I find funny about that, Madam Speaker? They've been in here with us long enough that they should know we aren't going to go home when we still have to stand up and do our job for constituents. Not one member on this side of the House is scared to consult with people. Not one member on this side of the House is scared to stand up in this House and do his job. Now that we've gotten there, you may try to ram through legislation hoping that we're tired. We'll stay here all night, and we'll do it again tomorrow, because that is our job, and we're proud to do it.

Mr. Barnes: I bought you your Christmas present.

Mr. Nixon: Perfect.

It won't work. You'd think they would learn. I get how they tried that the first time. They thought: "Wow. A rookie opposition, the first fall sitting, heading towards Christmas, and they're missing their families." Most of our members, like some of their members, including you, Madam Speaker, are far away from their families and their homes and their kids. They thought that we would cave on behalf of our farmers and ranchers. They learned, without a doubt that we weren't caving, that we would stand with our farm and ranch community, and we won't cave on this piece of legislation either. We will continue to stand up.

Here we have a piece of legislation and an amendment from me that says: hey, let's stop. That doesn't mean that we don't pass this legislation. That doesn't mean that this is not important or that we don't take the time or that we don't actually accomplish this in the end. What this means is that we say: stop, get it to the right group of people, make sure everybody gets to participate that will be impacted by it, and let's get a good piece of legislation. I strongly think that if this went to a committee process and everybody was allowed to participate, we would have a better law. We would have better legislation that would have a better impact on the people that we're trying to help with this legislation. I also think that if you sent it to a committee, very quickly you would separate the WCB and the occupational health and safety aspects of this bill and deal with them in two different components so that you could do a really good job.

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe we would go through a consulting process and I'd realize: "Oh, this makes sense. This is a good idea. We should put these two pieces of legislation together." I don't know. I can't see it right now, from the limited time that we've had with this legislation, but if we went through a proper process of consultation, there may be very reasonable reasons for going that way. That's why you consult.

Madam Speaker, when I talk to people about the work that we do here in Edmonton and they realize that legislation could come forward on a Monday and clear this Assembly by Thursday or Tuesday, but often within a week, before any of us who work for the people back home – okay. I work for the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. The members across the way do not work for the Premier. They work for their constituents and do a good job of it. I don't agree with some of the ways they do it, but I'm sure they're trying to represent their constituents. Then their constituents find out – I know they feel the same way as mine – that they don't even go home and talk to them about a bill as big as this, that this government expects the opposition just to fold and say: yeah, let's pass that.

The minister said: "Don't worry. I called them. It's good. Good, hon. member. We're good to go." Then I'm always so disappointed because my phone starts ringing off the hook, and they say: "No. They don't get it. They missed it completely." We have to continue to stand in this Assembly and do the same thing over and over. It's important that we do it. But what would be more effective is if the government actually took the time, listened to a reasonable amendment like this, and then said: yeah; you know, the opposition has got a point.

5:30

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre pointed out a bunch of people that I had never even thought about that would want to be consulted on this legislation. Some people over on the other side of the House have some expertise in this issue as well. It would be good to hear from some of the people that the hon. member is pointing out. Let's send this through a committee process. Let's make sure that we get this legislation right, and then we can pass it in January.

Until the government can stand up in this House and say, "Here is the economic analysis, here is what we've figured out, this is the impact that it's going to have on people, here are the people that we've properly consulted with, here are their concerns, here is what we're trying to accomplish, here is the purpose of this legislation, this is why we printed a multiple-hundred-page bill in the morning and threw it on your desks and asked you guys to pass this," they haven't done their job.

The biggest question is: why did this legislation take so long to get here in the sitting? They weren't ready. They were putting this legislation together, Madam Speaker, in the middle of the sitting. Hence, why we were going home at 4 o'clock in the afternoon was because the government was not ready to proceed. Then they put that legislation on our desks and said: "Pass it. Trust us. Everything is fine." It's not like the biggest blow-up, the biggest mistake that this government ever made, wasn't already a WCB and occupational health and safety bill. "No, no. Forget about that. We learned our lesson from this one."

When I heard it was coming, the day before, Madam Speaker, I thought: "Oh. Maybe they did learn their lesson. This is going to be interesting. It's going to be interesting to see who they talk to and if they have taken the time to do the job right this time, if they have learned from their mistakes, if they have learned better ways to proceed with this type of legislation." I was sorely disappointed. The same thing.

Less content problems with the bill. There's some really good stuff in this legislation. There was not much in Bill 6 that you could stand up and say was good. In this bill, though, we can stand up and say that some of it is good, but there are problems with it. The government still has not shown that they've consulted, which is why a reasoned amendment has been brought forward in this House by me. Through you, Madam Speaker, to the members across the way: you have not done your job. You have a responsibility. Do your job. There's nothing wrong with taking your time and doing your job right.

If there was an urgent reason in this legislation that this needed to be passed immediately, life and death or significant consequences that were associated with parts of this legislation, why is that not identified and passed right away and then proper work done on this legislation? Why do we go halfway all the time with the NDP government? Why? We're here, two years into their mandate, and we're still losing 12,000 jobs in a month because they're going halfway. They're not doing their job. They're not admitting the problems. They're not identifying the problems and then trying to fix them. They're just randomly throwing out pieces

of legislation not fully thought through and then rushing it through the legislative process.

Madam Speaker, if we were in Peace River today, you and I, and we sat in a coffee shop and we told them that the government expected legislation of this magnitude to be passed with only a few hours and a couple days of debate, I know, without a doubt, that they would be shocked to find out that our system works like that. They would be shocked. Most of them would think the government was going through a proper process, was taking time, was consulting with people. Most of them would think that there would be independent experts and people that understand the legislation that we're working with, that would have come as witnesses and would have addressed these issues with members, allowed members to ask questions. Most of them would have thought that we together would go through this bill and go, "This line here: I think there's a mistake here; this doesn't work," through a committee process.

That doesn't happen here. Instead, the government plays games. They put through a couple of bills at the beginning of a sitting. They adjourn, send everybody there, and then they get it all, load it all up, hundreds and hundreds of pages of legislation, dump it all on the members' desks, and then say: "Okay. Let's get out of here. We were scheduled to be out of here on Thursday."

I can tell you that the hon. members of the government, the hon. NDP members across the way, that had the responsibility and the privilege of sitting in opposition in this place in the past didn't like this either. They recognized the problem, rightly so at the time, when the Progressive Conservative government would do this to them. It's not right. Often what we see when we talk about these types of issues is that the hon. members rise, and they say: well, the PCs did it to us.

Madam Speaker, my kids do that to me sometimes. My daughter threw a little toy car at my son the other day when I was down in the basement. When I asked her why, she said: well, he did it to me. What? I get that from 11-year-old twins, but from the government, "The PCs did it to us"? They were wrong when they did it to you. That's why the PCs don't have a party in this House no more. [interjections] That's why the PCs do not have a party no more.

Mr. Coolahan: Because you joined them.

Mr. Nixon: That's correct. I actually want to help the members across the way. They are correct. There is one member who is identified as a PC member in this House, but they do not have a political party no more. I know. I wrote the agreement that oversaw that.

Anyways, the point is that it was wrong. Albertans didn't like it, so why would the NDP continue that behaviour? Their only justification to Albertans – forget about the partisan politics – is: oh, the PCs used to do that, so we'll keep doing that. I mean, it's the oldest story in the book. Two wrongs don't make a right. A lot of people have tried to figure out how to make two wrongs make a right, but it doesn't usually work out. In fact, all of us have probably done it. It doesn't work.

We're talking about something as serious as this, an issue that impacts Albertans, impacts workers, employers. It deals with life and death. When I was last working in safety – it was a long time ago. I left safety a long time ago, Madam Speaker. There used to be a workplace injury or death every three – I could have these stats wrong, but it was high. A workplace death almost every three days – that would have included long-term illness that was associated with work, cancer and those types of things – and an injury, I think, every three minutes. So it's serious. We recognize that. We also recognize if you don't get it right.

I'd like to close with another topic. There is a lot of stuff to talk about in this bill, and we're going to talk about a lot in the days to come, but that's the near-miss aspect of this. The government has talked about near misses as part of this legislation. I think near-miss reporting is important. They used to call it the iceberg kind of idea, that so many near misses would be floating down below like an iceberg, and then the accidents you can see above. It's an important thing. But now with mandatory we went too far, it appears, with what we're doing in this legislation. Do you know how many near misses would get reported on a job site? It's part of it, near misses. You're going to go too far. Then what's going to happen is that organizations are going to try, but employees aren't going to report. There has to be a threshold of what type of near miss; otherwise, that iceberg thing will happen.

So a hammer falls off a scaffold, doesn't hit anybody: that's a near miss.

An Hon. Member: It has to be reported.

Mr. Nixon: Yes. Absolutely. It's already in the safety protocol for the company to report it but not to occupational health and safety.

You know, here's the problem that they're not understanding. I represent one of the largest constituencies in this province, okay? Many provincial parks, two national parks, some of our most precious wildlife resources are there. Our headwaters, waters to almost every town in central and part of southern Alberta, flow through my constituency on the way to the towns that you represent. A big, big area, a beautiful area. Lots of you guys vacation there. I talk to you guys when you go there on rafting or canoe trips. It's a beautiful place to represent. Do you know how many fish and wildlife officers are covering these areas that are larger – larger – than most European countries? Do you know how many are left? One or two in those areas. Occupational health and safety: how many officers are going to be able to come in and deal with hammers falling off a scaffold? These are reasonable questions to ask.

5:40

Reporting near misses is important. It's already being dealt with within the safety protocols of companies. Again, you cannot pass a core audit if you do not have a near-miss reporting process in your organization, one of the very first things that an auditor will check when he does a safety audit in order to get your core audit. It already exists. Now you take it so far. What are the consequences of it? Now, there may be a reason. Let's talk about it.

Have we priced out what the increase will be to occupational health and safety as a result of this? Have we priced out what the impact will be to the taxpayer? Then what will be the benefit? It seems to me it would be cheaper to continue to allow the safety associations to address that in their audit protocols and make sure that near-miss reporting is happening and being followed up on. But maybe there's a reason. I would have enjoyed being in the committee and would have heard about the reason. Instead, I'm standing here tonight with a big piece of legislation and being asked to pass it on faith. I'm not going to pass legislation of this magnitude on the faith that this government has got it right because I haven't seen them get almost anything right yet.

This is a government that has been in power for over two years that has had more of a negative impact on the communities and the people that I represent than any government in the history of our province. If they thought that I stood up in this Assembly and just rubber-stamped their legislation on their word, I would sure have a problem in the Sundre A&W Friday, when I get there for a visit. That's not our job, and it's not their job either, Madam Speaker.

Their members who are not in cabinet should be asking the same questions. They should be demanding the same proper consultation process from the government on behalf of their constituents.

We've seen this on so many issues that relate to this. The crime thing was the most recent example, where you've got one side of the House standing up and representing constituents that are being devastated by a situation taking place, and the other side of the House, I know, is worried about it. I know they're worried. I've talked to rural members across the way. I've talked to people from the community. I know they're worried about it. They should be. It's terrible what's happening to people. But they're not up on their feet saying to the government: get it right; fix it.

No different with this bill. They're taking the government at their word. They're taking the hon. minister, who I have a tremendous amount of respect for, completely at her word that she got this right. Open your e-mails. Call your constituency assistants and find out what they're hearing from people on the ground. Talk to some of your largest employers. Talk to some occupational health and safety officers. Call in some national construction safety officers. See how this impacts them. That's your job. Their job, Madam Speaker, is no different than our job, and I think they forget it a lot in this House. I think that's unfortunate. I really hope that this side of the House, when and if they are given the privilege of forming government, don't forget that. It is our job to hold the government, those front seats, accountable for their decision. It is our job to make sure that they make the right decision, that they consult the people in Alberta, that they get legislation right, that they do not go halfway.

Madam Speaker, the members of the NDP Party that are not in government should be just as offended by this process as I am. They should be just as offended that this legislation was dropped on their desks and that they were asked to make decisions for their constituents without proper consultation. They should be just as offended that they don't get to participate to make sure this legislation is done right. They should be just as offended and insulted, in fact more because it's their own party that's doing it to them, bringing in this legislation and demanding that they pass it on trust and showing nothing that they did their job right, showing no economic analysis, showing nothing about consultation, no clear consultation process, all done behind closed doors. Who was consulted? That's not consultation, Madam Speaker.

We spend so much time talking about this in this House, it's ridiculous, but it's become the theme of the NDP government. It's become the theme of the NDP government. We don't consult. We just live inside the dome. We just live inside the dome. We talk to people. I'm just assuming now at this point, Madam Speaker, but they talk to people outside the dome that already believe what they've heard. They limit the people that they communicate with because if they were communicating with the same people that I communicate with all across Alberta, not just in my constituency, they would be hearing these same concerns because I hear it everywhere.

This party on this side of the House just underwent two major campaigns in the last year all across the province: one, to unite the conservative party, to bring like-minded conservatives together, something that has happened in the House; and, second, then to elect the new leader of the United Conservative Party and the next Premier of Alberta, the Hon. Jason Kenney. From one side of the province to another all of us have travelled during that process campaigning for different candidates, campaigning for unity, standing in town halls. I've been in many town halls along the way, and the theme is constant. I've got 22 counties and towns and school boards in my constituency, not counting the small ones like hamlets

and stuff, and every one of their councils feels the same way, no consultation. No consultation.

This government is making it up as they go, and they're in charge of one of the largest economies in the world. It's scary. Start doing your job. Madam Speaker, through you to them: start doing your job. For the backbencher MLAs that are across the way, start doing your job. There's nothing wrong with saying: we expect better. There's nothing wrong with saying that when you want to bring a piece of legislation to this House, you will make sure that there's enough time to properly debate it. You won't complain when the opposition does their job and debates it. You will make sure that there are committees and that the job is done right. And most importantly, you will consult Albertans before you bring in laws that apply to them and impact their lives and their livelihood.

That doesn't mean that what you're trying to do is wrong. In this case I think that most of it is pretty good. What's wrong is that you're not doing it right. You're not doing it right. Instead, you come to this House every night once we get to this stage, and you sit there frustrated because we talk too much. Again, Madam Speaker, my wife will probably agree with that.

Well, get up and start talking. Get up and start asking your cabinet ministers what they're doing about this. Get up and start asking what's going on with this bill. Demand better. Demand that the right people are consulted with. Demand that your constituents are consulted with. Demand that this goes to committee. That's what this amendment does. And if the members across the way vote for this, that's what they're doing, saying that we expect better.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know what it's like to be standing in this Legislature speaking, be in the middle of a thought, and then have the timer run out. So I just want to give the member some extra time to finish his thoughts and continue on. Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you. I think that a few more minutes is helpful. I felt a little bit tight on time there. You know, my point as I was closing, Madam Speaker, to the hon. member's question – I appreciate it – was on the need for all of us, no matter what our political stripes are, which side of this House we sit on, for those of us MLAs that are private members of this place, that are not in cabinet, to have a responsibility to do our job in this place. I don't get in my car on a Sunday night and drive from my beloved Sundre to this place, for a week away from my wife and three kids, my horses, my farm, the places that I love, to sit here and just talk.

We have a responsibility. We have a responsibility to say to ministers when they bring legislation forward here: "Did you get this right? Did you do this? What is going on with this? I think you got this wrong. This is what I've heard from my constituents." That is our job, and it's their job, too, and that's why we're bringing an amendment like this. When a minister, who I respect, brings forward a bill like this and then we find out from many people that they weren't consulted with and we hear comments from their backbencher MLAs that show that they haven't been consulted with, then it is our job, no matter if you're NDP, Alberta Party, or United Conservative Party, to stand up and say: "We expect better. Do better."

We are not going to take bringing in a piece of legislation like this and trying to force it through and then we're just going to rubber-stamp it. The people that elected to send us to this place would be offended, and rightly so, if they thought that's what we were doing. It is not our job to rubber-stamp on this side of the aisle,

certainly, and it is not the job of members across the way to rubber-stamp either. They have constituents, just like you and I do, Madam Speaker. They have a responsibility to those constituents to fight for those constituents, to make sure that things are being done right for those constituents, and certainly, at the very least, to represent them in this place and to make sure that they're being consulted with before legislation is passed.

5:50

They should be offended, in my mind, Madam Speaker, like I am, which is why I moved this amendment, that this legislation was not properly consulted on. They should be offended that there is no clear economic analysis of the consequences of decisions in there. They should be offended that there is no clear objective with this legislation. They should be offended that the minister and the NDP government have not articulated what they're trying to fix so that we can make sure that the bill, that they propose will fix it, will fix it. They're essentially just saying: "Here's a bill. Pass it." Well, we say: "What are we doing with the bill? What are we trying to fix?" And they say: "Oh, it's good. We talked to people." They should be offended by that.

They should stand up in the Legislature, and they should stand up for their constituents. I'm not saying that they're not representing their constituents back home in their ridings. I don't know that. I assume that most of them are doing that. What I'm saying is that in this place they have a responsibility. They don't get paid to drive here to just sit and do nothing. Their job is to hold the government to account, just like us, and they have a better ability to do it than we do. We will continue to do our responsibility as the Official Opposition, but government private members should do their job, too.

Demand better from your cabinet ministers. Demand better from the government. You guys make them the government. Your Premier is not the Premier if you don't say that she is, so you can demand better from her. You can demand that we get the job done right in this place. Or you can continue doing what you've been doing, which is rubber-stamping legislation without even a peep, which is standing by when important things like rural crime are just punted away or bills like this are put in front of this Chamber without proper consultation. Those are the two choices that are before every member of this House.

The members on this side of the House continue to stand up, and we will right up until the next election is called. I believe, Madam Speaker, that Albertans will fire that government and replace them with this side of the House because of that. But even that – even that – is not why you should do it. You should do it because you took an oath in this place to do it, and you should do your job. You should do your job and not continue to allow this behaviour to go forward.

That is what I was talking about. That is what I think is important. I think that it is a fair point, and it speaks directly to this amendment that I have brought forward in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Are we under 29(2)(a) here? [interjections] We're speaking to the amendment?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. I will speak to the amendment, then. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have to say that that was really impressive from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. It was really impressive.

It felt like it was a long, blustery summer's evening, but what ended up happening was that that bluster turned into a tornado. You know how a tornado acts in an urban area, where it hits one house, it misses a few, and then it hits another one? Well, that's kind of what happened there. He got one thing right, got a few things wrong, got one thing right, got a few things wrong. So let's talk about that. [interjections] That was pretty good.

Mr. Gill: That's very disrespectful. Homes are getting affected every day.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. Anyway, I don't think that was disrespectful at all. I'm telling you that he got some things right and he got some things wrong. That's just the way it is. [interjection] Just calm down over there.

Talking about the amendment here, you know, of course, I don't want to stop. We need to carry on with passing this legislation. Again, we need to talk about that this is not radical, Madam Speaker. It's not radical. This is bringing much of this legislation up to speed with the other provinces. That's not radical whatsoever.

A few of the things that the member got wrong, when I said that he was missing those houses in the tornado, were that, you know, he said it was silly of me to say earlier that because legislation is put forth on harassment, it actually helps the employers, that they couldn't do the job without it. I mean, come on, Madam Speaker. Have you not seen that every other week there is an article in the paper about harassment at a different workplace? Like, two weeks ago there was a series on it. It was huge. Clearly, it's not working, the unlegislated harassment policies in these workplaces. So we are helping employers in that respect, and we are helping employees so that they're safe at work.

The other thing that I believe was incorrect was when he talked about how we already have a right to refuse work, and that is not the case. The actual wording prior to this bill was that an employee has a duty to refuse imminent danger at work. At the risk of repeating myself – I talked about this the other day, too – it's a nuanced difference, and words are very important. So duty and right are very different. We know that from legislation. We know that from collective agreements and from contracts.

What changes when you call it a right rather than a duty is that when workers are assigned a duty to refuse unsafe work as it was,

it effectively shifts the responsibility from employers to workers. That's the big difference. Establishing a right to refuse unsafe work improves the ability of workers to protect themselves and others from unsafe work. The changes also protect workers from reprisals for exercising these rights and complying with workplace health and safety laws.

You know, we need to move forward with this legislation. And I understand that the opposition is complaining a lot about this being a big bill, okay? Again, at the risk of repeating myself, WCB and OH and S are intrinsically connected, and it's very logical to put these together. They want to not read this a second time. It's about three pieces: consultation, economic impact, and potential negative impact. I'm going to disagree with that.

In terms of economic impact, administering a joint health and safety committee should not cost employers any more money other than meeting time with employees. Also, I mean, we understand fully that for every one dollar spent on training and safety in the workplace, three dollars are saved because we don't have time off in the workplace for workers.

We need to move forward with this. Sometimes, Madam Speaker, you just need to do the right thing. This is doing the right thing. You know, this all started with Bill 17, the changes to the labour code.

Economic impact, too. I mean, lives are priceless, Madam Speaker. That's why we need to enhance our health and safety policies. You can't put a price on a life. You can't put a price on your husband or wife coming home from work. You can't put a price on your children coming home from work. I mean, really.

We know there will be some costs to WCB, and we are working on that. Most of that won't be implemented until June anyway, six months down the road. So there will be time to work on that.

Again, you know, this is not radical legislation. It does drive me a bit crazy when the opposition talks about how, you know, these are ideological changes. I mean, every government in Canada, do they enhance their . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but the House now stands adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 6, 2017

Day 62

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 33 Electoral Divisions Act

Mr. Stier moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the descriptions of electoral divisions referenced in the bill and described in the DVD tabled as Sessional Paper 624/2017 do not adequately provide for the effective representation of rural Alberta.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 5: Mr. Loewen]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I was last talking on this bill, I was going through, I guess, some of the trials that we see with some of the boundary changes and, in particular, some of the sizes of the rural constituencies. When I look at the minority report from Gwen Day, I want to point to one of her numbered comments here. It says:

3. Unnecessary disruption. In spite of population growth, many existing ridings could have remained unchanged and been within allowable variances both positive and negative. Because of the perceived need to reach voter parity, the final maps include significant changes to most rural and urban boundaries. This disruption, in my view, was unnecessary given the provision in the Act for justifiable variances.

Madam Speaker, the other day I tabled some maps where simple changes were made . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order (29)(2)(a).

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My hon. colleague got caught there in the middle of a sentence. I wondered if he just might like to finish it.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you. I would love to finish my comments on that. These maps that were tabled in the Legislature the other day redrew the boundaries with minimal disruption. It basically took eight maps to change 21 constituencies, so 66 constituencies remained unchanged. There wouldn't have to be any name changes because there weren't any significant enough changes to change any names, and all of these ended up within the variances that legislation allows. So when we talk about unnecessary disruption, obviously there were simpler ways to do this job and still come up with the same result, which, of course, is making sure that we're within the variances of the legislation.

Now, when we talk about the commission and how they listened to different people that presented, well, I hardly know anybody that's happy with these constituency changes. I don't even think the people in urban Alberta are happy with these changes because they've done a lot of changes that were unnecessary. I think, you

know, there are a lot of problems with this and, like I say, unnecessary disruptions, of course.

Now, I do want to point out one thing here. Like I say, when I was speaking before, I talked about the size of my constituency and how I could drive to the Legislature in Edmonton in the same amount of time I could drive to the furthest community in this new constituency, and I'm not even in the furthest south community in the constituency. For me to drive to the Legislature is about a three-and-a-half-hour drive, and to drive up to the Worsley area is three and a half hours the other way. That gives you an idea of the size. Of course, Fox Creek is an hour's drive south of me, so to drive from the furthest communities within the constituency is actually four and a half hours. That doesn't take you to the farthest reaches of the constituency, but they're the furthest communities.

Again, like I mentioned the last time I was speaking, I'm not complaining about my job and what my job would entail. I'm happy to do my job. I'm happy to travel. I'm happy to visit the areas that I represent within the constituency. But I do think somebody should take into consideration the people that are being represented and the communities that are being represented and how they feel about having an MLA that has to represent 71 different communities – 71 different communities – eight different MDs and counties, four First Nations reserves, and this huge expanse of area. Of course, the main point is that it didn't have to be that way.

The relativity of this constituency as it's been redrawn: as far as how the communities relate to each other and travel corridors and different things like that, there's no relativity in it anymore. There isn't anything that the people of Fox Creek, let's say, have with the people of Worsley. Of course, they're all Albertans. They have a lot of things in common, but there isn't anything that they would be doing to ever meet up or have anything, you know, that would correspond with each other.

Now, when I read through the interim report, I was interested to read about some of the people that presented in the report and some of the complaints they had with it. I was interested to read about the Member for Calgary-Klein and what he said about his constituency. I'll just read a couple of paragraphs: while I have no real objection to the proposal of adding the communities on the east side of the Deerfoot, both north and south of 16th Avenue, I do believe that the commission should consider the fact that, like 16th Ave, Deerfoot is a natural boundary that, again, generally is not crossed to participate in school activities. So here he is concerned about crossing the Deerfoot within his constituency. The Deerfoot, for some reason, is this grand barrier, but 400 kilometres is nothing, I guess. I guess I don't understand.

But it goes on. It gets even better, actually: what's more, adding the communities east of Deerfoot and south of 16th Avenue makes the two farthest points at either end of the riding a great distance. It was interesting to look at the map and actually calculate how great a distance this is. Would you like to know how great a distance this is? Well, let me tell you how great a distance it is. Ten kilometres. Ten kilometres.

An Hon. Member: How much?

The Deputy Speaker: He's keeping the House in suspense.

Another speaker to the referral? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to an amendment by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod in regard to Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act. I know that this bill will get passed here. It's just a matter of time before somebody waves the white flag and the government votes on this and the bill

gets passed. But I have a job, to represent my constituents of a rural constituency, and I'm going to do my job and try to speak up for rural Alberta.

Madam Speaker, Bill 33 does a disservice to rural Albertans, and for that reason this Chamber should not proceed further with reading of this bill. I'm sorry to have to take this stance, but the Electoral Boundaries Commission took a tack that creates an unfair disparity between rural representation and urban representation. Should we approve the boundaries as proposed by the commission, it will result in a shift from which rural Alberta will never recover.

The crux of the issue is that the commission has decided that voter parity – that is, the principle of one person, one vote – is the be-all and end-all when it comes to redrawing the boundaries. As a result, representing rural Alberta will become more challenging after the next election, and it'll continue down that road in future redrawing of boundaries for the commission is setting a direction for future reviews, too. In other words, Bill 33 makes it impossible for rural MLAs to provide their constituents with the level of representation that they'll want to offer. Bill 33 indicates that it's not just okay, but it will apply in the future, too, because the most important factor for redrawing the boundaries is that populations remain relatively the same between all ridings in Alberta, rural and urban.

This is the first time a boundary commission has taken that stance. Previous ones made an allowance, as the court permits, and the reason for that allowance is that effective representation has been and should continue to be the paramount factor when redrawing boundaries. This report, however, dismisses the challenges of rural representation versus urban representation and even went so far – and all of us know how ridiculous this is – to suggest that rural MLAs could hire staff to drive them around so that the member could work in the vehicle while travelling. When you have statements like that and then you have the commission's first draft, that creates constituencies that run from just outside of Edmonton's border to the Saskatchewan border, you know that there are underlying problems.

7:40

Then, Madam Speaker, the commission went back to the drawing board, and while making some admittedly better rural constituencies from the trading patterns and common community interests, it continued the error of holding up population density as the most important factor. A result was the loss of rural constituencies, with growth in urban constituencies. But the real problem is that rural members will have to cover an even larger geographic area as we all know that there's no money to hire staff to drive them around, and if there were, taxpayers would not be happy.

The solution would have been to make effective representation the priority for both urban and rural residents. With that in mind, the boundaries would only have needed some tweaking. Since it is the members in this Chamber who know better than anyone the challenges of this job, it is now our job to correct the wrong that Bill 33 is foisting upon Albertans.

Madam Speaker, Bill 33 should not proceed any further. Alberta is better off with its current boundaries, and the precedent that this bill sets is simply wrong. We must put a stop to it now, or rural Albertans in the future, after the next election and further down the road, will not have the representation that they deserve. Making this assertion takes nothing away from urban Alberta as representation is markedly different and presents its own challenges in our cities. Geography, though, isn't one of those challenges. For the commission not to consider geography as a considerable factor and,

in fact, dismiss it in an offhanded manner bodes so poorly for rural Alberta that we must deal with it now, before it is too late.

Now, Madam Speaker, you know, I don't blame the commission. I think they did their good work, and they meant well. I think that if you look back in *Hansard* to when this commission was set up, I said in this House that, you know, when you're setting up a commission to represent and draw the boundaries for all of Alberta, it would be nice to have people on the commission from all over Alberta. There wasn't one member on that commission from rural, northern Alberta. There are two from the government side, two from the opposition. That has nothing to do with representing all of Alberta. I think that in the future, if the commission was set up to have representation from all over the province, it might do a better job of trying to decide what's best for the province.

You know, not to be partisan or disparaging to any member in the House – I know that everybody works hard – but maybe just something to think about. I know it's been brought up lots, about the sizes of the constituencies in Alberta. We've heard of constituencies from 90,000 square miles to six square miles. Distance has been talked about lots, Madam Speaker, but something else I want people to think about – just think about it – is that the city of Calgary has 14 councillors that represent all of the people in the city of Calgary, and they actually deal with issues affecting the people of Calgary, you know, on a more direct basis than having to deal with the people, yet there are 21 MLAs representing the city of Calgary. So if 14 councillors can do the job, why does it take 21 MLAs?

I know that there are lots of rural constituencies that you can refer to, but I know mine the best. Grande Prairie-Wapiti has 51 councillors that represent that same area and one MLA. So I guess that one rural MLA does the work of 51 councillors whereas in the city it takes 21 MLAs to do the work of 14 councillors. I don't know. You draw the conclusions from that. I don't mean to be partisan or disparaging, but when you just think about what I just said and the numbers, maybe you'll think that this should be done a little differently.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Speaking as one of the former 14 councillors, between 2001 and 2010, as it turns out, I'm not the only one in the House who's a former councillor in Calgary. The government's Finance minister and President of Treasury Board is also a former councillor.

You know what, Madam Speaker? I will say that the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has made some good points, and I think they really need to be considered carefully. I would say to the member – I would ask him to say when I give him a chance here: what things are you concerned about? Let me say, because probably nobody else in the world calls it that but me, that it was the 2012 election, when I first came to this place, that I believe was the first time in the history of Alberta that urban ridings outnumbered rural ridings. I refer to it as the TSN turning point. I don't mean to be light about it, but the fact is that it's a shift in the balance of power.

Here's the problem with that. Cities where I represent need to be represented, but rural ridings need to be represented, too, because if Alberta is going to be strong, we need to remember that we're interdependent. While most of the wealth that's generated in Alberta gets administered within the cities, almost all of it gets generated in rural Alberta. So if rural Alberta suffers, Alberta

suffers. If urban Alberta suffers, rural Alberta suffers, and then all of Alberta suffers.

I would ask the member if he could enlighten the rest of us here about whether members or citizens in rural Alberta feel the same way, and maybe he could talk about some of their concerns. As this urban member of this House really believes, we need to look after all of Alberta, not just my riding. All of us in all 87 ridings need to worry about all 87 ridings even though we need to get elected in one. I'd like the hon. member to reflect on that if he would.

The Deputy Speaker: Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good questions. Like I said, I don't mean to be disparaging to MLAs from Calgary or Edmonton or any urban area. I'm just trying to point out that there's a huge difference, and we have to be careful that just population isn't the only reason for drawing constituency boundaries. I mean, I've got seven municipalities. I go to municipal council meetings every year. I meet with all the councillors one on one.

But in rural Alberta my focus isn't to go door-knocking. I get caught up, and I go help some of my colleagues, but in the cities you go door-knocking. If I went door-knocking in rural Alberta, I'd be driving 10 miles, and at every door I went to, I'd have to go in and be a guest for an hour and have a coffee. You don't get anywhere. Madam Speaker, this last weekend I was in a Santa Claus parade. I go to auction sales. There's nothing better in rural Alberta than an auction sale. You get to talk to a thousand of your constituents, and you do it all year round. When it comes to election time, door-knocking isn't where it's at in rural Alberta.

If you do your job for four years and meet the people, get around your constituency, go to rodeos and fairs and auction sales and trade shows, that's how you meet the people. But when I go to a trade show in my constituency, every person there is from my constituency. When you go to a trade show in Calgary, there might be 10,000 people there. Maybe, if you're lucky, there would be a thousand from your constituency, so you don't even know if you're talking to your constituents or whoever you're talking to. In rural Alberta, if you go to an auction sale, you know that everybody there that you're talking to is your constituent. There's a lot better connection.

But if you stretch that out and make it impossible, like I said in my speech, if you start down that slope and we get a little bit this time and next time, you know – I don't know – it might take 20 or 50 years, but pretty soon there are only going to be a couple of us left representing all of rural Alberta. And, as my colleague said, that's where the resources are, that's where the riches are, that's what's growing in Alberta, and that's what's important to building this province. All the oil revenue doesn't come out of the cities even though Calgary thinks they're the oil capital of Alberta. The oil comes out of the rural area.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good evening. It is a pleasure to rise during the most wonderful time of the year and speak to Bill 33. We have heard a lot of very, very, very good arguments – maybe that's an overstatement – very good encouragement and discussion around this very important issue that's before the Chamber. I want to just encourage all members to think about the impacts and decisions that we make.

7:50

You know, oftentimes when we debate particular issues, it's very easy for us to get focused on how it affects the constituency that we

represent the most. And while that's a very important role that we have – we're elected by those individuals in our constituency to represent those constituents, to speak on their behalf. We're not addressed by our names but addressed as the name of our constituency because we speak for those constituents. I understand that that's a very important part of our role.

Particularly when we're talking and thinking about Bill 33, it's quite easy to think about how it affects the constituency we represent. But this evening I'd like to encourage members of the Assembly to take a very broad view, not just thinking about the nuances of their constituency but of our whole province. How does it have a positive or negative impact on our province? Certainly, this particular piece of legislation has a major, major impact on rural Alberta and, as such, a major impact on our entire province. I encourage members to think about that as they are voting on this particular motion, this motion that essentially states that the

Electoral Divisions Act be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the descriptions of electoral divisions referenced in the bill and described in the DVD tabled as Sessional Paper 624/2017 do not adequately provide for the effective representation of rural Alberta.

I think it's important that as we take a look at that motion and consider the fact that the commission – while I appreciate the work that the commissioners did, it is important that we consider what it means for rural Alberta, not just for rural Alberta but effective representation, which in many respects is a tenet of our Westminster democracy. It is so, so, so critical that we maintain those traditions that have been enshrined both in legislation as well as in case law and then through Supreme Court rulings to make sure that this very important clause of effective representation is considered.

You'll know, Madam Speaker, from being part of the debate over the last number of days, that many strong cases have been made that effective representation is not, in fact, a key tenet of what the commission did. I think that we ought to take some time to fix this problem. One of the ways that we can do that is to not make Bill 33 into law. Some would say that because the commission did their report, because the commission went out and travelled around the province, we only have the option of accepting the report. Well, that's just not true.

I think that we need to focus on what our job here is to do, and that is to represent all Albertans. In this case the legislation said: effective representation. That is not what has been delivered. So I think that we owe it to Albertans to make sure that that's what we deliver. I encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this motion so that we can make sure that over the next generations effective representation remains an important tenet here in our Westminster democracy.

Let's just talk a little bit about rural Alberta and what that means and why it remains to be important. I think that in Commissioner Day's minority report she did a wonderful time, or a wonderful job – I'm sure she had a wonderful time – of describing the importance of rural Alberta and what it brings to the mosaic that is Alberta. And she does a wonderful job speaking specifically about the Charter and case law that lays the foundation for this effective representation tenet. It's a tenet that really has built our democracy. I know that folks in the city – and not all folks in the city, so that was a widespread generalization. But I know that there are a number of folks in the city who believe that because they have a slightly larger population in any one electoral division or another, there is a disproportionate amount of representation, but in fact the legislation provides for variances.

I'd like to talk a little bit about those variances and how they impact rural Alberta compared to the constituency size. If you look at a constituency, Madam Speaker, like Calgary-North, it has a

population variance of minus 16; Calgary-North East has a population variance of minus 14; Calgary-South East, minus 14 as well. Just in the name of fairness, there are a couple of constituencies inside Calgary that have a population variance of plus two digits as well: Calgary-Bow, plus 10; Calgary-Falconridge, 13. Those are the only two in that case.

I don't want to just highlight the minuses, but in this case you have a double-digit minus population variance in three constituencies in the city of Calgary. While I can appreciate that some of those constituencies will grow between now and the next Electoral Boundaries Commission, I also have some significant reservations that when you compare it to some more rural constituencies – even Spruce Grove-Stony Plain is a 10, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that I've highlighted on a number of occasions, is plus 15, the largest population variance of all constituencies, with a population of 53,809. Not only is it the largest population, but it also is in the top third of largest land areas. That should be concerning for all of us, that we're not going ahead and utilizing the population variances in rural Alberta to be minuses or slightly minus, making up for some of the additional tasks and the amount of travel that a rural MLA has to do.

As such, Commissioner Day spoke specifically about these variances and the use of these variances and how Supreme Courts have found these variances to be reasonable and within the limits. I just believe that in order to make sure that Alberta remains strong, all of the sectors of Alberta need to remain strong, and by sectors I mean regions, urban, rural, and what I like to refer to as rural as well, these smaller cities that have significant impact on rural Alberta or that service large portions of rural Alberta.

8:00

When you have a strong rural Alberta, you have a strong urban Alberta, and I think that making sure that we don't diminish the value and the voices in rural Alberta but that we celebrate those is so critical to the success of our province. Even if you look from an industrial perspective, the industries that fund so much of our government, including the foundations of that – the education system, our health care system, our social services, this very Assembly – much, much, much of the revenue that is generated is, in fact, generated in rural Alberta. So it's important that we have this effective representation in rural Alberta.

You know, so much of Alberta's prosperity can be tied back to the amazing hard work and dedication of our folks in rural Alberta, and overreliance on voter parity and keeping the variances within 5 per cent in the cities – and I think Edmonton is a great example of that: Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, minus 1; Edmonton-Castle Downs, minus 1; Edmonton-City Centre, 2; Edmonton-Decore, 5; Edmonton-Ellerslie, 3; Edmonton-Glenora, minus 3; Edmonton-Gold Bar, minus 3; Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, minus 7; Edmonton-Manning, 3; Edmonton-McClung, minus 5; Edmonton-Meadows, the only double digits in all of Edmonton, 11; Edmonton-Mill Woods, 7; Edmonton-North West, minus 3; Edmonton-Riverview, minus 3; Edmonton-Rutherford, 1; Edmonton-South, minus 2; Edmonton-South West, minus 2; Edmonton-Strathcona, zero; Edmonton-West Henday, minus 8; Edmonton-Whitemud, zero.

This overreliance on getting these city numbers so close to parity has actually come at a cost for rural Alberta, three seats in rural Alberta. In fact, rural Alberta has been weakened as a result of it. You don't have to just take my word for it. You can take the words of the AAMD and C, who spoke about this very issue and some of their concerns around the weakening of rural Alberta and about what fewer voices around the cabinet table or around the government table or even around the legislative table means for

rural Alberta. This is at a time when our economy is already in turmoil. Much of the turmoil has been created by the government, and I can tell you – I mean, I don't have to tell you. You know, Madam Speaker, being from a rural riding – and members of the government know that rural Albertans are feeling like this government doesn't take them seriously.

I get that the government didn't write the report – I'm not suggesting that they did – but the government does have the ability to say: "You know what? No. We're not going to accept the report as it was presented." Then they have some decisions to make about whether or not we go back to the drawing board, we have a new commission, we decide to delay the whole process until after the next general election and keep 87 members, whether we ask to reduce the number of constituencies. There are a lot of options, but rural Albertans have a real sense that the government doesn't take them seriously, and I know that we've highlighted a lot of issues in this Chamber about that.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: You know, in hearing my colleague explain to this Legislature that rural Alberta is critical and that we need to make sure we get this right the first time, I have to say that it's disappointing to see this bill, like the other bills that have just come in right at the end. What we're looking at here are some very large bills all coming in just before we finish the sitting of the House. That means that we don't have time to actually be able to take this bill in its final form – because there were changes made. Albeit they were minor changes, still changes were made to the recommendations the boundary commission had put forward.

Now, in our case I have to say that I actually will thank the House leader for co-operating on one of those changes, which was to make sure that "Bonnyville" was added to the name of the new constituency. I'm thankful for that. Thank you, Minister. In the end, it was named Cold Lake-St. Paul, and the new name is now going to be Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Again, you know, I do see that the government was willing to work with some of the MLAs that had significant townships lose their description within the boundaries commission, and it's good that they were willing to work with us on that.

What's disappointing here is that they're not willing to work with the fact that our boundaries have changed so significantly, especially with Bonnyville-Cold Lake, that it now makes it almost impossible for an MLA to effectively represent their constituency. You heard my colleague. He was outright saying that the new constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul is now going to be the largest constituency within Alberta for population over average. That's unbelievable. It's unbelievable that we have constituencies in rural Alberta that are larger than the provincial average. Not only is it unbelievable that it's larger, but it is the largest constituency above the provincial average. How a commission can justify that and sleep at night is beyond me. I will tell you that when it comes to effective representation, Bonnyville-Cold Lake's change goes against everything that I believe the commission should have brought forward.

If there is a legal challenge when it comes to Alberta's boundaries, it's going to be my constituency that's going to lead that charge because of what's been done by this boundary commission. It's shameful. We need to step back. We need to vote for this reasoned amendment, that says that this is not okay, that this whole boundary commission report is treating rural Alberta unfairly. I will admit – I will admit – that the commission worked very hard on this report, but putting voter parity first, above all else,

was not doing an adequate job when it comes to making sure that effective representation is for all Albertans.

To the member: do you feel that we are moving in the right direction? Have we set a precedent that Alberta now will follow, where rural Alberta is treated unfairly?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: Well, I thank you for your comments. I'm not entirely sure about the precedents, particularly because each commission does get to be the master of their own domain, but I do think that we are on a very dangerous road if we don't take proactive steps to ensure that rural Alberta remains a strong, vibrant voice in the province.

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to stand and speak on Bill 33. Every member of this House should take this seriously – I'm sure they all do – not only for the sake of their own political and personal future but, rather, because they care about the future of Alberta. I've no doubt that every member of this House, from all sides, does care very much about the future of Alberta. Otherwise, they wouldn't be here.

That's kind of the nature of what I'd like to talk about here, what is in Alberta's best interest. What's in Alberta's best interest politically is to have people represented well across the province so that every voice is heard. Every voice matters, and every voice has value, and that can be demonstrated and represented in this important House, in this important room where we are right now. One needs to consider more than one variable when you're talking about that, and therein, I believe, lies the problem.

The boundaries commission, bless their hearts, did what we asked them to do. We asked them to look at all of Alberta, to take submissions from across Alberta and put together a plan to set boundaries for the next election, and they were successful in doing that. On that basis, we should say thank you to them.

Part of the issue there – and it's not their fault, but I think that this is a lesson for us. The next time this happens, perhaps we should give the boundaries commission a little bit more detailed instruction than what we gave them this time. What I mean by that is that they felt free to – and they were free to – make the decision on the boundaries almost exclusively on the one variable about the population variance between ridings. I have no doubt that in their minds and in their hearts they really felt that that was the right approach to take. You know, an argument can be made that all votes are equal, so that is expressed in the same number of voters per elected MLA.

The problem is, Madam Speaker, that that's actually not the reality. The problem is that out of 87 ridings, some probably had 40 per cent voter turnout – I know the statistics are in the report – and some probably had 60 per cent turnout. So right there the Albertans that expressed their franchise by voting, if they happened to be voting in a riding where only 40 per cent voted, would actually have their vote, just on that one variable alone, having more weight than somebody voting in a riding that had 60 per cent of people coming out to the polls.

Why do I say this? I say this to demonstrate, I think quite obviously, that parity in the number of voters does not guarantee equality of weight of the vote for the people that exercise their franchise by coming out to the polls and making an X beside the candidate of their choice, of their selection. There are other examples I could give, but time is short. I have more to say than the

time allows. I'll live with that one illustration to prove, in my view, that the same number of voters in each riding is in and of itself and all by itself not a guarantee of the equal value, the equal weight of each vote.

The other thing that needs to be understood and, I believe, embraced and dealt with is the idea of access, access of the voters to their MLA, access of the MLA to their voters. This matters. If you look at the report, they do make some comments about my presentation when they were in Calgary. I expressed to them then that in my riding of Calgary-Hays I can essentially walk across my riding in two and a half hours the long way and in probably one hour the short way, because it's not a perfect square or a perfect circle. Well, there are ridings in this province where, if you were to walk across it, it might take a season. It might take three months. In fact, it would take longer to drive across some ridings than it does to walk across mine. Why is that important? It's not about me. I used the example of my riding simply because it's obviously the one I know best because that's where I work to represent the people there.

The problem is that if you want to express your concerns to your Member of the Legislative Assembly, even in this age of voice mail and video chats and video calls, sometimes, many times, actually, there is no replacement for a face-to-face conversation in private with somebody about things that matter to you, because all the members of this House know that when people come to our offices, they don't just talk about wanting a road or a bridge or a hospital or a school – and all those things are hugely important – but sometimes they want to talk privately about: "My family member can't get into the hospital for an operation that my family member needs, and it's life or death." Sometimes you want to look the person in the eye that you're having that conversation with, and sometimes it's helpful to the MLAs to look the constituent in the eye when they're having that conversation so that they can really empathize – feel the joy, feel the pain, feel the concern, whatever the case may be – with that constituent, and you just can't do it unless there's access for the people to their MLA and for the MLA to the people. So distance matters a lot.

I mean, there's a bill in front of the House now, which I won't discuss. I'm not going into another bill, but as an example, Workers' Compensation Board claims: when somebody comes in with a personal Workers' Compensation Board claim, sometimes there are personal details involved that somebody may not feel comfortable doing over a video call, over a fax machine, or over an e-mail. Sometimes they're more comfortable if they can sit with their Member of the Legislative Assembly and know that that member is giving them their full and undivided attention by looking them in the eye and being in the same room with them.

In a small urban riding it's fairly simple as long as you can get an appointment with your MLA and your MLA shows up for the appointment because you can probably get there, if you live in the riding, if you have access to an automobile, in some cases, in many cases in 10 minutes and in most cases in no more than half an hour. But if you are from a part of Alberta that's on the border of British Columbia, on the border of the Northwest Territories, on the border of Saskatchewan, or on the border of the United States, you can't necessarily get there easily in half an hour, to where your MLA's office is. Further to that, it gets doubly complicated because your MLA may well be coming back from Edmonton after a sitting or a meeting in the capital and the MLA isn't even in their own riding as much because they have to travel four or six hours to get back, where they can have that access.

This report did not seem to give any weight to those many, many, many circumstances. The person with the WCB claim in Slave Lake is just as important as the person with a WCB claim in downtown

Edmonton and equally as important as the person in Rocky Mountain House, the person in Milk River, or Pincher Creek. All those files are equally important, yet they don't have equal access to their MLA as the riding gets bigger and their MLA gets further from the capital, and this report has ignored all of those important considerations.

That's why I say that the next time we do this, we probably need to give the people doing the report a little bit more instruction, to say: these things matter, too. We didn't, but because we didn't doesn't mean we should approve a report that is gravely short in consideration of these things, because if we do, we're saying to those Albertans that live near the geographical edge of the province – I think many of us consider where we live to be the centre of the universe, whether you're on the Alberta-Montana border or you're in downtown Edmonton, but the fact is that you are farther away from your MLA and have a tougher time talking about your health considerations, getting access to child care support, getting medical attention.

It's not the same, and this report treats it the same, which makes the report flawed, which makes the report not adequate. It actually doesn't disparage but it shortchanges rural Alberta in a very big way. And even those of us in urban Alberta that represent urban ridings, as I do, should care about this, should give it their full consideration, their full care, the full weight of their thought before they vote on this.

8:20

I know there are members on the government side that voted against the other report. The only comment I'll say about that is that I know there are members on the government side that I believe have the same concerns that I do. I'd like to think every member on the government side has the same concerns that I do, and I'm prepared to believe that they do. I'm prepared to believe that they do. I'm prepared to believe that every member on the government side cares as much about rural Alberta as they do urban Alberta because, whether you're asleep, whether you're awake, whether you live in urban or rural Alberta, all these issues matter. Correct, members?

That's why I would ask members to think, before they support this report, which has so many important shortcomings, of how this is flawed, how we can do better, how members of this House can say that this report isn't good enough. The rural members can say, "Darn it; I'm going to stand up for my constituents because it isn't fair to them," and the urban members can say: "Darn it. Sure, I support most directly the people that vote for me, but I take responsibility for all 4.3 million, approximately, Albertans because the considerations in this House affect all 4.3 million Albertans, and I do not want my Alberta brothers and sisters shortchanged." I really believe that that is something that we should all consider heavily.

There are so many examples, Madam Speaker. You know, I touched on some of them. You don't necessarily – in fact, it may not even be a family member. It may be yourself as a constituent, that you have some medical issue that's quite personal. A lot of medical issues are. I'm not going to be indelicate here, and I'm sure you're all grateful for that. The fact is that some things are personal. With some things, it's a lot to discuss it with one other human being, let alone over a telephone line, over an e-mail, over even a video call. Sometimes you actually need to look your Member of the Legislative Assembly, who works for you, in the eye and say: you need to understand how much that means to me, how much that means to my family, how much that means to my community.

The equality of that access is barred by the current form of this report. I know for sure that wasn't the intention of the people that wrote it, at least as sure as I can be without spending hours talking

to them, because I'm making the assumption that all their intentions were good. Surely they did the job we asked them to do in terms of producing a report, and, bless their hearts, they produced a report. But they don't have the same experience as the people in this Legislature do. Consequently, they couldn't possibly know how important it is to have access between MLAs and their constituents, between constituents and their MLAs. This report falls woefully short. Not a little bit short; way short.

You know what? Again, I've talked to several members of my riding who are comfortable with the position I'm taking, that say: "No. We think that with 20-odd MLAs in Calgary and 20-odd MLAs in Edmonton and otherwise, there is a very high chance that urban Alberta's interests will be represented adequately." I haven't had one yet that said: "To hell with rural Alberta. Let 'em not be represented." No one feels that way, yet this report opens the door to treating rural Albertans that way.

That is why we ought not support the report in its current form, because Albertans understand that we're in this together. They understand that if rural Alberta fails and gets poor service, that hurts urban Alberta, and they understand that if urban Alberta fails and gets poor representation, that hurts rural Alberta. It's not an us-and-them thing. We ought not make it an us-and-them thing in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My colleague was cut off during his sentence there. I would love to hear the rest of it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was waiting for you to recognize me. I just want to say that I feel so strongly that we should have what I believe is the same heart as Albertans. They don't want to put themselves in front of their fellow Albertans. I think they're happy to work with their fellow Albertans as a province to win or lose, to succeed or fail, to swim or sink, however you want to put it, as a group. I believe that Albertans, being the generous-of-spirit people that they are, the kind, caring, compassionate people that they are, do not want to see another part of their province suffer for their own benefit.

I'll tell you what else they don't want. They don't want to see another part of Alberta suffer to not give them more benefit. If you talk about the urban-rural comparison right now, urban Alberta already has, before we make any changes, more than half of the seats. You know, in a democracy it goes by the weight and the power of the votes, so urban Alberta already has, by virtue of population, the upper hand, if you will. I haven't heard any urban Albertan clamouring to me, saying: let's take it to those rural Albertans. Rather, they would say: "Let's work together. We want our rural partners to succeed. We want our rural partners to have adequate representation for health care, adequate representation for education, adequate representation for social services, adequate representation for transportation and infrastructure building."

They want their fellow Albertans to be well looked after because, on top of everything else, Albertans are pretty social people. I think you'd be hard pressed to find somebody in rural Alberta that doesn't have somebody they love in urban Alberta, and I think you'd find it almost impossible to find somebody in urban Alberta that doesn't have somebody they love in rural Alberta. So since Albertans don't want this to be an us-or-them thing, why would we make it an us-or-them thing in this House? It's not what the people we represent want. I don't think it ever has been. I don't think it ever will be.

This an opportunity for us representatives of all Albertans. Yes, we all represent our own ridings, but every single one of us also represents all of Alberta. This is an opportunity for us to reflect the Alberta spirit of holding together, pulling together, working together, getting access to their elected people together, getting services that matter to Albertans together. Why would we not support that? I don't think there's anybody that's elected in this House that doesn't care about the whole province, yet if we pass this report, we're allowing a report to be passed that really favours one part of the province heavily over the other. That alone is a reason not to support this bill as it is.

It's not the government's fault. The government, like us, should have perhaps given different instructions to the committee. The opposition should have jumped up and said: we need to give them different instructions. You know what? We're all in this together. None of us did that. Even in this, we're together. Even in this, I can't say that it's the government's fault. In my view, even in this, the government can't legitimately say that this is the opposition's fault.

But what we can do together is to look at the report. What we can do together is to care about all Albertans. What we can do together is to say to Albertans: you all matter. There are no spare Albertans. There are no Albertans that can wait a little bit longer to get their question answered on health care, on education, on social services, on infrastructure, on child support payments, whatever it happens to be that we do. We all know what the important files are because we all have people coming into our offices every week dealing with these important files. I'm telling you that this urban representative in this House doesn't have any problem voting against this report to make sure that rural Alberta doesn't get trampled. All urban members of this House should vote against this report out of solidarity with their urban colleagues, with their urban fellow citizens. This is our opportunity to do just that. Please don't support this report.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I have to say that I believe that this commission – while I feel that they believe they did the right thing, I want to go through why I believe they have failed my constituency.

Now, I want to start with the fact that in the commission's report it starts off with something that is important to recognize, legal requirements. Legal requirements are right underneath there, on page 7 of the boundaries report.

In undertaking this work, the Commission is obliged to meet the requirements of the Act and to give due consideration to decisions of the various courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada and the Alberta Court of Appeal, regarding the creation of electoral division boundaries.

You know, I'm going to go through section 14. This is a clear sentence here on direction that I believe this Legislature gave this commission. I don't believe that there was a lot of leeway in this, the leeway they took, so I want to go to 14.

In determining the area to be included in and in fixing the boundaries of the proposed electoral divisions, the Commission, subject to section 15, may take into consideration any factors it considers appropriate but shall take into consideration . . .

And then it goes into (a) to (h). Very clear: "shall." It must – it must – take these into consideration. These were not optional. I believe that we gave a clear direction to this boundaries commission, which it ignored, and that is failure.

Now, I'm going to start with (a), which is effective representation, "the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." I along with seven colleagues wrote an article, that I will table tomorrow, that was called Effective Representation. We actually put some thought into this after the interim report. I'm not going to read the whole thing because I don't believe that that's going to help, but I will read parts of it.

Electoral boundaries are supposed to be determined by two things – population and extenuating circumstance. To calculate an average population per riding, the people who establish electoral boundaries take the total population and divide it by the number of ridings allowed by the legislature. This average is intended as a start-point or rough guideline only.

The second thing Alberta's electoral boundary people must do is obey the law, which obligates them to propose electoral boundaries that ensure "effective representation." This rule makes provision for extenuating circumstances such as distance, geography, etc. This is so important that Alberta's Electoral Boundaries Act actually says that to accommodate this objective, the population from one riding to another can "vary" by as much as 25%.

It's pretty clear.

Moving on further down in this article that we wrote:

"Effective representation" simply recognizes that some urban MLAs can drive across their constituencies in half an hour or less, and often have no requirement to interact with town councils, school boards, or junior governments. Conversely, in many rural ridings, not only is distance a factor, but [the] MLAs may have dozens of town councils with whom they have to interact, plus several school boards, [municipalities] or county councils, and multiple hospital boards.

The failure of Alberta's [Electoral Boundaries Commission] to establish "effective representation" in its recent recommendations for constituency changes prior to the next Alberta election has some observers suggesting that the Commission has circumvented an earlier decision by the Supreme Court of Canada. This was a 1991 ruling recognizing the importance of "effective representation." The EBC is proposing changes that would eliminate two rural ridings while increasing the size of rural districts.

That is what effective rural representation is. I don't believe that this commission adequately took that into account.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Now, moving on to (b), "sparsity and density of population," it's clear what they did. They divided our province, the population, by 87 and said: this is where we need to be. Clearly, this is the only factor that they have used. That's what it appears to me.

"Common community interests, community organizations, including those of Indian reserves." I have to say that when I presented before the commission, I had said that St. Paul and the Saddle Lake reserve needed to be put into the same constituency because they interact with each other. They have common interests. But also we've got a lot of area around St. Paul. What the commission did was that they lumped St. Paul and Saddle Lake into my constituency. Wonderful people. I'm honoured to represent them possibly one day, but the question is: is it effective representation? I'll tell you that my constituency right now is 15 per cent above the average population when you would expect a rural constituency to be below. That's truly shameful.

The other thing is Métis settlements. You need to be considering Métis settlements. I have two of those in my constituency.

Moving on to (d), it's talking about Edmonton and Calgary, which isn't relevant to my speech.

“Wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries.” What happens here is that we need to be saying: can we take counties and municipal districts and put them within one constituency boundary? One constituency boundary. In that way, we’re not splitting one MD between several different MLAs. One common interest, one common voice.

Now, “the number of municipalities and other local authorities.” This is actually in it. It says that we need to consider this, that we need to consider the number of municipalities and school boards and hospital boards and all these other boards that are within these constituencies. It’s unfortunate that they ignored this.

“Geographical features, including existing road systems.” Well, I can tell you that my constituency almost, if not for sure, doubled in size. They doubled the size of my constituency. That’s unbelievable.

Let’s talk about the last one, “the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.” This is another one that is important. This is something that says that we need to clearly make sure that people understand the boundaries they’re in.

To go through this, the boundary commission said: “Well, you know what? We’re going to explain away what we believe is important.” Number 1 on the general reasons for majority recommendations – you’re not going to believe this – is relative voting power and voter parity.

The majority supports the following recommendations because they result in minimum variance from the provincial average electoral division population after consideration of all other relevant factors related to the effective representation within Alberta.

They’re saying that this is the biggest, the most important thing, and that is not what section 14 says. Section 14 says that there are a lot of very important things that need to be considered. That’s why I am saying that this commission has failed horribly.

8:40

Now, I’m going to go on to some of the rural concerns. This is number 2. What we’ve got here are direct quotes from the boundary commission, Mr. Speaker.

While increased geographic size will likely increase the number of elected officials, community organizations and others with whom an MLA must connect, the majority is not satisfied that the resulting demands have been shown to significantly exceed those placed on MLAs serving [in] smaller geographic areas, including those in cities. Each riding, no doubt, imposes its own particular claims on an MLA’s time and resources; the majority does not accept that these demands increase only with an increase in geographic size.

This actually says the exact opposite of section 14, what they were mandated to follow. They actually put this in here. It’s unbelievable.

Now I’ll go on to another one.

While consideration of “common community interests” is such a factor, most existing electoral divisions outside of Edmonton and Calgary do not contain a single common community in total, or individually. These existing 43 electoral divisions together contain 16 cities, along with the large metropolitan areas [such as] Sherwood Park and Fort McMurray. Some are primarily agricultural in focus, but others [are] oil and gas . . . or a forestry, mining or tourism focus or some combination of all these factors. As a result, the majority could not conclude that those Albertans living outside of Edmonton or Calgary share a common community of interest for that reason alone or that each of these 43 constituencies share a common . . . interest one with the other.

So they literally just said, “I’m going to ignore more of section 14,” more of the mandate we gave them. It’s unbelievable that they even put this in the report because it actually says the exact opposite of

what we gave them as a mandate. It’s unbelievable. It’s truly unbelievable.

What we’ve got here is the next one.

The core concern that a reduction in the number of constituencies located in rural areas [within] the province will reduce the rural “voice” in the legislature, with the result that rural concerns will command less attention and fewer resources than they have in the past, was frequently raised. The inevitable result of applying the principle of representation by population as a relevant factor to constituency design is that as population shifts, the electoral divisions will also shift to ensure that all Albertans are effectively represented. To do otherwise would be to make some voices disproportionately louder than others, defeat the principle of representation by population and impede the effective representation in urban constituencies.

They literally, again, hammered section 14. This is unbelievable, that this is even in their boundary commission report. How can you say that your mandate is to follow section 14 yet throw out everything you don’t like other than voter parity?

Now I want to go on to the one that I think is most important.

Further, where constituency size is large, satellite offices can be opened within it. This assumes that sufficient budget has been provided to their MLAs to allow for the hiring of staff and paying of additional expenses to meet these needs. While the funding model for MLA office budgets is well outside the jurisdiction of this Commission, improvements addressing the specific costs of additional staff and the operation of satellite offices for remote constituencies would certainly help voters in geographically large electoral divisions feel that they can more easily access the services of their MLAs.

Wow. They actually just mandated us to do something. That’s remarkable. The commission had the incredible – they feel they have so much power in this that they can ignore section 14 and totally disregard it, and then they mandate us to do something, that we need to give more money to rural Albertans so that we can do our jobs. You know what? In the end, it comes down to the fact that they had decided that voters per electoral division was of the utmost importance. How? How can they justify this report?

The Acting Speaker: Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think we can just about all agree that our Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is certainly passionate about the Electoral Boundaries Commission and what happened to his riding. I’d certainly like to hear, as I think we all would, some more of what went on and what he believes has happened.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ve kind of explained what happened with my constituency, but you know what? Unless you hear some of the numbers, hear what the actual boundaries commission wrote about Bonnyville-Cold Lake, it’s hard to actually believe how poorly they’ve treated my constituency and other rural constituencies across Alberta.

It is recommended that the boundaries of the electoral division of Cold Lake-St. Paul be as shown on Map 56, resulting in a population of 53,809 [people], 15% above provincial average population size. The majority believes this variance can be supported as this is an area where future population growth is likely to fall . . . below the provincial average.

I don’t remember seeing in the boundaries commission’s mandate to start speculating on where populations were supposed to go. I understand that they are allowed to consider other things, but they disregarded most of section 14, in my opinion. Yet

somehow they have made the determination that my constituency is going to shrink. I cannot believe that they can do this, make a determination without actually backing it up with any factual evidence.

I can tell you that I put forward factual evidence to the committee, when I presented before them, that my constituency was going to grow beyond the provincial average – that was during the interim report period – yet somehow they determined that my constituency was going to shrink. Now, the only reason that I can come up with is that they determined that the NDP government's attack on my energy centre in Bonnyville-Cold Lake was going to literally put me out of business, if you will. It literally will destroy the towns and cities within my constituency. That's the only determination that I can come up with. It's unbelievable that they were allowed to make a determination like this with no facts. Unbelievable.

It is also a constituency that would be relatively small in geographic size, with the uninhabited Air Weapons Range being a large part of its geography. It is expected that by the time the electoral boundaries are next reviewed, the constituency population will be at or below the provincial average.

So now they're saying that because I had a smaller rural constituency, that makes up for the fact that they added a whole bunch of population to it, not the fact that a smaller rural constituency just has a lot more people in it.

The fact that we have a diverse group of different, incredible cultures within my constituency: this all was ignored. This was all supposed to be part of the government making a decision. This is why I'm telling you that should there ever be a court challenge on the validity of the boundaries commission and this report that they put out, they're going to use Bonnyville-Cold Lake to do that court challenge because what they've done to my constituency is an abomination. Fifteen per cent above the average population in Alberta is just unreasonable. Making unfactual determinations was well outside of the mandate.

8:50

It is unbelievable that we are here at this time debating this. What we should have done is vote down the motion that brought this forward. We should have said, "Let's throw this out; let's go with the old constituencies," because at least that's something we can work with. I'll tell you that I believe this boundaries commission dropped the ball, and it literally threw a ton of rural constituencies to the mercy of the wolves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I felt that I had to say something tonight given that I'm the MLA representing the largest by square kilometres constituency in the province, which has now become even larger. It now, in fact, is larger than the island of Newfoundland, which I think gives some people pause.

That said, I don't personally have a lot of disagreement with the recommendations for my own constituency. Grimshaw was added, which makes sense. They already come to my office in Peace River because it's much closer for them. It's only, like, a 20-minute drive as opposed to an hour's drive to get to Fairview. Tallcree First Nation: it's the same thing with them. It's much more convenient for them to come to Fort Vermilion, and I have these interactions. So the changes make sense, but it doesn't make sense to make it so big that it makes it even harder for me to be an effective representative. I do absolutely agree with the mover of this motion that the changes recommended "do not adequately provide for the

effective representation of rural Alberta." But at the same time I'm torn, and I'll tell you why I'm torn.

I have to say, though, about the commission that I attended their very first hearing up in Peace River. I didn't go to make a presentation. I just simply was going to be there to support it. But when they discovered that the local MLA was there, they had all kinds of questions. I tried, in answering their questions, to give them a sense of what it is like to be a rural MLA and to represent such a large area. I tried to give them a sense of the hours and hours and hours that I spend on the road driving. My constituency easily – and this is when roads are good – is six hours from south to north, six hours from east to west. That's just to get from one end to the other. That's not counting all of the areas in between. In winter you can multiply that by whatever, just depending on what roads are like. So it's huge. Recently I think I logged 2,000 kilometres over one weekend.

Those are hours where I'm not being an effective MLA because I'm in my vehicle driving. Yes, I listen to books on tape. I convert reports and things so that I can listen to them. I'm trying to learn French. I'm trying to be productive with it. But it's not me representing my constituents when I'm travelling on the road. I know that that's true of the other rural MLAs as well, so it's a huge consideration. I did try to help the commission understand that, and I believe that they were really, sincerely trying to do their job. I respect what my colleague here from Calgary-Hays has said, that, really, they were working with what they were given. They were given a mandate, and this is how they interpreted the mandate.

I also explored with them possibilities of some alternative things. If you're representing a large rural constituency, what other ways could you be effective? Could you do it with technology? I said that, absolutely, you could. There are ways to do those things. That's also true, though, of urban constituencies. You can use technology. You don't have to be face to face. In rural constituencies technology isn't all that reliable, and I did tell the commission that. There are areas of my constituency where we still have unreliable cell coverage. There is a large stretch where I drive where I have no cellphone, no Internet, nothing for hours at a time. So, you know, to say that that would replace it is simply not realistic.

We talked about having multiple offices and having constituency assistants do mobile offices, which mine do. However, there is a misunderstanding among many urban residents – I don't know about MLAs – that those of us in rural constituencies get extra budget to cover several offices, that our budget is large enough to cover two or three offices because we don't pay as high a rent as in the cities. This is simply not the case. We pay comparable amounts of money, and our staffing costs are identical. I cannot pay two full-time staff. I just do not have the funds for that in my budget.

I think this is maybe where the boundaries commission came up with the notion of recommending more funds to help support us, which, as my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake says, is quite outside their mandate. But, you know, certainly, it's worthy of consideration if it's something that we could do. I think they were trying really hard to do the right thing. I kind of hoped that they really got the message when they were stranded in Peace River because of bad weather and couldn't go to Grande Prairie the next day, because that's what we all put up with, but that somehow didn't really seem to get the message across. Again, I think that was no fault of theirs.

There are limitations when you don't live in a large rural constituency or even part of the province. You really don't understand what it's all about. I didn't. When I used to live in Edmonton, I never went to West Edmonton Mall because it was too far to drive. Now I think nothing of driving back and forth three

hours from Peace River to High Level several times a week. It's just part of my life. But if you come from an area of the province where you don't see that, it's hard to comprehend. Any time ministers come up, I try to make sure I get them on a road trip so they get a feel for what we're putting up with, and I think many of them who have come do understand that. I think that they're very, very sympathetic to the concerns that all of us here in rural constituencies are bringing up and my colleagues on this side of the House as well.

I think the question is: what does it mean to be an effective representative, and what does that really constitute? As I've already said, spending hours in your vehicle driving; that's not being effective. But there are a few other challenges that I don't know if they've really been identified yet. For a rural constituency like mine I have three distinct, very large industries that I must represent and lobby for their interest, communicate with. I've got agriculture, I've got forestry, and I've got oil and gas. In a town, say Calgary, for example, if you want to advocate for something like the green line, several MLAs can get together and work together and advocate for one project. I have multiple projects at any given time that I have to advocate for. Is it easy to be an effective representative? Well, I do my best, but it's a challenge.

We work collaboratively. I work with my colleague over in Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. I work with my colleague down in Lesser Slave Lake. We try to cover events for each other because there just aren't enough of us to go around. My constituents understand that. They're very, very patient. They know that if I'm at High Level for Canada Day, they're not going to see me again for another four years because I just can't get around to every community. Again, that doesn't mean that that's effective representation, you know. It really doesn't. I feel like the commission's report really has let us down in rural Alberta. It does really concern me, and I have to add that I have heard a lot. I've heard a lot from my constituents. I've heard a lot at AAMD and C, a lot at AUMA. I know that there are many, many in the province in rural Alberta that feel exactly the same way, and they're really asking: what can we do?

This is where I come up against the problem and why I'm torn. What can we do when we strike a commission that is independent and we ask them to make a report that affects every one of us here in this House quite profoundly, both negatively and positively, when it comes to political advantage? If we strike a commission, which happened some years back in the province – an independent commission was struck to recommend changes to salaries for MLAs. If that commission comes back and the MLAs say, "We don't like what you said, so we're not going to listen to it; we're going to do things the way we want it," what, really, does that say? That really concerns me. That's where I'm sort of in the middle here thinking: really, how effectively can we do this? Can we say to the commission, "Thank you; we appreciate the work you did, but we don't like the result, so we're going to go back to the drawing board"? Or do we find a way to live with what we've been given and ensure that rural Alberta is represented as effectively as possible through other means?

That's kind of where I'm standing on this issue. I'm hoping that we're going to be able to find some kind of a compromise, maybe, that will help those of us in rural constituencies be as effective as we can, because we certainly do need and appreciate that support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really want to thank the Member for Peace River for her words. I was recently up in her constituency for the first time over Thanksgiving because my partner's family lives up in High Level, and it is very different driving. My partner lives in Hinton, so I did Calgary to Hinton. Then we did Hinton to Grande Prairie and then Grande Prairie to High Level and then back, High Level straight to Hinton. It's a hell of a drive, I can say. Sorry. That's unparliamentary. But I can just tell you all that if you've never done that drive, it takes quite a lot out of you. I really appreciate everything that the member said, and I really appreciate the work that she does for her constituents. I know it's very difficult for many of my colleagues who are in rural ridings, who have to drive, like the member was saying, six hours from bottom to top. The member is right on the border of the Northwest Territories and goes right close to Grande Prairie. Most Albertans and nearly I'd probably say 90 per cent of Calgarians have not gone that far north.

9:00

So I really appreciate all that she does. I really appreciate her bringing the concerns of her constituents here to the House and just her words today to remind us all that this was an independent commission, that it was an independent commission that was hired by this House, and that we as members have a choice of whether we accept the commission's report or not. However, if we do say no, where does that put us? Where does that put us for future separate committees whom we have to hire, whether it be the next boundary commission or other commissions that we call? We can call as many commissions as we like and constantly say that we don't like their reports. That seems to be quite a waste of money. It seems like we are not agreeing – well, it's definitely not agreeing with their report, but it's also making them feel like we're just wasting their time. Pretty soon, if we keep doing that and we make a habit of doing that and this House makes a habit of doing that, it's going to be very difficult for us to find people who are willing to sit on those commissions.

That was a bit tangential. But I just once again want to thank the member for her words and thank her for the work that she does.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. I was interested in your example about MLA wages. Now, let's say that we gave the commission, this independent commission, a mandate to look at MLA wages that said plus or minus 5 per cent, and the commission comes back with a 40 per cent increase in wage. Do you think that you would agree with that commission, or would you say, "You went well beyond what we mandated you to do"? That is actually what has happened with the boundary commission that we see with this act in front of us today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: I have to say that that's a really good question. I don't have a real easy answer for that. I think, though, again, that that's the risk that you take when you strike an independent commission to do something. You may get something back that you like; you may get something back that you don't like. You know, I do want to reinforce that I think it's really, really important that we not forget that rural Alberta is so incredibly important and that we find a way, all of us here in the room, to support the needs of rural Alberta, however that might look.

Thank you for that comment.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I'm sure everybody is waiting with bated breath for the speech I have before me. I want to thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake as well as the Member for Peace River. You know, I think it's important for all of us urban MLAs to understand that rural representation – I don't want to state the obvious – is not the same as urban representation. Certainly, in my experiences with my rural colleagues, there certainly is a demand upon them to be at every event, every school, every graduation more so than maybe us urban representatives.

The other thing that I think we need to really understand here, which nobody has mentioned and I will from the urban perspective, is the toll on the family. The hon. Member for Peace River mentioned six-hour drives. When we think about it, you know, we're here from Monday to Thursday, and then there may be events on Friday and Saturday and Sunday. What is the time that these members are spending with their families? We talk about jurisdictions that are the size of Newfoundland, jurisdictions larger than Prince Edward Island. I mean, we're talking about areas within Canada that have their own governments, and here we have a single representative representing the provincial government, a single representative also representing the opposition side of a provincial party.

There's a toll. There's a toll on husbands, wives, partners, children. We have to take that into consideration when making this very, very important decision. Effective representation, yeah, absolutely, is important. It's hugely important. But so is the family. The family is hugely important as well. I, of course, support my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod in regard to Bill 33, the Electoral Divisions Act, and this amendment because of the toll it takes on the families, because of the toll it takes on the constituents.

Let's put this in perspective, right? I mean, we have colleagues here who are trying to ensure that the needs of his or her constituents are satisfied but also to balance work and life. You know, what's really sad is that if the hon. Member for Peace River indicates that a family member requires her to be somewhere and she's unable to make an event that maybe those people had been waiting for for months, is she the bad person here? No, not the bad person. She has a responsibility to her family member, but she also has a responsibility to her constituents.

You know, for me, I'm in a constituency where it's shaped like a nice little square. To be quite frank, I could probably go for a good run and cover pretty much the entire constituency, as I'm sure you can, Mr. Speaker, right? I mean, again, the demands that you or I have are not the same as what our rural colleagues have. So for those of us speaking out against this amendment who are from urban ridings, I think we really need to put this in perspective for our rural colleagues, the demands that they are facing through their constituents but also the strains on their families, which are quite intense.

I do of course represent the constituency of Calgary-West. I've listened with interest to all my rural colleagues and the difficult demands that these MLAs are facing. But the main concern that I as well as the UCP caucus have with Bill 33 is that the boundary commission chose to make this voter parity rather than effective representation, and that's concerning. In fact, in its report the commission repeatedly dismissed the challenges of travelling long distances for rural members: as I previously stated, six hours.

You know, I think about just from Calgary to Edmonton – and I'm sure that's nothing to you, hon. Member for Peace River. The first thing on my mind when I leave here tomorrow is getting to my family. That's still a three-hour drive. I just want to make sure that I'm there in time to tuck my kids in at the end of the night. I can only imagine having to drive the distance that you have to drive or that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake or my friend the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has to drive.

9:10

Quite frankly, when I got here from our previous legacy party and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti was the whip, I actually thought he lived closer to Edmonton than I did in Calgary. I'm a born-and-raised Albertan – right? – but again I don't travel that far north, which is to his point, why having northern representation input on this committee should have been very vitally important. We need to understand.

I don't dismiss what the commission was trying to do. I believe that they had great intentions. I think that they did the best that they could do, but if we are going to have proper representation, proper work-life balance, we have to have input from all stakeholders from every corner of this province. Although I think there were attempts made, from what I have heard from my friends from northern Alberta, maybe there could have been better input from them. Maybe the commission could have consulted a bit more, Mr. Speaker. I think that's very important. It's very, very important that we hear from our friends from northern Alberta and even my friends from southern Alberta.

I mean, I've heard the same stories from my friend from the Medicine Hat area. There are great distances. I can tell you that my friend from Strathmore-Brooks, when he and I were doing a couple of events regarding unification, Mr. Speaker, I remember commenting to him the great distance of travelling from Strathmore to Brooks. I couldn't imagine. Even then, that was only a portion of his riding. It is a huge riding, so to imagine that that riding, which I think is going to be broken up into Chestermere-Strathmore – then you have Brooks, and I think Brooks goes all the way to the Saskatchewan border.

These are long distances to travel, and we haven't even talked, as my friend here from Peace River did, about weather conditions. We haven't even talked about the safety concerns about having no cellphone coverage, about no Internet. It's not about doing work while you're driving. Let's just talk about general safety. To be in a position where you are travelling in northern Alberta with no cellphone coverage in areas where the weather is bad: that's unsafe. Are we talking about a bill when we talk about work conditions and being safe? That's not safe. For this member here to travel six hours when at times, as we get in northern Alberta, there's less light, right? So we're talking about in darkness, poor road conditions, cold weather, no cellphone coverage. Boy, I hope you've got a new vehicle, and it better be working properly. What else have we got, you know? Buses break down, too. No cellphone coverage.

I mean, you're going to have your driver. That was one of the most ridiculous, to be honest with you, things that I've heard. For some reason our friends in rural Alberta are going to require a driver, and they can sit in their car and do whatever work needs to be done. I mean, again, that's just not reasonable. That's really not reasonable.

I think that if we have that effective representation, we have to make sure that my friend from Peace River, my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake, my friends from all these other rural ridings can get from point A to point B within a reasonable amount of time – I know that's subjective – during a day and a reasonable amount of time to get home. I think that's another thing people need to

really take into consideration. When I go and do what I have to do in my job as an MLA, as a representative, will I get home to be with my family at the end of the night? From what I've seen listening to my friends here in rural ridings, the answer is no. You're not going to be able to get home. Is that reasonable? That's not reasonable. Selfishly, in my urban riding there are things I can do across the street, right? I went to a school opening that, really, was within walking distance. Two, actually, were within walking distance. Again, you know, people need to understand the difference between rural responsibilities and urban responsibilities.

I think that for all of our friends here who are representing urban ridings, before we're quick to pass judgment in support of this bill, each and every one of us from an urban riding really needs to sit down and talk with our friends in a rural riding and understand, you know: what are the challenges that you guys face that we don't face, and how is it that we can have that effective representation? We have to make sure that our constituents are represented properly.

When I hear stories about, you know, July 1 and "Maybe I'll see you in a couple of years" – and I know that she's talking about just to July 1 and stuff like that. But, for example, you know, for me, I attend an event for Remembrance Day in my constituency, and I've got nearly 2,000 people showing up, right? At the end of the day I just go home. Quite frankly, the longest part of my day is standing there and giving my two-minute speech. For you, hon. member, I'm sure it's the six-hour drive, if you can get there, and then doing what you have to do. Then, of course, because through no fault of your own you're there when you can be, every person wants to grab your attention – right? – whereas, for me, I'm just a guy in the crowd. A few people say hi. A few people thank me. But I understand.

We talk about rural representation. I talked to the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, right? When he's at an event – I mean, we all know he's a wonderful guy – I can tell you that every single person wants to talk to him, wants to have that engagement with him. That takes time. When we're talking about such large jurisdictions, again, let's put this into context. The size of Newfoundland: that, to me, just blew me away. And to think about you going from part of your constituency to the other part of your constituency in I think you said six hours: that's probably going slightly above the speed limit, right? I mean, let's be honest. If we're doing the speed limit, I'll give six and a half. My point is that that's a long drive. I think that if we are going to have this effective representation, if we are going to ensure that we have a work-life balance, ensure our families are taken care of, it is vitally important that every single one of us in this Chamber sit back and reflect. It's no disrespect to this commission, absolutely.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cyr: You know, I'm always honoured to represent my constituents, and I'm willing to put the hours in, to make sure that my constituents are heard, but I'll tell you that it is an impact to my family life, and I can tell you that I expect to hear from all of the rural MLAs out there that it's the same thing for them. It's ironic that that's not the first thing that I thought of, that it had to be an urban MLA that pointed that out, that this has an impact on me and my family.

Mr. Ellis: Children first.

9:20

Mr. Cyr: Children first. Exactly. I have to thank him for doing that and pointing out that there are more things than just being an MLA even though I feel so much honour to be elected.

Now, I was curious. My colleague has brought forward a lot of passion for family life. I guess my question to him is: if you were you to trade places with a rural MLA for even a week, what do you think that would end up like, sir?

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Wow. That's a great question because, to be honest with you, that is something that I have actually thought of, and sadly I think that what comes to my mind is the word "divorce." You know, my wife – and I say this with all due respect. For me to be away from her and my kids as it is puts a real strain on any relationship. I'm no different than anyone in this Chamber. Think of more time away, more driving time, you know, having to go to an event where it's not to give a quick speech, say a few words, and you're out but to have to go there and talk to everyone because, quite frankly, as a rural MLA you're important to that community. I mean, again, this is their opportunity to speak to a representative on a provincial level, so each one of these people – and you have to do this. I get it. You have to do this. You have to take the time to talk to every one of those constituents. I can tell that every single one of the rural MLAs here – and I've never heard anything bad about anyone who does not take the time as a rural MLA to talk to their constituents.

You know, as my friend from Grande Prairie-Wapiti said – I mean, we were talking about this just earlier – he has 51 councillors. Is that correct, sir? Fifty-one councillors. I have one that I share with, I think, two or three other folks in this Chamber, and I have, you know, one MP that I deal with, right? This is apples to oranges as far as I'm concerned. It's not the exact same representation.

Now, I will say this. From an urban perspective, I'm sure that I have challenges on a daily basis that are not the same as what rural folks have, right? I mean, I'm not saying that it's, you know, easy. I just have different challenges. I think that all the urban folks here just need to recognize that our friends from rural Alberta have challenges.

I'm not sure that this piece of legislation is completely fair or representative of our friends in rural Alberta, again, from a work-life balance perspective. That's serious. We all talk in this Chamber about how much we care about our families. This is supposed to be family friendly, right? This is what it was touted to be, a family-friendly Chamber. I don't see anything family friendly for my friend from Peace River. I don't see anything family friendly for my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I see challenges that each one of them has on a daily basis. I can only imagine what my friend here from Peace River has to do this weekend even to get to one event – well, first of all, to get home but then to get to one – let alone, you know, two or three. In my constituency we talk about challenges. Yeah, I get invited to a lot of things, so I, like you, Mr. Speaker, may go to two or three in a night. For my friend here from Peace River, you're lucky if you get in that one in a day, maybe two on the weekend.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill. First, I want to begin by thanking the Electoral Boundaries Commission for their work. They've put in a lot of time on this bill. I want to thank the minister responsible for democratic renewal – or was that Justice? – for bringing this forward.

An Hon. Member: Transportation.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, it's the thought that counts, Mr. Speaker.

I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-West for his comments. He has come with me to Brooks quite a few times and has managed to see in just a small way the demands which rural MLAs have. He also, I thought, brought a good perspective forward on the different demands that urban MLAs have. I'm greatly sympathetic to the urban MLAs and rural MLAs who represent constituencies that are overpopulated.

There is a need to have an Electoral Boundaries Commission about every two elections. That's our general principle here. As much as possible we want the populations to be roughly equal when we're going to the polls. The Member for Calgary-South East represents a massive constituency that is almost the size of a federal constituency in terms of population. That is a need. I as a rural MLA can sympathize with him and other MLAs here who represent overpopulated constituencies and the demands it places on them. But I'm asking for some understanding from the MLAs representing urban constituencies here, for them to understand the very different demands placed upon rural MLAs. I'll speak about that in a second.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission was agreed to unanimously by all members of this House, all parties, even when we had more parties at the time, and my hope was that it was going to be able to do its job correctly. Now, I have some personal insight on this. My father-in-law actually served on an Electoral Boundaries Commission a number of years ago. I think that it was in the '90s or early 2000s, when Premier Klein was still in office. He was appointed to the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

I remember I had questioned the independence of the Electoral Boundaries Commission around him. I didn't make the joke at the time because I didn't see it, but I would have said, if it was now, that it's about as independent as I am. Now, he scolded me greatly. My father-in-law might be an older guy, and he was quite sick at the time, so you might think he's not particularly feisty. But I can't use words that are parliamentary to describe what he almost did to me when I accused the process of not being particularly independent. If it was independent or not, he certainly believed that it was, and he put the fear of God in me of ever questioning that again. I spent a great deal of time talking to him about the process and understanding it.

Now, it is inevitable that politics come into it. It's inevitably a political document. We all have vested interests in it. Three members are appointed by the Premier, two members by the Leader of the Official Opposition. We would be fooling ourselves to believe that there is nothing political about that. It is, nonetheless, a significantly more independent system than you see in the majority of the states to the south, where the politicians themselves draw the borders and gerrymandering is a horrible, horrible problem. In blue states Democrats gerrymander it for themselves. In red states Republicans gerrymander it for them. It actually bleeds through onto the federal level because these things are somewhat intertwined. That is possibly the worst possible system. If you're going to have a single-member plurality or first past the post system, you need to have a relatively independent way of drawing these boundaries. The United States is possibly the best argument I've ever seen for proportional representation, and I say this as someone who does not believe in proportional representation.

Our system in Canada, both federally and in Alberta, is significantly more independent and, I think, well thought out than in the United States, but it is not without its flaws. I think it behooves us to understand that, that it's not perfect. These are humans on the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and humans are not perfect. They're capable of making mistakes. They're capable of not getting it right.

To the members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission's credit, they recognized that they got quite a bit wrong in the first draft and committed to trying to get it right in the second. Now, unfortunately, I think they actually got the second worse than the first, particularly in some regions. I think that in the cities they did a pretty decent job. I think it's admittedly easier to draw the boundaries within the two large cities. You've got neighbourhoods that you try to keep together, but you're really moving boundaries around, generally, a couple of blocks one way or a couple of streets the other. It's not radically different. I think they did a very good job, with a few exceptions perhaps, within the cities, but in rural Alberta they made some very, very significant mistakes.

9:30

They are humans. There are five people, a commissioner and two others from each side of the aisle, and they inevitably can't know everything on the ground. One I think was from Acme, another one from possibly Clearwater county, one from Calgary, and possibly another from Calgary. They don't have someone in Brooks who knows the lay of the land, which is why in the first report, for my own constituency, they made quite a mess out of it. They separated Strathmore and Brooks, which had been together since the 1993 election, I believe it was. They took Strathmore, connected it with Drumheller. That wasn't an outrageous proposition. That was actually kind of a reasonable match.

It was everything else they did with the counties that was unreasonable. They took a small slice of Vulcan county and added it in. They threw in Siksika Nation, which was reasonable. But they took a slice of Vulcan county, just a couple hundred, maybe a thousand people in the Arrowwood and Mossleigh area, and threw it up into the new constituency for Strathmore and Drumheller. They sliced those people out of Vulcan county. They would have essentially alienated them from the vast majority of the population representing their municipalities. Then in the north they took slices of Stettler county but not all of it, roughly half of it, and added it in. They threw in the special areas and a whole bunch of other smaller municipalities that were cut up in that dog's breakfast of a constituency.

Then on the southern side they proposed something similar to what they've come up with in the second draft for Brooks-Medicine Hat, but they took Newell county and, for some odd reason, took a small slice out of it, the Rainier, Scandia, Rolling Hills area. The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park knows the area pretty well. Other than that, I think that very few people have heard of these places. They're hamlets with about 150 to 200 people. They don't appear on the map unless you zoom in really close on Google. But there are real people who live there with real needs, and they were sliced off and thrown into a different constituency.

What were they going to call it? It essentially went into Little Bow. Taber-Vulcan was what they proposed for that one. The Member for Little Bow right now was looking forward to getting some really good Conservative voters out of my neck of the woods for it. Alas, they put them back in with Brooks. It was just a few hundred people, again, that they had just taken out of the constituency in Newell county and thrown onto the other side of the Bow River. As hard as the Member for Little Bow works, it would be hard to blame him, if he's the MLA for there, if he was not able to pay these few hundred people the attention that he would pay to the people in Vulcan county, who have more homogeneous issues. At the same time, it would have thrown a few people from Vulcan county, at the northern end of his county, back up into the other end of my remaining constituency, alienating them.

So it wasn't a very good proposal. I provided a very detailed submission to the Electoral Boundaries Commission when they

came through Brooks. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East was there, if I'm not mistaken. Little Bow, I think you were there. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat was there and Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Schneider: And Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. Lethbridge-East was there.

We provided a very, very thorough submission about what to do on a regional basis. Strathmore-Brooks was the only large rural constituency in southern Alberta, out of the large rural ones, that actually had the appropriate population. We were within a few hundred people of being smack on the exact number of the average population of Alberta. There was no need to change Strathmore-Brooks.

Strathmore is a growth node. We've got a lot of hamlets on the west side of Wheatland county that are growing. Lyalta, Carseland, Speargrass, and Strathmore itself are growing quite quickly. So it was going to keep up with population growth around the province. There was no need to touch Strathmore-Brooks. All of those counties were intact. It was a really nice, watertight constituency. You had Strathmore with Wheatland county and everything in Wheatland county in a single constituency, then the same with Brooks and everything within Newell county. It made really good sense. I'll speak in a moment about why that's so important, and I'll discuss that with my urban colleagues. The demands on us are very different, especially with local municipal issues.

I had recommended keeping Strathmore-Brooks together, but we ought to deal with, obviously, the population disparities in the other constituencies surrounding us, so we put forward a thoughtful submission that would have corrected some of this. It would have taken what the boundaries commission had proposed for the rump of Drumheller-Stettler, so minus the town of Stettler but the rest of that riding, moved it down, continued south of the special areas into parts of Cypress county that they proposed to put with Brooks, and then move Siksika Nation and the sliver of Vulcan county back into Taber-Vulcan and given back to Brooks that section of Newell county that had been cut off.

Now, my counties and towns were all in agreement. They said that if you're going to separate Strathmore and Brooks, at least keep the counties together. The outlying communities identify with the larger centre in the middle, and it makes no sense to cut it off, and it's important.

The second round of the Electoral Boundaries Commission made things significantly worse, though. They restored the integrity of Newell county – they put those hamlets back in – but then they did something that not a single person presented in person on the Strathmore side of the constituency. For the first time in the modern history of Alberta they combined Strathmore and Chestermere, not a generally natural pairing. Strathmore is a rural town, with some commuters into Calgary. Chestermere is more of a suburban Calgary community with some of its own – they're different communities. Strathmore and Brooks were probably a more natural pair.

That wasn't unreasonable, though, to put Strathmore and Chestermere together, but what was unreasonable was that they cut Wheatland county, which for the last two decades had been in a single constituency. Wheatland county, only a couple of thousand people: they cut it into four separate constituencies. Now, the winner in this lottery is the Member for Airdrie, who would get some constituents of mine from the rural areas, in Nightingale and some little hamlets there. Again, most people here have probably not heard of these areas, but they're good people. She's getting some pretty solid conservative voters out of there. I go duck hunting

there pretty regularly, so she'll have to invite me to her territory if this is what goes through. But there are just a couple of hundred people at most – it's a very unpopulated area – and they identify with Strathmore.

Now, I'd chance to say that a large number of the people there who are going to be put into the Airdrie-East constituency under this proposal have never been to Airdrie other than perhaps a stop-through on the way. No offence to Airdrie – I mean that with all respect to the Member for Airdrie and her constituents – but many of the people from Wheatland county, the area north and northeast of Strathmore going to Airdrie-East, have possibly never been to Airdrie for more than a few minutes. They don't identify with Airdrie in any way. There's not a main transportation route to there. It's completely bogus.

Then there are the areas on the east end of Wheatland county: Hussar, Standard, Rockyford. We've got the village of Rosebud there. It's got some of the best theatre in Alberta. Its new executive director is the former short-term Member for Calgary-Elbow, Mr. Gordon Dirks. That area there, though, eastern Wheatland county, has been put into Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They'll become outstanding constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I suppose.

Rockyford, Hussar, Standard, in that area . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. I would like to hear the rest of my colleague's statement there because I was very interested to hear what happened to his constituency. It sounds like he has a lot of the same challenges that I have in Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Thank you, sir.

9:40

Mr. Fildebrandt: I wanted to hear the end of my speech, too, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure all members look forward to it with bated breath.

But this area, these are a couple of little villages and some rural farms. I'm willing to bet 20 bucks to any member in this House that the majority of people in Hussar, Standard, or Rockyford have never been to either Olds, Didsbury, or Three Hills. They will be very surprised to learn that they'll be a part of a constituency that is named for places very, very far from where there are. It's going to disenfranchise them in many ways.

Then, the craziest of all are the hamlets of Gleichen and Cluny. They've been put into the – you can't call it Little Bow. You can't call it Vulcan-Taber. You can't call it anything but the hourglass of Montana or Montana's hat. It is shaped as an hourglass, and it goes from the Montana border at a pretty wide spread, comes in, gets real skinny on both ends as it squeezes its way past Lethbridge, and then it bursts out again, shaped as an hourglass, and comes all the way up and takes in the hamlets of Gleichen and Cluny, not more than a few hundred people. With all due respect to the Member for Little Bow – with all due respect – it's a couple hundred people. They're not going to be able to be effectively represented, no matter how excellent the MLA for that area is. They need to be with Wheatland county.

Now, the demands on rural MLAs are radically different. I did some back-of-napkin math, so bear with me. I travel about 38,000, 40,000 kilometres a year for the job. That works out to – at two kilometres a minute I spend approximately 13 days a year in my truck, 13 days a year just driving. I warn you to stay clear.

Now, the Member for Calgary-West explained about work-life balance. I actually didn't really realize how much I was working until I had a little more time on my hands. You know, I've got a

young daughter, and she had her first words just the other week, and I got them while I was in Edmonton, here. It was, you know, just FaceTime Live-ing her, and I managed to be there for that moment of her first words even though I'm very far away.

An Hon. Member: What were they?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It was "dada." Mama was not happy. I got to be there for that moment even though I'm very far away.

But I've realized in the last few months just how much I'm gone from my family, and I cannot imagine having to be gone even more. With these constituencies that are far flung, all the way to Saskatchewan in some cases, from areas that are nowhere close to it, we need to be aware of the human cost to this. But it's not about us. We need to be aware of what this does for our constituents.

You know, I'm going to say something that – it is parliamentary, but it's pushing the line. The hon. Leader of the Opposition said this to me once. Bear with me. He said: the difference between an urban and rural MLA is that we keep toilet paper in our truck.

Now, I keep jerry cans in my truck, and New Year's is coming up.

An Hon. Member: Happy New Year.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Happy New Year.

I have to keep jerry cans in my truck, and I'm sure the vast majority of rural MLAs have to as well, because, you know, I've had some pretty close calls. I'm very glad I keep at least one or two jerry cans in the back.

But these are issues that I just really want my urban colleagues of all parties here to appreciate. You have your own unique challenges that we need to appreciate, especially oversized constituencies, and that's an issue that needs to get fixed, but I think that this boundaries commission got it very, very wrong. There is never going to be a perfect report. There's never even going to be a right report. I know previous ones have got it wrong, too, and I won't tell that to my father-in-law. I fear him now. But this commission got it very wrong, and we need to go back to the drawing board.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to rise and talk in support of the reasoned motion on Bill 33. First of all, I too would like to echo thanks to the five people on the Electoral Boundaries Commission and thank them for their effort.

I would also like to say to my colleagues that have spoken earlier on this that I'd very, very much like to thank them all and for the shared duty that we have to our constituents and to the province of Alberta and the hardship of a bigger constituency, of the long distance from Edmonton and the travel that that can take, and, you know, all the opportunities that this job provides but all the costs and the losses that it has as well. So again I thank all my colleagues for being so cognizant, both rural and urban, of what each of us has to go through to do our very, very best at being the best representatives that we can be for our constituents.

This reasoned amendment to stop this makes total sense. Mr. Speaker, there are three other things that I want to talk about that I don't think I've heard here tonight.

First of all, with this constituency boundary report it changed so much from the interim report to the final report. Of course, that final report was just given to us and given to the people of Alberta sometime around the end of October. We've been here, other than

a one-week constituency break, almost inclusively, so we haven't had much time to talk to Albertans. We haven't had much time to talk to our constituents about what they think.

It's easiest to speak about first-hand experience. Cypress-Medicine Hat and Brooks-Medicine Hat, what was Medicine Hat and what was Cardston-Taber-Warner, have changed so much from what they were in the 2015 election to what they were in the first report to what they were in the final report that I maintain, I have the absolute belief that this final report is so different from their interim report that they need to consult with Albertans again, that they need to start the process over. Because of what we're hearing tonight from NDP colleagues and opposition colleagues, there are so many areas where the report is lacking. Whether it was in the initial engagement and where they were supposed to start or whether it was in the implementation of trying too hard to make all the constituencies with the same population or have a crystal ball into the future as to what some populations may or may not become, Mr. Speaker, we've heard many, many reasons just in the last hour, hour and a half why, if this report goes ahead, it will go further to hurt democracy in Alberta than if it doesn't. That's why this report needs to end.

I want to talk about how badly it started. I want to talk about the confusion that that led to, and I need to focus on Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat because that's obviously the area I know best. The report came to us on a Thursday at 4 or 4:30 in the afternoon. For some reason the headline in the *Medicine Hat News* that morning – Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about the morning before the report came out – was something like: Medicine Hatters should be happy we're going to get three MLAs. Again, I'm talking eight or 10 hours before the report came out. Okay. I'm thinking: what the heck? We sort of have two. We do have two, but for those that didn't know, the Speaker represents just Medicine Hat, about 80 per cent of Medicine Hat. Cypress-Medicine Hat is 20 per cent of Medicine Hat, roughly, Redcliff, Foremost, Bow Island, Cypress county, Forty Mile county. Okay. From two to three: that sounds like a good thing.

When the report came out that day, I was flabbergasted. I was shocked. I was amused because Medicine Hat was becoming one big constituency. The north part of Cypress county was going to be joined with Redcliff and Brooks, if I recall correctly. For the south part of Cypress county, so all around the south of Medicine Hat – and we're talking from the Montana border, Saskatchewan, Alberta, so right at Montana-Saskatchewan-Alberta – it was going to run all the way at kind of a 45-degree angle to 20 minutes from Calgary. It was going to go past Vulcan, past Milo, past Mossleigh. It was going to be, like, a four and a half hour drive at 70 miles an hour. Yeah, we sort of had three. Only one had the name Medicine Hat in it, and two of them didn't represent any part of Medicine Hat, but it sort of looked like what was leaked was accurate.

9:50

Okay. The facts were still the facts, and this was just a newspaper headline. But, my goodness, Mr. Speaker, the confusion that that created in Medicine Hat, the confusion everywhere I went for a week or two. "We're going to get three MLAs": nobody saw the report. I would spend some time, and I would tell them exactly what the first report said and how it really wasn't and how, as a mid-sized Alberta city, the best mid-sized Alberta city – we're a ways away from Edmonton, but if you've never been there, it's a wonderful place. We are competitive with the Red Deers, the Lethbridges, the Grande Prairies. We want everybody to do well, but we want to do well, too, and it hurt our feelings that all of a sudden we were only going to have one constituency with Medicine Hat in it where

Lethbridge was going to have two, Red Deer was going to have two, Grande Prairie was going to have two, Fort McMurray was going to have two. There are 62,000 of us. People weren't happy.

What this led to was that everywhere I went, councillors – I believe that the entire council of the city of Medicine Hat, I believe that the council of the town of Redcliff, Forty Mile county, Cypress county, I believe that Foremost and Bow Island, of all the municipalities in my constituency, sent a letter to the boundary commission review saying: leave it the way it is; leave it the way it is. A lot of them followed up with: at least make sure that we have two constituencies with the name Medicine Hat in them. Now, the board listened to that, and I'm glad they did.

One of the other examples I want to tell you about to show how flawed this was: when they came for the second time around, one or two people that presented pointed out that maybe instead of this great, great big constituency that ran all the way from Montana-Alberta-Saskatchewan to where you'd be voting with people from Calgary who just live on an acreage on the edge of Calgary, perhaps we were better aligned with people from Brooks. What the committee wasn't aware of, though, is that under the federal boundary changes Brooks had just been taken from the federal constituency and moved into a different one, and our Medicine Hat area had been put in more with the Cardston-Raymond area. That's fine. That's great the way it is. But there were some people that disagreed with that, and I think that's where the idea of being with Brooks came from.

I'm going to say to you again that the committee didn't do their job in looking at why that was being suggested. It was being suggested by people who maybe were unaware of how there are 87 MLAs but only 36 or 38 MPs and how it made some difference in the size of a federal riding compared to a provincial constituency. Mr. Speaker, I'm coupling this with the fact that something came out wrong, that was erroneous, that made it so that people in Cypress-Medicine Hat didn't understand the true way that this constituency boundary report was. Secondly, the committee didn't hear fully as to what the changes were, and we ended up with a report that doesn't really reflect what's best for us.

I want to go, though, to what I heard second. Everywhere I went, people said to me all through Alberta that it was just wrong to take out three seats from rural Alberta. Mr. Speaker, when you're in my constituency and you're standing in the Bindloss school after wildfires have just killed hundreds of cattle, hurt hundreds of lives – Maury, who was 89 and born in his house, was pulled out of his house with five minutes to spare before the house burned down. You're standing in the gym of a school. The school hasn't been open for 10 or 15 years, but that gym is still like you could play basketball in it tomorrow.

When you go down to Manyberries and you have the same instance, where you're standing in a school that is still in pretty good shape but there hasn't been a student in there for 10 years, when you go to Foremost or Bow Island and you know the changes that were made to the Medicine Hat diagnostic lab – now it's unclear as to whether the Foremost people can get their treatment

for their diabetes and their blood needs under the new structure, and it takes months to get an answer – Mr. Speaker, you know darn well why rural people are very, very concerned about losing their representation and their ability to have support. It's not because they want an advantage on anybody in Calgary and Edmonton. It's not because they want extra representation. They just want to make sure that they get treated like all Albertans. They just want to make sure that they have access and their children and their friends and their families have access to the things that, because of more people, because of more government sometimes, urban Albertans have more access to. They know that losing three seats – three seats in rural Alberta – will disenfranchise them, will make it so that they are less involved in the prosperity and the growth of Alberta. That is going to hurt us all. That is going to hurt us all.

The third thing I want to talk about. I don't really have to say much more. Mrs. Gwen Day, one of the five members, wrote a dissenting opinion. She said it all. One out of five people on this committee said: my committee got it wrong; all the constituencies don't have to be the same population. There are court cases. She put in one from Saskatchewan and one from Prince Edward Island where the Supreme Court said: no; you don't need exactly the same population in each one. There are other factors. You know, there are other factors that make it important and make it necessary as to why the rural seats, because of their size, because of their distance from Edmonton, because of the fact that the primary industries, forestry, agriculture, and oil and gas, where wealth is first created, are principally in the rural constituencies – maybe we've got to make sure that rural Albertans don't lose their voice.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end with a funny story. I got talking to several rural Albertans who were very upset and very concerned, somewhat despondent about this. "Okay. Here we go. Rural Alberta is taking it on the chin again. We're going to lose more. What do we do?" One of them, with jocularity and humour, as much as he hates the Canadian Senate, thought the only way to make sure that we had adequate representation for rural Alberta is if we go so far as to have a Mike Duffy and a Senate, as dysfunctional as that one is. My colleagues, I'm telling you – I'm telling you – that's how dissatisfied, that's how disengaged rural Albertans are right now, and this report exemplifies that.

So let's do the right thing. Let's put it on hold. Let's give all Albertans the opportunity to have their voice heard like they deserve to be heard. Let's do our best to ensure that they have the same level of service that all Albertans have. Mr. Speaker, thank you very, very much for listening to me. With that, I'd like to ask that we adjourn debate on this for the night, please.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to move that we adjourn until 9 o'clock in the morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:59 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, December 7, 2017

Day 63

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, December 7, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

If each of us could pray or reflect, each in our own way. As we conclude another full week of work in this Assembly, may we reflect on the hard work of our peers and what has been accomplished and commit ourselves to reaching agreement by recognizing that our objective is not to win or lose but, rather, to reach an agreement. Let us also continue to support each other and find mutual respect in our diversity.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 32

An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

Mrs. Pitt moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment December 6: Mr. Strankman speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, good morning, sir. Good morning, all. It's a pleasure to be joined by 87 of my closest friends and colleagues, some more friends than colleagues, some more colleagues than friends.

An Hon. Member: Are you counting yourself as a friend, then?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. You've got a friend in me.

Ms McLean: Apparently, you have a colleague in me.

Mr. Cooper: Well, you also have a colleague in me, particularly the Minister of Service Alberta.

It is a pleasure to rise this morning and speak to Bill 32, and by pleasure – I mean, I always enjoy rising, but it is with some great concern that I rise this morning, Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill 32. I had the opportunity to speak to this bill yesterday and identify a number of challenges that are in Bill 32. Just as I said yesterday, there are a number of really positive steps forward in Bill 32. Those include some of the discussions around the funding of third-party advertisers and how that is going to be co-ordinated and worked upon. Those include the use of voter assist terminals. They include some of the work to be done around advance polls.

But as I mentioned yesterday, I have some significant reservations around the speed at which this bill is likely to proceed, so that's why I was so, so, so pleased with the good work my hon.

colleague from Livingstone-Macleod did to recommend referring this piece of legislation to committee.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, because I'm sure that you've read it with great anticipation and excitement, this bill is over 200 pages long and was dropped as if it was hot just days before the scheduled end of the session. In fact, it was hot when it was dropped because it had just come off a photocopier in the backrooms of the Legislative Assembly. It was done so because the government wasn't even ready to get it introduced and it hadn't come back from the printers. But I think that we've provided this account of how it actually arrived here yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, one of the more concerning things about this piece of legislation is the lack of consultation that has taken place with the primary stakeholder. You know, the Chief Electoral Officer is entrusted as the keeper of democracy in our province. He or she is mandated under the current Election Act to

- (a) provide guidance, direction and supervision respecting the conduct of all elections, enumerations and plebiscites conducted under [the Election] Act.

The Chief Electoral Officer has a significant role and requirement inside our democracy to ensure that direction and supervision respecting the conduct of elections are considered.

In this case he is required to

- (b) enforce fairness and impartiality on the part of all election officers in the conduct of their duties and compliance with [the Election] Act and the Senatorial Selection Act;
- (c) issue to election officers any guidance, direction and information the [CEO] considers necessary to ensure the effective carrying out of their duties under [the Election] Act and the Senatorial Selection Act;

investigate matters that might constitute an offence under the Election Act; reach out to political parties or representatives concerning the election process. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on about what the Chief Electoral Officer's responsibilities and duties are.

My point here, Mr. Speaker, is to highlight the fact that the powers of the CEO are not to be understated. This individual is essential to the keeping of our democratic system. He's essential to keeping our democratic system accountable and the rules enforced at all times.

One would only assume that if you were going to be making significant structural changes to the Election Act, you might want to reach out to the individual who is primarily responsible for the enforcement of that act, say, the definite subject matter in this case. One would assume that you would want that individual to be quite involved or at least approached in crafting any legislation that pertains to areas he oversees; namely, the Election Act, the Senatorial Selection Act, and the election finances and contributions act.

So you can only imagine my surprise, Mr. Speaker, when said individual, the CEO, Mr. Resler, provided the following letter to the minister of democratic reform.

Mr. Stier: I was shocked by it.

Mr. Cooper: I was shocked myself. I was.

He issued a letter yesterday to the minister responsible for democratic renewal and very kindly CCed members of the Leg. Offices Committee. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer reports directly to that Leg. Offices Committee.

I might just premise, Mr. Speaker, that my comments today are providing very specific reasons why we should be sending this bill to committee as recommended by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod.

First and foremost is, Mr. Speaker, that the Chief Electoral Officer provided his opinion, essentially stating that he hadn't been

consulted with respect to Bill 32. Don't take my word for it; take his. I'll be able to provide significant portions of the letter this morning. But in this case he concludes his letter with:

Since I provided recommendations to the Special Select Ethics and Accountability Committee, I have not ...

Emphasis on "not"; my emphasis, not his.

... been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32.

Holy smokes, Mr. Speaker: a piece of legislation that dramatically changes the way that we do democracy in Alberta. Now, in the name of full disclosure, many of those things are a positive, but you would think that you would want to ask the individual who enforces, provides guidance, direction to that particular piece of legislation.

Let me provide some more context for you, Mr. Speaker, with respect to what Mr. Resler actually said. He says:

I have had a chance to review Bill 32 after first reading.

I am pleased to see that some of my recommendations respecting the residency requirements for electors, flexibility in hiring election officers, the ability to set remuneration of election officers, and the increase in accessibility provisions for electors to be able to vote anywhere and with voter assist terminals have been incorporated into Bill 32: An Act to ... Protect Democracy in Alberta.

While I applaud the spirit behind the proposals about advance polls and special mobile polls, I wanted to bring to your attention potential unintended consequences of these particular proposals. If passed in its current form, I am concerned that Bill 32 will deteriorate the service provided to electors and increase the timelines for communicating results.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer is concerned that Bill 32 will deteriorate the service provided to electors. Here the government claims that the legislation is going to strengthen and protect democracy, but the Chief Electoral Officer, who's responsible for the delivery of that service, says that Bill 32, if passed in its current form, will actually do the opposite, deteriorate service.

He continues:

The most notable areas of concern include the change in advance polling ... and the absence of the authority to utilize vote tabulators for advance polls, special mobile polls and Special Ballots.

He goes on to speak about a number of different changes. I don't believe I'm going to have the opportunity to read the entire letter this morning because of some time constraints, but I'm certain that some of my colleagues will be able to provide some additional content around this particular issue.

But let me highlight a few key areas of the letter, Mr. Speaker, because I know that you will share – I would never presume what you would share or not share with me, but I can only imagine that you will share some of my concern.

Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer identifies a number of issues in this letter with respect to advance polls and his inability to get where-to-vote cards printed and sent to electors. He speaks at length about his concerns around where-to-vote cards. These where-to-vote cards play a very, very important role in ensuring that electors know where they can vote. Now, it may be great that you can vote in the advance polls anywhere in the province – it's an idea that I support – but we have to give the Chief Electoral Officer the tools to be able to communicate to Albertans and for the Chief Electoral Officer to be able to report timely results to us as well.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the official results, the Chief Electoral Officer says:

I had recommended ... the time for the official results from 10 days to 7 days after polling ... This recommendation was premised on either status quo for voting, or vote-anywhere combined with tabulators. A vote-anywhere process without the ability to automate the sorting and counting of ballots comes with additional requirements that will result in an increased timeline for processing Special Ballots, advance poll ballots and special mobile poll ballots. The proposed amendment to section 55 to change the announcement of the official results from the 10th to the 7th day following polling day shortens the allowable timeline. It will be a challenge, if not impracticable, for returning officers to comply with section 55 if the other amendments noted above remain unchanged.

The Chief Electoral Officer is essentially saying that it will not be possible for returning officers to comply with other sections of the act.

You would think that if you were going to be introducing a piece of legislation in the Chamber, you would have at least asked one of the most important stakeholders when it comes to this bill. Mr. Speaker, don't worry, though. The Official Opposition is here to help, particularly my hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod, who said: we've got a solution for this problem; let's send this bill to committee so that the Chief Electoral Officer can come and present the facts to this government.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that you will recall in question period when the Premier stood in her place and made a claim that the opposition likes to ready, shoot, aim. Was there ever a more clear example of ready, shoot, aim than the Chief Electoral Officer not being consulted with respect to the primary piece of legislation that affects him? If there's anyone inside this Chamber that is a superstar at ready, shoot, aim, it is the government. Time in and time out, time and time again this government is proposing legislation where they haven't consulted with Albertans, haven't consulted with the stakeholders. Certainly, in this case – and I'll say it again – the Chief Electoral Officer concludes his letter with:

Since I provided recommendations to the Special Select Ethics and Accountability Committee, I have not been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32,

the bill that primarily he will be responsible for delivering. He has not been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32. I don't know if the government members remember or not, but it was well over a year ago that the government killed that committee.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you and good morning, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, all. You know, this new bit of ...

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Mr. Stier: Yes. Thank you. This new bit of information that has just come to our attention by the elections officer is, I think, a crucial point in our argument that we've been presenting for the past few days. I would urge members to pay a little bit of attention to what we have to say because I think this is vitally important to the discussion regarding sending this to committee. I have a prepared speech that I'll probably go into later on, Mr. Speaker, but with this new information, I think this is critical, and I think it is important that we hear some more details that the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was about to say. If that's the case, I'd like to ask him to carry on, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was about to say that I'm speechless, but clearly I am not. I have a few more things to say. How is it possible that this government thinks that they didn't need to consult with the province's leading expert on the matters on this issue when they are so critically important? Why is it that they didn't think that they needed to consult in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32?

You know, Mr. Speaker, in this piece of legislation the government has taken a number of recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer, and he acknowledges that. The problem is that they are creating a wide, wide swath of unintended consequences that are going to prevent and limit the ability of the Chief Electoral Officer and his team to comply with this very act. It makes absolutely no sense. I was shocked that the Chief Electoral Officer hadn't been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32. How is it that the government could bring forward legislation that fundamentally alters the way that our democratic elections are run without first consulting the Chief Electoral Officer on the ramifications of that issue?

Ms McLean: Table the letter.

Mr. Cooper: Oh, I would be more than happy to table the letter.

Ms McLean: I'd love it if you read the whole thing.

Mr. Cooper: I wish I had time to read the whole thing.

This is a perfect example, Mr. Speaker – a perfect example – of why this legislation must be referred to committee. We cannot possibly fix this legislation before the end of the session if we haven't heard from the experts. You know what will happen? We will pass this legislation, it will be a train wreck, and then we'll have to come back and fix the problems that the government created. In fact, a case could be made that that's what we're already doing here. If they had continued the special ethics committee, we could have discussed a wide range of issues, including those that affect third-party advertisers, which we were happy to do, but this government shut down the committee because the time ran out. I don't know if the government had the ability to extend the time or not, but they chose not to because they don't want to listen.

9:20

The Chief Electoral Officer has raised some significant concerns. In this letter, Mr. Speaker, he hasn't even identified his concerns with enumeration, that he identified at Leg. Offices just two weeks ago, and the additional costs. He has not spoken specifically about the independent elections commissioner and whether or not the way that the government has proposed it is, in fact, the best path forward. I'm just speculating here, but my guess is that he would say that it isn't. I also believe that the government hasn't asked whether or not he thinks it's a good idea. The reason why I would say that is because they didn't ask about policy direction leading up to Bill 32.

Mr. Speaker, this government clearly – clearly – has not taken the right path to strengthening and protecting democracy in Alberta. The Chief Electoral Officer indicated in his letter that it will do the exact opposite.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Good morning, everybody, and good morning and thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I just want to thank my hon. colleague for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for his elaborate dissertation on the documentation from the Chief Electoral Officer. It's quite enlightening to know that this government did not consult with someone who has such great power and authority.

I stand here to support the motion from the member to refer Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, to committee for further review and consultation. Since the hon. member mentioned the document from the Chief Electoral Officer, it's fairly obvious that one should definitely now or at any time consider this. I think that when we're talking about the topic of electoral integrity and protecting our democracy, we need to stop and think for a minute about the seriousness of anything we choose to do.

As members we know that our democracy in this province and in this country is an inheritance that predates the existence of Canada as we know it. As this parliamentary tradition that we have is our most sacred institution, I want us all to think about its history whenever we contemplate legislation that will affect our democracy.

Just two short years ago this Legislature had the honour to host what is perhaps the most sacred secular document in history, the Magna Carta, the Great Charter. It was the original guarantee of rights and liberties that we all enjoy and hold fairly dear. Today, if you go to that small village surrounded by green fields across the ocean, thousands of kilometres away, there is a small monument, one that on the scale of human structures might be hardly noticed by unknowing passersby, and on that memorial, amongst others, there are three words that stand out: "Freedom under Law." These three words, that capture the pillars of our free society and our democracy, convey the fundamental rights and liberties of the individual, they imply the rule of law, and, yes, also represent the very beginnings of our parliamentary democracy.

While most think of the Great Charter as simply a statement of rights and liberties, an early bill of rights, it's actually so much more. It required that the king gain consent of his royal council in order to levy taxes. It is this royal council that became the Parliament of England, the world's first parliamentary democracy. This, in turn, became the Parliament of Great Britain and eventually the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It is from that document, written more than 800 years ago, that the Westminster parliamentary tradition was developed and to where the Parliament of Canada and this Assembly trace their roots.

It is also important to remember that for hundreds of years this tradition and its institutions stood alone as a pillar of freedom and democracy in a world where most people were subject to the arbitrary rule of tyrants or despots. Still today, for the billions of people who live under the oppressive regimes of the world, Legislatures like this stand as a beacon of hope and freedom.

Again, I want all of us in this House to consider these facts, the exceptional history and significance of our democracy, before we make legislative changes that will affect it. I would suggest that this kind of consideration cannot happen in the few short days in which this government intends to pass this bill.

Above all else, if there are changes that deserve the review and the legislative scrutiny and the greater consultation that is allowed by sending this bill to committee, they are changes that affect our democratic process. Mr. Speaker, I realize that to some my words may seem like the kind that should be reserved for great constitutional changes, but it is vital to recognize that the changes in this bill could have impacts on so much more than just electoral technicalities.

This brings me to the name of the bill. If this Legislature is going to pass this legislation claiming to strengthen and protect democracy in Alberta, we should be absolutely sure that it does not contain measures that end up doing the exact opposite, and if it appears that it does, we should take steps to review them and amend them. To me, while there are good measures contained in the bill, there are also some significant problems with this bill. We need to

address these. Some of these are matters of practicality, and others are matters of principle. Let me start with the former.

I'm curious as to how the government came to the conclusion that the province-wide door-to-door enumeration ahead of the next election was a practical idea. The recommendation by Elections Alberta was that selective in-person enumeration accompanied by mail-outs would be the most effective and efficient manner in which to accomplish this goal. For many reasons going door to door can be difficult, not to mention extremely expensive. This is a situation where it would be worth while to go to the committee, look into the best practices, and try and find the best way to go about future electoral enumeration.

While I'm speaking about the duties of Elections Alberta, I would also like to address the proposed establishment of the new, independent elections commissioner. The stated purpose of this new office would be to oversee matters related to third-party advertisers. This is a role that has been administered by Elections Alberta in the past, something, I would suggest, that should be the case going forward. Albertans have confidence in the administration of our elections and the excellent people who have done and continue to do this. In addition, Elections Alberta has the budget and the expertise to execute a wide range of duties, including the ones that this bill proposes to be dealt with by this new office.

At a time when we desperately need to restrain new spending and expanding government, I see no reason why we need to create a new office and no reason why we cannot continue to place our trust and confidence in the women and men at Elections Alberta, under the leadership of the Chief Electoral Officer, someone we should have consulted with. If the government has a legitimate argument why this should not be the case, they should bring it to committee and share it with the rest of us.

Moving on, I would also like to suggest that there should be a second look taken at the list of exemptions that this bill would allow in regard to the ban on government advertising during elections. To me these exemptions are far too broad rather than prohibiting this kind of advertising during an election. Instead, give the government a road map on how to spend taxpayers' dollars during an electoral period. It is absolutely critical to ensure that taxpayer money is not used to give unfair advantage to one party in an election. The integrity of our democracy demands that we go back and take another look at this to close any loopholes that currently exist.

While I'm speaking about democratic integrity, I also want to raise the elimination of the residency requirements as a condition of voter eligibility. It should go without saying that only residents of Alberta should be able to vote in Alberta elections, and it is established in practice that an extended period of time is required to establish residency. This is no different than requiring one to be the age of majority and a Canadian citizen, requirements that are rightly being retained.

This bill as it stands opens a door to unacceptable outside interference in Alberta elections. While I know that the NDP is discovering that they don't have a whole lot of supporters left in this province, I would suggest that if they wish to change that, they should seek to better serve Albertans instead of changing the long-established rules on elections. Frankly, I think that if more Albertans were aware of this provision in the bill, there would be widespread and justifiable outrage. This piece of legislation, that has the appearance of trying to influence the outcome of free and fair elections, should be subject to absolute scrutiny. That part of the legislation alone should justify the referral motion at hand in order to better inform and consult Albertans.

A significant part of this bill is the new restrictions and expanded definitions in regard to third-party advertisers. I believe that this is an area where we also need to tread carefully. When you think about

it, what is a third party? Is it a party that is involved that is not contesting an election itself? In a way, this makes every single Albertan a third party. When we talk about advertising, is it clear that this is also a form of speech and expression? In this case, is it of a political nature? The regulation and restriction of political speech is a topic on which the Supreme Court of Canada has suggested that legislators exercise extreme care and caution. In this case, where we are applying these rules to those who are not themselves political parties and candidates, we should be even more aware of the potential impact on freedom of expression.

9:30

If we boil it down to a very basic example, if your average Albertan is concerned about a political issue and they compose and print off some flyers to post around their neighbourhood, should they be subject to restrictions by government? I would think that the nearly universal answer is no. Say this person is too busy to accomplish their goal themselves, and they want to spread their message beyond their local community. What if they hire someone to write and design their literature? What if they print off thousands of copies? What if they need to pay for envelopes and postage to get their message to Albertans across the province? Is it reasonable for the government to restrict this person's fundamental right to freedom of expression?

What if our hypothetical, politically-engaged Albertan finds a number of like-minded people who want to express their opinion on the same issue? Do the rights of the individual diminish because their idea is popular? What if this group of people find that there is a political party or a politician who shares their concern, or what if they find that there's a political party or politician working against their interests? Do their rights to organize and support or oppose like-minded people end if those people are seeking or hold elected office?

Of course, we know that one of the arguments is that Albertans should be restricted depending on their financial capability and capacity to spread their ideas. I would caution that restrictions based on these factors, while they may seem to be based on a principle of fairness, are in fact a form of censorship on a group of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, restricting the political speech of Albertans is something that should be done rarely and reverently. It is certainly something that deserves more than a few rushed days at the end of session. It is something that cannot happen without deep deliberation and consultation, the kind that could happen in the setting of a committee.

Mr. Speaker, to close – and I'm sure everybody appreciates it – I would just like to repeat one idea, that whenever we seek to change the rules of our democratic process, we should remember the potential significance of what we're really doing. We should remember that in our political tradition the primary defenders of our rights and liberties are the parliamentary bodies like this Assembly. As such, I would urge all members to help fulfill our duty as legislators and support the motion to refer this bill to committee for further scrutiny and consultation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Cardston-Taber-Warner, under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hunter: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Highwood for waxing poetically on this important referral motion, and I want to thank him for his reasonable argument for why this needs to go to committee. I think that this morning already we've heard some very good arguments that would indicate the need for this government to take a sober second thought, to send it to committee, and to provide Albertans with an opportunity to have a

more fulsome discussion on this issue. I think Mr. Resler's indication that this is a rushed process and that he has not been consulted is evidence enough of why this needs to go to committee and have a more fulsome discussion.

I'm very interested to hear from the hon. Member for Highwood how important it is for Albertans to feel like the democratic process that they are engaged in will have the best efficacy in terms of its application and that the process of that democracy is as strong as it can be. I would like to ask the member if he would be willing to share his feelings on this process of being able to make sure we get this right for Albertans, who are aware of the importance of democracy in our society.

The Speaker: The Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my hon. friend from Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Cooper: Easy for you to say.

Mr. W. Anderson: Yeah. It's early in the morning for Wayne.

Mr. Cooper: Names, names, names.

Mr. W. Anderson: I apologize.

Further to my colleague's question, the part that I find really disturbing is when we received the letter from the Chief Electoral Officer stating that he was not consulted with effectively. That, in its own right, should be a definition that this bill has to go back to committee. We have to consult with those of authority. I have a lot of respect for the Chief Electoral Officer, and given his words in his document, I think it's imperative that we have the opportunity to reconsider the democratic process that we're currently involved with and send this bill back to committee. My constituents in Highwood as well as constituents in other constituencies, obviously, are concerned about our democratic process, and they want to ensure that we do this the right way. Therefore, thanks to my hon. friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for highlighting the point that our illustrious Chief Electoral Officer was not consulted with and that we need to move forward and take this bill back to committee.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, is there anyone wishing to speak to amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you. I rise to support my colleague's motion to refer Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, to committee. Mr. Speaker, we see it again. Days from when this House is scheduled to rise, this NDP government introduces another piece of omnibus legislation that demands thorough review and broad consultation. How many is this now? Thirty, 31, 32 – and the list goes on – 33, 34? I don't know if there are more yet. We don't even know. They introduced one yesterday. Is there one today? We don't know.

Let me explain the massive undertaking that is Bill 32. Many of the concepts and proposals in this bill were previously discussed in committee, which ran out of time when the government refused to extend its mandate. We have a very clear idea of the complexity of discussions that need to occur on this bill, and they cannot be done in the waning hours of this session. Mr. Speaker, for that fundamental reason, Bill 32 must go to committee.

What does committee allow us to do? To begin with, it allows us to consult, and consultation is a critical part of our job. We must

ensure that we're reflecting the views of Albertans when we come to this House to review and amend and to pass legislation that will benefit all Albertans. Clearly, that is a challenging job, and we do not take any piece of proposed legislation lightly. We need to carefully review it, ask many questions of stakeholders, see how it affects them, and then determine potential ways of improving it.

This is our task for every piece of legislation. But when we have short sessions, with bills introduced practically every day of it, clearly that cannot happen, and this is not happening. We need to look at each piece of legislation with an eye to determining if it has forged the right balance of Albertans' differing views. Some bills are simple, but Bill 32 is not. This bill begs study, and the place to do that is in committee. This is a critical part of being a legislator. We need to thoroughly understand the proposals in every bill, for none of us want to pass something and then have a passed flawed bill.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at the complexity of Bill 32. The NDP want to create a new independent office of the Legislature. We don't know why, but we do know that these offices cost millions of dollars. Sending this bill to committee would allow us to explore this concept.

Bill 32 proposes to allow Elections Alberta to launch a door-to-door enumeration before every election. That might be a great idea, but the cost is, once again, massive. Sending Bill 32 to committee would allow us to look at the justifications and determine if that expense can be justified at every election. Perhaps it can, but right now we do not know. Yet we will have to vote on this within days.

9:40

Then there are the seemingly minor amendments such as the length of time a voter needs to live in Alberta before being eligible to vote in an election. Is that minor? Mr. Speaker, sending this bill to committee would allow us to ask Albertans what they think of that change. Perhaps they would want longer residency requirements.

Here's another good one. Bill 32 eliminates portions of the Senatorial Selection Act, that the NDP let fall by the wayside. Those elections were a big step for Alberta. They sent an important message to the federal government at the time, and Albertans may well want to keep those sections. Mr. Speaker, the NDP may not realize it, but Albertans care about elections and voting processes. They care very much, and pushing this bill through this House in days, as the NDP clearly intend to do, is wrong.

I haven't even touched on its size, but let me remind everyone that it's over a hundred pages long. These are not just technical amendments. They will change the nature of voting and elections in Alberta.

Some of the amendments in Bill 32 are good. I applaud the modernization aspects of this bill, easing up rules for advance polling and allowing for the use of new technologies. I'm sure that in typical fashion the NDP will only market those positive aspects of the bill to Albertans but fail to mention the more contentious changes.

Mr. Speaker, sending this bill to committee will allow the public to engage in this process, too. We rely on them, and they need to rely on us. Let's do the right thing here. I look to all of my colleagues to support this referral motion.

Mr. Speaker, this is the third time, I think, that this government has brought in amendments to the Election Act, you know, in their short time in this House. And here we go again with another version that's rushed through here with flaws in it, so I guess they'll be bringing back some amendments in the next one. I don't know if every session will have an automatic elections amendment act – I guess that could be – but maybe we should take our time and consult

and do it right. Even the last time when this went to committee, a bunch of the changes proposed today were recommended in that committee and voted down, and now here the government brings them back.

You know, they said that they took big money out of politics. That was the last idea that they had. Well, maybe they did take big money out of politics, but at least it was transparent, and everybody could see what it was. They took big money out, and now they're talking about dark money, so they turned big money into dark money, I guess. You took big money out and put it underground . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, come on.

Mr. Drysdale: You know, they took big money out, put it underground in the form of PACs and unions – it's all included in there – and now they call it dark money. Well, they created the dark money. Now they're going to try and take the dark money out. I don't know what colour the next money will be.

You know, Mr. Speaker, any time they change these rules without proper consultation, this is what happens, and then they'll have to make more amendments. Now they're going to propose to take dark money out, which, if you're going to get rid of the PACs, which they helped create, includes unions. I hear there are paid union workers out door-knocking in Calgary-Lougheed. I mean, that's PACs. That's dark money, so get rid of it, I guess.

We need to consult on this and make sure that it's done properly, Mr. Speaker. That's why this bill needs to be referred to committee. Thank you.

The Speaker: Member for Calgary-Hays, under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. McIver: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for recognizing me. And thank you to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for really enlightening the House on this bill. Really, to the hon. member through the Speaker, I was very taken by you pointing out what I think is obvious. This is another example where the NDP is bringing forward a bill to undo the damage that previous NDP bills have created. There are so many examples in this session alone. They say that they've taken away big money, and now they say they're going to take away dark money. The only money they're not interested in taking away is the orange money. They want no one else to be able to raise money but themselves, and that is actually, I think . . .

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Okay. I thought you were standing to shut me down, Mr. Speaker. I see you're just changing seats. That's never happened before. That's why I was so surprised.

As I shift gears, Madam Speaker, to the hon. member, I'm grateful that you pointed out that this bill is just another of many examples of the NDP having to create a bill to undo the damage and the harm that they did with the last bill and by the gang that can't shoot straight that hasn't got it right in the past.

This time I also thank you for pointing out that they want to create a new independent officer, which is going to cost, I would think, at least a million dollars a year, just based on what other independent officers cost – if it's a half a million or 2 million, the fact is that it's a bunch more money – presumably so that they can consult with that officer. And I thank you in your remarks for pointing out that they haven't consulted with the officer that they have now.

In fact, the smoking gun that shows this – and I thank the hon. member through the Speaker for pointing that out – is where in the letter from Mr. Resler, the one sentence in the last paragraph says,

"I have not been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32." To the hon. member, I have to wonder how he feels about the fact that this government claims over and over and over again, including on this bill, that they've consulted with everyone, yet one would think that the Chief Electoral Officer would be on the top three list of who they ought to consult with if they're going to consult with anybody. It would appear that the government hasn't even consulted with the person on probably the top three list of people they ought to consult with.

Madam Speaker, the hon. member has really made a powerful point here about the big difference between what the NDP says and what the NDP does, even down to the subject of the bill. So I want to talk to the hon. member about how he even feels about the title of the bill, which is actually typical with this NDP government. What the big print giveth, the small print taketh away. Now, the big print sounds pretty good. To the hon. member, I'd like to know how he feels about the title of the bill that says – it's very poetic – An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. I can't think of a better thing to do than to strengthen and protect democracy in Alberta, but the hon. member pointed out that that's the opposite of what the bill does and, in fact, has pointed out that one of the top three people they ought to talk to, the Chief Electoral Officer, has said in writing that that officer of the House hasn't been consulted whatsoever. His words; not mine.

A smoking gun here, folks, and somebody from our party will table it in the House here shortly although I'm sure the government is well aware because the letter was addressed to the minister that moved this bill, the minister responsible for democratic renewal. Again, what the big print giveth, the small print taketh away with the NDP. You just can't trust even the titles of the bills. You just can't trust them.

To the hon. member, I'd like you to reflect on the title of the bill and how absolutely opposite it seems to be to the effect of the bill, and also if I could get you to reflect on the obvious hypocrisy of wanting to create a new officer of the Legislature when the current officer of the Legislature has taken the trouble to send a letter to say that that officer hasn't even been consulted. I wonder, to the hon. member, how you think the government is going to make an excuse out of creating a new officer when they're ignoring the one they have already. [The time limit for questions and comments expired] Oh, my goodness. I wanted to hear that answer. I'm sorry, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak in favour of referring Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, to the Legislative Offices Committee on the grounds that this bill covers a lot of ground in its attempt to tip the balance of the electoral system in favour of the governing party.

9:50

The purpose of our committees is to foster debate on proposed legislation and issues facing our constituents. Committees allow us to host public forums and take submissions from private citizens, businesses, boards, trade associations, and the list goes on, all the while getting a better understanding of how we can better represent the needs and interests of those who will be affected most by the final decisions that we make in this House.

Given that Bill 32 is extensive in size and scope and given that we don't get to see the bill before it's released and given that the government only released this bill days before this House was

scheduled to rise, it follows logically that we send this bill to the Legislative Offices Committee so that we as members are extended an opportunity to further examine the merits of this omnibus bill.

I want to rewind for a minute and go back to the overall size of this bill. This is an omnibus piece of legislation. The members opposite are going to argue that they did the proper consultation before tabling it. But we all make mistakes. Yes, even members on this side of the House make mistakes. So why would it be a bad idea for more eyes to review this bill, especially eyes outside the walls of this hallowed House?

Now, one of the parts of this bill that was very disconcerting to me when I first read this part of the bill was stripping the right of Albertans to be able to vote for our senators. I remember this being a very important issue for Albertans. We have, I believe, fought for the right of being able to have equal and fair representation by elected senators in our province. In these people we have – I actually feel very proud of those senators that we've elected and sent to Ottawa. More importantly, Madam Speaker, is that they were elected. Our senate system is broken in this federation in that it's not elected. I believe that an elected senate is very important.

Now, we led out in this argument and in this case of being able to say: "You know what? In Alberta we're going to do it right. In Alberta democracy will reign supreme. We will have the opportunity to be able to say who our senators will be through the election process, through democracy." It is unfortunate that there were not more provinces that followed the example of Alberta to elect their senators. However, it doesn't matter whether or not everybody else follows that good practice. The fact is that Alberta led out. We led out in showing our federation that electing their senators is the right thing to do because we believe in an elected senate.

So for an NDP minister to put this part into this bill, I found completely offensive to the work that has been done in the past. I think it's only incumbent upon this government, if they feel that this is the right thing to do, to take that to committee, to send this bill to committee so that they can actually hear what those Albertans who fought so hard to get senators elected and to have that piece of legislation where we had the right to elect those senators stripped away from them – they need to have the right and their day in court where they can actually speak their mind, tell this government and that committee why they think it is a good idea or a bad idea. If they think that this is the right approach, then I don't see why they wouldn't want to have Albertans have their say on this.

But I can tell you, I believe that the government and especially the minister do not want to have this brought before Albertans because they know what the answer will be. They know that Albertans were passionate about this issue and that Albertans are still passionate about this issue and that they would reject this part of the bill. I have no doubt in my mind that the government will not send this to committee, will not give it a second sober thought, based upon the idea that they know what Albertans are thinking.

How can this be the path that this government is taking? I think that the polls show very well what Albertans think about this path.

By trying to ram this bill through in the dying days of session, the government is telling the members of this House and, frankly, all Albertans that: we know better than you, and we don't make mistakes. We are not being afforded sufficient time to consult stakeholders, draft amendments, and give this bill fair debate. That's why we should refer this bill to committee.

Madam Speaker, we also need to be honest with ourselves about the timing of public interest. There is this idea that what is salient is important, and saliency as far as politics and the public are concerned usually comes with the interest of the media after a bill is actually tabled. Prior to that, most people aren't paying attention

to the little details involving the government, reading government websites, filling out surveys, or attending public forums.

We must give the media the opportunity to be able to disseminate the information about these bills so that people can make an informed decision, and I have to say that the process that we have seen – and I will admit that I am new to this House, being two and a half years into it. As I've watched and seen what that process is and recognized that these bills can go from inception and introduction to completion within a week, how does that give our public the opportunity of being able to take a look at what is in these bills, especially the stakeholders? In this situation democracy itself is being redefined. I think that it's important, as a democracy-loving citizen, that the people should have the right to be able to take a look and have a say in how this thing is drafted.

The government could say that the public needs to pay more attention, but that's not fair given the thousands of other things nonpolitical people juggle in their days. People are busy, Madam Speaker. You know that. I think that when we allow the media to disseminate that information to the general population, then we have an opportunity of really getting true and fulsome feedback from Albertans.

All this to say that the e-mails, letters, calls, and meetings with private citizens don't usually flood in until the bill is knocking at their door. Unfortunately, by this point their feedback isn't given much attention unless the bill is referred to a committee, where those concerns are brought forward.

Now, I've spoken before about the necessity of even committees being able to hear the arguments and hear from their stakeholders. As I said before in another speech, I was in a committee meeting with Resource Stewardship where there were stakeholders that had been waiting for two and a half years to be able to come in and speak to this Resource Stewardship Committee, and the government side of the committee had blocked their ability to be able to come in and see them and talk with them. We gave them a great opportunity to be able to say: yes, you have the right to come in. We were going to create a working group.

The reason why I say this, Madam Speaker, in terms of context is that unfortunately the NDP government have created a pattern, are showing a pattern that rather than actually wanting to hear what Albertans have to say, they believe that they have it right and that they don't need to listen to what Albertans say. This is a dangerous, dangerous path to take, and I believe that when that happens, Albertans decide at elections that they no longer will accept that government.

I've heard of constituents concerned about the infiltration of outside influence into our elections by way of fake votes if this bill is passed. Bill 32 eliminates the six-month residency requirements for Alberta voters in general elections. You know, I believe that when the six-month rule, which I believe is fairly universal in terms of a democratic system, was implemented, it was implemented to fix a problem of people coming in and having undue influence in elections where, in terms of Alberta, we need to hear from Albertans, whether or not they accept the mandate that has been presented by each party and elect their representatives in that way.

10:00

Now, the concern that I have with them taking away this part of the six-month residency requirement is that potentially it could allow our elections to be influenced through outside influence. These constituents' concerns are that their votes will count for less in the next election. Again, I don't believe that Albertans deserve that. I believe that Albertans deserve the right to vote and to be able to vote for who they want to have govern them in the next four years after that.

This is all assuming the government calls the next election in the spring of 2019, based on the Election Act, so I guess we'll have to see on that. The point here is that concerns like this would never have come in during public consultation. I bring this up to highlight that there are likely countless other submissions just like this one flooding our constituency offices. All these concerns are legitimate and should be given due consideration.

One thing that I've been very interested in over the last two and a half years as I've listened is that I have yet to hear one NDP MLA, whether it's a backbencher or whether it's a government official, stand up in this House and table or send negative feedback that they've received. Now, I can tell you, especially on other bills that we've seen, that if my office is receiving this negative feedback, I'm sure that their offices are receiving it as well. Why would they not want to represent all of their constituents?

This, again, is a dangerous precedent that they've set, and I think that they are going to be punished in the next election for that. Furthermore, if the government was to send this bill to committee and allow for more input from the public, wouldn't it give the government side of the House more licence to pass bills like this? I know they have already heard from their list of stakeholders, but imagine how much approval a bill such as this could have with extensive input from the concerned Albertans that I've been hearing from.

I'd like to pose a question to the government and to the government side. What is their fear of sending this bill to the Legislative Offices Committee for a review? Is the government afraid of the feedback it might get from the 11 committee members, from the stakeholders, and from the countless Albertans that want to have a say in this regard, or does the government not trust this committee to make the right choice? I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the public trusted these individuals to make good choices by electing them, so is the government saying that it doesn't trust the decisions of the electorate?

This is not a stretch. The Standing Committee on Legislative Offices does not have the mandate to approve changes to legislation, but these 11 members could certainly discuss this bill, take feedback from the public, give it more consideration, and debate the recommendations for the rest of us to discuss. How can this be considered a bad thing?

Now, earlier I heard the Deputy Premier say: how many times did you do it? She was referring to, I would assume, the PC governance model in terms of omnibus bills. My question to her is: do two wrongs make a right? I mean, if you promised Albertans and said to Albertans, "We want to do things differently," then if you're throwing these omnibus bills, if you're not consulting, then, really, are you not doing what you supposedly were condemning in the past? Whether you believe that it's your right to do this because you have . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just appreciate the member's comments. I have two very quick questions, actually. One of them: in your remarks you suggested that perhaps the government thinks that they know better than Albertans or that the government knows best. I'm just curious to know what your thoughts might be around: do you think that they also have concluded that they know what's better for the Election Act than the Chief Electoral Officer, who is responsible for delivering results on that Election Act?

The second question that I have for you is around the Senate. Do you think that this government thinks that they know better than

what Albertans want with respect to elected senators, and is that why they chose not to bring the Senatorial Selection Act back to the Chamber for debate so that under the cover of darkness that bill would expire, because they were concerned about the push-back that may have come from Albertans?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank my esteemed colleague for what I believe are the quintessential questions about this bill. I'd like to address the first one first of all, you know, the question: does the government know best? Now, I would not presume to assume what the government is thinking on this bill. But in terms of actions and outcomes I would have to say that they have shown a propensity to believe that they know best about what Albertans want and what they think they want. This, again, in my opinion, is a dangerous precedent and a dangerous path to take.

Albertans in 2015 were decisive in how they felt about that. Whether it was perceived or actual, Albertans made a decision. It is incumbent upon any government, whether you are a Conservative government or an NDP government or a Liberal government, that you have got to consult with Albertans, that you have to really try to understand what the will of the people is and then govern in that way.

When it comes to the second question that my esteemed colleague asked, about the Senate, the loss of the Senate, I do believe that this is a very important question to Albertans. I do believe that they would love to have the right to discuss this issue and to bring it to committee so that people can come in and present their beliefs on whether it's important or whether it's not.

Again, as I said before to the Deputy Premier, this approach that the government is taking, the approach that, "Well, the previous government did it; therefore, we can do it," won't fly with Albertans. Albertans will reject it, and they will say: "No. We want you to consult with us. We want you to figure out what the will of the people is, and then we want you to govern accordingly." Again I have to say it, and I've said this before. I believe that the polls indicate that Albertans don't feel that this government is doing that. They're not following that course of action of consulting with Albertans, of making sure that Albertans' views, the views of the general population, are represented here in the House.

With that, Madam Speaker, I just hope that the rest of my colleagues will send this bill to the committee so that we can have sober second thought. Thank you very much.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and, once again, good morning, all. It's a pleasure to be here again this morning on a bright day. I see we have some wonderful schoolchildren in here today to witness our process. Everybody can wave. They're here to see democracy in action this morning.

Madam Speaker, we're talking this morning about a very important part of democracy, and that's Bill 32, which is titled An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. We're working on an amendment here that we want to send it to committee because we believe it needs to be rethought, and we think it needs some refinement, and we think it needs, with some new information that we just recently obtained, a little revamping.

You know, there's also been a lot of conversation this morning about a lack of consultation and so on and so forth. As we've seen many times in the past few years that I've been here, this seems to happen time and time again, but most often it is within the past two

years that I've seen this go on and on and on. So I feel sometimes I'm like a broken record every time I rise to speak in the House, asking and cajoling and pleading that this government consult on legislation that they're proposing. Here I am again asking that another massive NDP bill be referred to committee in order for there to be consultation on the impacts.

And it is a big bill. Stacked here on my desk are some of the bills we've got. This is the bill we're talking about.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I apologize for a moment.

We're not in committee, and all members are required to be sitting in their own seats. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock is welcome to take his seat in front of me. I don't mind.

To go on, anyway, Madam Speaker, as was pointed out earlier, we got a couple of copies of this Bill 32. It's a pretty big one. It's 105. I guess they had to bring it out in a rush before they made it that way because we got a big stack of paper a day or two ahead of that. It's something that I think indicates that this government wasn't ready on this one. I don't think that they had all their ducks in order when they brought this one out.

As I've stated before in debate on other bills and sometimes in statements and questions under consideration by the House, there's a difference between asking stakeholders about an idea versus asking them to consider a very specific change, as is articulated in this bill. This government needs to ensure that if it gets the legislation right, it doesn't end up being tied up in the court as various stakeholders and other parties challenge the constitutionality of various aspects of the bill.

The best way to ensure that legislation it is considering is constitutional is to ask the experts. By referring this bill to the committee, we will have the ability and opportunity to ask those experts to come before the committee and provide their expert testimony to consider when it writes its final recommendation on how the Legislature should proceed on the bill.

In that set of phrases I'd like to take a bit of a break from my prepared statement by just looking at something from the expert that we were talking about earlier today. I'm speaking of the letter that was addressed to the minister responsible for democratic renewal. It has been written by the Chief Electoral Officer, Glen Resler, as was mentioned by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills earlier, and I think it is probably something that when the government received it, they probably stepped back and said: "Uh-oh. We might have goofed here. We might have missed something." I'd like to take a moment beyond my prepared statement to say a few words and to read some of the statements made by the electoral officer because I think that there's a classic example of a true expert.

The second paragraph down he says:

While I applaud the spirit behind the proposals about advance polls and special mobile polls, I wanted to bring to [the attention of the House] potential unintended consequences of these particular proposals. If passed in its current form, I am concerned that Bill 32 will deteriorate the service provided to electors and increase the timelines for communicating results.

Now, how many times have members and how many people in here have participated in elections and wound up with some very, very, very angry voters when they've had difficulties with the voting process? This is important. If the electoral officer of Alberta has concerns, you can bet that Albertans will have concerns.

He goes on to say:

The most notable areas of concern include the change in advance polling days and the absence of the authority to utilize vote

tabulators for advance polls, special mobile polls and Special Ballots.

Those are important things that were mentioned in this bill, and the Chief Electoral Officer is very concerned about this, folks.

With regard to advance polling days he says:

While I support increased availability of advance polls, the earlier advance polling days do not leave sufficient time to notify electors adequately of the locations through the Where-to-Vote cards or to have candidate ballots printed.

He's very concerned about that process. Well, I would be concerned if the people of Alberta aren't given proper notice so that they have the time to consider where they're going to vote.

It goes on. He's now talking about where-to-vote cards.

Where-to-Vote cards are produced for . . . elector addresses that include the dates, times and locations of all polling places, including for advance polls. Because Alberta does not have a fixed election date, our returning officers cannot arrange polling places before knowing the voting days. The soonest that Where-to-Vote cards can be sent to print is Day 7 post-writ. This results in the cards being received by electors between Day 15 and 20, which is likely to fall [well] after the first advance poll days.

Well, that certainly can't work. That doesn't make any sense for this bill to contain something like that. It must be amended.

In regards to ballots, the nomination period must close [by] (Day 10) prior to sending ballots to be printed with [the proper] candidates' names on them. Opening advance polls earlier results in as little as [only] four days to proof, print, and make ballots available to . . . advance poll locations. With rural and more remote areas, this timeline could not be achieved.

I underline that, ladies and gentlemen. He's saying that with rural and more remote areas this idea could not be done, yet it's in the bill. I cannot understand us proceeding with this bill in the fashion that we're doing, without sending it to committee so that we can get these corrections obtained but, moreover, hearing from the gentleman that has written this, the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta.

Another concern he has is voting anywhere without tabulators. He's saying:

Proposed amendments to section 99 (Advance Polls) and proposed new sections . . . [regarding] (Special Mobile Poll), allow electors to vote for the candidates in their electoral division without being present in their polling subdivision. These changes are in alignment . . .

with what we were hoping to see as it goes.

However, without the ability to utilize tabulators and a tabulator ballot, the goals of improving efficiency and service to the elector will be eroded. The utilization of the vote tabulator would have allowed for ballot on demand to be printed at each location, and the tabulator could be programmed to read and report results from the 87 electoral divisions. Without authority for the use of tabulators, as noted above, a blank ballot may need to be utilized, and a manual method of noting and sorting the correct electoral division will need to be developed.

Imagine trying to sort that out at some or other voting station.

This process is anticipated to add additional timeframes and the results of elections across the province will likely be delayed.

As a matter of fact, he says:

In the recent BC provincial elections, this resulted in a delay in counting the "vote anywhere" ballots to 10 days after polling day.

It's absolutely ridiculous if we pursue this method of polling.

He also talks about voter assist terminals. He understands that there are some amendments to section 4

in regards to the use of . . . assist terminals [that] are intended to make voting more accessible to voters with a functional limitation that prevents them from voting independently.

That sounds like a good idea as it is.

10:20

He says, though:

Currently, the only voter assist technology that exists is specific to marking a tabulator ballot.

Without the ability to use those vote tabulators we just talked about, the provision for voting with assist terminals will not be able to be done. Uh-oh.

Mr. Cooper: Uh-oh.

Mr. Stier: Sounds to me – and the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I think, seems to agree – that this seems like a major problem.

He goes on. The last point I'll make with regard to the comments from the electoral officer is this.

The proposed amendment to section 55 to change the announcement of the official results from the 10th to the 7th day following polling day shortens the allowable timeline. It will be a challenge, if not impracticable . . .

I'll say that again.

It will be a challenge, if not impracticable, for returning officers to comply with section 55 if the other amendments [he's talked about] remain unchanged.

He concludes with this, Madam Speaker, in his remarks. He has provided special remarks to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, but he has not been consulted in relation to these problems in Bill 32. What more do we need in evidence to suggest that it's time to pull the string on this one, put on the brakes, and refer this to a committee?

Now, there are a number of points in the legislation that will strengthen voter engagement in Alberta and involve Alberta's newest voters through education and outreach. Those things, I think, we can support in this bill. But even if you do support the bill overall, as I've just outlined and I say again, there are still an awful lot of reasons to send this to committee. I don't think any member here would want to argue with the Chief Electoral Officer in Alberta on this point.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my remarks for this segment of my presentation. I think it's solid evidence that I have now presented – and it was introduced earlier by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – that we need to do a proper consultation on this for a change, not follow the normal NDP way of reviewing matters, pay attention to what the expert, the Chief Electoral Officer, has said, and vote positively to send this bill to committee.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I'd just like to thank my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for his comments and remarks. One thing that I found particularly interesting is how he wrapped up his speech speaking about the normal NDP way. This NDP government has become a say one thing, do another government. I think that is very, very clear in Bill 32 with respect to their lack of consultation with the Chief Electoral Officer that you, Member for Livingstone-Macleod, so eloquently indicated.

Another area where this NDP government is such a say one thing, do another government is that this NDP government likes to talk about getting dark money out of politics, but the reality, Madam Speaker, is that some of the biggest dark money in politics is NDP money. I'd just like to highlight that with some actual facts with respect to third-party advertisers. I know that my hon. colleague is also very interested and, quite likely, would like to provide comment if there's any time.

You know, Madam Speaker, in the first two quarters of 2017 the United Nurses of Alberta contributed over \$120,000 to the Alberta Federation of Labour's PAC, or third-party advertiser, as they actually are. [interjections] Just wait. We'll get there. We'll get there. The Health Sciences union contributed \$100,000 in the first two quarters; UFCW local 401, \$70,000 in the first two quarters; CUPE local 30 . . . [interjection] Pardon?

Mr. Clark: How much is in Alberta Can't Wait?

Mr. Cooper: Oh, I don't know. A lot. But we'll get there. There's a lot.

The good news is that for all third-party advertisers they're required to disclose their contributions, just like all third-party advertisers are. My point here is that the government likes to say one thing and do another. They have their PACs. They have their PACs, and they like to pretend that they don't.

Mr. McIver: That's orange money.

Mr. Cooper: This is orange money.

ATU local 583, over \$15,000 in the first two quarters; UFCW local 1118U, Red Deer, over \$12,000; CUPE local 30, Edmonton, just over \$10,000; CUPE local 37, Calgary, \$9,000, oh, just about \$10,000; communication workers union, Burnaby, British Columbia, outside of Alberta, Burnaby, Alberta, maybe – I wonder how the Telecommunications Workers Union of Alberta feels about Trans Mountain pipeline; I'm not sure – just over \$7,000. This all appears to be very, very, very dark money, Madam Speaker.

Ms McLean: That's not dark. It's right there.

Mr. Cooper: I hear the Minister of Service Alberta say that that's not dark money. Well, guess what? All PACs are required to publish their contributions.

Imagine that. Imagine, Madam Speaker. The government continues to say one thing and do another. I take great interest in the comments from my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod about how he has observed another area of the government saying one thing and doing another with respect to not consulting the most . . . [The time limit for questions and comments expired] Oh. That's unfortunate.

The Deputy Speaker: You've already spoken to the bill, hon. member; 29(2)(a) is finished.

Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak to the referral amendment on Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. I am a firm believer in sending Bill 32 to the Legislative Offices Committee and to do proper due diligence on this and to ensure that we have full transparency on the process and full input from Albertans on the direction that we hope to take their democracy forward with. I have the pleasure of serving on the Legislative Offices Committee, so we've heard a number of times from the Chief Electoral Officer.

I also had the privilege of serving on the Ethics and Accountability Committee, with an intent to improve the way our democracy functions within Alberta. What I found so disconcerting with the Ethics and Accountability Committee was that the government was very much on a track of: we're going to move forward only on the stuff that we're definitely in favour of. We saw many times where we had a committee that ended in a tie vote with the chair breaking the tie in favour of the governing party members on that committee. I

think what was quite evident was how the government was in the process of trying to stack the deck against the other parties within the democratic process in Alberta and in the meantime has created even more consequences that they were even warned about.

10:30

When we look at the discussion that we had in committee with regard to handing over the electoral system to possibly third-party entities – and that was brought out very clearly. I spoke on that in the September 19 meeting last year, what the government was proposing with regard to spending contribution limits coming across all parties, \$4,000 across all parties, and how it was very difficult to even enforce that. It was not only coming across all parties; it became \$4,000 limits on the party, on constituency associations, on nomination candidates, on leadership candidates.

Government sticking its fingers very much – a lot of overreach into all these different entities that helped to move our democracy forward in a very credible manner, and that's through political parties. Not only was the government intent on – and I believe that all parties were very much in favour of limiting political donations to a political party. But it becomes very difficult to all of a sudden work on policing or enforcing, for the Chief Electoral Officer to enforce the rules that were being put on the Chief Electoral Officer when it was cross-parties. So we were setting ourselves up to fail.

When we look at, then, the spending limits that were being put in place for individuals, for leadership candidates, for party candidates that are going to run an election process, those limitations in my opinion are tying the hands of individuals within constituencies to actually voice their concerns or to promote their freedom of expression. When we limit the amount that they put forward – agreed; we don't want to put it into the hands of a few within Alberta with large donations. But when we limit the ability of the political parties and the political candidates to fully utilize the money that they've been given for the purpose of spreading the message of that party or that candidate, I believe that's when you all of a sudden create the consequences that we're seeing before us now.

You know, I find it really quite concerning that now we get a letter from the Chief Electoral Officer with his concerns. We spent a lot of time with Mr. Glen Resler in the Ethics and Accountability Committee. He put forward many good recommendations that were being debated and discussed. He gave us a lot of good, credible front-line-worker type of feedback on how this can actually be implemented.

When I received this letter yesterday as a member of the Legislative Offices Committee – and to see that the consultation had not even gone as far as to ensure consulting with the Chief Electoral Officer on the ability to go forward in a way that has good policy and good policy input: I believe that there is a breakdown in consultation here. I believe that we have a situation where now the government is deciding that they know better. We've seen it in many different aspects where the government knows best. This NDP knows best. We had it many times in the Ethics and Accountability Committee on advice from the Chief Electoral Officer and others that were witnessing in the committee that – we would have the Wildrose Party, PC Party, Alberta Party, Liberal Party all very much in alignment with concerns that were being proposed, yet it would be voted down. This NDP government knows best.

Now we have a situation here where it's come to the attention that AFL has become a third-party PAC with some very significant contributions, and I just wonder if the United Nurses, all the nurses in Alberta, recognize that in this year they were contributing \$132,000 to the Alberta Federation of Labour's political action

committee. I just wonder if the Health Sciences Association of Alberta is being transparent enough with their members and if all of their members recognize and are informed that they gave \$111,000 in this year to the Alberta Federation of Labour political action committee.

What's really interesting about this report that we have before us from the Chief Electoral Officer is that all that money was primarily given in quarter 1 and quarter 2 this year, and all of a sudden it dried up in quarter 3. It leads me to question. Hmm. I wonder if this political action committee has received information from the government that they would make a decision that: well, we've got all the money that we're going to be able to spend, so we better just not bother taking any more donations. You've got to wonder where that money is going now. The concern we had in the Ethics and Accountability Committee was that the spending limits that we were putting on the political parties, the units that we have utilized within our democracy over the last hundred and some years, those spending limits would drive that money to other entities and possibly take it out of the realm of political parties, and I believe that is possibly what we're seeing here.

The NDP is promising to remove dark money from politics, and you would think the NDP are also going to remove the in-kind, personal support of staffers of the Alberta Federation of Labour from working on Alberta NDP campaigns or perhaps also the in-kind support the AFL provides the NDP by sitting on the NDP board. I sure would like to get Gil McGowan in here to committee and question him on these matters. After all, the NDP is restricting the AFL's ability to act as a political action committee, so I think it's prudent for us to get the feedback from the AFL as to what their concerns might be with Bill 32. There is a concern with Bill 32, if it does not go to committee, that we're not going to get transparent consultation and that Albertans will not get what I believe is the accountability of government to move forward in a very transparent manner.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

So how about it? Let's send Bill 32 to committee so we can get Gil McGowan in there and talk to him about how the Alberta Federation of Labour perceives Bill 32 and possibly even ask the question of why the Alberta Federation of Labour's political action committee money all of a sudden dried up for quarter 3. Was there any kind of information that Gil McGowan had that most others did not have that made them decide to do business in a different manner?

The NDP want Bill 32 to go after something called super PACs. Super PACs are something that we see, I believe, in the United States. Very significant political donation units have possibly gotten in the way of good democracy, but I believe what we're doing here is the government trying to fix legislation that they had already presented and promised to Albertans that was going to fix big money. We called it at that time big money. Now it's all of a sudden become dark money. We have dark orange money. We have dark blue money, apparently. We've got all kinds of different coloured money. I believe that we have a duty to send this, refer this to committee so this discussion can be had in an open, transparent way and that all Albertans can have the ability to have some input into the discussion.

10:40

The NDP want to set the spending limits for third-party advertisers so that beginning on December 1 prior to an election year to the day the writ is dropped they can only spend \$150,000, and of that, no more than \$3,000 to any electoral division. That means third-party advertisers can only play in 50 of the total 87

constituencies. I'm not sure how that makes sense to the government and if they just took these numbers out of the sky, but you would think that they would have the ability to spend the \$3,000 in all 87 constituencies. I believe this is blatantly unfair and that the dollar amount should be raised by \$111,000, at least, to \$261,000 for a level playing field.

Again, we look at having a level playing field right across Alberta. We are talking in another bill with regard to rural-urban voice and effective representation, and now we are driving limits that will possibly change the playing field. We could raise it to \$435,000 and make the limit \$5,000 per constituency. I believe that could even be fair also. But to have limits in place and that political action committees are going to make decisions based off where they want to pursue their activity: I think we need to open the door, that they can actually fully utilize the money that's given to them and put forward, that they can fully be a voice for the people that are contributing their money and spread it right across Alberta without any hindrance.

The NDP also want to change the spending for the writ period. The day the writ is issued to the end of polling day the spending limit is, again, a mere \$150,000 and, again, no more than \$3,000 of that to any electoral division. I believe there, again, we have the numbers that don't quite jibe with what should probably be where they have the ability to spend equally across all constituencies without hindrance.

The NDP also state that third-party advertisers will now be prohibited from incurring an expense that would be a campaign expense . . .

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to correct a couple of things that the member said and that have been said a couple of times across the way. I just want to preface this by saying that I've never been a member of any of the unions that are associated with the AFL. Actually, I was a member of Unifor for about a month when I worked with Château Laurier in Ottawa, but that was about it.

Mr. McIver: Which is it, yes or no? Yes or no? You said no, then you said yes.

Connolly: I've never been a member of a union in Alberta, which is all the unions that give money into the AFL. Because I was only there for a month, I think I paid \$3 in union dues, so there you go. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Calgary-Hawkwood has the floor.

Connolly: However, what I want to say is that I have been to the AFL convention as an MLA, and I can tell you that in order for them to give money to their political action committee – to begin with, the political action committee is not a part of the NDP, and we can show you this because the political action committee has done several campaigns against things that this government has been doing. That shows you that the money that's being spent by the AFL does not always support what this government does. It does support whatever the AFL would like to do, and that's what the political action committee is for. It's also voted on by the members of the AFL at the AFL annual convention, and all those unions who are members have to vote on whether or not to give money to the AFL through the political action committee. So there you are.

Mr. Nielsen: So they have to give permission?

Connolly: They do have to give permission. Thank you, Member for Edmonton-Decore. They have to give permission. They have to vote on it. It's a very democratic process.

And the reason you have the numbers on how much each union gave to the AFL is because it's very clear on the Elections Alberta website and because they are very open and transparent with not only their members but all Albertans.

So just all of that to say that we still do not know who Jason Kenney's donors are. If the opposition wants to talk about dark money and they are saying that we have the darkest money, the only reason they know about that money – it's not even going to us, and it's not even always associated with us or helping us – is because they can find it on the Elections Alberta website. If you are a member of a union that is a member of the AFL, you can just ask the AFL what their money is being spent on. It's very open, very transparent.

We don't know who's giving money to Alberta Can't Wait. We don't know who gave money to Unite Alberta. We don't know who gave money to almost all of those PACs that have been helping Jason Kenney and the UCP.

An Hon. Member: It's so dark that we can't see it.

Connolly: Exactly. It is so dark that we cannot see it.

They are not transparent to Albertans. They have been very untruthful to Albertans when Jason Kenney said that he would disclose his donors to Albertans several times. I am very concerned that the United Conservative Party don't actually know what they're talking about when it comes to this. They keep saying: dark money. They don't even understand what dark money means because they are the darkest party in this Legislature and, I would say, in all of Canada. We don't know who any of their funders are, and that is why we're putting this bill forward. We're not putting this bill forward to help us. We're not putting the bill forward to help the Alberta Party, the Liberals, the UCP. We're putting the bill forward to help all Albertans. We are making sure that this province is open and transparent with Albertans, that everything we do is seen by them, and that every single one of them is able to know who funded every campaign, who ran campaigns against each candidate, and how much money that candidate spent.

An Hon. Member: Albertans can't wait for Kenney to disclose his donors.

Connolly: Exactly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to support this bill, and I'm very concerned by the things that are being said.

An Hon. Member: It's garbage.

Connolly: Yeah, the garbage that's being spewed by the opposition. Quite frankly, it's untruthful, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, refrain from using terms like "untruthful." It's been cited by a previous Speaker.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will do my best.

Quite frankly, Albertans deserve to have elections decided on the basis of who has the best ideas and not on who has access to the most money, and that is why we made our election system fairer by banning union and corporate donations and imposing strict spending and contribution limits. Now, they keep saying, "We know who sends the AFL their money" and "Do the union members

know that their unions are sending money to the AFL?" Yeah, because they have to vote on it at the AGM.

The Acting Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on one of my favourite topics. One of the first things that we had the opportunity to do in this Assembly very shortly after the 2015 election was participate in the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, an all-party committee tasked with reviewing all aspects of Alberta's campaign finance laws, our Election Act, and the Conflicts of Interest Act. There were many, many different aspects of that committee. Now, it was a committee that was given one year in its mandate, and we, sadly, didn't get very far, unfortunately, before the committee was allowed to run its course.

What is so profoundly disappointing to me is that that committee is precisely where we should be having these sorts of discussions. The objective of a committee like that, an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, should be to provide thoughtful consideration to all aspects of the legislation that is before that committee. One of the reasons that we send that sort of legislation to those sorts of committees is that they have the time to consider all of the possible consequences one way or the other, intended and otherwise.

10:50

We bring in experts, we listen to the Chief Electoral Officer, we listen to the Ethics Commissioner, we solicit input from the people of Alberta in terms of how they would like to see the election laws in this province changed and updated. Let me be very clear. After 43 and a half years of PC rule, it was long overdue to update those election laws. I don't think, actually, that anyone in this Chamber would disagree with that fact, that they had become out of date. They biased large organizations, allowed donation limits far in excess of what I think most Albertans would have considered reasonable. These are things that we were grappling with, but when we make those changes, changes have consequences. Sometimes those consequences are intended and stated and clear, sometimes those consequences are accidental and unintended, and sometimes those consequences are very intended but kind of hidden, secreted away. And perhaps sometimes when changes are made, those changes are made for reasons that a particular governing party may think are in their best interest.

That, I think, is what's happened in this case. The government used their majority on the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee to stack the deck in their favour or try to do so. [interjection] They tried to do that. They tried to do that, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that members on the opposition side, all of us – the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the members from what is now the UCP, and myself – although we didn't agree on every single aspect of the changes that we would have preferred to see, we tried our utmost to hold the government back and say that with the changes you're making, while you might think they're in your best interest in doing so, there are some real risks to the changes you're making. That is why we are here debating Bill 32.

Bill 32 is a voluminous, large, wide-ranging, enormous, and very big attempt to fix the unintended consequences. What it is trying to do – this government, in restricting political activity in the way they did, created a monster. That monster is called PACs, or, colloquially, third-party advertisers according to the act. Having created a monster, we need to try to put that genie back into the bottle because these guys couldn't get their ducks in a row. I can't

think of any other analogies. Maybe: put lightning back in the bucket, whatever – I don't know – whatever it is.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that when these changes are made, they create knock-on effects and wide-ranging knock-on consequences. That has allowed PACs to spring up and what we refer to as dark money. Albertans know that's wrong. The challenge is that in a free and democratic society it's very difficult for a government to restrain or to constrict or limit an Albertan's ability to freely express themselves or freely associate with other people. So now here we are, trying to put this genie back into the bottle, and it's a really difficult thing to do now that they've been created.

I do have some concerns about this bill, about whether the limits on spending for third-party advertisers dating back to December 1, before the fixed election period, are in fact going to withstand a court challenge. I hope it does. I think it's not an unreasonable attempt to restrict third-party advertising leading into an election period, but it may not succeed given past precedent.

What is so troubling, Mr. Speaker, is, as we learned, the Chief Electoral Officer having written to the minister responsible for democratic renewal expressing his grave concerns about some aspects of this bill. What I am troubled to learn is that the Chief Electoral Officer was not actively consulted through the creation of Bill 32. I think one of the reasons we can see that that may be is that this government rushed to put some changes in place. One of the ways that we know that, a little hint as to how we know that this bill was so rushed, was that the bill was printed out on eight and a half by 11 paper. It was whacked together at the last minute.

Bill 30, on the other hand, is printed in the proper bill format, so we know that that's work that's been ongoing for a long time. We have some concerns with that. We can deal with that when debating Bill 30.

But Bill 32 was put together hastily, and in being put together hastily, the government either didn't have the opportunity or chose not to consult with the very people, the very organization that will be required to actually implement these proposed changes.

We're here debating the referral motion for Bill 32. I feel strongly that this government should have taken the opportunity, should have availed itself of the opportunity it had through the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which had very capable members from all sides of the House on it willing and able to work very hard to think through the potential changes, to really work that through. This government had a generational opportunity to make lasting change that would positively impact democracy in Alberta by saying: "We're not just going to make changes that are to the benefit of the New Democratic Party. We're not going to make changes that we think are going to undercut other parties. No. We're going to do the right thing because it's the right thing to do."

This change, these changes, this bill that they brought forward to make the changes that we find ourselves with now had the opportunity for them to say, "This isn't about us; this will stand the test of time; these changes are going to serve Albertans" and defy the opposition to vote against it, because the opposition would have been a part of actually making those changes. For those of us on this side, although we may not have agreed on absolutely everything, if we had seen this government taking thoughtful time to actually make meaningful change that was in the best interest, truly, of the people of Alberta, of democracy, we would have voted enthusiastically in favour of those changes. This government would have deserved the praise it received for doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do, but they didn't do that.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

They decided to stack the deck and put rules in place they thought were to their benefit. What they did was that they created a monster called PACs. We have these millions of dollars flowing into Jason Kenney's PACs and UCP PACs, even Alberta Together, this Alberta Together group, which has no formal affiliation with the Alberta Party. I don't want Alberta Together to exist. I don't think it should have to exist.

I think Albertans know what political parties are. I think the Alberta Party should attract donations from Albertans. We should report those donations publicly. Our job is to elect MLAs. Our job is to form the next government. Albertans understand what that is. That's our job. We shouldn't have to have these shadow organizations. I don't like that they exist. I want nothing to do with it. I think the UCP and Jason Kenney and all of that group should also feel like those things shouldn't have to exist either. All the organizations that support the NDP shouldn't have to exist either. Political activity should exist within the political system as governed very strictly and appropriately by Elections Alberta.

But here we are. We have a bill before us, and we have a referral motion, which we're debating, on whether or not this should be referred to committee. As much as I think that we should take some time and should have taken the time back a year and a half, almost two years ago to really thoughtfully go through Alberta's election laws, we have to bring this bill to fruition in this session because there are changes that exist in this bill, especially as it relates to third-party advertisers and PACs, which will at least constrain those activities somewhat. It fixes things, sort of.

Now, we're spending a lot of time here at second reading on many different bills, this bill included, and I can assure you that we intend to bring forward some amendments to Bill 32. I would encourage other members to do the same because there is a lot that needs to be improved here.

Again, the Chief Electoral Officer has brought forward a number of points, I understand, in some correspondence with the minister very recently specifically as it relates to advance polling and a number of other things. He's used the words "unintended consequences," and I just want to reflect on that briefly. Where an officer of the Legislative Assembly is using words like "unintended consequences," they don't do this lightly. Their job is not to pick sides. They are the least partisan organization in this entire province. Their commitment is to democracy. They care about free and fair elections. They care about a fair process. That's all they care about. So to hear those sorts of comments while a bill is before the Legislature is actually quite remarkable. It is actually quite remarkable, and I look forward to digging a little deeper into that.

I just want to identify a couple of areas that, once we get this bill out of the referral and finally through second and into committee, I think we need to tackle. I'd like to see a definition of PAC. What exactly is a political action committee in the eyes of Elections Alberta? I understand that a third-party advertiser is a thing defined by the act, but I think those organizations that exist only to foster political activity should also be defined as distinct from political action committees.

Let's define even further what PACs can do and not do as it relates to political parties. There's an effort to address that in this bill by saying that the PACs cannot sell memberships, cannot fund raise, cannot do those sorts of things. I get that.

11:00

Another area that we talked a great deal about in the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee and one of the reasons that I find myself the MLA for Calgary-Elbow, I firmly believe, is the very necessary step to restrict government advertising during by-elections and general elections. I'm sure you

will all recall the story, in the 2014 by-election, of announcements of school portables being made in my constituency by the then government. It actually happened in two different schools in Calgary-Elbow. It's funny; the one that seemed to get all the news attention was the school that my kids went to, interestingly enough. That was quite an experience. That was quite an entrée into politics, I can assure you.

Ultimately, interestingly, it didn't work, actually. The polls around the school where most parents sent their kids actually voted more for me than they voted for the Minister of Education at the time, interestingly enough. Even then it didn't work. Ultimately, here I am, and he's not.

Government advertising. You know, one of the things that we need to think about is that while a by-election is on, this bill would restrict what the government can announce specific to a constituency – fair; I think that is certainly a very good idea – but it doesn't restrict broadly enough, I don't think, what governments can advertise outside of the constituency. For example, as we look at the Calgary-Lougheed by-election, the government has not made any specific announcements relating to what might be happening in Calgary-Lougheed, but there has been some talk about the cancer centre and those sorts of things that would perhaps seek to influence the voters of that constituency notwithstanding the fact that it might not be directly in that constituency. I'd like to see some more restrictions on that.

Spending limits, as I talked about earlier, around the election period may in fact be problematic as it relates to the courts. Again, governments created this monster, which is tough to deal with.

One way to help deal with that, I would suggest, is a fixed election date, not a range of dates. I think that will help. I suspect that if the courts look at the potential range of December 1 of the year prior to the fixed election period – we could be having an election as late as May or June according to the fixed election period. I suspect that the courts may say that that six-month window is probably too long.

I would like some clarity on whether out-of-province donations are, in fact, banned for third-party advertisers, how exactly that may work.

In the end, I don't actually support the referral motion. I will vote against that because I feel that the changes that this bill brings forward, the opportunity for us to bring further changes and amendments at the committee stage, should we find ourselves ever actually at the committee stage on this bill or any other bill that's currently before the Legislature – should that day eventually come, there is some opportunity here, I think, to make some very substantive and substantial improvements to this bill. We certainly intend to bring some amendments forward, and I suspect and wonder if perhaps the government would also consider the same given the feedback from the Chief Electoral Officer. But I don't feel that it's appropriate at this stage to kick the can even further down the road.

I do wonder what the agenda of the UCP is in bringing in the referral motion. Perhaps they would like to continue benefiting from the many PACs that back both their leader as well as their party.

You know, I don't think that I have any more time, so I'll sit down.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm Calgary-Hays, just for the record. Yesterday when I tried to correct that, I got a few things wrong, too, so I'll just leave that right where it is if that's okay.

Let me just say that I was interested in the remarks. I was particularly interested in the fact that the hon. independent Member for Calgary-Elbow first started arguing, really, in favour of the referral and then said that he wouldn't support it. You can hardly blame any of us in here for wondering what he was actually saying. It wasn't quite as confusing as the member opposite saying that he was in a union one second and not in the union the next second and never ever clarifying that.

But I'll go back to the hon. member that just finished speaking because he's talking about what the motivation for people is, and I would wonder if he'd like to reflect on the fact that it's possible that people's motivation is to, within the law, give their money to the political party, group, or individual that they support. I did say "within the law," which is important.

I wonder if the hon. member would like to reflect upon whether the problem is that the government, through this and past pieces of legislation, is looking for a way to look like they're doing the right thing while trying to cut off all the money, except for the money that's going to come to them, by trying to outlaw methods of people giving that want to give to other parties but don't want to give to them while looking like they're supporting democracy.

It's no wonder that they're on their second or third piece of legislation to do it because it's actually hard to do that, and I'd like the member to reflect on whether it's actually people's will to find a legal means to give money to the party and the people they support. I wonder if the hon. member wants to reflect upon the fact that the third-party advertisers, euphemistically called PACs – I'd like him to reflect upon whether the PACs are a result of people actually wanting to give money to the parties and people that they support rather than the parties and people that they don't support.

I'd like him to reflect upon the fact that even with the third-party advertisers – it's clear from those that I think are targeted by this legislation that at least some of the third-party advertisers actually have chosen to want to support the previous speaker's group. Good for him. Good for him. Some have wanted to support the party that I belong to, and good for them. And as it turns out, some actually, much surprisingly, to me – but that's the great thing about democracy – want to support the governing party. [interjections] I'm shocked at that, too. I appreciate the government members pounding on their desks. Apparently, not only me but the government members are surprised by that. They should be happy about that.

I'd ask the member to reflect upon whether people give money directly to a candidate, a campaign, a party, a third-party advertising group, or a PAC – I think that's a fairly legally undetermined word, to my knowledge, although I'm happy to be corrected on that. The fact is that, whether we should be looking for ways to allow people to legally express their support for a political party or person or whether the legislation is actually designed to cut off all but the orange money, certainly it seems like again the government is having a hard time looking democratic while trying to be self-serving. And while the member is reflecting upon that, I would like him to think about: if the third-party advertising is cut off, what model would the hon. member prefer . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on the amendment.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I consider it an honour to be able to rise and speak to the current referral motion before the House, asking the House to actually refer Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, to committee so that it might be more fully and appropriately discussed and there might be some good progress come as a result of it.

I'd like to sort of focus my comments based on some of the insights received in the letter from the Chief Electoral Officer. The very first paragraph, which actually is a single sentence set aside and set apart by itself, is actually quite stunning. I used to read, way back in literature class, that the first sentence of a book is the most important sentence. Well, if the first sentence of a letter is the most important sentence, I truly commend the Chief Electoral Officer for what he's done here.

11:10

I would like to quote that first paragraph in one sentence. He says, "I have had a chance to review Bill 32 after first reading," period. That is an astounding statement, that the Chief Electoral Officer himself had not seen this bill until after it was presented in this House for first reading. That leaves me stunned. I find that unbelievable. I think that because of it, the Chief Electoral Officer was pushed to a desperate movement of having to actually write this kind of a letter to the government. It's almost unprecedented that the government's own chief agent in a particular portfolio needs to write and protest the actions of the government and what it's doing.

I'd like to actually reflect on that sentence a little bit and ask some questions about it. He says, "I have had a chance to review Bill 32 after first reading." If the Chief Electoral Officer has not seen the content of this bill until after it was presented in the House for first reading, I just wonder: who did see it first? I mean, this letter is addressed to the minister responsible for democratic renewal. So if she did not even permit him to see it, in what dark room did this thing get written? Why was he not actually involved in the concepts that were to craft the bill? I can't believe that the person most responsible to deal with this wasn't even given the opportunity to proofread it. In fact, he says, "I . . . had a chance to review [the bill] after first reading."

There is a serious disconnect here, that the very person in this province who is the most knowledgeable about elections and democracy in this province isn't even a part of the discussion. The reality is that this government may have a lot of zeal, but obviously the person who is the most knowledgeable, the most experienced, the most capable person to help them in writing the bill was excluded. A lot of zeal on the other side there but not much knowledge, obviously. A lot of mistakes result when those kinds of things happen. As the previous speaker just pointed out, we're now correcting with this bill the mistakes of the previous bill, and we're probably going to be correcting this one with another one.

If the Chief Electoral Officer had nothing to do with writing this bill, then I'd like to know who did. I just wonder if the minister that's supposedly responsible for democratic renewal could tell us that, but unfortunately I don't think that's going to happen. I don't know where they are. The reality is . . . [interjections] My apologies. Fine.

Who did contribute to writing the bill? I suspect that maybe it might have been a group of backbench MLAs, and while many of them may have had some significant career experience, I don't think, from their profiles, that any one of them could claim that in their previous career experience they're an expert in elections administration. I don't know who wrote this bill, but it certainly wasn't anybody from the Chief Electoral Officer's office who actually knows how this system works in this province.

The other reality here is that in a very, very clear way – and this is why this bill absolutely needs to go to committee – this government has not consulted. They don't consult with anybody about anything. It started with the very first of the bills that they presented. You know, there are a lot of groups and individuals in Alberta who have felt like they haven't been consulted but weren't really quite sure. The government keeps saying: oh, we consult; we

consult with everybody. But the reality is that many agencies have experienced this lack of consultation, and it's not their imagination. This is the reality. They don't consult. While we have a government that wants to plainly consult, obviously they haven't here.

While we have a government that wants to hand out platitudes and praise for our hard-working civil service, the reality is that they completely disrespect them. The one person that should have been at the elbow of the minister writing this bill wasn't even shown the thing until after it hit the floor in first reading, after it's all written, kind of sloppily printed on a photocopied bunch of paper because they're in such a rush to get it out. They save it till the end of session. They try to ram it through with morning sittings, afternoon sittings, night sittings. Next thing we'll probably have is weekend sittings. They push it through so quickly in such zeal to try and proclaim that they're making democracy better that nobody has time to even look at it, including their own experts.

I would like to actually look at some of the concerns of the Chief Electoral Officer. He says in his last paragraph, actually, as a wrap-up to his first sentence: "I have not been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32." So he not only didn't see it, as he says, but he makes it very clear that he was not consulted. Then he says in very diplomatic and careful language, but he says it anyway: "I have, however, had the opportunity to provide feedback on the workability of various proposals. The concerns I set out here reflect some of that feedback."

So here's his opportunity. After the thing is all said and done, he finally has to write a letter to this government. They won't sit down in a room with him and talk with him, so he puts it in writing and sends it to them with regard to the workability of this bill. Then he spends three pages detailing how it won't work, how it's so impractical and so poorly thought through that it just simply won't work. He is trying to provide feedback on what might make it work, but obviously it isn't going to work. So in order to try and make his point, he even attaches a detailed schedule, as an example from a by-election, of what has to happen on every single day in order to get an election process properly managed and properly cared for. He tries to provide some recommendations respecting all of these things but has some struggles.

Yeah, there are a few good things in the bill. There is a serious attempt here, I think, to try and improve the reality, but in fact the workability of it is dysfunctional, and I'm afraid that in many cases that's going to be the theme of NDP legislation. While it's got a lot of zeal behind it, a lot of passion to fix the world and change everything, it's so unworkable that even their own Chief Electoral Officer spends three pages writing and pointing out ways that the bill needs to change in order to make it something that's actually workable. This isn't the kind of legislation that Albertans are in need of. This is challenging.

He talks about the advance polling days. He refers to the fact that Alberta has a 28-day election period and there are a lot of activities that have to happen during that 28-day period, that some things cannot happen until other things happen, and that there's a very strict number of things that really need to be pushed through on this. With regard to the advance polling days he points out that the changes of pushing two new advance polling days two weeks before is actually almost entirely undoable because in order to get the ballots printed and everything created and to go through the proper – well, it starts with the nomination of candidates, and that has to be open for a certain period of time, and then it closes on day 10. Then they've got, like, just a couple of days and the ballots start to arrive at the returning officers' offices, but already, according to the schedule, there's supposed to be two advance polls happening.

So here we're going to have people supposed to be showing up for advance polls, but the notifications haven't gone out. The ballots

aren't necessarily even properly printed. He quite simply says: "While I support increased availability of advance polls, the earlier advance polling days do not leave sufficient time to notify electors adequately of the locations through the Where-to-Vote cards or to have candidate ballots printed." How are people supposed to show up at an advance poll when there hasn't been time to notify them of where it is and there's not enough time to print the proper ballots? What are they supposed to put their vote on, a ripped up piece of paper? How are they supposed to know?

11:20

I mean, this isn't me making this up. This is from the Chief Electoral Officer, who has to make this work. He says that it can't be done in a reasonable, respectful way. We're going to have people expecting to be able to vote, and there won't be proper ballots for them. They don't even know where to go, and they want to know. There's no time to notify them because you have to have a nomination process, and it takes time to get all these things done. It's going to create chaos.

As the Chief Electoral Officer says, these are issues of workability. They have nothing to do with politics or parties or visions of grandeur for some new democratic regime. It's unworkable. That's his point. How is this supposed to work? He's frustrated. I mean, I'm baffled by this, that we can create these kinds of bills that are so shoddy and unpolished. It's like the declining math skills in Alberta. The competency level is falling. We've got bills being pushed forward where even the most important person in the province to deal with this says that it isn't workable. That's my point.

Then he goes on and talks about the where-to-vote cards and the fact that because we don't have a fixed election date, the whole thing, again, is going to create chaos and is not going to work. He says that the soonest the cards are being received by the electors is between day 15 and 20, but on day 15 they're already supposed to be voting. Unbelievable. This is going to create chaos at election time for Alberta voters. This isn't a functioning, operable kind of idea here. It just isn't going to work in a very practical kind of way.

I mean, this bill has to be referred to committee. We have to give the Chief Electoral Officer, finally, the opportunity to engage in the process, to talk about what's possible and what's not possible. While I get that there are all kinds of zeal to somehow create this idea of a bill that claims to be an act to strengthen and protect democracy, in fact it's going to throw democracy into chaos. Many voters are going to feel cheated. Many voters are going to feel like the system is rigged against them because they didn't know where to vote on the day that they had to vote and there were not proper ballots. The whole system is going to lead to accusations of mismanaged voting and ballot process and procedure. This is a serious problem.

Then he talks about the ballots part and the requirement of 10 days for nominations to close, the process of figuring out, then, through that who the candidates are, putting on the candidates' names, getting them all printed up and created on a ballot. And he says, "Opening advance polls earlier results in as little as four days to proof, print, and make ballots available to all advance poll locations." That means everywhere in the province, not just here in the urban areas. And then he specifically identifies, "With rural and more remote areas, this timeline could not be achieved."

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I have to say, listening to my passionate colleague discuss some of the concerns

that the Chief Electoral Officer is bringing forward, that when it comes to the fact that I spent so much of my time on the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee with this gentleman, I've come to realize that this man isn't a passionate man. He's a man that will answer straightforward and be direct. He's not a guy that will overreact and try to get into the newspapers. [interjection] I'm talking about the Chief Electoral Officer, sir. The Chief Electoral Officer. I apologize if there's confusion.

The Chief Electoral Officer is a man that I spent almost a year with in committee meetings talking about ethics within Alberta, and for him to write a letter to government with concerns that he has not been consulted with is unbelievable. Now, I understand that he is independent. But you would think that what the government would do is it would take this proposed legislation and maybe see if it fits with what Alberta's current legislation requires moving forward. It's him that has to live with this legislation, so you would think that he would be involved, clearly, with the drafting portion of this or at least give an opinion on it. What we end up seeing, though, is a government that quickly pushed this legislation into a bill. The opposition repeatedly brought forward a lot of the concerns that were in this legislation, and now the government is shocked and dismayed that they're there.

Now, my question to the hon. member is: do you feel that this government has in any way, shape, or form done its due diligence and consulted with the stakeholders, especially the Chief Electoral Officer? I believe they have failed terribly when it comes to this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Absolutely not. They have not consulted. The Chief Electoral Officer himself clearly complains about that, so I think that the problem there is patently obvious. No need to reinforce it. But what I would like to add to that is that neither have they consulted in terms of true democracy with regard to rural people. As the Chief Electoral Officer points out in his letter, with rural and remote areas this is absolutely impossible. It cannot be done. He says that it cannot be achieved.

This is an ongoing attack on rural people in Alberta. On one hand, we have an Electoral Boundaries Commission that clearly favours urban areas with five more MLAs even though they have lower numbers of individuals per riding and much smaller geographic areas to cover. [interjections] They have five more ridings in Edmonton and Calgary than all the rest of the province. [interjections] All right. I'll defer to three. It may be my mistake.

The reality is that not only do we have a lack of representation there; now we have discrimination when it comes to voting because there's going to be even more chaos in those rural areas. The Chief Electoral Officer says that it cannot be achieved. This is just not equitable. It's not just. We see this lack of equity for rural Alberta over and over and over again. It's true in the lottery funding that goes to them, it's true in the allocations of health care spending across the province, it's true in terms of electoral representatives, and now we have it coming true again here in terms of voting. Madam Speaker, this is an injustice that is being perpetrated again and again and again by this government that continually tramples on the rights of rural people and puts them at a disadvantage to the people in the urban areas.

Again, the Chief Electoral Officer has pointed it out to us, and I think it's something that absolutely has to go to committee because of that. I truly would think that any members on the other side who are not just being whipped by their own party would take an honest look at this and realize that there are significant challenges here

with the workability of this thing. It will not work, it cannot work, and the Chief Electoral Officer has made that very clear.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am in favour of the referral motion with respect to Bill 32. I have so many things to say. I just don't even know where to start. It's been very, very interesting being in here this morning and listening to all this.

I just want to start off with a couple of things. This is what the last week and a half looks like in paper: Bill 30, almost 150 pages. The reason why I'm bringing this up, Madam Speaker, is to speak to the necessity for referral. One of the things on Bill 30 is – and there'll be a consistent theme, here – government overreach, leading questions within consultation, and specific letters coming into my office on lack of consultation.

11:30

Let's go to Bill 31. This one is the better deal for consumers. I think, probably, I can't even speak about this as well as I'd like to because the member for Vermilion spoke about that so beautifully. I'm sorry that I'm saying his area wrong right now. It'll come to me in a second here.

An Hon. Member: Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mrs. Aheer: Lloydminster. Thank you.

The impact of his words – because I don't know much about veterinary work, other than I love my veterinarian, and I think that he's, like, one of the best people I've ever met in my life. Our little fur babies in our household are very, very important to us, so those people are heroes in my mind, actually, in some respects because of what they've been able to do for our animals.

Having said that, though, the most important piece of that is that veterinarians were not consulted. There's another theme there, no consultation and, again, dropped in our laps in the last week and a half. This one is not quite as long; however, the impact of these things is huge. There we go.

Then we have Bill 32. I've got that one right in front of me, too. This came to us like this, ended up like this. Wow. That's recycling paper, and I have four of these on my desk, I might add.

Bill 32 is particularly interesting. We'll get to this one because it's what we're talking about today, but that's the weight of this one, again, in the last week and a half. The weight of these, just the weight: we'll get to that.

And then, interestingly enough, we've got Bill 33, which isn't as big; however, the impact of that bill is massive, not to mention the fact that we've had several applications not only from this side of the House but actually throughout the House about changes and amendments and things that need to happen within the electoral boundaries division to be able to make sure that this is a good decision.

I might add on that bill just one little thing, and I'm sure I'll have a chance to talk about that again. Taking three ridings from rural areas: we've all described why we think that that's not a good idea. I'd like to ask the urban MLAs how they would feel if that decision was reversed and we took three from you and put them with us. Just asking. It might have been something you wanted to think about within the consultation. Just saying. Those are 32 and 33.

Then we just got Bill 34. The reason I bring this up is because this is a massive amount of legislation and not minor legislation. We're talking about massive changes. We're talking about impacts.

Fundamentally, to go back to the beginning, this is not about us, folks, not about a single MLA in here, not about us at all. This is about the people we represent. I think what's so frustrating for me is that I – and I believe everybody in this House feels the same way – legitimately want to represent the people of the constituencies that we are privileged to represent. I don't doubt for one minute that every single person in here wants to do that. It can't only be on the opposition side that we have an issue with this, Madam Speaker. I am absolutely certain that opposition are not the only ones that are receiving a tremendous number of e-mails asking about this legislation, asking about the impact that it's going to have on them.

Just to give you an example, in Bill 33, in the electoral boundaries for the riding that I represent, this is the third major change in that riding in the last three changes. The third. And one of the things that the commissioner had said in the minority report, not that that's going to be listened to, is that consistency is important. Actually, that brings up my next point about listening to the experts.

There's one particular point I'd like to speak about, and that's with respect to the list of exemptions on the prohibition of government advertising during an election. These are really, really lengthy and extremely generous. I mean, oddly enough, it makes sense because it helps out the government. Essentially, the government is given this humongous amount of wiggle room. Actually, the member had mentioned earlier that there are these situations – for example, I mean, we have a by-election going on right now. Obviously, you can't announce that there's a school in that area. That is good. However, there are other announcements that are not within those areas that can be made in order to help out the government.

Now, if the government has a problem and an issue with things that have come before in other governments or anything like that, you know, it's fair to look at it and see if there is a way that you can change that to make the process more fair. I don't think any of us are going to dispute that. But when you're actually making the legislation be more accessible for the government and to be able to use taxpayer dollars to do that, I find that highly unethical. There are so many things that need to change, but, as the Member for Calgary-Elbow said, there's a huge monster at the end of this. A huge monster.

If we're truly, truly wanting to look at how funding is impacting how we run elections – I don't know – I would have asked the Chief Electoral Officer. You know what I find particularly interesting? The government now wants to have an independent electoral officer. What makes this any different? Are they going to listen to him or her, that person? Are they going to listen to that person? They're not listening to the one person right now who has a very, very thoughtful and common-sense approach to this entire process.

I was in my very first Legislative Offices Committee meeting last week. Very interesting. These are some of the most competent people I've ever met in my life. You know, they are working under very, very stringent budgets. They're completely transparent and accountable to every single dollar that goes across their plates. We are completely grateful to these folks and the work that they do with respect to the offices that they represent.

I find it interesting that we have an electoral officer that really, really gave some good feedback with respect to what the changes are and what was working and what's not. Then to not listen to him, and then to want to invoke another person to do a job that – I mean, an independent office is not a small undertaking. This is a good amount of money. The Member for Calgary-Hays was mentioning that just having a person that is called an independent even within the office is a million dollars. To set up an entire other office – I mean, I'm going to quote the government here in just a little bit – is a whole lot more.

As you can see and anybody who's watching at home who wants to see, this pile of paper: there's a really, really, really big theme here of a lot of very, very large and complicated and life-altering legislation. These aren't even the private members' bills. We have really excellent private members' bills that are also here, coming from the government and our side, that are mixed in with all of this legislation. I can't begin to explain how frustrating it is from the perspective of consultation on our part. Certainly, to be able to reach out and talk to people about the impacts it has on the people we represent is very, very difficult and certainly very frustrating.

One of the things I'd also like to bring up is that – again, I'd like to focus on the automatic registration of young voters. This piece is very, very interesting to me. I have some questions about that. I think probably most of us have had an opportunity to do this. You get invited into school, and you get to speak. Quite often, you know, they're asking you not only about what it is that you do and how you participate – you know, all of us get a chance to talk to these young people about the electoral process and about the right to vote and the importance of voting. Quite often what I'll say when I'm in those classrooms is that I talk about the country where my dad and my father-in-law and my mother-in-law originated from, which is India, and we talk about the electoral process there and about how democracy works in different countries. It's imperative that people understand how important it is to vote. I think we can be quite complacent here at times when it comes to voting because we're so privileged in this country. We're so lucky.

11:40

There are a lot of people, at least in my family as well, not able to read or write in any language, including their own. So when they are given the opportunity to vote, quite often there are things that are involved with getting their vote. Quite often they can't even write their names on anything signifying – they use an X or some sort of symbol in order to acknowledge who they are as human beings because they can't read or write in any language. You can imagine what that looks like from the democratic process. Quite often they may even not have the ability to go and vote as a result of the system that fails there. It fails especially people in poverty.

I tell this story to these young people in schools specifically to tell them and to explain to them about the importance of voting. I really like the idea that the government is wanting to engage at the ages of 16 and 17 to do that, but my question is: as well as understanding the privilege of being able to vote for the elected representatives, how are we within this legislation making sure that the youth are also receiving a balanced approach to the information from all parties? It's really important. I mean, when we go into schools, we want to really encourage people to vote, not necessarily to vote for any particular party, right? For most of us, if we're in our ridings and we were elected there, there are going to be a lot of people that are sort of onside with the stripe that you represent, at least largely, but our responsibility is actually to explain the process – right? – and the right to vote and the ability to vote and all those kinds of things.

So I'm curious. If we're talking about the information and about the young voters and their ability to vote, I'd like to ask these questions: how is that information being collected on these young people; by who; and what kind of information as a result of that will be provided to all political parties? Most importantly, that everybody has an understanding of how that data is being collected, not necessarily that it's being collected – because again I agree with the government; I think it's really important to engage these people – but just in terms of transparency and accountability that that information is shared with all parties in terms of the collection of that data.

Will the programming be made available to the public ahead of time for consultation and feedback just to ensure that there are no inherent biases? Now, if I was in government, I would expect that the opposition would ask me that as well, too, because if we're talking about all of these other things like money in politics and all of these other things, these dark horses, as they were, I think that it's a fair question to ask to make sure that this is a very balanced approach with our youth and that taxpayer dollars and advertising on behalf of the government are not being used to in any way influence. If that's not the case, then that's great and I'd love to stand corrected, but I just think that there needs to be things in place to make sure that that doesn't happen. The other piece, too, as we are dealing with 16- and 17-year-olds, is: how is that information going to be safeguarded, Madam Speaker?

The reason why I'm asking these questions is because these are things I think that should go through the Chief Electoral Officer in a committee to actually make sure we can reach out and talk to people maybe about other jurisdictions that have had success with this but also about some of the problems that we could have and the sensitivity around collecting data on our youth. We have a lot of space right now where we're very, very careful about how we collect data.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and just respond ever so briefly to the comments made by my hon. colleague the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View. You know, she raised some very, very important points this morning about the quality of individual that is the Chief Electoral Officer; about the importance of being respectful of private information, particularly that of minors; about how all of these things fit together, in particular how the government will engage with the process of making significant changes to the Election Act and the election contributions act. What we've seen from this government and what I think the member did such a great job of highlighting is a real lack of respect for the legislative office, in this case the legislative office of the Chief Electoral Officer.

You know, I know that I've had the pleasure of sitting on the Legislative Offices Committee over the past couple of years, and I know that Mr. Resler has done a fantastic job of guiding us through this important period of significant reform. I will be the first to acknowledge that we have changed a number of things around the way political parties are funded, around the way political parties can spend money, around nomination contestants, leadership, and the list goes on.

Some of those things have been very positive. In particular, a lot of the changes that are positive took place when the government listened to the Chief Electoral Officer. When they haven't listened or they've stopped listening to others, as was the case in the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, particularly when we arrived at the point of third-party advertisers, which is right around the time that the government decided to rush through the end of the committee and then not extend the mandate of the committee, they, in turn, wound up creating a lot of unintended consequences.

I find it so interesting that the Chief Electoral Officer in his letter to the minister spoke specifically about unintended consequences.

I wanted to bring to your attention potential unintended consequences of these particular proposals. If passed in its current form, I am concerned that Bill 32 will deteriorate the service provided to electors and increase the timelines for communicating results.

Many times when the government has actually listened to experts and legislative officers, they wound up getting many things correct. When they don't listen – and there are plenty of examples of them not listening – is exactly when the government gets themselves into a bad spot. That's exactly where we are today. The government goes around talking about how they'd like to strengthen and protect democracy in Alberta, but in actual fact they are going to deteriorate the services provided to electors. One might suggest that you could change the title of this particular piece of legislation to An Act That May Deteriorate the Services Provided to Electors because that's exactly what the Chief Electoral Officer has said. He says that if this is passed in its current form, it will end in exactly that.

I'm just curious to know if my hon. colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View would be willing and able to provide a few additional comments about some of the challenges around . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The time for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has expired.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

11:50

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this referral motion brought in by a very competent colleague of mine . . .

An Hon. Member: Highly competent.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

. . . from a mofussil town of my city of Calgary. She won't like it if we say that because for her Airdrie is the centre of the universe. She has been doing a great service to the public in the Airdrie constituency.

I commend her for bringing in this referral motion because the whole premise of it is to have greater consultation within the committee. Most of the previous speakers talked about having a quality debate in this House. Madam Speaker, yesterday we heard our House leader spend 90 minutes trying to, you know, bring that point out about having a quality debate.

Mr. Cooper: The best 90 minutes of my week.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

I know that the opposite side, you know, when our House leader tried to request yesterday in this House – he said that they have an obligation to represent the constituents that elected them, not to rubber-stamp what the front bench is saying, including the Deputy Premier trying to influence their backbenchers. That's not what they're supposed to do.

Ms Hoffman: What?

Mr. Panda: They're not supposed to rubber-stamp what the frontbenchers tell them to do. They are here to add value to the debate.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I don't know how seriously they took that suggestion from our hon. House leader, but our deputy House leader is trying to do the same thing through this referral motion, explaining the importance of having consultation. This is the first time I heard that one of the important stakeholders, who is the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta, who is supposed to be front and centre in these discussions, is not even aware and is not even consulted. That's an insult to democracy.

Mrs. Pitt: It's scary.

Mr. Panda: It's really scary. It's really scary to somebody like me, who came from the largest democracy in the world to a western democracy, where things should really work better for the sake of democracy, to preserve democracy. But these kinds of things shake the confidence of new Canadians like me, who come to these countries, western countries, with the hope of having a thriving democracy. It's not the case, it looks like.

I don't know why the government chose to do this. Like I said, our job is not to rubber-stamp, not even, you know, do that soft cushioning like the independent member, one of the previous speakers here, tried to do. Our job is to critically evaluate each and every bill that comes in front of this House and provide constructive feedback, which we are offering, but it's up to them whether they want to take it or not.

Ms Hoffman: Let's get it to committee.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. So why don't you accept to put it to the committee?

Ms Hoffman: To the stage of committee.

Mr. Panda: No. I'm talking about the standing committee. Our hon. deputy House leader is asking us to refer it to the standing committee, where we can have a quality debate like we had on the time change bill . . .

Mr. Cooper: Time waits for no man.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

. . . that your colleague brought in. Why are you afraid of that? Why are you afraid of that?

You're trying to bring in rules telling people that you care about democracy, that you care about closing the loopholes. Look at the CBC article. [interjections] Yeah. Your favourite, CBC. You saw it. Just google it. It will tell you that you're trying to arm-twist the chair of OHS to donate to your party. The chair of OHS has received letters from the NDP asking him to donate to your party. That shows the gap in your intentions.

Mr. Cooper: Sounds like dark money.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

An Hon. Member: Shameful.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please.
Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That gentleman actually spoke to the media, saying that he felt pressurized from the Premier's office that if he wants to continue in that arm's-distance position, he has to play ball with the ruling party. That tells something here. That actually tells that this party wants to do the same shady business, but then they want to tell the public, Albertans: "It is Jason Kenney's UCP which has something up there. We're trying to stop that." But in practice those are the ones who are actually doing things like this.

Like our hon. whip mentioned before, if Albertans are willingly contributing to a particular party, if they like the policies of that party and you are trying to artificially, you know, stop that party, that's not good democracy. Those things happen in countries like India, where I came from – I can understand that – but not here. I didn't expect that. Albertans deserve, really, better democracy.

We are a mature democracy. Canada is celebrating 150 years. We all said happy birthday to Canada on July 1, and today we are here in December, just before Christmas – everyone is in the Christmas mood here – and this government brings in these kinds of bills, hundreds of pages of bills that are rammed through here, putting undue pressure on the Official Opposition and on their own private members, backbenchers, to just overlook all the shortcomings and just rubber-stamp their legislation.

They don't have any time to consult anybody, including the Chief Electoral Officer. I was told by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake – I've never met this gentleman, the electoral commissioner. But it seems my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake worked with him for the last year on a particular committee. He seems to be a decent gentleman who is not there just to get some cheap publicity. He is there to contribute to preserve democracy. He is trying to do his job, and he's willing to contribute to this bill to make this bill better.

Mr. McIver: He's got to be included in the conversation.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

Without including him in the conversation – he is supposed to be a main stakeholder. He's the one who is actually going to execute the rules they want to bring in, but if he's not at the table and if we are doing the same thing with him as we are doing with our colleagues in this House, not giving them enough time – I mean, for someone like me, coming from business, what I would like to see . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, December 7, 2017

Day 63

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, December 7, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on your behalf to introduce to all members of the Assembly our constituency staff. Your constituency staff and their families: Laura Deschamps, Denis Deschamps, Danielle Deschamps, Della Kirkham, Stephen Bjarnason, Sam Bjarnason, and Jack Bjarnason, who are visiting us from Medicine Hat.

Laura Deschamps works in the Medicine Hat constituency office. She recently received her bachelor of social work through the University of Calgary and enjoys curling in her spare time. Denis Deschamps has been a district manager in the oil and gas industry for the past 35 years and enjoys hockey, fishing, and riding his motorcycle. Danielle Deschamps is in her third year of studying education at the University of Alberta. She is an avid Edmonton Oilers fan and enjoys recreational hockey, travelling, and participating in volunteer work. Della Kirkham recently joined the Medicine Hat constituency office but has had the privilege of knowing the Speaker for almost 15 years. Stephen Bjarnason is a career research scientist for the federal government and is acting centre director for Defence Research and Development Canada at CFB Suffield. Jack Bjarnason is 16 and, when not studying or video gaming, practises trumpet and is preparing for the spring track and field. Sam Bjarnason is 13, and he plays the trombone and is on the football team and wrestling team. The constituency staff and their families are all standing up. I would like them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

In addition, I would also like to welcome my constituency staff, Evan Gardner; a constituency staff member for the Deputy Chair of Committees who is up there as well, Page Moniz; and Kevin. My apologies, Kevin. We really rely on all of you, and it's a particularly difficult balance because you have to work so closely with the Speaker's staff as well and support us in our multiple roles. Thank you so much. We really appreciate you being here.

The Speaker: Welcome and thank you.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a young, inspiring Albertan, avid volunteer, and community and, perhaps, political leader of the future, Ms Kinga Nolan. Kinga is a graduate from Dr. E.P. Scarlett high school in the wonderful constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek who's been politically active since she was four years old, from volunteering on political campaigns to, more recently, promoting youth political engagement. In high school alone she volunteered nearly 20 hours a week for various causes and was awarded the Premier's citizenship award as a result. Kinga's hard work also led to her being one of the winners of 50 national Schulich leadership scholarships, valued at \$80,000, to study science in university. However, Kinga's success hasn't been without challenges. Several years ago she suffered a severe head injury and has since become an advocate for increased safety and resources surrounding these types of injuries.

She would like to see a form of Rowan's law, a bill addressing head injury safety originally passed unanimously in Ontario, adopted in Alberta. As well, she hopes that Alberta Health Services will dedicate support to the 10,000 Albertans diagnosed with head injuries annually as well as those who continue to suffer symptoms. I would ask Kinga to rise and remain standing to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the three ladies who have the hardest job in the world, and that is trying to make me look good. They're, of course... [interjections] Yes. I can already hear the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills starting to hum *The Impossible Dream* from *Man of La Mancha*. Now, these three ladies staff the constituency offices in both Vermilion and Lloydminster. They provide outstanding service to the constituents of Vermilion-Lloydminster, but I can say that while they do bring me coffee, they've given up trying to write speeches for me, and they have never brought me lipstick. It's my pleasure to introduce – and I'll ask them to stand – from my Vermilion office, Susan Hodges Marlowe and Emily Dye and, from the Lloydminster office, Kathy Bootsman. I'd ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome. You would have to have been in this House at 2 o'clock in the morning to pick up on the intent of his comment about lipstick.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my profound pleasure to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Angela Strojwas. Angela is my constituency assistant in Taber and has tirelessly worked with me for the past two and a half years. As members come and go in this government, great staff that can withstand the test of time and change are hard to come by. Angela has done just that, serving diligently with a smile in the constituency office for the last 20 years. We know in this House that our jobs are made tremendously easier when we have excellent staff working tirelessly behind the scenes. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Angela for her decades of dedication to the residents of southern Alberta. I ask Angela to stand, as she has, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you some very special guests. Inspector Pam Robinson assumed command of the St. Albert RCMP detachment this summer. She's an 18-year member who's been a member of Project Kare and has been the acting officer in charge of ALERT. With her are Corporal Laurel Kading, a 33-year member of the RCMP who's done everything from guarding foreign embassies to investigating crime; Constable Patrick Lambert, a 9-year member of the RCMP who is an investigator with the St. Albert community policing section; and Auxiliary Constable Shelly Ullery, a retired member of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry whose current work as a volunteer auxiliary constable is an integral part of community policing in St. Albert. I'd ask my very special guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Derrick Schulte from the Alberta Regional Council of Carpenters and Allied Workers. The council represents more than 12,000 carpenters, scaffolders, millwrights, roofers, ISM mechanics, drywallers, and floor layers in our province. Derrick is a 30-year journeyman carpenter and scaffolder who has helped build and maintain Alberta's refineries and plants across the province. He has recently been made executive secretary treasurer of the Alberta Regional Council of Carpenters and Allied Workers. I'd like to express my congratulations to him. He's especially proud of the new members who voted in a secret ballot this week for union representation, seeking better wages, benefits, and working conditions. I'd like to ask the Assembly to give him the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly the seva community, formerly known as the seva food truck, which operates in Edmonton and Calgary. Seva is a charitable community initiative spearheaded by the Sikh community. Their programs look to build a greater good for all. They work with schools to provide children with a free-of-charge extracurricular meal and workshop program, and they reach out to vulnerable inner-city residents in my constituency with a free weekly meal program. Here today are Manjit Nerval, Zora Jhaggi, Kulmit Sangha, Bean Gill, Nasra Adem, Gagan Hoonjan, Parminder Nerval, Jessy Nerval, Rick Gill, and Sheena Gill. I ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This introduction was actually a little bit of an argument in the Leg. cafeteria between the Member for Calgary-Bow and the Member for Calgary-East, but I won this one. My CA Katie Snut would be very excited to see this gentleman who's in the gallery today. I'd like to introduce Mr. Mark Laycock, who's the director of Métis Calgary Family Services, which provides human services for persons requiring indigenous-specific services. He also does a lot of work with urban indigenous populations within Calgary. I'd ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute privilege to introduce to you and through you to all my colleagues two visitors who are in the members' gallery. I invite them to rise as I introduce them. They are Joshua Perez and his mother, Myla Perez. Joshua is a grade 6 student at Our Lady of Peace school in my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. He has a knack for drawing and submitted a most beautiful image, that I am proud to put on my Christmas card this year to send to many constituents and others from around Edmonton-Glenora. His art is featured in this card. I'm so proud of him and his artistic skills, and so is his mother. It's an honour to be able to share it with the constituents. I want to wish

Joshua, his mother, and all residents of Edmonton-Glenora a very Merry Christmas. Please join me in extending our welcome.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Frank Garritsen. He is a tremendous advocate for the community of Fort Saskatchewan. Frank was basically born in Fort Saskatchewan before we had a hospital out there, so in Edmonton. He was raised his whole life in Fort Saskatchewan and spent 27 years as a corrections officer and also served two years on city council. Frank incurred PTSD and attempted suicide as a result of working in corrections. That has led Frank to be a brave voice advocating on behalf of himself and fellow corrections officers working to get presumptive PTSD legislation coverage for corrections officers. Back in 2012 it was introduced by our Premier to try and amend the legislation at the time to include them as first responders because they see murder, assault, suicide, and all manner of other things that the rest of us can never really fully appreciate. I thank him for his service. It's my honour to be able to call him one of my most valued and best friends, and I hope to see Bill 30 fully clarified before we pass it because corrections officers are first responders.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Chamber, in the government gallery, I believe, Mr. Greg Herzog, a farmer from Delia, and Ms Rhea Brady from the wonderful town of Drumheller. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my supreme privilege today to introduce to you maybe the best constituency office manager in the province. [interjection] Yeah. Absolutely. Anyways, Cheryl Christie, thank you for being here, and please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you two very special guests. Alberta has tremendous, great constituency assistants who do many, many things for us. Three of them are helping constituents that have a need or an idea, helping a constituent that has fallen through the cracks, or helping a constituent that just needs somebody to listen. Cypress-Medicine Hat is very, very fortunate to have two of the best. I would like to introduce to you, first of all, Shelley Beck, that has worked very, very hard for me for over five years, and, secondly, Michaela Glasgo, who for two years has worked very hard and is a great fiscal conservative although she still owes me two deer steaks. I would like to ask both ladies to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and introduce to you and through you and to correct some

of the members, because I actually have the best office staff in Alberta, Sharon Christensen and Nancy Pratch. My office staff are very good at their job and are very consistent in helping our constituents navigate the infuriating waters, sometimes, of our provincial ministries. As well, I'd like to take this moment to introduce my wife, who is, in my humble opinion, the hottest grandma in Alberta, Donna Hanson. If you'd all please rise.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can I top that?

I would like to introduce to you and through you a special guest of mine, the president of my EDA, Lizette Tejada. She's a wonderful advocate for the community of Bowness, and I'm so happy she's here to watch question period. I ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Albert, I understand you have another guest.

Ms Renaud: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Tom Genore, who is a constituent and the president of our constituency association. I'll ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a very important group of individuals in the galleries today who play a key role in the democratic process in the province of Alberta. Our constituency assistants are often the first point of contact for people in the communities we serve. Their jobs can be rewarding, but they're very demanding and very difficult, and I have to say that at this time of the year, when their MLAs are getting tired and we've been sitting for a while, I'm sure that they're extremely difficult. Thank you so much. We know how hard you work on our behalf.

They are all here today participating in the winter constituency employee learning and development seminar, which is developed each year with their unique roles and requirements in mind. The seminar provides them with an opportunity to network with each other and obtain an overview of numerous programs and services that are available through the Legislative Assembly Office.

Each year the service and contributions of these individuals are celebrated with an employee recognition dinner, which you will be hosting, Mr. Speaker, later on this evening. There are over 85 constituency office employees here with us from all corners of the province. I'd ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: It doesn't happen very often in here that we can get all of you folks to agree on one thing, that being that you may think you have the power, but the power really is up there.

Hon. members, are there any other introductions? The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of introductions today. Firstly, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of fantastic partners in serving children and families in southern Alberta. Zakk Morrison is the director of the Barons-Eureka-Warner FCSS and parent link centres, serving 13 southern Alberta communities. Zakk has with him two parent coaches from the Taber, Barnwell,

Vauxhall parent link centre sites, Jackie Fiorino and Kim Forchuk. I ask that my guests receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

For my second introduction I'm so pleased to have with us today representatives from the Intercultural Child and Family Centre here in Edmonton, one of Alberta's early learning and child care centres, where, thanks to our government's support, they offer affordable, accessible, high-quality child care for only \$25 a day. I ask my guests to rise as I call their names and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Jasvinder Heran, Mary Lynne Matheson, Kate Kidd, Ellen Genchez, and Ernie Yamniuk.

Lastly, my third introduction is an individual I met while meeting with residents of Sherwood Park interested in child care and early learning. Paola Ruiz talked to me about the need for more affordability, something I've heard from parents, providers, and experts across the province. Paola, please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Energy Policies

Mr. Nixon: Lucky for us that this government is so incompetent that it leaves its own internal analysis on the impact of disastrous oil and gas regulations lying around for anyone to find, and every so often the NDP also shows their true colours. While responding to a question yesterday, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade justified the government's heavy-handed rules by saying that they were moving in a direction of more ethical oil. To the Premier: is it really your government's policy or your government's thoughts that Alberta does not have ethical oil, or will you apologize for your minister's comments?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Bilous: Our energy industry is the most ethical and responsible in the world. Our partners in oil and gas deserve enormous credit, and they have unwavering support from their government. We've introduced new carbon competitiveness incentives that will spur a race to the top. They'll allow us to reduce emissions, spur new investment, and get a pipeline to tidewater, something that that side could never do. I am proud to stand in this House, Mr. Speaker, every day in support of our industry.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if the minister would apologize.

Let me be very clear about the record of the government that is across from us right now. They have two cancelled pipelines, another one that is on the ropes, and over and over and over they show their true colours. They try to mislead Albertans or hide it from them, but then it slips out like it did in question period. Instead of the minister standing up and reading his talking points, he should stand up and apologize for his comments to the people that work hard in Alberta's oil and gas industry. The question to the minister is: will you stand up and apologize for your ridiculous comments yesterday? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe I've answered the question, but it's not surprising that the member keeps asking. After all, the mind of a UCP member is a scary place. In recent days we've learned that they think socialists eat dogs, that marijuana leads directly to communism, and that Pinochet's reign of terror was "a success story." You can't make this stuff up, but if the UCP wants to keep talking, be my guest.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, they actually did make that stuff up.

Here is what has happened here today. We brought up a clear example of what the minister said that is in *Hansard*. The minister said that about our oil and gas industry, and instead of acknowledging that what he said was wrong and apologizing for it, he deflected and tried to avoid the issue. Again, Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: will you stand up and apologize for your ridiculous comments about our oil and gas industry and the people that work in it?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite may talk about supporting Alberta jobs, but their own leader, Jason Kenney, takes money from a PAC that is openly supporting Saskatchewan, which is cutting off access for Alberta construction workers. If Kenney won't stand up for Alberta now, when will he? Perhaps he should be running in Saskatchewan. We will stand up in support of our workers. We will take the government of Saskatchewan to court if we have to. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know you have a lot of fans in the gallery, but I can sense that today will be one of those robust events that we share with each other, so I would ask that all of you continue to practise that respect across and minimize the verbiage from one side of the House to the other.

I think we're on the second main question.

Provincial Response to Pipeline Opposition

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. Jason Kenney and this side of the House think what has happened in Saskatchewan with the licence plate issue is ridiculous. The question that comes from that is that this minister came out within five minutes to stand up against that issue, but five months ago an NDP antipipeline government was elected in B.C., and still this government has had nothing but words and has not threatened any consequences for what's happening. So put your money where your mouth is, Minister. Are you going to do that or not?

Ms Hoffman: I am so proud to have a Premier who has gone to the Members of the House of Commons in Ottawa and told the NDP: "You need to smarten up. You need to have a plan that keeps workers top of mind." She told the Conservatives: "You guys need to listen up. You need to stop acting like you're living on an island and work with our neighbouring provinces." And she told the Liberal government, "You need to make sure that you're working with us, that you're stepping up," and that's exactly what they've done. They're standing with us to make sure we get access to tidewater, they've joined our call, and we will get that pipeline built. You can mark my words. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member. Just stop. That's all you have to do, stop.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, talk is cheap. The Premier can stand up in this House and the NDP can stand up over and over and say

things, but they are not doing the same thing in B.C. They are not bringing forward serious consequences as a result of the action in the B.C. government that's taking place. The B.C. Premier confirmed that when he met with Alberta's Premier, she did not even try to persuade him on pipelines. How is that for standing up for this serious project? Are the minister's words yesterday against our oil and gas industry actually how this government feels?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the members on the other side are trying to spin. They're trying to create tantrums. You know what? If you want to behave like grown-ups, you have to sit at the table and act like grown-ups, and that's exactly what our government is doing. This week we worked with industry to make sure that we're working with Kinder Morgan, with the NEB to work to resolve the dispute in Burnaby. And you know who joined us there? The federal government, because we're acting like grown-ups. We're treating them with respect, and we're working to protect our industry and our workers. It's about time the members opposite stopped playing politics and making stuff up and started standing up for Albertans and Alberta jobs.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, to question the B.C. Premier's direct quote to a newspaper – I will take him at his word. I disagree with his position, but I take him at his word and would not deny it in this House. Again, you watch the anger machine across as they completely try to avoid the issue. What, if anything, has this government actually done, concrete, with the B.C. government and when was the last time that they did it to get this pipeline built?

Ms Hoffman: Well, exactly one week ago today the Premier was in British Columbia, and she was making that very case. We continue to have diplomatic, respectful relationships to make sure we get our products to tidewater. Guess what? On that side of the House their leader treaded water in Ottawa for 20 years, and guess what? It got him nowhere. It got Alberta nowhere. Instead, we take calm, measured actions to support Kinder Morgan and our partners while that side wants to yell, whine, complain, light their hair on fire. Frankly, they sound like Donald Trump. They're building walls. We're building a pipeline. [interjection]

The Speaker: I would encourage you to contain your comments, hon. member.

I think we're at the third main question. Please proceed.

Mr. Nixon: Well, let's talk about walls, Mr. Speaker. The government across from me has allowed a complete attack on us by letting the Liberals block and use upstream and downstream emissions to stop our projects and our pipelines. That's building a wall around our largest industry.

The question, though, that I ask, the last question, Mr. Speaker, is: why did the Premier not try to persuade B.C.'s Premier on pipelines? Why did the Premier not even raise this important issue with the B.C. government the last time that she was in Vancouver? Why? That is a simple question. Don't stand up and call people names. Stand up and answer the question. We're asking about your government and what they are doing to get this pipeline built. It's nothing so far.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, on this side we are not afraid of anything, and on this side we will stand up for the people of Alberta. Every time we have an opportunity to talk to our partners from across this country, we make a good case for Alberta, and we make a good case for Canada because it's in the national interest to make sure we get our product to tidewater, to make sure we get a fair price for the owners of that resource, Albertans, and to make sure that

employers, industry, and the people of Alberta have good access to markets, a good environment. On this side of the House we're getting results. That's why we got two pipeline approvals when you guys failed to get any. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Nixon: This government has two pipelines that are cancelled. That's all they have under their record. They have another one that's on the ropes. When something goes wrong between Saskatchewan and Alberta, they come out in five minutes and start to rightly defend our province on that issue. But when something is going wrong with the B.C. government and they're blocking a major construction project to get our product to market, this government will do nothing except for saying one thing in Alberta and saying another thing when they meet with the B.C. government. When will you start saying the same thing to the B.C. Premier as you are saying in this House? When, Premier? [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.
The Deputy Premier.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we stand with working people, we stand with the environment, we stand with our industry to make sure we get results so that we can all stand and be proud. On that side of the House they're sitting at the kids' table, throwing tantrums, and wanting to behave in a petulant way. You know what that gets you? Zero. We saw it after 20 years of their leader being in Ottawa. On this side of the House: two pipeline approvals, and we're proud of that.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, this government has two cancelled pipelines under their watch. My leader, when he was in Ottawa, had many pipelines built, which I have listed before in this House. But we see the Deputy Premier trying to dodge the question yet again.

The fact is this. When the Premier went to B.C. and met with the leader of the NDP Party in B.C., she did not even try to persuade him about this pipeline project. My question is: why not, has she since then, and if not, when is she going to start working with the B.C. government and put serious consequences down if they keep blocking our pipelines?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we've made it very clear time and time again that we will stand up for the people of Alberta. We will stand with the town of Beaumont, not the mayor of Burnaby. I know that the members on the other side are cheering for failure. They're cheering. They can't wait. They really want Alberta's economy to tank. But on this side of the House we're working. We've gotten approvals, and things are looking up. Drilling is up, housing starts are up, and car sales are up. You know what? Up, up, up. I feel like Shania.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. [interjections]
Order, please. Order.

Valuing Mental Health Report Recommendations

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nearly two years ago the Valuing Mental Health report made 32 recommendations to improve Albertans' access to mental health services. In June of this year we received an update on the government's progress in implementing those recommendations. Unfortunately, although the government says that it's a work-in-progress, there have been very few concrete outcomes. To the Minister of Health. One of the most straightforward recommendations was to create a performance-

monitoring framework, but those measures are nowhere to be found on the Alberta Health website. What is the status of that framework, and when will Albertans see results?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government has made mental health and addictions treatment a priority, not just for Health but across ministries. Community leaders and service agencies are key partners in this work and were central to creating the Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps action plan, which includes the evaluation framework the member opposite referred to. We've invested over \$80 million for mental health and substance use supports this year, including \$15 million specifically dedicated to implementing Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are incredibly frustrated by this government's slow pace of implementation. Albertans are waiting and in some cases dying from the lack of an integrated mental health care system. Here's another straightforward recommendation that should have been easily implemented. The report calls on government to create a comprehensive list of mental health services available in this province. Again to the Minister of Health: in the nearly two years since the report was released, have you created this listing, and if so, where can Albertans find it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Better, faster access to mental health services and supports for those using substances, like new detox beds, treatment spaces, and supervised consumption sites, is important work, as is early intervention for children and youth. To that end, we've created connections with primary care networks as part of whole-person and team-based care. [interjections] Mental health should not be stigmatized and treated as something separate. If any Albertans have any questions about mental health supports in their community, I encourage them to contact 211 or Health Link through 811 and ask to be connected to the mental health support line. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, they have the Internet on computers now, and it's possible to create these things and put them online, so I'd expect to see a list.

Mr. Speaker, the most recent Health business plan contains only a single measurable goal when it comes to mental health. While outpatient addiction treatment is certainly an important aspect of mental health, it is only one narrow part of a much larger problem. Again to the Minister of Health: why have you included only one of 32 recommendations from the Valuing Mental Health report in your 2017-20 business plan, and what does this say about your government's commitment to mental health?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of the Internet, I would also like to highlight a website that's been launched by our government called help4me.ca – that's the number "4" – which specifically lists resources for young people and children and their families. Our government has, with Valuing Mental Health: Next Steps, implemented a majority of the recommendations from the Valuing Mental Health report, working with community partners to make sure that we're able to target investments that will make the

most impact for Albertans and their families, which is a far cry from what members opposite would do when they call for deep cuts to undermine . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Saskatchewan's Construction Site Ban on Alberta Licence Plates

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker, given that the province of Saskatchewan said that they were banning Alberta plates on government road projects and given that the government of Saskatchewan made unsubstantiated allegations that Saskatchewan workers in Alberta feel pressured to switch over to Alberta plates when working on construction projects here, can the Minister of Economic Development and Trade clarify for this House and for the province of Saskatchewan: what is the requirement here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no requirement for Saskatchewan workers on government construction sites to switch plates. Now, unlike those who want to build walls, we want to work together with other provinces to increase trade. I understand why workers from Saskatchewan would want to come to Alberta to look for work, with our economic growth that's leading the country. The fact is that a worker from Saskatchewan can drive across the border today, work on the southwest Calgary ring road, and not have to get Alberta plates.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: beyond the unsubstantiated allegations, why do you think the government of Saskatchewan imposed such a ban on Alberta plates?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Saskatchewan is trying to distract from the fact that their economy is lagging behind. You see, Brad Wall, during a downturn, chose to make reckless and extreme cuts, the same cuts that Jason Kenney is calling for. Saskatchewan's GDP growth was revised downward, small-business confidence is down, and full-time jobs are down. Now, let's compare that to here in Alberta, where we chose to invest in infrastructure and protect public services Albertans rely on. Our GDP growth is the fastest in the country. Jobs are up, wages are up, and manufacturing is up. Our plan is working; their plan is not.

The Speaker: Second supplemental. [interjections] Order, please.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are trade agreements between provinces that govern the mobility of labour and given that Saskatchewan's move appears to have contravened the trade agreement, to the same minister: what is our government doing to fight back against Saskatchewan's protectionist move and stand up for Alberta workers?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, we made it clear that Premier Wall needs to smarten up, kill this restriction, or we'll take them to court. We told them that they have one week to do so yesterday, so the clock is ticking. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member.
Please continue.

Mr. Bilous: We told them that they have one week to do so yesterday, so the clock is ticking. They have six days to comply.

Mr. Speaker, we have the backs of Alberta workers, but the opposition and Jason Kenney have been buddy-buddy with Premier Wall for some time, so I want to ask them: when will you stand up for . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to represent Canada's border city, Lloydminster. With our biprovincial status, it is critical that the governments in Regina and Edmonton be on good working terms. That's why the current brouhaha over licence plates is of such concern. When the provinces aren't getting along and are feuding like schoolboys, it's the people of Lloydminster that suffer. To the minister of economic development and tirade . . .

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

Dr. Starke: . . . yesterday you told the Premier of Saskatchewan to smarten up. I'm sure that if one of their ministers said the same thing to our Premier, Albertans would be outraged, so will you withdraw your intemperate remark and apologize to Premier Wall and the people of Saskatchewan?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder when the hon. member who posed that question will apologize to Alberta workers and businesses for an unfair, non trade compliant restriction that the government of Saskatchewan has brought in. They're attacking Alberta businesses. Our government has the backs of Alberta businesses and Alberta workers, and we're going to fight back. Their ridiculous restriction is non trade compliant. They know that. We know that. They've got six days to do the right thing.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, an NDP minister trying to out-Trump Trump and out-Kenney Kenney.

Mr. Speaker, given that the people of Lloydminster rely on collaboration between the provinces for the seamless delivery of health care, education, social services, policing – and the list goes on – and given that every time there is a spat between the two governments, that should be allies, it's the people of Lloydminster who suffer, to the minister of economic development and blockade: when you made your little outburst yesterday, did you even give a moment's thought about the negative effects it would have on the people of Lloydminster?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I cannot cite the exact standing order, but in the many orders that I've read, I believe that there is a practice in the House that you use the specific title of the minister when you are addressing them. I would appreciate that. [interjections]

Hon. members. [interjection] Hon. member.

I would ask that all of you practise that in the future.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, I do understand the premise of the member's question and his concern as far as Lloydminster being a border town and how important trade is. I can tell you that trade is extremely important. My hope is to work collaboratively with Saskatchewan and British Columbia to enhance trade and our trade corridors. But when the government of

Saskatchewan makes allegations with no merit behind them and tries to build walls around their province and hurt Alberta businesses and Alberta companies, I will not apologize for standing up for the people of this province.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that any ongoing disagreement between our provincial governments hurts the people of Lloydminster and given that name-calling and threats of legal action do nothing to solve those issues and given that the real solution is an open and constructive dialogue between the provinces, something that we're pretty good at in Lloydminster, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I understand that you've called Saskatchewan – so you can call the 306 area code on your phone – and received no answer. Minister, I see Saskatchewan from my front door, and they do answer my calls. Do you want me to call and have a chat with them for you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder which side of the border the hon. member lives on. He's clearly cheering for Saskatchewan.

I can tell you that we will continue to argue and fight and stand up for Alberta workers. Now, what I can say is that we've seen this story before, and we know how it ends. Earlier this year Premier Wall was trying to use Saskatchewan tax dollars to offer incentives to lure Alberta businesses there. He had to walk back from it because it was non trade compliant. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that their actions are not trade compliant. We will continue to stand up for Alberta workers and Alberta businesses, and I will not apologize.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Greenhouse Gas Large Emitter Regulations

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the government announced changes to the specified gas emitters regulation, and unfortunately it's just more bad news for our oil and gas sector. Given that the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers estimated that the changes will cause a fivefold increase in costs to our industry, it is no wonder that investors' confidence in Alberta is in free fall. To the minister: will you please explain how increasing industry's costs five times will lead to increased investment and more jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll encourage the member to take a look at his notes because I think they're a little outdated. I can tell you this much. The world is changing, and members of Alberta's oil and gas industry understand that better than anyone, and they want to be a part of that change. Cenovus Energy said that our plan is, quote: an important step forward in addressing climate change as it will incent those facilities with the lowest emissions intensity. End quote. Our stakeholders are calling our approach thoughtful, fair, and smart, and I can tell you that by investing \$1.4 billion in innovation, we will continue to be the world leader.

Mr. Barnes: Given that the Premier is raising corporate, personal, carbon, and producers' tax rates, capping oil sands development, introducing onerous new regulations, and generally driving this province's economy into the ground and that our neighbour and largest competitor is implementing broad reforms, including cutting

taxes and repealing burdensome regulations, to the Premier: how does creating jobs in Texas and Oklahoma help the tens of thousands of unemployed Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it interesting that the members opposite want to continue to take advice from a Premier and a government that are seeing their economy in free fall. Their economy is shrinking. Job losses are up. You know, what their Premier did do was increase their PST to 6 per cent. That's not something that we're doing. We're not bringing that in. We stand with industry. Let me tell you what Jonathan Moser, who is the head of environment and public affairs at Lafarge Canada, said of our plan, quote: it will allow us to still be competitive to make the cement that we make every day to support the infrastructure we enjoy in Alberta, where we work, play, and live. End quote. Our made-in-Alberta solution . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I, too, was deeply disappointed to hear the Minister of Economic Development and Trade imply that our province's oil and gas industry is operating unethically. It was a slap in the face to tens of thousands of Albertans working in the safest and the most environmentally sensitive resource industry in the entire world, a record all Albertans can be very, very proud of. Will the minister do the right thing, withdraw the offensive comments, and actually apologize to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We are proud of our energy industry. We know that our industry is top of class. We are the most sustainable oil and gas producing jurisdiction in the world, and we are very proud of our industry. You know what we're doing? We're investing \$1.4 billion in innovation so we can bump that bar even higher. We know that we come up with solutions here in Alberta. Our oil and gas sector is cutting-edge. We're proud of the work they do, and we're going to support them to continue to be the world leader.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy stated over a year ago that "shovels will be in the ground within the year" with respect to the Kinder Morgan pipeline. A year later still no shovels, and Kinder Morgan will be spending 2018 getting local permits and losing \$75 million a month for the delays. To the Minister of Energy. The energy industry does not need any more challenges at this time. Why do you plan to take \$1.3 billion annually from the energy sector with your so-called carbon competitiveness incentives plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'll encourage the members opposite to maybe have a conversation with industry from time to time because what they will hear is that industry recognizes that we need to invest in innovation to ensure that they're doing two things. One, we are reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, and we are shrinking our environmental footprint while at the same time they're reducing their costs and making them more competitive. We are proud of our energy industry. We're proud to work with them.

We've been working with them for over two years on this plan. We have their backs, unlike the members opposite, who want to stick their heads in the ground.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that the carbon competitiveness incentives plan for Alberta was estimated by the government to have more job losses than the coal phase-out and given that Tim McMillan, head of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, said that it looks like the carbon tax is going up fivefold on the industry and that capital is fleeing to the U.S.A. and other places, to the Minister of Energy: if this was one of the most incredible, engaging rounds of consultation ever conducted, why are CAPP and so many others unhappy with the results? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, can it.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new carbon competitiveness incentives will support large industrial emitters to be more competitive while reducing their emissions and encouraging investment in renewables. Rather than pay lip service to reducing emissions, something members opposite in their former time in government often did, our approach rewards the best in class for large emitters. This is going to encourage a race to the top through new investment in new facilities, improvements to existing facilities. Now, we know that this is going to take time. That's why we listened to industry and are phasing in improved rules over three years.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, CNRL, Imperial, and the electricity industry are not pleased with the government's carbon competitiveness incentive plan. Given that the Premier stated to the Vancouver board of trade that there is not a school, hospital, bus, road, bike lane, or port that doesn't owe something to a strong energy industry – and now this minister is calling our industry unethical – can the minister explain why this government is perpetuating this sustained attack on our energy industry, the industry that provides a high quality of life and transfer payments to the rest of Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? Our made-in-Alberta solution rewards the kind of new construction investments that are going to keep Alberta competitive in a global market. Doing nothing is no longer an option. We are an export economy. We must adapt to the changing global landscape. But don't take my word for it. This is Dawn Farrell, the CEO of TransAlta.

TransAlta is pleased that the Alberta government is recognizing the value of existing and new renewable energy, including hydro. Hydro has been an integral part of the Alberta power system for decades and will continue to be a critical component as we reduce emissions and transition to clean power generation.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Energy Policies (continued)

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Economic Development and Trade accused the opposition of being offensive because we questioned his policies, but what's really offensive is

that the same minister suggested that Fort McMurray's oil industry is unethical. This government likes to say that all of its anti oil sands opinions have been reformed to pro-oil stances, but clearly that isn't true, not to mention that it's not NDP policy. To the Premier: is this message of unethical Alberta oil one that you're promoting on your taxpayer-funded business trips, and what is the minister of environment saying in Minnesota right now?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just because the opposition says it three times – Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice – doesn't make it true. Just because you say and assert that things happened on this side of the House, it means, actually, just that you're saying and asserting things. The truth is that on this side of the House we stand with industry, we stand with employers, and we stand with workers. That's why Cenovus, Lafarge, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, TransAlta – we've had Shell and others onside – are supporting things like our climate leadership plan, the OBAs. On this side of the House we get results for Albertans. That side of the House wants to pretend Ottawa will take care of it. Well, you know what? Their leader was in Ottawa . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, given that oil sands companies are very active in reclamation and that these reclaimed sites are thriving and given that Fort McMurray's air quality is better than Vancouver's or Montreal's, not to mention that we don't dump sewage into the water, and given that oil sands companies are often at the forefront of clean technologies, to the minister: will you come up to Fort McMurray and explain to my constituents why our oil and our industries are unethical?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, our government, our Premier, our Minister of Energy all stand with industry. We are proud of the work that our oil and gas sector does. In fact, last month I was in Abu Dhabi for ADIPEC, the second-largest world oil and gas trade show, with 50 Alberta companies. Let me tell you that there is significant interest to invest in our oil and gas sector. They recognize we have the technology, the expertise, and that some of the most qualified people in the world are here in Alberta.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, they chased all the internationals out of Fort McMurray.

Given that Fort McMurray and Alberta's oil sands are economic drivers in this province that create jobs for thousands of people not just in Alberta but across our country and given the fact that this industry also invests heavily in the nonprofit sector and that they continue to help Albertans while this government continues to impose harmful policies and regulations on them, to the minister: will you come up north and explain to my constituents your comments? I demand that you apologize to them.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member needs to check his facts because just two months ago JACOS, a Japan oil and gas company, announced a new \$2 billion expansion of their existing oil sands facility up in Fort McMurray. Drilling activity is up, with 64 per cent more wells drilled this year. Husky energy announced that they're going to boost their capital spending. Last month we learned Chevron is ramping up spending in the oil patch,

investing up to a billion on the Duvernay shale basin. Cenovus Energy has more than doubled its production this year. CNRL has also increased production. Suncor reported their best quarterly results since oil was \$100 a barrel. [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Thank you.

Hon. members, how many of you are looking forward to gifts in your socks at Christmastime? Please. We've got a lot of late nights, folks, and we need to keep each other together.

Public Service Pension Plans

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents are part of a public-sector pension such as the local authorities pension plan or the Alberta teachers' pension plan. A few years ago, under the previous Conservative government, there was a great deal of uncertainty about the viability of these plans. To the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance: what is our government doing to ensure the ongoing functionality of these vital pension plans for Albertans?

Mr. Ceci: Our government believes, Mr. Speaker, that all Albertans deserve a dignified retirement. That's why we supported common-sense and phased-in changes to CPP that will benefit Albertans.

As for the public-sector plans, I'm pleased to report that excellent strides have been made towards full funding of those plans. The public-sector pension plan is at 90 per cent funded, and the local authorities pension plan is 94 per cent funded.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that I understand from my work on the Alberta heritage trust fund committee that our pension plans' investments are managed by AIMCo and that AIMCo has had good returns for these investments, what effect will that have on prospective pension contribution rates for my constituents and for the government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. The public-sector pension plan and the local authorities pension plan are tremendously important to thousands of Alberta workers and retirees. AIMCo does an excellent job, and I would just say that their 10-year anniversary is tonight, Mr. Speaker. They've done an excellent job investing funds on behalf of Albertans, and I want to thank them for their hard work. These plans had been unfunded liabilities for some time before, but it looks like that gap is closing. AIMCo's sound investment decisions are part of closing that gap.

Dr. Turner: Given that nurses, teachers, and municipal workers are among my constituents who provide exemplary public service to Alberta and that they deserve a dignified retirement, to the same minister: how is the government ensuring the ongoing viability of public service pensions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to helping ensure Albertans have a secure retirement and that public-sector pension plans are sustainable and well run. As I mentioned, both the PSPP and the LAPP are close to being fully funded. As a result, the pension contribution rates have been reduced for both of those pension plans, which saves government and workers money. That is making life more affordable for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Cold Lake Area Unemployment

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A leaked memo from the NDP government specifically mentions that the Cold Lake region will see job losses. My constituency is already reeling from high unemployment, and now we hear from this memo that we can expect greater job losses than what we have already witnessed in the coal phase-out. To the minister: how am I supposed to tell my constituents that their mortgage-paying jobs are at risk and that they are going to be treated worse than can be expected in Hanna, Forestburg, and other coal communities? This is unbelievable. This needs to have an answer, Minister, please. Are you putting my constituents out of work?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the only thing that's unbelievable is Jason Kenney when he was part of a federal government that brought forward regulations to close coal and phase out coal, with no plan to help workers transition, no plan to support communities. I don't know if Mr. Kenney even visited the coal-affected communities. But I'll tell you what. Our government has their back. We not only created a \$40 million fund to help workers transition; we've also created a \$4.5 million fund to identify economic diversification opportunities for communities. We are working with the communities as they transition off coal, and we're excited at the opportunities the companies . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Jason Kenney has visited my constituency and given that a month ago I asked both the environment and Energy ministers what they are doing about projects in my constituency and they both potentially pushed forward policies that will hurt the oil sands industry, to the Minister of Energy and the minister of environment: will you confirm today the number of job losses that Alberta will sustain due to your policies? Is it a thousand as per the memo, is it worse than we can expect, or is it the 7,000 that CAPP quoted just last month?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I hope that Mr. Kenney apologized to them when he was visiting them.

What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that we've been working very collaboratively with industry: with CNRL, with Imperial, with Husky, and with all the other oil sands juniors. They have identified and said to us that we need to be investing in innovation, that the government of Alberta needs to be a partner with them. We have done that. We've come to the table to say: we know that our oil and gas sector is the best in the world, the most responsible. We're going to continue to work with them to drive down their costs, lower their emissions, and continue to remain competitive to attract investment back here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only apology that we need to see is from the economic development minister, who said that

my constituency is creating unethical oil. Will you apologize, Minister? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We're very, very proud of our energy industry, and we know it is the most ethical and responsible in the world. We know that through investments and innovation, including the \$1.4 billion that we announced earlier this week – that is going to go a long way to ensure that industry continues to develop solutions, reducing their costs, improving the way that they extract and refine, and ensuring that we are a world leader – Alberta will continue to be a world leader because our government is investing in our industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Energy Industry Opposition

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the government appointed known outspoken oil sands opponent Tzeporah Berman to its oil sands advisory group, who then went on to compare the oil sands to Mordor, the fictional hellish, scorched land in the *Lord of the Rings*. Given the recently leaked document which states that new emissions rules will put forward a cost to industry of \$900 million in the coming year and then \$1.2 billion in the year 2020, to the Premier: how much influence did Ms Berman have on this initiative?

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question and the opportunity to clarify again that the research that was shared publicly was research based on a plan that was months old that was never implemented. The plan that did move forward was created completely independently from the work that Ms Berman was involved with in the past. We're really proud of the work that we're doing. That's going to make sure that we continue to be leaders, that we continue to have good jobs, and that we continue to make sure we work hard for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's oil and gas industry continues to come under attack by this government. Given that as recently as yesterday Ms Berman referred negatively to the oil sands again as tar sands and since working for the NDP government on OSAG she has gone on to actively protest pipeline expansion in B.C., to the Premier: how is it feasible that this government is advocating internationally for the promotion of our ethical resource development when they are following the advice of environmental activists?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about people we've had past relationships with, I warn the members opposite that those who live in glass houses may not want to pick up those stones because we've certainly seen what happens when people who were formerly associated with them get up, shoot off their mouth, go into the middle of racist incidents, and incite violence. Certainly, I think it's important that we think about the people we have relationships with and the work that this government is doing and the policies we have. If you want to talk about past relationships, we're certainly happy to discuss relationships members opposite have had with Rebel media and others, but, you know, we're here to discuss government policy and opposition policy, and I look forward to doing that.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, Mr. Speaker, the taxpayer is on the hook for this particular relationship.

Given that Ms Berman and Ms Mahon have continually and continue to actively protest the oil and gas sector, that provides the amazing quality of life for Albertans, and given that the NDP believes that our oil and gas industry is behaving unethically, to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: how can Albertans have any confidence in the recommendations of these activists when they're working against the well-being and the prosperity of Albertans? Please apologize to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Albertans and the world can have confidence in the fact that investment is continuing to occur here in the province. As I mentioned earlier, we've got: Husky Energy announced they're boosting their capital spending; CNRL increased their production; Suncor as well took its first steps to set up two cogen units at its oil sands base plant. Steve Williams, the CEO of Suncor, said: "We believe that bold, ambitious action is required by all of us to effectively tackle the climate change challenge." I can tell you that the opposition wants to stick their head in the ground and pretend like this doesn't exist. We're . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the postsecondary tuition freeze implemented by the NDP government is unsustainable. Budgeting for students in institutions for future years seems impossible with this government's refusal to make any decisions. This government seems to have little thought for poor students and upfront grants and has budgeted more for student loans, setting the stage for something, but who knows what? There seems to be no timeline, and the minister keeps shifting his responsibilities onto the taxpayers of this province. To the minister: when will you announce the funding review so that students and institutions can plan for years to come, not just semester to semester?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was proud to announce last week our government's continuation of the tuition freeze that will keep tuition among the lowest in the country, which was not the case when we became government. Of course, under those guys opposite we had the highest tuition in the country. We don't believe that that's the way we create opportunities for our students. We want to make sure that no student chooses to not go to school because they can't afford it, which is why we're continuing with the tuition freeze. Of course, we'll have more to say about our policies around tuition and student aid in the very near future.

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, we know that since continuing the tuition freeze, the rate of inflation gap continues to grow exponentially each year by keeping tuition rates at 2015 rates, and given that the cost of this continued freeze will be either forced onto taxpayers or students in the future, is the minister buying time to set up political scoring points from students for the next election?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we recognize that the cost of delivering higher education goes up, which is why we've backfilled the difference between the tuition increase and the

tuition freeze that we've announced for three out of the four years of the tuition. Of course, you know, the members opposite are so concerned about future generations; however, they have no concern at all for the current generation of students who wouldn't be able to afford tuition under their policies.

The Speaker: I remind you again and yet again that statements like "not true" are not acceptable.

2:40

Mr. W. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has repeatedly promised frustrated administration and the students a funding model review that keeps getting pushed to the side and into the future and given that the minister can't use time and the freeze to keep Alberta students pacified and use international ones for the sustainable budgeting purposes, is the next item on the agenda to downgrade tuition costs entirely to Alberta taxpayers for all Alberta students and thus lower the quality of education and the completion rates here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we continue to have some of the most highly ranked universities in the whole country here in Alberta, and that will continue under the policies of our government. Not only that, but we're making it much more affordable for our students to get that high-quality education right here in the province. Under their plan they would close the doors to additional students. They would jack up tuition so that it's unaffordable for most students. We don't believe that that's the way to promote higher education in the province of Alberta. Our plan will support students.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

Official Opposition and Government Policies

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, the winter season has inspired me to write a poem based on Robert Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*.

Whose words are these I think I know:
Gays can marry, not each other though;
Reproductive rights aren't respected here.
Those words are Jason Kenney's prose.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer,
In my Alberta, you're all welcome here.
Human rights aren't give and take,
Who you love not cause for fear.

We give our collective heads a shake,
That access to abortion is at stake.
Not a word from UCP, not a peep.
When it comes to caring, they are fake.

What they sow they too shall reap.
A talent pool more shallow than deep.
Far less cunning than a rabid fox.
Wolves in wolf clothing, eating sheep.

To say the cancer centre is a box.
To patients, an insulting shock.
"Cannabis causes communism": so absurd.
They should think before they squawk.

Reckless cuts by them preferred.
Ideology makes their vision blurred.
I find their world view rather strange.
They like the facts, not stirred.

Denying hope and climate change,
Future generations would be shortchanged.
Carbon dioxide's on an upwards slope.
UCP priorities must be rearranged.

But don't despair and do not mope.
Alberta's Premier, she brings us hope.
Building pipelines east and west.
Could Kenney build them? The answer's nope.

Our Premier's plan is the best.
Keeping promises, she's never stressed.
And to fulfill them we will not rest.
And to fulfill them we will not rest.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Interprovincial Relations

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. Yesterday Saskatchewan announced it was banning Alberta licence plates from government infrastructure projects. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade rightly stood up for Alberta, very UCP-like. He cited existing trade agreements among the reasons why this action cannot stand and threatened legal action if Saskatchewan doesn't rescind their policy within a week.

Now, that's tough talk, Mr. Speaker, and we in the UCP always support standing up for Alberta's workers. But I wonder when the NDP changed its mind about free trade. It was this summer when a national trade panel found Alberta's beer subsidies to be in violation of our interprovincial trade obligations, yet the Finance minister, the minister of microbrews, chose to double down on his protectionist policies. It seems the NDP is only for free trade when their NDP friends give them permission to be.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, is the NDP action, or should I say inaction, on pipelines, specifically when it comes to blatant attempts by the B.C.'s NDP Premier to block Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain project. In this case we've seen no tough talk from anybody on the government side, no threats of legal action, no willingness to stand up for Alberta against an NDP government standing in the way of a project so critical to our economic prosperity. In fact, Horgan himself said that the Premier didn't even try to convince him on pipelines when they had dinner a year ago. Didn't even try.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is more than willing to get tough with a conservative government in Saskatchewan but not with their pals and partners over in B.C. It's all starting to make sense now. The fact is that the UCP is the only party willing to stand up for Alberta's interest in every case, not just when it's easy or convenient. We are the only party willing to get tough on B.C. when it comes to pipelines, and we're the only party that's truly looking out for Alberta's interests.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP is not standing up for Albertans. The UCP needs to take over so they will have somebody in their corner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

RCMP St. Albert Detachment

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inspector Pam Robinson, Constable Patrick Lambert, Corporal Laurel Kading, and Auxiliary Constable Shelly Ullery are RCMP members from the St. Albert

municipal detachment. All too often we don't recognize and celebrate their work and dedication until we are reminded of their heroism because of a tragedy. St. Albert is all too familiar with that kind of tragedy, so today I'm celebrating the women and the men who currently serve in St. Albert.

I'd like to share a few reasons why. I'd like to draw particular attention to Constable Lambert's role in St. Albert. In addition to patrolling, Constable Lambert works closely with the community to develop meaningful relationships that ultimately result in a stronger, more resilient community. Constable Lambert is a member of the St. Albert Neighbourhood Watch crisis management and outreach team. He also facilitated the implementation of the violence threat risk assessment model for St. Albert schools.

Spend some time in St. Albert during the warmer months and you'll run into RCMP members patrolling the parks and paths and playgrounds on bikes and golf carts. Our members collectively attended 150 block parties this year. They know the value of relationships, and they invest their time developing them.

Our members joined the collective earlier this year to do essential outreach in Lions park to the young people struggling with addictions and homelessness. This year we attended a city-wide block party, and of course one of the most popular events was Constable Lambert with his car. The kids were just clamouring all around him, wanting to turn on lights and sirens, but he took every moment and every opportunity to interact with the children and young people to teach them a little bit about how things work, and they always flock to him.

For all of these reasons and so much more, I extend my sincere gratitude to the men and women of the RCMP, who give so much every single day to all of us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Habitat for Humanity Edmonton-Mill Creek Project

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited today to share with you all a special occasion coming up for nine Alberta families. On December 21 these nine families will be receiving the keys to new houses in Carter Place.

Now, it's a common belief by many of us that everyone in Canada deserves the right to a safe, affordable, and decent place to live, yet many families do not have that. Habitat for Humanity, of which I've previously spoken, works diligently and extensively to enable families who cannot afford to buy a house using the usual mortgage system to purchase their own homes.

In the summer of 2017 Habitat for Humanity began work on a new build in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek, starting with the interfaith building component and then moving to the site construction at the Carter Place location. The project involved the building of 58 homes and was named Carter Place in honour of Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter, who take part in the annual Habitat for Humanity work projects. The Alberta government and the city of Edmonton teamed up with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Rosalyn Carter and many volunteers on one of the biggest Habitat builds ever undertaken. Now, a short six months later, nine of the houses are completed and ready for occupancy.

This project illustrates the power of collaboration and compassion. The project created an important benefit for people in need and was inspirational for those doing the building. Seeing the houses take shape and rise up from the efforts of so many, including the future owners, showed the power of working together and the strength of determination.

I'll be conveying good wishes to the new homeowners for long and happy occupancies and best wishes for a happy holiday season.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

2:50 Red Deer Regional Hospital Emergency Services

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to salute a dedicated group of people, the staff of the emergency department of the Red Deer regional hospital. An emergency department is not where anyone wants to be, but it is a place where I had to spend some time recently, and I was impressed by the efficiency and professionalism of the staff at the hospital.

I took someone to the hospital after a fall down the stairs. We arrived about 8:30 p.m. and within 10 minutes were triaged and assessed. While we waited, 11 ambulances arrived. Even with this sudden influx of patients, the staff was compassionate and efficient. Within two hours we were in a room awaiting X-rays. It was determined that a CT scan was necessary and that an overnight stay was required.

The staff, with all the incoming and checked-in patients, was stretched to the limit, yet they never stopped showing how much they cared for patients. From porters to nurses to doctors to X-ray technicians, each of them demonstrated respect and compassion in every interaction. When we face a medical emergency for ourselves or our loved ones, we are at our most vulnerable, and it is at times like this that the compassion and care of our medical professionals mean the most to us.

I want to recognize Red Deer regional hospital and their emergency room and other staff today because they are the front line, Mr. Speaker. They are the people that this government pledged to protect during our campaign in 2015, they are the people who look after Albertans around the clock every day, and they are the people who deserve our support and respect in return.

Thank you.

Rural Crime

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, we're in the season of Advent, during which time we look forward with anticipation to Christmas. Children eagerly await Christmas morning, when they will finally find out what lies beneath that wrapping paper.

Well, in rural Alberta residents have a different kind of anticipation, one filled with dread and one that, while it may sound exaggerated, is nothing but reality. Across rural Alberta residents are cowering as thieves and assailants wander freely. There is no silent night here, there are very few merry gentlemen, and all five golden rings along with the one-horse open sleigh have been stolen. Afraid to leave home yet afraid to stay, what are they to do? As parents tuck their children into bed, they pray that not a creature is stirring, but they have learned that that is often too much to hope for. While children hope that St. Nicholas soon will be there, their parents are concerned that someone else will be. Albertans should not need to wonder if their presents will still be under the tree come Christmas morning.

Last week, while this side was fighting for rural Albertans, including those 100 that came to the gallery, three Red Deer schools were getting robbed, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend yet another break and enter in Red Deer is turning into an attempted murder charge. Tell the people of Red Deer and Red Deer county that there is no emergency.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP members of this Assembly may not think that rural crime is an emergency, but the United Conservative Party

does, and we will not let up. I have been tabling terrified constituents' letters for eight days straight, and I'm not done. We have been meeting with rural crime watches and Albertans to listen to and to find solutions so that everyone, especially those in crime-stricken rural Alberta, might have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition signed by over 430 Albertans. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition The Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning all trophy hunting within the province of Alberta." The petition was created by a group in Edmonton called Voice for Animals Society and originally held more signatures. However, some of them were from outside of Alberta and therefore were, unfortunately, out of order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Hanson: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

The Speaker: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: That's okay, Mr. Speaker. I've got five copies. Yesterday, during debate on Bill 32, I referenced that many union members are forced to donate a portion of their union dues to the Alberta Federation of Labour. I have a report from Elections Alberta that shows that just in the first three quarters of this year AFL donations were \$503,267.38 on the backs of union members.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have five copies of a letter from the Minister of Service Alberta to the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association members. I'd just like to put that on the record.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present some more letters that have been coming to me from people who have suffered crime. This one – it's from a resident in Red Deer county – says: "I am afraid of being home alone day or night. I am afraid of leaving my home unattended. I am afraid . . . my children and grandchildren [are going to be] hurt."

Another one, from Sue and Doug: "We believe that we are no longer safe in our own home. We are [terrified]."

This is another one, from Alisha, who says that she suffers from anxiety every time someone comes in the yard and that her three-year-old son has recently started hiding his toys so the bad guys won't find them the next time they come back.

Mrs. Pitt: But it's not an emergency.

Mr. MacIntyre: But it's not an emergency, of course.

Also, I referred to two incidents in my member's statement, one regarding the attempted murder and home invasion in Red Deer and another one regarding three break-ins in Red Deer schools.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table two sets of correspondence. One is from Dr. Julie Schell, a veterinarian in Calgary-Fish Creek, in which she states that "Bill 31 is dangerous to animal patients because," and then she lists five different reasons why that is the case.

I also table some other correspondence, from Christian Hansen-Jones, also a veterinarian in Calgary-Fish Creek. "I am writing to express my grave concern with recent proposed amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act . . . contained in Bill 31."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the Hon. Ms Sigurdson, Minister of Seniors and Housing, responses to questions raised by Mr. Smith, the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, and Mr. Clark, the Member for Calgary-Elbow, on April 13, 2017, Ministry of Seniors and Housing 2017-18 main estimates debate; pursuant to ministerial order 001/2016 the office of the Seniors Advocate of Alberta annual report 2016-17.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we are at points of order. I understand that the first point of order was withdrawn.

The second point of order was by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to Proper Titles

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that you actually did call the member for Lloydminster to order during your statements at the time. Perhaps if the member for Lloydminster would simply stand up and withdraw the remarks. Otherwise, I could speak to it further, but perhaps we could resolve it quickly.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Could I just understand the . . .

Mr. Feehan: During question period you yourself made comments to the member about the comments that he had made during his questions. As such, I believe he's been already called to order, so perhaps if he'd just apologize.

Mr. Hanson: What's the citation?

Mr. Feehan: Okay. That's fine. I will make the full point of order. I thought we were going to be able to get through that a little bit quickly instead because the Speaker has already commented.

Under section 23(h), (i), and (j) I would like to comment on the violation of the rules – sorry; I should read that out: "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." And, of course, the violation of the rules of order under *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 613: "A Minister is [always] referred to by the portfolio he or she holds."

3:00

In this particular case the member for Lloydminster referred to our Minister of Economic Development and Trade as the minister of economic development and tirade and subsequently as the minister of economic development and blockade. Both of these are a clear violation of the rules of order in this House, and as such I believe that it's quite right that the member from Lloydminster stand and withdraw the remarks and apologize.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to respond to that. I'll start by responding that if I'm supposed to be doing that, perhaps you could get my constituency name correct. I'm the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, not the member for Lloydminster, and the people from Vermilion would like that recognized.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I find it a little bit rich that the folks from that side suddenly reply with righteous indignation when a turn of phrase is used against them because when they sat over here – in fact, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, back in the day when he was the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, when he sat over here, used these techniques on a regular basis. They were, in fact, the stock-in-trade, and I would even say that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was widely regarded as the Zen master of these techniques.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, the words that I used were neither nonparliamentary, nor were they abusive. In fact, the words that I used were chosen very carefully to reflect the minister's actions. You will note that the word "tirade" and the word "blockade" and the rather cleverly selected word that I had for my second supplemental all would have reflected exactly on the minister's activities yesterday.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can understand that if words are used to disrespect a minister, they perhaps should be called out of order, but one of our weapons, one of the tools we have to use as parliamentarians is the English language. If we are restricted from using the tools of the English language, if we are restricted from using idioms and turns of phrase to get our point across because the thin-skinned ministers on the government side can't handle it, yet at the same time they can quite easily misname our constituency names, which is the only name that we are to go by, well, there's a double standard going on here. Certainly, there's a double standard, considering that when I sat over in those chairs, we regularly had to hear these sorts of charges from the folks sitting especially in this corner of the House. Now that they're over there, suddenly something has changed.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly followed the directive that you gave me. I changed the language that I would have used in my second supplemental, but with specific reference to the point of order that has been raised here, I do not agree that this is a point of order. I do not agree that the citations that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the Minister of Indigenous Relations, has used are, in fact, relevant in this case.

While it is correct that we should use the names of the ministers, that is a convention. It is not a rule of order. To state that somehow the standing orders and the rules that we have here have somehow been violated because I chose a specific turn of phrase that was intended to get a point across in the 35 seconds that we are proffered in this House to do that, to suggest that that is somehow against the rules of order, well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that this government needs to grow a little thicker skin.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will comment on the 23(h), (i), and (j). You know, far be it from me to take the government's side, but on this rare occasion they're correct. It's a rare occasion.

You know what? I will say that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster – I hope I got that right; I certainly intended to – has some points about the disrespect that comes from the government side on a regular basis. To be clear, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that we could all perhaps use a lesson here. There are enough things to fight about, there are enough things to disagree about,

there are enough things to debate about without debasing one another's names. I'm of the opinion that we don't need to do that.

I will say, in fairness, that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster is a master of the English language, and I believe he's quite capable – I believe he's more than capable – of calling out the government when he needs to without debasing their names. I would suggest to you that you ask the member to withdraw that remark and find ways to call out the government, as he ought to do and is very good at doing, without debasing their names.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to this?

To the Deputy Government House Leader: I thought the point of order you may have made was with respect to another comment that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster made. However, that was not the case. As I recall – and I don't have the exact Blues in front of me – the point that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster made was that he referred to the minister as "economic development and blockade" if I recall exactly. I rose on the point and asked him not to repeat that, which he did not.

To the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, an experienced member of this House and, as said, very knowledgeable about the rules and procedures in this House: I know that he knows that his broad statement about that use of the English language is the only tool that – in fact, I think I heard you say "weapon." Isn't it unfortunate, members, that we have to use words like "weapon" in this place? So I beg to disagree with the hon. member with respect to the use of English.

To the Official Opposition House Leader: I hear your point about disrespect, and well intentioned it is. However, I think that in this instance I asked that the member not repeat that. He did not again.

Also, as you see on occasion in this room, I have not always been successful in terms of identifying the constituency names. I believe twice today I called one member a different constituency.

In this particular instance I don't believe there is a point of order, and I would suggest that we go to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

Mr. Loewen moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 5: Mr. Hunter]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Mr. McIver: No. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, we didn't hear the announcement of what bill is forward right now, please. That's why nobody knows

which amendment this is. As soon as we hear which bill it is, we'll ...

The Deputy Speaker: I do realize there was a little bit of distraction, but it is important to pay attention. The responsibility is on each member. I will, however, reinforce the bill that we are working on. We are on second reading of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, and the debate was adjourned on the referral amendment by Mr. Hunter.

Does any member wish to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to the referral motion to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. My colleagues have brought forward a lot of excellent points on a variety of topics, and I think it's important that I take a few minutes to expound on that.

3:10

Madam Speaker, you've been here as long as I have, which means you've heard this government talk about the importance of consultation just as much as I have, and I think you'd agree with me that without proper consultation nothing gets done properly. The thing with consultation, though, is that it's relatively simple to determine whether or not it's actually happened. Certainly, the government can point us to an online survey released this summer. This would be a good first step if only the questions weren't so heavily weighted towards getting the government the answers it needed to justify what's going on with this piece of legislation.

For example, who wouldn't want to know how much they need to pay before they have to pay? Just because the question appears on their survey doesn't mean that the practice is not already being followed. We have heard it here in this very Chamber from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that those conversations are frequently, if not always, had over the phone before a procedure takes place. Price shoppers, as he noted, exist in every industry.

It's an interesting thing to note that we deal with dentists as well, and there are concerns around the whole fee guide. Again, there's the motor vehicles act, the private member's bill that came across in our first term. I mean, there's an underlying sentiment about costings and billings and things that impact consumers, but I can't help but wonder if we just simply need some basic education for consumers as well as for all these businesses, to provide that freely, or for a consumer to ask for this information, to be a responsible consumer.

But I digress. We mustn't forget that veterinary medicine is not an industry. It's a profession, and the people that we're dealing with when we take our pets to the clinics are professionals. To suggest that they're trying to pull the wool over their clients' eyes I think is preposterous. I can certainly attest to my own experiences with veterinarians with my own canine. I've always been well informed. I think I've used three different ones over the life of my pet familiar there, and they've always been upfront with me. They've always explained what the procedures are, how much it will cost. They took the time to educate me, and I've always respected and appreciated that. I've never had any issues with veterinarians.

Consultation is not true consultation if it's not entered into by both sides with respect and in good faith, yet based on feedback from dozens and possibly hundreds of vets, this did not happen. Now, who do we believe? The minister, who has promised consultation, whose government has already proven time and time again that it does not quite grasp what that means, or do we trust independent people, groups, and associations who may have received a phone call or may not have heard from the minister at

all? For my part, I think that the volume of correspondence speaks volumes. What's more, these are not form letters that are being sent out but personal letters that describe personal situations and interactions. Again, we're dealing with veterinarians, a very professional crew.

Madam Speaker, you know as well as I do that the committees of this Legislature exist for a purpose, and that is to provide further venues to engage with the public, to engage with the government, and to engage with legislation. Committees provide an additional venue for questions to be asked and, at least theoretically, answered. They provide a place for stakeholders to take their concerns, either in person or via written submissions. There is, at times, more time available to devote to matters at committee than in the House, especially when the government is frantically trying to push through whatever legislation suits its fancy.

It is so important that we get consumer protection right because it is something that necessarily affects Albertans. Maybe someone isn't an animal lover, but they might love to attend a hockey game or a concert. Maybe some prefer home cooking to eating out. I mean, there's no need to write a review, good or bad, but they might be in the market for a car or require the repair of one.

Madam Speaker, I know that one of the hon. members has previously mentioned the good work that comes from sending a bill to committee. I've forgotten who that was now, but they referenced the Alberta Standard Time Act, the one that went through committee, and the members of the committee were given the opportunity to hear directly from stakeholders and to mull over the bill in greater detail and at greater length. This took an entire summer. There were several meetings held throughout that summer, and there were good responses coming in. The government put in the effort to go online through social media, mail-outs. They engaged so many various operators and influencers of the industry, and they came to a great, thorough conclusion that a lot of that legislation already existed. There were venues and means where a lot of it could be addressed already.

But the point is that committees are an integral part of this Legislature, and we have some experience recently in seeing the good work that they do. We have to remember, again, that even at the federal level, with our federal cousins, everything goes through committee because it is truly a fair way of ensuring that all sides get input, get the same information from stakeholders, from the public, and that they participate in that process. Basically, all sides are given time to accumulate that information.

This legislation also includes a section on computer software and bots. Now, this is something I like the sound of. Again, at face value it seems like a very noble and good thing to do, but we also have to remember that this is hard to track down. We don't know if we even have the resources to identify it and combat these large bulk purchases of tickets to events. We have to recognize that for these companies that do provide these services, these large ticketing agencies, it is not in their best interest either to have private vendors buying all the tickets and then reselling them at increased rates. That does not benefit the primary ticket sellers. They also recognize that it is a hard thing to track, but they do try, as they've stated clearly. We have to wonder if you have to make a rule for something that they are inherently trying to combat already. Perhaps some fines. I don't know.

This is another reason why we need to send this bill to committee. Let's take a look at the details. Let us see if maybe we can tweak the language a little bit to ensure that what we have is not just a benefit to consumers but also doesn't put our law and justice systems into an impossible situation. Again, it is about identifying the situation, addressing it, and finding how to penalize these people. In the end, we will have a hard time addressing that when

already the major ticket companies do struggle with that, but they continually try, and they continually evolve. They are inherently doing it within their own systems. Unfortunately, for every lock that is created, there's always someone who'll figure out how to pick that lock, and it keeps on going on and on.

Madam Speaker, with that, I'm going to wrap things up here. I just need to say one final thing. The government truly has nothing to lose by sending this to committee. Fuller conversation and consultation can only benefit the legislation and Albertans, and I think all of us here can appreciate the ability to get some legislation done properly and correctly to the benefit of all Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Some comments, if I may, on the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo's interesting argument in favour of sending this to committee. Certainly, he wants to repeat, say, the federal government's practice of referring things to committee, which had a terrible track record of actually getting things done for the benefit of the people of Canada.

Of course, we are a government that is keen to get things done for the people of Alberta, and we have a proud track record of doing those things. Just moments ago the NEB sided with the government of Alberta and decided to grant Trans Mountain the ability to build its pipeline without needing permission from the city of Burnaby, a significant accomplishment for our government, one that the people of Alberta can be proud of and one that the Premier can certainly be proud of. I look across the aisle, and I see some fallen faces. I know that their electoral hopes were really pinned on that project failing, Madam Speaker.

3:20

My point, Madam Speaker, is that we have heard for the last days, again, their deep commitment to not getting anything done for the people of Alberta. They want to send all four of the bills that are currently before the Legislature to committee. I'm just asking the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo why it is that he thinks that the people of Alberta don't deserve to get anything done from the Legislature. Why does he think that we need to continue the failed policies of the federal Conservative government, who failed to get any pipelines built? Why does he need to continue the practice of sending those bills to committees for endless examination – right? – without any commitment at all to getting things done that will benefit the people of Alberta, much like what our government has done with promoting the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline, Madam Speaker?

I ask the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo why it is that he feels that the people of Alberta don't deserve a government that's actually interested in doing things for the benefit of the people of Alberta. Why does he want to sequester the good members of this Legislature into a windowless committee room in the Federal Building so they can pore over the pieces of legislation, perhaps stare at their navels for a little while – right? – and repeat the practices of their heroes in Ottawa, who sat in Ottawa for 10 years and failed the people of Alberta every single year when it came to getting pipelines built? Why don't they want to adopt our approach of actually getting things done for the people of Alberta? Why don't they want to adopt our approach of a government that's working to make ...

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I will hear your point of order. Go ahead, hon. member.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. McIver: Well, Madam Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j). Listen, the hon. minister is clearly grasping at straws, and with the lack of any cogent argument on the legislation he's just slinging mud. He's saying things that aren't true. Certainly, as we've said in the House and demonstrated with documents, when our leader, Jason Kenney, was in Ottawa, three pipelines were built and another one approved, two of which have been cancelled since this government has gotten in. He talks about nothing positive being done during 10 years of a government, that he knows is not true, that actually was very positive towards Alberta, had an Alberta Prime Minister, something that we should be proud of.

The hon. minister, with the lack of any arguments to defend his indefensible legislation, stood here for the last five or 10 minutes and did nothing but sling mud and sling it, honestly, inaccurately. I won't use the L-word although it would be appropriate here. It was inaccurate. He should be called to account on that. He should be asked to address the legislation and stop trying to disturb the House with unfounded allegations.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think what we have here is not, in fact, a point of order but, rather, just a disagreement on the facts. The minister is putting forward his opinion about the circumstances over the last number of years that have occurred while certain members were in this House or while some of their friends were in Ottawa. The opposition clearly disagrees with that. We could spend all day arguing whether or not those facts are true. In fact, it is quite legitimate in this House to have a disagreement on those facts. That does not constitute a point of order. I think that in this particular case we would ask that you rule that way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to the point of order? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wish to point out that part of the responsibility that rests upon your own shoulders is to uphold I will call it the sanctity of the proceedings that take place in here with regard to parliamentary procedure. That member slagged accepted, long-standing parliamentary procedures of sending bills to committee for study, for testimony from the citizens of the countries in which we have the Westminster parliamentary system. That hon. member slagged that process and those long-standing procedures in a parliamentary procedure that has cost thousands and thousands of lives over the years to protect, to uphold, and to sustain. I take offence and I think the chair should also take offence at anyone that would slag a long-standing parliamentary procedure such as sending bills to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the point of order?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to rule. I think it's been a long week, and I think everybody is starting to really feel things quite intensely here, which is leading to this. I've heard many, many comments from both sides about pipelines, no pipelines, cancelled pipelines, pipelines not approved. It just goes on and on and on. So I'm inclined to think that this is really just a dispute over interpretation of the facts.

Just to add to your point, hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, there was nothing I heard in the minister's comments that was criticizing the parliamentary process, because we do deeply respect that here in this House. It was more that he was criticizing individual players within that that he felt perhaps had not lived up to that responsibility.

That being said, there was no point of order, and I would encourage us to all stick to the matter at hand. Let's try to get some work done here in the next hour and move some things forward in this House.

Please continue, hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I very much appreciate your incredibly wise ruling on this matter. Of course, I just wanted to reiterate that I have nothing but the greatest respect for the procedures that we follow here in the Legislature. We all have to keep in mind that we've been sent here by the people of Alberta to actually get a job done, and that is to pass legislation – right? – that will make the lives of the people of Alberta better, which is what we have before us right now. That's under debate.

It is, of course, my view, my comment on the comments made by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, my opinion that he doesn't seem to be interested in proceeding quickly with this legislation, that we want to delay and repeat the track record of not achieving outcomes for the people of Alberta that their idols in the federal Conservative government have in 10 years. It was interesting that the Member for Calgary-Hays stood up and tried to articulate the things that the federal government achieved for the people of Alberta and couldn't actually name a single thing. I'm hard pressed to also name anything that the federal government under the Conservatives achieved for the people of Alberta.

It's my view, of course, that our government has a proud track record of getting things done for the people of Alberta, that have made their lives better. Many of these are presented in the legislation that is before us for debate today. You know, our track record includes getting the Trans Mountain pipeline approved, as we just found out, and it's our view, Madam Speaker, that the time of the member . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on the referral motion to Bill 31. Now, I understand the government's reluctance to put this bill into committee because I believe that we've dealt with two of these issues in previous private members' bills this year. I mean, they were referred to committee, where they were shot down, yet here we go again.

They tucked them into something. You know, they tend to throw in these little nuggets that you can't really argue against like ticket resale and bot sales. You know, it's very, very difficult to talk against or vote against a bill with that kind of thing in it, but then they tuck in AMVIC, that was dealt with in Bill 203 earlier, and also the veterinarian act and the attack on the professionalism of our veterinary industry. I find that a little bit hard to swallow, and that's why I would like to get this bill in particular sent to committee, where it, again, can be quashed by the committee on a recommendation.

3:30

Now, what frustrates me about the veterinarians and their professionalism is that they talk about, you know, upfront estimates. I don't think we've ever taken any of our animals to a

veterinarian or called them on the phone and said, "How much would it cost for you to come out and do this?" where they weren't very up front with the costs. Sometimes, when they realize they hear a hesitation in your voice, "Oh, boy," they'll even offer a payment plan or some other way of coming out, because their concern is about the animal. I know that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster can attest to that, that most of these people aren't just: oh, this is a big money-making business. It's because they love the animals, and they love the patients that they deal with.

I really think that it's shameful that we're throwing this portion of the bill in amongst the other stuff and that we couldn't just leave it out, where it was quashed on Bill 207.

Now, I'd also like to brag a little bit. My daughter-in-law is also a veterinarian, and to suggest that she and other veterinary professionals are somehow unethical in the fees that they're charging is a little bit ludicrous.

An Hon. Member: That wasn't said.

Mr. Hanson: It is absolutely what they're saying.

You know, attacking an industry that tends to be highly populated by young women – if you look at the enrolment into Saskatchewan and in Calgary, I would say that probably upwards of 80 per cent, 80 per cent or higher, are young women. We talked about the loss of some of the seats that were going to Saskatchewan and the lack of veterinarians. We have young women that are in the prime of their life going into a profession, and a lot of times, while they're in university or shortly after, they get married and decide to have children. They want to take their maternity leave and work at raising their children, and they need good professionals to be able to stand in and fill in those spots. This is really an industry that, as far as supporting young women in our province, is a very, very important industry.

Add to that the fact that the veterinary industry also hires a lot of young ladies that are veterinary assistants or receptionists that work in the offices. They've got X-ray equipment to pay for. You know, it's not a cheap industry where you can just hang out a shingle and all of a sudden you're going to work: bring in the animals, and we're going to charge you through the nose and make a whole bunch of money. It's very, very expensive to set up a veterinary practice, and I think that they're doing an absolutely amazing job working and with all the employees that they have and the expense of the building rental, the natural gas, and I'll throw the carbon tax in there just for good measure. They're doing a very good job at keeping the costs down to treat these patients.

Another thing is that, you know, you talk about a veterinarian. When they're dealing with some of these animals that come in, these animals aren't always having their best day, and they're not always on their best behaviour, so there is a certain amount of risk involved as well.

To suggest that the veterinary industry isn't being ethical or isn't being up front with costs is quite surprising to me, actually, and I would really like to see this go to committee, where we can have this dealt with, have the veterinarians come forward, as the suggestion was in the letters that we got on Bill 207, the absolute uproar. I find it very surprising – well, actually, not surprising at all – that this government would try to sneak this in in an omnibus bill like Bill 31 and try and hide it behind something as devious as bot ticket sales. I can't believe that they actually have lumped the veterinarians in with that kind of an industry.

I want to relate a little personal story if I might. We had a very active young black Lab dog running with the horses out in the snow one day. I didn't even know it was possible, Madam Speaker, but dogs' back knees are built very much like human knees. They can

blow them just like an athlete can. Our black Lab blew the left knee, I think it was, and it required surgery to reattach it. While he was healing up from that with his cast on, he was putting so much stress on his other leg that – guess what? – he blew the other one, too. So now we've got a dog that has very powerful front legs and chest because when he goes outside to do his business, he's got to balance on two front legs. It's quite amazing.

You know, we could have very easily accepted a dog that was going to limp for the rest of his life, but we chose to bring him in to the veterinarian. We had the surgeries done. I'll tell you what. This veterinarian was so visibly heartbroken when one of the surgeries didn't take and he had to go in and do it again. I think this dog ended up having four surgeries or possibly even five. At least one of those surgeries the doctor did for free because he was more concerned about the patient than he was about making money. He wanted to make sure that this dog had a good, long, productive, healthy, active life.

Again, Madam Speaker, we need to push Bill 31 to committee, remove these clauses from it completely. I have no problem dealing with the ticket resales, but I'm sure that there are people in the industry that would probably have something to say about that as well. My concentration would be on the attacks on the veterinary industry, that I find really shameful. We already dealt with them in Bill 207. They shouldn't even be part of this bill. Like I said, I was surprised, but really not surprised, that this government would try to pull a fast one on the veterinary industry again and slide this into Bill 31.

I'd be very happy to answer any questions under 29(2)(a) if there are any. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise and talk about this interesting component, the idea of taking a piece of the legislation to committee. I'd like to speak to the member's comments about what I would call the compassion that was shown by the veterinarian. I wonder if he had any further experiences in regard to other animals that he's taken to veterinarians. In the case of other animals, I've experienced it widely in the case of bovines. As you may or may not remember, Madam Speaker, a few nights ago the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster had people, actually, in the gallery here overseeing the situation, and the member talked about that at that time. I was wondering if the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills could expand on the compassion shown by the veterinarian profession.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With pleasure. I could definitely add to that. You know, one thing I'd like to mention is that, especially in rural Alberta – and I know that there are a lot of veterinary clinics in Edmonton, emergency clinics as well as private, smaller clinics. Out in St. Paul we have a veterinary clinic. There's another one in Bonnyville. There's another one in Bellis, that deals more with horses, and I know that we've used that one, taken our horses there. People with animals, and with pets especially, will travel from one town to another, and it's not because they're trying to save a buck. It's not because they're trying to save a buck. I can get a procedure done in St. Paul for \$25, or I can get it done in Bonnyville for \$22, but it's going to cost me \$35 in gas to get there, so it doesn't make any sense. But I know people that will travel from St. Paul or from Two Hills all the way to Bonnyville because that veterinarian has the patient care and the respect of the people. They're not concerned about it.

I know that it happens here in Edmonton as well that there are veterinarians, just like in any other profession, that are good and bad. When people go specifically to them, they're not as concerned about whether the rates are 5 per cent or 3 per cent higher or lower than the other guy. They're there because of the way their animal gets treated, the way they get treated when they walk in the door, the way the receptionist is, the way the vet techs are.

You know, to answer the question there from the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, it is a profession. These are very, very respected people in our communities. Like I say, lumping them together with robot ticket sales is a little bit surprising.

3:40

I know that the veterinarians are very well respected. I know that my daughter-in-law is very respected. She did her training in Saskatchewan and really liked that school. To be honest, it was very good training that she got there. She's very well respected in all the places that she's worked at. Because of my son being in med school, they've lived in Edmonton as well as Red Deer. She's worked at, I think, three or four different veterinary clinics within the Edmonton area and the Red Deer area and always has been very well accepted, and they're very happy with her work. She is a very good professional veterinarian, and I respect her for that.

I think that all of our veterinarians and their veterinary assistants deserve a lot more respect from us and this government than they seem to be getting at this moment, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again here we are in the dying days of session, and the government introduces another large overarching and possibly overreaching piece of legislation. Here we are just beginning to talk about it, trying to appropriately and intelligently consider it, consult with our constituents – that's a novel idea – all of this with just a few days left in our legislative calendar.

Madam Speaker, this bill introduces sweeping changes that will affect consumers, businesses, all without any consideration for the economic impact or cost to many struggling business owners in Alberta, and I speak to many of them. In fact, this summer I spent time with virtually all of the small businesses in my constituency, talking to them about some of the challenges that they're facing in terms of survival, in terms of sustainability, in terms of viability, in terms of retaining staff, in terms of making payroll, in terms of not dipping into their personal savings, in terms of not having to mortgage their home to save their business.

Madam Speaker, taking the time to diligently review, consult on, and study legislation like this should not be treated with hostility or derision by this government. We are, after all, here to put forward the best possible legislation to advance the best interests of Albertans and, by extension, Alberta employers and entrepreneurs, who contribute to the vibrancy, resiliency, and health of our communities and the economy.

Madam Speaker, if improving a piece of legislation means that it ends up being addressed in a more detailed manner in committee and then passed a few months hence with potential improvements and with reflection on the economic impact and cost to both consumers and business through more robust consultation, that might just make the difference between mediocre legislation, with a plethora of unintended consequences, or improved and appropriately vetted policy, regulation, and legislation.

Madam Speaker, at the end of question period today I tabled two letters from veterinarians right in my own constituency. As the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has stated, veterinarians, from what I can tell from the correspondence I've received, are not happy with Bill 31. I would just like to read a few of the follow-up comments from one of the veterinarians in my area which were not contained in that letter. In fact, we had multiple e-mails back and forth with one particular veterinarian. The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association has

as a regulated, governing and disciplinary profession, many steps in place to have [vets] obtain informed consent from their clients before [proceeding with] procedures . . . Bill 31 . . . is a road block to veterinarians who are in surgery having to make immediate life and death decisions. [Having] to wait for every single detail to be pre-approved and signed off by a client [may] put the pet [their patient] at risk [in these situations].

Madam Speaker, make no mistake: informed consent is important. Vets already have a disciplinary body within the ABVMA who have the ability to manage those who contravene this policy. I cannot see a single proposed change that would improve the client-patient experience, the outcomes, or the quality of care offered in the field of veterinary medicine.

This vet who I corresponded with is also concerned that there is an increasing trend that the profession of veterinary medicine is beginning to be viewed as a commodity, and I think that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster would think and agree that the services he has provided are not a commodity. They are given with professionalism, with a heartfelt approach to their patients, Madam Speaker, as a professional service which requires an extremely high level of skill, investment, and training.

Madam Speaker, they would like to know why the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association was not consulted before Bill 31 was drafted – not consulted – which brings me back to why this bill should be sent to a committee of this Assembly. Strengthening legislation should be the key objective of debate in this House and in associated committees, and there is no better way to strengthen legislation, particularly of this nature and depth, than by sending it to a focused all-party committee for scrutiny, improvement, and recommendations. Sending it to a committee allows for robust discussion amongst all parties and for further consultation with key stakeholders, some of those who were not consulted prior, the people that were not consulted. We're hearing from the industry that they were not consulted before this was tabled in this House.

What we have here is a bill drafted by the government, for the government, and only for selected friends of this government, which they intend to ram through this Legislature in just a few short sitting days without consultation with those stakeholders that have been missed in the process. Sending it to a committee of this Legislature and allowing for due process allows for thorough stakeholder consultation. Thorough stakeholder consultation. That process is far superior to that which occurred prior to the introduction of this bill because it would allow all parties in the Assembly and independent Albertans and Alberta employers and employee groups to bring forward their opinions, those of themselves and the people they represent. It would allow government and this Assembly to consult thoroughly and in greater depth with stakeholders, the veterinarians.

I'm also hearing from motor dealers who say that they were not consulted. Does that not allow for us as legislators to better understand what might be the unintended consequences by talking to real people, real Albertans, about the legislation we enact? Do the members opposite really care about the impact on Albertans at large? It would seem perhaps that the answer to that may be no.

Sending a piece of legislation to committee is all about thoughtful, informed, thorough, and robust consideration of legislation before it

is passed into law. Take that word seriously, "law," that all Albertans will then have to adhere to – individuals, businesses, and the list goes on – that they must adhere to. Let's take that with the importance that those words imply and that they will have the effect of having on all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, let's use the committee system and process for what it was intended: to study legislation in greater depth, to consult, to consider, and to improve. We owe that to Albertans. This would yet again, as suggested for Bill 31 ahead of this, be an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that all members of this House are willing to use the time-honoured – I think that was mentioned by one of the members here – nonpartisan committee process when it actually makes sense, not politicizing the issue or legislation at hand but fully and comprehensively addressing it for the betterment of all Albertans.

Further, the government can prove that they have no interest in politicizing this issue nor avoiding the input, feedback, and concerns of Albertans by sending it to an all-party committee. Again, as already noted, at that stage a multitude of presenters and stakeholders, both individual and organizational, can be brought into the process to discuss how this legislation will actually impact everyday Albertans and what it will cost Alberta businesses and business owners both on the employee and employer side, somewhat in lieu of the economic impact study that does not seem to form a part of the work leading up to the moving of this bill.

3:50

Further, as already noted, this government has an abysmal track record when it comes to unintended consequences with various pieces of legislation. This government needs to be more considerate and respectful in the introduction of far-reaching legislation and take the time to actually listen to all stakeholders. All stakeholders. I'll say it again: all stakeholders, Madam Speaker. Then they may have the ability to prevent the fallout that we continue to see to this day from many past bills behind us, where that process was not followed, which again brings me back to my original concerns.

This legislation has a wide-ranging and far-reaching impact on individuals and businesses, and at what cost? No economic impact study to give us that information, no consultation with the veterinarians, no consultation with the motor dealers, no consultation with other businesses that we haven't even discussed here in this House, which again brings me back to some of my original concerns. This legislation will impact people and businesses of this province, virtually every single employer in this province and virtually every single employee in this province.

Madam Speaker, committee is a perfect place to thoroughly address those concerns and to allow all impacted stakeholders the opportunity to come before that committee, a committee of this House, that nonpartisan group, where we are instructed to act in a nonpartisan way to do what's best for Albertans and to allow the stakeholders the opportunity to come before us in that committee and share their concerns. Yes, again, the radical thought of creating an opportunity for input, consultation, and engagement of those most affected: is that too much to ask? I ask the members across the House here: is that too much to ask to ensure that we enact the best possible legislation in this Legislature?

Some of the experiences I've had in committee as well: it's not always time that I think has necessarily been well spent. But, in reflection, we talked about daylight savings time in our committee, the Economic Future Committee, and we gave that private member's bill due consideration, I think, respectfully across party lines in committee, respectfully with Albertans who came forward across this province: Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. After doing online

consultation, we did personal consultation, and we heard from Albertans. We heard from individuals. We heard from organizations.

We actually heard some of the economic impact and some of the strategic impact that would deeply impact opportunities for this province. We were able to balance that impact, that economic impact, with the personal desires of many, and we did come to a consensus at that committee and bring back recommendations to this House on that particular piece of legislation. Can we not bring that same process to a bill which has even more far-reaching impact on the economics, the fragile economics, of this province, Madam Speaker?

Again, I think we owe it to Albertans to be that thoughtful, to be that considerate, to be that diligent to ensure that we can bring forward the best legislation for us to vote on in this House, where we can all put on our hats, our thinking – we're not allowed to wear hats – which we bring into this House, and say that we represent all of our constituents. We think about those constituents when we come into this House. We think about the feedback we received from the veterinarians, from the motor dealers, from the individuals that come into our offices day after day, those constituency managers and staff that we had here today, who listen to them, day in and day out, who I receive letters from that are forwarded to me on a daily basis so that I can understand the concerns from my constituents, my honoured constituents, who are my bosses, to ensure that they are communicating.

Every time I send out a newsletter, every time I'm in a meeting, I ask my constituents: "Please, don't sit on issues that come up. Don't stew about them. Don't worry about them. Contact me. Let me be your voice in this Legislature. Let me talk on your behalf." I'm doing that now, Madam Speaker. I'm doing that because my constituents are saying: "I was not consulted. I want to be consulted. If this bill passes and I'm not consulted, how will you make the best decisions on behalf of Albertans?"

I'm not sure how we'll do that, Madam Speaker. How can we do that when we don't consult with people? When I'm getting, in what might be the dying days of us being able to vote on this bill, which may be passed in this Legislature irrespective of and disrespecting the voice of many of constituents telling us they have not been consulted – is that the right thing to do? I throw that question back at the members opposite as well. Is that the right thing to do? Are you hearing from veterinarians? Are you hearing from motor vehicle dealers? Are you hearing from other businesses? If you are, I'm not hearing it in this House. Are you representing them? I'm doing my best to do that.

Honestly, if somebody came to me and said, "I support this bill; it's a hundred per cent great; I've been consulted; I'm feeling great," you know what? I would tell you that, and I hope you would tell us the opposite as well. You know what? I'm an honest person. If they came to me and told me that, I would tell you that. I challenge all of you. If you're getting those e-mails, bring them to the table. Table them in the House. Bring them forward and table them in this House and show us that you're representing your constituents, all of your constituents.

An Hon. Member: They deleted them all.

Mr. Gotfried: Did that go with the 800,000 e-mails?

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for his comments this afternoon about consultation and about how that brings good legislation.

You know, as a former social studies teacher I can remember talking to my kids about the fact that in a democracy the legislation that we bring into our House should have at least three components to it. It should have the input of the people. I mean, if the legislation doesn't have the input of the people, what are we doing this for? Secondly, it should reflect the majority opinion of the people. Whatever legislation that we pass through this House, we should be able to say and be able to show that it reflects the majority will of the people of this province. The third piece that I said we really ought to be able to see out of any piece of legislation that comes out of the House is that it also respects the rights of Albertans. That's why consultation – I think that's the point we're trying to make – is so really important. It helps you to figure out: what do Albertans really want? What is their input? Does it represent the majority will of this province, and does it respect the minority rights of the people of this province?

So, I guess, in light of some of the comments earlier today by the Minister of Advanced Education, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, about his concerns with sending something to committee for referral, I was wondering if you could explain to us again and maybe help to educate this Chamber as to why strengthening legislation is so very important, why a robust discussion about these kinds of issues is so very, very important, why stakeholder input and sending it to a committee and referring it to committee should be so very important.

You know, when I look at the track record of this government on consultation, I get worried. I get worried because we read in the news just today that consultation obviously didn't occur on Bill 32 because the Chief Electoral Officer was saying that he was never even asked.

I've seen the value of consultation when I remember Bill 203, the fair trading amendment act. That was sent to the Families and Communities Committee. We brought in a wide range of stakeholders, we had a chance to listen to the feedback of the stakeholders, and at the end of the day the committee and the hon. member that placed forward that private member's bill, Bill 203, took it off the plate because of the consultation and that it didn't meet those three standards.

Madam Speaker, I would like to hear the hon. member's comments with regard to the importance of consultation on these kinds of issues if we could, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for his very thoughtful comments and questions. It reminds me that the stakeholders that we're talking about – and we use that term quite loosely here – are Albertans. They're our constituents. They are the people of this province, who we are here to serve.

4:00

Your comments about the majority will: I take those to heart as well. Yes, we have to ensure that the majority will is represented in that engagement, that consultation, but as importantly you mentioned the minority voice. I think the minority voice there is something that we all – again, we represent all constituents in our constituencies, every last one of them. I'm diligent about that, and I make myself available – and I hope every member in this House does – to listen to them. You may agree or disagree with them. They may sway your view. They may actually turn your thinking around, or you may inform them about your perspective, and you may agree to disagree and still maintain the respect that you have there. Those are very important things to do.

We talked about the unintended consequences and if we don't consult. Madam Speaker, if we don't consult – I think that consulting, the most important part of that, is what? It's listening. It's hearing our constituents and listening to our constituents and embracing what they're telling us. They're not wasting their time to gratuitously spew something just because they want to talk. They actually want to be heard. They want to be heard. They want to be consulted. I don't think we've given them that opportunity with this piece of legislation, by not consulting them.

By putting it to committee – again, I encourage all members of this House to support this amendment, not because it came from this side or that side or somewhere else or another side or one of the independent members but because we owe it to our constituents individually to do so.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the proposed amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:02 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Gotfried	McIver	Starke
Hanson	Pitt	Strankman
MacIntyre	Smith	Yao

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Connolly	Larivee	Schmidt
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Sigurdson
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 39
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[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to rise and make an amendment to Bill 31 if I could. I have the requisite copies for that here. I'll await your direction for further information regarding that motion as we distribute it.

The Deputy Speaker: Reasoned amendment RA1.

Go ahead, hon. member.

4:20

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The members should have or are going to be receiving from the pages a copy of the amendment. I hope the Clerk has the original at the desk there.

I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government did not adequately consult with the veterinary professionals across Alberta, including the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association.

With that, Madam Speaker, I think it's important – and we have been taking great pains and considerations – to try and come forward with as much democratic conversation as we can. I just would like to comment that in looking through the bill, not particularly referring to the veterinary section of the bill, I highlighted some nine different sections: the Fair Trading Act, the Consumer Protection Act, ticket sales and resales, automotive sales and repairs, the high cost of credit, court action by consumers. Part 15.1 just is entitled General. That's the number 7 point that I have. Number 8 is fees, authorization for veterinary medicine.

Part of my time in the Legislature and dealing with these things is a frustration that we keep adding all this legislation. We stack it up. In this case the legislation is, I believe, some 26 pages long, but we've had legislation – I think Bill 30 or 33, one of the two, was 150 pages long. The phone book in my district isn't that thick, Madam Speaker. It's important that this continual onslaught of legislation needs to be reviewed, I think. In some jurisdictions they call it a sunset clause. I'd like to see the addition of a review for legislation as we proceed.

Madam Speaker, I think it's important to comment that the first time I saw this bill, I had the hope that the government was seeking to regulate itself. In fact, I didn't see a section in there, though, in this whole long list, on the regulation of garage sales. You know, there may be some materials that are sold at garage sales which may not meet some regulation, and it's unfortunate that maybe the government needs to regulate that. Part of a review process would be, in the case of this government, that we would do that so that we can be more safe and secure in Alberta, particularly in the view of an NDP government.

I've lived right beside the social experiment called Saskatchewan previously, which had an NDP government, and only recently did they actually see significant growth and fervour. As I travelled to Saskatoon, the growth, Madam Speaker, in that town is marvellous. Even in the past I've used Saskatchewan for veterinarian services and had marvellous and excellent service in an open fashion.

I find it interesting that the government is wanting to elicit a vast umbrella of coverage, so it's somewhat frustrating. You know, this bill, on its face, Madam Speaker, is attempting to do some good things, and maybe the inclusion of garage sales or farm auctions or whatever they might see would be a greater inclusion if the government wants to try and regulate that. You know, they seem to have a wont to do that. I don't know. Is it going to make it absolutely safer? We've got onerous legislation: OH and S, Bill 6. The government had an interesting reaction to that, mostly negative.

It's interesting that the legislation targets some commercial areas where many Alberta consumers find themselves frustrated, areas like automotive repair. Madam Speaker, in the rural areas, where I come from, the qualities and the profusion of automotive repair is based on the number of vehicles that the operator has parked in his lot. A lot of people do it on a simple level of word of mouth, and the quality of the work travels by word of mouth. It doesn't travel by government legislation. That's the code of professional businesses. Word of mouth sometimes is far more prominent than

legislation. Legislation comes after the fact, but the work is done, in many ways, based on personal contracts.

The problem that you see, Madam Speaker, is that when you look at legislation like what we have before us, many of these bills are brought forward by the government but are riddled with problems and unsound thinking, leading to unintended consequences, and we see that in many pieces of legislation. This kind of legislation, in my view, is embodied by the government that we have at hand. It rests on the assumption that businesses in A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, like veterinarians in this case, in one portion of this act, may be out to singularly attack consumers. It implies that consumers should be treated like children rather than responsible adults. Just like I was using the example of the local automotive repair people, their profession, their skills travel widely

in many areas by word of mouth. Even in the area of Edmonton I found that to be the case.

Madam Speaker, at this time I'd like to take the opportunity to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Noting the time on the clock, I would seek the unanimous consent of the House to adjourn until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:28 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Thursday, December 7, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft, passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c13]

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2017 c11]

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c10]

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c12]

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c14]

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c15]

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017, with exceptions; SA 2017 cC-2.3]

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft.*), 1534-51 (*Jun. 5, 2017 aft.*), 1553-67 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1589-93 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c9]

Bill 18* — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1567-79 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1587-89 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017; c8]

Bill 19 — An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers (Gray)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1648-53 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1695-98 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1729-31 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act (Phillips)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1627-35 (*Oct. 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1655-64 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1728-29 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 21 — Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1664-72 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1699-1706 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1789-90 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 22 — Resident and Family Councils Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1687-94 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1706-14 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 1731-32 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1790-94 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 23 — Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017 (Ganley)

First Reading — 1685-86 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1761-69 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1805-15 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1910-17 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 24 — An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances (Eggen)

First Reading — 1726-27 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1769-74 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796-1803 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft.*), 1833-46 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1847-55 (*Nov. 9, 2017 morn.*), 1870-75 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1917-19 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1921-35 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 25 — Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 1745 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1794-96 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1815-19 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1935-36 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 26 — An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis (Ganley)

First Reading — 1978 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2021-26 (*Nov. 27, 2017 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2087-2104 (*Nov. 29, 2017 morn.*), 2121-26 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 2166-69 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 27* — Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1831 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1876-78 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1904-10 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1936-39 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn.*), 1955-59 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft.*), 2066-68 (*Nov. 28, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 2119-21 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 28 — School Amendment Act, 2017 (Eggen)

First Reading — 1953 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1980-81 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 2027-31 (*Nov. 28, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2126-29 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 2169-75 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 29* — An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving (Mason)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1959-66 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1982-85 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft.*), 2031-39 (*Nov. 28, 2017 morn.*), 2053-66 (*Nov. 28, 2017 aft., passed with amendment*)

Third Reading — 2117-19 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 30 — An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans (Gray)

First Reading — 2000 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2131-51 (*Nov. 30, 2017 morn.*), 2230-34 (*Dec. 4, 2017 eve*), 2209-25 (*Dec. 4, 2017 eve.*), 2235-43 (*Dec. 5, 2017 morn.*), 2274-78 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft.*), 2332-51 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft., adjourned (on amendment)*)

Bill 31 — A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act (McLean)

First Reading — 2115-16 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2225-30 (*Dec. 4, 2017 eve.*), 2243-46 (*Dec. 5, 2017 morn.*), 2263-74 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft.*), 2402-10 (*Dec. 7, 2017 aft., adjourned (on amendment)*)

Bill 32 — An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta (Gray)

First Reading — 2190 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2297-2316 (*Dec. 6, 2017 morn.*), 2369-88 (*Dec. 7, 2017 morn., adjourned (on amendment)*)

Bill 33 — Electoral Divisions Act (Mason)

First Reading — 2190 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2279-95 (*Dec. 5, 2017 eve.*), 2353-68 (*Dec. 6, 2017 eve., adjourned (on amendment)*)

Bill 34 — Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Mason)

First Reading — 2329 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 1614-20 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division (not proceeded with)*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 cA-5.5]

Bill 206* — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1747-56 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1879-82 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1756-58 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft.*), 1882-90 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn.*), 2008-11 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2012 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft.*), 2191-95 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 209 — Radon Awareness and Testing Act (Luff)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2195-2203 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 210 — Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017 (Smith)

First Reading — 1869 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 211 — Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (Discretionary Trust) Amendment Act, 2017 (Malkinson)

First Reading — 2259 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 212 — Tobacco and Smoking Reduction (Protecting Children's Health) Amendment Act, 2017 (Sweet)

First Reading — 2329 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 214 — An Act to Regulate Political Action Committees (Swann)

First Reading — 2165 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 215 — Tow Truck Safety Act (Drysdale)

First Reading — 2329 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 216 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017 (Ellis)

First Reading — 2259 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 11, 2017

Day 64

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 11, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let each of us reflect or pray, each in our own way. May we find strength and courage to speak thoughtfully and expressively. May we guide ourselves with patience, understanding, and respect for each other and for the people each of our members represents.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the entire Assembly some of the smartest and hardest working students in the entire province of Alberta, from the humble constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar the students of Forest Heights elementary school. They are joined by their teacher, Mr. Dean Jaster, along with a chaperone, Resa Chyz. If they would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Do you have a second introduction, hon. minister?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the government of Alberta's hard-working Alberta Cannabis Secretariat. They are seated high in the gallery. With them are . . . [interjections] These guys are a little bit slow. It takes them a while to catch on. Seated in the gallery are Kim Capstick, the executive director of engagement and outreach; Ethan Bayne, executive director of strategy and planning. Another member of the executive team, who couldn't be here today, is Andy Ridge, who is the executive director of policy. As well, there is a whole bunch of other members of the secretariat too numerous to name. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly and our thanks for making cannabis legalization so successful.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I have three introductions. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Ms Nadia Houle and Tracy Bradley, who are founders of Indigenous Birth. Indigenous Birth is a not-for-profit society that

advocates for the provision of high-quality maternity care options for indigenous families residing in treaties 6, 7, and 8 and Métis nations throughout Alberta. Ms Bradley and Ms Houle are passionate advocates for increasing the breadth and availability of indigenous midwifery care. I would ask both of them to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two constituents of mine from the wonderful community of Sherwood Park, Blaine and Donna Alexander. They are here to view our proceedings in the House, and I want to thank them for taking the time to attend today. I will ask Blaine and Donna to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Finally, Mr. Speaker, it is with so much pleasure that I rise to introduce to you and through you two individuals from the Strathcona Christmas Bureau. Deborah Mahaux is a board member and liaison with the Strathcona Food Bank, and Carol Everest is a depot manager. Carol used to work for *Hansard* and is also a professor of medieval studies specializing in medieval medicine. The Strathcona Christmas Bureau, that I will speak to you about in my member's statement, provides food and gifts to qualifying residents in Strathcona county. Deborah and Carol can also be found in the summer at the Brooks Medieval Faire teaching people about the medieval days. I would like to ask Deborah and Carol to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three members of my family. I have previously introduced my wife of 32 years to you. She's my closest companion, and I could not do this job without her support. I have yet to introduce to you and to this Assembly my parents, Wayne and Marlyn Smith. I received my love of teaching and music from my mother, who was a music teacher and has been involved either as a teacher, a choir member, or a director for most of my life. I received my passion for politics and sports from my father. My father has run many elections and has never lost a campaign. When I ran in the last election, my father agreed to be my campaign manager on two conditions, first, that I understood that he was my campaign manager and not my father and, secondly, that if I lost, it was my fault. I'm here. All three are foundation stones in my life and help to make me a better person every day. Could Lisa, Wayne, and Marlyn please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's Food Bank has been working with Edmonton's Sikh and Punjabi community for many years. In the last 10 years over \$400,000 and thousands of kilograms of food have been donated as a part of the birthday celebration for Guru Nanak Dev Ji. This ongoing support of the food bank and friends helps vulnerable members in our community. We have several of the members of the Sikh community from Gurdwara Mill Woods, Gurdwara Singh Sabha, the Punjabi Media

Association, and of course, a member from Edmonton's Food Bank. I'd ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Christmas Spirit

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been influenced in how I view Christmas by the time I spent in Phnom Penh, a devastated city beginning to rebuild after the fall of the Pol Pot era. I spent Christmas Day in the province of Prêy Veng, the most heavily bombed area of Cambodia during the Vietnam War. On that day I visited a hospital struggling to provide care with limited and unreliable supplies. I met many Cambodians who had lost limbs to the millions of antipersonnel mines scattered in their rice fields and ate rice that, while it had been carefully sorted, still had weevils in it with the governor of the province. The night before I had asked the Cambodians working where I was staying what they thought about Christmas. They all commented on the extravagant parties that marked Christmas for the French and American foreigners they saw. No one understood that Christmas celebrated the birth of Christ and that it was a holiday of generosity and compassion.

1:40

I am grateful that the real spirit of Christmas is alive in communities throughout Alberta, including my own. Last week the information and volunteer centre hosted a party, with dinner and gifts for families struggling this Christmas. Trinity Baptist church hosted a Blue Christmas event for people feeling alone and challenged at Christmas. Next week the Strathcona Christmas Bureau will deliver hampers to over 500 families under the leadership of the two ladies I introduced earlier. They ensure that every child gets at least one item on their wish list and a complete dinner, ready for Christmas Day.

This is a community-wide effort of generosity and empathy. It reflects what I believe is the thankfulness that many of us feel at Christmas when we are able to have enough not only for ourselves but to give to others as well. Acts of generosity and thankfulness are happening throughout our communities, in our schools and in our businesses. Others contribute overseas, be it through the Rotary or through their favourite relief and development organization.

Having celebrated Christmas both close to family and far away, with rich food and poor-quality rice, with friends and alone, I use Isaiah 9:6-7 as a reminder of the meaning of Christmas and the call to justice and righteousness.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. No?

Mr. W. Anderson: A changeup. Sorry.

Postsecondary Tuition

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's ideology needs a serious overhaul. This government knows that freezing tuition is unsustainable in our current economic situation. With the government's tuition review currently and continually being pushed to the back burner and increases in taxes in different forms, we have to wonder what will happen next.

Nothing is free. Everything comes at a cost. The cost has to be transferred to someone, but to who? Other countries are offering so-called free postsecondary education to domestic students. The thing is that these countries are using a variety of approaches to fund higher education, which is something this government is lacking. Some of them do not choose and they do choose to impose excessive taxes on their taxpayers, regardless of if you have a student in your home or not. Many of the countries are choosing to fund higher education by making use of their significant oil and gas resources. The problem is that this government isn't supporting our oil and gas industry, and with the economic situation the province is in, who has the money to pay for it? Well, someone is going to have to pay, and that cost will have to be off-loaded onto the taxpayer with an increase in taxes, whether this government calls it a tax or not.

The student will receive lower quality education. There are no regulations put on international students. Institutions may be forced to free up more international space, leaving less for Alberta students. Promises of tuition being lowered and off-loaded costs onto taxpayers create the impression that there is no cost. Studies have concluded that completion rates are lower when higher education is off-loaded. Persistence among students decreases. Institutions struggle to keep the best professors and resources by making necessary budgetary cuts. Mandatory fees increase, and this does not solve occupational shortages.

There are too many questions unanswered. While there may be a push to off-load tuition onto taxpayers, we need to think through all of the unintended consequences, which this government has not had a good track record of doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Guru Nanak Gurburab

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year the Sikh community celebrates the birth of Guru Nanak at the beginning of November. The community here in Edmonton highlights this day by collecting donations for Edmonton's Food Bank. The Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha in my riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie plays a central role in organizing this important fundraising endeavour along with the Punjabi Media Association of Alberta, other gurdwaras and organizations, and the entire Sikh community.

Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikhi and the first of the 10 Sikh gurus. His birth is celebrated world-wide as Guru Nanak Gurburab. Guru Nanak has been called one of the greatest religious innovators of all time. He travelled far and wide teaching people the message of one God, who dwells in every one of His creations and constitutes the eternal truth. He set up a unique spiritual, social, and political platform based on equality, fraternal love, goodness, and virtue.

I am always encouraged when hearing about the three pillars of the Sikh faith: to constantly remember the oneness that unites us all, to work with integrity while earning an honest living, and to share that wealth with all those in the broader community.

Mr. Speaker, over the last several years I have developed a number of great friendships in the Sikh community. There are often times when I'm welcomed with wide-open arms by members of the community when I visit their events and places of worship. I feel embraced and that I am like family. I know this community very well, and I know that they are incredibly generous and dedicated to fulfilling the tenets of the Sikh faith. They are proud to call Alberta and Canada their home and often bend over backwards to help those who are in need, no matter what their background. I can attest that we all share the same values, values such as dedication to one's family, profession, and community and being compassionate to

those most marginalized. Today I stand in this House along with my colleagues to say thank you to the Sikh community. Thank you for joining us today and for the valuable work that you do in helping others in our province. It is communities like yours that make Alberta a wonderful place to call home.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Cold Lake Legion Permission to Serve Moose Milk

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a good thing when government and opposition can work together to solve problems, and I'm happy to share such an example from my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake from only a month ago. Canada's Armed Forces have played and continue to play a significant role both within and outside our national borders. It was also the valour of our troops in the First World War that helped Canada gain an international identity and procure a seat at the League of Nations. Our forces went on to secure critical victories in the Second World War and play key roles in the Korean War, peacekeeping missions, and the war on terror in Afghanistan.

At home our legions provide a place for our military veterans to gather together, educate others, and celebrate Canada's victories. One such tradition within the Royal Canadian Legion is the consumption of something called moose milk, a distinctly Canadian alcoholic drink that is served in Legion halls to celebrate military events. Shortly after Remembrance Day the AGLC shut down the Legion's ability to serve the traditional moose milk in my constituency. I should be clear, though, that the AGLC was just carrying out their job, as they should. I was able to contact the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Finance about this important problem that we had and have a conversation, and when I sat and visited with the Legion only a short time later, I was told that the issue had been resolved. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that we honour our veterans and that we take the traditions into consideration when we make decisions. It's also important that we work together as government and opposition to find solutions. I am always proud to stand up for my constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake and to say thank you to our veterans, and I was happy to work with the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Finance to continue to accomplish this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Emergency Responders

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the fall session draws to a close, many of us look forward to the holiday season, when we can spend time with the people we cherish the most. As we enjoy the season, let us also think of all those individuals who sacrifice their holidays to ensure that we are kept safe. Fellow members, I am speaking about the emergency responders, who dedicate themselves to fighting for the health and lives of Albertans, the valiant individuals who brave winter weather and miss holiday dinners to ensure Albertans have access to the health care and other emergency services they need.

Let us thank the doctors, nurses, paramedics, and other health professionals who forgo their own families to help Albertans throughout the province. When we talk about Christmas gifts, there is no greater gift than to give of themselves to protect the lives of others. Let us also thank our law enforcement officers and firefighters who stick to their stations during the holidays to keep

us safe. Mr. Speaker, I have witnessed not only their integrity in providing emergency service but also their awareness of the impact these situations have on helpless family members. This is my personal thank you to those who responded immediately to the health needs of my father. This is my appreciation of their thoughtful understanding and patience for my mother and how their commitment enables my family to create more memories this holiday season.

Mr. Speaker and fellow members, I am fortunate this holiday season and, more, so thankful to live in a province and country where such commitment and dedication are woven into the fabric of our shared values. On behalf of all of my colleagues I would like to wish all responders and their loved ones a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Thank you.

Christmas

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, in the not-too-distant future we will be privileged to join our families and loved ones in my favourite celebration of the year, Christmas. In my humble opinion, it's truly the most wonderful time of the year. My fondest memories are centred around sleepless nights waiting in anticipation for Christmas morning and the wondrous gifts, food, and fun that awaited us as children. Now at this stage of my life I bask in the squeals of delight from my grandchildren as they, too, discover the wonders of this joyous season. Great memories are created, and strong, familiar bonds are forged. Maybe that's the secret of why it's enjoyed by so many, religious and nonreligious alike.

1:50

But for over 2 billion people around the world this time is not just a holiday season. No, Mr. Speaker, for Christians it is a most hallowed occasion. For Christians the season is marked as Christmas, emphasizing the reason for the season, the baby Jesus born in a stable. If anyone finds themselves offended by someone wishing them a Merry Christmas, I invite them to reflect upon a few words of the ever-perspicacious Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men . . .

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"

May we all remember to be a little kinder to each other. May we remember that no matter which side of the Legislature we sit on, it is within each of us to spread Christmas cheer and warmth to those in need.

With that, Mr. Speaker, from the bottom of my heart and from my colleagues I would like to wish you, Albertans, and all of my colleagues here in the House a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The Speaker: First of all, to the last member, on behalf of all of us thank you for your blessings and greetings to us all.

Speaker's Ruling Improper Inferences

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Advanced Education, I sense entirely that you were making humour in your comments with respect to the intellectual capacity of the House. I understand that that was not your intention, but it has been received as an issue where, in fact, the intelligence of all of the House as well as potentially of a family member – it's very sensitive to the families. So I would ask that all of us, because the next few days that we're together are going to be extremely sensitive, be conscious of that as we move forward and continue to be conscious of each other.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Federal Equalization Payment Negotiations

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, today the federal equalization program is being discussed at a meeting of federal, provincial, and territorial Finance ministers. This is an opportunity for the provincial government to fight for a fair deal for Albertans. We can all agree that Alberta should not be transferring billions of dollars to other provinces if those provinces are actively working to stop important resource projects that will help to grow Alberta's economy. To the Premier: is your government fighting for Albertans in these talks, or do you intend to just be the orange doormat for Ottawa?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, as the member opposite will recall, when the federal government first rolled out their proposal for a 50-50 split on the excise tax, as chair of the Council of the Federation I was very quick to dismiss that suggestion and to say that it was not acceptable and that there was no way that the provinces would accept that. My understanding is that now a different deal has been negotiated, one that does two things. It splits it 75-25 and also puts a cap on the overall amount that the federal government is allowed to collect so that the remainder goes to the provinces. So I think we actually did a pretty good job.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier is talking about something different. I was talking about transfer payments.

Last month this government chose to defeat common-sense motions right here that asked them to prepare for these equalization renegotiations. Equalization is what I'm talking about. We wanted them to update the Assembly on their preparations. At that time the Premier treated it as a joke. They chose to defeat this motion instead of being transparent with Albertans and helping to stand up for an issue that is very, very important to Albertans. Again, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: are you doing something to stand up for Albertans in the equalization negotiations?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The matter has been discussed to some degree at the Finance ministers' meeting. I don't think it has been concluded yet. The position that Alberta has taken, of course, is that what we need to do is allow for protection of provinces like Alberta when there's a tremendous amount of volatility. That's one of the things that's not addressed properly in the formula, so that is the matter that our Finance

minister is taking to Ottawa and that we are representing on behalf of all Albertans.

Mr. Nixon: It's important to Albertans that their government enter these equalization renegotiations from a position of strength. I hear about that all the time. Albertans know that they have lost \$200 billion to the federal coffers through equalization programs. It's important that this government seize the opportunity to correct existing imbalances in this program. I think that is clear. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: will your government be putting forward a concrete proposal for a new formula on these negotiations? Yes or no? If the government does not play ball, will you take constitutional action through the courts to make sure that they do?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the conversations are just beginning on this matter. As the member opposite will recall, the fact of the matter is that one of the things that's actually hurt Alberta through the recent downturn was the rule that was brought into play by former Prime Minister Harper and the leader of the UCP right now, Jason Kenney. As a result of that, Alberta lost hundreds of millions of dollars from what they would have received. That being said, we're doing everything we can, as I just said, to bring about a better formula, that will allow for the volatility that we experience in Alberta, to ensure that we get the best support that we can when we need it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, actually, the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer said that Albertans gained under those changes.

Now Albertans need a provincial government that will continue to fight for them on fairness in equalization. This is one of the number one issues that all of us hear outside this House. I know that members on all sides are hearing this issue. Albertans are not satisfied with where we are at with equalization, so will the Premier stand up and actually show a concrete plan to make sure she will force the federal government to come to the negotiation table and fix this problem once and for all?

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the last time this was negotiated, there was a Conservative government in Ottawa and a Conservative government in Alberta, and it is quite true that we did lose money as a result of the tweaks to the formula made by the Conservative government in Ottawa and the Conservative government in Alberta. So we are going to work very hard on behalf of Albertans to fix those mistakes, but it's a bit of a hill to climb thanks to the Conservative government in Ottawa and the Conservative government in Alberta.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer said that Albertans gained under those changes. The Premier is now standing up and saying that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is wrong. Can she justify that explanation and be clear about how she thinks that that is true and why she thinks the Parliamentary Budget Officer is not telling the truth? What is her point?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely true that the Parliamentary Budget Officer suggested that we gained if the price of oil continued to be high, but if something happened like that it went down again, which, of course, we should have all imagined might happen because that's kind of the way it's been for

the last 50 years, if it went down, we'd hit a floor. We did not go below that floor, so we could not get additional support when that happened. That is why the member opposite should look at both sides of what the Parliamentary Budget Officer said, and that is why Albertans did not do as well as they could have, and that's why we're going to try to fix it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the point, though, is still very, very clear: Albertans want a fair deal on equalization. This government continues to dodge that point. My question is: will the Premier fight, even through the courts if we need to, to make sure that resource-based revenue is removed from the equalization formula? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that our government will do everything we can to advance the best case we possibly can for Albertans. I think I've said that several times now. There is no question that we will continue to do that because we know that, quite frankly, all of Canada benefits greatly from the prosperity that we have here in Alberta even now, after the recession. We need to ensure that Albertans also benefit, and we will be sure to remember that that's who we are here for.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, in three weeks' time the NDP government plans on imposing a 50 per cent hike to their job-killing carbon tax. To date the carbon tax has not moved a single voice of no to yes when it comes to much-needed pipelines. All it has done is make it more expensive to live in Alberta and to do business in Alberta. No matter how much the NDP yell about that, it is still a fact that this is costing Albertans a lot of money. Has this government done any proper analysis of the economic impact of this 50 per cent hike to the carbon tax?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I would urge the member opposite to look at the documents that were released by the government of Alberta, first, when we introduced the climate leadership plan, and then, subsequently, when we introduced the levy last year because at that time there was an economic analysis done. The economic analysis was done for the first phase of the carbon levy, and the economic analysis was done for the second phase of the carbon levy. Interestingly, we are outperforming the projections already with respect to that economic analysis. The work was done, and we know that we're on the right path.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the NDP government did not campaign on their carbon tax. They misled Albertans on the carbon tax. It was not on any page of their platform but is now on the books as a massive tax on Albertans. When the 50 per cent carbon tax hike hits next month, transportation costs will go up for trucks and trains shipping grain, shipping livestock, and shipping crops. To the Premier: do you prefer that your hard-working producers absorb these costs or that it be passed on to Albertans in the form of their grocery bills?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, denial ain't just a river in Egypt; it is a good, solid part of the UCP caucus over there. I will

tell you that it does not help this conversation here or anywhere else in Canada when significant members of the UCP front bench continue to promote climate hoax conspiracy theories, as they did over the weekend. When will the members opposite stand up and tell Canadians that they believe climate change is real and that we should actually do something to combat it?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's the Premier that is in denial of what this is costing Albertans.

The carbon tax makes it more expensive to heat barns. The carbon tax makes it more expensive to heat other buildings that our farmers and ranchers use. The carbon tax makes it more expensive for our farmers and ranchers to transport their products. And now this government is intent on raising the carbon tax by 50 per cent. Mr. Speaker, not rhetoric, just clear facts. Has this government bothered to do an analysis on the impact of their latest increase to the carbon tax on farmers and ranchers, or are they too busy coming up with one-liners and talking points to try to avoid the facts that they're costing Albertans a tremendous amount of money?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite struggle with the facts, but I'm pretty sure I actually gave them the facts in answer to that question two questions ago.

What I will also suggest, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to facts, is that Albertans want to know whether the Finance critic for the UCP believes that climate change is a hoax or not. Will they come clean?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. I'll try to be facty.

Viscount Bennett Centre

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, it was recently announced that Chinook Learning Services' operations at the Viscount Bennett Centre in Calgary will cease at the end of August 2018. CBE also announced plans to reduce its upgrading capacity by a quarter, or 500 students. Viscount Bennett has served as a hub for high school upgrading since the '50s, providing an essential service to adult learners. To the Minister of Education: how can your ministry justify closing the Viscount Bennett Centre when the school's enrolment has doubled since 2014?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and answer this question on behalf of the Minister of Education. You know, our government has invested much more money in teachers, smaller class sizes, and additional learning supports for students in Calgary. Despite this, we've been concerned with reports from the Calgary board of education about budget deficits, and we've also heard from parents who are concerned about changes to various other things with the Calgary board of education. Our immediate priority remains to make life better for Calgary families, and we're looking at ways to do that. I'll commit on behalf of the Minister of Education to provide more information.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. In today's economy it's an advantage for those seeking employment to possess at a minimum a high school education. However, a traditional K to 12 environment doesn't suit everyone, and many have to upgrade high school marks in adulthood. Upgrading can change lives for people who have had challenges completing school. With a reduced upgrading capacity

divided across several high schools, how will the Minister of Education ensure continuity and quality of service for all upgrading students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it's important to remind the member and all members of this House that since our government took office, we've increased the funding to the CBE by over \$63 million – that's the operating funding – we've provided them \$18 million to fully cover the cost of reducing instructional and transportation fees, we've provided them \$13 million in additional funding to classrooms as part of our classroom improvement fund, and we've invested more than \$100 million in capital investments for new and modernized schools this year. Nothing is more important to this government than to give every Albertan the opportunity to receive a high-class, high-quality education in this province, and we're continuing to work to do that for the students.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, the closure of Viscount Bennett means that many teachers and staff are concerned about layoffs, and reducing the number of classes will likely mean an increase in the size of classes. This is going to make it even harder for people who want to complete their diploma. When will the Minister of Education provide a plan to ensure that increased class sizes will not mean increased barriers to success for adult learners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, again, I would refer the member to the previous question about the increased investments that we've made in the Calgary school board since we've become government. I think I would take the opportunity to remind the member and all members of the House that cutting 20 per cent out of the Education budget would not do anybody any favours in providing opportunities for students, nor would it do anything to enhance the quality of education in Calgary or anywhere else, and I think people should remember that when choosing their government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mental Health Long-term Care

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Hospital Edmonton previously had a unit devoted to transition support and care for long-term psychiatric patients. The patients have now been moved to smaller community-based facilities. To the Associate Minister of Health: what information is available from the staff as to how this change is working?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that this summer two homes have been renovated, in partnership with Aspire homes, and that 10 clients have been successfully housed with supports from mental health. A third home with an additional five beds will be opening in January. Eligible patients are able to rejoin the community and have support building relationships and routines, which is beneficial for their mental health. Our government supports care in the community where appropriate for patients, and we continue to support the vital work of Alberta

Hospital Edmonton as part of our mental health system. You've heard us say it before, that as long as there is an NDP government in this province, Alberta Hospital Edmonton will remain open.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that the staff at these facilities are able to provide adequate and appropriate supports to permit patients to integrate effectively into their new communities?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The staff with this program provide 24/7 AHS support for patients in the community, again, helping them to build those relationships and routines and helping to keep them out of hospital. We know that connecting people to the supports that they need where they live is making their lives better. That's why we're making important investments in both the mental health system and in primary care, with over \$80 million for mental health care supports this year alone. Those connections would be severed if our health care system is forced to endure the drastic billion-dollar cuts like members opposite are calling for, and people would suffer.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People with mental health issues deserve to have support as they continue to live with their issues and move toward recovery. To the same minister: what is the government doing to support ongoing care for long-term psychiatric patients?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the community of care offered at Alberta Hospital Edmonton, where health practitioners continue to find meaningful ways to engage with their patients. Just recently I had the honour of joining the hospital staff to participate in an indigenous healing ceremony. For the patients involved, this connection to cultural practices is an important way to address trauma and support long-term recovery and mental wellness. We are committed through the work of the valuing mental health implementation team and throughout our health system to make patients' lives better through whole-person care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

2:10 Provincial Fiscal Policies and Cash Flow

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few weeks I've heard constituents and other individuals who do business with the government say that they're getting paid slower than they used to. Others tell me that cash designated for approved projects is being pushed further into the future or being cancelled altogether. To the Finance minister or the Premier: is your government out of money, or do you have a cash-flow problem currently?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. I think the member knows full well, certainly, how things work, especially in Infrastructure. We reprofiled funds to line up with the cash flow on projects. For some of these projects it is to match federal and municipal funding and timelines. We are investing in infrastructure

in this province, and our plan is working, and it is working well. One of the things I can certainly say, having been through AAMD and C and AUMA in the last number of weeks, is that we heard from so many municipalities, and they are beyond pleased with the infrastructure dollars they got for their communities, which are making a difference.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that was a government-wide question and not an Infrastructure question, I'd still like the answer about the cash flow, and given that the NDP has been reckless with facts, telling an exaggerated version of the UCP policy on cost control, and given that the NDP promised to balance the budget by 2023 with no details attached, again to the Finance minister: with a \$54.7 billion budget, a \$10.3 billion deficit, which is about 20 per cent of the budget, what spending reductions are you planning to introduce so that you can actually balance the budget as you said you would?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is carefully and compassionately controlling spending to balance the books by 2023. That's only one year later than Mr. Kenney, but the opposition loves to make hysterical predictions. They predicted the economy would tank. We're leading Canada in growth. They predicted jobs would vanish and never return. We're creating tens of thousands of jobs and counting. The opposition frantically tried to talk the economy down, but here are the facts: Alberta's economy is looking up.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP deserves no credit for the positive details that are out there and given that with Keystone XL and Trans Mountain, even if they're built, the royalties won't be near enough to cover the \$10.3 billion deficit this government is running and given that the government through their carbon tax, minimum wage, corporate taxes is making it harder for businesses to create more revenue for the government and given that the minister has no plan to reduce spending, again to the minister: with no plan to reduce spending and with you making it harder for businesses to increase revenue, what is your plan to balance the budget, and will it ever happen?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, most of what the hon. member said in there is actually quite far from the truth. As far as encouraging investment and our government's participation in it, when we were faced with the largest downturn in generations, we introduced our Alberta jobs plan, investing in infrastructure, supporting our public services, and supporting our businesses. In the last six months alone we have Amazon, RocketSpace, Swoop, Champion Petfoods, Pinnacle, Google, and Cavendish Farms all coming to Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Carbon Levy and Pipeline Approvals

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The other day the environment minister, who is the minister with the most radical policies Alberta has ever had, denigrated the Hon. Jason Kenney for daring to criticize her ministry's policies, yet it is her ministry that is costing Albertans billions of dollars and thousands of jobs. Minister, since

75 per cent of Albertans already reject your, quote, pretty darn moderate carbon tax, will you commit to scrap it?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the question of whether this province is going to move forward with the climate leadership plan, which secured the approval of two pipelines, is a very short yes. We are moving forward with that set of policies, and here are some of the results. Drilling activity is up sharply, 64 per cent more wells drilled this year than last year. Baytex Energy just announced an 80 per cent increase in heavy oil drilling, which might interest the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. It's in his region. Husky Energy announced this week that they will boost capital spending, ramping up Tucker thermal and Sunrise. There's more on this list, and I will be happy to share it with the House.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister might want to start saddling up her unicorn to ride off into the sunset in 2019 since she insists on maintaining the fantasy that Albertans won't even notice the 50 per cent hike to the carbon tax that is coming in just 20 days and given that the carbon tax fits with the NDP's Leap Manifesto, which Albertans totally reject, Minister, since not a single pipeline opponent has been moved from no to yes as a result of your carbon tax, why won't you abandon it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, a year ago when the Prime Minister approved two new pipelines, he explicitly said that it was on the strengths of Alberta's climate leadership plan. Any claims that Alberta's economy or oil and gas industry is suffering as a result of the climate leadership plan flies in the face of the facts. Cenovus Energy has more than doubled production this year. CNRL has also increased production. Now they're considering adding a 30,000- to 40,000-barrel-a-day expansion at Horizon. Suncor reported their best quarterly results since oil was at a hundred dollars a barrel, and now they're proposing a new oil sands project.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister is calling our industry unethical and accuses the UCP of spreading fake news, let me share some real news here. Given that according to a *Sun* article on December 7, the Alberta Advantage is Dead and Buried, and that CAPP expects the CCI will put some existing facilities at competitive risk . . . [interjections] The government members think it's funny. It is not. Minister, since your job-killing carbon tax is destroying our ethical industry and it hasn't gotten Alberta any social licence, will you apologize to Albertans and cut this carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this fall we celebrated a \$2 billion oil sands expansion project by JACOS, which means good jobs for Albertans. As we move forward through the pipeline approval process, I was very glad to learn that Trans Mountain will be proceeding in the Lower Mainland. That's a fantastic development for the tens of thousands of jobs that rely on market access, which this side of the House secured with our approval of two pipelines. Now, Mr. Kenney sat on his hands in

Ottawa for a long time and did not secure pipeline approvals. Our government got the job done.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Milk River Irrigation District Water Supply

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, certain farmers from my constituency rely on water from the Milk River to irrigate over 7,000 acres of crops. A water-sharing agreement from Montana dating back over a century ensured both sides have enough water throughout the season. In 2001 this agreement was formalized with a letter of intent between Alberta and the U.S. However, last year this government decided not to honour this agreement, leaving farmers in southern Alberta without water, jeopardizing millions of dollars of crops and farm infrastructure. To the minister: will this government honour the letter of intent between the province and Montana?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a few items in that question that perhaps require a little bit of clarification from the Department of Environment and Parks, and I will be pleased to provide that information to the member so that he may appropriately communicate with his constituents, and we can clear up any misunderstandings that may arise.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that the letter of intent sets out an interbasin transfer of water in Montana to divert water from the same areas to the Milk River and given that Alberta already approved a separate interbasin transfer for water in St. Paul, diverting water from the North Saskatchewan to the Beaver River basin, and given that an interbasin transfer from the St. Mary River to the Milk River is the best-fit solution to this issue, to the minister: will you approve an interbasin transfer to avert the impending water crisis in the Milk River irrigation district?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to arrange a briefing for the hon. member and any of the municipal or other officials that would like to have some clarification on this matter. It is much, much different to be doing an interbasin transfer in a basin that is not closed as opposed to one that is, which is the South Saskatchewan. We have an agreement with Montana. We are moving forward with a number of improvements to that agreement and to supporting farmers and ranchers in southern Alberta as best we can to ensure that we have safe and adequate supplies of water to grow the economy in southern Alberta.

2:20

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that in good faith these farmers built the pivots, the irrigation system to make the desert bloom down in that area and given that this government continues to say that they're all about diversifying the economy – as you know, farming surely fits that bill – to the minister: are you willing to meet with these disenfranchised farmers to tell them to their faces whether they will have irrigation water next year or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did have the honour of spending some time in the hon. member's constituency this summer to discuss these matters. Of course, this province invests in irrigation infrastructure and other water management techniques. I believe it's \$19 million annually in the capital plan into irrigation

infrastructure, and in fact it was this province's support of farmers in southern Alberta and our support for irrigation and associated infrastructure that secured the largest private-sector investment in southern Alberta history, which is, of course, the expansion of the Cavendish Farms facility. That is going to open up new markets for potato farmers and others.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Water Act Enforcement

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the Minister of Environment and Parks spends her time finding new ways to make life more difficult for Albertans with the job-killing carbon tax, she is neglecting her existing ministerial responsibilities pertaining to administering and enforcing the Water Act. All too often individuals, corporations, or other government entities will conduct work in or around waterways and block the flow and natural hydrology, causing impacts like flooding a neighbour's farm upstream. Can the minister advise the House: how many Water Act enforcement actions has the department brought against individuals and corporations to date in 2017?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always refreshing to hear the Conservatives from across the way bring forward a spirited anticorporate message into this House. Be that as it may, I'm happy to follow up with the hon. member to provide him the information that he seeks. I do know that, for example, there was an audit of sand and gravel operations recently that did uncover some contraventions of the Water Act, and the department is taking all measures for redress in those areas.

Thank you.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, it's nice to see the minister has her finger on the pulse of her own ministry.

Given, Mr. Speaker, that there have been 11 enforcement actions this year and that another situation in my constituency, if not resolved, could result in the erosion of a graveyard and overland flooding of a golf course as well as many residences, can the minister advise: once an enforcement order has been issued under the Water Act, how long does an individual or a corporation have to get back into compliance, what can be the consequences, and why aren't the laws being enforced?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, enforcement orders, inspections, all of those aspects of the Water Act, have top priority on this side of the House, and that is why we have stabilized our budgets in Environment and Parks so that our operations staff, our approval staff, our inspection, our enforcement staff have the tools they need to do the job. You know what wouldn't help? A 20 per cent across-the-board cut to Environment and Parks staff. That's exactly what folks out there on the landscape who want us to protect the air, land, and water don't need from this government, and they won't get it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the town of St. Paul has asked numerous times over the last few years for enforcement of the Water Act on an individual in my constituency

and given that Alberta Environment and Parks does not seem to follow up to ensure actions are carried out or move in a swift and timely fashion even after issuing a very strict and time-sensitive enforcement order and there appears to be no incentive for noncompliant individuals or corporations to follow the rules, will the Minister of Environment and Parks stand up for the environment and enforce the Water Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to take the information that the hon. member has shared with the House and endeavour to get back to him in as timely a fashion as possible. But you know what wouldn't help? Some of the private members' bills that we've seen in this House, for example, to deregulate everything. This is exactly what members have in mind when they talk about red tape reduction. It's the type of rules that protect our air, land, and water, and on this side of the House we take them seriously. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This eye-rolling and name-calling government has been continually disrespectful in their language about Albertans. When the government was first elected, we heard them call the hard-working people of this province embarrassing cousins. Albertans are not falling for the hyperbolic NDP attacks. This weekend the NDP's by-election candidate accused concerned parents of being melodramatic about recent changes to the curriculum. To the Premier: does your government agree with your candidate that concerned Alberta parents are just being melodramatic? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has mischaracterized many things in that preamble, I would suggest. You know, certainly, we have the greatest respect for parents and the concerns that they have. We are not here to fight their by-election for them, and if the member wants to talk about government policy, we'd be happy to answer her questions.

Mrs. Aheer: The government may not be backing their own candidate, then, because that was a quote.

Mr. Speaker, given that parents are concerned about massive changes to the curriculum and the lack of consultation and given that parents are the primary educators of their children and bear the brunt of any changes that occur and given that as parents we care so deeply about our children and their education, why is the government so eager to dismiss our perfectly reasonable concerns about the extensive recent changes to the Alberta curriculum and name-call Alberta parents as melodramatic?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education. [interjections]
Go ahead.

Mr. Schmidt: Oh, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our current curriculum has enabled students to achieve at a world-class level, but we recognize that some of it is over 30 years old. A modern K to 12 curriculum will empower our children with the skills that they need to realize their dreams, and we believe that it's time for a common-sense curriculum update that builds on our strengths. We're not going to let Jason Kenney's conspiracy theories ruin the work of

thousands of parents and teachers to modernize curriculum. We're focused on providing constructive answers for the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Evidently the parents are wrong, so let's try this one, then. Albertans are adamantly opposed to the carbon tax, and given that the government has shown a pattern of behaviour in dismissing the concerns raised by Albertans and the opposition and given that the Premier and her friends spend more time hurling character assassinations at our leader and caucus than governing, when did the government decide that it was acceptable to call Albertans extremist and melodramatic for simply asking questions about really bad policy?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I hear the word "melodrama," I think of Snidely Whiplash, you know. I just don't understand why this hon. member ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Please continue.

Mr. Mason: Well, that was melodramatic, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to suggest to the hon. member that we are not here to fight a by-election. Why can't her own candidate speak for himself in this by-election without needing her to do it for him? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. How late do you suppose you're going to go tonight? Taking wagers?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Calgary Cancer Centre

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary cancer centre is a much-needed facility for people across the province who are struggling with the realities of battling cancer. Albertans deserve to have the best possible care when they are quite literally fighting for their lives. Given that Calgary families have waited years for a cancer centre to be constructed in our city, to the new Minister of Infrastructure: could you please provide Calgarians with an update on this important and much-needed project?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that excellent question. We're pretty excited about this project in Calgary. In October 2015 the Calgary cancer centre project was approved and announced, including the site selected for the facility. The contract for design/build was awarded in June 2017. On September 6, 2017, the site was partially mobilized to begin early construction. It's actually ahead of schedule, which is a wonderful thing. On October 16, 2017, full mobilization to the site occurred. I was lucky enough to attend the groundbreaking along with a number of my colleagues, which was actually fantastic.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to hear that the project is ahead of schedule. Members opposite would have you believe that all that Albertans are getting for their \$1.4 billion is a fancy box.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Malkinson: Shame indeed.

To the same minister: how will the new cancer centre lead the way in providing important clinical services?

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not a fancy box. This is an extremely sophisticated build that is going to provide stellar, state-of-the-art cancer care for Albertans. It has outpatient cancer clinics, more than a hundred patient rooms [interjections] – and I really would like to be able to say these words without heckling – more than a hundred chemotherapy chairs, double the space for clinical trials, research laboratories, 12 radiation vaults, double the capacity to treat patients with the best technology, a massive new underground parking structure so families can come and visit. It's really quite . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A billion dollars goes a long way in rebuilding our infrastructure deficit. To the same minister: how many good-paying jobs are being provided to my constituents and those around Calgary because of this project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Calgary cancer project will add about 1,500 jobs to the Calgary economy over the next six years. But here's something more important than that: the legacy of collaboration from cancer patients. A quote from Will Morlidge, a Calgary cancer centre patient and family adviser:

My wife Rebecca's legacy lives on in what she wanted the new Calgary Cancer Centre to be: a place of openness and [a place of] healing [and an] environment where patients will be given every possible chance to overcome their illness, and a place that radiates hope.

[interjections] I would have hoped to have gotten that quote out without heckling from the opposition.

Air Ambulance Service in Southern Alberta

Mr. Barnes: Albertans have become accustomed to code reds, but the problem is about to get worse for southern Alberta. Fixed-wing air ambulance service in Medicine Hat will be in jeopardy on March 31. The government has been forced to extend current provider Integra Air's service agreement once, and with the extended contract about to expire and the winner of the new contract without hangar space, despite that being a clear condition of receiving the contract, Mr. Speaker, will the government admit that their plan has always been to centralize air ambulance services at the risk of southeastern Alberta lives?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making life better for Albertans with an upgraded and modernized air ambulance system. This means newer, faster, safer aircrafts equipped with the latest technology. Can-West Charters began operation in eight of 10 base communities on September 1, 2017. AHS has extended the contracts of existing providers in Peace River and Medicine Hat until next spring. These are nonpolitical processes. Air ambulance service will continue unaffected come what may.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that AHS has confirmed that a new provider is taking over the air ambulance service in Medicine

Hat beginning April 1 and that it had, quote, managed to secure necessary hangar space at the Medicine Hat regional airport – end of quote – AHS has not provided specifics on where this hangar is. All they will say is that the contractor has guaranteed that they will have a hangar and that their word is good. Is this government's due diligence good, or is the NDP playing roulette with the lives of southern Albertans based on a handshake? Yes or no?

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, AHS and our government are working with all of the relevant parties to ensure that air ambulance services are unaffected and will continue as Albertans expect, come what may, which is different than what the members opposite are promising, with their reckless 20 per cent cuts to everything.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that transporting patients from Medicine Hat to Calgary is only half of the equation and that in cases where medical personnel are needed in southern Alberta, there is supposed to be a flight-ready airplane at the Calgary airport – however, there have been a growing number of reports that this is not always the case – and given that service is critical when the patient is too injured to make the trip to Calgary, as is often the case when it's a newborn or a small child, to the minister: in the past year how many days have there been when an airplane was not flight-ready to transport necessary medical personnel to southeastern Alberta?

Ms Payne: You know, Mr. Speaker, I think this really points to why it is so very important that our government is committed to modernizing air ambulance. The members opposite, when they were in charge, allowed the fleet to age. We are modernizing air ambulance. They threaten communities with closure and consolidation while we are working with all 10 base communities. They're trying to scare people with cheap political points, and we're ensuring that service levels remain constant.

Officers of the Legislature

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, this government has shown disdain and disrespect for Albertans by imposing a carbon tax that they didn't campaign on. Now they're showing disdain and disrespect for the independent officers of the Legislative Assembly. The Privacy Commissioner has repeatedly had her powers undermined by the government's interfering in the FOIP process, the Auditor General has been frustrated with the slow-moving process of this government, and now last week we saw the office of Elections Alberta speak out because they were not consulted on policy direction that specifically affects their office's responsibilities. The question is: is it safe to say that this government considers independent officers of the Legislature to be inconvenient figureheads?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Albertans deserve to have elections decided on the basis of who has the best ideas and not on access to dark money. We know that the opposition is bringing this forward because of their hiding behind what Jason Kenney is not exposing in terms of his donations. We certainly work very closely with the Chief Electoral Officer and have listened to many of his recommendations and incorporated them into the changes.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that the Chief Electoral Officer has said that they didn't work very closely and, in fact, in his letter from last week stated that he was not asked for policy direction or

input on this very piece of legislation, can the minister of democratic renewal please explain why the Chief Electoral Officer was not consulted on policy direction on the very foundation of the election process or why he was not even asked for his input?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the opposition wants to be quick to mischaracterize the CEO's letter, the CEO does note that he did provide feedback on policy proposals for Bill 32. In fact, officials from Alberta Justice met with the CEO several times in the development of Bill 32 to discuss his recommendations and how they would look in practice. We're committed to making elections fair and making democracy robust in Alberta, and we're doing exactly that.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given this government's track record on consultation or perhaps their lack of consultation and given the public discontent that we've seen from multiple independent officers of the Legislature, my question is: has it now become government policy to not consult with legislative officers, or is this just current government practice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I just want to say that we listened very closely to what the CEO of Elections Alberta brought in, and we incorporated some of his recommendations. Others we didn't. We continue to work closely with them, but we know that, moving forward, Alberta will have a very robust democracy, making citizens have more opportunity to be involved and have easier voting. We're very proud of those changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:40 Crime in Bonnyville-Cold Lake Constituency

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents in rural Alberta are not only tired of being broken into; they're tired of the catch-and-release practice that is being exercised right now. At the recent crime forum in my constituency, in Bonnyville-Cold Lake, residents expressed gratitude for the work of our law enforcement but frustration that the perpetrators are back on the street as quickly as they are brought in, a revolving door if you will. To the minister. Our justice system continues to fail. When can my residents be assured that the justice system is actually acting on their behalf and taking a hard stance on criminal activity within the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, nothing is more important to this government than making sure that every Albertan lives in a safe community. That's why we've continued to invest in police services all across the province, and we continue to invest in hiring more Crown prosecutors as well as building a courthouse in Red Deer. You know, with respect to the member's question, of course, the integrated crime reduction unit is operating in central Alberta, and we have other initiatives with the RCMP across the province to make sure that criminals are off the street.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of the initiatives that the hon. member was talking about happened in central Alberta and given that when residents were asked, "What should be done to fight crime?" the overwhelming response from my constituents was to impose tougher penalties and bail restrictions and given that I'm being asked, "Why are we letting criminals back on the street to continue committing crimes?" and given the sentiment echoed by residents in central Alberta, to the minister. Our courts are still so backed up. When are my constituents...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we continue to press the federal government to appoint judges to the Court of Queen's Bench so that we can deal with the very backlog that the member references. If he's worried about why we're backed up, I think he should ask his leader, Jason Kenney, why they didn't appoint additional members to the Court of Queen's Bench. He should also ask why he decided to cut funding for ALERT, which provides valuable police operations all across the province and puts the bad guys behind bars.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the Cold Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce and the MD of Bonnyville each had online surveys which identified that up to 63 per cent of respondents had been victims of property crime and given the e-mail that I received shows constituents think that, quote, the NDP government is turning a blind eye on this – end quote – to the minister: when will you start engaging in meaningful discussions with my residents to hear their concerns regarding rural crime so that we can work together to solve this problem in northeastern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I met with the guests in the gallery who were here from central Alberta a week ago, and I committed to meeting with them at the earliest opportunity in the very near future. Of course, if the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake would like to organize such a meeting, I will endeavour to make that as soon as possible as well. With respect to turning our backs on communities, Jason Kenney turned his back on Albertans when he was in the federal government by cutting ALERT funding, making sure that our government had to step up and put the funding in, as well as neglecting to appoint any additional judges to the Court of Queen's Bench.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've had a request for unanimous consent to introduce a guest.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Dr. Liu, professor and chair of the department of occupational therapy at the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Alberta. Dr. Liu provided very helpful feedback regarding private member's Bill 210 and has worked closely with other stakeholders providing key

information around seniors, dementia, and missing persons that helped to inform the silver alert bill before the House later today. Accompanying Dr. Liu is her associate, Noelannah Neubauer. Noelannah is a PhD student in rehabilitation science at the University of Alberta. She is doing her thesis on critical wandering in persons with dementia. Would Dr. Liu and Noelannah Neubauer please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

In just 10 minutes we'll continue. [interjections] In 10 seconds. Ten minutes would be better.

An Hon. Member: Upping the bar.

The Speaker: That's right, upping the bar.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some days I could use a 10-minute break, too.

Today I have one tabling for you. It's an article from the *Edmonton Journal* entitled Proposed Law Offers Protection to Alberta Pet Owners. The article tells a story of pet owners who have been taken unawares and how the veterinary changes could avoid some of these heartbreaks. One pet owner is quoted as saying in this article, "Seniors are [particularly] vulnerable because they have these very strong ties to these animals."

The Speaker: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to table an enforcement order that I referenced in my question today. It was issued in August. It was totally ignored by the person in noncompliance for blocking the flow of a creek. Not only that, but the department actually waived the minimum days for him to put in an appeal. I'd just like to see it dropped.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two online surveys and 17 letters that I'd like to table here. The first one is from my local chamber of commerce. A couple of key points are that 63 per cent of the respondents were the victims of property crime; 84 per cent of the respondents had some security measures in place when the crime happened; the estimated losses from the crimes vary all the way from \$1 to \$100,000. It's significant.

The second one is a crime survey done by the MD of Bonnyville. What's important here is that we're seeing large numbers of victims of crime within our MDs.

I'd like to point out that I have Lois, who wrote a letter saying that she's been a victim of crime twice in the past year, in 2017.

I have Lindsay: "Our home and garage were both entered by smashing windows and kicking in doors."

I have Kimberly, who is constantly living in fear.

I have Susan, who has the assailant on video stealing from them, but it appears that that's of no value.

I have Amber: "I worry throughout the day wondering if we will be next."

I have Sandra: "In September 2017 we had our one ton dualie stolen."

I have Rita: "My house was broken into resulting in over \$3000.00 [worth of] damages."

I have Eleanor: "Two break ins in the last 2 weeks."

I have Corrine: "My hubby and I were victims around Easter of 2016 . . . I do not feel safe in this area."

I have Jerry: "We were broke into Sept. 3, 2016 . . . I felt totally violated."

I have Corrine, a different Corrine: "Someone's package stolen right off [our] porch . . . in broad daylight."

I have Robert: "I fear that the break ins are going to turn [into violence] soon."

I have Barrie: "On Halloween night thieves stole every blow up yard ornament." Now, that sounds humorous, but these things are actually very, very costly.

What Mark has to say: "I had a truck, trailer and quad stolen."

I have Rachel: "We estimated a total of approx. \$38000.00 worth of belongings taken from our home."

I have Jess: "We have been victims twice. Twice in one year."

We have Lee, the final one: "We have been a victim several times."

This is tragic, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to encourage that, no question, we need to be assured that all citizens of our province have the right to pass this information along. Particularly in this window, it's a balance between hearing that and the amount of time to get legislation approved. I'd urge all of you to be conscious of that when you table so many documents at one time. I'd appreciate that.

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports (continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The letters continue to roll in. I have Dolores, who suffered a home invasion at 3 o'clock in the morning, locked herself in the bathroom. It took 45 minutes for the police to arrive.

Another individual here from my riding was robbed three times. This individual's response from the RCMP on all three occasions was: "[Well, just] come to the detachment and [file] a report." There was no on-scene investigation completed.

This is a request to the minister from Karen saying that criminals were out the next day. "Now is time for [this] Minister of Justice . . . to keep these criminals off the street."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a letter from Kerry Tremblay, president of the Bowmont Seniors' Assistance Association, to the MLA for Calgary-Bow and the Minister of Seniors and Housing. This letter asks for two members to support Bill 210, and I will be quoting from it when we debate the bill this afternoon. I have the requisite copies.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of a postcard that has shown up in the mailboxes of Edmonton residents trying to instill fear in them over their water

source and advocating for the sterilization of vast tracts of land in the area of the foothills known as the Bighorn from oil and gas, mining, agriculture, and forestry development, greatly damaging rural economies. This postcard was funded by the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and Love Your Headwaters, a group . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, have you got a shorter version of that?

Mr. Panda: Sure. That was funded in part by the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Calgary . . .

The Speaker: That's great. Thank you very much.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 210

Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, I would like to first recognize my former legislative co-ordinator, Maureen Gough, who is in the gallery this afternoon. Without Maureen this bill would not be here before us today. She was the one who brought the idea of a silver alert bill to me when she was caring for her mother, Anne McIntosh, who had advanced dementia.

This bill also would not be possible without the assistance and the input of the following individuals: Inspector Patty McCallum of the Calgary city police; Kim Savard, program manager with CARYA, formerly Calgary family services; Dr. Lili Liu, professor and chair, department of occupational therapy, Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Alberta; Dr. Sheree Kwong See, Alberta's Seniors Advocate; Raymond Swonek, president of the Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing Association; and Irene Martin-Lindsay, executive director of the Alberta Seniors Communities and Housing Association.

In addition, I would like to thank Kerry Tremblay, president of the Bowmont Seniors' Assistance Association, for sending a letter in support of this bill to the Member for Calgary-Bow. I tabled this just a little bit earlier and will be quoting from it as we move through this reading today.

Madam Speaker, all of these individuals added integral parts to this bill, and I would like to offer each and every one of them my most sincere thanks.

Bill 210 builds on work done by some of these individuals, who came together in Calgary and formed a steering committee to organize and host conversations with key stakeholders to gauge the interest and the capacity to develop a missing seniors response for the city of Calgary. Ultimately, this group is developing a framework for the community area's silver alert program, which brings together many organizations and falls now under the leadership of the Age-Friendly group from the city of Calgary. Expanding upon this fantastic work to allow all Albertans access to

this potentially life-saving alert system is something that I believe will be extremely beneficial to Albertans. It will allow for the greater ability to protect the health and well-being of Albertans who are potentially very vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, our seniors population is rapidly expanding in Alberta. In 2016 there were roughly 500,000 Albertans aged 65 and older. By 2031, as the tail end of the baby boomers reaches 65 years of age, Alberta's seniors population is projected to reach about 1 million people. This number will continue to grow, and by 2041 it is projected that 1 in 5 Albertans will be 65 or older.

A decline in cognitive functioning is associated with aging, and the risk of dementia doubles every five years after age 65. In Calgary the Alzheimer's Society estimates that more than 13,000 Albertans are living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia in that city alone, and for every person diagnosed with Alzheimer's or related dementia, 10 to 12 people are directly impacted. These would be family members, friends, and caregivers.

The Alzheimer's Association indicates that 6 out of 10 people with dementia will wander at some point. When individuals wander away from their homes and get lost or go missing, it can lead to increased risk of injury or death. The quicker we are able to locate these vulnerable individuals and return them home safely, the more likely we are to avoid a tragic accident.

Bill 210 seeks to address this problem by building on the Amber Alert system, which is already in place. Amber Alert is a voluntary, co-operative partnership between Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, participating radio and TV stations, police services, and the public.

The reasons vulnerable adults and seniors go missing generally are different than the circumstances that lead to missing children and Amber Alerts, so the approach has to be different to be effective. This silver alert system will provide a framework to enable police to send out a notice via local media when a senior citizen or another adult with cognitive impairment, a mental disorder, or a medical condition which may result in them being vulnerable goes missing. The goal is to begin the search locally unless there is evidence that the missing person is using some sort of public or private transport, which would necessitate a broader application of the broadcasts. To quote the letter of support from the Bowmont Seniors' Assistance Association, "This Bill will ensure that the relevant authorities have additional tools to employ to help locate and return individuals to safety in as efficient and effective a manner as possible."

Passing this bill puts Alberta at the forefront in Canada in terms of tabling legislation to protect our senior and vulnerable adult population. Manitoba has previously passed a silver alert bill; however, it is yet to be proclaimed. There have been many attempts in British Columbia to bring something like this online; however, all of the attempts to launch the systems have proven unsuccessful.

3:00

Several provinces, including B.C., have partnerships with an American program called project lifesaver. With this program citizens who are enrolled wear a small transmitter on their wrist or ankle that emits an individualized frequency signal. If an enrolled client goes missing, first responders will use this frequency to locate that individual. However, the downside to this program is that the cost of the program, which includes an initial fee and a recurring monthly fee, is borne by the individual, which is why I think the silver alert program is a more sound option for providing safety to vulnerable adults. This bill makes safety procedures available to all Albertans using resources that are already in place. As Bowmont Seniors' Assistance Association noted in their letter of support, this

“is a critical issue that affects almost all agencies providing social services.”

In closing, passing this bill will allow for a province-wide system to be brought online, which will allow vulnerable Albertans a far greater likelihood of being returned home safely. I believe that this is an issue that crosses political boundaries, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to offer wholehearted support for Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017. As the UCP critic for seniors it is important for me to speak on this important act and applaud the work of my colleague the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for bringing this piece of proposed legislation before this House. Thank you very much, sir, for doing this work.

The heart of every Albertan clenches, as we know, Madam Speaker, when we hear an Amber Alert, but we also know how effective they are because as a community we also celebrate when the missing child is found using the collective eyes of our community and using this Amber Alert tool. We feel that all sides of this Chamber should support my colleague's bill to use the same system for seniors who have gone missing.

How many times do we hear on TV, radio, and media reports that a senior, often one prone to wandering due to dementia, particularly Alzheimer's, has disappeared? I mean, it's very common these days. It is easy to envision them alone, walking in surroundings that at one time might have been familiar but now, because of those medical conditions, are confusing. They can travel a long way, especially because many Alzheimer's patients can retain their health, Madam Speaker, into much later years, because their disease often does prompt wandering. Just as we are crushed with worry when a child goes missing, we face a similar worry when an elderly person is missing on the streets and wandering on the streets, often in the dark, in the cold, or even driving until they run out of gas in their vehicles. These are the common stories we have all come across in this part of the province and also in other parts of this country.

The simplicity of Bill 210, in my opinion, is brilliant. The Amber Alert process is already in place. It is bolstered by social media to make it even more effective. We all know that it has saved lives. We know that; we experience that whenever the Amber Alert is used and the child is found safe. Children are vulnerable, and society bonds together to take care of them when we have an Amber Alert. I think it's no different for elderly Albertans or for Albertans with special challenges. I think Albertans want to help and that amber and silver alerts empower all of us immediately.

With so many initiatives that rise to the provincial level, local communities led the way in creating these kinds of alerts. The concept has been tested at a community level out of necessity, and we know it works, Madam Speaker. With the Amber Alert program so effective provincially, all of the safeguards are already in place to ensure processes will also translate to elderly and other vulnerable Albertans. This is a common-sense bill that builds on an existing framework and expands on it. I mean, we already have the framework, and we can just expand it to benefit the people of Alberta. The sooner we approve this bill, Madam Speaker, and allow it to get off the ground, the sooner we can start saving lives in our communities and start saving the lives of our seniors.

In closing, from the bottom of my heart I want to first thank the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for his hard work and congratulate your vision in bringing this important piece of

legislation into this House. For your commitment towards this House and towards this province I thank you. You have displayed your diligence as a legislator. As we all know, Madam Speaker, this hard-working Member for Drayton Valley-Devon consulted many, many stakeholders, looked at the different initiatives in other provinces, and came up with a wonderful solution to a heartbreaking problem.

In closing, I urge all members of this House that we all support this very important bill so we can all start saving lives. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seniors built this province, and we do want to and need to support them in their retirement and every stage as they age. We know that seniors are a critical part of our communities. In fact, I found this fact interesting, Alberta seniors volunteer more than any other province across Canada. Now, while many seniors live healthy lives, some, as they age, will experience natural declines in cognitive functioning. It's for these individuals that silver alerts will help.

I am very pleased right now to be able to speak in support of this bill because I know how important it is. My father had Alzheimer's, and of course you experience some changes in behaviour. People go from being very alert and aware and having good cognitive functioning to people that need some supports. To provide a way to be able to save them from being in dire straits if need be is a good move.

Now, the Alzheimer's Society, Calgary, notes that more than 13,000 individuals are living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias and that for every person diagnosed, 10 to 12 people are directly impacted. I thought that that was a very interesting number because in my experience, again, it is true, if not more people.

Researchers, of course, have identified a number of situations where a senior may wander away and go missing – I found that an interesting list – on a normal activity, but not returning. My father loved to drive and was so independent that you never, ever told him how to get anywhere, and he never used a map. He would visit regularly from central B.C. Then one day he was hours and hours late on arriving, and here he'd gotten lost. Right then the bell went off. He didn't get lost. He was a person who couldn't, but he did. That's one when the confusion hits or starts to hit.

3:10

Exiting the home setting when the caregiver is distracted by other tasks. That is a real occasion that happens. Somebody turns their back for a few minutes, and the other person will wander away, the person with dementia. Leaving the home-care setting when upset: that can happen. People don't always agree with everything that's being done for them, to them, with them. Becoming separated from the caregiver while out in community and just exploring the exercise of autonomy, just going for a walk. You've had a full adult life. You've done what you thought was necessary and wanted to do. You have seen no reason for stopping to do that. That can be a problem at this stage in a person's life. And so on.

Most research indicates that missing-senior incidents occur as a result of an independent trip to a usual activity which goes awry somehow. It's very critical in these instances that our communities and law enforcement have the tools that they need to ensure that a missing senior is brought home safely. There are many things to consider when issuing an alert. Of particular concern is that we protect an individual's autonomy, self-determination, and privacy, but first and foremost we need to try to protect their safety.

I support this bill, and I'd urge my colleagues in the House to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Bill 210, the silver alert act. I think it's an important piece of legislation. I will take my brief time here speaking to this bill to just speak broadly about the challenges that dementia and dementia care present for our province and, of course, most especially for the people who face dementia and their family, loved ones, and caregivers.

You know, as I talk to my constituents and Albertans around the province, I hear repeatedly about the magnitude of the gaps in dementia care in this province and the lack of knowledge and understanding about dementia and what it actually means. The hon. member speaking immediately before me talked about some of the impacts. For every 1 person who is diagnosed with dementia, it has an impact on 10 to 12 people on average, and in many cases that's even more than that.

I find it curious that this province does not have a provincial dementia strategy, something I've been pushing for for some time now, dating back to the spring, when I asked the Minister of Health about that. At that time she indicated that we would see a provincial dementia strategy coming, quote, unquote, within a couple of weeks. That was back in the spring. We saw no action on that. Again in the fall I was told that we would see a provincial dementia strategy with the funding associated with that sometime this fall. Well, we're still waiting, Madam Speaker.

A provincial dementia strategy is something that other provinces have taken on. Ontario has committed \$100 million over three years to a provincial dementia strategy, and that is in addition to \$20 million that they have allocated to respite care. Those sorts of funding commitments and an overall strategic framework are entirely missing from this province, so while we talk about Bill 210 and the importance of that, it is important that we understand the context in which we're debating this, and that is that there is no provincial dementia strategy.

The government has said in the past that more long-term care beds are coming. That's good. That is one important piece of dementia care, but it is by no means the sum total of what the provincial government ought to be doing. Yes, it's an important piece, but not every person in a long-term bed has dementia, and certainly long-term care would not be an appropriate setting for every single person with dementia, particularly true of those with early onset dementia who are in the early stages of this progressive illness. It's certainly not something that should be considered a replacement for a provincial dementia strategy.

As I think of the silver alert legislation, one of the reasons I'm so strongly in favour of it is the story of our neighbour Ken. Ken was in his early 80s and, unfortunately, had progressively worse Alzheimer's and would wander. He was still able to live at home. He's lived in the neighbourhood for almost all of his life and was born and lived in Calgary and moved to that neighbourhood when he was a small boy. Our house was his friend Graham's house, and he would come and knock on our door on a regular basis. He would wander through the neighbourhood, but those of us in the neighbourhood were able to look out for Ken and make sure that he was able to always find his way home. When I think of the importance of legislation like this, I think of Ken, and I would say: may Ken rest in peace. I had a nice opportunity to speak with Ken's wife last night at a community holiday event.

Dementia does touch all of us in this province, Madam Speaker. It's incredibly important that we support this legislation, and I do urge all of my hon. colleagues to do so.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 210, Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017, put forward by my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Devon. I'd like to commend my colleague for putting his time and his efforts and a lot of research into this piece of legislation that we see here before us today.

I think that many Albertans, in fact I might even be so bold as to say that most Albertans would certainly agree that having the ability to issue a silver alert is an important signal in our society. Anything that we can do in this Legislature that protects vulnerable persons and aids in finding missing persons is certainly a good step forward that we can all take here together today, Madam Speaker, in second reading.

I won't say much. I won't take up much time. I do support this piece of legislation. I think it is an excellent step forward in assisting in protecting and having the backs of our vulnerable seniors in this province, where dementia and other deteriorating diseases like that are a reality and where wandering off happens. It's no one's fault, and it is what it is, but having the systems in place that can help these people find a safe way home is a good step forward.

I will certainly be voting for this piece of legislation, and I urge all members in this House to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to have a couple of comments here. Again, thank you to all of the people that helped put this bill together. I think we all have been touched by people that we love who have wandered off and who need assistance, and if this bill can move us forward in that direction and towards safeguarding the lives of some of our Albertan citizens, then I think it's an important bill that we should all support.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising to seek unanimous consent that notwithstanding Standing Order 8 the Assembly will move into immediate consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to request the unanimous consent of this Assembly to waive Standing Order 8(7) to allow the Assembly to proceed to Committee of the Whole on Bill 210, Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**3:20 Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 209
Radon Awareness and Testing Act**

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to say again to the member: thank you so much for bringing this bill forward. The best part of the bill coming forward has been the education that we've all gotten in this House about radon. I'm very, very grateful that you've brought this to all of our attention. Thank you so much for that.

One of the things, going through just a little bit of consultation over the last week, since the bill was presented, was that we're not sure about the testing piece of it. The reason I'm bringing this up is because, as you know, there are a lot of little, tiny businesses all over Alberta that run day homes. With the legislation presently, as we know, if you have fewer than eight children in your home, there is no need to get any sort of certification to have a day home, but for any more than eight children it becomes a process of certification. This is just the legislation that presently is, how it works right now in terms of a day home.

The reason I bring this up, Madam Chair, is that one of the things that's so important to our small communities and, actually, even to the larger urban centres is the ability for people who would like to stay home and take care of children to actually be able to do that. It's a beautiful way that communities come together. They take care of each other's children. It's a wonderful way for a single person at home to be able to stay home even with their own child while taking care of other people's children. It's a wonderful homegrown business. Of course, sometimes it starts off pretty small and grows into a larger number of kids.

With respect to the larger facilities, I think one of the best things that will come out of this is that a larger facility that is going to be housing a daycare can be required – any person who's going to start a business there, within a larger facility, can request that this testing be done before they move into that facility. That can be part of their lease agreement or whatever that is going into that facility, especially, again, if there are over eight children. I think that's fantastic, not only for the daycare, but the facility will benefit from having that testing done. Obviously, if there are any concerns with radon, if they're finding any of this radioactive material, they're going to want to make sure and eradicate that as soon as possible.

We have a lot of families that live in the same dwelling. They've lived there for many years. Like I said to the member last time, you don't go to your home, your safe place, assuming that you've been breathing in anything poisonous. Again, it just was such a mind opener. I really, really, really appreciate the thoughtfulness behind this legislation.

With that, on the flip side we also want to make sure that people who are trying to start up these small businesses are not caught within a ton of regulation and red tape in order to do that. So I just wanted to bring forward an amendment if I may. I'd like to thank

the member very much for helping me with this amendment. I appreciate it very much.

Are we all good?

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I was having a little panic moment there.

I would like to move that Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act, be amended (a) in section 2(1) by striking out "coming into force of this Act" and substituting "coming into force of this section" and (b) by striking out section 6 and substituting the following:

Coming into force

6(1) This Act, except sections 3, 4(c) and 5, comes into force on Proclamation.

(2) Sections 3, 4(c) and 5 come into force 18 months after the date on which all remaining sections of this Act have been proclaimed in force.

Basically, what we're asking for is that there is a small exemption time for folks who have already got these spaces set up, especially small businesses. So if they're having difficulty finding the ability to be able to do this testing, the member will allow, hopefully, by accepting this amendment, small businesses the ability to have a small exemption, going forward, upon proclamation. That just gives a little bit of time for people to understand what the legislation is about, what the go-forward is with that. Like I said, we want to make sure with these small businesses that we're not putting in more red tape. Also, there are many different places within Alberta, some that have issues with radon and some that don't, depending on where these day homes and houses are built.

Also, one of the things that the member had expressed – and I agree with her completely – is the fact that we are looking at lung cancer. I mean, we can't take this lightly. It's not about putting off a decision. It's just about being thoughtful in how to process the decision and making sure that people have time to be able to absorb this legislation and be able to move forward.

I hope that everyone will be able to support this amendment. I thank the member again for this legislation and for taking a look at this amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Yeah. I just wanted to thank the member for bringing forward this amendment and for working with me around her concerns, particularly around smaller day homes. I know I have a number of day homes that operate in my riding. My neighbour operates one.

One of the things that we sort of discussed in this is, really, the randomness of where radon occurs, whether it's a small day home that has, you know, eight kids in it or whether it's a larger facility, if you're inside. Radon can really accumulate anywhere inside a building, so I think it is really vital – and it's a vital piece of this legislation – to require child care facilities to test.

I absolutely agree with the member. Giving them some time to adjust, to make sure that they're aware of what the new regulations are and to educate themselves on the best ways to test and to maybe, if they need to, save up a little money, even though tests generally are very inexpensive, is all right with me.

I would hope that everyone supports this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this amendment? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 209? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to bring forward an amendment quickly as well. Here are the required copies of that amendment, and I'll wait till it gets passed out to speak about it.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Luff: Okay. I did a fair amount of consultation when I was working on this piece of legislation, particularly with real estate brokers and realtors in the province. I spoke with RECA and AREA and several folks on their own, and they are absolutely aware of this issue. I've been really impressed with their willingness to work with me to make sure that we have awareness of this issue here in the province. It's something that they've really taken up thoroughly recently, but there were some concerns around sort of being overly prescriptive in some of the spots in this bill.

3:30

What this amendment does is that it strikes out clause (g), which just removes the definition of what a real estate broker is. Then section 2 is amended by striking out subsection (4), and instead of requiring the minister to provide materials directly to real estate brokers, it just allows the minister to make the materials available in a manner the minister considers appropriate. What this is is that it's just making it slightly less prescriptive.

I want to make sure that we're working with our real estate brokers, and I want to make sure that they're happy with this piece of legislation. That is what this amendment is for, and I would hope that everybody supports it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the hon. member for doing the legwork, the groundwork in the creation of this bill and being willing to work with industry in amending areas of concern. Really grateful for this.

I don't see any issues with this amendment. I think it's probably helpful given the consultation that the member had with industry stakeholders, and I think it's something that I can certainly support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 209? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm really happy to rise today in support of Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act. Like most members of the House, I admit that I had very little idea about radon until I attended a Breathe Alberta event in the Legislative Assembly, I think, about a month ago, where this organization helped us to understand the impact of radon on health and had free kits available to all members who did show up. I'm really glad that I did show up to this event, that was held down on the first floor of this building. I did take a radon kit home with me,

and I'm in the process of discovering if my house is affected by radon gas and the potential health hazard to myself.

It really has taught me a really good lesson. It has taught me that it's really important for me as an MLA to take all opportunities around free education that are available to me when organizations do come to the Leg. and want to inform MLAs, because if I hadn't gone to that event, I wouldn't have understood the importance of the bill that my colleague has just put forth in this House. I will make sure now that I always attend those kinds of events, and I'm hoping that everyone in this Assembly does so, too.

The reason I really like this bill is that very often as private members we can put forth bills that change things a little but really make it better for all Albertans and safer. In this Assembly over the last month or so we've done a number of things to make things safer for Albertans. We introduced Bill 19, that made life safer for gas and convenience store workers, and we passed Bill 26 around the control and regulation of cannabis, which is going to ensure that when cannabis is sold, it's out of the hands of children. It's going to protect public health by limiting where it can be smoked, and it also ensures safety on our roads.

This bill from my colleague from Calgary-East is another aspect of the commitment of government and private members on this side of the House to make life safer for all Albertans. I was particularly interested in the part of the focus of this bill that was around child care. I no longer have children in child care, but our kids spend a lot of time in child care facilities. The fact that this bill does deal with providing radon testing for all child care facilities I think is another good move on the part of members of this government to make life safer for all Albertans.

I'm happy to support this bill. I'm really hoping that after this bill is passed, every single MLA in this Legislative Assembly will bother to go to the Breathe Alberta site and get a free radon kit so that we can all have our houses tested and that we will encourage places where our kids go, such as child care facilities or other facilities, to also go and get a free radon kit so that they can be tested. By the passing of this simple private member's bill, we're going to all work collectively to make life safer for not only our families but for Albertans throughout the province.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm delighted to be able to support this bill.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to stand and talk in favour of Bill 209. You know, I think it's important to realize, of course, that Health Canada has deemed radon a serious health risk, so obviously we're dealing with something that can affect each of us as Canadians, as Albertans in our homes or in our businesses or wherever we are.

Since we know that radon is cancer causing, then I think it's prudent that we have the proper educational materials for it. I know that education is so important in the health and safety of the people in Alberta, and that's why I did appreciate the amendment that was made to make the educational materials available to the public. I think that's really important. This is something that I've learned more about just because of this bill being brought forward.

It's similar to, of course, public safety with asbestos that we've learned about over the years and carbon monoxide poisoning. I do have a little bit of personal experience with carbon monoxide poisoning. It must have been about 25 years ago. This was in 1993. I went to a home to find out why some people hadn't shown up to work, and I found, actually, that three people had succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. Also, there was one person that was

able to get out of there that survived. Of course, having that kind of experience with a situation like that makes a person a little bit more aware of situations like this.

Again, this is something that's maybe not quite as – the results aren't as fast as, you know, the situation with carbon monoxide, but these effects can affect people's lives down the road. I think that it's great that we can get the public aware of the concerns with radon poisoning so that we can work on this and make sure that we, you know, reduce the risk to Albertans.

I guess there's a 1 in 20 chance of developing lung cancer if exposed to high levels of radon over a lifetime. Of course, smoking can increase that rate, but that's a pretty horrific statistic in itself. Now, it says that in Canada 16 per cent of lung cancer deaths are attributed to radon exposure, so that's obviously very, very significant, too.

Now, of course, radon can't be seen, it can't be smelled, and it can't be tasted. It can be in your home, and you'd be completely unaware, which is very similar to carbon monoxide. Of course, the reports also say that children are at a greater risk than adults for certain types of this kind of exposure, so that's important to realize, too, how we need to protect our children. As adults we've already been exposed to this for years, but for our children, if we can reduce their exposure to it now, throughout their lifetime that prevents a lot of potential risks to health.

Of course, once the public is more educated about this, it will save lives. It will save health care costs and different things like that. But it's just so important to have this awareness, to know the risk of this. Now that the act will require radon testing to be done in child care facilities, they can have radon detector tests done, and that'll help children that are in daycares or child care facilities.

You know, Health Canada has already suggested that homeowners check to make sure that the service provider they choose to perform radon measurement services can be certified under the Canadian national radon proficiency program. It's our hope that the definition of radon measurement specialist in regulations can be held to those standards.

3:40

I think this is a good bill. We have to be always conscious of the different health concerns that Albertans can be exposed to without knowing it. Again, awareness is so important. Myself, I just had never thought of radon and had never thought of these health concerns, but now having had an opportunity to hear the discussion on this and hear the debate, I think it's a great opportunity for us to become aware and help our children, help all of us as Albertans to be aware and be able to help prevent serious health concerns that can result from radon.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 209 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 210

Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017

The Chair: Any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to move an amendment to Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017. I will wait for the amendment to be distributed before I continue.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017, be amended in section 3 by striking out "July 1, 2018" and substituting the word "Proclamation."

Madam Chair, this amendment was brought to us by the government and proposed to us by them. They have requested that the act come into force on proclamation instead of the originally intended date of July 1, 2018. This is a change that I believe everyone in this House can support, including the opposition.

We understand that the date of July 1, 2018, was chosen originally because we thought that it would provide enough time for the government to be able to determine how to implement the bill and any of the associated costs that would come with it. From conversations we understand that – because the system is going to be piggybacking on the original Amber Alert system, we believed and we still believe that the cost of this should be relatively minor, but we understand the government's rationale for wanting this relatively minor change of changing this to proclamation.

We know that there are a number of steps and processes that are going to need to be followed as we bring forward this piece of legislation should it be approved by the House. Whenever the government introduces a new program or plan or policy, these steps need to be followed. So if it helps the government to move this to proclamation, then we can support that without any difficulty.

Madam Chair, I'd like to thank the minister of seniors for suggesting this change. We agree that it will make the legislation easier to implement. I'd like to thank her as well as her staff for taking the time to review this bill. We very much appreciated the chance to meet with the minister's staff to discuss this bill and to put forward our idea to the minister, and we very much appreciate the respectful and collaborative manner in which this piece of legislation was approached.

At the same time, we would like to thank the Minister of Justice. We hope that she is getting some well-deserved rest, that she's enjoying this new little one that she has, and we look forward to her coming back into this Legislature and maybe giving us the chance to see this little one for the first time. We believe and we understand that this bill actually falls under her purview, so we just want to say thank you, again, to her department. We have confidence that she and her department will be able to implement this bill in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Madam Chair, this bill is one of those times, I think, when all of the members of this Assembly can come together in a collaborative way, that we can support this amendment. In order to allow the government greater ease in implementing a silver alert system in this province of Alberta if indeed this bill passes third reading, we would recommend support of this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 210? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to take this opportunity to rise and speak in support of Bill 210, which I believe is a great initiative on behalf of the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. It looks like, thankfully, we have unanimous support thus far in the House, and I hope that everyone will take the opportunity to support this bill. When I look at the opportunity for us to do something very positive in the community in terms of protecting vulnerable individuals, I'm always very heartened by that approach and that thought.

Again, I thank the member for his initiative in moving forward in his consultation and conversations with some of the people in the continuing care communities who deal with this day in and day out where they're having to monitor individuals who are prone to wandering the community. They do their best to ensure that that does not occur, but it does occur, and when it does occur, we also have to face the fact that we live in a harsh climate. That harsh climate is not forgiving, and sometimes a matter of hours can be the difference between life and death of an individual through no fault of their own, through a disability or through dementia or other mental health issues that may cause them to wander into danger.

That could be just in an urban environment, but it could be, we often hear, in close proximity to more natural areas. I say that as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. We have had a number of occasions in the past. I was looking up some of the news, and we have had seniors wander off into Fish Creek park. Although it's a wonderful urban environment, a natural environment in an urban setting, there are residents down there that are somewhat known to the wild, cougars and lynx and bobcats and other types of predators that could also affect these individuals, coyotes as well. In fact, my son, when he was about 13 years old, was stalked by a pack of coyotes just along the edge of Fish Creek park, and some watchful neighbours actually somewhat rescued him at the time. So vulnerable individuals can be taken advantage of on those occasions.

I was also looking up a very sad story just this past summer in Calgary, which involved not Fish Creek park specifically but a natural area around Calgary. It was the elder brother of a high school friend of mine. He was missing for three weeks before they found him in a natural area. His family was extremely diligent. They did fan out through the community. They engaged friends and local volunteers to do so. Unfortunately, he was found deceased in a wooded area not far from where houses were. I think, again: if we'd had that silver alert in place at that time, would we have been able to save that individual before his cellphone died? I was just reading that he actually had made a call or had sent a text at some point during the early part of his disappearance. Had it been taken to the authorities who had the technology to find that individual at an earlier stage, perhaps he would still be with us today.

3:50

That individual had had a brain injury a number of years prior and lacked short-term memory and had some other issues that he was addressing as well. Some of the things that go along sometimes with dementia or brain injuries can be things like depression and other issues which can cause people to also be more vulnerable when they wander off.

I'm very, very supportive of this bill. Again, I thank all members of this House for their thoughtful amendments to improve it. I think that's a positive move in this House. I think maybe we could be doing a bit more of that as time goes forward on all types of bills, where we bring all the best thoughts and research and scrutiny to legislation, that allows us to have the best legislation that we can bring out of this House, Madam Chair.

You know, when I look at some of the opportunities here for us to collaborate with the authorities but also with the media and the broadcast community, it takes me back to a situation that I found myself in back on Boxing Day 2004. I happened to be on a small island on the coast of Thailand. Of course, we experienced something that nobody ever wants to experience, which was the Indian Ocean tsunami. On that occasion many of the authorities around the world said: "Well, we knew it had happened. We knew that there was an earthquake, and we knew that it was likely to cause a tsunami. But we didn't have a system in place."

Madam Chair, there is a system in place. It's called CNN and BBC and all the media networks that we have here. There's always somebody watching that at any hour of the day, almost anywhere in the world. In fact, all they needed to do was to reach out to the traditional media. We didn't need some fancy alert system. We didn't need to spend millions of dollars on some new system, although that would have helped. In fact, somebody sitting in their hotel room who had jet lag at 2 o'clock in the morning and saw that on BBC probably would have gone down to the front desk at their hotel and told everybody to get off the beach. That did not happen – it was actually 9 in the morning – but that would have saved people. People were on the beach. People could have been warned, and people were not warned because they didn't use the systems and media that were in our hands, that were there for us.

I think that this bill says: let's use the media; let's use the traditional media who reach out with us. That silver alert allows us to work with the community. It allows us to work through social media. We have so many tools at our disposal now. We have those alert systems that we can put on Twitter. We can put it on Facebook. We can put it out through the traditional media. We can broadcast it onto radio and television and other things. We might save that one life or those numbers of lives per year. I would suggest that we will. I think that that's the positive thing that we can do with a bill like this. This is not about paper. This is not just about words. This is about what we can achieve through taking this legislation and enacting it in our communities across this province with the support of all of us in this House.

I'm very, very heartened to see this. I think that this is a very practical approach to a problem that, unfortunately, we are seeing more of. We're seeing more early onset dementia with many individuals. We also have an aging population. We will have close to 25 per cent of the population in this province that will be senior citizens within the next 14 years. Over 900,000 individuals will be seniors. Some of us in this House will be in that.

I think that this will be an opportunity for vulnerable people. It's not everybody who is going to have it, but there are going to be vulnerable people. Vulnerable people of all ages will benefit from this bill, and the opportunity for us in this House is to do the right thing through the enacting of this legislation, through empowering the authorities, empowering families to protect the members of their household, the aging members of their household or those that are specified in this bill as being more vulnerable, and engaging the broader community and our broadcast industry and those that are already doing it, as we've noted with the Amber Alert. Again, I think that if we look back on the statistics, we have saved lives with that program, and I think that there's an opportunity to do that again.

I would encourage everybody in this House to support this private member's bill. I thank those that have proposed and passed amendments thus far and thank the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for his initiative in taking his very valuable private member's bill to do this in consultation with all members of this House and members of the community and the broader community,

the seniors community, and the vulnerable communities that we're addressing. I encourage everybody to support this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 210 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Westhead: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 209 and Bill 210. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? Say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising to seek unanimous consent that notwithstanding Standing Order 8 the Assembly move into immediate third reading consideration of Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to request the unanimous consent of this Assembly to waive Standing Order 8(7) to allow the Assembly to proceed immediately to third reading on Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Madam Speaker, I rise to request the unanimous consent of this Assembly to waive Standing Order 77(1) to allow the Assembly to debate third reading on Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 209

Radon Awareness and Testing Act

Ms Luff: I'd like to move third reading of Bill 209, Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate.

Ms Luff: If no one else is going to say anything, I just want to take a minute here to thank everyone for their support for this piece of legislation. I really appreciate it. I would particularly like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who has been very enthusiastic about this particular bill. I would like to thank all of the people who I consulted with and who support this piece of legislation: AREA, the Alberta Real Estate Association; RECA; Dr. Aaron Goodarzi, without whose research I would never have, you know, found out about this whole thing; Erin Dowell, a woman in Calgary who was very concerned about this issue and with whom I had long chats on the phone; the Lung Association, Alberta and Northwest Territories; and CARST, which is the Canadian Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists, as well as Build Alberta.

4:00

The things that I really want people to take away from this piece of legislation are just that radon is a colourless, odourless gas and is the second leading cause of lung cancer in Canada; the location of radon is random, and 1 in 8 houses in Calgary have tested above the Health Canada limit of 200 becquerels per metre cubed. So it is something that is an issue here in the prairies particularly. It doesn't matter what kind of house you have. If you have a newer house, you're actually slightly more prone to radon because the seals on the house are done so well. The third thing that I want folks to remember is that children are more susceptible because they have smaller lungs and they breathe faster. That's why the child care testing piece of this piece of legislation is so important.

Just a fact that I didn't hear in any of the debate was that exposure over the recommended limit is often equivalent to taking 200 X-rays a year or smoking 40 cigarettes a day, so this really is a very serious public health issue, and it's something that people need to be aware of.

I want people to know that testing is relatively cheap, or it could be free. You can contact the Lung Association of Alberta to get a free kit if that's something that you're interested in. It should be done over the winter months, so now is actually a fantastic time to test for radon, when your doors and windows aren't open, because this is a time when you're more likely to accumulate more radon in your house. When you are doing the testing, you should put the test in a place in your home where you're spending more than four hours a day, so whether your children are sleeping in the basement or whether your family spends most of their day on the ground floor of your house, that's where the test should go.

I also want people to know that mitigation is relatively cheap. It can cost around \$2,500 to have your house mitigated, but mitigation is very effective. It works really well, and I think the cost is probably worth knowing that you're not exposing your family to a carcinogen that's likely to cause lung cancer.

I just want to urge everyone to please test, to please educate your friends and family, to please let everyone know that this is something that's important and that they should do.

I just want to thank everyone again for their support. I'm very happy to have been able to put forward this issue to educate Albertans about the dangers of radon and to hopefully prevent some cases of lung cancer in the future. Thanks to everyone.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a third time]

Bill 210

Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, this is one of those times when I believe that we see Albertans being well served by our government, working across partisan lines for the common good of all Albertans. I believe that the ones that are going to be most well served by the passing of this bill, should it pass, are the seniors that live in this province, so those who care for them will perhaps have some of that burden lightened just a little bit.

As I said earlier, Madam Speaker, we know that the idea for this bill was brought forward to me by my former legislative co-ordinator, Ms Maureen Gough, who at the time was caring for her elderly mother, Anne McIntosh. I can remember the conversations that we would have in my office and as we drove, where Maureen was telling me about the life that she had with her mother as she went into her later years and when she first began to realize that perhaps there was an issue in her mother's life.

Before Maureen was able to find, really, an appropriate or a secure facility for her mother, her mother, Anne, had been living with Maureen on the weekends while spending the weekdays at her sister's house. There were instances there of wandering and just the sheer panic that accompanies that realization that, you know, someone that you love so very dearly is no longer where you expected them to be and just how much of a sick feeling you've got in your stomach when you realize that your mom has gotten out in the middle of the night and could be wandering through the last of the winter days and wondering how safe she was going to be until you could find her.

Now, one of the amazing things about seniors that suffer from dementia and sometimes Alzheimer's and advanced senile dementia is that they can often be very creative. Their capacity for figuring out how to get out of a room or down the stairs or out of a locked front door and into the wider world and into the neighbourhoods around them can be quite creative, and it's amazing what they can do. I know that my mother-in-law, who suffered from the same thing – it just about killed my father-in-law trying to make sure that the person in his life that he loved the most was safe. When he was sleeping, what would happen? When he was maybe cleaning the house or cooking supper, she could just slip out quietly, and that is going to be something that is obviously very concerning for everyone that has somebody that they love that is suffering from senile dementia.

Now, the last time, I believe, that Mrs. McIntosh was out of doors, she was without any outdoor clothing, and it was 15 degrees below zero. That was a huge concern. She was eventually returned

safely, but the experience that Maureen had is multiplied many times over across the province.

You know, I was talking with a constituent, actually, a town councillor in Thorsby, and he was talking about the fact that just about a month and a half ago he was driving down a country road outside of Thorsby and saw a vehicle that was driving very slowly, fairly erratically. It eventually made its way into Thorsby, where, again, it almost had a couple of accidents, almost went off the road. He had been following it, and in the process of trying to follow this car, he had phoned the RCMP. They had suggested, "Well, just keep following him until we can get there." It took about 15, 20 minutes for the RCMP to be able to let him know: "Okay. You can break off. We're not far away. We'll find the vehicle." He got a phone call at the end of the day, and it was, again, an elderly gentleman who had left Red Deer in his vehicle and had been reported missing, but the RCMP had had no way of knowing that that was going to be the case and that this gentleman had gone all the way from Red Deer all the way up to Thorsby.

It highlighted for me why, again, we needed this piece of legislation, this silver alert. I believe it's flexible enough that should the individual go missing locally, it will be dealt with locally, but should the RCMP believe that the situation desires and needs a wider range of visibility across the province, then it's the RCMP that can step in and can call a silver alert. In this particular case, this would have been of a great deal of value to the people of Red Deer and to the family from Red Deer as it would have brought forward their father's case much more quickly to the people of Alberta.

You know, the story ended well, but it doesn't always. We know that this is a growing issue, and according to the Bowmont Seniors' Assistance Association:

Unfortunately, in 2015 in Calgary alone, almost 200 seniors were reported as missing to the Calgary Police. Many more – possibly as many as 2,000 – were believed to have wandered and their families and friends had to search for them. This problem will only grow as our seniors' population increases over the next decades.

That is the truth, Madam Speaker. As we move forward through the next 15, 20, 30 years, the population of seniors in this province is only going to continue to grow. I believe that this piece of legislation will allow us as a province the capacity to step in and to proactively address an issue before it becomes even more of an issue within our society.

4:10

You know, the fear of the potentially disastrous results that prompted my legislative co-ordinator to look into this issue took her to other jurisdictions to see what currently was being done in the province of Alberta and indeed across the country of Canada. What she found was that no province yet had legislation in place to provide a framework for attending to the safety of seniors and other adults vulnerable to critical wandering. I believe, Madam Speaker, that this bill in a reasonable way addresses this issue of wandering.

This bill certainly was developed, I believe, through the consensus of people that are currently engaged in seniors' issues, people that have in many cases significantly more input in and more understanding of the wandering issue in seniors' lives than what I personally had before we began doing stakeholder work in this area. You know, I consulted with seniors' advocates like Sheree Kwong See and her staff, and I would like to thank them for the afternoon that we spent, for the time that we spent together looking into this issue and into the insights that they brought into this complex issue around seniors and the issue of critical wandering.

Among other things from them I learned of a community-based program in Calgary that is developing a strategy to address both

prevention and education to ensure that we learn more about the needs of seniors and how to address those needs using current community resources. Sheree was so very helpful in her very gentle but strong way in addressing some of the concerns that we had and putting us into the right direction so that we could make sure that this bill addresses the needs of seniors in this province.

We contacted Kim Savard and Inspector Patty McCallum. They were part of the steering committee for that project, and we talked with Dr. Lili Liu at the University of Alberta, who is addressing the needs for research into critical wandering as part of that community initiative that is there to try and keep our seniors safe. You know, we had the chance in our conversations over the course of our stakeholder discussions to really see the common sense of people with experience. I think of Patty McCallum and Kim Savard as they gave us feedback and as we had the discussions about whether this was going to be . . . [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I'd like to speak to this bill. I think we all are familiar with the Amber Alert system, where if children are missing or the parents can't find them or whatever, they can send an Amber Alert out to notify people through the media and through various other means to help locate these children. Of course, these children could have just wandered away and may be lost, or maybe they could have gotten lost in a city or in the country, or maybe they were abducted or something more serious like that. But, obviously, when the Amber Alerts come out, I think people pay attention to that because they know that there's a child out there that could be in some serious trouble.

I think that as soon as those Amber Alerts come out through the media and everything, people immediately, especially if they're in the area where this Amber Alert comes from, start looking for children. They start noticing things, whether they're driving down the street in their vehicle or if they're at work or if they're at the park or whatever. They start noticing children. I think that's why this is so important for seniors and adults that maybe suffer from dementia or something like that, that as soon as a silver alert comes out, people will have that same kind of consciousness as far as what they'll be noticing.

I think we go through our lives a lot of times just not really paying attention to details and the different things that are happening around us, but when things like this come out, things like an Amber Alert or now possibly a silver alert, I think people will start noticing and paying attention to details. Those details could make the difference between life and death in these situations.

You know, when an Amber Alert comes out, people are looking for children, somebody a little smaller, maybe a child that doesn't have an adult with them in an unusual spot. But, of course, if we have a silver alert come out, then people will be looking for somebody bigger in size, probably older, and seeing if there is something unusual about what this person is doing. I think it's a very good idea to have this opportunity to have these silver alerts. This is truly something that could save lives. People could go missing day or night, and at night with the darkness it's harder to find people. With the weather we have in our area here, in particular in Alberta, even in the summertime the nights can be cold enough for hypothermia to set in very quickly, especially if we have any kind of rain or anything.

Of course, in the wintertime it's even more severe, where we could run into serious situations with people wandering outside without proper clothing or spending extended periods of time

outside. Hypothermia could set in, and that could be life threatening. I think it's a great opportunity to have this system so that we can take care of the people of Alberta that, like I say, suffer from dementia or anything else, any kind of cognitive problems, that may wander off and not really know what they're doing or how much trouble they could be getting themselves into. Adults and seniors: they are larger than children, so they can maybe reach a door handle easier than a small child could and get outside, or they could possibly get in a vehicle and drive because they would have that knowledge and skill set within them to do that.

I think there are several things that make this bill very important as far as helping the people of Alberta and particularly the people that have these problems that get into an area or into a situation that could be life threatening and could have serious consequences.

Now, I looked up a few things here. The B.C. Silver Alert mentions looking for vulnerable missing people: people suffering from Alzheimer's, dementia, developmental disability, cognitive disabilities, autism, Down syndrome. They are the people that they really want to be aware of, people that can get themselves into some serious trouble without being fully aware of what they're doing. The goal of the B.C. Silver Alert is to "provide a valuable public alerting system so that specific, targeted alerts can assist first responders to locate missing people who meet the criteria for urgency and vulnerability." Of course, that's the key there, to make sure that first responders have an extra tool to help people in need. These first responders can be helped by the general public with these alerts, and I think that's the key, to have even more eyes out on the landscape looking for the people that could be in some serious trouble.

I just checked out another article here, and it says that Canada's aging population and the growing prevalence of neurodegenerative diseases that cause dementia could see more seniors wander away from their homes and families. Experts say that half of those missing for more than 24 hours will suffer serious injury or death. That's a horrible statistic, that after more than 24 hours the possibility of having serious injury or death increases dramatically. Of course, actually, with the weather we have in this part of the country, we could run into problems in three or four hours, even less than that. We need to have this opportunity to respond quickly and to reduce the opportunity for people to run into serious injury or death.

It goes on to say that over half a million Canadians are currently living with dementia. Can you imagine that? Over half a million. That's a huge number of people that are suffering from dementia. That figure is expected to reach close to a million in the next 15 years, so this problem isn't going to get better over time. It's going to get worse, the numbers are going to grow, and we need to have something like this to solve these problems before they get even larger.

It says that more than 60 per cent of adults with Alzheimer's disease or dementia will wander according to researchers at the University of Alberta. Over 60 per cent of them will wander at some point and put themselves in that situation where they could risk serious injury or death.

4:20

It says that B.C. has the highest population of people older than 65 outside of the Maritimes and Quebec according to Statistics Canada. That fact, combined with the province's rugged terrain, is a rising concern among search and rescue officials. Of course, we have some of that same rugged terrain. We have the Rocky Mountains to the west in Alberta, and we have extensive forests in the north. You know, after slipping away in those areas, it would be very hard to find people and to recover them.

I just wanted to go on to another article here. Now, the United States has the silver alert, too. It says that silver alerts use a wide array of media outlets such as commercial radio stations, television stations, and cable television to broadcast information about missing persons. In some states silver alerts can use variable-message signs on roadways to alert motorists. We have these same kinds of signs on the highways in Alberta, where they could put out these silver alerts, too, and give an opportunity to travelling motorists, who maybe don't have the radio on or are listening to satellite radio or whatever, to actually be alerted to a situation.

Again – and this is relating to the U.S. silver alerts – it goes on to say that in cases in which a missing person is believed to be on foot, silver alerts have used reverse 911 or other emergency notification systems to notify nearby residents of the neighbourhood surrounding the missing person's last known location. Silver alerts can also be used for children who are missing without being in danger of being abducted. So they've actually used this for children, too, which, of course, we have the Amber Alert for.

It goes on to say that supporters of silver alerts point to the U.S.A.'s growing elderly population as a reason to support new programs to locate missing seniors. They go on with the same statistics as we have here, that 6 out of 10 dementia victims will wander at least once. Of course, that's a staggering statistic when you think that we have half a million people suffering from dementia in Alberta. If you think that 60 per cent of them will wander at one time or another, that's a staggering number of people. If we don't have every opportunity we can to find these people as quickly as possible, of course, we risk, you know, serious injury or death with these people out there on the landscape.

I just want to carry on here. We have a lot of, you know, good opportunity here. I think this is a good bill that has, really, a good premise as far as being able to help Albertans, save lives, and make the recovery of these people, to bring them back home, faster. This bill is patterned on the Amber Alert, and it amends the Missing Persons Act to create a silver alert. This would be issued when a represented adult or an adult with a cognitive impairment or who is otherwise vulnerable due to mental or physical health concerns goes missing. This bill also makes provisions for police to work with local broadcasters to alert the public if an adult with a cognitive impairment or who is otherwise vulnerable has gone missing.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am truly honoured to speak on this bill. I know that my colleague has worked very hard at promoting the safety of seniors within Alberta, and I know that his time as the shadow minister for Seniors and Housing gave him an opportunity to really look at this file and really show that dedication to make sure that our seniors across Alberta are handled in a respectful way.

Now, when it comes to the treatment of our seniors in our dementia care units, this is something that I personally and that I know a lot of my colleagues, both across the aisle and within the opposition, see is important. I myself make sure, whenever there is a concern brought forward by a family member about dementia care, that I take it very seriously, and I contact the unit that is taking care of that senior. I know that we all end up in seniors' facilities at one point in our life.

Now, I know that, for myself, I visit every seniors' facility within my constituency on or the next day after Mother's Day. It's important, you know. I take my wife and my two children, and I'll tell you that when we go and we meet with these seniors and we actually give them a rose, it brightens their day. It shows them that

there are caring people out there. Specifically with the dementia patients, going to this bill, you can feel the love from those individuals, and this is good. I had one of the dementia patients at one of my facilities who hugged my oldest daughter and didn't want to let go. You know what? My oldest daughter stood there for about five minutes hugging that elderly woman. It warmed my heart that my daughter could bring comfort to that woman.

Now, what happens is that these individuals don't have, a lot of times, the ability to defend themselves. This is why it's so important that, should they go out and find themselves alone outside of facilities or outside of family members' care, we have an ability to be able to notify people that we have somebody missing.

Now, I've got an older article, but it's very relevant to a lot of the points that I'm going to be trying to make. The article's name is 5 Tips for Tracking Missing Persons with Dementia. This is by CBC News in B.C. This was December 11, 2013, when this article was posted. Remarkably, that's four years from today. Unfortunately, this is a sad story. This is a very sad story. What we've got is a 76-year-old woman in a north Vancouver park that wandered away from her facility. What happened here is that somehow she had left the facility without her electronic tracking bracelet. She went missing on a Friday, and the family, friends, firefighters, police, and volunteers all joined in the search, a huge operation, to try to find this woman. Now, despite all these efforts she passed from hypothermia. She was found two days later. The family of this senior say that the searchers did all their best, but there is always going to be the lingering question: could they have found her sooner? Could they have found her sooner?

Now, we do have a research expert in this article. His name is Robert Koester. I apologize to the gentleman if I didn't get his last name correct. In this article it goes on to say that "in a database that he keeps, he's found that 22 per cent of cases of missing persons with dementia end with the patient found dead." This is stunning. It's a rate that is far too high, and I understand that my colleague sees from this fact that when our seniors wander away from a facility or from family members, there is a distinct possibility that that senior's life is at incredible risk.

Now, they go on and say that there are things that we can do to help find these seniors, and that's where special training comes in. What happens is that by creating a silver alert, we will have professionals ready to go that specifically will know how to find people with dementia. This is why this is so important.

Now, they've got five points in the article, and it's important to list them out, not only for trying to describe how hard it is to find these seniors but also to bring recognition that there are ways of tracking these seniors. But you know what? I didn't know them until I read this article. I'm sure a professional out there understands that these ways of finding our seniors are imperatives to get into the volunteers' hands.

4:30

Now, the first one is:

They'll go until they get stuck.

That's number one.

He said persons with severe cases of dementia will head out an exit door, keep going until [there's] a barrier or a bend in the road [that] redirects them and, if not found soon enough, they will eventually head off into the bush or into a water feature, where they get stuck, and stay.

I would have never thought to walk straight out the exit door to find a senior that had wandered off, but this is where the training would come in.

Water can be a draw.

Finding the nearest water source can be a draw for seniors. Now, I like the quote that Mr. Koester – and I apologize again if I didn't get his name right – put here. He's got a very clear quote on this one.

I don't even know if they perceive water for what it is.

So what we've got here is that water is a natural – it's something that attracts the seniors. I understand that. Water is beautiful.

Number three:

Searchers may be ignored, or avoided.

Now, in this he quotes:

They tend not to respond to searchers' shouts . . . They're living so much in the [past], they can watch a search team walk right by them.

It's important to know that screaming their name probably isn't enough.

Number four:

Look to the past.

More moderate cases of dementia will see the patient trying to find their way around a neighbourhood, thinking they are [still] in a different location from their past, and seeking . . . familiar-looking features.

This is important. This is why you need to contact the immediate family as soon as you can, saying: what is familiar to the senior?

The last one, number five:

Each case is unique, but [they're] always the same.

This is interesting. In the quote he says:

If you've met one dementia subject, you've met one dementia subject.

And it goes on to say:

But while there is no general pattern of behaviour that catches all cases, the inability to form short-term memories does guide a wanderer's path.

So what we can do is to make sure our seniors are taken care of. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak at third reading of Bill 210. There are a couple of things I wanted to note. I guess the first is just the tone of the House this afternoon and how refreshing it is that we've been able to move through two very important pieces of legislation and show Albertans that it is, in fact, possible for those of us in this Assembly, on both sides, to work together when it is to the benefit of the people of Alberta. And I would really hope – perhaps not expect but hope – that this could be an example of how we conduct ourselves in other matters even when we don't agree as clearly as I think we do on these two very important pieces of legislation.

You know, as I've been listening to the debate – another situation, that occurred in my constituency, that you may remember, very sadly and very tragically, unfortunately, played out in the summer. One of my constituents, Kelly Flock, a 68-year-old, went missing in Marda Loop, and his family and friends and the community undertook a very significant poster campaign and a lot of searching for Mr. Flock. It sounds like the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was connected to the family as well. He touched many, many, many lives. I just wonder. We'll never know if things may have been different. One wonders: if this bill were in place, if there were, in fact, a silver alert at the time, perhaps the word would have gotten out sooner. I know that the family and the community rallied very quickly and did a tremendous amount of work to search. It's just, I think, a good example of what benefit this bill may have.

Let's hope that these sorts of situations, which, unfortunately, do play out all too frequently in our province – whatever we can do to

help avoid such a situation again in the future, obviously, I think we need to get behind enthusiastically, and this bill will certainly do that.

Another note is that this will be the first bill of its type passed in our country, as I understand it. There is no Canada-wide system. I understand that in B.C. there is an informal program that aims to get the word out through social media. But where we have the tools at our disposal in the traditional media, I think, especially when talking about seniors who may not – not every senior I know is on Twitter. Some I know are on Twitter, and they're active social media users. But, certainly, using all tools at our disposal, especially and including mainstream media, I think, is a very important thing, and this bill, I think, will help us achieve that.

We know our population is aging in this province and in this country. You know, some statistics which are sobering: in addition to the fact that we know that for every person with dementia, 10 to 12 people in their lives, on average, are impacted – again, sometimes that's more – 1 in 10 Albertans aged 65-plus is dealing with some form of dementia. That number rises to half – fully half of people aged 90-plus deal with some form of dementia. Not all will be subject to wandering, but certainly many will. As I said in my earlier remarks, I have some personal experience in helping a neighbour through a situation like that and seeing the community rally around him. It was really heartening. But it was not, certainly, easy on his family.

That's not the situation that every person would find themselves in. Unfortunately, in our community, as communities get larger and we perhaps aren't as connected with our neighbours as we once were – and not everyone will wander only in a defined area. Perhaps they'll expand that out or get on the bus or even get in their car and, unfortunately, may find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. Those around them may themselves not realize they're lost. Again, a silver alert system, I think, will really make a big, big difference in the lives of Albertans and bring some peace of mind to their families.

I understand that in our country over half a million Canadians are currently living with dementia. The scale of this challenge is quite immense, and unfortunately it's only going to get higher. Nearly a million Canadians will be afflicted with some form of dementia in the next 15 years, and more than 60 per cent of adults with Alzheimer's disease or dementia will wander, according to research out of the University of Alberta. So these are tremendous challenges that we face in our country, and I think we clearly have a duty and a responsibility to make sure that we have structures in place. This is one of them.

It is an opportunity. You know, one of the things I'm always proud of in our province is when we have an opportunity to lead the rest of the country. This is certainly one of those opportunities. I think the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon and his assistant Maureen should be commended for their work in bringing this forward. It really is wonderful to see the member's family here and members of the research community here as well to witness the passage of this bill. I would hope that this is something that the rest of the country would take up, perhaps a national system, or other provinces perhaps would see this as a beacon of hope, if you will. So it is really good to be part of something that is leading the country and solving a really important problem that we have in our communities.

4:40

I also hope this is an opportunity for us all to take this message back to our constituents. As we talk with our local media, as we talk with our constituents, as we do those newsletters that I hope we all do, it is an opportunity, I think, for us to talk about something that

we should all be proud of. We've made a big difference by passing Bill 209 earlier today. That is something we should be proud of, and as we move forward with Bill 210, I think this is also something we should be proud of. It is an opportunity to show our constituents, to show Albertans that, in fact, it's possible for us to work together, that when issues unite us, the issues that matter to Albertans, we can come together, united as an Assembly, and do very good work in passing legislation that will make a tremendous difference in the quality of life of Albertans.

Again, I hope that we take this as an opportunity to reflect on the tone of the House this afternoon, that, in fact, it is possible for us on both sides of the House, even though there are a great many things, I think, that we disagree on, even when we do disagree – it would be nice if the tone of the Assembly was a little more like this and a little less fractious. As far as I know, I don't believe there's been a single point of order this afternoon, and maybe the House leaders are welcoming that as well, that we don't need to worry about those sorts of things. So I do think it's possible, Madam Speaker, that we work more collegially and perhaps take this as an opportunity, even when we disagree, to adopt some of this tone.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm without question rising to support Bill 210 at third reading, something that I think each of us in this Assembly ought to be very, very proud of, and encourage all the members to support Bill 210.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 210, Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017. Each and every time that I have the opportunity to visit one of the many long-term care or supportive living facilities in my community, I absolutely take advantage of that. I just have to speak about why that means so much to me.

As a teenager my mother worked in a supportive living facility, and on the weekends she would allow me to come and work with her. She would always steer me towards a resident that she felt needed a little bit of extra care, someone that maybe was a little lonely, someone that needed someone to talk to. One particular woman I remember very well. After breakfast she would go into her room, and she'd go into her closet and take out her suitcase, and she'd very carefully fill it up with all of her belongings and put on her coat and drag this suitcase to the front door, where she would sit and wait for her son to come and pick her up. My mother used to have me go and sit with her and strike up a conversation, and the next thing you know, we're going to the dining room and sharing a cup of tea together and taking her suitcase back down the hallway and unpacking it. The resident is happy. She's had someone to talk to, and then I could go on with the next resident.

I think that's what gave me my love of seniors, being able to volunteer in that setting. I absolutely looked forward to each and every weekend when I could volunteer and sit and have a conversation with the seniors. One of my favourite questions was to ask them: tell me what it was like in the olden days. Of course, they would absolutely love to sit and bend my ear for as long as I would sit with them. I think that's what began my career in working with seniors as an adult. In my community I have worked in long-term care and supportive living. I think I've worked in just about every facility in Red Deer. I absolutely loved my work. I loved the seniors.

Some of the facilities had bracelets that the residents would wear. It was maybe for residents that the facilitators, the operators, the nursing staff, or the families were fearful would wander off out of

the building. They would put a bracelet on them if the resident would wear one. Sometimes we would put it on their walker. When they would get close to the door, to an exit, an alarm, just a quiet alarm, would go off, and the door would lock. It wasn't always foolproof because sometimes when a visitor or a staff member was coming into a building, the resident would be leaving at the same time, and all of a sudden you have a resident that is outside and walking around, maybe looking for home, maybe looking for a relative, maybe just going for a walk.

There were a handful of times over the years where I found myself in the car driving around looking for a resident. Sometimes it was late at night, it was dark, the resident maybe didn't have a sweater on, or it was a little bit cooler in the evening. Of course, you can imagine how frightened the family members – they would have been notified – and the staff and the police were that were all out looking for a resident. I do have to say that each and every time we did find the resident and brought them home safely. I'm very, very happy about that. But I'm sure that there are stories that maybe didn't go quite so well.

I just have to say that I'm so happy with this act. I'm very proud that we're doing this here in our wonderful province of Alberta. I know that it would have been nice to have this act in place many, many years ago. I'm happy that, hopefully, we will all be in favour of this act and that, going forward, this will be an extra piece of protection for our seniors, who made this country, made this province the best province, the best country in the world to live, work, and raise a family in.

I want to thank the member for introducing this bill. I fully support it and hope that everyone in the House today supports it as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? Calgary-Bow.

Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to support Bill 210, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017. I would like to thank the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who brought this bill forward.

I meet with a bunch of stakeholders in my riding that work with seniors. We try to meet on a monthly basis. I have a high population of seniors in Calgary-Bow, and the point of the meetings is so that we can work collaboratively to see what we can do to help improve the lives of seniors who live in the community. One of the things that was brought up was people who wander off from facilities and how we can combat that issue. I met with CARYA. It's a group in Calgary that works with seniors. She did bring up the fact that she had talked with the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who was going to bring forward this private member's bill. I actually was very excited to hear that because it would improve the lives of so many seniors not only in my constituency but all over Alberta.

I remember that in 2015, during the campaign, I was driving down to Bowness. There's a seniors' facility there. I remember seeing a senior wandering around by herself. I thought to myself: well, that looks a little strange. So I decided to pull over and ask her if she was okay. Actually, she was a little confused, and she didn't know where she was. It was a good thing that I pulled over to talk to her. If I wasn't there, you know, who knows what would've happened to that woman?

4:50

I'm glad that this bill is now in third reading, so hopefully it's going to pass. I feel that there is going to be unanimous consent in the Legislature, which is really a refreshing thing to see.

I just wanted to say that I support this bill, and I want to thank the member for bringing this forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs? No?

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now we know what a deer in the headlights looks like, when you're asked to speak and you have no intention of speaking.

I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 210, a private member's bill. I have a short amount of time, I'm told.

Yeah. Silver alert. I'm just going to relay a short little personal message. My mother fell down a set of cement stairs, oh, goodness, three years ago, I think. Now, of course, she had lived in the same community for 60 or 70 years, probably 70, so she spent a lot of time walking to work and back. Everybody in town knew who she was, and she fell down this set of stairs. She phoned me the morning after she'd fallen. She'd actually gotten herself home, and she called and said: "There's something wrong. I don't know what it is, but there's blood everywhere, and I can't remember what happened." I went in to see what was going on, and she was bleeding from her nose, her lip, and bleeding from her ear. I thought: well, this is bad. We did get her to the hospital to find out how bad things were. At the end of the day, she had suffered a concussion, of course, and her cognitive ability started to slowly wither within the next year.

We worked on trying to find a place for her once we knew that it was going to become more serious than she could handle. She was living by herself. She had for several years, and there was no issue. She was able to clean her home and made sure that, you know, she could clean herself, have a bath and cook for herself, et cetera, et cetera. When we were trying to find a place to put her, it had to be a place with a dementia wing because not just anyone will take someone who's starting to have dementia. We do know that it isn't dementia because it hasn't gotten any worse.

At any rate, she continued to walk downtown to get the mail, continued to walk downtown to go to the stores, but as time progressed, she began to change her route a little bit. I mean, the woman had grown up – not grown up, but from the day she got married, when she was about 18, she certainly knew every inch of the town. The fact that she was changing her route either to or from where she was headed started to indicate some things.

I started to get some phone calls from folks in town that said, "Your mother is walking, like, down elevator row," or something to that effect. That was not something that she had historically done. She was probably looking for my wife. She knew that she worked down there somewhere, but she couldn't find her. She'd turn around and come back. People would call and say: "Your mother is standing in my back alley here, and she looks like she might be lost. I've never seen her in this alley before."

At any rate, there wasn't a silver alert. We're talking about a small town here, but I can understand. We did have a person that checked on her three times a day. I was trying to farm the farm, and my brother lives in British Columbia. We were doing the best we could until we could place her.

I've got one minute left. There was no seriousness with the Amber Alert. Everybody knows everybody in a small town. That's why I was getting phone calls from people that I've known all my life and that certainly knew her. They were advising me that she was doing strange things that she hadn't been doing in her life previously.

If something like this had happened in a city – and it's hard to place people. It's certainly hard to place seniors who have a little bit of dementia or the onset of it if they can't actually move in with you or another sibling or something. What we did in a small town was that we hired somebody to come morning, noon, and night to make sure she took her medication, make sure she was ... [interjection] Are we done? I'm afraid I have to quit. Sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon to close debate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking everyone that provided information and the stakeholders that provided us with the experience and the knowledge to be able to craft this bill. I want to thank my legislative assistant. I'd like to just thank her for her insight and for all of the things that her mother helped us understand about this bill moving forward. In some ways I'd like to dedicate this to the memory of Anne McIntosh. All of these conversations solidified for us that this would be an important piece of legislation to bring forward in this House.

I believe that the Bowmont Seniors' Assistance Association said it pretty well, that

Bill 210 will be a vital link in the successful implementation of our community-developed version of Silver Alert programme. The ability of our front-line workers to release and access information about a missing, vulnerable senior in a timely manner will save lives.

I think that just about says it all, Madam Speaker. This is about saving lives. It is about dealing with the people that we care about when they reach their senior days.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just seeing the time, I would move to call it 5 o'clock and get to Motions Other than Government Motions. I need unanimous consent for that.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Concussion Awareness and Prevention

511. MLA McPherson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize a day each year to promote the awareness and prevention of concussions.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It really is an honour to bring forward Motion 511. A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that affects brain function, and it can happen when there's a hit to the head or the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. Everyone likely knows someone who has had a concussion, and any measures that can be taken to reduce the number of concussions that occur to Albertans and to improve the outcomes for those who do receive concussions are important in improving the quality of life of the people of our province.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

It's difficult to quantify the problem. While some statistics are available for sports-related injuries – on average 3 to 5 per cent of all sport and recreational injuries are head injuries – this number doesn't reflect the other ways concussions can occur, like workplace injuries or accidents in the home or head injuries from motor vehicle accidents. What we do know is that even a mild concussion can be very serious, and repeated concussions have been shown to result in chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a neurodegenerative disease associated with repeated brain injury.

We regularly see stories in the news of former professional athletes who've suffered the effects of CTE, grappling with depression, diminished cognitive capacity, and personality changes. CTE is only diagnosed on autopsy of the person suffering from it. The disease is often associated with hockey and football players, and both the NHL and NFL have developed protocols to begin to address the issue. Ty Pozzobon, the 2016 Professional Bull Riders Canada champion, took his own life in January of this year after suffering the effects of 13 concussions in the pursuit of his dream.

5:00

Education and awareness are vital to preventing devastating outcomes like this. Today in Alberta there is a gap in the information available to diagnose and treat concussion and in the instructions concussion patients receive, and there's a lack of awareness of concussion treatment protocols among people who are most likely to be on-site when someone gets a concussion.

Concussions aren't necessarily life threatening, but they are serious. Even a mild concussion can mean months of recovery and rehabilitation, and the symptoms of concussion are not easy to deal with: convulsions or seizures, inability to wake up, unremitting headache, weakness, numbness, decreased co-ordination, vomiting, nausea, confusion, slurred speech, loss of consciousness. Some of these symptoms can appear right away while others can show up days or months or even years after the traumatic event. Symptoms of concussion can be different in small children than they are in other people.

Rowan's law was passed in the Ontario Legislature in 2016. This private member's bill, introduced by MPP Lisa MacLeod, came about as the result of an inquest into the death of a 17-year-old young woman there, Rowan Stringer, who was a loving, nurturing person who was also an avid rugby player. Rowan died on Mother's Day, 2013, after suffering two concussions that week.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Recently backers of Rowan's law, including Eric Lindros, who quit the NHL because of concussion injuries, Montreal Canadiens' physician Dr. David Mulder, and Nepean-Carleton MPP Lisa MacLeod, who introduced the legislation in Ontario, released an open letter to federal, provincial, and territorial health ministers, calling for their jurisdictions to follow Ontario's example of enacting legislation aimed at preventing and identifying youth concussions, particularly in sport.

Establishing a provincial concussion prevention and awareness day that is observed every year is an important step in closing the gap between the information that is available to prevent and diagnose and treat concussion and getting that information to the people who can help to prevent concussions from happening and to the people who are on the scene when they do occur, like minor sports coaches and parents and teachers in our elementary, junior and senior high schools.

We all know someone who's had a concussion; some of us have likely had our bells rung ourselves. Concussion is far too common, and the effects are often devastating. By passing this motion, we

help people facing concussion in the future and, hopefully, prevent some of them from occurring at all.

The Deputy Speaker: Other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak on Motion 511. I'd like to add my voice to that of the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill in urging the government to recognize a day each year to promote awareness and prevention of concussions.

Concussions often occur after blows to the head, when the brain is jostled and hits the inside of the skull. While sometimes there are external signs of injury such as scrapes, cuts, or bruises, other symptoms are silent and unnoticeable or can be confused with less severe situations such as headaches, fatigue, or sleep disturbances. As you know, concussions are no laughing matter. Concussions are brain injuries, and in some cases they result in complications, either within the first 24 to 48 hours or even weeks later. This clearly shows the severity of concussions as they can manifest themselves over many days and weeks after the initial concerns have dissipated.

Fortunately, we're in a time that is seeing increased attention paid to concussions. There is much more information, research, and data available these days that help to guide the discussion around prevention and treatment of concussions. For example, we've seen professional sport leagues institute concussion protocols. The National Hockey League, of which I'm confident we at least have a handful of fans here, updated their protocols just over a year ago. After a hit is taken, if the club's staff is concerned, they have the ability to remove a player from the game to ensure that he is all right. There are additional staff available as well, from on-ice officials to in-arena league spotters and also central league spotters. This is meant to ensure multiple checks to try and keep players as safe and healthy as possible.

In 2009 the NFL, the National Football League, first instituted their concussion protocol, and they've made continual adjustments since then to try and ensure best possible practices. Again, a club has a responsibility to immediately remove from a field any player who is identified as possibly having received a concussion. If there is such a suspicion, the player is brought to the locker room for a full assessment.

The Canadian Football League, the CFL, also has a concussion protocol, that includes an injury spotter monitoring every game and the ability of a player to request a second opinion. There are also restrictions on padded practices in place and a commitment to further research and education.

It's quite something to see these professional sport organizations take such a hard stance on concussions. It's probably helped in large part by the sheer number of athletes who have suffered from concussions, players such as Keith Primeau, Paul Kariya, Steve Moore, Eric Lindros, Pat LaFontaine, to name a handful of former NHL players. Or you may be aware of some seriously concussed NFL players such as Aaron Hernandez, Frank Gifford, and Kevin Turner.

It's important to remember, however, that professional athletes are not the only ones that suffer from concussions. Seniors and children are also at risk. The University of Calgary's Cumming School of Medicine has reported that over 1,000 children and adolescents visit the Alberta Children's hospital emergency department every year with concussions. I don't need to remind you that that is one hospital. CBC has recently reported that elderly people are suffering concussions due to falls. As a person ages and becomes less stable, they are at greater risk of falling and therefore at greater risk of brain injuries, including concussions.

More and more people are becoming aware of the severity of concussions and the importance of not only early diagnosis but education and prevention. I spoke just a few minutes ago about the spotters in place within professional sport leagues whose sole job is to identify potential concussions. You and I don't have the advantage of having someone with acute knowledge of concussions watching our every move to ensure that we take the appropriate steps after we may have experienced a concussion-causing event. Public awareness in Alberta has been largely spearheaded by professional groups such as the Sports Medicine Council of Alberta and the Brain Care Centre. They've been doing much good work on this front. While the government site supports the brain injury initiative, it does not have the comprehensive awareness program in place that's specifically centred around concussions.

I must note that people do tend to think that concussions are solely due to major sports injuries and whatnot, but I'd like to emphasize to people that in this winter weather, though, with the icy roads and icy sidewalks, some of the major head injuries can occur just by slippage and falling the height of your person. That five-foot drop is enough to severely damage your head, and people have died as a result of that, from internal bleeding and whatnot.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I think that it's important that our government strongly consider taking further steps to promote awareness and education about concussions. I therefore strongly encourage all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support this motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's really a pleasure today to rise in support of Motion 511. About two years ago I got woken up in the middle of the night by my son, who was living in Egypt at the time, because he had been hit once again with a basketball. He was a teacher at the time. While we had thought that the damage caused by previous concussions had gone away and that he was going to be okay, the time that he was hit by a basketball just brought all the symptoms back again. There followed for me as a parent and for him 10 months of really, really difficult time. I thought that I might have to go to Egypt to take him back home because the symptoms were so extreme. He had received one too many concussions. The symptoms did not go away. He barely could teach his last term at school, and when he came back to Canada, he couldn't function. He basically needed to spend time in a darkened room, he wasn't able very often to be fully coherent, and he had excruciating headaches. It was only with six months of rest and some treatment in a specialized institute in Victoria that he found some balance in his life.

I know what happens to people who have concussions, and I know the danger that happens when somebody has had a number of concussions. In his case, it was because he was involved in high-risk sports. He was involved in rugby, where he never, never, never decided to play it safe but always was right there in the tackle, and he was a goalie in hockey. His concussions were because he was involved in those sports.

5:10

I am thankful that the motion calls for the annual recognition of concussion awareness and provides an opportunity for the public to become more aware of concussions and the fact that concussions do not result in symptoms right in the time after they happen but also can last a very, very long time in the person's life. I know that for my son, even though he seems okay now, the fact that he had so many concussions is going to have an impact on his life throughout

his career. I'm thankful that now he takes a lot more precautions when he's coaching sports and basketball. I am also hoping that he plays hockey a lot safer than he used to.

I like the idea of proposing a recognition day because that recognition day would highlight all of the efforts that are going on in the province at this time around concussions. I understand that there are efforts under way at the moment to develop a pan-Canadian approach for concussions, and this work is being led by a federal-provincial-territorial working group. Alberta is represented by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism under the Member for Calgary-Cross.

I also know that there are injury prevention programs at Alberta Health Services and that the Injury Prevention Centre is working to reduce the incidence of injuries, including concussions. I'm also very well aware that in a lot of the sports teams, especially hockey, rugby, and those sports that are more likely to result in concussions, there's a lot of prevention that has been happening and the coaches, the players, the parents are all aware of the danger of concussions. As I've seen very often, because we're taking it seriously, if a child does fall on the ice, for example, there is a system to ensure that the child is followed up with by a doctor. Very often they end up in an emergency just to make sure that it is not a concussion or that if it is a concussion, the parents are fully aware of what to do, which includes watching the kid for the next 24 hours and making sure that they're not left alone when they're sleeping.

I would like to suggest to the member, if the member is open to that, that the recognition day could be declared in June because this is also Brain Injury Awareness Month. This would strengthen the linkage between concussion and the work already going on in terms of brain injury awareness, so there could be a synergy of activities happening at the same time.

I also appreciate the fact that concussions are not just as a result of playing sports, as in the case of my son, but, also, that it happens to a lot of the people involved in our heavy industries and seniors. My mother was hit by a car. She fell backward, and she had a concussion. In her case the concussion resulted in the loss of the senses of smell and taste. While she did recover, her senses of smell and taste never did. I appreciate the discussion this afternoon, that we are not just concentrating on concussions that are caused by active participation in sports but that we recognize seniors who fall on the ice, as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned, and that we're also recognizing that a lot of our labour force may be prone to getting concussions and that, just like young people, they may have symptoms due to concussion for the rest of their lives.

Passing this motion that was proposed would make Alberta a leader in concussion awareness. For that as a mother and as a daughter I am very, very grateful, that our province would really take concussions seriously and that we would understand that concussion and the resulting brain injury are something that lasts for a person's lifetime, so it's a very important thing to be aware of. No other provinces so far have declared a day to recognize concussions, so if this motion passes, we will make Alberta the first province to do so. I really do believe that this motion is an important step in reducing the occurrence of concussions. I would like to suggest that, as is already happening, all parents make sure that for the activities that their kids are involved in, there is very strong concussion prevention awareness, either through the staff or coaches having received training or through the young people themselves understanding the consequences of getting a concussion and how you prevent getting a concussion when you're active in sports.

I just wanted to end by suggesting to my colleagues in this House that we need to support this motion and that we need to support all

efforts to prevent concussion. We also need to support the recognition that concussions last for a person's lifetime and that sometimes a person's behaviour may be the result of a concussion.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a real honour to rise to speak in favour of this motion brought forward by my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. It's been interesting listening to the debate, and I'm pleased to hear that it sounds like we're all in agreement in this Chamber that this is a very important motion and that the issue of concussions should be taken very seriously.

We live in a time of increased awareness of concussions. It is interesting to note that professional sports leagues like the NHL and the NFL and, of course, the CFL as well as Major League Baseball have taken steps. I think any credible sports organization, professional or amateur, is now realizing the potentially devastating and negative consequences of concussion. But even though the awareness has increased, I think that it's very important that we move forward with supporting a specific day to recognize. I think that although there has been a lot of great work done, even more work is needed.

I note that my daughter's figure skating club this year has a poster on the wall and specific leaflets about concussion. They've adopted a specific concussion protocol, and it gives me great comfort as a parent to know that they've taken this issue seriously. But even more awareness is needed, and more awareness will help. As many members have noted already – but I think it's worth repeating – it is not just an issue that affects pro athletes. It's not even an issue that affects just athletes. There are any number of reasons why people may find a concussion befalling them.

I think of a constituent of mine, in fact, someone who worked tirelessly on my campaign. He missed the bottom step in his house and fell down, hit his head, and for the last two years has just not been right. He hasn't been able to work. It's been a really terrible, terrible journey for them. Recognizing that concussion has a tremendous impact on our community, the impact on his quality of life has been dramatic and, of course, the impact on our economy. He's been unable to work for that two-year period of time. It is not just athletes, and so much more work is needed in terms of research. It's heartening to know that a lot of research is under way, but even more needs to be done. Of course, the best form of cure for a concussion is prevention in the first place, so more research and work going on into helmets in professional sport and an overall culture of safety in the workplace as well are going to help.

5:20

I'm pleased to hear the Member for Sherwood Park rise to support this motion. I would encourage all members of the government side, all members of the opposition side to support this motion. I was also pleased to hear the Member for Sherwood Park propose a potential date, sometime in June. While a private member's motion, of course, can't compel the government to actually take action, merely urge the government to do so, I would hope the government does take the advice of this Assembly seriously and if, in fact, we do pass this motion today, finds a date that we can promote awareness and prevention of concussions. I think that finding a date in June, Brain Injury Awareness Month, would be very appropriate. Given that it is now December, I would hope that perhaps the government would find a date to mark this important promotion of awareness and prevention of concussions as soon as June of next year.

I would encourage all my hon. colleagues to vote in favour of this motion, and I thank once again my colleague for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill for bringing forward this motion. Concussion prevention and treatment is an issue of concern for many Albertans, especially given the potential for lasting physical, emotional, and cognitive effects. This is something that we've heard about a fair deal in my riding as well. We have a constituent who has visited us a few times. His son had a brain injury a couple of years ago, and it has had a really tremendous effect on the son as well as on his parents and on their family and their quality of life. It's completely changed this young man's personality as well as his future, the fact that he suffered this concussion.

As members may be aware, young people are at particular risk for concussion-related injuries, and youth aged 10 to 19, both boys and girls, have the highest rates of emergency department visits due to concussion. Approximately 10 to 15 per cent of individuals with concussions require access to specialist rehabilitation services, mental health care, and physician specialists. We know that many of these injuries can be prevented in simple ways, by learning to protect yourself and others and by taking precautions to create safer environments. People living with brain injury are more vulnerable to mental health disorders, including anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and depression.

This summer I had the opportunity to tour some of the incredible facilities devoted to brain injury and rehabilitation across Alberta. I also had the chance to meet with people living with brain injuries, families, and volunteer supporters, who are doing so very much to support people in their communities.

One that I would particularly like to highlight is the Central Alberta Brain Injury Society, located in Red Deer, where I had the opportunity to sit not just with members but also the volunteers and some of the individuals who have suffered from a brain injury and to speak with them at length about the experiences that they and some of the membership have had. I had the opportunity to meet with patients, family, and caregivers and hear about some of the programs offered such as family and peer support groups as well as caregiver supports.

I also had the opportunity to meet with the Southern Alberta Brain Injury Society in Calgary and tour the brain injury program at Foothills hospital. Patients of the brain injury program have access to a team of mental health professionals, who work to address their mental health concerns and provide support and guidance around available resources within the community. I also had the opportunity to meet with the Banff sports medicine foundation along with the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Other health supports that are offered in our province include the Injury Prevention Centre, which provides safety guidelines for activities in school and for fall prevention amongst seniors as well as the complex concussion clinic at the Glen Sather Sports Medicine Clinic, which offers long-term supports for patients with prolonged concussion symptoms from a multidisciplinary health care team.

I'm extremely proud of the work that my ministry is doing along with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Community and Social Services to advance research and care for Albertans with brain injuries, including concussions. The Alberta brain injury initiative provides province-wide access to supports for adults with acquired brain injury to live, work, and participate in

their communities. It consists of a network of 14 agencies across Alberta to assist survivors and caregivers in accessing supports from various programs and community resources.

There's also Campus Alberta Neuroscience, which is a network that brings together Alberta's neuroscience research community with clinicians, patient groups, funders, and policy-makers to facilitate strategic collaborations and alignment in education, research, and translation of health solutions. I was very pleased to join this group at the kickoff of their annual conference this fall.

It is clear that this is an issue that our government takes seriously and one that Albertans will continue to emphasize with me. The more work we can do to bring awareness to the issue of concussion safety, the better. For these reasons, I am pleased to support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to take two or three minutes and thank my colleagues that have spoken so far. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill for bringing this motion forward: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize a day each year to promote the awareness and prevention of concussions." I one hundred per cent, wholeheartedly agree with everything I've heard said about protecting our youth, protecting our athletes, protecting seniors and people that had a fall, and I want to add one more element that I'm aware of.

I'm grateful in this position to always have the opportunity to meet people and learn. About 25 miles from Medicine Hat we have the Suffield military base, and at the Suffield military base we have the defence research establishment Suffield. About five years ago I had the opportunity to be given a tour and a chance to see a lot of the research that they were working on. Something that I had absolutely never thought of, something that I was absolutely, completely unaware of is that one of the big things that our soldiers face when they're fighting is concussions from the shock waves, concussions from bombs and stuff, artillery that doesn't necessarily hit them but land nearby and, of course, has waves and shocks and serious, serious ramifications for our men and women in uniform.

My goodness, we owe so much to them. We can't thank them enough for what they do for us to protect our ability to live free lives and to stand in here and have the opportunity to talk about this. [some applause] Thank you.

So, hey, in some small way, if a day like this can help a military person or help somebody understand what a military person may be going through, I would say that it would be very, very rewarding and a very, very good step. Because of that and all the other reasons mentioned, I will be supporting this, and I thank my colleague for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to speak briefly on this just because, again, it's another motion today that I think is touching us all personally in many, many ways. I think all of us probably know members of our community and constituents that have suffered concussions, some of them silently and some of them having been more aware. I think this is an opportunity to increase that awareness so that when people have concussions or potential concussions, there's a greater awareness of those around them. Sometimes they're in a bit of a daze and not able to think clearly because of that injury.

I have a dear friend whose mother had a fall on a skating rink about 20 years ago, and she still suffers to this day. She's in her late 70s and still has many challenges that she faces both mentally and physically in terms of her ongoing rehabilitation, now even 20 years later, in terms of her ability to speak and reason and certain things like that. That's been a real impact on her life. Her husband, who was very helpful, passed away a number of years ago. Now she's living independently.

Another friend of mine's son was riding in a quad, and it came to an abrupt halt. He was thrown out of the vehicle, actually landed on his feet, fell back, and hit his head. He suffered a concussion and, in fact, maybe a little bit beyond that, a brain injury that took him a couple of years to recover from.

Just last week I had a young individual, a young constituent of mine, Kinga, who was introduced here in the House as well, who suffered a sports injury. She's now 18 years old and was diagnosed with a sports injury that she didn't even really know that she had specifically when she was 15, wasn't properly diagnosed or treated. She struggled, as she shared with me, with this invisible illness.

Few people understand the effects of concussions and don't take them seriously. Of course, the symptoms are imperceptible other than that somebody is having challenges sometimes with their schooling or with their lives or with work or other things like that. Sometimes those symptoms can be chalked up to other reasons, and in fact their lives can be very seriously affected in more ways from that.

5:30

She shared with me that there are 10,000 new concussions in Alberta alone each year, the leading cause of death and disability for those under the age of 44, so a huge issue for youth. She also said that some of the most vulnerable are girls between the ages of 14 and 17, for whatever reason. She indicated that there's a prolonged recovery period that she's been suffering through as well. Of course, there are sports injuries, vehicle accidents. Sometimes, again, what may not appear to be a serious accident could result in a concussion.

You know, in fact, even one of our caucus staff, who is on medical leave, had an injury also. Again, a very, very odd situation. She banged her head getting into a vehicle, a hard hit, and has suffered now for a number of months with light sensitivity and inability to concentrate. Of course, for those of us that work on computer screens, all too often that's not an easy thing to recover from. We certainly have a great deal of compassion for those situations where someone wants to be fully productive and work and get on with their lives, but through those injuries and the prolonged recovery it can be a problem.

Madam Speaker, this is another great initiative today. I echo the sentiments of the Member for Calgary-Elbow that we've addressed some really positive and, I think, some uplifting issues here today. I'm quite happy to support this motion so that we can raise awareness for all individuals. It obviously happens from a very young age right through to seniors, and this can be very debilitating. If we can raise awareness and, as importantly, raise identification of when those injuries occur and how we can address those as quickly as possible, I think that's a very positive thing.

I will be supporting this motion, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, the hon. mover of the motion, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to take a few minutes to thank some people this afternoon. I'd like to start by thanking everyone who took the opportunity to speak in favour of the motion this afternoon: the members for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Sherwood Park, and everyone else that . . .

Mr. Clark: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms McPherson: Yes, the Associate Minister of Health.

There was Cypress-Medicine Hat and Calgary-Fish Creek. I really appreciate it. I can tell that concussion really resonates with a lot of people. It's affected a number of people.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank some of the people that I consulted with in coming up with the motion. The first one is Dr. Mylène Hopf from Calgary. It was a conversation with her talking about concussions, patients that she saw in her own practice, and a lack of consistent information about concussion, both prevention and treatment. What she said to me was that a number of her patients didn't understand the instructions that were given to them, which makes sense because one of the symptoms of concussion can be confusion. So it makes a lot of sense that she would end up seeing people who were struggling with those symptoms.

She also related to me that she'd love to see some sort of way to disseminate information across the province, well, actually, with a few different groups, medical personnel and front-line medical workers, to have consistent information to share with patients, to have consistent education for people who are going to be dealing with situations where concussions might occur – minor sports is one area; teachers, coaches, parents are going to be attending those kinds of events – to have consistent information in the form of a brochure or an education program that would help people in those circumstances know what to do and also consistent information for patients so that when they have spoken to medical personnel, they're able to refer back to the information that they've received because it's very difficult for them to retain the information.

I'd like to acknowledge the hard work of the MPP for Nepean-Carleton in Ontario for her private member's bill Rowan's law. That established the Rowan's Law Advisory Committee to review jury recommendations made as a result of a coroner's inquest into the death of 17-year-old Rowan Stringer. The act required the committee to provide advice to the government with respect to head injury prevention and treatment. The report was tabled earlier this fall, and it contains 21 recommendations to address concussions.

Also, the Alberta Concussion Alliance and the Sport Medicine Council of Alberta have come together to provide direction about the prevention of and safe recovery from sport- and recreation-related concussions.

I also want to thank the numerous individuals I spoke to about their concussion experiences, how it affected their lives and continues to affect their lives, how long it took and is taking them to recover, and especially to Barb Currie from the Alberta Party caucus for generously sharing her family's experiences with concussion.

What this motion can do is create more awareness, prompt more education, hopefully spur more research about concussions, and ideally prevent some concussions and the associated suffering from occurring. I think it's an important motion, and I encourage everyone to support it.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 511 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think we will move on to private member's Motion 512 next week if we're here, so I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn till 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:37 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 11, 2017

Day 64

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk
Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
House Services
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services
Nancy Robert, Research Officer
Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

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Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Sandra Jansen	Minister of Infrastructure
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 11, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Statutes Repeal

36. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that, pursuant to section 3 of the Statutes Repeal Act, SA 2013, cS-19.3, the Legislative Assembly resolves that the following statutes, appearing on the list of statutes to be repealed which was tabled in the Assembly by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General on April 3, 2017 (Sessional Paper 126/2017), not be repealed:

1. Black Creek Heritage Rangeland Trails Act (2004 cB-2.5);
2. Forest Reserves Amendment Act, 2004 (2004 c9) s8;
3. Health Professions Act (RSA 2000 cH-7) ss155(1)(c), 156(n), (u), (aa), scheds. 1, 13;
4. Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008 (2008 c34) ss12, 13, 15;
5. Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Amendment Act (RSA 2000 c34 (Supp)) s8 (adds s8.1(3)).

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I'm sure all members fully understand this and will support this very clear and simple motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to Government Motion 36?

Seeing and hearing none, the Government House Leader does not want to close debate?

Mr. Mason: Do you want me to close, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: That would be wonderful.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that that's necessary. I think the motion is self-explanatory.

The Speaker: I wanted to hear it all again.

[Government Motion 36 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

Mr. Nixon moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not provided Albertans enough time to be consulted on the specific changes being

proposed and, further, has not provided assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impact on the economic well-being of Albertans.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment December 6: Mr. Coolahan speaking]

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill 30? The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak in the House with regard to the reasoned amendment on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. There are a multitude of reasons why this bill should be moved to a reasoned amendment, a lot of strong reasons why it shouldn't be read now, quite frankly. Once again, I think one of the primary reasons is because we have the NDP here pushing through a piece of legislation on a very tight timeline, a very large piece of legislation that actually needs significant opportunity to be examined, to be reviewed, to be understood, to be introduced to the public so that they can understand it. But none of that is going to happen. It just seems that from day one of this session there has been a process, an attempt to make sweeping legislation changes toward the end of the session with little or no public scrutiny. I think Albertans deserve more, really should have more.

For instance, let's just look at some details here. The current legislative logjam here is a result either of the inability or else deliberate manipulating by the current government to push everything to the end. Since the fall session began on October 31, this government adjourned debate early 11 times in the first 10 days. So for the first 10 days the government itself adjourned debate early, stretched things out, took their time, filibustered their own bills, and then at the very end here introduced five bills, totalling more than 565 pages, in the last seven days. That is a logjam, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP had little or no legislation at the beginning of the session, and now we're trying to ram significant bills through, as I said, 565 pages' worth, in less than seven days or about seven days. These are hundreds and hundreds of pages of new laws just in a few days that make it extremely difficult for Albertans to understand what's going on, to have opportunity to hear about it, for the media to focus on it. For that reason alone, I quite frankly think that this bill needs to be set aside for now and opportunity taken to look at it.

It really should have been, as the previous motion, sent to a standing committee, but we're past that stage now. It was defeated by this government because, again, I believe they just want to push it through. They're more interested in their ideology than anything else and particularly not interested in hearing from Albertans. A study by all parties on some sort of standing committee and from various stakeholders from around the province could have had a say except that that was defeated. Unfortunately, the reality is that that does take time, and it seems to me that that is not what this government is willing to take in order to get good legislation in Alberta. To get a bill of this size right, with so many pages, it needs to be mulled over. It needs stakeholders to consult on it. But once again we see very little evidence of consultation, no economic study to prove the bill's value or costs or any of that.

Just like the consultations a while back that took place in the middle of the afternoon, when all the people in the coal communities were at work – they do them in the middle of the afternoon so nobody can come. It doesn't work out to be consultations. Remember that little piece not long ago? We heard about it from the coal community. The call for a consultation when

everybody is at work: this is the type of consultation this government too often likes. Bringing in diverse groups, though, with diverse ideas, bringing in some real facts to an all-party committee is definitely not their style.

The reality is that mines, power plants, and many other industrial workplaces actually have an incredible culture of working safety. Hard hats, safety vests, steel-toed boots, permission to refuse work: so many of these things are already in place. I actually wonder how many of them were consulted on this bill and what they would actually have to say about Bill 30 although I doubt that they had the opportunity to even know it's coming. I doubt that that's the crowd that this government really wanted to hear from.

We found out on December 6 that there were going to be close to 200 layoffs beginning as early as April 1, when TransAlta mothballs Sundance 3, 4, and 5, taking 1,100 megawatts of electricity offline. I want to know how pleased Albertans are with the layoffs that have been perpetuated by the NDP in addition to the changes to OH and S and the WCB brought forward in this bill. It's supposed to be a bill to protect workers, Mr. Speaker, but the act won't protect workers if they have no work because they won't be at work. This all ties together. There needs to be the kind of policies and regulations that actually encourage workers to be able to have work, give them good jobs, and keep them safe. That's the objective, but clearly that's not going to be the unintended consequence. I don't think that's the type of change that Albertans voted for.

Sadly, though, this government is not intent on listening. If it's not on their agenda, they'll not listen, and they've proven time and time again that they aren't interested in listening. It's really quite a shame that they voted down the committee amendment because I'm not sure that the Workers' Compensation Board itself was even consulted on this bill.

There are some good pieces of thought in this legislation, but there are some big kinks in it that need to be worked out, ones that could cost the province dearly if not discussed. Unfortunately, all of the omnibus bills this government has pushed forward will cost the leaders of future generations time to redo and fix.

There are many people from our province, from different paths in this province, who work in the interest of workers and the interest of employers and those who work in the interest of the public. They could have been consulted. We're reminded that the Chief Electoral Officer was not consulted. He said so in writing. I seriously doubt that the WCB was consulted either on this particular bill. The very people who have to administer it probably didn't have any opportunity to put input into it, to say anything about it because that is the pattern and the established way that this government works. I also know that the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association was not consulted. They put it in writing as well. So I have some serious concerns about the level of consultation and public engagement not conducted by the government on these bills.

7:40

In fact, a letter was sent just recently to the Minister of Labour from the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association. That letter expresses strong concerns with Bill 30 and straight out requests that third reading of the bill be delayed until there's time for consultation. How many stakeholders from various companies and government agencies would actually come forward, if they had time to hear about the bill, and express concerns regarding the many problematic areas? We could have time to fix this thing right if it was done right. Therefore, due to the many complexities it should not proceed.

The amendment that my colleague has brought forward calls for the bill to not be read a second time because the government has

failed once again to provide any assurance that a full economic impact analysis has been done, as is the pattern. We can almost be confident that there has not been one done, or if it was and the government's own staff warned about the cost but the NDP buried the report, only after we FOIP it will the warning come to public light, much after they've been able to push this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, the lack of consultation, the lack of openness and transparency, the urgency to push many bills forward in the last seven days of this whole session: for those reasons, this bill really should not be advanced past this stage. We really don't know how this bill is going to affect the well-being of Albertans, and quite truthfully that's pretty sad. Our own government has no idea how the changes in this legislation will affect Albertans' jobs in this province and how many people will lose their jobs. People's livelihoods are at stake, yet this government doesn't know what the outcome of implementing a bill of this magnitude and size will be. That truly is tragic.

The government needs to do some due diligence to get things right. They need to take a look in their own backyard and see the devastations they themselves have been inflicting. Maybe the reason the NDP voted down the referral amendment was because they didn't want us digging too much into the annual report of the WCB and into the reality that of 163,718 claims this last year, only 3,041 received a review request. Less than 2 per cent – it's actually 1.8 per cent – of all claims were even requested to have a review. A pretty small number. The begging question is: where did the urgency for these kinds of sweeping changes come from? Who was asking for it? Who was pushing for it? Who stepped forward publicly for these things? It wasn't there. It's driven by ideology.

Or maybe the year-end funded ratio for claims, 133.8 per cent: is that something that needs to be covered up by this government, so they're rushing through? At 133 per cent that's a pretty good average of, you might call it, overfunding.

Or the fact that the WCB has over \$10.5 billion in funded assets against only \$7.9 billion in liabilities. There's a lot of extra money sitting there. Last year, in 2016, the WCB took in almost a billion in revenue from employee-paid premiums, \$994 million. The fund also, though, at the same time earned \$750 million on investment income. Now, imagine if the investment income displaces the premiums and becomes even greater than that. There are just so many things about this bill that need to be looked into and considered.

I could also ask the question: is a cap of \$98,000 realistic – or maybe I should say sustainable – in terms of maintaining the ability of the WCB to stay solvent? The average wage in Alberta is just over \$60,000. Where did the need for almost \$100,000 to be funded by employers come from, and is it a sustainable number? I don't know. Many things need to be asked about this bill.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder the NDP would not take Bill 30 to committee, with no thought to provide the potential economic impact, no consultations. This is a huge load on the small businesses of Alberta primarily, and the small businesses are our primary job creators and innovators. This is a download of more costs on the municipalities and the nonprofits, that are the lifeblood of so many communities large and small, and they, too, are going to be bearing additional costs here that nobody has even stopped to think about or ask about. We know the government will demand that they comply with the bill, but they'll provide nothing to help them with the costs. Are they supposed to fund raise from donors to support the government's grand schemes? Is this how you tax people even more after the grand carbon taxation plan? All of these questions are just as important as the changes to OH and S and the WCB that the NDP have proposed.

With that, I give you even more reasons why this bill should not proceed, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of the reasoned amendment because it's the only reasonable thing to do. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise today to speak to Bill 30, I'm honoured to do so, and it was a pleasure to walk through the courtyard between the Federal building and this building.

The Speaker: My apologies. I didn't see the other member. There was a question under 29(2)(a). Is that correct?

Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, under 29(2)(a). I was enjoying the member's speech here in talking about how the government had brought this legislation in. He talked about how in 10 days at the beginning of the session the government ended the days earlier. That's 10 days, so I guess four days a week. That's actually two and a half weeks we spent in this six-week session ending early. Of course, now we're near the end of the session, and all these big bills have been dropped on our desks here to review.

Obviously, you know, we have members on the other side saying how important this is. After 15 years this needs to be done, of course, but they seem like they want to ram it through, and they want to ram it through at the end of the legislative session. They don't want to have any committee work done on it. They don't want to do any proper consultation. The businesses, the government that's going to be affected by this, the workers who are going to be affected by this: nobody has had a chance to look at this and have input on this because this has just been brought in at such a late time in the session here. Of course, now the government is bound and determined to get this pushed through.

He mentions these things, and I just wanted to know if he could maybe continue in that vein and just talk a little bit more about how this is going to affect business and how pushing this through without proper consultation – now, of course, they talk about what they did beforehand, before they built this legislation, but now that they've created this bill, there should be more consultation because now we see exactly what the government wants to do. The businesses and the departments of the government can now look at this and say: "Okay. Now we understand where the government is going with this. Now let's look at it and let's see what the cost is going to be to businesses, what the cost is going to be to the organizations and to government and how it's going to affect the individuals that are affected by this." I wonder if he could maybe just continue in that vein a little bit and just give us a little bit better understanding of what that means and how it's going to affect us as we go forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I do think it's a very concerning situation we have, just a rush job to literally logjam all of the big, important bills into the last few days of session. It truly pushes legislation through so quickly that there isn't time for the important stakeholders to even know that it's out there, let alone scrutinize it. There's a real lack of accountability and transparency that occurs because of it. The biggest risk, quite frankly, is going to be to Alberta's recovery. We have a government that wants to create innovation, that wants to diversify our economy, that wants to grow our economy in lots of ways. Yet when you continue to push these

kinds of bills through that do in effect create real costs on the backs of businesses, that really slow down their ability to do that, the reality is that that innovation, that new business creation, that opportunity gets squelched with the load that they have to carry.

7:50

In western society the reality is that it's because of the freedom of wealth and the freedom to explore beyond the bare means of survival that we're actually able to develop so many new and creative ideas and the arts and all kinds of things. If we take that away from our small businesses, we will lose that innovative reality, and we will lose our strongest employers, which are our small businesses.

The unintended consequence – I don't say that this is deliberate. The reality is that these will be unintended consequences that have not been thought about, that have not been measured. Instead of fixing the system, they may in fact make the climate for our businesses, our employers, and our innovators even more difficult and could end up breaking up our system even more than we have seen from the economic downturn.

The reality is that it isn't just the economic downturn; it's the policies that go with it that have hampered our businesses. While the goal of this bill should be to ensure that Albertans, all Albertans, who work hard every day, are safe and healthy. As I said, if they don't have a place to go to work, it doesn't do much good. We really do need to think through the consequences of what this bill could do with regard to costs and the burdens that it's going to place on business. Now, in a downturn is really not the time to be doing that, when many of them are having a very hard time surviving as it is.

I understand the need to change, to review, to update things, but let's do it in a meaningful and thoughtful way. Let's take the time rather than ramming a whole bunch of bills through in the last couple of days. Let's take the time to do it.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to come to this House this evening to speak on behalf of Albertans. I was reminded of that honour as I walked here through the courtyard from the Federal building. To see all the children and the families taking in the Christmas spirit: it's just a reminder of what we're really here for and who we're meant to serve. It is an honour, and it is an honour to rise and speak on behalf of my constituents about Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans.

I'd like to start by again thanking the government for extending the presumptive coverage to paramedics who suffer a cardiac event just coming off shift or within 24 hours of their shift.

I also understand that much of this bill is bringing about changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Workers' Compensation Board that are overdue. It's essentially, in many cases, evergreening those policies. While I support this initiative to update the legislation and I'll be voting for the passage of this bill given the chance, I do have some concerns . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would just remind you that you're speaking to the amendment. Are you aware of that?

Mr. Fraser: Yes.

The Speaker: Yeah. Great. Thank you. Keep going.

Mr. Fraser: This is why it is important when we're speaking to this amendment tonight – and I urge the government to listen to what

the opposition is saying to them. It's important to recognize that their policies do affect Albertans in many ways and certainly our small businesses. I hope that the government, if they were to pass this bill, don't just walk away, that they would maybe listen in committee to some of the suggestions from the opposition, the third party, and other members about this crucial bill. I hope that the government will continue a dialogue with business to make sure that they can bear the additional costs – there are additional costs – and ensure that we're not making it too burdensome for small businesses to succeed, especially in this fragile opportunity to recover. We know that business confidence is up.

Again, speaking to the reasoned amendment and this bill, I hope that the government would listen to opposition members as they continue to speak about it. Even if, in the end, the government passes this bill, I hope that they continue to consult with businesses to make sure that businesses can actually afford the extra costs of this bill. Small businesses are definitely the backbone of our economy, and we need to foster them. We need to encourage them and help them grow.

The other piece of this, as I understand the legislation, is going to help Albertans that are on workers' compensation and occupational health and safety, to protect them. Again, the government needs to show Albertans that they can continue to be nimble and adjust course if these bills do not plan on working or they don't pan out and work. It's important to consult and make sure that this passage is serving the very people, with additional supports, that I believe Bill 30 is intended to help, with the Workers' Compensation Board. Again, as part of the reasoned amendment I do think it's important to pass these rules and make sure that they're in place to serve Albertans, but I would also caution the government to listen to the reason of the reasoned amendment to allow things. I hope that things would go to committee on a more often basis in this House so that we can truly serve Albertans in a much better manner.

Mr. Speaker, it was my honour, again, to speak to the members of this Chamber. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any comments or questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-South East?

Speaking to the amendment, Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today in support of the reasoned amendment to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. That was put forth by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on the grounds that the government has not provided Albertans enough time for consultation on the specific changes being proposed and, further, has not provided assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impact on the economic well-being of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, due diligence is a business term that means proper research and analysis is complete before steps are taken to complete the transaction. In law it means exercising reasonable care to avoid harm to other persons. There is a reason law firms make lots of money performing due diligence: because it takes a significant amount of time while all factors are being taken into consideration to protect a client, the public, a business, or whomever they may be representing. Due diligence takes time, something this government has not spent enough of in reviewing this bill with the public now that it has been tabled in this House.

Since this bill was tabled, businesses, interest groups, private citizens, and other organizations have been flooding members on this side of the House, asking for help and telling us how badly this bill will impact them. I have to assume that the members opposite are also getting the same feedback, so why haven't they been

listening? The government knows it's not enough to simply do public consultations before the bill is written. Much of the push-back comes after it has been introduced.

I'm realistic that the government isn't going to rewrite this bill, but as we have discussed over the past week, members opposed to this bill have been scoffed at and ridiculed for a number of reasons, and many of us are simply highlighting the initial feedback we have received from our constituents. The government may not agree with what we have to say, but will they go as far as mocking Albertans for commenting on a bill they don't like? I can't imagine it. Nevertheless, it's true.

Given that the government has failed to consider the economic impact of this bill, it stands to reason that Bill 30 must not proceed to second reading. An economic impact study takes into consideration three factors: direct impacts, indirect impacts, and induced impacts. Combined, these impacts equate to the total economic impact that a potential action might have on the economy locally, provincially, and nationally. When considering Bill 30, what are the direct impacts? What will the immediate results be from this piece of legislation? How will this bill affect employees, employers, the injured, and WCB and OHS industry workers? What about the indirect impacts? How will the bill affect the families of workers or employers? How will the supply side of this manage procedural changes and buying patterns? Finally, the induced impacts. What will the bill do to local economies that are dependent on the small and medium-sized businesses that this bill will affect most? A full economic impact study accounts for questions like these and countless others, which is why you can imagine such a process takes a long time to complete.

Mr. Speaker, the government is going to tell us that they have already accounted for all this. They're going to tell us that they already did the due diligence, but in response I ask: how? How did you consult Albertans in all 87 constituencies over the past week? I certainly haven't heard anything about the government visiting the people in my own riding. It's impossible. The government has been here since tabling this bill, with the exception of the Premier, who has been on her social licence, let's copy the UCP and Jason Kenney because pipelines finally matter tour, to select cities across Canada.

Preconsultation is only a part of the process. Many Alberta businesses and private citizens are just now waking up, and they are just now seeing the damaging effects this bill is going to have. If the government isn't going to listen to these people now, then the only option there is that I see is to refuse this bill a second reading.

8:00

We tried to have this sent to committee, but of course the government voted that down. There was an opportunity that we could have taken it to committee, where we could have brought in experts, we could have brought in industry, we could have brought in government, we could have brought in individuals. We could have brought in all those different people to have the input, looking at this bill as it stands right now, which is substantially different than the consultations before the bill was drafted.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things this government could have done to make this a far more open and transparent process and to have the proper consultation that's needed. We don't know what the unintended consequences will be because this government hasn't looked into them yet. We've seen other bills pass in this Legislature, multiple bills passed in this Legislature, where we on this side of the House warned the government of the negative consequences of their actions, what this could do, and we've seen this government over and over pass those bills, ram them through. Then we've seen them come to the Legislature again with other bills

to correct the damage that they created in the first bill, and if that isn't enough, then they'd have to pass another bill to solve the problems created by the second bill that was supposed to fix the first bill. We've seen that in this Legislature.

This government, as much as they can stand here and say, "We've looked at it all. We've got it all under control. It's great. Just trust us," Mr. Speaker, it doesn't cut it. It doesn't cut it. It won't cut it for Albertans. So we need to have this chance to review these things properly.

Obviously, economic impact assessments: those are things that we can see what the cost will be to businesses, what the cost will be to government and how it will affect things that people just can't see at a quick glance. That's why industry wants to see this. We've seen the Chambers of Commerce. They wanted this to go to committee. Obviously, I would expect the government must have consulted with them, and after seeing this, the Chambers of Commerce still says: we want this to go to committee.

Mr. Speaker, I think there's a lot of work that could be done to this yet. I know the members opposite have talked about how long it's been since this was last reviewed, 15 years. That's a long time. I'm sure it needs to be reviewed. I'm sure there are things that can be corrected. But with this, the way it's been done, it doesn't give that opportunity to be done properly. There's just not the time that is required.

Now, in this bill we've seen the government members talk about refusing unsafe work and how important that is and how it's so great that it's covered in this legislation. But, Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to go on a website here the other day, and this is actually the Canadian Union of Public Employees website, CUPE. This is their website. This is an article from June 12, 2014, on the website. Now, June 12, 2014 – that's a year before this government was elected, so long before they were elected, a long time from this period of time right now – they're talking about how great this is, giving the workers the right to refuse unsafe work. I'm going to read this.

The right to refuse unsafe work is one of the three basic health and safety rights achieved by the labour movement, along with the right to know about the hazards in your workplace, and the right to participate in workplace health and safety decisions.

Here's this organization, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, lauding the work that they've done to give workers the right to refuse unsafe work. So this isn't something new.

In fact, they say here – look at this:

Order wallet-sized right to refuse cards for your local for free in our web store.

You could even get little cards to pack around that can remind you about the right to refuse unsafe work. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is from June 2014, a year before this government was elected.

Now, it does go on to break it down province by province. Province by province I'll start with Alberta, of course, and this is what it says about Alberta.

The law in Alberta states that you shall refuse all unsafe work if you believe there is an imminent danger (that is not normal for the occupation or activity) to yourself or others caused by a tool, appliance, equipment or work procedure at the worksite, according to Section 35 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

There it is. Again, this is from the Canadian Union of Public Employees website, 2014, how it spells it out.

It goes on to say:

Here's how you can refuse unsafe work:

- (1) Notify your employer at the worksite that you are refusing work because you don't think it is safe, and state your reason for refusal.
- (2) The supervisor must investigate and take action to eliminate the danger. There must be a written record

of your notification, the investigation, and action taken. A copy of the report must be provided to you.

That seems pretty clear: notify, supervisor investigates, paper trail. Looks like it's covered fairly well there.

- (3) If, in your opinion, a danger still exists, you can file a complaint with a government occupational health and safety officer.

So if you're still not satisfied, you still have opportunities and options.

- (4) The officer shall investigate the complaint, and document actions taken in a written report. A copy of the report must be provided to you.

Again, another report on the same situation.

- (5) If you are not satisfied with the officer's report . . .

So if you're not satisfied with the first report and not satisfied with the second report

. . . and recommendations, you must legally return to work, but may appeal the report within 30 days.

Still an opportunity to appeal.

And it says here:

You cannot be disciplined or dismissed for complying with the legislation, according to Section 36 of the Act.

There it is, Mr. Speaker, how it's spelled out as far as refusing unsafe work in Alberta, again, long before this government was elected.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Decore got up and talked about there having been no review in 15 years, and when I hear that, I think: it should be done right, then. If it hasn't been done in 15 years, there's no reason to ram it through in just a few days. Do it right. Do the proper consultation.

The Member for Calgary-Klein said that this has been a government priority; it's long overdue. Ramming through legislation at the end of the session: is that how this government treats its priorities? I would hope not. I would hope that if this is a priority, it should get all the due care and attention that it could possibly get.

I'm no expert on any of this stuff, but there are people that are experts. I don't believe there are any experts in this House. But there are experts out there. There are experts that would come and present to a committee. They would be happy to be consulted by this government, to give their input. [interjections] Unfortunately, it seems like the government, from the chatter here on the other side, think they're experts on this, Mr. Speaker, and that's a pretty sad state, when we think that we have all the expertise we need in this House for such wide-ranging legislation as this.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I talked earlier about this. You know, during the first part of the session the government shut down our days early. We didn't even have evening sittings. In the afternoon we were getting sent home early. Either they didn't have their work prepared for this Legislature, or they were delaying bringing in the most important and biggest legislation for the end of the session so that they could ram it through before Christmas. I don't think that's the way we should be doing business here.

This is no way to prove accountability to the Alberta people. This is no way to prove transparency to the people. We don't know what the costs will be with this because the government hasn't done that economic analysis. What are the costs to the WCB? What is the cost to small business? What is the cost to the government? They'll have to abide by this, too. Every time you have more legislation, you have more costs. I don't believe that this government, of course, has looked at anything about reducing regulation anywhere, regulation that doesn't make sense. It's outdated. I don't see any removal of anything that's outdated or anything. All I see is more regulation and more cost to the WCB. And without the proper analysis I don't think that we can say that we are doing our due diligence here.

8:10

Now, the Member for Calgary-Klein suggested at one time that it would be insulting to workers to send this to committee. Well, no. I think it would be insulting to workers to ram something through that hasn't been properly vetted and hasn't been properly dealt with and hasn't been properly consulted. That's what would be insulting. We're not delaying safety here. We want to make safety better. We have an opportunity to make things better here. I mentioned earlier about the Chambers of Commerce. That would have been one of the organizations to consult with.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My hon. colleague from Grande Prairie-Smoky was talking about consultations and due diligence and the number of issues that we are trying to address in this bill. I know there is a valid reason why we brought in this amendment, to have more meaningful consultations, so I would ask my hon. colleague to continue to share his thoughts on this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much. Yes. We know that this government has had problems in the past with unintended consequences. I talked about that earlier, too, where they would come up with a bill and we would warn this government about the consequences of that bill, the unintended consequences, what would happen if they passed this legislation. Of course, they would pass it anyway. Then, of course, they would come back in the next session with another bill to pass to solve the problems that they created with the first bill they passed.

Then, of course, there were situations where the government ended up in lawsuits over legislation that they passed, where they were suing Albertans because of legislation they passed. We told them: be careful what you're doing; you need to look at the whole picture here. The government seemed to think that contracts written in black and white were somehow – I don't know – some sort of underhanded deal or something. The contracts that they were dealing with were black and white. They were written. They passed legislation that caused these companies grief, and then of course the government ended up suing them. In fact, they were suing Albertans, using Alberta tax dollars to sue Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, that's why this government needs to do the proper consultation. It needs to look at these bills and needs to allow people to look at these bills after they're produced. It's one thing to go consult with them before and then create a document and then say: I hope you're happy with it. I guess that's what they're saying. What they need to do is go back to those same people and say: this is what we've come up with based on what we heard from a wide range of people. I'm sure that not everybody they consulted with agreed with every single thing in this bill, but now that they see what the government wants to do, I'm sure they would have an opinion about every single thing in this bill if they had the opportunity to look it through and have some sort of opportunity for input, but obviously there's no opportunity for input when this government sets this legislation down on the table near the end of the session and starts pushing it through with multiple big bills all at the same time.

Of course, they consider every single one of these a priority, but if they're priorities, why aren't we taking care of them properly? Why aren't we properly consulting? Why aren't we taking the time to do this right?

We've seen the situation where the Member for Edmonton-South West, I think, brought forward a bill, and I think the consultation number he was talking about was that around 30,000 people had responded. You know what happened to that bill, Mr. Speaker? That bill went to committee afterwards. After all that consultation it went to committee for more consultation in order to try to get it right. Now this government brings this bill here, which is substantially larger – I'd probably say a hundred times larger – and they've dropped it on the table here and said: hey, we're done consultation; we've got this under control; just pass it. Well, I don't buy it, and I don't think Albertans are buying it, and I don't think small businesses in Alberta are buying it. They don't have any time at this time of the year to look and see what the costs of this will be to them.

Some of this bill comes into play January 1. This legislation hasn't even passed yet, and within two weeks they're going to be implementing some of this bill. And this is through the Christmas season, when either some businesses are incredibly busy or some businesses want to shut down and finally have a break to spend time with their families. Instead, they'll be going through 150, 200 pages of a bill to try to decide how it's going to affect their business. Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's fair to Albertans. I don't think that's right for Albertans. I think there's an opportunity for this government to do the right thing and help to pass this amendment so that we can have the proper time to consult, so that Albertans can be consulted, and so that small business can decide how they feel about it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any members who wish to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a tremendous honour for me to be able to rise to speak to some elements, to an element of this bill, anyway, because I'm very proud of our government for bringing it forward on behalf of the people of Alberta, the working people of Alberta and, frankly, their families and pretty much everybody who lives in the communities with those people. This is a very, very long, long overdue step forward on behalf of workers in this province.

You know, let me begin with just a few of the points that have been made. There are people out there saying, "Well, no one in this building is an expert on the matter," and there's no question that that is definitely true. No one is an absolute expert. But many people on this side of the House do have some experience with this matter, Mr. Speaker.

I was privileged when I was at law school to help work with a professor who wrote the Canadian textbook on workers' compensation law. I was privileged here in Alberta to be appointed to the Appeals Commission and to serve on the Appeals Commission and to hear appeals of workers' compensation cases. I, of course, spent many years representing injured workers, and of course, when I was in B.C., I also had the opportunity to sit on a panel of three that rewrote the health and safety legislation in B.C. So I've got a bit of experience on it. Of course, I along with our caucus members all understood that this was an area that had been long overdue and forgotten and neglected in Alberta at the profound expense of working people in Alberta and in a way that was absolutely unacceptably different than the standards that existed in the rest of this country. That's why it makes me personally very proud to be here.

The members opposite right now are playing the game of suggesting that this is really about more consultation. Let me say very clearly – and I will certainly talk about that in a moment – that

this is not about the need for more consultation. This is about the members opposite not wanting to take these important steps forward to protect workers, to protect their families, and to keep them safe. That is the decision that is being made here right now by the members opposite as they engage in these ridiculous conversations about the need to delay.

But before we talk about why it is that that's not really an issue, let me just talk a little bit about some of the statistics and some of the people that I've come to know in my time who've been subjected to the laws here in Alberta. You know, there was a time, back in the '90s, when we had a certain health and safety regime, and under the old PC government they decided that they would change the rules, and they created this new thing called deeming. It meant that when a worker was injured and they were permanently injured as a result of an unsafe workplace, they weren't necessarily entitled to compensation for the duration of that injury even if it meant that a disc was permanently ruptured, or maybe they'd gotten a steel bar in their back and were told by their doctor that they would never lift more than five pounds ever again in their life. Even if that was the case, they couldn't anticipate having benefits for the rest of their working life.

I mean, I had so many cases that I worked on, but I remember in particular one lovely woman who was a nurse. She had trained as a nurse for two years in England. She'd gotten her nursing degree back at the time when you could become a bedside nurse with a two-year degree. She worked bedside in England for about 20 years, taking care of patients. She moved to Canada, and she continued that work at one of the hospitals here. She was getting close to retirement. She worked bedside, giving medications, moving patients, helping them to walk up and down the hall, all the things that nurses do. One day a patient fell, and she reached in to stop that patient from falling, and she put out her back. She had to go get surgery, and she was never to be the same. She was about 55 years old. She hadn't lived in Canada long enough to be eligible for CPP.

8:20

She was told that there was a job in Calgary as the director of community services nursing, where she would have 300 nurses reporting to her, and that she, because she was a nurse, could get that job. Therefore, she experienced no earnings loss, and they cut her off. That is what happened to her. That was the kind of ridiculous stuff that was happening under the previous piece of legislation.

We walked in and said: "You know what? You have a duty to accommodate. You have a human rights duty to accommodate." Not only did the employer say, "No, we don't," but the Workers' Compensation Board said: "No, we don't. What's the duty to accommodate? That's not our issue." It's a function of the human rights code, Mr. Speaker. It's the function of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But systematically – systematically – our Workers' Compensation Board thought it was a bit inconvenient to actually give workers the benefit of that right, so that woman was left. Now, thankfully, we were able to appeal and take it all the way to the Appeals Commission, and ultimately she got her benefits. But for every worker that had to go all that way to get those benefits, there were five others who simply gave up in the fight.

Let me tell you a little bit about economic consequences. You know what happens when that happens? That problem doesn't just disappear into the ether never ever to be something to be measured as an impact on our community, on our economy, if you want to talk about economic consequences. That problem remains in our community. It is a person who is suffering, who has had their rights taken away from them, and they are still our neighbour. They are still our co-worker. They are still our relatives. That's the thing.

Just as a little, interesting sidebar, we have AISH in this province, and we have reasonably generous – most people on AISH wouldn't say that, but relative to the rest of the country it pays more than most. I would say that at least a third of the claimants on AISH right now are people who have been unable to secure the benefits to which they are entitled under the Workers' Compensation Board. Mr. Speaker, what that means is that the taxpayers of Alberta are paying the cost for employers who are not putting in place the kind of safe work practices that would stop these injuries from happening in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. This is not just something that happens because people are – what was it? – "stupid is as stupid does." I'm still waiting for the apology from the UCP for that because you owe it. You deeply owe it.

Nonetheless, it is not because of that. It is because we had a system that was not fairly compensating injured workers. How do we know that? Well, if you look at it statistically, people will say: "Oh, well, we don't have as many injuries in Alberta per capita. There are not as many. They're not reporting them to the WCB, so clearly it's not a problem." But, of course, claims can be suppressed, as was identified in the report that preceded this piece of legislation. When claims are suppressed, the stats are invalid. The only claims that cannot be suppressed, the only stats that cannot be hidden are when people die. Interestingly, Alberta has the highest fatality rate in the country for the very reason that we have not taken health and safety seriously and we have not taken compensation seriously. It has been an injustice that has gone on for decades in this province, and the folks over there should be ashamed at trying to delay us finally moving forward on it.

We are nonetheless moving forward, Mr. Speaker, and we are doing so after a tremendous amount of work ensuring that Albertans know what we are doing. I believe it was in the fall of 2016 that a WCB panel issued a discussion paper and went to all Albertans and said: "Here are the issues that we are looking at right now. Please give us your input." And, of course, they did, by the hundreds, by the thousands. Merit Contractors bought billboards, starting in the middle of 2016, telling everybody: "Go. Make sure you get in there, because the government wants to change your WCB." I mean, they were out there campaigning up the yingyang, fund raising off it, no doubt. The reality is that that's what they were doing, and that was out there in the summer of 2016.

As a result of that, in the spring of 2017 a final report was completed and released. But that was not enough – no, no – because the commission went further. They released their report, and they put it out again. They said: "Okay, folks. Here's what we heard from the thousands and thousands of people that engaged. Here's the report that we've written. We're going to put it out to you again. What do you think?" From June 2017 to September 2017 off they went. They consulted again, and people had more time to look at the finished report. This act that you see now is the product of that process, a year and a half. For the love of God, do you want to send it to another committee? Come on, people.

You know, the fact of the matter is that there are recommendations after recommendations from decades ago begging the government of Alberta to step up and to fix this system. There were judicial inquiries from fatalities saying: step up and fix this system. They've been trying. All these folks did was ignore it; they did everything they possibly could. Now they want to put it off even further because they just don't want to see finally some fairness for workers on this important issue.

Do you know what else, Mr. Speaker? We are the only province in the country – the only province in the country – that doesn't have mandatory joint work-site health and safety committees. The reality is that anybody – any working guy, any working woman, any

working person out there – knows that the way to create safety in the workplace is to have the front-line worker sitting in a room with the employer, who has the ability to make the decisions about resources, has the ability to make the decisions about the tools, has the ability to make the decisions about the work process. Those people have to be in the room, and the workers, who understand how it makes them unsafe, have to be in the room, and they have to be on a level playing field. They have to work out the way to make the job safe. That's how you create safety in the workplace. That is how workers and employers have been working to create safe workplaces from Newfoundland to B.C. to the Yukon, everywhere except in the province of Alberta under the leadership of those guys over there.

What they want us to do is wait even longer – wait even longer – make it even harder, stand by while more families suffer the consequences of fatalities and injuries at the work site. I just don't know how you look your constituents in the eyes. I just don't know how they do. I mean, we're all MLAs. All of us know that the single biggest thing that you will hear about from your constituents are the injustices that they experience as the result of things going wrong at the Workers' Compensation Board. It's a nonpartisan issue, for heaven's sakes, and if you think people are just making it up when they come to your office, give your head a shake. It's real. It is absolutely real.

We have an opportunity, all of us, to come together thoughtfully, carefully, to move forward, to get this legislation passed. We do not need to dither any longer, Mr. Speaker. We had decades of dithering over there. We have now had more than a year and a half of thoughtful consultation, collaboration led by experts, with massive amounts of engagement from unions and employers and workers and experts across the board. There is absolutely no reason to delay this. There is every reason to move forward and to do so in the best interests of and for the best outcomes for Albertans because, as you may have heard, we're really interested in making life better for Albertans, and this will do it.

For those people – I'm sure not many but maybe one or two members opposite – who think that the strategy here is to engage in the Chicken Little routine and claim that this is somehow going to put everybody out of business, rest assured that the WCB has engaged in an analysis of this. They tell us that the cost increases will be minimal and in the long term perhaps even less because of the prevention that we're going to be seeing through health and safety. But, in any event, they will not go any higher than what they were in 2010, which, to be clear, was still about half the national average, Mr. Speaker.

Costs are not the issue here. Safety is the issue, fair compensation is the issue, justice is the issue, supporting those families of injured workers is the issue, supporting our communities is the issue, and it's time to get the job done.

Thank you.

8:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, it was very disappointing to hear the Premier speak just now. She, of course, had to start off by saying that this side of the House does not want to implement safety and protection. Very, very, very wrong. If she says that this side of the House is wanting to delay the implementation of safety and protection, then she is also saying that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce is against safety and protection of workers. You know what? That's very, very disappointing, to have the Premier stand up in this House and accuse the Alberta

Chambers of Commerce of not caring about their workers. That is absolutely shameful.

Now, in our constituency offices we hear lots of complaints about the WCB. We want to see the WCB fixed. Now, the Premier herself has said that the system is broken, but do you remember what happened two years ago, Mr. Speaker? This very government passed Bill 6, and you know what they did with Bill 6? They forced every farmer in Alberta into WCB ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Loewen: ... a system that she herself said was broken. That's what they think of farmers, to put them in the same situation as the rest of Albertans, in what she claimed or said was a broken system.

Now, she said that we should be ashamed of delay. Mr. Speaker, this Legislature started sitting on October 30. October 30. What are we at now? We're at December 11. We're sitting here considering this legislation on December 11. This government has been in power for two and a half years. So when they accuse somebody of dithering, who's dithering? Two and a half years of dithering; six, eight weeks of dithering. We had the opportunity to send this to committee, and we could have been dealing with this right now in committee already, but you know what happened? This government turned it down. They turned it down. They voted it down, the opportunity to go to committee and have more input and make this legislation better. There are some very important parts of this legislation – very important parts – but there are parts that could use some improvement.

I know that organizations like the Chambers of Commerce want to have more input. They want to have the opportunity to have more say in this. Do you think, Mr. Speaker, that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce wants to see their workers hurt? Do you think they want to see them suffer from a system that's broken? I don't believe so. I don't believe so. I know those people in the Chambers of Commerce. I do business with them. I meet with them. I sit down with them a lot. Their members are a community. They do not want to see their workers hurt. They don't want to see them mistreated by the WCB or anybody else.

Now we have an opportunity to fix this, Mr. Speaker – we really do – but let's fix it right. Let's not ram it through at the end of the legislative session. Let's not wait till the end. That's dithering. Dithering is sending us home early the first two and a half weeks of the session, and then in the last session we're here till 10 o'clock, midnight, whatever. Happy to do our work. We'll be here till 2 in the morning if we have to be. I don't care. I'll be here till 4 in the morning if I have to be, but let's get this right. Let's not sit here and throw comments like that back and forth. That's not right. That's not helping the workers of Alberta.

What's helping the workers of Alberta is if we'd look at this properly, have the proper input, the proper consultation. That's what will help the workers in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, we had an opportunity to see other bills brought forward by government members, with months and months of consultation, tens of thousands of people having input on it, and then going to committee. I would like to see this so-called consultation. What did I hear? Eight round-tables? Wow. Wow. And 1,300 in an online survey or something like that? I mean, come on.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone else who wishes to speak to the amendment? Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the amendment to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. On this side of the House we are all

for more protection and benefits for injured workers. On this side of the House we are all for employers' access to assistance during appeals. On this side of the House we want to protect the workers from reprisal for complying with the act. There are so many good things that we'd like to support.

Today we saw some spirit of co-operation in this House, Mr. Speaker. When the Deputy Speaker was in your chair, we debated the bill brought by my colleague from Drayton Valley, and that was passed in collaboration with the government benches. The same with the other one, brought forward by the MLA for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, my neighbouring riding. We were so happy. We thought that this government was on the path of listening and collaboration. Now here we go. The Premier comes and started lecturing. [interjections] Yeah, yeah. She's asking for an apology. You know who should be apologizing? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Panda: She should be apologizing for calling Albertans sewer rats or Chicken Little . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, I want to . . .

Mr. Panda: . . . or embarrassing cousins.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please.

Speaker's Ruling Language Creating Disorder

The Speaker: Need I remind everyone that, particularly at this late time in the evening, continuously we hear – I'm trying to remember the exact clause.

Some Hon. Members: Standing Order 23(j).

The Speaker: Standing Order 23(j). Continuously I hear that. I don't think that the kind of rephrasing of words like "sewer rats," which was already mentioned in this House in an earlier session, helps at all with respect to the debate. Again I want to urge you all, particularly the hon. member, to be careful about using those kinds of words because they do cause disruption in the House.

Please continue.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, you just heard Madam Premier calling, "Chicken Little," and there was no objection to that. When you talk about disorder, there are so many things that would cause disorder. We're not starting it, but we are responding to it. Just to be on the record.

Debate Continued

Mr. Panda: As I said before, Mr. Speaker, we are here to support the good clauses of the bill, but like my colleague explained before, our job is to do due diligence, not to rubber-stamp whatever the Premier and the cabinet bring to this House. That's not why we are here. There are so many reasons, explained by the previous speakers. When the Premier says that we are not interested in that, that's not entirely correct. We are actually interested in passing good legislation, but don't expect us to rubber-stamp. Like the previous speaker explained, we're not delaying it. They had the opportunity to bring this bill much earlier. We're willing to go as long as it takes to make this bill better, so don't blame us for your incompetence and inefficiency.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, I also have a legal background with these workers' issues. When I worked in oil and gas, I was first surprised to hear that in this country, in this province workers have a right to refuse the work if it is unsafe to do. That's much before this Premier or this government or any of us. That was the culture. That was the work culture in this country, which I'm very proud of. I was pleasantly surprised, when I worked at Suncor, when I learned about that on the sites I was working at. So to say that workers don't have that right, as if they are the first ones to, you know, tell them that they have the right to refuse, is totally not correct.

There are so many things to complain about on these ones, but our job is to work collaboratively with them if they're willing to listen to the stakeholders. Don't listen to us, but don't insult stakeholders like the chambers of Alberta – the Calgary Chamber and all those guys – when they're telling you that there are clauses in this bill that will devastate the economy. You know, the Premier said that we should be helping workers. We'll help them if they have work to do, but if you're killing jobs, if there is no place for these Albertans to go to work, how are you helping them?

When we bring in stakeholders, we're not just saying to bring only the companies the Premier mentioned. You know, even Mr. McGowan can bring his colleagues and identify the improvements to this bill. We are all open for it. That's why we're saying: have a proper consultation.

With that, I think, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've talked a lot here this evening about the speed at which this has been pushed through and that, you know, this government is talking about, in fact the Premier just talked about how any kind of delay is just, I guess – I don't know. I'm not sure what the problem with it is to get it right. Anyway, she doesn't seem to be too supportive of having any more consultation on this.

I just want to read from a letter dated today to the Minister of Labour from the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Premier just talked about how anybody who wants to delay this at all obviously doesn't care about safety and protection of the workers, but of course we just talked about how the Chambers of Commerce would like to have seen this go to committee. I'm very certain myself – and I hope the Premier would agree – that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce does not want to see their workers hurt. It doesn't want to see them suffer because of poor WCB claims.

Now, let's just read what the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association said just today. Mr. Speaker, this is an organization that obviously has a lot at stake in this, and they finally looked through this and have given it the time they could and have written a letter just today. That's how little time the organizations that would view this bill as importantly as this group – and they're just finally getting a letter to the Minister of Labour today because it's such a huge bill and there's so much concern for it and how it could impact them.

I'll just read one paragraph here.

We are concerned at the speed at which Bill 30, introduced on November 27th, 2017 is moving through the legislature and request time for a full costing analysis . . .

Now, a full costing analysis sounds like an economic impact analysis. I think we've mentioned that once or twice here today and

over the last couple of days, Mr. Speaker. They're asking for the same thing.

... to be done by the Department before the Bill proceeds to third reading.

They're asking for the department to do a full costing analysis to see how it's going to affect them and the department.

We want to work with the Government of Alberta...

That doesn't sound very adversarial to me. They want to work with the government of Alberta.

... to ensure the changes presented in Bill 30 enhance workplace safety...

That doesn't sound like they want to dither around, like the Premier is suggesting, you know, possibly make people suffer or whatever the Premier was suggesting. That sounds like they care.

... while supporting a sustainable and economical structure for the Government of Alberta...

They're concerned about a sustainable and economical structure for the government of Alberta.

... workers and employers.

Mr. Speaker, this is a group, obviously a very large group, that's got a lot at stake here with this bill, with a lot of workers involved in this. I would hope that nobody on the other side is going to get up and suggest that the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association doesn't care about safety and their workers. I would hope that they're not going to suggest that. Very clearly, the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association would like to see this full costing analysis done because they want to see sustainability. They want to see an opportunity. They don't want to see their businesses fail. They don't want to see the government fail. They want to see success. Their businesses rely on success both with the government and themselves.

We see here that these organizations, even to this day, are still giving input to the government on this legislation. I don't see how the government can sit here and claim that they have consulted fully with everybody when organizations like this are sending letters today expressing their concerns. One of the concerns is the speed at which – Bill 30 was introduced on November 27. Mr. Speaker, this bill could have been introduced on October 30. In fact, if the government felt the need to, they could have started the session earlier, and we could have been dealing with it earlier.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other individuals who wish to speak to RA1? Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I rise to speak on RA1, reasoned amendment 1, that

Bill 30... be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not provided Albertans enough time to be consulted on the specific changes being proposed and, further, has not provided assurances that a full economic impact analysis has been completed detailing any potential negative impact on the economic well-being of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. There are good things here in Bill 30 – I'll give that to the minister, for sure – but there are also some things that raise significant concerns not just for myself and my colleagues but for many from industry and for many that are on the front lines. Whether it be the construction industry or any other businesses within Alberta, they are concerned.

Part of the reason that we raise concerns is the fact that we're dealing with such a large bill, and it does take time to fully digest it and analyze it. You know, today the minister was sent a letter by the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association – I believe everybody has received a copy of that – to get the Alberta

Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association's take on Bill 30 and some of the concerns they have.

The Premier stands up and talks about the fact that the WCB review has taken over a year and a half, but at the same time Bill 30 is not just with regard to the WCB. It also includes the OH and S Act. I do believe that we need to ensure that we are doing what's right on both of these aspects. It is disappointing for me to see that Bill 30 comes forward, an omnibus bill which could have easily been split into two bills.

8:50

Yet this government has decided that they know best and that they don't need to do the transparent and accountable consultation that Albertans expect. They are willing to come forward with legislation, try to ram it through right at the end of session. That makes Albertans and that makes employers and employees suspicious of what this government's intentions are with regard to Bill 30. I believe that we would have done a lot of good if we had moved into committee with it.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. This morning I was driving to work shortly after 7 o'clock, and on the radio they were talking about I believe it was Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act. They were discussing how sunrise was at 8:24 this morning and could you imagine if Bill 203 would have been passed, if the daylight savings time bill would have been passed? They said that we wouldn't have sunlight until 9:24. It's a good thing that it didn't get passed, they said. So, you know, committee work is important.

For this government to think that Albertans are happy with the process that's being proceeded with here, I think that they underestimate Albertans, and they are also doing a disservice to Albertans. At least, we could take the time to get this right, slow down Bill 30 so that the homework can be done on it, homework in a very transparent manner.

I believe that we need to ensure that Albertans have an open and transparent method of input towards legislation such as this. I'd be curious to see from the Chambers of Commerce their response and their input on what they're happy about with Bill 30 and also the things that they're concerned about with Bill 30. I would also like to hear from the Alberta Federation of Labour, Gil McGowan, get his perspective on Bill 30. But, of course, because we didn't refer it to committee, we're not afforded that opportunity.

They are doing it again, implementing changes to the Workers' Compensation Act and the OH and S Act at the same time. This large, complex bill could easily be split into separate pieces of more manageable legislation. All of these bills need the appropriate amount of scrutiny. Mr. Speaker, there are risks involved, and that's why it's important that this reasoned amendment comes forward.

You know, I was part of the hog industry, the pork industry. Over the 25 years that I was a producer of livestock, I saw it change a lot, some of it very reasonable changes, some of it a lot of red tape that was just paperwork that began to become excessive. Mr. Speaker, it does have implications because, at the end of the day, individuals are in the business to try and make a profit in order to keep their farms successful. When we started to implement more and more red tape, then many individuals – and we've seen it right across this province – decided that they were not prepared to do that any longer, and the hog industry restructured.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, we produced more hogs in this province in 1950 than we do today, on very small operations. Now, we get operations with 4,000 or 5,000 sows. Back in the day you had operations with 10, maybe 20 sows, and they were actually producing more pork at that time. You know, it's interesting to see the transition where we start to get farm-raised pork being a very hotly pursued commodity and how many people are looking for that

fresh, farm-raised hog now, very similar to the hog that was raised in the 1950s.

On some of the red tape that has come into the industry, I'll relay a story. I'm sure you'll find this amusing, Mr. Speaker. My brother-in-law was in the livestock hauling/transportation industry for over 30 years. It was to his dismay that — he was helping out a friend, a friend that had turned sick and needed a load hauled down to the plant in Red Deer. He got there, and he was not allowed to unload those hogs because he didn't have the paper to prove that he was trained to be able to unload those hogs safely. My brother-in-law had over 30 years of experience, in years previous to that, working on other cattle ranches and that type of thing, yet because he didn't have that piece of paper, he was deemed unqualified to unload livestock.

Now, in my opinion, that's red tape that's gone maybe a little bit too far. These types of things do present a risk to businesses staying in business and also to those that would like to start a new business. They look at it and they think: wow. At the end of the day, they decide that it's not worth the risk, that it's not worth the effort of trying. So then those businesses do not get off the floor. And, yes, I do believe that rules are needed, but definitely there can be overreach.

Mr. Speaker, I will leave it at that. There are many more aspects that we could reflect on in some of the responses we've had from different businesses. I do agree that the government has not provided Albertans with enough time to be consulted on these very specific changes that are being proposed in Bill 30. I do believe that it's important that Albertans have the opportunity to respond to what the government has presented, not just that we debate it in this House amongst colleagues but that we are able to receive full consultation from the people that are in the field and on the front lines in industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions to the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing no one, the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this evening to speak to the reasoned amendment to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. Bill 30 is a timely piece of legislation. It acknowledges that some Albertans face difficult working conditions, and it strengthens their safety net. While I'm happy to support the bill, I'll also comment on some of its limitations and outline some of the bill's strengths as these are the reasons I'm not supporting the reasoned amendment.

If passed, Bill 30 would inaugurate a number of changes to the Workers' Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, pieces of legislation that haven't been amended in a decade and a half. This bill would enshrine into law many aspects of occupational health and safety that employers in the public and private sectors have already incorporated into their HR policies, including the right to refuse unsafe work, the right to remain informed about potential hazards and have access to basic health and safety information, and the right to participate in health and safety discussions and committees. Equally important, if Bill 30 should pass, survivors' benefits for spouses of workers killed on the job will be consistent, and the definition of a child or dependant will be updated to include students, reflecting the needs of many modern families in Alberta. These are positive changes that will surely benefit Albertans, and I commend my colleagues across the House for proposing them.

Two positive aspects of the bill I would like to speak about in particular are the mandated changes regarding the refusal of unsafe work as well as the extended coverage for PTSD. Unfortunately, in many work cultures it's frowned upon to refuse unsafe work where such a policy exists, and many employees don't feel safe coming forward with a work refusal. This can be attributed to a number of reasons like fear of retribution from supervisors or colleagues. However, with the law more clearly on their side, many will feel more comfortable coming forward. This is a crucial part of the bill, and the reasoned amendment would prevent this. The extended coverage for PTSD is a huge step forward, and I am very happy to see it, Mr. Speaker. I've been a vocal proponent of PTSD care in the House, and it is time that we acknowledged the trauma that many Albertans experience on the job, especially our first responders.

9:00

I do have some concerns regarding this bill. In particular, I am concerned about nonprofit organizations' costs that they could incur in establishing health and safety committees. The legislation in question seems to omit this key sector of our workforce in that it does not specify whether not-for-profits will have to take on extra expenditures related to occupational health and safety that may be too much for an organization with limited funds. The legislation mandates joint work-site health and safety committees for workplaces with 20 employees or more that are responsible for inspecting work-site hazards, helping employers respond to health and safety concerns, helping to develop health and safety policies and safe work procedures, and more. These added tasks are going to be really large additions to the workload, and I'm wondering how a nonprofit that relies on government grants or donations is going to set up and pay for committee members and liaisons to take on all of these extra responsibilities.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, Bill 30 is an excellent bill that would be beneficial to multiple Albertans. Certainly, there are issues that need to be cleared up, but on the whole it's a bill that the Alberta Party is able to support. For these reasons, I cannot support the reasoned amendment.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments to the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill under 29(2)(a)?

Anyone else wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move a motion to go to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Nixon: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:03 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Loewen	Panda
Gill	Nixon	Schneider
Gotfried	Orr	van Dijken

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Kazim	Phillips
Babcock	Kleinstaub	Piquette
Bilous	Littlewood	Renaud

Clark	Loyola	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Luff	Sabir
Dach	Malkinson	Schmidt
Dang	Mason	Schreiner
Drever	McKitrick	Shepherd
Feehan	McPherson	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Starke
Goehring	Miranda	Sweet
Hinkley	Nielsen	Turner
Horne	Notley	Westhead
Jansen	Payne	Woollard
Totals:	For – 9	Against – 42

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: We are back, I believe, to the main motion of Bill 30.

Mr. Nixon: Question.

The Speaker: There will be no one closing debate on behalf of the minister, then?

Mr. Nielsen: I'm happy to close debate, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:08 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Kazim	Phillips
Babcock	Kleinstauber	Piquette
Bilous	Littlewood	Renaud
Clark	Loyola	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Luff	Sabir
Dach	Malkinson	Schmidt
Dang	Mason	Schreiner
Drever	McKitrick	Shepherd
Feehan	McPherson	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Starke
Goehring	Miranda	Sweet
Hinkley	Nielsen	Turner
Horne	Notley	Westhead
Jansen	Payne	Woollard

Against the motion:

Barnes	Loewen	Panda
Gill	Nixon	Schneider
Gotfried	Orr	van Dijken

Totals: For – 42 Against – 9

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a second time]

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

Mr. Strankman moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government did not adequately consult with veterinary professionals across Alberta, including the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 7: Mr. Strankman]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to . . .

The Speaker: I've been advised that you had spoken before. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 31 and to share my concerns on this bill, some of the arguments and conversation we've already heard, with respect to the rushing of some of the legislation that we're seeing in this session but also in terms of lack of consultation and stakeholder engagement.

It seems, Mr. Speaker, that once again we're seeing this government trying to legislate part of its job description, some of the things that they're supposed to be doing just as part of their day-in-and-day-out responsibilities. The minister can already draft a consumer bill of rights. It doesn't need to be an act of this Legislature, particularly when the consultation is not done adequately at this point in time.

The enforcement that we're seeing here with respect to ticket purchasing and bots: how is this being handled, and how has this been tested, and how has it been discussed with the stakeholders?

Auto repairs. I've got a letter here, actually, that I'd like to share from one of the motor dealers, Mr. Speaker, showing some deep concerns. This is actually from the executive manager of the Calgary Motor Dealers Association, who has not been adequately consulted before this legislation. He says:

Bill 31 speaks to several changes to industry, most of which are standard operating procedures for our Dealers.

Standard operating procedures already. Does that sound like something needs to be regulated or overregulated?

The changes we are most concerned with are with respect to AMVIC.

The proposed changes are unclear until of course the regulations are drawn up, but it certainly looks like Government wants to take control of the Compensation Fund (of which Dealers collected the funds for).

It also appears that changing this over to a public Board, industry will be losing our voice on the Board . . .

Voice, not control but their voice, on the board.

. . . of which we collect a majority of the funds to keep AMVIC funded.

They've funded it. They administer it. It's part of their opportunity to demonstrate their goodwill as businesses to the customers, that don't come back to them unless they treat them fairly.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Government also mentions that any changes will not cost taxpayers any additional funds. They seem to forget that Auto Dealers and all of [their] employees also pay taxes.

They're members of the community. They're philanthropists. They give back to the communities. I see many of the motor dealers and car dealerships in my community. I've got six of them in my constituency, representing those businesses well within the community. I see them at schools. I see them at community events. I see them supporting community associations.

These are just a few of our concerns regarding changes that Service Alberta is proposing.

Thanks for taking the time to read this email.

This is from Mr. Jim Gillespie, executive manager of the Calgary Motor Dealers Association. We've heard from them that they have not been consulted on this legislation, yet they are a significant part of this legislation and will be significantly impacted. But, as importantly, they've noted that some of these will impact their customers as well, Madam Speaker. That's where we're seeing again this repeated approach, which is a heavy-handed, heavy regulatory approach to things which will, actually, ultimately impact the consumer by increasing costs.

Now, there was an independent review that was completed by AMVIC with 23 recommendations that have yet to be implemented. Implementation of these recommendations should actually negate the need for any increased government control. Government controls mean government expense, mean government administration and bureaucracy to address this. Yet, again, we have not seen an economic impact study. We have not seen the costs, not only internally in the government applied to this but costs to business, costs to jobs, costs to economic activity.

Interestingly enough, the minister neglected to fill empty seats on the board of AMVIC for up to two and a half years, including seats she added after the independent review came out. This includes a time period of six months where there were no public appointees on the board at all. Even now there are two more public seats that need to be filled. So we're seeing an existing board that is not being filled, yet we now have to set up a new administration to oversee something that that minister had the opportunity to appoint more people to, to ensure the appropriate oversight of that organization.

Madam Speaker, changing AMVIC to a government agency creates uncertainty for the industry and uncertainty in terms of adequate representation on the new board of the government agency, which creates concerns about the ability to educate the public members about AMVIC's role and responsibilities. So you're going to have people who are not experts in the industry. I actually like to consult experts in the industry in everything that we do in this Legislature to ensure that we have that stakeholder engagement, not just from the public members and from the public and from the consumers but also from members of the industry who will be impacted.

9:20

We have a delicate balance right now in our economy, Madam Speaker, in that anything we do that layers on top of these businesses may affect the employment decisions that they make going forward, so again an economic impact that we have not tested nor measured.

Madam Speaker, stakeholders are concerned that this minister has historically shown a lack of understanding as far as the AMVIC compensation fund goes, and they're going to take over this fund, which is, actually, as we've heard, funded primarily by industry, yet industry is not going to have a say in that even though, from what I understand, they have been good and reasonable stewards of that fund up until this point.

Within this legislation we're also hearing a concern about the veterinary profession. I think we're going to hear more about that in the future from my colleague for Vermilion-Lloydminster, who also happens to be a veterinarian and probably can speak to some details on that. The question is: what consultation has been done there? Are there concerns that we're unaware of, and can we have those tabled to us so that we can understand why there's such concern about the veterinary profession? Or does the government

have something against veterinarians? I guess we can find that out as well in the future as we address this in more detail.

The government is taking steps to take more control and influence over self-regulating bodies. That is of serious concern to me. Madam Speaker, I think that when we work with industry, we create self-regulating organizations, and we trust that those businesses for the most part mean well in the community. They create jobs, they pay taxes, they employ people, and, yes, they need customers that believe in them and trust them and come back. That's how they do their business, through repeat customers. When we allow them to self-regulate, we put that opportunity in the hands of the experts. Yes, we have to monitor that, and, yes, they must be accountable, but in that accountability we also give them some responsibility for ensuring that their industry is one that is sustainable both economically and in terms of being able to address the needs of customers, whether that's motor dealers, whether that's veterinarians or some of the other groups that are touched by this bill.

Madam Speaker, we've seen this and we've talked in this House numerous times over the last few weeks about consultation, about stakeholder engagement, about listening to Albertans and Alberta businesses, about not rushing legislation through this House at the last minute, about not getting these sorts of documents that are stapled together, not even to the legislative printer's office on time to be properly bound for us.

What's happening here is that we're seeing a rush towards getting these things rushed through. We're hearing that it's about time and that we should rush these through and that we need to address these issues and move forward for the sake of Albertans, but what we're seeing is rushed legislation here. We're seeing that lack of consultation. We're seeing: let's hurry up and get it done. Well, Madam Speaker, I'd like us to get it done, but I'd like to ensure that we consult Albertans, that we consult the stakeholders, that we understand the economic impact of what we're going to be doing here, that we understand how it's going to affect jobs, that we understand how it's going to affect sustainability of the industries that we're touching, and, yes, of course, that we understand the positive impacts on consumers and the cost of achieving that.

It seems to me here that we're rushing this through. We're going to try and get in and out of here within a matter of a few weeks, rush this legislation through, as was mentioned by some of the previous members. We had a break in the middle. Why? We weren't ready? The government wasn't ready to bring this legislation forward, and now all of a sudden we're going to hurry this up and be ready to get out of here before Christmas? Madam Speaker, it's been mentioned by some of my colleagues. I'm prepared to stay in here until Christmas Eve if we have to, till midnight, because we need to ensure that Albertans' best interests are being met here, and I'm not getting the feeling that that's what we're actually addressing here or that is the outcome that is being sought by this government in terms of legislation we're addressing.

Madam Speaker, it concerns me deeply that the consultation and the stakeholder engagement – we've had opportunities here to send this legislation to committee. We're now trying to reason with the government here to ensure that this can be addressed in a proper way, that we have an opportunity to take a look at this legislation in a way that demonstrates, as we did earlier today, that through consultation and some collaboration and focus on developing the best legislation that we can in this House, we could actually do what we've been elected to do in this Legislature. We can work closely together in achieving that without looking at amendments to legislation and casting a negative eye on those just because they weren't authored on one side of the House or the other. Again,

we've seen that opportunity here that we can actually do that on occasion. Maybe we should do it more often.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, this concerns me. We've got several other pieces of legislation that are being rushed through. I know that I want to represent my constituents in the best way I possibly can, that we put adequate attention, consultation, stakeholder engagement on each piece of legislation that we address in this House, and I'm not sure that we're achieving that. I would like every member in this House to look inside themselves and say: "Are we achieving that? Are we doing this? Have we rushed this through with limited stakeholder engagement? Are we listening to all of the people that can be affected by this to the best of our ability?" If we can't say that to ourselves, that we've done that, then maybe we should be tapping the brakes a little bit on this to ensure that we have the opportunity to talk to our stakeholders, talk to our constituents.

We have a limited opportunity to go back to our constituencies and to talk to those people. As we're seeing, we're getting letters from various organizations, from motor dealer associations, from veterinary associations, from various other stakeholders here telling us that they have not been consulted adequately, that they're concerned about the costs, that they're going to see other costs coming, just after Christmas ironically, on January 1, increasing the carbon tax, an increase in so many other costs to them over the past year, increasing the minimum wage, all at a time when our businesses in this province are showing signs of modest recovery.

We're not seeing the robust sustainability that we'd like to see in this province in terms of many of the businesses I talk to day in and day out. I've talked to virtually every small business in my constituency, and we're hearing concerns because they're going to have increased costs. Even if their rent hasn't gone up, they're going to have increased operating costs passed on to them by their landlords, the employees that they've had for a number of years. They've had a couple of – and more to come – increases in terms of the minimum wage that they may or may not be able to absorb. I'm seeing small-business owners taking equity out of their homes, running up their credit cards, and working much longer hours themselves and sometimes hardly taking a wage themselves because there's no money left over at the end of the day or at the end of the week.

Now they're being layered with additional costs of regulation and this legislation, which is going to cost them more money in terms of administering and meeting some of these regulatory requirements that we're seeing. We saw it in the past bill and Bill 30 as well.

These are costs to business, Mr. Speaker. I urge us to choose . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek?

Anyone wishing to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the Assembly today in order to support the reasoned amendment from my colleague in regard to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. I must say that when I first saw the name of this bill, I had a brief hope that the government may be seeking to regulate itself as it seems to me that the best deal for consumers and businesses in Alberta would be to remove the NDP interference from the free commerce of enterprising Albertans.

You can imagine, Mr. Speaker, my disappointment when, after reading the bill, I came to find that it seems to be yet another

measure to give the minister more powers of regulation under the cover of helping consumers. Why I say this is because on its face this bill seems to be attempting to do some good things. It targets some commercial areas where Alberta consumers often find themselves frustrated, areas like automotive sales and repair, high-cost credit, and ticket resales.

9:30

The problem is that when you look a little closer, like many bills brought forward by this government, it is riddled with problems and unsound thinking. This kind of legislation, in a way, embodies the thinking of the NDP. It rests on the assumption that businesses are out to get consumers. It implies that consumers should be treated like children rather than responsible adults, and it is emboldened by the idea that the government is the solution to all problems. The reality is that the vast majority of commerce can be left to free and voluntary exchange between individuals and businesses without the involvement of overbearing regulation from government.

Now, of course, we can recognize that there are some instances where regulation may be prudent or necessary, but even in these situations we must ensure that those regulations are thoughtful and targeted so that they are both effective and efficient in their outcomes. This kind of scrutiny of regulation is exactly the reason why my colleague's amendment is so important. Every time we apply new regulations to the way in which consumers and businesses interact, we must carefully examine the potential outcomes and ensure that we are not needlessly inhibiting economic activity or making Alberta an uncompetitive place to do business. If the government will not allow us to do that, then this bill should be set aside.

We have to remember that these kinds of regulations, which are framed by some as tools to help fight for consumers, are often as harmful to consumers as they are to businesses. Consumers and businesses by and large exist in a symbiotic relationship, where their interactions are of mutual benefit, where the pursuit of interests by one party often ends up benefiting another party. The inverse is true as well. If government comes in with heavy-handed regulation for businesses, the consumer can be harmed to an equal or worse degree. While it is certainly important to be aware of the cost that regulations impose on businesses and their profits, it is critical to recognize the impact that they have on prices and choices for the consumer.

In the context of this legislation, we should consider the effects that it might have on the areas to address. Do we want to increase the price of and decrease the availability of tickets for resale to Albertans? Do we want to increase the cost or reduce the choices that you face when fixing a car or purchasing a new one? Do we want to prevent some Albertans from accessing credit because they cannot qualify for lower rate options? How about making it more expensive to take your pet to the vet? All the above would be unintended consequences if we don't get this legislation right. Albertans expect us to have the full picture of the effects of legislation before we pass it. We cannot let a well-intentioned attempt to help consumers end up harming them instead.

This brings me to another vital consideration, ensuring a competitive and open marketplace. When discussing regulation of businesses, we must always keep in mind the proportional burden that they impose. When new regulations come into effect, it is much easier for large businesses to absorb new costs and adapt to the new rules than it is for small and medium-sized enterprises, not to mention that they provide barriers to entry for those who want to start new businesses and provide their fellow Albertans with more choices. Mr. Speaker, those are some of the unintended consequences, that some of this regulation could inhibit new

businesses from starting out, which would give Albertans more choices and more competition. Let's think about the real impacts that these regulations could have. Think about the friends who want to open up a mechanic shop together in Calgary. Think about the veterinarian who might be struggling to get by in High Level. Think about the couple who missed out on getting tickets to see their favourite band at Rogers Centre and need to buy them on the secondary market.

Serving Albertans is what we do in this place, and we need to make sure that by adding additional regulations, we are not creating excessive burdens unintentionally. To ensure that we get this legislation right, I would encourage the members of the government caucus to support my colleague's reasoned amendment and come back when they have something worthy of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry if this sounded a bit like an economics lecture. While my intent is to make sure that we get an opportunity to scrutinize this bill in greater detail, it occurs to me that helping the government to improve their understanding of economic principles might serve to help this and future pieces of legislation as well.

I will now try to get to some more specific areas where I think this bill could use some improvement and rethinking. If we look at the new regulations that will be placed on the sale of tickets for concerts, sporting events, and other events in Alberta, we can find a few areas of concern. This bill attempts to provide regulation to prevent the practice of using computer software to circumvent security measures in place to both prevent automated purchases and limit the number of tickets sold to a single person. Now, this seems like a reasonable proposal, trying to increase access to tickets for those who will use them rather than those who will seek to resell them in large numbers in order to make a profit.

The problem is how the government and minister believe that they will be able to enforce this. These kinds of operations are almost always outside of Alberta and often outside the reach of any legal judgment made here. The reason that they are able to make a profit is because they stay ahead of the technology designed to detect and prevent them. This kind of legislation has been passed in other jurisdictions and has proven to be unsuccessful in stopping those which it intends to. Should we really be passing legislation telling Albertans that we are taking action when evidence shows that it will not produce the outcomes that it purports to? What is the point in this kind of empty measure?

Another part of the section that addresses ticket resales mandates the refund of tickets which are purchased from a secondary seller but end up being invalid and unable to be used. This is undoubtedly a good and fair proposal. If a person buys a ticket and the product provided does not fulfill its promise, a refund is the logical solution. Why, then, does the minister reserve the power to exempt certain businesses from complying with this provision? In what circumstances would a person not be able to obtain a refund? Does this create the possibility of the government interfering in the legitimate ticket resale market and threatening the integrity of a level playing field? All questions that we need answered, Mr. Speaker. If the government has answers to these questions, they need to provide adequate explanations to Albertans. Until they are willing to do so, this legislation should not be passed.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address the section of this bill that deals with AMVIC. The bill seeks to change AMVIC from its current form into yet another arm of the government, placing even greater powers of regulation in the hands of the minister. When I look at AMVIC's role, it says here on their website

regulate the motor vehicle industry in Alberta. This responsibility is delegated to AMVIC by the provincial government. The delegation agreement gives AMVIC authority to enforce the Fair

Trading Act and regulations that apply to the automotive industry.

Mr. Speaker, their roles are very clearly spelled out on their website.

Now,

AMVIC reviews every complaint if the complaint is related to one of the following:

- A registered automotive salesperson
- One of AMVIC's licensed automotive businesses
- automotive business transactions carried-on by unlicensed dealers (curbers)

When AMVIC suspects a compliance issue related to an automotive business transaction, the complaint is referred to AMVIC's enforcement arm.

If the complaint falls outside of AMVIC's regulatory authority, consider referring to these additional resources . . .

AMVIC exercises the powers, duties and functions as delegated by the Minister of Service Alberta. These responsibilities include enforcement of matters, automotive business matters that fall under the Fair Trading Act, the Automotive Business Regulations, the Cost of Credit Disclosure Regulation and the Internet Sales Contract Regulation.

It spells out pretty clearly what AMVIC's role is. It's a delegated authority of this government.

9:40

Now, it is interesting that when the government engaged in an independent review of AMVIC meant to address many legitimate concerns, the report following specifically looked at the idea of making it a government agency. It concluded that it would not be the best solution. Mr. Speaker, that was the review that was an independent review that was already done. We've had lots of time to talk about independent reviews recently in this House. Of course, the government, on one hand, sometimes says of an independent review: well, we've got to pass that because it's an independent review. On another hand, we look at an independent review, and they say: well, no, we ain't going to do nothing that it says in that one; I mean, why would we do that? It just seems like there's a little bit of picking and choosing as far as this government when it comes to independent reviews. Now, I know that expanding government at every opportunity is standard practice for this government, but I would hope that if they are going to engage experts to do an independent review, they would at least listen to their conclusions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring up what has perhaps been the most controversial part of this legislation, the new regulations on Alberta's veterinarian profession. I, for one, have no idea how these proposed changes ended up in this piece of legislation. Here is a profession that helps Albertans and their pets every day, often saving lives in the process. Why does this government think that consumers need protection from medical professionals? By all accounts, the number of issues and complaints associated with Alberta's veterinarians is extremely low. There doesn't seem to be any logical reason behind this proposal.

Now, I do have a letter from a veterinarian from my constituency. I'll just read a couple of parts of it.

I'm writing to express my grave concern with the recent proposed amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act contained in Bill 31 made by the Minister of Service Alberta. As a member of a self-regulated profession I take pride in upholding the high standards of veterinary medicine made possible by a professional regulatory framework developed by veterinarians and veterinary technologists that safeguards the public interest in animal health and welfare.

Then she goes on to say:

I echo the serious concerns of my colleagues in the ABVMA that proposed amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act

constitute an alarming overreach and intrusion into the veterinary profession's ability to self-regulate and were made without consultation with ABVMA.

Here we have again the government, no consultation.

I urge you to please contact the office of the Minister of Service Alberta to help get these proposed amendments withdrawn from Bill 31 as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, again we have this situation where this government fails to properly consult with the people affected.

Now, I just want to talk a little bit about the people in vehicle sales and repair. Mr. Speaker, just last week I had my car to the shop to have some repairs done to it, took it into the dealership to have the repairs done. Quite often I'll have repairs done at a local mechanic shop, not at a dealer's shop. These businesses are doing their best to provide good service to the people they serve. There's nothing wrong with that. I've bought new cars from salesmen, I've bought used cars from salesmen, and honestly I felt like I was fairly dealt with at all times. I'm sure that isn't the case with absolutely everyone, but every profession has its people that they may have problems with.

But, Mr. Speaker, a bill like this, that comes before this Legislature without proper consultation, without proper thought going into it – we tried to do the amendment to get it to committee so we could consult with the veterinarians, consult with the people in these industries that would be affected. Of course, the government voted down that opportunity to go to committee. It leaves us in the situation here now where we want to do this reasoned amendment so that we can put this off and take some time so that we can properly consult and do justice to Albertans and actually do what could help them instead of just ramming through some legislation that's kind of haphazard and not thought out properly.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to support this reasoned amendment. We need to be able to pass this and move on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Under 29(2)(a), are there any questions or comments for the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West on the amendment.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will speak very briefly to the amendment put forward by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler. I think that there's been a lot said about this, so I want to just speak specifically to the reasoning given in the amendment, and I think we'll get very clearly what I believe we should do about this amendment.

We know that veterinarians are trusted professionals, and Albertans look to them to provide quality care for their pets and their animals. This proposed legislation will help pet owners find that high-quality care for their pets. I know that the ministry met with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association on several occasions as well as with the Alberta association of animal health technologists, the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, and also met directly with several vet clinic owners. Now, Mr. Speaker, we heard their feedback and concerns. In fact, that is why we are focusing the proposals of this legislation on veterinary services for household pets.

Over the past several months we have heard from ordinary Albertans who told us that they want to be better informed when looking for veterinary services for their pets. A recent *Edmonton Journal* and Canadian Press article, that I tabled today, stated:

Davida Marantz got an unwelcome surprise when she got out of hospital in 2014 and went to pick up her beloved Sheltie Libby from friends.

The dog needed \$4,800 in dental surgery while the Edmonton senior was gone, an amount she felt obligated to pay back.

"They were so generous in taking her and caring for her and doing a really fine job that there's no way I would leave the dog with them and the bill with them," said Marantz.

She's 70 years old.

But when she checked with other clinics after paying the bill, she found that the surgery could have been done for thousands of dollars less.

That's why she applauds legislation introduced last week by the Alberta government that cracks down on the way veterinarians communicate their fees.

That's the end of the quote, Mr. Speaker.

The same article further states:

Kath Oltsher, co-founder of Zoe's Animal Rescue in Edmonton, also likes the proposed guidelines. The animal rescue takes in unwanted animals and attempts to help those with low incomes pay for the cost of veterinary care.

Oltsher said she's had positive experiences with veterinarians who provide services to the shelter. She doesn't want the profession to think that the changes are meant to be adversarial.

"It does come like we're coming after you," she said. "But I don't know how else to make a change happen."

Our proposals in Bill 31 are to require disclosure of all fees before administering any veterinary service or treatment for household pets except those fees exempted in regulation and to require customer approval prior to administering veterinary services for household pets unless exempted in the regulation; for example, Mr. Speaker, in case of emergencies. Currently ABVMA's bylaws speak to informed consent but do not define what that means or explicitly state that this includes the disclosure of fees in that process. We are simply enabling the advertising of those fees and the disclosure. It's something that veterinarians in Alberta are prevented from doing currently but is allowed in other jurisdictions.

I think that when we look at the clauses that are being brought forward in this amendment, we can see that there was consultation done; in fact, there was consultation done with thousands of Albertans. That's why I'm going to be urging all of my hon. colleagues on both sides of the aisle to vote against the amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Edmonton-South West? Under 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Dr. Starke: Yes, under 29(2)(a). The member mentioned the AAAHT in his address. I'm curious to know whether the member realizes that the AAAHT does not exist anymore.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Are there any others under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Edmonton-South West?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as long as we're at it, I'm curious to know. The member mentioned that there was consultation with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. I find that curious because the Western College of Veterinary Medicine was not consulted when it had its funding yanked by this government back in October, but if there was a meeting with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine specifically, I'd love to know what the date of that meeting was, who attended, and what was discussed.

The Speaker: The question's response?
Any other questions under 29(2)(a)?

9:50

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the opportunity. You know, I want to just recognize the importance of our veterinary community and the very important role that they play. I know that members, particularly those who represent rural ridings, have a very strong attachment to the veterinarians – it borders on an emotional experience – and I can understand why, because it's so critical to the functioning of our agriculture in this province. The large-animal veterinarians have played a very, very critical role and continue to do so. I want to just indicate that the government has the greatest degree of respect for the veterinary profession and is certainly strongly in favour of that profession being able to essentially regulate itself in the same way that other professions are able to do.

The bill, however, deals with the instances of smaller animal veterinarians, pets and so on. I know that those veterinarians also provide a very valuable service, and I know how much our pets mean to us. You can see that wherever you go, whether, you know, it's a dog lover or a cat lover or, in some cases, both – it's rare, but it does happen, Mr. Speaker – or other animals. I know, when our cat got on in age, just how important it was to have a good veterinarian so that she could live a comfortable quality of life and that her passing was peaceful. I also feel quite a bit of emotion with respect to that.

What the bill does, Mr. Speaker, is simply ensure that people are able to compare fees and compare prices. I think that as we've adopted, you know, a free-market system when it comes to veterinary care, certainly not equivalent, really, to the kind of care that our health care system offers for humans, it's important that consumers have the ability to know what the fees are for the various services and so on. I think that instances where veterinarians don't always provide the lowest cost option are rare, but I can tell you that we personally have experienced a situation where, when our veterinarian retired and sold his practice, the new veterinarian in a partnership certainly had a real practice of upselling. We switched veterinarians, and we found a very, very satisfactory one. But I think it could be avoided. That may in fact be a rare instance. But consumers have every right to know the level of fees that the different veterinarians charge for the various services that they do have. [The time limit for questions and comments expired]

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. Out of time.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members? You're speaking to the reasoned amendment?

Dr. Starke: Yes. I'm speaking to the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's once again a pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 31, in this case to the reasoned amendment. I want to focus my comments this evening specifically to the wording within the amendment. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-South West going after that specific area but was certainly disappointed that two of the references he gave in his speech he could not substantiate upon questioning. It concerns me if that sort of quotation is being made in the House, if it's stated that the AAAHT, which is an organization that no longer exists, was consulted with, if it's stated that the Western College of Veterinary Medicine was consulted with, yet we don't have dates, we don't have names, and we don't have any information. I can assure the Member for Edmonton-South West, in fact I can assure all of the members on both sides of the House that I have had more recent communication with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine than probably anybody else in the House has had, and, yes, that

includes you, Minister of Advanced Education. I've chatted with them since your meeting.

Mr. Speaker, what this amendment hinges upon, really, is the word "consultation." That is a word that, my goodness, gets tossed around here a lot. The concern that I have is that it seems that the word means different things to different people. So I went back to sort of the days when I was in high school debating. In every high school debate, when you had a debate, you had a resolution. Then the first thing you did: the first affirmative speaker had to define the terms. I said: you know, that would be a good idea; let's see if we can at least settle on what consultation means.

I did some checking in some different dictionaries. There are a number of them, but there is not that much variation. Basically, consultation means, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary* of English, for example, "the act of exchanging information and opinions about something in order to reach a better understanding of it or to make a decision, or a meeting for this purpose." I said: okay; that seems reasonable. In fact, the example that they used was: "We hope to work in consultation with Congress on how the law should be interpreted." Sort of makes sense.

The second definition, also from the *Cambridge English dictionary*: "the process of discussing something with someone in order to get their advice or opinion about it." I said: well, that certainly makes sense; consultation seeks opinion from the other person. Certainly, consultation implies a two-way exchange of information: somebody seeking information, somebody providing that information, and then going back and forth. I think that it's fair to say that you cannot reasonably call something a consultation if there is only a one-way flow of information. A consultation involves an exchange. A consultation is two-way. It's interesting that the example for the second definition that I gave was this: "The policy change was presented to us as a fait accompli, without consultation or discussion." Does that sound familiar?

I think that it does sound very familiar because, in fact, in talking to many, many stakeholder groups – and the veterinary profession is only the latest of those stakeholder groups – this government has fallen into a trap of dictation rather than consultation. I've talked to many stakeholder groups where they say that representatives from the minister's office brought them into a room, sat them down, told them what was coming, turned on their heels, and left the room. There was no opportunity for questions; there was no opportunity for exchange. That would happen once, usually shortly before the introduction of a bill. Not always. Not always. But I have heard of that pattern of behaviour time and time and time again from this government.

Now, that concerns me, and it should concern you folks because that does not engender trust. That, in fact, endangers trust. That does not engender a good working relationship. When we specifically talk about Bill 31 and the consultation during the course of debate on second reading, on the motion for referral, there's an exchange between myself and the Minister of Service Alberta. The Minister of Service Alberta said the following. This is in *Hansard* on page 2266.

I just want to touch again on the veterinary piece of this legislation. We consulted. We had two in-person meetings with the association. We had an additional phone call with the association. I'm told that this is, in fact, more consultation than what was done when there was the amalgamation of the technologists and the vets. You know, there was good and substantial consultation.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a basic problem when you make a statement like that. Veterinarians keep very good records. It's part of what we do. We record stuff. To give you an idea of the comparison of the consultation on Bill 13 and Bill 31, that we're

discussing right now, there is the sum total of the documentation on the consultation on Bill 31. Most of this I've tabled already. Now, I'll be tabling this. This is one copy of the consultation documentation on Bill 13. One copy.

10:00

The consultation on Bill 13, in fact, extended back to even before this government took office. I know that because when it was first considered to bring technologists into the veterinary profession, guess who was consulted by the then minister of jobs, training, and labour? Myself. I was consulted as to whether that would be a good idea, and I told the minister: "Yes. Absolutely, it would be a good idea. The veterinary profession certainly supports it. Animal health technologists are trusted professionals that work shoulder to shoulder with us, and we would very much like to see them as equal partners within our association." So, yes, there was consultation back then.

You know, I will say – and I said this before – that the hon. Minister of Labour, who became minister in January 2016, four months later was able to pass Bill 13. In those four months she had 12 separate instances of communication with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. Twelve separate instances of communication: e-mails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and the exchange of no fewer than four draft copies of the proposed legislation. Four were exchanged back and forth between the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and the minister's staff. That exchange and that work together engendered a sense of trust. The Alberta Veterinary Medical Association trusted the Minister of Labour and understood the rationale behind what was going on with that legislation. As a result, for those of you who recall, the debate on Bill 13 was rather uneventful. Pretty much everybody agreed on it because it was good legislation. It was legislation that had passed the test of consultation, a two-way discussion, a two-way dialogue that occurred.

Now, I'm sorry that the minister, it appears, has been given bad information, but when the minister is given information that says that the consultation on Bill 31 was, in fact, more robust and more complete than the consultation on Bill 13, it simply isn't true. You know, I find it interesting because the minister in her opening remarks on Tuesday afternoon said that there had been misinformation. In her very first paragraph in *Hansard* – this is on page 2265 – she said:

There seems to be a lot of misinformation being communicated throughout the House as well as outside of this House, so I would like to take another opportunity, in addition to the comments that I made upon introduction of second reading, to provide further clarification.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess my question is: where is the misinformation coming from, and who is disseminating it? You know, a number of my colleagues have now received the same form letter response from the minister with regard to this bill. That form letter response has in and of itself within it five major inaccuracies – five – and it's a short letter. It's interesting because members of this Legislature, private members and members of cabinet, in the government caucus have been using that exact same letter over their signature to reply to constituents. A form letter, and it's easily recognizable because the form letter contains the same five errors.

Mr. Speaker, this has done nothing to improve the level of trust between the Alberta veterinary community, including veterinarians and registered veterinary technologists, and this government. I'm also seeing that in the copies of letters I'm getting from many former supporters of this government, people who formerly voted for the NDP, people who had intended on voting for the NDP. But they won't be making that mistake again. This piece of legislation,

in fact, is changing votes, at least in my profession. Now, this government may well have made a calculation: there are only 3,000 of them, and we can afford to lose that many votes; you know, that's all worth while. We may well be the sacrificial lambs on their altar of what? What exactly are they trying to accomplish?

Now, the Member for Edmonton-South West repeated once again the situation of the senior with regard to her dog. You know, I certainly feel for her. Clearly, it was a difficult situation that she was in. But I will also tell you that if somebody asked me to review a dentistry bill of \$4,800, I would never offer a competing price quote without knowing exactly what was done on that animal and what was involved. If those other price quotes were given without that information, well, then that's part of the problem. That's part of the issue with the whole situation of price transparency, which the Government House Leader talked about. We're not talking about sacks of potatoes here, Minister. We're not talking about: this is the same as this, is the same as this. Every patient is unique, every single one, and to post a singular price that is supposed to be a one-size-fits-all – medicine doesn't work that way. Medicine doesn't work that way.

Mr. Speaker, this is the problem that we have with regard to consultation, and this government has completely broken the trust. They're acting with the input from whom? We were told: with the input of the AAAHT. Well, the association doesn't exist anymore. Input from WCVM: whom did they talk to? They said: several veterinary clinics. I'd love to know who. I'd love to know who in the veterinary community is saying that they actually disagree with the ABVMA on this.

You know, he gave two anecdotes regarding fees that seem to be unreasonable. Well, Mr. Speaker, I took statistics in university, and one thing I learned is that the plural of anecdote is not data. You collect together some scattered anecdotes, and you figure that you've got a strong case. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

Now, if there was an issue with that bill or any other bill, we have a very well-established disciplinary and ethics procedure within our profession, as do all other self-regulated professions. I've talked in this House before about how that works. I've also talked about how that is not a very busy part of our association. But if this government feels that there is something rotten in the veterinary profession – and clearly they do because otherwise they wouldn't be bringing this forward – if they think there's something so flawed within our current self-regulatory body, then I encourage them to open a dialogue with the Veterinary Medical Association and not what they're doing right now, and that is completely ignoring all requests for dialogue. The Minister of Service Alberta has never met once with the association or with its president.

The Minister of Labour, to whom we are actually responsible, came to the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association annual general meeting and spoke to that body. That's how you engender trust. You don't do it by doing this and undercutting a group of professionals that has self-governed successfully for over 111 years. I find it absolutely baffling that this government, under the guise of consumer protection, can reverse 111 years of successful self-governance and basically decide that they know better for the veterinary profession than the group of professionals that are actually involved in it. It is sad, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm going back to a letter that we received from the Minister of Service Alberta on November 3 in which she said that no legislative changes would be contemplated without consultation and engagement with the veterinary association. The next time we heard from the minister was the day before introduction of the legislation, at which time she was not willing to share. It wasn't her; it was one of her . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, under 29(2)(a)? Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the knowledge and the awareness of the actual facts of the reality that the member has been presenting. I'd love to hear him continue with what he was going to say. I have one question for him. As a veterinarian how does he feel about being lumped in with unscrupulous ticket resale scammers, supposedly honest automobile crooks, and high-cost credit groups who are sharking people? How does he feel as a veterinarian being lumped in with that group in one bill?

Thank you.

10:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. I mean, what I can tell you is that what maybe doesn't matter so much is how I feel because somehow my feelings don't matter according to the minister. It's bad to say anything negative about being grouped in. But I think what is important is how my colleagues feel, how the 3,200-plus members of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association feel about being placed in a bill that is specifically intended to deal with scammers.

That word, "scammers," was used by the minister in her introductory remarks to this. Because this bill deals not with the fringes of veterinary medicine – you didn't decide to go after the people who practise veterinary medicine without a licence, the unscrupulous people who provide what are veterinary services by definition but have never studied veterinary medicine, are not licensed, and if something goes wrong, the owner of the animal has no recourse to the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. You didn't go after those folks. Those are the scammers.

But no. Instead, you decided to go after the core of our profession. The very core of the veterinary profession is the target that you have decided to take with this legislation, and I wonder: who's next? Should the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud be concerned because the medical profession is next? Should the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake be concerned because the accountants are next in the crosshairs of this government?

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to once again quote. This is quoting from the letter that our association president received on the 3rd of November, some two and a half months after she asked the minister for clarification as to why this bill was coming forward.

Based on the consultation results, should the Government of Alberta determine this is an area of focus, further consultation and engagement with industry stakeholders would be necessary to develop the details of any potential legislative or regulatory amendments.

As responsibility for the Veterinary Profession Act falls under the Ministry of Labour, I would refer to my colleague, the Honourable ...

And it gives the minister's name.

... Minister of Labour, for her consideration.

Mr. Speaker, none of that happened. None of that happened in the space of time from November 3, when this letter was received, to December 4, when, I believe, the bill was introduced. Actually, it was introduced before then. It was introduced on November 29. There was zero consultation with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. There were not two in-person meetings and one phone call. There was one in-person meeting and two phone calls. I know that because that's what our medical records say, and I trust those medical records. We've already shown that some of the information that's been given to the Minister of Service Alberta is incorrect, so

it comes down to who I and who my colleagues trust as far as providing accurate information.

This reasoned motion, Mr. Speaker, provides and states that this bill should not be read a second time because veterinarians across our province haven't been consulted. I think it is pretty clear that that hasn't happened because you've all been receiving letters from my colleagues right across this province, from one end to the other.

The second reason is because the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association was not adequately consulted, and I can tell you that it was not. It was a massive departure from our experience with Bill 13, and that's why it is so disappointing.

Mr. Speaker, I am in favour of this reasoned amendment. I know the word "consultation" gets tossed around here a lot, but I can tell you that consultation is a two-way dialogue in which both parties feel they were equal participants. In this case that test has failed. This was not a consultation, and this amendment should pass accordingly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow on the reasoned amendment.

Mr. Clark: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I will rise and speak briefly to this amendment because there is absolutely no way I could outdo my colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster and his expertise in this area. I do rise to speak in favour of the reasoned amendment on this, specifically because the focus of this reasoned amendment is on the veterinary profession, and I think that it doesn't have any place within this bill. I think, as my hon. colleague very eloquently laid out, it is comparing the veterinary profession, which is governed under its own legislation, with people who would seek to scam others, be they unscrupulous ticket resellers or high-cost credit providers or perhaps some unscrupulous auto dealers, which, I would suggest, is the minority of that group as well. Regardless, it doesn't fit. I think that given that, we need to send this back to the drawing board on this particular issue specifically.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

There are aspects of this bill that I like. I certainly think that it is important that we protect consumers from the things we listed earlier, whatever we can do to protect Albertans from unscrupulous ticket resellers. I'm certainly curious as to how the government feels they will be able to successfully achieve that where so many others have failed, but I admire their attempt to make an effort there. I have some sympathy for those who are targeted by high-cost credit providers, and certainly I enthusiastically supported this government's changes to payday lending. I think this bill offers some similar opportunities there.

I have at least one constituent that I know about that was scammed by Treadz Auto. If this bill can in fact fix that situation specifically or prevent future situations like that, I'm certainly very enthusiastic and supportive of that.

But adding in the veterinary profession and lumping them in with those different groups doesn't make any sense. It's very clear from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster's previous comments that the veterinary profession was not adequately consulted.

The question I'll ask the government on this is the question I asked them so many times: please quantify the problem that you're trying to solve. Provide us with real, actual, tangible data, not just one or two letters from people who had a bad experience. I want to acknowledge that that bad experience, I'm sure, was a very real situation for them and not to be diminished. But does the Legislative Assembly of Alberta need, in fact, to step in and deal with what I

think are very rare exceptions when there are many other mechanisms that already exist to allow people to address unscrupulous – if there is a concern or a billing issue or a question that comes up in the provision of veterinary services, there are already mechanisms dealing with that. So it just simply doesn't fit, Madam Speaker, with the rest of this bill.

For that reason, I stand in support of the amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It was brought to my attention by table officers that when I moved my motion earlier today, I may not have been clear in my intent, which was to move to one-minute bells for the entire night. So, in the interests of clarity, I would like to move that motion again.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always an honour to rise in this House and speak. I rise today to speak to this reasoned amendment for Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, to go to committee. Once again with this NDP government bill we get a mixed bag of goodies, a mixed bag of unconnected legislative changes. It's too ripe for unintended consequences.

It certainly has some good points such as attempting to gain some kind of control over those who use ticket bots to unfairly escalate prices, although in typical NDP fashion it sounds better than it is because the new laws are unenforceable. More regulations for door-to-door sales or high-credit lenders can also be positive in this bill, but this bill prompts too many questions for it to continue through this House.

Let's start with the consumer bill of rights. What exactly does it do? This was a campaign promise of this NDP government, and I guess Albertans can decide if it fulfills anything other than taking up space on paper. The bill of rights reminds me of Bill 1. We all remember the jobs bill. As my hon. colleague from Calgary-Hays always reminded the minister, that bill created one job. The consumer bill of rights also does nothing. Calling something an act doesn't make it an act, but the NDP have become awfully good at playing that game and claiming that all those policies are going to change Albertans' lives and make life better for Albertans. [interjection] I expect that Albertans see through it, actually. Government House Leader, they see through it, sir.

10:20

Let's move on to a substantial part of the bill and pose some serious questions. An immediate red flag that we have questions about is the inclusion of veterinarians in this bill, like our colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster spoke about in depth. I don't think I can go into that depth, by any stretch of the imagination, on this topic.

I note that during the consultation the NDP had indicated an interest in addressing talent agencies and moving companies, a plethora of other entrepreneurial-type businesses. I'm not suggesting that they needed to include them in this legislation, but it seems strange that they dropped these kinds of businesses yet included veterinarians, who are governed by their own professional association. If my memory is still okay at this time, I think the

Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said that the association was, like, 111 years old. The NDP government wants to reach and strike at the self-governance by allowing cabinet to make regulations.

I remember last week on this thing we talked about that horses don't have gallbladders. That was interesting to know. We learned that. Today we learned that the AAAHT doesn't exist anymore.

An Hon. Member: It changed its name.

Mr. Gill: Well, I mean, like, if you're reading it so passionately, at least do your homework when you're reading.

It makes no sense: a group of people with no knowledge about a professional association that has done a good job for over a hundred years governing itself and cabinet is going to interfere with that. I just don't understand the rationale behind it. The question is: why? We haven't heard an answer, but we have heard that the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association was not consulted. That's what we know.

We tried to send this bill to committee to allow a fulsome consultation. Again, we just got a definition of consultation. I think it would serve a good purpose to all the stakeholders, to all Albertans to have consultation. There's only one common-sense path now because sending this bill to consultation, to a committee, which this NDP government doesn't want to do – Madam Speaker, the only other way to do it is to just vote this down as soon as possible. Veterinarians are justifiably upset over changes they didn't expect, and we have no idea who is asking for those changes. Let's end this now.

Madam Speaker, this government is also proposing to turn AMVIC into an agency. AMVIC, as we all know, has been a topic of interest for some time now. An independent review made 23 recommendations about AMVIC's fate. Not one of them – not even one of them – said: turn it into an ABC. We look forward to hearing from the Minister of Service Alberta about why she has chosen this route, but we have heard no explanation like the other consultation, the other legislation. No explanation.

Once again, Bill 31 could have gone to committee for a fulsome review, but, no, that's not what this government believes in. No explanation. Greater costs and oversight. We don't know why and we'll likely never know why they're making AMVIC an agency. What do we do? Bringing AMVIC under the umbrella of the ABC creates an unnecessary instability for the industry. That is a completely different route than what the independent review recommended, with no reason.

Auto repair is another dicey area for government to involve itself in. It tried once before with Bill 203, if we all remember, and had to step back from that mess of legislation. Now they're at it again. As far as we know, the NDP has not consulted with the industry. Again, is that a surprise? Certainly not to this side of the House. It's wrong because every time the government members talk, they claim that, you know: we're making life better for Albertans. So let's include Albertans in consultation.

Automotive shops are small businesses. They're in every community in Alberta, so let's include them. They have had a hard enough time surviving with this NDP's other bad policies. They don't need more unnecessary burdens. You never know what the breaking point is in their businesses. It has happened to too many businesses already in this province, so let's call a time out. Let's put a halt to unnecessary legislation and focus on the issue that matters to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, we can start today by voting for this reasoned amendment. I hope the members from the government side will also support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the reasoned amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:28 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Loewen	Schneider
Clark	Nixon	Starke
Gill	Orr	van Dijken
Gotfried	Panda	

10:30

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Kleinsteuber	Piquette
Babcock	Littlewood	Renaud
Bilous	Luff	Rosendahl
Carson	Malkinson	Sabir
Coolahan	Mason	Schmidt
Dach	McKitrick	Schreiner
Dang	McPherson	Shepherd
Feehan	Miranda	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Turner
Horne	Notley	Westhead
Jansen	Payne	Woollard
Kazim	Phillips	

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading?

Are there any members wishing to close debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:33 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Jansen	Phillips
Babcock	Kazim	Piquette
Bilous	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Carson	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Clark	Luff	Sabir
Coolahan	Malkinson	Schmidt
Dach	Mason	Schreiner
Dang	McKitrick	Shepherd
Drever	McPherson	Sigurdson
Feehan	Miranda	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Westhead
Hinkley	Notley	Woollard
Horne	Payne	

Against the motion:

Barnes	Nixon	Schneider
Gill	Orr	Starke
Gotfried	Panda	van Dijken
Loewen		

Totals:	For – 38	Against – 10
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[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank all members for their co-operation in having a very effective and efficient deliberation this evening on two very important pieces of legislation. I will move that we adjourn the House until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:38 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, December 12, 2017

Day 65

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
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Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

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New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. We are well into the holiday season, a time of sharing, generosity, family, goodwill. As we continue our work for this week, let us focus on kindness, on being good to one another, always remembering that we are here for something other than ourselves.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 32

An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

Mrs. Pitt moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment December 7: Mr. Panda speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to speak today in support of the referral motion pertaining to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. Now, this motion is just common sense, and while we know that it isn't a concept the government generally seeks to embrace, I hope that my colleagues and I may have some success in convincing them to let it be their guide today. I don't know why any person would be opposed to listening, to hearing what Albertans have to say on this bill, nor can I understand why anyone would be opposed to spending a little more time to review the details and intricacies of this 212-page piece of legislation. In fact, I think the apparent opposition from the NDP in regard to this motion is an example of a government saying one thing and doing another.

I think it is worth reminding this government of the positions and statements of their own party when it comes to legislation on democratic changes. As members of this House may recall, under the tenure of the previous federal government there was an electoral reform bill passed by the House of Commons. I would like the members opposite to listen carefully and try to recognize a few statements. Quote: the hotly debated legislation should receive more scrutiny. End quote. That sentiment came from the then leader of the NDP. I know they later threw him out, but – who knows? – maybe it was because the party decided his views on legislative scrutiny would be inconvenient for this government.

Now, I can guarantee that this will be a rare occurrence for members on this side of the House, but I want to cite Mr. Mulcair again just for the benefit of this House. He said the following in

April 2014 in regard to legislation that changes the rules for democracy, quote: never before in the history of Canada has a government tried to use its majority to unilaterally change Canada's election laws. End quote. How ironic is it that the party whose leader said this is now seeking to change Alberta's election laws by ramming through a bill in just days before the end of the session?

Madam Speaker, I think it may be worth while to look at and compare a little further this bill at hand now with the one that sat before the federal parliament a few short years ago. At the time, the NDP were outraged at the state of affairs. The bill needed amendment, they said. The bill needed further consultation. It seems, now they are in a position of government, that words like “consultation,” “amendment,” and “scrutiny” have magically disappeared from their vocabulary.

Now, one might argue that this is just a standard way of doing things when in government, that you ignore consultation and opposition to pursue your agenda. Well, it may be standard practice for the NDP governments, but I can tell you that the Conservatives actually heed their own words. When the federal Conservative government first sought to introduce electoral reform in 2013, it was in response to recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer. When the NDP went to introduce this legislation, they didn't even bother to consult with the Chief Electoral Officer.

In 2013, when Conservatives realized there were some issues with the legislation they intended to introduce, the minister chose to postpone its introduction and, quote, take the time necessary to get the legislation right. End quote. When it was brought up that there are issues with this NDP legislation, they decided to ignore the concerns and press ahead. When Conservatives passed this kind of legislation, they took it to committee. There were 29 committee meetings, more than 100 witnesses, and dozens of amendments passed. Conservatives took 135 days from the introduction of the bill until it was passed. This NDP government seems intent on not having one single committee meeting, not one witness's testimony, and not one single amendment. The NDP has forgone their legislative duty and not allowed for more than a few days of debate.

Madam Speaker, I think this speaks to the divide between this side of the House and the government benches. On this side of the House we want to take the time to produce the kind of legislation that Albertans deserve. On this side of the House we want to listen to what Albertans have to say. On the other side of things, like with most bills, the government is blinded by their ideology, driven by their partisan interests, and spurred by the ticking clock that counts down until Albertans get to return to the ballot box and turn the page on this accidental socialist government.

Madam Speaker, this bill is about democracy. It is about the rules that govern it. But for this government there are large pieces that don't appear to have anything to do with strengthening or protecting it. There are pieces of this legislation that seem to be all about the NDP's fear of the democratic will of the people of this province.

While it seems unlikely that we will gain support from the government for this referral, in order to properly examine it and gain input from Albertans, I will continue. I intend to use the time that is afforded me by the mandate to represent my constituents so that I may try and bring attention to the deep flaws that I see in this bill.

I will start with a portion of this bill that has received less attention than others but deserves to be highlighted. Some members may forget, but when it comes to positive democratic reform in this country, in past years Alberta was a trailblazer and a leader within Confederation. Long before the scandals and the intense public scrutiny Albertans knew that the Senate of Canada needed to change. Albertans knew that the status quo of unelected, unaccountable Senators was unacceptable. The body was supposed

to provide regional representation, yet too often Alberta's appointments were made by an out-of-touch government in Ottawa pursuing an agenda that Albertans did not support. That is why in this province we decided to pass the Senatorial Selection Act, so that Albertans could directly provide their input on who should fill the seats for our province. At the end of last year the NDP chose to allow this legislation to expire, and now they seek to repeal the remnants of this act.

Now we find ourselves with another out-of-touch government in Ottawa. But this time, instead of the provincial government seeking to empower Albertans, it has decided to take away the voice they had. Now, I understand that the NDP supports the abolition of the Senate, and that is a perfectly reasonable position to have, one shared by a number of Conservatives even. However, as long as the Senate exists in the unequal, ineffective, and unelected form that it does, surely the government of Alberta would seek to preserve any tools of opposition to the appointment of Liberal partisans by Justin Trudeau.

Madam Speaker, we have a situation here where this government has brought forward a bill called *An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta* when they're actually taking away democracy from Albertans, an opportunity that we had and we took advantage of to elect people to go to the Senate. It doesn't stand to reason as to why this government – they seem to hate the Senate, and that's their position. They want to see it abolished. Whatever. But why would you take away the opportunity for Albertans to choose who goes there in a bill that says that it's to protect democracy in Alberta? Well, I don't know what anybody else thinks, but when I hear of democracy, I think of the ability to choose who represents you. I believe that's the basis of democracy. But this government has taken away that opportunity for Albertans. Why would they do such a thing? Why would they take away that opportunity for Albertans to choose who represents them in the Senate?

10:10

In 1989 Albertans made history through the appointment of Stan Waters, Canada's first elected Senator, but now, in 2017, the NDP seems content to abandon Albertans' position of leadership on reform. At the very least, the government could have gone out and asked Albertans if they supported this move. If they were willing to send this bill to committee, we could get this input and make a more informed decision based on the wishes of Albertans. Informed decisions are important, Madam Speaker, and Albertans expect the legislation that we pass to reflect this sentiment.

I would then ask how many members of this House know the reason why the government has chosen to ignore the expert opinion of Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer in regard to the matter of how enumeration should be conducted in our province ahead of the next election. Bill 32 would require full door-to-door enumeration rather than the strategy suggested by the Chief Electoral Officer, which would have consisted of targeted in-person enumeration accompanied by a full mail-out to cover the majority of people. This is a strategy that has been shown to be successful in other provinces and would serve to save Alberta taxpayers millions of dollars.

As we have discovered, the Chief Electoral Officer wasn't consulted by the government ahead of introducing this legislation. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, but that just seems bizarre, that they wouldn't have done that. I would urge the government to help remedy this error by supporting this motion so that we can hear that expert testimony and make sure that we are making an informed decision.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to draw attention to the portions of this bill that address the prohibition on government

advertising during elections. The intent of this legislation is clear. Governments should not be able to use taxpayer dollars to give themselves any advantage in an election. This is common sense in a free and fair democracy. Unfortunately, this legislation does not take effective steps to eliminate this practice. When this government was in opposition, they were rightly against the use of tax dollars to create electoral advantages, yet now that they're in government, they have done nothing to close remaining loopholes. Why has the government refused to tighten up these rules when they had a perfect opportunity with this bill, that is supposed to be taking actions like this to strengthen and protect our democracy?

There would be a very easy way to look at the changes that need to be made. That is to send this bill to committee, like my colleague has suggested. This government has a choice on the message that they send to Albertans. Will they vote for this referral motion and commit that they will end the practice of government spending announcements during elections, or will they continue to ram this bill through and send a message that they don't really care about fairness in our democracy?

Speaking of fairness in democracy, we also need to talk about the removal of the residency requirements for voting in provincial elections. Madam Speaker, this is a very basic principle. Only Albertans should be able to vote in Alberta elections. Our representatives should be elected by those who have a long-term interest in our province and its communities. It is not at all unreasonable to require a term of residency in order to vote. This proposed change could cause serious harm to public confidence in our democracy. The legitimacy of our elections cannot become a matter of debate, and opening the door to the possibility of nonresidents voting in our elections is not acceptable.

The members opposite will surely tell us that this is not the case and that there is no risk in this change. Unfortunately for them, Albertans have had enough of taking the NDP at their word. The law needs to be strict and clear in order to mitigate any risks there might be. [interjections] It's interesting to hear the members opposite here, the government MLAs, laughing and joking about democracy in Alberta. I find it pretty shameful that they would sit there and do that. [interjections] They continue on, heckling and laughing and ridiculing democracy in Alberta. It's shameful. They continue on. They continue on. Madam Speaker, I don't think that democracy is funny; I think it's serious. That's why we live here in this free country. We respect democracy. The members opposite don't seem to care about that.

Again, Madam Speaker, I think that the people of Alberta have had enough of this government. They don't trust them anymore. They've heard one thing and seen another thing over and over from this government. When they were in opposition, they railed against things like this over and over again, but what do they do when they're here? They just ram it through. If this government wants to make this change and they have some other way of proving that they can maintain absolute electoral integrity, then they should come to the committee, tell Albertans what their thinking is, and provide evidence to support it.

If the government does not provide a detailed explanation to Albertans, it may raise questions on potential ulterior motives. Some may ask if enabling out-of-province voters is a hidden attempt of this change. Again, these questions could serve to erode the confidence of Albertans in our democratic process, which is exactly the opposite of what the bill purports to do. It doesn't seem to me that this would do anything to strengthen and protect our democracy and would in fact create an inherent weakness, one at risk of exploitation.

It is for the many reasons that I have mentioned above that I cannot support this bill as it stands.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to ask a question. I just wanted to thank my colleague for, I think, his very respectful approach to trying to understand what this legislation is about. Lookit, it's not always easy to ask difficult questions, and difficult questions quite often would get interesting responses. But what I find very interesting is that there's a lot of commentary coming from the government, lots in fact, especially when it comes to the piece about residency, which is probably one of the larger reasons why this bill needs work.

As my colleague was saying, there is an imperative piece, especially with a piece of legislation like this, that Albertans feel not only that their voice is heard but that it is their voice, that it's Albertans, people in this province, the ones who pay taxes here. Even for those who are living here – we have students that are living in our province; we have out-of-province workers that are living here – we want to make sure all of those folks have the ability to vote. That six-month space gives lots of time for anybody who's in the province to actually be able to do that.

The question remains, though – and my colleague was doing, I thought, a very good job of trying to at least ask the question – about why a government would feel it necessary to have a person be able to come across the border of our province and, by being able to be vouched for by a person who says that they live here, be able to vote.

My goodness, if I am misunderstanding that, I would absolutely love for one of the members across the way to correct the record. Honestly, with all my heart, Madam Speaker, if we are wrong, if we have misinterpreted this legislation, please, I would ask that one of the members stand up and explain that to us. If we're wrong, great. That's fine. I would prefer to find it out in here, and I'd prefer to discuss it in here. However, the interesting part is that with all of the yelling and all of the heckling and all of the commentary, we've yet to hear somebody actually stand up and explain to us, explain to Albertans, and actually put to rest any fear that this is a concern.

It's not just this government. Whatever government follows this government will have access to that same thing, and that's one thing to keep in mind. I mean, these pieces of legislation aren't just for right now. They have long-term effects, ripple effects, on the democracy of this province. Honestly, I'm terribly sorry if we have offended the government by asking difficult questions. That is absolutely our reason for being here at this point in time. Quite frankly, it's fine for with them if they're offended, but we need to ask those questions. I'm very grateful that my colleague brought up some very difficult – and to tell you the truth, Madam Speaker, I think what's most disconcerting is that these are the questions we're actually getting at our offices. It's very difficult to believe that they're not getting those questions as well.

10:20

If they've answered the questions for their constituents, do tell. Please share that information with us. Please explain it. If I'm not understanding, I am more than happy to be corrected and happy to share that information with my constituents. I've written quite a few bits and pieces about this. I've tried to look into it, tried to understand the mentality of what's happening here. There are lots and lots of opportunities to actually discuss it – that's why we're here, right? – and that's why we're in the House right now. There's no reason to be offended. That's the whole reason we're here, to ask these questions. If it is a question that can easily be answered, please, I really look forward to the response from the government to my colleague's questions and his concerns about this. I'm sorry

that the government is not as concerned as we are. This is one of those big things for me, the question of residency, the question of authentic voting within our province.

Again, you know, what's really, really magnificent about our country and about our province, Madam Speaker, is that we try our very best to make sure that people have the access to vote. It's actually one of the most massive privileges of our country. If you've travelled and you've been to other places around the world and understand the way voting works in other places around the world, we're very fortunate here.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed an absolute pleasure to rise this morning to speak to this bill on electoral reform within the province of Alberta and indeed to honour the request of the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to discuss the issue of residency and the changes that are proposed in this bill.

Now, over the weekend, Madam Speaker, there has been much discussion about this, sparked largely by some unfortunate misinformation on the part of the United Conservative Party of Alberta and, of course, their leader, Mr. Kenney, Hon. Mr. Kenney, noting claims that we were removing the requirement for residency in the province of Alberta. Now, there were some interesting suggestions from members across the aisle, including the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and some others, indeed the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, suggesting that perhaps these changes were in order to bus in large numbers of supporters from outside the province, an absolutely ludicrous proposal. It reminds me of some of the ridiculous claims we've heard from south of the border about phantom suggestions of mass voter fraud, which all seem to come from the same side of the political spectrum.

Now, Madam Speaker, to be clear, the rules within the province of Alberta, as noted, I should note, by the mainstream press – indeed, CBC Edmonton yesterday posted a very clear explanation of how these changes work. Perhaps the member has not had the opportunity to read that article yet. I would suggest that she perhaps would like to take a look.

But it makes it quite clear that what is happening in this legislation is as was requested on more than one occasion by the Chief Electoral Officer of the province, and I will say that as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I have deep respect for the expertise that is in fact offered by those legislative officers. Indeed, I will note, Madam Speaker, that the CEO, in fact, himself noted that he was consulted on several occasions about specific pieces that were brought forward in this legislation.

On this particular note, which is in response to his request based on a legal case which found that it would be against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to deny somebody the opportunity to vote, we are proposing to remove the requirement that somebody be ordinarily resident. Again, Madam Speaker, that is a specific definition that is provided on the Elections Alberta website, which, again, the members can read if they wish to educate themselves on this issue, and a term that is used in other areas. For example, in determining whether someone is eligible for the Alberta health care insurance plan, they also have to demonstrate that they are ordinarily resident within the province of Alberta. As long as that is the case, we are simply removing the fact that that has to be the case for six months, something which the Chief Electoral Officer has clearly stated was difficult and at times impossible to prove.

The members opposite are very fond of saying that we need to cut red tape and needless regulation. The CEO himself identified that this was a requirement that often could not actually be proven, so he recommended that we make this change and reduce it to the one item which is simple and basic to prove: is the individual who is wishing to vote ordinarily a resident of the province of Alberta? That is done, Madam Speaker, by that individual providing photo identification with their address or providing other identification as required under the act and clearly noted and explained on the Elections Alberta website. Or, in a particular case, if an individual does not have said ID – and in fact this is the case for some folks in my constituency who are homeless, who may not have access to identification and other things – an individual who knows that individual and who themselves produces the ID that is required, which shows who they are and that they are ordinarily resident in that particular electoral district, can vouch for one and only one other individual, sign a legal declaration stating that they are vouching for this individual. That individual then makes a legal declaration that they are, in fact, ordinarily resident in that area, and then that person is allowed to vote.

If this, Madam Speaker, is a mass conspiracy for voter fraud, it's a hell of an inefficient one. I apologize for my use of that word. I retract that word.

Mrs. Aheer: Angry.

Mr. Shepherd: Yeah. You know what? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View observed that I'm angry. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I am angry because of this abuse of the facts, this incredible, as was noted by Graham Thomson of the *Edmonton Journal* in his editorial yesterday, this constant, extreme massaging of the facts by the members opposite and by their leader. In fact, this has increased exponentially since they acquired this new leader. Of course, that does make me angry. Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve representatives that are able to discuss these issues based on facts, and the kind of fearmongering we're hearing from the UCP anger machine does a disservice to the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to have this opportunity to put the facts out there.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Yes, Madam Speaker. It was actually good to see that one of the government members would actually stand up and speak. Now, of course, he had – I guess he was angry. He said that he was angry. I'm not sure what he's angry about. What I thought was interesting is that he said that he had a deep respect for the Chief Electoral Officer. Well, I would think that a deep respect would involve some sort of communication with the Chief Electoral Officer and would involve something of . . .

Mr. McIver: Make a call.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Maybe make a call to him. Maybe have a little chat.

Now, he did say that there was a lot of communication. Well, that's funny because the Chief Electoral Officer clearly said that that's not the case. He provided it in writing actually, Madam Speaker. I think that might be – what did he call that?

Mr. McIver: Abuse of facts.

Mr. Loewen: Abuse of facts: that is the term the member used. The abuse of facts, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I don't know where to go with this, really. This is just bizarre. Now, one thing I found interesting is that the member quoted Graham Thomson, and I know the Member for St. Albert also quoted Graham Thomson. From the exact same article I want to quote Graham Thomson for the record, too.

Some even consider the Alberta Federation of Labour something of a PAC. It raised the largest amount in donations of any third-party group in the second quarter of this year with \$230,000.

I think that while you're quoting Mr. Thomson, you should quote all of Mr. Thomson and listen to what he says about the Alberta Federation of Labour.

He goes on to say, if we want to talk about Mr. Thomson's article, in this very same article that this member quoted and the very same article that the Member for St. Albert quoted:

The courts have already supported PACs under Charter rights to free speech. Simply banning PACs isn't possible. Placing severe restrictions on their activities at all times, not just during election campaigns, would likely be deemed unconstitutional.

10:30

Madam Speaker, this government wants to get what they call dark money out of politics, but maybe they need to do a little more homework, which is why we brought these amendments forward, so they could do a little bit more homework and find out if we're going to have court challenges and everything on this.

Now, I did get a note from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose here. It says: my copy of Bill 32 has only 105 pages, not over 200; how did your copy double? Well, Madam Speaker, I just want to, I guess, look at Bill 32. This is the copy the government provided me. Maybe what the member hasn't done is that he hasn't looked at the page numbering carefully. I'm open at page 71, and it says 71 on this page and on this page.

Mr. McIver: That whole math thing.

Mr. Loewen: It's that math thing where you have to figure it out. The last page on this is 105, but that isn't how many pages are in the bill.

Now, Madam Speaker, on one side it shows what's being amended in the original bill, and on the other side is what they're changing it to. That's normally how this is set up. But if you want to read the bill and you want to understand the bill, you have to see what it's changing. You don't just look at what it's going to be without seeing what it was before. That only makes sense.

I'll go back to Graham Thomson, another quote here: "In fact, Alberta government sources are expecting a legal challenge of Bill 32 ahead of the next provincial election." Madam Speaker, the government is even expecting this legal challenge, so don't you think that they should have taken the time to do a little more research and try to avoid things like legal challenges? Legal challenges are expensive, and what happens if you lose? If you lose, then all of a sudden you have limited options.

Madam Speaker, it was just, I thought, very rich to hear the Member for Edmonton-Centre get up and go on this huge rant, this angry rant. Of course, we've been listening to enormous amounts of heckling coming from the other side throughout this whole debate.

I think it's actually very, very – honestly, it's ironic that An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta actually takes away from democracy in Alberta. It just doesn't even make any sense. Now, of course, if this democracy . . . [Mr. Loewen's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder, hon. member, please, to table the documents you were quoting from later on.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to the referral motion on Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. This motion, proposed by my colleague from Airdrie, would in accordance with Standing Order 74.2 refer this bill to a standing committee, and that's exactly where it should happen.

Now, sometimes I like to use the phrase "déjà vu" in this Chamber. Actually, my favourite, if you're a little bit of a baseball fan, is *déjà vu* all over again. I like that one. But today I use it again because it's with that feeling that I have to mention that once again we find ourselves late into session and the government has dropped a bill on us that, quite frankly, should have probably been served up as two distinct bills. Actually, there's another bill that is made up of two rather large pieces of legislation that could have been divvied up into two bills that was also introduced in the dying days of the fall session. So this isn't anything new for this session. It may be odd, but it's not new.

Bill 32 is several pages long, rather than debate whether the numbers are correct, and was dropped just days before the scheduled end of session. How many times have we seen that, huge bills that everyone will likely know will have to be debated a lot, probably require a lot of amendments from this side of the House, huge bills that are just set up to be pushed through this House? Bill 17 of the spring session comes to mind. Bill 6 from the First Session since we were all elected comes to mind, too.

Anyway, yes, the two main areas of Bill 32 delve into the subject dealing with rules around elections, but this several-page bill documents two distinct parts that deal with areas that could fall under a broader title, possibly election finances and election reform. The point I'm trying to make here is that we need to ensure, with legislation this important and vital to democracy, that the bill is right. We need to ensure that anyone in the province of Alberta that takes issue with any parts of any piece of legislation that is put before legislators of this House that is this important has the ability to make a comment, to make a comment in their own words, not necessarily words that are chosen by the government of the day on an Internet site.

Isn't that kind of what democracy is all about? What harm can be done by moving this proposed piece of legislation to committee, as the MLA from Airdrie suggested and made in her motion? You know – good grief – we're talking about elections here, among other things, of course. Elections, if I may be so bold, are the primary decision-making process of any democracy. We need to ensure that we have done due diligence and taken the time and care to make this piece of legislation solid. My colleague's amendment helps ensure just that. Let's consult Albertans. Let's engage Elections Alberta and their staff. Let's make sure we get this right.

I remember Bill 203, the Alberta Standard Time Act. While it may have been a private member's bill, the Legislature saw fit to refer it to Alberta's Economic Future Committee. There was a lot of fanfare about the bill as it went to committee, but the fact was that after hearing from submitters all across Alberta and in the boardrooms in the Federal building, the committee recommended to the Legislature that the bill not proceed. I'm not naive enough to believe that there weren't some politics involved on the government side either, but it slowed things down a little, and we got to consider more points of the bill than just making sure that a piece of legislation was rammed through the House.

Now, for a moment I'd like to speak about a comment that I made a few minutes ago. Let's engage Elections Alberta, among others,

to make sure that we get this right. I think it's been said quite a few times in this House – and it may be said a few more yet – that, once again, we are seeing that some consultation may indeed have been used in the creation of this bill, but it was not an in-depth account, the likes of which should be used when creating a bill that is this important.

I'm sure that consultation of some sort may have been used, but as we have seen and many of my colleagues have already talked about, the very first organization on the list of potential consultees, if that's a word, was not consulted, let's say, fully. I say fully because Mr. Glen Resler, the Chief Electoral Officer, no less, of Elections Alberta stated in the letter that he wrote to the minister responsible for democratic renewal that he was pleased to see that some of his recommendations were incorporated into Bill 32.

Now, nobody from my side of the House was involved in the consultation process, obviously, but Mr. Resler did use the word "some" in his letter to the minister, which leads those of us from this side to believe that he may have actually proposed more than the bill considered. The Member for Edmonton-Centre claims that this side of the House is telling part of the story, claims that this side of the House is abusing the facts and is massaging those facts.

At any rate, Mr. Resler wanted to bring to the attention of the minister the potential unintended consequences of the proposals about advanced polls and special mobile polls contained within the bill. I believe, Madam Speaker, that that letter has been tabled to the House already. If not, I'd certainly be happy to do so. To continue, he believes that "if passed in its current form . . . Bill 32 will [tend to] deteriorate the service provided to electors and increase the timelines for communicating results."

Now, I don't know. That may seem kind of trivial, but when the Chief Electoral Officer writes a letter to the minister who has created a bill that somehow affects elections in the province suggesting unintended consequences to that bill, I've got to believe that in the best interests of Albertans he may need to be listened to. His letter contains a lot of information, but that sentence or two alone are a good enough reason to refer this bill to committee. Chances are that there are lots of Albertans that have an opinion or an idea that may be beneficial to the legislation. That's why it should be sent to the committee.

10:40

Speaking of getting it right, I can see that there are portions of this bill that appear, on the surface, to have been gotten mostly right, and there are some that I think may not have been quite as accurately portrayed. I'm uncomfortable with the idea, for example, that someone who has just moved to Alberta could, under these proposed changes, within a day simply appear and be allowed to vote in an election.

While some of the more politically engaged folks may think that this is great – and don't mistake me; I certainly want as many Albertans as possible to become politically engaged – I can't help but feel that perhaps at least 30 or so days of residence should be a minimum standard for residency. That's just my own opinion. Again, what is the perfect number? We haven't determined that. This bill states one. Is it 30 days, 60 days, six months? Maybe that was the right number. That's why this referral amendment needs to pass, Madam Speaker. These things can be worked out in the standing committee, with opinions sought and stakeholders engaged.

Another part of this that has kind of irked me is this topic of government announcements during an election or a by-election. Now, nobody's hands are clean on this one. Governments have always skirted the line on this issue, and the present government has not disappointed despite how they make a great deal of outrage

about this exact topic and how much outrage they made while sitting in opposition seats. While they have tried to take steps to fix this issue, it's clear from the laundry list of exemptions that they don't seem to have the seriousness to fix it. A token resistance perhaps.

Why so many exceptions? Why do we need the ability to grant government such a wide discretionary grey area? It seems to me that the potential for abuse is too great in that instance. The grey area of keeping the Alberta public informed is so vague that it would simply be better to allow committee to look at this a little more in-depth and see if we can get this list down to a lot shorter list, deal with the announcements required by law or even ones that are vital for public safety. I would think that Albertans are certainly savvy enough to understand when an announcement is strictly done to further partisan interest during a by-election, but fine-tuning this act in committee would help alleviate that doubt, Madam Speaker.

When my caucus mate from Drumheller-Stettler talked about door-to-door energy sales, he made the point about how people are reluctant to open doors to strangers these days. With the rampant rural crime rate and property crime increasing everywhere, how effectively could a mandatory door-to-door enumeration prior to an election fare if folks are afraid to come to the door? I have concern about the cost of a mandatory full door-to-door enumeration in every riding in the province prior to the next election. Elections Alberta priced out the potential costs for this option, and it came up with the number of \$11 million.

In the last election 60 per cent of returning officers had difficulty recruiting enumerators. Those enumerators also expressed concerns and are now required to travel in pairs, which, of course, is leading to skyrocketing costs for door-to-door enumeration with the doubling up of staff for safety reasons. So it's not just the homeowners who don't feel safe. Elections staff feel uncomfortable out on the streets as well. The fix to this is to take the advice of the CEO and allow for targeted enumeration combined with a full mail-out, which has been proven to yield more accurate results and will cost approximately \$5 million. That's a lot more palatable than the \$11 million number being bandied about.

It's supposed to be more effective in engaging the public as well. The standing committee could continue to engage with Elections Alberta and see what else could be done to alleviate the concerns and maybe find more efficiencies in both process and cost. You know, I guess that we're not going to know until we try, and that's why passing this amendment matters.

I hope that the reluctance isn't, as my friend from Grande Prairie-Smoky mentioned, the same as when the government-dominated Committee on Resource Stewardship defeated his motion to take extra time to engage stakeholders simply because they weren't willing to put in the work. You know, Madam Speaker, that perception could easily change with the passing of this amendment. I know that they will disagree with this assessment, and that's fair, too. Sometimes politics comes into play.

You have to wonder if that's why this government turned down our old legacy caucus when we asked not once but on two different issues to create an independent office of the Legislature that would advocate for the disabled on one occasion and seniors on the other. In that instance, both were turned down as the government deemed them too costly, yet we see that the government is now interested in establishing an independent office of the Legislature in the form of an independent elections commissioner that would investigate complaints, recommend prosecutions, and conduct investigations on third-party advertisers. It appears that the government wants to very clearly define the difference between the administration of an election and investigations resulting from an election.

Okay. Now, I may be able to get behind the concept but not the flow through. At a time when I think we all need to be reducing the spending that government makes, it seems that this could be an unnecessary and redundant office that would be very expensive. Alberta already has a Chief Electoral Officer, that oversees matters like this, and that office comes with a very large budget. There seems to be no conflict of interest between the Chief Electoral Officer and the proposed elections commissioner that would require them to operate independent of each other, so why incur the expense?

Madam Speaker, too many complexities and too many nuances need closer scrutiny, and without a doubt that can be accomplished in committee by the standing committee. So I ask all my colleagues in this House: why not pass this amendment, and we can fix this bill once and for all?

I'll encourage everyone in the House to do so. I thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm grateful for this opportunity, and I thank the hon. member for his thoughtful reflections on the amendment before this, the reasoned amendment to move this to committee for some – I won't even say additional consultation, probably for some initial consultation in some areas. I say that advisedly because I'm sure they talked to some people.

The hon. member mentioned in his remarks that the government wants to create a new independent officer of the Legislature having to do with elections, which is kind of interesting because in the letter that we received from the current head of Elections Alberta, he made it clear that the government never talked to him about the legislation. Yes, it makes it clear in the letter that there was discussion in the previous committee that got shut down, but during the time the government actually was putting together the piece of legislation that's before us, they never consulted with him, never asked him how he liked it, what he thought of it. He said that in writing.

I wonder, to the hon. member, if the government has either lost the phone number of the current head of Elections Alberta or has just chosen to leave it in the Rolodex or their smart phone or wherever it happens to be. I wonder how anxious they'll be to actually find the phone number of the new independent officer of the Legislature when the phone number of the old, current independent officer of the Legislature was so darn hard to dial. There are, after all, 10 digits. That will take – what? – a minute, and these people are busy. They're busy. They're busy not talking to Albertans. That's what they're busy doing.

10:50

I'll ask him to reflect a little bit, too, on the massaged facts from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, in regard to the residency requirement, when he talks about the fact that no one would ever do this. In fact, Madam Speaker, it is true that a good part of our electoral system is based on the honour system, and I think all members of the House would think that, for the most part, that's good. But I would ask the member to reflect on whether we shouldn't leave ourselves absolutely open to widespread abuse without really any effort by those people that do it for the same argument that while most of the people are honest in the world, I still lock my door. And I imagine most of the members on the other side lock their doors at the same time as believing that most people are honest.

In the same way that we lock our doors to keep honest people honest, I would ask the hon. member whether he thinks having a residency requirement of longer than a day might actually be the equivalent of locking your door though most of the people out there are honest, you know, and whether he thinks it's probably common sense and would be an example of showing good judgment, especially for something as valuable as democracy.

Well, I'm not a wealthy man – I don't know if anybody in here is; it's not my business – but I don't own anything that's worth more than democracy. I don't own anything that's worth more than democracy, and I would ask the hon. member whether cheapening democracy by unlocking the door on the front of it is an example of the government showing good judgment or, indeed, whether it's an example of the government showing something other than good judgment.

The hon. member also reflected upon the title of the bill to strengthen democracy. Again, Madam Speaker, what I've often said here is that with the NDP legislation what the big print giveth, the small print taketh away. While they're talking about protecting democracy, they're actually taking away Alberta's ability to vote for their next Senators. Now, I would ask the hon. member to reflect upon whether that actually increases democracy or whether that actually reduces democracy for the very Albertans that we are here to protect, that we are here to represent, and whose voice we are here to strengthen, or whether indeed it diminishes their voice.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Wonderful. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First of all, thank you to members who have previously spoken on this referral. I, of course, rise to support my colleague from Airdrie in regard to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, and the referral to send this to committee.

I think that before I get started, I just, you know, want to acknowledge, of course, the importance of committees. I certainly have had the opportunity to be a part of a couple. Certainly, I've worked with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and I've worked with the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, and I will say that both of those individuals are more than capable of dealing with anything that is brought forward to them, especially something as important as this. I believe that they do have the ability to deal with these complex matters, and I certainly recommend that – especially in the case of Edmonton-Centre, if he ever had the opportunity to successfully get this referred to his committee, I believe that he'd be more than capable of dealing with this.

I also want to touch a little bit here, Madam Speaker, in regard to the identification that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, of course, brought up. I guess that maybe I come from a slightly different perspective, again, from that law enforcement perspective. I believe my hon. friend here from Calgary-Hays brought this up.

You know, I was very humbled to have been the only law enforcement officer ever appointed to the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness and very proud of the work that I did back in the day. One of the things that I was able to assist with during that period of time was helping those in vulnerable positions get identification, because there were challenges. There were challenges, especially in the Calgary drop-in centre, for people to obtain identification. Some of them, sadly, may have been victims of crime, and some of them may have lost their identification. Of course, that hindered them in their ability to at times find work and get some of the necessary services that they need.

There was a process that was put into place by the minister at that time which assisted those who were vulnerable in getting

identification, but I can tell you that it was longer than a one-day process where a friend swore an affidavit saying that you were who you were. It was actually a very extensive process that was put into place whereby the person is of course saying that they, you know, are a name, a particular date of birth, and then there was an investigation that took place.

That investigation was quite extensive. It was thorough. It required at times background checks that went on. In some cases, when people had come here who had no identification but were from a jurisdiction, you know, let's say, in eastern Canada, the process was to call and do their investigation in eastern Canada or wherever that person was alleged to be from, again, to confirm that they are who they are because of the importance of handing out government-issued ID. Of course, like my friend from Calgary-Hays said, for the importance of democracy, we have to be sure that that person is who they say that they are before they are issued a piece of government identification, before they vote, quite frankly.

You know, I can tell you that from my experience, again, as a police officer, using the computer system that we had available to us at the time, it could take me 30 seconds, 10 seconds, however long it takes for the computer to boot up, for me to confirm somebody's identity, but that's the police. That's dealing with an investigation on a criminal matter. We're not talking about criminal matters. We're talking about people and their ability to vote. We're talking about confirming people's identification, and that will take longer than a day. We have to be sure about who somebody is before we give them the opportunity and the right to vote. I hate to say this, but it does open itself up to fraud.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Sadly, again, you know, in my previous career, when I used to hand out – Mr. Speaker, good to see you, sir. You know, if I charged somebody with a criminal offence and maybe I gave them an appearance notice or a promise to appear, maybe sometimes there were conditions associated with that, and I had people signing that in good faith, which is the reason I chose that form of release for that individual. I believed that that person was going to show up to court, or I believed that that person was going to abide by their conditions. However, sadly, in some cases, not all cases but in some cases, people didn't show up to court. People didn't abide by their conditions. They weren't honourable on their sworn piece of paper that they signed. So we have to be cautious about this. I think we have to err on the side of caution when it comes to this, and I think that's extremely important.

You know, again, I mean, there are parts of this bill that are good, and there are parts of this bill that I think just require a little bit more consultation. I think they require a little bit more tweaking in order to make it even better.

11:00

You know, I do have some concerns, especially from the Chief Electoral Officer, and I'll quote Mr. Resler when he said, "Since I provided recommendations to the Special Select Ethics and Accountability Committee, I have not been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32." That's concerning to me, and I think that is concerning enough to me to where we should be taking a pause. We should be allowing those who are the experts to come in and talk about this.

I mean, I can tell right now, you know, that most people in this Legislature other than the two ministers – actually, I don't believe the hon. Calgary-Hays was even a minister at the time. Certainly, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti might have been the only one in this Legislature that is aware that there was a process of

identifying people who did not have identification but, again, a process that takes longer than a day.

One of the other things, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring to your attention again comes from the Chief Electoral Officer, I think, when he stated, you know:

While I applaud the spirit behind the proposals about advance polls and special mobile polls, I wanted to bring to your attention potential unintended consequences of these particular proposals. If passed in its current form, I am concerned that Bill 32 will deteriorate the service provided to electors and increase the timelines for communicating results.

You know, it's a concern, Mr. Speaker, and I think, again, that has to do with a lack of consultation, especially with those who are in a position to best know our electoral system; i.e., Mr. Resler and his expertise as the Chief Electoral Officer. Those are concerns, and I think that it's very important that we, again, bring it back to what the hon. Member for Airdrie had indicated, that it goes back to committee for consultation with, again, committee chairs, who are more than capable of dealing with this issue that would be brought forward to them.

The other thing I would like to touch on, Mr. Speaker, of course, is the Senate. You know, I understand what the members opposite are saying. I understand what the folks on this side are saying. Yes, in the end, they are appointed. I get the impression from both perspectives that not everybody is happy with appointed. On reflection, I'm not sure I really agree that an appointed body has the right to overrule or stand in the way of or be a barrier to an elected body.

But Albertans, I can tell you – and I know some of the government members, well, have been here for about three years but at the time were fairly new to Alberta, and Albertans are very proud of this opportunity to elect or have the ability to elect a candidate who would then possibly be appointed to the Senate. So, no, it's not being directly elected to the Senate – we all get that – but Albertans were very, very proud, just proud of the fact that they had an opportunity to elect a Senator to stand to be appointed, potentially be appointed. You know, that's going to be taken away from them.

As somebody that's been here all my life, certainly, and talked with many of my friends and my colleagues and those who I've worked with, I remember when Albertans had that first right to vote for their Senator. It was thought of just as a step in the right direction – a step in the right direction – Mr. Speaker, whereby, hopefully, one day we would have that right to vote in our Senators, and to think that it's regressing and taking that step back is certainly a concern for Albertans. It's a concern for the constituents to whom I have spoken.

You know, I remember heading back to the constituency on the weekend and attending one of the hockey games. It seems to be my part-time job, doing that, with my son playing hockey all the time. But just in talking to some of the parents, one of them brought this up in regard to: "Hey, is that right? We won't be allowed to vote for the opportunity to have a Senator anymore?" They were concerned with that, and I think that their concerns are valid ones. I think that we should be progressive when it comes to this and not go in the opposite direction.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I see a bill such as this – again, I don't want to get in an argument as to the page numbers – certainly, something that is a large bill, that is dropped on us a week before the session was supposed to end, it's concerning to me. I think that in order for us to make sure that this can be the best bill possible for all Albertans, I believe that we really need to send this to committee and give the opportunity for the experts to come in and give their opinions on what really, truly is going to matter.

It cannot be stressed enough that the Chief Electoral Officer is somebody – and that's fine. I mean, everybody makes mistakes. You know, as my friend said, although he was being funny, they may have lost the Chief Electoral Officer's phone number. But, quite frankly, what's important is that he needed to be consulted on this, and we really needed to have his input. I can tell you that for anybody in my constituency, anybody in the election that I have been a part of, the Chief Electoral Officer is the first point of contact, and I think that for the government the Chief Electoral Officer should also be the first point of contact.

Mr. Speaker, I can't stress enough the importance of sending this to committee. I want to thank you and all the members for this opportunity.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions for Calgary-West under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. A couple of things I'd like to bring up and comment on with respect to some things that were said earlier.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're under 29(2)(a).

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, sir. Thank you so much.

With respect to what the member was saying, he was speaking specifically around the electoral officer. One of the things that, again, is very, very interesting about this bill is the piece on consultation, which the member was speaking about. The Member for Edmonton-Centre had said that they had spoken with the Chief Electoral Officer on many, many occasions. But, again, oddly enough, and like the member was saying, specifically around the piece that the independent officer – and I believe the Member for Calgary-Hays was also mentioning this as well – was never consulted, it's interesting that there are certain pieces that were consulted on and certain ones that weren't. I find that a little bit confusing.

One of the things I wanted to bring up as well is in response to some questions that I had asked earlier with respect to the residency pieces. I mean, to Mr. Resler's credit – and the member was mentioning this as well, around the six-month residency piece. He's asked for that change, for the six months to be removed because it is hard to prove, very difficult, which is what the member was mentioning. It's difficult to prove. Why is it difficult to prove? Because it's easy to abuse. It's easy to abuse because it is hard to prove. I know it sounds silly to say it back and forth. But that's the actual reason.

Now, does that mean that you stop the ability to have a body of proof? No. As the member had said, you have to have identification. We get that. My question, then, ultimately is – and hopefully the member will have a chance to answer this – does that mean that with removing that six-month piece, if a person is here for one day and has the ability to have somebody vouch for them, then indeed are they able to vote?

11:10

Further to that, on the other side of things, if you remove the six months, which other provinces have – and I get that – don't you think that it would be easier and better for Alberta voters and voters that have the right to vote in this province because they are residing here to have a little bit of time to be able to go get their documentation together, to be able to present at election that they do indeed live here?

I mean, obviously, if you're a student from another province, that's going to be slightly different, but you would have a piece of

mail that came to your residence or whatever that is. The issue of proof – and I'm sure the member will be able to elaborate on this a little bit more – is actually always going to be an issue, so if we want to create the ability for accountability, which we do, especially within the electoral process, if we want to make sure that residents feel protected, that they feel safe, that we're actually strengthening the legislation, don't we want to make, at the very least, the ability for the average Albertan or the average resident to make sure that they have all their ducks in a row before they go to that process?

And then, I mean, to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, like he said, there are people that do not have the ability or the means, or they don't have this identification and need somebody to vouch for them. We understand that. The question is, though, and the interesting piece is when I'd ask the question – and I ask the question to the member here – that Mr. Resler brought this forward not because of anything other than that it is hard to prove. So we're basically saying that because we can't prove it, that's the reason to remove it. In my opinion, if anything, fine; make it smaller; do whatever you need to do with it.

If I could ask the member to please respond. If you could tell us, from your perspective, in terms of safety, in terms of making sure of accountability: how do you feel with respect to that?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Thank you, hon. member, for the question. It is hard to prove. It's hard to prove six months. It's hard to prove. Again, that's why those checks and balances were put into place many years ago when dealing with people who have lost their identification. When people were challenged with being able to prove who they were, that was not something that could be done in a day. But the same to your argument as well. We couldn't prove six months or a year.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there members who wish to speak on the referral amendment to second reading of Bill 32?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:14 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Ellis	Schneider
Anderson, W.	McIver	Stier
Cooper	Orr	Yao
Drysdale	Pitt	

11:30

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Notley
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Jansen	Renaud
Ceci	Kazim	Rosendahl
Clark	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Connolly	Larivee	Schreiner
Coolahan	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sigurdson
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	Mason	Turner

Feehan	McLean	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring	Nielsen	
Totals:	For – 11	Against – 41

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Are there any members that wish to speak to Bill 32? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. I will reiterate that when the NDP does legislation, what the big print giveth, the small print almost always taketh away. This is just one more example of where that is indeed the case. In fact, I'm going to reflect for a few minutes. The Premier came into the House to speak on this bill last night, and that was highly entertaining. In fact, the Premier got a standing ovation from members on her side. The members on that side of the House are excited about this bill, but I have to tell you that there are lots that ought to concern Albertans, because democracy matters.

There are several issues here. First of all, let's just talk about democracy. The fact is that what the bill does is reduce democracy. Right up until now, until this NDP government showed up, Albertans had the ability to periodically vote for Albertans that might after that be appointed as Senators. This government has repealed that ability. Rather than strengthening democracy, this government has said that Albertans' voices are not important. That, actually, should be concerning to everyone in Alberta, the fact that their government doesn't want their voice heard.

It should also be a concern – we talked about the residency requirement. The residency requirement of six months has been repealed. Now, Mr. Speaker, when I take a vacation in Mexico, I don't get to vote for the government there, and if I take a vacation in Arizona, I don't get to vote there either. I would hate for people to think that they could come to Alberta for the weekend or the week and manage to vote. I think that is something that becomes a realistic possibility under this legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that members on the other side are feeling tender about this. In fact, one earlier today said that he was angry that he had to talk about this. I suppose that if a group of people I was connected to brought this forward, I might be angry, too, like the member opposite, having to defend such a piece of legislation. Then again, anger is the normal situation across the way. The fact that the six-month residency requirement has been taken away I think will be a concern for a lot of Albertans. I have to tell you that since this has been in the public discourse – you probably won't be surprised, Mr. Speaker – I don't judge what people really think.

Mr. Dach: Why do you want to disenfranchise people who want to come here to work?

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is so enthusiastic about democracy that he can't wait his turn. I hope that when he gets his turn, he will stand up and be just as enthusiastic about democracy, more enthusiastic than he's allowing Albertans to be that want to vote for their Senators, for example, much more than that.

Mr. Speaker, there's a discussion here about the possibilities. It's been talked about – and I don't know whether it's true or not – that there could be a Charter challenge here. Here's the concern. The government is going to take away some people's ability to speak: PACs, third parties, this or that. There's a school of

thought – and I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a judge, so I don't know whether this is right or not – that that might be considered unconstitutional. The government seems to realize that, but they're going ahead anyway.

What's common with this, as with several other pieces of legislation that they have passed with sections in that are widely thought to be unconstitutional: I can't help but wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether the government knows this, whether the government thinks that they might lose, but they just want it in place for one more election because if it's a constitutional challenge, it may well take more than a year and a half to get there. I'm questioning the government's motivation here and wondering whether, indeed, they're hoping to have these rules in place just for one more election, before a challenge could be mounted and concluded. I don't know. Perhaps some member of the government will stand up and make that clear one way or the other, but you can hardly blame me for wondering.

You can hardly blame me for wondering about the government's sincerity about listening to Albertans when they are trying to add a new independent officer of the Legislature when they're not talking to the current officer of the Legislature, Glen Resler, as he has made clear in a letter to the minister on December 6, 2017, where he says that he wasn't consulted. Yes, he says that he gave testimony at the committee that ended – I don't know – several months ago, whatever, but during the time the government was putting together this piece of legislation, the independent elections officer makes it clear that he was not called during that time.

Consequently, one really has to wonder about the government's sincerity in wanting to create another independent officer when they don't talk to the independent officer that they already have. You would think that they would pick up the phone and call. You would think one of them has access to e-mail. You would think that somebody has time to go and have a cup of coffee and knock on the door and say: hey, independent officer who is responsible for this area of legislation and democracy in Alberta, perhaps you should be included in the conversation. But, no, that's not what the government did. They ignored that independent officer.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you really have to wonder about their sincerity when you've got these inconsistencies, severe inconsistencies, in the bill. You've got to wonder about the fact that they've been warned after the fact, nonetheless. I'll resist the urge to reflect on the vote we just had because that would be out of order, but you do have to wonder about the fact that you've got so many pieces of this legislation that so many people haven't even talked about that are going to change the way, indeed, in which we pick our next government. You've got to wonder whether this is yet one more attempt by this NDP government to try to put themselves in an advantageous position in the next election. It's consistent with previous legislation where they set the spending limits based, generally speaking, on what's their own highest donation limit and below everybody else's. It's a great example, where they set the election donations limits at the place that would be most advantageous specifically for the NDP as compared to the other parties.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? As an Albertan anybody listening to this should be very concerned. I am concerned, too, which is why I'm on my feet talking about this, because whether they pick our party to be the next government or some other party to be the next government, I just want to know that the contest has been fair. I may not like the fact that the current government is the government. The fact is that they were elected, and they have the right to be that government. I want every election to be fair and unbiased and not weighted to one side or the other. I can't help but wonder whether

this is one more attempt by this government to weight things in their own favour.

11:40

Now, again, the fact is that the cost of enumeration has been talked about by Elections Alberta, \$11 million, and it's been noted that it probably won't be effective. In other words, why spend the money if you can't get the job done? It doesn't make sense, yet there it is in black and white. You know what, Mr. Speaker? It may not have been in there had the government actually talked to somebody who was in the know on these things. As we are sure of, that is not the case.

Now, the government has taken some steps to prohibit government announcements during the elections, to not use taxpayers' dollars. Unfortunately, the exemptions for this portion of the bill are too extensive and leave too much room for government discretion and potential abuse. In other words, what the big print giveth, there's a risk that the small print may taketh away. We think that the government has designed this in such a fashion that they could do an end run on it and basically put themselves in a position where others may not be able to advertise but they may. This is another reason why we should be concerned about this bill and another reason why Albertans should wonder about this government's intentions and whether they have any belief in indeed strengthening democracy and any interest in protecting democracy, which is really odd because they're here as the result of a democratic process that went their way. Yet they seem to want to tip the playing field in their favour as they go forward.

Now, the government also needs to provide clarity on the legal definition of, quote, the administration of political parties to ensure that the legislation is not unconstitutional given its regulations outside the writ period. This ought to be clarified before this legislation is put in place, Mr. Speaker. It's not one of those things that we should leave to hope and chance and leave to any party's discretion but this one's in particular, that has shown a real propensity for tipping the scales in their own favour. To have them decide after this legislation is beyond this House is most inadvisable for Albertans and, by extension, most inadvisable for this government.

The way that we're governed matters. The way that we choose those people that make decisions that everybody else has to follow matters a great deal. This is an example of ignoring those important issues. Now, this bill increases the maximum penalty for general offences under the Elections Act from \$500 to \$5,000, which, actually, may turn out to be a good idea. But I haven't really heard any explanation from the government side members of why that's the right number. I might even be prepared to agree with them. But the fact is that when they trot out a bill of such core importance to Alberta a week before the Legislature was scheduled to end – and thank goodness the opposition caused the Legislature to go longer so that we could at least attempt to debate this – and when it arrives on an eight and a half by 11 sheet rather than going to the printer, Mr. Speaker, it really shows that the government didn't have their act together, didn't have it planned out, and was jamming things in there at the last minute. It really shows that their claim to wanting to strengthen and protect democracy is a fleeting one indeed, especially when you consider that the House went many, many months between sittings after the spring session. We didn't get back in here till October, and during all of those months out of here the government didn't actually put enough effort into this, probably the most important bill because it has to do with the way we elect our governments, to have it ready before the day before they introduced it, which was almost the day before the Legislature was scheduled to recess.

The work hasn't been done. They haven't done the work. They haven't done the preparation. They haven't put the thought into it, and they're going to throw Alberta into the next election under the guidance of a government and an effort that is so haphazard, so slipshod, so half-baked that they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Instead, they're just angry that some people are questioning their shoddy workmanship when, in fact, they ought to be ashamed of their shoddy workmanship.

There are just too many things to be concerned about here. Now, again we're on the main motion, so I'll mention again the residency requirement. Mr. Speaker, I lock my front door; I imagine that you lock yours. I don't know. But there is a saying that you lock your doors to keep the honest people honest because dishonest people will come in whether your door is locked or not.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to focus specifically on the hon. member's comments about the residency period. You said that the way we're governed matters. You know what else matters? Facts, actual facts, matter. I have some concerns with this bill. There's absolutely no question that I have concerns with this bill. I have concerns with how rushed it is. I have concerns with the fact that they didn't allow the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee last year to do its work, which would have avoided many of the problems that this bill seeks to undo.

But to attempt to deceive Albertans to think that somehow we're going to be overrun by hordes of Saskatchewanians and British Columbians and people from Prince Edward Island and wherever who just swan in one day to vote in Alberta and then take off again – it's factually incorrect. It is not true. It is the kind of fact-free, divisive, negative, pandering, dog-whistle politics that is infecting our province. It is unhelpful. It's worse than unhelpful, Mr. Speaker. It is a threat, frankly, to our democracy. It is not true that someone could simply show up in Alberta one day and vote.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. It is true.

Mr. Clark: It is not true. You need to be ordinarily resident.

Why is this bit in the bill? Why is this in the bill? Because the Chief Electoral Officer suggested that it be in the bill. Why? Because the Ontario Court of Appeal, in a decision called, I believe, the Frank decision, ruled on the six-month residency requirement, okay? That is now before the Supreme Court of Canada. You need to declare that you are ordinarily resident in Alberta and provide identification to substantiate the place of residence. If you simply fly into the province and declare that you're ordinarily resident, you are not.

So to suggest that this is going to lead to widespread voter fraud, frankly, smacks of the kind of untruths that we see coming out of the United States right now. It isn't true. It isn't true, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] It isn't true. There was not widespread voter fraud in the United States, and there will not be widespread voter fraud in this province. It simply isn't true. People who come to this province and who are ordinarily resident should be allowed to vote. [interjections] It is problematic. How do we prove six months?

I have concerns with this bill, and I'm not going to defend every aspect of it, but the residency period and the way that the UCP has gone about using this as a divisive, dog-whistle wedge are not the kinds of things that I want to see infect politics in my province. It is disingenuous to do so. So I would encourage the hon. member and I would genuinely encourage the UCP to rethink their strategy on this. To suggest that there is widespread voter fraud even in the

United States appears to be completely untrue, and it certainly is untrue in Alberta. We do not have widespread voter fraud here. We will not have people who are fraudulently or illegitimately voting because of this bill. It simply will not happen, Mr. Speaker, and I think that it does not serve democracy, it does not serve the process for the UCP to suggest that that will happen here. I do fear for the tone of politics that we have seen recently in this province, and I fear that it's going to only get worse.

With that, I believe my time is nearly up. I look forward to finally moving on to the committee phase of this bill because we certainly have some changes that we'd like to propose. I would hope the government would actually take the opportunity to hear what the Chief Electoral Officer has to say as well and to . . . [interjection]

11:50

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Clark: . . . bring in some of the changes in Committee of the Whole and actually amend this bill and do so in this term, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I'll end my comments under 29(2)(a) and look forward to moving forward with the bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. The gentleman just voted against listening to the Chief Electoral Officer less than 10 minutes ago, 15 minutes ago. You can't believe a thing that the hon. member has to say when he's so definitely inconsistent with what he says. [interjections] You know what? No one . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member. Just a caution about personal comments, with respect.

Mr. McIver: Thank you for that caution. I will be careful, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, no one has said that there will be widespread voter fraud. I said: you lock your doors to keep the honest people honest. We ought to lock the electoral door just enough to keep the honest people honest, too, because democracy matters.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent, if there happens to be a division before noon, that the bells be shortened to five minutes, please.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Members wishing to speak to Bill 32?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:52 a.m.]

[Five minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Jansen	Renaud
Ceci	Kazim	Rosendahl
Clark	Kleinsteuber	Schmidt
Connolly	Larivee	Schreiner
Coolahan	Littlewood	Shepherd

Dach	Luff	Sigurdson	Anderson, W.	McIver	Yao
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha	Cooper	Orr	
Eggen	Mason	Turner			
Feehan	McLean	Westhead	Totals:	For – 40	Against – 8
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard			
Goehring			[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]		

Against the motion:

Aheer

Drysdale

Pitt

The Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 12, 2017

Day 65

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
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Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
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Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Clerk
Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
House Services
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
Committee Services
Nancy Robert, Research Officer
Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Sarah Hoffman	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health
Shaye Anderson	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education
Richard Feehan	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Christina Gray	Minister of Labour, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal
Sandra Jansen	Minister of Infrastructure
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Children's Services
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Stephanie V. McLean	Minister of Service Alberta, Minister of Status of Women
Ricardo Miranda	Minister of Culture and Tourism
Brandy Payne	Associate Minister of Health
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Climate Change Office
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Community and Social Services
Marlin Schmidt	Minister of Advanced Education
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Seniors and Housing

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jessica Littlewood	Economic Development and Trade for Small Business
Annie McKittrick	Education

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Taylor
Ellis	Turner
Horne	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	McPherson
Connolly	Panda
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schneider
Fitzpatrick	Schreiner
Gill	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Aheer	Miller
Drever	Orr
Hinkley	Shepherd
Horne	Swann
Jansen	Vacant
Luff	Yao
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Drever	Nixon
Gill	Pitt
Horne	van Dijken
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Littlewood	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Orr
Jabbour	Piquette
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Kleinsteinuber
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Nielsen
Ellis	Schneider
Goehring	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Fildebrandt	Miller
Fraser	Panda
Goehring	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Littlewood	Westhead
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hunter

Babcock	Loewen
Clark	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Drysdale	Nielsen
Hanson	Rosendahl
Kazim	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my very great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests that are attending today from St. Jerome's school in Vermilion. I will point out that St. Jerome's school was one of the schools that was tagged for a significant refurbishing under our government, and it was completed under the current government, and I do want to thank especially the Minister of Education for that. It would have been done on time, but the principal, Mr. Chase, is really particular, isn't he? Yes. They're all nodding up there.

They are students from St. Jerome's school, and they're led by Rolanda Beaudette and Mr. Ted Wheat. Ted and I have a history because he used to bring cows into my clinic, usually late at night, and would provide me with consulting information on how to improve my practice, which he provided free of charge. I do want to acknowledge that, and I won't make any comment on what that consulting information was actually worth. Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to join me in giving the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. members, there are no other school groups?

Seeing and hearing none, the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Alberta Federation of Labour's child care working group. The working group has representatives from 13 different unions and is responsible for the Fair Start Alberta campaign, which is calling for the implementation of universal early childhood education and care. Here today to watch the tabling of their petition are Siobhán Vipond, Chris Gallaway, Susan Cake, Ron Palmer, Fangfang Xiao, Allison Alberto, and Sam Nuako. I ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

Energy Efficiency Alberta Programs

Dr. Turner: I'm very proud to be the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud. This House will have heard me describe it as the nicest part of Edmonton. We are blessed with a diverse population who live in Edmonton-Whitemud because of the fine schools, churches, community leagues, and recreational opportunities. We value using our natural areas year-round such as the bank of the North Saskatchewan, Whitemud Creek, Snow Valley, and the Larch sanctuary.

I know that residents of Edmonton-Whitemud, like all Albertans, have participated in our government's energy efficiency programs at record levels. Recently Energy Efficiency Alberta shared that over 150,000 Alberta households have registered for the residential no-charge energy savings program. That's 12 per cent of all single-

family Alberta households. This enthusiastic response has been confirmed at the doors, at community events, and particularly by students at the schools that I visit in Edmonton-Whitemud.

Alberta's future leaders know that the most important thing that we can do to protect our environment is to take direct action to reduce our carbon footprint. These students know to make smart choices like choosing transit and ensuring homes are as energy efficient as possible. These students are going to buy net zero homes, drive electric cars, and limit their air travel. They're going to invest in corporations that participate in global warming mitigation to market their products like Suncor, La Maison Simons, Ford, Volvo, PepsiCo, and Tesla.

I'm very proud to be associated with Alberta's climate leadership plan. It has facilitated the approval of two major pipeline products, and it will pay off by heading off climate damages, reducing health problems, and creating thousands of jobs in alternative energy. Previous governments have put off acting, and now the risks of severe storms, forest fires, glacial melting, and food insecurity are severe. We Albertans can be leaders in dealing with climate change while protecting our economy so that we can continue to enjoy our quality of life. We must continue focusing on energy efficiency and helping our vulnerable populations. The human-caused problem of climate change needs to be human solved. It's the least we can do for those that come after us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Industrial Heartland Petrochemicals Industry

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans should be proud of the heavy industrial designated land area known as the Alberta Industrial Heartland, established to be the petrochemical hub of the province, where oil and gas pipelines converge. If we can't get our product to market via pipeline, the heartland can get our product out on rail by converting oil and gas to petrochemical and fertilizer products. In the heartland one person's waste is another person's feedstock.

Last week news broke that Alberta-based NOVA Chemicals will be building a brand new facility. Unfortunately, it'll be in Sarnia, Ontario. NOVA will be expanding their Corunna cracker by 50 per cent to provide ethylene feedstock to a new polyethylene facility. Their second AST2 facility will increase polyethylene production capacity by 450 kilotonnes. Completion is expected in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, this is a project that should have been built here in Alberta's Industrial Heartland, but current government policies are not aligned to attract investment. Hundreds of billions of dollars in investment in new petrochemical projects are forecast globally. Alberta is being considered, but close only counts in the game of horseshoes. Coming in ranked at number 2 or 3 means no investment, no new jobs.

Alberta has some disadvantages over other jurisdictions when it comes to petrochemicals. We have a long, cold winter. It is cold to construct here, and thermodynamics come into play, adding layers of engineering and driving up costs. We're also not at tidewater, which enables global shipping at the lowest cost. We have to rely on rail, and rail service has been identified as problematic in the heartland in the past but is improving.

We had good news when royalty credits were announced for two projects under the petrochemical diversification program, but too many other projects did not get credits. New policy options need to be considered in order to get the marketing and the development of the heartland fully under way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Collaboration

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Collaboration is a necessity for building strong communities, and collaboration and community development go hand in hand. With our increasingly diverse population, community development involves the collaboration of people from different cultural backgrounds, articulation styles, and various ideological, emotional, pragmatic, and professional perspectives. Collaboration means working together, not shouting down other people's opinions.

My constituency has nine vibrant community associations. Each one has dedicated, diligent, and devoted community leaders and residents, who volunteer day and night to make our communities better. Even though each one is different, they all form strong communities because they all collaborate. I was thrilled when I sat down with the presidents of the community associations of Calgary-Glenmore to listen to the vision they hold for the communities and how willing and open they are to collaborate to strengthen relations with each other as well as our neighbour Tsuut'ina Nation.

I was also honoured to meet with Chief Lee Crowchild of the Tsuut'ina Nation. My gratitude for Chief Crowchild's generous time to meet with me and the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations is beyond words. It was an inspirational experience meeting with him and learning about his vision for the bright future of the Tsuut'ina people, which embraces truth, fairness, collaboration, and strong neighbourly relations among all treaty people.

The only way we can create this brighter future is through understanding each other's differences and collaborating with one another. Those who practise the politics of division will never build a strong society in which everyone participates and everyone benefits. I would like to thank all of our community leaders for being amazing citizens and for moving our province and our society forward.

Thank you.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, by 2020 every last Albertan irrespective of age, race, creed, colour, gender, or religion will be the proud owner of over \$16,000 of public debt. That translates into just over \$66,000 of debt per family of four, and that debt, paid out over 25 years, will cost that same family almost \$50,000 in interest, for a total of \$115,612 repaid over that same period. The alarming part is that this will cost that household 385 after-tax dollars, or about \$500, off their paycheque per month to repay that debt so that they don't have to pass it on to the next generation, and they will do that 300 times over that period. But as alarming as that is, that same \$385 invested in low-risk investments for the same period would yield about \$226,000 in long-term savings.

1:40

So what does that mean to the family of four who this government promises to make life better for? Well, let me tell you what those dollars might buy: a mortgage paid off; a modest recreational property or a nice camper; nine new cars, six new light trucks or SUVs or vans, or transit passes forever; \$180,000 in RRSP savings plus \$23,000 in RESP savings per child; 105 seasons of hockey registration and brand new equipment each year; 26 brand new Yamaha quads for those inclined; 25 years of family ski passes with new equipment every year for the whole family, with tens of thousands left over; 452 years of dance classes; 194 years of family fitness memberships; or maybe a modest holiday or road trip to

expand your family's horizons or just make great memories as a family every few years; better, more nutritious food on the table; or maybe just leading a better, less stressed life.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members opposite: is your reckless spending and irresponsible approach to public debt truly making life better for Albertans or mortgaging our future and the future of generations to come due to fiscal mismanagement of this great province we call home? I want us all to have a Merry Christmas not just today but for years to come for hard-working Alberta families, to sustain our province, to provide world-class public services, with a realistic commitment to care for our seniors and the vulnerable. That is, to me, what making life better for Albertans is truly all about.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2017 Provincial Legislation

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we near the end of another session, I am proud that once again we have put forward a positive, progressive slate of bills. There is no greater gift that we as legislators can give to the people of Alberta than progressive legislation which makes life better for Albertans. For the record here are some of those: An Act to Reduce School Fees; An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence; An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government; New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017; An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation; An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates; Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act; Child Protection and Accountability Act; An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers; Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017; An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. There were 34 acts which received first reading and 15 private members' bills presented. Despite the ideological differences of the members of this Assembly I would like to thank everyone for their dedication to Albertans and all members for their diligence in looking at both the pros and cons in every debate.

I would like to thank all my constituents who provided input into my private member's bill, looking for consumer protection for their utility bills. We will strive in the future to tackle the issues of rising administration, transmission, and distribution costs. Likewise, thank you to all our committed caucus staff, who worked hard helping me to meet deadlines and edit the drafts and message notes, and thank you to all of the Legislative Assembly staff.

In closing, I just want to wish everyone all the best for this Christmas and holiday season, and I look forward to our spring session. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Government Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here we are at the tail end of a fall session, and this NDP government is desperate. We have seen these kinds of personal attacks before, and we recognize them for what they are, a sign of a very desperate government. This government is continuing down its typical path of making decisions on its own, without consulting with Albertans. We have seen it again in this session: bills 30, 31, 32, and 33. No consultation, yet this NDP government fully expected to see these bills approved in just days.

We've also seen it with this government's latest heavy-handed emission rules, which it announced last week. Let me quote the

Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers from a December 6 *Globe and Mail* article.

By seeing a substantial increase in the costs to industry, that as a standalone – regardless of the model – I think is something that may position us to be less competitive at a time when we need to be substantially more competitive.

Despite this criticism from a key stakeholder the NDP imposes new emissions regulations anyway.

Who are we trying to entertain here? We all come here, Mr. Speaker, to serve our people, and this government never misses an opportunity to say that they have families' backs. Which family are they talking about? I don't know whose life they are trying to make better, definitely not Albertans'. Hopefully, in this new year this government will change and learn and truly do things to make Alberta a better place to live, work, and raise a family. In the meantime on behalf of my colleagues I want to wish a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and from the other side a Merry Christmas with a 50 per cent increase in the carbon tax.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition seems to not be aware that their leader, Jason Kenney, is calling for 20 per cent cuts across the board, so I rise today to table the five requisite copies of an article from CBC News entitled Jason Kenney Proposes Drastic Cut to Alberta's Per Capita Spending, where it quotes him as saying that he would "exercise a period of sustained restraint in spending in order to get us down . . . to [B.C.] per-capita spending over time," spending . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I think we got the message.
The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All children deserve a fair start in life, and I am proud today to rise and table the requisite five copies of a document signed by hundreds of Albertans from across the province. This document was prepared by the Fair Start Alberta campaign. It calls on the government to expand the Alberta early learning and child care centre pilot project to take action to ensure an adequate workforce is trained and to ensure good working conditions for child care workers in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning while talking about Bill 32, I did reference a letter, which was from the Chief Electoral Officer, Glen Resler, to the hon. Minister of Labour responsible for democratic renewal. In essence, he did indicate that he had "not been consulted in relation to policy direction leading up to Bill 32." Anyway, I have the necessary five copies that I would like to table to you.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 13 letters from business owners from across Alberta that are concerned about bills 30 and 31. A couple of quick facts.

"It is clear to me that my voice as a citizen, business owner, and taxpayer has not been heard": this is from Scott, not the same one that's in front of you.

Greg is saying, "Bill 31 is an entirely worse bill from the automotive industry's perspective."

We've got Steve: "Another cost to be borne by the employers."

Bob: "The goal needs to be simplification and premium reduction, not adding further layers of administration."

Don: "These bills propose huge increases financially to the consumer and to the businesses."

Jason: "Please can I be consulted?"

John says, "Proposed changes were the result of the very biased and slanted on-line survey."

Jerry says, "Are being subjected to over regulation interference from your government."

Jim: "We were not made aware of any changes moving forward."

Paul says, "The consultation that the government did on the WCB changes was done by invitation only."

Daniel says, "Without consultation from Automotive Dealerships."

Colby says, "These changes will make it harder and more expensive to do business in Alberta."

Lastly, I have – I apologize – a Colin: "If Bill 31 passes, we may no longer have a voice as an industry."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Carbon Levy Increase

Mr. Nixon: In a few weeks' time this government will hike the carbon tax by 50 per cent on Albertans. That means that it will again cost families more to heat their homes, again cost families more to fill up their cars, and again cost families more to buy their groceries. In return, not a single pipeline opponent has been moved from no to yes, but Albertans' bills are moving from high to higher. To the Premier: given the frail economy, why is it that you are raising the carbon tax right now?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will take the UCP House leader's question today, but I want to say that given what we learned today, I think the House leader needs to carefully consider his role in the House and the message the UCP is sending to women. Instead of defending a woman who complained to him about sexual harassment, two days later he fired her. This is not an allegation; this is a finding of fact. Even more troubling, today we've learned that Jason Kenney, UCP leader, is defending this action. To all women across Alberta I say that I'm very deeply sorry that this is happening amongst the leadership in this province. I will, however, also say that this government on this side of the House will stand for women's rights and for their right to be protected in their workplace.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the United Conservative Party caucus and I take harassment in the workplace seriously. We think it's a serious issue, and we will continue to stand up on the issue. As I have said outside of this House and I will say inside this House, I deeply regret some of the decisions that were made by myself and my organization while handling that human resources issue. We were very, very disappointed with what happened to Ms Harrison. It was not right then, and it is not right now.

But my question, Mr. Speaker, was about my constituents and the increased cost of the carbon tax and if the Premier will cancel her carbon tax.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I will say that the member opposite needs to reconsider his position and whether or not the position of the members opposite with respect to Bill 30 under his leadership is one that Albertans can have faith in given the information that we learned today.

With respect to the matters around the carbon levy, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that we move Alberta forward as a responsible, sustainable energy producer. As a result, we will continue with the plan that has gotten us the pipeline approved so far to date.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the United Conservative caucus supports increased harassment legislation and making sure that we stand strong on that issue as a province and that we stand with employers who are trying to deal with those issues as well as with people that are being harassed.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, my question was about the carbon tax and the cost to Albertans, the significant increase in cost to Albertans. Will the Premier recognize that and cancel the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the world is changing, and Alberta industry is very keen to work with us to lead the charge to continue to be one of the most sustainable and responsible energy producers in the country. It doesn't necessarily help, however, as I said yesterday, when the UCP Finance critic, another member of that illustrious front bench, promotes climate conspiracy theories as he did over the weekend. The fact of the matter is that our plan is investing in innovation, our plan is focused on cutting emissions, our plan is phased in over three years. All of that will ensure that we are able to succeed in getting that pipeline built.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Carbon Levy and Charitable Organizations' Costs

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, winter is already a busy time for Alberta charities. Last month Inn from the Cold in Calgary said that they have been at or above capacity since April. They've had to open their overflow shelters more than 25 times already, but the NDP government chose not to exempt charities from their carbon tax grab. To the Premier: Charities like homeless shelters provide a valuable service to vulnerable Albertans. Why is the Premier making it more expensive for them to keep the lights on?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what our government has done is a great deal of work to support a number of different nonprofit organizations. Of course, one of the things in relation to the climate leadership plan is that there is a rebate that goes to low-income families and low-income households that actually assists them with those costs. And, in fact, they end up coming out ahead because those households tend to use less carbon than others. In addition, our government has not moved forward with 20 per cent cuts to the programs that support these charities and the people that these charities work with, and that's how we are supporting them.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, winter is already a challenging time for those living on the streets and a challenging time for those operating shelters. Two years ago many charities and nonprofits cited the economy as a reason for reduced donations yet higher demands for their services. The carbon tax now makes it more expensive for those charities to keep the lights on and as another tax on Albertans reduces capacity for giving to those charities. To the Premier: why are you making it harder for our charities to keep the lights on this winter?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, our government created the nonprofit energy efficiency transition program, which provides a grant to nonprofits for energy efficiency audits. In addition, through Energy Efficiency Alberta we've introduced the business, nonprofit, and institutional energy savings program. Up to this point we've had 137 different organizations successfully screened to participate in the program. The fact of the matter is that we are working with all elements of the community collectively, collaboratively to help us bring down our emissions because unlike the members opposite we believe climate change is real and we need to take action to stop it.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Food Bank says that their client numbers have rarely been higher than they are this year, 8 per cent higher than last year, but this government's carbon tax and their latest carbon tax hike make it more expensive to keep the lights on, more expensive to transport food, more expensive to buy groceries that can't be donated. To the Premier: why is this government putting a 50 per cent carbon tax on charities that provide a valuable service to vulnerable Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, what our government has been doing is working very closely with charities across this province to help them in the work that they do to support vulnerable Albertans. Again, it is just so contradictory and hypocritical for the members opposite to advocate for 20 per cent cuts to things like income support, health care, education, the kinds of things that support these communities and support these people, and then to talk about these issues with respect to the carbon levy. Their plan would actually create real hardship. We are standing up against that. We have the backs of Albertans, all Albertans, including women.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Provincial Response to Federal Policies

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Equalization was on the agenda at the recent meeting of the provincial, federal, and territorial Finance ministers. Ontario's Liberal government was already vocal last week about the impact of the proposed changes for them. B.C.'s NDP government was already vocal last week about the impact of proposed federal changes for them. Alberta's government was nowhere to be seen as the Finance minister continued his tour of breweries and distilleries. To the Premier: did her Finance minister even bother raising Alberta's concerns at the recent meeting, or did she just instruct her minister to rubber-stamp the feds' changes?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question and opportunity to speak on this, Mr. Speaker. You know, Alberta is recovering

from one of the worst downturns in a generation. At a time when revenues in this province dropped \$6.5 billion, we went to the federal government and said: there's a program there, the fiscal stabilization program, that needs to have our back. It didn't have our back. I raised that in the meeting with the ministers from across the country. We got 4 per cent of the revenues that we lost. That's inadequate, and we're going to change that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Albertans are transferring billions to other provinces who obstruct much-needed resource projects that create Canadian jobs and actually contribute to overall prosperity, the Finance minister said that he was agnostic on equalization. It was not something that as the Finance minister he's focused on. That might explain why her Finance minister is more interested in going to breweries, as great as they are, than Alberta's finances. To the Premier: what did her Finance minister contribute to the discussions on equalization at the recent meeting, or is she too agnostic to take a hard look at the equalization formula and make it fair for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. You know, that quote was from over a year ago, Mr. Speaker. A lot has changed in a year. There were two parties here, both on the right side, but they were here, and things have changed.

Dr. Starke: Still are, Joe. Still are. Still here, Joe.

Mr. Ceci: Good. I'm glad you're over there.

Mr. Speaker, I stood up for the views of Albertans with regard to equalization. It is a federal program. We have contributed as this province to the health of this country significantly. I stood up and I said that the FSP doesn't work. It needs to change. The floor there needs to change.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

2:00

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, equalization wasn't the only thing on the agenda. There were other concerns that this Finance minister could have also raised. The CFIB called on the provincial Finance ministers to raise concerns about the new federal rules on, I know, small-business taxes. They said that one of the largest tax changes for small-business owners in 40 years goes into effect in three weeks, and the federal government has provided zero detail or implementation advice to business owners or tax professionals. To the Premier: did her Finance minister raise these questions on behalf of Albertans? Premier, have you raised them with the federal government?

Mr. Ceci: You know, Mr. Speaker, Jason Kenney loves to tell Albertans that he will stand up for them, but the Fraser Institute report – yes, the Fraser Institute report – spells it out clearly. A rule change when he was in government, in the federal cabinet actually, hurt Alberta's interest and hurt Alberta's interest in the downturn we were just in. Jason Kenney did nothing to support Alberta when he was in cabinet. He's doing nothing now. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, a little of the ho, ho, ho continuum would really be helpful.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Workplace Bullying and Harassment

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What used to be hidden in the shadows has finally started to come to light. For far too long women who have been sexually assaulted or harassed in the workplace have been silenced or dismissed. Finally, our society is coming to terms with this injustice, and increasingly women are being heard, but it's only the beginning. To the Premier: how does the government of Alberta support women and all people who have faced harassment to seek assistance, and do you have confidence that the current process is adequate?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that very, very important and timely question. Let me say that our government knows that we have more work to do, and I look forward to being able to talk about some of the things that we will do.

I will say that going forward, should there be a change in government in a year and a half such that the UCP was in charge, I am deeply, deeply concerned about what will happen to women in this province. I am deeply, deeply concerned that almost 10 years after the member opposite was found to have fired somebody illegally for raising sexual harassment, they now come forward and say: oh, we are remorseful. I am not at all – I have no faith.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, earlier today I reviewed the respectful workplace policy that applies to government employees. My concern is not so much with the policy itself but whether there is an adequate education process to ensure that these policies are widely known and understood. Again to the Premier: will you commit to ensuring that there is a strong emphasis on education to ensure that all employees know about the protections available to them and that they can confidently come forward to report incidents of harassment and bullying?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I absolutely can commit to that. As a result of the ultimate passage of Bill 30, of course, there will be stronger rules in Alberta with respect to sexual harassment policies. In addition, while we already have those policies in the government of Alberta, they can definitely be stronger, and we can definitely do a better job of promoting and educating about them. Our government has already taken steps to expand that work outside the government of Alberta with the I Believe You campaign, for instance, that the minister of women's issues has dealt with, and we will . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, when I looked at the government of Alberta's respectful workplace policy, I was concerned to see that there is a 14- to 30-day limit to report an incident. Again to the Premier: in light of how long it can take individuals, especially women, to feel comfortable reporting harassment, will you review this limit to ensure that anyone can come forward in their own time?

Ms Notley: Well, indeed, we absolutely will do that. Our practice right now is to allow for complaints to come forward after that

period of time, but obviously if you've got those rules in place, people would be discouraged. So we will be changing that immediately. As well, Mr. Speaker, you'll know that we changed the law to allow for victims of harassment to file claims going back much further than they were before. That was a change that we made earlier in the session. It is fundamentally important that all members of this House understand that if people are the victims of harassment, they can complain about it, raise it, and not have to worry . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Condominium Property Regulations

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Statistics Canada recently reported that nearly 22 per cent of Calgarians live in condos. That number is second in the country, only behind Vancouver. This shows that more and more Calgarians, including many of my constituents, have chosen to live in condos. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how will the recently announced regulations to the Condominium Property Act protect these consumers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This government cares about everyday Albertans and believes that Albertans deserve to be protected when they make a purchase as large as a home. I am proud to say that we recently announced new rules that will improve protections for buyers of new and converted condominium units. These new protections will provide more information for buyers at the time of purchase, give the option to cancel a contract if the unit doesn't look like what they were promised, and protect Albertans' money by putting deposits in a trust.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the new regulations will protect people buying a condo, to the same minister: what is the government doing to protect those already living in condos?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are currently consulting on the second phase of regulations that will address living in a condo, including condo governance. This summer we invited Albertans to open houses across the province to tell us in person how we could improve condo living. Based on what we heard, we launched an online survey to continue this important conversation. The survey also included a variety of topics, including condo governance and proxy voting. The survey closed on November 10, and we look forward to reviewing the answers to create condo regulations that will make life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the proposed regulations aim to improve the quality of condo living and that we know conflicts will arise between condo owners and condo boards and given that currently the only resource for two parties is through the courts, to the same minister: what is the government doing to allow Albertans a low-cost alternative to resolve conflicts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As part of the third phase of the regulations we are also consulting on a dispute resolution mechanism for Albertans, including the determination of a tribunal's jurisdiction and structure. Albertans want and need a more efficient and less expensive way to resolve condominium disputes than having to proceed through our court system. The dispute tribunal is intended to provide them with that alternative.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. NDP fiscal mismanagement has come home to roost. After two years of promising stable funding, yesterday we learned that the Minister of Advanced Education has given Alberta postsecondary institutions just two weeks to come up with cutbacks, cuts that will directly harm Alberta students' futures. To the Minister of Advanced Education: why now? What frills and optional extras do you think our universities and colleges have today that they didn't have before?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our government is carefully and responsibly finding cost savings while increasing front-line support for students. I certainly appreciate along with the Minister of Advanced Education the important work that postsecondary institutions do. There is certainly leading-edge work done on campuses, and every single day we're very proud of the work they do. We're supporting them with a 2 per cent investment and, certainly, are working very closely with them at this time.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the timing of this request is absurd. Given that the adult learning review is more than a year overdue, it's insulting to give these institutions only two weeks to respond. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education: how do you know that the cuts will be targeted in the right areas if you don't have a proper strategy, and will we ever see the results of the adult learning review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not only is our government making education more affordable by extending the tuition freeze for another year; we're also providing universities with backfill funding. We're working closely with institutions across this province to make sure that they are supported and that there is affordable education for the students of Alberta. Two hundred and fifty thousand students save an average of \$1,500 each because of the tuition freeze. We're certainly working very closely with advanced education.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, this is incredibly frustrating. Given that the government told us for the longest time that cuts were irresponsible and given that instead of prudent fiscal management from the very beginning you chose to rack up huge amounts of debt but, as always happens, you hit the wall and given that you created an expectation that money is infinite but now you realize that money actually has to come from somewhere, again to the Minister of Advanced Education: which programs will be cut, and which students will have their education compromised by your poor planning?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just reiterate that our government is carefully and responsibly finding cost savings. We're working with the postsecondary institutions to do that. We want to make sure that education is affordable for students in this province, and we want to make sure that postsecondary institutions have the support to be able to offer the world-class programs that they do. We're working very closely with them, and we're proud of what we're doing in this sector.

Thank you.

Conklin Industrial Landfill Site Application

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, the residents in the hamlet of Conklin are concerned that their voices are not being heard by this government regarding a proposed industrial landfill only two kilometres from their community and Christina Lake. Part of the reason for the concern stems from the fact that, although public meetings have been held, there's been one hundred per cent opposition to this proposed landfill. To the minister of environment: what percentage of constituent opposition is required before this government takes notice and makes a decision on this site, or do you care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and climate change.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did have the privilege of meeting with the hon. member's constituents on this matter and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and they did share their concerns about this particular application for an industrial landfill. Those concerns have been heard, and we will be in touch with the constituents on the various options that are open to them. Certainly, our government is open to hearing from communities around large projects, and we will continue to do so.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, considering that the site this landfill is planned for impinges on an area that has historic and traditional land use for the Conklin Métis, including harvesting food and culturally important roots and medicines, and considering that there has already been a decline in the traditional uses of land around Conklin, to the minister: why are you delaying this decision? What is the delay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. member that the regulatory process is moving forward as it should. It will unfold in due time, in the fullness of time to ensure that we have heard from all of the affected community members, including the appropriate indigenous consultation.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, this government has a lot of plans for land around this small community, including processing an application for an oil sands site. Considering that such development could increase local growth in the area but that the addition of an industrial landfill next to town could discourage new settlement into that community in favour of more commuting, to the minister: is your objective to promote commuting over rural growth and development?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not exactly sure how the hon. member's constituents are served by this kind of line of questioning. The fact of the matter is that there is a regulatory application in place. I have heard from the communities, certainly. There is a regulatory process in place so that all community members can be heard. What doesn't help is undermining the confidence in the regulatory process. I'm not sure how the hon. member thinks that regulatory processes unfold, but it's certainly not how he has characterized it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Carbon Levy and Energy Industry Investment

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the environment minister said "the Prime Minister approved two new pipelines, [and] he explicitly said that it was on the strengths of Alberta's climate leadership plan." Of course the PM said that, because he wants to increase the carbon tax. He's selling the same failed social licence scheme that the NDP is. This government continues to deny the damage it is causing to Alberta's economy. Well, the truth is clear. Two cancelled pipelines, and large corporations are fleeing Alberta. The climate leadership plan is leading all right, leading investment away from Alberta to other jurisdictions, and this government keeps piling it on with caps, taxes, and red tape. When will this government stop holding Alberta's economy down?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, hardly a day goes by without another piece of economic good news coming to Alberta, you know, new investments in the oil and gas sector. I'm looking over and seeing folks who are looking a little glum today, but let me give you some good news: \$30 billion of new investment in the Duvernay area, including in the Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre area, where people are being put back to work. This is because we have created a stable investment climate, and as the price of oil recovers, so too does the economy. It doesn't help when the Conservatives talk Alberta down.

Mr. Loewen: Given that any increase in activity in the oil and gas sector is a result of increased oil prices and given that the NDP said over and over again that they do not control the price of oil – so, therefore, they can't take the blame for losses from it and therefore cannot take the credit for any economic benefit from the rise in prices – and given that the minister claims that companies buying out each other is new investment in Alberta when really it is just recirculation, will the minister come clean with Albertans and admit that her climate plan is destroying investor confidence and that the government's numbers are just a shell game?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our government's approach to the royalty review resulted in a large increase in drilling at a time when Albertans needed to be put to work the most in the oil and gas sector. The fact of the matter is that the Conservatives and certainly Mr. Kenney would take us back to the boom-and-bust cycle. That's not what Albertans are looking for. They're looking for diversification. They're looking for good jobs in the oil and gas sector. They're going to get both from this government.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the minister said that Cenovus Energy has doubled production and that realistically this was just the addition

of the production of the company it bought out, not new production, and given that Cenovus and other investors have cancelled projects – one company said about the cancellation that, quote, the project is further burdened with regulatory uncertainty around the climate leadership program and its potential impacts on the project, from carbon tax to the emissions cap, end quote – and given that the projects that are coming online now are projects planned and started before this government was in power, will the minister just admit that the NDP plan is a failure and cancel her economy-killing climate plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, only a Conservative with a loose grasp of the facts would try to allege that nation-leading economic growth, both this year and next year, is something to be ashamed of. We are not ashamed of the kind of growth that we are seeing here in Alberta. We are seeing 4 per cent growth. We are seeing tens of thousands of new jobs. If the members opposite want to continue to wave their pom-poms and cheerlead for Alberta's demise, we on this side of the House are going to celebrate the growth of this province and the tremendous number of new jobs that are being created as a result of our work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Rural Crime

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans remain profoundly disappointed by this government's behaviour when it comes to the serious problem of rural crime in Alberta. On November 17 in rural Airdrie three people assaulted a homeowner with bear spray, stealing his property. On November 23 two people broke into a residence just west of Airdrie. Crime is escalating and not just in my community but all across this province. On November 27 more than a hundred Albertans spent their time and resources to travel to this Legislature in hopes of watching their MLAs in an emergency debate to consider solutions. Minister, do you have any regrets for not holding that emergency debate? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that Albertans are concerned about rural crime, and we are, too. We're working with our police partners to reduce crime in rural areas, including through the Alberta RCMP's crime reduction program. One of the initiatives that's part of this program is the new integrated crime reduction unit in central Alberta. That unit has already led to the arrest of three individuals, and those individuals were responsible for roughly 300 calls to the RCMP prior to their arrest.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP had the nerve to say about the motion for emergency debate, "Whether or not it's serious or even extremely serious is not the question; the question is: is it an emergency happening now, or is it something that's happened over a longer period of time," and given that an emergency is still an emergency if it has been happening over a long period of time and given that the problem is only getting worse and given that Albertans are desperate for solutions, Minister, when we return home to our constituencies, what explanation should we give to our frightened constituents?

Ms Larivee: Mr. Speaker, we certainly are all confined to the rules around how this House is conducted; that does not change that we take rural crime incredibly seriously. ALERT is a key part of an

integrated province-wide response to serious and organized crime, and it works with smaller rural communities to share intelligence and help stop rural crimes. For example, in the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat's community ALERT's month-long operation led to 20 individuals being charged with drug-related offences and 29 individuals charged with stolen property offences, including over a dozen vehicles. We will continue to support our police partners to reduce crime in rural areas, a concern that we continue to take very seriously.

2:20

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural Albertans feel stifled by this NDP government, including those in NDP ridings, given that business owners are sleeping in their shops out of fear at night, given that Albertans are setting up and meeting in town halls to discuss possible solutions, given that law enforcement agencies are proactively encouraging crime prevention techniques like the 9 p.m. routine in Airdrie and Edmonton, Minister, it's clear there is a problem that Albertans are eagerly trying to fix. What specifically are you doing to address their concerns? What you're doing right now is certainly not working.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our police officers are hard-working, dedicated, caring individuals who leave their homes every day to protect Alberta families. That's why we continue to work with them, to listen to our police forces and Albertans to reduce crime. The RCMP have told us that reducing crime in Alberta cannot be achieved through policing alone. They've told us that we need a co-ordinated approach. That's why we're also investing in mental health supports and addiction services, to break the cycle of crime in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Energy Efficiency Initiatives

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Larch sanctuary at the confluence of the Whitemud and Blackmud creeks is in my constituency. The sanctuary is protected by Edmonton's first conservation easement and is a collaboration between landowners, the city of Edmonton, and the Edmonton and Area Land Trust. It's a prime place to connect with nature. Melcor has developed Larch Park, a community of net zero homes, a construction waste recovery program, LED street lights, and a community garden. To the Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the climate change office: what programs does your ministry operate that would foster more examples of this type of sustainable development that contributes to climate leadership?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In support of the climate leadership plan, in October 2016 the government of Alberta updated seven building codes. We did this because emissions from Alberta houses and buildings are responsible for about 19 megatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, or about 7 per cent of our overall emissions profile. The National Research Council Canada estimates that switching to even just energy efficient windows can save homeowners about 18 per cent on their heating costs. Changes to the building code and some of the incentives that we have put forward as part of Energy Efficiency Alberta help homeowners and

businesses permanently reduce their energy use and their monthly utility bills.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you. Given that another current example of inspired redevelopment by the private sector here in Edmonton is the new La Maison Simons store in Londonderry, which has solar panels on its roof and an innovative parking structure with solar panels that leads to an electric vehicle charging station, to the same minister: how can our government foster more of this sort of environmentally responsible business development in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How the climate leadership plan is proceeding is that we are taking the price on pollution and reinvesting it into the world we want, and part of that world is solar PV. We are doing so on farms, we are doing so in indigenous communities, and we are doing so in the commercial sector. For example, the Simons system that we see at Londonderry in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore's riding will generate 55,000 kilowatt hours per year of solar power. That project alone created 300 jobs. Those are good jobs that the folks across the way would eliminate.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you again. As I said in my member's statement, many of my constituents have signed up for the efficiencyalberta.ca programs. Can the minister give the House plans for this program in 2018 and '19?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very pleased that Energy Efficiency Alberta has been able to reach so many Albertans and find ways for everyone to be able to reduce their utility costs, whether it's on farms or in small businesses or in indigenous communities. Also schools, municipalities, and businesses both large and small have benefited from these programs. Alberta was the last jurisdiction in North America to adopt energy efficiency programming, and we will be moving forward with even more of these programs in 2018-2019 as we move the economy forward, as we diversify the economy, and save people . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Social Studies Curriculum

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to go down to Calgary-Lougheed on Friday to door-knock, something I know the Minister of Education has done recently, and during my time door-knocking, I happened to meet a social studies teacher. This teacher expressed serious concerns about the new social studies curriculum. They are troubled that the new material does not include enough historical knowledge or content for the students to make informed decisions, yet the government is asking them to be activists. To the minister: how can you ask our children to become activists when you're not providing them with the context and the knowledge to make their own decisions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly very proud of the curriculum work that we're doing in all subject areas, in all grade levels over the next five years. The work that we're doing is foundational at this moment, and certainly we have perhaps the biggest interaction with not just teachers and those working groups but the general society as well, including banks and energy institutions and forestry, 4-H clubs, you name it. We're building a curriculum that reflects who we are as Albertans in 2017. I'm very proud of that work, and so are the thousands of Albertans who are contributing to that work.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this teacher also expressed concern that the new social studies curriculum lacks the chronological information about historical influences and events required to understand the context of any major historical event and given that this contextual information is foundational to studying and understanding history and social studies, again to the minister: why is this basic foundational information being left out of the current rewrite of the social studies curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as a social studies teacher myself – and the member opposite is as well – we know that it's important not to make conclusions based on one, single person talking about the social studies curriculum, which is not even written yet. Certainly, we know that we're going to have a very strong foundational work in history. We know that you cannot study the present and the future without knowing what happened in the past. I mean, that's part of the reason that Albertans chose to have a new government, because they knew that 44 years of conservatism just was not bringing the sort of diversification in the economy that we need to prosper in the future.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've now heard concerns about this curriculum rewrite from thousands of parents and that we are now beginning to hear this same message from teachers as well, not just one, and given that the NDP's by-election candidate characterized these concerns as constant misinformation and melodrama, again to the minister: do you stand with concerned parents and teachers or with your candidate and his disrespectful comments?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I think that Jason Kenney and his distortion of the idea of how we're building our history curriculum is anything but thousands of Albertans. We know that 35,000 Albertans contributed to the first round of building our curriculum, and we will continue in the spirit of building with history, critical thinking, and a respect for tradition and culture in this province. The UCP are scared of critical thinking because once people achieve that goal, then they certainly won't believe a single word that these people are saying.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Lyme Disease

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents paid to go to the United States to get tested for Lyme disease. The test came back positive, but now she's fighting to find a doctor who will treat her in Alberta. She's become desperately ill, and she has considered travelling to B.C. or the U.S. for treatment. To the

Minister of Health: will you confirm that Lyme disease is present in our province and taking a toll on the health of Albertans?

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I would encourage the member to reach out to our office, to our MLA contact about the specifics of his individual constituent's case as we don't discuss individual health concerns in this Chamber.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the test administered in Alberta does not provide definitive results, yet a better one exists and is used in other jurisdictions, and given that the minister has previously confirmed that ticks carrying Lyme disease exist in Alberta and that she certainly knows that Albertans are also contracting it elsewhere, to the minister: why are Albertans not able to receive proper diagnosis and treatment in their own province for this debilitating infection?

2:30

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government makes decisions about which tests are and are not available upon the advice of doctors and the medical experts. I will certainly, as I said, be happy to follow up with the member about the particular question.

That said, I would also encourage any Albertans to be mindful of ticks and to follow the advice that is available through the Alberta Health website. Further, if you ever have any concerns about your health condition or any potential health concerns, I would really encourage Albertans to reach out to Health Link or their family doctor. You can reach Health Link by calling 811 and speak to a registered nurse.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituent told me that there's one doctor in Alberta who treats chronic Lyme disease but he has hundreds of patients and is not taking any more and given that forcing Albertans to seek treatment in other jurisdictions creates a two-tiered health system, to the minister: can you confirm that only one specialist treats chronic Lyme disease in Alberta, and if there are more, why won't someone in Alberta Health help my constituent to find one?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. As I said earlier, we'd be happy to connect with him about his particular constituent's concerns. Further, any Albertans who have any questions about treatment or concerns about a particular disease should talk to their family doctor for a referral. Additionally, they can reach out to Health Link and have their symptoms evaluated by a registered nurse and receive recommendations for next-steps treatment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Police Preparedness for Cannabis Legalization

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada is just seven months away from legalizing marijuana. Many provinces and police,

including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, are urging Ottawa to delay legalization because their enforcement services do not have time to properly train officers. To the Minister of Justice: what are Alberta's police services telling you about their ability to be prepared for July 1?

The Speaker: The hon. minister

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I have to say that our government's key priorities for cannabis legalization have been working with our partners to keep cannabis away from children, to keep profits away from criminals, and to protect our roads, workplaces, and public spaces. We continue to be committed to working with our police services to ensure that we can achieve those objectives together. We're very thankful for the relationship we have with the people who work so hard to keep our communities and our homes and our roads safe.

Mr. Ellis: I'm talking about preparation, Minister.

Given that Albertans are naturally concerned about the potential of more drug-impaired drivers on the roads as of July 1 and given that Alberta will need many more police officers trained as drug recognition experts to perform specialized impairment testing, again to the minister: how many drug recognition experts does Alberta have today? Minister, you should be able to provide a number for this question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we take the safety of Albertans very seriously. That's why we continue to work with our partners. We'll continue to have conversations with them and to work with them to identify what resources they need and what the challenges are. We'll move forward together to implement a plan to ensure that as cannabis becomes legal, we are able to keep our roads safe, keep our children protected, and keep money from getting in the hands of criminals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ellis: Albertans want answers to these questions, Minister.

Given that it takes time to train officers for this highly specialized work and they have to travel to the United States to receive it and given that Ontario estimates it will need double the number of drug recognition experts, which means that Alberta is facing a similar scenario, and these experts will be needed throughout our province, to the minister: how many trained drug recognition experts will be accessible to all police services throughout Alberta on July 1?

Ms Larivee: Mr. Speaker, once again I'll reiterate what I said earlier. Our police officers are hard-working, dedicated, caring individuals. We're very thankful for the sacrifices they make in leaving their homes every day to protect our families. We, again, work with our police forces in order to keep Albertans safe, and we'll continue to trust their expertise and to work with them to ensure that they have the resources they need as we go forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Carbon Policies

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a standoff in Alberta. The NDP says that its new emissions regulations won't cause Alberta's energy sector any problems, but professionals in the industry such as Imperial Oil say, quote: there's no question that

any increased costs on industry impact competitiveness, especially in the current challenging overall business environment. End quote. To the minister of environment: can you tell us for the record who is not telling the truth? Both of you cannot be right.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the output-based allocations system that was announced last week that will replace the specified gas emitters regulation starting in January was the result of two years of very careful consultation work with industry, not just in the oil sands but across the economy, in petrochemical upgrading, in fertilizers, cement, other forms of mining. The system is actually designed to protect jobs, to ensure that our trade-exposed industries remain vibrant and competitive in this province, and we expect that to happen.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Given that this NDP government is insisting on increasing the carbon tax despite our fragile economy and high unemployment, especially in our two largest cities, and given that this government is trying to slip in the hike in the carbon tax quietly over the holidays, Minister, why are you not letting Albertans know that they should brace for a 50 per cent increase in the carbon tax with zero net gain?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, only Jason Kenney's Conservative caucus would cheer for Alberta's demise. Only Jason Kenney's Conservative caucus would characterize two pipeline approvals as not being a net gain for this province. The thousands of people that are getting back to work in the oil and gas industry know better. Of course, the way that we are pricing carbon at our large industrial facilities, in our oil sands facilities is part of making sure that we move this province forward in a way that prices carbon in a way that is intelligent, that is thoughtful, and that recognizes that climate change is real.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, this is the biggest failure of a tax in Alberta history. Given that this NDP government has the opportunity to perform a nice deed this Christmas by cutting the carbon tax and given that this tax hasn't performed the task the NDP claimed it would – that is, buying social licence for pipelines; not a single pipeline opponent has been moved from no to yes, not a single opponent – Minister, why are you continuing with this tax increase, knowing that seniors will have to pay more to heat their homes this winter? [interjection] I know your caucus member thinks it's funny. It is not funny.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, this is just another set of questions that are designed to essentially cast doubt on whether we can trust what the Conservatives say. Here's what some folks are saying about the veracity of some of the statements that come from across the House: "Mr. Kenny seems to be making exaggeration and rhetorical overreach an art form. There is hardly a speech or even a comment" – I would add "a question" – "from this caucus that doesn't include a fact that has to be given a deep muscle massage." That's what we've come to expect from these Conservatives.

Trades Career Preparation for High School Students

Ms McKittrick: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've finally reached the last question. This morning I took part in a ceremony at the North West refinery celebrating the first barrel of diesel oil that was produced there. As our economy recovers, it's important for our education system to prepare young people to be those tradespersons who are working in our economy. One of the most important things that our education system does is to prepare students. To the Minister of Education: what program exists in the K to 12 education system to help students transition into the trades?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been working hard over the last two and a half years to make sure that we increase our reach into dual-credit programming. We've brought in \$16 million in order to have more dual-credit programming so that kids can go and get trades training and then get college credit for that as well. We have the registered apprenticeship program. We have the green certificate program, which we are now fully financing for students to be working in agriculture. So, yeah. We reach across to make sure that kids are getting the widest, most balanced education possible to prepare them for our future economy.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I have heard that the number of women entering the trades has plateaued. This morning at NWR I was pleased to support them in their partnership with Women Building Futures, that encourages young women to go into the trades. Again to the Minister of Education: what are you doing to ensure that girls know that they can pursue a career in the trades?

2:40

Mr. Eggen: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we've been working hard, again, with the registered apprenticeship programs and so forth and also with industry. I know that a couple of weeks ago I went out to Dow in Fort Saskatchewan. They have very strong programming to ensure that women are being hired in trades and in these professions. You know, we have to make sure that we are always providing confidence and programming in high schools. When I was in Centennial high school yesterday in Calgary, they talked about the importance of career and technology studies to help prepare young women to work in a wide variety of future careers.

Thank you.

Ms McKittrick: Given that the career and life management program in high school is meant to help students learn about the possibilities for career development, again to the Minister of Education: how will the curriculum review ensure that students have the information that they need to make decisions about their future careers?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you so much for the question. Mr. Speaker, it's very important that we are always upgrading and updating our curriculum. We have some areas that are more than 30 years old. As I said before, the curriculum has to not just reflect the composition of who we are as Albertans but make sure that we're catching a point of interest so that students are engaged in their studies every step of the way and can see the continuity of study from year to year. We're working very hard to do that. We're engaging with literally tens of thousands of Albertans in that enterprise, and we're very proud of that.

The opposite correlation to that, of course, is that if you make deep cuts to education, then you get none of the above.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a letter I received and referred to last night in discussions on Bill 30 from the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association with concerns at the speed at which Bill 30, introduced on November 27, is moving through the Legislature.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we'll just wait for about 10 seconds, and then we'll continue.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of section 35 of Occupational Health and Safety. I was assured by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that the right to refuse unsafe work was enshrined, and I was dismayed to find out that it was not. I table those five copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned in my Bill 33 speech effective representation, and I needed to table a kitchen table talk, Effective Representation, an article that was created by myself and seven other MLAs.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: I believe that we had one point of order today.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Reflections on a Decision of the Assembly

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. During question period the Member for Airdrie put some questions to the Minister of Children's Services with respect to a decision of the Assembly. It was purported that this had to do with rural crime, but the first question and I believe the first supplemental, at least, had to do with a decision of the Assembly with respect to a request from the Official Opposition for an emergency debate.

Now, according to Standing Order 23:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member

- (f) debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that Member's intention to move that it be rescinded.

In the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 13, rules of decorum, on page 617 it says:

Members may not speak against or reflect upon any decision of the House. This stems from the well-established rule which holds that a question, once put and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again.

Mr. Speaker, you yourself have ruled on this matter on May 9 of this year.

I also will read from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on the question of questions, Mr. Speaker, on page 502. It says:

In summary, when recognized in Question Period, a Member should:

- ask a question;
- be brief;
- seek information; and

- ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the individual Minister addressed.

In more general terms, Mr. Speaker, it's been held that question period affords the opposition and private members an opportunity to ask questions with respect to government policy and certainly with respect to matters relating to rural crime and others. If it was limited to that, that would be within the area of government policy. However, demanding that the minister account for a decision of the House with respect to her request for an emergency debate is clearly outside of the rules of this place for question period. I would hope that you would so rule and in the future intervene so that these questions cannot be repeated in the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you referenced a May 9 decision of this year. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Mason: I can read it to you, Mr. Speaker.

I cite Standing Order 23(f) and page 617, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*: "Members may not speak against or reflect upon any decision of the House." In other words, an allegation or question concerning how a member has voted is offside.

The House has made a decision on the matter. I believe there was a point of order in this situation, and I would caution again all members to – it may be good politics at times to do that, but respect and honour in this House is [to be] determined by each of us.

That was on May 9, 2017.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on the point of order. I would say through you to the Government House Leader that the answer resides within the hon. Government House Leader's question. Standing Order 23(f) says – and I will repeat it because even though the hon. Government House Leader said it, it's important to hear it right now:

debates any . . . vote of the Assembly unless . . .

Unless.

. . . it is that Member's intention to move that it be rescinded.

That is exactly what the member suggested to do. They can remember that as part of her question she said that the emergency is not over, the suggestion being that the government can still rescind it.

Mr. Speaker, as further evidence to this I would draw your attention to questions that our hon. House leader has asked in the last few days, where he has more than once, I believe, asked the government to rescind that decision. It's still the opposition's opinion, and it holds true that it's still an emergency. We would still want the government to rescind that decision and allow the emergency debate on rural crime because it's still an emergency. That was indeed what the hon. Member for Airdrie was suggesting. As such, I believe that there is no point of order here.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, could you say again the rescinding action that you're suggesting? Could I ask that you elaborate a little bit more on what you mean by that?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's our opinion that the hon. House leader, I believe, in the last few days has actually asked questions. He was asking the government if they'll change their decision on not allowing the emergency debate on rural crime. Rural crime is rampant. It's my assessment that the hon. Member for Airdrie today was actually suggesting that the government does

rescind that decision and allow the emergency debate on rural crime. I believe she made it quite clear in her question that it is still an emergency and it's still ongoing, the suggestion being that the government ought to rescind that decision. I think that's entirely within the bounds of what 23(f) suggests is acceptable. Consequentially and, I hope, respectfully, I would suggest to you that it wasn't a point of order.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there any other additional information?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a basic problem here. The request to rescind the decision is not the government's decision; it was your decision. Now, it just so happens that I disagreed with it. Nonetheless, we can't be asking you to rescind the decision. There's no way to move a motion to rescind a Speaker's decision. While the argument that the Member for Calgary-Hays puts forward is true if it was a decision by the government – and trust me, they've made a number of lousy ones – but in this particular instance that was your decision, no doubt influenced by the arguments made by the Government House Leader at the time; nonetheless, that was your decision. So there would be no motion of rescinding here.

I would like to point out, though, Mr. Speaker, that in this regard there are lots and lots of references made in speeches all the time about past votes and past members and past results of those. We hear it regularly when we're told: well, if you vote against the budget, you're voting against teachers and you're voting against nurses. Of course, that's balderdash. You know, in terms of referring to past votes and that sort of thing, that's a slippery slope. But in this particular instance where the question is only in order if it's calling for a rescinding of a decision that's been made by the House, I'd be fine if it was the House that made the decision, but in this case you made the decision. We can't call for your decisions to be rescinded unless you decide to reverse them.

Well, I'll leave that up to you as to whether you decide to make that decision.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let me just share the Blues. This is the statement made by the Member for Airdrie.

On November 27 more than a hundred Albertans spent their time and resources to travel to [the] Legislature in hopes of watching their MLAs in an emergency debate to consider solutions. Minister, do you have any regrets for not holding that emergency debate? Yes or no?

I believe there may have been an additional reference to an emergency debate in the first supplemental.

Let me also share a small part of the November 27 ruling, that the Government House Leader and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster – that, in fact, it was I who dealt with the matter. And I will quote:

Accordingly, I do not find the request for leave in order, and the question will not be put.

Had this matter have been dealt with in a more historical sense rather than more recently, I may have been persuaded that a different decision should result. Nonetheless, I believe in this instance that there is a point of order, and I would ask that the Member for Calgary-Hays withdraw the comment on behalf of the Member for Airdrie.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, as you have ruled, I on behalf of the member will withdraw the comment that you found to offend the point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 30

An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very proud and pleased to be able to speak to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, at Committee of the Whole. Bill 30 is long overdue. Bill 30 would continue our work to keep workers healthy and safe and to make sure that sick or injured workers get the supports they need to get healthy and return to work.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act was first enacted in 1976, and it has not had a significant update since. The last comprehensive review of the Workers' Compensation Act was more than 15 years ago. With this bill our government intends to make good on the basic foundation of health and safety and workers' compensation rules in Alberta, rules that have been left untouched for far too long. We will make sure that workplaces are safer, healthier, and free from bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment.

Since the 1970s legislators have been told that all workers need three basic rights, the three Rs: the right to know, the right to refuse, and the right to participate. Madam Chair, I'm so proud today to say that if passed, Alberta's workers will finally have all three of those rights enshrined clearly in our law.

Albertans will also know what their obligations and duties are. Whether you are an employer or a worker, a contractor or a supplier, your obligations would now be clear.

If passed, Bill 30 will also make important changes to the way Albertans are treated within the WCB. Of course, we will do everything we can to keep workers safe through education, participation, training, and prevention. Unfortunately, some workers still get hurt, and sometimes tragedy strikes and families lose a loved one on the job. When that happens, we need to make sure our WCB system is there: that it's there, that it's compassionate, accessible, focused on supporting injured workers and the families of workers that have been impacted by tragedy.

There has been much debate on the bill so far, and I'd like to, through these opening comments, address a few of the questions and comments I've heard, and then I look forward to continued debate in Committee of the Whole.

I've heard quite a few comments during second reading about consultation, and I would like to state for the record that there were significant amounts of consultation done on Bill 30, not just on the WCB side but on the OHS side as well.

We launched the OHS review in the summer, and I was very pleased to see the response from Albertans on that review. Alberta Labour received more than 1,300 online survey responses, nearly 90 written submissions, and conducted eight in-person round-table discussions with more than 200 in-person stakeholders across Alberta. Our government consulted with a range of Albertans,

including employers, workers, labour groups, municipalities, health and safety technical experts, and safety associations. These included face-to-face meetings, where we had an opportunity to hear ideas and take different views into account. Beyond that, we also consulted with our OHS officers and staff, the amazing folks who are on the front lines, making sure that workplaces across the province are meeting proper safety standards. A total of 141 staff were consulted, and feedback from the session was compiled and fed into the changes proposed in Bill 30.

On the WCB side an independent panel completed the 18-month review of the WCB in June of 2017 to ensure that the system continued to supply Albertans and it continued to remain sustainable and affordable. The panel's recommendations for our workercentric system were posted online July 6, 2017, and Albertans had until September 30 to provide feedback. On the WCB there were two rounds of consultation and feedback gathering. By the end of the panel process the panel received more than 1,700 questionnaires, 200 written submissions, 67 workbook responses. Over 60 responses were submitted in response to the panel's report as well: lots of consultation, lots of opinions, and lots of Albertans who participated. The WCB review panel members did a lot of work to consult with Albertans as well, and we are moving forward with positive changes.

3:00

I also wanted to address the costs of implementing changes to the WCB system, as the members opposite have spoken about. To be clear, these costs will not be passed on to employers in 2018 through an increase to premiums. In fact, the WCB has just recently released the premium rates for 2018, and lo and behold the average industry rate is remaining flat at \$1.02. So no change, no increase at all in 2018.

In addition, \$355 million in surplus from the accident fund was credited to employer accounts earlier this month, so the employers who fund the system are receiving the surplus through credit offsets. Employers will not see anything in this bill that means that the government is directing financial decisions at the WCB. None. What employers will see is an improved system that is effective, sustainable, and remains one of the most affordable in Canada.

Madam Chair, in my experience as Labour minister it's become all too common to hear: it's not broken; don't fix it. Well, I stand here in the House today with all confidence to say that in a province where workers didn't have the right to participate in making sure their workplaces are safe, we are fixing that. In a province where workers have the duty but not the right to refuse unsafe work, we are fixing that. In a province where injury benefits were out of step with real earnings, we are fixing that. And in a province where workers are not fully protected against harassment, we are fixing it, and we are fixing it now.

Now, I'm very interested in working with this House, through amendments and through the debate process, to make sure that Bill 30 is the best bill that it can be. To start that process, Madam Chair, I would like to table an amendment to Bill 30 that does the job of clarifying certain items within the bill and a little bit of housekeeping to it. I have the requisite 95 copies of this amendment, and I will pause there.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. This amendment will make housekeeping and clarifying changes to further strengthen health and safety protections and clarify the government's intention to improve OH and S and WCB legislation.

Please let me know, Madam Chair, if you'd like me to change how I'm doing this, but I will just speak to each section, as to what it is.

Part A of the amendment will ensure that workers who are employed in a private dwelling are protected under the OHS Act. For example, this change will ensure that live-in caregivers are covered by the OHS Act if passed. That would include the duties, essentially, that are defined in the act.

Part B will ensure that the OHS director can designate a prime contractor as responsible for a number of work sites in an industry. This will create another efficiency in the process for contractors working with OHS. The reason we use "class of work sites": an example industry, Madam Chair, would be logging, for example, where there are multiple work sites, but we would want the ability to designate a prime contractor.

Part C makes a change to the definition of domestic worker to make sure that we are including workers who live in a private dwelling and to ensure there's no ambiguity and that they have basic OHS protections.

Part D is a clarification change, simply ensuring that the deeming provisions of section 98 come into force on June 1, 2018. This part would be amended by striking out "96, 97 and 98," and substituting "96 and 97,".

Part E. This change will ensure there's clarity that our intent is to recognize correctional officers and emergency dispatchers as eligible for presumptive coverage for PTSD under the WCB. Madam Chair, this is in keeping with our government's policy direction. We spoke to this when we introduced the bill. Through the bill we have given ourselves the ability to make this change through regulation, but since the introduction of the bill we've heard directly from correctional officers and emergency medical dispatchers that the clarification that would come from having this in the legislation directly rather than through an update to regulation later would be quite meaningful to this group of Albertans, and as this was a recommendation from the WCB panel originally, we are happy to make this amendment and make sure that that clarity is there for these important workers.

Part F. This part of the amendment repeals section 41 of schedule 2, which makes reference to maximum assessable earnings. Making sure we're removing this reference is part of the decision to remove maximum insurable earnings from the Workers' Compensation Act. The section referenced is no longer required.

Madam Chair, overall, this is a set of housekeeping changes to increase clarity in the bill. I'm happy to answer questions that there may be on this amendment, but I certainly hope that all members of this House will support the amendment that I have put forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to rise and speak to the amendment as proposed by the minister. I actually had an opportunity – and I appreciate the minister sending it to me and having me take a look at it before. I appreciated that. I have actually no problems supporting this. There were some important corrections that needed to be in here, especially the definition of what corrections officer meant, being that it's a peace officer. Peace officers, obviously, as well as emergency dispatchers need to have that added in there. I appreciate that clarity and that being put in there. I think that these professions will need to have that added protection as well.

I guess the only thing that I'd like to say to the minister on this amendment, Madam Chair, is: look, I don't have a problem with the fact that you have put forward this amendment as it is a

housekeeping amendment. I guess the problem that I have – and this goes back to the original questions that we had – is about why you needed the amendments now. I mean, we've just been introduced to the bill, and we already have the amendments.

I do get the idea about the peace officers and corrections and dispatchers. There should have been, really, one line item in there that should have been changed, but what we see here is multiple sections that needed to have changes made as housekeeping changes, which speaks to the problem that we've been addressing for probably the last few days, and that is that the consultation process was rushed. The problem that we have faced: I've talked to many stakeholders, Madam Chair, that say that this was a very rushed process, that they did not feel that they had the opportunity to be able to speak to the issues fulsomely enough.

So here we are right now. We're dealing with a situation where shortly after the bill was introduced, the ministry recognizes that it was not written properly and that there needed to be housekeeping amendments done. Because of that, I think that it shows we need to step back from this bill, we need to give it the proper time needed, and we need to make sure that we hear from enough of the stakeholders, the 160,000 some-odd businesses that are actually contributing to WCB and that will be affected by these OH and S changes.

3:10

Let's be clear once again: these are not simple changes. We're talking about an extra hundred pages being added to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Think about what that will do to small and medium-sized businesses. They have to wrap their heads around the idea of these extra hundred pages that they have to deal with now, and they've got to be able to understand it because ignorance of the law is not an excuse.

We know a few things. We know that under this government the penalties will be the highest in Canada. Small, medium, and large businesses have got to really move quickly to be able to get their heads around what all these changes are, again, a hundred pages of occupational health and safety added onto the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Knowing that there are the highest penalties in Canada, knowing that ignorance of the law is no excuse, we now have a situation where they are putting a lot of stress on the businesses. That's really a concern that I've heard a lot when I've talked to the stakeholders.

That being said, I have a lot to say about this bill, but in terms of this amendment I will be supporting this amendment because, again, it speaks specifically to an important correction, which is talking about the peace officers and the emergency dispatchers being added to that part. But I do believe, once again, that because there are these housekeeping issues, it shows that the reality is that we have pushed too fast for this bill and that we should actually be slowing down.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Ms Gray: Just briefly. Thank you very much to the member for the support for this amendment, and I appreciate your comments. Similar to what we were talking about with the correctional officers and emergency dispatchers, when the bill is introduced into the House, although we've consulted with so many stakeholders and we were able to talk to them about potential policy direction and whatnot, the introduction of the bill is often the first time for safety associations, business groups, and OHS experts to read the details. The process of allowing the bill to be debated and for stakeholders to be able to reach out to us or to the opposition to talk about

potential amendments or changes is exactly how this is supposed to go. I'm very pleased that we were able to work with stakeholders on this and now with this House to make these housekeeping amendments to the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm really happy to be able to stand and speak to this amendment to Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. This amendment captures something I've been working on with correctional officers and their families since the election. They have been struggling with an extra five years now of not being entitled to presumptive PTSD coverage, and that has left what is a multiplying effect of cost on our society, on our province.

There are careers where, unfortunately, PTSD is more prevalent, and it's because they see traumatic things. I had the opportunity to introduce someone the other day, Frank Garritsen from Fort Saskatchewan, who had been working for 27 and a half years in corrections, and he had seen all manner of horror: slashings, hangings, murder, sexual assault. Something awful that I had never heard of was something where an inmate would take a bottle and mix together feces and urine and would explode it on a corrections officer as they passed their cell. Things that I had never even heard of were brought to me.

That's one of the many reasons why I knew it was really important to fight for this for the last two and a half years even though it's taken a really long time to go through really fulsome consultation with all of those that are affected, whether it's the public service or workers or industry. It's taken this long to make sure that it's comprehensive and looks after those things that, you know, I wouldn't refer to as housekeeping.

The point of having Committee of the Whole is to be able to bring forward amendments as a matter of going through the legislation and having an eye for it that maybe someone else didn't have, because we all represent just different constituencies in Alberta and different concentrations of a certain industry or worker. There are a lot of nurses in my constituency. There are a lot of corrections officers in my constituency. There's a lot of RCMP. There's a lot of Edmonton Police Service. There's a lot of military. I have the opportunity to hear those stories and struggles that they have as part of my role.

So when I have legislation come forward, you know, I'm seeing it for the first time, too, but I know that I've been part of this conversation for two and a half years. This isn't the first time that I'm hearing about these subjects and these issues, so I, knowing that there was this review happening, actively talked to people to be able to get a sense of what, like, work had been done before and reached out with questions about where things are so that I can get a really good sense of the things that might need redress when I see a bill.

This is one of those things. It's a very confusing thing. If someone were to say, "Oh, you know what? Corrections officers are covered in presumptive PTSD legislation," I might have read it initially, the original legislation, that had been passed in 2012, and thought that that made sense. That's, in fact, what happened in Frank Garritsen's case. He took his case to the WCB, and they opened up, you know, the legislation and said: "Oh, you're a correctional peace officer. It says it on your badge, says it on your paperwork. It makes sense that peace officers are covered." In fact, it took a year for them to figure out in the legislation that it is not correctional peace officers; it is peace officers defined as sheriffs. Sheriffs need protection, too, absolutely, but corrections officers have really high incidence of

posttraumatic stress disorder because of those awful things that we ask them to tend to.

You know, we're legislators that create laws that put people in the corrections system, and then we're not thinking about the people that are behind those walls, that are keeping society safe. That was a real, real hole that was left five years ago. It's troubling when people are dying. These corrections officers: it's not some faraway story. These are our friends. These are people that I have talked to via Twitter and Facebook and e-mail because they have heard about the work that we've been doing.

The idea that this needs to be put on hold is just flabbergasting to me and flabbergasting to the people who have these stories. I shared the story of someone named Isaac McNeill, who was happy to share his story on the record. He tried to cut his throat and woke up in a pool of blood. Like, this isn't some faraway thing that needs six months more or whatever number you want to put on how much longer you want to consult. This is happening. These people are in your communities, so this needs to happen now. This is not the time to dither.

3:20

Why did it take so long? The Premier, when she was sitting as an MLA in 2012, tried to put forward this amendment, tried to include correctional peace officers in the legislation, and she made very sound arguments, as she made last night. She was talking that there are issues when you create a class of workers and say, you know, that we're going to hold only certain people – and people that do incredible work. I mean, the first responders that are included and going to be included, including emergency dispatchers, do incredible work on behalf of Albertans.

But what it did was that it made people in the corrections field feel like second-class citizens. That was what I heard over and over again. When they would go through the WC process, they would feel like they had just been traumatized all over again. They would tell me that they just felt like the whole system was throwing them away like garbage. That's, unfortunately, what we heard concerns about, that the WCB Act did not focus enough on the needs of workers, so there was a lot of work that needed to be done.

Sorry. I wrote a lot of notes that are kind of in front of me because it's something that I am very passionate about, so I'm having just a slight trouble reading through my notes.

The struggle of posttraumatic stress disorder is serious. It interferes with everything. It creates difficulty in being able to form relationships with trust. It has hypervigilance as a part of it, which is just exhausting. We're starting to understand more about it so that we can better support them, and that's really important.

You know, it doesn't matter if you are attending an emergency in jail or if you are attending a car crash, trauma is trauma is trauma. I know that we have other regulations that will be able to protect the public-sector workers, but this is a really important piece that recognizes that corrections officers suffer at rates sometimes two, two and a half times police officers' because they are immersed in that place, in that environment full-time. Full-time.

There has been a basic lack of respect paid to these corrections workers. When they experience this psychological injury, this mental injury, it impacts their ability to take care of their families. They're not looking for any sort of special recognition, any special thanks. They just want to be able to put food on the table for their family when they get home. That's what is so important about having good legislation that protects workers because, you know, a worker should have the right to do that. They look after the rest of us, and then they just want to be able to go home and look after their family, too. So we need to make sure that we continue to do this

work. I'm really glad that we have the time to debate this now to make sure that these things have been seen to.

I want to thank the minister for tabling this amendment. I know that she knows how much this means to the workers that it represents. I'll leave it there, but I just want to make sure that everybody here knows that it is the right thing to do.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have a really quick question that I hope someone could give me an answer to. I heard the member opposite say that they've been working on this for about two and a half years. I guess the question that I have is – the minister talked about the process of how this thing actually rolls out, and she talked about how they had to work for a period of time. In terms of the consultation process there were 1,300 online survey responses, 90 written submissions, eight in-person facilitated round-table discussions, and then 200 stakeholders that were representing employers, workers, OHS professionals, health and safety associations, and academics. Just to be clear, that two-and-a-half-year-period process – and then she said that then once we go through that process of being able to draft the bill, at that point we have the opportunity to be able to bring it forward so that people can give us their feedback.

To the minister: does she believe that it is fair to go two and a half years in drafting this bill, which is over 200 pages, to be in a situation now where she is giving seven days to stakeholders, to people who are affected by this to actually just read the bill, a 200-page bill, digest it, and try to be able to come up with some reasonable responses to it? Seven days versus two and a half years to be able to draft this: I wonder. I just have to ask the minister: does she really believe that that is a reasonable amount of time to be able to make sure that the stakeholders, the people who will be affected by this, especially small-business owners, by what the unintended consequences will be, especially them, have had the proper time to be consulted and get their feedback during this important process?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. I just wanted to clarify that I said that I had been working on this amendment for two and a half years. I know that, you know, government never really stops working, so there is work that goes on in the department all of the time. That is its nature. But the draft report itself went out in July and therefore was available for review, feedback, further input between July and September. That was the second round of the review.

The Chair: Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. Just quickly, Madam Chair, as my colleague said, the draft report was out in July. We have to remember, too, that this isn't reinventing the wheel. We were playing catch-up with the other provinces, so we were able to take from some of that legislation as well. As this is rolled out next year, too, there is going to be a lot of support for small, medium, and large businesses and owners in terms of training, and we'll be able to discuss what is required to make their workplaces safe.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: I just wanted to clarify the point that I was trying to make. In this amendment they've identified peace officers and emergency dispatchers, that had been left out. Now, over a two-year to however long it was, a year and a half, two years, whatever, that

they were working on this – we were able to figure that out in about seven, well, actually, three or four days. The question that I have for them is: is the seven-day period that they're actually providing us with enough time to make sure that we've got the proper representation of the people who might be left out or might have been missed? Do they actually have enough time to be able to read the bill, know whether or not it affects them, and actually be able to give proper feedback and say: "Yeah. You know what? You forgot us." That was my question.

The Chair: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I think we want to quickly just review about the consultation that had occurred. They had pointed out some of the things that happened, but it was just on occupational health and safety – okay? – 1,300 online surveys just for occupational health and safety, 90 written submissions just for occupational health and safety. I can go on. The WCB. We've forgotten to continue to add the 1,700 questionnaires around the WCB, the 200 written submissions, and the 67 workbook responses. That was before the panel had submitted their report, which then got an additional 60 responses with that.

3:30

But what I wanted to quickly focus in on with regard to the consultations – I'm not too sure if there's some confusion here about the extent of just how far this went. There were, you know, 200 stakeholders across Alberta. Some of those stakeholders represent a very large number of working Albertans, and I think we'd be remiss if we didn't point out just some of them – I don't have time to go through all 200 of them here, but we can touch on just a few of them – you know, a stakeholder like Keyano College, which has 341 staff, with approximately 2,800 full-time students there, being consulted with on the bill. Bethany Care Society: 262 full-time employees, 1,147 part-time employees, approximately. The Centre for Newcomers Society of Calgary: 760 staff and volunteers.

You know, it's one thing to consult in just one little area. What we tried to do was to create a very wide net to capture as many of the stakeholders as possible. Red Deer Airport was a part of that, with approximately 240 employees. Red Deer chambers of commerce participated. They represent approximately 800 members.

Maybe I'll just quickly pull a page from the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. I'm hoping that we won't dismiss some of these stakeholders that are being mentioned that are not able or capable of representing their memberships' views and their employees' views. These are the people that we consulted with in coming up with the bill.

Royal Dutch Shell, which, you know, could also be known as Shell Scotford Alberta, with approximately 1,300 employees. Edmonton Exchanger & Manufacturing: approximately 1,000 employees. We have the Medicine Hat chamber of commerce with 825 members. Enmax has approximately 1,825 employees. Alberta Beef Producers: Madam Chair, 18,000 producers were consulted. The Alberta Construction Association: representing an impressive 3,000 members, encompassing approximately 226,000 employees. Alberta Health Services, with approximately 124,000 employees. Alberta Sand and Gravel Association: 125 members. Building Industry and Land Development Alberta Association represent approximately 1,900 members. Edmonton public schools, with approximately 8,640 employees.

PCL Construction Group has approximately 14,400 employees. UFA Co-operative Ltd.: a very, very impressive 110,000 active

members. Alberta Ready Mixed Concrete Association, representing 270 companies in their capture zone. Cargill Ltd.: total employees of approximately 8,100 Canada-wide. I think this is where it's very, very important to point out that some of these companies now are in other jurisdictions, where these changes that we're making already exist. I'm sure that some of these organizations, you know, have experience at this. Again, I think the Member for Calgary-Klein said that we're not reinventing the wheel. These are things that these members are already looking at.

Operating engineers local 955, you know, has more than 13,000 members. UFCW: 32,000 members, and of course they're representing the workers for Loblaws or Superstore, which have a very impressive number of employees working for them across Canada.

So I think when we're talking about the amount of consultation that has taken place, I think it very clearly demonstrated here that that net is cast very, very wide. There are amazing numbers of results that are being pulled in, which have formed this, which is why I think, you know, as the minister who brought forward the amendment said, again, it was to just quickly clean up, a little bit of housekeeping. I'm happy to support that. I think as we move forward, using consultation as an excuse to delay this bill, like the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville mentioned, would do a disservice to some of the people that we're looking to protect.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. As impressive as the list of participants in the survey is from the hon. member opposite, here we are right now with an amendment that says: oops; we forgot somebody. That is the point, that as impressive as that survey may have been and all the consultation may have been, we have an amendment right now before this House that essentially says: in spite of all that, we missed somebody. That is the point, that it's one thing to survey and consult before a piece of legislation is actually crafted, but once the thing is written and there it is bound and stapled together, that's the document people need to look at. That is the fruit of all of the consultation. That isn't something in a complete form that people got to read through ahead of time and give feedback on. The point that we're trying to make is, "All right. Now we've got this bill. Now let's take a second look at it and see: is there someone else that's been forgotten?" just as these amendments indicate is the case. That is the point.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thanks, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for all the comments that I've listened to, and I've certainly listened with intent. I especially want to thank the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville for, of course, bringing this sort of information to the government, which brings this amendment forward, which I of course do support. You know, I'll point out, as my friend the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake pointed out, that, to the point, clearly a couple of folks were forgotten, which is why we have an amendment here, which is concerning.

You know, I've spoken to this House previously in regard to a few of my we'll say opportunities within the police service. But corrections officer and emergency dispatcher: I certainly have not specifically been a corrections officer in a corrections facility; however, I was a judicial interim release hearing officer for two and a half years and performed the role of a corrections officer within the city jail in the city of Calgary. I can tell you that for at least two, almost three winters there were times when I did not even see any

daylight. That takes a toll on an individual. Some of the things that I had to witness were – well, honestly, Madam Chair, I probably cannot even speak about them within this House, which is how disturbing some of the things that I have seen were. But my point is that those experiences take a toll on people.

In having conversations with people who are corrections officers – I mean, I did that for two and a half years, to the point where I had to get out so I could have some peace of mind. Some of these guys and ladies do not have an opportunity to get out. In fact, they will do 15 years, 20 years, 25 years, 30 years, and I can only imagine what it's like to be in a facility for that long a period of time. You know, really, you're dealing with people who have been convicted of crimes, and it does take a toll. There is a disproportionate number of those workers who commit suicide, who have mental health concerns, and those people need to be protected, but as my friend indicated, clearly they were not thought of in the original bill, which is why the amendment is being brought forward. Well, who else have we forgotten?

3:40

You know, they touch on emergency dispatchers. A lot of people tend to forget about emergency dispatchers. I will tell you that I certainly commend this government and whoever specifically it was who brought emergency dispatchers in as part of this amendment. I can tell you that emergency dispatchers are your first point of contact when people call 911 or the nonemergency line. It is then determined at that time whether or not that call is going to go within a city, within a rural municipality. It'll be determined whether it is fire or EMS related, whether it is police related because there are specific skills that those folks have.

I can tell you that my wife was an emergency dispatcher for EMS and fire. We talk about posttraumatic stress disorder, and we talk about some of the challenges that those folks face which sometimes people don't understand. As a police officer visually am I the first one on a scene? Have I seen people in traumatic situations? Have I seen things that would make everyone here cringe? Yes, I have. However, I can tell you that my wife, what she experienced – and notice I used the past tense – was as traumatic as things that I had to experience while working the street.

In fact, she was involved in a situation. She dispatched in the Calgary surrounding area in the rural communities. Sadly, somebody had committed suicide, and a wife was the first upon the scene. Well, my wife had to counsel that lady for 30 minutes to 45 minutes before emergency services could even get to her. That took a toll on her. That was a very traumatic situation. My wife's past: she had a close friend when she was much younger that committed suicide, and then as a result, it compounded the incident that occurred at work.

I'm enjoying listening and hearing we'll call it the progressive nature of this type of legislation because I can tell you that her commander at that particular time – it was very disappointing to hear what his response was. That commander was having the attitude that my wife needed to really just kind of get over it, not knowing what her history was, not knowing the actual trauma of the call that she experienced as well. As a result of that experience, my wife could not continue working for emergency services as a dispatcher.

I think what was even more disappointing was the way that she was treated by the employer despite her having this posttraumatic stress disorder, them not recognizing and, in fact, them not really even caring, quite frankly. I mean, she was obviously lucky that she was in a position where she could eventually wipe her hands clean of that. We, of course, have small children, and she did think of

another career that was less impactful than working as an emergency dispatcher.

You know, I can tell you that those two jobs, emergency dispatcher, corrections officer: people don't realize what these people go through. People don't realize that the experiences that they have are equally if not as traumatic as what the police officer on a scene sees, what the fireperson sees, what the EMS worker sees. They are just as much a part of that call. In fact, when we do debriefs in emergency situations – critical incidents is what we call them – as a former commander I would always include the emergency dispatcher in our debrief. Why? Because they were an integral part of that call. What they were experiencing when that person who called in had trauma – that person was there. Although they were listening to my command, I can tell you that their point of contact was integral to that call.

For that reason, of course, I support this amendment. Again, I agree with my colleagues on this side. You know, these two critical, critical positions in our province, the people that I would say certainly have a role as a responder, almost like that service that people don't even seem to know about – right? – the kind of hero that doesn't really get recognized: those two individuals, those two jobs, were not mentioned in the first bill. I think that's why it's so critical to make sure that we get this sort of stuff right.

I would like to again thank the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and I would like to thank the government for putting this amendment forward. But, you know, really, folks, we have to make sure that we get this sort of stuff right and include everybody. I appreciate the comments made by other stakeholders that were included, but we have to make sure that we don't miss anybody, especially that provides critical services to our community.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. I want to thank the member for bringing forward the amendment because rarely is there perfect legislation. If we remember yesterday, we had the opportunities to rise and join together as a House to speak to some private member bills, to come to consensus, to have some amendments brought forward, to agree on those amendments, and to support them and make legislation better. I think that's the goal of this House, obviously, to provide the best legislation that we can potentially have for the people of Alberta. I don't believe that Bill 30 is any different. I rise, Madam Chair, to speak in favour of this amendment because any time that we can make a piece of legislation better, I believe that we have a duty as legislators to do so.

Now, you know, some of this amendment here, some of the parts of this amendment, are housekeeping, to be sure. When we have to define that a worker in a private dwelling is covered by OH and S or that workers that live in a private dwelling are called domestic workers, I would suggest that that probably is a housekeeping measure. But some of this amendment actually speaks to some important issues that have already been brought up by the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. We can see that when we're dealing with issues like posttraumatic stress disorder, including correctional officers as peace officers and including emergency dispatchers as first responders is an important amendment that needs to be included in this act.

Madam Chair, I used to have to try to explain to some of my students what the words "to amend" mean. I would have to explain

to them that it was to change and hopefully to bring about change that was progressive and that was better. When we talk about this in a political sense, we are amending or changing a piece of legislation in order to try to promote and to deal with some of the issues that perhaps speak to a need for improvement.

3:50

I was very pleased to hear the Minister of Labour say that when we go through this exercise of the Committee of the Whole, new ideas are brought up from both sides, that a part of our debate is ensuring that stakeholders' points of view and ideas that will improve a bill are brought forward and are put forward before the House. I would hope that that is a consensus of the government, that this is a process not just for the government to put forward amendments but for this House to bring forward amendments. Just as there was an appeal to the Official Opposition to listen and to consider and to support those amendments that would make a bill better, we plan on bringing forward amendments that will also, in our position, from our point of view, make this bill a better bill. I was very happy to hear the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville say that she believes that this process brings a new eye to legislation. We would argue, as we move forward and we provide amendments to this bill, that the House would consider those wise words.

Madam Chair, we have had the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner ask a question. After taking two years to draft and consult on this piece of legislation, why are we only taking seven days to debate this bill? We have an opportunity to bring forward amendments, and this is a good amendment. This idea of addressing correctional officers and emergency dispatch individuals were important issues that needed to be addressed and to be added into this bill. It shows us that there are times when the government and when the opposition identify issues and that this is the time, Committee of the Whole, to bring forward these ideas for the consideration of this Legislature. I would ask and suggest that the question of my hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner is a good question. Why the rush? Why the rush?

We can see that there are some concerns for our stakeholders in the opposition that we've talked to and government stakeholders that they've talked to, that even now they're bringing forward new ideas. I would argue and ask this House to not only support this amendment but to give serious consideration to the amendments that will be coming forward as we move through this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 30? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 30. Before I go any further, I will just present an amendment here to you, and then we will move on.

The Chair: This amendment will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Moved that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 1 in the proposed section 16(5)

by striking out "and" at the end of clause (c) and adding the following after clause (c):

(c.1) whether the employer is a non-profit company or society, and

The bill itself proposes to make workplaces safer for all Albertans. I think that's an important goal, certainly one the Alberta Party supports, but it must and will include workplaces that are comprised primarily or entirely of workers in the not-for-profit sector. This amendment seeks to allow some discretion for not-for-profit organizations to pool their resources in a way that allows them to comply with the new legislation but to do so in a way that doesn't have a very detrimental impact on their finances.

As I'm sure most of you know, not-for-profit organizations are rarely funded through grants for administrative costs, and that includes the human resources costs required to comply with the requirements of Bill 30. In addition, not-for-profits having 20 or more volunteers at a work site would now be required to comply with the legislation. Now, I know and have worked with not-for-profits that are certainly rich in people but less so in finances. This clause as it stands now before the amendment would have a disproportionately negative impact on them. It certainly could. Our amendment to section 16 of schedule 1, on page 26, of this bill would enable directors of inspection to consider an employer's nonprofit or charitable status and, hence, their financial capacity when working with organizations to build capacity to establish and operate joint work-site health and safety committees.

It's very important to the Alberta Party and to me personally that workers and volunteers at not-for-profits and charities are protected and are safe. We are looking for constructive and creative ways that those in government responsible for work health and safety can work with nonprofits. It's very important to work with nonprofits and charities to improve worker and volunteer safety in sustainable ways that work for everyone. That way not-for-profit and charitable workers that are under some of the unique constraints of nonprofit and charitable organizations and those who work in unusual work environments can enjoy the full protection of this bill, just like workers in commercial workplaces that might have more resources to build human resources capacity to meet the requirements of this bill. We see this amendment as a practical action we can take to make this bill work better for Alberta's nonprofit and charitable organizations and for the people who both work and volunteer for those organizations.

Now, we did share this amendment with the government in advance, earlier this week. I would hope that they would make a commitment and would be able to support it and make that same commitment to Alberta's tens of thousands of smaller nonprofits and charities, who would be protected if this amendment is passed from the unintended consequences – I certainly hope that the consequences and imagine that the consequences would be unintended – of the bill. The not-for-profits that I deal with in Calgary-Elbow and beyond are asking for assurances that the administrative parts of this bill not drive them out of the business of serving Albertans or impair their ability to serve Albertans because it would drive up the administrative costs of doing business for those not-for-profits.

So I ask the government and all members to please vote now in favour of a very clearly common-sense amendment that would in fact make things better for not-for-profits, for charities, and, most importantly, for the Albertans that those nonprofits and charities serve.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the member bringing forward the amendment. As we know, as it's spelled out in the act, there are certain duties around safety that are required of all employers. As we know, with all the great work that our charities do, they are still employers. You know, such groups as the United Way do fantastic work. They do have a lot of employees and are required to still provide a safe work environment for those employees, as spelled out. There are always potential things that can be looked at with regard to the regulations, but right now, of course, we are just talking about the bill itself. I do thank the member for bringing this forward and making sure that we are talking about charities, but at this time, respectfully, I will urge members to not support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

4:00

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to move an amendment.

The Chair: This will be amendment A3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 1 in section 41 as follows: (a) in clause (c) by adding "the regulations and the OHS code" after "review this Act and its administration" and (b) by striking out clause (d).

Now, this amendment proposes that the government initiate a review of OH regulations at the same time the entire act is reviewed, every five years. As I talked to different stakeholders, I realized, you know, that adding another hundred pages to the Occupational Health and Safety Act is going to be very cumbersome to them – it's going to be tough for them to be able to get their heads around this – and then adding on the regulations as well. They indicated to me that having this moved from a three-year period review to a five-year period would be a lot less cumbersome on them, so they asked that I move this amendment.

Now, one of the things that it says in this section that the government is actually proposing is that publishing a three-year OH and S review each year will create unnecessary work for this ministry. The concern that I have is that they're going to publish every year. They're going to be publishing a three-year OH and S review and then whatever regulations might come with that. This is going to add more onto not just businesses, small businesses especially and mid-sized businesses, but it's also going to be affecting the ministry because they will be the ones who will have to be reviewing this every three years as well.

The other thing that I heard was that the costs of these revisions can be anywhere up to a thousand dollars for each change for each of these organizations as they have to reprint and change the practices, the printed material, to go around to the different people who are in charge of safety. Now, that, I think, would be considered as one of the unintended consequences as I do believe that the government had the best intentions of being able to make things safer for employees. But remember that this is actually a symbiotic relationship between both the employee and employer and that we

need to make sure that we don't chase small businesses out of business because of overregulation and more paperwork to do.

I am concerned that if we don't move it to a five-year period, they will not have the opportunity of being able to just move forward with the changes that need to be done until after the third year, that they've got to go right back through it and do it again.

These are some of the concerns we had and that we had heard from our stakeholders, and I would recommend that all members of the House vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the member bringing forward the amendment. What we're talking about here is a requirement on behalf of the minister to come up with a plan every year when looking to review every three years, and that doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be a full-blown review at any time. You know, we can do this by sections here, so it's not felt that this will be too onerous on companies. They'll very easily be able to work with the minister. The minister is very adamant about making sure that there is co-operation on behalf of the ministry in order to help businesses move forward on this.

Again, I'll thank the member for bringing this forward at this time, but I won't be able to support this, and I'll ask members to not support this as well.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:06 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	MacIntyre	Smith
Hanson	Pitt	Strankman
Hunter		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Payne
Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jansen	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kazim	Schmidt
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Shepherd
Dach	Littlewood	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Eggen	McKitrick	Turner
Feehan	McLean	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move another amendment.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 2 in section 6 by striking out clause (a).

Now, this amendment – I would like to first of all just point out that when we actually take a look at the bill, what we've tried to do is to look at what the overarching position of this one point is, and then we've tried to talk about the background, about why we felt the minister was trying to go in this direction. We looked at, you know: why the need for the change? Then we also talked about what jurisdictions this was brought from and maybe took a look at some of the successful or not-so-successful positions in those different jurisdictions.

With that, I'd like to just point out that this amendment proposes that the government strike out the new section regarding WCB Board of Directors appointments, leaving it as it is currently written in the WCB Act. The WCB Board of Directors is currently comprised of members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. These members are selected based on merit after a rigorous third-party audit of potential candidates. The board cannot consist of more than three representatives supporting the interests of employers, employees, and the general public.

Bill 30 maintains that three members be selected from groups representing employers, employees, and the public. However, these candidates are no longer selected by merit. Rather, seven candidates are nominated by each group, and the Lieutenant Governor is required to choose from this small selection of candidates. Merit is no longer a requirement for selection to the WCB Board of Directors with these three appointments.

Now, the one thing that I like about the current system that WCB employs is that this current system includes a layer of oversight by a third-party auditor. The jurisdictions that use the current Alberta system are Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. I point this out because it's important to remember that a lot of these changes, from what I understand, came from a person that actually came from Manitoba, so I guess the question I have is: of the recommendations that were brought forward, where did this one come from? I can see how some of the bill came forward from this person that came from Manitoba and then some would come from industry and from the stakeholders, but I don't understand this one, why we would be taking merit out of the selection process. WCB's selection process is audited. It's an arm's-length process, and I don't think that we should be meddling in an arm's-length organization in this way.

Now, I guess the other question is that this could lead to a board that is overly partisan to certain interests, which could lead to a less effective board if members are there to fulfill an agenda rather than protect workers and employers. Appointments to the board of directors should be made based on merit – and I've stated that before – not nomination by organizations. I don't understand where this recommendation would come from. I imagine it would not come from stakeholders in industry because they believe that it's very important, first of all, to have that arm's length in this selection process, and they also believe that it's important to make sure that the people who are on there have the merit to be on that board.

I think that it's problematic that this is in the bill and that the best way, in my opinion, to be able to move forward is to strike out clause (a) and to make sure that we go back to the system that workers' compensation has been operating on for some time. Remember, once again, that the jurisdictions that are using the current system we have here in Alberta are Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia, Manitoba being where the individual who came up with all these ideas – I think that it's interesting that he would come

up with this idea even though Manitoba is using the system we have today.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Essentially, what we are doing with this is making sure that, going forward, the Workers' Compensation Board and the members who make up the board are representative of the interests that the WCB seeks to balance, which are the interests of workers and the interests of employers. When we struck the WCB panel, we had a representative of workers, a representative of employers, and a neutral chair.

4:30

Similarly, the board chair at the WCB is intended to be kind of a neutral party whereas the members – in this case, we've put forward a system where there will be a nomination from representative organizations. Labour, for example, can nominate people to then move on to the Workers' Compensation Board. We did this for a couple of reasons, and this is a change that I think both labour and employers, from the consultations that I've done and the conversations that I've had, are supportive of. What we found with some nominees in the past is that someone would be on the board as a representative of labour because they had been a shop steward 20 years earlier in their career but hadn't been engaged with labour in the province in recent history. So making sure that there are representative interests and making sure that we go and talk to employers about who they would like to see on the board as far as that makeup is concerned is a priority for us, and it gives more say, essentially, to the members of that board on the interests that are being represented.

This is very similar to the labour board, and that is probably the most direct linkage that I can point the member to as far as where this is coming from. In both situations you want two different interests to be well represented so that balanced solutions can be provided, and then we get that sustainable system that provides good rehabilitation for injured workers and benefits all Albertans. All employers want to have healthy and safe workers and want an injured worker to be able to return quickly, and all workers want essentially the same thing.

Looking at how the Labour Relations Board appointments are done, making sure that we're giving that enhanced power and influence to the stakeholders involved is what we've done with that.

I hope that answers the member's questions. I will not be supporting his amendment because I think that having nominated candidates representative of interests serves the system very well.

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I appreciate the comments of the minister. I guess the only question that I have, once again, is that you've addressed some important points, but you haven't addressed the issue of merit. My question to you is: do you consider, in the appointment of these onto the board, merit being an important part? If so, is there another mechanism where this merit is going to actually be established? That's, I guess, the question that industry would want to know. You know, can you just appoint anybody on there? Will there actually be that merit that we need?

Ms Gray: I appreciate the member's questions. Both labour and representatives of workers and employers and representatives of business care deeply about making sure that there is a sustainable and quality workers' compensation system. To that end, I know that

they will be thinking of the skill sets that are involved when they're making those nominations. That being said, they are nominating more candidates than are needed for the number of positions, allowing an appointment process to take place that will provide an assessment of the people who have been nominated. Essentially, we're giving them the ability to have some control over who is representing their interests, something that I've heard strongly from stakeholders that they appreciate and would like. We are making sure that we can still go through the board appointment process or review as well as do interviews and some of those other steps that currently take place, but the pool of candidates, we will know, represents the interests involved. So absolutely making sure that there is good suitability is something both I as the minister and the stakeholders who are nominating people will have an interest in and will be thinking about through this process.

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Sorry. I probably didn't ask the question properly, Madam Chair. Maybe I'll ask it one more time here. The current process of being able to present potential candidates is through a rigorous third-party audit at arm's length. My question is: with changing this, are you getting rid of the rigorous third-party audit, which is at arm's length? That's my question.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, hon. member. With this change, we are essentially giving more power and say to the stakeholders, whom we are interested in representing. We will continue to use the appointing processes that our government has put into place that continue to work towards increasing diversity on our board, making sure that there are quality appointees and making sure that we have kind of that independence piece to it.

In this case we are allowing the stakeholders to nominate, so essentially that is independent from government because it is either labour or the business community that would be making that nomination, allowing us to have that say in that way. That is where the independence comes from, giving more control and more influence to the business stakeholders and to labour to be able to nominate people. I mean, that's as independent as you can get, saying: please go and look at the qualified candidates within your pool of interested people and make sure that you have people on the Workers' Compensation Board that will represent your positions and your perspectives as a business owner, for example, and make sure that they will contribute to the overall Workers' Compensation Board in that way.

I hope I've answered your question there. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment, and I will be speaking in favour of the amendment. When we start looking at appointing individuals to agencies, boards, and commissions, there are really some very foundational perspectives that can be brought to these positions and to these appointments. One is a mindset that believes that merit should be the primary consideration, that experience and expertise, education, knowledge, all of these combine to provide the individual with the capacity and the merit to make wise choices on this agency, this board, or this commission. When you have that right person, that person that has the experience and the education and the knowledge and the expertise, when you've chosen that person and that person is well chosen for the position, then you get sound judgment, and then you get a committee that is bound together by people that have

the experience and the knowledge and the expertise to be able to make good decisions and to provide balance to decisions when it comes to making decisions, in this case the WCB, the Workers' Compensation Board.

Another way of looking at these kinds of decisions and choosing who's going to be a part of these commissions and these agencies and these boards is to group people into groupings and to look at them not from the position of merit but from the position of the group that they represent, whether that's an employer or an employee or whether it's the general public. We've heard the hon. minister stand up and say, "Well, we need to make sure that we have somebody from the employers and from the employees," and I guess that's what concerns some of us and why I'll be speaking in favour of this amendment. We believe that these appointments shouldn't be about the group that you belong to as much as it should be about the experience and the knowledge and the education that you bring to this board or this commission.

When you start to think of people as coming and looking at them from the point of view of a group and that being a primary consideration, that's when you get political ideology and when the process becomes politicized and where the group that you represent is more important than the merits needed for the job and the position and the decisions that are going to be made.

4:40

Presently the Workers' Compensation Board Board of Directors is appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council but selected on merit. We cast a net province-wide looking for applicants. We're looking at those applicants through the mind of the executive firm that is retained, that screens and shortlists these applicants, a neutral third-party auditor that isn't going to be looking so much at what group they belong to as looking at their experience and their expertise and their education and their knowledge whereas Bill 30 brings in this concept of: we need to have somebody from the employer, and we need to have somebody that's representing employees. That in many ways sets up the Workers' Compensation Board so that almost sometimes it could become a dysfunctional board because they're more concerned with the group that they fit in with rather than applying their expertise, their knowledge, their education, and their experience to making sure that we get good judgments and that we get good decisions and that we have balanced decisions coming out of this board.

I would suggest that the current system gives the Lieutenant Governor the freedom to be able to choose board members with a limited amount of political influence and where politics doesn't enter into the situation as clearly and as easily. The current system provides a layer of oversight, that third-party auditor, that allows the decisions to be outside of the realm of politics. We can see that this has done not only Alberta a good service over the last 20 years or so but the provinces in the rest of the country like Manitoba and Ontario and Nova Scotia, where they use the same or a similar system for board appointments.

We would suggest that this proposed amendment will allow the Workers' Compensation Board to be filled with members who are qualified to be there and that this amendment would lead to a board that is not overly partisan, that is capable of considering the needs of the worker and where the board becomes an effective agent for all that are coming before it.

I would speak in favour of this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to be brief because we obviously have a fundamental difference of opinion on how the WCB should work. Right now we have board members that are representative of the interests of workers and board members that are representative of the interests of employers. The problem we are solving is that we heard from stakeholders that there was a lack of transparency, that there was a lack of understanding about: "How does that person represent me? I wasn't involved in their recruitment, in their appointment process." So we have introduced as a method the ability for groups to nominate people because we need representative interests on the WCB. That is how the WCB finds balance. We need people who are representing workers, who are representing the public, and who are representing employers. This is not a new concept. We are not introducing this with Bill 30. This is how it works now, but there was a lack of trust that the people appointed were actually doing that.

We are solving that problem. We are increasing the transparency. We are making sure that through the call for applications, through the screening process and whatnot, the representative stakeholders are involved in that. I think I will leave it there because I think there's a misunderstanding about what we are doing when we are looking for people for the Workers' Compensation Board. It's very important that we do have people who represent various interests on that board, thinking of those interests as decisions are being made. It was important to our stakeholders that they have transparency and that they be involved in the appointment process. We currently select now for the three groups. We're just making sure that the interests that we are trying to represent are involved in this process. We've looked to the Labour Relations Board and other systems where that happened successfully. We've brought that to the Workers' Compensation Board, and I'm very proud of that change.

I will be rejecting the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will propose an amendment to Bill 30.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A5.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My amendment is as follows. I am moving this on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 2, section 9, in the proposed section 9.2 by adding the following after subsection (4):

- (5) The Board shall measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the Code of Conduct annually in informing all workers and employers of their rights in their interactions with the Board and take steps as the Board considers appropriate to improve awareness of those rights, including developing strategies for overcoming language, information and physical or mental capacity barriers.

Again, Madam Chair, the objective of this amendment, which we had shared with government, is truly, I hope, if taken in good faith and in a true desire, to make the bill better, to improve the bill. I would hope that members of both the government side as well as the opposition would see the merit in supporting this amendment.

As a principle, Bill 30 proposes to add to or expand the scope of work for several groups and initiatives that will advance worker safety and rights. Those include the Appeals Commission, the fair practices office, the code of rights and conduct, and the Workers' Compensation Board itself. There are tens of thousands of Albertans who stand to benefit each year from those, including Albertans who will take the time to learn about their rights and protections, Albertans whose employers and representatives do take the time to do outreach, and Albertans who are fortunate enough to work with well-informed peers.

Unfortunately, not everybody in this province has the privilege of working in such environments. Unfortunately, every year we see or hear stories of vulnerable Albertans or even just ordinary, rank-and-file working Albertans who don't practically or in reality actually enjoy all of the legislated rights that they should as workers. There is, unfortunately, abuse and bullying that goes on in some workplaces, and it is a significant minority of employers who allow such a thing to go on. That's important to emphasize, that that really is the minority. But there are some who would take advantage of workers' lack of knowledge about their rights – they take advantage of workers' lack of capacity with the English language or the capacity to learn about their rights – and who would threaten to fire or, in some cases, even deport employees who would seek to assert their legislated rights.

You know, one of the things that this bill has is various coming-into-force dates. That presumably is to allow time for education of workers as well as employers about the new provisions in here.

Now, the other thing I want to emphasize is how important it is, in all aspects of what government does, that we measure what we do. This amendment seeks to have the government measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the code of conduct annually and their success in informing workers and employers of their rights in their interactions with the board. That also would compel them to take steps that the board considers appropriate to improve the awareness of those rights, including developing strategies for overcoming the barriers that we've talked about: language, information and physical or mental capacity barriers.

I'm sure that the Workers' Compensation Board, that the various different – the Appeals Commission, the fair practices office, the code of rights and conduct, and WCB itself: I'm sure that they will do that work. I have no doubt they will. That is their core mandate, and I'm certain it will happen. Having said that, "How do we know?" is an important question that we in this Assembly, as the governors, ultimately, of organizations like WCB, should be asking ourselves.

This, to me, Madam Chair, is a common-sense amendment that I would hope the government would support. It takes into account the most vulnerable employees in this province or those in the most precarious position. The amendment makes it very clear that the thousands of people who don't necessarily have time to pore over the 100 some-odd pages of this substantial bill or the 100-plus pages of the Workers' Compensation Act don't really understand their rights. Now, I recognize that there are poster campaigns and websites and other education programs, but this amendment is, I believe, a practical action that will make the bill work better for Alberta's most vulnerable workers, that are often the most at risk. I would certainly ask that all members of this Assembly vote in favour of what I hope is a thoughtful amendment to make this bill genuinely better.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

4:50

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for reviewing Bill 30 and looking for ways to potentially improve it, particularly given the number of changes that we see in Bill 30 and some of the new pieces that have been introduced.

The code of conduct is one piece that was specifically recommended to us by the panel to articulate the rights of workers and employers and their interactions with the organizations and to articulate in detail how the WCB commits to operate in recognition of these rights. We want this code of rights and conduct to be developed by the WCB Board of Directors and to involve the stakeholders so that we make sure that people understand their rights in the system and to really shift the culture. That's what this code is intended to do, to help shift the culture towards one more worker centred. That being said, this code of conduct as well as a number of other measures will need to be evaluated.

The accountability for these changes needs to be in place, and we feel that it is, that the accountability mechanisms are there in the reporting responsibilities to the minister. As well, we will be working closely with the new fair practices office, that reports to the minister. In this case, I appreciate the member's amendment, but I feel that we have the ability to measure the effectiveness of these changes and we have the mechanisms in place without needing to accept this legislative change.

Thank you to the member, but I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to propose an amendment, please.

The Chair: This is amendment A6.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 2 in section 18 in the proposed section 24.3 as follows: (a) by striking out subsection (1)(b); (b) by striking out subsection (2); (c) in subsection (7) by striking out "and may pay remuneration to those members referred to in subsection (2)."

Now, this bill establishes an occupational disease and injury advisory committee. This board must consist of the director of medical services for OH and S, who will be the chair; a physician; an employee of the Department of Health; an employee of Alberta Health Services; and an employee of Covenant Health. These people, obviously, make sense. What is not clear is why the minister may also be allowed to appoint a union representative, an employer representative, and a member of the public. The purpose of the committee is to propose recommendations to the minister about the act and regulations as they pertain to occupational diseases.

It's not clear how these three additional members appointed by the minister are qualified to do that. This goes back to the last amendment that I was talking about, talking about the concept of merit, the merit of those people, the competency, the ability of those individuals to be able to bring forward recommendations, to be able to bring forward reasonable and valued advice to this occupational disease and injury advisory committee or to the minister. If the

minister has to choose from the list of three persons that are not nominated through an independent process or through a small pool of applicants, we risk people being on the committee that would only hinder it, not help it.

This amendment is to ensure that the occupational disease and injury advisory committee consists strictly of qualified individuals. Again, as I mentioned about the last amendment that I brought forward, this is about being able to have qualified people who have the ability to do what they need to be doing in a way that's going to be good for both the workers and the employers. So I would recommend that all the members of this House vote in favour of this amendment. I do believe that it's going to make this bill better.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. For reasons similar to the previous debate's, I disagree with the member opposite, and I'm not in favour of this amendment. It also removes the ability to provide reasonable travelling and living expenses for members of this occupational disease and injury advisory committee, which I am not in support of because it's really important that we make sure that our occupational injury and disease information is kept up to date.

This advisory committee was recommended to us by the panel and, I think, is a very important piece of Bill 30, making sure that we have up-to-date occupational disease and injury information. Given that right now we are dealing with a list of diseases that was crafted in the '80s and hasn't been updated, making sure we have that up-to-date information is important. Having the small and reasonable travel and living expenses be able to – oh, sorry. It's just the remuneration that they are striking out with this amendment. My apologies. I'm incorrect there. Not allowing the government to pay remuneration to the members, I'm not supportive of.

Who we want on the occupational disease and injury advisory group: it's going to be people who are physicians, who are representative of the three interests, as we've talked about. Making sure that we can have committed people who are able to advise us on the occupational disease and injury advisory committee is important, so I will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	MacIntyre	Smith
Hanson	McIver	Strankman
Hunter	Pitt	

5:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Carlier	Hinkley	Payne
Carson	Horne	Phillips
Ceci	Jansen	Piquette

Clark	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Coolahan	Larivee	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Sweet
Eggen	McKittrick	Turner
Feehan	McLean	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring		
Totals:	For – 8	Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to present.

The Chair: This will be amendment A7.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. I'm moving this amendment on behalf of my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 1 in section 75(1)(a) by adding the following after clause (iv):

- (iv.1) evaluation of worker safety training, education and research with respect to effectiveness and accessibility by all workers in Alberta;
- (iv.2) translation of worker safety information and outreach with respect to workers who do not speak English or speak English as a second language.

Madam Chair, this amendment would add to the creative sentencing options for employers who do not respect or protect the safety of their workers. It explicitly adds to the list of available creative sentencing options to fund translation, outreach, and evaluation in support of worker training, safety, education, and other initiatives.

I note that the existing section 75(1)(a) and the subsequent subsections allow for the court to use a variety of different measures, including:

- (i) training or educational programs regarding the health and safety of workers;
- (ii) research programs into the diagnostic, preventative or remedial aspects of worker health and safety;
- (iii) any worker health and safety initiative by a non-profit organization;
- (iv) the establishment and maintenance of scholarships for educational institutions offering studies in occupational health and safety and related disciplines;
- (v) any other purpose that furthers the goal of achieving healthy and safe work sites.

The reason we've moved this amendment is to be very explicit that there are certain workers in our society who, with language, knowledge, or job security barriers, are among the most difficult to engage. It's very important that we have specific and explicit programs to engage such workers because those are the workers that often have the most reason to not rock the boat, Madam Chair. Again, this is an authentic – I hope the government sees it as really a genuine attempt to make this bill better, to actually improve it, to bring it to a place where it can genuinely help the most vulnerable workers in our society.

It is important that any employer who would ever consider preying on vulnerable workers should be shown a path or, frankly, compelled to be on a path where they can actually help those workers to access the information that they need and that they no longer would abuse workers in that way. If they have been found, in fact, to have done so, it's important that they're not only punished and penalized, held accountable for that, but they are put on a path where they could actually improve, which is why we would seek to amend this legislation to explicitly allow outreach and evaluation of worker safety initiatives to be one of the available creative sentencing measures. It would emphasize and reinforce that employers and others who have responsibilities to protect worker safety and rights also have responsibilities to work together to identify and reach the most vulnerable workers, who may not be well served by broad-based campaigns.

The amendment here to the proposed section 75 in schedule 1 is a practical action that those of us in this House can take to make the bill better and make it work for Alberta's most vulnerable and least integrated workers. Again, we shared this with the government ahead of time, and I would hope that they would see this as a genuine and common-sense effort to make the lives of some of the most vulnerable workers in Alberta better. Again, I would genuinely hope that the government would accept this amendment and ensure that Albertans are best served by this important piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member. I would like him to know that I do see this as a genuine effort on his part to make positive amendments and to think about Alberta's workers and their needs, which I appreciate. He recognizes correctly that there are many vulnerable workers in Alberta, and we have been working hard to make sure that we serve them and their needs. I'm very proud of the work that our occupational health and safety team has been doing recently with the vulnerable worker inspection program, which I'd be happy to tell him more about at another time.

Specifically in this amendment, though, what he is suggesting is essentially covered in the clauses that we already have around education as well as allowing the court to decide how to use funds. So while I appreciate his genuine intent with this and the amendment that he's proposed, I will not be supporting it just because we already have what we need from these tools, making the amendment redundant.

I do want the member to know that I share his concerns about protecting Alberta's vulnerable workers. I think it's one of the key priorities for me as minister. The department has been working along those lines very well, and I'm quite proud of the work our occupational health and safety team does in these areas. Thank you to the member.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A7?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to propose an amendment, please.

5:10

The Chair: This will be amendment A8.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 1 in section 25 by adding “or the employer” after “When an officer inspects a work site, the officer.”

This amendment proposes that a representative of the employer, be it a lawyer or a member of a safety committee, et cetera, be permitted to accompany an OH and S officer during a work-site inspection. Now, this amendment will ensure that a representative of the employer is permitted to accompany inspectors while on the job site. Bill 30 eliminates the Occupational Health and Safety Council and transfers that authority to the Labour Relations Board. In doing so, occupational health and safety officers are granted extended powers, enumerated in section 51 of the bill. Given that officers have more authority, it is important that employers are protected and know their rights when an inspection is happening.

I want to point out here that I recognize that the difficulty with this bill is to be able to strike the right balance between employee and employer needs. If they become too draconian with regulations and with this bill on occupational health and safety and workers' compensation, then the problem is going to be that employers will just shut down. They'll just say, “We can't comply; we're not going to be able to continue on in our business,” and then they shut down. The concern that I'm bringing forward with this amendment, Madam Chair, is to be able to try to find the right balance.

With these extended powers given to the inspectors, I think that it is only right and fair that someone who's appointed by an employer have the ability to walk around with the inspector. This kind of shows more of a collaborative approach between the inspectors and the owners, supervisors, and so forth. So I would hope that the minister would consider this, I think, reasonable request in order to be able to provide that balance between the employee and the employer. Once again this is about being able to try to find that balance.

With that, I would hope that all members of this Assembly would vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for this amendment. One of the challenges that I heard during the consultation, quite frankly, was from workers who felt that they were not engaged when an occupational health and safety officer is inspecting a work site. Section 25 specifically allows the officer to request the joint work-site health and safety committee co-chairs or their designates or, in a workplace with less than 20 people, a health and safety representative to be present at an inspection.

One of the co-chairs of the health and safety committee is the employer representative, meaning that the employer representative has been included in this process already. Making sure that the employer is aware of an inspection taking place and is present is the general practice now. What we want to do going forward, particularly now that we have joint work-site health and safety committees, is that we want to make sure that these bodies, who are responsible for understanding health and safety on their work sites, dealing with a potential incident or near miss, and working productively, are able to be included by an officer during an inspection of a work site.

I appreciate very much the amendment from the member opposite. I will not be supporting his amendment because one of the

co-chairs of the health and safety committee is the employer representative or the designate, as this section refers to.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A8? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the member for bringing forward this amendment. The purpose of amendments, as we said earlier today, is to bring forward additional changes, improvements to a bill. I believe that this amendment will do so, so I will be speaking in favour of this amendment.

Now, rarely does proposed legislation come before this House in a manner that is perfect. We can always bring in new ideas. The hon. Minister of Labour even spoke to that earlier today, saying that debate brings forward stakeholders and members of this Assembly on both sides to be able to address and to take a look at the bill and to be able to propose changes and amendments that will benefit it. I would argue that this does exactly that.

This amendment proposes that a representative of the employer, be that a lawyer or a member of the safety committee, be permitted to accompany the OH and S officer during a work-site inspection. Madam Chair, the inspectors have additional powers under Bill 30. Officers are granted those extended powers, and they're enumerated in section 51 of the bill. For instance, inspectors can instruct that equipment be operated or that equipment be confiscated or dismantled on-site. A representative of the business side of the equation would allow and would ensure that there is a proper cause for such a request.

Madam Chair, we're just coming out of, you know, a very deep recession, one in which many of the businesses in this province have suffered greatly. We've seen that in my small town of Drayton Valley. A third of our warehouse space is now empty as businesses have had to close their doors. We can see that it's going to be imperative, if we want to continue to see a recovery from this recession, that we ensure that businesses – small, medium, and large businesses – have the capacity to be competitive, have the capacity to make sure that there's a collaborative atmosphere as we move forward.

When it comes to Bill 30, we would suggest that making sure and ensuring that an employer is accompanying the OH and S officer would allow for these businesses to ensure that there are no shutdowns or equipment being confiscated or dismantled without good and reasonable and strong reasons for doing so. Having the employer there would allow them to feel that they are respected, that they're represented during an OH and S inspection. It could reduce, at the end of the day, instances of appeal. These things would allow business and OH and S to work together in a collaborative fashion. We would believe, you know, that the employer is not there to tamper with an investigation or to become an impediment to it but, rather, to observe and to advocate on behalf of the employer.

That's going to be very important if we're going to move forward and ensure that both the employer and the employee have a balanced relationship and that the capacity is there for the business to move forward in providing a working atmosphere that is both safe but also profitable. That's an important thing to have happen, Madam Chair, because if, at the end of the day, the employer is not profitable, then there won't be too many employees. We need to ensure that that relationship is solid and balanced and that we have the capacity, through this amendment, to ensure that that is indeed the case.

I would speak in favour of this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

5:20

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to point out a little bit of clarity on this issue to the minister, and that is that it says in section 25: “When an officer inspects a work site, the officer may request the joint work site health and safety committee co-chairs.” The question that I have here is that they “may request” that. It doesn’t mean that they will or that it will happen. By adding the words “or the employer,” it allows the employer to possibly have requested a joint work-site health and safety committee co-chair be present at the inspection as well.

This is a just a way of being able to, again, find that balance so that they have that ability as the employer. They may choose not to, just as the inspector may choose not to. But that word “may” I think is really what has got industry and our stakeholders a little concerned. They have requested that we add “or the employer” so that it gives that balance, so that when they provide this, they have the balance of being able to say: “Okay. Well, if the inspector doesn’t feel it’s important” – they may not feel it’s important – “the employer may not feel it’s important as well.” I just wanted to make sure. That is important.

I think this is a very reasonable amendment that strikes the proper balance in this act and bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to be very clear. The normal procedure for OH and S is for the officer to go through the site with an employer representative. That is what happens most often, but it is not required. If an OH and S officer sees a concern, they are able to go onto a site and look at or address that concern. Similarly, it’s not required for the joint work-site health and safety committee to go along either.

I really want to be clear that the normal procedure is for officers to go through a site with an employer representative. What we are doing here is to allow that the officer may engage the joint work-site health and safety committee – again, a mandatory concept introduced with Bill 30 – or the designate or a health and safety representative.

I would note that by making an amendment that says “or the employer,” it becomes optional, either the joint work-site health and safety committee or the employer, which I’m not sure is even the intent of what the member opposite is attempting to do with this. What I’m hearing, what I understand the policy intent is, is that employers should be and are part of any interaction and that employers are critical to occupational health and safety. Occupational health and safety officers work with employers very, very closely.

I will not be supporting the amendment because we currently already work with employers quite closely, and the amendment as drafted doesn’t do what I think the member opposite is hoping it would do, which is to require that employers be part of it because it is an optional “or the employer” here. But thank you to the member for your thoughts on this.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A8?

Seeing none, I’ll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A8 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:24 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	MacIntyre	Smith
Hanson	McIver	Strankman
Hunter	Pitt	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Payne
Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Coolahan	Larivee	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Eggen	McKittrick	Sweet
Feehan	McLean	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Westhead
Goehring	Nielsen	Woollard

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 39
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[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to make another amendment. I’m actually quite hopeful on this one.

An Hon. Member: I love your enthusiasm.

Mr. Hunter: The night is still young.

The Chair: This will be amendment A9.
Go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: I move that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 1 in section 77 by renumbering it as section 77(1) and by adding the following after subsection (1):

(2) Any financial support provided by the Minister for the purposes of subsection (1) must be distributed equally between organizations representing the interests of employers and organizations representing the interest of workers.

(3) The Minister shall publish annually, on the public website of the Minister’s department, a list of the agreements entered into under subsection (1) and the amount of financial support, if any, provided pursuant to each agreement.

Now, section 77 of Bill 30 allows the minister to enter into an agreement with any person, government, agency or organization for the purpose of

(a) carrying out research [about] the health and safety of workers

and creating training and operating programs in things like first aid and emergency medical services. The proposed amendment attempts to ensure that resources allocated for this purpose are not distributed in a disproportionate way to groups that are more inclined to support the government such as unions and that if any money is distributed, it is publicly accounted for on the minister’s website. This is an issue of, first of all, making sure that the distribution of any funds is done equally, and the second point to this is that there is transparency.

5:30

The minister has spoken quite eloquently, in defeating one of my other amendments, about the importance of transparency, but I will say that this is an opportunity. If the minister has the same belief

that that transparency needs to be there, then she will support this amendment because this amendment says that whatever money is distributed needs to be distributed equally, and most importantly it needs to be published on the minister's website.

The government is attempting to carry out ongoing safety training and research to keep up with emerging trends in occupational health and safety. The provisions outlined in section 77 of this bill will help to accomplish this goal. However, our primary concern is that there is no cap on spending or resources that can be allocated. Once again the question: this amendment actually didn't specifically talk about a cap, but it specifically said that we need to make sure that both sides of the equation are equally represented, nor is there a limit on who can be engaged by the minister to carry out work. Furthermore, there is no public discourse required for any money that is given out.

Once again the issue here, in my opinion, is transparency, to make sure that for this money that can potentially be given out to any of these organizations – boards, commissions, agencies – that money will be transparent, that we will know where that money is going. Rather than having to ask during committee, that could be presented to all Albertans at a moment's glance as they look at the website.

Now, one of the things that I've been following the last little while is the argument of dark money. It's a very interesting term. If the government votes against this amendment, they are voting against transparency, the transparency of where the money is going and who it's going to. The whole concept of dark money, according to the definition that I've heard from the members opposite, is: we just don't know where it's coming from or where it's going. If the members opposite decide to vote against this one – that's why I say that I was very, very excited about presenting this amendment, because I'm actually speaking to some of their greatest concerns about getting rid of this dark money concept. So I think that it's important, incumbent upon the members opposite to continue the narrative, to continue to make sure that they support that kind of a concept, the concept that they are against dark money, by voting for this amendment and making sure that there is no dark money in the operations of this government.

I would hope that all members opposite would be very supportive and that members on this side would be supportive of this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for bringing forward this amendment. The first thing I'd like to say is that this section is essentially a bring-forward from the previous OHS Act since it's not changed. It just continues something that currently happens. Within that process this paragraph, or this section, which is considered fairly standard so that the department can provide funding to fulfill the mandate, provides transparency through the Public Accounts process. We already have a mechanism through which questions can be asked, and this information can be shared around how research and educational programs are being supported.

I would mention that the member opposite talked about giving more support to one type of person or group than another. This is work that the department has been doing for, I assume, decades but has also been doing since I've become minister. This is not something that comes up to me directly. Rather, it's work of the department, and the transparency is provided through the Public Accounts process.

For those reasons, I will not be supporting this amendment, but I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A9?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Chair: Any other further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to Bill 30, which I will hand to the page. I will await your receiving of this and await your instruction.

The Chair: This is amendment A10.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 1 in section 39(1) by adding the following after clause (c):

(c.1) development of educational materials and strategies explaining the rights of workers under this Act.

Madam Chair, this amendment is along the same lines thematically as my previous amendments here today. Really, what it does is that it proposes to ensure that the most vulnerable workers and those in most need of intervention and improved safety, who are also among those who actually have the least capacity to find out about and assert their rights under worker legislation – the occupational health and safety advisory council is there to enhance worker safety. That council as set up in Bill 30 has the ability to advise the minister on a variety of occupational health and safety matters. It's a good move by the government to create such a council or to provide it with the mandate that they have through this legislation, but again I think it's very important that we are very specific and more explicit about what exactly the duties of that council are. We know that the vulnerable and underrepresented workers in this province may lack the time, the language skills, the knowledge, or simple confidence to assert their protections and rights, so a direct and proactive outreach from the occupational health and safety advisory council is required to ensure that vulnerable workers are well reached and well protected by this legislation.

The amendment on pages 43 and 44 of Bill 30, section 39(1) of schedule 1: again, it's practical action that we can take to make this bill work better for the most vulnerable and least integrated workers. We want the occupational health and safety advisory council to explicitly focus on outreach and education especially and, again, explicitly to those workers who would receive, clearly, the most benefit from such education and outreach. I'm certainly not suggesting that the ministry or her department or any of the good people in the occupational health and safety group would ignore these workers. I know that they certainly do not, but we want to make sure. I think it's important, both for legislative and practical purposes but also symbolic purposes, to focus explicitly on that the occupational health and safety advisory council does in fact have an obligation to reach out and educate those workers on these matters.

I imagine the minister will tell me that these are things that are intended already through the bill or enabled already through the bill that, in fact, her ministry already does. If that's the case, I applaud that. Given that, though, there's no reason not to accept this amendment and no reason not to include it in the bill. One of the lessons I hope this government learns from, shall we say, the difficulties of Bill 6 was that there were a lot of things implied by what was missing. It allowed a vacuum where people could just

simply fill in whatever concerns they had, whether that was, in fact, what the government intended or not. This I see as actually the reverse of that, where the government will apply, imply, or suggest that certain education will happen – no need to actually put it in the bill – but we need the assurance that that actually will happen.

I would encourage the government, please, to support this amendment. It's a good, common-sense amendment that will proactively truly improve the lives of vulnerable Albertans and marginal workers across our province, which, I would hope, would be in keeping with both their philosophy and the intent of this bill. I would encourage all members on both sides of the House, please, to support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members? The hon. Minister of Labour.

5:40

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for once again thinking of Bill 30 through the lens of vulnerable workers and how we can best reach out to those workers and engage with them. He suggested – and he is correct – that this is work that the ministry and the department does, but they are only a piece of the puzzle. It's also work that nonprofit organizations like the Workers' Resource Centre and the Workers' Health Centre in Edmonton and Calgary do. There are other groups that are doing this work as well.

He says: well, then, why not also ask the council to do that? The reason is that the council is not set up for outreach. It is a part-time organization with members who really are only doing a little bit of work each month. These are not people who have a full-time job just sitting on the council. Because it's a part-time organization, it won't have the skill set or the resourcing to be able to engage in the development of educational materials and strategies explaining the rights of workers under this act.

That being said, making sure that vulnerable workers understand their rights is critical and something that the department takes very seriously, something that I take very seriously. We'll continue to work towards all methods that we can to engage with vulnerable workers and all Albertans, particularly now that, I hope, through Bill 30 we will have an updated occupational health and safety code. We want all workers to understand the three fundamental rights that they have. We want all workers to be able to know how to contact an occupational health and safety officer if there are concerns in their workplace. Outreach will be a very important piece of it, but giving that role to the council, which has more of an advisory nature, does not make sense. For that reason, I won't be supporting this amendment, but again I thank the member for his concern for vulnerable workers and reviewing this bill through that lens.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A10?

Seeing none, I'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, I would like to move another amendment.

The Chair: This is amendment A11.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, be amended in schedule 2 in section 23(1) in the proposed section 56 by (a) in subsection (3) striking out "Subject to section 68(1)" and substituting "Subject to subsection 3.1 and section 68(1)" and (b) adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) In computing net earnings for the purposes of this Act, no regard may be taken of the aggregate gross annual earnings of the worker in excess of an amount prescribed by order of the Board.

(3.2) An order referred to in subsection (3.1) applies only in respect of an accident that occurs on or after the day specified in the order.

And by (c) striking out subsection 18.

Now, the WCB Review Panel recommended maintaining the insurable earning level as it is prescribed annually by the Workers' Compensation Board Board of Directors. The actual amount of the cap, currently \$98,700, was adjusted over time to ensure that the earnings level covers 90 per cent of workers. Perhaps the cap could be higher than \$98,700 to accommodate higher income workers like some workers in Fort McMurray, but no cap whatsoever is going too far. In fact, Manitoba is the only province that has actually taken off the cap, and that is with caveats as well.

What the WCB Review Panel recommended instead was that a special graduated benefit be introduced for injured workers whose earnings exceed the maximum insurable earnings level. It would give the injured worker an additional benefit for a period of time up to five years to allow them time to adjust to a new level of income in the long term. Now, this recommendation that the WCB review panel made would have covered 99 per cent of all workers under the WCB.

I guess the question is – the minister often says that we need to be able to get in line with the rest of Canada and other jurisdictions. In this situation we are the outlier, and the concern that I have about being the outlier in this is: is this system actually sustainable, and will it provide for those workers who desperately need this in the future? What they are doing in this situation is that they are actually providing help for those people who could be maybe making \$500,000, half a million dollars, a year, 90 per cent of net earnings. These people a lot of times have the ability to get their own personal insurance, so I would have to say that this is actually an overreach and an overkill of what she's trying to accomplish with this bill.

With that, I hope that all members will support this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. What happens now with the 90 per cent cap is that a worker gets injured and immediately, when they are no longer earning their employment income but are instead receiving the benefits from the WCB, for that 10 per cent of workers that the member opposite referred to there is a drop in salary and in many cases a significant drop in salary. Not only is the worker dealing with the injury, with the rehabilitation, with caring for their family if they perhaps were the sole breadwinner or partial to the family unit, it's an economic shock on top of the physical shock and on top of everything that's happening.

In reviewing all of the recommendations from the panel, we looked at this one quite closely. The panel had offered a solution that, while complicated to read and explain, essentially means that the workers who make over the maximum insurable earnings cap of \$98,700, which is where it is today, would get a little bit more time but would still experience that earnings drop. So we have rejected the panel's claim because a worker who is injured deserves full compensation in our province.

We know that this applies to working people like those up in Fort McMurray. We know this can apply to nurses who are making more money than \$98,700. We know this can apply to any number of people in industries. When someone has coverage through the Workers' Compensation Board, we believe that making sure that they are fully compensated in the case of an injury is what that worker deserves for having given up the right to sue and to make that case through the court systems.

So I will reject the member's amendment, having considered this very, very carefully and listened to the feedback from working Albertans of all stripes through the very robust consultation process that we undertook in the WCB review. But thank you to the member for putting it forward.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just speak very briefly on this in support of the amendment. One of the concerns I have with this bill is the entire removal of this cap. It would leave Alberta as the only province in Canada that does not have a cap of any kind. While I agree and acknowledge that the cap perhaps should move up, I believe there should be a cap. As it stands now and as I understand it, Alberta's current cap is the second highest in the country. Now, Alberta's wages are higher. Again, I think it's certainly fine to review and have a look at whether the cap is, in fact, appropriate – and I do think it should go up – but there should be one, and I think that there's some risk if we don't.

That's why I will be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

5:50

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today in Committee of the Whole to speak on Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. I rise specifically today to address a portion of this bill related to workplace harassment and to clarify earlier comments I made in this House during second reading.

To be clear, Madam Chair, harassment and bullying of any kind, especially when it's sexual in nature, is completely and totally unacceptable. I know that as a man I can't begin to comprehend what countless women in workplaces across Alberta and around the world have had to endure when it comes to this kind of heinous behaviour. My colleagues and I are in agreement that this simply cannot stand.

Madam Chair, during second reading of Bill 30 I spoke at length about many aspects of this rather large piece of legislation. Briefly, I addressed the issue of harassment. In my comments I highlighted the fact that this is an issue that industry associations have been working on for quite some time. My intent was, first, to highlight the fact that this government did not adequately consult with industry before drafting this bill. If they had, they would know that a lot of good work has been done on this front over the last number of years, and this legislation would acknowledge that.

Second, Madam Chair, my intent was to make it clear that while I take no issue with legislating workplace harassment policies and indeed feel that such legislation is necessary, it by no means is sufficient. In my experience, meaningful change on issues like this is

driven from within the industry associations and their member companies to ensure that the training and tools that are necessary to assist in dealing with these situations appropriately as they arise are available. In that sense, simply writing out a law or forcing companies to draft a policy that sits in a binder on a shelf in the back of the shop is not enough.

At no time did I ever intend to argue that legislative workplace harassment policies were unnecessary or undesirable. But, Madam Chair, it has been brought to my attention that my words in this House can and have been interpreted in a different manner, and that is why I stand today to clarify and reaffirm my support for workplace harassment legislation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address some personal experiences that I had with respect to this issue, experiences that have been well documented today outside this House and which I did not bring up when I made my lengthy second reading speech. Specifically, I am the owner of a safety consulting company, and some 10 years ago, when a female employee of mine was sexually harassed by another subcontractor hired by my client to work on the same job site, I'm sorry to say, Madam Chair, that my organization and I as its president at the time failed to handle that incredibly complex and difficult situation properly. As a result, we failed our employee.

Had I known what I know now, I would have done things differently. As they say, Madam Chair, hindsight is 20/20. I would have retained counsel for my employee to represent her interest and to make sure she knew what her rights in that situation were. Most importantly, I would have terminated my contract with my client when it became clear that they were not taking the situation seriously.

I am not here to make excuses or to relitigate events that transpired over a decade ago, but I do wish to put on the public record how deeply I regret not taking these actions and that my company regrets not taking those actions and standing up for an employee as much as we should have.

To be sure, there are parts of this massive piece of legislation that we have a problem with, but the harassment portion is certainly not one of them. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify the record and make it clear where I stand on this issue.

With that, Madam Chair, I would like to move that we rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 30. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report, does the Assembly concur?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, that's my cue, I suppose. I will move that we call it 6 o'clock and that the House rise until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

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Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, December 12, 2017

Day 65

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	Miller
Cooper	Nielsen
Goehring	Nixon
Gotfried	Pitt
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Carson	Miller
Fildebrandt	Nielsen
Gotfried	Panda
Hunter	Renaud
Littlewood	Turner
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Drysdale

Babcock	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Fraser	McPherson
Hanson	Nielsen
Kazim	Rosendahl
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Loewen	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 34

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Government House Leader I move second reading of Bill 34, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

Madam Speaker, this bill has been circulated to the opposition parties, and I believe there is consensus on all of the clauses of the bill. It is our hope that it can be passed, therefore, without debate in the House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Are there any other members?

Mr. McIver: Well, the last thing I want to do is disappoint the hon. minister, but I would like to ask the House for unanimous consent for one-minute bells for the rest of the evening if that is acceptable to the members across the aisle. [interjection] Or for the remainder of Committee of the Whole. Pardon me. Yes. Sorry. For the remainder of Committee of the Whole, please.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, we're actually in second reading right now, so do you want one-minute bells for second reading?

Then when we enter Committee of the Whole, we'll have to have a new motion.

Mr. McIver: Yes, please. For the remainder of this bill, yes.

The Acting Speaker: So for the remainder of second reading.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to second reading?

Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close debate on second reading?

Ms Larivee: Sure. At this time I move that we close debate on second reading of Bill 34.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a second time]

Bill 33 Electoral Divisions Act

Mr. Stier moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the descriptions of electoral divisions referenced in the bill and described in the

DVD tabled as Sessional Paper 624/2017 do not adequately provide for the effective representation of rural Alberta.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment December 6: Mr. Barnes]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members looking to speak to the reasoned amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on the reasoned amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:33 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Loewen	Schneider
Cyr	MacIntyre	Smith
Gotfried	McIver	Strankman
Hanson	Orr	Yao
Hunter	Pitt	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Nielsen
Carlier	Jansen	Phillips
Carson	Kazim	Renaud
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Schmidt
Dach	Littlewood	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	Miranda	Woollard
Hinkley		

Totals:	For – 14	Against – 34
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[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are now back on Bill 33. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I rise to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 32(3), which would eliminate the need for a 15-minute bell when we enter committee later this evening. I would request that we have one-minute bills for the remainder of the evening, as has already been granted, including the waiving of Standing Order 32(3).

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, would any member like to close debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:39 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Miranda
Carlier	Horne	Nielsen
Carson	Jansen	Phillips
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinsteinuber	Rosendahl
Dach	Larivee	Schmidt
Dang	Littlewood	Schreiner
Eggen	Luff	Sucha
Feehan	Malkinson	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Westhead
Goehring	McLean	Woollard

7:40

Against the motion:

Barnes	Loewen	Pitt
Cooper	MacIntyre	Schneider
Cyr	McIver	Smith
Gotfried	Orr	Strankman
Hanson	Panda	Yao
Hunter		

Totals: For – 33 Against – 16

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 30 An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to just recap really quickly the process that we've just gone through. Committee of the Whole was an opportunity that, according to this government, was when we could bring forward reasonable amendments that we could discuss here and we could debate. We could vet those ideas. I can assure you that the stakeholders that I talked to that were very concerned about this bill felt like this was the opportunity for us to be able to really have a fulsome debate about these points.

Unfortunately, we saw the same kind of debate process as we've seen in terms of consultation from this government. In fact, there were times where the minister wasn't even the one standing up to speak to these amendments, which was a slight to the people who actually brought forward the amendments, not myself, and to the people in the industries that actually had thought about it, had taken a look at it, and had felt that it would make this bill not as bad.

I am saddened that we were able to bring forward many good, reasonable amendments and this government was not even willing to debate and vet these bills. Most of the information that we got was terse at best and certainly not a fulsome debate, which is what I think the stakeholders deserved in this situation. We're once again seeing a pattern from this government, Madam Chair, that is very

disconcerting and one that I think stakeholders will obviously take note of in the next election.

What I want to state is that one of the amendments I think was probably the best amendment that came forward. They were all great, but the last amendment that I brought forward, talking about how we are the only jurisdiction that is actually saying "No cap" – now, Manitoba said that they took off the cap, but they do have caveats to that, so we are actually outliers in this situation. We're outliers in Canada.

Now, I've heard many times this government say that they want to be able to bring us into line with the remainder of Canada, the way that the rest of Canada does. We're now in a situation where, by taking off the cap of the insurable earnings – when the cap was on, just so you know, \$98,700 was one of the highest in Canada in terms of the caps. That's net. The gross amount would be, like, \$140,000, which really took into consideration about 90 per cent of all of our workforce. Now we're in a situation where workers' compensation was developed and designed specifically for those people who, if something happened to them where there was no-fault insurance, they had the ability to be able to have something for themselves and for their families or for their loved ones. What we've seen here today by taking this off puts that in jeopardy, and I think it's extremely important for this government to recognize that they will have ownership to that.

Putting an organization that received a billion dollars from about 160,000 companies throughout Alberta to pay into workers' compensation – it was an arm's-length organization. This whole bill actually brings it so that there is a lot of tampering from the government and a lot of intervention where we didn't need to see it. When something is working as well as workers' compensation was working – and I'm not saying that they didn't have problems, but when it was working as well as it was, for them to interject themselves so resolutely and so deeply puts the sustainability of the system at peril. What I'm concerned about is that we are now in a situation where they had the ability to be able to make the tweaks that needed to happen, but they did not have to amputate rather than just a strategic surgery.

7:50

Now we're in a situation where the review panel recommended that there was a special graduated benefit that would have actually brought all workers, 99 per cent of all the workers under the – you know, it would have worked for 99 per cent of the workers. We're now in a situation where the sustainability of this organization, this insurance organization, could be at risk, and I wish that the government would reconsider the path that they're following. Think about the people who are benefiting from workers' compensation. These are the people who we're supposed to be fighting for at this point.

What's happened now is that we're in a situation where they have taken the cap off – no other jurisdiction in Canada has done that – and we're now in a situation where we're putting in jeopardy the very system that is designed to help those people who are potentially at risk, those people who don't make a lot of money. What I don't understand is that they constantly say that we try to help protect our big businesses and our rich friends, but this part, by taking off the cap, really speaks to them helping only the rich, those people who don't need it. They have their personal – they usually have their own insurance. They have their own ability to cushion the blow. Yet the only reason why I can see a cap coming off is to help them. This is very disconcerting, and I think that they need to really reconsider this.

I'll just finish with this, Madam Chair, and that is that they have said that the process that we have in this House is to have an

opportunity where the bill comes forward, we vet the bill, we get it out, the actual written bill, to our stakeholders, and then they have an opportunity to be able to comment on it. We will probably see this thing go through in fewer than seven days. How can a 200-page bill that's written in legalese really be digested that quickly and then be able to bring forward reasonable comments from stakeholders? It's impossible to do. Now, what we're going to have is that they've gotten themselves into another situation where they refused the process of getting fulsome discussion and the proper consultation. I don't know what they're hiding. I don't know what they're so worried about hearing from Albertans if they really believe they're on the right track, and this minister has said this many times.

If they are on the right track – and I will give them this. There were many parts to this bill that I was very excited about them bringing forward, and I've spoken to those things. I've said: look, we need to make sure that we protect those people that need to be protected. The OH and S components in here: I'm glad that they did bring these forward. But this was an omnibus bill, and because it's an omnibus bill, I have a really difficult time supporting all of the component parts in here that are going to be so detrimental to the very workers that we're supposed to be championing, one such being the cap being taken off.

Madam Chair, as much as we tried on this side of the House to be able to bring forward reasonable amendments, we're now in a situation where they have rejected all of our amendments, which came from stakeholders and people who had a vested interest in this, that would be affecting them. We're now in a situation where they have been completely disenfranchised, disenfranchised from the opportunity of being able to give their say on how this bill will be affecting them and for having all members of this House to be able to take a look at it.

I'm disappointed that that's happened, but I will say that I will not be voting in favour of this Committee of the Whole reading.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 30? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be very brief. I just wanted to stand up and support the arguments of my hon. colleague the Official Opposition critic on this file for all the good reasons that he explained.

I happened to talk on this last night, too, and our Premier was in the House. She was trying to take one of my comments out of context and asked for me to apologize to Albertans. If my comments from a movie and the dialogue hurt any feelings of any Albertan workers, I want to sincerely, unconditionally, unreservedly apologize to them and withdraw my comments. I hope that the Premier does the same thing. She should do the right thing. For all those comments she made against Albertans, I hope that she would do the same thing, the honourable thing.

Madam Chair, like my colleagues here, I'm not going to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 30?

Ms Fitzpatrick: Madam Chair, I feel compelled to rise and speak in support of this bill, and I'd like to speak directly to the need for this legislation. I would like to speak my lived experience as a former union representative. I will begin by saying that the number of staff who met with me about being harassed and bullied by management and co-workers was astounding. As a union rep I had two responsibilities. The first was to listen to the concerns and, if a

formal complaint or grievance was made, to investigate and take the appropriate action.

Now, as to the need for the legislation, many employers have harassment policies; for example, the federal government, where I worked for over 30 years. As an employer they had a harassment policy since at least the early '90s. However, harassment policies don't carry the same weight as a legislative change. The policy is nothing more than the paper it is written on unless the employer and employees abide by that policy. My experience with the Correctional Service of Canada, CSC, showed me that even when one employee admits to having harassed another staffperson or there is concrete evidence that harassment or bullying has occurred, many federal departments, including CSC, have done nothing.

I will cite just one case. I've got many, but I'll just cite one. This case happened almost two years ago at a local federal institution. Two officers during a shift had a dialogue on the internal telephone network about a female staff member working on their shift. The conversation, which lasted over 45 minutes, was about how they would allow inmates full access to this female staff member should an incident occur in the institution, and they would watch. These recorded statements were stating that they would put her life and her safety at risk. You depend on the people you work with to cover your back if you're working in a jail.

At the same time another incident had occurred elsewhere in the institution, and both staff were called but to no avail because the lines were busy. So the institutional management listened to the recording to see why the phones were busy and the two staff members didn't respond to the call. Management became aware of this and the risk to the female staff member. They did not even notify her of the threat that was posed to her for almost two months. She became aware of the incident through gossip at the institution, at which time management did cough up and allowed her to hear the tape. She withdrew her services under part II of the Canada Labour Code. She remained off work without pay for almost a year and a half and is still off work. The other two staff involved remained on duty and continued to be paid.

8:00

It wasn't until she hired a lawyer and went public that CSC finally took action against the staff involved, including the managers, who were aware of the situation and failed to take action despite there being a policy on harassment and bullying.

A similar situation occurred at another institution in B.C. Both of those situations are public knowledge and have been reported on one of the national media sites. There are many, many more cases like that even though there is a national policy.

On November 27 I spoke in this House about the prevention of violence, specifically family violence, and it's worth reiterating this with respect to supporting this bill.

The 16 days present an opportunity to change the conversation, change attitudes, and change behaviours to prevent gender violence.

We all have a responsibility to stop gender-based violence. I asked if conversations are

respectful and valuing, or are they demeaning and condescending? Do your words and actions empower or diminish? Do you use your privilege to make another feel less than? Do you understand the importance of consent? Do you laugh when a friend makes a derogatory comment, or do you challenge the behaviour [of the person doing that]?

Change actually begins with each of us. Actions speak louder than words. I see a leader as someone who lives those things not just in words but in actions. I am asking everybody in this House to do the same thing.

I can't even tell you how important this bill is. There were so many times when I had somebody in my office, in tears, ready to quit their job, their livelihood because they just couldn't live through what was going on. If there was legislation in place, it would have made a difference. There would have been consequences and direction about what should happen if this behaviour continued.

I stand in full support of this bill, and I ask everybody to stand and support this bill as well. Despite any misgivings you may have, this bill makes a difference to everybody who is working in Alberta. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 30 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 32 An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to Bill 32? Comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise this evening to offer an amendment to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. It has a number of different clauses to it, as people will see. I am particularly happy to see one section, that I will read in as soon as I pass this along to the chair and wait for it to be recorded.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, your amendment will be referred to as A1.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are a number of sections to this amendment. I won't read them all, but I will take the liberty as Minister of Indigenous Relations to speak to part C, which is adding the following after section 52:

Location of polling places on Indian
reserves and Métis settlements

52.1(1) In preparation for an election, the Chief Electoral Officer shall consult with the council of each Indian band and with the settlement council and settlement administrator of each Métis settlement to determine whether a suitable building located on the Indian reserve or Métis settlement may be used as a polling place for electors who are residents on the Indian reserve or Métis settlement.

I won't read any more of it.

I'd just like to take this opportunity to talk about how important it is and how proud I am to stand here to again take a moment to recognize that, indeed, indigenous people are Albertans and will be treated as such by this government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. As many of us in this House have now seen, the Chief Electoral Officer has raised some concerns with the current bill.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if I could just interrupt.

Hon. minister, I believe that your amendment is currently not in order. It needs to have a signature on it, so you just have to sign it.

My apologies, hon. Member for St. Albert. If you could please continue.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. As I said, as many of us in this House have now seen, the Chief Electoral Officer has raised some concerns with the current bill. I want to be clear that we recognize the importance of involving key stakeholders as we develop policy, and government officials were in contact with the Chief Electoral Officer throughout the preparation of the bill. That being said, all Albertans are entitled to an equal opportunity to read final drafts of government bills after they are introduced in the House. There is also a process to make any necessary amendments to bills, and that's what we're doing right now. We've carefully considered the Chief Electoral Officer's latest feedback, and I'm proposing amendments to address his points. All of these amendments have been discussed with the Chief Electoral Officer to ensure that they are workable.

We recognize that some of the concerns raised by the CEO involve the use of vote tabulators. We considered vote tabulators very carefully. We had to weigh the potential cost and risks with the potential benefit. Unfortunately, we felt that a potential cost of \$4.4 million was too much to pay for machines that perform a function we already have a tried-and-true way of doing, which is counting ballots. We recognize that vote tabulators may help save on staffing costs for Elections Alberta, but in the end any savings may still be undermined if for any reason the vote tabulators don't function as intended. We made the decision not to include vote tabulators in the bill to reduce the overall costs of our proposed amendments while also helping to enhance the integrity and fairness of our elections.

Part A. The first amendment I'm putting forward has to do with our proposal to allow voters to vote at any advance polling station or special mobile poll even if it's outside their electoral division. As the CEO has written, Elections Alberta may have trouble reporting the official results in a timely manner if they have to send ballots from other parts of the province to the appropriate electoral division to be counted. The CEO also mentioned that vote tabulators would have allowed a ballot to be printed on demand and that this would help ensure that people who are voting outside of their normal electoral division could receive a ballot that reflects the candidates in the appropriate riding.

8:10

The amendment I'm proposing would enable the CEO to make a directive about the handling of ballots from advance polls and special mobile polls. This would give the CEO the authority he needs to outline procedures related to the form and printing of the vote-anywhere ballots and to the delivery and counting of those ballots. When people vote in their regular electoral division, their ballots can be counted as they always have, but when people vote outside of their regular electoral division, those ballots may be transferred to a central location to be counted. This will help ensure that the vote-anywhere ballots are properly provided for and that they can be counted more quickly and that the results are available faster.

The CEO also mentioned that voter assist terminals would not be able to function as intended if Elections Alberta cannot use them in

conjunction with vote tabulators. Voter assist terminals work by marking a ballot that is then counted by a vote tabulator. In other words, there are no voter assist terminals that can function as intended without also requiring the use of a vote tabulator. This amendment would enable vote tabulators to be used only in conjunction with voter assist terminals. Voter assist terminals will enable those needing assistance at the polls to vote with greater dignity and greater privacy. All Albertans have that right, and I would encourage all members to support this amendment.

Parts B and C, polls on reserves. The next two amendments are meant to help ensure accessibility for indigenous communities. Part B will clarify that in section 52.1, which is the subject of part C, the same definitions will apply as are currently in section 21(8). In section 21(8) council, Indian band, settlement administrator, and settlement council are all defined. Part C would include a statutory requirement for Elections Alberta to reach out to First Nations and Métis communities and speak with them about the possibility of having a polling place on their land.

As I've already touched on, one of the major goals of this bill is to make voting easier and more accessible. Some indigenous communities are remote, and we want to make sure that they have access to a poll should they wish to vote. Polling places would only be set up on First Nations, on reserves, or in Métis communities if the appropriate community leaders agree to allow Elections Alberta to do so.

Part D, official results. The next amendment I'm proposing will allow Elections Alberta the time they need to report on the official results of an election. Rather than shortening the time period from 10 days to seven days, this proposed amendment would maintain the 10-day rule. This amendment will address the CEO's concerns and ensure that Elections Alberta has enough time to announce the official results of an election.

Part E, advance polling days. The next part of the amendment I am proposing will address the CEO's concern about the time needed to distribute where-to-vote cards. This amendment would ensure that advance polls take place on the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday before an election day. We had hoped to give voters two Fridays and two Saturdays of advance voting days, but this will not leave enough time for Elections Alberta to distribute their where-to-vote cards. There will still be a fifth advance polling day in addition to the existing four, and this will allow voters more opportunities to exercise their democratic right. This will also leave enough time for Elections Alberta to distribute their where-to-vote cards.

Part F, special ballots. The next amendment I am proposing is also the result of feedback from the Chief Electoral Officer. This amendment will allow the CEO greater flexibility in assigning duties of his staff. The current act requires either the returning officer or the election clerk to handle special ballots, but at the request of Elections Alberta the CEO would now be able to designate other people as well. This amendment would also save time by the returning officer, the election clerk, or a person designated by the CEO to place special ballots in a special ballot box sooner rather than having to wait until election night. This change is intended to help Elections Alberta count the special ballots faster come election night.

Part G, results of recount. I'm proposing another minor amendment that has been requested by Elections Alberta. This amendment will maintain the status quo and ensure that returning officers are responsible for reporting election results even in the event of a recount. The bill had shifted this responsibility to the CEO, and we're proposing to reverse that at the request of Elections Alberta.

Part H, transitional. The next amendment that I'm proposing will allow the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to begin the hiring process for the new election commissioner position as soon as the bill receives royal assent. When the bill receives royal assent, the standing committee will invite applications for the election officer position, and they will make a recommendation to the Legislative Assembly on their preferred applicant.

Finally, amendment I, coming into force. In follow-up to the previous amendment, this simple amendment will clarify that section 142.1 will come into force on royal assent. Section 142.1 allows the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to begin the hiring process for the new election commissioner position as soon as the bill receives royal assent.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment. I have a number of questions with respect to the amendment. It's my hope that I can ask a couple of them and that we can just quickly address some of the challenges. I think that for the purposes of our discussion I'll just highlight some of my ongoing frustrations with the legislative process here inside the Chamber.

As you know, Madam Chair, the Official Opposition had asked that this particular piece of legislation be referred to a standing committee so that we could hear from the Chief Electoral Officer specifically about some of his challenges and concerns. Now, I think it's fantastic that the Member for St. Albert and some others on that side of the House have taken the opportunity to call the Chief Electoral Officer finally and have him provide some feedback. We see that in the results of this amendment.

Now, having said that, it's very, very unfortunate that everyone else inside the Chamber hasn't had the opportunity to have a discussion with the Chief Electoral Officer to find out if this is, in fact, exactly what he was hoping for or if this is another government interpretation of what he may or may not have said. As you know, Madam Chair, it's now 8:15, and you may or may not know that the Chief Electoral Officer's office is currently closed, so what's going to happen this evening is that the government is going to ask the opposition to just blindly trust that what they've included in here is exactly what the Chief Electoral Officer has asked for. It is difficult to be in touch with the Chief Electoral Officer at this point in time given that we only received this amendment mere moments ago.

Now, I wouldn't want to misrepresent, and I would be happy to thank the minister. Her office did reach out to mine about an hour and a half ago, perhaps two hours – I don't know the exact timing that it took place – and shared this particular amendment with me and members of the Official Opposition, so I do appreciate that gesture. Unfortunately, the challenge still remains the same. At 6:30 the Chief Electoral Officer was also unavailable for me to correspond with him about whether or not these changes satisfied many of his concerns that he wrote in his letter, that, you will be aware, highlighted the fact that he hadn't been asked to provide input with respect to policy direction on Bill 32.

With that said, I heard the hon. member speak about vote tabulators and the fact that it would cost \$4 million but that the Chief Electoral Officer has spoken at length about why vote tabulators may be a real positive for us. I understand that they're currently being used in Calgary-Lougheed as the Leg. Offices Committee had approved that decision by the Chief Electoral Officer.

I might just double-check with the minister what the difference in cost between – with respect to enumeration. The Chief Electoral Officer has spoken at length about the high cost of door-to-door enumeration, and I'm curious to know the difference between that and what he recommends and the \$4 million that she referred to in her speech, whether or not those numbers would be close to each other, and then I have a number of other questions.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to the member opposite for the questions around these pieces. You're absolutely correct. My colleague did refer to tabulators as a \$4.4 million expense. But I would also stress that tabulators do the counting of ballots, something that we know currently works from the manual perspective, without introducing machinery or things that are connected to the Internet into our election process. So there is that other aspect to it.

That being said, you asked me for the cost for a full enumeration, and that has been estimated by the Chief Electoral Officer to be \$11.1 million, so I will give you that answer.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Minister. Chair, thank you. I also know that the Chief Electoral Officer has said that if we didn't do a door-to-door enumeration and used the equally as effective and exponentially safer version that he has recommended, there would be approximately, say, a \$5 million to \$6 million saving in that, and perhaps that would have, then, been a good use of those resources, to use vote tabulators, as he has suggested otherwise. Now, I'm sure that I'll have the opportunity to propose an amendment around this very reasonable solution, and I hope that at that time the minister will be able to support it.

While I do appreciate this particular amendment, section 6 in part A of the amendment I do have some concerns about, significantly changing the way that we count ballots. Traditionally, as you'll know, Chair, those ballots are sent back to the electoral district to be counted or would be if it wasn't for this amendment. So the government is making a change where we'll have essentially a mass manual counting centre at the head office or the headquarters of the Chief Electoral Officer. I'm wondering if the minister knows what the additional costs may be for that mass centralized counting centre, where they will count all of the vote-anywhere ballots, and if that will actually take place – and I may have to apologize. It may be included here in the amendment; however, I haven't had the opportunity to read each clause. As you know, Madam Chair, it was just introduced minutes ago. But would those ballots, then, be counted on election day, or would they be counted at the close of the advance polls?

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Member. You're not going to see that spelled out. What we've done with these amendments is essentially given the CEO the authority to make sure that he as the administrator is able to run the election in an efficient way, in a manner that he sees fit. In part A section 6 is amended under (a)(1.1)(a)(i)(C). That is where the Chief Electoral Officer is able to make a directive "providing for the counting of votes" and the process therein. As my colleague mentioned and I will state again, we worked with the Chief Electoral Officer to make sure he had the

flexibility in the drafting of these amendments so that he would be able to administer and run the election efficiently. What we've done with the amendments is given him the ability to determine what that looks like.

The challenge we are solving here: without his ability to provide for the counting of votes, we would have been receiving all of the advance votes at Elections Alberta and then sending them out to the respective districts so that they could be counted there, and the amount of time that would take would be potentially too long. So now they can receive them at Elections Alberta, and through this process, as you referred to, the Chief Electoral Officer would be able to provide for the counting of advance votes at Elections Alberta.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. Listen, I, as you know, have spoken glowingly about the Chief Electoral Officer, and I have all of the faith in the world – well, maybe that's a bit of an overstatement. I have a significant amount of faith and confidence in the Chief Electoral Officer, but to be clear, we are turning over how thousands and thousands and thousands – like, for example, in Calgary-Lougheed there were 3,500 people that voted in the advance polls, and advance polls are becoming more and more popular all across the province. Now we're going to have vote-anywhere advance polls, and while I think that it is a net positive, we are essentially making significant changes to the legislative process and then giving the Chief Electoral Officer virtually no oversight or guidance or direction with a pretty core fundamental of our democracy, which is counting the votes, the most important poll of all, and offering him the opportunity to do it in whatever way he sees fit.

While I appreciate the Chief Electoral Officer – certainly, the current one has done a fantastic job and will continue to do one – I must admit that I do like a little bit more certainty in the democratic process, something that we have all become very, very accustomed to. It's important to us. You know, we have no idea how scrutineering is going to work, who may or may not be allowed there. I'm not saying that there is anything untoward happening by any stretch of the imagination, but I do have some reservations about this particular clause in not fully knowing how the ballots will be counted.

Mr. Chair, I think that comes back down to the way the government has decided to legislate, the way that the government has decided to not refer things to committee. I'm certain that the Chief Electoral Officer probably could have provided us with reasonable answers, solutions, and then we could have an amendment that would have alleviated the concerns of not just me, but presumably some Albertans are concerned about this particular clause.

Now, no Albertans – not no Albertans. There are probably dozens of people watching online this evening, and now they have a sense that there may be a concern. Tens and tens of people, Mr. Chair. Now, they may have some concerns about this particular clause, but we didn't go to committee, which would have been a really good idea. We could have heard from the Chief Electoral Officer.

But let me proceed. Unfortunately, we don't have all night. Well, we do, but I think that we can continue on in some of the other areas of this particular amendment, this multipage amendment coming from the government.

I'd just like to speak briefly to changing the advance polling days to the Tuesday-Wednesday and then the Thursday-Friday-Saturday of the following week. While I think that having five days of

advance polls does make sense, I find it interesting that this particular clause would have never been needed if the government had just gone and, say, asked the Chief Electoral Officer if they would have been able to do the very important task of getting where-to-vote-cards mailed to Albertans prior to the first day of advance polling, which was an issue that I raised in my very first remarks with respect to Bill 32 at second reading.

I just would like to remind the government that perhaps it would be important to double-check with the Chief Electoral Officer before making significant reforms to this particular piece of legislation, or if the government's past track record is any indication of their future track record, there's a good chance that we're going to be coming back to fix some of their mistakes in this particular piece of legislation anyway, so we might want to double-check with him prior to that.

The last question I have – I believe it'll be the last question, anyway, on this particular amendment and on balance, as far as I can tell. There's more good than negative in this particular case, so while I think it's unlikely that I will find it within me to support Bill 32, I will be quite likely happy to support this particular amendment.

The question, though, that I have is with respect to part H of the amendment, the transitional section, when it speaks to the elections commissioner.

I hope to move an amendment a little bit later on in the evening, so I might just send this particular amendment to the table while I speak here. Perhaps the table officer would be able to quickly review it while I ask this question and to determine if the amendment in the future would be in order or out of order given that we are amending a section of this particular legislation as a result of part H, the transitional section, and that the amendment I hope to move a little bit later is around the elections commissioner. So whether we might be changing or closing this section of the act or not, we'll take it from there.

8:30

In fact, I may need to have one of my colleagues – I know that the Member for Calgary-Hays has a couple of questions as well, so perhaps it would be helpful if he would rise and ask a couple of those prior to us proceeding on a vote on this particular amendment. Again, it accentuates the point about why we should be doing this at committee, not in the Assembly, on short notice at 8:30 at night while we try to get pieces of legislation across the line for all Albertans.

With respect to part H, Minister, my question really surrounds what happens to third-party advertisers. I know that you'll know that the Alberta Federation of Labour is one of those third-party advertisers. Let's just say that they wanted to engage in some advertising or hold an event or sell memberships. Who knows what they might like to do between now and when the independent election commissioner is appointed? Who answers questions for third-party advertisers? As you'll know, Minister, there is a significant amount of discretion inside Bill 32 that will ultimately be determined by the elections commissioner, and the elections commissioner will be the judge, jury, and disciplinarian on a wide range of sections in this legislation.

Between now and whenever that might happen – as you've noted here on the transition, when it receives royal assent, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices shall invite folks to apply for the elections commissioner. Let me tell you, I have some things to say about whether or not we're on the right path with the elections commissioner, but in the meantime this bill might not receive royal assent for four weeks, eight weeks, depending on when the government gets around to it. I know the Lieutenant Governor has

a very busy schedule, so she may or may not be able to provide royal assent in an expeditious manner. Then the committee will need to strike a search committee, people will need to apply, there will be deadlines and so on and so forth. It's going to take some time, maybe up to six months or longer. What happens between now and then? How will third-party advertisers have any certainty about whether or not they're going to be in breach of the legislation?

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. I think that's very important. My advice to third-party advertisers would be that upon royal assent they can no longer do the work of political parties. They can no longer sell memberships. They can no longer gather lists of names to be used for political purposes and passed to a political party. They can no longer fund raise directly for a political party and funnel money in that way.

What they can do: the legislation, which will come into force on royal assent, will give them some clear guidelines that if they are a third party or involved in advertising, they can register with Elections Alberta. They can continue their activities because we are not restricting their free speech through these amendments. Now, if they have questions, what do they do? They can talk to the Chief Electoral Officer, who will continue to be our Chief Electoral Officer throughout this process and will be able to answer questions.

The guidelines that have been put in place have essentially two forms. Third parties, essentially, cannot do the work of political parties. That is something they are prohibited from. Apart from that, there is the requirement that they register with Elections Alberta, and they need to disclose their donors for the activities that they are undertaking when they are engaged in political advertising.

I look forward to future questions. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for her answer. I just have a bit of a concern, then, because in many respects we are creating some significant grey area for third-party advertisers, including those that want to engage in the political process. While I certainly can appreciate that they are unable to do the work of political parties – and I think that this, you know, is a step in the right direction – I think that we probably could have been well served to do that at the special ethics committee. This particular piece of legislation speaks about what third-party advertisers can and cannot do – I can't remember the section off the top of my head; I am just taking a quick peek here – with respect to third-party advertisers' ability to, say, hold a meeting where there is a significant benefit to a political party or to a candidate, a nominated candidate.

Let's just say, for example, that the Alberta Federation of Labour would like to hold a meeting that would be a Q and A with the hon. minister of environment: come and meet the minister and ask all of the questions you have. This third-party advertiser, in this case the Alberta Federation of Labour, promotes this widely amongst their members. You'll know that the minister of environment is widely respected around the province of Alberta, and many people might want to come and hear her.

An Hon. Member: Tens of people.

Mr. Cooper: Maybe tens and tens of people. I don't know.

Let's just say that there are tons and tons of members of the Alberta Federation of Labour. A case could be made that there's

significant benefit to her as a registered nominated contestant between now and when the independent election commissioner might be appointed. Well, a case could be made that that particular third-party advertiser is, in fact, in breach of the legislation, whether or not they wanted to or intended to be or they didn't.

My concern, through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister, is that the Chief Electoral Officer, as it very clearly states in the legislation, isn't responsible for providing decisions around third-party advertisers because it is at the direction of the elections commissioner. So between now and then that presents significant concerns to third parties. I mean, I don't know if it does because I just received the amendment now, but I can imagine that that is a concern that the ATA or other third-party advertisers may have with respect to perhaps inviting the Education minister to a forum.

The only person who can actually provide advice with respect to the legislation – Mr. Chair, through you to the minister, you'll know that the fine is up to \$5,000, not a small amount of money. I know that all of those third-party advertisers, particularly the ATA, likely take the expenditure of members' dollars very seriously, and they wouldn't want to be in a position where they were in contravention of the law.

I appreciate your thoughts around: well, just ask the Chief Electoral Officer. Is that really the only path forward or the best-case scenario given the fact that he's actually not the disciplinarian once this piece of legislation comes into effect?

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. What we've done with the rules that have been outlined in Bill 32 is really make sure that some of the guidelines are clear for third parties. In Bill 32 there are clear qualifications about what is a restricted event.

Now, until such time as the elections commissioner is in place, the Chief Electoral Officer is a resource available to all Albertans, where we can ask questions. In the case of a third-party advertiser they would be able to talk to the Chief Electoral Officer about their event and whether or not that event might be a good idea.

8:40

Mr. Cooper: Just for clarification's sake, then, and then I think we can move on: would you agree that the legislation requires that the independent election commissioner is, in fact, the one who will determine whether or not there has been a breach in the legislation and not the Chief Electoral Officer and that, as such, that presents a problem between now and whenever the independent election commissioner is actually appointed?

The Acting Chair: The Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you. The CEO is going to be able to provide advice. Once appointed, it is the election commissioner who is going to be the one to investigate complaints, take enforcement action, recommend prosecutions, or any number of other tasks that we have assigned to the election commissioner, but the Chief Electoral Officer is going to be able to work with third parties to provide advice in the meantime.

The Acting Chair: The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. So I am correct in saying that the Chief Electoral Officer could provide advice that would be not agreed to or in line with what the independent election commissioner may say upon appointment. As such, even though they asked the Chief Electoral Officer, they still could be in contravention of the

legislation and wouldn't know that until the elections commissioner is appointed.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister: this is a significant problem, one that you need to consider and one that, frankly, needs a solution so that you can provide clarity to all third-party advertisers. I am of the opinion that this stifles their ability to engage in political discourse during this transition period, and I don't think that's good for anybody. I don't think that it's good for members on that side of the House and I don't think it's good for members on this side of the House when we are, essentially, passing legislation that only creates a grey area as to what third-party advertisers can and cannot do.

I know that the minister disagrees because of what she has said with respect to the clear direction that they've provided, and I agree. With respect to selling memberships, they can't. With respect to fundraising, they can't. With respect to sharing the political party information that they gather for political purposes, they can't. It's clear. But there are many, many, many, many activities that a third-party advertiser may engage in that they would like the advice of the judge, jury, and disciplinarian on. What the minister is proposing in this amendment and in Bill 32 is the exact opposite of that. I think that the minister should reconsider. I think that the minister in this case – and don't misunderstand me. There are other things in the amendment, particularly with respect to voter assist terminals and some of the things that have been highlighted, that are a net positive, but this sort of grey area that the minister has created is not a positive.

The Acting Chair: I'd caution members not to use names.

Ms Gray: Thank you for the new pun.

I would like to clear up this grey area. What I have been saying is that the CEO will be available to answer questions. If you go to page 104 of Bill 32, section 142, it is clear that prior to the election commissioner being appointed, the references in the sections of the new Election Act to the election commissioner "shall be read as a reference to the Chief Electoral Officer." Essentially, between now and the appointment of the new election commissioner the Chief Electoral Officer will be the one enforcing this act.

Mr. Cooper: Well, to the minister: thank you for the clarification. I appreciate that. It certainly did create some grey area over the last 20 minutes or so. Well, we pointed in one direction, and now we have another, which, I can't reiterate enough, is a good reason that this should have been sent to committee. But if in fact the Chief Electoral Officer can do the job between now and when there's one appointed, I hesitate – I'm curious to know exactly what the point is of an additional legislative officer, but we can move to that later.

I know that some of my colleagues have some additional questions, so I will hope that they can take those.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to discuss the amendment, part C, the location of polling places on Indian reserves and Métis settlements. One of my questions is: is it already a practice to have polling stations on reserves and Métis settlements? One of my other questions is: by putting this into the legislation, does this now allow us to put that in there? Another question. Right now we're asking permission from the settlements and the reserves, from the councils. Are we setting precedents now that we need to ask other municipalities for permission to be able to hold polling stations? Another question I have is: if a reserve or settlement is remote and they deny access to the settlement or reserve, what solution is there

to allow those Albertans to be able to vote? If the minister could answer some of those questions, I would really appreciate it.

Thank you.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much for asking questions about this very important section regarding location of polling places on Indian reserves and Métis settlements. First off, I'll start with the last question you asked. If there will not be a plan for a polling station in a remote location, we have enhanced the special ballot process, and that can be taken advantage of by all Albertans. What we've done to improve that process is allow people to request special ballots ahead of writ drop because there was a certain percentage of special ballots that were not being returned in time to be properly counted. That continues to be an option for all Albertans if they are not able to get to a polling place.

We felt it was very important to make sure that as we were preparing to work with the Chief Electoral Officer in making sure that there are adequate polling locations on reserves and Métis settlements, there was consultation with the band or with the local settlement administration for each settlement as we go forward, to make sure that they are consulted because we need to find suitable building locations and suitable technology set-ups. There needs to be power, there needs to be Internet connection and so on. There needs to be collaboration between the Chief Electoral Officer and any polling location, and that process is used now, where the Chief Electoral Officer will contact school boards to work with them prior to putting a polling place in a school, for example. Going forward, because we are allowing more advance and mobile poll locations, they will be reaching out to universities, as an example. But there needs to be adequate resources for there to be a polling station.

The Chief Electoral Officer cannot unilaterally decide that there will be voting in X place because there needs to be co-operation, so through part C we are essentially enshrining that there needs to be a strong effort to make sure that we are reaching out to our First Nation and Métis peoples, that we are connecting with reserves and, where possible, placing polling locations to suit the populations that are there.

I hope that addressed your questions.

The Acting Chair: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

8:50

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. One of my questions was on how the process works. I do know that in my own constituency I've got three reserves and two settlements, and I truly want them to participate in the election process. The way I understood it was that the CEO would book a facility on that site, and then they would hold that as a polling station. Now are we creating an extra level or an extra layer that potentially could prevent my First Nations and Métis constituents that want to vote but can't because suddenly, say, a council decides that they don't want to participate? My question is – again, this is where I want clarity on this – are we adding an extra level of barriers for these important people within my constituency to vote? That's my question.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister for Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank the member for a very thoughtful question. I think that it is an important thing for us to be concerned about. The circumstances are such that, particularly with regard to First Nations communities, they are truly sovereign on their land, and we can't simply make a decision to do something on the reserve without the permission of the band and the band council. It's the nature of the reality of the jurisdictional divide between the province and federally, so it needed to be

worded in such a way that we were making sure that we were acknowledging the jurisdiction of the band council to make decisions for things that occur on their land.

As a result, you know, we worded it in such a way that we will have the CEO have a conversation with the band council. I would hope and I would imagine – all of my conversations with the band councils are that they want to be participants in the election – that they will simply turn it over to the CEO to find a space on the council. But it was a way of acknowledging and reflecting the reality of who has authority on that land.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: I understand and I completely agree that we need to respect First Nations reserves and also settlement land.

Now, this moves on to the next question. If we are treating the reserves and the settlements in this fashion, are we now going to be starting a precedent that we need to ask every town or city to be able to put polling stations? I think that's a reasonable question because I can see that we're doing it here, and I think that it's important to establish that. I would like to understand what sets this apart from the others.

The Acting Chair: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much.

I appreciate you following up with your concerns. We're not setting a precedent because towns and councils do not own the land around them. It continues to remain part of the province of Alberta, but there is a very different status on-reserve. It is not, in fact, Alberta land. It is federal land that they are on, and the jurisdiction for responsibility of what happens on the land remains with the band and the council, so it is already in law a different situation than anywhere else off-reserve in this province. We're just simply acknowledging a reality that we cope with and we deal with all the time.

In terms of our concerns, you know, as the province of Alberta we have found that very frustrating, as I know many other governments have. Of course, we want First Nations to be full participants in our democracy, in our economy and so on, and it has from time to time frustrated us that we couldn't simply do things on-reserve that we would like to do throughout the rest of the province.

That jurisdictional divide has been a problem, and I think it's been a very negative problem in terms of assisting people on-reserve, but we also cannot just simply pretend that it does not exist. This honours the law. It respects and honours the integrity of the sovereignty of the bands on their own land yet at the same time provides for them to be full participants in the democratic process here in the province of Alberta. It's not a process we have to worry about anywhere else in the province because the issue of whose land it is and who has sovereignty on that land only exists in that one unique situation.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Okay. I can see where the thought process for the minister is coming from when it comes to our First Nations. But is it not true that land is also held by the province? I hear your discussion point here, sir, that says that towns and cities are different, and I would fully agree when a reserve is involved with this. I don't mean to actually in any way, shape, or form say that we shouldn't be consulting with these groups to ensure that they get out there and are active. How is a settlement different from a town or city when it comes to this, sir?

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much for the question. You know, it is more of a concern in this situation, as you pointed out, because the land on settlements continues to remain in the province of Alberta. It's not considered federal land at this point. However, there have been recent decisions, particularly the Daniels decision, that recognize that the Métis people are indigenous people or aboriginal, as it says under the section of the act. As a result, we know that moving forward the federal government will be making new decisions about the treatment of indigenous land as presently occupied by Métis people. They are in the process right now of signing framework agreements with both the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis settlements, and we anticipate that they will be moving in this direction.

In this case I think you're identifying that we are seeking to honour our relationship with the indigenous people who are Métis in this province in a way that is somewhat anticipatory of the direction that we'll be moving in in the future. I don't believe that this will be problematic in terms of setting a precedent anywhere else in the province. I appreciate the concern, however. I think that we can be fairly confident that because the lands have been set aside uniquely for the Métis people and they have a unique government that only Métis people can vote for on that settlement, they indeed represent the Métis people on the settlements in a manner which is very similar to or akin to the nature of the relationship on-reserve.

I think that it's sort of good for us to acknowledge our new relationship with the indigenous people of this province, to respect that in our lives, and to signal that in the province of Alberta we are going to take to heart the commitment to adopt the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, which includes Métis people, and we will act on that as if it were law. That's essentially what, you know, the federal government has agreed to do most recently, just even last week, and what we as a province here in Alberta had indicated we would do some time ago, when we first formed the government in this province. It's consistent with the desires of the people of this province, the desires of the government to move forward, and the desires of the people who will be affected by that; that is, the Métis people in this province.

I do appreciate your concern. I know that you have a great respect for the people in your community and, of course, throughout the province, and I'm sure you will, you know, want to work with us to ensure that the indigenous people in this province become full participants in this great democracy that you and I share and have benefited from by being here today.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, sir, for your answer. You mentioned the Daniels case. I think that we had a lot of Métis people within Canada celebrating that case.

Looking at this legislation, part C, can I then move to the conclusion that you are anticipating to transfer our settlement land to the federal government? That is what it sounds like you are anticipating with this legislation, sir.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much for the question. I think that would be presumptive to think that that would indeed happen. It is a possibility that if the federal government at some point along the way follows through on some of their at this point mused about notions of setting aside land for Métis people in very much the same way that they have done for First Nations people in this province, then I suppose at some point in the future that is true. I would hate for that to go on the record at this time because there have been no consultations on that. There have been no discussions explicitly on that. It is something that we anticipate could possibly be an event

in the future but one that I would not want to codify in *Hansard* or anywhere in the law in this province.

9:00

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me say that in looking at this amendment, which has arrived here to us at the eleventh hour, more of it seems good than anything else. I will say that.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

An Hon. Member: It's only 9 o'clock.

Mr. McIver: The hon. minister is questioning the time zone we're in, I suppose.

But, Madam Chair, you know what? I have to say that this amendment, if it's the result of finally talking to the Chief Electoral Officer, really draws attention to the fact that our side of the House has been talking for days now about how the Chief Electoral Officer should have been consulted along the way. The government has been insisting that the officer was, and now they've kind of admitted that what they've been saying isn't, in fact, what's been the actual situation since a late-in-the-game consultation has led to this amendment. I will put that on record because it really speaks to who can be believed around here.

On a more positive note, even though I don't think Bill 32 can be saved, this amendment may well improve Bill 32. I'm particularly fond of the sections for locations of polling places on Indian reserves and Métis settlements. I see that as, in my view, a positive step and one that we should encourage. Surely, on the committee for the children in care panel, with members from all sides of the House, they will know that I've often asked the question, "Are the children in care more Albertan or more Canadian?" which, of course, simply means that if they are indeed Albertans, then perhaps they should be treated like Albertans, with all the rights and privileges everybody else gets, and this seems like a consideration of a similar way of looking at them, saying: "Let's bring them, as much as we can, more closely, more completely into the electoral process. Let's make sure they're welcome. Let's make it easy." This appears to be a step in the right direction.

However, some of the discussion has been around who owns the land and the fact that the reserves in particular are federal land instead of provincial land. Of course, on the reserves part of the rights that they have there is to allow people on the reserves or not allow nonaboriginal people on the reserves when they choose to. To the minister: have you considered the possibility of any complications?

Again, let me be clear. I'm very much in favour of having polling stations on the reserves, but what, for example, if there's a particular candidate – it doesn't matter which party because it's the same for all parties here – and they have a hard time getting their scrutineer to the polling station because they can't get on the reserve land? There are a number of legitimate reasons why that could crop up. I just wanted to ask the minister whether in any way the minister has considered these possible eventualities, or perhaps the minister has actually gone past what I'm musing about and indeed has an answer. Either way, I would be pleased if I could hear some comment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate the question that has been raised by the Member for Calgary-Hays. I am concerned, though, that we not begin to characterize the relationship with our friends

and our country mates on the reserves as somehow acting in a way to exclude people from their communities. In a way, that would be problematic in this case. I appreciate the concern. I guess there is some potential that something could happen, but it's not based on any experience that we have, and while I guess I could not rule it out ultimately, because there is some power to limit who comes onto reserves and who doesn't, there has not been even a single incident in the past that would make me concerned that there has been a model of rejecting people entering on reserves for these kinds of purposes.

In fact, in my time of working with reserves, initially as a social worker some 30 years ago and now as minister, I have seen such an incredible welcomeness and openness on the reserves in this province and people welcomed on for multiple reasons. I think that we need to really stand on our experience of the relationship with the community and acknowledge their extreme kindness to us from the day we settlers came to this country to the present. You know, I would just ask us to fall back on the relationship as the way to provide ourselves some comfort in this situation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: You know, I want to say to the minister how much I appreciate that, and I, too, have had nothing but positive experiences. Nonetheless, in light of planning for all eventualities, I thought the question was worth asking.

I will just close by reiterating that I think the idea of offering First Nations reserves and Métis settlements the opportunity to have polling stations is a positive one and one that I surely support.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to rise and speak again to section H of the legislation and more about the election commissioner. Unfortunately, because the government has chosen to move this amendment, it has limited the opposition's ability to make any other changes to the independent office of the election commissioner. I had intended on speaking at some length about some of the challenges around the election commissioner. In fact, I had hoped to be able to move an amendment that would take the election commissioner and make them responsible to the Chief Electoral Officer because, in fact, the independent office of the election commissioner is going to create significant amounts of duplication of what the Chief Electoral Officer can already do and perform.

We're going to see a significant amount of increased costs with respect to the independent election commissioner, and there's no reason why we can't have the election commissioner inside the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. I know that this government likes to speak at length about how they do things in Manitoba, and so much of Manitoba has been infiltrated by the NDP world view there. One of the things that they have in Manitoba is an independent elections commissioner. But, interestingly enough, Madam Chair, the independent elections commissioner doesn't actually function as an independent office of the Legislature, as we've seen this government propose in this bill. So I had really hoped to be able to move an amendment that would take the election commissioner and put them inside the office of the Chief Electoral Officer.

One of the reasons why I had hoped to do that is the significant amount of cost savings that would have been realized in that. You'll know, Madam Chair, that independent officers of the Legislative

Assembly are expensive. The Elections Alberta office alone ranges from \$7 million to \$30 million a year, depending on where we are in the election cycle. The office of the Public Interest Commissioner is \$1.2 million alone. The office of the Ombudsman: \$3.2 million. The office of the Auditor General: \$26 million. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner: \$6.7 million. The office of the Child and Youth Advocate: \$15 million. Unfortunately, I don't know that I have the Ethics Commissioner's here with me this evening, but you can see that there are significant costs that are going to be associated with the independent office of the election commissioner. I wondered if the minister might briefly just let us know exactly what the costs of this commissioner are going to be.

9:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. minister of democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Before we talk about costs, I'd like to address the member's concern that this is going to be duplication. I can tell you fairly clearly that the Chief Electoral Officer, who's responsible for administering the election, running an election, is going to be doing very different things from our election commissioner, who is going to be doing investigations and working on the complaints that essentially, if I were to imagine what this might look like six months from now, probably involve concerns around dark money, that people are concerned is seeping into our electoral system. And those special investigations will have a very different focus than somebody, the Chief Electoral Officer, who is concerned with and focused on administering and getting ready for the 2019 election, dealing with new boundaries, assuming the boundaries amendment act passes this session, and dealing with all of the processes gearing up to the 2019 election, so two offices doing very different work.

The member opposite also talked about Manitoba. We did look at what Manitoba was doing, but we also looked across the country in all jurisdictions, and one of the key areas that we found that had a model that we decided to emulate was the federal government. The federal government has had a separate office for their elections commissioner, someone who could do investigations and, not only that, someone who could request or hire special investigators in specific situations, people with expertise, to look into a particular type of concern. It was the federal model that we, in fact, chose to model our updates on, making sure that we could have that information and that set-up in a way that would respond to the concerns that we've been hearing from Albertans.

What I've been hearing from Albertans, in Mill Woods and across the province when I'm travelling in other communities, is the concern that parties are looking for loopholes or looking for gaps in the system to be able to bring in dark money, whether that be out-of-province or corporate money, and connecting that directly to parties. That was why it was so important for us to put in anticollusion mechanisms, why it was so important for us to really reconsider, through the amendments to the Election Act, how we could make sure that we are getting dark money out of our politics, that we are making sure that politics will remain with Albertans, and that people will be able to know who is trying to influence them, who is trying to sway their opinion on any given matter.

Now, we had to balance those issues, very clearly, with freedom of communication, freedom of speech, freedom of association. We saw a private member's bill brought forward with a very different model, one that specifically defined what a PAC is, one that specifically banned corporate and union donations to that PAC. I appreciate the work that the other party did on that private member's bill, but we could not, in good conscience, do something

that narrow and that specific, because by defining “PAC,” you’re leaving room for somebody to shift and to change what they are just enough not to fit that definition anymore. By banning corporate and union donations to those entities, you are impeding free speech, and despite what I’ve heard some people say on CBC lately, the Supreme Court has ruled on freedom of speech for unions and for corporations, and it would not have stood. Making sure that we separate out some of those items was important to us.

In looking into setting up the election commissioner and a separate office, to us reviewing the Manitoba model and the federal model seemed to be the best use of resources and the best way for us to meet the demands of Albertans who wanted to get big money out of politics, who wanted to know who was paying to influence their opinion, who wanted to be involved in those items. Madam Chair, I will follow up on the exact cost of that office just shortly.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Chair. You know, I find it interesting that the minister talks about getting dark money out of politics. Listen, I think it’s a good cause. She talks about out-of-province money. Just two days ago in the House the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills tabled a document of those who’ve been donating to the Alberta Federation of Labour’s third-party advertiser group – you might call them a PAC as well – including a union from Burnaby, British Columbia, making donations to such an organization that is spending significant amounts of resources supporting the NDP. They like to talk about dark money, and perhaps they should talk to some of their colleagues over at some of the large unions as well with respect to over half a million dollars being donated just this year alone to that PAC.

I find some significant concern in this edition of the independent office of the Legislature. Members on that side of the House, including Edmonton-Centre and Calgary-North West, have spoken about the costs, spoken against seniors’ advocates, disability advocates being independent officers of the Legislature, and now they want to make the elections commissioner an independent officer of the Legislature. I think it’s very disappointing.

There is a risk that Albertans will be confused about whether or not they need to contact the Chief Electoral Officer or the independent elections commissioner. Certainly, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer does this exact work now. We could have had significant savings by expanding the office. In fact, the amendment that I intended to propose didn’t remove an independent elections commissioner but more reflected the Manitoba model and put that inside the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. The minister references the federal model, but I think that it’s interesting because even that isn’t, in fact, an independent office of Parliament. It reports directly to Justice, I believe, or otherwise. You know, Madam Chair, I have significant concerns about the elections commissioner being an independent office of the Legislature. I think we already have a well-established independent office of the Legislature that does a fantastic job in the form of the Chief Electoral Officer.

I get a little apprehensive when the government is essentially going to be appointing who that person is. Although it will be done through the Legislative Offices Committee, as we see in section H of the amendment, the challenge is that that selection committee will almost certainly be weighted in the favour of NDP members of the Assembly.

There are a lot of concerns. I’m very disappointed that I’m unable to move this amendment that would bring the elections

commissioner into the office of the Legislature, but there is significant work to still be done this evening, so I think it may be best if we move on and address some of the other significant concerns in Bill 32.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wish to propose an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A2. Please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment before the Assembly this evening is as follows: section 2(a) is amended by striking out clause (iv) and substituting the following. The long and the short of the amendment – and there’s been significant debate around this particular clause – is with respect to residency and requirements for voting in elections here in Alberta. The amendment amends the section which removes the mandatory six-month residency period. This amendment changes the requirement from having to reside in Alberta on the day of the election to being a resident for 30 days.

9:20

Madam Chair, I think the intent of encouraging voter engagement is a very important intent. Here on this side of the House we also want to encourage those to engage in the electoral process wherever possible. Now, having said that, I believe that a six months’ residency requirement is, in fact, too long. I know that during the last provincial election I had numerous constituents in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills come to the office and speak about some of their concerns, that they’d love to be able to vote in the upcoming election; however, they had only been here for three months or four months. They had expressed some concern about whether or not half a year was really reasonable for them to have to wait to vote here in the province of Alberta.

I fully acknowledge that six months is, in fact, too long for people to have to wait. But I also believe that 30 days is significantly more reasonable, and requiring zero residency, as in that you can move to the province of Alberta on the day of the election and still be able to vote – now, I certainly acknowledge that there are requirements with respect to valid Alberta ID or that someone would vouch for you and be on the voter list. It is possible to vote without that ID, but obviously the easiest path forward would be to have some form of Alberta ID.

But this particular clause, Madam Chair – and I know that I’ve had the opportunity to speak with a number of constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and my office has received significant feedback from Albertans, and it’s important. At the end of the day, that’s what we’re for, to represent those constituents, and I am certain that all members of the Assembly have received some feedback around residency requirements. Thirty days is a reasonable amount of time. It means that on the day that the writ dropped, you are also already in the province of Alberta and you have been able to follow along in the election process, get a real

sense of the direction, also that you are in fact intending on continuing to be an Alberta resident, or certainly you've made some commitment to do that.

We do have significant concerns with respect to no residency requirement. I will acknowledge that there are other provinces that have moved towards this, but I think that it is very important that we do what is best in Alberta for Albertans by Albertans, and that is exactly what we have the opportunity to do here this evening, to provide Albertans some sense of certainty.

You know, I will be the first to acknowledge that the Chief Electoral Officer has said that this is difficult to enforce. But we shouldn't legislate; we should allow honest people to continue to be honest. I recognize that someone could also not be honest about 30 days, and it would be difficult to enforce. But lots of legislation is difficult to enforce, and we shouldn't not have things in place to protect our democracy because it might be difficult to catch someone doing the wrong thing. We ought to provide Albertans the best opportunity to be honest and also provide Albertans other assurances that there are some protections around the democratic process, particularly with respect to residency here in the province.

I won't belabour the point too long this evening as I know that at the other portions of the legislative process we have spoken about this particular requirement. I encourage all members of the Assembly to consider what I would suggest is a very reasonable compromise and still does a number of things that the minister has tried to do in terms of encouraging voter turnout.

It also has addressed some of the issues that I know the Chief Electoral Officer has had, not fully but certainly some of them, with respect to information sharing between Elections Alberta and Elections Canada. With a 30-day limit it provides them the opportunity to share information freely and openly. I know that six months didn't.

Certainly, this is reasonable. I encourage folks to support it and provide Albertans what they have been contacting my office and asking for; that is, some assurances that those who are voting in Alberta elections are actually Albertans and are here legitimately, want to stay, and want to be part of our process as well as have met some very basic requirements to ensure that our democracy is protected.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I appreciate that the member opposite has taken the time to make sure he's accurately describing both his amendment and also the change that our government has put forward. I'm not surprised to hear that he has had a lot of contact in his constituency office given the inaccurate social media shareables that have been out there on this issue, making it hard to gauge this issue given that misinformation was deliberately put out, confusing people on this issue.

We are not changing the ID requirements in that process. Rather, we are following a recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer, which I appreciate the member opposite acknowledges. I understand that you've spoken with him. The year 2014 was the first time, I believe, that the CEO brought this forward. It was discussed at length at a committee of the Legislature, and at that time the decision was made to shorten the six-month window. But the CEO was asking for its removal. Other jurisdictions have removed it. The CEO repeated his recommendation in 2015 to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

When someone moves to Alberta and puts down their roots here, they should be able to vote in our elections. Putting up barriers creates voter disenfranchisement, and I do not want to be a part of that. When someone becomes a new Canadian citizen, they can vote the very next day, but if someone moves from B.C., they can't. That doesn't make sense to me. I want to make sure that people who move to Alberta, who live in Alberta, who make it their primary residence, which is how the legislation is worded – that is what they are looking for, the ordinary residence of the person – will be able to vote in our elections.

For those reasons, I will not be accepting the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to take the chance to speak on this amendment. I think it's a very reasonable amendment, 30 days. I know the government itself, even though they won't admit now, have considered this, too, that maybe that would be reasonable, you know, to have a 30-day window. Of course, now they've dug in their heels. They're probably not going to change.

I want to point out a couple of things that have been said about this in this very House. Now, the Member for Edmonton-Centre got up and said something along these lines here:

It reminds me of some of the ridiculous claims we've heard from south of the border about phantom suggestions of mass voter fraud.

Another thing he said was:

If this, Madam Speaker, is a mass conspiracy for voter fraud, it's a [expletive] of an inefficient one.

Of course, later on we heard from the Member for Calgary-Elbow. He said:

But to attempt to deceive Albertans to think that somehow we're going to be overrun by hordes of Saskatchewanians and British Columbians and people from Prince Edward Island . . .

He goes on to say:

So to suggest that this is going to lead to widespread voter fraud, frankly, smacks of the kind of untruths that we see coming out of the United States right now . . .

Then he goes on to say:

There was not widespread voter fraud in the United States, and there will not be widespread voter fraud in this province.

9:30

Madam Chair, when I look at these comments on this very issue, I guess the only thing that they're concerned about is massive voter fraud. But you know what, Madam Chair? I'm concerned about voter fraud, period. I guess it appears from these comments that these people are only worried if it's massive. Well, I think we should be concerned about any voter fraud at all, and to suggest that, you know, if it's widespread, it's different than if it's isolated – I guess that's okay, then, if it's just some isolated voter fraud.

Now, if we look at the Member for Little Bow in a past election: won by 10 votes.

Mr. Cooper: Whoa. How many? Landslide. Landslide, Little Bow.

Mr. Loewen: Ten votes is all it would have taken to make a difference in that election. Actually, 11, I guess. So, Madam Chair, I don't see that there's a problem with the 30 days.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Elbow actually made a very bold statement, I thought. He said, "We will not have people who are fraudulently or illegitimately voting because of this bill. It simply

will not happen.” Well, I hope he’s willing to stake his political career on that because that’s a pretty bold statement, I would say.

Madam Chair, now, one thing that was brought forward is the issue of vouching. Of course, if somebody doesn’t have any ID to prove where they live or anything, then somebody that’s from the constituency that can prove where they live can vouch on behalf of somebody else that can’t. Of course, the way the law is written now, you could only vouch for one person in an election year. On April 20, 2010, the Premier brought forward an amendment to Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010. In this amendment it says, “be amended in section 31 in the proposed section 95 by striking out subsection (4). Subsection (4) states: ‘No elector shall vouch for more than one elector at an election.’” So the Premier at one time wanted to strike out the restriction to vouch for only one person per electoral year.

So, Madam Chair, I think we see some issues here. I think that this is a reasonable amendment. Thirty days isn’t a long time. I think we can see that the idea of vouching is not a bad idea. I think it helps in a lot of situations to increase voter opportunity. But it does offer an opportunity for the possibility of voter fraud, especially when you remove this requirement of six months and bring it to nothing. It’s not even a day. It just doesn’t exist anymore. I guess it’s one second; as soon as you show up in Alberta and you can have somebody vouch for you, then I guess you can be eligible to vote.

I know they talk about residency, Madam Chair, but, you know, as long as somebody is willing to show up and say that they plan on living here, then I guess they can change their mind after the election, whatever the case. This is a reasonable amendment. We should support this amendment. Like I say, I’m concerned about voter fraud, period, not just mass voter fraud.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the moment just to offer a few remarks quickly before we go ahead and, I assume, probably, vote on the question for this particular amendment. I did just want to note that when we are weighing these sorts of questions, as was in fact weighed in a court case, which the Chief Electoral Officer did reference in terms of the removal of the six-month residency requirement, what we are looking at is the likelihood of there being damage from making that decision. Looking at weighing whether allowing someone as much access as possible to their constitutional right to cast a vote versus the possibility of public harm due to an incident of something such as voter fraud: that is a very careful consideration to make. In general the principle under the rule of law is to err on the side of freedom and try to ensure the protection of someone’s rights. In this case that court ruling was that it was more important to protect that individual right than it was likely that that was going to cause severe harm.

The member that just spoke spoke about his concern about any voter fraud, and indeed that’s fair enough. But again, Madam Chair, to remind the House, there is no more likelihood of voter fraud under the legislation that we are proposing than there is under the current rules. Absolutely none. Someone is still perfectly capable right now, if they wish, of vouching for someone and saying that they are indeed a resident when they in fact are not. Somebody is perfectly capable of making that lie, making that misrepresentation under the legislation as it currently stands. Removing the six-month residency does not increase the likelihood of that occurring.

I respect the member’s opinion. I certainly respect the desire to protect the position that they’ve put forward as a party, but I cannot support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:37 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	Loewen	Pitt
Cyr	MacIntyre	Schneider
Ellis	McIver	Smith
Hanson	Orr	Strankman
Hunter	Panda	Yao

9:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	McLean
Carlier	Gray	Miranda
Carson	Hinkley	Nielsen
Ceci	Horne	Phillips
Clark	Jansen	Piquette
Connolly	Kazim	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Schmidt
Dach	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Sigurdson
Eggen	Malkinson	Sucha
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McKittrick	Westhead

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 39
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment. I feel like Gary Bettman. There’s been a trade.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you can just wait until I see the amendment.

Mr. Cooper: I would love to wait until you’ve seen the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A3. Please go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you. A3, my favourite amendment. Well, Madam Chair, we just heard the minister speak about how she’s listened to the Chief Electoral Officer with respect to residency requirements and it’s something that he had asked for. While I personally disagree with going to zero requirements, I believe that it was a very reasonable amendment. The minister has said that she’s been listening to the Chief Electoral Officer all along. Well, his letter did indicate something different than that.

I thought that I would bring before the minister an opportunity to listen to the Chief Electoral Officer again. I don’t know why she, through you to the minister, wouldn’t want to listen to the Chief Electoral Officer. This amendment specifically will eliminate the

requirement for a door-to-door enumeration. Madam Chair, I think that it's important. There are a number of reasons why we ought to go ahead and pass this particular amendment, particularly because the Chief Electoral Officer has provided significant feedback and communication around just how ineffective door-to-door enumeration has become, how costly door-to-door enumeration has become, and, perhaps most importantly to the Minister of Labour, the significant concern that the CEO has expressed about the safety of sending out enumerators on a door-to-door as well as a rural basis. There has certainly been significant discussion about crime in rural and central Alberta, and there is a significant concern around this particular risk. I know that the Minister of Labour will know that any worker is able to refuse unsafe work, and the Chief Electoral Officer has expressed significant concerns around the safety of enumerators, but not just the safety; he's also identified that the vast majority of individuals in his role, in the form of Chief Electoral Officers, are moving away from door-to-door enumeration and towards targeted and specific enumeration as well as mail-outs.

The Chief Electoral Officer quite recently, in fact on the 1st of December, spoke at length about the full cost of door-to-door enumeration being approximately \$11 million. Eleven million dollars. "As detailed in our 2014 budget submission, door-to-door enumeration" – I'm quoting from the meeting of December 1 – "is no longer effective in updating the register of electors." I'll stop there because the good news, Madam Chair, is that the minister responsible for democratic renewal knows better than the Chief Electoral Officer, who says that it's not effective, because I can't imagine her making a recommendation to spend \$11 million on something that she doesn't actually believe is the most effective use of those resources. Now, the Chief Electoral Officer has said that it isn't, but clearly she believes differently and knows better than the guy who's responsible for delivering this particular task.

I will continue to quote from that meeting now.

As previously reported by the former Chief Electoral Officer in his enumeration report, returning officers have expressed difficulty in recruiting staff. Fifteen per cent of the staff hired quit during the enumeration process. There were 336 polling subdivisions that went unenumerated. We experienced the loss of electors' personal information.

That's a problem.

There were three polling subdivisions where elector information was lost.

Kind of an important bit of information to keep track of if you're collecting people's personal information, that was in the custody of those enumerators after it was lost.

We had a high volume of Workers' Compensation Board claims, so slip-and-fall accidents, dog bites, and physical threats from electors at the door. There is also a high number of Albertans who refuse to open the door or are not home. Albertans are concerned about their safety, and this concern has grown over the last seven years. We've listened to discussions in . . .

Oh. This is a wonderful quote from him.

. . . the Legislature this week specifically about the safety in rural Alberta, and I share similar concerns about the safety of sending enumerators across the province.

Imagine. I know that the government doesn't like to talk about rural crime and that the government doesn't like to have emergency debates on very important issues, but the Chief Electoral Officer pays attention to what's happening in the Legislature, and he knows that there are significant safety concerns in sending enumerators out across the province. But, Madam Chair, I am fearful that the minister responsible for democratic renewal will choose to continue on the path of not listening to the Chief Electoral Officer and, as

such, not accept this particular amendment, that would not require a full door-to-door enumeration.

I'll quote again from the meeting of December 1.

No jurisdiction in Canada performs a full door-to-door enumeration because of the concerns mentioned in the previous slide and due to the establishment of a permanent register of electors that is updated on a monthly basis from public data sources. The last two jurisdictions to do full enumerations were Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Manitoba's last enumeration was in 2016, so five years after our last door to door, and the Chief Electoral Officer from Manitoba has stated . . .

I know they love Manitoba over there.

. . . in her report that 60 per cent of returning officers experienced difficulty . . . 39 per cent of enumerators found it difficult . . . to perform the task.

9:50

I could go on and on, but I think the point is very clear – very clear – the clearest point I've made all night, perhaps. The Chief Electoral Officer has significant concerns about the safety and well-being of those who might be performing this. It is a drastic, classic overexpenditure on something that everyone has walked away from in every other jurisdiction across the nation, yet this minister knows better than everyone else, it would appear. Spending \$11 million on something that is not going to get us results is profoundly disappointing. I hope that the minister will reconsider and accept this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleague both for this amendment as well as for reflecting for the record the concerns and thoughts of the Chief Electoral Officer on this item. I would like to draw attention to essentially what I am attempting to do, what we are attempting to do as a government with Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, and that is that we are looking to encourage voter participation. We are looking to see a higher voter turnout in the 2019 election. We want Albertans to be engaged in our democracy, and we've implemented a number of measures to reduce barriers to allow Albertans to be able to engage.

In this case, door-to-door enumeration – that personal touch of someone coming to your home to remind you of the electoral process, to remind you of your ability to vote in an election, to confirm your information, to compile that voters list to make sure that there is accurate voter information, and to encourage people to vote – is something that I think may help with voter participation. One hasn't been done in Alberta since 2011. We have not been doing door-to-door enumeration for quite some time. The opportunity to talk to the voters, to let them know of their rights to vote, to engage on that may have value.

Now, I am a former programmer, Madam Chair. I love technology. But database trawling and doing the online digital updates could be missing that interpersonal touch of telling someone, "There's an election coming up, and here's how you get onto the voters list or off the voters list," and working with them to that effect. Door-to-door enumeration is something which, I would remark, might be the most convenient way for an elector to get onto the list because someone comes to their door to engage them rather than them having to go to a website to sign up or to be tracked through some other digital update. In my opinion, I think that door-to-door enumeration and making sure that we have a final update of

our voters list, given the huge amount of change in Alberta since 2011, people moving here, people moving within Alberta – let's do one last door-to-door enumeration and update the list and assess at that point, on a go-forward basis, whether door-to-door enumeration has value or not.

These are the reasons why we have included a door-to-door enumeration. We want quality lists. More than that, we want Albertans to know about the upcoming election and how they can get onto the voters list and their ability to participate in our democracy. Making sure that we have good voter information and encourage participation is paramount to me. That is why so many of the pieces of Bill 32 are focused on voter participation and encouraging people to be part of the democratic process.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A3 as proposed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Why, thank you. I have an amendment to propose.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A4.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, thank you, thank you, Madam Chair. I propose an amendment. There has been much, much, much discussion about getting big money out of politics. I have had the opportunity to speak at length about the importance of getting big money out of politics. I've also highlighted the fact that there's no bigger money in politics than government money and their continual desire and unquenchable thirst for making announcements during elections, by-elections and advertising government programs during all of that time.

I would like to thank the minister for putting some restrictions on government advertising during elections and by-elections. However, in Bill 32 the government has proposed a number of exemptions that, you might say, Madam Chair, you could drive a government announcement through. This particular amendment proposes to strike out a number of the clauses that provide exemptions for government advertising.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

Now, I will be the first to acknowledge, Mr. Chair, that there is important work of the government that needs to proceed during elections and by-elections, particularly with respect to public safety, particularly with respect to health and other major issues that may be before Albertans. On issues of public health and safety I fully agree that the government should continue to be able to advertise when necessary during a by-election or a general election. I also continue to agree that during an election or by-election governments should be able to advertise with respect to procurement or other advertisements required by law.

Unfortunately, within the Bill 32 legislation the government has chosen to include clauses that will allow announcements during by-elections that may specifically have a larger impact on the constituency that is in the middle of a by-election. An example that

I have been given by members of the ministry is that the government would still be able to make an announcement with respect to the ring road in Calgary even though there was a by-election going on in Calgary-Lougheed because it affects all of the city and not specifically the constituency.

Mr. McIver: You could drive an announcement through that.

Mr. Cooper: You could drive a government announcement right around the ring road of Calgary that would have a significant impact or could potentially on the by-election happening in the Calgary area. It is a big ring road.

It's a big loophole. This amendment would remove that loophole, tighten up some of the restrictions around making government announcements. In fact, there's no reason to announce a school anywhere in the province during a by-election. Those sorts of announcements can wait 28 days. The only reason is that it is a significant benefit to government when making an announcement during a by-election. This amendment removes those giant, giant holes that are left before us.

10:00

I encourage the member, if she's serious about getting big money out of politics, that will include government advertising during by-elections – I appreciate the efforts that she's made thus far. Unfortunately, they leave significant discretion for the government to still continue to abuse this particular clause. I encourage her to tighten up the loopholes. Let's move forward, make sure that we're actually doing what we say, and that is to strengthen democracy here in the province of Alberta and get big money, the darkest money of all, government money, out of by-elections.

An Hon. Member: Grey, grey.

Mr. Cooper: Grey money.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to the member for this amendment. We need to make sure that the government is able to communicate to people on significant issues even during a by-election.

Now, we have put in place that during a by-election we will prohibit the advertising and the communication of things that disproportionately impact that area. In the example of the Calgary-Lougheed by-election we would think that it would be a bad idea to announce schools in the middle of a by-election in the by-election riding. We got that idea from reviewing some past behaviour, making sure that we do not – and those people are sitting across the way now. You could talk to your colleagues about these events. Making sure that we are putting some good constraints on government advertising communications is necessary because we have seen some terrible behaviour in Alberta in our not-so-recent past, and that is what we have done.

But discontinuing publications or advertisements required for ongoing programs, departments, or provincial corporations is too much. Discontinuing that is too much. Keep in mind that we are talking about provincial corporations. That includes things like ATB, who does economic impact updates on a regular basis. I do not think that those should stop because there is a by-election, and that is why we have put these exemptions in here.

As well, I would not want to see our budget delayed because a by-election was called. I've just startled our Minister of Finance. I apologize for that, Joe.

We're making sure that if a by-election needs to be called during the operation of the Legislative Assembly, we are able to continue to work because we cannot predict when these things will be called. And sometimes people demand that a by-election must be called immediately or else democracy is forever broken. Immediately. Now. Call it now. When that happens, we don't want that to have to impact the government planning and what is happening.

Making sure that we are able to balance those opportunities is what we've done, so I'm really proud that we have fulfilled our commitment, one that we made from the very beginning, to put some serious restrictions on government advertising. As the minister responsible for democratic renewal this has been very important to me, and we have that in front of us now.

I appreciate the members opposite and their amendment, but I will not be supporting it.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:04 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

For the motion:

Cooper	MacIntyre	Smith
Ellis	McIver	Strankman
Hanson	Pitt	Yao
Hunter	Schneider	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd
Carlier	Goehring	McKittrick
Carson	Gray	McLean
Ceci	Hinkley	Nielsen
Clark	Horne	Phillips
Connolly	Jansen	Piquette
Coolahan	Kazim	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Dach	Larivee	Schmidt
Dang	Littlewood	Shepherd
Eggen	Luff	Sigurdson
Feehan	Malkinson	Westhead

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Chair, point of order. I believe there's a member on the opposite side that may not have voted in the past division.

The Acting Chair: Sorry. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you didn't have a recorded vote for this amendment.

Mr. Hanson: I was voting for the amendment. Sorry.

The Acting Chair: Oh, you're voting for it?

Mr. Hanson: I never stood up in time, I guess.

10:10

The Acting Chair: All right. Just to indicate to all members, you have to stand during the divisions, standing votes.

As clarification for the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you said you were voting in favour?

Mr. Hanson: Yes, Mr. Chair, I was voting in favour.

The Acting Chair: Okay. So we'll cite that as 11 in favour.

I'll move on to the next topic item. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: I have an amendment.

The Acting Chair: Okay. This will be referred to as amendment A5.

Carry on, Member.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have an amendment to propose, and I believe, much to the chagrin of all members in the Chamber, I am sure, this will be my last amendment. [interjections] I, too, am sad.

My last amendment for this evening, barring any significant change – and there always could be that. This particular amendment is with respect to the election commissioner. While I expressed some major disappointment earlier about the role of the election commissioner and the fact that I felt that he or she should be within the purview of the Chief Electoral Officer, unfortunately, that was unable to be moved. But I do think that there needs to be some certainty around the election commissioner's ability to respond to third-party advertisers or nomination contestants. As we all know, there is a significant list of folks who are affected by this particular piece of legislation and how they interact or how they don't interact and those that want to engage in third-party advertising or advertising of a political nature.

As has been established by the minister, the election commissioner will rule on a number and a wide range of sections of the legislation, and they are solely responsible to do that. The fines for not following the legislation are up to \$5,000, which is fair, reasonable. This is a serious matter. We want third parties to be held to account to make sure that they are in fact following the legislation.

There are some matters where a third-party advertiser might like to ask the opinion of the election commissioner, but there's no actual requirement on the election commission to respond. Now, good practice would obviously indicate that the election commission would like to respond, but in the course of a general election, which we all know is only 28 days, a third-party advertiser might ask at the beginning of the election and they may not hear a response from the election commissioner for quite some time.

There is a significant number of areas where the election commissioner may be required to provide feedback, so I felt that it would be reasonable, particularly reasonable, to put some parameters on which the commissioner would be required to respond. This amendment asks that the election commissioner would respond within 14 days of a request, and it's reasonable that the election commissioner would do that. We also would never want to be in a situation where the election commissioner, for whatever reason, would choose not to respond. There are potentially some very complex decisions to be made about whether or not they have done that. It would essentially provide a preruling as to whether or not a particular event or advertisement would be considered to be in contravention of the legislation.

I think putting some sense of guidelines on what will be expected of this particular independent office of the Legislature is reasonable and also will provide third-party advertisers with some sense that they will be able to get the guidance and direction that they need. With that said, I encourage the minister to recommend to her colleagues, as I know that that's the only way things get done over there, to support this amendment.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think that in the case of this new office and officer, applying restrictions at this point is premature. There will be opportunities to work with the new officer through the legislative committee that he or she will be reporting to, so in this case I am not in favour of this amendment.

That being said, the reason we are creating an election commissioner is precisely for the situation that the member opposite describes, which is in the middle of a busy election, a short period of time, being able to respond effectively and quickly, when the Chief Electoral Officer is busy administering an election. It is completely fair because that is such a huge task. Having an election commissioner who will be able to respond to third-party advertisers, to political parties, and to potentially investigate things within, well, hopefully very soon after they are reported: that is what we want to be able to see happen, and that is why we are moving forward with plans for an election commissioner.

Thank you to the member for the question. This is probably going to be a very good question to ask the election commissioner as he presents his first annual report to the standing committee, how he was able to respond to requests and what tools and resources he may need and whether that is more legislation or how that can be addressed.

I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

Seeing and hearing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on Bill 32. The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have an amendment.

An Hon. Member: Hooray.

Mr. Clark: Hooray.

The Acting Chair: That will be referred to as amendment A6. Please carry on, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I move that Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, be amended in section 70, in the proposed section 125.1, (a) in subsection (2) by adding the following after clause (a):

(a.1) facilities on Indian reserves;

(a.2) facilities on Metis settlements;

and (b) in subsection (4)(a) by adding "(a.1), (a.2)," after "(a)".

10:20

Mr. Chair, this has the effect of listing specifically where special mobile polls are to be considered. Section (2) is: "Facilities at which a special mobile poll may be established include the following." It's important that we specify indigenous reserves and Métis settlements as a specific area within this bill as I know this

government and, I hope, all members are committed to reconciliation. This is one of those small, symbolic but, I think, very important points in terms of ensuring that we make elections free, fair, and accessible. Our country has a very sad and, frankly, shameful history when it comes to voting status for indigenous people. Indigenous people did not have the right to vote until 1960, which is absolutely shocking and simply wrong.

So it is very important that we ensure that remote areas – often indigenous and Métis settlements are, obviously, very remote – have the opportunity for a special poll. It's interesting, of course, that voter turnout tends to be very low on First Nations and Métis settlements, on average, in 2015, 20 per cent lower than the Canadian average. The more people who vote, the more engaged they are. It is, of course, the democratic right of everyone in this country to access voting. Special polls are one way of doing that. If the chief and councils ask for a special mobile poll, I think it's important that we accommodate them and make it easier to vote, not harder. I have had some conversations with government on this, and I am encouraged that perhaps they will in fact support this. I would obviously like very much to see that support.

I also want to just very briefly, as I conclude my remarks here, thank Parliamentary Counsel for some quick work this evening in fixing up this amendment for us and renumbering it here at the last minute. Of course, I also would be remiss if I didn't mention my very capable staff, who proposed this idea. Thank you to each of them for the work that you've done to move this amendment forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the member for this amendment. As you stated, yes, we are committed to reconciliation, and we've already moved an amendment this evening that specifically addresses Indian reserves and Métis settlements.

As such, I think this is good, and I'd like to recommend that we accept my colleague's amendment.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A6?

Seeing and hearing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 carried]

The Acting Chair: Are there any other questions, comments in relation to Bill 32?

Seeing and hearing none, are we ready for the question on Bill 32?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 32 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to report the vote carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:24 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miller
Carlier	Hinkley	Miranda
Carson	Horne	Nielsen
Ceci	Jansen	Phillips
Clark	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Coolahan	Larivee	Rosendahl
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Eggen	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Turner
Goehring	McLean	Westhead

Against the motion:

Ellis	McIver	Smith
Hanson	Pitt	Strankman
Hunter	Schneider	Yao
MacIntyre		

Totals: For – 39 Against – 10

[Motion to report the vote carried]

Bill 33 Electoral Divisions Act

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Seeing and hearing none, are we ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 33 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to report the vote carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:29 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Carlier	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Phillips
Ceci	Jansen	Piquette
Clark	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	

10:30

Against the motion:

Ellis	MacIntyre	Schneider
Hanson	McIver	Strankman
Hunter	Pitt	Yao

Totals: For – 41 Against – 9

[Motion to report the vote carried]

Bill 34 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

The Deputy Chair: Are there any questions, comments or amendments to be offered in respect to this act?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 34 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you. I'd like to move that at this time we would rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 33 and Bill 34. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 30 and Bill 32. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official record of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 30 An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is a privilege to be able to rise today to move third reading of Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta.

I'm not going to speak for very long.

An Hon. Member: Bill 30.

Ms Gray: Oh, Bill 30 – thank you; the other bill – An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, which is also very important and I'm also very proud of.

I'm not going to speak for very long, Madam Speaker. I really just want to highlight that this bill is a huge leap forward, updating occupational health and safety and enshrining the three rights for workers: making sure that harassment is defined and included in OH and S, making sure that responsibilities for all workplace parties are clearly defined, and on the WCB side making sure that we have a sustainable system that provides the supports that Alberta's workers need, provides the rehabilitation that they need. With the changes on the OHS and the WCB side this bill is really going to make a difference for working Albertans.

I'm very proud of the work that went into this. I want to say thank you to the team that helped to draft this bill and worked on it as well as all Albertans who took places in some very large consultations to get us to this point.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 30 in third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this evening to speak to this third reading of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. It's important to begin by saying that this bill includes several provisions that will live up to its title of protecting Albertans, Alberta's workforce.

First and foremost, harassment, bullying, intimidation, or assault of any kind, be it physical or verbal, are completely unacceptable. I echo the Member for Lethbridge-East's sentiment on this issue and thank her for speaking so passionately about this issue. That goes for the workplace or anywhere else, for that matter. Harassment has many faces, and they are all ugly. As members of this House we should strive to set the standard for comprehensive legislation against workplace harassment.

Second, this bill protects a worker's right to refuse unsafe work conditions without fear of reprisal from an employer or supervisor. Years ago the most junior employees on a work site were sometimes thrown into the most precarious situations. That is unacceptable. Often these employees had the least experience, but they were the least likely to complain to a supervisor for fear of losing their jobs. This bill aims to protect those workers, and I applaud that.

10:40

Third, I want to recognize how important it is to ensure our province has an OH and S and WCB system that is current. It's been over 15 years since we looked at this legislation, and it's vital that our province stay on top of evolving trends. This includes studying and reporting on a constant basis how we can make the workplace a better environment to be in while also protecting the rights of those who may have tragically been injured while doing their job.

These provisions and others lead me to believe that the hearts of members on the other side of this House are in the right place. Unfortunately, the execution of this bill overall falls short of what we would expect to be in the best interests of the province and its workforce. Now, Madam Speaker, I've spoken at length on this bill, both in Committee of the Whole and second reading, so I hope I don't sound like a broken record, skipping and repeating myself ad nauseam. But the strength of Alberta's workforce and, by association, our economy are too important to concede ground on this bill.

The most glaring deficiency with Bill 30 is the lack of public consultation. I can already see the eyes roll on the other side, but the government did not adequately discuss this massive piece of legislation with representatives from the employees' and employers' sides. I've heard the numbers: 1,300 completed surveys, eight town halls and meetings, 90 written submissions from industry, and the list goes on. However, I must remind the government that that is only half the job.

I've made a point in my life of not putting all my financial eggs in one basket. Because of that I've worked in several different fields, construction being one of them. I can tell you that when we took on a project, we always finished it. Imagine building a house and not putting on a roof. Imagine taking a cab and then getting dropped off two-thirds of the way to your destination. So I ask, through you, Madam Speaker: why is it okay in government that we only work in half measures?

This bill was introduced last week. How can the government expect that we fully consult stakeholders after the bill is introduced in a matter of a week? It's impossible. Most people don't take notice of these kinds of massive changes until the media reports on it. That's when the letters and calls start flooding in, but by this time it's too late. Those concerns directed at the government fall on deaf ears, and the fact that this government didn't even approve a single amendment proposed by the opposition proves that.

Madam Speaker, a letter was sent to the minister and MLAs from the Alberta Road Builders & Heavy Construction Association that expressed concern over the speed at which this piece of legislation was introduced and moved through the legislative process. An excerpt from the letter reads:

We are concerned at the speed at which Bill 30, introduced on November 27, 2017, is moving through the Legislature and request time for a full costing analysis to be done by the department before the bill proceeds to third reading.

Like many other industry associations ARHCA represents countless businesses. The minister may think that these are faceless organizations, but they are not. They employ real workers who go home each night to spouses, children, brothers, and sisters. Where is the concern for their jobs?

Had a full economic impact study been completed, the government would have learned how this bill will adversely affect small and medium-sized businesses and larger businesses as well, Madam Speaker. Large corporations are robust enough to absorb these costs, but one industry association told me that of the hundreds of businesses they represent, fewer than 10 per cent could even be considered large. The rest are at serious risk of layoffs and reduced employment hours as many parts of this bill take effect almost immediately in the new year. Had an economic impact study been carried out, the government would have realized the mistake of removing the maximum insurable earnings on WCB claims. From the government's perspective, I can see that the intention here is to certify that injured workers will be made almost entirely whole, but then there are those pesky unintended consequences.

In this case it's like a domino effect, which has the potential of risking recovery. One, remove the maximum insurable earnings cap. Two, WCB premiums increase to reflect the new cost of insuring workers. Three, employers have less capital to invest in their business and pay workers. Four, business is downsized, and workers get laid off. Five, fewer jobs become available in Alberta. Six, Alberta becomes less attractive for investment. Seven, tax revenues diminish, as we are seeing happen right now, resulting in social programs and services in jeopardy. Eight, people move away from Alberta, and the spiral continues downward.

In conclusion, I will end by saying that the members opposite have fine-tuned the skill of creating unintended consequences. If

that is how they wish to be remembered, then so be it. But in good conscience I cannot support this bill if its unintended consequences could cause Albertans to lose their jobs.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to third reading?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, in the summer of 1992 I worked for a marble and tile company. I was very young at the time, spry. But the comment from the hon. member before, saying that the newest workers were given the most precarious jobs: that was absolutely true in my case. I'll never forget being on the corner of 4th Avenue and 5th Street S.W. in Calgary climbing a rickety scaffolding, carrying 500 pounds of granite.

An Hon. Member: Come on.

An Hon. Member: By yourself?

Mr. Clark: Okay. With another guy, but with one arm. In the other arm I had seven bags of cement. Yeah. [interjections] It was an easy day, yeah. It was a huge slab of granite. I will acknowledge that there was another person there to help me do it. But I recall that that was not probably the single safest thing I've ever done. No fall protection. I'm pretty sure that I was wearing steel-toed boots, but that's about it. I was a lot fitter at the end of that summer than I was when I started, let me tell you.

You know, I compare that to, maybe, five years ago, when I was working in IT in the oil and gas industry, sitting in a boardroom on the 30-somethingth floor of a tall office tower in downtown Calgary. Yes, I could barely carry my laptop at that point. But at the start of that meeting we would do a safety moment. We would do a safety moment at the beginning of that meeting in a cloistered office far away from the oil sands plant of the customer that I was working at. That tells you a lot about the change, the evolution of safety culture over the last couple of decades, and I think this bill is in keeping with that broad evolution. It reflects the changes that we've seen, that a safety culture is a far more important thing now than it was in the past.

That's a very important thing to note. Responsible companies will have a strong safety culture, and that's an important thing, but there is a role for legislation. There is a role for legislation to ensure that that safety culture is not the only thing that we rely on and that, in fact, workers have recourse should they find themselves in unsafe situations. So, certainly, a lot of aspects of this bill I support.

We did try to amend it to make it even better, especially as it relates to vulnerable workers and to ease the burden on not-for-profits, to allow them some flexibility in, perhaps, pooling of resources on the administrative side to comply with some aspects of this bill. Very important, of course, that not-for-profits, as all companies or organizations, should be expected to comply with the health and safety standards and WCB regulations but to perhaps, given their limited administrative resources, pool some resources. It's unfortunate that we were not able to convince the government to pass that.

Also, education and alternative sentencing as it relates to vulnerable workers. We would have liked to have seen that as well as measures on the code of conduct provisions and making sure that that is reviewed on a regular basis.

I'm very pleased to see the change as it relates to psychological injuries, posttraumatic stress, and I think I would be remiss if I didn't note the importance of the bullying and antiharassment provisions of this act. Industry, of course, has a role in that, but there is a very

important role for legislation and very clear rules that people know. There must be legal recourse if they are abused on the job or fired for being sexually harassed. It's not acceptable. At no time has it ever been acceptable. It's certainly not acceptable now, and it's good to know that this bill is in place to strengthen those protections even further.

While we do certainly have some questions and some concerns about this bill, the Alberta Party caucus will be supporting it at third reading. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

10:50

The Acting Speaker: Thank you hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak – oh, 29(2)(a). My apologies.

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in support of Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans. Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act is important legislation. Hard-working Albertans know that health and safety can affect their lives and the lives of their colleagues and families. I believe Albertans and their families should have faith that they come home safe from a long day at work. That doesn't always happen.

Last year more than 44,000 workers were injured on the job, and 144 workers never made it home. That is unacceptable. It is a heartbreaking tragedy. In 2015, which is our most recent data, a study placed Alberta at number 2 in the country for workplace fatalities per million when it comes to our working population. Bill 30 seeks to change that record.

What makes workplace incidents even more tragic is that most are preventable. Preventing accidents and near misses is done with public awareness, training, proper precautions like using PPE, and effective enforcement of up-to-date legislation. Bill 30 will create a responsive system that can adapt to changing hazards to better prevent illnesses, injuries, and support workers' return to work. Bill 30 does this, first, by clarifying roles and responsibilities of everyone in the workplace, employers and workers alike, to ensure everybody's health and safety. Bill 30 enshrines workers' rights: the right to know about workplace hazards, the right to participate in workplace health and safety committees, and the right to refuse unsafe work.

People want to know that they are being listened to and that they have been heard. When an employee feels protected and respected, morale goes up and both performance and profitability increase. This mentality and its effects contribute to a strong economy. Our economy doesn't exist without workers, and this bill protects workers. Bill 30 will make it mandatory to promote a strong health and safety culture in our workplaces. All of these changes do more than bring occupational health and safety laws into the present; they also bring Alberta's workplace rights and protections on par with the rest of Canada. This in turn will make it easier and cheaper for employers to do business across the country.

Madam Speaker, a strong system of workplace health and safety programs saves lives. The changes in Bill 30, An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, are long overdue and deserve our full support. They are based on thorough reviews and extensive public input. They will better protect workers from injury and illness and will also better support workers if they do get hurt on the job. Bill 30 means a WCB system that's more fair, accessible, and better supports workers and their families. As legislators we have an obligation to make it happen and protect our fellow Albertans. Alberta's workers deserve these changes, and I will be voting in favour of this bill and encourage all in the House to support it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, is there any member wishing to close debate?

Seeing none, I will now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Carlier	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Phillips
Ceci	Jansen	Piquette
Clark	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Fraser	Miller	Woollard
Goehring		

Against the motion:

Ellis	McIver	Smith
Hanson	Pitt	Strankman
Hunter	Schneider	Yao
MacIntyre		

Totals:	For – 43	Against – 10
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[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At this time I'd like to request unanimous consent that notwithstanding Standing Order 77 the Assembly proceed to third reading of Bill 32.

[Unanimous consent granted]

11:00

Bill 32

An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very excited to speak to third reading of Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta.

This bill is going to make voting easier and more accessible for Albertans. This bill is going to get dark money out of our political system and increase the transparency for all Albertans through the creation of a new election commissioner and by making sure that third parties have reasonable restrictions and rules so that Albertans will know what's happening in their democracy. I'm very proud of

Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, and the positive changes that it brings for Albertans.

I'd like to thank all those who contributed to this bill and to the debate that has happened in this Legislature. It's been a pleasure to work on this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 32, An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta. I might just say that it's sort of a rubbish title. The fact of the matter is that there is so much about this legislation that really has missed the mark – has missed the mark – which is why I would use such strong language about the title.

Madam Speaker, much has been said not just this evening but over the past number of days as we're well and truly into, you know, extending the session and discussing this particular piece of legislation, that really hasn't accomplished all the goals that the government had set out to achieve. We've spoken at length about some of those concerns with respect to residency requirements. We've spoken at length on some concerns about the lack of consultation with the Chief Electoral Officer. We saw earlier this evening some movement around that particular area and, finally, the government listening to some of his concerns.

I highlighted at some length in Committee of the Whole the significant challenges around enumeration. The government seemingly likes to pick and choose all sorts of different things, and in this case the Chief Electoral Officer has very, very, very clearly laid out a case both for tabulators as well as, very clearly, a case against a door-to-door enumeration and highlighted a lot of concerns, including safety of workers, something that I was under the impression this government was in favour of. When the Chief Electoral Officer says, "I have safety concerns about a door-to-door enumeration; I have significant concerns around the fact that every other province and jurisdiction in this great land of ours has gone away from a door-to-door enumeration," the minister says: "No. Don't confuse me with the facts. I've already made up my mind. We want to spend 11 million bucks on something that's not going to provide the types of results that we say it is."

The Chief Electoral Officer has said that it is going to put workers at risk, which is exactly – the Chief Electoral Officer has said that he has significant safety concerns around this, yet the government has chosen to go in the exact opposite direction, spending to the tune of \$5 million more and getting worse results. It's exactly what this government continues to do in multiple areas of their tenure here in this Assembly, to go in the exact opposite direction, including tabulators, vote tabulators, where they could have saved \$5 million on enumeration and then delivered on something that the Chief Electoral Officer actually asked for, which was good enough for the by-election in Calgary-Lougheed, probably would have been good enough for the general election. But this particular minister has chosen not to heed the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer and to go in the exact opposite direction, Madam Speaker, and it should be concerning to every member of the Assembly.

While I will acknowledge that there are some sections in the legislation that have moved our democracy in the right direction – I believe a number of the regulations around third-party advertisers have certainly added value and clarity to the roles and responsibilities of third-party advertisers, and I fully support those. I think we made some good progress this evening on providing more access to democracy at a wide range of locations here in our

province with respect to First Nation and Métis settlements. I think we've made some positive progress with respect to voter terminals that will allow more individuals to vote. I think this is a real step in the right direction. I think we've made some positive progress around mobile polls.

But, on balance, there are major, major, major challenges with Bill 32. The Official Opposition made some significant commitments and some significant contributions to the debate this evening, much of which were not heeded by the government. So it is exactly for those reasons that I encourage all of my colleagues on this side of the House to vote against Bill 32, an act that, in fact, will not, to the fullest extent that was required, strengthen and protect democracy in Alberta. In fact, the Chief Electoral Officer had concerns about degrading the services that voters will come to expect.

With that, I encourage all members of the Assembly to vote against Bill 32.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, in many ways, this bill would not have been necessary. Certainly, most of it would not have been necessary had this government allowed the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee to do its work back at the outset, back in 2015-16.

Unfortunately, that committee was allowed to fizzle out before we had a real opportunity to tackle the challenge of third-party advertisers or PACs, so this legislation is required to try to undo some of the damage that was done through the unintended consequences or the lack of oversight that this government has allowed to happen as it relates to third-party advertisers, as it relates to PACs. It was an opportunity to really address overhauling Alberta's electoral system, both the Election Act itself as well as the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, and to put in place a new model, a new framework that would last for a generation.

What I genuinely worry about is that should this government find itself out of power after the next election and should our friends in the Official Opposition somehow find themselves in government, we've set ourselves up now for this whipsaw of governments just putting election laws in place that benefit them and don't benefit all Albertans. Should that happen, I'll be sitting here, perhaps with a few more friends next time, and talking about the UCP stacking the deck. You know, the NDP really did try to stack the deck in their initial changes to election law, and unfortunately they've realized that that was perhaps detrimental to – let's be generous – the entire province or perhaps their own election prospects.

So here we are with Bill 32. The fact that the Chief Electoral Officer was not adequately consulted in preparation for this bill and the fact that we have three or four pages of wide-ranging amendments presented tonight to try to fix some of the problems that would have been created had the bill been passed in its original form, I think, are telling. It's unfortunate that the government didn't take the time to sit down with the Chief Electoral Officer or perhaps even use something like the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee to do that work, which we were meant to do.

11:10

Having said that, it is the job of those of us in opposition not just to oppose the government but to propose alternatives and ones that we – and I will give the minister responsible for democratic renewal

credit and appreciate very much her acceptance of our amendment to specifically enumerate Métis settlements and reservations as locations that should be considered for special ballots and polling. I think it's very important that we make democracy accessible to every single citizen of our province and most especially those who have in the past not had as much access to democracy as they should have, specifically indigenous people in the province of Alberta. So I'm certainly very proud that we have seen that.

The last point I would like to make is that I hope there are some measurable outcomes that we're able to see from the government, especially higher voter turnouts by underrepresented peoples. There are some things in this legislation that I would hope would increase voter turnout and participation by marginalized people, and we will be certainly looking for that.

One final point, Madam Speaker, that I would just like to make once again. If I'm being generous, the unfortunate characterization of the change to the residency period that we've seen from Jason Kenney – if I'm not being generous, I would call it dog-whistle politics – is appealing to our basest instincts, certainly not my basest instincts but the basest instincts of some of those in our society who would seek to divide rather than unite. This is a change that is brought about by a court ruling from Ontario. It has to do not with ensuring that people can simply fly into Alberta on a Monday and vote on a Tuesday; it has to do with reflecting the reality that the six-month residency period that we have in place, that other provinces are going away from, that other provinces have already gone away from, is simply not enabling access to democracy.

I'm certainly not happy with every aspect of this bill, but some of the debate that we've seen, both within and outside the House on some aspects of this bill and particularly on the residency portion of that, has been I hope not a foreshadowing of what we're about to see in the next election. I fear it may be. But I think that when we see that, it's incumbent and important for all of us to call it out, and I've done so.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will vote in favour of Bill 32. Thank you for the opportunity to make these comments.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to third reading?

Is there any member wishing to close debate? The hon. minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I'm happy to close debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:13 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Carlier	Hinkley	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Clark	Larivee	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Luff	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Shepherd
Dach	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson

Dang	McKitrick	Sucha
Eggen	McLean	Turner
Feehan	Miller	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring		

Against the motion:

Cooper	McIver	Smith
Ellis	Pitt	Strankman
Hanson	Schneider	Yao
MacIntyre		

Totals: For – 40 Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At this point I'd like to request unanimous consent that notwithstanding Standing Order 77 the Assembly proceed to third reading of Bill 34.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 34

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Government House Leader I move third reading of Bill 34, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017.

11:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, hon. Minister of Children's Services, would you like to close debate?

Ms Larivee: Sure. I will close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At this point I'd like to request unanimous consent that notwithstanding Standing Order 39 the Assembly proceed to consideration of Government Motion 38.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Committee Membership Changes

38. Ms Larivee moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:
- A. on the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund that Ms McPherson replace Mr. Taylor;
 - B. on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mrs. Aheer replace Mr. Nixon;
 - C. on the Standing Committee on Private Bills that Mr. Orr replace Mr. Fraser, Ms Kazim replace Ms McPherson as chair, and Mr. Taylor replace Ms McPherson;

- D. on the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that Mr. Nixon replace Mr. Ellis, Ms Miller replace Ms McPherson, Mrs. Pitt replace Mr. Schneider, and Mr. Gotfried replace Dr. Starke;
- E. on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that Mr. Hunter replace Mr. Fraser, Mr. Nielsen replace Ms Goehring, and Mr. Carson replace Mr. Westhead;
- F. on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mrs. Pitt replace Mr. Orr;
- G. on the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future that Mr. Clark replace Mr. Gill, Mrs. Littlewood replace Ms McPherson, and Dr. Starke replace Mr. Panda;
- H. on the Standing Committee on Families and Communities that Mr. Ellis replace Mrs. Aheer, Ms Renaud replace Ms Jansen, and Ms McPherson be appointed to the vacant position;
- I. on the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship that Ms McPherson replace Mr. Clark, Mr. Drysdale replace Mr. Hunter as deputy chair, and Mr. Fraser replace Mr. Hunter.

Ms Larivee: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. By way of explanation to the House I can indicate that this motion is being made due to a number of changes to the makeup of this Chamber that have taken place since these committees were struck and were populated with members at the commencement of the spring sitting. The changes are being made based on consultation with all parties and with independent members. I can assure the House that attempts were made to accommodate all requests from members although that was not possible in every case.

In particular, I understand that the Member for Calgary-Elbow has raised a number of concerns with regard to the motion as it appears on the Order Paper. First, he has raised an issue regarding the balance between his own duties and those of his seatmate, the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. I can indicate that my colleague the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane will be presenting an amendment which should address that concern.

Second, I understand that the member also wants additional representation on more committees. This is an issue that he first raised in this Chamber on June 16, 2015, in the context of the Public Accounts Committee, and his concerns today relate to the Members' Services Committee.

As was indicated by the Government House Leader at that time, it's not always possible to accommodate every request. We believe this motion strikes the right balance between the needs of the government caucus, the Official Opposition, the Alberta Party caucus, and independents. Additionally, I do know that a subcommittee of the Members' Services Committee has been struck to review various matters and that their mandate includes looking at official party status and what that means.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Mr. Clark: I have plenty to say. I look forward to the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane moving the amendment. As it stands now, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill has three committee assignments and I have one, and much as I would like very much to off-load more of the work to her than to myself, I think that we should have some equity in our committee assignments. So I look forward to ensuring that in fact I am placed on the heritage savings committee instead of my colleague from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

I will say, though, that being now a caucus of two, in 1997 a great deal of precedent was established as it relates to official party status,

and that was established by a two-member caucus of the NDP. They were able to do that because they had a seat at the Members' Services Committee and were able to move motions and vote in Members' Services. As it stands now, these committee assignments do not reflect our standing as third party in the House, and we do not have standing on Members' Services, which is a great disappointment. I think, frankly, it does not serve democracy well.

I would also note that in 2001 the two-member NDP had a seat and a vote on Members' Services. That caucus included the now Government House Leader. In 2008 there was a two-member caucus, which included the now Premier and now Government House Leader, that had a vote on Members' Services at the time. I will say again, Madam Speaker, that I am profoundly disappointed that the Alberta Party caucus has not been afforded the opportunity to have a seat on Members' Services. But rest assured that we will continue to attend Members' Services meetings. We will continue to pay very close attention to the goings-on of that committee as well as any subcommittees that are struck and ensure that the minority interests of members in this Assembly continue to be reflected and preserved.

It's something that I would encourage, that the government remember where they came from, remember that one day they may perhaps find themselves back in the same situation that they were in the past, and I would certainly hope that they don't establish precedent that would disadvantage them at some point in the future. Even so, it really should not be about whether it's in the direct interest of one party over another; it should be what's in the best interest of governing our province. I think that democracy would demand that a party that has two members would have a seat on Members' Services. I would encourage the government and hope that as you bring this amendment, I'll be happily surprised that you will add the Alberta Party caucus to Members' Services and, again, remind you where you came from and that you may find yourselves back here one day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move an amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, if you could just wait until the table has the original and I have a copy, please.

Mr. Westhead: Absolutely.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A1. Please proceed.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. For the benefit of those who haven't received it yet, I'll read it. I'm to move that Government Motion 38 be amended in part A by striking out "Ms McPherson" and substituting "Mr. Clark."

Just to refresh everyone's memory, part A of Government Motion 38 deals with the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, so the effect of this amendment would be to have Mr. Clark replace Mr. Taylor in that respect.

That's about all I have to say, and I look forward to any further discussion.

11:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Speaker: We are now on the original motion. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As you'll know, there's nothing that I enjoy more than speaking on a procedural motion here in the Chamber. Some people like real things in life, and I like this. I just can't miss an opportunity to rise and speak to Government Motion 38 as amended, and I'd just like to highlight a couple of things very briefly with respect to the former independent member from Calgary-Elbow as well as the former leader of the Alberta Party.

While I appreciate some of his concern with respect to two-member caucuses inside the Chamber, there are certainly other bodies of work and precedent that require four members to be a party here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The times when there were two, I think one of the particular times he refers to in 2010, I believe, they were recognized as a party and then not. The previous time there was very little other opposition, so there were some requirements, if you will, to recognize two-member caucuses as parties.

I would just like to highlight something very specifically about the Official Opposition now and what is, in fact, the largest Official Opposition since 1993, the same year that he has referenced in his remarks. This particular motion that is before us now is actually going to see the Official Opposition lose total percentage of representation on these particular committees. While I can appreciate the Member for Calgary-Elbow's comments about the special things that he would like for a two-member caucus, the reality is that, as the Government House Leader has mentioned, not all caucuses get what they want all of the time. In fact, we are seeing a significant reduction in total numbers. As you know, Madam Speaker, the Official Opposition has increased to the largest Official Opposition, yet on no committee have we seen an increase in representation with respect to total percentages.

I just thought it would be prudent to highlight that there are certainly some concerns with this motion. There are some concerns with the makeup of committees.

In light of the hour I will leave my comments at that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, would the hon. Deputy Government House Leader like to close?

Ms Larivee: Sure. I would like to close debate. Thank you.

[Government Motion 38 as amended carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Having made incredible progress this evening, which I think we are all very thankful for, I would like to move at this time that we adjourn until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:35 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, December 13, 2017

Day 66

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Schreiner

Clark	Horne
Cyr	McKitrick
Dang	Turner
Ellis	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Sucha
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Carson	Littlewood
Clark	Piquette
Connolly	Schneider
Coolahan	Schreiner
Dach	Starke
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Cyr	Littlewood
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Drever	Miller
Ellis	Orr
Hinkley	Renaud
Horne	Shepherd
Luff	Swann
McKitrick	Yao
McPherson	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Shepherd
Deputy Chair: Mr. Malkinson

Aheer	Littlewood
Drever	Pitt
Gill	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteinuber	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Cortes-Vargas

Cooper	Nixon
Dang	Piquette
Jabbour	Pitt
Luff	Schreiner
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms Kazim
Deputy Chair: Connolly

Anderson, W.	Orr
Babcock	Rosendahl
Drever	Stier
Drysdale	Strankman
Hinkley	Sucha
Kleinsteinuber	Taylor
McKitrick	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Deputy Chair: Ms Babcock

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	Miller
Cooper	Nielsen
Goehring	Nixon
Gotfried	Pitt
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Cyr
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Barnes	Malkinson
Carson	Miller
Fildebrandt	Nielsen
Gotfried	Panda
Hunter	Renaud
Littlewood	Turner
Luff	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Loyola
Deputy Chair: Mr. Drysdale

Babcock	MacIntyre
Dang	Malkinson
Fraser	McPherson
Hanson	Nielsen
Kazim	Rosendahl
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Loewen	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, December 13, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning, hon. members.

There are many individuals in our province and some of our members who are in Hanukkah, and we wish happy Hanukkah to them.

Also, if you would bow your heads and reflect on the following Christian prayer.

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men . . .

And in despair I bowed my head:
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men” [and women].

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Child and Youth Advocate

37. Mr. S. Anderson moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the December 2017 report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, Sessional Paper 640/2017, and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that the Child and Youth Advocate, Mr. Del Graff, be reappointed for a term to expire on March 31, 2020.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To provide some context, I can indicate that on December 1 the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices met and unanimously approved reappointing Del Graff as Child and Youth Advocate for a two-year term ending March 31, 2020. As members know, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and, indeed, the child intervention system as a whole is undergoing significant change, including as a consequence of Bill 18 from this spring as well as the minister's child intervention panel. With this reappointment the office is assured of steady leadership during this period.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, if I may say a few words in response to the appointment of Del Graff as Child and Youth Advocate, the United Conservative Party is pleased to see the appointment of Del Graff into the role of the Child and Youth Advocate officially. Del Graff has worked tirelessly in that role and has exceeded his capacity to be able to offer investigative and advocacy services to marginalized youth in our province. As the scope of his work and his office has changed, we know that Del Graff will certainly rise to the challenge and do a great job moving forward, as he has in the past.

We congratulate him, and we look forward to working with him in the future.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak to Government Motion 37?

The hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. S. Anderson: I close debate. Thanks.

[Government Motion 37 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 31. One of our government's key priorities is making life better and more affordable by protecting Albertans' pocketbooks. That's why we're proposing to strengthen consumer protections. Since July we have been consulting with Albertans through an online survey, public open houses, and targeted engagement with industry stakeholders. This bill represents the culmination of this effort.

Before we begin, I would like to briefly highlight some of the issues for the committee. I want to start by speaking about the proposed amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act. We know that veterinarians are trusted professionals that Albertans look to to provide quality care for their pets. At the same time, over the past several months we heard from ordinary Albertans who told us that they want to be better informed when looking for veterinary services for their pets. We also met with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and other veterinary industry stakeholders, including clinics, and we heard feedback and concerns.

The new measures that we are proposing would require disclosure of all fees before administering any veterinary services or treatments for household pets except those fees exempted in regulation and require customer approval prior to administering veterinary services unless exempted in regulation; for example, in the case of emergencies. Currently ABVMA's bylaws speak to informed consent but do not explicitly state that this includes the disclosure of fees in that process.

We are also proposing to enable advertising of fees, something that veterinarians in Alberta are prevented from doing currently. This would give Albertans similar transparency measures as are available in Ontario and British Columbia. We look forward to working with the veterinary community in the development of regulations for Bill 31 if it is passed.

Now, Madam Chair, I would turn to the wider provisions of Bill 31. We are proposing to rename the Fair Trading Act to the consumer protection act and add a plain language preamble.

As well, we are mandating the creation of a consumer bill of rights to better inform Albertans of the protections under this legislation.

Section 6.1 will prohibit unilateral changes to ongoing contracts without the consent of the consumer.

We'll also address the use of mandatory arbitration clauses and agreements. Section 16 of the act will prohibit suppliers from enforcing or attempting to enforce these clauses or agreements and make clear that they're of no legal effect in Alberta. Ontario and Quebec already have prohibited such clauses.

Online reviews of businesses are more prevalent than ever. Our bill will add two new sections to the act to make clear that businesses cannot stop consumers from writing and posting reviews. Consumers who file complaints in good faith or issue a negative review would be afforded a new right of defence against lawsuits, and businesses would no longer be able to prevent consumers from posting online reviews or intimidate consumers into withdrawing any negative reviews or complaints.

Our bill will also prohibit the use of bots and prohibit anyone from knowingly selling or facilitating a sale of bot-purchased tickets. Given the unfairness of bots generally, the bill will also require primary sellers to carry out reasonable diligence to identify and cancel any bot-purchased tickets. The bill will also give a ticket purchaser or business a right of action in court when they have suffered a loss due to bots. The bill will require resellers, also referred to as secondary sellers, to provide a full refund in certain circumstances such as where the event is cancelled, the ticket is invalid or unusable, or the ticket was purchased by a bot.

Aside from a house, a car is likely the biggest purchase that most Albertans will make, and that's why we are proposing changes that will increase transparency and Albertans' confidence when buying or repairing a car. Our bill will require automotive businesses to disclose key vehicle information to consumers, use a standard bill of sale, provide a warranty for repairs, provide a written estimate of work on request for repairs, and not carry out repair work unless the consumer has provided authorization.

Madam Chair, I'd also like to briefly speak to the proposed changes to AMVIC. Our bill will further advance the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council's mandate and make it more responsive to the public interest, as envisioned in the Cuff report. If passed, the act will give greater public oversight of how AMVIC operates by transitioning it to a public agency. That means the government will have greater oversight of AMVIC's board, governance, and its bylaws. It also means that the AMVIC board will be subject to the same rules of transparency and accountability as the rest of Alberta's ABCs.

9:10

Currently the AMVIC board is a 13-member board of directors that includes seven industry appointees and up to six public-at-large representatives appointed by the minister. The intention of the proposed changes will shift the composition of the board to six industry appointees and six public-at-large representatives, with the minister appointing the board chair. The public members and the chair would be appointed through the existing open and transparent appointment process for all of Alberta's ABCs. As a result, I want to assure everyone that the auto industry will still maintain its voice on AMVIC while making AMVIC more responsive to consumer concerns.

Further, under the proposed changes the compensation fund will still exist, but these new provisions will allow the minister to work with the AMVIC board to address the existing issues related to appeals from claim decisions and notices.

I certainly want to recognize and do appreciate AMVIC's efforts to address the recommendations stemming from the 2016 independent review of their governance and operations by George Cuff. I also want to be clear that AMVIC will continue to play an important role in the auto sector, to the benefit of both consumers and businesses. I am committed to working closely with AMVIC

and its board to successfully implement the spirit of the remaining Cuff report recommendations, and the proposed changes will lay this foundation.

Payday loans are not the only form of high-cost borrowing, Madam Chair. Rent-to-own arrangements and vehicle title loans and other high-interest loans can raise many of the same issues as payday loans. This bill will regulate all lending that happens at a rate of 32 per cent or higher per year and will require that these businesses be licensed. In addition, these businesses will be required to disclose information about the credit being provided and have sufficient signage to warn consumers about the risks of relying on high-cost credit.

In summary, Madam Chair, this bill addresses a broad array of consumer issues and contains smart consumer protection proposals. This bill also aims to better protect the majority of honest businesses in Alberta by levelling the playing field.

I look forward to the debate on the bill, answering questions, and providing further explanations so that all members of this House have adequate information to support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is disappointing to hear the minister saying that she had consulted with veterinarians and AMVIC, the industry, but I will say that in the spirit of working with the minister, I'd like to move an amendment that I believe and my caucus believes fills a gap that is left within this bill.

The gap specifically is the fact that a person can own the software for doing these bot sales, but they are not allowed to use it. That seems strange. Why would we allow them to own something that clearly is not good for Alberta? A good example would be that you're not allowed to create commercial pills, yet we allowed commercial pill presses to be owned by Albertans. What my amendment is planning on doing is to make it so that people can't own the bot software as well.

The Deputy Chair: This amendment will be referred to as amendment A1.

If you could please go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I was explaining before, this is filling a gap. I would encourage every member of the House to vote for this. I think that it's a reasonable amendment, and it shows that opposition and government can work together to strengthen legislation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the member opposite for bringing this forward. This is clearly an amendment that I think is very well intended and brought forward with the intent to strengthen the legislation, so I certainly appreciate the member's intention on this and also the research that, I'm sure, he engaged in in order to bring this forward. That being said, it was really important to me and to our government from a policy perspective that all of the items that are found in this legislation are items that are enforceable. Enforcement certainly requires detection, which is why we have focused the bill in the way that we have.

Certainly, the policy proposals respecting ticket sales in this bill are intended to address secondary sellers that purchase a large

quantity of tickets to engage in the business of secondary sales, so we've referenced the use of bots to address this activity. Individuals who use bots with the intent to engage in secondary selling may procure bots, but they also often build them for the purpose of circumventing security measures, so it's not always through purchase. However, an individual can purchase a bot in order to acquire tickets.

Part of our concern here, Madam Chair, is that an individual can also purchase a bot in order to acquire a ticket for personal use. Given that this provision is not something that we've had the opportunity to consult on – the prevalence of bots being used to acquire tickets for personal use is not something that there is information available to the House on at this point – the extent to which this occurs, acquiring a ticket for secondary sales versus acquiring for personal use, is unclear to this House. Certainly, while this amendment would catch individuals who use bots to acquire tickets for secondary sale use, it would also catch them using it for personal use, which goes beyond the policy intent of these sections.

Additionally, Madam Chair, as I alluded to when I began, enforcement is difficult without detection, and there are no mechanisms in place to detect the procurement of bots. Through our consultations with the companies who are ultimately responsible for the due diligence portions that this would apply to, they have the ability to detect when bots are used. Primary ticket sellers have the technology and have invested quite a bit of capital to ensure that they can detect the use of bots to purchase tickets, which allows us from our side to be able to engage in enforcement. However, our consultations have shown that there are no mechanisms in place that exist to detect the procurement of bots, so while I agree with intention of the amendment, it is equally important to me that all of the sections in the legislation are something that I can practically effect, that are tangible, and that we have an avenue to be able to meaningfully address.

While I would love for this to be a reality, it unfortunately is not given the state of technology at this time, so for that reason I'm going to have to vote against this amendment. Certainly, Madam Chair, I do not want to suggest to Albertans that we can do something that we cannot actually effect or do and have a portion of the legislation that is not something that we can effect and that would suggest to the public that we could do more than could be done on this issue given the issues around detection. So I would encourage members to, unfortunately, vote against this amendment due to practicalities of the situation. But I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Before I move on to the next speaker, we have a request for unanimous consent to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill to do introductions.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Katie Soles is a highly regarded consultation and engagement professional known for her process design and facilitating contentious and complex issues, and she's helped unlock the best thinking groups across Canada and United States. Nominated and shortlisted for several awards, she is often called upon to design and deliver events and consultations whose outcomes demand significant shifts in behaviours and philosophies. She might be useful here. She's known for her skill with a wide range of stakeholders, from kids to councillors,

bohemians to businesspeople, artists to athletes, those seeking empowerment and the powerful. And she also has a fierce fashion sense. Katie, if you could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: Welcome.

9:20

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A1? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm disappointed to hear that we're not going to be moving this forward. Largely, I will say that, unfortunately, when it comes to this part of the bill, a lot of it is unenforceable, so one of the few things that we can put forward is that it is at least something we can do in Alberta, saying that it's not okay for owning this software. I'm very disappointed to hear that the minister is not accepting this.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the main bill. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I would like to put to the House, please. I will wait until members have had a chance to have the amendment distributed to them before speaking to it, but it should probably come as no surprise to anyone that my amendment deals specifically with the veterinary portions of this bill and deals with something that – certainly, I as a member of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association have received literally hundreds of e-mails over the last two weeks on this topic. I know, speaking to my colleagues on both sides of the House, I believe just about every member if not every member of the House has received some form of communication from a member of our association. Thus far, at least, in those communications I have yet to hear from a single veterinary colleague who is in favour of the changes that are contained within Bill 31. Not a single one.

Bill 31 creates a significant problem for us, so, Madam Chair, what I'm moving today is that Bill 31 be amended such that section 2 be struck from the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A2. Please go ahead.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much. You know, it's difficult to know where to start with this, Madam Chair, because this bill and the changes within it will result in changes to our profession that are so profound that I'm not even sure that everybody really understands just how significant they will be. You know, when you're not necessarily a part of a profession, when you're not necessarily involved with it, I think it's probably hard to really grasp what the effects might be and what the consequences might be. When I read some of the letters from my colleagues, both registered veterinary technicians and veterinarians, and I see the passion that they describe for their careers, for the work that they do, for their clients,

for their patients, I'm reminded of what it is about veterinary medicine that I first found special when I decided to become a veterinarian 45 years ago. It's something that I feel very, very strongly about, clearly.

I'm desperately proud of my profession. I think I communicate that, as I've also communicated that I, actually, have been retired. I saw my last patient in my hospital on December 31, 2011. Since that time I've only put my stethoscope back on once, and that was in May 2016, when I spent several hours volunteering to examine pets that had been evacuated from Fort McMurray from the wildfires. I was proud to be part of a veterinary team that donated hundreds and hundreds of hours to that effort. My contribution by comparison was small. I worked with a team of veterinary technologists from the Fish Creek clinic that had been there around the clock for three days. They had arrived there on the weekend, and they'd spent the entire weekend and Monday and Tuesday, and they were taking turns going back to their hotel room to rest. So I was very proud of my profession.

With specific regard, Madam Chair, to the bill and why I believe that the entire section on the Veterinary Profession Act should be deleted, I believe this because in order for this to be workable for the veterinary profession and for the animal-owning public in Alberta, there has to be a strong and productive working relationship between this government and the profession. I will say that Bill 31 and the way that it has been handled by the minister has destroyed that relationship irrevocably. It is damaged to the extent that, if this is proceeded with, our profession will suffer damage to an extent that I don't think anyone can even really imagine.

But, you know, last Tuesday the minister – on December 5, on page 2265 of *Hansard*, I quote the minister:

Our legislation is supported by a small-business owner, for example, the owner of Sandy Lane auto. It's supported by the Alberta Motor Association, which is very trusted in Alberta. They've said, "We believe all Albertans should have confidence in the service they're receiving." You know, they've got a long history of standards that make them experts, really, on the voice of this. I would encourage the members opposite to listen to the experts.

That's what the minister said last Tuesday, to listen to the experts. Well, I'm going to say exactly the same thing. I would encourage the members opposite to listen to the experts as well. Now, if you're stating that veterinarians aren't experts in this field, I would invite you to stand up and say that. But I would suggest to you, and in fact the minister has said in her letter, that veterinarians are trusted professionals. Sounds like they're experts. Veterinarians are trusted professionals. I would think that the over 300 emails that I have received – and I don't know how many have gone to the minister's office – would indicate that a large number of veterinarians and registered veterinary technologists indicate that Bill 31 is problematic.

But don't just listen to veterinarians. Why don't we listen to a lawyer? Mr. James Casey is a lawyer, a specialist in labour relations law. He is a Queen's Counsel. He graduated from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Law. He is a partner at Field Law. Actually, I got most of this information, interestingly, from the Labour department website, where Mr. Casey is listed on the website as being an expert on labour relations. I'll just give you some of his credentials because it's, like, a page long.

Jim is a sought-after speaker and author on labour and employment law topics and taught labour law at the University of Alberta as a sessional lecturer. Jim is the author of many labour and employment publications and is the editor of *Remedies in Labour Employment, and Human Rights* which has been cited by the Supreme Court of Canada. Jim also acts as legal counsel to many professional regulatory organizations. He founded the

Firm's Professional Regulatory Group and is the author of one of the leading texts in the area, *The Regulation of Professions in Canada*, which has been cited by the Supreme Court of Canada and many other Courts.

I read that, Madam Chair, to establish that Mr. Casey is indeed an expert. Mr. Casey has been retained by the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association to take a look at Bill 31. He has provided them with a preliminary opinion. In this opinion, amongst other things, it says, and I quote:

Part 5.1 of Bill 31 over-rides the AVMA's advertising rules that were democratically adopted by its members and creates a specialized regime for disclosure/consent that applies in certain circumstances. This was all done with very minimal discussion with the AVMA and without any reasonable advance notice that legislation was under active consideration. There was no crisis that needed to be addressed. Considering all the circumstances, I conclude that Bill 31 dramatically undermines self-governance for the profession of veterinary medicine and should be a matter of grave concern, not only to the AVMA but to all self-governing professions in Alberta.

That is from the Canadian legal expert on self-regulating professions. That's his opinion. It's not my opinion. It's not a veterinarian's opinion. It's from a lawyer who's an expert on self-regulating professions, and he's right here in Edmonton.

9:30

You know, it is stunning to me how this can proceed, and it seems that it's also quite surprising to Mr. Casey. I'd like to quote further from his brief.

In her letter of November 2, 2017 the ... Minister for Service Alberta and Status of Women made an express commitment to the ABVMA that should the Government of Alberta determine this is an area of focus, then "... further consultation and engagement with industry stakeholders would be necessary to develop the details of any potential legislative or regulatory amendments."

The letter was copied to the Minister of Labour.

What consultation and engagement with industry stakeholders took place about potential legislative and regulatory amendments? There was no "heads-up" during meetings with officials that legislation was under active consideration. Instead, the matter was presumably kept secret so that the ABVMA could not rally opposition until it was too late.

Based on how matters unfolded, I conclude that the ABVMA is entirely justified in feeling that it was "blindsided" by the legislation. In my 30 years of experience with self-governing professions and legislation, I have found that the best public policy is developed through robust dialogue between government and professional regulatory body about the details about potential legislative initiatives. The approach by the government with respect to engagement with the ABVMA on Bill 31 falls far, far short of what we have come to expect in Alberta.

Madam Chair, that is why veterinarians are concerned, and their concerns have been confirmed by, as I said, a gentleman who is an expert.

But let's look at another reason why veterinarians do not trust the minister. On that same day on page 2265 the minister said:

Then the next piece is with respect to giving permission to veterinarians to advertise or post their fees. Now, this is a simple matter of transparency. I think that the value of transparency is something that we can all get behind.

Well, I would agree.

Now, in my two hands I'm holding two documents. One is a document that was presented at a meeting with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, the only one that was held, on October 26, and at that meeting some results of the survey were

shared. In my other hand I hold a copy of a document that, while it looks similar, is in fact different because this is what was shared publicly with a member of our association and forwarded on to me.

Now, what's different? Let me read you a paragraph.

Veterinary billing. From the consumer protection survey results, out of the 15 issues that were consulted on, the issue of veterinary billing ranked number 13 in importance. The top four issues of concern for Albertans were the consumer bill of rights, automotive sector issues, ticket sales, and truth in pricing.

That paragraph that I just read was not in the document that was discussed with the veterinarians. How can you call that transparency when you use two different versions of a document, one that's been edited for presentation to the veterinarians that very clearly shows that the issues that are perceived to be so burning in the minds of so many Albertans are in fact way, way, way down the list?

You know, the other thing that's missing from the document that we shared with the veterinarians is this. Interesting how it was edited out, too.

Some respondents who commented on this issue expressed that the government's priorities should be elsewhere. Surely, the government has a higher priority than vet service fees. How about addressing the much higher costs of centralizing all AHS lab testing into a government-run laboratory?

That was deleted. That was conveniently left off the version that was submitted and discussed with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. How on earth are you supposed to build a relationship of trust that ensures that the best interests of both the public and the profession are being garnered when you're not being told all the information, when information is being deliberately withheld?

Madam Chair, that is why I am moving to strike all sections relating to the Veterinary Profession Act, and I'm going to encourage this government to go back to the drawing board. We'd like to go back to the drawing board with the Minister of Labour, who's actually responsible for the veterinary profession, not the Minister of Service Alberta.

From the relationship we had with her – and I talked about this yesterday – this was the consultation leading up to Bill 13, this stack of documents, with no fewer than 12 separate communications back and forth between the minister and the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, including the exchange of four copies of the draft bill. And this, by contrast, is the sum total of the consultations and the documentation on Bill 31. It's not even comparable, Madam Chair, and Bill 31 is far more profound in terms of how the association operates, how the profession will conduct its responsibilities, and how it will discharge them to the people of Alberta.

Bill 13 was certainly important, but really what it did was that it formalized what was already in place, a close working relationship between the registered veterinary technologists and the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, and we're glad to have it. It was a great piece of legislation, and there was a great deal of trust built up between the association and this minister. We'd like to go back to this minister. If there are problems, perceived or real, with the way veterinarians are handling things, we are interested in self-improvement. We want to work with this government in making things better, but we don't believe that a self-regulating profession should have dictated to it how to do it by government, by cabinet, by a group of individuals who, while well meaning, do not know or understand the veterinary profession. They simply do not.

Madam Chair, I'm moving this amendment because I do want to improve my profession. I absolutely do. This bill will not do that. This bill will cause more problems than the perceived ones that are there, and it won't solve the perceived ones that are there. Billing, making things more affordable: Ontario advertises fees. I just went

on the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association website, and their published total for an annual veterinary cost for a dog in Ontario, where they advertise fees, is \$406. I went onto our association and checked our fee guide. If you total the same procedures, in our fee guide the total is \$359.80, roughly \$50 less than Ontario. But they can advertise, and we don't. Not that we can't. We don't because we've chosen not to – we've chosen not to – and as a self-regulating profession we should be able to retain that right because of the damage that it creates to the profession when advertising is allowed. I've stated that at every stage of debate, and I continue to stand by it.

The Ontario and B.C. associations and several jurisdictions in the United States that allow the advertising of veterinary fees have seen the deterioration of care, and they have seen the deterioration of the collaborative work that needs to be done between veterinarians and veterinary practices. It will damage the veterinary profession in Alberta. I would say, without, I think, too much fear of contradiction, that veterinarians are trusted professionals. If we weren't trusted, why would we have a 93 per cent trust rating in Alberta according to a 2016 survey? I won't even give the number for politicians, pollsters, or lawyers, but I will tell you that the number for veterinarians is always within the top five. We are a trusted profession, and if there is 7 per cent of the population that doesn't trust us, we'll work on that, and we're happy to work on that.

All I'm saying to my colleagues on both sides of the House: do not vote in favour of this bill. Vote to remove these clauses from this bill because, I can tell you as I stand here, they will damage the veterinary profession. They absolutely will damage the profession, and they will not result in a solution to the perceived problems that are talked about in this survey. They will not. I can absolutely tell you that with absolute certainty.

9:40

You know, the minister is well intentioned. I really think she wants to make things better for Albertans and for pet owners, but the way to do that is to work with the association, not against it. The way to do that is to consult and collaborate and bounce ideas back and forth, not blindsides them with a bill with zero effective consultation. That's not how you make things better for Albertans.

Madam Chair, these sections are deeply offensive to veterinarians, but what is even more offensive is the way that veterinarians have been dealt with throughout the course of this debate. Many of my colleagues have received a form letter from the minister, or a form letter written by the minister's department that was then signed by a number of the members across that in most cases didn't even address what they had talked about in their letter. Veterinarians, justifiably, I think, feel just a little bit slighted by this government, but it's not beyond hope. It's not beyond hope.

Get rid of these amendments. Vote in favour of my amendment to remove the sections of the Veterinary Profession Act from this bill, and in my view you have a chance – a chance – to win back the trust of the veterinary profession in Alberta. But if these go through, that trust has been shattered, and I can tell you, from having treated some patients and having them be tearfully presented to me in my veterinary clinic, sometimes when things are shattered, you just can't put the pieces back together again. It's sad – it's really sad – when that happens, but that's what we're dealing with here.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the member for his passion and dedication to his industry, that he is certainly vested in and cares deeply about. We know that veterinarians are trusted professionals and that Albertans look to them to provide quality care for their pets. We met with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and other veterinary industry stakeholders: the Alberta Veterinary Technologist Association and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. We met with them in person and had telephone conferences with them and department officials from both Labour and Service Alberta on October 27, November 10, November 28. Then we met with various vet clinic owners on September 22, November 23, and November 26.

Madam Chair, certainly, we had in-depth conversations with them. We heard their concerns, but I think that there are some important things to point out here. First of all, as I've mentioned in my speaking notes, the provisions of this legislation are not dissimilar to what we find in other jurisdictions in Canada where self-regulating professions of all kinds are alive and well. This is also not dissimilar to other professions. For example, in Canada lawyers are permitted to advertise and are required to disclose their fees.

Additionally, Madam Chair, when we look to medical professionals in private, non publicly funded situations, we can look, certainly, very easily to our neighbours to the south for what that looks like in terms of advertising. The doctors in the United States, that are providing all kinds of care, including surgical services to humans, are advertising their fees and are permitted to do so, and I don't think anyone in this House would suggest that those doctors are not also trusted professionals as people are putting their very lives in the care of those medical professionals.

Certainly, these changes are very much in line with other professions, similar other professions in similar circumstances, and in line with other Canadian jurisdictions, Madam Chair, where self-regulating professions of all kinds are alive and well. It is within the purview of governments across Canada to set the scope for the associations that are self-regulating. Again, this is not dissimilar to what has been done in B.C. and Ontario.

We certainly did consult. We met with them. We had telephone conferences. We met with them in terms of their availability as well. Over several months we heard from ordinary Albertans as well, who told us that they want to be informed when they're looking for veterinary services for their pets. Madam Chair, we heard from average Albertans. We heard that they want to be informed when they're making these decisions.

A woman here in Alberta, Davida Marantz, got an unwelcome surprise when she got out of the hospital in 2014 and went to pick up her beloved sheltie named Libby from friends. The dog, while in her friend's care, needed \$4,800 in dental surgery while the Edmonton senior was in hospital care, an amount she felt obligated to pay back to her friends. She said that they were so generous in taking care of her pet and doing a really fine job that there was no way she would leave them with the bill. When she checked around at other clinics, feeling that that \$4,800 was very high, she found that the quotes that she could get were for thousands of dollars less. She is certainly in favour of transparency because she feels that this will help Albertans to get a sense of what they're in for.

Another woman came forward and told us her story. She took her cat in because it had swallowed a sewing needle, Madam Chair, during her spring cleaning. The animal was taken in and given an X-ray, and she wasn't told the cost of that X-ray before it was done. They just took their pet to the veterinarian nearest to their home. They were then told that it would be an additional \$1,200 to \$1,500 to repair the pet. She said: I can't afford that to operate on the pet. I imagine that an operation was required. They said: If you give us

\$400, we'll do the surgery, and we'll take your cat. She said that they paid the money, and they never saw their cat again. She said to me, in speaking with her, that she didn't know what happened to the cat at the end of the day, and she said that it was an absolutely wretched experience. She remembers sitting in her car crying, thinking: I just paid someone to take my cat away. She's glad that the government is making sure that veterinarians will have to make it clear how much the care will cost. As mentioned, certainly, disclosure is required by the association, but that does not expressly include fees, so she applauds this, stating: there's going to be more information up front about costs, and I think that will be hugely beneficial.

9:50

Kath Oltsher is the cofounder of Zoe's Animal Rescue in Edmonton. She also likes the proposed guidelines. The animal rescue that she is involved with takes in unwanted animals and attempts to help those with low incomes pay for the cost of veterinary care. She says that she's had positive experiences with veterinarians who provide services to the shelter, and she doesn't want the profession to think that the changes are meant to be adversarial. Neither do we, Madam Chair. She says: it does come like we're coming after you, but I don't know how else to make a change happen. I think that is important. We've heard impassioned pleas from Albertans who want to be informed, who want to know what the cost is going to be. Many of these are vulnerable Albertans with low incomes who rely on their pets for companionship. At the end of the day, Madam Chair, these individuals don't know who to turn to, don't know who to talk to. Like with any medical professional they deal with, they don't have the knowledge and expertise to know what is required to heal their pet, so they are left with very little information, reliant on one individual without being able to compare effectively.

Now, I appreciate the member, you know, bringing forward what the posted costs are in Ontario. He graciously informed us of what the costs are in the fee guide that is provided to veterinarians in Alberta, but that fee guide is not publicly accessible. It's a guide for veterinarians by veterinarians. It's not assistive to the public. That's what we're doing here, being assistive to the public.

Madam Chair, with that, this proposed legislation will help Albertans, will help pet owners find high-quality care for their pet. I've heard the member opposite speak passionately about how veterinarians provide quality care, take their ethical standards to the highest of their concerns and provide high-quality care. I have no doubt and I have every confidence that even with the ability to post their prices, they won't bring their ethics into disrepute. They will keep their own ethics at a high standard, as we expect them to and as their regulator expects them to do, regardless of whether or not they are now enabled to post fees despite the fact that they're not required to do so.

With that, Madam Chair, these changes are not out of the ordinary for the country. They are not out of the ordinary with respect to other professions, and they are something that Albertans have expressed they are very, very pleased for change in in terms of their interactions with veterinarians. While I appreciate that this may be a difficult adjustment, certainly this is something that will help many Albertans. So many Albertans are pet owners. There are over a million pet owners in this province. I cannot support the member's amendment, though I do thank him for continuing to be an advocate for the profession of which he is a member.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I will now call on the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for bringing forward this very sensible amendment. Bill 31 has been brought forward quite quickly, without enough consultation with the veterinary profession.

Registered veterinarians and veterinary technicians of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association take the privilege and the responsibility of self-regulation very seriously. Their current bylaws consider it unprofessional conduct to not obtain informed consent from a pet owner prior to performing any procedures. Part of this consent also includes divulging the expected cost of the procedure to the client. This can be seen as providing the public with more information and clarity when choosing their provider of veterinarian services.

We have observed similar changes put into effect in British Columbia and Ontario. Not only does allowing advertising of price not clarify the situation for clients, it can actually make it more complicated. In many cases a price is advertised for a service, but at the time of invoicing hidden charges are added on. In both Ontario and British Columbia complaints to the veterinary regulatory bodies increased substantially after rules similar to Bill 31 were introduced.

The best patient care is not achieved by price shopping, especially when, as mentioned, the prices often do not match what the final invoice totals, but by long-term patient/client-veterinarian relationships. As seen in other provinces, the advertising of prices will only tempt clients to seek seemingly less costly solutions, which very often are not, at the expense of their pet's health. Let's allow stakeholder input, especially from the hard-working, dedicated veterinarians of Alberta.

Section 2(2) replicates an existing bylaw already enforced by the ABVMA that upholds a universal requirement for health care providers to obtain informed consent, a vital part of which is fee disclosure, before proceeding with any procedures or treatments. The proposed amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act constitute an overreach and an intrusion into the veterinary profession's ability to self-regulate and were made without enough consultation with the ABVMA. To amend the VPA without consultation amounts to overreach. Just because other jurisdictions are doing it, it doesn't necessarily follow that it's right for Alberta. There appears to be a disconnect between Service Alberta and the ABVMA.

This amendment makes sense as Bill 31 is addressing a problem that doesn't seem to exist. I urge all members of the Assembly to support this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to say that the opposition came up with a similar amendment, and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has brought forward a sensible amendment. This is a sensible amendment.

Now, I don't want to go over the points that he's brought up because I've already brought up a lot of those, but they're fine points. What I would like to do is touch on the one letter that was sent to veterinarians that the hon. member had brought forward. We had tabled this letter before, so it's been tabled in the House. It's just a short part here. This is from the Minister of Service Alberta to veterinarians that are writing her office.

We know veterinarians are trusted professionals, and Albertans look to them to provide quality care for their pets. During consultations on wider consumer protection proposals, we met

with the ABVMA and other veterinary industry stakeholders and we heard their feedback and concerns. However, we also heard from ordinary Albertans who told us they want to be better informed when looking for veterinary services for their pets.

I can't believe we're sending that letter to our veterinarians. I can't believe, seeing that veterinarians are writing the minister saying, "We haven't been consulted," that you're actually correcting them with a letter saying that they have been consulted. That's truly unbelievable. I think that is very disingenuous of the government in this case in point, which is why this amendment is so important. Actually, to be honest with you, the fact that we had requested this whole piece of legislation go to committee was another thing that was disappointing to see this government didn't move forward on.

I would like to quote from an article that Emma Graney had written, Alberta Bans Ticket Bots under Sweeping Consumer Protection Bill. This was done on November 29, 2017. Now, you're going to find that, I would say, 96 per cent of this article is about other things that are in this bill, and a little tacked on at the very end says, "veterinary services." It's literally two sentences.

Any veterinarian procedures will require approval from pet owners. Vets will also have to disclose all fees for treatment (unless it's an emergency procedure), but they'll also be able to advertise their fees.

It doesn't say that they're pretty much destroying a self-regulating body there.

10:00

I think is something that needs to be put out in the public because right now it is making our veterinarians look like criminals, when we can consistently see in the last three years that for over 3,000 of the veterinarians that are reported within the province, we had no more than 30 to 35 complaints within the year: "Holy cow. This seems to be an epidemic. These guys are rampantly going out there. They're going out there to harm consumers." Well, that's clearly not the case.

This is disappointing that we are moving down this route. I fully support my colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster with the amendment to say: let's strike this. If the government chooses to come back and consult and bring forward legislation after they've consulted with the industry and not send them a letter that says, "We consulted with you," then at least they can have some feeling that they've been able to be heard, that their voices have been heard.

Madam Chair, I think that this is a very reasonable amendment. I think that we all need to take it seriously. I believe we all have veterinarians that are either within our constituencies or near our constituencies. We all have deep respect for them.

I can tell you that I had a long conversation with one of my local veterinarians, a wonderful woman. She was very concerned. I told her: I will ensure your voice is heard. And you know what? I believe that through this amendment we can make that happen.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to say a few things about some of the comments that the minister made. I'd like to also thank very much the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill and the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for their supportive comments with regard to this amendment.

Madam Chair, it seems that we almost seem to be doing this in this discussion. In every speech that I have given thus far on this issue, I have pointed out that British Columbia and Ontario have

gone down this road, and it has caused a great deal of harm to their profession, to the people who own animals in their jurisdictions, thereby also to the animals. The reason I say that is because we have veterinarians in Alberta that have practised in those jurisdictions. We have people that have practised in B.C., we have people that have practised in Ontario, and they've experienced it themselves. They know, and they don't want that to be visited upon us in here in Alberta.

The other thing we have in the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association is veterinarians who have served on the council and served as president of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, and as such they have interaction with their provincial colleagues from all the provinces in Canada. The thing that those members have told me again and again is that the folks from B.C. and the folks from Ontario do not feel that the advertising of fees has any benefit whatsoever. Now, I'm not sure if the minister consulted with the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association or the British Columbia veterinary medical association to find out, you know, what the history of those were. I'd be very interested in hearing if she did.

By way of interest, because the Member for Edmonton-South West, when I asked him these questions last night, was unable to give me an answer, but perhaps the minister can, I'd be very curious to know when you met with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine and who was there and what was discussed. I'd love to know when you met with the Alberta Veterinary Technologist Association because I have a letter here from the president of that association, who writes:

I have been [a registered veterinary technologist] for 20 years and have seen a lot of changes in that time. All of the practices that I've worked at have had clients sign consent forms (which include estimates) before carrying out procedures.

Why would you not meet with the president of the association if you're going to have a meeting with the association? Did you meet with some other envoys or liaison people from the association? I'd be very interested to hear the details of that meeting.

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

If it was a separate meeting from the meeting with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, I guess I'm a little curious as to why that happened because, of course, since May of 2016 veterinary technologists have been incorporated into our association. We are equals, and it's been good for our association. I think it's been good for animal health care. I, for one, am absolutely gratified by the support that our profession has received from our colleagues who are registered veterinary technologists. They are professionals. They work extremely hard.

Perhaps one of the sad things is that, contrary maybe to what some people believe about the veterinary profession, the veterinary profession has, in fact, on average, the lowest salary of any profession in the health care field, less than doctors – way less than doctors – less than dentists, less than optometrists. Way less. The reason for that is that there are economic realities that we deal with. We know what the minister is talking about with regard to the capacity for people to pay. We deal with that, Mr. Chair, every day in our day-to-day practice. We know all about that, and we can provide advice to this government with regard to how you can go about, you know, regulating things and making things better for all Albertans.

Now, the cases that the minister cites are absolutely, you know, very unfortunate circumstances. I guess the question that I would have is that we have a disciplinary process. We have a complaints process. Were either of those cases brought to the ABVMA for adjudication by the association? We have a process in place. It is a

very robust process. It is one that we treat with a great deal of respect, and we take it very seriously. As I said before, I've sat on the hearing tribunals before. While I haven't had very much to do on those, when a case does come up, we make sure that we're taking care of the public interest. We take that responsibility seriously.

Even in the discussion and the way that this bill has been presented, our profession has already been damaged. This bill has already caused damage in our profession. I'm quoting from a registered veterinary technologist who wrote me and said:

Bill 31 is asking us to do something that we, already, require of ourselves and is giving the public the impression that we need to be told to do this.

That's with regard to informed consent.

I have seen people's shocked comments to articles on Bill 31 about how sneaky vets must be to do things without consent. This is untrue, and extremely hurtful.

I really don't know why it is that the minister feels that she needs to suggest that our profession is doing something that's unprofessional. That's very disturbing to me, and it's disturbing to my colleagues. To suggest that we don't currently require consent is wrong. It is simply wrong.

With regard to fee disclosure I can tell you that fees are disclosed. They need to be disclosed to the clients before the procedure is started because if it's done afterwards, I can tell you that you have a lot harder time collecting that fee. Veterinarians always disclose the fees ahead of time, especially if it's a larger, more major procedure. But with regard to fee disclosure in every practice that I know, if there's a phone call from a client who wants to know the fees, we're happy to provide it.

Mr. Chair, I'd also like to hear from the minister an explanation as to why two different sets of documents were presented, one to the general public and one to the Veterinary Medical Association. I would very much like to hear her comments on how that engenders trust with the profession when an altered document is presented to the profession at a meeting with them, yet a different document with some very critical additional sentences is presented to the general public. I'd really love to hear an answer to that.

10:10

You know, Mr. Chair, perhaps some of the most compelling arguments on this have come from my colleagues; for example, from a doctor who is a former president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and also a past director of the animal health division of Alberta agriculture. He said:

I... was responsible for the government's role in administering the Veterinary Profession Act and its predecessors. I was involved in the rewriting and revising of several Acts and regulations including the Veterinary Profession Act.

I do not understand why you...

I'm talking to the minister.

... wish to undermine the responsibility of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association in the governance of Veterinary Medicine in Alberta. You may be setting precedent for making arbitrary changes to the acts relating to other professions in Alberta.

We heard that in the legal opinion of Mr. Casey.

Another e-mail, this from a past president of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and the Alberta representative to the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. In this case he's writing to one of my colleagues, an MLA on the government side:

With all due respect, it appears to me very clear that your own party has been actively misleading its MLA's. Certainly if you were briefed that there was consultation and negotiation and compromise in development of the amendments to the veterinary

profession act that are contemplated to be pushed through with Bill 31, you and your colleagues were indeed misled.

If that's what you've been told, you've been misled.

I have been watching debate in the legislature on this point, and I must say that the minister who is pushing for these changes (not the minister responsible for the veterinary professions act, a fact which I find very curious) tends to obfuscate the issues rather than clarify them, in my opinion.

He goes on to say:

It appears to me that someone in the halls of power is doing what they can to make changes to the [VPA] by manufacturing a problem that is not real, and not realizing that the effect of these changes will almost certainly reduce the caliber of veterinary services to the public of Alberta. The minister speaking for the proposed changes suggested that she had heard from "regular Albertans" on this issue. If she is referring to the service Alberta questionnaire that was used, I encourage you to have a look at it. With your background and awareness of the factors required to have a meaningful questionnaire you will see right away that the survey was very poorly done, with questions that were so leading that the use of the results would border on shameful, unless they are relied on only in total ignorance.

And then this one might have some interest to you from a political standpoint. This is from the same writer.

When the NDP was voted in I had anticipated some changes to the positive. Now I see brute use of power even in the absence of need is not something that was limited to the previous government – despite what we were told when the NDP was seeking a mandate to govern. As a member of the public of Alberta (I.e. also a "regular Albertan") I am so disappointed to see the government of Alberta so keen to ignore and sideline a professional group that has acted in the best interest of Albertans for decades. I know for a fact that the ABVMA is always eager to participate with government – we have not had so many unanswered requests for a chance to collaborate with government as during the period leading up to tabling Bill 31 ... I fear that your government is not being forthcoming with what they are doing, and this to a degree that they are misleading their own MLA's. For that I am deeply disappointed and for me this whole affair has me very likely changing my allegiance from the NDP to some group that deserves a chance to govern in a more transparent and collaborative way.

From a veterinarian in central Alberta: "Should this bill pass, the ABVMA will continue to be ignored, with decisions on standards and delivery of veterinary care being made by people outside of the profession, which will demolish the respect given to veterinarians as medical professionals."

I guess, on that note, Mr. Chair, I turn to my colleagues. You have a vote on this, and you have a chance right now to remove these clauses from the bill that are so harmful to the veterinary profession. I will state again that these clauses will not solve the perceived problems. The perceived problems will only be successfully solved if the government and the veterinary profession are working together. If they're not working together, I'm sorry; you just simply won't get a good solution to the perceived problems.

If there is a problem, then I would suggest that you turn to the Minister of Labour and have the Minister of Labour and her officials, who worked very closely with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association on Bill 13, address the problem. Then those problems have a much better chance and likelihood of being addressed effectively. But if you continue on this path, you will then be left with a shattered glass, one that cannot hold any sense of trust, and you won't be able to accomplish what you're trying to do. So not only will you do no good; you will do a tremendous amount of harm.

Now, none of you are veterinarians. This is perhaps the only bill in the five and a half years that I've been here, other than Bill 13, that is very directly involving my profession. With most of the other bills we discuss, we're not directly involved with what's going on, not necessarily, but with this one we are. With this one we are, and I'm telling you – and I'm trying to be as persuasive as I can – that veterinarians know what the risks are in this motion and in this bill. Veterinarians have tried to explain that in many, many different ways, and I've got a lot more quotes.

Ultimately, it lies in your hands what decision is made. I guess I'd just ask you: if you vote for this, if you vote to keep Bill 31 as it sits, with these changes to the Veterinary Profession Act, are you going to be okay with what happens to the veterinary profession afterwards? Are you okay with that? Are you okay if we see the same deterioration in the collaborative nature of our profession that has been seen in British Columbia and in Ontario? Are you okay with that? Are you okay with situations where it's harder to get an exchange of medical records? That has happened in B.C. and Ontario.

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

I would suggest that you don't want to see that. I would suggest that the best way to deal with the perceived problems that may exist is through a co-operative relationship, working with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, through the Ministry of Labour, to whom we are responsible, and that that is the true way to develop a better system of veterinary care for all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Dr. Starke: Three members rose for a division.

The Deputy Chair: Sorry. My apologies. A division has been called.

Some Hon. Members: Only two.

The Deputy Chair: There were only two? We'll have to move on.

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment for the House. I'm pleased to continue debate on Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. This bill will be creating strong new protections for Albertans who buy tickets, to ensure that they have a fair shot at seeing their favourite team or performers. To that end, I would like to propose a House amendment to Bill 31. This amendment respects the requirement in section 57.3(4) for primary ticket sellers to exercise reasonable diligence in determining if tickets have been purchased by bots and to cancel those tickets.

This amendment will introduce a regulation-making power to allow us to exempt certain primary sellers from the requirement in section 57.3(4). On further reflection we've determined that this may be necessary for smaller primary sellers like theatres and concert halls that sell tickets on their own website but that don't necessarily have the technology to determine if bots are buying their tickets nor the wherewithal to be able to procure that technology. Since these smaller ticket sellers may not be able to comply with

this requirement, this amendment will allow us to exempt them in regulation upon further consultation.

We'll do this by amending section 1(10) of the bill to add clause (b.1) to section 57.6, that reads:

(b.1) respecting the exemption of a primary seller or a class of primary sellers from the application of all or part of section 57.3(4).

The second part of this amendment will make section 57.3(4) an offence. It was always our intention to make this provision an offence, but it was inadvertently omitted from the bill in drafting. This amendment will simply remedy that omission by amending subsection (21) in the proposed section 161(e.1) by striking out "57.3(1) and (3)" and substituting "57.3(1), (3) and (4)."

Thank you.

10:20

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister. Your amendment will be referred to as A3.

Are there any members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Mr. Cyr: I'd just like to note that because we're rushing through this so fast, we're now having government amending government bills. If this had gone to a committee, like we had first requested, this would have been caught in the committee process. Very disappointing to see that we've got the government amending the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Yes. Madam Chair, I too see that there are some significant struggles when it comes to the fact that we are including AMVIC within this legislation. I'd like to move an amendment, and I will wait for the chair to receive it before I continue.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Your amendment will be referred to as A4. Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment is striking out subsections (15), (16), and (17).

I'd like to state for the record here that it's very disappointing to see that we have the minister moving AMVIC within the government's authority. The fact is that we had George Cuff do up a report in December 2016, a year ago, on how to address some of the concerns that consumers, the government, and the opposition even had with AMVIC. They came forward with 23 recommendations, and the minister accepted all 23 of the recommendations.

Now, what's going on here is that we need to recognize that the government moved an expensive piece of a review on to AMVIC, and then what they did was to more or less disregard the report that was done. Now we see them being rolled into government. This is very disappointing. I believe what we should have seen was that if Bill 31 had moved to committee, we might have been able to discuss how to best deal with the concerns the minister may have with AMVIC.

Now I'd like to read a few things from the Cuff report because I believe that this is important. I did table this report for the

Assembly, so please keep that in mind. In the Cuff report, page 218, 8.10:

While this comprehensive Review has focused largely on issues which were brought to our attention in the course of our study, we would be remiss if we did not point [out the] very important "bottom line": there is a need for AMVIC as a delegated regulatory organization functioning on behalf of consumers and industry alike. The fact that it has this two-fold audience means that it will always experience some degree of friction and perhaps strife. Very few people appreciate being regulated by someone else or something else. And yet, this regulation is needed so that [the] society is afforded protection from abuses by those who have difficulty living up to an acceptable standard.

The role of Government is that of oversight and protection of the well-being of . . . society. It does this in a multitude of ways: through laws, regulations, management oversight, checks and balances and through delegating some of that responsibility to others along with the clout/authority to operate and the responsibility to report and account for decisions made.

It is our view that AMVIC, with the enhancements noted, has the ability and capacity to fulfill its role.

This minister is choosing to ignore the very independent review that was put forward.

This is one thing that we continue to hear in this House. Let's talk about the boundaries commission. We say: well, it was an independent commission that did it; therefore, we need to give this an important focus, and then we need to accept it out of hand. Yet when we do this review – we've spent lots of Alberta's taxpayers' money on this review – the government doesn't like what they see, so they wait a year and do what they want anyway. It's very disappointing.

I think that the government should consider accepting this amendment. Then what happens, if the government chooses to continue down this road, is: put it forward to committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I certainly thank the member for his work, as always. However, I certainly will not be supporting this amendment.

Madam Chair, the prior critic for the Service Alberta portfolio certainly had some comments when the last changes were made to the Fair Trading Act in 2016, that permitted us to be able to get the investigation done by Mr. Cuff. He stated – and this was in *Hansard* – at that time:

While Wildrose is committed to the principles of the free market, we know that the key to successful industry is consumer confidence and trust.

And I would agree with the prior critic there.

Consumers deserve to know that they are protected by a properly functioning regulatory body, and we believe the proposed legislation does just that. Albertans understand that the former government used this government's agencies, boards, and commissions to reward their friends and donors. It was wrong then, and it's still wrong today.

I agree, certainly, with the member's comments at that time, when he was a member of the Wildrose Party. Perhaps things have changed since they have amalgamated with the Conservatives, who, as the member stated at that time, used the agencies, boards, and commissions to reward their friends and donors.

That being said, I will continue with what he had to say.

Wildrose will continue to watch these organizations closely to ensure that such practices do not continue under government's watch.

I also agree with those comments, and that's why I continue to watch the situation, read very thoroughly Mr. Cuff's report, met with Mr. Cuff in relation to the report, and discussed it with him at length.

The prior critic also said, on May 5, 2016:

Wildrose has long had concerns with the operation of AMVIC, and it's now our hope that following the passage of this bill, the minister will act quickly to conduct a review of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council.

We did that. We acted quickly.

We do hope this measure allows AMVIC to function more effectively for the consumers it was created to protect.

So I'm happy to stand with both members in government and my opposition colleagues in full support of this bill.

He then also went on to make further comments in response to the Cuff report once it was issued. He stated:

We are disappointed the recommendations released today does not take more decisive action for consumers or taxpayers . . .

Albertans paid for that fund through a levy on car sales. It is supposed to be there to protect consumers from illegal activity but it obviously isn't working . . .

When Albertans are getting defrauded by licensed businesses they should have access to the fund, but the rules are so restrictive that AMVIC is stockpiling cash rather than compensating consumers.

Again, I agree with the former critic for Service Alberta on all of those comments, but it seems to me that since the amalgamation with the UCP the tone has changed.

10:30

Regardless, however, of that shift in position, it is the government's responsibility to ensure that consumers are protected, which the prior critic agreed with, and we want to do that, Madam Chair. On review of the Cuff report, I agreed it was clear that in the scope of the structure of AMVIC, the current structure, simply the recommendations which were done within the context of that structure, how to make things better in that context, would not be able to give the decisive action for consumers or taxpayers that the prior critic was disappointed the recommendations did not address. I agreed with him. So I have taken more decisive action, and I would have hoped that that Wildrose perspective that previously existed would still be there. Unfortunately, it is clear to me that in the amalgamation some things have changed.

But, Madam Chair, I digress. I would now like to talk about what this does do. AMVIC's role is to protect the interests of the consumer and to ensure integrity in the automotive industry. Upon passing the proposed changes, it will ensure stronger public oversight of AMVIC by transitioning from an industry-controlled to a public member controlled board. One of the recommendations of the Cuff report was to change the makeup of that board to do just this. It would mean that AMVIC would be subject to the wider rules for ABCs. Transparency: also within the spirit of Mr. Cuff's recommendations and which is good for the public and which, I will remind my new critic, the prior critic certainly was in favour of.

It will also enable the minister responsible to set the composition of AMVIC, which, again, was one of the recommendations in the Cuff report. It will regulate the appointment of specific roles. Again, one of the recommendations in the Cuff report was that the board chair have specific duties and tasks assigned and a greater role. It will also establish governance rules: conduct of board meetings, decision-making by the board.

The proposed improvements to AMVIC operations will benefit consumers and businesses in the auto sector. Consumers will have greater confidence that rights are protected by AMVIC and respected by industry. Business will benefit from enhanced regulatory oversight in ensuring a level playing field. We've heard from industry that there is a broken relationship between them and the current state of AMVIC. We are going to be actively repairing that. Businesses will benefit from responsible operations throughout the industry and from consistency from the regulator.

AMVIC board members agree with this approach, and they have stated as much. Bill Burnett, the current chair of the AMVIC Board of Directors, stated:

I am very excited about the announcement of Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. It is a very important step to support AMVIC's mandate of consumer protection in Alberta. Thank you to the Government of Alberta for their leadership and commitment to consumer protection in Alberta.

Madam Chair, not only are these changes supported by the previous comments of my prior critic from the prior Wildrose, but they are also supported by the very chair of the AMVIC board.

Madam Chair, I absolutely cannot support this amendment. I want to make stronger protections in this area. I want to ensure that the regulator is acting well, that it is trusted by the public, and so does the AMVIC board, and so did, at least, the prior critic for Service Alberta and the prior Wildrose party.

Madam Chair, I want to ensure that the compensation fund works for Albertans. These changes will allow us to ensure that that is the case. So we will not be supporting this amendment. I encourage all members to vote against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to propose an amendment to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, and I'll wait for the amendment to circulate before proceeding.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, do you happen to have the original with you?

Ms McPherson: I do, yes.

The Deputy Chair: We'll trade.

Ms McPherson: Sorry. It's my first amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A5. Please continue.

Ms McPherson: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 1(8) in the proposed section 6.1(4) by adding "for a period of no less than 180 days from the date of the consumer's request" after "or make it accessible online."

Bill 31 proposes to add protections for consumers who sign agreements to receive services, including a requirement that

suppliers make copies of agreements available to consumers in written or electronic format. Having the option to receive and provide contracts online is a great idea. It can save paper, it can make things more searchable, and it can be great for access on mobile devices.

One of the challenges people experience: when suppliers send us an e-mail about new or updated contracts, it is with the URL of some website without the actual contract or agreement as an attachment. When the e-mail is fresh, the link to the contract on the website works, but how about a few weeks later, when the company has redesigned its website, rebranded, merged, or otherwise changed how it provides information to consumers? Our amendment to section 1(8) on page 5 of Bill 31 would require that if a supplier provides a consumer with an e-mailed or texted link to a copy of a contract on a website, the supplier must ensure that the contract is available at that link for a reasonable period of time after the consumer receives the link. We've suggested approximately six months after the consumer has requested the contract, but we're open to other time periods as well.

This amendment is a practical action that we can take in this House to make the bill work better for Alberta's many consumers. I'd love to have a constructive conversation about the idea and how we can work together to make it better. I'm certainly open to any suggestions that other hon. members may be able to provide. I'd ask that we all vote in favour of this common-sense amendment to make lives better for Albertans.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A5?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

10:40

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I will provide to the pages.

Madam Chair, now that the Chamber has decided that the Veterinary Profession Act should come under the purview of this, I'm going to try to become somewhat more surgical in my approach. As opposed to trying to cut the cancer out entirely, I'll now try to remove as much of this cancer as can be removed and at least apply some judicious chemotherapy to what's left. What we're going to do here is that we're going to discuss a little bit about the process of self-regulation and self-governance.

Now, earlier during debate I read out a couple of quotes from Mr. James Casey, who is a world authority on self-regulating professional bodies in Canada and world-wide. He has literally written the book on self-regulation. Mr. Casey has provided his opinion that this bill is a massive overreach that is unprecedented in our province, a massive overreach into the affairs of a self-regulating profession which, as I've stated in the House before, has been doing this for 111 years. Our province was less than one year old when the first veterinary professions act was passed, and that veterinary professions act provided for self-regulation of the veterinary profession.

What was interesting, though, was that the earliest veterinary professions act and all of the ones that came after, let's say, had a clause that indicated that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, in other words cabinet, had the final approving authority on any changes to the act. Now, that's really important. The veterinary association cannot change its regulations, its bylaws, or anything in

the Veterinary Profession Act without cabinet approval. So cabinet has always had the final say on things involving the veterinary profession.

I don't have a problem with that. I think that's actually good. But what is interesting is that that is a greater degree of control than a number of other professions in Alberta have. A lot of the other self-regulating professions don't have that check and balance. If they make a change to their regulation or their bylaws, it's just changed. They don't have to get cabinet approval, but we do, and I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that. I'm okay with a body of elected officials taking a look at it.

Where I have a problem and where I have a problem in Bill 31 is with what Bill 31 does in terms of self-regulating professions, specifically, obviously, the veterinary profession. I refer to page 25 of the bill, under Regulations, section 48.3(1), and I'll read it slowly.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council, after consultation with the Council, may make regulations respecting fees and authorization for veterinary medicine, including, without limitation, regulations.

Then it goes on to (a) through (h) on the scope of what those regulations could entail.

Now, what exactly does all that mean? Well, the Lieutenant Governor in Council is cabinet. The 21 individuals who have been appointed to Executive Council are cabinet, and when this bill passes, it will be cabinet that will have the power to make regulations for the veterinary profession. Cabinet will have that power.

What will that power include? Well, that power will include regulations respecting fees and authorization for veterinary medicine. Cabinet will have the power to decide the fees of the veterinary association. That is an unbelievable level of power and interference with a private business. If cabinet decides that the current fee for an examination of a dog, which is \$89.50 in the fee guide – but in polling six veterinary clinics from across Alberta, the range was \$76.50 to \$85. Not a single one charges as much as the fee guide. A member of cabinet, for example my friend the hon. Government House Leader, says: "That's unreasonable. Veterinarians aren't that smart, and \$89 is just gouging the public. That should be worth 22 bucks." He could say that. He would have the power to say that.

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Mason: Perhaps the hon. member would like to clarify that he is speaking hypothetically and not attempt to put words in my mouth.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, I'm happy to do that for my friend the Government House Leader. I would never suppose to put words in his mouth. I think that'd be impossible, and it'd also be kind of pointless because he has lots of words in his own mouth, and there'd be hardly any room.

Debate Continued

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, what I am saying is that cabinet would have the power to make the decision as to what fee should be

charged if this were to pass, and fees could be set at a level that is unreasonably low and would render veterinary practices unprofitable, or they could be set at a level that is unreasonably high and mean that there could be no access to veterinary services by the general public.

The people that I think understand best what sort of fees are appropriate are the people who own the businesses that provide the service. I guess my question is: what's next? If you're going to regulate the fees of veterinarians, what's next on the agenda?

My amendment, Madam Chair, is actually a fairly simple one. I won't read through all of it because it's not really necessary to read through all of it. I move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) by striking out the proposed section 48.3 and substituting the following:

Regulations

And here's the key difference.

48.3(1) The Council may make regulations . . .

Then it goes (a) through (h), which is the same wording as in the bill. Then, finally:

(2) A regulation under subsection (1) does not come into force unless it has been approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

So the exact wording that is in the bill remains. All of the powers that were to be given to cabinet remain, and cabinet will still have the final say on all of those regulations. But the concern that we have as a profession – and it is a concern that has been heightened since the totally inadequate consultation that went on with regard to this bill – is that the current bill says: “The Lieutenant Governor in Council, after consultation with the Council.” Now, that council is the council of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. After consultation they have all these powers.

We're also quite concerned with the insertion of the phrase “including, without limitation.” If that's in the bill, this cabinet has power to write in any regulation it wants. That, to me, is a level of control being handed over to an albeit well-meaning group of people that I'm sure want to do what's best for Alberta but a group of people that I'm not sure always necessarily understand the nuances of running a veterinary practice and why a practice has to be profitable, why a practice has to replace its equipment – and medical equipment is very expensive, veterinary equipment specifically so – and why we have to do things like pay our staff at a level that is commensurate with their experience and allows them to have a good living.

Madam Chair, this is the concern that we as veterinarians have. We do not want to see our association be the first, possibly, in a line of professional organizations to lose its power to self-regulate, but that's what this bill does. Make no mistake. This bill writes in that we lose the power of self-regulation, and that's something that veterinarians really don't want to lose. We feel that we have discharged the responsibility, the privilege of self-regulation in very good faith. And, in my opinion at least, if we are trusted professionals, we haven't done anything to deserve having that privilege taken away from us.

So I'm moving this amendment to suggest that the normal course of events for the making of regulations is where the ABVMA council in consultation with the membership as a whole comes up with a regulation, has those changes to the regulations ratified at an AGM of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, and then those regulations are approved by cabinet, which is what has always been in place. If we come up with something that cabinet doesn't like, well, they have the power to turn it down and say: go back to the drawing board. They still have the final say. We're not taking that out of here.

10:50

But I have a problem when the course of events and how things are done and have been done for 111 years are suddenly reversed by this government, by this minister without demonstrating that it will be better for the general public of Alberta, for the animals of Alberta, or for veterinarians. That has not been shown to me, that putting it in the hands of cabinet will result in an improvement.

Unless it can be proven to me that cabinet is a better safekeeper of the veterinary profession than the elected council of the veterinary profession, I can't support the bill that includes giving these wide-ranging, vague, and sweeping powers to cabinet. I can't, you know, approve that because, quite frankly, it's putting the control of the regulation of the profession in the hands of people that – although, again, they may be well-meaning, I just simply don't know that they have the information that is required in order to make the decisions to regulate our profession.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The amendment is referred to as A6.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I've heard the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, and, you know, I have to say that he's very passionate on this. Now we've heard that the government isn't willing to remove the legislation that is revolving around our veterinarians, and they're not willing to discuss the fact that they're taking on the regulation part of the veterinarians. If we know this is a route that we're taking, then it seems reasonable that we would give the veterinarians time to be able to work with government so that it doesn't actually have to reel like it has with this legislation coming forward, out of nowhere, blindsided if you will. So I would like to propose an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member. Your amendment will be referred to as A7.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. The amendment is: Mr. Cyr to move that Bill 31, a Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) in the proposed section 48.3(3), by striking out “Proclamation” and substituting “January 1, 2020.”

What this is essentially doing is saying that when we vote on Bill 31, we are going to give some time to the veterinarians to be able to work with the minister and see where she's going. I believe that that is reasonable. I believe a two-year time frame is a reasonable amount of time that we can give the veterinarians across Alberta to be able to discuss where the minister would like to see this legislation or where she's taking this legislation.

I'd also like to point out that it doesn't seem to be a move that the government seems to really put into action when it comes to consultation. So what I am trying to do here is to give the minister the time that she needs to be able to actually consult with veterinarians. She needs that time. They need that time. The veterinarian association, the regulatory body, needs that time. They all need that time to come up with a working plan, not be dictated to.

I would encourage everybody to give the veterinarians the time that they need to be able to consult with the minister before we make massive changes to their industry without any input from them.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A7? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to propose an amendment – and I'm going to be better at it this time – to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. I will wait for that to circulate.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A8. Please go ahead.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. I'd like to move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 1(8) in the proposed section 6.2 as follows: (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "a written notice of cancellation" and substituting "a notice of cancellation in same manner in which the consumer entered into the ongoing consumer transaction" and (b) in subsection (2) by striking out "sent" and substituting "provided."

Madam Chair, Bill 31 proposes to improve consumers' ability to cancel contracts for ongoing transactions if and when suppliers change those contracts. What we're proposing to do with this amendment to the proposed section 6.2 on page 6 of the bill is to enable a consumer to cancel the contract in at least the same way that they used to sign up for the contract.

Madam Chair, if a consumer signs up for a service online, they shouldn't be forced to go to a physical location to cancel the contract. A consumer who signed up by phone shouldn't be forced to look for and send a letter to a physical mailing address to cancel an ongoing service contract. If a vendor is confident enough to sign up a customer with a particular method, whether that's online, by phone, by text, or another method, the vendor should trust that method to allow a customer to cancel a subscription.

This amendment will make it easier for businesses that offer great customer service and suppliers who compete on the quality of their products and services to prevail. It also sends a clear message to suppliers who do not want to do business fairly and to suppliers who make it deliberately difficult for customers to walk away from bad service. Consumers deserve better.

This amendment is a practical action that we can take in this House to make this bill work better for Alberta consumers. I would ask that we all vote in favour of this common-sense amendment to make lives better for all of us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment A8?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A8 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move another amendment. I will wait for the chair to give me permission to speak.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A9. Please go ahead.

11:00

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. The intent of this amendment is an actual problem that I as an accountant have run into in my career. What it is is that you put a corporation between illegal activity, if you will, and what happens is that the directors or those that are individuals associated with that corporation draw the money out of that corporation. Then what happens is that there's no recourse for individuals to be able to get back, say, the money that they're owed by the government in this legislation.

What I would like to do is move an amendment that

any director, officer, employee or agent of a corporation who directed or authorized an activity that led to a contravention by the corporation of section 57.3(1) or (3) may be made a defendant to an action against the corporation under subsection (1) and on order of the Court may be made jointly and severally liable together with the corporation for an order of restitution of damages under subsection (2)(a) or (b).

I'm sorry that this is very, very technical, but I will tell you that what happens here is that if the government was to actually catch an individual doing this selling of tickets through these bots and then go for legal recourse against that individual, they would be prevented by the fact that there's a corporation between them. This is, unfortunately, a very common practice, and it's important that we need to recognize that people shouldn't be able to profit on other people's backs.

This is reasonable, and I encourage everyone to vote for this amendment because, in the end, I believe this strengthens the legislation. This is something we can work together on to ensure that profits that are illegally taken don't end up in the criminal's hands, if you will, but back into the victim's hands. We need to ensure that victims are able to have the legal recourse, and we need to be able to breach something called the corporate veil.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A9?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm getting better at it. I rise today to propose an amendment to Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. I'll wait for the amendment to circulate before proceeding.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, your amendment will be referred to as A10. Please go ahead.

Ms McPherson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 1(10) in the proposed section 57.3 by adding the following after subsection (4): "A primary seller may retain a portion of the ticket price for a ticket cancelled under subsection (4)(b) for the purposes of off-setting administrative costs incurred by the primary seller to cancel that ticket."

Bill 31 proposes to reduce the burden on ticket vendors who are victimized by those who purchase tickets with bots. As members of this House and members of the public may already know, cancelling or refunding a credit or debit card transaction costs time and money for a legitimate ticket vendor who unwillingly sold tickets to an automated ticket-purchasing bot. Bots can buy hundreds or thousands of tickets at a time, all of which the ticket seller would have to cancel under this bill. Refunding card transactions also costs them money through higher merchant fees and commissions. The 2 to 3 per cent commissions charged by a vendor with few refunds and transaction disputes might rise to 4 or 5 per cent, raising costs for consumers, businesses, employees, or all.

We're proposing to allow the primary ticket seller to be able to recover their direct costs of cancelling those tickets so that the operators of the ticket bot would pay for the unnecessary costs they generate. This amendment to proposed section 57.3 on page 9 of the bill is a practical action that we can take in this House to make the bill work better for Alberta's many consumers and entrepreneurs. By requiring the ticket bot operators to pay, regular consumers won't be exposed to higher ticket prices due to costs that legitimate ticket sellers would incur when dealing with ticket bots that break the rules.

I would like all of us to vote in favour of this common-sense amendment to make life better for Alberta's legitimate ticket buyers and vendors. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A10?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the original bill. I will now recognize the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have an amendment. I'm sensing that some hon. members opposite are saying: "You know, why is he doing this? Why is he bothering with these amendments that we are consistently and repeatedly defeating? Isn't it obvious that we're going to defeat this one, too?" That may well happen, but it is the prerogative of every member of this Assembly to put on the public record statements that are important to that member or to groups that he represents or to constituents. I was very proud, when receiving input from my constituents, that I received input from both veterinarians as well as clients of veterinary clinics, and it had specific regard to the provisions on fee advertising.

Now, I know the minister has said a number of things about that, that fee advertising won't be a disaster, won't be a bad thing, that it's been done in other places, and that it hasn't been a problem. But, once again, Madam Chair, I think that it's important that we have the sort of perspective of someone who has sort of been, if you will, in the trenches.

I move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) by (a) striking out the proposed section 48.2 and (b) in the proposed section 48.3 by striking out clause (f) and (g).

The effect of these amendments, Madam Chair, is essentially to remove from the bill the allowance or the permission for veterinarians to advertise their fees. Now, I know the minister has stated why she thinks that that's a good idea, and I have countered with many, many arguments as to why it's not a good idea, why it does not serve the public interest, why it does not result in a

decrease in fees, if that is indeed what the goal is here. The decrease in fees that, you know, one would ostensibly think would have happened in Ontario because they're allowed to advertise their fees: I just showed it didn't happen.

You know what was interesting, Madam Chair? I went and I polled six veterinary practices from all across Alberta. I asked them: if you were presented during regular hours with a dog with abdominal discomfort and you performed a physical examination on that dog and you decided to draw blood and do a complete blood cell count with a differential count, to run a full chemistry panel with electrolytes on that patient and then also take two abdominal X-rays, what would the charge to the client be? I also consulted our recommended 2017 ABVMA small-animal fee guide. The small-animal fee guide recommends a total fee for those procedures of \$539.60 for what's being done, that basket of procedures: the examination, blood testing, and X-rays.

11:10

Then I polled my colleagues. My colleagues reported back to me, and the range of prices from these six clinics from all different parts of the province was, actually, to me surprisingly narrow. The lowest price was \$435 and the highest price was \$515, a total difference in price of roughly \$80, on procedures that may seem standard but, in fact, require a fair bit of expertise. X-ray equipment is not cheap. X-ray equipment has to be certified and kept up on a regular basis.

Most veterinarians that I know have moved from what we used to do, and that was X-ray patients with film and have to run that film through dip tanks and hold it up to the light. Then if it wasn't quite the right positioning or if the animal had moved or something or it wasn't properly exposed, we had to do it all over again, and we had to expose ourselves to chemicals like developer and fixer. It was the way things used to be done.

Today the vast majority of veterinary practices in Alberta have digital radiography. They have a PAC system, where they can share these images with specialists in an instant and have those radiographs analyzed by a diagnostic imaging specialist anywhere in the world. It is incredible how far we've come, and we can share those images seamlessly and easily and I would suggest more easily than our medical counterparts in Alberta can.

The total charge that is recommended for that basket of procedures was \$539. Now, for interest's sake, I said: well, how would that compare to what would be charged to a human walking into one of our health care facilities in Alberta? I went to the fee guide that is on the Alberta Health site, and let me tell you that if you want to try to interpret that fee guide, you have to either be a United Nations translator or maybe C-3PO, because I can tell you that it is such a convoluted set of codes and riders and additional things that could be added or subtracted. To the best of our ability, although we're not quite one hundred per cent sure, the charge of what that costs Alberta health care is somewhere between \$404 and \$1,785, a range of almost four times, whereas the veterinary range was about \$80. From \$400 to \$1,700 in human medicine.

I'll tell you one other thing that I'm very proud of. Chances are pretty good that in most veterinary clinics in Alberta when you brought that dog in that needed a blood sample, that needed X-rays, you would have the answer from the veterinarian within the hour. Within the hour. When was the last time you went to your general practitioner, to your family doctor and he handed you a script or a requisition to go get bloodwork done, handed you another piece of paper and said, "Here; go to the radiology laboratory"? So you make an appointment and get your blood drawn. You make another appointment and go get your radiographs done. Then you have to make an appointment with your physician to have another

appointment in order to discuss and consult on the results of the bloodwork and the X-rays.

In veterinary medicine, in most veterinary practices in Alberta, that is done on-site within the hour. I think that's pretty good medicine. I think that is a pretty high standard of care. In fact, I would stack up our standard of care against what is provided to the two-legged humans in this province any time. Any time. I'm not saying that the people who work in health care aren't professional. They are; no question about it. But in terms of getting a rapid turnaround and a rapid answer on a patient, we veterinarians do a pretty good job. I'll tell you that if it was on an emergency service and I was on call, we could turn that whole thing around in less than half an hour. That's how good our equipment is, and that's how efficient we've become in terms of being able to diagnose.

What all goes into fees? Well, a lot of things go into fees, not just the professional training of the veterinarian and the registered veterinary technologist. There's the lease on the building, the maintaining of inventory within the clinic. There's a lot of overhead, obviously, insurance and that sort of thing. But the reason why it is difficult to quote a specific price is that every patient is different, and we've had this discussion already. If you just state a flat price and advertise that, and then the patient comes in and it's: oh, my goodness.

Let's say, for example, you advertise that to spay a dog is \$425, and then the dog comes in. It's eight years old, it's obese, it's had several litters of puppies, and it's a Rottweiler. That changes the procedure. Spaying an 80- or 90- or 100-pound obese Rottweiler that's had several litters of puppies and is maybe seven or eight years old is a whole different ball of wax from spaying a six-month-old Labrador retriever who's never had a heat cycle. They're two completely different things.

Yet the expectation here is that we're supposed to quote a flat price and put it up on the Internet. It's ridiculous. Animals are individuals. To suggest that we can, you know, say one price and then be held to that price, recognizing the vast differences in the patients we treat, is unreasonable, simply unreasonable.

You know, Madam Chair, I received a number of communications on this issue from my colleagues. One is from a veterinarian in Calgary, and she writes:

As a veterinarian I went to school for 8 years to obtain my professional degree. Our services require payment to pay for the equipment, the buildings we practice in, and the staff that we hire. Only by being able to have a fully stocked facility with highly trained employees can I provide quality health care. Perhaps you would trust a shady black-market option for your own health care if you had to pay for it but don't force us to lower our standards and not be able to pay our staff or ourselves in the interests of providing 'cheap' medicine. Cutting corners invariably leads to more problems long term both for us but mostly for the health of the patients we work so hard to help.

You know, Madam Chair, in that quote really lies part of the challenge that we have not just in veterinary medicine, but we have it in governing our province. We don't know what health care costs. Well, we know that it costs \$20 billion and it costs roughly – what is it? – \$157 million a day. But we don't know. When you go to the doctor and the doctor orders those blood tests, those X-rays, the ultrasound, whatever, we have no clue what the cost of that is. We have no idea. We're proud of the fact that we have, like, medicare. We have a system that means that you're not paying out of pocket for your own health care. I'm fully in favour of that. Trust me. I was actually surprised to hear the hon. minister sort of advocating – it sounded like she was advocating – the American style of health care, with the advertising that the doctors do in the States. Surely to

goodness that's not what the NDP is advocating here. It sounded like it, but perhaps she can clarify.

The reason that some veterinary fees can seem high is because we are insulated from the true costs of our own health care. I had an incident once in practice, Madam Chair, where I did roughly what I just described: examination, CBC, chemistry, a couple of X-rays, and I think we did one other thing. The total bill was roughly around \$500. I had gone over that with the owner, and she knew what the charges were. She came in to pick up the dog, and she says, "That is just so expensive." I said, "Well, did you not sort of understand what the quote was?" She said: "Oh, no. I understood the quote, and I'm okay, you know, that you kept to the quote. But that is so expensive." I said to her: "Well, you're a nurse. You're a nurse. What do you think this would cost in the human medical system?" She said: "Well, it's free. It's free. It doesn't cost anything."

Therein, Madam Chair, is one of our challenges not just as veterinarians but as a society. We don't know what our medical care costs us, and we don't know, when we're sent for yet another ultrasound or a repeat X-ray or we have diagnostic tests that we run again and again and again, how much that is actually costing the system. That's a problem. That's a problem.

Now, I have actually recommended that we at least go back to some kind of a system whereby – we don't mail out the statements like they used to. I actually kind of liked that system, but I understand that that's costly and that's another layer of bureaucracy that needs to do that. But why can't we access online our own medical chart and click on the dollar sign and say, "This is what you cost Alberta health care in the past year"? I think that would be extremely instructive. I think it would be very useful information. I tell you that it would sure help veterinarians because then people would realize the kind of absolute value they are getting at a veterinary hospital for services that in the human system would cost way, way more.

11:20

No, Madam Chair, advertising of fees, while it sounds like it would be a good deal for consumers, in the long run is not. You know, I've received many, many communications on this. This, for example, from a registered veterinary technologist:

We choose not to advertise, to eliminate clinics trying to battle with each other. By simply listing a price for a service, we are unable to advise our clients on what that price covers and whether that service is the best choice for that patient. We're not talking about buying a TV. There are a lot of factors that go into the treatment plan that cannot be listed on a billboard of fees. Our prices are not a secret. All a client needs to do is to call, and we will happily explain the costs and options.

That, Madam Chair, is why we simply don't put a price up on the Internet or publish a price schedule like a garage would, you know, in terms of this much for an oil change and this much for a brake job and that sort of thing. It's because our patients are living, breathing entities and each of them has to be dealt with on an individualized basis.

Madam Chair, again, my purpose here is not just to move what would be an amendment that would improve this bill, but my purpose here is to address something that I think is a very common misconception. In fact, a recent survey showed that 98 per cent of pet owners surveyed underestimated the lifetime medical costs of having a pet. Ninety-eight per cent. A large reason for that is because, again, we're insulated from what the medical costs are in the human medical system.

Madam Chair, I would ask for support for this amendment because I do think it removes one of the most egregious elements from within Bill 31. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A11?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Cyr: Okay. I'd like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, if you could wait till I have the original, then you can proceed. Your amendment will be referred to as A12. Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. This amendment is around the high-cost credit businesses. I would see that it's reasonable to expect that these high-cost credit businesses have physical locations within Alberta.

I think this is fairly self-explanatory. I believe that in the end, with the ability to be able to have high-credit business options, you should have the ability to be able to speak with the people face to face if a concern is brought forward. So I would hope that everybody would vote for this because I think that it's an important amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A12?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A12 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the bill. Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment, and I'll pass it to the pages. The original is on top there, and the rest are in there. Thank you.

Madam Chair, during the course of debate on this issue we've had some confusion creep into this vis-à-vis the scope of this bill. It specifically has to do with the scope of the species in question. Now, there's been some conflicting back and forth on this, and it's concerning to me, and it's concerning to a lot of my colleagues because, at the very least, they want clarification. Now, the bill states that it's domestic animals and those designated in regulation. I'll just find that here.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want to let you know that your amendment will be referred to as A13.

Dr. Starke: Thank you. I'll actually read it into the record here in a moment.

It's starting with 48.1(1)(a): "in respect of a domestic cat or dog or other specified type of domestic animal." Then it continues. You know, in various other sections there's this – and it's interesting because the minister, in one of the debates that we've had, said: well, the bill is very specific; it's dealing with household pets. Well, if that's the intent – and that's fine, that it would be limited to household pets – again, "household pets" is not a real strong term. I would say: let's bring it down to specific species because household pets can include a number of different species of birds, guinea pigs, ferrets, gerbils, hamsters, snakes, lizards, water

spiders, you name it. There's a wide variety of species, and this bill is unclear.

Furthermore, the domestic animal thing. They said: well, not food-producing animals. I've had a lot of questions from horse owners saying: "Well, where does that leave horses? I mean, my horse is my pet. It doesn't happen to be in the house. It's not a household pet, but it is my pet."

The purpose of this amendment is to try to get some clarity with regard to exactly what animals are involved. I move that Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, be amended in section 2(2) as follows: (a) in the proposed section 48.1(1) by striking out "or other specified type of domestic animal"; (b) in the proposed 48.2 in subsection (2) by striking out "and prescribed types of domestic animals" and in subsection (3) by striking out "and other specified types of domestic animals;" (c) in the proposed section 48.3(1) by striking out clause (a), in clause (d) by striking out "and other types of domestic animals," and in clauses (f) and (g) by striking out "and specified types of domestic animals."

Now, Madam Chair, while some of our other amendments have fallen on the rocky shoals of government resistance, shall we say, this one should be easy because this one basically is putting the language into the bill that the minister says is in the bill or should be in the bill or was her intent to have in the bill, yet it's not what the bill says. There may be an argument: well, if the minister said it in the House, it's in *Hansard*, and *Hansard's* part of the public record, and therefore it's official. Well, I'll tell you that most veterinarians I know don't tote around copies of *Hansard* to know exactly which species are referred to in this bill. They might carry around a piece of the legislation, a copy of Bill 31, but they're not going to be toting around *Hansard*. So we need clarity on this. If the intent of the government is to restrict this bill only to dogs and cats, then say so. It's fairly simple and straightforward.

I'll give you yet another reason why it's important. Now, this is from a colleague of mine, and this colleague has got a very impressive list of qualifications. She holds a bachelor of science in agriculture, a doctor of veterinary medicine, a master's degree in avian health and medicine, and she is a diplomat on the American College of Poultry Veterinarians. She is also the director of national veterinary services and quality assurance for a large national food production company in Canada, and she's a member of the ABVMA. She writes:

As a food animal veterinarian working solely in the poultry industry, I am additionally concerned that the proposed amendments to the VPA are unclear in relation to food animals. Despite numerous industry standards in place for poultry, swine, cattle, and dairy industries, producers still occasionally switch between veterinarians to obtain either the answer or the medication they are seeking. Often this comes with food safety consequences the alternative veterinarian is not fully aware of due to lack of complete historical knowledge of the client.

11:30

One such example is the medication of poultry flocks for Salmonella Enteritidis and other Salmonella species, an action which can mask the true health status of a flock. While treatment can reduce the rate of bacterial shedding it can also increase the risk of antimicrobial resistance; furthermore, since treatment does not cease shedding it means Salmonella bacteria will remain a risk to food safety for as long as the flock remains in production. By promoting clients switching veterinarians, situations as these where food safety concerns are obscured or ineffectively dealt with will only increase the number, putting at risk the health of our consumers as well as our ability to meet regulatory standards for the export of livestock products.

The proposed amendments to the VPA within Bill 31 and the process taken to incorporate them are gravely concerning. I

urge you to withdraw them as soon as possible to protect the integrity of self-governance in Alberta, the health of our patients, and the safety of our food supply.

You see, Madam Chair, the inclusion of a vague definition of which animals are actually involved in this bill creates concerns. It creates considerable concern because there's no real clarity as to whether we're talking about food-producing animals, domestic animals, or who it is that we're talking about.

Now, the minister has stated – and she stated publicly – that this is for household pets. Then let's have the bill language match what the minister's intent is. I cannot understand why you would leave the current language in place, which is vague and open ended and could result in inclusion of additional species, when the intent is to have it for dogs and cats. If that is the case, then the passage of this amendment, whatever it is now – A13 – would result in getting rid of that ambiguity and would result in clarity on this issue, which I think is extremely important that we have for the sake of not just the consuming public but also for the sake of the veterinary profession.

I would ask for support on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to amendment A13?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A13 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 31 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Madam Chair, I will move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

Mr. Hinkley: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 31. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 31

A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise a final time to speak about Bill 31, A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act. Over the past few weeks I've outlined the many ways this bill will help to protect Alberta consumers. Not only do these measures protect hard-working Albertans; these measures help promote a level playing field among businesses. They provide the government with the tools we need to ensure individual businesses do not get ahead by breaking the rules. This will lead to increased consumer confidence, which we know is good for businesses and the economy.

This is far from the end of the conversation, however. Many of our initiatives require well-crafted regulations to be fully effective. My ministry will keep these discussions going, continue consultation, and over the coming months make these stronger consumer protections a reality.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud of our government's record on consumer issues, from payday loans to condominiums. I'm pleased to move Bill 31 for a third time and add to this legacy.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to third reading? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, we're into third reading here, and it's disappointing to see that we've rushed this bill through the House so fast. We've requested that this bill be referred to committee and have our fine committees put to work so that they can actually improve this bill. I myself have moved several amendments on this bill on some of the areas of concern, both from industry and the fact that there's been a lack of clear consultation when it comes to Bill 31.

Now, it's upsetting to see that we have four big pieces of legislation moving through this House. I know that for myself – and I have to commend Parliamentary Counsel on their hard work. [some applause] Yes. Vermilion-Lloydminster is clapping on his desk, which he should because, I'll tell you, they worked darn hard, and they got those amendments ready for us. We threw a ton all at once, and this is the problem with rushing through so much legislation at the very end of a session. We are more or less ensuring that this legislation is going to be flawed, potentially, because of the fact that the opposition doesn't have the time to be able to go through these pieces of legislation in the detail that they need to. We don't have the time to be able to reach out to the stakeholders we need to.

A lot of this we had, more or less, the minister speaking on out in the public, saying that something was coming, but we weren't sure about all of these pieces. We hear about dark money or dirty money or shadow parties. We hear about how the boundaries commission put out a flawed report. We are hearing that there are some significant challenges when it comes to ensuring that Albertans have their voice inside of the Legislature. I guess that when we hear all of this, it's very disappointing that the government has done this.

I myself have spent a lot of time reading over the documents that stakeholders have been sending to my office, saying: "Please make sure you get this onto the record. In that way, when something does happen, we have the ability to go back and show the minister that we warned the minister about the fact that we weren't consulted on this."

Now, moving on, I'd like to talk about AMVIC. I will be the first to acknowledge that AMVIC has had its struggles. There's no delicate way of putting that. I myself was very disappointed with some of the things that were coming out, so I do understand that the

minister wanted to more or less take AMVIC forward and say: this needs to get better; we need to get better at this.

11:40

The minister went out to an independent body, George B. Cuff & Associates Ltd. They are management consultants. This is what they do. This is the stuff that they are trained to review and go into. To hear from them that the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, AMVIC, has a purpose outside of the fact that government shouldn't be in control of it, that there should be protections put in place – it came up with that there should be an equal number of industry as well as public representatives appointed by the minister, with the chair being appointed by the minister.

Right now, if there is, let's say, a conflict between the public members appointed by the minister and the industry representatives, the government has the ability to more or less move the decision in the best course that the government sees fit. Again, it is very disappointing that we set up this structure and that as soon as all of these members were appointed by the minister, suddenly we've got the entire AMVIC moving towards government governance.

Now, moving on to veterinarians, I can say that AMVIC has had its issues – that's clear – but I have not seen or heard the same issues with our veterinarian community. If anything, I see them as of the highest calibre, some of the most trustworthy people within Alberta, people that I consider to be my friends. I think that all of us can say that when it comes to veterinarians, they are people within our communities that are the highest respected – the highest respected – so when we hear that the industry for both AMVIC and the profession of veterinarians have not been consulted on these moves that are in Bill 31, we need to ask: are we moving this stuff too fast? We need to make sure we get this right.

I moved reasonable – reasonable – amendments for both AMVIC and the veterinarians, trying to ensure that their voices are heard. To my disappointment – and I'm sure many of my colleagues were disappointed as well – the government voted against those reasonable amendments. The fact is that whenever we've got a profession that is under attack – and I believe that veterinarians specifically are for some reason being targeted by this government – that is disappointing.

They use old complaints. Now, the one complaint that I have heard being used in one of the newspaper articles was by a woman that was very unhappy with the price of a procedure provided by the veterinarians. When I sat with the veterinarians' association, they said that that specific individual did not put a complaint forward. How do we fix this when the complaints aren't moving forward? Is it just that she didn't feel comfortable, or is it just the fact that somehow we have to expect that with every profession, whether it is government regulated or industry regulated, there are going to be, I guess, some people unhappy with the services that they've gotten or with the prices that they've paid. I believe that that same individual would have had the same experience under a government-regulated board. The fact that she didn't feel that she potentially had the opportunity to speak out about this is distressing. But I will say that the examples the minister has given for justification against our veterinarian community are examples that will happen under government-regulated boards as well. These things do not go away.

If this is going to exist, it makes sense that – if this profession is working just fine, why are we using an iron fist on them? It makes no sense. It also doesn't make sense that we are actually telling people right now that the government has clearly consulted because they haven't. They haven't consulted with industry, either AMVIC or the veterinarians.

Now moving on to other parts of the bill, we see that some of this stuff actually is troublesome, and I actually applaud that the minister is trying to correct some of that. So not all of this bill is bad. That's why committee is so important.

I would hope that this Chamber votes this bill down and the minister comes back with something that is more palatable to everybody that's involved.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Madam Speaker. I would request complete support in the House, unanimous consent, for a one-minute bell on third reading of Bill 31.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, very, very much. I guess this is our last opportunity to address this. I don't like using the term "kick at the cat" because veterinarians don't use that phrase.

Hon. Madam Speaker and my hon. colleagues, I do want to put into the public record a number of other statements that I've received from my colleagues. I think that perhaps everyone in the House has heard enough from me on this, and if that's the case, well, I'm sorry. But I do want to put into the public record some of the, again, hundreds of statements I've received from my colleagues, impassioned pleas to not go ahead with this poorly crafted, poorly consulted, and poorly executed piece of legislation, specifically with regard to the veterinary profession.

From an ABVMA member and past president of the association:

Unfortunately, Honorable Minister, you have made a great error in overstepping your duties to alter legislation of a self-regulated profession without due care, consideration, and consultation with the very professionals that the legislation deals with. We kindly request that you remove any reference to changes to the Veterinary Profession Act in this bill. Obviously, if this goes ahead, future election polls will dictate our final say. It will reflect our feelings toward you and your cowardly approach to modifying legislation without the courage to meet face-to-face with the very professionals you are affecting. This will be our final say as to how you treated us.

From a veterinarian in Calgary, who runs a very large pet hospital in south Calgary:

The Bill being discussed was poorly researched with little to no consultation with [the] profession and will result in a negative impact on us and ultimately on our clients, their pets and their bottom line.

11:50

Veterinary medicine is not a job. Veterinary medicine is not a money making venture. It is a passion. My husband and I both work here and our kids grew up in the clinic.

So did my sons.

... This commitment is true of all of our staff! I cannot tell you the amount of time that my staff stays late, work extra shifts and give their heart and soul to their clients and their pets. All this overtime and above and beyond care is never billed to the client. This is a profession based [on] compassion and love of our clients [and our patients]. I told you yesterday, but it is 100% true that my clinic's reputation is based on word of mouth and trust ... it is not about fees. When I first meet a new client I am often on my knees getting to know their dog. Can you imagine the detriment

that discussing fees first would have on this relationship? This negative conversation will downgrade the relationships between vets and their clients.

People choose their veterinarian for many reasons. They keep their veterinarian because they trust them. This Bill degrades client veterinary relationships and will ultimately do way more harm than good.

From a veterinarian in Edmonton:

This is a very important issue. In Bill 31, the Veterinary Profession is being lumped in with dishonest ticket scalpers, loan sharking outlets, and other dishonest scammers. Veterinarians are often rated as among the most highly trusted professions in many opinion polls, far above lawyers and politicians, yet your government has decided to use this Bill to launch an assault upon the Veterinary Profession in Alberta.

Albertans are taking note. Veterinarians serve millions of Albertans and the vast majority of our clients trust us implicitly. We work hard to earn and maintain this trust, and our clients know it and value it. Albertans will not forget your government's lack of fair consultation and how you treat hard working, highly trusted professionals.

This is weak, mis-informed and insulting legislation, and the government must withdraw it or amend it.

From a registered veterinary technologist in Edmonton:

Being that Albertans pay out-of-pocket for veterinary care for their pets, I do believe that it is important for them to be regulated independently. This allows veterinarians to truly practice medicine that is best for each unique situation, tailored to the pet, their owner and what they are willing and able to do for their pet. And veterinarians in turn support the community – every veterinary practice I've worked at has some form of emergency fund that is opened up for the clients who truly need it. Every practice has a [family pet who is taken in from someone] who was no longer able to care for the pet. And let's not forget what it truly means to be Albertan – Come Hell or High Water. Having lived through the flood in Calgary, I saw the enormous impact that veterinary clinics had on people's ability to survive through the flood. Knowing that their beloved pet was being safely cared for allowed them to worry about their own safety. The rescue efforts during the Fort McMurray fires are another example of the thousands of animals that were rescued and cared for by teams of volunteer veterinary medical professionals.

This is what Alberta means to me. This is what self-regulated veterinary medicine does for this province. I thought that the NDP understood this and that is why I voted for you in the last provincial election. Unfortunately, I am seriously regretting my decision. Your Government has tabled Bill 31 in the Legislature that is nothing short of insulting to the entire veterinary profession. I am severely disappointed in the way my profession has been misrepresented in the most appalling way. All the consultative processes have been thrown by the wayside. Veterinary medicine is not a consumer commodity; it is a medical field, filled with highly trained medical professionals who have dedicated their lives to be a voice for the voiceless. The Association (ABVMA) that we have elected to represent us has been completely shut out – the President of which is forced to sit in the gallery during sittings to learn what is being dictated to the profession. To be completely removed from what is supposed to be a two-way relationship is undemocratic. The proposed amendments to Bill 31 are insulting to my profession; they have come about in a way that is abusive to the very people who have devoted their lives to this profession and should be completely removed from Bill 31.

Madam Speaker, the final two quotes, one from a veterinarian in Calgary:

The changes that Bill 31 proposes show a complete lack of respect and understanding on the part of the current government of the veterinary profession. The proposed changes will deteriorate the high standards of care that the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association currently ensures, resulting in disastrous effects for business owners like myself and a deterioration of the human-animal bond and the commodification of care for animals. It's clear that the veterinary community in Alberta has lost trust in the current government over this issue, and I personally look forward to supporting a new government in 2019.

The final quote, and this is a personal one, Madam Speaker. In 2001, when I was living in Germany, I attended a veterinary orthopedics course. I met a young veterinarian at that course, and I found out that he was a graduate of the Karl Marx University in Leipzig. He was born in East Germany. In the fall of 1989 he was in his first year of veterinary school, and he participated in the Monday night demonstrations in Leipzig that eventually led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. He went to the Nikolai Kirche, and he grabbed a candle, and he participated in those. All of his classmates that participated were threatened with expulsion if they participated in those marches, and he said: no; this is too important. And in 1989, when the wall came down, this gentleman was there. This veterinary student was in Berlin when they opened up Checkpoint Charlie.

In 2003 I got a call from this veterinarian. He wanted to come to Canada, and I said: "I'll help you out. I'll see if I can find, you know, somebody that was looking for a veterinarian." He came to Canada. He has established his own practice in Grande Prairie. He's been very successful. He married a gal from northern Alberta.

He writes:

I was born and raised in East Germany and came to Canada in 2003. I was in Berlin the night they opened Checkpoint Charlie and the German reunification became a reality. My dream had always been to move to Canada and do what was never possible in East Germany – run my own Veterinary business.

I had watched my Dad struggle as an "employed veterinarian" in one of the biggest co-op's in East Germany. Already then, I had told myself I would like to go somewhere where honest, hard work pays off. Fast forward to Alberta, Canada December 2017. Here I am trying to understand why a provincial government is infiltrating and undermining my private business which I have worked so hard to build. No consultation with the ABVMA regarding this bill is bizarre and clearly indicates a government vindictive and attacking.

Madam Speaker, this doctor has now practised in Canada for 14 years, and I'm proud to call him my friend, I'm proud to call him a colleague, and I think he's made things better. But when I talked to him about this bill, he said: "That's exactly why I left East Germany, because the government, you know, couldn't and wouldn't stay out of people's business. What is happening? Why is this happening in this way?"

Madam Speaker, I'm opposed to this. I have been all along. I've been pretty consistent on that. I urge members to maybe finally now change your minds and vote this terrible piece of legislation down.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Would the hon. minister like to close debate? No? Okay.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:58 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Ms Sweet in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Feehan	McKitrick
Babcock	Fitzpatrick	McLean
Carlier	Hinkley	Miller
Carson	Horne	Miranda
Ceci	Jansen	Piquette
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Shepherd
Dach	Littlewood	Sucha
Dang	Luff	Westhead
Drever	Malkinson	Woollard
Eggen	Mason	

12:00

Against the motion:

Barnes	Hanson	Pitt
Clark	Hunter	Schneider
Cooper	Loewen	Smith
Cyr	McIver	Starke
Drysdale	McPherson	Strankman
Gill	Orr	van Dijken
Gotfried	Panda	

Totals:	For – 35	Against – 20
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[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly will stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:02 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 13, 2017

Day 66

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (NDP), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (NDP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Anderson, Hon. Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (NDP)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (NDP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (NDP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawthood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (NDP),
Government Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UCP)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (UCP)
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (NDP)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (UCP)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (NDP)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (NDP),
Deputy Government House Leader
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (UCP)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)

Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),
Official Opposition Whip
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (NDP)
McLean, Hon. Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Miranda, Hon. Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UCP),
Leader of the Official Opposition,
Official Opposition House Leader
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Payne, Hon. Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (NDP)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP),
Deputy Government Whip
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Shannon Dean, Law Clerk and Director of
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Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel

Philip Massolin, Manager of Research and
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Nancy Robert, Research Officer
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Paul Link, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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Babcock	Rosendahl
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Drysdale	Strankman
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Kleinsteinuber	Taylor
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Hanson	Nielsen
Kazim	Rosendahl
Kleinsteinuber	Woollard
Loewen	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 13, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: This will be the one moment that something has moved quickly around here.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View and deputy Leader of the Official Opposition.

Hanukkah

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Tonight Jewish families across Alberta and Canada will gather at sundown to light the hanukiah, a powerful symbol of faith and freedom. It is a statement of the Jewish people's struggle for religious freedom and shines with courage, with conscience, with strength, in centuries-long struggle for religious tolerance. The eight-day holiday commemorates the rededication of the temple against oppression more than 2,000 years ago. This victory still resonates today as a great triumph of religious freedom over subjugation and, as signified by the lighting of the hanukiah, of light over darkness. This joyous time represents an opportunity to think about the importance of faith and tradition as well as reflect upon the exceptional contribution of the Jewish community to our great province. Tonight as we watch the lighting of the second candle of Hanukkah, we're reminded of the ancient story of Israel's courage and their courage to make the darkness bright. We see the heroic spirit of the Maccabees live on in Israel today, and we know that a better day is coming when this festival of freedom will be celebrated in a world free from terror, and we will always keep hope that that light of hope will keep burning. The UCP caucus wishes a happy Hanukkah [remarks in Hebrew] to all those celebrating in Alberta and all around the world.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Hanukkah

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the Jewish tradition of Hanukkah. Yesterday at sundown families across Alberta celebrated the first day of Hanukkah through the lighting of the first candle of the menorah. The lighting of the candle represents the spread of light, wisdom, enlightenment, and faith throughout the world and is a demonstration of how every individual has the ability to change the world for the better.

Many cultures and religions brighten the darkest nights of the year with festivals of light, and the tradition of Hanukkah is one of the oldest. Hanukkah celebrates and commemorates the strength and perseverance of the Jewish people and their struggle for religious freedom. After the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem a one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days until new and ritually pure oil could be prepared for the temple menorah.

This year as we celebrate 150 years of Confederation, we have the special privilege of also celebrating the countless contributions of the Jewish people to Alberta and to Canada. We owe them a debt of gratitude for sharing their history, traditions, and culture with all of us and for their work as community builders and leaders.

As the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore I am proud to represent such a diverse and dedicated constituency that includes a very strong and proud Jewish community. I'm proud to join with them to mark the beginning of the festival of lights, and on behalf of my colleagues on both sides of this House I wish everyone celebrating a happy and peaceful Hanukkah. May the lights of the menorah shine upon all families of the Jewish faith this holiday season and brighten their prayers for peace.

Thank you.

Government Policies

Mr. Loewen: With apologies to Dr. Seuss' the Grinch.

Every Albertan down in Albertaville liked jobs and prosperity a lot,
But the Premier with her Leap Manifesto did not.
She talked of making life better, you see,
But she forgot overregulation is never the key.

She talked lots about having Albertans' backs,
But she never campaigned on her carbon tax,
Not to mention that large tax will increase by 50 per cent.
In January Albertans' pocketbooks will have a bigger dent.

Now, the NDP managed to increase surgery waits.
It was hard for hurting Albertans to wait for those dates.
Seven months or more wait for an MRI.
When the Health minister talked it was a pie in the sky.

Now, rural crime is going nowhere but up, up, up,
And Crown prosecutors are now looking at an empty cup.
Dippers talked about social license. Free pipelines for all,
But Kinder Morgan now has run into an NDP wall.

With the debt reaching over \$90 billion, we fear,
And expected interest racking up at \$3 billion a year,
Now the Dipper budgets credit agencies like this not,
So six credit downgrades is what we got.

They even reduced money to public schools
And called it an increase. No one was fooled.
Now rural crime is everywhere to and fro,
So the NDP responds by letting criminals go.

Now, when it comes to the NDP caribou plans,
MDs, counties, foresters, and oil are no fans.
All they've ever asked for is to be consulted,
But they continue to feel nothing but insulted.

Biologists just say the NDP have no species plans,
So how can they provide the feds with caribou range plans
When clearly we know that species interact?
Grizzlies and cougars eating caribou has an impact.

So before the feds get the caribou plans,
The people need to become very big fans.
That will take consultation, you know,
But with the NDP smoke they will blow.

Making life better is something they say,
But all indications point to higher costs each day.
Now, the Premier looked down from her lofty perch
Expecting to see Albertans left in a lurch.

Maybe prosperity, she thought, doesn't come in a bill.
Maybe prosperity in Alberta is hard to kill.
What happened then? Well the right did unite.
They chose a leader for Albertans they did . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Political Discourse

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a BA in professional communications, and in my studies I took a particular interest in political communications. It's a fascinating field that delves into human psychology, the evolution of technology, and how information can be shaped, transmitted, received, and taken in.

It was that study that led to my own increasing political engagement and eventually my run for office because I saw that the public and many people I knew felt disengaged and cynical, convinced that all politicians lie and everyday people have no hope of making a difference.

I ran to change that, to try and bring back some integrity to politics by helping people understand how our system works, how and why decisions are made, and how they themselves could get engaged. Now that I have the honour of standing here, I work every day to use my platform to do just that. That is why I'm committed to adamantly opposing the toxic environment being created by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

I recognize that political communications will always involve a certain amount of spin. Members will use hyperbole and exaggeration to frame their arguments, but we only have to look south to see the chaos and disorder created when elected officials take that behaviour to extremes. Since Jason Kenney's return to Alberta we've seen an exponential increase in the number of utterly inaccurate, disingenuous, and false claims infecting our political discourse to the point that our local media has felt the need to begin to call him out. It has been with great disappointment that I have seen members opposite follow that lead, spreading dangerously massaged and misleading information about GSAs, our electoral system, and even the written record of this House.

Mr. Speaker, to quote Charles Sykes, "Conservatives once recognized that politics was a means, not an end . . . that moral communities are 'fragile things, hard to build and easy to destroy.'" Power is not an end that justifies any means. That kind of attitude only serves to increase cynicism and drive our communities apart. Albertans deserve better. I'm committed to preserving the integrity of our political discourse, and I will continue to use my platform to call out those who abuse it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Clarissa Stoffelsen

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the distinct pleasure of telling you about Clarissa Stoffelsen, chief warrant officer of the 2850 Grande Prairie army cadet corps. Clarissa was recently awarded the General Walsh commemorative sword, the highest prize in army cadets in Canada. To give you an idea of the significance of this honour, she was invited to Ottawa for Remembrance Day where she joined the vice-regal party at the National War Memorial and was a luncheon guest at the Governor General's residence.

Clarissa was chosen as Canada's top army cadet from hundreds of nominees based on her experience, determination, fitness, outstanding service record, and the highest level of personal discipline. Mr. Speaker, our community could not be more proud, and I hope all Albertans now feel the same way.

1:40

Let me tell you a bit more about Clarissa. She joined the cadet program at the age of 12. Over the next five years she worked hard to reach the highest rank in the corps, regimental sergeant major. She also excels academically and has an excellent record of community involvement. Clarissa has received many awards during

her time as a cadet and has been rewarded with opportunities to travel to Chile, Europe, and the Yukon. She has one year left in cadets, and then she'll work towards a new objective, studying to become a doctor.

There's no doubt in my mind and I'm sure in all of yours now that I've told you about her that Clarissa will attain all of her life's goals as this cadet has already proven that she has the right stuff. She's the best of the best, Mr. Speaker.

Chilean Community in Alberta

Loyola: Mr. Speaker, today and every day my caucus colleagues and I stand with the Chilean community here in Alberta. Starting in 1975 Chilean refugees fled to Canada and other countries to escape the totalitarian and murderous military dictatorship in Chile. These families were torn apart by thousands of murders, tortures, and disappearances, but when they started new lives in safer places like here in Alberta, the process of healing began.

I spoke in this very House of the importance of upholding democracy and fighting for democratic principles while the members opposite belittled those very values. As I spoke of the Chilean dictatorship, a member opposite shouted at me and said that Pinochet's dictatorship was a success story. Mr. Speaker, Latin American Canadians from countries across this hemisphere know undemocratic governments and dictatorships far too well. For the opposition to ever think of joking about a dictatorship that resulted in the deaths of thousands is incredibly offensive. They undermine the Chilean community's ability to reconcile its past when they claim that a dictator was a success. They ought to know better, but belittling human rights appears to have become a pattern for them.

Canada is a wonderful place for people from all walks of life, and I'm grateful my family is here in Canada, living and respecting indigenous communities and their territory. I call on the opposition to apologize to the Chilean community here in Alberta. They need to withdraw their comments and educate themselves on the atrocities of the military dictatorship in Chile. They need to stand on the side of human rights, of peace, and, most importantly, of democracy.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from the reeve of Wheatland county, which I will read into the record this afternoon in debate of Bill 33.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the five copies of an OH and S alert issued by the United Nurses of Alberta entitled You Have the Right and Obligation to Refuse Unsafe Work! It also says, "What does this mean? . . . refusing to perform unsafe work is not only a right it is a legal requirement in Alberta." Unfortunately for this government, this was issued in 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regarding rural crime letters still coming in, I have one from Gordon here talking about the police response time of 45 minutes.

I have another one here from David talking about all the stolen vehicles just in his one community. It's just terrible.

I have another letter from Shauna pleading with the government to please do something to keep repeat offenders in prison.

Another one was anonymously sent. "Rural Crime is getting out of control." Eight residences were broken into in a two-kilometre circle around her farm just in the last year. These people are not feeling safe.

Another one, Marilyn, from my riding. This is regarding a home invasion. Again, criminals right back out on the street again. Of course, it's not an emergency.

This one was written to the Premier regarding the \$55,000 in security systems that this business installed which was stolen from their business.

It's not an emergency, Mr. Speaker?

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, over a year ago we had an emergency debate in this House about the tragic death of little Serenity in 2014. Albertans were horror stricken and heartbroken when they learned the details of Serenity's short life. They demanded action from this government to find out what happened and to ensure it never happens again. The government set up the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention that was to submit a final report within six months. The child intervention panel has been meeting for about a year now, and Albertans are getting anxious. To the Premier: when will Albertans receive the child intervention panel's final report?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will take the House leader's questions today or, rather, perhaps the Minister of Children's Services will, but first I need to say how surprised and frankly disappointed I am that the member didn't reconsider his decision to stay in this position. Instead of defending a woman who came forward to him about sexual harassment, he fired her, and instead of holding the House leader accountable, the UCP leader rushed to his defence. We'll certainly be answering the questions asked by this member, but I think that Albertans deserve some clarity from the leader of this party and the House leader as well.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I have addressed that issue both in and outside this House. This caucus takes harassment very seriously. I took the harassment that was happening to my employee at the time very seriously as well. I was deeply concerned about that. My firm and I made some mistakes as we worked through the processes, as our client removed Ms Harrison from our site. We would have made some decisions differently with the benefit of hindsight and experience. We regret that and have apologized for that.

But this question was about the report from the child intervention panel, Mr. Speaker. I will ask it again. When can Albertans expect to see that report?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very thankful to all the members of the panel, who've spent many months deliberating the very complex situation around child intervention in this province. Of course, we were moved to do so after hearing the story of Serenity and many other stories over the years. Certainly, I'm very thankful for that work, and I know that they have done some great work, even just this morning, in terms of coming forward with some

ideas on where they want to go with that. As they work to bring recommendations forward, I'll be happy to keep the House updated on what's happening.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, members from all parties have been attending meetings of the child intervention panel for almost a year. We all care deeply about the safety and well-being of children in our intervention system. This is not the first time in recent years we have had a panel or a round-table examining our child intervention system. Premier, what can you tell Albertans is different this time with this child intervention panel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without doubt, we want every child in Alberta to have a safe, healthy, and loving home because, truly, here in Alberta we take that seriously. We need to work together to take care of our families and our neighbours. That was the spirit with which we brought forward the panel, and certainly that was the spirit by which we responded to phase 1 of the panel's work, by bringing forward legislation as soon as possible after phase 1 was completed and the recommendations were submitted. We make that commitment as well, that as soon as the recommendations are received from the panel, we will be taking action and moving forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

1:50 Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services continues to state that she will do everything she needs to do to prevent child abuse to ensure a tragedy such as the one that occurred to little Serenity does not happen again. Premier, your government had a chance to do that with Bill 216, which has been before this House since December 5. You failed with this bill. Will you work with me and other members of this opposition to make it work as soon as possible for Serenity and her mom?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the member, I am very deeply committed to doing everything we possibly can to reduce child abuse in this province and to do everything we can to prevent a tragedy like what happened to Serenity. I certainly committed to Serenity's mother when she was here that I would work with the member in terms of achieving those goals and objectives. Again, I think that there were some challenges with Bill 216, but that does not mean that the commitment behind it to address these issues is not real. We had a meeting just last week, and I'm thankful for the...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services said in the House last week, "Our whole Legislature is committed to honouring the memory of Serenity by taking action to prevent child abuse." Premier, this is a good statement. I support it. The whole House supports it. You have said that you support it, but can you please tell us today what concrete changes you have implemented in the past 12 months that meet that goal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, again, when tragedies happen, families deserve answers and families deserve action. That was why we established the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. We all want to do better for children and families. We unanimously passed Bill 18 so that Albertans know that when something happens to children in care, our government is taking action. We're exploring ways to address the disparity in on-reserve services. We increased funding to hire 60 new staff to support vulnerable kids, and we will keep taking action on that. I can't wait to get the recommendations from the panel and start working with my department to take action to make life better for children who are in care and families who continue to be challenged.

Mr. Ellis: I am also waiting for the recommendations.

This government has vowed that it is committed to preventing child abuse. Well, Premier, all of Alberta is watching because Serenity's sad case has touched the hearts of everyone. Her family has come here twice to quietly and respectfully urge this government to take action. Premier, when will Albertans see action from your government that truly, truly does honour Serenity's memory?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reporting suspected abuse and neglect is both a moral responsibility and a legal requirement that we all have. I would continue to urge Albertans that if they suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, they must call the child abuse hotline at 1.800.387.KIDS. Each situation and family is different, so while some of the signs might point to abuse, they might also mean that the family is facing other challenges. Regardless, Children's Services can help children and their families be supported and make a difference in whatever that family may face. Again, any suspicion of abuse or neglect: please, please report it so that we can provide the support needed to those families.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Federal and Provincial Finance Ministers' Meeting

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Finance minister chose to avoid answering whether he stood up for Alberta's small business in the recent meeting of finance ministers. Alberta small-business owners are concerned about the federal tax, and they want a provincial finance minister that will actually stand up for their concerns. They are concerned that they may have to make major changes to their existing business structures at the end of the year. They're concerned because it is already the busiest time of the year for the retail service industry. Again, did the government raise these concerns at the finance ministers' meetings or, for that matter, have they ever raised them at the federal government level?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we have. Yes, we will continue to make sure that we prioritize the concerns that are brought forward from Alberta businesses. We're proud of our track record, and we're proud of the work we're doing to support them, including the fact that we have reduced small-business taxes by a third in this province. We'll keep working to make sure that Alberta continues to be the best place to work, start a business, and live.

Mrs. Aheer: We're hearing from small businesses, Mr. Speaker. They're very concerned. Yesterday the Finance minister claimed that he stood up on behalf of Albertans for important issues of equalization at the recent finance ministers' meetings. It's a welcome change from his past position where he was, quote, agnostic about equalization issues. It's important that this government seize the opportunity to correct existing imbalances in the government. To the Premier: did her Finance minister put forward a proposal for a new formula at these negotiations? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can say unequivocally that our Finance minister went to that meeting and he stood up and fought for Alberta. That is quite unlike Jason Kenney when he was a member of the Harper government, who had multiple opportunities to fix the equalization formula for this country to benefit Alberta. Instead, the one change that he did make made it worse. It's hurt Alberta because it has cost us money.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's no secret that Albertans give more than they get when it comes to equalization. That's why it's important that there's a provincial government standing up for Albertans when it comes to federal-provincial discussion on this matter. That's why it was troubling when the Finance minister said last year that equalization was not something that the minister was focused on, but yesterday the minister claimed that he was taking steps to stand up for Albertans. Can the Premier or the Finance minister now update the Assembly on the next steps and how they plan to follow through with these promises?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and members of this House that the Finance minister has put the financial position of this province relative to federal issues first and foremost, and I'll just give another example. The federal government began by saying that the proceeds from taxation on marijuana would be split 50-50 with all the costs coming to municipalities and to the provinces. Our Premier and our Finance minister stood up and fought for a much better formula. It's now 75-25 with a cap on federal . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Education Budget

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recently learned that the Education minister ordered all Alberta school districts and education organizations to reduce costs. This goes directly against the government's repeated commitment to not reduce funding for programs that Albertans value most. This is the second time this week that we're learning about big cuts to critical programs from the media rather than from the government. To the Premier: how many other critical programs and services have been targeted for cuts?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to revisit what's happened over the last number of years, we've been very focused on making sure that we stop the deep cuts that were coming forward from the now Official Opposition. We made sure that we funded enrolment growth, and we made sure that those funds went towards school districts. We also worked to make sure that we

reduced school fees in this province, and all of those things certainly wouldn't have happened under the opposition's watch. Now, in terms of local decision-making we respect the fact that we get the funds as close to the communities as possible, and we trust local decision-makers to do the best with those funds to meet the community's needs.

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, school districts have been told to cut several items that help our education professionals become better at serving Alberta students. Conferences, travel, and professional membership fees are on the block. These opportunities allow our teachers and administrators to share and learn best practices with education professionals around the world. To the Premier: what is the dollar amount that the government expects to save by cutting Alberta's education professionals off at the knees in their ability to become better educators in the future?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite is working at hyperbole, but that's exactly what that is. We've worked hard to make sure that we're getting funds into the classrooms. We're getting funds through the agreement that we had with the Alberta Teachers' Association classroom improvements funds. When I've gone to schools and asked "How are you investing some of those funds?", they've talked about very specific conferences that they've taken around literacy or numeracy or other items that are of particular interest to the students in their class. When I, of course, have met with school boards, some of them talk about the focus that they've really done around making sure that they have reasonable class sizes. These are all things that are only possible because this government brought in a budget that supports Alberta families and makes their lives better.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, it's unfair and lacking in compassion to present our educators with a lump of coal by demanding these cuts right before Christmas. There are definitely savings to be found by collaborating with educators rather than issuing a grinchy edict. To the Premier: how does the government hope to achieve compassionate cuts by surprising our educators with this last-minute rush to address costs?

Ms Hoffman: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that everyone knows that this government is deeply committed to ensuring that we have a very strong education system in this province, and we've shown that through all of our budgets. We've also shown all Albertans that we expect, now that we're out of the economic downturn and we're on a path of moving up, up, up, we want to do so while, of course, ensuring that we have thoughtful ways of addressing what might be some excess. That's why those letters were sent to school boards rather than dictates that said what they had to do. We want to work with them to make sure that we find efficiencies and make Alberta's classrooms even better.

2:00 Conversion Therapy Use in Alberta

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, attempting to change or repair a person's sexual identity is a very dangerous practice. LGBTQ-plus youth that are subjected to this unscientific and unproven treatment often face lifelong consequences, including substance abuse issues, self-harming behaviours, and potential suicide. I have personally heard from numerous Albertans about the dangers of conversion therapy. To the Minister of Health: what steps is the government taking to ensure that no Albertan is subjected to this archaic and dangerous practice?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her strong advocacy on this issue as well as many others. Our government unequivocally stands against conversion therapy. This harmful practice is incredibly detrimental to LGBTQ youth, and we refuse to support anything that could harm our most vulnerable Albertans. I'm deeply proud of the work we've done to support LGBTQ rights, including expanding human rights legislation. We know that there is more work to be done, and this continues to be a priority for our government.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that our LGBTQ-plus youth may be subjected to a practice that is not supported by health practitioners. To the same minister: what is your ministry hearing from stakeholders and health professionals about this practice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work very closely with a number of health professionals who engage in therapy, including psychiatrists, psychologists, and many others, social workers included. In every case these professional colleges were appalled at the practice of conversion therapy and have mechanisms to discipline any member who may be engaging in it. There is no billable service related to conversion therapy. We do not fund it in any way, and under this government we never will.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Ontario already has legislation in place banning conversion therapy, to the same minister: does this government plan to introduce legislation that would outlaw conversion therapy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The Ontario bill has made it illegal for any practitioner to bill Ontario Health for conversion therapy. I'm glad to say that Alberta Health in no way covers this practice. However, we are continuing to examine options to ensure that conversion therapy is not forced upon LGBTQ youth outside of the health care system. I appreciate the member's concern with this issue, and I look forward to working with her to protect all vulnerable Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Saskatchewan's Construction Site Ban on Alberta Licence Plates

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks a week since the province of Saskatchewan banned Alberta licence plates from bidding on highway construction projects. Given that our government gave the Saskatchewan government a week or we would take them to court, to the Minister of Transportation: what progress has been made in resolving this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can tell the House that after six days ministers from the Saskatchewan government finally returned our phone calls yesterday, and the minister of economic development and I asked them about this issue. They were not able to provide any concrete evidence to

support their claims that Saskatchewan firms are being discriminated against in our province. They have retroactively changed open tenders to restrict Alberta-plated vehicles, and we think this is unacceptable. As a result, we've demanded that they kill that ban and do so . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has a strong commitment to the New West trade partnership and to its other interprovincial and international trade agreements and given that, as the Premier has demonstrated on the pipeline file, we know that ultimately we see best results when we work through the systems available, to the same minister: how is this government working to resolve this issue through the courts or through other means?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've spoken with our legal teams and have a trade challenge prepared through the New West Partnership agreement. We're ready to file first thing tomorrow morning. I want to be very clear that we would rather resolve this issue through conversations as opposed to through the courts, but we are left with no choice given the government of Saskatchewan's stubborn position. Once this issue is resolved – and we will win – I hope that the western provinces can work together to further enhance trade to compete internationally.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that ultimately this is about standing up for Alberta's workers and that involves talking to all our partners in the industry, to the same minister: what is the government hearing from Alberta construction and road builders about this protectionist restriction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the building trades to construction associations, industry partners are dumbfounded and confused by Saskatchewan's unsubstantiated claims. They worry about their members and the impacts this restriction is going to have on construction. That's why we're standing up for Alberta companies and Alberta workers. We know that the government of Saskatchewan is not trade compliant. We will fight this in court, and we will win. Our government has the backs of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Veterinary Profession Act Amendments

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A little over two hours ago Bill 31 passed third reading in this Assembly despite vocal opposition from veterinarians, veterinary technologists, and pet owners from across the province. This bill includes several amendments to the Veterinary Profession Act, which is under the purview of the Minister of Labour. The veterinary profession reports to the Minister of Labour, who was silent throughout the debate on Bill 31. To that minister. Please clarify: do you support the changes that Bill 31 makes to the Veterinary Profession Act?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Status of Women.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were very proud to pass Bill 31 today. We know that veterinarians are trusted professionals, and Albertans look to them to provide quality care for their pets. Our government supports this legislation because after the past several months of listening to thousands of Albertans who told us that they want better protections for consumers and a level playing field for business, we were happy to be able to consult with the industry and other veterinary stakeholders. We heard their concerns, and we were happy to pass legislation and are very much, after hearing all sides, of the view that it strikes a balance.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know how that minister feels. We're really wanting to hear the Minister of Labour.

Given that the issue of veterinary billing was identified as number 13 out of 15 of the issues in the government's consumer protection survey and given that this paragraph was deleted from the report on the survey that was shared with the ABVMA and given that the withholding of this vital information is a disturbing practice by the Minister of Service Alberta, to the minister: how do you explain the two different versions of the document reporting on veterinary billing survey results, and why did you withhold selected information from the ABVMA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we heard from many ordinary Albertans who told us that they want to be better informed when looking for veterinary services for their pets. That's why we proposed reasonable new rules requiring fee disclosures that are in line with other provinces. Certainly, when we reviewed the results of the survey, we took not only into account quantity but also the quality of responses. After hearing some very heartbreaking stories from individual Albertans and, again, after consulting with industry, we determined this was a balanced approach.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the members of the veterinary profession are justifiably outraged by the callous and disrespectful treatment given them by the Minister of Service Alberta and given that this damage the ham-handed handling of Bill 31 has done to the relationship with our profession and given that the successful implementation of changes to the Veterinary Profession Act will require a co-operative effort between this government and the ABVMA, to the minister: now that you've taken over the Veterinary Profession Act, will you work to repair the damage you've caused by speaking at the AGM of the ABVMA, as the Minister of Labour did last March?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. minister.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take the opportunity to clarify something mentioned by the member. The legislation has not been moved under the jurisdiction of Service Alberta. We consulted with Albertans and with industry with respect to some specific changes around the issue of transparency, which we heard from Albertans was a concern and an improvement that they would like to see in this area. We will continue along with Labour, as we have throughout our consultations, in conjunction, to consult with the ABVMA and other stakeholders to ensure the regulations . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. [interjection] Hon. member.

Photoradar Review

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, last spring the Official Opposition called on the Transportation minister to conduct a review into the use of photoradar. Even the minister said last May that, quote: my concern is that there is a strong public view that photoradar has gone beyond just enforcing safe traffic and has become in some cases a bit of a cash cow for municipalities. End quote. Can the minister advise the House: what is the status of the review of photoradar, and when will the report be tabled?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to do that. I think there's been a great deal of public concern about the utilization of photoradar, and it's important that any kind of electronic monitoring of traffic or enforcement needs to be done on the basis of improving safety. That's our main objective. It's always focused on making sure that people are safe on our roads, and the degree that it can be a useful tool for that is the degree to which this government will support it. Otherwise, it should not be used in place of taxes.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that when the minister committed to the review, which has not been tabled, nor did he mention anything about it, Alberta was one of only four provinces with a photoradar program and given that Alberta is the only province that allows so-called mobile speed cameras on roadways that are neither school zones nor construction zones, can you update this Assembly on why your government is delaying this much-needed review, or is this another broken NDP promise?

Mr. Mason: I can assure the hon. member that that is simply untrue. This government is committed to seeing through this review and to making sure that our roads are as safe as possible but that these devices are not misused. That's the subject of the review, Mr. Speaker, and we're very much focused on that. Safety is our top priority, and we also want to make sure that drivers are not unfairly taken advantage of for taxation reasons.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have a long-standing concern about how photoradar is used in this province. Earlier this year the government scrambled to book a press room to get out ahead of the opposition last minute on this issue. Since the minister hastily announced this year that there would be a review, there has been no update or sign that the review is even close to completion or even started. Minister, how many people are working on this review, and is it anywhere near completion?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that a review is under way. We have issued an RFP in order to provide an opportunity to look at consultants who can help us with this review, and the House will be informed of the results of the review in due course.

Energy Policies and Industry Competitiveness

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the CAPP president, Tim McMillan, said, quote: Alberta's climate plan with its new regulations does not support working Albertans. End quote. He said that the \$440 million oil sands innovation fund pits companies and communities against each other and that the NDP government's plan does not

protect jobs or the competitiveness of the energy sector. Husky, Imperial, and CNRL all agree. To the Deputy Premier: why is your government making it more difficult to do business in Alberta while making life miserable for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. You know, we've been working with industry, including CAPP and all of their members, for the past two years, ensuring that we were going to move forward with our climate leadership plan to ensure that companies are moving forward on developing innovative technologies that will reduce their greenhouse gases, reduce their footprint but also make them more competitive. Last week we announced \$1.4 billion that will be invested with industry into finding innovative solutions and continuing to drive the innovation agenda forward.

Mr. Panda: When the Official Opposition is trying to do its job holding the government to account and offering constructive feedback, the NDP says that we are cheering for the failure of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth, and we will not be bullied by this NDP government. Instead of auditioning for the role of Official Opposition, why won't this NDP government face the facts about high unemployment, the brain drain, rural crime, credit downgrades, and vanishing investments and stop pulling from their record?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what I find disingenuous? That the opposition is continuing to hope that the pipeline approvals that we've secured will fail and that these pipelines won't be built. It's getting quite tiresome of an opposition that is running down our industry. We know that they are the best in the world. We are working collaboratively with them to increase opportunities, to expand the innovative technologies that they are developing. We are partnering with industry. We stand with our oil and gas sector. We stand with our energy sector. When will the opposition do the same?

Mr. Panda: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP shamelessly takes credit for any success of hard-working entrepreneurs and businesses like JACOS, who only recently started production after years of construction, and since the NDP is taking credit for the increased production of Suncor, Cenovus, and CNRL but it was all due to the mergers and acquisitions when the multinationals left, will the NDP admit that they're just following Tommy Douglas's energy policy of the 1970s to kick the big multinationals out of the oil sands while misleading Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? The opposition would have us sit on our hands and do nothing. Well, you know what? There is a role for government to play, and we're very proud of the role that we play in working with industry to encourage investments, to make it as easy as possible to invest in this province. The credit always goes to the companies and to the small-business owners. But there is a role for government to play, whether it's through our Alberta jobs plan, bringing forward tax credits that make us more competitive, or, again, investing \$1.4 billion from the carbon levy into innovation that's going to benefit our oil and gas sector, our energy sector, our food processors.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Renewable Energy Development

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans are being pressured to sign away the right to their land, all in the name of this government's rapid and irresponsible drive to 30 per cent renewables by 2030. I have asked repeatedly about what protections are in place for landowners and what reclamation requirements exist. The answer: none. It turns out that even minimum setback requirements are, quote, negotiable. When will this government protect rural Alberta farmers from the predatory practices of Ontario speculators furiously buying land options so they can develop subsidized wind projects in Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we're really proud of the fact that we're working to ensure that we address climate change. We do it in a way where we work with local Albertans, taking all of the money invested through that price on carbon, investing it back in Alberta's local economy. We also know that that means there are opportunities for more income, more employment. I've met with many rural landowners who are excited about the opportunities that they see now for diversifying some of their income as well. We respect them. We want to ensure that they have the opportunities to work collaboratively, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. MacIntyre: I look forward to the minister tabling that list.

Minimum wage increases, costly Bill 6 regulations, a carbon tax that unequally penalizes rural Albertans forced to travel further for their goods and services: it's, frankly, impossible to figure out what this government hasn't done to make life harder in rural Alberta. Given that we've heard repeatedly about efforts to buy development options along the poorly wind-resourced eastern slopes, do these developers even need to prove viability, or are skyrocketing electric bills one more thing rural Albertans can look forward to?

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. My rural roots just couldn't keep me seated on this one, Mr. Speaker, because just earlier this week I had the opportunity to visit a number of different health care facilities in northwestern Alberta, and I have to say that the number one question they ask is: we're really scared that our hospital is going to get closed. You know what? We've worked with those rural communities to ensure that we're providing stable, supportive care environments for those Albertans. We're working with rural landowners to make sure they have opportunities to get fair compensation if they choose to expand and diversify some of their opportunities for investment, and we're working to make sure that local municipalities have a voice and have strong opportunities to engage with this government. I'm proud of that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. MacIntyre: Wow. That was exciting.

The government is announcing today the results of Alberta's renewables auction. Pricing per kilowatt is reported to be below 4 cents. But that is not the full cost to Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell Albertans what the full cost of renewable electricity will be, including the cost of rapid-response backup generation and the infrastructure for it when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think there's quite a bit of wind blowing from the other side of the House.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta isn't just a leader in oil and gas; we're a leader in renewable energy as well. The announcement today is about great jobs, big private-sector investments, and making sure that we get the best possible price for Albertans. Alberta is setting a record for the lowest cost of renewables in Canada, less than half of the price in Ontario and amongst the lowest in the world. This shows that our made-in-Alberta plan is working. It highlights a highly competitive process, strong potential for renewable power in Alberta, and positive.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

2:20

Dementia Care

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The number of people with dementia in our province will triple in the next 30 years, and that's why I've been asking this government repeatedly about their dementia strategy, or should I say their lack of a dementia strategy. Frustrating as it is, I will ask today for the third time. In June the Minister of Health promised that a strategy would be completed in a couple of weeks. In September she said that it's coming soon, but Albertans are still waiting. To the Minister of Health one more time: where is the dementia strategy? When will we see it? Why is it taking so long?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. This absolutely has been a priority. Every time we feel like it's almost done – it kind of reminds me of when I was working on my master's thesis – we always think there's one more thing that we can just improve a little bit to make it that much better. We're doing this in partnership with a number of stakeholders, but it will be done very soon. I'll dare to give an exact date. I'm hoping to have it out before Christmas.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that this government has started sending signals that cuts are coming to education and PSE, we can only assume that health care is next and given that there are many community programs that are cost-effective and that deliver badly needed services to people with dementia, their families, and caregivers and given that these programs save money by keeping people in the community rather than hospital, again to the Minister of Health: will you commit to not cutting any existing dementia support programs in the next budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I think that our past budget practices have shown that on this side of the House we stand with Albertans. We're working hard to protect and improve health and education. The calls for cuts continue to come from the members opposite. We're working to make sure that we can move forward in a way that's respectful of all Albertans, including those who are living with dementia in their families.

Mr. Clark: That's not a no, Mr. Speaker, and you're not hearing calls for cuts from me.

Mr. Speaker, dementia care in this province doesn't just need sustainable funding for existing programs; new investments are badly needed. Given that Ontario has a fully funded provincial dementia strategy and given that this strategy allocates \$100 million over three years plus an additional \$20 million for respite care, one more time to the Minister of Health: if we do eventually see a provincial dementia strategy – and I sincerely hope that we do – will it come with significant new funding to support Albertans living with dementia, their families, and caregivers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again to the member for the question and for the opportunity to respond, Mr. Speaker. We continue to work with the dementia strategy itself, which will hopefully be released in the coming days. The budget process, the budget cycle begins, of course, in the spring. We look forward to bringing a budget to this House. We know that the Official Opposition has talked about cuts of 20 per cent. We know that wouldn't help Albertans. We're fighting hard to make sure that we improve opportunities for Albertans to get care in the communities that they choose to live in, and that, of course, includes dementia supports.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Agricultural Exports and NAFTA

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year 40 per cent of our agriculture products were exported to the United States, bringing in \$4 billion to the Alberta economy. The North American free trade agreement, or NAFTA, has played a critical role in giving Alberta producers access to the American market. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Farmers in my riding are curious to know: what is the government doing to protect Alberta's agricultural interests under NAFTA?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We understand how important it is for Alberta producers to get their products to market. It makes life better for farm families, makes life better for small communities, small rural communities. It's important for diversifying our economy and creating jobs that support families. We're working closely with the government of Canada and with other provinces to defend Alberta's interests during the review of our trade agreements with the United States and Mexico.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how is the government ensuring that the supply management of agricultural products is protected in any proposed changes to NAFTA?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Our government strongly supports supply management. Together, SM5 commodities accounted for 6.9 per cent, or \$891.6 million, of the total value of agricultural production in 2015. The latest demands to scrap the supply management system in the United States are unacceptable to us and industries like dairy. They've made unsupportable suggestions like this on other issues before. We'll continue to advocate for a system that ensures stable access to safe, healthy food.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to diversify Alberta's agricultural exports to make us less dependent on exports to a single market such as the United States?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, the world knows our reputation for good, safe, and quality products. Our government will work to open those opportunities for producers. That's why I'm pleased to participate in trade missions that showcase our amazing products, places like China, Japan, Korea, and Europe. We will continue to monitor developments in the U.S. very closely, and we will take a pragmatic, long view of any proposed changes to ensure that we're protecting Alberta's interests. The United States is Canada's biggest trading partner, and we value that relationship. We also know that we need to diversify our markets so that more people around the world have the opportunity to enjoy amazing agricultural products: beef, pork, grain, and oilseeds.

Justice Ministry Intervention in University of Lethbridge Labour Grievance

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, as disgusting as it may be to all of us, pockets of anti-Semitism still exist in Alberta. Anthony Hall, a disgraced, Holocaust-denying professor from the University of Lethbridge, may as well be the poster child for such hate-mongering beliefs. In October 2016 the U of L took a strong stand and suspended Dr. Hall based on his abhorrent conduct. Sadly, Dr. Hall's union pushed hard for his reinstatement. During court proceedings the government intervened in support of the position taken by Dr. Hall's union, an exceedingly rare action within Canada. Respectfully, to the Minister of Education: why did the government choose to intervene in this case?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity that the member has given me to address this issue. The Ministry of Justice did intervene in this case. It had absolutely nothing to do with supporting Dr. Hall's abhorrent views. It had everything to do with making sure that we followed the proper process, that was a result of the legislation that we brought forward to enhance postsecondary bargaining in this province. The Justice department was keen to make sure that all the parties involved in this dispute were following the proper procedures that were new to this case and to make sure that we didn't set a dangerous precedent.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that B'nai Brith, a respected Jewish human rights organization, reached out to the government during this dispute and warned them that intervening in this case could have the effect of placing a Holocaust denier back in the classroom and given that the government chose to brush off such concerns and intervene, arguing that they needed to do so in order to uphold the academic labour relations structure implemented via Bill 7, introduced this spring, again to the minister: why did the government ignore the concerns of B'nai Brith prior to intervening in this case?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we took B'nai Brith's concerns very seriously. We find as a government that

Dr. Hall's views on the world are abhorrent and really have no place, poisoning the young minds of the province of Alberta. It was important, though, that we follow the proper procedure in this case so that we don't set a precedent for dismissing people from our universities improperly. Dr. Hall is under investigation by the University of Lethbridge, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of that investigation in the very near future.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the judge overseeing court proceedings specifically said that the passing and content of Bill 7 are the reasons he was ruling in favour of Dr. Hall's union and given that the passing of Bill 7 retroactively strengthened Dr. Hall's and his union's position, leading to his reinstatement, thankfully not to a teaching position, again to the minister: were you aware that a situation like this, where a professor is reinstated to an institution that has valid concerns regarding adherence to human rights legislation, could arise as a direct result of the passing of Bill 7?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for all members to remember that the proper process has been in place. We certainly don't want people to be dismissed unfairly from any of our postsecondary institutions. We want to make sure that everybody has access to the proper procedures and the proper administration of the law, regardless of how abhorrent their views are. Dr. Hall is under investigation. The proper procedure is being followed in this case. I look forward to the outcome of following the proper procedure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Rural Crime

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Less than three weeks ago we had over 100 rural residents show up, demanding actions on rural crime. We asked the government for an emergency debate to discuss solutions that could be used to solve the rural crime problem, but the government argued against the need for debate. One of those solutions would be to ban the Waze app and other apps that track police vehicles. To the Acting Minister of Justice: has the government given any consideration to banning such software applications to get them out of the hands of criminals?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, rural crime has many faces. Certainly, trespassing and poaching are significant issues in rural areas of Alberta, and we remain very concerned about those in addition to all of the other rural crime issues that have been raised in the past. Our government has made significant advances in reducing rural crime, including investing in ALERT, a program that, of course, Jason Kenney cut when he was in the federal government. We continue to invest in more prosecutors. We're investing in more courthouses. The hon. member . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Hanson: Wow, Mr. Speaker. That's all I can say.

There are other things the government can do to combat rural crime, and since this government saw fit to build a new courthouse in Red Deer and demands for a new courthouse also exist in Strathcona county – meanwhile, courthouses in other parts of the province have been closed down – to the Acting Minister of Justice:

would your department be prepared to reopen the courthouse or resume court services in the provincial building in the town of Smoky Lake to help reduce the backlog?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we continue to examine ways that we can reduce rural crime, and it's important to remind all members that we have invested significantly in the justice resources that are available to the people of Alberta in spite of the calls from the members opposite to cut the budget by 20 per cent. It's interesting that the member opposite wants us to invest more resources while cutting the budget and cutting taxes for wealthy people. Those two things don't add up. We can't do both. We're investing in crime reduction.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to offer some practical solutions here. Given that adjustments to the courts could get more criminals and troubled people off our streets, cracking down on crime, and given that in other jurisdictions specialized courts like mental health courts can be used to get people the help that they need and in other places special night courts are held to deal with traffic offences, minor infractions, misdemeanours, and to enter pleas, to the acting Justice minister: are you prepared to sit night courts in the major cities in order to help us clear off the backlog?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as I've said in my previous answers, we continue to look at additional ways that we can reduce rural crime. We're very concerned about the backlog. We continue to press the federal government to appoint additional judges to the Court of Queen's Bench, but you know the member opposite has to recognize that the resources he's demanding cost money. We can't cut taxes for rich people, we can't cut a budget by 20 per cent and do the things that he's asking us to do. We need to invest in resources to cut crime. That is what our government is doing.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Stoney Trail 14th Street Interchange in Calgary

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Mr. Speaker, it wasn't that long ago when Stoney Trail defined the northern edge of the city of Calgary. However, over the last few years, as neighbourhoods in Panorama and Coventry were completed, growth in Calgary has expanded to the north side of Stoney Trail into the neighbourhoods of Evanston and Carrington. My question to the Minister of Transportation: when will the 14th Street overpass commence construction, linking the communities of Panorama and Evanston?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, our government is very committed to ensuring the safe and efficient transportation of individuals and goods on our provincial highways. We've had conversations with the city of Calgary going back to 2015 around this particular interchange. We have, in fact, retained a consultant with respect to this potential project, and we're waiting for the city of Calgary to put it on their construction program, which they have not yet done.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents of both Evanston and Panorama tell me that navigating around the Stoney Trail-14th Street interchange can be confusing and that they often have to drive through other communities, adding to neighbourhood traffic. My question, again to the Minister of Transportation: can residents expect to see this important project appear on the funded or unfunded capital projects list in the upcoming budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Speaker. We know that this project is important to those living in and developing these communities. We need to listen to the concerns of these residents and the businesses as well as being aware of the ongoing development plans of the city of Calgary. We have signed an agreement in principle for the city of Calgary to fund this interchange, and the member needs to stay tuned.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this could be the last supplemental of the session and, again, given how important the Stoney Trail and 14th Street overpass is to the connectivity of the neighbours, neighbourhoods, and commerce and given that this is the best time to move forward with infrastructure investments, when can we expect to see improvement on this issue for the betterment of north-central Calgary?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much for that question. Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member and the House that we're continuing to have conversations with the city of Calgary, and we will have more information to share on the tendering of this project and the eventual start date. It's another example of this government working with the people of Calgary to improve the lives of the people of that city.

Orders of the Day

Statement by the Speaker

Remarks at the End of the Fall Sitting

The Speaker: The time is already consumed, hon. members. [interjections] I'm surprised by the reaction. I heard rumours around this place – and of course there are very few rumours in this place – that many of you wanted to go home. I don't know if that's true.

In that light, hon. members, if you would allow me, as we leave, I'd just like to make a few remarks to all of you. I would say that I think that I speak for all of you that the privilege to be in here is beyond the expectation that any of us had prior to this experience. It's my hope that each of us will remind ourselves of that fact frequently. Whenever we speak to and with each other, let us remember that the goal is to reach an agreement, not whether one side lost or won.

I learn at least one thing every day that I am here. There is, however, so much more that I need to learn.

On behalf of the LAO staff, the deputy speakers, myself, I hope that each of you have a peaceful time with your loved ones. It has been my honour and privilege to serve you.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 33 Electoral Divisions Act

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand and move third reading of Bill 33.

Bill 33 enacts the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission as well as incorporating limited name changes approved in this Chamber on November 28. As I've said in the past, I think it's safe to say that electoral boundary redistributions rarely satisfy everyone. It's important, Mr. Speaker, to remember that this was an independent panel that studied the issue at some length. We believe that the alternative of politicians deciding their own boundaries is not appropriate, so it's for that reason that I urge members of the House to support this bill at third reading.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that we are here today with this bill. I will tell you that it's very disappointing for myself to see the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake be changed the way it is. A lot of my rural colleagues across the province – I would say that even some of the government colleagues – are not overly enthused with this.

2:40

Now, I would like to note a few things from my colleague from Battle River-Wainwright, some of the concerns that he brought forward for the House. I'd like to put that on the record, that he's put a lot of effort into some of this. The first thing that he mentioned here is that according to the interim report it's actually written that "Alberta is no longer rural." I would agree that after the commission is done, we're no longer rural. What happened was that they took that statement, and after realizing that this was probably a poor statement to put into an interim report and finalize into a final report, they changed the statement to, "Alberta is no longer entirely or primarily rural in nature." You've got to recognize here that I believe the commission is completely letting rural down. I am sad to see that some of our colleagues from across the aisle can't see the fact that this is causing long-standing damage to Alberta and to the representation to rural Alberta.

But I want to take this a step further, and I want to explain. I talked about section 14, I believe, in a referral motion to committee, but the specific things that my colleague from Battle River-Wainwright was very, very focused on were the legal aspects. Some of this can be a little dry, but I need to get it onto the record. Now, he goes on, saying that the legal part is something that needs to be considered. Is what we're doing legal? That is the question. It's clear to myself that the commission was given a mandate and they broke that mandate. It's a shame, but here we are today with this broken piece of legislation.

Now, what we need to say is: is rural Alberta getting effective representation? It's worth bearing in mind this explanation of the goal of redistribution as contained on an Elections Canada website. We've got a quote here. "The right to vote under section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guaranteed the right to effective representation. The goal of redistribution is a constitutional right to 'effective representation.'" So this goes beyond Alberta's laws. This is an actual constitutional right. This is what, I believe, our boundaries commission has deliberately broken, our right as rural representatives.

What we've got here is an example for assistance, this summary by the 2009-2010 commission on what effective representation is.

In summary, the principles of effective representation seem to the Commission to be as follows:

- (1) Relative parity of voting power.

- (2) Tradition in Canada is “effective representation,” not absolute parity as in the [United States].
- (3) The process of achieving effective representation may involve diluting the political force of some votes but not unduly and not without reason.
- (4) The balancing of these interests is a delicate one, which involves an examination in depth of the social history, geography and demography of the communities in every sense of the word.

Those are the four.

Now, I'd like to point out that what's key here in my view are comments 2 and 4. The 2009-2010 commission themselves gave clear indication that the exercise is not one purely of mathematics. This is important that this is a starting point, if you will, to ensure that we have numbers in constituencies. But what happens is that we need to be making sure that our MLAs are able to get the voice of our constituents out effectively, effective representation. That's effective representation, which I believe our commission has missed.

Moving on to voter parity now. In response to the commission's comment regarding the absolute voter parity reference I would offer this observation made by Justice McLachlin in the Electoral Boundaries Saskatchewan 1991, 2 SCR 158 decision.

First, absolute parity is impossible. It is impossible to draw boundary lines which guarantee exactly the same number of voters in each district. Voters die, voters move. Even with the aid of frequent censuses, voter parity is impossible.

So while absolute voter parity has a very intuitive appeal, one person to one vote is just not possible. It's just not possible.

Incidentally, moreover, in the redistribution rules is the concept of voter parity even mentioned? Further, population and voter parity numbers are two entirely different measures. Comments were made by the commission that with the advent of motor vehicles distance capacity would increase significantly. Unhappily, they failed to notice that the length of workdays has not increased. What we need to say is that by adding a lot more to an MLA, we are expecting a lot more from within that constituency, especially when you have something called windshield time, not to mention time spent actually carrying out the real work. It certainly gives very clear credibility to a quote by Robert Louis Stevenson that it is better to travel happily than to arrive.

Furthermore, regarding providing better allowances, more staff, satellite offices, and video conferencing, none of which the commission was mandated to actually move forward, what we have seen here is that they have completely failed. What they did was say: “Well, you know what? To make up for that failure, let's allow the government just to give those MLAs who are impacted more money.” That seems strange. This is literally robbing Peter to pay Paul, proposals that are at best unfair and at worst possibly a breach in the redistribution rules.

Regarding the commission I have made a case that a failure to properly apply section 14 is enough rationale that we are robbing some rural ridings of their current status. In turn, this is diluting, perhaps in some cases removing, effective representation, which is the goal of the redistribution rules that were in place. Put candidly, I believe that the commission is opening the door to a reverse Saskatchewan 1991 legal challenge.

As I have mentioned in my previous speeches, Bonnyville-Cold Lake is the prime example of a commission that went out of control. They chose to create facts that were refuted in the interim process. I don't understand how they could say that my constituency was going to decline versus Alberta's average even though I brought forward proof that the Alberta government themselves believed that my constituency is going to grow.

To put perspective to this, I am asking each and every member here to look at what it is that you're trying to do. I will tell you that rural Alberta needs your voice now. We need to vote this terrible piece of legislation down. We need to throw this review out, and we need to give that commission a better mandate.

Thank you.

2:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to go into too much detail because I think we've already covered most of the issues, but I'd just like to go on the record, you know, as saying: what a way to wind up the 2017 fall session, with a good hard slap to the face of rural Alberta.

You know, I don't believe that northern Alberta got a fair shake in this deal. I don't think that we were given the respect that we deserve as being the economic driver of the province. I think that all constituencies in this province benefit from what comes out of the northeast and northwest parts of our province, and I think that it should have been recognized as such.

The message all over the province, at least in the sessions that I attended, was very, very clear. Everybody sent the same message, to leave the boundaries the way they are. There aren't any constituencies that couldn't have been tweaked a little bit here or there. You know, it's very unfair that a lot of our rural ridings ended up plus 10 to plus 15 over the provincial average while some areas of Calgary and Edmonton are at par or negative, with really no potential to grow. Why wasn't that taken into consideration? We could have maxed out some of those, spread those lines a little bit. I mean, they're never going to increase in population by 10,000 people. It's impossible.

The legislation mandates a review of the boundaries on a regular basis I believe it's every eight years or every second election, whichever comes first but it does not mandate a wholesale change. It just mandates a review. So I think that the boundaries commission went way above and beyond what was requested or expected of them, and we're going to suffer the consequences in rural Alberta.

Now, I know that there are members across the aisle, both rural and urban, that don't like what's in this boundaries commission report, and I would urge those members to vote against this bill. I know that their constituents don't want it. And I would urge those members that are sitting on the fence to support your rural MLA that's going to have to go out and face his constituents over the next year and especially in the election in 2019 that will be coming up.

I'm just going to end with: again, support and stand up for yourself and your constituents; stand up for your MLAs that are going to suffer the consequences of this bill. It doesn't need to be done. I think we should all vote to reject it in third reading.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. Under 29(2)(a), sir?

Mr. Clark: No.

The Acting Speaker: Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak very briefly in third reading to Bill 33. I've heard the comments from our legislative colleagues representing rural constituencies, and I have a tremendous amount of empathy for the

challenges they face as rural MLAs. It is different than the challenges faced by urban MLAs.

I think that one of the things that we should consider and had I had the opportunity to be on the Members' Services Committee, perhaps Members' Services could have tackled this particular issue is looking at providing more financial resources to rural constituencies to allow those larger rural constituencies the opportunity to have more than one constituency office fully staffed on a full-time basis, or perhaps even more than two for some of the larger constituency areas, so that the residents of those large rural constituencies have adequate access to their representatives.

I acknowledge that it will not always be possible for MLAs in large rural constituencies to meet in person with every constituent that wants to. It is different, very different, to have to travel many hundreds of kilometres over many, many hours to get from one end of your constituency to the other. That is a different challenge than faced by urban MLAs, and I want my rural colleagues to know that I understand how difficult that is.

I think that in a time where we have access to information technology, to ways of connecting with your MLA that go beyond face to face it's not a replacement; it is somewhat helpful. It can never replace that face to face. I know constituents do want to come in and meet in person with their MLA. If they can't meet in person directly with the MLA, if there's an opportunity for us to find ways of providing more resources to those rural MLAs so that they can have more constituency offices staffed for more hours, perhaps that's a way of bridging some of this.

It will never be perfect. This will never be perfect. We'll never be able to have as many MLAs in as many places as, I'm sure, all of us might like. That said, I would never advocate for more politicians in Alberta. I don't think, as much as I would like to get re-elected, that that would be a strong platform to run on. I think that while the role that we play is an important one, we're never going to find a perfect world.

The process was a very open process. There were two rounds of the panel travelling the province, allowing Albertans the opportunity to provide their input rural and urban, north, central, south, east, and west provide that input in person, provide that input online, comment on a draft report, provide further comment. There was an opportunity for members to tweak some of the names of constituencies to make them more appropriate.

We're never going to get to a place where everyone is happy. I acknowledge the challenges this creates for rural MLAs, and I acknowledge and hear the concerns of rural Albertans. But I do in the end stand in favour of Bill 33 at third reading. The process was appropriate, and I think we need to move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the chair will recognize the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, we know that many government members are not happy with this, too. We know that a lot of the ones from the rural constituencies are not happy. We know that even urban MLAs are not happy. In good conscience, I would encourage those members to vote with their conscience on this and not be whipped into a vote or whatever they're doing there to make them vote along the lines of the government's choice, which is to pass this bill.

Now, when we look at this report, I think everybody seems to agree that there were a lot of mistakes in this. A lot of people agree on that. When I look at it, you know, the constituency that I represent now was actually misspelled, which might not seem like

a big thing. I mean, I'm sure that if somebody from southern Alberta misspelled the name of my constituency, that's not a big deal, but when the people in charge of creating a report like this can't get the name right, then I think that shows a little bit of how much care and concern they actually put into this.

During debate on this there was one thing that kind of struck me, and that was, of course, when the Member for Lethbridge-East got up and said that voting against this bill is gerrymandering. Now, that's an absolutely bizarre comment. Voting against this bill means that we'll have the status quo, what we have now. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how voting against something to remain status quo could be gerrymandering.

Now, what was also interesting is that the Member for Lethbridge-East made a presentation to the boundaries commission with a member of her NDP constituency executive. Mr. Speaker, as far as gerrymandering and trying to influence the commission to do something for political purposes goes, I would say that if an MLA shows up with a NDP constituency executive at a commission to do a presentation I'll just leave it at that.

What was also interesting is that the constituency of Lethbridge-East didn't change. It stayed the same through the interim report to the final report, as it is right now. Obviously, then, if it's gerrymandering to vote against this to remain status quo, then with the Member for Lethbridge-East voting to have the status quo, for her it must also be gerrymandering, I guess, following that same logic.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I tried to make one amendment to change the name of the constituency, to take it from three words to two words, to more accurately describe the constituency. Even that was voted down by the government. I mean, a simple thing like that, that changed nothing other than to more accurately reflect the constituency, was turned down by this government. Obviously, there is nothing we can do on this side of the House to change the government's mind on this. They're going to make all their members vote for this so that we have to take this report that, of course, they admit is not good.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to leave it at that. Like I say, there have been some very odd things said in this House in regard to this. I think that we should be able to vote our conscience on this. We should be voting against this and turning this down. Under legislation the report had to be made. The report is flawed. Accepting something that's flawed I don't believe does any justice to what our job is here.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 33 in third reading. First, earlier today I tabled copies of a letter from Mr. Glenn Koester, the reeve of Wheatland county. Now, currently, as the final boundary report sits, it puts a little chunk of Wheatland county into the new constituency of Airdrie-East. I'll read the letter and then I'll speak to it.

While we thank The Electoral Boundaries Commission for asking in July for our input regarding the proposed changes to electoral boundaries, we are concerned and disappointed that The Commission moved forward with drastically different boundaries than what were first proposed.

In our preliminary feedback, we indicated that we were satisfied with the new boundaries as suggested – as that proposal ensured that all of Wheatland County would remain in one

electoral division. In the Final Report of the 2016/17 Electoral Boundaries Commission however, Wheatland County is divided amongst four different electoral divisions. We are concerned that the needs of Wheatland County residents will not be sufficiently represented under this structure. The County areas included in each of the four electoral divisions will be insignificant in comparison to the whole of each division and, as such, they will have very little voice.

In conclusion, Wheatland County Council is greatly concerned that there was no opportunity to provide feedback on this proposed final version. We maintain that being inclusive is necessary at this stage of the process as well, and request that input be sought once again regarding these updated changes to electoral boundaries prior to adoption.

Mr. Speaker, as is very clearly articulated in this letter from Wheatland county, just Wheatland county, many of my hon. colleagues have expressed concerns as well as colleagues from the government side have expressed concerns, many different concerns, this one certainly being that a county, the county of Wheatland in particular, here in this case now resides in four different ridings.

The riding, the current riding of Airdrie, does in fact contain Airdrie city, a major population, and of course a good chunk of Rocky View county, which I know I share with a few other MLAs here in this Chamber. I do my best to make sure I represent the rural constituents in Airdrie and the Madden area, Nier, and Dogpound as well as the needs of the Airdrie citizens as a whole, whose population currently sits at about 65,000 people. Now, there's no doubt that given the population numbers in Airdrie the constituency would have to be split up in some way, shape, or form. I understand that. It's the fastest growing city in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Sorry; it was about a year ago, but I'm not quite sure where we sit right now, to be honest.

To be fair, the rural constituents in the Airdrie riding for many years have actually always felt a little bit on the outside. It doesn't matter who the MLA is or what efforts are taken; it's very common to think that as the largest part of the population of the constituency is within Airdrie. Now, any constituent that contacts my office certainly gets all of the respect and attention that they need for their concerns, and I will absolutely bring it forward. I have a great relationship with the reeve of Rocky View. I'm very, very grateful for that, and I will continue to nurture that relationship moving forward as Rocky View county also now sits in the new constituency of Airdrie-East. That would make it part of Airdrie, the city of Airdrie, part of Rocky View county, and a little bit of Wheatland county.

Now, Wheatland county in particular is the one that brings up the most significant amount of concern, and I absolutely share this concern. To be honest, Mr. Speaker, I've never been to Wheatland county. I will, and I'm sure it's a wonderful, wonderful place. I will seek a nomination in the Airdrie-East riding, and I will get to know the people and the councillors in the county of Wheatland and the area. I've heard it's beautiful. I've heard it's wonderful. Something about duck hunting. I don't know. Could be interesting.

There are some significant concerns on proper representation when a county that's split amongst four different electoral districts in very small chunks, to be honest, according to this letter that the reeve from Wheatland county sent – Mr. Speaker, they're going to feel the same way that many rural constituents do when they are put into a municipality with such a larger population. I mean, I don't think Wheatland county has a parade. I don't know.

Just speaking from experience in the riding that I currently represent, there's a pancake breakfast every year once a year in the area of Bottrel. If you've never been to Bottrel, it is a beautiful, wonderful area. There's a campground there. There's a neat creek

that goes through, and some really awesome people come out to this pancake breakfast every year. It's a great opportunity for me to be able to connect with a lot of the rural residents in the area; otherwise, there are not a lot of spaces or events or things where we all gather together in one place. I also, in the area of Bottrel, get to meet a lot of my colleagues' constituents from around the constituency of Airdrie as well and lots of farmers that are busy throughout the year, and you know this is one of the big main gathering events for the area of Bottrel.

Of course, Madden has a golf course and a community hall out there and an RV park. There is a golf course in that area as well. I think I just mentioned that. There are some things that happen there, but there are not a lot of times where the people of Madden and the people of Bottrel and the people of Airdrie interact with each other or do life together or have similar interests or concerns, that type of thing.

It was interesting: during Bill 6 I got a lot of e-mails from the rural constituents in the area, and a lot of people in the city didn't quite understand Bill 6 if they had not been those people that actually grew up in rural Alberta or in rural Canada, wherever they might be, having that understanding or that background of the things and the effects that Bill 6 has on that way of life. It was really interesting that that, in itself, shows quite a divide just on one piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I always will continue to balance the needs and the wants and the concerns of my constituents. I always have. I always will, and I have no doubt that everyone in this Assembly absolutely will, but the boundaries in this report, quite honestly, in many ways don't make sense, as expressed by many of my colleagues here in this Assembly both in the opposition and the government side. There are a lot of dangers in these ridings, I think, in proper representation.

Mr. Speaker, the mandate of the Electoral Boundaries Commission was to update the electoral districts while respecting the following considerations:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- (b) sparsity and density of population.

That certainly speaks to the density of population in the city of Airdrie and the sparsity of population in Wheatland county and Rocky View county. They don't do life together. I can bet many people in Airdrie have not been to Wheatland county and vice versa. Maybe we'll have to create a pancake breakfast should this report actually go forward just to bring all of these constituents together.

3:10

I think there could be the potential for many opportunities where the constituency is imbalanced on major issues, and that would not present a fair and equal opportunity for the constituents in the riding as a whole. I think Wheatland county would have the concern that perhaps they would be less on the totem pole, which is a valid concern to have. I'm not saying that that's what would happen, but their fears about not being properly represented are very clearly spelled out in this letter, and I can empathize with these.

I think that we don't actually have to pass this. We had to study the electoral districts and make recommendations, but there is actually no provision that says that we have to pass this or actually make those changes. We don't have to do that, so, Mr. Speaker, I would urge this Assembly to think long and hard about what we're doing here today when it comes to changing these districts because we don't want to make anyone feel like they are not part of what we do here in this Assembly.

When they go to vote in, say, a constituency like mine, Mr. Speaker, sometimes in the rural areas – and this is certainly true for

my riding, for many years – the rural constituents aren't actually quite sure which riding they're in. I have a few friends, actually, that showed up to vote for me in a riding and found out that my name wasn't there on the ballot. They were in fact, you know, right on that line and voted for my hon. colleague in Chestermere-Rocky View, so it worked out really well.

Mr. Speaker, I would just urge this Assembly – I won't take more time – to not vote this thing forward. Sit back, take a breath, and figure this out. I know that we've got some MLAs pitted against other MLAs when it comes to nomination on the government side and the opposition side. There are lots of problems with this, so listen to your conscience on this as you've listened to your constituents through your consultation on the electoral boundaries. The second draft was not at all like the first draft, and we have no way to provide input on this except by not moving the new electoral divisions forward.

With that, I will be voting against this, absolutely, and I urge all members in this Assembly to vote with your conscience, vote against this piece of legislation, and do the right thing for your constituents.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, anyone wishing to speak to Bill 33? The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinstuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad I had a chance today to speak to Bill 33, Electoral Divisions Act. I had quite a bit to say here, but I'll keep my remarks brief. In May 2017 the Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta interim report was released. At that time the report recommended that the boundaries for Calgary-Northern Hills be divided into three ridings: Calgary-North, Calgary-Bedlington, and Calgary-North East. There were a few concerns that I had with the report, and as a result, I joined many members of the community in Calgary-Northern Hills at the hearing in Calgary that was scheduled on the evening of July 20, 2017.

At that hearing I proposed three main suggestions. When referring to the link between the new proposed riding of Calgary-North East and the neighbourhoods of Coventry Hills, Harvest Hills, partnering with the communities in the northeast, I had the following concerns: one, recreation. Vivo for Healthier Generations is a community hub for Calgary-Northern Hills, and it would be part of the proposed Calgary-North East riding. It has very little connection with Redstone and Skyview Ranch, and I think there is too much distance between Coventry Hills, Country Hills Village, Harvest Hills, and the other communities across Deerfoot and past the airport in the north commercial district, the Métis Trail to the northeast communities of the proposed riding. Vivo should be closely connected to the communities it serves. Redstone, Skyview Ranch communities are more oriented to go with the Genesis Centre in the Saddle Ridge, Martindale, and Taradale neighbourhoods rather than Vivo and the Coventry Hills neighbourhoods.

Community associations were also an issue. The Northern Hills Community Association serves Panorama Hills, Coventry Hills, Country Hills Village, Country Hills, and Harvest Hills, and it has no connection directly with the communities east of Deerfoot. The proposed boundary changes would split these community associations and their political advocacy into three electoral districts.

Finally, the third issue was school infrastructure. The Notre Dame high school, CCSD; and the future north Calgary high school, which would be the CBE, are both provincially funded school systems, and their source communities are and will be Panorama Hills, Coventry Hills, Country Hills Village, Harvest

Hills, and Country Hills. The students in the Redstone and Skyview Ranch communities are more oriented to go with the new Nelson Mandela high school in Taradale.

Mr. Speaker, these were some of the concerns that I raised last summer, and I highlighted that these communities have little in common. But imagine the surprise when the final report was released, in October 2017, to see that the boundaries had not shifted, that they were nearly exactly the same as in the interim report.

Mr. Speaker, I know that myself and many members of the community put a lot of time and consideration into this report. One member actually drafted and submitted an alternative boundary map for consideration, and I would like to thank her for that thoughtful submission. In addition, another member of the community, the first vice-president and advocacy director of the NHCA, recently wrote a three-page letter voicing his concerns about the final report.

Mr. Speaker, despite all these negative impacts that I see from splitting Calgary-Northern Hills into three ridings, I had to reflect back to my initial observations when I started researching the 2016-17 Electoral Boundaries Commission. From the beginning I recognized that the city of Calgary had some wild differences in population between the ridings. According to the Calgary civic census count estimates for 2016 the population of Calgary-South East stands at 79,000 while the population of Calgary-Fish Creek, for example, is at about 40,000. One riding is nearly double the population of another riding.

The target identified in the interim report was 46,118, as noted on page 24. Again, the first thing I recognized in this report was that the populations of the city of Calgary had to be equalized to create more fair representation and access to MLAs. Calgary-Northern Hills' 2016 estimate was 61,377, which means that the population of Calgary-Northern Hills is over by 15,000 people. It was clear that the boundaries had to change. I and other members of the community made our case and presented our vision of how these boundaries should have looked. At this point I want to express my disappointment in the final conclusion. I felt that the commission could have reflected some of the requests that we had presented a little bit more clearly. However, I will be supporting Bill 33 at third reading because I think it's important that the populations in Calgary are balanced evenly between the electoral divisions.

I think it's also important to consider that the Electoral Boundaries Commission panel worked independently of politics and interference from the parties in this Legislature. In the end, if we cannot support the work of an independent panel and we start to delve into the electoral boundaries in the political sphere, it will open debate about the self-interest of individual MLAs, who should not decide these things.

Mr. Speaker, I'll continue to work hard for the constituents of Calgary-Northern Hills within the current boundaries. I want to again thank the president and volunteers of the Northern Hills Community Association, some of whom took some late-night phone calls from me. I'd also like to thank many of the other community volunteers who took the time out of their schedules and their lives to submit their suggestions and try to design the electoral divisions that reflect our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really confused here. The hon. member says that he doesn't agree with the report, and then on the other hand he says that he's going to support it.

Just to put it in context, actually, I ran in that riding of Calgary-Northern Hills twice. I probably door-knocked at every house, in those six years that I campaigned in that riding, five or six times, so I have a history in that riding. The persons that he is referencing actually called me, too, and they were very disappointed.

When it comes to my case, it doesn't matter to me. I can run anywhere in that part of the city although my riding is also split into three. Calgary-Foothills will become Calgary-Foothills, Calgary-Edgemont, and Calgary-Bedlington.

3:20

That apart, my initial dilemma was, you know, that if I go and represent myself and give my submissions, then I thought that maybe I'll be blamed because I'm looking after myself, my self-interest.

I thought that we would have an opportunity here to fix those shortcomings. The Government House Leader asked us to support this, but he's the person who actually rejected even simple fixes like the name changes. There was an opportunity to fix some of those problems and attach the historic names in our area. I'm sure that the members from Calgary-Hawkwood, Calgary-Northern Hills, and Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, all my neighbouring ridings, all agree with me. There is some sentiment attached there, so we asked for those name changes, but they were all rejected.

If I knew that this was how this government was going to handle this, unilaterally rejecting, showing an authoritative, dictatorial approach, I probably would have had better luck arguing my case, actually, with the boundary commission. So I should have done that. I deeply regret.

Mr. Hanson: Support your rural MLAs.

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

Now, my hon. colleague from Northern Hills was saying that he represented the problem correctly, but in the end he's caving in. That's not democracy. I'm not going to support this bill, and I ask my hon. colleagues on the other side to actually vote as per the wishes of their constituents and to also support some of these rural MLAs. They're going to face real hardship with these changes. It's an obligation on their part to show some sympathy and empathy and solidarity with their rural colleagues, too.

That's why I urge all members of this House, both sides, to unanimously reject this report. I'm not going to support this, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Yeah. I think that was under 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: Correct.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Yeah. I just want to comment as well. No, I don't think that we caved in. I don't think I caved in at all. I went and I presented on the mid-term report. I went with members of the community, and we presented our case, actually, to the boundary commission, as we should.

I just have a question as well for the member. I didn't see him at the boundary commission that night. I'm just wondering if he also had the opportunity to present his case then, if he did or if he didn't.

The issue here is that I think I made it clear that I and many members from the community did our very best. We made submissions, as we should, as we were asked to, when we saw the interim report and then took it to the final report.

The bigger issue, overall, was, in my opinion, with the populations in general for all the ridings in Calgary. I thought that, ultimately, as I mentioned in my statement here, the most important part was to balance that differential out evenly between the cities.

I appreciate as well some of the concerns that the member raised about the rural areas of the province. I, too, have a lot of sympathy for some of the changes there as well. Ultimately, as someone who represents a riding in the city, I thought it was important to represent my riding and respect as well.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I have to respond to some of the assertions made by the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills, recognizing that the final report may not have had many changes from the interim report for his riding, but in my opinion the final report had very significant changes throughout many parts of Alberta. In that respect, I find it very concerning. With the final report, I would have expected to have very minimal changes from the interim report.

Therefore, I cannot support this bill. I did not support the motion to accept the report, and I do believe that we are moving down a path that is not leading towards effective representation of Albertans but that the commission decided to move more on a path of equitableness. In my opinion and in the opinion of many decisions that have been made in the past, effective representation is the goal, and effective representation is in the best interests of all of its citizens within a democracy.

You know, we saw also in some of the submissions how we have Edmonton and Calgary being outside of the population base by 5 to 6 per cent and the rest of Alberta being below by 5 or 6 per cent and that a few minor adjustments within the urban ridings could have made the difference with regard to the concerns where certain ridings had significant population increases without disrupting the entire province.

I will speak against this bill. I do encourage all members in this House to recognize the damage that we are doing to the democratic principles of effective representation in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to speak on Bill 33 regarding the electoral divisions as they've been put forward by the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

I guess I would say that the one thing I knew for sure about the riding that I'm privileged to represent is that if it was going to change, it wasn't going to go east. It was going to either go north or south or west, but it was not going to go east. That was the only thing we knew for certain. It was interesting, in the interim report, where there was a significant expansion of the constituency in a westerly direction, where the current boundary is approximately where highway 36 intersects with highway 16, that that boundary was proposed to be extended all the way to Elk Island park, which would have been a considerable extension along highway 16. At the same time, there would have been what I call a compression of the riding into a very long, thin ribbon along highway 16 and also highway 14.

I will give the boundaries commission, certainly, credit. There were a number of constituents in Vermilion-Lloydminster who lived north of township road 532 that were proposed to be moved

into the Fort Saskatchewan-St. Paul riding, which was also being proposed. They expressed their concerns very, very clearly. They organized a letter-writing campaign, and about one quarter of the total number of written submissions to the Electoral Boundaries Commission came from the communities of Dewberry, Clandonald, Tulliby Lake, and Lea Park. I'm not sure that there are even 150 people that live in Dewberry, Clandonald, Tulliby Lake, and Lea Park, but certainly they got very organized. To the incredible credit of the boundaries commission, they looked at that and said: no, it makes sense to leave the boundary where it is, contiguous with the county boundary of the county of Vermilion River.

What was somewhat surprising in the transition from the interim report to the final report was that the electoral division was completely turned at a 90-degree angle, so instead of going east-west, it was flipped and now goes more or less north-south with the combination of the county of Vermilion River and the municipal district of Wainwright.

You know, overall, I'm actually very much in favour of using county boundaries as a way to set boundaries, especially in rural areas. They make sense. County boundaries are well established, they don't change, and the county boundaries are understood by everybody in the rural areas. If you say, "This constituency consists of this county, this county, and this MD," everybody knows exactly what you're talking about. That was one of the recommendations I made after the interim report was released.

3:30

I've listened to the debate, and I certainly listened very carefully to the comments by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and also his discussion of the minority report that was written by Commissioner Day. I would say that I completely concur with Commissioner Day's comments, especially vis-à-vis her comments with regard to rural representation. Commissioner Day, I think, absolutely nailed it when she discussed the need for rural representation to be reflective and also to consider the challenges of representing a large riding.

You know, I don't represent a geographically huge riding. I'm fortunate in that way, but I will tell you that despite that fact, on this past weekend, attending events in and around the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency, I didn't leave the constituency, but from the time that I left Edmonton on Thursday night to the time I returned to Edmonton Sunday night, I'd driven over 1,300 kilometres attending events in my constituency. With all due respect to the Member for Calgary-Elbow, the reason why some of the electronic communication tools – yes; they're great. But the reason you do that is a lesson I learned from my former colleague MLA the long-time Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, whose lesson to us as young legislators was: being there is 50 per cent of it. Fifty per cent of it is being there.

He was right. When you're there, you don't have to speak. Most people would actually prefer that you don't speak. When you're there and you're interacting with the constituents, people absolutely appreciate that. I'm sure everybody in this Legislature would concur with that. People want to see the whites of your eyes because when you're there, you're telling them you care. You're telling them that you care about their community. You're telling them that you care about their cause or, you know, whatever it is that they're promoting when you're there at a graduation or at a 50th anniversary, as I was this past Saturday, or at a sporting event or at a rodeo or at a parade. When you're there, you're saying that you support them.

As the rural ridings become larger and larger and larger, that's going to become more and more difficult, and there's no amount of teleconferencing or additional offices that is going to mitigate the

fact that you cannot be in two places at once. I think the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills said that. So did the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, you know, that really the only way that having extra offices was going to help was if you could be cloned. I have two offices now. I have an office in Vermilion. I have an office in Lloydminster. They're staffed by outstanding, outstanding assistants. I have wonderful staff. Could you open another office, say, in Wainwright, after the next boundaries? Yes. You could. In fact, I would definitely recommend that that be done, but basically what that means is that now not only do you have to staff the offices, but your presence is expected in those offices. If you have offices but you never show up at them, people start asking: "Well, why do you have this office? I want to be able to make an appointment to see you, and I want to be able to see you in the office that is closest to me. I don't want to have to drive an hour and a half one way to get to see my MLA."

So, Mr. Speaker, that's my concern. I think that Commissioner Day's comments were very, very well taken. I think Commissioner Day carefully considered the path this is going down and that if indeed we are to stay at 87 members – you know, I would even question whether that is this magic number of 87, but that was the parameter that was given, and that's fine – and if we're going to continue to do what this boundary commission did, and that was to put a heavy emphasis on voter parity and an equal number of voters per constituency, then rural Alberta's voice will become quieter and quieter and quieter. Pretty soon you'll have a scenario where the only rural representation will be in combination with an urban centre.

I have a riding that's a little bit like that. I mean, the city of Lloydminster on the Alberta side has got over 20,000 people, and that's nearly half of the total population of our constituency. Then Vermilion's got, you know, close to 4,500 people. But there are ridings like Drumheller-Stettler, for example, like Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, like Peace River, like the two Fort McMurray ridings. These are sprawling, huge tracts of land. You know, to have them represented by a single person, whether there are one, two, or three offices, is a daunting task. I worry sometimes about the fatigue of members. I worry about travel safety. I worry about the number of hours we spend driving. I know our families worry about that, too.

Like I say, I think that a balance has to be struck. I acknowledge that the Electoral Boundaries Commission has got a tremendously difficult job. The Government House Leader is right. No matter what gets proposed, somebody is going to be unhappy. He is right about that. But I think the overriding message in this Electoral Boundaries Commission report was the shift from rural to urban, those three seats. It doesn't sound like a lot, but it is, especially the precedent it sets that we are going to stick with absolute voter parity. Numerical voter parity does not equate to effective representation, and it's effective representation that we're trying to aim for.

I will be opposed to this bill. I will vote against it but not because I don't appreciate the efforts of the boundaries commission. I do. I recognize that they had a very difficult job. But I have to state unequivocally that it's so important that we have rural representation be able to bring forward the concerns and to have the rural representatives, the MLAs who represent these challenging ridings, be able to do their job, not just for them to have access to their constituents but for their constituents to have access to them. You know, while electronic means of communication are helpful – and they should be used; they're tools – ultimately it's your presence that people want. If the ridings become so very large that that becomes very difficult, it's going to become increasingly challenging, and I don't think that's good for democracy in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise very briefly today to speak against this bill, really around some concerns I have as an urban MLA. My constituency is rather concentrated. My ability to attend community associations and meetings throughout the constituency is very positive. My ability to attend events within the constituency is relatively easy in terms of access. I have an opportunity to see my constituents on a regular basis, and I make that opportunity to do so. So for me, although I'll be sad to lose the community of Canyon Meadows and will take over some territory from the hon. Speaker in terms of Midnapore and Sundance, those areas are not a far distance away from me. They are probably relatively similar in terms of the makeup of the community, in terms of the mix of rental accommodations and homeowners and multifamily and single-family and seniors' facilities and whatnot. Of course, then I'll have both sides of Fish Creek, so we won't have that boundary in the middle of us to converse over.

Ms Hoffman: Should you be elected.

Mr. Gotfried: Should I be elected. Should I be nominated, even.

The concern I have. You know, I always even talk to my children and I talk to people about the fact that the wealth of this province is not created – certainly, it's managed; the investment is there – in the glass towers of downtown Calgary. It's actually in the field, whether that field be the farmer's field or the forests that we enjoy or the oil and gas industries' operations, whether that be in the oil sands or whether that be drilling activity or natural gas drilling in the province. That is where our wealth is created.

The representation we talk about in this province is not always about raw population numbers; hence, obviously, when we get into the rural areas, where we have a lack of population density. But we do have rich resources in those areas. With appreciation for the hard work done by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, which we all appreciate, I think it's a bit of a slippery slope, and I'm concerned about that going forward. If we get continued urbanization of this province, what will happen is that eventually we will have fewer and fewer rural constituencies. We will have less and less representation of the land from which we derive our wealth in this province.

3:40

I'm concerned also with the huge distances and the chances and opportunities for representation, for attendance at community events, for those random opportunities. In my constituency I can see constituents at the grocery store and at the coffee shop and various other things, but that's because I am frequenting those areas. I'm often in those and have a chance to see them. When you might have 500 or 1,000 kilometres, or it could be longer distances, I think, in some of the constituencies, your chances to have those less frequent and more random opportunities to see your constituents, which I think we all embrace and enjoy, will become less. That concerns me deeply.

I just wanted to say as an urban MLA that when we are looking at this, I think that we should have the opportunity, possibly, for greater latitude within the urban environments, where we have an opportunity for strong representation, that we have sometimes more of an opportunity for density of individuals in those areas, that we do need to take into account more than just the population. We need to think about the wealth and the resources and the richness we have, whether that, again, be agriculture, forestry, tourism, or the

energy sector as well. I don't believe that those are being taken into account on this bill and the report that we're embracing and taking a look at today. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this bill, because of the concerns today, tomorrow, and into future for future generations.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 33? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I just wanted to briefly get on the record a couple of points. Of course, I mean, I haven't made secret my own concerns over the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I just want to respond to some of the things from the people on the other side. As a rural member I don't feel like my colleagues are throwing me under the bus. I have to say that, I mean, they're looking at this from a different perspective. I respect that. I understand where they're coming from when they look at their own ridings and when they look at that we appointed this commission.

That all being said, I'm going to be voting against this on third reading. I feel like I can't do otherwise. I mean, I did very extensive consultation with members in my riding. I spoke to every individual municipality, and I had unanimous consent. I had unanimous consent not from the municipalities merely but from every single councillor that was a member of every municipality. They all said the same thing, that they were really concerned about the changes. They were concerned about the dilution of representation that the expansion of the boundaries of our riding represented, and they urged me that what they wanted to see was the status quo. Because of this overwhelming voice from the riding, I can't support the report's recommendations. I have to give credit, too, you know, that I do have the ability to vote against this, and I intend to exercise it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gill: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a comment to the hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, I want to thank you for your commitment to your constituents and for listening to them and representing them in this Chamber while we're here. Thank you for voting against this bill. Thanks a lot, sir.

The Acting Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, any members wishing to speak to Bill 33? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't planning to speak to this bill, but last week I was in Westlock for the Digital Futures conference. It brings together people from rural Alberta. I grew up in Sexsmith, Alberta. I'm very proud of having come from a rural location, and my riding as it stands right now has a number of farms in it still. On the north end of Calgary there is land that hasn't been developed yet, and there are a number of farms. From the conversations that I have had and my own experience growing up in a rural location, I do have concerns about the proportion of representation for rural Alberta. I'm a big fan of eating, and I really appreciate the experience of having grown up in a rural area. I really value that lifestyle, and I think it's a big part of our history in Alberta. I don't know that the Electoral Boundaries Commission's report really addresses those concerns. I think it's an opportunity

for us to really think about what we value as Albertans, what's important to us. I would like to see more consideration of balancing those two.

For those reasons I will not be voting in favour of the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing and hearing none, any other members wishing to speak to Bill 33? The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 33. I think we've had a good debate. I think that members have legitimate concerns, but we've laid out the reasons why the government is proceeding with a bill that mirrors exactly the boundaries recommended by the commission because the appearance of objectivity and nonbias, I think, is critical to the confidence of Alberta citizens.

I urge all members to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, to clarify, was closing debate?

Mr. Mason: What?

The Acting Speaker: You're closing debate?

Mr. Mason: I just did.

The Acting Speaker: Okay.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Feehan	Mason
Babcock	Fitzpatrick	McKittrick
Bilous	Goehring	McLean
Carlier	Gray	Miller
Carson	Hoffman	Miranda
Ceci	Horne	Nielsen
Clark	Jansen	Payne

Connolly	Kazim	Sabir
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Schreiner
Dach	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dang	Loyola	Westhead
Drever	Luff	Woollard
Eggen	Malkinson	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Loewen	Rosendahl
Barnes	MacIntyre	Smith
Cyr	McIver	Starke
Drysdale	McPherson	Stier
Ellis	Nixon	Strankman
Gill	Panda	van Dijken
Gotfried	Piquette	Yao
Hanson		

Totals:	For – 41	Against – 25
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[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would like to begin by thanking all members for their contributions in this session. I think it has been a productive session, and we've passed a significant number of bills in this House.

I would like also to wish everyone the merriest of Christmases or whatever way people celebrate the season. I wish them the very same thing and wish everyone safe travels home and a wonderful break. I think I certainly have need of it, and I'm sure some members do as well.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Government Motion 35 I am rising to advise the Assembly that the business of the sitting has been concluded and that the House stands adjourned.

The Acting Speaker: Happy holidays, everyone.

Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 35, agreed to on December 5, 2017, the House stands adjourned until February 2018.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:06 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 35]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 3rd Session (2017)

Activity to Wednesday, December 13, 2017

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

Bill 1 — An Act to Reduce School Fees (Eggen)

First Reading — 6 (*Mar. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 105-10 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192-96 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 235-42 (*Mar. 14, 2017 morn.*), 269-71 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft.*), 273-74 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 282-91 (*Mar. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 424-31 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft.*), 556-58 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 674-78 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c6]

Bill 2* — An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence (Ganley)

First Reading — 67-68 (*Mar. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 110-11 (*Mar. 8, 2017 morn.*), 192 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft.*), 314-22 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft.*), 336-39 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 455-59 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 678-79 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c7]

Bill 3* — Voluntary Blood Donations Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 208 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., passed.*)

Second Reading — 323-36 (*Mar. 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 394-400 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*), 421-24 (*Mar. 21, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 472-80 (*Mar. 23, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 cV-5]

Bill 4 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 191 (*Mar. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 306-07 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., adjourned*), 322 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 389-93 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 449-52 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c2]

Bill 5 — Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 266 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-14 (*Mar. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 393-94 (*Mar. 21, 2017 morn.*)

Third Reading — 452-55 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 30, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force Mar. 30, 2017; SA 2017 c1]

Bill 6 — Northland School Division Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 558-61 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 671-74 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 755-59 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 cN-5.1]

Bill 7 — An Act to Enhance Post-secondary Academic Bargaining (Schmidt)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 679-81 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft.*)

Committee of the Whole — 810-15 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 828-38 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 865-66 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 879 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017, with exception; SA 2017 c4]

Bill 8* — An Act to Strengthen Municipal Government (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 577 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 691-700 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 716-22 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft.*), 780-84 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 784-95 (*May 2, 2017 aft.*), 838-45 (*May 3, 2017 aft.*), 855-65 (*May 4, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 991-1004 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1101-06 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1107-10 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c13]

Bill 9 — Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2017 (Carlier)

First Reading — 606 (*Apr. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 683-87 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 687-90 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 759-62 (*May 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c5]

Bill 10 — Appropriation Act, 2017 (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading — 670-71 (*Apr. 19, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 690-91 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 700-02 (*Apr. 20, 2017 morn.*), 722-23 (*Apr. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 762-67 (*May 2, 2017 morn.*), 795-97 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 799-810 (*May 3, 2017 morn.*), 845-47 (*May 3, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force May 4, 2017; SA 2017 c3]

Bill 11* — Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 771 (*May 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 849-55 (*May 4, 2017 morn.*), 924-39 (*May 9, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1072-77 (*May 16, 2017 morn.*), 1092-1101 (*May 16, 2017 aft.*), 1168-69 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1199-1202 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2017 c11]

Bill 12* — New Home Buyer Protection Amendment Act, 2017 (S. Anderson)

First Reading — 877 (*May 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 939-44 (*May 9, 2017 aft.*), 945-56 (*May 10, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 956-62 (*May 10, 2017 morn.*), 1004-1008 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1008-10 (*May 11, 2017 morn.*), 1111-20 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1169-71 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 c10]

Bill 13 — Securities Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 893 (*May 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 977-90 (*May 10, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1027-31 (*May 11, 2017 aft.*), 1065-72 (*May 16, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1137-44 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c12]

Bill 14 — An Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1090 (*May 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1144-52 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1225-30 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1244-46 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017; SA 2017 c14]

Bill 15 — Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1137 (*May 17, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1184-89 (*May 18, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1215-25 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1246-48 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c15]

Bill 16 — An Act to Cap Regulated Electricity Rates (\$) (McCuaig-Boyd)

First Reading — 1214 (*May 23, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1262-78 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1279-91 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1291-97 (*May 25, 2017 morn.*), 1351-58 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1389-1406 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1514-17 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017, with exceptions; SA 2017 cC-2.3]

Bill 17* — Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act (Gray)

First Reading — 1260 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Second Reading — 1311-22 (*May 25, 2017 aft.*), 1359-61 (*May 29, 2017 eve.*), 1363-76 (*May 30, 2017 morn.*), 1407-20 (*May 30, 2017 eve.*), 1421-32 (*May 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1432-36 (*May 31, 2017 morn.*), 1449-66 (*May 31, 2017 aft.*), 1467-79 (*May 31, 2017 eve.*), 1490-99 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn.*), 1517-20 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft.*), 1534-51 (*Jun. 5, 2017 aft.*), 1553-67 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1589-93 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2017 c9]

Bill 18* — Child Protection and Accountability Act (Larivee)

First Reading — 1388 (*May 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1481-90 (*Jun. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1567-79 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1587-89 (*Jun. 5, 2017 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017; c8]

Bill 19 — An Act to Protect Gas and Convenience Store Workers (Gray)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1648-53 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1695-98 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1729-31 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Beaver River Basin Water Authorization Act (Phillips)

First Reading — 1610 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1627-35 (*Oct. 31, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1655-64 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1728-29 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 21 — Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1664-72 (*Nov. 1, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1699-1706 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1789-90 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 22 — Resident and Family Councils Act (Hoffman)

First Reading — 1648 (*Oct. 31, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1687-94 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1706-14 (*Nov. 2, 2017 morn., adjourned*), 1731-32 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1790-94 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 23 — Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2017 (Ganley)

First Reading — 1685-86 (*Nov. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1761-69 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1805-15 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1910-17 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 24 — An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances (Eggen)

First Reading — 1726-27 (*Nov. 2, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1769-74 (*Nov. 7, 2017 morn.*), 1796-1803 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft.*), 1833-46 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1847-55 (*Nov. 9, 2017 morn.*), 1870-75 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1917-19 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1921-35 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 25 — Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2017 (Gray)

First Reading — 1745 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1794-96 (*Nov. 7, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1815-19 (*Nov. 8, 2017 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1935-36 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 26 — An Act to Control and Regulate Cannabis (Ganley)

First Reading — 1978 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2021-26 (*Nov. 27, 2017 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2087-2104 (*Nov. 29, 2017 morn.*), 2121-26 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 2166-69 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 27* — Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017 (Ceci)

First Reading — 1831 (*Nov. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1876-78 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft.*), 1904-10 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1936-39 (*Nov. 15, 2017 morn.*), 1955-59 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft.*), 2066-68 (*Nov. 28, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 2119-21 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 28 — School Amendment Act, 2017 (Eggen)

First Reading — 1953 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1980-81 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft.*), 2027-31 (*Nov. 28, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2126-29 (*Dec. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 2169-75 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 29* — An Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving (Mason)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1959-66 (*Nov. 15, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1982-85 (*Nov. 16, 2017 aft.*), 2031-39 (*Nov. 28, 2017 morn.*), 2053-66 (*Nov. 28, 2017 aft., passed with amendment*)

Third Reading — 2117-19 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 30* — An Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans (Gray)

First Reading — 2000 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2131-51 (*Nov. 30, 2017 morn.*), 2230-34 (*Dec. 4, 2017 eve.*), 2209-25 (*Dec. 4, 2017 eve.*), 2235-43 (*Dec. 5, 2017 morn.*), 2274-78 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft.*), 2332-51 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft.*), 2443-54 (*Dec. 11, 2017 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2489-2506 (*Dec. 12, 2017 aft.*), 2508-10 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed with amendment*)

Third Reading — 2525-28 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Bill 31* — A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act (McLean)

First Reading — 2115-16 (*Nov. 29, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2225-30 (*Dec. 4, 2017 eve.*), 2243-46 (*Dec. 5, 2017 morn.*), 2263-74 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft.*), 2402-10 (*Dec. 7, 2017 aft.*), 2454-63 (*Dec. 11, 2017 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2533-50 (*Dec. 13, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 2550-53 (*Dec. 13, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Bill 32* — An Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta (Gray)

First Reading — 2190 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2297-2316 (*Dec. 6, 2017 morn.*), 2369-88 (*Dec. 7, 2017 morn.*), 2465-76 (*Dec. 12, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2510-25 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 2528-30 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed on division*)

Bill 33 — Electoral Divisions Act (Mason)

First Reading — 2190 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2279-95 (*Dec. 5, 2017 eve.*), 2353-68 (*Dec. 6, 2017 eve.*), 2507-08 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 2525 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 2565-73 (*Dec. 13, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 34 — Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Mason)

First Reading — 2329 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 2507 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed.*)

Committee of the Whole — 2525 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 2530 (*Dec. 12, 2017 eve., passed*)

Bill 201 — Justice System Accountability Act (Jean)

First Reading — 127 (*Mar. 8, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 208-20 (*Mar. 13, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 202* — Protecting Victims of Non-Consensual Distribution of Intimate Images Act (Cyr)

First Reading — 245 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 375-86 (*Mar. 20, 2017 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 578-86 (*Apr. 10, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 738-40 (*May 1, 2017 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 880 (*May 4, 2017 aft.*) [Comes into force 3 months after date of Royal Assent; SA 2017 cP-26.9]

Bill 203 — Alberta Standard Time Act (Dang)

First Reading — 253 (*Mar. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 496-503 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 1614-20 (*Oct. 30, 2017 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Stier)

First Reading — 444 (*Mar. 22, 2017 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 503-07 (*Apr. 3, 2017 aft.*), 899-905 (*May 8, 2017 aft.*), 1046-50 (*May 15, 2017 aft., reasoned amendment agreed to on division (not proceeded with)*)

Bill 205* — Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Jansen)

First Reading — 552 (*Apr. 6, 2017 aft.*)

Second Reading — 1050-57 (*May 15, 2017 aft.*), 1120-25 (*May 17, 2017 morn., moved to Government Bills and Orders*), 1153-63 (*May 18, 2017 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1163-68 (*May 18, 2017 morn.*), 1191-99 (*May 23, 2017 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1231-43 (*May 24, 2017 morn., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2017 cA-5.5]

Bill 206* — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Aheer)

First Reading — 1024 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1334-45 (*May 29, 2017 aft., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 1747-56 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1879-82 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn., passed*)

Bill 207 — Regulatory Burden Reduction Act (Hunter)

First Reading — 1310 (*May 25, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1756-58 (*Nov. 6, 2017 aft.*), 1882-90 (*Nov. 14, 2017 morn.*), 2008-11 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft., defeated on division*)

Bill 208 — Government Organization (Utilities Consumer Advocate) Amendment Act, 2017 (Hinkley)

First Reading — 1512 (*Jun. 1, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 2012 (*Nov. 27, 2017 aft.*), 2191-95 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 209* — Radon Awareness and Testing Act (Luff)

First Reading — 1903 (*Nov. 14, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 2195-2203 (*Dec. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 2426-28 (*Dec. 11, 2017 aft., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 2430-31 (*Dec. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 210* — Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017 (Smith)

First Reading — 1869 (*Nov. 9, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 2423-25 (*Dec. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 2428-30 (*Dec. 11, 2017 aft., passed with amendment*)
Third Reading — 2431-36 (*Dec. 11, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 211 — Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (Discretionary Trust) Amendment Act, 2017 (Malkinson)

First Reading — 2259 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 212 — Tobacco and Smoking Reduction (Protecting Children's Health) Amendment Act, 2017 (Sweet)

First Reading — 2329 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 214 — An Act to Regulate Political Action Committees (Swann)

First Reading — 2165 (*Nov. 30, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 215 — Tow Truck Safety Act (Drysdale)

First Reading — 2329 (*Dec. 6, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill 216 — Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Protecting Alberta's Children) Amendment Act, 2017 (Ellis)

First Reading — 2259 (*Dec. 5, 2017 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Jewish Centre Amendment Act, 2017 (Kazim)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1110-11 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)
Third Reading — 1261-62 (*May 24, 2017 aft., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

Bill Pr2 — Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act (MacIntyre)

First Reading — 524 (*Apr. 4, 2017 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1027 (*May 11, 2017 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1110 (*May 17, 2017 morn., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Jun. 7, 2017 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force June 7, 2017]

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Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Managing Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

Alberta Hansard 2017
(29th Legislature, Third Session)

Indexes

The cumulative index, which provides subject access to debates of the Alberta Legislature, is uploaded on a weekly basis. It is provided for reference purposes only and is unedited and unofficial.

The table below is a list to date of *Alberta Hansard* issue numbers, dates, and page ranges, with links to the text document. The index itself starts following the table. Use the search capabilities of Adobe Acrobat to search the index and find the topic you are interested in; note the page number(s) associated with it. Then click on the page number range in the table below to open the issue.

NOTE: *Tabled documents are listed in the [Sessional Papers](#) for this session.*

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13	March 23 aft.	461-480
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17	April 6 aft.	541-562
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28	May 4 aft.	867-880
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30	May 9 aft.	913-944
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35	May 17 aft.	1127-1152
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38	May 24 morn.	1231-1248
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55	Nov. 16 aft.....	<u>1967-1986</u>
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Main Estimates 2017-2018

The main estimates (budget) for 2017-2018 are all being considered in the legislative policy committees. Below is a list of ministries, the schedule of debate, and links to posted transcripts. At 3 p.m. on April 19 the Committee of Supply will meet to vote on the estimates.

Meetings start at 9 a.m. (morning), 3:30 p.m. (afternoon); or 7 p.m. (evening). Estimates debates are scheduled for three hours except for Executive Council, Indigenous Relations, Service Alberta, and Status of Women, which are scheduled for two hours. The ministries of Education, Environment and Parks, Health, and Justice and Solicitor General each have two meetings scheduled for a total of six hours' debate per ministry.

Listing by date:

<i>Ministry</i>	<i>Committee</i>	<i>Meeting Date</i>
Culture and Tourism	Alberta's Economic Future	March 22 morning (3 hours)
Agriculture and Forestry	Alberta's Economic Future	March 23 morning (3 hours)
Justice and Solicitor General	Families and Communities	April 3 evening (3 hours)
Executive Council	Alberta's Economic Future	April 3 evening (2 hours)
Environment and Parks	Resource Stewardship	April 4 morning (3 hours)
Justice and Solicitor General	Families and Communities	April 4 afternoon (3 hours)
Environment and Parks	Resource Stewardship	April 5 morning (3 hours)
Advanced Education	Alberta's Economic Future	April 5 morning (3 hours)
Status of Women	Families and Communities	April 5 afternoon (2 hours)
Community and Social Services	Families and Communities	April 6 morning (3 hours)
Transportation	Resource Stewardship	April 6 morning (3 hours)
Health	Families and Communities	April 10 evening (3 hours)
Economic Development and Trade	Alberta's Economic Future	April 10 evening (3 hours)
Labour	Alberta's Economic Future	April 11 morning (3 hours)
Energy	Resource Stewardship	April 11 morning (3 hours)
Health	Families and Communities	April 11 afternoon (3 hours)
Service Alberta	Families and Communities	April 12 morning (2 hours)
Infrastructure	Alberta's Economic Future	April 12 morning (3 hours)
Municipal Affairs	Resource Stewardship	April 12 afternoon (3 hours)
Indigenous Relations	Resource Stewardship	April 13 morning (2 hours)
Seniors and Housing	Families and Communities	April 13 morning (3 hours)
Treasury Board and Finance	Resource Stewardship	April 18 morning (3 hours)
Children's Services	Families and Communities	April 18 morning (3 hours)
Education	Alberta's Economic Future*	April 18 afternoon (3 hours)
Education	Alberta's Economic Future*	April 19 morning (3 hours)

*Subsequent to passage of Government Motion 17 on March 21, 2017.

29th Legislature

- Adjournment *See* **Legislative Assembly of Alberta adjournment**
- Member's midterm reflections, members' statements ... *Clark* 770
- Third session accomplishments ... *Smith* 1448
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A Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act

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Act to Protect the Health and Well-being of Working Albertans, An (Bill 30)

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Act to Reduce Cannabis and Alcohol Impaired Driving, An (Bill 29)

First reading ... *Mason* 1903
 Second reading ... *Aheer* 1963; *Anderson, W.* 1961–62; *Drysdale* 1960–61; *Mason* 1959–60, 1965–66; *Miller* 1962; *Swann* 1963–64; *Turner* 1964–65
 Committee ... *Cyr* 1983–84, 2054–56, 2062–63; *Dach* 1985; *Drysdale* 2059–60; *Ellis* 2032, 2035, 2063–65; *Hanson* 2053–54; *Loewen* 2065; *Mason* 2031–32, 2034–35, 2037, 2054, 2056, 2059–60, 2065–66; *McIver* 2032–34, 2038–39, 2053, 2065; *Miller* 2063; *Nixon* 2059; *Pitt* 2035–37; *Shepherd* 2059; *Starke* 2056–58; *Strankman* 2037–38; *Swann* 2058–59; *Turner* 1982–83, 2061–62; *van Dijken* 2060–61; *Westhead* 1985; *Yao* 2039
 Committee, amendment A1 (proposed section 88.11(1), correction of bill name reference) (Mason: carried) ... *Mason* 2031–32

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Committee, amendment A2 ruled out of order ... *Deputy Chair* 2032; *Ellis* 2032

Committee, amendment A2 (5-year review of act) (Ellis: defeated) ... *Ellis* 2035; *Hanson* 2053–54; *Mason* 2037; *McIver* 2038–39; *Pitt* 2035–37; *Strankman* 2037–38; *Yao* 2039

Committee, amendment A3 (zero tolerance for all drivers) (van Dijken: defeated) ... *Cyr* 2062–63; *Ellis* 2063–65; *Loewen* 2065; *Mason* 2065–66; *McIver* 2065; *Miller* 2063; *Turner* 2061–62; *van Dijken* 2060–61

Committee, points of order on debate ... *Deputy Chair* 2038; *Littlewood* 2038; *Mason* 2038; *McIver* 2038

Third reading ... *Clark* 2119; *Drysdale* 2118; *Ellis* 2118–19; *Mason* 2117–18

Royal Assent ... 15 December 2017 (outside of House sitting)

Administrative penalty provisions ... *Swann* 2058

Comparison with other jurisdictions' legislation ... *McIver* 2033–34

General remarks ... *Pitt* 2209

Implementation cost ... *Anderson, W.* 1961

Provisions for driver's licence suspension appeals ... *Turner* 1982–83

Provisions for driver's licence suspensions ... *Mason* 1959, 2117–18

Provisions for regulations on electronic documents and signatures ... *Mason* 1960

Stakeholder consultation ... *Miller* 1962; *Turner* 1965

Zero tolerance provisions for all drivers proposed ... *Hanson* 2055–56

Zero tolerance provisions for persons with graduated drivers' licences (GDL) ... *Drysdale* 1960–62; *Mason* 1959; *Pitt* 2036

Act to Reduce School Fees, An (Bill 1)

First reading ... *Eggen* 6

Second reading ... *Aheer* 85–86; *Babcock* 241–42; *Barnes* 241; *Connolly* 242; *Cooper* 107, 290; *Cortes-Vargas* 194–96; *Dach* 235–37, 285; *Dang* 109–10; *Eggen* 82–84; *Fitzpatrick* 88; *Gill* 193–94; *Hanson* 89; *Hinkley* 283–85; *Horne* 287–88; *Kazim* 290–91; *Kleinstauber* 282–83; *Littlewood* 273–74; *Luff* 105–8; *Malkinson* 242, 269, 289; *Mason* 89, 289; *McIver* 270; *McKitrick* 192–93; *Miller* 289–90; *Nielsen* 290; *Piquette* 237–38; *Renaud* 194, 285–87; *Rodney* 288–89; *Shepherd* 270–71; *Smith* 108–9; *Sucha* 86–88, 107; *Swann* 88–89; *Westhead* 237–40, 284, 286–87, 290

Second reading, points of order on debate ... *Ganley* 239; *Hanson* 239; *Speaker, The* 239; *Westhead* 239

Committee ... *Aheer* 425–27; *Carson* 429–30; *Connolly* 430–31; *Dang* 558; *Eggen* 427–29, 431; *Swann* 556–57; *Westhead* 424–25

Committee, amendment A1 (striking out section 4, charter schools) (Swann: defeated) ... *Dang* 558; *Swann* 556–57

Committee, amendment A1 (striking out section 4, charter schools) (Swann: defeated), division ... 558

Third reading ... *Aheer* 675–76; *Clark* 676–77; *Drysdale* 677; *Eggen* 674–75, 677–78

Royal Assent ... *Lieutenant Governor* 879–80

General remarks ... *Coolahan* 97; *Eggen* 1509–10; *Littlewood* 101; *McIver* 1205; *Rodney* 1509–10, 1531–32; *Sweet* 868

Regulatory provisions ... *Aheer* 85, 427; *Eggen* 675

Act to Regulate Political Action Committees, An (Bill 214)

First reading ... *Swann* 2165

Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, An (Bill 2)

First reading ... *Ganley* 67–68

Second reading ... *Aheer* 315–17; *Connolly* 317–18; *Cooper* 319, 321; *Cortes-Vargas* 315–16, 319–21; *Deputy Speaker* 339; *Fitzpatrick* 318–19; *Fraser* 110–11, 315; *Ganley* 110; *Goehring* 315; *Jansen* 336–38; *McPherson* 314–16, 319; *Orr* 322; *Pitt* 111; *Rodney* 316; *Schreiner* 315; *Starke* 337–39; *Swann* 321, 339; *Westhead* 111

Committee ... *Carson* 458–59; *Connolly* 457; *Cooper* 457, 459; *Drever* 457–58; *Ganley* 455–56; *Gill* 456–57; *Gotfried* 457; *Swann* 455

Committee, amendment A1 (scope, categories of survivors) (Swann: defeated) ... *Ganley* 455–56; *Swann* 455

Committee, amendment A2 (provisions for persons with disabilities) (Gill: carried) ... *Connolly* 457; *Cooper* 457; *Gill* 456–57; *Gotfried* 457

Third reading ... *Clark* 679; *Ellis* 678; *Ganley* 678–79; *Pitt* 679

Royal Assent ... *Lieutenant Governor* 879–80

Definition of sexual misconduct ... *Ganley* 456

General remarks ... *Littlewood* 102; *McPherson* 96; *Piquette* 529; *Speaker, The* 321–22

Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, An (Bill 1, 2015)

General remarks ... *Coolahan* 97

Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, An (Bill 32)

First reading ... *Gray* 2190

Second reading ... *Aheer* 2385–87, 2467, 2472–73; *Anderson, W.* 2371–73; *Clark* 2381–82, 2475; *Connolly* 2302–4, 2380–81; *Cooper* 2298–2300, 2302–3, 2369–71, 2376, 2378, 2387; *Cyr* 2312–13, 2384–85; *Drysdale* 2373–74; *Ellis* 2315, 2471–73; *Gill* 2304–5; *Gray* 2297–98; *Hanson* 2306–2308, 2311; *Hunter* 2372–76; *Loewen* 2465–66, 2468; *Loyola* 2308; *Malkinson* 2309–10; *McIver* 2374, 2382–83, 2470–71, 2473–75; *Orr* 2383–85; *Panda* 2387–88; *Pitt* 2300–2302; *Renaud* 2305, 2308–10; *Schneider* 2469–70; *Shepherd* 2467–68; *Smith* 2305–6, 2310–12; *Stier* 2370, 2376–78; *Strankman* 2314–16; *van Dijken* 2378–80; *Yao* 2313–15

Second reading, motion that bill be not now read and subject matter referred to Legislative Offices Committee (referral amendment REF1) (Pitt: defeated) ... *Aheer* 2385–87, 2467, 2472–73; *Anderson, W.* 2371–73; *Clark* 2381–82; *Connolly* 2302–4, 2380–81; *Cooper* 2302–3, 2369–71, 2376, 2378, 2387; *Cyr* 2312–13, 2384–85; *Drysdale* 2373–74; *Ellis* 2315, 2471–73; *Gill* 2304–5; *Hanson* 2306–8, 2311–12; *Hunter* 2372–2376; *Loewen* 2465–66, 2468; *Loyola* 2308; *Malkinson* 2309–10; *McIver* 2374, 2382–83, 2470–71; *Orr* 2383–85; *Panda* 2387–88; *Pitt* 2301–2; *Renaud* 2305, 2308–10; *Schneider* 2469–70; *Shepherd* 2467–68; *Smith* 2305–6, 2310–11; *Stier* 2370, 2376–78; *Strankman* 2314–16; *van Dijken* 2378–80; *Yao* 2313–15

Second reading, motion that bill be not now read and subject matter referred to Legislative Offices Committee (referral amendment REF1) (Pitt: defeated), division ... 2473

Second reading, points of order on debate ... *Cooper* 2303; *Deputy Speaker* 2304; *Feehan* 2303–4

Second reading, division ... 2475–76

Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, An (Bill 32) (continued)

Committee ... *Clark* 2524; *Cooper* 2511–14, 2517–24; *Cyr* 2514–16; *Feehan* 2510–17; *Gray* 2512–15, 2517–19, 2521–24; *Loewen* 2519–20; *McIver* 2516–17; *Renaud* 2510–11; *Shepherd* 2520

Committee, amendment A1 (advance and mobile polls, polling places on reserves and Métis settlements, official results reporting, persons designated by Chief Electoral Officer, special ballots, results of recounts, transitional provisions) (*Feehan*: carried) ... *Cooper* 2511–14, 2517–18; *Cyr* 2514–16; *Feehan* 2510, 2515–17; *Gray* 2512–15, 2517–18; *McIver* 2516–17; *Renaud* 2510–11

Committee, amendment A2 (minimum residency requirement) (*Cooper*: defeated) ... *Cooper* 2518–19; *Gray* 2519; *Loewen* 2519–20; *Shepherd* 2520

Committee, amendment A2 (residency requirement) (*Cooper*: defeated), division ... 2520

Committee, amendment A3 (door-to-door enumeration elimination) (*Cooper*: defeated) [*See also Voter registration*]; *Cooper* 2520–21; *Gray* 2521–22

Committee, amendment A4 (government advertising during election periods) (*Cooper*: defeated) ... *Cooper* 2522; *Gray* 2522–23

Committee, amendment A4 (government advertising during election periods) (*Cooper*: defeated), division ... 2523

Committee, amendment A5 (election commissioner mandate) (*Cooper*: defeated) ... *Cooper* 2523–24; *Gray* 2524

Committee, amendment A6 (special mobile polls on reserves and Métis settlements) (*Clark*: carried) ... *Clark* 2524; *Gray* 2524

Committee, motion to report bill (carried), division ... 2524–25

Third reading ... *Clark* 2529; *Cooper* 2528–29; *Gray* 2528

Third reading, division ... 2529–30

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Administrative amendments re lapse of Senatorial Selection Act ... *Drysdale* 2373; *Ellis* 2315, 2472; *Gill* 2305; *Hunter* 2375; *Loewen* 2465–66; *McIver* 2471; *Smith* 2311

Chief Electoral Officer's response ... *Aheer* 2386, 2472; *Anderson, W.* 2371, 2373; *Clark* 2382, 2475; *Cooper* 2299, 2302, 2369–71, 2376, 2387, 2420–21, 2511–13, 2521, 2528; *Cyr* 2384–85; *Ellis* 2471–72; *Hunter* 2376; *Loewen* 2468; *McIver* 2374, 2474–75; *Orr* 2383–85; *Panda* 2388; *Pitt* 2302; *Schneider* 2469–70; *Shepherd* 2467–68; *Sigurdson* 2420–21; *Stier* 2370, 2377–78; *van Dijken* 2379

Election Commissioner provisions ... *Anderson, W.* 2372; *Cooper* 2300, 2302, 2517; *Gill* 2305; *Gray* 2517–18; *McIver* 2374, 2470; *Yao* 2314

Government advertising provisions ... *Aheer* 2386; *Clark* 2382; *Gray* 2297; *Loewen* 2466; *McIver* 2474; *Strankman* 2315

Government announcement provisions ... *Strankman* 2316

Minimum residency requirement removal ... *Aheer* 2467, 2472–73; *Clark* 2475, 2529; *Cooper* 2299; *Drysdale* 2373; *Gill* 2305; *Gray* 2298; *Loewen* 2466; *McIver* 2470–71, 2473; *Shepherd* 2467–68; *Smith* 2311; *Strankman* 2316

Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, An (Bill 32) (continued)

Provisions for emergent situations on election days ... *Gray* 2298

Public education provisions ... *Gray* 2298

Special ballot provisions ... *Gray* 2298

Stakeholder consultation ... *Gill* 2304–5; *Stier* 2378; *Strankman* 2316

Third-party advertising provisions ... *Cooper* 2303, 2513–14, 2523–24, 2528–29; *Gray* 2297, 2513–14, 2524; *McIver* 2473–74; *Renaud* 2309

Time for debate ... *Aheer* 2385–86; *Cooper* 2298–99; *Gill* 2304; *Pitt* 2300–2301

Transitional provisions ... *Cooper* 2513–14; *Gray* 2513–14

Voting procedure provisions ... *Cooper* 2299; *Gray* 2297

Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, An (Bill 8)

First reading ... *Anderson, S.* 577

Second reading ... *Anderson, S.* 691–92, 783–84; *Dach* 781–82; *Fitzpatrick* 696; *Hanson* 699–700; *Jean* 716–22; *Kleinstauber* 783; *Malkinson* 782–83; *McIver* 696–98, 781; *Piquette* 698–99; *Schneider* 694–96; *Shepherd* 780–81; *Stier* 692–94

Committee ... *Aheer* 860–61; *Anderson, S.* 784, 791, 793–94, 840–41, 843, 864; *Barnes* 843; *Cooper* 840–41, 844; *Cyr* 784–85; *Fitzpatrick* 787, 855–57, 860; *Gotfried* 861–64; *Hanson* 790–91; *Horne* 838–40; *McIver* 858; *Orr* 844–45; *Payne* 787–89; *Piquette* 794–95, 858, 862; *Schneider* 864–65; *Stier* 791–94, 841–44, 855, 857–58; *Sucha* 789–90; *Westhead* 785–87; *Yao* 858–60

Committee, amendment A1 (business improvement area tax) (*Anderson, S.*: carried) ... *Anderson, S.* 840–41; *Cooper* 840–41

Committee, amendment A2 (tax ratio amendment time frame) (*Stier*: defeated) ... *Anderson, S.* 843; *Barnes* 843; *Cooper* 844; *Orr* 844–45; *Stier* 841–44, 855

Committee, amendment A3 (property tax conformity time frame of 10 years) (*Stier*: defeated) ... *Fitzpatrick* 860; *McIver* 858; *Piquette* 858; *Stier* 857–58; *Yao* 858–60

Committee, amendment A3 (property tax conformity time frame of 10 years) (*Stier*: defeated), division ... 860

Committee, amendment A4 (conservation reserve cancellation provisions) (*Gotfried*: defeated) ... *Gotfried* 861–63; *Piquette* 862

Committee, amendment A4 (conservation reserve cancellation provisions) (*Gotfried*: defeated), division ... 863

Committee, amendment A5 (conservation reserves, municipal land purchases) (*Gotfried*: defeated) ... *Anderson, S.* 864; *Gotfried* 863–64

Third reading ... *Anderson, S.* 991–92, 1104–5, 1109; *Babcock* 995–96; *Cortes-Vargas* 1001–3; *Dach* 998, 1000–1001; *Drever* 994–95; *Eggen* 1003–4; *Fitzpatrick* 995; *Hanson* 1104; *Hinkley* 1002; *Jean* 1107–9; *Kazim* 1105–6; *Luff* 992–93; *Mason* 1108–9; *McKittrick* 1101–2; *Piquette* 996–98; *Schreiner* 993–94; *Stier* 1103–4; *Sucha* 1000; *Turner* 998–1000

Third reading, division ... 1109–10

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Conservation reserve provisions *See Municipalities: Conservation reserves*

Act to Strengthen Municipal Government, An (Bill 8) (continued)

Environmental reserve provisions *See* **Municipalities: Environmental reserves**

Input from AUMA and AAMDC ... *Aheer* 860–61; *Anderson, S.* 992–93; *Cortes-Vargas* 1002; *Fitzpatrick* 696; *Hanson* 699–700; *McIver* 697; *Piquette* 698; *Schneider* 694–96, 864; *Shepherd* 780–81; *Stier* 692–94, 794, 858; *Sucha* 790; *Turner* 999

Interjurisdictional collaboration provisions *See* **Municipalities: Consultation with aboriginal communities, legislative provisions**

Land-use planning provisions *See* **School boards and districts: Land use, mandatory joint-use planning agreements with municipalities**

Ministerial decisions, appeal provisions ... *Fitzpatrick* 856

Ministerial powers under act ... *Fitzpatrick* 856; *Schneider* 864–65

Provisions for consultation with aboriginal communities *See* **Municipalities: Consultation with communities, legislative provisions**

Provisions for noncompliance with ministerial orders ... *McIver* 697; *Stier* 694

Section 1(14-16), parental leave for councillors *See* **Municipalities: Parental leave for councillors**

Section 1(21), transportation infrastructure and off-site levies *See* **Municipal finance: Off-site levies**

Sections 14-15 *See* **Municipalities: Parental leave for councillors**

Section 31, municipal taxation provisions *See* **Property tax: Tax rate, ratio of residential to nonresidential**

Section 63, joint use and planning agreements *See* **School boards and districts: Land use, mandatory joint-use planning agreements with municipalities**

Stakeholder consultation ... *Fitzpatrick* 696; *Jean* 1108–9; *Shepherd* 781; *Sucha* 790

Stakeholder consultation, school boards ... *Eggen* 1003

Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, An (Bill 24)

First reading ... *Eggen* 1726–27

Second reading ... *Aheer* 1838–40, 1842; *Babcock* 1800; *Clark* 1801; *Connolly* 1773–74, 1834, 1836; *Coolahan* 1802–3; *Cortes-Vargas* 1840; *Eggen* 1769–71, 1846; *Feehan* 1844; *Fraser* 1835–36; *Luff* 1836–38; *McKittrick* 1796–97; *McPherson* 1773; *Miranda* 1797, 1799–1800, 1836; *Notley* 1844–46; *Phillips* 1801–2; *Pitt* 1798–99; *Shepherd* 1774, 1833–35; *Smith* 1771–72; *Sucha* 1840–42; *Westhead* 1835, 1837, 1842–44

Second reading, points of order on debate ... *Acting Speaker (Sweet)* 1798; *Mason* 1798; *McIver* 1798

Second reading, points of order on debate, remarks withdrawn ... *Pitt* 1798

Second reading, division ... 1846

Committee ... *Connolly* 1849, 1851; *Cortes-Vargas* 1855, 1871–73; *Dach* 1854–55; *Eggen* 1849; *Ellis* 1848–49; *Fitzpatrick* 1853; *Hoffman* 1849–50; *Horne* 1852–53; *Jansen* 1847–48; *Littlewood* 1850–51; *Malkinson* 1917–18; *Payne* 1918–19; *Piquette* 1874–75; *Renaud* 1853–54; *Shepherd* 1851; *Swann* 1870–71; *Turner* 1875; *Woollard* 1873–74

Committee, amendment A1 (application of School Act parental notification provisions) (Ellis: defeated) ... *Connolly* 1849, 1851; *Eggen* 1849; *Ellis* 1848–49; *Hoffman* 1849–50; *Littlewood* 1850–51; *Shepherd* 1851

Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, An (Bill 24) (continued)

Committee, amendment A1 (application of School Act parental notification provisions) (Ellis: defeated), division ... 1852

Committee, motion to rise and report progress (Bilous: carried), division ... 1875

Committee, concurrence in report (carried), division ... 1919

Third reading ... *Aheer* 1921–24; *Carson* 1930–31; *Clark* 1931–32; *Connolly* 1925, 1927, 1932–33; *Cortes-Vargas* 1924–25, 1930; *Drever* 1927–28; *Eggen* 1921, 1934–35; *Feehan* 1933–34; *Fildebrandt* 1929–30; *McPherson* 1929; *Smith* 1926–27

Third reading, points of order on debate ... *Aheer* 1923; *Mason* 1922–23; *Speaker, The* 1923

Third reading, division ... 1935

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Free vote in the Assembly proposed ... *Westhead* 1843

General remarks ... *Cortes-Vargas* 1823

Member to be absent for vote ... *Aheer* 1923

United Conservative Party leader's remarks ... *Connolly* 1927; *Smith* 1926–27

Act to Support Orphan Well Rehabilitation, An (Bill 14)

First reading ... *McCuaig-Boyd* 1090

Second reading ... *Babcock* 1145–46; *Ceci* 1150; *Cooper* 1150–51; *Fraser* 1146; *Littlewood* 1147–48; *Mason* 1148; *McCuaig-Boyd* 1144–45; *Rosendahl* 1148–49; *Schmidt* 1151–52; *Swann* 1150

Committee ... *Babcock* 1225–26; *Barnes* 1226–27; *Dach* 1228–29; *Gotfried* 1230; *Piquette* 1229–30; *Swann* 1227–28

Third reading ... *Barnes* 1245; *McCuaig-Boyd* 1244–46; *McPherson* 1245; *Rosendahl* 1245–46

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Stakeholder consultation ... *McCuaig-Boyd* 1145

Acute health care facilities

See **Hospitals**

Acute health care system

See **Health care**

Addiction and mental health officer

Position elimination ... *Payne* 1255; *Smith* 1255

Addiction and mental health strategy

Implementation, Auditor General's recommendations ... *Hoffman* 1133; *Smith* 1133

Strategy development ... *Payne* 2111; *Swann* 2111

Addiction treatment

[*See also* **Fentanyl use; Opioid use**]

Central Alberta services ... *Hoffman* 1976; *MacIntyre* 1976

Co-ordination between Health ministry and Alberta Health Services ... *Payne* 121; *Smith* 121

Facility closures ... *Clark* 1971–72; *Hoffman* 1972, 1977

Facility oversight ... *Clark* 1971–72; *Hoffman* 1971–72

Funding ... *Ceci* 358; *Gotfried* 37

Hours of service ... *Hoffman* 872; *Swann* 872

Integration with mental health services *See* **Mental health services: Integration with addiction treatment**

Opioid treatment for youth ... *Fildebrandt* 1862–63; *Payne* 1862–63

Outcome measurement, members' statements ... *Swann* 2164

Addiction treatment (continued)

Programs and services ... *Feehan* 40; *Payne* 124; *Sabir* 124; *Schreiner* 32–33; *Shepherd* 124

Rural services ... *Cortes-Vargas* 1995; *Hoffman* 1976; *MacIntyre* 1976; *Payne* 1995

Services for aboriginal youth ... *Swann* 868

Services for rural youth ... *Fildebrandt* 1681; *Payne* 1681

Suboxone use, funding for ... *Payne* 1255; *Smith* 1255

Addictions and mental health officer

See **Chief addictions and mental health officer (former)**

Adjournment of the Legislature

See **Legislative Assembly of Alberta adjournment**

Adolescent psychiatric care

See **Child mental health services**

Adoption

Advertising, laws and legislation *See* **Child, Youth and Family Enhancement (Adoption Advertising) Amendment Act, 2017 (Bill 206)**

Supports for permanency *See* **Child protective services: Supports for permanency**

Adoption Termination Act, Paula Jean Anderson

See **Paula Jean Anderson Adoption Termination Act**

Adult care workers

See **Care workers**

Adult guardianship/trusteeship

Auditor General's recommendations ... *Ganley* 301; *Pitt* 301

Adult learning

Literacy programs ... *Kazim* 1332; *Schmidt* 1332

Adult learning centre, Calgary

See **Viscount Bennett Centre, Calgary**

Advanced Education ministry

See **Ministry of Advanced Education**

Advanced educational institutions

See **Postsecondary educational institutions**

Adverse possession of land, law and legislation

See **Protection of Property Rights Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Bill 204)**

Advertising by government

See **Government advertising**

Advertising by third parties

See **Political advertising by third parties (corporations, unions, advocacy groups, etc.)**

Advertising by third parties, political, laws and legislation

See **Act to Strengthen and Protect Democracy in Alberta, An (Bill 32)**

Advertising by veterinarians, laws and legislation

See **Better Deal for Consumers and Businesses Act, A (Bill 31)**

Advisory Panel on Coal Communities

Funding from supplementary supply ... *Taylor* 307
Report ... *Anderson, S.* 1085; *MacIntyre* 1085

Advocate for children and youth

Review of governing legislation *See* **Child and Youth Advocate Act review**

Advocate for children and youth, office

See **Child and Youth Advocate's office**

Advocate for farmers

See **Farmers' Advocate**

Advocate for mental health patients

See **Mental Health Patient Advocate**

Advocate for persons with disabilities

Appointment ... *Clark* 2182–83; *Sabir* 2183

Advocate for Persons with Disabilities Act (Bill 205)

First reading ... *Jansen* 552

Second reading ... *Aheer* 1055–57; *Clark* 1055; *Cortes-Vargas* 1159–61; *Fitzpatrick* 1153–55; *Jansen* 1050–51; *Malkinson* 1156–57; *McIver* 1054–55; *McKittrick* 1158–59; *Renaud* 1053–54, 1121, 1123, 1125, 1154, 1157; *Rosendahl* 1157–58; *Sabir* 1163; *Shepherd* 1057, 1120–22; *Smith* 1052–53; *Sucha* 1122–24, 1154–55; *Swann* 1051–52; *Sweet* 1124–25; *Westhead* 1161–63; *Woollard* 1155–56

Second reading debate, Speaker's rulings ... *Speaker, The* 1161

Committee ... *Carson* 1194; *Dach* 1197–98; *Jansen* 1192–94; *McIver* 1164–66; *McKittrick* 1197; *Piquette* 1195–96; *Renaud* 1166–68; *Sabir* 1163–64, 1168; *Schreiner* 1194–95; *Shepherd* 1196–97; *Smith* 1193; *Swann* 1191–92

Committee, amendment A1 (sections 2, 3(2), 5, advocate roles, duties, and functions) (*Sabir*: carried) ... *Jansen* 1192–94; *McIver* 1164–65; *Renaud* 1166–68; *Sabir* 1163–64, 1168; *Smith* 1193; *Swann* 1191–92

Committee, amendment A1 (sections 2, 3(2), 5, advocate roles, duties, and functions) (*Sabir*: carried), subamendment SA1 (stakeholder consultation included in reviews; workers in disability sector included in mandate) (*Smith*: defeated) ... *Jansen* 1193–94; *Shepherd* 1235; *Smith* 1193, 1234

Third reading ... *Connolly* 1236–37; *Coolahan* 1236; *Cortes-Vargas* 1242–43; *Dach* 1237–38; *Drever* 1238–42; *Fitzpatrick* 1240; *Jansen* 1231, 1243; *Loyola* 1234, 1240–42; *Malkinson* 1232–33; *Nixon* 1231–32; *Shepherd* 1235–36; *Smith* 1233–35; *Turner* 1240; *Westhead* 1233

Third reading (carried unanimously), division ... 1243
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Advocate's mandate ... *Drever* 1239

Bill moved to Government Bills and Orders on the Order Paper ... *Nixon* 1232

Bill moved to Government Bills and Orders on the Order Paper (Government Motion 19: carried) ... *Cooper* 1120; *Mason* 1120

Bill sponsor ... *Westhead* 1161

Input from Inclusion Alberta ... *McIver* 1164–66; *Renaud* 1166–67

Lack of preamble ... *Nixon* 1232

Section 3, role and function of the advocate ... *Aheer* 1056–57; *Shepherd* 1057

Section 6(1), review of act ... *McIver* 1054

Stakeholder consultation ... *Cortes-Vargas* 1243; *Dach* 1198; *Jansen* 1243; *Nixon* 1232; *Renaud* 1529–30; *Rosendahl* 1157; *Sabir* 1529–30; *Shepherd* 1235; *Smith* 1234–35

Advocate for property rights' office

See **Property Rights Advocate's office**

Advocate for seniors

See **Seniors' Advocate**

Advocate for utilities consumers

See **Utilities Consumer Advocate**

AEC

See **Alberta Enterprise Corporation**

AEDA

See **Alberta Economic Development Authority**

AEDA amendments, laws and legislation

See **Agencies, Boards and Commissions Review Statutes Amendment Act, 2017 (Bill 21)**

AEDs

Presence in ambulances *See* **Emergency medical services (ambulances, etc.): Rural service, automated external defibrillators in ambulances**

AEF committee

See **Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, Standing**

AEMA

See **Alberta Emergency Management Agency**

AER

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 5, 2017, in the Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on March 23, 2017, in the Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 18, 2017, in the Committee on Families and Communities.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on March 22, 2017, in the Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.
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Ministry of Economic Development and Trade

Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 10, 2017, in the Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.
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Ministry of Energy

Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 11, 2017, in the Committee on Resource Stewardship.

Interim supply estimates 2017-2018 vote ... *Chair* 265
 Main estimates 2017-2018 vote ... *Chair* 669
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 Minister's response to NEB policy changes *See* **National Energy Board: Pipeline assessments, inclusion of upstream and downstream emissions criteria, Energy minister's letter on**

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 4 and 5, 2017, in the Committee on Resource Stewardship.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 3, 2017, in the Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 10 and 11, 2017, in the Committee on Families and Communities.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 12, 2017, in the Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

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Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General

Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 3 and 4, 2017, in the Committee on Families and Communities.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 11, 2017, in the Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 12, 2017, in the Committee on Resource Stewardship.

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Ministry of Seniors and Housing

Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 13, 2017, in the Committee on Families and Communities.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 12, 2017, in the Committee on Families and Communities.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 5, 2017, in the Committee on Families and Communities.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 6, 2017, in the Committee on Resource Stewardship.

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Note: Main estimates 2017-2018 were considered on April 18, 2017, in the Committee on Resource Stewardship.

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